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THE ATLANTIC BORDER OF THE SAHARA IN HOLOCENE TIMES

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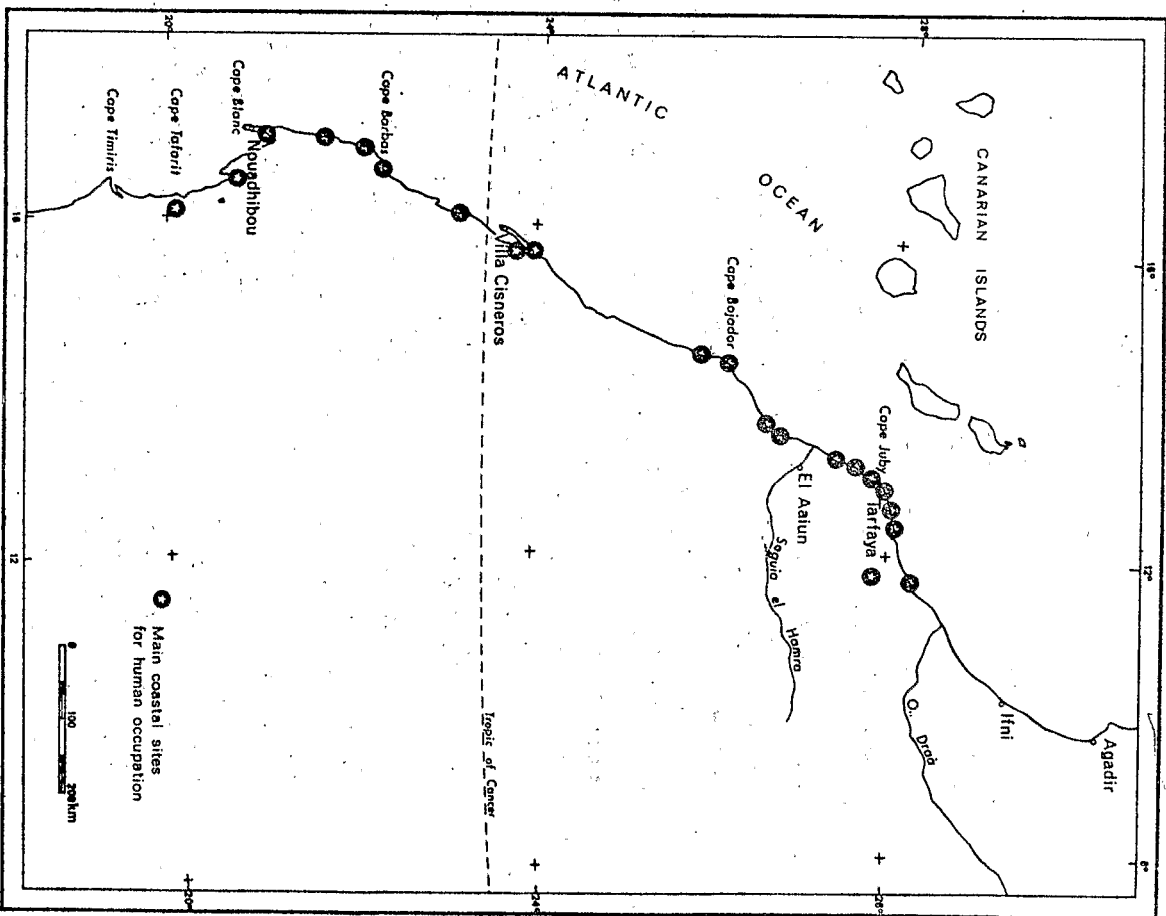
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From 1970 to 1974, six missions by the Laboratoire de Géologie du Quaternaire, C.N.R.S., France — studied the palaeoenvironment of the coastal zone between Uad Draâ (28°N) and Cape Tafarit (20°N). Shorelines, sea-shells, vertebrate faunas, pollens and human skeletal and cultural remains were investigated.

The period grossly dated from 4500 to —2000 years B.P. was of a sub-arid type in which large mammals and humans could survive. They were probably localized around watering points surrounded with a somewhat richer vegetation than nowadays. Faunas included mostly bovids, equids, caprids, antelopes, gazelles and ostriches. Moreover, around 20°N (Charni), a site provided a large number of *Phacochoerus aethiopicus*, together with *Loxodonta* sp., *Ceratotherium simum*, and even *Rana* sp. The vegetal environment consisted of *Chenopodiaceae*, *Gramineae* and *Cyperaceae*.

Human sites are often found on sand dunes bounding palaeo-gulfs of the last transgression (Nouakchottian-Mellahian, maximum around 5500 years B.P.). Men fed mostly upon sea-shells (*Arca senilis*, *Cardium edule*, *Tapes decussatus*, *Mytilus* sp., *Cymbium neptuni*, *Conus papillonaceus*, *Purpura haemastoma*, *Patella saliana*, etc) but also, between 28 and 22°N, upon fishes and large sea mammals (*Momachus monachus* and *Physeter* sp.).

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The Atlantic border of the Sahara in Holocene times.

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Material dating shows a peak at about 3000 years B. P.; this may suggest a climatic optimum, at least along the saharan atlantic coast. This fits with M. Servant's curve (1973) established for Chad (Period VII).

Before 4500 years B.P. (up to -10500) dates are scarce, which may indicate either a sparser human occupation or/and worse bio-climatic conditions.

No dates younger than 1500 years B.P. were obtained for neolithic sites.

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