

4

Stone Age North Africa

Nick Barton

4.1 Introduction

A substantial part of North Africa lies within the confines of the Sahara, which today covers a land area of over nine million km². Only a tiny fraction of this area has been adequately surveyed or mapped for archaeological sites, which makes the Stone Age material in the Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM) collections of particular value for researchers into the Palaeolithic. The majority of artefacts derived from the activities of collectors during the colonial periods of the 1920s and 1930s, and during the occupation of North Africa by Allied forces in the Second World War. The existence of related collections of Stone Age material in other UK museums, especially the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and the British Museum, further enhances the historical importance of the PRM collection from this region. Of relevance too are the archives of individual collectors that survive in various institutions, and could provide useful sources for future work such as the C.G. Seligman diaries in the London School of Economics.¹ The North African finds complement the PRM's Stone Age holdings from sub-Saharan Africa (cf. Chapter 2).

This Chapter introduces the PRM collection and collectors from Stone Age North Africa (4.2), and a series of overviews of the collections by country (4.3), before drawing brief conclusions about the character and significance of the collections (4.4).

4.2 Stone Age North African Material in the PRM

Stone Age material from this region is catalogued under the separate country headings of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt (*Table 4.1, Figure 4.1*). Due to the heavily French-influenced history of research in these countries, the archaeological terminology is dominated by European terms such as 'Middle Palaeolithic' and 'Upper Palaeolithic', and sub-categories like 'Mousterian' and 'Aurignacian'. In sub-Saharan Africa this scheme has long been abandoned, but it is only recently that prehistorians working in North Africa have begun to refer to Early Stone Age (ESA), Middle Stone Age (MSA) and Later Stone Age (LSA), alongside traditional terms for individual industries such as 'Aterian', 'Iberomaurusian' and 'Capsian'. In practice, there may be good reasons for retaining terms like Middle and Upper Palaeolithic in Libya and Egypt: because there has been a history of usage of this nomenclature, and because of possible affinities with the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic records of

¹ National Archives GB/NNAF/P148927. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra/searches/subjectView.asp?ID=P25704> (Accessed 14 April 2011).

