
Palaeoenvironment and plant use in the Upper Capsian: macro-botanical and micro-botanical remains from Kef Hamda (Tunisia).

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Abstract

Kef Hamda is an open-air site located on a 35 x 10 m terrace along the El Garia crest of the Tunisian Ridge, at 700 m a.s.l. The site was discovered in 1973, and has been the focus of renewed archaeological excavations in 2014. It is dated between the 9 – 8th millennium

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cal BP, with evidence of a lithic complex belonging to the Upper Capsian. Systematic integrated analyses of macro-plant (seeds and wood charcoal) and microfossils (phytoliths and calcitic wood ash pseudomorphs) have yielded a rich assemblage that provide a varied range of data on the palaeoenvironment and the use of plants for consumption, fuel and basketry, among other uses. Charcoal remains show that the most used wood for fuel was Aleppo pine (*Pinus halepensis*), but other species such as *Rhamnus/Phillyrea*, *Juniperus/Tetraclinis* or strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedo*), among others less frequently collected, were also used. This record indicates that the fuel collection was carried out within of scrubland Mediterranean formations. As for seed remains, preliminary results point to the collection of several food plants such as wild legumes (*Lathyrus/Vicia* sp.), acorns (*Quercus* sp.), Aleppo pine nuts (*Pinus halepensis*), juniper (*Juniperus* sp.), lentisk (*Pistacia lentiscus*) and elderberry (*Sambucus* sp.). In addition, macro and microfossils of Alfa grass (*Stipa tenacissima*) suggest that this plant could be used to produce basketry and other craft items, such as mats, cords, and containers. Further, no crop seeds or domesticate animals have been recorded, in spite that pottery fragments were identified in the late occupation of the site, suggesting that wild plants played an important role in the subsistence of Capsian foragers in spite of the introduction of technological innovations linked to the Neolithic.

Keywords: Archaeobotany, Capsian, Tunisia, Vegetation, Plant food, Basketry