Up to the mountain and down to the river: a raw material approach to the Neanderthal flint assemblage of stratigraphic unit VIII of El Salt (Alcoi, eastern Iberia)

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Résumé

Flint is the most predominant type of raw material used by Neanderthals for producing stone tools. It is also susceptible to physicochemical changes conditioned by the environment within which it is located. Hence, flint sourcing based not only on primary outcrops but also on secondary deposits may be a particularly suitable proxy of hunter-gatherer group mobility. Here, we present preliminary data from a study aimed at sourcing a Neanderthal flint assemblage from stratigraphic unit VIII of El Salt (Alcoi, Alacant, eastern Iberia) using siliceous raw material analysis. We interpret different provisioning environments based on geogenic features and, especially, postgenetic alterations, which are informative of primary, subprimary and secondary sources of distinct flint types. Then, we propose hypothetical catchment areas in which those environments could have existed in the region during the period represented by the Neanderthal occupations. Preliminary results point to short-distance catchment strategies and preference for fluvial and low-altitude deposits. Comparisons with chronologically contemporaneous and more recent stratigraphic units (i.e. IVb of El Pastor (Alcoi, Alacant, eastern Iberia) and Xa of El Salt, respectively) are made in order to reflect on the variability of Neanderthal regional resourcing dynamics through time.

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Mots-Clés: Neanderthal, Middle Palaeolithic, Iberia, hunter, gatherer mobility, siliceous raw materials