14.3: The Monuments

This section includes only those monuments found in northern Italy, in the northern extension of Etruscan territory, in the Po Valley. Stelae inscribed in Etruscan, of different types from those found in the north, occur on many sites throughout Etruria proper (equivalent to modern Tuscany, northern Lazio and parts of Umbria).

**Stelae from Bologna (Figures 2–3)**

More than 230 funerary stelae, complete or fragmentary, are known from the Villanovan and Etruscan cemeteries of Bologna (Etruscan *Felsina*), dating from the 8th or 7th century bc to the 4th century bc (Ducati 1911; 1943; Meller Padovani 1977; Stary-Rimpau 1988). They are made of sandstone and vary in shape from generically anthropomorphic early examples to mostly horse-shoe-shaped forms in the full Etruscan period. They are all decorated, carved in low relief and often originally painted, in a variety of different styles, often with figured scenes. Only 14 have inscriptions (and one of these is unreadable) and only these are included in this discussion. These inscribed stelae are dated to the 5th (or possibly late 6th) and the 4th centuries BC. Few of the monuments are complete, so it is difficult to ascertain their size range. The smallest of the complete monuments (stele 211) is 109 cm high while the largest (stele 10) is estimated to have been at least 270 cm high. The widths range from c.60 cm to c.160 cm and the thicknesses from c.20 to 44 cm. The monuments combine iconography and inscriptions; the carved decoration occurs not only on the main surface but often continues round the sides and onto the reverse. The inscriptions are normally on the main surface, but one large stele has three inscriptions, one of which is on the back. The inscriptions are mostly horizontal and written from right to left but one rectangular stele with rounded corners has an inscription round the upper edge extending round both corners. A common position for the inscriptions is in bands located between the decorative friezes.

Of all the monuments discussed in this chapter, the Bologna stelae are the most certain ‘tombstones’ since some have been excavated in cemeteries, including the Certosa cemetery, well known for its richly equipped tombs of the 6th and 5th centuries bc. The stelae were found in association with specific tombs, where they had been used as markers. The
inscriptions refer to the deceased individuals and include both male and female names.

**Cippi from Rubiera (Figure 4a–b)**

The only other inscribed Etruscan ‘tombstones’ from northern Italy are two cippi found close to the Secchia river near Rubiera, on the southern edge of the Po Valley, c.50 km northwest of Bologna (De Simone 1992). The cippi were not found in an archaeological excavation and their precise context is unknown. However, the area has yielded ancient burials and it is plausible to interpret them as funerary markers. They are cylindrical in shape with rounded tops. The smaller monument (*cippo* 1) is 141 cm high and has a circumference of 115 cm, while the larger one (*cippo* 2) is 170 cm high with a circumference of 100 cm. Like many of the Bologna stelae, they are decorated in low relief with orientalising motifs, but they are very different in form, with their cylindrical shape and both the decorative friezes and the inscriptions running continuously round the monument. The inscriptions are located between the decorative friezes and run horizontally, from right to left. They are dated on stylistic grounds (of both decoration and inscription) to the later 7th century BC.

**Monuments Inscribed in Venetic**

Most of the funerary monuments inscribed in Venetic come from the two southern Venetic cities of Padua and Este and there are marked differences in the funerary practices of the two cities. A small number of related monuments come from other Venetic centres; here they are discussed under the headings of those from Padua and Este.

**Stelae from Padua (Figures 5–6)**

The characteristic form is a rectangular stone stele decorated and inscribed on one side only, made of limestone or trachyte. 15 examples are known of 6th to 4th (or early 3rd century) BC date, from different locations in the city of Padua (Padova), of which eight bear legible inscriptions in Venetic (Fogolari 1988; Prosdocimi 1988; Zampieri 1994), while a further example of the 1st century BC is inscribed in Latin (Lomas 2006; Zampieri 1994). Two others of a related type are known: one from Monselice and one from Altino (Figure 7; Martini Chieci Bianchi and Prosdocimi 1969; Scarfi 1969–1970; Zampieri 1994). None have been found in situ but they are assumed to have been set into the ground as tomb markers; this assumption is supported by the fact that in many cases the bottom of the stone was left rough and was presumably not intended to be visible. The monuments are quite small: only one is more than a metre high, the one from Altino, which has a height of 115 cm. The others range in height from 54 to 95 cm, while widths range from 45 to 69 cm. They have a central reserved panel on the upper part of the stone containing a scene incised or carved in low relief. The inscription runs round the panel taking up one, two, three or four sides; each is written from right to left, except for the 1st-century example in Latin, which is written from left to right.