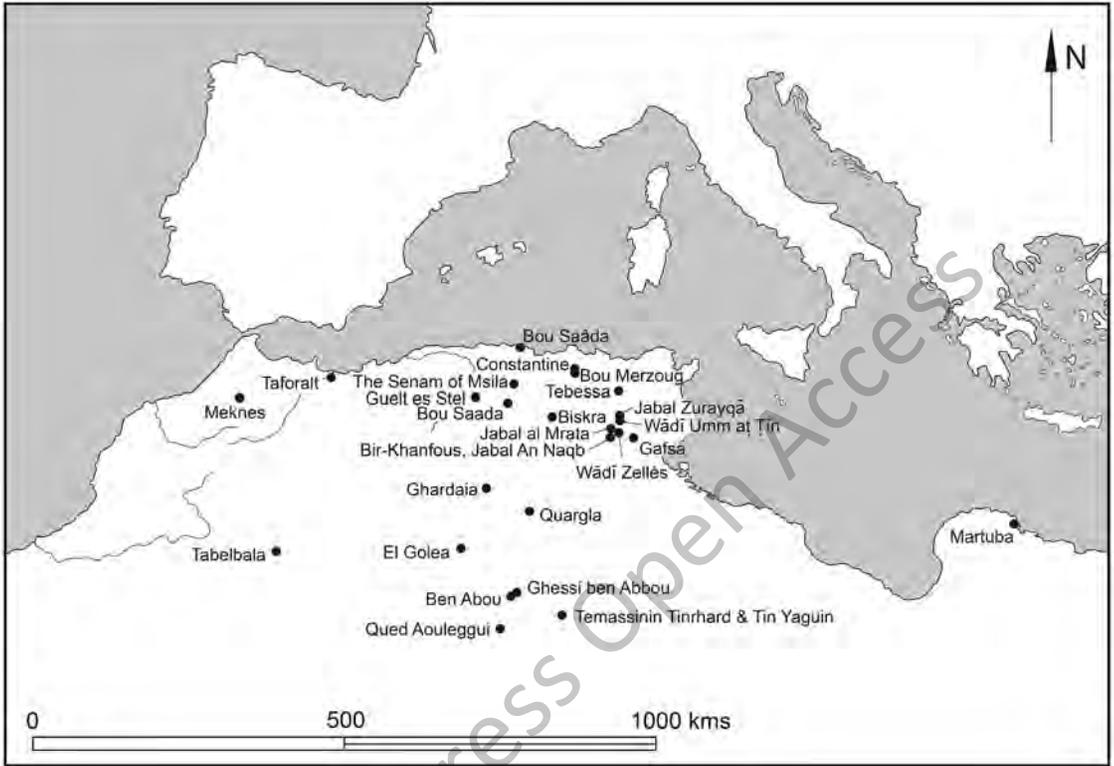


Figure 4.1 Map of North Africa, showing the main Stone Age sites referred to Chapter 4.

the Middle East and Levant (Shea 2010). In contrast, the chronology of the stone industries of the Maghreb (Morocco-Algeria-Tunisia) seems to fit better within the sub-Saharan Middle to Later Stone Age succession (Bouzouggar and Barton 2012).

Of particular historical interest in the PRM collections are the representative samples of Middle Stone Age Aterian finds and in Later Stone Age artefacts of Iberomaurusian and Capsian types. The Aterian is a distinctive industry, which is very widely spread across North Africa. Its dating and significance have been debated for nearly a century. Renewed interest in the Aterian has arisen because of a recent proposal that its development and spread may have been linked to the dispersal of anatomically modern humans (McBrearty and Brooks 2000). The industry contains technological innovations such as thin, bifacially flaked lithic points and pedunculates as well as evidence for personal ornaments and use of red pigments (D’Errico *et al.* 2009), though only lithic artefacts are present in the PRM’s collections. Various Aterian sites have now been dated in Morocco and

Table 4.1 Number of North African Palaeolithic objects in the Pitt Rivers Museum, by country.

Country	Number of Objects
Algeria	1,972
Egypt	1,202
Libya	101
Morocco	111
Tunisia	221
Total	3,607

suggest a long chronology extending back over 100,000 years (Barton *et al.* 2009; Richter *et al.* 2010) and the same may hold true elsewhere in the Maghreb and in the North African Sahara which were certainly 'wetter' and more habitable during the last Interglacial period.

In terms of the Later Stone Age, the occurrence of the Iberomaurusian may coincide with the appearance of fully modern humans in North Africa around 20,000 years ago (Bouzouggar and Barton 2012). There are useful typological samples of this material in the collections as well as from the succeeding industries of the Capsian. Both provide significant archives of material for comparative studies of the Later Stone Age in North Africa.

The PRM's Stone Age collections from the northern Sahara and its margins include stone artefacts from the Maghreb (from the modern countries of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia) and from locations that extend geographically eastwards into the Libyan Desert and parts of Cyrenaica. The large Palaeolithic collections from Egypt have been comprehensively described by Sarah Milliken in a monograph (2003), and are therefore only cursorily described below.

4.3 Overview of the Collections

4.3.1 Algeria

The majority of the PRM's North African Palaeolithic material is from Algeria. The lithic artefacts described here mainly derive from large surface scatters of material that represent palimpsests of finds from different periods that have been deflated onto exposed land surfaces. Despite the lack of stratigraphic definition the collections are nevertheless of value because they document the presence of Early to Later Stone Age occupation in the Algerian Sahara.

One of the largest collections is that from Herr Rudolf J. Fromholz of Eberswalde, Germany, purchased in February 1914. It includes 192 objects (within 1914.65.1–262). PRM records state that Fromholz collected the material himself in the southern Algerian Sahara and located the findspots on a 'chart'. Little is known about Fromholz himself, but he had ornithological interests and was collecting specimens in Algeria during the winter of 1912–1913. In describing the specimens of a new species of *Calandrella* he records 'All localities are in southern Algeria, about 300–400 km south of Ouargla, partly on Tadmaït, partly on the Tinghert plateau' (Fromholz 1913). It is probable that the stone tools were collected during this work, especially as one of the ornithological localities is Ghessi ben Abbou, which is also one of the named archaeological findspots.

