

The Neolithic levels of the Mezzocorona-Borgonuovo site (Trento): preliminary data

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ABSTRACT - The archaeological site of Mezzocorona-Borgonuovo is located in the Adige Valley North of Trento, at approx. 250m a.s.l. Two burial sites dating to the Bronze Age and a stratigraphic sequence of settlement levels which, at the present state of research, includes a span of time from the Final Neolithic to the Early Mesolithic period have been found. The preliminary results of the excavation works conducted on the Early and Middle Neolithic levels of the Borgonuovo site are presented herein. Some general comments are included as conclusions on the Early Neolithic period in the Adige Valley.

Key words: Neolithic, Settlement, Gaban Group, Square-Mouthed Pottery Culture, Trentino

Parole chiave: Neolitico, Insediamento, Gruppo Gaban, Cultura dei Vasi a Bocca Quadrata, Trentino

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1. INTRODUCTION¹

We hereby present the preliminary data regarding the Early and Middle Neolithic occupation of the archaeological site of Mezzocorona-Borgonuovo, situated in the Adige Valley, North of Trento, at the foot of the rockwall of Monte di Mezzocorona, at an altitude of about 250m a.s.l.

The site was discovered by Leone Melchiori and Remo Carli during excavation works on the rock protection barrier. Most of the anthropic deposit had been dug up by excavators. Research on the site started in spring 1991.

Two rescue excavations carried out by the Ufficio Beni Archeologici della Provincia Autonoma di Trento brought to light two Bronze Age burial areas on the upper surface (NICOLIS, 1996) and settlement levels attributable to the Neolithic (BAZZANELLA *et al.*, 2000) and to the recent phase of the Mesolithic (Castelno-

vian). A Mesolithic burial was discovered during the excavation campaign of 1995-1996 (DALMERI *et al.*, this volume).

Due to the destruction caused by excavators, only 10m² of the archaeological levels attributable to the Neolithic were investigated. The lower levels of the Neolithic sequence carry on from the Castelnovian ones, while the upper levels continue in a limited episode of the Final Neolithic/Copper Age. Stratigraphic analysis allowed to identify two Neolithic settlement phases.

There were no elements of dwelling structures in the more ancient levels that were attributed to the local Gaban Group on the basis of the findings. The only anthropic structure of the whole area that was investigated was found in the more recent levels referable to the early phase of the Middle Neolithic of the Square Mouthed Pottery Culture. This subhorizontal structured level consisted of small and medium-sized stones. Underneath the ground had been levelled and the lower levels had been partly cut into.

2. THE POTTERY

Even though the ceramic findings from the Early Neolithic levels were not very abundant, they were nevertheless very significant for their chronological aspect. A macroscopic analysis on the fabric allowed to distinguish three categories on the basis of the dimensions and the frequency of the filler: fine, medium and coarse wares. The filler visible to the eye is mainly represented by fragments of mica, while limestone is rarely used. There are granules of quartz added in the coarser wares. Chamotte is also used and in some cases ochre filler is present. No figuline ware fragments were found.

Elements attributable to the local Gaban Group were recognized, including nail decorations (Fig.1:1). There are also incised lines (Fig.1:8,10) including a wall fragment (Fig.1:11) which is probably part of a carinated cup decorated with hatched triangular motifs, comparable to the specimens found at Riparo Gaban (BAGOLINI, 1980a:57; 1980b, fig.47:3). The same decorative scheme is present at Villandro/Villanders-Plunacker in the Isarco Valley (DAL RI, 1989, Taf. III: 1-2), San Giacomo/St. Jakob in the Bolzano basin (NIEDERWANGER, 1988, Taf. 9:1-3) and at Isolino di Varese (GUERRESCHI, 1977, fig.3). The incised decoration of the sherd in Fig.1:10 has precise parallels with a finding from the excavations carried out in 1976 at La Vela di Trento in the Early Neolithic levels².

Along with these findings there are also materials which denote contacts with the Early Neolithic groups of the Po Plain. In particular there is a fragment of a flask vase in fine ware, with a long slightly concave neck and small horizontal perforated handles placed under the rim (Fig.1:3). The surface is accurately burnished while two of the three handles that were found have incisions on the base that can be interpreted as functional. This type of pottery is widely diffused in the Po Plain and Peninsular areas and is documented both on figuline ware and in common ware. Along the Adriatic area it can be seen on painted specimens of the Catignano facies (CREMONESI & TOZZI, 1987, fig.2:18) and in the Ripoli cultural area, at the Ripoli site (CREMONESI, 1965:104, fig.5:5, fig.10:19, fig.15:1), in the Grotta dei Piccioni di Bolognano (CREMONESI, 1976:110, fig.21:12), in the Caverna dell'Acqua or del Morto in Liguria (BERNABÒ BREA, 1946, tab.XLIX:8).

A specimen used for religious rituals was discovered in the Grotta dei Pozzi della Piana near Titignano (Orvieto) (PASSERI, 1970, fig.6:8).

In Northern Italy it is present in various sites attributable to different cultures of Early Neolithic including: Sammardenchia (Udine) (FERRARI & PESSINA, 1996:55), Lugo di Grezzana (Verona) (MOSER & PE-

DROTTI, 1996, fig.8:4; MOSER, 2000; PEDROTTI *et al.*, 2000), S. Giustina di Baldaria (Verona) (SALZANI, 1986, fig.3:9), Cazzago Brabbia (Varese) (BIAGI, 1976, fig.1), Vhò di Piadena, Campo Ceresole (Cremona) (BAGOLINI & BIAGI, 1975a, fig.26:10, tab.2:1), Vhò di Piadena, Campo Costiere Orefici (BAGOLINI & BIAGI, 1975a, fig.6), Pianaccia di Suvero (La Spezia) (GIARDI & MAGGI, 1982, fig.3; MAGGI, 1984, fig.92:3), Savignano sul Panaro (Modena) (BERNABÒ BREA *et al.*, 1990:119, fig.4), Chiozza di Scandiano (Reggio Emilia) (BAGOLINI & BARFIELD, 1971, fig.26:7, fig.27:1), Calerno (Reggio Emilia) (BAGOLINI & BIAGI, 1977a, fig.13b), Albinea (Reggio Emilia) (BAGOLINI & BIAGI, 1977a, fig.9), sito V di Miramare (Rimini) (BAGOLINI *et al.*, 1991, fig.9:3), Lugo di Romagna (DEGASPERI *et al.*, 1998:124). A recent acquisition is the sherd recovered in the Fiorano context at Casa Querciolaia (Livorno) (IACOPINI & GRIFONI CREMONESI, 2000).

