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1985

## Paestum: A City, a Civilization, a Heritage

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MARIO MELLO

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The visitor's impressions are supported by facts. The plains of Sele, where Paestum lies, have been among the most creative regions in Italy's long past. The area was a meeting place for different ethnic groups and cultures. Only the Greek "polis," however, managed to mold the region—or at least its southern portion—into an organizational unit and to give it political identity. The city walls defined the essential core of the administrative center.

After the Roman rule, which in many ways reproduced Greek models, the area witnessed different, more limited and segmented patterns of life. The various parts of the territory resisted being welded into a cohesive

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Mario Mello is a Senior Professor of Ancient History, the Director of the Archaeological Institute at Salerno University, Italy, and a Fellow of the *Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia* at Rome. Among his works are *Mens Bona*, *Paestum Romana*, *Ricerche sul territorio di Paestum nel l'antichità*, *Archeologia classica e archeologica cristiana nel territorio di Paestum*, and many scholarly articles.

Gerardo di Pasquale, who translated this article from the Italian, teaches foreign languages and literatures in an Italian high school and is a codirector of The Cambridge School of English, Agropoli, Italy. He has translated a number of literary and scientific works.



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS PRESS

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Paestum: A City, a Civilization, a Heritage

Author(s): Mario Mello

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 19, No. 1, Special Issue: Paestum and Classical Culture: Past and Present (Spring, 1985), pp. 9-22

Published by: [University of Illinois Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3332555>

Accessed: 15/03/2012 12:27

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whole once again, and the inhabitants started moving from the coast and the open, fertile lands of the plain toward the less pleasant but more defensible hills, where a new town, *Caputquae*, was founded in the Middle Ages.

The classical city of Paestum was still there but was ignored by later inhabitants of the area. Silent and constrained within the narrow limits of the city walls, Paestum was felt to be alien. Neglect did not, however, cause it to lose its past grandeur, which later came to be valued and treasured as a common heritage of the civilized world; rather, the period of oblivion helped preserve a unique, most precious record of the past.

By the time the Greeks decided to establish the colony of Poseidonia (later called Paestum) on the Sele plains between the late seventh and the early sixth centuries B.C., many generations of their ancestors, who had engaged in a profitable trade, had been frequent visitors to the region during preceding centuries. They had sailed all across the Mediterranean and were thoroughly familiar with the southern Italian and Sicilian coasts. One of the geographic features of greatest importance to them must have been the region traversed by the lower portion of the Sele River: its mouth was certainly an easy landing place, particularly useful to traders as the river gave natural access to the hinterland. People could meet along the river and easily exchange raw goods and manufactured articles. The vast plains stretching from the sickle-shaped coastline to the semicircle of hills, as well as the extensive inland region beyond, must have been quite attractive to the settlers.

These regions had all been populated since the most remote times and thus were inhabited when the Greeks first sailed along these shores. As evidence for these earlier settlements one may mention the famous prehistorical necropolis of Spina-Gaudo, just north of Paestum; the prehistorical site of the area that was later enclosed within the walls; the “*Madonna del Granato*” cave on the slopes of Calpazio Hill, where Capaccio Vecchia lies, which was inhabited from the middle and late Bronze Age down to the sixth century B.C.; the protohistorical finds discovered on the hill, exactly in the location where the medieval town was founded, as well as the “*Villanovian*” finds unearthed near Capodifiume springs.

The memory of the first Greek visits of long ago was still alive between the seventh and the sixth centuries. But those Greeks—coming, it seems, from Sybaris, a city on the Gulf of Tarentum and a more ancient colony of Magna Graecia—who began to establish the city that they called Poseidonia after Poseidon, the god of the sea, approached the Sele plains with a different outlook. They no longer came merely to trade but to settle there and found a city. Hence they looked for a place that would allow them to prosper and that could easily be defended against anyone who

might try to attack and seize it. A Greek “polis” (city) was actually a state with all the required defining characteristics.

