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The Urbanization of Northern Italy
Contextualizing Early Settlement Nucleation in the Po Valley

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Abstract

Recent excavations and theoretical advances have revealed evidence of an early and perhaps independent nucleation and centralization process in the region south of the Alps. This paper is an attempt to reassess the role of the Cisalpine regions as crossroads of trade and cultural transfer between the Mediterranean and Central Europe. Furthermore, a critical review of selected Late Bronze Age and Iron Age features from the Po Valley could contribute to the comprehension of various interdependent settlement agglomeration trajectories in pre-Roman European societies.

Keywords Northern Italy - Po Valley - Urbanization - Social complexity

Introduction

This paper sketches the process of centralization and settlement nucleation that took place in the Po Plain between the Late Bronze Age and the first half of the 1st millennium BC. The study assumes that societal change and settlement reorganization were ongoing in diverse Mediterranean and European regions during this period. However, although the picture of Central Europe has radically changed in the last two decades thanks to extensive research projects and game-changing interpretations (Sievers and Schönfelder 2012; Fernández-Götz and Krausse 2013; Brun and Chaume 2013; Fernández-Götz et al. 2014; Krausse et al. 2016; Stoddart 2017; Fernández-Götz 2018), and whilst urbanism has been a primary topic in Etruria and Latium (Pacciarelli 2001 and 2010; Guidi 2010; Riva 2011 and 2015; Leighton 2013; Fulminante 2014; Robinson 2014; Stoddart 2016; Attema et al. 2016), the role of Northern Italy has remained rather overshadowed (Pearce 1998; Piana Agostinetti 2012; Govi 2014; Smith 2017). This underrepresentation has multiple causes, too many to be listed here. One might mention only that local study traditions have remained fragmented between the boundaries of different disciplines and approaches, namely Protohistory, Etruscology and Classical Archaeology (Vanzetti 2002), and that the scarcity of published data and the limited

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scope of research projects have also played major roles. Nevertheless, the substantial influence of north Italian models on the emergence of complex settlements in Temperate Europe has already been hinted at (Ralston 2010; Collis 2016).

The first aim of this paper is thus to provide an updated and more dynamic picture of south Alpine population patterns based on the results of recent archaeological research. The focus is mainly on the alluvial Po Plain, while the cultures and settlements of the Alpine and Apennine regions are set aside or briefly mentioned. The chronological framework considered comprises the late stage of the Bronze Age and the first half of the Early Iron Age (around 1150 to 450 BC). Notwithstanding the considerable debate about Italian Iron Age chronologies – and the different positions held by scholars (Bartoloni and Delpino 2005) caused by the uneven quality of absolute dates and their evaluation (Pare 2008; David-Elbiali 2013), the presence of the 'Hallstatt plateau' in the radiocarbon curve, and a number of issues related to cross-dating and chrono-typological methods (de Marinis 2001; 2005; 2014) – in this paper I follow a conventional chronological scheme for Northern Italy (Fig. 1): Final Bronze Age between 1150 and 910 BC (the 'low' dating parallels the Hallstatt B2 / B3 transition in Central Europe, see Pare 2008); Early Iron Age between 910 and 600/575 BC; Middle Iron Age (or Archaic period) between 600/575 and 475/450 BC; Second, or Late, Iron Age between 475/450 BC and the later historical Roman conquest of Cisalpine Gaul (late 3rd / 2nd centuries BC).

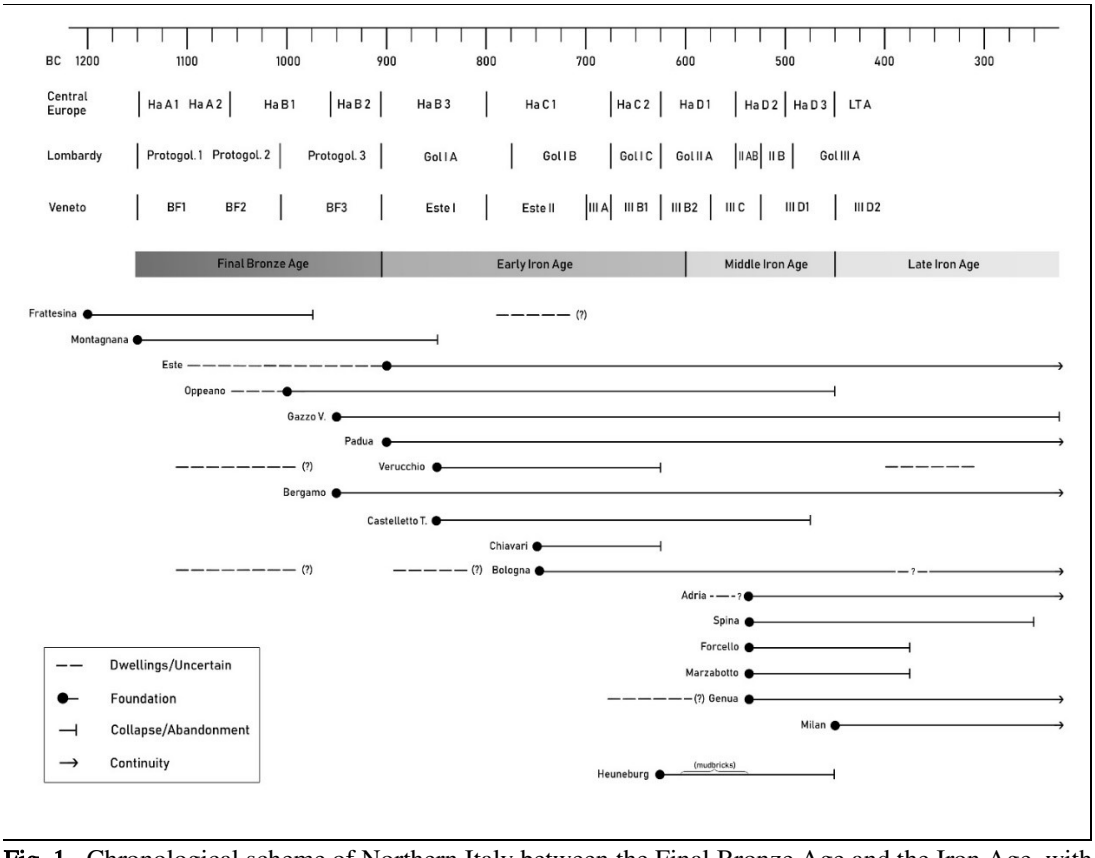

Fig. 1 Chronological scheme of Northern Italy between the Final Bronze Age and the Iron Age, with the approximate occupation periods of major sites mentioned in the text (author).

Reframing Urbanism

The title of this article should perhaps have ended with a question mark. Can we speak of 'urbanization' in Northern Italy before the Classical and Roman periods? This doubt prompts other conceptual questions: What is urbanism in archaeological terms? Is it still a useful heuristic category? How can we identify, without the support of written and epigraphical sources – as in the case of Bronze and Iron Age Northern Italy – a self-perceived sense of 'urban' lifestyle, if any? Are there more suitable alternatives for describing the aggregation and nucleation phenomena suggested for certain periods by the material evidence?

The first step is perhaps to move beyond a traditional, implicit, and 'common-sense' (Western) definition of urbanism, since, as Cowgill (2004) and M.E. Smith (2016) argue, no single criterion nor a rigid approach is sufficient for the definition of settlement agglomeration and centralization as seen in the archaeological record. Instead, a multiple, flexible, context-dependent and middle-range comparative definition of ancient cities and towns is needed (Smith 2016; Feinman 2018; Fernández-Götz 2018). In this paper I shall try to adopt a polythetic, i.e. varying and flexible, combination of archaeological attributes and socio-cultural traits that are visible in the record of Late Bronze and Early Iron Age Northern Italy, looking for local, independent processes of centralized agglomeration distinguishable from different population patterns (i.e. rural and hinterland settlement).

Following the comparative assumption that there exist multiple manifestations of urbanism around the world during different historical periods, with a variety of environmental and societal settings, the second crucial step is to free ourselves from the preconceptions inherent in the Classical and Near Eastern monothetic concept of urbanism, which for decades influenced a primitivist view of European history, including that of Northern Italy before the Roman conquest (Pearce in press). In other words, it seems ineffective to address at first issues of legal status, *census* and political representation, as emerge from Greek and Roman texts regarding different societal environments. More in general, without contemporary internal written sources, it seems difficult to identify an *emic* perception of what was believed to be part of a *civitas* (for example); likewise with Classical historical and archaeological study traditions mainly focused on the Greek-derived idea of *polis* (Ampolo 1988; Hall 2007; Osborne 2019; Riva in press).

In Italian Protohistoric study traditions, the primitivist, diffusionist, and linear-evolution perspectives have led to the use of awkward terms like 'proto-urban' (see also Smith 2016, p. 158; Moore 2017), which appears to be a definition based on vague criteria that seemed helpful only to justify the presence of centralized, complex sites before exposure to some external supposed influence (in our case, Greece, Etruria or Rome), or before reaching a completely 'urban' stage, whatever this means (Riva 2015, p. 440). 'Central place', on the other hand, is a general label that could refer to ''any kind of place with central functions for a supra-local community'' (Gerritsen and Roymans 2006, p. 255; see also Fernández-Götz 2018, p. 119): a term that looks too unspecific to explain the multifaceted nature of the archaeological evidence described below.

The much-debated category of 'state' itself, namely a regionally organized society ruled by ranked classes, with highly centralized and internally specialized government (Jennings and Earle 2016) that conducts coercive tax collection (Scott 1998), albeit adopted in previous

regional studies (Guidi 2008; 2010), appears rather inadequate since it derives from the colonial context (McIntosh 1995; Moore 2017). Moreover, the limited archaeological evidence regarding Bronze and Iron Age Northern Italy does not enable an understanding of the structure of any administrative governments or political institutions, or indeed the precise extension of ruled territories.

Finally, we must ask ourselves if too much emphasis has been put on urbanism itself in archaeological discourse; after all, more recently there has been a trend towards alternatives to urbanism (Gaydarska 2016; Moore 2017), exploring more nuanced categories such as nucleation, or population aggregation (Gyucha 2019; Riva in press). The main focus of a comparative approach is therefore on the variety and adaptive forms of settlement agglomerations, for which the traditional definition of urbanism is not well suited. There are many more possible interpretations of manifestations of 'urbanism', including 'mega-sites' (Gaydarska 2019), 'low-density' occupation (Fletcher 2012) and temporary meeting places (Moore 2017; Fernández-Götz 2018), along with small-scale and densely populated trading centres. Some examples of these alternative scenarios are described in the paragraphs below.

Although focusing on labels to describe the archaeological record is somewhat unavoidable, we should not however be obsessed by urbanism as a comprehensive and uni-directional heuristic category. It is far more important to describe and explain the various data available from a certain region, addressing multiple factors from a flexible perspective and avoiding socio-evolutionary classifications. In fact, too narrow a terminological debate on what can be called 'urban' or not might overshadow our understanding of the complexity of the societies studied (Moore 2017). Conversely, it is difficult to deny that urbanism still exercises a certain allure – which, if used consciously, could be useful to attract the attention of specialists and the wider public, re-emphasizing the significance of some overlooked sites or regions (see criticism in Moore 2017).

