Migrations and Economic Interactions in the North Tyrrhenian Basin (1500 BC-100 AD): the Examples of the Straits of Corsica and Elba

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The difficulties in interpreting the collective and/or individual processes in relation with the human behaviour, even though the observer cannot evaluate his/her ability to detach him/herself from his own reference system, are obvious. In archaeological studies the question of the synchronic expression of stylistic and material affinities, often schematized under the vague notion of "influence", is recurrent, especially for far epochs, because it imposes by itself the problematic of otherness. The nature, the importance, the meaning, the impact and, ultimately, the significance of the mechanisms at the origin of these occurrences is indeed the source of many debates and reflections in which the notion of contact between groups, and therefore the identities of these groups, is always underlying. By simple geocultural logic, the attempt to define contact dynamics between regions separated by the sea is more concrete and obvious than doing so in the case of more or less adjacent terrestrial territories because it allows for absolving and transgressing the biases linked to a multitude of transfer phenomena rarely highlighted by the methods of archaeology but long documented and catalogued in social anthropology, even in ethnoarchaeology. The high difficulties of the horizontal transfer of cultural dynamics logically generates a materialized response during protohistory by the development of navigation, for a purpose which remains to be defined with precision but is multiple, multipolar and evolutionary each according to the considered periods. The ways of affinity can themselves vary according to the processes from which they result - before eventually becoming the cause - whatever the contact mechanism that causes it: mobility of people, goods or ideas, within a social, family, commercial sphere, etc., that the archaeological survey can only touch with difficulty.

Within the framework of our study, the Tyrrhenian Strait, on average 80 km wide, would thus play the double role of barrier and bridge between Corsica and Tuscany. In fact, the diffusion of Italic cultural dynamics to the islands – and vice versa? – has always been at least filtered before a digestion whose contours are dictated by the independence of local learning spheres – vertical transfer – which have often given way to reinterpretations and appropriations. By attempting to take into account the tacit and fleeting complexity of the phenomena involved, we will attempt here to relate the obvious correspondences expressed by craft production of furniture of Corsican and Tuscan protohistoric groups in a diachronic and contextual perspective, focusing on the issue of migrations.

The Case of Protohistoric Corsica

Preliminary Considerations about "Cultural Relations"

In this chapter we will try to present the material testimonies which illustrate direct relations between groups living in Corsica and in the neighbouring regions during the Bronze and the Iron Ages. In these contexts, the demonstration of technical or stylistic similarities between more or less distant regions makes it possible to envisage contacts and thus occasional, regular or institutionalized maritime migrations between the different territories.

The issue of the intrusion of exogenous elements into indigenous material systems is a recurring topic of the social sciences. In particular, it has been described in social sciences by Bronislaw Malinovski (1884–1942), who showed the various stages leading to the differentiated adoption of external models to their assimilation as an endogenous vector of identity. In the North Tyrrhenian basin, to which there belong the shores of Corsica, Sardinia, Liguria, Tuscany (mainland and islands) and Lazio, these problems can be measured by the study of movements of stylistic models by sea or land.

The study of the links maintained by the Bronze and Iron Ages Corsicans with their island or mainland neighbours is not a new subject.² Indeed, the proximity of other regions has logically had a great influence on the development of research, considering the geographical proximity of Tuscany, Liguria and Sardinia. For example, archaeology provided early – and for all periods – direct evidence of imports of raw material, revealing the existence of supply networks across the sea since the Mesolithic and consequently the role of small groups of migrants for ensuring this distribution. This is particularly the case for lithic resources during the Neolithic.³

During the Bronze Age it is not only raw material but also stylistic repertoires that arrive on the island. The Sardinian archaeologist Enrico Atzeni must be granted the primacy of discoveries around this topic, particularly through his research at Filitosa.⁴

In our context, the question of maritime relations can only be posed by taking into account the climatic and meteorological rules which have provided so many constraints in favour of certain relations to the detriment of others. The influence of the prevailing winds on sailing is also an important topic to be taken into account.

