

# Verucchio and its Hinterland. Landscape Archaeology in the Valmarecchia

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## Abstract

The special position occupied in prehistoric research by the proto-urban centre of Verucchio in southern Romagna can be explained not only in the extraordinary finds that have been made in its necropolis but also in its position as an Etruscan bridgehead in Umbrian territory. However, the history of the origins of the settlement and its zone of influence are largely unexplored. The project Verucchio: City Development and Trade Links, Eleventh-Seventh Century BC, supported by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), aims to address this desideratum at various levels such as survey, settlement patterns, trade routes and raw material supply. Research focuses on the areas directly adjacent to the valley of the river Marecchia, the main trade route between the Tyrrhenian Sea and the Adriatic coast in this area. Between 2009 and 2013 an archaeological landscape survey was successfully carried out and will be completed in 2015. Particular attention is being paid to topographically favoured hilltops and plateaus. In most of these locations archaeological remains with varying degrees of clarity can be identified through systematic site inspections. During the previous five survey campaigns more than 200 sites dating from the Stone Age to the Roman Imperial Age have been located. This

preliminary paper aims to give an overview of the most important known and some of the newly discovered archaeological sites in the Marecchia Valley.

**Keywords:** *Bronze Age, Iron Age, Hilltop Settlements, Verucchio*

## Introduction

In 2009 the Department for Archaeology of the University of Innsbruck, in cooperation with the Soprintendenza Archeologia dell'Emilia Romagna, started a survey project in the Marecchia Valley (fig. 1). The goal of the project is the exploration of vast portions of the valley to detect unknown archaeological sites as well as integrate already known archaeological sites into a Geographical Information System. Our research is not yet concluded but this paper will illustrate the methodology and some preliminary results of our research activity.

Initially the Valmarecchia Project was funded exclusively by the University of Innsbruck. During the first project phase (2009-2013), research focused on the archaeological landscape survey of the Valmarecchia, the trade-route between the

