

Migration, language and identity: Greek in Italy



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Greek identity

“...the kinship of all the Greeks in blood and speech, the shrines of gods and the sacrifices that we have in common, and the similarity of our way of life...”



Herodotus 8.144.2 (C5th BC)

- (1) Genealogy**
- (2) Language**
- (3) Religion**
- (4) Customs**

Who speaks Greek?



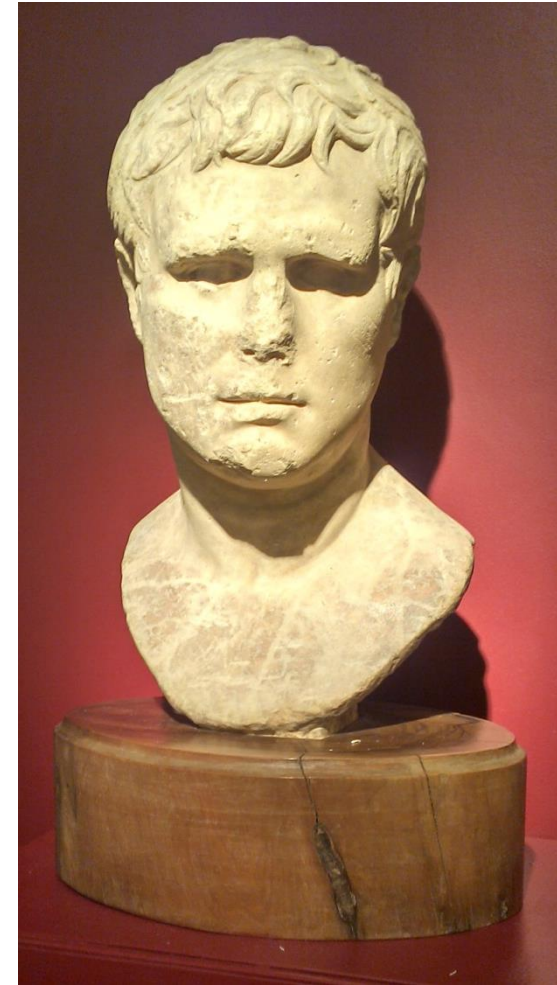
Roman identity

“We are told that Marius never studied Greek literature, and never used the Greek language for any matter of **real importance**, thinking it ridiculous to study a literature whose teachers were ruled by another country.”

Plutarch, *Life of Marius* 2.2 (Marius lived C2nd BC)

“I do not fail to understand that it is difficult to explain the dark discoveries of the Greeks in Latin verses, especially since we must often use new words because of the **poverty of our language**...”

Lucretius 1.136f (C1st BC)



Ordinary Romans speaking Greek



Slave Olympio: haec res. etiamne astas?
enim uero πράγματά μοι παρέχεις.

Master Lysidamus: dabo tibi μέγα κάκον

Olympio: This is the job. Are you still
standing around? At least you could give me
some stuff.

Lysidamus: I'll give you a big beating.

(Plautus Casina 728f.)

