

The historical significance of Frattesina

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SUMMARY

This paper offers a brief overview of the key points of scholarly agreement in the interpretation of Frattesina, a manufacturing and trading centre at the head of the Adriatic, in north-east Italy, that flourished between the twelfth and ninth centuries BC. It then discusses a number of points of scholarly controversy: what sort of settlement Frattesina may have been, what may have been its social structure, who were its trading partners and finally, how Frattesina fits into the historical trajectory of the western Veneto, its relationship with the Recent Bronze Age *terramare* polity of the Valli Grandi Veronesi area and the formation of the Iron Age Villanovan and Este cultures. After brief reviews of the debate, I offer my own opinions on these matters.

RIASSUNTO

In questo contributo si offre una breve sintesi delle principali aree di consenso scientifico riguardo l'interpretazione di Frattesina, un centro manifatturiero e commerciale del *Caput Adriae* databile dal XII al IX sec. a.C.. Si affrontano poi alcuni argomenti di controversia scientifica: quale era la natura dell'abitato di Frattesina, che struttura sociale aveva, chi erano i suoi *partners* commerciali ed infine, quale era lo status di Frattesina nella traiettoria storica del Veneto occidentale, il suo rapporto con la *polity* *terramaricola* delle Valli Grandi Veronesi dell'età del Bronzo recente e la formazione delle culture di Este e di Villanova dell'età del Ferro. Dopo aver passato in rassegna le posizioni principali all'interno del dibattito scientifico, vengono offerte le mie opinioni a riguardo.

INTRODUCTION

Since its discovery in 1967 Frattesina, north-east Italy (Fratta Polesine - RO), has been at the centre of archaeological attention and has consequently generated a substantial number of publications. As a result of the important excavations by Anna Maria Bietti Sestieri (1981a; 1990), not to mention the excavations of its cemeteries by Maurizia De Min¹ and Luciano Salzani,² surface collection over the last 50 years and more recently remote sensing (DE GUIO *et al.* 2009; BALDO *et al.* 2018), we are beginning to have a clearer idea about the chronology, the extent of the site, its economic activities, social organisation and wide trading network. Much of this work is summarised in the recent volume edited by Bietti Sestieri, Bellintani and Giardino (2019), which as well as providing an overview also contains important new studies. In this paper I shall first outline what I see as the principal points of agreement concerning Frattesina, and then discuss some points of controversy which I believe are important to resolve. For some of them I shall attempt to offer solutions.

WHAT CAN WE AGREE ON?

¹ DE MIN 1982; 1986a; 1986b.

² SALZANI 1989; 1991, SALZANI, COLONNA (eds) 2010; CARDARELLI *et al.* 2015.

Bronze Age archaeology is often characterised by controversy about chronology, in particular based on alternative readings of ceramic typologies, but there is general consensus that Frattesina spans the twelfth to the ninth century BC,³ although the data for the later phases is less good, as a result of the destruction of the upper layers of the site by earth moving. As such Frattesina documents the transition between the Bronze Age and the Iron Age in north-east Italy and the head of the Adriatic; furthermore, as we shall see below, it has early evidence for iron (BIETTI SESTIERI 1997, p. 39; GIARDINO 2019, pp. 270-272).

Thanks to its chronology, Frattesina tells us about the Adriatic, and indeed about Mediterranean trade more generally, after the collapse of the palace system. Frattesina was a major commercial node in Mediterranean and European trading networks and used weights related to the Levantine shekel weight system (BELLINTANI 2001; CARDARELLI *et al.* 2004, pp. 83-84). It traded in Baltic amber (BELLINTANI 2015; ANGELINI 2019b), bronzework (PEARCE *et al.* 2019), and Levantine or north African elephant ivory (BIETTI SESTIERI, DE GROSSI MAZZORIN 2005) and ostrich eggshell.⁴ But the site was not just a trading site at an advantageous position between the east Mediterranean and transalpine Europe, it was also a major industrial centre. The exotic raw materials (the amber, elephant ivory and ostrich eggshells) were imported not as finished artefacts, but to be worked on site. Moreover, antler (BIETTI SESTIERI 1975, pp. 5-7; BELLATO, BELLINTANI 1975) and glass were also worked,⁵ and it seems that bronze artefacts were manufactured on an industrial scale: at least 100 casting-moulds and 4 founder's hoards are known from the site.⁶