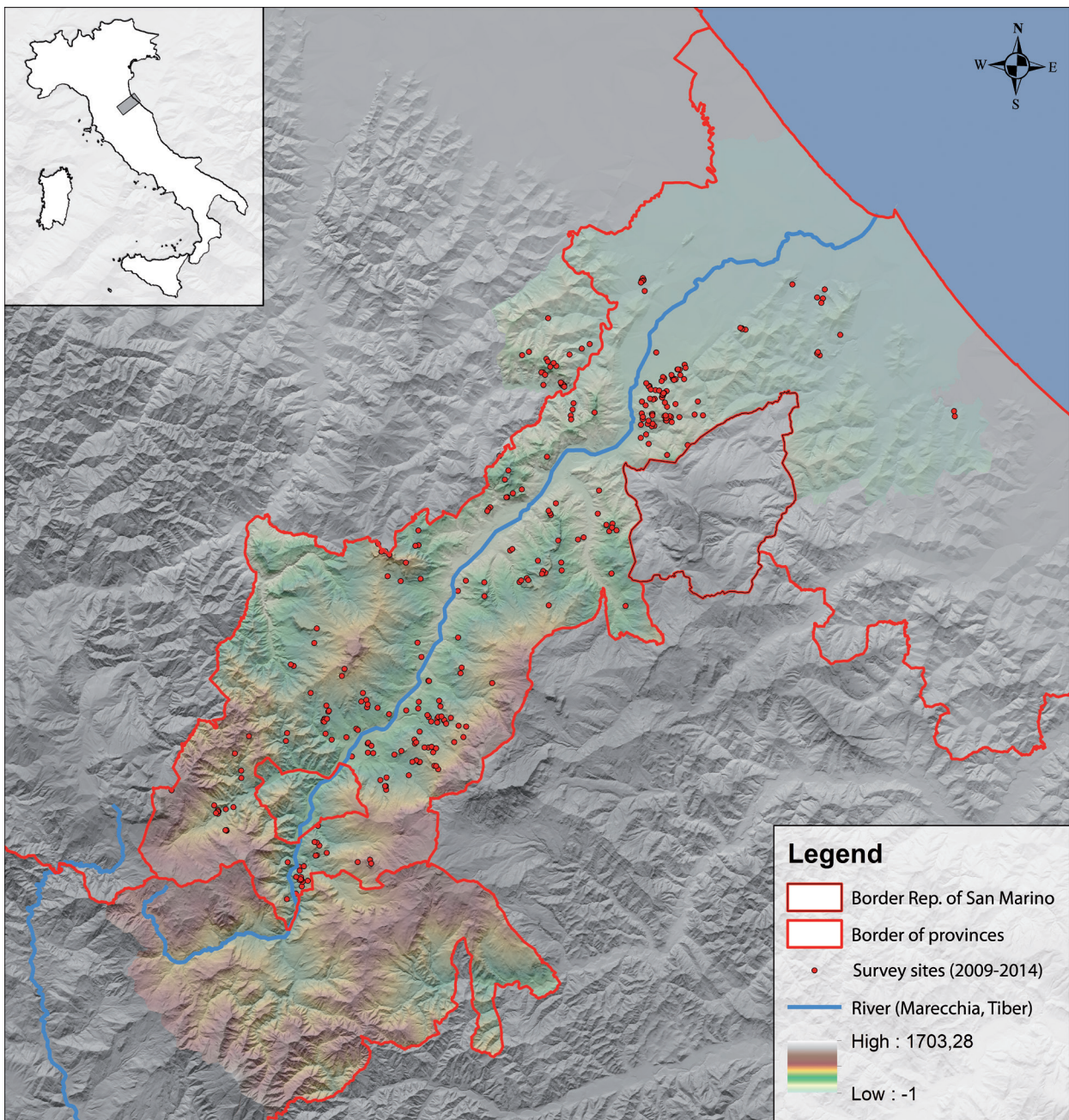


Fig. 1 Sites and artefact scatters in the Valmarecchia, preliminary results 2009-2013 (DEM: TINITALY/01; Tarquini et al, 2007; Tarquini et al, 2012).

Tyrrhenian Sea and the Adriatic coast. The data providing a settlement history of the valley will be developed for a better understanding of the centralisation-processes at Verucchio. Our results will then be compared to processes known about

the development of the proto-urban settlement types in Central Etruria and southern Italy.

Since 2014, the project is subsidised by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF). This allows us to extend our research focus: in addition to the archaeological field work, selected sites will be investigated using geophysical prospection methods. Further commercial and cultural contacts will be explored on the basis of material analysis of the imported raw materials and

the locally-produced luxury goods exported elsewhere. Together with numerous partners, the Soprintendenza Archeologia dell'Emilia Romagna, the Soprintendenza Archeologia della Toscana, the Ruhr Universität Bochum and Vassar College, we intend to determine the composition of bronze artefacts and the origin of the amber from Verucchio burial sites. In addition, the research is closely linked to the analysis of the amber artefacts found in Ephesus (Naso, 2013).

Even though the project is diachronic, research focuses on the formation processes of settlements during the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age. Since the Valmarecchia is seen as one of the major routes connecting the Adriatic with the Tyrrhenian Coast – the Iron Age centres of Verucchio and Vetulonia – acquiring knowledge about the prehistoric Marecchia Valley will bring us to a better understanding of the formation processes and the development of its main Iron Age centre Verucchio (Mansuelli, 1983; Von Eles, 2008).

## La Valmarecchia

The Marecchia Valley, in the southern part of the Emilia-Romagna, originates in the Alpe della Luna Mountains, Province of Arezzo, Tuscany, and stretches for more than 70 km in a north-eastern direction through the province of Rimini and the territory of the Republic of San Marino to the mouth of the eponymous river Marecchia (Polloni, 1966) at Rimini on the Adriatic coast. The upper course of the valley is rather narrow and characterised by steep slopes. At the town of Pennabilli it starts to widen and the slopes become gentler. When passing the hilltop town of San Leo, the alpine scenery begins to turn into hill-land that continues downstream until Verucchio, where the valley opens up into the coastal plains of the Adriatic Sea.

The landscape is formed, on the one hand, by clay soils which assume, due to various erosion processes, rather gentle forms, even in the steeper terrain. On the other hand, huge sand- and limestone rocks dominate the valley bottom in the middle course of the river (Santolini, 1988).

These flat-top mountains with dimensions of up to 30 ha harboured throughout the centuries settlements and fortifications of various cultures and dimensions and were embossed, until modern times, with the settlement-system of the Valmarecchia. The most prominent of these sites are the rock of San Leo, Verucchio and the Monte Titano harbouring the Republic of San Marino.

The Valmarecchia has always been an important traffic and communication route between the Adriatic Coast and Central Italy. In fact, the Valmarecchia is connected by the Viamaggio pass with the Tiber Valley and so with southern Etruria. This route – already used in the Early Iron Age as similar findings from Verucchio and Vetulonia suggest – was developed by the Romans after the foundation of Rimini in the third century BC connecting the newly founded colony with Arezzo. The original name of the road is unknown; by modern convention it is called Via Ariminensis or Via Maior (Rodriguez, 2004).

