
Geographical variability and commonality in the development of bladelet technology in the Levant: implications for coast-inland relations in the Initial–Early Upper Paleolithic

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Résumé

This paper discusses late Pleistocene social relations between core and periphery areas in the Levant by reviewing archaeological records regarding cultural changes from the Initial Upper Paleolithic (IUP) to the Early Upper Paleolithic (EUP) period. For this purpose, I will present an overview of current datasets and several unresolved issues regarding the geographical variability and commonality in the development of bladelet technology in the Levant. As a common general trend, bladelet production increased in the Levant from the IUP to EUP in association with technological changes for platform preparation, i.e., more frequent employment of overhang removals that create small striking platforms of blanks, typically punctiform and linear types. However, geographical variability is indicated by several records that include 1) early radiocarbon dates for the Ahmarian deposits in the coastal area, i.e., Kebara and Manot Caves, 2) late dates for some IUP assemblages in the inland zone, i.e., Wadi Aghar Layer B, Umm el Tlel, and Jerf Ajla, and 3) different trajectories of lithic technological changes between the coastal and inland areas, represented by the northern and southern Ahmarian variations. While the validity of these records needs to be checked further, they can be used to discuss possible scenarios for the core-periphery relations in the IUP–EUP Levant.

The currently available data indicate both social interactions and separations of groups inhabiting the coastal and inland zones in the Levant. The social distance between the groups is suggested by 1) differences in core reduction technology represented by the northern and southern Ahmarian variations, 2) possibly different timings in the emergence of bladelet technology between the coastal and inland zones, and 3) the endurance of the IUP technology in the inland zone. On the other hand, widespread adoptions of basic techno-morphological ideas about bladelets are likely to have resulted from social interactions among groups inhabiting different areas in the Levant. This is also supported by evidence for long-distance distributions of sea shells in the IUP and EUP. Collectively, I propose a working hypothesis that bladelet technology emerged earlier in the coastal zone, and it was subsequently adopted by the groups inhabiting the inland zone through social interactions. This took place following the technological tradition of the inland groups, and some of the inland groups may have retained the IUP technology.

Mots-Clés: Levant, Upper Paleolithic, Lithic technology, Bladelet

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