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## Rethinking the Italian Neolithic

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# Impact, language communities and archaeological schools: British archaeologists and Italian Neolithic studies

Mark Pearce

## INTRODUCTION

It is probably accurate to say that most academics, when they see a new publication on a subject on which they have worked, naturally start reading from the back, looking at the bibliography to see whether they have been cited. When we see that our important contributions are referenced we are naturally satisfied, and we are disappointed when our work is ignored.

In this paper I wish to address a simple question: why do some ‘outsiders’ have great influence on scientific debate, whilst others do not? Or, to put it in another way, why is it that our work, even good work, is sometimes ignored? Before trying to address this question, let me outline some basic premises that I shall use for this discussion. First of all, I intend to use Thomas Kuhn’s (1970) concept of a ‘scientific community’, but subdividing it into ‘national’ – and sometimes ‘linguistic’ – ‘communities’. Thus I shall treat workers from outside a national context, such as British archaeologists working on Italian material, as ‘outsiders’. The situation of Italians working outside Italy, and therefore within a different scientific paradigm from that in their country of origin, is rather more complex and I will not address it in this paper.

I shall attempt to examine why some ‘outsiders’ are very successful in influencing debate, in setting new agendas, and perhaps more importantly, why others are not so influential.

## SOME POSSIBLE REASONS FOR SUCCESS OR FAILURE

A number of reasons may be put forward *a priori* to explain the success or failure that foreign archaeologists may have in influencing the debate in Mediterranean archaeology.

For example, one issue which is of undoubted importance is language. It is self-evident that most people find it easier to read in their native tongue. Thus, to maximise impact in a linguistic scientific community, it is best to publish in the home language (I understand that I am perhaps stating the blindingly obvious here). A further issue is the arena within which work is published. For instance, the major forum for scientific debate in the UK is the academic journal, and publication in high-impact 'A'-rated journals is rewarded by University promotion committees and highly rated by Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and, one imagines, Research Excellence Framework (REF) panels (these two bureaucratic exercises aim to assess the value of work produced by academic units in UK Universities, and are described in detail on the webpages of the Higher Education Funding Council for England, which is responsible for their conduct: [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk); last accessed 16 August 2014). However, amongst the Italian prehistory community, the conference is perhaps the most important major arena for academic exchange. How many British archaeologists would feel happy about submitting to the British REF (or in the past, the RAE) a paper in Italian published in the proceedings of the annual scientific meeting of the Istituto Italiano di Preistoria e Protostoria? And yet, a glance at any Italian prehistory publication's reference list will confirm the high impact that such papers have within the Italian academic community.

In preparation for this paper, I asked some Italian colleagues why they think that some outsiders have great influence in setting the agenda, whilst others less so. They all laughed at the question, saying that it was down to '*simpatia*'. That is to say, we tend to read, and cite, the work of colleagues whom we like and or respect. This is of course a variant of the practice highlighted by John Bintliff, of the (arguably) deliberate exclusion of theoretical opponents from reference lists (Bintliff & Pearce 2011: 2).

My view is that we can go a little further in explaining the relative influence that different workers have, and I wish to do so by looking at a few case studies.

## CASE STUDIES IN THE NEOLITHIC OF ITALY

I shall look at this issue using some very simple metrics, the reference lists of synthetic works on the Italian Neolithic. I shall use three publications, Alessandro Guidi & Marcello Piperno's (1992) *Italia preistorica*, Daniela Cocchi Genick's (1993) *Manuale di Preistoria. II. Neolitico*, and Andrea Pessina and Vincenzo Tiné's more recent (2008) textbook, *Archeologia del Neolitico: L'Italia tra VI e IV millennio a.C.* I accept that this is not a perfect measure, but it is I believe useful. Since all three are textbooks produced for Italian University students, rather than primary research, the references listed are likely to reflect those works which are considered to be most significant, but it is not impossible that work in foreign languages was considered less accessible and therefore under-referenced.

