

CROSSING THE ALPS

**EARLY URBANISM BETWEEN NORTHERN ITALY
AND CENTRAL EUROPE (900-400 BC)**



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AND CENTRAL EUROPE (900-400 BC)**

EDITED BY LORENZO ZAMBONI, MANUEL FERNÁNDEZ-GÖTZ
& CAROLA METZNER-NEBELSICK



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Chapter 7

Spheres of Consumption of Metalwork and Trans-regional Interactions at the Onset of the Urban Phenomenon in Northern Italy

Cristiano Iaia

This paper investigates aspects of consumption and circulation of metalwork in northern Italy in the framework of the first explicit appearance of the urban phenomenon (8th – 7th century BC), with special focus on a multifunctional and polysemous class of artefact, bronze axes. An analysis of the discarding/deposition, ritual treatment, and circulation of these objects allows us to outline the existence of different spheres of consumption in Villanovan north-central Italy: one that conceives of axes as functional tools/weapons, and as a key medium for bulk trade of metal; the other utilises some of them in the manifestations of self-aggrandisement of nascent elites during sumptuous funerary rituals. Different understandings of axes as working tools and weapons associated with swords emerge from mortuary rituals and votive offerings in Veneto and the Caput Adriae. The production and distribution of axe types suggests that two distinct trans-regional networks of communication were in action, respectively centred on Etruria and the southern Po plain (with Bologna and Verucchio as core centres) on one hand, and on northeast Italy and the circumalpine Hallstatt zone on the other.

Keywords: Early Iron Age; Bronze metalwork; Bronze axes; Trans-regional interaction; Italy-Hallstatt interaction.

7.1 Introduction

This paper is concerned with some aspects of the production, circulation, and consumption of metalwork in Early Iron Age north-central Italy, with particular focus on the 8th- early 7th century BC formative stage of the urban centres in northeast Italy. This area, and the historical timespan are considered crucial for understanding the relationships between Italy and transalpine Europe in the Early Hallstatt period. Furthermore, aspects of trade and cultural communication across the Alps, emerging in the 6th and 5th centuries BC, have some fundamental precedents in those earlier stages.

I shall focus on some aspects of consumption, that is, the ways artefacts are valued and socially appropriated and how they circulate accordingly (Appadurai 1986; Dietler 2010). This specific choice is partly due to two pragmatic reasons: firstly, the lack of an adequate corpus of analytical data on technological aspects and metallurgical installations dating

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to this period in Italy, that is on manufacture proper; secondly, the concentration of findings in burials, where artefact inventories may be the outcome of a strict ritual selection of elements. The consequence of this state of evidence is that the image we get from the surviving contexts privileges specific facets of consumption and discarding, which correspond to the end of the life cycle of finished objects. At the same time, these data invite us to investigate aspects of taste and consumption choices (cf. Bourdieu 1987) that are symbolically charged and determine the construction of both local and trans-regional identity patterns of specific social agents.

7.2 Metalworking in the context of early urbanisation northeast of the Apennines

The most explicit features of incipient urbanisation emerge in the east-central portion of the southern Po plain in the course of the period II of the Early Iron Age (hereafter EIA), traditionally identified with the 8th century BC. In that time, Bologna-*Felsina* developed as a vast agglomeration, surrounded by a network of smaller sites, some of which already existed in an earlier stage and hosted wealthy social groups (Manfredi and Malnati 1991, 23-51; Ortalli this volume). The core of the settlement area, of no less than 180 ha, saw the edification of monumental communal buildings and an impressive fortification (Ortalli 2013). A remarkable increase of minor sites is recorded for the nearby area between the rivers Panaro and Idice in the 8th and 7th centuries BC (Forte 1994), which is also indicative of the formation of a hierarchical settlement system and dramatic demographic growth. The nodal role of Bologna, at the junction of various east-west and north-south natural routes, is evident, connecting the area south of the Alps with the blooming milieu of the nascent cities in Etruria proper.

Given these prerequisites – centralisation of functions and demographic growth – during the 8th century Bologna's metal industry grew tremendously in terms of quantity and diversification, with a peak in the phase EIA IIB (Pare 1998, 299-313), or *Villanoviano III* according to a different nomenclature (Dore 2005), around 750 – 700 BC. The most significant quantities of high-value artefacts, especially bronze vessels, horse gear, and parts of wagons, were concentrated in a few top-level cremation burials deposited in monumental structures. The picture shows a more intense polarisation of status display with figures of paramount male leaders, such as those represented by the tombs Benacci Caprara 39 and Benacci 494 (Frey 1969, 30; Morigi Govi *et al.* 1996; Tovoli 1989).

A key context to understanding the production of metalwork in the advanced EIA at Bologna-*Felsina*, and in north-central Italy more generally, is the San Francesco hoard. It was found in the late 19th century, but remains substantially unpublished, except for collections of single

artefact classes (Carancini 1984; Manfroni 2005; Ortalli this volume; Vitali 1985; Zannoni 1888). It includes nearly 15,000 bronze objects and three of iron, which were deposited in a huge jar within an area of the Villanovan settlement of *Felsina*. As with several other hoards, but on a grander scale, the San Francesco hoard contains, complete but worn out artefacts and an enormous number of fragmented objects, which encompasses nearly all the main categories of the bronze industry of that period, including about 4000 axes and 3000 fibulae. An unusual feature of the San Francesco hoard, which has not attracted much attention so far is the c.1050 ingots, mostly fragmented, of pure copper, which have highly diverse impurities, detected by physicochemical investigations in the 1980s, suggesting a widely assorted provenance of raw materials (Antonacci Sanpaolo *et al.* 1992).

This evidence throws some light onto the role that Bologna might have played in the 8th century BC both as an attractor of raw materials from various sources and as a centre of secondary metallurgical production. A direct relationship with metalworkers is also suggested by the occurrence of semi-finished objects, particularly fibulae, and rare metalworking tools (Bentini and Mazzeo 1993). The composition of this impressive accumulation of materials, including several artefact categories that are absent in coeval burials, and its substantial scale leads to the interpretation of it as a public reserve of metal, perhaps ritually deposited. This, however, presupposes the existence of a political power that identifies itself with the community as a whole.

A comparable burst of metal manufacture is observable at Verucchio in the same age, from the second half of the 8th and early 7th centuries BC. The publication of recently investigated burials by Patrizia von Eles and her team gives us a better idea of the whole picture than at Bologna (von Eles *et al.* 2015), even though the concentration of the evidence in mortuary contexts is an undeniable bias. Diversified and elaborate metal craft with various aspects of cross-craftsmanship between various materials (bronze, iron, gold, amber, wood and others) is characteristic of elite burials at Verucchio (Rondini and Zamboni this volume; von Eles and Trocchi 2015). Not unlike some situations of coeval northern and southern Etruria, the grave sets are highly varied, including sumptuous sets of weapons and status symbols, as well as plenty of metal luxury ornaments and banquet paraphernalia (von Eles 2014; von Eles *et al.* 2015). Considering the generalised diffusion of wealth and fine metalwork in burials, the Verucchio mortuary rituals demonstrate a typical manifestation of newly formed aristocratic groups in the competition for power and authority through forms of conspicuous consumption. To this end its aristocracy, exploiting a relatively advantageous geographical position close to the Adriatic, engaged in attracting intense flows of raw materials, such as amber, and polarised different forms of artisanal skills.