In what follows, I shall introduce a selection of cultural traits derived from the wider-ranging reappraisals of ancient urbanism (Marcus and Sabloff 2008), although remaining distant from a 'checklist approach', that is the search for a site's urban characteristics in relation to a supposed 'standard' model of the classical city, a method traditionally adopted in archaeological urbanism after Weber (1966 [1921]), Wirth (1938), Childe (1950), Braudel (1976), and Kolb (1984) (see also Jennings and Earle 2016; Moore 2017; Fernández-Götz 2018). A comparative framework (Smith 2012; Feinman 2018) seems instead more useful to unravel the massive changes that occurred in our case study, Po Valley societies between the end of the 2nd and first part of the 1st millennium BC.

In accordance with this premise, for a definition of pre-Roman Northern Italy settlement aggregations a selection of distinctive and unprecedented context-specific attributes is discussed under the following headings: 1) Trade and long-distance contact; 2) The presence of connective infrastructures; 3) Site scale and layout; 4) Enclosures and defences; 5) Public spaces; 6) Settlement planning and building technology; 7) Settlement hierarchy; 8) Population growth and social stratification.

The psychological and symbolic attractiveness of the centralized site, however perceived and (self)promoted, could also be assumed, although this is more difficult to demonstrate in pre-literate societies. The presence of ancestrally significant places, somehow exploited for communal cultural memory (Moore 2017), should also be considered with regard to settlement choice and further development.

Besides, it is worth remembering that 'all that glitters is not gold' and negative effects of urban living should also be taken into account (McMahon 2019). Cities and towns are indeed considered by social studies as vectors of overexploitation of natural resources, social inequality and social conflicts, crowding, poverty and disease (Algaze 2018; McMahon 2019).

Missing 'Urban' Attributes

Other categories derived from the traditional checklist approach and associated with the 'urban versus non-urban' debate, are underrepresented in our studied region. These missing features are mainly monumental architecture, including royal palaces and large temples, long-lasting stone buildings, and (textual) evidence of administrative bodies. This could of course depend on investigation strategies and archaeological visibility, but we cannot exclude that some of these traits were simply not relevant to the local societies (Smith 2016, p. 164) or not adaptable to the regional environment.

As already underlined, before the introduction of written history in the Greek and Roman periods, the discourse on legal status (citizenship) seems not easily accessible. As we shall see, in the study region there were not even mints or coinage before Roman influence and conquest, since the exchange model remained for centuries based on non-monetary mechanisms.

Another aspect hampers our understanding of centralized sites in Northern Italy. A specific condition of several towns in the Italian Peninsula is their long-term human habitation through the millennia, which often limits the use of geophysical methods and extensive excavation projects. With the few exceptions of sites without later occupation layers (such as Spina and Forcello amongst the case studies described in the following paragraphs), reconstructions are thus mainly based on preventive surveys and small trench excavations, often subject to urban-archaeology limitations.

The Environmental Setting: between the Alps and the Apennines

The Po Valley, the largest floodplain in Italy (more than 71k km^2, see Brandolini and Carrer 2020), is a typical river valley with abundant land and water resources, the kind of environment that worldwide is usually characterized by intensive resource exploitation, demographic growth and settlement aggregation (Carneiro 1970; Feinman 2018).

The region is situated between two major mountain ranges, the Alps and the Apennines, and crossed from west to east by a principal river, the Po, and by the River Adige in the north-eastern sector, together with several tributaries and secondary streams (Fig. 2). Lakes and perifluvial water basins are also preeminent features, as well as swamps and coastal lakes in the delta area (Ravazzi et al. 2013; Balista 2018). Adaptive strategies across the millennia have usually focused on river terraces and proximity to active waterways.

On one hand, this environment provides soil fertility and good connectivity based on river transport, but on the other hand it constitutes an unstable landscape, subject to floods, frequent overflowing and river diversions, especially during periods of worsening climate (Cremaschi et al. 2016). Consequently, great efforts have always been made in these regions regarding water management, hydraulic technology and drainage works (Ortalli 2010; Bellintani and Saracino 2015), including embankments, moats, ditches, canals and field channels. How these

conditions may have influenced the size and layout of Late Bronze and Iron Age settlements is outlined in the following paragraphs. In addition, the abundance of water represents an extremely favourable environment for archaeological research, accounting for the exceptional state of preservation of perishable materials including timber, wooden artefacts and textiles.

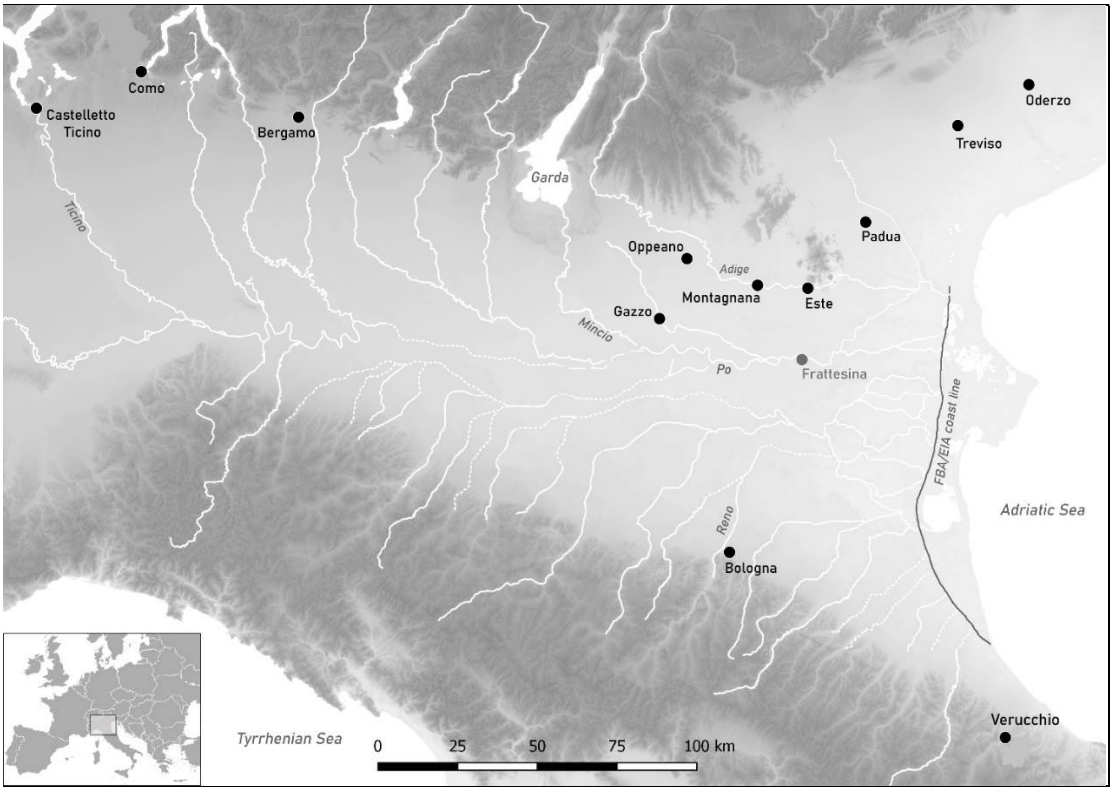

Fig. 2 Map of 9th and 8th centuries BC major sites mentioned in the text (author).

Trade and Long-Distance Contact

The first attribute explored regards production and trade, since the economic processes of production and redistribution are usually considered an important force leading to settlement nucleation and agglomeration. These activities have indeed been hallmarks of the Po Valley through the millennia, thanks to the availability of natural resources and its strategic position. The importance of interdependence and growing economic networks in the Po Valley in the Late Bronze and Iron Age is clearly shown by the archaeological evidence, together with certain specific trajectories and local developments, well-illustrated by a selection of comparable case-studies, the Late Bronze Age polities and the hub of Spina. What stands out is a general trend towards the formation of focal centres of economic and political networks, as well as a labour-intensive engineered landscape.

In the Middle and Recent Bronze Age periods (from around 1650 to 1150 BC) the *Terramare* Culture flourished in the central Po Valley. This society established long-term trade and connections with Central and Northern Europe, and the Mediterranean, with an economy based on the exchange of raw and semi-finished materials, including grain and

animal products, in addition to textiles and bronze weapons, utensils and ornaments (Kristiansen 2018). However, after a general crisis towards the end of the Recent Bronze Age (1200/1150 BC), the *Terramare* system collapsed (Cremaschi et al. 2006; Cremaschi 2009; Cardarelli 2009). A combination of factors has been invoked for the complete abandonment of the *Terramare* Culture, including demographic pressure, political instability and warfare, overexploitation of resources, and consecutive years of drought as triggering events (Cremaschi et al. 2006; Cardarelli 2009; Cremaschi et al. 2016; see also Kristiansen 2018 for a broader picture of international Bronze Age connections). Only in western Veneto, within the 'Valli Grandi Veronesi' polity and the central place of Fondo Paviani (Cupitò et al. 2015), was the Recent Bronze Age crisis somehow less severe.

During the following Final Bronze Age, the settlement of Frattesina some 50 km further south (Bietti Sestieri et al. 2015) managed an international trade in raw and semi-worked goods, such as amber, ivory, bronze, and glass (Bietti Sestieri et al. 2019). Frattesina was the focal centre of a settlement polity in the Polesine region, which comprised the nearby large settlement of Villamarzana (Salzani and Consonni 2005), and the craftworking site of Campestrin di Grignano Polesine, where a large-scale production of amber beads is attested during the 13th century BC, including the 'Tyrins type' beads which are also widespread in the Aegean and the Levant (Bellintani et al 2015; Pearce 2019). Frattesina is interpreted as the hub of an international exchange network, involving the northern Adriatic region, Central Europe and the Aegean world, with a trade based mainly on prestige and exotic goods, such as amber, elephant ivory, and glass (Cardarelli et al. 2015; Bietti Sestieri et al. 2019). Regarding glass production, in Frattesina there is evidence of a local workshop, including crucible fragments, glass ingots, and waste from the working of some 2,800 beads. According to element and isotope analysis, mixed-alkali glass (referred to as LMHK, low magnesia and high potassium oxide) was produced in Frattesina (Bellintani et al 2015; Pearce 2019). The isotopic origin of the copper has been recognized in Trentino – Alto Adige, one of the most important European Protohistoric mining districts (Bietti Sestieri et al. 2019).

Continuity in the flow of goods and long-term connectivity are attested through the early centuries of the 1st millennium BC. While there was a shift towards new centres of power and trading hubs, like Este and Padua in the Veneto, and Verucchio and Bologna in the south and south-eastern areas, no general crisis or depopulation affected Northern Italy in the following centuries, until the 5th century BC at least.

Conversely, in connection with the 'globalization' of Mediterranean trade (Sherratt 2016), the Po Valley experienced a trade explosion, with the opening of new markets and the strengthening of contacts and exchange with both the Mediterranean and Central Europe (Collis 1997; Sassatelli 2011). Especially after the mid-6th century BC, a detectable increase in the presence of Greek trade along the Adriatic is attested, and the local communities welcomed these new commercial opportunities by opening *emporia*, such as Adria and Spina.

The case of Spina, in particular, demonstrates the scale of international trade during the Middle Iron Age, as shown by the amount of imported Greek pottery (black and red figured, black glazed), oil and wine amphorae (Sacchetti 2012), as well as bronze, glass and amber artefacts (Zamboni 2016). Other exotic products include oil, unguents, perfumes, spices, and various wines that came from the Aegean, eastern Greece, and Egypt, as indicated by the presence of characteristic vessels and amphorae (Sacchetti 2012). Imported for centuries from

the Baltic regions into the northern Adriatic area, amber was worked or semi-worked and redistributed from Frattesina in the Final Bronze Age, from Verucchio during the 9th and 7th century BC, and finally from Spina after the mid-6th century BC.

