

SHORT REPORT

Investigating Social Exclusion in Late Prehistoric Italy: Preliminary Results of the "IN or OUT" Project (PHASE 1)

Massimo Saracino*, Lorenzo Zamboni†, Vera Zanoni† and Elisa Perego‡

This report presents the preliminary results of the "IN or OUT" Project, a collaborative, interdisciplinary effort which aims to investigate social exclusion, marginality and the adoption of anomalous funerary rites in late prehistoric Italy. In particular, this contribution explores the incidence and meaning of practices of ritual marginalisation and funerary deviancy in the region of Veneto between the Bronze Age and the early Iron Age period.

Introduction

This report presents the preliminary results of the "IN or OUT" Project, a collaborative, interdisciplinary effort which aims to investigate social exclusion, marginality and the adoption of anomalous funerary rites in late prehistoric Italy. In particular, research focusing on *Practices of Ritual Marginalization in Bronze Age Veneto* ("IN or OUT" Project PHASE 1) has been carried out by our team (Perego, Saracino, Zamboni and Zanoni) since April 2013 (see Perego *et al.* 2013a, 2013b, forthcoming; Saracino *et al.* 2014). To the best of our knowledge, this research represents the first systematic attempt to investigate funerary deviancy and social exclusion in Bronze Age Italy.

Research Background

Recent research by the authors of this contribution has investigated the incidence of practices of marginalization and funerary deviancy in the Italian region of Veneto between the beginning of the Iron Age and the early Roman period (c.10th-9th century BC – early 1st century AD) (e.g. Perego 2010, 2012a, 2012b, in press, forthcoming; Perego *et al.* 2013a, forthcoming; Saracino 2009; Saracino and Zanoni 2014; Zamboni and Zanoni 2010; Zanoni 2011). A fundamental aspect of this research was the attempt to connect the adoption of rare or anomalous funerary rites (e.g. prone or settlement burial) to genuine occurrences of social exclusion, potentially relating to the status, age, gender, health condition or cause of death of the deceased. From a methodological and theoretical point of view, our work has drawn on archaeological research on funerary deviancy (e.g. Murphy 2008; Reynolds 2009; Tamorri 2012) and on anthropological approaches to marginality and social exclusion (e.g. Germani 1980; Park 1928, 1931; Stonequist

* PhD Independent researcher, Verona, Italy
massimo_saracino@hotmail.com

† Università degli Studi di Pavia, Italy
lorenzo.zamboni1@gmail.com,
vera.zanoni@libero.it

