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1 **The exploitation of rabbits for food and pelts by Last Interglacial Neandertals**

2

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31 **Abstract**

32

33 The exploitation of small game, especially rabbits, by Neandertals as sources of food or for
34 utilitarian purposes is no longer a subject of debate given increasing evidence for such
35 practices in Europe from the Middle Paleolithic onwards. Instead, focus is now on whether
36 rabbits were an occasional prey or were fully integrated into the socio-economic system of
37 these human groups. Here we address this issue based on a detailed analysis of rabbit
38 remains from the Mousterian deposits of Pié Lombard (Tourrettes-sur-Loup, Alpes-
39 Maritimes, France). Dated to the last interglacial period (Marine Isotope Stage 5), rabbit
40 remains (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) are the most abundant species throughout the site's
41 Mousterian sequence. Our multi-aspect taphonomical analysis combining mortality profiles,
42 skeletal-part representation, breakage patterns, and bone surface modifications revealed a
43 high incidence of human involvement, demonstrating the rabbit assemblage from Pié Lombard
44 to have been primarily accumulated by Neandertals. Multiple lines of evidence indicate a
45 recurrent and optimised exploitation of carcasses directly on the site, both as sources of
46 meat (preferentially eaten roasted) and marrow as well as for their pelts, which appear to
47 have been transported away from the site. The high frequency of rabbits in the Pié Lombard
48 Mousterian assemblage, comprising at least 225 individuals, is unique for this period and
49 probably reflects the location and function of the rock-shelter. The capture of such a high
50 number of this small mammal potentially required sophisticated acquisition techniques
51 formerly known only from Upper Palaeolithic contexts. Finally, our results shed new light on
52 the subsistence practices, settlement systems and socio-economic behavior of Neandertals
53 in Western Europe during MIS 5.

54

55

56 **Keywords:** Neandertal subsistence strategies, Marine Isotope Stage 5, Middle Palaeolithic,
57 Mousterian, *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, small prey, taphonomy.

58

59 1. Introduction

60

61 The behavioural complexity and flexibility of the Neandertals, as well as their cognitive
62 capacities compared with anatomically modern humans, continues to attract significant
63 attention from paleoanthropologists and prehistorians. Changes in subsistence strategies or
64 the development of symbolic practices amongst Neandertal societies are commonly
65 considered as evidence for the emergence of so-called "modern" behaviours. Increasing
66 evidence of the behavioral, social and cultural "modernity" of Neandertals is in part due to
67 new fieldwork at previously excavated sites and the re-evaluation of old collections using
68 new analytical techniques. We now know that these groups developed remarkably similar
69 behaviours to anatomically modern humans, including the burial of their dead (Pettitt, 2002,
70 2011; Rendu et al., 2014), personal ornaments (Zilhão et al., 2010; Finlayson et al., 2012;
71 Radovčić et al., 2015), pigment processing (Soressi and d'Errico, 2007; Roebroeks et al.,
72 2012; Hoffmann et al., 2018a; Dayet et al., 2019, Pitarch Martí et al., 2019), the manufacture
73 of bone tools (d'Errico et al., 2012; Soressi et al., 2013), rock art (Rodríguez-Vidal et al.,
74 2014; Hoffmann et al., 2018b), frequent aquatic resource exploitation (Trinkaus et al., 2019),
75 and the construction of complex structures deep within karstic cave systems (Jaubert et al.,
76 2016). In terms of subsistence practices, although the majority of evidence suggest
77 Neandertals primarily focused on ungulates (e.g., Richards and Trinkaus, 2009; Discamps et
78 al., 2011; Rendu and Morin, 2018), recent research indicates a more substantial contribution
79 of small game to the diet, including leporids (e.g., Brown et al., 2011; Blasco and Fernández
80 Peris, 2012; Cochard et al., 2012; Hardy et al., 2013), birds (Blasco et al., 2014, 2016;
81 Romero et al., 2017; Gómez-Olivencia et al., 2018), small terrestrial carnivores (Soulie and
82 Mallye, 2012; Gabucio et al., 2014; Gómez-Olivencia et al., 2018), tortoises (Blasco, 2008;
83 Nabais and Zilhão, 2019), and marine resources (Stringer et al., 2008; Brown et al., 2011;
84 Gutiérrez-Zugasti et al., 2018).

85

86 Amongst these small preys, the European rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) is of particular
87 interest, as they sometimes occupied an important, if not central role in Palaeolithic socio-
88 economic systems in Western Europe. The remains of leporids are frequently found in
89 archaeological sites and are in some cases the most abundant species (e.g., Pelletier, 2018).
90 The first European evidence for the exploitation of these small mammals dates to the Middle
91 Pleistocene, around 400-350 kyr BP (Desclaux, 1992; El Guennouni, 2001; Sanchis and
92 Fernández Peris, 2008; Blasco and Fernández Peris, 2012). However, whether Middle
93 Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers regularly exploited rabbits remains an open question. Several
94 studies have highlighted the systematic acquisition (hunting and / or trapping) and
95 consumption of rabbits to be uniquely associated with Upper Paleolithic anatomically modern
96 humans (Stiner, 1994; Villaverde et al., 1996; Stiner et al., 1999, 2000; Aura et al., 2002;
97 Hockett and Haws, 2002; Cochard and Brugal, 2004; Pérez Ripoll, 2004; Lloveras et al.,
98 2011; Fa et al., 2013). For example, Stiner et al. (1999) argue that the significant increase of
99 leporids in the human diet at the end of the Upper Paleolithic is related to the demographic
100 growth of human groups. The gradual increase in the density of rabbit remains in different
101 Upper Paleolithic techno-complexes would equally reflect profound cultural changes in the
102 socio-economic organization of human groups (Cochard and Brugal, 2004). In fact, despite
103 the typically low return rates compared to ungulates (Speth and Spielmann, 1983; Ugan,
104 2005), the socio-economic potential of leporids is also reflected by the fact that both their
105 bones and pelts can be exploited (e.g., Hockett, 1994; d'Errico and Laroulandie, 2000;
106 Fontana, 2003; Cochard, 2005).

107

108 The regular incorporation of small game in subsistence strategies during earlier periods,
109 particularly the Middle Paleolithic, has been questioned by some researchers who argue
110 that Neandertals, unlike modern humans, lacked the cognitive capacity and / or a sufficiently
111 well-developed technology for regularly exploiting small game (Stiner et al., 1999; Fa et al.,
112 2013). While it is now clear that Neandertal groups did consume rabbits (Gerber, 1973;
113 Blasco, 1995; Sanchis and Fernández Peris, 2008; Brown et al., 2011; Blasco and

114 Fernández Peris, 2012; Cochard et al., 2012; Hardy et al., 2013; Rufà et al., 2014; Pérez et
115 al., 2017; Carvalho et al., 2018), in several cases a significant portion of the rabbit remains
116 found in sites can be tied to accumulation by carnivores or raptors (El Guennouni, 2001;
117 Lloveras et al., 2010, 2011; Sanchis Serra, 2012; Rufà et al., 2014). Understanding the
118 agent(s) responsible for the accumulation of rabbit remains in Middle Paleolithic contexts is
119 thus essential for providing insights on this aspect of Neandertal subsistence behavior.

120

121 Given its small size and weight (1 to 2 kg), the rabbit is currently the preferential prey of more
122 than 40 predators in Western Europe (Delibes and Hiraldo, 1981). Because this species is
123 known for its burrowing behaviour and ability to produce complex and substantial
124 underground warrens (Pelletier et al., 2016, 2017), determining the nature of leporid bone
125 accumulations can be problematic. For example, the presence of rabbit bones in a fossil
126 assemblage can be connected to three different accumulation agents: 1) non-human
127 predators (terrestrial carnivores, nocturnal or diurnal birds of prey); 2) humans; or 3) natural
128 accumulations without any evidence of predation (accidental deaths in natural traps or
129 attritional deaths in burrows). Moreover, these agents are non-exclusive in the formation of
130 leporid assemblages within a same deposit. In order to derive valid paleo-ethnographic and
131 palaeoenvironmental interpretations, it is therefore essential to reliably demonstrate the
132 origin of an archaeological rabbit accumulation, especially in cases when rabbits represent
133 the most abundant species in a given stratigraphic sequence.

134

135 This is the case with the Pié Lombard rock-shelter; a Mousterian site in southeastern France
136 dated to the transition between Marine Isotope Stages (MIS) 5 and 4 (Texier et al., 2011).
137 Here we present a detailed taphonomical and zooarchaeological analysis of the assemblage
138 of rabbit bones recovered from this Middle Palaeolithic site with the goal of evaluating the
139 exact role Neandertals or other accumulation agents played in the formation the assemblage.
140 Our results provide key contextual information for discussing the role of this small prey

141 species in the socio-economy of late MIS 5 Neandertal groups and for interpreting the site's
142 function within the regional Mousterian settlement system.

143

144 **2. Material and Methods**

145

146 *2.1. Pié Lombard rock-shelter*

147

148 The site of Pié Lombard is located near the town of Tourrettes-sur-Loup (Alpes-Maritimes,
149 France), on the east bank of the Loup River, 9 km from the Mediterranean Sea and 15 km
150 south of the Alpine foothills (Fig. 1). Situated 200 meters a.s.l, this small rockshelter in
151 Bajocian-Bathonian (Middle Jurassic) limestone was exposed following karstic erosion.
152 Discovered in 1962 by an amateur prospector (A. Mellira), the site yielded Mousterian lithics
153 and Upper Pleistocene faunal remains (Lumley-Woodyear, 1969). Excavations at the site
154 were directed by one of us (P.-J.T.) as part of a larger analysis of the region's Middle
155 Palaeolithic archaeological record (Texier, 1972, 1974). The exhaustive excavation of the
156 rockshelter's archaeostratigraphic sequence, which included the systematic wet-sieving of
157 sediments (using 5, 2 and 0.4 mm sieve meshes), was carried out mainly between 1971 and
158 1975, accompanied by fieldwork in 1983 and 1985, and a final excavation season in 1996.
159 This work recovered a significant amount of lithic and bone remains accumulated in a
160 diacalse at the front of the rock-shelter. The three-meter deep archaeological sequence was
161 documented in a four meter long and less than one metre wide trench (Fig. 2).

162

163 Although the site was excavated by archaeological levels, the uneven configuration of the
164 diacalse, as well as small volume of excavated sediment and limited number of piece-plotted
165 pieces per level, meant that the sequence was separated into two stratigraphic complexes
166 (Texier et al., 2011; Fig. 2):

167

168 • An Epipaleolithic complex (ensemble I) comprising three layers (*a*, *b* and *c*) and dated
169 by Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS) between 20,639 - 20,167 cal BP or 22,581 -
170 22,073 cal BP (Tomasso, 2014). The exact cultural attribution of this occupation remains
171 difficult to characterize due to the low density of material (n=81), which is also poorly
172 preserved. Some 180 faunal remains were also collected, with a significant part of the dental
173 elements represented by carnivores, while herbivores are mainly represented by the Alpine
174 ibex (*Capra ibex*) and a limited number of red deer (*Cervus elaphus*);

175

176 • A Mousterian complex (ensemble II) (1,000 lithics and fauna per m²) subdivided into 5
177 lithological layers (*d*, *e*, *e1*, *f*, *g*) and attributed to the MIS 5 to 4 transition based on a
178 thermoluminescence (TL) date of 70 ± 8 kyr BP (Valladas et al., 1987). Stalagmites
179 supporting Mousterian sediments returned two Electron Spin Resonance Dating (ESR) dates
180 of 147 ± 10 kyr and 130 ± 20 kyr BP (Yokoyama et al., 1983). The Mousterian lithic industry
181 comprises 902 pieces, including cores, fragments and flakes > 2cm. The retouched pieces
182 (n = 172) occupy a significant portion (37.2%) in the corpus (n = 462) where Levallois
183 products have a particularly high transformation rate. Semi-local and allochthonous raw
184 materials are most common, with transfer distances not exceeding 40 km. However, several
185 microquartzite and jasper pieces derive from sources found 60 and 240 km, respectively,
186 from the site (Porraz, 2005). In terms of faunal remains, 16 species of large mammals have
187 been identified (Table 1) from around 2,500 identifiable elements and several thousand bone
188 splinters (Texier et al., 2011; Romero et al., 2017). Among herbivores, Alpine ibex (*Capra*
189 *ibex*) and red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) dominate the Mousterian complex, representing 63%
190 and 30% (NISP) of the assemblage, respectively, and are accompanied by a limited number
191 of chamois remains (*Rupicapra rupicapra*; 4%). The carnivore assemblage is dominated by
192 panther (*Panthera pardus*), wolf (*Canis lupus*) and lynx (*Lynx spelaea*) and includes juvenile
193 remains of panther and brown bear (*Ursus arctos*). Preliminary zooarchaeological data
194 indicate that, while Neandertal groups are clearly responsible for the introduction of several
195 deer and ibex carcasses, it is impossible to exclude a contribution from other predators (e.g.

