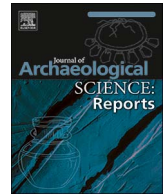




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Animals in LBK society: Identity and gender markers

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ABSTRACT

Thanks to archaeological work undertaken in the Paris Basin (France), a large volume of high quality faunal remains data was obtained from settlement and funerary contexts from the first Neolithic societies, the Linear Pottery Culture “LBK” (sixth millennium BC). It allowed us to carry out extensive analyses: first, we were able to develop a novel interpretation of the LBK settlement organisation. It integrates subsistence autonomy and social reciprocity between houses. Second, we analyzed the faunal remains from the ceremonial enclosure at the site of Menneville and graves containing human associated with faunal remains resulting from different practices and depositions. We use both the settlement model and the analysis of the burials to identify one of the essential dimensions of the LBK society, namely a social organization with a true duality between domestication and hunting. Society is structured around bovines, caprines, wild-boar, aurochs and red-deer, found systematically in the houses, in the village space and in the funeral structures. The interpretation that we provide to hypothesize a social framework from these archaeozoological data in both profane and sacred domains is their presence as markers. We think of these markers as indicating the identity of units such as clans, in this case breeders of cattle, sheep breeders, and possibly pig breeders. But also gender markers: males with wild boar and pig, and possibly females with red deer. And finally age markers, with a link between sheep and children.

1. Introduction

For the Neolithic period, it is common to focus only on animal domestication and to refer to the general population as farmers and stockbreeders. That said, it is important that we not forget to take into consideration the important component of wild animals. The archaeozoological data demonstrate contrary to conventional thought, that the foundations of everyday consumption, as well as social status and religious rituals practised by the Linear Pottery Culture, or the «LBK», are not based solely on the symbolism of the domestic sphere but borrows from both the domestic and the wild. The two are intrinsically linked and are markers of identity and gender. I will demonstrate this premise with an analysis divided into two parts: the first part is based on the settlement faunal remains from the Aisne valley villages, and, the second part based on the ritual faunal deposits from graves, and from Menneville, a ceremonial enclosure.

1.1. Animals in the households and village organization

This study was mostly conducted in the very rich archaeological environment of the Aisne Valley in northern France, one of the westernmost settlement areas of the LBK (Fig. 1). Such exceptional archaeological evidence has permitted reflection on the relative

chronology of these different occupations, the organisation of the territory and the economy of the people in question (Ilett, *in press*; Allard et al., 2013; Dubouloz, 2012a, 2012b; Ilett, 2010, 2012).

The radiocarbon dates of the occupations of the Aisne valley belonging to the end of LBK chronological sequence called “RFBS” (Rubané Final du Bassin de la Seine) fall between 5100 and 4900 BCE (Dubouloz, 2003). Three ceramic stages have been defined by M. Ilett (Ilett, 2012; Blouet et al., 2013, p. 316) after a seriation of the ceramic assemblages: Aisne 1, Aisne 2 and Aisne 3 (corresponding to early, middle and late RFBS).

Unlike many LBK sites from central Europe, settlements in the Aisne valley consist of houses well separated from one another with absence of overlap and therefore mixing between houses.

To date extensive zooarchaeological analyses has been done on the remains from 53 well-dated houses with distinct floorplans and 75,556 bones from the pits (Supplementary data 1–3). In our study we refer to the description of house plans proposed by Coudart (1998) and more specifically our formal classification (Hachem, 2000, 2011), which defined two categories of house size depending on the number of bays (units) in the rear of the house: small houses (house length: 9.5 m to 15 m) have a single bay after the corridor, whereas large houses have two bays (15 to 21 m) or three bays (21 to 39 m) after the corridor.