‡ Institute of Archaeology, UCL, United Kingdom
elisaperego78@yahoo.it

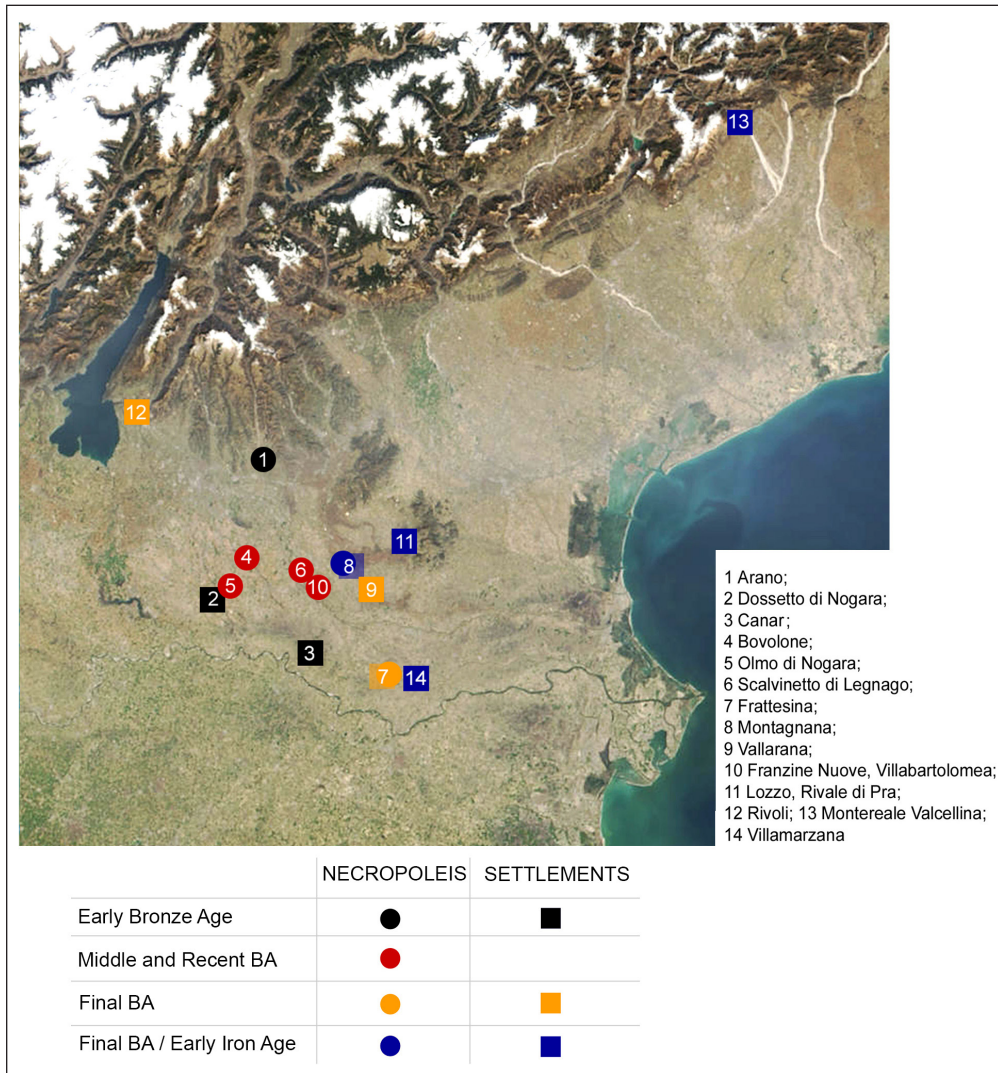


Fig. 1: Map of Veneto region with sampled sites (elaboration by L. Zamboni).

1935). When available, a particular emphasis has also been placed on osteological and bioarchaeological data (e.g. Agarwal and Glencross 2011; Robb 2002). This evidence – potentially shedding light on the life conditions, health status and cause of death of the deceased – may be vital to uncover the reasons motivating the adoption of abnormal funerary treatments (e.g. immature or abnormal death, contagious disease, handicap and physical deformity, or social discrimination based on gender, age or status).

Aims and Methodology

The aim of the “IN or OUT” Project, PHASE 1, is to widen the focus of our research to include the Bronze Age period, in order to identify possible occurrences of social exclusion and funerary deviancy in Veneto during the late third and the second millennia BC (FIG. 1). In this article, therefore, we propose the preliminary results of a contextual and statistical analysis of funerary evidence archived in a relational database hosting all the archaeological, bioarchaeological,

archaeometric and taphonomic data available for each burial selected for examination. To date, our research has mainly consisted of a preliminary screening of published data: this includes evidence from more than 30 settlement and cemetery contexts across an area roughly corresponding to present-day Veneto. Further research relating to PHASE 1 is intended to add unpublished evidence to our dataset. Furthermore, we aim to broaden the focus of our analysis to sites we have previously been unable to sample, or to archaeological contexts currently under study or in press. Future research may be extended to other regions of Italy and/or to different chronological phases. A suitable methodology for the identification of funerary deviancy in the context under study has been preliminarily discussed in recent publications and conference presentations (e.g. Perego 2012a; forthcoming; Perego *et al.* 2013a; forthcoming; Saracino and Zanoni 2014; Zanoni 2011). For Iron Age Veneto, possible markers of funerary abnormality include the adoption of the inhumation rite (but see below); a lack or scarcity of grave goods; forms of spatial displacement (settlement burial, burial in ritual or sacrificial sites, burial in marginal cemetery areas and/or burial in isolation); the adoption of anomalous tomb structures; the evidence of *pre-mortem*, *peri-mortem* and *post-mortem* violence, deviant body treatments (e.g. binding) and/or anomalous body postures (e.g. prone or face-down burial); the adoption of practices of skeletal manipulation (e.g. disarticulation) and hasty interment possibly aimed at constraining or degrading the corpse. The social criteria determining the adoption of anomalous mortuary treatments for some individuals may have been linked to their low social status, health condition, age and/or cause of death. Occurrences of capital sentence, damnation and forms of exclusion relating either to local religious practice or necrophobia (the fear of the dead: Tsaliki 2008) are also possible, although they remain more difficult to demonstrate due to

the complete lack of Venetic written sources regarding these issues.

Preliminary Results

Early Bronze Age (23rd – 17th centuries BC)

The funerary rituals of Early Bronze Age Veneto remain poorly investigated and poorly understood, with the exception of some recent discoveries (e.g. de Marinis and Valzolgher 2013). However, a recent survey of the available evidence (de Marinis 2003) offers a starting point for identifying possible occurrences of anomalous mortuary behaviour in this region.

