

Richness and Diversity of Burial Rituals in the Upper Paleolithic

Giacomo Giacobini

Among the cultural innovations that characterize the Upper Paleolithic, those relating to burial practices furnish the possibility of evaluating the profound changes that differentiated this era from the Middle Paleolithic – even though between the two periods no distinct break is evident.

The presence of grave goods and body ornaments clearly associated with the deceased, the use of ochre and the way graves were laid out, all associated in diverse ways on these burial sites, bears undoubted witness to an intent to undertake a form of burial ritual. The graves of the Upper Paleolithic offer us a sometimes compelling glimpse of the complexity of the symbolic, cognitive and social environment of those peoples, as well as of the evolution and diversification over time and space of the rituals they associated with death.

But the significance of these burial sites is not limited to the archaeological evidence that they yield by which we may explore the conceptual universe of Upper Paleolithic peoples. The way graves were constructed ensured protection of their contents from the dangers of dispersal and destruction by various taphonomic factors. As a consequence, in the majority of cases the skeletons (along with their associated goods) have been preserved to a remarkable degree, and hence our knowledge of the physical anthropology of these populations has become significantly enhanced.

The aim of this article is to show that even if, as noted by various authors, there are certain constants that can be identified, at least across certain geographical ranges and cultural phases, the observed variability of burial forms during the Upper Paleolithic remains very great, and each case reveals its own particular characteristics. This fact might be imputable to the relative paucity of the examples currently known, even if our knowledge of the burials of this period is based on a number of discoveries which are decidedly more numerous than for the Middle Paleolithic. Nevertheless, research carried out for over a century and a half in Upper Paleolithic deposits allows a sufficient confidence to affirm that to bury a deceased individual

Copyright © ICPHS 2007

SAGE: Los Angeles, London, New Delhi and Singapore, <http://dio.sagepub.com>

DOI: 10.1177/0392192107077649

at that time still represented an exceptional event, and was probably limited to those who held a special position within their group. Indeed, because of aspects associated with the way the body was adorned, the accompanying grave goods and the type of grave constructed, or for reasons probably related to the way in which the individual died, each burial appears unique and tells a different story.

The total set of burials discovered to date within the territorial boundaries of Italy – which constitute the richest grouping presently known – is particularly representative of these features. Numerous, diverse and well-endowed, they provide important information about the peoples of the Upper Paleolithic and of the way they responded to the death of one of their number. Furthermore, a separate analysis of the burial sites in Italy can be justified by the specific characteristics by which the Upper Paleolithic evolved in this geographical zone and by the regional particularities by which the Italic Gravettian and Epigravettian cultures were differentiated. But these graves are also important for reasons linked to the history of research and ideas. Certainly, they already represent a significant body of evidence, available since the final decades of the 19th century, which is incontrovertible when it comes to the debate on the degree to which Paleolithic man can be considered culturally fully human and the extent to which he intentionally buried his dead; a debate which elicited sharp differences of opinion over whether they could be categorized as in fact belonging to the Paleolithic Age.

Historical overview of the discoveries

Discoveries of Upper Paleolithic burials began in Italy with Emile Rivière's excavation of the so-called 'Man of Menton' in the Barma du Cavillon, one of the Grimaldi Caves, in 1872 (Rivière, 1872). As this discovery was being made, the debate over whether burial practices existed during the Paleolithic was just getting under way (Cartailhac and Trutat, 1871) and the dating of the Cro-Magnon burial, discovered four years previously, was still being contested (Cartailhac, 1872). The controversy over whether a form of religious practice existed in the Paleolithic, a controversy in which Emile Cartailhac and Gabriel de Mortillet in particular took a prominent part, was to develop subsequently in parallel with the debate over cave parietal art, provoked by the discovery of the Altamira cave paintings. Burial practices were taken to be an indicator of a religious awareness, and artistic expression was judged to be incompatible with the primitive nature of Upper Paleolithic Man (see Groenen, 1994, for an analysis of these debates and for bibliographic references). In 1883, in his book *Le Préhistorique* [The Age of Prehistory] which reached a wide readership, de Mortillet classified the Cro-Magnon and Cavillon burial sites as being Neolithic ('Robenhausian' following his terminology). On the other hand, he was prepared to accept the Paleolithic origin (Magdalenian period) of the 'crushed man' of Laugerie-Basse, as this individual, who was discovered beneath a large broken-off slab of rock, was interpreted as being the victim of a landslide. In similar fashion, Rivière reckoned the Cavillon skeleton to be that of 'a man overcome by death during sleep', which would have made him the object of just a summary inhumation, but 'without displacement of the body after death' (Rivière, 1872).

In the Grimaldi Caves, discoveries of burials continued to be made up until the end of the century, thanks to the efforts of Emile Rivi re (three instances uncovered at Bausu da Ture between 1872 and 1873; a double burial at the Grotte des Enfants [Children's Cave] in 1874–5), and those of Louis Julien and Stanislas Bonfils and of Giuseppe Abbo (four burials, one a triple grave, at Barma Grande between 1884 and 1894 see Palma di Cesnola, 1993; Giacobini, 1999, 2006; Henri-Gambier, 2001, 2005). The excavations beginning in 1892, organized by Prince Albert I of Monaco and conducted by L oncel de Villeneuve, opened a new phase in the study of the Grimaldi Caves. These excavations, undertaken with scientific care and with particular attention paid to the stratigraphy, led in 1901 to the discovery of three new burials (one a double) in the Grotte des Enfants. These new discoveries played a decisive part in the debate over the existence of burial practices in the Upper Paleolithic. The ranks of the sceptics progressively thinned and, after the discovery of Neanderthal skeletons at La Chapelle-aux-Saints, Le Moustier, La Ferrassie and La Quina between 1908 and the outbreak of the First World War, even the existence of burials during the Middle Paleolithic became broadly accepted. Nevertheless, in 1914, Paul de Mortillet, the son of Gabriel, in his book *Origine du culte des morts. Les s epultures pr ehistoriques* [Origins of the Cult of the Dead. Prehistoric Burials], continued to attribute the earliest burials to the Neolithic period.

