quently associated with a dense vegetation, during a forest period like the Eemian s.s., but also the beginning of the OIS 4. In addition, the environmental patterns of some assemblages show that they are not always linked to a temperate and large forest environment. In this case, dense or scarce vegetation could not have contributed to a small pebble exploitation, a specific subsistence behaviour (high mobility in a scarce vegetation and more contacts among human groups?) or a game processing.

– *lithic traditions?*

Why did they make such small flakes without material reasons? The question of a specific tradition has then to be raised, the small flakes being used alone (Neanderthals were able to use them),[17] associated together on wooden blanks or to work wooden tools. We will be in this case in a different world, with another tool conception.

Traditions among Neanderthal groups and their ancestors seem to be everywhere proved in Europe, as in Africa for the first Modern Humans.[18] From 350 000 or 300 000 years old, lithic assemblages show more complex flaking methods.[19] The flake shape is moreover controlled, even if it could be easier to obtain the desired tool shape by retouch rather than by a direct production of a blank of appropriate shape in the cases of a poor quality raw material. Specific and long lasting processing systems appear in Europe, covering large areas, through time and environmental changes. They can give evidence of large technological traditions. Sometimes, within smaller areas, sites show specific behaviours which suggest that they could reflect local traditions related to geographical conditions or human choices.

Lithic assemblage studies, now, show that both technological traditions and activities have to be considered to explain the characteristics of the abandoned material at a site.[20] Consequently, it is necessary to try understanding their connection in order to describe the originality of a human settlement. Furthermore, the assemblage composition and variability are the result of complex interactions of behaviour, environment and the physical properties of the raw material used. The understanding of human occupation and the nature of the accompanying lithic assemblages are thus related to all the site data: type of location, faunal remains (part of the anthropogenic agents) and subsistence behaviour, raw material acquisition, technological behaviours, and types of tools. The manner in which the surroundings have been exploited has to be observed to know the reasons for settling. Plenty of evidences suggests that Neanderthals took the available animal resources in the nearby area and were able to organise specialised hunting of small or large herbivores (for example, La Borde, Mauran, Biache, Vaufrey or Salzgitter-Lebendstedt).[21] A repetitive hunting of ani-

[17] Villemeur 1994.

[18] McBrearty–Brooks 2000.

[19] Mellars 1996.; Shea 1997., 1998.; Gamble–Roebroeks 1999.

[20] Binford 1992.

[21] Grayson–Delpech 1994.; Geneste–Jaubert 1999.; Gaudzinski–Roebroeks 2000.