

Cum grano salis. The functions of the protohistoric coastal settlements of Etruria.

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In the 1940s and 1950s, Fernando Barbaranelli, after the discovery of the Bronze Age settlement of Luni on the Mignone, focused his attention, and consequently that of the scientific milieu, on the category of the "Villanovan villages of southern maritime Etruria." Within five years, the active and fruitful amateur researcher from Civitavecchia published on this topic three papers in the *Bullettino di Paleontologia Italiana* and one in the *Proceedings of the VI International Congress of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences* held in Rome in 1962. Many studies and many new investigations on these known settlements came after, but few new discoveries were made. The relevant aspects of this particular category of archaeological sources are their nature and geographical distribution.

In light of the connections proposed in recent decades between these coastal installations and salt production by briquetage, we will first analyse the characteristics of these settlements (through some indicators, such as extension, location, presence of *olla* and/or household pottery, chronology, presence of workshops, etc.) and then the consistency of the briquetage hypothesized and of the further presumed functions.

We also intend to critically address contributions that have denied or downplayed the "village" aspect of these protohistoric coastal settlements.

The environmental reconstruction of Etruria's coastline is an important aspect related to the analysis of Early Iron Age coastal settlements. It has undergone radical changes from the earliest discoveries to the present.

Such a reconstruction is also necessary for the proper evaluation of the current distribution of these coastal settlements, which shows a marked irregularity. The concentration of villages in some stretches and the absence in others must be considered in relation to the change of the shoreline whose main factors of modification are marine erosion, sediment supply, and the heavy anthropogenic alterations of the last 80 years.

As far as chronology is concerned, the earliest evidence can be dated to the advanced Middle Bronze Age; on the other hand, Recent Bronze Age records, a time of increased concentration of communities in defensible areas, are completely lacking. Evidence of the Final Bronze Age is scarce, especially at the end of the phase when the large proto-urban settlements were born and conceived. At the end of the Bronze Age, we can hypothesise a subordination of the coastal settlements (we know few of them) to the fortified villages in the immediate hinterlands. The latter, placed on strategic high points, maintain visual control of large portions of the adjacent coastline. For these coastal settlements, an economic function related to the exploitation of marine resources but also an interest in the frequentation of foreign peoples is conceivable. The occupation of the coast should be imagined as an expression of the power of the dominant elite in the main villages, which was able to control the means of production and access exotic goods, even for mere social representation. In any case the relationships between settlements not far from the sea and others gravitating on the mineral deposits of the Tolfa Mountains seem to intensify between the Recent Bronze and the Late Bronze Age, a period in which other metalliferous resources of Etruria, such as those of the Colline Metallifere-Massetano districts, began to be exploited.

The "crisis of the villages" will materialize in the advanced 10th century BCE when, in coastal Etruria, the proto-urban revolution constituted a turning point: the outcome of a radical and extraordinary political and socio-economic transformation of the communities. The analysis of coastal developments provides a privileged setting not only to identify the Proto-Etruscan facilities dedicated to the development of maritime activities but also to feel the image and representation that Proto-Etruscan communities had given themselves on the sea. Here, in addition to the control of the navigation of the Tyrrhenian Sea, relationships with allogeneic populations were fundamental. The coastal geography of Etruria was defined between the 10th and 8th centuries BCE, when, in full knowledge, an extensive peopling plan was prepared, no longer labile as in earlier periods, limited to a few landings intended for encounters/exchanges with external prospectors. The construction of the Etruscan maritime "façade" is in its beginnings but already rationally embedded in an international perspective: it is an organization responding to compelling needs for efficiency and identity on the sea. The sea was to be controlled/dominated so that equal relations with foreigners could be ensured. From the beginning of the Early Iron Age, the development of the coastline represents a stable interface to the trans-marine world, pertinent to highly advanced communities, which, however, show different topographical patterns. Finally, the functions related to the new form of navigation of the early protohistoric states of Etruria, although taken into consideration by numerous authors, deserve special attention in the context of the interpretation of this class of settlements. The primacy of Villanovan seafaring is made evident, in addition to the widespread distribution of coastal settlements, by the high level of experience achieved in shipbuilding. This is particularly evident in the model ships made of impasto from Tarquinia, inserted in tombs of highly prestigious figures, even before the beginning of relations with colonial Greek civilization.