

Republican Sicily at the start of the 21st Century : the rise of the optimists ?¹

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Writing in 1981, Guido Clemente observed the existence of optimistic and pessimistic conceptions of Roman Sicily in the existing historiography of the island². In reality, Clemente's idea of optimistic was not particularly optimistic, since the distinction which he drew was that between a view which focused upon a continuity in citizen life and the gradual development of *latifundia* on the island from the beginning of the Imperial period³, and one which traced progressive decline from the inception of the Roman province in the third century BC in both urban and rural contexts⁴. In the course of a deliberately brief (and therefore schematic) survey of the *status quaestionis* of Republican Sicily, which makes no claims to comprehensive coverage, it is my intention to suggest that we can today be rather more optimistic about the state of scholarship on Republican Sicily ; whether the picture of Republican Sicily that is beginning to emerge is itself more optimistic remains to be seen. I begin by contextualizing the dichotomy presented by Clemente⁵.

Ettore Pais, in 1888, wrote of the « triste pace ed il lugubre silenzio della morte », which he saw as characterizing Roman Sicily⁶. Shortly after, Adolf Holm in his *Geschichte Siziliens im Alterthum* wrote that, « Seit dem Falle von Syrakus und Agrigent war die Bedeutung Siziliens bei weitem nicht mehr die alte. Eine römische Provinz hat nur in sehr beschränktem Umfange eine gesonderte Geschichte »⁷. Some 80 years later, Salvatore Calderone explicitly echoed Holm's words, and Filippo Sartori, in the same volume of

1 I am grateful to Sandra Péré-Noguès for the invitation to participate at the study day in Toulouse (25.10.2007) at which the original version of this paper was presented; and to Josephine Quinn for her comments on a subsequent draft.

2 Clemente, 1980-1981, p. 194-197.

3 e.g., Manganaro, 1972, 1980.

4 e.g., Coarelli, 1981.

5 For an excellent and comprehensive survey of post-Second World War scholarship on Roman Sicily, see Campagna, 2003, which this paper in no sense seeks to replace.

6 Pais, 1888, p. 128.

7 Holm, 1870-1898, 3, p. 67.

Kokalos as that in which Clemente's observations appeared, stated : « ... l'età romana occupa uno spazio minore di quello riservato alle età precedenti. Ma ciò non è senza ragione, perché il governo romano, mirando a forme omogenee di vita amministrativa, finì con il contrarre e soffocare manifestazioni di vita prima diverse da città a città, sicché la documentazione del periodo romano non offre oggi se non un panorama piuttosto uniforme, povero di fatti e fenomeni degni di particolare attenzione. ... E dunque: fino a che punto furono i Romani i responsabili della progressiva estenuazione delle peculiarità civili, sociali e culturali della Sicilia preromana ? »⁸.

This perspective, namely that, with the creation of the Roman province, Sicilian culture lost its vitality and Sicilian history its interest, overshadows even the distinctions which Clemente sought to draw - the debate for Clemente seems really to be between the less pessimistic views of what happened after *c.* 210 BC. But Clemente's remarks came at a significant moment (although they do not mark the end of views of the sort quoted above). Subsequent to the pre-war studies of, e.g., Pais (1888), Holm (1898), Carcopino (1919), and Scramuzza (1937), work on Republican Sicily began to gather pace from the 1960s. Much of this work followed on from the earlier study, and was focused upon the institutional history of the province : either debates about the formation of the *provincia*, or on the nature of the taxation system⁹. But already with Giacomo Manganaro's « Per una storia della Sicilia Romana » (1972), there was an awareness of the possibility of something more – Clemente's optimists at work, motivated in part by a more optimistic appreciation of the available evidence. What marked Manganaro's work out was his extensive use of epigraphic and, to a lesser extent, numismatic material. However, even there the discussion was still by and large driven by the questions raised, e.g., by Carcopino's study of the taxation system and its consequences. In essence, scholars sought to elucidate the impact of the taxation system on land-holding in Sicily, primarily using the limited resources of the literary sources - Cicero's *In Verrem* and Diodorus Siculus on the Slave Wars¹⁰. Such debates came to a head in the same year as Clemente's observations, in three different papers : in addition to Manganaro's contribution to *La Sicilia antica*, which sought answers as much through the epigraphy as through the literary sources ; Mario Mazza tried to resolve the conflicting literary accounts by the application of a (neo-)Marxist approach to Roman history, emphasizing the role of the slave-mode of production on the island ; and Filippo Coarelli tried to set the archaeology alongside the literary sources¹¹.

