

Biological Anthropology of the African Continent: From the First Hominins to Extant Populations

Anthropologie biologique du continent africain : des premiers hominines aux populations actuelles

F. Marchal · I. Crevecoeur · F. Détróit · S. Prat · F. Ramirez Rozzi

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“The biological anthropology of the African continent: from the first hominins to extant populations” is a vast undertaking not only because Africa is a vast continent, but also because Africa, as the “cradle of humanity”, is the only continent that encompasses the full chronological depth of the history of humankind from its earliest origins. This was the theme of one of the two thematic scientific sessions of the 1842nd SAP meeting held in Paris, at the National Institute of the History of Art, from 25 to 27 January 2017. The seven articles published together in this issue of BMSAP¹ are from papers submitted during this session. Obviously, neither the papers read nor these articles can fully cover such a wide topic. The idea, rather, was to present, with some examples, an overview of current research conducted by our community on the African continent. This resulted in a rich session, with guest speaker Professor Robert A. Foley, 15 oral presentations and 6 poster presentations.

F. Marchal (✉)
UMR 7268 ADES, Aix-Marseille université, CNRS, EFS,
Faculté de médecine de Marseille, secteur Nord, bât. A CS80011,
bld Pierre-Dramard, 13344 Marseille cedex 15, France
e-mail : francois.marchal@univ-amu.fr

I. Crevecoeur
UMR 5199 PACEA, CNRS, université de Bordeaux,
ministère de la Culture et de la Communication,
allée Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire, 33615 Pessac Cedex, France

F. Détróit · S. Prat
UMR 7194 HNHP, CNRS, MNHN, UPVD, Sorbonne
universités, Musée de l'homme,
17, place du Trocadéro, 75016 Paris, France

F. Ramirez Rozzi
UMR 5288 AMIS, Faculté de chirurgie dentaire,
1, rue Maurice-Arnoux, 92120 Montrouge, France

1. Articles relating to this specific session were produced with the associated editors (F. Marchal, I. Crevecoeur, F. Détróit, S. Prat and F. Ramirez Rozzi).

Human evolution was naturally one of the topics explored in this session, with two oral presentations and three poster presentations. Robert A. Foley (Cambridge University) [1] presented his Afrotropical Model for Hominin Evolution, explaining why Africa is so central to the issue of hominin evolution through an approach mainly based on evolutionary geography (the spatial and distributional properties of evolutionary processes). Also devoted to hominin evolution was the paper given by Prat and Caparros (UMR 7194 HNHP) [2], who used cladistic analyses to assess the taxonomy of the earliest representatives of the genus *Homo*. In their poster presentation, Louail and Prat (UMR 7194 HNHP) [3] discussed the relevance of the ASUDAS standard scoring system when applied to hominin teeth and proposed some adaptations to encompass their morphological variability. Another poster, by Verna (UMR 7194 HNHP) [4], presented the use of this ASUDAS standard scoring system together with a morphometric analysis to compare dental morphology between humans from northern and southern Africa during the Pleistocene (MIS 5–3). Finally, the poster by Matu et al. (UMR 5199 PACEA) [5] presented new human remains from the Holocene site of Hara Idé 3 (Djibouti) documenting the morphological variability of African *Homo sapiens* and the issue of continuity or discontinuity at the Pleistocene–Holocene boundary.

Five oral and three poster communications dealt with mortuary or funerary practices of past African populations from various periods and geographical origins, illustrating both the variety of these practices as well as the close involvement of SAP members in the field in Africa. Chronologically speaking, the first of these communications was the poster by Hanon et al. (UMR 7194 HNHP) [6], showing the experimental taphonomic approach they developed to reassess the intentionality of the process that produced the linear marks on the South African hominin Stw53. The talk by Chalamon de Bernardy et al. (UMR 7194 HNHP) [7] then presented new Later Stone Age human remains from

