N. Bonacasa: Thomas, Eine postume Statuette Ptolemaios IV.

sarci direttamente, soprattutto perché esso costituisce premessa ulteriore per lo sviluppo futuro delle indagini sulla iconografia tolemaica, soprattutto di quella minore, non monumentale e non di lusso. L’esperienza di altri e personale ci fa certi che la via per lo studio dei piccoli bronzi e delle terrecotte con valore iconografico potrebbe portare a risultati inattesi e di rilievo, non solo e non tanto nel campo sempre rischioso delle identificazioni, ma soprattutto in quello della ricostruzione dei contesti e dello sfondo culturale cui codesti piccoli monumenti appartengono.


Palermo Nicola Bonacasa


The contents of this publication, which deals with one of the most important Villanovan and early Etruscan complexes presently known, is the complete edition of data relative to both excavation and funerary outfits of three groups of burials from two of the Villanovan cemeteries of Verucchio (Rimini, Romagna); the excavations were carried out by the author in 1970 (24 cremation burials from the cemetery at Le Pegge, and 26 from the cemetery below the Rocca Malatestiana, podere Lippi), and in 1972 (163 more cremations from podere Lippi).

The book is divided in three sections: a general introduction (A) and the complete description of the graves from each of the two cemeteries (B, C).

A detailed reading of the Introduction is necessary, since this is the only part of the book which offers a summary of archaeological and historical research
relative to Verucchio and the northern Villanovan, as well as the author’s views and interpretation.  

A. 1 – Sguardo generale, p. 13–20. This is a brief overlook of the archaeological evidence and chronological development of the settlement and cemeteries of Verucchio from the Final Bronze Age to the orientalizing and early archaic period, with some reference to the other major northern Villanovan centre, Bologna. A schematic map showing the relative position of settlement and cemeteries provides the illustration to this subsection (fig. 1). The location of the settlement, a plateau and acropolis on the top of a steep hill surrounded by separate cremation cemeteries set on the adjacent slopes and plain, is compared to the usual setting of the Villanovan centres of Etruria and of Fermo, in the Marche. According to the author, who follows quite faithfully Pallottino (1984), Bologna was a projection from the northern zone of Etruria, i.e., Tuscany between the Arno and Ombrone rivers, that had been established in order to control the trade-routes to the Po plain and to trans-Alpine Europe. Verucchio and Fermo were connected to southern Etruria, especially Veii and Tarquinia, and provided the contacts with Illyria, on the opposite coast of the Adriatic, and with the amber route from northern Europe, as well as with the eastern Mediterranean prior to the Phoenician and Greek colonization. As regards this point, it should be remarked that, although Massimo Pallottino’s reconstruction of the Villanovan period still holds, recent research consistently indicates that the emergence of the so-called peripheral Villanovan centres both in Emilia Romagna (Bologna and Verucchio) and in the Marche (Fermo) represents the final outcome of the strong cultural
and territorial integration that linked the central regions of Italy (Tuscany, Umbria and Marche) to the Po plain throughout the Final Bronze Age (see for example Bietti Sestieri 1997).

The absolute chronology proposed by the author follows the general scheme that was more or less universally adopted in Italy prior to the new elements introduced by dendrochronology and calibrated 14C dates (see now Bartoloni and Delpino, in press): Verucchio I, 9th century BC; Verucchio II, 8th century; Verucchio III, 7th to first half of the 6th century.

The occupation of the site of Verucchio with the adjacent area between the Marecchia and Uso rivers was the result of an advance from southern Etruria, that begun already in the Final Bronze Age. Verucchio was a junction of interregional routes both from the interior to the Adriatic coast, via the Marecchia and the Tiber valleys, and along the coast, from Novilara, in northern Marche, to Romagna.

