

THE FIRST CITIES OF WESTERN EUROPE¹

ALESSANDRO GUIDI
Roma Tre University

‘Contacts with Greeks and Phoenician brought a new source of wealth and a new way of expressing it. From the late eighth century the variation in grave wealth increases enormously, and imported items from Greece and Levant are regularly found in the richest graves... The climax of this phase occurred in Italy in the seventh century... What *followed* in all these areas was a new form of social organization, the state...’

(Champion *et al.* 1984: 259; italics are mine)

‘The contacts with Phoenicians and Greeks ‘... were initiating a fundamental transformation of peninsular Italy which was to lead to the urbanization of Etruria’ (Sherratt 1993: 39)

These two quotations represent well the traditional perspective about the emergence of the first cities and of the Early State in Italy, in a word a diffusionist perspective.

The Italian protohistorical archaeological record tells us a completely different story: in the development of every Italian ancient city it’s possible to detect two (essentially autonomous) stages, the protourban and the urban one.

With the term “protourban” we mean “*a centre whose main characteristics are the radical change in size with respect to the settlements of the preceding phases with a corresponding growth of their functions and, at the same time, their transformation in true urban sites in the following phases*” (Cardarelli, di Genaro 1996).

This definition doesn’t have any relationship with the effective size of the centre, but with the proportional growth respect to the preceding phase. As a matter of fact:

- 1) a centre of 100-150 ha., if in the preceding phase the maximum size is 10-15 ha;
- 2) a centre of 40-60 ha., if in the preceding phase the maximum size is 4-6 ha.;
- 3) a centre of 20-30 ha., if in a preceding phase the maximum size is 2-3 ha.

They all have in common the same characteristic, an average growth of ten times from the pre-urban phase villages to the protourban one.

This tremendous growth, that happens, as we’ll see, in different ways and periods, is detectable in many

1. I must thank the organizers of the congress for their kind invitation to speak about the first phases of urban formation in Italy. Many of the points here expressed are present in preceding articles (with the relative bibliography) on the subject (Guidi 1998, 2006, 2008, 2010). Many useful data are present also in Pacciarelli 2000.

parts of peninsular Italy, between the first half of Xth (I follow the “high” chronology)² and the last quarter of VIth century B.C.

What’s more impressing is the quantity of protourban centres whose extension approaches to or overcomes the size of 100 ha., the theoretical threshold, according to the Australian anthropologist Roland Fletcher, between a city and other types of nucleated settlements (Fletcher 1995) .

On the ground of the data collected in the last 20 years, it’s first of all possible to detect, for the protourban centres, different types of formation processes:

- growth (Caere, Tarquinia, *Visentium*, *Latium Vetus*, Como, Oppeano, Oderzo, Ancona?)
- displacement (*Veii*, Este)
- incorporation (Vulci, Castelletto Ticino, North-Eastern Italy)
- synoecism (Rome)
- colonization (Campania, Verucchio, Bologna, Fermo?)
- centre/periphery relationships (Sabine, Friuli/Slovenia, Southern Latium)

At the same time we can detect different periods for the beginnings of the process (not depending from a sort of “decalage” between central and northern Italy):

Final Bronze Age 3 (1000-950 ca. B.C.) - Etruria, *Lavinium*, Este, Oppeano.

Early Iron Age 1&2 (950-730/20 ca. B.C.) - *Latium vetus*, Castelletto Ticino, Oderzo, Treviso, Padua, Campania, Verucchio, Bologna, Fermo (?)

Early Iron Age 3&4 (730/20-525 ca. B.C.) - Sabine, Southern Latium, Altino, Cologna Veneta, Concordia, Palse, Friuli/Slovenia, Como.

Even more, as previously said, we recognize at least three types of size range in the protourban centres (not by chance the lesser one typical of areas as Sabine, Southern Latium or Friuli/Slovenia, where a sort of centre/periphery diffusion of the phenomenon is visible):

- 80/100 Ha.: Etruria, Rome, Campania, Este, Padova, Fermo (?), Oppeano, Altino, Como, Castelletto Ticino, Cologna Veneta, Bologna
- 40/60 Ha: *Latium vetus*, Ancona, Verucchio, Oderzo, Concordia, Treviso
- 20/30 Ha.: Sabine, Southern Latium, Friuli/Slovenia

