
First evidence of an Associated-Bone-Group in Northwestern Africa: The deposit of a domestic sheep skeleton from the Neolithic phase of Medjez II site (Algeria)

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Résumé

The lasted excavation campaigns at Medjez II yielded new important data about the prehistoric context of this well-known "escargotière". A nearly complete domestic sheep (*Ovis aries*) skeleton in perfect anatomical connection was an exceptional discovery recently made at the site. Archeozoological study determined that it aged less than 16 months, and the analysis of bone surfaces has detected no trace of any treatment of the carcass. The osteoarcheological analysis of the carcass, performed during the excavation, has demonstrated the presence of several procedures which have been applied around of the carcass: digging and preparation of a pit, paw binding, carcass wrap, many lithic objects and ocher were deposited, and finally the body was loaded with stones. The articulated state of the skeleton and the absence of any economic or subsistence treatment or evident injuries, make it the first case of an Associated/Articulated Bone Group (ABG) reported in Northwestern Africa for the prehistoric period. The study of the archaeological context of this deposit combined to its absolute dating (5651 – 5580 cal BP) revealed that this ABG belongs to the Neolithic period. Despite the presence of "funerary-type" characteristics common to conventional burials from this period and guided by the domestic and consumed nature of this animal, we favour the hypothesis of the deposit as an offering, probably linked to the practice of agriculture.

Mots-Clés: Neolithic, Associated, Bone, Group, Domestic sheep (*Ovis aries*), Northwestern Africa, Algeria, Medjez II.

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