

The Spilamberto Group: new data from the Modena area

ALESSANDRO FERRARI & GIULIANA STEFFÈ

ABSTRACT - Surveys and systematic excavations in the Modena area have improved our knowledge about the Copper Age, especially with regards the Spilamberto Group. Here we outline some aspects concerning population, settlement structures, material culture and burial and funeral rituals.

Key words: Emilia-Romagna, Modena area, Eneolithic, Spilamberto Group

Parole chiave: Emilia-Romagna, Territorio modenese, Eneolitico, Gruppo di Spilamberto

Alessandro Ferrari - Gruppo Naturalisti Spilamberto, via Mazzini 12, I-41057 Spilamberto (MO)

Giuliana Steffè - Soprintendenza Archeologica dell'Emilia Romagna, via Belle Arti 52, I-40100 Bologna.

1. INTRODUCTION¹

Accidental finds and programmed research over recent years have improved our knowledge of the Chalcolithic population of the Modena area.

At the moment, nothing is known about the initial stages of the Copper Age which is also true of the rest of Emilia. There is in fact, an absence of knowledge regarding the last stages of the Neolithic and the full Copper Age. In the Modena area the former period is represented by Late Neolithic materials from the Spilamberto site VIII – levels I-II, with Lagozza elements and Square Mouthed Pottery and the latter by the Spilamberto Group (BAGOLINI *et al.*, 1998; BAGOLINI, 1981). This hiatus is apparent in the gaps found in the stratigraphic sequence of site VIII at Panaro, where during the last period of Neolithic occupation, the deposits of fine fluvial material overlap; these deposits, pedogenized, are subsequently settled again by the Spilamberto Group.

New sites with scale decorated (“a squame”) pottery were discovered between the mid-mountain area and the far northern part of the high plains; at Gaiato, Castelvetro, Savignano sul Panaro and South of Modena. These can be added to other important finds at Mezzavia di Sassuolo (BAGOLINI, 1981) and Fiorano-Cava San Lorenzo (STEFFÈ, 1988).

Rich documentation regarding this period was

also found at the bottom of a gravel quarry at San Cesario, to the north of other finds discovered on the Panaro river-bed.

The geographic position of the Gaiato site is particularly interesting (unpublished by the Museo Archeologico of Modena). It is situated in a panoramic area controlling the middle of the Panaro Valley, and testifies to the exploitation of the mountain areas more or less along the main axis of the Apennine Toscana-Emilia valley passes. This evidence is confirmed at Pompeano (BAGOLINI & BROGLIO, 1985), Marzabotto in the Bologna area, along the Reno Valley (BRIZZOLARA *et al.*, 1980).

The three graves known as the “tombe dei fanciulli” (children’s tombs) found by Malavolti at Fiorano Modenese-Fornaci Carani (MALAVOLTI, 1953) are referable to the Eneolithic Age. These were initially attributed, to the Square Mouthed Pottery Culture, on the basis of the potsherds found in the filling of the burial pit. However, they feature depositional and grave goods characteristics similar to those of the Spilamberto cemetery. The three individuals are placed in a supine position, in an E-W direction with a single vessel at their feet (grave 1 and 3) or placed between the femurs (grave 2). The ceramic fabric, the shape and the surfaces are clearly characteristic of the Spilamberto Group.

Apart from the systematic research carried out at Spilamberto, excavations were carried out in only two

of the above mentioned locations: at Castelvetro in 1995 and at S.Cesario, where they are still in progress².

2. NEW RESEARCH

2.1. *Castelvetro*

In the summer of 1995 at S.Polo Canova near Castelvetro, farming work uncovered part of a large structure on a terrace overlooking the Holocene bed of the Guerro stream. This structure had been badly damaged during recent agricultural activities (FERRARI & STEFFÈ, 1997a). The first level of the deposit consisted of brownish clay, rich in carbons, overlapping a yellowish deposit with frequent calcareous concretions and large loose carbons. Pebbles and stones (some of which had been worked) were extremely common, while flaked stone artefacts, ceramic fragments and faunal elements were less in evidence.

The lithic industry consisted predominantly of flint available on site. There were awls, arrowheads, ogives and cores with centripetal detachments (Fig.1).

The ceramic was mainly made of a coarse fabric with mineral components. The forms were generally wide and deep, decorated "a squame" and sometimes had plastic handles.

