

# The Evolution of Funerary Ideology Among the Elites of Roccagloriosa During the 5<sup>th</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> Centuries B.C.

Katrina Tarnawsky

The practice of mortuary archaeology often relies upon the examination of funerary assemblages in order to reconstruct socio-cultural changes among a group of people. This paper takes a closer look at the grave goods from two pairs of Iron-Age elite Lucanian tombs at the settlement of Roccagloriosa in order to detect how funerary ideology changed over time. From the evidence I argue that there was an evolution of aristocratic gentilician identity alongside the establishment of the newly formed Lucanian ethnos in Southern Italy between the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.

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The study of burials, according to Ian Morris, is also the study of rituals the living use to construct the concept of death, but also to create an ideal model of the world in which they live.<sup>1</sup> Often the funerary realm was a locus for the negotiation of identity where members of a community strove to represent themselves in accordance with a socio-cultural or political ideal. Thus, one may examine how a group of people buried their dead in order to infer their social structure and methods of self-definition. My own study of the La Scala necropolis of the Lucanian fortified settlement Roccagloriosa will use these principles in an attempt to understand how the funerary ideology of the elite burials within reflected the socio-cultural reality of the interred individuals and why it underwent changes over the course of the cemetery's use.

The earliest tombs at the La Scala necropolis are dated to the end of the fifth century B.C. which plants them fully within a period of ethnic transformation in the southern area of Tyrrhenian Italy that came to be called Lucania. This region had previously been inhabited by diverse Italic groups – the Oenotrians, Ausonians, Chones, and Opici – but by the fourth century B.C., the written record describes a definable and distinct entity called the Λευκάνοί (Leukanoi).<sup>2</sup> The Oscan-speaking Lucanian presence was probably the result of Samnitic penetration into the territory of Magna Graecia, a theory that is supported by the find of an Oscan-Sabellian bronze statuette from the first half of the fifth century B.C. in a small rural sanctuary near Mt. Centaurino.<sup>3</sup> Much research has been done in recent years regarding the socio-cultural and ethnic identity of this southern Italic people, this essay will deal specifically with the developing aristocratic group of one of the Lucanian *oppida*<sup>4</sup> by contrasting two pairs of chronologically separated tombs (likely different generations of the same family). Both sets of tombs contain an aristocratic male and female burial, the first pair appear to be a married couple of the end of the fifth century B.C. and the second a mother and son from the third quarter of the fourth century. In examining the evidence from these two pairs of graves, I put forward the argument that over the course of the fourth century B.C., there existed an observable and deliberate change in the representation of the dead Roccagloriosan elite individuals

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Morris, *Death-Ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Elena Isayev, *Inside Ancient Lucania: Dialogues in History and Archaeology* (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2007), 11-2.

<sup>3</sup> Helena Fracchia, "Western Lucania, Southern Samnium and Northern Apulia: Settlement and Cultural Changes, Fifth-Third Centuries B.C.," in *Samnium: Settlement and Cultural Change*, ed. Howard Jones (Providence: Centre for Old World Archaeology and Art, 2004), 70.

<sup>4</sup> In Latin, an *oppidum* signifies a fortified indigenous settlement.

through the grave goods buried with them. The inspiration for this modification seems to be linked to the evolving concept of the oligarchic *gens* within the Lucanian world, from a group establishing its status and power within the *oppidum* to a secure dynasty that turned its focus to emphasizing its genealogy and its social and ritual importance to the community.

The earliest individuals buried in the La Scala necropolis, the male and female in tombs 6 and 10, are located in the northeast area of the cemetery's plateau and seem to form the two loci around which a basically symmetrical clustering of tombs developed over the next century. This evidence along with the veritable treasure trove of grave goods that the individuals are buried with points to the assertion that they were the leading couple of the local community and the progenitors of the *gentes* which occupy the rest of the cemetery.<sup>5</sup> Tomb 6 and 10 are trench graves and contain bronze, iron, and ceramic objects that appear to conform to a model current among the Italic societies of Magna Graecia. This model, which placed an emphasis in the funerary sphere on banqueting in the Homeric fashion, resulted from cultural contact with the nearby Greek and Etruscan city states, but also had at its core traditional Italic elements such as a focus on the warrior as the idea male role in society and the ritual of cremation.

