
Neandertal selective hunting of roe deer? The example of Riparo Tagliente levels 35-36 (MIS 3-4, Italy)

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Résumé

In southwestern Europe, during the Upper Pleistocene, a monospecific hunting strategy was a behaviour highlighted, in particular for medium and large-sized ungulates. However, the specific prey selection of small-sized ungulates was less common, especially for Neandertal groups. The revision of the faunal assemblage of two Mousterian levels with a zooarchaeological and taphonomic approach shows how roe deer species dominates the faunal spectrum of Riparo Tagliente (Italy). Riparo Tagliente is a rock shelter located in the Venetian Pre Alps, discovered in 1958 and excavated from the 1960s. Our taphonomic results indicates that the accumulation is almost exclusively anthropogenic. An intensive exploitation of the carcasses, with all the butchery steps of the *chaîne opératoire*, especially the systematic marrow recovery, even for the part less marrow quantity such as phalanges, is identified. The presence of foetal or new-born remains might indicates, at least, spring occupations. The Neandertal groups had a selective hunting strategy of roe deer and selective transport of the best part of other animal carcasses such as moose, red deer, bison or horse. The subsistence strategy shows a repetitive pattern along the sequence where the Neandertal prey selection was rather focus on a low-ranked species (in term of cost-returns). Therefore, the intense exploitation of roe deer, the high degree of the anthropogenic bone breakage, and the presence of infantile individuals could be indicative of nutritional stress episodes suffered by those Neanderthals that dwelled Riparo Tagliente at the beginning of MIS3. SUBSILIENCE project investigates how this causes affected their final decline. SUBSILIENCE is an ERC-CoG project funded by ERCEA (ref 818299).

Mots-Clés: Middle Paleolithic, Zooarchaeology, Taphonomy, Subsistence strategies, Roedeer

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