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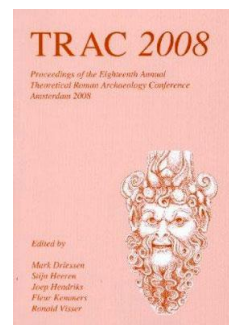
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‘Montani Atque Agrestes’ or Women of Substance? Dichotomies of Gender and Role in Ancient Samnium

Amy Richardson

Introduction

Historical and gender biases in the study of ancient ‘Samnium’ have obscured the more subtle ways in which ethnicity, cultural identity and social structures were asserted. Studies of the history and archaeology have been divided between the trust placed in the ancient historical sources and a desire to uncover more detailed histories from individual sites. Furthermore, the faith placed in the literary construct of the rustic warrior is at the root of polarised preconceptions of male and female, which has consequently led to assumptions which are not founded on substantial evidence. This research addresses two main dichotomies that are a feature all too often in the ancient territory. The aim is to overcome these preconceptions and provide an alternative, complementary social history of ‘Samnium’ prior to the Samnite Wars, through a re-examination of the necropolis sites, such as that at San Vincenzo al Volturno.

Livy’s History of Rome remains, to this day, the principal reference point for the Samnite League. The late first century B.C. work recorded the conflicts between this tribal alliance and Rome’s expansionist policies from the mid fourth century until the end of the Social War (Livy: Book VII, ff.). Livy drew on a number of pre- and post-Social War sources, including L. Calpurnius Piso and C. Licinius Macer, to create a detailed, if embellished, account of the three ‘Samnite Wars’ in the fourth and third centuries B.C. (Ogilvie 1982: 21). Livy’s historical account sparked a fascination with these formidable peoples that has been a feature of British archaeology for the last century (cf. Dench 1995; 2004).

The boundaries of Samnium and its subdivisions have largely been drawn from the historical sources (Fig. 1). The most commonly accepted tribes within the ‘Samnite League’ are considered to be the *Hirpini*, *Caudini* and *Pentri* as recorded by Livy (Livy: XXII 13, IX 1–12, IX 31), and the *Carricini*, drawn from Ptolemy and a twelfth century text by Zonaras. The historical sources are most concerned with the three Samnite Wars, which took place between the mid-fourth and the early third century B.C., and the resurrection of ‘Samnium’ as the last stronghold of resistance to Roman domination during the Social War in the early first century B.C. However, we also have some texts on the earlier development of the ‘Samnite’ tribes.

Origins of the ‘Samnites’

Strabo recounts the *Sabini* (to the north, Fig. 1) sending out a ritual migration party, who colonised the land of the *Opici* and thereby became the Samnites.

The Sabini, since they had long been at war with the Ombrici, vowed (just as some of the Greeks do) to dedicate everything that was produced that year; and, on winning the victory, they partly sacrificed and partly dedicated all that was produced; then a dearth ensued, and some one said that they ought to have dedicated the babies too;

this they did, and devoted to Mars all the children born that year; and these children, when grown to manhood, they sent away as colonists, and a bull led the way; and when the bull lay down to rest in the land of the Opici (who, as it chanced, were living only in villages), the Sabini ejected them and settled on the spot, and, in accordance with the utterance of their seers, slaughtered the bull as a sacrifice to Mars who had given it for a guide. It is reasonable to suppose therefore that their name ‘Sabelli’ is a nickname derived from the name of their forefathers, while their name ‘Samnitae’ (the Greeks say ‘Saunitae’) is due to a different cause.’ (Strabo: 5.4.12)

This *ver sacrum*, or ‘Sacred Spring’, is a recurring theme in Strabo’s work to explain the formation of tribes (used also for the *Hirpini*, Strabo: 5.4.12), and attempts have been made to link this supposed sixth century migration with shifts in the material culture of the region, but providing little support for the actuality of such a proposition (Dench 1995: 193). An overarching cohesive material culture of the Adriatic has been proposed by Cianfarani, which declined due to increasing contact with the surrounding regions, particularly the Greek influences of Campania, rather than an evident Sabine single migration from the north (Cianfarani *et al.* 1978: 55 ff.; Dench 1995: 189; 1997: 45–47).

