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Crvena Stijena revisited: The Late Mousterian assemblages

Dušan Mihailović^{a,*}, Robert Whallon^b^a Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade University, 18-20 Čika Ljubina, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia^b Museum of Anthropological Anthropology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA

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ABSTRACT

Crvena Stijena represents one of the key Middle Paleolithic sites in southeastern Europe. In the course of earlier investigations, the upper part of the Mousterian sequence was excavated on two occasions: in 1956 and 1958 by M. Brodar and from 1961 to 1964 by Đ. Basler. Materials from these campaigns were published separately and interpreted differently. After re-analysis of all these materials, it has been established that the artifact assemblages can not be directly assigned to any of the traditional facies (Denticulate Mousterian, Micromousterian, etc.), but rather to an undifferentiated (non-Levallois) facies of Typical Mousterian, which is characterized by pronounced expedient technology based on the exploitation of local raw materials and the application of ad hoc methods of core reduction and the preparation of tools. This re-analysis pointed out especially that in the final Mousterian at Crvena Stijena, as at several other sites in the Adriatic-Ionian region, blade/bladelet technology and Uluzzian elements (flaking of blades and bladelets from unipolar or bipolar cores on flakes, splintered pieces, backed tools) are present. This seems to indicate continuity and connection among cultural phenomena over the entire Adriatic-Ionian region during MIS3 and suggests the possibility that the Uluzzian might have spread from the southern Balkans towards Italy along the southern rim of the "Great Adriatic Plain," all of which could have belonged to a single "social territory."

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1. Introduction

The rock shelter of Crvena Stijena in Montenegro represents one of the key Paleolithic sites in the Adriatic-Ionian region. In the course of earlier investigations, carried out here by Mitja Brodar from 1955 to 1959 and by Đuro Basler from 1960 to 1963, 20 Middle Paleolithic layers, with a combined depth of over 20 m were excavated. Numerous artifacts and faunal remains were recovered from these layers, and a series of superimposed hearths with a depth of over 2 m was recorded (Brodar, 1958, 1958–1959, 1962, 2009; Basler, 1975a,b). This Middle Paleolithic sequence is capped by a layer of tephra, which can confidently be linked to the Campanian Ignimbrite event of 39.3 ka (Morley and Woodward, 2011). With all this, Crvena Stijena represents a unique site, not only in the Balkans but also in the whole Mediterranean area, and could present us a basis for observing changes in technology, economy, and the way of life of Neanderthals over a major portion of the Upper Pleistocene.

Unfortunately, given that investigations were made long ago, key data concerning the context of finds often does not exist or is unavailable, and the finds have not been analyzed adequately and published to a satisfactory extent. For these reasons, it has not been possible to discuss the place of Crvena Stijena in the development of the Paleolithic in the eastern Mediterranean region. However, the situation has changed significantly in recent years. Excavations were begun again at Crvena Stijena in 2004 (Baković et al., 2009), which have begun to give us a better picture of the horizontal and stratigraphic distribution of artifacts in the upper portions of the Middle Paleolithic sequence (layers XVIII–XVII). Also, the materials from Brodar's excavations, which have all been completely preserved, have become available for analysis. Because of these developments, we are now in a position to present a clearer picture of the artifact assemblages from the upper Middle Paleolithic layers at this site, and on the basis of these analytical results to attempt to determine to what degree the finds from Crvena Stijena agree with new interpretations of the end of the Middle Paleolithic in this area (Karavanić et al., 2008; Sittlivy et al., 2008; Mihailović, 2009; Kaczanowska et al., 2010; Peresani, 2012; Peresani et al., 2016).

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: dmihailo@f.bg.ac.rs (D. Mihailović), whallon@umich.edu (R. Whallon).

2. Geographical position and site stratigraphy

Crvena Stijena is located near the village of Petrovići, in the immediate hinterland of the Adriatic coast (Fig. 1). It lies high above the valley of the Trebišnjica River, where the river has now been turned into an artificial lake, at an elevation of around 700 m above sea level. Prior to excavation, the rock shelter was some 26 m wide, 15 m high, and 25 m deep, but now, after partially emptying the shelter of sterile sediment, its dimensions are considerably larger. Investigations have shown that the layers inside the rock shelter were deposited in a deep pocket between a large mound of sterile detritus at the entrance, washed in from above, and the back wall of the shelter. The layers in the site thus exhibit a strong slope from the entrance toward the interior.

After initial excavations in 1954, when it was determined that the shelter contained aceramic layers, M. Brodar joined in the research, and excavations of the Upper Paleolithic and the later phases of the Middle Paleolithic were carried out under his direction from 1955 to 1959. Brodar began excavations in 1956 in the innermost part of the shelter (his sonda C), where he reached layer XIV (Brodar, 1958), and in 1958 he opened a test pit against the back wall of the shelter (Fig. 2) where he reached layer XVIII (Brodar, 1962). Alongside stratigraphic information, Brodar also presented preliminary data on the character of the assemblages, noting that the industry from Crvena Stijena reminded him strongly of that from San Bernardino in northern Italy, and in accordance with that could be assigned to the Micromousterian (Brodar, 1958, 1962).