The skulls or cranial fragments found at sites such as the pile dwellings of Canàr (San Pietro Polesine, Rovigo) and Dossetto di Nogara (Verona) – as well as at other contemporaneous northern Italian pile-dwellings settlements – might have been linked to rituals relating to ancestor and skull veneration (*culto dei crani*) or other forms of skeletal manipulation whose meaning remains unclear (e.g. de Marinis 2003: 38–39; Tecchiati 2011; Menotti *et al.* 2014). Given the overall scarcity of funerary data from this phase, we believe that these practices cannot be easily classified as abnormal burials or occurrences of social exclusion marked by the adoption of atypical funerary treatments.

The only possible case of funerary marginalization identified so far is attested near the burial site of Arano di Cellore di Illasi (Verona) and dates to the central phase of the Early Bronze Age (c. 20th - 19th centuries BC) (de Marinis and Valzolgher 2013; Salzani and Salzani 2008; Valzolgher *et al.* 2012). With over 60 inhumation tombs and one cremation, Arano is the largest Early Bronze Age cemetery presently known in northern Italy. The relevant tomb, known as *US 20-1a*, was found in isolation c. 90 m north-west of the cemetery, on the bank of a ditch running close to the settlement area known as *Sector A*. The grave belonged to a three to four year-old child and is currently the focus of in-depth chronological and stratigraphic analysis. The

deceased was buried in a crouched position on an E-W orientation with the head pointing to the west. The skeleton was covered with stones and a wooden table. While the burial displays some ritual features comparable to those characteristic of most graves clustered in the main cemetery area (e.g. adoption of inhumation rite), its location far from the other tombs may be indicative of the young child's anomalous status within his or her burial group.

Middle and Recent Bronze Age (17th – 12th centuries BC)

Whilst a greater amount of data is available for the subsequent Middle and Recent Bronze Age phases, further research is needed to identify clear occurrences of social marginalization and funerary deviancy in this time period within this dataset, especially in view of the preliminary nature of some published material (e.g. Salzani 2011) and the scanty and/or poor osteological evidence accessible for some burial contexts (e.g. Salzani 2010). However, some preliminary observations are possible. Firstly, the persistence of the practices of bone and skeletal manipulation already attested in the previous period is suggested by evidence from the cemetery of Bovolone (Verona). Here, the possible removal for ritual purposes of the crania from inhumation Tombs 1/1956 and 29–30 has been interpreted as a possible persistence of the 'skull veneration' phenomenon (Salzani 2010). Secondly, remarkable for their rarity and anomalous location are the occurrences of inhumation burials created in isolation in relation to the clusters of cremation tombs which progressively came to dominate the landscape of many Veneto's burial sites since the Recent Bronze Age (14th – 12th centuries BC) (Salzani 2011: 228), but mainly during the Final Bronze Age (see for example the case of Frattesina Narde II, discussed below). An example is Bovolone Tomb 135, characterized by a NE-SW orientation and placed in between two or three groups of cremations (Salzani 2010). Significantly,

this burial, presumably pertaining to a 'sub-adult', was the only inhumation found in the Bovolone cemetery segment known as *Sector C 1996* (FIG. 3).

The most significant evidence dating to this phase, however, is the appearance of prone inhumation burials in biritual cemeteries such as Olmo di Nogara (Verona), Scalvinetto di Legnago (Verona), Castello del Tartaro (Cerea, Verona) and Franzine Nuove di Villabartolomea (Verona). At these sites, the vast majority of the inhumations were supine burials, while prone burial was an extremely rare practice. As far as Iron Age Veneto is concerned, prone burial is a ritual phenomenon which has already been connected to practices of social exclusion and marginalization, especially when accompanied by occurrences of spatial displacement (e.g. settlement burial), *pre-mortem* or *peri-mortem* violence, handicap or disease, and abuse or degradation of the corpse (e.g. Perego 2012a; in press; forthcoming; Saracino 2009; Zamboni and Zanoni 2010). The complexity of this phenomenon is well evidenced by its persistence in the *longue durée*, with cemetery and settlement occurrences dating from throughout the Iron Age up until at least the Roman period (Rossi 2011).

For the previous Bronze Age phase, the cemetery of Olmo di Nogara has yielded to date approximately 526 graves, with a large prevalence of inhumations over cremations (465 = 89% vs. 61 = 11%). The graves can be dated to between the Middle Bronze Age and the late Recent Bronze Age, with the earliest cremations going back to the end of the Middle Bronze Age. The burial site was delimited by a 'funerary road' on the west and subdivided into at least three different segments known as *Areas A, B* and *C*. Most graves have been found in *Area C*, where the tombs clustered into two segments known as *C1* (in the north) and *C2* (in the south) (Cupitò and Leonardi 2005; Salzani 2005).

