

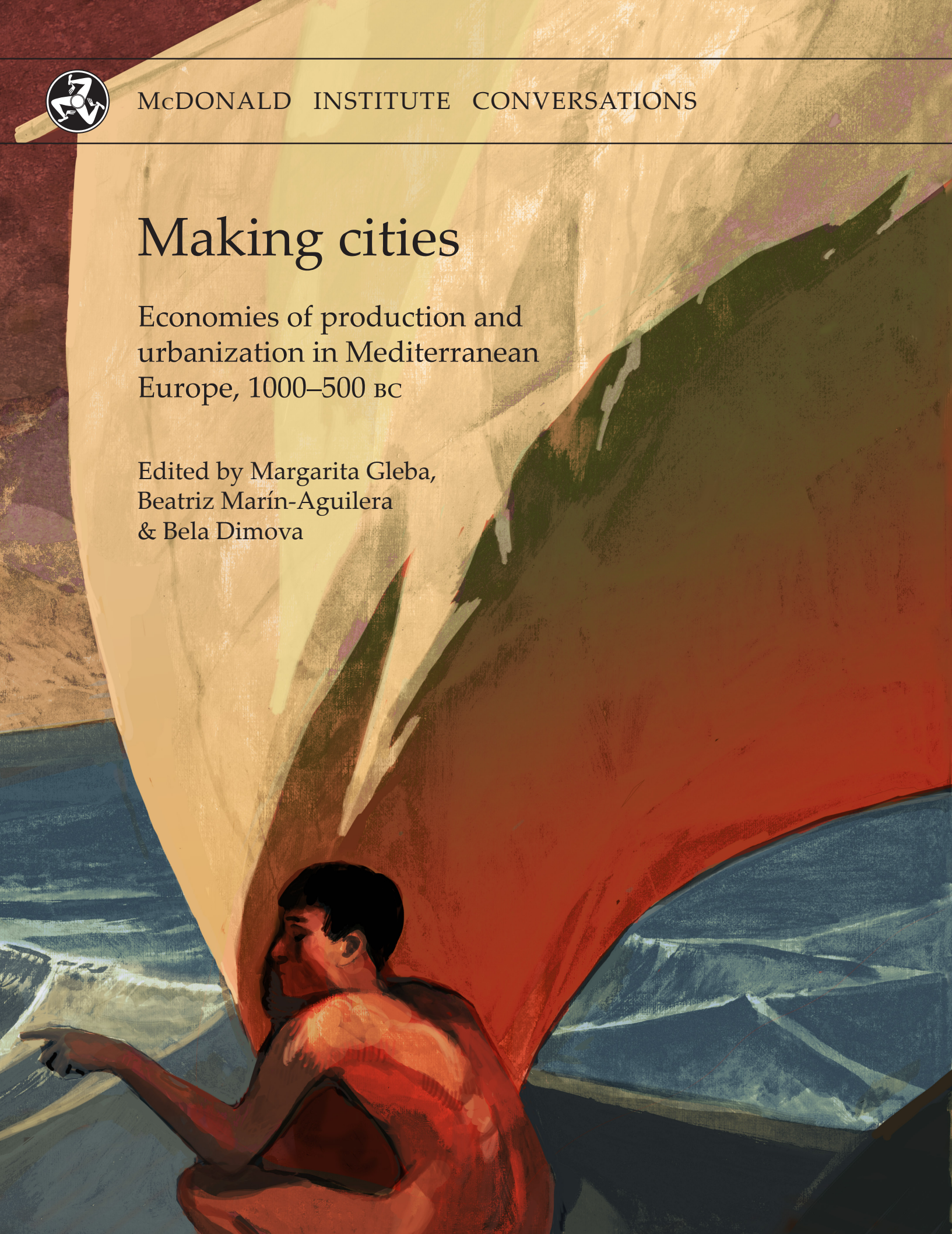


McDONALD INSTITUTE CONVERSATIONS

# Making cities

Economies of production and  
urbanization in Mediterranean  
Europe, 1000–500 BC

Edited by Margarita Gleba,  
Beatriz Marín-Aguilera  
& Bela Dimova





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Beatriz Marín-Aguilera & Bela Dimova

*with contributions from*

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## Chapter 18

# Birth and transformation of a Messapian settlement from the Iron Age to the Classical period: Muro Leccese

Francesco Meo

Archaeological studies of southern Italy in the Iron Age usually emphasize the Greek colonial experience and especially the birth of the so-called *Magna Graecia*. However, during the last few decades, extensive archaeological research has been conducted into indigenous settlements, including those on the Salento Peninsula in the southern part of the Puglia Region (Fig. 18.1). During the Iron Age, the Salento was at the centre of traffic and migrations that led to the foundation of the Greek town of Taranto in the late eighth century BC and to the development of the Messapian population in the southern part of Puglia, with different traits than the Daunians in the north and the Peucetians in the centre of the region. Knowledge of the settlements and territory of this local population has benefited significantly from research conducted by the University of Salento and other important international institutions.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I focus on the urbanization of the Salento Peninsula during the Early Iron Age and the Archaic-Classical period, with a special focus on the settlement of Muro Leccese, today a town of about 5000 inhabitants. Like other towns in this area, its history began in the Iron Age and has continued almost uninterrupted up to the present. The archaeological research conducted in this town by the University of Salento every year since 2000 has explored several areas, albeit in varying degrees of detail, and the results now allow us to draw a preliminary profile of the ancient inhabited area as a whole. Muro's long history can be divided into three phases characterized by different forms of settlement: an Iron-Age village from the mid-eighth to the mid-sixth century BC, a proto-urban settlement from the second half of the sixth to the third quarter of the fourth century BC, and a deep transformation, with the construction of an imposing surrounding wall, in the late fourth century BC. This last phase of ancient Muro Leccese existed until the third century BC, when

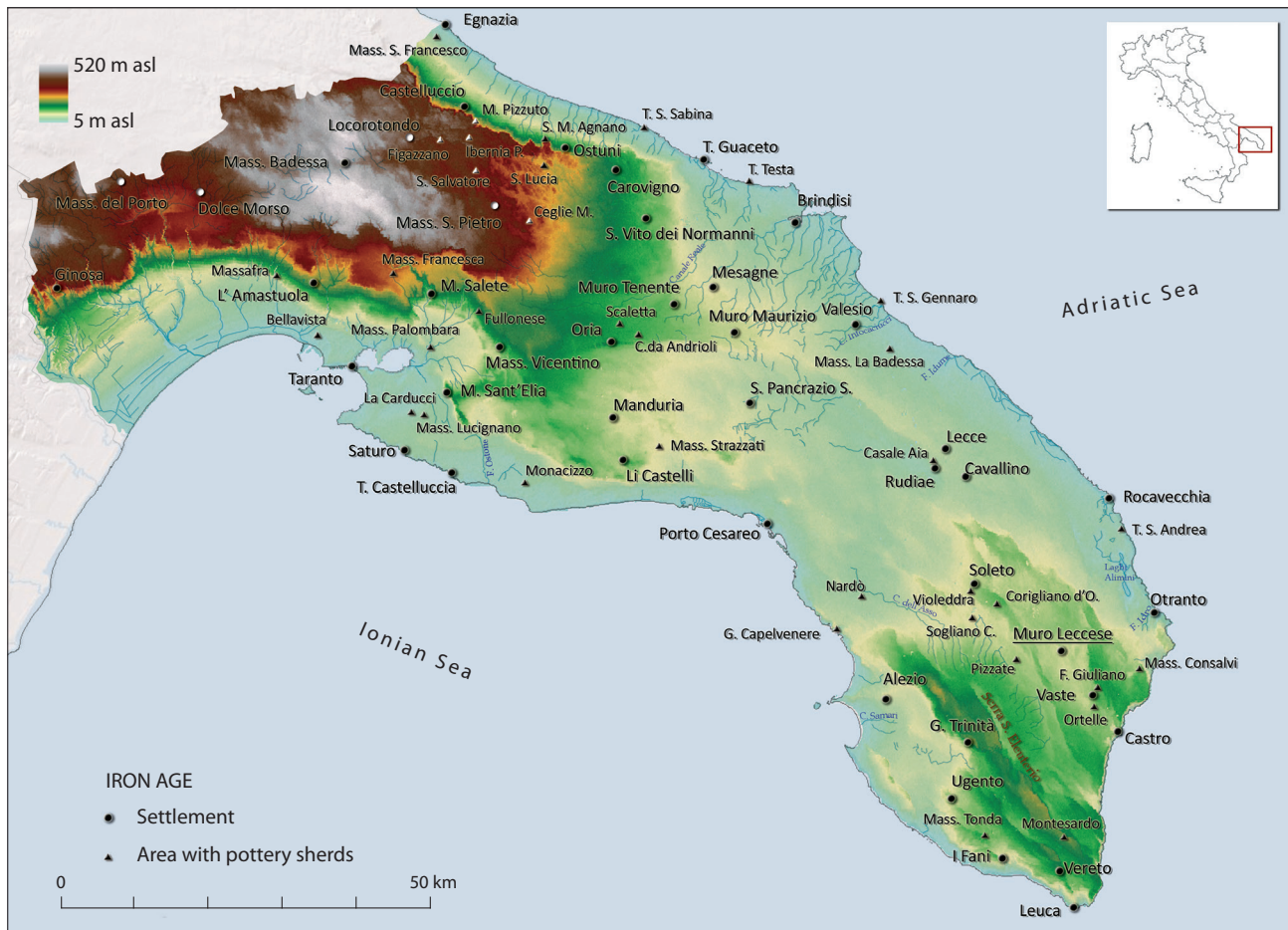
it was conquered and destroyed almost certainly by the Romans following a siege.<sup>2</sup>