Another detail explains, more than others, the level of cultural interaction in Spina: the arrival of the complete set of Greek cooking ware (*kados*, *chytra*, *kakkabe*, *lopas*, and mortarium), coexisting with the local wheel-turned and handmade coarse-ware *ollae* and pots, testifies to the ongoing process of cultural hybridization within the social space of the kitchen (Zamboni 2017b; Mistireki 2019). Trading routes towards other regions of Northern Italy and Central Europe are also traceable in the distribution of settlements and imported goods all across the Po Valley. Intermediary outposts were founded along the course of the River Po and its tributaries, like the *emporion* of Forcello di Bagnolo San Vito (see below).

Through the ages the plain has been a core agricultural area able to exchange an abundance of trade goods, including cereals, meat, salt, and craft materials. Exports consisted mainly of agricultural products, including cereals, especially wheat. Focusing again on Spina, thriving agricultural production and consumption has been revealed by palaeobotanical analysis, which has documented the presence of chard, lettuce, fennel, dill, carrot and parsnip (see Marchesini and Marvelli 2017) amongst the vegetables. The daily diet in Spina was also based on barley, bread wheat, spelt, millet, legumes, beans, peas, chickpeas, lentils, and aromatic plants such as rosemary, sage and mint. Dried and fresh fruit is attested (hazelnuts, walnuts, pine nuts, cherries, grapes, plums and even melon) and also the local cultivation of olives and vines (Marchesini and Marvelli 2017, p. 50). Moreover, the plain and the nearby woodlands provided reeds, skins, worked animal bone and meat, especially of pigs, along with fishing (Trentacoste 2016).

Another long-term activity along the Adriatic coast was the extraction of salt from seawater, fundamental in farming and the dairy industry, for food preservation and for tanning clothes (Harding 2013), and likely used as 'commodity-money' (Zamboni in press). Some ancient authors also mention a further aspect of Iron Age commerce, that is slavery – which, however, leaves few or nearly invisible archaeological traces.

Trading System and Standardization

Protohistoric transactions in the Po Valley were based on a specialized form of barter which involved standardized ponderal weighing systems and proto-currencies, with a substantial absence of coinage until the Late Iron Age (Zamboni in press). In this region, as well as north of the Alps, a long-term tradition of regularized barter, based on relatively accurate weighing systems, is attested from the Bronze Age (Ialongo 2018; Rahmstorf and Stratford 2019). After the *Terramare* era, when this system was developed, similar regular stone and lead weights were adopted by the Frattesina polity and other Final Bronze Age cultures.

During the Iron Age periods commodification of several non-countable goods and raw materials, including salt, grain, and meat, was made possible by adopting a similar system based on stone or metal weights and equal-arm balances, making use of different weight units and compatible multiples and fractions (Zamboni in press). The use of 'utensil-money', like silver and other valuable goods is also assumed (Vickers 2017), but more difficult to prove because of its low archaeological visibility. Moreover, the use of proto-currency is testified

by the presence in several sites of *aes rude*, including a special thin type known from the main *emporia* of the late 6th and 5th century BC (Spina, Adria, Oppeano and others), and *aes signatum*, starting from the 5th century BC. However, it remains unclear whether the *aes* tokens were employed only as objects of known weight (*per aes et libram*), or perhaps had a value assigned by some authorities (more details in Zamboni in press). Although in small quantities, actual coinage began to circulate in northern Italy only after the Gallic invasion and the beginning of the Roman conquest (Gorini 2017; Zamboni in press).

How to interpret this commodification tradition and standardization process in the Po Valley over the *longue durée*? The broader archaeological picture suggests that it is unlikely to have been due to some sort of superregional ruling authority or 'state' (see below), but more probably associated with the persistence of successful self-regulated trading networks based on customary commercial relationships, that fostered mutual interaction and the possibility of normalization and conversion between different commodification systems (Ialongo 2018; Zamboni in press).

Connections and Infrastructures

A large-scale exchange economy is made possible and promoted by an adequate network of natural and artificial infrastructure. Among the first, it has frequently been claimed that Northern Italy shows strong transalpine connections since prehistory (Barfield 1971; Pauli 1991; Pearce 1995; Deschamps et al. 2019), since the Alps do not seem to have been a major obstacle to ancient mobility, as might have been expected. To the south, conversely, the Apennine mountains, although of lower altitude, have been often described as less permeable, with few passes and straight crossings (Pearce 1995; for a different perspective see however Locatelli 2014; Santocchini Gerg 2015). Boats could dock both on the Adriatic shore (Rimini, Spina, San Basilio, Altino) and the Tyrrhenian side (Chiavari, Genoa, Savona). The main Iron Age lines of transport are assumed to have been the rivers and streams, navigable with small boats since prehistoric times (Pearce 1995; Bellintani and Saracino 2015), as no out-of-town paved or unpaved roads of pre-Classical date have been discovered. The waterways connected the Po Valley southward to the Apennines, and to the principal Alpine passes (Brenner, Stelvio, Splügen, St Gotthard, St Bernard amongst others) heading north (Fig. 2). Of course, terrestrial paths were also possible, albeit more difficult to identify (Pearce 1995). For example, cross-country pathways were in use along the Apennine foothills (becoming the *Via Aemilia* after the Roman conquest) or further north connecting Lake Garda, the Golasecca domain, and the Alpine passes (Cicolani and Huet 2019).

The presence of engineered connecting structures is somehow less visible. In the Iron Age some extra-urban paved routes are attested outside the major centralized sites, such as Bologna and Este, while fords and seaports are even more elusive. A major ford on the River Po is assumed to have existed near Brescello (province of Reggio Emilia, see Zamboni 2018b), and in the Golasecca district a river port at Sesto Calende (Via Marconi) is reported to have been active during the 5th century BC (de Marinis 2001). Furthermore, possible seaports on the northern Adriatic shores are Altino, already established between the 9th and 8th century BC (Tirelli 2011), and to the south – in possible connection with Adria – San Basilio di Ariano Polesine (Salzani and Vitali 2002), where preliminary excavations have yielded high quality Greek pottery, mainly dating to the 6th century BC (De Min 1988).

Site Scale and Layout

Analysis of settlement sizes, mainly determined by the identification of boundaries and defensive elements such as ramparts, moats, walls or canals, is common practice in archaeological urban studies. According to the traditional checklist approach, a 'town' should possess a large, dense population aggregated inside a nucleated and structured settlement.

However, the estimated size of urban settlements still remains a controversial point. The large scale of settlement areas has often assumed to be a self-evident indication of centralization and urbanism (e.g. Guidi 2008). Yet a polythetic interpretation model claims that settlement size and population size per se do not really matter, as "sizes of early urban agglomerations were far from uniform" across world cultures (Feinman 2018, 15). It should also be recognized that a site's maximum extension need not be merely determined by natural borders (hillsides, high ground or rivers), but estimates ought to be based instead on a careful and diachronic evaluation of landmarks, including defensive structures and lines of enclosure, suburban cemeteries, *extra moenia* cultic places and extra-urban roads (Gamba et al. 2008; Rondini and Zamboni 2020). Unfortunately, extensive and intensive "big data" projects, which combine high-resolution remote sensing and geophysical surveys, are not yet available in the study region.

A close look at selected case-studies from the Po Valley between the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age might however clarify the role of site scale and settlement layout seen through the lens of a context-based approach.

Bronze Age Agglomerations

In the Bronze Age the first known structured sites are related to the *Terramare* Culture. The *Terramare* were high-density square settlements, between 2 and 20 hectares in area, surrounded by ditches and ramparts, with houses built on piles and advanced water-management systems (Bernabò Brea et al. 1997; Mele et al. 2013).

In the last stage of the 2nd millennium BC, the leading settlement of Frattesina (which is only partially known) appears to have occupied an elliptical area of around 12 to 20 hectares, oriented east-west along the ancient course of the 'Po di Adria' (a northern branch that has now disappeared). Major features in Frattesina are the presence of a grid of perpendicular canals around a main central axis, probably a large canal, along with other drainage works that define the settlement area (Bietti Sestieri et al. 2019).

The Frattesina polity network was not isolated in the context of Final Bronze Age north-eastern Italy. Another relevant site is Montagnana, only 30 km north-west of Frattesina, where there was a settlement covering 14 hectares surrounded by wooden palisades in the mid-10th century BC. An overall size of 65 hectares was reached by Montagnana between the late 10th and 9th century BC (Bianchin Citton et al. 2015). Other early structured sites in eastern Veneto were Treviso and Oderzo (Capuis and Gambacurta 2015).

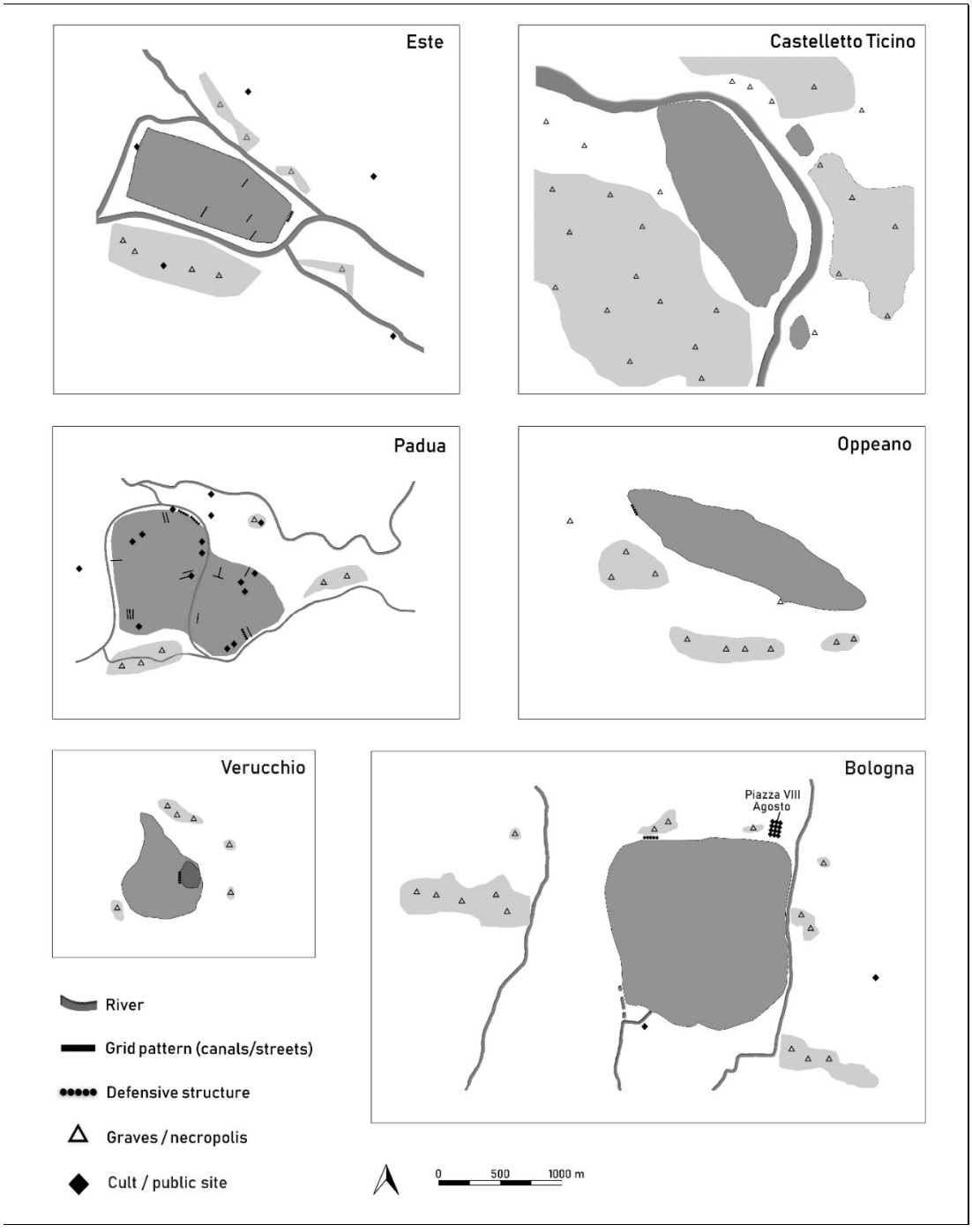

Fig. 3 Plans of selected Iron Age sites. Este, Castelletto Ticino, Padua, Oppeano, Verucchio and Bologna (author).

