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Ancient Greek Civilization in Southern Italy

MICHAEL C. ASTOUR

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And each hour multiplies the wrongs,
And a day will come when there will remain no trace
Of your Paestums, maybe!

—Alexander Blok, "The Scythians"

Thus the great Russian poet warned the "Old World" in a powerful poem written on January 30, 1918, in the cataclysmic time of world war and revolution, calling upon it to join, before it was too late, the new Russia—barbarous, Asiatic, but open to all refinements of Western culture. While he perceived the Russians as "Scythians," "Paestum" symbolized for him the dead but hauntingly beautiful remains of a vanished world, and he half feared and half expected that the same fate would overtake the European civilization of his own time.

It was in Blok's swan song that I, as an adolescent, first encountered the name of Paestum, and I felt some of the poet's emotion associated with it. Many years passed before my dream came true and I stood, on a hot summer day, among the gold-colored pillars of Paestum's Doric temples. But to me they evoked not the decline and fall of the ancient world but, on the contrary, the beauty and vigor of its highest manifestation, the Hellenic civilization, transplanted into a strange country but retaining its unique essence till, centuries later, it became reincarnated in the cultures of Oscan, Roman, and modern Italy.

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*Michael C. Astour, a Professor of Historical Studies with Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, is the author of *Hellenosemitica: An Ethnic and Cultural Study in West Semitic Impact on Mycenaean Greece*. His articles, several of them on the subject of ancient Ugarit, have appeared in numerous scholarly journals in this country and abroad.*

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sand years later than in Greece, and the technology of metalwork was less advanced in the south of the peninsula than in its northern part. But it was southern Italy that was visited by Mycenaean Greek sailors during the Late Bronze Age. They even established an emporium at the site where the Greek city of Tarentum, with its magnificent natural harbor, was to flourish later. They were attracted to Italy by the prospect of purchasing copper in exchange for the beautiful artifacts of their homeland. Between 1400 and 1200 B.C., the connection with the Aegean world left its trace in the material remains of southern Italy. Its impact could have considerably accelerated the rise of local culture, in the long run, had it not been for the catastrophe that engulfed Mycenaean Greece around 1200 B.C., the time of the great series of migrations which is conventionally called the Invasion of the Peoples of the Sea and whose ultimate cause remains unknown. The link with Greece was weakened and soon broken when the Mycenaean settlement in Tarentum disappeared in what seems to have been a southward movement of tribes from north-central Italy.

These newcomers were probably the direct ancestors of the peoples who inhabited southern Italy on the eve of the Roman conquest, although we cannot be sure of this because they were illiterate and left no records of their languages. Their progress was slow: the Iron Age came to Italy around 900 or even 800 B.C., three or four hundred years after its start in Greece and the Near East. The country was very different from what it was to become later, containing no cities, and none of the olive groves and vineyards that, for the last 2,500 years, have been such distinctive features of its landscape. It was a land of small villages, scattered primitive agriculture, and especially cattle breeding with large-scale transhumance. Ancient tradition claimed that the Greek geographical name *Italia*, which originally applied only to the southern part of the peninsula, derived from the native (Oscan) *Vitelliu*, which is related to the Latin *vitulus*, "calf." The equally rural but considerably more developed Villanovan culture of northern and central Italy did not extend into its south.

Meanwhile, Greece passed through a period of mass destruction and violent reshuffling of populations. The great palatial cities of the Mycenaean Age were burned and abandoned, literacy had become extinct, maritime connections with East and West were interrupted, arts and crafts declined, and the country entered its Dark Ages. But under the ashes of the old, a new Greek civilization was germinating, and around 800 B.C. it suddenly emerged from the darkness and began to grow in complexity and to expand geographically with an amazing speed. What accounted for this Greek Renaissance? Perhaps the brilliant legacy of the Mycenaean Age was not entirely forgotten; perhaps the fragmentation of Greece into a multitude of relatively isolated little valleys and islands prepared the ground for the peculiarly Greek phenomenon of polycentrism which fostered competi-

tion between city-states and contributed to the perfection of applied arts; perhaps the ancient combination of royal and priestly functions prevented the formation of separate, hereditary priestly castes and, after the abolition of royal power toward the end of the Dark Ages, brought on the rise of secular societies; perhaps it was the fortunate geographical situation of Greece—close enough to the ancient civilizations of the Near East to profit from their cultural achievements, but far enough to be safe from conquest by one of the powerful, despotic Eastern empires. Probably each of these factors played a role in the genesis of Greek civilization in its political, economic, artistic, and spiritual aspects. Once started, this civilization moved ahead at a tempo unparalleled in human history. The Greeks, one might say, rushed from one phase to the next in the development of their political organization, artistic creativity, literary genres, and philosophical thought. No wonder that their progress was uneven and often contradictory, that revolutionary innovations coexisted with archaic beliefs and superstitions. Yet was not just this multiformity a potent component of Greek charm?