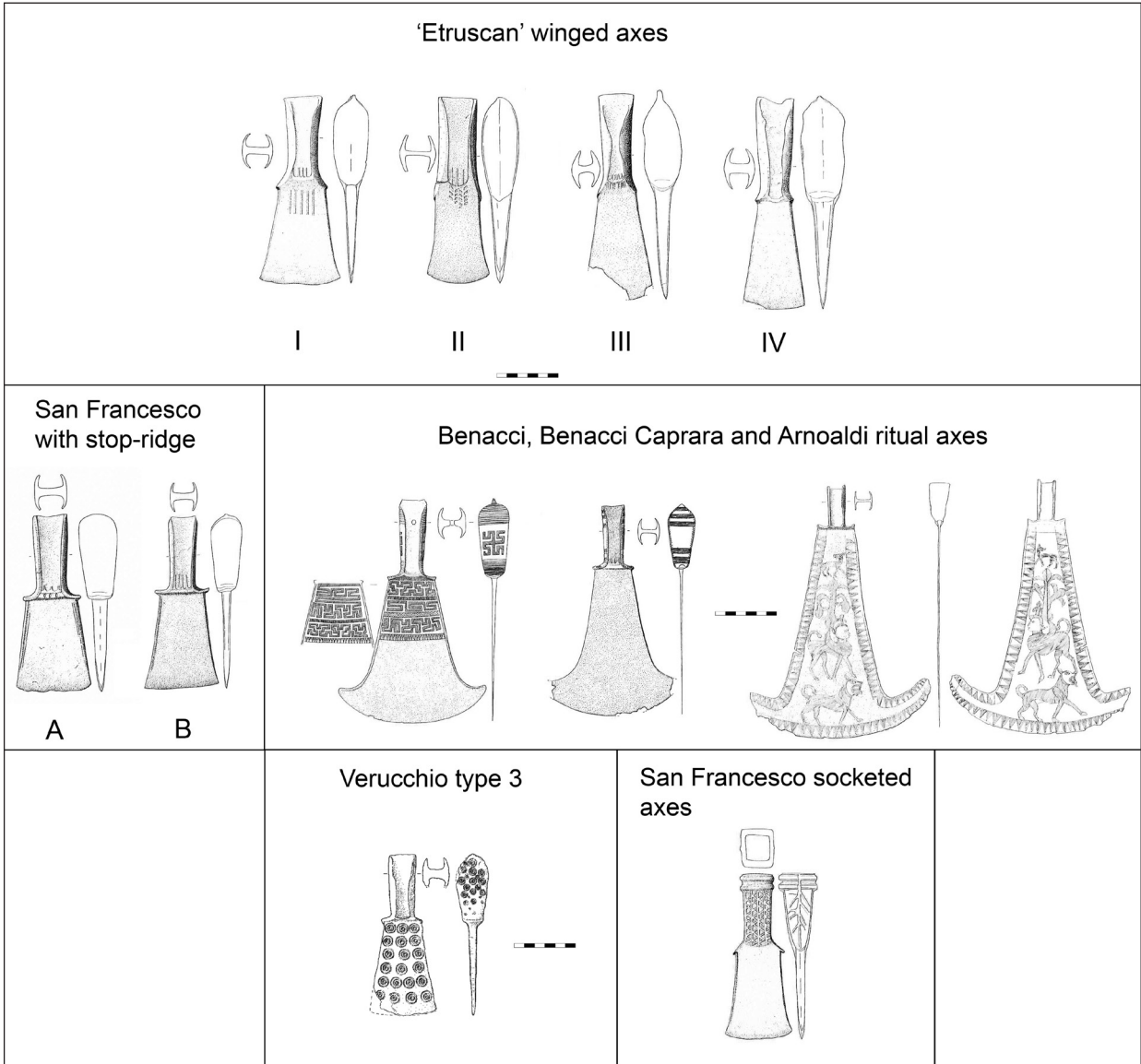


Figure 7.1. Main types of bronze axe-heads from north-central Italy, 8th – early 7th centuries BC (modified after Carancini 1984; Bentini and Di Lorenzo 2015).

In parallel to the development of Bologna and Verucchio in the 8th and 7th centuries BC, northeastern Italy witnessed the formation of a system of urban centres mainly located in the Po plain and strongly dependent on the main fluvial routes connecting the eastern Alps and the Adriatic Sea (e.g. Balista and Gamba 2013; Capuis 1993; Gambacurta this volume). Este and Padova take on a clear hegemonic role in this framework, but they are nonetheless part of a more extensive network of towns, from Oppeano and Gazzo in the west to Concordia in the east. The formation of this network of centres – some of which assumed the status of embryonic city-states – was a gradual and continuous phenomenon that embraced the

entire 8th to 6th centuries BC. Characterising the nature and scale of metalwork production and consumption at the onset of this process is not an easy task. In what follows, I confine myself to sketching the evidence that indicates how the Venetic centres were part of an autonomous network of trans-regional connections encompassing a vast area north and east of the Alps.

7.3 Bronze axes/adzes in north-central and northeastern Italy

There is no space to detail the examination of the multiple EIA metalcraft categories from this area. Thus, I shall focus on a specific and often overlooked artefact class,

