
The Archaeology of Early State in Italy: New Data and Acquisitions

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ABSTRACT

During the last five years, many new data have contributed to a better definition of the problem of State emergence in protohistoric Central and Northern Italy, especially in the fields of settlement, organization and ritual.

In the north-east of the Italian peninsula researches in Oppidano and Baldaria and recent excavations in Este and Padua are drastically changing our perception of the emergence of the cities in these regions. In terms of ritual data from Etruria, Latium and North-Eastern Italy support the idea that alongside cult activities performed by some male and female members of the élite, there is evidence of some peculiar deposition determined by an archaic corpus of laws.

The paper explores all these new perspectives and the most recent studies of the problem of ethnicity and the interpretation of primitive art objects. All the new data confirm and better define the picture already given in my preceding articles on this subject.

FOREWORD

At 2004 'Hierarchy and Power' congress I presented a paper (later published in *Social Evolution & History*) that intended to be a complete review of the archaeological record of early state formation in Central and Northern Italy (Guidi 2006). Many things changed from then: recent discoveries, researches and studies help us to consider the problem under a new light (some data already in Guidi 2008a).

Carefully examining the new data we see that the number of sites in which we can recognize protourban centres of the Early Iron Age has largely increased; besides, we now can add to the

three items treated in my previous paper (settlement, burials and religion) the evidence for other three fields of enquiry – art, law and ethnicity – crucial in the transition from protourban to urban phase.

Before going into details we must also remember that new and important adjustments were made also (notwithstanding a wide and rough debate) in the absolute chronology (for a diagram comparing Italy, European and Aegean sequences see Table 1): the beginning of the Iron Age is established, by many scholars, around the middle of the 10th century BC, while the boundary between Early Iron Age 1 and 2 can now be fixed in the second half of the 9th century BC (Bartoloni and Delpino 2005).

Table 1

Compared chronology between Italy, Central Europe and the Aegean

	ITALY	CENTRAL EUROPE	AEGEAN
1700	Middle Bronze Age 1	Bronzezeit B 1	Middle Helladic
			Late Helladic I
	Middle Bronze Age 2	Bronzezeit B 2	Late Helladic II
1350	Middle Bronze Age 3	Bronzezeit C	Late Helladic III A
	Recent Bronze Age	Bronzezeit D	Late Helladic III B
1200		Hallstatt A1	Late Helladic III C
	Final Bronze Age 1		Submycaenean
	Final Bronze Age 2	Hallstatt A2	
950	Final Bronze Age 3	Hallstatt B1	Protogeometric
850	Early Iron Age 1	Hallstatt B2/3	Early Geometric
			Middle Geometric
730	Early Iron Age 2	Hallstatt C1a	Late Geometric
625	Early Iron Age 3	Hallstatt C1b/2	
525	Early Iron Age 4	Hallstatt D	

Besides, as a proof of an ever growing interest in this debate, a very interesting article on simulation models for the emergence of the state in Etruria was published in late 2004 (Cecconi *et al.* 2004).

The authors studying a long period from 2200 to 730 *ca.* a.C. demonstrate the importance of a high defensive potential for the settlements of the Bronze and the Early Iron Age, especially in the transition to the protourban phase. Subdividing the southern Etruria territory in settlement cells (that with defended areas weighting more than the others) they simulate the gradual increase of percentage of defended sites (Fig. 1, black line), a figure astonishingly similar to that derived from real data (Fig. 1, grey line); also the major protourban centres' areas of influence designed with this method show that they are similar to the territories known from the written sources (Fig. 2).

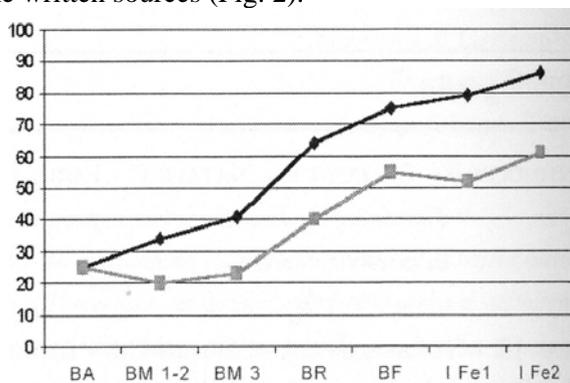


Fig. 1. Etruria: number of defended sites from the Early Bronze Age (BA) to the Early Iron Age (Fe). Black line = simulation; grey line = real data (from Cecconi *et al.* 2004)

