
First results on the Aterian of Bizmoune Cave (Essaouira, Morocco)

Steven Kuhn^{*1}, Abdeljalil Bouzouggar², Philippe Fernandez³, Dirk Hoffman, Susan Mentzer, and Ed Rhodes

¹University of Arizona – États-Unis

²Institut National des Sciences de l'Archéologie et du Patrimoine – Angle rues 5 et 7 Rabat-Instituts, Rabat, Maroc

³Laboratoire Méditerranéen de Préhistoire Europe Afrique (LAMPEA) – CNRS : UMR7269 – France

Résumé

Bizmoune cave is located in southwestern Morocco on the south-facing slopes of Jebel Hadid, about 15 km northeast of the modern city of Essaouira. The cave was first identified as a Paleolithic site in 2008. The current project, a collaboration between Moroccan, French, German and American researchers and institutions, began in 2014. Archaeological deposits at the site span the Neolithic, Upper Paleolithic/LSA (Ibero-Maurusian) and MSA (Aterian): the majority of the stratigraphic sequence contains Aterian assemblages. Bizmoune cave holds the potential to provide much unique information about Aterian adaptations in a little-explored area of western North Africa. Current chronometric information places the Aterian deposits in MIS 4 and 5, but it is likely that the earliest archaeological deposits predate the last Interglacial. Aterian layers document changing occupational intensity, with sparse remains at the top of the sequence and deposits very rich in organics and archaeological materials in the lower part of the sequence. Typical Aterian shaped tools such as tanged pieces and bifacial foliates are relatively abundant, and shell beads have been recovered from the earliest Aterian layers as well. The faunal assemblages, which consist mainly of African bovids, appear to be primarily or entirely anthropogenic in origin. The presence of shells of typical marine food species such as *Mytilus* is noteworthy given the site's distance from the sea during the Pleistocene. The density of land snail shells is very high in the Neolithic, Ibero-Maurusian but also in the earliest MSA deposits. Further study is required to determine whether the Aterian snail shells were accumulated by hominins or were the results of natural deaths within the cave.

Mots-Clés: Aterian, Morocco, shellfish, ornaments

*Intervenant