2. For the general debate on Italian protohistoric chronology see Bartoloni, Delpino 2005.

At the same time, there are different types of trajectories from protourban to urban centre, in different periods; also in this case we can detect two main problems:

1) the way of transformation (a sort of re-organization of the internal spaces for centres like *Veii*, Vulci, Caere, Campania, Sabine, Bologna, Verucchio, North-Eastern Italy. processes of- growth/expansion as in the cases of Rome, Ardea, *Gabii* and *Visentium*, an opposite type of phenomenon, the contraction/reduction of size, as documented in Tarquinia;

2) the age of transformation (on the ground of our, still incomplete data, second half of VIII Century B.C. for Thyrrenian Central Italy, end of VII-beginnings of VI Century B.C. for North-Eastern Italy.

A short review must begin with Etruria, where a massive process of incorporation of more than 70 villages in 6 big protourban centres characterizes the second half of X century B.C.

As an example of the type of occupation of these huge volcanic plateaux, we can quote the distribution of surface material of the early Iron Age at *Veii* (fig. 1), based on the results of the British School survey of the Sixties and of the Topography Institute of Rome University of the Eighties; Villanovan pottery found in many parts of the plateau shows a distribution totally inconsistent with the theory of villages (in this case, one could expect to find 'clusters' of ceramic material); at the same time, the distribution does not demonstrate the existence of a capillary occupation, giving rather the idea of a scanty but diffused occupation that has been defined as 'leopard spotted'. This picture of huts divided by more or less empty spaces, well detectable in each big protourban centre has been interpreted-

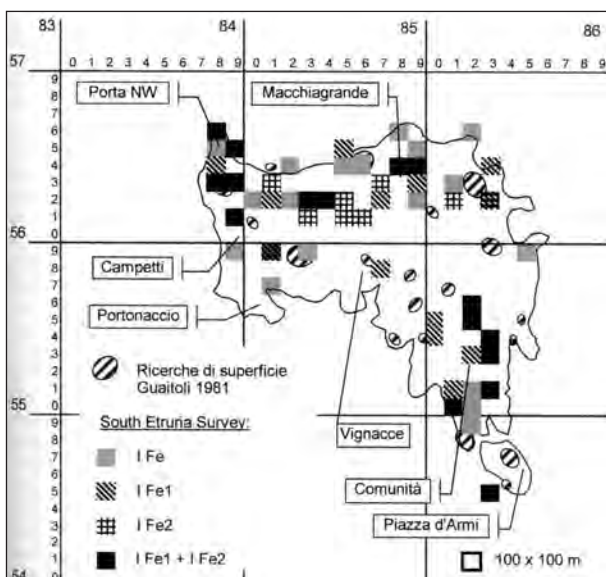


FIGURE 1. *Veii*: surface distribution of Early Iron Age pottery (from Guidi 2010).

ed, using ancient sources about the Romulian distribution of land to the elder males (*paterfamilias*), as the archaeological correlate of a situation in which each family owned a plot of land.

A similar structure of protourban centres is visible in the Villanovan city-states outposts in the South (for example Pontecagnano, with a settlement area of 80 ha) or in the North (for example Bologna, the Etruscan *Felsina*, whose size, in the VIII century B.C. is estimated around 250 ha.)

What is the situation south of the Tiber? It's useful to observe (fig. 2) a comparison of size between Etruscan (top) and Latin (bottom) protourban centres.

Another substantial difference is that in Latium you can detect a more gradual increase of size in the same sites between middle/recent Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, as you can see, for example (fig. 3), at *Lavinium* (the present Pratica di Mare), with the dotted area (A) occupied in the middle-late Bronze Age (B being the graveyard) and the entire plateau being the protourban centre yet at the end of Final Bronze Age.

The only exception to this picture is Rome, where the distribution of materials seems to indicate the existence at the beginning of Early Iron Age at least of two big systems of settlements (Quirinale-Campidoglio and Velia-Palatino) whose synoecism in the IX century B.C. brings to the emergence of a huge 200 ha. protourban centre (Fulminante n.d.)

