



## Call for contributions - Session:

### The oldest 'mastering' of the underground world.

The first humans that mastered the underground world were thought to be the anatomically modern humans (*Homo sapiens*). It corresponded to the first ornamental caves with graphical expressions of mainly animals. In Europe, these sites such as El Castillo or Chauvet-Pont d'Arc, are of Late Palaeolithic (41,5-36 ka cal.BP) age.

Already in 1995 F. Rouzaud and M. Soulier suggested that the constructions of the Bruniquel cave were possibly related to Neanderthals. The recently obtained age of late Middle Pleistocene (MIS 6) (Jaubert, et al. 2016), confirmed the visionary interpretation even beyond any prognostic and assigns now the constructions to Early Neanderthals. Meanwhile, the age of the paintings in several Spanish caves, obtained by international teams, shifted the first paintings towards recent to late Middle Palaeolithic, assigning them to Neanderthals (Pike et al., 2012, 2018), an age that was recently questioned by White et al. (2019). Besides the Bruniquel cave, a critical assessment of European cavities frequented by Neanderthal beyond daylight should be discussed and documented.

The session aims at identifying the oldest indications of mastering of the underground areas and at clearly defining this "mastering of the underground areas" ad minima beyond daylight and with the undeniable proof of human presence. These may be evidences of all kind, remains, marks or traces of human passages e.g. dated soot from torches, footprints, etc. that are clearly distinct from animal traces, notably bears.

It will precise to what exact period of the Aurignacian the first underground ornamental sites can be assigned. The mid-upper Aurignacian (Chauvet), however not the early Aurignacian nor the Proto-Aurignacian let alone the Châtelperronian, nor any so-called MP-UP transition industry? The first graphical manifestations in Africa (rather exceptional), in Asia notably the Southern Asia (Sunda, Wallacea) or in Oceania (Sahul) compete now with the oldest ornated shelters and caves of Europe. Does the presence of Humans far in caves and far from daylight represent the same issue in all these sites?

A complementary approach is to assess the oldest Palaeo-Mesolithic explorations in terms of the underground pathway (sensu 'palaeospeleology') and to point out the methods to identify, quantify and date these explorations. Who are the humans who explored the sites and what capacities are needed? The aim is to determine if some groups or cultures are out-standing the general norm, e.g. the Pyrenean Middle-Magdalenian, or if, since the Aurignacian, all recent Palaeolithic cultures went underground in a similar extend and in similar regions. What human groups and for what reasons exactly did they travel such distances underground? For this last point, the comparison with ethnographic, historic, Proto-historic, Neolithic sources, with examples disregarding specific regions or periods, could contribute to better frame the underground human presence in the Palaeo-Mesolithic.

Registration: <https://uispp2020.sciencesconf.org/>

Contributions in English and French are welcome.

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