Sixth and fifth century epigraphic evidence from Picenum makes reference to a ‘safin-’ ethnic, which we later find reiterated on an inscription from the Samnite site of Pietrabbondante (Marinetti 1985: 215–223 for Penna Sant’Andrea; Vetter 1953: Ve. 149 for Pietrabbondante). It may be possible, therefore, to discuss the existence of a ‘Samnite’ peoples (‘safin’ in their native language of Oscan) from the sixth century onwards. However this ‘safin-’ ethnic, stretching across the central Apennines, appears too reliant on scant evidence and, for the period prior to the Samnite Wars, the peoples in the region may instead be described as ‘proto-Samnite’ in accordance with the term increasingly used by Italian archaeologists. Further evidence for a Samnite tribe co-existing in the fifth century is found in the Campanian cities, particularly Capua and Pompeii, both of which were seized by the Samnites in the later part of the fifth century (leaving behind inscriptions in Oscan) and were dominated by these peoples until the Samnite Wars. Tagliamonte has observed a rising homogeneity in funerary ideology and linguistics beginning on the south-western fringes of ‘proto-Samnum’, closest to Campania, from the fifth century B.C., and spreading across the region throughout the fourth, which he suggests may represent a unifying sense of identity, perhaps at a tribal or ethnic level (Tagliamonte 2004: 140–142).

These efforts to ascertain ethnicities in central Italy are problematic. In archaeological studies of the fifth century onwards, there has been an undeniable preoccupation with the ancient histories in ‘Samnum’. The names commonly assigned to the region have been derived from the historical sources, written in a later period and with information that may not always be reliably accurate. Nonetheless, those named tribes have been treated as a rigid framework into which the archaeological evidence can be shaped and moulded, as has often been the case for Iron Age Britain (Jones 1997: 31). Conversely, the prehistoric archaeology of the region has largely been addressed in concordance with culture-history models, zoning areas based exclusively on the distribution of certain aspects of material culture, as in the cases of the Adriatic culture (Cianfarani *et al.* 1978), and the Oliveto-Cairano culture (Colucci Pescatori 1971). Whilst material culture was inevitably a reflection of trading patterns, availability and spheres of influence, the interpretation of such material as a passive reflection of ethnicity has been discredited (Jones

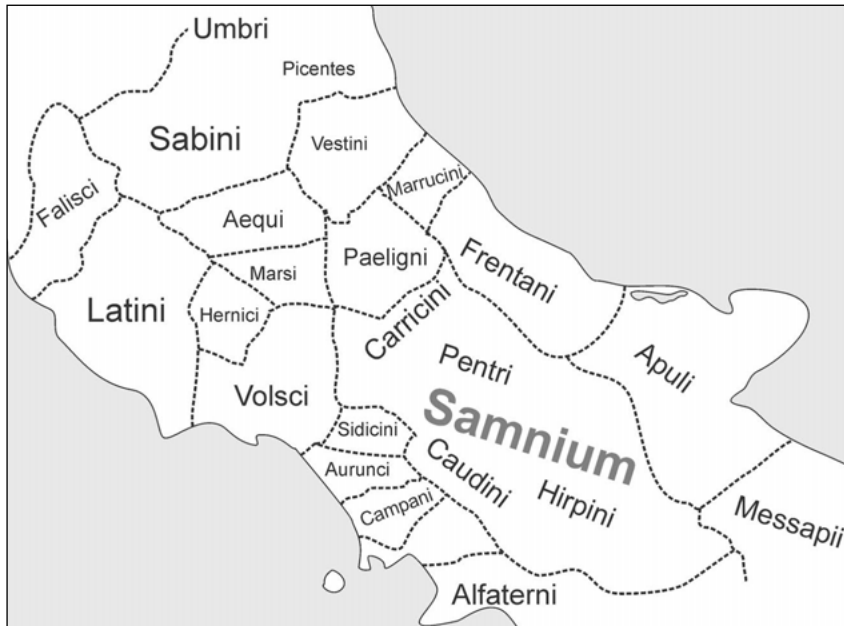


Figure 1: Ancient 'Samnium' (after Salmon 1967, Map 1).

1997: 110, 113). Studies in anthropology and sociology have revealed material culture to be a dynamic phenomenon, deliberately manipulated to communicate social information, as illustrated by Wiessner's study of the Kalahari San (Wiessner 1983). Furthermore, the indications of such studies are that such expressions of ethnic similarities and difference may be more deliberately and emphatically exerted in response to political and economic stress (Hodder 1982: 26–27; Jones 1997: 113), although these exhibitions may not always be visible in the archaeological record and therefore be overlooked. In the case of 'proto-Samnium', apparent aggregation in response to increasing external threats in the late fifth and early fourth centuries B.C. may be an example of this phenomenon (Tagliamonte 2004: 144). Nevertheless, we do not have conclusive evidence for the Samnites defining themselves in this way, or even at a tribal level, prior to the Social War in 91 B.C. (Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 130). In fact, Oscan inscriptions on two helmets from the fourth century specify the communities from which their owners herald, but omit the tribe or ethnic to which they are designated in the historical sources (Tagliamonte 2004: 145).

