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The Negotiation of Social Hierarchies in a Mountain Community of Pre-Roman Samnium, Central Italy

Abstract: *The upland region of Samnium in central Italy, in the time of the early Roman expansion (c. 400–200 BCE), is a historical context of the ancient world where distinctions between elite and subaltern social agents might have been less clear-cut than in neighbouring and more urbanized areas. Greek and Roman writers characterised pre-Roman Samnium as a backwards zone, describing its inhabitants as rough highlanders (montani atque agrestes), village dwellers (komedon zontes), and even as akin to wild beasts. In this chapter, I approach Samnium to shed light on the negotiation of social hierarchies in contexts of first millennium BCE Italy that were removed from the main avenues of social and political power, and of which there are virtually no contemporaneous written accounts. Through an in-depth examination of published and contextualized archaeological and osteological data from the site of Gildone (Molise), I identify variations in mortuary treatment in a small rural community where health and living standards were apparently precarious across the board; I also draw a comparison of the funerary data with material from a nearby and roughly contemporaneous farmhouse. Results suggest that forms of hierarchy and intersectionality were present within communities that were economically and politically marginalized. Further exploration of these dynamics can improve our understanding of inequality and dependence in pre-Roman Italy.*

1 Introduction

Historian Kostas Vlassopoulos has proposed two distinct models for conceptualising social inequality in antiquity. One might be termed the “different worlds” model, which posits a fundamental gap between elite and nonelite cultures, lifestyles, world-views, and experiences – as was arguably the case, for example, in early modern European society. The “continuum” model, on the other hand, presents a more fluid scenario where certain activities are more readily available to people with wealth and power, but are not necessarily closed off on the basis of birth, descent, or status. Vlassopoulos describes the implications of this second type of situation in the following terms: “If there was no distinctive elite culture, lifestyles or values, then we must

think very carefully about what constitutes subaltern individuals and communities in such circumstances.”¹

The mountainous region of Samnium in central Italy, in the time of the early Roman expansion (c. 400–200 BCE), is one context where distinctions between elite and subaltern social agents were probably less clear-cut than in neighbouring and more urbanized areas. Greek and Roman writers characterised pre-Roman Samnium as a backwards zone, describing its inhabitants as rough highlanders (*montani atque agrestes*), village dwellers (*komedon zontes*), and even as akin to wild beasts.² These stereotypes reflect the prejudices of Greco-Roman elite authors.³ Even so, archaeological research seems to confirm that pre-Roman Samnium was devoid of the more spectacular forms of elite display that are found across first millennium BCE Italy. The region’s material record from the Iron Age (c. 1000–400 BCE) reveals some degree of social complexity: The spatial organization of cemeteries suggests the possible segmentation of communities along familial lines; tomb architecture and furnishings suggest some differentiated access to resources, with a minority of tombs featuring distinctive items such as bronze armour, worked amber jewellery, finer pottery (for example, bucchero and black gloss), and/or bronze cinerary urns, depending on the period.⁴ Yet, there is nothing that matches the so-called princely graves of Tyrrhenian Italy and their lavish contents, not to mention the monumental chamber tombs with painted interiors, prestigious painted pottery such as refined Attic or Apulian vases, as well as substantial elite housing such as the third century BCE multi-story structure that was excavated in Gabii.⁵ Indeed, the absence of large urban centres before the first century BCE has been seen as a particularly important mark of Samnium’s isolation and rusticity (although this view has been giving way to more nuanced approaches).

Pre-Roman Samnium can be seen as a region inhabited by people who possessed relatively less political and economic power in the context of pre-Roman Italy. Such a view is apparent in Nicola Terrenato’s study on the early Roman expansion, which describes Samnium as “a large, intractable, and raid-generating enclave” that stood in

1 Kostas Vlassopoulos, “Subaltern Community Formation in Antiquity: Some Methodological Reflections,” in *Ancient History from Below: Subaltern Experiences and Actions in Context*, ed. Cyril Courrier and Julio C.M. de Oliveira (London: Routledge, 2021): 35–54.

2 Livy 9, 13, 6–8 (rough highlanders); Strabo 5, 4, 11 (villagers), 5, 4, 2 (savages).

3 Emma Dench, *From Barbarians to New Men: Greek, Roman and Modern Perceptions of the Central Apennines* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

4 Overview of trends in the funerary record: Angela Di Niro, “Le Necropoli dell’Area Interna: Le Necropoli della Zona Costiera,” in *Samnium: Archeologia del Molise*, ed. Stefania Capini and Angela Di Niro (Rome: Quasar, 1991): 61–71; Amalia Faustoferri, “Prima dei Sanniti: Le necropoli dell’Abruzzo meridionale,” *Melanges de l’Ecole Française de Rome* 115, no. 1 (2003): 85–107.

