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Rethinking Emireh Cave: The lithic technology perspectives



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ABSTRACT

The Emiran is the earliest technocomplex within the Levantine Upper Palaeolithic sequence. It was defined after biased lithic assemblages from el-Wad and Emireh caves by Dorothy Garrod. The term Emiran was further adopted and was incorporated into a broader definition known as the Initial Upper Palaeolithic (IUP) that is commonly used as a proxy for identifying human migrations during the Middle-Upper Palaeolithic interphase. More specifically it is conceived to represent the first arrival of modern humans to the Levant from Africa/Arabia, as well as being the forbearers for post-Mousterian entities in south and central Europe.

In this study, we reanalyzed the same lithic assemblage from Emireh Cave that was published by Garrod in 1955 as the typical Emiran site. Our technological study shows the assemblage contains at least three distinctive knapping methods: Levallois, broad-base blades (non-Levallois), and narrow-base blade/lets. In addition, there is a substantial number of endscrapers that could not be technologically defined. We suggest the assemblage indeed contains an 'Emiran' component, including Emireh points, but it also bears Mousterian, Ahmarian and Aurignacian components. Thus, the Emireh cave lithic assemblage is assorted.

We propose that the scenario at Emireh Cave in which Emiran and other industries are included in the same layer is likely to be the case in other southern Levantine sites where Emireh points were noted (i.e. el-Wad, Kebara, Qafzeh). It is suggested that the mixture is due to the ephemeral nature of the Emiran occupation at these sites.

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1. Introduction

The transition between the Middle to the Upper Palaeolithic periods in the Levant is considered to correspond with demographic changes triggered by the last major dispersal of modern humans from Africa to Eurasia (e.g. Mellars, 2006; Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen, 2010; Hublin, 2014). The fossil record in the Levant shows Neandertals were the dominant species during the Late Middle Palaeolithic until the arrival of Anatomically Modern Humans (AMH) (e.g. Shea, 2003; Kadowaki, 2013; Been et al., 2017; and references therein). While Neandertal remains are quite abundant, Early Upper Palaeolithic AMH remains are sporadic and correspond to the Ahmarian tradition (Bergman and Stringer, 1989; Vandermeersch et al., 2013). In one case, at Manot Cave, AMH remains were recovered but were not culturally assigned due to unclear contexts (Hershkovitz et al., 2015). As for the Middle to

Upper Palaeolithic 'transitional phase', as far as we know, there are a few fossils remains: a partial maxilla from Ksar Akil XXV, and teeth from el-Wad and Üçağızlı caves (Garrod, 1951, p. 121; Kuhn et al., 2009, p. 108; Douka, 2013, p. 2). Since the morphological assignments of these fossils are unclear we do not really know which hominins made the transitional industry.

With the scarcity in the fossil evidence, researchers turn to material cultural remains seeking for indications of human dispersals. Stone tool technologies that are the most common finds in prehistoric sites are taken as the most reliable proxies (e.g. Haynes, 2002; Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen, 2013). Thus, the transition between the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic in the Levant is defined after lithics studies (e.g. Copeland, 1975; Marks, 1983a; Tostevin, 2000).

The first who thought to identify a transitional phase was Turville-Petre (1927) who excavated at Emireh Cave in the eastern Galilee, Israel (Fig. 1). His excavations revealed prehistoric remains that were disturbed by later/modern activities (see below). Turville-Petre conducted several trenches and in one of them, trench A, he identified Palaeolithic deposits bearing Mousterian