Dichotomy between history and archaeology

The divisions between the histories and the archaeology are readily apparent. For decades, the search has continued to find corroborative evidence for the historical sources. Livy's description of these 'rough mountain men' (*montani atque agrestes*) remains the most often quoted and accepted stereotype of the Samnites (Livy: XI, 13). The ancient writer's narrative of the Samnite Wars is founded on this caricature of Rome's adversary, 'a people who were strong in both resources and arms' (*gentem opibus armisque ualidum, mota arma*) (Livy: VII, 29). This image of the Samnites was further reinforced by both Pliny the Elder, who deemed them

to be ‘amongst the very bravest of races in Italy’ (*gentium vel fortissimarum Italiae*) (Pliny the Elder: III, 11.106) and Strabo (Strabo: V, 4.11). The most comprehensive work on Samnium and the Samnites, by E. T. Salmon, was in many ways faithful to the Livian notions of the noble barbarian, eking out a sparse living in the hills and valiantly defending his rocky territories (Salmon 1967: 50 ff.).

Emma Dench’s work has deconstructed the notion of the ‘barbarian’, based on a Roman literary construct in order to provide a contrast with Rome’s sophistication (Dench 1995). The might of the Samnite forces are likely to have been exaggerated in order to elevate the victories of the Roman army. Nevertheless, these concepts of warrior have continued to dominate the archaeological research and have been supported by evidence from burials, such as the large quantities of armour and weaponry found at sixth and fifth century B.C. sites of Cairano, in the territory of the *Hirpini* (Bailo Modesti 1980) and Alfedena, on the fringes of the *Pentri* and *Carricini* ‘Samnite’ tribes (Mariani 1901; Parise Badoni and Ruggeri Giove 1980). Although such burials appear to echo the historical image of a warrior society, they should not be assumed to be conclusive evidence of this notion. Härke’s work on Anglo-Saxon weapon burials in England has illustrated that the association of weaponry in a mortuary context does not necessarily relate to the participation in military activity (see Härke 1990; Härke 1997). Weaponry was accorded to infants and to adults who would have been incapable of participating in warfare, through injury, disability or illness, whilst some of those who appear to have sustained injury through conflict receive no weaponry at burial (Härke 1990: 36). The studies have further indicated that there is no positive correlation between weapon burials and increased military activity discussed in the historical sources (Härke 1990: 32). In the case of Anglo-Saxon England, it would appear that weapon burials correlate with ethnic or familial descent (Härke 1990: 40; Härke 1997), rather than with ‘warrior’ activities, thereby illustrating far more about funerary ideology than the activities of the living.

Statues, such as that found at Capestrano, Abruzzo, from the second half of the sixth century B.C. (Fig. 2) would appear to highlight the prominence of the warrior in central Apenninic society prior to the Roman period (Moretti 1936, 1936/37). The ‘Capestrano Warrior’, recovered from a necropolis, has given rise to several propositions for its function, as a grave marker like the Daunian *stele*, a focus for funerary ritual or an offering to the gods (Ferri 1939; Holland 1956). No matter what the function, the recovery of the elaborate statue from the necropolis and its association with a mortuary context reinforce the correlation between death and the ‘warrior’.



Figure 2: Capestrano Warrior, Museo Nazionale Archeologico di Chieti (Schneider-Herrmann 1996, Pl. 81a).

This icon of Samnite fortitude continues throughout the following centuries, being amplified in the material culture during the time of the Samnite Wars. Imagery from the red-figure pottery of Campania and Apulia displays attributes which were iconic of the central-Italian warrior, and the Samnite, in particular. For example, the Bail Amphora illustrates a warrior figure wearing the characteristic triple-disc heart protector and thick 'Sabellian-Samnite' belt, of leather plated with bronze, distinctive of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. and recovered from sites such as Alfedena as well as beyond the borders of Samnium (Fig. 3) (for 'Sabellian-Samnite' belts: Suano 1986; Romito 1995).

Following centuries of conflict and tension, at the end of the Social War, these peoples eventually attained Roman citizenship but their wholesale adoption of a Roman identity is as questionable in Italy as it is for the peoples of western Empire, though it has not been the subject of such heated debate (see Menozzi 2003; Wallace-Hadrill 2008; for the Empire: Mattingly 1997; Key and Terrenato 2001). The notion that the peoples of Italy simply replaced one identity with another is as far-fetched in the Italian peninsula as it was in the provinces. Regardless of how these 'Samnite' peoples perceived themselves, by the turn of the millennium the 'Samnite' territory was barely recognizable. The Augustan division of the 'regiones' carved up the area that had once been Samnium, dividing the formerly threatening tribal league, and including in the new 'Samnium' peoples who had been loyal to Rome in the preceding centuries (Dench 2005: 200).