The geological characteristics of the Marecchia Valley and its long settlement tradition provide a series of problems when it comes to surveying the area with an archaeological perspective. The geological map shows how unstable the clay soils are, especially in the upper part of the valley, causing landslides of great dimensions destroying or covering up archaeological features. Further erosion of landslides often leaves behind badlands. Since this phenomenon is not limited to modern times but is seen as an ongoing formation process, the reconstruction of a paleotopography is an almost impossible task. Modern agricultural working techniques like ploughing with multi skank rippers, which penetrate up to one metre into the soil, also intensify the erosion-processes and the destruction of unknown archaeological sites. The development of modern settlements on the flat-top mountains since the Middle Ages has partly erased the remains of prehistoric settlements. The naturally fortified rocks, with their circumferential visibility, were at all times favoured spots for the foundation of towns, churches and monasteries. The modest elevations of the lower Marecchia Valley offered space for

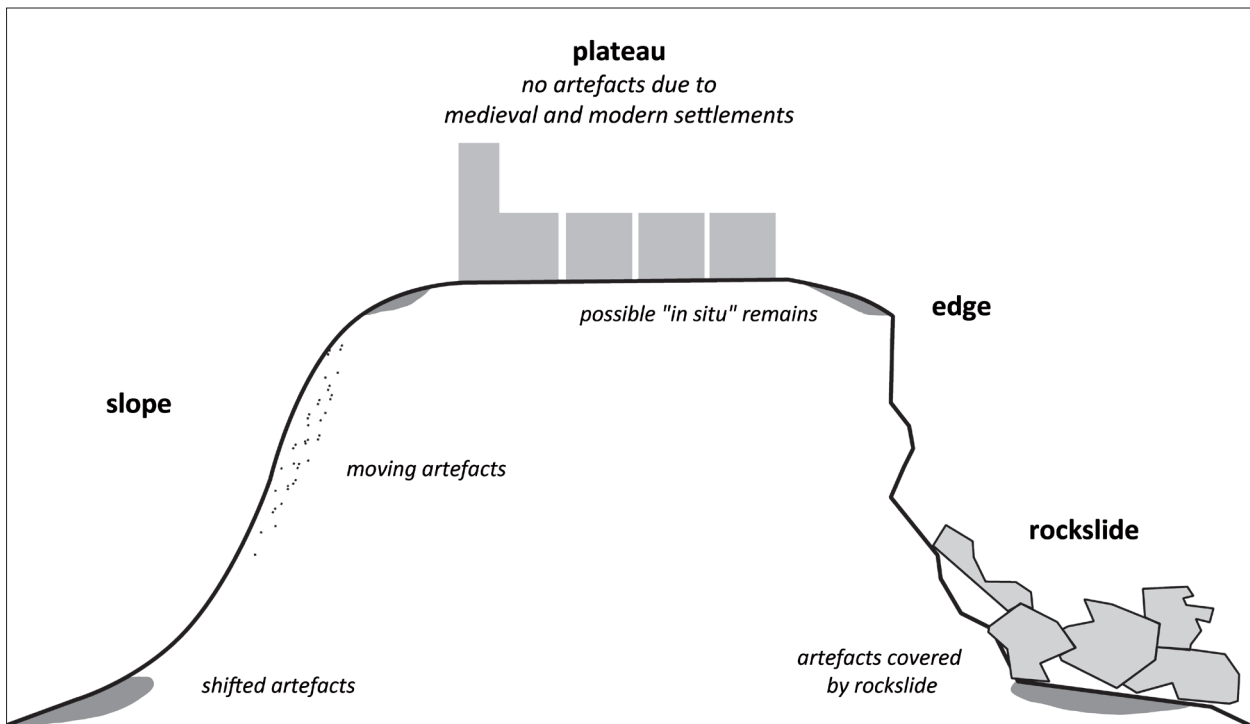


Fig. 2 Erosion-scheme of a “Sasso” in the Valmarecchia (modified from Pacciarelli, unpublished).

pre-Roman settlements and burial sites later obliterated in Medieval times by churches and monasteries like Sant’Aquilina, Sant’Ermete, San Fortunato, San Patrignano and so on (Copioli, 2008; Curradi, 1984).

It seems appropriate to adapt the erosion-scheme developed by Marco Pacciarelli for the flat-top mountainous sites in central Tyrrhenian Italy to the geological characteristics of the Valmarecchia (fig. 2). The geology of the Valmarecchia, as well as the reoccurring landslides by which the isolated hill-top sites – the so called Sassi – are affected, hinder investigations of pre-Roman settlements. Debris falling from the hilltops covers up shifted artefacts that were crumbled due to erosion processes, becoming inaccessible. The most ancient layers of these sites often are covered by tons of fallen rocks, making it difficult for further research. The rock of San Leo and the Rocca di Maioletto are the most impressive examples of this phenomenon.

