

Neanderthal hunting dynamics in Mediterranean Iberian and Cantabrian area: the role of prey, processing strategies and environment

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Abstract

Neanderthal groups from the Iberian Peninsula were excellent hunters of medium and large sized prey, alongside a proven consume of small games like leporids, tortoises or birds. Therefore, they had a great knowledge of the surrounding landscape and the available resources (animal and plant biomass, lithic resources, sites positions, etc.) However, these groups still influenced by the environmental variations of stadial/interstadial episodes, or geographical zones conditions.

Among this changing framework, one of the main issues is to understand their hunting behaviour. For example, in some well-known site from the Mediterranean Iberian area as Abrigo de la Quebrada or El Salt a wide taxonomic spectrum of fauna composed the diet of these groups, with a clear preference for Spanish ibex. On the contrary, in the north of the Peninsula, sites like Cueva de Llonín, red deer were more consumed by humans. At what level were these differences due to hunting selection or were consequence of other factors like carnivore competition? Were they really conditioned by the environmental conditions? On the other hand, Neanderthals usually exploited all the resources from the hunted species (meat, grease, fur, bones) with different purposes (consumption, bone industry, clothes, or even fuel). However, it is not clear that they will be practice a homogeneous strategies on all sites: are there general patterns repeated in all the areas and sites? Are there differences between sites due to factors such as geographic location, chronology or the type of prey?

To answer the above questions, we combine archaeozoological, taphonomic and palaeoecological data from various sites from north to south-east of the Iberian Peninsula in order to determine different hunting and processing behaviour of the Neanderthal groups, and know to what extent environmental conditions have played a fundamental role in their behaviour.