Over the Hills and Far Away

Last Glacial Maximum Lithic Technology around the Great Adriatic Plain

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Cover: Fosso Mergaoni (Ancona, Italy), early Epigravettian, ca. 21,000 calBP: refitting of lithic artefacts produced by the reduction of a large flint pebble.

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This study

'...e dirò di pietre consumate, di città finite, morte sensazioni,
racconterò le mie visioni spente di fantasmi e gente lungo le stagioni
e canterò soltanto il tempo...'

Francesco Guccini, 'Il tema'

This book is the direct outcome of my PhD research which addressed the subject of the human occupation of the northern Adriatic fringe around the end of the Last Glacial Maximum, ca. 24,000-20,000 calBP (Cancellieri 2011). The main contribution of this work is a technological analysis of the lithic assemblages from three early Epigravettian sites located in the central Italian Apennines, adding new elements to the set of data already established, and is useful in reconstructing settlement systems around the now submerged Great Adriatic Plain. More precisely, using information gained from the study of lithic assemblages, the objective here is to refine the picture of an important series of convergences and similarities linking the east and west sides of the current northern Adriatic gulf.

The main goal is to account for sites function, and for their role within a settlement system in the given area. To do this, analysis is focused on the detection of individual characteristics and peculiarities of selected archaeological assemblages and on their potential to indicate a functional orientation of the sites. Analysis of the archaeological record employs a techno-economic approach applied to the whole corpus of material from the given contexts. This maximizes the possibility of obtaining a wide and complete idea of the production, consumption and circulation of the lithic raw materials and the flaking products. The approach combines analysis of the reduction sequences and the assessment of the raw materials and flaking products economy.

The first chapter outlines the theoretical and methodological framework in which this study was carried out. In the introduction to the chapter, a very brief excursus of the main themes and directions of study in the archaeology of prehistoric hunter-gatherers is provided, with particular attention to the informative potential of lithic industries. The rest of the chapter sets out the main descriptive and interpretive standards adopted in the analysis of the archaeological material.

The following three chapters are devoted to the analysis, description and interpretation of the lithic assemblages from the study sites. Each chapter is introduced by a general description of the site, its location, the research carried out, and the chronological and stratigraphic data. The main section of each chapter presents the technological analysis of the lithic artefacts, whose description follows the theoretical phases of the reduction sequence. Morpho-technical and morpho-metric data are also provided. The final section of each chapter aims at organizing data synthetically and organically, as well as to provide an interpretation for the formation of the archaeological assemblages.

The last chapter synthesizes the archaeological evidence from three areas: the central Apennines (Marche and Abruzzi regions), the Berici Hills (Venetian region) and the northwestern Balkans (Slovenia and northern Croatia), and aims at integrating technological data within the broader discussion related to the human occupation of the northern fringe of the Adriatic gulf at the end of the LGM, focusing upon the borders of the once exposed Great Adriatic Plain.

This study contributes a point of view for the debate over whether the Great Adriatic Plain could have represented a favourable place for human groups during a period of environmental stress. Here, an argument is made for it having been presumably extensively occupied because its borders bear evidence for brief human visits for the purpose of resource acquisition, thus implying the existence of more stable settlement areas. Data about human mobility strongly point to an east-west direction, which further supports the idea of an active role of the Great Adriatic Plain.