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A red deer antler from the Eneolithic necropolis of La Selvicciola (Ischia di Castro, Viterbo)

Un palco di cervo dalla necropoli eneolitica de La Selvicciola (Ischia di Castro, VT)

Summary - The archaeological site of "La Selvicciola", located about 7 km SW of Ischia di Castro (Viterbo), presents an interesting superimposition of historical evidences: the Eneolithic necropolis, the Roman Villa, the Paleochristian structures, the Lombard necropolis. In particular, the Eneolithic necropolis, discovered in 1987, is still under investigation, and so far includes 30 "a grotticella" tombs; such tombs are composed by one or more circular or elliptic chambers preceded by a quadrangular or circular vestibule. The necropolis, one of the largest attributed to the Rinaldone facies, on the basis of the radiometric dates on human remains, may now be framed between the first half of the 4th millennium and the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC. Tomb 31 is located in the southern part of the East sector, whose use seems to be concentrated mainly in the central part of the 4th millennium BC, with three evidences in the last quarter of that millennium. The tomb is composed by a quadrangular access shaft and two sub-circular chambers; inside chamber 2, close to the access from the shaft, a basal portion of a right red deer (*Cervus elaphus* L.) antler was recovered. This paper describes the conservation techniques and the archaeozoological analysis of this skeletal element.

Riassunto - Il sito archeologico de "La Selvicciola", situato a ca. 7 km a SW di Ischia di Castro (Viterbo), presenta un'interessante sovrapposizione di testimonianze storiche: la necropoli eneolitica, la villa romana, le strutture paleocristiane, la necropoli longobarda. In particolare la necropoli eneolitica, scoperta nel 1987 ed ancora in corso di esplorazione, è costituita, finora, da trenta tombe a grotticella, formate da una o più camere circolari o ellittiche precedute da un vestibolo all'incirca quadrangolare o circolare. La necropoli, una delle più grandi attribuite alla facies di Rinaldone, in base alle datazioni radiometriche effettuate su resti antropici può essere attualmente inquadrata tra la prima metà del IV e l'inizio del II millennio a.C. La tomba 31 si trova nella parte meridionale del settore est, la cui occupazione sembra essere concentrata maggiormente nella parte centrale del IV millennio a.C., con tre evidenze nell'ultimo quarto, ed è costituita da un pozzetto all'incirca quadrangolare e da due camere sub-circolari; all'interno della camera 2, in prossimità della porta di accesso dal pozzetto, è emersa una porzione di palco di cervo (*Cervus elaphus* L.). Nel contributo vengono descritte le tecniche di restauro e l'analisi archeozoologica del resto scheletrico.

Key words: Archaeozoology, Eneolithic, necropolis, red deer.

Parole chiave: Archeozoologia, eneolitico, necropoli, cervo.

THE ENEOLITHIC NECROPOLIS

The archaeological site of "La Selvicciola" is located about 7 km SW of Ischia di Castro (Viterbo) on the left bank of the Fosso Strozzevole. The area presents an interesting superimposition of historical evidences: the Eneolithic necropolis, the Roman Villa, the Paleochristian structures, the Lombard necropolis. In particular, the Eneolithic necropolis, discovered in 1987 and still under investigation (by the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici dell'Etruria Meridionale, Dott.ssa P. Pettiti), includes so far 30 "a grotticella" tombs, formed by one or more circular or elliptic chambers preceded by a quadrangular or circular vestibule (Cerilli *et al.* 1993; Conti *et al.* 1997; Pettiti *et al.* 1999; Conti *et al.* 2006a-c; Cerilli *et al.* in press; Pettiti *et al.* in press). The tombs are grouped into two relatively distinct clusters: one in the East sector and one in the North sector. The necropolis, one of the largest attributed to the Rinaldone facies, on the basis of the radiometric dates on human remains,

may now be framed between the first half of the 4th millennium and the end of the 3rd-beginning of the 2nd millennium BC.

