

The Neolithic site of La Vela: 1987-88 excavations. Preliminary notes on the burial rituals

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ABSTRACT - Authors present a description of seven burial structures found during the excavation campaigns at La Vela (Trento). These tombs belong to an early phase of the so-called Square Mouth Pottery Culture.

KEY WORDS: "La Vela", Trento, Tombs, Square Mouth Pottery Culture

PAROLE CHIAVE: "La Vela", Trento, Tombe, Vasi a Bocca Quadrata

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Seven burial structures were found during the excavation campaigns at La Vela in 1987-88 (Vela VII), including both stone cists and stones placed around the body (Fig. 1). These tombs belong to an early phase of the so-called Square Mouth Pottery Culture: none of the tombs cut through the settlement levels of the full meander-spiral phase, but on the contrary they cover the best-preserved ones with their sedimentary deposits.

As for the geographical distribution, the two types are mainly found in completely different areas: the tombs with stone cists are found to the South-West; the ones with stone enclosures to the North-East. This distribution dichotomy confirms what had already been discovered in the previous excavations and rescue carried out in the 60s and 70s.

All the tombs face SE-NW, the heads towards NW and the bodies placed on the left side either in a crouched or squatting position. The tombs are in pairs, side by side or aligned along an axis. Interestingly enough, each pair of tombs has the same depth (Fig. 2).

Only Tomb 7 (the burial of a child surrounded by just a circle of stones) is isolated and covered by the floor of what probably used to be a house.

The tombs have sub-vertical or slightly sloping walls and a flat floor; their fill includes potsherds with meander-spiral decorations, dating the burial to the period in which the Square Mouth Pottery Culture adopted this type of decoration.

Breccia and pebbles were used for the first layer covering the body.

The burial rites are associated with the lighting of fires: to the North-west of group T.1 - T.2, a rectangular pyre area with a stone enclosure; to the West of group T.5 - T.6, a badly-preserved sub-circular pyre area in the ground; to the North-west of T.7, the child's tomb, a burnt structure with a cylindrical section filled with charcoal and fire-cracked pebbles (Fig. 1). Areas of reddened soil from the hearth enclosure above were present in the deposit at the bottom of T.2 (Fig. 3): this is evidence of the ritual of the lighting of fires during burial, while the grave was still partially uncovered.

When the stone cists had been removed, the pebbles that had been placed along the outside to wedge the outer slabs were uncovered and these were very similar to the pebble enclosures of the "tombs with enclosures" (cf. T.1 whilst being taken apart).

