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Article

The "Total Archaeology Project" and the Mesolithic occupation of the highland district of San Vito di Cadore (Belluno, N-E Italy)

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Key words

- Lithic scatters
- Mesolithic
- Belluno Dolomites
- Landscape Archaeology

Parole chiave

- Rinvenimenti litici di superficie
- Mesolitico
- Dolomiti bellunesi
- Archeologia del paesaggio

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Summary

Mesolithic lithic scatters were identified in the highland district of San Vito di Cadore (1800-2700 m a.s.l.) since the late 1970s, mostly enhanced by the discovery of the site of Mondeval de Sora. From 2011 to 2015 a new archaeological survey project was developed in this territory, focusing on the area between Passo Giau and Col de la Puina. A "total archaeology approach" enabled different types of archaeological evidence to be recorded. In this paper the Mesolithic assemblages are presented. Both previously identified and newly recognised find-spots were positioned, described and spatially analysed in connection to the topography of the investigated territory, in order to provide insights on the settlement strategies adopted by the Mesolithic groups in this area.

Riassunto

Il rinvenimento di manufatti mesolitici in alta quota nel territorio di San Vito di Cadore (1800-2700 m s.l.m.) è iniziato durante fine anni '70 del secolo scorso, incentivato dalle ricerche nel sito di Mondeval de Sora. Tra il 2011 e il 2015 è stato sviluppato un nuovo progetto per la ricognizione archeologica di quest'area e, in particolare, del settore fra Passo Giau e Col de la Puina. L'adozione di un "approccio di archeologia totale" ha permesso di registrare numerosi tipi di evidenze, non limitati ai soli manufatti preistorici. In questo contributo saranno prese in considerazione esclusivamente le presenze mesolitiche. Nello specifico, i siti già noti e quelli individuati durante il recente survey sono stati posizionati, descritti e analizzati in relazione alla topografia del territorio al fine di avanzare ipotesi sulle strategie insediative dell'area.

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The total archaeology project: an introduction

Between 2011 and 2016 a new field survey project has started in the upland territory of the ancient "Regole" of San Vito di Cadore (Belluno Dolomites, North-Eastern Italy) involving the Universities of Ferrara and Trento with the collaboration of the Soprintendenza Archeologia del Veneto (Heritage Office for Veneto Region). The research territory includes the areas of Passo Giau, Mondeval de Sora and Malga Prendera-Col de la Puina, located at altitudes spanning between 1800 and 2700 m a.s.l. and delimited - north to south - by the Boite and Cordevole valleys, sub-tributaries of the Piave river.

The main aim of the project is the recording of every evidence of human activity identifiable on the surface, with no chronological restriction. Prehistoric and historical sites, as well as modern and contemporary material evidence of human occupation of the uplands were documented, thus overcoming the traditional chronological boundaries of archaeological research (Visentin et al. 2016, Cavulli et al. 2015). This approach has been called "total archaeology". The same terminology has been used to describe other archaeological projects that integrate different methods and approaches (Olson *et al.* 2013, Evans *et al.* 2006), but has rarely been referred to diachronic landscape analyses, as in the present case. Fieldwork activities followed a multi-scale approach, looking for evidence of different sizes: 1) micro- e.g. artefacts; 2) meso- e.g. rock engravings; 3) macro- e.g. structures and facilities.

The Mesolithic evidence

The discovery of Mesolithic assemblages in the Belluno Dolomites started in the late 1970s with the work of B. Bagolini and

Tab. 1 *- Mesolithic evidence in the uplands of the study area. Altitudes have been estimated using the 5x5 m Digital Terrain Model provided by Regione Veneto. Notes: * uncertain position/unverified during the survey. / Evidenze mesolitiche documentate nell'area di studio. Le quote sono state calcolate attraverso il Digital Terrain Model a maglia 5m fornito dalla Regione Veneto. Note: *posizione incerta/non verificata durante le prospezioni.*