5 Andrew C. Johnston et al., “A Monumental Mid-Republican Building Complex at Gabii,” *Papers of the British School at Rome* 86 (2018): 1–35.

the way of the Roman imperialist project in the fourth and third centuries BCE⁶ From this perspective, the long series of conflicts known as the Samnite Wars of c. 343–290 BCE can be understood as confrontations between mountain communities that relied on a pastoral-raiding economy, and the rich, urbanized communities of central Italy. Ancient accounts mention Samnite political and military leaders in the context of the wars, but it is not clear if there is enough of them to speak of a hereditary aristocracy or state-level administration in Samnium at that stage. It is only towards the second century BCE, after the Roman conquest, that we start to have inscriptions mentioning formal magistracies, which were occupied by individuals that seem to come from a select pool of families.⁷ It is also towards the late second century BCE that monumentalization began to be visible in sanctuaries such as Campochiaro and Pietrabbondante, the latter with its limestone temple and theatre built in the lead-up to the Social War of 91–87 BCE.⁸

In this chapter, I approach pre-Roman Samnium to shed light on the negotiation of social hierarchies in the less urbanized contexts of first millennium BCE Italy that were removed from the main avenues of social and political power, and of which there are virtually no contemporaneous written accounts. I focus on a specific archaeological context that was active from the fourth to the second century BCE – the site of Gildone in modern-day Molise; it is one of the few archaeological complexes from pre-Roman Samnium combining funerary and settlement areas that have been systematically excavated and published, and where the funerary data include the results of osteological and bio-archaeological analyses.⁹ Through a contextual examination of the published data, I identify differences in the mortuary treatment given to members of a small rural community where access to luxury goods was apparently absent, socioeconomic disparities were not expressive, and health standards were apparently precarious across the board. These differences suggest that forms of hierarchy and intersectionality were present among marginalized people in late-first millennium BCE Italy.

6 Nicola Terrenato, *The Early Roman Expansion into Italy: Elite Negotiation and Family Agendas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

7 Edward Bispham, “The Samnites,” in *Ancient Italy: Regions without Boundaries*, ed. Guy Jolyon Bradley et al. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007): 179–223.

8 Bispham, “The Samnites.”

9 Angela Di Niro, “Cercemaggiore-Gildone: la Casa, le Tombe e il Sacello,” in *Samnium: Archeologia del Molise*, ed. Stefania Capini and Angela Di Niro (Rome: Quasar, 1991): 121–26; Angela Di Niro and Pier Paolo Petrone, “Gildone: mortalità, stress nutrizionali e da attività lavorativa in un campione di Sanniti del V–IV sec. a.C.,” *Papers of the British School at Rome* 59 (1993): 33–49; Rafael Scopacasa, “Gender and Ritual in Ancient Italy: A Quantitative Approach to Grave Goods and Skeletal Evidence in Pre-Roman Samnium,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 118, no. 2 (2014): 241–66; Isabella Muccili et al., “Il sito di Pesco Morelli a Cercemaggiore (CB): riesame dei dati di scavo e considerazioni generali sul rapporto spazio pubblico e spazio privato nel mondo sannitico,” in *The State of the Samnites*, ed. Tesse Dieder Stek, *Papers of the Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome* 69 (Rome: Quasar, 2021): 103–10.

2 Dataset

The study area consists of a stretch of hilly uplands situated between two mountains, Monte Saraceno and Montagna di Gildone, close to the modern town of Gildone in Molise. The area has been described in antiquity as isolated because of its distance from the main transhumance routes that connected the central Apennine mountains to Apulia in the south.¹⁰ Previous research has tended to focus on the two fortified centres located on each of the two mountains. The nature of these hillforts remains open to debate, as it is uncertain if they were permanently settled or mainly used as temporary places of refuge. Tableware recovered at Monte Saraceno suggests a stable occupation of some sort, while the surveys conducted at Montagna di Gildone suggest that most of the area enclosed by the fortification walls (33.7 ha) was occupied in the Hellenistic period (fourth–first century BCE).¹¹ Ongoing work at both sites will surely add to our understanding of settlement forms and dynamics in the region.

Within the area located between the two hillforts, archaeological surveys have identified various surface finds from the Hellenistic period, but only a few of the sites have been systematically excavated and published. These comprise the funerary site at Gildone and the nearby (300 m) rural settlement at the locality of Pesco Morelli, which includes a stone-built structure that is interpreted as a farmhouse or *fattoria*.

2.1 The Cemetery

A total of twenty-three tombs were excavated at Gildone (Fig. 1), a hilltop location c. 800 m above sea level. Reports mention additional tombs that were destroyed in the course of building work prior to the excavations, indicating that the cemetery was larger than the known sample of tombs.¹² At the southern end of the site, a small, quadrangular stone structure was interpreted as a shrine or *sacello*. No funerary remains were identified in association with this structure, which yielded instead a few ceramic finds, including an Eros-type figurine datable to the Hellenistic period.¹³

The excavated tombs are simple rectangular trenches or pits that do not seem to have been particularly expensive or difficult to build, except for only a few cases, as we shall later see. The tombs appear to be spatially divided into three distinct clusters, which may correspond to small familial units. All the burials in question seem to

¹⁰ Di Niro, “Cercemaggiore-Gildone.”

