

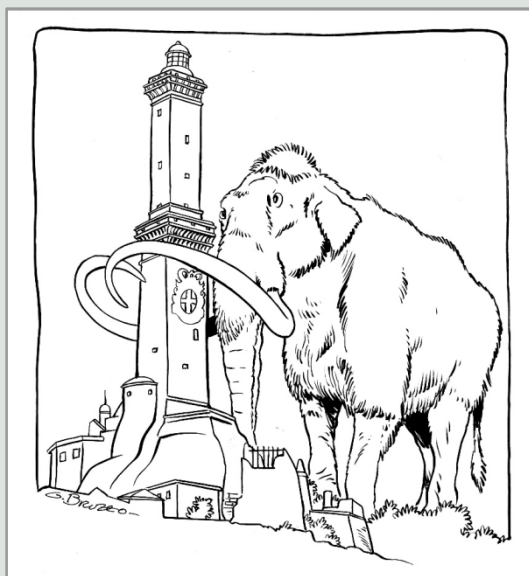
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DI PREISTORIA
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1 ANNUAL MEETINGS
OF PREHISTORY
AND PROTOHISTORY

Il Paleolitico e il Mesolitico in Italia: nuove ricerche e prospettive di studio

*The Palaeolithic and Mesolithic in Italy: new
research and perspectives*



ABSTRACT BOOK



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a cura di / eds.: Fabio Negrino, Federica Fontana, Adriana Moroni, Julien Riel Salvatore

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Sede Operativa Via della Pergola, 65 – 50122 Firenze
www.iipp.it – e-mail: iipp@iipp.it

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FELICE LARocca, FABIOLA ARENA

A piece for the whole. A case of isolated bone deposition dated to the Palaeolithic at Grotta della Monaca (Cosenza)

Grotta della Monaca is a karstic cave set in the North of Calabria region, close to the coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea (Larocca 2005). The University of Bari carried out research and archaeological excavations in the site from 2000 to 2012, that recognised a main human frequentation of the cave dated, with some gaps, from the Neolithic to post-medieval time.

The cave entrance is located on the cliff of a rugged mountain overlooking the Upper Esaro Valley. Grotta della Monaca played two functions: mining – because of the abundant iron hydroxides and copper carbonates within it, intensively mined during the late Neolithic (Larocca 2010) – and funerary. In effect, the cave became a large burial ground during the Middle Bronze Age (Arena *et alii* 2014).

In 2005, a human ulna was found in the archaeological deposit at the entrance of the cave, inside fractures of the rock emerging from the ground. This human skeletal remain was placed into a dimple within a natural layer of goethite (an iron hydroxide very abundant in the cave). A large boulder was intentionally deposited above the dimple, as a funerary slab. Radiocarbon analysis dated the ulna to 18250-17800 BC cal 2σ (84.6%) / 17750-17600 cal BC 2σ (10.8%) (LTL3580A - 16761 \pm 100 BP) and placed it in the Upper Palaeolithic.

The anthropological exam allowed us to define the biological profile of the individual that the ulna belonged: an adult male, slightly taller than the average of the time. The autopsy examination of bone alterations on the proximal epiphysis and interosseous crest indicates vigorous movements of pronation and supination and mechanical strain of the joints or load stress (Arena *et alii* in press).

The meaning of this deposition is unknown. However, the specific place where the human ulna was found (an orange goethite vein that characterizes the entire surrounding area) allows to suppose that it could be a kind of "control" signal of this resource. Certainly, it was not rare, but it was such abundant in Grotta della Monaca as to make the site a preferred source for its exploitation. However, we do not exclude that the deposition could have a ritual significance. These hypotheses should be clarified, as far as possible, with future investigations.

