

Depicted vs Consumed: When Rock Art Shows Species Absent from the Faunal Record

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Main Organizer:

Paweł Lech Polkowski

Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences // Poznań Archaeological Museum

Co-Organizer:

Sebastián Francisco Maydana

Institute of Infection, Veterinary and Ecological Sciences, University of Liverpool

Jakob Bro-Jorgensen

Institute of Infection, Veterinary and Ecological Sciences, University of Liverpool

Abstract:

A discrepancy between the species depicted in rock art and those identified in the faunal record at archaeological sites associated with it has been observed in many regions worldwide. This discrepancy, which suggests that the species represented visually were not always the same as those exploited as food or other usable resources, raises a number of intriguing questions, not only about the choices and motivations of past communities but also about the methodologies of our research and the taphonomic processes affecting the available data.

This session invites case studies from around the world in which the problem of “depicted vs consumed” has been observed and addressed. We welcome papers examining the interpretative aspects of such phenomena, including explanations for the selection of particular species in rock art repertoires and the omission of others from the visual domain. We are interested in both local case studies that illustrate direct relationships between specific archaeological sites and rock art localities and papers presenting more synthesised approaches to larger datasets. Another possible area of inquiry concerns the evaluation of our methods and data in relation to the emergence of these observed “discrepancies,” as well as the ideological and interpretative factors and biases that may unwarrantedly lead us to treat such discrepancies as problematic in the first place. After all, our expectation that the faunal record and rock art should correspond does not necessarily have to be correct.

Although the topic is not new and has already received considerable attention over the years, the growth of available data and the development of new methodologies and approaches justify revisiting it time and again. The session welcomes not only rock art researchers but also zooarchaeologists, biologists, anthropologists, and all scholars interested in the relationships between prehistoric images and the contexts in which they were created.