



Faunal analysis of the Neolithic units from the Gueldaman Cave GLD1 (Akbou, Algeria) and the shift in sheep/goat husbandry



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ABSTRACT

The GDL1 cave belongs to the large karst network of the Adrar Gueldaman ridges (Northern Algeria). New excavations by the Centre National de Recherches Préhistoriques, Anthropologiques et Historiques (CNRPAH) since 2010 have yielded rich archaeological remains dated between 7002 cal BP and 1484 cal BP. The paper presents results of the zooarchaeological analysis of the macromammals from the Neolithic units in sectors S2 and S3. They reveal the presence of a restricted fauna, dominated by sheep and goat, goat being more frequent than sheep. Domestic cattle and pig may also be present. The age profiles of the goat/sheep finds suggest a shift in the management of the sheep/goat herds aiming first at the production of meat and later at the production of meat and secondary products.

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1. Introduction

Several recent researches on the Neolithic and the “Neolithisation” of the Mediterranean Northwestern Africa have been conducted and published in recent decades. Many focused on the domestic animals, which demonstrate the early adoption of caprine (sheep and goats) husbandry, in contrast to what is observed in the Sahara. Cattle seem to be the first domestic animal in the Saharan region (Hassan, 2000; Gifford-Gonzalez, 2005). In Mediterranean Northwestern Africa, the earliest presence of sheep and goat pastoralism is documented in Libya. de Faucambergue (2014) has recorded the presence of domestic sheep/goat in the 8th millennium cal BP sites of Abu Tamsa and Haua Fteah. At approximately the same period, domestic caprines have been discovered in the Moroccan sites of Kef Taht el-Ghar and Ifri Oudadane (Ouchaou and Amani, 1997; Linstädter et al., 2012). Tunisia (Doukanet el koutifa and Kef el-Agab sites, Aouadi et al., 2014) and Algeria (Capéletti and Damous el Ahmar sites, Roubet, 1979, 2003) have also delivered evidence of domestic sheep/goat during the 7th and 6th millennium cal BP. These findings have provided new information about the onset of the Neolithic in Mediterranean Northwestern Africa and a better understanding of this Neolithic process. However, some gaps remain, mainly on the exploitation of these domestic animals such as the management of herds and the steps of

butchering and cooking processes. This paper raises issues related to the management of sheep and goat herds by the Neolithic population of Northwestern Africa, and also investigates the kind of products extracted from these animals and the way to prepare and eat the meat. For this purpose, we propose a zooarchaeological analysis of a faunal assemblage resulting from recent excavations (2011–2012) at Gueldaman cave (GLD1).

2. Site

The GLD1 cave is one of the six caves located on the southeast slope of Adrar Gueldaman, an eastern Mediterranean ridge of the western Tellian Babors (Fig. 1). It is situated near the town of Akbou (Bejaia, Algeria), on the southwest side of the Soummam River. Located at 507 m altitude, the GLD1 cavity is oriented to the southeast. The maximum length of the cave is about 80 m. The entrance is a semi-circular arch of 6 m radius, which leads to a long dome, shaped corridor, ending at the main room, “Grande Salle”. At 55 m from the entrance several fused speleothem pillars take the form of a high wall, behind which other large areas and narrow corridors remained unexplored.

De Beaumais and Royer (1926) carried out the first excavations at GLD1 in 1920. They provided a large collection of artefacts: polished bone tools, fragments of pottery, some lithic tools as polished axes, faunal bones, and a few human remains. This archaeological material was assigned to an Early Neolithic culture, because the polished axes and the potteries, at that time, were considered as markers of the Neolithic. New investigations and excavations have been

