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THE LEGEND BEHIND THE MAN: NARRATIVE AND MEMORY BEHIND THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE WARRIOR OF CAPESTRANO

LA LEGGENDA DIETRO L'UOMO: NARRATIVA E MEMORIA DIETRO L'ICONOGRAFIA DEL GUERRIERO DI CAPESTRANO

Elena Scarsella

RIASSUNTO: Questo articolo propone un'analisi delle armi, dell'equipaggiamento difensivo e dell'abbigliamento della statua del guerriero di Capestrano, confrontandoli con i ritrovamenti archeologici della zona e con l'abbigliamento tipico di un guerriero vestino. In questo articolo si sostiene che, mentre alcuni oggetti trovano stretti confronti nelle tombe della zona, altri possono essere trovati solo in luoghi lontani, o persino in fasi più antiche. Un'analisi approfondita della statua aiuta infatti a inquadrare il popolo Vestino in un contesto molto più ampio di interazioni con i popoli limitrofi, in cui i guerrieri avevano un ruolo chiave nella trasmissione di una narrazione transgenerazionale sulla violenza e sulla memoria.

PAROLE CHIAVE: italici; archeologia preromana; memoria; statuaria; paesaggio.

ABSTRACT: This paper will go through an analysis of the weapons, the defensive gear and the apparel of the statue of the warrior of Capestrano, comparing them with the archaeological finds in the area and the typical apparel of a Vestine warrior. Here it is argued that, while some objects find close comparisons in the graves from the area, some others can only be found far away, or even in an earlier period. An in depth analysis of the statue helps to frame it and the people that it represented in a much wider context of interactions where the warriors had a key role in the transmission of a transgenerational narrative around violence and memory.

KEYWORDS: italic people; pre-roman archaeology; memory; statuary; landscape.

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THE LEGEND BEHIND THE MAN: NARRATIVE AND MEMORY BEHIND THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE WARRIOR OF CAPESTRANO

Elena Scarsella

Introduction

In September 1934, a farmer working on a field in the countryside between Capecstrano and Ofena (L'Aquila, Italy) (Fig. 1) found what is now considered the most exceptional example of Italic statuary: the Warrior of Capecstrano. Since that day of mid-autumn, the statue has been studied from many points of view: artistically, archaeologically, culturally and, in recent times, even archaeometrically. Despite the great deal of attention that the Warrior of Capecstrano has received in the past 90 years, some of its fundamental aspects remain to be unravelled. Is it a faithful representation of a single individual, maybe the Nevio Pompuledio mentioned in the inscription? Or maybe, does it represent the ideal image of a warrior and a leader? Is it a king, as the use of the word *raki* suggests, or is it just a leader and a warlord?

On the other hand, archaeology in Abruzzo has made a huge progress in the last 30 years. The investigations in Fossa, Bazzano, Caporciano – Cinturelli and Capecstrano itself have made an unprecedented amount of data available, both in terms of material and general knowledge of the Vestine culture. The overall number of known and dug sites, including settlements and graves, is currently around 130 and, only in terms of graves, there are now about 3000 burials that have been properly dug and documented. While these data cover a chronological span of about six centuries (from the end of the 9th century BC to the 2nd century BC), it still remains an impressive amount of data, for a relatively small area (about 580 km²). With all these data in hands, it is possible now to reconsider the archaeological and cultural context of the statue of the Warrior of Capecstrano and make a new proposal about the identity and the social context of the man that it allegedly represents.

The Discovery

In his first report on the Warrior of Capestrano, Giuseppe Moretti¹ wrote about the circumstances of the finding:

“While digging all around the rock in order to remove it, the peasant noticed that human shapes were revealing themselves little by little. However, as he was unaware that it might be valuable or meaningful in any way, he paid it no mind. He did not pay it any mind even shortly thereafter, when he uncovered a helmet the size of a shield a few meters away, as well as a female bust beneath it”² (Transl. Roberto Turati)

While the archaeological and stratigraphic context is now completely lost and reconstructions about the original position of the statues can only be hypothetical, it is interesting to note that the female bust and the helmet were found together, while the male statue was slightly away from the two. This latter, lately named the Warrior of Capestrano after the main modern centre of the area, was at the time of its discovery broken above the knees, while the female bust was broken above the belt and missing the head³. A later investigation on the field allowed to recover some other parts of the male statue, except for the crest of the helmet, while no other sherd was found that could be relative to the female bust. The most interesting detail of the report concerns the helmet. A rectangular shaped housing in this latter perfectly matches the one on the top of the head of the male statue, allowing to state with a certain degree of certainty that the discoid element is indeed a helmet or a hat rather than a shield, as the shape

¹ MORETTI 1936.

² Original, in Italian: “Mentre per rimuoverla le faceva vuoto attorno, si accorse che si venivano da essa esprimendo forme umane: ma lontano da ogni sospetto che potesse perciò avere un valore e un significato, non se ne diede alcuna cura. E non se ne diede neppure quando a qualche metro scoperse poco dopo anche un elmo grande come uno scudo, e sotto a questo un busto di donna.” (MORETTI 1936, p. 5).

