

## Introduction

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The present issue of *Studia Hercynia*, *Trans-Adriatic Dynamics: Late Bronze to Early Iron Age Matt-Painted Pottery in the Southwestern Balkans and Southern Italy*, brings together a series of studies that emerged from the session held at the annual meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists in 2024 in Rome. The aim of that session was to reassess a ceramic tradition that, although highly visible across several regions of the Adriatic and its hinterlands, has rarely been considered as a coherent phenomenon. Connections between the traditions on both sides of the Adriatic have been mentioned several times in literature since at least the 1970ies, based on similar painted motifs (e.g. KILIAN 1976), but never systematically explored.

The last comprehensive treatments of the materials from the Northwest Aegean and Southwestern Balkans (HOREJS 2007, 218–286) dates back almost twenty years, while for Southern Italy it is necessary to go back more than thirty years (YNTEMA 1990; but see also DE JULIIS – GALEANDRO – PALMENTOLA 2006). Since that time both field research and analytical approaches have advanced to various degrees and material from numerous new sites is now available across the entire region. Developments on the Western side of the Adriatic – especially in southern Italy – have yielded significant new evidence and have prompted a fresh evaluation of long-held assumptions regarding interaction, mobility, and the transfer of knowledge during the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages.

In the present volume, it has been decided to focus on these two periods – the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age – and not to include the Aegean Middle Bronze Age matt-painted wares, as they represent a topic in their own right (BUCK 1964; the most recent MBA pottery publication is SPENCER 2024; for further bibliography see also HALE 2014). These wares display numerous distinct regional styles and precede the developments discussed here. They often constitute a separate branch of research (for which a comprehensive overview is still lacking), comparable to the distinction between Italian and Southwest Balkan matt-painted wares. Their relationship to Late Bronze Age developments in the Northern Aegean would likewise require much further investigation, although a possible link may be traced through the early LBA wares of Thessaly. More generally, the Pagasitic Gulf must have played a crucial role in the south–north transmission of material culture. After all, matt-painted pottery is not only a phenomenon across space, but also across time (KRAPF 2017).

Late Bronze to Early Iron Age matt-painted pottery, in all its regional manifestations, constitutes a category of material culture that traverses cultural, technological, and social boundaries. It appears in tell settlements of Central Macedonia as well as in lakeside pile-dwellings and tumuli of the southwestern Balkans, where it is also attested at hilltop sites and even in caves. It likewise forms part of the rich ceramic repertoire of Basilicata, Apulia,



**Fig. 1: Distribution of Late Bronze to Early Iron Age matt-painted pottery. Extent of the distribution zone of matt-painted pottery across the Adriatic and adjacent regions.**

and the wider southern Italian littoral, with occasional findspots extending to Central Italy, Sicily, and the Aeolian Islands.

Individually, these traditions have long been the subject of local or regional studies, often framed within modern national boundaries. Such approaches have tended to obscure the broader picture, not least through chronologies shaped by national scholarly discourses, particularly concerning the origins of this ceramic tradition. What has been lacking is a synthetic perspective on the technological choices, stylistic developments, and social practices that shaped the production and use of matt-painted pottery across this broad, interconnected zone.

The contributions assembled here seek to address precisely this gap. They combine new field data, refined chronologies, petrographic and technological analyses, and contextual interpretations. Most importantly, and for the first time, studies from both sides of the Adriatic are presented side by side. A central theme running through the volume is the tension between continuity and difference: although matt-painted pottery constitutes a recognisable tradition from the fifteenth to the seventh century BC, its inter- and intra-regional expressions display substantial variation in morphology, decoration, production techniques – including the use of the potter’s wheel in the later phases – and consumption practices, as well as significant change over time within individual regions. This variability challenges simplistic diffusionist models, while simultaneously inviting more nuanced explorations of shared knowledge, convergent innovation, and human mobility across the Adriatic.



Fig. 2: Distribution of Late Bronze to Early Iron Age matt-painted pottery. Sites discussed in this volume.

