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TECHNIQUES AND TERRITORIES

New Insights into Mesolithic Cultures



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FOREWORD

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The young researchers round-table project “Techniques and Territories: new insights into Mesolithic cultures” arose from a meeting of doctoral and post-doctoral researchers working on the Mesolithic. This meeting was held in November 2011 at the MAE (Nanterre, France) and organized by G. Bosset (Paris I – UMR 7041 ARSCAN) and B. Marquebielle (Toulouse II - UMR 5608 TRACES). It highlighted the growing number of young researchers participating in interdisciplinary research on the Mesolithic and the concomitant need for meetings entirely devoted to this period, which would bring together the community of Mesolithic researchers.

The young researcher’s round-table in Toulouse thus made this inter-disciplinary, -institutional and -generational project concrete, in large part through the diffusion of finished or on-going research, university theses and field operations.

Over two days, twenty papers and nine posters were presented in two sessions. The first session addressed techniques in the broad sense (manufacturing and production strategies, and skills) and their role in the definition of the Mesolithic and its lifeways. The second session was dedicated to research news. In both sessions, the number of presentations was equally divided among young researchers (Master’s and PhD students and Post-Doctorates) and researchers affiliated with various institutions (CNRS, Universities, Inrap, and private rescue archaeology companies). This event also attracted non-French participants (presenters and auditors) from Algeria, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Switzerland.

During the general discussion, the participants unanimously agreed upon the need to structure research at a national level through continued meetings dedicated to the Mesolithic. The next round-table project was proposed at this time, “Au cœur des gisements mésolithiques”, organized in Besançon in 2013 by C. Cupillard, S. Griselin and F. Séara. We hope that this effort, which aims to facilitate exchanges between Mesolithic researchers and to increase the visibility of this community, will continue in the future.

From a scientific perspective, one of the contributions of this round-table was to incite serious discussion on the epistemological status of the Mesolithic. Much remains to be done to improve the recording of this period, as well as to revive its originality, through complementary research questions (Human-environment relationships, techno-economic behaviors, mobility and territorial strategies, emergence and evolution of Mesolithic societies, Neolithization processes, etc.). Since the work of J.-G. Rozoy, fundamental in the sense that he sought global vision of Mesolithic lifeways, different general models have been proposed, the inefficacy of which (denounced by Kozłowski and others) was well understood. The desire to go beyond the general consensus led to a reconsideration of the value attributed to cultural divisions made based on lithic typology alone, and more precisely, the typology of microliths. The exclusively environmental hypotheses for the emergence and evolution of the Mesolithic have been revised with a clearer perception of the processes of adaptation of different groups in different environments. The variability and complexity of practices

is now explored through a more local and interdisciplinary approach to the archaeological record, leading to a (re)construction of the interpretative and cultural models. The constitution of reliable actualistic reference bases is now often an integral element of this approach.

The publication of these proceedings, consisting of fourteen articles, reflects these new priorities.

“Techniques and territories” session

Following these trends, G. Marchand presents the Early/Late Mesolithic transition with an emphasis on the complexity of the phenomena that lead to the proposition of this division. Questioning the validity of traditional “cultural geography”, he reminds us that a material culture is comprised of multiple elements and that it is therefore necessary to consider all material remains and their societal implications.

Based on data from five open-air sites in the north and east of France that yielded abundant and homogeneous assemblages, F. Séara insists on the importance of extensive lithic refittings. In addition to a better understanding of the spatial organization of Mesolithic sites, this method enables an evaluation of the variability of lithic production strategies and their palethnographic implications.

L. Chesnaux presents her thoughts on the evolution of preparation procedures in the manufacturing of triangular geometric microliths, drawing on a techno-functional study of two lithic assemblages from the Early Mesolithic, which reveals significant differences.

A. Henry and I. Théry-Parisot address fuel use and management and propose research directions aimed at showing behaviors associated with fire, thus contributing to our understanding of the specificity of the Mesolithic.

N. Valdeyron offers some elements for reflection on the exploitation of vegetal food resources.

T. Ducrocq relies on interdisciplinary data to present a brief summary of the complex evolution of the Mesolithic in northern France.

M. Reversat inventories the archaeological data available from 26 Mesolithic sites in the Brive and Quercy regions to begin addressing questions concerning the roles of these sites and their implications in terms of mobility strategies and/or complementarity between sites.

E. Defranould, through a study of the lithic industry of the site of Combe-Grèze (Aveyron), addresses the question of technical skill transmission between the Late Mesolithic and the Early Neolithic in order to better understand the role of the Mesolithic foundation in the emergence of a production economy.

“Research news” session

D. Visentin, F. Fontana and S. Bertola present the lithic artifacts from an occupation attributed to the Early Mesolithic on the Pô Plain in Italy, whose study suggests the importance of domestic activities.

D. Nukushina presents the results of a new study of the lithic assemblage associated with the Amoreiras shell midden in Portugal, in which she challenges earlier chrono-cultural attributions.

A. Bénard and C. Guéret discuss the contributions of new research on archaeological data associated with decorated rock shelters in the southern Ile-de-France region.

L. Bassin, looking for possible Neolithic influences, addresses the evolution of Swiss lithic productions at the end of the Mesolithic

S. Guillon discusses the main factors underlying vegetation dynamics at the Mesolithic / Neolithic transition in South-eastern France based on palynological data.

H. Reis presents preliminary results from the study of the Paco Velho 2 shell midden in Portugal, contributing to discussions on the Mesolithic / Neolithic transition.

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