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Study of decidual teeth discovered in the 19th century in Saint-Acheul (Somme, France)

Étude de dents déciduales découvertes au XIX^e siècle à Saint-Acheul

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- 1 Five isolated human decidual teeth have been identified in the collections of the Museum of Toulouse. An associated label mentioned the site of Saint-Acheul, the names of Édouard Lartet (1801-1871) and Louis Lartet (1840-1899) and the date of 1869. Moreover, the teeth were stored with a biface, an equid tooth, several pebbles and two fossil sea urchins. No more information is known about the context of their discovery. The series includes an upper right central incisor (di1), an upper right second molar (dm2), a lower right central incisor (di1), a lower right first molar (dm1) and a lower right second molar (dm2). They may correspond to a single immature individual. The objective of this study is to determine the biological characteristics of these teeth, their taxonomic attribution and the taphonomic processes that would have affected them. A morphological and metric analysis was performed, integrating 160 teeth belonging to 93 fossil individuals from the Middle (n=62) and Late Pleistocene (n=31). We estimated an age at death for this dental series (di1, dm2, dm1, dm2) between 1.23 and 1.41 years (Liversidge and Molleson, 2004). However, due to its root degradation, it was not possible to determine the developmental stage of di1. Morphometric data of the decidual teeth from Saint-Acheul revealed many similarities with Neanderthals (rhomboidal crown shape of dm2 with prominent hypocone) but also with Upper Paleolithic humans considered in this study (absence of shoveling and lingual tubercles of the incisors). Due to the overlapping of dental variability in these prehistoric populations, it was not possible to conclude. Elements on the context of discovery of these teeth would be useful to go further. Note that the enamel alteration observed on all the teeth could be the result of a partial digestion process, which gives information on their taphonomic history.

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