The sherd of a flask shaped vessel with a flat profile is decorated with a triangular groove placed above the mark where the handle was fixed to the vase. The shape and the motif suggest it is attributable to the Fiorano Culture (Fig.1:6). Our sherd could be similar to the specimen found in the 1969 excavations at Chiozza di Scandiano (BAGOLINI, 1972a, fig.8:2) and to a flask vase with four handles found in the settlement of Lugo di Romagna (VON ELES MASI & STEFFÈ, 1987, fig.2:5; DEGASPERI *et al.*, 1998:123, fig.19)³.

Among the decorated material there was also a sherd in medium ware with a fine incised chevron motif executed when the pottery was leather hard before firing (Fig.1:9). The decorative scheme and the technique recall characteristics usually found in the Vhò Culture (BIAGI, 1995:108) and in some contexts of the Early Neolithic in Northern Italy as for example at Arene Candide (BERNABÒ BREA, 1956, tav. VIII: 6e-g), at Alba (GAMBARI *et al.*, 1992, fig. 6:3, fig. 5,7; VENTURINO GAMBARI, 1987, tav. XIII, sp. 2:34.24; VENTURINO GAMBARI *et al.*, 1995, figg. 92-93), at Pizzo di Bodio (BANCHIERI, 1990, fig. 2:32,35; 1995, fig. 3:6).

The wall sherd with a lobe in relief on the edge (Fig.1:14) probably belongs to a truncate cone-shaped cup and has parallels in the sites of the Adriatic Impressed Pottery of Villaggio Leopardi (Pescara) (CREMONESI, 1966:30-32, fig.2:2-3, 3:2) and San Marco di Gubbio (Perugia) (MALONE & STODDART, 1992, fig.16:3, 18:47-48), in the Po Plain at Lugo di Romagna (DEGASPERI *et al.*, 1998:122, fig.13), Rivaltella (Reggio Emilia) (BAGOLINI & BIAGI, 1977a, fig.12), Albinea (Reggio Emilia) (BAGOLINI & BIAGI, 1977a, fig.9), Fiorano Modenese (BAGOLINI & BIAGI, 1977a, fig.2), Vhò di Piadena, Campo Ceresole (Cremona) (BAGOLINI *et al.*, 1977, fig.21:5), Vhò di Piadena, Campo Sera Mattina (Cremona) (BAGOLINI & BIAGI, 1975a, fig.16:19, 17:4, 18:3), Ostiano, Dugali Alti (Cremona) (STARNINI, 1995, fig.12:P63), Isorella, Cascina Bocche (Brescia) (STAR-

NINI, 1998, fig.6:1-2), Casa Gazza (Travo, Piacenza) (BERNABÒ BREA, 1991, fig. at the bottom of p.38) and in the Monti Lessini area at Lugo di Grezzana (Verona) (MOSER & PEDROTTI, 1996, fig.8:1). The presence of a bowl with a strap handle and lobe-shaped raised brim in the settlement of Paterno (L'Aquila) referred to contacts with the Early Neolithic Groups of Northern Italy (PESSINA, 1991:124-125, fig.6:2).

There are also two sherds, one of which is a stray find, probably belonging to the same vessel, featuring a dotted line motif (Fig.1:15). The same motif is documented on the ceramic material at La Vela di Trento settlement (excavations 1976), Lugo di Grezzana (Verona) (MOSER, 1996), Campo Costiere di Vhò di Piadena (Cremona) (BAGOLINI & BIAGI, 1975a, fig.2:5).

Among the non-decorated material there is a sherd of a globular vessel with handles (Fig.1:7), the remains of a drinking cup in fine ware with a slightly concave bottom (Fig.1:4-5)⁴ and the sherd of a straight round brim probably belonging to a deep drinking cup of a very fine ware (Fig.1:2).

The mending technique carried out by making holes on the sides of the vessels for the assemblage of the sherds is also attested (Fig.1:13).

In the upper levels the ceramic is highly fragmented and it was difficult to place in context. Among the scarce material recovered there were two sherds of a vase with straight rim and wall, probably belonging to the same square mouthed vessel (Fig.1:12).

3. THE LITHIC INDUSTRY

The chipped stone assemblage is almost entirely made of flint, part of which is from local sources and some coming from Southern Trentino and probably from the Monti Lessini. Two crystal rock elements, one of which is an unfinished trapeze were found in the Early Neolithic levels (Fig.2:19).

Preliminary analysis of the materials from the lower levels allowed to place the lithic assemblage in the context of the Early Neolithic of the Po Plain and of the Alps. This can be compared to the local site of Villandro/Villanders-Plunacker (DALRI, 1989, Taff. I-II), Dos de La Forca (BAGOLINI *et al.*, 1987, fig. 4; MARZATICO, 1997, vol. I:81-91; vol. III, tavv. 8-13), Riparo Gaban (BAGOLINI, 1980a:58 and unpublished), Romagnano Loc III (BAGOLINI, 1971), Pradestel (unpublished), La Vela (PEDROTTI, 1990, fig.5:9-16 and unpublished).

The production technology is strongly represented by laminar materials, including many bladelet cores with one or more prepared platforms (Fig.3:1-3).

Elements of Castelnovian tradition are also present, such as trapezes (Fig.2:15-19), notched blades

(Fig.2:10-11), long and short endscrapers (Fig.2:3-8), truncations, borers (Fig.2:9), burins, microburins (Fig.2:20-22), retouched blades and also burins on a side notch (Ripabianca burins) (Fig.2:1-2) and rhomboids (Fig.2:12-14) typical of the Early Neolithic of the Po Plain.

The upper levels are characterised by the presence of foliate implements including arrowheads with a concave base (Fig.3:5-7) and a pedunculate shape (Fig.3:8), which refer to the early phase of the Square Mouthed Pottery Culture.

A stray find, an arrowhead with a very deep flat retouching and shiny traces of use wear on one of the two edges, is attributable to the same cultural context (Fig.3:4).

Similar findings are common at the sites of Fimon Molino Casarotto (BAGOLINI *et al.*, 1973, fig.25:14; BARFIELD & BROGLIO, 1966, fig.4:13), Laghetto del Frassino (SPADONI, 1973, fig.2:7), Borghetto all'Adige (BAGOLINI, 1980c, fig.14:2), Solteri di Trento (unpublished), Torbiera di Bosisio Parini (DE MARINIS, 1994, fig.7:1-2), Spineda, località Prebenda Parrocchiale (ANGHINELLI & ANGHINELLI, 1993, fig.6:15).