The population of European Greece and of its extension on the eastern shore of the Aegean Sea was growing. A previously rural society with a natural economy was becoming increasingly urbanized. The transition from monarchy to aristocracy caused the ruling class, along with their servants and retainers, to move to the centers of government. Itinerant artisans and peddlers settled there permanently and became the nucleus of the new middle class of merchants, seafarers, and owners of craftshops working for the market. Through renewed contacts with Phoenicia, the Greeks acquired much new knowledge that helped to transform their way of life. They took over the Phoenician system of weights and monetary values, improved their skills of shipbuilding and navigation (as seen from their designation of the Polar Star as “the Phoenician star”), and it is probable that their system of aristocratic councils and elected magistrates was influenced by Phoenician political models. Even more spectacular was the Phoenician impact in two other domains. The Greeks emerged from their long period of illiteracy by adopting the Phoenician alphabet and adjusting it to the phonetic and morphologic requirements of their own language. And they learned anew from Phoenician ivory carvings, embroidered fabrics, and embossed metalware how to produce representational, naturalistic works of art with human and animal figures instead of the linear, geometric, abstract decorations of their Dark Ages. Thus began the Orientalizing period of Greek art, which at first imitated the eclectic style of Phoenicia but soon found its own ways of expression.

Large commercial cities arose in advantageous points—at the starts of trade roads; on isthmuses, straits, and natural harbors; on islands athwart naval communication routes—among them Miletus, Samos, Phocaea,

Colophon, Chalcis, Eretria, Corinth, Megara, Aegina, soon followed by others. The cities needed imported food, metals, timber, hemp, and other raw materials. To pay for them, they had to export; and they soon found that their graceful painted vessels, their beautiful bronze- and silverware could be profitably sold overseas. Voyages by merchant adventurers resulted in discoveries of new, distant markets; trading posts were established here and there; news about fertile lands, plentiful spring water, safe moorings, commercial opportunities, friendly or weak natives came back to the maritime cities and aroused hopes and initiatives. As a result, a prodigious colonial expansion started in the first half of the eighth century B.C. Its main phase lasted for about 250 years and brought upon a manifold increase of the Greek-speaking domain around the Mediterranean and Black Seas. Each colonizing city-state acted on its own (cases of cooperation between two or more cities were rare); and each colony, in turn, became a new, independent political entity. Nowhere did the colonies reach deep inland. "We Greeks sit around the sea like frogs around a pond," said Plato, and according to the apt remark of Cicero, "It appears that the Greek coast formed, as it were, a fringe about the territory of the barbarians."¹

Two regions of the earliest and most extensive Greek colonization were southern Italy and Sicily. They were very similar to the Greek homeland. To be sure, their coastlines were nowhere as abundantly carved into bights, inlets, and promontories as the Aegean littoral; but they had the same climate, the same soil that was fit for wheat, olive, and vine—the classical Mediterranean triad. They also surpassed the other outlying areas of the Greek world in their cultural achievements, not only keeping abreast with the developments of their Grecian and Ionian metropolises, but also contributing on their own to the progress of Hellenic artistic, literary, and philosophical expression. However, Greek Sicily is a chapter by itself. For the ancients, be they Greeks or Romans, Sicily was not a part of Italy, and it will have to remain outside the limits of this essay. Even so, the subject of Greek southern Italy is so vast that it can be only adumbrated in these few pages. It was for a good reason that the Greeks themselves referred to southern Italy as *hè megalè Hellas*, rendered in Latin as *Magna Graecia*. Let us briefly list the Greek cities of southern Italy according to their origins, with the traditional years of their founding where these have been transmitted, approximate dates in other cases. (See map on page 36.)

The earliest Greek settlement in Italy was at the same time the farthest from home. In the first half of the eighth century, the Chalcidians, among the most active Greek colonizers, assisted by fellow Euboeans from Eretria and Cyme, settled on the island of Pithecusae (now Ischia), to be as close as possible to the copper and iron mines and the lucrative market of Etruria. In 757 B.C., they grew bold enough to build a city on the western coast of the fertile Campanian plain, which they named Cyme. The Romans called

it Cumae. Around 600 B.C., Cumae founded, thirteen miles to the east, the "New Town," Neapolis (Naples), which outgrew and outlasted its mother city. Around 525 B.C., Cumae built its harbor on the Bay of Naples, only four miles away, under the name of Dicaearchia ("rule of justice"). The Romans later renamed it Puteoli ("little wells," now Pozzuoli) and made it a great commercial harbor. Another Chalcidian foundation, traditionally dated to about 730 B.C., was Rhegium (Reggio) on the Italian coast of the strategic Strait of Messina.