196 wolf, leopard, and lynx) to the ungulate assemblage. Except for the lagomorphs, which are
197 represented by a single species, the European rabbit *O. cuniculus*, the Mousterian deposits
198 yielded a relatively diversified small vertebrates collection comprising 45 species (Table 1; 1
199 lagomorph, 2 reptiles, 1 amphibian, 2 insectivores, 5 bats, 10 rodents, and 24 birds). A
200 combination of malacological, palynological and faunal data is consistent with colder climatic
201 conditions than experience today in the region and typified by wooded and open areas with a
202 marked Mediterranean influence. Finally, the site produced two deciduous incisors attributed
203 to a Neandertal individual of between 2 and 4 years of age (Texier et al., 2011).

204

205 Pié Lombard was initially interpreted as a potential fur and skin processing site given the
206 abundance and especially the diversity of small and large carnivore species in the
207 Mousterian assemblage (Brugal and Jaubert, 1996); however, no clear evidence was
208 provided to support such an interpretation. It is very likely that carnivores used the
209 rockshelter as a long-term den (natural death, reproductive place) and during different
210 periods (Texier et al., 2011; Romero et al., 2017). Despite the difficult access to the site
211 during the Pleistocene, Neandertals nevertheless imported deer or ibex carcasses for
212 immediate consumption in the rock-shelter. It is likely that Pié Lombard functioned as a
213 seasonal basecamp incorporated within a well-developed territorial system rather than as
214 short stay hunting camp (Texier et al., 2011). In addition, it has been recently demonstrated
215 that Neandertals were equally responsible for part of the bird remains from Pié Lombard
216 primarily as a food source and potentially for the use of their feathers (Romero et al., 2017).

217

218 *2.2. The rabbit assemblage*

219

220 The rabbit assemblage from the Mousterian complex consists of more than 16,000 bones,
221 which were conditioned and stored by anatomical part during the exhaustive sorting of the
222 small vertebrate remains. The near-absence of coxal bones is noteworthy; only a limited
223 number of coxal bone fragments (NISP=50) were found mixed with the other previously

224 sorted anatomical elements. This pattern suggests that coxal bones were in fact present
225 during excavations and the subsequent conditioning of the material, meaning that the limited
226 number of specimens is highly unlikely to reflect a taphonomic bias. We assume that the box
227 containing the missing coxal bones was lost during the relocation of the collections. In order
228 to avoid biases when comparing the Pie Lombard assemblage with other studies, we
229 excluded this element from all analyzes.

230

231 As multiple taphonomical criteria are shared by several accumulating agents (e.g., Cochard,
232 2007, 2008; Lloveras et al., 2010; Pelletier et al., 2016), it remains difficult to reliably identify
233 the origin of rabbit assemblages recovered from archaeological sites. This being the case,
234 we integrated four types of data to investigate the nature of the accumulation: mortality
235 profiles, skeletal-part representation, bone breakage and bone surface modifications.

236

237 *2.2.1. Mortality profile of rabbits*

238

239 Age at death was estimated from the degree of long bone (humerus, radius, ulna, femur, and
240 tibia) ossification. In rabbits, adult size is reached at five months (Biadi and Le Gall, 1993),
241 while ossification is complete at the age of eight months (see synthesis in Jones, 2006).
242 According to Pelletier et al. (2016), four age classes can usually be distinguished:

243

244 • “Infants”: aged up to two weeks and characterized by their small size, no epiphyseal
245 ossification, an incomplete diaphyseal ossification, as well as unerupted or erupting adult
246 teeth;

247

248 • “Juveniles”: aged between 2 weeks and 3 months with unfused epiphyses that have
249 not yet reached their adult size;

250

251 • “Subadults”: aged between 3 and 8 months, who, although having reached their adult
252 size, nevertheless display incompletely fused epiphyses;

253

254 • “Adults”: aged more than 8 months with all epiphyses fused.

255

256 It has recently been shown that age structure models of rabbit populations can help to
257 identify acquisition strategies, predator behaviors or the type of accumulation (Pelletier et al.,
258 2016, 2017). Although age distributions may depend on the size of the predator, the season
259 of capture and / or geography (e.g., Cochard 2004b, 2008; Lloveras et al., 2012a; Arriaza et
260 al., 2017), and that several accumulator agents (e.g., foxes and eagle-owls) produce very
261 similar mortality profiles; they nevertheless rule out certain predators that prey almost
262 exclusively on adult individuals, such as medium-to-large sized carnivores (i.e., badgers,
263 dholes, lynx), large birds of prey (i.e., eagles, vultures), and humans (Hockett, 1991;
264 Cochard, 2004a, 2007; Mallye et al., 2008; Lloveras et al., 2011, 2014a, 2016, 2017;
265 Cochard et al., 2012; Pelletier et al., 2016, 2017). Age structure can also be useful for
266 identifying or excluding several potential species known to prey on rabbits. For this study, we
267 used ternary diagrams (Stiner, 1990) modified after Discamps and Costamagno (2015) and
268 specifically adapted for rabbit populations by Pelletier et al. (2016).

269

270 Finally, we omitted sex data for the Pie Lombard assemblage given the recent demonstration
271 that commonly employed models (Jones, 2006) for determining the sex-ratio of rabbit
272 populations (Cochard et al., 2012; Blasco et al., 2013; Rufà et al., 2014, 2017; Martínez-
273 Polanco et al., 2017) do not accurately distinguish males from females in a reproducible
274 manner (Pelletier et al., 2015). Sexing rabbit remains is further complicated by the fact there
275 is no sexual dimorphism in this species (Pelletier, 2019).

276

277 *2.2.2. Anatomical representation of rabbits*

278

279 The number of identified specimens (NISP), minimum number of skeletal elements (MNE)
280 and the minimum number of individuals (MNI) were calculated for each skeletal element
281 (Reitz and Wing, 1999; Lyman, 2008). Relative abundance (RA) was calculated using the
282 formula proposed by Dodson and Wexlar (1979):

283

284 •
$$\%RA = [MNE / (MNI * E)] * 100$$

285

286 where MNE equals the minimum number of skeletal elements, MNI equals the minimum
287 number of individuals based on the greatest number of any single element in the assemblage
288 subdivided by age cohort, and E is the number of elements present in one skeleton (adapted
289 here without the coxal bone).

290

291 The proportion of skeletal elements for all rabbit age classes was calculated using adjusted
292 ratios based on the work of Andrews (1990) and Lloveras et al. (2008), and slightly modified
293 by Pelletier et al. (2016). For our study, these ratios were adapted to reflect the exclusion of
294 coxal bones from the analysis:

295

296 •
$$PCRT/CR\% = [(PCRT * 32) / ((PCRT * 32) + (CR * 182))] * 100$$

297

298 where PCRT is the total number of postcranial elements (limbs, vertebrae, and ribs) and CR
299 the total number of cranial elements (mandibles, maxilla, and teeth);

300

301 •
$$PCRAP/CR\% = [(PCRAP * 32) / ((PCRAP * 32) + (CR * 112))] * 100$$

302

303 with PCRAP being the total number of limb elements (long bones, scapula, patella,
304 metapodials, carpals, tarsals, and phalanges);

305

306 •
$$PCRLB/CR\% = [(PCRLB * 32) / ((PCRLB * 32) + (CR * 10))] * 100$$

307

308 with PCRLB calculated as the total number of long bones (humerus, radius, ulna, femur, and
309 tibia);

310

311 •
$$\mathbf{AUT/ZE\%} = [(AUT * 12) / ((AUT * 12) + (ZE * 98))] * 100$$

312

313 with AUT comprising autopodia (metapodials, carpals, tarsals, and phalanges) and ZE
314 zygopodia and stylopodia (tibia, radius, ulna, humerus, femur, and patella);

315

316 •
$$\mathbf{AN/PO\%} = [(AN * 12) / ((AN * 12) + (PO * 16))] * 100$$

317

318 with AN representing the number of scapula, humerus, radius, ulna, and metacarpals, and
319 PO being the femur, tibia, and metatarsals;

320

321 •
$$\mathbf{Z/E\%} = [(Z * 4) / ((Z * 4) + (E * 6))] * 100$$

322

323 with Z grouping zygopodia (tibia, radius, and ulna) and E stylopodia (femur and humerus).

324

325 *2.2.3. Bone breakage and surface modifications*

326

327 To help discern rabbit assemblages resulting from natural deaths from those produced by
328 predators, the percentages of complete elements, isolated teeth and articulated elements
329 were calculated (Cochard, 2004a). In this regard, the percentage of shaft cylinders was also
330 recorded for comparison with anthropic accumulations (e.g., Hockett, 1991; Pérez Ripoll,
331 2004). The type and nature of breaks (green or dry bone) were recorded for each long bone
332 fragment based on morphological criteria provided by Villa and Mahieu (1991) and applied to
333 small mammals by Armstrong (2016a, 2016b).

334

335 Break type was equally recorded for each bone element following Lloveras et al. (2008) and
336 applied in several subsequent studies (e.g., Lloveras et al., 2009a, 2012b, 2014a, 2016):

337

338 • Cranium were recorded as complete (C) or represented by the incisive bone (IB),
339 incisive bone and maxilla (IBM), maxilla (M), zygomatic arch (ZA) or neurocranium (NC);

340

341 • Mandibles were recorded as complete (C), incisive part (IP), mandible body and
342 incisive part (MBI), mandible body (MB), mandible body and branch (MBB) or condylar
343 process (CP);

344

345 • Scapula were recorded as complete (C), glenoid cavity (GC), glenoid cavity and neck
346 (GCN), glenoid cavity, neck and fossa (GCNF), neck and fossa (NF) or fossa (F);

347

348 • Long bones (humerus, radius, ulna, femur, tibia), metacarpal and metatarsal bones
349 were classified as complete (C), proximal epiphysis (PE), proximal epiphysis and shaft
350 (PES), shaft (S), shaft and distal epiphysis (SDE) or distal epiphysis (DE);

351

352 • Vertebrae were recorded as complete (C), vertebral body (VB), vertebral epiphysis
353 (VE) or spinous process (SP);

354

355 • Phalanges were recorded as complete (C), proximal fragment, (P), distal fragment (D)
356 or fragment (F);

357

358 • Patella, carpals, tarsals (calcaneus, talus, cuboid, cuneiform, and navicular), ribs and
359 teeth were classified as complete (C) or fragmentary (F). For teeth, breakage was recorded
360 separately depending on whether teeth were found isolated or still set in the mandible
361 (Fernández-Jalvo and Andrews, 1992).

362

363 All remains were observed under a light-reflecting microscope (40x magnification) in order to
364 systematically describe bone surface alterations. Evidences of non-human predation (i.e.,
365 digestion, tooth/beak marks) were counted for each element, as were traces of human
366 modifications such as cut-marks or burning.

367

368 **3. Results**

369

370 *3.1. Mortality profile*

371

372 The rabbit assemblage recovered from the Mousterian complex is well preserved and
373 comprises 16,084 bone elements (NISP), corresponding to a minimum of 225 individuals.
374 Epiphysation of the distal end of the humerus demonstrates at least 219 individuals to be
375 older than 3 months (97%), with the non-epiphyseal proximal end of the tibia reflecting the
376 presence of 34 subadult individuals. Overall, long bones correspond to at least 6 juveniles,
377 34 subadults, 185 adults. No infant remains were identified in the Mousterian rabbit
378 assemblage.