Tomb 6, which contained the skeletal remains of a male adult between the ages of 35 and 45, has a large collection of the sympotic ware mentioned above including a great amount of "hereditary" middle fifth century bronzes of Etrusco-Campanian production such as a stamnos with cast hand shaped handles, strainer, ladle, fire-dogs, and six skewers.<sup>6</sup> Tomb 10, which supposedly contained the female counterpart of the man in tomb 6, held a similar assemblage of banquet goods, missing only the bronze skewers. These items all reference the custom of the reclining banquet, or symposium, which had been derived from the Italiote tradition and was in use among native elites by at least the last quarter of the seventh century B.C. in Etruria.<sup>7</sup> In particular, the materials used in the roasting of meat denoted only the highest members in the social order as the roasting of viscera was a restricted privilege. In the context of Homeric myth that the symposium represented, only the aristocratic warrior group consumed the roasted sacrificial victim while the lower ranked members of society had to prepare their portion of meat by boiling it in cauldrons.<sup>8</sup>

At a time when the Lucanian elites were still relative newcomers to positions of power in the region, it is feasible that they would have adopted a pre-existing ideological model in the realm of death that exhibited their social class and wealth. This Homeric aristocratic ideal was a form of self-representation that the individuals interred in tombs 6 and 10 may have used to translate their social prestige into the political power needed to establish their clan as the rulers of Rocca gloriosa and its surrounding territory. Such a need to firmly entrench the family line can be seen in the age of the bronze banquet goods of tomb 6. Because they are from a generation earlier than the burial date, the materials seem to imply the importance of ancestral descent in the social station of the individuals.<sup>9</sup> The fact that the items themselves are of Etruscan origin further strengthens the assertion that the funerary custom of banqueting was a result of elite foreign cultural contact that symbolically facilitated this gentilician group's growing influence and claim to power.

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<sup>5</sup> M. Gualtieri and M. Jackes, "The Cemetery Areas: Material Culture and Social Organisation", in *Fourth Century B.C. Magna Graecia: A Case Study*, ed. M. Gualtieri (Sweden: Paul Åströms, 1993), 158-9.

<sup>6</sup> Gualtieri and Jackes, "The Cemetery Areas", 143.

<sup>7</sup> Corinna Riva, *The Urbanization of Etruria: Funerary Practices and Social Change, 700-600 BC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 145.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>9</sup> Fracchia, "Western Lucania", 72.

However, the grave goods from this pair of early tombs do not reflect an ideology of death fully acculturated to the Greek world. One element that reveals a distinctly Italic modification of a Greek tradition is the adoption of the strigil<sup>10</sup> along with some marker of a militaristic identity within the burial context. Fabio Colivicchi writes that the end of the eighth century B.C. marked the abandonment of conspicuous military displays in tombs of the Greek *poleis* in favour of an emphasis on the role of citizen within the community.<sup>11</sup> This stands in marked contrast to the typical Lucanian funerary custom of burying the elite members of society with at least a spear and/or javelin and bronze belt, if not a full panoply of armour. Yet, the addition of the strigil to these traditional grave goods, which in the Italiote world represented the passage from boyhood into manhood and citizenship through athletic achievements, was further modified by the native oligarchies to become only one complementary component in the process of mastering the heroic warrior's way of life.<sup>12</sup>

There are strigils in both tombs 6 and 10 at Roccagloriosa, a clear sign that the clan was making use of the Greek-derived tradition explained above. Yet their presence in both a male and female tomb is anomalous and suggests that the element of the strigil was somewhat revised by the local elites to become less a symbol of the ideal masculine role and instead a marker of great social prestige. Furthermore, the inclusion of the bronze spear head and possibly the knife in tomb 6 is telling of the necessity of the Lucanian elites to concertedly express their place within the Italic mentality of the "world of warriors".<sup>13</sup> Though unlike the impressive panoplies that are more typical of Lucanian graves, the subtle devices of the victorious warrior can be read as the elite family's concession to what Helena Fracchia terms the funerary "aspect of 'display'" – the accoutrements that have been culturally necessitated to convey the legitimacy of the clan's aristocratic social position.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, the plain ware olla included among the grave goods in tomb 6 is of interest because it stands out as a fully traditional element in the cremation ritual derived from the Samnites. As I discussed above, in both the social and military spheres, the *gens* represented by the individuals in the paired tombs deliberately chose to utilize Hellenizing traditions, albeit in modified forms, to confirm their status as an oligarchic family. Their intent was to illustrate their social status and great accumulation of wealth, not their origins or ethnic identity.<sup>15</sup> Yet, the olla was rooted in the centuries-old ritual practice of heroic cremation and along with a dipper, would be used to douse the pyre and were then placed at the feet of the deceased.<sup>16</sup> It is curious that in religious terms, the Lucanian elites apparently needed to validate their elevated position through specifically Italic means rather than through the Greek model that influenced the other grave goods. Perhaps ritual remained one part of the way of life at Roccagloriosa that defined the elite and substantiated their powerful station. This hypothesis is supported by the archaeological remains of a long, two-room rectangular building located on the Central Plateau which served as both habitation and cult place.<sup>17</sup> It is no

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<sup>10</sup> A strigil was an instrument composed of a curved piece of metal that was used by athletes to scrape off the oil and dirt that had accumulated after engaging in sporting activities.