¹¹ Tesse Dieder Stek et al., “A Non-Invasive Archaeological Approach to the Study of Mountain-Top Settlements: First Results from the Hill-Fort of Montagna di Gildone in Ancient Samnium (CB, Italy),” in *The State of the Samnites*, ed. Tesse Dieder Stek, Papers of the Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome 69 (Rome: Quasar, 2021): 141–50.

¹² Di Niro, “Cercemaggiore-Gildone.”

¹³ Di Niro, “Cercemaggiore-Gildone.”

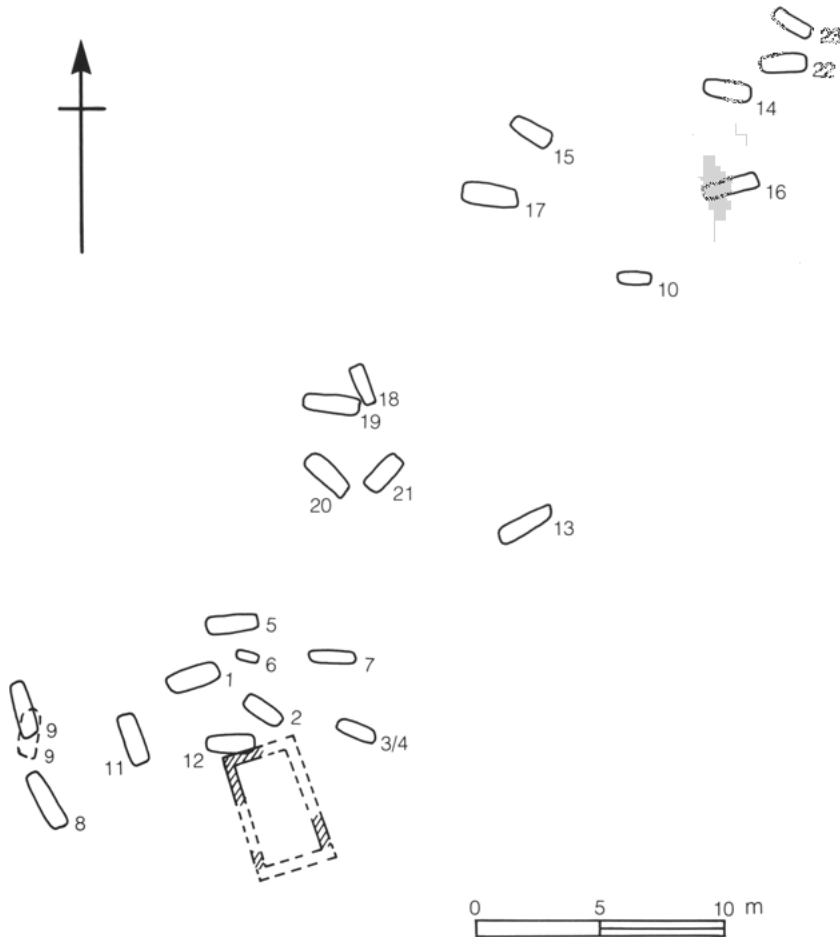


Fig. 1: Plan of funerary site at Gildone.

have been individual supine inhumations, which is normal as regards the published funerary evidence from pre-Roman Samnium as a whole.¹⁴

In terms of chronology, most of the excavated tombs have been dated between the late fifth and late fourth centuries BCE, roughly a 100–125-year timespan that covers a few generations.¹⁵ Whereas some tombs have been dated specifically to the turn of the fifth/fourth century BCE (Tombs 12, 20) or to the last quarter of the fourth century (Tombs 22, 23), others have been given a more generic fourth century BCE date

¹⁴ See, e.g., Rafael Scopacasa, *Ancient Samnium: Settlement, Culture and Identity Between History and Archaeology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), with bibliography.

¹⁵ Dating: Angela Di Niro, “Il sepolcreto sannitico di Gildone,” *Conoscenze* 5 (1989): 27–36; Ida Macchiarola, “I corredi del sepolcreto di Gildone,” *Conoscenze* 5 (1989): 37–79.

(for example, Tomb 19). A future re-examination of the material may generate a higher-resolution picture of diachronic change at the site.

Most of the inhumed individuals have been classed in terms of biological sex and age, on the basis of osteological analyses of the human remains carried out in the early 1990s.¹⁶ These data would need to be tested and refined with the aid of more updated techniques, such as ancient DNA analysis. In what follows, I will refer to the existing sex and age classifications in a preliminary sense that should not be given too much weight, except when otherwise stated.

