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► **To cite this version:**

Amélie Vialet, Anne-Marie Moigne, Marie-Helene Moncel. Saint-Prest (northern France): further evidence of human presence in north-western Europe around 1 Ma?. ESHE, 2022, Tübingen, Germany. hal-03820420

HAL Id: hal-03820420

<https://hal.science/hal-03820420>

Submitted on 19 Oct 2022

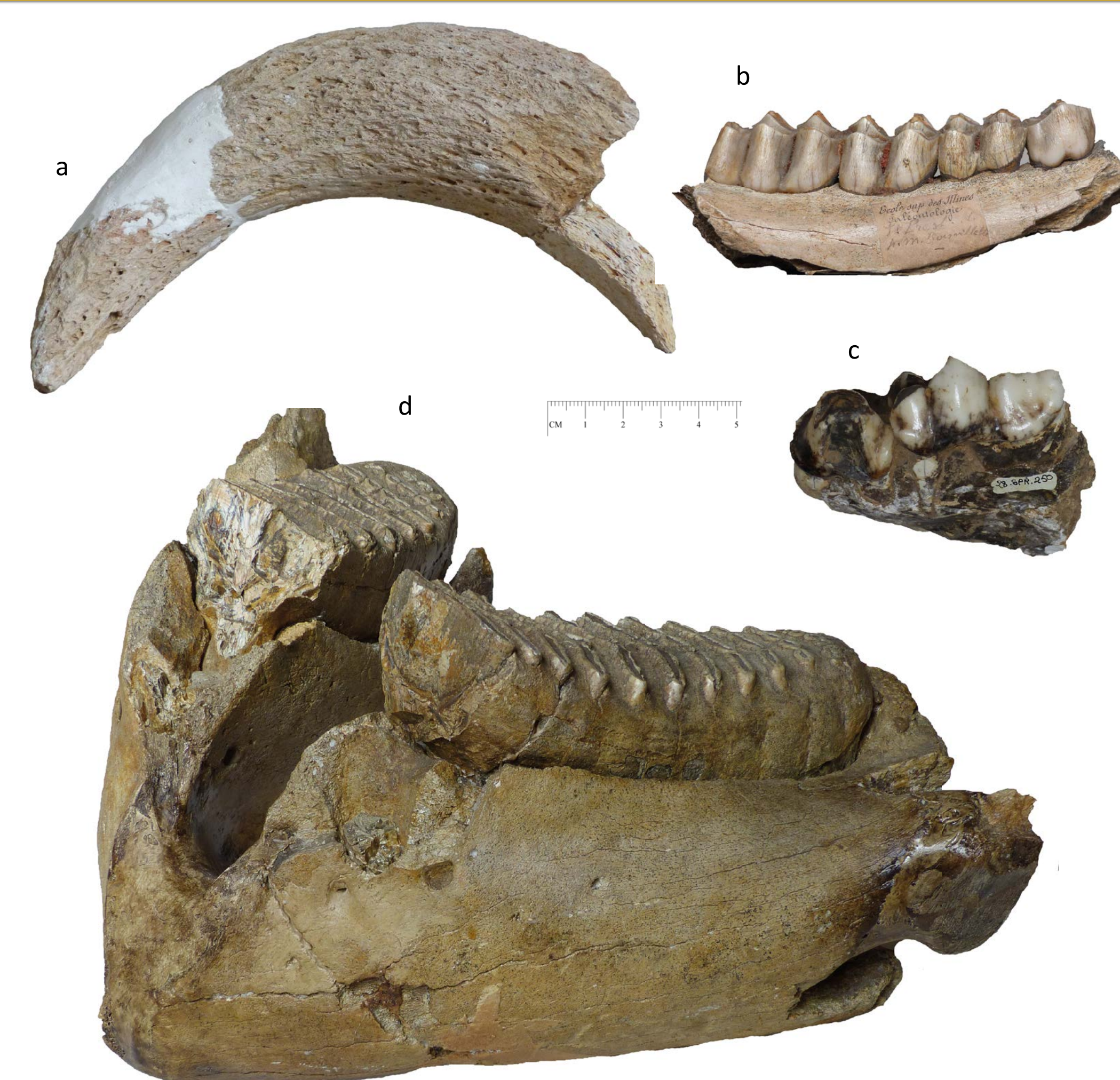
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Saint-Prest (northern France): further evidence of human presence in north-western Europe around 1 Ma?

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Fossils from the Saint-Prest site: *Bison shoetensacki* bony ankle (a), mandible of *Alces carnutorum* (b), left maxillary bone of *Pachycrocuta brevirostris* (c), mandible of the type specimen of *M. m. depereti* (d), longueur : 31 cm.

Evidences of human presence around the Mediterranean Sea and location of the Saint-Prest site, from Muttoni et al. QSR 2018