The starting point of our project was the hill of Verucchio, known for its rich Iron Age burial sites that surround the settlement: from the oldest burial site, the Campo del Tesoro in the south, to the most northern one, Lippi-Sotto la Rocca. Isolated tombs and small burial sites associated with equally small or not yet known settlement sites have been found in the surroundings of Verucchio at Cella Nera and Dogana di Verucchio.

Since the hilltop of Verucchio is densely covered with Medieval and modern buildings, the structure of the Iron Age settlement is practically unknown. In order to estimate the size of the town various scholars have developed different models to calculate the settlement area; due to the different approaches, their calculations, ranging from 46 to 22 hectares, differ significantly from each other (Gentili, 2003; Malnati & Manfredi, 1991; Scarani, 1963). On the basis of an accurate digital terrain model, and taking into account the rock-falls as natural borders of the hilltop, Verucchio disposes a buildable ground of approximately 26 ha plus eventually another 0.6 ha, taking into account the so called Rocca, the most northern point of the modern town (Hye & Naso, in press).

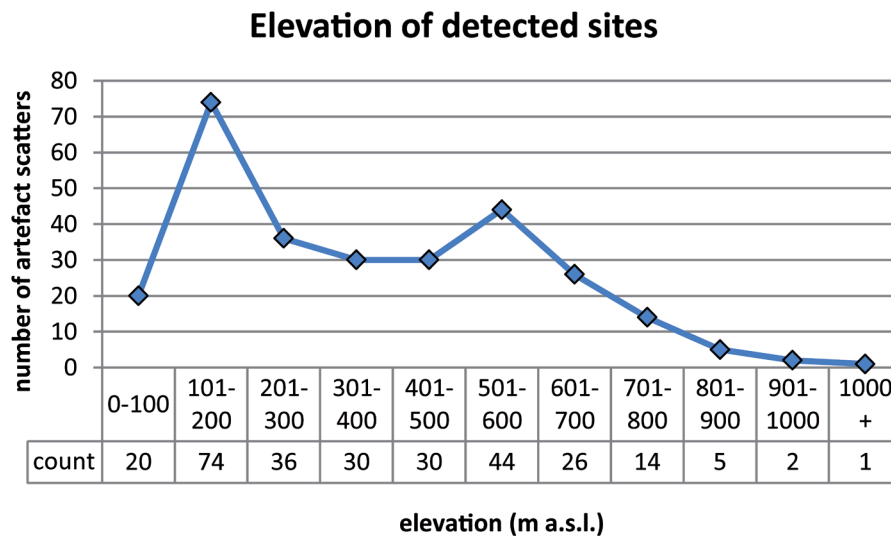


Fig. 3 Number of detected artefact scatters according to elevation (preliminary results 2009-2013).

The investigation area was chosen by the characteristics of the terrain without giving weight to a pre-determined distance from the water course; rather we followed the nature of the landscape. Between 2009 and 2013 we identified 282 sites and occurrences; in the lower Valmarecchia the sites were concentrated around Verucchio, in the middle and upper parts of the valley, Pennabilli was the municipality with the highest site-count.

### Preliminary Results

Since the field work is still in progress, any conclusion on the site-altimetry remains preliminary. To this date, we have a look at altitudes between 100 and 200 m – for about 70 – and another between 500 and 600 m, for more than 40 (fig. 3). A cross-check of site-altitudes versus site-chronology has not yet been made but, in general, the prehistoric settlements occupy higher terrain like hilltops while Roman sites occupy the valley bottom.

Usually, the count of ceramic fragments within a concentration is rather small due to the diffusion of the pieces by ploughing activities over time,

disrupting archaeological finds. In this sense it seems important to mention, that we did not come across any architectural remains whatsoever. The collected pieces of ceramics, in most cases, are of small and very small dimensions.

### From the Palaeolithic to the Aeneolithic Age

The hill of Covignano within the immediate urban hinterland of Rimini is known – like some other spots along the river banks – frequented since the Upper Palaeolithic Age (Cartoceti & Sassi, 2000; Fontana & Peretto, in press).

Among the new finds of the Neolithic Age, particularly at the Miramare site south of the mouth of the river Marecchia, a small axe of polished green serpentine is striking. It was found at the slopes of Monte Perticara and represents a form already documented at Miramare and numerous other sites in the northern part of the Marche Region like the Conca Valley (Bagolini et al, 1989; Monacchi, 1995; Venturino Gambari, 1996; Zamagni, 2005).

