Ornaments as proxy for reconstructing social networks from Iberia Mesolithic hunter-gatherers

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Abstract

Archaeologists and ethnographers have long suggested that certain artifacts classes may be especially useful to investigate shared identities or shared social practices due to their symbolic meaning or style (Peeples, 2019). Among these artifacts, personal ornaments are perceived by members of hunter-gatherers (HG) societies as an indicator of their ethnic identity, enhancing within-group cohesion and contributing to drawing the boundaries with neighboring groups (Newell et al., 1990; Wobst, 1977). Although ornaments provide great inference on HG's social connectivity, the refined assessment of the social structure through means of Social Network Analysis (SNA) has been overlooked in archaeology (Romano et al., 2020). We use this innovative approach to formally reconstruct HG networks in the Iberian Peninsula throughout early Holocene. Developed within the scope of the ERC project PALE-ODEM (ERC-GoG-2015 Ref.683018), which aims at studying Late Glacial and Postglacial population history and cultural transmission in Iberia, this communication presents the preliminary results from a case study that formally applies SNA methods on the Mesolithic archaeological record. First, we assume that the greater the similarity between ornament assemblages, the greater the likelihood of shared social relations (Mills, 2017). Second, matrices of similarity based on ornaments assemblage are used to create two weighted and undirected networks: one corresponding to the Early Mesolithic and the other to the Late Mesolithic. Next, networks are characterized according to their microscopic (i.e. relevance of regional groups within the network) and macroscopic (e.g. how densely connected is the network) features. Last, we compare their structural properties and track potential changes throughout time. With this study case, we hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of the patterns of socio-spatial structure of HG during the Mesolithic, which ultimately may provide insights into the mechanisms behind the significant cultural changes documented in the Iberian Peninsula during the same period.

Key words: Mesolithic; Social Network Analysis; Iberian Peninsula

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