

## New data on the Vadena (BZ) necropolis: the 1989-1997 excavations

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**ABSTRACT** - From 1989 the diggings at the prehistoric necropolis of Vadena, already known since the half of the last century, were restarted. They were brief and specific works which allowed the finding of many untouched tombs and demonstrated that the necropolis had not been completely dug. Many tombs, belonging to the Late Iron Age, showed burial procedures unknown to the Fritzens-Sanzeno culture and filled therefore a lack in the studies of Vadena and the whole of Trentino-Alto Adige. Another important piece of news is a possible tomb found under the carbon layers of the Early Iron Age, containing Luco A ware (Final Bronze Age 3). This information, together with a present study of the old diggings, allow the re-definition of the chronology of Vadena necropolis at least from the Final Bronze Age (12<sup>th</sup> cent. BC) to the late Roman Age (6<sup>th</sup> cent. AC) uninterruptedly. Furthermore it's possible to pinpoint the origin of the setting towards the end of the Bronze Age as a commercial centre linked, through the navigation by river, with similar centres, especially in the Padana Plains between the rivers Adige, Po, and Tartaro.

**KEY WORDS:** Vadena, Necropolis, Final Bronze Age, Luco A

**PAROLE CHIAVE:** Vadena, Necropoli, Età del Bronzo Finale, Luco A

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In 1989 the "Soprintendenza ai Beni Culturali di Bolzano" continued excavations on the prehistoric necropolis of Vadena-Laimburg (this abstract is part of the author's degree thesis *La necropoli preistorica di Vadena* that will be discussed at "La Sapienza" University of Rome with Prof. R. Peroni) and already known to the scholars of the XIX century as Stadio/Stadl. They were brief and specific excavations, due to construction work, which allowed to find a lot of untouched tombs and demonstrated that the necropolis had not been completely discovered. Six of the eight uncovered tombs belong to the Recent Iron Age (II m. V-III) and attest burial procedures unknown to the Fritzens-Sanzeno Culture, filling a gap in the studies regarding Vadena and also the whole Trentino Alto-Adige region.

Another important discovery that was made in survey C was an anthropic layer, found under the carbon layers of the Early Iron Age, which contains classic Luco type pottery. There are various fragments (Fig.1:1) of a Luco A type jug (Final

Bronze Age 3) and of other vases, broken on the spot (Fig.1:2) and placed carefully into a pit. A small number of burnt bones make it very difficult to define the tomb in question. The comparison with a similar finding in the necropolis of Rasun di Sotto (BZ) is interesting. Under the carbon layers of the Iron Age there was a brown stratum without bones and containing classic Luco type pottery (there was also a post hole on the border of the terrace, probably part of a fencing and linked to a lower ditch with rampart). In both cases it is either a necropolis or a settlement of the Final Bronze Age; at the moment it is not possible to solve the query because of the few comparable cases.

This finding, together with the most recent 1998 excavation (survey D), in which a lot of other objects belonging to the Final Bronze Age were found, sheds new light on the findings discovered at the necropolis during the last century, which were up to now considered chronologically uncertain and unreliable. They are mainly bronze objects: a Mar-

co, Fiaavè, Vidolasco type coiled pin, a Vadena seal type pin, a Vadena type pin with a bi-conical concave head, a pin with a sub-trapezoidal profile head, a pin with a lenticular head with appendix, an arch-shaped fibula with eyelets, a twisted bow-shaped fibula with 8-shape loops, a simple arch-shaped twisted fibula with a long narrow catch plate and with plastic art decoration, a Vadena type semicircular-shaped razor with spur-shaped back, a Pavese-Transalpine type small shovel and a Vadena type knife with a tongue-shaped hilt. There are also gold earrings, a truncate conical spindle-part decorated with small circles, a necklace-spacer and a horse-bit made of bone and spindles made of ivory, which find precise comparisons in the settlements in the Po Plains and in the area of Lake Garda in the Recent and mainly Final Bronze Age. A present re-examination of the old excavations allows to pinpoint the origin of the Vadena necropolis to the end of the Bronze Age (between Recent and Final Bronze Age) as a trading centre with

access by river to similar centres especially in the area between the rivers Adige, Po, and Tartaro. Vadena was in a very strategic point. It was on the right bank of the River Adige, which, in those days formed large and wide meanders and was navigable up to this point; it was situated just south of the confluence between the rivers Isarco and Adige, the valleys of which begin at the very important passes of Brennero and Resia; it was located just north of a narrow part of the Adige valley (between the cone of Ora and the peak of the Monte di Mezzo), which could easily be crossed; at the foot of a small pass which links the Adige valley to this area of Oltradige which in those days was densely inhabited. These important qualities had encouraged human settlement since remote times (at least from the Eneolithic Age), first sporadically and then in a continuous and unceasing way for about 2000 years from the Final Bronze Age to the Early Middle Ages (XII century BC-VI century AC).