³ D’ERCOLE 2020.

may have suggested⁴ (Fig. 2).

That was also the beginning of the archaeological investigation of the area, and it led to the excavation and documentation of the first graves of the necropolis of Capestrano: 33 tombs were found and, for the first time in the area, their grave goods were accurately documented and partially drawn⁵. The archaeological area of Capestrano has now been extensively dug and it has been object of systematic investigations in relatively recent times, so that now the number of published graves amounts to about 350⁶. Despite this, a clear connection between a grave and the Warrior and the Lady of Capestrano remains aleatory.

The Middle-Adriatic Statuary

The Warrior of Capestrano is an exceptional piece of statuary, but it is not isolated. In the last few years, many new findings have greatly enhanced our understanding of the figurative culture of pre-Roman Adriatic⁷.

The very first and comprehensive analysis of the middle Adriatic statuary was firstly made by Giovanni Colonna in 1988⁸, where the author first created a system of types and sub-types, not only with a classifying purpose, but also and maybe primarily, with the intend to draft a first attempt of seriation. In his seriation, the stele of Guardiagrele was to date to the 7th century BC, followed by the head of Manoppello, the head of Numana and the torso from Atessa. The Warrior of Capestrano was placed around the middle 6th century BC and the Lady of Capestrano was instead to be dated to the end of the same century, together with the Warrior of Rapino. At the end of the seriation, at the beginning of the 5th century BC, there was the stelae of Penne di Sant'Andrea. In 1999 Giovanni Colonna remarks once

⁴ MORETTI 1936, p. 6.

⁵ MORETTI 1936-1937.

⁶ D'ERCOLE *et Alii* 2018, CELLA 2012.

⁷ For a recent synthesis, see: D'ERCOLE 2017.

⁸ COLONNA 1992.

again the connection between Etruscan and Adriatic statuary, reinforced by the discovery of the statues of Casale Marittimo, but he also highlights the closeness with the artistic experience of the south, namely the Gargano and the Daunian areas of Apulia⁹. On the other hand, a few words should be spent about the undeniable similarities between the Warrior of Capestrano and the transalpine sculpture¹⁰. The Vestine statue shows not only a similar concept, but also a close iconographic language of the Warrior of Glauberg and the Warrior of Hirschlanden, as both of them exhibit the same posture of the hands, deposited on the chest and showing symbols of power: the shield in the first case and the sword in the latter¹¹.

A number of recent discoveries made the general picture more complex and articulated. In 2004 a fragment of a stela was found in Rosciano (province of Pescara)¹², and a few years later, in 2007, Vincenzo D'Ercole developed a new chronology, re-dating the Warrior of Capestrano on the basis of its weaponry and in the light of the new graves found in Capestrano and the rest of the Vestine area. According to the author, the statue has to be dated between the end of the 7th and the beginning of the 6th century BC, while the statues of Penne Sant'Andrea should be moved back to the end of the 6th century BC¹³. It is interesting to note that Maria Ruggeri found in the necropolis of Comino Guardiagrele a number of "hats", discoid stone elements interpreted as headwear and marking the graves, that she dates to the first phases of the necropolis, around the 9th century BC¹⁴. Last but not least, Amalia Faustoferrì confirmed the chronology of the bust from Atessa to be around the end of the 7th century BC and pinned the origin of a fragment of limestone leg from Acqua Chiara and the so called *Gambe del Diavolo* ('Devil's Legs') from Collelongo¹⁵.

⁹ COLONNA 1999.

¹⁰ SASSATELLI 2013.

¹¹ On the complex relationship between Etruscan, Trans-Alpine, and Italic art see: FREY 2024 and relative bibliography.

¹² STAFFA 2004.

¹³ D'ERCOLE 2007.

¹⁴ RUGGERI 2003.

¹⁵ FRANCHI DELL'ORTO 2010, p. 184.

The Archaeology of the Vestini

Today, Capestrano is a small village perched in the Tirino Valley, a valley that stretches just north of the Aterno, the main river crossing Abruzzo. The area was part of the territory of the Vestini Cismontani in the Roman sources and it included the L'Aquila Valley, the Navelli Plateau and the Tirino Valley. Overall, they all gravitate around the Aterno. The Aterno, indeed, with its North-West to South-East orientation, constitutes a corridor between Sabina and the Adriatic, connecting the two sides of the peninsula. On the other hand, the complex morphology of the territory, with its mountains and small valleys, creates some areas of isolation. This did not discouraged pre-Roman populations from occupying these mountains, so that we can broadly say that the Vestini were enclosed between *Praetutii*, to the North, *Vestini Transmontani* to the East, *Paeligni*, *Marsi*, and *Aequi*, to the South, and *Sabini* to the West (Fig. 3)¹⁶.

