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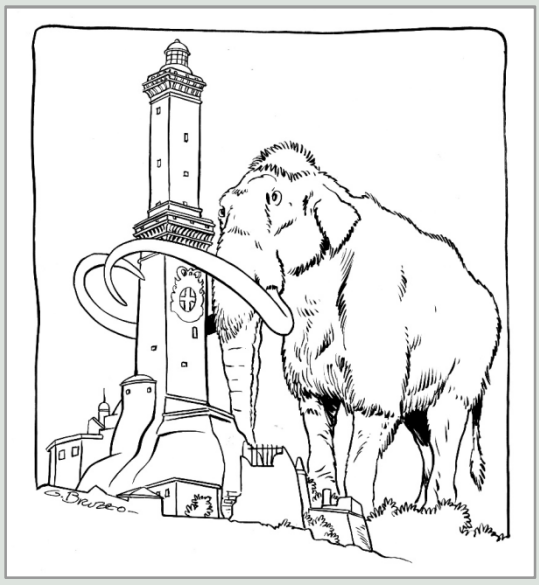
Il Paleolitico e il Mesolitico in Italia: nuove ricerche e prospettive di studio

The Palaeolithic and Mesolithic in Italy: new research and perspectives



ABSTRACT BOOK

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Podium Presentation - 4/02 h 12:00

MAURIZIO ZAMBALDI, DIEGO E. ANGELUCCI, MARTA ARZARELLO

First data on stratigraphy and formation processes at Ciota Ciara cave (Monte Fenera, Borgosesia, Vercelli)

Ciota Ciara is one of the active karstic caves of Monte Fenera (Borgosesia, Vercelli). The cave is located at 670 metres altitude and was explored in the 19th and 20th centuries – as a matter of fact, Ciota Ciara is a key-site for understanding human occupation in North-Western Italy during the Upper Pleistocene.Systematic excavations at the site were resumed in 2009 by the University of Ferrara in partnership with the Soprintendenza Archeologia del Piemonte, focusing on the cave entrance.

The stratigraphic succession today visible in this position corresponds to the lower portion of the original entrance deposit, as its upper part was removed in previous excavation campaigns. Archaeological data collected until now show that the cave was used by Neanderthals, probably during MIS 5, in a temperate humid climatic context, characterized by deciduous open woodland.The intersection among different habitats, near-by outcrops of lithic raw materials, presence of rockshelters and water were probably the main factors that fostered human occupation at Ciota Ciara as well as in other cave sites at Monte Fenera (Arzarello *et alii* 2012; Angelucci *et alii* 2015).

We here present the first data on the stratigraphy and formation of the deposit filling the cave entrance, which was studied by means of the geoarchaeological approach, using both field and laboratory methods (details in Zambaldi 2014/2015).

In the field, five statigraphic units were defined and furtherly sub-divided into sub-units (fig. 1).

