

The Copper Age Megalithic type funereal-cult complex of S. Daniele-Sovizzo (VI)

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ABSTRACT - A Megalithic type funereal-cult complex was brought to light at S.Daniele-Sovizzo (VI), on the highest part of an alluvial cone dated to the Late Holocene period. It is formed by a sacred corridor, three funerary tumuli of various dimensions and an ellipsoidal platform. The archaeological findings uncovered here, referable both to disordered burial goods (arrowheads), and to the occupation of the funereal area, probably for cult reasons (potsherds). The dating of both the megalithic area and the mound is suggested as the final phase of the Copper Age, in the second half of the III millennium BC.

KEY WORDS: Sovizzo-locality S. Daniele, Copper Age, Megalithism, Funereal site

PAROLE CHIAVE: Sovizzo-località S. Daniele, Età del Rame, Megalitismo, Sito funerario

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A Megalithic type funereal-cult complex was found between 1990 and 1991 at S. Daniele-Sovizzo, in the northern part of the Vicenza area (Fig. 1). More specifically, the megalithic type structures identified as a result of preliminary stratigraphic ascertainments in a building development area, South of Viale degli Alpini, are situated in the centre of a series of emerging alluvial undulations, developed in an East-Western direction, a few metres higher (49m a.s.l.) than the surrounding area (47m a.s.l.). These undulations were formed by deposits of the river Agno-Guà during the Holocene period and are characterised by alternating layers of gravel-sand and silt-sand sediments. The complex of the structures of the Copper Age prevail on the higher part of the alluvial cone and precisely on a palaeo-surface level cut into the paleosol, also of the Holocene period, presumably occupied from the Late Neolithic onwards. The complex of the Megalithic type structures develops in an East-North-East/West-South-West direction for a total of 62.80m and is formed by calcareous stones coming from nearby hills and fluvial pebbles, mainly basalt and dolomite rock, gathered on the emerged local alluvial cone of the palaeo-Agno-Guà (Fig. 2-3).

The "entrance" is on the West side and is

made up of two masses of rock and a small stele. This stele is a thick slab with accurately shaped faces and is 32cm high, 42cm wide, and 15cm thick.

The "sacred corridor" is a linear 22.50m long structure and is made up of three more or less parallel rows, forming two aisles bordered by mainly small irregular-shaped calcareous stones and by fluvial pebbles fixed into a silt-clayey palaeo-surface of a brown-reddish colour. The entrance of the sacred corridor is situated on the South-West part and made up of groups of three pebbles aligned from North to South in axis with the stele. On the opposite side, the central row comes to an end while the two external ones meet. The two aisles can be walked down in both directions and are from 60 to 75cm wide. The ritual corridor leads into the "large tumulus" in front of which there is a small vertical slab. This tumulus consists of calcareous blocks and fluvial pebbles bound by a brown compact silt-sandy sediment. It is more or less round shaped with a 6.30m diameter from East to West and 6.80m from North to South. Its maximum calculated height is a little less than one metre. Groups of stones and pebbles are arranged along the external perimeter forming a star shape. Furthermore, the central body of the tumulus, consisting of mainly medium and small lithic elements, appears to have

collapsed towards the centre where there is an almost rectangular hole. It is likely that this hole, also found in other funerary tumuli of the Megalithic complex, was originally occupied by rotted timber structures corresponding to the burial pit. The large tumulus has not yet been investigated. There are however enough elements to suppose that, similarly to the smaller ones, it was built as a covering of an inhumation tomb.

The "small tumulus" (Fig. 2-4), situated South of the large one, consists of large calcareous blocks and fluvial pebbles placed as a covering of an inhumation tomb. Before the excavation, it appeared collapsed at the centre, more or less round shaped, with a 3.40m diameter from East to West and 2.80m from North to South. Its maximum calculated height was approximately 0.55m. This tumulus was also bordered along its perimeter by groups of stones and pebbles and by two post holes, which probably referred to wooden signs. The burial pit, dug out of the gravel-limy sub-strata and surrounded by large-size calcareous stones arranged obliquely, tub-shaped with almost vertical walls and with a flat bottom. It contained considerably decayed remains of a young child placed in a foetal position (Fig. 6). In the pit soil filling, a small marble pearl which was part of the burial goods was found (Fig. 5:1).

