
Occupying cave-sites: A case study from Azokh 1 Cave (Southern Caucasus)

Lena Asryan^{*†1,2}, M. Dolores Marin-Monfort^{3,4}, Andreu Ollé^{5,6}, Norah Moloney⁷, Yolanda Fernández-Jalvo³, and Tania King⁸

¹Àrea de Prehistòria, Universitat Rovira i Virgili (URV) – Avinguda de Catalunya 35, 43002 Tarragona, Espagne

²Institut Català de Paleoecologia Humana i Evolució Social (IPHES) – Zona Educacional 4, Campus Sescelades URV (Edifici W3) 43007 Tarragona, Espagne

³Museo de Ciencias Naturales (MNCN) – José Gutiérrez Abascal, 2. 28006 Madrid, Espagne

⁴Universidad de Valencia, Department of Botany and Geology (UV) – Avda. Dr. Moliner, 50, 46100 Burjassot, Valencia., Espagne

⁵Àrea de Prehistòria, Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Fac. de Lletres (URV) – Av. Catalunya 35, 43002, Tarragona, Espagne

⁶Institut Català de Paleoecologia Humana i Evolució Social (IPHES) – Zona Educacional 4, Campus Sescelades URV (Edifici W3), 43007 Tarragona, Spain, Espagne

⁷University College London (UCL) – Institute of Archaeology, 31-34 Gordon Square, WH1E 0PY, London, Royaume-Uni

⁸Blandford Town Museum – Bere's Yard, Blandford, Dorset, Royaume-Uni

Résumé

The Caucasus is an important intercontinental passageway for fauna and hominin dispersal from Africa to Eurasia. Numerous Pleistocene sites emphasize the importance of this region for the study of human evolution and hominin "Out of Africa" dispersals. The Azokh 1 site in the Southern Caucasus provides a stratigraphic sequence, the renewed excavations of which showed the presence of well-contextualised lithic and faunal assemblages dated between 300 – 100 Ka associated with hominin remains (*H. heidelbergensis* and *H. neanderthalensis*) also found in the site.

The study of faunal assemblages shows a dominance of cave bear (*Ursus spelaeus*) remains resulting from their hibernation at the rear of the cave. Recent taphonomic studies indicate some of these remains were exploited *in-situ*. Other faunal remains, mainly herbivores, some showing signs of human activity, were most likely introduced into the cave by hominins. The study of lithic artefacts suggests an incomplete operative chain for all raw materials with a general absence of knapping debris, natural bases, rare cores and refits. Techno-typologically, these assemblages are considered from late Acheulean or early Mousterian to Levallois Mousterian.

The recovered faunal and lithic assemblages represent a marginal area at the back of the cave. Research results, including some preliminary data on lithic use-wear, along with spatial distribution, and post-depositional modification analyses, indicate that occupation of

*Intervenant

†Auteur correspondant: lenaprehistoria@gmail.com

the cave was short and seasonal in character. Cave bears were an important factor affecting the period and duration of hominin occupation of the cave. The characteristics of lithic assemblages indicate these probably included mobile toolkits, with some isolated evidences of *in-situ* knapping or retouching activities.

Mots-Clés: Azokh 1 Cave, *Ursus spelaeus*, Lithics, Mobile toolkit, Short term occupation