

Foreword

This book presents research reported at the conference: “The Rhine During the Middle Paleolithic: Boundary or Corridor?” held in Sélestat in May 2017. Héloïse Koehler, Nicholas Conard, Agnès Lamotte, Kevin di Modica, Harald Floss and Fabio Wegmüller organized this conference with the financial support of the Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles du Grand Est, Archéologie Alsace, AnTET Laboratory, Lille University, Strasbourg University and the city of Sélestat, the Department of Early Prehistory and Quaternary Ecology of the University of Tübingen, and the Institute of Integrative Prehistory and Archeological Science of the University of Basel. The conference and this publication represent a collaborative project with the UISPP Commission on The Settlement Dynamics of the Middle Paleolithic and Middle Stone Age.

The goal of this book is to discuss the role of the Rhine during prehistory, and in particular its role in forming the first European cultural identities. Recent history shows the role the Rhine has often played as a boundary. The role of the river has been widely debated in the dramas of European history, highlighting more the political instrumentalization of the Rhine than a real geographical border. In this context it seems appropriate to focus on Paleolithic populations in order to examine the geographical and cultural perception of the river by the region's early hunter-gatherer populations.

The Rhine flows from south to north through the heart of western Europe and constitutes a major axis linking northern and southern Europe. Furthermore, the width and power of the river could have also created an obstacle or a boundary for animals and humans settling on both the eastern and western sides of the river. The role of the river—boundary or corridor—varied through time and is reflected by the archaeological material recovered from both sides of the river, reflecting a back and forth of a strong regionalism together with external influences.

Archaeological evidence suggests the Rhine impacted human populations since at least the Middle Pleistocene. Particularly, techno-typological differences in lithic assemblages allow researchers to distinguish separate cultural areas centered on both the east and west sides of the river. One sees differences dramatically during the Lower Paleolithic with a rich

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Acheulean tradition west of the Rhine and essentially no Acheulean east of the Rhine. The river valley, however, did not always serve as an impassable border, as affinities have been noticed between some archaeological assemblages from Germany, France and Belgium. Researchers also need to confront the archaeological data collected on both sides of the river and assess critically the impact of the various schools of prehistoric archaeology. Few studies address multiple regions and, more importantly, data from different countries. Studies are often limited by the current administrative boundaries, which are themselves linked to the political history of nation building. The relevance and basis of certain interpretations of perceived differences and similarities between sites and artifacts must thus be questioned. Additionally, syntheses are not always based on actual observations of the data when they are located beyond current administrative boundaries. That is why we wanted the conference and the book to be the product of researchers from the various countries and research traditions located on both sides of the Rhine.

With this goal in mind, the papers collected in this book bring together researchers from both sides of the Rhine and from various disciplines. Our aims as editors and authors were to both question and illuminate Middle Paleolithic lifeways and technology through multiple scientific approaches in order better to understand the impact of the Rhine on human settlement, mobility and cultural variability. The area of study covers northern Switzerland, western Germany, eastern France, Belgium and the Netherlands. This wide geographical setting fosters cross-examinations drawing on sites from both sides of the Rhine as well as serves to integrate the discussion of data coming from both open-air and cave sites. From a chronological perspective, authors discuss the entire Middle Paleolithic period (ca. 300,000 and 35,000 BP) from its older manifestations to the extinction of Neanderthals and the shift to the Upper Paleolithic.

After a presentation of the geomorphological context of the Rhine Graben, the various papers follow a geographical, thematic and chronological order. We hope these contributions will advance the research on the settlement and population dynamics in northwestern Europe. We also hope this work will contribute to the scientific exchange among researchers from the various countries located along both sides of the Rhine.

Finally, in addition to the many authors who contributed to making this volume possible, and to Rhoda Allanic for translations, we thank Kerns Verlag for publishing this research. The publication has been funded by the Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles du Grand Est, Archéologie Alsace and the Foundation for Early Prehistory and Quaternary Ecology of the University of Tübingen.

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