

Monte Bibeles is located south of Bologna, in the Apennine range, and was predominantly inhabited between the 4th to 2nd centuries BC (Brasili et al. 1997:248, Scheeres et al. 2013:3615, James 2005:59). This mountainous massif is home to a settlement, necropolis and two sacred spaces, with evidence of an abundance of fresh water springs as well as copper and tin deposits at the foot of the mountain (Penzo et al. 2017:580, James 2005:59, Vitali 1991:288). This location had a long periodic history, reaching back into the 14th-13th centuries BC (Penzo et al. 2017:570) and the Copper and early Bronze ages (Vitali 1991:288). Etruscan peoples can be identified from the 4th century BC, followed by the entrance of Celtic warriors during 375-350 BC, which mashed together to create an ethnic and cultural hybrid of Etruscan-Celtic style (Penzo et al. 2017:570-1, Fiori et al. 2011:454-5). This is believed to be connected to the academically agreed migratory movements of Celtic populations during the early 4th century (Scheeres et al. 2013:3614). While Roman sources declare this movement to be one concerning invasion and destruction, with the Celts being a new player on Italy’s lands, there is evidence of the Celtic tribe Boii having close contact with inhabitants of the Po Valley (Haeussler 2018:720). The Boii were allied with the Etruscans, and Carthaginians, and suffered alongside them during Rome’s growing power and conquest (Penzo et al. 2017:571, Vitali 1991:221-3). It is believed that the conquest is the cause for the fire that destroyed Monte Bibeles during the transition from 3rd to 2nd century BC (Penzo et al. 2017:571, James 2005:59, Fiori et al. 2011:455).



Monte Bibeles

The village within this archaeological complex is known as Pianella Di Monte Savino (Scheeres et al. 2013:3616, Fiori et al. 2011:454) and is said to have housed between 200-300 people (James 2005:59, Vitali 1991:288). The natural hillside topology is enhanced through the clearing of trees and construction of artificial terraces (Penzo et al. 2017:571-2, James 2005:59, Fiori et al. 2011:455). Furthermore, this site is in a strategic location for controlling trade to Etruria, central Italy, and beyond the Alps through mountain passes, and as a military outpost (Vitali 1991:228, Fiori et al. 2011:454, Vitali 1991:289). This urban area has an even distribution of street space and domestic dwellings, with indication that this was planned and built quickly (Penzo et al. 2017:571, James 2005:59, Vitali 1991:288). The dwellings themselves had stone foundations, with wooden walls and thatched roofs with space extension extending vertically yet with the clay hearth always located on the ground floor (James 2005:59, Vitali 1991:288). The roofs were designed to allow rainwater drain from them at the edge of the village (Fiori et al. 2011:455).

Within the dwellings, pottery used for food preparation and preservation was found albeit destroyed by the fire, causing them to be preserved in a carbonized state (James 2005:59, Vitali 1991:289). Not only were loom-weights, animal bones and Greek amphorae unearthed, but within one store house, the varied diet of the Monte Bibeles inhabitants is revealed: “several hundredweight of wheat, oats, broad beans, lentils, peas, flax, acorns, olives, garlic, hazel nuts, apples and grapeseed” (Vitali 1991:289). Although some of these were imported, most of them were grown using local agricultural techniques (Vitali 1991:289) with the pottery also being of local production (Fiori et al. 2011:464).

This site is one that displays unity and diversity of the ancient world. Not only does the pottery indicate local trends, as other very similar items are located in Etruscan settlements, it shows classification and functionality through firing techniques and associated colouring (Fiori et al. 2011:464-6). The pottery is not the only similarity to other Etruscan sites, but also the design of the settlement, the finding of coins, amphorae, ceramic imports and ornamental objects that have reached the sites through long distance commercial trade that reaches from Greece. (Fiori et al. 2011:455) As Haeussler (2017:728) points out, there no obvious indication for defensive requirement against the Celts, but instead these settlements emerged due to socio-economic changes, with sites requiring more certain trade connections in order to survive in urban landscapes (Haeussler 2017:728). With the inclusion of Celtic peoples, ideas and material culture, things were changing in the region. Other settlement sites and necropolis’ in the region display similar attributes and seem to follow a continuous line of military outposts, although Penzo et al (2017:571) do not highlight if these are Etruscan or Celtic outposts which could imply that they are the product of allied cultures increasingly amalgamating through defensive strategies. Furthermore, the Golasecca Celts are known to have worked as intermediaries between the Etruscans and north Alpine Celts providing the image that these people are accepting of individuals regardless of origin and were happy to integrate and adopt customs (Vitali 1991:220). Moreover, dualism of Celts and Etruscans are also seen at Bologna, a Boii settlement, through its burials and varied grave goods which display that Etruscans had “adopted Celtic weapons or that the Celts had become part of the local culture, or both” (Vitali 1991:227) and a form of Celticization was occurring (James 2005:35). There is a plethora of evidence that displays Etruscans and Celts were living beside each other within settlements (Haeussler 2017:724), proving that the literary evidence provides a simplistic and misinformed image of Celtic identity and events (Vitali 1991:220). It is known from these sources that Celtic warriors were highly mobile but the archaeological evidence indicates that they were adopted into Etruscan settlements, not destroying them as authors such as Polybius declare.

