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Book Review

## Social Networks and Regional Identity in Bronze Age Italy

By Emma Blake. Pp. xiv + 325, figs. 23, tables 15, maps 18. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2014. \$99. ISBN 978-1-107-06320-4 (cloth).

Reviewed by [Mark Pearce](#)

Using an approach that has become fashionable in archaeology, this book identifies social networks in later Bronze Age Italy (i.e., the Recent and Final Bronze Ages [RBA and FBA]), tracing their role in the formation of the peoples named in the ancient sources. It is very well written, wears its theoretical garb lightly, and has been well proofread. There are a few errors—for example, the use of “emigration” where “immigration” is meant (21), mistranslation of the Italian quotation at the head of chapter 3 (66), and there are no sites in the modern region of Liguria in figure 5.7 (137). The structure of the book is admirably clear: chapter 1 provides a general introduction to the problem of identifying ancient peoples of Italy in the archaeological record and gives a general introduction to the period studied. Chapter 2 introduces the data set, and chapter 3 discusses archaeological approaches to ethnicity (an especially clearly presented section) and social network analysis. Chapter 4 introduces the networks identified, while chapters 5–8 deal with northern, east-central and west-central, and southern Italy in more detail. Finally, chapter 9 provides conclusions and a discussion of the long-term survival of regional identities during the Roman empire and afterward.

The treatment of the archaeological evidence owes much to Anglo-American and English-language literature and is thus in many ways a synthesis of syntheses. It is noteworthy that Blake makes much use of the work of Anna Maria Bietti Sestieri, who has published much in English, and less use of that of the late Renato Peroni, the major scholar of the Italian Bronze Age. Blake does extensively reference Peroni’s 1979 English-language paper but ignores much of his later work. For example, she counterpoints Peroni’s views (“From Bronze Age to Iron Age: Economic, Historical and Social Considerations,” in D. Ridgway and F.R. Ridgway, eds., *Italy Before the Romans: The Iron Age, Orientalizing and Etruscan Periods* [London 1979] 7–30) with later publications in English by Bietti Sestieri (e.g., “Italy in Europe in the Early Iron Age,” *PPS* 63 [1997] 371–402), ignoring Peroni’s later work (in Italian) (155–56). The effect is that much of the archaeological picture is outdated, and occasionally the views of the Italian mainstream are misrepresented.

Blake’s analysis is based on the distribution of 40 RBA and 23 FBA 1–2 types, including Aegean-style pottery, type Tiryns and Allumiere beads, donkeys, glass, antler and ivory artifacts, and a number of bronze types, mostly based on the relevant *Prähistorische Bronzefunde* volumes. This is very problematic, as the volume in that series on swords dates to 1970, on pins to 1975, knives to 1976, razors to 1979, daggers to 1994, and fibulae to 1986 and 2010. While it would have been a major undertaking to update the distributions of the various types chosen to document connections, it must be doubted whether such old studies always provide an accurate picture of metalwork distribution or modern scholarship. It is perhaps not surprising that fibulae are so well represented in this study in southern Italy (229), as Lo Schiavo’s magisterial corpus is the most recent of the *Prähistorische Bronzefunde* volumes (*Le fibule dell’Italia meridionale e della Sicilia dall’età del Bronzo Recente al VI secolo a.C.* [Stuttgart 2010]). Indeed, the weakest part of this book is its presentation of the material culture record, and as there are too many issues to discuss in full in this short review, I shall highlight the most egregious examples.

Frattesina, a major Mediterranean hub in the Po Delta, must inevitably play an important part in any discussion of later Bronze Age connectivity. The site appears after the collapse of the Terramare and may be dated to the 12th to ninth centuries (i.e., the FBA and very beginning of the Iron Age). Thus, it seems very strange to include the site in RBA connectivity since even if the site may have appeared at the very end of the RBA, it is a post-Terramare phenomenon (40–1, 109). It is worth noting that since this book was published, it has become clear that amber beads were manufactured in the Po Delta, both at the specialized site of Campestrin (P. Bellintani et al., “L’ambra dell’insediamento della tarda Età del bronzo di Campestrin di Grignano Polesine [Rovigo],” in G. Leonardi and V. Tiné, eds., *Preistoria e protostoria del Veneto* [Florence

2015] 419–26) and at Frattesina itself (A.M. Bietti Sestieri et al., “Frattesina: Un centro internazionale di produzione e di scambio nell’Età del bronzo del Veneto,” in G. Leonardi and V. Tiné, eds., *Preistoria e protostoria del Veneto* [Florence 2015] 429, fig. 2.12).

Blake rightly sees the collapse of the Terramare (contemporary with that of the eastern Mediterranean palaces) at the end of the Italian RBA as the “key moment of change,” a major reconfiguration of settlement pattern in the central Po plain that has a wider domino effect (and, as we have seen, leads to the emergence of Frattesina) (17). However, I doubt whether she is right to assert that the Terramare and contemporary lake dwellings show “no evidence of social divisions,” following Bietti Sestieri’s arguments (22, cf. 116–17, 130–31). For example, when the Terramare of Santa Rosa di Poviglio is extended, the defenses surrounding the original site are massively enhanced, suggesting an elite quarter or citadel rather than simply an old town (sensu M. Novák, *Herrschaftsform und Stadtbaukunst: Programmatik im mesopotamischen Residenzstadtbau von Agade bis Surra man ra’ā* [Saarbrücken 1999] 302–13). Moreover, the evidence of regular town planning, the complex water management, and the evident intersite hierarchies are also more parsimoniously interpreted as evidence for hierarchically organized communities. The burial evidence also provides proof of social hierarchy: at the recently excavated Terramare cemetery of Casinalbo, weapons and female ornaments were burned in the pyre and then rendered no longer functional and deposited in specific areas, so that the argument that the lack of grave goods indicates an egalitarian society no longer holds (A. Cardarelli, “The Collapse of the Terramare Culture and Growth of New Economic and Social Systems During the Late Bronze Age in Italy,” *ScAnt* 15 [2009] 453).

All modeling requires arbitrary decisions, and one that Blake makes in her initial discussion is to define ties as “the links between nodes that share at least one object type and are also a short distance apart” (89). This short distance is set at “50 km, or a two-day walk or manageable day’s sail.” In a landscape as variable as that of modern Italy, one wonders whether a 50 km journey in the mountains is equivalent to one in the flat Po Plain or the Apulian Tavoliere.

Finally, the least convincing part of the book is its discussion of the “aftermath” of the Roman conquest (244–56). While Italian scholars are often keen to emphasize their own regional diversity, it is strange to claim that Augustus’ Regio XI is named Transpadana rather than named after a specific ethnic group because “there were no well-defined supra-local (that is beyond the scale of a single township) groups there” (248). I doubt that the Romans, who fought hard to conquer the Insubres, would have agreed. Likewise, Blake’s dismissal of Gabba’s and Wickham’s arguments (C. Wickham, *Early Medieval Italy: Central Power and Local Society, 400–1000* [Totowa, N.J., and London 1981]; E. Gabba, *Italia Romana* [Como 1994]) for the survival of local differences is rather too facile.

Does Blake succeed in providing “a novel explanation for why some regional groups in Italy forged what we can call an ethnic consciousness and others did not” (2)? I would suggest that she shows some interesting patterns, some of which are the result of inadequate data; these patterns may indicate that some regional diversities go back to the RBA–FBA transition, if we accept the parameters on which her models are based (17, 242). In sum, this book is an interesting and admirably clear exercise in social network analysis, but it is a poor guide to the archaeology of the Italian RBA and FBA.

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