N.	Site	Alt. (m)	Type	Culture	References
1	Costone del Col Piombin 1*	2263	open-air	Sauveterrian	Mondini & Villabruna 1992, Cesco Frare & Mondini 2005
2	Costone del Col Piombin 2	2205	open-air	Sauveterrian	Mondini & Villabruna 1992, Cesco Frare & Mondini 2005
3	Costone del Col Piombin 3	2159	open-air	Sauveterrian	Mondini & Villabruna 1992, Cesco Frare & Mondini 2005
4	Costone del Col Piombin 4	2144	open-air	Sauv. + Castel.	Mondini & Villabruna 1992, Cesco Frare & Mondini 2005
5	Costone del Col Piombin 5	2112	open-air	Sauveterrian	Mondini & Villabruna 1992, Cesco Frare & Mondini 2005
6	Forcella della Puina 1	2035	open-air	Mesolithic	Fontana et al. 2002, Marsale 2003
7	Forcella Giau - VF20	2330	rock-shelter	Sauveterrian	Fontana & Pasi 2002
8	Malga Prendera - VF3	2065	open-air	Sauveterrian	Fontana & Pasi 2002
9	Malga Prendera - VF4	2084	open-air	Mesolithic	Fontana & Pasi 2002
10	Malga Prendera - VF5	2119	open-air	Mesolithic	Fontana & Pasi 2002
11	Malga Prendera - VF24	2110	open-air	Mesolithic	Fontana & Pasi 2002
12	Melei 1	2065	open-air	Castelnovian	Fontana et al. 2002, Cesco Frare & Mondini 2005
13	Melei 2.1*	2155	open-air	Mesolithic	Fontana et al. 2002, Cesco Frare & Mondini 2005
14	Melei 2.2	2140	open-air	Mesolithic	Fontana et al. 2002, Cesco Frare & Mondini 2005
15	Melei 2.3	2138	open-air	Mesolithic	Fontana et al. 2002, Cesco Frare & Mondini 2005
16	Melei 2.4	2130	open-air	Mesolithic	Fontana et al. 2002, Cesco Frare & Mondini 2005
17	Melei 2.5	2132	open-air	Sauveterrian	Lunz 1986, Fontana et al. 2002, Cesco Frare & Mondini 2005
18	Melei 2.6	2137	open-air	Mesolithic	Fontana et al. 2002, Cesco Frare & Mondini 2005
19	Melei 2.7	2139	open-air	Castelnovian	Fontana et al. 2002, Cesco Frare & Mondini 2005
20	Mondeval de Sora - VF1	2135	rock-shelter	S.+C. + Co./Br. Age	Fontana et al. 2009a, 2009b
21	Mondeval de Sora - VF2	2194	rock-shelter	Cast. + Co./Br. Age	Fontana & Pasi 2002
22	Mondeval de Sora - VF16	2142	open-air	Mesolithic	Fontana & Pasi 2002
23	Mont del Fen	1958	open-air	Mesolithic	Fontana et al. 2002, Marsale 2003
24	Piezza	2093	open-air	Sauveterrian	Lunz 1986
25	Pra Comun - Val Costeana 1	1972	open-air	Castelnovian	Cesco Frare & Mondini 2005
26	Pra Comun - Val Costeana 4	1988	open-air	Castelnovian	Cesco Frare & Mondini 2005
27	Pra Comun - Val Costeana 5	1993	open-air	Castelnovian	Cesco Frare & Mondini 2005, Marsale & Reberschak 2007
28	Pra Comun - Val Costeana 6	1992	open-air	Castelnovian	Cesco Frare & Mondini 2005
29	Pra Comun - Val Costeana 7	1988	open-air	Mesolithic	Cesco Frare & Mondini 2005
30	Pra Comun - Val Costeana 8	1994	open-air	Castelnovian	Unpublished
31	Rio Ambrizzola - VF7	2231	open-air	Mesolithic	Fontana & Pasi 2002
32	Rio Ambrizzola - VF18	2191	rock-shelter	Castelnovian	Fontana & Pasi 2002
33	Val Cernera 2	2106	open-air	Mesolithic	Unpublished