The collections come from a variety of locations in the southern Algerian Sahara, such as Temassinin Tinrhardand (24 artefacts, 1914.65.194–217) and Tin Yaguin (34 artefacts, 1914.65.218–244, 1914.65.255–262) from which there are handaxes and large bifacial tools (e.g. 1914.65.203, 1914.65.219) as well as admixtures of clearly later stone artefacts in the form of fifty Neolithic arrow-heads and undiagnostic blades of probable Iberomaurusian and Capsian types. Another major collecting area was Ghessi ben Abbou and the nearby site of Ben Abou, which besides rich accumulations of flakes and blades were also prolific sources of chert raw material. In addition to scatters of Iberomaurusian and Capsian artefacts, it is possible that discrete sub-clusters of LSA artefacts existed within the larger scatters as for example indicated by a small box of two microburins and nineteen other artefacts including bladelets (the artefacts are all marked with the single number 227). Another significant location was that of the Oued Aoulegguï, Tadmaït plateau that included scatters of undiagnostic flakes some of which could be of MSA types.

Another major collector in Algeria was Professor Charles Gabriel Seligman who collected extensively from near the border with Morocco. One of the richest sites was that of Tabel Belat (also labelled Tabel Balah and identified with the present-day Tabelbala oasis). Amongst the 423 objects held at the PRM from this site are ESA cleavers and crude handaxes made of quartzite and chalcedony (1928.50.1–7) as well as 20 MSA pedunculate points (1928.50.60–79) and bifacial foliates that are typical of the Aterian. Other finds from this location include four Mousterian points (1928.50.1–2, two are unnumbered) and assorted tools. The collection from Tabel Balat also comprises Iberomaursian (LSA) and large numbers of Neolithic artefacts. It is conceivable that further information on the local provenance of these finds may be found in the field notebooks of Seligman that are presently archived at the London School of Economics. Further Tabel Balat material was donated by Seligman or his wife Brenda in 1940, the year of his death. It includes examples of ESA handaxes and cleavers (1940.12.693), discoidal and Levallois cores in distinctive reddish quartzites and chert, and a small series of Aterian pedunculate points (1940.12.699).

It should be noted that Tabelbala is significant for its Acheulean finds. It is one of the two type-sites for Tabalbala-Tachenghat type cleavers that are known only from the northwest Sahara. These cleavers are large side-struck examples from centripetally prepared Levallois cores. The technique is discussed in more detail by Aliment and Zuate y Zuber (1978). A further interesting historical footnote is that the original discoverer of the site in 1914, Tarel, described tanged points from the same general location in amongst other Stone Age material. Seligman later drew attention to these finds and records that Breuil thought the examples from the Tabelbala oasis area were of Mousterian age and type. He also wrote:

‘I have seen and handled many of these points, and I venture to say there can be absolutely no doubt as to their being arrow-heads or the points of light spears, the date being the only matter that can be open to discussion’ (Seligman 1921: 128).

This might have provided the incentive for him to visit and continue collecting at Tabelbala.

In addition to the finds above, an impressive concentration of 48 Aterian tanged points in a variety of raw materials are recorded as coming from Guelt es Hel (also known as Guelt es Stel) (1940.12.697) and are worth further investigation and comparison with diary entries in Seligman’s notebooks.

Dorothy Annie Elizabeth Garrod, a former diploma student at the PRM, collected 101 finds mainly of Iberomaursian and Capsian types with some Neolithic arrow-heads from Ghardaia (1923.59.98–198). The locality of Wargla (modern day Ouargla) provided evidence of MSA artefacts in the form of a large double side scraper (1923.59.107) and a few bifacial foliates that could be of Aterian origin. Another site with Capsian finds is that of Bou Saada that produced a small but important collection of typical lunate and trapezoidal microliths (1923.59.199–211).

