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Identity and Ethnicity in Italy: The case of the Tomb of the Diver

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Course: Burial and Ancient Society

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Introduction

The archaeology of death and burial can be seen, in contrast to other specializations within the field, as a study of the individual. Although patterns are important when studying a cemetery, the main question remains: who was the person in the grave? This question can only be answered by looking into the identity of the deceased. However, there is still much debate about the whole concept of identity. What is identity, does a person have one or multiple identities, and (how) can we determine ones identity using archaeological remains?

The first chapter of this essay will begin with a short overview of the history of ethnicity studies, which will be based on an article that was written by Francesca Fulminante.¹ Afterwards, multiple scholars who have all written about ethnicity/identity will be compared to each other. At the end of the chapter, I will also pose my own ideas concerning the named topic.

Because this essay will focus on identity in the Tomb of the Diver, which is situated in Poseidonia, the second chapter will start with the history and geography of Poseidonia. Then I will then go into the Tomb of the Diver and its painted walls, presenting some of the research that already has been taken out.

I will use this particular case because of the very interesting history of the foundation Poseidonia. In 700 BC, inhabitants of the Greek city Achaea founded an *apoikia*² in Italy which they called Sybaris. After 70 years, the inhabitants of Sybaris founded another *apoikia* which was called Poseidonia. With other words, Poseidonia was a colony of a colony, which resulted in the fact that Poseidonia was under a lot of different influences: Greek, indigenous and later on also Roman. This situation makes the Tomb of the Diver, in my opinion, one of the most interesting tombs to use in an essay about identity.

As I will also mention further on in this essay, the painted walls of the Tomb of the Diver have gotten too much emphasize. Consequently, a lot of other evidence is neglected. Therefore, I will use the third and last chapter to offer a new approach towards the Tomb of the Diver. This way, I hope to not only make a contribution to the discussion about the identity of the person for which the tomb was build, but also to be able to confirm or discard some of the statements that have been made about ethnicity and identity.

¹ In the article 'Ethnicity, identity and state formation in the Latin landscape. Problems and approaches', Fulminante starts with an excellent overview of the history of ethnicity studies.

² An *apoikia* is a Greek settlement outside the Greek area.

Chapter 1: Ethnicity and Identity in Archaeology

As stated above, this chapter will deal with several aspects of ethnicity studies: the past, the present, the archaeological evidence upon which the visions are based, and my own opinion. In the second chapter, these visions (including my own) will be tested through the case-study of the Tomb of the Diver in Poseidonia.

§1.1 The history of ethnicity

The subject of ethnicity in archaeology did not get much attention until 1969, when the book of Barth³ changed archaeology forever. In his book, Barth discards the idea that there are clear boundaries between ethnic groups, which was the general idea in that time. Instead, he argues that “*ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves*”.⁴ Moreover, Barth argues that ethnic identity is part of a dynamic social process that constantly changes over time, claiming that “*we can assume no simple one-to-one relationship between ethnic units and cultural similarities and differences*”.⁵

Following the ideas of Barth, Emberling proposed a social anthropological model to study ethnicity in 1997. He stated that the biggest problem for archaeologists is to identify the particular social meaning of an artefact, and argues that although ethnographic comparisons and literary sources can help us identifying social and ethnic boundaries, “*these boundaries always have to be tested by intra-regional contextual analysis of production and use of artifacts, compared with inter-regional analysis of different practices or artefacts between neighbouring groups; and finally these results have to be confronted with analyses of other categories of evidence, which may support an identification of ethnic difference*”.⁶

In 1997, Jonathan Hall wrote a book called ‘Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity’. In this book, his main focus point is the constructive nature of ethnicity. And, in his eyes, ‘race’ and ‘archaeological culture’ are practically the same.⁷ According to these statements, Hall believes that ethnicity, race, or culture are all the same and have a constructive nature. Moreover, Hall states that he does not believe that ‘collectivities’ can be determined with archaeological remains, although those remains can reflect cultural elements. Consequently,

³ The book is called *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*.

⁴ Barth 1969, 10. Also stated in Fulminante 2012, 90.

⁵ Barth 1969, 14.

⁶ *Ethnicity in Complex Societies*, Emberling. Stated in Fulminante 2012, 93.

⁷ Hall 1997, 13.

he argues that, in order to say something about ethnic identity, we must look solely to the written sources.⁸

Then, in 2000, Bradley wrote the book ‘Ancient Umbria: State, Culture, and Identity in Central Italy from the Iron Age to the Augustan Era’, in which he stated that the use of ancient authors in ethnicity studies was ‘old fashioned’.⁹ With this remark, Bradley actively participates in one of the biggest discussions at the time: whether we should give more priority to ancient sources or to archaeological material. Besides this rather bold remark, Bradley also stated that Italic people became aware of their ethnic identity in contrast to the expansion of the Roman identity.¹⁰ With other words, even though Roman identity was on the rise, the Italic people became more and more aware of their own identity.

In 2005, however, this was discarded in a paper of Bourdin called ‘Ardée et les Rutules: Réflexions sur l’Émergence et le Maintien des Identités Ethniques des Populations du Latium Préromain’. Bourdin argues that it was *because* of the expansion of Roman identity that the Italic people became aware of their own identity. She believes that there was a case of competitive identity in which Italic peoples established a own identity to set themselves apart from Rome.¹¹

§1.2 Recent believes and opinions towards ethnicity

Although Fulminante has written down all the visions from the authors mentioned above, this does not say that she actually agrees with them. Firstly, in contrast to the believes of Barth, Fulminante argues that although ethnicity is a social construction (as Barth claims it to be), this fact does not deny the cultural content of ethnicity. She states that ethnicity is not something to which people belong, but that it has to mean something to someone. Moreover, she argues that the principle of redundancy should be adopted in order to define ethnic boundaries between different groups.¹² Secondly, in contrast to Emberling, she argues that ethnicity is only one of many identities an individual can have, naming categories as: family, city, region, class and gender. Thirdly, in contrast to Bradley, she does believe that ancient sources can be used within ethnicity studies. However, she sees them as complementary to archaeological evidence.

