

BOOK REVIEW

Archaic and Classical Greek Sicily: A Social and Economic History. By FRANCO DE ANGELIS. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. xxii + 441. Hardcover, \$85.00. ISBN 978-0-19-517047-4.

Sicily was among the first western locales to be colonized by the Greeks in the 8th century BCE. Its prime geographical location was conducive to trade, and this, coupled with the fertility of the land, ensured the relatively quick success of the colonies. As a result, Sicily emerged as a strong commercial and political power, attracting the attention of artists and philosophers. The ensuing influx of talented individuals prompted the production of innovative artistic and architectural works and allowed the island to serve as a bastion for creative and discerning individuals, such as Archimedes, the archetypal polymath.

Like their ancient predecessors, scholars of the modern era have also been drawn to Sicily. Serious systematic inquiry into the island's history and archaeology arguably began with E.A. Freeman's four-volume *History of Sicily from the Earliest Times* (1894), and Freeman's efforts have served as the foundation for subsequent island-wide studies.¹ De Angelis' book sets itself apart from previous surveys of ancient Sicily as it is the first to present a comprehensive social and economic history of Archaic and Classical Greek Sicily (8th century BCE to ca. 320 BCE). As the author states, the work has two overarching goals: "to collect and analyze the evidence in an interdisciplinary and theoretically informed way, and to help shape future research" (1). To achieve these aims, De Angelis interprets both textual and material evidence through the lens of multidisciplinary methods and theories derived from the fields of sociology and frontier economics.

The book is organized into four chapters, bookended by an Introduction and a Conclusion. The Introduction frames the author's research questions by

¹ Examples include: R.J.A. Wilson. 1990. *Sicily under the Roman Empire: The Archaeology of a Roman Province, 36 BC–AD 535*. Warminster; R.R. Holloway. 1991. *The Archaeology of Ancient Sicily*. London; R. Leighton. 1999. *Sicily before History: An Archaeological Survey from the Paleolithic to the Iron Age*. Ithaca; C. Smith and J. Serrati (eds). 2000. *Sicily from Aeneas to Augustus: New Approaches in Archaeology and History*. Edinburgh.

outlining past approaches to the social and economic history of Greek Sicily, describing his methods, and summarizing the subsequent chapters. Chapter 1 situates Sicily within its wider geographical and historical contexts (*ca.* 1200 to 600 BCE), and is primarily concerned with identifying the ways in which earlier geographical factors and cultural precedents contributed to the development of the societies and economies of Sicilian Greek settlements. Eschewing the traditional Hellenocentric approach, De Angelis finds that cultural exchange flowed freely between natives and Greeks. Moreover, the agricultural and institutional differences between natives and Greeks provided a variety of economic opportunities, and “both sides either took advantage of them or were taken advantage of in the pursuit of success” (321).

Building upon the discussions of the previous chapter, Chapter 2 shifts to the Sicilian Greek *poleis* themselves and tracks their political, territorial, and urban development over a period of four-phases that correspond to major episodes in the island’s state formation (initial formation *ca.* 8th c. BCE to 500 BCE; first attempt at political centralization *ca.* 500–465 BCE; collapse and return of political centralization *ca.* 465–405 BCE; struggles for control and independence, primarily between Syracuse and Carthage, *ca.* 405–320 BCE). In general, Sicilian Greek imperialism resulted in new configurations of the island’s political landscape which “ranged from the abandonment of entire cities and emporia to the systematic centralized exploitation of agriculture and the creation of consumer cities supporting non-agricultural populations” (322).

Chapter 3 examines the societies of Greek Sicily, tracing their development over the four key historical phases outlined in the previous chapter. These societies diverged from their counterparts across the Greek world in that they were multiethnic and exhibited a preference for authoritarian and hierarchical government. According to De Angelis, the multiethnic make-up of Sicilian Greek communities is a result of labor requirements. The Sicilian Greeks were not multiplicitous enough to meet their own agricultural and military needs, which necessitated the recruitment, and eventual settlement, of numerous Greek and non-Greek peoples.

The final chapter, Chapter 4, focuses on the economics of Greek Sicily, with special attention paid to patterns in production, distribution, and consumption across the four key historical phases. The Greeks, De Angelis maintains, initially came to Sicily to exploit agricultural and trade opportunities. Over the course of the Archaic period, spin-off industries, such as fishing, textiles, and ceramics, developed and contributed to a burgeoning of economic success. Subsequent

waves of island-wide prosperity prompted concomitant episodes of societal growth and development.

In the Conclusion, De Angelis summarizes the results of the previous chapters and discusses his overarching conclusions. Namely, he asserts that the relationship between Greece and Sicily is best described not as “center and periphery” or “colonial,” but rather as independent yet interconnected, as Sicily played an integral part in the development of the ancient Greek world. Furthermore, previous studies of the Greek colonization of Sicily generally interpret their findings in one of two ways—the Greeks shaped ancient Sicily *or* the Greeks were shaped by their Sicilian experience—but De Angelis argues that neither one of these polarizing explanations accurately describes Greek Sicily. Instead, the island’s natives and Greeks mutually influenced one another in numerous and varied ways.

The book is remarkable for its interdisciplinary and comprehensive approach. De Angelis’ impressive command of historical, archaeological, and textual evidence, coupled with his sophisticated use of sociological and economic theory, has produced a fresh, contextual analysis of the political and economic developments of Greek Sicily that reveals new and unexpected societal trends. This book not only provides us with a more complete picture of the ancient island, but it also will undoubtedly influence future studies of the history and economics of Greek Sicily.

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