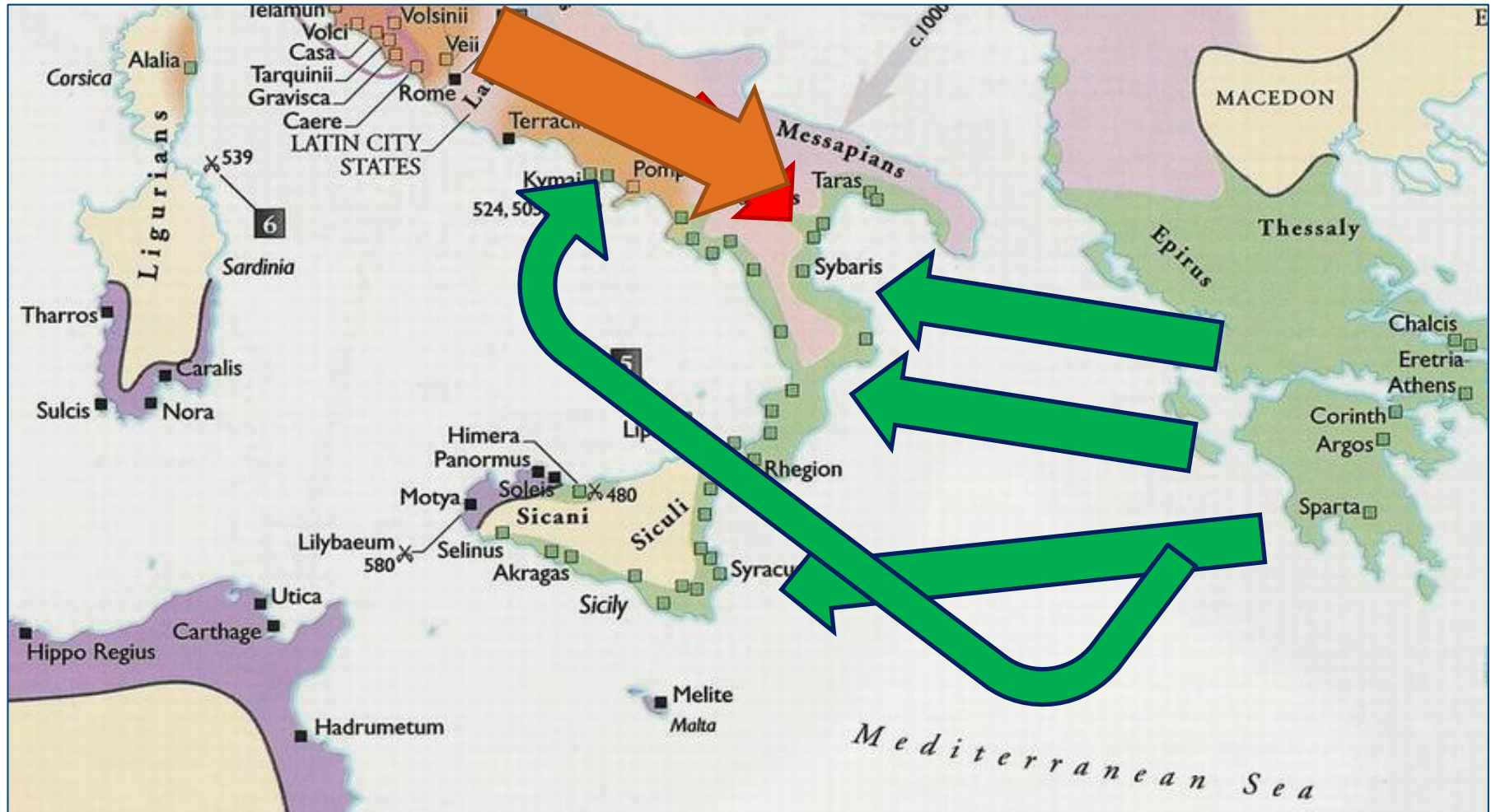
Languages in the ancient world



Languages of Italy c. 450 BC



Greek settlement in Italy



Greek in Italy project



Greek in Italy project



Greek in Italy project



Choosing a language: Oscan or Greek?



Greek: "In the magistracy of Nummelos"



Oscan: "Mais Arries in his magistracy"

Choosing a language: Oscan or Greek?



Ancient magic: curse tablets



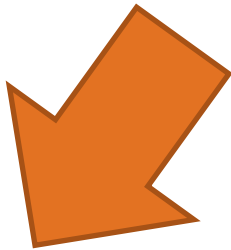
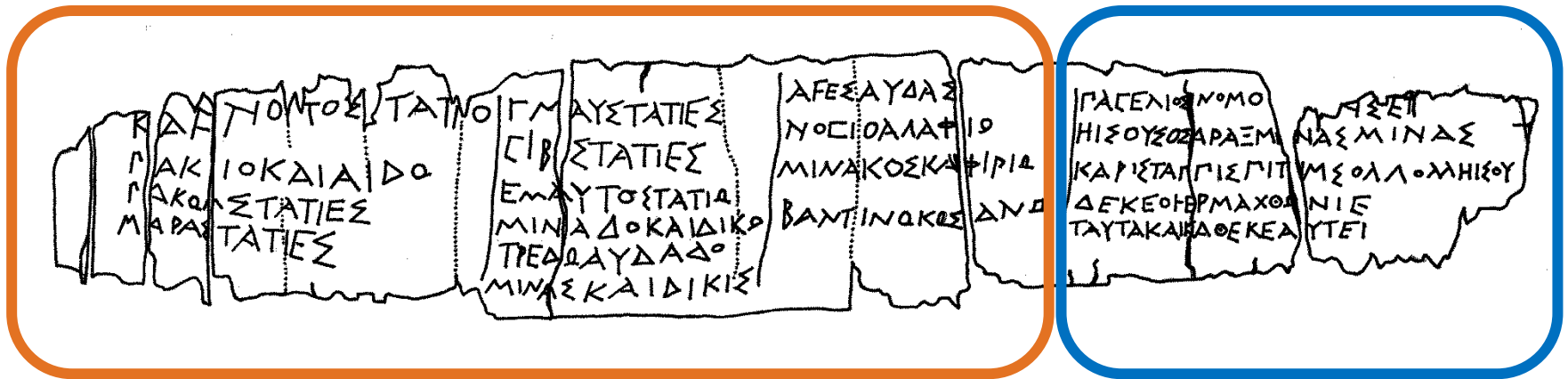
Curse tablets



