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The Site of Santa Maria di Agnano (Brindissi, Italy)



Amel Chakroun^{1*}, Henry Baills² and Donato Coppola³

¹Département de géologie, Faculté des Sciences de Tunis, Tunisia

²Centre Européen de Recherches Préhistoriques de Tautavel, France

³Department History, University of Rome, Italy

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***Corresponding author:** Amel Chakroun, Département de géologie, Faculté des Sciences de Tunis, El Manar II, Tunisie,
Email: chakroun_amel@yahoo.fr

Abstract

In this review we will present the state of the different researches in the site of Santa Maria di Agnano. A brief presentation of the Gravettian skeletons Ostuni 1 and Ostuni 2 is presented. The different axis of the recent studies focusing on industry, sedimentology and archaeomalacology are enumerated and placed in the sites dynamic context allowing the knowledge of the Gravettian group living conditions.

Keywords: Santa Maria d'Agnano Cave; Gravettian; Burial; Pregnant Women; Shells; Adornments; Taphonomic; Sma Esterno; Floral; Faunal; Art factual; Human groups; Skeletons; Gravettian group; Burial pit; Crouching; Historic; Skulls

Introduction

The cave of Santa Maria di Agnano (Brindissi, Italy) had been frequented by human groups in many periods spanning from the Gravettian to historic times [1-3]. In 1991, this cave of Santa Maria d' Agnano revealed the presence of two Gravettian burials [2,4]: ostuni 1 (25589-25482 calBC) and ostuni2 (26339-25779 cal BC). The discovery was made by professor D. Coppola who successively found both skeletons in a crouching position with flexed legs, Ostuni 2 standing against the first skeleton Ostuni 1 [4,5]. The first discovered skeleton was attributed to twenty year old pregnant woman in a high stage of pregnancy [2]. The remarkable discovery of an exceptional well preserved mother and foetus skeletons could probably shed light on the Garvettian group behavior.

In 1995, the artifacts found in the burial pit of ostuni1 were considered as associated to the burial [4]. Later, in 2012 the techno-topologic analysis carried out by H. Baills on 129 artifacts demonstrates that the lithic series correspond to the Gravitation industries of southern Italy including various burins (Figure 1). Only eleven artifacts were deposited voluntary, the 118 remaining tools associated to a reddish sediment rich in charcoal, reminding the deposit situated in front of the cave, were considered to be originated from the anthropic frequented area (SMA esterno) situated in front of the cave [6-8]. Indeed, the sediment logic analysis of the different habitat layers samples were composed of reddish deposit, rich in charcoal and lithic remains [9]. Excavations conducted at the site revealed

additional floral, faunal and art factual evidence of human occupation [7,8,10-14].



Figure 1: Ostuni1 skeleton (photo by D. Coppola).

Both skeletons Ostuni 1 and 2 were involved in a large genetic program implying DNA determination of 51 Eurasian specimens belonging to the period ranging from dating from 45,000 to 7,000 years [11]. Thus based on the mitochondrial DNA analysis this research attributed both skulls to two women (Fu et al., 2016). Hundreds of perforated red ochre colored shells cover all the skull of Ostuni 1 [4].

The shells are perforated and belong to few species. Several kinds of perforated shells (*Tritianeritea*, *Tritiamutabilis*, *Trivia*

monacha and Columbellarustica) constitute a bracelet around the right wrist of ostuni 1 and cover her skull. Taphonomic, technological and morphometric analysis of the ornaments associated to the ostuni adornment are used to understand the choice of the shells to manufacture the bracelet and the head beads. The first result shows that the elements that compose the bracelets and the head beads belong to a few numbers of species, which confirm the choice of certain species among others present along the Adriatic coast in their near environment. The large number of shells in the ornaments elements reflects the importance and the time spent to collect these latter [15].

Our present analysis focused on all ornaments associated to Ostuni1 skull preserved in the Preclassic Civilization Museum of Southern Murgia in Italy. Traces of ochre were observed on Nassarius. The adornment would testify either of the affection of the family members or translate a social rank in the group. In the latter case, it could characterize a woman who has acquired by her actions a particular status within the group or it was a special action toward a pregnant woman who sadly passed away without giving birth to her baby.

However, our knowledge of the living conditions of the human groups who frequented this site is still largely incomplete. The different research axis aims to fill at least some of these gaps. Thus the site was considered to be of a major importance in the understanding of the dynamic of the Gravettian groups in the area. Currently, different excavation areas had already been lead on this remarkable site in different places: inside and outside the cave in the "SMA ESTERNO" which is situated in front of the entry area. The objectives of the different excavations are: to understand the spatio-temporal organization of Gravettian occupations inside and in front of the cave SMA-Esterno, to estimate the degree of bioturbation, to estimate the lateral extension of the Gravettian level and to specify more precisely the type of human occupation. In order to evaluate the stratigraphy of the site and the degree of the post-depositional modifications, a micromorphologic study, will complete the data on the archaeological deposit dynamics.

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