

THE SPANISH MESETA

The Spanish Meseta (the plateau in the centre of the Iberian Peninsula) is not an area with an important tradition of Upper Palaeolithic research. However, in recent years (2006-2013) some important new work (excavations, analysis and publications) have contributed towards enlarging the knowledge we previously had of the archaeological record in this region.

Studies and excavations

Among the publications synthesising the research in the northern Meseta, the colloquium-tribute to José Luis Argente must be cited first of all. This was coordinated by Germán Delibes and organised by the Fundación Duques de Soria in late 2002, although the proceedings were published in 2006. This meeting was an excellent opportunity to share information about research on the Upper Palaeolithic in the interior of the Iberian Peninsula at that time. It was a forum for reflection and debate, and the result was a joint publication that offered an up-to-date view of the topic and signified a turning point in Upper Palaeolithic research in the Meseta (Delibes and Diez, 2006).

Other general publications are those presented at the meeting held in Barcelona and the paper published in *Quaternary International*, which assessed the documentation of the Upper Palaeolithic in both the northern and southern Mesetas. Its main interest lies in the chrono-stratigraphic study that completes it, accompanied by an exhaustive table with all the absolute dates known at that time, together with their calibrations (Cacho *et al.* 2010; 2012).

Equally noteworthy, although it was not limited to the Upper Palaeolithic, the topic of this quinquennial synthesis, is the publication of the *Proceedings of the 5th Meeting on Archaeological Heritage in the Community of Madrid*, held in November 2008 in the Regional Archaeological Museum. This meeting made the Pleistocene in Madrid the central theme of the sessions in order to disseminate the numerous sites discovered during building work on the M30 motorway. The large investment made in the public works had the positive effect of reviving research into the Madrid Palaeolithic. Some old sites were re-studied and new ones were excavated, while surveying led to excavations in different parts of the Community, such as the northern mountains, where new settlements were located (Santonja, 2010). All the sites with Upper Palaeolithic evidence are referred to in the following sections.

Regarding excavations performed between 2006 and 2008, the site that has yielded most new information about the Magdalenian in the Meseta is La Peña de Estebanvela (Ayllón, Segovia). This rock-shelter was the subject of pluri-disciplinary research from 1999 to 2010, in the framework of two research projects. The results of the geo-archaeological, chrono-stratigraphic, zooarchaeological, taphonomic and technological studies, together with spatial, use-wear and environmental analysis, have been published in two monographs and several other publications mentioned below.

Other important fieldwork in the region has been carried out in the Community of Madrid, particularly in El Monte Rock-shelter, in El Vellón. The site was excavated in the course of two field seasons, supervised by Gerardo Vega in 2007 and 2009. These discovered the only Magdalenian sequence known in Madrid and obtained an interesting archaeological record as well as two radiocarbon dates.

In the same community, excavations have been performed at Parque Darwin, in Puente de los Tres Ojos in 2006, and in Las Delicias in 2008 and 2009. Las Delicias has been a well-known site in archaeological historiography since the work of Obermaier and Wernert in the early twentieth century, and the presence of “Esbaikian” industries has been cited. The new excavations and the geo-archaeological study have allowed an updated assessment of this site with clear evidence of Upper Palaeolithic occupations.

Maltravieso Cave (Cáceres) is well-known because of its rock art and for the first time excavations have been carried out in its “Sala de las Chimeneas” (Hall of the Chimneys). Two radiocarbon determinations have been obtained for charcoal samples from Level 1, which date it in the late Upper Palaeolithic: $17,840 \pm 90$ BP (Poz-30469, 21,563-20,885 cal BP IntCal09, 2 sigma) and $17,930 \pm 100$ BP (Poz-30460, 21,578-21,041 cal BP IntCal09, 2 sigma). However, the archaeological record found in this stratigraphic unit (lithic industry and a portable art object) is not significant enough to determine a cultural attribution precisely (Canals *et al.*, 2010; García Díez *et al.*, 2012).

The list of excavations in the Meseta from 2006 to 2013 is completed with the continuing work at Palomar Rock-shelter (Yeste, Albacete). This has revealed a Mousterian level covered by three stratigraphic units attributed to the Gravettian and a further unit possibly corresponding to the terminal Magdalenian.

Early Upper Palaeolithic and Solutrean

The transition from the Middle Palaeolithic and the EUP are scarcely represented in the Meseta, and most of the references are old and hard to verify today (Cacho *et al.*, 2010: 116). Some recently obtained absolute dates from Valle de las Orquídeas (Mosquera *et al.*, 2007) and Cueva Mayor (Ortega *et al.*, 2008) suggest the possibility of occupations in the EUP. However, in both cases the associated industry is too scarce or of little significance to be able to accept that interpretation, and consequently only new studies will be able to corroborate the chronocultural assignment.

