THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF POWER IN LOMBARD FEMALE BURIALS IN CENTRAL-NORTHERN ITALY.
MARRIAGE, INTEGRATION, GRAVE GOODS AND STATUS SYMBOLS

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Abstract: This paper highlights several unusual aspects of the socio-political structure of Lombard society in the years following the conquest of Italy, bearing in mind that Germanic society consisted unequivocally of both men and women with complementary roles and the possibility of action, including intervention in the economic sphere, which could be expressed in various ways. As well as the capacity of foreigners to integrate with the local community, traditionally recognised in the two cemeteries of Nocera Umbra and Castel Trosino, the archaeological evidence shows a second form of integration with a process that took place exclusively within individual Germanic communities. The Collegno cemetery reveals the presence of women belonging to the Merovingian culture, probably from Transalpine territories and of high social status, who integrated with the Germanic community without losing the prerogatives of their rank during the transitional period. Lastly, the case of the Spilamberto cemetery shows how the formation of grave goods, and thus the investment capacity of individual families, corresponded to requirements that exceeded any other necessity including the state of health of female individuals. By placing all these elements on an ideal hypothetical level of reflection, it can be suggested that a funeral, at least until the mid-seventh century, was not just a religious ceremony but the moment when the family of the deceased displayed their economic capacity to absorb the roles, prerogatives and property of the dead person through the permanent loss of material goods, sometimes of significant value, when they were placed in the burial.

Keywords: Archaeology, power, Lombard female burials, Central-Northern Italy, marriage, integration, grave goods, symbols of power

1. SOCIETY AND RITUAL: WOMEN AND MARRIAGE IN LOMBARD SOCIETY

In the belief that early medieval women had no legal capacity and nor even a precise or clearly defined economic role, Italian historiography has always considered Lombard society as an essentially pyramidal structure profoundly marked by ties of a military type and by the warrior tradition, where property issues and alliances between kinship groups were devised, made and run exclusively by the male members of the family group, relegating women to a purely subordinate role. Contrary to this assumption, the archaeological evidence demonstrates that Germanic women had a key role in activating – generally through marriage – new economic equilibria and power strategies which has been confirmed by the comprehensive study of grave goods (and the artefacts they comprise).[1]

To understand the socio-economic dynamics of the central northern part of the *Regnum Langobardorum*, the study analysed both the characteristics of the integration processes experienced by the female members of Germanic society – in terms of the foreign women who reached Italy from Pannonian areas and their interactions with local women with Romano-Byzantine traditions and culture – and the possible significance of the grave goods in

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[1] La Rocca 2000, 45–46.

female burials of the immigrant generation. This corresponds to a crucial period for the transformation of early medieval customs and society which can be reconstructed, especially for the earliest phase, on the basis of archaeological data from cemetery finds characterised by graves with the funerary ritual of 'clothed burial', accompanied by grave goods and gifts, according to the traditions of Germanic peoples, for Lombards recorded in the cemeteries of the phase preceding the conquest of the Italian Peninsula.[2]

It is only from about the mid-seventh century onwards that there are the first important references to women's social status in legislation, contained in the 'Edictum Rothari' and during the eighth century in additions made to the previous text by Liutprand (713–735) and Aistulf (750), who updated the original provisions by bringing them into alignment with the transformation of social customs. These changes required intervention, especially in the field of inheritance, in order to defend family property, in which women acquired important new rights. They reflect a social organisation based on land ownership and trade, but also reveal an advanced state of Christianisation and full integration with the Romano-Germanic and religious ruling classes.[3]

The funerary ritual of the grave goods, which included clothing, jewellery, ordinary work tools (spindle whorls, shuttles, and small knives) and rich gifts that were placed in Italo-Lombard burials, follows phases of development that can be identified chronologically. The phase that corresponds to the generation affected by migration can be recognised archaeologically due to the presence, in female graves, of Pannonian brooches (fibulae) which can be considered as a primary indicator of Germanic iconography and production. Besides brooches, the grave goods include jewellery and other lavish gifts (an iron folding stool [*sellae plicatilis*] with damascened decoration, bronze vessels and glass drinking horns), which are distinctive features of aristocratic and middle-class tombs. These artefacts come or derive from multiple places and influences interacting through contacts of varying intensity: the coexistence in the same areas of peoples of different cultures, the circulation of people and diplomacy involving the exchange of gifts and war booty. The influences stem from the capacity to carry out trade and exchange with provincial Roman populations, nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes from the Eurasian steppes, northern European-Scandinavian territories and the areas of the neighbouring Byzantine Empire.

Within the context of the mobility of groups of people and individuals, women were subject to matrimonial dynamics that could lead a Lombard woman to travel far from her own family (exogamy) and original territory. Women should be considered as the means of transmission of artefacts and traditions and, due to their migrations from one community to another, were responsible for transforming and redefining their own traditions and those of their new family.[4]

Another intercultural feature – in the case of marriages outside the original ethnic substrate – could be the dowry that the woman brought to her husband and the gifts that she received from him, according to an ancestral tradition, an element that is to be found in all Germanic law codes, and for the Lombards in the Edictum Rothari. The historical sources provide ample evidence of female mobility due to the matrimonial strategy of alliances between ruling families, also practised among lower classes to consolidate military or property alliances.[5]

Interculturalism is a complex phenomenon and must take into account relationships established within a community between free men and women (nevertheless subject to the *mundio*), who followed the same Germanic customs and, in the case of Roman peoples, were united by their own traditions and laws. In this context, it is also interesting to note the provisions of the Edictum Rothari which regulated the economic value of the motley crew of servants, slaves and semi-freedmen and women who made up the family in a broader sense and who were often buried alongside the ruling elite and their relations with female counterparts (slave girls who were daughters of a free mother or a freedwoman, or free women whose mothers were enslaved) in a broad framework of various possible combinations.[6]

The assimilation between the Lombard and Roman populations in Italy took place within a cultural fabric heavily influenced by Imperial-Mediterranean and Christian-Byzantine traditions. A significant element of this gradual social and cultural change, which can also be observed in funerary rituals, consists in the variability of the

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[2] Tütken–Knipper–Alt 2008, 13–42; Bóna–Bóna Horváth 2009, 169–178.

[3] La Rocca 2000, 47–53; La Rocca 2011a, 65–68.

[4] La Rocca 2011a, 65–72.

[5] Jarnut 1995, 12–28; Giostra 2004, 73–77; Modzelewski 2008, 161–172.

[6] Azzara–Gasparri 1992, 205–207; Paroli 1997, 94–101; Rupp 1997a, 28; Rupp 1997c, 174–177; Modzelevski 2008, 185–196; De Marchi 2009, 465–471; Giostra 2011a, 253–272.

regulations regarding marriage. In the Edictum Rothari, confirmation that the wedding had actually taken place was certified by checking that the bride had been handed over to the bridegroom although wedding rings in an Italo-Lombard context are already known archaeologically in the first half of the seventh century.

During the reign of Liutprand, marriage was certified by the ring through which the man established a bond with the woman and made her his own. The object that symbolises Christian marriage was mentioned for the first time in legislation passed by Liutprand. The transition from giving one's hand in marriage to giving rings marks the transition from a community based on blood ties to a broader Christian society, based on law.[7] Laws related to marriage were extremely important because they affect inheritance which differentiates legitimate children from natural children. For this reason the economic value of maternity, which ensured the legitimacy of the lineage, increased the cost of the fine, which was already high (1200 *solidi*) and more than that for a man of similar lineage, in the case of premediated homicide of a free woman which caused the premature death of the child. During the eighth century women acquired numerous rights, especially in terms of hereditary succession and the supervision of bequests.[8]

2. THE GRADUAL PROCESS OF INTEGRATION AND ITS VARIABLES

The process of assimilation between cultures, in which the traditions involved change, follows a chronological sequence that stems from social and economic changes. It was caused by a state organisation that was becoming increasingly territorial, organised in hierarchies based on landed property, production (aristocracy, the management of land for third parties, tenant farmers and servants) and trade which required a foreign policy (Transalpine countries and the Byzantine Empire), and closer relations with the ecclesiastical hierarchies.[9]

In Lombard society, the ruling class, as was customary, was the first to adapt to 'international status symbols', a means of feeling equal to princes and rulers of empires and other Romano-Germanic kingdoms, but golden brocade clothing, borrowed from imperial fashion, is accompanied in male burials by weapons, and in female burials by jewellery and clothing accessories, precious objects closely associated with the fashions and lifestyles of the Roman aristocracy. Aristocratic women, who did not use weapons, were freer and more open-minded towards innovation.

However, the interaction between cultures varied according to the proximity of the settlements to Transalpine or Byzantine territories. In this regard, it is particularly interesting to note the funerary contexts found in the cemeteries of Nocera Umbra and, especially, Castel Trosino, situated in the territories of the duchies of Spoleto and Benevento, full of materials that imitate, or were made in, the world of Rome and Constantinople, and the high quality of the road network which enabled the movement of people and products, including pilgrimage routes.[10]

The Italian Peninsula also includes more conservative peripheral areas. In the seventh century, Alpine populations continued to bury their womenfolk with traditional Roman jewellery and clothing. This conservatism could be a feature of marginal rural areas, but could also be an affirmation of identity and membership of the ruling class, a widely adopted approach among free aristocratic warriors who, between the late sixth and the first half of the seventh centuries, were buried with a set of weapons and military equipment, sometimes accompanied by the burial of the horse, displaying their adherence to a tradition and chosen status.[11]

3. THE CENTRAL SOUTHERN CEMETERIES OF NOCERA UMBRA (PERUGIA) AND CASTEL TROSINO (ASCOLI PICENO)

The cemetery of Nocera Umbra (Perugia), situated on the border with the Byzantine Empire controlling *Via Flaminia* in the duchy of Spoleto, was used from the last thirty years of the sixth century to about 740. It contains the burials of a mainly military community. The chronological sequence reveals the development of funerary ritual

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[7] FEVRIER 1986, 881–942; AZZARA–GASPARRI 1992, 183–184 (Rothari); 30 (Liutprand).

[8] LA ROCCA 1997, 33–35; LA ROCCA 2000, 51–55; DE MARCHI 2012, 151.

[9] AZZARA–GASPARRI 1992, 75 (Rothari); 2 (Aistulf).

[10] PAROLI 1995a, 119–212; RUPP 1997a, 23–25; RICCI 2001b, 331–432; CHRISTIE 2010, 113–122.

[11] BIERBRAUER 1991b, 143–145; PAROLI 1995a, 206–212; RIVIÉRE 1995, 90; DE MARCHI 1999, 215–243; BROGIOLO–CHAVARRÍA ARNAU 2020, 291.

until the reduction and disappearance of grave goods and gifts, through the study of burials of girls, with Lombard and Roman clothing, and adult women.[12]

A burial of a girl (t. 148) with grave goods dating to between the sixth and seventh centuries exceeds in quality the grave goods of extremely wealthy adult women because it includes a brooch (fibula) with 'counterposed animal protomes' and almandine inlay, a rich necklace with gold pendants and beads made of gilded cast bronze wire, a bronze armilla, a ring in the Roman tradition made of rock crystal worn as a pendant, a loom shuttle, believed to be a distinctive sign of high status and the craft of weaving, a hairpin, a gold cross, a wooden casket and a drinking horn *(Fig. 1)*. It repeats with greater emphasis the level of burial at Cividale S. Mauro (t. 27, see paragraph 5) in terms of the high quality of gifts, similar chronological dating and objects belonging to the Lombard tradition and the Romano-Byzantine tradition and production.[13]

The adult woman (t. 100) buried in a wooden coffin provides an example of German and Romano-Byzantine interaction. Objects belonging to the German tradition include the violin-bow brooch in the '2nd zoomorphic style' in the Italo-Lombard tradition (c. 600 AD), the pearl necklace, the silver armilla with punched lozenge decoration, the trimmings of garters and shoes (clasp and two caps), while artefacts in the Romano-Byzantine tradition include a silver hairpin (buried near the head), gold earrings decorated with hoops made of knurled wire, the gold sheet cross, the gold ring with a cup bezel (worn on the left hand), which refers to religious symbols of Late Antiquity (c. 600 AD) *(Fig. 2)*. An iron *sella plicatilis* (folding chair) with ornate damascened decoration (which has been lost), as well as a comb and a knife, also lost, had been placed on the structure of the grave. The *sella plicatilis*, in particular, confirms the adoption of symbols of power from the Roman tradition which would have been unthinkable without the extraordinary heritage of ancient craft techniques.[14]

The evolution of customs and the mixture of culturally diverse groups is very clear in the final phase of the cemetery (mid-seventh century), when a girl (t. 113) was buried with a cloak sealed with a bronze Romano-Christian cruciform brooch.[15] A bronze hairpin, placed beside her left temple, held her hair in place, with a bronze armilla being the only piece of jewellery, while egg shells and pottery in the Roman tradition were placed between her knees. This grave is surrounded by other burials which all either have no or very few grave goods. It is reasonable to suggest that it was a cemetery cluster related to the local population with inhumation burials accompanied by artefacts of the culture of the community which had adopted the burial customs, traditional clothing, grave goods and gifts of the Lombard tradition. The process of cultural interaction seems to have reached an advanced stage.[16] *(Fig. 3)*

As already mentioned, the mid-seventh century witnessed a reduction in the number of grave goods, restricted to a few objects, according to the Christian funerary tradition, probably due to the need to save materials of any value that could ideally be left in inheritance. The tradition of burying treasures was coming to an end. Ritual and memory emerged from anonymity to enter mausoleums and churches which were founded with greater intensity during the seventh century, reflecting a change in attitude towards investment by the 'aristocrats' of the period. The buried gift was replaced by prayer and soul-candles.[17]

The cemetery of Castel Trosino (Ascoli Piceno) – the duchy of Spoleto along *Via Salaria* – displays a strong Byzantine component within a context of landed aristocracy that corresponds to the Lombard model.[18]

The grave goods of 'tomb S' (excavated before systematic excavation campaigns) consist of artefacts that belong to the Germanic tradition. The gilded silver violin-bow brooches, widely used by the pre-Italic Lombards, very worn and therefore used for a long time (or inherited), are decorated in the *'Schlaufenstill'* zoomorphic style which enables them to be dated to the transition between the sixth and the seventh centuries. The Germanic brooches were found next to a disc brooch in gold sheet with embossed decoration and knurled wire, probably a Byzantine product but also possibly Roman. The pair of triangular plate earrings with gold and amethyst pendants belongs to the Imperial-Mediterranean tradition, and could date from the third/fourth century to the seventh century. The precious jewellery is associated with a gold cross, a glass bottle with a globular body and a pair of wedding rings with

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[12] Rupp 1997a, 23–40; Rupp 1997c, 181–183; Bierbrauer 2008, 126–129; Paroli–Ricci 2008, 477; Rupp 2008, 171–174.