Illustrations

The chronological development of testimonies attests to extra-island contacts and migrations of ideas, styles and people between Corsica and the neighbouring region.

The "international phase" of the Campaniform productions did not reach Corsica. Indeed, around 2500–2300 BC the island is in its terrinian period, which is marked by total stylistic and economic hermeticism. It is necessary to wait until 2200 BC for evidence of a particularly fugacious regional Campaniform (Bell Beaker), present today at only three or four sites (fig. 1).⁵ Early Bronze 1 is part of a similar tradition. Later, in Early Bronze Age 2, contacts are established with Liguria and Southern France, illus-

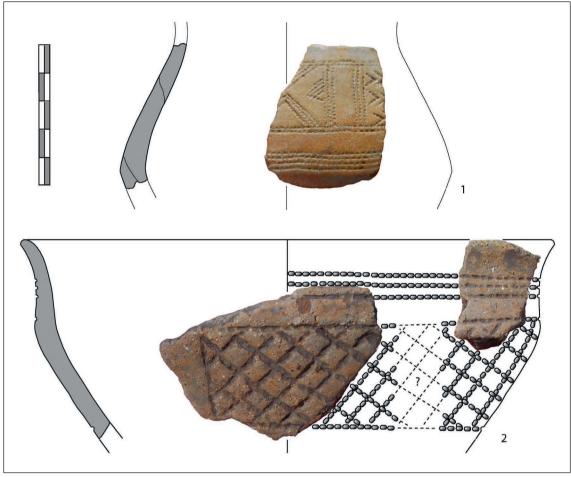


Fig. 1: Evolved Bell beaker decorated pottery from Corsica: 1. I Calanchi; 2. Monti Barbatu

trated by the diffusion of one-handled low hull cups (fig. 2).⁶ But the most obvious exogeneous element is the Sardinian component in the pottery of Early Bronze Age 2, which is clearly distributed in Corsica along a south-north gradient. This influence is notably characterized by the diffusion of footed cups in the burials as well as bowls with a bent handle. At the same time, the pottery also illustrates connections with Tuscany, mainly in domestic contexts. Contemporary metallic productions, essentially bronze axes, follow a slightly different pattern: Sardinian influences seem to be less active, while those of Tuscany and northern Italy are obvious.

This trend increases with the transition to Middle Bronze Age 1, since the axes of this period have much in common with the productions of Lombardy, Piedmont and the Swiss plateau (fig. 3). This connection to Central Europe is also illustrated by the presence of two *brotlaibidole* in the north of the island. These objects, of indeterminate function, date from around Middle Bronze Age 1. Their global spread extends from

