
Roast, trash or fuel? Thousands of burnt bone splinters in the Mousterian campsite of Roca San Miguel (Arén, Huesca)

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Résumé

Roca San Miguel was an open-air campsite inhabited during MIS 6a –MIS 5e on the right bank of the Noguera Ribagorzana River, a Pyrenean tributary to the Ebro River. There, archaeological works have located a thick deposit of superimposed ashes and rubefacted sediments that we interpret as an accumulation of noteworthy hearths, which contain thousands of bone splinters in all possible degrees of cremation: from no fire marks to full calcination. Under the traditional point of view, in which Neanderthal activities were considered almost mere opportunistic acts, this concentration of bones would be explained as a cleaning activity or as a consequence of cooking the meat. But we propose in this study its possible use as fuel during the harsh climatic period of the MIS 6a –when firewood should have been scarce-, or even perhaps to smoke the meat of the hunted preys given the intense smoke that the bones produce when burned.

Mots-Clés: Mousterian, Ebro Basin, bone as fuel, MIS6a

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