The four prone burials known to date from the Olmo cemetery were located in the northern segment of *Area C* (Salzani 2005)

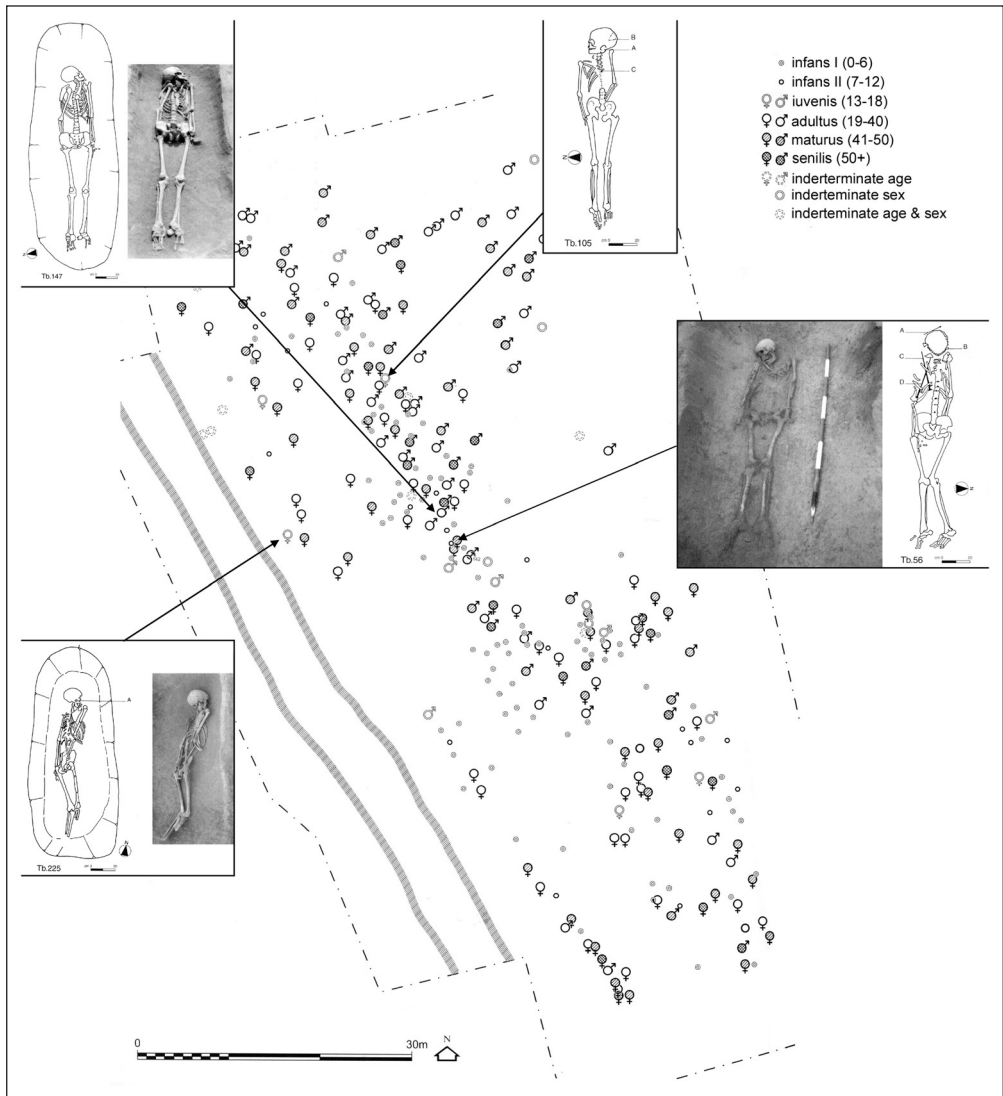


Fig. 2: Olmo di Nogara (Verona) graveyard: location of prone burials mentioned in the article (elaboration by M. Saracino after Salzani 2005).

(**FIG. 2**). Tomb 56 was the deposition of an adult female buried with a W-E orientation during the Middle Bronze Age (Phase 3). Tomb 105 might have been the burial of a female individual aged approximately 17 at death; it had an E-W orientation and was probably deposited during the Recent Bronze Age. Tomb 147 yielded the remains of a man around 50 years, and had a SE-NW orientation. Tomb 225 was a NW-SE oriented

female subject, around 20 years old at death. Notably, only Tomb 147 did not contain a grave assemblage. Despite this evidence, the social and structural complexity of the Olmo di Nogara burial site does not allow us, at this stage of the project, to make further suggestions regarding the meaning of these burials. Recent research has, however, suggested that *Area C* may represent the most interesting burial segment from the Olmo cemetery