### The Iron Age village

During the Iron Age, the Salento was characterized by a settlement system of considerable interest. From the second half of the eighth century BC, there was a marked increase in the number of villages, as a consequence of internal mobility processes and the occupation of new areas for agriculture and livestock (D'Andria 1981, 121–2; 1985, 357; 2012, 552).<sup>3</sup> The birth of Muro Leccese can be placed in this period.

A paper on Iron Age Salento published by Francesco D'Andria in the proceedings of the fiftieth International Conference on Magna Graecia just a few years ago confirms the as-yet insufficient degree of knowledge of the 26 villages identified in southern Salento (D'Andria 2012). In most cases, the settlements cannot be properly compared because it is only possible to attest their existence, while most of the villages investigated to date had an area of less than 10 ha. In a recent update by Grazia Semeraro, Taranto, Oria, Cavallino and (based on the initial published data) Muro Leccese are the only settlements of the mid-eighth and seventh centuries BC in southern Puglia that have an area of more than 30 ha (Semeraro 2016, 354, fig. 3).

Muro Leccese is one of the 75 settlements that have so far been identified in southern Puglia and, together with Otranto, Vaste and Castro (Fig. 18.1), it represents one of the most thoroughly investigated sites in southeastern Salento to date.<sup>4</sup> The archaeological investigations conducted in the last 30 years have shown that Salento villages consisted of clusters of huts distributed over a wide area. Some were surrounded by circuits of walls, although there is no evidence of such a structure in Muro Leccese in the Iron Age (Fig. 18.2). In Muro, the dwellings were built in accordance



**Figure 18.1.** Muro Leccese and the other Iron Age settlements in the Salento peninsula (after Semeraro 2015).

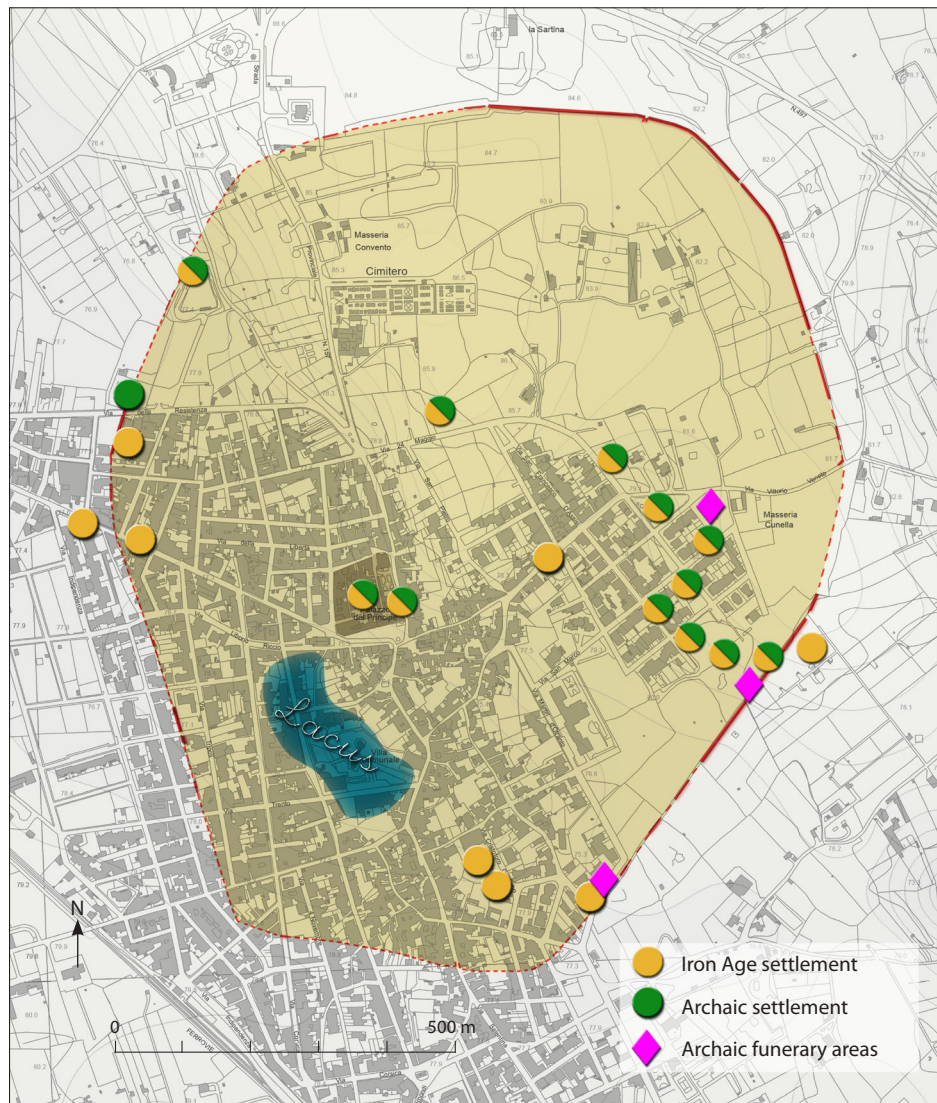
with two different techniques depending on the location (Fig. 18.3): where the bedrock outcrops and is sufficiently regular to form a floor, the huts were built directly on the rock, sometimes with a pit excavated in the inner part to create a small underground room for the storage of foodstuffs. In contrast, where the bedrock was too irregular to form a floor, it was levelled with soil and paved with very small stones (for a more detailed description see Giardino & Meo 2013a, 305–7; Meo 2019).

The oval-shaped huts documented in Muro Leccese are also attested in other settlements, both nearby, such as Cavallino (D’Andria 1996, 409, fig. 3; Polito 2005) and Vaste (D’Andria 1996, 407, fig. 2), and more distant, such as L’Amastuola (Burgers & Crielaard 2007, 115–16; 2011, 62, figs. 3.24–5; 2012a, 72, figs. 4–5), Oria (Yntema 1988, 159), San Vito dei Normanni (Semeraro 2015, 207–11) and Valesio (Burgers 1998, 175, fig. 88). In other villages, such as Castelluccio di Cisternino, the shape with an apse is attested as well (Semeraro 2017, 320, fig. 3). In some cases, the huts had a pit for

collecting rainwater. The perimeter walls, today conserved to a height of a few dozen centimetres, were made of irregular stones laid without mortar and waterproofed with a layer of clay.