⁸ Hall 1997, 182.

⁹ Bradley, stated in Fulminante 2012, 95.

¹⁰ Bradley, stated in Fulminante 2012, 98.

¹¹ Bourdin, stated in Fulminante 2012, 98.

¹² Fulminante 2012, 90.

William Dever has a similar vision to Hall's. His article¹³ goes into the archaeological record of early Israel. Although this article also discusses ethnicity and identity, it stands out in comparison to the other articles and books discussed in this chapter because it focusses on Israel, while all the others focus on the Mediterranean. The advantage of the research on ethnicity in Israel, opposed to other areas, is that all the available written material has been interpreted in so many different ways (for example the Bible). Another reason the article of Dever can be an asset, is because scholars in the same area and the same field of expertise tend to be influenced by each other, adapting each other's ideas and using more or less the same arguments. Consequently, just like his colleagues in the Mediterranean, Dever will probably have been influenced by scholars focussing on the same area and subject. However, these scholars are different to the ones that influenced the Mediterranean scholars, which could result in Dever having different ideas towards ethnicity/identity.

Dever offers criticism towards some theoretical objections. Firstly, following the ideas of Hall, he claims that not only ethnicity, but all intellectual formulations are social constructs, including culture itself. He states that '*if a certain group thinks itself a distinctive people, then they are by that very fact*'.¹⁴ Secondly, he states that although ethnic boundaries are constantly changing and flexible, they do exist and can be subjected to systematic analysis. However, in contrast to Hall, Dever does believe that material remains can be used to determine identity in antiquity. He states that if '*ethnic traits either cannot be adequately characterized or will turn out not to be reflected in material culture*', archaeology cannot be possible because it studies the reflection of behaviour in material culture.¹⁵ Finally, and for this essay the most important notion, he states that it is possible to reflect a specific ethnic identity and that texts only supply the specific ethnic label of a group.¹⁶

Robin Osborne has written the third article I want to discuss here; it is called 'Landscape, Ethnicity and the Greek Polis'. Osborne believes that Greeks would normally identify other Greeks by means of their *polis*, but in certain circumstances they would be identified as part of a larger group with a possible political identity (Ionian, Dorian, Samian etc.).¹⁷ He also argues that the Greek landscape shaped the Greek *polis* and that the separateness of the *poleis* marked themselves out culturally.¹⁸ Concerning the adaption of

¹³ Ethnicity and the Archaeological Record: The Case of Early Israel, 2007.

¹⁴ Dever 2007, 52.

¹⁵ Dever 2007, 52.

¹⁶ Dever 2007, 52.

¹⁷ Osborne 2012, 24.

¹⁸ Osborne 2012, 24-25.

new cultural elements, Osborne believes that there is a difference between different regions.¹⁹ Moreover, he believes that ethnicity played almost no role in achieving political goals and that it has to be looked at more as a resource that was used when it was needed.²⁰ In short, Osborne sees ethnicity as a handy political ‘tool’ that can be used in specific situations, but that did not play a large role in society and was probably not really important.

The fourth article I would like to discuss here has been written by John Bintliff²¹ and discusses the possibility of the existence of multiple ethnic origins within one political entity. He starts his article by regarding 5 points of view that, in his eyes, have been made clear by other scholars in the last 10 years. These are: (1) ethnicity is a social construct, (2) ‘ethnicity is the pursuit of political goals through the creation of commonness and difference’²², (3) the ethnos is open and changeable, (4) heroic genealogies are cultural artefacts of the 8th century BC and later, and (5) ‘the ethnos has to be seen as a contemporary response to the conflicting tendencies toward local separatism’²³.²⁴ Asking the question what we can say about the region and people through their origin stories, Bintliff states that we can say two things. Firstly, that we have to contextualize the origin legends into the period in which they were constructed, only to deconstruct them in order to determine their actual historical value. Secondly, that the merging of peoples into larger political groupings hides the great variety of populations within such a grouping.²⁵ For example, the merging of Italian peoples in the Roman Empire.

The fifth and last article I want to mention has been written by Gertjan Burgers and is called ‘Landscape and Identity of Greek Colonists and Indigenous Communities in Southeast Italy’; it discusses a subject with some links to the situation of the Tomb of the Diver: the identity of Greek colonists in Italy. Burgers starts his article by stating that the research towards Italic settlements that has been taken out over the years is biased. He mentions that these settlements were seen as Greek when ‘Greek’ material was found and that they were seen as indigenous when ‘indigenous’ material was found. Moreover, according to Burgers, there was always a ‘rigid indigenous-Greek dichotomy’.²⁶ And when Greek material was found in indigenous settlements, this appearance was used as evidence to confirm the power

¹⁹ Osborne 2012, 25.

²⁰ Osborne 2012, 30-31.

²¹ The article is called: ‘Are there alternatives to ‘Red-Figure Vase People’? Identity, multi-ethnicity and migration in Ancient Greece

²² Barth, cited in Bintliff 2012, 52.

²³ McNerney, cited in Bintliff 2012, 52.

²⁴ Bintliff 2012, 52.

²⁵ Bintliff 2012, 56.

