Islands in the Desert: 
North Africa in the Middle to Upper Paleolithic Transition

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In North Africa west of the Nile Valley, the Aterian industry was the work of modern humans and is seen as equivalent to late Middle Paleolithic. It ended before (probably long before) 40,000 BP. Parts of Libya have a generic Upper Paleolithic, the Dabban, from about 40,000 to perhaps 25,000 BP, while the Maghreb was uninhabited. North Africa was successfully recolonized around 20,000 BP. There was no detectable traffic across the Strait of Gibraltar.

Angela Close is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Washington in Seattle. She has conducted archaeological research in some of the world’s driest desert landscapes for more than 30 years, including the western desert of Egypt, the Sinai peninsula, and the South African Karoo as well as in the wetter climates of coastal Washington State. Her interests range from the Middle Paleolithic to the origins of agriculture and complex societies.