
The Mousterian Settlement of Grotta Reali (Rocchetta a Volturno, Molise, Southern Italy)

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Résumé

Grotta Reali is a key site for reconstruction of technical behaviour of the last Neanderthals in the Italian peninsula and the paleoenvironment of the area during MIS 3. The site is located in a small cave/shelter generated on the backside of a tufa waterfall, at the edge of a large terrace, in correspondence of the major spring of the Volturno River. The settlement dating between 50,940 and 40,370 cal BP, attests an intensive occupation localized at the crossroads of different biotopes, not far from the sources of raw material. Geomorphology, pollen data and faunal assemblage leads to the persistence of wooded environments with large open areas where cervids, horse and aurochs lived. These data are consistent with the chronological framework of the Pleniglacial Interstadial (MIS 3). The Mousterian occupation of Grotta Reali gives detailed information on the depositional dynamic of a major spring in Southern Italy, and contributes to the international debate on technical behaviour at the end of the Mousterian. In fact, productive strategies attest an "evolved" behaviour in which the laminar debitage is associated with "typical Mousterian" methods such as Levallois, discoid and the S.S.D.A. The presence of a laminar debitage in a volumetric conception, as occurs at Grotta Reali, is now attested in several European Middle Palaeolithic sites, and it is correlated by some authors to an important climatic fluctuation which would have caused a change in the techno-economic behaviour. In Italy, this production method has already been described in a few sites distributed along the entire peninsula: Riparo Tagliente, Grotta della Ghiacciaia and Grotta di Fumane in Northern Italy; Grotta di Gosto, Svolte di Popoli, Torre in Pietra and Grotta Breuil in Central Italy; Grotta di Castelcivita, Riparo L’Oscurusciuto and Grotta del Cavallo in Southern Italy. Main aim of this work is to provide further information on Mousterian technical behaviour, faunal and environmental data, based on the multidisciplinary studies undertaken in the Mousterian settlement of Grotta Reali in Southern Italy during a climatic unstable period of the Pleniglacial.

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Mots-Clés: Middle Palaeolithic, human behaviour, palaeoenvironment, subsistence strategies, calcareous tufa, Southern Italy