

LIBYA

New investigations in the Tadrart Acacus, Libyan Sahara

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Introduction

In 1955, Fabrizio Mori carried out his first fieldwork in the Tadrart Acacus, a relatively small, 150-km long, mountain range east of the Hoggar, in Libyan territory. Since then, the research has provided information on the rock art and cultural deposits of the area (Mori 1965). This led to the creation of a Libyan-Italian Joint Mission for Saharan Research, which included the Department of Antiquities in Tripoli and the University of Roma "La Sapienza". In the late 1970s and early 1980s, archaeological research intensified, particularly in the Ti-n-Torha shelters in the northern massif, as well as in the Uan Muhuggiag shelter, located in the Wadi Teshuinat, in the central part of the mountain range (Barich 1987).

Starting in 1990, the Mission carried out new multidisciplinary investigations supported by the University of Rome "La Sapienza", the National Research Council, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Universities of Milan and Modena, through the cooperation of the Department of Antiquities in Tripoli. Aims of the research were to continue fieldwork on cultural deposits, to obtain more radiometric dates from new sites and from those dated in the early 1960s, to integrate the archaeological data with contributions from geoarchaeology, pedology, palynology, paleobotany, anthracology, and physical anthropology, and to record the rock art in a data base.

Uan Muhuggiag

The site (Figure 1, No. 1) is already known thanks to detailed research conducted by F. Mori (1965; Pasa and Pasa-Durante 1962) and B.E.

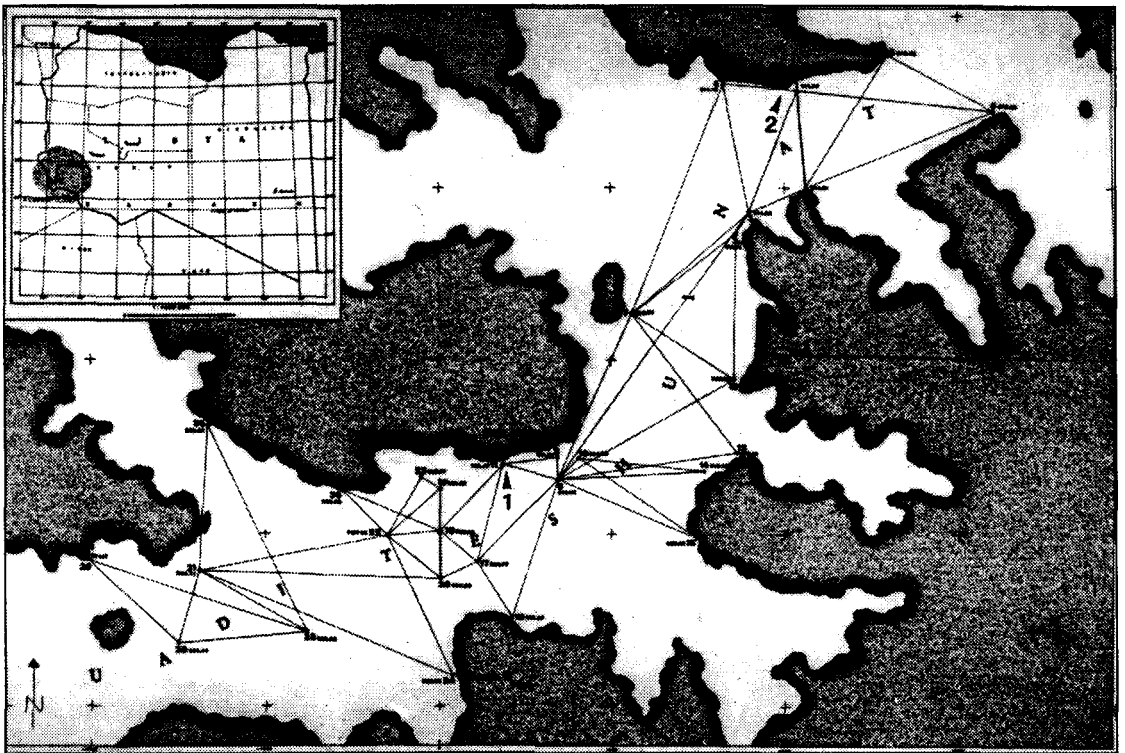
Barich (1987). In 1991, sedimentological and depositional analyses were made with particular attention to the area outside the shelter, along the bank of the Wadi Teshuinat. The goal was to study the relation between the shelter sites and the main wadi of the Acacus massif, where a number of sites are concentrated. The present author did not take part in this phase of the work, and only a brief description of the resulting data is provided here (for further details, see di Lernia and Manzi 1992). The sounding, started in 1991 and concluded in 1992, revealed five sedimentological layers. At a depth of 200 cm, the deposits covered two stone slabs associated with a human burial. The upper two layers contained pottery decorated with alternately pivoting stamp, return and simple impression techniques, and lithics (unretouched flakes and arrowheads). The lower layers did not include any potsherds or arrowheads, and were characterized by the occurrence of backed and microlithic tools. The following radiocarbon dates were obtained for the lower part of the deposit: Layer 3: 7823 ± 95 B.P. (C13 corrected), on wood charcoal, GX-17816-AMS, and Layer 4: 7550 ± 120 B.P., wood charcoal, GX-17815-AMS.

