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## Introduction

This book is about the earliest phases of the development of the Latin city-state, as it can be reconstructed by essentially archaeological means. This choice of method was not a matter of principle: contemporary or nearly contemporary written sources would have been of great help for building up a model of socio-political development and testing it through the archaeological data. Unfortunately, Iron Age Italy has no equivalent of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* or of Hesiod's *Works and Days*. The earliest authors who wrote about this period in a reasonably detailed way lived several centuries later and, although they may have transmitted some significant information about events, they certainly cannot provide any dependable elements concerning the structure and organization of the Latial communities. Thus, anthropological models, along with the analysis of the archaeological record, represent the essential tools at our disposal for research about this period.

However, I am not convinced that there is necessarily an opposition between anthropological and historical models, or, to make a complex matter simple, that a synchronic ('anthropological') approach cannot be used in order to achieve a diachronic ('historical') reconstruction. The methodological debate in archaeology, which of course has much to do with this general problem, was rather lively in the eighties. In spite of massive, and often significant, criticism levelled against it, I believe that the statement by Schiffer (1976) and Binford (1980) about the 'behavioural' (and thus essentially synchronic) nature of the archaeological record is one of the most important achievements of archaeological method so far. Even the emphasis placed by Ian Hodder (1982) and other post-processual archaeologists on the non-predictable, symbolic and ideological elements which are inherent to material culture, as opposed to its predictable behavioural significance emphasized by Schiffer and Binford, does not, in my opinion, lessen the value of this statement. Acknowledging the behavioural as well as the symbolic and ideological nature of material culture has a significant bearing upon archaeological method and diachronic research.

The necessary implication is not, as many archaeologists seem to believe, that a detailed analysis of the material evidence and an understanding of its specific meaning (which is inherently synchronic) is of limited value to historical reconstruction and can therefore be simply omitted, to the advantage of more substantial procedures. On the contrary, the implication is that such an analysis and understanding constitute the first, indispensable level of an archaeologically based diachronic ('historical') research.

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In other words, precisely because of its inherent behavioural and symbolic significance, the archaeological record cannot be used as a direct source of information about socio-cultural 'norms' and diachronic development. A full understanding of the specific meaning of the archaeological data (what material culture meant to the community which produced it in terms of its behavioural, symbolic, ideological and other significance) is, in my opinion, the only possible starting point for any serious attempt at identifying social structure and organization and their development in time.

This was the methodological problem which I tried to consider as comprehensively as possible, since the core of this study was the reconstruction of a single Iron Age community on the basis of cemetery evidence. The extension of the results of this rather localized analysis to the overall development of the Latial Iron Age culture and to a comparison with contemporary Etruria and Campania implied the consideration of other, equally important, problems. The first one was to reconstruct the ways and means of inter-communal, socio-political organization within ancient Lazio.

Evolutionary models of 'primitive' social organization, such as those elaborated by Fried (1967), Flannery (1972) and Service (1971, 1975), must be used with caution in archaeological research, since they can describe ancient societies and their development only in an abstract and rather general manner; their explanatory value is inversely proportional to the degree to which the single case-study can be thoroughly examined in its own right. However, this is a general feature of all the models which can be used in our discipline, which, nevertheless, fulfil the useful function of providing heuristic landmarks.

As far as Late Bronze and Early Iron Age Lazio (and, possibly, indigenous Campania) is concerned, in my experience, the concept of tribe (as defined, for example, by Sahlins 1968; Braun and Plog 1982; Plog and Braun 1984; Creamer and Haas 1985) is best suited to describe a level of loose political interaction between kinship-based 'egalitarian' communities, who possessed a limited degree of social ranking and were distributed over the territory of their region by separate clusters of villages and individual households.