The faith placed in the Livian creation of the Samnites, and their subsequent 'Romanization' has all too often directed the course of archaeological study, prompting the search for Roman ways of life in Samnium, rather than exploring them as an independent and complex culture, first and foremost, in order to comprehend the role they played in the development of the Italian peninsula. Even in the excavation of necropolis sites from the preceding period, prominence has been given to men, and particularly the warrior graves, seeking a precursor to the force with which the Roman armies clashed. Where such evidence has not been recovered, the sites have, in the past, been limited in their scale of publication and the academic recognition they have received. Progressively in the Italian studies of such sites, a more objective approach is being taken, but this has not yet redressed the balance of the warrior emphasis of the past and theoretical questions have not yet been systematically applied to the material.

Dichotomy between men and women

The most significant division that has occurred as a result of this literature-led research has been the neglect of those other than adult males in the archaeology of the region. Women have been, by and large, reduced to 'spinnors and weavers', deemed as of little importance in a warrior-based society, where their roles were mostly confined to domestic service. The dichotomy



Figure 3: Bail amphora, Rheinbach, Koch coll. Walters sub-group (Schneider-Herrmann 1996, Pl. 67).

in the treatment of men and women has had a wholly negative effect on the course of study. Although, in some cases, loomweights and spindle-whorls are recovered from female burials, the proportion in which these occur is relatively small.

Dismissive attitudes to women have dominated studies of this region, regarding them as outside of the political and military sphere and, therefore, having little bearing on history. Salmon referred to the women of Samnium as: '...the maids of the mountains' (Salmon 1967: 57, n. 1). Tagliamonte has more recently recognised the centralism of the role women played in society, as the perpetuators of familial groups (Tagliamonte 1996: 42). Recent excavations published by the Molise *soprintendenze* have begun to address the articulation of women and children in mortuary contexts, at sites such as Gildone and San Giuliano di Puglia (Macchiarda 1989; Di Niro 2004). However, no synthetic approach has explored these themes across a range of sites.

It would seem likely that the importance placed on the historically documented Samnite Wars has led to an overshadowing of women in the archaeological record. Those symbols of male power, in the sword or the armour, have been addressed as 'truer', as holding genuine significance, where women have been a mere afterthought. Yet when one looks at the archaeological record, women are not more negligible than their male counterparts. Weapon and 'warrior' burials can reveal some insights into the structuring and cultural make-up of the societies they represent, as has been examined elsewhere (see Burns 2006). Those sites which pre-date the Wars provide the opportunity to examine the Samnite outside of Roman and androcentric philosophies. The emerging indigenous models, which were taken from the sixth and fifth centuries, during the period of state formation, into the battles for power in central Italy of the fourth and third centuries, shed light on the complexity of tribal communities which were curtailed in their development by Roman hegemony. And their nature can only be comprehended if we address social structures as a whole, redressing historical gender biases.

When making use of the evidence that archaeology provides, the potential values of material culture must be examined. Renfrew proposed that, in pre-literate societies, material culture may be used as a form of 'external symbolic storage' to record and convey information (Renfrew 1998: 4). Symbolic schemes in material culture, where they are used, may refer not only to inter- but also intra-group divisions. Hodder's research in the Baringo district of Kenya has illustrated the manipulation of these symbols to differentiate also between gender and age categories (Hodder 1982: 58). Ethnographic studies have revealed, in a variety of contexts, that identity is expressed through dress, particularly in the dress and adornment of women (such as those by Eicher and Erekosima 1995; Sumberg 1995). For example, Welters' analysis of three ethnic groups in late nineteenth century Greece reveals that the expression of cultural differences is most strongly conveyed in the clothing of women at the geographical margin where two groups meet, such as the Vlach and the Sarakatsani (Welters 1995: 67). Not only is this display reserved most evidently for women's clothing (when men's clothing appears to perform a more functional service), but it is also more conclusive as a boundary marker of ethnicity than the names borne by the groups, the usage of which is far more flexible and liable to overlap, particularly when used by external communities.

In archaeological studies, it has been observed that conservatism and preservation of local stylistic attributes in material culture are more frequently features of artefacts associated with women rather than men (Swift 2000: 11). This can be attributable, for the most part, to the mobility of men in communities where freedoms belong more predominantly to the male population. Whether it be through migration, armed conflict, trade or transhumance, the potential