### **Research methods**

Before beginning I shall explain my research methods: I have simply counted each work that is listed in the bibliographies of these publications. I have not taken note of multiple citations of the same work, and I have identified the nationality of the author as being their country of work. Thus, by this measure the American scholar John Robb counts as British as he is employed at the University of Cambridge. Although this may seem perverse, it is the simplest way to deal with academic mobility, and is the method currently used by the European Association of Archaeologists. Where there are multiple authors, I have considered the first author only. Although this might be judged to be a limitation, it was again the simplest procedure. It would have been possible to consider all papers with at least one author who worked outside Italy in this study, but it is very difficult to assess the relative contribution of authors to a paper (though it is of course sometimes stated). An author who has contributed the majority or a substantial part of a paper has a very different

impact from one who contributes just a paragraph or two, perhaps as a specialist. Principal authors are likely to be listed as first author of a work. Counting the first author only is an imperfect criterion but its effect may even out over the statistical population as a whole, though it may not be insignificant that many of the best-known authors on the north Italian Neolithic all have surnames beginning with a B: Bagolini, Barfield, Bernabò Brea (both Luigi and Maria), Biagi and Broglio. This is not surprising if we consider that around 50% of Italian surnames begin with A, B, C or D!

I might conclude that if you are called Whitehouse you are unlikely to be the first author in the alphabet and therefore may not be listed first. Perhaps that is why Ruth Whitehouse sometimes publishes with John Wilkins!

### **Case Study 1: Guidi and Piperno (1992), *Italia preistorica***

My first case study is Alessandro Guidi and Marcello Piperno's (1992) *Italia preistorica*. This is a collective work, with separate chapters on northern Italy by Bernardo Bagolini (1992), central Italy and Sardinia by Renata Grifoni Cremonesi (1992) and southern Italy and Sicily by Mirella Cipolloni Sampò (1992).

Bagolini's (1992) chapter only cites 23 works, and Bagolini himself is author of 13 of these. This is in part a measure of his significance in north Italian Neolithic studies, but the chapter appears rather under-referenced. There are 20 Italian works, and one each of Polish (Kozłowski), British (Sherratt) and US (a paper by Ammerman and Cavalli-Sforza) nationality, in the sense used in this paper. Bagolini had already published a major synthesis on the north Italian Neolithic in 1980, *Introduzione al Neolitico dell'Italia settentrionale nel quadro dell'evoluzione delle prime culture agricole europee*, and at the time of writing this chapter was preparing a more detailed synthesis for the *Atlas du néolithique européen* (Bagolini & Pedrotti 1998), and indeed recycled in that publication the illustrations prepared for his chapter in Guidi and Piperno's volume. This may explain why Barfield's important publications on the Square-Mouthed Pottery (*Vasi a Bocca Quadrata*) culture are not cited (Bagolini [1980: 191] references seven works and Bagolini & Pedrotti [1998: 283-4] 25 publications of which Barfield is the first or only author).

Grifoni Cremonesi's (1992) chapter on central Italy and Sardinia cites 37 works: 34 by Italians (she is author of just four of these, while her husband, Giuliano Cremonesi, is author of six) and three by British authors – two publications by Barker and one by Trump. It should be noted that Barfield is also co-author on one of the papers which I classified as 'Italian' according to my first author criterion.

Cipolloni Sampò's (1992) paper on southern Italy and Sicily has the fullest bibliography – 65 Italian works, of which five by Cipolloni herself, plus three French, two US, one Hungarian and 10 UK publications. This perhaps reflects the fact that there have traditionally been a good number of British workers on the south Italian Neolithic. The 10 publications break down into three by Ruth Whitehouse, one each by Caroline Malone, Keri Brown, Graham O'Hare and Jim Lewthwaite, plus Barri Jones' (1987) *Apulia* and Mallory's (1984–87) publication of Lagnano da Piede. Finally she also cites David Clarke's *Mesolithic Europe: the economic basis* (1976).

