
Rethinking the significance of microlithic variability in the Early LSA microlithic records of the Maghreb

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Abstract

Microliths are small cutting implements made from stone and found around the world in a variety of prehistoric contexts. The global phenomenon of microlithization seems to be associated with a shift toward complex hunting technologies and strategies in response to climate change associated with the Last Glacial Maximum (23–18 ka cal BP). With the advent of the lithic technology approach which launched the movement leading to what is customarily called the concept of the "chaîne opératoire", the microlithic industries are better understood and come out of the sclerosis imposed by the proliferation, primarily inherited from the typological analysis. Here, an overview is given to compare and contrast the patterns of variability in microlithic technologies during the Late Pleistocene of the Maghreb and to highlight the relation between the microlithic technologies and the shifting subsistence patterns in response to paleoenvironmental changes. We present the example of sites in Algeria dating from the Late Pleistocene which served, among others, to fuel the Iberomaurusian paradigm (Late Upper Paleolithic culture of the Maghreb). The entire lithic production collected and sieved, made it possible the analysis of the "chaîne opératoire" of lithic production. In addition, recent publications on these sites provide new contextual data of palaeoenvironmental, archaeozoological and behavioral patterns, considerably enriching our knowledge on the Late Pleistocene populations. The confrontation of the techno-economic patterns of the Iberomaurusian techno-complexes presented here with the palaeoclimatic and palaeoenvironmental changes highlighted the existence of divergent adaptive responses in relation to the dynamics of palaeoclimatic crises that human populations have known during the Late Pleistocene. The alternative expansion or reduction of the phytogeographic zones are considered as a primary reason for the changes in social and economic strategies applied by hunter/gatherers.

Keywords: Late Pleistocene, Iberomaurusian, Maghreb, microlithic technologies.

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