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Woven Stories: The Golden Thread in the Early Iron Age

1. Introduction

The conference that generated the current volume has witnessed even closely related archaeological disciplines using rather different notions of images as a concept. Speaking of the visual quality of images this can be exemplified by contrasting images in European Prehistory and Near Eastern Archaeology. With the large scenic depictions of Assyrian palace murals in mind, the contemporary middle European Early Iron Age cultures may appear rather devoid of this sort of images. From the point of view of European Prehistory, however, the cultures of the Early Iron Age show a broad spectrum of images and small-scale sculptures. The depiction of textiles and textile production in particular can be placed in a larger narrative context within European Early Iron Age burial practices. Before specific examples can be taken into scrutiny, it is unavoidable to clarify several concepts that are fundamental for the understanding of image, object and narration in prehistoric and preliterate societies.

This study utilizes a narrow concept of the image as a starting point, with the main objects of consideration being material figurative representations. These depictions can range from free standing small-scale sculpture over works of *repoussée* to drawings made by incision in unfired clay. They are used by the cultures of the European Early Iron Age predominantly as a single picture, with rare cases of scenic representations. An analysis of their context of usage will show a broadening of this narrow concept is necessary to fully understand the interaction of images and non-figurative objects in their respective societies.

The second concept, being fundamental for this study, is the definition of narration. In the case of the Early Iron Age in Europe it is important to take into consideration, that the societies under examination are so called prehistoric societies. 'Prehistoric' as a term is rather badly chosen, because nobody would nowadays doubt these cultures' very own history. Therefore, these societies are better

described as preliterate, because written language and thereby written texts were not used as a cultural concept in the respective societies. As a consequence, communication and thus narration could only take place by means of oral language. This fact entails the necessity to adapt a concept of narration that leaves the narrow confines of text as consequence of written language. As an alternative a wider concept of narration must take into consideration the characteristics of oral language and its performance. In this regard, the aspects of repetition, transfer of information and storage of information and their respective techniques in written and oral language are of particular interest.

The study in question focuses on methods and means for examining forms and contents of narrations in preliterate, oral societies from a modern point of view, i. e. from a perspective that is completely dominated by the use of writing, and in which the way of scientific thinking is based on the consequences of the usage literacy, how can archaeologically documented artefacts contribute to the understanding of narration and narratives in these societies?

2. Characteristics of Oral Language and Concepts of Narration

Whereas the study of narration and narrativity, originating from literary studies, has established itself in many different disciplines, prehistoric archaeology has remained mostly untouched by it. This may have been caused by the quality of archaeological sources, i.e. mainly artefacts, on the one hand and by the close relation to written texts, when dealing with the narrow concept of narration. In the present study, the Early Iron Age communities of the Apennines and the Alps are an example for a cultural environment during the shift from primary orality to literacy. According to Walter Ong, primary orality refers generally to thoughts and their verbal expression within cultures which do not use or have no knowledge of the written word.[1] Primary oral cultures depend on methods in their communication, cultural interaction, and storage and transfer of knowledge, which are fundamentally different from those of literary cultures. The spoken word cannot be stored, meaning that communication is based on the simultaneous presence of sender and receiver. Communicational statements exceeding a situational character, as e.g. cosmological statements or social claims, have to be of narrative quality and have to be retold to be conveyed any further. The memorability of verbal content facilitates the retelling of said content. This is achieved by framing the content in a narrative. The specifics of such orally transmitted narratives are the formulaic structuring of the content, additive sequencing of content, aggregative descriptions, redundancy of content and a close relationship to the human lifeworld. Antagonistic motives and a general character

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[1]   Ong 1967.

of accountability, tension and situational relatedness are also important properties of oral narratives. From the structure of these properties and their use emerges a strongly conservative and traditionalistic character of narrative. Individually made alterations and interpretations of the narrative are difficult or impossible, because they hinder or prevent the functioning of the above-mentioned techniques. Alterations of the narrative constitute at the same time an attack on a community's common identity and the order of things. In an oral tradition, the world represented within a narrative dies, if the narrative is not retold or if it is fundamentally changed.

During the first half of the first millennium BC, the first steps towards a transition to literacy, urbanisation and early statehood can be observed in the regions south of the Alps. This complex process is illustrated by cultural expressions such as tombs with rich grave goods, pictorial representations, early writings, the emergence of sanctuaries and the permanent concentration of settlements in the form of early towns.[2]

The present study focuses on a selection of artefacts, that belong to the context of a group of lavishly furnished graves of the Early Iron Age. The objects under scrutiny were used culturally during a period between the 9th and the 5th century BC in the region of the Apennine peninsula and the South-East Alps.

To live up to the interdisciplinary character of the current volume, it is necessary to outline the basic scientific properties of burials for the non-archaeologist reader.

