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Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

The Rearrangement of the Archaeological Museum of Arcevia: Aiming to Improve Accessibility

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The Marche region in central Italy hosts quite a number of archaeological museums, containing a wide range of specimens and collections that cover a time span from the Palaeolithic onwards. From Stone Age votive statues to Iron Age weaponry, from Greek and Celtic luxurious jewellery and pottery to unmatched Roman finds; local museums preserve a huge variety of specimens that are of great interest to the public, scholars and amateurs alike.



During the last decade, many museums of the province and of the whole region hosted events of experimental archaeology and didactic laboratories, during which the public had a chance to interact with archaeological replicas. Those events were generally successful and proved to be positive for both the museums and their visitors.

Despite this, much is still to be done in terms of accessibility, with visitors with special needs sometimes finding themselves struggling against architectural barriers, language barriers and other issues.

A brilliant exception in the province of Ancona is the Museo Omero, located in the province's capital Ancona, which is historically dedicated to visually impaired visitors. Since its opening in 1993, the Museo Tattile Statale Omero (Omero State Tactile Museum) has aimed to offer the public a tactile way to enjoy its collection, and it does so by allowing visitors to touch the specimens and interact with them.

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The Archaeological Museum of Arcevia decided to take things a step further on the occasion of a major rearrangement of its collection, that took place between the last months of 2022 and ended in April 2023. Located in the medieval rooms of the former St. Francis convent, the Museum first opened in 1996, and its entrance is found in the convent's cloister. The Museum consists of a number of rooms in which the specimens are exposed in chronological order: specimens from the Paleolithic in the first room, the most important Copper Age finds from Conelle di Arcevia in the next one, followed by Bronze Age finds and Celtic specimens found in the famous necropolis of Montefortino.

Another room is fitted with a reconstruction of the Monti-Anselmi collection. These two were researchers that gathered an impressive number of specimens and fossils from the local territory towards the end of the 19th century. Those finds, from fossil shark teeth to Copper and Bronze Age pottery and including bronze jewellery and lithic weapons and tools, constituted their private collection. This wunderkammer was replicated in a room in the Museum when it acquired the collection.

On the 20th of April the reorganization was finished and the new exhibition inaugurated. The new museum itinerary begins with a box office from which the public is led to the Monti-Anselmi room; this has been quite cleverly elected as the first room to visit since the specimens found by the scholars form the primitive nucleus of today's collection. I personally find the Monti-Anselmi room to be the most fascinating and romantic, with wooden

showcases positioned like a horseshoe and with the century-old tickets that the scholars applied to almost all the specimens they found.

But I am not a visitor with special needs and the items contained in those showcases can't be enjoyed, for example, by a visually impaired visitor. The next room is where the Museum takes a step further in terms of accessibility.

Four modern glass showcases contain flint tools found in the local territory, dating from the Lower Palaeolithic onwards. A lithic workshop has been recreated like it was found in Ponte di Pietra, but that is under glass too, and even though some real size figures of men knapping flint have been put adjacent to it, they still cannot be enjoyed by everyone.

This changes completely in the two showcases next to that. The left one contains some flint cores and blades, the right one contains flint scrapers and other lithic tools. All of this is under glass of course, but the base of each showcase presents captions in Italian, English, and in braille script. The last two are already an innovation in terms of accessibility, but the real showpiece lies next to them: a replica of a core with a blade and of a flint scraper have been glued to the bases, so that everyone can interact with them and sense them in the most appropriate way. The permanent presence of this kind of replica in the exhibition of an archaeological Museum is not really common in the province, and the Museum of Arcevia is a pioneer in this.

The writer is particularly proud of this because he is also the producer of these replicas. It was December 2022 when I got a phone call by the Museum staff; they requested a flint core for the rearrangement they were doing. Two days later I had already picked up a bag of flint stones, chosen the best ones, and a few hours later four cores and an unspecified number of blades, scrapers and other tools were ready to go to Arcevia. All of this was made by knapping the flint with a sandstone hammer, using direct percussion. Having already provided replicas for other Museums in the past, I knew how useful this approach could be and I was really excited that the Museum of Arcevia was adopting it.

During the "Night of the Museums" held in Italy last May the 13th, visitors were guided through the Museum's rooms by a very knowledgeable guide, and they all enjoyed the possibility to touch the flint replicas.

From this point on, pretty much any of the bases of the remaining showcases will have an empty slot in which replicas of specimens can find their place. Those specimens are currently being made using 3D printing by the "Sapienza" University of Rome and once they will all be in place they will include bronze jewellery, Copper Age pottery and so on. This way the Museum will really be accessible for anyone!

The next room is the biggest and includes Copper and Bronze Age findings, among which the quite famous pottery found in Conelle di Arcevia. This is a Copper Age village made famous by


its huge defensive moat, which is more than 100 meters long, about 6 meters wide and 7 meters deep. A cool modern diorama of the village can be seen in the middle of the room, and many screens have been put on the walls to show educational films to the public.

The next room hosts Iron Age and Roman specimens in the form of votive pottery and bronze figures, and a collection of specimens that have been illegally acquired by private persons in the past and were luckily tracked down and seized by the Carabinieri so they could be returned to the people.

The last two rooms host showcases in which magnificent specimens found in the famous Celtic necropolis of Montefortino can be seen: golden and silver jewellery, iron weapons and armours, luxurious pottery meant for magnificent banquets; all can be seen here. The tactile part of this section is yet to be implemented, but the staff are working on it.

