



“Diffusion with modifications”: Nubian assemblages in the central Negev highlands of Israel and their implications for Middle Paleolithic inter-regional interactions



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ABSTRACT

Nubian Levallois cores, now known from sites in eastern Africa, the Nile Valley and Arabia, have been used as a material culture marker for Upper Pleistocene dispersals of hominins out of Africa. The Levantine corridor, being the only land route connecting Africa to Eurasia, has been viewed as a possible dispersal route. We report here on lithic assemblages from the Negev highlands of Israel that contain both Levallois centripetal and Nubian-type cores. Wetter conditions over the Sahara and Negev deserts during MIS 6a–5e provided a generally continuous environmental corridor into the Levant that enabled the dispersal of hominin groups bearing the Nubian variant of prepared core technologies. The Negev assemblages draw renewed attention to the place of the Levant as one of the dispersal routes out of Africa during the Late Pleistocene and could suggest that processes of human dispersals and cultural diffusion resulted in the spread of Nubian technology across eastern Africa, the western Sahara and the Nile Valley, the southern Levant and Arabia.

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1. Introduction

Nubian Levallois technology was initially suggested to represent a technological component found within different local lithic industries confined geographically to the Nile Valley and Nubia (Guichard and Guichard, 1965; Marks, 1968a; Van Peer, 1992). These industries were later integrated into a single techno-complex defined as the Nubian Complex (Van Peer, 1998, 2001; Van Peer and Vermeersch, 2000). In Africa discoveries of Nubian cores have been reported from Kenya (Tryon et al., 2012), Ethiopia (e.g., Wendorf and Schild, 1974; Kurashina, 1978), and the Libyan Desert (Foley et al., 2013). The discovery of Nubian cores in surface collected assemblages from Arabia (See Table 1 for a list of assemblages with Nubian cores and Fig. 1 for a map of with their location) led to the revival of the discussion as to their cultural significance (Rose et al., 2011; Crassard and Hilbert, 2013; Usik et al., 2013), using Nubian Levallois technology as a “type fossil” for the dispersal of *Homo sapiens* out of Africa and into Arabia (Van Peer and Vermeersch, 2007; Usik et al., 2013) or vice versa (Rose et al., 2011; Marks and

Rose, 2014). Dated sites with a Nubian component are few (Table 2), including only one dated occurrence in Arabia with Nubian technology – Aybut Al Auwal in Oman dated to a minimum of ~107 ka (Rose et al., 2011). Other sites in Arabia were assigned to MIS 5 based on paleoclimatic inferences (Crassard et al., 2013; Usik et al., 2013). The same is true for the Nile Valley Nubian assemblages. Excluding Taramsa 1 and Sodmein cave, dated to 68–78 ka and 118 ka respectively, all other sites were assigned a chronological framework based on geographical and paleoclimatic considerations (Mercier et al., 1999; Van Peer, 1998; Vermeersch and Van Peer, 2002; Chiotti et al., 2009; Van Peer et al., 2010: 224, 229; Scerri et al., 2014a).

To date, only sporadic occurrences of Nubian cores have been recorded from Levantine Middle Paleolithic (MP) assemblages (Munday, 1976a; Vermeersch, 2001). The finding of Nubian core technology in the previously unpublished H2 surface collection (N = 686) from the Negev highlands (Fig. 1), and the recognition of Nubian cores in other published MP surface collections from Har Oded (HO) and North Mitzpe Ramon (NMR), situated in the same area (Boutié and Rosen, 1989), rekindles interest in the southern Levant within the context of discussing Late Pleistocene modern human dispersals across vast geographical areas (i.e. northeastern Africa, eastern Africa, the Nile Valley and adjacent deserts, the

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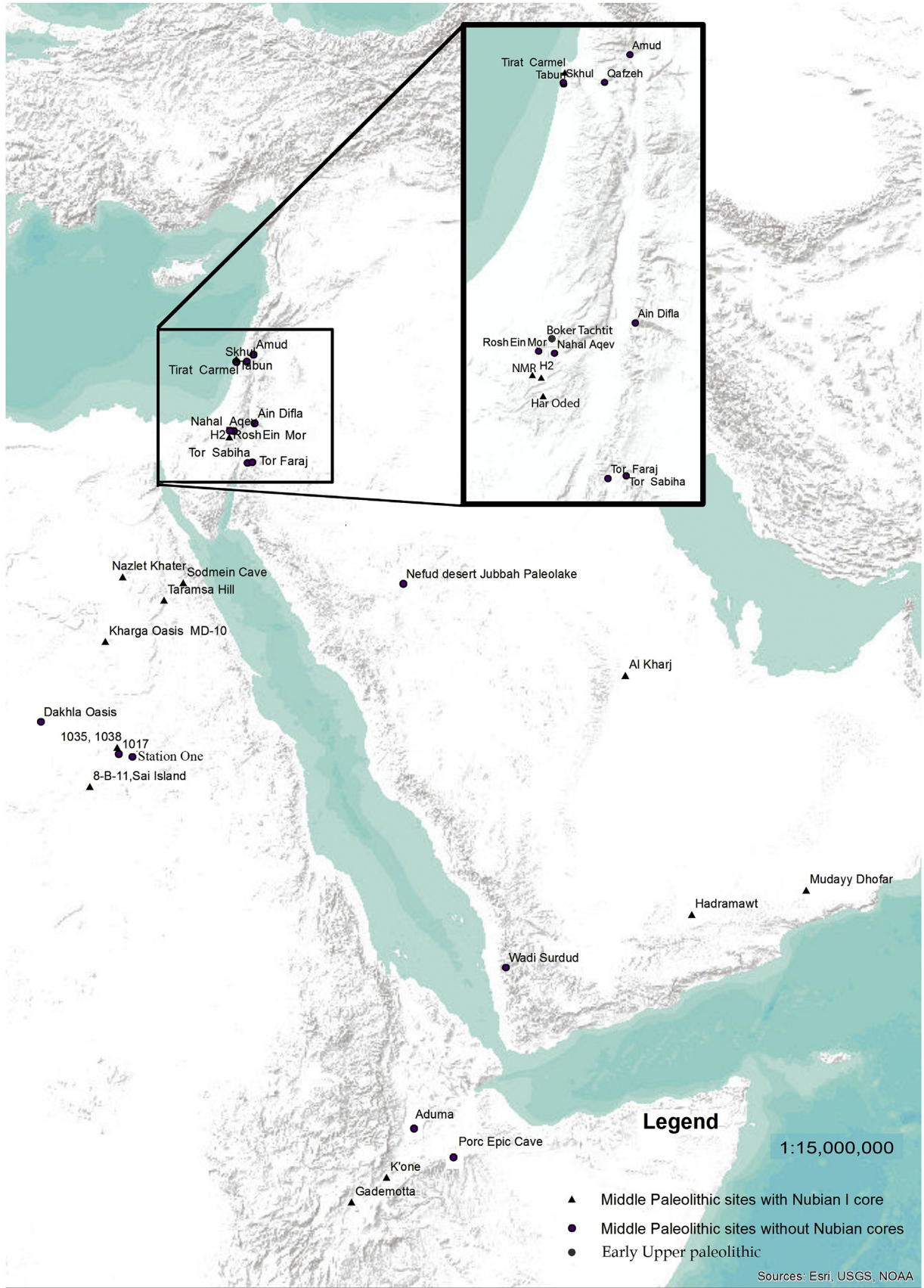


Fig. 1. Map of Middle Stone Age and Middle Paleolithic sites in eastern Africa, the Levant and Arabia.

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