The settlers chose the southern part of the plains, about fifteen kilometers wide and bounded on its northern side by the river Sele which was, and continued to be in later periods, both a geographical and a cultural dividing line. To the west, the area was bounded by the sea; to the east and south, it was enclosed by a crown of hills, rising from Calpazio (including Monte Soprano) and stretching as far as the Cilento hills and the cliff on top of which the nearby town of Agropoli would be built. The southern border must, however, always have been quite indefinite.

This was a land with a plentiful water supply and fertile soils, with natural boundaries that the city had to control at all cost. The Greeks tried hard to impose a functional unity on the region, linking its essential components (the sea, the Sele River, and the hills) with its urban center. The latter rose in the middle of the plains, not far from the sea, on a slight calcareous rise and on the right bank of a small salt-water stream, today called Salso or Capodifiume.

Most important for Poseidonia’s position with respect to the surrounding countryside was its linkage with Calpazio Hill, which the author believes originated along the Capodifiume River. This river flowed along the western side of the walls protecting the city and joined it to the slopes of that hill at the point where the springs form a wide, living basin.

Calpazio Hill was of vital importance to the area: it was an observation post with a commanding view of both the arch of hills that connected the populations of the hinterland with those of the plains and of the course of the Sele River which, with its intense trading activities, was at that time a border and a meeting place. The hill also dominated an important corridor which Poseidonia soon used to penetrate further inland (as evidenced by seventh- and sixth-century votive objects found in the area called Rocca-daspide), but through which threats were also likely to come. It is therefore probable that the Greeks attached military significance to Calpazio Hill. The hill may also have served as a cult center. It has erroneously been believed that no use was made of Calpazio Hill until the late Roman Empire period, when Paestum’s inhabitants abandoned the city and the plains, fleeing from malaria and the Barbarian invasions. However, archaeological excavations have supplied evidence that the Greeks settled on this hill when they first began colonizing the coast, that Romans took over after the Greeks, and that both had been preceded by a surprisingly large proto-historical settlement. To the north, the mouth of the Sele remained a significant landscape feature; after the founding of the colony, it assumed even greater importance as a point of juncture between the lower and the upper portions of the plains. This important function was proved by U.

Zanotti Bianco and P. Zancani Monturo's discovery of the remarkable ruins of the temple of Hera, undoubtedly one of the most interesting archaeological discoveries in our century.

According to many scholars, this sanctuary might have had its origin in an earlier sacred building erected during the first Greek visits to these shores, long before they were penetrated by colonists. In fact, Strabo says that Jason, the legendary leader of the Argonauts, founded this temple. There is no proof of so remote an origin, but there is evidence that it was contemporary with Poseidonia's founding. The author is therefore inclined to think that the entire area was encompassed within the same general design. There is no doubt that the impressive Heraion (temple of Hera) on the Sele River had both a religious and a political function, since the very presence of this Greek temple on the left bank would have justified the claims of the Poseidonians that they spoke with the voice and power of the divinity to the people who lived beyond the river, on the right bank.

Although the southern boundary of the region cannot be defined precisely, it is certain that, on the southern side, the promontory where Agropoli lies today is an extremely interesting site, as it enclosed and had a view of the plains. The Greek presence there is proved by archaeological finds being unearthed at the top of that promontory. Here the temple of Poseidon is most likely to have been built. This temple has not yet been found inside the city walls, but the city is bound to have contained it, since it was named after that god. From the heights of the temple above the sea, Poseidon could have kept an eye on the sailors' routes, dominated the city, and protected the southern boundary which must in any case not have been far from there.

Poseidonia, located in the center, must have formed quite an early link between the opposite ends. Midway along the road that connected the city with the hill of Agropoli lies the Linora archaeological center, which in the sixth century B.C. had the character of a sacred area but later, in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., was an ordinary settlement. This road continued beyond the smaller but by no means less important Solofrone River, the third river to flow into Poseidonia's sea. Another road, reminiscent of the one from Athens to Eleusi, extended to the Sele River to the north, linking the city with the area where the Heraion stood. The existence of archaeological sites along the sides of these thoroughfares leads us to believe that, until the end of the fourth century B.C., the population of the area was concentrated there. Another north-south axis, one lying farther inland, connected the city to Eredita and the hills to the south and was most likely quite early in origin. Many small centers existed along this axis as well, beginning with St. Vito on the Sele River, which was discovered recently and seems to have been the place of that saint's martyrdom.

