Ministry of Culture

National Centre for Prehistoric, Anthropologic and Historic Research

Second Pan-African Cultural Festival

International Symposium:

"Africa, Cradle of Humanity: Recent Discoveries"

The " *Centre National de Recherches Préhistoriques, Anthropologiques et Historiques*" (CNRPAH) (National Center for Prehistoric, Anthropological and Historical Research), Algeria organize on October 25th, 26, and 27th, 2009 in Sétif (Eastern Algeria) an international symposium on the early African Prehistory entitled "Africa, cradle of humanity: recent discoveries". The symposium will take place on the occasion of the second Pan-African cultural festival whose organization is entrusted to Algeria by the African Union. The symposium will gather African and Africanist scientists experts in Human Paleontology and early Prehistory for debating the discoveries made recently in Africa and their hominid biological and cultural implications.

Symposium themes

It is common knowledge that Africa is the cradle of humanity. The earliest fossil hominids, sometimes associated with the oldest stone tools, have been discovered in Africa. The first fossil hominid in the continent was discovered in 1924 in South Africa by Raymond Dart, and it was the first to be named *Australopithecus africanus*. Subsequently, the Leakey couple uncovered the remains of another more robust hominid at Olduvai Gorges in Tanzania that they named *Paranthropus boisei*. It was dated to 1.79 million years ago (Ma) using the Potassium/Argon dating technique. Because of its remote antiquity, the discovery of this later hominid triggered a real "hominid bone rush" in eastern Africa during the 1960s and 1970s. Intensive systematic field investigations carried out in the immense African rift area; covering several countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Malawi; have allowed scientists making pertinent hominid discoveries. These

discoveries include: *Australopithecus afarensis* (Afar, Ethiopia) dated to 3.4 Ma, *Paranthropus aethiopecus* (Lac Turkana, Kenya) dated to 2.6 Ma, *Paranthropus robustus* (South Africa) dated between 2.2-1.1 Ma, and *Homo habilis* (Olduvai, Tanzania and Turkana, Kenya) dated to 2.3 Ma. Further fieldwork undertaken during the 1990s enriched the hominid fossil record by adding even older hominids such as *Orririn tugensis* (Tugen Hills, Kenya) dated to 6 Ma, *Ardipithecus kaddaba* and *Ardipithecus ramidus* (Middle Awash, Ethiopia) dated to 5.8 and 4.3 Ma respectively, *Australopithecus anamensis* (Kanapoi, Kenya) dated between 4.2 Ma and 3.8 Ma, *Kenyathropus platyops* (Lac Turkana, Kenya) dated to 3.5 Ma, and *Australopithecus garhi* (Middle Awash, Ethiopia) dated to 2.5 Ma. However, the turning point in the African Paleoanthropological research were the finding of *Australopithecus bahrelghazali* dated to 3.5 Ma and *Sahelantropus tchadensis* dated to 7 Ma, more known by its nickname Toumai. These two hominids were found recently in Chad, in central Africa located 2500 km to the west of the east African rift valley, and have enormously transformed current data and models on early hominid evolution by pushing back in time the emergence of the earliest hominids to 7 Ma, and by showing that eastern Africa was not the unique center in Africa for early human evolution.

Archaeologically, although the sites of Olduvai in Tanzania and Koobi Fora in Kenya still represent the landmarks of early Prehistory of Africa and the world; recent fieldworks carried out at various areas of Africa show that the beginning of stone tools and earliest human occupation of the continent, and the emergence of the Acheulean technology occurred much earlier than was commonly believed. For instance, excavations at the sites of Gona in Ethiopia and Western Turkana in Kenya exposed stone tools of sophisticated technology dated to 2.6 and 2.3 Ma, respectively, prompting some archaeologists to divide the Oldowan Industrial Complex into two industries. The first industry is older dating between 2.6 Ma and 1.8 Ma named Pre-Oldowan; and the second, preceded by the Pre-Oldowan, represents the classical Oldowan dating between 1.8 Ma until its disappearance circa 1.5 Ma. The *Australopithecus garhi* was found in association with the oldest evidence of cut marks, indicating that by 2.5 Ma hominids incorporated substantial amount of meat in their diet, and raising again the relevant issue of the identity of the stone tool makers, i.e. *Australopithecus* versus *Homo*.

Furthermore, excavations in Eastern Africa (at Konso Gardula in Ethiopia and Kokiselei in Kenya) have revealed that the oldest Acheulean stone tools date back to 1.7-1.6 Ma. Consequently, the long chronology of the Acheulean questions the validity of the Developed Oldowan as a transitional industry between the Oldowan and Acheulean and the role (if any) that the Acheulean might have played during the initial phases in the evolution of *Homo erectus* and the nature of this species' expansion into areas unoccupied by earlier hominids. In North Africa, fieldworks conducted at Ain Hanech and El-Kherba in Algeria have revealed that early hominids occupied this part of the African continent by 1.8 Ma and the technology they used was similar to the East African Oldowan.

The objective of this symposium is to discuss the new discoveries of hominid fossils (7 to 1.5 million years) and the Oldowan and Acheulean stone tool discoveries made recently in Africa, and their implications on hominid morphological and behavioral evolution. The symposium seeks to address the following issues:

1) The emergence of bipedalism;
2) The implications of the anatomical transformations between hominids older than 3.8 Ma (*Sahelantropus tchadensis*, *Orririn tugensis*, *Ardipithecus kaddaba*, and *Ardipithecus ramidus*) and those dated between 3.8 Ma and 2 Ma (all Australopithecines); and later between the Australopithecines (beginning ~3.8 Ma) and early *Homo* (~2.3 Ma);
3) The emergence of *Homo erectus* and its geographical origin: Africa or Asia;
4) The emergence of stone tools, and whether the beginning of early hominid stone tool manufacture and use was driven by changes in global climates;
5) The identity of the makers of the first stone tools, and whether the Australopithecines made and used stone tools.
6) The nature of Pre-Oldowan and its significance, and whether it reflects hominid lack of skill or it is due to raw material quality and variability;
7) The validity of the Developed Oldowan as a transitional industry between the Oldowan and Acheulean, and whether it represents a distinct industry from the Oldowan or it reflects the birth of the Acheulean Industrial Complex;
8) The time and appearance of the Acheulean, and whether it emerged suddenly or it developed from the Oldowan;

9) The appearance of the Acheulean overlapped with the first expansion of hominids out of Africa or they left the continent before the invention of the Acheulean;
10) What is –what are- the outcome of the Acheulean in Africa? What are the beginnings of the passage to the Levalloisian Middle Palaeolithic?