The origins of the Acheulean in East Africa

Fact Sheet

Project Information

ORACEAF
Grant agreement ID: 283366

Status
Closed project

Funded under
FP7-IDEAS-ERC

Overall budget
€ 1 500 000

EU contribution
€ 1 500 000

Hosted by
University College London
United Kingdom

Objective

The disappearance of the earliest human culture, the Oldowan, and its substitution by a new technology 1.6 million years ago, the Acheulean, is one of the main topics in modern Paleoanthropology. However, little is known about the biological and cultural evolutionary mechanisms underlying this process. Traditionally, it has been assumed that this major cultural change was ignited by the emergence of a new human species, Homo ergaster/erectus, and that there was a steady technological evolution during the Oldowan that eventually led to the emergence of the Acheulean handaxes. However, these assumptions are not grounded in the current available evidence, but rooted in paradigms that should now be superseded.

Olduvai Gorge (Tanzania) is the site where the earliest Acheulean was first discovered, and where the traditional view of the Oldowan-Acheulean transition was established. Despite the pivotal role of Olduvai as a sequence of reference for East Africa and elsewhere, the original datasets are now outdated and are unsuitable for
current discussions. This proposal aims to solve this problem by conducting a comprehensive research program at Olduvai, based on the retrieval of fresh data derived from new laboratory and fieldwork research. The multidisciplinary character of this study will provide an integrative perspective to the analysis of the paleoecology, archaeology, geology and geochronology of the early Acheulean at Olduvai. Using an innovative theoretical perspective that combines interests in cultural change, ecological adaptations, and biological evolution, and state-of-the-art methods in archaeology, geology, and taphonomy, this project aims to make Olduvai the world’s best reference for understanding of the evolutionary processes that led to the emergence of the Acheulean, the longest lasting culture in the history of humankind.

Field of science

/humanities/history and archaeology/archaeology
/natural sciences/earth and related environmental sciences/geology/geochronology
/natural sciences/earth and related environmental sciences/palaeontology/paleoecology
/natural sciences/earth and related environmental sciences/geology
/social sciences/sociology/anthropology/physical anthropology/paleoanthropology
/humanities/history and archaeology/history

Programme(s)

Topic(s)

Call for proposal

ERC-2011-StG_20101124

Funding Scheme

ERC-SG - ERC Starting Grant

Host institution

University College London

Address  
Gower Street  
WC1E 6BT London

Activity type  
Higher or Secondary Education Establishments

EU contribution  
€ 1 457 126
United Kingdom

Website  Contact the organisation

Principal investigator  Administrative Contact
Ignacio De La Torre Sainz
(Dr.)

Beneficiaries (2)

University College London

EU contribution
€ 1 457 126

Address  Activity type
Gower Street  Higher or Secondary
WC1E 6BT London  Education Establishments

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United States

EU contribution
€ 42 874

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