

The remarkable connection between the North and the South

Booms, D., J. Higgs. (2019). *Sicily: Heritage of the World*. London, The British Museum.

This journal is about the relations between the south, The Mediterranean, and the north, the Arctic, the Nordic countries and generally the northern Europe. Half of the book under review here is specifically about this relation, the Norman influence on Sicily and its institutions, starting about the year 1000 and lasting until the middle of the twelfth century. The other half is about archaeological excavations in Sicily of objects and artistic works from the period of Greek influence in Sicily lasting from the eight century BC until third century BC. The book is a result of a conference related to the exhibition, *Sicily: Culture and Conquest*, that opened in 2016 at the British Museum in London, giving a deep background to the exhibition.

Not having seen the exhibition at the Museum is a drawback for a reviewer of this book. When you add to it that the reviewer is not an archaeologist or a historian specialising in these periods but only an interested amateur the objective of giving a reasonable appreciation of this book and what is in it becomes a tough job but not an impossible one. The reason is that the authors in this book write clearly, are obviously knowledgeable in their areas of expertise and can convey to the reader complex issues and knowledge that is specific, detailed, and wide. There are 18 chapters in this book, 11 about the Greek influence and 7 about the Norman contribution to the culture and identity of Sicily.

The ancient Greek world is fascinating and important for European understanding of their continent and societies. It is often assumed that there is a direct link between ancient Greece and modern Europe, but this is a simplification. The Middle Ages, the influence of the Muslim culture on southern Europe, the Muslim conduct of science, have made the link to ancient Greece more complex than we often are willing to admit. Sicily was a Greek colony and was not central to the development of Greek societies and is often considered not as important as Athens or Sparta. Such views often become paradigms in research and skew our vision of what really took place because it often depends on the initial premisses what we see.

Sicily is strategically placed in the Mediterranean, a place to which people have migrated

and settled and made their own in their social practices and culture. It should come as no surprise that some of the historically dominant powers in this area have colonised parts of Sicily and influenced its culture and society in various ways. Ancient Greece was one of those powers and it left a long-lasting legacy in Sicily in buildings and various types of objects that are examined in these papers. They look closely at how indigenous people reacted to Greek and Phoenician settlers and how the cultures reacted, how the mixing of cultures increased artistic and technological activity, there are reinterpretations of old finds in the light of new discoveries, how isolated marbles that are to be found in many modern museums were originally parts of groups of works that created narratives that are missing when the work is observed in isolation.

Normans arrived from the northern part of Europe, the Nordic countries, Normandy and other places, sometimes as pilgrims, sometimes as mercenaries. Some came by land from France through Iberia onto Italy, others came by “austurvegur” on boats on the rivers in Eastern Europe to the Black Sea and many becoming “væringjar” or mercenaries in Byzantium. Some of these Normans arrived in Sicily and gradually established themselves there having to fight the established authorities reigning at the time that were Muslim. Gradually the Normans became more powerful and influential. Some of the Muslims were not pleased with their absent authorities in Egypt or Ifriqiya (roughly modern Tunisia and eastern Algeria) and seem to have preferred the Normans who were present as authorities. The research presented here investigates the processes of interaction between the new rulers and the settled population and the former authorities. Other papers deal with the legacy of the Norman period even lasting to the present.

This is an interesting collection of papers on the history and development of Sicily. Anyone interested in this history would do well to read this collection of papers on various aspects of these subjects. The text is very good and informative, and the pictures add substantially to the text.