

BERNARDINO BAGOLINI\* e PAOLO BIAGI\*\*

## DISTRIBUTION, CHRONOLOGY AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE "METOPAL" WARES OF NORTHERN ITALY\*\*\*

**RIASSUNTO** - *Distribuzione, cronologia e significato culturale delle "ceramiche metopali" dell'Italia Settentrionale.* Gli Autori prendono in esame i siti calcolitici che hanno sinora restituito ceramiche con decorazioni metopali e ne discutono la posizione cronologica. Vengono inoltre nuovamente sottolineate le affinità che tale stile ceramico presenta con quelli della Cultura di Fontbouisse.

**SUMMARY** - The Authors examine the North Italian Chalcolithic sites which produced 'metopal' ornamented pots and discuss their chronological position. They also consider the affinities which exist with the more or less contemporary Chalcolithic Fontbouisse Culture of Southeastern France.

This article considers the "metopal" wares of Northern Italy in an attempt to understand the chronological and cultural significance of this Chalcolithic material.

As far as we know, thirteen sites have produced ceramics decorated in this style (fig. 1). They are distributed in various environmental conditions and the pots have been uncovered associated with different cultural contexts.

Restricted mouthed vessels with metopal incised decorations are known from the large cemetery site of Remedello Sotto (COLINI, 1898-1902; CORNAGGIA CASTIGLIONI, 1971), in the Central Po Valley as well as from the mortuary houses recently brought to light by BARFIELD (1983,1986) at the Riparo Valtenesi along the south western coast of Lake Garda.

Regarding to Remedello, two complete pots were found in tombs 46 and BS1, while other fragmented vases decorated with hatched panels come from tombs 74 and 71. Remedello is the largest Chalcolithic cemetery today known in Northern Italy. At the end of the last century approximately 124 burials were excavated on the left terrace of the Chiese river. Most of the tombs were in two separate groups. Only a very few isolated skeletons were found.

The cemetery of Riparo Valtenesi presented extremely different burials from Remedello. The excavations which were carried out between 1976 and 1983, revealed the existence of five mortuary houses with wooden walls made of oak piles. They were rectangular in shape, with pavements made of water-worn flat lake pebbles. Most of the human bones were located in the northern part of the chamber and none were in clear articulation. All the bones were mostly burnt and almost all

---

\* Dipartimento di Storia della Civiltà Europea - Università di Trento.

\*\* Dipartimento delle Scienze Storico-Archeologiche e Orientalistiche - Università di Venezia.

\*\*\* This article is a revised version of a paper delivered at the XII Internationales Symposium über das Spätäneolithikum und die Frühbronzezeit (Novi Sad, 3-7 October 1982).

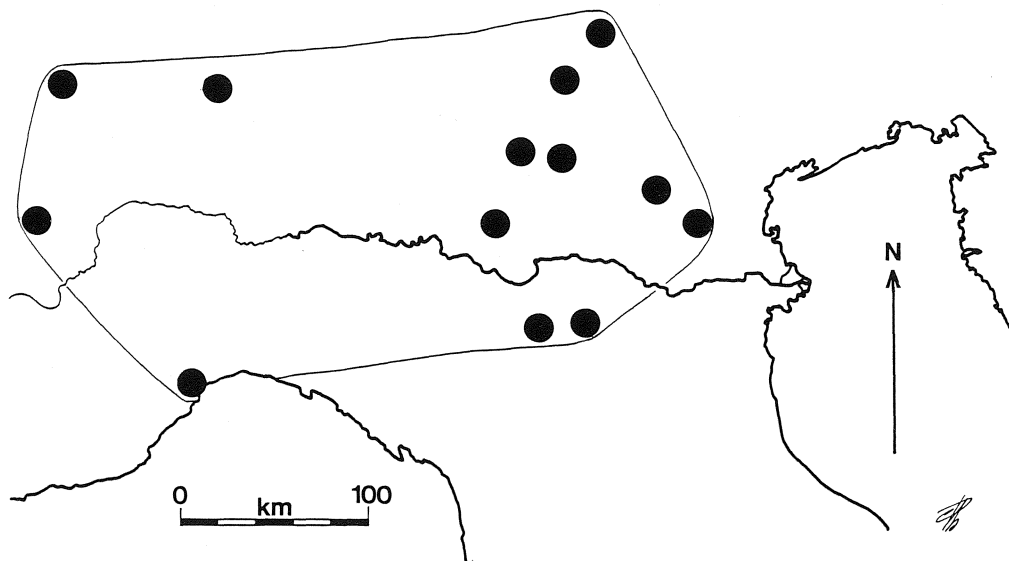


Fig. 1 - Distribution map of the North Italian sites which produced «metopal» ornamented potsherds.

were crushed and broken extensively. Fine ware pottery is comprised of restricted mouth pots of Remedello type, with vertically perforated lugs, incised hatched motifs on the neck and the body and carinated bowls ornamented in the same way (BARFIELD, 1986).

