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PLEISTOCENE ART OF THE WORLD

Short articles



DATING THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT AND ESTABLISHING PLEISTOCENE FREQUENTATION IN CUEVA DE NERJA (MÁLAGA, SPAIN)

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In this paper we present a collection of prehistoric material associated with the rock art found in the Lower Galleries of Cueva de Nerja. Forty-two assemblages were documented in the Lower Galleries and parts of the Upper Galleries. The majority of these were carbonaceous remains, but skeletal remains, shells, and artefacts were also found.

A series of radiometric datings have been made for some of this material and the results merit further reflection. We have provided a brief summary of these results and outlined several different stages in the frequentation of the inner chambers of Cueva de Nerja during the Upper Palaeolithic.

The most recent phase dates to 14320 ± 90 BP and corresponds to the height of the Magdalenian technocomplex in the Iberian Mediterranean. No evidence has so far been found in the settlement area of Cueva de Nerja that is directly associated with this chronology. One of the conclusions in this regard lies in the determination of the frequentation of the cave at that time and hence of the southern peninsular region. At the same time, the location of the sample in question (assemblage no. 40) is striking, as it is in a location that is difficult to reach, half-way between the chambers of the Lower Galleries and the Upper Galleries, and it is only accessible via these galleries. Furthermore, an equid protome was also found in the vicinity of motif Ne.230, in a position vertical to the floor. This indicates that there was some frequentation of this part of the cave at the time and possible frequentation of the Upper Galleries during the Late Glacial Maximum. This would tie in with the production of rock art at Cueva de Nerja, specifically the pinnipeds (Ne.254-256) in the Salón de los Delfines in the Upper Galleries, which up until now have been placed in the Magdalenian.

The second phase appears to correspond to the Solutrean and in turn can be subdivided into two stages. Assemblage no. 41 had already been dated to 19900 ± 210 BP and from a global perspective can be placed in the middle Solutrean. The figure of the quadruped with which it has been associated (Ne.241) also has characteristics that correspond to the proposed date and horizon. In turn, assemblage no. 37, which has been associated with a painting of a red goat (panel Ne.220), and which had been mixed with moonmilk on the floor of the cave, has been dated to 20980 ± 100 BP, corresponding to the middle Solutrean or, if we take standard deviation into account, the lower Solutrean, which is a phase that was also recently detected in the Sala del Vestíbulo at Cueva de Nerja.

The third phase begins with assemblages nos. 30 and 35 and dates to the Gravettian. Assemblage no. 35, which was found in the northern part of the Sala del Cataclismo, was located in a natural concavity formed with moonmilk agglomerate and has been dated to 23800 ± 140 BP.



Assemblage no. 3 (*Pecten concretizado*) in the Galería del Fémur.

In contrast, assemblage no. 30, which has been dated to $24\,130 \pm 140$ BP, was dispersed, and was found on the floor of Los Órganos in the Lower Galleries. These dates correspond clearly with the development of the Gravettian in the whole of the Mediterranean Iberian Peninsula.

In the Sala del Vestíbulo of Cueva de Nerja, there is evidence of occupation during this time of a Gravettian techno-typology. Given the results for the material that has now been dated however, an earlier dating of some of the rock art in Los Órganos could be considered. Motif Ne.133/III, which involves the outline of a cervid in a vertical position, was made in a “trilinear convention” and was initially dated to the early stages of the Solutrean but could have an earlier chronology that would perhaps be more consistent with the latest radiometric datings. In any case, there was clearly frequentation of the deepest sections of Cueva de Nerja during the Gravettian period.

Finally, the earliest phase that ^{14}C AMS results can be dated back to is an Aurignacian stage, and assemblage no. 39 in the Fondo de Cataclismo has produced the staggering date of $35\,320 \pm 360$ BP. Due to its location in the recesses of the Lower Galleries, we would have liked to attribute it to the premature presence of anatomically modern humans in the cave, however the dating also coincides with the end of the Middle Palaeolithic in the southern peninsula, and in this case Neanderthals may have frequented the cave as far as these chambers. At present, this dating is one of the earliest known, as Aurignacian level 11 at the site of Bajondillo near Bahía de Málaga has been dated to 32-33 ka BP, and level 13, which is more problematic, has been dated to around 37 ka BP.

We must emphasize that we are aware that these dates are new and problematic, and we intend to continue dating all of the material found. We are also carrying out a review of all the pictorial groups in view of these new findings, which merit further reflection.





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