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# From animals to osseous remains: recent advances in the study of human-animal relationships in the Mesolithic

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## Abstract

In Mesolithic archaeology the relationships between groups of hunter-gatherers and animal populations are mainly described by the study of osseous remains. According to whether the assemblages mainly reflect hunting, butchering or crafting activities, these studies are often conducted by zooarchaeological and technological specialists.

The tools with which questions have recently been addressed are becoming more and more precise, but also diverse (e.g. experimental archaeology, isotope analysis, ZooMS, dental microwear analysis, aDNA analysis, use-wear analysis, ethology, etc.). However, although numerous links between these different studies exist, systematic studies of a global approach towards animal exploitation have only rarely been presented for the Mesolithic. Such studies cover the entire operational system from the living animal through to the final discard of its remains.

The need to fill this research gap is reinforced by the fact that the suite of animals changed at the Pleistocene/Holocene border and with them we see an adaptation of their role for the life of hunter-gatherers during the early-mid Holocene. Not only a redistribution of animals took place but moreover we see alterations of biotopes. Within this framework, and for societies based on hunting, animals are at the crossroads of dietary, technical and symbolic systems. Thus, environmental changes necessarily had a huge impact on socio-economic structures.

Consequently, the study of human-animal relations must be considered on multiple axes in order to reflect the numerous implications that animals had on past human societies. The application of global approaches to human-animal interactions can be fulfilled by multi- and

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transdisciplinary approaches that are – in particular – based on sites with multiple high-resolution datasets as regularly offered by excavations of Mesolithic sites.

We therefore welcome zooarchaeologists, technologists, and natural scientists to contribute to our session. Contributions involving innovative methodological approaches and joint studies are particularly welcome. The overarching aim of this session will be to present regional syntheses of the global approach to animal exploitation during the Mesolithic in Europe.

**Keywords:** human, animal relationships, zooarchaeology, osseous technology, global approach