Henry Balfour donated 111 small boxes of stone tools from Algeria in 1945 (1945.9.11), which had been collected by an unnamed ‘French insect collector’. These objects have yet to be fully catalogued. A preliminary look indicates that amongst them are a major array of Iberomaursian and Capsian artefacts which according to the PRM records were collected near Guelt es Stel, Sela Rous, about 200 miles south of Algiers on the High Plateaux north of Djelfa. Other artefacts donated by Balfour include a group of 16 Aterian pedunculate points and scrapers. Unfortunately, there is no clue as to the precise location of these finds. These appear to be mixed in with a number of Mousterian points and material of post-MSA types. Further Stone Age material, this time a very impressive series of 412 Capsian microliths (2010.79.1–412) that have been ordered typologically and placed in separate boxes, come from a

location northwest of Elgolea (modern El Goléa), and southeast of Ouargla. They were probably given to Balfour by one of the Rothschild family in 1921 (probably the naturalist Walter Rothschild of Tring).

In amongst the lesser collections from Algeria are Capsian finds from the later 'monument' sites of Senâm mâr Msila, near modern M'Sila (150 lithics) and Bou Merzoug near Constantine, (120 lithics). The first is a long low hill called the Senâm, which is covered with large numbers of stone circles and a series of dolmens. A similar complex exists at Bou Merzoug, a location noted for its natural springs. The Stone Age finds were donated by David Randall-MacIver in 1900 (1900.38.126). The impetus for this work had been the recent discovery of late Neolithic (Predynastic) remains in Egypt that Petrie and his colleagues believed had originated in Libya:

'Professor Petrie was persuaded by various coincidence of detail, and especially by the existence amongst the modern Kabyles of a red and white pottery closely resembling that which was made by his 'New Race' to connect the latter with Libyans represented in our own times by the modern inhabitants of Algeria' (Randall-MacIver and Wilkins 1901: 6).

Thus it was that Randall-MacIver went westwards from Egypt with Anthony Wilkins. Their work at Senâm mâr Msila and Bou Merzoug aimed to determine the age and nature of these and other monuments and recorded that they had found small black flints of the same kind at both sites. They also noted that the flints must have been brought from a distance, as there was no trace of any native flint on either site (Randall-MacIver and Wilkins 1901).

A small number of artefacts including an MSA convergent scraper comes from the desert near Biskra and was donated by Dr. G.B. Longstaff in 1905. Finds originating from Ipswich Museum comprise ESA handaxes from Constantine and Tebessa (1966.2.140 .1-2), a series of unidentifiable flakes and large bifacial point from Ougla and 3 Aterian points, one of which is marked as coming from Tebessa.

4.3.2 Tunisia

Much of the material from Tunisia derives from sites around Gafsa and was either donated by Dorothy Garrod (1923.59.217-282) or purchased from Marius Latapie (1924.72.1-91). Garrod's 67 objects comprise various flakes, burins and endscrapers, handaxes and one unstruck Levallois core that was apparently picked up from Quaternary gravels in Zellés-Gafsa (Wadi Zellés). Several other finds of Levallois cores are recorded from Gafsa district as well as a side scraper on an elongate flake from Jebel Zerique (probably Jabal Zurayqā'). A noteworthy discovery is an Aterian scraper on a tanged support (1923.59.223) that came from Mrata (probably Jabal al Mrata) in the Gafsa District. It may well be related to an Aterian point also from the same location. Apart from these finds the majority of artefacts from both Garrod and Latapie probably belong to the Capsian. Mention here can be made of a scraper and retouched flake from a 'shell heap' at Ain Sendès (Gafsa District), plus burins and backed pieces marked as 'Capsian' and from Gafsa District. The existence of another collection of Capsian artefacts is noted at Haute Sendès which includes backed blades, drill-bits, burins and scrapers and an interesting flake with evidence of red ochre on its edge. A number of artefacts in this group have 'shell heap' written on them.

