

Iconographical Representations of Musical Instruments in Apulian Vase-Painting as Ethnical Signs: Intercultural Greek-Indigenous Relations in Magna Graecia (5th and 4th Centuries B.C.)

Fábio Vergara Cerqueira

Federal University of Pelotas—UFPel, Brazil

Rua General Telles, n. 861, apto. 1105. Pelotas, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil

CEP 96.010-310

fabiovergara@uol.com.br

Abstract

The paper deals with the representation of musical instruments on Apulian pottery. I shall sketch a general account of the red-figured pottery produced in Apulia and its development between the late fifth and the early third centuries, discussing the iconographical trends in its different phases. Secondly, I shall offer a brief survey of the musical instruments: the instruments belonging to Greek tradition (*lyra*, *kithara*, *aulos*) as well as those belonging to local tradition (rectangular cithara, rectangular sistrum), and those that result from local developments of instruments received from the Greek continental tradition (*tympanon*, *pektis*). Morphological and contextual analysis of the representation of such instruments will allow us to sustain our inferences about the intercultural processes of hybridization between local, Greek and oriental organological traditions, pointing to a scenario of multiple and negotiated identities in the colonial world of Magna Graecia.

Keywords

Magna Graecia – Apulia – music – iconography – pottery – identity

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(...) the commerce of things puts in contact also the ideas, and makes men circulate

GUZZO 2008, 43

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Introduction

The goal of this paper is to analyze the iconography of Apulian red-figured vases, particularly scenes representing musical instruments, produced between the last third of the fifth century, when the red-figure vase-painting technique was introduced in southern Italy (about 440 B.C.), and the first third of the third century (about 270 B.C.), when the production of Apulian painted pottery ceased, because of the decline of Taras. These scenes are either mythological or representations of daily life, or in some cases a mixture of the two. The instruments in this study include percussion (*tympanon* and the so called Apulian sistrum) and string (*lyra*, cithara and harp).

The study of Apulian iconography, which corresponds to more than ten thousand conserved vases, makes it possible to assemble a very rich body of empirical material to draw on when raising questions about the interpretation of Magna Graecia's culture. The musical instruments are represented in a large number of Apulian vases (ca. 10%), which enables a systematic analysis, aimed at verifying ethnic elements present in the iconographical representations, and allows us to reflect on the multiple influences that shaped the regional culture, marked by a miscegenation between Greeks and natives, and by the birth of a new culture.¹

1 Our study is influenced by the postcolonial debate about cultural relations between colonizers and colonized, replacing the paradigm of Hellenization with the paradigms of 'transculturation' (Ortiz 1968), and, more recently, 'hybridization', as proposed by Bhabha 1993, 212 as a strategy of discursive negotiation, which seems to offer an important alternative interpretation of the colonial intercultural process. In agreement with Hall and Gay 1996, we consider the Apulian cultural identity as multiple and heterogeneous, and even controversial. The theoretical horizon of 'transculturation' points towards the abandonment of the one-way perspective of 'acculturation', present in the concepts of Hellenization and Romanization, as criticized in Lepore 2000 and Hingley 1996.

The Apulian Pottery: Origin, Themes, Chronology, Styles

From the archaic period onwards, there were workshops in the Italian Peninsula dedicated to the black-figure vase-painting technique, under the influence of Euboea, Corinth and Athens. However, the use of red figures, a technique invented in Athens about 525 B.C., was delayed by almost a century, due to its technical difficulties. Its introduction may be linked—according to a theory proposed by Adolf Furtwängler in 1893 and accepted by Schmidt 1996—to the foundation in the Taranto Gulf of the pan-Hellenic colony Thourioi, under the initiative of Pericles. Attic artisans may have migrated there, fleeing from the instability of the Peloponnesian War (Furtwängler 1893, 150. Schmidt 1996, 244-45).² In the first decades (440-400 B.C.), the technique had spread along the Greek colonial cities of the Ionic shore, principally Metapontum, and soon developed into Lucanian pottery. In Apulia, the red figure technique established itself rapidly, and as soon as in 440-30, the so-called Early Apulian began in Taras. In the first phase of Italiot production (Early Apulian I), until around 400, it was difficult to distinguish between Attic and local painting (Boardman 2001, 112).