Early Iron Age Nucleation in North-eastern Italy

At the turn of the millennium a process of diffuse settlement nucleation was underway, mainly in the regions closer to the Alps. The rapid expansion of these habitations is attested, with dimensions ranging from medium size, around 25-80 hectares, to larger sites of up to 100 hectares (Capuis and Gambacurta 2015). The locations were selected on flat river terraces raised over the surrounding wetlands and woodlands, often at the confluence of two or more rivers. In Veneto, a series of endogenous factors may be envisaged for the process of early nucleation, including demographic growth and an increasing intensification of production, with episodes of continuity and settlement expansion from the preceding Final Bronze Age, but also the abandonment of previous sites, as in the case of Frattesina, and foundation of new centres.

The new town of Este became the focal point of the Veneto Iron Age culture. The settlement was founded after the abandonment of previous Final Bronze Age dwellings in the southern terrace of Borgo Canavero (Bianchin Citton 2015), possibly in connection with the decline of Montagnana, 16 km to the west. Already in its early stage, the nucleation process in Este led to a size of some 100 hectares (Fig. 3) (Capuis and Gambacurta 2015), with an engineered environment documented by drainage, wooden planking and platforms.

A second centre of remarkable size, Padua, was founded about 30 km north-east of Este, strategically located on the banks of the River Brenta (*Medoacus* in Latin), a waterway connecting the circum-Alpine region to the Venice lagoon. After Late Bronze Age dwellings, a large structured settlement was established before the end of the 9th century BC, with an overall area of 120 hectares in the 8th century BC (De Min et al. 2005).

Two other large, structured settlements were established in the western Veneto plain during the early Iron Age, sited on main routes towards the River Adige and Lake Garda: Oppeano and Gazzo Veronese. Inhabited since the Final Bronze Age, the ancient river terrace town of Oppeano reached in the early Iron Age an extension of 80 hectares (Fig. 3) (Candelato et al. 2015), with productive districts, storage facilities, and cultic places documented during recent excavations. The southern side of the settlement had been reinforced by a ditch and rampart (Balista 2004).

Gazzo Veronese is the westernmost site in the Veneto plain, at the confluence of the rivers Tartaro and Tione. The upper terrace of Coazze, of around 30 hectares, had been populated since the Final Bronze Age, and the whole settlement extended over an area of nearly 60 hectares, at least during the 6th century BC (Gonzato et al. 2015). In the easternmost part of northern Italy, in the present-day eastern Veneto and Friuli regions, the archaeological evidence points to a different occupation pattern, with a dense network of small or medium-size fortified settlements (or 'castellieri'), such as Concordia Sagittaria, Palse, Gradisca, and Pozzuolo, which however never reached the large dimensions and structural complexity of the western Veneto sites (Prosdocimi 2017; Borgna et al 2018).

The Western Margins: the Golasecca District

While in the western Veneto plain early settlement nucleation was already ongoing between the Final Bronze Age and the beginning of the 1st millennium BC, the north-western part of the Po Valley shows a somewhat different picture. The alluvial plain remained largely

untouched, and the major agglomerations were located in the Alpine foothills. Here, in the present-day eastern Lombardy, western Piedmont, and the Ticino region of southern Switzerland, after prior Final Bronze Age occupation (Protogolasecca period), the dominant Early Iron Age phenomenon was the Golasecca Culture, mainly defined on the basis of funerary evidence (de Marinis and Biaggio Simona 2000; de Marinis 2001; Lorre and Cicolani 2009).

An early settlement aggregation is located between the modern villages of Castelletto Ticino, Sesto Calende and Golasecca. The site was on the river terraces where the Ticino crosses Lake Maggiore, along one of the principal pathways towards Central Europe. A 9th century BC cemetery is known in Via del Maneggio, but a larger settlement was established nearby between the 8th and 7th centuries BC (Fig. 3). Although no enclosure has been yet identified, the estimated area is around 90 hectares (Gambari and Cerri 2011). The amount of imported goods from the cemeteries testifies to a wide range of connections, from Central Italy to the Hallstatt regions (Casini 2015; Cicolani and Huet 2019). In the Middle Iron Age, however, Castelletto declined and was abandoned in about 475 BC, probably after deterioration of the climate and local environment, and at the same time that a second Golasecca centre emerged at Como.

Como was established on the hill of Monte della Croce, at the southern tip of the south-west arm of Lake Como, overlooking a swamp where later the Roman town was founded. Although already populated in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age periods, Como flourished during the 6th and 5th centuries BC, reaching an extension of some 150 ha (Casini et al. 2001; Mordeglia and Uboldi 2017).

After the foundation of Genoa during the 6th century BC (Melli 2007), the preeminent pathway in the western part of Northern Italy become the north-south route connecting the Tyrrhenian Sea to the Alps along the rivers Polcevera, Scrivia and Ticino. In southern Piedmont, the productive site of Villa del Foro was active during the 6th and early 5th centuries BC (Venturino et al. 2017), but no other nucleated settlement is known to date. As suggested by M. Pearce (2007), in peripheral regions such as southern Piedmont, it is possible to see long-term analogies between the absence of Iron Age urbanism and the failure of late Roman and Medieval towns, on the basis of similar environmental instability and marginal geographical conditions. In the mid-western Po Plain, the picture changed only during the 5th century, when the centre of Milan, the region's capital in the centuries to follow, was established at the confluence of several waterways (Ceresa Mori 2015).

Low-density Early Urbanism in Northern Italy?

Given the remarkable estimated size reached by some of the major north Italian sites between the 11th and 8th centuries BC, like Villamarzana (65 hectares), Montagnana (65 hectares), Este (100 hectares), Padua (120 hectares), Castelletto Ticino (90 hectares), and Bologna (180 hectares, see below), one may wonder what kind of urbanism we are dealing with. Were these centres densely inhabited from the beginning, after considerable population growth and immigration? Or is it possible to hypothesize the presence of low-density agglomerations? Low-density urbanism is an alternative form to the 'classical' model, that assumes the existence of multiple agglomerations, or multi-polar centres, with a dispersed population.

From a comparative perspective, the primary role of low-density urban sites would have been for assemblies and public meetings, rather than for permanent habitation, as in the European examples of the *oppida* of Manching and Bibracte (Moore 2017; Fernández-Götz 2018), or further afield in Mesoamerica and Africa (Fletcher 2012). As far as north Italy is concerned, the identification of low-density agglomeration is limited by the scarcity of evidence regarding clearly defined open spaces for public meetings or assembly.

Palisades and Defences

Fortifications, in whatever form widespread amongst human settlements (ditches, ramparts, walls and other kind of enclosures), may be at the same time a highly visible and problematic proxy in archaeology. As recently argued (Reymann 2020), an emphasis on the category of 'fortified' settlements may lead in archaeology to a stereotypical classification of institutionalization and urbanism. The implicit assumption is that only an elite-guided or stratified society would to be able to organize the amount of work required for building massive fortifications (for alternative views on common labour see Feinman 2017).

Yet a look at the ethnoarchaeological evidence suggests a more cautious and polythetic approach, as there is no clear link between fortification and complex social systems. Consequently, fortifications alone may not be used as self-evident indicators of centralization and urbanism. As A. Reymann argues (2020, p. 12) "different social systems can construct similar fortifications, so that a fortification itself seems not to reveal what type of social system it was based on". In fact, a number of complex fortifications do exist among hunter-gatherers and in small-scale societies with low social and political complexity, as well as in diverse hierarchical pre-state societies.

From this perspective, fortifications are assumed to be mainly signifiers of (expected) forms of warfare, but also, as in the case of the Po Valley, attempts to prevent flooding and other natural calamities. The symbolic meaning of delimitation between 'in' and 'out' space should also be not underestimated (von Nicolai 2020).

On the other hand, during the Early Iron Age, unprecedented massive enclosure works appeared in Northern Italy together with further categories of settlement centralization, such as increases in production and trade, site size and hierarchy, and social complexity. A case study to test this hypothesis might be the site of Verucchio.

The Fortifications of Verucchio

Situated in the south-eastern sector of present-day Romagna, in the Apennine foothills and close to the Adriatic coast, Verucchio was a powerful centre in the 9th to 7th centuries BC (Zamboni and Rondini 2018; Zamboni 2018a). Due to its strategic location, Verucchio could control the mouth of the River Marecchia, at the end of a valley which rises to the south-west, towards the Tiber springs and inland Etruria (Naso et al. 2014).

Recent archaeological investigations carried out on the hilltop of Verucchio, in the Pian del Monte area, discovered a large north-south oriented earthen structure at least 70 metres long and 8 metres wide, composed of a ditch, two canals, and a timber palisade, documented for a maximum length of 11 m, with posts that were 80 cm wide and 60-70 cm deep on average, located at the bottom of a narrow ditch (Fig. 4.2) (Zamboni and Rondini 2018; 2020). Other features on the western side of the main structure, including a water well, minor

channels, and several pits, could have served for drainage, water management, and productive activities (Harari et al. 2017).

This moat and palisade system could be part of a larger enclosure that surrounded the south-eastern hilltop of Monte dei Gigli, already settled during the FBA (Bartolo 2018). The fills of the ditch, the canals, the palisade and the surrounding pits contained local handmade domestic pottery that can be dated to the early Villanovan period (late 9th – early 8th century BC), as confirmed by radiocarbon determinations (Rondini and Zamboni 2020). A relatively early date that suggests that Verucchio should no longer be considered a 'colony', founded by newcomers from mainland Etruria (Sassatelli 1996; Guidi 2008), but rather the result an endogenous agglomeration process.

Moreover, the disuse of the defensive structure suggests a reorganization process after the 9th century involving the entire hilltop of Verucchio (covering nearly 27 hectares, Fig. 3), with new cemeteries, mainly dating to the 8th and 7th centuries, established all around the rocky hillsides (Lippi, Le Pegge, Moroni). Verucchio was suddenly abandoned around the mid-late 7th century BC just after its heyday, when grave goods from the burial grounds indicate that a powerful and wealthy society was present (von Eles 2013). The reasons for this abrupt decline are still unclear, but either the collapse of the aristocratic society or external macro-economic and political changes could be envisaged.