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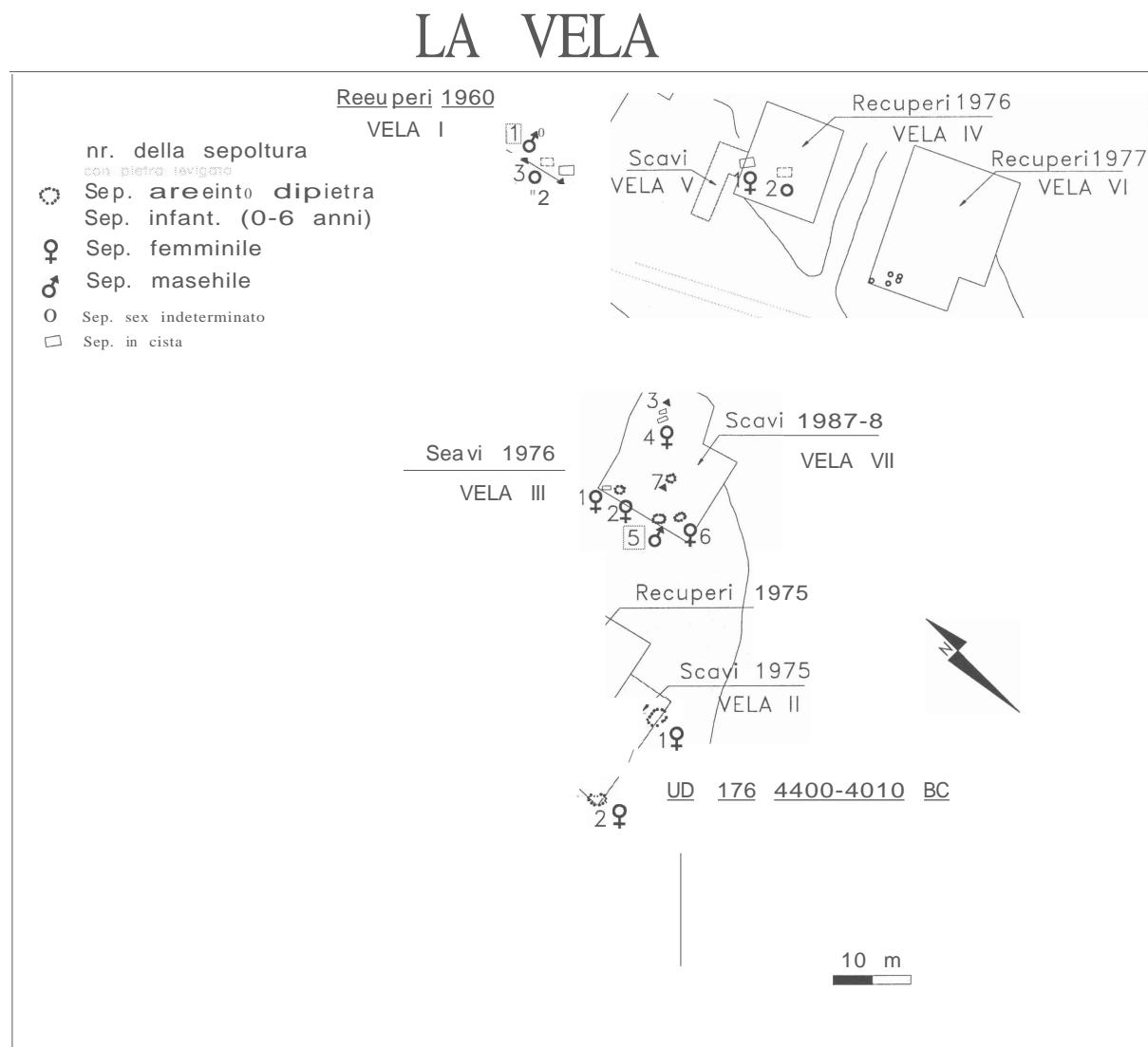
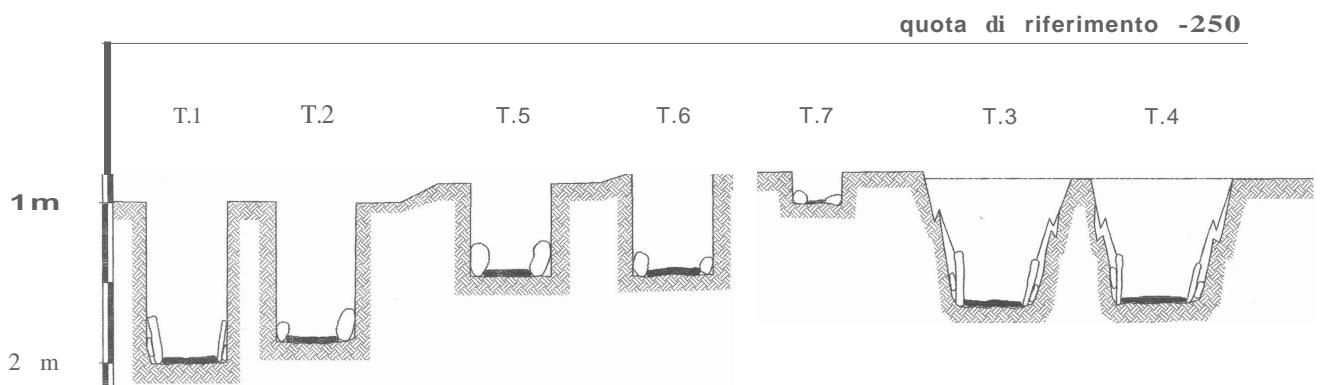


