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Surviving Colonization in Ancient Italy and Colonial North America: A Modern Perspective for the Study of Ethnicity in the Ancient World

This paper focuses on the complex nature of Italic ethnic identity as it existed before, during and after the colonization of southern Italy by the Greeks and Romans. The central problem is whether the native peoples had already formed a coherent, ethnic identity before the threat of Greek and Roman conquest. My focus is on the Italic center of Roccagloriosa in southern Campania, south of Paestum, and the surrounding territory. The Italic peoples in this region are called "Lucanians" by both ancient historiographers and modern archaeologists and historians. The history of these peoples begins with their apparent conquest of the Greek colonists at Paestum and other coastal Greek cities during the fifth century BC. The cultural label of "Lucanians" was first applied by the Greek historiographers who were not very interested in ethnography in the modern sense. Later Greek and Roman historians such as Diodorus Siculus, Strabo, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Livy and Pliny the Elder have all drawn upon the earlier Greek sources and continued using the word "Lucanians" to describe the peoples who once occupied this region. However, these writers were mostly writing in the time of Augustus, after the bloody, social wars in which the descendants of the various Italic peoples unified to rebel against the Romans for political reasons. Thus any reference to "Lucanians" in these writers is inevitably tainted by the recent bloodshed of the social wars.

The same problem arises when dealing with the archaeological evidence. Much of the Italic material from major centers such as Paestum has been studied only in relation to the material of the Greek and Roman periods. The native Italic peoples also adopted many of the colonial Greek cultural institutions, making it difficult to discern the Italic elements. Lastly, the Roman colonies established by Sulla consequently obliterated the Italic levels of occupation. The Italic or Lucanian phases of habitation thus become even more difficult to reconstruct. The site of Roccagloriosa, however, provides a unique opportunity to study a purely native settlement, away from the Greek coastal colonies, and not destroyed by the establishment of a Roman colony in the immediate vicinity.

Any approach used when dealing with the problem of Italic ethnic identity and Roman colonization must therefore take the above factors into consideration before undertaking an analysis with the cultural label of "Lucanians" already formulated. The work of Frederik Barth (*Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Boston, 1969) and J. Milton Yinger (*Ethnicity* (Albany, 1994) provides an analytical framework needed for dealing with culturally-specific questions of ethnicity. The employment of such an analytical formulation will facilitate a reconsideration of the validity of the ethnic label "Lucanians", used by both ancient and modern writers. The Lucanians may have exhibited a very early tendency for identification with a coherent ethnic group.

Anthropological and archaeological studies of other societies where native peoples have been colonized provide a comparative model against which the ancient case can be evaluated. A coherent, analytical framework and comparative model together form a systematic approach for dealing with the validity of the term Lucanians, inherited from

the fragmentary and biased historiographic tradition. Material in the form of Oscan inscriptions, pottery, architectural structures, and mortuary practices, in addition to spatial and settlement organization all reveal a syncretic culture formed from the union of colonizers and native peoples. These findings lead to a revised ethnography of these peoples, vastly different and more complex than the accounts of the ancient sources. They also may shed light on a new methodology in dealing with problems concerning the study of both ancient and modern ethnicity.