<sup>11</sup> Fabio Colivicchi, "Warriors and Citizens. Models of Self-Representation in Native Basilicata", in *Verso la città. Forme insediative in Lucania e nel mondo italico tra IV e III sec.a.C.*, (Conference proceedings, Venosa, May 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>, 2006), (Venosa, 2009), 70.

<sup>12</sup> Colivicchi, "Warriors and Citizens", 77.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>14</sup> Fracchia, "Western Lucania", 73.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Helle W. Horsnaes, *The Cultural Development in North Western Lucania C. 600-273 BC* (Rome: L'ERMA di BRETSCHNEIDER, 2002), 87.

<sup>17</sup> Fracchia, "Western Lucania", 71.

stretch to suspect that this structure belonged to the leading family of the *oppidum* buried in tombs 6 and 10, or if not, to a kin group of similar social clout.

Of the later burials at La Scala, tombs 19 and 24 provide an excellent comparison to tombs 6 and 10 that can be used to investigate the evolution of the elite *gens* and their socio-political role within Roccagloriosa. These two chamber tombs were found in the northern enclosure of the cemetery as part of a cluster of graves that were most likely an extended family. The adult male burial, tomb 19, is dated to approximately 330 B.C., while a forty-year-old female in tomb 24 has been given a date of 350 B.C. Based on this chronology, their location in the cemetery, and their position side by side, the argument has been made that they were mother and son.<sup>18</sup> This pair of tombs gives one a very different picture of the funerary ideology current among the Lucanian elites after half a century of development. The grave goods buried in the later tombs suggest that distinction based on wealth and status was less important due to the aristocratic clan's success in securing its position of power. They instead shifted their focus in the funerary sphere toward the consolidation of their family line and an insistence upon their inherited roles within the developing institutional framework of a more complex settlement. For it was during the fourth century the settlement underwent developments toward a more publically organized, *polis*-type model as evidence by a monumental building near the Central Gate containing an armour deposit as well as by the semi-public votive shrine located in Complex A.<sup>19</sup> It is also likely that the elite family buried at La Scala comprised the *meddes*<sup>20</sup> that are mentioned in an Oscan *lex* found in the Central Plateau habitation, and that Roccagloriosa served as the seat of political and administrative control for the surrounding rural territory.<sup>21</sup>

Part of the ideological transformation is evident in the renewed prominence of the mounted warrior as a representation of the ideal *Lucanian* aristocratic figure. In tomb 19 was found a bronze assemblage containing a spur and harness rings along with iron horse-bits and an iron *drepanon* – a sickle-shaped blade used in cavalry combats. In addition, a monumental red figure volute krater has a depiction on one of its faces of a dismounted cavalryman heroized within a *naiskos*. No longer was the Greek model of restrained military references required, and instead, the established elites chose to emphasize their illustrious genealogy by including ethnically specific grave goods in their burial assemblages. Symbols of heroic military victory such as the bull- and mule-head rhyta found in the same tomb became the vehicle of choice for articulating the hereditary nature of aristocratic status. One further symbol linking the elites to the specifically Lucanian ideal of *aretē* in battle was the bronze belt. Although not present in tomb 19, the Samnitic bronze belts worn by warriors were ceremonially placed in six other male burials at La Scala beginning in the second quarter of the fourth century B.C. They attest to the importance of the family's self-identification with the Italic ideological paradigm of the mounted aristocracy.

The mythological narratives depicted on red-figure vases in tombs 19 and 24 are further evidence of the ideological shift that occurred in the second half of the fourth century B.C. In tomb 19, the deceased was buried with the mascaroon krater already mentioned, as well as an equally massive

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<sup>18</sup> Maurizio Gualtieri, "Late 'Apulian' Red-figure Vases in Context: A Case Study" in *Red-figure Pottery in its Ancient Setting*, ed. Stine Schierup and Bodil Bundgaard Rasmussen (Langlandsdgade: Aarhus University Press, 2012), 62.

<sup>19</sup> Fracchia, "Western Lucania", 76, 78.

<sup>20</sup> *Meddix* is a term found in Oscan inscriptions designating a magisterial or head administrative position among Italic peoples. Its meaning is similar to the Latin *index* for a judicial official. See the discussion in Joshua Whatmough, *The Foundations of Roman Italy* (London: Haskell House Publishers Ltd., 1937), 395.