Fig. 1 - La Vela VII: plan of the tombs

LA VELA scavi 1987-88



EQUIPARAZIONE DELLA PROFONDITA' DELLE SEPOLTURE NEL SETTORE VII

Fig. 2 - La Vela VII: levelling the depth of the tombs

quota di riferimento -350 cm

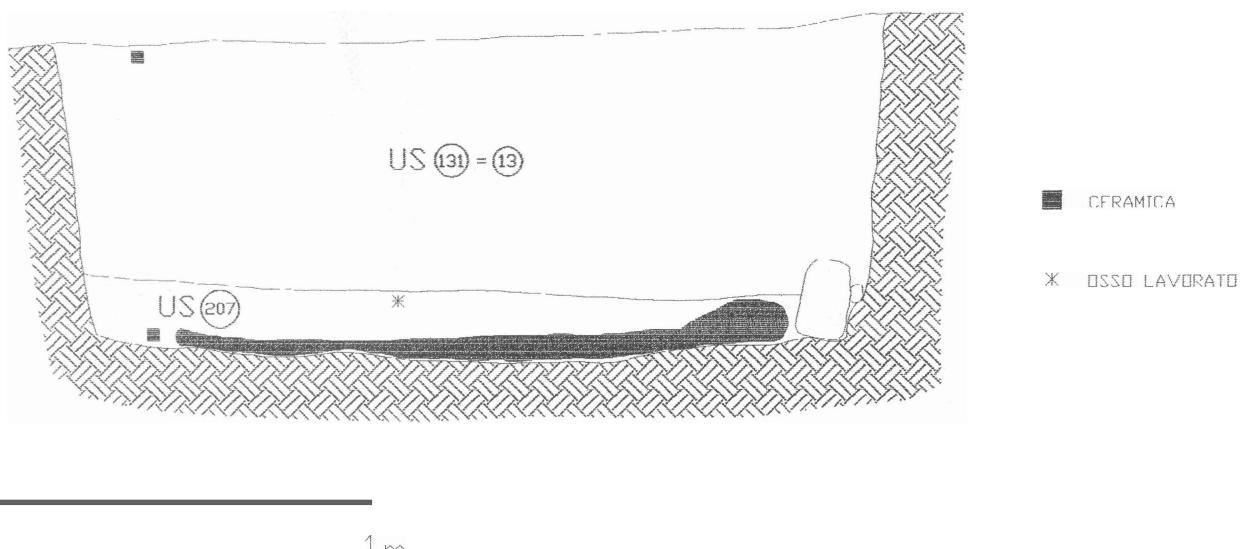