As well as by exotic raw materials (the elephant ivory and ostrich eggshell), Frattesina's participation in Mediterranean trade is also indicated by ceramic evidence. Best known is the Po-valley-made LHIIIc "Italo-Mycenaean" pottery, which suggests the presence of potters trained in the Aegean, or perhaps even Aegean potters who had migrated to the Po delta (JONES *et al.* 2014, pp. 212-214, 216-217, 274-275, 294, fig 4.88) after the fall of the Mycenaean palaces (cf. PEARCE 2000, p. 111). Another index of Aegean influence is the 15 fragments of anthropomorphic clay figurines known from the site (CASSOLA GUIDA 2013), as are the sherds of two early ninth-century (?) pithoi which perhaps depict a ritual dance (maybe the "crane dance") (MALNATI 2002). I have already mentioned the weights which fit the Levantine shekel weight system. Finally, I might add the practice of situating cemeteries on the opposite side of water courses to the settlement, also known elsewhere in the Final Bronze Age Po plain, which seems to reflect Greek and Egyptian funerary ideology, so that the dead reach the afterlife by crossing water (PEARCE 2006).

Thanks to lead isotope studies, over the last few years it has become clear that the copper worked at Frattesina originated in the south-eastern Alps,⁷ rather than in *Etruria mineraria* as had previously been thought.⁸ South-east Alpine copper was traded around the Adriatic basin and, in the form of finished artefacts of Italian types, as far as Greece (JUNG *et al.* 2011; JUNG, MEHOFER 2013), and it seems likely that this trade originated in Frattesina. A thorough review of the radiocarbon dates available for smelting in the Trentino – Alto Adige/Südtirol region confirms that smelting may have already started again in the south-eastern Alps (after a possible hiatus) in the sixteenth century cal BC and continued until the ninth century cal BC

³ BELLINTANI 1992; 2000; BIETTI SESTIERI *et al.* 2015, pp. 429-431; BIETTI SESTIERI *et al.* 2019.

⁴ BELLINTANI, PERETTO 1972; BIETTI SESTIERI *et al.* 2015, pp. 432-433; ANGELINI 2019c.

⁵ TOWLE *ET AL.* 2001, CAT. NOS 1-27; HENDERSON *ET AL.* 2015; ANGELINI 2019a; HENDERSON 2019; BELLINTANI, STEFAN 2009.

⁶ BIETTI SESTIERI 1975, pp. 5-7; BIETTI SESTIERI *et al.* 2015, pp. 433-435; BIETTI SESTIERI, GIARDINO 2019; LE FÈVRE-LEHÖERFF 1994, pp. 171, 187-212, figs 4-8, 11-12, 19, 21-22, 24, 26, 28-29, 31-32, 37-38.

⁷ JUNG *et al.* 2011; JUNG, MEHOFER 2013; VILLA, GIARDINO 2019; PEARCE *et al.* 2019.

⁸ BIETTI SESTIERI 1981b, pp. 235-237; 1997, pp. 385-396; PEARCE 2000; cf. 2007, pp. 89-90, 101-107.

(PEARCE *et al.* 2019). This finding falsifies the traditional model for the circulation of copper in northeast Italy, according to which there was an interruption in the supply of south-east Alpine copper at the beginning of the Final Bronze Age, in the twelfth or eleventh centuries BC, which was replaced by copper originating from *Etruria mineraria* (PEARCE *et al.* 2019).

