



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Quaternary International

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/quaint

Late Middle Palaeolithic assemblages with flake cleavers in the western Pyrenees: The Vasconian reconsidered

Marianne Deschamps

UMR 5608 TRACES, Maison de la recherche, 5 allée Antonio Machado, 31058 Toulouse Cedex 9, France

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Available online xxx

Keywords:
Late Middle Palaeolithic
Neanderthal behaviour
Technoeconomic variability
Vasconian
Regionality

ABSTRACT

The analysis of several lithic assemblages with flake cleavers and bifaces from sites attributed to MIS 5 and 3 in the western Pyrenees provides the basis for a new chronological and typo-technological characterisation of the region's late Middle Palaeolithic record. Previously assigned to the Vasconian based strictly on typological criteria, a certain degree of variability evident between the analysed assemblages likely indicates different occupation types. However, broad typo-technological traits reflecting a common regional tradition can be identified and are discussed against the backdrop of the regional diversity and cultural geography of late Middle Palaeolithic industries dated to around 50 ka BP. This 'regionalisation' of lithic techno-complexes may also have important ramifications for the socio-economic organisation and demographic dynamics of late Middle Palaeolithic human groups.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd and INQUA. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Despite the Western European Middle Palaeolithic portraying substantial technological diversity, certain techno-complexes in this expansive region were quickly isolated and defined, with others remaining the subject of debate. This is particularly the case with assemblages containing bifaces or flake cleavers in the western Pyrenees and on the northern slopes of the Cantabrian cordillera. The first Middle Palaeolithic industries were documented in this region at the end of the 19th century, most notably at the Spanish site of El Pendo (Sanguino González and Montes Barquin, 2001). Despite numerous excavations during the first few decades of the 20th century (Vega del Sella, 1921; Obermaier, 1924, 1925), the existence of a regional Middle Palaeolithic facies, the Vasconian, was proposed only as early as the 1950s based essentially on typological criteria (Bordes, 1953). Defined primarily by the presence of flake cleavers, these assemblages contain high numbers of scrapers (close to the limit of Bordes' Charentian index) and denticulates associated with Levallois debitage (Bordes, 1953). The coherence of this entity was, however, quickly questioned. In fact, the substantial typological variability of these assemblages appeared to some beyond what should be expected of a well-defined cultural entity (Freeman, 1966, 1969–70; Jordá Cerdá, 1977; Cabrera, 1983, 1984; Rodríguez Asensio, 1983).

Consequently, the term 'Vasconian' was largely abandoned and the different industries containing flake cleavers subsequently re-assigned to other broad Middle Palaeolithic facies, namely the Mousterian of Acheulean Tradition (MTA) or the Typical Mousterian (Freeman, 1994).

In this respect, both flake cleavers and bifaces from MIS 5 contexts were interpreted as the sporadic persistence of the Iberian Acheulean (Jordá Cerdá, 1977; Rodríguez Asensio, 1983; Rodríguez Asensio and Arrizabalaga, 2004; Álvarez-Alonso, 2014), with the presence of these heavy duty tools in MIS 3 contexts suggesting their continued use throughout the Middle Palaeolithic. While MIS 3 examples are noted in the literature (Freeman, 1966, 1969–70; Cabrera, 1983, 1984) and described in some detail (see particularly the work of Benito del Rey, 1972–73, 1976; 1979, 1981) more focused attention has been paid to flake cleavers from MIS 5 contexts (Rodríguez Asensio, 1983; Montes, 2003). These tool forms in late Middle Palaeolithic assemblages were sometimes considered variants of typical MTA bifaces, whose particular form likely reflected limitations imposed by poor-quality Pyrenean raw materials (Chauchat, 1986; Freeman, 1994). Ultimately, these industries were perceived as the expression of a cultural mosaic set apart from the MTA industries of the northern Aquitaine Basin. However, it remains unclear whether differences between these assemblages reflect deterministic factors, such as raw material availability, or the existence of a regional MIS 3 techno-complex distinct from the MTA.

E-mail address: mardesch1690@gmail.com.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.quaint.2016.01.043>
1040-6182/© 2016 Elsevier Ltd and INQUA. All rights reserved.

Recently, early Middle Palaeolithic (MIS 5) assemblages containing flake cleavers and bifaces have been extensively revised, particularly with a view to better identify late Acheulean occupations in the Cantabrian region and the emergence of the early Middle Palaeolithic (Montes, 2003; Djema, 2008; Lazuén, 2012; Álvarez-Alonso, 2012, 2014; Santonja et al., in press). Late Middle Palaeolithic assemblages (MIS 3) with flake cleavers have been identified in the Basque country and Cantabrian and Asturian regions of Spain, as at the El Castillo, level 20 (Cabrera, 1984; Bernald de Quiros et al., 2010), Amalda, level VII (Baldeon, 1990; Ríos-Garaizar, 2012), La Viña, level XIII-base (Fortea, 1998; Santamaria, 2012). An important synthesis of all known Middle Palaeolithic cave deposits and open-air sites in the Cantabrian Region (Carrión, 2003; Carrión et al., 2008) revealed sites containing flake cleavers and bifaces to be distributed across the region during MIS 5 and 3 based on relative and absolute chronology (Fig. 1). However, the chronological position of most sites remains difficult to establish with any certainty.