Reviewing citations in these three chapters, I was struck by the lack of references to Lawrence Barfield. However, in the bibliography of the book as a whole, there are 16 items where he is sole or first author, the highest score for a non-Italian, followed by Graeme Barker at 13.

### **Case Study 2: Cocchi Genick (1993), *Manuale di Preistoria. II. Neolitico***

Daniela Cocchi Genick's (1993) *Manuale di Preistoria: II. Neolitico* is my second case study. This is a volume of a much larger text book, and is more traditional in style than Guidi and Piperno's volume. Indeed Cocchi Genick is perhaps best known for her work on pottery typology, and she has paid much attention to nomenclature.

This handbook looks at the Near East and Europe as well as Italy, but in order to compare it with Guidi and Piperno I confined my analysis to the chapters on Italy. The first introductory chapter on Italy cites 12 Italian publications, whilst the chapter on northern Italy cites 85 Italian papers plus five British ones – all by Lawrence Barfield (though three have Italian co-authors). The central Italy chapter cites 86 Italian papers but none by any other nationality, while the chapter on the South cites 74 Italian papers, two French (though perhaps their author, Madeleine Cavalier, should be classified as Italian in my scheme), six US (of which four by Ammerman) and three British (Bray, Mallory and Whitehouse). The chapter on the islands has 57 Italian, one French work (by Cavalier again) plus one British, by Trump (who is also co-author on a work I classified as Italian).

I find it difficult to assess the bibliography of this handbook, which is very much a work of synthesis designed for Italian university students. It might be worth noting that a recent (2005) work by the same author, “Considerazioni sull’uso del termine ‘facies’ e sulla definizione delle facies archeologiche”, published in the widely-respected *Rivista di Scienze Preistoriche*, in a bibliography of 40 works (13 by the author herself) cites just one foreign work – Gordon Childe’s (1929) *The Danube in Prehistory*, which is perhaps strange for a theoretical discussion concerning the definition of archaeological cultures.

### **Case Study 3. Pessina and Tiné (2008), Archeologia del Neolitico: L’Italia tra VI e IV millennio a.C.**

This textbook is an altogether more satisfying work, which shows great openness to the debate outside Italy. It even cites Bourdieu’s (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (in English translation), which is quite surprising in a textbook aimed at Italian students of prehistory. The bibliography is much more wide-ranging, and the most cited foreign authors are Ammerman (10 works), Barfield (13 works), Barker (six works), Guilaine (10 works), Hodder (five works), Robb (six works) and Skeates (five works).

## DISCUSSION

In order to understand these statistics, let us consider the impact of Lawrence Barfield, who died in 2009. His initial research was on the Middle and Late Neolithic Square-Mouthed Pottery culture, and his excavations enabled him to establish clear chronologies from the Neolithic through to the Bronze Age (Pearce 2009). Lawrence’s impact in Italy was huge – much more so than in Britain, and we might ask why this was so. Indeed, as we saw, he is the most cited non-Italian author in both Guidi and Piperno’s (1992) and also Pessina and Tiné’s (2008) textbooks.

Firstly, he published much in Italian, both in Italian journals and conference proceedings. These were occasionally relatively obscure from an outsider’s perspective, such as the *Annali del Museo di Gavardo* (e.g. Barfield *et al.* 1975–76; this worthy journal is frankly obscure even from an Italian perspective), but he also published in the *Bullettino di Paleontologia Italiana* (Barfield & Broglio 1966) and the *Rivista di Scienze Preistoriche* (Barfield 1968), which are of course the premier national journals.

Secondly, he was immensely popular, and mentored many Italian archaeologists who have since emerged as key players in Italian prehistory.

But I believe that there is another reason for Barfield’s impact, one which is perhaps even more important for our analysis. In order to analyse this, we shall have to consider the Italian idealist philosopher Benedetto Croce, who lived from 1866 to 1952, and who was perhaps the most important intellectual opponent of fascism in Italy, drafting the (1925) *Manifesto degli intellettuali antifascisti*, the Antifascist Manifesto.