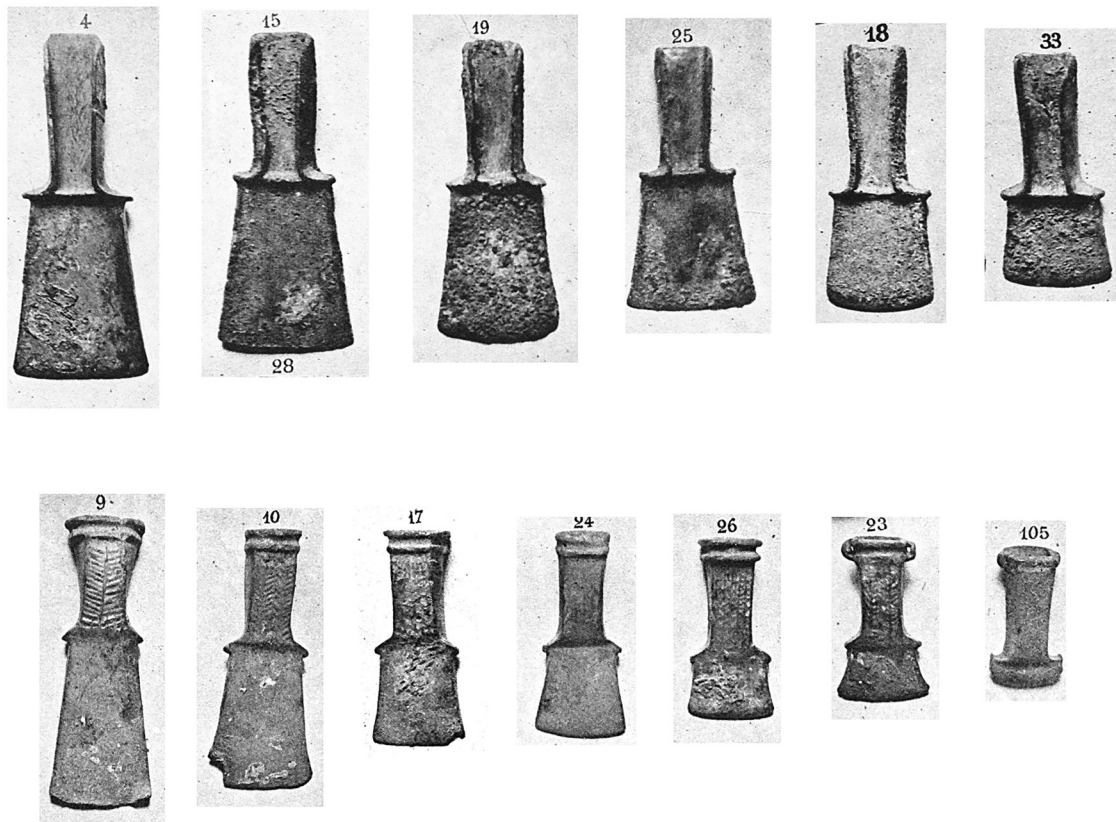


Figure 7.2. A selection of bronze axe-heads from the San Francesco hoard, Bologna, featuring different degrees of use-wear (after Zannoni 1888, with modifications).

bronze axes and adzes, which in the Iron Age assumed a multipurpose and polysemous role (Carancini 1984). In particular, two points are worth considering: as often suggested by scholars in the past, the value of bronze axe-heads as standard objects incorporating a considerable quantity of alloyed metal and subject both to being stored and amply circulated; and their significance as tracers of local workshops and stylistic idiosyncrasies. The advantage of analysing bronze axes also lies in their nearly ubiquitous presence in various contexts. On a hypothetical scale of values, they range between standardised bulk commodities and status-enhancing items.

At the moment, the only way to address the production and consumption of bronze axes in EIA Italy is by examining their typology, distribution, and contexts. This task can be accomplished thanks to the *Prähistorische Bronzefunde* volume on Italian axes by G.L. Carancini (1984), to whom we also owe a very detailed catalogue and classification system. On this occasion, I have simplified Carancini's typology and updated his catalogue of the Bologna axes to allow the major morphological and stylistic distinctions to emerge (fig. 7.1).

The axes from the San Francesco hoard raise many interesting questions relative to the economy and society

of a proto-urban centre. It is apparent from the extremely numerous series of nearly identical blades that they represented serial production, making them particularly suited to utilisation as a standardised means for storing and exchanging considerable quantities of cast bronze. Even in the absence of a traceological analysis (cf. Dolfini and Crellin 2016), the different blade lengths of similar complete axes indicate varying degrees of wear (e.g., fig. 7.2). This gives us some clues about the extensive use of these tools in everyday life: for instance, as heavy-duty working tools, as well as weapons damaged in combat and repeatedly sharpened.

A more complicated picture emerges if we compare the massive evidence from the San Francesco hoard and the coeval record from burials. Separate spheres of the utilisation of different categories of axes are apparent. Dating to the first half of the 8th century BC several burials from Bologna feature axes with markedly thin blades, clearly non-utilitarian and ritual tools, which correspond to Carancini's winged axes of the Benacci, Caprara, and Arnoaldi types (Carancini 1984, 99-105) (fig. 7.1). The prestigious character of these tools is also frequently heightened by the elaborate decorations and the

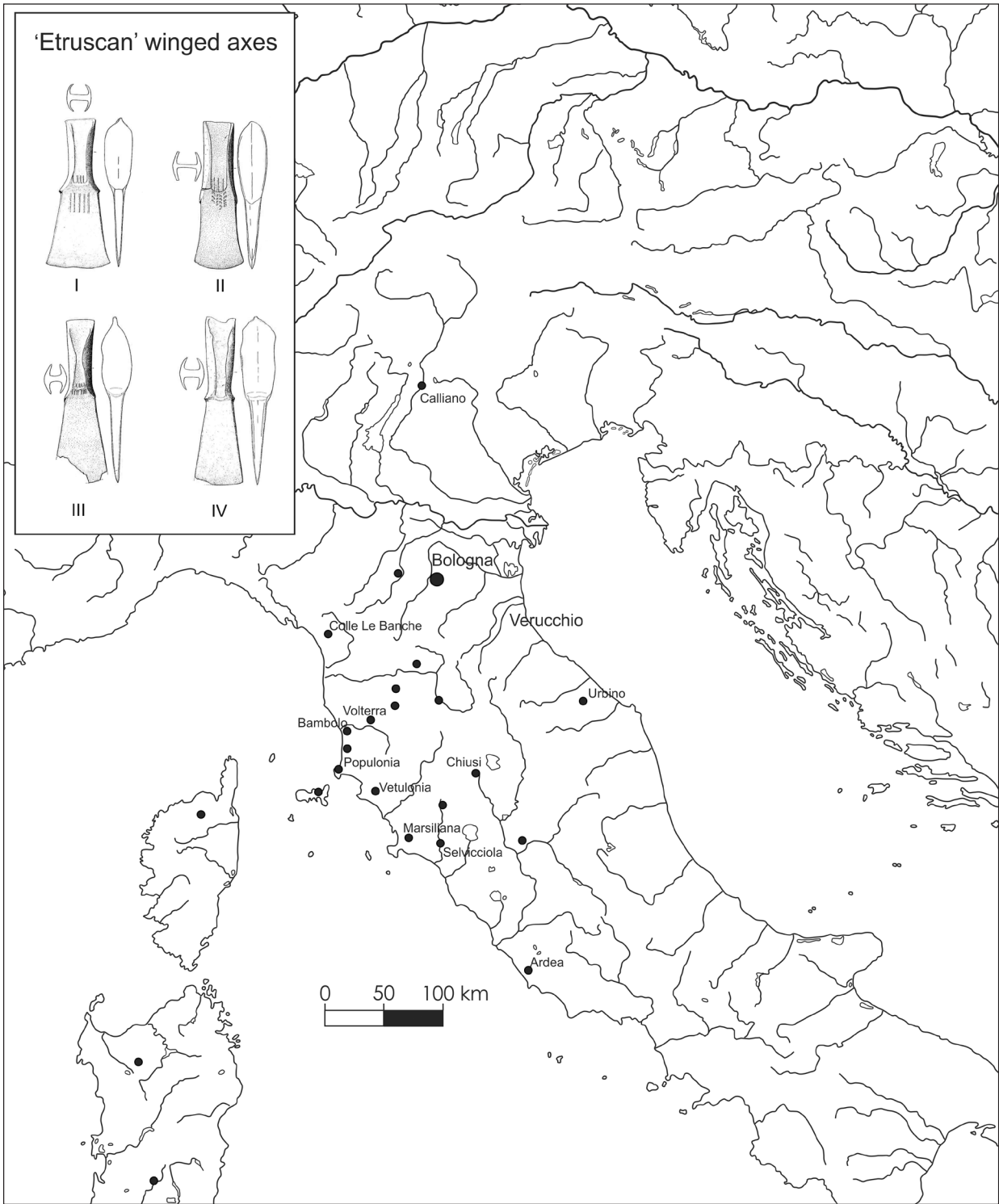


Figure 7.3. Distribution map of the bronze 'Etruscan' winged axes (author's drawing based on Carancini 1984; Lo Schiavo 1981; Lo Schiavo and Milletti 2011; Setti 1997).