2.2 Tomb Architecture and Furnishings

The grave furnishings tend to be streamlined, with most tombs containing from two to four items (Tab. 1).¹⁷ The most recurrent grave good types include small personal ornaments, such as bronze and iron brooches and rings, and small pottery vessels (black gloss cups and bowls). Despite this general appearance of uniformity, however, a more in-depth examination of the grave furnishings reveals variations in funerary treatment. As a preliminary step, I have classed the tombs in view of their material culture features according to the following analytical criteria:

1. Tombs that contain larger-than-average assemblages (five items or more: Tab. 1) and/or feature object types that can be considered unique or rare in the present sample (Tab. 2); many of these tombs also display relatively elaborate construction or architecture;
2. Tombs with average or smaller-sized assemblages (from one to four items), which do not include artefact types that can be considered unique or rare in the sample, and which do not show signs of relatively elaborate construction or architecture;
3. Lastly, tombs that are devoid of surviving furnishings, some of which may display signs of relatively careless/effortless construction or treatment.

It is important to note that the first two groups of tombs (Groups 1 and 2) are present in all the above-mentioned chronological phases identified at the site (from the late fifth to the early fourth century; fourth century generic; late fourth century). While the three unfurnished tombs cannot be securely dated, their overall formal and structural similarities with the furnished tombs suggest that they are not radically distant in time.

¹⁶ Di Niro and Petrone, "Gildone."

¹⁷ The data in this section, including the gender and age estimates for the buried individuals, were taken from Di Niro, "Il sepolcreto sannitico" and Macchiarola, "sepolcreto di Gildone."

Group 1: Tombs with larger-than-average assemblages, and/or unique or rare objects, and/or relatively elaborate architecture. Many of the “rare/unique” objects in question are also elaborate in formal and technical terms, and some may be imports.

- Tomb 12 is possibly one of the earliest in the sample, dated to the late fifth/early fourth century BCE; it contained an individual identified as a middle adult of “40–48 years” and of unspecified gender; the grave-good assemblage stands out for including a bulla-shaped bronze pendant, the only one found in the sample;
- Tombs 2 and 14 both contain individuals identified as young adult males, with the one in Tomb 2 identified tentatively as an adolescent. Both were buried with bronze belts of the so-called Samnite type, which, in the case of Tomb 2, was accompanied by a spear and a bronze basin, and in Tomb 14 by an iron razor. The bronze basin may be an Etruscan import, whereas the source of the so-called Samnite bronze belts is debated;
- A third “Samnite” bronze belt was found in Tomb 8, which also uniquely featured a silver coin from the Campanian town of Allifae, datable to c. 400–350 BCE; its occupant was identified as a male of unspecified age;
- Tomb 6 may have belonged to a sub-adult, considering the reduced dimensions of the pit; it is one of the most fully furnished tombs in the sample, with two pottery vessels (one of which is an amphora, a unique form in the present sample), and three items of personal adornment (including a glass bead, also unique among the sampled tombs);
- Finally, Tomb 10 contained an individual identified as an adult female (the only one in Group 1) of “50–60 years.” There are many signs that this person was the focus of special funerary treatment: There is an unusually large quantity of personal ornaments in the form of rings and brooches; it is also the only tomb in the sample where faunal remains were identified; there is no information as to the type of animal, only that a “piece of meat” (*pezzo di carne*) was placed at the feet of the inhumed individual. This is potentially significant, since an analysis of the human remains suggests a low protein diet among the sampled cemetery population overall, and particularly among individuals identified as female (see below). Lastly, the person in Tomb 10 is the only one whose body was clearly placed in a pit that had been carefully lined and covered with large ceramic tiles, arranged in the *a cappuccina* fashion which appears in central/southern Italy from the late fifth century BCE onwards.

Separate mention must be made of four tombs, which display assemblages that are not large by the standards of the sample but feature unique or rare items; and/or that display relatively elaborate construction:

- Tombs 1 and 4 each contained a small iron axe, a rare object among the sampled tombs; another unusual aspect of these tombs is their extreme (recorded) depth of 3 and 2.20 m, respectively; the human remains have not been given sex or age estimates, probably owing to the poor preservation of the skeletons;

- Tombs 17 and 23 each contained an iron spear, which is also rare among the excavated tombs; the spear in Tomb 23 was uniquely placed in an upright position. Tomb 23 is dated to the last quarter of the fourth century BCE and is therefore possibly one of the latest in the sample; like Tombs 1 and 4, it is also unusually deep (2.20 m according to published reports); the inhumed individuals have been identified as males of “30–40 years” (Tomb 17) and “58–67 years” (Tomb 23).

Group 2: Tombs with average or smaller-sized furnishings, with no unique or rare items, and no signs of relatively elaborate construction or architecture. This group includes three of the four individuals osteologically identified as females (Tombs 13, 20, 22); at least one of the tombs in this group may have belonged to a sub-adult (Tomb 21, in light of the reduced dimensions of the pit). The grave furnishings generally conform to one of the following configurations:

- One to two small pottery cups (Tombs 5, 16, 21);
- One small pottery cup and one to two metal personal ornaments, namely rings and/or brooches (Tombs 9 b, 13, 18, 20, 22; note that Tomb 20 is one of the earliest dated tombs in the sample and 22 is one of the latest; Tomb 9 b included an additional iron knife);
- Tomb 11 included no pottery but three metal brooches;
- Tomb 19 contained no personal ornaments but only a pottery cup and an iron razor.

