

Session title: CAVES IN CONTEXT: THE ECONOMICAL, SOCIAL, AND RITUAL IMPORTANCE OF CAVES AND ROCKSHELTERS

Organizer: Knut Andreas Bergsvik, Department of Archaeology, History, Cultural Studies and Religion, University of Bergen, Norway

Discussant: Robin Skeates, Department of Archaeology, Durham University, UKn

Time: Saturday morning

Room:

Session abstract:

Caves and rockshelters are found all over the world, and they have been frequently occupied throughout prehistory and early history. In many areas of Europe, some of these natural places are still used as sites of worship and as shelter against the elements. There is great variability in their use. Some appear to only have traces of short occupations, while others have thick cultural deposits, indicating longer and several occupations. Others again seem to have been used for ritual activities, such as feasting, production of rock-art, offerings or funerary rites. Some caves and rockshelters have been used for a multitude of activities, both sacred and profane and by several communities through time.

The purpose of the session is to explore the importance of caves and rockshelters in a wide perspective in order to grasp aspects of what they may have meant for people in different kinds of societies. Are there recognizable patterns that vary according to basic economic and cultural differences? For example, do hunter-gatherers use them different from farmers, or do egalitarian societies use them in other ways than hierarchic groups? In what wider environmental contexts do the different caves/rockshelters appear? Do their locations vary according to the hunter/farmer dichotomy; to what extent are they situated adjacent to natural resources, hunting grounds, pastures or farmland? Furthermore, are caves and rockshelters everywhere perceived as “liminal places”, or should instead each cave and rockshelter be understood in its own term and according to its specific cultural context? Papers presenting case studies of caves and rockshelters and their context are wanted, as well as more general theoretical approaches to the problem. Scholars specialising on periods spanning the Palaeolithic to Modern times are welcome.

Paper abstracts:

VARIABILITY OF THE PLANT-GATHERING PATTERNS IN DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENTS ON THE SAMPLE OF NEOLITHIC AND NEANDERTHAL CAVE DWELLINGS OF THE CAUCASUS

G. M. Levkovskaya, Institute of History of Material Culture, St Petersburg, Russia

The report is based on multidisciplinary materials (including about 200 SEM-micrographs) which were obtained from 21 Mousterian layers of 10 cave dwellings of the West Caucasus

(excavations of S.Kulakov, V.Lubin, E.Beliaeva, L.Golovanova, V.Trifonov) and 7 Neolithic layers of Guamsky rockshelter. Anthropological remains of the Neanderthals were found in Matouzka, Barakaevskaya, Mezmaiskaya and Monasheskaya cave dwellings. The samples collected from the levels of Neanderthal and Neolithic inhabitation contain great variety of plant micro remains (wood, seeds, charcoal, pollen, algae) and other biological objects (eggs of helminthes, etc.) that provide information on the resources that Neanderthals and Neolithic population used as food, medicine, fabricating materials and others. Obtained information allows recognizing and comparing paleo-economic patterns of Neanderthal hunters and gatherers and Neolithic agricultural population. The presentation is based on the materials collected for the manuscript of the atlas on the problems of plant-gathering.

SKALISTY ROCKSHELTER: CASES OF THE INTERSTRATIFICATION

Valery Manko, Department of Archaeology, Kyiv, Ukraine

The site Skalisty rockshelter is located in Ukraine, in Crimea, in territory of village Skalisty, is under a canopy in the second ridge of Crimean mountains. Necessity of excavation of the site has been caused by action of nature forces (threatening of full destruction of a site by water streams). The excavation of the site has been conducted since 2004. Currently, excavation of the site covers about 30 square metres and the depth is up to 6 m. 38 cultural layers have been revealed. Deeper probing of the site has shown presence of at least 5 cultural layers located on depth 6-11 m. The data consists of flint and faunal material, separate finds of human bones and objects of art. The analysis of the material shows a correspondence to two cultural phenomena which are known as *Szhankobien* industry of final Paleolithic and Mesolithic and is dated 13-8,5 kyr BP, and with Mesolithic industry, which is named *Towbodracian* and is dated 10-9500 kyr BP.

During the excavation, the inter-stratification of cultural layers, connected to different industries, were revealed. Obviously, there are differences in the strategies of using of rockshelter by representatives of different cultural traditions.