Similar behaviors have been highlighted at the site of Cuiiry-lès-

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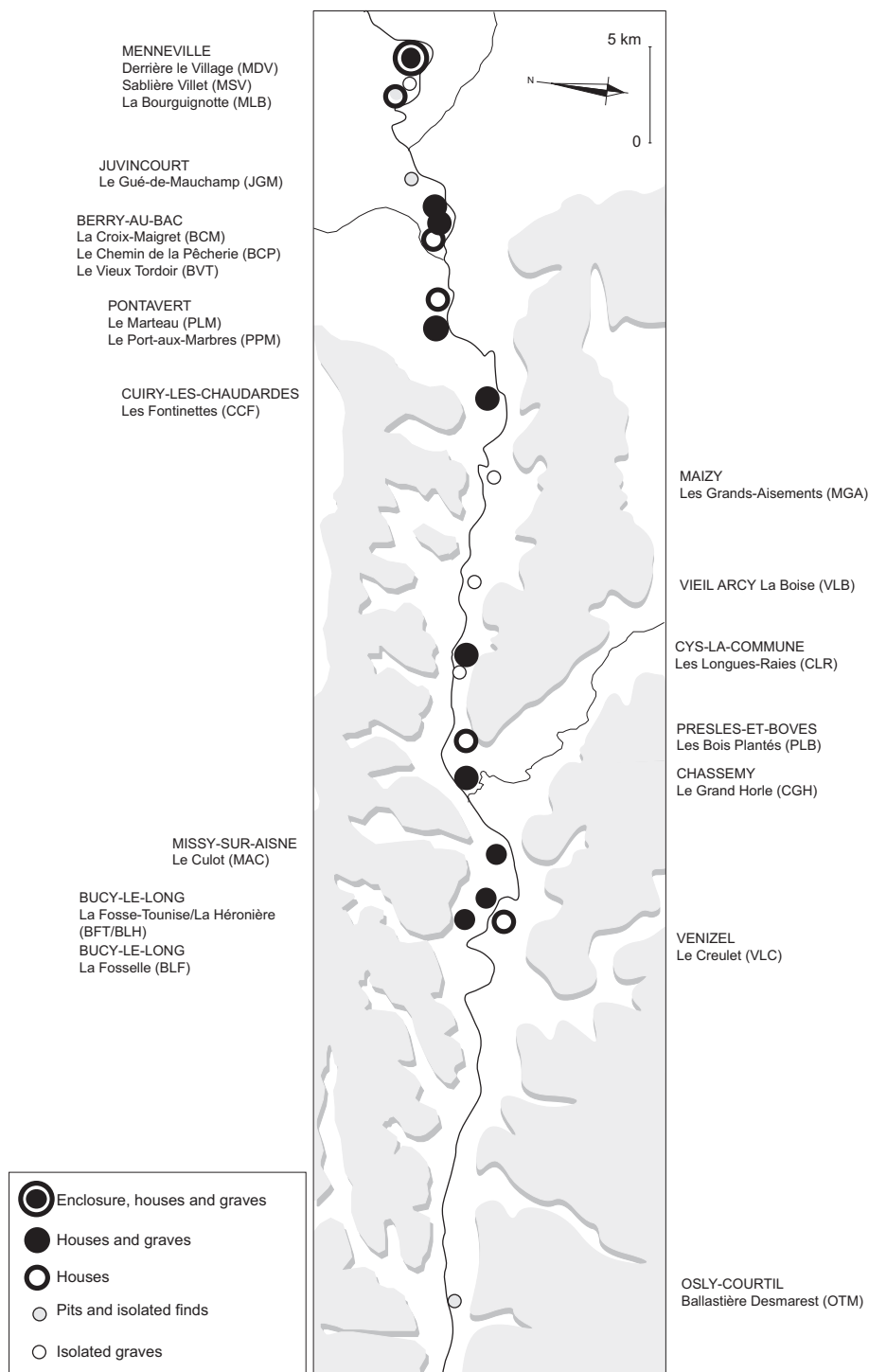


Fig. 1. Map of the main LBK sites excavated in the Aisne Valley (France). Document ASAVA-UMR 8215 *Trajectoires*.

Chaudardes (Hachem, 1997, 2000, 2011), at several LBK sites in the Aisne valley (Hachem, 1995, 2001; Hachem and Bedault, 2008), and at other LBK sites in Europe (Hachem, 1999; Hachem, 2009). The main results are discussed here, in addition to some unpublished data given in the tables (Supplementary data 1–6).

The refuse assemblages from the Aisne valley settlements invariably yield a majority of domestic animals (58,9% to 98,4%), and the wild species consumed were varied (20 species identified). The large quantity of bones measured (2500 bones), and comparisons with published data, enabled clear distinctions to be made between domestic cattle and aurochs, pig and wild boar (Hachem, 2009; Hachem, 2011). Slaughter patterns for cattle and pig suggest that herds were raised for producing

meat. Use of caprids may have been more diversified, for milk or for the wool. In terms of meat weight, almost as much meat comes from red deer and wild boar as from cattle. A phenomenon of communal consumption of aurochs followed by distribution of certain meat parts to other houses can be argued.

The house unit is self sufficient in terms of subsistence: each contains the remains of cattle, caprines, pig, and red deer, with several other species, large game and small game (Supplementary data 4–6). Wild boar and roe deer, although they are well represented in proportion, may be totally absent from the pits of a household.

However, although there is a common food base for the houses, significant variations are observed. The first distinctive feature in these

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