Today, after a long period of neglect caused by the belief that in Greek times the sea reached almost as far as the city walls, attention is being paid to the area between these walls and the sea. Apart from attaching importance to the Sele estuary, many scholars are now inclined to believe that there must have been some port on the shore facing the city.

Thus Poseidonia was closely linked with the most important parts of the region. Objects dating back to the sixth century B.C. have been found outside the walls; other sites are located to the north, south, and east (Sele estuary, Linora, Tempa del Prete, the hilltop of Capaccio Vecchia), and still more are likely to be found on the shores and on the Agropoli promontory.

Either the choice of the city's site determined the shape of this network of essential roads, or these routes, owing their existence to geographic and historic factors, forced the colonists to build their city in this location. There are also good reasons to think that the earlier settlements, traces of which are frequently found in the substrata below settlements from the classical Greek period, accounted for the colonists' familiarity with the area and their making productive use of it.

Poseidonia continued in its organic development until the late fifth century B.C. and throughout this period enjoyed its status as a polis. City-state status afforded the prestige of autonomy and fostered an improved standard of civilization, but it also imposed the burden of self-defense.

The city of Poseidonia met the test brilliantly. Autonomy did not mean isolation; rather, it was characterized by the initiation of an intense cultural and commercial exchange not only with the Greek world, but also with the non-Greek populations of the hinterland and with those gravitating toward the important though still unknown city that arose on the banks of the Picentino River. These latter populations had exerted their influence and had made their presence felt in the northern portion of the Sele plains since the early Iron Age. Archaeological research over the last decades has shown these populations to have had similarities with those living in the areas where the Etruscan civilization flourished. This research confirms the previously underrated information supplied by Pliny the Elder, who says that the Picentino area between the rivers Sarno (as it seems) and Sele belonged to the Etruscans.

Poseidonia, then, had to maintain itself against these civilized populations, even though it seems that, starting from the middle of the sixth century B.C., these were in the grip of an economic recession which worsened during the fifth century, for such reasons as the Etruscan defeats of 524 and 474 B.C. that caused serious problems, particularly for the coastal cities.

When the archaeological sites at St. Vito on the Sele River will have been thoroughly explored and studied, the relationship between the two great

entities that faced each other on opposite banks of the river will be much clearer to us, since the location of the site leads us to believe that it must have served as a bridge between the two cultures. However, Poseidonia no doubt exerted various influences in several directions and, in turn, accepted others, though never passively; it absorbed and amalgamated them, was enriched, but never changed its cultural identity. In fact, apart from the various interpretations given by scholars, the splendid “diver’s tomb” paintings of 480 B.C., which have aroused a lively debate on the vast but insufficiently researched topic of Greek painting, clearly show the combination of Greek and Etruscan elements as well as the originality with which the Poseidonian artist relived, synthesized, and expressed them. If, as some believe, the extraordinarily broad and rich attributes associated with the Poseidonian Hera stem from a local cult of the great goddess of the substratum, then here again any possible native influence was absorbed not only into new and original forms, but also in ways consistent with Greek religious feeling which, after all, freely allowed the addition of peculiar local characteristics to those generally attributed to the gods of Olympus.

During the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., the creativity the people manifested as they absorbed and adapted foreign ideas made the city one of the liveliest Italiote centers. The three splendid major temples, which are unanimously regarded as the highest examples of Greek classical architecture, are undoubtedly the tangible result of experiences and values developed in Poseidonia and its environment. The flourishing cultural and artistic life was equalled by the development of political and economic life. Soon after the middle of the sixth century, Poseidonia was called on as the warrantor of a treaty between the great Sybaris, its motherland, and the Serdaioi; a copy of this treaty was kept in the sanctuary of Olympia in Greece. The city thrived particularly after Sybaris and its commercial empire fell in 510 B.C. Poseidonia, along with other colonies, filled the gap and took over a precious heritage. There are some who believe that the mysterious sacred underground building discovered in the center of Poseidonia, with its eight splendid bronze vases, the black-figured amphora, and the long metal spikes, was at that time a cenotaph dedicated to Is, the founder of Sybaris, in order to emphasize the cultural link with that important colony.

