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ABSTRACT BOOK

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The Soyons mammoth: a Late Palaeolithic butchered woolly mammoth associated with lithic artefacts in the Rhône valley, Ardèche, France

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An incomplete skeleton of a mature male mammoth *Mammuthus primigenius* (Blumenbach, 1799) was found in 1985 on the right side of the present-day Rhône river. This find was discovered in the loess of an ancient terrace of the «Vallée Morte de Touloud», where the palaeo-Rhône ran until the second half of the Middle Pleistocene. The mammoth remains were found in a house basement and were unfortunately highly damaged during the construction work. However, the recovered material includes the maxilla and the mandible each with the sixth molar, fragmented parts of the tusks, atlas, axis, and seven other cervical vertebrae in anatomical connection, six dorsal vertebrae also in anatomical connection, nine fragments of ribs and eight carpals and tarsals (Fig. 1A). All these elements have fused epiphyses and certainly belong to the same individual. The nature and patterns of the wear of the molars show that it is a mature mammoth, and its age at death was probably about 45-50 AEY (Laws 1966; Haynes 1991). Based on the tusk diameter at the alveoli (172 mm), it is probably a male individual (Vereschagin & Tichonov in Lister 2009).

The main interest of this skeleton resides in the fact that several clear cut marks have been identified on two of its ribs (Fig. 1B). This shows that the pachyderm was butchered. However, it is not possible to assert whether it was actively hunted, killed while dying or scavenged.

It is very interesting to note that five flint artefacts were discovered in strict association with the remains: one scraper, one laminar flake, two blade fragments, and one bladelet, all attributable to a Late Palaeolithic industry, and probably to the Gravettian or Solutrean local industry (Onoratini et al. 1995). Since no other piece of lithic were found on the site, « finished products » are over-represented and the chaîne-opératoire is clearly incomplete. This may suggest that the finished tools were imported from elsewhere, implying a possible high degree of planning of this butchery event.

The Soyons mammoth is the only Western European example of an isolated butchered Proboscidean carcass for the gravetto-solutrean period found in association with lithic artefacts. It helps us to better understand the «opportunistic» Proboscidean exploitation during the Late Pleistocene.

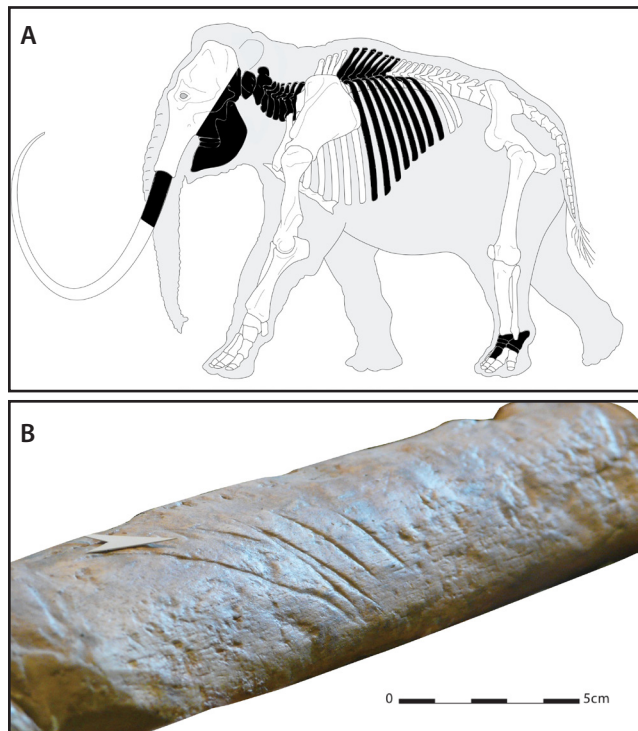


Fig. 1. A, Skeletal element representation of the Soyons mammoth. B, the documented cut marks on the rib.

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