There are today more than 20 thousand well preserved red-figured vases produced in Magna Graecia and Sicily, corresponding to about one and a half century's activity from approximately 440-30 to 270-60 B.C. The majority of these vases are Apulian (about 10,000), providing goods to the region and replacing Attic imports, followed by Campanian vases (4,000) and others, e.g. Lucanian and Paestan (Boardman 2001, 110. Dias 2009, 53). Apulian pottery presents its singularity from the start: the taste for multiple subsidiary ornaments, the fine floral fantasies, leaves and garlands (Boardman 2001, 113) and, furthermore, plastic ornaments, for instance the rococo of some *nestorides* and krater handles, mainly the so-called *cratere a mascheroni* (De Juliis 1996, 266-68).

The contents of the prevailing scenes are mythical and mystical, merging Dionysiac, Orphic and funerary meanings in an original way, with an unexpected effeminate Eros taking part in the Dionysiac *thiasos*, and linked with Eleusinian beliefs (Schmidt 1987). The funerary scenes use original models with the representation of the dead inside a *naiskos*, as a house in the realm of Hades. Traditional Greek mythological scenes receive a very detailed treatment (Sarian 1987). Banquet scenes oscillating between the Dionysiac and the everyday life are occasionally depicted, as well as love and domestic scenes, highlighting the female figure. Music and musical instruments are present in the iconographical representations of all these categories of scenes.

2 Recently, Denoyelle and Iozzo, 2009, 98-99 rejected this theory, considering the lack of archaeological evidence for the production of red-figure vases in Thourioi.

The frequency and approach of the different themes vary significantly during the history of the Apulian red-figured vases. The proto-Apulian style in the last third of the fifth century remains faithful to original Attic prototypes and the assimilation of Hellenized iconographical subjects. Gradually, the local culture and traditions imposed themselves, mainly about the mid-fourth century, as happened also in other Italiot ceramics industries (Dias 2009, 60).

The Musical Instruments Represented in Apulian Pottery

The musical instruments represented in Apulian iconography include both traditional Greek instruments, imported from mainland Greece, whose morphology we know very well from Attic iconography (string instruments: *lyra*, *kithara*, *barbitos* and harp; wind instruments: *aulos*, *salpinx* and *syrinx*; percussion instruments: *tympanon*), and regional south Italian instruments (Di Giulio 1988, 119). The regional singularities consist in the existence of special types of instruments (like the *sistrum*) and organological variations (as the *tympanon* and *cithara*).

The *tympana* represented in Apulian pottery (Figure 1a) were much more elaborate than the drums pictured in Attic pots (Figure 1b), being almost a new instrument: the membranes were ornate with concentric geometric or floral motives and dots; decorative ribbons hang from the drum; sometimes they seem to have small rattles; their size varied from very small to very large, on average reaching 60 cm diameter. According to Di Giulio 1991, 6 the Apulian drum's originality "demonstrates a level of cultural independence of the indigenous population."

Another Apulian organological variation is the rectangular *cithara* (Figure 2a), very different from the typical trapezoidal *kithara* depicted in Attic iconography and employed in concert music (Figure 2b). Later in the Greek-Roman world this instrument became common, with many morphological variations, and may be identified as the *nablas* (Lat. *nabilium* or *nablium*), whose origin in South Italy may result from ancient contacts with cultures arising from the East, such as the Phoenicians and Carthaginians.³

3 The name *nablas* derives from the Greek word to identify a Hebrew form of the harp with a similar shape. Related words existed also in Aramaic and ancient Hebrew. This prototype of string instrument could have its origin, among the Greeks, in Poseidonia, Magna Graecia (Ath. 4.175. Strab. 1.471), where the instrument may have been introduced through contact with an organological tradition arising from the Middle East. According to Du Cange 1757, 615 (*nablisare*): *Nabilium erat Phoenicium organum lirae vel citharae simile*. Cf. J. AJ 7: 'Some musical instruments have barbarian names, as the *nablas* and the *sambuka*, the *barbitos*, the *magadis* and many others'.