Fig. 3 - La Vela VII: section of Tomb 5

quota di riferimento -373 cm

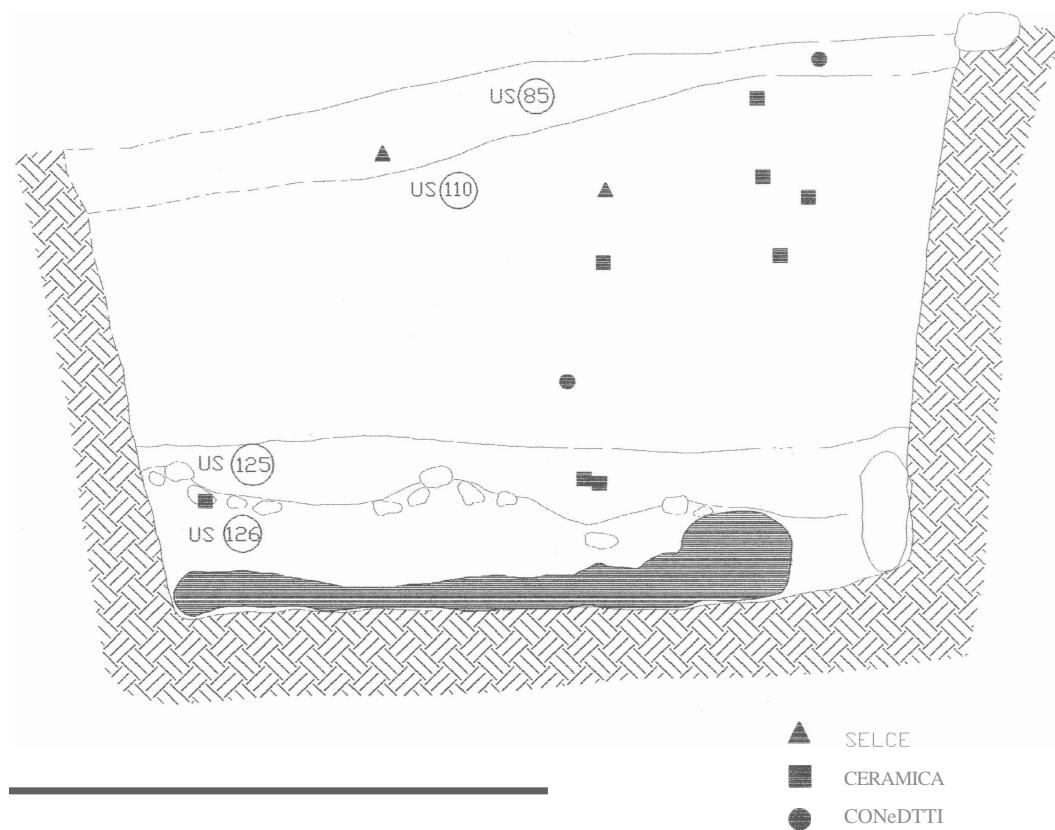


Fig. 4 - La Vela VII: section of Tomb 6

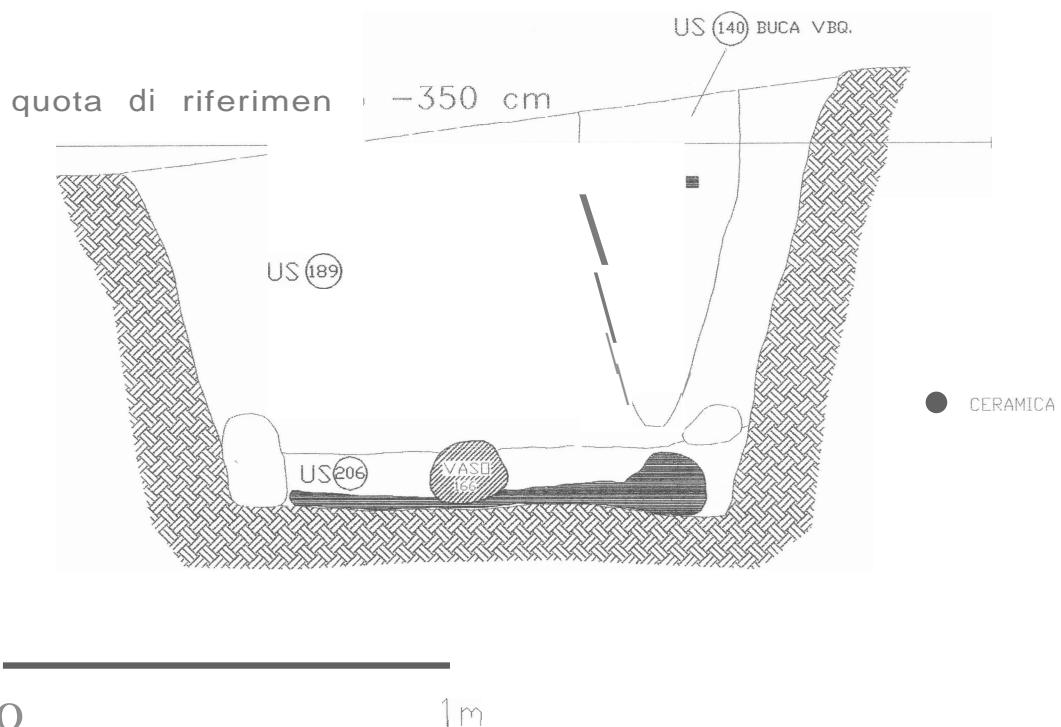


Fig. 5 - La Vela VII: section of Tomb 2