[13] Rupp 1997a, 89–90; Rupp 2005, 16–17; Rupp 2008, 185–189.

[14] Rupp 1997b, 103–105; Rupp 2005, 121–122; Rupp 2008, 189; Gütermann 2011, 91.

[15] Rupp 1997b, 109–110; Rupp 2005, 134–135.

[16] Rupp 1997c, 176–177.

[17] La Rocca 1997, 36–39; La Rocca 2000, 53–55; de Vingo 2010, 57–64; La Rocca 2011b, 17; De Marchi 2012, 157.

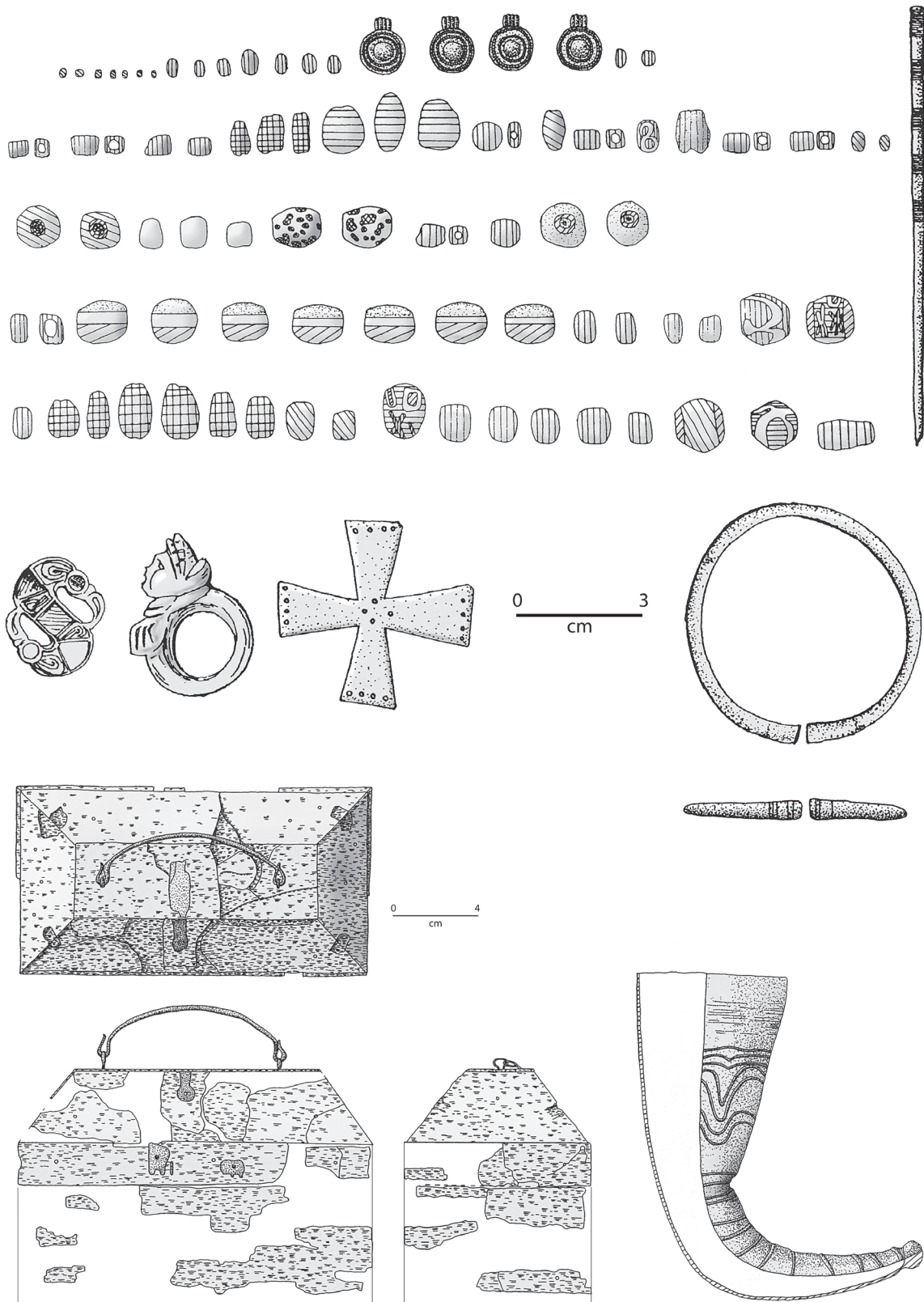[18] Bierbrauer 2008, 129–134; Paroli–Ricci 2008, 476.

Fig. 1. Cemetery of Nocera Umbra (Perugia). Grave 148, articles of women's clothing and grave goods (from RUPP 2005, 337–338)
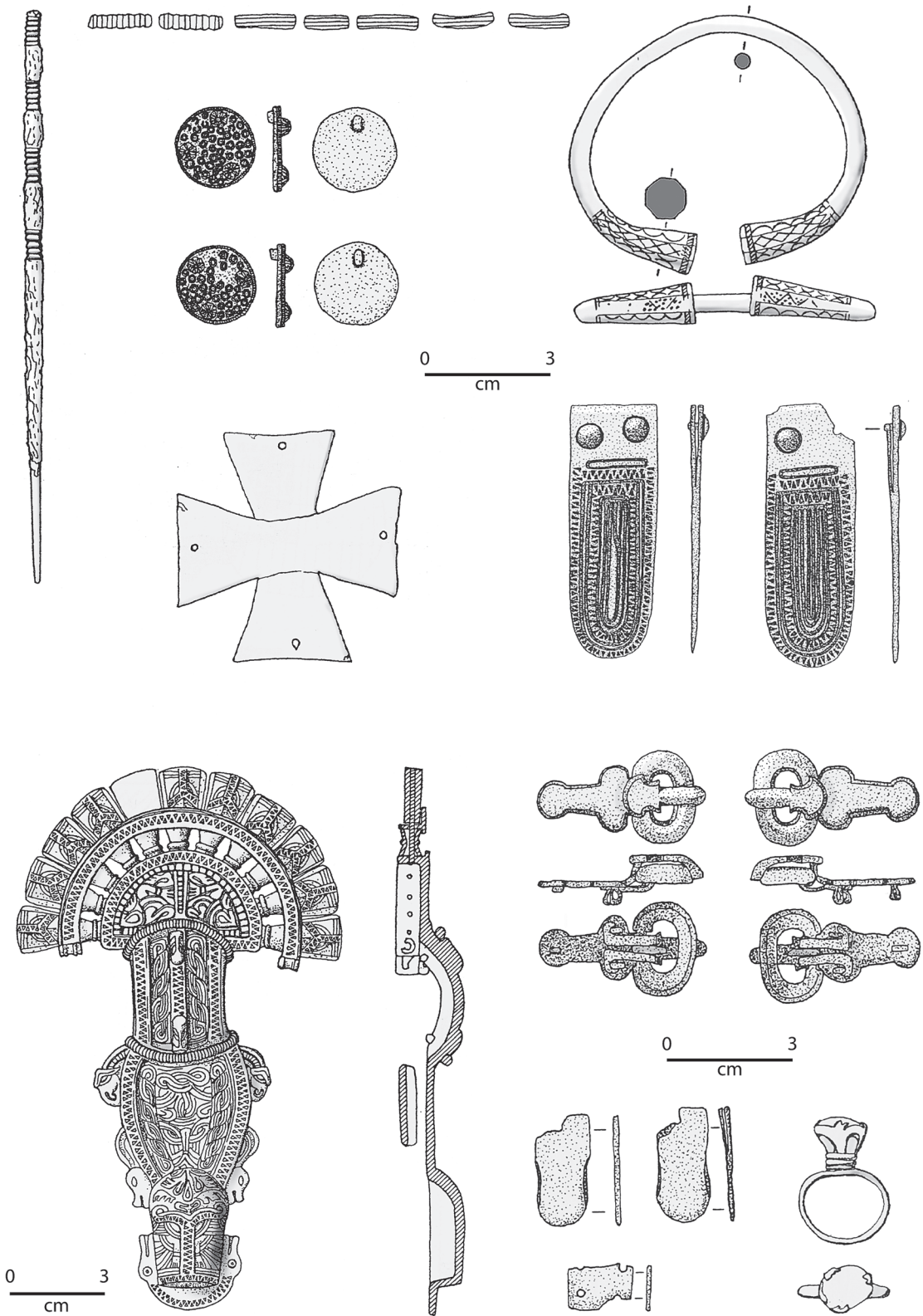
Fig. 2. Cemetery of Nocera Umbra (Perugia). Grave 100, articles of women's clothing and grave goods
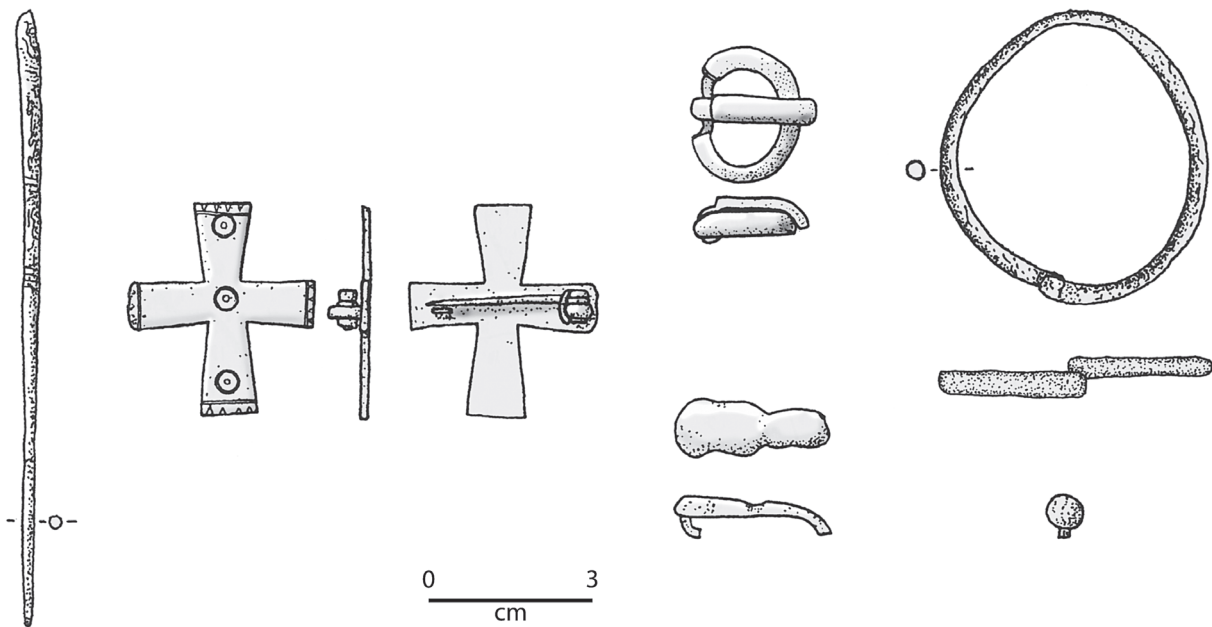(from RUPP 2005, 298–299, reworked)

Fig. 3. Cemetery of Nocera Umbra (Perugia). Grave 113, articles of women's clothing and grave goods (from Rupp 2005, 309)

a double lozenge that belong to the Roman tradition. They lack names while other rings have the names of the married couple engraved in the bezels.[19] *(Fig. 4)*

Tomb 168 contains jewellery inspired by or made in the Byzantine world, influenced by the tradition of late antique jewellery: a gold brooch with a discoid form and 'cloisonné' decoration, probably made in Middle Eastern or Byzantine-Sassanid workshops. The objects also include a silver hat pin, Byzantine 'basket earrings' (6th–7th century) and two rings: the first ring is made of silver and has an architectural structure, alluding to the Holy Sepulchre and associated symbols, which continued to be produced throughout the sixth century, while the second is a wedding ring. These grave goods can be dated to the first half of the seventh century.[20] *(Fig. 5)*

Basket earrings made of gold and silver, and trilobate ornaments used with bronze hairpins to attach hats to the head (t. 31) were distinctive elements of women's fashion between the late sixth and the seventh centuries.[21] This grave is contemporary with the female grave (t. 32) that contains a silver cross-shaped brooch, belonging to the late Roman Christian tradition with an engraving of the Latin name 'RUSTICA', which interestingly refers to a rural environment, accompanied by the greeting formula 'VIVAT' (RUSTICA VIVAT). The first name, and in particular the use of writing, refers to local Christian culture. The grave goods correspond once again to Lombard funerary customs.[22] *(Fig. 6)*

4. FUNERAL AS A FORM OF SELF-REPRESENTATION OF POWER

Funerals can be imagined as outdoor theatre in which the deceased becomes the means of communication between the actors – those organising the funeral – and the public. This implies that the funeral ceremony could be seen, witnessed and remembered – the message is codified but is understandable, especially to those in attendance – as if the funeral was a natural stage with a choreography involving three cultural elements; the site, the objects and the body. The body of the deceased enters the stage accompanied by gestures, rituals and objects, whose choice is pre-determined, since it stimulates specific meanings among the spectators which derive from their personal, social,

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[19] Paroli 1995a, 207–210; Paroli 1995b, 273–280; Bierbrauer 2008, 133–134; Paroli–Ricci 2005, 33–35.