²⁶ Burgers 2012, 66-67.

of Hellenization.²⁷ Burgers, however, questions if we can determine a culture using archaeological remains.²⁸

§1.3 The archaeological evidence

Dever argues that ethnic differences can be attested when comparing 12 different ‘material traits’, as he calls them. Dever subdivides the archaeological evidence, coming from 300 Israelian villages from the 12th century AD, in these 12 traits that consist of: (1) the environmental setting, (2) settlement type and pattern, (3) demography, (4) technology, adaptation and subsistence, (5) house type, (6) burial customs, (7) dress, (8) language, (9) social organization, (10) political structure, (11) religion and culture, (12) external relations. To summarize the evidence in short, Dever found that the founding of the 300 villages he investigated were a result of the environmental setting because the isolation and scarcity of resources did not encourage large-scale industries (1-2). He also sees an immigration of new peoples around the 11th century (3). Concerning technology, adaptation and subsistence, Dever notes that there is a complete absence of pig bones (4). Also, the houses are very stereotype in plan (5). However, the evidence for burial customs and clothing (6-7) is not existent due to the fact that no burials have been found and the clothing was probably made of perishable fabrics. Concerning language (8), some inscriptions in Hebrew have been found. Social organization (9) can, according to Dever, be inferred from the material that was used for the other groups. He also states that the villages represent a pre-state level of political organization (10). Describing the religion (11), Dever goes into the one open cult place that was found, in which he sees continuity and discontinuity with Late Bronze Age Canaan. Finally, he states that there is little evidence suggesting trade with outsiders (12). Dever concludes his article by saying that we are dealing here with Israelite peoples, but that their material culture derives from the earlier Canaanites.²⁹

In contrast to Dever, Osborne focusses more on only 2 aspects of material culture, namely the Greek alphabet and fine pottery, to support his statement that ‘*the separateness of the different Greek poleis marked itself out culturally*’.³⁰ About the alphabet, Osborne argues that ‘*the idea of taking on the letters of the Phoenicians but charging them with different sounds (...) can only have been an idea that occurred to one individual and group and was*

²⁷ Burgers 2012, 66-67.

²⁸ Burgers 2012, 67.

²⁹ Dever 2007, 54-57; 60.

³⁰ Osborne 2012, 25

*disseminated from that group.*³¹ Concerning the fine pottery, Osborne states that *'here too there are some moments where ideas from a single source seem to have been important catalysts for local production'* and he takes the Geometric style as an example.³² However, Osborne also states that although the Geometric style had a huge impact on pottery, it was followed by the development of regional styles. He then goes into the 'Catalogue of Women' that was supposedly written by Hesiod. Osborne mentions that this work has been interpreted by other scholars as a poem that was written to find common ground in all the local origin stories, in order to create a common origin.³³ However, Osborne interprets the 'Catalogue of Women' as a product of the desire to be part of a whole. Moreover, he states that this desire was already attested in Homer's Iliad, and that the coming together of Greeks was not based on ethnicity or birth, but on a *'common participation in an entirely artificially manufactured bond.'*³⁴ Osborne then uses pottery in multiple Greek cities to show that differentiation was sometimes more apparent within one *polis* than between two different *poleis*.³⁵

This last remark also comes back in the work of Bintliff who, based on genetic studies, argues that genetic variation is greater within nations than between them.³⁶ This gives ground to the belief of some scholars who argue that communities are too often regarded as cultural entities. Bintliff then tries to prove the importance of the landscape, using the results from the Aetolia Project. Bintliff shows that the different tribes living in Aetolia all have a different group identity; these groups all live in certain districts that defined by natural boundaries.³⁷ Bintliff sees these natural boundaries as the reason that the tribes are living separate from each other, which resulted in their different identities. At the end of his paper, Bintliff goes into his own study in Boeotia. He states that *'today all the villages are Greek speaking, Orthodox Christian, typical in all cultural forms for the homogenized world of Modern Greece'*, but that almost all inhabitants are from origin Albanian immigrants making them *'in origin entirely exotic to Greece'*.³⁸

Burgers uses the field surveys and excavations near l'Amastuola to support his statements. He explains that the settlement hill was first occupied in the middle of the 8th century BC and that the people in that time lived in hut structures common in the contemporary native world, but that between 680/660 these were overbuilt by dwellings with

³¹ Osborne 2012, 25.

³² Osborne 2012, 25.

³³ Osborne 2012, 26.

³⁴ Osborne 2012, 26.

³⁵ Osborne 2012, 28.

³⁶ Bintliff 2012, 53.

³⁷ Bintliff 2012, 56-57.

³⁸ Bintliff 2012, 58.

a rectangular ground plan similar to Greek dwellings and that there also is a sudden change in pottery.³⁹ Moreover, the burials have direct parallels in Taranto and can be seen as distinctly Greek, making it very attractive to interpret a sudden Greek takeover.⁴⁰ However, Burgers argues that we must interpret the evidence in a completely different way, namely as evidence for the taking over of a Greek identity by an indigenous elite. Also, he states that l'Amastuola must be seen as a community with mixed groups and hybrid identities.⁴¹

§1.4 Remarks

Some criticism and remarks on the article of Dever are in place. Firstly, some of the 'material traits' are not material traits at all. This brings us to the question whether these factors can actually be compared to each other. The second question one might ask when concerning these 12 traits, is 'when can you speak of ethnic difference'? How many factors have to differ between two villages to be able to speak of ethnic difference? And does one factor weigh more than the other? Secondly, the complete absence of pig bones mentioned by Dever should be seen more as something religious than as something technological, considering the fact that most inhabitants of the villages were probably Jewish. Thirdly, Dever sees language as one of the most important aspects of ethnic or cultural identity. Although I have to agree with him that language is a very important factor, we must be careful with linking it directly to ethnicity or cultural identity. If someone speaks a language, it is not to say that this person also identifies himself with the peoples that are linked to this language. This is especially true in burial practices, when language (inscriptions etc.) is very limited and consists in many cases of (a part of) one sentence. Finally, we must take into account that the heritage of Israel is a very sensitive topic, especially when considering ethnicity and cultural identity. In many cases, and I feel also in this case, the archaeological evidence is twisted in such a way that the authenticity of the Israeli is either confirmed or discarded.