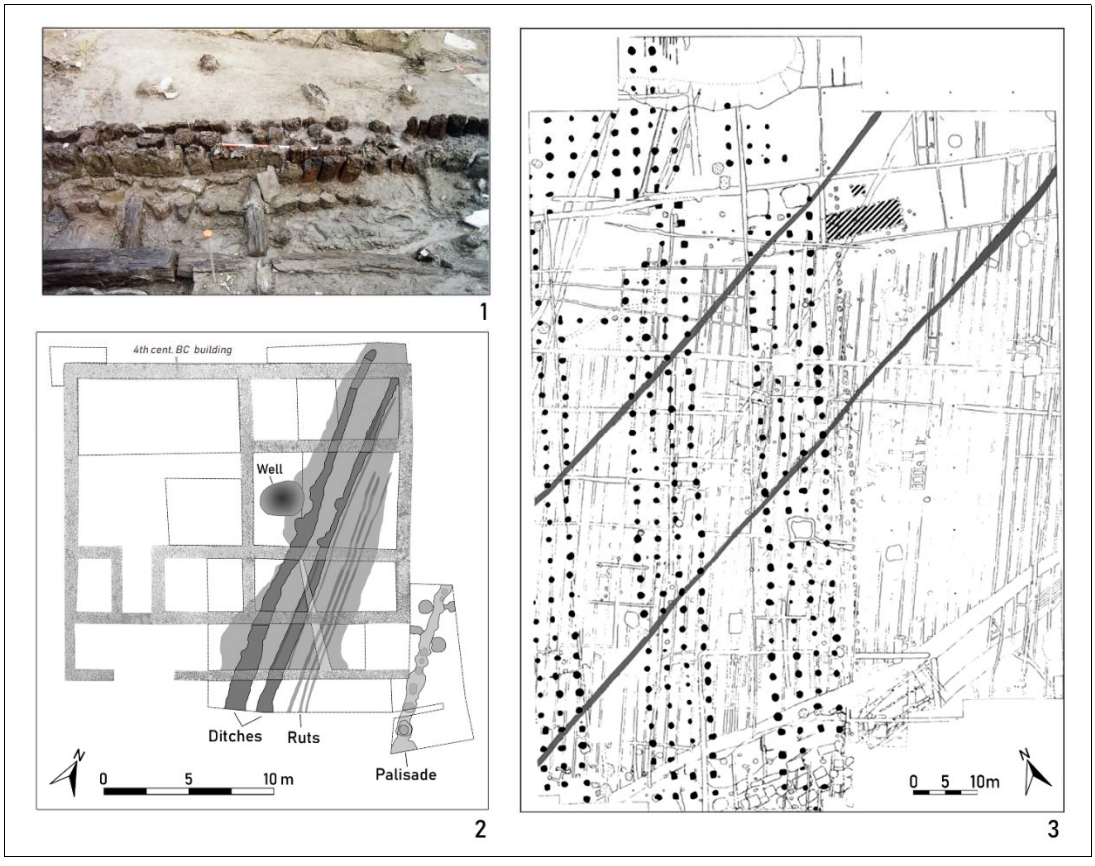

Fig. 4 1. Timber palisade and waterfront of Este (modified after Meadows et al. 2014); 2. Verucchio, late 9th century BC fortification structure (modified after Zamboni 2018a); 3. Bologna, Piazza VIII Agosto (modified after Ortalli 2013).

Other Early Iron Age Fortifications

Wooden enclosures and earthen fortifications are recurrent features in several nucleated centres of the Early Iron Age Po Valley – usually coupled with ditches and canals, because here a recurrent and urgent problem, besides warfare, was probably to prevent flooding. In Este, for example, there are structures for water management and wooden fences around the perimeter, including an oak timber waterfront of horizontal beams in the south-eastern sector, dated by dendrochronology to the end of the 9th century BC (Fig. 4.1; Meadows et al. 2014). In a similar manner, Padua was surrounded by a double wooden palisade, dated to 840 ± 130 BC (Balista and Rinaldi 2005; see also Rondini and Zamboni 2020).

A massive fortification has been discovered in Bologna, in the north-western sector of the site in Piazza Azzarita. Here a structure 40 metres wide (the total length is unknown due to the limited size of the excavation trenches) was composed of three parallel ditches in front of a series of aligned timber palisades, each one with at least three rows of large posts, reinforced with wooden planking. Its boundary role is confirmed by the presence of a cemetery just outside this construction (Ortalli 2018).

Public Spaces

The site of Bologna is also instructive for the presence of a different type of feature, otherwise extremely rare in Iron Age Northern Italy, that is open areas for communal meetings. Called *Felsina* in the Etruscan period, this major site prospered at the foot of the Apennines, controlling a large part of the fertile plain along the River Reno, a major natural route across the mountains to Tuscany. The ancient site is only partially known, due to its burial by deposits that have accumulated continually through the millennia, yet recent rescue excavations unearthed evidence that has been linked to an early and independent nucleation process (Ortalli 2013, 2018). These results suggest that Bologna was founded during the 8th century BC after the abandonment of at least three nearby 9th and mid-8th century BC villages (Malnati et al. 2010; Vanzini 2018; Ortalli 2018). The new site is at the foot of Villa Cassarini, a high ground with religious or representative role (Ortalli 2013; Santocchini Gerg 2015). A settlement size of at least 180 hectares in the early phases has been suggested (Ortalli 2010, 2013) (Fig. 3).

In the northernmost sector of Piazza VIII Agosto a massive structure about 50 metres wide (investigated for 100 metres in length) was recorded, composed of hundreds of large posts, with postholes more than one metre deep, aligned north-south in three rows, and spaced 10 metres apart (Fig. 4.2) (Ortalli 2013). This timber structure was dismantled during the 7th century BC, for reasons probably linked with a reorganization of the town's layout.

In this respect, Bologna might be an example of a “political city” (Smith 2016, p. 165), a large structured and nucleated settlement where public activities took place, involving populations from wider areas. These performances may also have been ‘theatrical’ ceremonies (in accordance with the classical definition of Geertz 1980). As already suggested by J. Ortalli (2013; 2018), an open area such as Piazza VIII Agosto could have hosted communal practices and/or rituals and processions, perhaps employing resources coming from the surrounding agrarian landscape (i.e. of ‘internal’ production), social activities that would have taken

collective forms (Feinman 2017). The contemporary iconographical representation of aggregation, civic ceremonies and performative collective meetings in Situla Art (Zaghetto 2017) might confirm the cultural importance of these practices in Bolognese as well as in Veneto societies.

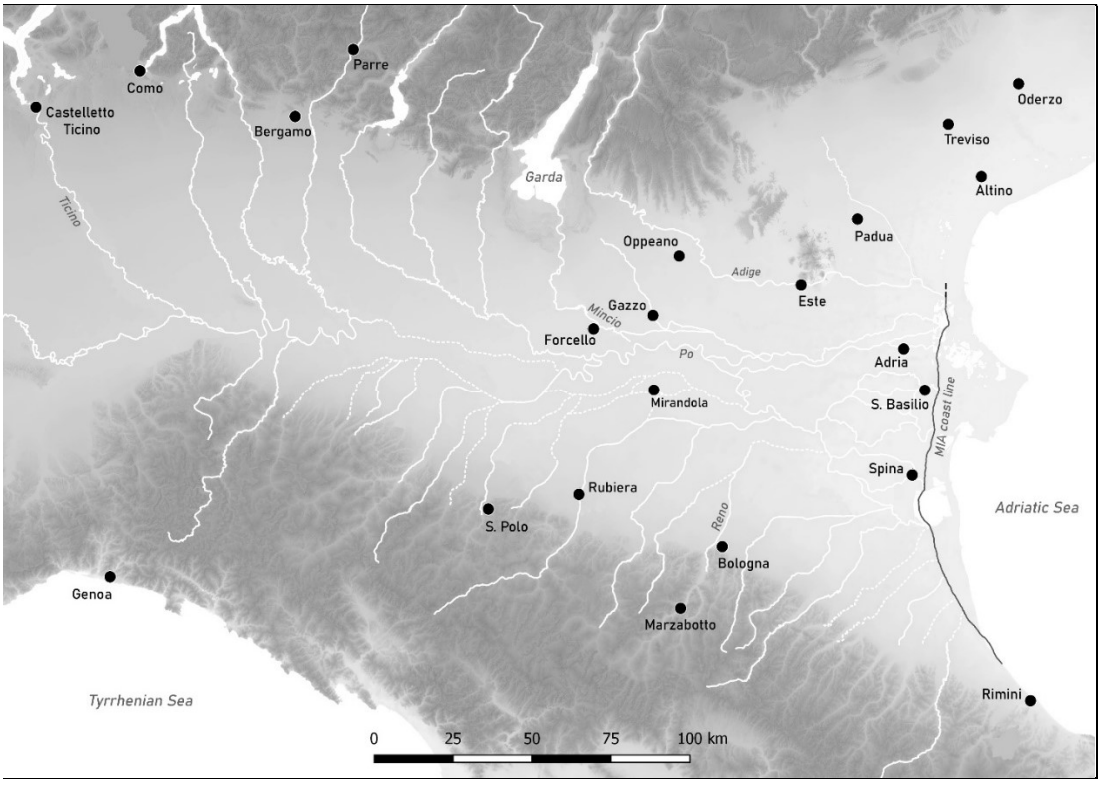

Fig. 5 Map of 6th century BC urban sites mentioned in the text (author).

Regular Plans

A nucleated site of the 'urban' type is often defined by the presence of regular planning and formal house-building, displaying a relatively high degree of technology and architectural solutions able to ensure their inhabitants live with a certain level of efficiency, and comfort (Braudel 1976; Smith 2007 and 2016).

In the Po Valley settlement plans are deeply influenced by the local environment, a palimpsest of water bodies and wetlands, rich in water resources and fertile soil, but also unstable and changeable. It is thus probable that structured and organized forms of settlement were perceived as more suitable, together with intensive land-management. A local and continuous tradition of regularized sites, with perpendicular grids composed of rectangular units, is attested since the Bronze Age *Terramare* Culture (Cardarelli 2018), with continuity through the Final Bronze Age, in sites such as Frattesina, Calcinato (near Brescia), and Treviso (Rondini and Zamboni 2020), and during the entire Iron Age period.

In general terms, a right-angled grid has usually the double aim of giving the settlement a regular form and keeping it cleaner and drier. On the other hand, as argued by J. C. Scott (1998), a geometrical and formal urban order is at the same time a powerful administrative tool and a means of social regulation, or even of coercive control.

In the Po Valley the perpendicular grid was first created with large or minor canals, instead of paved or unpaved streets. A regular plan of canals is attested in Frattesina during the Final Bronze Age, and these are widespread in most of the Iron Age sites.

What remains unclear, however, is the actual function of these canals. It is usually assumed that they were artificial waterways, for water management and conveyance. Yet we may wonder whether they were constantly full of water throughout the year, and if the larger ones were somehow navigable with small dugouts (as in Medieval and modern towns, such as Venice), or perhaps if there was a regulation system with locks of some sort: in this case, the canals could at times have been empty, or maintained with low water levels, and filled in case of necessity, such as flooding or high water, preventing overflow into houses and working areas.

In any case, the main settlement axis was usually oriented along the river, or the nearest water body, and enclosed by defensive structures such as wooden palisades and ditches. The cemeteries were usually placed on the opposite side of the river, for both functional and symbolic reasons (Pearce 2006). Sanctuaries and industrial activities, when known, were mainly located in the surroundings, around the site's perimeter. In a few cases, such as Padua, the settlement plan shows two or more divergent grids (Fig. 3), an indication of adaptation to particular environmental conditions and different water flows.

'Economic cities'

A regular grid of water canals is also attested, and better documented, in new trading hubs founded in the second half of the 6th century BC, namely Adria, Spina, and Forcello (Fig. 5), for which a settlement structure based on regular rectangular blocks originating from the canal grid is also evident. The function of these new towns was mainly that of *emporia* (Gailledrat et al. 2018), or 'economic cities' (Smith 2016, p. 165), a definition that includes nucleated settlements where the economic activity has a major role and a stronger influence on the growth of other cultural and political fields.

