



WORKSHEET 4. THE MONTALE TERRAMARA: THE HISTORY OF AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

Before the *terramara*: on the site where the *terramara* was to rise there was a natural mound near which a watercourse flowed. All around were dense woods, predominantly oak.

At the time of the *terramara*: around 1600 BC, a Bronze Age community began work on preparing the area.

The first thing to be done was the removal of trees so as to obtain wood needed to build the houses and so as to create fields for arable land and pastures. Later, the ditch was built, and water was diverted from a nearby river. Then the earthworks were constructed with the earth removed to create the ditch.

The dwellings, which had a rectangular form and were positioned on an East-West axis, were at first on a raised platform, while later they were built directly on the ground. The material used to construct the houses was wood, straw and clay.

The village at Montale underwent numerous reconstructions, probably related to natural events such as fires. As a result, the inhabitants had to provide for necessary maintenance work on the houses and fortifications.

When a dwelling collapsed in a fire or was pulled down because it was unstable, the remains were levelled and covered over with earth so as to create a flat layer on which to build again. These operations, which were repeatedly performed during nearly four centuries of village life, together with the tips that formed following most activities carried out by the community (handcrafting, discharging refuse, food preparation...), formed numerous layers. As a result, by the time the village was abandoned, it had "risen" by almost four metres.

Desertion: in 1200 BC, the village at Montale, as with most of the other *terramare*, was deserted. What remained in the Po plain landscape was a small hill or mound formed partly by a natural relief and partly by the stratified layers of the village. It rose to a total height of six metres. The hillock must then have been covered with vegetation and been integrated in the surrounding countryside.

At the time of the Etruscans: the site was deserted for several centuries until 500 BC, a period to which some of the Etruscan finds uncovered in the hillock can be dated.

At the time of the Romans: between the first and fourth centuries AD the summit of the hillock was possibly occupied by a small farm, as attested by remains of flooring, pottery, oil-lamps and coins. The countryside was subdivided into allotments of equal size, as per the Roman practice known as centuriation. The river was used for irrigating the fields.

The Middle Ages: a castle was built at the top of the hill in the 12th century, or shortly before. It was surrounded by fortified walls with towers; these walls extended in large part to the perimeter of the *terramara* earthworks. Once again, the river performed a defensive function around the perimeter wall. The present church bell-tower stands where the chief tower of the castle once stood.

Woodlands made a return since the land was less intensively farmed: the territory was given over to pasture and woodland, which was often flooded due to the dense network of canals which had been dug in a previous age and then abandoned.

The countryside was thus less densely populated than before.

During the Renaissance: in the 16th century the mound or hillock was depicted in a fresco conserved at Spezzano castle. The parish buildings are clearly visible on top of the hillock as is the church, which was demolished in 1760 and replaced by the church we see today.

During the 19th century: the locality became a destination for Sunday excursions by people from Modena, who sought the shade afforded by the enormous chestnut tree that stood on top of the hillock. In 1868 Carlo Boni, founder and first director of the Modena Civic Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, recognised in the hillock the remains of a village dating back to the Bronze Age, and similar to many others that were being discovered in Emilia at the time. In 1871, excavations began at Montale, but the mound was soon used as a compost heap, given that its soil was rich in organic matter. It thus shared the fate of many other *terramare*. The soil that formed these artificial hillocks was actually so rich in organic deposits that it was ideal for fertilising the fields: it was called "mara" or "marna" and the place it was dug up from was called "terramare". This name was later adopted by archaeologists to refer to Bronze Age villages with the above mentioned characteristics. Digging up the earth naturally entailed the hillock's destruction and an entire archaeological heritage was lost. Montale, however, with its church buildings constructed on top of the mound, was able to preserve intact and in its original depth a portion of its archaeological deposit, and this extraordinary circumstance is what makes Montale unique.

1996 – 2002: about a century after Carlo Boni's research, the Modena Civic Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology resumed excavations of the Terramara at Montale. The new excavations brought to light traces of the village's fortifications, remains of dwellings and evidence of handcraft and economic activity, in addition to an abundance of other archaeological material. The results of this research made it possible to reconstruct a portion of the ancient village in order to set up an archaeological park that was able to testify to the importance of the *terramare* civilisation, documenting, in concrete terms, aspects of its everyday life, its society and its ideology.