The new data from Uan Muhuggiag suggest that the area was occupied not only inside the rockshelter, but also outside, next to the wadi bank. The settlement area was in use over a long period of time and showed at least three main occupational phases. The first one, dated to the 8th millennium B.P., is found in the lower layers defined by di Lernia and Manzi (1992) and in the lower phase observed by Barich (1987). The second phase, shown in the upper two layers of the 1991/92 sounding, was correlated to Uan Telocat (see below). It may be tentatively dated to the 6th to 5th millennium B.P. The third phase, corresponding to the 4th millennium B.P., refers to the latest inhabitants of the area, before it became too dry. This latest phase is found only in the interior part of the shelter (Barich 1987), possibly representing a population decrease of a different function for the site, which may have been used for shorter periods of time.

Uan Tabu

Uan Tabu is found a few kilometers northeast of Uan Muhuggiag in the Wadi Teshuinat (Figure 1, No. 2). It is another shelter, known since the

Figure 1: the central area of the Wadi Teshuinat in the Tadrart Acacus.



1960s for its rock paintings and an archaeological deposit, originally dated to 7045 ± 175 B.P. (Mori 1965). A trench excavated in 1963 was extended from 1990 to 1993. The depth of the cultural deposit was 225 cm. It accumulated over a time period from the Late Pleistocene to the Early/Middle Holocene. The lowest layers revealed a yellow sandy sediment containing Aterian tanged points and large flakes, some exhibiting Levallois technique, which suggested that this part of the deposit dates to the Late Pleistocene. They showed a dark patina, resembling the rock varnish that is so visible on lithics scattered on the present-day surface.

The lowest layers were separated from the upper ones by a thin calcareous crust, which covered the earlier yellow sandy layers and some blocks probably collapsed from the roof of the shelter. The formation of the crust and the collapsing of blocks from the shelter may represent a considerable drop in both temperature and humidity, which took place at the end of the Pleistocene.

The upper, Holocene layers, including almost 2 m of deposit, showed a high frequency of lithics made on flakes, blades and bladelets. A few ostrich eggshell beads and fragments were also found. Raw materials for lithics were sandstone, quartz, chert, quartzite, flint and silicified siltstone. Potsherds are extremely rare and only occurred in the uppermost part of the deposit. They are decorated with a rocker technique. Wood charcoal is abundant throughout the Holocene deposit. Several radiocarbon dates were obtained, which place the Holocene occupation in the beginning of the 9th millennium B.P. (Garcea, in press). No evidence of domesticated fauna appeared from this deposit. A number of grinding stones with traces of red, yellow and black colors occurred in the Holocene deposit. They may have been used to prepare pigments for the rock paintings. The archaeological material from this shelter provides new evidence on the occupation of the central Acacus during the Aterian and Epipalaeolithic, previously unknown from this area.

Uan Telocat

A trench was excavated in the deposit at the Uan Telocat shelter, in the Wadi Imha, south of the Wadi Teshuinat. The site was already known for rock paintings belonging to the Round Head and Pastoral phases, and for its archaeological deposit, dated to 6745 ± 175 B.P. (Mori 1965). The new trench revealed a stratigraphic sequence of cultural layers 140 cm deep. It included a lithic industry on large sandstone, and occasionally quartzite, flakes. The pottery is mainly impressed by double-pronged implements. Ostrich eggshell beads and unworked fragments are present. Faunal remains are frequent and include a considerable amount of domesticated ovicaprids and rare fragments of domesticated *Bos*. All other remains belonged to wild animals, among which the most frequent was *Procavia capensis* (Corridi 1992). Radiocarbon dates indicated that the occupation was later than originally supposed, as they ranged from the beginnings of the 6th to the first half of the 5th millennium B.P. (Garcea and Sebastiana 1995). The site may have been seasonally occupied by pastoral peoples, and faunal remains suggest that the shift from large to small livestock had already occurred at Uan Telocat.

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