ROCCAGLORIOSA
Excavation of the site of a Greek colony in southern Italy

MAURIZIO GUALTIERI

The problem of the contacts between the Greek colonists settled along the coast and in the fertile valleys of southern Italy and the native populations living in the mountainous hinterland has been a major point of interest for archaeologists working in this part of the Mediterranean world.

Thanks to the initiative and the constant work of coordination of the various Superintendencies responsible for these regions, an invaluable body of new data has been unearthed in the last two decades, ranging chronologically from the Early Iron Age (8th century B.C.) to the Roman colonization of the area in the 3rd century B.C. Thus new information about the south Italian area of Magna Graecia during this period is contributing to a deeper understanding of the process of acculturation resulting from peaceful or violent contact between the Greek settlers and the Italian tribes inland. It was within the framework of this kind of research that, in the early 1970's, the Department of Antiquities of Salerno undertook a program of systematic exploration in the hinterland of Velia, a colony founded ca. 535 B.C. by Phoecians on the coast of western Lucania and commanding a vast territory [chora], corresponding roughly to the modern territory of Cilento.

Unlike many of the Greek cities in Italy, Velia was never conquered by the Italic tribes but, nevertheless, may have been forced to defend her chora more carefully. The presence of a series of fortifications built near the end of the 5th century B.C. and the beginning of the 4th, along the border of the territory of Velia, is clear evidence of the pressure of the Lucanians (a group of Oscan-speaking tribes related to the Samnites) upon what must have represented a stronghold of Hellenic culture along the Tyrrhenian coast after the fall of Cumae and Paestum to the Samnites, and Laco to the Lucanians, in the second half of the 4th century B.C. What were the major aspects of the material culture of the Lucanian tribes settled in the immediate hinterland of such important centers of Greek life and culture, and to what extent were they feeling the impact of the latter? The evidence obtained by two long seasons of excavations (1977 and 1978) at Rocca Glioriosa, a Lucanian site in the lower Cilento region, adds considerably to the picture of western Lucania during this period, a picture which had heretofore been known mainly from the evidence of the Greek site at Paestum.

The Rocca Glioriosa site is situated in a commanding position over the valley of the river Guescino (ancient Picus), overlooking a large section of the Tyrrhenian coast stretching from Palinuro to Laco. It is naturally protected toward the southeast by a long crest falling with a drop of over eighty meters to the hilly countryside below, while toward the west it was defended by a massive fortification wall built around the middle of the 4th century B.C. Like many similar fortifications in inner Lucania, the structure of the wall reveals techniques and ideas borrowed from contemporary Greek military architecture. The appearance of such strategically sited fortifications, all at about the same time, has been generally thought to be connected with the campaigns of Alexander the Molossian and his Macedonian troops in southern Italy in support of the Italo-League, which was created by a group of Greek colonies under the leadership of Tarentum to offset the pressure of the Oscan tribes. Thus the
presence of a similar fortification wall on the Gulf of Puscasto would seem to confirm the belief that the consequences of the Molossian's campaigns were being dramatically felt also in the westernmost part of the Lucanian territory.

The wall was built to create on the west, where defence was lacking, a fortified area at the back of the massive crest which was a natural defense toward the north and the east of an area of small plateaus gently sloping toward the valley of the river Mignardo. All around, traces of scattered habitation are evident. Interestingly, the densest concentration of habitation debris so far detected has been outside the wall, thus strengthening the view of a short-lived fortification for defense purposes. It is, in fact, some 150 meters west of the central part of the wall that a complex of structures was uncovered in 1971 by Professor Napoli in the course of a preliminary exploration of the site. These buildings are located on either side of what seems to be a major alley, and were used, at least in part, for public purposes—more specifically, for religious purposes. Inside the wall, on three small plateaus enclosed by it, the habitation areas so far explored would seem to point to large, separate units rather than to densely inhabited areas.

The overall pattern of settlement would seem to fit very well with the type of "paganic" habitation envisaged by Prof. Salmon for the Samnites in their Apennine homeland. There is enough evidence, indeed, for much of scattered habitation structures in a large area surrounding the fortified site to allow one to envisage Roccagloriosa as a point of reference for a population living off stock raising and some agriculture over a large area between the Bussento and Mignardo Rivers. More extensive exploration of the habitation areas on the northern and central plateaus (Carpineto and the Piano Centro) and the northwest plateau outside the wall should give us a better understanding of the organization of the center which, judging from the evidence of burials, seems to have enjoyed a period of relative affluence and to have entertained far-flung contacts with important centers of Magna Grecia.

