**Exploring eastern Mediterranean Iron Age coastal connections through sheep astragali using geometric morphometrics**

It currently seems obvious that the Mediterranean basin is a place of great exchanges of cultures, populations and goods. Although studies have focused quite extensively on the archaeology of maritime exchanges1–3, it is challenging to assess archaeologically to what extent these networks had an influence on the biology of domesticated animals in the past, or even if animals were part of the trip. The question of past populations establishing extensive connections in the Mediterranean basin during the Iron Age and Persian period and especially, if these population exchange livestock and how these connections contributed to the animals phenotype or morphotype diversity is still difficult to document in the (zoo)archaeological record. These are amongst the questions Harding et al.4 are making an attempt at documenting. Focusing on archaeological deposits from Cyprus and Israel in the eastern part of the Mediterranean basin, they use sheep astragali as a proxy to explore the potential connections that might have existed between evolution of the animals’ morphology and exchanges through sea travel. Postulating that animals from inland sites should have variant morphology from those of coastal sites due to more intensive exchanges for the latter, mainly because of the incorporation of non-native animals, they conducted geometric morphometrics analyses to make an attempt at documenting the phenomenon. Observing changes in size and shape, but also an increased morphological variability within the assemblages from coastal sites, they nicely discuss and put their results in perspectives with the archaeological record and literature5,6. Although, as they acknowledge, their sample size is rather limited to draw any general conclusion, this paper sheds new lights on the influence of maritime transport and its influence over domesticated sheep diversity between Cyprus and the southern Levant, paving the way for future studies.

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