

Archaeometric study of pre-roman pottery from the archaeological site of Bec Berciassa (Roccavione, Cuneo, North-west Italy).

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Abstract

The archaeological site of Bec Berciassa is the most important protohistoric settlement in the Maritime Alps region in the province of Cuneo. It is situated at the confluence of the Gesso and Vermenagna rivers, at a height of 692 meters above sea level, it overlooks the surrounding valleys and transalpine routes that have been used since the late prehistoric period. Before the romanization of the region in the 2nd century BC, this hill had been occupied since the Late Bronze Age (LBA), 1550-1200 BC by the ancient Ligurian tribes.

The study of pottery individuates an older phase dating back to the Late Bronze Age, represented by a small sample of ceramics, while the chronology of most part of this material is homogeneously ascribable to a period between the 6th and the beginning of the 4th century BC (Iron Age).

The archaeometric approach to the study of ceramics has been conducted in a highly transdisciplinary context. The integration of the archaeological features, the texture and composition of the mixtures, the geo-archaeological reconstruction of the territory and its resources revealed parts of the history of the local communities that allow to shed light on many aspects, previously not yet defined, of this protohistoric settlement.

The ceramic fragments show a wide variety of mixtures (5 main types). They are mostly coarse-grained, iatal and serial-textured, calibrated with the addition of fillers. The fine matrix is very homogeneous in composition, although with compositional variations in terms of Fe₂O₃ and Al₂O₃. It is therefore possible to hypothesize a single source of supply. The different types of filler can be traced back to minerals and rocks that are found outcropping within the basins of the Gesso and Vermenagna rivers and can, therefore, be present as pebbles in their beds. Calcschists, spatic calcite, magmatic rocks (granites and aplites), and sericite-schists have been used since the Bronze Age; quartz sandstones and quartzites are instead present only in Iron Age pottery. At a macroscopic level, all these filler agents are light in color, tending to white, almost as if the color and homogeneity of the geological material were a criterion of choice, dictated more by tradition and know-how than by a technological reason.

Keywords: ceramics, pre-roman production, North-west Italy, raw materials, production technology, petrography.