On the other hand, the same concept does not seem to apply to contemporary Etruria, where the level of socio-political organization was clearly more complex, both in the Late Bronze and the Early Iron Age. As regards this region, however, the rather unsatisfactory state of the archaeological record for the period considered, while making it difficult to propose a well-defined model based on the specific characteristics of the local evidence, does not even allow adopting other models of socio-political organization such as that of chiefdom (Service 1971, 1975; Earle 1977, 1978; Creamer and Haas 1985). Of course, one should remember that the period of the history of Etruria being dealt with is considerably earlier than the Archaic and even the Orientalizing phases, which date from the late eighth century BC onwards.

The second important methodological problem, which is closely linked to the first one, is that, in all probability, the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age is precisely the period which coincided with the emergence and consolidation of regionally based ethnic groups throughout the Italian peninsula. Thus the problem of the relationship

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between material culture and ethnic identity is crucial to archaeological research in this period.

Recent theoretical and ethnoarchaeological research has indicated that homogeneous assemblages of clearly defined formal features in the material culture of a given area or region (archaeological 'cultures' as defined by Childe, 1929) cannot be directly equated with ethnic groups (Trigger 1990: 383f.). Different ethnic and linguistic groups can share the same material culture, and, inversely, formal differences in material culture within the same ethnic group or community may be meant to reflect internal divisions (for example, those relating to gender, age or social class) as well as to express and reinforce social competition (Hodder 1982: 119ff.). Differences of this kind have been brought out by the present study, especially in the detailed analysis of the cemetery of Osteria dell'Osa. On the regional scale, recent research emphasized some features of the archaeological evidence from the areas and period considered in this book relevant to the problem of ethnicity and material culture. As regards Etruria, Colonna (1988: 515ff.) pointed out the similarity in material culture between ethnically distinct groups (the Latin and Sabine speaking groups in the south-eastern part of the region, as opposed to the Etruscan speaking groups who occupied the largest part of the territory). An overall analysis of the problem of archaeological aspects as opposed to ethnic groups in the central Tyrrhenian regions was presented by Peroni (1989: 544ff.): in Etruria, he noted the range of intra-regional variability among the Iron Age, so-called Villanovan, aspects appearing in the sites of the future Etruscan cities. As regards Lazio, a significant feature in this respect is the lack of a definite boundary in the distribution of the local material culture both to the east (towards the Sabine area) and to the south (towards Campania). In Campania, the two main archaeological aspects appearing in the Early Iron Age (the *fossa*-grave and the so-called southern Villanovan) share a considerable number of material features although, especially in the earliest part of this period (around the ninth century BC), differences clearly prevail over similarities.

However, the opinion shared by the majority of Italian scholars is that the archaeological aspects of the Early Iron Age, which are mostly distributed over definite regional territories, indicate the emergence of different ethnic groups, quite likely the immediate predecessors of the Etruscan and Italic peoples referred to by ancient historians (see for example Pallottino 1984: 50; Peroni 1989a: 136). As will be shown in greater detail in the next chapters, an important feature of the Italian Iron Age society, as seen from the archaeological evidence of the central Tyrrhenian area, was its openness to intra- and interregional contacts, which may be reflected by some similarities in material culture among generally different archaeological aspects.

The core of the study presented in the following chapters is constituted by research on the Latial Iron Age cemetery of Osteria dell'Osa. On the basis of several years in the field and the subsequent study of the different categories of data, I have tried to reconstruct the structure and organization of the corresponding community throughout its development, approximately coinciding with the overall time-span of the Early Iron Age of Lazio (roughly the ninth and eighth centuries BC). The complete

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publication of the cemetery, including its last (Orientalizing) period, which has not been fully illustrated here, is being prepared (Bietti Sestieri, in press).

