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# SOME CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE SKELETAL REMAINS OF THE UPPER PALAEOLITHIC HOMO S. SAPIENS IN ITALY

ABSTRACT: The abundant skeletal material of Italian Upper Palaeolithic age is presented in this paper. The cranial morphology falls into the Crô-Magnoid type and does not show any character that could remind the Neandertalian typology. New studies on the specimens discuss some old theories still accepted by contemporary Italian authors. We exclude the presence of the Combe-Capelle type and we think that the gracilization observed for the samples belonging to the final Upper Palaeolithic is probably due to sedentarization and to poor nutrition.

KEY WORDS: Italian fossils – Gravettian

## INTRODUCTION

It is well known that in some parts of Italy Uluzzian lithic industries were found, which seem to contribute to the general phenomenon that caused the Chatelperronian in France (Palma di Cesnola 1965-66, 1989). In the second half of this century a hypothesis has appeared: that the Chatelperronian lithic industry had come from the Mousterian (Leroi-Gourhan 1956). The recovery of the obviously Neanderthalian skeleton from Saint-Césaire (Leveque, Vandermeersch 1980) into Chatelperronian layers which are following – from the lower to the upper one – the Mousterian, can be used as part of the evidence we have for this hypothesis.

In Italy Uluzzian human remains are represented only by two permanent molars which have been found in the Grotta del Cavallo (Messeri, Palma di Cesnola 1976). The study of these remains has clarified the archaic characteristics which are generally found in the populations of the Lower and Middle Palaeolithic period of Europe: foveae; cingulum

(at least in one tooth)(Mallegni, Sozzi, in print). So, we could suppose that the Uluzzian remains, dated by C14, are more than 31,000 years old (Palma di Cesnola 1975, Messeri, Palma di Cesnola 1976) and that they belong to archaic people (*Homo s. neanderthalensis*?).

The above dating is very important because the Uluzzian and the human remains of the Grotta del Cavallo, are placed in a considerably late period. Indeed, in Eastern Europe, there had been Aurignacian lithic industries since a long time, which usually have been attributed to the "modern humans" (Homo s. sapiens) though no human remains have been found for the earlier phases of these industries. We can refer to two examples for the Aurignacian which were dated between 42,350 ± 1,900 and 37,850 ± 900 B.P. in Installosko (Hungary) and 41,000 B.P. at Bacho-Kiro in Bulgaria (Broglio, Kozlowski 1987).

Until now, we have no dates of this period in Italy. However, in the Grotta di Castelcivita (Salerno) the Proto-Aurignacian level is represented by small backed blades (facies Dufour) which could be attributed to *Homo s. sapiens*, and are dated to  $30,980 \pm 720$  years B.C. (Gambassini 1982) (unless we find Neanderthalian remains which can be connected with this industry).

It is also possible that in Italy and in other European sites, these subspecies co-existed in a late phase (e.g. in Piage and in Roc de Combe in France); here, the Chatelperronian and Aurignacian layers document that the last Neanderthalian groups and the first *Homo s. sapiens* were contemporaries and inhabited sites with in the same region (Demars, Hublin 1989). Thus, the subspecies *Homo s. sapiens* could not have originated from the former one (Neanderthalians) (Gambier 1989).

The oldest remains of *Homo s. sapiens* which date back approximately to more than 90,000 years B.P. (Valladas *et al.* 1988) have been found in Skhull and Qafzeh (Israel). They have been considered as Proto-Cromagnoids (Vandermeersch 1981).

When the first remains of *Homo s. sapiens* were found in Western Europe, they were the Crô-Magnons, whose distinctive characters are the following: the skull is elongated, voluminous and considerably ovoid-pentagonoid; the vault is low (but higher when compared to Neanderthalians); the frontal bone is rather vertical; the occiput is prominent; the parietal eminencies are higher and evident; the occipital contour is house-like, the face is broad, basically low and orthognathe; the supercilliary arches and the supra-orbital borders are divided; the orbitals are of various forms, but generally low and subrectangular; the nose is narrow and prominent with a slightly raised profile; the infra-malar region is well marked; the canine fossa is deep; and the chin is prominent.

