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Estratto

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FONDATA DA SABATINO MOSCATI

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ROMA
EDIZIONI QUASAR

Estratto

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Estratto

TWO NEW SCARABS FROM THE EIA SETTLEMENT OF PONTECAGNANO: SYMBOLS OF PRESTIGE FOR AN EVOLVING COMMUNITY

RAFFAELLA BONAUDO, LUCA CERCHIAI, GÜNTHER HÖLBL, MARIA TOMMASA GRANESE,
ANTONELLA MASSANOVA, ALESSANDRA SPERDUTI
with EVELINE GUIDI and VIOLA CECCONI*

Abstract: The paper presents the preliminary results of a preventive archaeological excavation carried out at the protohistoric center of Pontecagnano, whose significance emerges across multiple interpretative dimensions. From a topographical perspective, the newly acquired data allow for a more precise definition of the extent and organization of the settlement during the Orientalizing period. The stratigraphic sequence reveals a marked discontinuity between the Orientalizing phase – characterized by the presence of hut structures – and the preceding phase, which is documented by a funerary cluster. The composition of the grave goods further displays distinctive features that identify this group as an elite segment of the local community during the Early Iron Age (Phase IIB in the Pontecagnano sequence). On the basis of the exceptional discovery of two steatite scarabs, combined with the typological analysis of selected categories of material culture, it has been possible to outline a network of long-distance interactions linking the Near East and the Tyrrhenian coasts of the Italian peninsula, likely mediated by Phoenician agents. The paper therefore aims to stimulate further critical discussion and in-depth analysis of the dynamics of exchange and interaction that affected not only Pontecagnano but also the broader framework of interregional connections during the crucial transition from the Early Iron Age to the Orientalizing period.

Keywords: Pontecagnano; Early Iron Age; Ancient Scarabs; Ancient Trade Networks; Mediterranean Exchanges

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2023, the exhibition: “*Per terra e per mare. Gli Etruschi di frontiera tra mobilità e integrazione / By Land and Sea. The Etruscans on the Frontier between Mobility and Integration*” was hosted at the National Museum of Pontecagnano (SA). The exhibition focused on the long-term development of the Villanovan and Etruscan settlement as a key crossroads of mobility and trade in Campania and southern Italy.

Within this framework, the curators, Luigina Tomay and Carmine Pellegrino, chose to present a pair of scarab-shaped amulets recently discovered in EIA burials 10026 and 10031 during a preventive archaeological excavation. Their inclusion was intended to highlight their relevance to the exhibition’s broader interpretative themes.

The present study aims to provide a preliminary chronological and cultural framework for these scarabs through the analysis of their archaeological context. By presenting contextual data, this paper seeks to

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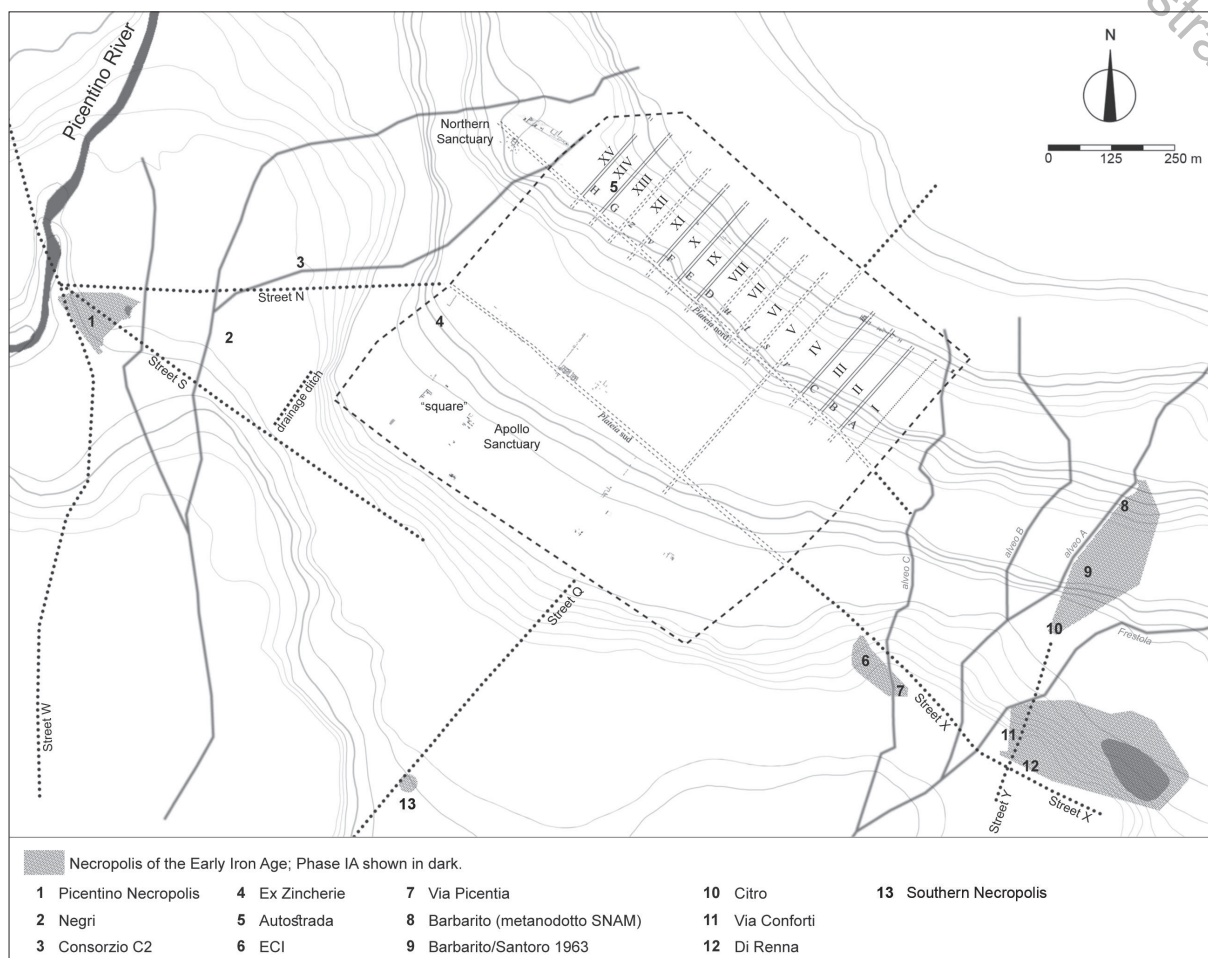


Fig. 1. Plan of the settlement with the necropoleis (A. Massanova; elaboration by Pellegrino – Rossi 2011).

introduce evidence of particular significance to the current scholarly debate; it is conceived as a preliminary report, to be followed by a more comprehensive analytical publication.

L.C.

2. THE TOPOGRAPHICAL ENVIRONMENT

The archaeological investigations were conducted between May and July 2022 in an area on the western edge of the plateau on which the Villanovan and Etruscan settlement of Pontecagnano stands.¹ The work forms part of a broader program for the protection of the ancient Etruscan center and, in areas such as this – already densely occupied – for the recovery and advancement of archaeological knowledge. This program has been pursued since the 1960s and has consistently been shaped by the need to contend with increasingly intensive urbanization.²

1 A preliminary report is in Bonaudo 2025, pp. 55-57.

2 On the development of methods and approaches to the site protection, see Pellegrino – Rossi – De Simone 2015; Pellegrino – Rossi 2017, with references.

