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INSTITUT HISTORIQUE BELGE DE ROME
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Conceptualising early Colonisation



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eds

Contextualising early Colonisation II

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2016

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D/2016/351/2
ISBN 978-90-74461-82-5

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The Migrant's Identity: 'Greeks' and 'Natives' at L'Amastuola, Southern Italy

Gert-Jan BURGERS & Jan Paul CRIELAARD

The paper discusses two concepts fundamental to recent studies on ancient colonisation. The first concerns a shift away from approaching this phenomenon in terms of single events to a point of view that considers it in terms of processes. The second notion diverges from common conceptions of ancient colonial encounters, that interpret these encounters in strongly oppositional, ethnic terms of Greeks versus natives. In contrast, the authors emphasise the complexity of colonial encounters, questioning the idea that cultures can be readily identified from archaeological remains and associated with ethnic groups, either Greek or indigenous. In line with this, they insist on studying the dynamic and situational nature of identity, and to investigate how material culture and settlement organisation were used as media to negotiate social relations. Both notions are discussed with regard to southeast Italy and in particular the Taranto region, relating theory to fresh archaeological data.

1. Introduction

In many papers presented at this conference attention has been devoted to new approaches towards Greek and, more generally, ancient colonisation. In line with the title of the conference, in most of these approaches colonisation is studied in its wider geographical context. In the Greek case, research is no longer limited to specific groups of Greek colonists and their motives and background, but

now includes indigenous groups living in the regions they migrated to. Moreover, Greek dominance is no longer assumed; the nature of the relationship between migrants and indigenous communities is now a major research question in itself.

In the present paper we would like to focus on two related concepts that we consider of prime importance for the study of this theme. The first concerns a shift away from viewing colonisation in terms of single events to a point of view that considers it in terms of processes. The second concerns a shift from bipolar interpretative schemes emphasising a Greek-native divide, towards approaches that cherish a more diversified picture, not only of the immigrant presence in Italy, but also of that of autoctonous communities and of the encounters between the various groups. We will discuss these notions with regard to southeast Italy and in particular the Taranto region, relating theory to new archaeological data.

2. Colonisation as a process

Starting with the first notion, an important result of the new interest in Greek-indigenous interactions is the greater significance attributed to archaeology. In the wake of this, written sources are being re-examined in the light of archaeological data. The greater importance attached to archaeological sources has also stimulated a critical re-evaluation of the concept of colonisation itself. In earlier views, which rest on the ancient literary tradition, the

founding of a Greek colony is perceived as a single action or a sequence of individual actions involving the transplantation of a new population and a new culture to foreign soil. More recently, however, there has been a tendency to consider Greek colonisation as a form of migration that is to be analysed not so much as a single event but as a long, drawn-out process. Or, referring to the Annales School paradigm, there is a shift away from considering colonisation in terms of *événements* to a point of view that considers migration and settlement in terms of *conjunctures*.¹ This process encompasses amongst others the movements (plural!) of people, interactions between newcomers and local populations, the negotiation of local identities, the redefinition of material culture and the rearrangements of the landscape. It is archaeology in particular that has the potential to study such long-term processes.

As far as landscape and settlement patterns are concerned, especially systematic field surveys can provide useful information on longer term processes. This is illustrated by the surveys we have carried out during the last decades on the so-called Salento Isthmus between Taranto and Brindisi, on behalf of VU University Amsterdam (fig. 1).² It is increasingly becoming clear that this region was in motion in the 8th and 7th centuries. It saw an influx of

Greek migrant craftsmen, traders and settlers, reflected amongst others in the literary tradition which mentions Spartans founding the colony of Taras in 706 BC.³ But this is only part of the story. The field surveys provide testimony of an expansion in the number of indigenous communities, especially in inland regions of southeastern Italy. What we seem to witness is a gradual filling in of the landscape notably during the second half of the 8th century BC.⁴ The settlement pattern that developed in that phase displays a remarkably regular pattern as far as geomorphological location and spacing is concerned; almost all of the sites are of the village type, spaced some 10-12 km apart, often in defensible positions (fig. 2). This pattern continues into the interior of the Murge table land, and can most probably be related to the mobilization of and control over high-quality agricultural and pastoral resources. The aggregate extent covered by the individual new villages doesn't differ greatly, varying between 15 and 28 ha.⁵ However, a definite hierarchy emerges when we consider a number of sites reaching nearly 100 ha, like Oria, in the very heart of the Salento Isthmus.⁶ Significantly, Oria is also the only Iron Age site in this region that is known to have been continuously occupied from the Bronze Age onwards.⁷ In fact, it had already been a major fortified settlement in the Late

¹ Braudel, *Écrits sur l'histoire*; Bintliff, *The 'Annales' School*.

