

Introduction

1.1 The settlement of Casalmoro

The settlement of Casalmoro lies on a river terrace, on the left bank of the Chiese river, in the Po plain, within the province of Mantua (MN) (Map 1.1). The area occupied by the archaeological testimony is extraordinarily large, as suggested by the evidence of the crop marks, indicating the presence of hundreds of pits spread over about 700 ha. The archaeological finds dating to the Final Bronze Age¹, support the hypothesis of this unusually large area of settlement, as they have been found to extend between the territory of Acquafredda, province of Brescia (BS) and Casalmoro, for a length of about seven km and with an average width of one km (Map 1.2). Furthermore, some finds of the same chronological period were found south of Casalmoro in the territory of Asola (MN), and to the north as far as Carpenedolo (BS), over a whole distance stretching for about 12 km².

The only evidence known at the moment are the pits: no traces of any other kind of structures were located, probably due to the intensive erosion of the soil. No traces of post-holes, hearths, or dwelling structures were preserved *in situ*³. The pits, visible even on the surface of the actual fields in the shape of circular crop marks, were filled with anthropic layers of various consistencies and colours, rich in archaeological material. Of two main and different typologies, by their shape and dimensions, it is generally possible to divide them into a larger and shallower type, and a deeper second form whose base actually reaches the water level (Figure 1.1). The original function of these features was hypothesised by R. De Marinis and M. Hummler, who believed the pits were initially used to access a supply of water, then reused as rubbish pits after part of their walls collapsed⁴. This interpretation seems to be the most feasible, especially when concerning the deeper pits.

During the course of the years of excavation, the pits have yielded a huge number of finds, all of which belong to the Final Bronze Age⁵, and in particular assignable to the first phases of this period. Most of the finds are constituted of pottery, but also a good quantity of bronzes, glass beads, bone and deer antler artefacts, faunal remains⁶, and fragments of burned clay were found: the last of

which belong to hearths and to building elements. Several burned clay fragments with imprints of straws indicate the presence of dwelling structures built in the wattle and dab technique.

The great majority of the pottery finds is fragmented, but complete vessels are also present. The bronze artefacts are in many cases still well preserved in their original shape, without signs of fragmentation.

This extended area of settlement is the biggest one in the Po plain and in Italy for the Final Bronze Age. Other known sites for the same period in eastern Lombardy are Sacca di Goito⁷ (MN), Mantua Gradaro⁸ (MN), Ponte San Marco⁹ (BS), but they are much smaller in their extensions. The necropolis of Fontanella Grazioli¹⁰, at Casalromano, is located in the same Mantua territory, south of Casalmoro, and its related settlement is not known.

The great importance of the site and the incompleteness of the studies about its material culture, led me to study the finds from the first excavations and discoveries at Casalmoro. This research was the subject of my MA dissertation in European Protohistory at the University of Rome ‘La Sapienza’, under the guidance of Professors R. Peroni and A. Vanzetti¹¹. For this research I worked on the drawings of all the finds presented in this Catalogue, and studied them from a typological and associative viewpoint, which allowed me to identify two chronological phases for the complex. These phases proved to be comparable with coeval Final Bronze Age Italian sites. My work was carried out both in Brescia, at the Museum of Natural Science and in Remedello (BS), at the Civic Museum, where the main body of the finds is located.

Later on, after the MA dissertation, I also investigated some finds from the same pits which were kept in the National Archaeological Museum of Mantua. Here, thanks to the support and to the collaboration of E. M. Menotti, former director of the National Archaeological Museum, and officer responsible for the Archaeological Heritage of Lombardy “Soprintendenza Archeologica della Lombardia”, I continued researching into the Final Bronze Age of the Mantua area, also analysing finds from more recent excavations at Casalmoro and other Final Bronze Age contexts of this area¹².

¹ For a definition of Italian Final Bronze Age see ch. 3.

² De Marinis 1989; 1999, 517.

³ On this point, De Marinis has spoken of the phenomenon of intensive erosion that occurred between the Final Bronze Age and the Roman Age (De Marinis 1999, 516).

⁴ De Marinis 1999, 516; Carver and Hummler 1980–81.

⁵ De Marinis 1984; 1986; 1989; 1999; Menotti 2012; Pau 2009; 2012; 2015.

