

From Golasecca Celts to *Insubres*. Northwestern Italy in the Late Iron Age

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Introduction

Celticity in Late Iron Age Cisalpine is a complex phenomenon that is difficult to ascribe to a single model. Indeed, we cannot speak of a culturally homogeneous Cisalpine Gaul. Rather, we should speak of a multiplicity of cultural entities. In doing so, a far more complex picture emerges than the one defined on the basis of the tribal names mentioned in the classical historical sources,¹ which is further complicated by the fact that it is not always possible to associate the *ethnē* of

classical historiography with specific archaeological evidence. In chronological terms, the settlement of the Celts in the Cisalpine took place in distinct waves at different times. The key factors affecting the duration of each cultural entity are their relationships with the preexisting peoples, that is, the encounter/merging or clash/replacement, as well as the political relationships with Rome. The settlement of the *Senones* is the earliest one. However, by the 3rd century B. C. they can be considered an extinct cultural group after decisive clashes with Rome (Battle of *Sentinum*, 295 B. C.), soon followed by colonial deductions and the partitioning of the *ager Gallicus*. Clashes with Rome also marked the fate of the federation of the *Boii* at the turn of the 2nd century B. C. From this point on, the Gaulish presence was in fact reduced to the Transpadana, where the *Cenomani* and the *Insubres* suffered a final subjugation between 197 and 196 B. C. Nevertheless, they retained almost their entire territory.

¹ Livy (*Hist.*, V, 34–35) lists the main tribes, from west to east: the *Insubres*, settled in the upper plain between the Rivers Ticino and Oglio (thus in the area of the Golasecca Celts). Between the Rivers Oglio and Adige, the *Cenomani*, who occupied territories once partly of the Etruscans and partly of the *Veneti* (who retained most of their positions, including the main centers of Padua and Este). Further east, the *Boii*, between the River Po and the Apennines, in an area settled by the Etruscans. On the Adriatic coast, bordering the *Boii*, the *Lingones*, and further south into present-day Romagna and Marche, the *Senones*.

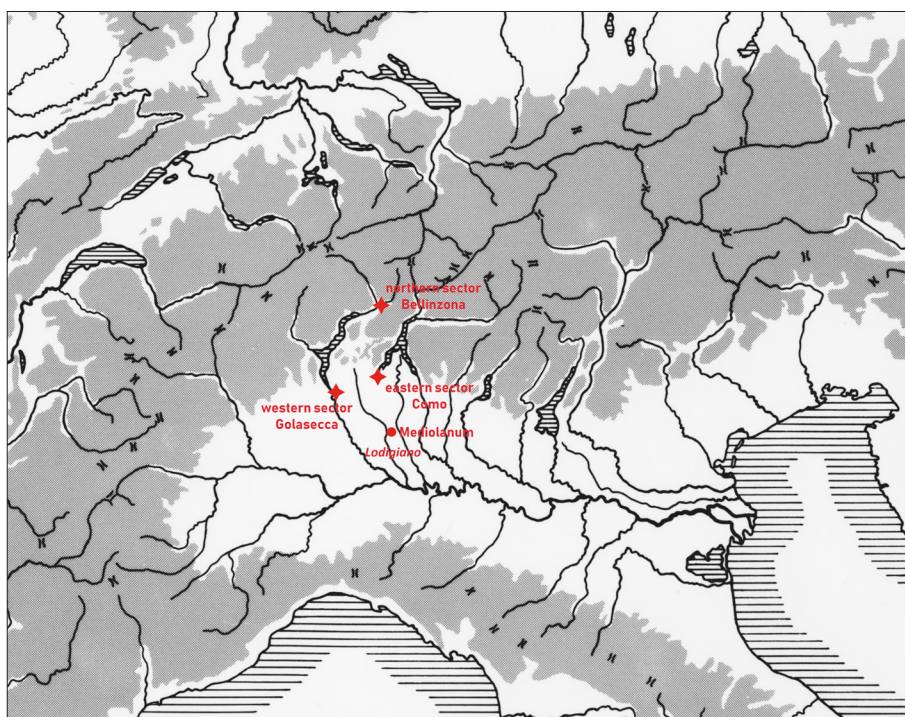


Fig. 1. Map showing the location of the main centers of the three sectors of the Golasecca Culture (Map: M. Rapi).

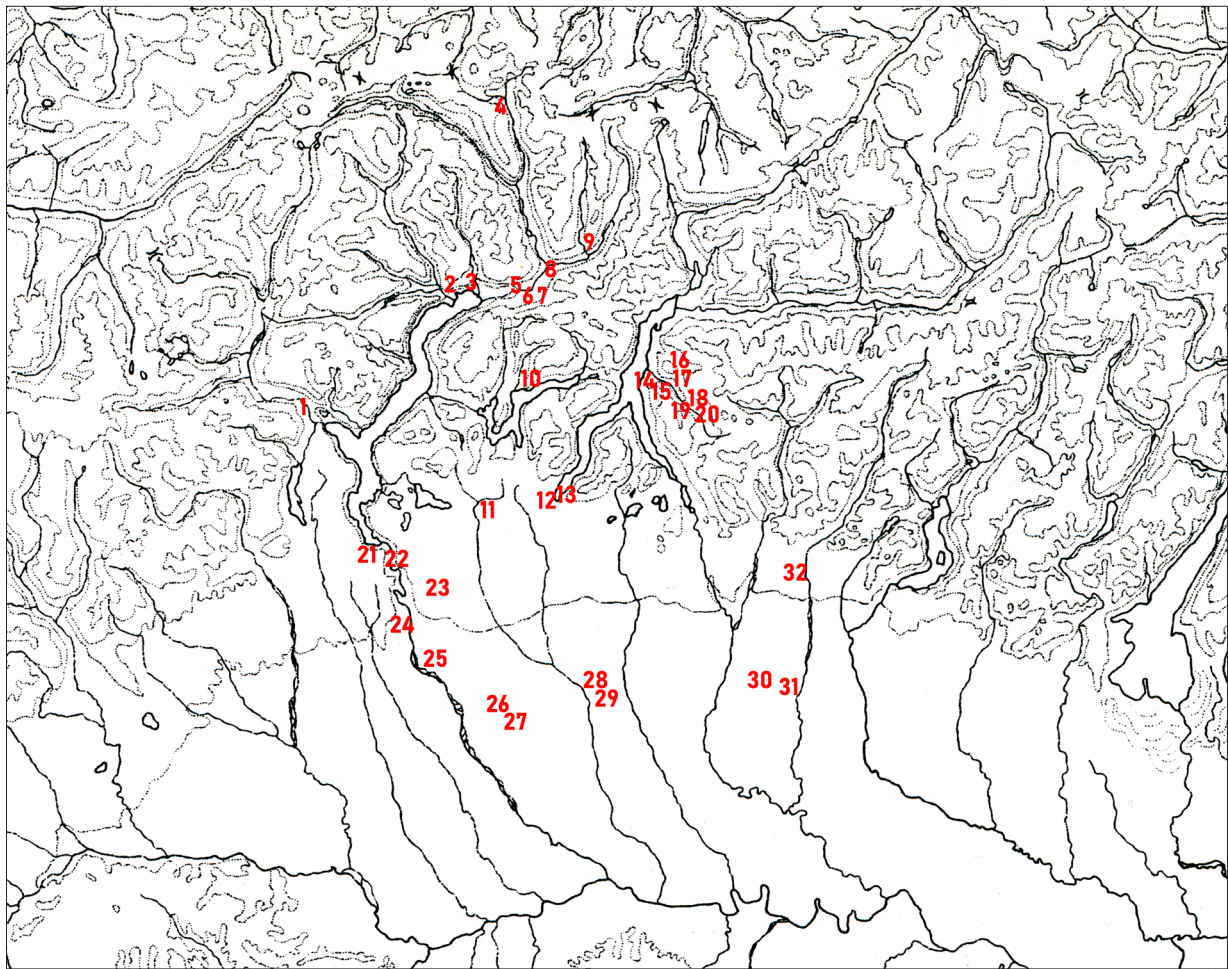


Fig. 2. Map showing the location of sites mentioned in the text: 1 Ornavasso; 2 Solduno; 3 Tenero; 4 Dalpe; 5 Gudo; 6 Giubiasco; 7 Pianezzo; 8 Molinazzo and Cerinasca di Arbedo; 9 Castaneda; 10 Pregassona; 11 Malnate; 12 settlement and cemeteries in the surroundings of Como; 13 *Comum Novum* (Convalle); 14 Varenna; 15 Esino; 16 Pagnona; 17 Casargo; 18 Introbio; 19 Pasturo; 20 Barzio; 21 Dormelletto; 22 settlement and cemeteries of Golasecca-Sesto Calende-Castelletto Ticino; 23 Arsago Seprio; 24 Oleggio; 25 Nosate; 26 Magenta; 27 Albairate; 28 Baranzate; 29 Milan/*Mediolanum*; 30 Treviglio; 31 Misano di Gera d'Adda; 32 Bergamo (Map: M. Rapi).

It has been claimed that the Romanization of the Transpadana was essentially a political or cultural process, rather than a demographic or ethnic one.² In this paper we will ask whether 'latènization' in this region is also to be understood according to a similar process.

