



Original article

Patterning of the early Middle Paleolithic occupations at Douara Cave and its implications for settlement dynamics in the Palmyra basin, Syria

Structuration des occupations du Paléolithique moyen initial de la Grotte de Douara et ses implications dans les dynamiques de peuplement du Bassin de Palmyre en Syrie

Yoshihiro Nishiaki ^{a,*}, Takeru Akazawa ^b

^a *The University Museum, The University of Tokyo, Hongo 7-3-1, Bunkyo, Tokyo, 113-0033, Japan*

^b *Research Institute, Kochi University of Technology, Miyanokuchi 185, Kami city, Kochi 782-8502, Japan*

Available online 14 November 2015

Abstract

This paper examines spatial patterning and settlement dynamics of early Middle Paleolithic hominins at Douara Cave, located on the northern edge of the Syrian Desert. The analyzed material came from our 1984 excavations of Horizons IVB–IVD, techno-typologically assigned to the Tabun D-type Levantine Mousterian (ca. 250 to 130 ka). Two findings are reported. One is the existence of spatial organization in the cave interior. Analysis of the field records shows that the occupation floor of the early Middle Paleolithic at Douara was well-organized into specific activity areas with a focal area of intensive activities close to the back wall. This suggests that the organized use of space known at late Middle Paleolithic sites like Tor Faraj, Jordan, is also applicable to the early Middle Paleolithic. Second, this paper discusses the functional role of this cave within the regional settlement system. A range of features characterizing its living floor(s) point to a very low occupational intensity, undoubtedly reflecting adaptation and particular land use patterns in the arid environments of this region. Moreover, this pattern, along with the division of interior space, seems to have remained consistent through multiple early Middle Paleolithic levels (IVB–IVD). These observations suggest that Douara Cave was a short-term camp embedded in a regional settlement system in the arid environments of this period.

© 2015 Elsevier Masson SAS. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Syria; Palmyra basin; Douara Cave; Early Middle Paleolithic; Settlement dynamic; Occupation patterning

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: nishiaki@um.u-tokyo.ac.jp (Y. Nishiaki).

Résumé

Cet article étudie la structuration et l'occupation de l'espace par les hommes du Paléolithique moyen de la grotte de Douara située sur la frange nord du désert syrien. Le matériel analysé provient des horizons IVB-IVD de nos fouilles de 1984. D'un point de vue techno-typologique, il s'agit d'une industrie du Moustérien levantin de type Tabun D (environ 250–130 ka). Deux résultats sont développés. Le premier correspond à l'organisation spatiale à l'intérieur de la grotte. L'analyse des données de terrain montre que le sol d'occupation du début du Paléolithique moyen de Douara a bien été structuré en domaines d'activités spécifiques avec une aire dédiée à des activités particulièrement intense au fond de la grotte. Cela suggère que l'organisation de l'espace connue sur les sites de la fin du Paléolithique moyen comme Tor Faraj, en Jordanie, est également applicable au début du Paléolithique moyen. Le deuxième examine le rôle fonctionnel de cette grotte dans le système d'occupation à l'échelle régionale. Un ensemble de traits caractérisent le ou les sols d'occupation. Ceci démontre une très faible intensité de l'occupation, ce qui reflète sans doute l'adaptation et notamment les modes d'exploitation du territoire dans les environnements arides de cette région. En outre, ce modèle, avec la division de l'espace intérieur, semble être resté cohérent à travers de multiples niveaux du début du Paléolithique moyen (IVB-IVD). Ces observations suggèrent que la grotte de Douara était un campement de courte durée intégré dans un système d'occupation régional dans les environnements arides de cette période.

© 2015 Elsevier Masson SAS. Tous droits réservés.

Mots clés : Syrie ; Bassin de Palmyre ; Grotte de Douara ; Paléolithique moyen initial ; Dynamique de peuplement ; Structuration des occupations

1. Introduction

There have been increased attempts to analyze spatial patterning and settlement dynamics of Middle Paleolithic sites across Eurasia over the past decade. Such research has yielded important insights on the complex behavioral patterns and cognitive abilities of hominins during this time period (e.g., Conard, 2001, 2004; Conard and Delage, 2010; Vaquero and Pasto, 2001; Stiner et al., 2010; Rosel et al., 2011; Henry, 2011, 2012). This trend reflects the expansion of research dimensions for this period from reconstructing the cultural-historical chronostratigraphy to including analysis of settlement systems and behavioral forms of Middle Paleolithic hominins in their spatial context (Conard and Delage, 2010: 10).

In the Middle Paleolithic of the Levant, the temporal and regional focuses of this paper, those analyses have revealed the practice of a deliberate division of space into specific activity areas during this time period. A prime example is at Tor Faraj, Jordan. Henry (2003, 2011, 2012) revealed highly organized spatial patterning at this rockshelter, a behavior virtually indistinguishable from that known from some modern hunter-gatherers. Although not as exceptional as the evidence from Tor Faraj, the patterned use of space has been claimed at other Levantine Middle Paleolithic sites like Kebara Cave (Bar-Yosef and Meignen, 2007; Speth et al., 2012), Amud Cave (Alperson-Afil and Hovers, 2005; Hovers et al., 2011) and the open-air site of Quneitra (Oron and Goren-Inbar, 2014). A behavior once attributed solely to modern humans (McBrearty and Brooks, 2000), the organized use of space apparently originated well before the Upper Paleolithic. The reports describing areas for different activities at Gesher Benot Ya'aqov (Alperson-Afil et al., 2009) and Qesem Cave (Assaf et al., 2015; Shahack-Gross et al., 2014) suggest its even earlier occurrence in the Lower Paleolithic. Accordingly, current research is directed toward documenting how space was organized in the Middle Paleolithic rather than merely pointing out its presence in a site.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1033633>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1033633>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)