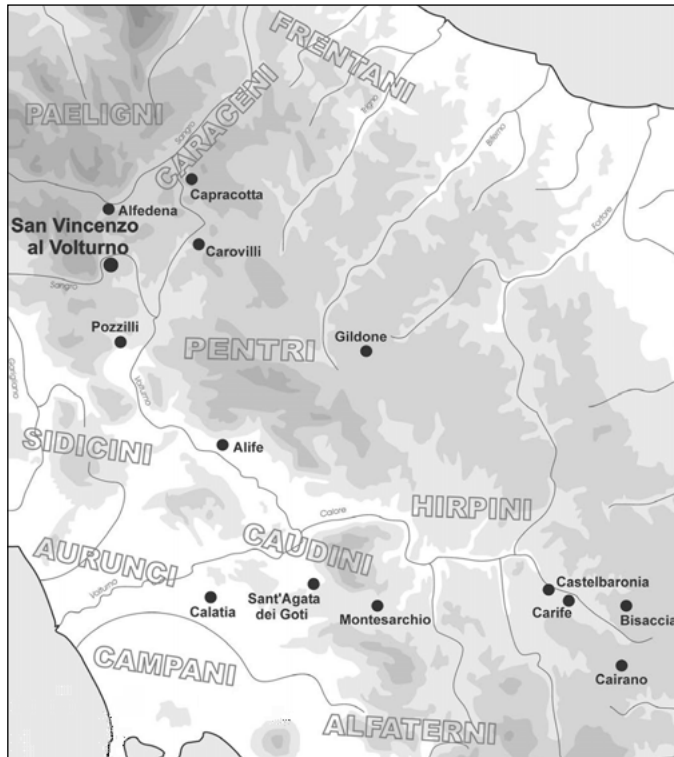


Figure 4: Locations of San Vincenzo al Volturno, Alfedena and necropolis sites in 'Samnium'.

for contact with and transitions between other ethnic communities is far greater than for women whose lives are largely concerned with the domestic sphere. It would be unwise to characterise proto-Samnitic society along these warrior/homemaker lines, as studies in gender archaeology have illustrated (Gilchrist 1999; Stoodley 1999). Where some sites in southern Italy appear to conform to these stereotypes, such as that at San Giuliano di Puglia, the archaic necropolis at Morgantina has yielded evidence for gender largely following traditional social roles, but with some burials transcending these divisions (Lyons 2000: 95; Di Niro 2004). It would appear that gender is not necessarily explicitly represented in the burial assemblage, which, instead, represents a host of concepts related to the funerary ideologies of a community and not necessarily the activities of the living.

San Vincenzo al Volturno and Alfedena

Some of these issues may be explored through the cemetery sites at San Vincenzo al Volturno and Alfedena, less than twenty kilometres apart, located in the north-west of 'Samnium' (Fig. 4). The necropolis at Alfedena, on the margins of the *Carricini* and the *Pentri* (identified as ancient *Aufidena* by some, referred to in Livy: X, 9), was partially excavated in the nineteenth century and led to the publication of around 1400 burials (Mariani 1901). Subsequent excavations in the locality of Campo Consolino, during the 1970s, revealed a further 134 burials from the later

sixth and fifth centuries B.C., which will be discussed here. Through an examination of the grave goods of the biologically sexed burials, methods of representation regarding gender and social roles may be clarified beyond the traditional dichotomy of male warrior/female homemaker. Recurring patterns of symbolic schemes, regarding sex and age in the archaeological record, may be observed in a necropolis and then compared, in this case, between geographically and chronologically close sites. These comparisons of funerary ideologies may, in turn, reveal cultural affiliations and differentiations in expression within the region.

The Samnite *vicus* at San Vincenzo, in the territory of the *Pentri*, has been identified by pottery scatters covering some 10 hectares in the locality of modern Castel San Vincenzo (Bowden *et al.* 2006: 49). This site has not been conclusively identified as one of those mentioned in the historical sources, but from its location we know that it would have been situated close to the borders with the *Volsci*, the *Marsi* and *Paeligni*. Livy's narrative records the ongoing conflicts between Rome and these three tribes (Livy: VI.2, VIII.6). In a landscape of mounting political tensions, one might have assumed that this region, at the heart of the military zone, would have contained a wealth of so-called 'warrior burials', yet there is a complete absence of weaponry in any of the graves excavated at the San Vincenzo cemetery. Furthermore, there is an absence of evidence for 'fatal violence and injury' amongst the San Vincenzo burials (Bowden *et al.* 2006: 76), as one might expect amongst a population at war. A single Sabellian-Samnite belt was found in later levels, which would indicate a possibility of richer male graves in the area, but conclusive evidence has not yet been found (Bowden *et al.* 2006: 89). However, this sample is very small; a high frequency of cranial trauma at Alfedena, for the same period, particularly amongst adult males, is indicative of violence within the region (Paine *et al.* 2006: 48). Furthermore, amongst the graves excavated at Alfedena, 14 percent include knives, and 7 percent include 'warrior' associated goods, such as lance tips, 'Sabellian-Samnite' belts, swords and scabbards, all of which are absent from the San Vincenzo graves. All of the graves containing these 'warrior' associated artefacts belong to adult males, as is the case for the knives (with the exception of one child), suggesting that these are symbolic of masculinity at Alfedena, though not necessarily at nearby San Vincenzo.