SOME OUTSTANDING HISTORICAL PROBLEMS

Having established the main points of consensus concerning Frattesina, I shall now discuss some issues where there is no agreement. In the following paragraphs my focus will be on what sort of settlement Frattesina may have been, what may have been its social structure, who were its trading partners and finally, how Frattesina fits in to the historical trajectory of the western Veneto, its relationship with the Recent Bronze Age *terramare* of the Valli Grandi Veronesi area and the formation of the Iron Age Villanovan and Este cultures.

Before beginning this discussion, it is worth noting that many scholars working on Frattesina, and in particular Anna Maria Bietti Sestieri, have taken a substantivist approach to understanding the later prehistoric economy and by extension society. This was inspired by two influential books, one by an anthropologist, Marshall Sahlins' (1972) *Stone Age Economics*, the other by an ancient historian, Moses Finley's (1973) *The Ancient Economy*, both of which were translated into Italian (SAHLINS 1980 and FINLEY 1974) and which promoted a view of the prehistoric economy as based on social rather than rational economic motivations. This, and a pervasive primitivism, mean that scholars often tend to underestimate the levels of complexity shown by prehistoric societies.

That said, it was quickly clear to all who looked at the evidence from Frattesina, in particular the presence of exotic materials and the clear evidence for large-scale craft production, that it was an exceptional site. For example, early on, in a wide-ranging review of the metals trade in Etruria at the end of the Bronze Age, Bietti Sestieri commented that the particular characteristics of Frattesina's economic structure made it well adapted to engage in organised and systematic exchange (BIETTI SESTIERI 1981b: 237). The key question, however, relates to the autonomy of Frattesina as a socio-political phenomenon: was Frattesina an outside initiative, a trading station established as a result of east Mediterranean and/or Etrurian commercial interests, or was it an independent, autochthonous, polity? Clearly, any answers to this question are easily biased by the primitivist premise, because if the initiative was local, this presupposes the existence of a sophisticated polity, which would challenge the primitivist assumption.

An important attempt to understand the nature of the settlement and social organisation of Frattesina was proposed by Armando De Guio, who saw it in World-System terms as a peripheral "gateway community" which drained the resources of its hinterland through a dendritic network (DE GUIO 2000, p. 307;⁹ for gateway communities see HIRTH 1978). On the other hand, as a primitivist and substantivist, Bietti Sestieri doubted that Wallerstein's (1974) World-System model, which had been developed in order to understand the European economy in the sixteenth century AD, could be applied to later prehistoric Europe, and she also pointed out that it is a form of the early twentieth-century *ex Oriente lux* diffusionist model, by which social change is explained by external, eastern, causes (BIETTI SESTIERI 1997, p. 372).

Bietti Sestieri (1997, 2009, 2012) argued that Frattesina was not an independent polity that took part in Mediterranean trade and she has preferred rather to see it as an outpost, "an

⁹ De Guio also sees the Valli Grandi Veronesi polity of the Recent Bronze Age in these terms: BALISTA, DE GUIO 1997, pp.156-157.

intermediate base for the trade relations of Etruria with transalpine and eastern Europe” selected on the basis of its being a strategic node (1997, p. 396), and suggested that it played a similar role to Felsina/Bologna in the Villanovan Iron Age (BIETTI SESTIERI 1997, p. 390). She argued this on the basis of the formal similarities between the Protovillanovan material culture of the Veneto and Tuscany and the idea that Frattesina imported metal from Etruria (which as we now know, is erroneous). Frattesina was not therefore to be understood in its local, Veneto context but rather as part of the development of Etruscan society, as a sort of proto-Etruscan trading colony in the north (cf. DE GUIO 2000, p. 314).