Most interesting for the Aeneolithic and Early Bronze Ages is a disk-butted stone axe, found in 2003 during the renovation of the Saint Filippo Neri Church at Pennabilli in the upper Valmarecchia (fig. 4). Similar objects were already known from the Marecchia Valley: U. Rellini called attention to a disk-butted stone axe from the San Leo territory

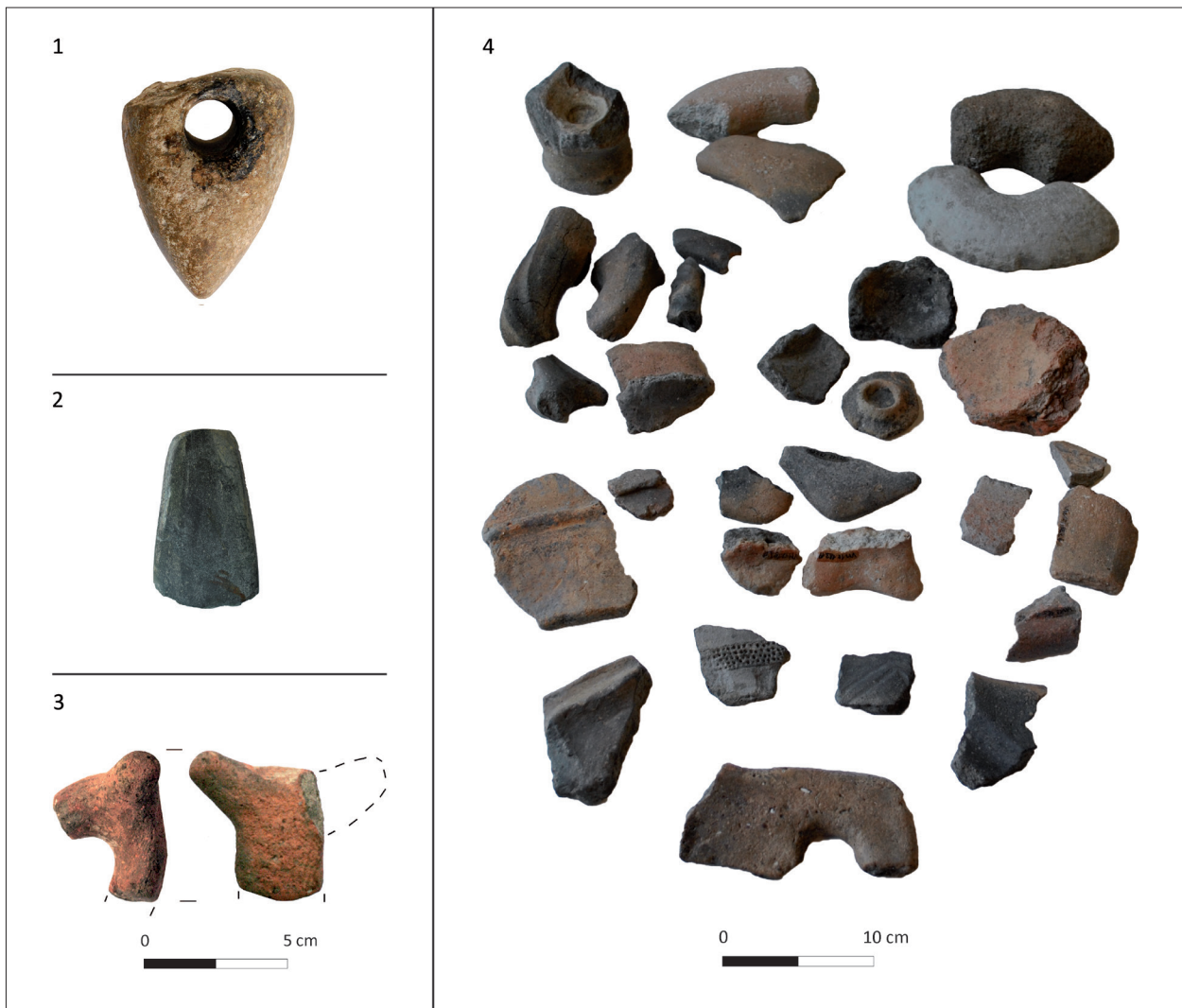


Fig. 4 Aeneolithic and Bronze Age artefacts from Pennabilli (1), Novafeltria (2, 4) and Verucchio (3).

found at “Prado di Sotto”, sadly unpublished and now considered as lost (Carrisi, 2005; Mazzieri et al, in press; Rellini, 1909; 1910; 1931). A similar object of unknown provenance, given to the museum of Santarcangelo di Romagna in 2013, also remains unpublished.