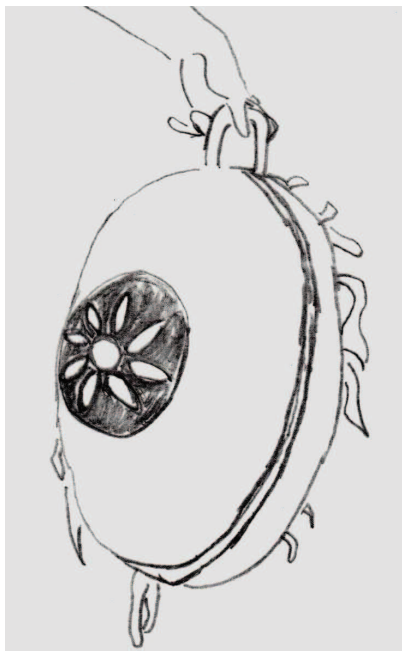


FIGURE 1A *An Apulian tympanon.*
Bell-krater. Middle Apulian.
Painter of Genova 2754 (RVAp. I.9/38, pr. 72.1-2).
Genova, 2753.
Ca. 375-350 B.C.



FIGURE 1B *An Attic tympanon.*
Oinokhoe (khous). Attic. Red figure.
Athens, National Museum, inv. 1222.
Last quarter of the fifth century.
Ref.: DEUBNER, 1959, p. 244, note 3, pr. 31.3.

Some morphological differences are the straight arms and the flat harmonic bar in the place of the pentagonal sounding board typical of the *kithara*.

The third case is the so-called 'Apulian sistrum'. There is no trace of this instrument in any source from mainland Greece, written, iconographical or archaeological (Figure 3). It was a percussion instrument shaped by two bars connected by a varied number of crossbars, with small bells and rattles on the ends that sounded when shaken. We cannot be sure of its name, although some authors have tended to identify it as the *platage* mentioned by Archytas of Taras (Smith 1976, 137). Some archaeologists preferred to name it as a xylophone (Trendall 1982; 1978), apparently on account of its ladder-like form; others named it 'Apulian sistrum', by analogy with the Egyptian instrument of Hathor and Isis, and adopted the supposition that it had an Apulian origin because of its frequency in images on Apulian pottery. Recent studies based in South Italian archaeological findings and in similar Mesopotamian iconographical testimonies indicate, however, that it was probably known for a few centuries in Sicily and South Italy thanks to the exchange of oriental merchandises, probably with the Phoenicians (Bellia 2011). Bellia argues that we should therefore name it rectangular sistrum and not 'Apulian sistrum', which weakens the theories that link its origin to Isis (Di Giulio 1988, 116-17) or Aphrodite (Smith 1976, 137).

Another singularity may be observed in the representation of the harps, since the most common is the *pektis* (Figure 4a), less usual in the Attic iconography, where the most frequent is the *trigonon* (Figure 4b), again suggesting a direct influence from the Orient.⁴

4 In the case of the harps, there remain still many doubts about the correspondence between the harp-names known through the literary sources and the harp-shapes known through the visual evidences. Maas and Snyder 1989, 147 following Wegner 1949, 47-50 classify and identify the iconographical representation of the harps accordingly to their shape. Basically, they identify open and closed structures. The opened structure is named 'angle harp'; the closed one, 'frame harp'. The iconography reveals two types of 'frame harps', that "would have been the ones for which the name *trigonon* ('triangle') would have been most appropriate" (Maas and Snyder, 1989, 151). However, Paquette 1984, 190 contended that the 'angle harp' (which he prefers to classify as 'la harpe en étrier', respecting Wegner's classification) should be identified as the *sambuke* mentioned in Arist. *Pol.* 8.6.7. I consider it more appropriate to identify the 'angle-harp' as the *pektis*, since its iconographical representation is consistent with some musical features ascribed to this instrument in literary sources, as described in Maas and Snyder 1989, 148-49 as being 'poly-harmonic' ("capable of being tuned according to many *harmoniai*"), using the tuning in octaves, and named as *dikhordos* ('two-stringed'). The harp of the Naples pelike analyzed below seems to correspond to these descriptions.

