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OBSERVATIONS ON THE LATE NEOLITHIC OF NORTHERN ITALY**

RIASSUNTO - Vengono puntualizzati i problemi relativi alla fine del IV - inizio del III millennio nell'Italia Nordorientale sottolineando i fenomeni che interessano la fine della Cultura dei Vasi a Bocca Quadrata, il sorgere della Cultura di Chassey prima e di Lagozza poi e quindi nel pieno III millennio bc le prime espressioni di carattere eneolitico.

SUMMARY - The Author considers the problems connected with the late IV-early III millennium bc in North Eastern Italy that is the transition between the final aspects of the Square Mouth Pottery Culture and the Chassey and later Lagozza traditions. Some considerations are also made about the first Copper Age Groups which made their appearance in the Po Valley during the mid III millennium bc.

The Square Mouth Pottery Culture reached its maximum expansion around 3500 bc. At this time almost all Northern Italy was covered with sites of the «spiral meander» phase of the Culture when Adriatic influences seem to have been very much in evidence (BARFIELD 1973; BAGOLINI, BIAGI 1985). These latter can be seen particularly in the ornamentation of pottery of the phase.

Excised decorations and dinamic incised motifs, principally various types of running spirals, are the most common decorative motifs and their oriental origin has already been stressed at different times (BAGOLINI, BARBACOVI, BIAGI 1979). For the spiral meander or Adriatic phase we are in possession of several radiocarbon dates from which one can see its generally later dating with respect to the earlier «linear geometric» or Quinzano-Finale phase (BARFIELD 1971), which flourished at the start of the IV millennium bc (fig. 1).

During the third phase of the Square Mouth Pottery Culture, or period of incised and impressed decoration, one notes a radical change in ceramic production. Characteristic are bowls with four spouts, decorated with incised and impressed zig-zags and with a buff coloured fabric; deep pots sometimes with impressed cordons and impressed rims; open bowls with incised herringbone decoration or impression of corn stalk or dots.

The classic site for this phase is Rivoli Veronese in the Adige Valley (BARFIELD, BAGOLINI 1976). The third phase of the Square Mouth Pottery Culture has distribution restricted to a small area of Northern Italy, namely Eastern Lombardy, the Trentino and part of the Veneto. At least as far as we can recognise to date, its southern limit does not cross the River Po (fig. 2).

In Liguria the stratigraphy at Arene Candide traces the changes in Neolithic development during the IV and III millennia bc. In this cave, above the Square

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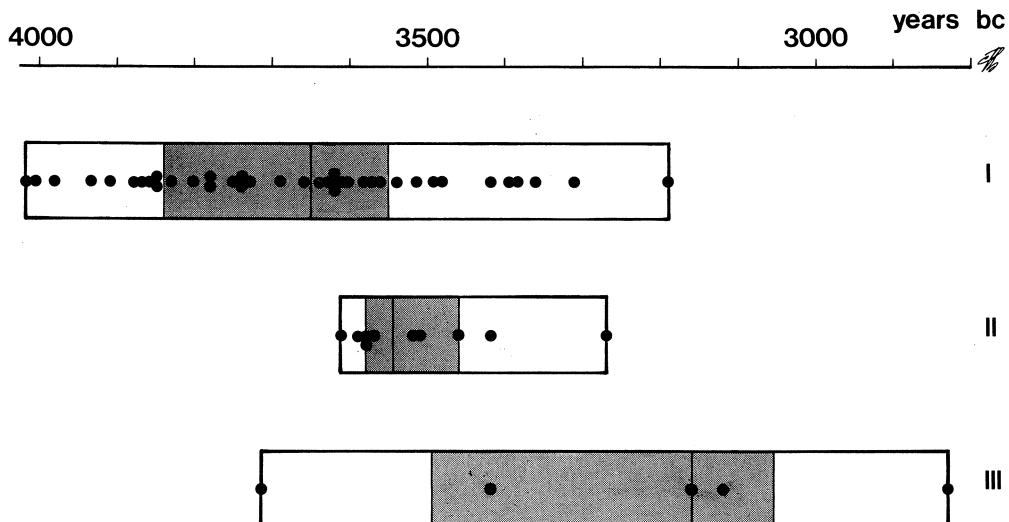


Fig. 1 - List of the radiocarbon dates today available for the three phases of the Square Mouth Pottery Culture displayed with the OTTAWAY (1973) method.

Mouth Pottery Culture layers, we find those characterised by the Chassey Culture (BERNABÒ BREA 1946; 1956). This latter assemblage is stratified above layers with Square Mouth Pottery material in which elements of the middle phase, i.e. sherds decorated with excisions and spirals, are found.