The necropolis, known as Monte Tamburino is located on the western slope, at the summit, and is roughly 200m north-west of the settlement area (Fiori et al. 2011:454, Vitali 1991:289). It is known as the largest Celtic cemetery south of the Alps and contains 123 inhumations and 38 cremations (Scheeres et al. 2013:3616, Vitali 1991:289). The burials chronologically follow the topographical landscape, with the earliest (450-330 BC), Etruscan burials at the top, and increasingly Celtic grave goods being identified when investigating down the hillside whereas the cremation placement is seemingly sporadic (Scheeres et al. 2013:3615, Vitali 1991:289, Fiori et al. 2011:455, Vitali 1991:231). Grave goods include “ornaments, jewels, a pottery and metal banquet service, iron weapons, together with objects related to the social status and/or to the age of the dead person” (Fiori et al. 2011:455). It seems that local Etruscan objects are included alongside La Tene weaponry and jewellery (Scheeres et al. 2013:3618). An article by Brasili et al (1997) discusses possible pathological conditions that are identifiable through the remains in this cemetery. They note that Alpine and Mediterranean burials are identifiable from its’ early occupation, with the introduction of Dinaric and Nordic types in later years (Brasili et al. 1997:248). Another study has results that indicate 19% of the analysed remains were non-local, and women were more likely to be local than men (Scheeres et al. 2013:3621-2). As time progresses, it appears that a warrior elite emerges as Celtic burials become segregated and containing prestigious grave goods (Vitali 1991:289). These tombs indicate how wealth is attributed in death and displays that these peoples were in close cultural contact with continental Europe because their weaponry follows the evolution of objects found in the ‘Celtic’ world (Fiori et al. 2011:455, Vitali 1991:233). There is even possible evidence of a marriage alliance between a highborn Etruscan woman and a Celtic chieftan (Vitali 1991:233).

Two sacred areas have been identified at the Monte Bibeles complex; a votive offering location that is on route to the cemetery and linked to a fresh water spring, and a rectangular place of worship, orientated east-west, on the purposefully summit (Vitali 1991:289, Fiori et al. 2011:454). The votive offering site dates to the 5th century BC and reveals hundreds of anthropomorphic bronzes and vases of Etruscan origin, whereas the rectangular summit site dates from 4th century and is like other sites north of the Alps (Vitali 1991:289, Fiori et al. 2011:454). A similar site to Monte Bibeles is that of Gournay, and there is also a similar sanctuary identified at the pre-Roman site at Hayling Island, Hampshire. (James 2005:94). This could indicate acceptance and assimilation of Celtic people into an Etruscan environment – therefore causing one to question the ‘invasion’ discussed by ancient sources; was this propaganda to allow for the ‘justified’ brutal subjugation of seemingly foreign peoples? (Haeussler 2017:722).

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The problem of identity and classification is prominent here. The idea that these people were diverse, but somehow unified under one ‘Celtic’ culture seems outdated and simplistic (Haeussler 2017:734). Within the ancient literary sources, Keltoi or Galli were used interchangeably to describe the peoples living in north Italy and continental Europe and although not attested in these sources, the archaeological record recognises that Celtic-speaking peoples lived alongside other ethnic/cultural groups for centuries (Haeussler 2017:719). Furthermore, the Celts are ethnically classified through linguistic analysis, but were never a homogenous group – the material evidence displays that there were local stylistic variations of the wider ‘Celtic’ cultures (Haeussler 2017:722). However, “groups and individuals are othered as their particular socio-cultural identities... fail to conform with assumptions and beliefs about the nature of rural society” (Little 1999:439) which implies that modern assumptions are forced upon the archaeological record in order to classify it in a way that is normalised in current theoretical frameworks, yet this does not necessarily equate to reality of the situation. This is similar to ideas of social constructionism which requests that data be viewed through the cultural lens of the studied, not the studied (Andrews 2012). It is clear through study of the Celts that their identities were short-lived and reflected changing traditions (Haeussler 2017:723). Funerary contexts mirror trends and do not provide an accurate image of the life they lead (Haeussler 2017:734). However, typically, it is possible to identify Celtic elements within burials due to the weaponry which was often ritually destroyed (swords were bent several times) but the burial rituals themselves usually correlate to local traditions (Haeussler 2017:736).

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