The aim of the campaign was to evaluate the archaeological impact of an urban redevelopment project on a site previously occupied by an industrial facility (“Zincherie Noschese”, Fig. 1.4). Following the discovery of archaeological remains of the ancient settlement, as well as EIA burials, the project was modified to enable their future integrated use and public accessibility within the urban fabric of the modern city, without any new construction.

The area in which the cluster of tombs that is the subject of the present report is located, traditionally considered part of the ancient settlement, represents a key topographical marker for the southern boundary of the Pontecagnano settlement during the EIA.

As well established, the distribution of the IA necropoleis reflects a highly structured spatial organization. The main burial areas are arranged within the two necropoleis of Picientino to the west (Fig. 1.1) and Sant’Antonio to the east (Fig. 1.6-12), along the margins of the travertine plateau on which the settlement is located, in close association with defining landscape features such as contour lines and watercourses.³ An additional necropolis is located further to the south, likely along a route leading toward the coast (Fig. 1.13).

Around the mid-8th century BCE, corresponding to Phase II of the local sequence, several isolated groups of graves begin to appear progressively closer to the central plateau, initially as single occurrences and subsequently as small clusters. This phenomenon is clearly attested both in the eastern necropolis at Sant’Antonio⁴ (Fig. 1.6-7) and along the northwestern⁵ (Fig. 1.5) and southwestern⁶ (Fig. 1.3) edges of the settlement.

In this same period, the necropolis under consideration developed. Although it has not been fully excavated, it was likely originally more extensive, as suggested by the discovery of an EIA bronze fibula during expansion works at the industrial facility.⁷

Thus, while the evidence from this funerary area confirms, at this chronological stage, the presence of clusters of graves located predominantly along the periphery of the settlement – as clearly highlighted by B. d’Agostino and P. Gastaldi for the western and eastern necropoleis⁸ – the grave goods, which include imported items and prestigious objects, point to the presence of groups characterized by exceptional cultural dynamism and integrated into an extensive network of commercial and cultural interactions with multiple Mediterranean actors.

All these features, considered as a whole, constitute clear markers of a society in transition and foreshadow, in many respects, the profound structural and socio-cultural changes that would take place during the Orientalizing period.

Despite the poor and disturbed archaeological stratigraphy at the site, as in the other necropoleis, the burial ground was no longer in use from the end of the EIA, and the area came to be occupied by huts.

3 The settlement area, initially defined on the basis of surveys by the Fondazione Lerici, has been progressively refined through analysis of the placement of the necropoleis and, more recently, through detailed topographical study of the geomorphology and the overall distribution of archaeological finds, Bonaudo *et al.* 2009, p. 170, notes 4 and 5; Pellegrino – Rossi 2011, pp. 29-36; 209-210; Pellegrino – Rossi 2023, all with references. On the IA necropoleis, see d’Agostino – Gastaldi 1988, pp. 3-8; De Natale 1992, pp. 3-11; De Natale 2016, p. 9.

4 Bonaudo *et al.* 2009, p. 172, note 10; d’Agostino – Gastaldi 1988, pp. 123-124; d’Agostino – Gastaldi 2012, pp. 412-415.

5 In this area, the presence of a burial context was first indicated by the out-of-context discovery of a fibula “a drago” dating to the third quarter of the 8th century BCE, together with a spool and a spindle whorl: see Pellegrino – Rossi 2011, p. 59.

6 Two unpublished tombs, 9966 and 10015, were found in the area of Via Raffaello Sanzio (zona Consorzio C2) by Dr B. Baglivo under the scientific direction of the Soprintendenza ABAP per le Province di Salerno e Avellino – Dr L. Tomay, to whom we are indebted for the information.

7 Pellegrino – Rossi 2011, note 87.

8 d’Agostino – Gastaldi 2012.

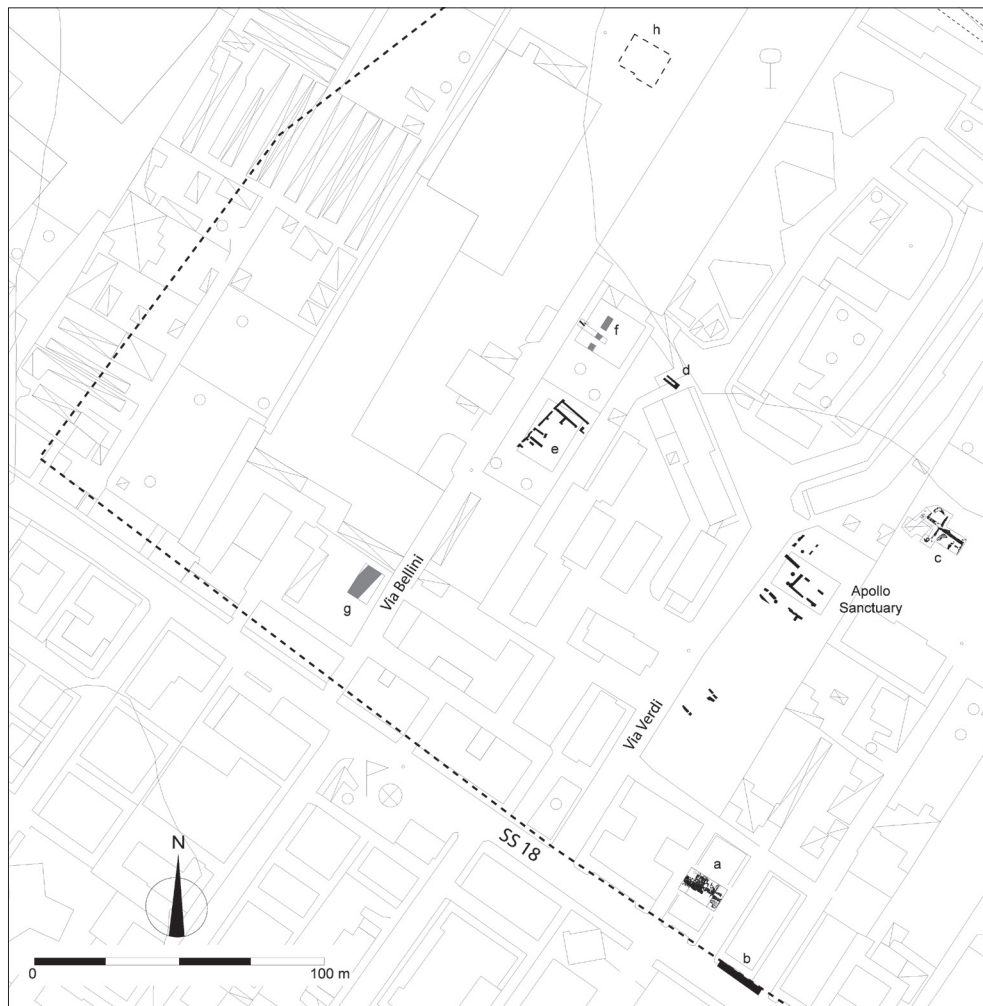


Fig. 2. Topographical framework: a) road (Negri property, excavations 1966-1967); b) ditch along the SS 18; c) Ina Casa excavation (Negri property, 1966-1967); d) Ina Casa kiln; e) Via Bellini complex (excavations 1968-69); f) road (Noschese property, excavations 1968); g) road (excavations 2001); h) excavations at Ex Zincherie Noschese (reworked from Cerchiai – Cinquantaquattro – Lupia 2023, p. 259, fig. 2).

One of these, partially unearthed, was associated with a well that fell into disuse in the early 6th century BCE. The few ceramic sherds recovered from the postholes of the huts provide only limited evidence,⁹ thereby precluding a precise chronological analysis.

