



Original article

Rethinking the Hummalian industry

Repenser l'industrie hummalienne

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Abstract

Recent research reveals that the production of elongated blanks using different flaking techniques is an important part of the Early Middle Palaeolithic (EMP) industries in Near Eastern sites dated between 250 and 160 ka ago. The excavation at Hummal located in the arid steppe of Central Syria produced blade industries located in the stratigraphy between the Yabrudian and Levalloiso-Mousterian and this sequence is dated to about 200 ky. This paper presents data on the Hummalian culture from its discovery in 1980 to the systematic excavation of *in situ* archaeological layers between 1997 and 2010. Today the Hummalian industry is seen as a single, but very complex reduction strategy related to both the Laminar and the Levallois-like system of debitage. It is a unique reduction system containing diverse types of core volume management within which blanks of different morphologies have been produced from a single core using a direct, hammer percussion. Though, the Hummalian still shares many techno-typological similarities with the others laminar, lithic assemblages found on the Early Middle Palaeolithic sites in Levant, the same chronological and stratigraphical position and similar land-use strategies. As the EMP blade industries in Levant are preceded by the Acheulo-Yabrudian techno-complexes, the shift between both these lithic complexes, already seen in their chronological boundary, may also imply a technological discontinuity and possibly differing human populations.

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Keywords: Hummalian; Blade industry; Early Middle Palaeolithic; Levallois; Laminar; Land-use; El-Kowm; Levant

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Résumé

Le Proche-Orient est caractérisé par la présence d'industries laminaires qui s'est développée sur une longue période entre 250 et 160 ka. Elles comprennent des techniques de débitage différentes mais toujours orientées vers la production de supports allongés. La fouille à Hummal, dans la steppe désertique de la région de Palmyre, en Syrie centrale, a montré dans la stratigraphie la présence d'industries laminaires datées entre le Yabrudien et le Levalloiso-Moustérien. Elles sont datées aux environs de 200 ka. Cet article présente un ensemble de données sur la culture du Hummalien, de sa découverte à la fouille systématique *in situ* effectuée entre 1997 et 2010. Aujourd'hui, l'industrie hummalienne est considérée comme un unique système de débitage laminaire basé sur une conception volumétrique exploitant l'ensemble du bloc en passant du système de réduction laminaire à celui du Levallois. En conséquence, des supports de morphologies différentes ont été produits à partir d'un nucléus unique en utilisant la percussion directe. Cependant, le Hummalien montre également de nombreuses similitudes techno-typologiques avec les autres assemblages laminaires lithiques trouvés dans les sites du début du Paléolithique moyen du Levant, il occupe également la même position stratigraphique et chronologique ainsi qu'une exploitation du territoire comparable. Les industries laminaires du début du Paléolithique Moyen au Levant sont toujours précédées par les techno-complexes Acheulo-Yabroudiens ; la différence entre ces deux traditions lithiques, déjà soulignée par leur séparation chronologique, peut également impliquer une discontinuité technologique entre elles et peut être un changement dans les populations humaines.

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Mots clés : Hummalien ; Industrie laminaire ; Paléolithique moyen initial ; Levallois ; Exploitation du territoire ; El-Kowm ; Levant

1. Introduction

The excavation of the spring site of Hummal, located in the region of El-Kowm (Central Syria), is a reference site for the Palaeolithic in the interior Levant due to its archaeological sequence of settlements from the Lower to Upper Palaeolithic. Hummal is the only site in this area where the Early Middle Palaeolithic blade assemblages were discovered within the stratified deposits and assigned to a new culture, labelled 'Hummalian' (Besançon et al., 1981, 1982). The primary stratigraphical and sedimentological sequence studies by Le Tensorer (2004) at the site showed that the previous lithic studies (Besançon et al., 1981, 1982; Hours, 1982; Bergman and Ohnuma, 1983; Copeland, 1985) from the primary Ia layer were carried out on collections that were not discovered *in situ*. A new series of studies completed on the Hummal sequences during the 1997–2005 and 2009–2010 seasons show that the materials from these new excavations can, unlike the materials found previously, be considered to have been *in situ*. Therefore, a far greater comprehension of the lithic Hummalian industries is now possible. The main goal of this paper is to review all information concerning Hummalian in the past and show the complexity of this unique, blade industry. The occurrence of Early Middle Palaeolithic laminar phenomena in the Levant will be also shortly discussed. We would like also point out difficulties arising when analysing assemblages incorporating different reduction strategies in the production system and the still ambiguous definition of Levallois.

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