379

380 The Pié Lombard profile is distinct from those generated by solitary small-predators, such as
381 foxes or eagle-owls, who preferentially prey upon juveniles with smaller body sizes (Fig. 3). It
382 is also substantially different from modern warrens, which are characterised by higher
383 numbers of both juvenile individuals and infants (Pelletier et al., 2016). Moreover, age
384 profiles produced by solitary predators and typical of warrens are also characterized by
385 greater proportions of immature individuals. This is not the case with the Pié Lombard profile,
386 which is much more similar to those generated by larger predators such as badgers, dholes,
387 or humans. In fact, the Pié Lombard mortality profile falls within the “old” (○) zone of the
388 ternary diagram, which is consistent with the selection of the most profitable prey and

389 considered evidence for a targeted hunting strategy (Stiner, 1990; Discamps and
390 Costamagno, 2015).

391

392 *3.2. Anatomical representation*

393

394 The Pié Lombard Mousterian assemblage produced all elements of the rabbit skeleton, a
395 pattern consistent with a large proportion of complete skeletons having been introduced to
396 the site. Phalanges, metapodials, vertebrae and teeth are most common (%NISP), while the
397 smallest elements, such as carpals/tarsals, sternebrae, sesamoids, and patellae, are less
398 well represented (Table 2). The relative abundance mean value (43%) is low, which indicates
399 a significant loss of bony elements in the assemblage. The best-represented anatomical
400 elements are the humerus (95%), calcaneus (94%), and talus (86%), whereas sternebrae,
401 ribs, carpals, vertebrae and cuneiform are less abundant (1% to 8%).

402

403 The assemblage produced relatively similar proportions of cranial and postcranial elements
404 (PCRT/CR%=48%), although the latter are underrepresented compared with long limb bone
405 elements (i.e., PCRAP/CR% and PCRLB/CR%; Table 3). The AUT/ZE% index shows a
406 deficit of the autopodia compared to the zygopodia (39%), and relatively equal proportions of
407 lower and upper limb elements (Z/E%=51%) as well as anterior and posterior members
408 (AN/PO%=46%). The patterns of skeletal part representation documented for the Pié
409 Lombard assemblage differs substantially from either modern reference collections or other
410 fossil rabbit assemblages (Fig. 4). The proportion of postcranial and cranial elements is
411 somewhat similar to skeletal profiles generated by birds of prey (PCRT/CR% and
412 PCRAP/CR%). However, the high degree of variability in skeletal part profiles produced by
413 humans does not exclude this type of accumulation. For example, the under-representation
414 of autopodials in the Pié Lombard assemblage is a typical signature of birds of prey but
415 shared with the clearly anthropic assemblage from Gazel cave (Fig. 4). The balance between
416 the anterior and posterior elements allows a clear link with the anthropogenic accumulations.

417

418 *3.3. Bone breakage: frequency and type*

419

420 While overall bone fragmentation is relatively high (46% complete bones), it varies according
421 to bone element and size. The smallest bones (i.e., carpals/tarsals, patellae, phalanges, and
422 teeth) 86% are complete, while long bones display a significantly higher breakage rate, with
423 an average of only 0.2% complete bones (only two humerus, two radius and one tibia are
424 complete).

425

426 Skulls and mandibles are never found complete and are mainly represented by the maxilla
427 (M) and mandible body (MB), respectively (Table 4). Nearly half of the teeth (49%) were still
428 recovered in the mandible and were generally complete (90%), just like isolated teeth (88%).
429 Only one complete scapula is present and most fragments include the glenoid cavity (GC).
430 Metacarpals and metatarsals are complete in 38% and 11% of the cases, respectively.
431 Carpals (98%), cuneiforms (99%), cuboids (92%), and naviculars (84%) are more frequently
432 complete than talus (71%) and calcaneus (58%). Only 70% of proximal phalanges are
433 complete, while 91% and 99%, respectively, of mesial and distal phalanges are complete.
434 Vertebrae are complete in 13% of cases, primarily represented by the vertebral body (VB),
435 while ribs are almost always fragmented (98%).

436

437 In terms of long bones, all breakage categories were found among which fragments of
438 diaphysis are most abundant. Humerus and tibia are most often represented by distal
439 epiphyses, while proximal epiphyses of radius, ulna and femur fragments are more frequent
440 (Table 4). Thirty-five percent of all long bones are represented by shaft cylinder fragments,
441 with nearly 20% representing the humerus, femur and tibia (Fig. 5). Most long bone fractures
442 concern green bone (Table 5) and are characterized by an oblique fracture angle (68%) and
443 a V-shaped profile (70%). Dry bone breaks with a right fracture angle (17%) and a transverse
444 fracture profile (15%) are less common, and result from post-depositional processes (e.g.,

445 pressure and sedimentary movements, roof collapse, weathering). Approximately 15% of
446 bone breakage is recent, probably occurring during excavation and/or cleaning.

447

448 *3.4. Bone surface modifications*

449

450 Bone surfaces are very well preserved and bear no signs of weathering or alterations by
451 abiotic agents. Traces of digestion are evident on less than 3% of the rabbit assemblage
452 (Table 6), with metacarpals, metatarsals, talus, calcaneus and phalanges the most
453 commonly affected. Pits and punctures are present on 33 bones (0.2% of NISP) and mostly
454 occur on the scapula (n=8), femur (n=6), calcaneus (n=4), metatarsals (n=3) radius (n=2)
455 and mandible (n=2). Carnivore tooth marks, likely a relatively small-sized predator such as
456 fox, wild cat or lynx are concentrated around the glenoid cavity (n=4), the proximal part of the
457 femur (n=2) and ulna (n=1), as well as on the mandible body (n=1).

458

459 Most of the bone surface modifications can be attributed to human activity. A total of 481
460 bone elements (3% of NISP), primarily long bones (n=219), display cut-marks (Fig. 6; Table
461 6). Cut-marks are also frequent on metacarpals (n=43) and metatarsals (n=107), and
462 concern mainly lateral metapods, such as the metacarpal II (n=10) and V (n=16), and
463 metatarsal II (n=26) and V (n=31). A significant number of cutmarks were also recorded on
464 the calcaneus (n = 54), talus (n = 12) and scapula (n = 14). On the long bones, most cut-
465 marks were located on shafts and near the epiphyses and are almost always transverse to
466 the principal axis of the bone. Traces of burning are evident on 9% of NISP and are not
467 concentrated on any particular portion of the skeleton; 15% of cases concern the epiphyses,
468 with long bones, the calcaneus, talus, metapodials and phalanges most commonly affected
469 (Table 6). However, we did not record any traces of human teeth on the bones, although
470 reliably identifying such marks is difficult (e.g., Cochard, 2004; Lloveras et al., 2009b).

471

472 **4. Discussion**

473

474 *4.1. The origin of the Pié Lombard rabbit assemblage*

475

476 Despite differences in the relative abundance of certain skeletal elements, the overall
477 anatomical representation of rabbits at Pié Lombard suggests whole carcasses were
478 introduced to the site. Most potential rabbit predators transport whole carcasses and can
479 produce the same pattern than an attritional mortality typically observed for warrens. Infants
480 only leave the warren 2 to 3 weeks after birth (Biadi and Le Gall, 1993), and the presence of
481 their remains could suggest a warren and the potential bioturbation of archaeological layers
482 (Pelletier et al., 2016, 2017). However, most predators, including humans, lynx, dholes,
483 eagles or badgers, tend to focus primarily on adults, who generally comprise at least 80% of
484 an assemblage (Hockett, 1991; Hockett and Bicho, 2000; Jones, 2004; Cochard, 2004a,
485 2007; Brugal, 2006; Mallye et al., 2008; Lloveras et al., 2011, 2016, 2017; Cochard et al.,
486 2012; Rillardon and Brugal, 2014; Rosado-Méndez et al., 2015; Arriaza et al., 2017; Rufà et
487 al., 2017). Taken together, the absence of infant remains at Pié Lombard and an assemblage
488 dominated by adult individuals (82%) is in good overall agreement with an accumulation
489 produced by a large predator.

490

491 Despite some variation in skeletal part representation, anatomical profiles produced by
492 terrestrial predators are generally similar, especially when complete carcasses are
493 transported. In the anthropogenic assemblages, the best-represented elements are generally
494 mandibles, long bones, scapula and coxal bones (Hockett, 1991; Hockett et Haws, 2002;
495 Cochard, 2004a; Brugal, 2006; Lloveras et al., 2016), which is the case with the Pié Lombard
496 assemblage (except for coxal bones, which were excluded from our study; see section 2.2).
497 In the case of accumulations generated by lynx, skeletal profiles tend to be very similar,
498 characterised by a higher abundance of cranial remains and an over-representation of
499 forelimb bones compared to those of the hindlimbs (Lloveras et al., 2008). The Pié Lombard
500 profile clearly departs from this pattern, particularly in the under-representation of cranial

501 elements, and resembles accumulations produced by some raptors, who tend to focus
502 essentially on immature individuals (Sanchis Serra, 2000; Cochard, 2004b; Lloveras et al.,
503 2009a; Sanchis Serra et al., 2014) and sever the limbs and / or head before transporting the
504 most nutritious parts for consumption elsewhere (Donazar, 1988).

505

506 Can this particular skeletal-part representation of Pié Lombard be connected to the
507 differential preservation of bone remains? According to Pavao and Stahl (1999), in cases of
508 differential preservation, density differences between hindlimb (more dense) and forelimb
509 (less dense) elements should be reflected in femur and tibia outnumbering humerus, radius
510 and ulna. At Pié Lombard, all of these elements are present in similar proportions, which is
511 consistent with an overall good preservation of the assemblage. The underrepresentation of
512 the extremities of the paws (phalanges, carpals/tarsals, and metapodials) is generally due to
513 their small size and that these elements are frequently overlooked during excavations or lost
514 during sieving when using large mesh sizes (Shaffer and Sanchez, 1994; Cannon, 1999; Val
515 and Mallye, 2011a). A systematic water sieving protocol using less than 5 mm meshes
516 during excavations at Pié Lombard exclude recovery biases affecting skeletal-part profiles.
517 The absence of the differential transportation or preservation of rabbit remains at Pié
518 Lombard reflects a particular context, with the skeletal representation of the remains
519 suggesting humans to be responsible for the accumulation. The Pié Lombard assemblage
520 falls between the anthropogenic accumulations from the Mousterian occupation of Les
521 Canalettes (Cochard et al., 2012), the Late Aurignation at Arbreda cave (Lloveras et al.,
522 2016) or the Late Magdalenian at La Faurélie II (Cochard, 2004a), where rabbits were
523 exploited uniquely as a source of food, and the anthropogenic accumulation from Gazel
524 Cave, where leporids were captured both for their fur and meat (Fontana, 2003).

525

526 Bone breakage linked to marrow extraction produces numerous epiphyseal and shaft-
527 cylinder fragments (e.g., Hockett, 1991; Cochard, 2004a; Pérez Ripoll, 2004). With few
528 exceptions, rabbit accumulations from Upper Paleolithic contexts generally contain less than

529 15% (of NISP) of shaft cylinders (Hockett and Bicho, 2000; Cochard, 2004a; Cochard and
530 Brugal, 2004; Brugal, 2006; Lloveras et al., 2011, 2016; Rillardon and Brugal, 2014; Rufà et
531 al., 2017). In this regard, the proportion of shaft cylinders at Pié Lombard (35%) is more
532 similar to the Middle Paleolithic assemblage of Les Canalettes (39%; Cochard et al., 2012),
533 which as dates to the same period (i.e., MIS 5-4). The percentage of complete long bones
534 (0.2%) is equally consistent with anthropogenic accumulations (e.g., Cochard et al., 2012;
535 Lloveras et al., 2016; Rufà et al., 2017) and lower than that observed for modern predators
536 (Sanchis Serra, 2000; Lloveras et al., 2008, 2009a, 2012b, 2014a, 2017; Mallye et al., 2008).
537 Moreover, fauna accumulations generated by non-human predators are characterized by
538 very high percentages of digested remains (>60%). At Pié Lombard, less than 3% of NISP
539 show traces of digestion and only 33 elements bear carnivore teeth-marks (0.2%), reflecting
540 an extremely limited impact of non-human predator on the Pié Lombard rabbit assemblage.
541 The skinning and defleshing of rabbit carcasses leaves clear evidence in the form of cut-
542 marks and traces of burning on the distal ends of long bones (Vigne et al., 1981; Vigne and
543 Marival-Vigne, 1983; Lloveras et al., 2009b). At Pié Lombard, 3% of bones are cut-marked
544 and 9% show traces of burning, a pattern consistent with what is observed in anthropogenic
545 accumulations (for a synthesis, see Lloveras et al., 2016).