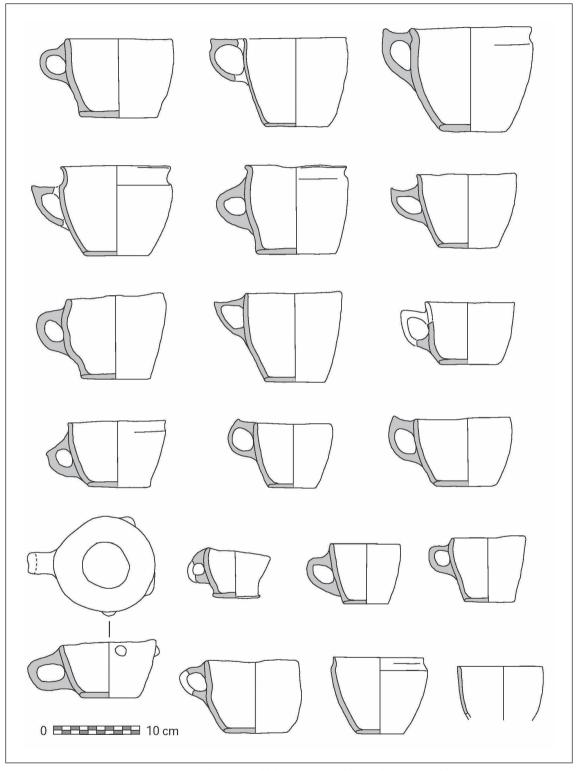


Fig. 2: One-handled low hull little cups from dolmen of Settivà $\,$

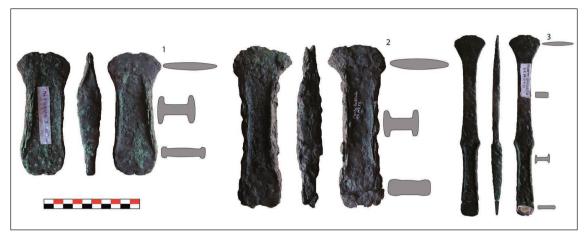


Fig. 3: Alpine and northern-Italy styles bronze axes from Monti Barbatu: 1. Allevard type; 2. Torbole type; 3. Cressier type

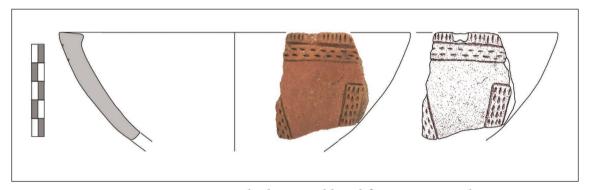


Fig. 4: Grotta Nuova style decorated bowl from Monti Barbatu

Southern Poland to Northern Italy, with an epicentre in Slovakia. One of them is present in Sicily. At the same time, Corsica massively adopts the ceramic forms and ornaments of the Proto-Apenninic, Grotta Nuova (fig. 4) and Viverone Italic styles. This phenomenon is particularly strong around 1600/1400 BC; it loses importance later. Therefore, the introduction of Italic stylistic repertoires to Corsica happens initially by an integration of the models. Subsequently, the decorative and/or morphological registers are subject to local reinterpretation. This cultural infiltration betrays important relations, with presence on the island, at first of potters arriving from mainland Italy, perhaps in the context of matrimonial alliances, from which then there developed a kind of tradition.

During the following period, the Late Bronze Age, these contacts with Italy become basically less intensive. At that time the material productions of the island undergo an autonomous evolution. However, it is during this phase that objects originating from the Eastern Mediterranean arrive in Corsica and Sardinia, probably thanks to a Mycenaean vector, which highlights the establishment of long-distance supply networks to this region, an epoch that marks the first globalization on a Mediterranean scale. The

analysis of the artefacts allows researchers to envisage that raw materials and artefacts were part of exchange networks connecting the Baltic region, Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Aegean shores to Corsica and mainly Sardinia, the final destination of *exotica* towards the West. Concerning this interpretation, it seems that only this kind of goods is travelling, even if the nationality of sailors remains unidentified. However, there is an exception: Corsica has also delivered several moulds attesting to a very specific work of *repoussé* metallurgy, probably from metal sheets. This technique is not known in neighbouring regions at these times, but it is well documented for the Aegean area and Egypt. Here again we could evoke a possible link between Corsica and the Eastern Mediterranean, perhaps even the occasional passage of specialized craftsmen who could be described as "technical migrants", known for the mastery of their art and expertise. A very similar case is known from Southern Sardinia with the immigration of Cypriot smiths at the same time or immediately after.

At the beginning of the Final Bronze Age many changes affect the Corsican society. Cultural references are then shaken and renewed.¹³ The south of the island looks back to Sardinia and objects are imported: Nuragic bottles with four handles, bronze axes, etc. Some pottery techniques are also introduced, perhaps indicating the crossing of the strait by Sardinian potters (women?), perhaps in a matrimonial perspective. This phenomenon is particularly illustrated by the identification of Northern Nuragic ceramic techniques, such as the use of baskets to flatten and standardize the bottoms of the vases.¹⁴ Contemporarily, the relations with the Italic space are not abandoned. Certain funeral practices, but also forms of vases or bronze weapons reveal frequent contacts between Southern and the regions of Central and Northern Italy. A recent discovery confirms this aspect. It consists of a glass bead belonging to the typology and showing the chemical composition of the Frattesina type, found in a tomb in north-west Corsica. This object reveals a more or less direct connection with a workshop of the lower valley of the Po river, like Frattesina.¹⁵

