

Hominin responses to Pleistocene environmental change in Arabia and South Asia

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Abstract

Palaeoanthropologists typically outline human evolution within a framework of Pleistocene environmental change. Environmental change occurring across the Early–Middle Pleistocene transition is examined relative to patterns of hominin dispersal, ecological adaptations, cognitive advances and behavioural flexibility. Although climatic information has been used as the backdrop to human evolution, major lacunae exist in our understanding of the ecological settings where hominins evolved. Data from investigations conducted in the Arabian peninsula and the Indian subcontinent are reviewed, indicating the nature of Palaeolithic localities and their physical settings. Although much information remains to be obtained from these terrestrial records, significant changes are recognized in the environmental and archaeological record. The Early–Middle Pleistocene transition shows some conservative trends in hominin adaptations and technology, yet it is also an interval that evidences an increasing ability to transcend environmental controls through a greater level of behavioural flexibility and innovation.