² See in particular Yntema, *In Search of an Ancient Countryside*; Burgers, *Constructing Messapian Landscapes*; Burgers and Recchia, *Ricognizioni archeologiche sull'altopiano delle Murge*; Attema, Burgers & Van Leusen, *Regional Pathways to Complexity*; Burgers and Crielaard, *Greci e indigeni a L'Amastuola*.

³ Cf. Lombardo, *I Messapi e la Messapia*, 10ff.; Πημα "Ιαπύγισσι", for discussion of ancient sources.

⁴ See especially Burgers, *Constructing Messapian Landscapes*; Attema, Burgers & Van Leusen, *Regional Pathways to Complexity*, pp. 119-133.

⁵ Burgers, *Constructing Messapian Landscapes*, pp. 174-179. These figures include open spaces between the settlement nuclei; the surface effectively covered with scatters varies between 4 and 10 ha.

⁶ An estimate based on all available information from archives, excavations and surveys; Yntema, *In Search of an Ancient Countryside*, p. 157.

⁷ Maruggi, 'Il territorio a Nord di Taranto'.

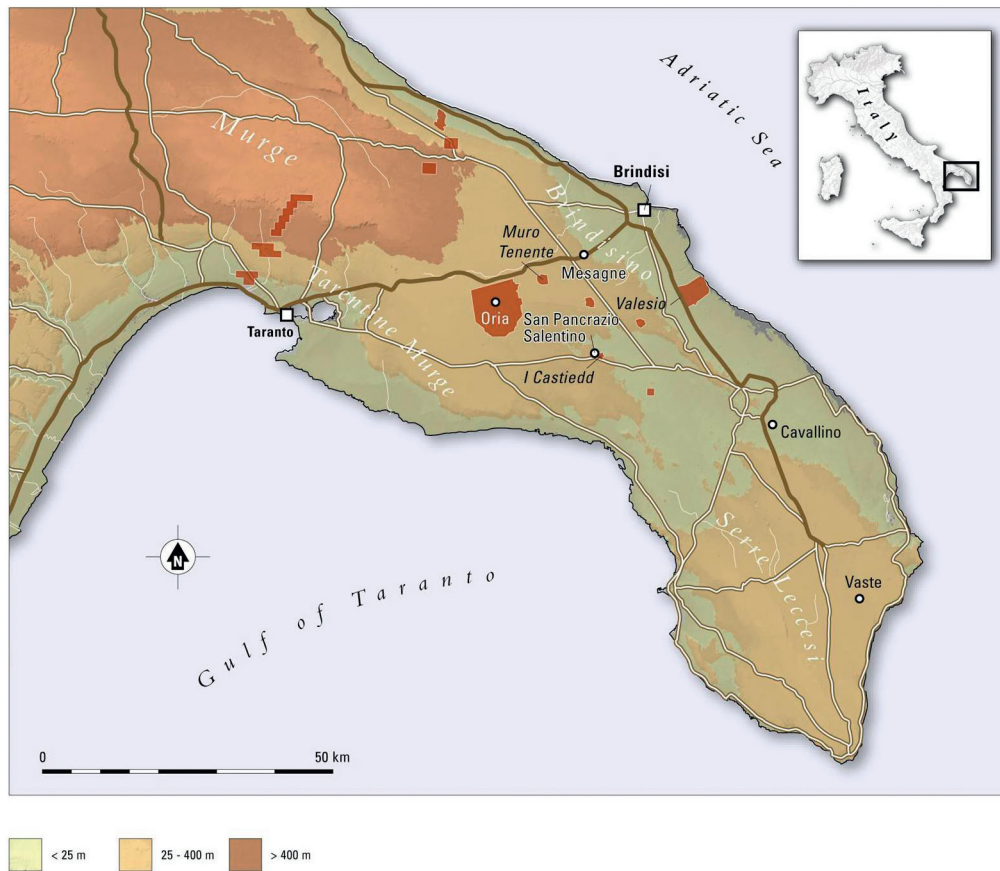


Fig.1: The Salento Isthmus area with the ACVU-survey areas in dark brown

Bronze Age. Apparently, it expanded again during the 8th century BC, when it became the largest population centre in the central part of the Salento Isthmus. Some of the new village sites that we just discussed, most probably originated within its territory.