The Early Iron Age shows stylistic and traditional continuity, but coupled with an evident cultural hermeticism. Only the burials illustrate contacts to the outside: to the Villanovian area in the Northern valleys, ¹⁶ to Sardinia in the south. Around 565 BC the Phocaean colony of Alalia is founded. One generation later the Greeks will be driven out by a coalition of Etruscans and Carthaginians, who will remain there until the Roman conquest in the third century BC. All along the classical period the city will have little influence on indigenous groups. With the rise of Roman commercial networks during the Republican period, Corsica is characterized by new complex dynamics, materialized in particular by the export of local products to Tuscany, Elba and Liguria. ¹⁷

Discussion: Centre, Relay or Periphery?

If we put all this information into perspective, we can see that the history of relations between the Corsicans and their neighbours is full of changes particularly during the different phases of the Bronze and Iron Ages. At the beginning of the period, after a

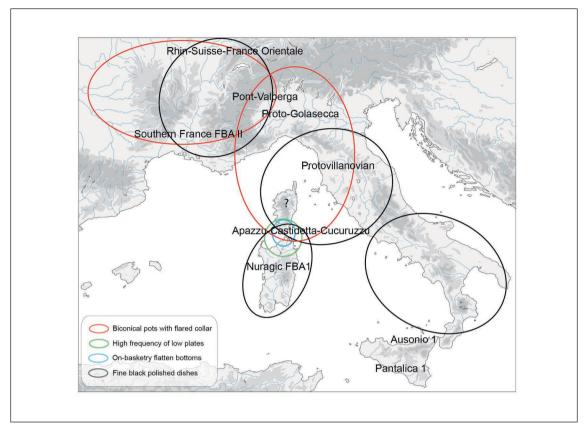


Fig. 5: Cultural relations in the Tyrrhenian context during the early FBA from the point of view of Southern Corsica pottery

long period of hermetism in the Chalcolithic, Corsica opens to the Western Mediterranean. At this time the occurrences of the Sardinian and Northern Italian repertoires serve as a cultural reference for local groups. Subsequently, in the Middle Bronze Age, the importance of Sardinia will decrease in favour of Tuscany. With the dwindling of relations with Etruria during the Late Bronze Age, Eastern Mediterranean imports will appear. In the Final Bronze Age, a rather global period of renewal, Northern Sardinia and Tuscany will once again play a key role in the formation of the repertoire of island industries (fig. 5). The middle/final phase of the Final Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age are characterized by a new moment of hermetism, materialized by a notable differentiation towards the neighbouring area. Only at the end of the Iron Age, maybe under the influence of Roman economic trends, new forms of contacts are born and propel the island into Antiquity.

In any case, the model of integrating new ideas brought by maritime migrants, for which reasons whatsoever, remains the same: first import or copy, later assimilation, finally reinterpretation. Unfortunately, archaeology only provides us with the distorted image of the consequences of these small migrations. Anyway, the positioning model

of Corsica in the protohistoric Mediterranean networks clearly refers to the idea of a peripheral sector, a territory receiving stylistic infiltrations from its closest and most dynamic neighbours. With the automatic assimilation of these characters, depending of phase, the island should be considered a centre, a relay and/or a periphery in the Tyrrhenian cultural systems. In concrete terms, the situation reveals relatively frequent relations between Corsican, Sardinian and continental groups from Early Bronze Age 2. These contacts are made through the navigation circuits, perhaps in a general context linked to the supply networks of raw materials. Nevertheless, the integration of stylistic models and, above all, technological know-how illustrates more advanced ways of collaboration which penetrated deeply into local learning spheres. One of the preferred hypotheses for explaining these processes is the practice of exogamy, which could be qualified as a specific kind of migration.