A prominent role in the Greek colonization of southern Italy was played by an otherwise rather unremarkable region of Greece, Achaea on the southern shore of the Gulf of Corinth. The Achaeans chose the eastern coast of Calabria (Italy's "toe") as the arena of their activities. Here they started from creating two large and prosperous cities with wide hinterlands and flourishing agriculture: Sybaris (720 B.C.), more to the north, and Croton (708 B.C.), more to the south. Alarmed by the founding of Tarentum and Locri, each of the two cities called for reinforcements from Achaea and helped to establish two new city-states: Sybaris founded Metapontum around 690-680 B.C. to check the expansion of Tarentum, and Croton established Caulonia on the approaches to Locri around 675-650 B.C. The two principal Achaean cities also planted several secondary colonies. Croton founded Petelia and Scylletium on the east coast of Calabria, Terina on its west coast, and (an exception in Greek practice) Pandosia high in the upland between the two seas. All of the Sybaritan colonies were located on the west coast: Laus, Scidrus, Pyxus, and, almost on the border of Campania, Poseidonia (around 700 B.C.). It is this latter city, later renamed Paestum, that deservedly forms the subject of this journal issue. The rationale behind the foundation of west-coast colonies was the desire of their mother cities to maintain direct communications with the Tyrrhenian Sea, avoiding the treacherous and jealously guarded Strait of Messina.

Taraes (Latin Tarentum, now Taranto) was established in 706 B.C. by a group of half-breed Spartans who did not fit into the rigid caste system of the Spartan state and of whom the régime was happy to get rid by peaceful means. With an excellent topographic sense, the Spartan pioneers chose for their settlement a most advantageous site between an inner and an outer natural harbor, an attractive port of call for all ships sailing from Greece to Italy and Sicily. The city prospered and eventually became the largest in Magna Graecia. Tarentum built two colonies on the opposite shores of the Italian "heel": Hydruntum (Otranto) and Callipolis (Gallipoli).

Locri, or more fully Locri Epizephyrii, was founded in 673 B.C. not, as one might expect, by the Ozolian Locrians on the Gulf of Corinth, but by the Opuntian Locrians on the Strait of Euboea in eastern Greece, a small

community not distinguished for its maritime activities. Perhaps they emulated their Chalcidian neighbors on the other side of the strait. Locri had for a long time maintained the most exclusive aristocratic régime in *Magna Graecia*: all power belonged, by law, to one hundred families. Locri, too, established two colonies on the western coast: Hipponium and (around 575 B.C.) Medma.

While the Achaeans were busy erecting Metapontum as a barrier against Tarentum, Ionians from Colophon landed on the open coast between Metapontum and Sybaris and founded Siris (around 670 B.C.). Not only did the new city intrude into what the Achaeans considered their own preserve, but it even succeeded in detaching Pyxus from the Sybaritan allegiance and forming with it a close alliance across the peninsula. Siris subsisted for a hundred and fifty years till it was utterly destroyed (around 520 B.C.) by a coalition of Sybaris, Croton, and Metapontum.

The other Ionian colony in Italy was established by the Phocaeans in rather dramatic circumstances. Phocaea was not one of the largest and richest Ionian cities, but it was second to none in producing daring sailors and colonizers. It was the Mediterranean Far West that attracted the Phocaeans: Massalia (Marseilles), the powerful Greek city in southern Gaul, was founded by them around 600 B.C. In 545 B.C., half of the population of Phocaea preferred to leave their city rather than to submit to the Persians and settled in Alalia, on the eastern coast of Corsica. But the site was too close to Etruria and to Carthaginian-held Sardinia, and the behavior of the Phocaeans was too aggressive for the colony to last long. Ten years later, a joint Carthaginian-Etruscan fleet attacked the Phocaean navy. The Phocaeans repulsed the attack, but with such heavy losses that they evacuated Alalia and fled to Rhegium. From there, following the advice of a Poseidonian citizen, they founded Elea or Hyele (Latin *Velia*) on the Lucanian coast between Pyxus and Poseidonia. These events mark the end of the great age of Greek colonization.² From then on, the western Greeks had to fight long and hard wars against the Carthaginians, Etruscans, and Italics simply to keep their possessions from being wiped out.

