

# LOOKING FOR THE HERD

## Interdisciplinary project to track the origins of transhumance at northeast of the Iberian Peninsula during Middle Ages

### Introduction

Here we present the first project focused on understanding the evolution of livestock practices, with special attention to the practice of transhumance, in the Montseny massif, a mountain range located at the northeast of the Iberian Peninsula, during the transition between Late Antiquity and Middle Ages

### The Montseny massif

#### The Montseny Natural Park

The Montseny Massif is situated in the Catalan Pre-coastal mountain range, between the territories of Barcelona and Girona. The Montseny Biosphere Reserve has been expanded in 2014, up to 50,166 ha.



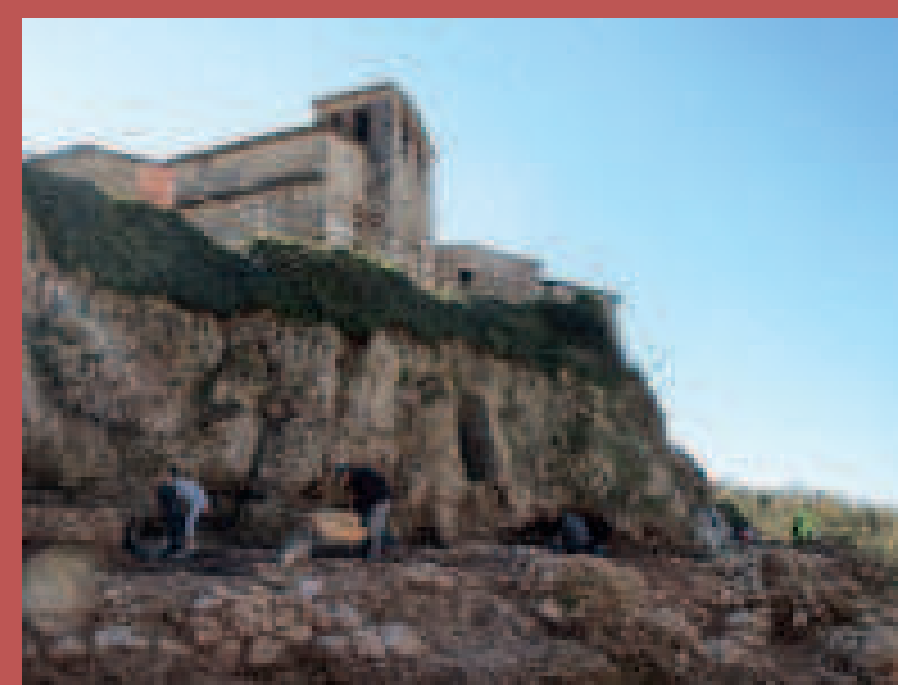
Known everywhere for the beauty of its landscape, the first settlements in Montseny date back to prehistoric times (stone axes and knives, megaliths, carved rocks). Later, during the Iberian period, the hills began to be occupied in a more stable manner (Iberian fortifications and settlements). With the Romans preferring to settle on the plains surrounding the massif, in the Middle Ages the exploitation of mountain resources intensified and it was during this period that most of the farmhouses were built, let alone churches, castles and fortified houses.

#### Pla de la Calma plain

This supra-forestry plain (1350 m.a.s.l. in its highest peak) is a conglomerate of narrow valleys that are divided by flat slopes. Although it is naturally covered with forests, the current image corresponds to the traditional exploitation of livestock and agriculture.

#### Aiguafreda archeological site

Sant Martí was the parish church of Aiguafreda until the 19th C and is currently an archaeological site formed by the church, the cemetery, the rectory (converted into a farmhouse) and different cultivated terraces build using dry-stone walls.



### PastMont: An interdisciplinary project

Previous research and projects associated with the study of the archaeological sites of the region under study, have shown how agriculture and livestock practice were two of the most important factors in the dynamics of the formation and transformation of the landscape. However, there is a need for in-depth documentation of the agricultural areas associated with the various settlements, an objective that will be achieved with the execution of the PastMont project.

The interdisciplinarity nature of the project will allow to cover different aspects of the landscape transformations. The team includes researchers of different fields of expertise:

- Archaeozoology.
- Archaeobotany.
- Geoarchaeology.
- Biochemistry.
- Landscape archaeology.
- Agrarian archaeology.
- Archaeological interpretation of Medieval written sources.
- Archaeomorphology.



