
Spatial distribution of Mesolithic scattered human remains from Noyen-sur-Seine (France)

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Abstract

As during the late Paleolithic, and more specifically the Magdalenian, the occurrence of scattered human remains in Mesolithic sites is a quite widespread phenomena in northwest Europe. However, these dispersed remains, often in the context of settlements, may differ in their meaning. Cannibalism, disturbed burials, complex funeral practices, non-funeral practices or wastes are the different evoked hypotheses. Bioarcheological analyses of the bone remains allow enlarging the investigation to the study of mobility and subsistence pattern during the Mesolithic.

The site of " Haut-des-Nachères " at Noyen-sur-Seine (France), which has provided 63 human cranial and infracranial remains distributed on a surface of 400m², offer the opportunity to conduct such studies. We present here a spatial analysis (GIS), macroscopical and isotopical examination of the remains fragments to document the mortuary practices and subsistence pattern of 11 individuals, adults and juveniles, who lived in the Seine valley during the first (8000 to 7300 years BP) and second (7000 to 6200 BP) Mesolithic.

The investigation of the spatial distribution of the human remains suggests the influence of taphonomical parameters, especially water displacements of remains located in the paleo-channel. Other factors seem also to have contributed to the dispersion and partial representation of the skeletons. Indeed, most bones are fragmented and 58% show the occurrence of cut-marks. These traces are interpreted as resulting from dismemberment of the bodies and cleaning of the heads. The isotopic analyses and paleobiological study of the teeth conducted on three individuals (adults and juvenile) have revealed a significant exploitation of the local

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aquatic resources. These hints, combined with other archaeological data, would testify to a long-term occupation of the site of a group well-adapted to its environment.

Keywords: Mesolithic, scattered human remains, mortuary practices, spatial distribution, isotopic analyses, paleobiological study, human subsistence, environment