The protohistoric (Villanovan) settlement of Verucchio is known through a number of separate excavations, including a complete stratigraphic sequence from a Villanovan well. The most important information relative to dwelling structures and everyday life comes from the rich furnishing of the orientalizing graves, especially the wooden throne from grave 89 Lippi, with representations of houses, carts, looms and different activities performed by humans and animals.

The cemeteries include the separate cores of Fondo Lavatoio-Campo del Tesoro, Le Pegge (predio Moroni), and the main one, below the Rocca Malatestiana, on the northern slope of the hill.

The economy of Verucchio was based on the manufacture of pottery, textiles, metals, wood, amber and bone (ivory?). Throughout phase I the community of Verucchio was egalitarian; during phases II and III the funerary evidence points to the uneven distribution of wealth; the funerary outfits of the representatives of the upper classes include luxury items, exotica, indications of the use of horses and carts. The grave goods imply the belief in a new life in the afterworld. Ritual activities are documented by the offering of three shields at the Villanovan well at Pian del Monte.

The villages that coexisted on the hill of Verucchio constituted a political unit from the 9th century; in the 8th century the emergence of high rank individuals points to the establishment of a common administrative system, and by the end of the century the community was unified under the rule of a petty chief-king, whose role was marked by some exclusive features in the funerary ritual and grave goods: a large wooden box which contained the cremation urn and part of the funerary outfit, and specific indicators of power. From the 8th century an alphabet of Etruscan type was in use.

From the mid-6th century, in chronological coincidence with the full development of Etruscan Bologna, Verucchio underwent a crisis and a cultural change, due to the increasing pressure from umbro-sabellic groups; by the mid-4th cent. the invasion by the Galli Senones produced a new change and the appearance of a Latène-type archaeological aspect.

A. 2 – Le necropoli, p. 21–29. This subsection is devoted to the history of archaeological research on the cemeteries of Verucchio, and to the distinctive features and chronology of each one. Systematic research begun in the 19th century, with the formation of private collections of materials from the cemeteries. Regular excavations were first planned by Edoardo Brizio: between 1893 and 1895, Brizio himself and Alessandro Tosi excavated 116 graves from the cemetery of Fondo Lavatoio. The excavation was also extended to the main cemetery, below the Rocca Malatestiana: 28 graves were discovered at podere Dolci, 9 more at podere Fornace.

Cemetery of Fondo Lavatoio: phases I, II and III. In the earliest part of phase I the graves were plain pits containing biconical urns with geometric decoration and some
bronze ornaments. Toward the end of this phase the decoration of the urns included me-tope patterns, and sheet bronze vessels appeared among the grave goods.

The funerary outfits of later graves, both from Fondo Lavatoio and from the cemetery below the Rocca Malatestiana, were richer and more complex; personal ornaments include sanguisuga and navicella fibulae, the former often decorated with lavish inlays of amber and bone (or ivory?), bracelets, horse-bits, iron weapons, possibly some biconical urns of bronze sheet.

Cemetery at Le Pegge: discovered in 1934, 5 graves were excavated in 1962, 37 by the author in the predio Moroni. The graves can be generally dated to phase II. The biconical urns may be covered by a cloak and protected by a basket, a row of wooden posts or a dolium. The rich grave goods include bronze vessels, personal ornaments of bronze, amber and precious metals, pieces of wooden furniture, bronze and iron weapons, and an Egyptian scarab dating from the 13th–11th century from tomb 4.

Cemetery below the Rocca Malatestiana, terreno Lippi. From the 26 orientalizing graves excavated by the author in 1970 come at least two carts, ornaments of precious metals, important wooden artifacts. The 162 tombs excavated in 1972 cover the whole sequence from the Early Iron Age to the Orientalizing period. According to the author’s interpretation, the outstanding grave goods of tomb 85 (three wooden tables with different offerings of food besides the rich funerary outfit) can be attributed to a wealthy member of the community. Tomb 89, with its wooden box, throne with figurative scenes carved on the back, axe, two helmets, a wealth of precious personal ornaments and wooden furniture, horse gear and cart, belonged to the local petty king. Both are dated by the author to the mid-7th century BC.

