Summary
The Authors describe the site with lithic artifacts, relations with neighboring structures of similar meaning and reference to possible archaeological and archaeoastronomical interests. A discussion of the assumptions of dating and use of findings follows the presentation.

Description
The Bric Ercea is a relief (altitude: 304 m asl) located south of Bric Pianarella, easily accessible from the villages of Monticello and San Bernardino, near Finale Ligure (near Savona, Western Liguria). The western side is formed by a steep wall on the Aquila Valley, already used as a climbing wall. The remaining sides are less sloping and, from East, the summit of the Bric (a Ligurian term for “mountain”) can be reached, turning to the west, on the left, at 298 m asl: 44.19448°N; 8.33257°E, from the path that, starting from San Bernardino, reaches Ciappo (the term "Ciappo", in Finalese, indicates a stone slab) dei Ceci (i.e. Ciappu de Cexi or Ciappu de Cunchette) and the Ciappo delle Conche (i.e. Ciappu de Cunche).

The first part of the oronym originates from the Celtic \(bhr\)ĝh\(\)a, i.e. "mountain, stronghold" < Indo-European \(bher\)gh- i.e. "high". According to other Authors (5) the term would have a pre-Indo-European origin (5), (25), (42).

It is found in the major languages of the Indo-European family: Celtic, Germanic, Latin and Sanskrit (25).

It is, therefore, one of the roots of the most important and most widely used in this linguistic and cultural context, so even Celtic-Ligurian: a significant proof of the value that these peoples gave to the tops of the mountains as natural sites of dwelling, defense and worship devotion. The large number of toponyms be found, not only in the Finale, is a non-random datum (20), (24), (25), (27).

The second part derives from the Celtic-Ligurian "erxi", meaning “Holm oaks”, related to the Latin “ilex” and the Greek “\(\delta\)\(λ\)η”, i.e. “wood”, “forest”.

This meaning is understandable, although seemingly simplistic, because the vegetation consists, in large part, from Holm oaks (Quercus ilex). Through this woods, after going through some dry stone walls, delimiting bands of ground, the remains of a wall, apparently erected in order to delimit the area of the highest of the rise can be reached (1), (41). At this level there is an artifact that could be interpreted as a rudimentary Anthropomorphic Stele , tilted about 45 degrees , at an acute angle open towards the north, resting on another stone, part of that wall. The GPS coordinates of this lithic finding are: Lat: 44.19332°N; Long: 8.33095°E; at 297 m asl (Photo 1). In the immediate vicinity, there is a boulder with cup-marks (Photo 2).
At about 80 m in South-West direction, through another wall, with the presence of a horizontal stone table, supported by smaller ones, on the summit of the Bric Ercea there is the so-called Pila delle Penne. It is a rocky outcrop with a rectangular pond about 60 x 35 cm and 15 cm deep, on average, (Photo 3 ), gutters and a petroglyph that might resemble a Bucranium (i.e. bovine horns and skull) (Photo 4).
The GPS coordinates are: Lat: 44.19267°N; Long: 8.330482°E; at 303 m asl.
The toponym Pila delle Penne is also composed of a first part originated, in all probability, from the Latin “pila” (basin carved, mostly, in stone) and refers also to the pre- and/or Indo-European root “*pl̥” connected to “water” (5). Penne derives, however, from the Celtic “Pen(n)” : the top, the mountain. Celtic-Ligurian peoples worshiped like gods dwelling on the summits of mountains. On the plateau that forms the top of the Bric Ercea, other lithic industries can be observed, such as cup-marks (Photo 5), a petroglyph depicting a prayer (Photo 6) and a perforated stone (Photo 7).
Discussion

The dating of the described finds, all in the Finale Stone (a Miocenic bioclastic limestone rock formation, rich in fossils originated from 20 to 10 million years ago), is a difficult problem, since the artifacts are located in "open" places (45), easily modifiable by meteoric, animal and anthropic factors (26), (47), frequented by humans even in fairly recent times.

The appearance of petroglyphs and megalithic structures as dolmens, menhirs and megalithic enclosures can, however, be traced back to a period between the Neolithic (that developed between 5,800-3,600 BC in Liguria) and the Bronze Age (2200-900 BC), the terraces to the Bronze Age, while the Hillforts of Finalese and Western Liguria, are now considered built in the Iron Age (900-180 BC).

In particular, the summit walls, were erected with very bulky stones following the lay of the soil and seem likely to have provided protection and defense, such as the Hillforts of the Iron Age. The construction technique of the walls also reminds the megalithic model: the large boulders of local stone are combined and overlaid. The spaces left free between a boulder and the other, are filled sometimes with smaller stones and soil. We can not, however, exclude the hypothesis that they were part of the megalithic enclosures of "cromlech" type. The same Anthropomorphic Stele is leaning to a boulder, forming part of these walls near a cup stone (Photo 2). The carved standing stone are traced back to the third millennium BC (between the Copper and the Bronze Ages) and the Bric Ercea Stele is quite similar, in shape and positioning, to other similar artifacts discovered at a considerable distances, e.g. the Stele of Giurdignano, near Lecce, Puglia (43).

The lithic artifacts on top of the relief are represented by boulders with cup-marks with deep furrows, grooves and notches. This may suggest their use as mortars for grinding cereals and / or legumes, in order to obtain alimentary flours, or as basins for collection
of water in order to watering animals therein or to lure them for hunting purposes. We must also consider a destination for the collection of the blood of the animals after killing them, both for food that sacrifice.

