

Preface

The project to reopen the renowned paleontological site of Senèze began at a meeting of old friends. The investigators of the Vatera paleontological sites on the island of Lesbos, Greece, had invited a small group of colleagues to visit the area and participate in a short workshop from September 29 to October 2, 1999. The workshop “On Late Plio/Pleistocene Extinction and Evolution in the Palearctic: The Vatera Site” was held in Polichnitos, on Lesbos, and mainly included discussions of the mammalian fauna of the Villafranchian interval of Europe. Guérin and Faure presented a report on their recently completed study of the Saint-Vallier site and mammals, noting that it was older than the famous but less well-known locality of Senèze. Delson discussed his ongoing work on the large European cercopithecine primate *Paradolichopithecus*, which was known from Senèze and had also been recovered from Vatera-F.

During the meeting, Delson renewed his long acquaintanceship with Guérin and met Faure. He mused that it would be interesting to look again at Senèze, as Guérin and Faure had done at Saint-Vallier, bringing together a team of colleagues to investigate the geology, dating, paleontology, taphonomy and paleoenvironment. Guérin and Faure were thinking about a new project and were interested, so Delson suggested a joint venture, offering to seek funding in the US while Guérin and Faure directed the work on the ground. They agreed to start investigating the possibilities of a Franco-American team project.

Following numerous email exchanges later in 1999, Delson applied to NSF for a small grant, while Guérin and Faure requested a permit to work at Senèze. With the support of the Mayor of Domeyrat (the hamlet of Senèze is administratively part of the commune of Domeyrat), Faure submitted a request to the French Ministère de la Culture, Service Régional de l'Archéologie, Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles (Regional Archaeological Service of the Regional Office of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs); since 1945, Pleistocene paleontology in France falls under archaeological legislation. The Ministère de la Culture agreed to provide an authorization to survey and prospect for fossils. The NSF Physical Anthropology Program provided almost \$9,000 in a “high risk exploratory” grant to Delson with Co-Investigators Guérin, Faure, geologist Evelyne Debard (University of Lyon) and dating specialist Bonnie Blackwell (Williams College). Blackwell agreed to wait until the following year when a full season would occur if the first work proved successful, and the other four were joined by Andrea Valli, then a Ph.D. student with Guérin at Lyon. Details of that first season (and the following years) are presented in Chap. 1 below. As a result of that “chance meeting” on Lesbos, 7 years of fieldwork were undertaken at Senèze, and the results of that project are presented in this volume. It was long delayed by a combination of other

responsibilities and the need for detailed editing but the final product is an extensive analysis of this important Early Pleistocene locality, with implications for mammalian systematics and regional biochronology.

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