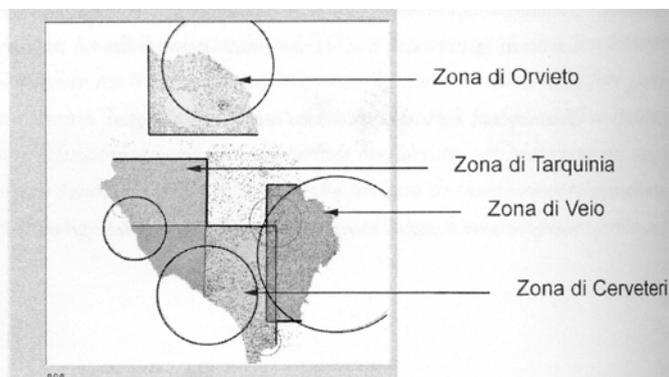


Fig. 2. Etruria: reconstruction, from simulation data, of single protourban centres territories data (from Cecconi *et al.* 2004)

SETTLEMENT

We know new data on the diffusion of Villanovan pottery on the Veii plateaux thanks to the recent revision of pottery found in the Ward-Perkins survey in the Sixties (di Gennaro, Schiappelli, and Amoroso 2004). A recent excavation at Campetti, always in Veii, brought to the light a sector of the earlier defence walls of the city, a rampart made by stones mixed with earth dated the first half of the 8th century BC (Boitani, Neri, and Biagi 2007–2008).

At the same time, the studies conducted by Phil Perkins at Doganella and recent surveys and excavations directed by Andrea Zifferero in Marsiliana D'Albegna (two sites located near Grosseto in the ancient territory of Vulci) demonstrated the existence of big 100 ha centres also in the early historical periods (Perkins and Walzer 1990; Camilli *et al.* 2006).

Thanks to Francesca Fulminante (Fulminante n.d.) we now have a careful reconstruction of the process that carried Rome to begin a big protourban centre in the Early Iron Age, a real synoecism between at least two big villages (Quirinal-Capitol and Velia-Palatine) that carried to a unified centre of more than 200 ha; moreover, the excavations by Andrea Carandini on the Palatine northern slopes allowed us to identify in the urban phase the first *Domus Regia* (the king's palace) (Carandini 2007) (Fig. 3).

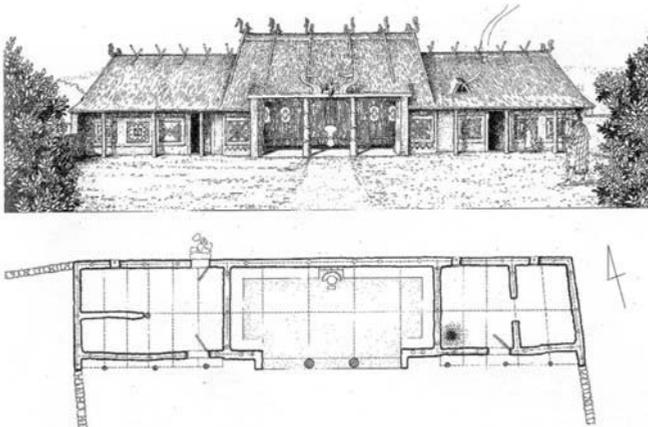


Fig. 3. Reconstruction of the plan (below) and layout of the *Domus Regia* (from Carandini 2007)

For the question of a ‘secondary’ diffusion of the urban model I have recently studied the area located immediately southeast of the ancient *Latium* (Fig. 4) characterized by big centres of 40–60 ha (the big dots) of the Early Iron Age: it is now possible to identify at least five smaller (20–30 ha) and later (the end of the 8th – the beginning of the 7th century) protourban centres (the little dots) coinciding with the cities of the literary tradition (Guidi 2007).

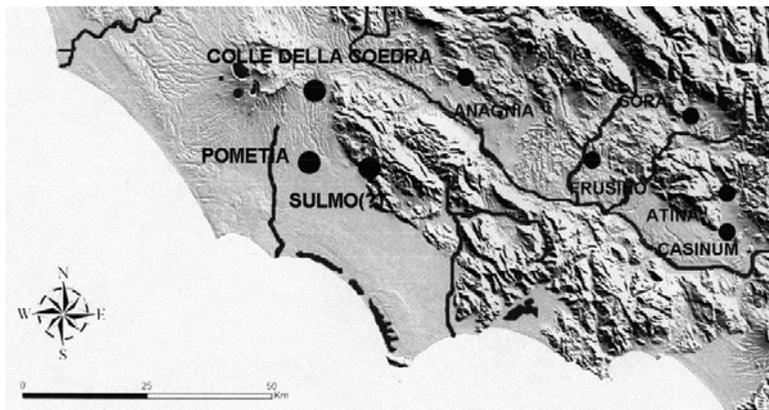


Fig. 4. Southern *Latium*. Big dots = earlier (the 9th–8th cent. BC) protourban sites. Little dots = later (the end of the 8th–7th cent. BC) protourban sites