[20] Paroli 1995c, 295–300; Paroli–Ricci 2005, 97–98.

[21] La Rocca 2011b, 15.

[22] Paroli 1995d, 307–311; Paroli 1995e, 312–315; Paroli–Ricci 2005, 52 (grave 31); Paroli–Ricci 2005, 52–53 (grave 32); Bierbrauer 2008, 119–120.
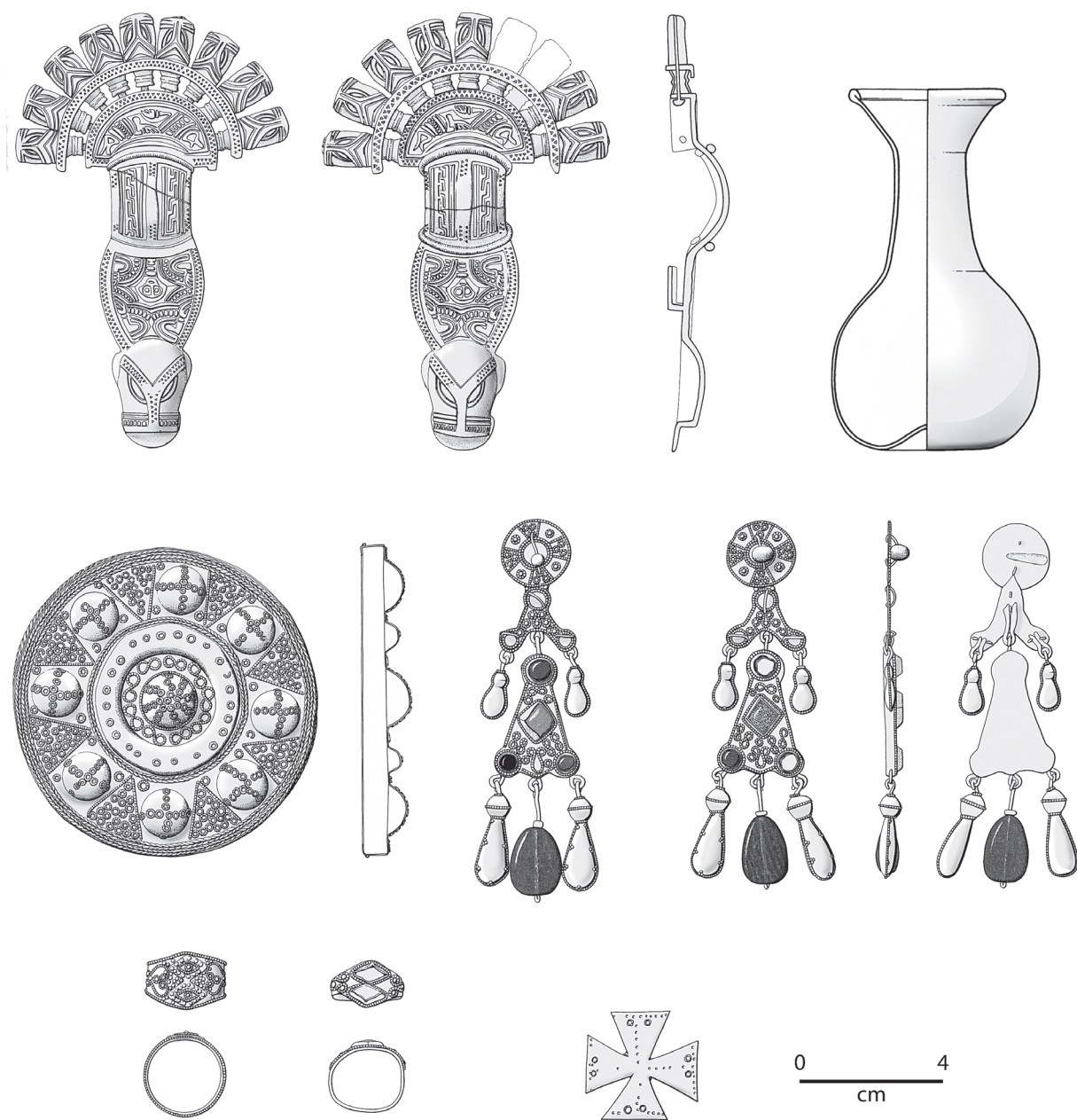
Fig. 4. Cemetery of Castel Trosino (Ascoli Piceno). Grave S, articles of women's clothing and grave goods
(from PAROLI–RICCI 2005, pl. 21–22)

Fig. 5. Cemetery of Castel Trosino (Ascoli Piceno). Grave 168, articles of women's clothing (from PAROLI–RICCI 2005, pl. 126)
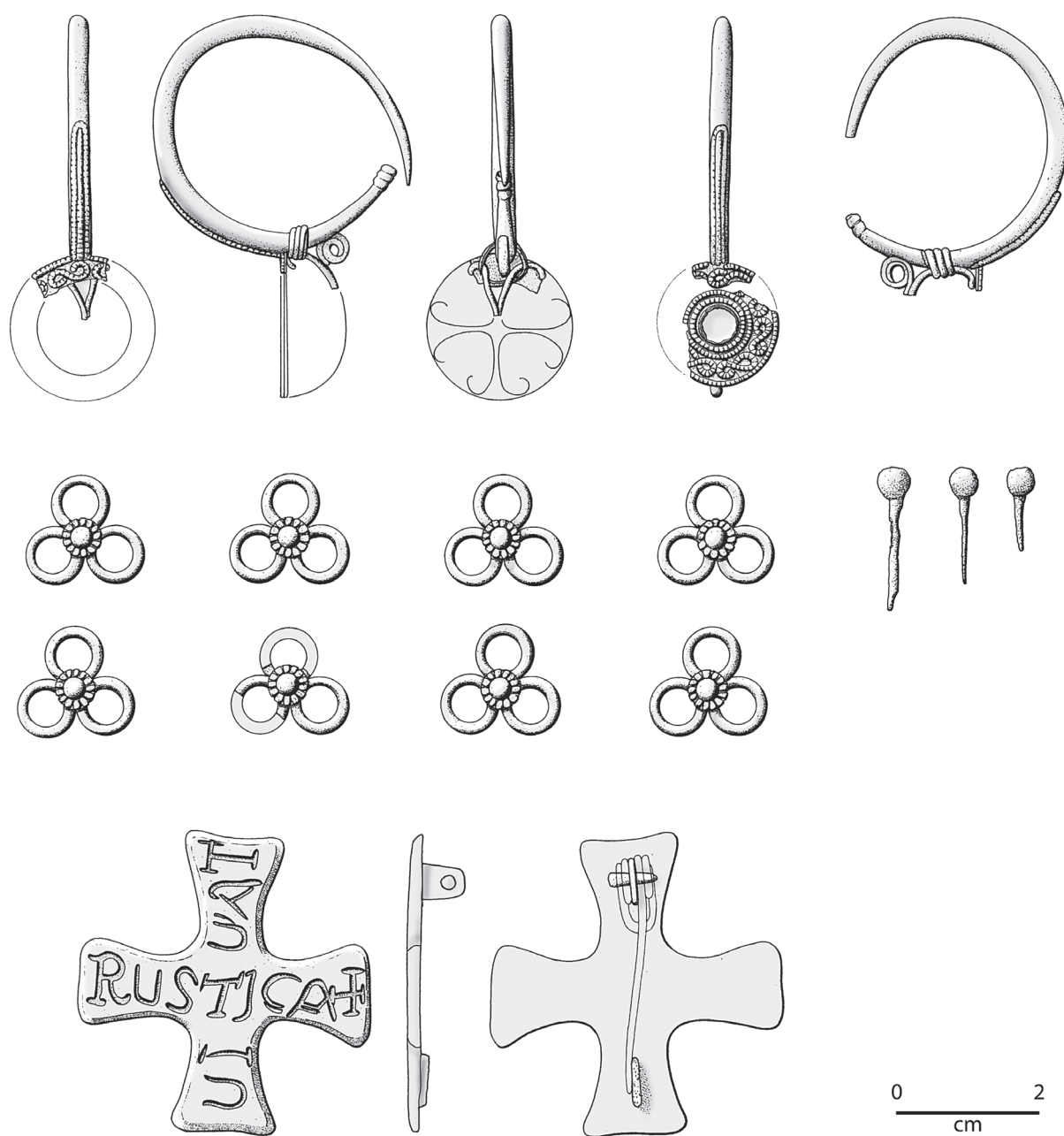
Fig. 6. Cemetery of Castel Trosino (Ascoli Piceno). Graves 31–32, articles of women's clothing (from PAROLI–RICCI 2005, pl. 44, reworked)

cultural and aesthetic perceptions.[23] The mourning relatives are secondary actors whose role in the phase of managing the funeral may change in various societies since the whole of the organisational phase may depend on them or they may simply ensure that the deceased's wishes are respected.[24] If the funeral can be imagined as a ritual, then it is plausible that it takes place according to a script that determines certain pre-determined parameters and ceremonies, which vary according to societies and cultural contexts in a specific historical period.[25] At the same time, however, the actors also have the opportunity to add variations according to their socio-political status, the status of the deceased and the personal wishes of the deceased. Whatever the case, the actors always decide the way in which the funeral takes place and choose the objects that are visible during the ceremony accompanying the deceased. It is always the relatives who choose the tomb and determine (and pay for) the position among a variety of possible places. The selection of objects that are visible during the ceremony implies that other elements have been excluded so that not only will the ceremony be transformed into an operation of assembly and display – determined by the presence or absence of one artefact rather than another – but it will also be evaluated for the capacity to represent a hypothetical world. Objects can be made exclusively for the funeral but can also belong to everyday life where they perform significant representative functions, transformed from tools to a means of performative communication.[26]

The selection and omission of objects are also activated in the representation of the deceased, in the choice of which of their different identities should be displayed. This decision stems from the combination of various social dimensions which are present in the society of the living.[27] The various forms of identity that distinguish each individual have different meanings and levels of importance: some comprise all the members of a community, while others only concern specific groups. Age and sex are fundamental forms of identity, but the potential significance they can have within the context of the funeral, through the choice of objects or the treatment of the body, varies in time and space. By employing the same principle, religion, origin and ethnic identity can manifest themselves and overlap when they coexist in different forms, or they can be taken for granted and are therefore not displayed, or are intentionally hidden in areas with a high degree of conflict. Profession, wealth and political role may or may not be significant, depending on the different levels of hierarchisation in the community of the living and among those taking part in the funeral. Lastly, the number and type of goods invested for the funeral – and the relative degree of wealth or poverty with which the deceased is represented – do not necessarily reflect their actual social status.[28] The contexts in which funerals are held become the space in which social relationships between relatives-actors and the community-audience develop. Cemeteries – the place where at least the final part of the funeral ceremony takes place – are therefore transformed into places of power in which reality is represented, combining a pre-determined ritual and subjective interpretations, through which reality is filtered, altered and invented.[29]

5. CIVIDALE S. MAURO (UDINE) AND COLLEGNO (TURIN): THE FIRST GENERATION TO EMIGRATE TO ITALY

The cemetery of Cividale S. Mauro (Friuli), founded by the generation that emigrated in 568, provides a good example of the honours reserved for an aristocratic girl who died aged seven years old (t. 27) in the last thirty years of the sixth century. The deceased girl had been buried with a pair of brooches with 'counterposed animal protomes', with cloisonné decoration and the insertion of garnets, which were designed to seal the neckline of the tunic and the cloak, while a pair of violin-bow brooches hung between the femurs from straps suspended from the belt. These clothing accessories belong to older traditions of Germanic culture, and were often handed down in the form of inheritance.[30] The burial contained other precious objects and, in this case, they testify to economic wellbeing: the burgundy glass drinking horn, decorated with festoons, placed on the chest, the gold *tremmissis* of Justinian (527–575), found close to the jaw, according to the Roman ritual of the viaticum (food for the journey), a shell, a disc amulet and a bronze pyxis for storing ointments. The palaeo-anthropological analysis seems to suggest that the skeletal characteristics are morphologically compatible with those of the Lombard members of the community.

[23] PEARSON 1998, 33.
[24] BRATHER 2007, 304; BARBIERA 2012, 16–17.
[25] METCALF–HUNTINGTON 1985, 56–59; WILLIAMS 2006, 20–22.
[26] BARBIERA 2012, 17; GIOSTRA 2017c, 61.
[27] WILLIAMS 2006, 36–39; BRATHER 2005, 160–161; BRATHER 2007, 306–307.

[28] BRATHER 2005, 160–162.
[29] HÄRKE 2001, 19–28; WILLIAMS 2006, 196–197; WILLIAMS–SAYER 2009, 5–7; DE VINGO 2010, 60–65.
[30] MELUCCO VACCARO 1989, 13–14; AHUMADA SILVA 2010a, 50–57; DE MARCHI 2011, 278; POSSENTI 2017, 241–246.