These phenomena of internal expansion and migration are contemporary with the arrival of Greek settlers or even preceding this movement. The new, autoctonous sites are commonly located in dominant positions in the

midst of fertile lands, as was the case at the hill-top site of L'Amastuola, a little northwest of Taranto, which we were able to investigate through systematic field work (fig. 3). Elsewhere we have argued that behind such migrations there were dynamic social processes within the indigenous world, just as Greek migrations were also induced to a significant degree by internal processes in the Greek world.⁸ Population growth, socio-economic differentiation and related elite proliferation were assumably

⁸ See especially Burgers, *Constructing Messapian Landscapes*, 'Western Greeks in their regional setting'; Attema,

Burgers & Van Leusen, *Regional Pathways to Complexity*, pp. 119-133.

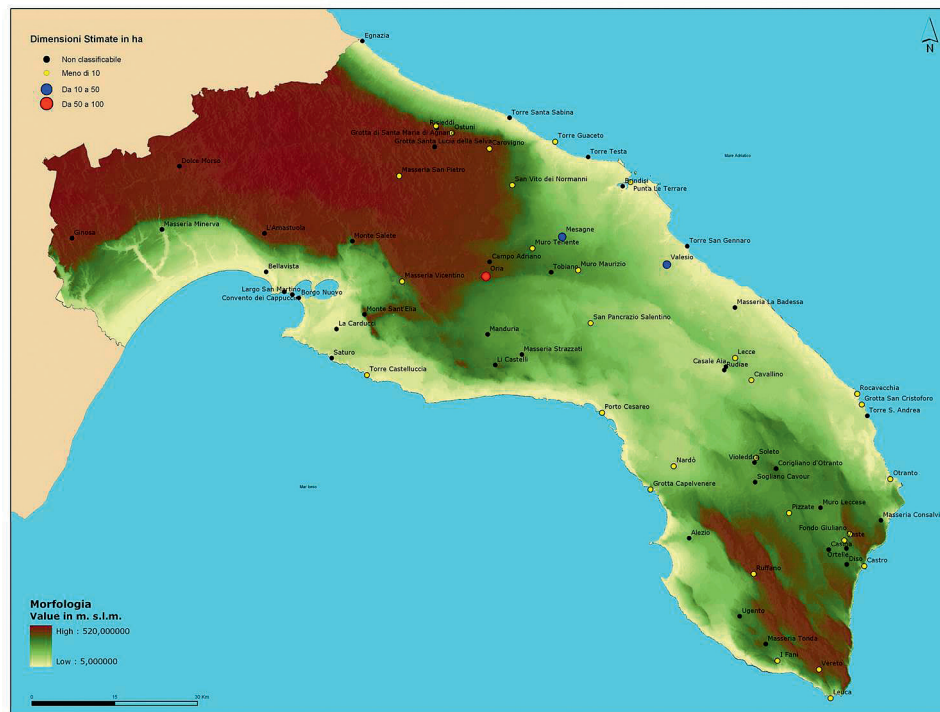


Fig. 2: The Salento peninsula with major late 8th/7th century BC sites



Fig. 3: Oblique aerial view of the L'Amastuola hilltop

among the most prominent factors, as well as the quest for control over agricultural and pastoral resources and external networks. Still much research is needed to further substantiate these theses. However, it seems difficult to ignore that these developments went hand in hand with internal colonisations, with a redefinition of territorial boundaries and – correspondingly – with a series of related conflicts between local communities. In our view, it is in this setting that groups of Greek migrants came to settle in southeast Italy. We propose that they did so not as dominant triggers of sudden change, but as new elements in the ferment of already existing shifting power factions within the autoctonous world.

