
Non-biface assemblages and lithic variability in MIS13-11 Europe

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Résumé

The Clactonian question - that is the presence of Middle Pleistocene assemblages in England that lack handaxes – has puzzled those concerned with the Palaeolithic of Britain for generations (e.g. Warren 1926; Wymer 1974 McNabb 1992; White 2000; Fluck 2011; Wenban-Smith 2013). However, the phenomenon of absent handaxes is not limited to the UK. By looking at those assemblages reported as lacking handaxes from across Europe an overall pattern of assemblage variation emerges that is often obscured by the focus upon handaxes.

The limitations of available raw material, chronological distinctions, geographical isolation and cultural variation have all been proposed as explanations. This paper will look at sites from England, the Iberian peninsula, France and central Europe and explore whether a single explanation for the absence of handaxes is appropriate, or whether our obsession with the handaxe has clouded a potentially more interesting picture of lithic variation in MIS13-11 Europe.

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Mots-Clés: Palaeolithic, biface, variability

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