
Brand New Insights into Neolithic Animal Exploitation in the Elbe-Saale Region (Germany)

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Résumé

During the Neolithic, between 5500 and 2200 calBC, the Elbe-Saale region in central Germany was densely inhabited. Throughout this period, exogenous influences brought new knowledge and innovative productions to this crossroad area. From the Linear Pottery to the Beaker Culture, people settled in this fertile region with its loess and chernozem soils. The subcontinental climate, with hot summers, harsh winters and low annual precipitation, required husbandry adapted to these conditions.

In archaeozoological terms, the purpose here is to reveal new agropastoral practices introduced into this region, to characterize the technical sub-system of animal resource exploitation and to illustrate consequences of human interventions on animals. Fifteen archaeozoological studies for Neolithic settlements are considered and almost 40 000 identified bones are used for the analysis. The sites are mainly located in Saxony-Anhalt, in or near the Saale valley. Faunal spectra, logarithm size index (LSI), gender distinction, paleopathology, age at death estimations based on teeth eruption and wear are used to compare the data. A synthesis of osteometrical data is carried out for cattle, sheep and pig in order to identify effects of domestication and developments in zootechnic practices.

This research highlights that the subsistence economy is based on farming and cattle are the principal source of animal products. Trends in size and morphology differ between the three main domestic species. Animal husbandry practices are relatively well developed. From one site to another, herd management varies and there are several types of animal exploitation (mixed exploitation or exploitation more focused on dairy or meat production, textiles or traction). Animals are also used in the symbolic sphere. This particularly involves cattle, in relationship with their new use for traction. But other species are also used for symbolic acts, such as dog, sheep, pig, horse and some wild animals, including red deer and fox.

Mots-Clés: Neolithic, central Germany, breeding, logarithm size index, morphological evolution, herd management, symbols.

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