

THE ACHEULIAN PHENOMENON IN WESTERN EUROPE WITH A FOCUS ON ITALY

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ABSTRACT: Nicoud E., *The Acheulian phenomenon in Western Europe with a focus on Italy*. (IT ISSN 0349-3356, 2011)
If the Acheulian "culture" appears in Western Europe during 300.000 years (Oxygen Isotopic Stage 16 to 8), it cannot be considered as a unic phenomenon because of the technical diversity within the industries (bifaces, tools, and chaînes opératoires). Italian datas from Notarchirico, Castel di Guido and Torre in Pietra are presented in the european chrono-spatial framework and used to discuss the "Out of Africa" diffusion patterns and the reinvention hypothesis.

RIASSUNTO: Nicoud Elisa, il fenomeno acheuleano in Europa occidentale. (IT ISSN 0349-3356, 2011)
Se la "cultura" dell'Acheuleano persiste in Europa occidentale per 300 000 anni (Stadi isotopici dell'ossigeno 16 a 8), non deve essere considerata come un fenomeno unico perchè le industrie litiche sono molto diverse (bifacciali, strumenti o catene operative). I dati dei siti italiani di Notarchirico, Castel di Guido e Torre in Pietra sono presentati nel quadro chrono-spaziale europeo. Sono anche utilizzati per discutere i modelli della diffusione "Out of Africa" e la possibilità della reinvenzione locale.

Acheulian, Biface, Western Europe, Out of Africa, Diffusion Patterns, Bifacial Piece

Acheuleano, Bifacciale, Europa occidentale, Out of Africa, modelli di diffusione, Pezzi bifacciale.

The Acheulian culture has been created in the XIXth century by G. De Mortillet to describe the lithic industries with handaxes found in the Somme river valley, in Northern France. Then the word "Acheulian" has been used to categorize Lower Palaeolithic industries everywhere in the Old World. If the biface is essential to the Acheulian, its inner diversity and variability has been denounced very often, even at the creation of the word (D'ACY IN MORTILLET, 1910). So, historically and substantially, the Acheulian is a variability. What appears today to be a paradox and thus an intellectual deadlock (one world define many different things) seemed for Mortillet a solution to answer his problematic, mostly relevant to the typo-chronological classification of the industries.

The Acheulian is a very confused paradigm because of the broad differences within its appearances. The diversity can be see within the industries: typologically (many classifications of the biface tried to clarify it), petrographically, technically and technologically. In addition, the sites are rare, above all, the ones with a reliable chrono-stratigraphical context. The dating must be taken with great care.

Also, the biface appears at 1.7 million years ago in Africa but also at the end of the Mousterian (MTA). Notarchirico level F, well-dated at 630 ka (PIPERNO, 1999), is the first appearance of the handaxe in Western Europe. The Upper limit of the Acheulian is not clear and commonly, but artificially, is put at 300 ka, when the Levallois concept massively appears.

Before OIS 11, biface appearances are scarce in Western Europe but increase at this time, mostly in the Paris basin (South of England, North of France). It become common in Italy, Spain and Southern France after that, during OIS 9.

We tried to light up the vagueness of the Acheulian by confronting the industries with a technological approach (Nicoud, PhD in progress). The biface is described by a structural analysis that allows us to understand its systemic role within the serie.

Three italian sites showing three very different lithic productions are used here to illustrate the speech: Notarchirico in Basilicata (PIPERNO, 1999), Torre in Pietra (MALATESTA, 1978) and Castel di Guido in Lazio (RADMILLI & BOSCHIAN, 1996). Thus, the biface seems to take almost three different forms, involving direct and major changes in the whole lithic production systems.

The diversity shown by comparing the three italian sites but also all the Western Europe appearances, make us believe that the Acheulian doesn't exist as a homogeneous entity, in a technical or a chronological meaning. We can only understand the phenomenon by comprehending the uniqueness of each appearances.

As we cannot see a homogeneous Western Europe during the Acheulian, we propose to discuss here the Acheulian diffusion patterns of the Acheulian and consider the idea of a re-invention of the bifacial piece inside Europe, maybe at different

times and in different forms. Also, because of technical links and chronological succession of some forms of the bifacial piece, it is possible to hypothesize an evolution of it and a diffusion inside Western Europe.

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