4. POLISHED STONE INDUSTRY

A polished stone axe was found in the Early Neolithic levels (Fig.4:12)⁵. This is a very important finding as it was thought that this category of artefacts did not belong to the cultural context of the Gaban Group (BAGOLINI, 1992:234). Polished stone artefacts (axes, rings) were also found in the Early Neolithic levels of the multilayered site of Villandro/Villanders-Plunacker in the Isarco Valley (DALRI, 1996:91, fig.63).

5. THE BONE INDUSTRY

The bone industry is mainly represented by the category of points. There are five specimens (Fig.4:2-6) from the Early Neolithic levels, fashioned out of the thick section of the bone, so it was not possible to ascertain the type of support used. Among the working techniques the following methods are attested: abrasion, smoothing and polishing that was probably due to the wear and tear. Four of the five specimens had circular or subcircular sections and all the far ends were broken off (there are no traces of the implements being used after they were broken). The fifth specimen is a point with a rectangular section, broken at the nearest end. The very thin point suggests that it was not used

as an awl. Traces of abrasion can be seen on both sides of the finding.

The only instrument available for the Middle Neolithic is a point that is broken at the far end, fashioned out of the thick section of the diaphysis of a long bone with evident traces of abrasion on both sides (Fig.4:1).

6. ORNAMENTS

Among the ornamental objects of the more ancient levels there are pierced atrophic canines of deer, and a pierced fish vertebra. Pierced *Columbellae* were found in the levels of the Middle Neolithic (Fig.4:7-11) as well as a fragment of a bead made from a *Dentalium* shell.

7. FAUNA

The preliminary faunal analysis shows that red deer were much more abundant than other species in both the Neolithic levels and economy was strongly based on hunting.

For the Early Neolithic levels the presence of the following animals is also documented: roe deer, ibex, chamoix, goats/sheep, oxen, pigs, foxes, wild cats, badgers, martors, beavers and brown bears.

Generally there is a lower percentage of fauna in the Middle Neolithic levels that clearly means that the area was less frequented than during the Early Neolithic. As well as red deer, which still prevail, there are roe deer, ibex, chamoix, goats/sheep, oxen, pigs, wild cats, foxes and beavers.

It must be stressed that the material was highly fragmented indicating that all the levels were subject to trampling. With regard to domestic animals, the only species that is surely documented is oxen. Even though goats/sheep were present in the Early Neolithic levels they cannot be clearly distinguished from the wild species even in the Middle Neolithic levels.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The Borgonuovo sequence undoubtedly recalls those of other sites situated along the Adige Valley (Romagnano Loc, Pradestel, La Vela, Riparo Gaban, Dos de La Forca) which symbolically synthesize the evolu-

tion of the prehistoric population of this important geographic and cultural area. The findings of the Borgonuovo site are very significant as there is little information available regarding the Early Neolithic of Trentino. A preliminary analysis suggests that the industries of the Early Neolithic levels of Mezzocorona-Borgonuovo could refer to a recent period of the Gaban Group on the basis of the evidence of the stratigraphic sequence of the eponymous site (BAGOLINI & BIAGI, 1977b:227-229).

On a strictly local ambit, these data integrated the knowledge on the Neolithic population of the Piana Rotaliana⁶, which is based at present only on the evidence of the site of Dos de la Forca (BAGOLINI *et al.*, 1987)⁷. With regard to the lithic industry of the Early Neolithic, the two sites are very similar, while the scarce ceramics found on these sites are different in typology. Considering the closeness of the two areas, the Borgonuovo site is possibly more recent, which is also confirmed by the finding of a polished stone axe and ceramics that document evident contacts with the Po Plain. With regard to this, in a wider regional context, the evidence of the influence of the cultures of the Early Neolithic of the Po Plain, is at present limited to the few elements present at Riparo Gaban, Romagnano III, and La Vela⁸.

The upper levels of Borgonuovo document aspects referable to the early phase of the Square Mouthed Pottery Culture, which are not attested in the Dos de la Forca site but are present in other archaeological contexts of the region showing different settlement patterns. The materials referable to this chronological horizon are however too few to express further considerations on cultural aspects.

9. CONSIDERATIONS ON THE EARLY NEOLITHIC OF THE ADIGE VALLEY

The many works concerning the issue on the origins of the Neolithic in this geographical area, mainly undertaken by Bernardino Bagolini, have underlined how this phenomenon came about gradually by means of an acculturation process, which determined the "ceramization" of the local substratum in an economic and technological background, mainly tied to the Mesolithic tradition⁹.

With regard to the settlement patterns, a distinguished choice of the settlements is not evident as shown by the fact that all the deposits of the Early Neolithic of the Adige Valley maintain a stratigraphic continuity with Castelnovian levels both in open sites on alluvial cones (La Vela)¹⁰, in rockshelters (Riparo Gaban, Pradestel, Dos de La Forca) and in sites on detrital cone

deposits at the base of the rocky walls (Romagnano Loc III and Mezzocorona-Borgonuovo).

Nevertheless, at the present time there is no clear picture as to the cultural and chronological development of the Early Neolithic period of the Trentino territory of the Adige Valley. This situation is due to many circumstances. The main fact is that there were very few sites that yielded significant information and as can be seen, they were situated in a restricted area, between Mezzocorona and Romagnano. These are Dos de la Forca and Borgonuovo sites in the Comune of Mezzocorona and Riparo Gaban, Romagnano and La Vela in the basin of Trento¹¹. We have no other information on the remaining territory apart from a few sporadic findings. This is the case for Riparo Moletta Patone of Arco which yielded scarce lithic material and ceramics attributable to the Early Neolithic (BAGOLINI *et al.*, 1984)¹².

It should also be underlined that careful attention must be paid in interpreting the archaeological evidence, due to the characteristics of the neolithic deposits in the Adige Valley, for example the small surfaces investigated, often situated next to the rock wall, the recurrent occupation in the same areas in different periods and the small amount of material found, above all pottery¹³.

The latest date relative to the Castelnovian in the Adige territory is documented in the Pradestel site; a charcoal sample coming from D1 and D3 levels is dated 6870 ± 50 BP (R-1148) (BROGLIO & IMPROTA, 1995:25, tab.1)¹⁴.

At the present time the most ancient evidence with regard to the Neolithic comes from level AA 1-2 of Romagnano III, where Castelnovian-type lithic elements appear, associated to a burin of Ripabianca (BROGLIO, 1971:183, fig.20) and to a few potsherds with impressed decorations (BROGLIO, 1971:185, fig.21). A radiometric dating obtained on a charcoal sample (R-1136: 6480 ± 50 BP)¹⁵, allows us to place this occupation episode in the second half of the VI millennium BC in calibrated chronology. This chronological evidence is comparable to the new ^{14}C datings available for the Central Eastern Po Plain, which date the appearance of the first farming communities to around the middle of the VI millennium BC in calibrated chronology (IMPROTA & PESSINA, 1998).