Lastly, we have *Group 3: Tombs apparently devoid of any surviving grave goods, some of which display signs of careless construction and/or later destruction.*

- Tomb 7 contained an individual identified as an adult male of “48–57 years”;
- Tomb 15 included an individual identified as an adult male of “22–30 years”; this tomb stands out for its recorded depth of only 80 cm, whereas the average reported tomb depth at the site is 1–1.5 m; the apparent shallowness of the pit could indicate its careless or makeshift construction;
- The case of Tomb 9 is complex: this tomb, whose occupant was identified as a young adult male, was apparently partially destroyed by the building of Tomb 9 b (above). It is not clear if the disturbance was part of a more elaborate attempt to transform Tomb 9 into a collective grave, or whether Tomb 9 was simply obliterated. At any rate, the fact that there was some disturbance could account for the absence of furnishings that could safely be assigned to Tomb 9.

2.3 Human Remains

The human remains contained in seventeen of the twenty-three excavated tombs were subjected to osteological analyses conducted in the 1990s.¹⁸ The analysed remains pertain to Tombs 7–23, which together span the three chronological phases at the site, and all the three classes of tombs outlined here on the basis of material culture (above).¹⁹ No detailed osteological information is currently available for each of the seventeen sampled individuals. Instead, the published data pertain to trends concerning the sample as a whole, so that only a low-resolution picture is possible. With that in mind, the most significant findings include the following:

- *Enamel hypoplasia* was detected in all seventeen sampled individuals and in almost 50% of the entire dental sample.²⁰ Enamel hypoplasia is considered a good indicator of the health and lifestyle conditions of people in the past; it is a defect in the formation of tooth enamel that can be caused by stress in utero and/or during childhood, including stress resulting from (infectious) disease and nutritional deficiency.²¹ It would appear, therefore, that all the seventeen sampled individuals from Gildone experienced developmental stress to some degree. The incidence of enamel hypoplasia per teeth was reported to be higher among the individuals identified as females. Considering the potential uncertainties of the gender categorisations available (above), the information needs to be treated with caution;
- *Cavities* were reported for 93.3% of the seventeen sampled individuals, again with the observation of a somewhat higher incidence among the individuals identified as females.²² Overall, the results suggest the prevalence of a low-protein, high-carbohydrate diet across the board, which may have been particularly severe for women;
- Lastly, the data regarding *lesions and trauma* seem to be less homogenous. Osteoarthritis was reported for c. 80% of the sampled individuals, mostly affecting the shoulders, hips, and elbows; enthesitis and lesions were reported for most of the sampled individuals, but without any specific data that can allow for precise quantification.²³

¹⁸ Di Niro and Petrone, “Gildone.”

¹⁹ Di Niro and Petrone, “Gildone”: 20.

²⁰ Di Niro and Petrone, “Gildone”: 39.

²¹ Simona Minozzi et al., “Enamel Hypoplasia and Health Conditions through Status in the Roman Imperial Age (First to Third Centuries, Rome, Italy),” *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 30 (2020): 53–64.

²² Di Niro and Petrone, “Gildone”: 39.

²³ Di Niro and Petrone, “Gildone”: 41–45. The authors discuss additional potential dental issues identified in the sample, which will not be considered here in depth.

2.4 The Farmhouse

At a distance of only 300 m from the cemetery, situated on lower ground close to a nearby stream, a small rural site was identified (Fig. 2). The excavated remains constitute a stone-built, squarish structure measuring c. 17 x 19 m – the so-called Pesco Morelli farmhouse. The building consisted of a central courtyard surrounded by a series of rooms and extensions, similar to other known farmhouses of Hellenistic Italy.²⁴ The house featured paved floors and a tiled roof; there were adjacent quadrangular spaces attached to the northeast corner of the house, whose spatial configuration is less clear based on the published evidence. According to the excavators, these adjacent spaces seem to have had beaten earth floors and may have been used as stables.



Fig. 2: Plan of Pesco Morelli farmhouse.

²⁴ Di Niro, "Cercemaggiore-Gildone"; Di Niro and Petrone, "Gildone"; Muccili et al., "Il sito di Pesco Morelli."

The building appears to have served both residential and productive purposes. Elements suggestive of inhabitation include sooted pottery vessels, paved floors, a fireplace, a plastered washbasin, and several iron nails indicative of furniture and possibly of a wooden upper storey. With regard to productive activities, these seem to have been both agricultural and artisanal, given the presence of food storage jars (*dolia*) and loom weights. We have here material signs of some degree of comfort and agricultural surplus. There are no references to imported fine ware pottery or other potential “luxury items” in the published reports, although the presence of black gloss wares is noted.