The "medium sized tumulus" situated between the small one and the triangular platform, is also formed by calcareous blocks and fluvial pebbles and placed as a covering of an inhumation tomb. Before the archaeological surveys were started, its structure also appeared as being roundish and collapsed in the centre with a diameter of 5.80m in an East-West direction and 5.50m in a North-South direction. Its maximum calculated height was approximately 0.55m. Its perimeter is still bordered with groups of stones and pebbles. The burial pit, outlined by large size calcareous stones arranged obliquely and digging into the sub-strata, is tub-shaped with almost vertical walls and with a flat bottom (Fig. 7). It contained considerably decayed remains of the skeleton of a young child placed in a crouched or curled up position and a chip of grey flint stone (Fig. 5:1).

The "ellipsoidal platform" orientated from West to East, features a vaguely ellipsoidal shaped display of mainly small and medium sized stones and pebbles. It is 21.20m long and its maximum width is estimated as being 7m. Originally there was just one structure but now it is broken up in two sectors and the central part is irretrievably damaged. In the southern section of the platform, a few significant masses of calcareous stones and pebbles can be identified, probably the remains of tumulus coverings of other inhumation burials.

Under the remains of a slightly protruding tumulus, a tub-shaped pit was in fact identified, measuring 1.83m long, 1.10m wide and 0.44m deep. While the shape and the dimensions of the pit implies a real and proper burial, its filling of oxidised soil and charcoal could well refer to the use of the sacred fire during funereal rites. The scarce archaeological remains found on the platform such as flint weapons, potsherds, could in fact be either part of burial goods or a consequence of the use of the site for cult of funereal reasons. The grey flint arrowheads with flat, covered and bifacial retouches, (Fig. 5:3-5) are likely to belong to disordered burials pits. They are of different forms: long triangular, saw-edged, with straight and pendant shoulders with divergent sides, typical of the so-called "spires" of the Remedello Culture.

Further away from the Megalithic type sacred area and precisely in Via Alfieri and Viale degli Alpini, investigations were carried out on another tumulus that had been very damaged by some Longobard burial pits.

Its alluvial cone shape and dimensions were thus inferred on the basis of the portion of tumulus found *in situ* and were estimated as being: 4.5m in an East-West direction, 3.5m in a North-South direction, with a maximum height of 80cm. On the Eastern side of the tumulus, a considerably decayed skeleton of a young, presumably 12-13 year old individual, placed with his legs bent and in a North/South position (Fig. 8). The inhumate had been laid on the ground, presumably a pounding level of the Late Neolithic, as proved by tiny potsherds and flint working discards. The actual burial place was not in the centre of the tumulus. A pair of large long triangular flint arrowheads featuring straight shoulders and parallel margins with flat retouched coating were placed on the skull (Fig. 9:1-2). These two burial goods, which find precise similarities with the arrowheads of the megalithic area, show that the tumulus in the earth is contemporary to the megalithic period or similarly dated to a final period of the Copper Age, that is the second half of the III millennium BC.

Other flint artefacts (Fig. 9:3-6) were recovered from the excavation of the earthy layers which formed the tumulus body, a scraper, an ogive, a slightly broad triangular penduculate arrow head, a bifacial grater typical of the "Campignana" technique. These findings seem to have been casually englobed in the sediment used for the actual construction of the tumulus and together with the minute ceramic fragments and the remains of flint flakes from the paleosol - refer to a more ancient occupational level of the area probably dating to the Late Neolithic Age (end of IV millennium BC).

