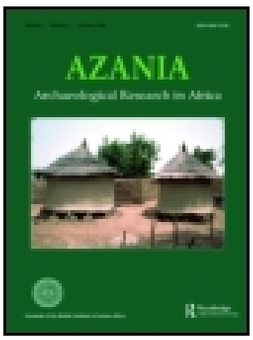

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Holocene prehistory in the Télidjène basin, Eastern Algeria: Capsian occupations at Kef Zoura D and Aïn Misteheyia

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BOOK REVIEW

Holocene prehistory in the Télidjène basin, Eastern Algeria: Capsian occupations at Kef Zoura D and Aïn Misteheyia, edited by David Lubell. Oxford, Archaeopress, 2016, vi+226 pp., £38 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-78491-373-1. Also available as an ebook (£19) ISBN 978-1-78491-3-748.

Kef Zoura D and Aïn Misteheyia are key sites of the Capsian culture of North Africa, as they both feature archaeological deposits that have been assigned to the *Capsien typique* (Typical Capsian) to *Capsien supérieur* (Upper Capsian) transition. The data presented here stem from excavations in the 1970s that were never completed because of changing political circumstances in Algeria. Since many projects undertaken in more stable political situations fail to reach publication, we should applaud the dedication shown by Lubell and his team in publishing these very important assemblages.

The volume opens with a very detailed, precise and honest presentation of the Kef Zoura D stratigraphy that enables the reader to follow the excavator's interpretation. As I know very well from my own experience in excavating shell-rich Epipalaeolithic and Neolithic deposits in Northern Africa, so-called *escargotières*, interpretation of such sites is very challenging. Within these anthropogenic, loose sediments, which consist of snail shells, ash and artefacts, the boundaries between layers are difficult to identify. In this instance Lubell uses the percentages of different land snail species to subdivide the deposit and to define occupation phases. Other parameters, such as absolute dating and artefact distributions, confirm the subdivisions, demonstrating that Lubell's method is ideal for reconstructing site formation processes.

The Kef Zoura D deposit is subdivided into five stratigraphic units: I–III (*Capsien typique*) and IV–V (*Capsien supérieur*). Units I–IV occur within the shelter, while Unit V could only be detected in a test pit outside the dripline. Due to the premature end to the fieldwork, no stratigraphic connection between Units IVs and V could be discerned. Furthermore, stratigraphic observations, in combination with the data from the faunal remains, compiled by Mary Jackes, show that none of the deposits outside the shelter is *in situ*. This observation complicates all further interpretation. The general treatment of radiocarbon dates is exemplary, with raw and calibrated dates, as well as laboratory numbers, provenance and information about the material dated all provided. The *Capsien typique* deposit dates between approximately 10,700 and 9300 cal. BP, the *Capsien supérieur* layers to between 8400 and 6700 cal. BP. The hiatus between them is probably linked to climate and environmental change, based on a discussion of all available North African palaeoclimatic records.

A detailed study of the lithic assemblage by Peter Sheppard succeeds the presentation of the Kef Zoura D site. In contrast to Lubell, Sheppard sees the transition from *Capsien typique* to *Capsien supérieur* as occurring between Units IV and V rather than between Units III and IV. He argues that this transition coincides with a sudden change in the technology of blade-bladelet production. Sheppard points out that the increase in backed bladelets indicates a gradual change in tool use and does not result from stratigraphic disturbance. This technological change accompanies the onset of pressure-flaking from 8500 cal. BP onwards, something also observed in other North African sites, irrespective of their facies. The application of this technique results in very standardised blade production, significantly affecting the frequency of microliths and backed bladelets in the assemblage. The study shows that the tool composition of the assemblage, employing Tixier's typology, changes through the sequence.

Major artefact classes, such as segments, trapezes and elongated triangles, represent a chronological sequence; however, the individual (Tixier) types within these classes result from blade-blank characteristics and the microburin technique. Thus, Tixier types can still be used as chronological markers, not because of their stylistic sensitivity, but because they indirectly point to changes in blade-blank production.