After the important research undertaken in the Grimaldi Caves, and with the exception of the three skeletons (most likely buried) unearthed in Epigravettian (Romanellian) deposits in the Romanelli Cave in Apulia at the beginning of the century (Stasi and Regalia, 1904), it was not until the years 1937–42 that a significant new set of burials was discovered.¹ The excavations conducted by Carlo Maviglia and Paolo Graziosi in the San Teodoro Cave in the northeast of Sicily led to the discovery of several sets of human remains in Epigravettian layers. At least five individuals were probably the object of forms of burial practice, but the documentation of the excavation is somewhat cursory and the archaeological levels were disturbed by unauthorized searchers.

Between 1940 and 1942 an important series of discoveries was made in the Arene Candide Cave near Finale Ligure. The excavations directed by Luigi Cardini led to the discovery of a considerable number of burials constituting a sort of 'necropolis' in layers from the later Epigravettian (at the time they were considered to be Mesolithic) and of a very richly furnished grave (labelled that of the 'Young Prince') in older levels (today classified as Gravettian). Cardini's excavations were conducted with minute care and the resulting records (field notes, sketches, photographs) make up a thoroughly compiled documentation.

During the 1960s and 1970s, burials dating from the Gravettian age (Le Veneri and Paglicci Caves in Apulia) and from the Epigravettian (the Tagliente Shelter in Venetia, Vado all'Arancio in Tuscany, the Maritza Cave in the Abruzzi, the Romito Shelter-Cave in Calabria) were discovered in the course of systematic searches. In most cases, the documentation of the excavations is very detailed, even if in some cases (as for the Romito site) some data still remains unpublished.

A final series of discoveries, beginning in 1988, has continued up to the present, and have sometimes occurred in sites that had already turned up burials. These included Gravettian burials from the Paglicci Cave and from the Santa Maria di

Agnano Cave in Apulia and Epigravettian burials from the Villabrana Shelters (Venetia), the Continenza Cave (Abruzzi), the Le Mura Cave (Apulia) and the Romito Shelter-Cave (Calabria). In the majority of cases, the documentation was supplemented by silicone casting effected during the excavation process (Cilli et al., 1997–9; Giacobini, 1996).

Geographical distribution and classification by culture and chronology

The number of burials from the Upper Paleolithic discovered in Italy cannot be precisely calculated. Several factors account for this uncertainty, as well as for the paucity of information relating to certain discoveries: the doubtful standard of care taken over some of the excavations, often the older ones, together with documentation that is sometimes inaccurate or even missing altogether; the disturbance of certain deposits (and some of the graves themselves) by unauthorized excavators; and the dispersal of some collections. Besides which, in several sites, human bones have been found dispersed and more or less significantly damaged by reason of different taphonomic factors (human or carnivore); in such cases the association of these with a particular burial is sometimes highly likely but in other cases remains doubtful.

However, by taking into account only those that lend no difficulty of interpretation, it can be safely asserted that more than 50 separate burials (including seven doubles and one triple) have been discovered in Italy up to the present. These discoveries are contributing either to the analysis of burial rituals or to physical anthropology studies, since they have made available a set of more than 60 skeletons

of which the majority are whole or almost so. The sites that have provided these graves, which cover a period spanning the Gravettian up to the end of the late Epigravettian, are distributed over a very extensive territory, characterized by a great diversity of landscapes, reaching from the Dolomites to Sicily and from the sea-coast to alpine environments.



Fig. 1. Distribution of Upper Paleolithic sites in Italy where graves have been found

Liguria

The Grimaldi Caves

Located on the Ligurian coast near the French frontier are the Grimaldi Caves (otherwise referred to as the Baoussé-Roussé Caves). There are entrances to several caverns in a cliff-face which is now close to the sea, but in front of which there used to be a broad plain, because of the lower sea-level during the colder phases of the Upper Paleolithic. As previously mentioned, discoveries of Paleolithic burials in these caves took place over the period between 1872 and 1901. We are dealing therefore with early excavations, most of which are poorly documented, except for those undertaken by Léonce de Villeneuve which led in 1901 to the discovery of three burials (one a double) in the Grotte des Enfants. In this latter case, the stratigraphy is consequently better known and the excavation documentation is, for the period, very detailed. Apart from the Grotte des Enfants (GE), the other caves of note are Barma du Cavillon (BC), Bausu da Ture (BT) and Barma Grande (BG). (In the descriptions that follow, the skeletons are identified following the numbering system in the *Catalogue of Fossil Hominids*, Sergi et al., 1971.)



In most cases, the burials are single ones (BC 1; BT 1, 2 and 3; BG 1, 5 and 6; GE 3 and 4), but there are also double burials (GE 1 + 2 and 5 + 6) and also a triple (BG 2 + 3 + 4). For the reasons explained above, their chrono-stratigraphical sequence cannot be precisely reconstituted (for discussion and references, see Henry-Gambier, 2001, 2005; Mussi, 1986a; Onoratini and Da Silva, 1978; Palma di Cesnola, 1976, 1993). On the basis of analysis of the accompanying artisanship, of some Carbon 14 dating by the Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (ASM) technique (Formicola et al., 2004; Henry-Gambier, 2001) and by comparison with other sites, most of these burials can be attributed to the Gravettian or to a very early phase of the Epigravettian. Only the burials in the upper layers of the Grotte des Enfants (GE 3 and GE 1 + 2) belong to the Epigravettian.