Vestini Cismontani and *Praetutii* are divided by a mountain, Gran Sasso (Fig. 4). While it is not entirely insurmountable and some passes are practicable, it does not seem to be a common passageway, as the piedmont areas on both sides do not show any sign of archaeological evidence in pre-Roman times. South-East, the mountains decline into a barrier of lower reliefs, crossable through a couple of passes, such as Forca di Penne and the gorges of Popoli. On the south, orography gets more complicated. The border with the *Paeligni* is the most interesting one, at the meeting point of three rivers, three valleys, and the final parts of both the Gran Sasso and the Majella groups, and possibly

¹⁶ It has to be specified that it is hard to label these tribes in a period prior to the 4th century BC, when they, in fact, entered in the literary sources. The only piece of evidence of an ethnonym prior literary sources dates to the 5th century BC and comes from the stelae of Sant'Andrea, where the name *sainús/Sabini* appears (ACCONCIA 2015, LA REGINA 2010). Although this topic will not be addressed here, an extensive literature can be consulted for a better understanding of the current debate (see: BOURDIN 2012, FARNEY – BRADLEY 2017, MENOZZI 2022, D'ERCOLE 2023). In this paper, tribes' names will be used for clarity sake as an indication of territory, without any ethnic implication.

highly fortified. Going westward, a line of mountains creates an alternation of narrow valleys and steep sides that closes the visibility of an area and which would have made control difficult. The landscape of the last front, to the west, is nowadays completely altered by modern occupation, although the site of modern L'Aquila seems to be a highly strategic passage point, where the Aterno meets a choke point before the Middle-Aterno Valley.

The area so far outlined can be further divided, as proposed by D'Ercole and Martellone, into four zones, on morphological basis (Fig. 5)¹⁷. The first one is an alluvial valley, with the middle part of the Aterno river as its main geographical feature. At its centre, Mount Cerro, with its roughly 300 meters of elevation from the Valley of L'Aquila, looms over an area that is otherwise mostly made of plains. The passage to Zone II is marked by a chain of reliefs crossed by narrow passages known from historical sources to have hosted brigands and hence avoided by the main routes¹⁸. This second zone, mostly occupied by the plateau of Navelli, is around 750 meters above sea level and surrounded by a crown of mountains. North-East of it, separated by a barrier of mountains, lays Zone III. This is the Tirino Valley, crossed by its homonymous river and blessed with a microclimate that allows for the cultivation of vines. The fourth and last of the zones has a completely different environment and landscape. Here, at an altitude between 1300 and 1700 meters above the sea level, valleys are narrow, and the skyline continuously changes according to the point of view. The only fixed points, visible from everywhere, are the two peaks of Gran Sasso and its neighbour, Pizzo Cefalone. Here, nevertheless, lays the real treasure of the entire Vestine territory: Campo Imperatore, around 80 square kilometers of plateau of glacial and alluvial origins, between 1700 and 1900 meters above sea level and able to host a huge amount of flocks during the summer.

The impressions given by geography of a harsh, and mostly hostile natural landscape, are reinforced once we look at the settlement pattern and the position of oppida and fortifications (Fig. 5)¹⁹. The

¹⁷ D'ERCOLE – MARTELLONE 2010.

¹⁸ GALEOTA 2018, p. 17.

¹⁹ ACCONCIA 2015; ACCONCIA – FERRERI 2016.

northern front is mostly undefended, possibly due to the massive barrier of the mountains and the limited access to their closer district. Although the dataset should be considered with due caution, the general appearance here is that *Praetutii* are not considered by the *Vestini Cismontani* as a threat²⁰. The Eastern front looks problematic because, if we look at the coastal side of the natural barrier of the mountains, a few fortified settlements guard the passes²¹. At the same time, if we focus on the other side of the mountains, we can observe a complete lack of settlements. Recent researches led by the Ecole Française of Rome have not brought to light any archaeological trace along the eastern side of the ridge, and while we can attribute this to post-depositional factors, it is also possible that the relationship with the *Vestini Transmontani* was not hostile²². On the contrary, the relation between *Vestini Cismontani* and *Paeligni* seems to be fairly clear: a line of fortifications, tighter than elsewhere, covers most of the peaks of the area on both sides²³. The site of Colle Santa Rosa I (n. 121), with its two walls of fortification, gives a good idea of the level of tension in the area²⁴. In fact, as the place is a delicate geographical point, in the nearby of one of the few passes connecting the mountains with the coast, a fortified border here is unsurprising. A second line of high fortification follows the ridge of the Aterno Gorges, where the hillforts of Colle Rischia (n. 79) and Colle Opi (n. 87) control the passage along the Subequana Valley (C)²⁵. The border with *Marsi*, in the area of the Altopiano delle Rocche (B), looks almost completely unguarded. This is possibly due to a lack of archaeological record,

²⁰ D'ERCOLE 1996.

²¹ STAFFA 2004, p. 27.

²² BOURDIN – NATALI 2008; 2012.

²³ Classical authors considered *Vestini Cismontani* and *Transmontani* as the same people, the different denomination being the result of a modern interpretation (LA REGINA 1968). While, looking at the archaeological data some differences are observable, a larger political organisation cannot be discarded *in toto*.

²⁴ MATTIOCCO 1981; about Colle Santa Rosa I see: MATTIOCCO 1986, pp. 79-84.

