

Abstract

Sicily has been the home of people of different cultural background and ethnicity from prehistoric times. The 8th century BC marks the beginning of continuous presence of Greek and Phoenician communities in the island. One of numerous research questions surrounding this period is about the modes of encounters between the new arriving people from the eastern Mediterranean and the diverse local communities. The existing explanation models range from describing the local population as passive recipients to responsible agents, who selectively adopted foreign cultural elements and reinterpreted them in their own context. Although the notion of a one-sided acculturation process is certainly too simplistic, other approaches seem to be too generalizing as well for describing the complex and multifaceted cultural and ethnic setting of ancient Sicily.

The talk aims to emphasize the need for a case-by-case study of the available sources and it approaches the topic of cross-cultural encounters from the perspective of social psychology. As can be demonstrated, a number of observations based on the historical and archaeological sources, are well explainable from this perspective, allowing for a more differentiated and thus - in all likelihood - realistic assessment of the influence of Greek and Phoenician settlers on the local communities.