The Late Pleistocene sequence of Roccia San Sebastiano cave (Mondragone, Caserta) in Southern Italy. New data about technical behaviours in Final Mousterian levels (~39 ka BP)

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Résumé

The cave of Roccia San Sebastiano is a cave of tectonic-karstic origin at the foot of the southern versant of Monte Massico, in the territory of Mondragone (Caserta) in Campania (Southern Italy). Systematic excavation campaigns have been conducted here since 2001, under the direction of Marcello Piperno and Carmine Collina, leading to the partial exploration of an important Pleistocene deposit, extraordinarily rich in archaeological and palaeontological remains.

The cavity is divided into two distinct parts: a shelter, about 12 m long and 3 m deep, and a cave whose dimensions have not yet been ascertained because it is still partially obstructed by reworked sediments. The excavation campaigns lead to the exploration of the first gravettian level, called C, over a surface of about 6 m2; furthermore, the stratigraphic sequence was tested in a 3 m2 sounding, localized within the excavation area, to a depth of about 3 m.

The deepening of the sounding evidenced a thick stratigraphic and cultural sequence. At the present state of the research, at least six major phases, from different Gravettian horizons to Aurignacian until to the Final Mousterian levels, have been recognized in the deposit, whose chronological framework is based on a series of C14 dates on faunal remains included between 19.570±210 BP and 38.980±950 BP. A tooth of child attributed to Neanderthal has been found in the mousterian levels. From Final Mousterian to Gravettian the plain of Mondragone is characterized by the presence of persistent fresh water environments after the deposition of CI, ~39 kyr BP. During the marine regression a wide coastal plain emerged, creating the ideal habitat for equids and aurochs. The subsistence of the human groups living in the cave was based on the capture of red deer, aurochs, hydruntine and, to a lesser extent, of chamois. In this paper we present the chronostratigraphic data of the archaeological sequence and we shall take into consideration data from lithic assemblages attesting the variability of technical behaviours among the Final Mousterian levels. The study of the evolution of the lithic complex from these layers is important to understand the dynamics of the transition from Middle Paleolithic to Upper Paleolithic in the Tyrrhenian versant of Southern Italy.

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sciencesconf.org:uispp2018:181017
Mots-Clés: Southern Italy, technical behaviours, Final Mousterian, Palaeolithic