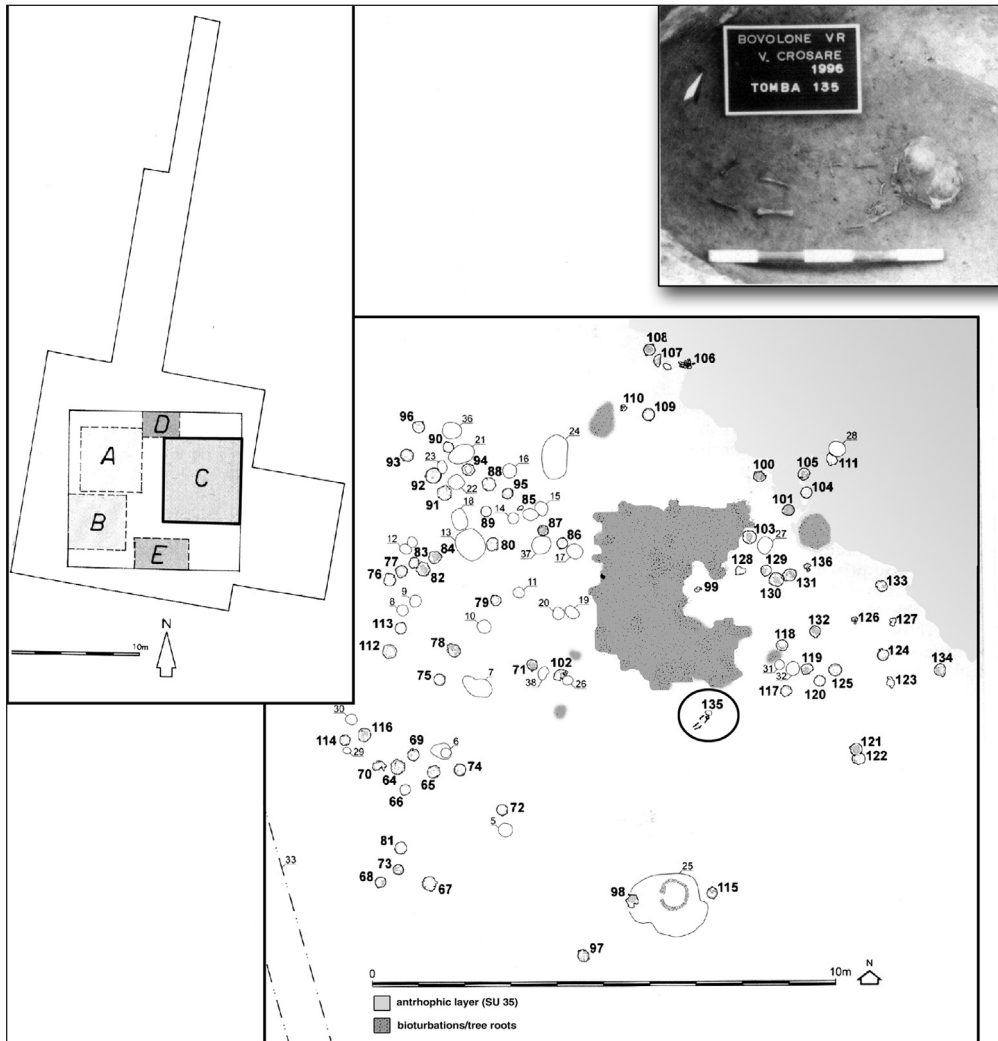


Fig. 3: Bovolone (Verona) graveyard: location of isolated Tomb 135 (elaboration by M. Saracino and L. Zamboni after Salzani 2010).

for a study of the socio-political transformations that involved the local community in the period under consideration (e.g. Bietti Sestieri 2011; Cupitò and Leonardi 2005; De Angelis 2005; de Marinis and Salzani 2005; Speciale and Zanini 2012). It is in this area, for example, that over 367 tombs variously characterized by more simple or more complex graves assemblages are clustered; of these graves, 321 are inhumations and 21 are cremations. Furthermore, the southern segment of *Area C* yielded the majority of

the so-called 'sword-bearers' (i.e. male burials accompanied by a sword) attested in the entire cemetery (i.e. 28 out of 43).

