

Golasecca culture settlements: features, chronology and roles

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Introduction

Thanks to its geographical position, between the Alpine watershed, the Po, the Sesia and the Serio rivers (fig. 1), the Golasecca culture maintained important relations with the western Hallstatt culture, the Paleoveneti, the groups gravitating around the *Caput Adriae* and with the Etruscan world with the mediation of Bologna.¹ Its historical role was precisely to relate the Etruscan to the western Hallstatt world first and the Early La Tène one later, thanks to the knowledge and control of the Alpine passes and for the fact of speaking a Celtic dialect that favored communications with the transalpine populations.

This territory reaches at the moment of its maximum expansion about twenty thousand (20,000) square kilo-

meters, including mountainous regions and valleys, large and small Lake basins, morainic hills, the whole plain crossed by a dense hydrographic network, partly navigable.²

Over the centuries, the density of the population changes, but the heart of the area of Golasecca culture remains the sub-alpine zone of the morainic hills. Elsewhere, periods of widespread settlement have alternated with others in which the population is more sparse or almost absent.

The study of the settlements provides us with a picture of the dynamics of their development,³ but in the general evaluation it is also necessary to keep in mind the distri-

¹ CASINI / DE MARINIS in press.

² DE MARINIS 1988.

³ CASINI 2022.

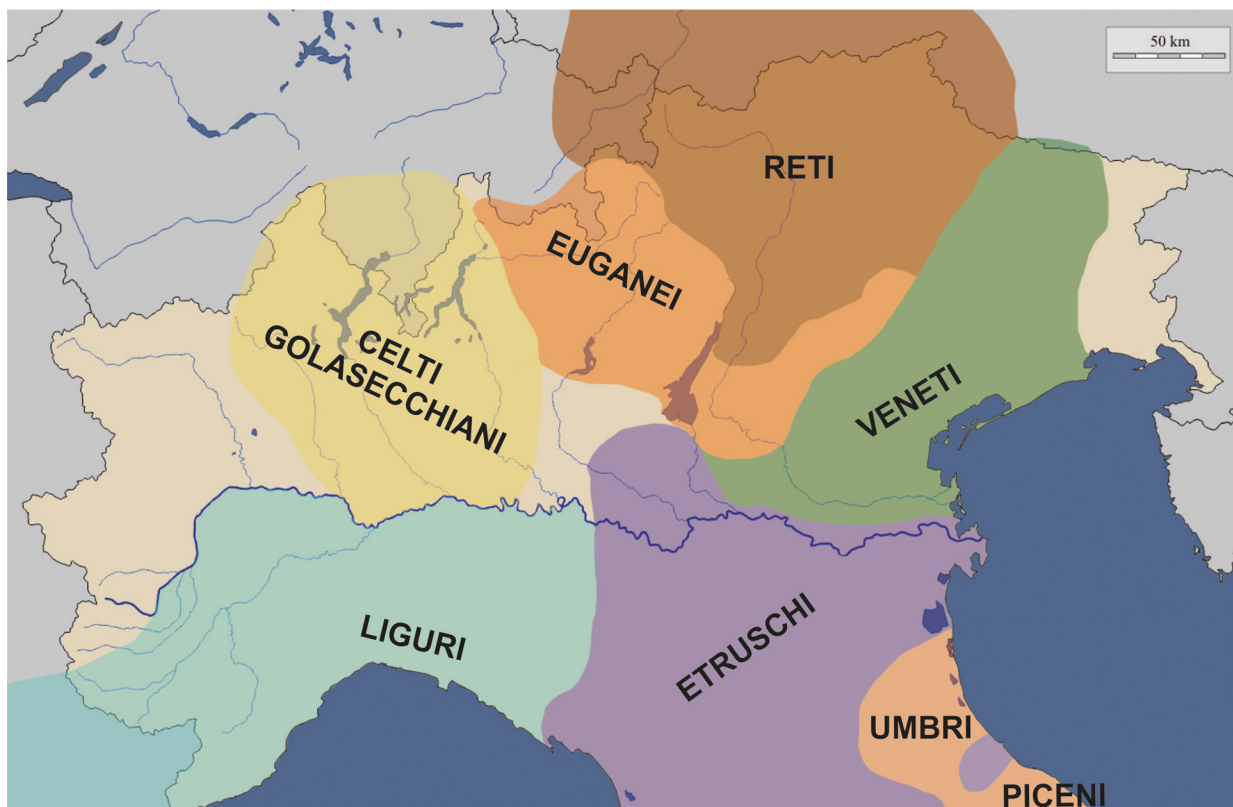


Fig. 1. Map of the first Iron Age cultures of Northern Italy (Map: St. Casini).



Fig. 2. Map of the Protogolasecca culture (FBA) sites (Map: St. Casini).

bution of the cemeteries, since each of them is related to a not preserved inhabited area (fig. 3).

The origin of Golasecca settlements is to be found in the Final Bronze Age (FBA), during the Protogolasecca, which constitutes its formative phase both in a cultural and geographical sense⁴ (fig. 2).

The areas of the oldest settlements, since the 12th–11th century B. C., are the upper Verbano, with Castello di Tegna,

San Michele di Ascona, and the related necropolis of San Materno,⁵ the Piana di Magadino and the Mesolcina valley, where both cemeteries and inhabited areas document a continuity of occupation up to the 10th century B. C.⁶

To the south of Monte Ceneri, most of the documentation relates to the 10th century B. C.: we can mention settlements such as Arolo and Ispra along the Lombard

⁴ DE MARINIS 1988, 161–166. The origin of the Golasecca culture dates back to the Recent Bronze Age, in the Canegrate culture, which could be considered regional facies of the European Urn-field.

⁵ JANKE 2000 (Tegna); DE MARINIS 2000a, 140 (San Michele di Ascona) 124–137 (San Materno).

⁶ See the cemeteries of Claro, Gorduno and Giubiasco (DE MARINIS 1972, pl. I, DE MARINIS 2000a, figs 11–12) and the Castaneda settlement (NAGY 2012).

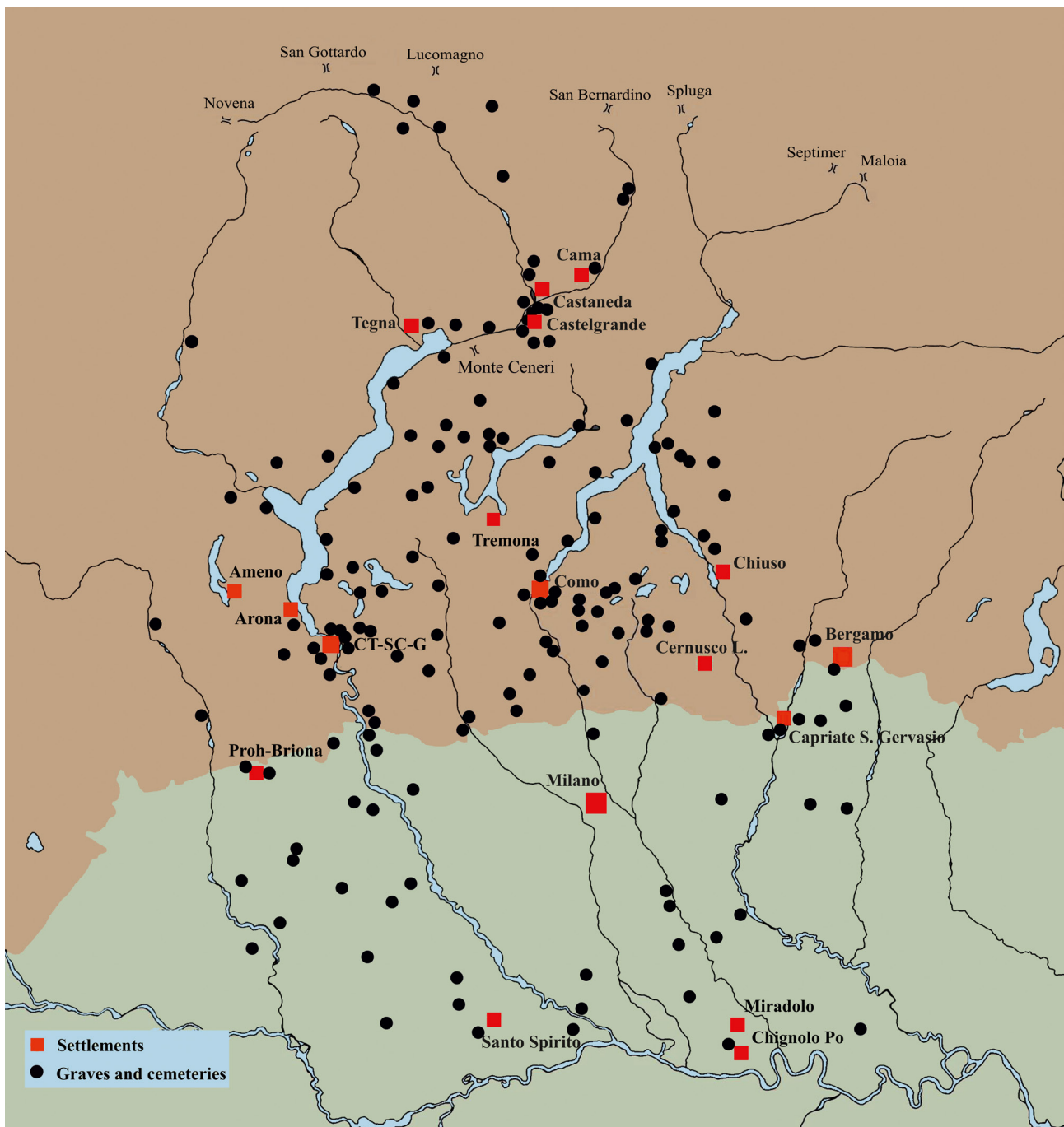


Fig. 3. Map of the Golasecca culture sites from the 9th to the beginning of the 4th century B. C. (Map: St. Casini).

shore of Verbano Lake, Isolino di Varese, Caslé di Ramponio Verna and Tremona-Castello between Varese and Lugano Lakes.⁷

The Lecco area also returned evidences of the FBA; here the settlement of Chiuso⁸ has been active since the 11th century B. C. and from here perhaps the occupation

of the east shores of the Como Lake and Valsassina,⁹ rich in mineral resources, began in the 10th century B. C. and reached the border of the Alpine cultural area that includes Valtellina, where the border settlement of the Protogolasecca culture is Dubino-Careciasca.¹⁰

⁷ Arolo: DE MARINIS 2009c. – Ispra: ARMOCIDA et al. 2008; Isolino di Varese: DE MARINIS 2009a, 162–164. – Caslé di Ramponio Verna: UBOLDI 2010. – Tremona-Castello: MARTINELLI 2000.

⁸ CASINI 1994; CASINI 2010.

⁹ In Valsassina the finds currently known date back to the 10th century B. C.: a tomb at Esino Lario (DE MARINIS 1972, 81, pl. 9,12–15), and the settlements of Corna del Biscia a In-trobio (RUFFA 2010a) and of Casere Sasso in Alta Val Biandino (CREMASCHI et al. 1994, 235–258); on the lake shore there is the settlement of Corenno Plinio di Dervio (CAIMI / LINCETTO / REDAELLI 2010).

¹⁰ POGGIANI KELLER 1989, 50–51.

The main feature of the settlements in the Canton Ticino and Lecco areas is the occupation of hills to control communication routes and provide stopping points.

During the 10th century B. C., the plain around Milan, at the center of what will be the territory of the Golasecca culture, was depopulated, while along the course of the Po there were two settlements very close to each other and to the river: Badia Pavese-San Tommaso and Campo Verde of Chignolo Po with the cemetery of Bissone.¹¹

Still along the Po, but further west, the cemetery of Pobietto near Morano Po,¹² attributed to the Protogolasecca from a cultural point of view, is probably a border site, permeable to different influences, due to its role in controlling the important river route that flows through all of northern Italy.

¹¹ Badia Pavese-San Tommaso: PEARCE 1991, 52–129. – Campo Verde di Chignolo Po: NEGRONI CATACCHIO 1979. – Bissone: DE MARINIS 1972, 66–67 pl. 7–8.