⁶ For the faunal remains see Clark 1986.

⁷ Donadel 2013; 2015.

⁸ Menotti, Pau and Tirabassi 2012.

⁹ Poggiani Keller 1994.

¹⁰ Also known as Fontanella Mantovana in literature. Trerotoli 1951–2; Salzani 1978.

¹¹ The MA thesis was discussed in 2004.

¹² Menotti 2012; Menotti, Pau and Tirabassi 2012; Pau 2012; 2015.

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Map 1.1. Localisation of Casalmoro in Italy. Map by D. Schirru.



Map 1.2. The territory of Casalmoro. Main fields in which pits have been excavated or localised with the observation of the crop-marks, and the localities analysed in this study. 1. Santa Maria Segreta, Vezzola de Munary Quarry; 2. Fadasider; 3. Municipio.

In this research the finds from 26 pits recovered in the first excavations at Casalmoro were studied; only a minimal part of which had been published by De Marinis (De Marinis 1986; 1989; 1999). The pits were located in the area of S. Maria Segreta to the quarry Vezzola De Munari (pits: 1/1979, 1/1981, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, B, G, F/6, M, P, Q, S, T, X, Y, A320, A340, A2050), in the area of the Fadasider factory (Pit Fadasider 2) and in the area of the new Municipal building, (here called Municipio).

1.2 History of the research

The first evidence for a settlement of the Final Bronze Age in Casalmoro came to light in 1979. Early research concentrated in the first years mostly in the area of S. Maria Segreta – the Vezzola de Munari quarry. Since 1980, rescue excavations in this area were conducted by the Soprintendenza Archeologica della Lombardia (Archaeological Heritage of Lombardy), under the directions of R. De Marinis, E. Pia and L. Simone, with