One important Greek city, however, was founded in Italy well after that watershed and as a result of a unique and exceptional undertaking. The initiative came from Athens—a city that was conspicuously absent from the colonizing ventures of the eighth to sixth centuries. In the fifth century, it was a great naval power, the head of an Aegean maritime empire; it had political and commercial interests in Italy and Sicily (including a steady market in Etruria for its exquisite red-figured pottery) but no outpost in the west. Already Themistocles, the father of the Athenian maritime build-up, had plans of an Athenian colony in Italy. But from 480 to 446 B.C. Athens was engaged in incessant wars against the Persians, Peloponnesians, Boeotians, and some of its own unruly allies. And once peace

was established, Athens simply did not have enough men for a distant colony: many fell, many others were distributed as soldier-settlers throughout its own empire. Pericles, the leading democratic statesman of Athens, issued an appeal to all Greek cities to take part in founding a Panhellenic colony on the site of Sybaris that had been destroyed in 510 B.C. The new city was to be free from the constricted particularism of Greek city-states and to be built in the spirit of the latest rational methods. The response from wide circles of Greek society was enthusiastic. Many prominent men from different communities enrolled as citizens of the new city, among them the philosopher Empedocles of Acragas, the sophist Protagoras of Abdera who wrote the city constitution, the historian Herodotus of Halicarnassus, the architect-urbanist Hippodamus of Miletus who drew the master plan for the city, and the exiled Spartan general Cleandridas. The traditional religious procedures were not neglected: the project had to be approved by the Delphic oracle. Lampon, an interpreter of oracles and a person close to Pericles, was charged with overseeing the foundation of the new community. The city was established in 443 B.C. not far from the old site of Sybaris and received the name of Thurii. From the point of view of Athenian interests, Thurii proved to be a disappointment. Athenians formed only one-tenth of its citizen body and did not succeed in leading it toward a pro-Athenian policy. But as an experiment in Panhellenic statehood, Thurii was a complete success in a period when many homogeneous Greek communities were torn apart by internecine struggles.³

It must be remembered, however, that Thurii as well as its new neighbor, Heraclea (founded by Tarentum in 433 B.C.), were actually refoundings—the former of Sybaris, the latter of Siris—and did not expand the Greek holdings in Italy.

The general character of the Greek colonies in southern Italy emerges more clearly when they are compared to the cities of their Etruscan rivals in the northern part of the peninsula. The Etruscans, too, came to Italy from the East, apparently at about the same time as the first Greek settlers, and they, too, developed a sophisticated urban civilization and deeply influenced native Italic tribes, most of all the early Romans. But their civilization, despite its multiple origins, was nevertheless a purely Italian phenomenon. An Etruscan was nowhere at home but in Italy. Not so an Italian Greek. The cities of Magna Graecia were particles of Aegean Greece, bodily transplanted across the sea and uncontaminated with any alien elements. An Italian Greek spoke the dialect of his mother city, dressed in the same fashion, worshipped the same gods, built temples and public edifices in the same architectural style, participated in athletic and poetic contests at Olympia and suchlike sites of Greece, and was fully aware of the latest artistic and literary trends of the old country.

Greek civilization, however, was anything but uniform. Within a com-

mon and rather elastic framework, there was a great deal of individuality. Each region, even each city, had its physiognomy. Magna Graecia had its specific traits that distinguished it from other parts of the Greek world, among them its peculiar devotion to mystic cults and secret fraternities such as Orphism and Pythagoreanism. Orphism (if this immense and controversial subject can be compressed into a few words) was a syncretistic religion, an artificial but skillful synthesis of many disparate elements of pre-Greek, Greek, West Semitic, Egyptian, Iranian, and Indian origin. It first became discernible as a powerful undercurrent of Greek religious thought in the middle of the sixth century. Unlike the official religion of Greek city-states, which was part of public life and relied on traditional rituals rather than on written doctrine, Orphism was universalist; it promised individual redemption and immortality, and it was a book religion like Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. There existed a large body of Orphic writings of cosmogonic, ritual, moral, and eschatological contents, which were ascribed to Orpheus, allegedly an ancient singer and prophet but actually a creation of the sixth century that was retroactively interpolated into old myths. Orphism remained a closed sect for initiated members only—and this probably accounts for its lack of success in taking over and dominating the entire society, as the other book religions succeeded in doing—but its influence was nevertheless very great. It inspired many pages of Euripides, Aristophanes, and Plato, and its integration into Pythagoreanism assured its partial survival as a component of more than one philosophical school. There were two centers of Orphic literature in the sixth century, Athens under the Peisistratidae and southern Italy. There are good reasons to think that the latter was the cradle of the Orphic movement. Orpheus is first mentioned by the poet Ibycus of Rhegium, and Plato ascribed one of the basic tenets of Orphism to “a clever mythologist, perhaps some Sicilian or Italian.”⁴ Of the eight extant golden tablets with Orphic texts (fifth to third centuries B.C.), six were found in southern Italy, one near Rome, and one in Crete. Southern Italy was more affected by the spread of Orphism than any other part of the Greek world.

