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Goths and Lombards in Italy: the potential of archaeology with respect to ethnocultural identification

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Recent archaeological practice offers new, more complex data regarding the ethno-cultural markers with which to trace allochthonous groups in Italian territory. Such data provides a new starting point for analysis of their distinctive features, cultural development, and the manner and timing of their integration process.

Keywords: barbarian, identity, migrations, Italy, Early Middle Ages

La più recente pratica archeologica offre un rinnovato e più articolato quadro di dati relativi alla possibilità di stabilire l'identità etnico-culturale dei gruppi migranti. Tali dati forniscono un nuovo punto di partenza per l'analisi delle specifiche caratteristiche, studiarne lo stadio culturale e i modi e i tempi dell'integrazione.

Parole chiave: barbari, identità, migrazioni, Italia, alto medioevo

1. Introduction

The potential of archaeology for ethno-cultural identification in the age of migrations and of the birth of the Roman-barbarian kingdoms has been heatedly debated for years.

In the study of the complex processes of the ethnogenesis of the barbarian *gentes* based on written sources, the historiographic trend known as the 'Vienna School' is renowned for its resolute criticism of the very concepts of 'ethnicity' and 'traditional culture' in the barbarian world. Starting from an (undoubtedly appropriate) focus on an open, fluid and composite cultural framework, this perspective has reached the point of even denying the existence of a collective consciousness of identity or of ethnocultural cohesion,

in favour of a picture of rapid acculturation and assimilation into the Roman world. This has led, as an automatic consequence, to the exclusion of the possibility that specific archaeological features could be the result of specific cultural attributes that might be employed as indicators of ethnicity.

The present work is meant to be a contribution to the debate. In Italy too, there has been a major qualitative leap with regard to the archaeology of the barbarian world, because excavations are now investigating not only funerary sites – extensively and strictly stratigraphically excavated – but also traces of the neighbouring settlements. Moreover, archaeology is refining its analytical approaches, also thanks to sciences such as physical anthropology and archaeometry. This is an undoubted chance for an improvement in research, when compared with the more traditional archaeology of barbarian cultures, which was focused on typological studies of weapons and costume accessories deposited in burials, but yet deserves credit for having defined important specialist knowledge. Several case-studies analysed here have the potential to be useful for testing the possibility, in current archaeological practice for recognising the Gothic and Lombard presence in Italy, bearing in mind that such groups had a very composite nature. The most distinctive specificities will be sought, instead of the more common features they progressively acquired when integrating themselves.

2. The potential of recently discovered sites

Until about ten years ago, the identification of the Ostrogoths in Italy was based on a few artefacts from burials, mostly found out of context or from old, poorly recorded finds which lacked additional information concerning the circumstances of their discovery: ‘zone fossils’ (prevalently female brooches and buckles) recognized by comparison with the East-Germanic cultural material known from the countries of eastern central Europe, isolated finds largely removed from their archaeological context¹. Although today the number of Gothic finds is still decidedly limited (especially if compared with the relative abundance of Lombard sites), recent excavations have begun to throw a new light on the possibilities for recognizing migrant

¹ After the weighty compendium of material evidence pertaining to the presence of the Ostrogoths in Italy which Volker Bierbrauer published in 1975 (BIERBRAUER 1975), the important exhibition on the Goths at Palazzo Reale, Milan in 1994 (*I Goti* 1994) included some new and better-documented finds from burials, but the general picture it gave was similar. In fact in 2001 Gian Pietro Brogiolo, reflecting upon the time of the Goths in northern Italy, suggested the establishment of a Gothic archaeology (in an ethnocultural sense) or even a Gothic period, a brief span not easily distinguished from the preceding era with respect to most parameters of change (BROGIOLO, POSSENTI 2001, p. 257).

groups of East-Germanic origin and for investigating their (admittedly multifaceted) cultural physiognomy (starting from the more traditional and distinctive survivals²), an indispensable starting-point for identifying the nature of their settlements and their impact on the landscape, as well as the dynamics of their interactions and integration with the pre-existing population.

At the site of Frascaro (Province of Alessandria) careful excavation has brought to light a cemetery with 27 burials (to date) and a part of the associated settlement, dating from the late 5th to the first half of the 6th century³. The latter was composed of huts made entirely of wood, one of which was rectangular (3,8 m by more than 4 m long) and sunken, with an internal partition based on two beams which supported several small uprights and numerous wattle fragments, part of the standing structure (fig. 1, a). These technical and typological features are characteristic of a long Germanic tradition (although not necessarily exclusive to these peoples)⁴. The cemetery was a short distance from the settlement and probably enclosed by a palisade. Some of the burials were in coffins made from hollowed-out tree trunks placed in grave cuts (fig. 1, b): this custom – quite common among Germanic peoples⁵ – has been recorded along the long migration

² Written evidence was discussed by Stefano Gasparri in a 1993 study on Germanic traditions attributable to the Goths in Italy, although in his opinion this constituted “fragments of national Gothic tradition” lacking the coherence of a still-vital tribal culture, which latter condition he clearly discerned with respect to other representatives of the Gothic kingdom present in Italy, such as the Rugians and Heruls (GASPARRI 1993). In the same publication, Walter Pohl investigated the persistence of traditions from the steppes, transmitted by the nomadic peoples with whom the Goths lived in close contact during the Pontic-Danubian phases (POHL 1993). He underlined especially the ambiguities – changes in funerary customs (e.g. the disappearance of vessels), the semantic complexity of images which did not necessarily have the same significance in different settings, his conviction that cranial deformation was by now “a usage which did not characterize the Goths in Italy” (p. 234), the inter-ethnic transmission of names – which did not allow the recognition of material and linguistic evidence of distinct and homogeneous steppe traditions. He thought that during the re-definition of their political identity, the Goths in Italy had constructed a past that was able to “maintain the feeling of ethnic identity of a small group of nobles in a Roman environment which exercised strong cultural pressure” (p. 250). With regard to the linguistic aspect, it has recently been sustained that “Graeco-Roman names were at times used by Goths, but the inverse situation, of Romans with Gothic names, is not found” (FRANCOVICH ONESTI 2010, p. 188). Gothic names are therefore reliable indicators of Gothic presence; furthermore, among the Goths “Gothic was still current and spoken in the mid 6th century” (*ibidem*, p. 184).

³ MICHELETTI 2003, 2004; MICHELETTI, VASCHETTI 2006. The 2007 excavation is unpublished; work to date has not uncovered the entire site: both the settlement and the cemetery continue beyond the excavation limits. One of the most accurately datable objects is a silver quarter-siliqua of Theodorich in the name of Anastasius (491-518) from t. 11.

⁴ Among the Goths, rectangular sunken huts divided in two are known from settlements of the Černiachov cultural phase (3rd-4th century), such as at Lepesovka in Volinia (*I Goti* 1990, pp. 35-36, figs. 1.20-22). With regard to the diffusion of the *Grubenhäuser* in Italy, mainly between the second half of the 5th and the late 7th to the first half of the 8th centuries and mostly in north and central regions in concomitance with the arrival of Germanic peoples, see Vittorio Fronza's article in this volume.

⁵ See, for example, the two perfectly-preserved tree-trunk coffins from the Alemannic cemetery at Oberflacht, with two twin-headed snakes on the lids (STORK 1998, fig. 471). Burgundian tree-trunk burials, at times associated with intentional skull deformation, continue until the 7th century (ESCHER 2005, p. 129).



