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# The Near and Middle East as a unique terrestrial corridor between Africa and Eurasia during the Pleistocene

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## Abstract

The Near and Middle East is a key region to study past human population dynamics and dispersals out of Africa to Eurasia. The issue of the routes to enter Europe is not solved although the main and oldest way to leave Africa was likely the Levantine corridor. It is the only gateway by land that provided an access to Europe by Turkey or by the northern shores of the Black Sea, and to Asia by using the Arabic peninsula as a platform step. The oldest site in Eurasia, Dmanisi, dated to 1.8 Ma, located 2000 km straight to the north in the Caucasus region, at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, was probably reached via this route. Half a million years later, in present-day Israel, the first handaxes appeared at Ubeidyia and the earliest evidence of fire was observed around 0.8 Ma at Geshert Benot Ya'akov. During all the Pleistocene period, migration waves succeed to other waves resulting at the end of the Middle Pleistocene period in the coexistence of several human species in this area, with distinct cultural behaviors. Dating methods are of paramount importance to constrain the chronological framework in which past humans evolved. Here we present the main sites dated by radiometric methods yielding a contribution in the understanding of human evolution from a chronological point of view.

**Keywords:** The Near and Middle East, corridor, Africa, Eurasia, Pleistocene

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