The dwellings are organized into groups of several huts of varying size, possibly indicating a certain hierarchy within the nuclei: in one of the areas of Muro Leccese, two huts have been identified, one of which is about 55 sq. m and the other 20–25 sq. m (Fig. 18.3). Similar situations have been discovered in other settlements, such as San Vito dei Normanni, where next to a hut of 40 sq. m are three smaller units of 20 sq. m (Semeraro 2015, 209, fig. 5). In Muro Leccese, at least six such residential clusters situated at extremely variable distances from each other have been identified to date. The lack of any Iron Age archaeological material in areas between the identified clusters of huts suggests that they were interspersed with lots used for agriculture and livestock breeding.<sup>5</sup> A distinctive feature of Iron Age Salento settlements is the lack of any funerary evidence, probably because the dead were cremated





**Figure 18.2.** Muro Leccese, find spots of Early Iron Age and Archaic ceramics and structures in the area surrounded by the fourth century BC walls (C. Bianco).

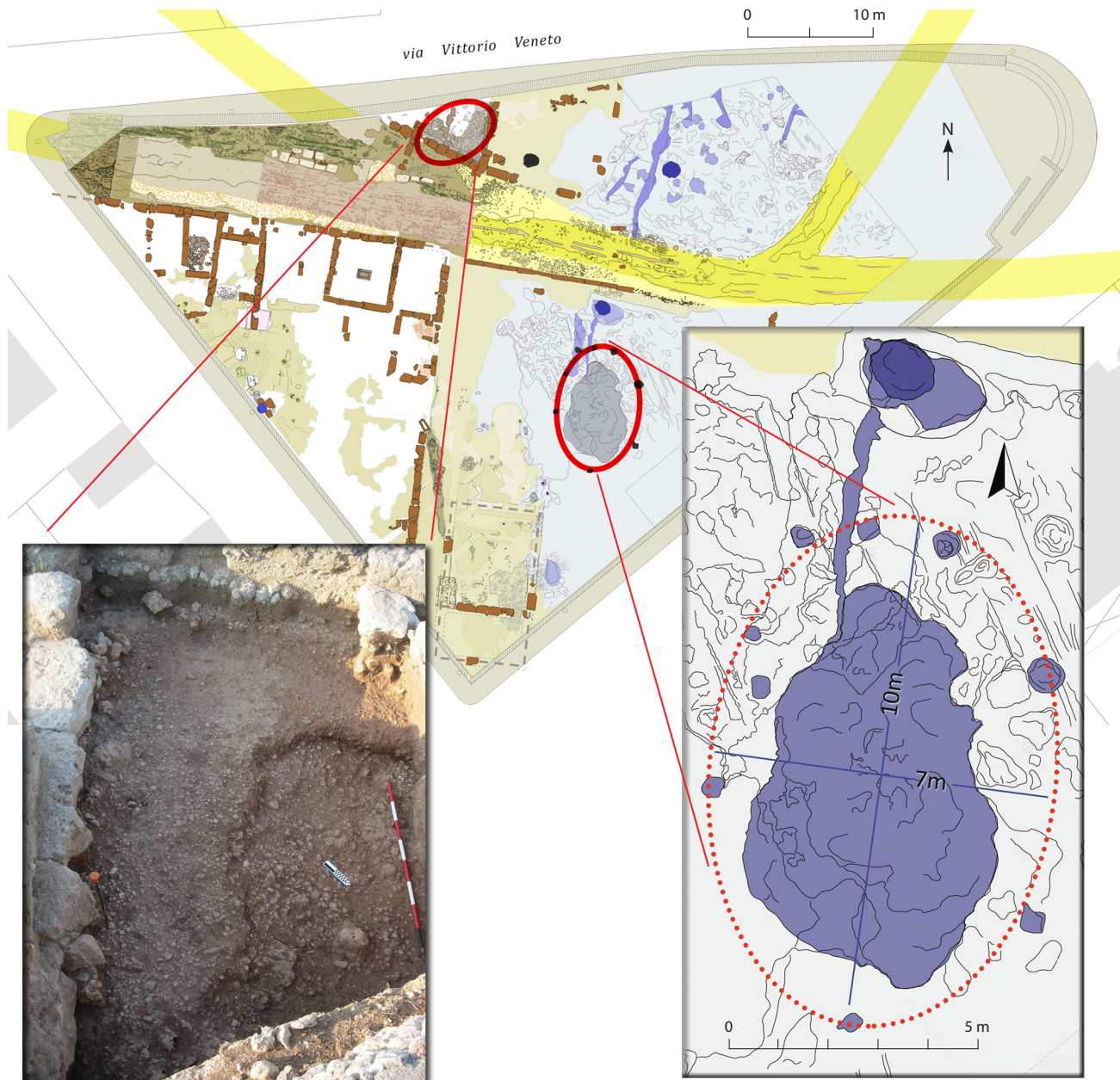
and their ashes scattered (Lombardo 1994, 38–40, based on Justinus; see also Bietti Sestieri 2010, 332–46).

The archaeological evidence in Muro Leccese (Meo 2019) tends to be found in restricted *nuclei*, some of which lie outside the circuit of walls built in the fourth century BC (Fig. 18.2). This suggests that the Iron Age village had a different shape from the later walled settlement, being distributed more along an east–west axis than north–south. The numerous excavations conducted in the northern part of the Hellenistic settlement by Cosimo Pagliara in 1984, Jean-Luc Lamboley between 1986 and 1992 (Lamboley 1999), and Liliana Giardino in 2000 (Giardino 2002), as well as the excavation of the Eastern gate of the circuit of walls (Giardino & Meo 2013a, 301, fig. 4), have found no Iron Age layer or material.

Moreover, in a flat landscape such as that of Muro Leccese, there was no tendency to build the huts on

higher ground, the inhabitants preferring places close to the water reserves, fundamental in a region with few watercourses such as the Salento (Fig. 18.4). A natural depression, still used in the first half of the last century to channel rainwater, as also highlighted in a map of 1948 drawn by the Italian Military Geographical Institute, was the probable *lacus* around which the village developed (Meo 2019; Giardino & Meo in press).<sup>6</sup> There is indeed a clear topographical and functional relationship between the basin and the distribution of the Iron Age clusters of huts. Together with the absence of traces from this period in the northern part of the fourth-century BC settlement, this suggests that the *lacus* may have been decisive for the formation of the original village.

The spatial analysis also allowed us to verify that the areas characterized by Iron Age structures are distributed over an area of about 70 ha (Fig. 18.2), while