In prehistoric archaeology, burials serve as one of the main sources of research and their content can be subdivided into three main categories: the buried body, the artefacts contained in the tomb, and the construction of the grave itself. The body of the deceased facilitates observations about biological characteristics as age, sex, diseases and possibly about the cause of death. Additionally, the treatment of the deceased's body after death can be noticed, such as incineration, mummification, mutilation etc. With regards to social questions and cultural practices, the artefacts contained in the tomb, also known as grave goods, are the main field of inquiry. On the basis of formal characteristics such as material, form, ornamentation etc., and the artefacts' distributional combination in different burials, archaeological groups and their temporal and spatial distribution can be defined. In addition to the investigation of grave goods, constructional features of the grave itself provide information about whether the tomb was intended to be accessible after the funeral or to serve as a monument for the funerary community. It is however necessary to clarify, that the scientific value of burials does not lie in the investigation of their depositional conditions as an end in itself. The importance is rather constituted by the fact, that burials allow access to a whole chain of activities, which have taken place before, during and after the actual funeral. These activities are modes of

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[2]   With regard to role of images as archaeological sources, cf. Huth 2012.

expression of the complex social realities of the respective communities and facilitate insights into ideas about identity and the order of things. The range of insights is only limited by the preservation and the quality of detail of the archaeological record.

The death of a person has immediate consequences for the surviving community. Aside from coping with the loss of a beloved one, a pragmatic reorganisation of the community is necessary to fill the resulting social gap as well as a confirmation of fundamental ideological ideas, that constitute the order of things. On the basis of this premise, it is reasonable to assume, that the activities observable in the context of burials are closely linked to the active handling of these consequences in the face of death. With regard to the oral nature of prehistoric cultures, all of the described activities have to be performed by the remaining community in a way, that enables them to recall, to perform, to reaffirm and to pass on information without the use of the written word. It is therefore necessary to examine, in which way grave goods where part of these activities. Which role did they play in relating to a common narrative, and how did they contribute to its narrativity?

It is important to bear in mind, that it is not possible from today's point of view to access the actual content of any oral culture's narration, due to the specific properties of said narration. Objects and images as part of the performance of a narration do not tell the narrative themselves. It can however be shown, how objects and images can refer to a common narrative, especially in their use in the Early Iron Age burial practice of Upper Italy and the Eastern Alps.

3. Case Studies

As already indicated in its title, this paper aims to follow a specific motif, that is pervasive in Early Iron Age burial practice. Textiles as a general concept are referred to different ways in the material tradition of that period. The range varies from actual textile garments used as containers in graves, or objects used for textile production as grave goods, to the pictorial representation of textiles or textile production on vessels or other grave goods. Being part of a composition of objects, which was deliberately selected for burial with the deceased, they are assumed to refer to a common narrative. From today's point of view, pictorial representations appear to be the most immediate way to access the narratives of prehistoric oral cultures. With regard to the visual representation of textile production, the most well-known examples are the wooden throne from tomb 89 from the necropolis 'Sotto la Rocca' near Verucchio[3] and the so called tintinnabulum from tomb 5 from the 'Arsenale Militare' necropolis at Bologna.[4]

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[3]   Gentili 2003, 298, fig. 59.
[4]   Morigi-Govi 1971.

The carved images on the back of the wooden throne from Verucchio show scenic depictions of textile production, with spinning and weaving as final steps in the process being accentuated.[5] The 'tintinnabulum' from Bologna is an embossed bronze sheet pendant with depictions of the same topic. Spinning and weaving can also be found as a major motif in scenic depictions on many Daunian stelae,[6] which were used as grave markers. In a reduced form, as single motif, representations of looms are known from Frög,[7] Austria and Maria d'Anglona,[8] Italy. In both cases, not only does the image refer to the act of weaving, but also the medium, being a clay loom weight.

The recently found situla from Alpago[9] (**Fig. 1**) is a notable example for the depiction of spinning and weaving from the Alpine region. The bronze vessel attracted general publicity due to its embossed images of sexual intercourse between a man and a woman in different positions. This find is not only important because of its unique selection of motifs, especially with regard to the portrayal of a birth scene. Its importance lies also in the fact, that the scenic depictions decorating it place the act of weaving within a broader narrative context.

From left to right an encounter can be seen between a woman, wrapped in a cloak, and a man, wearing a hat. After the woman having touched the man in the face, the couple is depicted having sexual intercourse, with the man being naked, and the woman still wearing her cloak. Important visual elements of the depicted scenes are several instruments, displayed in oversize, like a throne, a mallet, a hatchet-like object or a distaff. All of these elements are also shown on the back of the wooden throne from Verucchio in the context of textile production. The different displays of sexual intercourse are always accompanied by the witnessing of another person, who is also wrapped in a cloak. The final sex scene happens on a bed, with two footstools standing in front of the bed or beneath it. Similar footstools are also depicted on the wooden throne from Verucchio and the Daunian stelae. Separated from the preceding scenes through vertical bars, the fincal scene shows the birth of child, with two cloaked women as attendants. One of the cloaked women is holding a bucket with a handle. The rather manner of depiction notwithstanding, these scenes reveal a sequence of events and link two parallel processes in a single picture story: the production of textiles and the conception and birth of a child.