The cemetery of Scalvinetto was presumably connected to the nearby settlement of Fondo Paviani, a site that appears to have functioned as a 'central place' in the territorial organisation that developed in southern Veneto between the Middle Bronze Age and the beginning of the Final Bronze Age. The burial area excavated until now roughly dates between the central phase of the

Middle Bronze Age and the Recent Bronze Age: it has yielded 705 graves, of which 437 are cremations (62%) and 268 are inhumations (38%) (Cavazzuti 2008–2010: 77; Salzani 2004). The inhumations were mainly located within a 35m by 20m area in the western segment of the cemetery. By contrast, the cremations were generally located in the eastern segment of the burial site and coalesced in clusters of variable size and density. The clusters were separated by empty areas, where rare scattered graves were occasionally found. Notably, the inhumations discovered in the eastern area of the cemetery were never located inside the clusters of cremations, but were always placed on the margins or outside. Preliminary stratigraphic data seem to indicate that the inhumations might have been more ancient than the cremations, although this cannot be proved for the entire burial site (Cavazzuti 2008–2010: 81). Among the inhumations, Tomb 345 is the only prone burial presently known from Scalvinetto. The deceased was a 25 to 30 year-old woman buried on an E-W orientation (Cavazzuti, 2008; 2010; Salzani 2004).

While the burial site of Castello del Tartaro remains mainly unpublished (but see Salzani 2011 for some preliminary considerations), the cemetery of Franzine Nuove, which was connected to the nearby settlement of Fabbrica dei Soci, yielded approximately 582 graves, most of which are inhumations (394 vs. 188 cremations). The tombs were located in two main archaeological layers dating to the late Middle and the Recent Bronze Age. Grave goods have been found associated with 19% of the inhumations while all the cremations were deprived of any visible funerary assemblage – as was customary during the Middle and Recent Bronze Age in Veneto (Aspes and Fasani 1968; Salzani 2011: 228). The prone burial from Franzine (Tomb 497) belonged to a ‘young-adult’ – possibly male – although the osteological evidence available does not support any further speculation (Corrain *et al.* 1967).

Final Bronze Age and Early Iron Age Phase 1 (c. 12th – 9th centuries BC)

Since the Final Bronze Age, the richness of the funerary record discloses significant instances of funerary deviancy, potentially ascribable to genuine cases of social exclusion relating to the peculiar conditions of life and/or death of the subject apparently ‘marginalized’ in the funerary record (e.g. Perego 2012a, in press, forthcoming; Saracino 2009; Saracino and Zanoni 2014; Zanoni 2011). The cases of prone burial and spatial displacement already attested in the previous phases are now accompanied by more numerous occurrences of settlement burial, deposition in marginal cemetery areas, and practices of abuse, manipulation and constraint of the corpse in abnormal postures. Among the most significant occurrences, it is worth mentioning the settlement burials at Montagnana (Padua) (Bianchin Citton *et al.* 1998; *Venetkens* 2013), Rocca di Rivoli (Verona) (Barfield and Bagolini 1976), Villamarzana (Rovigo) (Consonni 2008) and Montereale Valcellina (Udine) (Corazza 1997). Also notable are the prone burials found at the Narde II cemetery of Frattesina di Fratta Polesine (Rovigo) (Salzani and Colonna 2010) (**FIG. 4**). Sometimes, the co-occurrence of several deviant attributes in relation to the same subject seems to emphasize the abnormal nature of these burials. For example, this might be the case with Frattesina Narde II Tombs 223, 227 and 13 which are placed in isolation from, or in-between large clusters of, cremation graves possibly belonging to kinship groups (Salzani and Colonna 2010). Tomb 223 was the prone burial of a 30 to 40 year-old man apparently interred far from any cluster of tombs in the cemetery’s *Sector II* (see Salzani and Colonna 2010: 28, fig. 8). According to Salzani (Salzani and Colonna 2010: 300), the ‘limbs of the deceased may have been intentionally fractured’. Tomb 13 contained the remains of an eight year-old child, also buried prone with the legs bent towards the back (Salzani and Colonna 2010: 182–3); again, this burial may have been

