

THROWING MORE LIGHT. STATIC LIGHTING IN PALAEOLITHIC “SANCTUARIES”:

the Example of Cueva de Nerja (Málaga, Spain)

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Here we present initial findings from a hypothetical approach to fixed lighting in Palaeolithic “sanctuaries” that was carried out in one of the chambers of Cueva de Nerja.

The difficulty of accessing the Upper Galleries from the Show Galleries in prehistoric times is a problem that has kept many of the cave’s researchers on tenterhooks. The only access point into the Upper Galleries is a tiny opening near the ceiling at the back of the *Sala del Cataclismo* at about 25 m above floor level. Reaching the opening is complicated as one must climb up a steep slope and cross several escarpments and ledges, continually struggling to keep one’s balance along the way. This is rendered all the more difficult when the limestone is wet.

As with the Show Galleries, the fact that large numbers of images are found in the Upper Galleries gives rise to many questions: how did people reach the opening? What lighting did they use? What technical resources did they have? How many individuals were there? How long did they remain?

Caves are, by definition, in total darkness, otherwise they would be classified as rock shelters or cave entries in which sunlight only enters during daylight hours. Therefore, in order for people to occupy the cave by night or to penetrate into its deepest chambers, they would first have required a source of light.

Numerous researchers have studied lighting in the underground areas of caves. The latest study on this subject was by S. A. de Beaune, who in several different articles defined three different types of cave lighting: stone lamps, torches, and hearths.

We focused our work on fixed light sources, as there is no evidence of mobile methods having been used in the cave, with the exception of a few *Pecten maximus* valves. For this reason, we looked for the existence of fires that may have been used to fuel other light sources and / or that may have been the basis of lighting in the cave. We also looked for other fixed light sources used along the way, containing the initial one from which the rest of the cave was lit. We then marked and recorded the route that was used, for as Beaune has stated, “... lamps must be accompanied by another source of fire, whether hearth, torch, or another lamp, so that they can be rapidly relit”.

At the same time, we identified a total of 58 objects that met the characteristics defined in the previous section. We nonetheless considered it appropriate to carry out a formal classification of each of them in order to gain better precision and draw conclusions. In this way, according