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Aurignacian lithic economy and early modern human mobility: new perspectives from classic sites in the Vézère valley of France

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Abstract

During the past decade the chronology and hominin attributions of the Aurignacian have been revised or called into question. These controversies have coincided with an increased appreciation for the social complexity of Aurignacian culture in the realms of organic technologies and mobiliary and parietal manifestations of symbolic behavior. Lithic raw material procurement and reduction intensity evidence from Aurignacian occupations at the Vézère Valley sites of Abri Pataud, Le Facteur, and La Ferrassie may reflect complex group mobility strategies. The lithic components under consideration were always dominated by cherts available within a few kilometers radius. Assemblages associated with the early Aurignacian have elevated proportions of cherts

Assemblages associated with the early Aurignacian have elevated proportions of elements from distant sources. Lithic retouch data indicate that some early Aurignacian assemblages reflect greater extent and/or intensity of marginal retouch compared with the later Aurignacian. Lithic reduction data, however, reveal evidence of greater core reduction intensity during the later Aurignacian. Flexible strategies of residential mobility, possibly in response to changes in the subsistence environment, may account for some of the variability between early and later Aurignacian assemblages. Similar shifts in raw material procurement were evidently associated with the Middle Paleolithic in southwestern France. However, Aurignacian populations may have acquired most lithic materials by movement directly to sources, while certain non-utilitarian materials were probably obtained via some form of indirect social exchange. This suggested coexistence of direct and indirect procurement mechanisms serves to distinguish Aurignacian assemblages from earlier Middle Paleolithic deposits and emphasizes that socially-directed intensification was one of the fundamental elements of the suite of cultural changes referred to as the Middleâ€“Upper Paleolithic transition.



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Keywords

Paleolithic archaeology; southwestern France; Aurignacian; lithic economy

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