

Peninsular cultural influences in the Square Mouthed Pottery Culture of Trentino

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ABSTRACT

In 1976, after the discovery of a clay stamp ("pintadera") in the site of La Vela di Trento, the existence of cultural relations between the Neolithic groups of the Adige valley and those living in the South of the Italian peninsula was suggested. The "pintadera" may be a proof of contacts with the Serra d'Alto Culture. The consolidation of cultural and economic relations is also suggested by the presence, at La Vela, of an obsidian bladelet which most probably came from the Lipari island. Another piece of evidence, i.e. a vessel attributable to the Serra d'Alto Culture.

KEY WORDS: Pottery, Square Mouthed Pottery culture, Serra d'Alto culture, La Vela, Alto Garda, Adige Valley, Trentino, Italy

PAROLE CHIAVE: Ceramica, Cultura dei Vasi a Bocca Quadrata, Cultura di Serra d'Alto, La Vela, Alto Garda, Valle dell'Adige, Trentino, Italia

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The existence of cultural contacts between the Square Mouthed Pottery of the Adige valley and the Neolithic communities based in the southern areas of the Italian peninsula was suggested for the first time by Bernardino Bagolini, after the discovery of an S-shaped clay stamp, at the site of La Vela near Trento in 1976. This was probably linked to the Serra d'Alto Culture (BAGOLINI, 1977) (Fig.1:1).

This hypothesis was confirmed after further excavations were carried out at the same site by the Archaeological Service for the Autonomous Province of Trento in 1987-1988. Another anthropological area with remains of settlement and burial structures came to light (BAGOLINI, 1990). Among the grave goods of burial VI, probably belonging to a seven-eight years old female laying in crouched position on her left side (CORRAIN & CAPITANIO, 1996:11), there was a globular vessel with a short neck placed on the pelvis, ascribed to the Serra d'Alto Culture (BAGOLINI, 1990:227-228, fig.7 and 10:1) (Fig.1:3 and Fig.2). Among the ceramic ma-

terials found during the excavations of July 1976 in the sector named Vela IV, which has recently been re-examined, a sherd of a handle was recovered. It was part of a quadrangular-type handle with a pair of holes, and incised decorations. It probably belonged to the same type of vessel which was most probably included in grave good (Fig.1:2). In fact, in this area, building excavations destroyed one stone cist grave and part of another burial that was sectioned and exposed towards the southern part of the excavation (BAGOLINI *et al.*, 1976). There are similar handles among the pottery found at the sites of Chiozza di Scandiano (BAGOLINI & BARFIELD, 1971, fig.2:7; BARFIELD, 1981, fig.3:3 and 9)¹, Ripoli (CREMONESI, 1965, fig.11:31) and Fossacesia (RADMILLI, 1977, fig.120:1).

The establishment of cultural and economical relations between the Square Mouthed Pottery communities of the Adige valley and the Neolithic groups of Southern Italy is also indicated by the finding at La Vela of an obsidian bladelet, probably from Lipari (AMMERMAN & POLGLASE, in press).

Along with this documentation, there is another small flask recovered on “the Riva del Garda territory”, found during the reorganisation of archaeological collections in the local Civic Museum (Fig.1:4 and Fig.3)². This vessel is made in fine pottery, with a flattened ellipsoidal body, a flat bottom and is fragmented at the base of the neck. There are two quadrangular handles on the shoulders, slightly sagging on the upper part with a pair of holes going through them. One of these handles was most probably fractured when it was dug up. There are traces of red colouring on both of them. At the moment we do not have any information regarding the discovery of this vessel but it would not seem to be an imported object. From a typological point of view, it is very similar to examples with Serra d’Alto aspects and in particular with those generally found in funerary contexts (MALONE, 1985:129, fig.9:8).

The archaeological documentation at Riva del Garda, regarding the funerary aspects of the Square Mouthed Pottery Culture is represented by the burials discovered in 1956 at Cave di Monte Brione. During sandstone quarrying, three burial structures came to light (BALDO, 1956). The first burial, in simple trench grave, contained the skeleton remains of an individual, most probably placed in a crouched position without any grave goods whatsoever. Grave goods were found in the second cist grave. These included a fragmented polished stone axe, four arrowheads and a sickle slade. The third burial consisted of a small cist grave with few skeleton remains and no grave goods. All the osteological material was destroyed when it was uncovered, while the grave goods of the second burial were lost just after the finding³.