In North-Eastern Italy where the size of some Final Bronze Age sites like Montagnana (it is not still clear if it is a really unitary centre) seems incredible (60 ha), my survey on the protourban site of Oppeano allowed to demonstrate how it was completely occupied (80 ha) already in the very beginning (Early Iron Age 1) of the Iron Age (Guidi 2008b).

It is possible to perceive a similar trend toward an earlier dating also for the major centres of Este and Padua.

In the first case thanks to the data of new emergency excavation we now know many other aspects of the internal structure including various levels of the city fortification and a road leading to a peer in correspondence with the river surrounding the settlement (Balista and Ruta Serafini 2008). A synthesis book published in 2005 on pre-Roman Padua was the occasion for a general reconsideration of all the data including a suggestive computer-graphic reconstruction of the city and its cemeteries (De Min *et al.* 2005).

Thanks to the surveys conducted in Baldaria (Fig. 5) in occasion of some emergency excavations it was also possible to reconstruct a 100 ha area for this 8th century protourban centre (Rossi 2005).

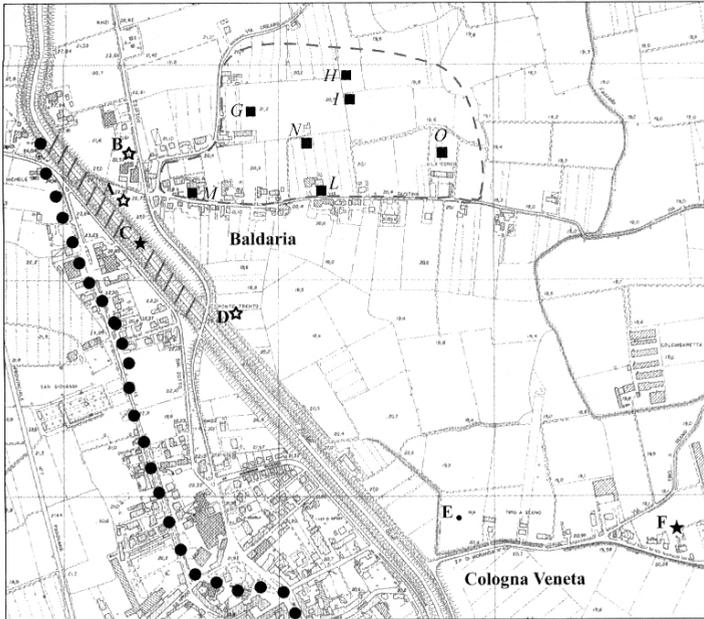


Fig. 5. Cologna Veneta: the hatched line represents the protourban site extension (from Rossi 2005)

The new data allow us to make some preliminary observations (see Guidi 2008a) on the change in settlement pattern between the protourban and the urban phase.

A first set of hypotheses can be proposed for the emergence and development of the protourban phase.

a) *Type of formation process.*

We can observe:

- progressive growth of the centre (Caere, Tarquinia, Bisen-tium, Latium Vetus, Como, Oppeano, Oderzo, Ancona?);
- displacement between Final Bronze Age 3 and Early Iron Age 1 from a little site to a big adjoining centre (*Veii*, Este);
- the incorporation of neighbouring sites in a big centre (Vulci, Castelletto Ticino, North-Eastern Italy);
- synoecism (Rome);

– colonization from another protourban centre or from more adjoining protourban centres (Campania, Verucchio, Bologna, Fermo?);

– consequence of Centre/Periphery relationships (Sabine, Friuli/Slovenia, Southern Latium).

b) *Beginning of the process.*

Three different periods seem to be interesting:

– Final Bronze Age 3 (Etruria, *Lavinium*, Este, Oppeano);

– Early Iron Age 1 and 2 (*Latium Vetus*, Castelletto Ticino, Oderzo, Treviso, Padua, Campania, Verucchio, Bologna, Fermo?);

– Early Iron Age 3 and 4 (Sabine, Southern Latium, Altino, Cologne Veneta, Concordia, Palse, Friuli/Slovenia, Como).

c) *Sites size range.*

– 80/150 ha (Etruria, Rome, Campania, Este, Padova, Fermo?, Oppeano, Altino, Como, Castelletto Ticino, Cologne Veneta, Bologna);

– 40/60 ha (*Latium Vetus*, Ancona, Verucchio, Oderzo, Concordia, Treviso);

– 20/30 ha (Sabine, Southern Latium, Friuli/Slovenia, Concordia).