Here, the so-called Gaulish invasions are documented by the introduction, though fairly limited, of La Tène-type elements of transalpine origin into a horizon of the final phase of the Golasecca Culture, the main cultural entity of the Early Iron Age in western Lombardy, eastern Piedmont, the Canton of Ticino, and the Leventina and Mesolcina Valleys (southwestern Canton of Grisons).³ In its later stage (Phase G. III A3), dating to the first decades of the 4th century B. C., the Golasecca Culture was located in its northern (or Tessin) sector, particularly the surroundings of Bellinzona, and in its eastern sector, centered on the settlement in the surroundings of Como. The eastern sector also included Bergamo and the territory up to the River Serio, the lower Lombardy plain and Milan,

which was founded in the 5th century B. C. (see below). By the early 5th century B. C., the western sector, centered on the proto-urban area of Golasecca, Castelletto Ticino and Sesto Calende, was in decline (fig. 1).⁴

When considering the change occurred in the 4th century B. C. and the inclusion of the Cisalpine into a 'latènized' sphere (increasingly culturally homogeneous with Central Europe), it is important to first state that the Celticity of the Late Iron Age is not the only complex belonging to Celtic archaeology in northern Italy, and in Lombardy in particular. In fact, as noted by Raffaele Carlo de Marinis,⁵ there are at least three distinct 'Celticities' in the Cisalpine that partially overlap diachronically. The earliest one pertains to the Golasecca Culture (c. 900–380 B. C.). The most recent one (4th–1st centuries B. C.), related to the vast phenomenon of reconfiguration of the geography of peopling over much of Europe, involved the spread of Celtic tribes carrying a La Tène-type culture south of the Alps. Between these two 'Celticities', there are late

² DE MARINIS 1986, 134.

³ DE MARINIS 1988; DE MARINIS 2017.

⁴ CASINI 2022.

⁵ DE MARINIS 2001.

Hallstattian or La Tène A-type contexts ascribed to the presence of Celts in the Po Valley for trade, mercenary activities, or exogamy. These contexts – not numerous and essentially within a framework of cultural continuity – are found in the Golasecca, Venetic and Padan Etruscan areas. While it is not difficult to recognize the evidence of these three phenomena and order them in time, since the picture offered by the material culture is quite clear,

it is rather difficult to understand from a historical and ethnographic viewpoint how the transition from the final stage of Golasecca (G. III A3) to the 'latènized' contexts of the Late Iron Age connoted as 'Insubrian' occurred. This is mainly due to: a) the number of the classical historical sources available and their gaps especially concerning the time of transition; and b) the link between the classical historical sources and the archaeological record.

Golasecca Celts and Insubrian Celts

With respect to the 'Insubrian *quaestio*', it should first be pointed out that, thanks to linguistic studies of inscriptions on pottery and stone considered to date to as early as the 7th century B. C. in the area of the Golasecca Culture, we know that the people of this culture spoke a continental Celtic language called Lepontic.⁶ On these arguments is based the thesis that the Golasecca Culture, belonging to a Celtic-type language family, was a specific archaeological complex of it. Moreover, since there is no break between the Golasecca Culture and its formative phase, i. e. the Protogolasecca (c. 1200–900 B. C.),⁷ the Celticity of northwestern Italy can be set back to the Final Bronze Age, if not even earlier.⁸ This is a Celticity which is either autochthonous or attributable to a very early migration. Different is the Celticity of the Late Iron Age, which in the area of the Golasecca Culture is represented primarily by the *Insubres*, but also by the *Lepontii*,⁹ the *Orobii*¹⁰ and other smaller tribal groups. According to Livy, the *Insubres* were a coalition of tribes from Gaul who,

having crossed the River Ticino under the command of Bellovesus, occupied a territory whose name, *ager Insubrium*, belonged to an indigenous community.¹¹ In Livy's account – which, in three instances, dates the *ver sacrum* of Bellovesus to c. 600 B. C.¹² – it is noteworthy there is the presence of celtized groups in the Transpadana prior to the 4th century B. C. This is implied in the recognition, by the newcomers, of an affinity with the place they were going to settle (the name, *Insubrium*, is that of one of the *pagi* from which Bellovesus' troops came).¹³ According to the same account, Bellovesus founded *Mediolanum*.¹⁴

Even before archaeological research began, the *Insubres* were known from classical historical sources, as we have just seen. In the early days of scholarly history, before the distinction between the Early Iron Age and Late Iron Age became widespread, all pre-Roman archaeological evidence in western Cisalpine was referred to as Insubrian or Gaulish and interpreted according to the classical historical sources.

When the first study of Golasecca antiquities was published, the Early Iron Age contexts were assigned to Gauls who had participated in the 218 B. C. clashes between Hannibal and Publius Cornelius Scipio (Battle of *Ticinus*).¹⁵ Similarly, the *prima tomba di guerriero* [First

⁶ LEJEUNE 1971; TIBILETTI BRUNO 1978; GAMBARI / COLONNA 1988; DE MARINIS 1991; DE MARINIS / MOTTA 1991; SOLINAS 1992/93; SOLINAS 1993/94; SOLINAS 1995; MOTTA 2000; MARAS 2014.

⁷ DE MARINIS 1972; DE MARINIS 2000a.

⁸ For the relationships between the Protogolasecca and the Canegrate Culture (13th century B. C.) and the ethnographic question of the Canegrate Culture see DE MARINIS 1988, 175 and DE MARINIS 2000b, 128. The Canegrate Culture was interpreted as an infiltration of groups from the *Urnenfelderkultur* (RITTATORE 1954, 33 ff.) or otherwise of transalpine origin (PAULI 1971, 31 ff.). It has recently been pointed out that in western Lombardy, Piedmont and Liguria a cultural framework with well-defined and homogeneous traits is present, diachronically articulated in taxonomic entities, defined on the basis of some reference complexes, which are in strong evolutionary continuity from the Middle to the Final Bronze Age: Viverone-Bric Tana (Middle Bronze Age II), Alba-Scamozzina-Monza (Middle Bronze Age III and Recent Bronze Age I), Canegrate and Alba-Solero-Sant'Antonino di Perti (Recent Bronze Age I–II), Protogolasecca/Pont-Valperga/Protoligure (Final Bronze Age) (RUBAT BOREL 2019).

⁹ According to Strabo (IV, 6), the *Lepontii* were settled north-west of Como (Υπέρκεινται δὲ τοῦ Κώμου πρὸς τῆ ῥίζῃ τῶν Ἄλπεων ἰδρυμένοι τῆ μὲν Παιτοὶ καὶ Οὐέννωνες ἐπὶ τὴν ἔω κεκλιμένοι, τῆ δὲ Ληπόντιοι καὶ Τριδεντίνοι καὶ Στόνοι).

¹⁰ Plin. nat. III, 124, assigns Como and Bergamo to the *Orobii*.

¹¹ [...] *haud procul Ticino flumine, cum in quo consederant agrum Insubrium appellari audissent cognominem Insubribus pago Haeduro, ibi omen sequentes loci condidere urbem; Mediolanum appellarunt* (Liv. V, 34).

¹² According to Livy's account, the events took place 200 years before the siege of Chiusi (*Ducentis quippe annis ante quam Clusium oppugnarent urbemque Romam caperent, in Italiam Galli transcendere* [V, 33]), during the reign of Tarquinius Priscus (*Prisco Tarquinio Romae regnante* [V, 34]), at the time of the foundation of *Massilia* (*Galli fortunae suae omen rati, adiuvere [Massilienses] ut quem primum in terram egressi occupauerant locum patientibus Saluis communirent* [V, 34]). Livy is the only classical historian who reports Celtic migration to Italy prior to the 4th century B. C. The thesis of a Celtic migration around 600 B. C. has been refuted (DE MARINIS 1988, 174), taking also into account contradictory aspects of Livy's narrative (SORDI 1976/77).

¹³ See footnote 11.

¹⁴ See footnote 11.

¹⁵ GIANI 1824. Abbot Giovan Battista Giani (1788–1859) excavated more than fifty Early Iron Age burials in the area of Sesto Calende.

Warrior Grave] at Sesto Calende, discovered in 1867 and dating to the end of the 7th century B. C., was attributed by Bernardino Biondelli (1804–1886) to an Insubrian warrior who died defending the national independence against the Roman legions at the beginning of the 2nd century B. C.¹⁶ Biondelli coined the name ‘*gallo-italici*’ for the Gauls of northern Italy.

The first scholar who correctly attributed the Golasecca antiquities to the Early Iron Age was Gabriel de Mortillet (1821–1898). He based his work solely on the archaeological finds and did not use archaeology to clarify the classical historical sources.¹⁷ However, his work was not immediately accepted by local scholars. For many of them the Golasecca population continued to be the Gauls of the migrations. Nevertheless, there were scholars who saw them as a Mediterranean lineage, i. e. the *Ligures*,

¹⁶ BIONDELLI 1867.

¹⁷ DE MORTILLET 1865; DE MORTILLET 1866a; DE MORTILLET 1866b.

preexisting the Gaulish migrations of the 4th century B. C. Among them was Pompeo Castelfranco (1843–1921), who over the years abandoned the Italian term *Liguri* in favour of the term *Insubri*, but in the sense of a Celto-Italic population settled in the Ticino territory even before the time of the Gaulish migrations. Castelfranco, the most important Lombard prehistorian between the 19th and the 20th centuries, established the first definition and the periodization of the Golasecca Culture into three phases, which is still basically valid.¹⁸

¹⁸ Starting from 1872, Castelfranco devoted himself to excavations in the area of the cemeteries of Golasecca, Sesto Calende and Castelletto Ticino and recognized the existence of two periods, called Golasecca I and II (CASTELFRANCO 1876). He later identified a third period, contemporary with the Certosa cemetery in Bologna and the Third Period of Este, not represented in the Golasecca area, but well documented by discoveries made in the Lodigiano area and in the surroundings of Como, which he called the *Lodigiano* period or Golasecca III (CASTELFRANCO 1883).

