
Palaeolithic local flora in dry and semiarid Mediterranean regions: an insight from plant macroremains

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Abstract

Archaeobotanical macroremains are good markers of the local flora and their study improves our knowledge on how human groups used the vegetal resources and how the vegetation has changed through time. Combining anthracology and carpology is essential, since we can obtain more information and improve the interpretation of plant remains. The agents primarily responsible for the accumulation of the material in the archaeological deposits were the human groups who collected plants as firewood for their hearths or other uses. Probably, most of the carpological remains were carried to the cave by humans, with the firewood, as food, etc.

In this communication, we present archaeobotanical results for several Palaeolithic sites located in the E-SE dry and semiarid Iberia, covering a wide sequence from MIS 5 to MIS 2.

In general, sequences show that conifer forests dominate Palaeolithic landscapes, especially those species of cold and dry or sub-humid conditions (*Pinus* type *nigra/sylvestris*, *Juniperus* spp.), the warm ones being relegated to southernmost locations (*Pinus pinea*, *Pinus halepensis*) or warm periods (MIS 5e). Open formations of *Juniperus* sp. and Fabaceae, sometimes in association with *Ephedra* sp. and *Artemisia* sp., spread during phases of greater aridity. The low diversity of shrubs and small plants possibly indicates the presence of open herbaceous steppe formations.

This information indicates that during the glacial periods, most of the region had similar bioclimatic conditions to those currently prevailing in the Iberian summits of the supramediterranean belt. Thermophilous species took refuge below the 40th parallel North during the Last Glacial Period, and rainfall regime would be dry in Alicante and semi-arid in the Murcia area.

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