



Mesolithic human remains at Cueva de Nerja (Málaga, Spain): anthropological, isotopic and radiocarbon data

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Abstract

The Iberian Peninsula is one of the European regions with the highest number of documented Mesolithic burials so far. For more than a century, many research projects have been carried out by several national and international teams, that have located most of these burials in three different geographical areas: Valencia region, northern Spain and the Portuguese estuaries of the Rivers Muge and Sado. Only one inhumation from this period is known in the south of Spain. It was discovered in Nerja Cave (Málaga), an exceptional site with continuous occupations during different periods of prehistory. This burial of a woman, known as ‘Pepita’, is rarely cited in the academic world, probably because the first radiocarbon date was obtained with the conventional ¹⁴C method and the result would not be acceptable today. In recent years, the new AMS dates have shown that the Mesolithic chronology was correct. In consequence, a new series of analyses have studied anthropological, diet and mobility aspects of the female in detail. These have provided new information about the time in which Mesolithic communities began to practice a funerary model based on burials in graves, but also about her diet, mobility strategies and possible relationships with other groups. The chronological data show that this is one of the earliest Mesolithic burials in the Western Mediterranean and the diet was based on the consumption of terrestrial animal protein along with marine resources. This type of diet has been found in other contemporary individuals in the east of the Iberian Peninsula.

Keywords Mesolithic · Burial · Bioarchaeology · Diet · Mobility · Chronology

We refer to ‘formal burials’. In Spain and Portugal, there are a few examples of older Mesolithic with not scattered human remains found in archaeological layers.

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