¹² VENTURINO GAMBARI 1999, 39–40; AVELLA / PACCIARELLI 2017.

Beyond the river Serio, which in the Iron Age marks the eastern border of the Golasecca culture, was the settlement of Vidolasco,¹³ which can be dated to the 10th century B. C., with the possibility that some Ascona elements can trace its origin back in time.

Many of these settlements were abandoned at the beginning of the Iron Age: the Sopraceneri and the Mesolcina valley appear depopulated.¹⁴

In the subalpine hilly area, however, as early as the 10th century BC there were important aggregation poles which have continuity in the Iron Age, with different but decisive outcomes in the context of the settlement strategies of the Golasecca culture: Bergamo, Como and the area of Somma Lombardo and Malpensa,¹⁵ along the course of the Ticino river, on both shores¹⁶ (fig. 2).

¹³ DE MARINIS 1972, 84–86.

¹⁴ SCHINDLER / DE MARINIS 2000, 160; 164.

¹⁵ Somma Lombardo: MANGANI / RUGGIERO 2014. – Malpensa: DE MARINIS 2009e; BRUGHIERA 2012.

¹⁶ On the Piedmontese shore there are Galliate and Romentino: DE MARINIS 1972, 61–65; DE MARINIS 2000c, 21–22 figs 3–6.

Bergamo

Although the stratigraphic sequences of the Upper Town of Bergamo (fig. 4A) have been incompletely and insufficiently published,¹⁷ as well as with dating errors¹⁸, the study conducted by Cesare Ravazzi and Roberta Pini¹⁹ on the cores drilled in the heart of the Upper Town, with the support of radiocarbon dates, has begun to outline the history of the protohistoric settlement which could be the oldest, in the general framework, together with Como and those of the upper Verbano and the Sopraceneri.

On the hill of Bergamo Alta, between the 13th and 8th century B. C., there was a decrease in the tree cover, with the evident beginning of stable agricultural-pastoral activities from the end of the 11th century B. C. Pottery from the Final Bronze Age comes from the excavation at the Cathedral, including fragments of the 12th century B. C., redeposited in more recent layers (fig. 4B).

Between the 8th and 7th century B. C. there was a different use of the land on the hilltop, as agricultural and livestock activities decreased; this fact indicates a great change that only the analysis of cultural aspects can

explain in detail. Personally, I believe that, instead of a decline of the settlement, as envisaged, we are facing with a reorganization of the site in which the areas on the hill were used for housing and all production activities and probably even the cemeteries were relegated outside it.

These elements would be in favor of a proto-urban development of the settlement, which, however, cannot be confirmed due to the total absence of the cemeteries, which, better than any other archaeological evidence, allow to define the social structure. The only already known graves are those found in the Scarlasso locality,²⁰ on the road that led from Bergamo to the ford on the Adda river, located near Brembate Sotto and Capriate S. Gervasio; the graves, unfortunately lost, contained metallic vessels including a ribbed cyst and an Etruscan Schnabelkanne with a heart-shaped attachment.

We know from the increased evidence that during the 6th century BC there was an expansion of the settlement, consolidated in the 5th century B. C., when it reached a width of about 22 hectares and became the reference centre of an extended territory occupied in the plain area by rural villages of which today we know only the cemeteries: Zanica, Verdello, Osio Superiore, Fornovo S. Giovanni,²¹

¹⁷ POGGIANI KELLER 1982; POGGIANI KELLER 1986, 65–80; POGGIANI KELLER 2001; POGGIANI KELLER 2007a; POGGIANI KELLER 2012; POGGIANI KELLER 2019; POGGIANI KELLER / RONDINI 2020; CASINI 2022, 553–555.

¹⁸ POGGIANI KELLER / RONDINI 2020, fig. 17,3B–C: only nr. 11 and 14 are surely datable to FBA. See also fig. 17,5B 3, misattributed to 8th–7th century B. C., while being FBA.

¹⁹ RAVAZZI et al. 2020; PINI et al. 2020.

²⁰ CASINI 2000, 140–143; DE MARINIS 2019.

²¹ CASINI 2000.

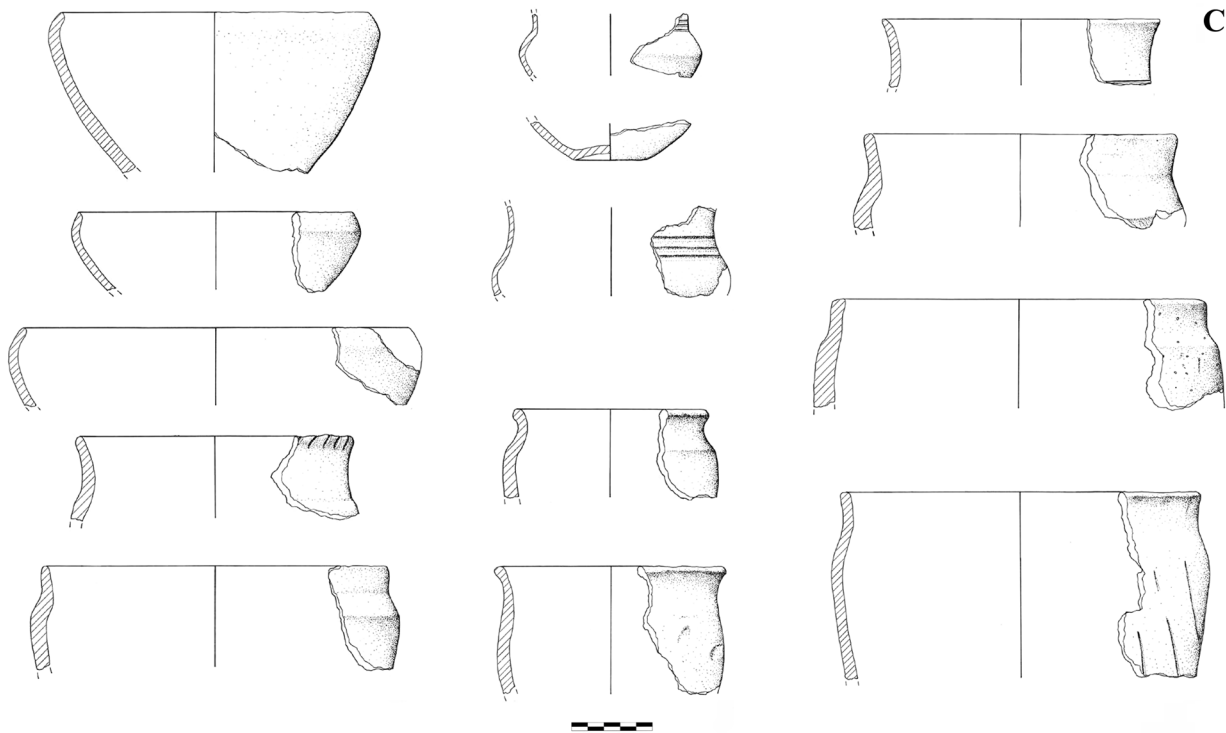
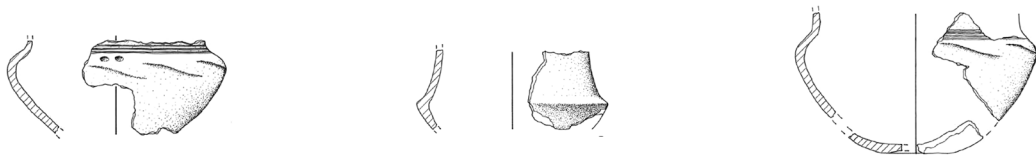
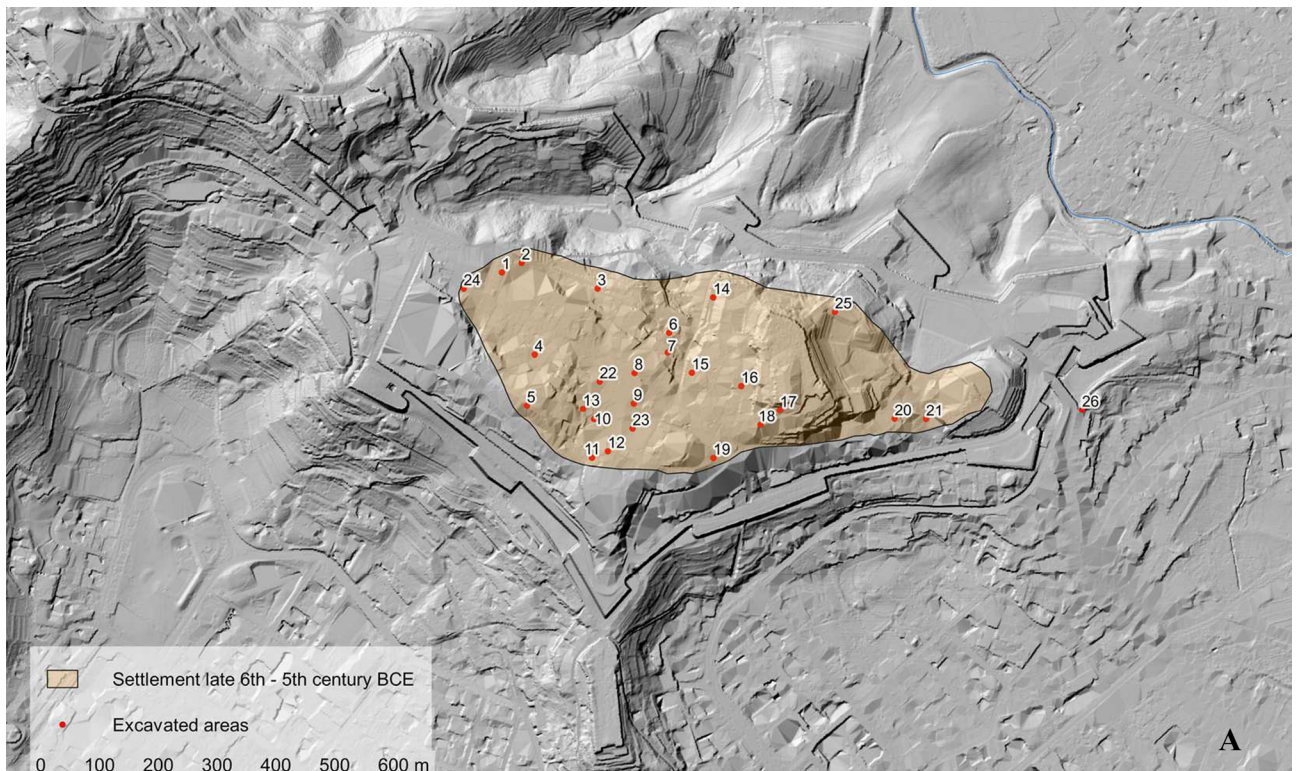


Fig. 4. A) Map of the Upper Town of Bergamo with the indication of the sites where the excavations brought to light traces of the Golasecca settlement. – B) Pottery fragments from the 12th century B. C. from the excavation of the Cathedral. – C) Pottery from the 11th–7th century BC from the excavation of the Cathedral (all the images after POGGIANI / RONDINI 2020).



Fig. 5. Attic Pottery from the excavation in Bergamo: 1–2 Owl skyphoi from the San Francesco Closter and the Cathedral; 3–4 kantharoi St. Valentin from the Cathedral; 5–6 kylikes from via Solata and via Arena; 7 glass alabastron from Piazza Mascheroni (after CASINI 2019).

Brembate Sotto,²² and Caravaggio.²³ The Capriate S. Gervasio settlement,²⁴ along the Adda river, indicates one of the ford points on the route that reached Como and later Milan; on the opposite shore, in fact, the Trezzo d'Adda tomb indicates the existence of a small settlement.²⁵

Positioned at the mouth of the pre-Alpine valleys, during the 5th century B. C. Bergamo probably played a role of connection between the mountains, rich in mineral resources, and the plain. It was also a stop on the most important trade route, which from the Po Valley

Etruria,²⁶ in particular from Forcello of Bagnolo S. Vito near Mantua,²⁷ passed through Brescia and reached Como, the real hub of trade before crossing the Alps.

Pottery from both the Euganean settlers in the Alpine valleys²⁸ and the Etruscans of the Po valley²⁹ document the contacts that Bergamo maintained with them, in addition to the Attic pottery and an alabastron of white and purple-brown glass probably imported from Rhodes,³⁰ conveyed by the Etruscans (fig. 5).