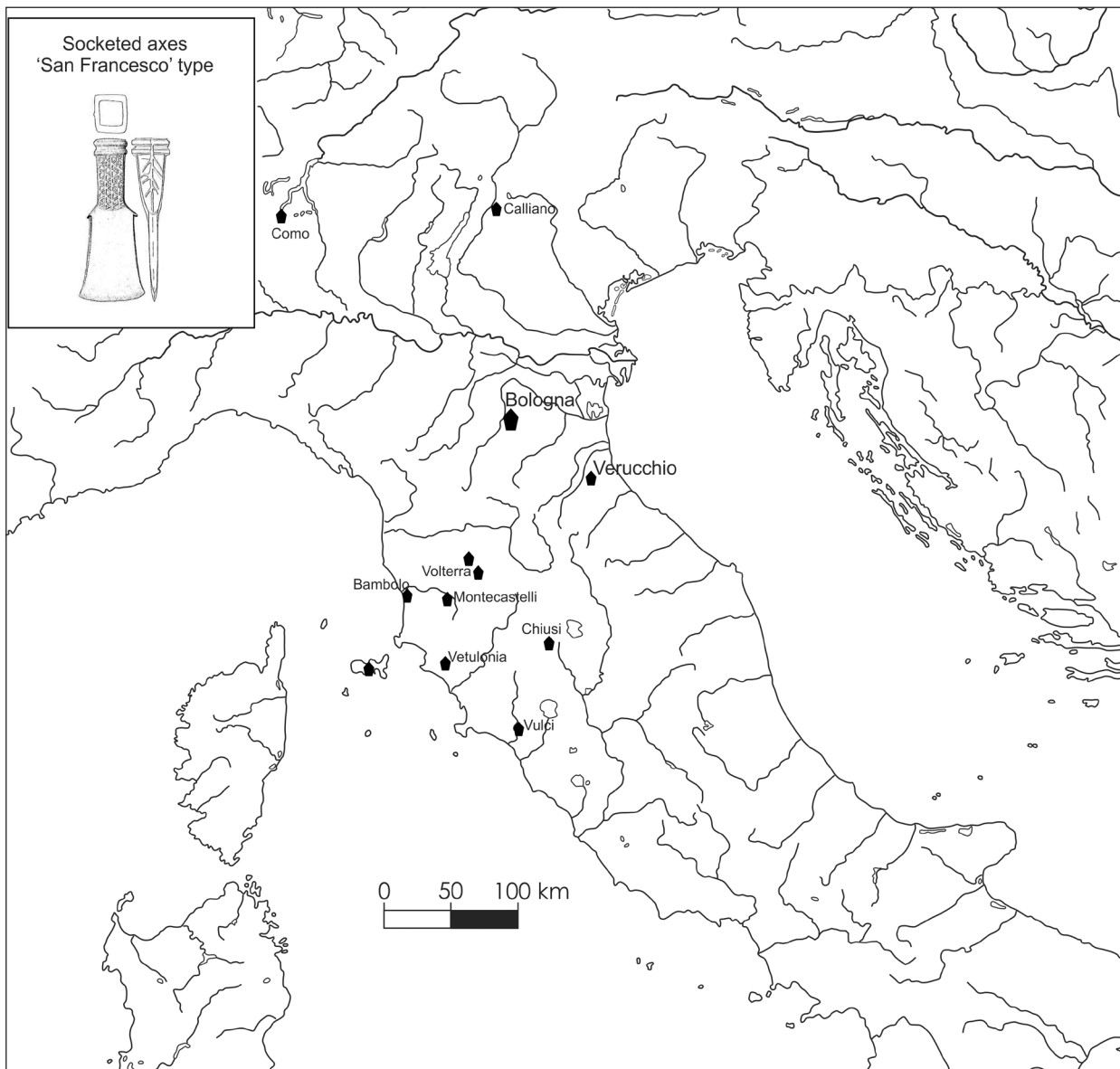


Figure 7.4. Distribution map of the bronze socketed axes with protruding shoulders, San Francesco type (author's drawing based on Carancini 1984; Delpino 1981; Nascimbene 2009).

association with other markers of rank, such as horse gear (e.g. von Hase 1969, abb. 2-5). Interestingly, these types are exclusive to Bologna's cemeteries, and no specimens of them are present in the San Francesco hoard.

In graves belonging to eminent members of the Bologna and Verucchio elites, mainly males but also females, sets composed of three axes included individual pieces burned and heavily damaged, while others had been left intact (Ossani and Pozzi 2015; Tovoli 1989, 136, 174; von Eles 2002, 151; von Eles *et al.* 2015). Thus, while some might have been weapons, others can be interpreted as tools for sacrificial ceremonies involving butchering practices or iconic objects. Behind these patterns, there is a complex symbolism of

ritual acts performed during the funeral, with constant references to the spheres of power and status.

A look at the distribution maps of the main typological classes of bronze axes is necessary in order to grasp their economic and cultural role in the advanced EIA. The distribution map of axe types known in north-central Italy is highly significant. The winged axes include distinct series: by far the more numerous series includes what I have denominated as 'Etruscan' winged axes (fig. 7.1), as their distribution predominantly covers northern Etruria and Bologna, with minor occurrences in the Marches, Latium, and Trentino. They correspond to Carancini's Vetulonia, Bambolo, Grottazzolina, Marsiliana d'Albegna, Cignano, and