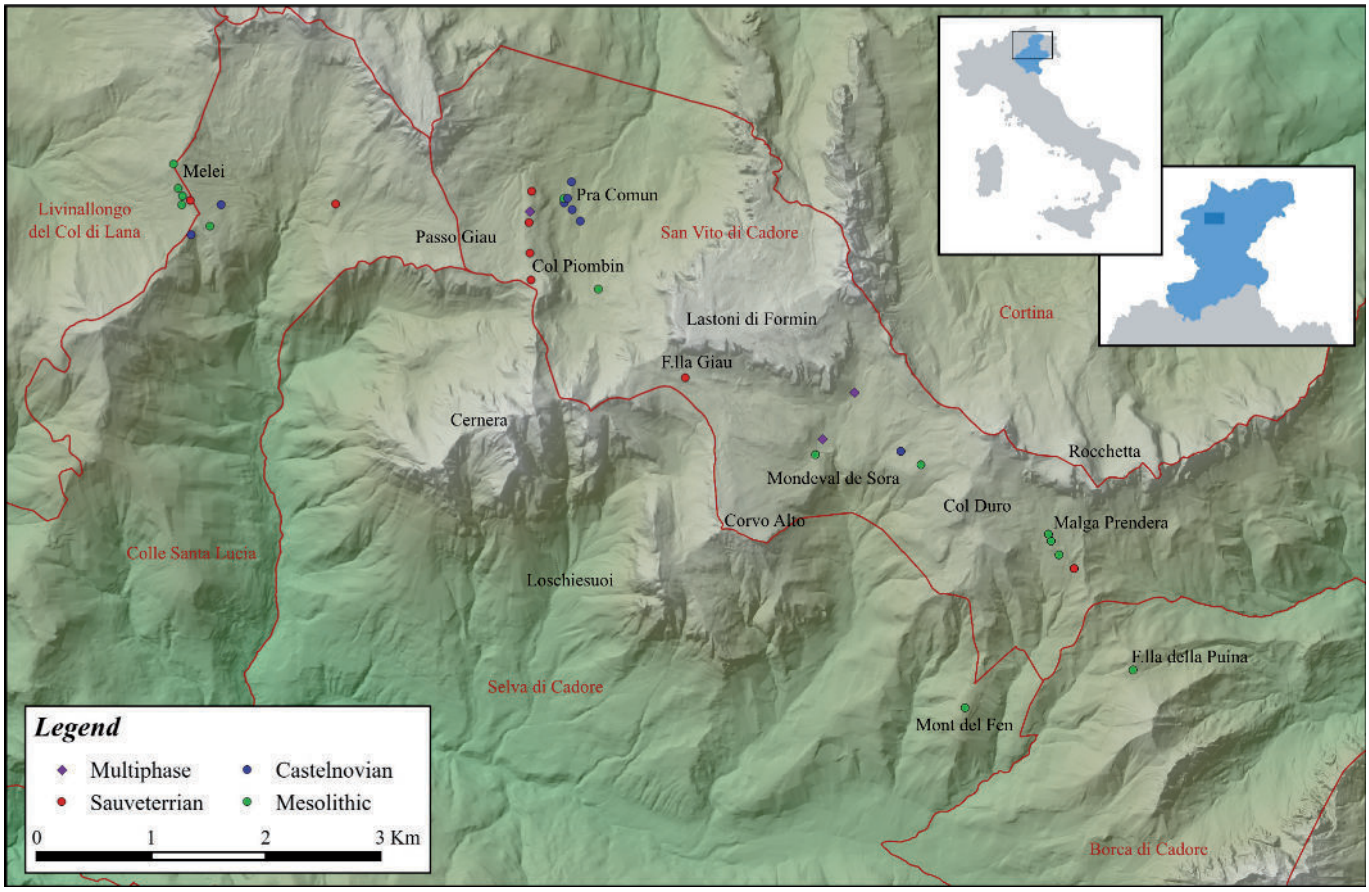

Fig. 1 *- Location of the Mesolithic sites mapped during the survey campaigns and through bibliographic research. / Localizzazione dei siti mesolitici mappati durante le campagne di prospezione e le ricerche bibliografiche.*

D. Nisi (1978) and continued in the following decades with the activity of both academic researchers and amateurs, also enhanced by the discovery of the site of Mondeval de Sora by Vittorino Cazzetta in 1985 (Alciati *et al.* 1992).

Although these field surveys provided a crucial dataset for understanding the Mesolithic occupation of the Belluno Dolomites, no critical review aimed at contextualizing this rich evidence within the wider framework of human occupation of the Dolomites was carried out (Bagolini *et al.* 1980a, 1980b, Broglio & Corai 1980, Mondini & Villabruna 1982, 1992, Lunz 1986, Fontana *et al.* 2002, Fontana & Pasi 2002, Marsale 2003, Cesco Frare & Mondini 2005, Marsale & Rebeschak 2007, Franco 2016). Significant exception is the rock-shelter site of Mondeval de Sora (VF1) which was extensively excavated (sectors I and III) over more than one decade, becoming one of the most important Alpine sites for this time span (Fontana *et al.* 2009a, 2009b, Valletta *et al*. 2016).

