
Pots and bones: taphonomic and spatial analyses of the Middle Holocene pastoral occupation at Takarkori rock shelter (Tadrart Acacus, Libya).

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Abstract

A quarter of a century after the seminal publication by Chang and Koster (1996) on the "archaeology of pastoralism", the quest for the "unambiguously" differentiation and identification of pastoral sites is still challenging. This is especially true for sites characterized by numerous, multi-phased occupations resulting in a palimpsest layout hard to disentangle and difficult to explore.

The archaeological landscape of the Tadrart Acacus massif (SW Libya, Central Sahara) is made of sites that shown cultural-specific settlement and economic strategies stretching over millennia of occupation. Caves and rock shelters, in particular, represent an important part of the landscape exploited by mobile prehistoric herders in their seasonal mobility patterns system. These types of contexts are affected by numerous natural and anthropogenic factors that regulate the formation processes of the archaeological deposits. In this regard, the site of Takarkori in the southern Acacus, thanks to its well-preserved archaeological record, represents a highly valuable archive of past societal activities.

Here we show the taphonomic and spatial analyses of pottery and faunal remains dated to the Middle Pastoral (7100-5600 cal BP). The study of diverse taphonomic categories (i.e. fragmentation, burning, weathering, etc.) on organic (fauna) and inorganic (ceramics) remains, of their spatial distribution in the archaeological contexts and their association with features like pits, hearths or stone structures allows to assess the multiple depositional and post-depositional processes responsible for the composition and organization of archaeological material. This integrated approach moreover sheds light on site occupation, space management and use in the frame of the pastoral groups' settlement strategies in the region, where seasonal mobility represents a key adaptation coping climatic and environmental instability.

Keywords: Sahara, Middle Pastoral Neolithic, formation processes, taphonomy, spatial distribution

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