A first case study is Adria, situated in a wetland close to the ancient Adriatic coastline, along an old branch of the River Po (known as the 'Po di Adria') and active until the 6th century BC. Although a previous Middle and Recent Bronze Age settlement has been identified (Balista et al. 2015), there is no evidence of continuity into the Iron Age. The layout of Adria is still unclear, since most of the finds come from 19th century discoveries, and the town has been continuously inhabited until today. The location of the cemeteries, along with the scattered remains of the ancient town, point to an extension of nearly 12 hectares. The settlement was NE-SW oriented, along the ancient river course, and based on a grid of perpendicular canals. The site's foundation dates to around the second half of the 6th century BC (Bonomi and Gambacurta 2017). Excavations in the 1930s (Pubblico Giardino area, see Donati and Parrini 1999), and more recent trenches (Ex Riformati, see Bonomi and

Gambacurta 2017) have documented foundation drainage layers made of wooden planking and branches.

Besides Adria, Spina is thought to have been a major international hub in the north Adriatic between the late 6th and 4th century BC, a bridgehead of Greek interests towards Central Europe (Berti and Harari 2004; Zamboni 2016). Hidden for two thousand years under the mud of the Po lagoon, the first graves were discovered during land reclamation in 1922, with grave assemblages full of Greek pottery, bronze artefacts, small glass and amber objects, and wooden furniture. The waterlogged condition of the area is due to its position close to the Po Delta, inside a swamp reclaimed only during the 1950s, and because the archaeological features are c. 4 metres below current sea level (Zamboni 2017a). Spina was founded in around 540/530 BC, a few km north of a previous Iron Age settlement in the Mezzano Valley (Podere Alberi; it was excavated in the 1980s and is still poorly known, see Cattani and Boccuccia 2018). An ancient branch of the River Po (called 'Po di Spina') ran on the left side of the town. Across the river, on the sandbanks in front of the ancient seashore, are more than 4,000 graves that have yielded one of the richest collections of Greek vases ever found in situ. A wooden palisade, with six to eight rows of posts and a ditch (Buoite et al. in press) enclosed an area of around 6 hectares (Fig. 6.1). Spina's town plan is regular and NNE-SSW oriented, with a perpendicular grid of larger and smaller canals defining several rectangular blocks. Spina went into crisis during the mid-4th century BC; sling bullets and burnt layers probably linked to a military attack have been found (Buoite et al. in press). However, archaeological evidence suggests that Spina somehow survived that crisis, at least until the 3rd century BC (Reusser 2017), when the site was completely abandoned, except for later Roman rural *villae* in the surroundings.

A third *emporion*, Forcello di Bagnolo San Vito, could be interpreted as an intermediary outpost. The site of around 12 hectares was settled in about 540 BC on a low ridge along the River Mincio close to its confluence with the Po, a few kilometres south-east of the later town of Mantua (de Marinis and Rapi 2007; de Marinis 2010). Forcello was a harbour on the shore of a lake that has since disappeared (Ravazzi et al. 2013). Its bridgehead role for the trading of Mediterranean imports towards transalpine regions is attested by large quantities of Greek amphorae (Sacchetti 2012), glazed and figured Attic pottery, glass *aryballoi* and beads, silver and even coral jewellery, along with bronze fibulae of circum-Alpine origin (de Marinis and Rapi 2007; de Marinis 2014; de Marinis et al. 2017). Forcello was suddenly abandoned around 390 BC, at the time of the Gallic invasion of Italy.

Another interface area is about 16 kilometres north-east of Forcello, in Gazzo Veronese, at the western margins of the Venetic culture. The dynamic role of this site is highlighted by finds assemblages containing hybrid and culturally mixed elements, including anthropomorphic stone statues (Gamba and Gambacurta 2011), and a variant of red and black painted pottery (Saccoccio 2016, pp. 253-256).

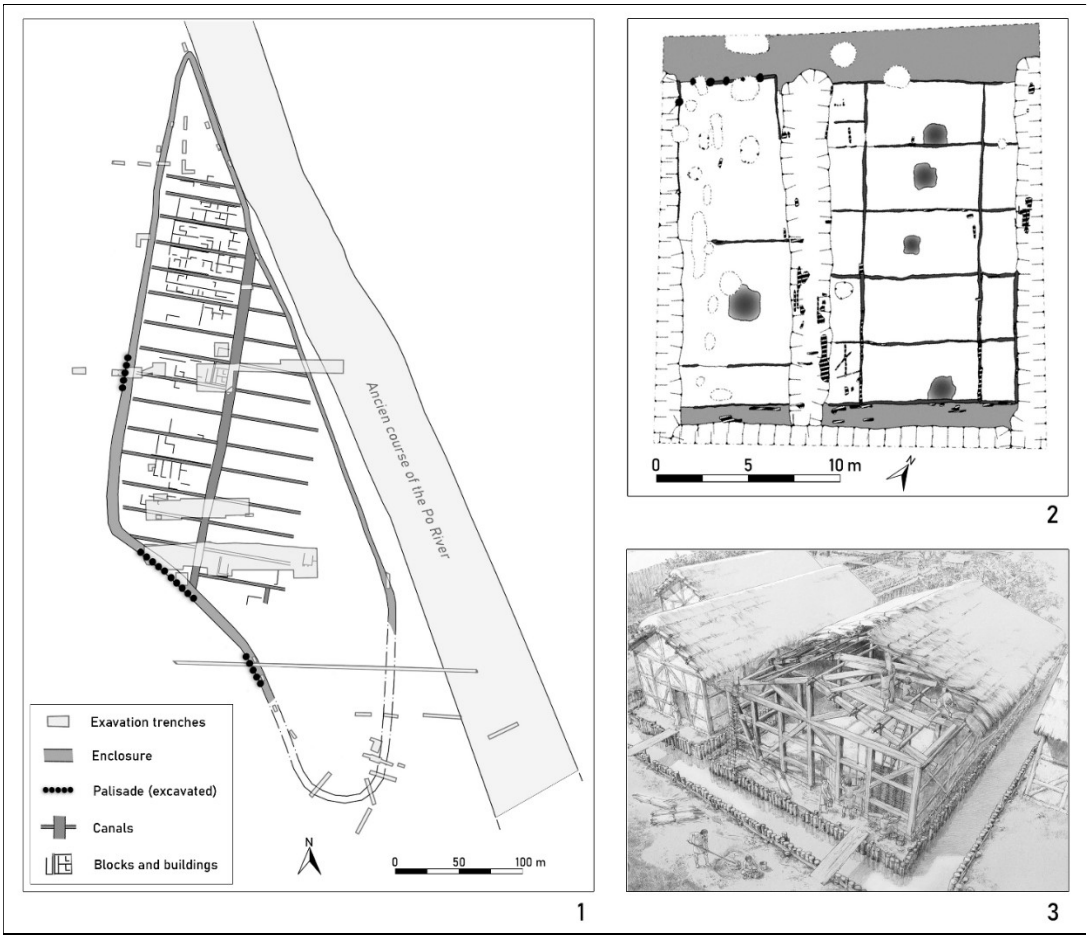

Fig. 6 1. Plan of the enclosed settlement of Spina (author); 2. Forcello, plan of a late 6th century BC building (modified after Quirino 2014); 3. Reconstruction of 5th century BC buildings in Spina (modified after Buoite and Zamboni 2017).

House Types

Regarding the built environment, another 'common-sense' equation in archaeology is between rectangular structures, urbanism, and increasing social complexity, assuming that the discovery of buildings with square or regular plans and multiple rooms is evidence of urbanization. Yet cross-cultural studies suggest the rejection of such a linear, socio-evolutionary view, in favour of a higher degree of complexity, with rectangular and square structures documented among non-urban societies (Ember 2014). Once again, only a context-based approach and the recurrence of significant cultural and social features could explain the significance of these findings.

In the Po Valley, rectangular buildings of different size and complexity are widespread from the Bronze Age *Terramare* Culture onwards, mainly built on wooden platforms and up to 60 square metres in area (Cardarelli 2018). In the Early Iron Age centralized settlements at Este and Padua, the houses were rectangular in plan, with foundation beams, clay floors and daub walls. A similar architectural tradition is attested in the 6th and 5th century BC *emporia*.

In Adria, for example, the buildings were rectangular, with horizontal timber foundations protected by covering clay slabs (also known in Spina), walls made of wattle and daub, or mudbricks (Bonomi and Gambacurta 2017).

In the earlier phases, the rectangular houses in Spina were also built on interlocking beams (Zamboni 2017a). The walls were made of wattle and daub, occasionally with mudbricks (Fig. 6.3), without clear evidence of tile roofs until the later phases (4th and early 3rd century BC), except for a few ridge tiles. In Spina and Adria is also common to find rows of posts reinforcing the surrounding canals and the buildings' perimeters.

It has been noticed that the rectangular houses of Adria, Spina, and Forcello were of regular dimensions, 17 metres in length by 10 metres wide, suggesting a possible standardized 'module' perhaps related to multiples of the 'Attic foot' of 29.6 cm (Quirino 2012 and 2014; Zamboni 2017a).

In the western region characterized by the Golasecca Culture, square houses with foundations cut into the rock and timber-framed walls are known in Como (Rondineto, Prestino, Pianvalle) and Castelletto Ticino, where regular buildings were made in the earlier periods, with timber foundations and mud walls.

Building Durability

The increasing adoption of stone and brick as building materials in the 'classical' cities suggests that durability may be a key element in defining urbanism as a major improvement in lifestyle conditions. This aesthetic and qualitative Western prejudice originated in Classical antiquity and increased during the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution (Braudel 1973; Merlo 1989). Yet, from a comparative perspective durability appears to be another unreliable criterion, since it depends on the variability of the local environment and the natural resources available, as well as on cultural choices and architectural energetics (Purcell 2005; Riva in press). The lifespan of wooden constructions is specifically affected by multiple aspects, including the type of wood, the time of felling, the use of scorching and the presence of clay daub, the position inside the structure, as well as specific soil, environmental and weather conditions: ethnological comparisons point to an average lifespan of earthfast wooden posts between 5 and 9 years, while oak and chestnut beams, in certain conditions, could last for 60 years or more (Črešnar 2007).

Several cases in the Po Valley, Spina above all, document the stratification of layers related to burning, collapse and flooding, with levelling and rebuilding recurring almost every generation (Reusser 2017; Zamboni 2017a). These episodes of instability could be explained by the background of ecological fragility that characterized the waterscapes of the Po Valley, requiring continuous effort in land reclamation and maintenance works.

Rural Sites and Hinterlands

Population aggregation in specific places is possible only in relation to a wider landscape, and a hierarchical relationship is usually assumed between the urban-like centres and rural or minor settlements. We have already stressed how soil fertility and the abundance of water and

other natural resources have been major features in the Po Valley's history over the centuries, making it one of the agricultural heartlands of southern Europe, since soil accumulation has been continuously favoured by the presence of the Po and its more than one hundred tributaries (Brandolini and Carrer 2020).

However, the dynamics and development of hinterlands during the Iron Age have been scarcely addressed and understood in Northern Italy, since excavation projects and regional studies have been primarily focused on major sites, with few comparative analyses and overviews. Town-hinterland relations, and the complex strategies beyond food supply and the extraction of other subsistence goods, for example timber, should be a focus of further research, as well as the social impact of towns on rural communities (Falconer 1994; Smith 2014; McMahon 2019; Cowley et al. 2019).

