

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON 1979 EXCAVATIONS AT SCALORIA CAVE NEAR
MANFREDONIA, ITALY

The exploration of Grotta Scaloria was a joint Italian-American research project. The principal investigators were Prof. Santo Tinè of University of Genoa, and Prof. Marija Gimbutas of University of California, Los Angeles.

The excavation at Scaloria Cave was one part of the project, entitled "The Neolithic of Southeast Italy", coordinated by Dr. Gimbutas. Excavations of habitation sites at Passo di Corvo and Lagano were under the supervision of Dr. Tinè and Dr. James Mallory.

In addition, the project included scholars with individual areas of research: Dr. Katherine Delano-Smith, paleo-geographer from Nottingham, England and Dr. János Nemeskéri, anthropologist, Office for Population Studies, School of Biodemography at Budapest, who studied human bones found at Scaloria and Passo di Corvo; Dr. Sandor Bökönyi, the Institute of Archaeology, Budapest, who analyzed the animal bones; Dr. L. Castelletti of University of Milano, who identified the tree species from carbonized pieces of wood found in the cave; Dr. Mannoni, who helped to identify clay and rock samples; and Dr. M. Follieri, who identified grain samples.

It is expected that three or more radiocarbon laboratories in California, Italy, and France will do the analysis of charcoal samples in order to establish the chronology of our findings.

The archaeological season at Scaloria Cave lasted 6 weeks, from July 27 to September 6, 1979, and was supported by labor and donations of money by 17 volunteers, most of whom came from California and New York. They arrived in two shifts, each group spending 3 weeks at Scaloria. Additional support came from the Ahmanson Foundation at Los Angeles. The Field Director at the Cave was Dr. Milton M. Winn, of the University of Southern Mississippi, U. S. A. The Italian representatives included

Eugenia Isetti, Naida Franchisetti, Paola Ribbola and Nicola Leone – ^athe well-known speleologist of Manfredonia.

During the first week of the excavation, the entrance to the cave was located and opened. This was accomplished with the help of the magnetometer study done by Lerici Foundation staff, pneumatic jackhammer, excavator, workmen, and our staff members. Originally, there was only a small hole at the aqueduct. The magnetometer readings have shown anomalies in another area near the cave entrance. It was necessary to leave explanation of the anomaly for study in 1980, as the area belongs to another proprietor, and a new permit is required. The Entrance fill from the outside and interior of the cave was removed and sieved, as were the crevices on top of the entrance.

Large boulders and stones outside and inside of the entrance were not cleared due to lack of funds for manpower and machinery. This major task has to be postponed until 1980. It is hoped that clearance of an area near the entrance will make it possible to open a long trench along the entrance, an area which must include traces of the habitation of the earliest neolithic phases.

Seven test trenches c. 2 by 3 meters were opened in the various areas of the upper cave after the removal of mounds of earth resulting from clandestine digging and other surface rock debris (Fig. 1).

The summary of the results is as follows:

First, we have discovered not only neolithic deposits and graves (about which we knew from the test excavation in 1973 by Dr. Winn), but also an upper paleolithic or mesolithic settlement (trench 8, western side of the cave). We hypothesize that it may date from between 10,000 to 20,000 years before the present. The age of this pre-agricultural habitation will be determined by radiocarbon analysis from the five charcoal samples we have collected. The settlement yielded remains of hearths and bones of animals hunted in this area, such as aurochs, deer, wild horse

(not yet analyzed), as well as flint tools, flint refuse, and local shells. Animal bones were deposited in four groups.

Secondly, traces of both habitation and graves of three or more phases of the neolithic Scaloria culture have been discovered. The chronology of all these phases will be determined by the radiocarbon method. At the present, the phases can be discerned by stylistic changes of pottery and the statistical analysis of ceramics (done by Dr. Winn). 120 charcoal samples have been collected, of which about 50 hopefully will be analyzed in the geophysics laboratories at the University of California, University of Rome and perhaps in Monaco. If this is accomplished, the Scaloria culture will become one of the best-dated neolithic cultures of southern Europe. The charcoal will also serve for identification of plant species. It can already be seen that forests of deciduous trees were growing near the cave and the climate was more humid and colder than today.

Our present estimation of the chronology of the neolithic Scaloria culture is from c. 6,000 to c. 5,000 B.C. After 5,000 B.C., the cave was abandoned, perhaps due to its collapse or ecological factors. A few sherds of late neolithic Diana culture (sherds with typical tubular handles) found at the entrance indicate that the cave was frequented by the people of the fourth millennium B.C., but not inhabited or used for ritual purposes. No bronze or iron age deposits have ever been found in the cave.

Thirdly, we were extremely fortunate to find a large number of human skeletons, or parts of them. Prof. Nemeskéri, leading specialist of paleoanthropology in Europe, arrived from Budapest, to examine the human bones and has informed us that he has identified bones of at least 120 individuals.

The analysis of this material will allow us to talk for the first time about the physical appearance, diseases, and diet of the people during the period of some 8,000 years ago. The preliminary examination shows that the people were long-headed, and 164-166 cm

tall. Their life expectancy was only c. 23-26 years. Women died between 20-22 years. The child mortality rate was 5 times as great as today.

The study of human bones will shed new light on the problem of various rituals and customs. Many of the dead must have been killed for ritualistic purposes as skulls have cuts through the forehead or at the back, indicating that human brains may have been ritualistically extracted and eaten. Trephined skulls (with artificially cut out holes) were also found.

We have only just begun to amass the information. Only the cumulative results from research of archaeologists, geologists, anthropologists, palaeozoologists, palaeobotanists, mineralogists, and shell specialists can provide this important information. Before that can be achieved, an additional season with a large-scale operation is necessary.

The 1979 excavation yielded 1,319 bags of bones, pottery, body sherds, decorated ceramics, flint, chert, quartz, ochre, clay daub, shell and bone ornaments, flint, obsidian and other stone tools, bone awls and polishers.

Appendix I: list of catalog and inventory with individual boxes with bags therein of the above mentioned materials, except special finds.

Appendix II: list of special finds (tools, ornaments and other unusual finds).

Appendix III: list of charcoal samples for radiocarbon and botanical analysis.

Appendix IV: list of bags containing human bones.

Appendix V: copy of the Excavation Diary.