**Cippi from Este (Figures 8–9)**

These cippi are small obelisk-shaped (pyramidal) stones, mostly made of trachyte, some of which bear inscriptions but no iconography. Cippi, of which there are also many uninscribed examples, may have been set up outside a group of tombs or a tumulus covering several tombs and are thought to mark a kinship group rather than individual burials (Balista and Ruta Serafini 1992; Fogolari 1988: 99–105; Marinetti 1988: 136–137, 147–149; Prosdocimi 1988: 247–259).
They are mostly dated to the 5th and 4th centuries BC, though their use could begin as early as the late 6th century and go on as late as the 3rd century. Twenty-four typical inscribed examples are known while there are also three stelae of other forms. Like the Paduan stelae, the stones often have rough bases presumably intended to be set in the ground and therefore not visible. They average 50–60 cm in height, while the largest is 150 cm tall and the smallest only c. 30 cm. They are normally rectangular rather than square in section, measuring from c. 14 × 20 cm to 31 × 40 cm above the rough base, reducing in dimensions towards the top. The inscriptions run vertically in one, two or three lines, in boustrophedon form when there is more than one line. Most cippi have inscriptions on one face only, but three have two adjacent sides inscribed.

**Ciottoloni from Padua (Figures 10–11)**

The ciottoloni are natural pebbles of glacially smoothed Alpine porphyry, with maximum dimensions ranging from 16 to 46 cm. They were probably used as funerary markers, although few have been found in any meaningful context. There are 18 examples incised in Venetic, of which 17 come from the territory of Padua or close by, while one comes from Oderzo; a further example comes from Serso and is inscribed not in Venetic but Raetic (found in the area northwest of the Venetic region). The inscriptions are mostly short but a few are longer; they tend to run round the longer circumference of the stone although more complicated arrangements also occur, including one figure-of-eight design. They lack any iconography except for one example of a stylised key design, which appears on the example with the inscription in the form of a figure-of-eight (Figure 11). They are often attributed dates from the 6th to the 1st centuries BC on a mixture of linguistic and general associational criteria, although none very secure. Calzavara Capuis et al. (1978: 188–190) have argued for an early date (mid–5th century bc or earlier) for all the ciottoloni on the basis of name-forms, palaeography and the archaeological context of one example from Piovego.

**The Cartura Stone (Figure 12)**

A unique monument found near Cartura, on the border between the territories of Este and Padua, is sometimes considered a variant of the ciottolone class, but is in fact quite distinctive. Unlike the ciottoloni, it is made of limestone and is not a natural pebble but has been worked into shape. It is oval in form but has a flat top and bottom and straight sides with bevelled edges at top and bottom (it is sometimes colloquially known as ‘the cheese’ because of its shape). It measures 27 × 17 cm and has a height of 100 cm. This stone bears one of the longest and most complicated of all the Venetic funerary inscriptions, with eight words, running right to left round the upper edge of the circumference of the stone. It is dated to the 6th century bc, among the earliest of the Venetic inscriptions. However, the stone was found without archaeological context and the dating is based on letter form and the absence of punctuation — an inherently weak basis, as John Wilkins and I have argued elsewhere (Whitehouse and Wilkins 2006: 542–543).

**Other Monuments**

There are a few other stone monuments that appear to have been used as funerary markers in the Venetic centres; these are stelae or cippi of various shapes, some quite irregular, and do not fall into any clear class. They are excluded from the present discussion.