The article of Osborne was the first of a few articles in the bundle 'Landscape, Ethnicity and Identity in the Archaic Mediterranean Area' that I have discussed in this essay. As the title of the bundle makes clear, an important part in the study of identity and ethnicity has now been attributed to the landscape. This fits in the period we now live in, where landscape archaeology gains more and more importance. Following the scholars who published in the bundle (of whom only Burgers, Fulminante, Osborne, and Bintliff are

³⁹ Burgers 2012, 69.

⁴⁰ Burgers 2012, 70.

⁴¹ Burgers 2012, 70-71.

discussed in this essay), I also believe that the landscape played a very large and important role in the construction of cultural and ethnic identities. However, I do not agree with Osborne concerning his idea about looking at ethnicity/identity as a resource that was only scarcely used. Personally, I believe that one's identity played a huge role in his/her way of living. Maybe not on a conscious level, but certainly on an unconscious level. Also, based on Hesiod, Osborne argues that ethnicity was in many ways more a political construct. The idea of regarding ethnicity as a political construct, as we will see in the following articles, has been put forward by a lot of other scholars. I do believe that politics play a part in the construction or maintenance of an ethnic/cultural identity, but I do not see it as the main factor.

The 5 point put forward by Bintliff, mentioned on page 7 of this essay, can to some extent be criticized. His second point can be linked to the ideas of Osborn and Barth, namely that the idea the identity is the pursuit of political goals. As mentioned before, I do believe that identity and politics are to some extent intertwined, but I do not believe that achieving political goals is the sole purpose of ethnicity. In my opinion, identity is also used to create a sense of commonness. Concerning the origin stories, I would argue that the most important fact about them is that they are there. These stories are mostly written centuries after they supposedly happened and are a product of the construction of an identity. Therefore, even though they are not always historical correct, an origin story can always be used as evidence for a common ethnic identity. Also, Bintliff's statement about Boeotia is very interesting, because it goes into the *emic* vs. *etic* debate that was started by Kenneth Pike in 1954.⁴² In short, an emic account is a description of a culture from someone who is part of the culture, while an etic account is a description of a culture from an outsider. In this case, the emic account is that the inhabitants of Boeotia are Greek, while the etic account is that they are Albanian. For us as archaeologists, both the emic and etic accounts are equally important because, especially when taken together, they can say a lot about a person's identity.

The article of Burgers can be regarded as daring, because all the evidence seems to point to a 'typical Greek city'. I share his opinion that the situation was probably not as clear cut as it seems and that indigenous peoples probably still played a significant role in the settlement. However, purely on basis of the archaeological evidence it is very difficult to come to this conclusion. The tendency to give indigenous peoples more importance derives from post-colonial times; the debate finds its origins around 1960. And of course, indigenous peoples were much more important than people thought 60 years ago, but in this case I feel

⁴² 'Language in relation to a unified theory of the structure of human behavior', 1954.

that Burgers in gives too much emphasis to the indigenous people living in l'Amastuola. Cultural interaction can happen in a lot of ways and sometimes this is by conquest and suppression, and I would argue that this is the case here. Nevertheless, this approach could very well be useful to other scholars investigating different sites.

Lastly, the reader that has paid enough attention will probably have noticed that the article of Fulminante was not mentioned in paragraph 1.3. This has much to do with the fact that her article was mainly theoretical and did only very sporadically incorporate archaeological evidence. Her article was meant as an introduction in ethnicity studies, giving an overview of various scholars who have written about this subject till the present day. However, she also ventilates here own opinions without backing them up with evidence. Therefore, although some things might sound very logical, they are almost always based on assumptions. Personally I believe assumptions are a part of science, but there has to be enough evidence to support them. And especially within the field of archaeology, this simple fact is ignored more than once.

This essay mostly focusses on 2 (cultural and ethnic) of the many identities a person can have. It is very difficult to grasp how the ethnic identity of a people starts, especially because it is not possible to find evidence for this in the archaeological material. Personally, I believe that landscape and environment play a huge role in this. Whereas peoples living together will probably construct the same ethnic identity, peoples that are living in isolation by themselves will create their own ethnic identity. I do use the word create in this instance, because (following some of the scholars mentioned above) I also do believe that ethnic ethnicity is a social construct. A people will, sometimes instantly and sometimes only after a while, try to find or create a common *ethnos*, in most cases based on myths and legends combined with historical facts. It is then the job of the elite or 'politicians' to keep the stories and the sense of commonness (it is not called a community for nothing) alive. This people will then display its ethnic identity in a lot of ways, for a large part through the material culture, constructing a cultural identity. When two or more different peoples then interact, exchanging goods and stories, these cultural identities will constantly change and transform whereas the ethnic identity will stay the same. When archaeologists find the materials they try to pinpoint them to one particular culture, even though this is impossible because cultures do not exist in isolation and are always transforming. Therefore, there is always a layer of mixture in the material.

§1.5 Conclusion

In the section above, several visions and believes towards ethnicity and identity have been put forward. Firstly, the fact that landscape is an important factor in the creation of an ethnic identity. Secondly, the fact that ethnicity/identity is a social construct that is constantly changing and of which the boundaries are not clear cut. However, as stated above, I believe that it is the cultural identity that is constantly changing while the ethnic identity stays more or less the same. Thirdly, there is still a lot of discussion about the importance of textual evidence. Fourthly, some scholars believe that the most important fact of ethnicity is achieving political goals. And last but not least, can we even try to say something about ethnicity or identity on the basis of archaeological and historical remains? As said, I will use the case of the Tomb of the Diver in the next chapter to try and prove or discard some of these believes. However, it must be stated that the conclusions of this essay are solely based on the Tomb of the Diver, while the funerary ritual is only one of the many ways in which identity can be displayed. In order to come to decisive arguments about the issues mentioned above, all the evidence (architecture, religion, household etc.) should be taken into account. However, due to time and space limit this will not be included in this essay.

Chapter 2: Poseidonia, the Tomb of the Diver and the problem

As already mentioned, this chapter will go into the Tomb of the Diver which is situated 1.5 kilometres from the city walls of Poseidonia. Before I will go into the tomb itself, I will first briefly go into the history and geography of Poseidonia. This way I will be able to point out why this tomb and this city are ideal as a case study in the discussion on ethnic identity.