The absence of a clear stratigraphy makes it difficult to determine the farmhouse’s chronology and the extent to which it may have been contemporaneous with the nearby cemetery. Coin finds pertain to the second century BCE, but the excavators acknowledge the likelihood that the structure was in use previously, given the presence of black gloss pottery that potentially dates to the fourth–third century BCE, and traces of renovations that partially altered the spatial configuration of the house, probably completed at some point before the second century BCE. There may have been a period, therefore, when the two contexts – house and cemetery – were used simultaneously.

3 Discussion

On a general level, the observable disparities in grave furnishings and tomb architecture at Gildone are not extreme. This might indicate a limited degree of socio-economic stratification, at least among the people connected with the sampled burials – not necessarily the inhumed individuals themselves, but also/rather those responsible for organizing and funding the funerary rites.

In this regard, it seems significant that all the pottery items placed in the tombs appear to be black gloss wares, without exception. They were identified as being mostly of Campanian manufacture, according to typological analyses carried out at the time of the site’s excavation.²⁵ At the Pesco Morelli farmhouse, both black gloss and common wares were present, suggesting that the apparently exclusive deposition of black gloss in the nearby tombs was the result of deliberate choice. In addition, the fact that the farmhouse did not contain more sophisticated ceramics, such as Attic or Apulian painted wares, could indicate that black gloss may have been the most refined pottery technology accessible locally. The exclusivity potentially given to these wares for ritual deposition suggests that a certain degree of value was assigned to them; and yet, black gloss wares can hardly be considered prestige items in the con-

²⁵ Campanian provenance: Macchiarola, “sepolcreto di Gildone”: 74–76. Subsequent developments in the study of black gloss production in Italy might alter this picture.

text of Hellenistic Italy, as their production and circulation would have arguably reached global proportions by that point in time. Such a scenario could therefore underline the economic and commercial marginalization of the Gildone community, since it might not have had easy access even to relatively widespread pottery technologies. On the whole, therefore, the Pesco Morelli farmhouse suggests a scenario of a small peasant household of moderate means.

Osteological data from the cemetery add to this picture by suggesting that local inhabitants did not have very discrepant lifestyles, at least as regards the sampled buried individuals. As noted above, the osteological data appear to indicate a somewhat “democratic” vulnerability to physical stress, illness, and/or malnutrition among the sampled cemetery population. The reported incidences of osteoarthritis, enthesitis, and trauma, for example, would indicate that susceptibility to heavy manual labour was not the preserve of a separate group from among the sampled individuals – although the nature of these heavy physical activities may have varied, depending on factors such as gender, age, and occupation (for example, agricultural, domestic, warfare-related, etc.). A more detailed assessment of this issue would only be possible through a re-examination of the osteological evidence.

The lack of published data on each of the seventeen individuals osteologically analysed makes it difficult to assess the intensity of health problems per individual, and whether it correlates with material culture differences among the tombs. Even so, it seems significant that all seventeen individuals were reportedly affected by enamel hypoplasia, which, as noted above, is a reliable indicator of disease and malnutrition suffered in utero and/or during childhood. The significance of the Gildone data seems especially salient when a comparison is made with other cemetery populations from ancient Italy. A study of two Imperial-era cemeteries near Rome – Collatina and Casal Bertone – concluded that, of the 174 sampled individuals, 15% were unaffected by enamel hypoplasia, whereas among the wealthier graves the figure reportedly rose to 30%.²⁶ This brief comparison suggests a more equalized susceptibility to disease, nutritional deficiency, and/or food insecurity among the sampled cemetery population at Gildone, although the differences in sample size and chronological context need to be highlighted. The sites of Collatina and Casal Bertone developed when Roman power was already consolidated in Italy, and they were furthermore situated in a region with longstanding urbanisation.

In line with the data on enamel hypoplasia, the reported incidence of cavities affecting c. 93% of the sampled individuals from Gildone suggests the prevalence of a low-protein, high-carbohydrate diet across the board. These results should not be totally surprising, as we are dealing with an ancient agricultural community. Even so, the scholars responsible for analysing the Gildone sample drew comparisons with other pre-Roman cemeteries of Italy, arguing that the average incidence of cavities

26 Minozzi et al., “Health Conditions through Status”: 59.

per teeth at Gildone was around four times greater than that in samples taken from the cemeteries of Campovalano and Pontecagnano.²⁷

Yet, whereas the skeletal data in particular suggest an overall preliminary picture of socioeconomic homogeneity, a closer analysis of the material culture elements at Gildone reveals some non-negligible differences among the tombs in terms of furnishings, energy expenditure, and architecture. The granting of comparatively more elaborate and/or expensive mortuary treatments to certain individuals – namely those in Group 1 – suggests the negotiation of social distinctions and hierarchies in the funerary sphere to some degree. The possible criteria behind these differences in funerary treatment seem to involve a combination of age, gender, and other sociocultural categories that remain to be better understood.