Poseidonia became rich in every sense of the word. The city and its surrounding area formed a well-structured whole. After the construction of the so-called Basilica (Temple of Hera) in about 550 B.C., the so-called Temple of Ceres (or rather Athena) was built in about 500 B.C., along with a number of other sacred buildings, followed in about 450 B.C. by the Temple of Neptune (or rather Hera), which in its matchless impressiveness reflects and symbolizes the splendor of the polis.

Even when Poseidonia was still in the heyday of its prosperity and devel-

opment, the dangers that were to bring about deep and irreversible changes already loomed on the horizon.

Toward the end of the fifth century, the Lucanians, an inland Italic people who had been jealous of the city's wealth and covetous of the fertile lands of the plains, made their presence felt. They eventually conquered the city and ruled it until the Romans took over in 273 B.C.

The historical interpretation of the Lucanian period has been much debated. In the past, great importance was attached to a statement by Aristoxenos of Tarentum, who lived in the fourth century B.C., claiming that in his time the residents of Poseidonia reverted to a "barbarous" condition, that they changed their language and customs and came to celebrate just one festival during which they would collectively engage in nostalgic reminiscences about the "good old days" and would recollect ancient names and institutions. The Lucanians were thought to have been responsible for this regression to a barbarous estate (Aristoxenos, however, blames the Etruscans and, possibly, the Romans).

According to the schematized picture of the era produced by some scholars, the Greek and Italic populations were in sharp conflict with one another, as evidenced, in these scholars' opinion, by the change of the Greek name of Poseidonia to Paistom = Paestum (we are not sure, however, just when this renaming took place; some think it was a result of the Roman conquest).

Research done in the last decade is providing evidence that the fourth century was in many ways a prosperous period for the city; a remarkable economic expansion and population growth occurred. With increased productivity and commerce, the city exerted greater influence in the northern part of the plains, as is shown by the red-figured vases produced in Poseidonia and found plentifully in the unknown city on the Picentino River that was mentioned earlier.

The rich funerary offerings and the wonderfully painted interior walls of a surprisingly large number of tombs that have recently been unearthed demonstrate that a great proportion of the inhabitants enjoyed wealth and comfort. It is on account of these tombs that those wishing to study and acquire knowledge about ancient painting rate Paestum as one of the most important sites.

We are led to believe that in the fourth century the city, already made rich by its ownership of fertile lands, increased its wealth through profitable and intensified trade with the hinterland, to which the ruling Lucanians formed a natural connection. Other facts, moreover, rule out too serious a degree of "barbarism." Great ceramic artists like Assteas and Python still took their inspiration from the Greek tradition: the inscriptions on their vases are in Greek. Poseidonia-Paestum, like so many other centers, shows how deeply Greek culture influenced the Lucanians, who, after all,

were not reluctant to assimilate it to their own civilization. However, although all these facts may diminish the credibility of Aristoxenos' assertions, it would be reckless to claim that there was no truth to them; today's scholars, reacting against earlier interpretations, generally think there was. Lucanian culture was certainly not absorbed completely by the superior Greek one and in many ways preserved its traditions, its religious rites, its social organization, and its artistic taste, as can readily be demonstrated.

Italo-Lucanian taste is clearly discernible, for instance, in tomb paintings, mainly those dating back to the fourth century. It is evident in the kinds of scenes and people depicted (particularly warriors, gladiators, and women mourners), in the clothing and arms, as well as in the crude realism, the choice of colors, and the tendency to emphasize details.

The city acquired a more complex aspect. It was no longer a fully autonomous city-state with complete dominion over its lands. But although its general characteristics changed somewhat, its high degree of civilization was preserved, its influence retained.