2.2. *San Cesario sul Panaro*

At the bottom of the Cava Marchi, large structures were found in an area of about 4000m², which was separated from the cemetery and the Panaro Eneolithic settlements by a paleochannel. Some of these structures yielded remains of rich cultural material (FERRARI & STEFFÈ, 1997b).

To date the area investigated (about 64m²), is characterised by a large number of sub-structures- more than 20 - including shallow pits, shafts, post-holes, ditches and canals, filled with more or less developed anthropical deposits. Inside the structures ample evidence of ceramic, lithic and bone industries was uncovered, along with many faunal and palaeobotanical remains.

As well with the traditional deep-shaped "a squame" pottery, there were also bowls and narrow mouthed vases, some with impressed bands and truncate cone-shaped vessels with digital horizontal or slanting cordons, which up till now were unknown or rare in the finds of the Spilamberto Group according to the evidence found in the close Panaro river-bed (Fig.2-3). There were also flat discoidal spindle-whorls and several with truncate cone shaped sections.

Apart from typical retouched types and pebble cores with centripetal detachments, the lithic industry included various foliate points similar to those found among the grave goods of the Spilamberto cemetery (Fig.4-5). The bone industry is richly represented and there are bone, horn and steatite ornaments.

As with the Panaro sites, the lithic implements are made of flint, jasper, phthanite, quartzite and more or less silicified mudstones. Even though the raw materials used are found locally, the lithic industry is more varied than at Castelvetro reflecting a larger availability of flakable lithotypes in the area.

3. THE SITES AND THE ENEOLITHIC CEMETERY OF PANARO

In order to publish the overall Chalcolithic evidence of the Spilamberto Group site of Panaro, a study is being carried out on the data obtained following the fundamental research made by Bagolini (BAGOLINI, 1981, 1984). Even though the new documentation obtained from the Panaro sites is much smaller than that being collected at Cava Marchi, it is an important source of information and along with the other data on this area, it provides a clearer picture especially with regards to the lithic industry (Fig.2:6-7).

The latest excavation campaigns at the Eneolithic cemetery³ exhausted the possibilities for excavations on the right hand bank of the river. They also allowed the definition of the spatial relationship between the necropolis and site X. In fact the investigation showed how the outskirts of these settlements stretched up and downstream towards the northern part of the necropolis, bordering the "place of death" that completely lacks traces of settlement activities. In respect to what has already been published (BAGOLINI, 1984), the Spilamberto cemetery contains 39 graves (Fig.8). The characteristics of the depositions, the position of the bodies and the grave goods of the last 11 graves can be superimposed onto the previous information (Fig.9). The grave goods mostly include groups of "a squame" vases, generally with open shapes and rounded profiles (graves 29-31,35,37). Truncate cone-shaped or round-shaped vessels with rusticate surfaces are also present (graves 38-39) along with bowls with more or less smooth surfaces (graves 33,36). Single segments of digital cordons used as handles are applied to the rims of the vases of the grave goods of graves 35 and 39; three of these handles are placed symmetrically around the mouth of the small vase found in grave 37. Vertical tongue-shaped handles are applied on vessels 33 and 36; there is a boss on vessel in grave 29, while the vase with a round profile in grave 38 has two small horizontal perforated handles applied to the rim. There

was also a very characteristic carinate mug with an elbow-shaped handle (grave 32) associated with a container decorated "a squame" and handles used to mark out the grave.

In accordance with the data already published (CREMASCHI, 1981) and with the data from Cava Marchi, the flaked stone points of the grave goods are made from local siliceous rocks. An arrowhead (grave 16) and a dagger blade (grave 28) do not follow this tradition and are made of "alpine" flint. Considering the exceptional characteristics of the inhumation (BAGOLINI, 1984), the dagger blade was probably imported.

The funeral ritual aspects that had already been documented (BAGOLINI, 1984) have now been confirmed. Among the elements of particular interest there are the cenotaph shaped graves 29 and 35, and the frequent use of small vessels in children's graves 33, 37-38.

4. THE LATE COPPER AGE

The new information available today for the Spilamberto Group is very similar - with regard to the ceramic and lithic aspects - to that published regarding the Panaro river-bed (BAGOLINI, 1981), which should be referred to for a general outline. Therefore, at the moment it is not possible to provide a date range for this facies. Neither is it possible to give details as to the

cultural connections and the relations with the other Chalcolithic site in the Modena area with its quite individual style that does not include bell-beaker: the cemetery of Cumarola (BAGOLINI *et al.*, 1982).