On the basis of the study carried out on the lithic assemblages, layer AA of Romagnano has been attributed to a late phase of the Castelnovian in transition to the Early Neolithic (BROGLIO & KOZLOWSKI, 1984:145). The same authors have also underlined that in the Romagnano sequence, a marked transformation of the lithic industry is only found from the upper level, named T4 (BROGLIO & KOZLOWSKI, 1984:145, note 12), onwards, where ceramic elements were also present, documenting a Fiorano Culture influence (PERINI, 1971:96, fig.52:11).

In our opinion, layer AA1-2 of Romagnano III represents an early phase of Early Neolithic of the Adige Valley, as had already been noted by Bagolini & Biagi¹⁶. Even in the Neolithic evolution scheme of the Alpine region proposed by A.Gallay, layer AA1-2 of Romagnano is quoted as an example, of the so called “phase néopionnière 2A” in Northern Italy. According to the author, farming pioneers explore new territories and come into contact with native hunting groups in this phase (GALLAY, 1990:33-34). No remains of domestic mammals were found in this layer (BOSCATO & SALA, 1980). Levels T3-4 of the same sequence, however, suggest a later development of the Gaban Group, which is also confirmed by two ^{14}C datings, which allow to place this occupational episode in the first half of the V millennium BC¹⁷.

As for the other sites, for the moment it would seem that a chronological evolution within the Early Neolithic could possibly be distinguished only at Riparo Gaban, on the basis of the stratigraphic evidence and on the archaeological materials recovered (BAGOLINI & BIAGI, 1977b:227-229; BAGOLINI, 1980b:108-109).

It has been hypothesized that the earliest Neolithic levels of Riparo Gaban are probably contemporaneous with the AA1-2 layer of Romagnano Loc III (BAGOLINI & BIAGI, 1975b:16). However, the radiometric datings available for the Neolithic levels of this site do not predate the first half of the V millennium BC cal¹⁸.

The data referring to the Early Neolithic of the La Vela settlement are almost completely unpublished. Traces of occupation regarding this chronological horizon are documented in the sectors Vela II (1975 excavations)¹⁹ and Vela III (1976 excavations)²⁰, while important structural evidence is present in the Vela VII sector (1987-88 excavations) (DEGASPERI & PEDROTTI, 1997:122-123). From a typological point of view, the few ceramic materials originating from the 1975 and 1976 excavation campaigns would seem attributable to a recent phase of the local Early Neolithic. The cultural findings of the 1987-88 excavations are unpublished.

The outline of the situation regarding the Adige Valley is highly incomplete at present, also due to the fact that in nearly all the cases the dates available refer to an advanced period of the Early Neolithic. However, it is possible to distinguish the phase of evolution in which the Early Neolithic elements appear for the first time in a Mesolithic economic and cultural background (Romagnano Loc III, level AA1-2). It is still difficult however to distinguish the processes that lead to a first “ceramization” of the local Mesolithic substratum.

As for the advanced phases of the Early Neolithic in the Adige area, we believe that Bernardino Bagolini’s acculturation model is still valid. Nevertheless,

it must be underlined that, compared to this model, a process of acculturation coming from the Po Plain, rather than from the main centres of Balkan-Danubian Europe is more feasible for the present. In fact fully Neolithic communities existed as far back as the first half of the VI millennium BC on the Po Plain (PESSINA & ROTTOLI, 1996; PESSINA, 1998; IMPROTA & PESSINA, 1998).

We do not agree with the theory proposed by A. Pedrotti, whereby groups of humans of Neolithic culture and economy "colonized" the Adige area²¹; the negligible data available and consequently the difficulty in distinguishing the cultural aspects of the Adige area and the stages of evolution must not be overlooked. With regard to this, A. GAILLAY's contribution (1995) suggests that it is necessary to review the traditional opinion regarding the existence of Mesolithic groups of hunters-gatherers on the one hand and communities of farmers on the other and consider more articulate and complex realities that can only partly be detected through excavation data.

Apart from the obvious use of the Adige Valley as a transit route, it is legitimate to wonder what motivated the groups to move away from more fertile farming areas like Po Plain, Veneto, and Friuli to what A. GAILLAY (1990) would define as "ecologically marginal" areas.

NOTES

1 - In this work, the general description of the site and the analysis of the industries were undertaken by E.Mottes, F.Nicolis and L.Moser; the study of the fauna and the bone industry by M.Bazzanella. The conclusions and the considerations on the Early Neolithic of the Adige Valley were elaborated by E.Mottes and F.Nicolis.

2 - The findings of the excavations and the recoveries at La Vela di Trento in 1975, 1976 and 1977 are being studied by E.Mottes.

3 - The highly fragmented piece does not allow for an exact reconstruction of the shape.

4 - The typology of the base of this finding suggests a certain similarity with the specimen found in Structure 1 in the area of Canale di Nogaredo al Torre (UD) (PESSINA, 1993, fig.8:1).

5 - The petrographic study of the artefact is being carried out at the moment by the Dipartimento di Scienze della Terra e Geologico-Ambientali of the University of Bologna.

6 - The valley floor area known as Piana Rotoliana, is situated about 20km North of Trento where the Noce torrent flows into the Adige Valley. The Noce forms a wide alluvial cone with Mezzocorona on the left and Mezzolombardo on the right. The town of S.Michele is situated on the left slope of the Adige Valley where the two rivers meet. Here, the Adige Valley faces NE-SW and is about 2km wide (cfr. COLTORTI, 1994).

7 - Evidence of the Early Neolithic period was also found in the neighbouring area in the Comune di Mezzolombardo at Riparo La Rupe (BAGOLINI, 1972b) and at Riparo Nogarole 1 (BAGOLINI *et al.*, 1985).

8 - A cup with tubercular handles, clearly influenced by the Fiorano Culture was found at Riparo Gaban in the levels that are attributed to the recent phase of the Early Neolithic (BAGOLINI, 1990a, fig.5:8). Sherds of a carinated cup decorated with engraved lines and impressed dots, clearly inspired by the Fiorano Culture were found in layer T4 of Romagnano Loc III (PERINI, 1971:96, fig.52:11). In 1960 a sherd of a cup decorated with grooves was found at La Vela di Trento (BARFIELD, 1970, fig.4:C1). On the basis of the type of filler used, this cup sherd was probably imported from the Fiorano Culture area. Among the ceramics found in the same site during the 1975 excavations there was a sherd of a neck probably belonging to a flask vessel comparable to the analogous specimen of Fig.1:3, found in Borgonuovo, not only because of the typology but also for the ceramic filler. The sherd of a neck probably of a fine ceramic flask vessel was also found in layer A of Pradestel and was recently published as a sherd of the neck of a carinated cup (PEDROTTI, 1998a:127, fig.3:8). With regard to this, we would like to thank Dr.Giampaolo Dalmeri for his constant help and for allowing us to view the lithic material and ceramics from the levels attributed to the Early Neolithic of Pradestel, preserved in the Museo Tridentino di Scienze Naturali di Trento.