The Case of Elba

The island of Elba, the largest in the Tuscan Archipelago, has since antiquity been a key transit point between the Tyrrhenian route of cabotage and the itinerary linking the largest islands of the northern and central sector of the Tyrrhenian Sea (Corsica and Sardinia). The opportunities afforded by this location are complemented by those provided by the island's size, its morphology, its creeks (especially those of Portoferraio and Porto Azzurro), its resources in terms of water and agro-pastoral activities and, for the latter stages of Protohistory, mining (iron and copper).

A strong relationship between Elba, Sardinia and Corsica appears extremely consolidated already from the Copper Age, presumably due to the start of metallurgy and the circulation of technological knowledge. This situation is also reflected by the funerary practice on Elba until the early Roman period.

Between the Bronze Age and the early Iron Age an effective settlement network only exists for the sub-montane area of Monte Capanne and the mountain ridge around the Gulf of Portoferraio. Summit settlements – located at fairly constant distances – share many common elements such as natural defensive position, the presence of perennial springs of water a few meters away and the existence of a mixed economy, agricultural-pastoral, confirmed by the set of archaeological material discovered (fig. 6).¹⁸

The settlement of this phase also shows an established interest in the exploitation of copper ores, demonstrated from the same position of settlements and the presence of "depots" of bronzes in adjacent locations to mining areas.¹⁹

The typical bronze finds from depots and burials dating to the early Iron Age clearly indicate broader cultural horizons of reference, allowing for the reconstruction of a network not only within the Populonia area and the most advanced centres of the nearby Tyrrhenian coast but also with inner Central Italy (Bologna region) and, above all, with Corsica and Sardinia (fig. 7).²⁰

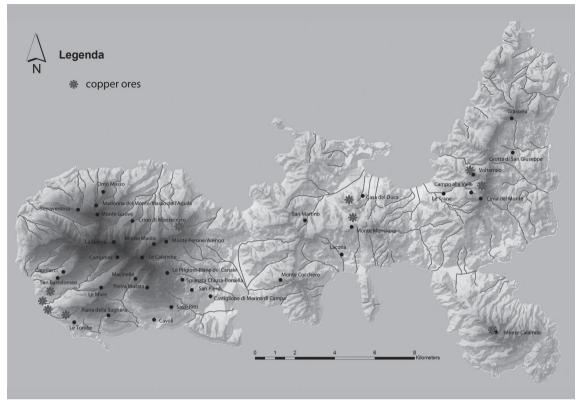


Fig. 6: The settlement on the island of Elba between the end of the Bronze Age and early Iron Age.

Still in the LBA-EIA, local burial customs (consisting of inhumation into rocky natural caves) are evidence of the cultural syncretism between Elba and the mid-western territories of Corsica and Sardinia.

Tombs at Monte Moncione, Monte Calamita and in a few caves in western Elba²¹ are of greatest importance, due to the exceptional burial rite (fig. 8): inhumation in rocky caves is rare in Northern Etruria in the Iron Age, as it was replaced by incineration rituals.²² In Etruria the use of rocky natural caves for burial purposes in the Villanovan age is documented only at Riparo Biserno (San Vincenzo, LI), near the Campigliese Hills.²³ It is not a mere coincidence that the same burial custom was at the same time in use in both these contiguous and directly connected mining districts (Elba and Colline Metallifere).

Inhumation into rocky natural caves is not found in Etruria but is widely spread in Corsica,²⁴ where up to the Late Iron Age collective burial in caves or gorges is the rule, with a few exceptions; the same ritual occurs in Gallura, Sardinia.²⁵

As a consequence of the common Elban and Corsican funerary customs, the similarities between metal objects from rocky tombs at Moncione (Elba) and Corsica is not surprising.