The main topic of this book is a well-known historical and archaeological problem: the overall cultural and socio-political development of Etruria, Lazio and Campania, the three central regions of the western (Tyrrhenian) coastal area of Italy, from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age, approximately the twelfth to the eighth centuries BC. During this period, some critical processes took place in this area: in Etruria, the earliest stages of the formation of the city-states, from the first concentration of Late Bronze Age settlements on and around the sites of the future Etruscan cities, to the immediate precedents of the emergence of true urban structures; in Lazio, the slightly later and inherently different process of urban formation, as well as the beginning of the central role of Rome. In Campania, the Late Bronze Age was marked by the evidence of Late Mycenaean contact; in the eighth century, the renewal and intensification of maritime contacts from the Aegean and East Mediterranean were soon to be followed by the foundation of Pithekoussai and Cumae. By the end of the period considered, the Tyrrhenian regions constituted the core area of socio-political development in the Italian peninsula.

Etruria, Lazio and Campania differ widely in overall geographic features and natural resources. Moreover, throughout the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages, the specific characteristics of the economy and social organization were not identical in the three regions. However, the archaeological evidence consistently indicates that they were closely linked together. This network of systematic interrelations was an important component of local cultural developments. The present study seeks to clarify the processes and mechanisms by which the connection was carried on. Its starting point, and, hopefully, its original contribution, is a detailed reconstruction of the structure and organization of a specific Iron Age community of ancient Lazio.

With few exceptions the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages are the earliest periods of Italian later prehistory for which a serious attempt at an archaeologically based socio-political reconstruction is possible. There are three main reasons for this: (1) the total amount of archaeological data is far greater for this period than for the preceding ones; (2) a relatively high number of systematic excavations and research studies have been carried out, especially as far as Early Iron Age complexes are concerned; and (3) as already stated, the Italian Iron Age communities constituted the immediate predecessors of the Italic peoples described by Greek and Latin historians.

The Late Bronze and, in particular, the Early Iron Age of Etruria, Lazio and Campania have been the privileged subject of both archaeological and historical research, mainly as a result of concentrated interest upon the subsequent historical development in these areas. Until a few years ago, our knowledge of this period was based essentially on a single category of archaeological data: pottery and bronze artifacts, mostly from cemeteries. The reconstruction consisted of typological analyses, aimed at establishing relative chronologies. The diachronic dimension was definitely emphasized, since it was considered as the only possible archaeological contribution to 'true' history. Socio-political reconstruction was based almost

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exclusively upon the little information provided by literary sources, which, even in the most favourable cases, are a few centuries later than the events and people concerned.

The approach to archaeological research on the later Italian prehistory has been rapidly changing in the last few years, with an increasing acknowledgement of the full potential of archaeological data. Systematic field-work and excavation are a widely diffused practice, along with the complete recovery and analysis of all the available categories of material data. Several excavation projects of this kind are in progress, or already completed, in the Tyrrhenian area, and particularly in Lazio, in the territory around Rome. Information on the majority of these works is available, essentially thanks to the publication of a number of preliminary reports (especially in the *Archeologia Laziale* series) and exhibition catalogues (*CLP*, 1976; *Ricerca*, 1979; *Ficana*, 1980–1; *Enea*, 1981; *Satricum*, 1982; *Ardea*, 1983). These new research studies, summarized by Colonna (1988), have considerably extended the archaeological knowledge about proto-historic ancient Lazio as illustrated by the same author in his 1974 paper.

The situation in Etruria is remarkably different: recent excavations have concentrated on Late Bronze Age settlements; the Early Iron Age of the region is known essentially through a number of old cemetery excavations, the most important exception being the relatively recent one at Veii, Quattro Fontanili (Close-Brooks 1965; Toms 1986).

As regards Campania, the state of archaeological research is not substantially different from that of Lazio, although the actual number of systematically excavated complexes certainly is considerably greater in the latter region. The present state of archaeological research is summarized by d'Agostino (1988); while this book was being prepared, the final publication of an important Early Iron Age complex, the 'Villanovan' cemeteries of Pontecagnano, appeared (d'Agostino and Gastaldi 1988).

