

Brooks, Alison S.

George Washington University/ Smithsonian Institution

The background to “Out-of-Africa 3”: behavioral and environmental change within the Middle Stone Age.

The category “Middle Stone Age” has been used in Africa to include industries dating from older than 270 kya to as young as 22 kya. The grouping of multiple industries under the term “Middle Stone Age (MSA)” obscures important regional and temporal variability. McBrearty and I have argued that while there is an overall pattern of increasing behavioral complexity with time, the changing and discontinuous patterning of innovations in the MSA may represent, in part, localized responses to resource stress. This local resource stress, in turn, may have resulted from a combination of increasing population and environmental deterioration. Understanding this variability is difficult as local chronologies are often lacking or imprecise at best, and many sites lack palaeoenvironmental information. Even the limited data available, however, suggests that sites may be relatively more common in many areas of the continent in OIS 7 and 5 (and the onset of 4) and relatively rarer in OIS 6, 4, and 3. Many (but not all) of the exceptions are located in highland areas, north and south coastal zones and on the margins of the central African forest, where rainfall was greater during glacial phases.