In Liguria, therefore, as in a good part of North-Western Italy, it seems that the Italian version of the Chassey Culture was established by the end of the IV millennium bc. Round pots of burnished fine ware with pan-pipe lugs have been found on several Ligurian, Lombard and Emilian sites as well as in Square Mouth Pottery Culture settlements such as Rivoli Veronese, which seems to have had trade links with the Chassey sites.

At a later date, that is to say at the start of the III millennium, as we can see from Cl4 dates, the Lagozza Culture develops (GUERRESCHI 1967), which is characterised by globular pots with perforated lugs, brimmed plates, carenated bowls and flat based conical vessels covered with bosses, in coarse ware. The differences between the two groups of Chassey and Lagozza have recently been more clearly defined as a result of the excavations carried out at Spilamberto in Emilia, where the remains of two settlements have been found (BAGOLINI 1981). One of these, the earlier of Chassey type, is dated to 3045 ± 100 bc (I-11817) and the other, which is later, is Lagozza in character. The western penetration of this latter Culture on surviving sites of the Square Mouth Pottery Culture can be demonstrated by the finds made at Monte Covolo (BARFIELD, BARKER, CHESTERMANN, PALS, VOORrips 1977-79; BARFIELD, BIAGI, BORRELLO 1975-76), where the earliest horizon produced Lagozza material associated with rare sherds of square mouth pottery. A similar situation is known further east at Palù di Livenza, a site located in a lake-basin (PERETTO, TAFFARELLI 1973).

Also at Mosio in south east Lombardy, a site in a key position at the most southerly limit of the maximum expansion of the final phase of the Square Mouth