9 - See also the following works: BAGOLINI, 1980a, 1986, 1987a, 1987b, 1990a, 1990b, 1992; BAGOLINI & BROGLIO, 1985.

10 - Archaeological levels referable to the Early and Recent Mesolithic were uncovered solely in sector Vela VII during the 1987-88 excavations undertaken by the Ufficio Beni Archeologici di Trento (PEDROTTI, 1990:222; BAZZANELLA *et al.*, this volume).

11 - The other sites were placed in context on the basis of the scarce material available or even on single lithic elements as was the case for Busa de l'Adamo di Lizzana (BAGOLINI & RIGOTTI, 1975), La Rupe (BAGOLINI, 1972b) and Nogarole di Mezzolombardo (BAGOLINI *et al.*, 1985) or on sporadic collections of the 19th century like the material from Doss Trento that included a flask vessel decorated with engravings (BAGOLINI, 1975, fig.1a; MARZATICO, 1997, vol. I:259-260, vol. III, tav. 50:735) and lithic industry generically attributable to the Recent Mesolithic-Early Neolithic (MARZATICO, 1997, vol. I:278-293, vol. III, tavv. 54-66:766-926). The evidence referring to the Early Neolithic at Acquaviva di Besenello is represented by level d in which "... recent Mesolithic type lithic industry, stratigraphically associated with minute sherds of atypical ceramic" is present (ANGELINI *et al.*, 1980:69). Level A at Pradestel yielded two ceramic sherds (PEDROTTI, 1998a:127, fig.3:8-9; regarding n.8 cfr. note 9) and about ten lithic finds including trapezes with *piquant trièdre*, a notched and denticulated blade, a few scrapers and some microburins.

12 - In our opinion, the very position of the deposit does not assure reliability, not even for the study on the faunal remains. In the conclusions of this contribution, the Authors say the "chronological and stratigraphical incoherence of most of the documentation under the burial level seems to

be attributed to the fact that the deposit was formed by sedimentary accumulations that slided and flowed from the nearby detritus cone on the slope, north of the rockshelter. It is only during the Mesolithic that the rockshelter itself is used as an episodic dwelling; on the contrary, the Neolithic materials infer articulate episodic settlements outside the shelter." (BAGOLINI *et al.*, 1984:124).

13 - With regard to this, the sherds of the same truncated cone-shaped vase with heel, decorated with impressions, of Riparo Gaban (BAGOLINI, 1980a:61b) were found in different strata attributable both to the early and to the recent phase of Early Neolithic.

14 - Corresponding to 5769-5654 BC cal 1 sigma (BAGOLINI & BIAGI, 1990:10, tab.1).

15 - Corresponding to 5440-5335 BC cal 1 sigma (cfr. IMPROTA & PESSINA, 1998:111, tab.1).

16 - "The most ancient "Neolithic" complex in Trentino was found in layer AA of Romagnano Loc III. Ceramic represented by a few sherds, some of which were decorated with plastic cordons and nail impressions, were found here for the first time ever. The lithic industry would seem to slowly evolve from the lower AB2-1 level...." (BAGOLINI & BIAGI, 1975b:15). The same authors have also observed the following: "The revision already carried out on strata T3-4 of Romagnano III is not the only one that should be considered in the important stratigraphic sequence of this Trentino site. In fact, layer AA of the same deposit, once defined as a "tardenoid complex with ceramics", turned out to be stratigraphically inconsistent. In fact it has been confirmed that it was part of the above layer T3-4 "(BAGOLINI & BIAGI, 1977b:229; BAGOLINI, 1980b:111). Furthermore: "some of the potsherds found in layer AA belong to a vessel whose sherds were also found in the upper T4 level " (BAGOLINI & BIAGI, 1977b, note 25).

17 - This regards the dates R-781a: 6060±50 BP (5043-4908 BC cal 1 sigma) e R-781: 5810±50 BP (4764-4592 BC cal 1 sigma) that were carried out on charcoal samples from level T4 (IMPROTA & PESSINA, 1998:111, tab.1).

18 - We refer to the following dates carried out on charcoal samples from level D2 (Bln-1777: 6030±45 BP corresponding to 4948-4848 BC cal 1 sigma; R-1777a: 5750±60 BP corresponding to 4701-4516 BC cal 1 sigma) and from level D8 (Bln-1778: 5990±45 BP corresponding

to 4932-4809 BC cal 1 sigma; Gif-3766: 5650±150 BP corresponding to 4686-4345 BC cal 1 sigma) (BAGOLINI & BIAGI, 1990:12-13; IMPROTA & PESSINA, 1998:110, tab.1).

19 - Preliminary report in BAGOLINI *et al.*, 1975:326-328. Some of the most significant ceramic and lithic findings from the 1975 excavation were published later by A.PEDROTTI (1990:222, fig.5). It can be deduced that the sherd of a bowl with a truncated cone-shaped body and a flat bottom in fine black ceramic decorated with geometric scratched motifs (PEDROTTI, 1990, fig.5:8, 1998a:127, fig.3:21), is attributable to the typical geometric-linear aspects of the Square Mouthed Pottery Culture from both the stratigraphic position it was found in and the characteristics of the typology. The paleobotanical data from Square Mouthed Pottery Culture levels of the 1975 excavations (CASTELLETTI, 1977) were attributed to Early Neolithic levels by mistake (PESSINA & ROTTOLI, 1996:93, tab.3).

20 - Preliminary information in BAGOLINI *et al.*, 1976:222-225. In sector Vela III the Early Neolithic deposits were almost completely carried away by alluvium from the Vela stream. The archaeological materials are unpublished.

