
Early farming and pastoralism in Southern Pyrenees: new data

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Résumé

Since the last fifteen years, the identification of new sites and the excavation of some of them have challenged the previous image about the prehistory in mountain and high mountain areas of the Southern Pyrenees. Acquired data show that the human presence in high areas of the Axial Pyrenees is dated back to Mesolithic times; however, the more relevant information comes from the Neolithic period. Current record display settlements located in the slopes of the mountains, at about 1500-1600 m. asl., with a fully developed agriculture and pastoralism, at least after 5300 calBC. This means no more than two or three centuries later than the first indices of agriculture in the northeast of the Iberian Peninsula. A paradigmatic site is the cave of Coro Trasito, in the Monte Perdido massif, where storage pits, a high amount of cereal and the zooarchaeological remains testify a well-established farming practices and livestock breeding around 5300-5100 calBC. After this chronology, it is possible to follow the expansion of the pastoralism (and possibly also of agricultural practices) to higher altitudes during the Fifth Millennium cal BC. Less intense and possibly more seasonally occupations of little rockshelters and caves, like Cova del Sardo and Obagues de Ratera, exemplify this process. Nevertheless, the consolidation of a general pastoral exploitation of alpine areas did not take place until around 3300 calBC. After this date, a multiplication of settlements is observed in different areas of the Southern Pyrenees, suggesting a general trend of intensification of the exploitation of high mountain areas.

Mots-Clés: High mountain archaeology, Pyrenees, Neolithic, Farming, Pastoralism

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