Together with the gold coin, the drinking horn is an indicator of status and shows that the economic and social ca-
pacity of the relatives of the deceased gave them access to luxury goods to the extent they could reach Byzantine
territories and Rome where this type of container was made.[31] *(Fig. 7)*

At Cividale S. Mauro the burial of an adult woman (t. 21), buried fully clothed in the final phase of the
seventh century, contains a cast bronze cooking pan made in the Byzantine-Mediterranean world decorated with
lozenges, floral motifs within rhomboid frames, and with an engraved augural inscription in Greek, with close
parallels in Byzantine and Coptic *situla*e of the 5th–7th centuries, a sign of high status, a luxury symbol of contacts,
trade and gift exchange with the Roman-Mediterranean world.[32] *(Fig. 8)*

The female graves in the cemetery of Collegno (Piedmont) (tt. 1, 18, 47, 48) – in particular graves 47 and
48 which were selected for analysis – have brought to light the richest and most complex clothing artefacts pub-
lished so far from the cemetery.[33] In one case (t. 48), two bow brooches were found of which the first belongs to a
type already documented in Pannonia – but whose presence is also confirmed during the first two decades of sett-
lement in Italy – while the second has been attributed to a Frankish-oriental brooch ('Bréban–Aulnzieux' type)
dating to between 530 and about 570 *(Fig. 9)*. From a chronological perspective, the burial can easily be attributed
to the immigrant Lombard generation, although the term 'ethnic' used to describe the buried individual and the
events in which she was involved and which formed this combination of artefacts would seem to be an extremely
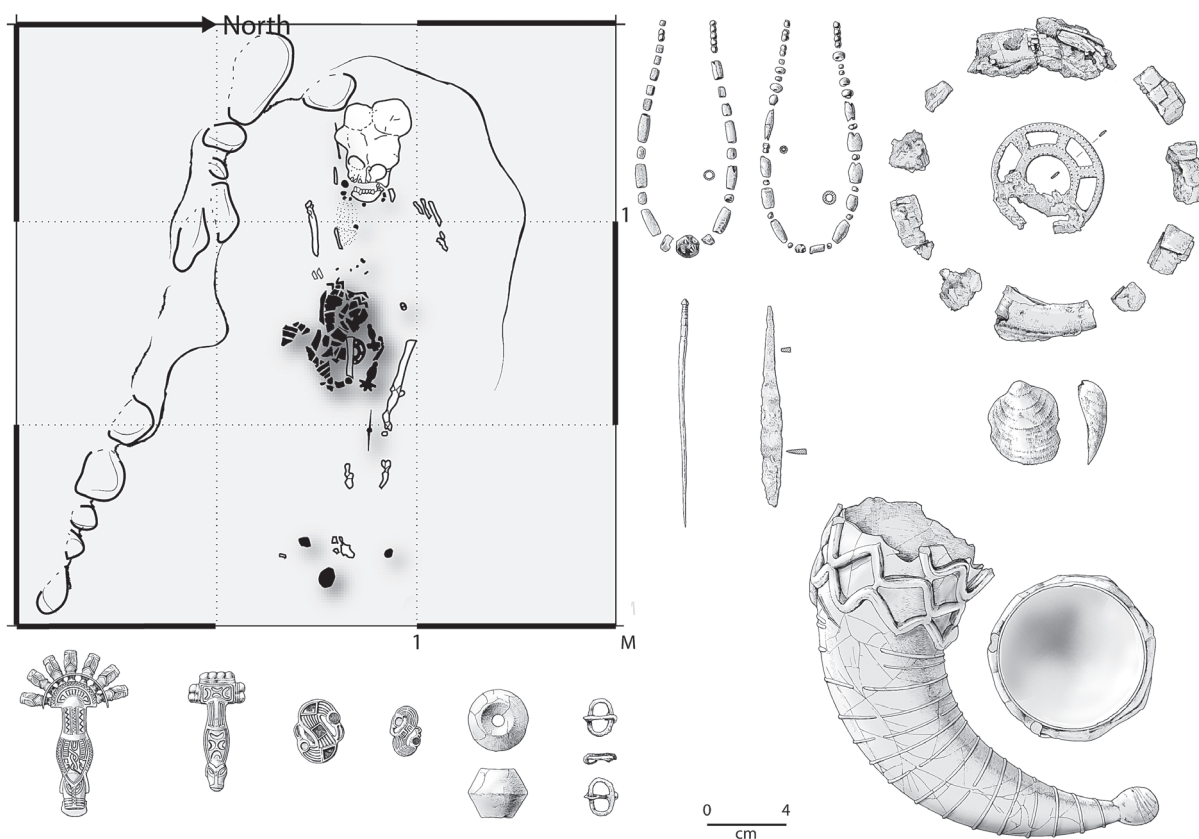complex one.[34]

Fig. 7. Cemetery of S. Mauro (Cividale del Friuli–Udine). Articles of women's clothing and grave goods from grave 27,
(from Ahumada Silva 2010b, reworked)

[31] Saguì 2001, 307–322; De Marchi 2011, 291–292.
[32] Ahumada Silva 2010a, 35–50; Colussa 2010, 203–212.
[33] Pejrani Baricco 2004b, 30–33.
[34] Giostra 2004, 53; Giostra 2019a, 31.

Fig. 8. Cemetery of S. Mauro (Cividale del Friuli–Udine). Grave 21, cast bronze decorated cooking pan
(from Ahumada Silva 2010b, reworked)

Combining different types of brooches in the same burial was a fairly widespread phenomenon in Central Europe, especially in sixth century contexts. In some cases, these artefacts can vary considerably in terms of chronology, the extent of wear and especially the original cultural provenance, with the inclusion of a third element to a pair of identical brooches. There are also documented cases where the objects are not worn in the traditional position – with respect to the main cultural background – or are associated with objects of different provenance, possibly from the local area.[35]

Despite the lack of a specific study, the simultaneous presence of different kinds of brooches and the possible variations that may occur, represent one of the most interesting circumstances in the broader and significant phenomenon of brooches discovered in areas that are remote from their original ones. It may not just indicate rela-
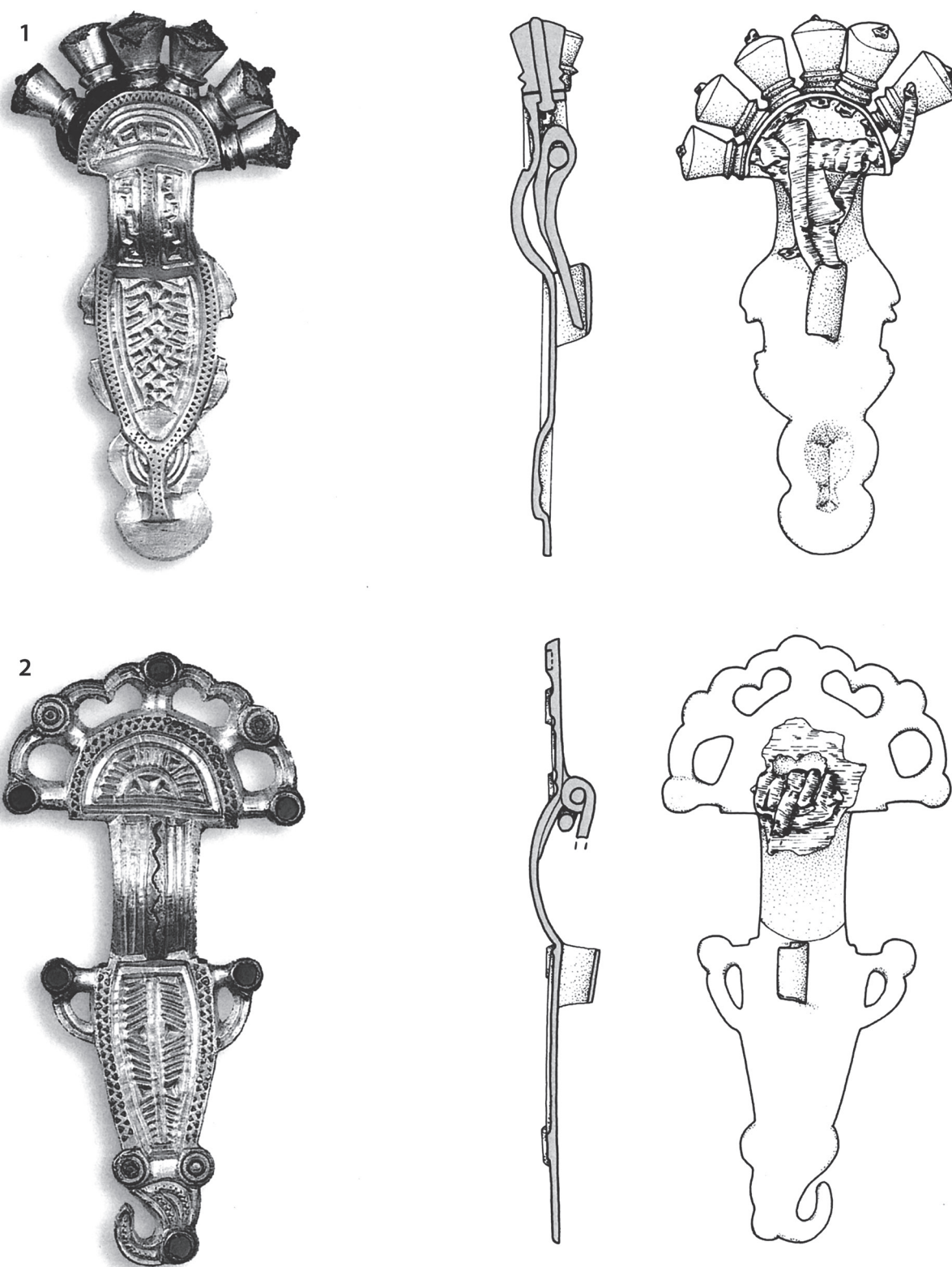
[35] Stork 1997, 298; Koch 1998, 536–537.

Fig. 9. Cemetery of Collegno (Turin). Grave 48, bow brooch (1), bow brooch 'Bréban–Aulnzieux' type (2) (from GIOSTRA 2004, reworked)

Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae 71, 2020

tionships between different peoples – which may have led to exogamous unions or even the movement of entire family units – but would confirm the composite nature of Romano-Germanic kingdoms or of several settlements in particular, or may reflect the precise means of the transmission of objects of significance to the family to which an individual belonged.[36]

In the few Italian Lombard contexts that have brought to light two brooches of different types, there are no examples related to types belonging to the Merovingian culture: in some rarely documented cases, there are sporadic elements where the associated artefacts are unknown.[37]

Both the written sources and the archaeological evidence confirm the close relations between the Lombards and the Alemanni while they reveal far more sporadic contacts with the Franks in the years following the territorial conquest of the Italian Peninsula.[38] Gregory of Tours and Paulus Deaconus describe the raids made by individual Lombard groups in the part of Central Gaul controlled by the Burgundians during the first seventy years of the sixth century, leading to destruction, pillaging and the capture of prisoners.[39] This woman (t. 48) – like other females buried with Transalpine objects – may therefore have arrived directly in Piedmont from the Frankish kingdom after one of these raids and may have been betrothed here, keeping elements of her own material culture and acquiring others encountered in this part of Piedmontese territory.[40]

No 'national' types of brooches or clasps were produced during the phase of the second Burgundian kingdom (443–534) although after 534 there is evidence for brooches of Frankish, Thuringian, Alemannic and local origin.[41] The second brooch from Collegno belongs to the 'Bréban–Aulnzieux' type. The terminal of the brooch consists of a protome in the form of the 'head of a bird of prey' portrayed upside down and is a type documented in western Switzerland from where the individual buried at Collegno may come.[42]

The silver tips, decorated with rows of minute geometric punch marks, interpreted as trimmings for stockings, a relatively unusual accessory for Lombard women in Italy, may have a similar provenance (t. 47). This type is unique to the western and eastern side of the Rhine in southern Germany in Frankish-oriental burials and therefore in the Alemannic territory bordering the Burgundian kingdom which was extremely receptive to products of high artistic quality in various material cultures of Germanic peoples.[43] *(Fig. 10)*

Two belt buckles with different kinds of decoration were also found in the two graves at Collegno: the first one (t. 48), made of bronze and iron with a ring in the form of a 'D' and the second made of bronze with an oval ring and a 'shield-like' belt prong (t. 47). The morphological characteristics and the type of decoration of the two brooches belong in both cases to Frankish-Alemannic cultural contexts of the late sixth century.[44] *(Fig. 11)*

The constant presence of objects of lower quality suggests that it is unlikely that the Transalpine materials were part of a long-range exchange network or were considered war booty, both because they were not particularly attractive and were therefore probably not purchased systematically, and because they gave a degree of consistency and homogeneity to the female clothing in the burials concerned. It is likely that objects that were extraneous to Lombard material culture arrived in the Germanic community of Collegno brought by their legitimate owners. The possibility that Frankish women may have reached Italy, together with Frankish-Alemannic soldiers during raids that preceded and followed the conquest of Northern Italy, given the territorial continuity between the two areas – and therefore remained in Piedmont – does not appear to be the most logical explanation. This circumstance may be explained by 'strategic marriages' whereby members of the most influential families sealed wedding alliances with people of high social rank from other Germanic peoples, leading to the creation of ties which would have had important consequences on the socio-political order.[45] Whether or not it was a marriage between a woman from Collegno (t. 48) and a Lombard warrior, it cannot be excluded that everything took place in the Pannonian phase and the woman may have joined her adopted community during the journey to western Piedmont: the first brooch analysed in this study belongs to a type which is documented in Pannonian areas.[46]

Lastly, it is worth emphasising that the results of the osteological analyses carried out on the skeletal remains seem to suggest slightly different demographic dynamics; both individuals (tt. 47, 48) had a congenital

[36] La Rocca 1997, 42–43; La Rocca 2000, 34; Le Jan 2008, 518.

[37] Paroli–Ricci 2001, 20–22 (grave G), 27–29 (grave K).

[38] Koch 1998, 548–549; Giostra 2019b, 169–172.

[39] Gregory of Tours, *Historiarum Libri Decem,* Liber IV.3–IV.41; Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum,* Liber I.27.

[40] Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum,* Liber I, 27.

[41] Escher 2005, 639–643.

[42] Koch 1998, 703; Escher 2005, 237–239; Geary 2019, 45.

[43] Giostra 2004, 56; Giostra 2019b, 166–167.

[44] Giostra 2004, 54; Giostra 2019b, 172.

[45] Giostra 2004, 55; Giostra 2017b, 92.