Archaeological evidence and contextualization

Later, Castelfranco’s clear and rigorous vision of a periodization of the Iron Age into various phases (G. I, II, III or *Lodigiano*, Gaulish or La Tène period), which was based on a precise knowledge of the archaeological complexes, was lost. Mention should be made of an unfinished work of the 1950s on the Cisalpine Gauls by Mario Bertolone (1911–1965). Here, Phase Golasecca III was extended to the whole Gaulish period, because of continuity in material culture, particularly in pottery known from the present-day Province of Como and the Canton of Ticino. Bertolone subdivided Phase Golasecca III into three sub-phases: G. III A, III B, III C.¹⁹ Regrettably, the G. III A (Castelfranco’s *Lodigiano* period) was wrongly placed by Bertolone after the Gaulish migrations of the 4th century B. C., to which the depopulation of the Golasecca area was attributed.

Until the 1970s, there were no framework and nomenclature for the archaeological horizons following the Golasecca Culture, which, while clearly retaining traits

of cultural continuity, by the 4th century B. C. should be considered a different group or cultural entity.²⁰

The basis for a precise internal periodization of the G. III A and the Gaulish period was set for the Canton of Ticino by Margarita Primas²¹ and Werner Stöckli,²² and for Lombardy by Raffaele Carlo de Marinis.²³ Primas established a clear distinction of Bertolone’s G. III A into two chronological phases, i. e. Tessin C and Tessin D, based in particular on the grave goods from Castaneda, Dalpe, Dalpe-Vidresco, Cerinasca, Gudo, Cademario, and Pragassona, but also on some coeval finds from Lombardy.

De Marinis, working on complexes from Lombardy, defined the chronological boundaries of the G. III A (480/475–375/350 B. C.), established an internal subdivision synchronizable with the Tessin chronology (G. III A1 = Tessin C; G. III A2 = Tessin D-early; G. III A3 = Tessin D-late) and placed the Early Iron Age/Late Iron Age transition within the G. III A3 (around 400 B. C.). He also proposed to use for the Cisalpine the Central European periodization system defined by Paul Reinecke and subsequently refined by Werner Krämer, Frank Roy Hodson and Hartmut Polenz.²⁴ A local chronology was in fact impossible, since the incompleteness of the archaeo-

¹⁹ BERTOLONE 1969. – G. III A = La Tène I (4th century B. C.) = horizon of the Gaulish migrations in northern Italy, as a result of which the Golasecca Culture underwent cultural changes while continuing to maintain its traditional traits. G. III B = La Tène II or Central European Middle La Tène (3rd–2nd centuries B. C.) = horizon of the *vasi a trottola* and, in the Canton of Ticino, of the Solduno cemetery; G. III C = Late La Tène and Late Roman Republican period (La Tène D; 2nd–1st centuries B. C.) = horizon of the later types of the *vasi a trottola* and of the diffusion of the black-glazed pottery north of the River Po; this latter horizon is well represented in the Ornavasso cemetery.

²⁰ RITTATORE VONWILLER / NEGRONI CATAACCHIO / ARSLAN 1975. A chronology for the Golasecca Culture was also proposed by PERONI et al. 1975.

²¹ PRIMAS 1970.

²² STÖCKLI 1975.

²³ DE MARINIS 1977; DE MARINIS 1981.

²⁴ DE MARINIS 1986.

logical record prevented, then and to some extent now, the elaboration of autonomous sequences especially for the 4th and 3rd centuries B. C. This scarcity of evidence, affecting mainly the period of transition and the upper plain between the Rivers Ticino and Adda, that is, the area of Insubrian settlement as indicated by the classical historical sources, makes it difficult to understand whether and how new populations had arrived there. From a cultural viewpoint, de Marinis interpreted the gradual transformation of the Golasecca Culture, after the G. III A3, as a phenomenon of acculturation of the preexisting populations under Gaulish influence, unlike other areas of the Po Valley (such as the Boian area, where cultural change was associated with demic movements).

The scant archaeological evidence from the 4th and the early 3rd centuries B. C. in much of the area traditionally regarded as the core of the Golasecca Culture, mainly attributable to the disruption of the Padan Etruscan economic system following the Gaulish migrations, has engaged scholars in the years since.²⁵

At any rate, the dearth of finds of transalpine origin in the whole sub-Alpine belt and in the plain which can be associated with the early stage of 'latènization' remains problematic. These consist of only a few burials with La Tène-type weapons at Varenna (see below), in the Milan area at Albairate²⁶ and Baranzate di Bollate,²⁷ and in the present-day Province of Varese at Malnate²⁸ and Arsago Seprio,²⁹ weapons from destroyed cemeteries in the Milan area at Magenta and Nosate,³⁰ and glass and bronze elements of annular ornaments. The paucity of data does not even allow us to ascertain with certainty the possible change in burial ritual as an indication of the arrival of new people. Despite some problematic aspects that characterize the evidence, such as the one just mentioned, data are now available that allow us to understand the cultural dynamics of eastern Piedmont, Lombardy, the Canton of Ticino and the southwestern Canton of Grisons. After the G. III A3, a new period began in which the unity

of the Golasecca territory broke up but did not disappear altogether. The archaeological record seems to confirm an acculturation model. The outcome of 'latènization' differs depending on the area we are considering, although it should be pointed out that, as far as the material culture is concerned, the more the documentary basis increases, the more homogeneous the picture is.

Since the 2000s, a number of new discoveries along with projects promoted by the Universities of Bologna, Milan, Rome and Zurich, and supported by museums and Archaeology Offices (both in Italy and in Switzerland) aimed at bringing to publication previously unpublished site data and specialist reports, have created a broader database for exploration and analysis. In particular, we should mention the publication of large funerary complexes investigated between the 19th and 20th centuries such as Giubiasco,³¹ Castaneda,³² Gudo,³³ Pianezzo³⁴ and Tenero-Contra,³⁵ of museum collections from the area of Como,³⁶ the re-examination of the cemeteries of Ornavasso,³⁷ the publication of the cemeteries of Dormelletto and Oleggio³⁸ and of some isolated burials such as those at Albairate,³⁹ Baranzate di Bollate,⁴⁰ Arsago Seprio,⁴¹ Treviglio,⁴² and the publication of settlement sites, such as those in Bergamo⁴³ and in Milan (especially Via Moneta⁴⁴ and the area of the Amphitheater⁴⁵). We should also mention general works on periodization,⁴⁶ on some geographic areas,⁴⁷ and on dress accessories and personal ornaments as well.⁴⁸

²⁵ CASINI / RAPI / TORI 2022.

²⁶ SIMONE ZOPFI 2008.

²⁷ DE FRANCESCO / MORDEGLIA 2015.

²⁸ DE MARINIS 2009a, 28 fig. 13.

²⁹ DE MARINIS 2009b; RAPI 2009b.

³⁰ TIZZONI 1984.

³¹ TORI et al. 2004; TORI et al. 2010; PERNET et al. 2006.

³² NAGY 2012.

³³ SORMANI 2013.

³⁴ GIANADDA 2000.

³⁵ DEL FATTORE 2010.

³⁶ RAPI 2009a.

³⁷ PIANA AGOSTINETTI 1999.

³⁸ SPAGNOLO GARZOLI 1999; SPAGNOLO GARZOLI 2009.

³⁹ See footnote 26.

⁴⁰ See footnote 27.

⁴¹ See footnote 29.

⁴² DE MARINIS et al. 2020.

⁴³ POGGIANI KELLER 2007; POGGIANI KELLER 2020.

⁴⁴ CERESA MORI 2015.

⁴⁵ RONCORONI 2021.

⁴⁶ PIANA AGOSTINETTI / KNOBLOCH 2010.

⁴⁷ DE MARINIS / BIAGGIO SIMONA 2000; CASINI / TIZZONI 2015a.

⁴⁸ RAPI 2000; FÁBRY 2008; TORI 2019.

The Lepontic area after the G. III A

600/520 540/530 BC	Ti A				
540/530 500/500 BC	Ti B				
500/490 450 BC	Ti C				
450 390 BC	Ti D				
380 280 BC	LT B				
250 150 BC	LT C				
150 20/15 BC	LT D				

Fig. 3. Typochronological framework for the Canton of Ticino (Phases Tessin A – LT D). Modified after SCHINDLER / DE MARINIS 2000, fig. 6 (Graphic: M. Rapi).

In the Alpine area of the *Lepontii*, north of Monte Ceneri, the cultural framework is quite clear thanks to the richness of the archaeological evidence, though mostly funerary, in the surroundings of Bellinzona (cemeteries of Giubiasco, Gudo, Cerinasca, and Molinazzo) and in the Mesolcina Valley (Castaneda) (fig. 3). During the G. III A3–LT B1 in the Sopra Ceneri there is no change in the occupation of the territory, as shown by the continuity of burial ritual and by the use of the same burial areas (for example, at Giubiasco, Pianezzo, Gudo and Castaneda⁴⁹). The Middle La Tène is significantly documented only in the cemeteries of Giubiasco and Solduno. Basically, the large cemeteries of the Magadino plain and of the surroundings of Arbedo continue to be used from the Tessin period to the La Tène period, and we can see very well how the Golasecca Culture gradually changes under La Tène influence, so that after the G. III A3 the different chronological horizons assigned use the labels La Tène B1, B2, C1 and so on, but only for taxonomic purposes and without implying the arrival of new populations.⁵⁰ Transformations involving ornamental and dress objects are best observed in

the funerary contexts, which are particularly numerous around Bellinzona. The adoption of La Tène objects occurs more rapidly in male grave goods, where bronze and iron early La Tène brooches now appear, and more slowly in female grave goods, which remain more adherent to tradition, and where leech brooches of late Alpine type and bronze wire earrings with amber beads continue to be deposited.⁵¹ A gradual process of acculturation can be observed: over time, many La Tène elements are adopted (in weaponry and pottery). The most tenacious persistence can be observed in female body ornaments and dress accessories, but eventually women too adopted La Tène-type brooches. In the banquet-related offerings novel elements are the *Tessiner Kannen*, produced in imitation of the Etruscan *Schnabelkannen*, known from burials mainly dating to the LT B1.⁵² The deposition of bronze foil cup-shaped ladles and Tessin-type *situlae*, found in the Sopra Ceneri, continues. As the study of the Giubiasco cemetery has shown, the communities settled in the Sopra Ceneri were still mainly organized on a household basis, and progressively established themselves as hegemonic and reorganized their territory.⁵³

⁴⁹ SCHINDLER / DE MARINIS 2000.