²⁵ BOURDIN – NATALI 2008, p. 206; BOURDIN – NATALI 2012.

rather than reflecting ancient realities, but it remains coherent with a reading of this area as a buffering zone and an area of summer pastures²⁶. Data from the Sabine region are not good enough to make any reasonable hypothesis, but the site of modern L'Aquila has a high strategic value and it is reasonable to assume that it was already occupied, at least by a watchtower or an outpost.

Looking now at the organisation of hillforts and oppida within the borders, as a general pattern, a three-stepped model is observable in the dimensions of the hillforts: those larger than 3 hectares occupy central positions in direct visual contact with minor settlements (2-1 ha) and indirect connection with outposts and watch tower (< 1 ha)²⁷. At the very centre of Zone one, the settlement of Mount Cerro (n. 12) has complete visibility of most of the valley, into which it is integrated by Mount Bazzano (n. 8)²⁸. The line between zones one and two is the most fortified one, with a chain of walled settlements and small outposts that cover the entire front. In this way, most of the narrow passages that served as ambush places are clearly visible from at least one place each and no-one could enter or leave the plateau without being seen²⁹. The Navelli plateau does not have as clear a centre as Mount Cerro, but its territory is well guarded by a crown of settlements. The two sites of Mount Asprino (n. 56) and Serra di Navelli (n. 57) watch over one of the few passages between zones two and three, and at the same time these sites have clear visibility over the final part of the plateau, where the aforementioned site of Colle Santa Rosa I (n. 121) marks the other border³⁰. Concerning the fourth zone, the main centre is Colle della Battaglia (n. 116), a site where recent investigation has brought to light an impressive double fortification and with a position that allows a perfect visibility of most of the valley³¹. While the area is in general highly fortified, it is not possible to recognise a single line or front. This is potentially due to

²⁶ GROSSI *et Alii* 2011, p. 626.

²⁷ D'ERCOLE 2014; D'ERCOLE 2000.

²⁸ TARTARA 2007, p. 469, nn. 1-2.

²⁹ ACCONCIA 2014, pp. 120-126.

³⁰ BOURDIN – NATALI 2008, pp. 207-208.

³¹ D'ERCOLE – D'ALESSANDRO 2011.

the complex orography of the landscape, but also possibly due to this system of hillforts having another purpose. Indeed, if in the other areas the main assets are the valleys and their potential to produce agricultural products and grass for flocks, then, here in the mountains, the passes and the routes toward Campo Imperatore, are what needed to be controlled.

The analysis of the landscape and its fortification system highlights the will of the *Vestini Cismontani* to control the territory in all its parts, and most of all it shows the existence of a landscape of violence (practiced, but most importantly displayed) where occupation, control and ownership of the territory is continuously negotiated through a show of force.

The Vestine Warrior

The picture drawn by the cemeteries is of a vertically structured society, potentially ruled by one or more leaders, probably on a hereditary base³². Despite the high number of necropoleis that have been found and investigated in the area in recent times, most of them are still yet to be fully published, with three exceptions: Bazzano, Fossa, and Capestrano³³. The first two lie on the valley floor of the first zone, while the third is the main burial area of the third zone. The pattern of associations within warrior burials is, for the study area, rather repetitive: warriors usually have a sword, a spear or a javelin, and a dolium. Although most of the burials are rather simple, as in Bazzano, where most have just a sword, a spear and a jar, some bear more valuable items. Tomb number 112 in Capestrano, for example, features weapons alongside feasting bronze vessels (a cauldron, a bronze jug and drinking pottery), while tomb number 507, in Fossa, features an imported etrusco-corinthian *kylix*³⁴. As for the age of the

³² D'ERCOLE 2014.

³³ WEIDIG 2014; D'ERCOLE – MIELI 2001; D'ERCOLE – COPERSINO 2003; D'ERCOLE – BENELLI 2004; D'ERCOLE *et Alii* 2018.

³⁴ D'ERCOLE *et Alii* 2018, pp. 206-207; D'ERCOLE – BENELLI 2004, pp. 215-216.

warriors, while during the Orientalising phase, children buried with daggers were not uncommon, this changed with the second half of the 7th century BC, when swords and spears became exclusive of adult males³⁵.

The most distinctive weapon that characterises the Vestine warrior is the sword (Fig. 6)³⁶. As for its use, the leaf-shape, the length and the pointed end, along with the slight shift of balance toward the point, they all ensure that these swords are good for both thrusting and cutting. The wide base of the blade is functional in many ways: it strengthens the blade against mechanical stress, it offers the possibility of strong parries, and, possibly, of using the thumb for more efficient control of the blow³⁷. All this considered, it is clear that using these swords would have required a good level of training and intense practice from a young age, consistent with the results of the bioarchaeological study of the humeral asymmetry, where most of the warrior tombs show a high level of lateralisation³⁸. These weapons are hence not consistent with occasional use, and they speak of a society where training was practiced from a young age.