SUMMARY - A Megalithic type funereal-cult complex was brought to light at S. Daniele-Sovizzo (VI), on the highest part of an alluvial cone dated to the Late Holocene period, formed by the deposits of the old course of the river Agno-Guà. It spreads from North-North-East to West-South-West for 62.80m and is formed by a sacred corridor, three funerary tumuli of various dimensions and an ellipsoidal platform. The structures are made up of lithic elements such as calcareous stones and fluvial pebbles, mainly basalt and dolomite rock. The entrance is on the west side and is made up of two masses of rock and a small stele. The largest tumulus has not yet been investigated. The two smaller ones result as being built as a covering of an inhumation pit belonging to two quite young individuals. The structural remains of the tumulus coverings of other two inhumation burials can be identified on the ellipsoidal platform. The archaeological findings uncovered here, referable both to disordered burial goods (arrowheads), and to the occupation of the funereal area, probably for cult reasons (potsherds). Not far from the megalithic complex, there was a mound placed as a covering of an inhumation burial of a young individual with two arrowheads on his head. The dating of both the megalithic area and the mound is suggested as the final phase of the Copper Age, in the second half of the III millennium BC.

RIASSUNTO - Un complesso funerario-culturale di tipo megalitico è tornato alla luce in località S.Daniele di Sovizzo (VI), sulla parte più elevata di un conoide di età tardo-olocenica formata dai depositi di un antico corso del fiume Agno-Guà. Esso si sviluppa in direzione nord-nord-est/ovest-sud-ovest per 62.80m ed è costituito da un corridoio sacro, da tre tumuli funerari di diversa grandezza e da una piattaforma ellissoidale. Gli elementi litici che compongono le strutture sono pietre calcaree e ciottoli fluviali, principalmente basalto e dolomia. L'ingresso, ubicato sul lato occidentale, è costituito da due massi e da una piccola stele. Mentre il tumulo grande non è stato ancora indagato, i due tumuli di minori dimensioni sono risultati essere stati eretti a copertura di una fossa di inumazione pertinente a due individui alquanto giovani. Nella piattaforma ellissoidale si possono individuare le strutture residue di tumuli di copertura di altrettante sepolture a inumazione. I reperti archeologici qui rinvenuti sono riconducibili sia a corredi tombali sconvolti (le punte di freccia), sia alla frequentazione dell'area funeraria probabilmente a fini culturali (vasellame ceramico assai frammentato). Poco lontano dal complesso megalitico è stato individuato un tumulo in terra, eretto a copertura di una sepoltura a inumazione di un giovane individuo con due punte di freccia sul capo. Sia per l'area megalitica che per il tumulo in terra si propone una datazione ad un momento finale dell'Età del Rame, nella seconda metà del III millennio AC.