Croce’s historical ideas are usefully, and accessibly, outlined by R.G. Collingwood in his seminal (1946) *The Idea of History*. Collingwood (1946: 190–204) identifies three stages in the development of Croce’s philosophy of history. In the second stage, marked by the

publication of *Logica come scienza del concetto puro* in 1909 (translated into English in 1917 as *Logic as the Science of the pure Concept*), Croce denies the distinction between universal truth and contingent or individual truth, for universal, abstract definitions have a historical element: they are formed by an individual historical thinker who is facing a particular problem at a particular time (Collingwood 1946: 194–5).

The third stage in the development of Croce's philosophy of history identified by Collingwood is that of his (1917) *Teoria e Storia della Storiografia*, published first in German translation as *Zur Theorie und Geschichte der Historiographie* (1915). Collingwood (1946: 202) tells us that for Croce history is "the self-knowledge of the living mind": all history is, he maintains, thus contemporary history. "... [H]istory is not contained in books or documents; it lives only, as a present interest or pursuit, in the mind of the historian when he criticises and interprets those documents" (Collingwood 1946: 202).

So, to put it more simply, we examine the past to answer contemporary questions. Such questions are defined by our socio-cultural and historical context. This may all seem self-evident in a Post-Processual archaeological world, but the point is that what will interest an archaeologist, and what they will see as a satisfying explanation, depends on their own social and intellectual context. Or to put it another way, outsiders will have more influence if they connect with the concerns of what I have called the 'national scientific community'. I would argue that Barfield's success was predicated on his engagement with the Italian debate.

It is instructive to look at one of Barfield's contemporaries, Ruth Whitehouse, who has had a major influence on Mediterranean prehistory and has in one way or another mentored many British prehistorians working on Italy. Examination of the bibliography of Pessina and Tiné's (2008) book finds references to her work on caves (her ground-breaking (1992) book *Underground Religion*), and on Gender (1998), but only one paper specifically focused on the south-eastern Italian Neolithic, the relatively late "Social organisation in the Neolithic of southeast Italy" (1984). It might be flippantly argued that this is because of her differences about pottery chronology in that area with Vincenzo Tiné's recently deceased father, Santo, and as my Italian colleagues remind us, we should not underestimate the importance of *simpatia* (or family ties). However this is most unlikely and not just because of the widely acknowledged professionalism of both Pessina and Tiné. In fact, I believe that here too, Croce and Collingwood offer a useful hint: Ruth Whitehouse, writing at the beginning of the New Archaeology in the English-speaking world, argued that ceramic assemblages may reflect other than simply chronological distinctions. Italian prehistory, still married to an exclusively chrono-typological model, was not ready for such discourse, so that her explanation was not judged as satisfying and therefore her publications on this theme were largely discounted by Italian scholars of the time.

Let us, finally, look at the work of another, but younger, ancestor, Graeme Barker. It could be argued that Salvatore Puglisi, who spent some time at the University of London Institute of Archaeology when writing his book, *La civiltà appenninica* (1959), which posited a transhumant Bronze Age society, prepared the way for his work. But perhaps here there is another factor – Graeme Barker offered what was for 1970s Italian prehistorians a new technique, faunal analysis. He did not invade anyone's academic territory, indeed he enhanced his colleagues' work. Italian prehistory was waking up to the new suite of techniques and methods offered by the Anglo-American Processual revolution, and Barker benefited from this opening.

## CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, outsiders have long contributed to Mediterranean archaeology, and have often played a role in setting the intellectual agenda of the fields where they work, for example in studies of the Neolithic transition in Italy. If we are to explain the different impacts that workers have had on Italian prehistory, this can depend on their engagement with

the Italian debate or the accessibility of their work (that is, by publishing in Italian), or even simply personal relationships, but we should not forget the plain fact that different scientific communities have different interests and concerns, which may seem strange or irrelevant to outsiders, but which are perhaps best explained by their socio-cultural and historical context. It is therefore by engaging with them that we may have the greatest impact.

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