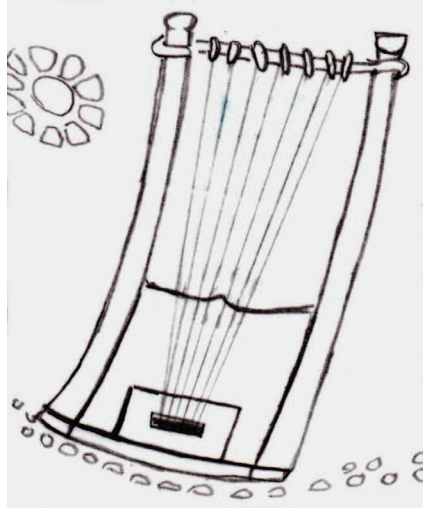


FIGURE 2A *An Apulian rectangular cithara.*
Skyphos. Late Apulian.
'di Gnathia' Style.
Bari, Museo Archeologico di Bari.
End of the fourth century.
Ref.: De Juliis, 1996, n. 247.

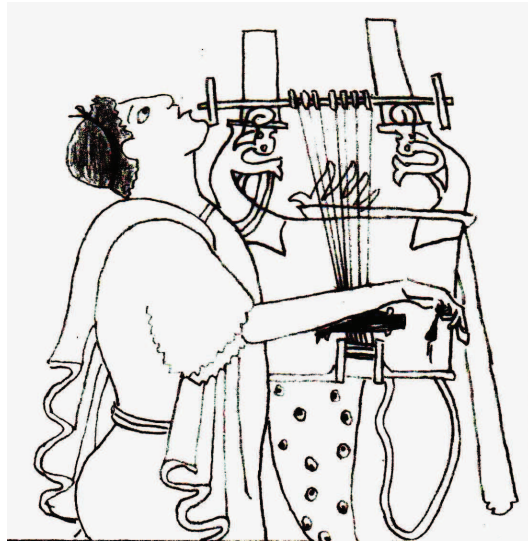


FIGURE 2B *The kithara, named Asia.*
Amphora. Attic. Red figure.
The Berlin Painter (ARV² 197/3).
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 56.171.38 (Fletcher Fund).
About 490 B.C.



FIGURE 3 *Woman playing rectangular sistrum.*
Lekythos. Middle Apulian.
Plain Style. Beginning of Baroque Style.
Group of Ruvo 425 (RVAp I.15/44a).
Essen, Folkwang Museum, 74.158 A 3.
Mid-fourth century.



FIGURE 4A *A woman, in a love scene, plays a pektis with swan-shaped ornaments.*
Pelike. Late Apulian.
Circle of the Darius Painter and Underworld Painters (A) Larger vases. Vases closely
associated with the Underworld Painter. The Tarrytown Group (RVAp II.18/357, pr. 205.5-6).
Naples, private collection, 23.
Ca. 330-20 B.C.



FIGURE 4B *Woman plays the trigonon.*
Nuptial lebes. Attic. Red figure.
The Bath Painter (ARV² n26/6).
New York, Metropolitan Museum, 16.73.
Ca. 430-20 B. C.

In that case, underlying the difference from the Attic tradition, a near-eastern organological tradition, conserved in long-term cultural memory (Assmann 2008, 17-50), must have been received and recreated locally: notice, for instance, the inclusion of animal-shaped ornaments on some parts of the instrument (Duchesne-Guillemin 1984, 129-142), as in the swan-shaped details seen on the Apulian harps (Figure 4a).

Regarding musical aspects, the innovations appreciated by the Apulians in the instruments' morphology enriched the musical possibilities, in comparison to the mainland Greece prototypes, as we can presume from the rattles added to the *tympana*, which, furthermore, presenting a significant variation of size, may offer drums of high, middle or low pitches. A very singular musical feature may be deduced from the representation of the *pektis* depicted in some Apulian vases, as we can observe in the Naples *pelike*: the lower structure, where one attaches the lower ends of the strings, is actually divided into two yokes, which could enable these instruments to be played in two different tunings. Such features are not observed in the iconographical representations of musical instruments in Attic vase-paintings.

Conclusions: Musical Instruments, Ethnic Signs and Cultural Hybridization

We can analyze the ethnic implications of the various representations of string instruments. In Early Apulian Style (430-370 BC), the representation of the *lyra* is predominant, showing the strength of the Greek colonizers' identity, since the *lyra* was ethnically considered the typical national Greek instrument. In this phase, as we see in a bell-krater of the Berlin Dancing Girl, Orpheus was represented playing the *lyra*, as in Attic vase-painting models (Figure 5).