At the end of the last century, the excavation of Tana della Mussina, a burial cave which opens on the northern slopes of the Emilian Apennines, also yielded closed mouthed and carinated vessels, only one of which was decorated with metopal patterns (CHIERICI, 1872; BARFIELD, 1975).

The recently excavated cemetery of Spilamberto, in the Emilian Po Valley, produced evidence of one sherd only decorated with incised metopal motifs, while the whole assemblage strongly resembles Central Italian influences from the Rinaldone sphere (BAGOLINI, 1981).

Another site that yielded metopal decorated sherds is Selva di Stanghella in the Veneto. Here both a settlement and a cemetery were completely destroyed before rescue excavations could begin. It is not clear whether the pots we are dealing with come from the settlement or from the burials (CORRAIN *et al.*, 1968).

The Copper Age village of Colombare di Negrar in the Lessini Hills was excavated by ZORZI (1953) in the Fifties. A rectangular house made of square local stones with a possible small entrance at one of the shortest edges, gave carinated bowls decorated in the metopal style as well as a very rich assemblage of other typical Chalcolithic material (fig. 2, n. 3).

Other miscellaneous sherds are known from the uppermost layers of the Arene Candide Cave in Liguria (BERNABÒ BREA, 1956) (fig. 2, nn. 1, 2), from Grotta Perin in the Berici Hills (LEONARDI, BROGLIO, 1962-63), from the Gaban sequence and the Bersaglio di Mori rock-shelter in Trentino (AVANZINI *et al.*, 1985), from Vollein