To Croton belongs the credit for the rise and development of the esoteric religio-philosophical school of Pythagoreanism. Pythagoras, a character that became semilegendary in the transmission of his disciples, was born in Samos (the traditional date is 571 B.C.), traveled extensively over the Near East, and around 530 B.C. cut his ties with his home island and settled at Croton. There he created a secret brotherhood of initiated and totally committed members which was at once political, religious, and philosophical. Politically, it was ultra-aristocratic and aimed at imposing its exclusive rule upon the entire community. Religiously, it took over most of the Orphic tenets and practices (and one may wonder how great was

Pythagoras' personal contribution to the arsenal of Orphism) and combined them with the veneration of the teacher as the prophet of truth and a semi-divine being. Most important was the philosophical teaching of Pythagoras, which can be defined in the shortest and most simplified terms as a view of the world as consisting of numbers bound together by their ratios into an orderly entity called by him *harmonia*. His greatest achievements were in the fields of arithmetics, geometry (such as the famous theorem on the sides of a right-angled triangle), music (mathematical theory of tones), and astronomy (spherical form of the earth, earth's rotation around an invisible central fire—a partial anticipation of the Copernican system—and an intuitive application of mathematics to the movement of heavenly bodies). Pythagoreanism gained much following in the aristocratic circles of Croton and other south Italian cities, but its aggressive political action met with a vigorous resistance from broad masses of citizens. Pythagoras himself had to flee from Croton to Metapontum, where he died in 497 B.C. His brotherhood later succeeded in gaining power over Croton but was overthrown after the middle of the fifth century. Many members were killed, others fled from Italy, and the movement came to an end as an organized force. Only then was part of Pythagorean teaching committed to writing by Philolaus; of the older Pythagorean works nothing remains. But the philosophy of Pythagoras deeply influenced the Platonic, Stoic, and Neoplatonic schools of subsequent centuries.

Other famous citizens of Croton, also in the sixth century, were Milo, the champion athlete who won seven Olympic and six Pythian victories and was, in addition, a statesman, a general, and a disciple of Pythagoras—a fine specimen of the aristocratic ideal of *kalos kagathos* or “perfect gentleman”; and Democedes who, according to Herodotus, was the best physician of his time, when Crotonian medicine was generally regarded preeminent in the Greek world, and who served in turn as the public medical officer at Aegina and at Athens and as the court physician of Polycrates, the tyrant of Samos, and of Darius I, the king of Persia.⁵

The Phocaean colony of Elea became another center of philosophical thought and instruction in Italy. Its initiator, Xenophanes, was born in Ionian Colophon but left it in 545 B.C., in the wake of the Persian conquest of Ionia, and after many wanderings settled in the newly founded Elea, where he died around 473 B.C. He expounded his philosophical views in hexametric verses, some of which have survived. He sharply attacked Greek mythology, in which he saw nothing more than the naive fairy tales of primitive ages, and the polytheistic and anthropomorphic character of Greek religion. He asserted the existence of “one God, greater than any god or man, not like mortals either in form or in thought, swaying all things without toil by the thought of his mind, and abiding ever in the same place, not moving at all.”

The true founder of the Eleate school was Parmenides, who flourished in the first half of the fifth century. He started as a Pythagorean but later developed his own system. He, too, wrote a long philosophical poem in epic verse, "On the Nature," in which he stated, anticipating Descartes, that "to think and to be is one and the same." He proceeded from the premises that (1) what is, is and cannot not be; what is not, is not and cannot be; (2) what is, can be thought or known, and uttered or truly named; what is not, cannot. There is no nonbeing, hence no void; therefore, being is indivisible, unchangeable, immobile, and uninterrupted. It is infinite in time but not in space where it forms the most perfect whole—"a well-rounded sphere." His disciple Zeno (whose "acme" is put at 464-460 B.C.) tried to prove by paradoxical syllogisms that motion does not exist, and he opposed the protoatomistic theory that the world consists of minute units or monads set in a void. Another student of Parmenides was Melissus of Samos, a philosopher, statesman, and naval commander. He defended the system of his master and made categorical statements to the effect that the testimonies of our senses are deceptive and that reality can be comprehended only by reason.