In Middle and Late Apulian (370-280 B.C.), the *lyra* almost disappeared, being replaced numerically by the traditional Greek *kithara* and the regional rectangular cithara. Nevertheless, the analysis of the iconographical repertoire shows a different treatment of these instruments. The *kithara* continues to appear in mythological scenes, associated principally with Apollo (Figure 6a) and Orpheus (Figure 6b)—and it is worth observing that Apollo and Orpheus are no longer represented with the *lyra* after about the middle of the fourth century.



FIGURE 5 *Orpheus playing lyra.*
Bell-krater. Early Apulian.
Pioneers. The Sisyphus Group. Painter of the Berlin Dancing Girl (RVAp I.1/12, pr. 2.1-2).
Zurich, Market. Arete, ex Anagni, Museo del Duomo.
Ca. 430-420 B.C.



FIGURE 6A *Apollo with kithara.*
Oinokhoe. Middle Apulian.
The Suckling-Salting Group. The Group of the Yale Pelike (RVAp I.15/18, pr. 140.5).
Naples Stg., inv. 574.
Ca. 350-330 B.C.

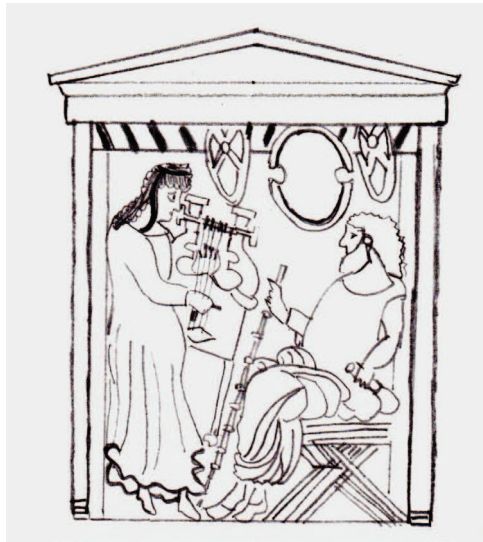


FIGURE 6B *Orpheus plays the kithara, in front of the dead man holding a papyrus roll in his hand, inside a naiskos.*
Amphora. Late Apulian.
Ganymedes Painter.
330-320 B.C.
Basle, Antikenmuseum, inv. 540.
Ref.: Schmidt, 1996, n. 214.

On the other hand, the rectangular cithara appears in scenes concerned with an idealized daily life, like love scenes (Figure 7a) and domestic female scenes (Figure 7b), or local funerary practices and beliefs, like the scenes with the deceased represented inside the *naiskos* (Figure 7c). The vase painter in a very clear way marked the presence of Greek and local elements in the hybrid character of musical life, indicating two different and concurrent identities: the membership of both a Greek and a regional Apulian and autochthonous tradition.



FIGURE 7A *Rectangular cithara in love scene.*
Pelike. Middle Apulian.
The Lycurgus Painter and his Circle (RVAp I.16/57).
Geneva, Chamay Coll.
350-40 B.C.

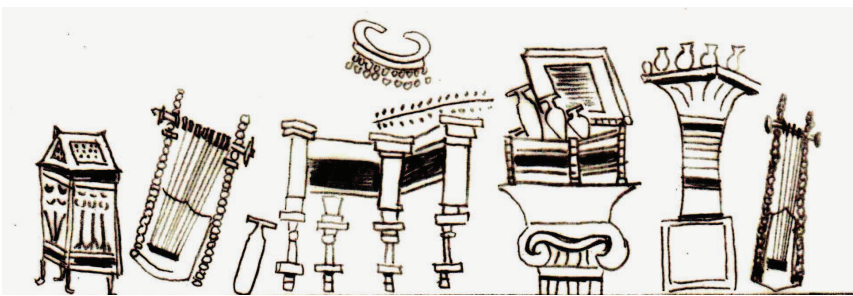


FIGURE 7B *Detail of the representation of a domestic female scene, depicting typical female daily-life objects.*
Loutrophoros. Late Apulian.
Passano Group.
Matera, Museo Nazionale 'D. Ridola', inv. 164531 (ex. Coll. Rizzon).
320 B.C.
Ref.: Schmidt, 1996, n. 328.

