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Wooden thrones: ritual and function in Italian Iron Age

Summary
A large number of wooden thrones have been found in Italian Iron Age sites. We present an updated analysis of the Villanovan tombs with wooden thrones from Bologna, Imola and Verucchio: the areas which have so far produced the highest concentration of these thrones. Recent excavations in Emilia-Romagna, which have paid particular attention to tomb structure and post-depositional phenomena, have provided detailed information on the thrones. The significance of the different types of tomb, their date and topographical arrangement will be examined in the context of the various necropoleis. We then discuss the available data regarding the position of the thrones in the graves and their association with other significant items. Some thrones are decorated with bronze studs and carved figured scenes whose interpretation will be briefly discussed. Finally, we consider differences in funerary rites between the various sites, as in our opinion they relate to the expression of group and individual identity.

Riassunto
I troni in legno: ritualità e funzione nell'Età del Ferro italiana.
Un significativo numero di troni in legno è stato rinvenuto in contesti dell'età del Ferro Italiana. Ci si propone qui di fornire una sintesi aggiornata dei rinvenimenti dalle necropoli villanoviane di Bologna, Imola e Verucchio, da cui proviene attualmente la più alta concentrazione di esemplari noti. Scavi recenti in Emilia-Romagna, nei quali una particolare attenzione è stata dedicata all'esame delle strutture tombali e dei fenomeni postdeposizionali, forniscono dati dettagliati. Il significato dei diversi tipi di tombe, la loro cronologia e organizzazione topografica vengono esaminati nel contesto delle varie necropoli. Vengono poi discussi i dati relativi alla posizione dei troni nelle tombe e la loro associazione con altri oggetti significativi. Alcuni troni sono decorati con borchie in bronzo e a intaglio con scene figurate la cui interpretazione viene brevemente discussa. Infine vengono sottolineate le differenze tra i rituali funerari dei diversi siti poiché riteniamo che siano da mettere in relazione con l'espressione delle identità sociali e individuali.

Foreword

Although wooden thrones and furniture are mentioned in the ancient literature[1] and known from iconographic representations, until recently actual finds of wooden specimens from Italy, dating to the protohistoric period, were limited to a few examples found in Verucchio.

New excavations in Emilia Romagna in some of the Iron Age necropoleis of Verucchio, Bologna and Imola, thanks to careful and microstratigraphic methods, have identified the presence, and in some cases allowed definition of the shape and size, of furniture even when the objects were not recoverable.

Following studies based on recent excavations and attention paid to grave structures, we believe it is essential to analyse data concerning the exact position of thrones in the graves, particularly in relation to other objects. This kind of information allows us to make a reasoned hypothesis regarding the function and ritual meaning of the thrones; see the first full report on the Verucchio thrones for such an analysis[2].

Different points of view have been expressed about the iconography of the decoration, particularly that on the throne from Verucchio Lippi grave 89/1972 starting with Kossack's comments in 1992[3]. Particularly significant is the discussion that has developed after the complete analysis and publication of the grave in 2002[4].

We believe some aspects can be further discussed with reference to other pieces from the region which are not yet adequately known. It is also essential to refer to thrones represented on the bronze *tintinnabulum* from Bologna.

Verucchio

Verucchio is a hill not far from Rimini at the entrance of the Marecchia valley, which connects the central Adriatic coast to the Tyrrhenian Sea and Tuscany. Around the top of the hill four separate necropoleis[5] have been discovered with more than 600 graves. Following important excavations at the end of 19th century, other extensive explorations were undertaken by G.V. Gentili and P. von Eles. During recent excavations in the Lippi necropolis, two horse depositions were found, one containing two horses, the other three. No objects were found with the horses and no direct stratigraphic data relate the depositions to human burials in the cemetery. Nevertheless their position in a central area suggests that the sacrifices took place during the lifespan of the burial ground or, at the latest, before the area was abandoned, in which case they possibly assumed the significance of a final consecration.

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[1] See the dedication of a throne (possibly a wooden one) by *Arimnestos*, king of the Tyrrhenians, at the Temple of Zeus at Olympia (Paus. 5.12.5). About the throne material see Naso 2006, p. 339, note 62 (with previous bibliographic references).

[2] For a recent update and previous references on the Verucchio excavations see *Immagini di uomini e di donne* 2015 and in detail about thrones, Mazzoli, Pozzi 2015, pp. 89-98.

[3] Kossack 1992.

[4] *Guerriero e Sacerdote* 2002.

[5] The four necropoleis are: Fondo Ripa-Lavatoio, Moroni, Le Pegge and Lippi.

Grave	Sex	Age	Grave Structure	Position	Dimensions	Chronology (Phase)
Moroni 24/1969	F	Ad	1A	/	/	III
Moroni 25/1969	F + ?	Ad F + Inf	1A	/	/	IV
Moroni 26/1969	F	Inf 1 (< 3 year)	4C	c3 close to the dolium	H 68 cm ca.	V
Lippi B/1971	M	Ad	4C (?)	/	fram. max H 30 L 15 cm	V
Lippi 85/1972	M	Ad	4C	c3	H 79 cm; Ø 50 cm	V
Lippi 89/1972	M	Ad	5A	C on the wooden box	H 79 cm; Ø 40 cm	IV
Lippi 32/2006	F	Nd	complex	c2 in lateral niche	H 78 cm ca.	IV
Lippi 40+40bis/2006	2F	Ad	6C	B	H max cons. 20 cm ca.	V
Lippi 71/2008	M	Ad	complex	C in lateral niche	H max cons. 15 cm ca.	V
Lippi 72/2008	M	Ad	2A	C on the dolium	H 51 cm ca.	IV
Lippi 73/2008	M	Inf 2 (3-7 year)	2C	c3 in lateral niche	H backrest 35 cm	V
Lippi 76/2008	M	Ad	2C	c3 in lateral niche	H base 36 cm	V
Lippi 82/2008	M+F	Ad	2C	c1 in lateral niche)	H max cons. 48 cm ca. Ø 43×30 cm	V
Lippi 85/2009	F	/	complex	in lateral niche	H 78 cm ca.	V
Lippi 88/2014	M					
Lippi 90/2014	M	/				

tab. 1 – List of thrones in Verucchio graves, showing sex, age, grave structure, size and chronology (size width mm 150).

A research project concerning old and new finds started in 1992 and is still going on. Particular attention has been dedicated to grave structures, funeral rites and composition of sets of grave goods, which can all be seen as expressing communication within an aristocratic group[6].

The graves are almost exclusively cremations dating from the Italian First Iron Age (9th century BC) to the middle Orientalising phase (mid 7th century BC). Already in the first phase a topographic organization can be seen, in which specific areas are allotted to family groups[7]. The number of graves increases in the following phases seeing a real "explosion" in the early Orientalising phase before the last quarter of the 8th century and a relative contraction before a sudden end shortly before the middle of the 7th century BC.

So far in Verucchio's necropoleis sixteen wooden thrones have been found: fourteen were definitely identified[8] whereas the existence of two more (in graves Moroni 24/1969 and Moroni 25/1969) can be suggested, due to the presence of footstools[9] and several fragments of wood which might belong to thrones.

A miniature ceramic throne (*fig.* 1) with stamped decoration completes the number of thrones found in Verucchio[10] (*tab.* 1).

