



Article

New data on the Mesolithic from the Alpine foreland: the Montebelluna and Montello area, North-Eastern Italy

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Key words

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Summary

Recent researches on the prehistory of Montebelluna and Montello area have provided new data on the Mesolithic population of the Venetian Plain. Lithic assemblages have been identified after review of the archaeological materials stored at the Museum of Natural History and Archaeology of Montebelluna and new findings have been made from the field surveys carried out between 2009 and 2011. The most important result was the identification for the first time of some flint cores and tools related to the ancient Mesolithic, whereas the recent Mesolithic was already known in the area. The Mesolithic findings from the territory of Montebelluna can be placed into the broader context of anthropogenic population of the Eastern Italian Alps; particularly, the significant peopling of Montello and Montebelluna Hill suggests the strategic importance of this area in postglacial times, due to geographic and economic factors such as the favorable topographic position, the proximity to the Piave river, the geographical location close to the foothills of the Alps in a point of easy access to the mountain sector and, at least, the availability of nearby sources of lithic raw material.

Riassunto

Recenti ricerche sulla preistoria del territorio di Montebelluna e del Montello hanno fornito nuovi dati sul popolamento mesolitico della Pianura veneta. A seguito della revisione dei materiali da vecchi recuperi conservati presso il Museo di Storia Naturale e Archeologia di Montebelluna sono stati individuati nuovi complessi inediti di industrie litiche provenienti dal territorio; inoltre sono state fatte nuove scoperte a seguito delle ricognizioni di superficie effettuate tra il 2009 e il 2011. Per la prima volta sono stati individuati alcuni nuclei e strumenti in selce attribuibili al Mesolitico antico, mentre il Mesolitico recente era già noto in quest'area. Le evidenze mesolitiche del territorio di Montebelluna possono essere interpretate nel più ampio contesto del popolamento delle Alpi italiane orientali; in particolare, il consistente popolamento del Montello e della Collina di Montebelluna suggerisce l'importanza strategica di questo territorio nel periodo postglaciale, dovuta a fattori sia geografici che economici, quali la favorevole posizione geografica, la prossimità al Fiume Piave, la vicinanza alla fascia collinare prealpina in un punto di facile accesso al comparto montano e, infine, la disponibilità a poca distanza di fonti di approvvigionamento della selce.

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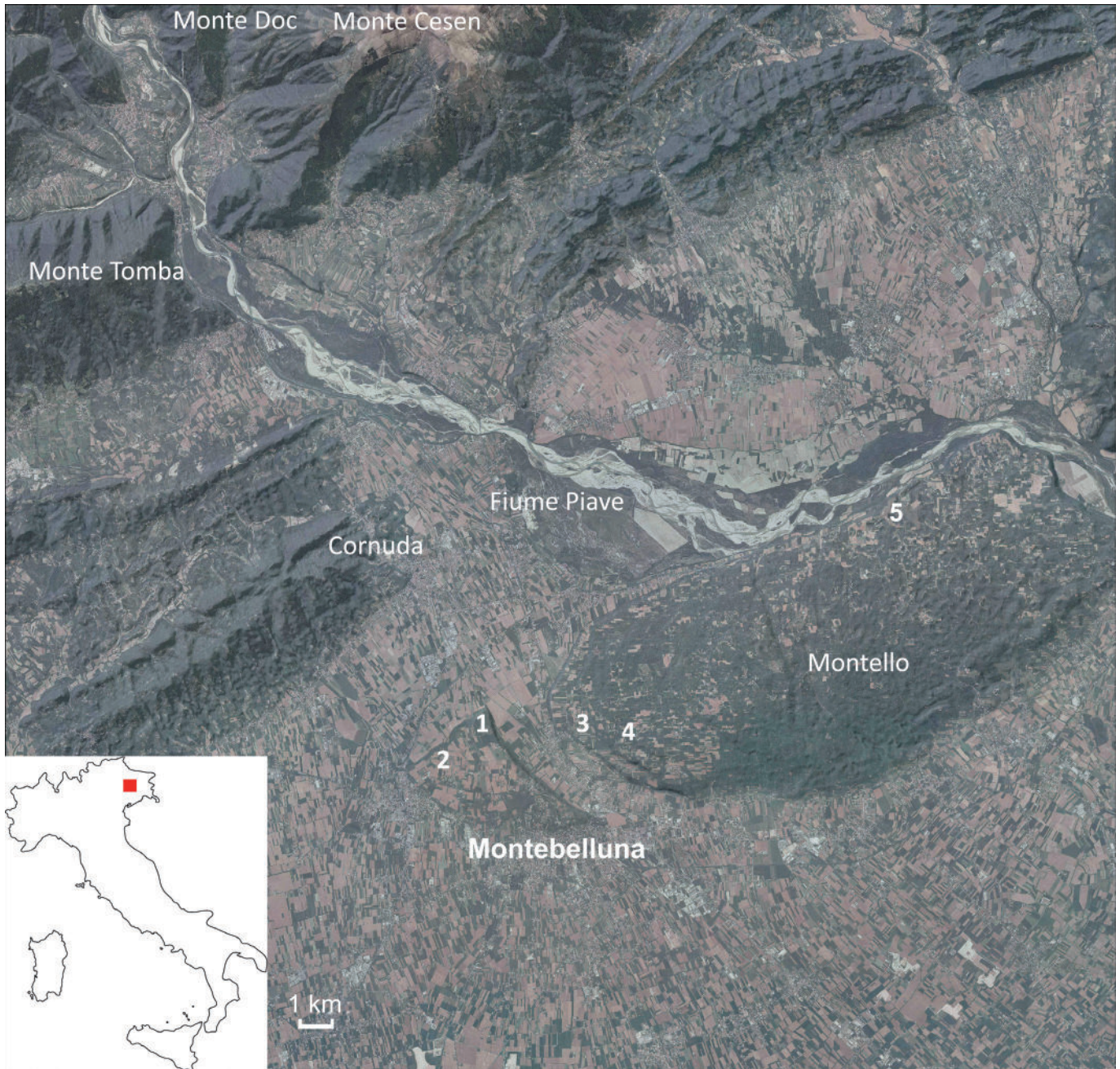