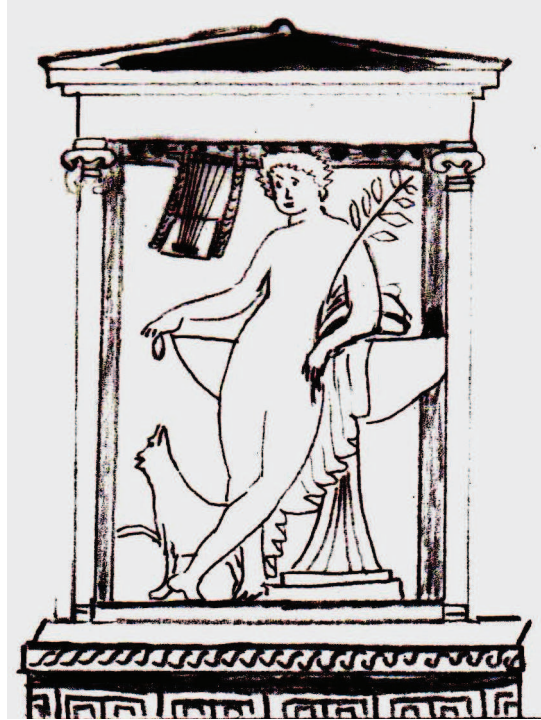


FIGURE 7C *A rectangular cithara in funerary scene.*
Volute-krater. Late Apulian (RFV-Handbook n. 189).
Painter of Copenhagen 4223.
Geneva, HR 69.
Last third of the fourth century.

A vase conserved in the Paul Getty Museum (Figure 8) arouses my interest, for it bears witness to this conscious coexistence of Greek and regional cultural traditions in the second half of the fourth century, and the influence of both traditions on Apulian life. Furthermore the painter seems to consciously use both the musical and pottery traditions as indicators of ethnic elements in their hybrid culture. It is a *loutrophoros*, made in the special cylindrical shape of the Apulian *loutrophoroi*, which constitutes a new vase form.⁵

The iconography is very significant in this connection. The main theme is the *naiskos* with the dead woman, to whom the living figures pay homage. I would like to highlight some details. Inside the temple, there are two vases:

5 According to Denoyelle and Iozzo, 2009, 243 this shape of *loutrophoros* was produced exclusively in Apulia.

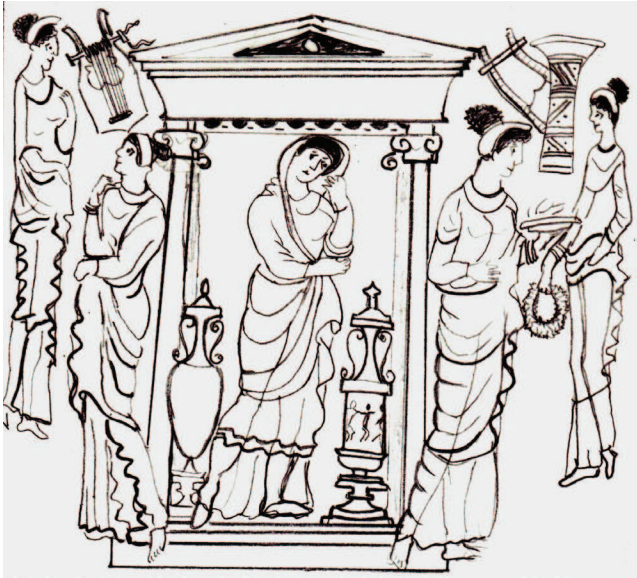


FIGURE 8 *Detail of a funerary scene inside the naiskos.*
Loutrophoros. Late Apulian.
Painter of Louvre MNB n48—The Tantalidae (RVap Supp. I.20/278a. RFV-Handbook
n. 183).
Malibu, J. P. Getty Museum 82 AE 16.
Ca. 340-30 B.C.

on the left side of the dead woman, an Attic *loutrophoros*, on the right side, an Apulian *loutrophoros*. In parallel to this ethnic dichotomy of the material culture, we see, on the same side as the Attic *loutrophoros*, a traditional Greek *kithara*, and, on the same side as the Apulian *loutrophoros*, a rectangular cithara, typical of the regional organology.

