Revisiting Hornos de La Peña 100 years after

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Abstract

The site of Hornos de la Peña (San Felices de Buelna, Cantabria, Spain) was first discovered by Alcalde del Río in 1903, and was excavated by H. Obermaier in 1909-10. The results from this excavation were succinctly published in Breuil and Obermaier’s book (1912). In the last decades the site has remained almost forgotten, and only few attempts to obtain new information have been carried out (Bernaldo de Quirós, 1982 ; Carrión, 2002). The major handicaps for the site are the lack of definition of the archeological sequence, the bias created by old excavation methods, the difficulties for attributing specific artefacts to the archeological units described by Obermaier (see for example the case of the engraved horse frontal- Tejero et al. 2008), and the absence of a reliable chronology for the human occupation there (see Soto-Barreiro 2003).

Despite these handicaps the site is still very interesting, first because an important rock-art assemblage was found (Alcalde del Río, Breuil and Sierra, 1911), including typical Pre-Magdalenian and Magdalenian manifestations (Rivero and Garate 2013); and secondly, because the site contains Mousterian and Aurignacian occupation evidences which makes an ideal location to investigate the Middle to Upper Paleolithic transition. Besides, the Solutrean and Magdalenian occupations at the site are relevant to understand the LGM and Late Glacial occupations in the mountainous region of upper Besaya river. Unfortunately, the site has suffered from severe alterations due to phosphate exploitation previously to Obermaier excavation, the use as a refugium during spanish Civil War (Ontañón, 2009), and the civil works made at the site to facilitate the touristic visits. All these affections and archeological works have left only few stratigraphic witnesses to evaluate the archaeological sequence at the site.

In 2016, in the framework of a reanalysis of the rock-art assemblage led by O. Rivero, one of the stratigraphic sections left by H. Obermaier situated in the entrance hallway (just after the fist hall of the cave) was cleaned, revealing a complex sequence comparable to the
descriptions made by Obermaier. Sedimentary, faunal and lithic samples have been recovered from this section cleaning and bones with anthropogenic modifications from levels 4, 5, 6 and 8 have been sent for AMS dating. First results suggest the existence of a Magdalenian layer situated at the top of the Paleolithic sequence (level 4) and several Mousterian layers at the bottom (levels 8-14). In between several layers have been identified but the chrono-cultural attribution remains uncertain. In 2017 we extended the excavation one of these Mousterian layers (level 13), revealing a rich and well preserved Neandertal occupation.

With the current research the aim is to provide new information about Hornos de la Peña with a modern and multidisciplinary approach, to remark the importance of the site within the Cantabrian Paleolithic.

References:


Keywords: Paleolithic, Cave site, Rock, Art, Aurignacian, Mousterian, Magdalenian, Solutrean