More recently, Bietti Sestieri’s argument has become more nuanced. In 2012 she argued that the Villanovan developed simultaneously in two different core areas, South Etruria and in the area around Frattesina, with neither driving developments in the other. She suggested that Frattesina is the result of a dialectic relationship between indigenous communities and East Mediterranean elites, who, attracted by its strategic position, stimulated its development as a manufacturing centre and entrepôt, and who (at least) initially took political control (BIETTI SESTIERI 2012).¹⁰ Finally, in her introduction to the proceedings of the workshop on Frattesina held at the Accademia dei Lincei in 2015 she suggests that Frattesina may have belonged to a larger polity, centred on the substantially unexplored but much larger site of Villamarzana (RO) (BIETTI SESTIERI 2019, p. 10).

Scholars in the Veneto have, on the other hand, preferred to emphasise aspects of local continuity, rather than explaining Frattesina as a trading outpost from Etruria (e.g. LEONARDI 2009). The key model was developed by De Guio¹¹ who argued for a long-term trajectory in which the socio-political centre of gravity shifted gradually eastwards towards the coast, from the Lake Garda area (Early Bronze Age), to the middle Veronese plain (Middle Bronze Age), to the Valli Grandi in the low Veronese plain (Middle and Recent Bronze Age) and thence to the Polesine, the apex of the delta where Frattesina was established in the Final Bronze Age. De Guio suggested that this trajectory was primarily linked to control of trade in metal (DE GUIO *et al.* 2015, p. 315; cf. DE GUIO 2000, p. 308).

The key to understanding Frattesina is, I believe, its manufacturing role. It was not simply an entrepôt situated at a particularly favourable communication node, but imported raw materials, including exotic goods like amber, ivory and ostrich eggshell, which its craftworkers transformed into manufactured goods; in economic terms we may say that value was added at Frattesina (PEARCE 2019, p. 350). Indeed, in 2000, I pointed out that “[t]he scale of production at the site suggests that Frattesina was not just a place occasionally visited by wandering East Mediterranean merchant ships, but was an active partner in a long-distance trade system” (PEARCE 2000, p. 110), commenting that “the civilising *deus ex machina* of East Mediterranean traders is not necessary to explain the sophistication of Frattesina” (PEARCE 2000, p. 113). More recently, I have argued that Frattesina’s manufacturing role meant it was an equal partner in Mediterranean trade (PEARCE 2007, p.97), noting that “[w]hereas most Protovillanovan (Final Bronze Age) settlements in Italy produced goods primarily for internal consumption, the nature of the specialised craft production at Frattesina suggests that its economy was geared for export, and this seems to have been on a large scale” (PEARCE 1997, p. 103). This means that, to express it in Wallerstein’s (1974) terms, Frattesina was part of the “core”, rather than the “periphery”; it was a major player in Mediterranean and European trade.

¹⁰ It is worth noting that this too constitutes an *ex Oriente lux* explanation, notwithstanding BIETTI SESTIERI’S (1997, p. 372) strictures.

¹¹ DE GUIO 1991, p. 175-176, fig. 12; 2000, pp. 306-308, fig. 21; DE GUIO *et al.* 2015, pp. 315-316.

I have further argued (PEARCE, in press) that while it does not resemble a first-millennium BC Greek *polis* or Etruscan or Roman city, Frattesina fulfils many of the widely-agreed criteria for identifying a town – town planning; “a central position in a trade network ...; a diversified economy with a concentration of craft activities and participation in long-distance trade ...; ... evidence for social differentiation among the people living at the settlement ...”. However, there is no evidence for defensive structures, which are a recurring criterion for urban status, and although it is relatively large (10 ha; BALDO *et al.* 2018), it is not the largest site in its putative polity. Perhaps the most important criterion for a town is the presence of a market, and whether or not it had an actual market-place, Frattesina was very certainly a market.