The postcranial bones have well marked muscular insertions, but the general structure is gracile when compared to archaic characters and the volume of the bones of the Neandertalians, which have a more robust appearance and voluminous epiphyses in the long bones of the extremities. The stature is very often considerably high; in fact, nearly all the individuals are taller than the modern European average (Parenti 1971).

There is a certain variability in the form and the dimensions, when considered from the point of view of modern morphology. Thus, the so-called "old man of Crô-Magnon" being considered the typical representative of the group, now has, at least at the cranial level, features which place him in one extreme position of the Crô-Magnoid variability.

About the skull of these first *Homo s. sapiens* also archaic traits may be distinguished, which are never in accordance with Neanderthalian apomorphies (Gambier 1989). It is very well known that a certain individual variability, completely normal, can be observed in all human groups, even in the most homogeneous ones.

We must avoid to think that this variability permits the presence of several human types (though this hypothesis can be found in several Italian anthropological papers), as we will see later.

### THE ITALIAN HUMAN SAMPLES

The human skeletal remains of Italy are the richest for the Upper Palaeolithic period. The skeletons, more or less complete, that have been found in primary burials and studied or described in preliminary reports, are 48. The Aurignacian-Gravettian ones are 18 (if we count the foetus of the pregnant woman found in the Grotta di S. Maria di Agnano in Ostuni – Vacca et al. 1992). The remaining 30 skeletons belong to the Recent Epigravettian period.

The oldest human remains are those of Grotta del Fossellone (a maxilla and a scapula – Mallegni, Naldini-Segre 1992). The maxilla is very fragmented but the alveolar process is low, so there is an impression of a low facial appearance which reminds of a Crô-Magnoid one. The teeth are robust and their morphology is modern, as well as that of the scapula. The morphology of these two remains is not random and thus permits to exclude the presence of Neanderthalians.

The excavations which led to the discovery of the Balzi Rossi (Grimaldi) skeletons, (Riviere 1873, 1879, 1887, Verneau 1892, Villeneuve et al. 1906) do not offer any certain dating, because they are very old (of the late 19th and the early 20th centuries), however, some of them could be referred as belonging to the Aurignacian period (Palma di Cesnola 1993). The oldest are the following: Barma Grande 1 (probably an adult male); Bauso da Ture I, II (two adult males) and III (an adolescent); Grotta del Caviglione 1 (has been considered as an adult male, but it is definitely a female – Giacobini, pers. comm.); Grotta dei Fanciulli IV (Grotte des Enfants) (an adolescent and an old female).

Among the old Gravettian or Epigravettian skeletons there are another four skeletons of the Barma Grande II burial (an adult male and two adolescents), the IIIrd burial (an adult male) and the individual No. 4 of Grotte des Enfants. The remaining Gravettian skeletons are the following: the pregnant woman and the foetus of the burlal in the Grotte de S. Maria di Agnano in Ostuni who have been dated to 24,410  $\pm$  320 years B.P. (Vacca et al. 1992) Vacca, Coppola 1993); the skeleton of a young adolescent [Paglicci 12] (Mallegni, Palma di Cesnola 1994) (olim Paglicci 2) (Mallegni, Parenti 1972) and a young adult female [Paglicci 25] (Mallegni 1992, Mallegni et al., submitted), dated to more than  $24,750 \pm 370$  and  $23,040 \pm 370$ 380 years B.P., respectively. Parabita 1 and 2 (Grotta delle Veneri), an adult male and adult female dated to about 20,000 years B.P. (Cremonesi et al. 1972, Palma di Cesnola 1993, Mallegni et al., submitted). The adolescent of Arene Candide [1] the so-called "young Prince" (Sergi et al. 1974), dated to the Early Epigravettian period.

