
New finds from Hohle Fels Cave in the Swabian Jura call for a reassessment of the cultural chronology of the late Middle Paleolithic in Central Europe

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Résumé

After several seasons of excavating low-density Middle Paleolithic deposits in Hohle Fels Cave in the Ach Valley of southwestern Germany, in 2020 we reached the comparatively rich archaeological horizons (AH) X and XI over a meter below the base of the site's well-known Aurignacian layers. Four ESR dates from herbivore teeth recovered from the overlying AH IX provide a weighted mean age of 64 ± 4 ka BP. Environmental data from micromammals document that AH X and XI correspond to relatively warm and wet conditions that likely correlate to either interstadial conditions during early MIS 3 or late MIS 5. Initial faunal analysis documents an abundance of cave bears bones from natural deaths, as is typical for the Middle Paleolithic of Hohle Fels, as well as remains of more typical prey species. Additionally, the faunal assemblage includes a retouched bone fragments and numerous pieces of burnt bone. The lithic assemblage from AH X includes a complete leaf point together with diverse lithic artifacts documenting Levallois and non-Levallois reduction of local raw materials. Use-wear demonstrates that the leaf point was used as a hafted spear. The leaf point from Hohle Fels is the first artifact of its kind recovered from a modern excavation and the first recovered from a stratified context since Gustav Riek's dig at Haldenstein Cave in 1938. Traditionally, the leaf point horizon, or *Blattspitzengruppe*, of southern Germany, and Central Europe more generally, has been placed at the end of the Middle Paleolithic cultural chronological system. Current research at Hohle Fels raises questions about the validity of the traditional cultural chronology of the region and underlines the need for new, high quality cultural and chronostratigraphic information on the Swabian and Central European Middle Paleolithic.

Mots-Clés: excavating, Middle Paleolithic, southwestern Germany

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