Nevertheless, the context shows close parallels with other huts dating to the Orientalizing period found in the nearby area of Via Bellini,¹⁰ associated with a communal space that would later become a point of exchange for the Archaic city.¹¹

M.T.G.

⁹ More specifically, a fragment of the everted rim of an impasto ware plate, datable to the end 7th/beginning of the 6th century BCE.

¹⁰ Cerchiai – Cinquantaquattro – Lupia 2023, with references.

¹¹ Cerchiai 1995, pp. 81-82; Pellegrino – Rossi 2011, p. 211 and note 31.

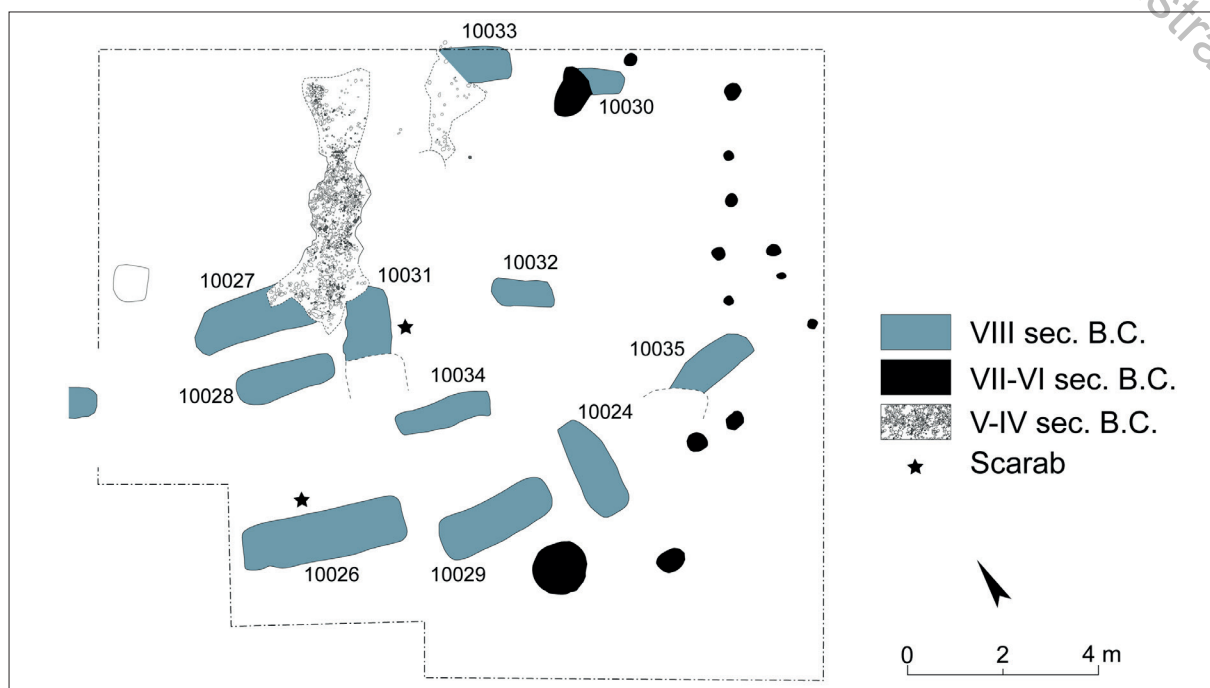


Fig. 3. The burial ground (drawing A. Massanova).

3. THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FROM TOMBS 10026 AND 10031

The archaeological excavation yielded 11 burials, all heavily damaged by subsequent interventions carried out in the area. They are arranged in closely spaced, parallel rows, following organizational criteria that recur in other contemporary clusters, where deviations appear to mark more explicitly close familial relationships (Fig. 3).¹²

The burials, datable to around the mid-8th century BCE, are predominantly of the *fossa* type, in some cases of considerable size. They are generally covered with pebbles, often mixed with small tuff blocks, which also line the walls of the grave¹³ and, in three instances, the burial floor itself.¹⁴

The prevailing funerary rite is inhumation, with the deceased laid in a supine position and oriented without a strict pattern: in five cases with the head to the west-southwest, in two to the northeast, and in two to the east-northeast. Tomb 10029 stands apart as the only cremation within the group, in which the burnt bones were scattered across the burial surface.¹⁵

Excluding the two plundered graves,¹⁶ the sample under examination comprises eight adult burials (three female and five male) and one non-adult individual.

12 For example, the lot found during the ECI excavation, published in De Natale 1992. A comparable spatial organization is evident at Monte Vetrano, both in the northern necropolis of Porte di Ferro and in the southeastern sector at Boscarello; see Scala 2011, pp. 148-191.

13 Tombs 10024, 10026, 10027, 10029, and 10031.

14 Tombs 10026, 10027, and 10031.

15 The cremation rite, with burnt bones scattered over the burial surface, is common during the local Phase II. This type of deposition is usually associated with cist graves, although in some burial grounds it coexists with *fossae* graves that adopt the same ritual. So, for example, the ECI necropolis, De Natale 1992, pp. 140-141.

16 Tombs 10028 and 10030.

While the female component is identifiable almost exclusively through anthropological analyses and a limited number of specific indicators – such as ornaments and an impasto spindle whorl from Tombs 10024, 10031, and 10032 – the male component is more clearly defined in terms of functional indicators, following a well-established system based on the presence of weapons.¹⁷ The weapons are accompanied by fibulae typical of male attire, attested in both iron and bronze, and, in one case, by a bronze razor.¹⁸

The knife is not a gender marker, as it is generally attested in burials of both sexes; although in the group under study it appears only in male graves, where it is placed in the large bowl, on the torso, or in proximity to the weapons, and is sometimes duplicated.¹⁹

Noteworthy is the presence of a bronze bracelet worn by the deceased in Tomb 10027.²⁰

The ceramic assemblages, preserved in six graves, consist of a limited number of impasto artefacts. The impasto set, as a rule placed at the feet of the deceased, comprises an olla, a cup, and a large bowl (*scodellone*).²¹

Within an overall context of substantial homogeneity in grave assemblages, burials 10026 and 10031 are distinguished by the presence of two steatite scarabs, alongside other ritual-specific features. The former pertains to an adult male aged between 20 and 30 years, whereas burial 10031 is attributable to a subadult, likely a pre-adolescent female.²²

Tomb 10026 differs from other Pontecagnano tombs containing scarabs, as such amulets are typically associated with female interments or with children's graves whose assemblages display markers traditionally linked to the male sphere.²³

This grave, the largest in the necropolis, was a pebble-lined *fossa* grave of rectangular shape, oversized relative to the interred individual,²⁴ and oriented east-southeast/west-northwest, with the cranium oriented toward the northwest (Fig. 4). The pebble covering was largely found collapsed within the grave; this collapse, together with scraping and more recent interventions, compromised the preservation of the burial, and much of the grave assemblage was no longer in its original position.

The skeletal remains consisted of the skull and two fragments of the lower limbs. At the feet of the deceased, the ceramic assemblage was placed, consisting of the remains of a storage vessel, probably an olla, a cup, and a large bowl (Fig. 4, no. 4). Associated with this assemblage were a large bronze basin (diameter 27-28 cm) and a razor, which was likely contained within it (Fig. 4, no. 5).