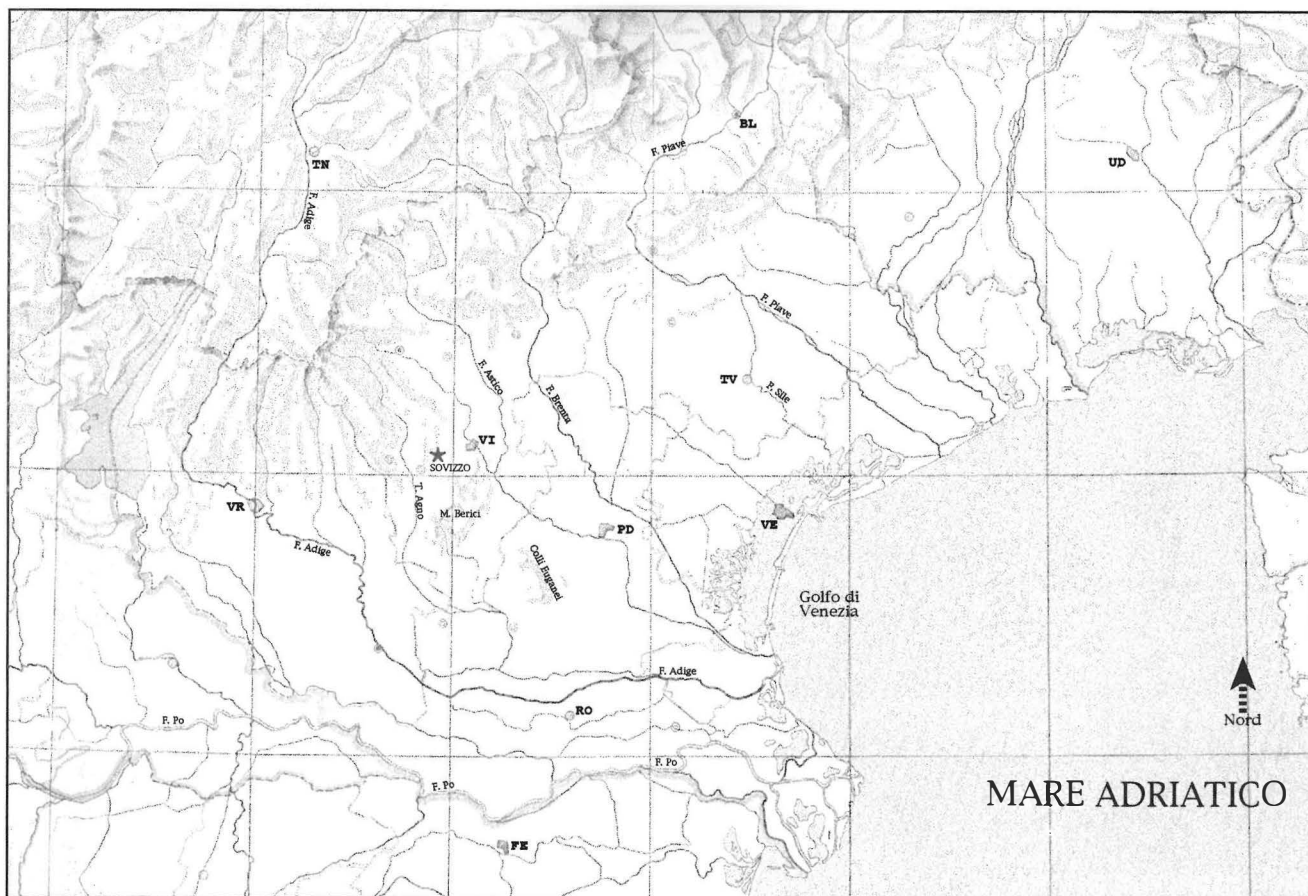


Fig. 1 - Sovizzo (VI). Locality S. Daniele: location of the megalithic type funerary complex (graphic elaboration by computer I. Bettinardi)

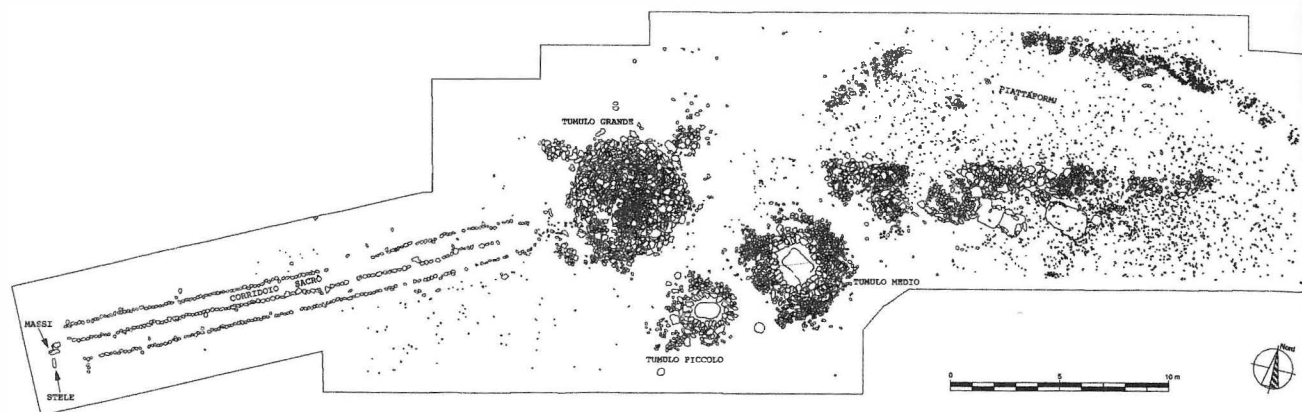


Fig. 2 - Photogram relief of the megalithic funerary complex (FO.A.R.T.-Parma)