Rhegium produced at least two men whose achievements transcended the limits of their city and region. One of them was Ibycus (latter part of the sixth century), a scion of a rich aristocratic family, who exchanged an easy life at home for the career of a minstrel wandering through the Greek cities of Italy, Sicily, Greece, and Ionia, till he was allegedly killed by robbers near Corinth. His death gave rise to the legend (made popular by a ballad by Schiller) of the "cranes of Ibycus." Posterity included him among the nine outstanding Greek lyric poets. Little remains of the seven books of his poems, but we know that he was particularly renowned for his erotic poetry. Cicero, who could still read his works, noted that "above all, however, Ibycus of Rhegium was, it is clear from his writings, a passionate lover."⁶

The other famous Rhegian was the sculptor Pythagoras (active in the early fifth century), a bold innovator whose works marked the transition from archaic to classic Greek art. His contemporaries were amazed by his ability to render the human body in motion. Instead of the stiff statues of the preceding age, which could be viewed in only two aspects, front and profile, he created truly three-dimensional figures. Ancient authors left laudatory descriptions of, among others, his *Wounded Philoctetes*, shown limping and with an expression of pain on his face. The few surviving Roman copies of Pythagoras' works give us some idea of his technique.

Locri boasted of being the home of the semilegendary Zaleucus, who shared with another westerner, Charondas of Catana, the honor of being the author of the earliest Greek code of law. Cumae was famous for its Sibylline oracle. At Tarentum, the physician Heraclides (third century)

was the first to practice dissection of corpses in order to understand human physiology and the nature of diseases. But even though the names of a given city's outstanding residents may not have come down to us, we know that all of the Greek colonies participated in the rich and intensive cultural and artistic life of Magna Graecia. The accident of historical preservation determined that pre-Hellenistic temples and frescoes have survived only in the second-rate and poorly attested city of Poseidonia (Paestum); but they tell us what we might have expected to find in the larger and more glorious Cumae, Tarentum, Sybaris, Croton, or Thurii, had their remains come to us in a better state. As it is, enough of bronze and terracotta artifacts and artistic ceramics have been discovered in many of the other sites to allow us to appreciate the taste and the skill of their creators.

But there was also a darker side to the Greek national character. Like the wolf in Ivan Krylov's fable, who fled to idyllic Arcadia in the hope of finding there a peaceful life but had not left behind his temper and his teeth, so did the Greek settlers bring to their new homes the bane of their mother cities—their extraordinary bellicosity, their intensive but narrow patriotism, their mistrust of and hostility toward neighboring states. As a Theban general told his troops before a battle with the Athenians, "In dealing with neighbors, it is always equality of force that guarantees liberty."⁷ The Greek principle of *autonomia kai eleutheria*, "independence and freedom," in practice meant, first of all, the right of waging war against any other state, near or far. And the Greek laws of warfare were very harsh and sometimes led to wholesale massacres, enslavements, and destruction.

The demolition of Siris by a coalition of three Achaean cities has already been mentioned. A short time later, a war erupted between two of the erstwhile allies, and in 510 B.C., oblivious of their common origin, the Crotonians destroyed and totally obliterated Sybaris, a great city whose wealth and luxury became proverbial, and dispersed its population. Permanent antagonism and intermittent wars between neighboring cities dimmed the brilliance of Magna Graecia. Rhegium was hostile to its sister city across the strait, Messina; Tarentum, to Thurii; Elea, to Poseidonia; Naples, to Cumae; Locri, to Croton. Cities of the extreme south suffered heavily from Dionysius I, the empire-building tyrant of Syracuse. In 389 B.C., he destroyed Caulonia and Hipponium and deported their inhabitants to Sicily. Rhegium and Croton were captured and sacked; they never fully recovered.

Moreover, the Greek settlers were soon reminded that even though they proudly called themselves Italiots, they owned only a small part of Italy. Cumae had to defend itself against the Etruscan conquerors and colonizers of Campania. It withstood the Etruscan siege in 524 B.C. and (with Syracusan help) won a naval victory in 474 B.C. But the weakening of Etruscan power only helped the Oscan mountaineers, who took over most of Cam-