On the other hand, the direct oriental influence over the forms the instruments assumed in the musical culture of Sicily and South Italy, hypothesized for the sistrum and the rectangular cithara, is supported by archaeological findings that show contacts with the oriental material culture as an alternative mode of interculturalization, different from the contacts with the Greek world (Pouzadoux 2009).⁶

6 As an example, the tombs in Pithecusa, the most ancient Greek colony, founded in the middle of the eighth century in Italy, on the island of Ischia, revealed Egyptians scarabs and faïence, as well as Syrian pottery. Furthermore, Carthage maintained a regular occupation on the western shore of Sicily, defending Phoenician interests in the region (Markot 1999).

We deal directly, in the materiality of our research object—the Apulian vases—, with at least three traditions: the pottery tradition, the iconographical vase-painting tradition and the organological tradition. Such traditions suffered a hybridization process, bringing several different pasts into the Apulian present (430-270 B.C.), native, Greek and near-eastern pasts.⁷ The symbolic and material elements, through which these traditions express themselves, take part in this wider memory, the cultural memory, which according to Assmann 2008, 50 is complex and pluralist, like a labyrinth, including a quantity of memories and plural identities, different in time and space, with tensions and contradictions that produce its own dynamic. In the same way the heterogeneous Apulian identity and musical culture was a locus of multiple faces and contradictions.

There was a configuration of intercultural exchanges, very propitious to inter-ethnic relations. This scenario directly affected the constitution of hybrid identities, shaped by many stocks of memory, short and long-duration memories, which, in conscious and unconscious ways, received and reworked different musical traditions that were present in the musical culture of the Apulian colonial world. These traditions were reflected in the regions with Greek presence and influence (as in the city of Taras and its surroundings), as well as in the regions within the domain of native elites (such as Messapia, Peucetia and Daunia). Such local societies, relatively Hellenized, continued to cultivate traditional regional values and tastes, and their commercial contacts with the Greeks and with other overseas external stimuli generated new and original cultural manifestations.

In this cultural ambience, the iconographical representation of the musical instruments in Apulian pottery was clearly used as an ethnic indicator, in the context of a multiethnic syncretism. In the middle and late fourth century, when the colonial elites of the Greek *apoikiai* had lost their political, military and even cultural hegemony in South Italy, these representations highlighted the local traditions, as well as the new cultural commodities generated by

7 Margot Schmidt points the contribution of the pottery in studying what she called the “context of reciprocal exchange”: “Over the last few decades the present generation of scholars, particularly of Italians, has been able to make significant advances toward obtaining a proper focus on the native peoples. In this sense, the historical question of cultural receptiveness becomes a central issue: Italic vases assume particular interest when seen in the context of reciprocal exchange, and their historical significance becomes more critical for our better understanding of the highly complex structure that is Magna Graecia, which owes much of its specific nature to its been rooted in the Italian peninsula.” (Schmidt 1996, 447)

the cross-cultural dialogue between Greek and indigenous memories and identities. In a different way, some generations earlier, in the first phase of Apulian pottery, mainly between 440 and 400 B.C., the time when the elites of the colonial Greek cities dominated the region, the representation of the musical instruments had expressed an assimilation (or imposition) of cultural values linked to the Greek colonizer.

So the *lyra* gave place to the Apulian rectangular cithara, while the *trigonon* was replaced by the *pektis*, which received a swan-shaped ornament. The *tympanon* became a more complex instrument and became the expression of the regional popularity of the cult of Dionysus, while the use of the rectangular sistrum, known in South Italy and Sicily since the 8th century, spread all over Magna Graecia, imposing itself as an Apulian cultural symbol. The traditional Greek *kithara* remained as the main concert instrument, representative of the fine culture, connected to the most elevated Greek intellectual and artistic values—which continued to have an enormous prestige, particularly in music, the *kithara* players Apollo and Orpheus remaining the imaginary symbols of cultural refinement and respectability.

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