Fig. 1. The Gothic site of Frascaro: a. sunken hut; b. inhumation in hollowed-out tree trunk (t. 24); c. intentional deformation of the cranium (t. 23); d. pair of bow brooches (from t. 26, which also contained a buckle with Cloisonné plaque) (Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici del Piemonte).

route of the Goths, who left their homeland in Poland in the first centuries AD⁶. In Italy, it has been recognized in the late-4th century graveyard found at Goito (province of Mantova). A group of 38 burials are distinguished by the frequent presence of dress accessories belonging to the Černiachov - Sintana de Mureş phase of Gothic culture, with the addition of nomadic elements⁷ (fig. 2). At Frascaro intentional deformation of the skull was also found⁸ (fig. 1, c), a practice that was widespread in eastern central Europe, particularly between the 5th and first half of the 6th centuries, on the part of the Alans, Huns and East-Germanic peoples⁹. The clothed female burial was accompanied by bow brooches in the upper torso region, single or in pairs

⁶ *I Goti* 1994, pp. 48, 56, 68-69, figs. I.48, I.76.

⁷ This burial ground is of great interest as evidence of the presence of a migrant group living in Italy during the late Empire, interpreted as Goths and/or Alans belonging to the Roman army; see: MENOTTI 2006; SANNAZARO 2006a; SANNAZARO [in press]. "Gothic tree-trunk burials" have also been found in Parma, "outside the S. Barnaba [now Garibaldi] Gate" (CATARSI 2007).

⁸ The skeleton from t. 23, the only one with a well-preserved skull.

⁹ Among recent review articles on the subject, see: BUORA 2006; PANERO 2006-2007; HAKENBECK 2009.



Fig. 2. The late 4th century Goito cemetery: Gothic brooches, gold leaves and nomadic mirror (above: t. 210, t. 206; below: t. 214) [from Sannazaro 2006a].

and at times associated with striking belt buckles of Germanic design¹⁰ (fig. 1, d); it was still the practice to place pottery and wooden containers in the tombs, in line with pre-Italian Gothic funerary customs¹¹.

The variety of different kinds of ethnocultural indicators now known (rather than just dress accessories, the pertinence of which to allochthonous groups however has been confirmed) adds up to a decidedly diversified body of material evidence – inevitably transient and of scarce visibility, but of considerable historical significance – pointing to the presence of middle-status East-Germanic family groups. It has the following properties: 1) a clear discontinuity with respect to autochthonous contexts, in which these distinctive features are absent; 2) continuity with regard to areas previously inhabited by East-Germanic groups; 3) internal consistency with regard to ‘markers’ from the same site; 4) concomitance with the arrival of migrant

¹⁰ The finds are being studied by the author and will soon be published. Although a male burial contained a pair of quite impressive buckles, probably from a belt with a shoulder strap for weapon attachment, the presence of these was not customary (MICHELETTI 2003).

¹¹ Opinions to the contrary, regarding the complete disappearance of vessels in Italian Gothic burials, are largely based on tombs that were not excavated with sufficient care (BIERBRAUER in *I Goti* 1994, p. 173).

groups recounted in written sources¹². Artefacts in every-day use (common-ware vases, glazed ware, terra sigillata and its imitations, soapstone), which reflect a certain vitality in the trading and circulation of both local products and those from centres involved in long-distance exchange (Micheletto, Vaschetti 2006), furnish evidence of one form of interaction of the group with established communities.

Based on current evidence and interpreted in ethno-cultural terms, this is a stimulating context for achieving a deeper understanding of the cultural level of the East-Germanic groups present during Theodoric's reign, if compared to the writings of Cassiodorus and other contemporary writers or with 'high-status' architectural remains. An approach which seeks to isolate each aspect and play down its originality and significance would seem merely a recipe for lost opportunities for increasing our knowledge.

At Collegno (Province of Torino), in proximity to a ford on the River Dora along a route which led to the Alpine valleys connected to Val di Susa and to Gaul, the presence of both a small group of Gothic burials (8 tombs) and a more extensive Lombard graveyard (157 tombs) has permitted the identification of typical and distinctive features that show clear differences between Goths and Lombards¹³. In the former burial ground the intentional deformation of the skull has been recognized in an adult male (probably the leader of the group) and also in a child, an occurrence which demonstrates that the practice continued after the Goths arrived in Italy (Bedini *et alii* 2006). The burial of the 'leading' male was accompanied by grave goods, in particular a belt with shoulder strap, but not by weapons, despite the subject's being identified as a horseman (on the basis of anthropological evidence)¹⁴; he was interred at the bottom of a large, deep pit that was covered above ground by a sizeable walled structure. Female dress traditionally involved the association of two bow brooches on the shoulders with a large and typically Germanic belt buckle (t. 6); sometimes the pair of clasps was substituted by a 'dove' brooch of local tradition – evidence of a gradual

¹² In HALSALL 1992 and 1995 the following criteria are proposed for the evaluation of whether a funerary ritual might be due to the arrival of a newly migrated ethnic group rather than the result of evolution within a region: 1) the significant difference of the ritual from those of the "host country"; 2) the identification of the precise geographical origin of the ritual, which is outside of the host country; 3) the appearance of the ritual in the host country before its disappearance in the place of origin and the similarity of these two occurrences. In BIERBRAUER 2007, pp. 111-112, the ethnic interpretation of the two women's burials with eastern-Germanic bow brooch worn in the center of the breast after the Roman fashion is solely based upon the assessment of the costume (which according to the more traditional Munich school is a strongly diagnostic feature) and wavers between Romanised eastern-Germanic women and Roman ones wearing unusual ornament. Frascaro is in my opinion a clear example of how a broader vision of the ethno-cultural indicators can improve the traditional specialised research.

¹³ PEJRANI BARICCO 2004, 2007a and 2007b. A complete publication of the site is in preparation.

¹⁴ BEDINI *et alii* 2006: skeletal traces were identified corresponding to what is known as "cavalryman's syndrome", since they probably derive from prolonged and energetic horse-riding.

change in usage – and a bow brooch hung from the belt, perhaps indicating a particular attachment to this object (t. 3)¹⁵.

The large Lombard cemetery exhibits unmistakably distinctive features, especially during the earliest period of use (c. 570-630): the presence of wooden chambers made of planks wedged between the four corner posts so as to line the sides of the sizeable grave cuts (and perhaps continuing above ground); the sacrifice of a horse, probably placed next to the tomb of the first-generation chief; the frequent interment of sets of weaponry (found in 22% of all first-generation burials); the marked taste for Germanic-style animal decoration and zoomorphic subjects derived from pagan imagery, such as the wild boar¹⁶ (fig. 3, a-d). In northern and central Italy the wooden “houses of the dead” and horse sacrifices are inevitably associated with graves containing weapons and female jewellery of Germanic tradition and therefore must share the same cultural roots: these have been found at Cividale - S. Mauro, Romans d’Isonzo, Povegliano, Trezzo sull’Adda – S. Martino, Leno – Campo Marchione, Goito, Testona, Collegno, S. Albano Stura, Spilamberto and Nocera Umbra¹⁷. Such practices are extremely similar to those of Lombard Pannonia (for example in the Szentendre cemetery, where there are a horse sacrifice, numerous wooden chambers, and weapons and traditional jewellery accompanying the dead)¹⁸ and would seem to have been associated with a group which arrived in Italy led by King Alboin, an interpretation also applicable to the Collegno community. The latter was of small size (about 16 individuals per generation, giving an estimated population of about 32, equal to two generations, for the settlement)¹⁹ and

¹⁵ The finds are being studied by the author and will soon be published. In this case the high social status of the subjects, who were probably Gothic aristocrats, may have motivated their “[maintenance of] the signs and customs of their ethnic identity, as a guarantee of the social privilege they had acquired and exercised” (PEJRANI BARICCO 2007b, p. 261).

