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# An elusive transition: Revisiting the Mesolithic/Neolithic continuity in the Southern Adriatic and its margins

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## Résumé

Both Mesolithic and Early Neolithic occupations have been recorded in several caves in the south of the Adriatic Sea with hinterland (Crvena Stijena, Vruća Cave and Odmut in Montenegro), and in the area between the Adriatic and Ionian seas (Sidari in Greece and Konispol in Albania). This apparent stratigraphic continuity was often interpreted as an evidence of population continuity and therefore as an evidence of acculturation of indigenous Mesolithic groups, i.e. their adoption of Neolithic innovations. These claims were supported by an apparent technological stability in the lithic production over time evidencing a cultural continuity between the Mesolithic and Neolithic. In this paper, we question these claims of continuity by re-examining the data from two cave sites in Montenegro, Crvena Stijena and Odmut.

We do this by considering two lines of evidence: lithic technology from both Mesolithic and Early Neolithic layers, and the quality of contextual information that will inform about possible post-depositional disturbances and/or inadequate excavations and artefact curation.

Lithic assemblages were studied according to the concepts of *chaîne* and *schéma opératoire*, débitage economy, and raw material economy. The contextual information was evaluated based on the available excavation documentation and collected data.

The reinterpretation of the data shows that the lithic industries from both horizons can be described as Castelnovian, which leaves the acculturation hypothesis possible. Such claims, however, cannot be reliably demonstrated because of evident post-depositional disturbances coupled with inappropriate methodologies of old excavation field techniques and post-excavation treatment of the data (mixing of materials, "inversions" in radiocarbon sequences, excavation performed by unskilled workmen following arbitrary layers, inadequate recording of the context, dissatisfactory storage, non-critical interpretations, etc.).

**Mots-Clés:** Neolithisation, Castelnovian, Montenegro, Adriatic, Lithic production, excavation and curation

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