Although the material comes from two separate donations it may originally derive from the same sources. Latapie was the *Préparateur* at the Institut du Paléontologie Humaine in Paris, and a colleague of the Abbé Henri Breuil. As a young man he had

worked with Maurice Reygasse and published several papers with him on Algerian prehistory, including a key paper on the *'escargotières'* of the Tebessa region concerning the shell mounds of the region that were mainly of Capsian age (Reygasse and Latapie 1911). Breuil was a great supporter of Dorothy Garrod in her early research, and he introduced her to many archaeologists working in the Palaeolithic. These introductions may have included Latapie, or mutual acquaintances. Both the Garrod and Latapie collections contain material from Ain Sendès, Haut Sendès and Jebel Zerique in the Gafsa region. The Garrod collection of 67 objects contains material from Mrata and Zelles, and the Latapie collection of 119 artefacts from Fedj Nahla (Djebel Fedj en Nahla), Châlet Boughoub, Bir-Khanfous (at the northern end of Jabal An Naqb) and Oud-el-Tin (probably Wādī Umm aṭ Ṭīn). Together the material is a good representative collection from this region, including from some sites known in the 1920s (e.g. Ain Sendès; Bir-Khanfous). It would be interesting to know more about how the material was acquired by Garrod and Latapie, but further information may be contained in the Garrod archive in Paris.

4.3.3 Libya

The collections from Libya were made during the Second World War. Amongst the restricted number of finds there is material that has potential relevance for present-day researchers in this region. The primary artefact donor was Captain Christopher Musgrave (Figure 4.2) who collected from various sites around the southern side of the Gulf of Sirte and in Cyrenaica while posted in the region. Of interest is a box containing large numbers of waste products of blade and bladelet material (1944.1.87² probably belonging to Capsian and LSA Iberomaursian technologies. The finds come from an open-air location at Martsba (near Matrubah) that served as an airbase for the RAF, and according to a note from Musgrave in the box derive 'From (a) sunny crestoverlooking from the north the Wadi el Maallegh, which forms the southern boundary of the Martsba plateau, some 20 miles south of Derna'. The note also mentions that Charles McBurney of Cambridge University had selected some objects for examination that would be returned to the collection once the analyses were complete. There are no retouched tools or microburins in the collection, which suggests that if such examples existed they would have been amongst the material borrowed for study by McBurney.

Over 60 lithic flakes and flake tools probably mostly of post-Palaeolithic age and donated by Captain M.H.A. Boyd (1944.2.1) were surface collected from locations about 20 miles inland from the Gulf of Sirte in the Wadi Chebr and Wadi Tarret. Similar post-Palaeolithic finds registered in 1947 are recorded from Jerabub in Cyrenaica. They include thin, pointed bifacial tools, picks and scrapers. Some 37 stone implements made through surface collection at various sites in Libya by Robert Soper in 1960 remain to be fully assessed.

4.3.4 Egypt

Sarah Milliken's monograph (2003) describes and depicts in detail the 17 collections that comprise the Egyptian Palaeolithic collection of the PRM, which derive from fieldwork conducted between 1872 and 1934. As such, the collection documents the first six decades of Palaeolithic archaeology in Egypt, from Lubbock's visit to Egypt in 1873 to investigate the validity of initial claims of a Palaeolithic in Egypt (1928.68.477), through General Pitt Rivers' own demonstration of such Palaeolithic implements *in situ* in Egypt (1884.132.39–40, 91–92), to Seligman's fieldwork just

² Currently a bulk accession.



Figure 4.2 Photographic portrait of physical anthropologist Captain Christopher Musgrave (died 1978) in the Western Desert, 1942 (courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford).

before the First World War. Indeed, Charles Seligman donated the largest portion of the collection, numbering some 687 artefacts in total. His work, much of it only documented in his diaries now held at the London School of Economics, attest to the thoroughness of his investigations into Egyptian prehistory, amongst the first of the more rigorous work to be undertaken in the country. For example, he established that there was no correlation between particular Nile terraces and temporally diagnostic archaeological industries. Aside from the teaching potential that such a wide collection offers, the value of the collection is related to this history of archaeology.

4.3.5 Morocco

The PRM holds just under 40 Stone Age artefacts from Morocco. They include a small but significant sample of 15 finds collected by H.N. Moseley from a series of 'Kitchen Middens' near Mequinez (modern Meknes; 1910.49.1–6). The finds are probably post-Iberomaurusian in age and may include deliberately heat-treated chert. Despite an absence of more detailed documentation they suggest an interesting primary association with hearths and midden debris from a rare inland location.