¹⁶ PEJRANI BARICCO 2004 and 2007a; GIOSTRA 2004. The bow brooches in t. 48 of the Lombard graveyard were found between the femurs rather than on the shoulders. For the distinguishing features of traditional Lombard culture, its resistance to change, its function in the preservation of the ethnic identity of the conquered people, and on the characteristics of “a tribal group tied to the pagan traditions of its stock” (p. 8 and Note 1), see the rich and still – in my opinion – highly stimulating 1983 work by Gasparri (who, however, has more recently cast doubt on the very existence of a “traditional Lombard culture”: GASPARRI 2003, p. 27).

¹⁷ Cividale, S. Mauro: AHUMADA SILVA 2000 (the cemetery is in course of publication); Romans d’Isonzo: *Lombardi a Romans d’Isonzo 1989*, GIOVANNINI 2001; Povegliano: BERTELLI, BROGILO 2000, pp. 73-74, n. 18 (C. LA ROCCA); Trezzo sull’Adda: LUSJARDI SIENA 1997; LUSJARDI SIENA, GIOSTRA, in preparation; Leno – Campo Marchione: most recently, GIOSTRA (in press a) with bibliography; Goito: MENOTTI 2004; Testona: PANTO, OCCELLI 2009; S. Albano Stura: MICHELETTI, GIOSTRA (in press); Spilamberto: BREGA 2010; Nocera Umbra: RUPP 1996 and 2005. The list could be extended to include Fornovo S. Giovanni (province of Bergamo) (DE MARCHI 1988, pp. 23-28), together with other poorly recorded graveyards found in the past.

¹⁸ Most recently: BÓNA, HORVÁTH 2009, *passim*. With regard to the strong connection between the first phase of Lombard necropolises in Italy and those in Hungary earlier than 568 A.D., see, among others, BIERBRAUER 1993.

¹⁹ This assumes 20 years per generation (between birth and reproduction) and thus 10 generations during the two centuries of use of the cemetery, which contains nearly 160 inhumations. The same result may be obtained based on the average life expectancy of a generation (40 years), giving 5 complete generations each of 32 individuals (with parents and children overlapping).



Fig. 3. The Lombard cemetery and settlement at Collegno: a. 'wooden chamber' with corner holes (t. 48); b. pit with horse; c. weapons accompanying the deceased (t. 53); d. Germanic animal decorations (cross t. 49 and end-piece t. 69) and amulet with boar's head (t. 47); e. sunken hut; f. skull showing wounds (t. 70) (from Pejrani Baricco (ed) 2004).

notably compact, to judge from the surprising degree of uniformity which is emerging from studies of the grave goods, together with the physical continuity of the burial groups and the respect shown for the graves of preceding generations, evidently made possible by continued upkeep of grave markers²⁰.

²⁰ Also the transmission from one generation to another of some belt fittings (GIOSTRA 2004 and below) – and indeed of certain genetic characteristics – confirms the cohesion created by group traditions and blood relationships and expresses a sense of identity and of belonging to a well-defined lineage and cultural grouping.

These people lived in the contemporary 'sunken featured buildings' with stamp-decorated pottery on the floor surfaces which were found about 300m from the cemetery, near the Gothic burial ground (fig. 3, e). They were erected over buildings of quite different construction techniques and building plan, with wall bases in cobbles bonded with clay or supporting post-built structures²¹.

The recognition of a rural Gothic settlement that was substituted by a Lombard community constitutes an important starting point for studying the legal basis of such an occurrence, the role of the settlement (strategic, on public land? agricultural?), the changes undergone with regard to organization, society and religion (considering the attraction that would have been exercised by religious centres such as the nearby church of S. Massimo), both in the long term and after the end of the *regnum*: a concrete and detailed case study of the settlement dynamics and sociocultural evolution of allochthonous groups in Italy²².

Moreover, with regard to the Collegno Lombard community, the particularly significant contribution made by anthropological studies should be noted, permitting the establishment of not just morphometric characters and possible kinship links, but also of occupation, lifestyle and dietary habits²³. To summarize briefly, the armed men of the early generations actually did use weapons, often on horseback, and exhibited various (and sometimes fatal) wounds caused by blades; they clearly led quite dynamic

²¹ In BARBIERA 2010 (p. 145), the author outlined the Collegno site – without mentioning Goths or Lombards – with reference to a supposed interruption in the use of the cemeteries widespread in northern Italy in the mid 6th century, irrespective of the population component involved and notwithstanding the continuity of the associated settlements. With regard to the extensive Collegno burial ground, "this new foundation could have been due to a new mode of organizing funerary areas from the Lombard period onwards, perhaps for the purpose of accommodating the dead from more outlying villages". However, this re-interpretation of the preliminary readings of the site's excavators would appear not to take into account the archaeological evidence: the marked specificity of each of the two graveyards (which have easily recognizable cultural roots), without any significant time gap (an improbable circumstance from the perspective of cultural anthropology in a high-survival context such as a cemetery), of the even more marked discontinuity with the local burials, of the clear break indicated by the re-occupation of the settlement at this period (with overlying buildings of clearly different typology), or of the small size of the group and the homogeneity of the grave goods (quite different to those from the nearby and contemporary cemeteries at Rivoli), which do not seem to indicate dispersion from several nearby communities.

²² Gian Pietro Brogiolo writes that "it cannot be denied that the inhabitants of Varda locality, Collegno, constituted a group of migrant Lombards who settled on the site of a previous Gothic village (both clearly distinguished by their finds) and maintained its community identity for a couple of centuries [...] The data are incompatible with hypotheses of a rapid acculturation process and the easy and rapid integration of invaders and Romans. The Collegno site is difficult to explain on the basis of the concept of continuity without breaks, of *open micro-societies with fluid identities readily adaptable to changing circumstances* [Barbiera 2005, p. 7]" (BROGIOLO, CHAVARRIA ARNAU 2008, pp. 269-270). And likewise Sauro GELICHI (2005), in a work on Gothic and Lombard finds from Emilia Romagna, whilst admitting the difficulty of ethnocultural determination on the basis of objects which are often isolated and expressing the desire for a different theoretical approach to the study of Merovingian funerary contexts, more founded in post-processual archaeology, makes profitable use of what he calls "specific markers" for the Gothic period (*disiecta membra*) in relation to the debate on the forms and modes of the Gothic territorial presence in Italy, phenomena that are otherwise currently archaeologically invisible.

²³ BEDINI, BERTOLDI 2004; BARTOLI, BEDINI 2004.

and bellicose lives [fig. 3, f] (a profile which demonstrates, at least in this instance, that burial with weapons could reflect an actual state of affairs rather than being symbolic). Their contemporaries without grave goods, who presumably belonged to a lower social class, were involved in intense labour of a different nature. In the second phase of use of the graveyard, the individuals buried with (a by now reduced number of) weapons still showed signs of considerable physical activity, but not exposure to serious risks. During the 8th century, on the other hand, the group, by then more integrated with the pre-existing population, lived in less favourable conditions and carried out heavy physical labour. Analysis is currently being carried out of the DNA from various distinct but culturally similar cemeteries, which should afford a clearer picture of kin relationships within communities and, above all, the haplogroups of the latter. It would also be useful to conduct stable-isotope analyses on the skeletal remains. Such research on barbarian groups North of the Alps has yielded interesting results regarding diet, as well as identifying 'foreign' individuals who grew up in natural environments detectably different from the migration and new settlement areas²⁴.

Fieldwork has by now led to the definition of restricted geographical areas in which several sites of the same age are present; the comparison of these allows the identification of criteria of distinction or aggregation and of the cultural evolution of a local community and its diverse components.

