
Investigating the Early to Late Mesolithic transition in North-Eastern Italy: a multifaceted regional perspective

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Abstract

The Early to Late Mesolithic transition represents the main large scale cultural event occurred at the times of last European hunter-gatherer-fishers, although not necessarily homogeneous from the point of view of its origin and diffusion. Such transition was recognized since the earliest researches on the Mesolithic and was identified through changes recorded by lithic assemblages. Still it continues to be almost exclusively discussed on the base of the lithic evidence although in the last years a wider techno-economical perspective has been adopted.

This paper does not seek to identify the origins of this transition but to focus on its effects and in particular on the dynamics and features describing its development on a regional perspective. In order to investigate the underlying phenomena of this technological transition the main archaeologically visible shifts in the daily life of hunter-gatherer-fisher groups were monitored, as well as the relations between them and the change pace (i.e. gradual vs. abrupt).

Our work explores the evidence from North-Eastern Italy, where Early and Late Mesolithic are represented by the Sauveterrian and Castelnovian cultural facies. This area represents one of the European regions with the richest Mesolithic record, despite the limits imposed by the still small number of available radiocarbon dates. In the absence of any genetic record this issue is tackled from a wide archaeological perspective by discussing different orders of data: technological (implications related to the adoption of the new knapping techniques in the Late Mesolithic, raw materials requirements and itineraries related to provisioning), economical (especially in relation to subsistence strategies), territorial (settlement patterns

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and organization of mobility), social and ritual (evidence of stability versus shifts in the social organization of human groups and their symbolic world).

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