### Bronze Age

For the transition phase between the Aeneolithic and the Early Bronze Ages we have evidence of

a threefold burial on the Monte (Lec)ceti (521 m) next to which earlier investigations found ceramic material from the same age and the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age, pointing to a hill-top settlement. Our research allows us to confirm this hypothesis: first for the hill-top position of the site, which dominates the northern riverbed of the Marecchia at Ponte Santa Maria Maddalena. On the opposite side of the river, at the Tausano Hills (579 m) and the Monte Fotogno (458 m), in direct visual contact with Monte (Lec)ceti, the survey led to the discovery of hand formed but, unfortunately, poorly diagnostic ceramics. Otherwise on the Monte (Lec)ceti, we identified a new site, disturbed by a quarry ditch, containing abundant ceramic appertaining not only to already known periods but also datable to the beginning of the Late Bronze

Age, *Bronzo recente* in the Italian terminology. In most of the settlements north of the river Esino, dated to this particular phase of the Bronze Age and at Monte (Lec)ceti, findings dating to the Final Bronze Age – *Bronzo finale* in Italian terminology – have not yet been made. This fits perfectly into the picture of abandonment at the beginning of the twelfth century BC, like those pointed out by A. Cardarelli and M. Pacciarelli for the Padan Plain and the Romagna (Baldelli et al, 2005; Pacciarelli & Von Eles, in press). Focusing on the Montefeltro Region, this seems to be valid also for Monte Copiolo (1033 m; De Marini, 2006) and Sasso Simone (1204 m; Ermeti, 1995; Veggiani, 1971) as well as for a fortified settlement in Via Mondaini at Villa Verucchio, investigated in 2010 by the Soprintendenza ai Beni Archeologici dell’Emilia-Romagna. The settlement on the Pian del Monte (330 m) at Verucchio starts during the Final Bronze Age (Pacciarelli & Von Eles, in press).

One of the few exceptions to this tendency is the site of Monte Aquilone near Perticara (863 m) in the upper Valmarecchia, inhabited since the Neolithic as the studies of A. Veggiani as well as our own investigations confirm (Baldelli et al, 2005; De Marini, 2011-2012; Veggiani, 1964; 1975). In this case, the continuity between the Late and Final Bronze Age may be explained by assuming that the considerable brimstone deposits were at that time already known and exploited. The exploitation of brimstone deposits is documented in Sicily: there, ingots of pure sulphur associated with Aegean imports dating to the Early Bronze Age have been found indicating the interest in this material, used in the textile industry as well as for pharmacological and cultic purposes (Castellana, 1998; Mattias, Crocetti & Scicli, 1995).

## Final Bronze Age – Early Iron Age

During the Final Bronze Age a settlement-system favouring the often isolated but vast flat-top hill-sites characterizing the Valmarecchia and the Montefeltro becomes apparent. Neuralgic points were discovered at Verucchio-Pian del

Monte, Monte Titano at San Marino (Bellintani & Stefan, 2009) and Ripa Calbana in the Uso-Valley (La Pilusa & Zanini, 2008); these places have also revealed hoards, like the one from Camerano at Poggio Berni and the one from Casalecchio near Villa Verucchio (Morico, 1997).

As M. Pacciarelli e P. von Eles noted

*it is striking that in the case of Verucchio the settlement traces were not located on the Rocca but on the vast plateau of Pian del Monte, measuring 26 ha, being so at the extreme upper limit of settlement dimensions during the final Bronze Age. The occupation was presumably scarce and/or partial, but the choice of such a spacious place has by itself a specific meaning (Pacciarelli & von Eles, in press).*

The two scholars postulate the existence of ‘a network of settlements still to discover’ (Lollini, 1979; Peroni, 2005; Veggiani, 1971). Our insights fit in with this theory and support it, even though, due to the low amount of diagnostic material, not with the desired chronological precision.

Among the new discoveries providing hand formed pottery datable to the Final Bronze Age or the Early Iron Age the following places are worth mentioning: the Torriana Hights, Castello di Monte Maggio (536 m), Tausano, Monte Fotogno, San Leo (639 m), Antico (municipality of Pennabilli), Rocca Pratiffi (municipality of Sant’Agata Feltria) and also the Monte Perticara and other hill-top sites adjacent to the Valmarecchia like Sasso Simone and Monte San Marco (1123 m; Lollini, 1979). How closely meshed the outlined settlement-network has to be seen is a major question for further research.

