



WORKSHEET 3. TERRAMARE

The *terramare* is one of the most significant features in this “Europe of villages” and one of the most advanced societies in its period. Their development, between about 1650 and 1200 BC, makes them contemporary with the civilisations of Minoan and Mycenaean (the Trojan War is dated at 1200 BC) or with the Egyptian dynasties of Akhenaton and Tutankhamen. This period also features the wars between the Hittites and the Egyptians, the development of Nuragic civilisation in Sardinia and the final phase in building the circle of megaliths at Stonehenge. The *terramare* occupy the central Po plain in an area between the provinces of Modena, Reggio Emilia, Parma, Piacenza, Mantova, Cremona, Verona. At present, over 200 settlements are known, varying in size from 1-2 hectares up to 20 hectares (1 hectare: 10,000 square metres). The overall number of inhabitants, which was very high for its time, must have been somewhere between 150,000 and 200,000.

The *terramare* were nearly always surrounded by imposing perimeter defence systems comprising ditches and earthworks. The ditch was generally filled with water that came from a nearby river or stream. The function performed by a ditch, which could reach 40-50 metres in width, was not just for defence purposes or to safeguard the village against flooding, but also to provide the settlement with a precious reservoir of water. The defensive system was completed by earthworks, often built with the soil removed to dig the ditch, and was surmounted by a palisade.

The houses, which were arranged regularly within the village, were often built on raised platforms supported on piles, probably to isolate them from humidity (unlike pile-dwellings, which were raised in order to isolate them from the water). The size of the houses was between about 60 – 70 square metres. *Terramare* society was organised on a “participatory” model: the complex way of constructing the villages required not only efficient planning but also made it vital for inhabitants to work together. This organisation did not, however, exclude economic and social differences: the warrior caste probably fulfilled the role of chiefs and their wives could be distinguished from other women in the village. Craftsmen skilled in metalwork were also important, manufacturing powerful weapons and refined ornaments, but also utensils and tools such as scalpels and scythes.

Another form of handcraft was working with deer horns, which were collected after they had broken off, and were used to produce a wide range of objects, some of which were particularly refined, probably requiring specific handcrafting skills.

Each family nucleus probably provided for its own needs in domestic pottery, textiles and clothes. The latter were made of wool, linen (flax) woven on upright looms with weights. Nevertheless, we cannot exclude the possibility of specialist craftsmen both for pottery and weaving.

The other members of the village dealt with jobs related to sustaining the community: arable and livestock farming formed the basis of the *terramare* economy, while hunting and fishing were less common.

Around 1200 BC, the world of the *terramare* went into crisis, and only a few decades later the villages disappeared. Archaeologists have still not been able to explain exactly what happened, but it is possible that a series of causes, both natural and man-made, brought about the demise of the *terramare* system.