Apart from the depictions of textile production already shown, artefacts used for textile production represent a second category, that is likewise frequently found

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[5] For a survey of the individual steps of textile production, cf. Grömer 2007 and Gleba 2013, with additional literature.

[6] Stele SD 585 (Norman 2011, 3; fig. 8.5).

[7] Tomb 50/3 (Tomedi 2002, 453–455; tab. 16).

[8] Tomb 92 (Frey 1991, tab. 3A/6; 42,3).

[9] The authors thank Katharina Rebay-Salisbury for providing them with an accurate illustration of the situla.
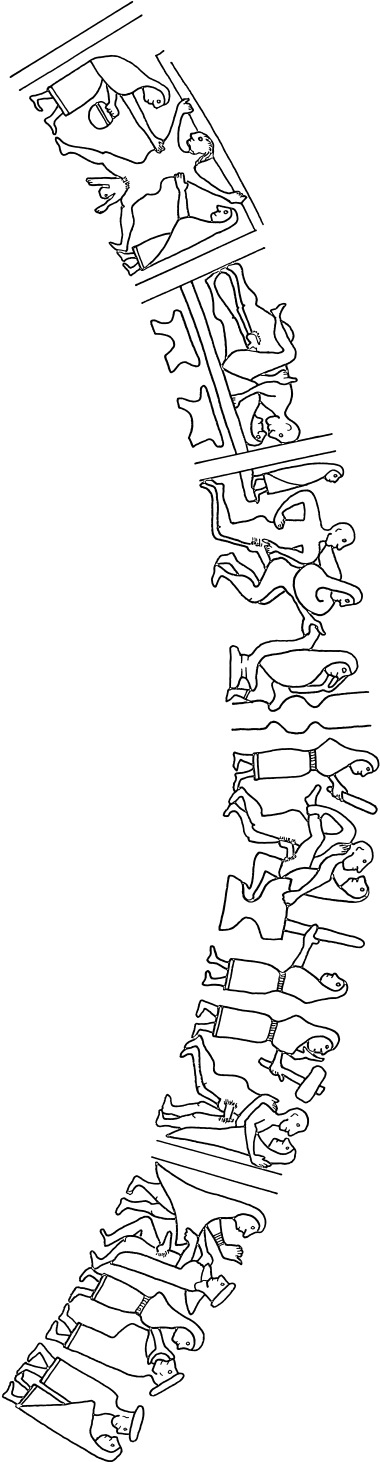
Fig. 1: Lower register of the situla from Alpago
(Illustration: K. Rebay-Salisbury).

Fig. 2: Distaff made of amber elements; Spindle whorl made from glass paste (after Forte 1994, Fig. 59 + Fig. 67).

in burials, sometimes even in large numbers. Spindle whorls made of clay, spools, spindles, distaff and loom weights are typical Early iron age grave goods from burials in the Italic and Circumalpine region. Tomb 120/1 from Frög[10] contained even a complete wooden loom. It is remarkable, that especially spindle whorls and distaffs are elaborately ornamented, or are sometimes even painstakingly made from costly and rare materials, like glass, silver or amber (**Fig. 2**).[11]

Ultimately, the textiles themselves are not only present in burials as clothing of the deceased but also as fabrics used for the wrapping and draping of some of the grave goods. Due to this use, they play an important role in the internal structuring of a burial. Particularly impressive examples of this structuring use of textiles can be found in the necropolises around Verucchio, near Rimini.[12] There are cremation burials in deep pits or shafts, mostly with the deposition of a lavish set of grave goods. A peculiarity of these tombs is the very good preservation due to the effects of waterlogging. In many cases, it was therefore possible to observe, that not only several vessels were stacked one inside the other within the tombs, but that also the wrapping of these vessels with fabrics was practised. Tomb 16 (**Fig. 3**) from the necropolis of Sotto la Rocca[13] exemplifies this principle of nesting, its composition reminding of the Russian nesting doll, the matryoshka.