Warriorhood may have been a relevant criterion behind some of the differences in funerary treatment detected above. This is because tombs containing potential weapons (iron spears/javelins, axes, and daggers) tend to be distinguished by other markers of special funerary treatment in the context of the cemetery, namely unusual depth (Tombs 1, 4, 23), and/or grave goods that are unique/rare in the sample and which might in some cases be imports (bronze basin in Tomb 1; bronze belts in Tombs 2 and 8; silver coin in Tomb 8; iron razor in Tomb 17). We could be witnessing the social valorisation of individuals who were somehow associated with the idea of military prowess, possibly irrespective of age (for example, the “adolescent” in Tomb 2 and the individual of “58–67 years” in Tomb 23, both with iron spears). This would be understandable in the context of the endemic warfare in fourth–third century BCE Italy, which seems to have hit Samnium particularly hard according to literary sources.²⁸

Yet, while warriorhood may have been an important criterion for social distinction and hierarchy at Gildone, it apparently intersected and/or competed with other criteria. To begin with, some of the artefacts that can be interpreted as weapons may also/otherwise have been used in non-military activities such as ritual sacrifice, namely the iron axes in Tombs 1 and 4 and the iron dagger in Tomb 8. These individuals’ distinctive funerary treatments may therefore be due to their association with ritual activities that may or may not have involved the sphere of warfare. Another significant case in this regard is Tomb 10, which contained an individual identified as an adult female of “50–60 years.” As noted above, this tomb is the only instance at the site that was clearly shown to have a *cappucina* architecture with terracotta tile lining and covering. It is also the only tomb in the sample reported to include faunal remains, namely the “piece of meat” at the feet of the inhumed individual. If the deceased person’s classification as female is correct, the meat deposition would be

²⁷ Di Niro and Petrone, “Gildone”: 40–41.

²⁸ Elisa Perego and Rafael Scopacasa, “Children and Marginality in Pre-Roman Samnium: A Personhood-Focused Approach,” in *From Invisible to Visible: New Data and Methods for the Archaeology of Infant and Child Burials in Pre-Roman Italy*, ed. Jacopo Tabolli (Stockholm: Astrom Editions, 2018): 167–76.

especially significant, considering the excavators' hypothesis that women at Gildone were particularly vulnerable to malnutrition and protein deficiency.²⁹ The special funerary treatment given to this "female of 50–60 years" may have been connected with the person's relatively mature age. Yet, intersecting variables would also have been at play: this is because individuals identified as being in the same age range as the person in Tomb 10 received less well-provisioned funerary treatments, most notably the individual in Tomb 7 ("48–57 years"), which was apparently unfurnished.

It is worth mentioning that seemingly unfurnished tombs appear to be more numerous in Samnite cemeteries that are known to have been active in the Hellenistic period, such as Gildone, in comparison with cemeteries that were used mainly or exclusively in earlier periods. As regards the present sample, it has been proposed that the individuals buried in the three unfurnished tombs were of servile or enslaved status (it might be significant that all three were osteologically identified as adult males).³⁰ These individuals' possibly marginalised condition is further suggested by the fact that in two out of three cases, their tombs display potential signs of careless construction and/or treatment. As noted above, Tomb 15 was recorded as being only 80 cm deep, whereas the average reported depth of the sampled tombs seems to be c. 1.5 m; Tomb 9 was partially destroyed owing to the construction of Tomb 9 b. Archaeothanatological analysis could shed crucial light on the issue, by helping to determine the extent to which these individuals' bodies were disposed in a more careless manner as compared to the ones in the furnished tombs.³¹ The fact that two of the unfurnished tombs were placed on the edge of their respective clusters (Tombs 9, 15) could also be seen as indication of their occupants' subaltern status; yet, similarly peripheral positions were apparently given to the better furnished Tombs 8 and 10.

It therefore seems that the burying community at Gildone recognised varied and intersecting criteria for the expression of social distinctions through funerary ritual. The rationale behind these hierarchies and the kinds of intersectionality involved remain to be better understood. Age and gender most likely played a part, but in conjunction with other factors. For example, differences in sophistication and/or expenditure in the burials of young adult males (for example, Tombs 2, 23 vs. Tombs 7, 15), and the

29 "Nell'insieme, il campione femminile risulta più colpito," ("In all, the female sample is more affected"), see Di Niro and Petrone, "Gildone": 40.

30 Di Niro and Petrone, "Gildone."

31 See, e.g., Veronica Tamorri, "Taphonomic Approaches to Funerary Evidence in Times of Collapse and Crisis," in *Collapse or Survival? Crisis and Social Change in the Ancient Central Mediterranean*, ed. Elisa Perego et al. (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2019): 29–56; Elisa Perego et al., "Marginal Identities in Iron Age Veneto: A Case Study Based on Micro-Scale Contextual Analysis and Burial Taphonomy," in *Multiple Identities in Prehistory, Early History and Presence*, ed. Alena Bistáková et al. (Nitra: Archeologický ústav SAV, 2020): 81–96; Elisa Perego et al., "Child Personhood in Iron Age Veneto: Insights from Micro-Scale Contextual Analysis and Burial Taphonomy," in *Ages and Abilities: The Stages of Childhood and Their Social Recognition in Prehistoric Europe and Beyond*, ed. Katharina Rebay-Salisbury and Doris Pany-Kucera (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2020): 174–92, on the archaeothanatological analysis of potentially marginalised individuals in Iron Age Veneto.