Here we present an analysis of material from six either new or recently reassessed late Middle Palaeolithic sites with bifaces and flake cleavers in southwestern France, focusing attention on their typo-technological variability. Do, for example, flake cleavers found in assemblages with particular recurrent characteristics reflect a techno-complex whose differential expression is connected to the nature of the occupation? These new results are compared with other sites from Cantabria and Asturias in a broader regional perspective in order to reconsider the coherence of a Vasconian techno-complex during the MIS 3. In addition to addressing the issues outlined above, this more refined vision of flake cleaver industries has important repercussions for our understanding and interpretation of late Middle Palaeolithic technological variability.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Techno-economic approach

As post-depositional processes, particularly in cave and rock shelter contexts, have been shown to considerably affect archaeological assemblages (Lenoble and Bordes, 2001; Lenoble, 2003), the typo-technological integrity of each lithic assemblage was first assessed using a detailed taphonomic analysis. Vertical projections of piece-plotted artefacts (Gifford-Gonzalez et al., 1985) combined with a consideration of lithic surface alterations (Thiébaud et al., 2010) and an inter- and intra-layer refitting program (Cahen and Moeyersons, 1977; Bordes, 2002) allows the type and degree of post-depositional disturbance to be evaluated.

Lithic techno-economy is based on the *chaîne opératoire* concept (Tixier, 1978), which traces a technical process from raw material acquisition to artefact discard. Not only does this approach allow the geographic organisation of the process to be investigated, it can also reveal the extent of a territory exploited by humans groups as well as the manner in which they coped with local and regional environmental conditions. Moreover, when combined with detailed provenance studies the *chaîne opératoire* concept can help identify the form in which particular raw materials were introduced to sites and for what end. A four-phase conceptualisation of lithic production systems (Geneste, 1985) reveals both the degree of spatiotemporal fragmentation of the *chaîne opératoire* (e.g. Turq et al., 2013) and the anticipation of needs. When combined, these aspects provide important information concerning the techno-economic organisation of late Middle Palaeolithic groups.

Several Middle Palaeolithic flaking methods have been identified (e.g. Discoid, Levallois, bifacial shaping), several of which continue to be the subject of debate, particularly the distinction of

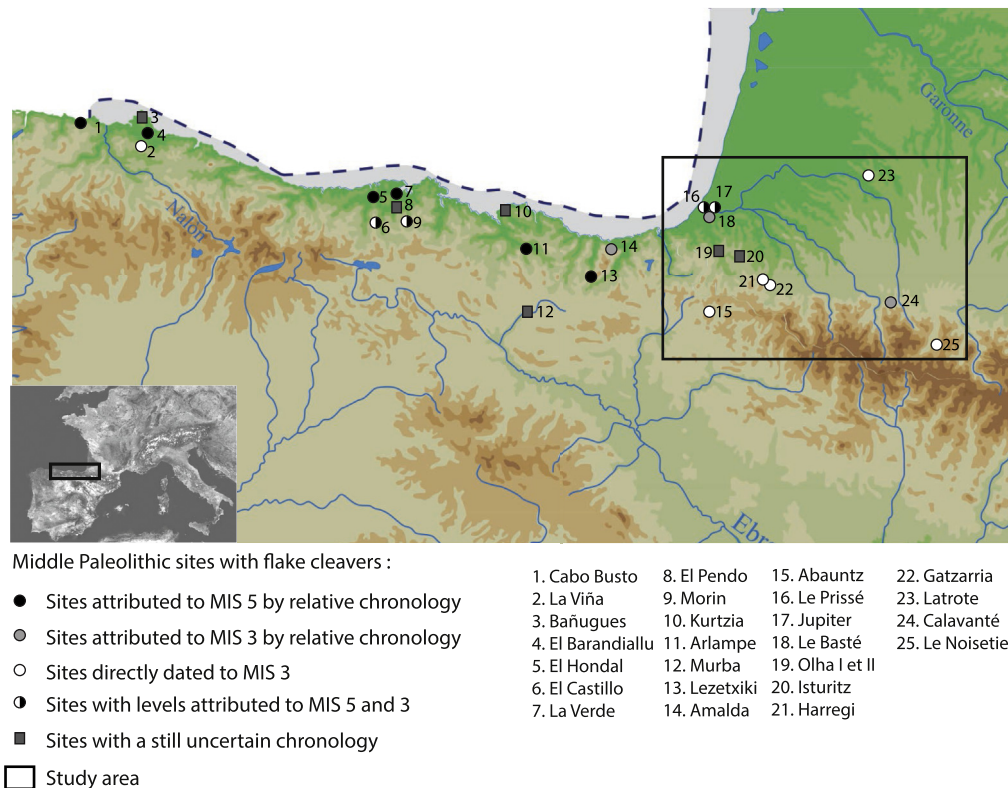


Fig. 1. Study area and distribution of Middle Palaeolithic sites with assemblages including flake cleavers from MIS 5 and 3.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5113567>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5113567>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)