At a smaller scale, as I said, and in a later period we can see sites like *Cures*, in the Sabine territory, a 1 ha. hamlet in the VIII century B.C. that becomes, be-

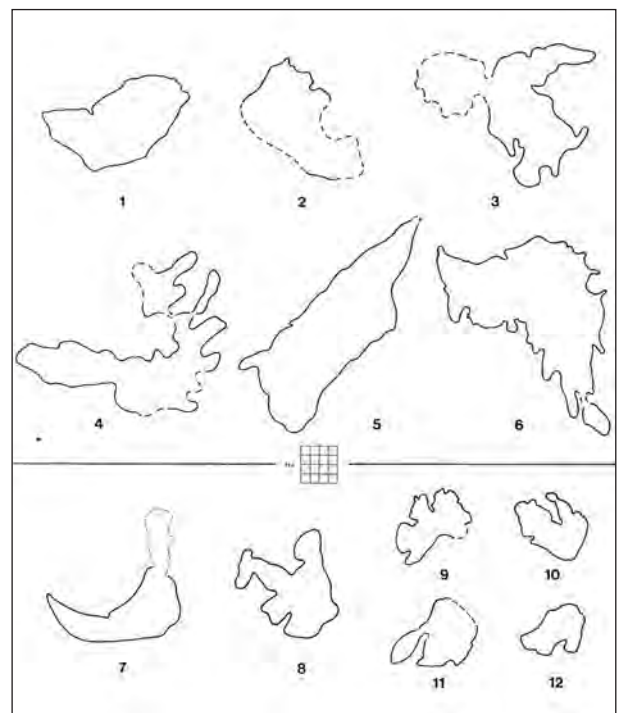


FIGURE 2. Comparison of size between Etruscan and Latin protourban centres (from Pacciarelli 2000).

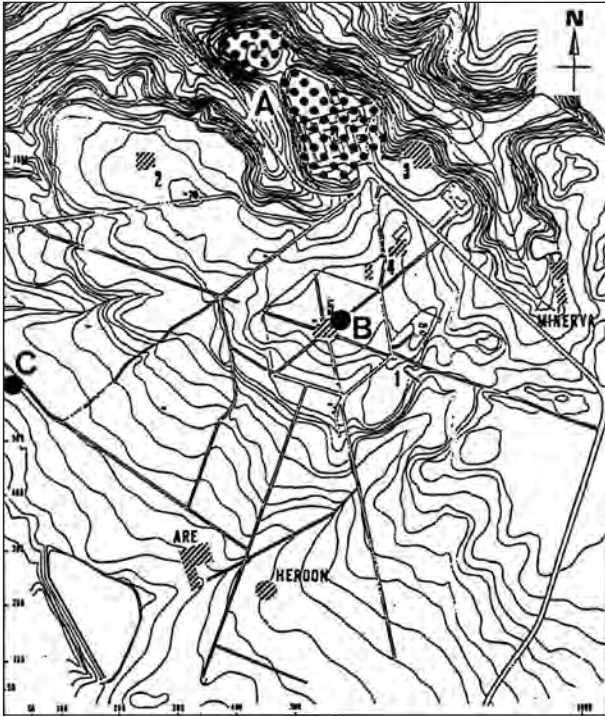


FIGURE 3. Pratica di Mare (*Lavinium*). A: Middle-Final Bronze Age settlement. B: Final Bronze Age necropolis. C: Xth century B.C. grave (from F. di Gennaro, A. Guidi, *Il Bronzo finale dell'Italia centrale. Considerazioni e prospettive di indagine in Il Protovillanoviano al di qua e al di là delle Alpi* (Atti della giornata di studio, Pavia, Collegio Ghislieri, 17 giugno 1995), *Biblioteca di Athenaeum* 38, Como 2000:99-138).

tween the end of VIII and the beginning of VII century B.C., a 25 ha. protourban centre.

Turning our attention to north-eastern Italy I must first of all quote the Venetic site of Oppeano where, thanks to our surveys (Guidi, Salzani 2008), we could detect a widespread diffusion of pottery yet between and of Final Bronze Age-beginning of Early Iron Age on a surface of more than 80 ha (fig. 4).

A unitary centre is well detectable at the beginning of the Early Iron Age, in the two biggest Venetic sites, Este (100 ha.) and Padua (150 ha.).

Analogous protourban centres appear in north-western Italy, at Castelletto Ticino (VIII century, 80 ha.) and at Como (VI century, 150 ha.).

It's interesting to note that the funerary evidence is not "symmetrical" respect to the settlement one.

In Etruria, for example, the graves of the late Final Bronze Age show real differences in the wealth of furnitures, while in the oldest phases of the Early Iron Age these differences are less pronounced. An impressive acceleration of the social differences is well visible in the graves of the first half and overall of the third quarter of VIII century B.C., when true "regal" graves that prelude to the princely burials of the Orientalizing period appear (fig. 5).