Spears and javelins are the most common weapons in Vestine tombs. In Bazzano alone they are attested in about 220 tombs, equal to 85% of the male burials of all chronological phases, and in Capecstrano and Fossa they are more or less equally frequent³⁹. While until the end of the 7th century BC, spears often appear in pairs in the graves, this changes with the beginning of the 6th century (in Bazzano earlier than in Fossa) when even very wealthy burials have just one of them⁴⁰. The range of typologies for spears and javelins is very wide, but a major change in shape occurs with the dawn of the 5th century⁴¹. This does not seem to be related to the introduction of the long swords, as this occurred half a century earlier, but this may be the result of a

³⁵ CESANA – D'ERCOLE 2018; WEIDIG 2014, pp. 665-667.

³⁶ SCARSELLA 2021; D'ERCOLE 2019.

³⁷ GENER 2018, pp. 160-162.

³⁸ GENTILE *et Alii* 2018.

³⁹ WEIDIG 2014; D'ERCOLE *et Alii* 2018; D'ERCOLE – BENELLI 2004.

⁴⁰ WEIDIG 2014, pp. 181-183.

⁴¹ Ivi, pp. 178-179.

progressive adaptation to a different way of fighting. As a general rule, it is not easy to distinguish between javelins (to be thrown) and spears (to be used *melee*). It is commonly accepted that the discriminant is the dimensions: the small ones are usually interpreted to be for throwing, while the longer ones are for close-quarter combat⁴². On the other hand, recent experimental studies on bronze weapons demonstrated that even objects previously interpreted as javelin heads present clear traces consistent with parries, slashes, and impact with other blades⁴³. These traces are such that only a *melee* fight could have caused them, and they clearly demonstrate that the versatility of spears is much greater than a superficial look suggests. In fact, the length of the blade is only marginally telling, and even very short blades have proved to be adaptable to *melee* combat.

A delicate matter in the archaeology of the Vestine area is the defensive gear, which appears to be completely missing from the grave goods. Many explanations have been proposed for this, from the perishable materials of which cuirasses, helmets, and shields were supposed to be made, to a religious taboo, even to their effective absence outside the tomb as well⁴⁴. In fact, traces of armours are not only archaeologically scarce, but also missing from iconography: the only accurate representation known at present is the Warrior of Capestrano, the statue of a Vestine warrior, and he wears no cuirass, except for a pair of *kardiophylakes*, which find some archaeological comparison. Despite this, they are not commonly found in any but the wealthier burials. Although the Vestine ones are not usually decorated, some examples coming from other areas of Abruzzo and Central-Italy are engraved with fantastic animals⁴⁵. Moreover, the association within tombs with other indicators of high rank allows us to consider this class of objects as a prerogative of high-level individuals. On the other hand, helmets and shields are completely missing. The nearest thing to a representation of a Vestine shield is the fibula of Pizzoli, and it comes from the Sabine part of the Aterno Valley and it can be

⁴² TAGLIAMONTE 2012.

⁴³ HERMANN *et Alii* 2020.

⁴⁴ D'ERCOLE 2014, p. 37.

⁴⁵ PAPI 1999; WEIDIG 2015.

dated to the 8th century, two centuries earlier than the Warrior of Capestrano⁴⁶. Here a male figure holds a round element (shield?) with his left hand and a mace with his right. The lines on the supposed shield may indicate a wicker or leather component, which would explain the quick and traceless perishability.

The Statue and its Weaponry (Fig. 7)

The statue of the Warrior of Capestrano is about 2 metres high, including a base about 35 cm high, making the human figure of a natural size. Two pillars have the structural role of sustaining it. The statue has been carved from a single block of local limestone, characterised by its white-yellowish nuance, except for the headpiece, that has been sculpted from a different block of the same geological formation. The stone is today known as the “yellow stone of Abruzzo” (*pietra gialla abruzzese*), or “gentle stone” (*pietra gentile*), and it is a soft and very common limestone, easily available in this area of Central Apennine. Thanks to its softness, production traces are still visible in some parts of the statue, and they hint at the use of tools like toothed chisel (*gradina*), flat chisel, scratch awl, and gauge. Some surfaces also hint at a final finish made through a soft cloth and fine sand. There are also traces of colour, mainly red⁴⁷, to highlight some of the details, such as the ears and the edges of clothes and weapons, but also an underlayer of white. Overall, the statue presents itself as a complex technical work of art, and the sculptor, whoever they might be, had all the skills to realise it without traces of inexperience nor uncertainty. As it will be further developed later in this paper, the artist also appears to have a clear idea of the materiality of the objects represented in the statue, in all their details⁴⁸.

The weaponry and the overall apparel of Warrior of Capestrano are represented in a clear and realistic manner and they can be easily

⁴⁶ COSENTINO 2011.

⁴⁷ The XRF analysis showed that the colour red has been obtained from a mix of iron oxides and hydroxides, mainly Fe_2O_3 (AGOSTINI 2010).