In Northern Italy, ceramic elements similar to Serra d’Alto aspects are also pointed out in both settlement and funerary contexts in the following sites: Riparo Valtenesi, Manerba del Garda (BS) (BARFIELD, 1981, fig.3:3 and 10), Castello d’Annone, loc. Collina di Castello (AT) (VENTURINO GAMBARI *et al.*, 1996:223; ZAMAGNI, 1998:146-147, fig.3:8), Collecchio (PR) (BERNABÒ BREA, 1992, fig.17), Gaione Cascina Catena (PR) (BERNABÒ BREA *et al.*, 1991:116-117, fig.8), Fidenza, località Ponte Ghiara (PR) (BERNABÒ BREA *et al.*, 1997:18), Chiozza di Scandiano (RE) (BAGOLINI & BARFIELD, 1971, fig.2:7), Reggio Emilia, Via Rivoluzione d’Ottobre (RE) (TIRABASSI, 1984:69, nota 9, fig.4:12), Rivaltella-Cà Romensini (RE) (TIRABASSI, 1998:250), Pescale (MO)⁴, territorio di Miramare (RN) (BAGOLINI *et al.*, 1991).

The vessel from Riva del Garda finds precise typology parallels with the examples from La Vela di Trento, Gaione Cascina Catena (PR) and

Collecchio (PR). With regard to Southern Italy, the pot is very similar to one of the examples found in the cist grave of San Martino in Matera (INGRAVALLO, 1976, tab. XX:4; CASSANO, 1994, fig.6: 5) which, on the basis of the grave goods, was attributed to the last stage of the Serra d’Alto Culture.

These findings are proof that there were significant relationships between the Trentino territory, the Po Plain, and the Italian peninsula and can be placed in the wider context of the intercultural connections over vast areas established by the Square Mouthed Pottery Culture.

NOTES

1 - A burial which was also found at Chiozza contained a globular vessel of “figulina”ware which was placed on the forearms of a female adult and is preserved in the Civici Musei in Reggio Emilia (DEGANI, 1965, chart V, in the middle).

2 - This vessel was originally preserved among the Roman age materials found on Riva del Garda territory. I would like to thank Annapaola Mosca for pointing this out to me.

3 - There are other findings of burials belonging to the Square Mouthed Pottery Culture in the Alto Garda area. During construction works carried out in 1874 on the new Romarzolo cemetery in Arco (situated between Chiarano and Varignano) a grave came to light containing a small polished stone chisel (*Schuhleistenkeil* type) (AMBROSI, 1876:140; BARFIELD, 1970, fig. 5,1; PEDROTTI, 1996:159, fig. 118). Not far from this finding another cist burial was discovered in Cava Santorum at Chiarano (Arco) in 1955, containing the remains of a young male individual placed in a crouched position on his left side along with a green-stone axe and a long flint blade (FORLATI, 1955:233-234; FOGOLARI, 1956:541; BARFIELD, 1970, fig. 5: 2-3). In 1958 three more cist burials were discovered in the same place, two of which were destroyed during excavation works. The third grave contained the skeleton remains of a child of about 9-10 years, accompanied by grave goods including a polished stone axe and two flint arrowheads (BALDO, 1958; PEDROTTI, 1996:159). According to witnesses who lived nearby, other burials were destroyed by excavators in the same area during the following years (BAGOLINI *et al.*, 1984:127).

4 - Personal communication of Alessandro Ferrari whom I thank.

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SUMMARY - In 1976, after the discovery of a clay stamp ("pintadera") in the site of La Vela di Trento, the existence of cultural relations between the Neolithic groups of the Adige valley and those living in the South of the Italian peninsula was suggested. The "pintadera" may be a proof of contacts with the Serra d'Alto Culture. This hypothesis was later confirmed by successive discoveries made in the same site in 1987 and 1988 when a densely inhabited area was discovered with numerous remains of dwelling and burial structures. In the grave goods of burial VI, which belonged to a person, most probably a female, of app. seven or eight years of age, a globular vessel pot was found which can be attributable to the Serra d'Alto Culture. Furthermore, among pottery items found in the sector Vela VI during the excavations in July 1976, a sherd of a quadrangular handle was found which could have been part of a vessel of the same style which was most probably included in grave goods. The consolidation of cultural and economic relations among the Square Mouthed Pottery communities of the Adige valley with those living along the shores of the Mediterranean sea is also suggested by the presence, at La Vela, of an obsidian bladelet which most probably came from the Lipari island. Another piece of evidence, i.e. a vessel attributable to the Serra d'Alto Culture has recently been added to that set of findings, which was found in the "Riva del Garda area". This vessel was recently found following the reorganisation of the archaeological collections of the local Civic Museum.