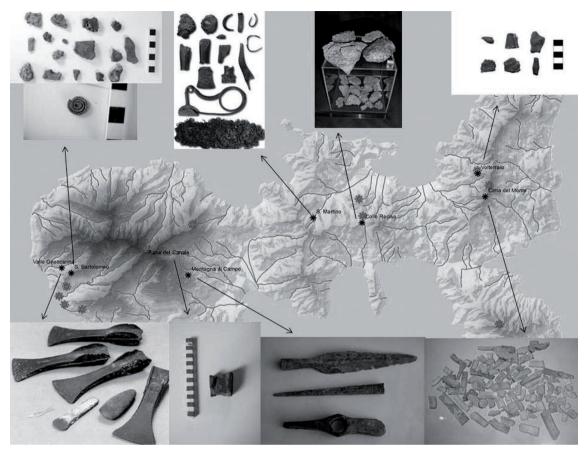


Fig. 7: "Deposits" of bronzes found on the island.

Plain bracelets from Elba graves are similar to Corsican items, and the presence of a biconical pendant is noteworthy that can be compared to the several olive or biconical pendants retrieved from the burial cave at Ordinaccio. These ornaments were considerably popular in Corsica between the 8th and 7th centuries BC.²⁶

Ancient relationships between Corsica and Populonia through the island of Elba are suggested by a passage in the Servian comment to the Aeneis. There, three different versions of the legend of the foundation of Populonia are given: the first one connects Populonia to a people from Corsica; the second one defines it as a Volaterranean colony; the third one says that the Volaterraneans seized it from Corsicans. From these tales we may assume that in Servius' sources people from Corsica founded Populonia on the mainland, before or after the formation of the Etruscan confederation; then, Etruscans from Volaterrae seized it from the former dwellers and founded a colony in the same place.

Of course no archaeological evidence can be put forward to support the above tradition, though many findings of Peninsular objects testify for the circulation of people,

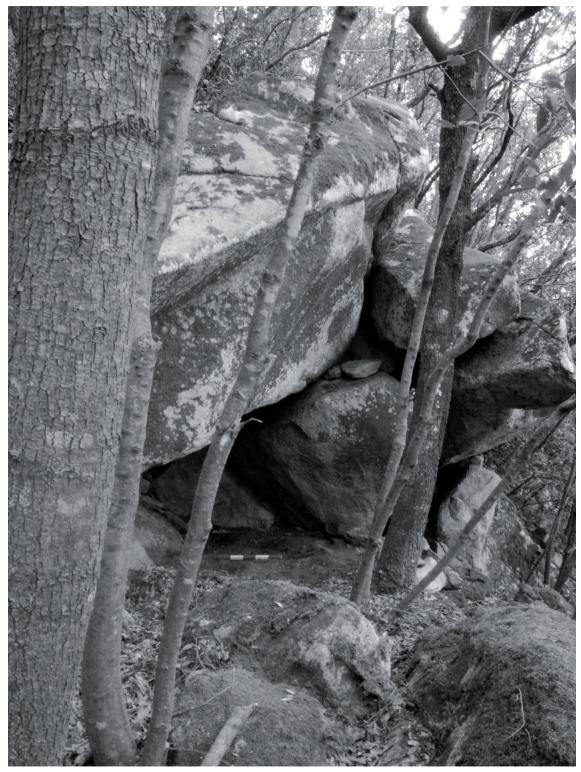


Fig. 8: Monte Moncione (island of Elba). Rocky natural caves used for burial purposes.

goods and artisanal designs between Corsica and the mainland;²⁷ but anyway new data from Elba supports several suggestions.

There is a long tradition in literature about ethnic commonality between Elba and Corsica peoples, focusing on the Middle Ages and relying on clear lexical and linguistic affinities which are not considered here.²⁸ From an archaeological point of view, the geographic location of Elba as a bridge between Corsica and the mainland; common burial customs and some aspects of material culture; a strong toponomastic influence from Corsica on Elba; all these issues together enlighten the strong relationship between Corsican and Elban communities and the possible presence of a Corsican group settling on Elba.