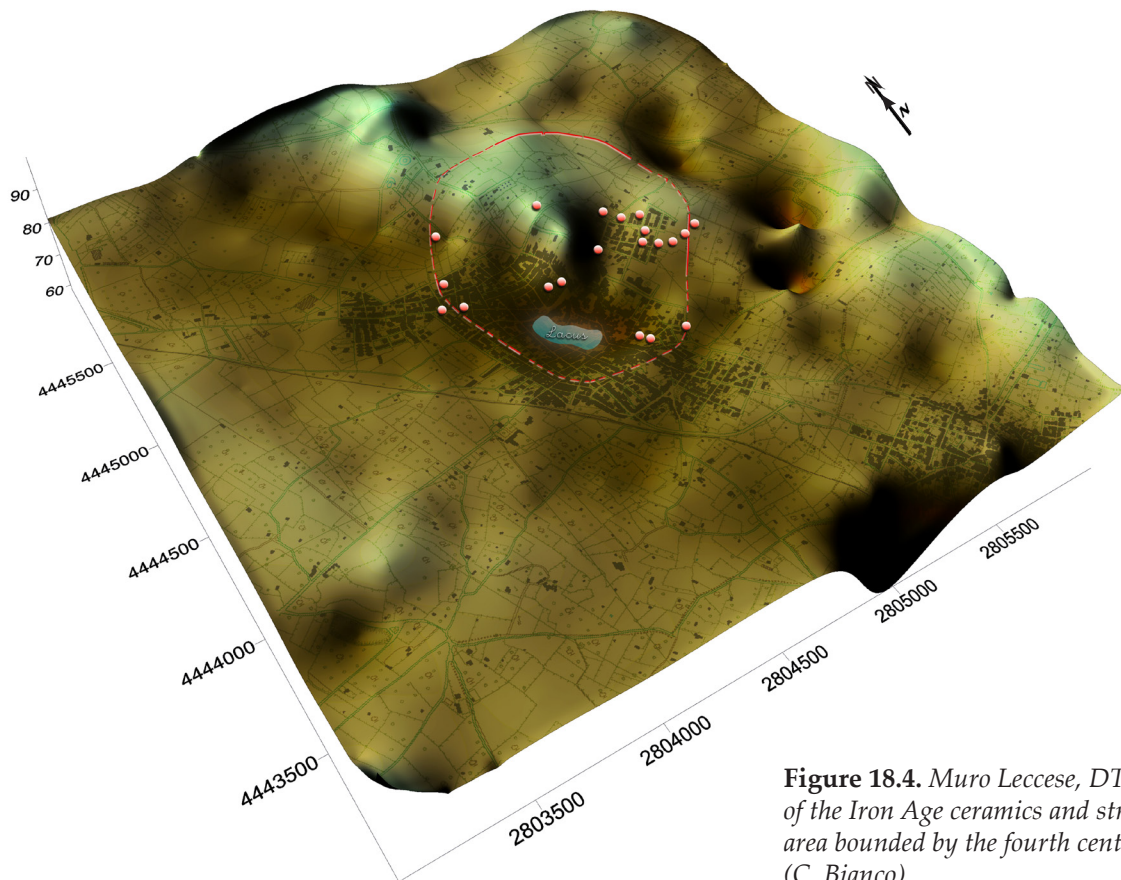
**Figure 18.3.** *Muro Leccese, Cunella district, traces of two huts (C. Bianco).*

the archaeological material is dispersed over an area of almost 90 ha. These data are extremely interesting as they are absolutely new for southern Salento. An area of this size is exceptional even compared with northern Salento settlements, where the surveys carried out by the Free University of Amsterdam indicated the dispersion of materials over an area of about 90 ha for Oria alone (Yntema 1993, 157; Semeraro 2014, 332), while all the other villages were of much smaller dimensions: Muro Tenente, Muro Maurizio, Valesio and San Pancrazio-Li Castelli are all between 15 and 28 ha in

size (Burgers 2015, 196), while L'Amastuola (Burgers 2015, 197), Castelluccio di Cisternino (Semeraro 2015, 211, fig. 8) and San Vito dei Normanni (Semeraro 2015, 208, fig. 4) are smaller still.

Oria and Muro Leccese are thus the only two settlements with an area of more than 50 ha in the Iron Age discovered in Puglia to date. However, these two villages are very different. Oria is located on the southern slopes of the Murge hills, in the province of Brindisi, while Muro Leccese lies in a broad lowland of Salento. The earliest traces of occupation of





**Figure 18.4.** Muro Leccese, DTM with location of the Iron Age ceramics and structures in the area bounded by the fourth century BC walls (C. Bianco).

the area of Oria date back to the prehistoric phase (Mastronuzzi 2013, 13–15), and the growth during the protohistoric period, particularly in the Iron Age, has been interpreted from the perspective of a hierarchy of settlements, with Oria playing the dominant role (Burgers 2015, 197). In contrast, the village of Muro Leccese has yielded no archaeological material older than the eighth century BC, and it is believed to have spread over a large surface in the space of a few decades, with all the residential areas created at roughly the same time.

The role that such a large settlement may have played in the southern Salento, probably from the end of the eighth century BC and especially in the following centuries, is still to be investigated, again in comparison to Oria. Gert-Jan Burgers has proposed that Oria was responsible for the foundation of Muro Tenente (Burgers 1998, 53–94; 2015, 198),<sup>7</sup> a village dated to the mid-eighth century BC, which is just 10 km from Oria. In the southeastern Salento, the situation is very different because Muro Leccese is more recent than the nearby Vaste (D’Andria 1990, 51–6), a smaller village just 8 km away. Why and how the newly founded site of Muro Leccese grew so rapidly in the eighth–seventh centuries, while Vaste did not,

remains to be understood, but it may be linked to the presence of the large *lacus* in the former.

Although the presence of other *nuclei* which have not been identified because of the presence of the modern town cannot be excluded, it is important to emphasize that, in all the investigated areas, the chronological horizon of the discovered materials, both imported and locally produced, appears homogeneous and never earlier than the eighth century BC. Even assuming that a few decades would have passed between the establishment of the first groups of huts and the moment when the inhabitants were able to acquire imported products, the absence of locally produced materials prior to the eighth century BC is fundamental to any attempt to date the birth of the settlement. It is probable that the proximity of Otranto, a port that played a strategic role in Mediterranean trade (Malkin 1998, 8; D’Andria 2012, 554, 556), enabled the rapid, though initially limited, diffusion of Corinthian vessels in Muro Leccese from the mid-eighth century BC, just a few decades after the birth of the village.

Regarding local production, specialized craftspeople made ceramics from purified pale clay, usually decorating it with black or red and black pigment (matt-painted ware). Most of the vessels were for the



**Figure 18.5.** Vases and decorative motifs characteristic of matt-painted ware from Muro Leccese, dated to eighth to mid-sixth century BC (C. Bianco, T.O. Calvaruso).





**Figure 18.6.** Vases imported from Greece and Greek apoikiai of mid-eighth to mid-sixth century BC from Muro Leccese (C. Bianco, F. Malinconico).

conservation of food (*pithoi*, *ollae*), or for transporting and consuming it (jugs, cups and bowls) (Fig. 18.5).<sup>8</sup> The decorative motifs reflected local traditions or imitated those of ceramics produced in Greece. The spread of Greek pottery in the Salento Peninsula from the ninth century BC is linked to the role of Otranto as a port of trade, where Corinthian pottery arrived via its *apoikia*, Kerkyra (modern Greek island of Corfu), and the Albanian coast, which are just 80 km away. Vases imported from Greece appear to have been reserved for the consumption of wine and female grooming, and their use is believed to have had a symbolic meaning, conferring social distinction on the individual within the community. Wine consumption is documented by the large *amphorae* used for its transport, kraters for its serving and, above all, cups and beakers for drinking, which all shed light on the chronology of the Iron Age village. The discoveries of a Corinthian *protokotyle*, Thapsos-type cups, Corinthian *kotylai*, striped bowls and Middle Corinthian *kotylai* have established the chronology of the Iron Age village as running from the mid-eighth to the first half of the sixth century BC (Fig. 18.6). Female grooming is documented by containers for the storage of perfumes and unguents (Fig. 18.6). The accumulation of a particularly high number of Greek vases in the same hut is seen only in exceptional cases,<sup>9</sup> since in all other contemporary contexts – not only in Muro Leccese but also in Cavallino, Lecce, Rudiae, Soleto and Castro – imported ceramics are rare (D’Andria 2012; 2013, 414–23).

Textile production in Iron Age villages took place in the households (Landenius Enegren & Meo 2021). Tools discovered inside or around huts of Muro Leccese and other villages are spindle whorls of different shapes, truncated pyramidal loom weights, and spools (*roccetti*) with an oblique perforation. The analysis of the textile tools, in particular loom weights, makes it possible to calculate the warp density and the thread tension provided by a specific set of loom weights, thanks to the experimental archaeology research conducted in Denmark at the Centre for Textile Research (CTR) in Copenhagen and the Centre for Historical-Archaeological Research and Communication (CHARC) at Lejre (Mårtensson *et al.* 2009; Andersson Strand 2012; 2013; 2014; Andersson Strand *et al.* 2015). The presence of spools is particularly interesting because these objects disappear at the end of the Early Iron Age but at present we do not know why. There has been much discussion about their possible function, including the idea that they were used as small loom weights in the tablet weaving of textile decorative elements or for starting borders attached to the upper loom beam (Gleba 2008, 145, fig. 100, no. 1; Landenius Enegren 2015, 135). Experimental archaeology performed by

Hedvig Landenius Enegren and Ulrika Mokkdad at the CTR demonstrated that spools would have been also suitable for the technique of warp-twining, since the oblique perforation creates an automatic stop for the thread thus facilitating the twining procedure (Staermose-Nielsen 1999, 52–3, fig. 29A).

