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Mesolithic in Central–Southern Italy: Overview of lithic productions

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ABSTRACT

Drawing upon the already well-known archaeological record and on recent data, we present a general overview of Mesolithic stone production in Central–Southern Italy and its main islands, Sicily and Sardinia. In the Early Mesolithic (10th–9th mill. uncal. BP ca.), the lithic industries of this wide area reveal the presence of different *facies*, each with its own peculiar techno-typological features; an articulate picture most likely originating from differentiations in lithic production already in existence at the end of the Epigravettian in both the central–southern regions of the peninsula and in Sicily. On the basis of the available chronological and stratigraphical record from several Mesolithic sites, these lithic *facies* at least appear to be partly contemporary. Two of them, a Sauveterrian-like aspect and the Undifferentiated Epipalaeolithic, spread more widely, involving both the peninsular region and the main islands. Regarding the Sauveterrian, both the variability and originality of the southern complexes seem to be in relation to the progressive distance from the northern areas. In Southern Apulia, we see the appearance of the Epiromanellian, coeval to the spread of Sauveterrian. In Sicily the situation is more intricate. During the Early Holocene an Epigravettian–tradition microlithic *facies* with unilateral backed tools and geometrics is attested on the island, spreading together with peculiar Sauveterrian-like industries and the Undifferentiated Epipalaeolithic. In Corsica–Sardinia, only the Undifferentiated *facies* is documented. The emergence of some industries with trapezes during the first half of 9th mill. cal. BP in Central–Southern Italy and Sicily and, later, in Tuscany attest the formation of Castelnovian-like aspects which closed the local Mesolithic cycle.

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1. Introduction

The last decade has produced numerous studies on the Mesolithic in Central–Southern Italy and the islands of Corsica–Sardinia and Sicily. Several papers focused on single sites, in addition to a few regional-scale works (i.e. Costa, 2004a,b; Vigne et al., 2005; Alhaique and Bietti, 2007; Lugliè, 2009; Lo Vetro and Martini, 2012; Martini and Tozzi, 2012) have served to progressively update the complex framework of the Mesolithic in this area. A first, and quite-exhaustive, synthesis for the Mesolithic stone production of Central–Southern Italy was presented by Martini and Tozzi at the UISPP held in Italy in 1996 (Martini and Tozzi, 1996). The authors presented an articulate delineation consisting of different Mesolithic *facies* – each with its own peculiar techno-typological features – the variability of which derived from the different lithic traditions characterising the local Late Epigravettian. Nearly twenty

years later, a new study into the Mesolithic stone productions of this wide area is necessary, not only to incorporate the new evidence but also to fit it within the context of the Mesolithic of other Mediterranean regions. This paper therefore presents the synthesis of a considerable amount of data, some of which is unpublished or in press (i.e.: Fiore et al., 2016; Tagliacozzo et al., 2016; Martini et al., 2016; Martini and Sarti, in press), about the techno-typological features and chronology of Mesolithic stone assemblages from numerous key sites of Central–Southern Italy and the islands of Corsica–Sardinia and Sicily. The results of recent multidisciplinary research and new radiocarbon datings, provide us food for thought to further discuss the variability of these lithic complexes, and their economic implications, and how they relate to the different local environmental context.

After a brief overview of the archaeological record (section 2) and the geomorphological and environmental settings (section 3), the main attributes of each *facies* (Sauveterrian, Undifferentiated Epipalaeolithic, Epiromanellian Epigravettian–tradition Sicilian *facies*, Castelnovian), will be described (section 4). Section 5 offers hypotheses accounting for the variability of the Mesolithic stone

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assemblages in these areas. Three main topics will be discussed: 1) the cultural processes of regionalisation relating to the spread of Sauveterrian techno-typological models in Southern Italy and Sicily; 2) the cultural identity of the Undifferentiated Epipalaeolithic *facies* and the critical issues of an exclusively functionalist interpretation of these lithic complexes; 3) the origin of blade and trapeze tradition in Southern Italy and Sicily.

2. Archaeological record

In Central–Southern Italy and Sicily, the emergence of the Mesolithic is to be situated during an early phase of the Holocene, as in other areas of Northern Italy. In contrast, however, with the Po Valley and the alpine regions, which were united by the spread of Sauveterrian, several coeval techno-typological trends occurred in the central and southern regions of the peninsula and in Sicily during the Early Holocene. Some spread only locally, such as the Epiromanellian in Salento (south of Apulia), and a microlithic *facies* in Sicily (the so-called “Epigravettian-tradition *facies*”), both marked by distinctive typological features which can be traced back to the local Epigravettian. Other *facies* disseminated more widely, such as the Undifferentiated Epipalaeolithic, which also includes

the Sardinia–Corsica region, and the Sauveterrian-like assemblages which spread mainly along the Tyrrhenian side and Sicily (Figs. 1 and 2) (For the reference about the different lithic *facies* see section 4).

Numerous radiocarbon dates, taken from several sites across the different regions, have yielded a detailed chronological record for the Mesolithic of the Central–Southern Italian Peninsula and its islands (Table 1). After a critical review of the radiocarbon dates pertaining the different Mesolithic *facies*, we may conclude that, in general, the earlier evidence should be placed within the Preboreal in a chronological range spanning from 11.6 to 11 ka cal. BP. ca., without significant chronological differences between the central and southern regions. On the basis of the most reliable radiocarbon dates it seems that the most ancient dates are recorded in the South of the Peninsula while Sardinia–Corsica which became involved about a millennium later (Figs. 3 and 4). This chronological framework appears comparable to that of the continental regions, indicating a rapid and quite simultaneous “mesolithisation” of this area of the Mediterranean. The emergence of several industries with trapezes, during the first half of 9th mill. cal. BP in Southern Italy and Sicily and, some centuries later, in the central regions, closed the local Mesolithic cycle.

