Where is the ancient harbour of Utica?

Geoarchaeology and palaeoenvironment of the Medjerda delta (Tunisia)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Interdisciplinary project, starting from an archaeological problem...

1.1 The Medjerda Delta

The Medjerda Delta is located on the northern coast of Tunisia, between the mouths of the Medjerda and the Sbeitla rivers. The delta is characterized by a complex system of channels and lagoons, which have evolved over time due to the interaction of tectonic, climatic, and sea-level changes. The Medjerda Delta is one of the largest deltas in Tunisia, and its morphological evolution has been studied extensively.

1.2 The Ancient Harbour of Utica

Utica was a major city in the Roman Empire, located on the Medjerda River and extending between the mouths of the Sbeitla and Medjerda Rivers. It was an important trading hub and a major port, with a population of several thousand people. The city was founded in the 7th century BC by the Phoenicians and was later occupied by the Punic Carthage.

1.3 The Problem of the Harbour Location

The location of the ancient harbour of Utica has been a subject of debate among archaeologists and geologists. Different hypotheses have been proposed, including the possibility that the ancient harbour was located outside the present-day delta, which is covered by the modern Medjerda Delta. This study aims to address this issue by examining the palaeogeographical and palaeoenvironmental records from the Medjerda Delta.

1.4 Objectives

The main objectives of this study are to:

- Determine the location of the ancient harbour of Utica
- Investigate the palaeogeographical and palaeoenvironmental changes in the Medjerda Delta
- Understand the evolution of the delta over time

2. AIMS

Reconstruction of the Medjerda delta landscape changes during the Holocene and of the ancient coastline

3. MATERIAL & METHODS

- In the field: mechanical extraction of cores (15-20 m deep) to reach the early Holocene. Two of these cores are particularly developed in this poster: core UCN1, 14 m deep and core UTC2, 17 m deep.
- In the laboratory: particle size analysis and quartz morphoscopy, sedimentological and biological analysis, mineralogical and geochemical approaches, radiocarbon dating.

4. RESULTS

Core UCN1 (Utica Compartiment Nord) (see fig. 5)

Where? In a marshy area, North of the «North compartment» of the delta.

Why? To determine if this area could have been a marine bay during the occupation of the site. This bay could be a potential location for harbour infrastructures.

So? This area was effectively covered by the sea (Unit B) at any given time, which will be determined by the next radiocarbon dating.

5. PERSPECTIVES

- Dating of the marine units in the core UCN1
- Establish the chronological framework of the retreat of the coastline
- Understanding the passage of the Medjerda into the «North compartment» of the Utica-Kalatid
- Marine environment
- Post-peat environment
- Pre-peat environment
- In the laboratory: particle size analysis and quartz morphoscopy, sedimentological and biological analysis, mineralogical and geochemical approaches, radiocarbon dating.

REFERENCES


So? This area was effectively covered by the sea (Unit B) at any given time, which will be determined by the next radiocarbon dating.

Sea inlet and/or marine bay? The size of the area covered by the sea during Antiquity has to be precisely with two other points planned for the next corening campaign.

REFERENCES