In the southern Meseta, the presence of the EUP has been mentioned in connection with Level 3 in Peña Capón Rock-shelter (Muriel, Guadalajara) based on the study of materials from a test pit excavated in the early 1970s by Julio Martínez Santaolalla (Cacho *et al.*, 2010). A recent review with a detailed techno-typological study of the assemblage has suggested that it should be assigned to a proto-Solutrean. It is dominated by endscrapers together with a large number of notches, as well as several Vale Comprido points and burins, among others. However, the radiocarbon determination obtained for a tooth from this Level 3 (Beta-246879: $19,980 \pm 100$ BP, 24,279-23,468 cal BP IntCal09) does not match this cultural assignment, as it is a millennium more recent than the Portuguese proto-Solutrean (Alcaraz-Castaño *et al.*, 2012; Alcaraz-Castaño *et al.*, 2013).

Level 2 at Peña Capón can be more clearly attributed to the Solutrean due to the presence of bifacial leaf-shaped objects in the lithic assemblage. They include convex-base laurel-leaf points, willow-leaf points and the asymmetrical points that have caused the level to be attributed to the middle Solutrean. The radiocarbon determination obtained, also for a tooth, is $19,930 \pm 110$ BP (24,227-23,420 Cal BP IntCal09: Beta 246880) (Alcaraz-Castaño *et al.*, 2013).

In the Manzanares Valley, in the Province of Madrid, Solutrean evidence has been found in the form of leaf-shaped points at Puente de los Tres Ojos. The assemblages in two levels (2a and 2b) have been compared with those at La Parra, Antonio López, El Sotillo, El Huerto de San Andrés, El Prado de los Laneros and Las Delicias (Tapias *et al.*, 2010 and 2012).

In fact, Las Delicias has been the site of a research project and new excavations since 2008. These have enabled the geo-archaeological, chronometric and palaeo-environmental study of the sedimentary deposit and its surroundings, as well as the

technological study of the lithic assemblage recovered. This comes from two levels in secondary position, both of which are characterised by the presence of leaf-shaped implements – including a laurel-leaf point in Level IIC – together with bifacial products and preforms abandoned in different stages of their reduction. These distinctive traits indicate the Solutrean nature of these stratigraphic units. Blade products are scarce and expedient, which suggests an occasional production for the preparation of retouched elements. The small number of tools compared with a vast majority of pieces in the process of being manufactured led the site researchers to interpret it as a workshop (Alcaraz *in press*).

The most important contribution to the study of the EUP in the southern Meseta has been the research of Paloma de la Peña. Both her doctoral thesis, on the Gravettian techno-complex in the Iberian Peninsula (Peña, 2011), and later papers (Peña, 2013; Peña & Vega Toscano, 2012; Peña Alonso & Vega Toscano 2013) review the Gravettian sequence at Palomar Rock-shelter (Levels V, IV and III) within its palaeoclimate framework, and present a detailed techno-typological characterisation of its assemblages. This analysis of the lithic industry highlights the presence of a large number of *esquilleés* pieces which have been associated through use-wear analysis with two types of activity: bipolar knapping and the use of wedges to work with materials like bone, antler and wood. At Palomar Rock-shelter these objects are found together with a large majority of projectile points and very few domestic tools, such as endscrapers. The difference of this repertoire from other Gravettian records in Iberia is interpreted as a consequence of different activities carried out in continuous sites.

The absolute dates obtained at Palomar Rock-shelter discriminate two stages in the Gravettian occupations. The first, which includes Levels V and IV, is dated to between $26,430 \pm 210$ and $21,289 \pm 110$ BP) and the second, represented by Level III, to $21,560 \pm 110$ BP (Peña, 2011, 2013; Vega & Martín, 2006).

The Magdalenian and Epipalaeolithic/Mesolithic

The early Magdalenian is well documented in the northern Meseta at La Peña de Estebanvela (Ayllón, Segovia) and Alejandro and Vergara Rock-shelters (Deza, Soria), whose radiocarbon determinations date them to between $15,370 \pm 110$ and $14,000 \pm 100$ BP. A test-excavation performed at Alejandro Rock-shelter has revealed a single fertile level (Level III). This stratigraphic unit, which has yielded a limited archaeological record due to the small surface area that has been excavated, has been assigned to the initial Magdalenian and associated with a cold stage of the Oldest Dryas. The occupations in Level c and d at Vergara appear to correspond to the same cold phase of the Oldest Dryas. The lithic assemblage includes backed bladelets with fine direct retouching, burins and nucleiform endscrapers, as well as *perçoirs* (Utrilla *et al.*, 2006).

The lower levels (Levels V and VI) at La Peña de Estebanvela reflect a change in the typological composition as the burins are more numerous than the scrapers group. Together with greater variety in the choice of raw materials, this suggests a process of techno-typological change. The absolute dates obtained for Level VI ($14,450 \pm 80$ and $14,200 \pm 50$ BP) confirm this chronocultural attribution (Cacho *et al.*, 2012, 2013).

The occupation at Monte Rock-shelter in Madrid may be attributed to this early phase of the Magdalenian. Dates of $14,660 \pm 80$ BP and $13,570 \pm 70$ BP have been obtained, together with a lithic assemblage with blade technology, several remains of decorated bones, and some personal ornaments made from fox canine teeth (Vega *et al.*, 2010).

