



Onwards and upwards in the Caucasus – A multidisciplinary approach to understanding the lifeways of the earliest modern humans in Armenia

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The Armenian Highlands have functioned as a gateway with regards to the peopling of the Southern Caucasus. Most importantly, changes in climate have long controlled access to this remote and often inhospitable mountainous region. Here we present the results of the multidisciplinary study of Aghitu-3 Cave which brings together researchers from the fields of archaeology, geology and geomorphology, zooarchaeology, paleobotany and paleoclimate. By integrating these areas of study, we have reconstructed the lifeways of the earliest behaviorally (and presumably anatomically) modern humans who settled Southern Armenia about 35,000 (cal BP) years ago and placed this occupational sequence within a framework of environmental change. These first Upper Paleolithic inhabitants of Armenia made temporary use of this basalt cave located along the Vorotan River corridor at an altitude of 1601 m during seasonal forays into the highlands. The infrequent use of this site as a hunting camp comes to an end at about 31,000 cal BP. The next package of sediment shows little evidence of human occupation, although fauna seem to flourish during the time between 31-29,000 cal BP. Following this phase of depopulation, the intensity of occupation increases substantially after 29,000 cal BP. Human presence is amply documented in the numerous stone artifacts, faunal remains and fireplaces that cover the site. These changes in population movement are echoed in the sequence of sediments preserved in the cave and can be correlated with the fluctuating climatic conditions associated with the late Pleistocene.