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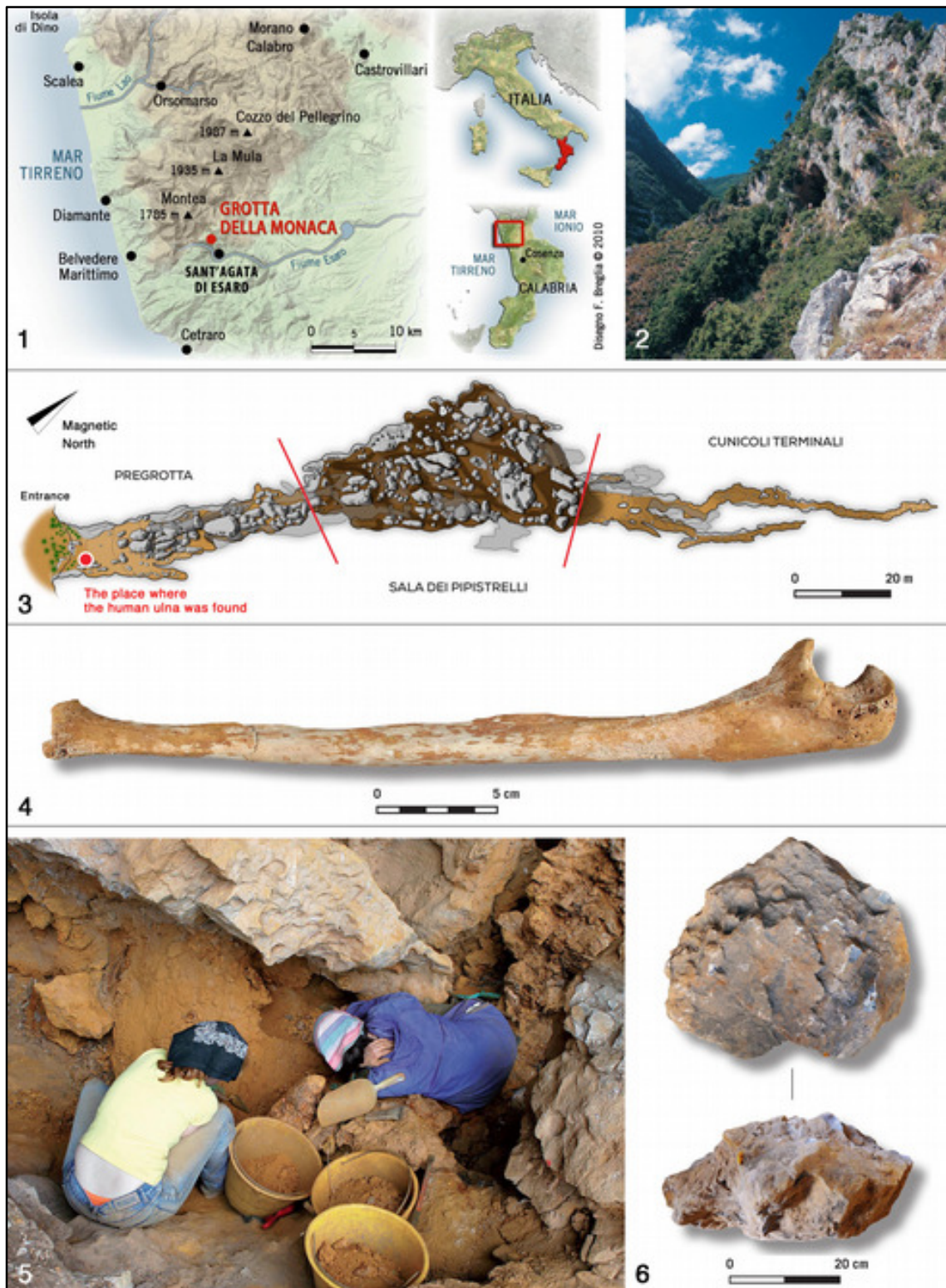


Fig 1 - Geographical map of Grotta della Monaca site placed in Sant'Agata di Esaro (*drawing by F. Breglia*). 2) The cave's entrance locates on the top of a rocky peak in the Esaro River Valley (*photo by F. Larocca*). 3) Plan of the underground system showing the place where Palaeolithic human ulna was found (*topography by the CRS "Enzo dei Medici"*). 4) Right ulna belonged to an adult male dated to the Palaeolithic. 5) Archaeological excavations in the place where the human ulna was discovered. The ulna was intentionally located in a little dimple within a goethite vein, blocked with a calcareous boulder (*photo by F. Larocca*). 6) The large boulder that blocked the dimple where the human ulna was placed, showed in two views (*photo by F. Larocca*).