§2.1 The geography and history of Poseidonia

§2.1.1 Geography

In the research on settlements in the Mediterranean, almost nothing was written about the geography and environment until the rise of landscape-archaeology around 20 years ago. This is to regret, because the geography and situation of a site can provide us with valuable information about the development of a settlement. Therefore, I will start here not with the history, but with the geography of Poseidonia.

Greek settlements in South-Italy are mostly situated near the sea, in coastal plains that are surrounded by mountains.⁴³ They were founded in these areas, because the Greeks chose specific aspects in the landscape when building a city. In most cases, the Greek settlements in Southern-Italy had a large surface and were probably relatively populous. They also had a large periphery and were thus, by means of agriculture and cattle breeding, able to create a surplus of resources. Because the settlements were on the one hand situated near the sea and had the opportunity of trade overseas, and on the other hand possessed large pieces of agricultural areas, they were very prosperous.⁴⁴

One of these settlements was the city of Poseidonia, situated near the west coast of Italy and 80 kilometers south of Naples (or Neapolis as it was called by the Greeks) (Fig. 1).⁴⁵ Poseidonia was situated in a fertile plain that was crossed by the river Sele; through this river, access was gained to the hinterland and the south coast of Italy. Moreover, it had easy access to Campania and the Etruscans, not only by sea but also by land.⁴⁶

Poseidonia, was founded by colonists from Sybaris (Fig.1). If we look at the situation of both cities, the reason for Poseidonia's founding can be easily guessed. By founding Poseidonia, Sybaris could transport its products through a relatively short trading route to the Tyrrhenian area without the devious and time consuming trip around Calabria.

⁴³ Lomas 1993, 19.

⁴⁴ Lomas 1993, 21.

⁴⁵ Pedley 1990, 11.

⁴⁶ Sestieri 1953, 15.

§2.1.2 History

The history of Poseidonia starts with its founding by the inhabitants of Sybaris around 600 BC.⁴⁷ Sybaris was a Greek settlement near the south coast of Italy and was founded by Greek colonists from Achaea on the north side of the Peloponnesus, making Poseidonia a secondary colony.⁴⁸ The founding of Poseidonia is also attested in Strabo, who states that “*The Sybarites [when they founded the city] built the fortifications close upon the sea, but the inhabitants moved higher up.*”⁴⁹ However, this passage is one of the very few that has survived the test of time.⁵⁰ Sybaris has not enjoyed its new colony for a long period of time, because Sybaris itself was destroyed after a 70 day siege by inhabitants of the neighbouring city Kroton in 510 BC.⁵¹ Remarkable in this case is the fact that Kroton also was a Greek colony.

The time between the founding of Poseidonia till 400 BC was a relatively quiet and stable period for the city. However, from 400 BC onwards, Poseidonia was probably increasingly influenced by the Lucanians, who were also living in the area. Some modern scholars even state that the city was taken over by these Lucanians, although no material or historical evidence has been found to support this.

In 273 BC, Poseidonia became a *Colonia Latina* and was renamed Paestum. Although this event is also very interesting and probably had a lot of impact on the city, the subject falls outside the scope of this essay and will therefore not be treated.

§2.2 The tomb of the Diver

§2.2.1 The basics

Around 1968, excavations carried out by Mario Napoli and Venturino Panebianco unearthed a very nice decorated tomb, situated approximately 1.5 kilometers from the city walls of Poseidonia in the necropolis called Tempa del Prete.⁵² The tomb was found in a small cluster of graves that were believed to be linked to an ancient farm. The bones in the tomb were almost entirely gone and only a few grave goods were found. Although much of the skeleton was gone, it still was used to determine that the deceased was probably a young man. However, the sex of the deceased was also determined by linking him to the person that was depicted on the paintings on the slabs of the tomb. The grave goods existed out of a black-

⁴⁷ Greco 1996, 9, 15; Pedley 1990, 11.

⁴⁸ Strabo, geciteerd in Cipriani/Pontandolfo/Rouveret 2004, 5.

⁴⁹ Strabo v, 4, 13, vertaald door Hamilton en Falconer.

⁵⁰ Zie ook Berard 1963, 195-205.

⁵¹ Greco 1996, 10.

⁵² Holloway 2006, 365.

glazed lekythos and the sounding box of a lyre. The grave was dated around 470 BC on the basis of the lekythos.⁵³ It was a cist tomb with five limestone slabs surrounding the deceased, which were all very richly decorated with paintings (Fig. 2 and 3). These paintings have caused a lot of discussion about the person that was buried, because the Tomb of the Diver is the only known Greek tomb with these kind of painting so far.⁵⁴ A lot has already been said and written about the iconography in the tomb and I will discuss here the most important aspects of the discussion in the next paragraph.

§2.2.2 *The iconography*

On the north and south wall, a symposium⁵⁵ is depicted (Fig. 4). On the north wall, five men are visible. From left to right, we see a male holding a drinking cup or *kylix*. Then we see another male holding a *kylix*, but in such a position that the only interpretation can be that he is throwing the last zip of wine away.⁵⁶ Then we see the man in the middle, who is distracted by the last two figures on the painting. Holloway has interpreted their position as follows: *“Here the youth grasps his lyre to his chest while discouraging the advances of an older man who caresses his head.”*⁵⁷ If this interpretation holds true is to be discussed, but is not important for this essay.

The south wall is very similar to the north wall, also depicting a symposium (Fig. 4). What is remarkable in this scene, is that now the first figure (who is holding a lyre) is distracted by the two men behind him who are, according to Holloway, ‘conversing’.⁵⁸ At the far right a duo is visible, probably making music by playing the double flute and singing. The north and the south wall are thus very much similar, especially because the first three men on the south wall have more or less the same position as the last three men on the north wall.