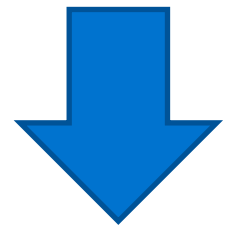
Curse tablets



Curse tablets: Greek for magic?



List of Oscan names



“Whoever is of them / Hermes of the Underworld, take them and hold them there”

Coins from the Social War



From: <http://www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=195864>

http://wildwinds.com/coins/rsc/marsic_confederation/Syd_621.2.jpg

The Italian bull and the Roman wolf

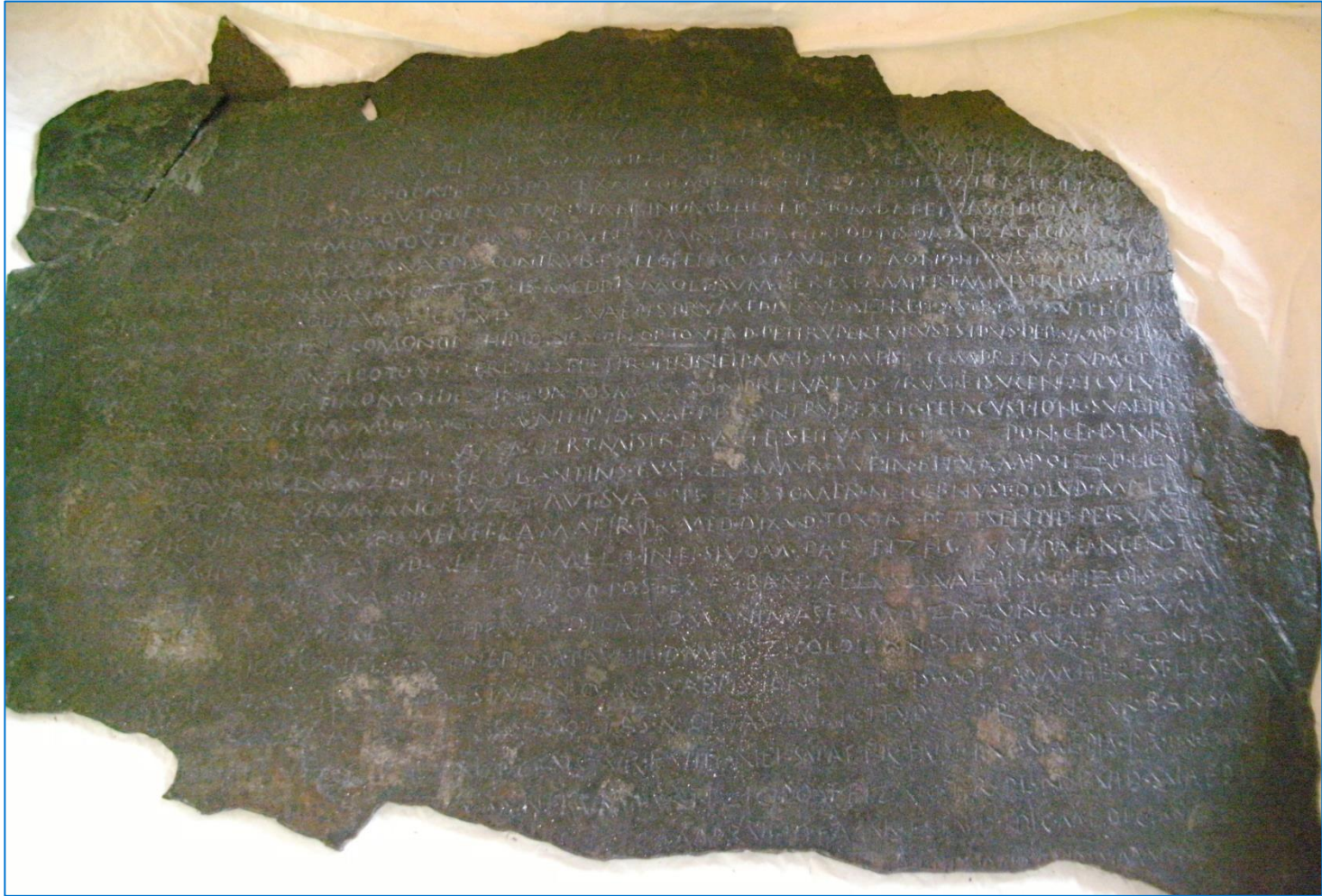


<http://www.britishmuseum.org/>

Weights and measures table in Pompeii



Tabula Bantina (c. 100-90 BC)



The Tabula Bantina as a sign of local identity?

“At one level, the re-adoption of Oscan as the official language of record at Bantia in the years before the Social War suggests that the Oscan language – but not necessarily the Oscan scripts – was a powerful symbol of local identity and anti-Roman feeling...