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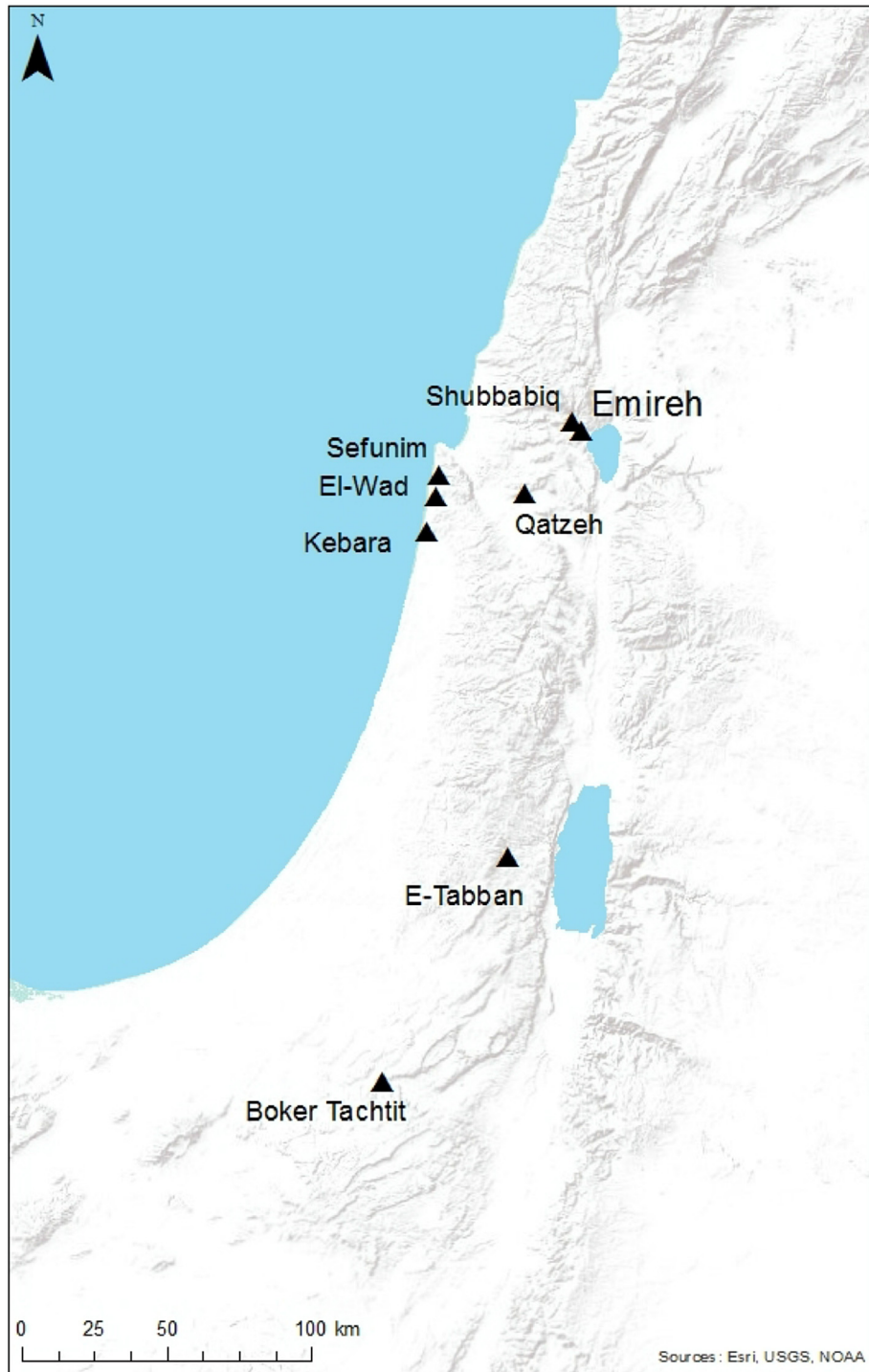


Fig. 1. Geographical distribution of Emireh Cave and other sites discussed in the text.

and Aurignacian implements that he assigned as a homogenous layer (Fig. 2:a-b).

For many years, his proposition was not accepted by Dorothy Garrod who supposed the materials from Emireh were mixed. But later she changed her mind and after recognizing what she thought to be a transitional phase at el-Wad Cave, layers G-F (Garrod, 1951). The definition of the transitional industry was based on typology of tools and cores that displayed a wide combination of Middle and Upper Palaeolithic utensils. The most significant tool, although

found in low quantities, was a new diagnostic spear point known as the Emireh point: “The Emireh point is a triangular flake which has the bulbar end thinned by chipping on both faces, the thinning retouch being always directed from the base of the flake and never from the lateral edges” (Garrod, 1951, p. 124).

Garrod also reexamined the lithic assemblage from Emireh Cave and concluded it was transitional just like that of el-Wad (Garrod, 1955). She noted the “lack of interest in Emireh was the suspicion that it contained a mixture of two separate industries, since typical

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