
”Going to the source”. New perspectives in the study of Canaanean Blade Technology from the Northern Iraqi Kurdistan

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Résumé

This paper presents a preliminary overview about the outstanding evidence of chert mining and specialized lithic workshops which have been found on the southern slopes of the Jebel Zawa mountain, in the Dohuk Governorate of Northern Iraqi Kurdistan. Here, intensive activities of chert extraction from karstic galleries and open-air quarries as well as specialized workshops for blade production have been identified through systematic surveys within the 2015-2017 ”Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project” field campaigns. Technical features observed on the lithic materials – such as cores and waste products – collected in several dense concentration areas, allow the identification of this mining complex as the source of the raw material used to make large and regular tools, known as ”Canaanean blades”. According to functional analysis carried out so far, Canaanean blades were mainly used in agricultural work. They were diffused throughout the Levant and Mesopotamia during the mid-4th to 3rd millennium BC. Manufacturing these standardized products required certain equipment, technical skill and a suitable raw material; given their wide distribution and quantity, a specialized production is assumed. However, little is known about the raw materials provenance and no analysis has been attempted in order to identify the supply areas. The Jebel Zawa mines are the first known system of quarries and specialized workshops within the core area of the Canaanean Blade Technology. Our data can contribute to provide a new perspective for investigating the phenomenon of long blades production and consumption in Northern Mesopotamia: from the source to the settlements as seen on a regional basis. We will discuss the mining evidence, the organization of the production, and the distribution of manufactured items (cores, blades) in the Northern Plains of Ninive.

Mots-Clés: Canaanean blades, chert mining, lithic workshops, Iraqi Kurdistan, Ninive

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