The continuity of use of rocky caves and gorges for burial purposes in the 6th century is again an unusual feature, unparalleled on the mainland. This choice could be interpreted as the will of the local people to represent themselves according to their tradition and to recall well established burial customs and social features, though by then living under Populonian rule.

The items composing these tomb assemblages consist mainly of Caeretan buccheroes and Etrusco-Corynthian probably from Vulci and are of the highest importance for tracing trade routes hat reached the island of Elba in the Archaic age, probably through Populonia.²⁹

As a conclusion, we may assume that settlement patterns on Elba from the earliest times can be better understood through reference to the 'metropolis' of Populonia on the one hand and, on the other hand, to the various peoples frequenting the islands of the Tuscan Archipelago, which since the early Neolithic was a crossroads for sea routes reaching Tuscany from the South and from Sardinia and Corsica. The connection to the sea predisposes the island of Elba to international relationships and trade and to a bridging role in the Tyrrhenian sea, therefore enhancing from the beginning the multiethnic (Corsican, Sardinian, Greek and Populonian) feature of the island.³⁰

Notes

¹ Malinoski 1922.

² It is therefore logical already at an early stage that the pioneers of archaeology were interested in this, with more or less success, such as Roger Grosjean (1966) who developed the famous theory of the invasion of Corsica by the Shardanas, an illustrious group of the Coalition of the Sea People. These ideas have now been abandoned.

³ Le Bourdonnec et al. 2010.

⁴ Atzeni 1966.

⁵ Camps – Cesari 1991; Peche-Quilichini et al. 2019.

⁶ Peche-Quilichini 2013.

⁷ Graziani – Lorenzi 2010.

- ⁸ Peche-Quilichini Cesari 2014.
- ⁹ It is interesting to note that some very particular techniques are incorporated by Corsican potters, especially a know-how consisting of enhancing the decorations of a white paste inlay made of crushed bone.
- ¹⁰ Peche-Quilichini et al. 2016.
- ¹¹ Graziani et al. 2014.
- ¹² Lo Schiavo 2001.
- ¹³ Peche-Quilichini 2014.
- ¹⁴ Peche-Ouilichini forthcoming.
- ¹⁵ Peche-Quilichini et al. forthcoming.
- ¹⁶ Acconcia Milletti 2011.
- ¹⁷ Piccardi Peche-Quilichini 2013.
- ¹⁸ Zecchini 1971, 20-24; Zecchini 2001, 62 f.
- ¹⁹ Delpino 1981, 275; Maggiani 1988, 197; Zecchini 2001, 47; Colmayer 2007, 60; Lo Schiavo Milletti 2011, 309–355; Alderighi et al. 2013, 67–81.
- Delpino 1981, 291 f.; Maggiani 1988, 197; Zecchini 2001, 71 f.; Ducci 2001, 222; Lo Schiavo et al. 2009, 203–213; Falchi Milletti 2012, 1613–1617; Milletti 2012.
- ²¹ Foresi 1867; Delpino 1981; Zecchini 2001; Maggiani 2006.
- ²² Bartoloni 2003; Bietti Sestieri 2011.
- ²³ Fedeli et al. 1989, 149–185.
- ²⁴ Delpino1981; Lanfranchi Weiss 1997.
- ²⁵ Ferrarese Ceruti 1968; Oggiano 1996.
- ²⁶ Lanfranchi Luzi 1971, 127–140; Lanfranchi Weiss 1997, 401 f.
- ²⁷ Milletti 2012; Bartoloni 2000, 33; Delpino 1981; Lanfranchi Weiss 1997, 204.
- ²⁸ Sabbadini 1919-1920; Cardarelli 1934; Cardarelli 1963, 521.
- ²⁹ Martelli 1973; Maggiani 2006.
- 30 Cambi et al. 2014, 375-394.

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