RIASSUNTO - L'esistenza di contatti culturali tra i gruppi di facies v.b.q. della Valle dell'Adige e le comunità neolitiche stanziate nei territori a sud della penisola è stata prospettata nel 1976 dopo il ritrovamento nel sito de La Vela di Trento di una pintadera per la quale venne proposto un collegamento con l'orizzonte culturale di Serra d'Alto. L'ipotesi ha trovato conferma nel corso di interventi successivi effettuati nello stesso sito che negli anni 1987-1988 hanno portato alla scoperta di un'altra area densamente antropizzata con resti di strutture sia insediative che sepolcrali. Tra gli elementi di corredo della tomba VI, appartenente ad un individuo di probabile sesso femminile di circa sette-otto anni, si segnala la presenza di un'olletta ascrivibile all'ambito culturale di Serra d'Alto. Inoltre tra il materiale ceramico proveniente dai recuperi effettuati nel luglio del 1976, nel settore denominato Vela IV, è presente un frammento di presa quadrangolare che sembra riconducibile allo stesso tipo di recipiente e che con molta probabilità faceva parte di un corredo funerario. In quest'area infatti gli scassi di fondazione di un edificio avevano causato la distruzione di una tomba in cista litica e parte di un'altra che era rimasta sezionata ed esposta sul fronte sud dello scavo. L'instaurarsi di relazioni culturali ed economiche tra le comunità atesine della Cultura dei vasi a bocca quadrata e i gruppi neolitici dell'Italia meridionale è indiziata anche dalla presenza nel sito de La Vela di una lamella in ossidiana che con molta probabilità proviene da Lipari. A questa documentazione si aggiunge ora un altro esemplare di olletta riferibile all'aspetto di Serra d'Alto che proviene "dal territorio di Riva del Garda". Il reperto è stato individuato recentemente in seguito al riordino delle collezioni archeologiche del locale Museo Civico.

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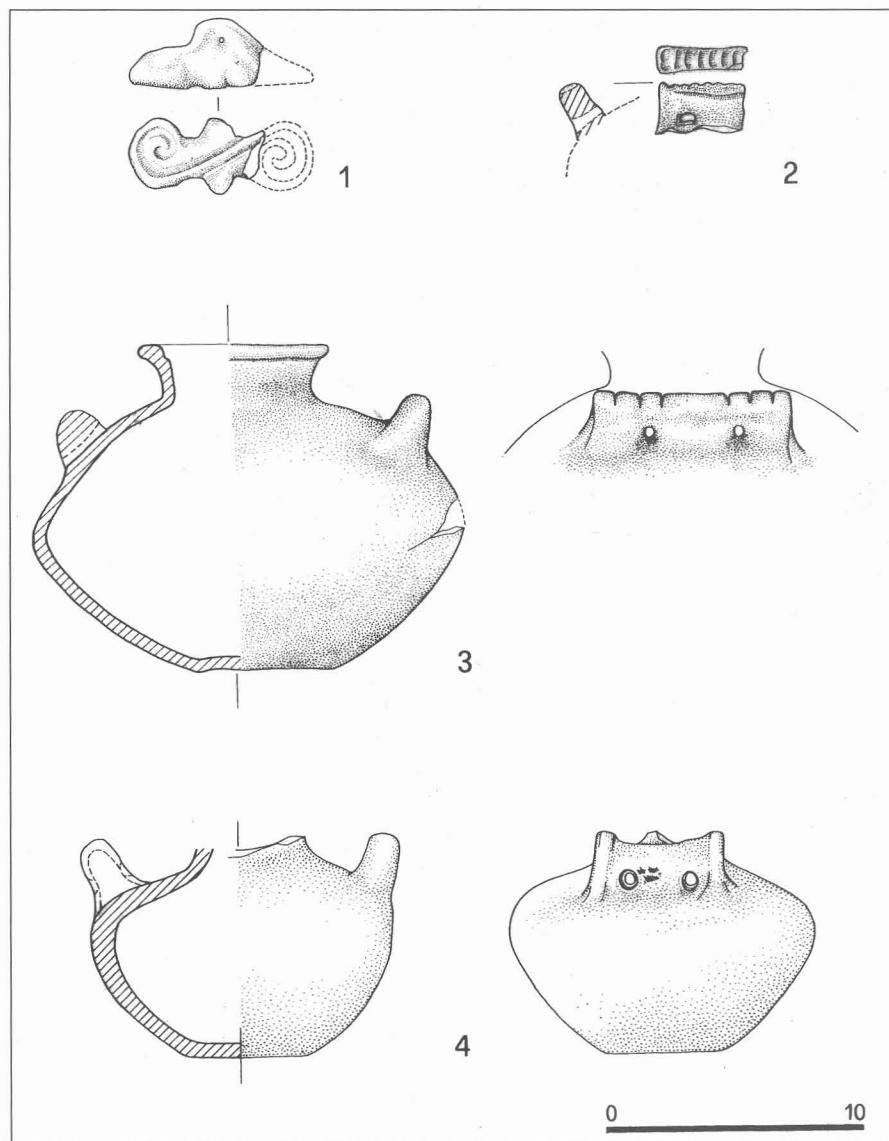