⁴⁸ AGOSTINI 2010; ADINOLFI *et Alii* 2020.

recognised in the archaeological context of the Vestini. The first and the most striking element of the statue is the discoidal headpiece. A first glance could mistake it for a shield, but the placing system and the matching shape of the head and the disc make it indisputable to be placed on the top of the statue⁴⁹. That said, such a headpiece is hardly functional as a helm and quite unpractical in a physical match, and, as G. Colonna already pointed out in his paper in 2017, it finds many comparisons in the etruscan and greek art⁵⁰. For this reason, its functionality should be framed as of display, rather than protection. The closest and probably fittest comparison is with the statues of the ancestors found in Murlo and their huge hats⁵¹. Around the neck of the statue and around its arms there are elements of decoration, such as a torque and three armillas. The torque is particularly interesting, as it shows a rectangular pendant, while one of the two armillas on the left arm has trapezoidal decorations. The other two seems to be plain, although the single one on the right arm has traces of red painting.

The second pivotal element of the armour is the *kardiophylax*, a discoidal protection for the heart that covers both the front and the back of the chest of the statue, suspended and kept in place by a harness of buckles probably made of leather. The discs appear to be smooth and without any evident decoration, although it cannot be excluded that there may have been painted motives. The pelvis is protected by a garment in the shape of a mitre with the hem decorated by a meander and painted in red.

The weapons depicted in the statue appear to be the basic apparel of the Vestine warrior, as it will be better argued later. The most significant one, and the one with a prominent aesthetic relevance, is the sword. Overall, its appearance is not different from the archaeological finds: it is about 70-75 centimetres long, with a 10 centimeters long hilt, a cross guard, and an ergonomic grip. What makes this sword special is the decoration. Decorated pommels are not

⁴⁹ For a full and recent discussion on the function of the headpiece, see: COLONNA 2017.

⁵⁰ For an exhaustive list of comparisons and their relative bibliography, see: COLONNA 2017.

⁵¹ For a general introduction, see: O'DONOGHUE 2013.

unusual in the archaeological record, but the iron oxidation makes it often impossible to identify decorative motives on the grip and the guard. The motif on the grip shows two human figures on two registers, while the cross-guard has two animals, maybe horses. Unfortunately, the pommel is ruined so it is impossible to say if it was decorated as well. A knife or maybe a whetstone is located on the scabbard. The right hand holds an axe. Axes are not unknown in the archaeological record of the area, but they are usually dated to earlier periods.

Some last few words about the warrior and its features should be spent about the inscription on its side. The text has been object of a long debate in the course of history⁵², although the interpretation by A. La Regina seems so far the most convincing one.

Adriano La Regina (1986)⁵³ reads the inscription as:

ma kupri koram opsút aninis raki nevii pom[p . . .]ii

Translated as:

*Aninius had me made beautiful image/statue for king Nevius Pom[p . . .]ius*⁵⁴ (Translation by the author)

The full social meaning of the title “king” exhibited by Nevius Pomp[.]ius remains lost to the modern interpretation, but it is undeniable that, wheter he was a proper king or more of a clan chief, or a leader or a warlord, he had an important role within his community, at the point of being dedicated a statue.

The Role of Violence and Memory amongst the Vestini

The archaeological and anthropological examination of the case study

⁵² For a full history of the interpretation on the subject, see DIONISO 2011.

⁵³ LA REGINA 1986. For a more recent discussion, see: LA REGINA 2010.

⁵⁴ Original, in Italian: “me bella immagine fece Aninis per il re Nevio Pompuledio” (LA REGINA 1986, p. 129).

area highlights a complex relationship between interpersonal violence, conflict over resources, cultural identity, and environmental conditions. The presence of functional weapons and widespread defensive structures unequivocally substantiates the existence of close-range violence within the community. This violence is not merely a sporadic outburst but is deeply intertwined with the socio-economic dynamics of the region.

Conflict over resources emerges as a pivotal driving factor in the use of violence in the case study area. The environmental conditions, characterised by resource limitations, propel communities to choose violence as the most efficient way of solving the problem, adopting strategies such as raid economies, leading to a constant struggle for survival. This escalation often results in the emergence of powerful leaders, exemplified by figures like The Warrior of Capestrano. These leaders wield influence by leveraging control over vital resources, perpetuating cycles of conflict and violence.

Despite the pervasiveness of violence, the case study area shows a consistent degree of cultural unity. This identity finds expression through the memorialisation of ancestors and narratives of communal memory. Funerary practices highlight the significance of memory in shaping collective identity and reinforcing social cohesion. The emphasis on “warrior identity” further underscores the cultural valorization of martial elements and show of force as a preventive measure.

It is important to note here that violence in this context was probably not limited to physical encounters on the battlefield. Instead, it permeated through the collective memory and symbolic displays of the community. The commemoration of past conflicts and heroic figures served to perpetuate a narrative of resilience and survival, legitimising power structures and social hierarchies. Moreover, violence served a functional role within the specific environmental conditions of the region. It acted as a mechanism to maintain a delicate balance between population and resources. The cyclical nature of violence reflects the ongoing struggle to adapt and thrive in an environment marked by scarcity and competition.