THE USE OF CAVES AND ROCK-SHELTERS BY THE LAST NEANDERTHAL AND THE FIRST MODERN HUMAN SOCIETIES IN CANTABRIAN IBERIA: SIMILARITIES, DIFFERENCES AND TERRITORIAL IMPLICATIONS

Javier Ordoño, University of the Basque Country, Spain

The Middle-to-Upper Palaeolithic Transition has caused much discussion within the archaeological research during the last decades. Factors such as human biology, technological evolution, language, symbolism have been suggested as causes for the different changes that happened in this controversial period. One aspect that has received less attention is the territorial behaviour of the populations involved in the process. We have some knowledge about their sites, but even less about the decisions and conditionings that led them to settle and move back and forth across the territory.

This contribution analyzes the case of the Cantabrian Region, an excellent setting for an archaeo-geographical study because of its ample archaeological record (approximately 100 sites) and its specific geographical position. The main caves and rock-shelters are

examined in order to gather information on their spatial distribution, their geographical and topographical position regarding to their natural environment, their orientation and visibility, their relationship with the main economic resources (especially water sources, accessible biotopes and lithic raw material supplies) and, if possible, on their quality and functionality. The interpretation of these variables would allow us to detect differences and similarities in the territorial behaviour of the “transitional populations”.

ON THE (L)EDGE: THE CASE OF VALE BOI ROCKSHELTER (ALGARVE, SOUTHERN PORTUGAL)

Nuno Bicho, João Cascalheira, and João Marreiros, FCHS, Campus de Gambelas, Universidade do Algarve, Faro, Portugal

Rockshelters have been most important in the study of prehistoric archaeology, particularly for the Paleolithic period. In Portugal, however, very few rockshelters have been found, tested and excavated.

This paper focuses on the rockshelter of Vale Boi (Algarve, Southern Portugal), a site which has traces of Upper Paleolithic as well as early Neolithic occupations. Interpretation of the site and of the diversity of human occupations will be discussed, focusing on differences across time. The interpretations will concentrate on various aspects, such as site formation processes on slope deposits and intra-site spatial organization. These results will hopefully shed some light on the Paleolithic and Neolithic occupation of the Western edge of Europe.

FROM INCHNADAMPH TO OBAN: THE PREHISTORIC HUMAN USE OF CAVES AND ROCK SHELTERS IN WESTERN SCOTLAND

Clive Bonsall and Graham A. Ritchie, School of History, Classics, and Archaeology, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK

The human use of natural shelters was a constant feature of the prehistoric past in many parts of the World. Thus caves and rock shelters constitute an important resource for archaeologists. Nowhere, perhaps, is this more evident than along the Atlantic coast of Scotland, where cave archaeology has made a uniquely important contribution to prehistoric studies from the Mesolithic to the Iron Age. Using the evidence from a few well-documented sites, this paper examines the changing uses of caves by the prehistoric inhabitants of a small, mountainous region on the north-western fringe of Europe over a period of some five millennia, from primarily *economic* in the Mesolithic to predominantly *ritual* and *symbolic* in the later periods of prehistory.

CONTINUITY AND PRODUCTION IN LIGHT OF ROCK SHELTER FINDS FROM CENTRAL NORWAY

Anne Haug, Department of Archaeology, Museum of Natural History and Archaeology, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway

From Central Norway we have an extensive collection of finds from caves and rock shelters; material which, relatively speaking has not been utilized in an archaeological context. Much of this material was examined in the early 1900s, but relatively little has been published. So far there has been no attempt to compile material from cave and rock shelters found in this region.

Based on the archaeological excavation of a rock shelter carried out in 2005 at Monge in Rauma, Møre og Romsdal county, I will outline a project that will more closely examine the use of rock shelters in a long-term perspective. In particular, this project will focus on social organization, production and changes in production. Analyses of bone material from several of the shelters reveal a large variation in hunting and trapping both on land and at sea. In addition, a number of bones from domestic animals have been found at these sites. Traces of ritual or religious activity have also been found at several of the rock shelters.

This project aims to investigate whether these rock shelters were in continuous use or tied to specialized or seasonal activities, and whether or not this changes through time or place.

CAVES AND RITUAL ACTIVITY DURING THE MAGDALENIAN: AN EVALUATION OF THE CURRENT EVIDENCE

Pablo Arias, Instituto Internacional de Investigaciones Prehistóricas de Cantabria, Universidad de Cantabria, Spain

The identification and interpretation of ritual areas is probably among the most challenging problems in the study of Prehistoric societies, especially when we are dealing with hunter-gatherers. However it is not unusual that supposed evidence of that kind of activity is claimed in the archaeological literature. Several sites where the existence of ritual areas has been proposed are related to the presence of human groups inside the caves. In this communication we will discuss the available information dated to the Magdalenian period, including evidence from recently documented sites like La Garma (Spain)