3. Colonisation and mixed groups: the case of L'Amastuola

Another conclusion that can be drawn from the above argument is that the local indigenous world should not be viewed as a single entity, but as existing of highly differentiated groups. This brings us to the second notion that we consider of prime importance for a balanced recontextualisation of early Greek colonisation, that is the acknowledgement of the diversity and heterogeneity that existed within groups of Greeks and natives. This notion diverges from common conceptions of ancient colonial encounters, that interpret these encounters in

strongly oppositional, ethnic terms of Greeks versus natives. In contrast, and in line with more recent, cross-cultural studies of colonial encounters, we feel it is prudent to allow for a greater diversity and complexity of colonial encounters, resulting in mixed groups with hybrid identities.⁹ Most importantly, we have questioned the idea that archaeological remains allow us to identify well-defined cultures that can be equated with ethnic groups, either Greek or indigenous. Instead, following post-colonial studies on the role of agency, we prefer to take into consideration the dynamic and situational nature of identity, and the ways material culture and settlement organisation were used as media to negotiate social relations.¹⁰ This is especially relevant with regard to the site of L'Amastuola, that we have already mentioned.

L'Amastuola is located some 15 km northwest of the modern city of Taranto (fig. 1). The site occupies a flat-topped, elongated ridge that reaches an altitude of 200 – 213 m above sea level (fig. 3). It derives its name from a 18th/19th century *masseria* (landed estate) that crowns the highest point of the ridge, now abandoned. Since the test excavations carried out in 1991 by the late Graziella Maruggi, the site of L'Amastuola has claimed a key role in the debate on early Greek-indigenous relations.¹¹ Between 2003 and 2010 excavations, surveys and other field work were conducted at and around the site by VU University Amsterdam.¹² Our research has led us to conclude that the

⁹ Cf. Van Dommelen, 'Colonial constructs', *On Colonial Grounds*; Malkin, *The Returns of Odysseus*, 5-6; 'Postcolonial Concepts and Ancient Greek Colonization', 355-357; Antonaccio, 'Excavating Colonization'.

¹⁰ I.e. Moreland, 'Restoring the dialectic' 1992; Van Dommelen, 'Colonial constructs', *On Colonial Grounds*; Canuto and Yaeger, *The Archaeology of Communities*; Dobres & Robb *Agency in Archaeology*; Giangiulio, 'Deconstructing Ethnicities'.

¹¹ Maruggi, 'Crispiano (Taranto), L'Amastuola' (1988), 'Crispiano (Taranto), L'Amastuola' (1992), 'Crispiano (Taranto), L'Amastuola' (1996), 'Il territorio a Nord di Taranto'; Lipopolis, *L'Amastuola (o La Mastuola)*.

¹² Burgers & Crielaard, 'Greek Colonists and Indigenous Populations', 'Paesaggi del contatto', *Greci e indigeni a L'Amastuola*, 'Mobilità, migrazioni e fondazioni nel Tarantino arcaico'; Crielaard and Burgers, 'Communicating Identity in an Italic-Greek Community', 'Greek colonists and indigenous populations'.

earliest traces of settlement dating to the late 8th century BC reflect an apparently thriving indigenous community living in oval huts and using matt-painted and impasto ceramics. L'Amastuola was one of these new, native foundations emerging in the bustling decades of the second half of the 8th century. From ca. 675 BC onwards, however, the site is characterized by a more heterogeneous material culture, combining 'typical Greek' elements, such as rectangular house plans and archaeologically visible burial customs with 'typical indigenous' features, including agger-type fortifications, oval huts, indigenous ceramic repertoires and grave stelae. We hypothesize that from that time onwards, Greek migrants and indigenous inhabitants became gradually integrated, developing their own, local culture. In our view, indeed the L'Amastuola community was composed of mixed groups of various backgrounds in a kind of open settlement as discussed in Massimo Osanna's contribution to the present conference. The major issue of course, which however is rarely raised, is how this can be convincingly argued without falling into the trap of traditional cultural-historical reasoning along the lines of 'pots equal people'. And here we reach the cardinal point of our approach, which acknowledges the dynamic and contextual nature of identity and of the use of material culture to express it. This can be illustrated with the help of a number of specific contexts from both the settlement and the necropolis at L'Amastuola.