<sup>21</sup> Maurizio Gualtieri, "Between Samnites and Lucanians: New Archaeological and Epigraphic Evidence for Settlement Organization" in *Samnium: Settlement and Cultural Change*, ed. Howard Jones (Providence: Centre for Old World Archaeology and Art, 2004), 46.

loutrophoros and oinochoe. On the former is depicted the myth of the marriage of Herakles and Hebe while the latter features an illustration of the rape of Chrysis who reaches out to his father Pelops for aid. There is also a well-published Apulian red-figure neck amphora depicting the motif of the mourning Niobe along with a lebes gamikos (a vase typically used in wedding ceremonies) deposited at the feet of the woman in tomb 24 that apparently reference the same themes as the vases in her son's tombs.<sup>22</sup> The myths and even the vase shapes themselves can be considered to be expressly chosen as part of a metaphorical program that highlighted marriage and genealogical links to associate this new generation of Lucanian aristocracy with the mythological royal family of Thebes. Marriage became one of the most important means of expressing the continuity of the aristocratic lineage at this time because the position of authority that the clan held was evolving along with the community of Roccagloriosa. With political, military, and ritual aspects developing into institutions of a more public nature, the *gens* needed to consolidate its identity by stressing that their status was an inherited privilege. In this context, therefore, the stress on mythological marriages and the family of Thebes through successive generations provided "an explicit referential background to the events of a royal genealogy" which was a tactic of legitimization for the family.<sup>23</sup> When both the oinochoe and the amphora are read together, the character of Pelops specifically stands as a representation of generational links as he supports his father Tantalos in the mourning Niobe scene but then transitions into the family patriarch that his son, Chrysis, turns to in his need.<sup>24</sup>

A few other exceptional grave goods from tomb 24 are worth investigating because they are valuable for understanding how the female role in the clan could be used to invoke the hereditary social rank of the *gens*. A two-handed miniature coarse ware olla, bronze phiale, and an iron *a codolo* knife were all placed along with the Niobe vase at the deceased woman's feet. This prominent position, the expensive materials the artifacts are made of, and their size suggest that they do not allude to the typical Greek association of such items with food preparation.<sup>25</sup> Instead, they are analogous to objects used in archaic Roman rituals and, as such, are likely components of an indigenous Italic tradition.<sup>26</sup> When these three grave goods are interpreted thus, it becomes possible to view the ceremonial *drepanon* from tomb 19 as an allusion not only to a military function but also to a religious one.<sup>27</sup> The funerary assemblage seems to support the hypothesis that the aristocratic clan buried in the necropolis played an important ritual role in the community and, taken in the light of the ceramic evidence and the agglomeration of the tombs into an extended family group, that this role was hereditary. This argument becomes less hypothetical when one takes into account the votive shrine within the largest house in the settlement (in Complex A). Therefore, the aristocracy's ideological focus was based on not only reinforcing their inherited political roles as *meddes* but also on consciously indicating their religious importance to the community.

It is evident that Roccagloriosa and, more generally, the Lucanian world underwent many dramatic social, cultural, and political changes over the course of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. At the beginning of this paper's period of study, the indigenous Lucanian elites were in a situation of

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<sup>22</sup> Gualtieri, "Late 'Apulian' Red-figure Vases", 66.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Gualtieri, "Late 'Apulian' Red-figure Vases", 67.

<sup>25</sup> Helena Fracchia, "Family and Community: Self-Representation in a Lucanian Chamber Tomb" in *Communicating Identity in Italic Iron Age Communities*, ed. Margarita Gleba and Helle W. Horsnaes (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2011), 95.

<sup>26</sup> A similar resurgence of symbols of ancestral links was discussed in relation to the implements of mounted cavalymen that were found in tomb 19.

<sup>27</sup> Fracchia, "Family and Community", 96.

emergence and needed to establish their power bases and justify their positions of power to external societies as well as to their own communities. Their goal was translated into the funerary sphere by the use of a pre-existing Hellenistic model of banqueting and athletics that also included traditional ritual and (less obviously) militaristic elements. Then, a deliberate change in self-representation occurred in the tombs of the La Scala necropolis in the second half of the fourth century. A quintessentially Italic symbolic repertoire of the mounted aristocratic warrior takes centre stage while mythological narratives and ritual materials are used to signal the importance of ancestry and family continuity. These changes in funerary ideology can be best explained by the evolving socio-cultural position of the leading *gens* of Roccagloriosa and the way in which they manipulated burial traditions to form an ideal representation of their position in a changing Lucanian world.

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