²⁶ DE MARINIS 1995.

²⁷ DE MARINIS 1986a; 1986b; DE MARINIS 2010.

²⁸ POGGIANI KELLER 2007a, fig. 175,10.

²⁹ POGGIANI KELLER 1986, fig. 46,6.

³⁰ Attic pottery: CASINI 2007b, 107–108; MUSCOLINO 2014. – Glass alabastron: CASINI 2007b, 98–99 fig. 1,3.



A

B

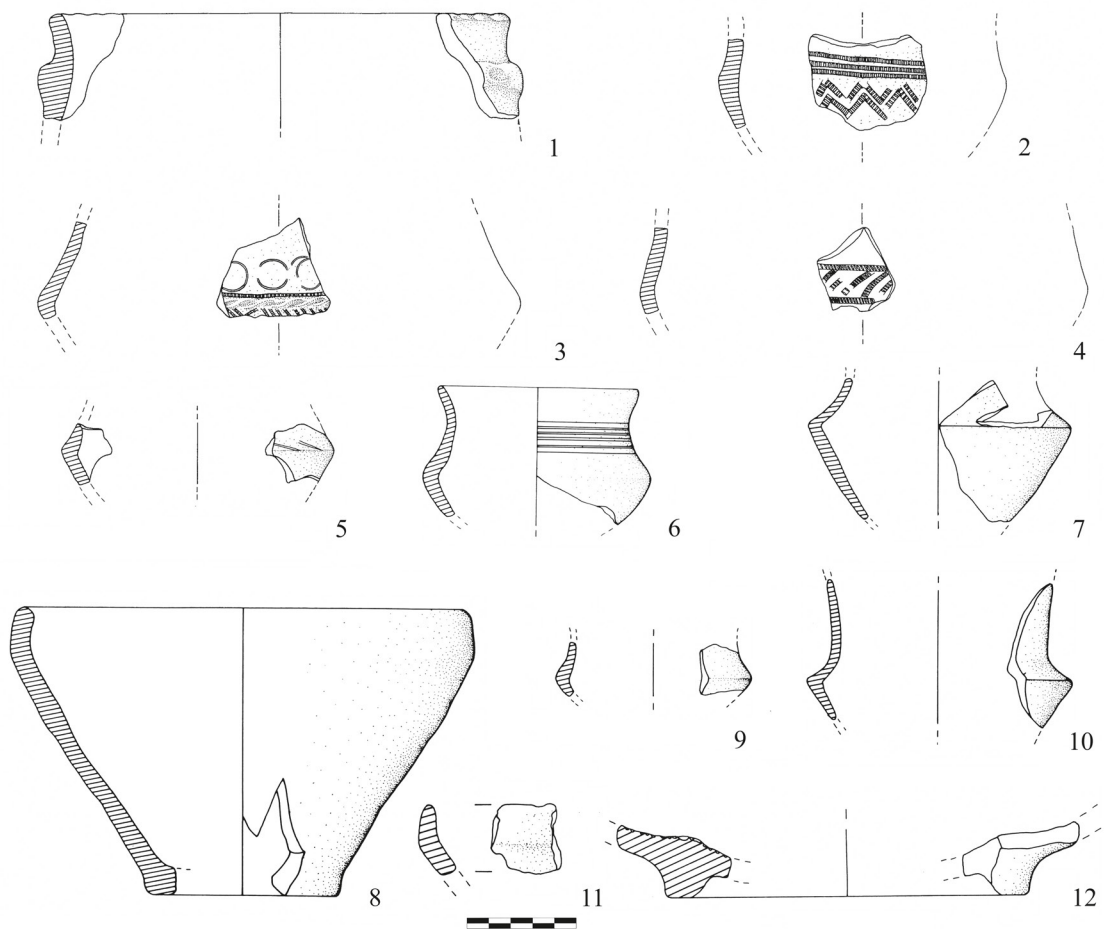


Fig. 6. Chiuso (Lecco). A) View of the settlement site from the Garlate lake. – B) Sample of the pottery found: 1–5 FBA pottery; 6, 8–9 pottery from the 9th–7th century B. C.; 7, 10 pottery from the 6th century B. C.; 11–12 pottery from the 5th century B. C. (photo and drawings by St. Casini).

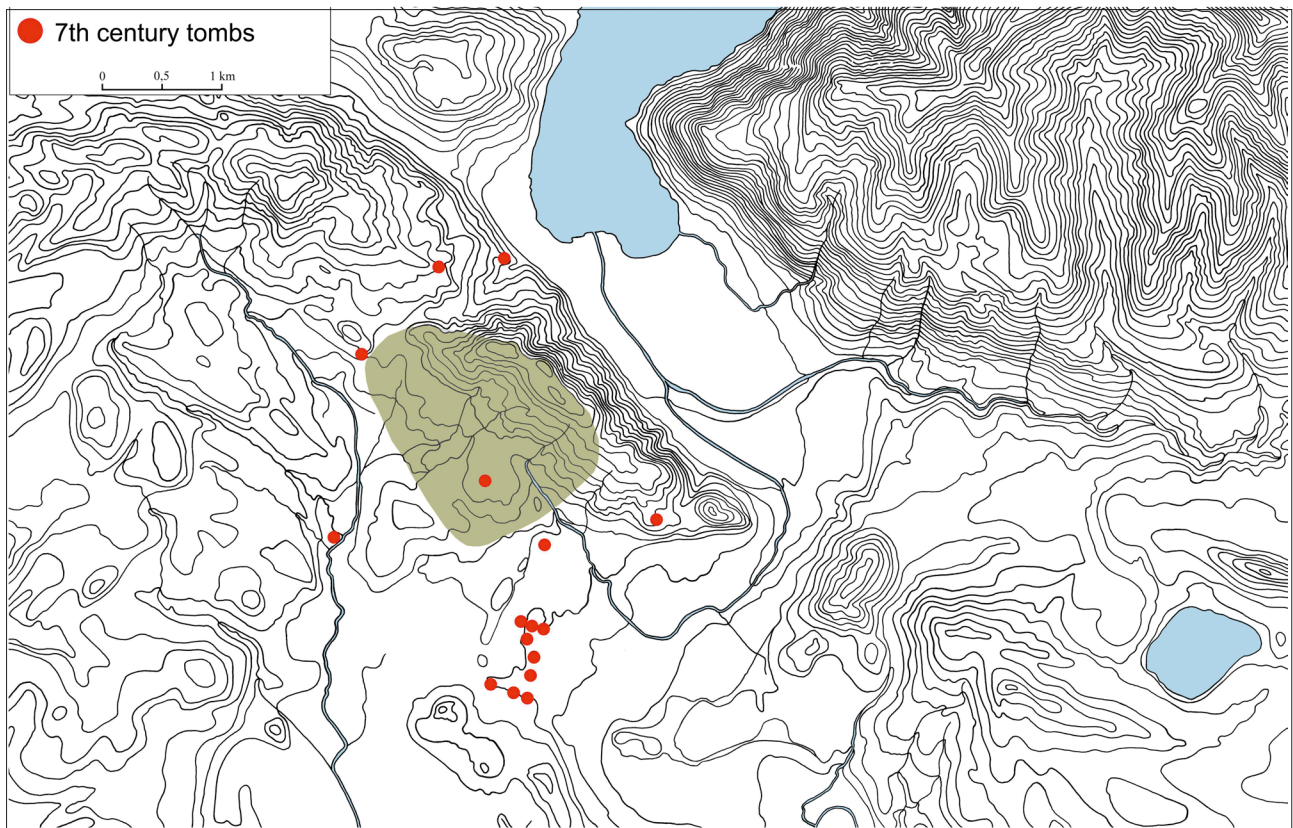
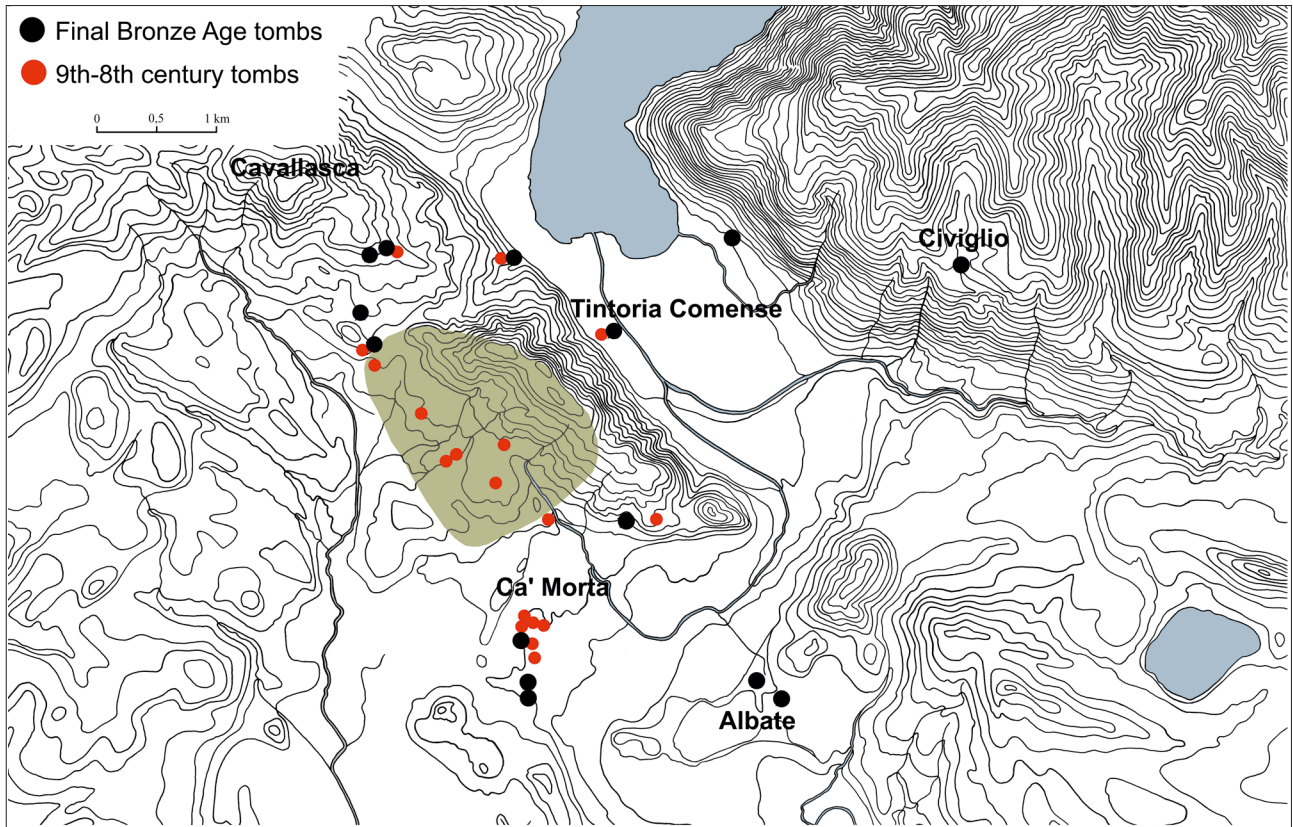


Fig. 7. Maps of the protohistoric settlement of Como: A) finds from the period between FBA and 8th century B. C. – B) finds from the 7th century B. C. (drawn by St. Casini).

Chiuso

The northernmost road that connected Bergamo to Como crossed the Adda at the Garlate Lake, just in front of the hilly settlement of Chiuso (fig. 3; 6A). This route is documented by the small cemetery of Ponte San Pietro,³¹ at the ford on the river Brembo, with materials dating back to between the 10th and 8th century B. C. and from the tomb of the 8th century B. C. at Caprino Bergamasco.³²

At Chiuso (fig. 6A) a limited survey in 1988 revealed a terracing wall and an uninterrupted stratigraphy from the Final Bronze Age to the 6th century B. C.³³ (fig. 6B). From the surface, extensively reshaped probably during the construction of the nearby castle, came the materials of the 5th century B. C. (fig. 6B,11–12); on a small plateau the

walls of two different structures refer to a time subsequent to 9th century B. C.

