

Exploring stone-tool technology in the Congo Basin from the Earlier to the Later Stone Age

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S9-A: Creating in tropical forests: toolkits and technical behaviours of prehistoric hunter-gatherers between 23° North and 23° South.

First hominids arrived in the Congo Basin more than 2 millions years ago. A complete sequence of occupation has been exposed in different valleys of the region covering Earlier to Later Stone Age. During the Oldowan and the Acheulean, lithic tools testify of a homogeneity with the other African regions. However, from the Middle Stone Age, a regional techno-cultural facies emerged in the Congo Basin and its periphery. The importance of shaping in stone-tool production and the richness of heavy-duty tools led scholars to argue that Middle Stone Age populations adapted their tool-kit to the African rainforest. During Late Pleistocene and Early Holocene, the Later Stone Age facies multiplied, suggesting the existence of different techno-cultural traditions inside the Congo Basin. Despite this apparent rise of regionalization in Central African Stone Age, Prehistory in the Congo Basin remains poorly documented, possibly due to historiographic reasons. This is especially the case for the Pleistocene, whose records lack paleoenvironmental data and chrono-stratigraphic contexts.

Using a diachronic frame, we will explore the different hypotheses about the arrival of the first humans, the rainforest landscape occupation modalities and the inter-regional influences. To do so, we will present the results of assemblages analyses that we conducted combined with data available in the literature. Eventually, we will discuss the current knowledge of the Prehistory of the Congo Basin and the existence of particularities in the tool-kits of the African rainforest.

Keywords: Congo Basin, tool-kits, Pleistocene, diachrony, rainforest, technology, lithic