Excavations at the San Vincenzo New Abbey in 1994 and 1996 revealed two small groups of Samnite burials in the cloisters and atrium, which have been studied in detail, with work carried out on the skeletal remains. Preliminary work on the remains from Alfedena has established the sex for many of the skeletons and some age categories, although the published data are less detailed than that from San Vincenzo (Parise Badoni and Ruggeri Giove 1980: XII). In most cemetery excavations from this region, such scientific analysis has not been carried out. The identification of women in un-sexed remains, using only grave goods, is justifiably criticised for the subtleties in gender divisions which it may obscure. These sample sites may be able to illuminate the associations of grave goods with either sex, or portraying certain gendered values, which could assist us further with gender studies in central Italian necropolis sites, particularly when re-assessing those excavated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where skeletal analysis has not been possible.

At San Vincenzo, the 15 graves excavated, dating to the late sixth and early fifth centuries B.C., were judged to be only a small sample of a potentially much larger necropolis complex (Bowden *et al.* 2006: 49). The excavated burials contained 16 skeletons, including that of a foetus (either pre- or perinatal) on the abdomen of a young woman. The state of preservation was sufficient for 14 skeletons to yield some information on age, revealing that the majority

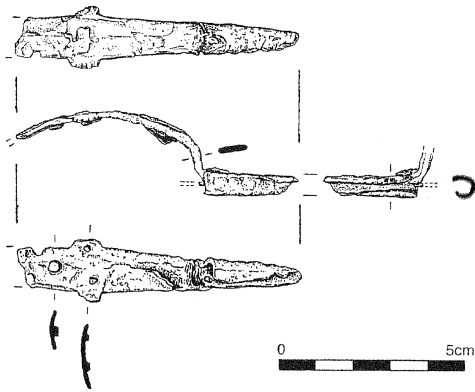


Figure 5: Composite iron and bronze fibula from San Vincenzo grave 20 (SF 2767) (Bowden *et al.* 2006: Fig. 3.7).

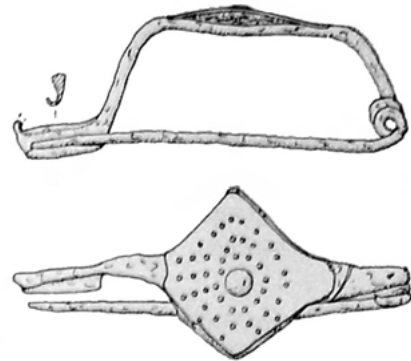


Figure 6: Composite iron and bronze fibula from Alfedena Tomb 31 (Bedini *et al.* 1975: Fig. 84).

of deceased in these two samples are adults (above 20 years old), as opposed to infants and children.

Evidence for spinning and weaving is sparse on the site. Two spindle-whorls have been recovered from the burial assemblages, one from the grave of the young pregnant woman (Grave 59, SF 2753) and one from the grave of an adolescent female, who received a comparatively great wealth of objects at burial (Grave 98, SF 2763). Of the 14 aged skeletons, six have been identified as certain, or likely, females. Considering that these women are all post-pubescent, only one third receive these artefacts apparently so symbolic of their domestic labours. Furthermore, at Alfedena only a single spindle-whorl was recovered, and that from a small grave cut with no human remains (Parise Badoni and Ruggeri Giove 1980: 42, Tomba 66 bis). This may be the product of a poor survival record. Certainly spindles would have been commonly made from wood or bone, and the whorls could be made from a variety of perishable and non-perishable materials, including wood, ceramic and bone, as seen in Roman Britain (Wild 1972: 7). Objects of personal adornment survive more commonly in the graves, with iron and bronze frequently included in one form or another. These less functional and, presumably, more valuable objects are constructed from enduring, less easily obtained materials, and perhaps invested with greater prominence than those of spinning and weaving.

The fibulae at both sites occur in male and female graves alike, yet there are significant differences in their use. Where fibulae feature in the male graves at San Vincenzo, they appear to be included in pairs, whereas in the female graves, the numbers are more variable. There is a greater conservatism in the fibulae associated with men at Alfedena also, though they are most frequently buried at the larger site with a single fibula or none at all. In San Vincenzo Grave 98, a total of 30 large fibulae fragments were identified, placed horizontally on the body. These are suggested to have been too impractical for daily adornment and primarily reserved for funerary use (Bowden *et al.* 2006: 89). The fibulae at Alfedena support this suggestion, with large iron fibulae reaching up to 20 cm in length. Almost one fifth of the fibulae present at San Vincenzo have composite arches, which combine bronze and iron in elaborate forms or have

simple arches with highly adorned catch-plates (Fig. 5). There is no indication of rectangular or composite iron and bronze brooches in any of the male graves in this sample. It would appear that the more elaborate fibulae forms were reserved exclusively for female adornment at San Vincenzo al Volturno, though similar examples of composite brooches appear associated with men as well as women at Alfedena, as seen in Tomb 31 (Fig. 6) (Bedini *et al.* 1975: 470–471; Tagliamonte 1996: 84).