In the municipal area of Leno (province of Brescia) (fig. 4) numerous Early Medieval burial groups are distinguished by the presence of tomb structures, mostly in brick/tile, of which some contain two skeletons, but no grave goods; 6th-century funerary inscriptions are also found²⁵. In the general panorama, the large Campo Marchione cemetery stands out as being noticeably different (fig. 5): the 249 tombs excavated to date included 15 wooden chambers and many weapon burials and female jewellery sets composed of pieces of evident Germanic tradition, especially in the first phase (ca. 570 – early 7th century)²⁶. Although they suggest average to above-average lev-

²⁴ Isotopes of elements such as strontium and oxygen are incorporated into bones and teeth of humans and animals during tissue growth to an extent affected by the geology and climate of a habitat; measurement of them allows identification of the area in which growth occurred (SCHWEISSING, GRUPE 2000; PRIVAT, O'CONNELL, RICHARDS 2002; HAKENBECK *et alii* 2010). The use of such analyses (which are costly) needs to be based on "indicators of mobility", starting with those which indicate possible generations of allochthonous immigrants – and which may thus receive independent verification.

²⁵ See in particular the finds from Villa Angelina, Via Umbria ('Morti del Lutù'), Via Pavese, those from the area of the monastery founded by Desiderius (but older than it), the graveyard associated with the church of S. Giovanni and the burial found in front of the façade of S. Nazzaro, and the group between Castelletto and Milzanello (Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici della Lombardia archive; CALPB 1991, pp. 124-126). On the Early Christian and Early Medieval inscriptions from Leno, see SANNAZARO 2006b.

²⁶ BREDA 1995-1997; DE MARCHI, BREDA 2000; GIOSTRA (in press a). The finds are currently being studied by the author. I have been told of the presence nearby of negative impressions left by wooden buildings, probably belonging to the associated settlement, which it was unfortunately not possible to excavate archaeologically.

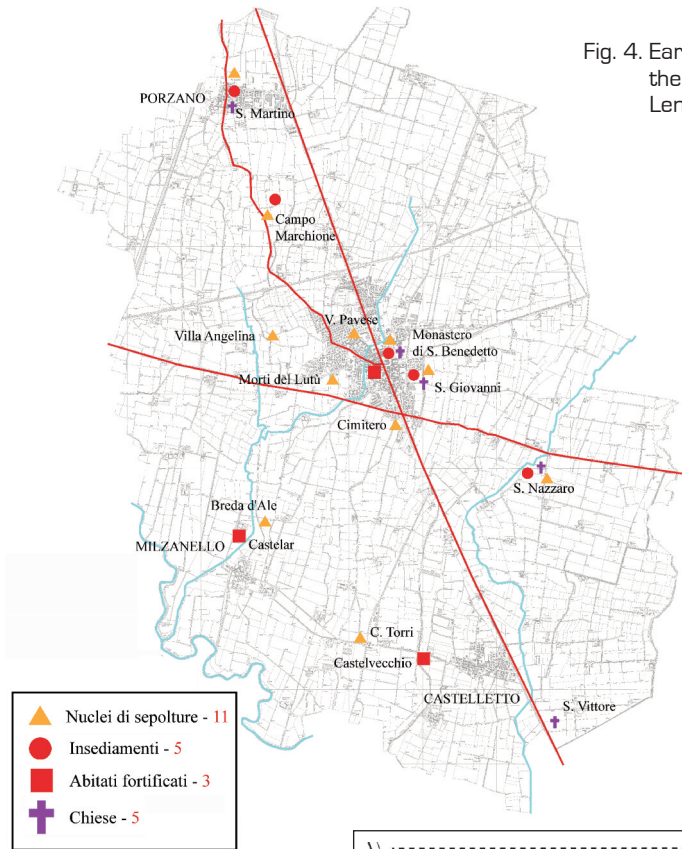


Fig. 4. Early Medieval finds from the municipal territory of Leno (A. Breda).

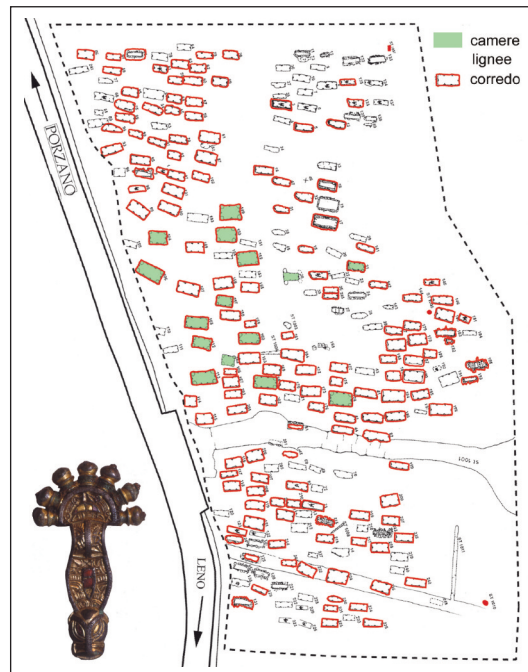


Fig. 5. Plan of the Campo Marchione cemetery, Leno, and one of the two bow brooches from t. 87 (Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici della Lombardia).

els of wealth, these burials do not contain indications of particularly high rank (such as crosses in gold foil, ‘ceremonial’ shields, or vessels in bronze or other materials). Such items, however, may be recognized among the objects from tombs containing weaponry (datable from the late 6th to early 7th century) found in the past near the modern cemetery. They include two prestigious glass drinking horns, as well as two gold-foil crosses²⁷, considerably larger than the relative local and regional averages (Giostra, in press b), finely worked and decorated with precociously-adopted motifs – drawn, in the case of the human figure on one piece, from the Mediterranean iconographic heritage – and indicate the presence of two high-ranking males. These were probably associated with a different, but nearby, settlement, such as that of Leno (which was definitely fortified, at least later on) the inhabitants of which were perhaps buried in a separate burial area²⁸. From Breda d’Ale, north of Milzanello, another locality which was fortified during the Medieval period²⁹, comes a prestigious ceremonial shield with central *applique* in gilt bronze; together with other weapons, it indicates the burial of at least one further high-ranking individual.

The large cemetery at Campo Marchione, together with the other burial grounds, fell out of use in the second half of the 7th century. Several groups of grave goods from the graveyard which surrounded the baptismal church of S. Giovanni are also datable to this period (Breda 1992-1993). In the most notable tomb, t. 120, were interred a *Langsax* with minute silver decorations on the scabbard, damascened spurs with ornamented straps and a knife: a typical reduced group of weapons of a certain prestige from a late 7th to early 8th century burial. Unlike the extensive Campo Marchione graveyard, S. Giovanni also yielded two gold crosses, smaller than those found in the vicinity of the modern cemetery, but with decorations deriving from Mediterranean traditions (De Marchi 2006). The grave goods from the church reflect the changed funerary practices of the Lombard cultural sphere, by now consciously Christianized, together with a greater integration with the pre-existing local community. The inscription that was applied to the opening of the t. 120 *scramasax* scabbard, “RADONI VIVA[T] IN D[E]O SE[M]P[E]R” (fig. 6) was clearly and correctly engraved. It is probably indicative of a high level of literacy on the part of the possessor: an aspiration drawn from the Christian for-

²⁷ VON HESSEN 1973; DE MARCHI 2006.

²⁸ It is highly probable that the Leno monastery and parish church of S. Giovanni were enclosed by a protective wall at least from the first half of the 10th century, as is suggested by a 958 charter of Berengar II and Adalbert to Abbot Donnino (*idest monasterium cum sui adiacentiis in circuito in quo situm est cum baptismali ecclesia sancti Johannis*) (ZACCARIA 1767, p. 69. Doc. IV) and as was stated by Malvezzi at the beginning of the 15th century (MALVEZZI 1729, col 867) (I am grateful to Andrea Breda for this information).