The skeletons which are dated to the final Epigravettian are the following: Paglicci 3 (Mallegni, Palma di Cesnola 1994) (olim Paglicci 1) (Corrain 1965) (skeletal fragments of a male individual dated to 14,270 ± 230 and 13,590 ± 200 years B.P.); Grotte des Enfants 1, 2 and 3 (two children and one old woman); the 11 skeletons, more or less

complete, of Arene Candide (4 males, 2 females and 5 children), with a range of age between 0 – 35 years (Paoli et al. 1980); the skeletons of a child and an adult male disturbed burial) of the Grotta Riparo di Maritza (Grifoni, Radmilli 1964, Borgognini-Tarli 1969); the skeletons of San Teodoro (all the skeletons were considered to be males in earlier papers, but have recently been restudied and the Nos. 1 and 4 are now considered to be females – Fabbri 1993); the six adult skeletons of Grotta del Romito in Papasidero (3 males and 3 females – Mallegni, Fabbri 1995) which are dated to the end of the Epigravettian; the two skeletons of Vado all' Arancio (a young adult male and a child - Pardini, Lombardi-Pardini 1981); and finally the skeleton of an adult male in the Riparo Tagliente (Corrain 1966, 1977).

There is also a great number of teeth and isolated human bones of adults and children, found in the following sites: Grotta del Fossellone (Mallegni, Naldini-Segre 1992). Grotta Paglicci (Mallegni, Palma di Cesnola 1994), Grotte des Enfants, Arene Candide (Paoli et al. 1980), but also in other layers of the Grotta Romanelli, Grotta dei Cervi, Grotta Corbeddu, Finocchieto, Fontana Nuova and Grotta Polesini (Fabbri, in print).

The latter are probably disturbed burials and, perhaps in most of these cases, bear evidence of unknown ritual practices. So to give an explanation one should get involved into dangerous ethnographic parallels with contemporary populations.

# ABOUT SOME PAST THEORIES

The analysis of most of the Upper Palaeolithic human remains, especially of older discoveries, can be considered as completely out-of-date, as far as their interpretation is concerned. However, traditional anthropological methodology permits the discovery of Crô-Magnoid characters even in the most ancient individuals. This is true as much for the human remains of Liguria (where the great majority of the oldest remains and 52 % of Upper Palaeolithic burials have been found) as for the specimens of southern territories. This position can be confirmed by the continuous presence of the above mentioned characters among them, with some exceptions, the high stature being relevant. Some of these characters have been genetically defined. defined as archaic ones, e.g. well marked browridges; phenozyghy; high nasal ridge as in Neanderthalians; robust mandibles with evident gonion; prominent occipital protuberance (Graziosi 1942, Borgognini-Tarli 1969, Parenti 1969) Parenti 1960). Other characters are defined as those of the Upper Palaeolithic populations because they are found again in all the meric, again in all the individuals, e.g. the values of the meric, pilastric and tibia), pilastric and cnemic indices (for the femur and tibia), referring telerring only to some of the postcranial indices. For example, Bianchi et al. (1980) have used in their study some measurements of the femur and tibia for the analysis by Disco.

Mesolithic by Discriminant Functions of the Italian Mesolithic

specimens (including some specimens of the Late Upper Palaeolithic), that indicate that in the Mesolithic period in Europe and Northern Africa, two human types were represented: the Crô-Magnoid/Obercasseloid in the southwest and the Combe-Capelle/Proto-Mediterranean in the northwest (Bianchi et al. 1980).

In reality, the majority of the cranial characters mentioned above can be a consequence of the use of teeth (masticatory apparatus) and the pressure applied.

In such a way, we interpreted (Mallegni, Fabbri, in print) the presence of a tubercle observed in the zygomaxillary suture at the level of the lower edge of the orbital cavity in all the skulls of the Upper Palaeolithic era (Mallegni, Fabbri 1995). This tubercle is very often thick, because of the prominence of the lower edge of the eye-socket [orbital cavity] in the malar bone (zygomatic). The forces caused by the mastication process end in this region, on the nasal pillars as on the browridges. This is naturally followed by the thickening of this lower edge, forming a tubercle.