At the beginning of the 1977 campaign, a major cemetery area was discovered some 100 meters outside the southern end of the wall. It was thoroughly excavated during the summers of 1977 and 1978. The central part of this cemetery area, relatively flat and sloping toward the west, was occupied by a scattering of tombs of the fossa type. Each consisted of a rectangular trench cut into virgin soil, usually lined with stones on the four sides and covered by a gabled roof carefully made with pan-tiles and cover-tiles. In one case, at least, there is evidence for the use of a central coldyptor (rounded tile) to cover the ridgepole.

With the addition of the roof, the tomb must have acquired a stately appearance, all the more so in that the average measurement was over 2.50 meters long and about 2 meters wide. Furthermore, in the case of Tomb 6 a wall had been built all around the trench, perhaps as a protection for the roof, so conferring to the burial the overall look of a small underground shrine.
Indeed, this protective wall suggests the possibility that the roof projected somewhat above ground-level. This type of burial, the fungus grave with roof, seems to have been the more common one, starting from the earliest period of the site (the late 6th century B.C.), which would seem to coincide with the Oscan settlement of the area.

As for the grave goods, the evidence from Tomb 6 would seem to reveal the existence in the area of an upper stratum of the population with a remarkable concentration of wealth, probably deriving from trade with other parts of Magna Graecia. The fine quality of the bronzework points to contacts with areas of Etruscan influence in northern Campania, perhaps Cappia itself, at that time still a major center for the production of bronze metalware.

Such display of personal belongings is even more evident in a later burial. In Tomb 9, the deceased (apparently a young woman) had been laid with all her jewelry on some sort of bier (or couch) supported by a rectangular limestone block on the east side of the trench, whilst the pottery had been disposed all around it. The gold double-arch fibulae, symmetrically placed on the two sides of the breast, must have fastened a veil or an upper garment by which the deceased was dressed at the moment of the funeral. They belong to a type seemingly not common at such a late period (mid-5th century) and may have been family heirlooms expended for the burial ritual.
The necklace, made of fine pendants of the bulls type in embossed gold sheet, representing alternately a woman's head and a lion's head, with cylindrical elements between, appears more contemporary. The severe look of the female heads compares well with the pendants of the Cripiano earrings in the Taranto Museum, the work of a Tarantine jeweler of the mid-4th century. However, considering the appearance at about the same time of elaborate jewelry items in burials of central-southern Lucania (Rocca nova, Armento) one should not exclude the possibility of some Lucanian workshop imitating Tarantine products. Equally fine in craftsmanship is the gold bracelet which the deceased was wearing on her left arm. Although the coiled snake type becomes standard in Tarantine production of the late 4th century B.C., the scheme of the double snake is not common; in our specimen this scheme is enriched with a motif of two opposing faces, one at each end of the snake's body; this is quite unusual and not found in Tarantine specimens.

Certainly imported from the Etruscan area would seem to be one of the two gold finger-rings with a cornelian scarab representing the forepart of two horses in the "a globulo" technique.

The greater part of the pottery set around the funeral bed would seem to belong to Lucanian workshops of the mid-4th century B.C.; the large amphora with a scene of apotheosis on the front, representing the deceased as a Dioscur standing beside his horse, may be the work of the Primato or the Rocca Nova Painters working in central/southern Lucania under the influence of Apulian workshops.

One last aspect of interest in the Rocca Nova burials, which may also shed some new light on certain aspects of Lucanian culture, is the use of cremation on a large scale for what seems to be an elaborate burial ritual. In fact, cremation is not very popular in the 4th century, particularly among the Oscan populations, although a few instances of interments (i.e., the charred remains resting in the areas used for cremation) occur in Capua, Paestum and other centers of Magna Graecia. What is remarkable, however, is the evidence found at Rocca Nova, from the latter part of the 4th century is the use of very large funeral pyres for the cremation of a single body enriched by a wealth of offerings.
In the case of Tomb 23, on the layer of charcoal resulting from such a fire a tomb had been built with squared limestone blocks and two large amphorae of coarse pottery may have been used for putting out a fire at the end of the cremation ritual. It appears that the use of such an elaborate ritual was reserved to a select group of the population: the fact that all the large funeral pyres were found within two enclosures on the north and south ends of the cemetery area, set off from the rest of the cemetery by stone walls, would seem to bear this out.

Although further excavations in the habitation areas should provide more data from this Lucanian site, the evidence emerging from the burials as restoration of the finds progresses seems already to reveal a blend of native and acquired traits in the material culture of western Lucania, which greatly enriches the picture so far derived from more extensively explored sites, such as Paestum. Here, indeed, the Lucanians appear already settled into the urban type of organization which they inherited from the defeated Greek colonists.