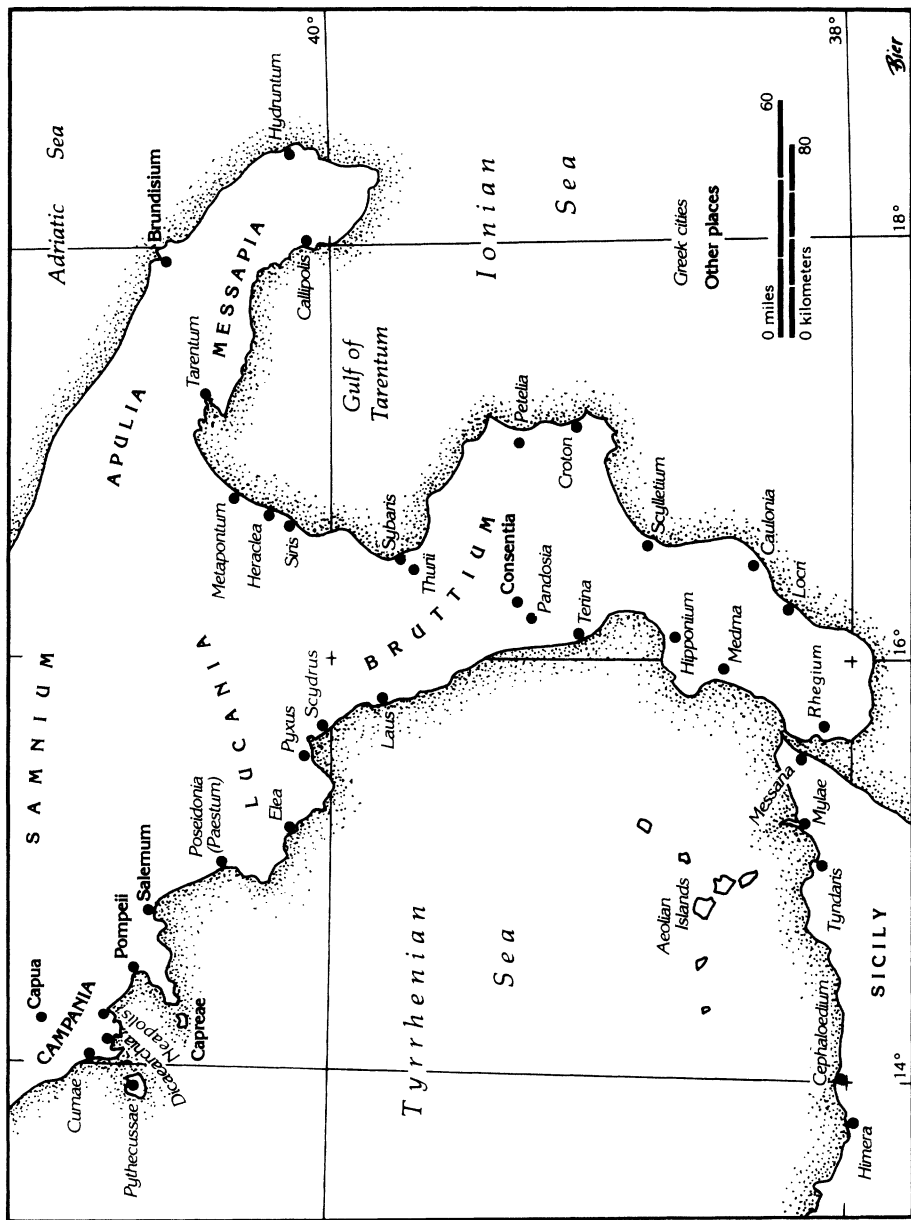
pania and, in 421 B.C., conquered Cumae.⁸ A little earlier, their Lucanian cousins seized Poseidonia and renamed it Paestum. A third group of Oscan-speaking tribes, the Bruttians, took possession of the uplands of Italy's "toe," cut the connections between its east and west coasts, and pressed hard on its Greek cities. The Italian Greeks had to call for help from their kinsmen overseas. But the expeditions led by Archidamus of Sparta (343-338 B.C.), Alexander of Epirus (334-330 B.C.), Cleonymus of Sparta (303 B.C.), and Agathocles of Syracuse (298-295 B.C.) provided for only short-term relief. In the meantime, a new power—Rome—succeeded in defeating the proudly independent tribes of central and south-central Italy and in forcing them into a federation whose policies were determined solely by the Romans. At the start of the third century, only the extreme south of Italy remained outside Roman control, but not for long.

An interference by Rome at the request of Thurii brought about a conflict with Tarentum, which called to its aid King Pyrrhus of Epirus with a large and well-trained army. The Pyrrhic War (280-275 B.C.) ended in a hard-won Roman victory but brought new sufferings to Greek cities, whether pro- or anti-Roman. Rhegium was seized and held for ten years by its mutinous Campanian garrison, which plundered and massacred its population at will and also raided and sacked Croton. Tarentum was besieged, forced to surrender, and had a Roman garrison installed in its citadel. The Romans expelled the Lucanians from Paestum in 277 B.C., and the city became a Latin colony, i.e., a privileged allied community. All Greek cities of Italy were enrolled into the Roman Federation as "naval allies" with the obligation to provide ships and crews for the Roman navy. They kept a modicum of self-government, and they now enjoyed the benefits of the enforced *pax Romana* within Italy; but their population and prosperity greatly declined, and they knew that they had lost their cherished independence.

