

AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY: THE MIDDLE GRAVETTIAN SITE OF PIOVESELLO, ITALY

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The Italian Apennine is extremely dearth of evidence dating to the Middle Upper Palaeolithic and at the moment one of the best know Gravettian settlement in this area is represented by the site of Fonte delle Mattinate, in the Marche region (Silvestrini, Peresani, Muratori 2005). After that discovery, no advancements have been made in surveying other patches of this long, but easily crossable mountain chain, until the recovery of the site of Piovesello, a remarkable radiolarite assemblage, buried by lacustrine sediments and exposed in consequence of water erosion.

This site is located close to the Ligurian - Emilian Apennine watershed (Cassimoreno, PC) at 870 m of elevation (Fig. 1), in a district subjected to the expansion of glaciers during the Last Glacial Maximum at elevations not far from the Piovesello. The first artefacts were discovered in 2007 by one of us (F.F.), who recovered almost 2000 lithics in primary or subprimary position embedded in loamy sediments in a very limited area (10 m²).

The preliminary fieldwork allowed to identify on the exposed sections a single layer (US7) with lithic implements of the ten stratigraphic units described (Fig.2). Radiolarite is the almost exclusive raw material employed; it seems to have been recovered in the outcrops of Mt. Lama, ca 12 km west by alking. An handful of flint artefacts, without any North Apennine affinities, testifies farer acquisition transfers. A preliminary refitting allowed to reconstruct most of the reduction sequence of two cores and to shed light on the aims of blade and bladelet production. This unexpected result has justified the implementation of a large-scale investigation.

The blade reduction sequence (Fig.3) exploits a slab of radiolarite along its maximum length axis. The slab has cortical surfaces formed by interstrata joints. The preliminary shaping and the dorsal convexity are maintained by means of a sequence of orthogonal flake removals with hard stone percussion, while the lateral convexities through blade removal using soft stone percussion. The detachment of a long and plunging crested blade, creates a wide striking platform with a suitable angle which will be scarcely managed. The full production phase is conducted with a frontal and unipolar flaking sequence oriented to the obtainment of long (ca. 60 mm) and relatively symmetrical blades, produced with soft-stone or organic percussion. Bladelet production is carried out on the flake-core byproducts of the laminar reduction sequence. New-crests are realized for the maintenance of the transversal convexity, while an opposite striking platform is seldom used to maintain the longitudinal convexity. Central blade products are almost always lacking in the lithic assemblage, thus suggesting an exportation of the desired products to be used elsewhere.

Retouched artefacts (Fig.4: a,b,c) are also very rare and are above all endscrapers, burins and notches, while the armatures are almost completely absent.

An estensive campaign of excavation will take place in the incoming summer with the aim to explore the archaeological content of this deposit and to depict the limits of the settlement. Reconstructing the dynamics of human frequentations at the very edge of the territory of hunter-gatherers during the Gravettian will produce data of relevance for the first time in the north of Italy.



Fig. 1



Fig. 3



Fig. 2

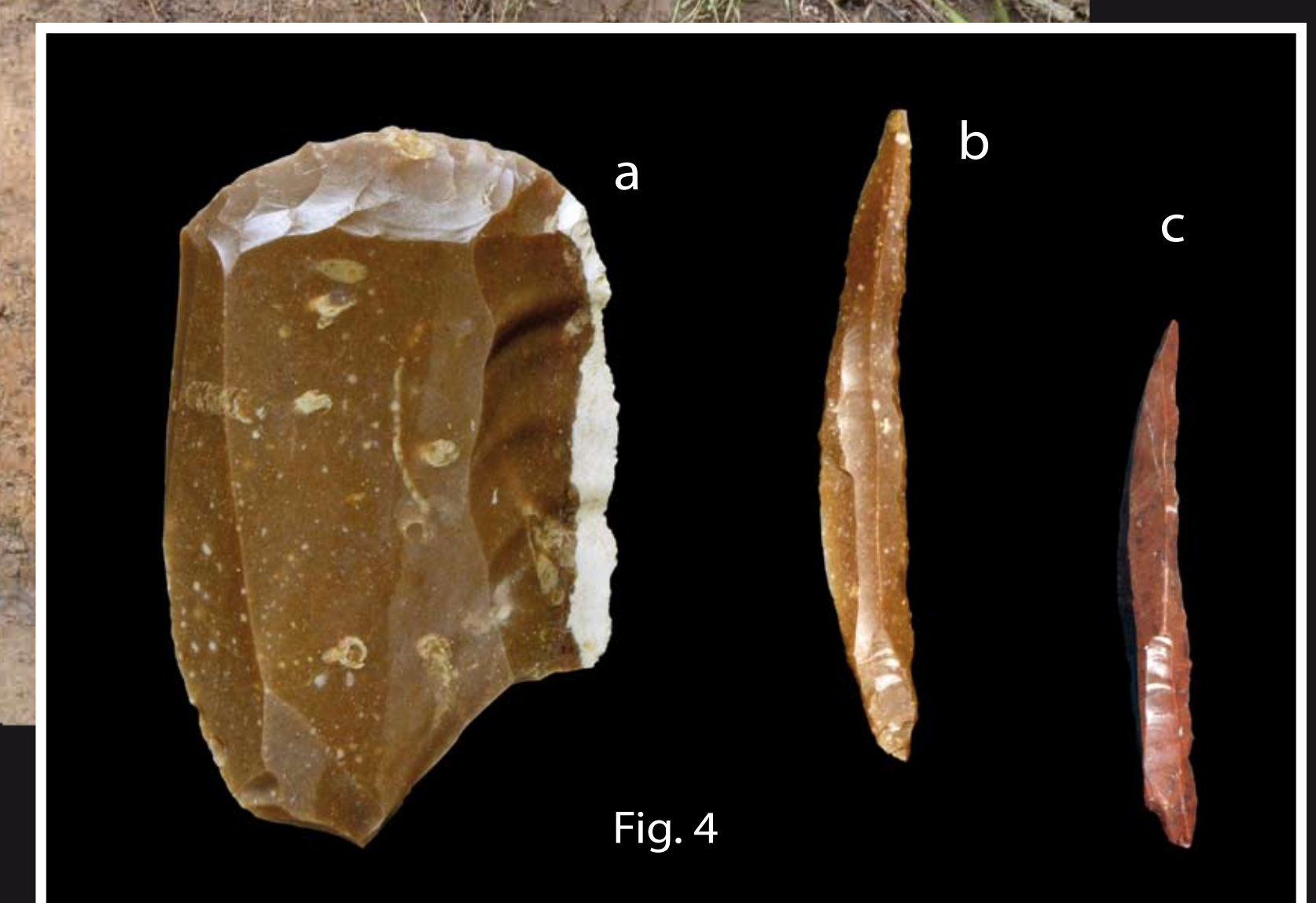


Fig. 4