The last phase of the Eneolithic in the Modena area follows the bell-beaker tradition. This is mostly evidenced by the Malavolti excavations at Pescale (MALAVOLTI, 1953-55 and unpublished by the Museo Archeologico of Modena), where, along with very few pots herds with traditional decorations, there is a rich lithic industry, with partially retouched artefacts made also of flint quarried from the Formation of the Sandstone of Bismantova, on which the settlement lays.

Apart from the evidence from Pescale, there have also been several new surface finds along the strip of highland plains - mainly rare pottery - while the existence of a fragment decorated in the traditional bell-beaker style found on the Panaro river-bed has been known about for some time (Spilamberto - Site XII). From the same area, the river-bed has yielded more consistent traces of settlement datable to the Early Bronze Age (FERRARI *et al.*, 1998).

NOTES

- 1 - All the authors equally took part in this work.
- 2 - Research carried out by the Soprintendenza Archeologica dell'Emilia-Romagna in collaboration with Gruppo Naturalisti of Spilamberto.
- 3 - Cfr. note 2.

SUMMARY - Systematic surveys in the Modena area have allowed us to achieve a better understanding about land holding standards during the Copper Age, mainly concerning the Spilamberto Group. The excavations carried out at the Castelvetro and San Cesario settlements uncovered a number of structures in which we found materials of great interest, namely pottery, lithic tools, bone and horn artefacts, and faunal and palethnobotanical remains. Thirty-nine burials have been excavated as a result of the latest research in the Eneolithic cemetery at Spilamberto. Grave goods and burial rituals seem to confirm the validity of the framework outlined by B. Bagolini. It is worth mentioning the very interesting attribution to the Spilamberto Group of three children's graves ("tombe dei fanciulli"), which were found by Malavolti in Fiorano; attribution has now been made on the basis of pottery characteristics. Moreover, both the burial orientation and position, and the placing of grave goods suggest many analogies with the Spilamberto cemetery.

RIASSUNTO - Le più antiche testimonianze del popolamento calcolitico del Modenese sono riferibili ad un aspetto non iniziale dell'Età del Rame: il Gruppo di Spilamberto. Gli scavi negli insediamenti di tale Gruppo a Castelvetro e a S. Cesario hanno messo in luce una pluralità di strutture da cui provengono significative attestazioni d'industria litica, ceramica, su osso e corno nonché una ricca documentazione faunistica e paletnobotanica. Il prosieguo delle ricerche nella necropoli eneolitica di Spilamberto hanno portato a 39 le sepolture scavate. Composizione dei corredi e rituali funerari risultano in larga misura sovrapponibili al quadro già a suo tempo delineato da Bagolini. Interessante risulta l'attribuzione al Gruppo di Spilamberto, sulla base delle caratteristiche formali dei vasi di corredo, delle tre "tombe dei fanciulli" di Fiorano Modenese. Orientamento e giacitura degli inumati, posizione e composizione del corredo mostrano strettissime analogie con quanto evidenziato dalla necropoli di Spilamberto.

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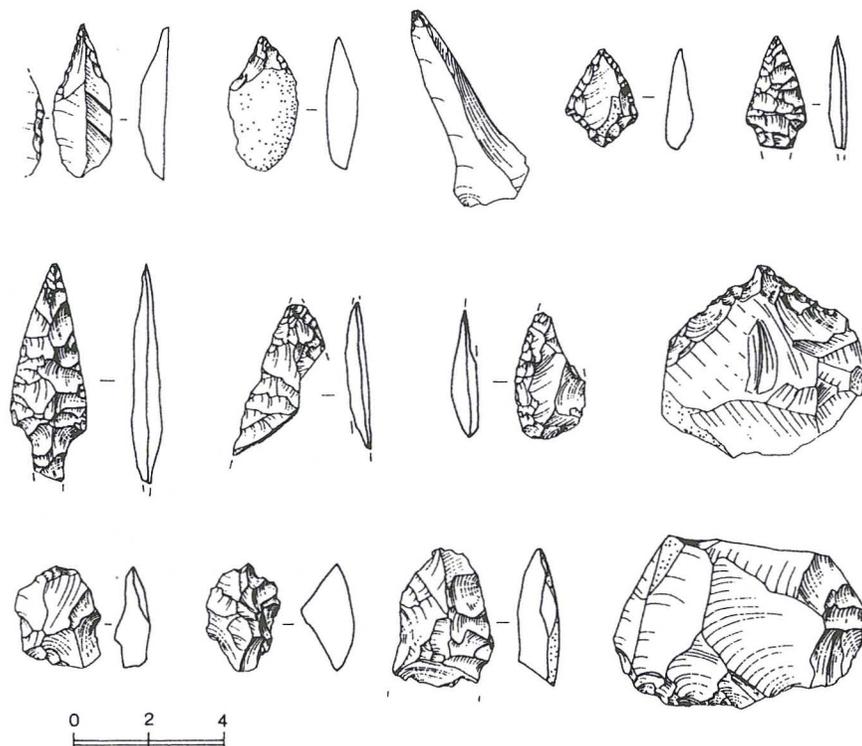