The burial pit, with a diameter of about 1 m and a depth of 1,15 m, contained a large ceramic storage vessel, which was deposited on a layer of mixed earth, charcoal

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[10]   Gleirscher 2002.
[11]   Von Eles 1994, 194; fig. 59.
[12]   Gentili 2003.
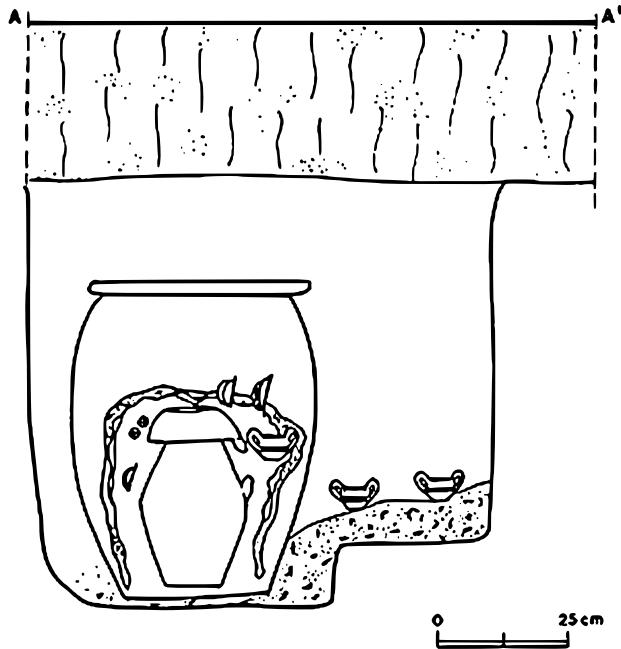[13]   Gentili 2003, 186–187; fig. 42.

Fig. 3: Tomb 16, Verucchio (after Gentili 2003, fig. 42).

and small stones. A two-handled drinking vessel and a large ceramic pot, covered with an inverted one-handled bowl, had been placed inside the storage vessel. The large ceramic pot, with its bowl lid, contained the cremated bones of the deceased and was wrapped in a large cloth, with the cloth being held in place by various amber fibulae.[14] The deceased's cremated bones were therefore not simply deposited in a burial pit, but were carefully hold by three further layers, namely a vessel, a cloth and another vessel. Other tombs from Sotto la Rocca, e.g. tomb 47, yielded textile wrappings, which were additionally trimmed with beads made of amber, bone or glass.[15] This usage of textiles for the wrapping and structuring of grave goods is well known not only from Verucchio but also from necropoleis from the Eastern Alps. For example, the wrapping and nesting of vessels[16] is documented in the burials from the necropoleis of Most na Soči[17] and Frög.[18] Even in the high-status burials of the Hallstatt- and Early Latène period in the area north of the Alps, like

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[14]   Gentili 2003, 186–187.

[15]   cf. Gentili 2003, 237.

[16]   Glunz-Hüsken and Fath 2011.

[17]   Lo Schiavo et al. 1985.

[18]   Tomedi 2002.

Hochdorf[19] (**Fig. 4**) and Glauberg,[20] draping of the burial chambers and wrapping of the grave goods contained therein was practised.

To fully understand the relationship between images and objects on the one hand, and narrative practices in prehistoric communities on the other hand, it is necessary, to have a closer look at the interrelation between images and objects in a burial context.

The grave goods of tomb 89 from Verucchio are of crucial value for this. On the front side of the wooden throne's backrest, two different scenic registers are combined in a complex visual structure. The main motifs comprise: persons weaving on a loom, persons riding a wagon, and persons depicted as warriors. The weaving motif shows some noteworthy characteristics. The loom is composed of several rows of double-headed bird protomes, with the topmost carrying a queue of four human figures. The two persons weaving on both sides of the loom are sitting on throne shaped chairs. A slightly different throne is also visible in the scene with persons riding wagons, where passenger on the left waggon is sitting on said chair.

The motif of the warriors, finally, occurs in a central scene, where four warriors, characterized by a pointed helmet, shield and lance, are flanking pairwise two persons handling some kind of object. This central motif remains obscure due to the fact, that this part of the back of the chair is preserved rather badly. As a kind of closing bracket, the two registers, consisting of the motifs described, are flanked by a group of deer on each side.
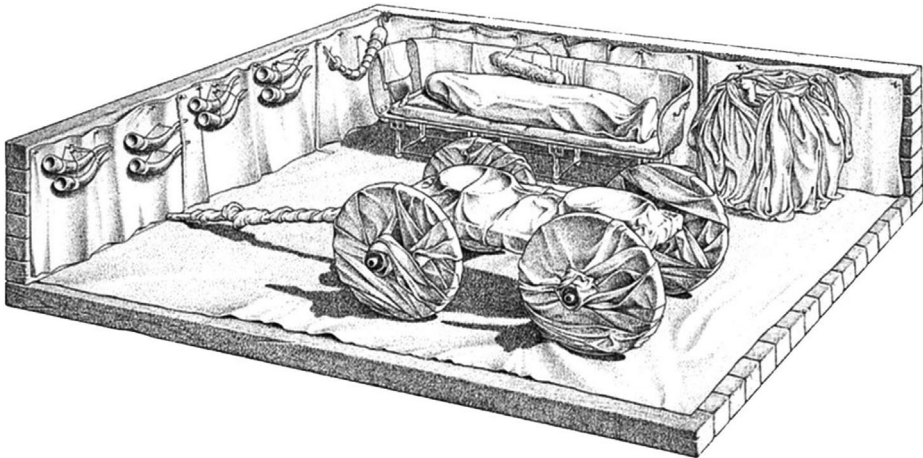

