



# Wild boar (*Sus scrofa scrofa*) hunting and exploitation strategies during the Mesolithic at Les Cabônes (Ranchot Jura, France), layer 3



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## ABSTRACT

Wild boar (*Sus scrofa scrofa*) is one of the key subsistence resources, together with red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) during the Mesolithic period in Western Europe. However, the hunting strategies and exploitation patterns involved are still only sparsely documented. The meticulous recovery techniques during excavation and the good preservation of the faunal material from Mesolithic layer 3 of “Les Cabônes” rockshelter (Ranchot, Jura), dated between 8200 and 7300 cal BC, offered the opportunity to analyze a large sample of wild boar remains, including a high proportion of teeth. The present paper focuses on the reconstruction of wild boar mortality profiles with a reappraisal of the aging methods based on tooth eruption and wear stages. The validity of available reference data sets and their application to archaeological samples is also discussed. The results show that Mesolithic hunters at “Les Cabônes” mostly targeted sounders, i.e. sows with their piglets, ensuring a steady food supply and occasionally solitary males that would certainly provide a greater amount of meat and grease per individual, as well as ivory from tusks. The carcasses of hunted animals were transported to the site either complete or semi-complete on a regular (multi-seasonal) basis, to be butchered and probably consumed onsite. Finally, comparisons with regional data are discussed in terms of patterns of site occupation.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, archaeofaunal studies have demonstrated the importance of wild boar (*Sus scrofa scrofa*) in the subsistence economy during most of the Mesolithic period in Northern and Eastern France and in western Switzerland.

In assemblages dated 9500–7000 cal BC in the Jura area, wild boar and red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) are almost always the two main hunted species, as exemplified at the following sites: Rochedane, layer A3 and Mannfelsen I, layers Q–L (Bridault, 1990, 1993); Bavans layer 6 (Aimé, 1993); Choisey, level C2, and Ruffey-sur-Seille, levels R4, R3 and R2 (Séara et al., 2002); Dammartin-Marpain, locus 1 to 16 (Leduc in Séara and Roncin, 2010; Séara and Roncin, 2013); Mollendruz, layer 4d (Chaix in Pignat and Winiger, 1998); Ogens, layers C2 to C13–14 (Bridault and coll. P. Chiquet, 2000); Birmatten, levels H5–H3 (Schmid, 1963) (Fig. 1).

At the present time, it is clear that in northern France, where numerous sites are located in the Seine and Somme valleys and its tributaries,

wild boar became dominant in the assemblages dated between 8600 and 7800 cal BC (Marinval-Vigne et al., 1989; Bridault, 1997; Ducrocq et al., 2008, 2014; Coutard et al., 2010; Séara et al., 2010; Bignon-Lau et al., 2013; Leduc et al., 2013).

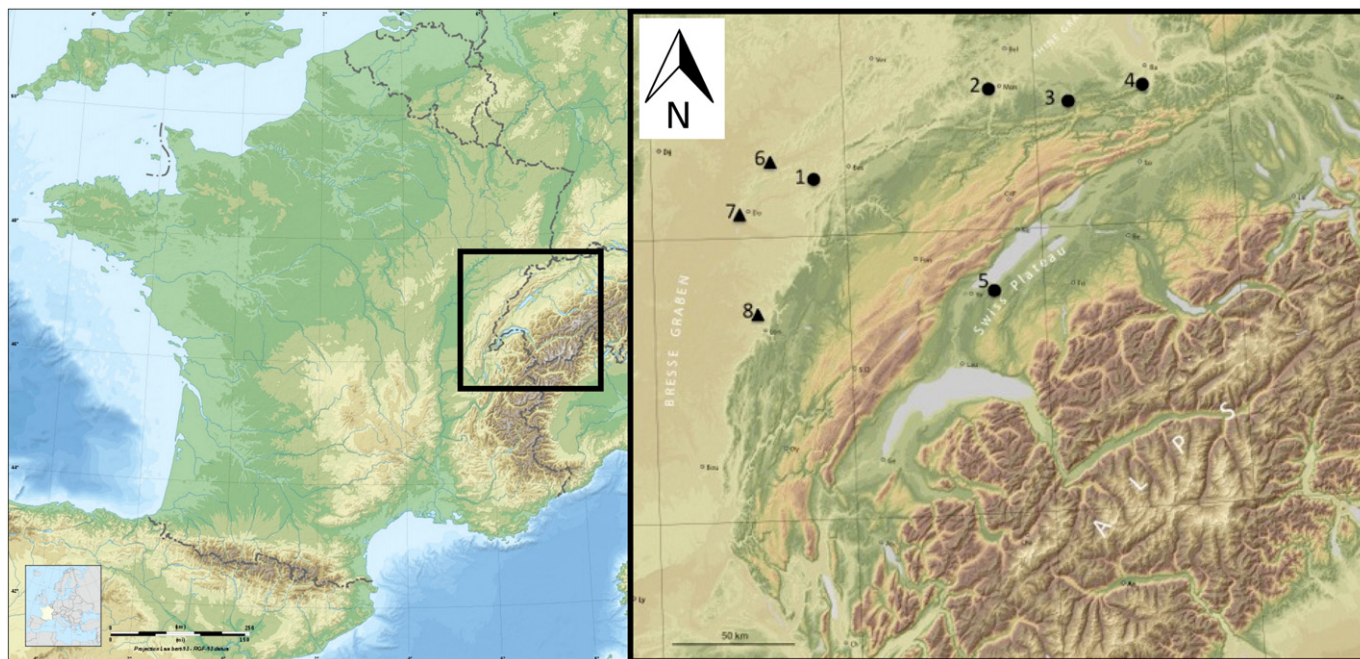
Despite the apparent importance of the wild boar in the subsistence economy of these Mesolithic groups, the hunting strategies and exploitation patterns involved are still only sparsely documented. One of the authors (AB) has stressed that wild boar hunting at Rochedane was focused on the primary social group (Bridault, 1993: 486–490, 1994: 63), i.e., a few sows, their last litters and juvenile offspring of previous litters (Mauget, 1981). It was also suggested that hunters could thus take advantage of targeting several animals at once. Such groups are the most easily located, as their mobility is more circumscribed than solitary males, and encountered more frequently, as they often take the same routes when wandering (Mauget, 1981).