the Leopard Cave in Namibia. These document a previously unknown mortuary *chaîne opératoire* for the southern African Later Stone Age. Probably also from the Holocene is the Fossil man from Asselar (Mali). With their poster, Dumesnil et al. (UMR 7194 HNHP) [8] proposed new insights into the archaeology of the deaths of these individuals whose remains were discovered in 1927. Sellier et al. (UMR 7206 Eco-Anthropology and Ethnobiology) [9] presented some results of their fieldwork in Sudan in the Kadruka 23 cemetery, including newly discovered Neolithic funerary practices in Sudan such as pre- and post-burial practices that imply wrapping and carrying of the dead. Le Roy et al. (UMR 5140 ASM) [10] documented the Egyptian area, presenting evidence from new fieldwork at Kom Abu Billou of funerary practices in the Nile delta during the Roman period. Gleize et al. (INRAP) [11] are involved in fieldwork in Lalibela, Ethiopia, and presented new data from the Qedemt cemetery bringing more in-depth knowledge on the influence of Christianization on funerary practices in mediaeval Ethiopia. Ardagna and Maillot (UMR 7268 ADÈS) [12] co-authored a poster presenting the mediaeval necropolis of Mouweiss in Sudan. They notably document a very rare case of leprosy in mediaeval Nuba. Finally, for the most recent period, Polet et al. (IRSNB) [13] presented results from Kindoki in the Democratic Republic of Congo, describing two cases of DISH for the first time in an African archaeological sample.

The African continent also displays such a wide diversity of human populations that it is an inexhaustible source for research on the biological anthropology of living humans, as illustrated by the nine papers given during this session. West Africa was represented in five of these. The first, by Cohen et al. (UMI 3189 ESS) [14], presented results on the biocultural determinants of excess weight in Senegal, arguing in favour of local and global policies to fight obesity in that country, where a nutritional transition is in progress. The second study, by Macia et al. (UMI 3189 ESS) [15], compared the prevalence of obesity and body size perceptions between urban and rural areas, which enabled them to explain how and why obesity is becoming a health problem in rural areas in Senegal. A third study from the UMI 3189 ESS team in Senegal was presented by Duboz et al. [16]. They compared the determinants of self-rated health between urban and rural areas in order to determine whether self-rated health is a relevant indicator of actual individual health in Senegal. Moving from Senegal to Ivory Coast, the work of Kouassi et al. (ISAD) [17] shows that the interaction between parity and physical self-esteem of the mother significantly influences the physical development of children. Kouadio et al. (ISAD) [18] also dealt with children's development, comparing the environments of children living in different socio-sanitary conditions and confirming that these factors strongly influence the children's development.

Ramirez Rozzi (UMR 5288 AMIS) [19] is working on the life history of the Baka Pygmies in Cameroon. Based on chronological age, he shows that tooth eruption proceeds at an early age, suggesting that growth diversity in modern humans is larger than previously thought, as his work on body proportions in Pygmies confirms. From South Africa, Ridel et al. (University of Pretoria) [20] presented a computer-assisted method for the approximation of the nose, based on an analysis of the anatomical variability of nasal shapes among South African groups, with some forensic anthropological implications. The great diversity of human populations in Africa is also the result of a complex history of peopling and migration. This can be analyzed by genetic anthropology, as exemplified by the last two communications of this session. Verdu et al. (UMR 7206 Eco-Anthropology and Ethnobiology) [21] studied the trajectories of genetic and linguistic admixture in Kriolu speakers in Cape Verde and propose combining the two trajectories to reconstruct the complex admixture processes that have shaped the wide diversity of human populations living in this archipelago. The last communication, by Fortes-Lima et al. (UMR 7206 Eco-Anthropology and Ethnobiology) [22], offered new insights into the genetic legacy of African-American populations. They showed that Noir Marron communities have a strong African genetic legacy, and more specifically that they are linked to the populations residing today in the historical Gold Coast and Bight of Benin.

The number of communications and the variety of topics covered during this session clearly demonstrated the close involvement of our community in every aspect of anthropological research in Africa and also emphasized the major importance of research conducted in the field. Field research is, and will always be, the most important source of primary data ensuring high-level scientific output. We hope that by illustrating this with examples from across a whole continent, we will have given further encouragement to all our colleagues already engaged in field research and helped to motivate those who aim to do so in future.

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