A bronze spear was located at the left shoulder of the deceased, along the left side of the body; an iron spear and a sickle (?) were placed to the right of the head (Fig. 4, nos. 1, 7, 8; Fig. 5). In association with

17 Bronze or iron, single or duplicate, spears: Tombs 10026, 10027, and 10029.

18 The male fibulae are of the serpentine-bow type. The iron specimens correspond to d'Agostino – Gastaldi 2016, type 320[E]3b2a, whereas the bronze specimen cannot be assigned to a specific subtype.

19 Knives appear with some frequency in the grave goods of high-status individuals. For example, one may recall the cases of Tombs 3090 and 3090bis in the western Picentino necropolis, and Tombs 3006, 7178, and 7765 in the eastern necropolis; see d'Agostino – Gastaldi 2012, pp. 402-403, 406, 408.

20 The bronze bracelet is rarely present within the Picentino necropolis: it occurs in high-status warrior tomb (Tomb 3090), a young male burial (Tomb 6523), and an infant burial (Tomb 4870); see, respectively, d'Agostino – Gastaldi 2012, pp. 402-403; De Natale 2016, pp. 79-80, and d'Agostino – Gastaldi 1988, pp. 222-223.

21 The *ollae* (Tombs 10024, 10026, 10027, and 10029) correspond to the Type 30C; the large bowls (*scodelloni*) (Tombs 10026, 10027, and 10031) to Type 150A1; and the cups, present in each tomb except 10031, to Types 120D and 120E, typical of the local Phase II. The typology follows d'Agostino – Gastaldi 2016.

22 This identification is based on the dimensions of the burial and, in particular, on the space available for the body (approximately 1.10 m), a measurement which, in known cases, generally corresponds to burials of sub-adults of approximately 9-10 years of age; see De Natale 2016, pp. 136-137; Pellegrino 2021, pp. 432-433.

23 On the presence of scarabs at Pontecagnano and its surroundings, see Massanova – Pellegrino – Poole 2025, p. 160, fig. 2.

24 Size: 3.40 x 1 m.

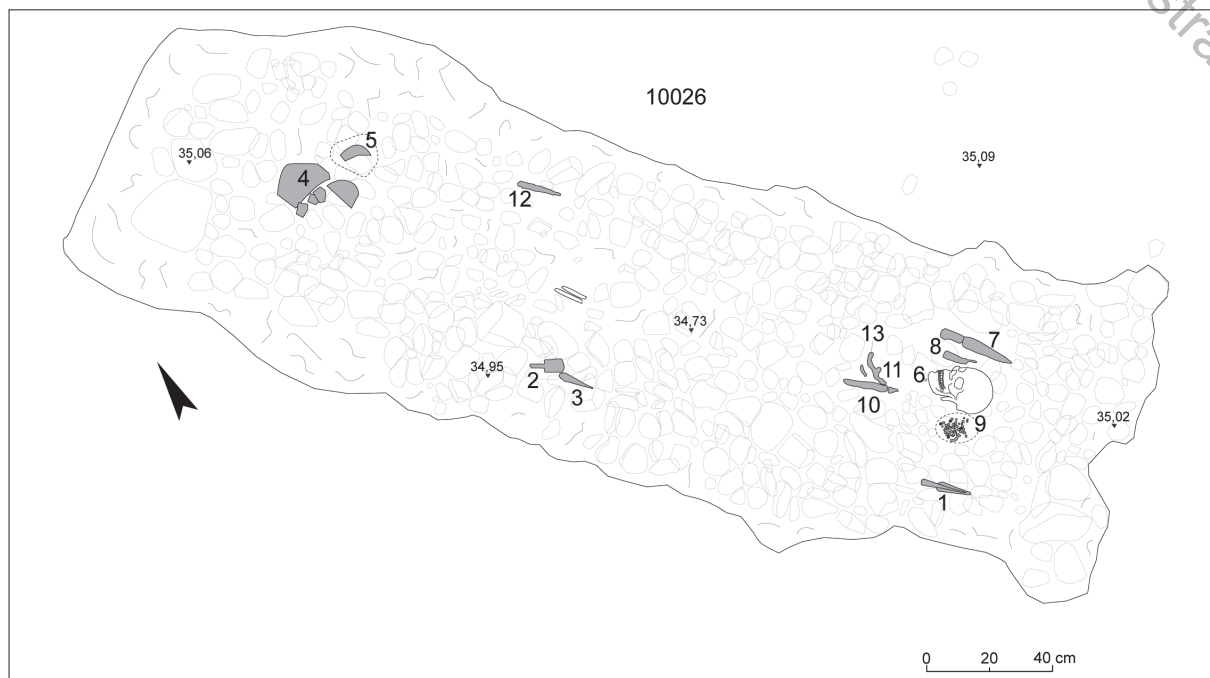


Fig. 4. Tomb 10026 (drawing A. Massanova).

these weapons, at the level of the right leg, an iron spearhead was found, placed with the tip pointing upward (Fig. 4, no. 12).

On the chest of the deceased were a knife and a large serpentine-bow iron fibula, beneath which a pin with a *pasta vitrea* bead was positioned (Figs. 4, nos. 10, 11, 13; 6.b). Not far away, to the left of the head, a second iron fibula was recovered, together with numerous bronze rings and studs (Fig. 4, no. 9). Additional studs were found beneath the cranium. The personal assemblage was completed by the scarab discovered beneath the chin (Fig. 4, no. 6).

In the southern portion of the pit, at the level of the legs but found at a higher stratigraphic position, were iron tools consisting of an axe and an eye-axe (Fig. 4, nos. 2, 3), while an iron arrowhead was recovered from the southwest corner of the burial.

Tomb 10026, with its complex system of markers – including tomb structure, grave assemblage, and funerary ideology – has significant parallels with the large “warrior” tombs of the western necropolis from the final phase of the Iron Age, such as Tombs 3090 and 3090bis, as well as with other prominent burials from the eastern necropoleis.²⁵



Fig. 5. Detail of Tomb 10026 during excavation (Archivio SABAP SA, Ph. A. Massanova).

25 d’Agostino – Gastaldi 2012, pp. 402-403; Aurino – Gobbi 2012. Other parallels can be drawn with eminent burials from Monte Vetrano, for example Tomb 51 (Boscariello): Scala 2011, pp. 157-170.

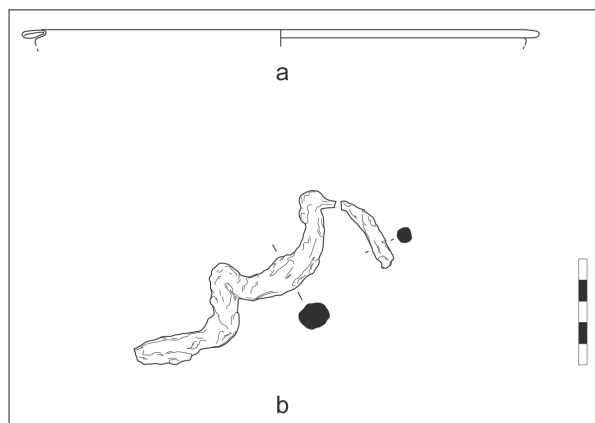


Fig. 6. Tomba 10026: A) The bronze basin; B) the iron fibula “a gomito” (Drawing V. Miceli).

Tomb 10026 is further distinguished within the context of warrior burials by the presence and arrangement of certain types of ornaments. In addition to the scarab, there is a pin on the chest³⁰ and a series of small rings and, most notably, studs found near the head, which suggest the presence of an elaborate decorated tissue.³¹ The function of this tissue could be enlightened by the discovery of a small fibula near the cranium, likely used to secure the textile.