Fig. 1 - Castelvetro, S. Polo Canova district. Lithic industry (drawing by D. Mengoli).

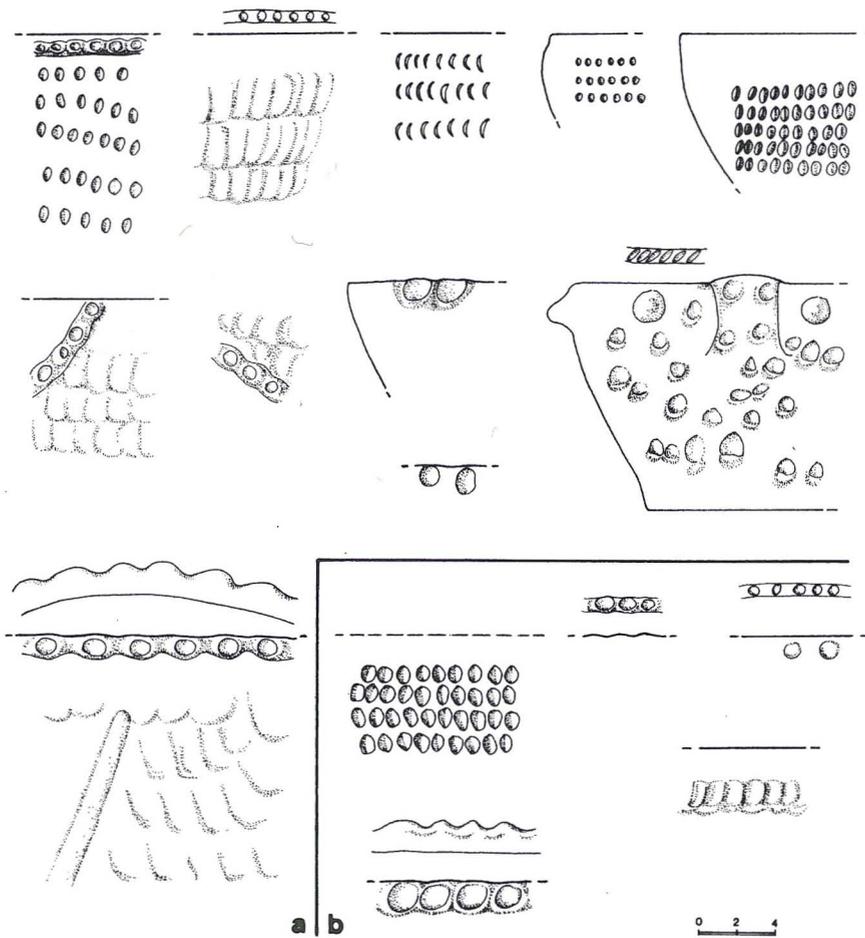


Fig. 2 - Decoration syntax: A) S. Cesario sul Panaro, Cava Marchi; B) Spilamberto, Site X (drawing by G.Morico, V.Politi).



Fig. 3 - S.Cesario sul Panaro, Cava Marchi. Ceramic (drawing by G. Morico, V. Politi).