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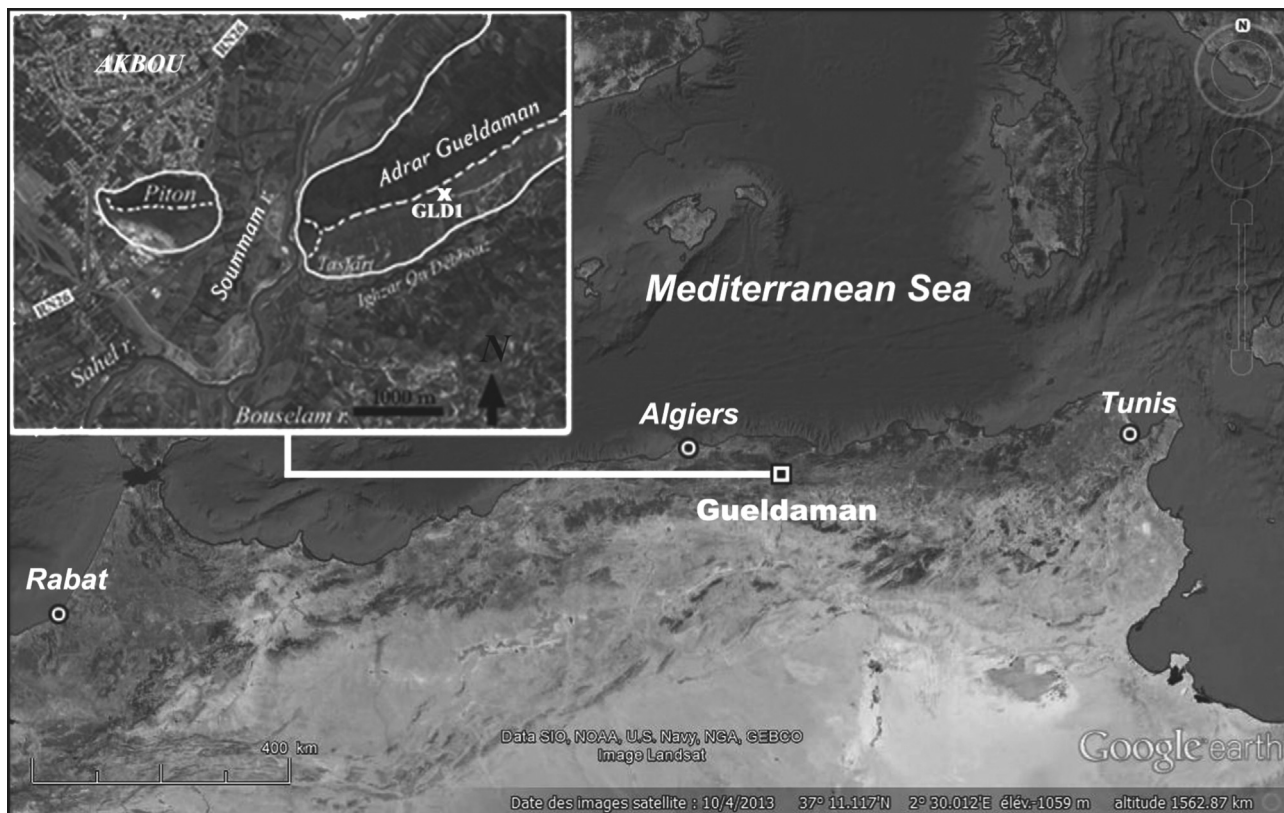


Fig. 1. Location of Gueldaman Cave GLD1.

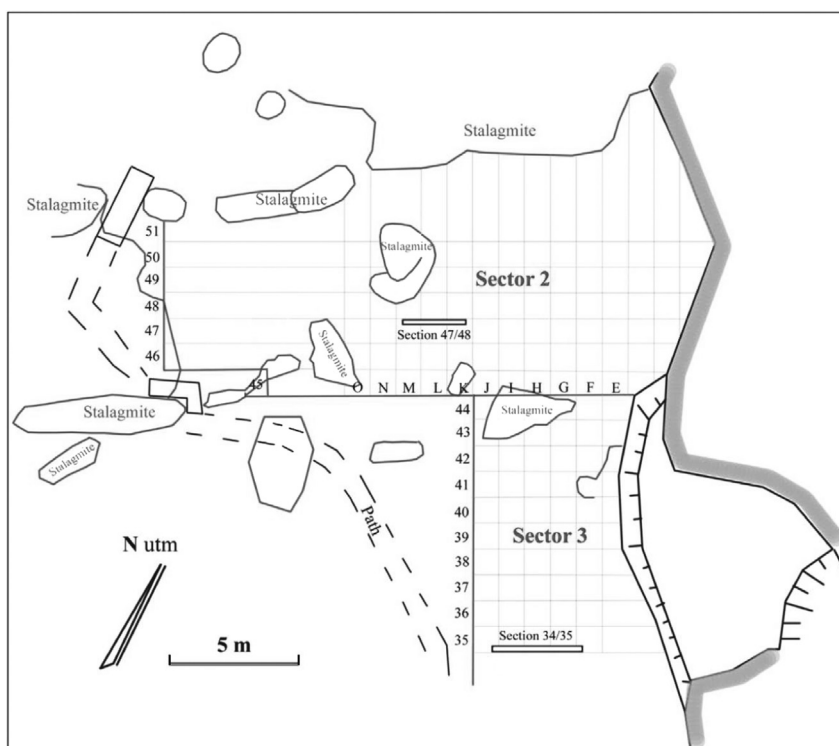


Fig. 2. GLD1 – Plan of excavated sectors S2 and S3.

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