Table 1
Radiocarbon dates from the Mesolithic sites of Central–Southern Italy, Sicily and Sardinia–Corsica calibrated with CalPal, 2007 (Weninger et al., 2013) using the IntCal13 calibration curve (Reimer et al., 2013). Dates from marine shell are calibrated using marine reservoir correction value ($\Delta R = 71.00 \pm 50$) for Sicily (Siani et al., 2000). Dates that are manifestly wrong, because they are inconsistent with the stratigraphic sequences or with the archaeological context, have been excluded. (B: bone; C: charcoal, MS: marine shell).

Site	Code Lab.	Age BP	Calendar age cal. BP (2 σ)	Cultural facies	Sample	System	References
Central Italy							
Isola Santa (Tuscan Apennines)							
spit 4a	R-1525a	7380 \pm 90	8370–8020	Sauveterrian	C	Conv	Kozłowski et al., 2003
spit 4a	R-1525	7460 \pm 130	8518–8010	Sauveterrian	C	Conv	Kozłowski et al., 2003
spit 4b	R-1526	8840 \pm 120	10200–9561	Sauveterrian	C	Conv	Kozłowski et al., 2003
spit 4c	R-1527	8590 \pm 90	9887–9435	Sauveterrian	C	Conv	Kozłowski et al., 2003
spit 4d	R-1528	8780 \pm 110	10159–9551	Sauveterrian	C	Conv	Kozłowski et al., 2003
spit 4e	R-1529	9220 \pm 90	10650–10225	Sauveterrian	C	Conv	Kozłowski et al., 2003
Piazzana (Tuscan Apennines)							
layer 3A1	Rome 400	7330 \pm 85	8339–7983	Castelnovian	C	Conv	Kozłowski et al., 2003
layer 3D	R-395	8080 \pm 90	9270–8650	Sauveterrian	C	Conv	Kozłowski et al., 2003
layer 3E	R-396	8450 \pm 90	9595–9143	Sauveterrian	C	Conv	Kozłowski et al., 2003
layer 3F	R-397	8890 \pm 90	10225–9695	Sauveterrian	C	Conv	Kozłowski et al., 2003
layer 3I	R-399	8990 \pm 90	10372–9770	Sauveterrian	C	Conv	Kozłowski et al., 2003
layer 3G	R-398	8780 \pm 90	10154–9555	Sauveterrian	C	Conv	Kozłowski et al., 2003
Riparo Fredian (Tuscan Apennines)							
layer 4	AA-10951	9458 \pm 91	11105–10444	Sauveterrian	C	AMS	Kozłowski et al., 2003
Levane (mid-Arno valley – Tuscany)							
Unit III	LTL231A	8885 \pm 65	10195–9743	Sauveterrian	C	AMS	Magi et al., 2008
Unit III	LTL232A	8823 \pm 40	10151–9699	Sauveterrian	C	AMS	Magi et al., 2008
Riparo Blanc (Lazio)							
upper level	R-341	8565 \pm 80	9760–9423	Undifferentiated Epipalaeolithic	C	Conv	Taschini, 1968
Grotta Continenza (Fucino basin – Abruzzo)							
spit 24	LTL6186A	7000 \pm 60	7942–7698	Castelnovian	C	AMS	Serradimigni, 2014
spit 25	Rome 552	9490 \pm 100	11145–10516	Sauveterrian	C	Conv	Grifoni Cremonesi et al., 2011
spit 26	Rome 553	9100 \pm 100	10556–9931	Sauveterrian	C	Conv	Grifoni Cremonesi et al., 2011
spit 26	Rome 555	9650 \pm 100	11231–10721	Sauveterrian	C	Conv	Grifoni Cremonesi et al., 2011
spit 27	Rome 554	9330 \pm 100	11057–10245	Sauveterrian	C	Conv	Grifoni Cremonesi et al., 2011
spit 28	Rome 556	9680 \pm 100	11247–10734	Sauveterrian	C	Conv	Grifoni Cremonesi et al., 2011
Grotta di Pozzo (Fucino basin – Abruzzo)							
Unit VI	TO-6081	9110 \pm 80	10516–9970	Sauveterrian	C	AMS	Mussi et al., 2011
Unit VI	TO-3421	9140 \pm 70	10496–10199	Sauveterrian	C	AMS	Mussi et al., 2011
Unit VI	TO-3422	9370 \pm 80	11060–10292	Sauveterrian	C	AMS	Mussi et al., 2011
SW Italy							
Grotta della Serratura (Southern Campania)							
layer 5	Bln-3568	9700 \pm 60	11237–10792	Undifferentiated Epipalaeolithic	C	Conv	Martini, 1993
layer 5	UtC-751	9790 \pm 170	11918–10676	Undifferentiated Epipalaeolithic	C	AMS	Martini, 1993
layer 6	Bln-3569	9620 \pm 60	11179–10759	Sauveterrian	C	Conv	Martini, 1993
layer 6	UtC-752	9770 \pm 140	11700–10712	Sauveterrian	C	AMS	Martini, 1993
layer 7	Bln-3570	9870 \pm 70	11604–11179	Sauveterrian	C	Conv	Martini, 1993

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