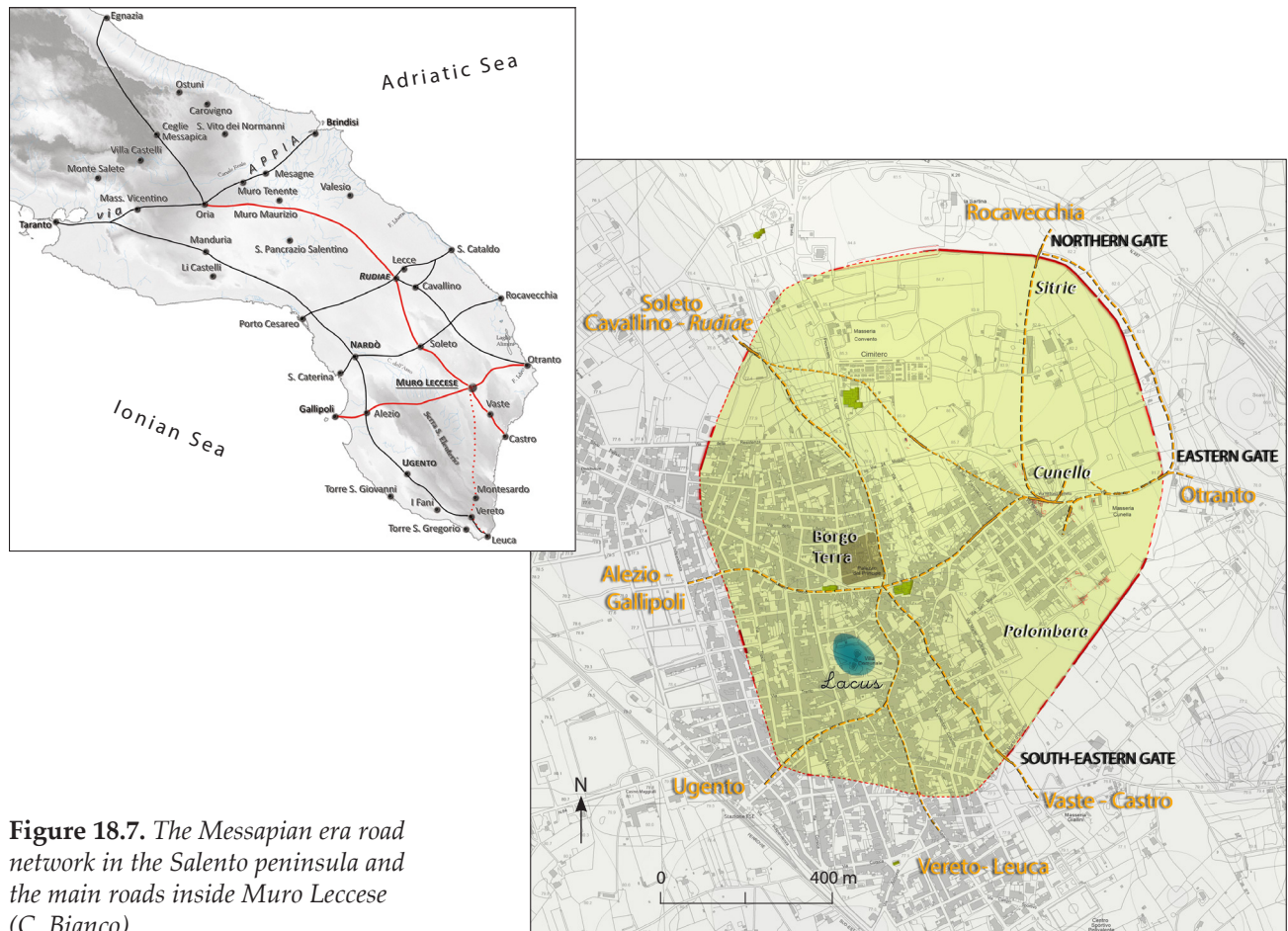
Together with textile tools, the study of mineralized, carbonized or calcified textile remains found exclusively in funerary contexts makes it possible to directly understand textile production connected to a specific site. Despite the lack of textile remains from the Iron Age villages of this area, there is an imprint of a tabby cloth folded in several places from Oria, preserved on the exterior of a locally produced undecorated krater (Landenius Enegren & Meo 2021, 24–5). The textile has 12–14 threads per cm in warp and weft and thread diameter of 0.4–0.5 mm. This find is very important both in terms of its early date, but also because, thus far, it is the only example of an imprint of cloth found on pottery in Italy.

### The Archaic and Classical settlement

While evidence of the Iron Age has emerged in the last few years, less is known of the Archaic period, although the settlement shows a surprising continuity with the previous phase despite the many changes, including the introduction of writing, a new type of domestic architecture, the appearance of funerary areas, and a road network. Currently, it appears that the final phase of the Iron Age village of Muro Leccese was not marked by violent and sudden abandonment, but rather an internal transformation that resulted in the huts being levelled and covered with a layer of clay.

The introduction of writing began to spread among the Messapian settlements in the sixth century BC. The oldest epigraphical texts at Muro Leccese date to the end of that century (Giardino & Lombardo 2011, 23, fig. 63), and can now be added to the list of inscriptions found in this site (De Simone & Marchesini 2002, 336–44).

Together with writing, one of the most significant developments was the construction of a road system that both connected individual residential *nuclei* within the village and linked Muro with other Archaic Messapian towns. Inside the settlement, two roads are particularly important because they correspond to sections of the Messapian long-distance road network (Fig. 18.7): the north–south stretch is part of a road that connected Oria with Santa Maria di Leuca (the southernmost point of Salento), while the east–west stretch is part of the road that linked the two coasts, from Otranto on the Adriatic Sea to Alezio-Gallipoli on the Ionian (Giardino & Meo 2013b, 165–6, 170, fig.



**Figure 18.7.** The Messapian era road network in the Salento peninsula and the main roads inside Muro Leccese (C. Bianco).

5; Giardino 2016a). The position of Muro Leccese in the overall road network of the Salento Peninsula, at the intersection of these two main roads, may have favoured the growth of the Archaic settlement. The archaeological excavations of the last two decades have verified that, under some of the main streets of the modern town, the Messapian roads are preserved (Giardino & Meo 2016a, 19, fig. 5).

Most of the evidence from the settlement is linked to domestic architecture. The residential areas of the Archaic period usually overlap with those of the Iron Age village, since in all the areas where materials from the latter phase have been discovered, Archaic and late-Archaic pottery are also present (Fig. 18.2; Giardino & Meo 2013a, 315). The Archaic landscape therefore had the same spatial organization as the previous phase, with groups of houses distributed over a large area, interspersed with large free spaces reserved for agriculture and livestock and the new funerary spaces. As with the preceding period, no form of demarcation has yet been identified and the *lacus* probably maintained its central and essential function as a source of water.

To fully understand the transformations affecting Muro Leccese, a comparison with Cavallino, one of the main Messapian Archaic settlements in Salento, is necessary. Francesco D'Andria has proposed that its Archaic reorganization was driven by groups and individuals occupying positions of power within the community (D'Andria 2005, 36–9; 2016, 483–7). Signs of the role of these elites also appear clearly in San Vito dei Normanni, where Grazia Semeraro has discovered a residential building where feasts and ceremonies that included the consumption of an alcoholic drink are believed to have taken place, with the function of consolidating the leadership of the ruling elites (Semeraro 2009; 2014; 2015; 2017, 323–6).