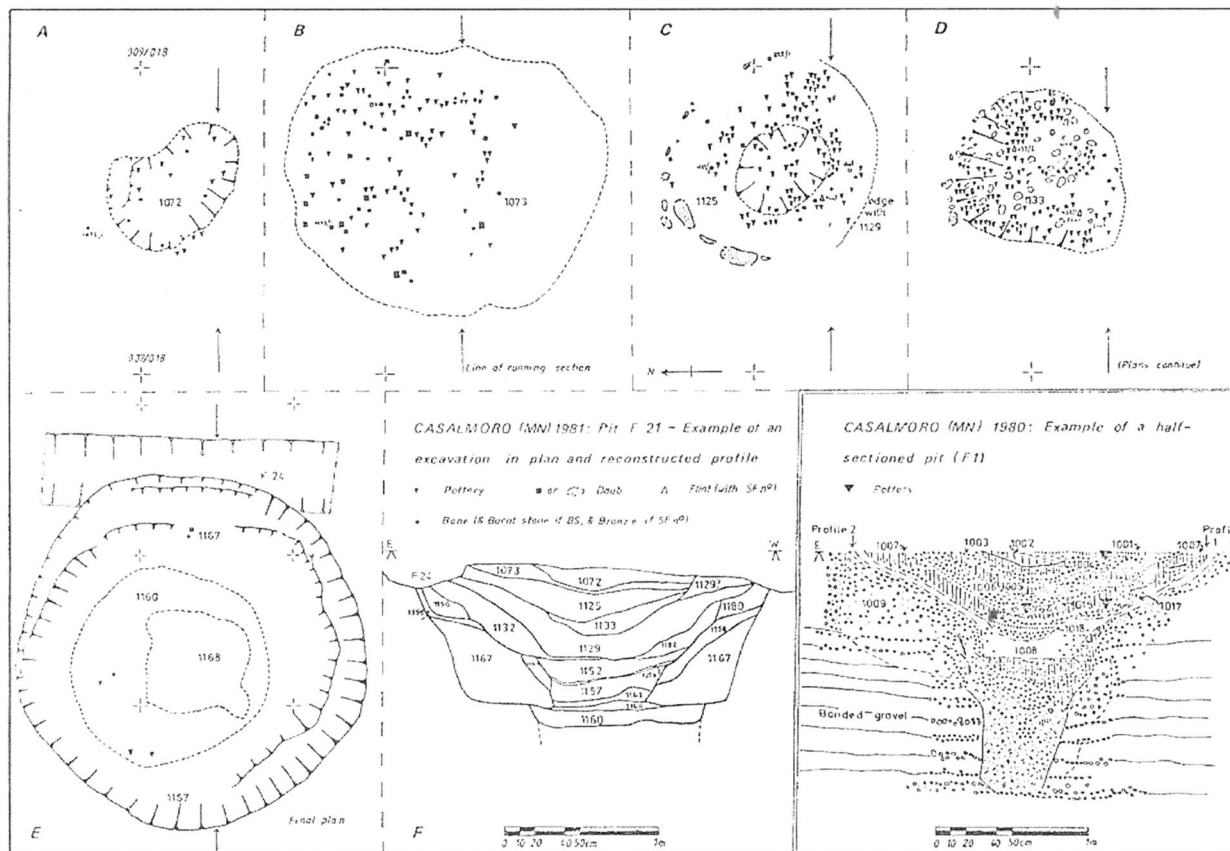


Figure 1.1. Plans and sections of pits from Casalmoro (Carver and Hummler 1980–81).

the help of the ‘Archaeological Group of Remedello’, a group of local amateurs¹³.

The first finds in Santa Maria Segreta were found during the extraction of gravel from a quarry; mostly the pits have been opened in rescue excavations, without a real stratigraphical method of excavation being feasible; in some cases even, as for the pits X, 13, M, the finds were only recovered among the filling of the pit after the earth-moving machine had removed this one.

The Universities of Birmingham and Oxford carried out jointly two excavation campaigns in Santa Maria Segreta, under the direction of M. O. H. Carver and M. Hummler, in September–October 1980 and in June 1981. The stratigraphical excavations conducted by the British research teams over an area of 612 m led to the identification and excavation of three more pits: F1, F20, F21, and of one feature identified as a ditch: F6. Furthermore, during the same excavation campaigns in the area other archaeological remains came to light, such as Neolithic graves, La Tene graves, and Roman evidence on the area east of the quarry. In the report by Carver and Hummler¹⁴, some contexts were analysed in more detail: the pit F1 (according the “Gruppo Archeologico di Remedello” this is also named pit G) was interpreted as a well. This feature could only be partly excavated, because

the quarry works had obliterated two-thirds of it before the archaeological excavation could begin. According to the researchers, after the original function of the pit was over, it had been filled with layers of silt and gravel; in the upper part these filling layers were of clay and gravel, and it is here that the anthropic layers with the Final Bronze Age materials were recovered. The F6 feature was first interpreted as a ditch, in which traces of a palisade were found. Here a simple arched twisted bow fibula was found; as the object is burned and distorted, probably from exposure to fire, Hummler hypothesised it as evidence for the presence of a post-cremation offering, as suggested by De Marinis (‘a fibula twisted in a manner usually connected with post-cremation offerings, info Dr. De Marinis’)¹⁵.

Excavations in the area of Santa Maria Segreta continued until 1983, always with the support of the ‘Gruppo Archeologico of Remedello’, and under the scientific direction of the Soprintendenza Archeologica della Lombardia¹⁶.

Further excavations were carried out in the centre of Casalmoro, during construction works of the new municipal building in 1985, and subsequently in the localities of the Fadasider factory, Corobiolo – San Faustino, Area 167 and the Cooperativa S. Stefano¹⁷. Isolated finds were recovered by the archaeological group of amateurs of Remedello,

¹³ De Marinis 1999, 516.

¹⁴ Carver and Hummler 1980–81.

¹⁵ Carver and Hummler 1980–81, 47.

¹⁶ De Marinis 1999, 516.

¹⁷ De Marinis 1999, 517.

from around the territory of Acquafredda and Casalmoro; moreover, there are notices of other pits being discovered and excavated both to the south in the territory of Asola, Rione Affò, and north in that of Carpenedolo¹⁸. These finds, also located alongside Chiese river, could represent outlying points of the same settlement area, or perhaps smaller related sites located at short distances to the south and the north of the core. Finds from these last localities are unpublished.