Among these graves there are those which, for historical reasons or because of the richness of the body ornaments or of their grave goods, have been most often cited in the literature. We have already mentioned 'the Man of Menton' (BC 1) (Fig. 2) discovered by Rivière in 1872 in Barma du Cavillon. It is probably in fact a female skeleton, laid out on its left side in the semi-foetal position. Physical

Fig. 2. Gravettian grave at Barma du Cavillon, Grimaldi Caves, Liguria (casting)

resemblances with the Cro-Magnon 'race', discovered four years previously, were pointed out by Rivière (1872, 1887) and by other authors (notably Verneau, 1906). The body ornaments and grave goods were represented by a cap made of shells (genus *Cyclope*) and perforated deer canines, an awl fashioned from the radius bone of a cervid, two flint blades placed against the occiput and a 'leg bracelet' (made of *Cyclope* shells) below the left knee. The cranial vault was coated with a red ochre; 'a groove filled by . . . powdered oligist' (Rivière, 1872) was observed on the front of the face; oligist powder was also spread over the skeleton.

Barma Grande turned up four burials, the most well-known of which, a triple burial discovered by the cave owner, Giuseppe Abbo and one of his sons in 1892 (Verneau, 1892), contained individuals BG 2 (adult male), 3 and 4 (adolescents aged around 12–13 and 14–15 years, probably female). The adult skeleton was laid out on its back, the others on their left sides (Verneau, 1906, 1908). All were lying in a trench and were covered with red ochre and powdered oligist. There was a very rich array of grave goods and body ornaments, composed of three large flint blades (17, 23 and 26 cm long), caps made from shells, deer canines and salmon vertebrae, shell and deer canine necklaces and pendants, both claviform and 'in the shape of a double olive' made from bone or ivory (Malerba and Giacobini, 2005). The fact that ivory objects were present in this grave and in another discovered in the same cave (BG 5) is noteworthy because of the extreme rarity of this material in the Upper Paleolithic in Italy.

The Grotte des Enfants owes its name to the double children's burial (GE 1 and 2) discovered between 1874 and 1875 by Emile Rivière. The two subjects, aged somewhere between 24 and 36 months (GE 1) and 12 and 24 months (GE 2), were lying side by side, laid out on their backs. More than a thousand perforated shells set out in longitudinal rows formed a kind of 'belt' or 'skirt', which covered the pelvic region of the two individuals. A recent study has attributed the death of one of the children (GE 2) to a wound caused by a flint point which was found embedded in one thoracic vertebra (Henry-Gambier, 2001). A direct dating (^{14}C by ASM) of a skull fragment of GE 1 has yielded an age of $11,130 \pm 100$ BP which confirms the Epigravettian attribution (Henry-Gambier, 2001).

In the same cave, the excavations led by Léonce de Villeneuve in 1901 brought to light three other burials. Among these later discoveries, the 'double' burial, found in the lower layers of the deposit, aroused, more than all the others, a lively argument concerning the processes of inhumation as well as about issues of physical anthropology and of cultural and chronological attribution. This burial (Fig. 3), which is the oldest of those in the Grimaldi Caves, contained the remains of an elderly woman (GE 5) and of an adolescent probably female (GE 6), laid in a trench. The woman was 'face down with legs bent, knees up near the shoulders, feet near the pelvis'; the adolescent 'was lying on her back, slightly inclined over to the right side, knees completely bent, heels pulled up to the body' (Cartailhac, 1912). The grave goods consisted of shells (*Cyclope*), perforated deer canines and some flint tools. A little structure of assembled stones protected the adolescent's head. This 'double' burial is probably the result of two successive interments, with the adult female having been placed in the adolescent's trench on a second, later occasion (for a discussion, see May, 1986). The so-called 'Grimaldi race', thought to have certain negroid features,



Fig. 3. Gravettian double burial, previously called the 'negroids' grave (GE 5 + 6) of the Grotte des Enfants, Grimaldi Caves, Liguria (after Verneau, 1906)

was identified on the basis of these two skeletons (Verneau, 1902). The inconsistency of this hypothesis was demonstrated by P. Legoux (1964). This grave, attributed initially to the Aurignacian period (Cartailhac, 1912), turned out in fact to be Gravettian; the digging of the grave-trench in the underlying Aurignacian layers may well have brought about a mingling of the artisanal traces in the layer (habitation level I) containing the burial (Palma de Cesnola, 1976; Onoratini and Da Silva, 1978).

For more detailed material on these burials and the other discoveries made in the Grimaldi Caves, as well as for other bibliographical references, readers are directed to the numerous works published by various authors and to summary overviews (Cartailhac, 1912; Formicola, 1991; Giacobini, 1999, 2006; Graziosi, 1976; Henry-Gambier, 2001, 2005; May, 1986; Mussi, 1986a, 1996; Palma di Cesnola, 1993; Sergi et al., 1971; Verneau, 1906, 1908). As for the anthropological study of the skeletons, older descriptions (Legoux, 1964; Massari, 1958; Rivière, 1887; Verneau, 1906, 1908)

have been complemented, in certain cases, by more recent analyses (Formicola, 1988, 1989, 1991; Henry-Gambier, 2001).