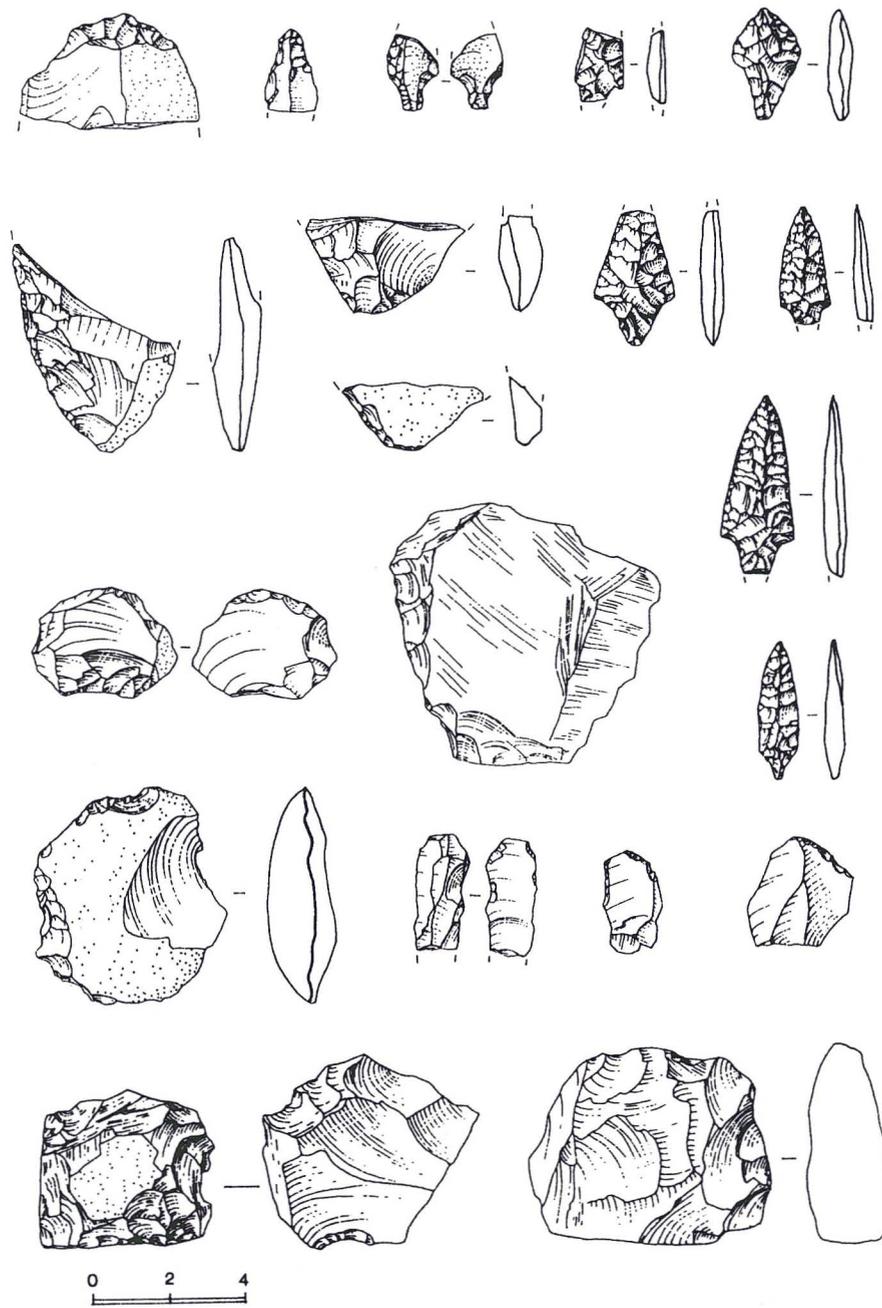


Fig. 4 - S. Cesario sul Panaro, Cava Marchi. Lithic industry (drawing by D. Mengoli).