On the west wall, a scene is depicted with three figures (Fig. 5). Here, I will treat the figures from right to left due to their probable importance. The figure on the right side is the only girl depicted in the whole tomb, which we can assume because of her white skin. In the middle, a naked man with a stole over his arms is following, himself being followed by a man

⁵³ Holloway 2006, 365.

⁵⁴ Holloway 2006, 365.

⁵⁵ A symposium was a Greek tradition in which the male elite came together to drink wine. The symposium was also linked to homosexuality and the Dionysus cult. See also ‘The Symposium in Ancient Greek Society and Thought’, 2013, Fiona Hobden.

⁵⁶ This also comes from Greek tradition and was seen as a sort of game, called the *kottabos*, and consisted of throwing the last residue of the wine at a target. See also ‘The Symposium in Ancient Greek Society and Thought’, 2013, Fiona Hobden.

⁵⁷ Holloway 2006, 367.

⁵⁸ Holloway 2006, 367.

in a gown. The latter has something in his hand that has been interpreted by Holloway as a walking stick.⁵⁹ The whole scene is probably depicting the entering or leaving of the symposium.

On the east wall, a nude male is standing next to a crater. In his hands he is holding something that has been interpreted by Robinson as a oinochoe.⁶⁰ Although the crater has been identified as a Greek volute-crater by the excavator, Robinson argues that it looks more like an indigenous Palinuro-Krug (Fig. 6).⁶¹

The roof of the tomb (Fig. 7) depicts a scene which gives the tomb its name: it depicts an image of a male diving in water. Two olive trees are in the picture, just as a tower. Two factors in this picture are remarkable. First, the image of a diver has not been attested in other Greek tombs. Secondly, the tower is not the platform of which the diver jumps.

§2.2.3 Interpretations

The iconography in the tomb has led to much debate about the identity of the deceased that was buried here. Some scholars think that the deceased was a Greek, because of the depiction of a symposium and the fact that it is a cist tomb. Other scholars, however, have argued that the deceased was probably an indigenous person because of the depiction of a diver, even though there are almost no other tombs in Italy which depict a diver. Moreover, the indigenous character of the tomb is based on the fact it has no parallels whatsoever in other Greek cemeteries. Robinson has also argued that the tomb was built for an indigenous person, mainly based on the interpretation of the crater depicted on the east wall as a Palinuro-Krug.

However, to what extent can we actually say something about the identity of the deceased solely based on the interpretations of the frescoes in the tomb? The answer to this question is: very little. Because of the exquisite paintings in the tomb, archaeologists have failed to do proper research on the other aspects of the tomb: grave goods and the surrounding cemetery. Therefore, in my next chapter, I will go into all the other aspects that can influence our understanding of this tomb, excluding the grave goods. By doing this, I am hoping to make my own contribution to the discussion of this tomb and the identity of the deceased.

⁵⁹ Holloway 2006, 371.

⁶⁰ Robinson 2011, 52.

⁶¹ Robinson 2011, 52, 54.

Chapter 3: A new approach

As stated before, too much emphasis has been put on the iconography in the Tomb of the Diver. Therefore, I would suggest a completely different approach in trying to answer the question of the identity of the deceased within it. In this essay, I will kick off this new approach by looking at the other burials near Poseidonia. This way, I am hoping to be able to place the Tomb of the Diver more in perspective. Although, in my opinion, the grave goods also have to be taken into account, these will not be included in this essay because I fear too little has been published about the grave goods to come to a significant conclusion.

Because the general focus of studying the dead in Poseidonia has always been put on the Tomb of the Diver, the other burials near the city have not been published as extensively. The main contribution that goes into the other burials was written by Angela Pontandolfo, Agnès Rouveret and Marina Cipriani⁶² and was not translated in English until 2004. The rest of this chapter will thus be mainly based on their publication.

§3.1 *The other burials*

Poseidonia had 6 main *necropoleis*, extending for about a kilometer north and south of the city walls. They are called: Andriuolo, Laghetto, and Arcioni to the north, and Santa Venera, Licinella, and Spinazzo to the south. These *necropoleis* have all been linked to the city. Other burials have been found at Tempa del Prete, Linora, Contrada Vecchia di Agripoli, Vannullo, Gaudò and Albanella (Fig. 8). These *necropoleis* have been identified as belonging to ancient farms, and not necessarily to the city itself. The Tomb of the Diver was found in the *necropolis* of Tempa del Prete.⁶³

In these *necropoleis*, a change in funerary ritual is visible from 400 BC onwards. These changes have been linked by Pontandolfo *et al.* to the (discussable) invasion of the Lucanians. “*The Greek custom of inhuming the dead with few or no grave-goods is abandoned in favor of burials where the quantity, quality, and juxtaposition of objects are used to stress gender, age, and social hierarchies. Craters, neck-amphorae, weapons and armor distinguish the graves of men; hydriae, oinochoae, lebetes gamikoi and ornaments those of women.*”⁶⁴ However, within the cemeteries, there are also signs of continuity when

⁶² The book is called ‘The Painted Tombs of Paestum’.

⁶³ Cipriani/Pontandolfo/Rouveret 2004, 8.

⁶⁴ Cipriani/Pontandolfo/Rouveret 2004, 8.

looking at the kind of tomb (cist tomb) and the deposition of only one deceased within one grave.⁶⁵

According to Cipriani, Pontandolfo and Rouveret, clusters of graves that were centered on one eminent tomb were discovered in the more thoroughly investigated *necropoleis*.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, they fail to mention what makes these tombs so eminent, although we can assume that these tombs probably contained rich grave goods and, at least in some cases, were painted. Moreover, 80 tombs from the 4th century BC have been found that were painted, of which 50 come from the *necropoleis* that are directly linked to the city. Also, the ratio of painted tombs in the *necropoleis* change over time: 9% in the first quarter of the 4th century BC, 18% in the second quarter, 12.5% in the third quarter and only 3% in the last quarter.⁶⁷ However, although also depicting men and women, the paintings were stylistically different in the Tomb of the Diver (some would even say qualitatively better).