Two inhumation burials from the area of the cemetery probably date from the subsequent Umbro-Sabellic phase.

B – Il sepolcreto in località Le Pegge, p. 31–121; C – La necropoli nel declivio sottostante la Rocca Malatestiana, p. 103–376. These two chapters consist exclusively of the description of the individual graves, from excavation to grave-goods catalogue. Plates Ia, II and XII of volume 9 show the position of the cemetery of Le Pegge relative to the settlement hill, and a detail of the excavation. A schematic general plan (fig. 2 in the text) indicates the areas of excavation and the relative position of each grave. According to this map, the excavation was carried out by means of a number of trenches, separated by wide areas which apparently have not been tested or excavated. In other words, no elements are provided relative to the overall extension of the cemetery, although the map seems to indicate that the grave-groups found so far were isolated from each other by wide empty spaces. As regards the cemetery below the Rocca Malatestiana, its location at the foot of the Rocca is shown in pl. Ia; a more detailed plan (text, fig. 17) shows the overall distribution of plain pozzetti and pozzetti with dolium unearthed by the 1970 and 1972 campaigns. The figures in the text include simplified plans and sections of each grave, while the plates that illustrate the funerary outfits consist of good quality drawings (pl. 1–50, Le Pegge; pl. 51–171, La Rocca) and photographs (pl. IIa, XVI–LXXXI, Le Pegge; pl. IIb–XV and LXXXII–CCCXLIV, La Rocca).

The description of the excavation is exhaustive, although only the largest artifacts are indicated, and are not numbered. The short descriptions of the artifacts, that apparently have not been classified prior to publication, include measurements, registration number and reference to the plates.

As already stated, Verucchio as a whole is one of the most important Villanovan complexes known so far, and its cemeteries constitute an extraordinary document of an early Etruscan society at the peak of its wealth and power. An
outstanding feature of its cemeteries is the exceptional state of preservation of organic materials, including wood, textiles, amber and basketry, which provide a unique opportunity to appreciate the full range of the local material culture as well as some figurative documents, mainly, the carved wooden throne from grave 89.

Moreover, given the variety and overall wealth of the individual funerary outfits, combined with the spatial data relative to both clustered and isolated graves, the potential for a thorough reconstruction of the society of Verucchio from its cemeteries is extremely high.

This task is being performed, and will hopefully be achieved in the next few years, thanks to the launching since 1992 of the Verucchio project, that aims to the publication of all the archaeological complexes from the Villanovan site, as well as to the new setting of the local museum.


The first full edition to have appeared so far is the publication of tomb 89 of the cemetery of Podere Lippi (von Eles, ed., 2002): this includes the analysis of the tomb structure and funerary ritual, the classification of all the different classes of artifacts, supported by analytical and experimental sections, the analysis and determination of human and animal remains; a wide space is devoted to the interpretation of the complex scene carved on the back of the throne.

It is to be hoped that an equally high level of analysis will be achieved by the publication of the rest of the archaeological complexes from Verucchio.

The archaeological work by Gentili, who is now retired, has been characterized by the commendable habit of publishing his excavations; throughout his career in the Italian Soprintendenze, he has been able to publish some important archaeological complexes, such as the Roman villa of Piazza Armerina, in Sicily (Gentili 1999, three volumes).

The publication of the Verucchio cemeteries provides all scholars who work on Italian protohistory with the basic information on these complexes, i.e., with the opportunity to perform further analyses and research on a sound scientific base. In the best of all possible archaeological worlds, it would have been perhaps desirable for the excavator himself to carry out the complete analysis and interpretation of these cemeteries; however, it is only fair to acknowledge the extraordinary achievement represented by these two volumes, for which the international scientific community should be grateful to the excavator and author.

Roma

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