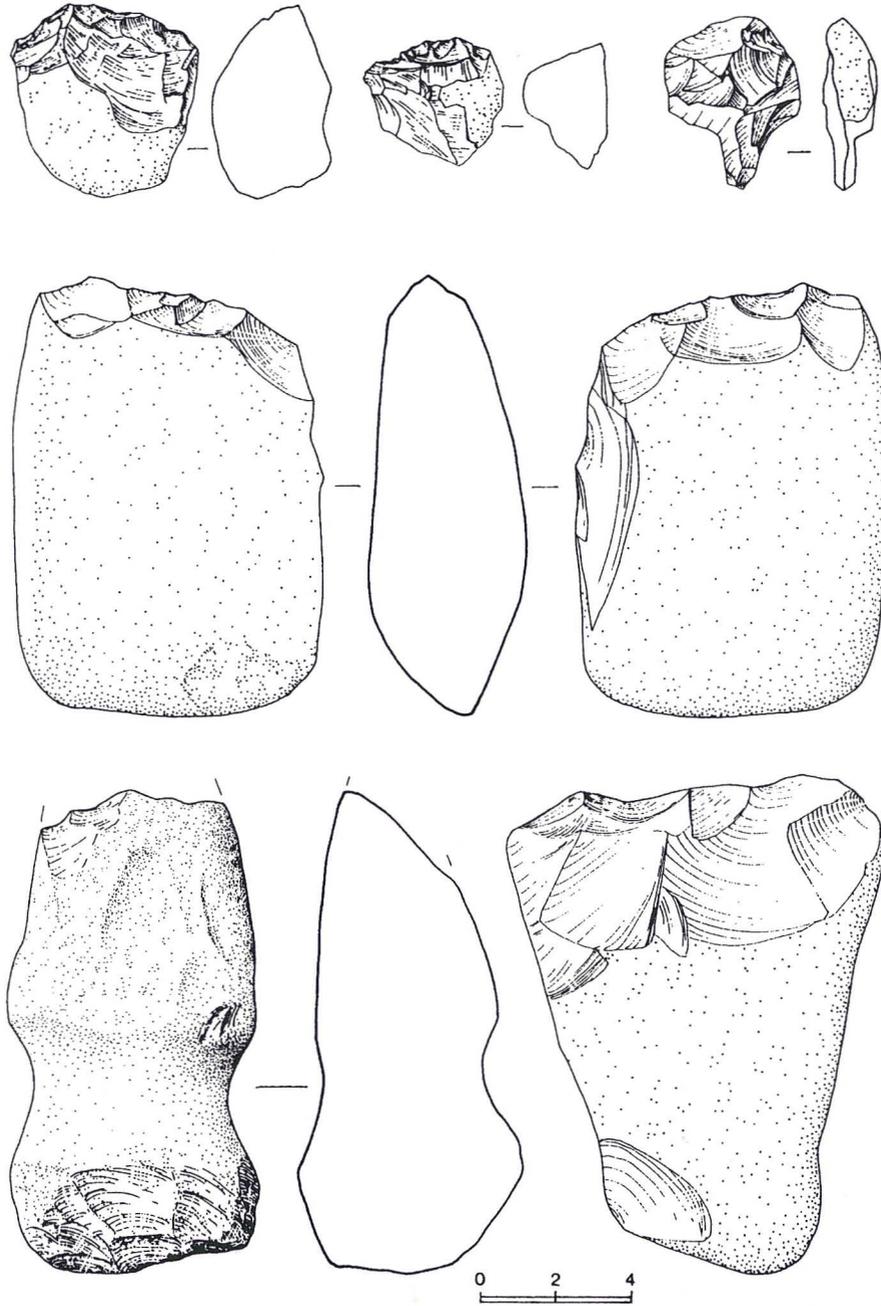


Fig. 5 - S. Cesario sul Panaro, Cava Marchi. Lithic industry (drawing by D. Mengoli).