§3.2 *The other painted tombs*

These other painted tombs will now be discussed, although not to the same extent as the Tomb of the Diver. By doing this, I will be able to point out the differences and similarities between the other painted tombs and the Tomb of the Diver.

When concerning the depictions in the painted tombs, there is a noticeable difference in sex.⁶⁸ In the tombs for males, the return of a warrior is in most cases depicted on the slap behind the head of the deceased. The warrior is always bearded, riding a horse and using Italic defense weapons. Moreover, in some tombs there are clues that an age distinction is made between male roles in society: a youth, a warrior, or an old man. Concerning the grave goods, the deceased is always accompanied by a crater and vases used for wine consumption.⁶⁹

When considering the female tombs, we see a completely different picture. Here, on the main slab behind the head of the deceased, the woman is visible spinning wool with the assistance of a handmaid. In most cases the deceased female is accompanied by funerary vases, jewelry, a hydria, and a lebes.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Cipriani/Pontandolfo/Rouveret 2004, 8-9.

⁶⁶ Cipriani/Pontandolfo/Rouveret 2004, 9.

⁶⁷ Cipriani/Pontandolfo/Rouveret 2004, 9.

⁶⁸ Although the depiction of funerary games is common in both male and female tombs.

⁶⁹ Cipriani/Pontandolfo/Rouveret 2004, 35-36.

⁷⁰ Cipriani/Pontandolfo/Rouveret 2004, 39-41.

§3.3 Conclusions and interpretations concerning the Tomb of the Diver

So what is there to be learned about the Tomb of the Diver using the new approach? One of the most important facts that has often been overlooked by archaeologists, is that the Tomb of the Diver has been found in a small cluster of graves that were connected to an ancient farm. Moreover, Tempa del Prete and Linora are situated 1.5 kilometers from the city walls and 1 kilometer from the other cemeteries of the city. So, can this cluster of graves be linked to Poseidonia and can we even safely assume that these people actually lived in the city? My answer to this question would be ‘no’.

Secondly, from 400 BC onwards, a change is visible in the grave ritual. This change has been linked to the occupation of the city by the Lucanians. However, besides the fact that this occupation is discussable, the Tomb of the Diver has been dated 70 years earlier. Moreover, the depictions in the grave do not resemble that of the other painted tombs in Poseidonia. A few things can be in play here. Firstly, how sure are we that the dating of the tomb is correct? As mentioned before, this was on the basis of only 1 vase and the dating of the tomb has never been discussed. The paintings have probably also been dated, but this is never mentioned in the literature. Moreover, paintings are mainly dated on style, which is not very precise. So it could, in my opinion, very well be possible that the dating of the tomb is different than what scholars now believe. If so, this would completely alter the image we have now. On the other hand, it is also possible that this tomb was an example for others. It is possible that the Tomb of the Diver was the first painted tomb, after which multiple others followed. However, the Tomb of the Diver stayed unique because none of the other painted tombs has copied the apparent ‘Greekness’ of the paintings in the Tomb of the Diver.

According to Holloway, when the tomb was discovered, “*Panebianco wanted us to remember that Paestum’s location near the mouth of the Sele River, considered by the ancients to be the border between Greek and Italic-Etruscan Italy, meant that the tomb painting at Paestum should be viewed in relation to influence from the Etruscans, whose archaic and classical tomb theory that the Tomb of the Diver was an otherwise unparalleled creation made for a nostalgic Etruscan.*”⁷¹ However, the paintings in the Tomb of the Diver do not resemble the paintings in the rest of the Tombs. So could it be that (Etruscan?) tomb painting was adapted as a new trend, but by someone who identified himself more as a Greek? I would say that there is no evidence to rule this possibility out.

⁷¹ Holloway 2006, 385-386.

Conclusion

Concerning Ethnicity

In the first chapter I stated that I wanted to use the Tomb of the Diver as a case study to confirm or discard some of the statements that have been made about ethnicity and identity. Firstly, the fact that landscape is an important factor in the creation of an ethnic identity. I would argue that this vision holds true, if we see landscape as borders, environment and every other aspect of the land, sea and sky we can think of. For example, Poseidonia was situated at the mouth of the Sele, bordering the sea and surrounded by mountains. Therefore, it can be regarded as a sort of peninsula within the Italic landscape. This means that a common ethnic identity was created very easily, because there was little contact with other peoples. However, this little contact increased and had a changing cultural identity as a result. We can therefore argue that cultural identity is not (always) affected by borders. It is, however, affected by the landscape because the environment has a lot of influence on the way cultural identity progresses.

Secondly, the fact that ethnicity is a social construct that is constantly changing also holds true in this case. We do see changing funeral rites over time; because cemeteries are a reflection of the living society, there can be argued that a change must also have been visible in other aspects of daily life. I also mentioned that, according to my believe, ethnic identity was something more static. And although I do still believe this, I think it cannot be proven with this case study. Moreover, I believe that cultural and ethnic identity are only two of the many identities a person can have.

Thirdly, I mentioned that there is still a lot of discussion about the importance of textual evidence. With this case study, I have not been able to prove or disprove the importance of texts. However, I do believe that they can help us understand how people thought a long time ago.

Fourthly, as I said, some scholars believe that the most important fact of ethnicity is achieving political goals. Again, I have not proved or disproved this with my case study. However, I believe that an ethnic identity is created not because of politics, but because of a sense of commonness, although I have no evidence whatsoever to back this up.

Lastly, one of the most important question we have to ask ourselves, can we even try to say something about ethnicity or identity on the basis of archaeological and historical remains? I think that there absolutely are ways to do this, although caution has to be exercised always.