However, it should also be noted that much of the format and content of the document is very close to that of Latin municipal or colonial charters of the late second and first centuries BC, and it seems that, despite the symbolic choice of language, Roman influence on epigraphic culture in general was considerable.”

(Lomas 2008: 125)

An Oscan identity?

“We also suspect that our text is the work of an élite which normally spoke and wrote Latin and which in any case used the Latin script and wrote from left to right, which became desperate to assert an Oscan identity.” (Crawford 1996: 276)

“.. to ask whether we may not see the lex Osca Bantina less as an attempt to revive a dying language, than as one to find a local idiom and make it the community's own, despite its obvious Latinity, and in the process make a political statement (as well as producing a political document) about Bantian distinctiveness” (Bispham 2007: 145)

Assumptions about Bantia

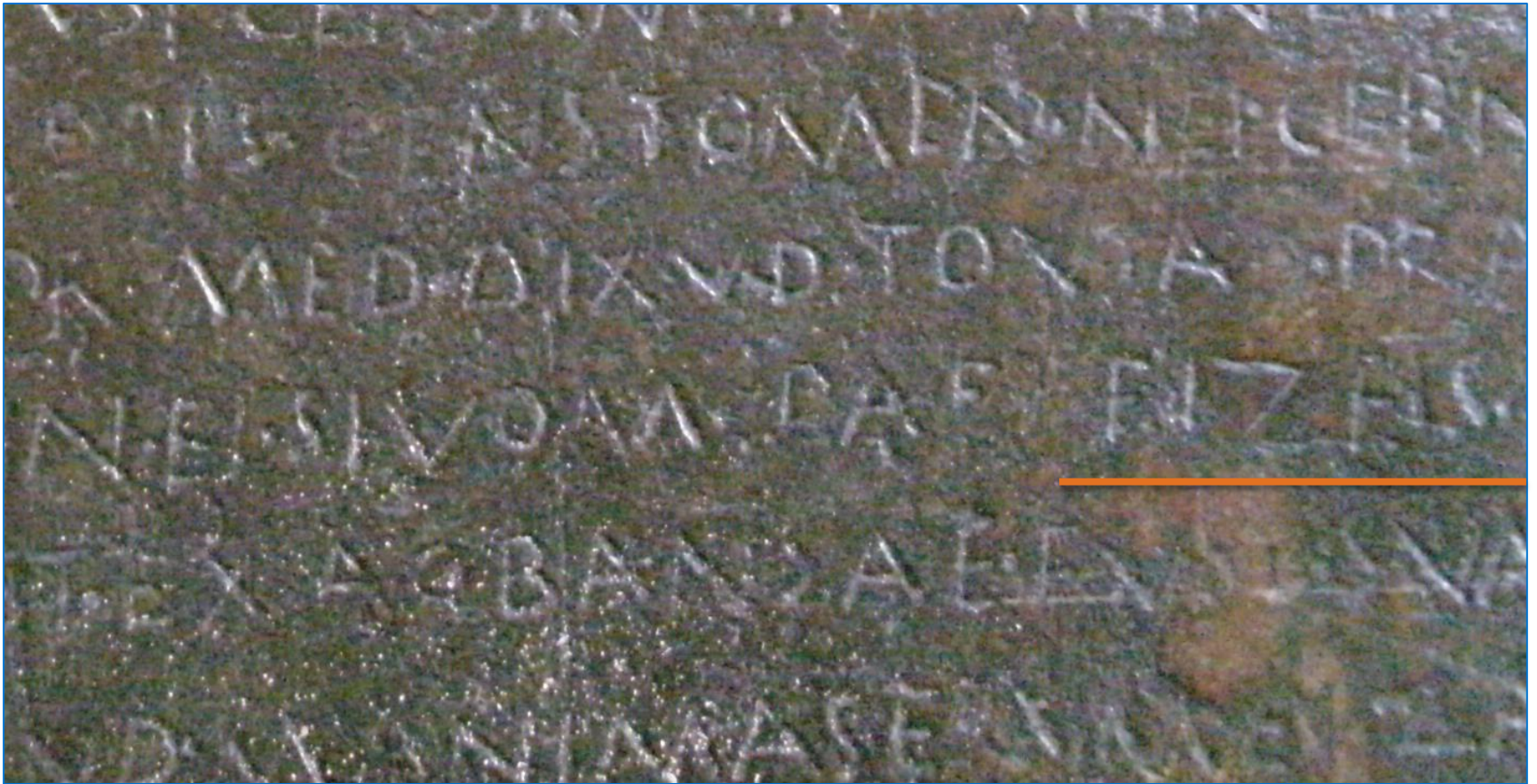
- Choice of language **is** a mark of 'Oscan'/Bantian identity **BUT**
- Choice of alphabet **is not** a sign of identity