This hypothesis could be supported by the fact that on the surface of the outcrop rock on top of the Bric Ercea, moreover the stone vessel, there is an engraving with the characteristics of a "bucranium". This representation is relatable to the fertility cults. The presence of the basin carved in the stone, of other rudimentary cups and of the horizontal stone table (Photo 8), in fact, can remember what was reported in numerous studies that refer to the sanctuary of Panoias (Northern Portugal), where next to a large rock with tanks, canals and pans, there is the following Latin inscription dating from the third century A.D. (14) "HVIVS HOSTIAE QVAE CADVNT HIC IMM (ol) ANTVR EXTA INTRA QUADRATA CONTRA CREMANTVR - SAN (gu)IS LAC(i)CVLIS (iuxta) SVPERFV(ndi)TVR" (i.e. "Here the slaughtered victims are consecrated to the Gods: their entrails are burnt in the square ponds and their blood is diffused along the surrounding small ponds").

The observation of stone slabs with characteristics similar to those described for the sanctuary of Panoias, is not uncommon in the Finalese. They have, at least for a time, had a similar function. The fact, moreover, that these probable "stone altars" are found on high places indicates, probably, the desire to choose an appropriate site of visual control of the land below, also in relation to the sacredness of the hills and mountain peaks, typical of Ligurian-Celtic populations (8), (24).

Holed and cup rocks may also been used as supports for the poles, in the foundations of huts. This would indicate a permanent human presence, for short and/or long periods.
The anthropization of this area in ancient times (for worship, sustenance, and protection from external aggression, looting, theft, especially of cattle), spanned over a much wider area than the only site discussed in this paper.

The zone, currently rich in vegetation, in fact, is located to a short distance from other structures of archaeological and archaeoastronomical significance such as the Dolmen of Monticello, the stone altar, the petroglyphs, the "Observatory" (with adjacent Casella) of Bric Pianarella, the Ciappi (of Ceci and Conche), the Marcello Dalbuono Complex, previously described (10), (29), (30), (31), (33), (34), (35), (36), (37), (38), (39). These sites may also have been used for the worship of the gods and/or the dead (22), (23) and this may be suggestive for human frequentation before the Iron Age (46).

The megalithic structures, such as menhirs and dolmens, are located, as already stated above, in a period between the end of the fifth millennium to the late third millennium BC, corresponding roughly to Neolithic and Bronze Age (44).

Dolmens and menhirs are therefore no strangers to the cultural sub alpine area, as was thought until a few decades ago.

It was believed, in fact, that the megalithic culture had been arrested in transalpine regions, without crossing the Alps. Only exception was Puglia, where the dolmens, menhirs and “specchie”, however, were attributed to the influence of people from the Balkan Peninsula across the Adriatic Sea. The work of S. Puglisi "La Civiltà Appenninica. Origine delle Comunità pastorali in Italia" (40) at the end of the '50s of the last century and the discovery in the '60s of the megalithic necropolis of Saint Martin de Corléans in Aosta, demonstrated the groundlessness of this thesis (15), (16), (17), (18), (19), (21).

Regarding Liguria, in the second half of the '80s two circular burial mounds have been identified in North of San Remo (near Imperia). One of these fences, studied with stratigraphic methods, by the local branch of the “Istituto Internazionale di Studi Liguri”, could be attributed to the final phase of the Bronze Age (1).

These studies demonstrated that megalithic culture in this region, presumably penetrated from the nearby Provence and the Po Valley. As a result, other artifacts found in Liguria, especially in the area of Finale Ligure (including the Menhir and Dolmen Verezzi), hitherto attributed, though with reservations, to the peasant recently civilization (21), have taken on a different meaning and scarcity of megalithic remains in Italy, differently from the transalpine regions (especially the north-western and islands), could be explained by the higher turnover of civilization over time, that would have radically changed the appearance of the area, resulting in the loss of many of these artifacts (10), (11), (12), (13).

Conclusions
The Bric Ercea turns out to be an archaeological complex that probably might hold additional findings. The petroglyphs and megaliths, demonstrates a broader human attendance, not only during the Neolithic, but also in the periods before and after the Neolithic same (Metal Age) up to a time very close to ours (2), (3), (4), (6), (7), (8), (9). The megaliths, moreover, can be considered as a marker of the links, as early as the Neolithic period, between the Mediterranean Sea, the North West of Italy and Transalpine Europe. In this perspective, Liguria and especially, the Finale (for its geological, palaeontological and palaeontological peculiarities), may represent crossroads
for these commercial and cultural exchanges, already well documented for later prehistoric and protohistoric ages.
The spread of the Impressed Ware Culture and Square-Mouthed Pottery Culture in Northern Europe and in the rest of Continental Europe, although with different methods of application, may demonstrate the active commercial and cultural exchange between the geographic-cultural areas examined in this work. For further validation, the discovery of the "Token" of Pian del Ciliegio (9), (16), (32), (44) shows cultural and commercial relations, since the Neolithic, with the Middle Eastern regions, such as Phoenicia and Mesopotamia.
Finalese is, therefore, a crucial area to fully understand the developments of the stages of human history and prehistory.

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