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### MESOLITHIC HUMAN REMAINS FROM LA GROTTTE DU BOIS LAITERIE: A PRELIMINARY REPORT

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Among the faunal remains from la Grotte du Bois Laiterie submitted for study to the second author (see Gautier, this volume), quite a few human remains were found. Most of these are associated with the Breccia, which was originally thought to contain a Neolithic "ossuary" because of the presence of potsherds. A talus (see inventory below; Square V9, base breccia, 45 cm BD) was AMS dated with the surprising result of  $9,235 \pm 85$  BP (GX-21380, uncalibrated), *i.e.*, early Mesolithic, despite the total lack of any characteristic Mesolithic artefacts on the site. Thus BL joins the growing list of early Mesolithic funerary caves with few or no cultural remains in the Upper Meuse-Sambre Basin of Namur Province. Some of these are individual tombs, others represent more complex multiple or collective ones, testifying to the diversity of mortuary practices in the Mesolithic (see, *e.g.*, Cauwe, 1995). Material of the sample for AMS dating was also submitted to carbon and nitrogen stable isotope analyses (Krueger, this volume); these would indicate that Mesolithic hunters-and-gatherers hunted less than it is generally assumed. For details on the site and its context, the reader is referred to the other contributions in this volume.

An inventory of the human finds by square or subsquare and depth (BD : below datum) follows. The names of the skeletal elements etc. are those used by Anderson (1969). Measurements, not reproduced in this preliminary report, were taken following Martin (1928). Brothwell (1963), Bass (1971), Szilvassy (1977), Herrmann *et al.* (1990) and Knussman (1992) provided ageing criteria.

- Square Q2:

Rib : a shaft fragment.

Left upper limb : a clavicle, which on the basis of the morphology of the *facies articularis sternalis* would indicate an individual of 21-25 years.

- Square V8 (breccia # 69, 60 cm BD) :

Right foot : a talus.

- Square V9b (base breccia, 35-45 cm BD) :

Left hand : a hamate co-articulating with a triquetrum.

Hand : a proximal, middle and distal phalanx of the second to fifth finger.

- Square V9b (base breccia, 45 cm BD) :

Left foot : three co-articulating tarsal bones : talus, calcaneus and navicular; a proximal fragment of a second metatarsal. The talus accords morphologically and metrically with the talus of Square V8. The second metatarsal articulates with the co-articulating left foot bones W9a (#16).

Right foot : four co-articulating metatarsals : second, third, proximal fragment of the fourth, and fifth.

Foot : a proximal phalanx of the first toe.

- Square W8c (breccia, 60 cm BD) :

Hand : a middle and a distal phalanx of the fifth finger, co-articulating.

Left foot : a second metatarsal, which accords morphologically with its right homologue in square V9b.

Foot : a proximal phalanx of the first toe, two proximal phalanges of other toes, a distal fragment of a metatarsal and a sesamoid.

- Square W9a (base breccia, # 16) :

Right hand : a third metacarpal.

Hand : a proximal and a middle phalanx of the second to fifth finger. The proximal finger bone exhibits bony spurs or osteophytes ventrally.

Sacrum : a fragment of the spinal part.

Left knee : a patella.

Left foot : three co-articulating bones : second and third cuneiforms, third metatarsal; a distal fragment of a metatarsal and a distal phalanx of the first toe.

Foot : a proximal phalanx of the second to fifth toe; a proximal fragment of a middle phalanx and a sesamoid.

- Square W9a (base breccia, 60 cm BD) :

Dentition : an upper right lateral incisor of which the crown has broken off *post mortem*, but with slight traces of calculus still visible on the lingual side.

Left hand : a lunate and a proximal phalanx of the first finger.

Hand : a proximal and a middle phalanx of the third finger, co-articulating.

- Square W9c (base breccia, 60 cm BD) :

Dentition : an upper left third molar with inter-proximal neck caries and a medium calculus deposit on all sides; the degree of wear suggests an age of 17-25/25-35 years.

- Backdirt :

Left arm : a proximal epiphysis of a juvenile radius.

Right leg : a right femur shaft with a quite marked linea aspera (male?).

The size difference of the two left second metatarsals and two proximal phalanges found in squares V9b and W8c indicate clearly two adults of different stature. To these another smaller individual can be added, represented by the distal fragment of a metatarsal in Square W8c; this bone is decidedly smaller and apparently more gracile than all the other metatarsals. In our view, it might represent a juvenile. In squares V8/9 and W8/9, we would therefore be dealing with the remains of two adult individuals and a younger one. Most of the remains in the V-squares belong probably to the same adult who appears to be somewhat smaller and more gracile than the adult apparently represented by most of the remains in the W-squares, including the third molar of 17-25/25-35 years. Perhaps the observed morphological differences reflect sexual dimorphism. The femur shaft from the backdirt most probably represent a third adult (male?), while the radius fragment from the same context may represent a second juvenile individual, both having been reworked in the backdirt as a result of the clandestine excavations by pothunters. The isolated clavicle of square Q2, if also Mesolithic, might be added as a fourth adult, but the fill of the test pit Q2 is mixed, so the relationship to the *in situ* material in the breccia is unclear.

Summing up, the finds combine into minimally two Mesolithic adults, perhaps of different sex, and a juvenile(?), and possibly a child and another two adults whose provenances are less certain. Two of the definitely Mesolithic adults seem to be represented by clustered hand and foot bones, which co-articulate in some cases. The predominance of these smaller bones is probably mainly a taphonomic artefact, *i.e.*, degradation of other skeletal elements proceeded much further and poorly preserved fragments of these eventually ended up in the category of non-identifiable faunal remains. Whether the finds represent a multiple or a collective burial, disturbed by non-human or human agents is difficult to say. Excavation of remaining breccia with human remains, essentially in squares V8/9 and W8/9, has been carried out recently as a separate project. A detailed osteological and spatial analysis of all the human remains and the faunal remains (wild boar, red deer) which may be associated with them (I. López Bayón, pers. comm.), will be published separately and will no doubt shed more light on the nature of the Mesolithic «ossuary» of La Grotte du Bois Laiterie.

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