Arene Candide Cave

This cave, which fronts onto the sea near Finale Ligure (Savona province), less than 80 km directly east of the Grimaldi Caves, yielded an important set of burials. Among these, the one referred to as that of the 'Young Prince' (Fig. 4) is the most famous and one of the most richly adorned presently known. Discovered in 1942 in the deepest layers reached by the excavators (Cardini, 1946; see also Cilli et al., 1997–9), it is associated with Gravettian artefacts. Direct dating of a bone sample from the femur (^{14}C by ASM) has given a date of $23,440 \pm 190$ years BP (Formicola,

1997–9; Pettitt et al., 2003). The skeleton, which was lying on its back in a trench covered by stones, belongs to a male of around 15 years old (Sergi et al., 1974). This burial is characterized by a very rich array of grave goods: a cap made from shells, four pierced batons made from elk antler, four ivory pendants (Giacobini and Malerba, 1995; Malerba and Giacobini, 2005) and a large flint blade. Red ochre was spread over the skeleton. The grave goods show affinities with those of the Barma Grande graves; the flint blade is similar to the three large blades found in the triple grave (BG 2 + 3 + 4) and two of the ivory pendants have the same shape as certain pendants associated with the triple burial and with BG 5, but from which they nevertheless differ by their larger size (Malerba and Giacobini, 2005; Mussi et al., 1989).

The part of the 'necropolis' discovered in upper levels of the deposit (Fig. 5), initially considered to be Mesolithic (Cardini, 1946, 1980), was in reality associated with Epigravettian artefacts dating to between $10,910 \pm 90$ and $11,750 \pm 95$ years BP (Bietti, 1987; Fabbri, 1987a). The totality of the remains corresponds to 22 individuals (13 adults, of whom probably



Fig. 4. Gravettian burial of the 'Young Prince' of the Arene Candide Cave, Liguria (cast)

Venetia

Tagliente Shelter

This vast rock shelter is situated in the Valpantena (Venetian Prealps), near the city of Verona. The excavations, carried on since 1962, have revealed layers of deposits strongly marked by human presence, containing a sequence of fundamental importance for the understanding of the evolution of the Epigravettian in northeastern Italy. This site also furnished several examples of 'portable' art. An Epigravettian grave was discovered in the inner recesses of the shelter (Bartolomei et al., 1974). It had been partially destroyed by digging carried out at some time during the historic era. Only the lower part of the skeleton (from the pelvis to the feet) has been conserved. The skeleton, that of an adult male (Corrain, 1977), was laid out on its back, with legs extended, in a deep trench. It was covered over by stones, two of which bore engravings; one showed linear incisions and the other the outline of a lion's head and an aurochs horn. The burial adornment, the most important elements of which one must suppose were in the part of the grave that was destroyed, were represented by a fragment of the bone core of the horn of a large bovine, probably a bison (Bartolomei et al., 1974; Broglio, 1996).



Villabruna Shelters

An Epigravettian burial (Fig. 6) was discovered in the Villabruna Shelter A (Cismon Valley, Venetian Dolomites) in 1988 (Aimar et al., 1992; Broglio, 1996, 1999). The level the burial was found in is calculated as 12,040 ± 150 years BP. The skeleton, whose lower limb extremities had been destroyed by road-building operations, belongs to a male of around 25 years, showing a quite typical morphology of Cro-Magnon type. The skeleton was laid out on its back in a trench 30–40 cm deep. Six objects – a bone point, a backed knife, a flint blade, a flint core, a siltite-argillite tool-retouching pebble and a ball of resin and wax – were found near the left forearm. The bone point

Fig. 6. Epigravettian grave in the Villabruna Shelter A, Venetia (cast)

appeared to be completely intact when first excavated, as its pointed tip seemed to form a continuous piece with the base. But a mesial fragment of a little over 1 cm was missing and was discovered, during the sifting of the site, in the material filling the trench. To date, no comparable examples have been found for this observation, which suggests a ritual behaviour. The trench was filled in with stones, of which five bore ochre designs painted in well-defined motifs (Broglio, 1992, 1999).

Tuscany

Vado all' Arancio

Two burials were discovered in 1969 and 1970 in late Epigravettian levels in the Vado all' Arancio Shelter near Massa Marittima (Grosseto province); these layers are dated between $11,330 \pm 50$ and $11,600 \pm 130$ years BP. Burial A contained the skeleton of a young adult male (Fabbri et al., 1988; Minellono et al., 1980; Pardini and Lombardi-Pardini, 1981). It had been laid out in an oval pit between 60 and 20 cm deep, lying on its back with legs extended, and on a surface of red ochre. Several stones were found on top of the material filling the pit. Several objects, which might represent grave goods, were found in the grave: a fragment of roebuck jawbone, a horse molar, an aurochs pre-molar, three smooth pebbles (two of limonite and one of silicified limestone), ten or so pierced shells, two flint scrapers and a flint flake. Burial B (Minelloni et al., 1980), for which there is no trace of a trench, was that of a child of around 18 months, laid out on its back; the skeleton is very fragmentary. Some stone instruments and a few pierced shells, found near the skeleton, have not been associated with any certainty with this burial.

Abruzzi

Maritza Cave

The Epigravettian levels (showing the so-called 'Bertonian' industry) of this cave, located near Avezzano, have produced two human skeletons. In both cases, the excavations have failed to produce clear proof of intentional burial (dug-out trench, ochre, grave goods; Grifoni and Radmilli, 1964), even if an inhumation is suggested by the state of preservation of the skeletons. The Maritza I skeleton, derived from levels later than 14,000 years BP, is that of a child of around 8 years whose skull is missing. The various parts of the Maritza 2 skeleton, an adult male (Borgognini Tarli, 1969) have been rediscovered dispersed about the area. This is probably a case of a burial disturbed by carnivores.