21 - "The data available would tend to indicate that Neolithization took place around the end of the VII/beginning of the VI millennium BP as a result of the penetration of small farming communities who settled in open-air sites at the bottom of the valleys and elaborated the Gaban facies in contact with the local Mesolithic groups. [...] The local communities, on the contrary, probably still used rock-shelters. [...] The local groups apparently accepted only the pottery and the Ripabianca burin and the rhomboids from the new populations." (PEDROTTI, 1998b:231). It must be stressed that there are no important differences in the choice of settlements between the Neolithic and the Mesolithic, both in the Adige area sites as already mentioned including San Giacomo/St. Jakob (Bolzano) (NIEDERWANGER, 1988) and in the open-air ones of the Isarco Valley, on mid-slope terraces (Villandro/Villanders-Plunacker) and bottom valleys (Bressanone/Brixen-Stufles) (DEMETZ, 1998). Furthermore, Po Plain elements certified on this Adige territory up till now are too scarce to suggest that the human groups could be defined as "communities".

SUMMARY - The archaeological site of Mezzocorona-Borgonuovo is located in the Adige Valley north of Trento, at the foot of a rocky cliff of the Monte di Mezzocorona, at a height of app. 250 m a.s.l. In 1991, during the construction works of a boulder barrier an archaeological deposit was exposed, which had been largely damaged by the excavators. The rescue excavations carried out by the Office for Archaeological Heritage of the Provincia Autonoma di Trento exposed, on top of the deposit, two burial sites dating to the Bronze Age and a stratigraphic sequence of settlement levels which, at the present state of research, includes a span of time from the Late Neolithic/Copper Age to the Early Mesolithic period. The preliminary results of the excavation works conducted on the Early and Middle Neolithic levels of the Borgonuovo site are presented herein. The analysis of the stratigraphic evidence identified two different stages of settlement. The earliest levels seem to be attributable to late phase of Gaban Group. Among pottery together with items typical of that period of time, elements are found typical of the early Neolithic period of the Po Plain (Fiorano, Vhò, etc.). In the upper level there is evidence of human presence that, based on the few remains which were found, seem to be traceable to the Early phase of the Square-Mouthed Pottery Culture. General comments on the Early Neolithic in the Adige Valley are included.

RIASSUNTO - Il sito archeologico di Mezzocorona-Borgonuovo è posto in Valle dell'Adige a nord di Trento, ai piedi della parete rocciosa del Monte di Mezzocorona, ad una quota di circa 250 metri s.l.m. Nel 1991 in seguito ai lavori per l'apprestamento di una struttura paramassì è stato messo in evidenza un deposito antropico, in buona parte intaccato dai mezzi meccanici. L'intervento di emergenza effettuato dall'Ufficio Beni Archeologici della Provincia Autonoma di Trento permetteva di mettere in luce, al tetto del deposito, due aree sepolcrali dell'età del Bronzo e una sequenza stratigrafica di livelli insediativi che allo stato attuale delle ricerche copre un arco cronologico compreso tra l'età del Rame e il Mesolitico antico. In questa sede vengono presentati i risultati preliminari delle ricerche condotte nei livelli neolitici del sito di Borgonuovo. L'analisi delle evidenze stratigrafiche ha permesso di individuare due fasi di frequentazione. I livelli più antichi sembrano attribuibili ad un momento recente nell'ambito del locale Gruppo del Gaban. Tra i materiali ceramici, in associazione a quelli tipici, sono presenti elementi che denotano contatti con le facies padane del primo Neolitico. Nei livelli superiori è documentato un episodio di frequentazione che sulla base dei pochi reperti rinvenuti sembra riferibile alla fase iniziale della Cultura dei vasi a bocca quadrata. In conclusione vengono espresse alcune considerazioni generali sul Neolitico antico della Valle dell'Adige.

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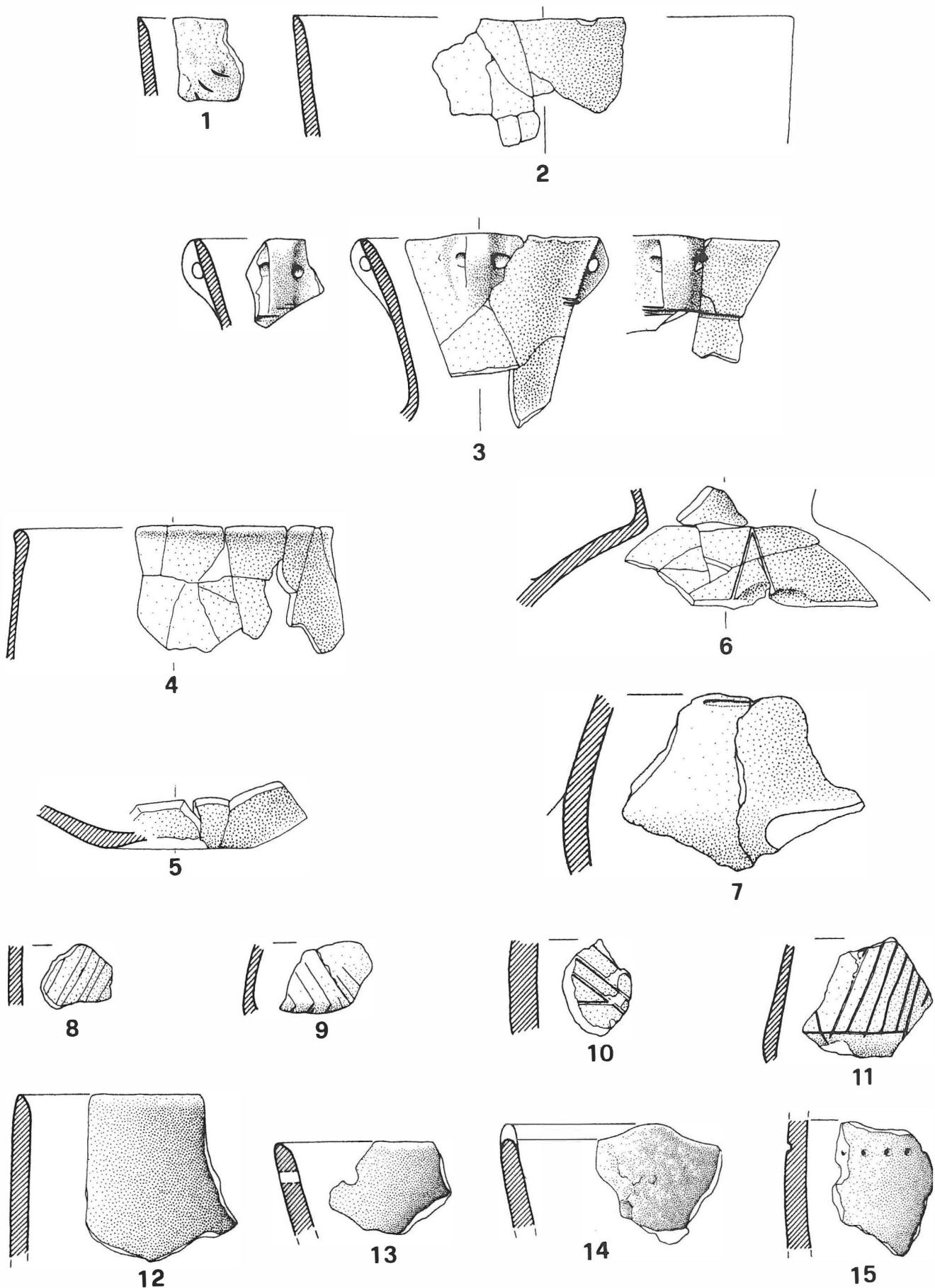


Fig. 1 – Pottery from Mezzocorona–Borgonuovo (Trento). Scale 1:2. Archivio Ufficio Beni Archeologici – P.A.T.; drawings by Giorgio Nicolussi.

