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Preface

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PREFACE

The papers published in this volume of the *Mededelingen van de Rijks Geologische Dienst* concern a remarkable and extremely interesting site, Belvédère, near the city of Maastricht in the province of Limburg, The Netherlands.

Modern Quaternary research is highly multidisciplinary in character, although it should be said that even the early work on important sites of Quaternary age tended to combine the efforts of geologists, palaeontologists, and prehistorians. This is quite natural, because the Quaternary period was characterized by ice ages and marks the emergence of mankind.

The Belvédère site and its environs first attracted attention in the early nineteenth century, when geological research began in this area. After a period of diminishing interest in the site, some lucky finds of palaeolithic artifacts - found around 1980 by several open-minded enthusiasts, both amateurs and professionals - led to systematic archaeological excavations by a team representing many disciplines. In 1982, the INQUA National Committee for The Netherlands organized a symposium at the Museum of Natural History in Maastricht, during which the first results of the excavations were presented. Since then much additional information has been collected about the section and especially the relative and absolute ages of the main artifact-bearing horizon. As chairman of the INQUA National Committee for The Netherlands I have followed with pleasure the harmonious co-

operation of so many people, amateur and professional archaeologists, palaeontologists, sedimentologists, and other specialists from not only The Netherlands but also other countries. The contribution of a number of research institutes should be mentioned here, i.c., the Instituut voor Prehistorie (Leiden), the Instituut voor Aardwetenschappen (Utrecht), the Instituut voor Aardwetenschappen (Amsterdam), the Fysisch Geografisch en Bodemkundig Laboratorium (Amsterdam), and the Rijks Geologische Dienst (Haarlem). Of particular interest, finally, are the possibilities this site offers for absolute dating of the main archaeological horizon. The contributions made by the research institutes of Oxford and Köln deserve special mention in this respect.

At present, the palaeolithic site of Belvédère, which has yielded well-circumscribed *in situ* finds accompanied by many fossils of different kinds, is both the best absolutely dated one in Western Europe and the oldest one known so far in The Netherlands, since it dates from an intra-Saalian warm-temperate interval with an established age lying roughly in the middle of a period which occurred between 200,000 and 300,000 years ago.

It is with great pleasure that I recommend this volume containing the results of a concentrated joint effort in modern Quaternary research.

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