

Summary

The Organisation of Lithic Technology in the Middle and Early Upper Palaeolithic Industries at the Haua Fteah, Libya

Colin Campbell Moyer

The site of the Haua Fteah is located near the slopes of the Gebel el Akhdar mountains near the Mediterranean coast in Libya. Three cultural periods are examined, the Pre-Aurignacian, the Middle Palaeolithic and the Early Dabban. The dating for the site is controversial, however, the Pre-Aurignacian appears to date from ca. 195kya, the Middle Palaeolithic from 130kya – 42kya and the Early Dabban from 42kya – 30kya. Non-lithic evidence suggests that the Early Dabban is an Upper Palaeolithic industry that exhibits evidence of modern behaviour. There appear to be no Aterian affinities at the site.

Based on a statistical analysis of the debitage at the site, a number of conclusions are reached. Three conceptual modes – complexity, shape and efficiency – explain the bulk of the differences between three techno-chronological categories (flake blades, Levallois flakes and blades). Unlike the previous periods, the Early Dabban shows an integration of these conceptual modes in a single, numerically abundant technology (blades). In terms of tool production, the Early Dabban shows an organised, integrated strategy that is largely missing in the preceding periods: blank selection and/or intentional production of blades are important aspects of tool design. Despite some evidence of cumulative change in the previous periods, the changes in the Early Dabban signify a much larger and important shift: the different aspects of tool production become integrated and organised. This indicates extensive changes in human behaviour and capabilities.

Based on evidence from the site, Palaeolithic archaeology, primate behaviour and modern ethnography, a genetically based cognitive shift is rejected as a plausible explanation for this transition. Changes in human social organisation, specifically the emergence of a kin-ordered mode of production, are seen as a more plausible explanation for the changes that occur at the Middle to Upper Palaeolithic transition

at the Haua Fteah and elsewhere. Cognitive redistribution across kinship networks creates the possibility of exponential increases in the complexity of behaviour and cognition.