Unfortunately, the limited investigations did not allow to outline the extension and the internal organization of the village. The absence of burials in the surroundings is another obstacle to define the character of the population.

Interesting is the analysis of a small sample of fauna, currently the only documented for the Golasecca culture, thanks to the type of soil that has allowed its conservation.³⁴ The breeding was mainly focused on pigs and small cattle, mostly of adult age; also the remains of goats and sheeps refer to adults and document the prevalent exploitation of animals for secondary products. Deer and brown bear hunting was practiced and small dogs lived in the settlement.

31 DE MARINIS 1972, 81–86.

32 POGGIANI KELLER 1994.

33 CASINI 1994b; CASINI 2010.

34 BOSCATO / CASINI 1999; BOSCATO et al. 2019.

Como

Continuing to the west we arrive in the protohistoric settlement of Como³⁵ (fig. 3).

The large agglomeration of the 5th century B. C., which occupied the terraces and wide plateaus of the south-western slopes of Monte Croce, is the result of an increasingly widespread occupation process of the area, probably starting from the 12th century B. C., as demonstrated by the tomb 507 recently discovered at Ca' Morta.³⁶

The small groups of tombs of the Final Bronze Age reveal the existence of little villages scattered throughout the territory (fig. 7A), one of which was located a little further north-west of Monte Croce, in the locality of Cavallasca,³⁷ which has returned typical domestic pottery of that period.

During the 9th and 8th century B. C., the vast area of the protohistoric settlement was probably occupied by small groups of houses, with graveyards in the immediate vicinity (fig. 7A). The few tombs in via Mantegna and via Tito Livio³⁸ (at least 10 tombs), via per Mornago-via Rigamonti³⁹ (at

least 8 tombs), the Villa Cantaluppi near Cascina Fontana⁴⁰ and the tomb of the Vigna di Mezzo⁴¹ in Prestino, indicate that in the 9th and 8th centuries B. C. those areas were not yet exclusively intended for residential purposes and they were occupied by small villages.

The graves are almost all distributed along the southernmost offshoots of Monte Croce (fig. 7A) and seem to confirm that the oldest cores of the settlement should be recognized in the sites of Camerano, Rondineto and Prestino, located in a higher position on the hill.

No structures from this period are known, only ceramics redeposited in the most recent layers.⁴² The organization of the settlement is therefore not known; the gap appears all the more serious for the 8th century B. C., when the composition of some grave goods reveals the existence of a restricted social class which held considerable economic, as well as political power, and which entertained relations with the Villanovian Bologna in a privileged way,⁴³ starting the social and economic process that transformed the inhabited area into a proto-urban centre; we may quote the fragment of a bronze lozenge belt from via Isonzo-la Pesa (us 145)⁴⁴ (fig. 8,1–2), the boot-shaped vase of the Bologna-Vetulonia-Veio group from the

35 CASINI / DE MARINIS / RAPI 2001.

36 GRASSI / RAVAGLIA 2022, 18. Until the discovery of CM 507, the earliest tombs of Como were datable to the 10th century B. C., but now it is clear that on the one hand much was lost in the past two centuries and on the other there is still much to discover.

37 FRIGERIO 1987, 43–45.

38 CAPORUSSO 1997, 19–22 (via Tito Livio) 22–23 (via Mantegna).

39 MORDEGLIA 2017.

40 GIUSSANI 1936, 85–86.

41 DE MARINIS 1975, pl. 14,B; DE MARINIS 1988, figs 146–147.

42 CASINI 2022, fig. 2.

43 CASINI / DE MARINIS in press.

44 DE MARINIS 1999, 605–611 figs 1–2.

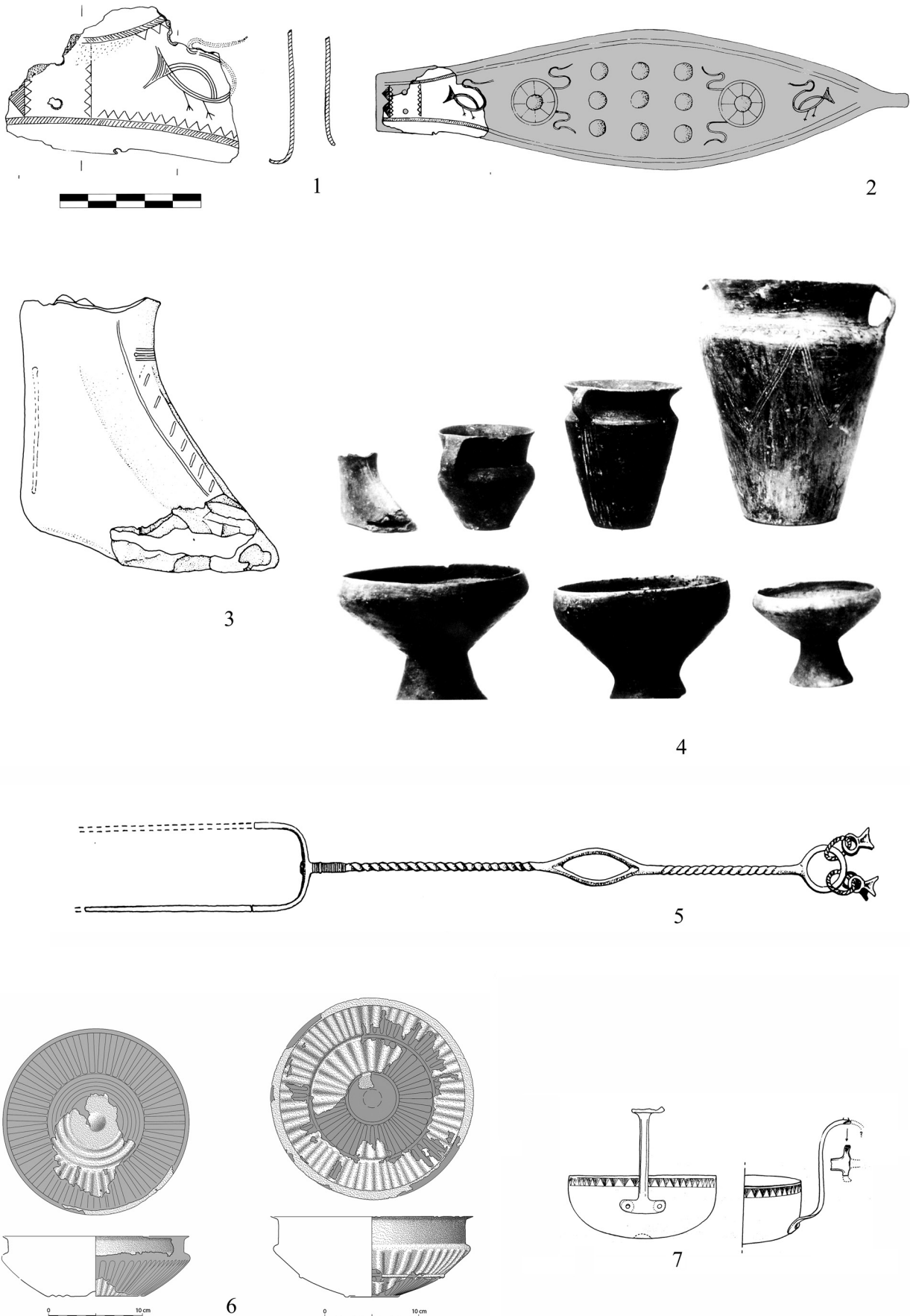


Fig. 8. Como, imported objects from Etruria or imitations: 1–2 the bronze lozenge belt of Villanova type from Prestino-via Isonzo 39 and its reconstruction; 3–4 the Villanovian boot shaped vase from Villa Giovio; 5 two pronged bronze fork of the tomb of Vigna di Mezzo; 6 the cups of Colmar type of the Carrettino tomb; 7 the ladle with open handle of the Bologna type of the Carrettino tomb (1–2 drawn by R. C. de Marinis; 3–4 after DE MARINIS 1999; 5; 7 after CASINI / DE MARINIS in press; 6 after CHAUME 2020/21).

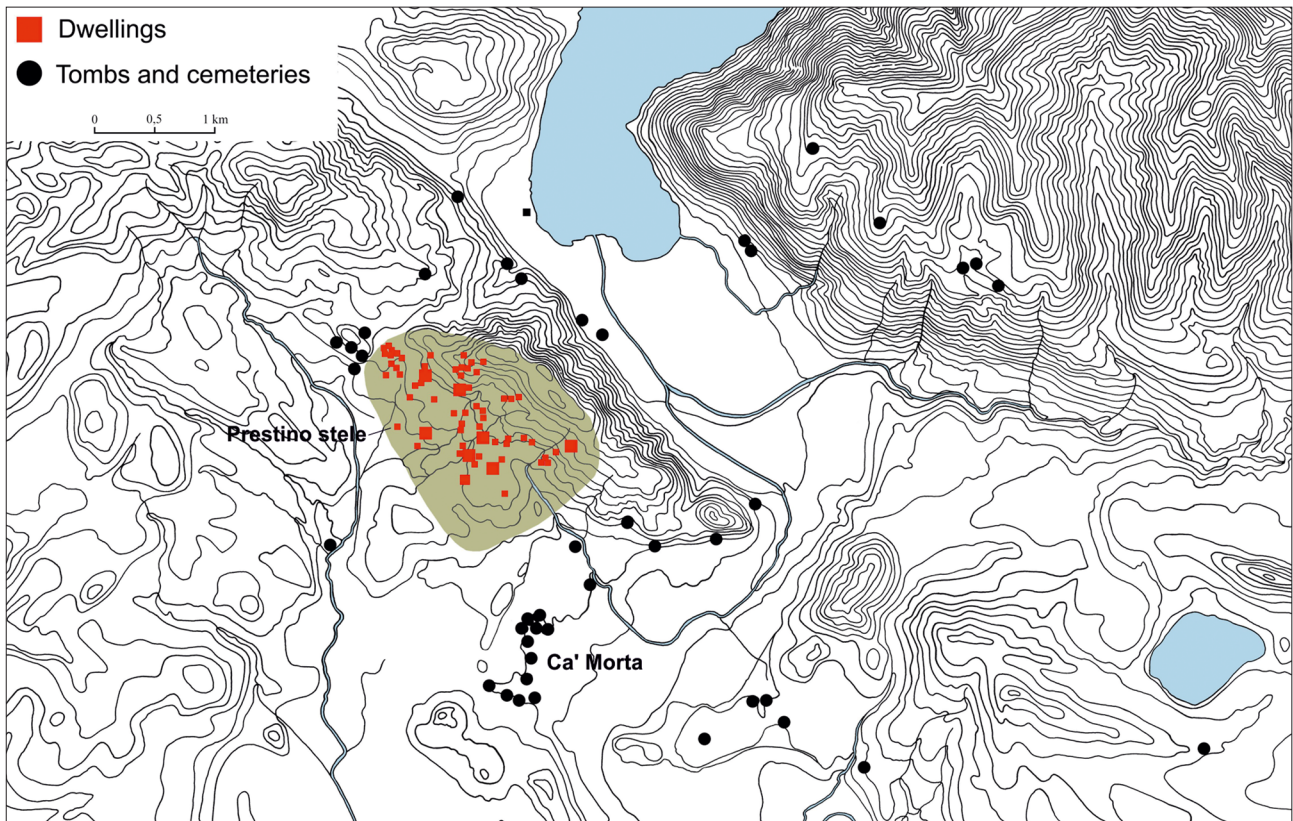


Fig. 9. Map of all the protohistoric finds of Como. In the 6th and 5th century B. C. the settlement reaches its great expansion (drawn by St. Casini).

tomb of Villa Gioivo⁴⁵ (fig. 8,3–4), the two pronged bronze fork – inspired by an oriental ideology – from the tomb of the Vigna di Mezzo (fig. 8,5) and some objects of the Carrettino at Ca' Morta grave such as the Colmar cups and the Villanova type laddle (fig. 8,6–7).⁴⁶

During the 7th century the burials, with a sole unsure exception, seem to be located outside, to the south-east and north-west (fig. 7B), on the edge of what would have been the area of maximum expansion of the settlement.

