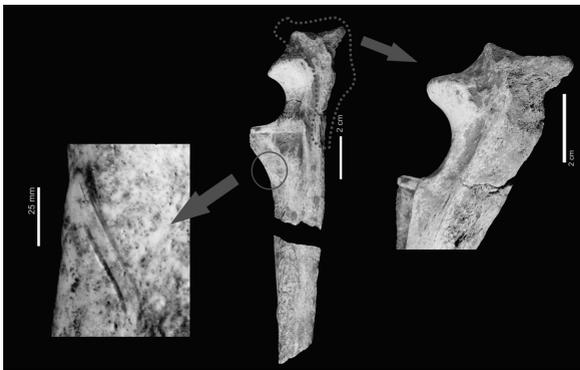


## THE TAPHONOMIST'S CORNER

### THE SCAVENGER OR THE SCAVENGED?



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The bone surface modifications that help us to infer the taphonomic history of fossils are sometimes real palimpsests. The picture shows an ulna of *Crocuta crocuta* found at the Sala de los Huesos site (Maltravieso Cave, Cáceres, Spain). This specimen exhibits cutmarks, carnivore damage in the form of pits and furrowing, and at least, one diagenetic fracture. The two fragments that compose the fossil were recovered more than two meters away from each other. Evidence of human processing and consumption of carnivores during the Pleistocene is unusual, although cases are well known in different chronologies that increase at the end of the Palaeolithic. In particular, the processing of hyena carcasses has not been recorded until now. This specimen, dated approximately around 120 ka B.P. represents a clear case of hominid butchering of a hyena carcass. At the same level, an innominate that shows cutmarks and peeling was also discovered. Despite the presence of lithic tools, the data provided by the taphonomic analysis of the assemblage indicate that the site was mainly a hyena den. The absence of human activity in situ, allows us to raise the issue that the scarce remains that show anthropogenic modifications were transported to the deposit by hyenas or by mechanical processes. If so, the storyboard of this fossil could develop in two stages and three acts:

- 1) apprehension and butchering of the hyena carcass from hominids outside the cave,
- 2) transport inside the cave and scavenging of the carcass by other hyenas,
- 3) dry fracturing and dispersion of the fragments in a postdepositional way.

However, this explanation can also be modified following the principle of Ockham's razor. The law of parsimony suggests that *entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*, which would reduce the various steps to a single scene in which access by hominids to the hyena occurred inside the den. The taphonomic history inferred from the whole faunal assemblage allows us to equally support both arguments involving either exocarstic or endocarstic activities. In the case of the hyena remains, the only feature which invites us to reduce the number of scenarios is the processed subject. The ecological relationships between hominids and hyenas as competitors can be used to argument a complex taphonomic history, in which different processes are valid for the same outcome.