The third chapter is dedicated to the study of bone artefacts and artefacts made of ostrich eggshell from both Kef Zoura D and Aïn Misteheyia. According to its authors, Simone Mulazzani and Jean-Philip Brugal, bone tools occur only as small and medium-sized points. In the case of Aïn Misteheyia, despite the limited size of the assemblage, the authors have been able to reconstruct the *chaîne opératoire* of point production. This technological approach complements the classical typological method and sheds light on distinctly local patterns of behaviour in exploiting animal resources. A use wear analysis by Giacoma Pertullo of both bone tool assemblages complements this techno-typological study, revealing that bone points were used for several tasks, though primarily for processing vegetable materials and skins.

David Reese analysed the marine shell and, in so doing, provides a very informative overview of the distribution of ornaments made of this material. The assemblage includes perforated *Columbella rustica* shells, also known from other late Pleistocene and early Holocene sites in North Africa. Significantly, the Télidjène Basin is located 175 km from the Mediterranean, so the presence of marine shells indicates long-distance contacts.

Also indicative of the creative and symbolic behaviour of the inhabitants of Kef Zoura D is an engraved figure of an ostrich. Discussing this, Noura Rahmani and Lubell show that ostriches occupied a pre-eminent position in the perception of the environment across the entirety of the eastern Maghreb. All ostrich figures in this region date to the *Capsien supérieur* from 8800 cal. BP onwards when Capsian people extended their territory towards the Sahara and thus into this bird's geographic range. For Rahmani and Lubell, the appearance of ostrich imagery correlates with a trend towards aridity, an early example of art reflecting climate and environmental change.

Mary Jackes and Lubell studied a 10% sample of the vertebrate fauna from only the main trench at Kef Zoura D. Numbering 15,191 pieces, the assemblage is rich, but highly fragmented. Their report highlights site formation processes and butchery practices, as well as providing information on the species hunted and thus, indirectly, on the prevailing environment.

The study of charred botanical remains by Catherine D'Andrea, Sarah Oas and Thomas Shay is limited to the wood charcoals from the 1978 excavation of Kef Zoura D. Fruits and seeds were not preserved. Their study therefore focuses on reconstructing the immediate environs of the site. A shift in taxa composition towards Unit V reflects a change in regional vegetation, correlating with more humid conditions at the end of the *Capsien typique*, and thus confirms data from other terrestrial climate and environmental archives within the Maghreb.

The final, well-illustrated chapter, by Bernard Gassin and Juan Gibaja, presents the results of the use-wear analysis of 354 artefacts. Most interesting is the finding that all the microliths and backed bladelets were obviously used as projectiles, whereas backed blades were used for cutting activities. All the notched pieces, which were used to work wood or animal bone, are the product of intentional retouch rather than the result of use.

This volume is a detailed and convincing interdisciplinary presentation of important archaeological material, illustrated with numerous very informative, high-quality figures. Although its title suggests that both Kef Zoura D and Aïn Misteheyia will be examined in some detail, study of Aïn Misteheyia is confined to the analysis of its bone tools and marine shells, probably because other data from this site have been published previously in journals

such as *Science*, *Libyca* and the *Journal of African Archaeology* (Lubell *et al.* 1975, 1976, 1982-83; Lubell 2009).

Within his detailed and well-structured presentation of the chronology and stratigraphy of Kef Zoura D, Lubell also presents, quite unexpectedly, parts of the lithic assemblage. This is mainly material from the external test pit, but also includes some from the main trench. This is slightly disconcerting because Sheppard's very detailed study of the lithic assemblage follows immediately and reveals some inconsistencies between the analysts: Lubell refers to Layer IV as *Capsien typique*, while Sheppard assigns it to his Upper Capsian. Further, though both mention pieces covered with ochre, they refer to different numbers (Lubell, p. 29; Sheppard, p. 34, Table 3).

But notwithstanding these minor issues, in summary, *Holocene Prehistory in the Télidjène Basin* offers numerous insights into the very important site of Kef Zoura D. Furthermore, it makes important contributions to several discussions, including the chronological framework of the North African Epipalaeolithic, technological developments, such as the appearance of pressure-flaking, and the significance of climate and environmental changes.

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