Needless to say, there was a problem, and it was one which both Mazza and Coarelli explicitly recognized at the start of their discussions, namely the partial nature of the literary sources and the very weak set of alternative evidence. The published archaeological data were extremely limited (Wilson subsequently criticized the inadequacy of Coarelli's archaeological material) ; no proper epigraphic *corpus* existed (still a problem, but arguably the least of the problems, given the work of Manganaro and others ; Mazza instead simply

8 Calderone, 1964-1965, p. 63 ; Sartori, 1980-1981, p. 291.

9 See especially Calderone, 1960, 1964-1965, Dahlheim, 1977, Pinzone, 1999 [1979], Kienast, 1984, Marino, 1984.

10 e.g. Pritchard, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972, 1975, Verburgghe, 1972, 1974.

11 Manganaro, 1980, Mazza 1980-1981, 1981, Coarelli, 1981.

criticized Manganaro for giving excessive weight to epigraphy) ; and no proper numismatic study of the Republican period¹². Those problems could not be immediately overcome by Mazza, Coarelli, *et al.* and so the accounts they wrote, although still highly influential, are also highly pessimistic and inevitably limited as a direct consequence of the evidence they employed (indeed, in Mazza's case, that seems to have been one justification for the theoretical approach he adopted). Pessimism is not a necessary consequence of this situation, as demonstrated by the perspective of Manganaro, but the combination of the evidence available and the historiographical trends noted makes it more likely.

The underlying reasons for this are rather circular : the only literary accounts of the island in this period are the fragmentary remains of Diodorus' account of the two Slave Wars, and Cicero's highly tendentious prosecution of C. Verres. Both, by their very nature, present negative pictures, although there is no obvious reason to take them as representative – but if they are all that one has, certain consequences are almost bound to follow for any history that is written from them. From the archaeological perspective the difficulty is rather different, but, in its simplest formulation, amounts to a long-standing prioritization of Greek over Roman. A similar problem has long existed for the study of Punic culture in Sicily¹³. Attempts, for example, to claim a Roman identity for Sicily are extremely rare, and limited to the Fascist era ;¹⁴ the emphasis and the debate have tended instead to be concentrated on the choices between native and Greek, in the period down to the fourth century BC. It is an underlying paradigm that persists even in some of the most recent accounts : in a recent volume on Sicily in this period, with the outwardly optimistic title of *Nuove prospettive...*, one of the leading contributors writes that Sicilian Hellenism, whether understood politically, economically, or productively, did not outlive the sack of Syracuse, and that « Purtroppo, la presa e il saccheggio di Siracusa, nel 212 a.C., ad opera di M. Claudio Marcello, le guerre servili della seconda metà del II sec. a.C., che insanguinarono la Sicilia ; e poi, i gravi contraccolpi politico-economici delle guerre civili insieme al disinteresse di Romani per la provincia di Sicilia, segnarono il tracollo della produzione artistica siciliana. »¹⁵. This has a less obvious, but no less significant and problematic echo in the recent wave of study of the third century BC in Sicily and the Hieronian kingdom : Hellenistic Sicily, and in particular Hieronian Syracuse has been seriously understudied in the past, but such studies draw their boundaries of periodization even more sharply at 215 or 212 BC, with inevitable consequences, however unintentional¹⁶ ; Punic War studies, being Romano-centric and employing fixed chronological boundaries, have very similar effects. The tendency to privilege Hellenism in the archaeological tradition has of course been recognized in various forms for some time, and one simple reason for the optimism over

12 Wilson, 1990, p. 20 n. 56 ; Mazza, 1981, p. 43-44 ; the only significant study of the Republican coinage specifically was that of Bahrfeldt, 1904 with 1925-1928, rarely cited.

13 See the examples quoted in Prag, 2006, p. 2 n. 3.

14 e.g. Bonanno, 1933.

15 Bonacasa, 2004, p. 44.

16 Besides the earlier Talbert, 1974, and De Sensi Sestito, 1977, see, e.g., Muccioli, 1999, Consolo Langher, 2000, Bonacasa *et al.*, 2002, Smarczyk, 2003, Caccamo Caltabiano *et al.*, 2004, Lehmler, 2005.

the state of Sicilian studies embodied in this paper is precisely the extent of the (reflective) historiographical analysis which has taken place in recent years, exposing this tendency in the very beginnings of the modern study of ancient Sicily; Sicilian historiography is becoming increasingly self-aware¹⁷.

