

GENETICS, BIOARCHAEOLOGY AND ARCHAEOLOGY TELL A STORY OF MOBILITY, MODES OF SUBSISTENCE AND INTERACTIONS IN THE DOGON COUNTRY (MALI)

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Archaeology, oral narratives and historical linguistics show the Dogon Country in central Mali as a zone of important interactions of people from different cultural spheres. Its rocky plateau ended by an escarpment, located at the interface of the Inland Niger Delta, the Gourma Sahelian plains, and the Sudanian savanna regions of the Volta basin, simultaneously served as a crossroads and a refuge zone, along historical and climatic contexts. For these reasons, the Dogon Country presents an excellent case study for the exploration of the peopling history in a multi-disciplinary approach.

Using a large sample of skeletal remains of individuals from the collective burial caves of the Bandiagara Escarpment for bio-archaeological and genetic analysis, our current research aims at providing a more comprehensive population history of this region. So far, 86 AMS radiocarbon dates allow to establishing a new chronology for the funerary practices. Stable carbon and nitrogen isotope analyses shed light on diet evolution between pre-Dogon and Dogon periods, as well as a geographic distinction between foodways at the southern and northern ends of the Escarpment. Furthermore, inter-site differences demonstrate that communities were disposing of their dead in different caves. Consistent with previous archaeological and ethnographic evidence, these results attest to past complex dynamics of population and economies. Through the analysis of strontium isotopes and ancient DNA studies, we are also exploring further the history of population settlements, co-existence, continuity, origins, movement patterns and the nature of their relationships.