The wooden thrones have a cylindrical base and a curved backrest. The height of the thrones and other kinds of wooden furniture (and therefore comparisons between them) has to be considered with care: the wood of the thrones was subjected to processes of decomposition and dehydration that could have partially changed their size. In some cases measurements were only possible after restoration, in other instances approximate measurements could only be obtained from the excavation records. Most thrones are roughly the same size, except for the throne (and all the other pieces of wooden furniture) from grave Moroni 26/1969, which are significantly smaller than similar items from other burials. This is most likely due to their being made on purpose for the burial of a three year old child, whose age was determined by analyses of the cremated bones. Apart from this unusually small example, the better preserved wooden thrones have a height of about 0.78-0.79 m, which makes them large enough for practical use by adults. Note that the typologically similar bronze thrones are *circa* 20-25 cm higher[11].

All known wooden thrones were made out of a single tree trunk, carved into shape and then decorated[12].

Analysis of the Lippi 89/1972 wooden throne (*fig.* 2) indicates that the wood employed was probably poplar

[6] Up to date results of the project have been recently published with previous references (*Immagini di uomini e di donne* 2015). The finds are exhibited in Verucchio Archaeological Museum.

[7] The four necropoleis explored so far were apparently used only by members of the *élite* families. No burial can be attributed to other members of the community; no artisans can be identified, even though typological and technical studies clearly demonstrate the existence of highly specialized, local craft production in metal and amber (von Eles, Trocchi 2015).

[8] Graves: Moroni 24/1969, Moroni 25/1969, Moroni 26/1969, Lippi B/1971, Lippi 85/1972, Lippi 89/1972, Lippi 32/2006, Lippi 40-40bis/2006, Lippi 71/2008, Lippi 72/2008, Lippi 73/2008, Lippi 76/2008, Lippi 82/2008, Lippi 85/2009, Lippi 88/2014 and Lippi 90/2014.

[9] Mazzoli, Pozzi 2015, p. 89, with previous references. In addition we include here the footstool and the remains of a possible wooden throne from grave Moroni 25/1969, after Gentili 1985, pp. 81-82 and the unpublished records (1992) in the archives of Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Bologna e le province di Modena, Reggio Emilia e Ferrara (Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Bologna e le province di Modena, Ferrara e Reggio Emilia). The footstools in Verucchio, when the shape can be recognized, belong to the same type seen in grave Lippi 89/1972, although with notable differences in size. The presence of thrones not associated with footstools is known in some cases on bronzes decorated with Situla art, but we do not find footstools without thrones (Zaghetto 2017a).

[10] Zuffa 1965, pp. 351-355; Jurgeit 1990, p. 10, fig. 2 a-b. Not included in tab. 1.

[11] See, as examples, the throne from Palestrina (grave Barberini: Steingräber 1979, p. 199, n. 28) or the one on display in the Louvre Museum (Paolucci 2000, p. 582, no. 131).

[12] Torelli 2006, p. 686.

fig. 1 – Miniature clay throne. Private Collection, Verucchio.

fig. 2 – Throne from Verucchio, grave Lippi 89/1972.

fig. 3 – Detail of painted decoration on the basis of the throne from Verucchio, grave Lippi 89/1972.

(genus *Populus*)[13]. Poplar wood is not only easy to work due to its flexibility, but it also takes fine carved decoration well. At Verucchio, thrones can be decorated with different techniques and complexity. Carved decoration with figurative and/or geometrical scenes is present in three cases; painted decoration was also present on the thrones in Lippi 89/1972, and in Lippi 40-40bis/2006+84/2009. In addition "solar wheels" are present on the upper part

[13] Marchesini, Marvelli 2002, p. 298.

of the backrest (Moroni 26/1969, Lippi B/1971, Lippi 85/1972 and Lippi 89/1972) a motive that also appears on some bronze thrones.

The preservation conditions of many thrones from Verucchio, as already mentioned, is not always good; nevertheless, recent excavations have shown that traces of their organic decomposition are often visible in the field. Traces of wood are identifiable even if the wood is not always well preserved and in some graves painted decoration can be recognized (*figg*. 3-4).

Thrones are known both in male and female graves of adults and children (*tab*. 1)[14]. Their presence is recorded in extremely rich and complex graves, as well as in some less rich ones.

It is difficult to identify specific criteria for the deposition of thrones, particularly for the male graves; it must be remembered however that all belong to the aristocratic groups that exclusively used the known necropoleis[15].

All available information, including that already published, was re-examined and studied in the light of the new data coming from recent excavations (2005-2009). The results have shown that thrones occur in tombs with a range of structural types[16]. They include tombs characterized by a simpler structure, as for example *dolium* graves (Structure 2A) on top of which was placed the throne (Lippi 72/2008), but also *dolium* graves with a lateral niche (Structure 2C); in this case the throne was placed in the niche: Lippi 73/2008, Lippi 76/2008 (*fig.* 5), Lippi 82/2008. In other, more complex grave structures, characterized by a wooden box covered with a lid, the throne was placed, as in grave Lippi 32/2005[17], in the lateral niche. Finally, the double structure in grave Lippi 40-40bis/2006 (Structure 6C) is an exceptional and unique case, where the throne was placed on the wooden lid that sealed both graves[18]. Grave Lippi 85/1972 represents, in the final phase, around the middle of the 7th century BC, a structure very similar to a furnished chamber.

From a typological point of view these thrones can be attributed to *Thronetyp I,* subtypes *a* and *b,* of Steingräber's classification[19]. In the Etruscan area, this type of throne seems already to be in use from the middle of the 8th century B.C. as shown by the small ceramic throne found in grave 18 of the Olmo Bello necropolis in Bisenzio (prov. Viterbo, Latium)[20]. Other parallels are the examples made of bronze, stone and ceramic from Etruria, mainly from the rich Orientalising graves of Palestrina and Cerveteri (both in the province of Rome) and the ceramic thrones of Chiusi (prov. Siena).

fig. 4 – Detail of painted decoration seen during excavation on wooden remains of a throne in Verucchio, grave Lippi 40/2006.

With regard to the general characteristics and similar decoration, the best comparisons for these thrones are the metal ones, all datable to the first half of the 7th century BC. Namely the throne from the Barberini Tomb of Praeneste (prov. Rome), the one possibly coming from Vulci (prov. Viterbo) in the Musée du Louvre (Paris) and the one presently in the Badischen Landesmuseum Karlsruhe[21].

There is an important difference in chronology: the first wooden thrones in Verucchio being older than the above mentioned bronze ones[22]. The first wooden throne comes from a grave dated to Verucchio Phase III, around the middle of the 8th century BC[23]; and some date to Verucchio Phase IV[24], dated between the last quarter/end of the 8th and the first decades of the 7th century BC. A remarkable nine thrones date to the final Phase V (second and third quarters of the 7th century BC); a sign of the power that the élite groups continued to maintain and wanted to express through the funeral rites.

[14] See *Tab*. 1. Archaeological studies of the grave goods sets have been compared for sex determination with results from the anthropological analyses; Onisto 2015, p. 136. It is difficult to use archaeological data to identify children's graves at Verucchio as very few "small size" objects have been found.

[15] See better *infra*; Bonfante 2005.

[16] For a definition of the types of grave structures in Verucchio see Angelini *et al*. 2015, fig. 1.

[17] Poli, Trocchi 2015.