Fig. 1 - 1. La Vela III (excavations 1976): pintadera; 2. La Vela VII (1987-88 excavations), grave VI: vessel in the Serra d'Alto style; 3. La Vela IV (1976 findings): sherd of a quadrangular handle; 4. From Riva del Garda territory (TN): vessel in Serra d'Alto style. (Drawings by G. Berlanda).

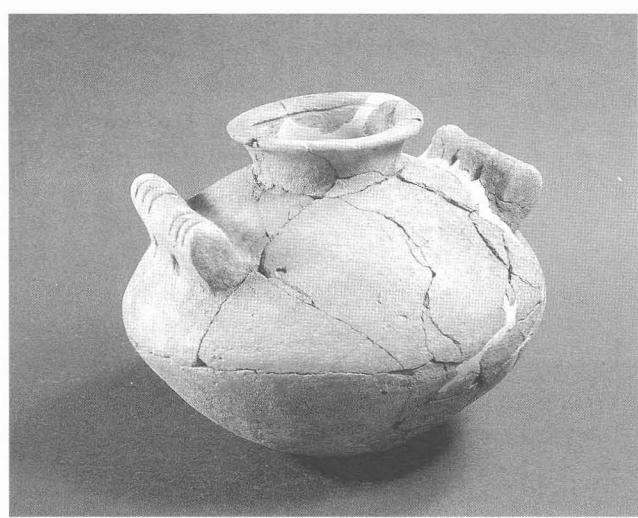


Fig. 2 - La Vela VII (excavations 1987-1988): vessel in the Serra D'Alto style (Archivio Ufficio Beni Archeologici of Trento).

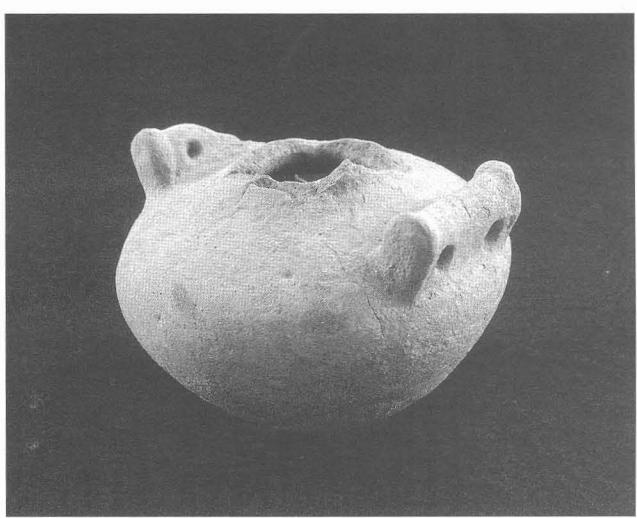


Fig. 3 - From Riva del Garda territory (Trento): vessel in the Serra D'Alto style (Archivio Ufficio Beni Archeologici of Trento).