546

547 Moreover, the accumulation of small vertebrates at Pié Lombard is characterized by a very
548 high proportion of rabbits (Table 1). Such an overrepresentation has never, to our
549 knowledge, been encountered in any Pleistocene natural death assemblage or mixed
550 accumulation (rock shelter or cave sites; e.g., Andrews, 1990; Desclaux et al., 2011) or in any
551 modern coprocoenosis (e.g., Géroutet, 1984; Bayle, 1992; Lloveras et al., 2014a, 2014b,
552 2017; Sanchis Serra et al., 2014). This further underlines the unique nature of the Pié
553 Lombard Mousterian assemblage, which results from the acquisition and processing of small
554 game, primarily rabbits as well as birds, by Neandertal groups. The presence of a limited
555 number of digested remains and carnivore-gnawed bones shows that another agent,
556 probably a small terrestrial carnivore, contributed only marginally to the accumulation.

557

558 *4.2. Function of the Pié Lombard site*

559

560 Pié Lombard was alternately occupied by small, medium and large carnivores during
561 particular periods as well by Neandertal groups as part of a seasonal mobility system (Texier
562 et al., 2011). Both predators introduced large herbivores as well as small vertebrate remains
563 to the site. A recent taphonomic analysis of the bird remains from the Mousterian complex
564 showed that multiple agents were responsible for the accumulation (Romero et al., 2017):
565 birds of prey (i.e., nocturnal raptors) transported their prey (usually choughs) to the rock-
566 shelter, where they were consumed and subsequently regurgitated; small terrestrial
567 carnivores (i.e., lynx or red fox) also occasionally hunted birds; as did Neandertals, who
568 focused almost exclusively on pigeons, partridges, and choughs, mainly for their meat and
569 perhaps also for the use of their feathers.

570

571 Unlike the mixed origin of the avian assemblage, the rabbit remains from Pié Lombard were
572 primarily transported to the site by Neandertal groups. The Pié Lombard assemblage
573 demonstrates whole carcasses have been brought and butchered on-site and bones broken
574 to access marrow. At Les Canalettes, the low rate of burned bones (<1%) led Cochard
575 (2004a) to suggest that carcasses were boiled rather than roasted. At Pié Lombard, the
576 relatively high rate of burned bones (9%) suggests that rabbit carcasses were roasted rather
577 than boiled. Rabbits can be roasted directly after being skinned without having to first
578 dismember the carcass (Rufà et al., 2017). Moreover, disarticulation and defleshing are, in
579 fact, easier after roasting, and do not require the use of tools, which could explain the low
580 number of cut-marks observed on the remains.

581

582 Although it is still difficult to definitely demonstrate the processing of leporid pelts by
583 prehistoric hunter-gatherers (e.g., Cochard, 2004a; Mallye et al., 2018), numerous cut-marks
584 potentially unrelated to meat consumption are present. Generally, skinning carcasses for

585 pelts leaves abundant evidence on bone, primarily on the skull (Lloveras et al., 2009b; Val
586 and Mallye, 2011b). Although rabbit skull elements are too heavily fragmented and poorly
587 represented at Pié Lombard to observe traces clearly referable to skinning, other lines of
588 evidence are suggestive of this process. Metapodials alone bear nearly 31% of all recorded
589 cut-marks, which are concentrated on the lateral sides of metacarpals (II and V) and
590 metatarsals (II and V), suggesting the removal of the skin (Val and Mallye, 2011b). The
591 under-representation of these elements, as well as the phalanges, compared to the
592 numerous tarsals, including the calcaneus and talus, which also carry numerous cut-marks
593 resulting from skinning and disarticulation processes, could also testify to the transport of
594 pelts for tanning beyond the excavated area. In this scenario, a large portion of tarsal
595 elements (calcaneus, talus) would remain in the area where carcasses were processed for
596 food, while the metapodials and phalanges would be transported still attached to the skin.
597 Such a hypothesis was previously proposed by Cochard (2004a) for the Middle Paleolithic
598 site of Les Canalettes. Finally, the very limited number of caudal vertebrae (NISP=14)
599 equally suggests the removal of the tail with the skin (Fontana, 2003).

600

601 The importance of leporid fur for Upper Paleolithic societies remains a subject of
602 considerable debate (Jullien and Pillard, 1969; Soffer, 1985; Alhaique, 1994; Charles and
603 Jacobi, 1994; Morel and Muller, 1997; West, 1997; Pokines, 1998; Fontana, 2003; García-
604 Argüelles et al., 2004). This is in no small part due to difficulties in reliably inferring skinning
605 processes and the fact that cut-marks alone are not sufficient evidence for the removal of
606 skins (Cochard, 2004a). Other taphonomic characteristics, such as skeletal-part
607 representation, provide additional evidence for skin processing. For example, the under-
608 representation of the autopodial and caudal vertebrae at a butchery or consumption site can
609 provide indirect evidence for such activities. At Pié Lombard, the limited number of these
610 small elements does not reflect either differential preservation processes or biases
611 connected to sieving (i.e., mesh sizes). Traces of digestion on the autopodial could suggest
612 that a scavenger influenced anatomical representation. However, although digested bones

613 are present at Pié Lombard, the impact of a terrestrial carnivore, such as red fox, wildcats, or
614 lynx (Table 1), is low (2.6% and 0.2 %, respectively, of bones bear evidence of digestion or
615 tooth-marks). This indicates that, while these species may have scavenged remains left by
616 humans, their presence is too limited to account for the under-representation of the
617 autopodial.

618

619 Whether rabbits were sought specifically for their pelts or first and foremost as a source of
620 food remains an open question. In any event, the working of skins leaves very little trace on
621 bones themselves, and wear on non-perishable tools is often the only evidence of this
622 activity (Beyries, 2008). While bone and stone tools from Middle Palaeolithic contexts have
623 been linked to the processing of skins (e.g., Chase, 1990; Texier et al. 1996; d'Errico et al.,
624 2012; Soressi et al., 2013), no such evidence was recovered from Pié Lombard. With this
625 being the case, tanning may have occurred outside the excavated area or at another site, as
626 indicated by the under-representation of the metapodials and phalanges (cf. supra).
627 Likewise, demonstrating fur processing at Pié Lombard to have been related to the
628 manufacturing of clothes, either for group members or as trade goods, is also difficult.
629 Substantial ethnographic and archaeological evidence, however, attests to the importance of
630 leporid pelts for human societies (Teit, 1906; Emmons, 1911; Rogers, 1963, 1973; Oberg,
631 1973; Speck, 1977; Rogers and Smith, 1994; Charles, 1997; Kennedy and Bouchard, 1998;
632 Lahren, 1998; Beyries, 2008), whether utilitarian purposes, such as the use of long bones to
633 produce needles (Soffer, 1985; McComb, 1989; Leesch, 1997; Cochard, 2005) or personal
634 ornaments manufactured from long bone shaft cylinders (Hockett, 1994; d'Errico and
635 Laroulandie, 2000). There now exists robust evidence of personal ornament use by
636 Neandertals, including raptor terminal phalanges (Morin and Laroulandie, 2012; Finlayson et
637 al., 2019), bird feathers (Peresani et al., 2011; Finlayson et al., 2012; Fiore et al., 2016;
638 Finlayson et al., 2019), small to medium carnivore teeth (Caron et al. 2011; Soulier and
639 Mallye, 2012), and shells (Stringer et al., 2008; Mellars, 2010; Zilhão et al., 2010). In view of
640 the high number of rabbit remains present at Pié Lombard, it is reasonable to assume that

641 this small prey played an important role in the socio-economic practices of Neandertal
642 groups in southern France during MIS 5-4.

643

644 Taken together, there is sufficient evidence from Pié Lombard demonstrating rabbits to have
645 been roasted and consumed on the site, with their pelts subsequently processed and
646 transported away from the site. Moreover, the numerous cut-marks, burnt bones and shaft
647 cylinders are all consistent with what is commonly found on Upper Paleolithic sites and is
648 readily comparable with the Mousterian rabbit assemblage from Les Canalettes. The
649 Neandertal groups who occupied Pié Lombard therefore exploited rabbits in the same way
650 as Upper Paleolithic anatomically modern humans. Interestingly, while it is generally
651 accepted that rabbits were of secondary importance in the Neandertal diet due to a
652 significantly lower caloric return compared to ungulates (Table 7), at Pié Lombard, the large
653 number of rabbits provided at least 226 kg of meat, representing more than 7% of the
654 group's overall caloric intake (Table 8). This value is much higher than what is known on
655 other Mousterian sites. Indeed, rabbit generally constituted less than 1% of the energy intake
656 of the Mousterian groups, with its role in the human diet increasing significantly in the Upper
657 Paleolithic, especially during the Magdalenian (Table 8). The exploitation of small game
658 (rabbits and birds) at Pié Lombard departs markedly from this pattern. The large number of
659 rabbits (Table 1) suggests they were the principal focus of Neandertal subsistence practices
660 at Pié Lombard and may reflect difficulties in accessing the rockshelter and hence an
661 emphasis on more easily transported small game rather than large herbivores.

662

663 *4.3. The exploitation of rabbits by Neandertal societies: a regional and repetitive*
664 *phenomenon?*

665

666 Prior to the Upper Paleolithic in southwestern Europe, it is generally assumed that small
667 game was rarely exploited by humans (Stiner, 2013). Consequently, the place of rabbits in
668 the Neandertal diet has been the subject of considerable debate. When present in Middle

669 Paleolithic assemblages, taphonomic analyses have generally demonstrated rabbits to have
670 been primarily accumulated by carnivores or raptors (Defleur et al., 1994; Blasco, 1995;
671 Martínez-Valle, 1996; Fernández-Jalvo and Andrews, 2000; El Guennouni, 2001; Hockett,
672 2006; Lloveras et al., 2011; Sanchis Serra, 2012). Evidence of human modifications on rabbit
673 remains is rare, and Neandertals are commonly considered to have played very minor role in
674 their accumulation. For example, while the Mousterian assemblages from Bolomor Cave
675 (NISP=457, MNI=49; Blasco and Fernández-Peris, 2012), Arbreda Cave (NISP=1,317,
676 MNI=43; Lloveras et al., 2010), Les Canalettes (NISP=1,627, MNI=58; Cochard et al., 2012),
677 Columbeira Cave (NISP=1,784; Carvalho et al., 2018), El Salt (NISP=1,789; Pérez et al.,
678 2017), or Teixoneres Cave (NISP=3,964, MNI=49; Rufà et al., 2014) contain a limited
679 number of rabbit remains, only Bolomor Cave and Les Canalettes produced robust evidence
680 for a rabbit accumulation linked to more long-term, repetitive Neandertal occupations. In this
681 respect, the over 16,000 rabbit remains and the presence of least 225 individuals make the
682 Pié Lombard assemblage not only unique for the Middle Palaeolithic but readily comparable
683 to anthropogenic accumulations found from Upper Paleolithic sites such as Les Cendres
684 Cave (NISP=14,976, MNI=337; Real, 2016), La Faurélie II (NISP=15,569, MNI=87; Cochard,
685 2004a), Arbreda Cave (NISP=17,700, MNI=43; Lloveras et al., 2016) or Molí del Salt
686 (NISP=22,627, MNI=445; Rufà et al., 2017). With this being the case, how best to interpret
687 the exceptional number of rabbits in Middle Paleolithic assemblage from Pié Lombard? It is
688 often argued that Upper Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers most likely adapted their subsistence
689 strategies 1) depending on the availability of different preys in the landscape; 2) as response
690 to increasing group size and social structure; or 3) following profound changes in socio-
691 economic organization in connection with settlement patterns and resource management
692 (e.g., Stiner et al., 1999, 2000; Aura et al., 2002; Cochard and Brugal, 2004). Similar
693 behaviours have partially been demonstrated for several Middle Paleolithic sites in
694 southwestern Europe based on the zooarcheological analyses of large (e.g., Discamps et al.,
695 2011; Morin et al., 2014; Rendu and Morin, 2018) and / or small mammals (e.g., Sanchis
696 Serra and Fernández Peris, 2008; Blasco and Fernández Peris, 2012; Blasco et al., 2014).