[18] von Eles *et al*. 2014; Manzoli, Negrini, Poli 2015, pp. 81-82, fig. 7; Manzoli, Poli 2015.

[19] Steingräber 1979, pp. 23-25. This classification was based on thrones made of bronze, marble and ceramic and also on the examples depicted in the iconography. The wooden thrones were not included because they were found in Verucchio after the publication of his work.

[20] Roncalli 1986, p. 557, fig. 460.

[21] Praeneste: Steingräber 1979, p. 199, no. 28. Louvre: Paolucci 2000, p. 582, no. 131. Karlsruhe: Jurgeit 1990, pp. 1-10, fig. 1.

[22] For the chronological phases of Verucchio see von Eles 2015, pp. 42-43.

[23] The existence of a throne in grave Moroni 24/1969, dated to Verucchio Phase III, has been deduced from the presence of a footstool, an object which is normally associated with thrones at Verucchio.

[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 23-43.

fig. 5 – Verucchio, Grave Lippi 76/2008, a wooden throne during excavation.

Bologna, via Belle Arti

The via Belle Arti necropolis, in the historic centre of Bologna, was excavated between 2002 and 2005[25]. It was an emergency exploration limited to the area of a building project. Only part of a certainly larger necropolis was excavated. It was probably originally organized in separate areas consisting mainly of preroman graves[26]; but the use of the burial ground in roman times was also documented (*fig.* 5).

During the first phase, in the second half of the 8th century BC, the south east area of the burial ground was occupied by cremation graves, generally in square pits and wooden boxes. The graves are mainly arranged around a central nucleus, including one female and three males. These graves[27], placed at a remarkably deep level, also have exceptional dimensions, a very complex structure and extremely rich grave goods sets.

All contemporary burials, though less impressive, exhibit rich grave goods sets and altogether seem to indicate an exclusive use of the burial ground by members of a social *élite*.

This is probably partly similar to what has been observed in other necropoleis in Bologna[28], where the spatial organization can be seen as the expression of a more complex social system, as it has several aristocratic families, and minor groups, organized around a central couple.

Five animal burials were also found. Of particular interest is the sacrifice of three horses; two of them still had part of the bit in their mouth and one also had a spearhead in its neck. The exact moment of the sacrifice cannot be precisely determined: the horses overlay a poor and badly preserved burial; the *terminus ante quem* is clearly established by the position of grave 151 which is dated by the grave goods to the late 7th-early 6th century BC[29]. When grave 151 was created the location of the horses was obviously known as some of the stones covering them were removed and then replaced after the burial was positioned, all this without disturbing the horse's bones.

In the via Belle Arti necropolis at Bologna wooden objects (burial structures, furniture and vessels) have occasionally been preserved (Grave 142) (*fig.* 6); in some cases their identification has been possible only during conservation work following the excavations. The presence of thrones can be inferred from microstratigraphic data and from the analysis of post depositional movements inside the graves; it can be suggested also by the position of the urn and occasionally by the presence of the footstool, often documented sitting in front of the thrones, both in tombs and in images.

Considering all the data, the presence of a throne can be suggested in two cases[30]. While only one burial (119) certainly contained a throne, a similar situation can be proposed for another grave (140). Grave 159[31] contained a round wooden table and vessels, but the presence of a throne is not certain. Wood traces in other graves could not be attributed to specific objects.

An extremely important and well-known object from Bologna is the bronze *tintinnabulum* whose decoration includes images of ladies sitting on thrones[32], while weaving and spinning. As far as one can judge these thrones are identical to the wooden ones found in Verucchio in both shape and decoration, for example solar wheels are clearly represented on the backrest.

While at Verucchio direct observation of the details of form of the wooden thrones and furniture has been possible, this was not the case in Bologna and Imola. In both these necropoleis, as previously mentioned, the presence of such objects has been indirectly inferred from excavation observation and data.

As far as conservation allows, it seems that the structures of the three graves mentioned above, each definitely or possibly containing a throne, have marked similarities as well as significant differences. Grave 119 was a small, but solid and well built, square wooden box (approximately 1.10×1.20 m) which, as far as could be documented, was not covered by a stone tumulus; the ceramic cinerary urn was placed on the wooden throne in the South-East corner and was "dressed" and displayed bronze feminine ornaments (fibulas). A wooden *suppedaneum,* other bronze objects and possible remains of a leather belt, were recovered even though the tomb was badly damaged. The remains of the funeral pyre had been laid at the bottom of the wooden structure on the

[25] von Eles, Mazzoli, Negrini in press; Locatelli, Malnati 2012; Bentini *et al.* in press.

[26] 162 Preroman graves were excavated.

[27] Graves 119, 140, 142, 143.

[28] Benacci necropolis, group "E": Morigi Govi, Tovoli, Dore 1996, pp. 10-11, 13-14.

[29] Villanovan IV B 2 phase, Carancini 1969.

[30] Graves 119, 140. It must be noted that in grave 142 the *footstool* was placed in front of a wooden table whose function was equivalent to the throne, the bronze urn being placed on it.

[31] Grave 159.

[32] Morigi Govi 1971. The *tintinnabulum* comes from Bologna, Arsenale Militare necropolis, grave 5 dating to the last quarter of the 7th century BC.

