

## THE ORIGIN OF HUMAN POPULATION IN THE ITALIAN PENINSULA

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On the basis of recent research, the oldest population of Italy can be dated to a period older than 1 million years ago. Among the most important sites, that of Ca' Belvedere di Monte Poggiolo stands out. The multidisciplinary study of the site and the palaeomagnetic and absolute dates indicate an age of slightly more than 1 million years. The industry is characterised by flaked pebbles (cores) and a large quantity of flakes, many of which refit together.

The presence of a simple and opportunistic technology seems to be a common characteristic in other Italian sites which date to the same period or to slightly more recent phases; these sites are found all over the country, and in particular in those regions where most fieldwork has been carried out, such as in Tuscany, Lazio and Emilia-Romagna. The first population of the Italian peninsula therefore seems to have been a consistent and widespread phenomenon, rather than occasional and sporadic. The simple lithic technology was aimed at the production of a large number of artifacts with cutting edges (flakes) which were used in daily subsistence activities, as is demonstrated by the traces of use wear found on their surfaces. The presence of retouched artifacts, on the other hand, is minimal, and there is no suggestion that they were intentionally produced.

This first phase of the human population of the Italian peninsula was followed by the spread of Acheulean industries from about 700,000 years ago onwards; these industries include not only handaxes but also a wide range of retouched tool with specific morphologies and more articulated production techniques. There is no proof for an *in situ* 'evolution' from the oldest industries to the Acheulean ones, and we suggest that the two distinct phases (the with core and flake industries and the second with handaxes) may represent two different migrations by different hominids.

This chronological sequence, which bears a general resemblance to that in Africa, is decidedly more recent compared with the latter. Various hypotheses can be proposed to explain this chronological difference, though we suggest that it

is only by developing the research and in particular the dating of the European sites that we will be able to resolve this problem.