A decisive turning point took place during the 6th century B. C., when the dwellings multiplied in number and constituted the first clear phase of a long period of occupation. Already in the 6th century B. C. the houses partially excavated in the rock were built and inhabited, such as the Great Room, and the so-called “enclosures” were also built, such as that of Prestino via Isonzo 39 (La Pesa) and Leno.⁴⁷

We can therefore say that the phase of great expansion of the town, which reached and perhaps exceeded 100 hectares, began during the 6th century (fig. 9).

Excavations evidences indicate that the 5th century B. C. was mainly a time of rebuilding and rearrangement

of previous structures,⁴⁸ perhaps with a new internal organization in which different uses of the various areas were established: for example from the central-southern areas of the town (via Isonzo 39, via Isonzo 22–24, via Ronchetto and Pianvalle) come casting moulds, nozzles, bellows pipes, crucibles and loads of crucible, metal slags and bronze scraps which indicate the carrying out of metallurgical activities⁴⁹ (fig. 10).

We also know an area with a ritual destination consisting of an enclosure, a *temenos*, where the famous Prestino stele of the 5th century B. C. was found, located on the edge of the town to the south-west.⁵⁰

In the the Golasecca culture sphere, there is no doubt that Como was the most important settlement. After having activated privileged contacts with the Etruscans in the 8th century B. C., as we have seen, and starting from the Etruscan colonization of the Etruria Padana and the foundation of Forcello in the mid-6th century B. C., Como became the main hub for the distribution of luxury goods coming from the Mediterranean and peninsular territories and directed beyond the Alps, a role that it maintained throughout the whole 5th century B. C.⁵¹ The diffusion

⁴⁵ DE MARINIS 1999, 611 ss. figs 4–6.

⁴⁶ DE MARINIS 2017, 207–208; CHAUME 2020/21.

⁴⁷ Prestino via Isonzo 39: CASINI / DE MARINIS / RAPI 2001, fig. 13, structure nr. 3. – Leno: LURASCHI et al. 1968/69, 219–220.

⁴⁸ See for example the site excavated by the Archaeological Superintendence in the area of via Rigamonti/via Fittavolo in Camerano: JORIO 2014 and RAVAGLIA 2014.

⁴⁹ CASINI / DE MARINIS / RAPI 2001, 111 figs 6–7.

⁵⁰ DE MARINIS 1992, 211, figs 6; MOTTA 2000, 197–198.

⁵¹ DE MARINIS 1986b; CASINI / DE MARINIS / RAPI 2001, 114–121.

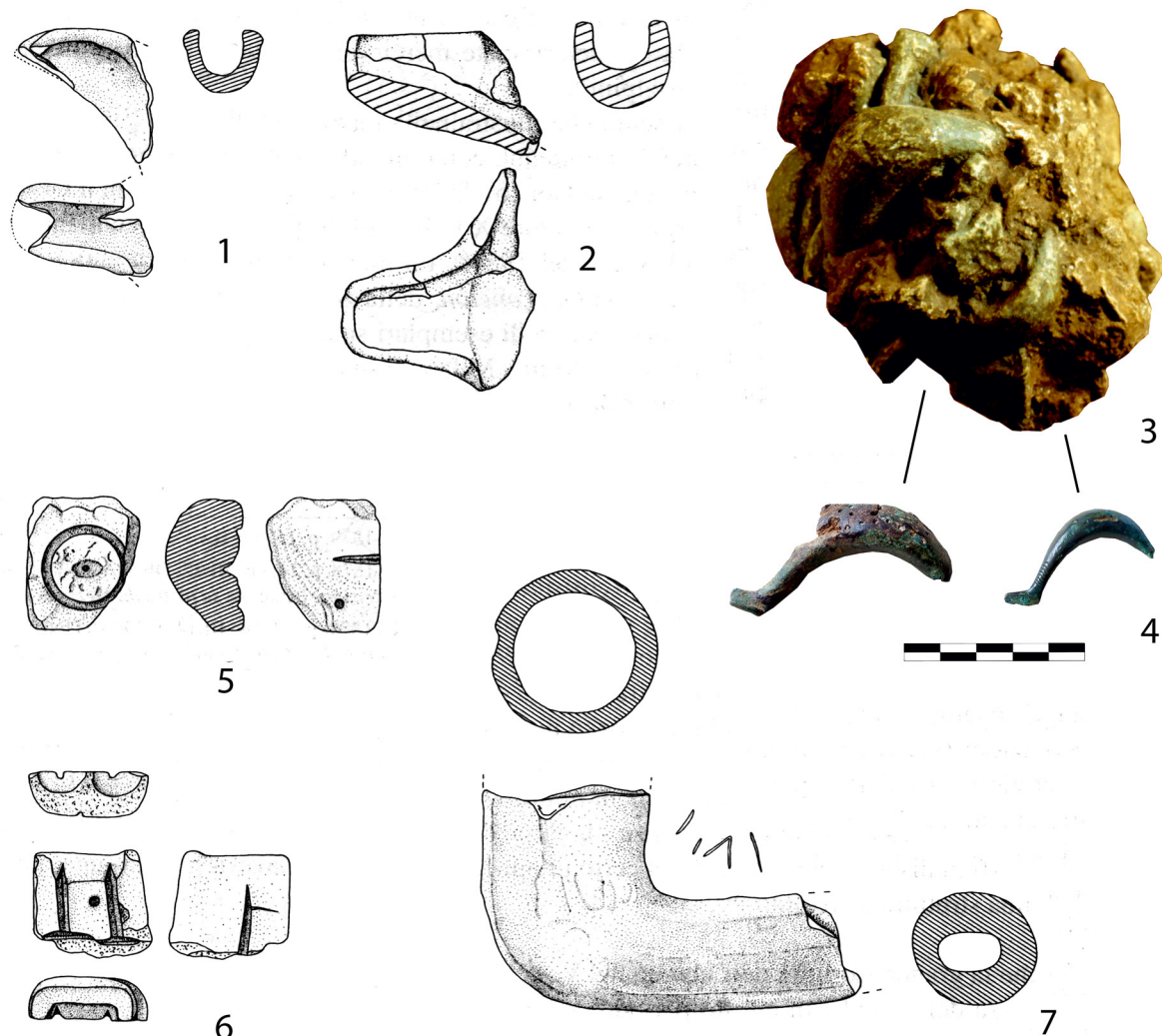


Fig. 10. Como, Prestino, traces of metallurgic activities: 1-2 Fragments of crucibles; 3 Load of crucible made of fibulae and bronze fragments; 4 two of the fibulae extracted from the load of crucible; 5-6 stone casting moulds; 7 terracotta bellow pipe (drawings and photo by St. Casini).

of some typical products of the Golasecca culture, as the Rhine-Ticino type *situlae*, in the same territories where Etruscan Schnabelkannen were widespread (fig. 11) – especially the Rhine-Mosella area – means that these vessels traveled together and that the Etruscan goods passed through the territory of the Golasecca culture,⁵² which was involved in a real, well organized one-way commerce that pointed to the regions North of the Alps.

Close contacts with the Etruscans are demonstrated by the Attic and Etruscan pottery found in the settlement;⁵³ particularly indicative of the intensity of these relations is the discovery in Prestino, via Isonzo 39 – in a context of the second half of the 5th century B. C.⁵⁴ –, of the only Etruscan coin north of the Apennines, a silver didrachma with the head of a Gorgon from the mint of *Populonia*.

The grave goods, rich in imported Etruscan bronze vessels,⁵⁵ sometimes with exotic materials, such as Arabian incense,⁵⁶ reflect the presence of a dominant aristocracy and in general of a wealthy society, with privileged and constant contacts with the Etruscans on the one hand and the transalpine Celts on the other.⁵⁷

After the Gallic invasions of 388 B. C., while undergoing a drastic contraction of the occupied area, the main sites on the south-eastern slopes of Monte Croce continued to be inhabited, until the foundation of *Novum Comum* on the Lake shore.⁵⁸

According to ancient authors (Cato *apud* Plin., 134) Como and Bergamo were founded by the Oromobi tribe and therefore their territory also included the intermediate settlement of Chiuso.

⁵² DE MARINIS 2000b, 342–368, fig. 8 (spread of *situlae*); 25 (spread of Schnabelkanne); DE MARINIS 2008.

⁵³ Attic pottery: CASINI 2007, 98–99; Etruscan pottery: CASINI / DE MARINIS / RAPI 2001, fig. 12.

⁵⁴ DE MARINIS / CASINI 2018.

⁵⁵ Altogether we count 3 Schnabelkannen, 5 *stamnoid situlae*, 2 *kyathoi*, 2 basins, 1 strainer, 1 cist with fixed handles of Bolognese production. For the lists of the objects see DE MARINIS 2000b, 387, tab. VIII.

⁵⁶ BASERGA 1932/33, 24; 35 ss.

⁵⁷ DE MARINIS 1986b; DE MARINIS 2010.

⁵⁸ CASINI / DE MARINIS / RAPI 2001, 121–136.

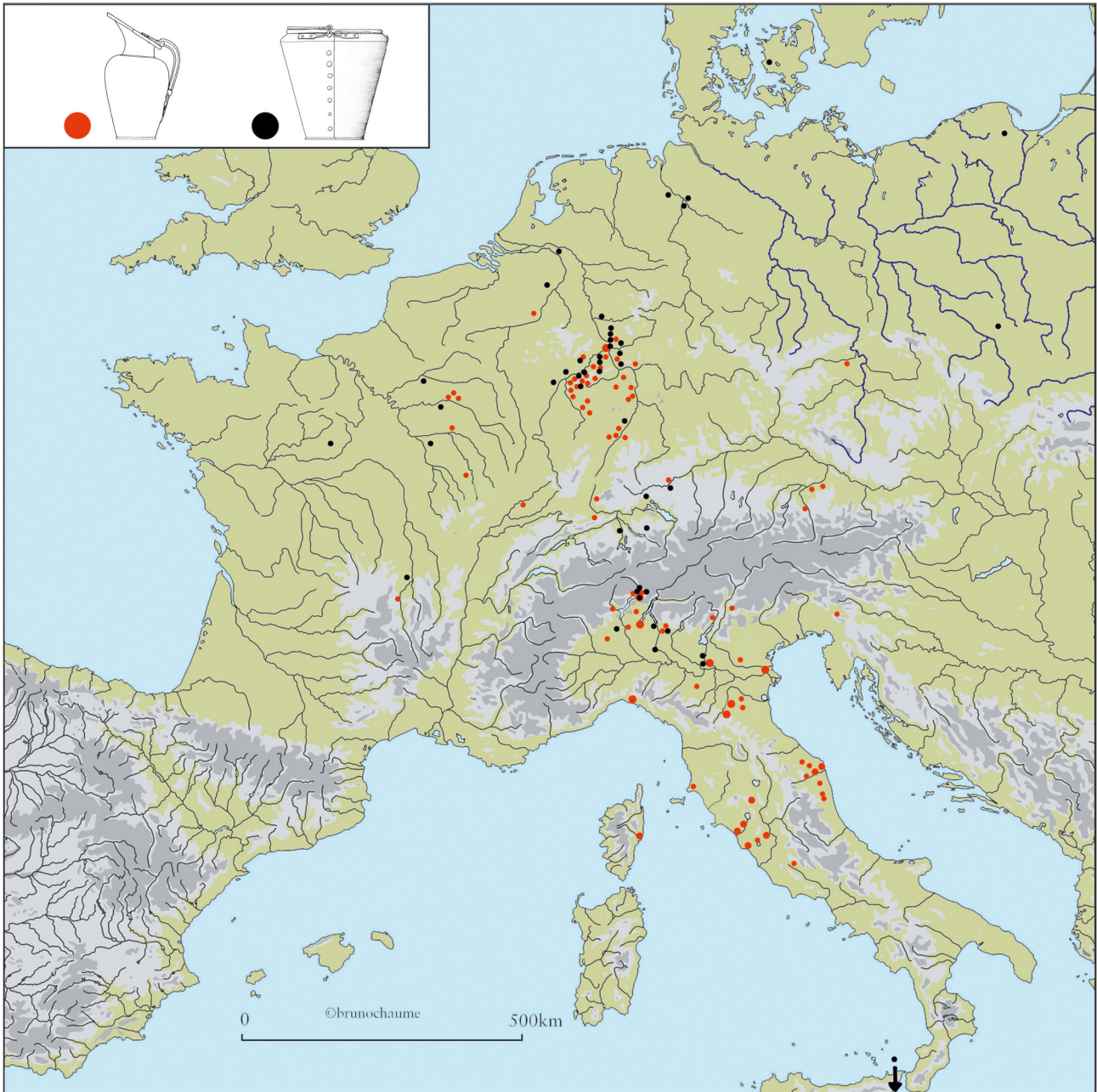


Fig. 11. Map of spread of both Etruscan Schnabelkanne and Ticino-Rhine type *situlae* (after CASINI / DE MARINIS in press).

