

Middle Grounds at Sybaris: Tracing the Indigenous Role in Colonial Settlement

In the past two decades, archaeologists have conducted fieldwork at various ancient settlements surrounding the site of Sybaris, an Achaean *apoikia* on the Lucanian coast, with great consequences for our understanding of the development of the polis. For instance, the excavation of a temple site at Timpone della Motta, thought to have once been a sanctuary to Epeius, demonstrates a remarkable fusion of Hellenic and local Oenotrian material culture through the evolving architecture of the site and changing patterns of votive dedication. Moreover, new analyses of indigenous burial practice throughout the Sibaritide (the *khora* of ancient Sybaris) suggest that Oenotrian culture persisted during the Greek migration process but also adopted particular aspects of Hellenic material culture over time (Kleibrink 2001). Lastly, information collected from numerous surveys and excavations suggests both the early dominance of Oenotrian culture as well as the likely cohabitation between these populations and migrating Achaeans into the 7th century BCE (Attema 2008). These findings challenge the conventional model that archaeologists and historians have employed to describe the foundation of Sybaris, which emphasizes the capacity of migrating Hellenes to immediately and violently acculturate, expel, or eradicate indigenous populations at the moment of settlement (Guzzo 1982). To explain these findings, we must employ new, more nuanced narratives to describe the settlement of this *apoikia* (Osborne 1998; Owen 2005).

This presentation focuses on the specific capacity of the “middle ground” model to demonstrate how a pattern of reciprocal and peaceful interactions influenced the development of Sybaris, utilizing these recent discoveries. Middle ground theory was first hypothesized by Richard White to explain colonial French-Native American interactions in the *pays d’en haut* (a name for the region around the Great Lakes) of North America (1991). It is predicated on the

notion that extensive cross-cultural interactions occur when distinct populations meet without a clearly dominant power. The theory argues that a system of repeated miscommunication during social, religious and economic transactions between such populations contributes to the creation of a hybridized culture. Scholars have employed middle ground theory to describe the interactions between Greeks, Phoenicians, and Sikeliotes in Sicily during the 7th and 6th centuries BCE, particularly those that resulted in the fusion of the deities Herakles and Melqart (Malkin 2011). Drawing on architectural, ceramic, epigraphic, and literary evidence from the Sibaritide and the rest of Lucania, this presentation elucidates a process through which indigenous cultures may have shaped Sybaris as it grew to dominate the region. The presence of a middle ground at this *polis*, coupled with recognized middle ground interactions at other Greek *apoikiai*, suggests that this approach may be instrumental in arriving at a more refined and holistic understanding of the colonial process in the Archaic Mediterranean.

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