Fig. 1 - Study area with the location of Montebelluna and Montello at the beginning of the upper Piave Valley. Mesolithic sites: 1, Capo di Monte; 2, Caerano San Marco-Le Rive; 3, Le Campagnole; 4, Panerola; 5, Presa 10 surroundings. / Area di studio con il posizionamento di Montebelluna e del Montello allo sbocco della Valle del Piave. Siti mesolitici: 1, Capo di Monte; 2, Caerano San Marco-Le Rive; 3, Le Campagnole; 4, Panerola; 5, Area della Presa 10.

Introduction

Recent researches on the prehistory of Montebelluna and Montello area have provided new data on the Mesolithic population of the Venetian Plain.

The study area is located in the Treviso district, in the eastern part of Veneto region. It lies in the Venetian Plain at the outlet of the Piave River valley. Here the river borders the northern edge of the Montello which is a hill of approximately elliptical shape (370 m a.s.l.) and maximum length of about 13 km; its major axis is ENE-WSW oriented. This hill slopes gently to the south, where it connects with the plain through a smooth slope and slightly tilted, whose foot lies the town of Montebelluna. As regards the Montello area, the fol-

lowing places have been considered: Le Campagnole, Panerola, Presa 10 surroundings (Fig. 1, nn. 3-5).

The landscape of this region is also dominated by the hill of Montebelluna (also named Montelletto), a small elevation (200 m a.s.l.) roughly triangular in shape. This hill was originally connected to the western side of Montello, from which it is now separated by a narrow ancient river valley (Solco di Biadene). As regards the Montebelluna area, the following places have been considered: Capo di Monte and Caerano San Marco-Le Rive (Fig. 1, nn. 1, 2).

Thanks to the Archeogeo Project (AA.VV. 2012), lithic assemblages have been identified after the review of the archaeological materials stored at the Museum of Natural History and Archaeology of Montebelluna and new findings have been made from the field

surveys carried out between 2009 and 2011.