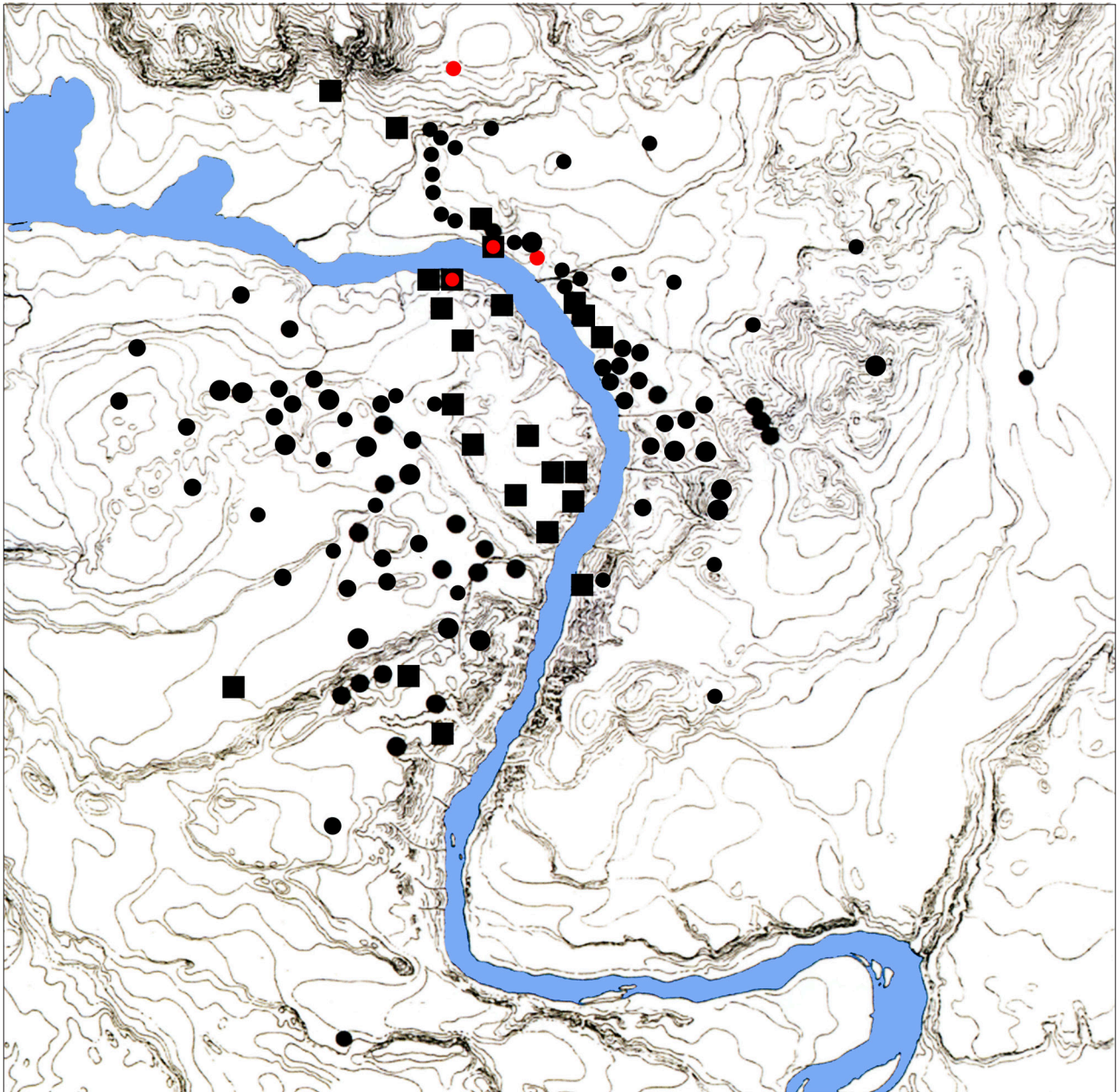
Castelletto Ticino-Sesto Calende-Golasecca (CT-SC-G)

The excavations carried out in Castelletto Ticino have not been fully published yet and therefore it is difficult to draw a precise picture of the evolution of the settlement⁵⁹ (fig. 12A).

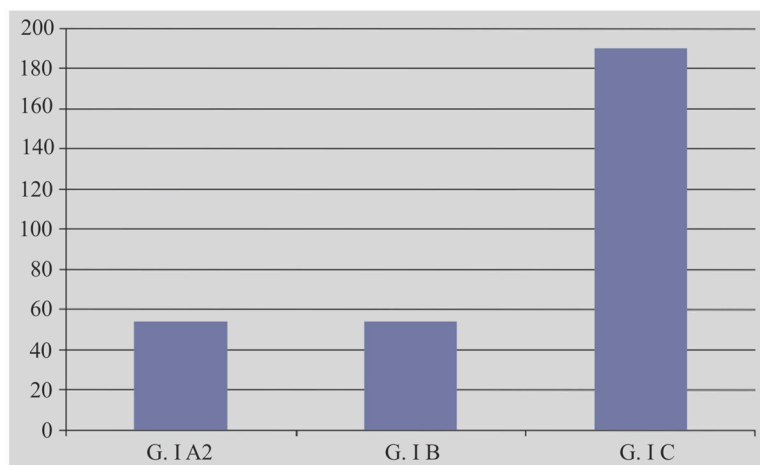
The oldest grave goods in this area date back to the beginning of the 8th century B. C. (fig. 12B), so it can be assumed that the population settled in the Somma Lombardo-Malpensa area during the FBA at a certain time

moved to Castelletto Ticino and Golasecca, closer to the river, which became an important waterway during the 7th century B. C. The distribution of the findings indicates that the inhabited area was on the right bank of the Ticino and was surrounded by the cemeteries that developed towards SW and E, on the left bank of the Ticino, in the area of Sesto Calende and Golasecca. Here some riverside sites of the 8th and 7th century B. C. reveal the existence of

⁵⁹ GAMBARI 1986; GAMBARI / SQUARZANTI 1995.



A



B

Fig. 12. Golasecca-Castelletto Ticino-Sesto Calende area: A) map of the finds. – B) the increase in burials between phases Golasecca I A2 and Golasecca I C (A–B, after CASINI / DE MARINIS 2020).



Fig. 13. Golasecca-Castelletto Ticino-Sesto Calende area: 1 Orientalizing kyathos from San Giorgio-Sesto Calende; 2 the earliest inscription (iunthanaka) on the 7th century cup from Sesto Calende; 3–4 Attic pottery from Sesto Calende-via Marconi and Castelletto Ticino-Briccola; 5 bowl with a La Tène stamped decoration from Sesto Calende-via Marconi (1 after DE MARINIS / RAPI 2017; 2, 5 drawn by R. C. De Marinis; 3–4 after CASINI 2007).

small ancient ford and landing places, such as the Cascina Testa site.⁶⁰

In the settlement of Castelletto Ticino, which at the moment of its maximum expansion reached an extension of about 90 hectares, the oldest structures identified during the excavations date back to the 7th century B. C.,⁶¹ in

parallel there is a sharp increase in the number of burials (fig. 12B), which are quadrupled compared to previous periods.⁶²

During the 7th century B. C. this district held the leadership of contacts with the Etruscans, removing the trade control from Como.⁶³ This is evident not only from

⁶⁰ DE MARINIS 2009d.

⁶¹ GAMBARI 1993; RUFFA 2001.

⁶² DE MARINIS / CASINI 2020, 245–246 fig. 15,2–3.

⁶³ DE MARINIS 2017, 208–209; CASINI / DE MARINIS in press.

the rapid demographic increase,⁶⁴ but above all from the presence of imported objects, such as the orientalized basin from the tomb of Castelletto Ticino-Motto Fontanile⁶⁵, the kyathos from a lost grave in San Giorgio⁶⁶ (fig. 13,1), and the Greek-archaic greaves of the two famous Sesto Calende warrior's tombs,⁶⁷ as well as from the most ancient attestations of writing of the whole Golasecca culture;⁶⁸ the first inscriptions are the iunthanaka on a G. I C (7th century) cup from Sesto Calende⁶⁹ (fig. 13,2), and other two inscriptions of uncertain reading, one on a bowl from Golasecca and the other one on a stone from Castelletto Ticino.⁷⁰ Due to the continuous contacts with the Etruscan world, the settlement became rapidly a proto-urban centre, although later than Como.

Based on the few published data we know that the buildings of the earliest phase in Castelletto Ticino were made of wood, replaced during the 6th century B. C. by iso-oriented houses with dry stone perimeter walls and wooden floors resting on cobblestones. Cobbled or paved stones also characterized open areas and paths.⁷¹

Towards the beginning of the 5th century B. C. the area was depopulated. The rapid decline is indicated by the absence of burials from the 5th century B. C., with the

only exception of the small interesting group of tombs in via Bellaria, dating to the second half of the 5th and the beginning of the 4th century B. C. (G. III A2–III A3).⁷²

Some findings datable to G. III A, such as that of via Marconi-via Moncenisio in Sesto Calende⁷³ and that, exactly across the river, of Castelletto Ticino-Cimitero⁷⁴ indicate that in 5th century B. C. a ford point survived and that the westward trade contacts increased in this later period, depending on the new role of Milan, as we will see. This is demonstrated by the discovery of Attic pottery⁷⁵ (fig. 13,3–4) and a bowl with stamped decoration of the Early La Tène type from Via Marconi⁷⁶ (fig. 13,5).

Castelletto Ticino represented the main settlement for the western area of the Golasecca culture, although we know an inhabited area in the plain between Ticino and Sesia, at Proh near Briona.⁷⁷ The suggested dating of the occupation would be placed between the 7th and 5th century B. C., although the necropolis of San Bernardino indicates the 6th century B. C. as the most important, with no traces of the later periods.⁷⁸

Together with the district of Castelletto Ticino, the Lakeside settlements of Arona and Ameno, active since the 10th century B. C., turned off in the 6th century too.⁷⁹

64 DE MARINIS / CASINI 2020, fig. 15,2.

65 DE MARINIS 2017, 209–216 figs 15,19–23.

66 DE MARINIS / RAPI 2018.

67 DE MARINIS 2017, 211–216.

68 DE MARINIS 2017, 210–211.

69 DE MARINIS 2009b, 157–159, fig. 1.

70 DE MARINIS 2017, 210; CITTÀ 2011, 19 fig. 3.

71 GAMBARI 1993.

72 GRASSI 2014.

73 GRASSI / MELLA PARIANI 2009, 35–43.

74 GAMBARI 1983, pl. 47,A.

75 CASINI 2007, 101; 115, nr. 7–9 fig. 1.

76 DE MARINIS / CASINI 2020, fig. 15.6.

77 RUBAT BOREL et al. 2013.

78 PAULI 1971.

79 TERRA E ACQUE 2004, 162–164; 170–173.

Milano

At the same time of the general depopulation of the CT-SC-G area we are witnessing the birth of a settlement in Milan at the beginning of the 5th century B. C.⁸⁰ (fig. 3); this fact could suggest that most of the population settled along the banks of the Ticino river has moved to the new site in the center of the Po valley, perhaps to cope with modified economic strategies: the loss of importance of the course of the Ticino in favour of Como, which was in close contact with the Etruria of the Po plain.

So starting from the 5th century B. C., the Golasecca settlement of Milan developed, occupying an area of at least 17 hectares, and underwent a great expansion during the 4th and 3rd century B. C.,⁸¹ that is after the Gallic invasions, when the other Golasecca settlements contracted (fig. 14).