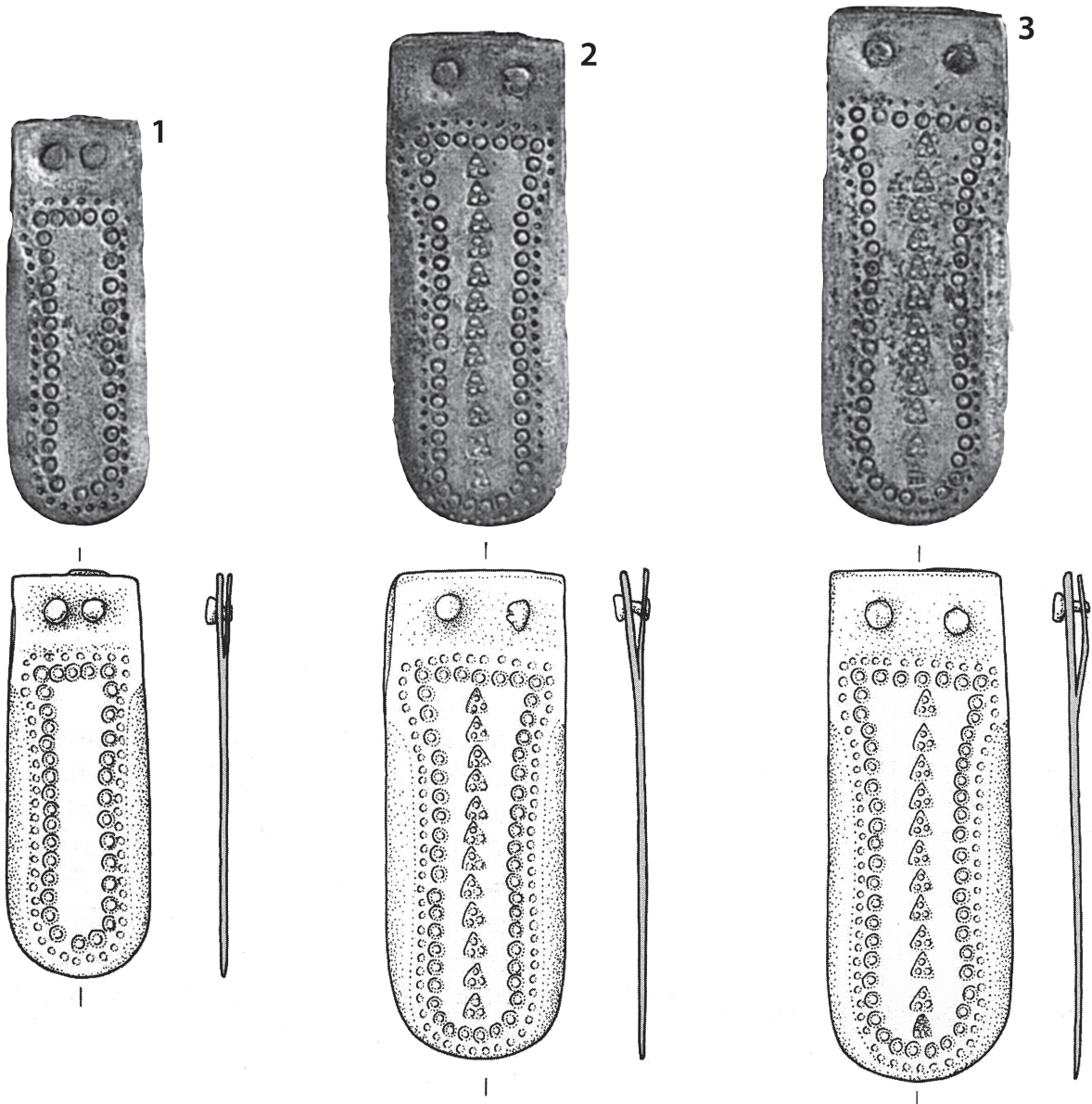[46] Bóna–Bóna Horváth 2009, 191–194.

Fig. 10. Cemetery of Collegno (Turin). Grave 47, silver tips, decorated with rows of minute geometric punch marks
(from GIOSTRA 2004, reworked)

anomaly that led to a cranial deformation and may have been blood relatives. However, while the first female was an adult (t. 48), buried between 570 and 590, the second (t. 47) buried towards the end of the sixth century – so at least ten years later – was a younger person so it seems possible that even though they were both adults there was a slight difference in age and that there was therefore a generational difference between the two women.[47] The younger woman (t. 47) – who must have almost certainly been linked to the older one (t. 48) by a direct blood tie – may not have arrived from Gaul, but may have been born and raised in the Germanic community by a foreign mother, from whom, or through whom, she received Transalpine clothing accessories.[48]

[47] BEDINI–BERTOLDI 2004, 217–218.   [48] GIOSTRA 2004, 56.

6. SPILAMBERTO (MODENA): FEMALE WEALTH AND POWER IN A MALE-DOMINATED WORLD

In the Lombard cemetery of Spilamberto in western Emilia, a significant amount of wealth is concentrated in four graves of girls (t. 36), adolescents (tt. 60, 62) and one female whose age has not been determined (t. 54). They would have probably worn a tunic fastened at the front and reaching down to the knees with fairly broad sleeves, sewn only at the shoulders and supported at the waist by a composite belt, to which the only variant that was added was a chemise underskirt worn during the colder months. The tunic belonged to the clothing of the Mediterranean tradition but also to the Celtic world and, by adoption, to the Germanic world as well. A kind of cloak
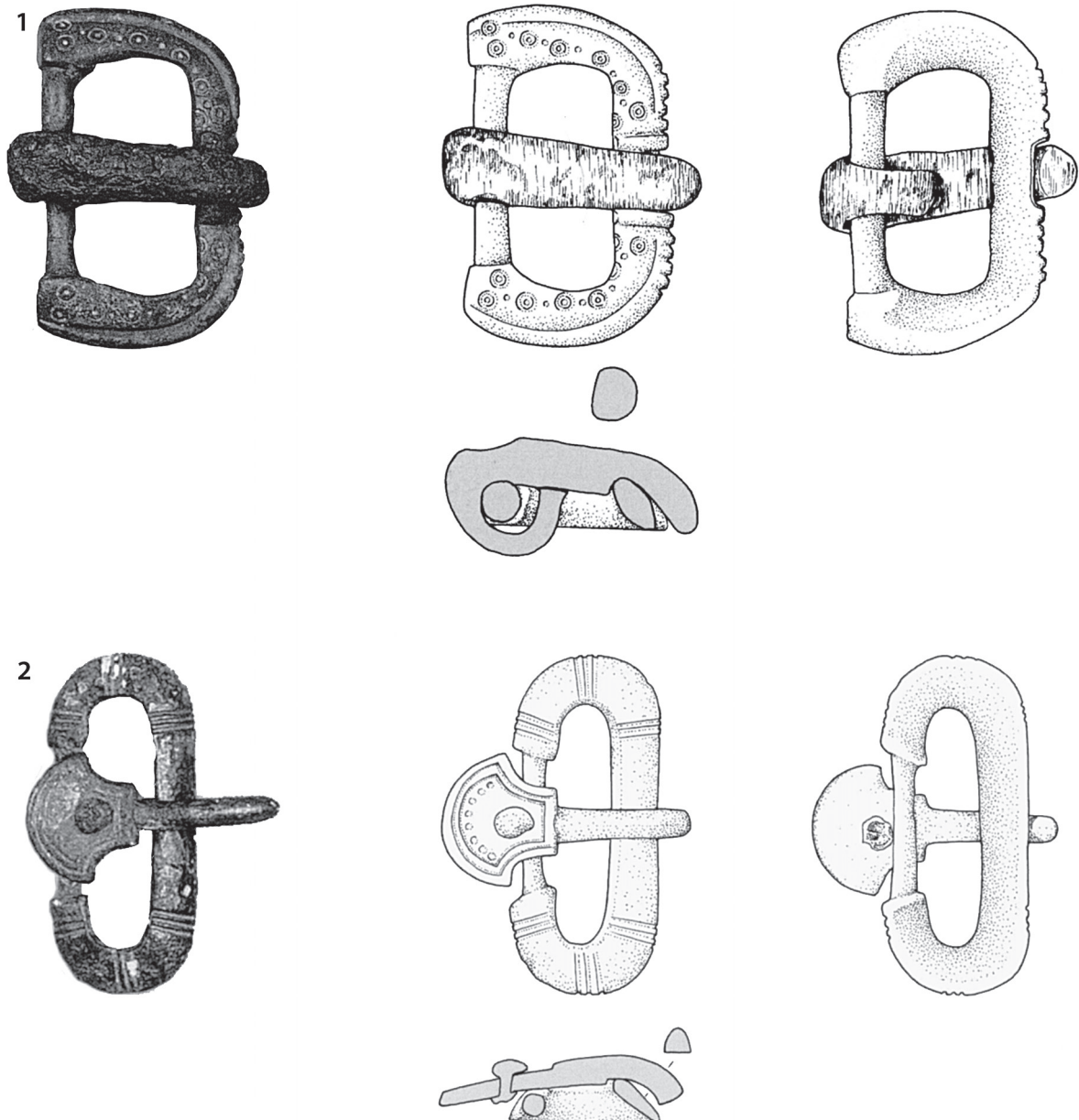

Fig. 11. Cemetery of Collegno (Turin). Grave 48, bronze-iron belt buckle with a ring in the form of a 'D' (1); grave 47, bronze belt buckle with an oval ring and a 'shield-like' belt prong (2) (from GIOSTRA 2004, reworked)

was worn over the tunic which, in the case examined here, was fastened by one brooch with animal protomes or discoid brooches with the same function.[49]

A gilded silver brooch in the form of an 'S' consists of two protomes of counterposed birds, with curved beaks, joined at the body in a right-handed pattern (t. 36).[50] In the central part which has cloisonné decoration, the brooch has ten small cells with nine garnets inserted in them (one missing); the central cells are square, the intermediate ones are trapezoid while the ones arranged towards the curves of the body are triangular. The garnets that represent the eyes are round in shape. The correlated cells are lined with thin gold foil which has been intricately engraved. The moulded edges have two pieces of ribbing, the outer one of which is knurled. On the back just part of the bow is preserved while only oxidised traces of the pin remain.[51] *(Fig. 12.1)*

The closest parallel is to be found with similar objects found in the cemetery of Cividale S. Mauro (tt. 1, 39, 51, 56) and at Romans d'Isonzo (t. 97), from which this brooch differs in terms of the number of cells (ten instead of nine).[52] This makes it possible to include the artefact from Spilamberto among the variants of the Schwechat–Pallesdorf–Várpalota grave 19 type, a large, oval S-brooch with animal protomes with a beak and small round cells for the eyes, showing close links with Franko-Gepid and Gothic Pannonian areas.[53] This group, which has been dated to the period from roughly 570 to 600,[54] has parallels in the Italian Peninsula with the brooches from the cemetery of Arcisa (t. 4), Nocera Umbra (t. 10) and S. Giovanni–Cella at Cividale.[55]

A disc brooch (Castel Trosino type) in gilded silver (t. 62) reuses a previous pendant of which the top of the primitive hook is still preserved even though, on the back and in a fragmentary state, the subsequent system of attachment to the clothing is still present; it consists of the spring of a pin wrapped around a hinge within an eyelet, the catch bent like a hook and the pin broken in two points. The flat surface of the disc is decorated along the edges with four circular settings alternating with the same number of quadrangular settings containing river pearls and blue and green glass paste. At the centre there is an oval bezel in which a reused carved stone is set. The distinctive feature of the central bezel and the quadrangular ones is a second frame moulded in relief and soldered along the inner edge. Eight pairs of 'S-shapes' formed by moulded wire soldered to the surface are placed within the space between the central frame and the individual bezels. The stone used is probably an onyx, on whose rounded surface an engraving was made in Late Antiquity, depicting a female face looking upwards and the hair partially gathered beneath a wreath of leaves.[56] *(Fig. 12.2)* This type of brooch at Castel Trosino belongs to the first phase of the cemetery and dates to between the late sixth century and the first half of the seventh century.[57]

The second fibula is also a disc brooch but much smaller than the previous one (t. 60) and consists of a fairly thick silver plate, on which sheets are soldered, forming a central circular pattern from which 11 small trapezoid cells branch off radially. Each of the cells contains a reddish-brown almandine. No type of fastening is preserved on the back.[58] *(Fig. 12.3)*

The graves described above contain an impressive series of objects which can be attributed, in terms of manufacture and use, to the late antique tradition in Italy. These materials, which are fairly rare in the graves of the first generation, increased proportionally beginning from the end of the sixth century, coinciding with the generalised growth in the number of grave goods which was a feature of the early seventh century. This process would culminate in a rapid change not only in clothing and personal ornaments but also in female funerary clothing which became so similar to that of the local population that it soon became indistinguishable. This phase of transformation was marked by two processes which initially ran in parallel – the enrichment and transformation of personal belongings – but which were inevitably bound to intersect and overlap in the final phase. It also witnessed a gradual in-

[49] Paroli 2001, 263–265; de Vingo 2014, 170; de Vingo 2020, 188.

[50] Fuchs–Werner 1950, 60–61; von Hessen 1971b, 13.

[51] de Vingo 2010, 46; de Vingo 2014, 170–171; de Vingo 2020, 188.

[52] De Grassi–Giovannini–Maselli Scotti 1989, 77; Ahumada Silva 2010a, 54.

[53] Koch 1977, 66; Koch 1990, 138–139; Bierbrauer 1991a, 28–30, fig. 6; Vida 2008, 83–84; Bóna–Bóna Horvath 2009, 191–193; De Marchi 2011, 284.

[54] Fuchs–Werner 1950, 60–61; Sturmann Ciccone 1977, 14; von Hessen 1978, 17–18; von Hessen 1980, 125; von Hessen 1983, 23–24; Gelichi 1988, 568–569, fig. 508–510; Gelichi 1989, 165–177; Rupp 1997a, 29–30, fig. 8, 89; Paroli 2000, 155.

[55] Von Hessen 1971b, 23–24, fig. 8.1; Rupp 2005, 16–17, fig. 20.2a–2b, 202; Paolucci 2009, 20; Ahumada Silva 2010a, 54–57, fig. 14.

[56] Giordani 2010, 77–78; de Vingo 2020, 188.

[57] Paroli 2000, 152–154, fig. 13.19, 153; Paroli–Ricci 2005, graves 16, 46; graves 57, 59–60; de Vingo 2014, 171.