In the fourth century B.C., Paestum assumed a mediating function in the melding of the different cultures—Greek-Italiote, Italico-Lucanian, and Etrusco-Campanian—that met and coexisted on the Sele plains. With additional contributions from Apulia and Tarentum, the result was a composite civilization in which predominance alternated among cultures, depending on which sector of the cultural area one examines. More research needs to be carried out in this field; however difficult such investigations may prove, they are likely to reveal the existence of cooperative relations and a “modus vivendi” among the different cultural groups rather than the hostility and rivalry suggested by many scholars. The people living along the Sele River and in the area around the gulf of Poseidonia permitted a sort of “*koiné*” (commonwealth of nations) to emerge which had its roots in much earlier, long-standing relationships. The resulting equilibrium, however, proved to be neither well defined nor stable because of blows inflicted by political and military events that upset the entire Italiote and Italic world. Thus, in the second half of the fourth century, the Greek cities of Magna Graecia (or Greater Greece), urged on by Tarentum and under the leadership of Alexander the Molossian, reacted against the pressure from the Italic world. A Greek victory near Paestum aroused hopes for a recovery, but it was a short-lived dream, and the Greek cities never regained their former autonomy.

In the meantime, the rising star of Rome had appeared on the horizon. Paestum became a Roman colony in 273 B.C. It is likely, however, that Rome had long had an active interest in the Picentino and Sele valleys. In fact, in the fourth century the Romans were militarily engaged in Campania, and their politics closely followed the unsettled and dynamic scenario of Italic and Italiote events.

We do not know exactly how the Greeks and Lucanians responded to the arrival of the first settlers from Rome. There are no literary sources, and inscriptions do not attest to any substantial traces of Greek and Lucanian culture remaining in the city's public life. We are certain that the founding of the colony was a well-thought-out stage in a plan for the colonization of Southern Italy devised by the Romans after the wars against the Samnites and the struggle against the Italiotes and Phyrus.

To Paestum, once an independent state, being absorbed into the political and military organization of the Roman Republic meant the beginning of a thoroughly different form of existence. The pattern of this new way of life was determined elsewhere by a logic inspired by broader political ambitions that included complex arrangements for Italy's various ethnic groups. Paestum's population became more heterogeneous. The city was given a new structure that was to remain characteristic for subsequent centuries. Public works were undertaken, the city walls restored. To facilitate communications, transportation, and the development of agriculture, the existing road network was improved, new roads were constructed, and the rivers were canalized. Calpazio Hill, which had been used to advantage by the polis, was presumably still used and improved because of its excellent strategic position. Port facilities were restored as well. The colony was permitted to mint its own coin and kept this privilege for the exceptionally long period of about three centuries, until the Empire of Tiberius.

Paestum was a faithful ally of Rome at all times, even during the difficult years of the war against Hannibal, when many other important cities defected. Although it may be thought of as thriving and populous at the beginning of the conflict, the city was weakened at its end, as it had generously supplied men and materiel to the war and had suffered destruction at the hands of opposing armies that clashed in the area. The population decrease and economic crisis that affected most of Southern Italy during the second century B.C. were a direct consequence of the victory over Carthage as well as the result of prolonged neglect of the land. Strabo tells us that the Capodifiume River overflowed its banks and created a marshland that bred malaria; although he fails to say when this happened, we can be reasonably certain that it was during this period.

Nor did the first century B.C. begin happily. During the "*bellum sociale*," the Lucanians took up arms against the Romans. In addition, the slave war waged against Spartacus spilled over into the region, causing bloodshed in the Paestum countryside itself.

From a constitutional point of view, the *colonia Latina* of Paestum became a *municipium* after the Social War and later became a Roman colony. Although these events cannot be dated precisely, they occurred during the first century B.C.

Evidence seems to point to a general recovery beginning in Paestum after 70 B.C. The Temple of Peace was completed, a number of public

fountains were built, and there are traces of new arrangements within the city. The increase in activity noted locally was duplicated in many other Italian cities during the same period. The cult of the goddess Mens became widespread. This divinity received exceptional honors at Paestum, and the many expressions of her cult (a temple, coins, statues, inscriptions) reveal a vigorous religious life in the city.

