Mammoth hunting in Central Europe – case studies of Kraków Spadzista and Milovice sites

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Résumé

Several mammoth bone deposits are known from Gravettian open-air sites in Central Europe. Mammoth remains from Dolní Věstonice I and II, Předmostí, Milovice, and Kraków Spadzista have been variably interpreted: as the remains of specialized mammoth hunting, as results of exploitation of mammoth bones, or as patterned scavenging of mammoths at natural death sites.

Two Late Gravettian sites, Kraków Spadzista sector B+B1 (dated 24-20 ka uncal BP) and Milovice sector G (dated 25-21 ka uncal BP), were archaeozoologically investigated further to find clues about mammoth hunting strategies of Gravettian hunter-gatherers. Although woolly mammoth is the dominant prey species in both sites, there are differences in age profiles, morphology of animals, and taphonomy. At Kraków Spadzista, the dominance of young and subadult individuals roughly reflects typical proportions in living populations. Therefore, it appears that hunters were not selective about which individual mammoths to kill, and chose prey animals randomly. At Milovice, on the other hand, adult individuals are prevalent, which suggests a hunting strategy specialized to kill individuals in specific age classes.

The mammoth remains discovered at both sites were associated with numerous lithic tools interpreted as hunting weaponry. Although both assemblages are Gravettian, their tool typologies are different. In this presentation we show the correlation between archaeological features and results of archaeozoological studies, which eventually can demonstrate mammoth hunting strategies of Central European Gravettian societies.

Acknowledgments:
The studies were partly supported by National Science Center, Poland (grant decisions No. 2015/18/E/HS3/00178 awarded to J. Wilczyński and 2015/17/B/HS3/00165 awarded to P. Wojtal).

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Mots-Clés: Gravettian, archaeozoology, hunting implements