⁵⁰ “Die Kontinuität der Gräberfelder, der Grabriten und der Keramik zeigt, dass bei **einer möglichen Einwanderung** [emphasis ours] die einheimische Bevölkerung weder ausgerottet noch vertrieben worden ist.” (STÖCKLI 1975, 103.)

⁵¹ TORI 2019, 35–47.

⁵² DE MARINIS 2000c, 390–396.

⁵³ TORI et al. 2010, 327–328.

The area of Como after the G. III A

In Como the situation is quite different.⁵⁴ Here, the settlement is downsized with clear evidence for the abandonment of some structures. In Via Isonzo-La Pesa, for example, of the four houses used during the 5th century B. C. only one is still in use in the following century. In terms of archaeological evidence, there is a contraction that is undeniably quantitative and problematically qualitative. Indeed, in the 4th century B. C. we still find valuable bronze vases which, albeit of local production, can only be related to high-status individuals and whose occurrence cannot be explained except by assuming an even partial continuity of the settlement.⁵⁵ The existence of a flourishing community still in the 3rd century B. C. is indicated by bronze vases, certainly from Etruria, found in the Ca' Morta cemetery. The overall examination of the available data shows that all the chronological phases of the Late Iron Age are attested to. This is an indication that the area of the protohistoric settlement was never abandoned even though it went through a phase of recession.

Material culture, primarily pottery, clearly shows the persistence of local aspects even in the La Tène phases. The Via Isonzo-La Pesa complex pertains to an early La Tène horizon, but it is in cultural continuity with the G. III A3. Persistence is very clear in some pottery types, although for some classes it is impossible to establish complete seriations. The goblet (first the stem goblet and then the egg-cup goblet) stands out as one of the most distinctive La Tène-period elements of the Como *facies*. It was deposited in burials from the Golasecca I to the period of Romanization, without interruption. A distinctive pottery type is also the *vaso a trottola* (spinning top-shaped vase) (fig. 4). Even in the burial ritual there is full adherence to the Golasecca tradition, i. e. cremation only.

Between the LT B2 and the LT C1, at Como the evidence is poor but finds from the nearby pre-Alpine valleys increase, especially starting from the 3rd century B. C. A hierarchical settlement system seems to be suggested, whereby a central site (Como) – more ‘urban’ and characterized by expressions of wealth and high-status in female personal ornaments and dress accessories and in the use of writing – exercises armed control over a surrounding

territory.⁵⁶ In the valleys of the eastern side of the Lario, particularly in the Valsassina, all of the contexts are funerary (cemeteries at Esino and Introbio, isolated burials or small groups of burials at Casargo, Barzio, Varenna, Pagnona and Pasturo⁵⁷). Complexes such as the so-called *tomba di guerriero di Varenna* [Warrior Grave of Varenna] show the association of La Tène-type weapons with dress accessories and pottery of local tradition (fig. 5). However, the way in which this burial was discovered was such that many of the most significant elements for establishing the *ethnos* of the deceased were lost.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, we can see in these finds an indication of the arrival of transalpine Celts, perhaps attracted by the mining potential of the area, but in a context where the Golasecca element is also well present (fig. 6A).

The archaeological evidence is again fairly rich between the 2nd and 1st centuries B. C. (LT C2, LT D), when an extensive cultural *koinè* is defined, even under Roman influence, which smooths out the differences between the various Gaulish and non-Gaulish groups in the Transpadana. In the area of Como, once occupied by the Early Iron Age settlement – but also in newly identified areas both in proximity to Lake Como and to the Brianza plain – settlement increased, joining the *oppidum* of Como, founded in the Convalle, and the network of the Romanization-period small settlements south of Monte Croce and in the upper Brianza plain. This network of settlements is attested indirectly by groups of burials and small cemeteries. The historical juncture, at the beginning of the 2nd century B. C., coincides with the last military clashes that took place in the area of Como between the *Insubres* and the Romans, the winners under the command of Consul Marcus Claudius Marcellus in 196 B. C. Probably, this did not have any decisive impact on the region's demography, at least until the ‘institutional moves’ reported by the classical historical sources, i. e. the concession of the *ius Latii* in 89 B. C., the colonial *supplementum* in 77 B. C. and the foundation of *Comum Novum* in 59 B. C.

⁵⁴ CASINI / DE MARINIS / RAPI 2001; RAPI 2009a; RAPI 2014, fig. 1.

⁵⁵ RAPI 2014, fig. 2.

⁵⁶ RAPI 2014, 383–384.

⁵⁷ RAPI 2009a, 128–129.

⁵⁸ RAPI 2007.

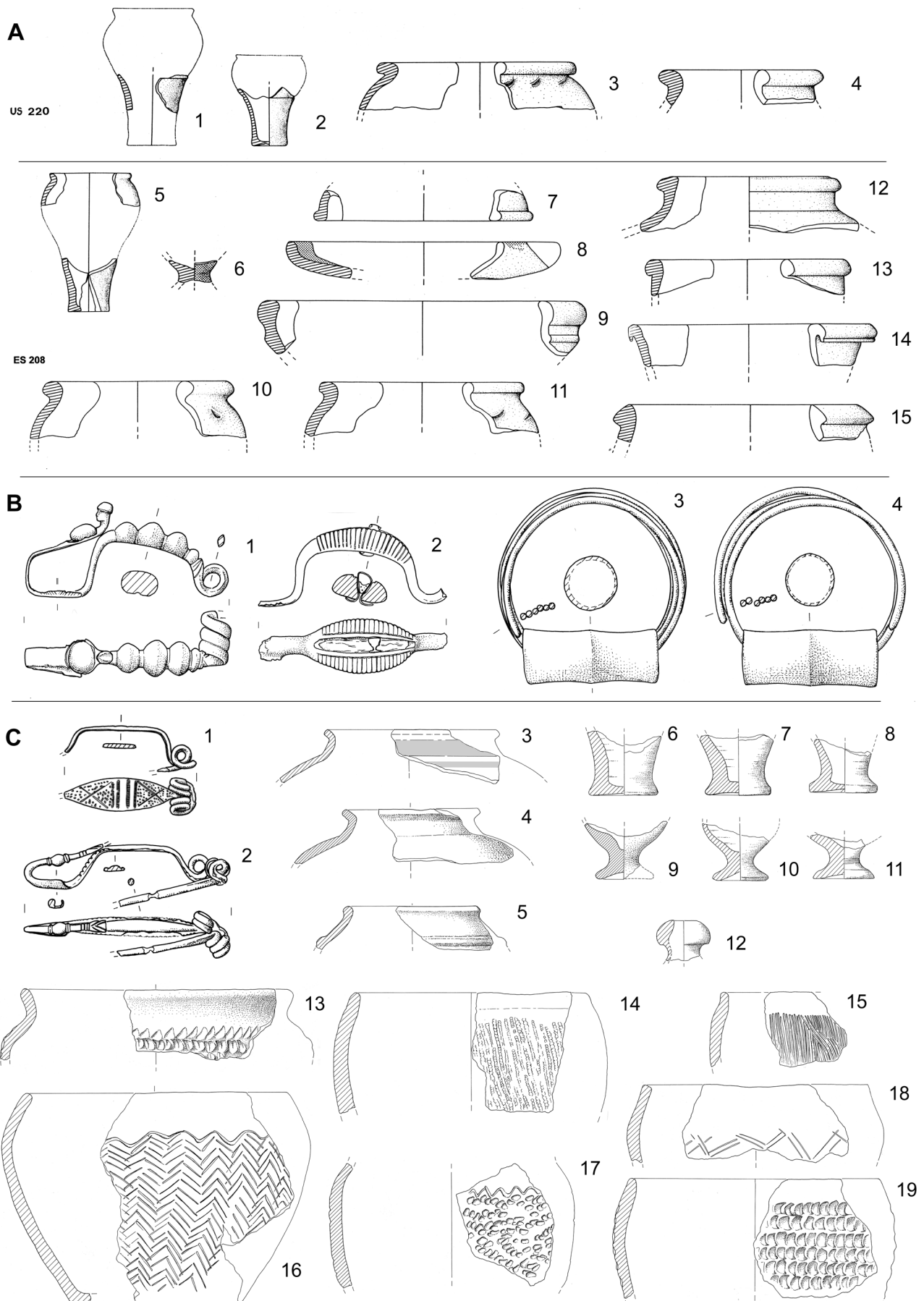


Fig. 4. A) Prestino (Como), LT B pottery from the settlement. Stem goblets: 1–2, 5–6. Bowls: 7–9. Ollae: 3–4, 12–15. – B) Como and surroundings (locations unknown). Bronze *Helmkopffibel* (1), brooch (2) and earrings (3–4). – C) Rondineto (Como), finds from houses (stratigraphic provenience unknown). Bronze brooches of Dux-Münsingen type (1–2), fine ware *ollae* (3–5), stem goblets and egg-cup goblets (6–11), and impasto ware *ollae* (13–19). Pottery: scale 1:4; bronze: scale 1:2. Modified after RAPI 2009a, pl. II–IX (Graphic: M. Rapi).