²⁹ The *castellum Dale* (near Cascina Breda d’Ale) in the vicinity of Milzanello is mentioned from 1001 onwards (SETTIA 1984, p. 185, n.139, p. 317, n. 67). For the 1885 Borgo d’Ale find of five or six burials, see CALPB 1991, p. 124, n. 851, fig. 37.

mulary, suggestively associated with a weapon³⁰. The cultural itinerary traced above would have been an appropriate prelude to the foundation in A.D. 756-760 of the nearby monastery by King Desiderius, of which recent excavations have brought to light significant structural remains and a tomb distinguished by a plastered interior with painted crosses³¹.

Numerous Early Medieval villages were present in the countryside, evidence of the many-centred nature of settlement in this period; burial grounds, presumably associated with these, are found in the vicinity of each.

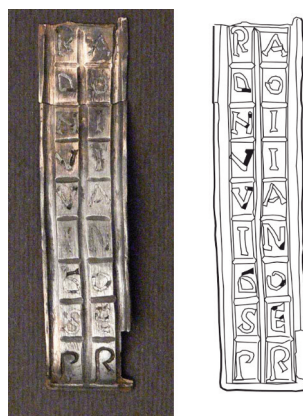


Fig. 6. Fitting in nielloed silver with inscription from t. 120, Leno, S. Giovanni (photo: Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici della Lombardia; drawing: C. Giostra).

3. The study of grave goods

A correct and complete evaluation of a burial ground where grave goods are present necessitates a careful study of each of these artefacts, with regard to: typology, origin and distribution; decorative style and the tradition from which it derives; function and possible adaptations (regarding dress, activities and every-day habits); degree of wear and possible breakage; modality of deposition, association with other objects and relationship to other information obtained from the burial³². This body of data (considered,

³⁰ With regard to other inscriptions or pseudo-inscriptions present on grave goods (damascened belt end-pieces), which allow us to trace a gradual and anything-but-linear increase in literacy (passing by way of the attribution of magical properties to writing and inaccurate copying), see GIOSTRA 2007, pp. 332-334. In particular, on the belt-end from t. 17 at Collegno (c. 670-700), the initial "+DOMINE" probably signalled the start (the rest is missing) of a Christian invocation (GIOSTRA 2004, p. 124, with Alemann parallels from North of the Alps). On the ornamental bridle disc from Reggio Emilia the inscription reads: "+ SI DEUS PRO NUS QUI CONTRA NUS", of Biblical inspiration (STURMANN CICCONE 1977, p. 14); nearer to the Leno formula is the inscription on a cruciform brooch from Castel Trosino, t. 32: "RUSTICA VIVAT" (PAROLI 1995, pp. 312-313).

³¹ BREDA 2006; STRAFELLA 2006, who dates the painted tomb to the second half of the 8th century.

³² By way of example, 'S' and bow brooches in which the Germanic animal ornamentation is preponderant seem to last for a few generations and then disappear without becoming fashionable and being transmitted to the pre-existing population; the opposite happens, though, with other jewellery of non-barbarian origin such as 'basket' earrings and cruciform brooches, which are found in burials of Germanic tradition. Cast-bronze hand basins, mostly produced in the East Mediterranean, were much more widespread, being found as status-symbols in Anglo-Saxon territories, and were probably connected with practices of Roman origin. Gold foil crosses appear suddenly in Italy, without Pannonian precursors, for reasons that were probably socio-political as well as religious, but which await precise delineation; on the highly visible surfaces of the most prestigious Germanic shields the *triquetra* decoration was replaced in time by crosses or peacocks around a *kantharos*.

when possible, in the light of the broader picture obtained from settlements, churches etc.) may furnish the archaeologist with important information regarding the relevant cultural horizon and stage; it would seem reductive, on the other hand, merely to compile a record of objects present, simple indicators of gender and status³³.

Actually, careful study of the finds can reveal the consequences of actions performed during the funeral ceremony, components of a complex ritual generally considered to be lost to us. For example, the intentional breakage or rendering unusable of highly symbolic objects – such as the belts to which weapons were attached, at times found with fittings broken or scattered in the grave due to the leather part having been cut into pieces (as in t. 60 and t. 53 at Collegno and t. 86/11 at Selvicciola, Ischia di Castro), combs from which the teeth had been intentionally broken in a single operation (e.g. at Collegno, t. 47) and perhaps also weapons, as seemed to be the case with the shield from t. 82/2 at Selvicciola, Ischia di Castro (province of Viterbo) of which the handle bar had been intentionally bent in antiquity – inevitably suggests actions performed shortly before interment³⁴.

In tombs at Collegno a damascened belt fitting was found which was probably a generation older than the other objects present (all of similar date, but different to it with respect to typology and style of decoration). It sometimes happens that it is possible to recognize (on the basis of clear resemblance) that an “intrusive” object has come from the belt of a nearby inhumation, from which a piece is missing³⁵. In such a case, due to the antiquity of the anomalous item, it seems unlikely that the explanation could be a repair; this has been interpreted instead as the symbolic transmission of parts of accessories that are of special importance and perhaps – in the case of a weapon-belt – possess some magical-apotropaic significance³⁶, probably between members of the same family: an inheritance of spiritual import that may have been received during the funeral of a forebear and kept, mounted on a new belt, until death³⁷. Anomalous associations of fittings, of guaranteed reliability in the recent example from Turin because of the quality of the excavation, should perhaps be reconsidered in the case of older finds of belts such as those from Pisa (fig. 7), Calvisano (province of Brescia) - locality Mezzane, t. 1, Piedicastello (province of Trento) and others. Analogous cases have also

³³ See Conclusions below.

³⁴ GIOSTRA 2004, pp. 52-53; INCITTI 1997, pp. 220, 225-230.

³⁵ GIOSTRA 2004, pp. 61-63; this circumstance links unequivocally several burials found during the 2006 excavation campaign, currently under study.

³⁶ Among the nomadic steppe horsemen and warriors from Germanic tribes there is a collection of beliefs and legends centred on the concept of the belt as affording protection to its wearer.

³⁷ Several 8th-century wills (in particular that of Rottopert of Agrate of 745) illustrate that – in addition to the custom of leaving belts to heirs – they might also be broken up and the most valuable parts handed out to the poor, for the good of the dead man’s soul (GIOSTRA 2004, p. 63, with bibliography).



Fig. 7. Damascened belt fittings from Pisa (from Magistra Barbaritas 1984).

come to light in extensive cemeteries that are currently being studied, such as Leno, Campo Marchione. This custom – which is well known north of the Alps – is widespread, rather than a mere local peculiarity³⁸.

With the most rigorous archaeological analysis, including exact records of the position of each find and careful attention to traces of every sort, even the least obvious, remains of the funeral banquet and the food offerings buried with the deceased may be detected. In t. 50 at S. Mauro, Cividale del Friuli, there were two vessels – a pottery jar and cast bronze jug – that were found covered by two flat pieces of stone. They probably originally contained beverages. A pig humerus was found together with these; it constitute the remains of an offering of meat to the deceased, perhaps food for the hereafter. From the fill of the same tomb the remains of a funeral meal were recovered, consisting of burnt bones and numerous pottery dishes, perhaps broken ritually³⁹. Remains of food offerings, most commonly eggshell and chicken bones, but also sheep, cattle and pig bones in smaller quantities, are frequent in Hungarian cemeteries; in Italy they are found in the early phases of use (up until the first decades of the 7th century) of extensive cemeteries with marked Germanic characteristics, such as Leno-Campo Marchione, Romans d'Isonzo and Nocera Umbra⁴⁰.