This raises the question as to how sophisticated the social organisation was at Frattesina. For Bietti Sestieri (2019, p. 11), the site marks the transition to a centralised form of power, a “chiefdom” society, while De Guio (2000, p. 307) points out that the preceding Valli Grandi Veronesi polity is likely also to be a chiefdom society, but I would argue that this underestimates the degree of social complexity at the site.¹² Indeed, careful analysis of grave goods at Le Narde, one of the two cemeteries of Frattesina, indicates a pyramidal social structure consisting of five social groups, found in male, female and juvenile tombs (CARDARELLI *et al.* 2015). At the top of Frattesina society are the sword-bearers, whose graves contain ritually broken swords (2 cases) or one or more sword rivets deposited as *pars pro toto* (4 cases).¹³ There seems to be a ritual taboo on the deposition of spearheads, notwithstanding that they were both produced and used at Frattesina (LEONARDI 2010, p.553), so that it is difficult to identify what proportion of the male population carried arms. Cardarelli *et al.* (2015, p. 445) argue that the Le Narde cemetery indicates a pre-urban aristocratic society based on descent groups and patron-client relations, “un’incipiente struttura gentilizio-clientelare preurbana”.¹⁴ Bietti Sestieri’s (1997, p. 394) suggestion that only one man bore a sword in each generation implies some form of monarchy (cf. DE GUIO *et al.* 2015, p.316). The Frattesina polity was a complex society.

The second question that I should like to discuss is, who were Frattesina’s trading partners? There are a number of solutions that have been put forward. The traditional response is that they were actors from the Aegean, though it was not immediately understood by all scholars that Frattesina dates to the aftermath of the fall of the palace system (PEARCE 2000, p. 111). Certainly, Italian-type artefacts in metal from the south-eastern Alps are documented in Greece (JUNG, MEHOFER 2013, p. 178, fig.5) and as I have already discussed, there are generic indicators at Frattesina of contact with the Aegean. However, Elisabetta Borgna (1992, pp. 85-86) has suggested that the partners may have been Cypriots, who replaced the palace-based traders in the East Mediterranean (SHERRATT, SHERRATT 1991, pp. 374-375), and this is an attractive hypothesis. Although there is no direct evidence for contact between Frattesina and Cyprus,¹⁵ there is Late Helladic IIIB “Cypro-Mycenean” pottery at Scoglio del Tonno (Taranto – TA) in Puglia (VAGNETTI 2001, p. 82; LO SCHIAVO *et al.* 1985, pp. 5-7, fig. 2: 6 and 7), which may have been one of the intermediate stopping places (BETTELLI, VAGNETTI 1997, p. 616). Cypriot links with the west Mediterranean¹⁶ are documented most

¹² This is again an example of pervasive primitivism.

¹³ On the deposition of sword rivets as *pars pro toto* see LEONARDI 2010, pp. 552-553 and especially note 18.

¹⁴ Cf. PERONI 2000, p. 257.

¹⁵ An ivory comb found in Late Cypriot IIIB1 tomb 6 at Enkomi (Cyprus) is of the Frattesina type but does not belong to the sub-class found at Frattesina, having closer parallels in central and southern Adriatic Italy (BETTELLI, DAMIANI 2005).

¹⁶ RUSSELL, KNAPP 2017 provide useful summaries of Cypriot and Cypriot-type material in Sardinia (tab. 2), Sicily (tab. 3) and mainland Italy (tab. 4), though from a “minimalist” position that downplays its significance.

visibly by oxhide ingots (LO SCHIAVO *et al.* 2009), and also on Sardinia by Cypriot pottery sherds found at various sites including Nuraghe Antigori (Sarrocch – CA; LO SCHIAVO *et al.* 1985, p. 7; JONES, DAY 1987; pp. 259, 262-263; VAGNETTI 2001, pp. 78-81; LO SCHIAVO, CAMPUS 2013, p. 150), contacts which are confirmed by a Sardinian “upside-down elbow” handled necked jar at Pyla *Kokkinokremos* (Cyprus; KARAGEORGHIS 2011, pp. 89-90, 94, fig. 2) and the recent find of Nuragic Grey/Black Ware bowls of Sardinian manufacture at Hala Sultan Tekke (Cyprus; FISCHER 2019, p. 246, fig. 15). Cyprus seems to have played an important role in the development and diffusion of early iron working (SNODGRASS 1980), and it is perhaps therefore no coincidence that iron has also been found at Frattesina (BIETTI SESTIERI 1997, p. 39; GIARDINO 2019, pp. 270-272). Given the early evidence for Punic contacts with Iberia (LÓPEZ CASTRO *et al.* 2016, tab. 1; ESHEL *et al.* 2019), it may be wiser to speak more generically of Cypriot and/or Levantine partners.

