

Report on 1980 Research of 1979 Excavation of Grotta Scaoria at Manfredonia, Southeast Italy

By Marija Gimbutas, 1980

Materials excavated at Grotta Scaloria in 1979 indicated habitation during both the Upper Paleolithic and Neolithic. The finds were thoroughly scrutinized for a period of three weeks by a group of twelve persons consisting of archaeologists, specialists of several other disciplines, and volunteers, the research supported by the University Research Expeditions Program. The purpose of the return to Manfredonia was the completion of research left unfinished after the intensive excavation season of 1979. The finds from the Grotta Scaloria are at present in the museum at the Manfredonia Castle, and representative pieces are on exhibit at the Manfredonia Office of Tourism.

Among the specialists present at this season were Dr. Sándor Bökönyi of the Institute of Archaeology of Budapest, for the study of animal bones; Dr. Wolfgang Götte of Hanover, for the study of human teeth; and Dr. Ernestine Elster of the Archaeological Institute of the University of California at Los Angeles, for the study of lithic material. Special attention was directed to the pottery (by Principal Investigator, Marija Gimbutas), including the study of signs and symbolic motifs in order to obtain information on the ritual meaning of the cave. The UREP volunteers assisted all research categories.

I. The Upper Palaeolithic Campsite

The three dates obtained from the Mt. Soledad Radiocarbon Laboratory, University of California, San Diego, suggest that the Upper Palaeolithic occupation of the site dates from the eleventh millennium before present: 1) 10,840±230 (LJ-4978); 2) 10,960±210 (LJ-4979); and 3) 10,100±300 (LJ-4982).

The analysis of the animal bones by Dr. Bökönyi shows that fauna in the area was abundant. The 648 identified bones belong to seventeen species: aurochs, ibex, chamoix, red deer, fallow deer, roe deer, wild swine, wild ass, lynx, wild cat, fox, small carnivore, small rodent, hare, tortoise, wild fowl, and fish. The interesting feature of the fauna is the high ratio of wild ass, asinus hydruntinus, and of fallow deer. With the exception of lynx and wildcat, animals of the dense mountain forest, the above

mentioned species are typical of forest steppes. The foothills of the nearby Gargano Mountains some 11,000 years ago evidently produced vegetation cover abundant enough even for such large animals as the aurchs.

Upper Palaeolithic tools were crafted of local brownish and gray Gargano flint. 717 used flints were identified, among them scrapers, burins, points, arrowheads.

II. Neolithic Settlement and Sanctuary

The importance of Neolithic Scaloria lies especially in the areas of chronology, environmental study, population study, ceramics, and religion.

Chronology

Six radiocarbon dates for Neolithic Scaloria have been obtained from the charcoal samples collected in various trenches of the upper cave including the mass burial (with skeletons of some 130 individuals). The dates are: 1) 6800±160 B.P. (LJ-4980), Trench 10, mass burial; 2) 6620±280 (LJ-4981) B.P., Trench 10, mass burial; 3) 6720±100 B.P. (LJ-4649), Trench 3, Level 3; 4) 6490±140 B.P. (LJ-4650), Trench 1, Level 8; 5) 6330±90 B.P. (LJ-4651), Trench 1, Level 8; 6) 6050±130 (LJ-4983), Trench 5, Level 3. Calibrated by dendrochronology, the dates should fall between 5,600 to 5,300 B.C. The true age, therefore, of the major cultural phase at Grotta Scaloria is the middle of the sixth millennium B.C. Both the technology and the typology of the pottery of that period, typified by red band decoration, indicate that the upper cave and the lower cave (sanctuary) were simultaneously occupied. The upper cave, however, was inhabited also during an earlier period, commonly known as "Guadone," typified by impressed and brown burnished pottery. This earlier period was stratigraphically present in Trench 9 and Trench 5, Levels 8 and 9. The cave was also frequented later, during the fifth millennium B.C., as indicated by several fragments of "Serra d'Alto" and "Diana" types of pottery found at the cave entrance. The sanctuary (lower Scaloria), where neither earlier nor later

finds have been recovered, belongs exclusively to the period of Scaloria proper. All the graves and the upper cave mass burial (total 137 individuals) are also of this period.

Faunal Analysis

More than two thousands (2,264) animal bones from the Neolithic layers were identified, representing in all twenty species. The domesticated animals were: cattle, sheep, goat, pig, dog. The wild animals were: aurochs, ibex, red deer, fallow, roe deer, wild swine, wild ass, lynx, wild cat, fox, small carnivore, small rodent, hare, tortoise, wild fowl, and fish. Domesticated animals were of primary importance; their bones represent 70% of the sample, demonstrating the decisive place in the economy of animal husbandry, although hunting was still an important additional source of food and raw materials. The domestic fauna, in which caprovines predominate (90%), is very similar to that of Neolithic sites on the Balkan peninsula. Most of the wild fauna, among whom the survival of the wild ass is noteworthy, were species whose habitat was the forest or open forest. That area was then more forested than at present is clear from the presence of these animals. Charcoal of deciduous trees found in excavated hearths (now being analyzed by Dr. L. Castelletti, University of Milan) will hopefully furnish more information on vegetation of the area.