The new field survey project started in 2011 in the upland territory of the ancient "Regole" of San Vito di Cadore enabled the position of most of previously identified sites to be verified and some new find-spots to be recognized. The rich record yielded by this territory could be thus re-analysed in a broader perspective. In this paper only the lithic scatters attributable with a good approximation either to the Mesolithic or to one of its two phases (Sauveterrian and Castelnovian) were included, while undetermined assemblages were excluded. All the sites and find-spots were positioned, described and spatially analysed according to the topography of the territory, in order to explore the settlement and exploitation strategies adopted by the Mesolithic groups. The cultural context of published sites and lithic scatters has been inferredaccording to bibliographical information and the analysis of newly found artefacts.

Chronology

66 prehistoric find-spots were mapped in the territory of San Vito di Cadore and only partially in the neighbouring municipalities of Livinallongo del Col di Lana, Colle Santa Lucia, Selva di Cadore and Borca di Cadore. 33 of them could be assigned to the Mesolithic while the others remained undetermined (n. 29, 43.9%) or were attributed to more recent phases (Copper Age, n. 4) (Visentin et al. 2016).

The Mesolithic dataset (Tab. 1) includes two multi-layered sites, Mondeval de Sora VF1 (Early and Late Mesolithic together with more recent phases) and Mondeval de Sora VF2 (Castelnovian and later occupations), one open air site where both an Early and a Late Mesolithic occupation are attested (Costone del Col Piombin 4), eight Sauveterrian sites, eight Castelnovian ones and 14 sites that have been generically attributed to the Mesolithic.

Location of the sites

Almost all the sites are found along a band of territory running south-east to north-west along the watershed that separates the Cordevole/Fiorentina from the Boite valley. It consists of a large and relatively flat high altitude belt stretching for more than 9 km as the crow flies from Melei to Malga Prendera (Fig. 1).

A first cluster of sites is located in the area known as Melei (Fig. 2), west of Passo Giau. Here both Sauveterrian and Castelnovian occupations are attested. Most of the sites are positioned along the ridge spanning between 2130 and 2150 m of elevation, while another one lies on the slope that leads to the pass. Another Sauveterrian site has been identified one kilometre to the east; it was partially destroyed during excavation works for the construction of a parking lot (Piezza); (Fig. 3).

***Fig. 2** - Melei. Numerous sites have been identified mostly along the modern path (Photo D. Visentin). / Melei. Lungo la cresta numerosi siti sono stati individuati per lo più in corrispondenza del sentiero (Foto D. Visentin).*

***Fig. 4** - Costone del Col Piombin. One of the terraces on which Sauveterrian lithic artefacts have been collected (Photo D. Visentin). / Costone del Col Piombin. Uno dei terrazzi su cui sono stati raccolti i manufatti sauveterriani (Foto D. Visentin).*

***Fig. 3** - Piezza. The Sauveterrian site has been partially destroyed by mechanical excavations (Photo D. Visentin). / Piezza. Il sito è stato in parte distrutto dai lavori di scavo (Foto D. Visentin).*

***Fig. 5** - Prà Comun - Val Costeana. Numerous Castelnovian sites have been identified along this secondary valley, located at the foot of the Col Piombin (Photo D. Visentin). / Prà Comun - Val Costeana. Lungo questa valle secondaria, posta ai piedi del Col Piombin, sono stati identificati numerosi siti castelnoviani (Foto D. Visentin).*

The eastern slope of Passo Giau features one of the richest areas for Mesolithic findings. Five sites were identified on the five terraces that characterise the northern ridge of Col Piombin (Fig. 4). All of them yielded Sauveterrian lithic assemblages. Only one trapeze was collected at site 4, representing the only artefact dated to the Late Mesolithic coming from this area. On the other hand five of the seven sites located on the valley at the foot of the Col Piombin - known as Prà Comun-Val Costeana - are undoubtedly Castelnovian (Fig. 5).

On the eastern slope of Forcella Giau, under a small limestone block located next to the main path, the highest Sauveterrian site of the area (2330 m) was identified (VF 20).

Five Mesolithic sites are attested in the Mondeval de Sora basin among the numerous undetermined lithic scatters (Fontana & Pasi 2002; cfr. Visentin *et al.* 2016). Two of them are represented by rock-shelters with multi-layered sequences. One is the most famous site VF1, occupied during both the Early and Late Mesolithic (Fontana et al. 2009a, b, Valletta et al. this volume), while the second (site VF2) yielded artefacts that can be referred to the Castelnovian and to later periods (Fontana & Pasi 2002). Another Castelnovian assemblage was identified next to a small stream known as “Rio Ambrizzola”, while the last two find-spots, one located near the latter site and the other next to VF1, can generally be attributed to the Mesolithic.