This study was first based on a large collection of unpublished flint artifacts from field surveys carried out during '70s and '80s. This analysis either confirmed the peopling of the area during the recent Mesolithic (Broglio & Paolillo 1989; Paolillo 2004) and provided new evidence about the ancient Mesolithic. Since the former collection suggested the presence of significant concentrations of lithic artifacts in certain areas of the Montebelluna municipality, such as the hill of Montebelluna and the western side of Montello, new field surveys have been carried out in that localities between 2007 and 2010, within the Archeogeo Project. Unfortunately, the surveys highlighted that the whole area was heavily damaged by intensive ploughing since '60s. Plough damage affected most of the prehistoric deposits, as indicated by mixed artifacts from different periods, with the consequent loss of pedological and stratigraphic data relating to the original contexts. Thanks to the new field researches, anyway, more Mesolithic flint artifacts have been collected. These materials, together with the artefacts from the old collections, allow for greater detail in defining the Mesolithic human presence in the Montebelluna area.

Findings attributed to the Sauveterrian

The review of lithic materials from old collections enabled the identification of some artifacts most probably attributed to the Sauveterrian: noteworthy is a fragment of a "Sauveterre" point (Fig. 2, 3) that finds comparisons with the lithic armatures of other sites dated or attributed to Sauveterrian, such as Romagnano III in Adige Valley (Flor *et al.* in press, Fontana *et al.* in press), Colbricon (Bagolini & Dalmeri 1987), Plan de Frea (Alessio *et al.* 1994) and Mondeval de Sora (Fontana & Vullo 2000) in the Dolomites, Cima XII on Sette Comuni Plateau (Broglio *et al.* 2006) and Casera Davià (Peresani & Angelini 2002) on Cansiglio Plateau. Besides, two truncated points and numerous microburins, indicators of microliths production, have been identified. Unfortunately, the lack of triangles, segments, and backed and truncated bladelets does not allow to specify the chronological phase of this frequentation. With regard to cores, some small prismatic (Fig. 2, 2) and carenoid (Fig. 2, 1) specimens intensely exploited through the alternation of several knapping surfaces have been attributed to the Sauveterrian. Moreover, few cores with an oval shape (Fig. 2, 4; 2, 11) were characterized by the exploitation of both opposite surfaces through unipolar production sequences. This latter morphology, aimed at obtaining bladelets and laminar flakes, finds accurate comparisons with some specimens from Cima XII on the Sette Comuni Plateau (Broglio *et al.* 2006).

Findings attributed to the Castelnovian

Certainly attributable to the Castelnovian are many trapezes characterized by short forms, scalene, with a concave base (Fig. 2, 7-10; 3, 3; 3, 5-8; 3, 12-15) or less frequently with a rectilinear one (Fig. 2, 12), and a residual piquant-trihedral edge on the opposite extremity. These types are well documented in the Mesolithic sequences of the Adige Valley (Broglio 1992) and in many other sites in north-eastern Italy dated to the Castelnovian. Challenging is the ascription to this cultural complex of several cores with a subconical or pyramidal shape (Fig. 3, 4), characterized by regular ridges and emphasized counter-bulbs, related to the use of pressure as knapping technique. This technique, indeed, is employed in Northern Italy both during the Castelnovian and the Early Neolithic. Strict comparisons, anyway, come from the Castelnovian industries of Trentino (Dalmeri *et al.* 2008; Flor *et al.* in press) and Emilia (Ferrari 2011).

Raw material provisioning

The flints knapped in the Montebelluna area belong to several varieties mostly related to the Cretaceous sequence of the Venetian and Trentino platform. The primary sources closer to the site are the Maiolica and Scaglia Rossa limestones on the Tomba, Monfenera and Cesen mountains and those of the Scaglia Variegata Alpina on Doc mount (about 15-20 km from the Montebelluna area) (Fig. 1). The analysis, carried out only macroscopically, took into account different features like the color, texture and consistence of the flint. The study of the cortical elements has shown as the main provisioning area does not correspond to primary sources but rather to Montello conglomerate.