Another set of hypotheses can be proposed (only in cases in which the archaeological evidence was well studied) also for the transition from the protourban to urban phase.

a) *Type of transformation.*

It is possible to observe three processes:

– Reorganization (*Veii*, Vulci, *Caere*, Campania, Sabine, Bologna, Verucchio, North-Eastern Italy);

– Growth/Expansion (Rome, Ardea, *Gabii*, *Visentium*);

– Contraction/Reduction (Tarquinia).

b) *Age of transformation.*

– the second half of the 8th century BC (Tyrrhenian Central Italy);

– the end of the 7th – the beginning of the 6th century BC (North-Eastern Italy).

BURIAL

It is now possible to reconsider (or criticize?) the idea of an egalitarian Villanovan society in the beginning of Early Iron Age 1.

The new data regard two classes of archaeological evidence:

1) The traditional graves; we can quote a rich warrior grave with a bronze cup from Tarquinia (Iaia 1999: 40–42) and the well-known rich female grave with Sardinian bronzes from Vulci, re-

cently dated (Moretti Sgubini *et al.* n.d.) to the first part of Early Iron Age 1.

Not less impressive are the recently published fragments of alabaster vases from a grave in Tarquinia (Babbi *et al.* 2004).

2) The second class of findings regards two exceptional graves in Veii settlement area.

Under the already mentioned 8th century walls, in Campetti, inside an E.I.A. 1 hut, Francesca Boitani found a grave pertaining to an adult (35–40 years) female; the hut was associated with a complex pottery kiln, a fact probably to interpret as a clear allusion to a social role of the woman, in the field of pottery production (Boitani, Neri, and Biagi 2007–2008).

Even more impressive is the grave excavated by Gilda Bartoloni in Piazza D'Armi, the acropolis of Veii.

Here in the centre of a hut a fossa containing the remains of a 25–30 year-old man, C14 dated at the beginning of E.I.A. 1, was surrounded by post-holes. The reconstruction proposed is that of a little hut-shaped 'funerary chapel' (Fig. 6) whose importance is confirmed by the superimposition of a later two rooms big hut. Gilda Bartoloni proposed the attribution of this grave to a member of the élite, perhaps the king of *Veii* Villanovan protourban centre (Bartoloni 2002–2003, 2007–2008).

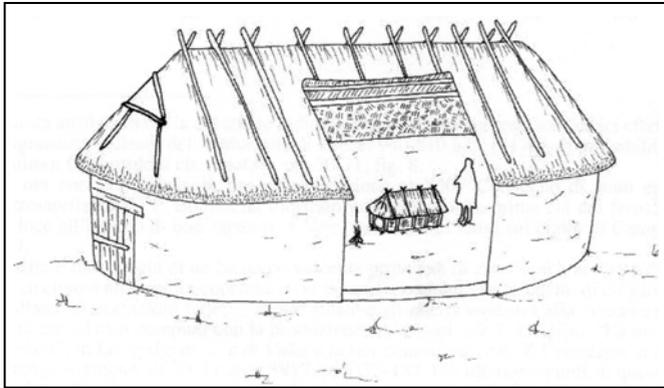


Fig. 6. Reconstruction of *Veii* male hut-burial (from Bartoloni 2007–2008)

RELIGION

In the field of archaic religion one of the main discoveries of the last years is the open air cult-site of the Final Bronze Age under

the well-known Diana sanctuary, in Nemi (Bruni 2009). The first protohistorical temples were huts of the second half of the 8th century BC (the period of transition to the urban phase), also these stagraphically covered by the archaic period temples: the latter were found in *Lanuvium* and in *Velitrae*, the present Velletri (Ghini and Infarinato 2009).

A precious work of reconstruction of the various phases of development of the Tarquinia sacred area was made by Maria Bonghi Jovino (2007–2008: 774–775; Fig. 3), while the Carandini's excavations in Rome gave the opportunity to locate the hut-shaped first temple of Vesta (second half of the 8th century BC) in the Forum (Carandini 2007) (Fig. 7).

