Dis-Afr-Paleo-Aterian

North African Middle Stone Age technocomplex

Aterian is defined by the presence of ‘tanged’ or ‘stemmed’ tools

Aterian tools were a combination of two raw materials (stone point and wooden shaft) into a single composite tool for hafted knives or scrapers with alternating active edges, rather than hafted weapons

The evidence for

an early invention and increasing prevalence of hafted tools is

mounting, both in Europe, among Neandertals (e.g., [71,72]) and

in Africa, among anatomically modern humans ([73,74]). In light

of this evidence, it is perhaps more appropriate to treat the

‘Aterian question’ in terms of an early innovation in hafting, rather

than in projectile use, or, indeed, in weapon use at all. And if that

is the case, we must ask what prompted the invention of the

hafting insert. It could be speculated that the invention of this

distinguishing feature of the Aterian, the tang, was associated with

a move into increasingly arid zones of the Sahara [19,20,75],

where the lack of resin-bearing trees could have created the need

for a hafting insert adapted for use with bindings (but see [73] for

evidence of an increase in the use of resin for hafting in southern

Egypt in the Upper Pleistocene and [76,77] for an ethnographic

account of spear-hafting using resin in the Australian desert). It is

as yet unclear if gum-yielding plants would have been available in

the more arid zones of North Africa 100 thousand years ago, but it

makes sense that a tang allows for an easier hafting using leather

bindings, since it provides a less sharp and more regular surface to

wrap around.

The Aterian culture is found across North Africa (see Map) and is differentiated from the Mousterian and essentially defined by the presence of these tanged (stemmed) tools.

**Formal Label: Aterian Culture**

**Alpha-Numeric Identifier:**

**Date or Time Horizon:** 100,000 BP

**Geographical Area:** North Africa

**Cultural Affiliation:** Aterian

**Medium:** Flint, Silicified limestone

**Dimensions:** H 1-3 in

**Weight:**

**Provenance:**

**Condition:**

**Discussion:**

**References:**



Map of Aterian sites (red circles). Base map from NASA http://www2.jpl.nasa.gov/srtm/africa.htm.

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Reference

Iovita R (2011) Shape Variation in Aterian Tanged Tools and the Origins of Projectile Technology: A Morphometric Perspective on Stone Tool

Function. *PLoS ONE* 6(12): e29029. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0029029