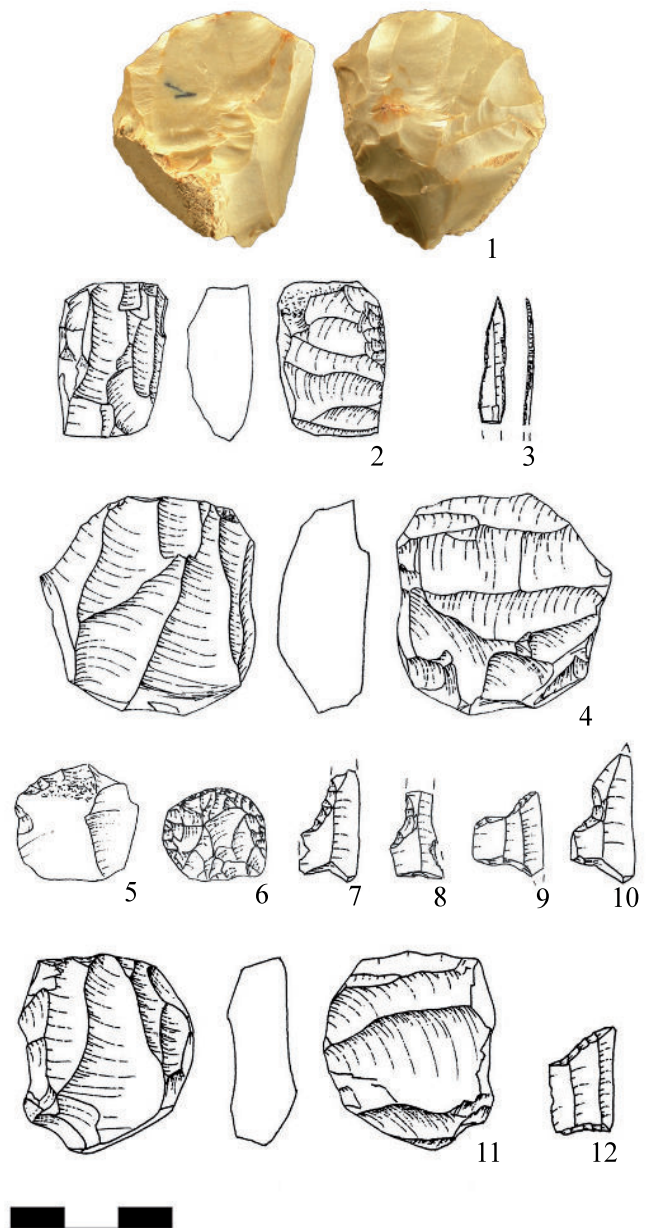


Fig. 2 - Sauveterrian (1-4, 11) and Castelnovian (5-10, 12) findings from Capo di Monte and Caerano San Marco-Le Rive: 1,2,4,11 cores, 3 "Sauveterre" point, 5,6 end-scrapers, 7,8,9,10,12 trapezes (drawn by E. Gilli, photo R. Duches; scale 2:3). / Reperti sauveterriani e castelnoviani da Capo di Monte e Caerano San Marco-Le Rive: 1,2,4,11 nuclei, 3 punta di "Sauveterre", 5,6 grattatoi, 7,8,9,10,12 trapezi (disegni E. Gilli, foto R. Duches; scala 2:3).