Muro Leccese offers further confirmation of the role of families with significant economic and political power in the transformations affecting the settlement from the final decades of the sixth century BC onwards. Their dominant role in the community was asserted via forms of self-representation appropriated from the Greeks but deployed in a distinctly Messapian way, as seen in funerary rites, banquets and religious worship.





**Figure 18.8.** Muro Leccese, Palombara district. Portion of a late Archaic residential complex with the fragment of a terracotta slab with a double-braid motif, the small hoard of 10 incuse coins and the banqueting hall with a small offering table in the corner (graphics C. Bianco; photos L. Giardino, F. Meo).

A large quantity of interesting data is now emerging from a new area of excavation in the eastern part of the town (the Palombara district), in a location where the Iron Age and Archaic period are particularly well attested.<sup>10</sup> The research conducted here since 2016 has revealed a late Archaic residential complex of 1300 sq. m, whose presence was heralded some years ago by the discovery of two key pieces of archaeological evidence (Fig. 18.8) (Meo 2020). The first is a fragment of an architectural terracotta slab with a double-braid motif painted in red and black and a perforation (to mount it on a support) with traces of an iron nail inside (Fig. 18.8). The colour and type of clay suggest it was produced in Taranto, while the motif is widely seen in the fictile decoration of the Archaic Achaean temples of *Magna Graecia*.<sup>11</sup> However, the indigenous populations of Italy used such slabs for decorating the residences of aristocratic groups, such as the large late Archaic building on the acropolis of Monte Sannace (Riccardi 1989, 146, nos. 18–20, pls. 260, 299–300), the *Anaktoron* in Torre di Satriano (Capozzoli 2009) and the Etruscan buildings in Acquarossa (Stoppioni 1985, 45–8).

The new excavation in the Palombara district has made it possible to contextualize the slab from Muro: indeed, a residential building with a large (5.40 × 4.40 m) banqueting hall with an entrance on the east side and a pantry on the west side has now been identified (Fig. 18.8). In the northwestern corner of the room is a small altar in limestone, a sort of offering table supported by two low pillars, which may be linked to domestic cults or to rites performed during the banquets (Fig. 18.8). It is the only item of its kind discovered in the whole of Messapia to date, and has parallels with marble cult tables found in places of worship in Aegina and Athens in Greece (Dow & Gill 1965, 105–10; *ThesCRA* V, 235–6, no. 513, tab. 38). The use of such an altar in a domestic context instead of a cult space is similar to that of the slabs which were used by the indigenous community to decorate residences rather than temples. Fragments of at least four Laconian and locally produced column-kraters and several cup-*skyphoi* and *kylikes* were discovered inside the banqueting hall, together with other vases (Fig. 18.9).<sup>12</sup> The archaeological material can be dated to the end of the sixth–early decades of the fifth century BC. This includes the slab fragments, which come from the north end of the banqueting hall, indicating that the upper part of the wall was decorated with a red and black double braid motif. The discovery of this slab, together with several architectural elements in the same area, suggests the presence of a residential building characterized by a certain architectural grandeur that was most probably destroyed around the mid-fifth century BC.

In addition to the abundant traces of fire, this hypothesis is supported by the discovery of a small hoard of 10 incuse coins composed of five staters and five diobols (Fig. 18.8). The staters are among the most ancient coinage to be minted in Metapontion, Kaulonia, Kroton and Sybaris (end of the sixth century BC), while the diobols were minted a few decades later, all in Metapontion (Siciliano *et al.* 2015). Despite the fact that this was a chance discovery, the new research and the personal account of one of the discoverers have clarified that the coins were hidden close to the external side of the northern wall of the banqueting hall. It is therefore possible that the owner of this residence accumulated his wealth thanks to contacts with the nearby Greek *poleis* on the Ionian coast. However, something happened – most probably around the mid-fifth century BC, as there are no coins minted after that period – and the house was destroyed, as attested by the traces of fire that the new excavations are bringing to light.

The residential building also revealed part of a set of truncated pyramidal loom weights which can shed light on textile production in Archaic Messapia. The loom weights have a width of 6–6.5 cm and a weight of 230–260 g. The thread tension applicable to this group of weights is between 10 and 15 g, resulting in a low warp density, between 5 and 9 threads/cm (Landenius Enegren & Meo 2021, 22). These results are comparable with those of other settlements like San Vito dei Normanni and Cavallino. Two sets have been identified in the residential building at San Vito dei Normanni. They could have worked in a warp by providing a tension included between 5 and 15 g, with the density of the warp relatively low as in the case at Muro Leccese, between 5 and 11 threads/cm (Landenius Enegren & Meo 2021, 23). The discovery of two different groups of weights is most probably linked to the production of different textile qualities. The presence of more than one set of weights in domestic contexts was also documented at Kaulonia, where three groups of loom weights were identified (Luberto & Meo 2017), as well as in the so-called Casa dei Pithoi at Serra di Vaglio (Meo *et al.* 2020, 240–3) and in the *Anaktoron* at Torre di Satriano, where two isolated sets were found (Quercia 2018). Although Cavallino did not produce similar sets, it is still possible to determine the ranges related to the density and tension applied to warp threads. The loom weights would have required a tension of 5–20 g and the warp density ranged between 4–5 and 15–16 threads per cm, depending on the tension applied (Landenius Enegren & Meo 2021, 19).

While no fabrics dating between mid-sixth to mid-fourth century BC were discovered to date in Messapia, those recovered from burials of Muro Leccese and Vaste dating to the second half of the fourth



**Figure 18.9.** Muro Leccese, Palombara district. Vases dated to the end of the sixth–early decades of the fifth centuries BC from the banqueting hall (drawings F. Malinconico; graphics C. Bianco; 3D A. Bandiera – SIBA).



century BC confirm the weaving of unbalanced tabbies. A tabby is balanced when the warp and the weft have the same density, that is the same number of threads per cm. Messapian fabrics are weft-faced tabbies, with relatively few threads per cm in the warp, which can be linked with the low density indicated by the loom weight analysis. This type of cloth never appears, at least to date, in contexts prior to the foundation of the Greek *poleis*, while it is well attested in Greece already in the Bronze Age (Gleba 2017). The appearance of these weft-faced tabbies is noted not only in Messapia, but also in other south Italian indigenous contexts, for example in the mid-sixth to the mid-fourth century BC necropolis of Ripacandida (Gleba *et al.* 2018) or in a Lucanian burial of Paestum (Meo & Gleba 2017). It appears thus that transformations which involved all the Messapian settlements from the middle of the sixth century BC (the introduction of writing, the changes in domestic architecture, the creation of funerary areas) also occurred in textile production.

Coming back to the residential building of Palombara, the terracotta slab, the architectural elements, the incuse coins and the banqueting hall with the altar all confirm its political and economic importance during the late Archaic period. Whereas this residential building, the excavation of which is still in the early stages, seems to have been abandoned during the Classical period and reoccupied in the Hellenistic, albeit for other purposes, another structure, discovered a short distance away in the Cunella district, seems to have maintained its layout substantially unchanged from the Archaic period to the first half of the third century BC (Fig. 18.10) (Giardino & Meo 2013a, 310–15; 2013b; 2016b). It consists of a number of rooms arranged around a broad, paved, open space and is very similar to that of the large Archaic building in San Vito dei Normanni (Semeraro & Monastero 2011; Semeraro 2017, 323–6).

The building in the Cunella district in Muro Leccese has a main room that was used as a banqueting hall, with an altar in the middle and a large paved courtyard that was also used for ceremonial practices (Giardino & Meo 2016, 113, fig. 9). Some of these practices preceded the construction of the building, while others were performed when the residence was in use. Evidence of the first type of rite is the discovery, next to a stone altar placed in the courtyard, of remains of a pregnant sheep arranged in a circle (Fig. 18.10). The animal was sacrificed together with other animals deposited a short distance away in a second pit (De Grossi Mazzorin & Perrone 2013, 205–9; Giardino & Meo 2013b, 180–4, 198–9; Giardino 2016b, 78, figs. 2–3). An example of the second type of rite is a large clay pit lined with tiles that protruded slightly above the

paving in another sector of the courtyard. Deposited inside it were imported Greek objects and a few locally produced items (Fig. 18.10), some of which were probably used in purification and libation rituals (*louterion*, pitcher, cups), while others are attributable to the female sphere (*kalathos*, loom weights). The pit was in use until the final years of the fourth century BC when it was closed after a purification ritual, again marked by the sacrifice of animals.<sup>13</sup>

The discovery of the two residences in Cunella and Palombara and their distance from the heart of the settlement confirm that Muro Leccese was organized in several *nuclei* of dwellings built around the central one.