The burial structures have been excavated in a sedimentary substrate formed by levels of different colors that are sub-horizontal or slightly SE dipping and are made of reworked volcanic materials deposited in a fluvio-lacustrine environment. Such substrate, heavily altered by pedogenesis in its upper part, is affected by an erosional surface, identified on the whole investigated area, dated between the Upper Pleistocene and the Holocene (Carrara 1994; Carrara *et al.* 2002). Above the erosional surface and the paleosol, a travertine bed with variable thickness according to the distance from the thermal springs was deposited.

TOMB 31

Tomb 31 is located in the southern part of East sector, whose use seems to be concentrated mainly in the cen-

tral part of the 4th millennium BC, with three evidences in the last quarter of that millennium. The tomb, whose edges have been heavily disturbed by the events occurring after the abandonment of the necropolis, is composed by a quadrangular access shaft and two sub-circular chambers. In both chambers, (C1 e C2), filled by a thin layer of filling and by the collapse of the vault, some very disturbed human skeletal elements were present. The shaft too contained some human remains.

During the excavations a basal portion of a red deer (*Cervus elaphus* L.) antler was recovered inside chamber 2, close to the access from the shaft.

THE RED DEER ANTLER

In consideration of the precarious preservation conditions of the specimen (the bone tissue was not cohesive and much fractured), it was necessary to perform a first conservative intervention already during the excavation. The antler was excavated and delineated for the required graphic and photographic documentation, without detaching it from the underlying sediment. At the same time a preliminary cleaning was carried out; after this process, thanks to the anhydrous conditions, and after verification of the absence of human modifications, the specimen was consolidated by aspersing it with a 5% solution of Paraloid B 72[®] in acetone.

In order to allow a more secure sampling and transportation, the antler was then bandaged with gauze and protected with temporary supports. The specimen was then removed with part of the underlying sediment and packed on a rigid support.

In order to allow the study, the element was restored by the author. At the beginning the bandage was removed by slightly moistening the gauzes with acetone and then gen-

tly removing them. The surface was then cleaned from the sediment still present, by mechanical removal and/or by the aid of hydrophilic cotton balls soaked in acetone. After drying, the specimen was again consolidated by aspersing, until rejection, with a 5% Paraloid B 72[®] solution in acetone. Some small fractures and some small, almost detached, portions have been stabilized by means of local injections of a 20% Paraloid B 72[®] consolidant solution in acetone. In some cases the local application of small drops of cyanacrylate adhesive (Super Attack[®]) was necessary. In order to operate in full safety, all these processes were carried out proceeding by small adjacent areas.

Despite these conservation processes, the preservation conditions advised against the separation the specimen from the sediment of the base that was then regularized and consolidated with a 10% Primal[®] consolidant solution in water.

The specimen consists of the basal portion of a right red deer antler (Fig. 1), preserving the pedicle with a portion of frontal bone, the coronet, very damaged, and the base of the beam with the brow tine. The tine is almost complete, although with some gaps, and is very large (length of the preserved portion about 250 mm, superior-inferior basal diameter 40 mm).

Because of the very bad preservation of the surfaces it was not possible to detect traces of human modifications, such as cuts and chop marks.

The dimensions and the morphology of the specimen indicate that it was not a shed antler and it belonged to a red deer stag that died at an advanced adult age, if not senile, between August and mid-February, when males still have the antlers. The presence of red deer indicate a landscape with wooded and forest areas in a temperate-fresh climate.