Five Iberomaurusian microliths are recorded from the site of Taforalt in eastern Morocco (2010.73.1–5). This is a famous Palaeolithic cave site with well-documented collections spanning the MSA and LSA (see Bouzouggar *et al.* 2008). It is unknown how these points were acquired by the PRM.

4.3 Conclusions

Although the North African collections of the PRM may seem primarily to be of historical interest, a number of assemblages are important for their rarity and would be useful sources of information for comparative studies. The collections that probably have the greatest potential for future study are those from the Middle Stone Age of Algeria and Tunisia, from sites that are relatively well located in the landscape and that could be mapped using satellite imagery to investigate their proximity to palaeolakes or other fossil features such as dry stream beds. It may also repay the

effort of investigating individual collectors such as C.G. Seligman who kept diaries that could provide valuable contextual detail about individual sites, for example in the Algerian Sahara. Such regions are still generally under-researched archaeologically and there is enormous scope for developing new work in these areas.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Alison Roberts for adding important bibliographic details about the collectors and drawing my attention to the significance of Tabelbala in Algeria. She also compiled the map of findspots.

References

- Alimen, H. and J. Zuate y Zuber 1978. *L'évolution de l'Acheuléen au Sahara Nord-Occidental: Saoura - Ongarta – Tabelbala*. Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique.
- Barton, R.N.E., A. Bouzouggar, S.N. Collcutt, J.-L. Schwenninger and L. Clark-Balzan 2009. OSL dating of the Aterian levels at Grotte de Dar es-Soltan I (Rabat, Morocco) and possible implications for the dispersal of modern Homo sapiens. *Quaternary Science Reviews* 28: 1914–1931.
- Bouzouggar, A. and N. Barton 2012. The identity and timing of the Aterian in Morocco. In J.-J. Hublin and S. McPherron (eds) *Modern Origins: A North African Perspective*. Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 93–105.
- Bouzouggar, A., R.N.E. Barton, S. Blockley, C. Bronk-Ramsey, S.N. Collcutt, R. Gale, T.F.G. Higham, L.T. Humphrey, S. Parfitt, E. Turner and S. Ward 2008. Re-evaluating the age of the Iberomaurusian in Morocco. *African Archaeological Review* 25: 3–19.
- D'errico, F., M. Vanhaeren, N. Barton, J. Bouzouggar, H. Mienis, D. Richter, J.J. Hublin, S.P. McPherron, and P. Lozouet 2009. Additional evidence on the use of personal ornaments in the Middle Paleolithic of North Africa. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA* 106(38): 16051–16056.
- Fromholz, R.J. 1913. Eine neue nordafrikanische Calandrella. *Ornithologische Monatsberichte* 21: 140–141.
- McBrearty, S. and A.S. Brooks 2000. The revolution that wasn't: a new interpretation of the origin of modern human behavior. *Journal of Human Evolution* 39 (5): 453–563.
- Milliken, S. 2003. *Catalogue of Palaeolithic Artefacts from Egypt in the Pitt Rivers Museum*. Oxford: British Archaeological Reports (BAR International Series 1166).
- Randall-MacIver, D. and A. Wilkin 1901. *Libyan Notes*. London: Macmillan and Company.
- Reygasse, M. and M. Latapie 1911. Note sur les escargotières de la région de Tebessa. *Bulletin de la Société de Préhistoire de France* 9: 166–167.
- Richter, D., J. Moser, M. Nami, J. Eiwanger and A. Mikdad 2010. New chronometric data from Ifri n'Ammar (Morocco) and the chronostratigraphy of the Middle Palaeolithic in the Western Maghreb. *Journal of Human Evolution* 59(6): 672–679.
- Seligman, C.G. 1921. The older Palaeolithic Age in Egypt. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 51:115–153.
- Shea, J.J. 2010. Neanderthals and early Homo sapiens in the Levant. In E.E.A. Garcea (ed.), *South-Eastern Mediterranean Peoples between 130,000 and 10,000 Years Ago*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, pp. 126–143.
- Tarel, R. 1914. Contribution a l'étude de l'industrie lithique du Sahara occidental. Gisements préhistoriques de Poasis de Tabelbala. *Revue Anthropologique* 24: 312–355.