If the Cypriots were indeed trading partners of Frattesina, it might seem unlikely that they would have needed access to south-east Alpine copper, as this metal is a resource which is not lacking on Cyprus (KNAPP, CHERRY 1994; cf. PEARCE 2007, p. 106). However, the existence of a market for metal in southern Italy and Greece (JUNG, MEHOFER 2013, p. 178, fig. 5) may have led Cypriot ships to take it on board for trading on their return journey.

Archaeologists have the tendency to over-interpret exotic goods,¹⁷ and we need to ask how much actual east Mediterranean material there is at Frattesina and whether exotic raw materials necessarily document the actual presence of east Mediterranean traders: there are many indirect ways in which goods can travel. As we have seen above, the actual amount of demonstrably east Mediterranean material is low (and the elephant ivory and ostrich eggshell may in fact be north African in origin).

Moreover, trading relations between the Cypriots and Nuragic Sardinia seem to have been essentially the exchange of prestige goods between élites, perhaps accompanied by metals or other raw materials, while Frattesina seems to have played a very different role, as a manufacturing centre in the Mediterranean world system.

Frattesina was most likely visited by boats and perhaps also crews of multiple origins, east Mediterranean (Cypriot and/or Levantine), but also Adriatic and Aegean. We do not have to believe that individuals or individual ships necessarily made the whole journey from the east Mediterranean all the way to Frattesina, and we can imagine that cargos were transferred between ships at intermediate points on the journey (RUSSELL, KNAPP 2017, p. 20).

The final question which I should like to address regards the relationship between Frattesina, the preceding Middle and Recent Bronze Age *terramare* and formation of the Iron Age Villanovan and Este cultures. As I have already outlined above, Bietti Sestieri sees Frattesina as an intrusive phenomenon in the Po plain, and on the basis of the formal similarities between the Protovillanovan of the Veneto and Tuscany, and the metals trade between the two areas, has posited that Frattesina was a trading outpost, a projection northwards from Protovillanovan Etruria (e.g. BIETTI SESTIERI 1997, p. 396), almost a proto-Etruscan colony (cf. DE GUIO 2000, p. 314, who does not accept this hypothesis). She argues that Frattesina in the Final Bronze Age has a similar role to Villanovan Bologna/Felsina and that the Este culture only develops after the end of Frattesina, based on an entirely new settlement pattern.

¹⁷ This tends to be a debate where *a priori* judgements are pre-eminent, as shown in the “minimalist” discussion of Cypriot relations with the West by RUSSELL, KNAPP 2017.

We have also noted that scholars based in the Veneto, on the other hand, emphasise aspects of continuity,¹⁸ seeing Frattesina as the successor to the complex Recent Bronze Age *terramara* polity of the Valli Grandi Veronesi, centred on Fondo Paviani (Legnago – VR),¹⁹ which it is argued plays a similar role in trade with the eastern Mediterranean (for example, it has “Italo-Mycenaean” pottery: BETTELLI *et al.* 2015). Indeed, its social complexity could have provided the basis for the complex social-economic structure of Frattesina (cf. LEONARDI 2010, p. 555), an idea which is confirmed by strontium isotope analyses of skeletal material from Le Narde that suggest that one of the sword-bearers (tomb 168) may have grown up in the area of Fondo Paviani and that there was significant (37%, i.e. 17 of the 46 analysed individuals) migration to the site, mostly (all but two) from within a radius of 50 km (CAVAZZUTI *et al.* 2019). This continuity model sees Frattesina as the origin of the Iron Age Este culture. In this view, the period of formation of the (palaeo-)Venetic *ethnos* is at least Final Bronze Age, perhaps earlier.²⁰ Frattesina then becomes the antecedent of the delta trading-settlement of Adria rather than Villanovan Bologna.

