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Paleoenvironmental and paleobiogeographical implications of a middle Pleistocene mollusc assemblage from the marine terraces of Baía Das Pipas, southwest Angola

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Abstract

Quaternary raised marine terraces containing the remains of diverse, shallow water marine invertebrate faunas are widespread across the coast of Angola. These deposits and faunas have not been studied in the same detail as contemporaneous features in northwest and southernmost Africa. We analyzed the fossil assemblages and sedimentology of two closely spaced middle Pleistocene marine terrace deposits in Baía das Pipas, southwest Angola. This revealed 46 gastropod and 29 bivalve species, along with scleractinian corals, encrusting bryozoans, polychaete tubes, barnacles, and echinoids. The fauna is characteristic of intertidal and nearshore rocky substrates and sandy soft-bottom habitats. Sedimentological analysis is consistent with faunal data and indicates an upper shoreface paleoenvironment along a gravel coast. This diverse fauna stands out as a rare example of a marine Pleistocene assemblage from over 6,000 km of the West African coast. The assemblage is dominated by extant tropical West African molluscs, including species from the "Senegalese fauna" that colonized northern Africa and beyond during Pleistocene interstadials. Additionally, as along the modern coast of the Namibe Desert, the influence of the cool-water Benguela Current is apparent in the paleofauna by the occurrence of a few temperate species. The distribution and thermal tolerances of extant species identified in the Pipas fauna indicate that this region experienced similar climatic and oceanographic conditions as that of the present during this interstadial. Seasonal temperature varied between ~20 and 28°C and resulted from upwelling in this tropical setting.

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