CAVE BURIALS IN THE IBERIAN PENINSULA AND AMONG THE ANCIENT MAYA: A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON

Estella Weiss-Krejci, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Vienna, Austria

In the Iberian Peninsula caves were frequent locations for the deposition of the dead from the beginning of the Early Neolithic through the Copper Age. These mortuary contexts usually contain multiple individuals ranging from at least a few to hundreds of people. The bones are disarticulated and often associated with animal bones. The high number of individuals in caves, age and gender distribution of the dead, and the lack of elaborate grave goods suggest that at least in some areas they were the preferred burials place for the members of agricultural communities which lived in the surrounding regions. The ancient Maya considered caves as sacred places and as portals to the underworld. In the Maya area caves were also frequently used for the deposition of the dead. However, some of the

individuals buried in Maya caves may have held a special social status. The paper explores similarities and differences in cave burials from both regions.

FULL OF HOLES: CAVES AND ROCKSHELTERS IN THE EAST ADRIATIC BETWEEN MESOLITHIC AND BRONZE AGE

Dimitrij Mlekuz, Dept. of Archaeology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Caves and rockshelter are not just passive places or backdrops for human activity but can actively interfere in the way people interact with each other and environment. When people chose to dwell in cave they not only surround themselves with the envelope of materiality provided by the cave, but they can also impress themselves upon cave surfaces, create sediments and layers that accrue over time. By moving from cave to cave across the landscape people distribute themselves across time and space, and this network is shaped by the materiality of caves and traces of human presence too.

The paper investigates the relation between people and caves in the east Adriatic coast from the Mesolithic to the Bronze Age by exploring the materiality of caves and rockshelters and depositional practices of groups dwelling in them. It explores how the materiality of caves interferes in the relations between cave dwellers themselves (humans and animals) and between cave dwellers and landscape. It challenges dichotomy between profane and sacred use of caves examining relation between materiality of caves and depositional practices.

RITUAL CAVE OR TROGLODYTIC HOUSE ? STUDY OF TECHNOLOGICAL CHOICES TO DEFINE THE FUNCTION OF CAVES DURING FRENCH MIDDLE BRONZE AGE. THE CASE OF DUFFAITS CULTURE.

Sébastien Manem, UMR 7055 - Préhistoire et Technologie, Maison de l'Archéologie et de l'Ethnologie, Université de Paris 10, France.

Since the 1980s, a number of French Middle Bronze Age caves have been considered as refuges or settlement sites, corresponding to the interpretations of other sites of the Duffaits Culture (1500 BC). However, all of these caves show abundant and heterogeneous material. Many contradictions are also observed amongst the caves: caves are used both for storage (food and bronze or amber precious objects) and for refuse (carcasses of animals). A technological study of ceramics from caves reveals a considerable diversity in the chaînes opératoires of fashioning, which means that numerous potters with different know-how have been involved. This result is not in accordance with the traditional model of household production in which technological choices are homogeneous and made by a few people. Furthermore, such a diversity of production is identical to gifts in necropolis caves and contradicts the troglodytic nature of the Duffaits culture. Caves stand exclusively for ritual and/or funeral places in which the majority of social actors were involved in the process of making offerings. The technological approach thus demonstrates a centripetal role of caves, and reveals complex ritual practices.

THE TROGLODYTIC PHENOMENON IN LATE MEDIEVAL MALTA

Keith Buhagiar, Department of Classics and Archaeology, University of Malta, Malta

A non-invasive field survey of rural Malta demonstrated how during the Late Medieval period, it was probably cheaper to excavate a cave into a brittle limestone deposit known locally as 'Mtarfa Member', other than having to purchase and transport masonry in order to build an above ground dwelling. Cave settlements are a continuation, rather than an imposition on the rural landscape and the fact that numerous troglodytic settlements are not visible from a distance further demarcates this point.

Cliff-face settlements overlie the 'perched aquifer', successfully tapped by a series of narrow near-horizontal galleries tunnelling into the cliff-face and furnishing the fronting area with a perennial water source. The galleries, which are typologically similar to qanat systems of the Near East and North African regions, were possibly introduced locally during the course of the 11th to 13th centuries from neighbouring Sicily.

Several caves provide evidence for the former presence of a 'centimolo' or animal driven mill – a factor which boosted the economic significance of rural settlements. Cave screening walls, internal partitioning and furnishings, roofing strategies, cobbled passage ways and the utilisation of caves for cultic worship, all portray the social dimension and environment/landscape adaptation strategies resorted to by the rural inhabitants of Late Medieval Malta.