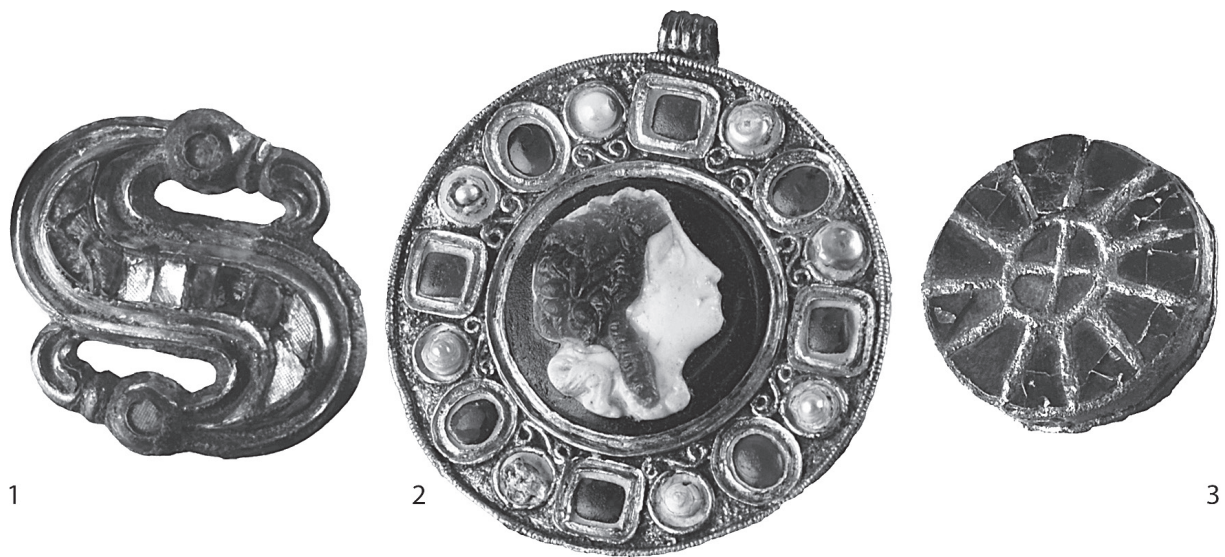[58] de Vingo 2010, 47.

Fig. 12. Cemetery of Ponte del Rio (Spilamberto–Modena). Graves 36, 62, 60. 1: Women's brooches with 'protomes of counterposed birds'; 2: gilded silver discoid brooch, central cameo, river pearls and glass paste; 3: silver discoid brooch with coloured glass on a gold background

Fig. 13. Cemetery of Ponte del Rio (Spilamberto–Modena). Graves 36, 54, 62, 60, bronze ware

crease among the grave goods in ceramic vessels and, to a lesser extent, glass vessels which marked the resumption of an ancient funerary custom which was still preserved in the memory of the Romano-Byzantine population.[59]

The bronze vessels include a 'ewer' (t. 36), a bottle with a high neck and spheroid belly (t. 54), a jug with a straight neck and a pear-shaped body and a ribbon handle in two parts soldered near the rim (t. 60) and a second jug with a 'question-mark' handle and small trapezoid feet which are rounded at the base (t. 62) *(Fig. 13)*. Lastly, there is also a bronze oil lamp with a double channel and a chain for suspension (t. 60) *(Fig. 14)*.

This type of artefact, which was particularly widespread in Northern Africa and Western Europe, has fairly homogeneous characteristics which suggest that it was made in a few workshops that specialised in mass production.[60] These workshops have generally always been identified in Egypt – the term Coptic is often associated with this category of artefact which includes vessels made of cast bronze (Group A) and hammered bronze (Group B) – but the discovery at Ballana in Nubia of an aristocratic burial (t. 80) dating to the 5th–6th century containing work tools as well as various types of object (bronze basins and jugs) has made it possible to pinpoint the site of one of these production centres.[61] The discovery of a wreck at Camarina in the Ionian Sea, whose cargo consisted of a supply of Coptic vessels and scrap bronze – clearly designed to be reused in the production cycle – could be related to the presence of a workshop in Southern Italy.[62] This means that this class of materials can be given a more adequate typological definition: 'Early Christian bronze ware'.

In Northern Italy, bronze vessels are relatively rare in Byzantine areas – except for jugs and basins found in Sardinia and Emilia – and appear chiefly in Lombard cemeteries in Friuli (Cividale–S. Stefano, Stazione Ferroviaria, Fondo Zurchi, S. Giovanni–Gallo, S. Giovanni Cella–Cividale, Porta S. Giovanni–Cividale, S. Mauro), in cemeteries in Piedmont at Testona and Turin–Carignano while in Central-Southern Italy only the cemeteries of Nocera Umbra and Castel Trosino have brought to light bronze ware.[63]

Cosmopolitan products that represent economic power and social status are distinctive features in places situated along routes capable of supporting a continuous flow of people and products: in Piedmont, Testona and Carignano, located along the route to Turin and the Alpine passes, and in Central Italy, Nocera Umbra and Castel Trosino, located along the consular roads *Via Flaminia* and *Via Salaria* – the main corridor towards the Exarchate of Ravenna during the Early Middle Ages – were the main centres of power due to their control of the territory.[64]

With regard to the typological diversity of material from Spilamberto, it is worth underlining the pans which are extremely similar to those at Nocera Umbra (tt. 36, 48, 86) and the artefacts in the Gorga Collection in Rome dating to the late sixth-seventh centuries.[65] The first bottle (t. 54) belongs to the *'Blechkannen'* Group II and is attributable to type d variant 3, similar to vessels for storing liquid from Montepagano in Marche in a storage room dating possibly to the sixth century, from Porto Torres in Sardinia though lacking a reliable context, from the Alemannic graves of Täbingen and Niederstotzingen dating between the sixth and early seventh centuries, from the seventh century wreck of Yassi Ada in Turkey, and from an example in the Lombard burial of Trezzo–Adda which has been dated to 630.[66] The second bottle (t. 60) belongs to the group mentioned above but is attributable to type g variant 2, similar to objects recorded in Bulgaria, Greece, Asia Minor, Palestine, Jordan, Sicily and in Sardinia at Dolianova.[67] For this reason alone, it has been suggested (but not demonstrated) that this type was manufactured in Central Asia and spread to Europe by land via Bulgaria and by sea, taking advantage of the trade routes that connected Middle Eastern countries to western ones.[68] The jug (t. 62) with the 'question-mark' handle is similar in shape and size to artefacts in Friuli at Trieste and at Cividale–S. Mauro, at Nocera Umbra (t. 17) and in the female burial of the territory of Emilia (Montale) where it has been attributed to the last quarter of the sixth century.[69]

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[59] Paroli 2001, 265; Giostra 2007b, 335; de Vingo 2010, 51–52; Roffia 2010, 72–73.

[60] Pilet 2008, 516; de Vingo 2014, 174–175; Beghelli–Drauschke 2017, 51-61; de Vingo 2020, 194–196.

[61] Tobias 2009, 143–146; Beghelli–Drauschke 2017, 61–72.

[62] Périn 1992, 49–50; Ricci 2001c, 421; Beghelli–Pinar Gil 2017, 232–233; de Vingo–Baronio–Maddaleno 2018, 205–206.

[63] Von Hessen 1971a, 117, fig. 64; Negro Ponzi 1981, 1–12; De Marchi 2011, 286–287; Castoldi 2012, 295–308; Beghelli–Drauschke 2017, 51–54.

[64] Beghelli–De Marchi 2017a, 169–173.

[65] Ricci 2001b, 332–333.

[66] Bolla 2012, 292–293.

[67] Bolla 2012, 291–292.

[68] Bolla 2012, 292.

[69] Caretta 1982, 17–26; Gelichi 1988, 561–564; Von Hessen 1990, 212; Gelichi 1994, 15–26; Gelichi 1995, 146–147; Ahumada Silva 2010a, 117–123, grave 50, fig. 63.1; Bolla 2012, 288–295; Castoldi 2012, 295–307; Giostra 2017c, 67; de Vingo 2020, 196–197.

Fig. 14. Cemetery of Ponte del Rio (Spilamberto–Modena). Grave 60, cast bronze oil lamp and chain attached for suspension

Fig. 15. Cemetery of Ponte del Rio (Spilamberto–Modena). Grave 60, silver spoon with engraved inscription 'PERFILIUSVIVAI'

In one of the most complex and elaborate burials at Spilamberto in terms of funerary offerings (t. 60), the grave goods also included a precious silver spoon with a half-shield heel, a rectangular section handle in the point where it is soldered to the bowl and circular in the central and final part of the stem which ended with a bulge surmounted by a small pommel. The whole of the surface of the stem, close to the bowl, has an inscription with the letters 'PERFILIUSVIVAI'. This type of spoon, made of bronze and of silver, with an ovoid shape and a heel joining the bowl to the stem, was first made in the fourth century and remained in use until the seventh century.[70] *(Fig. 15)*

Only in one case have two pendants of gold foil with a small central umbo been identified (t. 60). They should be related to other beads found in the same grave which were part of a necklace. This type of gold decoration, which appears in Italy in female graves in the cemeteries of Romans d'Isonzo (tt. 79, 97), Castel Trosino (tt. 82, 115) and Nocera Umbra (tt. 69, 95, 102, 148), is widespread in northern Germanic areas and southern Romano-Byzantine areas where they are unequivocally linked to aristocratic women. They date mainly to the late sixth century and the first few decades of the seventh century and are often found associated in necklaces with amethysts, with a combination of materials and shades of colour which are unmistakably Byzantine in taste.[71] *(Fig. 16)*

A *sella plicatilis* (folding stool) from the same grave (t. 60) has an extremely profound cultural and symbolic significance. It consists of two incomplete rectangular iron frames with a pivot connection at the centre of the two long sides that connects them to each other. On the inner part of the two short sides there would have been rings and bars for the suspension of the stool which, in this case, are missing. The outer part of the two frames, with an octagonal section in the central part and quadrangular at the edge, must have been completely damascened even though only parts of the original brass decoration are preserved with motifs that include elaborate simple and double meanders, herringbone pattern, wavy lines, plant tendrils and spirals.[72] *(Fig. 17)* The decoration displays close parallels with the damascening made on two curule seats from Nocera Umbra (tt. 17, 79) dating to the late sixth century.[73]

Considerable interest has been shown in the *sellae plicatilis* placed in the graves and the interpretation that links them to the presence of senior officials of the Roman state seems to be outmoded.[74] During the Early Middle Ages this kind of artefact is frequently found in the cemeteries of the Avars in the Carpathian Basin (Zamárdi-Rétiföldek, Kölked-Feketekapu A and B), in Germanic-Mediterranean areas and in African areas.[75] In the context of a cemetery, they do not really represent a funerary offering but can be interpreted as an expression of power and prestige. This coincides perfectly with the overall evaluation of the grave from Spilamberto where the *sella* was placed, quite intentionally, in the upper part of the grave.[76]

A preliminary analysis of the morphological and stylistic elements of this *sella plicatilis* points to an artefact with extremely similar structural and decorative characteristics to those found in Hungary in the Avar cemetery of Zamárdi in a male burial (t. 121) dating to between the late sixth and early seventh centuries. Based on comparison with the published photos and drawings, it would appear that the two objects, both in terms of structure and the decorative repertoire, were produced by the same workshop.[77]

A significant number of extremely thin accordion pleated gold filaments concentrated on the right side of the cranium of a subadult female were placed in the second of the richer inhumations and with one of the most elaborate and symbolically significant sets of grave goods in the whole of the cemetery (t. 62).[78] The position of the find makes it possible to link them either to the decoration of a veil or to a gold brocade band but, in both cases, they are placed on the head of the deceased.[79] *(Fig. 18)* The origins of these woven artefacts should be traced to oriental regions under the assumption that – if Late Roman and Byzantine sumptuary laws prescribed that they should come under strict state control[80] – it was implicit that Constantinopole was in charge of its production and commercialisation.[81] Despite the extremely sparse archaeological evidence in Italy, it cannot be excluded that fabrics

[70] Gelichi 1994, 42–43; Aimone 2007, 186; Aimone 2008, 378; de Vingo 2014, 176; de Vingo 2020, 197.

[71] Roth 1973, 73–74; De Grassi–Giovannini–Maselli Scotti 1989, 77–82; Rupp 1997b, 97; Paroli 2001, 271; de Vingo 2014, 176; de Vingo 2020, 197–199.

[72] de Vingo 2010, 54–55; de Vingo 2014, 176–177; de Vingo–Baronio–Maddaleno 2018, 233; de Vingo 2020, 199–200.

[73] Rupp 2005, 25–27 (grave 17); Rupp 2005, 98–101 (grave 79); Gütermann 2011, 88–91.

[74] Rupp 1997b, 124; Gütermann 2011, 63–65.

[75] Bárdos 2000, 78–79; Gütermann 2011, 98–102.

[76] Bárdos 2000, 79–82, fig. 1, 100; Gütermann 2011, 71.

[77] Bárdos–Garam 2009, 29, fig. 15a, 215.

[78] de Vingo 2010, 56; de Vingo–Baronio–Maddaleno 2018, 233; de Vingo 2020, 200.

[79] Giostra 2007a, 103–104.

[80] *Theodosiani libri XVI*, X.21, 1–2; *Codex Justiniaenus*, XI.9, 1–2.

[81] Comba 2004, 166; Giostra 2011b, 26–28; de Vingo 2014, 177–178.