Another discovery of the last twenty years is the existence of hut-temples in every protourban centre, specially in middle Thyrrhenian area.

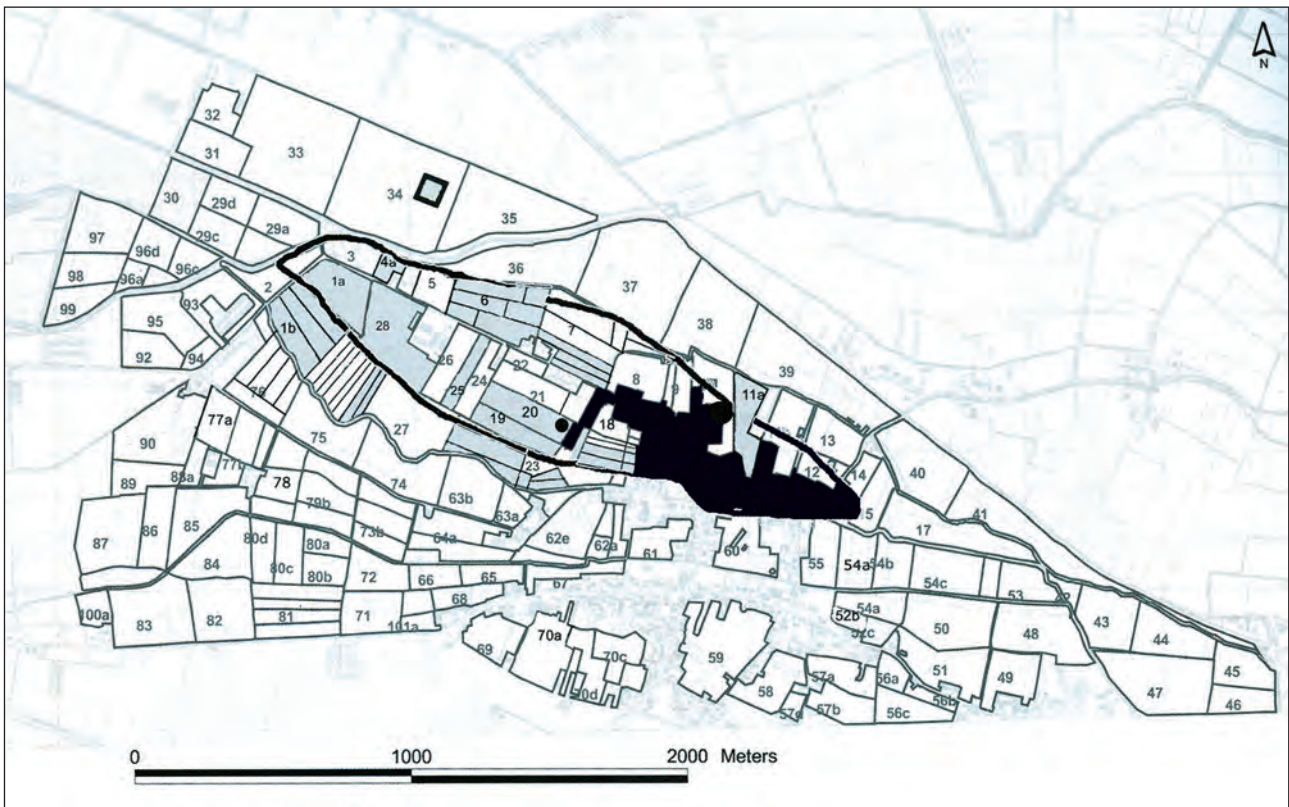


FIGURE 4. Oppeano (Verona). The dark line marks the extension of the protohistorical settlement, the black area is occupied by the present day village, the grey areas are fields in which Final Bronze Age-Early Iron Age pottery was found (from Guidi, Salzani 2008).



FIGURE 5. *Veii*, grave furniture of Qjuattro Fontanili tomb AA1 (from Guidi 2006).

The most famous case is *Satricum*, where the hut has the same orientation of the early archaic temple (fig. 6), but in recent years it was possible to discover other hut-temples in Tarquinia, *Caere*, *Ardea*, *Lanuvium* and *Velitrae* (the present Velletri).