A second, no less simple reason for optimism of this sort is the development of the study of the much-maligned literary sources. Although there is still some way to go with Diodorus, the Slave Wars have now been extensively studied in their own right, above all by Bradley, from comparative perspectives rather than from Diodorus alone, and also in relation to other evidence¹⁸; and work on Diodorus since 1990 holds out the hope that treatment of this difficult material – because fragmentary and still poorly understood historiographically – will become ever more sophisticated¹⁹.

The picture is arguably even better with Cicero's *Verrines*. Cicero studies in general have undergone something of a sea-change in the last quarter-century, and with this has come actual study of the *Verrines* in their own right, rather than simply as a mine for either Roman political history or Sicilian institutional history. A number of sophisticated studies of the rhetoric employed in the *Verrines* – as opposed to the use of the *Verrines* for information on the taxation system, Sicilian agriculture, provincial edicts, etc.²⁰ – have been produced since the start of the 1990s²¹, and more recently two volumes dedicated to the *Verrines* and Sicily have resulted from an on-going French project²². The first modern historical and archaeological commentary on one of the *Verrines* has now been published, and another historical commentary is in preparation²³. All of these studies hold out the hope that we can move beyond the narrow debates which frequently take the texts of Cicero out of context and at face value (can we really hope to identify the exact number of cities on the island from passing remarks in Cicero, Livy and Diodorus?). Some might respond, more pessimistically, that such study is in reality somewhat negative, and has in fact taken away the possibilities which the *Verrines* appeared to offer for, e.g., study of provincial administration; viewed more positively, the results are no less rich, just rather differently focused. Underpinned

17 The list of such work is now long, and includes Momigliano, 1984 [1978], La Rosa, 1987, Pinzone 1999 [1987], 2000a, Salmeri, 1991, Ceserani, 2000, France 2007a, as well as the above-cited survey of Campagna, 2003.

18 Bradley 1988, 1989, Manganaro 1967, 1982, 1983, 2000; note also, from an archaeological perspective, Maniscalco, McConnell, 2003.

19 See, for instance, Sacks, 1990, Galvagno, Mole Ventura, 1991, Ambaglio, 1995, the papers in *Mediterraneo antico*, vols 1.2 and 2.1 (especially Pinzone, 1998, Corsaro, 1998, 1999), Ambaglio, 2005, Yarrow, 2006; note also the new Budé edition, with commentary, of the fragmentary books 21-26 by Goukowsky, 2006.

20 Examples: taxation in Carcopino, 1919; agriculture in Pritchard, 1969, etc.; on both these aspects however, see now also Soraci, 2003; provincial edicts in Mellano, 1977, Genovese, 1999.

21 See esp. Vasaly, 1993, Scuderi, 1994, 1996, Steel, 2001.

22 Dubouloz, Pittia, 2007, Prag, 2007a.

23 Lazzaretto 2006 on the *De signis*; an edition of the *De frumento*, with commentary, in the *Budé* series of the Belles Lettres, Paris, is in preparation with contributions by J. Andreau, J. Dubouloz, J. France, S. Pittia, and J. Prag.

by the comprehensive work of Genovese, it is reassuring to see that the extensive recent work on the more formal and legal aspects of the province have now taken many of the associated cautions on board (such as the very questionable status of the *lex Rupilia* as a *lex prouinciaie*, or the recognition of the modern fiction of the *ciuitas censoria*)²⁴; discussion of the formation of the province has also moved on²⁵.

A third, also simplistic reason for optimism is the huge growth in recent years in the study and publication of epigraphy, archaeology, and numismatics from the island. But if there is now more material to work with, it is not necessarily any easier. Although civic *corpora* do now exist for many of the major cities (but certainly not all, and most obviously Siracusa), there is still no *corpus* for the island worth the name²⁶. On the other hand, Alessia Dimartino's attempt to compile a corpus of dated inscriptions from the Hellenistic / Republican period, which will amount to the first serious attempt to put the process of dating Sicilian epigraphy in this period on a scientific footing, offers real prospects for the future²⁷. The situation with the coinage, although the number of studies of various sorts has increased significantly, is if anything getting worse in certain respects with the huge rise in forgeries not simply of silver coinage but also of local bronze issues²⁸. But in this case too, Suzanne Frey-Kupper's imminent publication in *Studia Ietina* of the results of her work on the coins of M. Iato (and Entella, and elsewhere), promises the first serious analysis of local and provincial coinage in Republican Sicily since Bahrfeldt, with the promise of some genuinely exciting results²⁹. In the realm of archaeology, the situation is massively improved, but there is much that is still not published, and in the case of field-survey, we are very much still on the threshold of a major transformation³⁰.