There appears to be a division in the attribution of particular items to women along the lines of biological sex at both Alfedena and San Vincenzo. Ceramics and fibulae are, in a basic sense, gender neutral. This would be understandable in their utilisation by both sexes. Furthermore they are not exclusively age assigned. However, non-functional items, particularly those of adornment, show a greater alignment with gender in the San Vincenzo al Volturno excavated assemblages (Table 1). Beads and pendants appear in both male and female graves, but chains, rings and spindle-whorls, all of which appear in more than one grave, are exclusive to skeletons identified as female in this sample. Pendants, beads and the torque recovered from San Vincenzo all came from contexts of individuals under the age of 30, from those of young children to those of young adults. Furthermore, children rarely receive more than simply the functional objects, with the exception of Grave 473, where beads are substituted for the ceramic assemblage.

Alfedena reveals a slightly different picture. Ceramics, fibulae and pendants occur in both male and female burials, as do chains, finger-rings and bracelets. Objects made from bronze or

Table 1: Presence and absence of artefact types at San Vincenzo al Volturno.

Zone	Grave No	Sex	Ceramics	Fibula	Beads	Pendant	Iron awl or punch	Chain	Finger ring	Torque	Chatelaine	Bracelet	Spindle-whorl	Armlet	Flint projection point	Strap fitting	Amber necklace
Cloisters	3	Male	x	x	x	x	x										
Atrium	473	Child		x	x												
Atrium	605	?Male	x	x													
Cloisters	56	?Male	x														
Cloisters	76																
Cloisters	115																
Cloisters	77	Child	x														
Atrium	546	Child	x	x													
Atrium	604	Young F?	x	x													
Cloisters	20	?Female	x	x												x	
Atrium	633		x	x					x	x							
Cloisters	15	Female	x	x					x						x		
Cloisters	50	Female	x	x				x	x								
Cloisters	59		x	x		x		x					x				
Cloisters	98	Female	x	x	x	x		x			x	x	x	x			x

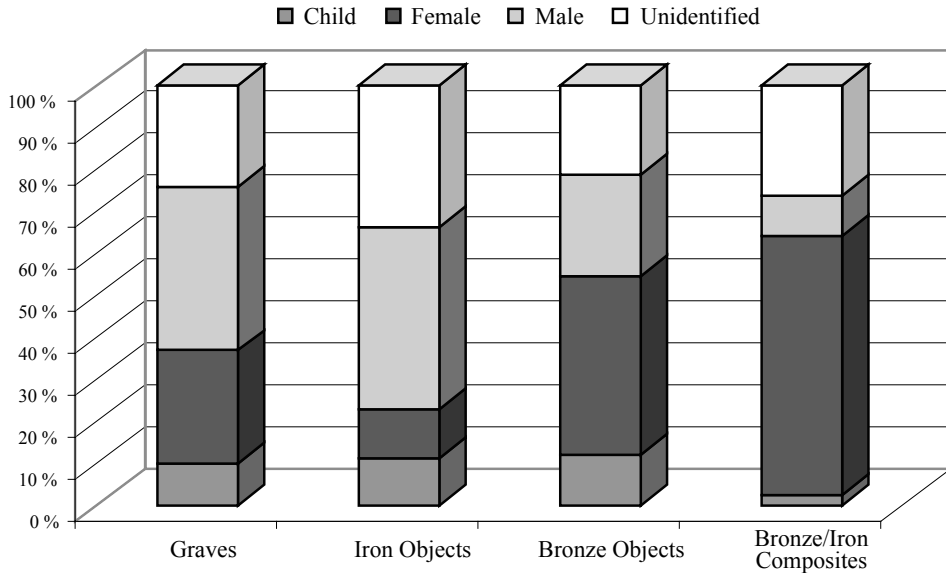


Figure 7: Proportional comparison of grave numbers and metals from the Alfedena necropolis.

iron occur in both contexts. However, in this much larger sample, an analysis of the materials used reveals that the combination of objects made from iron, those made from bronze and those made from a composite of the two have subtly gendered relationships, with an overall bias towards iron for men and bronze for women (Fig. 7). Although the composite fibulae feature in both the male and female dress repertoires, for the most part they were included with women and comparatively few with men or children. Curiously, the combinations of metals seem to relate more closely to gender than the metals in isolation. The combination of a composite piece (either an inlaid knife or fibula with bronze detail), with iron objects (but no bronze) is almost exclusively masculine; the composite fibula with bronze objects (but no iron) entirely feminine. Only one of the thirteen identified child's burials contained composites of bronze and iron, highlighting their symbolic role in gender and the construction of social categories. Weaponry, knives and belts are the preserve exclusively of the men-folk, whereas amber and paste beads appear exclusively in the context of women. Torques or collars appear to have a similar relationship with youth to those at San Vincenzo. Conversely, eleven of the twelve graves in which amber appears belong to women over the age of 45, perhaps indicative of a new phase in the later life-cycle of women at Alfedena.