The gentle slope where Malga Prendera (2060-2100 m) is located yielded several lithic scatters. One of them was dated to the Sauveterrian and the others to a generic Mesolithic. This vast area probably represents a palimpsest of numerous occupations covering a large time period, as the identification of lithic artefacts and potsherds attributed to the Copper Age seems to indicate (Bianchin Citton 1992). Unfortunately the area has undergone heavy slope processes caused by anthropic activities and intense natural erosion that have probably led to the destruction of archaeological deposits (Fontana & Pasi 2002). A couple of other sites—Forcella della Puina (2034 m) and Mont del Fen (1959 m)—represent possible links with other highland districts (the former) and the Fiorentina valley bottom (the latter).

Vertical distribution

All the Mesolithic sites in the area are located between 1958 and 2330 m a.s.l. (Fig. 6) and about 40% of them between 2100 and 2150 m. Generally Sauveterrian sites are located at higher altitudes than Castelnovian ones, as none of the latter is located above 2200 m and none of the former under 2050 m. Unfortunately the available

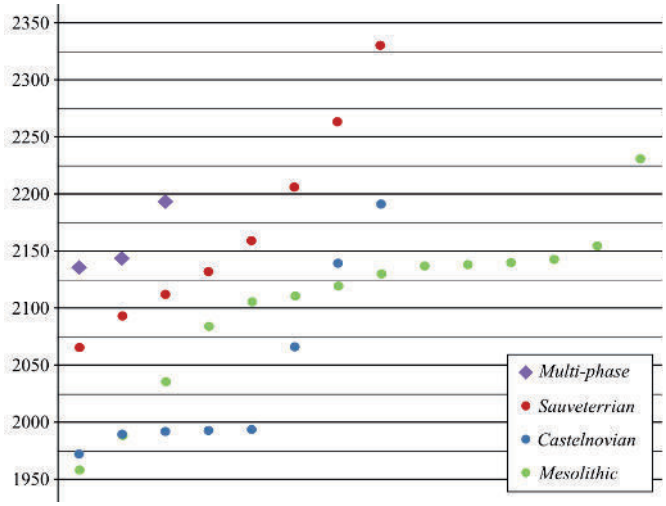

Fig. 6 - Vertical distribution of the sites. / Distribuzione verticale dei siti.

data are too limited to provide any reliable inference. The high presence of Castelnovian sites at about 2000 m is connected to the occurrence of a group of sites of this chronology within a restricted area (Prà Comun - Val Costeana).

Discussion and conclusions

As highlighted by the results of this project, the territories of San Vito di Cadore and the neighbouring municipalities represent a rich and informative area for the reconstruction of highland occupation strategies during the Mesolithic. The great density of find-spots identified in this district confirms the high visibility that characterizes the Mesolithic evidence in the south-eastern sector of the Alpine chain (Fontana et al. 2011). It also enables us to move the attention from the best known area of the Adige drainage basin towards the east, including part of the high Piave valley (namely its right tributaries), and comparing the evidence available from these two territories (Dalmeri & Pedrotti 1994, Fontana 2011).

For what concerns the settlement strategies, one of the most interesting aspects is represented by the topographic distribution of sites along a flat upland band that stretches south-east to north-west along the watershed that separates the Cordevole and Boite drainage basins between 1900 and 2200 m a.s.l. (corresponding to the ecotone zone of the early Holocene tree-line); (Fig. 1); (Visentin et al. 2016, Fontana & Pasi 2002). As for the Adige basin where this model has been previously recognised, the reasons that can explain such distribution are closely connected to the presence of high altitude paths that allow moving across the area with reduced vertical displacements and a good visibility on the surrounding territory (Kompatscher & Hrozny-Kompatscher 2007). Moreover the evidence appears denser around important geographic features such as narrow and large passes, and wide secondary valleys and ridges which represent favourable locations for settlement.

Lastly the number of Castelnovian sites is higher in this territory with respect to Sauveterrian ones, in contrast to what is attested for the Trentino Alto-Adige area (Fontana et al. in press). An intense occupation of this mountain sector can thus be envisaged both during the Early and Late Mesolithic, although available data are too few to attempt a reconstruction of the possible changes of settlement strategies between these two periods.

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