

The Middle Palaeolithic in loessic context in Northern France

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Northwestern France is at the western end of the Eurasian loess zone characterized by a subcontinuous loess cover. It contains a large amount of Lower and Middle Paleolithic open-air sites. This region, and in particular the Somme Valley, has played an essential role in the history of Prehistory.

The Middle Palaeolithic of northwestern France is characterized by the presence of many Middle Palaeolithic sites, covering the entire period. The Saalian phase is less documented, partly for taphonomic reasons. The lithic industries indicate mastery of all production systems for flakes, blades, points and to a lesser extent, bifaces. During the Upper Pleistocene, the occupation of this territory by Neandertal groups is important. The vast majority of these lithic series cannot be attributed to discrete cultural facies of Mousterian defined by Bordes, due to the low number of retouched tools. Aside from some typical Mousterian of Acheulean tradition bifaces and blade production characteristic of the Early Weichselian, which are stylistic and cultural markers, there is nothing to differentiate Mousterian groups. In an attempt to identify their cultural identities, lithic assemblages were analyzed using the *Chaîne opératoire* method that studies artifacts from the acquisition of raw materials through the final objectives of the different production systems to the ultimate abandonment of tools. The situation is considered from each chronostratigraphic phase to attempt to distinguish the settlement patterns of this region. This renewed approach to technical studies points to a wide diversity of Neandertal adaptive faculties, which can be interpreted in terms of cultural diversity.