
The MSA to LSA transition in North Africa, with special reference to Taforalt cave

Nick Barton* , R. Nicholas Barton*^{†1}, Abdeljalil Bouzouggar^{‡2}, Simon Collcutt³, Louise Humphrey⁴, Jacob Morales⁵, and Alison Roberts⁶

¹University of Oxford – Royaume-Uni

²INSAP University of Rabat – Maroc

³Independent consultant – Royaume-Uni

⁴Natural History Museum, London – États-Unis

⁵University of Gran Canaria – Espagne

⁶Ashmolean Museum – Royaume-Uni

Résumé

A longstanding debate in Africa concerns the precise chronological and cultural relationship of the MSA (Middle Stone Age) to the LSA (Later Stone Age). In sub-Saharan Africa, this is sometimes because there is a question over the definition of the LSA or it is a matter of poor chronological control (for recent discussion see, Tryon and Faith 2016; Loftus et al. 2016; Pargeter and Redondo 2015). In North Africa, the matter is potentially clearer because there appears to be less variation in the LSA (Bouzouggar et al. 2008; Barton et al. 2016). In broad terms, the North African MSA is represented by Levallois flake and blade industries that sometimes contain small cores and a range of potential projectile forms such as bifacial foliates and tanged points that define the Aterian. These industries which date from at least 130 ka are attributed to early forms of *Homo sapiens*. In contrast, the LSA (25-10 ka Cal BP) is identified with a more recent demographic expansion of modern humans into North Africa (Maca-Meyer et al. 2003; Pereira et al. 2010) and is associated with a microlithic bladelet culture known as the Iberomaurusian. Previously it had been believed that a considerable time gap of more than 20 ka separated these cultural entities but, as a result of recent fieldwork and dating programmes at Taforalt and other sites, this hiatus has been considerably narrowed, raising the possibility of greater continuity in human populations from the MSA to LSA. In this paper we discuss the MSA to LSA transition at Taforalt and the occurrence of a lithic technology that falls within this timespan. The latter appears to have few direct counterparts in North Africa. It contains well-made adzes and triangular-sectioned tools that show some morphological parallels with Lupemban picks.

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*Intervenant

[†]Auteur correspondant: nick.barton@arch.ox.ac.uk

[‡]Auteur correspondant: abouzouggar@yahoo.fr

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