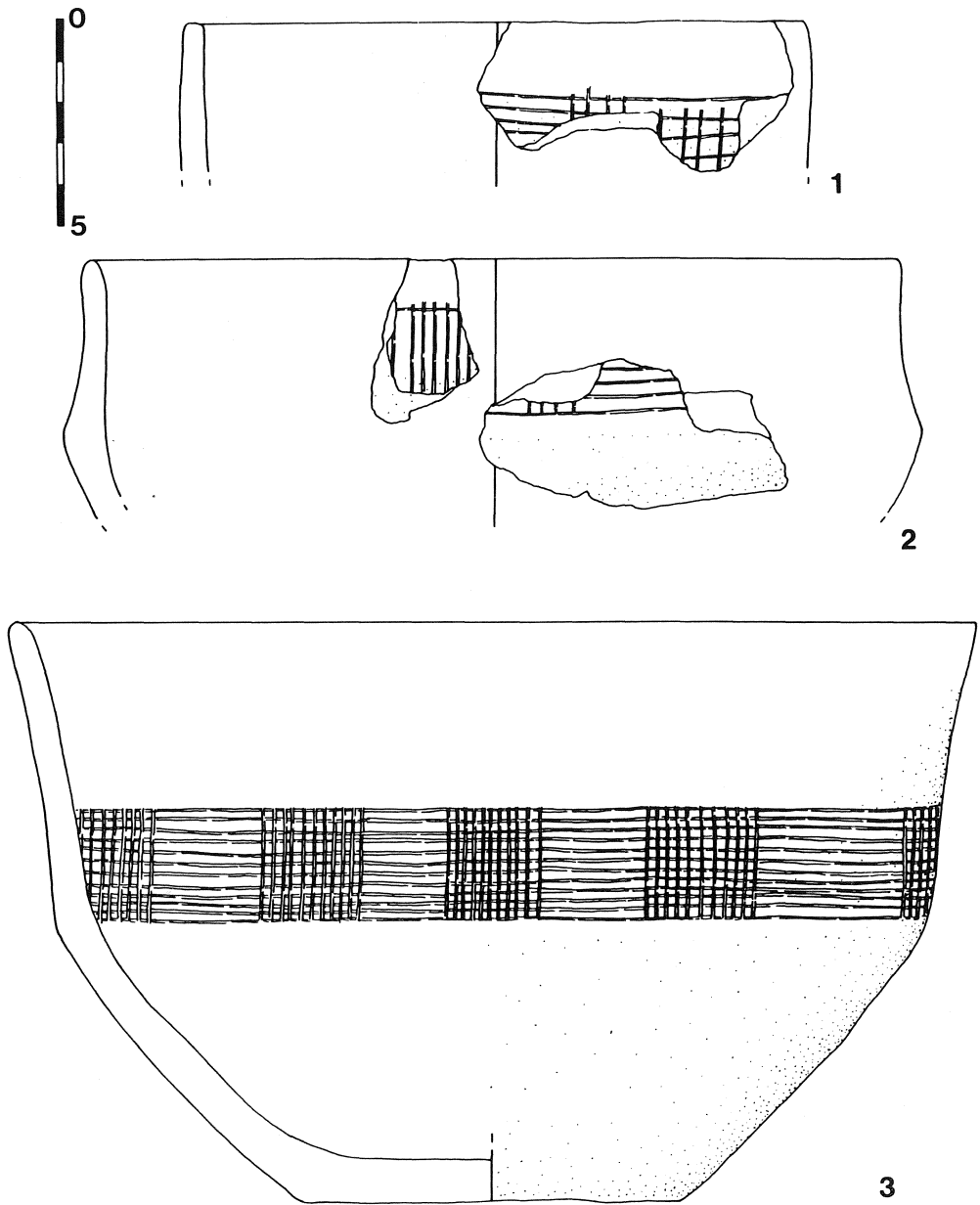


Fig. 2 - «Metopal» ornamented wares from the Caverna delle Arene Candide (SV) (1, 2) and Le Colombare di Negrar (VR) (3).

in the Val d'Aosta (MEZZENA, 1982), from Briona (GAMBARI, 1986) and Chianocco in Piedmont (BERTONE, 1986), a site in the Susa Valley with typical Balm'Chanto material (NISBET, BIAGI, 1987).

## CONSIDERATIONS

As mentioned above, metopal wares have been found in different geographic locations: caves of the Ligurian coast, burial caves in Emilia, large cemeteries in the Po Valley, mortuary houses in perilacustrine rock-shelters, open air settlements and stratigraphical sequences.

In regards to the cultural contexts, it is clear that this pottery is an intrusive element common to various *facies* of the same chronological horizon. From available data, we calculate that the *facies* of the burial caves found in Liguria, in the Emilian Apennines and the Alps are dated from the periods between the Copper Age and the very Early Bronze Age (BARFIELD, 1981).

The Po Plain cemeteries of Remedello, Volongo (BAROCELLI, 1971), Fontanella (ACANFORA, 1956), Cumarola (BAGOLINI *et al.*, 1982) and Selva di Stanghella and Spilamberto seem to have been in use for a shorter period probably around 2400-2200 bc as confirmed by a C14 date from Spilamberto which gave the result of  $2245 \pm 95$  bc (I-11816) (BAGOLINI, VON ELES, 1981: 133).

All the above mentioned sites probably flourished slightly earlier than the spread of the Bell Beaker Culture. On the contrary it is not quite clear whether the "White Ware" pottery is contemporary or earlier than the typical Remedello ceramics (BARFIELD *et al.*, 1975-76). In fact these two different traditions are mainly known from sites scattered in the same region and no C14 date is actually available for the «White Ware» horizon.

Reasonable similarities can be observed between the Italian metopal style and the southern French Fontbousse one (GASCO, 1976). Also the radiocarbon dates might suggest that the two traditions are more or less contemporary to each other (MILLS, 1985; GUTHERZ, 1975: 106).

## B I B L I O G R A F I A

- ACANFORA M.O., 1956 - *Fontanella Mantovana e la Cultura di Remedello*. *Bullettino di Paleontologia Italiana*, 65: 321-385.
- AVANZINI M., BAGOLINI B., CAPITANIO M., CHELIDONIO G., PASQUALI T., PROSSER G. e ROBOL B., 1985 - *Bersaglio di Mori (dati e ricerche)*. *Annali dei Musei Civici di Rovereto*, Sezione Archeologia, Storia, Scienze Naturali, 1: 23-66.
- BAGOLINI B., 1981 - *Il sepolcreto e gli insediamenti eneolitici di Spilamberto - S. Cesario nel quadro culturale mediopadano*. In: BAGOLINI B. (ed.) *Il Neolitico e l'Età del Rame. Ricerca a Spilamberto e S. Cesario 1977-1980*. Tamari, Bologna: 217-276.
- BAGOLINI B., FERRARI M.G., GIACOBINI G. e GOLDONI M., 1982 - *Materiali inediti della necropoli di Cumarola (Maranello di Modena) nel quadro dell'Eneolitico Italiano*. *Preistoria Alpina* 18: 39-78.
- BAGOLINI B. e VON ELES P., 1981 - *Documentazione dei resti culturali*. In: BAGOLINI B. (ed.) *Il Neolitico e l'Età del Rame. Ricerca a Spilamberto e S. Cesario 1977-1980*. Tamari, Bologna: 69-134.
- BARFIELD L.H., 1975 - *Il periodo eneolitico nella provincia di Reggio Emilia*. In: *Preistoria e Protostoria del Reggiano*. Tecnostampa, Reggio Emilia: 27-30.
- BARFIELD L.H., 1979 - *Eneolitico*. In: *Preistoria nel Bresciano. La Cultura Materiale*. Grafo, Brescia: 35-44.
- BARFIELD L.H., 1981 - *L'Eneolitico e l'antica età del Bronzo in Lombardia*. In: *Atti I Convegno Archeologico Regionale*. Geroldi, Brescia: 139-165.

