

UISPP – Session Proposal

Title: Cave taphonomy: Beyond human subsistence strategies

Keywords: Pleistocene; Early Holocene; Zooarchaeology, Accumulation agent(s); Depositional processes, Experimental studies

Abstract: Caves are one of the most dynamic and informative archives of the Quaternary record. From natural bone accumulations to anthropogenic deposits, they preserve exceptional information about palaeoclimate, faunal interactions, and human presence. Taphonomy, understood as the study of the transition of animal remains from the biosphere into the lithosphere, is essential for determining the origin of accumulation of the faunal remains inside caves, as well as all the processes that alter and modify the assemblages. In this session, we aim to move beyond traditional zooarchaeological analyses mainly focused on identifying human subsistence and, instead, highlight the complex interactions between biological and non-biological agents, geochemical environments, and depositional dynamics that shaped bone assemblages in cave deposits.

We invite researchers working on taphonomy, zooarchaeology, palaeontology, site formation processes, and experimental studies interested in exploring how bones were accumulated, altered, and preserved by the different agents in caves during the Pleistocene and early Holocene. Our session also challenges the understanding of taphonomy as the loss of information and promotes a shift towards a more positive view of deep-time processes that link life, death, and preservation. By bringing together case studies from diverse temporal and geographic contexts, this session seeks to foster a multidisciplinary dialogue on how caves capture palaeoenvironmental conditions, prey-predator relationships, along with hominin activities through time. This session provides an open space for discussion and knowledge exchange in response to new data and perspectives.

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