
The site of Murten/Ober Prehl (Canton of Fribourg, Switzerland) : reflection on the notion of territory in Early Mesolithic

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Abstract

The present talk is the result of a collective work on the Swiss Mesolithic site of Murten/Ober Prehl. Located near the Lake Murten in the canton of Fribourg, it was excavated between 1990 and 1991 by Michel Mauvilly in a rescue context (Archaeological Service of the State of Fribourg ; Boisaubert *et al.*, 2008). The excavation uncovered on a surface of 520 m² several layers of distinct occupations ; the oldest one dated from the Mesolithic. No bone was found, but 2016 lithic artifacts were at least gathered; a majority belongs to the Mesolithic.

As just preliminary papers were published (Mauvilly *et al.*, 2002), it was decided to make a complete study of this material in a master's degree at the University of Burgundy (Rostollan, 2019). Three main objectives were defined: refine the dating of the site, characterize the nature of the site and assess its place in the regional context. To answer, several approaches have been carried out. The typological study of this collection was completed by the study of the spatial distribution of the remains, the search of the reassemblies and use-wear analysis. Then, thanks to the petrographic analysis conducted by Jehanne Affolter, it was also possible to define the management of raw materials. The results of these approaches will be presented in this paper.

The dating of the site is based on the presence of segments associated with retouched and transverse basal points and isosceles triangles. Such armatures are characteristic of the Early Mesolithic in the Jura (Thévenin, 2008).

More than 99% of the pieces were coordinated, so it is possible to create spatial projections. The results show a high density zone, over an area of about 30 m², and a second one, less larger (15 m²), a few meters West. Lithic reassemblies shows links between these two locations, so potentially contemporaneous. The number of the burned flints allows to hypothesize the existence of a hearth within the dense area, but none in the second one.

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The petrographic analysis identifies the diversity of the raw materials found in Murten/Ober Prehl. The pattern of the geographical origins show clearly a predilection for local resources, especially ölkvartzite and radiolarite, which could be collected in a less than 50 km radius. Many elements are also from more than 100 km. The most exotic raw material is a flint from the Ain department, more than 170 km away. Such supply pattern seems to be reminiscent of the one recognized for the Dammartin-Marpain locus 2 in Jura (Séara et Roncin, 2013).

The lithic reassemblies reveal several operating chains, some of conducted entirely on the site – namely local rocks such as fine-grained quartzite -, other ones partially. These observations complete our knowledge about the circulation of materials.

Furthermore, comparison with other sites allows us to propose a restitution of the cultural landscape in which Murten/Ober Prehl was integrated in the early Mesolithic period. These comparisons are made with sites located in the neighbouring Swiss cantons crossed by the Jura Mountains (Cornaux " Prés du Chêne ", Mollendruz) but also in the French departments also crossed by this mountains (Oberlarg, Ruffey-sur-Seille), and finally with sites in south-western Germany (Siebenlinden).

In addition, a few elements from Murten/Ober Prehl deserve to be mentioned, namely numerous sketched pieces. Used for the treatment of animal hard material during the Neolithic period (Le Brun-Ricalens, 2006), their role still unknown for the Mesolithic period, and complementary studies must be led.

This brief summary about Murten/Ober Prehl shows the interest of returning to sites excavated a couple of years ago. The aim of this presentation is not only to make this Fribourg open-air site better known, but also to compare it with the advances in Mesolithic archaeological research and to have a reflection about the notion of territory through the supply territory and the cultural territory.

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