697 These research call into question the idea that the diversification and intensification of
698 subsistence strategies were coincident with Middle to Upper Palaeolithic transition (e.g.,
699 Stiner et al., 2000; Hockett and Haws, 2002; Aura et al., 2002). Pié Lombard provides
700 additional evidence for the regular exploitation of small prey around 70-75 kyr, some 25-30
701 kyr before the emergence of the Upper Palaeolithic.

702

703 In addition, rabbits were abundantly available in the Mediterranean region of Western Europe
704 from MIS 5 until the beginning of MIS 4. During this period of temperate environmental
705 conditions associated with substantial forest cover (Pelletier, 2018), rabbits only occasionally
706 formed part of the Neandertal diet (Gerber, 1973; Blasco and Fernández Peris, 2012;
707 Cochard et al., 2012; Hardy et al., 2013; this study). During MIS 4 to 2, although
708 environmental and climatic changes led to a decline in rabbit populations and their retreat
709 into several refugia in the Iberian Peninsula (Branco et al., 2002; Pelletier, 2018), rabbits
710 were continuously exploited in these areas (Blasco, 1995; Sanchis Serra and Fernández
711 Peris, 2008; Lloveras et al., 2010; Brown et al., 2011; Rufà et al., 2014; Pérez et al., 2017;
712 Carvalho et al., 2018). During MIS 3 (around 45 kyr BP), Europe witnessed a genuine
713 “cultural revolution” (Mellars, 1996; Bar-Yosef, 1998, 2002), as Middle Palaeolithic cultural
714 traditions gave way to Upper Palaeolithic technological and symbolic innovations (McBrearty
715 and Brooks, 2000; d’Errico, 2003; Henshilwood and Marean, 2003; Zilhão, 2011). This
716 transition equally coincided with substantial biological change as the Neandertals were
717 gradually replaced by dispersing anatomically modern humans (Trinkaus, 1986, 2007;
718 Stringer and Andrews, 1988; Stringer, 2002). Despite these profound cultural and biological
719 changes, rabbits continued to be exploited at the beginning of the Upper Paleolithic in the
720 Iberian Peninsula by Aurignacian (between 40 and 30 kyr BP; Rosado-Méndez et al., 2015;
721 Lloveras et al., 2016; Sanchis et al., 2016), Gravettian / Solutrean (Brugal, 2006; Hockett and
722 Haws, 2009; Lloveras et al., 2011; Aura et al., 2012; Manne et al., 2012; Sanchis et al.,
723 2016), and Magdalenian societies (Aura et al., 2002; Sarrión et al., 2008; Rufà et al., 2017;
724 Yravedra et al., 2018). On the other hand, no clear evidence for the exploitation of rabbits is

725 currently available for southern France during the early Upper Paleolithic (Cochard and
726 Brugal, 2004). This is likely explained by the absence of this species in this region until the
727 end of the Late Glacial (Pelletier, 2018). The reincorporation of rabbit in post-Late Glacial
728 subsistence strategies accompanied the return of more temperate climatic conditions in the
729 region (Séronie-Vivien, 1994; Cochard, 2004a; Jones, 2006; Rillardon and Brugal, 2014).

730

731 The distribution and density of rabbit populations in southwestern Europe during the Middle
732 and Late Pleistocene was therefore relatively discontinuous and largely dependent on
733 climatic conditions (Pelletier, 2018). When rabbits were available, they were consumed by
734 both Neandertals and anatomically modern humans. Thus, the diversification of the human
735 diet towards the end of the Upper Paleolithic, notably the inclusion of leporids, cannot be tied
736 uniquely to cognitive, cultural or economic changes but better tracks palaeobiogeographic
737 factors modifying the range of this species. If the exploitation of small prey during the Middle
738 Paleolithic now appears uncontested, several authors nevertheless maintain that changes
739 in the importance of rabbit in human subsistence strategies was not due to prey availability
740 and / or ecological or climatic variations but reflects a clear cultural choice (Lloveras et al.,
741 2010, 2016; Sanchis et al., 2016). Despite the continuous presence of this species on the
742 eastern coast of the Iberian peninsula, significant differences are evident in the exploitation
743 of rabbits between Mousterian and Aurignacian groups at Arbreda Cave (Lloveras et al.,
744 2010, 2016) or between Aurignacian and Gravettian groups of Malladetes Cave (Sanchis et
745 al., 2016), differences potentially due to the socio-economic organization of these human
746 groups. Finally, the integration of leporids in the diet, especially at the Middle-Upper
747 Paleolithic transition, could be the result of multiple factors integrating both prey availability
748 and human choice, whose relative impact would have varied between regions (i.e., the
749 eastern coast of Spain versus southern France).

750

751 In addition to Romero et al's (2017) recent demonstration of the exploitation of birds at Pié
752 Lombard, our data, combined with evidence from Les Canalettes (Cochard et al., 2012),

753 demonstrates that around 70-75 kyr Neandertal groups in southern France had a diversified
754 subsistence strategy that sometimes incorporated a significant proportion of small game.
755 This pattern suggests that these groups had both a clear working knowledge of the
756 landscape and mobilised specific acquisition strategies. Two modes of acquisition are
757 generally cited to explain the presence of high numbers of rabbits in Paleolithic assemblages
758 (Jones, 2006): 1) a mass collection near burrows or warrens, where immature individuals are
759 often abundant; or 2) an opportunistic capture of solitary individuals in the landscape, which
760 is reflected in the prevalence of adult individuals. Although these arguments (Jones, 2006)
761 have recently been questioned (Pelletier et al., 2015; Pelletier, 2018, 2019), the large
762 number of rabbits at Pié Lombard suggests the use of specific acquisition methods to
763 capture multiple individuals. The near-absence of immature individuals can probably be
764 explained by their low energy return or that rabbits were procured outside the birthing season
765 (Cochard et al., 2012). Ethnographic and historical sources report the use of several
766 techniques to hunt large numbers of small prey, such as leporids, including bows and arrows,
767 throwing weapons, nets, snares, or individual or collective traps (Nelson, 1973; Bean, 1974;
768 Oswalt, 1976; Callou, 2003; Lupo and Schmitt, 2005). Although the perishable nature of
769 these technologies makes it is difficult to identify them archaeologically, their use is regularly
770 attributed to Upper Paleolithic hunter-gatherers (e.g., Stiner et al., 1999; Hoffecker, 2005;
771 Rufà et al., 2017) as well as the Middle Stone Age of South Africa (Wadley, 2010). The
772 pattern of Middle Palaeolithic rabbit exploitation documented at Pié Lombard currently finds
773 no equivalent in Europe for this period and provides indirect evidence for the development of
774 advanced hunting strategies by Neandertals during MIS 5-4 as well as their advanced
775 cognitive capacities.

776

777 **5. Conclusion**

778

779 Given current debates concerning the diet and cognitive capacities of Neandertals,
780 demonstrating the primary accumulation agent responsible for faunal assemblages,

781 especially those dominated by small mammals, as at Pié Lombard, is fundamental. Our
782 taphonomic analysis shows the rabbit remains at the site to have been primarily accumulated
783 by Neandertals, who sought both the meat and pelts of these small mammals. The intense
784 exploitation of rabbit at Pié Lombard reveals Neandertals were not only able to exploit their
785 environment but also maximize the return of available resources. Moreover, the high
786 numbers of rabbits potentially suggests that a variety of trapping techniques were likely
787 developed during the Middle Paleolithic, well before the arrival of modern humans in Western
788 Europe.

789

790 Over the last decade, the number of studies focusing on the behavioural variability and
791 lifestyle of Neandertals has increased exponentially, providing new evidence for the
792 advanced cognitive capacities and social organisation of these groups. Neandertals
793 repeatedly exploited small game, whether for their meat, fat, bones, teeth, feathers or furs.
794 Evidence from Pié Lombard, Les Canalettes and Bolomor Cave provide new insights into the
795 diet and socio-economic organisation of Middle Paleolithic human groups in southwestern
796 Europe during MIS 5.

797

798 Finally, the intense and regular use of locally abundant small game that potentially required
799 sophisticated acquisition techniques is no longer limited to the end of Upper Paleolithic. The
800 exploitation of small animals seems to have been above all influenced by environmental
801 conditions and social factors, rather than by biological and cultural differences between
802 Neandertals and modern humans.

803

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805

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807

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820

821 **Author contributions**

822

823 **Maxime Pelletier:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Writing –
824 Original Draft. **Emmanuel Desclaux:** Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Investigation,
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826 **Jean Texier:** Resources, Writing – Original Draft, Supervision, Project Administration.

827

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1583

1584 **Figure captions (color online only)**

1585

1586 **Figure 1** (2 columns). Location of the Pié Lombard rock-shelter.

1587

1588 **Figure 2** (2 columns). Stratigraphy of Pié Lombard (after Texier et al., 2011). A. Plan of the site and
1589 location of the Paleolithic deposits (excavation 1971-1986); B. View of the excavation in 1974; C.
1590 sagittal profile in squares C/D 3-5.

1591

1592 **Figure 3** (1 or 1,5 column). Mortality profiles for the Pié Lombard Mousterian complex (**PL**) and other
1593 reference collections. BI = Bettant I, BVIII = Bettant VIII (Mallye et al., 2008), FA = fox accumulation
1594 (outside the den), FD = fox den (inside the den), ABI = Aigües de Busot I, ABII = Aigües de Busot II,
1595 PZ = Penya la Zafra (Sanchis Serra, 2000), BC = Benaxuai Caves (Sanchis Serra et al., 2014), CV3 =
1596 El Conjunto de Coveta 3 (Sanchis Serra and Pascual Benito, 2011), LSC = Les Six Chemins (Pelletier
1597 et al., 2016), VAU = Vaufrey (Cochard, 2007), CAN = Les Canalettes (Cochard et al., 2012), AN =
1598 Anecrial (Brugal, 2006), LFII = La Faurélie II (Cochard, 2004a). Diagram divisions correspond to those
1599 proposed by Discamps and Costamagno (2015): JOP = Juveniles-Old-Prime, JPO = Juveniles-Prime-
1600 Old, P = Prime, O = Old. Confidence intervals have been omitted for clarity.

1601

1602 **Figure 4** (2 columns). Pié Lombard Mousterian skeletal-part representation (**PL**), as well as those of
1603 the other reference collections. Attritional death in a rabbit-warren (Pelletier et al., 2016);
1604 accumulations by terrestrial carnivores as the red fox (Sanchis Serra and Pascual Benito, 2011), the
1605 European badger (Mallye et al., 2008) and the dhole (Cochard, 2007); accumulations by birds of prey
1606 (golden eagle from Lloveras et al., 2017) and the eagle-owl (nest **2** and nest **1** from Lloveras et al.,
1607 2009); and anthropogenic accumulation from Les Canalettes (**C**, Cochard et al., 2012), Arbreda cave
1608 (**A**, Lloveras et al., 2016), La Faurélie II (**F**, Cochard, 2004a), and Gazel cave (**G**, Fontana, 2003).
1609 Rectangles represent 95% confidence intervals.

1610

1611 **Figure 5** (2 columns). Examples of rabbit shaft cylinders from the Pié Lombard Mousterian complex.