Our data tell us that after a long protourban phase a speed increase in social differentiation happened in the final stages of protohistory with the reorganization of settlements, the appearance of regal graves, of a true organized religion and, in some cases, of the first examples of artistic production, all features of the new urban organization.

In conclusion, the first Italian cities mark an epochal change, with the appearance of the Early State in his first stages of development characterized by the transition from an “eterarchical” to a “hierarchical” organization, corresponding to a comparable transition from protourban to urban centres.

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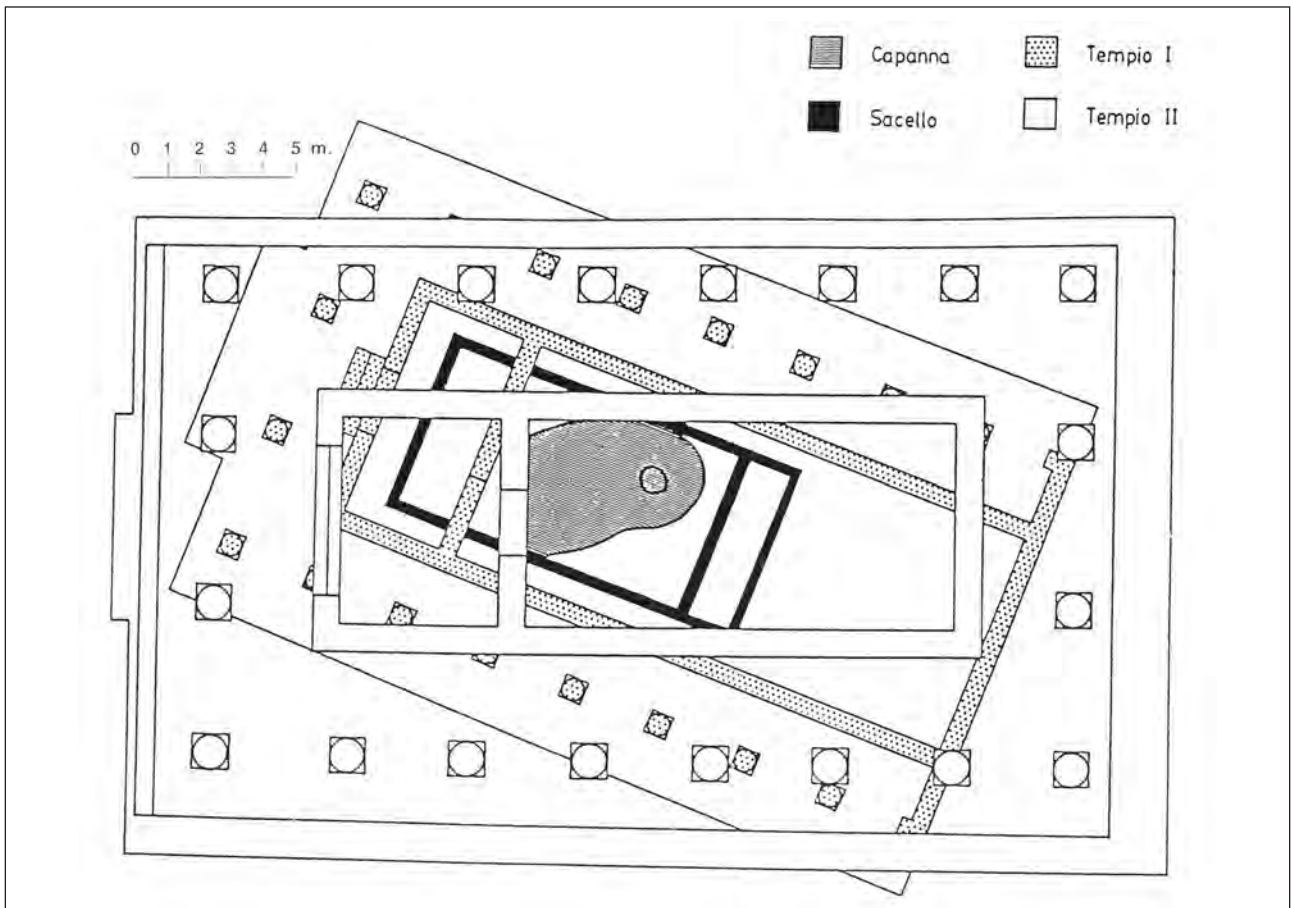


FIGURE 6. *Satricum*: position and plan of the hut found under the archaic sanctuary (from Guidi 2006).

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