Fig. 4: Reconstruction of the textile draping of the burial chamber at Hochdorf (after Banck-Burgess 2012, Fig. 4).

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[19]   Banck-Burgess 1999.
[20]   Balzer et al. 2014, 4.

A comparison of the visual motifs and the grave goods from the same burial shows, that both artefacts and images refer to similar subject matters (**Fig. 5**). With regard to the animal depictions in the different registers, several bird-shaped bronze pins were found, as well as a double-headed figure of a dog and a knife handle in the shape of a sitting monkey. The visual representation of the throne-shaped chairs is reproduced by the medium itself, on which the chairs are depicted, a wooden throne with a curved back. Further examples of depicted objects reproduced in reality are a wooden footstool, a fan, and a bronze helmet. The bronze horse bit can be seen as an indicator for the use a horse-drawn wagon, as depicted in the lower registers of the throne back. Aside from these fully functional artefacts, the burial contained several miniaturised objects too, like a miniature shield made of bronze, which refers to the same motif as the depiction of warriors. It can be argued, that the miniaturisation of an object, in this case a shield, stresses its figurative properties and thus turns the object itself into an image.

Miniaturised objects can also be found in the context of the necropoleis of Este. Tomb 23 from the necropolis 'Casa di Ricovero' in Este can be dated to the beginning of the 3rd century BC.[21] An inscription on the bronze situla, which contained the cremated bones of the deceased, identifies the defunct as NERKA, thus giving
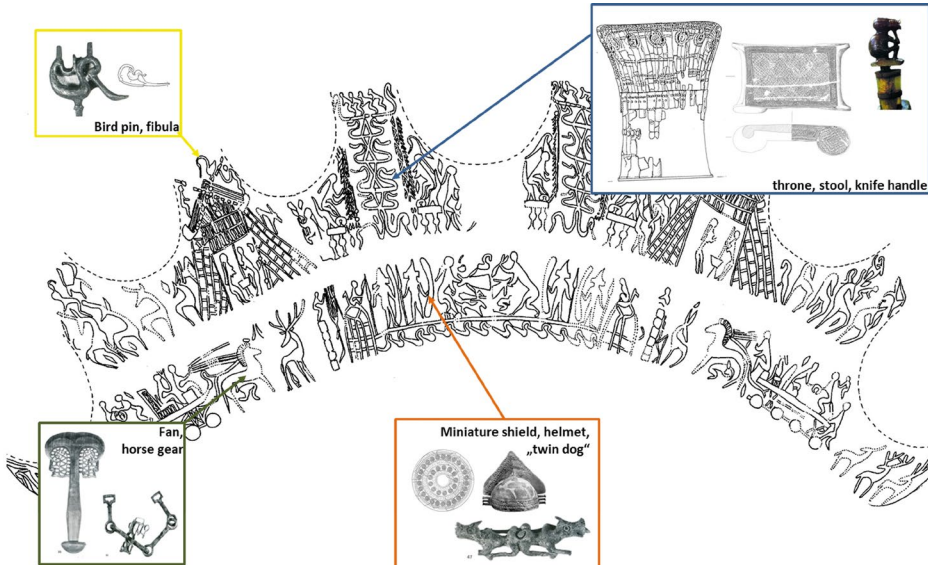

Fig. 5: Thematic interrelation between visual motifs and artefacts from tomb 89, Sotto la Rocca, Verucchio (Author [B. Fath] after Gentili 2003).
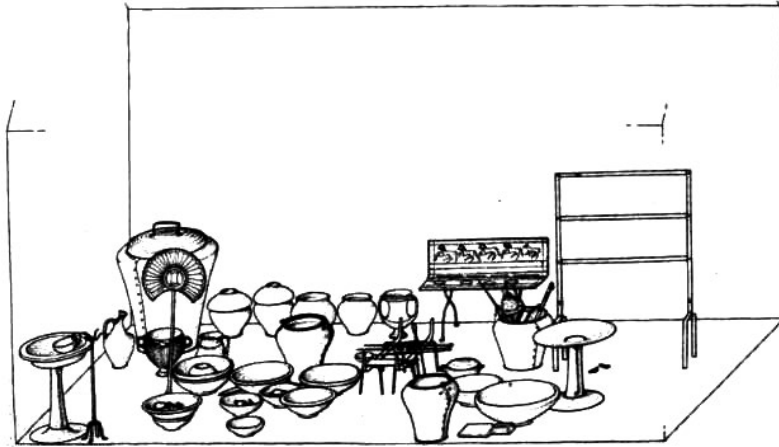
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[21]   Chieco-Bianchi 1987.