In conclusion, a reflection on interpersonal violence in the case

study area offers valuable insights into the complex and dynamic relationship between environmental, cultural, and socio-economic factors. By examining the tangible evidence of conflict alongside intangible expressions of collective memory, we may gain a deeper understanding of how violence shapes and is shaped by human societies. Memory, in this context, has a specific value and role, as legitimization of violence passes oftentimes through the narration and the memory of it and through tales and stories of the ancestors and their deeds⁵⁵. Ancestors have a critical role in the active building of group and community identities, and their memory can be placed in many ways in the physical and mental landscape of their descendants. The presence of an ancestor narrative is widely testified by group and multi-generational burials (Fossa, Bazzano, Capestrano), but also by their placement in the landscape in pivotal places of visibility and centrality⁵⁶. The employment of figurative art, such as statuary, as a reinforcement of the already established practice of remembering and building an identity around real or fictional ancestors, should not surprise. They moreover contributed in the construction and maintenance of a landscape of memory and ancestors. Together with tumuli and necropolis:

“They were also resources for social discourse, and they represented a continuum between present, past and future – a form of ‘ancestor time’ in which landscape and people were ritually and habitually fused”⁵⁷.

Some Final Remarks

The statue of the Warrior of Capestrano, hence, appears here in all its idiosyncratic nature. It is the representation of a warrior whose iconography is both rooted in the contemporary idea of a warrior and its ideal representation. The Nevio Pompluedio named in the

⁵⁵ SCHRÖDER – SCHMIDT 2001.

⁵⁶ SCARSELLA 2022.

⁵⁷ MURRAY 2016, p. 149.

inscription is hence a real person, but most of all he is the ideal projection of what a warrior and an ancestor should look like, a player in the grand narrative whose main characters are landscape and memory. The idealisation of the person represented by the statue of the Warrior of Capetrano is a part of the long-term process of creation of a narrative and an identity around the legitimization of violence and its symbolic language, in a society where violence is part of the daily experience of the individuals and perceived as the main means of survival in a harsh and hostile landscape.

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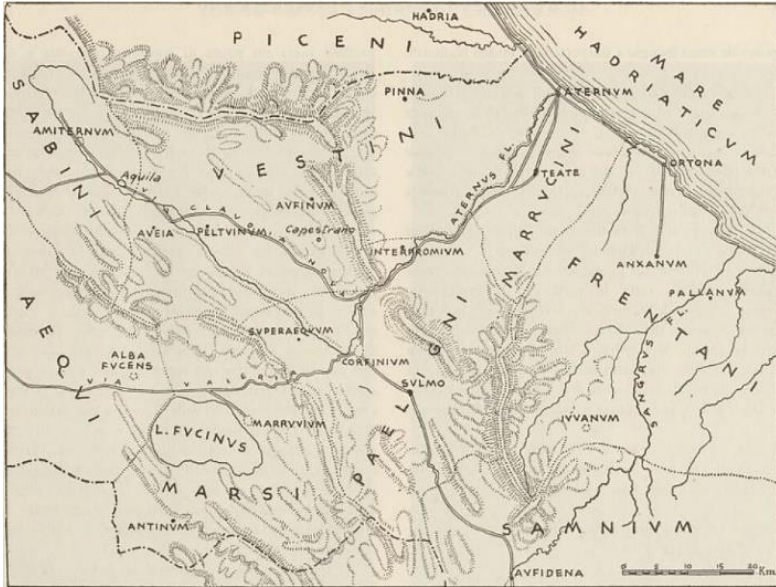


Fig. 1. Map of the area where the statue was originally found (MORETTI 1936, p. 5, fig. 2)



Fig. 2. The helmet and its matching housing on the head of the statue (MORETTI 1936, p. 8, fig. 5)

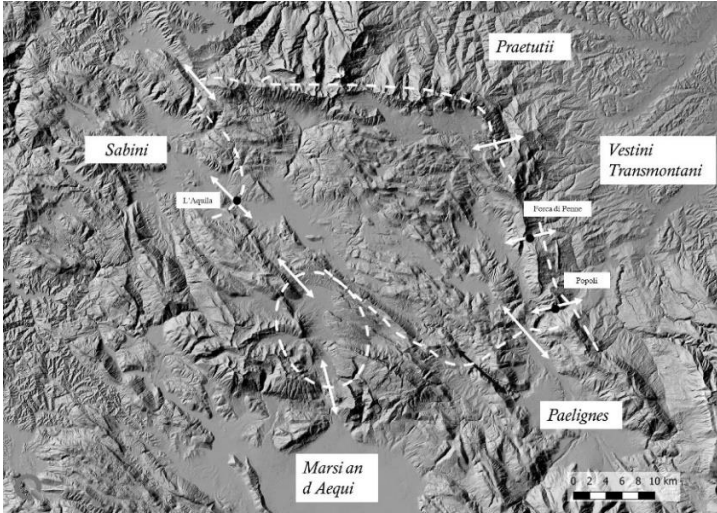


Fig. 3. *Vestini Cismontani, natural borders and passes* (elaborated by the author in QGis)

