
Large-sized games and seasonality: results on the estimation of the season at death at De Nadale Cave, a single-layered Quina Mousterian site in the north-east of Italy.

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Résumé

The analysis of Neanderthal mobility patterns offers valuable information about the spatial temporal organization of this past hominid and about his capacity to schedule. In this context the study of the seasonal organization of the activities (site occupation and hunting strategies) are of prime interest for documenting the choice made by Mousterian population for exploiting their territory.

In zooarchaeology, some valuable methods can be applied to teeth, such as the analysis of carbon and oxygen stable isotopes, the study of tooth eruption and replacement patterns, the dental micro- and mesowear analyses and the cementochronology technique. However, using one of these methods alone, may not always be reliable, since, when used independently, a certain technique may provide too low-resolution data and limited information. Hence, this contribution focuses on the seasonality and the extent of the occupation of De Nadale Cave, a single-layered Quina Mousterian site located on the Berici Hills, in north-eastern Italy. Moreover, the area is a key region for the study of the behavior of hunter-gatherer groups, thanks to the numerous and important prehistoric evidence spanning from the Middle to the Upper Palaeolithic.

Here we present the results obtained through a combined approach based on two high-resolution proxies, cementum increments and dental meso- and microwear. We analyzed

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molars from large-sized games, mainly cervid and bovid, which were the base of the subsistence of Neanderthal groups at the site. Despite some taphonomic alteration of the material, we were able to characterize the hunting seasonality of the different prey and estimate the duration of the occupation of the Quina layer. Our results bring new insight into the occupational pattern in the North-east of Italy during the MIS 4.

Mots-Clés: Seasonality, cementochronology, tooth wear, Middle Palaeolithic, large, sized games.