Fig. 6: Tomba di NERKA (after Chieco-Bianchi 1987, 233, fig. 59).

the tomb the moniker 'tomba di NERKA' (**Fig. 6**). Despite its very late date, the burial shows striking similarities in its layout and its composition of the grave goods in comparison to the Early Iron Age graves mentioned above. The house-shaped burial chamber, built from large stone slabs, contained said bronze situla; earrings, pendants and fibulae made from gold, silver and amber were distributed around the situla in a certain manner, suggesting it was clothed or wrapped origi-nally in some kind of textile fabric.[22] The grave goods also included a set of bronze and ceramic vessels for drinking and dining, as well as a bronze miniature loom and a bronze miniature bench. The back of the miniature bench is again decorated with figurative depictions. Another situla contained several implements for textile pro-duction, like a spindle whorl, a distaff, a spindle, and two weaving combs. Close to the bronze bench, a pair of andirons, a pair of spits, a pair of pliers, and a knife, were found, all of them made from thin sheet bronze, which made them unfit for actual use. Whereas the figurative character of the loom and the bench is due to their miniature size, the roasting utensils gain their figurative character from being actually unusable token items.

The composition of grave goods from the tomba di NERKA reveals, that dif-ferent groups of objects refer to the theme of textile production and a range of other themes. Besides scenic representations and functional objects, artefacts with a non-functional character may also refer to this theme. Their non-functional char-acter is characterised by their miniature size or technical features, that render them unfit for real-life use. In archaeological literature, this group of objects is often

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[22]   Chieco-Bianchi 1987, 231; fig. 58.

described as 'models'. With regard to their figurative character, it is just as well possible to consider them as three-dimensional 'images', with properties comparable to that of a proper sculpture. In the case of the tomba di NERKA, it is not only the grave goods to display such properties, but also the grave itself, with the burial chamber generically recreating the superficial shape of a house with a gabled roof.[23] It is important however to bear in mind that only a portion of Iron Age graves exhibit such a comprehensive set of grave goods and figurative features. More often than not, only individual artefacts show these characteristics. A good case point is provided by tomb 94 from the necropolis of Maria d'Anglona, Basilicata.[24] Besides ear jewellery, ceramic vessels, and several anklets, the inhumation burial contained an intact clay loom weight as well as a broken one. The intact loom weight was made of fired clay and shaped like a frustum. Incised on three of its four sides, figurative representations can be found: a deer, a nondescript quadruped and a loom. The perforation at the top of the loom weight, normally used for attaching the warp yarn, was only indicated by a shallow groove, thus rendering the loom weight non-functional. Both loom weights had been fired only for a short time, leaving them rather brittle for actual use. Thus, these loom weights can be considered rather as three-dimensional, plastic images of loom weights, than as actual loom weights. In addition to this property, they exhibit the peculiarity, that they serve as a medium for additional images, the depictions of a deer, a quadruped and a loom. With regard to the depiction of a loom, the loom weight gains a certain recursive character, superficially comparable to the *mise en abyme* in Early Modern art.

This recursive reference to the act of weaving is manifest in a more complex form in the case of the Daunian stelae. These flat, decorated stone slabs can be dated to the 9th – 7th century BC, with their centre of distribution in the area of modern Apulia.[25] They are fashioned in a long-rectangular shape, in some cases with a rudimentarily elaborated human head. The incised depictions of human arms, hands, and of artefacts like fibulae, necklaces, bracelets, and weapons contribute to the anthropomorphic character of the stelae. Since they are usually found in a secondary use as spolia, their original archaeological context is difficult to determine. The congruity of the items depicted on them and contemporary assemblages of grave goods hint at a primary use as funerary stelae. The depictions on the Daunian

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[23] Further examples for the described features can be found in the tombs of the necropolis of Osteria dell'Osa. The burials, dating from the 9th to the 6th century BC contain miniature representations of weapons, furniture, and houses in the form of house urns (Bietti-Sestieri 1992); cf. tomb 158 (Bietti-Sestieri 1992, fig. 3a. 23,13), tomb 128 (Bietti-Sestieri 1992, fig. 3a.17) and tomb 135 (Bietti-Sestieri 1992, fig. 3a. 67,7).

[24] Frey 1991, plate 3A.