Returning to the more “usual” grave goods, in order to attempt to decipher the signs and symbols chosen for a burial and to appreciate the significance and connections between the forms and decorative styles which are as frequent in Germanic material culture as they are ambiguous (above all during the periods of greater change), I have, in the past, emphasized the usefulness of attentively seeking correlations between the intrinsic features of an artefact and the other burial data: all are possible choices made in relation to the same social identity (Giostra 2007). This approach aims at the identification of recurrent combinations or absences which are unlikely to be the result of chance, but which rather appear to be the expression of consistent, perhaps widespread, behaviour: expressions of cultural compo-

³⁸ GIOSTRA 2004, pp. 61-63; GIOSTRA (in press a). Among the more striking cases from Leno, as well as the plain iron ‘five-piece’ belt from t. 57 accompanied by a damascened multiple-belt end, is the bronze belt with *Kerbschnitt* decoration which supported the sax in t. 180, of which the functionally necessary fittings remained, but which was missing no less than four plaques. These, in turn, were attached to the ordinary dress belt in t. 234.

³⁹ AHUMADA SILVA 2005. Further fragments of burnt pottery were found among other burnt material in the fill of t. 43 (of a horse and horseman) in the same burial ground (AHUMADA SILVA 2000, p. 198).

⁴⁰ BÓNA, HORVÁTH 2009, *passim*; GIOSTRA (in press a); *Longobardi a Romani d'Isonzo* 1989, *passim*; RUPP 2005. For a review of the consumption of meat and food offerings among the Alemanni: KOKABI 1997. The deer antlers and cattle horns found in tt. 24, 26 e 28 of the cemetery at S. Stefano in Cividale (AHUMADA SILVA, LOPREATO, TAGLIAFERRI 1990, pp. 48, 64, 79) must have had a different meaning, probably apotropaic. Likewise the more common boar tusks (Cividale, S. Stefano, t. 5; Offanengo, t. 3; Nocera Umbra, t. 16, and others); these would seem more similar to the amulet pendants made from antler tips or other bone (e.g.: Montichiari: DE MARCHI 2007, p. 64; Leno, Campo Marchione, t. 208, GIOSTRA (in press), previously called “Thor’s Hammers” (BÓNA 1976, p. 84, fig. 27).

nents so important that they are widely shared, above and beyond local cultural models and social equilibria and individual or family choices. Some examples are briefly outlined below.

The multi-purpose nature of tools such as scissors leaves ample scope for the interpretation of their presence in burials; they are presumed to have been used in various every-day environments – domestic, artisanal or agricultural/pastoral. Due to their consistent association or equivalence with combs (when present)⁴¹, and – to a lesser extent – their frequent presence in the vicinity of the head of the corpse (especially if male), the existence has been hypothesized (with due caution and without pretence to exclusiveness) of a symbolic value linked to hairstyle, an essential attribute of the traditional image of the Lombard and in particular a reference to the cutting of hair: an act which, in Germanic tradition, marked several important moments in the lives of men and women. These customs may still have been observed in Italy, or just symbolically recalled so as to give expression to the condition of warrior/free man or married woman⁴².

Let us consider the numerous gold crosses that must have been sewn on shrouds, widely distributed in the tombs of those of upper and middle status from the time of the Lombards' arrival in Italy. The varied iconographic repertory found in the decoration ranges from Germanic animal interlacing to Mediterranean-style plant shoots, including also various figurative subjects represented more naturalistically, monograms and coin impressions: images of various origins whose meaning is sometimes ambiguous, probably because they were the expression of cultural and religious intermixing. The criteria by which the subjects were selected remains mysterious⁴³.

Amongst these, the representation of coins has been variously interpreted: as ornamental or amuletic in function, as an expression of authority, as an allusion to Christ, the supreme authority, and in other ways. Coin impressions appear on a limited number of crosses from: Vicenza, SS Felice and Fortunato (with the reproduction of a coin of Heraclius, 610-641); Milano,

⁴¹ An illustration of what is meant by 'equivalence with combs' is given by the positions in which the two objects were found in the double burial at Nocera Umbra, t. 111, where each was beside the head of one of the two warriors equipped with identical weaponry; together with the scissors was a knife, perhaps a razor (RUPP 2005, pl. 122). At Trezzo-S. Martino, t. 13, Chiusi-Arcisa, t. 5, and Borgo d'Ale, t. 2, combs, scissors and knife were wrapped up in a single bundle; elsewhere, combs and scissors were often found one on top of the other (GIOSTRA, in press c).

⁴² GIOSTRA 2007, pp. 321-322; TERZER 2001, p. 188, was also of this opinion. Among the ancient sources which cast light on such practices, I mention here the paintings of subjects of Lombard nationality which, according to Paul the Deacon (*Hist. Lang.*, IV, 22), Queen Theodelinda had made in her Monza palace and which depicted the traditional haircut, shaved on the back of the neck and head. With respect to women, Liutprand's laws still contain the definition "long-haired maidens" in reference to those unmarried (Liutprandi, *Leges*, II).

⁴³ To the c. 340 crosses listed previously (GIOSTRA 2000-2001), the 14 pieces in the Rovati collection in Monza may now be added, although doubts remain concerning the authenticity of several of these (GIOSTRA 2010).



Fig. 8. Cross in gold foil from Novara Cathedral (from Menghin 1977).

S. Ambrogio (two tremisses minted in Ravenna under Heraclius, 615-641); Novara, the cathedral (a barbarian-minted tremiss of Justin, 565-578); unknown provenance, probably Benevento (a tremiss of Leo III the Isaurian, 717-741)⁴⁴. In all the cases of known provenance, the locations are important urban or suburban Early Christian churches; the same representation is not found, however, in the many crosses from rural areas. This similarity of location which unites finds not otherwise linked by geographical area or chronology might offer some support to the religious interpretation of the impressed imperial effigies. However, the prestige of the churches, together with the privileged position of the Milan burial in front of the presbytery and the presence of a gold seal-ring, suggest that the tombs' occupants were individuals of considerable importance. The impression on the Novara cross (fig. 8) was made using the minting die of a barbarian coin, which was evidently available to the craftsman and not felt to be inappropriate with respect to the recipient. This suggests that the motif, rare in that it was exclusive, may have been reserved for leading figures, perhaps with public roles (perhaps even regarding mints – a precise reference to a social role).

In summary, this type of analysis, performed upon a wide range of grave goods, suggests that their presence may have expressed multiple meanings, from references to the most general (and continually evolving) cultural horizon to the ostentation of precise features of individual social role. They appear to be referring to different aspects of the deceased's "social identities".

⁴⁴ On the Vicenza find: LUSIARDI SIENA *et alii* 1989, p. 204, fig. 122; on the Milan find: KURZE 2004, p. 18; on the Novara find: MENGHIN 1977, p. 28, n. 24, pl. 17,1 and ARSLAN 1978, p. 10; on the cross which may be from Benevento in the National Germanic museum of Nuremberg: MENGHIN 1977, p. 28-29, n. 25, pl. 17,2 and, for problems concerning the hypothetical provenance, ROTIU 1984, p. 92. On typology: GIOSTRA (in press b).



Fig. 9. Glass-paste necklace beads from Trezzo, loc. S. Martino, t. 21 (from Lusuardi Siena, Giostra (eds), in press).

4. Archaeometry and experimental archaeology: craft traditions

Technical knowledge too may constitute a specific feature of the cultural profile of a people and reflect the complex processes of transformation and integration between different components of the population⁴⁵. Chemical and physical analyses which identify the raw materials and production processes of artefacts specific to each one, furnish factual data useful for recognizing specific places of origin and technical traditions.

The classification of the polychrome glass necklace beads from Trezzo sull'Adda, locality Cascina S. Martino (fig. 9), which are fairly typical of the typological panorama of Lombard Italy, formed the basis for a programme of x-ray microanalyses performed upon samples taken from them and from material selected for comparison from Cividale, Voltago, Nocera Umbra, Castel Trosino and, for contrast, from Byzantine Cròpani (province of Catanzaro)⁴⁶.