Detailed regional studies include some specific areas and periods: the Final Bronze Age of southern Etruria (di Gennaro 1986), the Iron Age of Lazio (Colonna 1974, 1988; Ampolo and others 1980; Bietti Sestieri and De Santis 1985) and of Campania (d'Agostino 1974). As regards the archaeological record, these studies depend almost exclusively upon old excavations, along with preliminary reports of recent field-work.

This book consists of three sections:

- 1 A general outline of the existing archaeological information on the cultural process in the central area of Tyrrhenian Italy (ancient Lazio, southern Etruria and Campania) in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages.
- 2 The analysis of a recently excavated Early Iron Age cemetery of ancient Lazio (Osteria dell'Osa, near Rome), aiming at a detailed reconstruction of the structure and organization of the corresponding community in the crucial period during the ninth and eighth centuries BC.
- 3 An evaluation of the contribution of section 2 to section 1 in terms of: (a) a mere extension of existing information through the addition of new data; (b) a re-examination of the main funerary evidence from Early Iron Age Lazio by



using the same approach (and, possibly, method) adopted in section 2; and (c) a re-examination of the overall archaeological evidence from the three regions which have been analysed in section 1.

This procedure involved some serious difficulties which are inherent both in the tradition of cemetery studies in (Italian) archaeology and in the present state of the archaeological record in the regions concerned. The main question was that of elaborating and applying a purely archaeological method for the identification of social structure and organization from cemetery data. I had not the support of an established body of method, although obviously the subject of cemetery studies has been widely discussed in the last twenty years. The essential theoretical principle on which my research is based is that, in most societies, a measure of correlation exists between funerary practices and social structure and organization; therefore, the study of cemeteries is a legitimate field for social reconstructions. This basic assumption has been illustrated, for example, by Saxe 1970, Binford 1971, Brown 1971, Tainter 1978, Chapman, Kinnes and Randsborg 1981, Alekshin 1983, O'Shea 1984 and Morris 1987.

However, the primary scope of funerary practices is the performance of some specific social functions; of these the most important can be described as the need to enclose death within a framework of socially approved behaviours, rules and rituals, in order to neutralize its disruptive potential (see for example Huntington and Metcalf 1979). Thus the first problem, while dealing with the archaeological record, is that of identifying the material correlates of these functions. An attempt at social reconstruction can only follow a reasonably complete understanding of the specifically funerary significance of an archaeological record relating to a cemetery.

This was not an easy task in the case of the cemetery of Osteria dell'Osa, since the bulk of the archaeological material (that is, the grave-goods accompanying the individual burials) were only a few vases and personal ornaments. Ethnographic and ethno-archaeological research indicate that grave-goods of this and similar kinds may be meant to symbolize some aspects of a community's structure and organization in a more or less direct way; however, this is by no means a general rule. Moreover, there is not a well established method for dealing with funerary goods (especially pottery) as a specific means to social reconstruction. My research, therefore, essentially consisted of an attempt at identifying those formal, qualitative and quantitative features of the grave-goods which would be significant in view of this specific end. This was achieved, at least in a tentative way, by systematically checking the correlations between grave-goods and anthropological and spatial data. The result is not beyond further testing and interpretation. However, I think it can be considered as inherently consistent, from both a synchronic and diachronic point of view.

Another serious difficulty was that of bringing together the results of the study of Osteria dell'Osa and the existing archaeological information on ancient Lazio, southern Etruria and Campania in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages. As already remarked, the archaeological record relative to this area comprises a remarkably high number of information units of uneven quality. The majority of them, however, suffer

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either from the preliminary form of their publication, or from the lack of one or more critical categories of data. Their overall quantity allows some reasonably reliable statements of a rather general nature to be made; however, the use of analytical techniques on a detailed level is obviously not possible. This state of affairs constitutes the most serious obstacle to a significant comparison between Osteria dell'Osa and the major contemporary cemeteries in the Tyrrhenian area.