The other characters of the femur and the tibia are influenced by the stress caused by walking, very often on rough ground (Perzigian et al. 1984, Townsley 1946, Ruff, Hayes 1983). The way of life and the economy of the Upper Palaeolithic populations, indeed allow these conclusions. The postcranial characters can show the similarities and/ or the common trends of the morpho-functional elements better than the genetic relations.

The skeletons in the double burial in the Grotte des Enfants, the individuals No. 5 and No. 6 [GdE 5 and GdE 6] seem to exhibit different characters. They are an old female and a male adolescent, known as "Negroids" according to Verneau (1892). These negroid characters, in reality, are an artefact caused by the bad reconstruction of the skulls (Legoux 1966). The disproportional parameters of the face which is low and wide in comparison with the cranial vault (elongated) remind quite well of the Crô-Magnoid morphology.

Finally Olivier and Mantelin (1973-74) restudied the Grotte des Enfants 6 (young male), making a cast because the original was in poor condition. The result is that this individual has Crô-Magnoid characters differing a little from the other Crô-Magnons (p. 81).

The short stature of the two "negroids" can be considered as the result of a secular trend and/or nutritional stress during the bone development. The same is valid for the remaining individuals who are, more or less, contemporary, e.g. Barma Grande 1 (Graziosi 1942) and lying in the outer limit of the Crô-Magnoid range of variation for this character (Parenti 1971).

Fabbri has begun a new study of all the Italian Upper Palaeolithic skeletal material for his PhD in the Laboratory of Anthropology of the Bordeaux University (Fabbri, in print). He has already formulated several observations for sex determination based on modern methodologies. It seems that there were some mistakes in sex determination, e.g. in San Teodoro, but also in the Ligurian sample.

The same erroneous sex determination has occurred in

other cases such as in the skeletons of the Grotta del Romito in Papasidero (Mallegni, Fabbri, in print) and in the Grotta delle Veneri in Parabita (Mallegni et al., in print).

The last case, unlike the determination by Frayer (Mussi et al. 1989), consists of an adult male (Parabita 1) and an adult female (Parabita 2) who had been buried. Parabita 2 exhibits at the level of the pelvis the vast majority of estimated characters belonging to the female sex (Mallegni et al., in print). The determination made by Parenti, based on palaeoethnological considerations (position of the two skeletons) (Cremonesi et al. 1972) has been then confirmed.

So, we can doubt the validity of certain hypotheses about the meaning of burial customs in the Italian Upper Palaeolithic. This hypothesis was applied to the male skeletons (Formicola 1988, Mussi et al. 1989), but the presence in the Grotte des Enfants 6, of the five females of the earlier period, and another seven ones of a later period, do not seem to confirm this at all.

When young individuals are discovered, not showing the physical robustness of the adults, we do not find anything better that wondering if among the distinguishing criteria which concern the burial, we should include also the factors of the inherited social class [rank] (Formicola 1992).

This hypothesis (being moreover just a hypothesis of a hypothesis!) can be considered as funny and cheap, because there have been until now only male skeletons and generally defined as robust. Also, we should not forget the presence of very robust females (such as S. Maria di Agnano, Grotta Paglicci 25, Parabita 2, and Grotta del Caviglione 1 – Vacca et al. 1992, Mallegni 1992, Mallegni et al., in print), taking into account the fact that they might have been considered as the only suitable for skeleton burial, because of their physical appearance.

Ending this discussion, we would like to give a review of the theories which see the presence of two different human types and their mixing up into the populations of the Italian Upper Palaeolithic (Crô-Magnoids and Combe-Capelloids).

However, we must remember that the dating of the skeleton of Combe-Capelle to the Upper Palaeolithic has been under discussion for a long time. There are serious doubts about this (Asmus 1964).

Gambier (1989) analysed the theories on this burial and the critiques of other authors for the metrical data (Thoma 1972). The conclusion is that there is strong evidence for supporting the dating to the Upper Palaeolithic. More probably it was a matter of digging into the Aurignacian layers when preparing a grave in more recent times (Mesolithic, Neolithic? – Gambier 1989: 196).