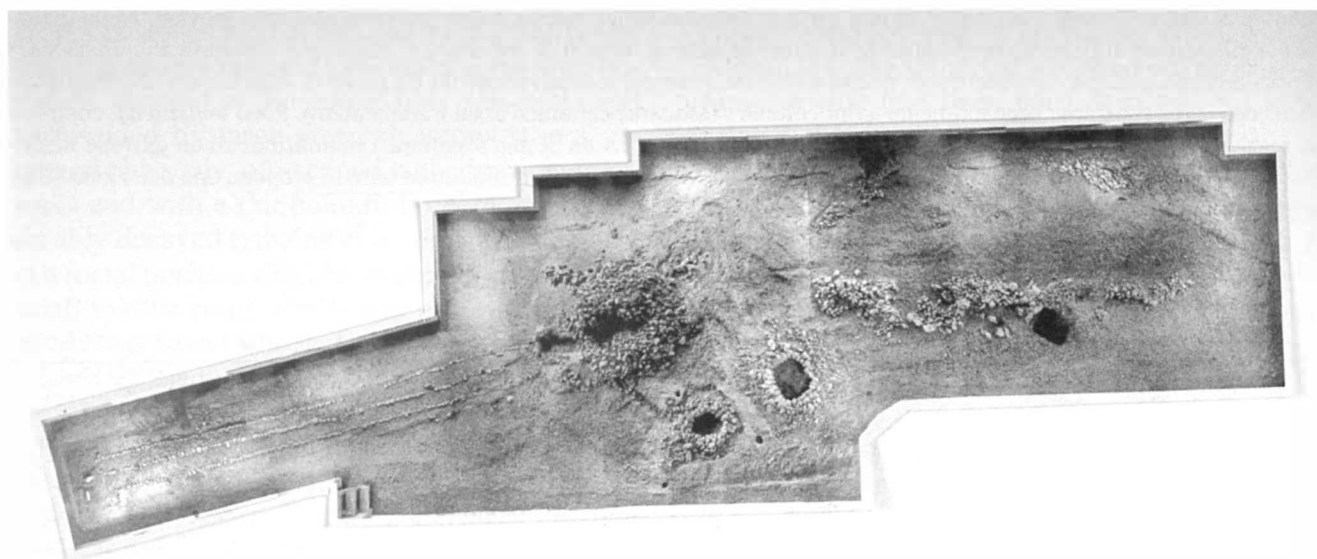


Fig. 3 - Mosaic photo of the megalithic funerary complex (FO.A.R.T.-Parma)

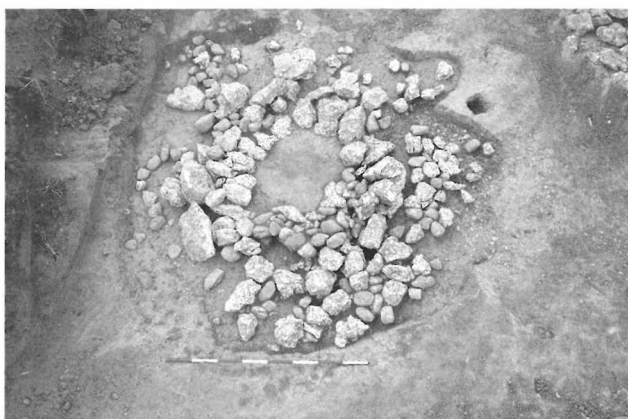


Fig. 4 - Small tumulus before the excavation (photo: Soprintendenza Archeologica del Veneto)