[25] A comprehensive overview of the Daunian stelae can be found at Nava 1980 and Nava 1988. For the representation of spinning and weaving cf. Norman 2011.

stelae refer to the motif of weaving in three different ways. The clothing of the anthropomorphic figure of the stele itself is indicated by textile-like designs, that cover large portions of the stele's surface. Single elements like ribbons or fibulae are depicted as if they are holding the clothing textiles in place at the neck, breast, and shoulders. The second level of reference to weaving can be found in scenic representations, that are situated at the midsection of the steale, and which are divided into separate registers, similar to the images described further above. These scenic representations depict motifs known from other Italian burial contexts, like water-fowl, vessels, wagons, and finally persons weaving at a loom (**Fig. 7**). The weavers are sitting on high-backed chairs, and are displayed wearing long braids or veils. It is an interesting detail, that, in some cases, the anthropomorphic representation of the stele features the same cruciform symbol as the weaving persons, both wearing the symbol on their lower arms.

The third reference to the act of weaving, displayed on the Daunian stelae, is presented in a more ambiguous form. On some stelae, e.g. on stele SD 622, fibulae with long-chained pendants can be found in a prominent position between the
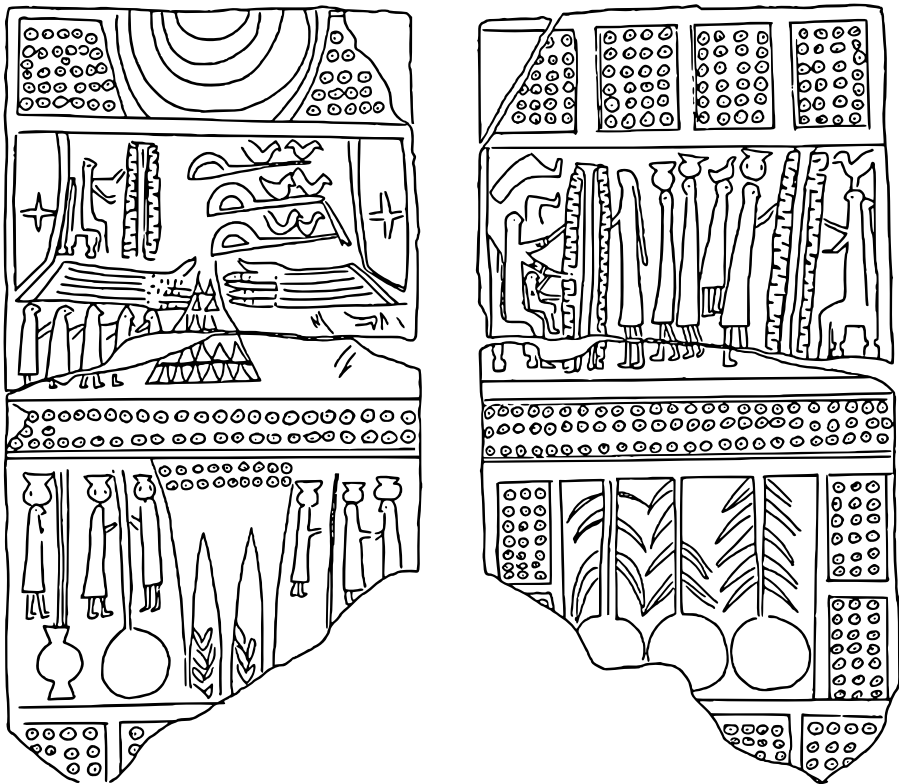

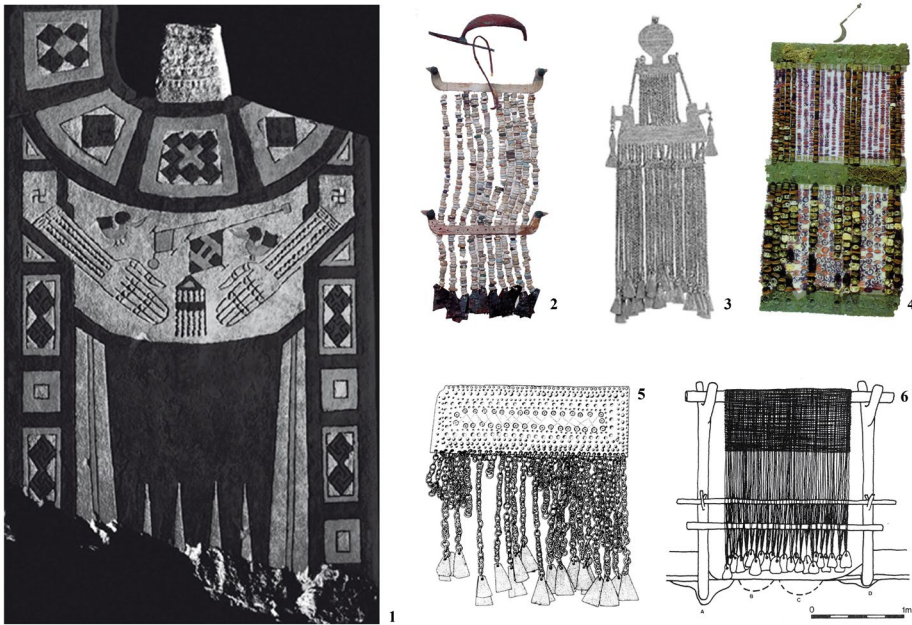Fig. 7: Daunian Stele SD 585 (after Norman 2011, Fig. 3.5).