The traditional thesis that crisis and malaria were irreversible and caused a steady, unstoppable decline should be rejected. The first records of the rose gardens of Paestum also date from the first century B.C. If at that time Paestum's roses enjoyed such fame, there must have been an extensive floriculture producing large quantities of highly priced, fine-quality roses that were traded as far as Rome. Vergilius tells us about the roses of Paestum blooming twice a year, Propertius mentions their special scent, and Ovid talks of them in connection with Paestum's mild climate. Also in the first century A.D., Columella, an expert in agriculture, indicates interest in the roses of Paestum, while Martial praises their bright-red color, their abundance, and, again, their scent. The Paestum countryside eventually became known as the land of flowers, and the poet says that the whole of Rome was flooded with rose garlands from Paestum even in winter. Martial also speaks of an extensive cultivation of well-known varieties of violets and privets in Paestum. It follows that the area could not have consisted primarily of swamps but must have contained fertile fields tended by skilled and well-organized agri- and floriculturalists. We may assume that not all of the large rose harvest was exported and that the remainder was processed into perfumes such as those produced in Campania and mentioned by Pliny.

The era between the end of the Republic and the beginning of the Empire was a period of continuing prosperity, as evidenced by inscriptions bearing the names of many well-established *gentes* who often had ties with Rome. These *gentes* appear to have come to Paestum about 50 B.C., and their descendants stayed there for centuries. There were also a large number of important citizens and patrons who may have provided benefits to the city. The many records relating to public life present a picture of anything but decay.

The year 71 A.D. saw an infusion of new life when Emperor Vespasianus allotted parcels of land in the region to veterans of the Misenum fleet in lieu of their severance pay. Although some of these veteran colonists did not stay on, their very arrival worked to Paestum's advantage since it marked a population increase and a consequent push into farming and other activities.

In the second century and during the first half of the third century A.D., the city enjoyed a happy interval. It was again considered an attrac-

tive location and lured people from elsewhere. The *Tullii Cicerones*, descendants of the great orator, may have come from Pompeii after the year 79 A.D. To them a move to Paestum surely did not mean a regression to small-town living in an out-of-the-way place. They held top public offices, enjoyed important connections, owned large properties, and had powerful friends in Rome. As can be seen from inscriptions, along with the *Tullii*, a number of *gentes* and other important individuals such as the *Digitii*, the *Vinicii*, and the *Valerii* frequently made Paestum their place of residence. Outstanding citizens built and restored temples and thermal baths, organized public athletic events at their own expense, and made donations. These patrons were rewarded with honors and statues bearing inscriptions at their bases that were erected as ornaments along the streets and in public places. Construction activity was intense during this period; marble-coated houses with porticos and swimming pools filled up the open spaces. The substantial number of inscriptions dedicated to the emperors are a show of loyalty through which the city, well represented by wise and powerful patrons, sought and probably received protection and favors from the capital. As far as is known, only in Paestum was the divinity *Mens* referred to as *Augusta* in second-century inscriptions. This addition of the name *Augusta* is a plea for and, at the same time, a flattering acknowledgement of assistance by that goddess of wisdom to the emperor.

Judging from evidence now available, the formerly abundant signs of prosperity decreased considerably in the second half of the third century. One has the impression that the number of important families dwindled and activities of all sorts declined, which in turn resulted in a lowering of the standard of living. There are documents from the first part of the first century in which Paestum, in the hope of gaining help and support, offered the title of patron to persons who, we are certain, resided elsewhere.

Similar symptoms of recession can be found in many other towns in Italy throughout the Empire. We know that the crisis, particularly in the southern cities, was brought on by deep and ancient causes. Nevertheless, a fourth-century inscription mentions the restoration of the aqueduct. Also, a remarkable volume of coin was in circulation. While other cities had a shorter and more difficult existence, Paestum was still an important center at the beginning of the Middle Ages.