First the settlement, as found on the so-called south terrace of the L'Amastuola hill top. Under one of the dwelling complexes that we

excavated we found an indigenous type of hut that after the mid-7th century was replaced by a Greek-type, rectangular dwelling (fig. 4).¹³ Significantly, there were no signs that this hut met a violent end. In fact, more or less the contrary is true, since part of the hut's foundation stones were re-used for constructing the house. Its location in exactly the same place and its similar orientation seem to suggest that hut and house represent two consecutive phases of continuous inhabitation on this particular spot, most probably by the same people. Moreover, in both phases the inhabitants used a mixture of Greek and indigenous types of pottery. In this particular context therefore, the 'Greek' building style is unlikely to have been ethnically motivated. Rather, it can be argued to express the wish of its inhabitants to conform to new living standards.

A similar argument can be held with regard to the necropolis of L'Amastuola, some 800 meters south of the hilltop (fig. 5).¹⁴ It was partly excavated by the *Soprintendenza* in 1988. According to the excavator, Graziella Maruggi, the necropolis dates between 675 and the mid 5th century BC. This would closely link the graveyard to the contemporary settlement on the hilltop of L'Amastuola. The necropolis turns out to be organized in clusters of tombs that are located on top of slight elevations in the landscape, separated by small gullies. Within each of the three major clusters identified so far, dozens of burials have been found, of both adults and children. These burials have close parallels in those of the *polis* centre of Taras, underneath modern Taranto. Consequently, ever since their discovery they have been identified as burials

¹³ See in particular Burgers and Crielaard, *Greci e indigeni a L'Amastuola*, pp. 47-91, figs. 3-23/3-24.

¹⁴ Maruggi, 'Crispiano (Taranto), L'Amastuola' (1988), 'Crispiano (Taranto), L'Amastuola' (1992), 'Crispiano (Taranto),

L'Amastuola' (1996), 'Il territorio a Nord di Taranto'; Lippolis, *L'Amastuola (o La Mastuola)*. Cf. Waagen, 'La necropolis arcaica de L'Amastuola'.



Fig. 4: Trench 5 of the ACVU-L'Amastuola excavations. Rectangular house partly covering a previous hut

of Tarentine Greek colonists who had started to move inland. The tomb type (rock-cut fossae), burial customs (inhumations in supine position) and the cemeteries' location (at a distance from the settlement, forming a separate necropolis) all seem to stem from the Greek milieu. On the other hand, this presumed Greek character of the burial customs deserves a more balanced appraisal. For instance, like in many indigenous and colonial-Greek cemeteries, at L'Amastuola Corinthian pottery forms an important category of the funerary assemblages. Apparently Corinthian and Corinthianizing pottery had distinct funerary connotations. We are probably wrong to eval-

uate this pottery in ethnic terms. It is more likely that in the Italic world for Greeks and natives alike Corinthian ceramics were connected first of all with ideas about what was proper burial. We may say that Corinthian or Corinthian-style pottery was part of a supra-local 'burial language'.

Yet other elements in the same necropolis seem to express a different type of 'language'. This is the case with a life-size stele of indigenous type found in the midst of the otherwise Greek-style necropolis (fig. 6).¹⁵ The stele was retrieved in one of the cemetery clusters, but not *in situ*. It was broken into two pieces, which were lying face-down among many other

¹⁵ Burgers, 'La stele di L'Amastuola'.



Fig. 5: Location of Archaic necropolis

cemetery-related features such as cover stones. Both the front and back of the stele are carefully dressed, as are the two slightly concave flanks. At its top, left and right, the stele carries upward-pointing projections, which, however, are partly broken off. The form of the stele conveys an anthropomorphic impression. In this regard, a parallel may be found in the well-known Daunian stelae, the anthropomorphic identification of which is confirmed by all kinds of incised decoration such as hands,

cloths and personal ornaments. However, on the L'Amastuola stele, decoration is limited to zigzag motifs. Most evident is the double zigzag line that runs horizontally along the middle of the stele, which can possibly be interpreted as a waist belt. This kind of decoration, as well as the form of the L'Amastuola stele, have their closest parallels in neighbouring Salento, amongst others at the indigenous sites of Cavallino, Mesagne and Muro Tenente. In view of this, it must be observed that the presence of