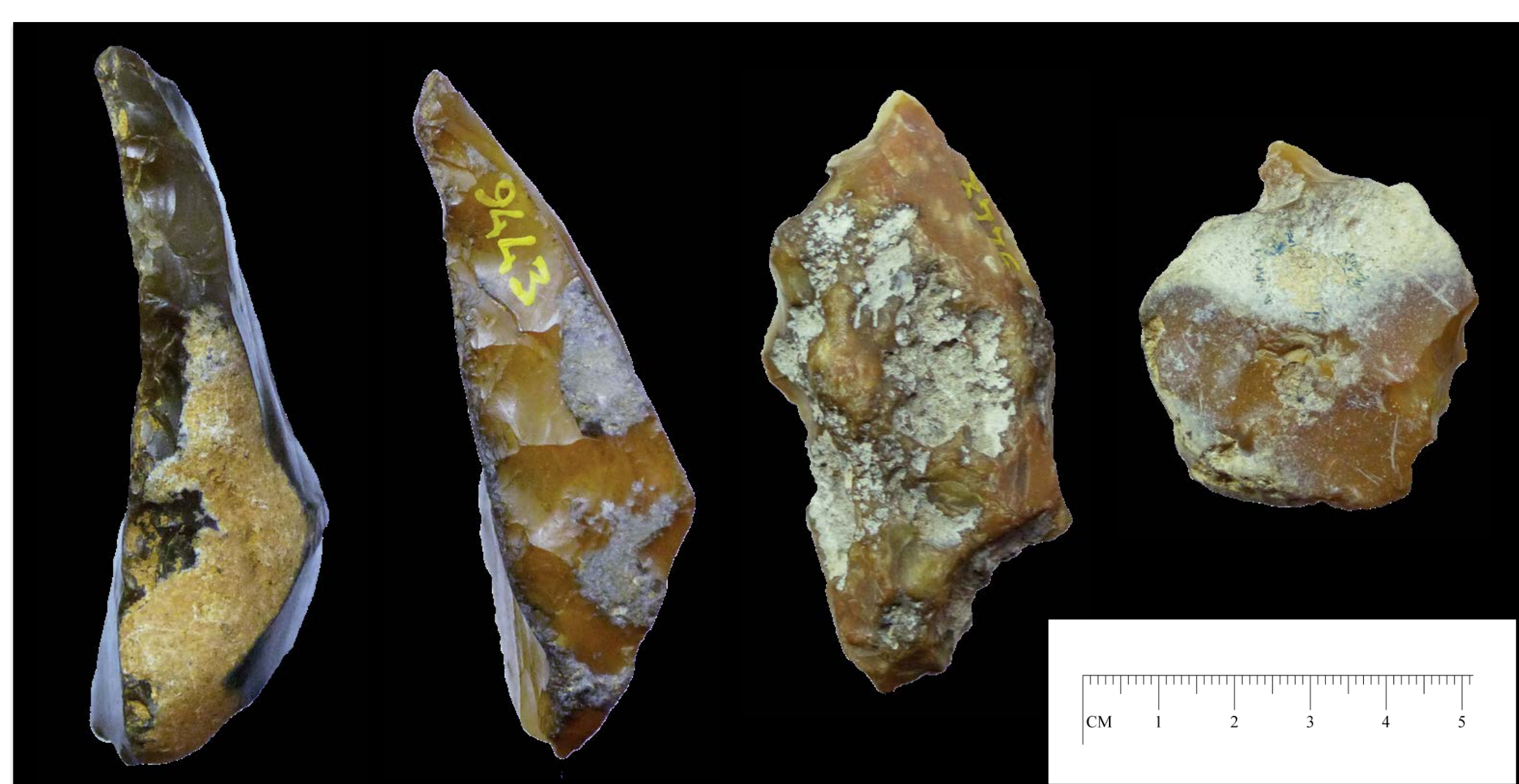
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In the middle of the 19th century, numerous bones of large mammals (*Mammuthus meridionalis*, *Hippopotamus antiquus*, *Bison schoetensacki*, *Pachycrocuta brevirostris*...) were discovered at Saint-Prest, in a quarry in the Eure valley, north-east of Chartres. For palaeontologists, this site remains a reference as several types have been described there such as *Cervalces carnutorum* and *Trogontherium cuvieri boisvilletti* (Laugel 1862) or *Mammuthus meridionalis depereti* (Coppens and Beden 1982). More recently, a geological and taxonomic revision has been carried out confirming the attribution of the faunal assemblage to the epi-Villafranchian, between 800 ka and 1.2 Ma [1].

However, one question remains unanswered: **is there a human presence on the site?** As no human remains have been found, they can only be attested by indirect evidences: artefacts and/or cut-marks on animal bones. The latter were described as early as 1863 by E. Desnoyers [2], giving rise to lively debates that led to mistrust of the site and ultimately to its being forgotten.



Above: cut marks identified on a scapula of Mammoth (left) and on a femoral head of Bison (right)
Below: 3 flakes and 1 fragment of flint corresponding to the lithic tools from the Saint-Prest site described by the Abbey Bourgeois [4] – coll. Musée d'Archéologie Nationale, Saint-Germain-en-Laye



Revision of the faunal and lithic material

As part of a multi-disciplinary research program, we sought to locate the collections dispersed in various public and private institutions and conducted an archaeozoological analysis of the material identified [3]. Concerning the lithic material, only the **4 flint flakes published by the Abbey Bourgeois** [4] and now preserved in the *Musée d'archéologie nationale*, could be discussed to assess human passages. Concerning the fauna, out of about 600 fossils examined, **5 to 10 traces could be considered as anthropic cut-marks**. The evidence is therefore scarce to attest a hominin presence in Saint-Prest around 1 Ma. However, in the pene-contemporaneous sites, particularly around the Mediterranean basin and in the Yunxian site in China, traces of cut-marks are often rare as well.

Thus, the Saint-Prest site, along with those of Happisburgh 3 and Pakefield in UK, could testify the earliest human occupations in Western Europe in their northernmost extension.

References

[1] Guérin et al. 2003, Géobios, p.55-82 ; [2] Desnoyers, 1863, Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Sciences, p.1073-1083 ; [3] Vialet et al. 2021, Mérgoïl éditions, p.97-113 ; [4] Bourgeois 1867, Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Sciences, p.47-48