La Peña de Estebanvela has yielded an important late-final Magdalenian archaeological record in its middle and upper units.

The middle stratigraphic units (Levels III and IV) typologically display a lithic assemblage in which burins begin to acquire certain importance although there is still a significant presence of endscrapers and, above all, single and double backed

bladelets with fine direct retouching. The bone assemblage is small, consisting of only two needles, a spear point and two indeterminate objects (Tejero *et al.*, 2013), and equally few portable art objects have been found (García Díez, 2013) compared with a significant number of personal ornaments made from gastropods, mostly marine shells (Avezuela, 2013). The find of a hoard of flint, or “cachette”, in Stratigraphic Unit III should be cited. The radiocarbon determinations for these levels date the occupations to between $12,530 \pm 60$ and $12,070 \pm 40$, and therefore they have been associated with the upper Magdalenian (Cacho *et al.*, 2007, 2012, 2013).

The upper levels at Peña de Estebanvela have been radiocarbon dated to between $11,700 \pm 70$ and $10,640 \pm 60$ BP. In the retouched assemblage, tools made from bladelets, together with short endscrapers, are the most frequent types. In addition, a significant number of blades with scalariform retouch have been found in the upper level. This archaeological record is completed by a large number of decorated cobblestones and plaques, mostly with geometric motifs, and a larger osseous assemblage with a predominance of domestic tools (needles and awls) and a smaller number of personal ornaments. The latter are all made from marine shells except for two red deer atrophied canine teeth. Other evidences worth citing are three hearths in Level II (Cacho *et al.*, 2012; 2013; García Díez, 2013; Tejero *et al.*, 2013; Avezuela, 2013). These stratigraphic units have been ascribed to the terminal Magdalenian.

The large faunal record in the middle and upper levels at La Peña de Estebanvela attests the exploitation of the immediate surroundings. The prey hunted was mainly ibex and horse, as well as lagomorphs. To a lesser extent, red deer, chamois, roe deer and wild boar were hunted, and also some lynxes (Yravedra & Andrés, 2013). The diet was complemented with trout and possibly with fruit like cherries, hazelnuts, sloes and apples (Perea & Doadrio, 2013; Ruiz-Alonso *et al.*, 2013).

The little information obtained between 2006 and 2013 for Late Glacial occupations in the southern Meseta is limited to El Palomar Rock-shelter. A “rich late Magdalenian assemblage in the upper level of the sequence (Level I)” has been cited (Vega and Martín, 2006).

The early Holocene is well attested at La Uña, Acebedo, and El Espertín, Burón. Both of these caves in the north-east of the Province of León are at about 1,200m altitude, near to natural mountain passes to the northern Iberian coast, with which they appear to have maintained close relationships. Four levels have been differentiated at La Uña. The lower two are ascribed to the Azilian, while the upper two have yielded trapezes, some of them with a double bevel, together with fragments of Neolithic pottery (Level II) and even Modern Age sherds (Level I). In the industries in the Azilian levels, short endscrapers, backed bladelets and points are common, as well as numerous burins and several of the characteristic flat harpoons of that period. Especially significant was the find of a number of bone fragments decorated with geometric motifs. A small hearth in a pit surrounded by stones was documented in Level III. The excavators underscore that it was positioned in the best place to avoid smoke building up in the cave (Neira *et al.*, 2006).

El Espertín displays a single occupation level that was at first attributed to the late Magdalenian, but the later appearance of trapezes and a radiocarbon determination of 7790 ± 120 BP confirmed that it should be assigned to the geometric Mesolithic. A bone fishhook and a pierced *Trinia* were found in addition to the lithic assemblage (Neira *et al.*, 2006).

More recently, the major discovery of La Braña (Valdelugeros, León), a cave near La Uña and El Espertín, has been reported. At this site, two Mesolithic burials have been dated to 6980 ± 50 BP and 7030 ± 50 BP. No industry was found associated with the human remains, placed in a flexed lateral decubitus position and in an excellent state of conservation. However, one of them, La Braña 2, was accompanied by a group of 24 red deer atrophied canine teeth. The site has been interpreted as a cave used exclusively for funerary purposes (Vidal *et al.*, 2008; Vidal & Prada, 2010).

The evidence of human occupation in the early Holocene detected in the southern Meseta during the years covered by this summary is restricted to Parque Darwin. This site, being excavated since 2005, is located to the south-east of the city of Madrid, at the junction of the national road III and the M30, next to the Sierra Toledana Bridge connecting Moratalaz and Vallecas. The first radiocarbon determination obtained from a sediment sample, 8470 ± 70 BP was followed by a further two for charcoal samples, 8710 ± 40 and 8920 ± 40 BP, which are very close to the date for Arroyo de las Moreras (8720 ± 40). Both sites have been assigned to the Mesolithic. In the case of Parque Darwin, the lithic assemblage is characterised by notches and denticulates which, unlike the record at other Iberian sites of the same cultural context, are not associated with geometrics or bladelets. A possible hut has also been documented at this settlement, thought to have been of a short duration (Escobar, 2010; Pérez González *et al.* 2007).



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