Disentangling the Micromousterian in the southern Balkans

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Résumé

Among several Mousterian facies in the Balkans recognized according to F. Bordes’ method or by a predominant technological or typological element, the Micromousterian stands out as a group defined in a completely different way – on artifact size. This ‘facies’ has been recognized in assemblages from numerous sites along the Adriatic coast in the southern Balkans. Its definition is independent of techno-typological parameters and as such obscures the variability that likely exists within this group. Small average artifact size in a lithic assemblage can result from several factors: raw material constraints, raw material selection, intensity of utilization of lithic resources, a purposeful production of small blanks, or a combination of these factors. Most of the eastern Adriatic Micromousterian industries most likely demonstrate the effects of small or low quality locally available raw materials that have an impact on the size and the flaking dynamics (e.g. Crvena stijena, Klissoura etc.), but some of them contain evidence of purposeful production of small flakes (e.g. Asprochaliko). Regardless of the cause of “microlithism”, all these assemblages are clustered together and considered to be a regional phenomenon. Despite the vague criteria used for its attribution, Micromousterian as a group remained in use, sometimes owing to the lack of any particular element that would classify or describe an assemblage, other than small artifact size. This paper will address the issue of the Micromousterian in the southern Balkans and aim to elucidate the causes of “microlithism” at two stratified and relatively rich rockshelters in the Adriatic region of the Balkan peninsula, Crvena stijena and Bioče (Montenegro). Raw material differences and the effects of their properties as well as on-site reduction intensity are recognized as factors affecting the stone implement size. Production of small blanks is testified both through extensive use of cores and through flake production on cores-on-flakes, including cores with varied arrangements of removals that resulted in small blanks sometimes of elongated form. These results will be compared to other assemblages in the Balkans so as to evaluate any regionally continuous development and chronologically consistent trends.

Mots-Clés: Middle Paleolithic, lithic technology, Balkans, Micromousterian

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