To put it briefly, the base glass used, obtained from several main centres or from recycling waste, was rendered opaque and coloured with metallic slag, in particular copper-based substances for opaque red and transparent green, or compounds of tin and lead for white and yellow: substances derived

⁴⁵ LA SALVIA 2009 is also of this opinion, and emphasizes the importance of the archaeology of production processes for the identification of the different traditions of material culture, that of Mediterranean origin and that typically barbarian, and for tracing the pathways of interaction between cultures through the transfer of technologies and/or objects. In essence, a technological tradition also constitutes a significant component of the ethnic and social identity of a human group.

⁴⁶ These analyses are discussed in VERITÀ (in press, with ample bibliography), to which reference should be made for further details. I wish to thank Marco Verità, who performed the analyses, for having allowed me to use the results outlined below. This is the first analysis of barbarian necklace beads conducted in Italy, but the field has already undergone a certain development North of the Alps (a recent publication is MATTHES *et alii* 2004).

from metallurgy or synthesized by means of processes similar to those used in metalworking. Among the principal colours, opaque yellow, white and red were produced using complex processes which were difficult to control; knowledge of the compatibility of the expansion coefficients of different glasses combined together in the glass beads also indicates a sophisticated technological understanding. The systematic use of tin compounds for the production of opaque whites and yellows – a well-understood technique – is found extensively in northern Europe from the 2nd century BC onwards, and in the Germanic kingdoms and Scandinavia between the 5th and 9th centuries the practice was widespread. This is quite different from the most typical Roman tradition, in which compounds of antimony are used to obtain the same colours. Thus there are, on the one hand, substantial differences from Roman glass-making techniques (also confirmed by the chemical composition of red-brown glass, to which iron oxide was added, and the inability to create blue or turquoise, generally obtained by recycling), and, on the other, close similarities with the production of central and north European Germanic peoples.

With regard to the (7th-century) Calabrian samples, the most notable discovery was that – in addition to new ‘recipes’ for the production of turquoise and black – these revealed the precocious adoption of a base glass not of ‘natron’ type, but of ‘soda-ash’ type and of possible eastern provenance, which is generally only found from the 8th century onwards⁴⁷; the sporadic occurrences found among samples from other localities derive from bead types which are uncommon with respect to the more typically Lombard artistic heritage.

The understanding and reconstruction of a product’s fabrication process, starting with the instruments used, may furnish archaeological evidence useful for the identification of the locations of workshops and areas of craft activity.

Cloths with gold brocade were traditionally considered to be luxury products made in Constantinople and perhaps Rome (for example in the *ergasterion* of the *Crypta Balbi*), subsequently traded with migrant groups⁴⁸. Before the arrival of the Goths and Lombards in Italy techniques were different: the thread was wound in spiral fashion around textile ‘reels’ (which have not survived)⁴⁹; it was not of the “flat with rectangular section” type, inserted into the weft during the weaving process, usually in such a way as to create a continuous field interrupted by tiny motifs left blank (fig 10, a). This second method of making precious cloths has many parallels in the barbarian burials of central and insular Europe.

⁴⁷ The use of soda-rich vegetable ash, obtained by burning littoral plants (saltwort etc.), rather than the potash-rich variety obtained from land plants (ferns, beech-wood etc.), excludes any connection with traditional North European technology.

⁴⁸ BERTELLI, BROGIOLO 2000, pp. 46-47 [L. PAROLI].

⁴⁹ BEDINI, RAPINESI, FERRO 2004, pp. 81; MASPERO 2002, pp. 219-220.

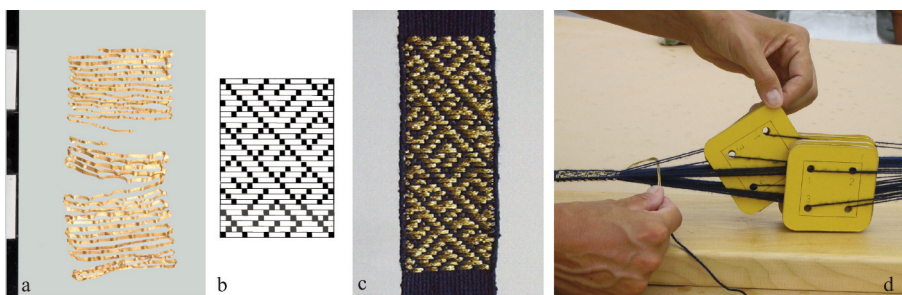


Fig. 10. a-c: brocade from Mombello Monferrato, t. 10, fragments of gold, decorative pattern and experimental reproduction; d: weaving with a tablet loom (a-b from Micheletto [ed] 2007; c-d from Giostra, Anelli, in press).

Experiments have confirmed the use of the “tablet loom”⁵⁰ (fig. 10), a rather simple, but versatile, device capable of producing bands decorated with multi-coloured designs which also permitted – thanks to a particular procedure – the insertion of gold or silver thread into the weft so as to create brocade borders. The widespread diffusion of the technique among barbarian peoples in Roman and Early Medieval times is indicated by occasional fleeting references in written sources, which seem to suggest diverse craft traditions: one was more common in the Mediterranean area where they were expert at using the more complex looms with heddles; the other, of pre-Roman origin, persisted above all among the ancestral populations of northern or barbarian provinces, and was associated with the ample potential of the tablet loom⁵¹. Above all, the extensive distribution of Roman tablet finds in northern central Europe and then in numerous Frankish, Alemannic and Anglo-Saxon contexts (fig. 11) – not to mention the discovery of a loom with the warp mounted ready for weaving in the ship-burial of Oseberg in Norway, attributed to Queen Asa (c. mid 9th century) – demonstrates the widespread familiarity of the Germanic peoples with the tablet loom (although this may not have been exclusive)⁵². The technique has also been recognized in several textile remnants from Lombard tombs⁵³.

⁵⁰These were conducted in collaboration with Paola Anelli and are described in detail in GIOSTRA, ANELLI (in press), which should be referred to for technical explanations, further archaeological and iconographical comparisons and related bibliography.

⁵¹For the classical period, see especially Pliny (*Naturalis Historia*, VIII, 196), who writes: *Plurimis vero licis texere, quae polymita appellant, Alexandria instituit, scutulis dividere Gallia* (“Alexandria indeed introduced weaving with very many heddles, which they call *polymita*, Gaul the division [of the warp] by means of tablets”). In the Poetic Edda, in the Second Ode of Guðrún, there is a passage for which the following translation has been proposed: “Hunnish maidens who weave gold braids with tablets [...]” (*Hunskar mejar / þær’s hlada spjöldum / ok gæra gullfargt*).

⁵²Unrecognized weaving tablets also existed in Early Medieval Italy (for example in the village of Noli, 8th-9th century phase, DE VINGO 2007).

⁵³For example in the border, made of very fine thread, found on the back of a bow brooch from t. 77 at Romans d’Isonzo (S. PIERCY EVANS in *Longobardi a Romans d’Isonzo* 1989, p. 134). In Pavia an *aurifarius* was active in 915 (SCHIAPPARELLI 1903, I, n. 99, p. 261).



Fig. 11. Weaving tablets from Alemannic settlements (from *Die Alamannen* 1997).

There is, then, no reason to suppose that the brocade from barbarian tombs was imported from areas under Byzantine control; a more convincing hypothesis (which will require further studies) is that from the 5th century onwards, barbarian peoples, as well as those of the Middle East, produced brocades, adopting their own decorative patterns and methods, such as the use of non-twisted strips. The production of bands and stoles using the tablet loom – which would seem to have been introduced into Europe mainly by the barbarians – was to flourish and remain widespread for the entire Medieval period (Collingwood 2002, *passim*).

