
Dynamics of pre-Hispanic human settlements in the northern Mesoamerican fringe: contribution of the study of variation based on tooth internal structure

Dynamiques de peuplements humains préhispaniques dans la frange septentrionale Mésoaméricaine : apport de l'étude des variations de la structure interne des dents

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**Édition électronique**

URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/bmsap/8742>

DOI : [10.4000/bmsap.8742](https://doi.org/10.4000/bmsap.8742)

ISSN : 1777-5469

Éditeur

Société d'Anthropologie de Paris

Référence électronique

Clara Delluc, Sélim Natahi, Mona Le Luyer, Clément Zanolli, Véronique Darras, Brigitte Faugère, Grégory Pereira et Priscilla Bayle, « Dynamics of pre-Hispanic human settlements in the northern Mesoamerican fringe: contribution of the study of variation based on tooth internal structure », *Bulletins et mémoires de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris* [En ligne], 34(S) | 2022, mis en ligne le 30 décembre 2021, consulté le 26 décembre 2023. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/bmsap/8742> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/bmsap.8742>

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 26 décembre 2023.



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- 1 The western Mesoamerica was the place of several human displacements and cultural exchanges. During the Middle Postclassic Period (1200-1450 AD), in the Zacapu basin (located in the NW of the actual state of Michoacán), large urban centers developed, resulting in an increase of the human population. Some hypotheses link this demographic growth to the arrival and the settlement of a new population and likely contributed to the development of these sites. In order to test whether a new population settled in the Zacapu region during the Middle Postclassic Period, we used a corpus of 39 upper and 25 lower second molars from 54 individuals. Analyzing the enamel-dentin junction (EDJ) shape and enamel thickness, we have assessed the phenotypic differences between 20 individuals from one urban center: Malpaís Prieto and a sample of autochthonous populations originating from the Zacapu basin and its surroundings. The results show that the shape of the EDJ varies between the groups considered and that individuals from Malpaís Prieto are noticeable for their particular morphology. Thicker enamel is found in the teeth of the autochthonous groups while the individuals of Malpaís Prieto display on average thinner enamel (even if quite variable between individuals). In this study, enamel thickness better distinguishes between human groups than EDJ shape. These differences could be of functional or genetic

origin, and it would be interesting in the future to work on a larger corpus of individuals to learn more about the true nature of these variations. Finally, dental evidences support the hypothesis of an arrival of these autochthonous groups in the Zacapu region.

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