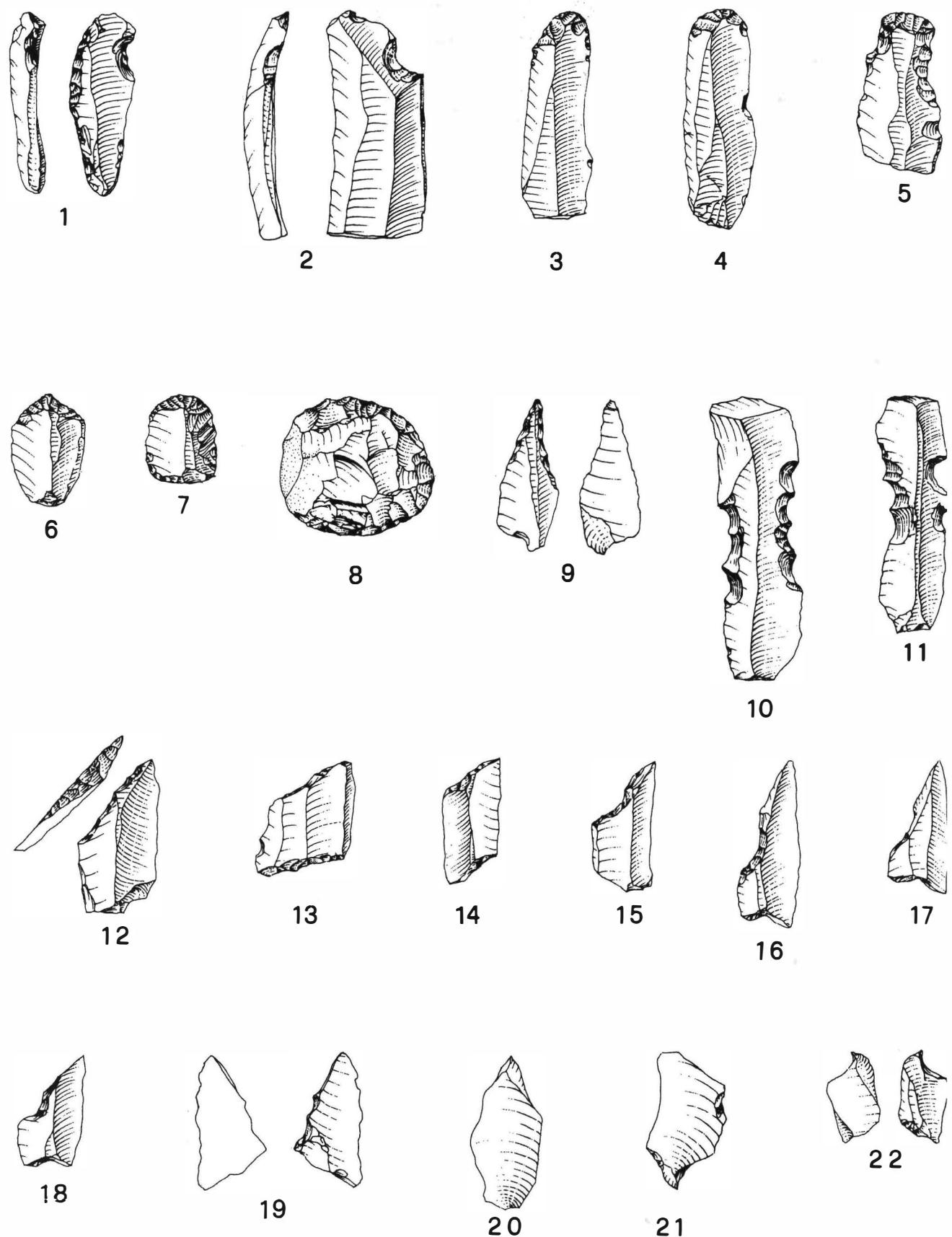


Fig. 2 - Lithic industry from Mezzocorona–Borgonuovo (Trento). Scale 1:1. Archivio Ufficio Beni Archeologici – P.A.T.; drawings by Antonio Paolillo and Jenny Schenal.

