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Fragmented reduction processes: Middle Palaeolithic technical behaviour in the Abri du Maras shelter, southeastern France



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ABSTRACT

New excavations at the Abri du Maras, located in the southeast of France, have yielded Middle Palaeolithic assemblages with evidence of rock shelter occupations in a cold climatic context contemporaneous with MIS 4. Few MIS 4 sites are known in this part of France and especially in this state of preservation. The paper is focused on one sedimentological layer divided into two archaeological levels (sub-levels 4.1 and 4.2). Our goal was to examine the Middle Palaeolithic lithic assemblage of these two levels by interdisciplinary approaches (technology, origin of flint and functional analysis of stone tools) in order to identify the technical strategies and the land-use patterns in a specific environmental context. The two occupations do not show differences in behaviours. The technical strategies applied to flint and other stones indicate a fragmentation of the reduction processes in a local and semi-local perimeter around the site. The main core technology is Levallois, generally on flint cortical cores on flakes. Flint flakes, blades and points are the main components of the series and the technological aims of the debitage. Due to the small size of the flakes used for flaking, large flint flakes, blades (Levallois or cortical) and Levallois points were produced elsewhere, to the north and south of the site (up to 20–30 km) according to the geological study, and then brought to the shelter. Flakes in other lithic materials (quartz, quartzite) were also knapped elsewhere before being transported to the shelter. Some of the large flint flakes, but also nodules and fragments of slabs, were then used for onsite flaking. Flake-tools are very rare. Evidence of impact fractures and TCSA/TCSPs values of the corpus of unretouched Levallois points suggest that some points, brought or prepared on the site, could have been used as projectile tips. The lithics attest to management of local and semi-local stones in a perimeter of 30 km around the site (possibly more due to some unidentified flint) and an anticipation of domestic needs in relation to reindeer hunting, the predominant activity. Imported artefacts and artefacts made on the site were used for the same diversity of activities and materials (butchery, plant and woodworking). The technological strategies and the type of management differ slightly from those from cave assemblages in the same area located in valleys and on low plateaux near the Rhône corridor, possibly due to the type of the site, a vast shelter. Data from the Abri du Maras are compared to data from the other Middle Palaeolithic sites of the region and the role of the topographic aspect of the site on the type of occupations is discussed.

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1. Introduction

The Abri du Maras site is located in a small valley less than 1 km from the Ardèche River, a tributary of the Rhône River and close to the Rhône Valley in southeast France. This site is renowned for the Middle Palaeolithic (MP) deposits at the top of the sequence bearing Levallois laminar debitage and seven distinct levels (levels

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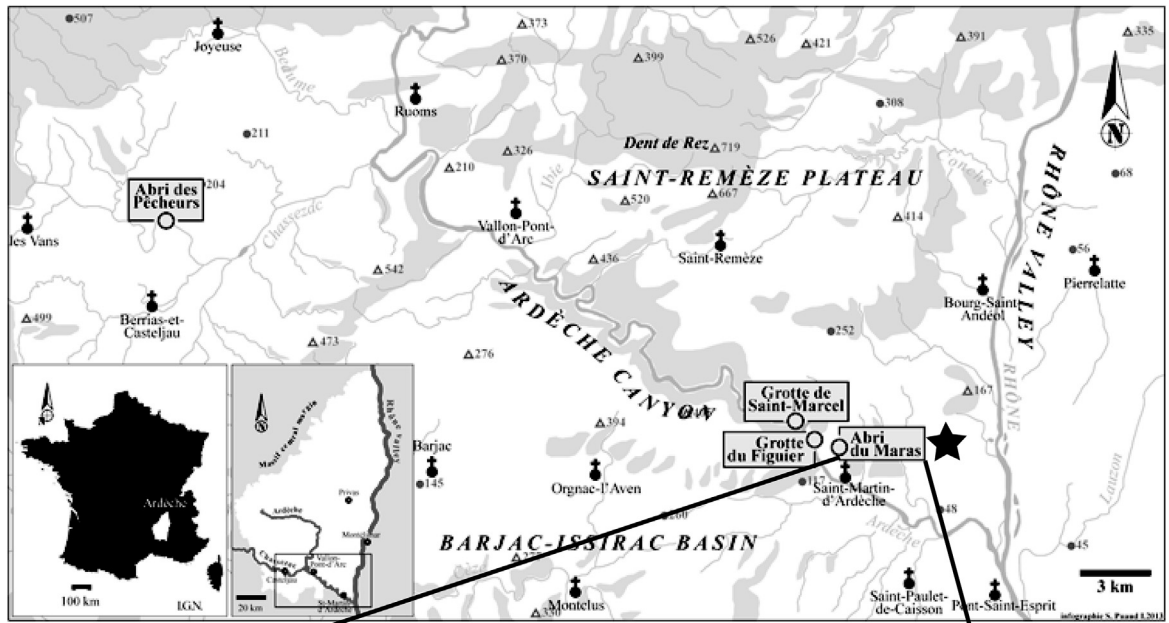


Fig. 1. Location of the Abri du Maras in southeastern France. View of the topographical position of the site in a small valley near the Ardèche River. Aspect of the present shelter.

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