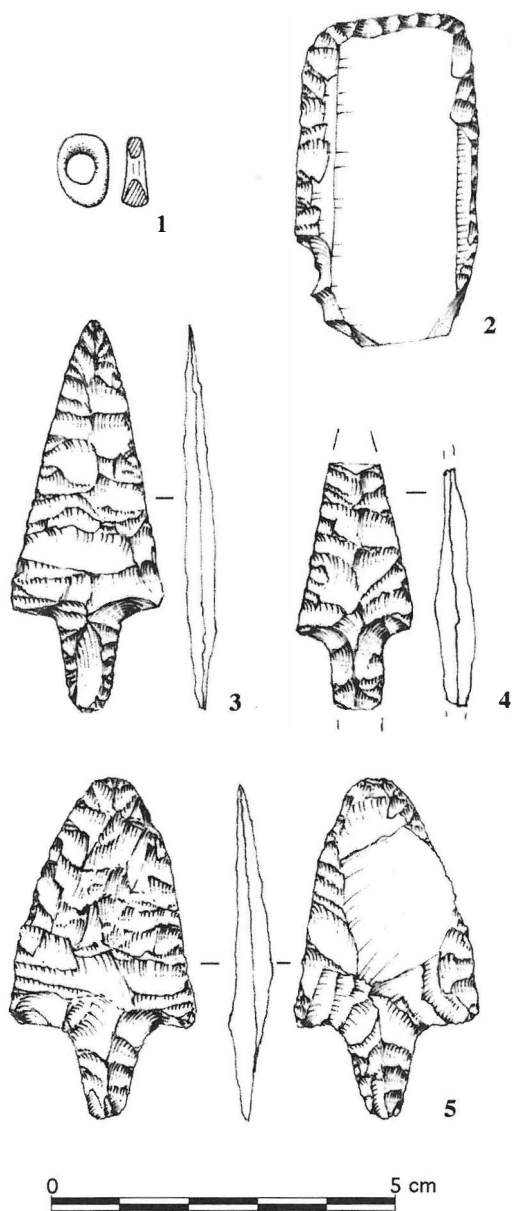


Fig. 5 - Lithic material of burial goods of the megalithic funerary complex (natural size, drawings G. Almerigogna)



Fig. 7 - Burial pit of the medium size tumulus with inhumation remains (photo: Archivio Soprintendenza Archeologica per il Veneto)



Fig. 6 - Burial pit of the small tumulus with inhumation remains (photo: Archivio Soprintendenza Archeologica per il Veneto)

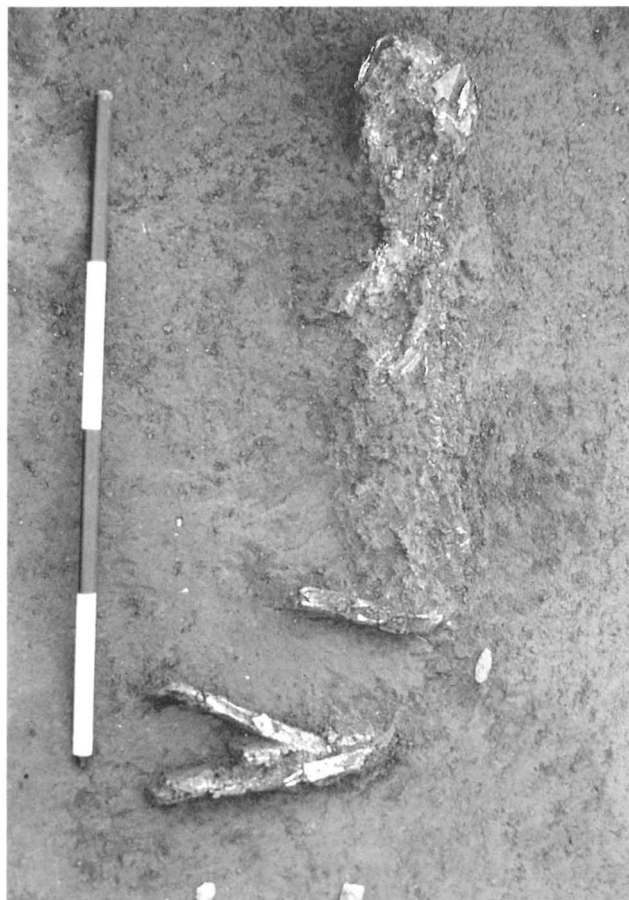


Fig. 8 - Inhumated individual of the tumulus in the soil with burial goods on his head (photo: Archivio Soprintendenza Archeologica per il Veneto)