Once ready and installed, the reorganization will be complete and the Museum will have made another step towards people with special needs, which so far have been excluded from the achievements of the Museum. This will be an important improvement and will really mark a new beginning for a large part of the population.

I would like to express my gratitude to EXARC for publishing this text, and for the editor for making it understandable.

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Gallery Image



FIG 1. FLINT CORE REPLICA BEING ENJOYED BY VISITORS FOR THE FIRST TIME. PHOTO BY MAURO FIORENTINI



FIG 2. VISITORS DURING THE "MUSEUM NIGHT". PHOTO BY MAURO FIORENTINI



FIG 3. MAKING THE FLINT CORE REPLICA. PHOTO BY MAURO FIORENTINI



FIG 4. PART OF THE MONTI-ANSELMI WUNDERKAMMER. PHOTO BY MAURO FIORENTINI

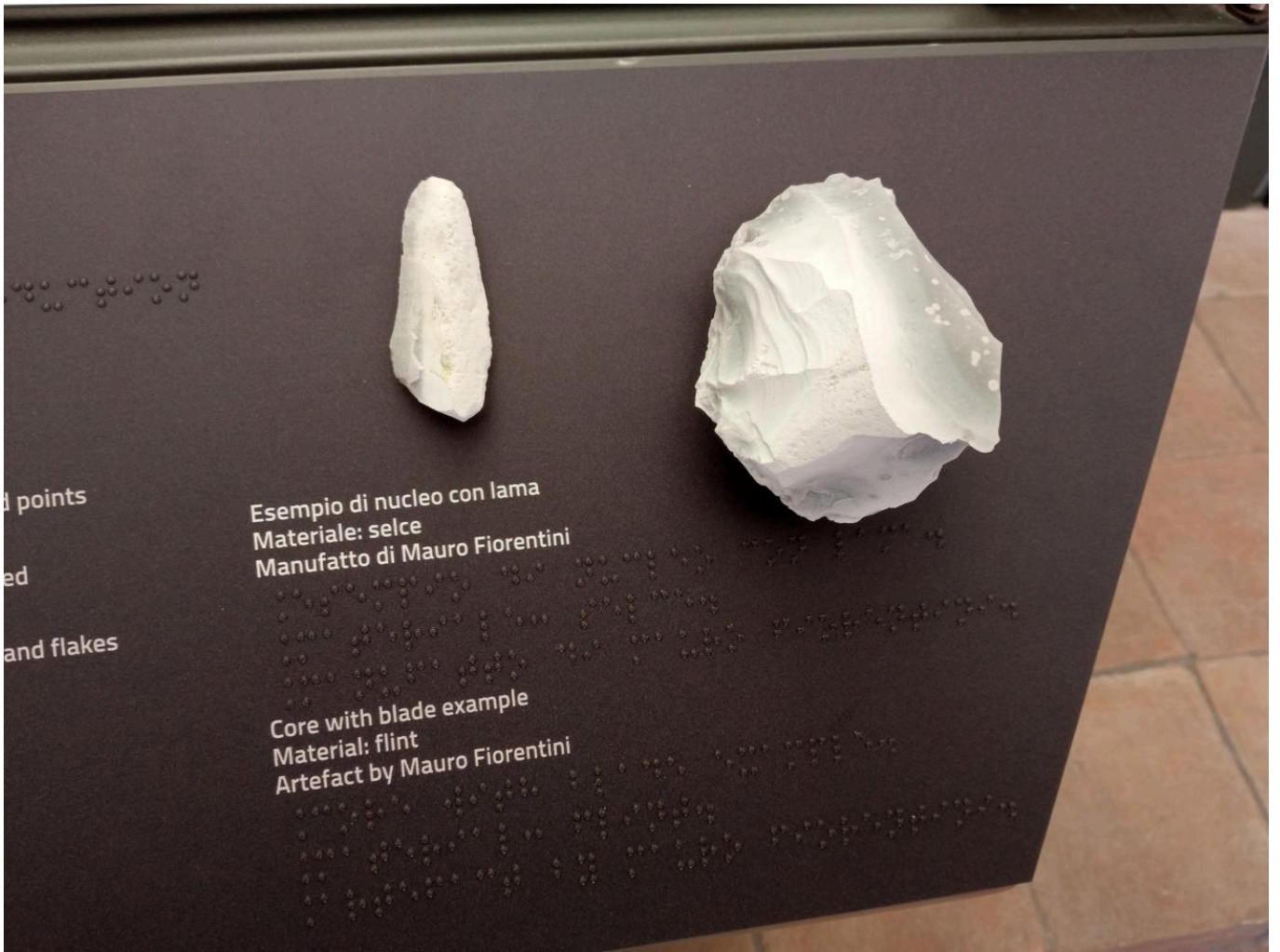


FIG 5. THE FLINT CORE REPLICA AND ONE OF ITS BLADES IN THE NEW EXHIBITION AT THE MUSEUM. PHOTO BY MAURO FIORENTINI



FIG 6. VISITORS DURING THE RE-OPENING OF THE MUSEUM ENJOYING THE NEW EXHIBITION. PHOTO BY MAURO FIORENTINI



FIG 7. BRONZE AGE ARTIFACTS FOUND IN THE TERRITORY OF ARCEVIA. PHOTO BY MAURO FIORENTINI