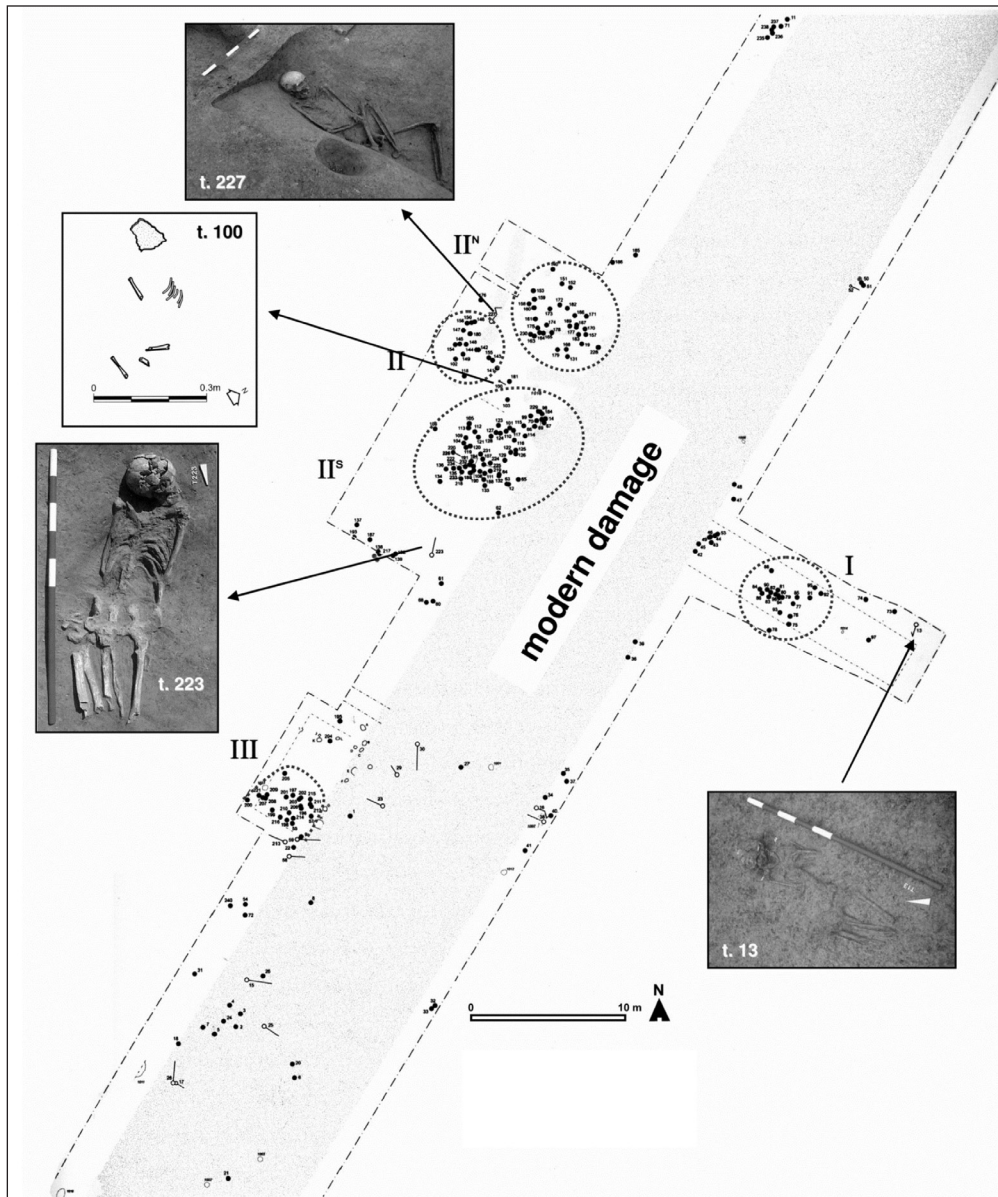


Fig. 4: Frattesina Narde II (Rovigo) graveyard: location of inhumation burials mentioned in the article (elaboration by M. Saracino after Salzani and Colonna 2010).

placed in isolation or relative isolation (see Salzani and Colonna 2010: 26, fig. 6). Tomb 227 was a shallow pit excavated in a ditch dating to the earliest phases of the cemetery. The individual – a woman older than 50 – was interred in a supine position, with the lower limbs unusually flexed leftward and

the left leg bent towards the pelvis (Salzani and Colonna 2010: 282). Another notable occurrence is Tomb 25, the burial of a 13 to 14 year-old individual showing possible skeletal evidence of growth disturbance (Salzani and Colonna 2010: 56 ff.); the deceased was buried with the lower limbs abnormally crossed,

forming an 'X'-shaped position (Salzani and Colonna 2010: 188).

Notable – and in need of further investigation – is the presence of scattered human remains at settlement sites such as Frattesina (Rovigo) (Bellintani and Cassoli 1984; Bietti Sestieri 1984), Vallarana (Padua) (Vanzetti 2007–2008: note 65), Lozzo Atestino (Padua) (Zerbinati 1982), Treviso (Tecchiati 2011) and Villamarzana (Rovigo) (de Marinis 2003). For the period under consideration, these occurrences are mainly attested between the 10th and the 9th centuries BC (for later occurrences dating to the Iron Age see Zanoni 2011; for an analysis of this phenomenon in late prehistoric Trentino–South Tyrol see Tecchiati 2011). In most cases, the skeletal remains are represented by cranial fragments and portions of long bones from the lower limbs such as femurs. Sometimes, evidence of 'processing' possibly intended to turn the bone into an instrument or a tool has been noticed (for a preliminary discussion see Perego 2012a: 214–5; Zanoni 2011).