Continenza Cave

The Epigravettian (Bertonian) levels of this cave, located on the shores of the former lake at Fucino, had already turned up human bones, attributed to an adult male, in 1990 (Grifoni Cremonesi, 1998). In 1993, the lower section of the deposit yielded a



Fig. 7. Epigravettian burial in the Continenza Cave, Abruzzi (cast)

burial (Fig. 7) (Grifoni Cremonesi et al., 1996). The skeleton of an adult male was lying flat, face down in the middle of a circle of stones; no grave-trench has been identified. The skull and the first cervical vertebrae, which are missing, appear to have been replaced by several stones; both knees were considerably bent, and the feet were almost in contact with the pelvis. No elements of grave goods or body ornaments have been clearly associated with this grave.

Apulia

Paglicci Cave

The extended stratigraphical sequence of the Paglicci Cave, located in the Gargano promontory (Foggia province), makes the cave a site of prime reference for the evolution of the Gravettian and Epigravettian of the Adriatic coast of southern Italy.

Works of parietal art are present at this site, intensely associated with human activity, as well as significant examples of portable art. The Upper Paleolithic layers of this cave have yielded several isolated human remains (Corrain, 1966; Sergi et al., 1971) as well as two Gravettian burials. The first burial, excavated in 1971, contained the skeleton of a 13–14-year-old individual of tall stature and probably of male gender (Mezzena and Palma di Cesnola, 1972; see Mallegni and Parenti, 1972–3 for the anatomical analysis; see also Borgognini Tarli et al., 1980). This burial is dated at $24,720 \pm 420$ years BP. The skeleton was lying on its back with legs outstretched and covered with a fine layer of haematite, but no trace of a grave-trench can be discerned. The grave goods consisted of perforated deer canines (one found near the left wrist, one near the right ankle and around thirty about the skull), a cowrie shell on the thorax (probably having been suspended from the neck), a bone-piercing tool and a dozen flint tools.

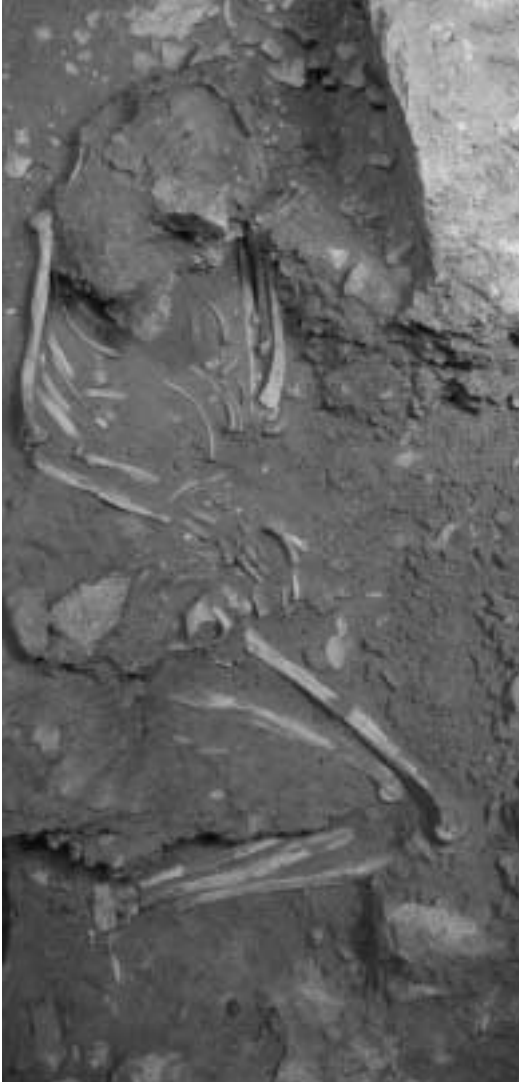
The second burial was excavated in 1988 in levels dated at between $23,470 \pm 370$ and $23,040 \pm 380$ years BP (Mezzena and Palma di Cesnola, 1993). The skeleton of a young female adult, flat on its back with extended legs, was covered over with ochre in a trench of around 40 cm deep. The face was slightly turned to the left, the hands were placed on the belly; the feet were hard up against the cave wall but were slightly more elevated since the rest of the body had become inclined downwards as the result of a slumping of the deposited material of the cave floor. The head and the right shoulder had been set into a little recess off the main trench. This was covered over by a stratigraphical sequence, consisting of two layers very abundant in animal remains and flint chips. The grave goods and body ornaments were represented by a 'diadem' of seven pierced deer canines arranged on the skull, a scraper, two chisels, a flint flake blade and by a fragment of *Pecten* shell. The skeleton, which was very robust and tall, showed significant Cro-Magnon-like affinities (Mallegni, 1992).

Le Mura Cave

This cavern, situated on the Adriatic coast near Monopoli, south of Bari, yielded the burial of a child of around $2\frac{1}{2}$ years old, in levels of the late Epigravettian, which also gave up several items of grave goods. The skeleton was lying on its back with legs extended, and was covered over with flat stones (Calattini, 2002).

Santa Maria di Agnano Cave

Two Gravettian burials were discovered in this cave, located near Ostuni (Brindisi province) (Coppola, 1992). The Ostuni 1 burial (Fig. 8), dated at $24,410 \pm 320$ years BP, belonged to a young adult female (Coppola and Vacca, 1996; Vacca and Coppola, 1993), laid out on its left side in a slightly hunched position. The right hand lay on the belly, the left was under the head. The woman had been buried near the end of a pregnancy. The skeleton of the foetus, whose head is lodged in the lower pelvic cavity of the woman, was in a good state of preservation. The grave goods and body ornaments are represented by a cap made of around 100 pierced shells (mainly *Cyclope*); other shells (genus *Columbella*, cowries, genus *Nassarius*) were grouped together near the two forearms and in front of the chest and belly; a pierced deer



canine lay near the right parietal bone. There were also a few flint tools. The red ochre was mainly limited to the skull. The anthropological study of this skeleton, quite clearly of the female sex, provides significant information on the sexual dimorphism of the Upper Paleolithic peoples and on the degree of robustness of female individuals (Vacca and Coppola, 1993).