In the First Punic War (264-240 B.C.), the Greek cities repeatedly saw their costly warships sink with all hands in battles or in storms, and their shores were often raided by Carthaginian squadrons. But this counted for little when compared with the catastrophe that overtook them, together with the entire Italian South, as a result of the Second Punic War (218-202 B.C.), of which the region was the principal theater of operations. All of the southern Greek cities except Rhegium (which remained in Roman hands) joined Hannibal, along with their erstwhile Samnite, Lucanian, and Bruttian enemies. At the end of the war, most of them lay in ruins. Tarentum fell to the Romans in 209 B.C., was mercilessly sacked, had 30,000 of its inhabitants sold into slavery and much of its land confiscated. When Hannibal sailed away from Italy, he evacuated with him most of the population of Thurii and Petelia and killed those who refused to leave. The cities were so depopulated that it was necessary to plant Roman and Latin

colonies in many of them. Impoverished, reduced in size, they retained at least their ancestral laws and customs. But as a result of the Social, or Italic, War (90-88 B.C.), Roman citizenship was extended to all inhabitants of Italy. The allied communities thus obtained full civic equality with the Romans, but they paid for it by the loss of their traditional autonomy and ethnic individuality. Neapolis, Tarentum, and Heraclea refused to accept the new status. But in the end they, too, had to yield to the process of Italian unification. It is symbolic that the only extant copy of Julius Caesar's municipal law, which introduced a uniform system of local administration in all of Italy, was found at Heraclea. With it, the separate history of the Greek cities of Italy comes to an end, though Greek continued to be spoken in some spots.

But before the fiercely independent Greek spirit in Italy was extinguished, it deeply transformed the entire country. The first Greek settlers brought to Italy the cultivation of vine and olive. The Chalcidian alphabet of Cumae became the ancestor of the Etruscan and other Italic scripts, including Latin. Long before the Roman conquest of Greece, in fact even before the Roman expansion into Magna Graecia, Greek influence was felt in Campania and Latium. Demeter and Dionysus made an early entry into the religion of Rome (especially of its plebeian circles) under the Italic names of Ceres and Liber Pater, and Apollo under his own, and the heroes Castor, Polydeucus (Latin Pollux), and Heracles (Latin Hercules) became truly Italian characters. Greek armor and weapons were adopted by the Romans and by the southern Italic tribes (one need only look at the terracotta statue of a Lucanian warrior in the Paestum Museum). The Etruscan debt to archaic Greek art needs no elaboration. Latin literature had its start with the appearance at Rome of Livius Andronicus, one of the Tarentine prisoners of 272 B.C. Neither were his immediate successors Romans, but hellenized Italics. Naevius was a Campanian; Plautus, though of Umbrian birth, certainly received his training as comedian and producer and his fluency in Greek language and literature in Campania; Ennius was a Messapian, educated in neighboring Tarentum, who later learned Latin; it was therefore said that he had three hearts. One final example will suffice. We have seen that Cumae, the earliest Greek city on the Italian mainland, was also one of the first to fall. But almost three hundred years after its takeover by the Oscans, we meet in Rome the Cuman Gaius Blossius—an Oscan by name but a Greek in spirit, a disciple of the Stoic philosopher Antipater of Tarsus. He was a friend and teacher of Tiberius Gracchus, in whom he inculcated the Greek political and social theories which the tribune tried to implement for the benefit of Rome's destitute masses. After the murder of Tiberius Gracchus (132 B.C.), Blossius went to Pergamum, joined the democratic and egalitarian insurrection of Aristonicus, and committed suicide when it was crushed by Rome.⁹ Here we see how



Magna Graecia—The Greek Colonies of Southern Italy

Hellenic culture survived its political defeat and lived on in the souls of its conquerors.

It so happened that during the early Middle Ages the extreme south of Italy remained the longest under Byzantine rule. This, no doubt, helped to preserve the vestiges of the Greek tongue there, and they subsisted long after the Normans, in the eleventh century, deprived the Byzantines of their last Italian holdings. Thus, at a time when geography and religious schism kept the Latin West separated from the Greek East, when the knowledge of Greek was forgotten in western Europe, there remained in a corner of Italy a number of native speakers of Greek who also spoke Italian and knew Latin. It was from such a bilingual teacher, a Calabrian, that Giovanni Boccaccio, first among the Italian humanists, acquired his knowledge of Greek—well before Byzantine scholars came to spread it in Italy in the fifteenth century. Thus, as it were, Magna Graecia extended a hand across the gap of the Dark Ages to pass on its heritage to the newborn Italian Renaissance.

NOTES

1. Cicero, *De republica*, II:4.
2. Herodotus, I:164-67.
3. Plutarch, *Pericles*, 20; Diodorus Siculus, XII:9-11.
4. Plato, *Gorgias*, 493a.
5. Herodotus, III:125, 129-37.
6. Cicero, *Disput. Tusculanae*, IV:33:71.
7. Thucydides, IV:92:3.
8. Diodorus Siculus, XII:76:4.
9. Plutarch, *Ti. Gracchus*, 8.