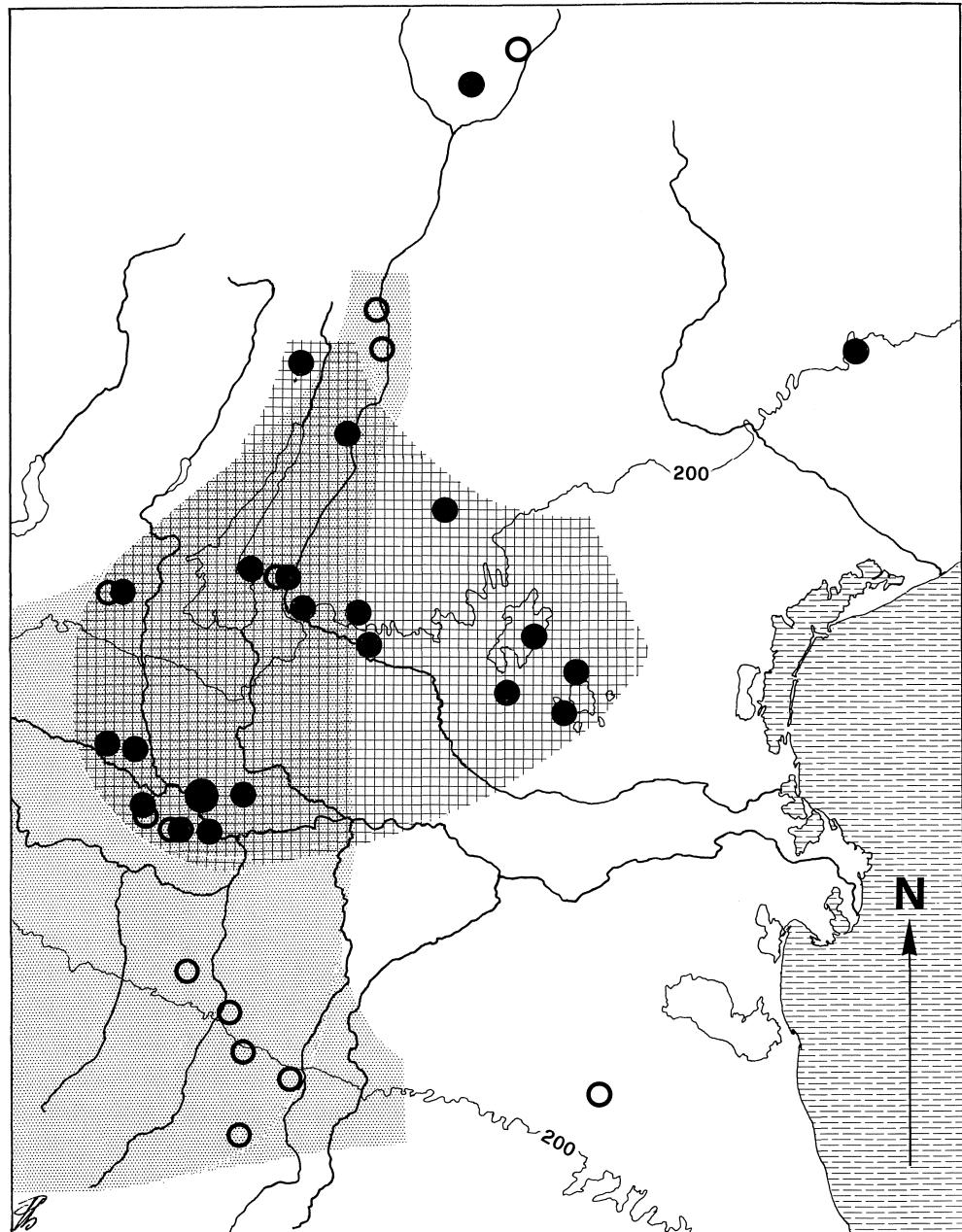


Fig. 2 - Distribution map of the Square Mouth Pottery Culture sites of the «spiral meander» (circles) and «incised and impressed» styles (points) in North Eastern Italy (after BIAGI, BARKER, CREMASCHI 1983).

Pottery Culture, a pit containing both Lagozza and Square Mouth pottery of an unusual type with very prominent spouts and curious flattened bosses below the

spout, was found (SIMONE 1980). This assemblage probably represents the final survival of the Square Mouth Pottery Culture in an area which from that point on, was dominated by the new western features which appear at the end of the IV millennium bc.

The main problems relating to the end of the Neolithic in Northern Italy can be summarised as follows.

Around the middle of the IV millennium bc, the Square Mouth Pottery Culture is at its maximum expansion with its spiral meander style clearly showing Adriatic influence. The following spread of Chassey from the west over a large part of the region coincides with the geographical restriction of the late Square Mouth Pottery culture, which is now restricted to a region delimited by eastern Lombardy, Trentino and part of the Veneto. At the start of the III millennium bc, the Lagozza Culture appears to finally invade the whole of Northern Italy including that area which had just previously had Square Mouthed Pottery occupation as can be demonstrated by the presence of pure Lagozza sites within this area such as the Rocca di Manerba in Lombardy (BORRELLO 1978) and the Grotta Perin, in the Veneto (LEONARDI, BROGLIO 1962-63).

Southern influences can also be recognised in the appearance of Diana type sites along the Adriatic coast of the Romagna (BAGOLINI, BIAGI 1977), while the technique of decorating coarse ware pots with impressed cordons in the final phase of the Square Mouth Pottery Culture can be regarded as Central European influence. With the start of the Chalcolithic, the picture becomes more complicated on account of the lack of finds in secure stratigraphical association. At Monte Covolo, the stratigraphy showed that above the Neolithic there was a level with white-coloured pottery of a very friable nature, in large simple shapes with restricted or upright rims. The rims are plain but with a line of partial perforations impressed from either the inside or the outside. This pottery called «white ware» (BARFIELD, BIAGI, BORRELLO 1975-76), has been found on other sites in Northern Italy, mainly along the Alpine fringe, and which can perhaps be considered distinctive of the Chalcolithic in this region. In the white ware levels at Monte Covolo a copper object was recovered which is evidence for the knowledge of metallurgy at the site.

On the Central Po Plain, two sites have produced finds attributable to this phase of development. At Sant'Ilario d'Enza, MONACO and BERNARDI (1950-51), excavated in 1943 a series of pits containing fragments of deep vessels with perforated rims and large pots with impressed cordons or simply decorated with finger impressions which were associated with Lagozza type pottery. The same type of coarse ware was found in pit IV at Casatico di Marcaria in South East Lombardy (BIAGI, BARKER, CREMASCHI 1983). The presence of this type of pottery at Monte Covolo, Sant'Ilario d'Enza and Casatico di Marcaria suggests a renewal of the Central European and North Alpine links already apparent towards the end of the IV millennium bc.

Even if unfortunately we do not have radiocarbon dates for these three sites, their absolute chronology seems to be referable to the middle of the III millennium bc.

After this initial phase of the Chalcolithic, which is still very little known, the assemblages of the so-called Remedello Culture (COLINI 1898-1902) and Spilamberto Group (BAGOLINI 1981) make their appearance in the Po Valley, both of which are probably contemporary with the caves of the Lombard Pre-Alps (BARFIELD 1981).

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