
Neanderthal hunting seasonality and Mobility Patterns

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Résumé

Neanderthal mobility pattern has become a major topic in recent research in Paleoanthropology. In particular, the temporal organization of activities in the Neanderthal's territory has been largely used to discuss their management of food resources and scheduling abilities and indirectly to approach their cognitive capacities.

The late Middle Paleolithic in Southwestern Europe is characterized by major climatic fluctuations that had direct impacts on Neanderthal eco-systems. Sedentary and migratory ungulate populations alternated in the environment. Neanderthal hunter-gatherers, were forced to adapt their mobility to the migration pattern of their prey, conducting to a reorganization of the activities within their territories in function of the seasonal cycle.

In this context, seasonality is a key topic for reconstructing and understanding the settlement patterns developed by these human communities.

We proposed here to tackle this specific topic through a cementochronological analysis of sites from Southwestern France, attributed to the late Middle Paleolithic. Ungulate teeth from sites attributed to the MIS 4 and 3 with available zooarchaeological data were selected. The sampling was based on the MNI and postmortem modifications were systematically looked for. The results were then compared to comparative collections prior being interpreted in term of season of death.

Our study shows that different Neanderthal populations developed specialized strategies to cope with the seasonal fluctuation of their prey. Innovative hunting strategies were established as a response to the ethological specificity of their games. The development of seasonal hunting specific locations had for consequence the reorganization of human settlement dynamics and the adoption of different mobility patterns.

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