In the area between Verucchio and Rimini, dominated by the hill of Covignano and subject to an intensified urbanisation compromising archaeological sites (Copioli, 2008), multiple sites of isolated graves or small-scale graveyards containing artefacts similar to those known from Verucchio were found. Among these a warrior grave, discovered in 1879 between San Martino in Venti and Santa Aquilina, containing a bronze

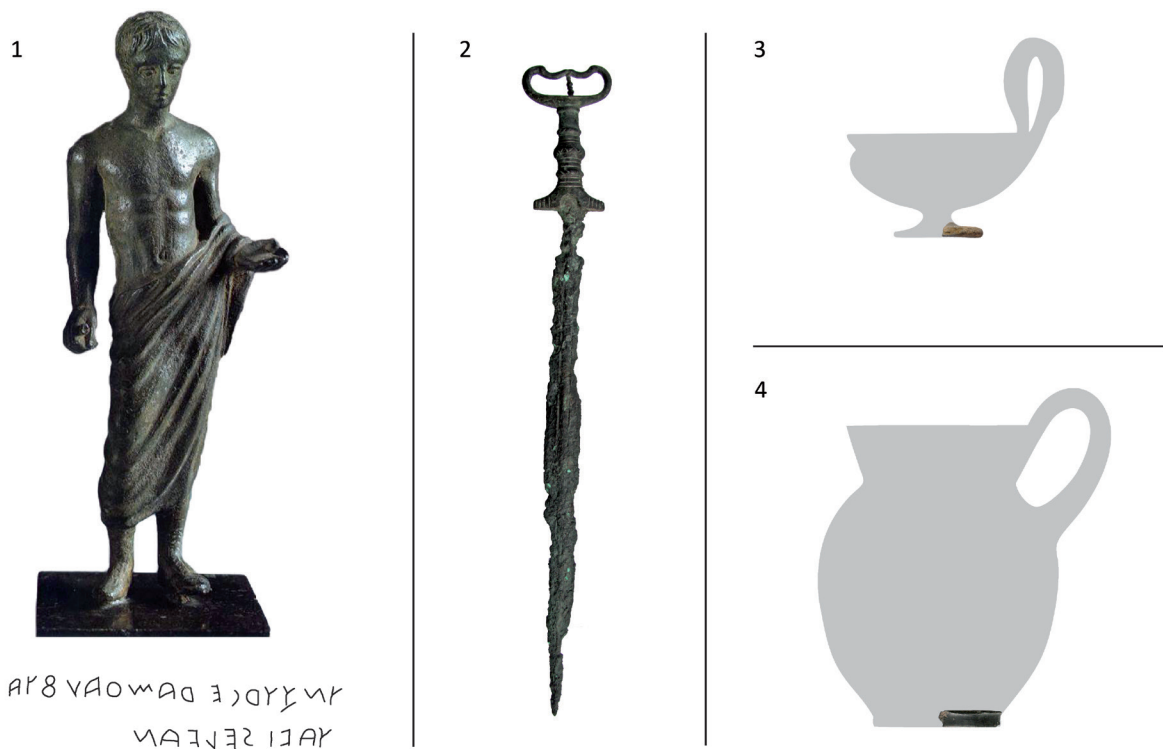


Fig. 5 Iron Age artefacts from the Marecchia valley: 1) Bronze statuette known as Selvans di Carpegna, Scavolino, municipality of Pennabilli; 2) Bronze antenna sword, Ca' Prucoli (Rimini, Mus. Com. inv D/340); 3) bucchero fragment of a ring-foot belonging to a kantharos or kyathos, Casteldelci; 4) bucchero fragment of a jug Rasmussen 1-2, Torriana.

antennae sword with a framed knob and iron inlays on the guard is striking (fig. 5.2). This form is known only in two other sites on the Italian peninsula, both from graves with extremely rich and significant burial goods: from Casa Ricovero 236 at Este and Benacci-Caprara 39 at Bologna, both dating before the last quarter of the eighth century BC which is the same as the sword from the hinterland of Rimini (Bianco Peroni, 1970; Iaia, 2006; Tovoli, 1989).

## Orientalising and Archaic Period

The Orientalising period is documented in the Romagna between 730 and 650 BC and represents the zenith of Verucchio. The city extends its influence to a vast area covering the lower Valley between Rimini and Dogana di Verucchio as well as other districts, for example, the strategically important peripheral site of Torriana which controlled the access to the adjacent Uso valley in the north. Further the existence of extraterritorial enclaves of variable scale is presumable, as the wagon grave from Longiano, Province of Forlì-Cesena seems to indicate (Camerin, 1997). Imaginable are small scale rural sites known because of the pertinent burials subject to occasional investigations during the 1800s (Hye & Naso, in press). The accredited decline of population at Verucchio around 650 BC affected, in a radical way, the population of these rural areas, which then were concentrated in a restricted number of sites: the hill-settlement of Covignano between Verucchio and Rimini dates back at least



to the sixth century BC and has to be seen as a “central place” of the lower Valmarecchia as the finds of architectural terracotta and the votive deposit of Villa Ruffi suggest (Cartoceti, 1998; Cristofani, 1995; Fontemaggi & Piolanti, 1995; Miari, 2000). The modern appearance of the hill characterised by division into numerous private properties sadly prohibit survey activities.

