

Share and Share Alike: Cultural Blending  
and the Orientalizing Phenomenon in Magna Graecia  
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Scholarship exploring Greek interactions with Near Eastern populations during the Orientalizing Period has been remarkably one-sided; often with the view that the Greeks absorbed elements from these cultures while providing little in return. The scarcity of Greek vessels in Levantine contexts has resulted in the assumption that eastern peoples resisted Greek customs. Nevertheless some view Greeks as more resistant to Eastern influence than is usually accepted. S. Morris has posited that some aspects of eastern culture (i.e. elements of religion and epic tradition) that are commonly assumed to appear in Greece at the end of the Dark Age is rather evidence of continuity of Mycenaean culture which also had strong trading ties with the Levant. Coldstream sees the resistance of mainland Greeks to adapt Phoenician open ceramic shapes as proof that Greeks were more interested in the contents of the pots rather than the pots themselves. This can be projected as Greek elites keen to obtain objects perceived as “foreign” but not ready to blur the line between Greek and “other” and thus allowing these elites to differentiate themselves from non-elites within their own communities. An exception to this picture may be found in Magna Graecia during the first wave of Greek colonization. Phoenicians and Greeks were both settling southern Italy in small numbers and in close contact at several settlements. Since the indigenous populations in the Bay of Naples consisted of loosely organized chiefdoms, there was no strong central authority. Without a strong power base, settlers and locals alike would have been eager to strike a delicate balance with one another. Archaeological evidence supports a fusion of the cultures, perhaps in an effort to appeal to each other’s values and thus allowing a peaceful co-existence. This paper will examine how the situation in Magna Graecia was unique in that the “clash” between Greeks, Phoenicians and the indigenous populations was more fluid than elsewhere in the Mediterranean world. In the absence of contemporary sources, my arguments will rely heavily on the archaeological evidence obtained from grave goods, principally those discovered in and around the cemeteries of Pithecusae, where the blending of these various cultures is particularly poignant. By examining how the material evidence substantiates a unique “Orientalizing” movement in the Mediterranean, I hope to show why perceptions of “the other” in Magna Graecia were distinct from the rest of the Greek world.