Concerning the Tomb of the Diver

So who was the person buried in the Tomb of the Diver? The person buried in the tomb was probably a male, if we can indeed link him to the paintings and the bone analysis can be trusted. So he has a male sexual identity.

Then we look to his ethnic and cultural identity: was he Greek or was he something else? Based on the iconography in the tomb, the form of the tomb and the grave goods found in it, one would argue that he is indeed Greek. Based on the fact that the tomb is painted, that there is a diver and an indigenous crater (Palinuro-Krug) depicted, one would argue that he is 'indigenous'. My guess is that the person who was buried here had an 'indigenous' ethnic identity, but had a 'Greek' cultural identity. This could be the result of living near Poseidonia and coming into contact with Greeks and learning their ways. The reason I do not believe he is actually a Greek, is because his tomb does not provide evidence that the person lying there knew of the exact Greek rites concerning burial. The other possibility is that the deceased had a Greek cultural and ethnic identity, but was to some extent influenced by the indigenous peoples of Italy. Although I do not think this was the case, the possibility cannot be ruled out.

But with pinpointing his sexual, ethnic and cultural identity, we are far from answering the question *who* the person in the tomb was. We have now only answered *what* the person in the tomb was. To answer the question about who he was, textual evidence would come in handy. However, in most cases and also in this case, no textual evidence is available. Therefore, we must also look to other things.

Firstly, we can safely assume that the lyre played an important role in this man's life because it appears in the paintings multiple times. Secondly, it is questionable if his role in society was indeed as important as some scholars led us to believe. It is also very well possible that he just was very important to the people he left behind, who honoured him with this grave. Although the richness of the tombs contradicts it, there is a possibility that the deceased was 'just' a farmer, which is suggested by the link of the cemetery with a farm and the situation of it 1.5 kilometres outside the city walls.

In conclusion, this grave could well be the grave of a Lucanian farmer (or a farmer's boy) who adapted to the Greek way of living and loved to play the lyre. Maybe the evidence put forward in this essay is not conclusive and is open for debate, the image sketched here differs significantly from the image that has been proposed till now. And it is very important for all archaeologists to keep in mind that the approach and subsequent interpretation of the

evidence are essential in reconstructing the past, and that when the approach differs, the evidence can still be the same but the outcome completely different.

Images



Figure 1: The spatial situation of Poseidonia (in the top north-western corner) and Sybaris (in the west, just above the heel).

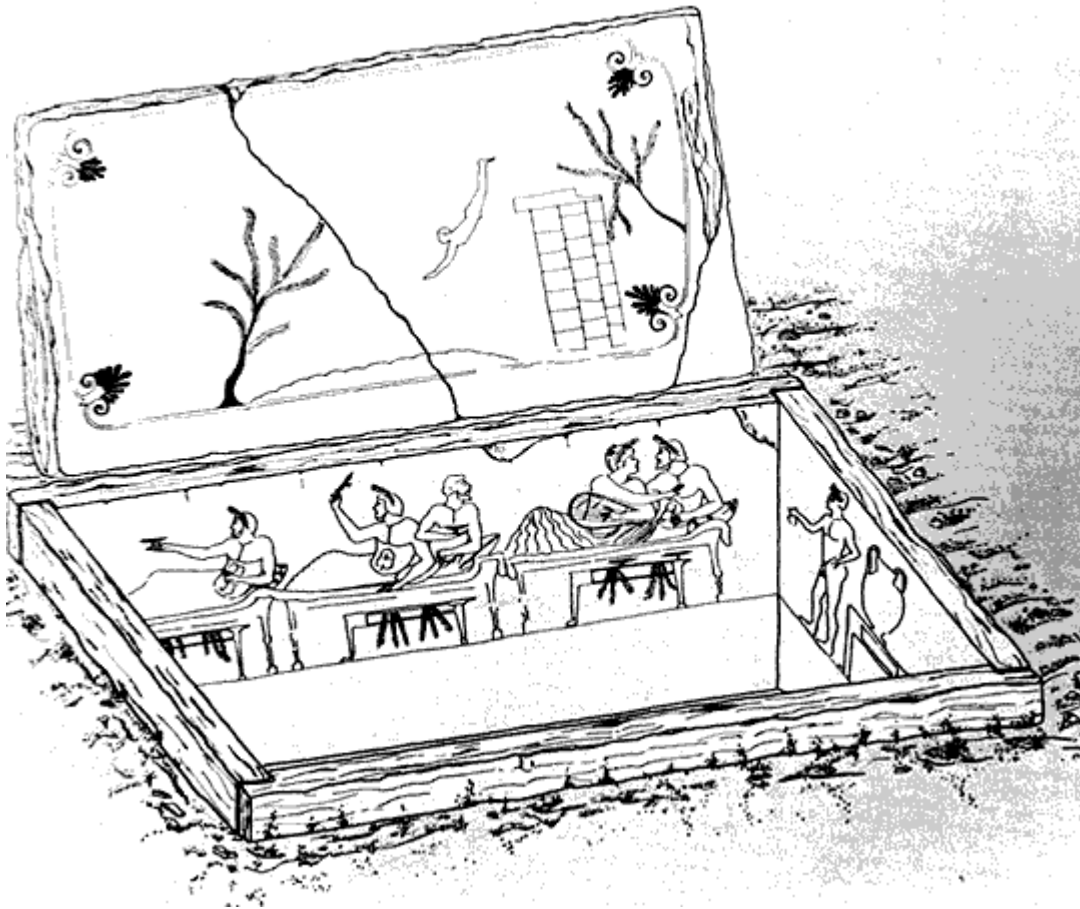


Figure 2: The Tomb of the Diver.



Figure 3: An overview of the paintings in the Tomb of the Diver.



Figure 4: The symposium depicted on the north and south walls of the Tomb of the Diver



Figure 5: The painting on the west wall of the Tomb of the Diver/



Figure 6: The painting on the east wall of the Tomb of the Diver.



Figure 7: The painting on the roof of the Tomb of the Diver.



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