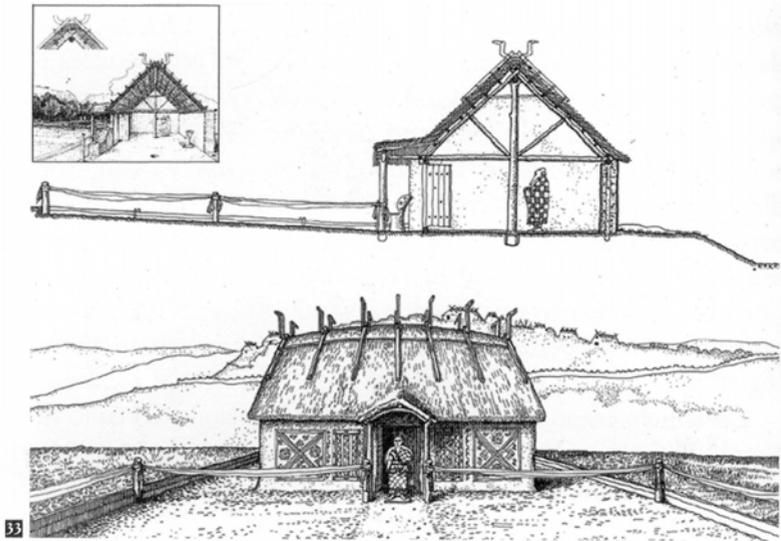


Fig. 7. Vesta temple: reconstruction (from Carandini 2007)

A recent publication by Andrea Babbi (2008) was the occasion to show many ‘ritual’ vases, whose presence in grave furnitures of Early Iron Age 1 clearly reveals a specific role of the deceased. New discoveries in the centre of Rome and in the countryside around the city allowed to fill the chronological ‘gap’ between Final Bronze Age 3 male burials with the miniature sacred shields (the *ancilia* of the Latin tradition) and the Veii warrior burial of the end of the 8th century with the same shields, in natural size, thanks to new grave furnitures with miniature shields dated to Early Iron Age 1 (De Santis 2009, n.d.).

I have recently paid my attention to the class of female rich graves of the 8th century BC curiously located in the Latial settlements where normally only children were buried (Guidi 2007–2008).

The first example is the grave of a 18 year-old woman found in Ardea under the temple of Colle della Noce together with the protohistorical huts (probably also hut-temples) with a very rich furniture. The second is an equally rich grave of a young woman from Caracupa under the polygonal walls of a hilltop settlement and near an archaic votive deposition. Here the decoration with schematized men and women is often recurrent on the vases. Even more impressive is the presence of a *kernos*, again with a handle in the shape of a schematized human figure comparable with the already seen Villanovan vases.

The literary sources about Rome and Alba tell us that in these centres only the Vestals (a sort of archaic priestesses devoted to the cult of Vesta) had, among others, the privilege to be buried inside the *pomerium*. For this reasons I think these are graves of Vestals, again typical of a period of transition to the urban phase with the definitive birth of a sort of State religion.

ART

Another crucial evidence of the early urban period is the appearance of an artistic production, generally with the aim to glorify the élites. The famous cult wagon from the rich female tomb of Bisenzio was defined, more than 10 years ago by Mario Torelli, as a sort of *incunabulum* of the early Etruscan aristocracy (Torelli 1997).

The crowd of bronze figurines seems to recall many concepts and moments of the aristocratic way of life, the house and the family, the war and the hunting activities. Recently Michele Cupitò has made an iconographic analysis of these figurines interpreting them on the ground of the opposition between domestic and wild animals as a metaphor of different economic activities or even of the subdivision of land around the city between agricultural areas and pastures, or even woodlands (Cupitò 2003, 2005). The same role in the Venetian territory in the 7th – 6th century BC can be attributed to the well-known *Situlenkunst* (art of the *situlae*).

Luca Zaghetto has studied the iconography of these bronze vessels proposing to break down single motifs and images as words

or phrases made by single words to build a sort of syntax arriving to detect a typology of representations using it to reinterpret famous art objects as *situlae* or bronze lids as complex scenes of the aristocratic way of life (Zaghetto 2002).

LAW

The reinterpretation of the old data and the new discoveries allowed to identify in the centre of Rome two examples of ritual killing and deposition of people. One is the case of the male, female and child graves in the area of *Equus Domitiani* in the Forum stratigraphically datable in the second half of the 8th century BC, the other three similar skeletons in the Carcer Mamertinus interpreted by Mario Torelli as a ritual of extermination (Filippi 2007–2008; Torelli 2007–2008).