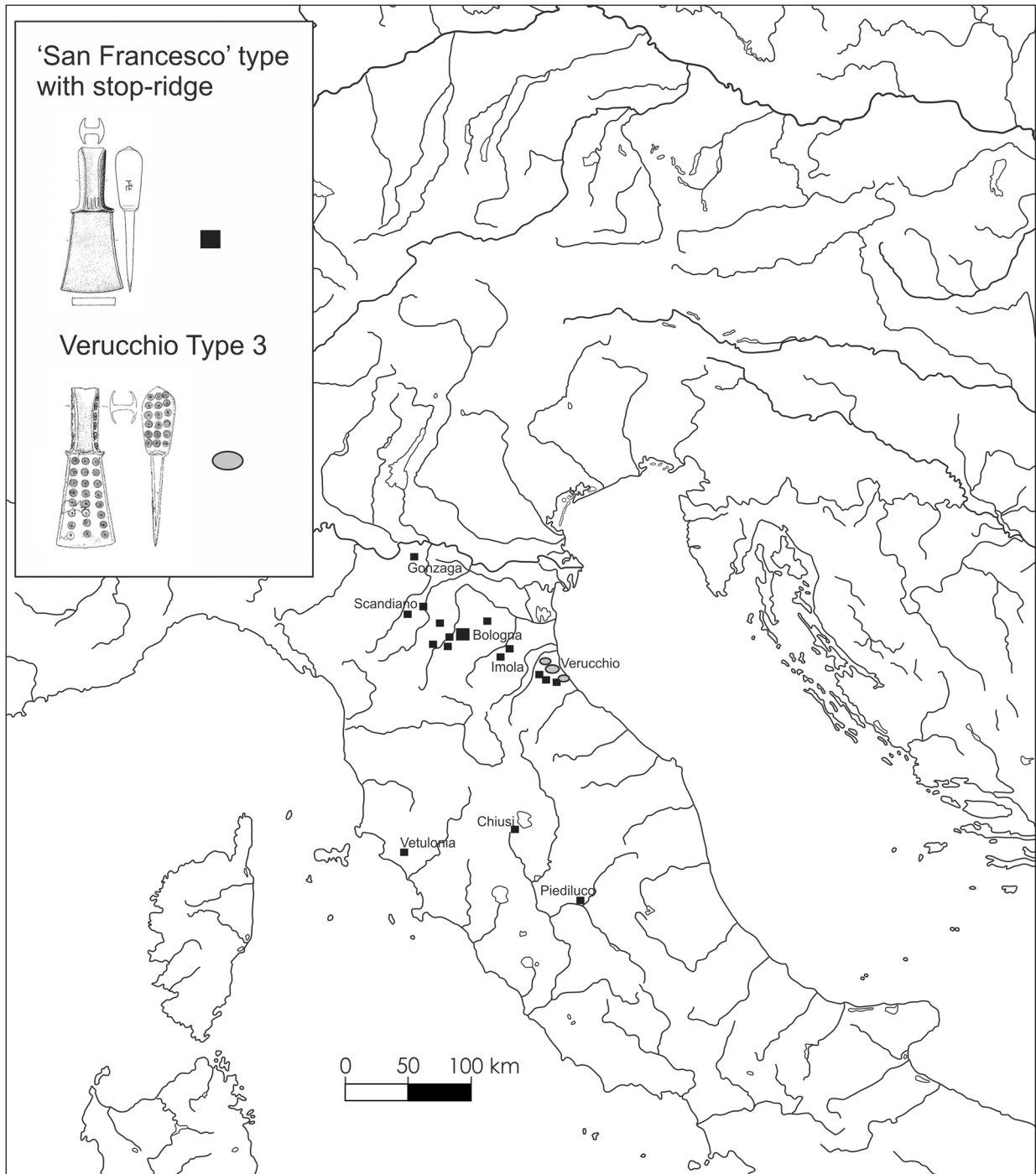


Figure 7.5. Distribution map of the bronze axes with large shoulders and stop-ridge of the San Francesco type and Verucchio type 3 (author's drawing based on Carancini 1984; Bentini and Di Lorenzo 2015; Esposito 2018)

Volterra types (Carancini 1984; Setti 1997), that, for the sake of intelligibility, can be sorted into four main groups. They may represent different series, possibly manufactured by distinct producers or workshops, that nonetheless operated within the same craft tradition. This homogeneity is confirmed by the recurrence of the same decorative features,

a row of incised segments, placed between the heel and the blade. The San Francesco hoard contains hundreds of specimens belonging to these series, but the vast distribution in northern Etruria and the exports into Corsica and Sardinia (Lo Schiavo 1981; Lo Schiavo and Milletti 2011) makes it likely that manufacture took place south of the Apennines (fig. 7.3).

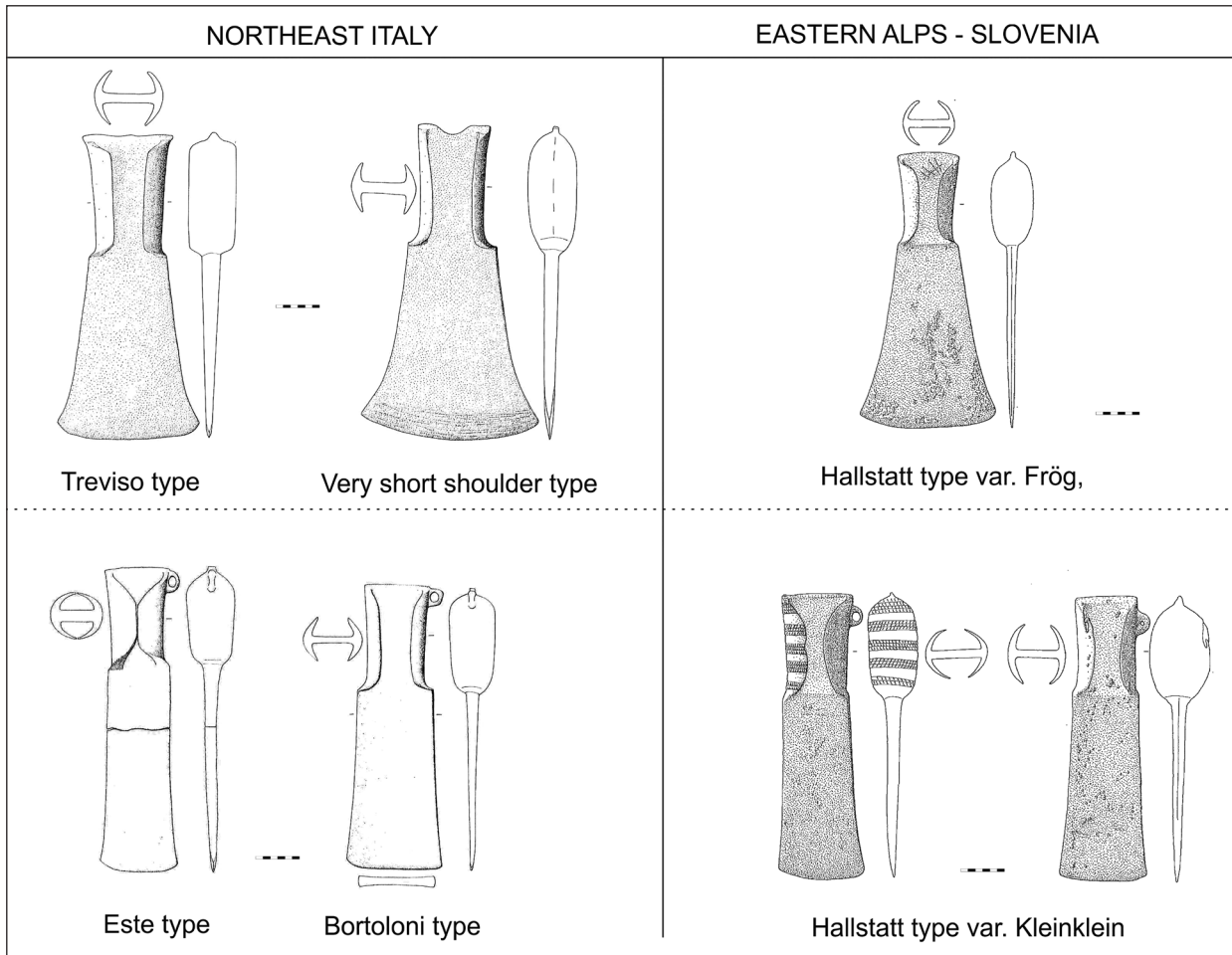


Figure 7.6. Comparison between the main types of bronze winged axes in northeast Italy, eastern Alps, and Slovenia in the 8th-early 7th centuries BC (modified after Carancini 1984; Mayer 1977).