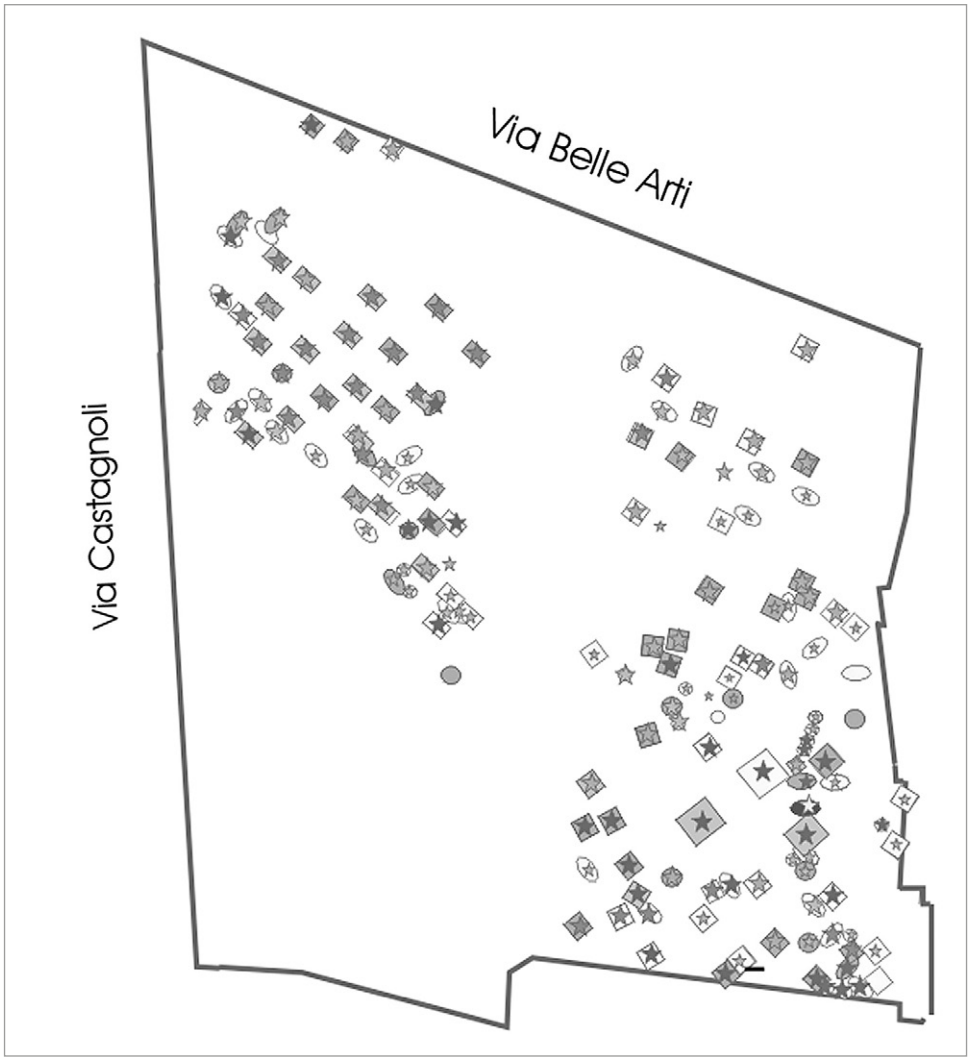

fig. 6 – Bologna, via Belle Arti necropolis, map of the necropolis.

fig. 7 – Bologna, via Belle Arti necropolis, grave 140, two different "drago" fibulae.

North-East side. Grave 140 was a large wooden structure (3.0×3.20 m) covered by a stone tumulus which had partly collapsed into the box. The preserved wooden structure was impressively well built and solid. In the north-west corner, near an "*impasto*"[33] vase and fragments of ritually broken pottery, there were traces of a wooden post, which may have supported the cover of the grave. The urn and its lid were in bronze and placed at the center of the grave, on a throne facing north-east as shown by the position of the footstool; the urn was covered with a garment, probably of leather, adorned and fixed with a bronze pin of a type common in men's graves (*fig.* 7). Near the urn a rich set of ornaments was found, as well as many different bronze and ceramic vessels possibly containing offerings of food or drink as suggested by preserved hazelnuts. Also present were horse harness and chariot elements.

The remains of the funeral pyre had been laid at the bottom of the wooden structure on the north-east side, and among the small fragments of burnt objects, a particularly significant find was a group of small bone decorations which had originally been attached to the funeral bed.

The structure of grave 142 was build to imitate in a very realistic manner a domestic structure with a robust floor, solid walls (*fig.* 8.3)[34], and double inclined roof covered by a straw layer (*fig.* 8.4).

Inside the wooden chamber, the urn and other goods were arranged as though the aim was to recreate the deceased's body and environment after cremation. The bronze urn, completely covered with textile and leather, sat on a small table; wooden reproductions of the feet and sandals were placed on a footstool in front of the urn. This is the first example of such realistic "anthropomorphism" to be found in Villanovan Bologna, and is an aspect of the ritual that otherwise is only known from later periods in northern Italy[35]. In front of the urn was a wooden shelf

[33] A pottery ware with abundant temper.

[34] Botanical analyses have shown that all structural elements were made from *quercus robur*.

[35] See Nerka's grave in Este Casa di Ricovero necropolis, dated to the early 3rd century BC: Chieco Bianchi 1987.

fig. 8 – Bologna, via Belle Arti necropolis, grave 142, the grave during excavations (8.1-3) (8.3-A shelf with tin decoration; 8.3-B oval table with twelve legs); 8.4 graphic reconstruction.

(*fig.* 8.3A) over two meters long, exceptionally decorated with tin strips, on which had been placed wooden and ceramic cups and dishes; on an oval table, with twelve legs (*fig.* 8.3B), were baskets full of hazelnuts and a very rich set, of mainly bronze vessels, which could be used to serve and drink liquids, was placed on the ground. In the via Belle Arti necropolis all the burials, of this date, contained cremations[36].

The most common structure is a wooden box, but grave 140 and particularly grave 142 have, externally and internally, architectural structures similar to those used in real life by the deceased, who was possibly the head of the family and certainly an important member of it. The "sacred" significance of cremation is well known in the literature[37] and is proven, if proof were necessary, by the attention dedicated to recovering all the remains of the pyre and placing them at the bottom of each grave. The usual "symbolic representation" of the body destroyed by cremation, as seen in grave 119 (and in many others), in graves 140 and 142 is taken to extremes. We believe every aspect and detail of the funeral rite to be part of a communication system addressed to the community taking part in the ritual. Therefore the urn being placed in one case on a throne and in the other on a table certainly had a meaning which was clear to the community though impossible for us to understand now.

The graves containing thrones in the via Belle Arti necropolis have been dated in the Bologna sequence[38] to the

[36] This is not the case in other necropoleis in Bologna, which also included graves not belonging to the dominant groups.

[37] Peroni 1996, p. 226.

[38] Dore 2005, with earlier references.

fig. 9 – Imola, Pontesanto, grave 7.

late 8th century BC, that is at the end of the Iron Age and beginning of the Orientalising Period.

Pontesanto (Imola)

During excavations in 1999-2000 in Pontesanto, near Imola, eleven graves were explored[39]. They were connected to a nearby small rural settlement approximately 30 km east of Bologna. Ten of the eleven graves are cremations in large wooden boxes. The rich grave good sets include bronze banquet vessels, weapons, horse harness, chariots and elaborate ornaments in bronze, glass and amber, indicating that the burials belonged to an aristocratic group. This hypothesis is also supported by the complex structure of the graves as well as by the presence in four of them of wooden thrones[40] (*fig.* 9). The existence of two different families could be suggested by the graves being separated into two groups located on the opposite sides of the settlement.

The elaborate funerary ritual clearly shows this small community, which derived its wealth from agricultural exploitation of the land, to be culturally dependent on the Villanovan protourban site of Bologna.

The presence of the four thrones in Pontesanto was inferred from the stratigraphy and post-depositional movements of the furniture, urn and its lid. The carbonized remains of the funeral pyre were found in a cylindrical pile – the shape can only be explained by their being originally contained within the base of the throne which had subsequently decayed. The urn and its lid apparently fell to the ground from a higher level some time after deposition; they had probably been placed on the throne.

As previously observed regarding the via Belle Arti necropolis, direct data concerning the structure of the thrones were very limited. The throne in grave 5, which was the better preserved, had a very similar shape to some of the Verucchio examples. Bronze studs of various sizes were found in two graves[41]; on the throne of grave 5 they were arranged in three lines around the curved border and under three perforated wheels[42].

The small necropolis of Pontesanto has been dated to two chronological phases, the first dating to the third quarter of the 8th century BC. The second phase which concludes the life of the settlement can be dated between the end of the 8th and the first decades of the 7th century BC.

In each phase there are two burials with thrones belonging to a male and a female.

After the early 7th century BC, settlement at Imola, as far as is presently known, moved to other locations in the direction of the Appennine Santerno valley, where other

[39] For a preliminary report on the Pontesanto excavations see Esposito in this volume. Esposito 2013/2014.

[40] Graves 3, 5, 7, 8.

[41] Graves 3 and 5.

[42] Trocchi 2004, p. 64.