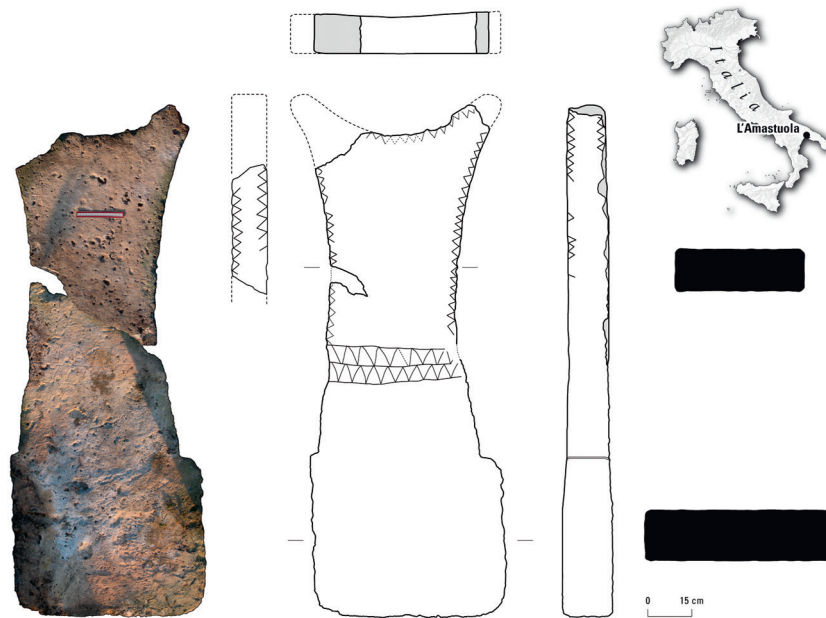


Fig. 6: Drawing of stele

the stele is at odds with the otherwise Greek-type funerary elements. It can be argued that with this stele some individuals at L'Amastuola had chosen to add a native touch to the common supra-regional burial language. The reason for doing so may have been to give expression to their indigenous identity, but also to refer to other aspects of their social identity. First, if compared to the corpus of Daunian steles, we can arguably identify the representation as female and consider it an expression of gender. Second, conspicuous grave markers of this kind are likely to express also high status. In this regard the erection of such a stele at L'Amastuola may be seen as an expression of elite solidarity with peer groups in the indigenous world.

To conclude on the topic of identity, there are other contexts in which material culture seems indeed to have been consciously employed to express ethnic affiliations. This may be the case with two ritual deposits in the settlement of L'Amastuola.¹⁶ They were excavated in locations that are some 22 m apart from each other: one inside an indigenous hut and using preponderantly matt-painted wares (fig. 7), the other in an open setting and employing mainly Sub-Geometric dining equipment next to a minority of pots of indigenous type (fig. 8). The two depositions are more or less contemporary and the ritual in question seems comparable. They concern communal eating and drinking, food sacrifices, and ritual destruction of dining equipment. In both cases,

¹⁶ See in particular Crielaard, 'Le indagini di scavo sulla collina de L'Amastuola (2003-2008)'.



Fig. 7: Selection of matt painted pottery from deposition within indigenous hut

the selectivity in types of pottery seems to be significant. Probably Greeks and indigenes were each having their own celebrations or may have celebrated together but then carried out rituals in accordance with each others' traditions.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, these examples emphasise how complex the issue of identity is in Greek colonial contexts. From a cultural-historical perspective, the site is characterised by a heterogeneous material culture. However, aspects of material culture seem to have been variously used to express a range of identities depending not only on the ethnic background of groups or

individuals but also on time, place, gender and status. This is what is intended with the study of the dynamic and situational nature of identity. In our view, the Archaic community of L'Amastuola should be interpreted in such terms, that is as being composed of a mixture of groups of various backgrounds. Living in a highly dynamic region in which many groups were on the move and in competition with each other, they redefined material culture and rearranged the local landscape in order to negotiate identity and social relations.