True capital punishments are documented also in the late 8th century phase sacred area of Tarquinia where a serious anthropological analysis by Francesco Mallegni helps us to reconstruct the successive stages of the killing of a 30–35 year-old man while the careful examination of a 8 year-old child skeleton lacking the skull allows to understand that he was beheaded (Mallegni and Lippi 2007–2008).

In North-Eastern Italy in the 6th century BC we have an analogous evidence particularly in the case of the few inhumations documented in the graveyards: one of them is a grave from Gazzo with an individual buried prone (Salzani 2008: 55–56; Fig. 5). I found a similar evidence in Oppeano settlement area where a 35–40 year-old man was found in a similar prone position in the fillings of a big hollow (Guidi, Candelato, and Saracino n.d.).

It is clear that in all these cases we deal with capital punishments that suggest the existence of a corpus of laws, another typical characteristic of the mature early state.

ETHNICITY

More than 50 years ago Massimo Pallottino noted an almost perfect equivalence between the diffusion of the prehistorical cultures and the corresponding languages a fact that later allowed other scholars like Adriano La Regina to propose reconstructions of the territory pertaining to the different Italic *ethne* (La Regina 1970).

As a matter of fact, ethnicity is one of the main characteristics of complex societies and it is possible to see it very well in the archaeological record of protohistorical Italy as we can see also in the recent proposal of reconstruction of the territories of the *ethne* in the Abruzzi region by D'Ercole (Copersino and D'Ercole 2005) based on the data gathered in the Iron Age cemeteries (Fig. 8).

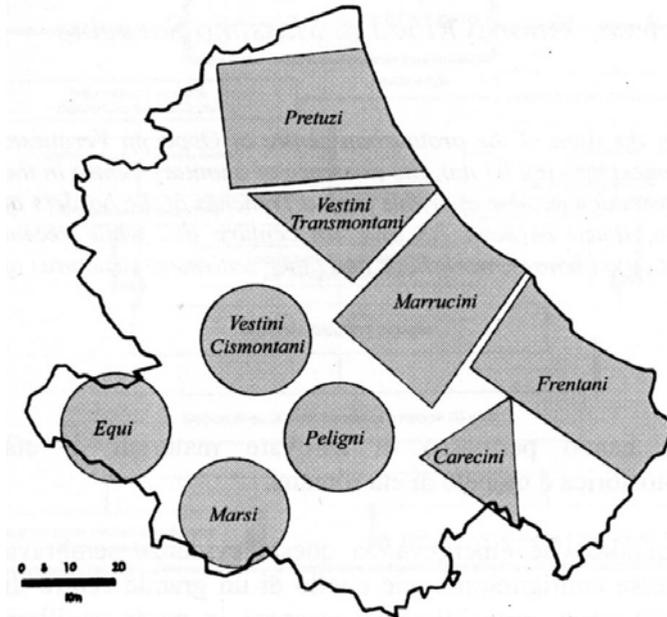


Fig. 8. Abruzzi: schematic reconstruction of ancient *ethne* territories (from Copersino and D'Ercole 2005)

Another example is the definition by Piercarlo Innico of the ceramic shapes typical of the Volscan culture whose diffusion in the 7th century not by chance coincides with the territories of the protourban centres in the area located immediately southeast of the ancient *Latium* (Innico 2006).

Ethnicity allows us to individuate in the Iron Age cemeteries groups of graves with allochthonous material, the archaeological correlate of real movements of people, as in the case of the diffusion of material pertaining to a human group coming from southern Italy in the Early Iron Age 1 phase of the Latial necropolis of Osteria dell'Osa (Bietti Sestieri and De Santis 2004).

CONCLUSION

It is time to think over an explanation for the birth of the State in our country finally divorced by the old idea of a diffusion of the new social organization from more advanced populations (Greeks? Phoenicians?). The archaeological evidence points toward a totally internal process that occurred between the end of the Bronze Age and the first two centuries of the Early Iron Age in many parts of Central and Northern Italy.

The task for the future will be the verification of this hypothesis through small or medium-scale territorial projects, the only possibility to see the process in its formative, mature and advanced/terminal phases. Only in this way the problem of relationships with other populations will deal with trying to individuate all the real influences that in many fields (specially the ideological one) these contacts brought to pre-roman Italy.

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