Together with domestic rituals, whose purpose was the economic and social self-representation of the family who lived in the great complex of the Cunella district, other cult spaces are also attested (Giardino & Meo 2013a, 313–15, figs. 21–3; 2013b, 171–3, figs. 6–8). They consist of large open spaces surrounded by walls (Fig. 18.11), with entrances sometimes preceded by a vestibule, such as the cult area found in Ugento according to the reconstruction proposed by Francesco D'Andria (D'Andria 2002).

The one found in Muro Leccese is paved with beaten limestone dust and several pits have been found within it. They contain depositions of sheep or goats, as well as the various types of ceramics used in the rituals (Fig. 18.11). These ceramics consist of imported Greek vessels associated with the consumption of wine (black-gloss *skyphoi*, Attic black-gloss *kantharoi* of the rare sessile variant with impressed palmette decoration, and Attic kraters with scenes of Dionysus and his *thiasos*), with a smaller quantity of locally produced vases and containers used for the preparation and consumption of food (Fig. 18.11). The discovery of a *skyphos* with a pierced bottom suggests that liquids were poured on to the soil (Giardino & Meo 2013b, 172, fig. 7). The pits, their contents and the way they were filled all bear close similarities to the ritual spaces found in nearby Vaste, which were used from the Iron Age until the mid-third century BC (Caldarola 2012; Mastronuzzi 2013).

The transformation of the funerary practices in the mid-sixth century BC led to the creation of funerary areas not far from the houses. Indeed, one of the characteristics of Messapian settlements is that burials are found both inside and outside the surrounding walls.

An important archaeological find, from a burial space in the central-eastern sector of the town, not far from the Cunella district, is a large Attic krater with volutes from the workshop of the Antimenes Painter (detailed description in Giardino 2014), who was active in the final decades of the sixth century BC



**Figure 18.10.** Muro Leccese, Cunella district. Plan of the residential building with sheep bone evidence of the consecration rite performed for the area, clay tile-lined pit in the courtyard with some of the late sixth–early fifth century BC ceramics discovered in it and banqueting hall with altar in the middle (graphics and drawings C. Bianco; photos L. Giaridino).

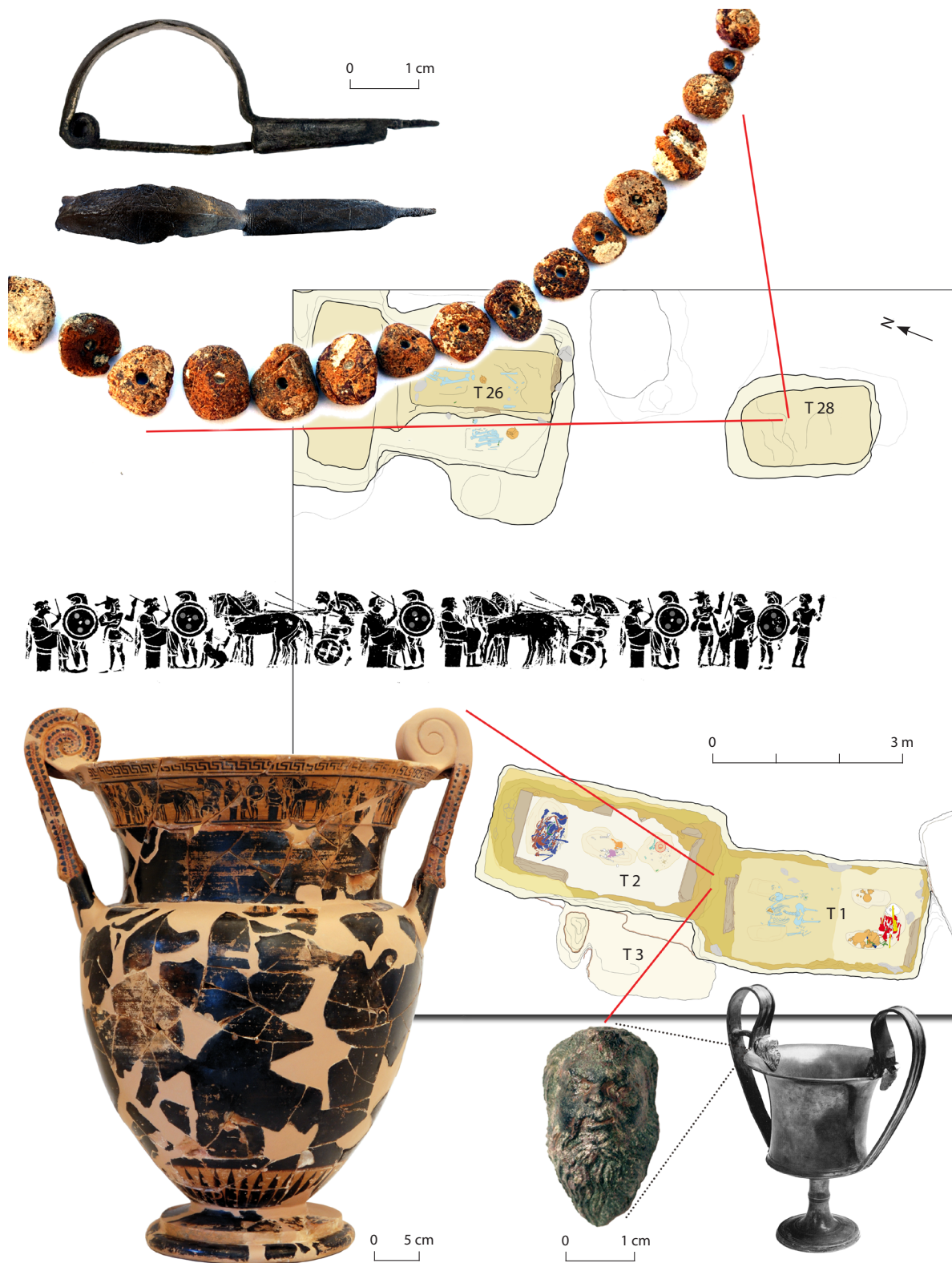




**Figure 18.11.** Diorama of the place of worship in the archaeological area of Cunella with details of the scene: sacrifice of sheep or goat followed by its deposition in a pit and deposition of vases in cavities that were sealed and no longer used (diorama F. Ghio; photos and graphics C. Bianco).

(Fig. 18.12). Volute-kraters were objects of great prestige, used in the Greek and non-Greek worlds in domestic, religious and funerary contexts (Mannino 2014).<sup>14</sup> The Muro krater comes from the interior of

two adjoining semi-chamber tombs used from the late sixth to the mid-third century BC. Although the graves had been severely disturbed by looters, they have yielded other objects which attest to the elevated



**Figure 18.12.** Muro Leccese, Masseria Cunella district. Tombs 1 and 2 with Attic krater from the workshop of the Antimenos Painter and fragments of a bronze kantharos; Tomb 28 with amber necklace and silver fibula (graphics C. Bianco; photos C. Bianco, L. Giardino, A. Bandiera— SIBA).