The distribution of socketed axes with protruding shoulders of the San Francesco type overlaps with the previous one (Carancini 1984, 175-187; Delpino 1981; Nascimbene 2009) (fig. 7.1). This is a particular shape, frequently characterised by a net-like plastic decoration made by casting (Lehoërff 2007, 191, fig. 111). In light of the distribution map, the primary area of manufacture of this form was likely the metal-rich coastal Etruria (fig. 7.4). Some evidence suggests a different sphere of utilisation for these axes in Etruria proper and Bologna: while in the former region they are sometimes deposited as single occurrences in burials, which also included weapons and working tools, in the latter a considerable number of them (148 specimens including fragments and worn-out pieces) occur exclusively within the San Francesco hoard. This pattern could suggest an oscillation of the value of these objects between practical use and commodification, depending on local choices.

The axes with large shoulders and stop-ridge (fig. 7.1), Carancini's *asce ad alette con setto di divisione* (Carancini 1984, 69-90) indicate a completely different distribution

pattern (fig. 7.5). They concentrate between Bologna and its surroundings, including the recently discovered aristocratic pole of Imola-Pontesanto (Esposito 2018, tav. 1.5), and could be considered products of the dominant centre which were redistributed to 'vassal' communities. Similar axes featuring a distinctive decoration with impressed concentric circles, type 3 of a recently published typology (Bentini and Di Lorenzo 2015), are instead exclusive to Verucchio and its closer environs, between the Marecchia valley and the Adriatic Sea (fig. 7.1 and fig. 7.5). Interestingly, the very restricted circulation of the latter is consistent with the whole mortuary record of this centre, where local elite groups utilised prestige artefacts of different quality in the framework of private ceremonies.

In northeastern Italy the types of bronze axes dating to the 8th-7th centuries BC are morphologically distinct from those of north-central Italy and follow exactly the models found around the eastern Alps (fig. 7.6). In particular, there is perfect parallelism between the winged axes of Treviso, 'very short shoulder' and Este Bortoloni types in northeast Italy (Carancini 1984, 115-116; 118), and the variants Frög and Kleinklein of

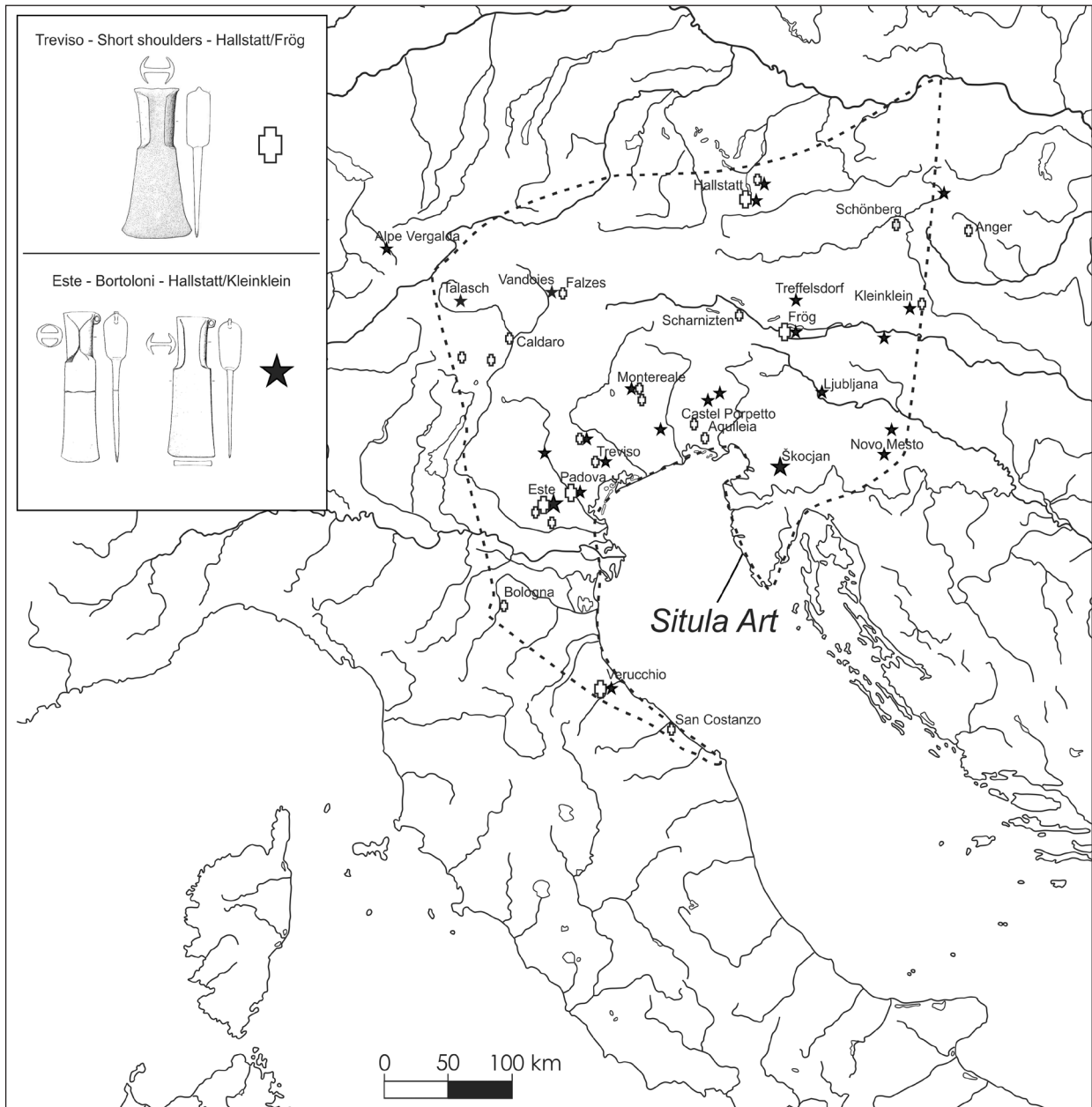


Figure 7.7. Distribution map of the bronze winged axes in northeast Italy, eastern Alps and Slovenia; in dashed line the distribution area of the Situla Art (author's drawing; sources in the text).

the Hallstatt type (Mayer 1977, 170-172). The distribution map of these two different series is extremely telling (fig. 7.7).¹

1 The catalogues of specimens from Italy and Austria pertaining to these types published in Carancini 1984 and Mayer 1977 is here updated with further additions from Slovenia (Božič 2015; Djura Jelenko and Božič 2015; Tecco Hvala 2017; Turk 2016, 113-115), and recent findings from northeast Italy (De Min *et al.* 2005, 157; Gamba *et al.* 2011; Gamba *et al.* 2013, 2.1.4, 209; Pettarin 1996), and from Verucchio (von Eles 2002, 151, n. 162).