Fabbri, in the history of his research of the anthropology of the Italian Upper Palaeolithic, presented in the introduction to his PhD (Fabbri, in print), observes that the type of Combe-Capelle [as belonging to the earlier Aurignacian period according to Klaatsch and Hauser (1910)], is considered parallel to Crô-Magnon by Giuffrida-Ruggeri's paper (1917). According to this author, the Upper

Palaeolithic people must have been divided in two types: the Crô-Magnon and the Combe-Capelle.

This theory has influenced very much the following authors who have accepted it: Graziosi 1947, Sergi 1952, Parenti 1960.

The study of the "young Prince" from Arene Candide (Sergi et al. 1974) provided the chance to accept for the first time (according to Parenti, n.d.s.) that the Italian Upper Palaeolithic population could have consisted of a unique group, and not of two distinct ones. The differences among the individuals could be due to an individual range of variation. But the validity of the Combe-Capelle type has never been put in question.

Later, after the publication of other skeletal remains (Pardini, Lombardi-Pardini 1980) of the Mesolithic period (Bianchi et al. 1980), including the cemetery of Arene Candide which is dated to the final Epigravettian, but has been considered in the above mentioned publication as Mesolithic, we are coming back to the typological approach and interpretation (Paoli et al. 1980).

Bianchi et al. (1980) also noticed that the statistical method applied confirmed the theories of traditional anthropology, and they supported the article of Giuffrida-Ruggeri (1917). We would like to underline here again that Bianchi et al. (1980) used certain characters which have been widely affected by functional stress and poor dietary situation; the proof of it is that the meric, pilastric and cnemic indices are reconsidered as indices for evaluating this kind of stress (Townsley 1946, Ruff, Hayes 1983, Perzigian et al. 1984).

We observed traces of gracilization, in the skeleton of Combe-Capelle (in comparison to Crô-Magnon), which reminds of certain Neolithic ones, represented in the Mediterranean type. Consequently, some individuals of the end of the Upper Palaeolithic showed evolutionary trends which played a role in the origin of the Mediterranean human types of the Neolithic and more recent periods (Giuffrida-Ruggeri 1917). Some individuals (the four of the two burials in the rock-shelter of the Grotta del Romito in Papasidero) and the skeletons of San Teodoro (Graziosi 1947), have therefore been considered as Proto-Mediterraneans. The hypothesis of Giuffrida-Ruggeri (1917) can be found again in one of the recent articles dealing with this problem (Bianchi et al. 1980). The presence of gracile individuals with short stature in the final Upper Palaeolithic is incontestable but the possibility that they represent Combe-Capelloids does not exist anymore, given that the individual of Combe-Capelle is perhaps a Neolithic one [ .... in favour of a Post-Aurignacian age (or even Post-Palaeolithic) for the Combe-Capelle skeleton] (Gambier 1989: 196). Besides we do not understand why the influence of Combe-Capelle would have been evident only at the end of the Upper Palaeolithic, considering its supposed great antiquity.

Perhaps it is more scientific to see in these phenomena of gracilization the results of evolutionary trends, where a role was played by the new strategy of survival consequent

to climatic changes (the beginning of sedentary life and/or other changes?).

other changes
The hypothesis for the arrival of new human groups
during some phases of the Upper Palaeolithic has not been
verified until today by any finds. According to LeroiGourhan (1956) significant human movements are very
rare and generally much slower than those of cultural
artifacts.

In any case, it is sure that the people of the Upper Palaeolithic and the Mesolithic continue to manifest Crô-Magnoid characters which were observed in the more ancient specimens, with a normal individual variability. A recent study has proved that the Neolithic people, the most ancient of Southern Italy, clearly show certain characters which can be related to those of the Upper Palaeolithic – Mesolithic (Mallegni, Usai 1995).

This significant homogeneity has been observed also in other groups of Western Europe. The frequent genetic exchange between different groups could be the only explanation. This would prevent the differentiation of gene pools. Besides, the strategy of survival of the Upper Palaeolithic populations, based on hunting and gathering, must have obliged them to frequent movements.

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