The Ostuni 2 burial, contained within a bloc of sedimentary concretion that has been removed to the Museum of Ostuni, is dated at $23,450 \pm 170$ years BP. It enclosed a skeleton in a position comparable to that of Ostuni 1, but the lower limbs were more bent. The body ornaments include several shells (cowries) and pierced deer canines (Coppola and Vacca, 1996).

Fig. 8. Gravettian burial from the Santa Maria di Agnano Cave, Apulia (cast)

Le Veneri Cave

A double burial of the Gravettian period was excavated in this cave, located near Parabita (Lecce province). The two skeletons were initially classified as being a male (Parabita I) and a female (Parabita II), both adult. (Cremonesi et al., 1972; see also Fabbri et al., 1988); but it is more likely that they are both male (Mussi et al., 1989). They were discovered in a natural depression of the rocky floor of the cave. The upper parts of both skeletons had been dislodged by the digging away of the deposited material during the Neolithic period. Going by the positions of the

remaining preserved bones, it may be presumed that the two skeletons lay on their backs with outstretched legs. It would appear that the right knee of Parabita I, pushed out towards the left, lay on the lap of the other individual. The grave goods (probably partially destroyed by the Neolithic diggings) consisted of a flint flake and a pebble, both coloured with ochre, and by 29 pierced deer canines set out in two rows against the wall of the trench in the area where the skull of Parabita I was originally found. Affinities between these skeletons and Cro-Magnon 1 were brought out by comparative anatomical study (Parenti and Romano, in Cremonesi et al., 1972). This burial is dated at around 22,000 years BP by a comparison with the age measurements of layers of the Paglicci Cave, which contain comparable artisanship (Palma di Cesnola and Bietti, 1983).

Romanelli Cave

This cave, whose entrance is situated at the extreme southern tip of Apulia, has given its name to a late phase of the upper Epigravettian, designated Romanellian. This cave also contains examples of parietal art (principally non-figurative) and its deposit has turned up numerous small plaques engraved with animal figures or geometric motifs. Three human skeletons (one adult and two children) were found in Upper Epigravettian layers of this cave at the beginning of the 20th century. Precise archaeological data are not available; however, since the skeletons are preserved almost in their entirety or are represented by several elements anatomically connected one with another, it is reasonable to conclude that these were the result of intentional burial (for an anatomical description and bibliographical references, see Fabbri, 1987b). Other human remains have been sporadically rediscovered (see Sergi et al., 1971).

Calabria

Romito Cave-Shelter

In the same way that the Paglicci Cave is the site of prime reference for the evolution of the Gravettian and Epigravettian on the Adriatic flank of southern Italy, the Romito Cave-Shelter, located near Papisidero (Cosenza province) at an altitude of 500 m, is equally a site of prime reference for the Tyrrhenian flank. Its contents have provided a wealth of archaeological material over a very thick stratigraphical sequence. The data relating to the excavations directed by Paolo Graziosi in the 1960s are for the most part still unpublished, but new excavations have been undertaken by Fabio Martini since 2000.

Two double burials (skeletons Romito 1 + 2 and 5 + 6) and two single burials (Romito 3 and 4) were uncovered between 1963 and 1965 in the Epigravettian levels (for references see Fabbri et al., 1989). They are dated at between $11,150 \pm 150$ and $10,960 \pm 350$ years BP (Martini, 2002a). Two other single burials (Romito 7 and 8) were discovered in 2001 and 2002 in levels dated between 12,200 and 13,000 years BP (Martini, 2002a, b).

Anatomical studies of the human skeletons have been published (Fabbri et al., 1989; Frayer et al., 1987, 1988). The most well-known burial (Fig. 9) was found beneath the overhanging shelter, at the foot of a rock on which were engraved the outlines of three aurochs (one of which was just a head). It contained the skeletons Romito 1 (an adult female) and 2 (an adolescent afflicted with a form of dwarfism) (Frayer et al., 1987, 1988), together with two bone cores of aurochs' horn. The second double burial, containing the skeletons Romito 5 and 6 (an adult male and female) was located also beneath the overhang, ahead of the stone with the aurochs engravings but somewhat further away. The skeletons were laid out with the heads and shoulders raised a little in relation to the trunk, in sub-oval pits lined and covered with stones. The graves



Fig. 9. Epigravettian double burial (Romito 1 + 2) in the Romito Cave-Shelter, Calabria (cast)



Fig. 10. Epigravettian burial (Romito 8) in the Romito Cave-Shelter, Calabria (after Martini, 2002a)

containing individuals Romito 3 (a male, the upper half of whose skeleton had been destroyed by unauthorized diggings) and 4 (a female) were found in the little cavern that opened in the shelter wall. The skeletons were laid out in two trenches dug one beside the other (these two skeletons are occasionally erroneously described in the literature as though they were part of a double burial). Romito 7 and 8 (Fig. 10) were located close by these two single burials. The skeletons were lying on their backs with legs outstretched in deep trenches covered over by stones. The grave goods, absent from Romito 8, were limited to a flint point in Romito 7 (Martini 2002a, b).