Finally, the presence of a bronze basin is noteworthy, further enriching the body of evidence already known from Tombs 3090, 3090bis, and 539 (Fig. 6A).³²

Tomb 10031 likely had a rectangular shape, oriented northwest/southeast, with a pebble covering, as well as lining of the pit, and a few tuff fragments (Fig. 7).

The grave was heavily damaged by recent works. The deceased, whose skeletal remains are not preserved, was probably placed in a supine position, with the cranium oriented to the northeast. At the feet were an impasto large bowl (*scodellone*) with an inward-turned rim (Fig. 7.1)³³ and a black cup, recovered at a higher stratigraphic level and possibly originally contained within the bowl (Fig. 8). Beneath the bowl, two bronze ankle rings were found (Fig. 7.2-3),³⁴ while additional ornaments were recovered at the level of

The presence of a pair of spears represents a relatively uncommon feature,²⁶ although they are almost always associated with iron tools related to carpentry and agricultural activities, generally axes, chisels, and knives.²⁷ In Tomb 10026, the set of iron tools appears to be complemented by a sickle, which is generally rare in the Pontecagnano necropoleis, positioned in a prominent location beside the head and near the iron spear (Figs. 4, no. 8; 5). This arrangement can be compared only with examples from Tombs 3090 and 3089, where the sickles were instead placed alongside other tools.²⁸ The bronze razor also forms part of the same system of accumulated prestige markers, although its occurrence is far from systematic.²⁹

26 Pairs of spears are attested in the following tombs: Tomb 2150 in d'Agostino – Gastaldi 1988, pp. 198-200; Tombs 3184 and 3284 in De Natale 1992, pp. 49-50 and 109-111. From eastern necropolis: Tombs 3089, 3093, 3006, 3010, and 536 in d'Agostino – Gastaldi 2012, pp. 404-406.

27 d'Agostino – Gastaldi 2012, pp. 403-418 (Tombs 536, 3006, 3010, 5037).

28 On the sickle from Tomb 3090, see d'Agostino – Gastaldi 2012, p. 401, fig. 5.6; Aurino – Gobbi 2012, p. 808. Sickles used with the same meaning are attested in the Oenotrian necropoleis of Francavilla Marittima, S. Maria d'Anglona, and Tursi – Valle Sorigliano: Iaia 2006, p. 184, with references; Aurino – Gobbi 2012, p. 808, note 13.

29 The razor can be assigned to d'Agostino – Gastaldi 2016, Type 450B2. On Tomb 4858, see d'Agostino – Gastaldi 1988, pp. 215-216; on Tomb 3284, De Natale 1992, pp. 109-111.

30 See the female TG1 Tomb 166 from *Pithekoussai*: Buchner – Ridgway 1993, pp. 208-2011, and Type A20A23 in Nizzo 2007.

31 The studs are attested in several warrior tombs, in *fossae* burials (3089, 3090, 3090 bis, 3093), in one case positioned near the upper part of the body, and at least in one cremation context (6569). On Tomb 6569, see De Natale 2016, pp. 99-100.

32 Mercuri 2004, Type 6, fig. 51.6; see Tomb 88 from Francavilla Marittima. On Tombs 3090 and 3090bis, see d'Agostino – Gastaldi 2012, p. 424; Aurino – Gobbi 2012, pp. 804-805, 811-814; for the basin from Tomb 539, see d'Agostino – Gastaldi 1988, p. 49 and pl. 15.

33 d'Agostino – Gastaldi 2016, Type 150A.

34 d'Agostino – Gastaldi 2016, Type 360A.

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Fig. 7. Tomb 10031 (drawing A. Massanova).

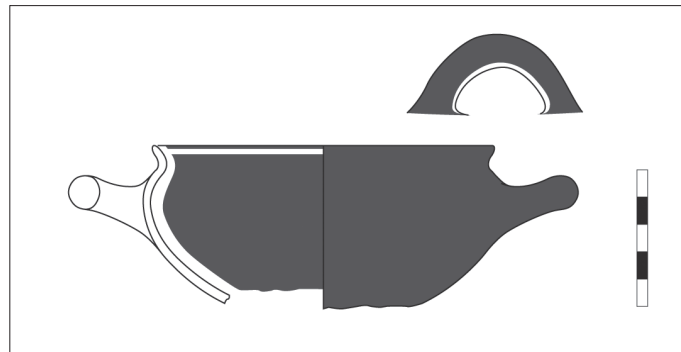


Fig. 8. The black cup from Tomb 10031 (Drawing V. Miceli).

the chest of the deceased. These include the steatite scarab and two small rings in bronze and gold, found together with small bronze fragments, some belonging to groups of rings (Fig. 7.5-6).

Of particular note is the black cup, which has been attested at Pontecagnano since Phase IIA.³⁵ The specimen from burial 10031, characterized by a shallow basin, belongs to an earlier type, still within MGII, and may be of Euboean manufacture.³⁶

A.M.

3.1. Tomb 10026 from Pontecagnano: Anthropological Analysis

The skeletal remains recovered from Tomb 10026 were temporarily entrusted to the Bioarchaeology Service of the Museo delle Civiltà for study and analysis.

According to the excavation records (Fig. 4), the individual was laid in a supine position, with the cranium oriented to the northwest and the lower limbs extended and parallel. The position of the upper limbs cannot be determined due to the absence of observational data. At the time of discovery, the cranium was resting on its right side; however, the absence of the cervical segment of the vertebral column makes it impossible to determine whether this represents the original position or the result of taphonomic processes.

The osteological assemblage consists of a limited number of elements, which are highly fragmented and generally in a poor state of preservation. Bone surfaces exhibit significant diagenetic alterations, including exfoliation and deep corrosion, which have partially compromised their morphology. The preserved remains pertain almost exclusively to the cranial region, except for a few fragments of long bones. The maxilla and mandible are the only elements preserved in relatively good condition, as they were embedded within

a soil block, with the dentition largely preserved *in situ* (Fig. 9). For this reason, washing was deliberately avoided to prevent further fragmentation and to allow for more accurate analysis.

The cranium is represented in all its components, albeit with varying degrees of preservation. A notable discrepancy is observed between the left and right sides, the latter being more affected by diagenetic processes due to its depositional position. Identifiable elements include portions of the frontal bone, both parietals, the occipital bone, and both petrous portions of the temporal bones. Within the facial skeleton, the zygomatic bones, maxilla, and mandible are present, the latter being the only element preserved almost in its entirety. The postcranial skeleton is poorly represented, consisting of a few indeterminate long bone fragments, with the exception of two fragments attributable to the diaphyses of the left tibia and fibula.

Cranial morphology suggests a male individual.³⁷ In particular, the glabella and supraorbital

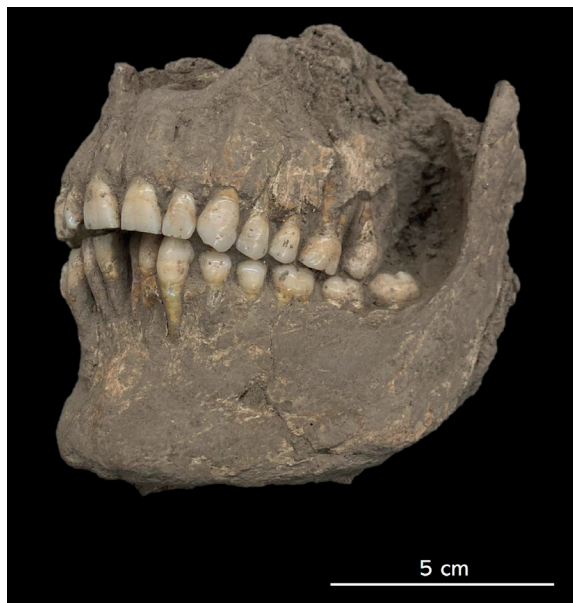


Fig. 9. Tomb 10026: maxilla and mandibula, embedded within a soil block. Frontal view (Bioarchaeological Service – Museo delle Civiltà, photo and processing E. Guidi – V. Cecconi).