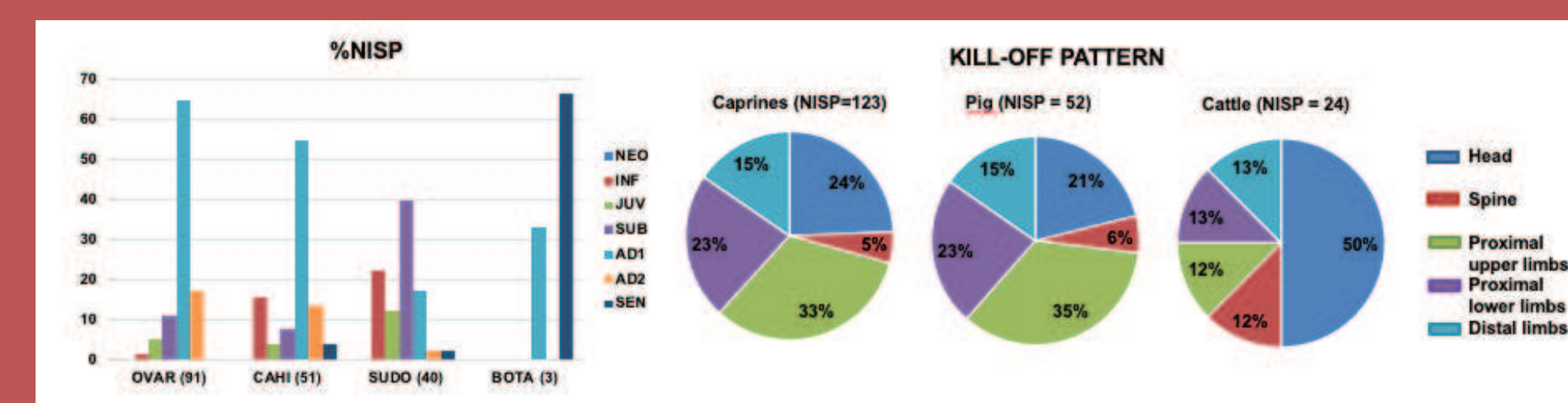
### Preliminary results

The ongoing results allows us to postulate that the inhabitants of Montseny had a organized and hierarchised system. As the current osteological study from Aiguafreda de Dalt points, livestock practices were mainly focused in the exploitation of caprine herds. Dental microwear analysis suggests that the shepherds used the transtermitance management system to nourish their herds.

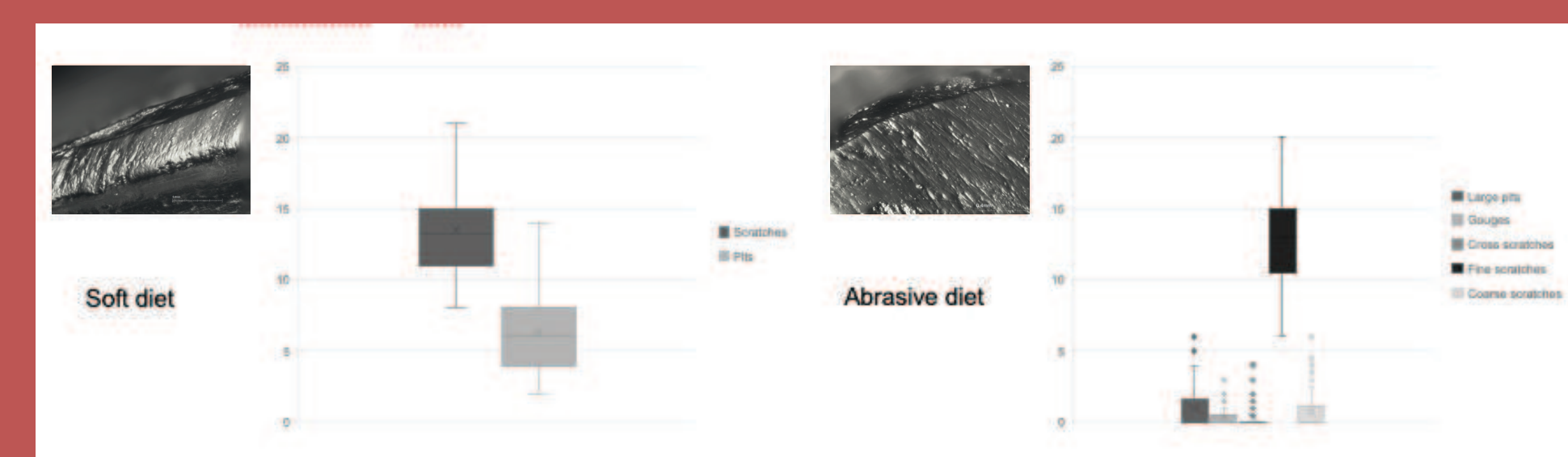
Both archaeozoological and written sources data related to Aiguafreda de Sant Martí also let to propose the existence of a wealthy community which ruled in the area. This group would control livestock production, making profit of their ruling. The consumption of tender meat from lamb, kid and swine, the possession of finest objects and the information extracted from manuscripts are a incontestable proof of this fact.