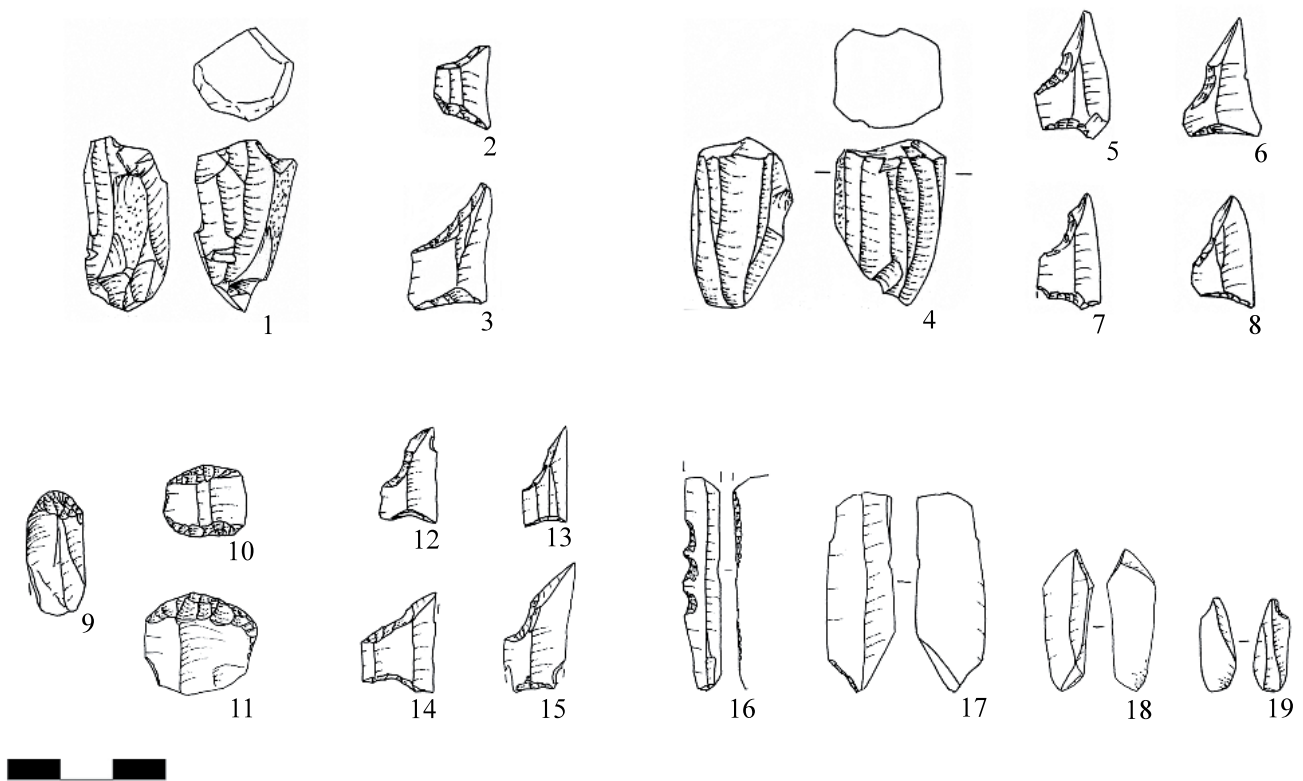


Fig. 3 - Sauveterrian (1) and Castelnovian (2-19) findings from Le Campagnole (1-3), Panerola (4-8) and Montello - Presa 10 surroundings (9-19): 1,4 cores, 2-3 5-8 12-15 trapezes, 9-11 end-scrapers, 16 notched blade, 17-19 microburins (drawn by E. Gilli, photo R. Duches; scale 2:3). / Reperti sauveterriani (1) e castelnoviani (2-19) da Le Campagnole (1-3), Panerola (4-8) e Montello Presa 10 (9-19): 1,4 nuclei, 2-3 5-8 12-15 trapezi, 9-11 grattatoi, 16 lama denticolata, 17-19 microbulini (disegni di E. Gilli, scala 2:3)



Fig. 4 - Panerola. View of the site (photo P. Beltrame 2012). / Panerola. Panoramica del sito (foto di P. Beltrame 2012)

Discussion

The findings from the territory of Montebelluna can be placed into the broader context of the Mesolithic population of the Eastern Italian Alps; particularly, the significant peopling of Montello and Montebelluna Hill suggests the strategic importance of this area in postglacial times, due to geographic and economic factors such as the favorable topographic position, the proximity to the Piave river, the geographical location close to the foothills of the Alps (Fig. 1) in

a point of easy access to the mountain sector and, the availability of nearby sources of raw material. The scarcity of Sauveterrian artifacts support the hypothesis of an occasional human presence in this area during the early Mesolithic. The abundance of Castelnovian finds in almost all the territory of Montebelluna, instead, suggests a strong frequentation of this area in the second part of the Mesolithic.

The topographic position related to the presence of several trapezes and exhausted bladelets cores, advocates an interpretation of these sites such as seasonal residential camps, comparable to those of Romagnano Loc III and Pradestel (Flor *et al.* in press; Fontana *et al.* in press, Dalmeri *et al.* 2008). The information on the Mesolithic peopling of the Treviso area derived from other significant findings in the hills (Broglia & Paolillo 1989; Paolillo 2004), along the Venetian karst springs and around the lagoon. These sites are probably part of a wide settlement pattern characterized by a well attested human presence in the Venetian Plain, strictly related to wetlands, waterways and karst springs. An economy based on hunting, fishing and gathering shellfish, can be assumed according to the zooarchaeological data from the Adige valley sites (Boscato & Sala 1980; Crezzini *et al.* 2014; Wierer & Boscato 2006). The availability of nearby sources of lithic raw material and the variety of ecosystems defined by the Piave river and the Treviso Prealps, must have affected significantly the prolonged stay of the Castelnovian hunter-gatherers in these territories.

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