35 Bailo Modesti – Gastaldi 1999, Tomb 4967, no. 3, p. 31; Tomb 4866, no. 1, p. 50; Tomb 3211, nos. 1-2, p. 51; Tomb 2337, no. 1, p. 52; Tomb 229, no. 1, p. 52; Tomb 204, no. 1, p. 53; Tomb 6547, no. 1, p. 55.

36 Kourou 2005, pp. 402-403. About the cup see above.

37 Ferembach – Schwindezky – Stoukal 1980.

ridges are pronounced; the supraorbital margin is thick and tends toward a squared profile; the palate appears broad and rounded; the zygomatic bones are prominent and exhibit a rough surface; and the mandible is robust, with a prominent, squared chin and a thick inferior border. Based on these observations, a sex index was calculated following the criteria proposed by Acsádi and Nemeskéri.³⁸ The score obtained, based on 11 cranial dimorphic variables, is 1.09, further supporting the male assessment.

Age at death, estimated between 20 and 30 years, was determined by integrating data from the stage of cranial suture closure³⁹ and the degree of dental wear observable on the preserved teeth.⁴⁰ Ectocranially, the sagittal and coronal sutures show no evidence of synostosis, while endocranially an initial stage of obliteration is present, suggesting that the individual did not exceed 30 years of age at death. The assessment of occlusal wear was conducted on those teeth not fully embedded in the soil, particularly the molars of the right hemimandible and maxilla. The resulting estimate places the individual within the 20-30-year age range, confirming the indications derived from cranial suture analysis.

Due to the embedding of the dentition within the soil matrix, the analysis of oral pathology focused primarily on the buccal surfaces of the teeth and, where possible, on limited occlusal observations. No carious lesions were identified.

Both the maxilla and the mandible exhibit numerous linear enamel hypoplasias,⁴¹ indicative of episodes of metabolic stress occurring during growth (Fig. 9). Based on their number and distribution, it can be inferred that the individual experienced at least three mild stress events between approximately 2 and 4 years of age.⁴²

A.S.

3.2. Scarabs from Tombs 10026 and 1031

3.2.1. Scarab from Tomb 10026

Dimensions: L. 17.8; W. 12.5; H. 9.3. Near-white steatite, with a smooth and slightly lustrous, unglazed surface (Fig. 10).

Typology: The head is rectangular, horizontally divided by a groove, with lateral eyes; the clypeus is separated by a notch and terminates at the frontal edge in five well-preserved angular lobes; the plates are smooth. The dorsal structure is defined by deeply incised grooves: the separation between the pronotum and elytra is marked by double lines, while the humeral callosities are shaped as pointed triangles. The edge of the back is reinforced by an additional line; the legs are naturalistic, with hatching on the upper sides. The triangle carved between the fore and mid legs displays roughly vertical striations. In dorsal view, the extremities protrude prominently from beneath the back on all sides; the object is longitudinally pierced. When the base is correctly oriented, the head is positioned on the far-right side.

Base: The base is decorated horizontally with coarse linear incisions.⁴³ Within a central oval, positioned above a papyrus plant from which umbels extend to the left and right, is a male figure. He features a sim-

38 Acsádi – Nemeskéri 1970.

39 Meindl – Lovejoy 1985.

40 Lovejoy 1985.

41 The term hypoplasia refers to a nonspecific indicator of stress, a manifestation characterized by a multifactorial etiology (including malnutrition, infections, trauma, or metabolic stress). During enamel formation (amelogenesis), interruptions or delays in deposition may occur, the effects of which are visible on the surface of the dental crown. See Hillson 1996; Larsen 1997.

42 Reid – Dean 2006.

43 The author translates the technique known as “lineare Gravur” (German), “au trait” (French), and “outline figures” (English) as “linear engraving.”



Fig. 10. The scarab from tomb 10026 (Photo and drawing Günther Hölbl).

plified *uraeus* on the forehead and a diagonally projecting beard; a rudimentary *ankh* sign is visible on his raised knee, consisting of the oval element and the crossbar (the latter terminating in short vertical lines on both sides, while the vertical stem is absent). The central figure is flanked by two protective hawks with outstretched, hatched wings; the birds extend their legs – rendered with a thick groove – toward the center, their talons partially forming a semicircle. The hawks are executed in a flat-incision technique.⁴⁴ Above the central scene is a stylized *z3* sign (Gardiner V17), flanked by two outward-facing ostrich feathers (Gardiner H6).

Origin and Dating: The available evidence suggests a Levantine production dating from the 12th to the early 8th century BCE.

Commentary: Although the rectangular shape of the bipartite head is unusual, the external morphology and the rounded longitudinal section of the upper part correspond closely to Egyptian scarabs of the New Kingdom. The overall structure of the back, together with the fact that the hatched legs protrude from beneath the body on all sides, may point to the 19th Dynasty⁴⁵ Coarse, relatively thick linear incision was employed during the Ramesside period⁴⁶ as an archaizing technique referencing the Middle Bronze Age IIB style (ca. 1650-1500 BCE); it is also attested on so-called Neo-Hyksos scarabs dating to the 900-700 BCE period.⁴⁷ By contrast, in the scarab from Tomb 10026, the hawk wings are rendered in sunken relief and coarsely hatched.

Crucial to the questions of origin and dating are the three signs above the central figure on the base. The motif of the *z3* sign flanked by two outward-facing feathers appears on early Palestinian scarabs of the Middle Bronze Age,⁴⁸ a period in which this specific form of the *z3* sign was particularly widespread.⁴⁹ The same sign is also well attested within the Neo-Hyksos scarab group.⁵⁰ The geographical origin of this group is likely the eastern Nile Delta or, more probably, the southern coastal plain of Palestine, within a chronological framework spanning ca. 830-700 BCE.⁵¹

From an Egyptian perspective, the male figure (identified by the *uraeus* and beard) with the *ankh* on his knee could represent the sun god on the papyrus.⁵² However, the depiction of a “god on the flower” (in

44 “Tecnica a incisione piatta” in Italian, “gravure en intaille” in French, and “flächige Gravur” in German.

45 Keel 1995, p. 51, fig. 58 and § 100.

46 Keel 1995, p. 131, § 332.

47 Keel – Munger 2003, p. 138.

48 Ben-Tor 2007, pl. 51, nos. 16, 45.

49 Ben-Tor 2007, pls. 51, 53, *passim*; see also Keel 2017, pp. 112-113, Jericho, no. 191.

50 Keel – Münger 2003, pp. 127-128, (nos. 1, 3, 4), 138, 152.

51 For the dating, see Keel 2017, p. 384, commentary on Jerusalem, no. 230.

52 See Keel 1997, pp. 704-705, Ashkelon, no. 42: his sitting on the *nb* basket, with the solar disc above his head.

this case, the papyrus) as an adult deity would be highly unusual in Egypt. The theme of the “god on the flower” is also well known in Phoenician ivories, where both child and adult deities are represented.⁵³

The protective hawks with joined legs, terminating in prominently incised semicircular talons, create a distinctive visual effect. Such hawks with outstretched wings often feature the *šn* ring (Gardiner V9) in front of their talons—a symbol guaranteeing protection and divine legitimacy. According to Othmar Keel,⁵⁴ the semicircular talons of the hawks on the present scarab may allude to the *šn* ring. Similar protective hawks, symmetrically arranged with large hatched wings, extended legs, and rounded talons, are found on certain Phoenician scarabs of the so-called Tyrian group (9th-8th century BCE).⁵⁵

In conclusion, despite a well-executed typology consistent with the late New Kingdom of Egypt, the evidence discussed above suggests that the scarab from Tomb 10026 is more likely an archaizing product manufactured in the Levant between the 12th and 8th centuries BCE.