Fig. 16. Cemetery of Ponte del Rio (Spilamberto–Modena).
Grave 60, gold necklace pendants 'embossed' in filigree and bronze hairpin while being excavated

Fig. 17. Cemetery of Ponte del Rio (Spilamberto–Modena). Grave 62, *sella plicatilis*. Iron with brass damescened decoration with featuring motifs made with simple and double 'meanders', 'herringbone' pattern, wavy lines, plant tendrils and spirals
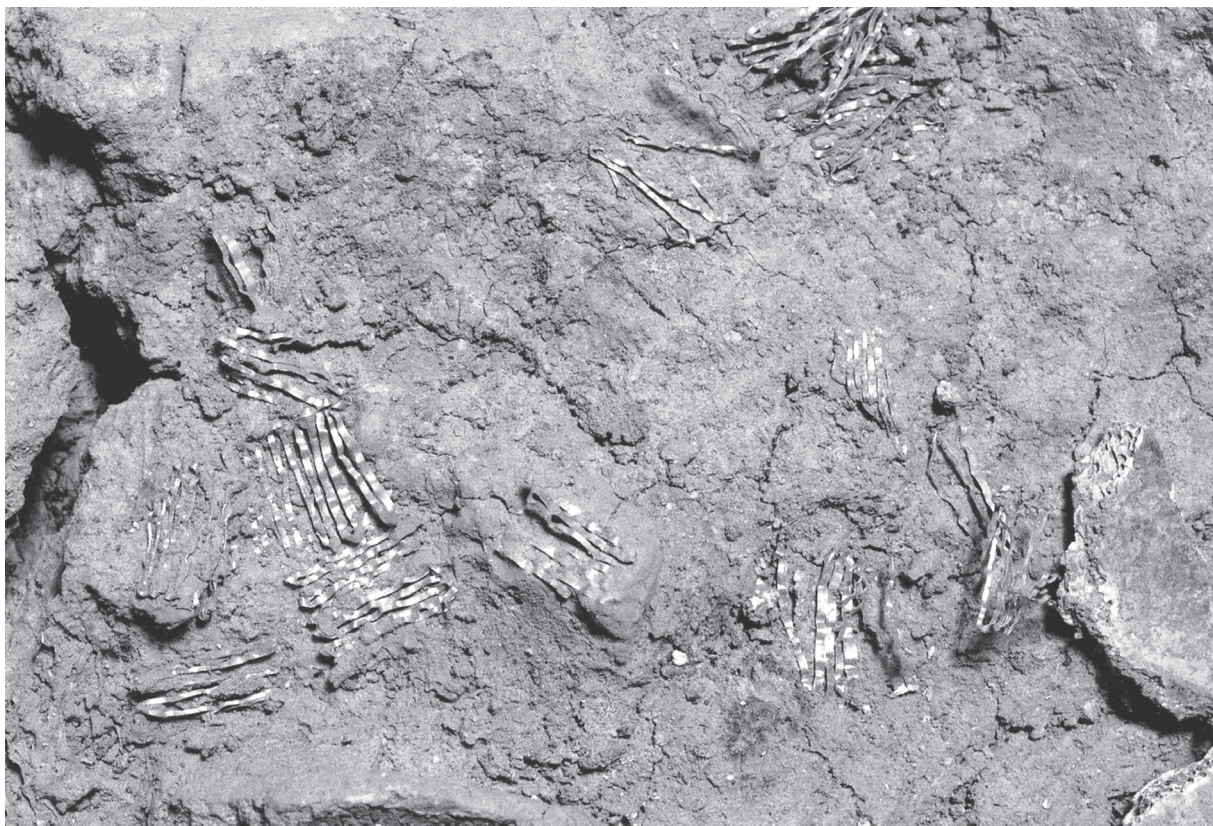
Fig. 18. Cemetery of Ponte del Rio (Spilamberto–Modena). Grave 62,
threads of gold sheet woven into the veil or onto the frontal band of brocade

decorated with gold thread were made in other production centres with different technologies than those tradition-ally adopted.[82] Firstly, the gold filaments found at Campione–S. Zeno and subsequently those from Trezzo–Adda have been used to determine the folds and original decoration of single items of clothing, trying to reproduce, using a modern 'tablet weaving loom', the original brocade trimming on early medieval tunics.[83] *(Fig. 19)*

The graves of Spilamberto – previously indicated as burials where there was significant investment in luxury goods and objects – also include a drinking horn (t. 62), a bottle with a globular body (t. 62), two drinking glasses (tt. 36, 54) and a re-used imperial Roman tubular ointment jar (t. 36). It is almost as if the families of the deceased wanted to emphasise their membership of the aristocracy and, at the same time, wished to demonstrate an economic capacity that was superior to that of other groups within the community; if the goods placed in the graves were effectively lost forever because it was impossible to recover them legally, the families that could clearly afford to lose an investment of this kind must have had considerable purchasing power.[84] *(Fig. 20)*

The green decorated blown glass drinking horn (t. 62) attributed to EVISON IV GROUP TYPE I, dating to between the late sixth century and the first few decades of the seventh century, and to the STIAFFINI FORMA A6, exemplifies the concept of major economic resources given that in Italy it is always found in Lombard graves with particularly rich grave goods and can therefore be considered as an indicator of high social status.[85] In the cemetery of Nocera Umbra it appears as a funerary offering in pairs with a similar object in two cases (tt. 17, 148) or together with glass cage cups in two other burials (tt. 12, 20) without distinction in terms of gender or age, both in the case of adult males and females or of subadult females. Only one drinking horn was found in the cemetery of Castel

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[82] GIOSTRA 2011b, 26–28; BRANDOLINI 2014, 75–80.
[83] CAPORUSSO *et al*. 2005, 29–30; GIOSTRA 2007a, 103–104; GIOSTRA–ANELLI 2012, 338–339; GIOSTRA 2017c, 67.

[84] DE VINGO 2010, 60–64; DE VINGO–BARONIO–MADDALENO 2018, 231; DE VINGO 2020, 200.
[85] EVISON 1975, 80–83, fig. 21; STIAFFINI 1985, 677–678, tav. 1.9; ROFFIA 2010, 71–72; GIOSTRA 2017c, 66.

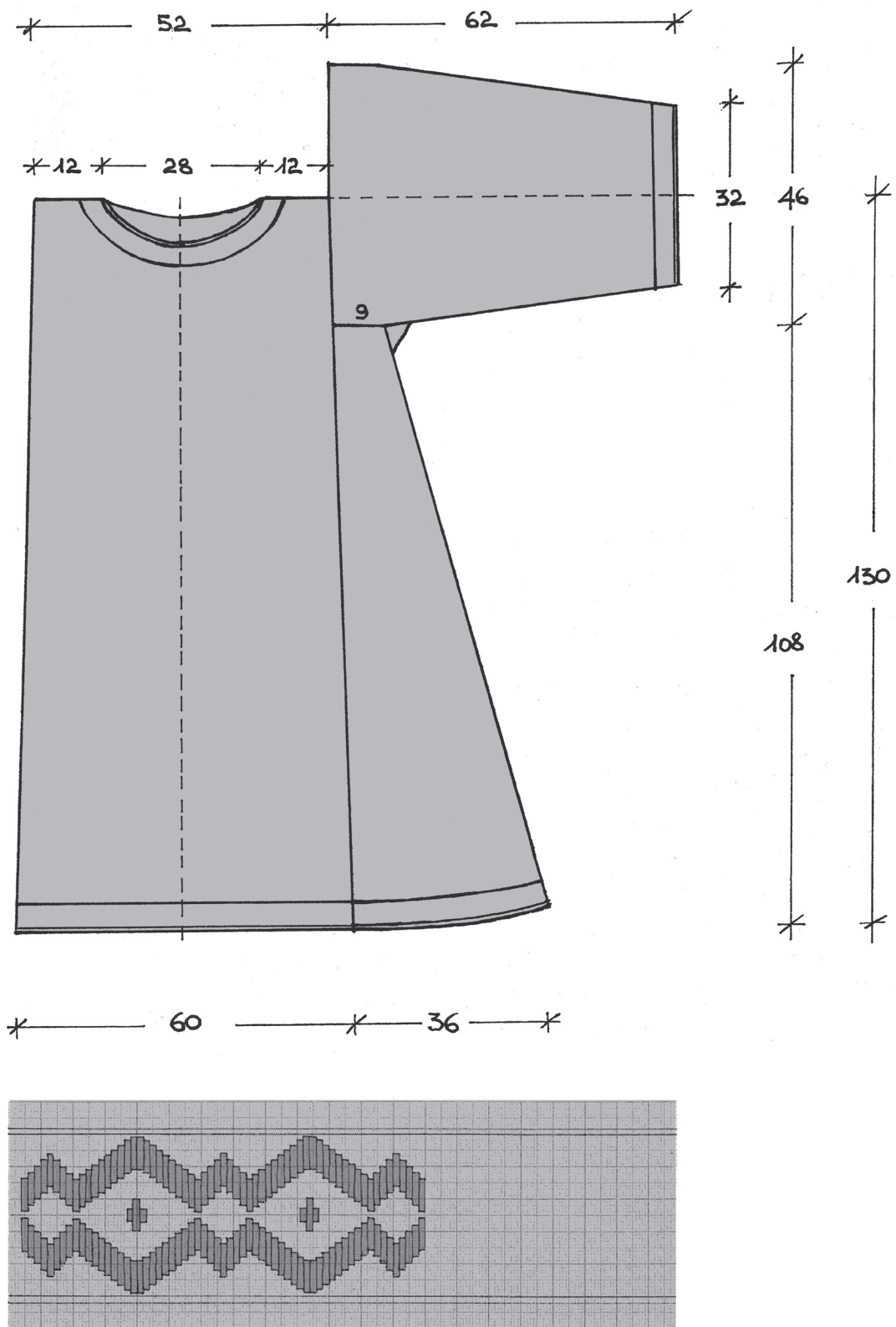Fig. 19. Formal elaboration of the tunic of a female burial in grave 11,
with hypothetical reconstruction of the decoration (from BLOCKLEY et al. 2005, 40)

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Fig. 20. Cemetery of Ponte del Rio (Spilamberto–Modena). Grave 62, drinking horn and bottle with globular body;
graves 36, 54, drinking cups; grave 36, tubular imperial Roman ointment jar

Trosino in a male burial (t. 119) and similarly, one single example comes from an urban excavation in the Forum of Nerva in Rome.[86] *(Fig. 21)*

The trading relationships that led to such a plentiful supply of objects produced outside the region – and more generally, the Mediterranean area – must have developed on various levels even though they involved the upper and middle classes of the 'community of the living'. Unfortunately, it is still not possible to be sure whether it involved a continuous flow of objects over a brief period or whether it took place over an extended period. The gold brocades and the jewellery must have influenced the tastes and interests of the aristocratic class so profoundly that, as reflected in this cemetery, various types were sold while, for other exceptional objects, there may have been areas of production that were distant or extremely remote from the village where they eventually ended up. The possibility of moving beyond political and cultural boundaries reflects the extent to which trading relationships were – at least during these centuries – able to bring together peoples with different cultures that were strategically aligned on opposing sides.[87] While this economic potential implied a spending power capable of purchasing artefacts of such high quality, it might seem a contradiction that the preliminary osteological analyses – carried out on a subadult female (t. 62) with one of the richest and most elaborate grave goods – have highlighted enamel hypoplasia on the deciduous maxillary incisors. In this case, the hypoplastic defect could be related to malnutrition or a disease that affected the individual in the neonatal phase leading to her death at an early age (4–6 years old). It would be particularly interesting to investigate the extent to which enamel hypoplasia constituted a common problem and how it was distributed in relation to sex or to the social status indicated by the grave goods.[88]

7. FEMALE GRAVE GOODS: SOCIAL CONTINUITY AND INNOVATION

Before examining the possible significance of the objects placed in the graves, it is worth emphasising that the term 'grave goods' refers to anything intentionally or incidentally left in a grave, in other words that does not stem from accidental inclusion, that is not part of the body, the means of carrying the corpse to the grave or the structure of the grave itself.[89]

In Italy, all Lombard cemeteries are based on a pyramidal, patriarchal social structure where the members of the various clans that made up the community of the living – demographic groups that were not completely homogeneous and united by kinship ties but also by common cultural elements – were inserted into the world of the dead following the same principles.[90] In general, these were newly founded cemetery areas, although there are cases of continuity or overlap with older cemeteries.[91]

A comparative study carried out on cemeteries in Pannonia and Friuli has highlighted a process of accentuation of the family group among burials following migration, confirmed by a more distinct separation between the deposition areas of families, and greater differentiation in the typology and wealth of the grave goods, in contrast to the relative egalitarianism of the cemeteries in Pannonia where only gender and age determined the grave goods and spatial distribution of the deceased. Weapons were placed in the graves of adult males, female clothing and accessories were placed in the graves of women of reproductive age, while no grave goods or neutral elements were placed in children's graves.[92] The vertical distinction of age and gender was not abandoned in Italian cemeteries – there are cases where specific cemetery areas were reserved for children, the elderly, only men or only women – and reveals a more distinct horizontal separation between family groups and individuals with richer or poorer grave goods, a sign of an advanced process of social transformation encouraging more rapid inclusion within the complex settlement context of Italy.[93]

[86] De Luca 2001, 571–576; Paroli–Ricci 2005, 85, tav. 110.55; Rupp 2005, 20, tav. 22.3, 27, n. 14a–b; 168, n. 12a–b; Rupp 2008, 185–189, fig. 11; Bierbrauer 2008, 126–129, fig. 20.11, 128; Ahumada Silva 2010a, 57; Ahumada Silva 2014, 331.

[87] Ricci 2001a, 82–86; Gasparri 2008, 16–17; Giostra 2011b, 28; de Vingo 2014, 178–180; Beghelli–De Marchi 2017a, 173–175; de Vingo 2020, 202.

[88] Fiorin 2010, 89; Marinato 2019, 127–128.

[89] Gastaldo 1998, 16.

[90] Gasparri 2011, 37; Rotili 2012, 343–344.

[91] Paroli 2007, 204; Pejrani Baricco 2007b, 264.

[92] Halsall 1996, 22–24; Barbiera 2005a, 307–311; Barbiera 2005b, 277–290; La Rocca 2004, 210; Barbiera 2007a, 357–358; Barbiera 2007b, 245–246; Giostra 2007b, 321–322; Barbiera 2008, 456–457.