Sicily

San Teodoro Cave

Located near Acquadolci (Messina province) 2 kilometres from the coast in north-eastern Sicily, it has yielded a significant set of human remains (for a description of the site see Vigliardi, 1968). Most of these remains, uncovered between 1937 and 1942 in Epigravettian layers (Graziosi and Maviglia, 1947) dated at around 14,000 years BP (Vigliardi, 1968), were definitely or in all likelihood the objects of intentional burials. Few details are known about the characteristics of these burials (Graziosi, 1947; Maviglia, 1941; see also May, 1986; Mussi et al., 1989), since the excavations were carried out under difficult conditions and the deposits were disturbed by unauthorized diggings which damaged several skeletons. In some cases it is known that the skeletons were lying on their left side (San Teodoro 1) or on their back (San Teodoro 2 and 4), in a trench. San Teodoro 1 probably bore a body ornament represented by 12 pierced deer canines. San Teodoro 4 was found to contain a fragment of a deer antler, a few smooth pebbles. The graves of skeletons 1–4 were apparently grouped together as a single unit covered over with a layer of ochre 5 cm thick. San Teodoro 5 appeared to be a little more recent.

These human remains (San Teodoro 1–5: four adult males and an individual of indeterminate age and sex) have been the object of anthropological study since the 1940s (Graziosi, 1947). Only San Teodoro 1 is represented by an almost complete skeleton (Fabbri, 1993). Two other skulls, San Teodoro 6 and 7, have been described (Aimar and Giacobini, 1989; Pardini, 1975).

Conclusions

Over the last few years, the sheer number of Upper Paleolithic burials in Italy and the rich quantity of the material their graves contained has drawn the attention of several authors, who have devoted to them numerous summary review articles (Giacobini, 1999, 2006; Henry-Gambier, 2001; May, 1986; Palma di Cesnola, 1993). Some of these authors have made comparative analyses of the data, seeking to re-establish the evolution of the burial practices and proposing explanatory models on the basis of age and sex and on chrono-stratigraphic, cultural and geographic criteria (Henry-Gambier, 2005a; Mussi et al., 1989; Palma di Cesnola, 1999).

Furthermore, the interest of pre-historians and anthropologists in such sites on the territory of Italy, and for this very rich heritage which has proved fundamental for the study of burial practices of the Upper Paleolithic, but which is often little known outside of Italy, has been rekindled by recent discoveries which have caused considerable excitement in the international literature.

Nevertheless, the analysis and comparative study of the data remain difficult on account of the uneven care taken with the excavations. Certain burials that were among the first to be discovered, such as those of the Grimaldi Caves which were among the most important, often unfortunately have only limited or even near-to-non-existent documentation on the contextual data (information relating to the stratigraphic contexts of burials discovered during the excavations of Léonce de Villeneuve in the Grotte des Enfants constituting the exception for that period). Other burials have been revisited for renewed study, such as the children's burial in the Grotte des Enfants (Henry-Gambier, 2001), which has demonstrated that significant information could still be recovered from a re-examination of the documents and by carrying out new analysis.

The ASM ¹⁴C dating method has offered new possibilities for the direct dating of human remains, allowing a confirmation or more accurate estimation of the chrono-stratigraphic context; this was the case, for example, for some of the Grimaldi graves such as those just mentioned (Henry-Gambier, 2001) and for skeleton 6 of Barma Grande (Formicola et al., 2004). This category could include the 'Prince's' grave in the Arene Candide Cave (Pettitt et al., 2003). However, this method has not been applied to the Bausu da Ture skeletons, because an insufficient amount of collagen had been preserved in the bones (Henry-Gambier, 2005a).

Still, even though the archaeological documentation is often insufficient, the skeletons derived from the early diggings have been preserved intact in the majority of cases, and some have become the object of new anthropological study – as examples one may cite the studies of the Grimaldi Cave skeletons (Formicola, 1988, 1991; Henry-Gambier, 2001), the Romanelli Cave (Fabbri, 1987b) and the Romito Cave-Shelter (Fabbri et al., 1989; Frayer et al., 1987, 1988). This research complements the anthropological studies done on more recently discovered skeletons by providing an ever more precise framework for assessing the variability, evolution and regional diversification of the physical characteristics of Upper Paleolithic populations in Italy.

The Upper Paleolithic burials currently known in Italy were laid in caves and rock shelters but never in open-air sites, as was the case in other regions. In the majority of cases these were single burials. For all that, double burials are also quite frequent: for the Gravettian period one can cite those of the Grotte des Enfants (the burial earlier referred to as that of the 'Negroids') and the Veneri Cave; for the Epigravettian, those of the Grotte des Enfants (the children's burial itself), of the Arene Candide Cave (two double burials), and of the Romito Cave-Shelter (two double burials). The only triple burial currently known in Italy dates from the Gravettian period at Barma Grande – the only other triple burial known is that of Dolni Vestonice in Moravia (Klima, 1987).

There were burials of adults, adolescents and of children. For the Gravettian period, however, no burials of children under 12 years of age have been found. This may correlate with the fact that, as pointed out by Henry-Gambier (2005), in several

ancient societies the bodies of children were not treated in the same manner as those of adults because they did not have a recognized place in the social order. But in the Epigravettian burials, even very young children are represented, as in the Grotte des Enfants, at Arene Candide (even at the perinatal stage), at Vado all'Arancio and at the la Cala Cave. Among the adult skeletons both males and females are represented; however, the sexes allocated to the interred individuals by different authors are not always in accord with each other. The presence of both sexes leads to the consideration that sex-distinction was not a prime criterion in relation to burial practice. Females nevertheless appear to be somewhat under-represented in the sample, and the degree of robustness of the postcranial skeleton of the pregnant female of Santa Maria di Agnano (the sole case for the Upper Paleolithic where the sexual attribution is incontrovertible) is cause for some reflection on the subject.

The position the bodies were laid in is very variable, even more so in the case of the Gravettian burials (bodies laid flat on their backs or on their left side; sometimes the body is hunched) than for the Epigravettian burials, where the body is almost always in the extended dorsal position. The burial in the Continenza Cave, where the body is laid out in the extended ventral position, is a case apart.