With regard to the publication of these first excavations at Casalmoro extant before I started the study of the finds, some short notes were published in the “Notiziario della Soprintendenza Archeologica della Lombardia” (the *Journal of the Archaeological Heritage for Lombardy*): they concern very brief preliminary notes (without drawings of the finds) about the excavations of the 1980s¹⁹. Excavated finds in the Santa Maria Segreta – Cava Vezzola de Munari area were partly published by De Marinis²⁰, who provided both a general framework of the site and a cultural and chronological interpretation of it, assigning the finds to the first phases of the Final Bronze Age – twelfth to eleventh centuries BC, on the basis of the presence of the asymmetric violin-bow fibulas, and of the simple arched violin bow; the pottery, present in huge amounts at the site, was also sampled by the same author, but the great majority of it remained unstudied.

In more recent years, rescue excavations in Casalmoro, including new localities in the area, were carried on by the “Soprintendenza Archeologica della Lombardia” (Archaeological Heritage of Lombardy), and the finds from this further evidence have been in part studied and published²¹, thus confirming presence of the same cultural and chronological assessments.

1.3 Historical framework and role of the Casalmoro settlement in Final Bronze Age central-eastern/northern Italy

The key role of Casalmoro in the study of the Final Bronze Age (twelfth to tenth centuries BC) is down to the extremely extensive area occupied by the settlement²², and by the chronology of the finds, which helps in defining the site as one of the earliest settlements of the Final Bronze Age known.

At the transition between the Recent and the Final Bronze Age²³, the area of the Po plain, which was densely populated and had been characterised by the presence of the Terramare culture since the Middle Bronze Age²⁴, faced a dramatic depopulation, with the disappearance of most of the sites in the entire territory²⁵. This collapse was exceptionally intense

in the area south of the Po river, where there is no evidence of sites from the Recent Bronze Age having survived, except for a few exceptions in the piedmont areas close to the Po plain boundaries²⁶. The northern area of the Po plain is quite similarly marked by large-scale depopulation, but here some resilience to the crisis is indicated in the appearance of new settlement patterns as a response to the collapse²⁷ (Map 1.3). A few sites continued on into the beginnings of the Final Bronze Age, such as Fabbrica dei Soci²⁸ and Fondo Paviani²⁹ in the Valli Grandi Veronesi area, province of Verona (VR) while new foundations appeared at the beginning of the same period as in the cases of Frattesina di Fratta Polesine³⁰ and Mariconda di Melara³¹, in the Polesine area, province of Rovigo (RO), Montagnana³², province of Padua (PD), and Casalmoro itself. In other cases, such as Sabbionara Veronella (VR)³³ and Ponte San Marco (BS), the last one located at the north-west limits of the area, it is possible to talk about a sort of continuity, as they still have evidence of habitation right until the end of the Final Bronze Age or even into the Early Iron Age. Notwithstanding, in these two cases there was a probable break of occupation at the beginning of Final Bronze Age, since there is not evidence related to this chronological phase in both sites. With regard to Frattesina, an earlier phase in the Recent Bronze Age than the main one represented could be suggested by isolated finds attributable to it, but no stratigraphical evidence is yet able confirm this hypothesis³⁴. Campestrin, di Grignano Polesine (RO)³⁵, brings evidence of a Recent Bronze Age 2 and a Final Bronze Age 1 occupation³⁶; this site is nearby Frattesina and related to this latter.

Multiple causes for the collapse of the Terramare settlement system have been suggested by different authors: climatic, demographic and economic factors, along with social and political instability have all been cited in different works³⁷.

Unlike the area to the south of the Po, where the former Terramare settlements had not been replaced by new sites, in the northern area of the plain several new foundations emerged: these latter were situated across the territory at wider distances between themselves than before, and generally along important river courses. In this phase, settlement choices are undoubtedly different from the ones which had characterised the same area for a long period of earlier time.

¹⁸ De Marinis 1999, 517.

¹⁹ For this short notes see Perini 1983; 1985.

²⁰ See De Marinis 1986; 1989; 1999.

²¹ Pau 2015; Menotti and Pau 2012.

²² See section 1.1 and map 1.2.

²³ Around 1200 cal BC, see ch. 3.1 for a better explanation of Late Bronze Age chronology in Italy.

²⁴ Middle Bronze Age: 1700–1350 cal BC. For a general overview on the Terramare settlements see Bernabò Brea, Cardarelli and Cremaschi 1997a.

²⁵ Bernabò Brea, Cardarelli and Cremaschi 1997b; Cardarelli 2009.