**Figure 18.13.** *Muro Leccese, fourth century BC walls built over demolished dwellings in the Palombara district (F. Meo, L. Giardino).*



social status of the occupants: bronze *fibulae*, some of which were coated with gold leaf, a *kantharos* with a plastic appliqué of a satyr's head (Fig. 18.12; Giardino 2016a, 74, fig. 12), and fragments of decorated pots. As the volute-krater is the only entirely reconstructed vessel belonging to the tombs' initial phase of use, it should not be seen as merely a prestigious item or a funerary marker, but rather as an object with a strong cult value: Liliana Giardino suggested it was placed there to affirm the origin of the aristocratic group that held power in the settlement (Giardino 2014, 219–20). However, as another volute-krater was discovered in the banqueting hall of the residential building at San Vito dei Normanni (Semeraro 2009), Katia Mannino proposed that the vessel was originally acquired in order to be placed in a residential complex of Muro Leccese and was moved to the funerary area after being used, maintaining its symbolic value (Mannino 2021, 50–2). The scenes below the rim of the krater may also have a highly significant meaning, as warriors and wagons are also seen on Messapian stone stelae.<sup>15</sup>

Not far from the burial site where the volute-krater was found, the 2017 archaeological excavations revealed a single grave containing an amber necklace and three *fibulae* dated to the first half of the fifth century BC, two of which were made of silver (one intact, one broken) and one of bronze (D'Andria 1990, 84, 132).<sup>16</sup> The amber necklace is the only item of its kind discovered in Messapia to date, and the intact silver *fibula* has a very elegant decoration with geometric motifs on the arc and bracket executed with the burin technique (Fig. 18.12). Although this grave had also been severely disturbed by looters, these objects confirm the high social status of the occupants of this funerary area during the late sixth–mid-fifth centuries BC.

### The Hellenistic period and the end of the town

Muro Leccese, with the above-described urban and cultural characteristics, persisted without evident changes until the final decades of the fourth century BC, when a series of structural changes occurred and it was modified to varying degrees. The most striking development in terms of the economic and political commitment required, was the construction of the monumental walls made of squared blocks (Fig. 18.13) (Bianco 2016). Approximately 4 km long, 7 m high and 3 m thick, their construction required nearly 85,000 cubic m of local sandstone and also entailed extremely high costs in terms of the substantial number of specialized labourers required. This implies strong political power concentrated in the hands of the community's leaders. In any case, the

project reshaped the settlement (Fig. 18.13), excluding a number of peripheral residential and funerary areas at the eastern and western ends and occupying new land to the north (Giardino & Meo 2013a, 315, fig. 25).

These changes appear to have arisen as a result of internal political dynamics, with the advent of new dominant groups: in some cases, these groups maintained the aristocratic order of the previous period, continuing to occupy the same locations in order to confirm the validity of their power, while in others they broke with the previous period, erasing older dwellings and funerary spaces and creating new ones.

In daily life, Messapian communities became markedly less open to external cultural experiences, reflecting a strong conservatism among the local ruling classes. The building techniques used for the new dwellings replicated those of the Archaic and Classical periods, while the ceramics used for daily purposes included far fewer imported items, limited almost exclusively to *amphorae* for wine.

When the Romans arrived in Messapia in the third century BC, some of the ruling families chose to form an alliance with them, enriching themselves in the process. Others, like those of Muro Leccese, chose war and were annihilated along with their towns. The discovery near the surrounding walls of lead sling bullets and stone balls launched by catapults indicates that the settlement underwent a siege in which the inhabitants put up a spirited defence (Meo 2020). There is evidence of fires and collapses followed by the rapid and definitive abandonment of the houses, and the necropolis areas ceased to be used. All this indicates a comprehensive destruction of the settlement and the dispersal of its inhabitants throughout the region.

### Notes

- 1 In addition to the more than 30 years of research by the Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam in the northern Salento, other institutions have worked in other areas, such as the École française de Rome in southeastern Salento, or the University of Sidney at Li Fani and the Université Paul Valéry of Montpellier at the site of Soleto.
- 2 Most probably during the *bellum sallentinum*. For the literary sources on this conflict, see Lombardo 1992, 84, 146–7, 165, 261; Grelle & Silvestrini 2013, 115–25.
- 3 According to Douwe G. Yntema (2013, 49–50), the increase in the number of inland sites corresponds to an abandonment of coastal settlements. However, Francesco D'Andria (2017, 289) has pointed out that sites such as Otranto and Castro continued to operate not only during the Iron Age but also in the subsequent period.
- 4 See D'Andria 1990, 19–48; Mastronuzzi *et al.* 2008 (on Otranto); Mastronuzzi & Melissano 2015 (on Vaste); D'Andria 2009; 2013 (on Castro).



- 5 On the transformation of farming practices during the Iron Age, see Semeraro 2014, 331–2. Detailed data about Muro Leccese are in Meo 2019.
- 6 Other examples of large basins for rainwater are found in Oria and Cavallino, see D'Andria 1997, 275–8.
- 7 This hypothesis can be seen in the context of the agricultural colonization of previously uninhabited inland areas and the transformation of semi-nomadic groups dependent on herding into settled communities (Yntema 2013).
- 8 Data on Iron Age pottery in Muro Leccese, both locally produced and imported, can be found in Giardino & Meo 2013a, 306–10; Meo 2015; 2016; 2017; 2019.
- 9 A context in which the quantity of imported ceramics is much higher in comparison to the others, such as the hut found in Fondo Pelli at Cavallino (Polito 2005), has not yet been found in Muro Leccese or in any other settlement in Salento.
- 10 An Archaic house that had been obliterated by the construction of the circuit of walls at the end of the fourth century BC was discovered in 2006–2007 (Giardino & Meo 2013a, 315, fig. 25). The new excavation has been authorized by the Italian Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MiBACT – Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali e per il Turismo, prot. ns. SABAP-BR,LE,TA 5585 of 23/05/2016, 9922 of 18/05/2017; DG-ABAP 8895-P of 28.3.2018).
- 11 For example, in Kroton (Aversa 2013, tabs. IV.3, VIII.3), Poseidonia (Aversa 2013, tab. XXIII.5–7), Siris (Mertens 2006, 62, fig. 71; Aversa 2013, tab. XX.1–4) and Sybaris (Aversa 2013, tab. I.5–6).
- 12 On the presence of Greek pottery in Archaic Messapia, see Semeraro 1997. See also Stibbe 1989, 40–3, for the dating of the Laconic all-black stirrup kraters; Bandiera *et al.* 2017 for a preliminary study of the cup-skyphos with deer, most probably from Metapontion; Bernardini 1965, 14, for the Attic cup with horses and gods in a chariot, attributed to the workshop of the Haimon Painter and dated to 490–480 BC.
- 13 De Grossi Mazzorin & Perrone 2013, 209–11; Giardino & Meo 2013a, 311–13, figs. 16–19; 2013b, 190–3, 199–200; Giardino 2016b, 78–81.
- 14 Grazia Semeraro stressed that they are always found in contexts of particular importance, such as the residence of San Vito dei Normanni: Semeraro 2006; 2009.
- 15 There are five currently known stelae with figurative decoration. Two of them, from Cavallino and Muro Tenente, were found in secondary deposits. The other three were discovered in Mesagne, in a context dated to the Iron Age by Assunta Cocchiario (2006, 26–7). Although Francesco D'Andria and Giovanni Mastronuzzi recently attributed them to the sixth century BC (D'Andria & Mastronuzzi 2008, 226–9), the dating of the oldest Messapian stelae was taken up again by Gert-Jan Burgers (2011; Burgers & Crielaard 2012b, 535–6).
- 16 All the examples from Vaste are made of bronze.

## Abbreviation

*ThesCRA* – *Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum*

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## Making cities

Large and complex settlements appeared across the north Mediterranean during the period 1000–500 BC, from the Aegean basin to Iberia, as well as north of the Alps. The region also became considerably more interconnected. Urban life and networks fostered new consumption practices, requiring different economic and social structures to sustain them. This book considers the emergence of cities in Mediterranean Europe, with a focus on the economy. What was distinctive about urban lifeways across the Mediterranean? How did different economic activities interact, and how did they transform power hierarchies? How was urbanism sustained by economic structures, social relations and mobility? The authors bring to the debate recently excavated sites and regions that may be unfamiliar to wider (especially Anglophone) scholarship, alongside fresh reappraisals of well-known cities. The variety of urban life, economy and local dynamics prompts us to reconsider ancient urbanism through a comparative perspective.

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