The most significant number of objects recovered from San Vincenzo al Volturno is from that of the adolescent female, grave 98 in the small group of burials (Fig. 8). This burial is reflective of a trend in northern Samnium during the sixth century. Similar patterns are noted at the sites of Gildone and San Giuliano di Puglia in Molise, to the east of this site (Macchiarda 1989; Di Niro 2004). However, the most obvious parallels for the assemblage are from the nineteenth century excavations at Alfedena, where a similar repertoire can be found in a number of graves, some with black glazed pottery, as at San Vincenzo, and even one belonging to a child (for example Mariani 1901: 448, Tomba B" LXXIX). However, this wealth of artefacts in a single burial is unparalleled in the modern excavations at Alfedena, and the inclusion of amber within the

burial of the San Vincenzo adolescent would suggest that a variety of funerary ideologies were operating contemporaneously within this small geographical area and even within the sites themselves.

Conclusions

The findings would seemingly contradict the assumptions that have been, in the past, drawn from the historical sources. Whilst there is evidence for warrior burials on a number of sites, this should not obscure a far more complex social structure co-existing with this increasingly militarily-involved tribe. As far as the grave goods are concerned, differentiation between the sexes is made less through their occupations than through their appearance. Spinning, weaving and objects relating to occupational activities appear less iconic of gender than the adornment of women, which plays a greater social role in self-representation, being more closely related to the body and self. Men also engage in adornment, although at Alfedena it tends to be in a more functional manner, with the inclusion of knives, belts and brooches. The divisions between genders are apparently drawn along biological sex divisions. However, it is worth noting that a large proportion of the burials, particularly in the larger Alfedena assemblage, contain no evidence of gender signifiers. Potentially, as Stoodley observed in Anglo-Saxon burials, this is an indication that gender, in the burial assemblage at least, is also defined by class or wealth (Stoodley 1999: 125). The elevation of younger individuals, in some cases, through adornment and wealth of grave goods perhaps displays a dichotomy between youth and age, as well as male and female at this stage in Samnite society. These acknowledgements of the life-cycle in the burial assemblage, along with the confinement of goods, such as amber and torques, to particular stages in life, reveal the importance of age and development in relation to biological sex and gender.

The construction of social relationships cannot be assumed to follow simple dichotomies. Polarisation around labels such as Roman/barbarian and warrior/homemaker can only hinder our understanding of past societies; the fluidity of identity within any social structure is masked by making assumptions based on such notions. The yoke of Hume's 'handmaiden to history' approach still hangs heavy around the necks of archaeologists addressing documented periods (Hume 1964). The issues of ethnicity and cultural identities that the histories raise are worth exploring through the archaeological material, but should not be detrimental to our understanding of the whole. It is necessary to explore these sites, the material culture they yield and *all* the people they represent without the application of traditional stereotypes and prejudices derived

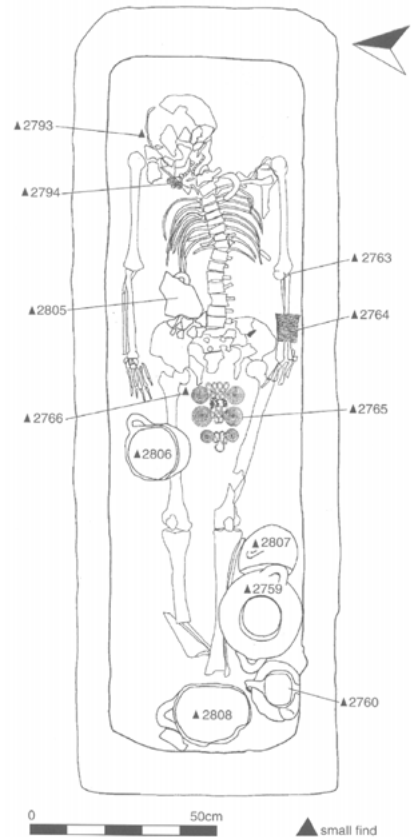


Figure 8: Grave 98 from San Vincenzo al Volturno (Bowden et al. 2006, Fig. 3.14).

from the historical sources, in order to understand multilayered societies which do not operate along the cultural guidelines provided either by the Roman scholars or by ourselves.

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