1612

1613 **Figure 6** (2 columns). Cut-marks from Pié Lombard resulting from different processing activities, such
1614 as skinning, defleshing and disarticulation. Numbers between brackets indicates number of cut-marks
1615 per bones. %RA: percentage of relative abundance of the rabbit elements. The coxal bone (dark grey),
1616 not taken into account in this study.

1617

1618 **Table captions**

1619

1620 **Table 1** (2 columns). The Pié Lombard Mousterian faunal assemblage. MNI: Minimum number of
1621 individuals.

1622

1623 **Table 2** (1 column). Rabbit skeletal elements identified in the Mousterian complex from Pié Lombard.
1624 NISP = number of identified skeletal parts, MNE = minimum number of elements, RA = relative
1625 abundance.

1626

1627 **Table 3** (1 column). Proportions of different parts of the skeleton in the Mousterian complex from Pié
1628 Lombard, along with 95% confidence intervals. For the definition of the indices see the section
1629 concerning the "Anatomical representation of rabbits".

1630

1631 **Table 4** (2 column). Numbers and percentages of rabbit skeletal elements from the Pié Lombard
1632 Mousterian complex included in each breakage category. Cranium as complete (C), incisive bone (IB),
1633 incisive bone + maxilla (IBM), maxilla (M), zygomatic arch (ZA) and neurocranium (NC). Mandibles as
1634 complete (C), incisive part (IP), mandible body + incisive part (MBI), mandible body (MB), mandible
1635 body + branch (MBB) and condylar process (CP). Scapula as complete (C), glenoid cavity (GC),
1636 glenoid cavity + neck (GCN), glenoid cavity + neck + fossa (GCNF), neck + fossa (NF) and fossa (F).
1637 Long bones (humerus, radius, ulna, femur, tibia), metacarpal and metatarsal bones were classified as
1638 complete (C), proximal epiphysis (PE), proximal epiphysis + shaft (PES), shaft (S), shaft + distal
1639 epiphysis (SDE) and distal epiphysis (DE). Vertebrae as complete (C), vertebral body (VB), vertebral
1640 epiphysis (VE) and spinous process (SP). Phalanges as complete (C), proximal fragment, (P), distal
1641 fragment (D) and fragment (F). Patella, carpals, tarsals (calcaneus, talus, cuboid, cuneiform,
1642 navicular), ribs and teeth as complete (C) and fragment (F).

1643

1644 **Table 5** (2 column). Fracture angle and fracture outline frequencies for rabbit long bones from the Pié
1645 Lombard Mousterian complex. N = effective, NISP = number of identified specimens.

1646

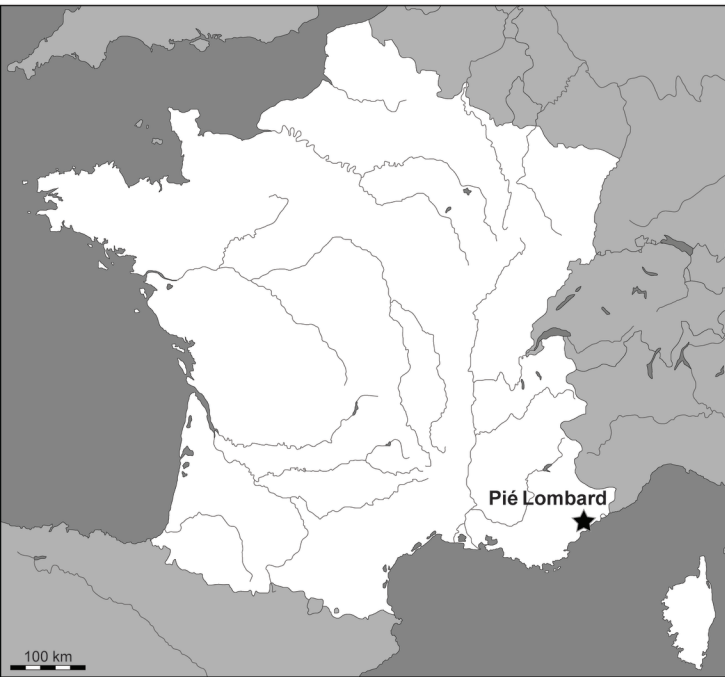
1647 **Table 6** (1 column). Distribution of cut-marks, burnt bones, digestion damage and tooth marks on
1648 rabbit bones by anatomical part in Mousterian complex from Pié Lombard. N = effective, NISP =
1649 number of identified specimens.

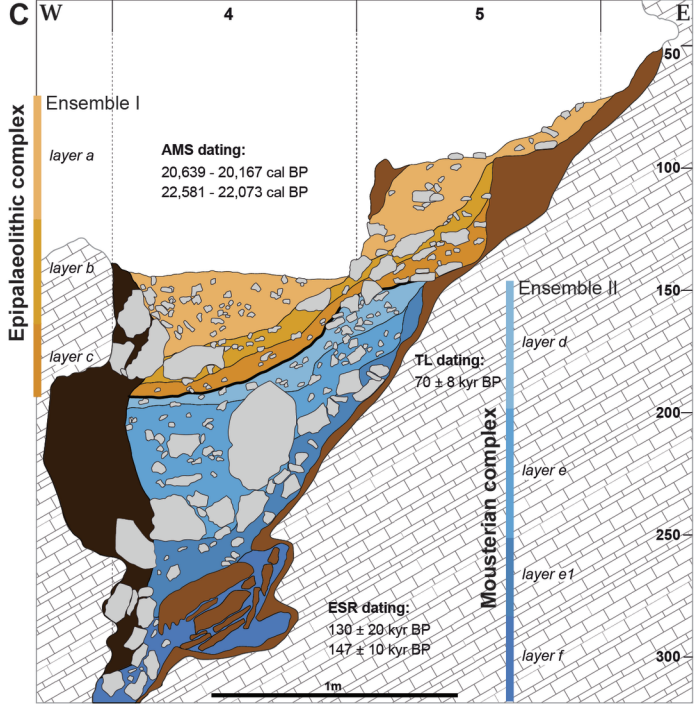
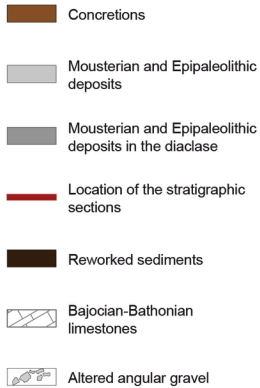
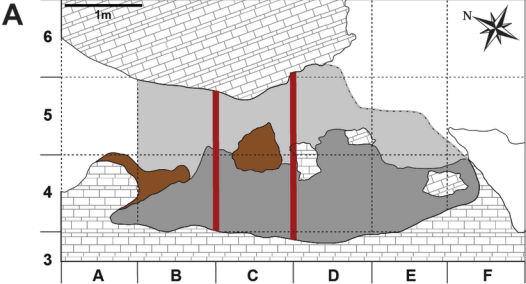
1650

1651 **Table 7** (1 column). Average total weight values, average meat weight and average calorie values for
1652 meat weight for several faunal species present during the Paleolithic of southwestern Europe (from
1653 Brugal, 2005 and Cole, 2017).








1654

1655 **Table 8** (2 columns). Caloric intake of rabbits compared to large herbivores from different Paleolithic
1656 deposits in Western Europe. MNI fauna for Terra Amata (from Valensi and El Guennouni, 2004),
1657 Bolomor cave (from Blasco and Fernández Peris, 2012), Lazaret cave (from Lumley et al., 2004),
1658 Arbreda cave (from Lloveras et al. 2016), La Peña de Estebanvela (from Yravedra et al. 2018), Molí
1659 del Salt (from Rufà et al., 2017). Raw data available in Table 7.

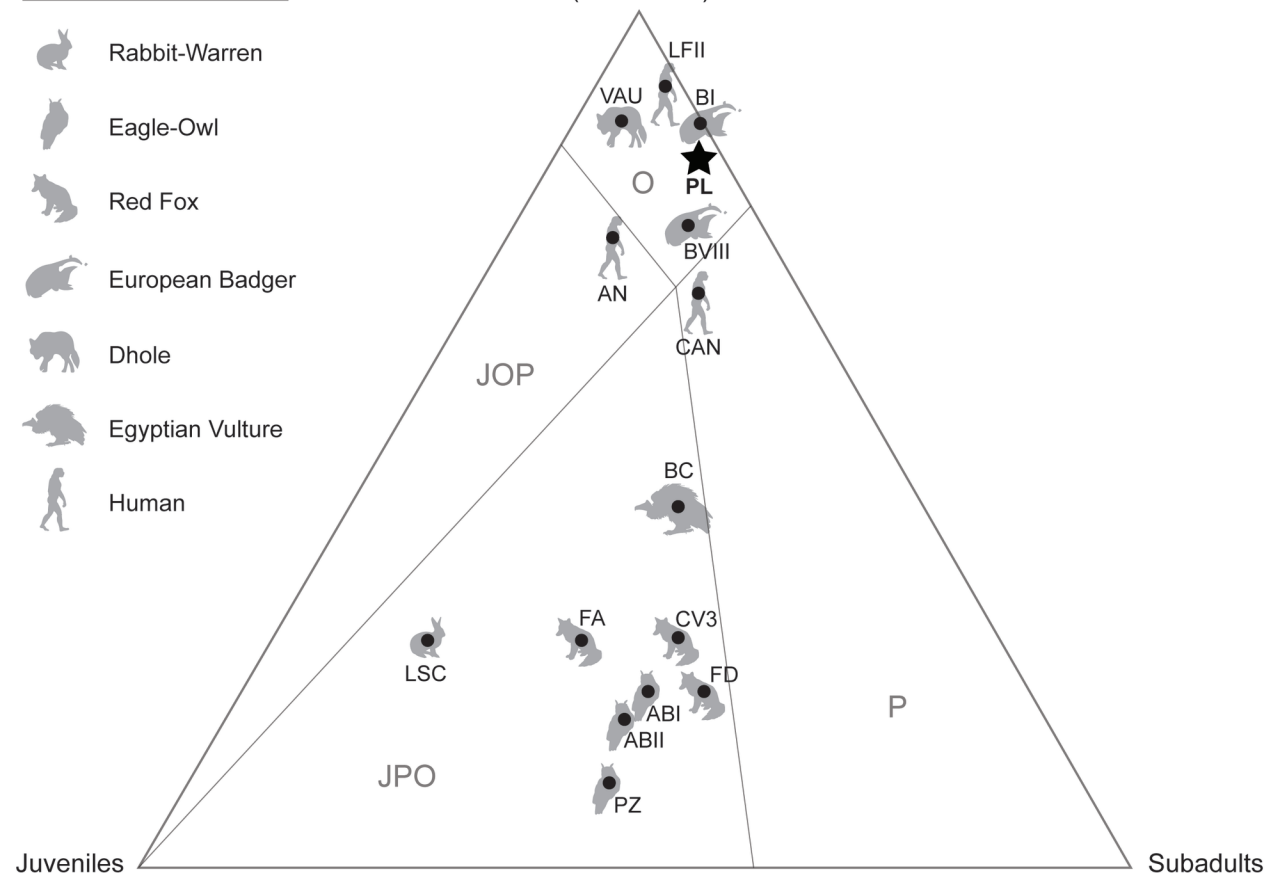




Accumulator agents :