Following preparatory work in 1959, in which Brodar did not participate, research at Crvena Stijena was taken over by Đ. Basler in 1960. Over the following four years, Basler expanded and deepened excavations considerably (Basler, 1975a). He removed all the Upper Paleolithic layers from the shelter, undertook excavation of the upper part of the Middle Paleolithic sequence over a much larger area (encompassing all earlier excavation areas), and brought the base of the excavations to a depth of 20.3 m (Fig. 3), where he was forced to stop because of a lack of space.

The results of the 1960–1964 research were published as a

monograph with chapters by several authors (Basler, 1975a). An abundance of information on the structure of archaeological and paleoecological data collected during this research is presented in this monograph. Nonetheless, the composition of artifact assemblages is given only summarily, along with basic quantitative data on cores, unretouched artifacts, and tool types. Basler determined the artifact assemblages as different types of Mousterian: the finds from layer XVIII were defined as Pontinian, from layers XVII–XIV as Mousterian, from layer XIII as Denticulate Mousterian, and from layer XII as Late Mousterian (Basler, 1975b), without taking the materials from Brodar's excavations into account at all. Karavanić et al. (2008) pointed to the small dimensions of the artifacts and the high frequency of denticulate tools at Crvena Stijena in their report on Mujina Pećina, and Papaconstantinou and Vujević considered the questions of the Denticulate and the Micromousterian in their dissertations (Papaconstantinou, 1989; Vujević, 2011).

There have been two major sedimentological investigations of the deposits at Crvena Stijena. Brunnacker undertook granulometric analyses with the aim of reconstructing the mechanical and chemical disintegration of the bedrock (Brunnacker, 1975), while Morley carried out analyses of the fine sediment fraction, applying sedimentological, geochemical, mineral magnetic and microscopic techniques (Morley, 2007; Baković et al., 2009). Morley separated three lithofacies within the stratigraphy at Crvena Stijena: lithofacies 1 consists of the upper layers, down to and including layer XIII, with coarse sub-angular to sub-rounded limestone gravel units in a sandy matrix, lithofacies 2 comprises the layers rich in charcoal and ash (XIV–XXIV), and lithofacies 3 is defined by the coarse, angular to sub angular limestone gravel beds of layer XXV (Morley, 2007).

Both Brunnacker and Morley attempted to assign geochronological ages to the layers at Crvena Stijena. Without going into the details of their determinations, and limiting ourselves only to the layers containing the archaeological material that one of us (Mihailović) has analyzed, it is worth noting that both authors related layers XVIII–XVII to climatic oscillations within MIS 5, and

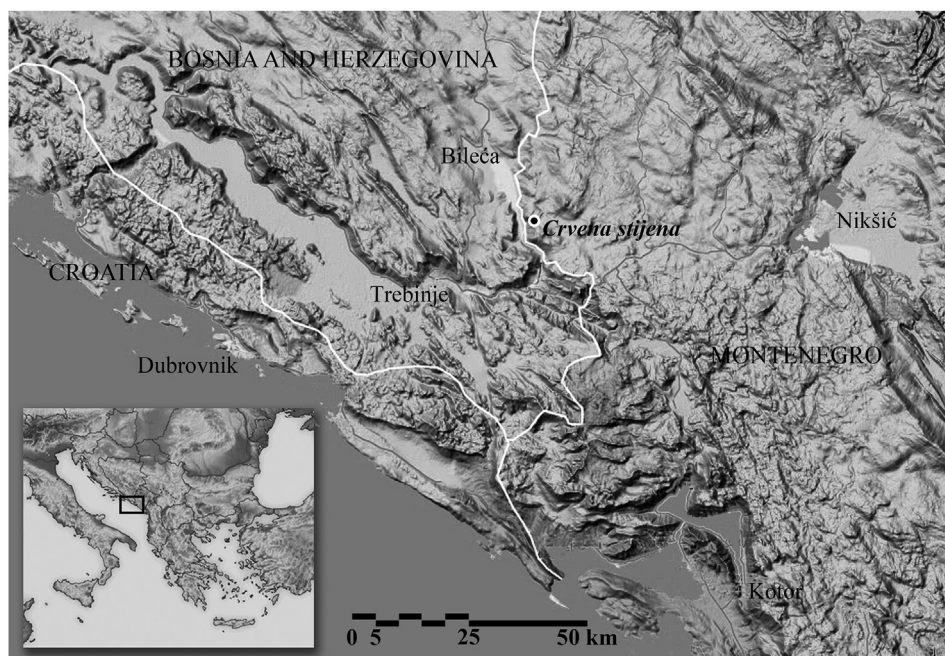


Fig. 1. The geographical position of Crvena Stijena.

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