1 - Kastanas, 2 - Agios Mamos, 3 - Assiros, 4 - Thessaloniki Toumba, 5 - Mesimeriani, 6 - Episkopi Imathias, 7 - Kalindria, 8 - Dimov Grob v. Ulanci, 9 - Stobi, 10 - Dolna Bežanija v. Krivi Dol, Štip, 11 - Vodovratski Pat v. Vodovrati, 12 - Vardarski Rid, Gevgelija, 13 - Sovjan, 14 - Maliq, 15 - Kuç i Zi, 16 - Barç, 17 - Tren, 18 - Drenovë, 19 - Kamenicë, 20 - Luaras, 21 - Rehovë, 22 - Prodan, 23 - Piskovë, 24 - Rapckë, 25 - Vodhinë, 26 - Katundas, 27 - Lofkënd, 28 - Patos, 29 - Plaošnik, 30 - Ohrid, 31 - Leskoec, 32 - Gradište, 33 - Ploča Mičov Grad, 34 - Trebenishte, 35 - Selcë, 36 - Podgorie, 37 - Symiza, 38 - Shuec, 39 - Boboshticë, 40 - Roca Vecchia, 41 - Torre Santa Sabina, 42 - Vivara, 43 - Lipari, 44 - Milazzo, 45 - Incoronata, 46 - Gravina, 47 - Matera, 48 - Monte Serico, 49 - Monte Irsi, 50 - San Nicola dei Greci, 51 - Gravina in Puglia, 52 - Francavilla Marittima, 53 - Tzanata-Riza, 54 - Palia Stani-Prosfoleika, 55 - Kokkolata-Kangelisses, 56 - Tris Langades, 57 - Polis and Pelikata, 58 - Aetos, 59 - Choirospilia, 60 - Amali, 61 - Karou, 62 - Lithakia-Kamaroti.

**Evangelia Vliora and Evangelia Kiriatzis** open the volume with a technological and contextual study of matt-painted pottery circulating within the tell settlements of Central Macedonia. By combining macroscopic and petrographic characterisation with detailed contextual analysis, their paper sheds light on production practices and social consumption within one of the best-documented regions of northern Greece. **Zlatko Videski** provides a systematic re-evaluation of the matt-painted assemblages of the Ulanci cultural group in the Vardar valley, offering a clear overview of forms, motifs, and chronological developments. **Esmeralda Agolli** explores the southern Albanian material, emphasising how innovation in ceramic production operated within particular socio-economic constraints. The contribution by **Pero Ardjanliev** revisits the ceramic sequences from the Lake Ohrid-Prespa region and presents new chronological anchors that refine our understanding of developments in this inland zone.

The second half of the volume shifts the focus to southern Italy, where recent work has transformed our understanding of the Final Bronze and Early Iron Age. **Francesco Iacono and co-authors** reassess southern Italian Protogeometric pottery through the key site of Roca Vecchia, highlighting the local appropriations of styles often considered exogenous. **Cesare Vita** examines the matt-painted assemblage of Incoronata in Basilicata, with particular attention to the *chaîne opératoire* of production and the social contexts of consumption. Finally, **Christina Souyoudzoglou-Haywood** surveys the long but less well-known tradition of matt-painted pottery on the Ionian Islands, spanning the Middle Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age, and situates this island material within the wider Adriatic and Balkan frameworks.

Taken together, these papers reveal a complex picture of technological expertise and stylistic creativity. They demonstrate that similar decorative principles could be realised through different *chaînes opératoires*, and that local communities selectively adopted or resisted external influences. They also underscore the importance of context: the role of matt-painted pottery could differ markedly between coastal trading hubs, inland valleys, and long-lived tell settlements. The volume thus moves beyond typology to address broader questions about social practice, identity, and interaction at a time when communities around the Adriatic were becoming increasingly interconnected. The refined chronologies found herein become crucial when exploring the connections between the different regions.

We hope that this collection will serve as a foundation for further comparative research on matt-painted pottery, and more generally on the technologies and practices that shaped interregional dynamics during the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages. The contributions assembled here demonstrate the value of bringing together scholars from different national and disciplinary traditions, and they highlight the potential of collaborative research to refine and challenge entrenched narratives.

In addition to the papers published in this volume, the session included further contributions by Ole Aslaksen on portable XRF analyses of matt-painted pottery in southern Albania and Epirus; by Martina Čelhar on Daunian matt-painted pottery from northern Dalmatia, a region without locally produced matt-painted wares; by Leah Bernardo-Ciddio on socio-technological approaches to the study of matt-painted pottery in Puglia; and by the team of Florinda Notarstefano, Grazia Semeraro, Serena d'Alfonso, and Gaia Sabetta on matt-painted pottery and multidisciplinary explorations of commensality in Salento.

Taken together, the full set of papers presented in the session illustrated many aspects of the diffusion of matt-painted pottery, while also highlighting areas that require further investigation. One noteworthy case, absent from the present volume, is Aetolia in Greece (WARDLE – WARDLE 2021). It would also be fruitful to explore why this ware did not appear in other neighbouring regions, particularly to the north, and to examine the relationships between the distribution of matt-painted pottery and other ceramic traditions, including earlier Mycenaean and later Greek wares.

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Peter Pavúk – Tobias Krapf – Francesco Iacono – Leah Bernardo-Ciddio

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