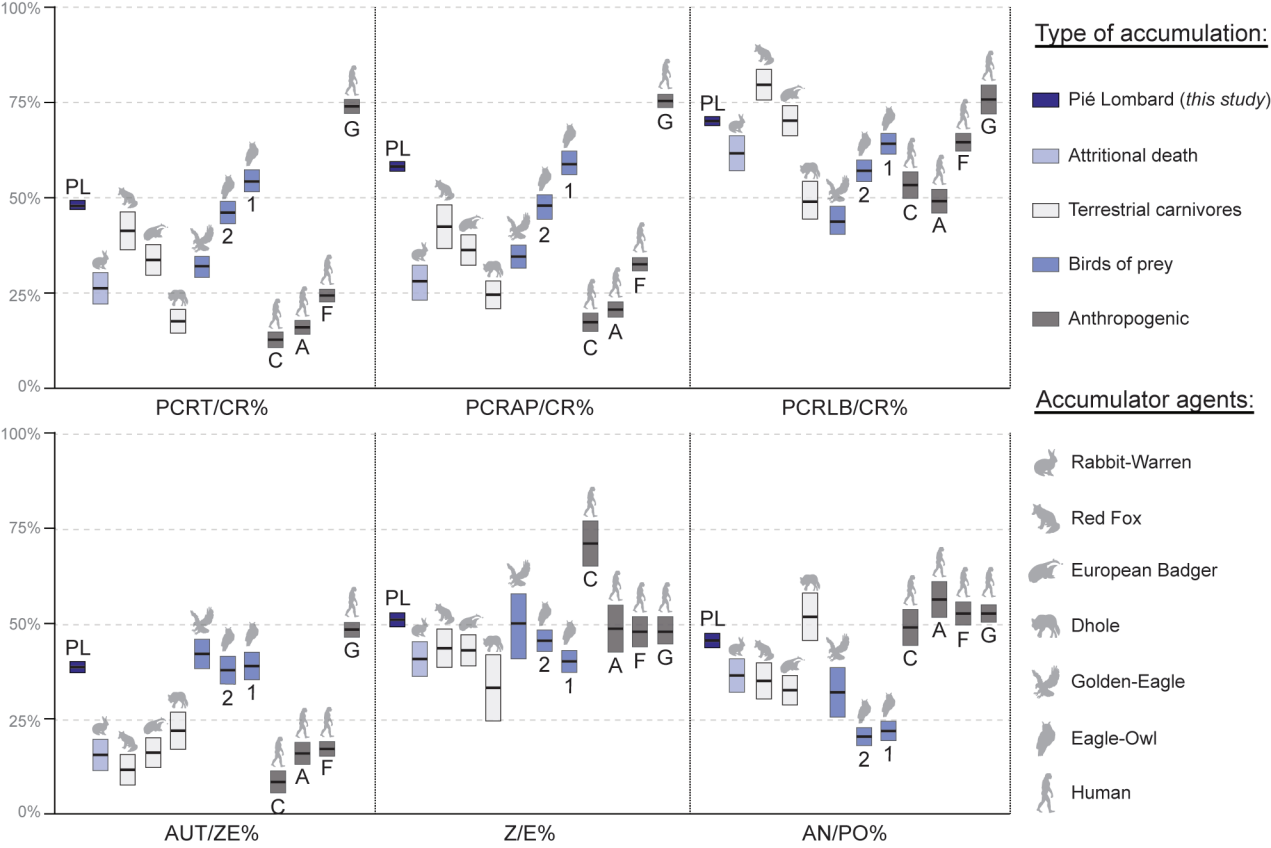
-  Rabbit-Warren
-  Eagle-Owl
-  Red Fox
-  European Badger
-  Dhole
-  Egyptian Vulture
-  Human

Adults
(>8 months)



Juveniles
(<3 months)

Subadults
(3-8 months)





2 cm

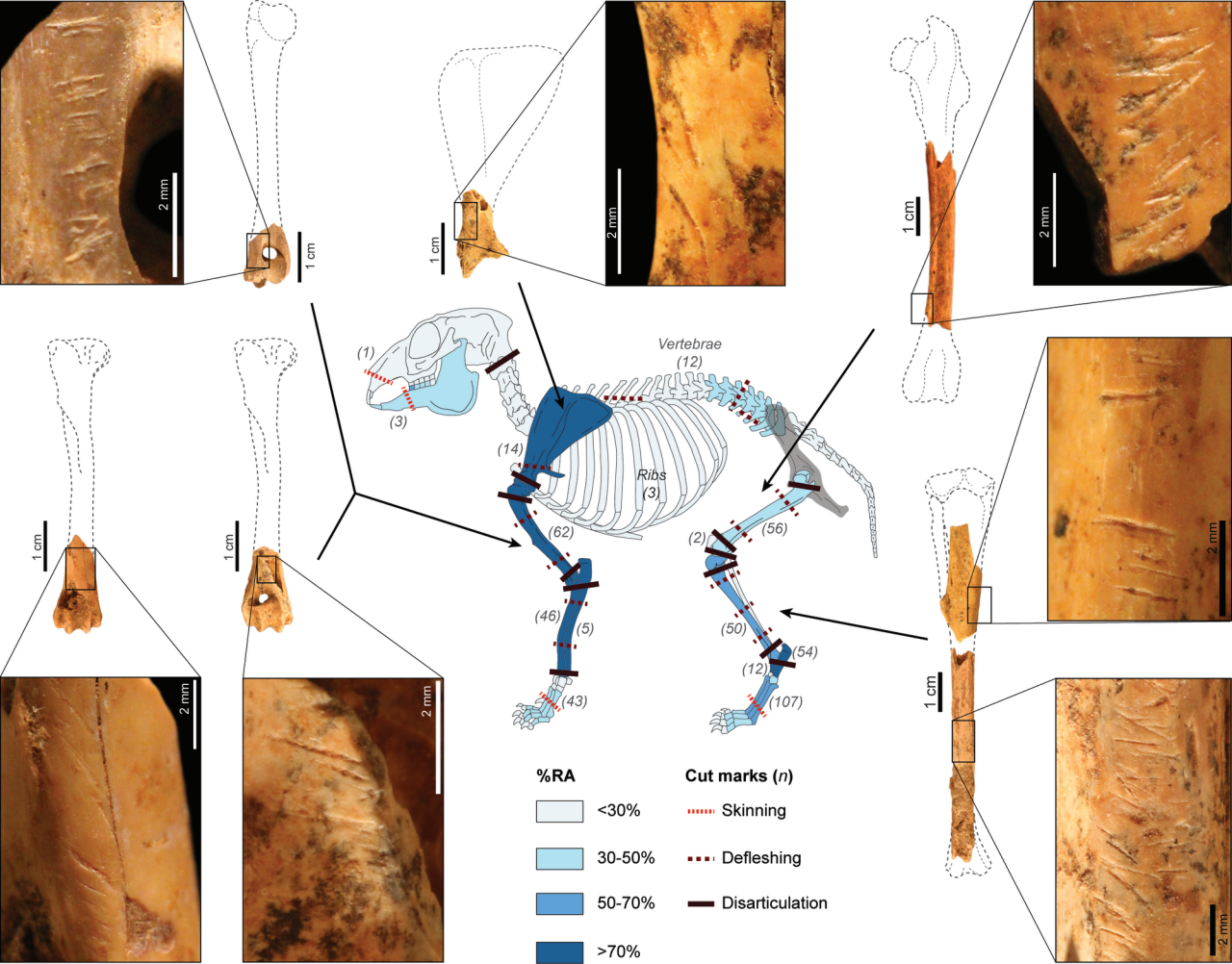


Table 1 (2 columns). The Pié Lombard Mousterian faunal assemblage. MNI: Minimum number of individuals.

Species	MNI	Species	MNI
CARNIVORA		INSECTIVORA	
<i>Felis silvestris</i>	2	<i>Talpa europaea</i>	2
<i>Lynx</i> sp.	2	<i>Crocidura</i> sp.	3
<i>Panthera pardus</i>	2	AMPHIBIA	
<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	1	<i>Bufo bufo</i>	x
<i>Canis lupus</i>	2	REPTILIA	
<i>Cuon</i> sp.	1	<i>Lacerta viridis</i>	x
<i>Ursus arctos</i>	4	<i>Anguis fragilis</i>	x
PROBOSCIDEA		ANSERIFORMES	
<i>Elephas</i> sp.	(1)*	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	3
ARTIODACTYLA		<i>Mergus merganser</i>	X
<i>Bos primigenius</i>	1	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	X
<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	15	ACCIPITRIFORMES	
<i>Sus scrofa</i>	1	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	1
<i>Capra ibex</i>	23	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	x
<i>Dama dama</i>	1	COLUMBIFORMES	
<i>Rupicapra rupicapra</i>	3	<i>Columba livia</i>	23
<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	2	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	1
PERISSODACTYLA		GALLIFORMES	
<i>Equus caballus</i>	2	<i>Alectoris graeca</i>	7
LAGOMORPHA		<i>Perdix perdix</i>	5
<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i> (this study)	225	<i>Lagopus</i> sp.	1
RODENTIA		PASSERIFORMES	
<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>	22	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	1
<i>Marmota marmota</i>	1	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>	48
<i>Castor fiber</i>	3	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	15
<i>Eliomys quercinus</i>	10	<i>Corvus corax</i>	5
<i>Glis glis</i>	1	<i>Corvus corone</i>	2
<i>Arvicola amphibius</i>	4	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	1
<i>Microtus arvalis</i>	2	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	5
<i>Chionomys nivalis</i>	5	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	1
<i>Myodes glareolus</i>	2	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	2
<i>Microtus duodecimcostatus</i>	5	<i>Anthus cf. campestris</i>	5
CHIROPTERA		<i>Turdus merula</i>	1
<i>Rhinolophus ferrumequinum</i>	1	<i>Turdus cf. viscivorus</i>	1
<i>Rhinolophus euryale</i>	1	STRIGIFORMES	
<i>Miniopterus schreibersi</i>	1	<i>Athene noctua</i>	x
<i>Myotis myotis</i>	1	<i>Aegolius funereus</i>	x
<i>Myotis bechsteini</i>	1		

* one small fragment of tusk

Table 2 (1 column). Rabbit skeletal elements identified in the Mousterian complex from Pié Lombard. NISP = number of identified skeletal parts, MNE = minimum number of elements, RA = relative abundance.

	NISP	%NISP	MNE	%RA
Cranium	341	2.1	109	24.2
Mandible	269	1.7	146	32.4
Incisor	259	1.6	259	19.2
Upper molar	531	3.3	531	19.7
Lower molar	957	6.0	957	42.5
Scapula	434	2.7	354	78.7
Humerus	586	3.6	429	95.3
Radius	619	3.8	371	82.4
Ulna	433	2.7	316	70.2
Metacarpals	1,000	6.2	719	39.9
Carpals	120	0.7	120	6.7
Femur	438	2.7	186	41.3
Patella	70	0.4	70	15.6
Tibia	727	4.5	277	61.6
Metatarsals	1,763	11.0	1,021	56.7
Calcaneus	462	2.9	425	94.4
Talus	417	2.6	387	86.0
Cuboid	216	1.3	216	48.0
Cuneiform	109	0.7	109	8.1
Navicular	259	1.6	257	57.1
Proximal phalanx	2,123	13.2	1,886	46.6
Mesial phalanx	1,326	8.2	1,306	36.3
Distal phalanx	1,114	6.9	1,108	27.4
Vertebrae	1,057	6.6	675	7.5
Rib	420	2.6	314	5.9
Sternebrae	8	0.0	8	0.7
Sesamoids	9	0.1	9	-
Undetermined frag.	17	0.1	-	-
Total	16,084		12,568	

Table 3 (1 column). Proportions of different parts of the skeleton in the Mousterian complex from Pié Lombard, along with 95% confidence intervals. For the definition of the indices see the section concerning the "Anatomical representation of rabbits".

Index	
PCRT/CR%	48.1 ± 0.8
PCRAP/CR%	57.9 ± 0.9
PCRLB/CR%	70.1 ± 0.8
AUT/ZE%	38.7 ± 0.9
AN/PO%	45.8 ± 1.4
Z/E%	51.1 ± 2.5

Table 4 (2 column). Numbers and percentages of rabbit skeletal elements from the Pié Lombard Mousterian complex included in each breakage category. Cranium as complete (C), incisive bone (IB), incisive bone + maxilla (IBM), maxilla (M), zygomatic arch (ZA) and neurocranium (NC). Mandibles as complete (C), incisive part (IP), mandible body + incisive part (MBI), mandible body (MB), mandible body + branch (MBB) and condylar process (CP). Scapula as complete (C), glenoid cavity (GC), glenoid cavity + neck (GCN), glenoid cavity + neck + fossa (GCNF), neck + fossa (NF) and fossa (F). Long bones (humerus, radius, ulna, femur, tibia), metacarpal and metatarsal bones were classified as complete (C), proximal epiphysis (PE), proximal epiphysis + shaft (PES), shaft (S), shaft + distal epiphysis (SDE) and distal epiphysis (DE). Vertebrae as complete (C), vertebral body (VB), vertebral epiphysis (VE) and spinous process (SP). Phalanges as complete (C), proximal fragment, (P), distal fragment (D) and fragment (F). Patella, carpals, tarsals (calcaneus, talus, cuboid, cuneiform, navicular), ribs and teeth as complete (C) and fragment (F).