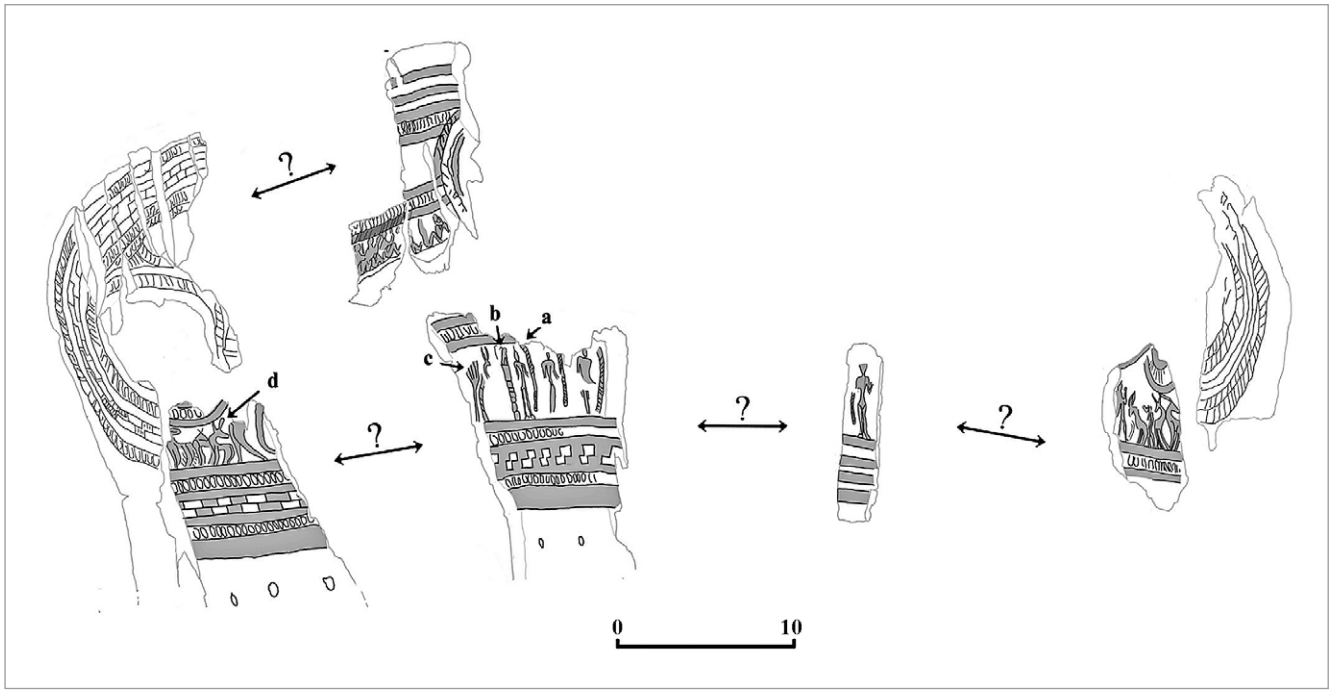

fig. 10 – Verucchio, grave Moroni 26/1969. Details of the carved decoration on the backrest of the throne.

burial grounds have been uncovered showing a different and not markedly aristocratic structure.

The iconography of throne decoration

Exceptional conservation conditions have preserved carved decoration on some thrones from Verucchio; these include the famous throne from grave Lippi 89/1972 which has been extensively published[43], and other ones from graves Lippi B/1971 and Moroni 26/1969. All these thrones have decoration representing complex scenes which include human figures, except for the throne from grave Lippi 85/1972, whose decoration does not include human figures.

We will not discuss here the interpretation of the figured scenes. In some cases they are well known in the literature[44], in other cases a detailed study still has to be carried out. However we totally agree with the opinion that iconographic interpretation cannot be undertaken unless it is based, first of all, on a clear methodological approach and, secondly, on a complete, detailed, and rigorous analysis of each specimen[45]. We wish instead to add new information about the throne from grave Moroni 26/ 1969 and to examine some facts that could be useful to show and perhaps understand the reasons for the presence of such complex decoration in the Verucchio graves.

In order to better understand the iconographic meaning of the decoration at Verucchio we believe it is also necessary to consider other objects which probably also have a symbolic decoration; these are from graves Moroni 26/1969, Lippi B/1971 and Lippi 85/1972[46].

The throne from grave Moroni 26/1969 belongs to a child approximately three years old. The sex cannot be anthropologically determined but personal ornaments and weaving tools suggest this was a young girl. The old restoration of the throne has recently been revised[47].

Although in this case much less of the figured decoration (*fig.* 10) is preserved and the position of single fragments is certainly different from what had been proposed in the first restoration, it seems certain that the figured scenes are organised in only one horizontal register on the internal side of the backrest.

Regardless of the different size and general scheme, similarities between the throne in Lippi 89/1972 and the smaller one in Moroni 26/1969 are striking. On both thrones there are warriors armed with spears, shields and high crested helmets. They are the only figures whose bodies are seen from the front.

[43] Similar figures may be present on the item in grave Lippi B/1971. It has not been possible to assemble the many small fragments but recognizable details on some of them, including a large animal figure, suggest that the general scheme of the decoration could be very similar to that in Lippi 89/1972 and Moroni 26/1969 (von Eles 2002).

[44] Recent observations by Verger regarding some details are correct (i.e. it is true that different hair styles are used for different figures on the throne in grave Lippi 89/1972), but the consequent interpretation needs a discussion that cannot be undertaken here: Verger 2011.

[45] Zaghetto 2002.

[46] Gentili 2003.

[47] The throne (Id. 1985, pp. 83-90) was exhibited in Athens in 2012 (von Eles 2012), and an unfortunate accident happened during the return journey. Thanks to the insurance policy, the (then) Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici dell'Emilia Romagna (dr. A. Pozzi) arranged for a new restoration based on a complete revision of the previous assemblage. New detailed photographs were taken; and drawing all the fragments was entrusted to Anna Maria Monaco in collaboration with P. von Eles (previously in charge, for the Soprintendenza, of the Verucchio archaeological areas and Museum). A graphic reconstruction of the figured scenes might in future be possible, but at present, it is possible only to examine the general scheme of the decoration and single motives, checking what could be seen in the old restoration against newly documented details. Unfortunately the throne is not yet back on show in Verucchio Museum as final decisions (by the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per le province di Ravenna, Forli-Cesena e Rimini) on the new restoration are pending.

In the Moroni 26/1969 throne the helmets do not show, on the sides, the plates with false rivets that in real helmets were on the front and back sides[48]; this is different from throne Lippi 89/1972. The shields, as in grave Lippi 89/1972 are obviously larger in relation to the figures than real ones would be as their size would prevent the users from seeing what is in front of them (*fig*. 11, a).

The central part of the scene is not preserved, but the pose of the warriors is exactly the same as on the other throne; it is legitimate therefore to think that here too something was happening that the warriors were supposed to protect without being allowed to watch.

Here too the location is an area well delimited by wooden structures above which, as in Lippi 89/1972, a human figure is sitting (*fig*. 11, b); the structure is outside as clearly indicated by trees (*fig*. 11, c) and wild animals at the sides (*fig*. 11, d).