It was not possible to establish if the antler was separa-

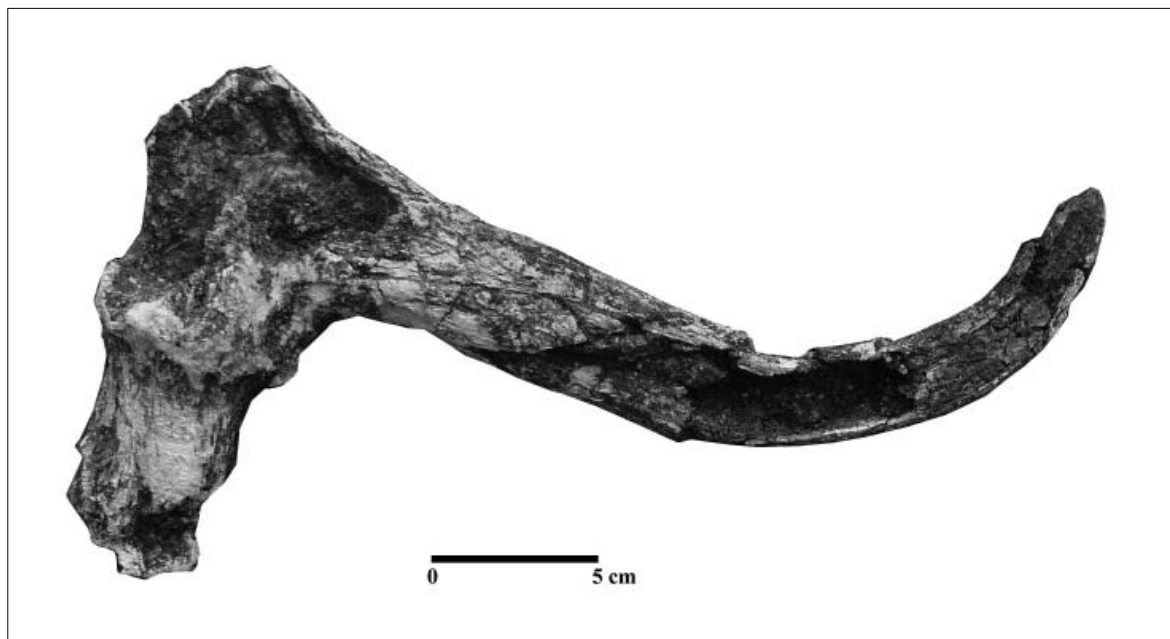


Fig. 1. Eneolithic necropolis of "La Selvicciola": basal portion of a right *Cervus elaphus* antler from Tomb 31.
Necropoli eneolitica de "La Selvicciola": parte basale di palco destro di *Cervus elaphus* dalla tomba 31.

ted from the cranium of an intentionally killed animal or if a cranial fragment of an animal dead for natural causes was collected and deposited. Furthermore, the impossibility to recognize traces of human modifications does not allow suggesting hypotheses on the possible manipulations that occurred before the deposition; it is also possible that the missing portions have been removed by disturbances after the closure of the tomb.

COMPARISONS

If red deer hunting is well attested in some Eneolithic settlements, mainly in central Italy, as for example at Conelle and Ortucchio (Wilkens 1999a-b), the presence of red deer remains in burials is less widespread. Remaining in nearby geographic areas it is possible to mention the fragment of red deer antler from the so called "Tomb of the Widow" (T20) at Ponte S. Pietro (Cardini, Rittatore 1958; Miari 1993; Tagliacozzo, Fiore in this volume), or, always in the Latium area, the tomb 2 at Cantalupo Mandela that yielded remains dubitatively attributed to red deer (Carboni 2002; Curci, Muntoni 2008). More frequent are instead the ritual depositions of dogs and pigs, complete skeletons or parts of them, as for example at Fontenoce (Silvestrini, Pignocchi 1997) and at Casale del Dolce (Fiore, Tagliacozzo 2000).

As far as the presence of red deer is concerned, during the Eneolithic in some sites of central and southern Italy, in continuity with the final Neolithic, there is a tendency towards resuming the exploitation of wild animal resources and there is an increase in red deer antler artifacts (Wilkens 1999b) which could be used for manufacturing tools and ornaments or as hammers and retouchers for the production of the lithic industry.

As far as the cultural and cult aspects are concerned, for the moment, *pour divertissement*, it is possible to suggest only comparisons with other geographic and chronological contexts, as for example the sorcerer dressed as a red deer (or half man and half deer) from Trois-Frères (Francia, ca. 13000 a.C.), or a large rock engraving in Val Camonica (4th cent BC), or the deer-god of kelt origin (e.g., the Gundestrup cauldron, 1st cent BC), examples of the continuous presence of the cult of the image of this animal, considered also as a "noble" inhabitant of the woods and not only as a source of proteins and raw material.

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