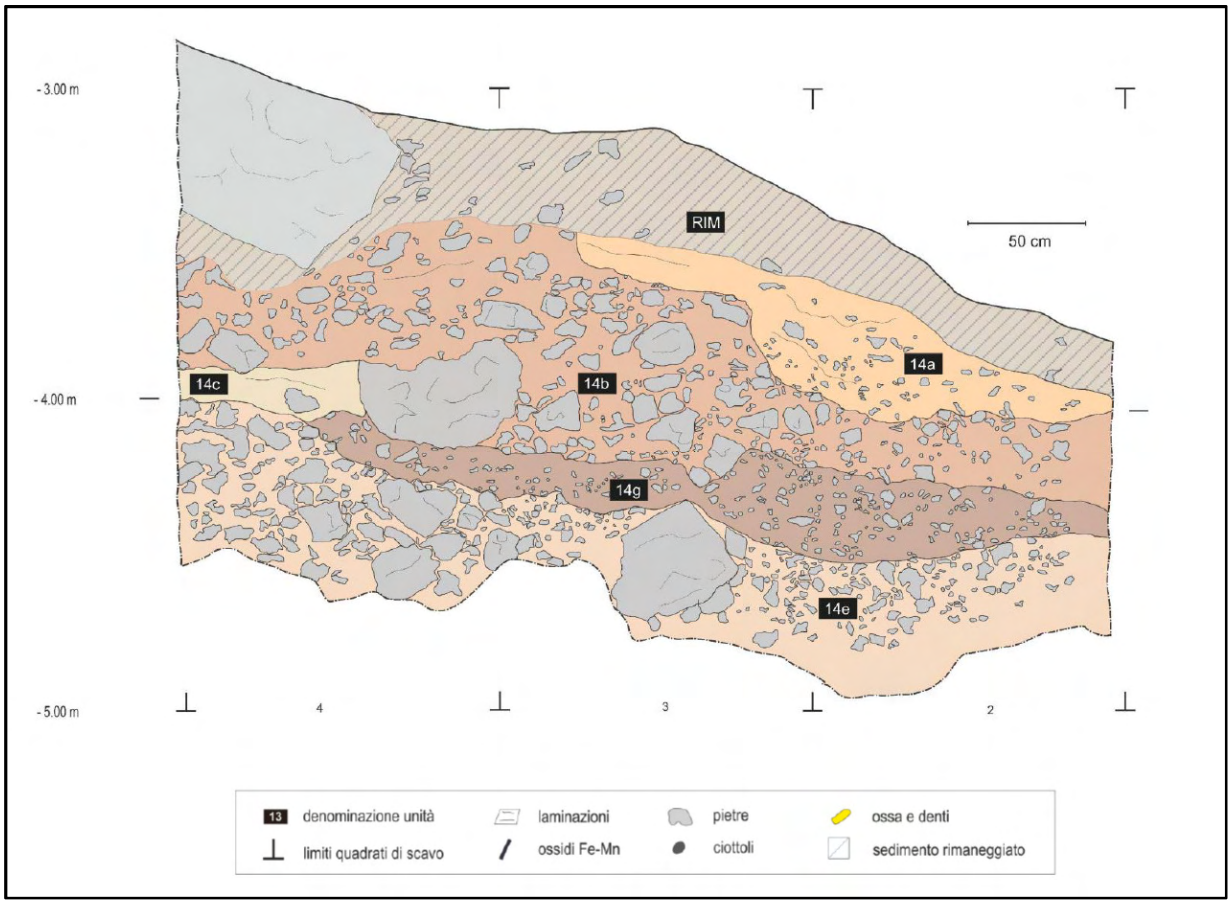

Fig. 1 - Ciota Ciara cave. Cross-section along squares C4, C3 and C2, excavation sector "ATRIO", 2014.

Most units are sandy-silt, with common to many stones, badly-sorted, massive and show chaotic arrangement and fabric. Thin layers of well-sorted fine sand also occur. Concentrations of Fe-Mn oxides (often coating bones), phosphatic rinds and (clay?) coatings are detected in almost all units.

Twenty-two samples were collected from the units exposed in 2014 to perform textural routine analyses (grain size analysis, carbonate content and organic matter content). Laboratory results show that most units are composed of poorly-sorted silty-sand sediment. Two grain size distributions were detected, although quite similar between them; sand fraction prevails in all the samples and the silt one is common. The coarser fraction is mainly composed of dolostone fragments detached from the cave roof and walls and of few sandstone fragments – the latter probably come from geological formations outcropping at Monte Fenera summit and were embedded in the sediment by karstic waters. Calcimetry and LOI (Loss on Ignition) analyses show that the content of both carbonates and organic matter is scarce.

The data indicate that the deposit filling Ciota Ciara entrance was mostly laid down by dynamics related to concentrated flows emerging from the cave, with inputs of dolomite fragments from the cave bedrock and occasional events of deposition by surface water currents with tractive mechanisms. This implies that part of the collected assemblage can be in its 'original' position, but that some objects may have suffered short-distance displacement from the inner cave to its entrance. Post-depositional processes are mainly related to secondary accumulation of Fe-Mn oxide and phosphates, to illuviation and to partial dissolution of dolostone fragments. There are no significant discontinuities within the succession, which seems to have accumulated within the same climatic and environmental context.

Future analyses (geochemistry, soil micromorphology…) will help clarifying site formation at Ciota Ciara, by integrating the preliminary data exposed here.

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