No fragments can be placed between the warriors, the lateral animals and the perforate lateral round wheels. The connection of the wheels to solar cults and to the journey of the sun through the sky is well known. In the North Italian Copper and Early Bronze Age the solar symbol was exclusively used by dominant males as a way to express their lineage[49]. In the case of the thrones in Villanovan graves the solar wheel symbol was perhaps still being used to express membership of a dominant lineage, but it is certainly significant that it appears in male and female graves of both adults and children. The presence of this symbol has to be considered in connection with the role some women apparently had in the management of ritual activities[50] as indicated by the ritual bronze cup with a high handle shaped like a solar wheel in grave Lippi 32/2006[51]. The wheels might also have, depending on their position and number, a "calendrical" meaning but the available data is not sufficient to allow a convincing hypothesis to be developed.

Despite these striking analogies, the two thrones show significant differences not only in size and in the general composition of the figured decoration, but also in specific details and perhaps also in graphic conventions[52], confirming that each was made specially for a specific burial. Different details, i.e. the number of warriors and the decoration of their shields, could refer to differences in family traditions and in the way ceremonies were performed. The ceremonies were probably performed in an open air sanctuary, possibly one shared by all the elite families.

The figurative scenes on the thrones are not related to personal individuality, but were meant to show to the community that the dead person belonged to a family that participated in these ceremonies. Thus the presence of warriors, which would usually be surprising in the burial

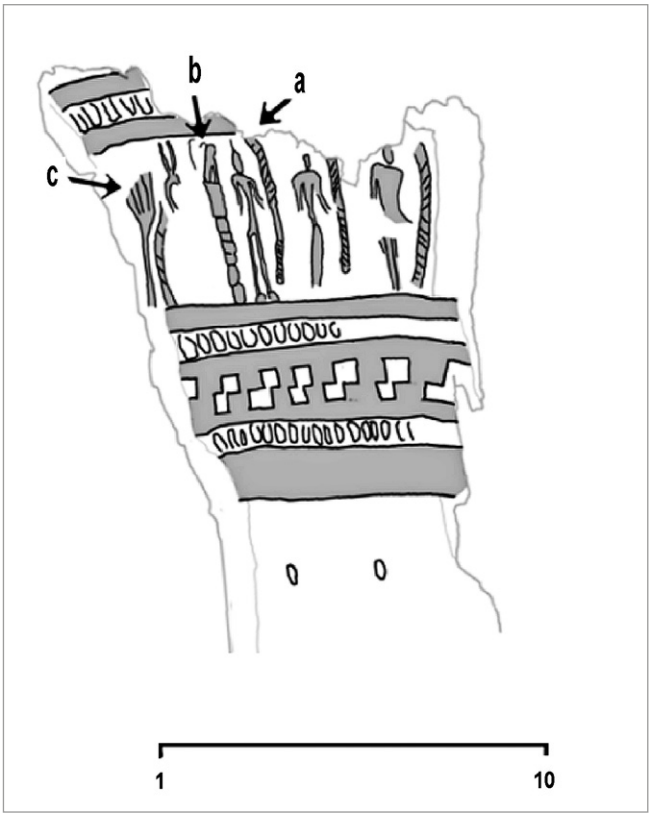

fig. 11 – Verucchio, grave Moroni 26/1969. Details of the carved decoration on the backrest of the throne: warriors with helmets and shields.

of a young girl, makes sense if one considers that it relates to the social status and role of her family.

It is important to observe that the figured scenes are, as on all the other wooden thrones, located on the internal side of the seat, while on the exterior side (both of seat and base) the decoration, carved and/or painted is only geometric. This means the representation could be seen only when the throne was not in use[53]. Decoration on the internal side of a seat or couch is also present on the large *klinai* of which there are both real examples, such as the one from Hochdorf, and those in figurative representations[54]. However, in these cases the decoration on the internal side could still be seen if someone was using the *kline*, in contrast with single seats such as thrones where an occupant would obscure the decoration. Although it is possible that exhibition of the furniture could take place in life during particular ceremonies, we believe this could hardly be true in the case of a three year old girl (Moroni 26/1969), and therefore we think that these items were made exclusively for the funeral ritual and burial[55].

In the same Moroni 26/1969 grave another object, whose use is difficult to determine, has figured decoration. It

[48] This can be considered an expedient mixing of frontal and lateral perspectives, in order to stress a specific characteristic, used in grave Lippi 89/1972 throne to represent also other details such as the large four wheeled chariots: *Guerriero e Sacerdote* 2002, p. 247, 250, footnotes 595 and 610.

[49] Leonardi 2012, p. 34.

[50] von Eles 2007a, pp. 149-156.

[51] Poli, Trocchi 2015, p. 14, figs. 14-15.

[52] See, for example, the different way of representing helmets that definitely belonged to the same type (Triangular crested helmets): Mazzoli, Negrini 2015, pp. 6-7.

[53] Unfortunately, traces of use have not been found on these wooden objects as they often are on bronze items.

[54] See the detail on the Certosa of Bologna situla compared in Biel 1985, fig. 116.

[55] Although of a different date and cultural context, the famous bronze couch from Hochdorf: Id. 1985 is also decorated on the internal side. The couch was used before deposition in the grave and the body was laid on it on top of blankets. Hooks on the back of the couch are thought to have been used to support blankets, so it is impossible to establish when the decoration was made and visible.

fig. 12 – Verucchio, grave Moroni 26/1969. Wooden objects: box (1), *suppedaneum* (2), table (3), unknown function (4).

was made of a concave wooden inferior part to which two other elements, one wooden and one leather, were fixed by two carved birds (*fig.* 12, 4).

The birds motive appears in Verucchio not only in the figured scenes but also on many bronze objects; particularly frequent are series of ducks applied in several lines to the lid of *dolia* containing the cinerary urns, symbolizing the solar boat driven through the sky by birds[56]. The motive of two birds facing opposite directions, could have a different meaning, and this deserves a detailed study. It is perhaps useful to remember that among the hundreds of amber objects found in Verucchio, only one has a figured central bead and it shows two opposed birds[57].

In grave Lippi B/1971 the preserved fragments of the wooden throne are not sufficient to allow a reconstruction: it is only possible to observe that carved geometric motives were present probably together with figured scenes as proved by one fragment showing a large four legged animal[58]. In the same burial other objects with figured decoration are a wooden disc[59] which was possibly a small shield used as the lid of the cinerary urn, and a round table (*fig.* 13) with sculpted figures applied to the legs[60]. Some other small wooden human figures were probably parts of different items of furniture[61].

The wooden disk (*fig.* 14, 1) is decorated with applied figures cut from thin tin sheet representing warriors, lions and birds and stars. Many elements have been lost but some essential facts can be appreciated. The scene is horizontally divided in two parts, each divided in quarters, a division that could have an astronomical significance. Each quarter shows a warrior wearing boots, and armed with spear and shield; the presence of a helmet is uncertain and in any case the type cannot be defined. Above the warriors are a bird and, in one case[62], a crossed element; on the external side there is a large animal, probably a lion with open mouth. All the same elements occur on the exceptional gold fibula from Vulci (Prov. Viterbo, Latium) that has been the subject of an extremely interesting study by Marco Pacciarelli. The scene on the Vulci fibula (*fig.* 14, 2), with the duel

[56] Kristiansen, Larsson 2005, pp. 305-308. For this motive on the throne in grave Lippi 89/1972: von Eles 2007a, p. 151; for the small bronze birds on the border of a *dolium* lid see grave Lippi 21/2005: Ghini, Negrini, Poli 2015, p. 9.

