
Redefining the Levantine Aurignacian occupation of Sefunim Cave, Israel

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Résumé

Excavations at Sefunim Cave, Mount Carmel, Israel, during the 1960s by A. Ronen established the site as an important reference point for studying the Levantine Aurignacian in the Levant. Our recent excavations at the cave re-examine the Upper Paleolithic sequence and provide a new look at the level termed Levantine Aurignacian. The archaeological manifestation of the Levantine Aurignacian is commonly assumed to represent a wave of immigration into the Levant of the Aurignacian complex which spread over large parts of Eurasia. The stratigraphic sequence at Sefunim shows a succession of occupations from the base of Middle Paleolithic archaeological horizon (AH) VII, through the early Upper Paleolithic AH V, the late Upper Paleolithic AH IV, and the Epipaleolithic AH III-II. Here we focus on AH V which dates between 35-30,000 cal BP based on charcoal and shell. AH V is 20-40 cm thick and rich in flint tools, bones and shell beads, along with other elements of material culture such as ochre, antler fragments and massive stone choppers. Micro-geoarchaeological analysis of sediments from this layer show elevated concentration of ash, burnt bone and burnt shell. The study of stone artifacts shows typical Aurignacian tool forms. Well represented are burins and thick scrapers, which are often nosed or carinated. Some blades show a flat and intrusive modification, often termed "Aurignacian retouch". The total number of faunal specimens identified to date is ~840, with ungulates accounting for 93% of the NISP; however, a number of other taxa are present, including birds, small carnivores and tortoise. Gazelle (n=380) and fallow deer (n=164) predominate, indicating a particular focus on these species. Antler and bone tools with single points are the most frequent form, although one artifact, likely of antler, is a bi-point. Alongside numerous ochre pieces, the presence of shell artifacts is notable. Although the newly excavated shell assemblage comes from a relatively small area, it now represents one of the largest collections from this period in the Levant. A single gastropod species, *Columbella rustica*, predominates, followed by the scaphopod *Antalis* sp. Together these taxa comprise about 85% of the shells.

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While this set of behaviors, with regard to lithic technology, bone tools, shell beads and use of fire, supports the attribution of AH V to the Levantine Aurignacian, the varying character along the entire sequence is significant, as it sheds light on the nature of change between the early and late Upper Paleolithic.

Mots-Clés: Israel, Upper Paleolithic, Levantine Aurignacian, lithic artifacts, faunal analysis, shell beads, microgeoarchaeology