
Ornaments and Pigments and their implications in behavioural modernity during the Middle to Upper Palaeolithic transition in Italy

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Résumé

The Early Upper Palaeolithic is characterized by key innovations and significant changes involving both technological and symbolic aspects. The use of personal ornaments and colouring substances as well as the occurrence of figurative art are consistently related to "non-utilitarian" (symbolic) activities. Since the late Middle Palaeolithic, objects of this kind are usually associated to the emergence of the so-called "modern behaviour". In the Uluzzian and the Protoaurignacian archaeological deposits of Northern and Southern Italy, such evidence mostly consists of personal ornaments (mainly perforated Gasteropods) and mineral pigments. However, the Protoaurignacian notch and incision patterns from Riparo Bombrini and Riparo Mochi are also worth of consideration as symbolic activities. Instances of figurative art are rare and are found only in Northern Italy, in particular at Grotta Fumane where formal expressions painted on stones have been retrieved.

From an archaeological perspective, the systematic use of personal ornaments and pigments (which are possibly also connected to body painting) is the ideal proxy from which a number of behavioural characteristics involving social relationships within a group (in terms of age, gender, social status etc..) and ethnic identity can be inferred.

We propose a state-of-the-art account based on the whole set of materials related to symbolic behaviour (e.g. personal ornaments, engraved stones or bones, pigments...) from

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archaeological sites bearing evidence of the Middle to Upper Palaeolithic transition in Italy. Technological processes (from the procurement of raw materials to their processing) used in the manufacturing of this intriguing class of materials will be taken into account in order to make sound inference on their use. In this respect, the potential of personal ornaments and pigments from the Italian transitional complexes has been so far little explored. Our synthesis will be, therefore, of great help to lay basis for more in depth studies aimed at detecting cultural innovations at the onset of symbolic behaviour in the context of "transitional" human groups.

Mots-Clés: Uluzzian, Early Upper Palaeolithic, Ornaments, Pigments, Italy