Some graves contain the skeletons of individuals who, given the richness of the body ornaments and the grave goods included, may well have occupied an important position in their community. This hypothesis has often been evoked in the case of the 'Prince' of Arene Candide and the adult in the triple burial at Barma Grande. The dwarf buried in one of the double graves in the Romito Cave-Shelter could represent another case of an individual with a particular social role.

The variety of the objects of body ornament and of the grave goods is remarkable, particularly in the Epigravettian burials, and the use of animal hard tissues (bones, antlers, teeth, ivory, shells) for the manufacture of these artefacts is the principal factor responsible for this richness and diversity.

Body ornaments and grave offerings are, however, completely absent or nearly so from other burials. That is the case, for example, with the two burials recently discovered in the Romito Cave-Shelter (Martini, 2002a, b), which does not exclude the possibility that there may have been objects created from perishable materials placed in the grave-trench.

Very deficient in grave-goods, the Villabruna Shelters burial represents a particular case. A few objects of simple workmanship have been found there, notably a bone point, which nevertheless suggest a form of ritual behaviour. Furthermore, the trench was covered over with large river pebbles, of which five carried designs painted in ochre (Broglia, 1992, 1999). Decorated slabs covering a grave were also present in the Tagliente Shelter, where the stone bore the engraved profile of a lion.

The use of red ochre in the graves is very common, with the exception of some burials of the Gravettian (Barma Grande 6, Bausu da Ture 3) and Epigravettian (Tagliente Shelter, Villabruna Shelters, Continenza Cave and some burials in the Romito Cave-Shelter). A small quantity of yellow ochre was also used at Arene Candide (the 'Prince's' grave). In the Grimaldi burials (Barma du Cavillon and the Barma Grande triple burial), a lustrous oligist powder was sprinkled over the bodies. The application of ochre was sometimes limited to the head (Barma du Cavillon, Santa Maria di Agnano), but sometimes spread lavishly over the whole

body (Arene Candide, Paglicci). However, it tended to disappear from the burials dating from the end of the Epigravettian.

The forms of the graves established in association with burials are often quite complex. In the case of the oldest excavations, like the Grimaldi diggings, precise information is often lacking, but in the case of the triple burial at Barma Grande and in the older of the double burials in the Grotte des Enfants, the presence of a grave-trench seems obvious. Flat stones lining the trench and rock constructions have also been described in some of the Grimaldi burials (BG 5, GE 4, GE 6). As for more recently excavated burials, the presence of an often deeply dug grave-trench covered over with stones has been well documented in most cases, as at the Tagliente Shelter, the Villabruna Shelters and at the Romito Cave-Shelter. On occasions the layout of the trench appears more complex, as in the case of the Paglicci female (with a recess for the head and several layers of covering made up of stones and bony animal fragments).

Analysis of the available data for the Upper Paleolithic burials uncovered up till the present on the territory of Italy therefore reveals a considerable diversity. It is noteworthy that in other European areas that have furnished numerous skeletons from the Upper Paleolithic, the burials are often concentrated in a limited number of sites, as in Moravia (Dolni Vestonice, Brno and Predmost). In total contrast, the 50 or so Italian burials are distributed between 14 different sites (17 if the 4 distinct Grimaldi caves are considered separately). This broad geographical (and chronological) distribution could account for a certain variability, which seems principally linked to chronological and cultural factors and to the specific nature of the site (whether or not it was associated with a particular ritual significance). Significant affinities between some of the Gravettian burials located at a considerable distance from each other, as between Liguria and Apulia, suggest that, within an identical cultural phase, geographical factors could be relatively insignificant, which would suggest the existence of strong traditions and codified systems of behaviour. In relation to this, one may cite the remarkable similarities (disposition of the bodies, decoration of the head with ochre and shells) between the burial of the 'Menton man' (probably really a woman) and that of the pregnant woman of Santa Maria di Agnano, who belonged within the same cultural context but whose bodies were discovered in sites separated from each other by a distance of 900 km in a direct line.

Following Mussi's proposition (1986b; Mussi et al., 1989), Italy's burials of the Upper Paleolithic can be classified in two chronological phases: phase I, corresponding to the Gravettian (or to an initial phase of the Epigravettian), dating from between 25,000 and 20,000 years BP, and phase II, corresponding to the late Epigravettian, dating from between 14,000 and 10,000 years BP. Phase II, which is marked by almost double the number of burials in comparison with phase I, corresponds to a cultural period which is more strongly represented over the whole set of the Italian sites. Newer discoveries (Gravettian burials Paglicci 3, Ostuni 1 and 2; Epigravettian burials in the Villabruna Shelters, in the Continenza Cave and the Romito Cave-Shelter) confirm the assertions of these authors, according to which the burials of phase I are concentrated in Liguria and Apulia while those of phase II are to be found over the whole length of the peninsula and in Sicily.

The recent discoveries and the excavations currently in progress in the deposits of the Upper Paleolithic, some of which have already turned up burials, lead us to imagine that the documentary evidence produced from Italy could be further enriched in the near future. These numerous evidences of death rituals hence offer us possibilities that are becoming ever clearer for exploring the death-ritual behaviour of our ancestors of the Upper Paleolithic, and to derive from this significant information on the physical appearance and cultural world of the interred individuals.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to express his gratitude to Mr Dominique Sacchi for his constructive criticisms of this work and for having patiently reviewed the French text.

Giacomo Giacobini
University of Turin

Translated from the French by Colin Anderson

Note

1. For bibliographical references to all the discoveries mentioned above, see the cumulative references section at the end of this issue. Readers are also referred to the following overview articles by Palma di Cesnola, 1993; Giacobini, 1999, 2006; and Henry-Gambier, 2001, 2005.