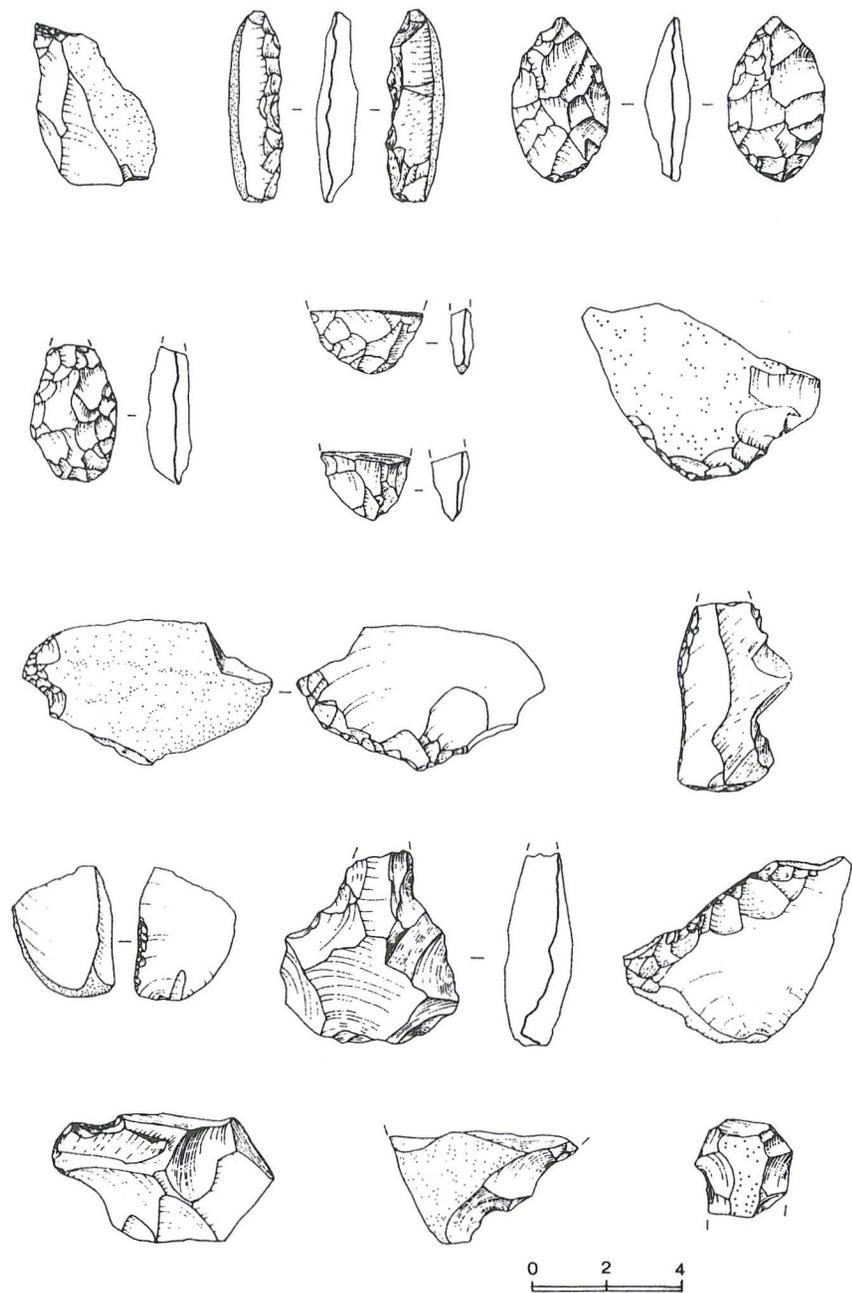


Fig. 6 - Spilamberto, Site X. Lithic industry (drawing by D. Mengoli).

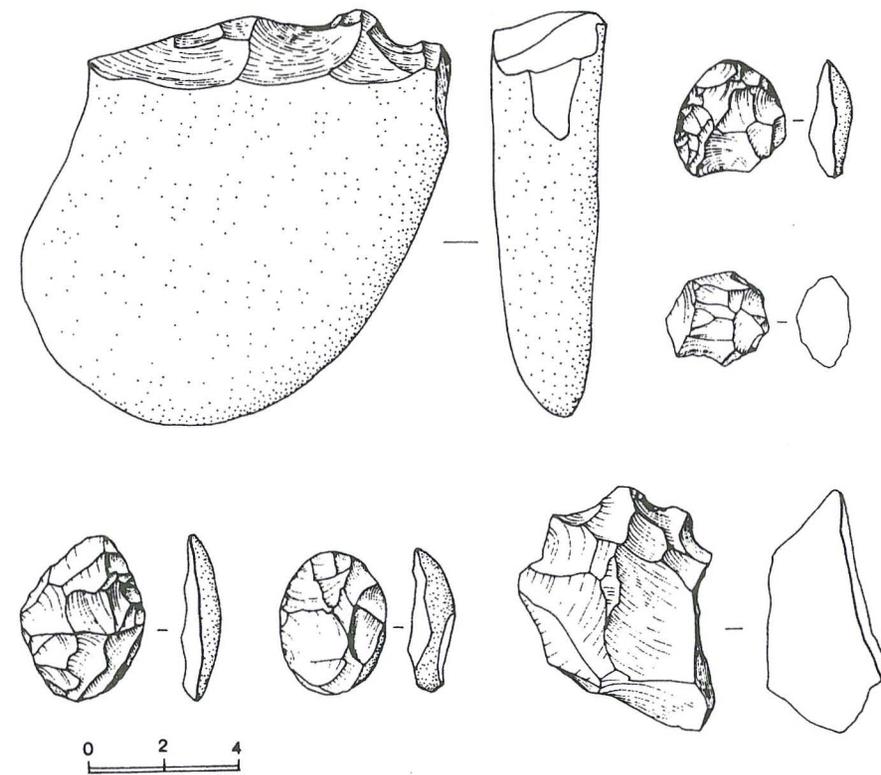


Fig. 7 - Spilamberto, Site X. Lithic industry (drawing by D. Mengoli).

