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# Fell and lost into the Abyss? Mesolithic human skull remains from a sinkhole in southern tip of Iberian Peninsula (Sima Hedionda, Casares, Málaga)

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## Abstract

The presence of isolated human bones in cavities and sinkholes throughout Late Prehistory is a common phenomenon in a large part of the Iberian territory. These are usually interpreted as erratic elements from burial contexts, which are very frequent in karst areas of the Iberian Peninsula since the Early Neolithic and especially frequent in the Late Neolithic and Copper Age. However, the discovery of Mesolithic human remains in cavities is becoming more and more frequent, both as complete sets associated with sepulchral deposits (La Braña, León) (Vidal et al. 2008), or as disarticulated elements of a markedly different nature, including postmortem manipulations and consumption events (Santa Maira, Alicante) (Morales, et al. 2017). In this work, we present the partial remains of a human skull belonging to an adult male dating from the middle of the 7th millennium Cal BC, found at the bottom of a 30 m deep sinkhole, located in the geographical area of the Strait of Gibraltar. This discovery is very significant not only for its nature and interpretation (that may be an accidental fall, intentional thrown or to be part of a dismantled funerary deposit) but also because it is one of the few pieces of human evidence in the VII and the first half of the VI millennium Cal BC in the south of Iberia. In this territory, as can be seen in other parts of the western Mediterranean, the appearance of the Early Neolithic farmers seems to follow a perceived archaeological gap or hiatus, whose cause and nature we are difficult to evaluate in the current state (Aura et al. 2009). In the absence of new evidence, the appearance of partial human bone remains in caves could constitute one of the few testimonies of the last hunter-gatherer populations in the southern tip of Iberia.

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