Since direct comparison was not possible, I chose an alternative procedure. This consisted of testing current views on the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age cultural process in the Tyrrhenian area by means of the results of the study of Osteria dell'Osa. In other words, I tried to establish the degree to which the specific features of this community of ancient Lazio were compatible with the accepted views about its inter-regional context or, rather, would contribute either to modify or to enrich it. This obviously was made possible by the occurrence of two prerequisites: (1) the community of Osteria dell'Osa was fully representative of contemporary Lazio throughout the Early Iron Age (about the ninth to the eighth centuries BC); and (2) the archaeological evidence relating to it included some significant indication of the relationship with both Etruria and Campania.

Additional information about terms used most frequently in this book to define chronological phases and periods, regional areas and archaeological aspects can be useful for the reader who is not familiar with Italian protohistory. The Italian Late Bronze Age is conventionally divided in two periods: *Età del Bronzo Recente* (approximately the thirteenth to the twelfth centuries BC) and *Età del Bronzo Finale* (about the twelfth to the tenth centuries BC). The earliest period dealt with in the book coincides with the *Età del Bronzo Finale*; however, since this term, or its English equivalent, would be hardly understandable to a non-Italian reader, I have referred to it as Late Bronze Age. The conventional time-span for the Italian Early Iron Age includes the ninth and eighth centuries BC; its final moment in Lazio, Etruria and Campania is marked by the beginning of the Orientalizing Period (*c.* 730/20 BC).

The modern regional boundaries of Lazio comprise the southern part of ancient Etruria, that is, the area on the right (northern) bank of the Tiber roughly coinciding with the province of Viterbo. Thus the term southern Etruria indicates the northern part of the area of modern Lazio; the terms Lazio or ancient Lazio, which have been used in the book, both indicate the part of modern Lazio which lies on the southern (left) bank of the Tiber.

As far as archaeological aspects are concerned, the meaning of the term Villanovan used in the text differs substantially from its common use in English (see for example Macnamara 1990: 8). In that language, this term is usually understood as indicating a chronological period, roughly coinciding with the Early Iron Age, and is easily extended to the whole territory of Italy; therefore 'the Villanovan period in Lazio' is equivalent to 'the Early Iron Age in Lazio'. In the Italian meaning used by this book, the term is used to define a specific archaeological aspect of the Italian Iron Age, which is characterized by a definite – although wide – geographic location (Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, part of Umbria and the northern part of modern Lazio, some areas of Cam-

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pania, a small core at Fermo, in the Marche). Thus 'late Villanovan' does not mean 'dating from a late phase of the Iron age' but 'belonging to a late manifestation of the Villanovan archaeological aspect'. Of course, the term Villanovan has no specific cultural or ethnic significance, but simply takes its origin from the site of the first discovery (Villanova, in Emilia), in 1853. The use of this term is equivalent to those relating to other regional archaeological aspects, such as Latial and *fossa*-grave. The relative chronology for each of these aspects or archaeological cultures is indicated by their division into Periods and phases.

The Latial culture, which is particularly important for the scope of this book, is divided into four Periods (Ampolo and others 1980): Latial Period I (roughly the tenth century BC); Period II, divided into phases IIA (c. 900–830 BC) and IIB (c. 830–770 BC); Period III, divided into phases IIIA (c. 770–740 BC) and IIIB (c. 740–730/720 BC); Period IV (Orientalizing), divided into IVA (c. 730/720–630/620 BC) and IVB (c. 630/620–580 BC).



## 2

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## Cemetery studies and social reconstruction

The study of cemeteries is one of the traditionally most important fields of prehistoric research. In several regions of Europe, and certainly in Italy, excavations of cemeteries have been carried out far more systematically and on a wider scale than those of settlements. There are two main reasons for this. First, from the point of view of archaeological recovery, graves (essentially single graves) present the researcher with an ideal circumstance, since each one constitutes a synchronous and reasonably complete unit. In archaeological terms, a cemetery can be described as a stratified deposit whose depositional units are a priori separate, and therefore readily distinguishable. Moreover, the internal spatial organization of each unit is rather close to the original one and its time of deposition is either simultaneous or relatively short (if a multiple or collective grave is the case). This is in striking contrast with the usual state of other types of stratified complexes (settlements are the obvious examples), in which the identification and separation of each depositional unit, the reconstruction of their time-span and the evaluation of the degree to which the archaeological record corresponds to the original deposit are among the basic problems to be solved by the excavator.