The available data indicate that the emergence of an early nucleation process in Northern Italy had a strong impact on the organization of the countryside, at least since the Bronze Age, but more visible after the opening of new trade paths during the second half of the 6th century BC (Quirino 2017) . Archaeological investigations have revealed early evidence of rural land reclamation and water management (Ortalli 2010), and the establishment of several clusters of farmsteads, hamlets, or villages, with small cemeteries nearby (Zamboni 2018b). More in detail, on the Emilia plain several examples of late 6th and 5th century BC small and medium rural sites are known, interpreted either as isolated farmsteads or small villages, including Baggiovara (Malnati 1988; Stoppani and Zamboni 2009; Losi 2011), San Claudio (Malnati, Losi 1990), Magreta (Cattani 1994), Fiorano Modenese (Locatelli 2006). The inland territory of Adria has also been investigated thanks to the excavation of the rural site of San Cassiano di Crespino (Harari and Paltineri 2010). The site of Forte Urbano, near Castelfranco Emilia (Malnati and Neri 2008; Buoite 2017), illustrates a different type of structured small village (c. 1 ha in area) during the 5th century BC. The built environment, with a defensive moat-and-ditch system, and a regular internal grid of water canals, recalls some of the features already described for the major centralized sites. The timber-framed houses and other buildings inside these rural sites usually have one or two rooms and thatched roofs supported by one or two rows of posts. The presence of courtyards and small granaries is also suggested, yet without clear evidence of wealth accumulation or social differentiation. Common features are also kilns for the supply of local pottery, and other small-scale production facilities (Stoppani and Zamboni 2009).

Given the generally low level of material culture and economic diversity (for example the scarcity of imported goods, including fine ware and amphorae), hinterlands in the Po Plain seem to confirm the traditional model of a power imbalance between town and village, with the rural agricultural communities supporting the consumer city (McMahon 2019, with alternatives). Yet our limited knowledge of hinterland areas could easily underestimate the scale of production and their socio-political role.

The presence of nonagricultural and noncontiguous hinterlands (McMahon 2019) can also be assumed, especially in marginal geographical areas, like the inner swamps of the Po Delta, the alluvial lowlands, or in other low-density interfaces.

Population Growth and Immigration

A common characteristic of urbanism, in whatever form, is that it is attractive to a certain number of people, who lived in nucleated sites in greater density (than in rural communities), thanks to the perception or promise of economic improvement and a better quality of life with more social connections. Paradoxically, there is also a higher mortality rate due to poverty, violence and disease (Agalze 2018).

In Northern Italy several large or high-density agglomerations show early and extremely rapid demographic growth and nucleation, as confirmed by thousands of graves per site, that can hardly be explained by natural population increase alone (see Feinman 2018, 21). Apart from massive colonization movements that may have sometimes occurred (Fernández-Götz 2019), it is likely that the majority of people were of local origin or immigrated from the neighbouring regions, because centralized settlements "absorbed immigrants and resources from a wide hinterland, and their diverse inhabitants engaged in mass production and long-distance trade" (McMahon 2019, 4).

With regard to the Bronze Age, an average of 125 inhabitants per village has been estimated for the *Terramare* society, with an overall estimated population of 150,000 individuals in the earlier periods (c. 1650-1450 BC) (Cardarelli 2018). The substantial population increase is explained both by internal growth and the progressive penetration of small groups coming from adjacent and more distant areas, reaching around a thousand people living on the larger sites, up to 20 hectares, in the later periods (14th and 13th century BC) (Cardarelli 2018). It has also been argued that the *Terramare* collapse was followed by a huge movement of people (Cardarelli 2009, 2018; Vanzetti 2013; Kristiansen 2018; Bettelli et al. 2018), and consequently the alluvial plain south of the Po river remained deserted for centuries after. Regarding human mobility and interaction, strontium and oxygen isotope analyses from the cemeteries of Frattesina and other Bronze Age sites in the Polesine area and the Emilia region (Cavazzuti et al. 2019), suggest movements of people within a territorial radius of 50 km. This result confirms the scenario of an internal process of stabilization for the cultures of the Late Bronze Age in north-eastern Italy, with people coming to the new trading hub of Frattesina mainly from local or neighbouring geographical areas.

A similar reconstruction for the Iron Age is hampered by a lack of studies addressing population provenance and estimation. Conversely, population increase during the nucleation and centralization process has traditionally been explained by Italian Etruscology by means of the highly problematic 'colonization' model (Della Fina 2008). This approach suffers from a text-based and 'culture-history' bias, entangled with an uncritical emphasis on ethnicity and ethnic identity, perceived as long-lasting and immutable cultural traits present in the archaeological record – regardless of the ongoing debate on mobility and interaction within postcolonial studies and theoretical archaeology (Dietler 2010; Bradley et al. 2006; Van Dommelen 2006 and 2012; Donnellan et al. 2016; Driessen 2018). This culture-historical ethnic narrative is (as usual) based on supposed 'invasions' and expansions: in our case study, this involves the undisputed dominion of the Etruscans, who came from the mainland south of the Apennines and built an imagined (*sensu* Anderson 1991) Etruscan 'empire' led by an aristocratic society (see also criticism in Smith 2017, 178-179). This approach fails however to explain the complexity and fluidity of the archaeological evidence, and an overall rejection

of this culture-historical paradigm is still much needed within Italian archaeology (Zamboni n.d.).

On the other hand, the rapid growth of many centralized sites in the Po Valley described above, even in cases of low-density population, cannot be entirely explained by internal processes, and it must be presumed that immigration played a significant role (Cardarelli 2018), although within a limited territorial range. Unfortunately, as no isotope results are currently available for this period, our understanding is limited to generic considerations based on population/depopulation patterns.

For Bologna, for example, a massive movement from neighbouring large villages that became depopulated during the first half of the 8th century BC has been suggested (Vanzini 2018; Ortalli 2018). In turn, however, these early Iron Age villages (namely Fiera, San Donato, and Savena – few excavation trenches in the Fiera area yielded alone more than 1.300 graves) must have been populated in their earliest phases by people coming from other regions, probably the Polesine or the Apennine areas, because the Emilia plain had remained completely deserted after the *Terramare* collapse around 1150 BC (Cardarelli 2018).

An analogous flow of people could also have occurred in Veneto, from the sites previously occupied during the Final Bronze Age, such as Frattesina, Villamarzana, and Montagnana and their hinterland, to the new large-scale settlements of Este, Padua and Oppeano (amongst others). The evidence for immigration to Verucchio is less clear, but may have been linked to the abandonment of the surrounding hilltop sites at the beginning of the 1st millennium BC (Rondini and Zamboni 2020).

For the new foundation of the 6th century BC *emporia* such as Spina or Forcello, we can presume the arrival of newcomers coming from different regions, mainly the Po Valley, but also other Adriatic and central Italian regions. In Spina there may also have been a minority of immigrants bearing Greek lifestyle and culture. This flow points to a multi-cultural environment that is also suggested by the heterogeneity of languages and dialects used in Spina for hundreds of nominal inscriptions (Zamboni 2016; D'Ercole 2018).

Social Authority and Stratification

Every form of aggregated site, included the centralized and hierarchical types, reflects the social context in which the site emerged (Moore 2017). However, if the traditional checklist approach sees the city as the trigger of increasingly complex socio-political mechanisms, including the division of labour and the development of specialized craftwork and local production, in more recent studies the appearance of complex settlements is rather perceived as the outcome of social transformations – to the development of which, nevertheless, urbanism in turn contributed (Moore 2017).

In Northern Italy, though, previous archaeological research has placed excessive emphasis on elites and high social ranks, as well as the exchange of prestige goods. Consequently, the traditional and still prevailing approach tends to overemphasize the role of a powerful 'aristocratic' ruling class, perceived mainly in the wealth and luxury of funerary assemblages. The elites, mainly considered in a social-evolutionist fashion, would thus have promoted and led the Final Bronze and Early Iron Age centralization process south of the Alps, exercising firm control over other economic and social activities (for example Malnati 2004; 2011).

A different scenario has been outlined only for earlier periods: the *Terramare* society of the Middle and Recent Bronze Age has been sometimes interpreted as more egalitarian, with a transmission of power mainly based on kinship. The sparse and homogeneous settlement pattern – hundreds of small structured villages surrounded by ditches and embankments – is incompatible with pronounced forms of hierarchization. Even the early adoption of the funerary practice of cremation, with the ashes placed inside a coarse-ware urn together with ornaments and other grave goods (Cardarelli 20014), concerned a large part of the population, without marked signs of social differentiation. Moreover, a comparative approach indicates that an economy based on internal agricultural resources, involved in intensive exploitation and massive landscape modifications, like in the Bronze Age Po Valley, could easily develop collective forms of cooperation (Jennings and Earle 2016; Feinman 2017). This scenario is not in contrast with the suggested presence of certain settlements highly specialized in the mass production of goods, especially textiles (Sabatini et al. 2018; Cardarelli 2018).

During the last stage of the Bronze Age, the formation of larger polities of villages, able to manage larger scale infrastructures and land engineering, has been supposed (Cupitò et al. 2015; Cardarelli 2018). Yet the social structure likely remained kinship based, since the presence of some distinctive grave goods, such as a few bronze weapons in male burials, and metal hoards (Cardarelli 2018), does not seem sufficient to identify an ongoing process of hierarchization of society and the formation of elite groups (for a parallel, see Kienlin and Stöllner 2009).

However, the passage from more inclusive Bronze Age communities based on kinship, to highly hierarchical societies dominated by high-rank elites in the Early Iron Age, is widely agreed upon (Cardarelli 2018).

A closer look at the case of Verucchio, although based mainly on funerary data, seems to confirm this picture. While the scarce 9th century BC grave assemblages display few signs of social or gender differentiation, during the 8th century BC the hierarchization process of Verucchio society, as reflected by funerary ritual, grew rapidly (von Eles and Bandelli 2017). A minority of tomb structures became more complex, with a deep chamber cut into the bedrock, sometimes containing multiple depositions, with timber planks separating upper and lower levels, and an undecorated gravestone as a marker. Moreover, the concentration of plenty of weapons, metal horse-harness and chariot components, wooden furniture, banqueting vessels and jewellery gives a vivid image of a highly self-conscious elite class that displayed their power and wealth through the exhibition of kin bonds and aristocratic ideals during the funeral (Negrini 2018). The Verucchio elite was perhaps ruled by few high-ranking individuals (such as the so-called 'prince' of the famous grave Lippi 89, buried with a wooden throne and symbols of power) belonging to restricted family groups, faithfully attached to their traditions and ceremonies, with an emphasis on warfare and competition.

On the other hand, this 'aristocratic' model is not as self-explanatory as it seems at first glance, and cannot be uncritically applied to other sites and contexts. In fact the high-rank elite model is based on a disproportionate attention to funerary matters, and an exaggerated (almost obsessive) focus on opulent graves and symbols of power (Schumann and van der Vaart-Verschoof 2017; see criticisms in Kienlin and Zimmermann 2012). In the traditional approach "emphasis was situated too heavily on the strategies of elites" (Feinman 2018, p. 18).

A different perspective based on comparative analogies and social studies indicates that marked differences in wealth, especially if limited to the realm of funerary rites, are not automatically correlated with a higher degree of political complexity (Feinman 2017). The agency behind societal change, including the development of complex and structured economies and nucleated settlements, "has never been limited to the realm of the elite" (Feinman 2018, p. 16).

On the contrary, for centuries in the Protohistoric era the Po Valley's wealth was based on internal agrarian resources, a precondition that could promote collective forms of governance. It is also possible (no matter that this may be perceived as counter-intuitive due to our Western preconceptions) that increasing settlements numbers are due to "reverse dominance hierarchy" mechanisms, namely reactions of egalitarian groups preventing the emergence of potential leaders, limiting domination (Jennings and Earle 2016).