The Treviso – Frög series connects the *Venetorum Angulus*, including Friuli Venezia Giulia, with the northeastern Alps, while the Este-Bortoloni-Kleinklein series spread in a larger area including Slovenia to the south. It is worth stressing that these types of axes were systematically deposited as part of the most prominent male graves dating between the mid-8th and early 7th century BC in the entire area.

In Veneto, bronze axes oscillate alternatively between a ritual codification as working tools or as weapons. Some of the wealthiest male depositions at Este and

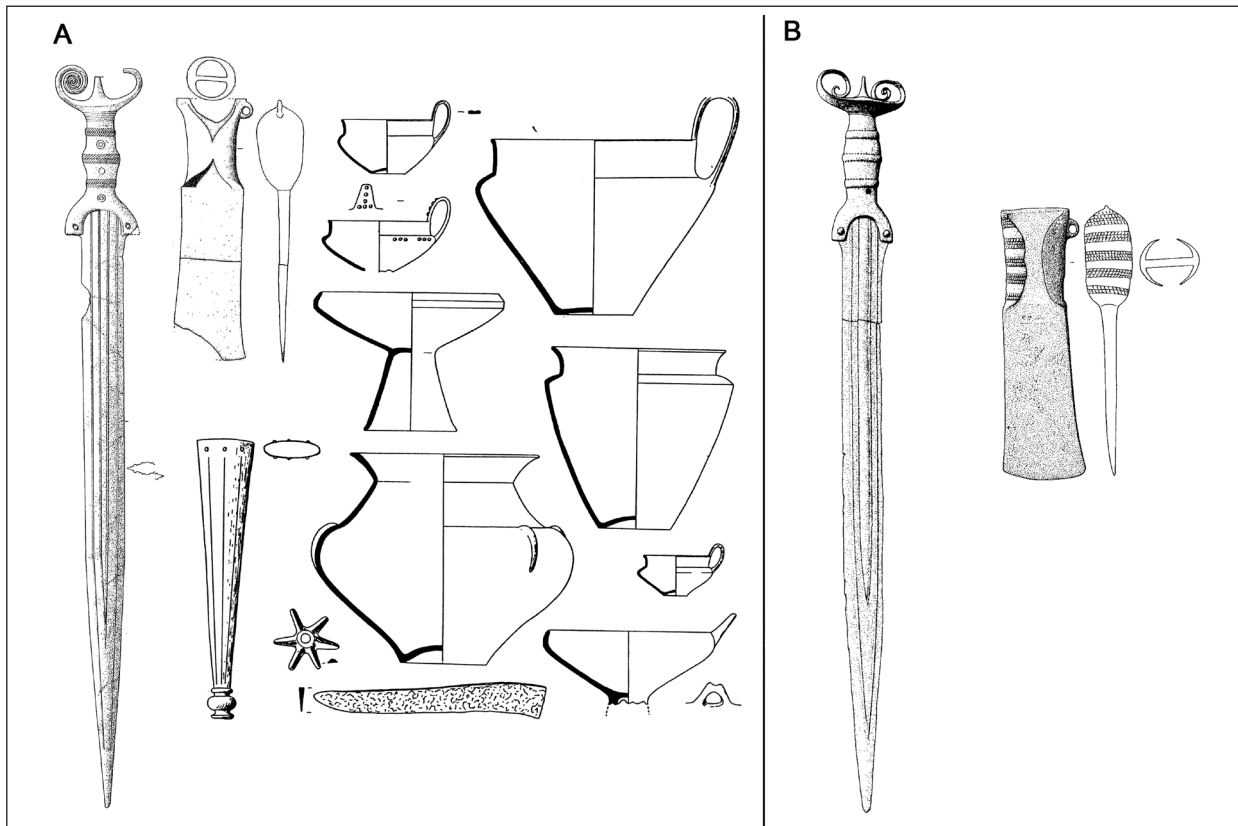


Figure 7.8. Burial grave sets including a Bortoloni – Kleinklein type axe and a sword. A: Este (PD, Veneto, Italy), tomb Candeo 302. B: Kleinklein (Leibnitz, Styria, Austria), Hartnermichelkogel tomb 1. No scale (after Bianco Peroni 1970; Müller-Karpe 1959; Egg 2004, with modifications).

Padova include a Treviso or Bortoloni type axe as part of a prestigious woodworking toolkit.² In the *Tomba dei Vasi Borchiatati* at Padova (Gamba *et al.* 2011), c.700 BC, the Bortoloni type axe is associated with a sumptuous set for banqueting. Here, the illustrious individual is identified with someone capable of managing commensal hospitality, sacrificial practices, and craftworks. This understanding overlaps with the funerary use of axes of the Bortoloni – Kleinklein type as elements of weaponry. Over the entire space between Veneto and the eastern Alps in the 8th century BC, they occasionally occur in remarkable burials associated with old-fashioned bronze swords of the antenna type, weapons which they are also associated with due to their frequent voluntary damage and fragmentation. It is the case of the grave Candeo 302 at Este (Müller-Karpe 1959, taf. 91A) and the oldest deposition in the tumulus grave Hartnermichelkogel 1 at Kleinklein (Egg 2004, abb. 3) (fig. 7.8). The transcultural nature of this form appears manifest when considering the princely

burial of Novo Mesto in southeastern Slovenia, dating to around 700-690 BC (fig. 7.9). Here the Bortoloni-Kleinklein axe is part of a panoply of weapons including elements extraneous to the Venetic context, such as the iron curved sword with T-shaped hilt and the pair of long spearheads (Božič 2015, 48-51; Knez 1993, 425).

Other evidence suggests the association with swords and the involvement of the Bortoloni-Kleinklein axes in cultic acts: the ritual deposition of heavily damaged specimens in rivers in Veneto, Friuli, and Slovenia, in continuity with the Late Bronze Age tradition of *Gewässerfunde* (Turk 2016, 113-115 with literature). Highly significant in this respect are the burned axes found in the cultic cave known as Musja Jama-Grotta delle Mosche at Škocjan-San Canziano (Turk 2016), which mark the last stage of the utilisation of the site after a long sequence of votive deposition started in the Late Bronze Age.

There is no doubt that all these areas formed an interconnected, yet highly diversified, world in which material forms with strong symbolic character were assuming increased significance as identity markers. This, in particular, is highlighted by the nearly total overlap of the distribution of these last types of axes and the

2 Este tomb Randi 14 (Frey 1969, abb. 7) and Ricovero 236 (Chieco Bianchi and Calzavara Capuis 1985, 300, tavv. 201-210); Padova tomb via Umberto I 318 (De Min *et al.* 2005, 154-157).