In such a local model, there is no need for Cypriots, Levantines or proto-Etruscans to provide the input necessary for the socio-economic organisation of Frattesina, because Frattesina is simply a stage in the engagement of the people inhabiting the eastern Po valley with Mediterranean trade and the supply of metal from the Alps.

CONCLUSIONS

Frattesina is without doubt a key site in the Final Bronze Age – Early Iron Age Adriatic, indeed the central Mediterranean. Its sophistication and engagement in manufacture and trade are astonishing, and raise questions about the social organisation of its north Italian context, which are especially challenging for those scholars who approach the archaeological record from a substantivist or more generally primitivist premise. Situated at a key transshipment node between the land route to the Alps and across to northern Europe (copper, amber) and the Mediterranean sea lanes south and east (ivory, ostrich eggshells, eastern cultural influences), it seems to have been a key place in the World-System at the end of the Bronze Age, at a time when the structures of the Ancient World of the first millennium BC were emerging. I have taken an uncompromisingly modernist approach to the evidence, arguing that Frattesina was a manufacturing town (“urban”) at which value was added, with a complex social structure. It was much more than a chiefdom, and its descent groups had a number of social “classes”, with a single ruler over the aristocracy who was marked out by

¹⁸ There is however no simple continuity in the pottery between the Valli Grandi Veronesi polity and Frattesina: LEONARDI (2010, pp. 548-549) sees the Protovillanovan pottery of the Final Bronze Age as the result of a “melting pot” in which the local *cultura terramaricola-palafitticola* pottery tradition is influenced by the eastern Urnfield and western Canegrate cultural elements, while DE GUIO’S (2000, pp. 308, 319) multivariate analysis and seriation algorithms suggest a bottleneck between the Valli Grandi Veronesi material and that of Frattesina.

¹⁹ DE GUIO 1991, p. 175-176, fig. 12; 2000, pp. 306-308, fig. 21; DE GUIO *et al.* 2015, pp. 315-316.

²⁰ While it is not a strictly archaeological or historical matter, it should be noted that there is a further, political, consideration to be made. The proposed continuity from the Valli Grandi Veronesi *terramare* to Frattesina to the Este culture is important because the Este culture is identified with the pre-Roman inhabitants of the modern-day Veneto and eastern Lombardy, who the ancient sources identify as *Veneti* (Latin) or *Heneti* (Greek). A fourth-century BC stele with a Venetic inscription, found at Isola Vicentina, first documents the name in its local, Venetic form, “venetkens” (BRACCESI, VERONESE 2013, p.20, fig. 4). The pre-Roman material culture of the region, denominated the Este culture (e.g. PERONI *et al.* 1975), shows continuity from at least the eighth century BC, and since the Second World War, scholars from the Veneto have increasingly preferred to talk of the people associated with this material as “Veneti” (e.g., FOGOLARI, PROSDOCIMI 1988; CAPUIS 1993). Therefore, if there is continuity back from Este through Frattesina to the Valli Grandi Veronesi *terramare*, then it can be argued that the origins of the Veneti lie in the Bronze Age, which is not without significance in a contemporary Italian context where regionalism is a political force, not least in the Veneto.

the right to bear a sword. Frattesina traded with the East Mediterranean, but not necessarily directly as transshipments between vessels at intermediate points are likely. Finally, Frattesina, and the material cultural succession of the Bronze Age and Iron Age Veneto is of modern cultural and political relevance, in a discourse which gives a putative time depth to regional identity.

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