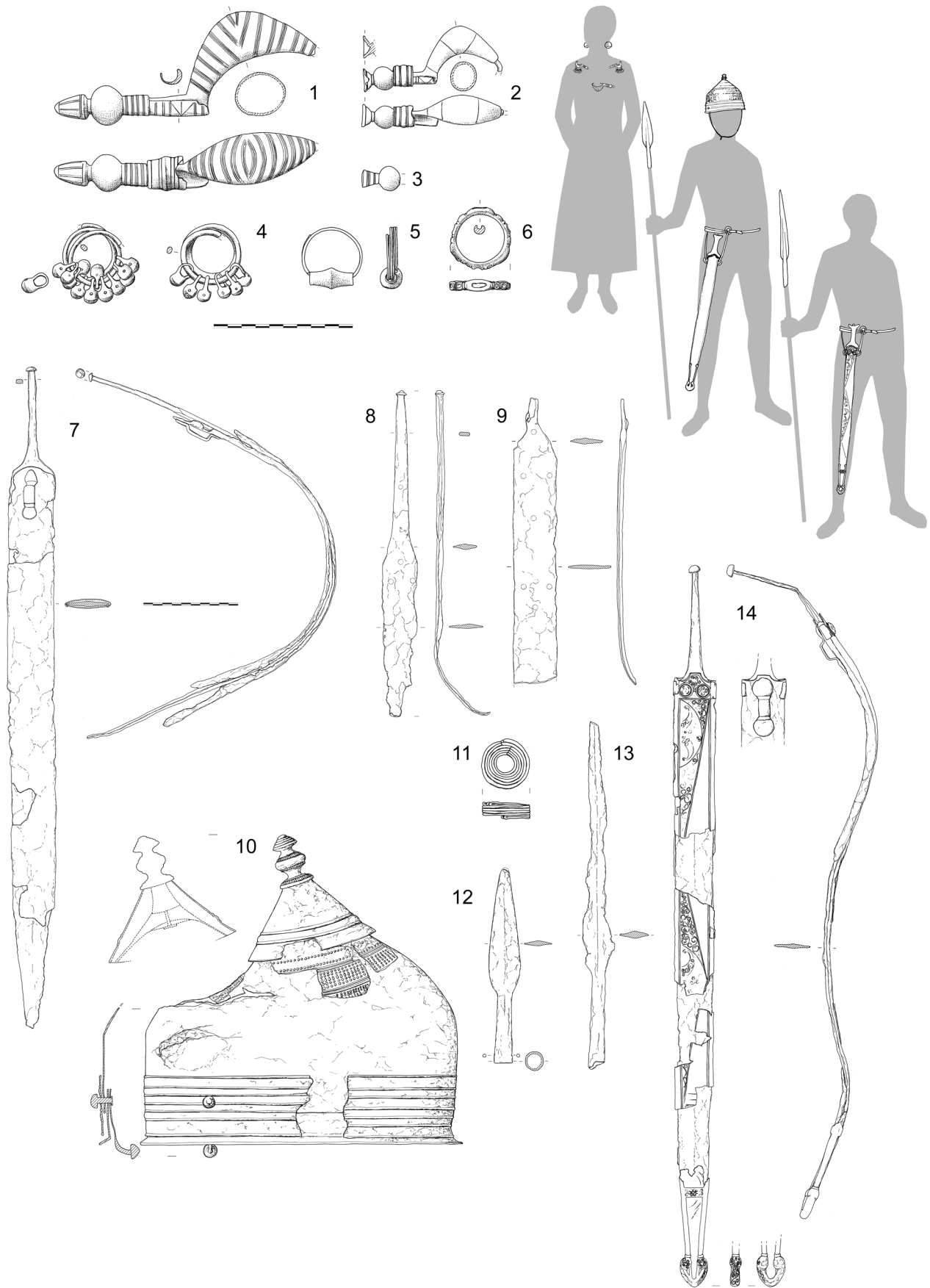


Fig. 5. So-called Warrior Grave of Varena (Lecco). G. III A3 bronze dress accessories and body ornaments: brooches (1–3), pair of pendants (4), earring (5), ring (6). La Tène iron weapons: LT A sword (7) and helmet (10). Spearheads (12–13), fragmentary sword blades (8–9). LT B sword and scabbard with Continuous Vegetal style decoration (14). 1–6, 10: scale 1:2; 7–9, 12–14: scale 1:6. Modified after RAPI 2009a, pl. XXXII–XXXIII (Graphic: M. Rapi).

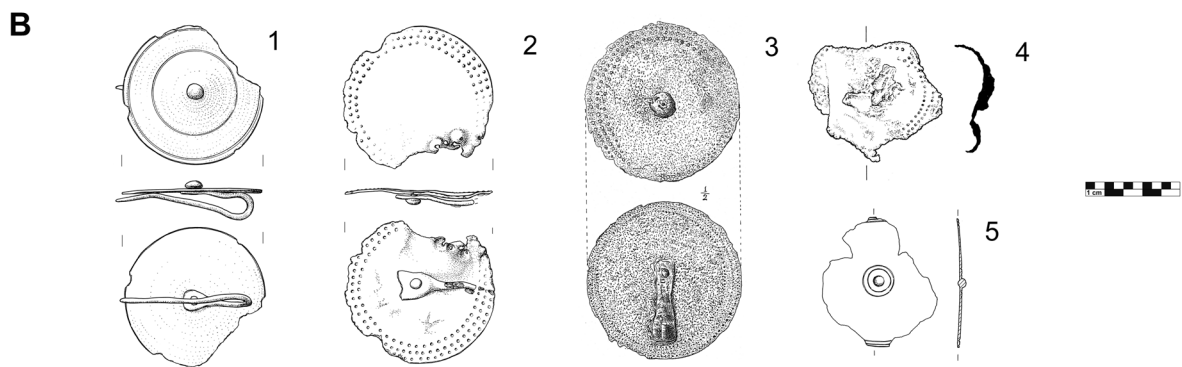
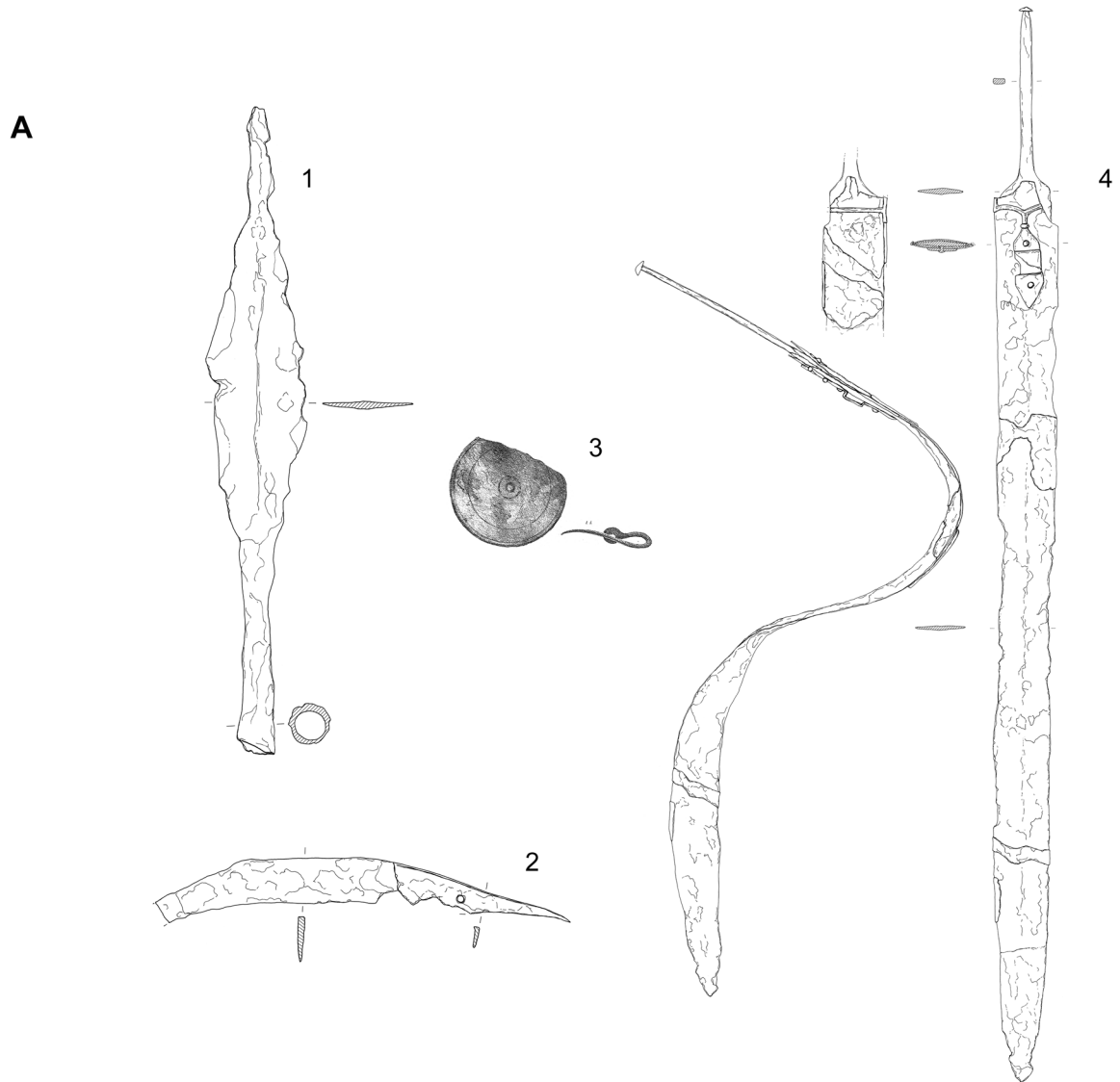


Fig. 6. A Casargo (Lecco), warrior grave. Iron spearhead (1), knife (2) and sword (4). Bronze disc-shaped belt hook (3). 1–3: scale 1:2; 4: scale 1:6. – **B**) Bronze disc-shaped belt hooks from the Lario: Introbio (1–3), Esino Lario (4), Valsassina (location unknown) (5). Scale 1:2. – A: modified after RAPI 2009a, pl. XXX. – B: modified after RAPI 2009a, fig. 11 (Graphic: M. Rapi).

