

EDITORIAL

A MESSAGE FROM MR. SAPIENS

It is currently believed that all humanity today derives from fossil *Homo Sapiens Sapiens*. This may well be so, although unanimous consent is not necessarily a proof of veracity. It seems, however, that most characteristic physical differences between human types today are the result of recent developments.

As to the globality of *Sapiens*, some doubts may persist regarding small enclaves of peripheral ethnic groups relegated to inhospitable areas, primarily by the aggressive diffusion and expansion of *Sapiens*. These doubts arise not just because of somatic characteristics, but also because of cultural and technological considerations such as methods of producing stone implements and other aspects of material culture which, in the cultural sequence, reflect archaic habits, mentalities and technologies. Pre-*sapiens* species, are, however, practically extinct. How did this happen: was there a violent process involved, or were there archaic groups being absorbed through intermingling, or did remnants of palaeoanthropic populaces survive in isolation, perhaps in hiding, in remote parts of Africa and Asia while *Mr. Sapiens* was populating the earth? Likely, in different contexts, all these three possibilities took place.

Homo Sapiens Sapiens (repeated twice to emphasize his peculiarity!) was indeed a very special kind of creature. He had developed a wide range of abilities that gave new dimensions to his life. His capacity to abstract, analyse, synthesise and communicate are evidenced by his material culture from the very moment he emerged. He was able to produce art and, yet in his early stage of evolution, created some of the greatest masterpieces the world has ever known. This also implies that he had the ability to use language in a very complex and sophisticated way and had mastered logical thinking which included a sophisticated perception of time. All of this has been elaborated in detail elsewhere. But there was more: he had the inquisitiveness of the explorer. This curiosity pushed him to learn, to know, to explore beyond the known horizon.

Mr. Sapiens appeared some 40,000 years ago, after anthropoid beings had already inhabited the earth for several million years. But he was the first to reach the far north of Europe and Asia, the American continent, Australia and the Pacific. Prior to his emergence, the world of humans was much more circumscribed and was

in fact restricted to some parts of Africa, Asia and Europe.

He was also aggressive, jealous and possessive, not unlike the gods he created. Similarly, the merciful image of pity and generosity as advocated by 'moral behaviour' by all of humanity since its earliest records, is a common characteristic of our species, which is preached within the ethnic, social or political group but does not preclude the killing or exterminating of other parties, going head-hunting or dispossessing those who are considered 'enemies' of their belongings principally because they are 'different'. Such patterns, and many others, have common roots and must be traced back to the time when the early nucleus of *Mr. Sapiens* may have been a single cultural unit.

Homo Sapiens has conquered the world and has established his rules. All other humans were cast aside and the primordial affluent society used its abilities to dominate the Earth. This was accomplished very efficiently. *Sapiens* was present in Africa 40,000 years ago, and shortly thereafter he was in Asia and then in America and in Oceania. Most likely, the last continent he conquered was Europe, some 36,000 years ago. This process of global expansionism is usually viewed by traditional evolutionists as a slow and gradual process. Present trends of research, however, seem to indicate just the contrary: that the process was very fast, having a duration of no more than five to six thousand years. To the disappointment of some Europeans, the origins of our direct forerunner must be looked for outside of Europe, either in Africa or in Asia, but most probably in Africa.

This continent seems to be a sort of genetic laboratory, where the earliest hominids came into existence some million years ago and where modern man found and developed the energy to proliferate and expand. It is interesting to note that even today Africa is the homeland of the most diversified and heterogeneous human crowd in the world. Africa seems always to have been the ideal region for 'genetic' experimentation.

In this issue, the 'State of Research' article now presents another aspect of the riddle. Even the artistic creativity of man, which was until recently believed to have had its beginnings in Europe, appears to have originated in Africa. Likely, the roots of art coincide with the roots of *Homo Sapiens*. Artistic creativity emerges as one of the fundamental needs, skills and characteristics of *Mr. Sapiens*.

The birth of this new species remains a puzzle; the intellectual abilities and be-

havioural characteristics may well be the outcome of a successful mating: a 'generic' experiment which is unlikely to have been repeated, in similar contexts, and with the same results, in different areas. Homo Sapiens Sapiens, who today numbers over four billion souls, may well have originated from the unplanned, extemporaneous encounter of two cleans or even of two individuals, a male and a female, who produced gifted offspring. Some traditional evolutionists will probably shift uncomfortably in their armchairs when reading these words. But, in fact, this is the only plausible explanation for the universality of the fundamental elements of culture. The basic capacities of imagination, synthesis and abstraction, the specific characteristics of human logic, the technological skills, the patterns of social aggregation, the systems of communication and language, the need for intellectualization resulting in the concepts of religion, mythology and philosophy, and artistic creativity, are at one and the same time specific and universal features of Mr. Sapiens.

It seems that modern culture has a common origin that is not so very old. This origin should be connected with the appearance and expansion of Homo Sapiens Sapiens just some 40,000 years ago. Of course, there have been evolutions of culture both before and after his appearance, but our modern Babel is the result of secondary diversifications which are even more recent.

The epic of Adam being created out of mud is a magnificent metaphor of Homo Sapiens's ability to analyse and synthesise, to imagine and to abstract. But our cultural roots and intellectual background emerge as the issue of Homo Sapiens, during the last 40,000 years. So too must have evolved our marvellous ability to create art, our unique capacity to communicate ideas, theories and abstract concepts with our fellow men through the complex system of sounds and noises which we refer to as language.

Aggressive Mr. Sapiens, in his earliest years of existence, conquered much more than Julius Caesar or Alexander the Great: he conquered all of the continents of our planet, he reached areas that remained unknown to these emperors; he settled them, adapted himself to the environment and learned how to utilize the indigenous natural resources.

This is the beginning of our history: when Homo Sapiens Sapiens emerged and proliferated. The archetypes of our culture can be traced back to those foggy times. Art spread with our early direct ancestors as did language, modern complex language, and many other aspects of culture which today, for one reason or another, seem so very different to us. Homo Sapiens, when expanding, took with him his own way of living, communicating, believing and behaving. We, homo'sapiens' modernus, are his issue. Hominids existed on earth before and evolution, of course, began much before, as it has always existed, but our culture has its roots with Homo Sapiens Sapiens. It seems possible to deduce that, at that time, it was a universal and homogeneous culture which the nucleus of our ancestors brought along with them. Is this a message which comes to us from the remote past? No doubt, by understanding what the term 'human' means, we feel more human. Being 'human', or being 'Mr. Sapiens' is not the only way of being; and the archetypal elements which unite human cultures today are far more substantial and permanent than what makes them different from one another. Can we decipher the message?

Una versione italiana dei concetti espressi da questo editoriale apparirà in B.C. Notizie.

An Italian version of the concepts expressed in this text appears in B.C. Notizie.

Fig 1: Two human beings against two evil spirits. They are followed by their protecting spirits (flying busts) which resemble their own profile. Rock engravings from Valcamonica, Seradina, Period IV-C (Early Iron Age: 850-750 B.C.).