Breakage category												
Cranium	<i>n</i>	%	Mandible	<i>n</i>	%	Scapula	<i>n</i>	%	Humerus	<i>n</i>	%	
C	0	0.0	C	0	0.0	C	1	0.2	C	2	0.3	
IB	31	9.1	IP	46	17.1	GC	89	20.5	PE	40	6.8	
IBM	0	0.0	MBI	87	32.3	GCN	189	43.5	PES	28	4.8	
M	150	44.0	MB	79	29.4	GCNF	72	16.6	S	80	13.7	
ZA	48	14.1	MBB	38	14.1	NF	53	12.2	SDE	298	50.9	
NC	112	32.8	PC	19	7.1	F	30	6.9	DE	138	23.5	
Radius	<i>n</i>	%	Ulna	<i>n</i>	%	Metacarpals	<i>n</i>	%	Femur	<i>n</i>	%	
C	2	0.3	C	0	0.0	C	378	37.8	C	0	0.0	
PE	33	5.3	PE	26	6.0	PE	8	0.8	PE	144	32.9	
PES	337	54.4	PES	91	21.0	PES	297	29.7	PES	43	9.8	
S	148	23.9	S	266	61.4	S	13	1.3	S	111	25.3	
SDE	82	13.2	SDE	18	4.2	SDE	248	24.8	SDE	9	2.1	
DE	17	2.7	DE	32	7.4	DE	56	5.6	DE	131	29.9	
Tibia	<i>n</i>	%	Metatarsals	<i>n</i>	%	Vertebrae	<i>n</i>	%	Ribs	<i>n</i>	%	
C	1	0.1	C	190	10.8	C	134	12.7	C	10	2.4	
PE	40	5.5	PE	21	1.2	VB	696	65.8	F	410	97.6	
PES	47	6.5	PES	733	41.6	VE	83	7.9				
S	362	49.8	S	74	4.2	SP	144	13.6				
SDE	151	20.8	SDE	541	30.7							
DE	126	17.3	DE	204	11.6							
Patella	<i>n</i>	%	Prox. Phal.	<i>n</i>	%	Mes. Phal.	<i>n</i>	%	Dist. Phal.	<i>n</i>	%	
C	68	97.1	C	1495	70.4	C	1200	90.5	C	1101	98.8	
F	2	2.9	P	391	18.4	P	106	8.0	F	13	1.2	
			D	237	11.2	D	20	1.5				
Carpals	<i>n</i>	%	Calcaneus	<i>n</i>	%	Talus	<i>n</i>	%				
C	117	97.5	C	267	57.8	C	295	70.7				
F	3	2.5	F	195	42.2	F	122	29.3				
Cuboid	<i>n</i>	%	Cuneiform	<i>n</i>	%	Navicular	<i>n</i>	%				
C	198	91.7	C	108	99.1	C	217	83.8				
F	18	8.3	F	1	0.9	F	42	16.2				
			<i>In situ</i>				Isolated					
	Incisors		Upper molars		Lower molars		Incisors		Upper molars		Lower molars	
Teeth	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
C	49	62.8	170	85.0	542	93.1	143	79.0	308	93.1	352	93.9
F	29	37.2	30	15.0	40	6.9	38	21.0	23	6.9	23	6.1

Table 5 (2 column). Fracture angle and fracture outline frequencies for rabbit long bones from the Pié Lombard Mousterian complex. N = effective, NISP = number of identified specimens.

	Ancient break				Recent break	Total of long bone break	Total of long bones	NISP
	Fracture angles		Fracture outline					
	Oblique (green)	Right (dry)	V-shaped (green)	Transverse (dry)				
<i>N</i>	656	165	679	142	149	970	2803	16,084
% of breaks	67.6%	17.0%	70.0%	14.6%	15.4%	100%	-	-
%NISP	4.1%	1.0%	4.2%	0.9%	0.9%	34.6%	17.4%	100%

Table 6 (1 column). Distribution of cut-marks, burnt bones, digestion damage and tooth marks on rabbit bones by anatomical part in Mousterian complex from Pié Lombard. N = effective, NISP = number of identified specimens.

	<i>Cut marks</i>		<i>Burnt bones</i>		Digestion damage		Pits / Punctures	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Cranium	1	0.2	35	2.4	3	0.7	-	-
<i>Incisive bone</i>	1	0.2	6	0.4	-	-	-	-
<i>Petrous part</i>	-	-	3	0.2	1	0.2	-	-
<i>Maxillary</i>	-	-	19	1.3	-	-	-	-
<i>Neurocranium</i>	-	-	7	0.5	2	0.5	-	-
Mandible	3	0.6	21	1.4	3	0.7	2	6.1
Incisor	-	-	13	0.9	3	0.7	-	-
Upper molar	-	-	11	0.8	14	3.3	-	-
Lower molar	-	-	14	1.0	5	1.2	-	-
Scapula	14	2.9	56	3.8	23	5.4	8	24.2
Humerus	62	12.9	90	6.1	13	3.1	-	-
Radius	46	9.6	69	4.7	25	5.9	2	6.1
Ulna	5	1.0	47	3.2	17	4.0	1	3.0
Metacarpals	43	8.9	90	6.1	26	6.1	-	-
<i>Metacarpal II</i>	10	2.1	20	1.4	6	1.4	-	-
<i>Metacarpal III</i>	3	0.6	14	1.0	6	1.4	-	-
<i>Metacarpal IV</i>	7	1.5	14	1.0	2	0.5	-	-
<i>Metacarpal V</i>	16	3.3	9	0.6	6	1.4	-	-
<i>Metacarpal NS</i>	7	1.5	33	2.3	6	1.4	-	-
Carpals	-	-	3	0.2	1	0.2	-	-
Femur	56	11.6	65	4.4	24	5.7	6	18.2
Patella	2	0.4	8	0.5	7	1.7	-	-
Tibia	50	10.4	102	7.0	7	1.7	1	3.0
Metatarsals	107	22.2	149	10.2	25	5.9	3	9.1
<i>Metatarsal II</i>	26	5.4	27	1.8	4	0.9	1	3.0
<i>Metatarsal III</i>	10	2.1	31	2.1	1	0.2	-	-
<i>Metatarsal IV</i>	10	2.1	19	1.3	11	2.6	-	-
<i>Metatarsal V</i>	31	6.4	24	1.6	4	0.9	-	-
<i>Metatarsal NS</i>	30	6.2	48	3.3	5	1.2	2	6.1
Calcaneus	54	11.2	44	3.0	22	5.2	4	12.1
Talus	12	2.5	54	3.7	38	9.0	-	-
Cuboid	1	0.2	23	1.6	4	0.9	1	3.0
Cuneiform	-	-	8	0.5	4	0.9	-	-
Navicular	1	0.2	18	1.2	6	1.4	1	3.0
Proximal phalanx	-	-	194	13.2	51	12.0	1	3.0
Mesial phalanx	-	-	108	7.4	32	7.5	1	3.0
Distal phalanx	-	-	90	6.1	53	12.5	-	-
Vertebrae	12	2.5	107	7.3	14	3.3	2	6.1
<i>Atlas</i>	2	0.4	7	0.5	-	-	-	-
<i>Axis</i>	1	0.2	5	0.3	1	0.2	-	-
<i>Cervical vertebrae</i>	-	-	25	1.7	5	1.2	-	-
<i>Thoracic vertebrae</i>	4	0.8	25	1.7	1	0.2	1	3.0
<i>Lombar vertebrae</i>	5	1.0	37	2.5	5	1.2	1	3.0
<i>Sacrum</i>	-	-	3	0.2	-	-	-	-
<i>Caudal vertebrae</i>	-	-	4	0.3	-	-	-	-
<i>Vertebrae nd</i>	-	-	1	0.1	2	0.5	-	-
Rib	8	1.7	30	2.0	1	0.2	-	-
Sternebrae	-	-	1	0.1	-	-	-	-
Sesamoids	-	-	1	0.1	-	-	-	-
Undetermined frag.	4	0.8	14	1.0	3	0.4	-	-
Total	481	100	1,466	100	424	100	33	100
%NISP	3.0	-	9.1	-	2.6	-	0.2	-

Table 7 (1 column). Average total weight values, average meat weight and average calorie values for meat weight for several faunal species present during the Paleolithic of southwestern Europe (from Brugal, 2005 and Cole, 2017).

	Average total weight (kg)	Average meat weight (kg)	Kilocalorie value / Kg (meat)	Kilocalorie value / individual (meat)
<i>Bos primigenius</i>	687.5	412.5	2.04	841.50
<i>Capra ibex</i>	75.0	45.0	1.09	49.05
<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	24.5	14.7	1.00	14.70
<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	165.0	99.0	1.24	122.76
<i>Dama dama</i>	71.3	42.8	1.24	53.01
<i>Equus caballus</i>	287.5	172.5	1.15	198.38
<i>Equus hydruntinus</i>	225.0	135.0	1.15	155.25
<i>Hemitragus bonali</i>	75.0	45.0	1.09	49.05
<i>Megaloceros giganteus</i>	480.0	288.0	1.24	357.12
<i>Rupicapra rupicapra</i>	41.3	24.8	1.05	25.99
<i>Sus scrofa</i>	102.5	61.5	4.00	246.00
<i>O. cuniculus</i>	1.8	1.5	1.07	1.61

Table 8 (2 columns). Caloric intake of rabbits compared to large herbivores from different Paleolithic deposits in Western Europe. MNI fauna for Terra Amata (from Valensi and El Guennouni, 2004), Bolomor cave (from Blasco and Fernández Peris, 2012), Lazaret cave (from Lumley et al., 2004), Arbrede cave (from Lloveras et al. 2016), La Peña de Estebanvela (from Yravedra et al. 2018), Molí del Salt (from Rufà et al., 2017). Raw data available in Table 7.

Period	Site (layer)	Date	Taxa (MNI)	Average meat weight (kg)	Kilocalorie value (meat)	Caloric intake of rabbits compared to large herbivores
Lower Paleolithic	Terra Amata (layer C1b)	MIS 11	Rabbit (19)	29	30	0.38%
			Total herbivores (33)	3599	7942	
Middle Paleolithic	Bolomor cave (layer XVIIc)	MIS 9	Rabbit (12)	18	19	0.94%
			Total herbivores (10)	1402	2039	
	Bolomor cave (layer XII)	MIS 7	Rabbit (10)	15	16	0.22%
			Total herbivores (30)	5043	7420	
	Lazaret cave (UA25)	MIS 6	Rabbit (25)	38	40	0.70%
			Total herbivores (34)	3824	5683	
	Bolomor cave (layer XI)	MIS 6	Rabbit (7)	10	11	0.55%
			Total herbivores (10)	1402	2039	
	Bolomor cave (layer IV)	MIS 5e	Rabbit (20)	30	32	0.44%
			Total herbivores (34)	4234	7324	
Les Canalettes (layer 4)	MIS 5a	Rabbit (56)	84	90	0.60%	
		Total herbivores (66)	10136	14881		
Pié Lombard (ensemble II)	MIS 5a	Rabbit (225)	338	361	7.23%	
		Total herbivores (48)	3486	4632		
Upper Paleolithic	Arbrede (layer G)	MIS 3	Rabbit (43)	65	69	1.64%
			Total herbivores (14)	2610	4145	
	Estebanvela (layer I)	MIS 2	Rabbit (210)	315	337	8.76%
			Total herbivores (32)	2904	3511	
	Molí del Salt (layer A)	MIS 2	Rabbit (455)	683	730	23.93%
			Total herbivores (16)	1238	2321	