What follows from this approach to Greek 'colonisation' is that we have to be more cautious not to interpret phenomena belonging to the sphere of cultural encounters, exchanges and socio-political developments in oppositional, ethnic terms. We may reconsider to what

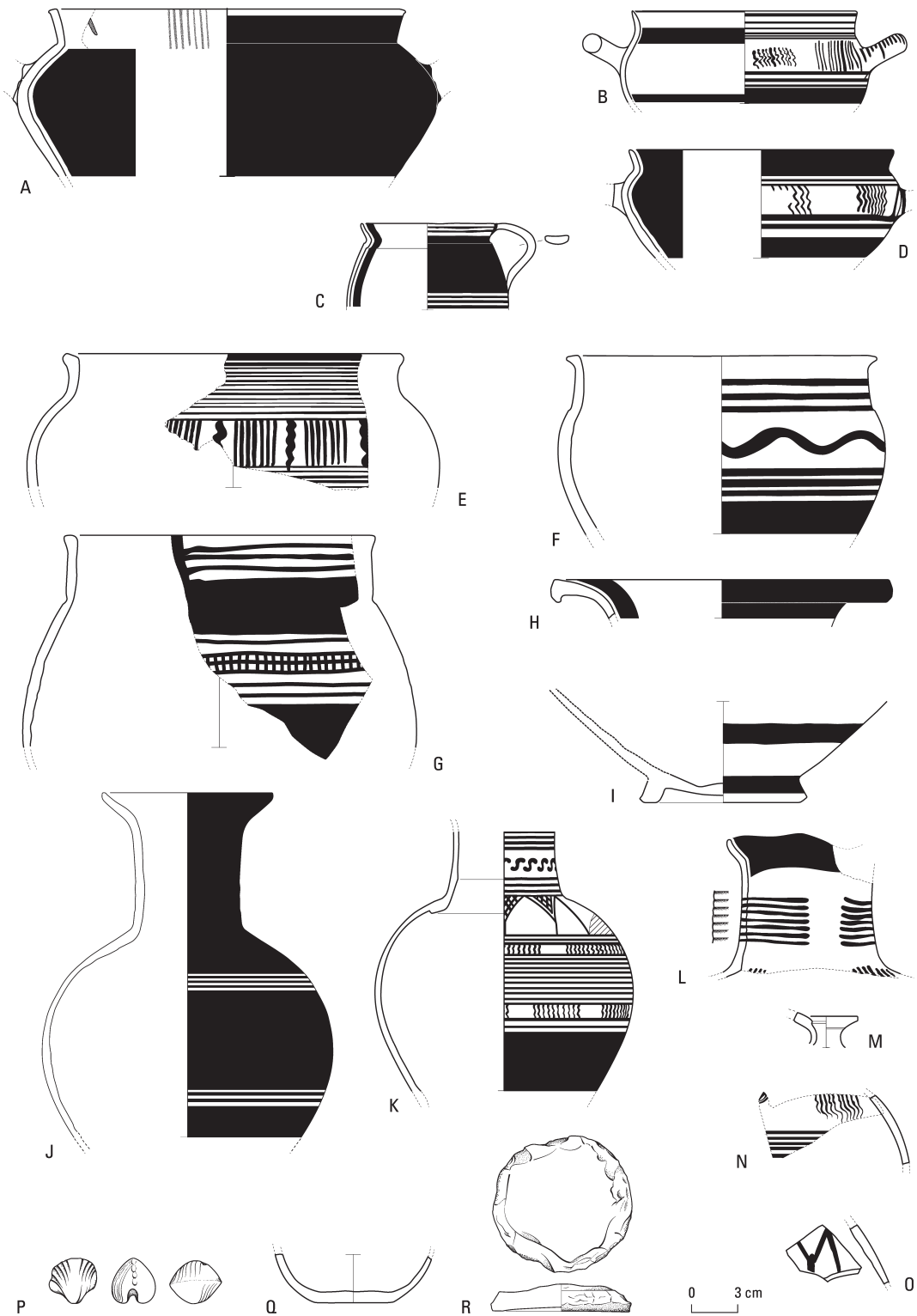


Fig. 8: Selection of pottery from Sub-Geometric ritual deposition

extend and for which cases such catch phrases as “Greek colonists and indigenous populations”, “Greek traders in native contexts”, “Greek-indigenous encounters” etc. are appropriate characterisations of the phase that follows on to first-contact situations. Such dualistic labels are hard to reconcile with what accommodation and middle ground is all about. Moreover, most scholars now agree that it was only in the 5th century that Greeks started to develop ideas about ethnicity that envisaged an oppositional rather than aggregative notion of other ethnic or cultural groups, bringing with it relatively sharp boundaries between the Self and the Other. It is probably more correct to give more credit to local or regional entities and identities in our attempts to explain the socio-cultural dynamics in Archaic southern Italy.

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