

Research Project

Investigating colonial identity: Greek and Native interaction in Northern Calabria (800 - 500 BC)

Third-party funded project

Project title Investigating colonial identity: Greek and Native interaction in Northern Calabria (800 - 500 BC)

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Project Website <https://francavilla.philhist.unibas.ch/de/colonial-identity/>

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From the late Bronze Age onwards South Italy was (and still is) a focal point of human migrations. Among these the "great Greek colonisation" of the early 1st millennium BC is of particular relevance as it resulted in the expansion of Greek civilisation into the Western part of the Mediterranean and onto the Italian peninsula in particular. While this process of cultural interaction has hitherto been regarded primarily from a Graeco-centric point of view, it is currently being studied more intensively with regard to the effects it had on the native inhabitants of South Italy and on the emergence of new forms of cultural identity, both for the immigrants and for the local population. Until recently this encounter was first and foremost discussed on the basis of the material evidence from archaeological contexts. It has meanwhile become evident, however, that the cultural interactions initiated in the "Greek colonization" constitute complex processes that cannot be understood by a simple binary opposition between Greeks and Non-Greeks as reflected in culturally connoted artefacts. In order to overcome this aporia the present project proposes a new methodological approach to the question of "identity" in the colonial world by combining archaeological with scientific analysis and by studying both the material evidence as well as the physical remains of the human actors. By testing the feasibility of ancient DNA studies and conducting stable isotope analyses on the skeletal remains from various cemeteries in Northern Calabria we want to develop a broad interdisciplinary basis for the discussions of the social, cultural and economic transformations taking place in South Italy during and in the aftermath of the "Greek colonisation". At the same time it is planned to continue archaeological investigations in the Macchiabate necropolis of Francavilla Marittima, which is a key site in assessing the diverse effects of the "Greek colonisation" in South Italy. Our aims are twofold: on the one hand, the excavations serve to improve our understanding of the cultural identity of the people buried in the native necropolis at the time of the flourish of the nearby colony of Sybaris (7th/6th century BC), a period largely neglected by scholarly research in favor of the earlier, pre-colonial phases of the cemetery; on the other hand the investigations will provide new and well documented osteologic and archaeobiometric data for the assessment of the biological and social identity discourse mentioned above. With its rich material heritage Francavilla Marittima is the ideal place to conduct our research. There we will be able to profit from our longstanding experience with the site and exploit both the material culture and human skeletal remains to achieve the best possible results. In order to understand the phenomenon of cultural interaction in its broader terms it is important to extend the horizon of the investigation to the whole of Northern Calabria and even beyond. A PhD-thesis will therefore be de-

voted to the archaic burial practices in the Sibaritide in general; a postdoc project will investigate similar processes of interaction in the neighbouring Locride. By its integrative approach comprising archaeological and scientific methods as well as theoretical models the present project introduces a trend-setting methodological dimension into the current archaeological debate, shedding new light on the cultural as well as on the physical identity of the people living in the colonial world, both before and after the foundation of the Greek colonies. It will thereby generate a better understanding of human mobility and cultural interaction in a pivotal area of the Mediterranean world at a crucial moment in history.

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