G.H.

3.2.2. Scarab from Tomb 1031

Dimensions: L. 14.5; W. 11.0; H. 7.8. Near-white steatite, unglazed (Fig. 11).

Typology: The scarab’s back appears to have originally rested against a metal object, resulting not only in the formation of verdigris (copper acetate) on its surface but also in physical compression; this hypothesis, however, requires further verification. The head shape is not discernible; the smooth plates are separated from the head, and the anterior edge of the clypeus is worn. The structure of the back (pronotum and elytra) is not visible. The entire upper portion of the scarab is fragile and marked by extensive cracking. In place of the fore and mid legs, grooves forming a flat triangle are prominent, while the hind legs are rendered in relief.

Base: The base is decorated horizontally with rounded carving. Within an oval, a venerable figure is seated on a throne with a curved backrest; although the facial features are indistinct, part of the nose and a short, Syrian-style goatee are visible. The enthroned figure, wearing an ankle-length garment, is flanked on both sides by standing figures with their hands extended in a gesture of adoration; these figures also wear structured garments reaching below the knees. Positioned in front of the enthroned figure’s head is an oval object with a handle, from which a form of libation appears to descend.

Origin and Dating: Levantine production, possibly Phoenician, tentatively dated to the 10th-early 8th century BCE.

Commentary: The execution of the lateral view, featuring a low triangle that fills the space of the fore and mid legs in flat relief, is attested on Phoenician scarabs⁵⁶ and is comparable to examples from the Phoenician Tyrian group.⁵⁷ In the latter, however, a vertical line is typically incised at the center of the triangle.

The subject of the scene, depicting an enthroned figure flanked by standing individuals in a gesture of adoration, is relatively rare in Egypt.⁵⁸ Examples include representations of Amun enthroned between

53 Herrmann 1986, pl. 43, nos. 192 (ram-headed god, crouching on papyrus), 193 (falcon-headed god, crouching on a lotus), 195 (child god, crouching on a lotus); similar to the latter: pl. 46, n. 212; pl. 257, nos. 995-996, etc.

54 Keel 2010, pp. 148-149, Tell el-Far’a Süd, no. 282 (probably 22nd Dynasty, i.e., late 10th-8th centuries BCE). See also Matouk, 1977, p. 391, nos. 941-942 (such falcons with outstretched legs and rounded talons protect the *Menkheperia* cartouche).

55 Boschloos 2014, pp. 24 (no. 3. 5), 26 (no. 5.1), and 27 (no. 6.5).

56 Hölbl 2021, pp. 137-138 (cat. 180), pl. XXXV, 2.

57 For this type, see Boschloos 2014, p. 6, fig. 1.B.

58 Görg 2024; unlike the scene depicting a venerable figure standing – usually the god Amun – flanked by two worshippers: Newberry 1907a, pl. V, n. 36306; pl. IX, second row, six examples; Newberry 1907b, pl. XVI, no. 30.



Fig. 11. The scarab from tomb 10031 (Photo and drawing Günther Hölbl).

Hathor and Isis on an 18th Dynasty scaraboid.⁵⁹ Similarly, the Egyptian king is occasionally depicted seated on a throne and flanked by two figures in an attitude of veneration.⁶⁰ However, the present scene is entirely non-Egyptian in its illustrative style. Instead, the iconography recalls Egyptianizing motifs found on earlier Syro-Levantine cylinder seals⁶¹—where both the enthroned figure and the adorants wear long cloaks, comparable to those depicted on the scarab from Tomb 10031 at Pontecagnano. Furthermore, the representational theme of an enthroned deity flanked by two inward-facing divinities is well attested in Phoenician glyptic art.⁶² The throne featuring a crossbar beneath the seat is likewise well documented in Phoenician seals.⁶³

Consequently, the observations outlined above suggest that the scarab discussed here is likely a Levantine product dating to the early centuries of the 1st millennium BCE.

G.H.

4. PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS AND RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

In concluding this brief exposition, it is useful to present some preliminary observations on the data, which may be further developed as the systematic study of the context and associated material findings.

The starting point is the occurrence of one of the two scarabs in a male burial (Tomb 10026), as indicated by both paleoanthropological analyses and the evidence provided by weapons and tools.

This is the only occurrence currently known at Pontecagnano, where scarabs have typically been found in the tombs of children and women. This pattern is widely observed in indigenous and Greek communities of Campania, likely reflecting the primary protective value attributed to these amulets.⁶⁴

At Pithekoussai, this practice – largely maintained in both indigenous and Greek funerary contexts – has a notable exception in Tomb 950, a supine burial of an adult male over 40 years of age, datable to the mid-8th century BCE. The deceased, with the scarab placed on his throat and interred with ankle shackles, was accompanied by a Picene-type sword, identifying him as a prisoner of high rank. Despite his subordinate

59 Hodjash 1999, p. 56, n. 50 (reign of Amenhotep I).

60 Hornung – Staehelin 1976, p. 255, no. 319; cf. Fraser 1900, p. 54, no. 465.

61 Keel 1980, p. 261, fig. 67; Teissier 1996, pp. 114–115, no. 240.

62 Boardman 2003, p. 33 (6/58), pl. 6 (green jasper scarab).

63 Gubel 1987, pls. XXXVI, 124; XXXVII, 134, 135, 139; XXXVIII, 141, 146.

64 See *infra*. On scarabs and other *Aegyptiaka* in Campania in the Iron Age, see Melandri 2010 and Melandri 2011; Desiderio – Esposito 2022; Massanova – Pellegrino – Poole 2025. See also Botto 2021, p. 473.

and non-local condition, he appears to have been granted the right to burial within a defined sector of the necropolis, perhaps owing to ties with the group buried there.⁶⁵

As a working hypothesis, following a suggestion by T. Cinquantaquattro for the *Pithekoussai* example, the individual from Tomb 10026 at Pontecagnano may have held a prominent role within the funerary group under consideration. Thus, the funerary ideological system appears to operate through the dual valence of gender markers: it draws on characteristic elements of elite male grave goods, while simultaneously incorporating an element typically associated with the female or subadult sphere, namely the scarab.⁶⁶

Although it is not yet possible to determine more precisely the nature and status of the deceased or of the group to which he belonged, an analysis of the grave goods associated with the scarabs may nonetheless provide significant insights.

Tomb 10026 is distinguished by the presence of a bronze basin, in association with a substantial assemblage of iron weapons and tools.⁶⁷ This combination of grave goods situates the burial among the most prominent male interments of local Phase II B.⁶⁸

The basin, possibly of Etruscan manufacture – perhaps from Veii – belongs to a class of artifacts that, from the mid-eighth century BCE, characterizes the trade networks operating across the southern Tyrrhenian. These exchange routes linked the region, on the one hand, with Etruria and, on the other, with Euboean agents engaged in westward maritime ventures.⁶⁹

A further step in the same direction may be suggested by the surviving funerary assemblage of the burial that yielded the other scarab, Tomb 10031, which is likely female, as indicated by the presence of a small gold wire ring.