### Management and exploitation of the domestic triad

- Within the domestic triad, ovicaprid remains are the most represented taxon on the assemblage, followed by pig and cattle.
- Animals were sacrificed, processed and consumed at the settlement, showing a self-sufficient economy based mainly in meat production, followed by milk, wool and animal energy. Breeding of caprine and pigs were also recorded.

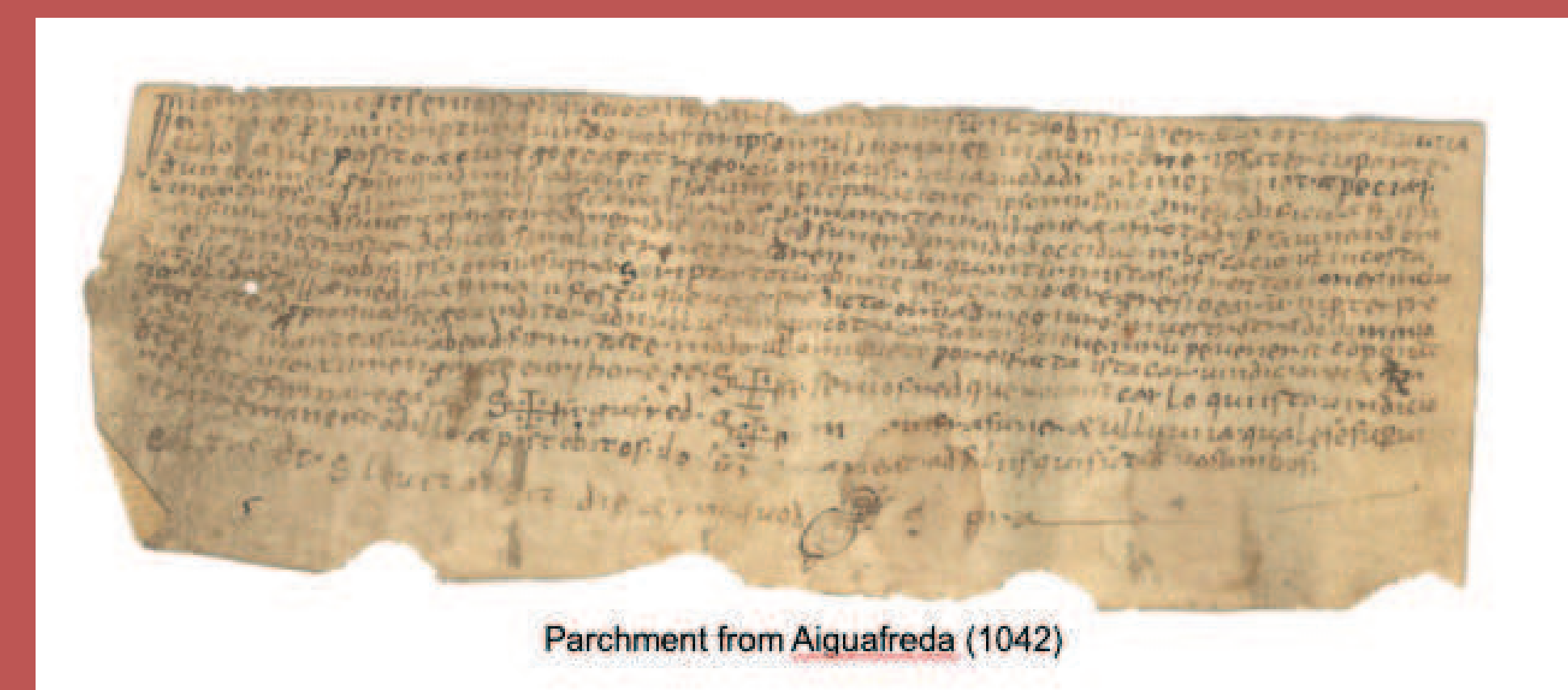


- The dental microwear study has revealed two different feeding management strategies, one composed by a soft diet and an second more abrasive. It has been interpreted as the use of the transtermitance practice, moving the herd from the upper-forestry of Pla de la Calma to the surroundings of Aiguafreda de Dalt.



### The written sources: tracking animal husbandry activities

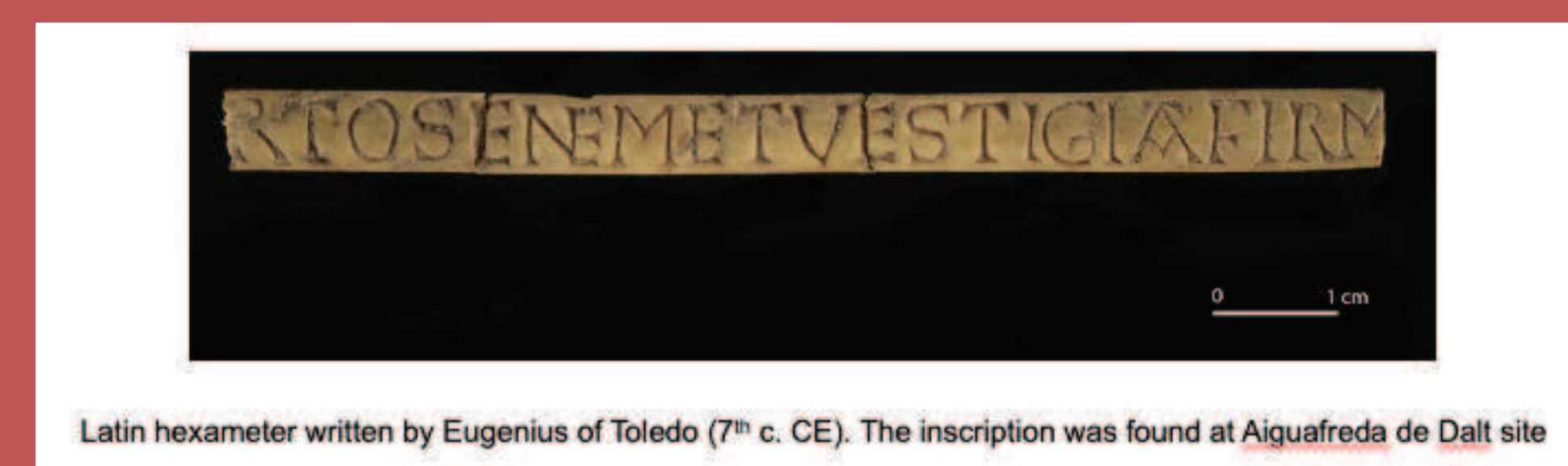
Archaeological or written records? Each source is the realm of specialists who differ from each other in presuppositions and methods: "historians", with its focus on written records, and "archaeologists", who analyse the remains of material culture. Attempts to unite them have frequently been unsuccessful through allowing one element to dominate the others. But to diminish one type of evidence without reasons or to enhance the significance of another without positive grounds will produce a crooked reconstruction of the past. Every information is precious, it is only a matter of recognize that each type of evidence has its own weight and informative potential and limits. The PastMont Project incorporates this perspective with the aim of reconstructing the role of late-antique and early medieval societies in the origin of new mountain landscapes.



Parchment from Aiguafreda (1042)

### Landscapes, written sources and aristocratic control of peasantry

The first written documentation (9th-12th Centuries) shows the interest of the aristocracy to control peasant work processes, with the objective of capturing rents. But doesn't it also show its capacity to transform agricultural spaces to increase the volume of those rents? And this transformation, can it be prior to the first written records?



Latin hexameter written by Eugenius of Toledo (7th c. CE). The inscription was found at Aiguafreda de Dalt site

### Bibliography

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