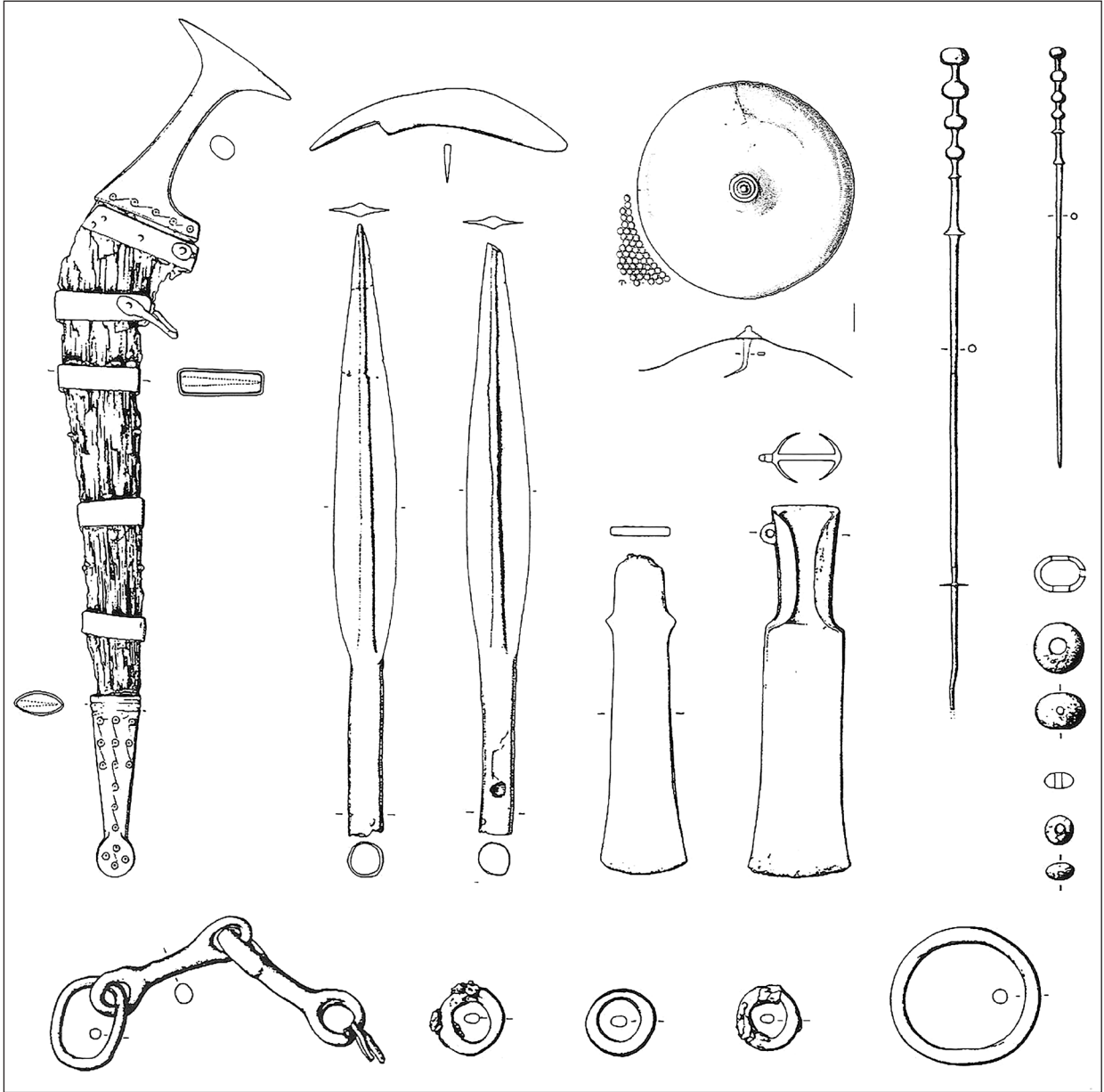


Figure 7.9. Novo Mesto (Dolenjska, Slovenia), Kapiteljska njiva, Grave 16, Tumulus I. No scale (after Knez 1993).

later Situla Art, as indicated by the dashed line in fig. 7.7 (where only the ‘classical’ manifestations of this style are considered). It seems as though, in the 7th to 4th centuries BC, the network of connections between the aristocrats around the eastern Alps was prepared and enriched by the intense relationships of the preceding period.

In about 700 BC, Verucchio acts as a key junction between the two different networks illustrated above. The isolated occurrence of a Bortoloni-Kleinklein type axe in the famous ‘princely’ tomb Lippi 89 at Verucchio (von Eles 2002, 151, n. 162, tav. 65) appears to be an exotic gift from Veneto or the southeastern Alps. This artefact is among the

most prominent symbols denoting the paramount status of the deceased in this burial, and the bronze conical helmet, from the same context, adds a further element of connection to the eastern Alps and *Caput Adriae* (Mazzoli and Negrini 2015, 6).

7.4 Conclusions

Focusing on the consumption of a polysemous bronze item, the axe, has helped me to stress the existence of distinct patterns of consumption and circulation of symbolically charged artefacts. We should distinguish between spheres of consumption and circulation that coexist within the same

cultural and social environment on one hand, and networks covering different geographical spaces on the other.

In the southeastern Po Plain, the coexistence of different spheres of consumption is particularly evident. The San Francesco hoard gives us a glimpse at a utilitarian ambit of consumption and the economic strategies of an emergent urban centre, Bologna. Here, serially produced axes are understood both as working tools and standardised units of cast metal intended for storing and trading. I have not addressed the enormous and controversial topic of the possible use of fragmented axes as a form of proto-currency, but this is certainly an aspect to be taken into account in explaining this specific case. Moreover, the strong relationship in terms of axe types between Bologna and metal-rich northern Etruria suggests the central importance of metal trade in this scenario. In the end, Bologna provides strong signs of interest towards 'liquid commodities' (Bachhuber 2011, 170), in other words convertible items.

At the same time, both the Bologna and Verucchio mortuary records provide evidence of a different pattern of consumption. Axes of local production and restricted circulation (Benacci and Caprara ritual axes, San Francesco with stop-ridge and Verucchio type 3) were primarily conceived of as ceremonial tools involved in elaborate rituals of self-aggrandisement. At Verucchio, this takes place in the framework of particularly extreme forms of conspicuous consumption of valuable goods, including other precious materials, such as amber and striking polymaterial artefacts. The utilisation of luxury artefacts in Verucchio's mortuary context, including hyper-decorated axes, can thus be explained as a form of 'sacrificial economy' (Bachhuber 2011; Wengrow 2011), whereby great quantities of valuable objects were eventually taken out of circulation, and practically destroyed by depositing them on the funeral pyre and/or in the grave.

The geographic space between Veneto and the eastern Alps highlights slightly different patterns of consumption and partakes in a different network of communication. Extreme forms of conspicuous consumption are not unknown, but in general are very rare. In the case of axe types, the production/exchange network is utterly unrelated to the Villanovan (or Tyrrhenian-oriented) one and assumes the appearance of a distinct systemic contact. It is highly likely that in an earlier stage these axes were manufactured in emergent proto-urban agglomerations, like Este and Padova. Artisans residing in these centres strove to create new forms and stylistic patterns to respond to the increasing demand for idiosyncratic material culture by the local elites. Some specific type of axes, understood as either working tools or prestigious weapons associated with swords, assumed a marked transcultural character which linked the most prominent members of elites around the eastern Alps into a chain of connections. This east-west systemic interaction is nonetheless a highly significant phenomenon, which could

have laid the foundations of the profound cultural amalgam overshadowed by the Situla Art in the ensuing period.

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