The Archaic period from the end of the seventh to the sixth century BC is documented by rare finds of *Bucchero*, in the past absent at Verucchio. Two foot pieces were retrieved; one disc-foot of a jug Rasmussen 1-2 (Rasmussen, 1979) found at Poggio Torriana in the Uso Valley (VM09.24: fig. 5.4), the other identified as a fragment of a ring-foot belonging to a *kantharos* or *kyathos* found near Casteldelci in the upper Valmarecchia (VM13.276: fig. 5.3). Another fragment of this pottery, unusual on the Adriatic versant, was found at the Montefeltro at Monte Copiolo (Benelli, 2004; De Marini, 2006). The fragment from Poggio Torriana is of high quality and an import from Etruria. The presence of *Bucchero* Ware in the Romagna at a time of recession might be explained by considering *Bucchero* Ware as exchange goods for amber, an exotic product and motivation for the contacts between the Adriatic Coast and the Tyrrhenian Sea.

## From the Fifth to the Third Century BC

Covignano and Rimini can be considered the lifeblood of the settlements in the lower Valmarecchia which mostly consists of scanty rural units. The social hierarchy is indicated by burials of warriors equipped with helmets of the Negau type in the variants Belmonte and Vetulonia, documented all over the Romagna between the sixth and fifth centuries BC (Dal Poggetto, 2003; Naso & Mazzoli, 2010; <https://it-it.facebook.com/SpottedSantAgataFeltria>).

The correspondent settlements are hard to identify, especially because of the uncertainty in dating the respective finds: the introduction of roof tiles in the middle-Adriatic Region is still one

of the central questions concerning this period. However, roof tiles were surely rare in rural regions; mixed roofing – thatch and roof tiles – is also imaginable (Naso, 2010).

The rural settlement-structure also included ritual places like Verucchio (von Eles, Miari & Romualdi, 1997), Villa Ruffi near Covignano (Miari, 2000) and the one near the town of Scavolino, municipality of Pennabilli, to which, recently, the bronze votive statuette of a human being known as “Selvans di Carpegna” (Amann, 2012; Cristofani, 1985; Monacchi, 1999; Rix, 1991) could be attributed. The statuette (dated to the beginning of the third century BC) represents a male and bares a votive inscription in the Etruscan language, translated as ‘this was offered by Ramtha Uhtavi. (Property) of Selvans’ (fig. 5.1). The votive inscription, by an Etruscan woman by the name of Ramtha Uhtavi, follows graphical norms common at Volsinii and the lower Tiber valley, as well as on Etruscan inscriptions known from the Marche Region (Colonna, 1976). Significant is the dedication to Selvans, a divinity connected to the protection of the boundaries of fields as suggested by inscriptions invoking him with appellatives like *tularia* found near city gates. This allows us to compare the Etruscan *Selvans tularia* with the Roman *Silvanus finium*, known at Rome as the protector of the frontiers (Dorcey, 1992; Rendeli, 1993). The dedication of a statuette to Selvans in a rural area could therefore be seen as to be close to a boundary, which might be identified with a mountain chain culminating into Monte Carpegna (1411 m), a natural border surmounting the plateau of Scavolino, where we identified a considerable and dense rural settlement from the middle Republican period, accentuated by abundant rests of black-glaze pottery. Another ritual place existed on the territory of San Leo next to the monastery of Sant’Igne, where a further Etruscan bronze statuette of a male dating to the first half of the third century was found (Ravara Montebelli, 2013).

## Roman Period

The colony of *Ariminum* was founded by the Romans in 268 BC on a site frequented at least since the Early Iron Age. As a colony under Latin Right, *Ariminum* followed Verucchio and Covignano as the hegemonic centre of the lower Valmarecchia, shifting the focal point of the valley to the coast (Lenzi, 2006). The foundation of the Roman colony, followed by the installation of *mansiones* along the river course, near Verucchio at the parish of San Martino in Rafaneto, near Secchiano at the church of Santa Maria in Vico and near Ponte Messa, by the clergy of San Pietro in Messa, introduces a new historic chapter (Monacchi, 2010; Rodriguez, 2004) the discussion of which would go beyond the scope of this paper.

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