

The variability of the utilisation of mammoth remains from assemblages at three Epigravettian sites in the northern Ukraine

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Efficient mammoth hunting by Palaeolithic humans as well as the collection of mammoth bones are issues discussed in the current literature. During the excavation of three Epigravettian sites (located close together and dated to 14-15,000 BP) in the Middle Dniepr basin, the existence of both methods of procuring mammoth remains was confirmed and new data concerning various methods of the utilization of these bones was obtained. At the Semenivka 1 kill-site a pile of 35 selected and carefully stacked bones of mammoth (tusks, pelves, shoulder blades and long bones), from a minimum of four individuals, was revealed close to the remains of a hunted and butchered brown bear. No traces of fire were discovered, and only 4 lithics (the tip of a backed point with a projectile impact fracture, a burin, a blade and a flake) were present among these remains.

The neighbouring site of Semenivka 2 functioned as a transient seasonal camp for a larger group of Epigravettian hunters. Only the remains of mammoth (a total of 79 bones) were

found, along with 200 lithic tools (backed microliths with numerous projectile impact fractures and burins) and fragments of charred bones. Fragments of ribs (47) dominate among the 54 identifiable skeletal elements of mammoth, which were undoubtedly used as food and fuel. Fragments of skulls were not found. The same situation was observed at the Semenivka 3 site (a long-term seasonal hunting camp) where a richer cultural layer with lithics, marine shells, charred bones and faunal remains (mainly mammoth and isolated bones of other species) was discovered. The artefact assemblage (including backed microliths with projectile impact fractures, fragments of slotted ivory points and burins) reflects a specialization at this site of tools for hunting. Ribs dominate the assemblage of more than 200 mammoth bones; parts of the skull are, once again, absent. The ribs were also used in some light dwelling constructions as wedges to fix wooden elements of the tents in the ground.