

## IL DEPOSITO PRELACONICO DI BORGO NUOVO A TARANTO

BY FELICE GINO LO PORTO. PP. 80, FIGS. 31, PL. 1. GIORGIO BRETSCHNEIDER EDITORE, ROME 2004. €70. ISBN 88-7689-186-2 (PAPER).

You have to tip your hat to Felice Gino Lo Porto. One of those Italian superintendents who fiercely protected unpublished finds from the prying eyes of other scholars, he distinguished himself from most of his contemporaries by publishing a good deal of this material in retirement. Indeed, the list of publications (4–7) shows how much more productive Lo Porto was in the 25 years after his retirement in 1976 than in the first 25 years of his neatly symmetrical scholarly career (this volume appeared posthumously).

This book is about an extraordinary deposit of approximately 550 ceramic vessels discovered in 1880 during the frantic phase of building activity that accompanied Taranto's redevelopment as an important port city for the new Republic. The group is often referred to as the Borgo Nuovo ("new city") deposit, less frequently as the "pozzo d'Eredità," after the landowner, Ignazio d'Eredità. What is extraordinary about the group is that it is made up entirely of indigenous handmade Italian pottery—impasto (dark burnished ware) and matte-painted—that seems to predate the foundation of the Laconian colony of Taras, traditionally dated to 706 B.C.E.

A long report on the deposit by the excavator, Luigi Viola, was sent to the ministry for publication in the *Notizie degli Scavi* but was rejected as being "prolix, with too many parentheses." It would appear that the ideals of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei have not changed a great deal in the subsequent 120 years, since this volume, like others in the series, is relentlessly dry. It consists of four chapters: discovery (15–7), a catalogue of impasto pottery (19–39), a catalogue of matte-painted pottery (41–70), and brief conclusions,

which decline to speculate much on the meaning and importance of the deposit (71–4).

Chapter 1 brings together information on the discovery and hypotheses about the function of the deposit. Viola's summary description spoke of a large rectangular "tomb," excavated three meters into the limestone bedrock, with rubble in the upper part, then "pyre soil" and pottery in the lower parts, with a little human bone. There was immediate skepticism about the interpretation of the deposit as a tomb, since it was (and is) completely unlike any burial excavated in south Italy.

The chapters detailing the approximately 350 impasto and the approximately 200 matte-painted vessels enormously expand the number of complete vessels known from the Salentine peninsula for the eighth century B.C.E. The reason for this is odd: in this century graveyards are found throughout the Italian peninsula, except in Salento (the "heel" of the boot). This absence of burials corresponds precisely with the distribution of the matte-painted ceramic styles dubbed Salento Middle and Late Geometric by D.G. Yntema; Taranto is the westernmost outpost of these styles.

For the impasto pottery parallels are noted from sites in Albania and South Italy, particularly those to the north and west of Taranto. It is strange that so few parallels are found from Salento itself, and this is perhaps due to the fragmentary nature of those potential comparanda. A few finds from the author's excavations at Satyrion are mentioned, but nothing from Oria, Cavallino, or I Fani.

The chapter on matte-painted pottery relies heavily on Yntema's *The Matt-Painted Pottery of Southern Italy* (Utrecht 1985). The author does not, however, address Yntema's proposal that

certain vessels, especially those with “a tenda” decoration (cat. nos. 95, 121, 134; also no. 189) may be imports from the Bradano district, to the northwest. Since none of the pottery descriptions includes Munsell readings or information on inclusions, the reader is in no position to judge the likelihood of these vessels being imports.

From the conclusions, one discovers that a total of 199 out of 547 vessels and fragments have been catalogued, with the remainder classed as “replicas and fragments.” One can almost, but not quite, recreate the deposit in quantitative terms on the basis of the tables presented: 93 of the 350 impasto vessels are classified simply as “various shapes.” Of the 197 nonimpasto vessels, 26 had no painted decoration; none of them is catalogued, and it is impossible to find out their shapes. More could be expected from a publication that sees itself as definitive.

In the rest of the concluding chapter, ceramic parallels are summarized, and a date of 790–740 B.C.E. for the deposit is asserted, principally on the basis of the matte-painted pottery. This gives a false sense of precision in the dating of Salentine matte-painted pottery, and does not accurately reflect the author’s own parallels. I suspect that some of the vessels date back into the ninth century, and that others may go down well into the eighth or perhaps even beyond. Scholars used to expect a clean break in the archaeological record when Greeks settled in Italy. Recent results from sites such as Francavilla Marittima, Siris, Incoronata, and Metaponto tell a different story. The later bellicose reputation of Laconian Taras does not have to be projected back into the eighth century. Indeed, in the current issue of *BABesch* (75 [2007] 77–114), Dutch scholars have revealed evidence for a mixed Greek and indigenous settlement of the seventh century at

L’Amastuola, which was only brought within the *chora* of Taras in the fifth century.

As to the nature of the Borgo Nuovo deposit, Lo Porto sees it as “perhaps mainly funerary” (73). Yntema has recently proposed the following elegant solution: since it was discovered in the area where the seventh-century B.C.E. inhabitants of Taranto buried their dead, perhaps the Borgo Nuovo deposit was the result of the ritual purification of a preexisting ninth/eighth century necropolis (*BABesch* 75 [2000] 19). Given the number of miniature vessels among the group, some might lean toward explanations involving an indigenous votive deposit, invoking the recent finds at Francavilla Marittima. Reburial of grave groups probably explains better the complete absence of metal finds, which may have been buried elsewhere or recycled by the putative Tarentine purifiers.

As usual for this series, the quality of paper and production is of the highest order, and typographical errors are almost completely absent. The line drawings are of high quality. Those of us who are responsible for producing books will blanch at the sight of the single plate at the back of this volume, but such extravagance does not seem to have been passed on to potential consumers, since the volume costs a relatively modest €70.

This volume, while not quite a definitive account of the Borgo Nuovo deposit, is a welcome addition. Its publication will presumably free up access to this material for scholars with further questions to ask of it.

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