²⁶ A similar phenomenon of continuity in areas close to the Po plain can be observed in the piedmont areas of Veneto, see Balista and Leonardi 2003; Leonardi 2006; 2009.

²⁷ Bietti Sestieri 1997b; 2008; Cardarelli 2009; Cupitò *et al.* 2012; 2015; De Marinis 1997; 1999; 2009; Leonardi 2009.

²⁸ Salzani 1977; Bagolan, Levi and Vanzetti 1997.

²⁹ Cupitò *et al.* 2012; 2015; Fasani and Salzani 1975.

³⁰ For a more detailed overview on Frattesina see Bietti Sestieri, Bellintani and Giardino 2019, with previous bibliography.

³¹ Salzani 1973.

³² Bianchin Citton, Gambacurta and Ruta Serafini 1998.

³³ Salzani 1990–91a.

³⁴ Bellintani 1992; Bietti Sestieri, Bellintani and Giardino 2019.

³⁵ Bellintani 2013; Bellintani *et al.* 2019; Salzani 2009.

³⁶ Bellintani *et al.* 2019, 50.

³⁷ Bernabò Brea, Cardarelli and Cremaschi 1997b; Cardarelli 2009; Cremaschi 2009.



Map 1.3. Casalmoro and the main sites of the beginning of Final Bronze Age mentioned in the text. 1. Casalmoro; 2. Ponte San Marco. 5. Sacca di Goito; 7. Mariconda di Melara 8. Fondo Paviani; 9. Fabbrica dei Soci; 10. Frattesina di Fratta Polesine; 11. Campestrin Grignano Polesine; 12. Montagnana; 13. Sabbionara di Veronella. Map by D. Schirru.

The settlements born in this phase are of bigger dimension and present major social and economic complexity, with a clear craft specialization, and in some cases demonstrate contacts with distant areas, as proved by the Aegean-type pottery sherds found in Frattesina, Fondo Paviani and Montagnana³⁸, and by the crafting of Baltic amber and of ivory testified again in Frattesina³⁹ and Campestrin di Grignano Polesine⁴⁰.

In this historical framework, Casalmoro represents a new foundation for eastern Lombardy, which was before occupied by several settlements of the Terramare tradition. These failed in the irreversible crisis, allowing the emergence of new settlement patterns, of which Casalmoro itself represents an emblematic case-study.

The Final Bronze Age 1 seems to have been a short and poorly defined period, and until today only few contexts allow to describe this phase, e.g. the lower level of Mariconda⁴¹. The archaeological record of Casalmoro sheds light on unravelling this problem, as it was possible to distinguish two phases (which I will better discuss in chapter 3), the more ancient of these belonging to the Final Bronze Age 1 and the more recent one to the Final Bronze Age 2.

It is worth pointing out that this site experienced a very precocious beginning, perhaps even coinciding with the transition from the Recent to the Final Bronze Age, as is also suggested by the find of a knife of the oldest variety of the Matrei type⁴², traditionally dated to the end of the Recent Bronze Age⁴³.

As the material culture of Casalmoro suggests, it can be considered as part of the *Central-Eastern facies* of north Italy as defined by Peroni⁴⁴, and it shows a clear affinity with the coeval sites of Mariconda di Melara, Sabbionara, Fondo Paviani and Frattesina, in Veneto, and Ponte San Marco, Sacca di Goito and Mantua Gradaro in eastern Lombardy.

De Marinis highlighted the cultural relationship between Casalmoro and the sites of the *Proto-Venetic* area, finding similarities with the pottery of such sites as Sacca di Goito, Sermide, Frattesina, Montagnana and Mariconda

di Melara⁴⁵. Concerning Ponte San Marco, located north of Casalmoro, on the same side of the Chiese river, De Marinis suggests that this site does not show connections with the *Proto-Venetic* area, and can be better related to the Alpine *Laugen-Melaun facies*⁴⁶. As the present study demonstrates, Ponte San Marco, whose material culture is very similar to the one of Casalmoro, actually shows many analogies and can be for the most part enfolded in the same *facies*, although it does also receive strong influences from the Alpine area, to which it is closely connected by the course of the Chiese river, as also pointed out by R. Poggiani Keller⁴⁷.