Mediolanum

Large-scale archaeological investigations, such as those undertaken when the third line of the Milan Metro was built (1982–1990), revealed no evidence of any Golasecca or Insubrian settlement in the areas of Piazza Duomo and Via Missori, which lie in the heart of ancient Milan.⁵⁹ Excavations at other locations have shown that Milan was founded as a Golasecca settlement at the beginning of the 5th century B. C.,⁶⁰ a period that witnessed the decline of the Golasecca-Castelletto Ticino-Sesto Calende sector, the increasing importance of Como, and the activation and en-

hancement by the Etruscans of the routes connecting the Alpine passes and the Gulf of Tigullio, where the Etruscan *emporium* of Genoa was founded at this time. Golasecca-period Milan must have been the end point of the route from Genoa along the valley of the Scrivia stream. It is interesting to note that the foundation of the Golasecca settlement took place on a site seemingly insignificant in morphological terms, never previously inhabited. However, it was located halfway between the Rivers Adda and Ticino and between the region of the lakes and the course of the River Po, a strategic position that ensured continuity and prosperity for the settlement, first as the capital of the *Insubres*, then as the crossroads of the most

⁵⁹ CAPORUSSO 1991.

⁶⁰ CERESA MORI 2004, 204.

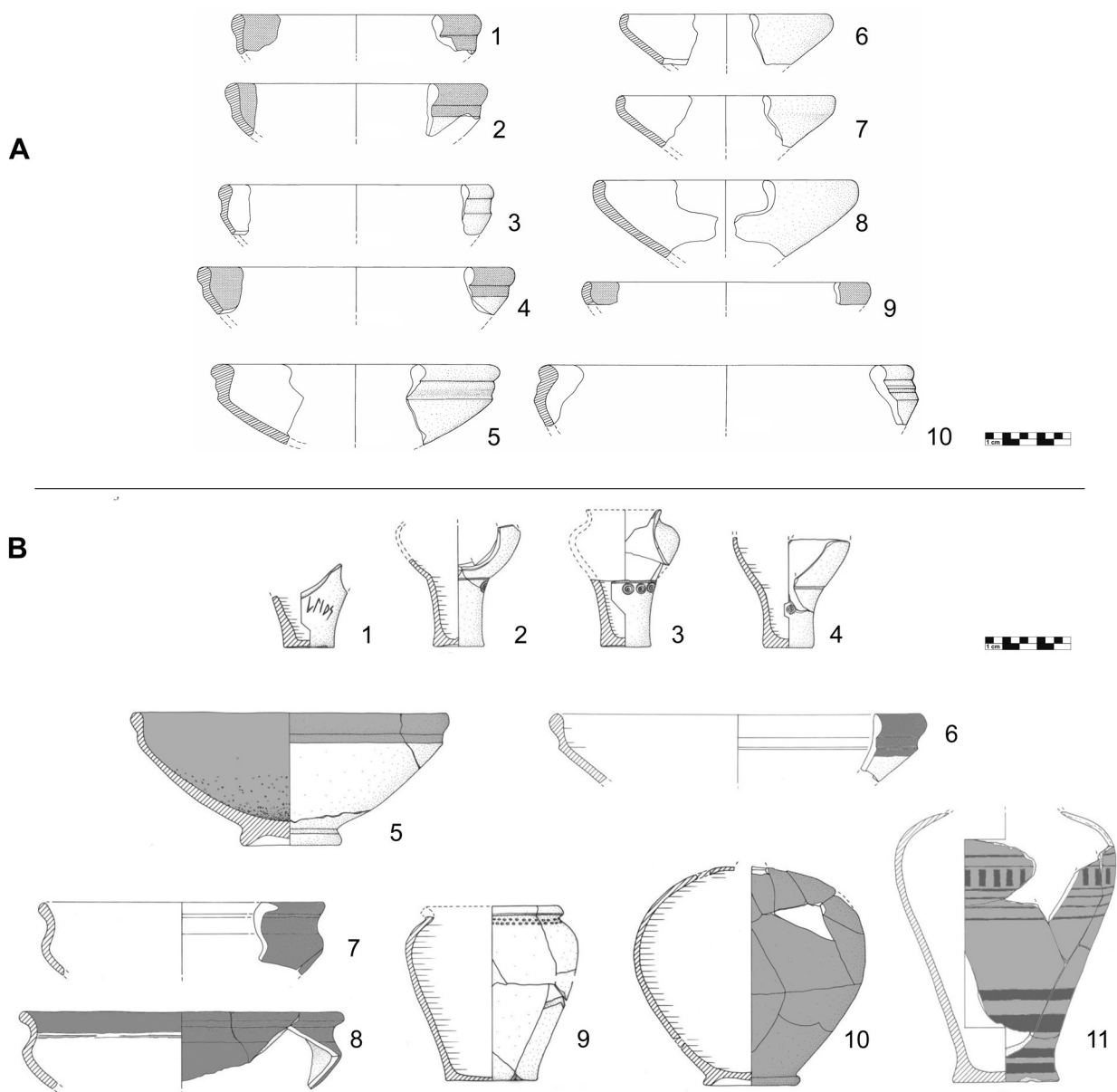


Fig. 7. A) Milan, Via Moneta. Pottery of the Golasecca tradition, LT B. Modified after CASINI / RAPI / TORI 2022, fig. 7. Scale 1:4. – B) Milan, Amphitheater. Pottery of the Golasecca tradition (1–6) and La Tène-type pottery (7–11), LT C. Stem goblets (1–4), bowls (5–8), *ollae* (9; 11), *vaso a trottola* (spinning top-shaped vase) of archaic type (10). Scale 1:4. Modified after RONCORONI 2021 (Graphic: M. Rapi).

important communication routes of the Transpadana and the Imperial capital. Excavations have uncovered La Tène-type materials at several locations in the center of the city and over an area larger than the 5th-century B. C. settlement.⁶¹ Also, finds from more peripheral areas (Conca del Naviglio, Sant'Eustorgio) point to the existence of a non-compact urban fabric or small-sized settlements along the roadways.

According to the classical historical sources, as far as the Gaulish period is concerned, *Mediolanum* would have been the only *metrópolis* in the Transpadana worthy of the name. However, the same sources associated the Cisalpine Celts with a nonurban lifestyle (Pol. II, 17.9: ὄκουν δὲ κατὰ κώμας). In fact, the monumental features that would have characterized the settlement, i.e. defensive structures or the sanctuary where the insignia of a patron deity would have been kept (Pol. II, 32.6), have not yet been identified. But other evidence seems to point to a *caput gentis* status, such as 3rd–2nd century B. C. Padan drachmas thought to be issues of an Insubrian mint that would have been based in *Mediolanum* itself.⁶² In general, the structural aspects of the settlement are virtually unknown, except for a few contexts.⁶³ Problematic is indeed the situation of the archaeological deposits, mostly in a secondary position, often with a direct superimposition of the 2nd–1st century B. C. layers to the 5th century B. C. Golasecca layers, preserved *in situ* only in a few cases (including the sites at the Biblioteca Ambrosiana⁶⁴ and in Via Moneta). This stratigraphic discontinuity has been interpreted as a result of the urban restructuring works that took place in the late 2nd and the early 1st centuries B. C., including also changes to the hydrogeological structure (owing to the construction of canals and to

reclamations). The enlargement of the settlement took place very rapidly and probably coincided with the period of peace following the final defeat of the *Insubres* in 196 B. C. (see above) and the signing of *foedera* between the *Insubres* and the Romans. The non-orthogonality of the layout of Roman-period Milan would seem to indicate a preexisting layout, defined by canals and radial roads.⁶⁵

In what would be the period of the migrations, between the LT B2 and the LT C1, *Mediolanum* experienced an intense development (over the last decades, in Milan the number of sites dating from this period has multiplied⁶⁶). The cultural affiliation of *Mediolanum* can be defined mainly through the study of pottery. Most of the pottery types are in continuity with the 5th-century B. C. tradition: stem goblets, carinated bowls with thickened cordon rim, and large cordoned *ollae* with flattened, oval rim.⁶⁷ In particular, the 4th–3rd-century B. C. conspicuous pottery assemblage from the Amphitheater area, carefully deposited in a large pit, clearly testifies to a derivation from pottery types of the Golasecca tradition⁶⁸ known from the Canton of Ticino, where the survival of the Golasecca Culture in its Alpine or Lepontic *facies* was best documented so far, and in the area of Como. Of particular note is a globular stem goblet of variant G recently published by Francesca Roncoroni, which on its surface bears the etched inscription PLIOS, written in Lepontic characters and referring to an onomastic formula rendered in the nominative. This goblet reinforces the linkage with Como, where this personal name is attested on pottery dating to the G. III A1–A2 and (generically) to the G. III A, respectively, but in the genitive form PLIOISO (fig. 7).⁶⁹

⁶¹ For an updated map of the finds in Milan see CASINI / RAPI / TORI 2022, fig. 6.