- BARFIELD L.H., 1983 - *The Chalcolithic cemetery at Manerba del Garda*. *Antiquity*, 57: 116-123.
- BARFIELD L.H., 1986 - *Il Calcolitico alla luce degli scavi del Sasso di Manerba*. In: *Atti II Convegno Archeologico Regionale*. New Press, Como: 397-414.
- BARFIELD L.H., BIAGI P. e BORRELLO M.A., 1975-76 - *Scavi nella stazione di Monte Covolo (1972-73). Parte I*. *Annali del Museo*, Gavardo, 12: 7-160.
- BAROCELLI P., 1971 - *Ostiano e Volongo (Basso Oglio). Note di Preistoria Bresciana*. In: *Oblatio*. Nosedà, Como: 81-108.
- BERNABÒ BREA L., 1956 - *Gli scavi nella Caverna delle Arene Candide. Parte I. Gli strati con ceramiche*, 2. Bordighera.
- BERTONE A., 1986 - *Chianocco (TO), loc. Orrido. Inseediamento della fine del III millennio a.C.*. *Quaderni della Soprintendenza Archeologica del Piemonte*, 5: 182-185.
- CHIERICI G., 1872 - *Una caverna del Reggiano*. *La Rivista Provinciale*. Calderini, Reggio Emilia: 3-10.
- COLINI G.A., 1898-1902 - *Il sepolcreto di Remedello Sotto nel Bresciano e i Pelasgi in Italia*. *Bullettino di Paletnologia Italiana*, 24: 1-110; 25: 1-32; 218-311; 26: 57-101; 202-267; 27: 73-132; 28: 5-43; 66-103.
- CORNAGGIA CASTIGLIONI O., 1971 - *La Cultura di Remedello. Problematica ed ergologia di una facies dell'Eneolitico Padano*. *Memorie della Società Italiana di Scienze Naturali*, 20 (1).
- CORRAIN C., CAPITANIO M.A. e CORRAIN C., 1968 - *Una stazione eneolitica a «Selva» di Stanghella (Padova)*. *Rivista di Antropologia*, 55: 51-84.
- GAMBARI F.M., 1986 - *Briona (NO), loc. Cascina Le Coste. Abitato preistorico e protostorico*. *Quaderni della Soprintendenza Archeologica del Piemonte*, 5: 180-181.
- GASCO J., 1976 - *La communauté paysanne de Fontbouisse*. *Laboratoire de Préhistoire et de Palethnologie*, Carcassonne.
- GUTHERZ X., 1975 - *La Culture de Fontbouisse. Recherches sur le Chalcolithique en Languedoc Oriental*. *Association pour la Recherche Archéologique en Languedoc Oriental*, 2. Imprim'Offset, Garons.
- LEONARDI P. e BROGLIO A., 1962-63 - *I Covoli della Cengia Bassa di S. Cassiano nei Berici (Vicenza)*. *Bullettino di Paletnologia Italiana*, 71-72: 155-189.
- MEZZENA F., 1982 - *Ricerche preistoriche e protostoriche in Valle d'Aosta. Risultati e prospettive*. In: *Atti Convegno Bimillenario Città di Aosta*. Sorta, Cuneo: 149-204.
- MILLS N., 1985 - *The Neolithic of Southern France*. In: SCARRE C. (ed) *Ancient France. 6000-2000 BC*. The University Press, Edinburgh: 91-145.
- NISBET R. e BIAGI P. (eds), 1987 - *Balm'Chanto: un riparo sotto roccia dell'età del Rame nelle Alpi Cozie*. *Archeologia dell'Italia Settentrionale*, 4. New Press, Como.
- ZORZI F., 1953 - *Resti di un abitato capannicolo eneolitico alle Colombarie di Negrar (Verona)*. In: BLANC G.A. (ed) *Actes du IV Congrès International du Quaternaire*. Castaldi, Roma: 3-15.

Indirizzo degli Autori:

BERNARDINO BAGOLINI, Dipartimento di Storia della Civiltà Europea, Università di Trento, Via S. Croce 65 - 38100 TRENTO  
 PAOLO BIAGI, Dipartimento delle Scienze Storico-Archeologiche e Orientalistiche, Università di Venezia, Palazzo Bernardo - S. Polo 1977/A - 30125 VENEZIA