5. The current historiographical debate and conclusions

Recent developments, the fruit of an archaeological practice ever more attentive to stratigraphic detail and the interaction of the discipline with fields such as physical anthropology and archaeometry, have made outstanding contributions to the identification of the presence of migrant groups and the reconstruction of the more peculiar traits of their cultural physiognomy, still certainly composite and dynamic. They are an essential basis for understanding barbarian contributions to Medieval society⁵⁴.

⁵⁴ The overall impression is undoubtedly one of complexity, given the variety of different circumstances recorded, but also of peculiar traits and shared characteristics, robust and coherent, which gradually become diluted and transformed. DELOGU 2007 (among others) is of a similar opinion.

I, among others, wish to propose – with all due caution – this interpretation of the variety of evidence which is emerging, that demands, above all, an insistence on the necessity of a rigorous in-depth analysis of material culture as an indispensable component of archaeology's contribution to the understanding of history in all its complexity. This viewpoint is in conflict with the historiographical tendency led by the 'Vienna School' (H. Wolfram, W. Pohl, with followers also elsewhere: in Italy C. La Rocca, S. Gasparri, and more radical representative in Freiburg: S. Brather)⁵⁵. As mentioned in the introduction, this school asserts the impossibility of archaeology ever providing evidence with regard to ethnic belonging, or identifying the ethno-cultural identity of migrating groups. According to this view, such groups, being open and composite, would have lacked ethno-cultural cohesion, and would have been quickly assimilated and integrated into the Roman world⁵⁶. These beliefs, projected onto archaeological research, rule out the possibility that specific material features could be the result of specific cultural attributes that might be employed as indicators of ethnicity; they are instead seen solely as expressions of *status* against a background of social mobility and competition, symbolic vehicles for the construction of social relations and strategies.

These assumptions, however, would not appear to be based on specific, exhaustive analyses of the material evidence, performed according to proper archaeological specialist procedures, without prior conditioning by the premises themselves. Further, the application of theoretical models adapted from sociology and cultural anthropology to cemeteries is restricted to the definition of their social organization and the interpretation of the presence of objects accompanying the dead in relation to the gender, age and social role of the individual⁵⁷. A specialised study of the artefacts and other material evidence is neglected. It is denied that these may have an identity-conferring value, in the context of an undifferentiated population, thus dilut-

⁵⁵ For example: POHL, REIMITZ 1998; BRATHER 2000; GASPARRI 2003; LA ROCCA 2004. In the present paper consideration of the more extreme positions of the negationist 'Toronto School' (W. Goffart, A. Gillet, M. Kulikowski and in the USA, P. Geary) has been omitted, on the grounds that little interest is shown in archaeological data. For a recent expression of the opposite position, see MODZELEWSKI 2008.

⁵⁶ Regarding the "construction" of ethnic identity in literary works such as Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum*, "there is no sense in seeking the 'true' peoples behind these narratives. 'Peoples' do not exist independently of discourses which, alone, give them meaning and coherence" (POHL 2006, p. 64).

⁵⁷ On the relationship between the world of the living and funerary representation and the funeral as a moment of communication within the community and an opportunity for the 'production of social identities', HÄRKE 1989 and 2000; LA ROCCA 1998; BRATHER 2007; for a sociological view of dress: VON RUMMEL (in press); for a discussion of gender as the key to the interpretation of clothed burials: EFFROS 2002; LUCY 2002; DÍAZ ANDREU *et alii* 2005; LA ROCCA 2007 (with respect to which questions are raised in DELOGU 2007, p. 404). For a summary of the application of Post-Processual Archaeology to funerary matters, in Italy: D'AGOSTINO 1985; CUOZZO 1996.

ing the discontinuities (pits containing horses, weapons as grave goods, cranial deformation and so on)⁵⁸, and neutralizing the notions of barbarian culture and identity⁵⁹.

Based on the conviction that the recognition of human groups on the basis of material evidence – which, after all, constitutes an expression of their culture and identity – is an essential process in archaeological epistemology, and in view of the specialist studies currently under way with regard to numerous important recent finds, I believe that fundamental interpretative hypotheses should be based, in the first instance, upon hard evidence of discontinuity, and thus on a solid and rigorous archaeological foundation. This is essential also for a productive interaction of archaeology with the disciplines of sociology and cultural anthropology, and constitutes an important contribution to the reconstruction of historical complexity.

⁵⁸ In PROVESI 2010 the ethnocultural value of funerary horse sacrifices is reconsidered with respect to the Vicenne-Campochiaro cemetery, currently in course of study and largely unpublished (information from Dr. Ceglia, the official in charge); a careful study of the grave goods is lacking. The interpretation draws on Cassiodorus' *Variarum*, in which the social importance of the horse is emphasized, but without mention of ritual sacrifice, whereas the vast archaeological literature on the subject is not taken into account.

⁵⁹ In BARBIERA 2005, a study centred on the Lombard migration from Pannonia to Italy seen through funerary evidence – and in particular on “the construction of gender and its relation to age classes and cemetery organization” (p. 10) – comparison is made between three Hungarian cemeteries (Hegykő, Szentendre and Tamási) and three in Friuli (Cividale-S. Stefano, Romans d’Isonzo and Liaris). Due to severe doubts concerning the ethnic identification of burial grounds (p. 7), “the cemeteries were selected exclusively on the basis of their chronology, location and completeness of documentation, ignoring the labels they were given on the basis of artifact types and styles” (p. 8). The study, moreover, was based on the “type of object, not distinguished by style, dimension or number” (p. 18) [these are therefore not studied, but merely registered]. The ‘archaeology of gender’ in this case consists largely of revisiting the association of weapons placed with the male dead and that of jewellery with the female dead, and establishing that the majority of the individuals were young or adult. “It was possible to verify that the same grave goods (with weapons and brooches), which was traditionally considered expression of the Lombardic origins of the deceased, were rather the expression of masculinity or femininity” (BARBIERA 2007, p. 345). From their distribution the social structure of the cemeteries is obtained. These seem to show a clear and rapid change between the graveyards of the two areas (and between those in Italy): more egalitarian in Hungary and with particularly marked social distinctions in S. Stefano. Various hypotheses are proposed by way of explanation. Despite the interest of a research into Hungarian sites that are still little known and of some sociological significance, some aspects of the archaeological analyses are not convincing. At least with regard to the Cividale burials with the richest and most numerous grave goods [studied in detail principally by MUTINELLI 1961], none are earlier than about 600, an epoch a little more recent than the migration itself – the age of Agilulf and Theodelinda -, which was characterized by more pronounced processes of social diversification (and interaction between groups), perhaps not unconnected with the well-known process of grave-good enrichment (and change in the case of females). The exclusivity of the gold belt from t. 1 of S. Stefano, still the only Italian example of its kind, suggests that this may be a rather unusual case. On the other hand, the first phase of Romans d’Isonzo, which dates to immediately after the Lombards’ arrival in Italy shares important cultural traits with the Hungarian graveyards, like the other ‘open’ Italian cemeteries (Leno-Campo Marchione, Nocera Umbra, Collegno, S. Albano Stura, Povegliano etc.). As to the burials at Liaris, considered to be different from the others and without any indicative traditionally-accepted Germanic features (weapons in particular), the impossibility of distinguishing ‘male’, ‘female’ and ‘neutral’ grave goods is attributed to a lack of gender signalling. Why not, to start with, a different ethnocultural character? Why, in the absence of indicators of mobility, “Changing Lands in changing Memories”? Lastly, the follow-up regarding the organization of family groups at S. Stefano may be found in BARBIERA 2007: the cemetery organization, determined by kin relationships and centred on the presumed family head, seen as a most significant factor for understanding the Lombard graveyard (though perhaps in reality shared with many human cultures), is found to correlate with the 3rd century Aquileia cemetery: “therefore, it might be a tradition with ancient roots” (p. 347).

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