The city first appears as officially Christian in a public document of the year 344, and quite early it became an bishopric see. This latter development cannot be dated precisely; it is assumed to have occurred during the fifth century, although Felice, the first known bishop, lived in the late sixth century. Perhaps as early as the beginning of the fifth century, a church was erected right in the center of the ancient city, almost di-

rectly opposite the so-called Temple of Ceres, and parts of its structure have survived to this day. Some time later, the very temple itself was turned into a Christian basilica around which a village arose during the first centuries of the Middle Ages.

These, then, are the signs of persistent vitality. Nor should we ignore another coastal village at the southern edge of the Paestum plains which seems to have been active throughout the Empire, until the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. At the other end, the center on the Sele River that was referred to earlier continued to show signs of life throughout the same centuries and seems to have endured even longer. While the two above-mentioned churches were in use, there was probably yet another on Calpazio Hill, since we have certain knowledge that a church in that location, called Santa Maria di Capaccio, was in need of restoration in the tenth century. This may have been the same church still extant today and now called Madonna del Granato, although it has undergone complete structural change.

During the late Imperial period, the people of Paestum came to look on the hill of Calpazio, which had always played a particularly important role in the history of their city, as the most familiar, suitable, and the safest place to settle. They gradually withdrew to it from the plains for a variety of reasons that included the city's decay and more direct, pressing local ones such as invasions. As the people began to abandon the city and the plains, malaria spread and contributed to the general state of neglect. When the old city had become so poor that it did not have enough strength and vitality left to defend itself, the salt-water Capodifiume River, breaking through the walls from the south, flooded the city. Its embankments having fallen into decay, the river changed its course at will and created swamps even more unhealthy and deleterious than the ones that had existed in the second century B.C. Calpazio Hill thus became the area's center. Although some use was still made of the lowlands, the former hierarchical relationship between sea, plains, and hill had been completely altered. One era had come to an end; another was definitely beginning: the Middle Ages.

Even the name of the glorious Greek and Roman colony was dropped. The new city, from which today's Capaccio originated, was called *Caput-aquae* (or *Caputaquis*, as it is usually identified in documents).

The decline of Poseidonia-Paestum, however, like that of many other classical cities, did not mean the end of a great civilization. Having survived inevitable periods of trouble, this civilization would become an inspiration to the development of others that followed it in subsequent centuries; eventually, it would give birth to and set the outlines for the civilizations of Europe and America.

The conception of human individuality, as expressed in the declaration of human rights by the United Nations General Assembly, matured in

Greece and was developed and disseminated by Rome. It is the idea that ascribes to humans the intellectual concepts of reason and freedom, grants them indefinite personal creative ability, and makes them the foremost determinants of their own destiny. It was in Greece that philosophy first arose as an intellectual discipline that pursues a deliberate investigation of human nature and promotes the elevation of spiritual life to ever higher planes.

The Greeks also produced a theory of the relationship between the individual and the state that asserted the rights of the former, and Socrates claimed conscience to be man's supreme guide. In Rome, Greek philosophy turned to considering humans in their more objective dimensions. By evolving ideas about the relations between individuals and the state that were gradually assimilated into their Empire, the Romans managed to create a political organization that by and large accommodated subjects as well as rulers, allowing both to develop a common culture. In defining the relations between individuals and the state, the Romans also created a new branch of philosophy or science, jurisprudence, whose essential principles would endure to become the basis for any body of law and any constitution in the civilized world.

The natural human desire to live in society was guaranteed fulfillment by Roman law, in which clear and definite rules ensured equality for everyone, safeguarded the liberty of the individual, and allowed for balanced self-realization.

It is regrettable that, absorbed in the realities of our daily lives, we are often oblivious to such an enormous cultural heritage, for we ought to know and treasure our past in order to understand the present and build a better future.

The fact that Paestum and its surrounding region were abandoned permitted unique records of Greek and Roman times to come down to us; these would have been obliterated or destroyed had the city experienced sustained growth or been the site of important later events. The Sele plain is one of the places where ancient and noble pages in our history have been preserved in abundance and with accuracy. The monuments of Paestum are themselves of immense value and represent a great heritage; moreover, they are the voice of the past calling us back to our roots and urging us to know our own civilization and our innermost being.

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