The abundant boar remains, including a high proportion of teeth, identified in the Mesolithic assemblage from layer 3 at Les Cabônes rockshelter (Ranchot, Jura) (Fig. 1), offered the opportunity to study the hunting strategies and carcass exploitation patterns at this site. The analysis was done as part of a Master's thesis (Leduc, 2005). The present paper addresses these issues, with an emphasis on the reconstruction of age-at-death distributions, i.e., mortality profiles.

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**Fig. 1.** Location of the Mesolithic sites of the Jura area cited in this paper: circle (map of France from Cartesfrance.fr) = cave or rockshelter; triangle = open air sites. 1 – “Les Cabônes”, rockshelter, Ranchot, (Jura, France); 2 – “Bavans”, rockshelters, Bavans (Doubs, France); 3 – “Mannlefelden I”, rockshelter, Oberlag (Haut-Rhin, France); 4 – “Birmatten”, cave, Nenzlingen (Bern canton, Switzerland); 5 – “La Baume d’Ogens”, cave, Ogens (Vaud canton, Switzerland); 6 – “Prairie du Milieu” open air site, Dammartin-Marpain (Jura, France); 7 – “Aux Champins”, open air site, Choisey (Jura, France); 8 – “A Daupharde”, open air site, Ruffey-sur-Seille (Jura, France).

## 2. The site

Les Cabônes rockshelter, also called “Abri du Colonel Martin” is located near the town of Ranchot (Jura), midway between Besançon (Doubs) and Dole (Jura) (Fig. 1). It is situated on the right bank of the Doubs River, very close to the river, at an altitude of 216 m. The cavity is quite small, 5 m deep, 4 m wide and 2.5 m high, oriented south-west and opening onto a wide rockshelter ca. 10 m long (Cupillard, 1998a, 2002, Fig. 2).

Following test excavations during the 1950s and 1960s, large-scale excavations were undertaken from 1978 to 1989, directed by A. Thévenin,

M. Campy, S. David and C. Cupillard (David, 1996; Cupillard, 1998a; Cupillard and David, 1991, 1995; Cupillard and Richard, 1999). The stratigraphy contains four main layers with an Upper Magdalenian occupation in layer 4 (David, 1996; D’Errico and David, 1993; Cupillard, 1998a) and several Mesolithic occupations in layer 3 and the lower part of layer 2 (Fig. 3).

Layer 3 is 60 to 70 cm thick and was excavated over a surface area of 50 m<sup>2</sup> but probably covers 80 m<sup>2</sup> into the rockshelter, as suggested from test excavations. Its preservation is irregular depending on topography and the sectors excavated. The layer is absent in the cave where it was destroyed by old excavations while it is well-preserved between the



**Fig. 2.** Excavation of “Les Cabônes” rockshelter (1988). General view towards the east with black layer 3 in the foreground. © C. Cupillard.

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