The most striking feature within the grave goods, however, is the presence of a Euboean black cup. The distribution of this particular vessel type attested in Sardinia and Campania and in the Ionian district too, both on the coast and in the inland, suggests its inclusion within a network of interactions among these regions that was already active by the end of the 9th century BCE.⁷⁰

In this regard, it is useful to recall several significant examples. At Pontecagnano, a fragment of a Levantine-type cauldron was found in Tomb 683, belonging to the local Phase IB (end of the 9th–first quarter of the 8th century BCE).⁷¹

At Cumae, Tomb 4 Osta, dated to the third quarter of the 8th century BCE, yielded a tripod basin with iron feet and a “Doomed cup”. Both artifacts have been attributed to Cypriot manufacture.⁷²

According to M. Botto, the cauldron may be interpreted as a «work of a Nuragic atelier with privileged relations with Cyprus and the Levantine area»; the scholar associates its arrival at Pontecagnano with «the

65 Cinquantaquattro 2012-2013, pp. 42-43, with references.

66 Although the thousand tombs from the necropoleis of the Sarno Valley have not yet been subjected to systematic analysis, the same interplay between different gender markers appears to be exceptionally replicated in a closely analogous manner in Tomb 597 prop. Milone, of San Valentino Torio. Here, in a context dating to the first quarter of the 7th century BCE, the presence of a scarab as a personal ornament is associated with the deposition of weapons and tools: Merlati 2023, esp. pp. 19-20, 541.

67 See *infra*.

68 d’Agostino – Gastaldi 2012.

69 Mercuri 2004, pp. 172-182.

70 d’Agostino 2017. These Tyrrhenian occurrences have been added to the ones known from Sybaritide and Siritide and, maybe, from Taranto, Bianco – Giardino 2010, p. 615, fig. 3; Cinquantaquattro 2010, p. 495, figg. 8-9, both with references, also on examples from Sybaritide.

71 Gastaldi 1998, pp. 88-89 no. 13, 167.

72 Criscuolo 2014; Criscuolo – Pacciarelli 2009; Greco 2014, pp. 62-63. See also Botto 2021, pp. 474-475 and, with regard to the tripod basin, D’Acunto *et al.* 2021, pp. 373-376.

line of contact between Sardinia, Etruria and the Lower Tyrrhenian Sea, which was established early on by indigenous fleets and soon also used by Tyrian ships». ⁷³

The same connection with Sardinia may also be observed in Tomb 4 Osta, which yielded two “Nuragic buttons” within a rich assemblage of ornamental objects. ⁷⁴

In this burial, the tripod basin has been dated by M. D’Acunto to the Cypro-Geometric I period (1050-950 BCE), thus representing an object of earlier date than the rest of the grave goods.

D’Acunto emphasizes that the occurrence at Cumae of this «object with a biography» resulted from «a high-level exchange of gifts with the indigenous elite by the Euboean/Phoenician/Cypriot components who frequented the village». ⁷⁵

The most recent archaeological campaigns carried out at Cumae by M. D’Acunto have provided further evidence in support of this relationship, revealing the presence of Phoenician and “Sardinian-Phoenician” pottery in stratigraphic levels associated with indigenous hut structures dated to the mid-8th century BCE. ⁷⁶

The discovery offered M. Botto, editor of the Cumaean findings, the opportunity to advance the hypothesis that the Phoenicians – perhaps in partnership with Sardinians groups – managed a direct maritime route linking the Sinis Peninsula and the Gulf of Oristano to the Campanian coasts, thereby bypassing the Villanovan centers of Etruria. ⁷⁷

As previously suggested, the distribution pattern of Euboean black cups provides compelling evidence for the existence of a preferential trade route and, more specifically, underscores the central role of Pontecagnano during the EIA.

The settlement at the mouth of the Picentino River was so integrally connected to a wider regional network «that has its main points of reference in the central Mediterranean settlements of the Gulf of Tunis and southwestern Sardinia». ⁷⁸ The site participated in the circulation of Eastern, Euboean, and Etruscan imports, as evidenced by the bronze basin recovered from Tomb 10026.

The same routes – and likely the same intermediaries – have also been hypothesized for the contemporaneous circulation of scarabs in the southern Tyrrhenian. Studies of scarab finds in Sicily and Calabria appear to support what has been suggested for Campania, pointing to a Phoenician-Cypriot mediating role in the distribution of these objects, which are frequently found in association with Euboean pottery. ⁷⁹

Pending a more in-depth study of the context and typology of the scarabs, and within the broader framework of their occurrences, the examples from the earliest tombs of Pontecagnano Phase IIB – dating to the mid or slightly earlier 8th century BCE – precede their wider dissemination in the second half of the century, suggesting a relatively high level of commission. ⁸⁰

73 Botto 2021, p. 473; Botto 2011, p. 169; Bernardini – Botto 2010, p. 65.

74 The “Nuragic buttons” find close parallels in analogous artifacts from Pontecagnano, likewise datable to Phase IB, which represent – together with a few other small bronze items – the earliest evidence for the site’s connections with Sardinia; see Gastaldi 1994, pp. 50-52.

75 D’Acunto *et al.* 2021, p. 375. Botto 2021, p. 475, also links the basin and «an exchange of gifts” between local elites and merchants trading in the region».

76 D’Acunto *et al.* 2021; D’Acunto 2025.

77 Botto 2021, pp. 470-79. About the role of Sardinia, and particularly of Sant’Imbenia in this reconstruction of trade networks, in which the relationship with Pontecagnano seems to be a little bit earlier than Cuma or Pithekoussa, Bernardini – Rendeli 2020. A recent examination of the relationship between Sardinia and Campania from the perspective of the wine trade has been conducted by Botto 2025.

78 Botto 2021, p. 470.

79 Hölbl 1982, pp. 22-23; Hölbl 1998, p. 273, Hölbl 2005, p.123; Hölbl 2006; De Salvia 2006, pp. 15-16; De Salvia 2011; De Salvia 2020; Hölbl 2021, pp. 6-12; 21-23; Hölbl - Kleibrink 2024, pp. 7-27, with references.

80 See Massanova – Pellegrino – Poole 2025 for other occurrences in Pontecagnano IIB burials.

It may be supposed that this exchange system persisted even after the founding of Pithekoussai, as demonstrated, for example, by the evidence from Montevetrano.

Particularly significant is the evidence represented by a scarab from the third quarter of the 8th century BCE depicting a dance scene around an oriental amphora, as well as by the rich contemporary Tomb 74.⁸¹ The former stands out for its exceptional quality in comparison with the numerous Pithekoussan specimens, while the latter includes a “Nuragic boat” and a north Syrian “bull bowl”.⁸²

Alternatively, the existence of a circuit independent of *Pithekoussai* has already been suggested by N. Kourou and B. d’Agostino, who attributed the cultural matrix of Italo-Geometric vessels decorated with concentric circles – found at Pontecagnano and Francavilla Marittima – to a «Cypro-Italian connection».⁸³

The specific context of the scarab finds, including their complex iconography – which requires further detailed study – as well as their anomalous topographical placement in relation to the settlement and the broader network of exchange, constitutes an unambiguous signal. It may, therefore, be interpreted as evidence of the social dynamism that would give rise to the emerging urban center at the dawn of the Orientalizing period.

R.B.

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83 Kourou 2005, p. 506; d’Agostino 2017.

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