Some Greek Inscriptions on Native Vases from South East Italy

Alastair Small
University of Edinburgh

Brian Shefton has frequently explored the complex pattern of distribution of Greek artifacts throughout the Mediterranean World and its fringes, and many of his articles, especially on little-known classes of pottery or bronzes, document the links of commerce or gift exchange between the Greeks and their ‘barbarian’ neighbours. The bronzes and ceramics are of course only the most durable items remaining as evidence for what must have been a much more extensive cultural interaction. Usually they can tell us little about the ideas that were exchanged together with the goods—beyond what we can infer from the artistic representations they carry, or from their cultural contexts. Such written evidence as we have for Greek and native cultural interaction has passed through the filter of Greek historians writing later than the events they describe, and with Greek prejudices. The contemporary words in which the ‘natives’ expressed their ideas about Greek culture have almost entirely vanished.

Occasionally, however, a word inscribed on a pot or bronze can help us to enter this almost vanished thought-world, and I propose in this paper dedicated to Brian to look at two examples of native pots inscribed with Greek words which raise interesting questions about Greek and native cultural identity. Both come from Southeast Italy, and both can be dated around the end of the late archaic period.

The first is a stamnos-krater in the wheel-made painted ware typical of Central Apulia in the Late Iron Age (Figs. 3, 4). It forms part of a tomb group (Tomb 3, 1952) excavated at Santo Mola 3 km south west of Gioia del Colle in central Apulia (Fig. 1). The site has never been systematically studied, but it must have been of some importance, for it is situated on a high point which forms the watershed between the Adriatic and the Ionian Gulf. The burials are said to extend in an east-west direction for a little more than 1 km.
The tomb in which it was found was excavated in 1952, together with at least fifty two others from the same cemetery. The excavation has not been fully published, but a brief summary of the artifacts found in the burials was listed in the inventory of Taranto Museum, and has been reported by Antonio Donvito in a volume of studies on Gioia del Colle.\(^1\) A photograph in the Museum at Gioia del Colle (Fig. 2) confirms that our stamnos-krater was found together with fourteen other pots. Most of them are in the same wheel-made painted ware (two trefoil oinochoai, a kantharos, a miniature kantharos, two mugs with vertical handles, a two-handled bowl, and two handle-less dishes or lids), but two plain wheel-made one-handled cups, a cooking-pot with vertical handle, a hand-made one-handled jug decorated in Peucetian subgeometric style (typical of the tail-end of the Peucetian geometric tradition), and an Ionian type cup were also found in the tomb.

Evidently the tomb contained a variety of pots which may have had different uses connected with the funerary ritual. Some are likely to have been used for preparing or serving food (whether in a funerary banquet, or in a symbolic banquet of the dead in the after-life), but others, especially the Ionian type cup, the oinochoai and the stamnos-krater were probably designed for use in a symposium. As in other parts of South Italy, the precise relationship between grave goods and symposium is not self-evident,\(^2\) but the presence of these vessels shows that the dead man belonged to a social group which was familiar with Greek drinking customs, and probably copied Greek symptic practices in mixing, pouring, and drinking wine.

The tomb group can be dated broadly by the Ionian type cup, which is by far the commonest Greek type of pot imported into ‘indigenous’ parts of Apulia. They were produced in large quantities in Metapontum, and probably also in other cities of Magna Graecia, in the 6th century.\(^3\) They were particularly frequent in the

---