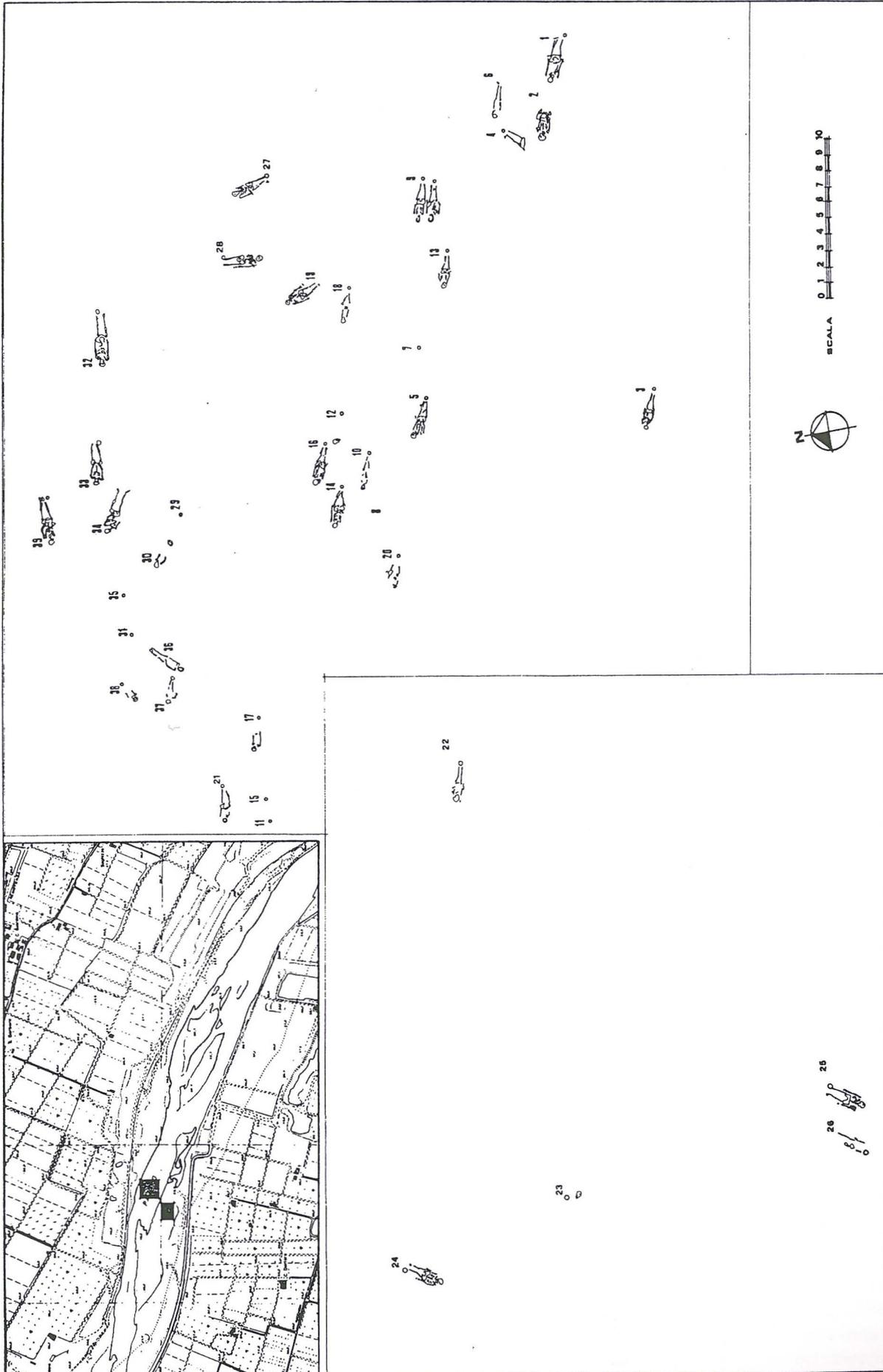


Fig. 8 - Spilamberto. Layout of the cemetery (drawing by A. Ferrari).

TOMBE N°		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9d	9s	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39											
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Fig. 9 - Spilamberto cemetery: summary scheme of the depositions and the grave goods.