
Earliest evidence for tropical rainforest exploitation in South Asia

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Résumé

The timing and the route of dispersal of *Homo sapiens* out of Africa are among the most prominent debates in current palaeoanthropology. A range of recent evidence indicate the earliest expansions moved followed a southern route around the Indian Ocean rim and into Australia prior to human expansions northwards within Eurasia. The expansion through this southern route necessitated adaptation to tropical rainforests, an ecological habitat interpreted by many scholars as a barrier due to the scarcity of fat-rich fauna, and carbohydrate-rich plants. In the last decade, increasing archaeological evidence has documented the use of tropical rainforest resources by early modern humans in South Asia, Southeast Asia and Melanesia. However, the exact strategies employed by early humans in these environments remains little-studied. This poster aims to present new data from the excavation carried out in 2012 at Fa-Hien Lena, a cave site previously yielding the earliest fossil evidence of modern humans in Sri Lanka (~33ka). Our new results, which extends the chronology of habitation back to ~45ka, attests to the use of bipolar technology on local quartz and the production of geometric microlith and osseous projectiles. The latter appears to have been using in the specialized hunting of intermediate and small-size rainforest mammals. These animals were apparently roasted in hearths, with bones recycled as a new series of tools for projectile hunting. There is also evidence for the consumption and use of rainforest plants. Marine shell beads from the lower stratigraphic layers hint at possible social networks with coastal dwelling populations. This site provides some of the earliest detailed evidence in the world of tropical rainforest exploitation by our species.

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Mots-Clés: Homo sapiens, South Asia, Microliths, Rainforest foragers, Late Palaeolithic.