Are these reasonable assumptions?

- No clear evidence of switch from Oscan to Latin before the Tabula Bantina
- Other available alphabets, notably Greek alphabet – which contains the letter Z



The letter Z



An Oscan/Latin Tile



An Oscan/Latin Tile

Oscan: **Hn. Sattieís detfri seganated
plavtad**

“(The) Detfri of Herennius Sattius
marked it with her foot.”

Latin: Herenneis Amica (amica?)
signavit qando ponebamus tegola

“Amica/the girlfriend of Herennius
Sattius marked it when we were laying
out the tiles.”



Conclusions

Questions:

- Is language in the ancient world bound up with personal/political identity?
- What information can we get from ancient sources (literary/inscriptional)?

Answers:

- Probably a lot (at least some of the time), but...
- We have to be careful to pay attention to context!

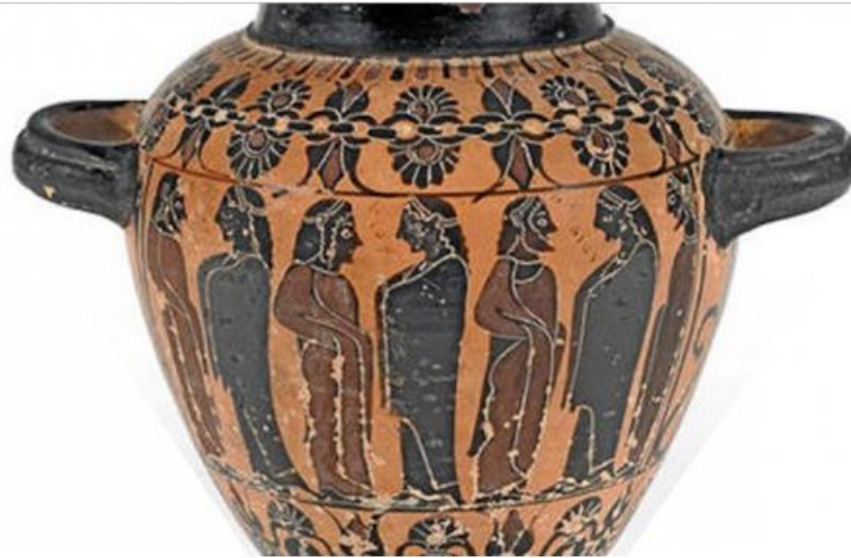


Conclusions

1 language \neq 1 ethnic group

1 person \neq 1 language





Arts & Humanities
Research Council

The Project

Greek in Italy is an AHRC-funded research project based in the Faculty of Classics, University of Cambridge. The project will run from January 2014 – December 2017.

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