[57] *Dono delle Eliadi* 1994, p. 161, no. 532.

[58] This essential detail is not cited by Gentili who only mentions geometric decoration (Gentili 2003, 154).

[59] Trocchi 2007, p. 210, no. A51.

[60] von Eles 2007a, pp. 151-152; Ead. 2007b, pp. 203-204, no. A17.

[61] *Ore e giorni delle donne* 2007, p. 209, nos. A44, 45, 46, 47.

[62] It is unfortunately impossible to know if the crossed element was also present in the other "quarters".

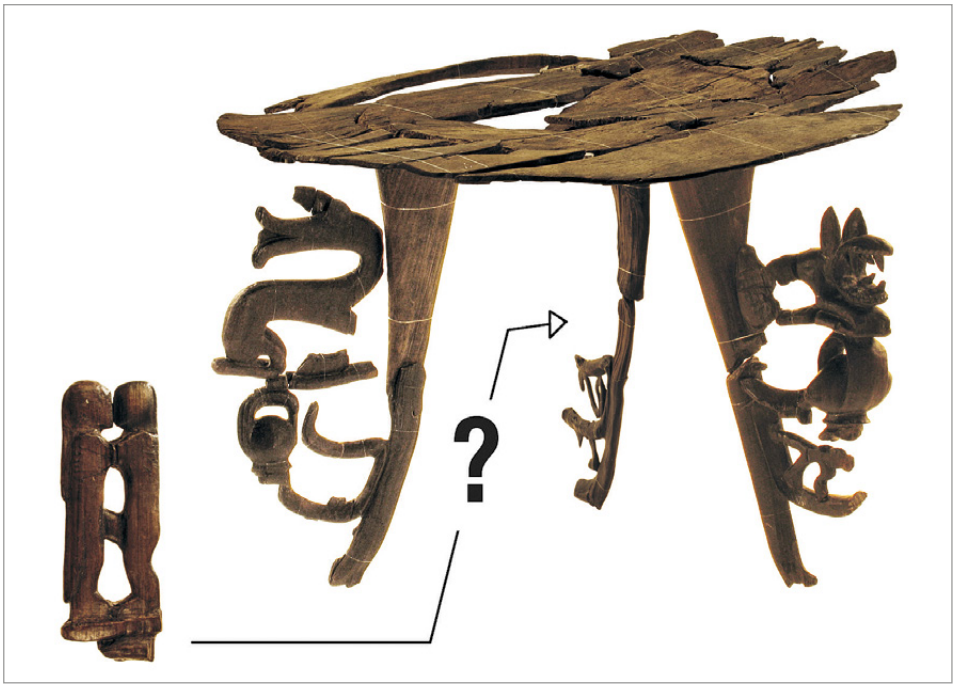

fig. 13 – Verucchio, grave Lippi B/1971. Wooden table with figured legs.

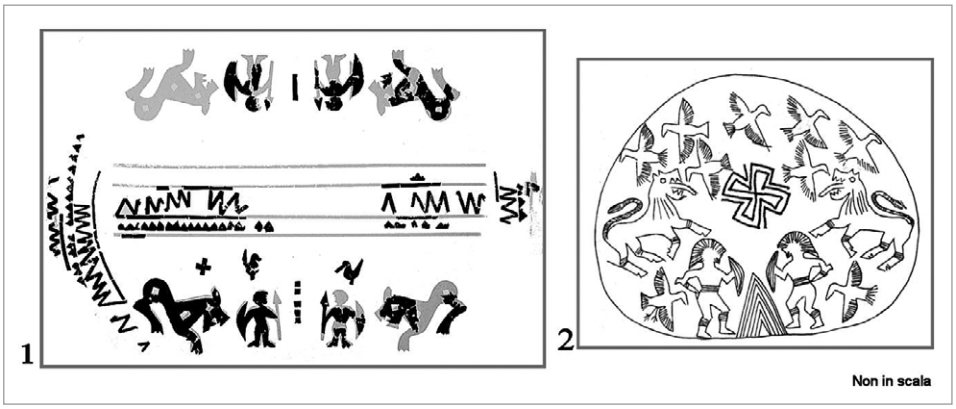

fig. 14 – Tin decorative figures on wooden disc, from grave Lippi B/1971 (1); disc plate in golden fibula from Vulci Ponte Sodo (from Pacciarelli 2002) (2).

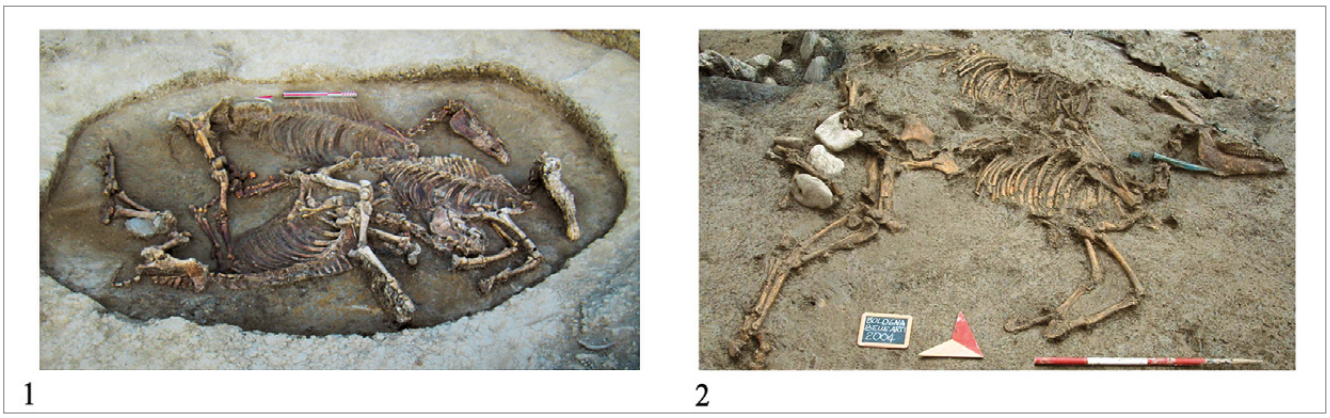

fig. 15 – Horses sacrifices in Verucchio, Lippi necropolis (1) and Bologna, via Belle Arti necropolis (2).

between two warriors, has been connected by Pacciarelli to a myth with structural connections to the saga of the fight between the Roman twins Romulus and Remus. The gold fibula dates to the second quarter of the 7th century BC, and belongs to an individual, probably a woman, of princely or regal status[63].

Similarities between the Verucchio disc[64] and the Vulci fibula are found in both the overall arrangement of the scene and in individual iconographical elements (the warriors, the long beaked birds, the open-mouthed lions). However,

[63] Pacciarelli 2002, pp. 315-323.

[64] Belonging to one of the richest and most significant male burials dated to Verucchio Phase V (von Eles, Elenco datazioni e relazioni stratigrafiche, in *Immagini di Uomini e di donne* 2015, Dvd attached).

a fundamental difference must be pointed out. The warriors on the Vulci fibula are shown facing each other and engaged in a duel while on the Verucchio disc they are both facing outwards and are differently armed – with shields and spears instead of knives[65]. There is clearly a difference in the meaning of the scene that we are unable to connect to local myths. The Verucchio disc, as just mentioned above, is somewhat earlier, in the Verucchio chronology, than the Vulci fibula but the similarities oblige us to consider that there must be some kind of common background in the Iron Age between these two culturally different areas of Verucchio and Rome.