In 1995, in a conference held in Pavia titled *Il protovillanoviano al di qua e al di là dell'Appennino*, G. Leonardi and M. Bagolan included both Casalmoro and Ponte San Marco in their review of the Final Bronze Age in Veneto, pointing out that although they are respectively located in the provinces of Mantua and Brescia, they must be considered as part of the *Venetic facies*, like Fontanella Mantovana⁴⁸. Also, they proposed a chronology reaching back to the first phases of the Final Bronze Age, although the finds were not analysed or presented in detail in their study.

The stylistic analysis of the pottery effectuated in the present study supports a continuity with the previous phase of the Recent Bronze Age: in particular some shapes of the Final Bronze Age 1, as some types of jars with everted rims can be compared with vessels at Recent Bronze Age sites such as Custoza (VR)⁴⁹ and Sabbionara di Veronella. The social and political changes being undergone on the Po plain involved the same populations as before, which still inhabited the same area north of the Po, although arranged different settlement patterns and with a new socio-economic organization⁵⁰.

An important topic in the study of the site is the nature of the site itself: it would be worth knowing if the site represented a huge single settlement spread over such a vast area, or, likelier, if several distinct settlement nuclei existed, located at short distances from each other.

Moreover, the actual function of the pits is not clear; they were pits indeed used for disposing of rubbish, but some ritual elements could be present in the life-cycle of the structures, as suggested by the presence of ornaments and other objects such as glass beads, bone and deer-antler artefacts, and small entirely preserved vessels. Furthermore, on the basis of the documentation now available, it is not easy to understand whether the pits were set within the boundaries of the settlement or whether they represent extra-site features.

³⁸ For the Aegean type pottery in northern Italy see Jones *et al.* 2014.

³⁹ For a more detailed overview for the hoards from Frattesina see Bellintani and Peretto 1972; De Min and Bietti Sestieri 1979; Salzani 1987; 2000; 2003; for the amber see Negroni Catacchio 1972; 1973; Bietti Sestieri *et al.* 2015; Angelini 2019b; for the glasses, Bellintani 2014; Angelini 2019a; for the bone and deer antler industry see Bellato and Bellintani 1975; for the ivory see Bietti Sestieri and De Grossi Mazzorin 2005. For a general overview about trades in the Po plain and Frattesina see Bellintani 2014; Pearce 2019; Pearce *et al.* 2020 for an updated general overview on Frattesina see Bietti Sestieri, Bellintani and Giardino 2019.

⁴⁰ For the ambers of Campestrin see Bellintani *et al.* 2015.

⁴¹ Salzani 1973.

⁴² The knife comes from a pit in locality Fadasider. De Marinis 1999, 518, 525, fig. 9.14.

⁴³ Bianco Peroni 1976, 18.

⁴⁴ Peroni 1996, 324; Peroni *et al.* 1980, 62.

⁴⁵ De Marinis 1989; 1999.

⁴⁶ De Marinis 1999, 519.

⁴⁷ Poggiani Keller 1994, 103.

⁴⁸ Bagolan and Leonardi 2000.

⁴⁹ Salzani 1997.

⁵⁰ For a different position on this problem see De Marinis 1989, 30; 1999, 514.

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The exceptionally wide extent of the archaeological evidence would suggest the presence of sites located at short distances, rather than a single settlement. The core of the complex could be identified in the areas of closer and greater archaeological concentration, as occurred at Santa Maria Segreta.

The problems surrounding the interpretation of the site are crucial, especially for the evidence that the site developed in a relatively short span of time, during the first phases of the Final Bronze Age, and that it apparently did not survive into the Final Bronze Age 3. The absence of any subsequent archaeological evidence, at the actual state of the research, would indicate a very fast, indeed a presumably near-instantaneous abandonment of the area.

As pointed out by the association chart set out in this study (see chapter 3), some areas of the complex, such as Municipio and Santa Maria Segreta, had been targets of frequentation since the very first attested phase (Final Bronze Age 1), and they both continued to be so until the last phase (Final Bronze Age 2), with some pits attributable exclusively to either one or the other phase, and others of longer duration, which are considered to have been used for the whole life of the settlement.

This work represents a beginning for the interpretation of this important complex, where many features are still to be excavated, and whose importance for the settlement dynamics of the central-east of northern Italy has been until now underestimated.