**SUMMARY** - From 1989 the diggings at the prehistoric necropolis of Vadena, already known since the half of the last century, were restarted. They were brief and specific works which allowed the finding of many untouched tombs and demonstrated that the necropolis had not been completely dug. Many tombs, belonging to the Late Iron Age, showed burial procedures unknown to the Fritzens-Sanzeno culture and filled therefore a lack in the studies of Vadena and the whole of Trentino-Alto Adige. Another important piece of news is a possible tomb found under the carbon layers of the Early Iron Age, containing Luco A ware (Final Bronze Age 3). This information, together with a present study of the old diggings, allow the re-definition of the chronology of Vadena necropolis at least from the Final Bronze Age (12<sup>th</sup> cent. BC) to the late Roman Age (6<sup>th</sup> cent. AC) uninterruptedly. Furthermore it's possible to pinpoint the origin of the setting towards the end of the Bronze Age as a commercial centre linked, through the navigation by river, with similar centres, especially in the Padana Plains between the rivers Adige, Po, and Tartaro

**RIASSUNTO** - Dal 1989 sono ripresi gli scavi alla necropoli protostorica di Vadena, conosciuta già dalla metà del secolo scorso. Sono stati interventi brevi e circoscritti, ma hanno consentito di ritrovare ancora diverse tombe intatte e di appurare che la necropoli non è affatto esaurita. Diverse tombe scoperte appartengono alla recente Età del Ferro e attestano riti sepolcrali finora sconosciuti per la cultura di Fritzens-Sanzeno, colmando così una lacuna negli studi sia per Vadena che per tutto il Trentino Alto Adige. Altra importante novità è una probabile tomba, sottostante gli strati carboniosi dell'antica età del Ferro, contenente ceramica tipo Luco A (Bz fin.3). Questi dati, insieme ad un riesame in corso dei vecchi scavi, consentono di ridefinire la cronologia della necropoli di Vadena: almeno dal Bronzo finale (XII sec.AC) fino alla tarda epoca romana (VI sec. DC) ininterrottamente. Inoltre si può avanzare l'ipotesi sull'origine dell'insediamento verso la fine dell'età del Bronzo quale emporio commerciale collegato, attraverso la navigazione fluviale, a centri simili soprattutto della pianura padana tra Adige, Po e Tartaro

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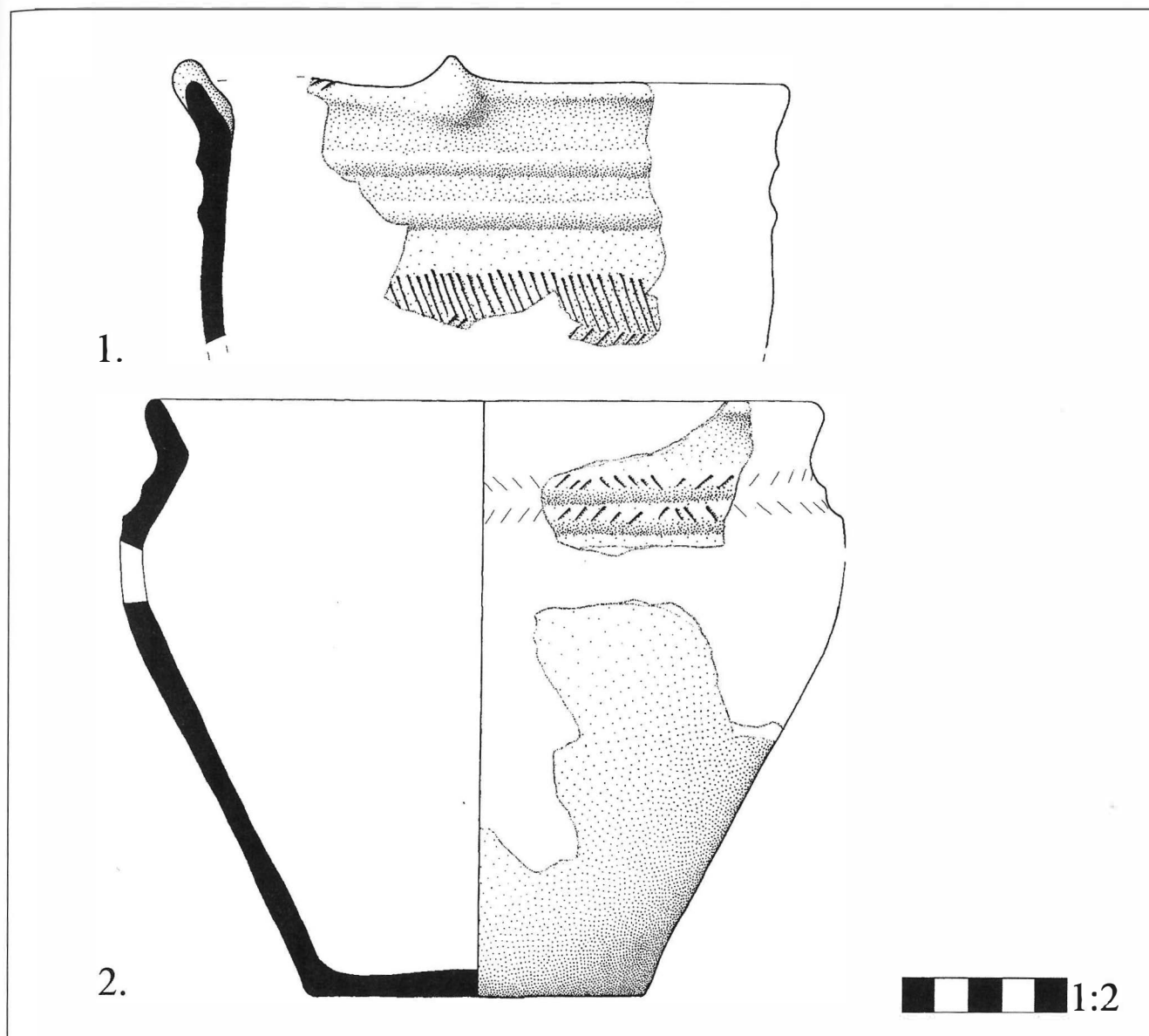


Fig. 1 - Luco A type ceramic (1997 excavation, survey. C US154)