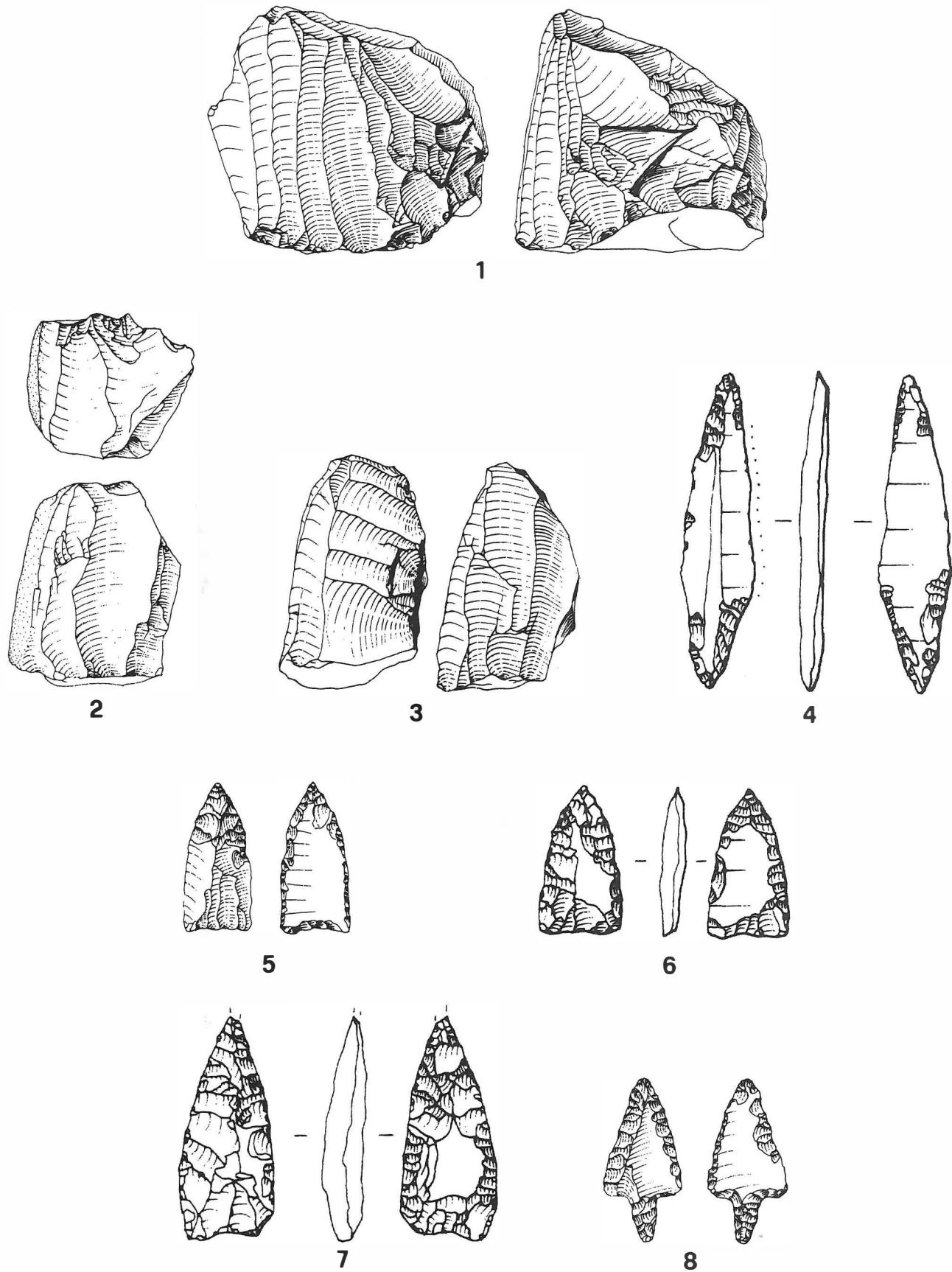


Fig. 3 - Lithic industry from Mezzocorona-Borgonuovo (Trento). Scale 1:1. Archivio Ufficio Beni Archeologici – P.A.T.; drawings by Antonio Paolillo, Jenny Schenal (1-3) and Monica Tait (4-8).

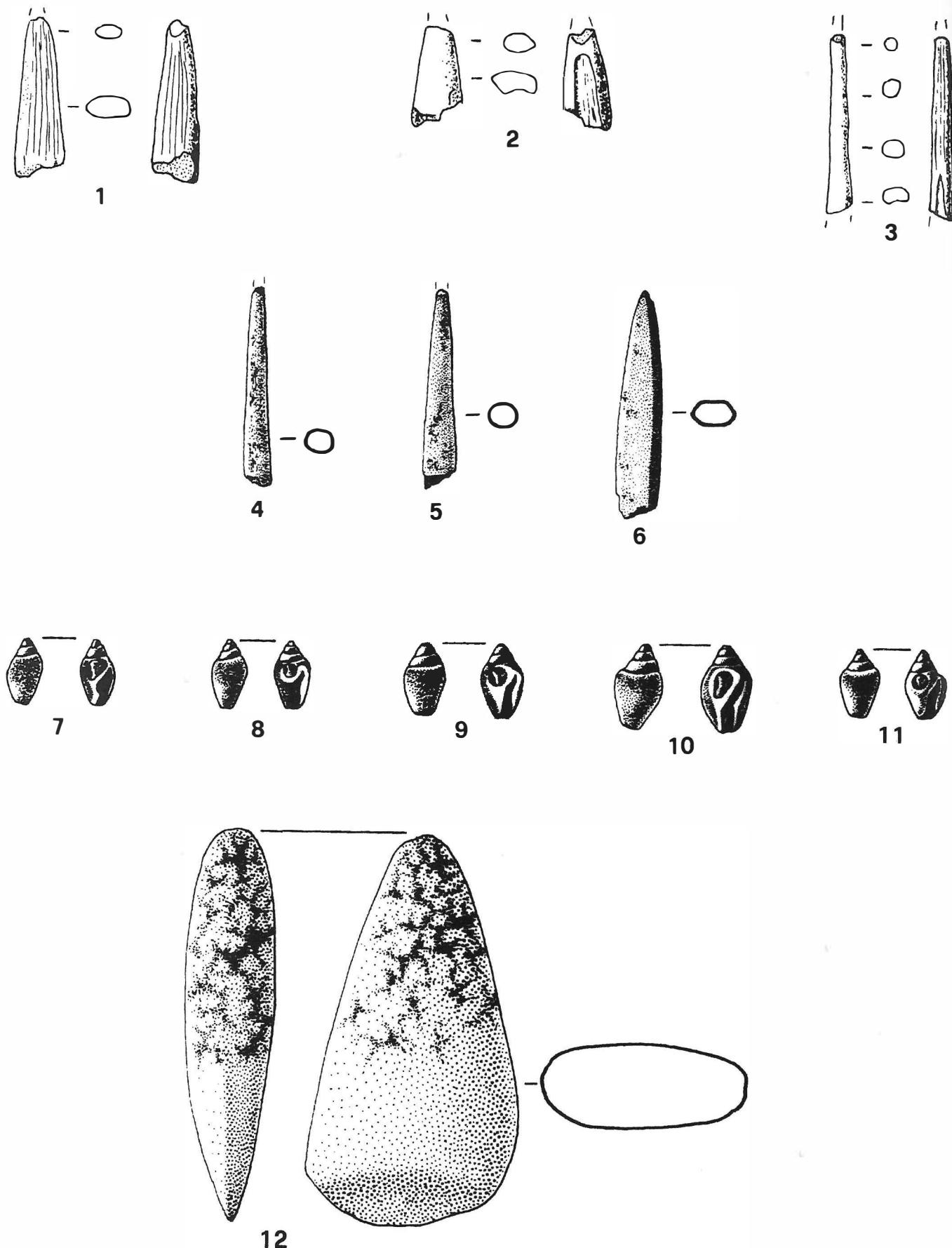


Fig. 4 - Mezzocorona-Borgonuovo (Trento). Bone tools, polished stone axe, and perforated *Columbellae*. Scale 1:1.
Archivio Ufficio Beni Archeologici - P.A.T.; drawings by Marta Bazzanella (1-3) and Monica Tait (4-12).