
Butchery site or large-spectrum occupation ? Discussion about the Late Mesolithic refuse layers in Noyen-sur-Seine (France).

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Abstract

Noyen-sur-Seine is best known for the abundant remains from the Early Mesolithic, but much less for those dated to the Late Mesolithic. Excavated between 1985 and 1987, the most recent levels are located inside two small depressions filled with peat during the second half of the 7th millennium BC. The study of the numerous faunal remains has been supplemented in recent years by a technological analysis of the lithic material. This approach was accompanied by a critical return on the taphonomy of archaeological levels and their spatial organisation. Despite the very good apparent conservation of the archaeological material, this work has shown the existence of chronological mixtures and a sedimentary history much more complex than expected. As for the older occupations, the river shore occupied by the Mesolithic populations also was totally destroyed by the floods. Therefore, the protected objects within the peat layers constitute the last available remains to reconstruct the function of the occupations. In this respect, research conducted over the past 30 years give us a solid basis for understanding the nature of the material discarded into the refuse layers. However, the archaeozoological and lithic data give fairly contrasting data. The abundant faunal remains reflect the image of relatively short occupations related to hunting episodes focused on the wild boar. At the opposite, the flint tools dated to the Late Mesolithic correspond to highly selected material which therefore give only a very partial picture of the activities that have taken place on the river shore. The use-wear traces found on the tools are few but indicate a surprising functional diversity that tempers the image of too specialised occupations. These data are supported by the discovery of several human bones and some osseous tools. In the end, the different approaches around the Late Mesolithic occupations show the necessity of this interdisciplinary approach. Even in the case of wetland sites, apparently well-preserved, it is essential to conduct a critical analysis of the contexts, combined with a real cross-study of the archaeological remains.

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