Analysis of Human Teeth and Jaws

Dr. Götte has examined the teeth and jaws of some 50 individuals from the Scaloria Cave and of two individuals found at Paso di Corvo settlement near Foggia, contemporary to Scaloria. The teeth and jaws belong to 35 adults and 15 children. The preliminary report is as follows: 1) Carious decay could only be detected on a total of three teeth; 2) periodontopathics were a common disease: approximately 50%; 3) supraingival and infragingival concretions in various degrees were stated; 4) some of the adults at the age ca. 35 years show a degree of decay of the periodontium, which nowadays occurs only at an age of 60-70 years; 5) demastication of teeth was general. The first molars often show a complete loss of the substantia adamantina on the surface and as a consequence transparent substantia eburnea; 6) the abrasion on the front teeth is remarkable as a result of the loss of the cuspides

and leading to a kind of "sledge articulation"; 7) most of the adults had wisdom teeth with enough space in the jaw, and clearly molarized crown; one individual had a fourth molar in the upper jaw and one individual lacked molars in the lower jaw; 8) one lower jaw showed a double number of incisors with not enough space in the bone; 9) the teeth show no firmness either in the front nor at the molars. In addition, tuberculum Carabilli could not be found; 10) some individuals had distortions of the premolars without detectable reasons; 11) no influence of violence could be observed on the teeth. A survey on various diseases detectable by the teeth will follow at a later date. Dr. Nemeskéri's report on diseases will also follow at a later date.

Lithics

Nearly 1000 Neolithic blade tools have been detailed for computer analysis to facilitate the precise description of the lithic industry, which utilized flakes of all shapes and sizes. The majority of the recovered blades were cutting tools. Some pieces have silica sheen, suggesting their use as sickle blades set in wood handles. The mastery of pressure flaking by this Neolithic people is evidenced by tiny bladelets beautifully retouched along the margins. Obsidian, highly valued for the production of fine cutting instruments, was also used. It was imported either from the Lipari Islands or from Sardinia, the source to be determined by subsequent spectroscopic analysis. The obsidian blade tools found in Scaloria were knapped with exceptional skill.

Typical of Scaloria are the so-called "Campigny" type tools, used mostly for wood working: large bifacially flaked artifacts of several shapes, axe, pick and round scraper.

Symbolic Motifs on Pottery as a Key to the Detection of Cult Practices

The Cave of Scaloria is unique because of its sanctuary and mass burials. The Cave poses questions related to cult and deity worship as yet unanswered.

Over a thousand fragments of painted pottery which preserve recognizable motifs or were diagnostic of vessel shape were critically examined and computerized. The dominating motif on a variety of forms, a V or triangle, or beak, appears in a multitude of combinations of the more than five

hundred vases represented by the fragments. The V as the symbol of the Bird Goddess, became current in the Upper Palaeolithic and persisted throughout the Neolithic and Copper Age of Old Europe. At Scaloria the V motif appears mostly on the exterior of bowls painted in red band. Often it is combined with other discrete motifs--parallel lines, discontinuous lines, net pattern, checkerboard, concentric semi-circles--motifs probably symbolic of water or "life element" conceived as a source of water. The parallel line motif is frequently combined with the breast motif and with that of the snake which characteristically adorns the interior of bowls. Pithoi and jugs also bear the V or chevron sign. Often the perforated lugs of a jug are framed by a V; they possibly represent the schematic head of the Goddess, attributing function or dedication of the vessel. A double triangle, vertically stacked, which appears on the interior of bowls may also be a schematic representation of the Goddess. The double triangle is usually combined with a meander motif and the snake skin design. In addition, the large meander ending in a sharp point resembling a bird beak or snake head is peculiar to the Scaloria motif repertory,

The V or chevron motif in association with the snake, snake meander, or snake skin design is frequent in the symbolism of Scaloria. This corresponds in general to the findings in other areas of Old Europe (pre-Indo-European Europe) where the Bird and Snake Goddesses are well represented and were worshiped either as single or dual Goddess. We can hypothesize that the Scaloria people worshipped the deity in the epiphany of a water bird or snake.

This combination and association of motifs is crucial to the understanding of the symbolic message. The motifs on the Scaloria vases are clearly connected with the Life Source concept and we may therefore conjecture that the Bird/Snake Goddess was worshipped as the Giver of Life. It is of interest to mention in this connection that the egg motif is frequent and appears in association with the

plant or "life tree" design on shallow dishes (egg design on the exterior, plant motif on the interior).

Again, we have to do here with the beginning or regeneration of life. The snake itself is symbolic of Life Power. The stalagmites and stalactites of the lower cave at Scaloria were apparently perceived as related to snake and phallic symbolism, the water dripping from them adding to their mystery and power.

Discovery of the Script

The great surprise of this season's research was the finding on pottery and polished bone objects the Ol European script signs. Thus far, these signs known from the Vinca, Tisza, and Karanovo cultures of Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria respectively, date to ca. 5500-4000 B.C. The use of signs in southern Italy seems to go back as far as 6000-5000 B.C. since their presence is evidenced on Guadone type vases (the same date is indicated by the signs on the pottery from the Cave of Pipistrelli and the Serra d'Alto site on the exhibit in the Archaeological Museum of Matera). In my opinion, the signs were used as "sacred" script. They are symbols with additional linear signs. There are about 20 core signs, originally symbols, and about 60 modified signs.