
Mammals and birds in Italy : a view across the MP-UP humans transition.

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Résumé

Evidence of Late Middle (MP) and Early Upper Palaeolithic (UP) human activities are well represented in rock-shelters, caves and open air sites across the Italian peninsula. Over the past decade, the revision of taphonomic processes affecting archaeological faunal assemblages as well as new zooarchaeological studies, allowed archaeologists for the reconstruction of activities, strategies and cultural behaviors attributed to Neanderthal and Sapiens groups in this region. The present work (part of a 5 years research program ERC n. 724046 – SUCCESS) offers a state-of-the-art synthesis on human exploitation of mammals and birds in the Northern Mediterranean area across Late Middle and Early Upper Palaeolithic, i.e. in a critical chronological interval for reconstructing change in human behaviour and adaptive strategies. Data sources, between 45 and 35 ky ago, comprise faunal assemblages recovered in the final Mousterian, Uluzzian and Aurignacian stratigraphic contexts from Grotta di Fumane, Riparo del Broion, Riparo Bombrini in northern Italy, and Grotta di Castelcivita, Grotta della Cala, Grotta del Cavallo, and Riparo l'Oscurusciuto in southern Italy. As a whole, such record includes ungulate, bird, and carnivore bones, resulting more often from primary accumulation than from post-depositional processes or from direct carnivore action. Overall, zooarchaeological analysis and comparison between sites suggest a marked change in the ecological context of the examined human occupations since the earliest Aurignacian occupation, with particular reference to lower temperature and lower humidity. In some cases,

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avifaunal and carnivore remains seem to offer a better proxy of available resources. Taphonomic analysis reveals the presence of human modifications referable to different butchering actions over almost all the ungulates. However, the processing of ungulate bones dated to MP is clearly different from the same processing recorded throughout the UP. A preliminary comparison between different contexts based on bone frequencies and on the distribution of levels of bone combustion poses interesting questions concerning the use of hearths. In addition, based on preliminary results, higher diversity in hunted taxa may be hypothesised since the end of middle Palaeolithic. The inclusion of different contexts, the generation of new qualitative taphonomic records produced by humans within a large area, and the formal test of specific hypotheses on the processes underlying change over time in the frequency of exploited taxa contribute substantially to reveal exploitation strategies of small, medium, and large carnivores, rodents, and birds by Neandertals and modern humans.

Mots-Clés: Aurignacian, Uluzzian, Mousterian, taphonomy, zooarchaeology, Italy