granting of relatively more lavish burials to both adults and (potential) subadults (Tomb 6), suggest that biological sex and age were not the sole or key criteria behind “wealthier” and “poorer” burials – in contrast with Etruscan funerary contexts, where age has been identified as key in this regard.³²

4 Concluding Remarks

The foregoing analysis of fourth–second century BCE Gildone in Samnium can yield insights into the negotiation of social hierarchies in a less urbanised context of first millennium BCE Italy inhabited by people with relatively little political and/or economic power. If the Pesco Morelli farmhouse is representative of the local socio-economic profile, it would suggest that the relative austerity of the sampled tombs at Gildone was more a product of necessity than choice, as the farmhouse data do not reveal access to anything more ostentatious than what was found in the tombs.

Although there are no extreme differences among the sampled tombs at Gildone, closer analysis reveals variations in material culture, energy expenditure, and tomb architecture. These variations should not be overstated, especially in light of the broadly similar lifestyles outlined by the osteological data available. Yet, the differences in funerary treatment arguably suggest complex and nuanced negotiations of social hierarchies at work in a relatively impoverished and remote context of late first millennium BCE Italy, where susceptibility to physical stress, trauma, and malnutrition seems to have been more equally distributed among the sampled cemetery population, particularly in comparison with other contexts of (pre-)Roman Italy. A fuller understanding of these dynamics would be possible through a re-examination of both the osteological and archaeological data, as indicated in the foregoing discussion.

Recalling Kostas Vlassopoulos’s models of ancient social inequality mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the present analysis suggests that a stark divide between elite and nonelite worlds may have been alien to certain Italic communities before the consolidation of Roman power over the peninsula – even if these communities were plagued by precarious living conditions that may have been especially severe for women. Whether and how the Roman conquest and related historical processes affected such social realities is another complex issue, deserving of further exploration. For now, I hope to have shown the potential of an in-depth approach to less urbanized and economically marginalized contexts for our understanding of inequality and dependence in pre-Roman Italy.³³

³² Marina Micozzi, “I bambini perduti di Cerveteri: primi appunti per la ricostruzione della ritualità funeraria infantile nelle necropoli di Monte Abatone e della Banditaccia,” in *Birth: Archeologia dell’infanzia nell’Italia preromana*, ed. Elisabetta Govi (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2021): 395–416.

³³ See Elisa Perego et al., “Introduction: Collapse or Survival? Crisis and Social Change in the Ancient Central Mediterranean,” in *Collapse or Survival? Crisis and Social Change in the Ancient Central Medi-*

Appendix

Tab. 1: Grave good quantities (per tomb).

Tomb no.	Total grave goods	Tomb no.	Total grave goods
Tomb 10	7	Tomb 20	3
Tomb 2	6	Tomb 3/4	2
Tomb 6	6	Tomb 18	2
Tomb 8	5	Tomb 19	2
Tomb 14	5	Tomb 21	2
Tomb 9 b	4	Tomb 22	2
Tomb 12	4	Tomb 23	2
Tomb 13	4	Tomb 16	1
Tomb 1	3	Tomb 7	0
Tomb 5	3	Tomb 9	0
Tomb 11	3	Tomb 15	0
Tomb 17	3		

Tab. 2: Grave good quantities (per object type).

Artefact (grave goods)	Quantity (overall)	Status in sampled tombs
bead (glass)	1	Unique (occurs only once)
pendant (bronze)	1	
dagger (iron)	1	
coin (silver)	1	
small amphora (black gloss)	1	
lekythos (black gloss)	1	
basin (bronze)	2	Rare (occurs 2–3 times)
small axe (iron)	2	
belt (bronze)	3	
javelin/spear (iron)	3	
razor (iron)	3	
ring (iron/bronze)	6	Common (occurs 6 times or more)
knife (iron)	7	
cup/bowl (black gloss)	15	
brooch (iron/bronze)	18	

terranean, ed. Elisa Perego et al. (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2019): xix–xxx, for further discussion on the potential of a microscale approach to first millennium BCE Italy/central Mediterranean, with special attention given to the issue of marginalization. The kind of microscale analysis developed in the present chapter draws on the contributions of Elisa Perego et al., “Marginal Identities in Iron Age Veneto”; Perego et al., “Child Personhood in Iron Age Veneto”; Perego and Scopacasa, this volume.

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List of Figures

- Fig. 1** After Di Niro and Petrone, “Gildone”: 19, fig. 7. Courtesy of Soprintendenza Archeologica del Molise
- Fig. 2** After Di Niro and Petrone, “Gildone”: 16, fig. 5. Courtesy of Soprintendenza Archeologica del Molise
- Tab. 1–2** Made by Rafael Scopacasa