If, though, a society depends more on external resources (as in the case of Verucchio, situated at the margin of the fertile plain, on a hilltop dominating Apennine pathways), more vertical, despotic and autocratic forms of power are to be expected (Blanton and Fargher 2011; Feinman 2017; 2018). This is because its economy will be tied to external networks, built and managed by the elites, and exotic goods (metals or other material of 'intrinsic' value, like amber for Verucchio) are key elements of exchange and high-status maintenance.

Therefore, if we look at evidence other than grave goods, we see that in the Final Bronze Age and Early Iron Age Po Valley there is no clear evidence of elaborate 'private' architecture, such as monumental residences or palaces, or monumental *tumuli*, which are elsewhere indicators of family wealth concentration and despotic central authority (Feinman 2017; on *tumuli* see also Naso 2011).

Conversely, we have described how during the settlement nucleation process in Northern Italy there was rather widespread resource investment in community features and constructions, including enclosures, water management, gridded streets, and (although rarely) public areas, that could "potentially enhance the well-being or standard of living of subalterns as well as elite" (Feinman 2017, p. 466).

Commoners, Artisans, and Merchants

Although the role of the upper classes as agents of social change is not to be underestimated, especially during the Early Iron Age and Orientalizing period (Burgio et al. 2010; von Eles 2013; Malnati and Gamba 2003), a more nuanced picture could be outlined regarding different forms of cooperative social entities (Ortalli 2013).

It is perhaps worth remembering that most of the population aggregated in the new centralized settlements would always have been composed of commoners and workers: "those who came together to form the first cities were largely farmers, herders, and fisher folk" (Jennings and Earle 2016, p. 475). And when more heterarchical, rural societies move to more centralized social forms and agglomerations, they usually retain 'rural' settlement forms and social units, which are the basic households (Jennings and Earle 2016; Moore 2017).

Moreover, the social interaction patterns between artisans and their clients, whether elites or commoners, have not been adequately addressed until recently, as well as the role of materiality and manufacture in shaping social relations (Brysbaert and Gorgues 2017; more generally, see Ingold 2013). Although some Bronze and Iron Age working tools have been classified (Iaia 2014), the role of craftwork and craftspeople in the formation of aggregated

and nucleated settlements has been regularly overshadowed by the aristocrats' (supposed) preeminence.

For a reassessment of merchants and middle-class groups, especially during the trade explosion of the 6th and 5th centuries BC, Spina is once more a useful case study. The site was mainly a commercial centre, ruled by a wealthy merchant class, whose inhabitants come from various places of origin and lived there in a multicultural environment, as outlined above. Both the settlement layout and the grave assemblages point to an equalitarian redistribution of wealth, with a substantial absence of high rank or outstanding features (such as palaces, buildings of larger size or higher artistic level, or monumental tombs), and emphasis is more on portable wealth (jewellery, metal furniture and imported figured pottery), rather than on monumental constructions.

The bourgeois and cooperative character of Spina's society is confirmed by the absence of family names, as documented by hundreds of graffiti on potsherds, which bear only single names of Etruscan, Greek or other origin (Zamboni 2016; see also Scott 1998, for the coercive state's imposition of family names). Moreover – if we accept the provocative thesis of M. Vickers (2017), that within the Classical economy pottery was more like a by-product, a surplus that served as a space-filler in large ship cargoes, "distinguished-looking, but comparatively cheap ceramic surrogates of the Attic silver vessels with which real trade was conducted" (Vickers 2017, p. 123) – then the abundance of Greek figured vases among the grave goods at Spina should not be seen as a sign of hierarchy and high-rank wealth, but instead of widespread, horizontally distributed well-being within an entrepreneurial society.

Non-elites and Marginality

Another context for outlining the presence of multicultural non-elites and their relationship with the hinterland areas is the alluvial plain west of Bologna. Here 6th century BC funerary evidence reveals the presence of a rural community settled in a boundary region between the Golasecca Culture to the north-west, the Veneto region to the north-east, and the Etruscan towns to the east, without any sign of settlement nucleation (Zamboni 2018b). In the small bi-ritual cemeteries in this area, typical grave goods assemblages, mainly of female type, show several influences coming from the surrounding northern and Alpine cultures (including specific types of bronze pendants, fibulae and ornaments, bronze belt-plates and toiletry items). On the other hand, no visible evidence of power or warfare is attested, whether prestige goods, luxury items, or weapons. Funerary practices in 6th century BC western Emilia were abnormal also because pottery is completely missing from the grave goods assemblages, suggesting the exclusion – perhaps prohibition – of the social performance of drinking from afterlife beliefs. Overall, the non-urbanized and divergent community of the western Emilian Po Plain looks like a non-elite society established in a frontier region during a formative stage with a lack of hierarchy markers and a low level of social differentiation (Zamboni 2018b).

One last aspect regards subaltern groups, which have long been ignored by archaeological research in the regions addressed. A recent reappraisal has however highlighted the presence of less visible social groups, such as slaves and other marginalized persons (Saracino et al. 2017). In the selected cases, the contextual association of unusual traits, such as burial displacement, signs of disease, malnutrition or violence and heavy work markers, supports the scenario of pronounced social inequality, especially in Iron Age Veneto and, to a lesser

extent, in Bologna and the Alpine regions (Perego et al. 2015). A direct connection between the centralized form of settlements and evidence of social inequality, poverty and disease, as outlined for other regions and periods (Algaze 2018), could be a matter of further analysis.

Conclusion

The first aim of this paper is to highlight to what extent ongoing archaeological projects and theoretical advances could undermine the primitivist perception of an underdeveloped protohistoric Europe (Collis 2016), prone to the idealistic prejudice that cultural innovations could have flourished only after contacts with supposedly 'advanced' civilizations (as far as the Italian Peninsula is concerned, the Greek arrival in Campania during the 8th century BC, or the supposed Etruscan conquest of Northern Italy). The regions between the Alps and Apennines are deeply involved in this paradigm shift (Pearce 1998), since no external 'colonization' or 'civilization' is needed to explain the early and endogenous population growth and development of society and settlement patterns there (Cardarelli 2018).

Northern Italy must have also played an intermediary role in the broadest scenario of South-Central Europe, because the region shows a remarkable precocity in settlement agglomeration and site nucleation. The process started not later than the mid-2nd millennium BC with the *Terramare* in the middle Po Valley, with trajectories of both discontinuity and continuity seen in Late Bronze Age polities. It is assumed that these local Bronze Age cultures, already involved in international trade and with wide-ranging connections, provided a crucial background for later population developments. In fact, during the 1st millennium BC, if compared to the picture outlined for northern Alpine regions (Buchsenschutz 2015; Stoddart 2017; Fernández-Götz 2018), a centralization process appears earlier in Northern Italy, at least in the 9th and 8th centuries BC (as seen in the case-studies of Este, Padova, Oppeano, Bologna, Verucchio, Castelletto Ticino, amongst others), in close parallel with the regions south of the Apennines, i.e. Etruria and Latium (Guidi 2008; 2010; Pacciarelli 2016).

This early development could be explained by a set of pre-existing models, traditions and technical skills, including timber architecture and water management, that could have pushed and facilitated south of the Alps the planning and shaping of complex agglomerated sites. This model does not exclude, of course, cultural interaction and close contacts with Central Italy and the Mediterranean, especially after the 7th and 6th century BC, but avoids preconceptions about one-way dependency relations.

On the other hand, while some of centralized centres in Northern Italy survived and flourished, other sites declined or even disappeared between the 7th and 6th century BC, offering examples of 'eventful', 'éphémère', or 'fragile' urbanism, as outlined for the regions north of the Alps (Arnold 2010; Brun and Chaume 2013; Stoddart 2017; Fernández-Götz and Ralston 2017), but also of successful long-term habitation. A new wave of settlement nucleation took place in Northern Italy after the mid-6th century BC, when newly founded sites of medium or small dimensions (between 6 and 20 ha), including the *emporia* of Adria, Spina, and Forcello, held key roles in the exchange networks between the Mediterranean and Central Europe (Fig. 5).

At the same time, while reassessing the Po Valley's role in the wider context of the European debate on settlement centralization and societal complexity, this paper also aims to explore alternatives to 'common-sense' and classical forms of urbanism and social formation. Different types of agglomerate sites with divergent developmental trajectories have thus been presented, from densely and sparsely populated polities to extensive nucleated settlements, perhaps with forms of low-density occupation, and high-density trading hubs, characterized by a combination of recurrent distinctive attributes, including trading networks, connectivity, an engineered environment, as well as population growth and social stratification.

However, several questions about these early structured aggregations in the Po Valley remain, especially regarding social structures. Firstly, assuming a timely disentanglement of the simplistic equation between urbanism and social hierarchy, it remains unclear if the major outcomes of the settlement centralization south of the Alps were encouraged and controlled by high-rank elites and central authorities, as assumed in previous models (Smith 2016, p. 165), or if there is space for more cooperative, bottom-up mechanisms. In this regard, while egalitarian and isonomic forms of power have been suggested for the Bronze Age *Terramare* and the early town of Bologna, the varied archaeological picture of the Po Valley allows us to reassess the role of 'intermediate' social ranks, including lower-ranking elites, productive classes, merchants and artisans, and other categories of commoners. The abundance of 'public provisions', such as water supply, gridded streets and fortifications, along with the availability of local resources, suggests, from a comparative perspective, less autocratic rule and more collective forms of power (Blanton and Fargher 2011; Feinman 2017). Moreover, the study of marginalized people, however poorly visible in the material record, is a primary indicator of increasing social inequality within the centralized societies.

Secondly, our limited evidence cannot indicate whether the centralized sites of the Po Valley represent 'powerscapes', namely places where ideological and shared mnemonic practices played a key role in shaping the invention of the 'urban tradition' and mythological discourses, perhaps with material objects being actively involved in the process. In few cases and in specific places that acted as foci for large group meetings in times of ceremony, crisis, or decision making, a sense of theatricality could be also envisaged, namely the choreographed movement of people during processions or other public activities (Moore 2017).

The latter aspect, which likely involves the concept of seasonality, allows us to address the idea of temporality and cycles of durability. I have suggested for some sites the presence of low-density areas, inside or outside the main town perimeter, that could have been used for short-term or occasional craft activities, including periodical markets, when these spaces might have been occupied by hundreds or thousands of temporary dwellings and other mobile structures. An insight into the biographies of buildings could also deepen our knowledge of periodic cycles of management and rebuilding, particularly frequent in the unstable environment of an alluvial plain, beyond the rhetorical discourse of urban stability and permanence.

To sum up, the Late Bronze and Iron Age population and settlement patterns in the Po Valley offer a palimpsest of variability and diversity that require – besides more extensive excavations and landscape projects, and more detailed analyses of the agency of single structures and objects – better conceptual tools to overcome unreliable notions of linear progress and presumed uniformity.

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JOURNAL OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

6 May 2020

Dr. Lorenzo Zamboni
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Dear Dr. Zamboni,

We are pleased to inform you that your manuscript, "The Urbanization of Northern Italy: Contextualizing Early Settlement Nucleation in the Po Valley," has been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Archaeological Research,* following a round of peer review.

We thank you for preparing this paper for the journal. Your article will go into production later in the year. Your article is scheduled for Volume 29, with a print date of 2021, but we anticipate it will be available online before the end of 2020.

Cordially,

Gary M. Feinman, Contact Coeditor
MacArthur Curator of Anthropology

William A. Parkinson, Coeditor
Curator of Anthropology