Fig. 8: Iron Age loom representations (after Norman 2011, fig. 3.10 [1], Forte 1994 [2, 4], Montelius 1904, Pl. 160,6 [3], Forte 1994 [4] Tomedi 2002, Taf. 78,6 [5], Experimentelle Archäologie 1990 , 424, Fig. 1[6]).

stele's hands. The pendant, attached to the head of the fibula, consists of several vertically suspended chains and one or two horizontal bars. The pendant's basic design resembles that of a warp-weighted loom, with vertically suspended warp yarns and horizontally orientated top beam and heddle bar.

Real-life examples of the fibulae depicted on the Daunian stelae are also known as grave goods from several Italian Iron Age burials (**Fig**. **8**). Although their design differs in detail in construction and material, their overall design follows always the principle outlined above. In some cases, trapeziform bronze sheet pendants are attached to the lower ends of the vertically suspended chains, thus suggesting a similarity to frustum-shaped loom weights in shape and structural positioning. A different detail can be found on the fibulae pendants as well as in the representations of looms on the back of the throne from Verucchio. The terminal ends of the pendants' horizontal bars are shaped like the heads of waterfowl, similarly to the waterfowl-shaped constructional elements of the depicted looms.

This exemplary comparison of finds from the Apennine peninsula and the South-Eastern Alps illustrates, that the motif of weaving materializes in different ways within Iron Age grave good assemblages. The visual depiction ranges from

low relief images to three-dimensional representation in the form of miniatures, mock items and tools or textiles. Another characteristic is the recurring overlapping of these different modes of representation, with figurative references to the motif being present on actual weaving tools or weaving products.

4. Conclusion

A loom, found in a burial context, consists in its single technical components of the pieces, we regard as constitutive of a loom. Due to this, it can be recognized as a loom by the modern viewer. However, its deposition in a tomb deviates from assumptions based on social practice, since the practical life activity of weaving would normally take place in a domestic context. Through its presence in a burial, the loom is detached from its trivial context, and gains a distinctive symbolic value. Based on the fact, that looms appear in figurative representations as well as in miniature representations (**Fig. 8**) in the same regional and chronologic environments, it may be assumed, that they play a specific role in a greater symbolic context. The inclusion of the weaving motif, and textile production in general, in the scenic representations known from Iron Age burials documents the motifs' symbolic usage in a narrative relevant to the context of the death of an individual. The scenic representations from the throne back from Verucchio and from the situla from Alpago testify to this vividly.

Narration in oral cultures, like the Early Iron Age communities of the Apennine peninsular and the South-Eastern Alps, is necessarily dependent on the spoken word, and thus has to follow different rules than in literate cultures. Information cannot be stored in text, and has to be repeated orally in order to be disseminated.[26] Thus, if content is framed in a narrative, it is easier to structure, to present, to retain, and to repeat. Nevertheless, to gain primary access to the content, it is still necessary to be personally present at its performance. Artefacts, related to motifs in the narrative, can emphasise the message of the narrative during its performance. After having played their supportive role in the dissemination of a narrative, objects can serve as markers, that trigger parts of or the whole narrative in the mind of the informed observer. With this is mind, it is reasonable to interpret grave goods with figurative character, as described above, in two, mutually not exclusive, ways in regard to their narrative properties. They can be seen as actual residues of a narrative performance on the occasion of the funeral of a deceased. From a more general point of view, they can be interpreted as markers, triggering the known content of a narrative in the mind of the observer. Returning to the example of textiles and textile production, it is necessary to note, that, as described above, artefacts referring to the overall

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[26]   Ong 2002, 24.

motif can be present in one burial in large numbers, whereas a different burial may yield only one or two instances of it. With regard to their supposed narrative properties, this can be interpreted as different degrees of emphasis in narration, and not so much as a question of wealth or social power. The concrete content of the narrative remains hidden to the modern researcher, due to the inherent performative quality of an oral culture's distribution of information. The performance of the narrative on the occasion of a transitional event like a funeral, and the depiction of real life transitional events, like childbirth, in the figurative scenes in this context, underline the importance of the narrative for life and structure of the Early Iron Age communities.

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