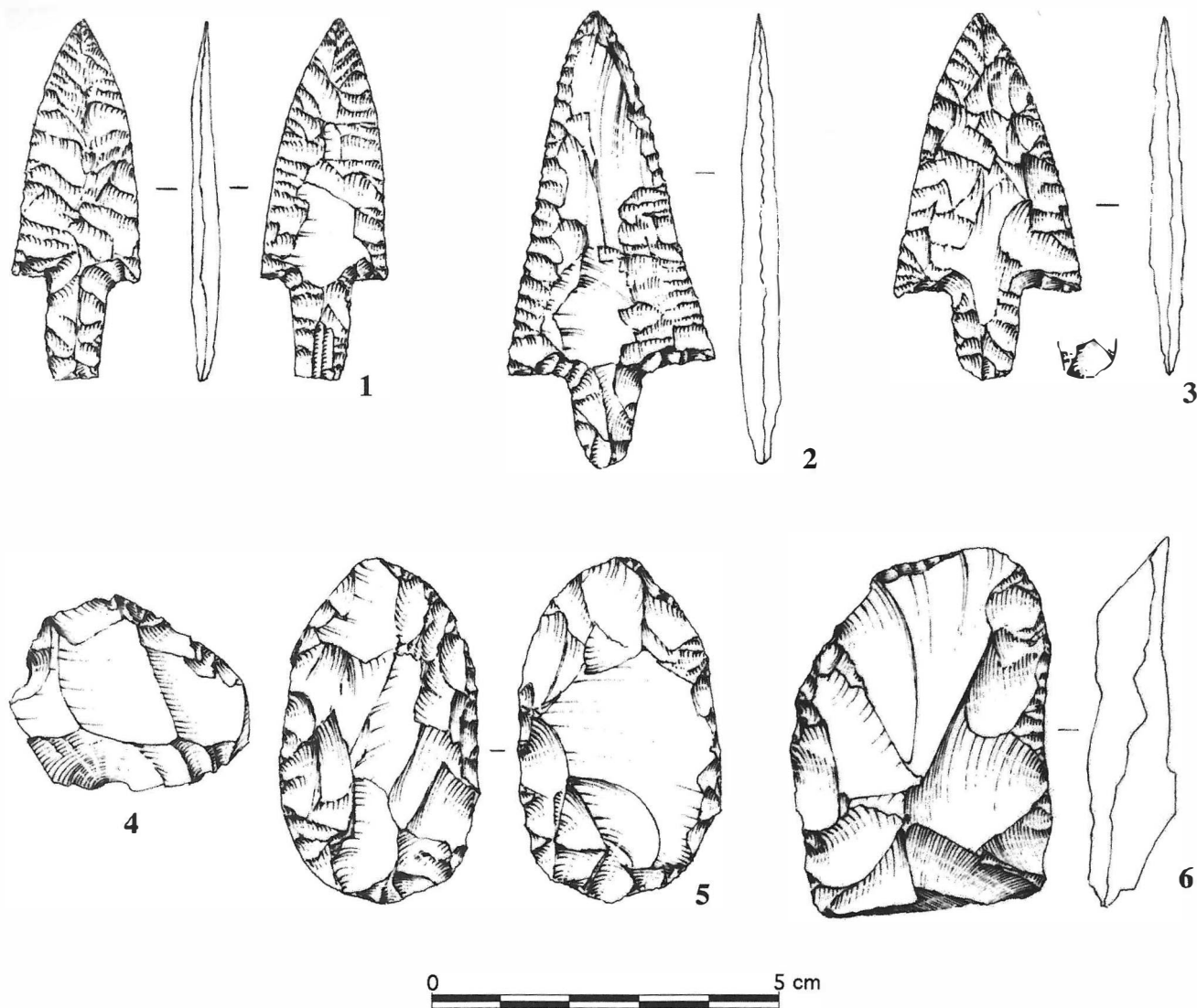


Fig. 9 - Lithic elements of the burial goods (1-2) and of the tumulus strata (3-6) (natural size; drawings by G. Almerigogna)