Early Middle Stone Age occupations in the Atlantic southern Morocco and implications for the origins of modern human behaviour

Abdeljalil Bouzouggar∗†1,2, Steve Kuhn3, Amy Clark4, and Philippe Fernandez5

1 Origin and Evolution of Homo sapiens Cultures in Morocco research group, Institut National des Sciences de l’Archéologie et du Patrimoine, Hay Riad, Madinat Al Irifne, Angle rues 5 et 7, Rabat-Instituts, 10 000 Rabat, Morocco – Maroc
2 Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Department of Human Evolution, Deutscher Platz 6, D-04103 Leipzig, Germany. – Allemagne
3 School of Anthropology, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721-0030, USA – États-Unis
4 Department of Anthropology, Harvard University, 11 Divinity Avenue, Peabody Museum 575A, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA – États-Unis
5 CNRS, Aix Marseille Univ, Minist Culture, LAMPEA UMR 7269, Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l’Homme, 5 Rue du Château de l’Horloge BP 647, F13094, Aix-en-Provence, France – UMR 7269 – France

Résumé

Recent survey work in the south of Morocco has revealed the presence of many MSA open air sites which though not well dated (Arzarello et al., 2013) may correlate with the relatively humid conditions that prevailed 130,000 years ago (Coulthard et al., 2013). A previous survey in the southeast of Morocco clearly shows palaeo-rivers, which could have acted as corridors for human migrations. This new project in Essaouira area allows for the first time an evaluation of a site with a deep, well-stratified sequence in southern Morocco and place it within an environmental context that includes river systems, past shorelines and associated ecosystems. Significant results could be obtained concerning the trans-Sahara contacts since the cave is only 500 km from the border of the Sahara. The sites in the southern Atlantic Morocco provide well-preserved evidence on the archaeology of early Homo sapiens and this new project focuses on the how environmental factors such as proximity to the coast or a river or climate change influenced early human movements and distributions. Archaeological sites are placed in context to past sea level variations and proximity to water and ecological resources to better understand human-landscape interactions and this data base will allow for an evaluation of site distribution in southwestern Morocco. In this paper we will also present issues concerning the changes in the lithic assemblages within the MSA technology to test if they are related to changes in climate and environment or to lithic raw material procurement.

∗Intervenant
†Auteur correspondant: abouzouggar@yahoo.fr
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