

Aristoxenus' Fragment on the Barbarization and the Painted Tomb of Capua and Poseidonia: an Interdisciplinary Comparison

Aristoxenus' fragment on the barbarization of Poseidonia (fr. 124 Wehrli), from the second half of the fourth century BCE, has long been considered problematic due to the absence of the Lucanians. Although they are attested in other contemporary sources—most notably Isocrates (*De pace* 49–50)—the musicologist from Tarentum does not attribute responsibility for this “barbarization” to them. Instead, he claims that the Greeks of Poseidonia became Tyrrhenians or Romans. This article proposes a new interpretation of Aristoxenus' testimony by situating it within the broader cultural and political transformations that affected Magna Graecia at the end of the fourth century, a key period when Poseidonia confronted the advance of Rome toward the South.

The final phase of Poseidonia's painted tombs, represented by the Spinazzo necropolis at the end of the fourth century BCE, reveals both continuity and transformation in funerary practices. Tombs display simpler grave goods, yet increasingly emphasize kinship and elite identity through iconography depicting encounters between deceased and ancestors or magistrate-like figures, gestures of *fides*, and symbolic objects such as the *toga* and the *anulus aureus*. Comparison with Capua and Livy's account (IV 37, 1-2; 52, 6; VIII 11; 14) contextualizes Aristoxenus' fragment and highlights the political dimension of these images: the local elite appear to adopt Roman symbols voluntarily, negotiating identity and privileges in anticipation of the *deductio* of 273 BCE. This evidence, alongside urban and epigraphic sources, demonstrates how Poseidonia's aristocracy engaged in a broader process of cultural and political adaptation during Rome's southward expansion, paralleling developments in nearby Campanian cities and reflecting the interplay of Greek, Italic, and Roman models.

A political reading of Aristoxenus' fragment suggests that the omission of the Lucanians reflects a deliberate ideological stance aligned with Tarentine interests around 320 BCE. Rather than acknowledging the Lucanians—by then potential allies of Tarentum—Aristoxenus shifts attention toward the Tyrrhenians and Romans, perceived as the true threats to Greek hegemony in Magna Graecia. This rhetorical choice, noted by Asheri (1999), Musti (2005), and Wonder (2014), reveals both the fluidity of Italic ethnonyms and the philosopher's engagement with contemporary political realities. His testimony thus mirrors Tarentum's evolving strategy of rapprochement with Italic groups in opposition to Rome's growing influence in southern Italy.

More broadly, this study addresses identity mechanisms in antiquity and the voluntary dimension of processes traditionally termed Romanization and Hellenization, here understood as tools used by Italic populations to negotiate power, affiliation, and representation. Drawing on previous scholarship (Gallini 1973; Torelli 1988; Cecconi 2006; Versluys 2014; Terrenato 2022), the article argues that these phenomena should be read as complex and interactive cultural strategies rather than unilateral impositions. The case of Poseidonia—its “becoming Roman” as perceived already by Aristoxenus—thus offers a compelling example of how local elites actively shaped their identities within the shifting political landscape of fourth- and third-century BCE Italy.

Works cited

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