The second reason, which has much less to do with archaeological method, is the usually good state of preservation of non-organic grave-goods (in most cases, substantially better than is the case with settlement material) and the frequent occurrence among them of rare and/or intrinsically precious objects. Unfortunately, this specific characteristic of cemeteries has prompted clandestine digging and looting of graves. Intense excavation of cemeteries has been considered more fruitful and rewarding than that of other types of complexes, and led to the emphasis on the construction of cemetery-based typological sequences and relative chronologies.

With the advent of anthropological archaeology in the sixties (Binford 1972) and the beginning of the studies labelled a few years ago as 'the archaeology of death' (Chapman and others 1981), it became increasingly clear that the high potential of specifically archaeological information provided by cemeteries could be exploited far more thoroughly than it had been in the past. The basic theoretical point, which is by no means shared by all archaeologists (see for example Ucko 1969; Piggott 1973: 10), is that there is a substantial degree of interdependency between the overall funerary practices of a community and its structural and organizational principles. The empirical basis for this generalization is a certain degree of systematic correlation to be observed in most societies between some, at least, of the relevant components of funerary practices: age and gender of the deceased and their respective roles in the

family and in the community; different rates of energy and wealth expenditure in the disposal of the individual deceased; and funerary ritual.

In the archaeological record, the correlates of these components are a number of material items and features, such as the relative dimensions and spatial position of the graves, the specific characteristics and combinations of the grave-goods and, of course, the skeletal remains of the deceased.

### **Ritual and ideological biases**

Funerary evidence from an archaeological record cannot be analyzed as if it were an 'objective' marker of social structure and organization. In other words, funerary practices cannot be considered as a faithful and neutral reflection of the functioning of a living community. On the contrary, they serve cultural purposes which are specifically connected with the treatment of death. Principles of social structure and organization which may be identifiable through them, can be considered as essentially subordinate to the performance of funerary practices. In order to achieve a meaningful insight into the funerary practices of a given community, our primary concern is to reconstruct their specific place in the overall context of the community's ideology, life and activities.

French and American sociologists and anthropologists have indicated rather clearly the two most important social goals achieved by funerary practices. The first one consists of allowing the transition of the deceased from the world of the living to the world of the dead. In several cultural contexts, this passage is thought to be dangerous for the living, since in the period immediately subsequent to death, when his/her spirit is not yet separated from the body, the deceased is believed to be an unfriendly and possibly hostile entity (Fuchs 1969; Huntington and Metcalf 1979). The second social goal consists of re-integrating the community after the loss it suffered from the death of one of its members.

Funerary ceremonies and rituals are primarily connected with these two specifically funerary aims, and possibly with other, less generalized ones. A representation of the *social persona* of the deceased individual, which results from his/her different social identities (Goodenough 1965; Tainter 1978), and of his/her relationship to the community is an integral part of these ceremonies. As a consequence, the two most important biases at work when identifying social structure and organization from the funerary record are: (a) those features produced by ceremonial and ritual prescriptions relating to the transition period; and (b) those features relating to the ways and means through which the community represents itself in the funerary performance.

In order to identify these features, the first step is to have an insight into the community's point of view on itself and the subsequent step should be the reconstruction of social structure and organization from the observer's (that is, the archaeologist's) point of view. According to the terms introduced by Pike (1954) and redefined by Harris (1968), the first step should be performed by adopting an 'emic' perspective, while the second one should be achieved through the use of an 'etic' perspective. It is, of course, questionable whether these definitions, which have been invented in the context of linguistic and ethnographic research, can be applied to an archaeological