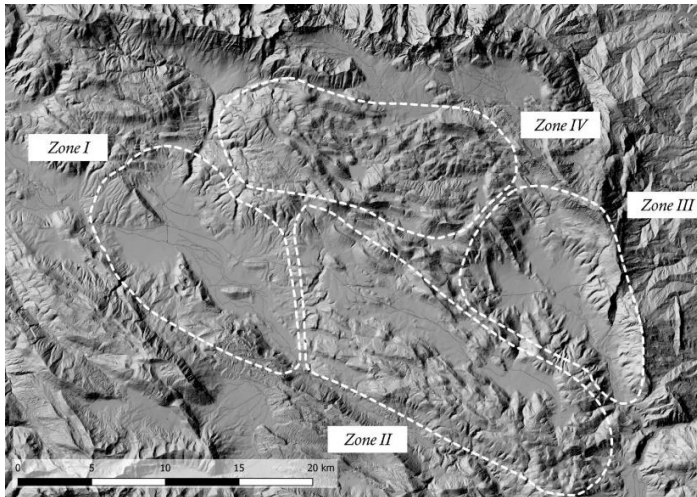


Fig. 4. *The four zones* (elaborated by the author in QGis on the base of D'ERCOLE – MARTELLONE 2010)

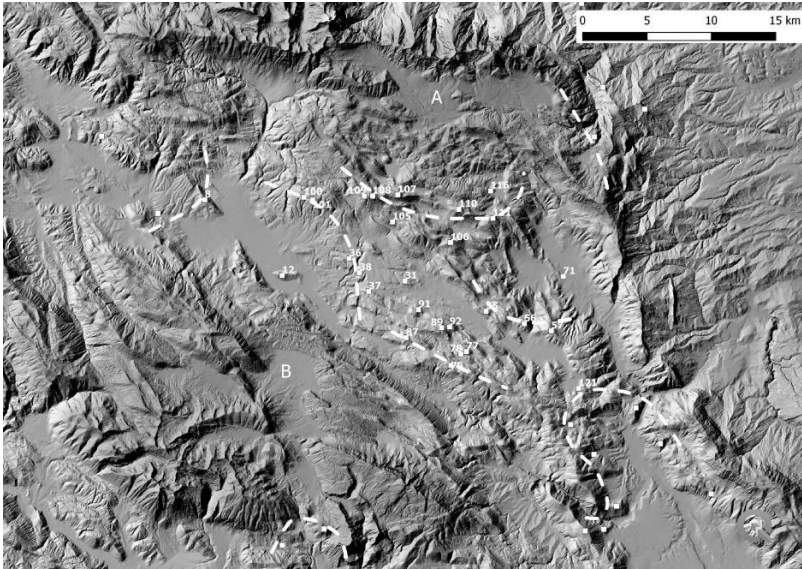


Fig. 5. Fortified settlements and places referred in the text: 8) Monte Bazzano, 12) Monte Cerro, 56) Monte Asprino, 57) Serra di Navelli, 79) Colle Rischia, 87) Colle Opi, 116) Colle della Battaglia, 121) Colle Santa Rosa I; A) Campo Imperatore, B) Altopiano delle Rocche

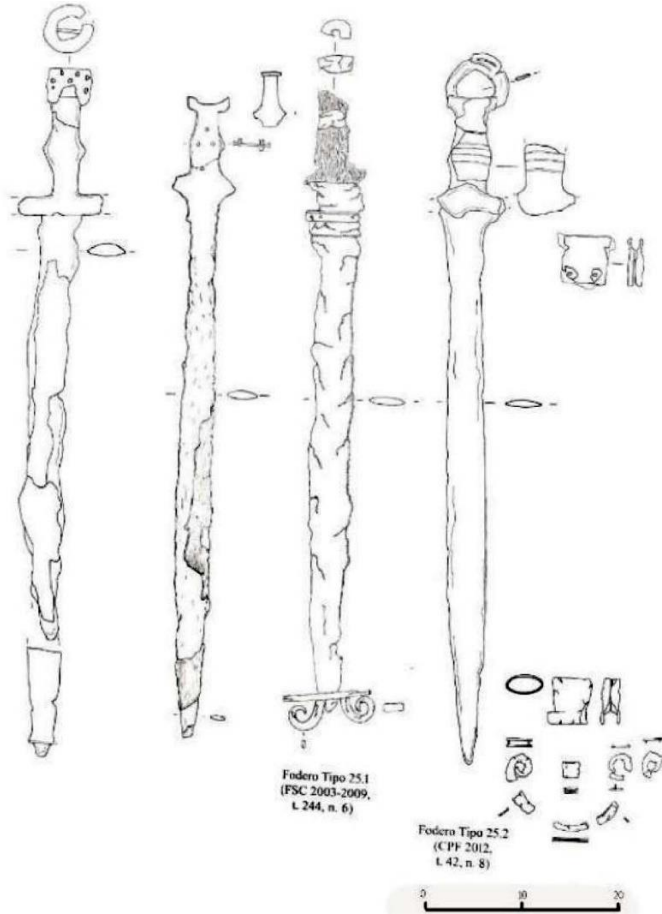


Fig. 6. Swords from Castrano (D'ERCOLE et Alii 2018, p. 198)



Fig. 7. The Warrior of Capestrano from different perspectives (ADINOLFI et Alii 2020, p. 5, fig. 3)