Until now the complete absence of evidences relating to the 6th century B. C. seems to invalidate Livy's version (V, 33–35), which places the arrival of the Gauls from the Transalpine territories 200 years earlier than 388 B. C.,⁸² on the contrary it strengthens the statements of the Latin authors, such as Polybius (II, 17, 1), Diodorus (XIV, 113), Dionysius of Halicarnassus (XIII, 10, 1 ss.), Justin (XX, 5), Plutarch (Cam. XV e XVIII), who placed the Gallic invasions at the beginning of the 4th century B. C.⁸³

Complete and not even significant structures of the 5th century are known, due to the continuous rebuilding

80 CERESA Mori 2015; CASINI / TIZZONI 2015a.

81 CASINI / TIZZONI 2015a; CASINI / RAPI / TORI 2022, fig. 6.

82 Also some recent discoveries confirm the chronology proposed in CASINI / TIZZONI 2015a, see CONSONNI et al. 2021.

83 Polybius and Diodorus derive the informations from Filistus *apud* Timeo; they both synchronise the Gallic invasion with the siege of Reggio by Dionysius the 1st in 388/387 B. C. See SORDI 1976/77 and 1986.

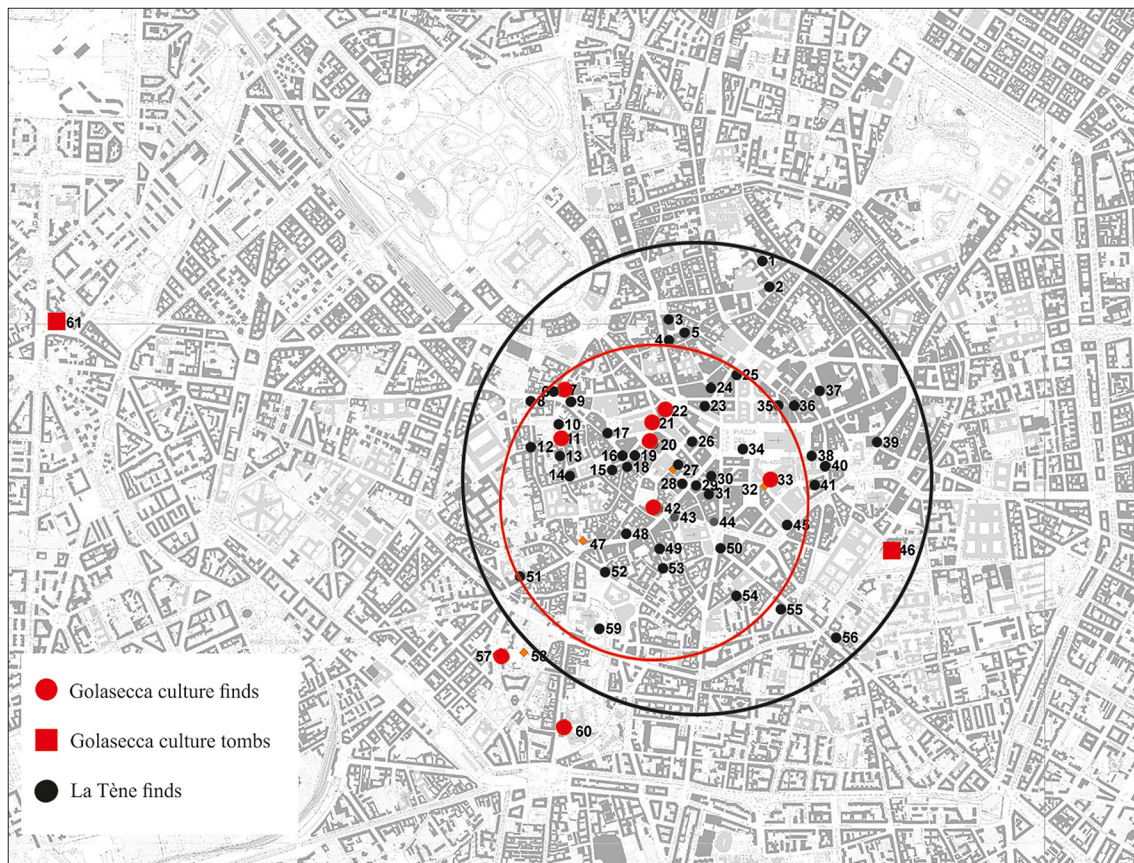


Fig. 14. Map of the Golasecca and La Tène finds in Milan (reworked after CASINI / RAPI / TORI 2022).

of the city. We know a pottery productive structure of the 5th century B. C. under the Palazzo Reale court.⁸⁴

The excavations carried out at the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, very close to Via Moneta, brought to light 130 post holes and some strips of stratigraphy in two distinct zones. In the northern part the remains of a yellowish silt floor laid on pebbles have been recovered, together with traces of a hearth. In the southern part there were post holes and horizontal beam channels. The findings refer to a residential area occupied by a series of wooden structures and earthen floors with hearths, one of which was in a quadrangular cut with the bottom lined with pebbles. There are also fragments of clay walls with traces of wattle on the back. The density of the post holes attests the continuity of life which, according to the archaeological material recovered, mainly pottery, can be chronologically placed between the 4th and 1st century B. C.⁸⁵

The study of the materials from the pre-Roman levels of Via Moneta revealed the absence of contacts with the Po Valley Etruscans, while the links with the Ligurian environment, both on the coast and in southern Piedmont,

are evident from some types of pottery (fig. 15). Over time, relations with the Ligurian and French Tyrrhenian areas are increasingly evident, following the gradual opening of new markets and the start of new trades after the arrival of the Gauls in 388 B. C.⁸⁶

The few fragments of bucchero vessels of the 5th century B. C. could have come to Milan not from the Po Valley Etruria, but from Genoa and the Ligurian territories through the Scrivia valley and Tortona,⁸⁷ where the bucchero is well attested, or from southern Piedmont, where the site of Villa del Foro has returned locally produced bucchero-type ceramics.⁸⁸

Milan was an Insubri tribe settlement before and after the Gallic invasion, becoming the most important *oppidum* of the Gauls, a *metropolis* according to Strabo, with a great contribution of the newcomers in 388 B. C.

84 JORIO 1987.

85 CERESA MORI / CASINI 2022.

86 CASINI / TIZZONI 2015a; CASINI / TIZZONI 2015b.

87 Bucchero fragments: CASINI / TIZZONI 2015a, 84. – SERRAVALLE Scrivia: ZAMBONI 2019. – Tortona: VENTURINO GAMBARI et al. 1996, 34–39. – See also MELLI 2014.

88 VENTURINO GAMBARI et al. 2017.

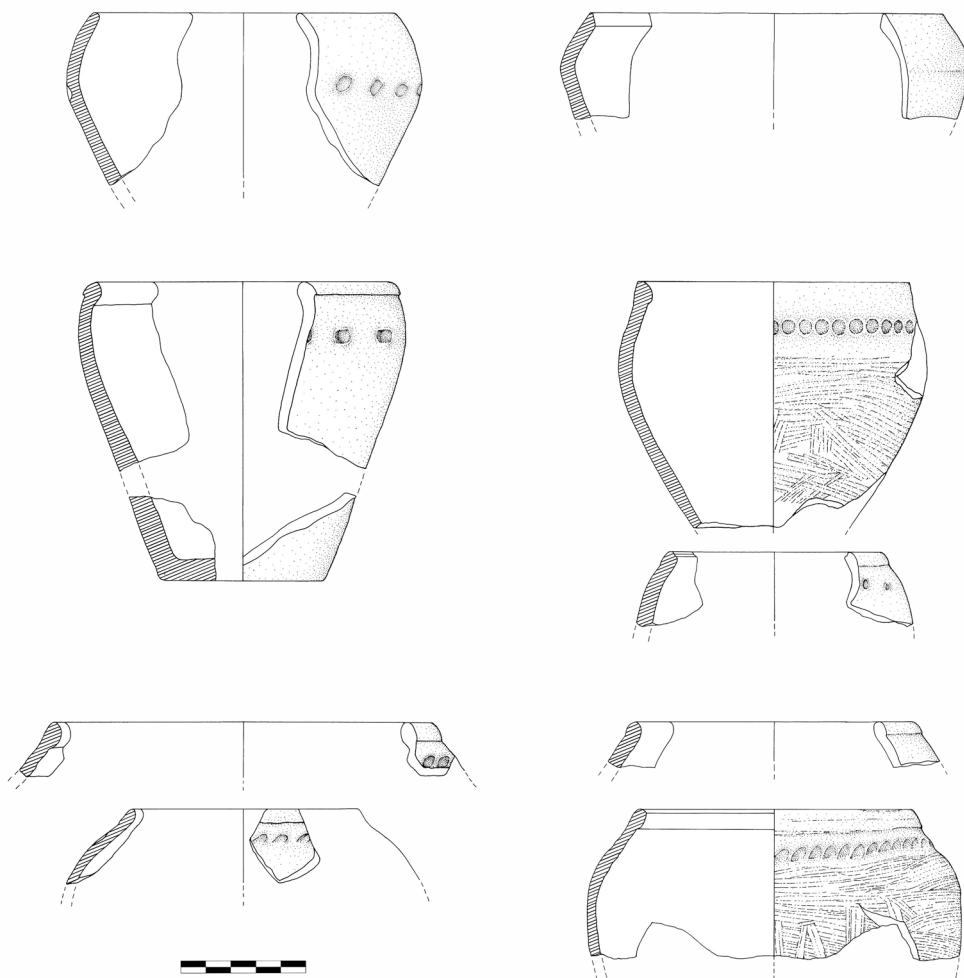


Fig. 15. Milan, via Moneta. Pottery of the Ligurian type (drawn by St. Casini).

Santo Spirito near Gropello Cairoli

During the 5th century B. C. the connections between Milan and the Tirrenic area passed through Santo Spirito-Gropello Cairoli (fig. 3), the gateway from Liguria to the Golasecca culture; Santo Spirito is located in Lomellina on a promontory over the Ticino (fig. 16) and was an important settlement on the southwestern border of the Golasecca culture;⁸⁹ unfortunately it was devastated by the sand quarrying activities, although there has been a partial control, many recoveries and some excavations mostly in the Seventies of the last century.⁹⁰

The studies conducted so far by Michela Ruffa on the bronze and ceramics finds identify the 6th and 5th century B. C. such as the periods of settlement of the site, with some elements dating back probably to the 7th century B. C.

The documentation refers to the discovery of “remains of oval-shaped hut bottoms [...] almost everywhere on

the promontory”, each equipped with a hearth. There was a moat that crossed the hill in its central part and craft areas, including the so-called “Blacksmith’s Hut”,⁹¹ an oval-shaped structure, with wattle and double elevations, gravel floor and fire places. Inside the “Hut” slags from metal processing were found, remains of partially recast bronze objects and five stone molds, one of which bears the shape of a belt buckle dating back to the 6th century B. C., which gives a chronological reference to the activities (fig. 17,6); a casting shape for a bronze hammer useful for processing the foils was also discovered nearby⁹² (fig. 17,7).

The interesting aspect of this settlement is its border position north of the Po. In the 5th century B. C. from Genoa, passing through Serravalle Scrivia and Tortona, it was possible to reach Gropello Cairoli by land and from here the river navigation was possible up to Castelletto

⁸⁹ RUFFA 2012; RUFFA 2018; RUFFA 2019.

⁹⁰ RUFFA 2010b.

⁹¹ RUFFA 2012, 99–100 fig. 4.

⁹² RUFFA 2012, 100–102; 103–105 figs. 2–3.



Fig. 16. Gropello Cairoli, Santo Spirito. Map of the site (reworked from RUFFA 2012).

di Cuggiono;⁹³ again by land Milan was reachable in a short time.

The contacts with the Ligurian environment emerge from the production of coarse ware, from some carinated beakers, and from bucchero vases partially decorated with stralucido that are comparable to ceramics from

Tortona, Guardamonte di Gremiasco and Montecastello⁹⁴ (fig. 17).

It is interesting that Latin authors indicate this area as inhabited by populations of Celtic and/or Ligurian lineage, the Levi and Marici tribes (Plin. nat. III, 124), who would have founded *Ticinum* (currently Pavia); today this statement finds an explanation in this mixed cultural context.