⁶² ARSLAN 2001; ARSLAN 2015.

⁶³ CERESA MORI 2015.

⁶⁴ CERESA MORI / CASINI 2022.

⁶⁵ CERESA MORI 2004, 305.

⁶⁶ TIZZONI 1991; CERESA MORI 2001; CERESA MORI 2004; CERESA MORI 2015; GAMBARI 2015; RONCORONI 2021.

⁶⁷ CASINI / TIZZONI 2015a, 236–240.

⁶⁸ RONCORONI 2021, figs 26–29, 1–19.

⁶⁹ RONCORONI 2021, fig. 26, 4. See also FEDELI et al. in press.

The 3rd and 2nd centuries B. C.

Starting from the 3rd century B. C. (LT C1), across the area associated with the Golasecca Culture, further changes occurred. The number of weapons deposited in burials increases, both in the Sopra Ceneri and in northern Lombardy, where we find swords of Middle La Tène types and sword-carrying chains of a type peculiar to the Insubrian and Lepontic area, datable towards the end of the 3rd century B. C.⁷⁰ Examples are known,

e. g., from Casargo,⁷¹ Arsago Seprio in Via Roma⁷² and in Via Beltrami,⁷³ Tornavento and Nosate-Turbigo,⁷⁴ and Giubiasco (Grave 348).⁷⁵ As far as female personal ornaments and dress accessories are concerned, although the Golasecca influence remains, as shown by

⁷⁰ PERNET et al. 2004, 40.

⁷¹ RAPI 2009a, 64.

⁷² DE MARINIS 2009b, 527 fig. 6.

⁷³ RAPI 2009b, 531.

⁷⁴ TIZZONI 1984, 68 pl. LXXVI.

⁷⁵ PERNET et al. 2004, 40.

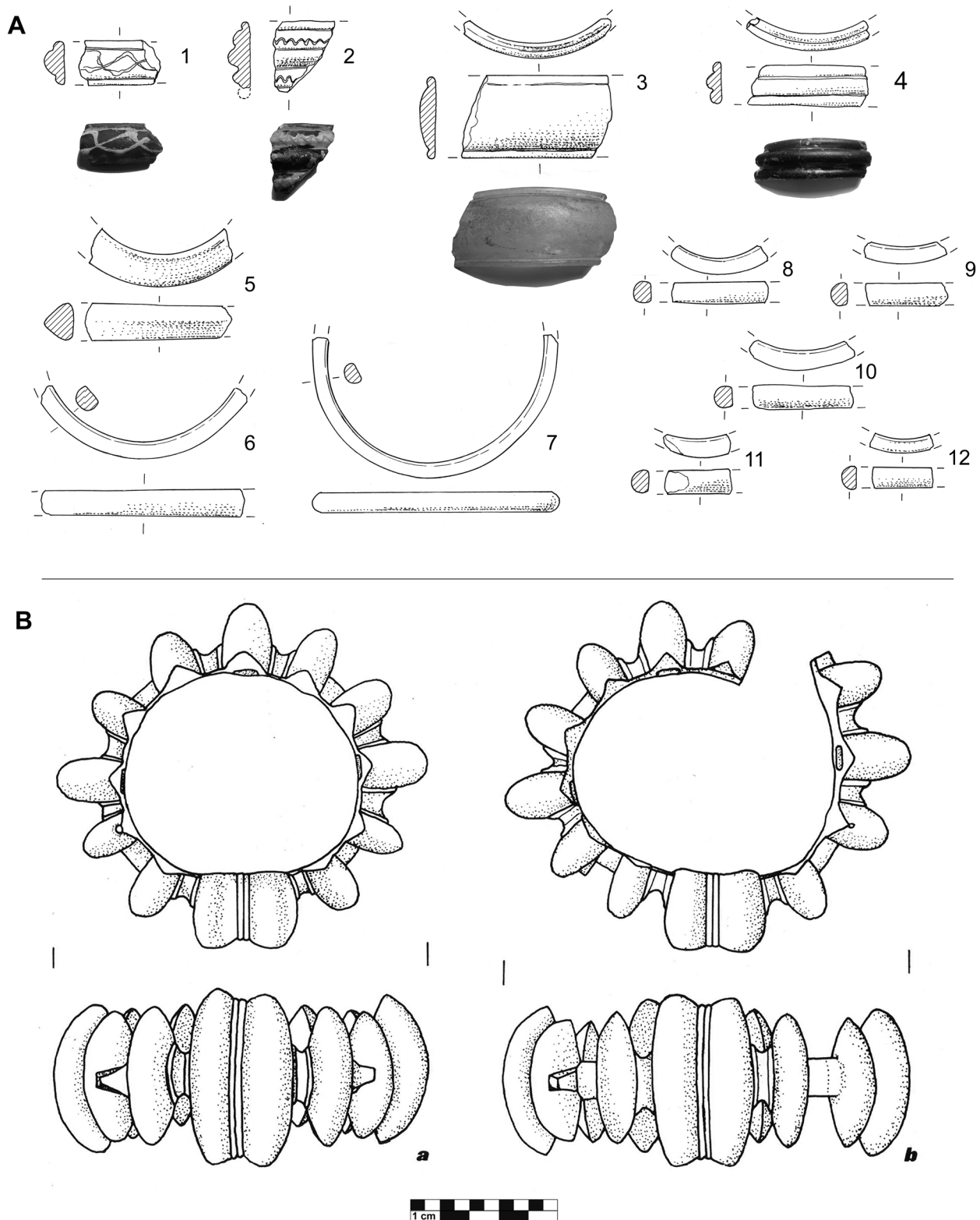


Fig. 8. A) Milan, Via Moneta. Blue and yellow glass bracelet (1), blue and white glass bracelet (2), transparent glass bracelet (3), purple glass bracelets (4–5, 8–12), dark blue glass bracelets (6–7). Scale 1:2. – B) Bettola (~5 km south of Milan). Bronze anklets decorated with solid rounded bosses. Scale 1:2. A: Modified after RAPI 2015, fig. 1. – B: Modified after TIZZONI 1984, pl. XVI (Graphic: M. Rapi).

bronze wire earrings with an amber bead in the Canton of Ticino or with a bronze biconical bead in the Lario, new objects are now attested. These include: a) objects with a micro-regional distribution (e. g. the disc-shaped belt hooks in the Lario); b) objects of generic La Tène derivation such as the glass bracelets (see, e. g., the

burial of Baranzate di Bollate),⁷⁶ which henceforth will constitute one of the few elements recognizable as characterizing the Insubrian female parure;⁷⁷ and c)

⁷⁶ DE FRANCESCO / MORDEGLIA 2015, 124.

⁷⁷ RAPI 2000.