The round table in the same tomb (Lippi B/1971) belongs to a well known type; but the basic features have been modified to create a unique object certainly responding to needs that cannot be considered merely ornamental. Different carved figures have been attached to each leg (*fig*. 13).

One of them supports a "monster", the second a snake, and it is likely that an intertwined couple was attached to the third[66]. It is important to observe that in this case the standing position of the figures, and the lady being dressed in a mantle reaching the ankles, implies that the figure group does not have an erotic significance. The figures on the table legs could be interpreted as a remarkable symbolic representation of the complete cycle of life[67]: the couple representing sexual union (*hierogamy* or sacred marriage) as the origin of life, the monster as horrid death or the underworld, and the snake, through shedding its skin, representing rebirth[68].

Grave Lippi 85/1972 contained two objects with a complex iconography. The burial is certainly one of the most important in the Lippi necropolis, belonging to an adult male and being topographically located not far from grave 89/1972. The objects in the rich grave goods set and the structure of the grave, almost a "chamber tomb", date this burial to the final period of the Verucchio necropoleis, probably to the second/third quarter of the 7th century BC.

Most important here is the throne, very different from those previously described. The carved decoration is much simpler with no figured scenes[69]. On the internal side of the backrest there are two lateral carved solar wheels while the central one is perforated and surrounded by an incised zig-zag motive; on the cylindrical base the motives almost become a geometrical decoration delimited by straight lines. In addition to the throne, in this burial, figurative decoration appears for the first time on a ceramic vase, a situla that has two series of animals, partly fantastic and difficult to identify, irregularly arranged on two lines[70].

The throne and this vase show that figurative decoration was used differently in this period and this is perhaps the key that allows us to perceive important changes. The symbols are still there but they are not used in the narrative schemes that were shared by the leading families of earlier generations. This probably indicates that while the social structure of Verucchio was apparently much the same as before, a hidden change in the cultural background of the elite groups was taking place. A change that might have to do with the abandonment of the necropoleis of Verucchio by the leading families.

The throne as a prerogative of individuals belonging to aristocratic groups represents, in the Italian Iron Age, an import from the East in the so-called Orientalising period (second half of the 8th-7th century BC). Differences in symbolic and ideological significance are present in different contexts, expressed by the position of the throne in the grave and its relation to other objects rather than by the structure of the grave itself.

Similarly shaped thrones can be found in princely graves in Etruria and Latium[71], but in these areas differences in deposition reveal variations in meaning.

In Chiusi, Bisentium and Bologna the throne is closely connected to the images of the dead: the urn symbolically representing the body sits on the throne. In Etruscan burials the throne is often placed in an area that has been interpreted as the equivalent of the "antechamber", a space thought to be connected to the cult of the ancestors where in some cases, as in Cere, more than one throne was present[72]. In the Colle del Forno necropolis (Rome)[73] the throne is duplicated: a ceramic throne was found inside the burial chamber, where the cremated remains were also placed, while a second one was above the grave, clearly stressing the social position of the dead person.

Studying the different situations in the necropoleis of Emilia Romagna where wooden thrones have been found, some important differences have been noticed. In Verucchio there is a clear intentional separation between the area dedicated to the dead person and the separate space dedicated to the throne[74]. In the space dedicated to the urn[75] the deceased's image and his/her social rank is stressed, while the throne is clearly connected to the ritual banquet; analysis of banquet vessels, considering both the shape and the number of pieces, has shown a definite difference between female and male burials; males had a higher number of drinking vessels, while females had a higher number of vases connected to the consumption of solid food[76].

The five female burials with a throne presently known from Verucchio clearly show differences with regard to other rich female graves. In these five graves the throne is not only a means of showing the prestige of the family[77], but also, the position of the throne and its connection to rare and uncommon objects can be interpreted as a sign of a particular religious activity.

[65] The use of knives instead of more common weapons like spears has been remarked on by Pacciarelli (Pacciarelli 2002, p. 318) who suggests this might be related to a sacred value of the duel. In Verucchio large iron knives are usually associated with spears in warriors' burials.

[66] In restoration though the piece was kept separate as the physical contact was missing.

[67] von Eles 2007a, p. 151.

[68] *Encyclopedie des symboles*, Torino 2000, passim.

[69] Gentili 2003, pl. 136, no. 42.

[70] *Ibid.*, pl. 137, no. 45.

[71] See, as an example, the throne, probably coming from Vulci, at the Louvre Museum (Paolucci 2000) and the one from the Barberini Tomb from Praeneste (Steingräber 1979, p. 199, no. 28) both in bronze.

[72] Colonna, von Hase 1986, pp. 13-59.

[73] Grave 36, Colle del Forno necropolis: Benelli, Santoro 2009, p. 62.

[74] Only one burial shows a direct connection between the throne and the dead person: Grave Lippi 90/2014 excavated in 2014 under the direction of Dr. A. Pozzi and Dr. T. Trocchi: Mazzoli, Pozzi 2015, p. 89, footnote 6.

[75] Graves Lippi 32/2006, 71/2008, 73/2008.

[76] Poli, Trocchi 2007, pp. 141-142.

[77] Parallels in oriental images of women seated on thrones, with their feet on a stool, are well known: Delpino, Flourentzos 2000, p. 95.

In contrast with Verucchio, the symbolic meaning of the throne in the funeral ritual at Bologna and Imola Pontesanto is totally different: at the latter sites the image of the dead is created by dressing the cinerary urn with rich textiles and ornaments and sitting it on the throne. The same direct physical connection between the throne and the dead person is found in Etruria and Latium.

The difference between two Villanovan sites, Verucchio and Bologna, that have much in common, as mentioned in previous works[78] appears clearly in the ritual sphere, which, in our opinion, more and better than others is used by the community to express its cultural identity and its differences from other groups.

Other facts that have been pointed out in this paper suggest the existence of some kind of common background between different areas of Italy in the Iron Age. Note the striking similarity between the iconographic elements on the disc from grave Lippi B/1971 and the gold fibula from Vulci.

We also think it is essential to stress the presence of horse sacrifices in Verucchio and Bologna as this must have been an extremely important aspect of rituality (*fig*. 14). The wide distribution, both cultural (in the Indoeuropean world) and chronological (European Bronze and Iron Ages) of horse iconography and the connection to solar cults has been analysed by Zaghetto[79] in his studies on Situla Art.

Concluding this analysis of the archaeological contexts of wooden thrones in Emilia Romagna we wish to observe that the sacrificed horses in both Bologna and Verucchio must be interpreted as an extremely important indication of long-lived traditions and of a common background in areas that in terms of other cultural aspects are usually considered as culturally separate[80].

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[78] von Eles 2009.

[79] Zaghetto 2002; Id. 2017a and Id. 2017b, with earlier references.

[80] All photographs are from the archives of the previous Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici dell'Emilia Romagna (now Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Bologna and Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per le province di Ravenna, Forli-Cesena e Rimini); graphic reconstruction of grave 142 via Belle Arti necropolis in Bologna (*fig*. 8.4) is due to Agnese Mignan; graphic assemblage of fragments of grave Moroni 26/1969 in Verucchio is due to P. von Eles on the basis of drawings by Anna Maria Monaco.

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