[93] La Rocca 2004, 210–211; Barbiera 2005a, 311–312; Barbiera 2010, 128–142; Barbiera 2012, 138–141.
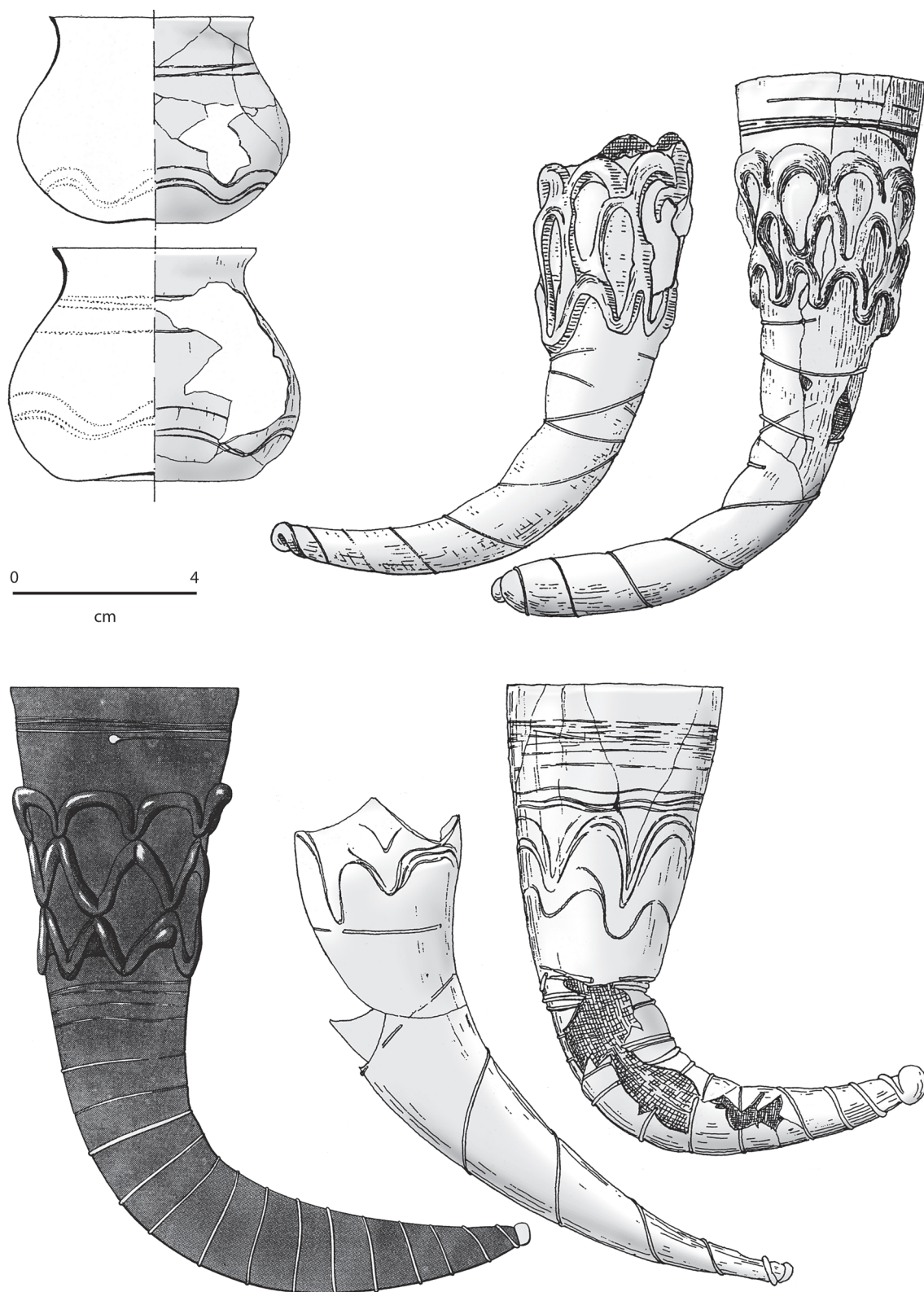
Fig. 21. Cemetery of Nocera Umbra (Perugia). Graves 12, 17, 20, 148, drinking horns; graves 32, 38, glass 'cage cups' (from RUPP 2005, 204–338, reworked). Cemetery of Castel Trosino (Ascoli Piceno). Grave 119, drinking horn (from PAROLI–RICCI 2005, pl. 110)

During the Lombard conquest of Central-Northern Italy, there seems to have been an exponential increase in the qualitative and quantitative aspects of grave goods which reached a peak in about the seventh century and the period immediately following it. The presence of burials – in some cases, particularly rich graves coinciding with the most hard-fought period of settlement during which considerable fortunes were amassed – has justifiably been interpreted as the desire for display and confirmation in the eyes of the local community of the status acquired within a context of extremely unstable economic and social relations.[94] A very similar dynamic has been observed during the same period in Northern Gaul and has been explained as the consequence of territorial and settlement reorganisation, which in this phase took on a more widespread and scattered distribution compared to previous centuries, following the end of Roman political control.[95]

During the first decades of the seventh century, female grave goods began to become more simplified. Bow brooches disappeared and the buckles and straps linked to the main belt were reduced in number. Circular brooches, which only became a part of women's clothing after 575, continued to be used until the seventh century but were gradually replaced or supplemented by zoomorphic brooches.[96] Decorative elements included necklaces with ceramic beads, gems, glass paste, bone and amber in which coins could be placed with distinctive means of insertion (perforation or soldered hook), while earrings, armillae and rings are less frequent. The discovery in female burials of long bronze hairpins, placed next to the cranium of the deceased, could be related to her social status symbolically represented by the type of hairstyle used. Neutral elements such as knives, combs, and pottery or glass vessels complete the range of artefacts. Besides not occurring on a systematic basis, all the objects could be associated in a highly variable manner.[97]

The reduced investment in female graves, which took place during the first half of the seventh century, can be seen very clearly, for example in the cemetery of Nocera Umbra and, even more strikingly, in the cemetery of Collegno (Turin) where the phenomenon is confirmed by the fact that, in this case, women constituted a distinct minority with respect to the overall inhumed population numbers.[98] This numerical difference seems fairly generalised and remains a distinctive element of Italian medieval cemeteries which has only been partly explained. The reduction in the number of female grave goods – considered as an expression of a more rapid process of integration of women with the customs of the local populations – may indicate a change in women's functions during the initial phase of the Lombard conquest, possibly caused by the redefinition of their social role in relation to the new conditions of life in Italy.[99]

This study of grave goods follows a chronological overview that involves all the territories in the Italian Peninsula that came under Lombard control from the migration phase to the late seventh century, caused by the gradual Christianisation and reorganisation of a society based on land ownership. The ruling class gradually modelled itself, according to rank, on the iconography and customs of the Romano-Byzantine upper classes and the religious ruling elite.[100]

The sequence of female grave goods and gifts analysed here is significant for the evolution of female customs and status in a two-way process of integration which involved Romans and Lombards with variable, albeit constant, forms. During the earliest phase, particular emphasis was given to the funerals of the community to whom the deceased belonged, still linked to their own ancestral rites. Subsequently there was a transition towards the celebration of Christian funerary ritual, without the squandering of gifts placed beside the deceased, but with burial in oratories and private mausoleums which guaranteed the memory in perpetuity of the deceased, associated with prayers and religious ceremonies, as well as the visibility of economic power and the faith of the founders of the building.[101]

The burials examined in this study show that not just high-ranking women received honours due to their family but, as in the case of Spilamberto, that even girls who died prematurely were assured grave goods and gifts worthy of their lineage, that clothing, jewellery and other objects were gradually drawn from local and Byzantine workshops, that childbirth was the most widespread cause of death and that mothers and children were placed in the same burial.

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[94] LA ROCCA 2004, 210–211; DE VINGO 2010, 57–58.

[95] HALSALL 1995, 25–37; EFFROS 2002, 89; EFFROS 2003, 165–166; BRATHER 2007, 306; DE VINGO 2010, 268–269.

[96] MARTIN 1997, 351–353; PAROLI 2001, 266; ROTILI 2012, 344–345.

[97] PAROLI 2007, 205; DE VINGO 2010, 63–64.

[98] PEJRANI BARICCO 2004a, 38–40; PAROLI 2007, 205; PEJRANI BARICCO 2007a, 372–376; PEJRANI BARICCO 2007b, 263–264; GIOSTRA 2011a, 261.

[99] LA ROCCA 2011a, 65–68; BARBIERA 2012, 129–130.

[100] LA ROCCA 2011b, 17.

[101] DE MARCHI 2007, 235–237.

8. THE WEALTH OF THE DECEASED: GRAVE GOODS AND SOCIAL STATUS

Cultural transmission should not be regarded as a one-way process because it involved a complex, multi-directional and variable pattern according to specific cases and circumstances. This is because material culture has never been a static phenomenon: it is a form of perpetual, infinite motion continuously modified by human contacts and movements, creating a new mixture in which the components that contributed to making and moulding it initially differed from those of later phases.[102] The process by which an authentic and ancestral tradition is identified is always determined retrospectively, as happens in history, in order to crystallise those aspects of culture that are indispensable for legitimising the dividing lines between distinct ethnic, social, political or religious groups.[103] Each cultural system is subject to continuous modifications over time, determined not so much or not exclusively by contact with different cultural systems – but rather by significant social and economic transformations within the system itself.[104] Besides this, functional and environmental elements can trigger other changes and condition forms of material culture. Each cultural system – since it is subject to modifications caused by social, economic and environmental factors – is by no means uniform: on the contrary, the different technological, decorative and morphological variants of each system are distributed unevenly within the same culture.[105] At the same time, the discontinuity in the distribution of the individual elements of a cultural system is broadly conditioned by social factors. Material culture is not passively maintained and does not inevitably need to be shared. The chance to employ a specific cultural variant can only be reserved for certain individuals or only for single groups and may prove inaccessible to others since each component of a specific society has different opportunities for gaining access to culture on the basis of their social role. All this leads us to consider the possibility that the various identified archaeological cultures can never be uniform and circumscribed, precisely because they are extremely uneven. If a distribution map could be made of the various cultural components defined by archaeologists, then it would be possible to see that objects attributed to different cultural environments can coexist in certain areas and, at the same time, that there are contexts which are not marked by a distinctive culture. Moreover, the distribution areas of a specific material culture do not always coincide with the settlement sites of the ethnic group that produced it. This demonstrates that the transformations of material culture are determined by complex social and environmental variants, and not just by the ethnic component.[106] Funerary practices should be evaluated not just as the capacity of cultural diffusion but need to be examined by focusing on the structural variations and the complexity of the communities under consideration. What needs to be assessed is the relationship between the level of investment carried out for the preparation of the funeral, the burial and the rank of the deceased: complex depositions and therefore numerous, intrinsically high-quality grave goods are supposed to reflect the high social status of the deceased.[107] In complex societies, in which the division of wealth is unequal, family clans with greater power and control over available agricultural and livestock resources tend to prepare and organise rituals aimed at highlighting their hegemony in order to confirm their membership of the dominant group, investing more resources in complex ceremonies and in more elaborate forms of burial, and therefore to reiterate their own capacity to absorb and maintain the prerogatives of the deceased. Although early medieval graves are marked by the presence of numerous and variable objects, it may be precisely the grave goods that were used to establish the rank and social role that the deceased had embodied in earthly life. Accordingly, the socio-political role merged in the formation of ethnic identity without undermining it: the richest grave goods were placed by the immigrant members of the community, both as a distinctive tradition, and to confirm the power obtained in the areas of conquest not just over the local population but rather towards all the various clans that had taken part in the occupation phase.[108]

The concept of ethnic identity should not be treated rigidly since the possibility of being included within, or excluded from, within a specific demographic group is contingent and not innate, while the definition of ethnic entities themselves is determined by the capacity for interaction between different groups. According to this perspective, ethnic identity was used as a strategy for self-definition and identification in juxtaposition with other ethnic groups, ensuring that its boundaries were not rigid but subject to continuous transformation and mediation.

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[102] ROTILI 2012, 339–340.
[103] WILPERT 1989, 21–23; BAYART 1996, 45–48; AIME 2004, 56–57.
[104] ROTILI 2012, 340–341.
[105] BINFORD 1965, 207–208.

[106] BARBIERA 2012, 104–106; ROTILI 2015, 303–304.
[107] WILLIAMS 2006, 39–42; BRATHER 2007, 306; GIOSTRA 2017a, 19.
[108] BARBIERA 2012, 99–100; BROGIOLO–CHAVARRÍA ARNAU 2020, 292–293.

The meanings attributed to material culture were not static but were continuously redefined so that, even if a specific cultural form might remain unaltered, its significance could be modified in different historical and social contexts.[109]

In this specific case, it is important to underline the performative function of funerals as ritual operations run by family members or relatives of the deceased in which the symbolic choice of the symbols used to remember the person who has died reflects, above all, the need to reinforce, affirm and create social relations in the present and may not necessarily reproduce the life of the deceased. Of all the various identities (age, sex, ethnic and family membership) that the deceased may have had in life, only some can be chosen as being representative during the phase of inhumation, without excluding the possibility of adding new elements that were not previously included. At the same time, emotional ties also act as filters, so that an individual can be commemorated differently according to whether it is the children, a wife or only secondary relatives who are grieving over their death. The arrangement of the grave and the choice of grave goods represent the images of the ancestors that the descendants wished to construct and prepare for the community of the living as a whole. In this way, people of the same social status can easily receive burials of different size and graves with the same contents in terms of wealth may contain individuals of extremely different social status. The key players are not included in the world of the dead but are inserted in the world of the living and are represented by those that actually organise the funeral and take part in it as spectators.[110] The deceased therefore did not constitute just a means of communication from the afterlife but, during phases of greater social instability, investments in funerary ritual were considerable: only after the eighth century, when social status and thus agricultural property and livestock, personal objects of significant economic and not just sentimental value became hereditary, did the deposition of grave goods decline in favour of individual wills and bequests.[111]

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[109] Barbiera 2012, 95–98.
[110] Williams 2006, 195–196; Barbiera 2012, 107–108; Giostra 2019a, 19.

[111] La Rocca 1989, 88; Effros 2003, 91–94; Giostra 2004, 63; La Rocca 2005, 456–457; Williams 2006, 44–45.

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