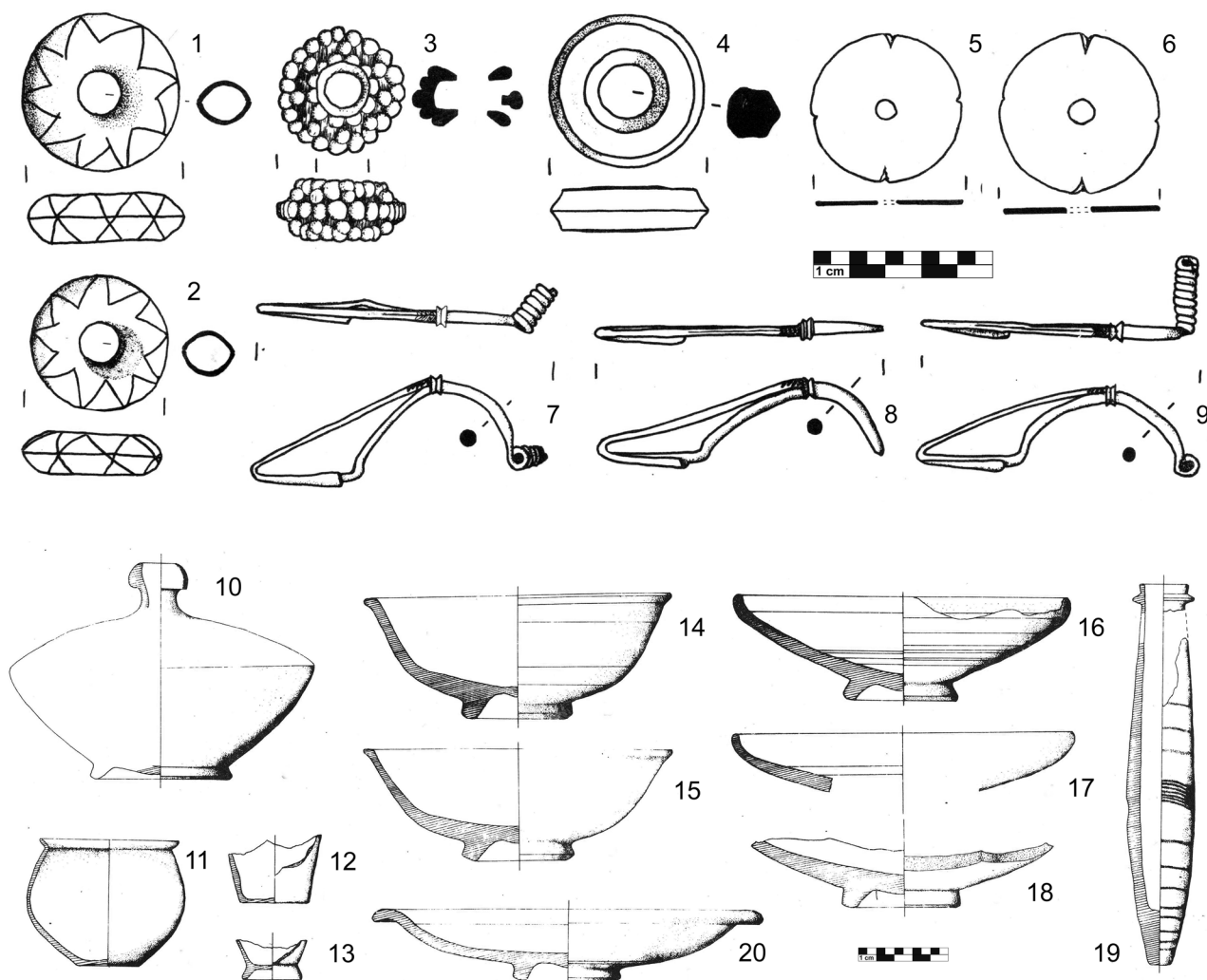


Fig. 9. Misano di Gera d'Adda (Bergamo), warrior grave, LT D1. A selection of the grave goods (also including a sword, a spearhead, a pilgrim flask, two frying pans of Aylesford type, strigils, and a mirror). – Bronze rings (1–4), so-called *dischi fermapièghe* [disc-shaped dress accessories] (5–6), brooches (7–9), scale 1:2. – *Vaso a trottola* (spinning top-shaped vase) (10), figulina pottery goblet and small-sized vases (11–13), cups (14–15), black-glazed pottery *paterae* (16–18), achromatic coarse ware *patera* (20), alabaster unguent bottle (19). Scale 1:4. Modified after TIZZONI 1981, pl. 1 and 6 (Graphic: M. Rapi).

original, re-elaborated versions of La Tène objects, such as the *Kopffibeln* and the *Helmkopffibeln*.⁷⁸ Since these latter brooches are found not only in the Sopra Ceneri and in the Lario but also in burials north of the Alps – particularly in the Alpine Rhine Valley, in the upper Valais, and in the Aare Valley – they might also indicate the mobility of individuals and probably marriage alliances.⁷⁹ The introduction of La Tène-derived objects in the female *parure* is also indicated by annular anklets decorated with solid rounded bosses (previously unknown in the Golasecca area). This type of body ornament, significantly attested in Piedmont⁸⁰ and in Lombardy, including two examples from the present-day Province of

Milan,⁸¹ is considered to be a local production imitating LT B2 and LT C1 transalpine examples (fig. 8).⁸² As for the pottery, types linked to the Celtic tradition persisted, such as the small-sized *ollae* with rustic decoration. The Golasecca types were no longer produced, with the exception of the goblets. These goblets are attested by the most recent types, such as the egg-cup goblet in the Canton of Ticino, in the present-day Province of Como, in *Mediolanum*, and in the Novara and Varese areas. This is the end of a centuries-old cultural tradition. Decisive, indeed, are now the impulses deriving from the spread of the black-glazed pottery from Volterra and Arezzo, which result in achromatic productions imitating the black-glazed pottery types.⁸³ Bronze vases, i. e. pitchers and frying pans of peninsular production, were deposit-

⁷⁸ TORI 2019, 77; CASINI / RAPI / TORI 2022, 729 fig. 21.

⁷⁹ TORI et al. 2010, 46–56.

⁸⁰ In particular, the Dormelletto cemetery (Novara) yielded numerous examples, of both transalpine and transpadan type (SPAGNOLO GARZOLI 2009).

⁸¹ DE MARINIS 1986, 103–105 pl. III,1–2.

⁸² FÁBRY 2008, 128–129; FÁBRY 2011, 296–297.

⁸³ SPAGNOLO GARZOLI 1999, esp. 289–320.

ed again (along with strigils), indicating the adoption of Mediterranean customs regarding banqueting and personal care (fig. 9). The diffusion of these bronze vases suggests a large-scale resumption of trade between the Mediterranean and the regions north of the River Po and north of the Alps along a route that led on one side to

the Verbano and to the Val d'Ossola, where Ornavasso is the cemetery richest of imports,⁸⁴ and on the other side to the Magadino plain. *Mediolanum* began to trade on a wider scale, as the *kàlathoi* of Iberian provenance that probably contained honey⁸⁵ clearly indicate.

⁸⁴ GRAUE 1974; PIANA AGOSTINETTI 1999.

⁸⁵ CASINI / TIZZONI 2015b.

Conclusions

In spite of their different names, the *Insubres*, the *Lepontii* and the *Orobii* shared a language and material culture, which, basically, is of the Golasecca type. The *Insubres*, however, are characterized by some distinctive objects, namely personal ornaments and dress accessories such as the annular anklets, the glass bracelets⁸⁶ and, in the late La Tène phase, the Misano-type brooches.⁸⁷ A distinctive element of the pottery seems to be the *vaso a trottola* (spinning top-shaped vase).⁸⁸ Notwithstanding the critical nature of the sources, it is quite clear that the process of transition from the Golasecca Culture took place within a framework of strong continuity, in both topographic and cultural terms. There is neither any archaeological evidence for an abrupt cultural change, nor for substantial demic contributions. Also, both the Golasecca Culture and the foreign component can be defined as Celtic. Therefore, the model of a progressive acculturation under La Tène influence within a framework of cultural continuity seems appropriate for describing the G. III A 3–La Tène transitional context.

In conclusion, at present there is no basis for considering the Insubrian complex as something foreign to, and a substitute for, the preexisting Golasecca tradition. The *Insubres* are the result of a process of ethnogenesis rooted in the most recent aspects of the Golasecca Culture which led to the formation of a culturally and politically

connoted group and as such recognized and named by the classical historians. According to some scholars, it would be legitimate to use the term *Insuber*, which in classical historiography refers only to the Gaulish period, for the earlier Golasecca contexts as well.⁸⁹ However, it is preferable to avoid this in order to prevent further confusion in a picture that is already remarkably complex.

The *Insubres* were probably at the head of a federation in which other transpadan tribal groups also converged: the *Orobii*⁹⁰ in Como, in the Lario, and in the valleys of the present-day Province of Bergamo; the *Laevi* and the *Marici*⁹¹ in the Lomellina (in western Lombardy); and the *Vertamocori*⁹² in the present-day Province of Novara (in eastern Piedmont).⁹³ *Mediolanum* would have had the role of *caput gentis*. As for the *Lepontii*, it can be reasonably argued that they were a distinct political entity. In general terms, the archaeological record seems to be in agreement with the more political than ethnic⁹⁴ meaning that the name *Insubres* had even for the classical historians.

⁸⁹ CICOLANI / GAMBARI 2021, 192; 197.

⁹⁰ See footnote 10.

⁹¹ [...] *Ligurum, ex quibus Laevi et Marici condidere Ticinum non procul a Pado* [...] (Plin., nat., III, 124).

⁹² [...] *Novaria ex Vertamocoris* [...] (Plin., nat., III, 124).

⁹³ It is difficult to define the territorial boundaries of the different tribes even when between the 2nd and 1st centuries B. C. the archaeological evidence in the plain becomes rich again, since by then a process of cultural levelling is taking place throughout the Transpadana that tends to flatten differences.

⁹⁴ GRASSI 1991, 112.

⁸⁶ DE MARINIS 1986, FÁBRY 2008; RAPI 2009b.

⁸⁷ PIANA AGOSTINETTI / KNOBLOCH 2010.

⁸⁸ RAPI 2023.

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Abstract: From Golasecca Celts to *Insubres*. Northwestern Italy in the Late Iron Age

This paper summarizes our current knowledge of the Late Iron Age in the area of the Golasecca Culture (eastern Piedmont, western Lombardy, the Canton of Ticino). We focus on the Insubrian context, which with respect to the geography of the Golasecca Culture – including a Tessin or Lepontic sector (Bellinzona), a western sector (Golasecca–Sesto Calende–Castelletto Ticino) and an eastern sector (Como, and from the 5th century B. C., Milan) – corresponds to the latter sector. Following a general overview of research history, the archaeological evidence, examined also in relation to classical historical sources, is presented. In the area of the Golasecca Culture the earlier tradition was not completely erased and survived with renewed traits through the adoption of La Tène-type elements.

Zusammenfassung: Von den Golasecca-Kelten zu den Insubrern. Nordwestitalien in der späten Eisenzeit

Der Beitrag fasst den aktuellen Forschungsstand zur späten Eisenzeit im Gebiet der Golasecca-Kultur (östliches Piedmont, westliche Lombardei und Tessin) zusammen. Der Fokus liegt auf dem insubrischen Kontext, der hinsichtlich der Verbreitung der Golasecca-Kultur, die einen tessinischen oder lepontischen (Bellinzona), einen westlichen (Golasecca–Sesto Calende–Castelletto

Ticino) und einen östlichen Bereich (Como und ab dem 5. Jahrhundert v. Chr. Mailand) umfasst, mit dem letztgenannten übereinstimmt. Zunächst wird ein allgemeiner Überblick über die Forschungsgeschichte gegeben, danach erfolgt die Darstellung der archäologischen Zeugnisse, auch mit Blick auf die antiken Schriftquellen. Im Gebiet der Golasecca-Kultur wurden ältere Traditionen nicht völlig ausgelöscht, sondern sie lebten durch die Übernahme von Elementen des Latène-Stils in anderer Form weiter.

Keywords / Schlagwörter

Iron Age / Golasecca Culture / Celts / Gauls / *Insubres* / Lombardy / Canton of Ticino.

Eisenzeit / Golasecca-Kultur / Kelten / Gallier / Insubrer / Lombardei / Kanton Tessin

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