Overall, the widespread adoption of cremation as the dominant funerary rite as well as the poverty and/or abnormality of most of the rare inhumations attested from the 12th century BC raise important questions about the meaning of the inhumation rite in Veneto between the Final Bronze Age and the Late Iron Age (up to c. 300–100 BC). At the moment, however, it remains unclear whether inhumation might have constituted *per se* a marker of marginality and social exclusion (e.g. Perego 2012a, in press, forthcoming; Saracino and Zanoni 2014). Particularly significant in this regard is the evidence from the Via Umberto I – Emo Capodilista Palace cemetery of Padua (late 9th – 1st centuries BC). Here, the inhumations dating to the earliest phases of this burial site do not display any clear evidence of marginalization and spatial displacement in respect to the cremations (for a preliminary discussion see Gamba and Tuzzato 2008). The cemetery, however, remains mostly unpublished.

Open Problems and Preliminary Conclusions

Research carried out for the "IN or OUT" Project (PHASE 1) allows us to propose some preliminary considerations on the incidence and meaning of potential cases of funerary deviancy and ritual marginalization in Bronze Age Veneto. (1) A notable variability in funerary practice and ritual behavior is attested during the period and across the geographical setting under consideration, even in relation to potential cases of abnormal burial; certainly, deviant burials are not exhaustive of all aspects of mortuary behavior in Bronze Age Veneto. (2) While it remains problematic to link funerary deviancy directly to social marginalization, this seems possible in some of the cases sampled for our study (see occurrences from Montagnana and Frattesina). Notably, the criteria for the definition of both social and funerary marginality appear to evolve over time, possibly in relation to changes in the socio-economic structure and religious ideology of the Bronze Age period. (3) No clear evidence linking funerary deviancy to a specific age or gender group has emerged so far; the lack of neonatal and infant burials from some funerary sites, however, may indicate that very young children were granted alternative burial rites or no burial at all, at least in some contexts or chronological phases (e.g. Cavazzuti 2008–2010: 84, 165–174). Indeed, the issue of funerary representativity (e.g. Cavazzuti 2008–2010) and its potential connection to marginality should be paid more attention in future research. (4) Particularly problematic is our understanding of the Early Bronze Age funerary rite, partly due to the scarcity of the data available. For example, the only potential case of funerary marginalization sampled to date, the child burial from the Arano cemetery, might be motivated by the young age of the deceased. Further analysis, however, will only be possible when the cemetery is fully published. (5) During the Middle and Recent Bronze Ages, it is

possible to note in the biritual cemeteries of Veneto the presence of some rare prone inhumation burials, sometimes located in 'liminal' locations within the funerary space. The reasons for the adoption of this funerary practice in this chronological time span remain unclear, although we cannot exclude that the adoption of an abnormal burial ritual might have been intended to underline some substantial 'difference' existing between these individuals and the rest of the buried community. (6) An increasing formalization and visibility of funerary deviancy practices seems attested from the Final Bronze Age, although it remains unclear whether the transition phase between the Recent Bronze Age and the Final Bronze Age represented a real watershed. However, this cannot be excluded *a priori*, given the remarkable changes in funerary practice attested from this period (e.g. the dramatic spread of cremation rites coupled with a sharp decline in the adoption of inhumation). It is also worth mentioning that the 12th century BC has already been recognized as a phase of crisis and dramatic change in the Veneto region (the so-called *crisi del XII secolo a.C.*). Amongst other phenomena, this phase was characterized by the collapse of the *Terramare* settlement system, which appears to have been the result of a chain reaction including cultural, socio-economic, climatic, and environmental causes (e.g. Cardarelli 2009; Cremaschi 2009; De Guio *et al.* 2009; Leonardi 2010). The connection between these phenomena and any change in funerary ideology would deserve further investigation. (7) The criteria we have potentially identified for the recognition of funerary deviancy and social exclusion in Iron Age Veneto may not be valid – or entirely valid – for the previous Bronze Age period, especially for the chronological phases preceding the Final Bronze Age. This does not necessarily mean that these previous societies were more egalitarian, although this cannot be excluded (on the social structure of Bronze Age Veneto see Bietti Sestieri 2011; Leonardi

2010; Peroni 2004; Peroni and Vanzetti 2006). It is possible that significant changes which occurred in the Bronze Age mortuary ideology of Veneto render this earlier evidence less 'readable'. By contrast, given that the Final Bronze Age funerary rituals in Veneto partially anticipate those of the Iron Age (e.g. widespread adoption of cremation rites, lack or scarcity of visible grave goods in inhumation tombs), more reliable deductions can be made from the funerary record of the 11th- and 10th-centuries BC.

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