⁹³ A Golasecca cemetery was found at Castelletto di Cuggiono: DE MARINIS 1981, 143–155.

⁹⁴ RUFFA 2019, 9.1.

Castaneda

The site of Castaneda is also interesting, although it may not have been the main settlement of the Leponti territory, which was probably located near Arbedo.⁹⁵

After a long period of abandonment, its reoccupation takes place during the 7th century B. C. and continues up to La Tène D (LT D); during this long period different areas are mutually occupied.

Castaneda is one of the few settlement sites in the Lepontic region that have been extensively investigated, even if most of the excavations, starting from 1929 and

up to the Seventies of the last century, were not carried out with scientific methods.⁹⁶ Its cemetery is also known, fully studied by Paul Nagy, and is located south of the settlement.⁹⁷

The inhabited area, estimated at a total size of about 40 hectares, has returned evidence of buildings with a circular, oval and more often quadrangular plan, with surfaces up to 50 square metres, made with dry stone walls. Inside the houses there were fireplaces and functional separations of the rooms. In the “Sole” area, the one that

⁹⁵ DE MARINIS 2017, 217.

⁹⁶ NAGY 2012, 29–75.

⁹⁷ NAGY 2012.

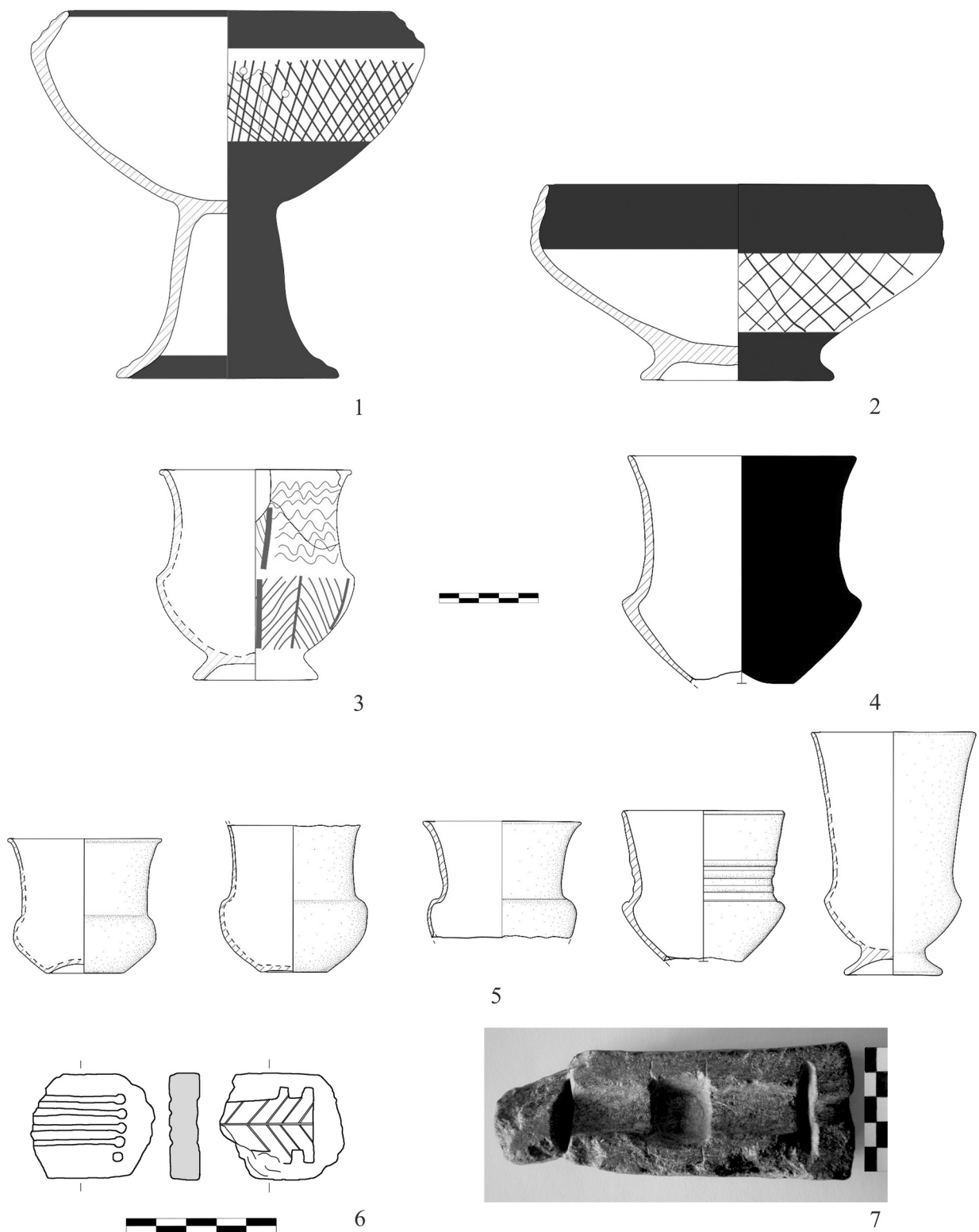


Fig. 17. Gropello Cairoli, Santo Spirito. 1–5 Typical pottery of the site with mixed features of the facies of CT-SC-G area and Como; 6 casting mould for belt hook of the 6th century BC; 7 casting mould for bronze hammer (1–5, after RUFFA 2018; 6–7, after RUFFA 2012).

returned the most complete structures of the entire village, but without stratigraphic documentation, as well as buildings, terracing walls and also a long enclosure wall were found.⁹⁸

Despite the fact that the settlement stood at the entrance to Val Mesolcina, along the road that leads from Como to the San Bernardino pass, it did not return many imported materials. Even in the cemetery, with tombs of a certain wealth, most of the bronze vessels are locally made; 7 are the Etruscan Schnabelkannen and 1 the *stam-*

⁹⁸ NAGY 2012, Ab. 72.

noid situla;⁹⁹ Attic ceramics is completely absent both in the tombs and in the inhabited area; amber is widespread, a material that came from the coasts of northern Europe

99 NAGY 2012, 1; 216 ss.

and was probably worked precisely in the Lepontic area, to make necklaces and earring beads.¹⁰⁰

100 TORI 2019, 160–161.

General considerations

The analysis of the archaeological evidences can be summarized as follows:

- The main settlements of the Golasecca culture, such as Bergamo and Como, find their origin in the FBA; also the people of the CT-SC-G district have FBA origin, but they were originally settled at Somma Lombardo and Malpensa, from where, a little bit later than the beginning of the First Iron Age, they moved to the new territory; then they probably moved again to Milan at the end of the 6th century B. C. All these three settlements (Bergamo, Como and Milano) anyway became important Golasecca centres, then Gallic oppida and finally Roman towns.
- During the 7th century B. C. the main settlements organized their settling areas and Como and Castelletto Ticino became proto-urban centres thanks to long time contacts with the Etruscans. The plain of Magadino and Val Mesolcina were permanently reoccupied at this time.
- The 6th century B. C. represented the true expansive period of the main settlements and the founding period of smaller centres in the plain. At the end of this century the people settled at CT-SC-G district moved to Milan area.
- The 5th century, on the other hand, represents a phase of consolidation of the territorial organization, in

which the Golasecca centres perform a specific role in terms of trade with the Etruscan of the Po Plain, with the exception of Milan, still in the process of formation. Between the 6th and 5th century B. C. other settlements unearthed by excavations are part of the settling of the Golasecca Celts with minor roles, but not less important for logistic and economy: Capriate San Gervasio, on the eastern bank of the Adda river, controlled one of the fords;¹⁰¹ Tremona was a stage on the path that led from Como to the Sopraceneri;¹⁰² Cama was on the route to San Bernardino pass;¹⁰³ Miradolo, to the south, controlled the navigation of the Po river.¹⁰⁴

- The occupation of this huge territory changed completely after the Gallic invasions of 388 B. C. South of Monte Ceneri the territories were depopulated and the most important settlements were downsized so much that they became irrelevant, while Milan, on the contrary, underwent a strong demographic impulse and a rapid and unstoppable development, becoming the most important centre of the new demographic structure, centered on the Insubres tribe.

101 POGGIANI KELLER 2007b.

102 MARTINELLI 2000.

103 Nagy 2012, 649–652.

104 NEGRONI CATAACCHIO / ROSSI 1979.

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Abstract: Golasecca culture settlements: features, chronology and roles

The territory of the Golasecca culture reaches at the moment of its maximum expansion about 20,000 square kilometers, including mountainous regions and valleys, large and small Lake basins, morainic hills, the whole plain crossed by a dense hydrographic network, partly navigable. Here the main settlements of the Golasecca culture find their origin since the Final Bronze Age. Over the centuries, the density of the population changes and starting from the 7th century B. C. the main settlements organized their settling areas and Como and Castelletto Ticino became proto-urban centres thanks to long time contacts with the Etruscans. The 6th century B. C. represented the true expansive period of the main settlements and the founding period of smaller centres; then the 5th century represents a phase of consolidation of the territorial organization, in which the Golasecca centres, such as Bergamo, Como, Chiuso, Gropello Cairoli, Castaneda, perform a specific role in terms of trade with the Etruscan of the Po Plain; in this century Milan appeared on the scene, probably founded by the people of the Castelletto Ticino-Sesto Calende-Golasecca area. The occupation of the huge territory of Golasecca culture changed completely after the Gallic invasions of 388 B. C.: some areas were depopulated and the most important settlements were downsized so much that they became irrelevant; Milan, on the contrary, underwent a strong demographic impulse and a rapid and unstoppable development, becoming the most important centre of the La Tène period.

Zusammenfassung: Siedlungen der Golasecca-Kultur. Merkmale, Chronologie und Bedeutung

Zur Zeit seiner maximalen Ausdehnung umfasst das Gebiet der Golasecca-Kultur rund 20.000 Quadratkilometer. Zu ihm gehören Gebirgsregionen und Täler, große und kleine Seen sowie Moränenhügel. Die gesamte Ebene ist von einem dichten Gewässernetz durchzogen, das teilweise schiffbar ist. Hier befinden sich die wichtigsten Siedlungen der Golasecca-Kultur, deren Ursprung in der ausgehenden Bronzezeit liegt. Im Verlauf der Jahrhunderte ändert sich die Bevölkerungsdichte und ab dem 7. Jahrhundert v. Chr.

beginnen die Hauptsiedlungen damit, ihr Siedlungsgebiet zu organisieren. Como und Castelletto Ticino werden dank ihrer bereits lang andauernden Kontakte zu den Etruskern zu proto-urbanen Zentren. Im 6. Jahrhundert v. Chr. erfolgt dann die eigentliche Expansion der Hauptsiedlungen, gleichzeitig werden kleinere Zentren gegründet. Das 5. Jahrhundert sieht eine Phase der Konsolidierung der territorialen Organisation, in der die Zentren der Golasecca-Kultur wie Bergamo, Como, Chiuso, Gropello Cairoli oder Castaneda eine besondere Rolle bezüglich des Handels mit den Etruskern der Po-Ebene spielen. Im selben Jahrhundert betritt auch Mailand die Szene, vielleicht gegründet von Menschen aus dem Gebiet Castelletto Ticino-Sesto Calende-Golasecca. Das Siedlungsbild im riesigen Gebiet der Golasecca-Kultur ändert sich nach dem Einfall der Gallier 388 v. Chr. völlig: Einige Gebiete werden verlassen und die bislang wichtigsten Siedlungen so stark verkleinert, dass sie in die Bedeutungslosigkeit versinken, während im Gegensatz dazu Mailands Bevölkerung einen starken Zuwachs erfährt und die Ansiedlung sich rapide und unaufhaltsam zu einem der bedeutendsten Zentren der Latènezeit entwickelt.

Keywords / Schlagwörter

Final Bronze Age / Iron Age / Golasecca culture / settlement / cemetery / Bergamo / Chiuso / Como / Castelletto Ticino / Golasecca / Sesto Calende / Milano / Gropello Cairoli / Castaneda

Späte Bronzezeit / Eisenzeit / Golasecca-Kultur / Siedlung / Friedhof / Bergamo / Chiuso / Como / Castelletto Ticino / Golasecca / Sesto Calende / Milano / Gropello Cairoli / Castaneda

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