It will be apparent that there are two uses of the word « optimistic » being employed here. There is good reason, as indicated above, to be optimistic that the material increasingly exists to make it possible to write exciting history of Republican Sicily (beyond the sort of accounts exemplified by Holm, Carcopino, Scramuzza, or even Mazza and Coarelli), and some possible directions will be suggested at the end of this paper. The very existence of several recent volumes of collected papers on Sicily in this period inspires such confidence.³¹ But there is also a different sort of optimism, more akin to that which was called optimistic by Clemente, namely a picture of continuity. This was visible already in the work of those

24 Genovese, 1993, 1999; other work includes Caliri, 1989, Vera, 1996, Pinzone, 2000b, 2003, Gebbia, 2003, France, 2007b, Maganzani, 2007.

25 See esp. Crawford, 1990, but also Pinzone, 1999 [1979] and 2000b; cf. Serrati, 2000.

26 General survey for the period in Prag, 2007b. For Siracusa, see now Dimartino, 2005.

27 Preliminary work in Dimartino, 2006.

28 Recent studies include Calciati, 1983-1987, Buttrey *et al.*, 1989, Caccamo Caltabiano, 1999; Castrizio, 2000 on mercenary coinage; Caccamo Caltabiano *et al.*, 1997 on Hieronian coinage. For recent overviews of the Republican period, see Crawford, 1985 and Frey-Kupper, 2006.

29 Bahrfeldt 1904, 1925-1928; Frey-Kupper, forthcoming; see also Caccamo Caltabiano, 2000.

30 Convenient archaeological surveys for the period in Wilson, 2000 and Campagna, 2006; see also Portale, 2006; recent general survey of Sicilian archaeology in De Angelis, 2007. Discussions of recent field-surveys include Perkins, 2007, Bergemann, 2004.

31 Caccamo Caltabiano *et al.*, 2004; Osanna, Torelli, 2006; Dubouloz, Pittia, 2007; Miccichè *et al.*, 2007.

responding to the archaeological material in the 1980s, but has perhaps been voiced most clearly by Wilson, and in the papers in the recent volume *Sicilia ellenistica, consuetudo Italica* (2006)³². Ideologically this is no less problematic, since implicit within it is a rejection, or at least a decentralizing, of the impact of the Punic Wars, Roman imperialism, or the chaos of the Slave Wars, which underlie many of the earlier accounts (one is tempted to see parallels, as Mazza already did in 1981, in the post-Toynbee debate about Italy)³³. This is most evident in the archaeological study of urban Sicily, which is rapidly becoming a major scholarly battleground. The evidence for domestic housing, public spaces, and public buildings in Hellenistic / Republican Sicily is now genuinely impressive³⁴. But is this « Sicilian Hellenism » ? Or, as one scholar has now dared to call it, « Romano-Sicilian »³⁵ ? Or, should we be seeking a new term altogether, that breaks free of the unhelpfully vague shackles of Helleno- and Romano-centric narratives ? There are of course multiple ideological battles being fought here, not just about Roman rule, but also about centre and periphery, Hellenism vs Romanization, native vs acculturation, etc. Or, to put it in concrete terms, where lies the primacy of « influence » : with Hellenistic Syracuse, or the independent *poleis* such as Ietina (Monte Iato) ? With local Sicilian skills and ideas, or eastern Hellenistic inspiration (Macedonia, Pergamum, etc.) ? Which way around should one construe the interactions between Sicily and Campania ? And so forth. Put crudely, this form of optimism advocates a Sicily that remained Hellenistic (and is therefore intended as a positive spin on the older view that Sicily « failed » to Romanize)³⁶.

Nonetheless, as we move away from the Greek vs Roman dichotomy, and place the emphasis instead on the local and all of its many different interactions, this opens the door to a combination of both forms of optimism – that it is possible to write a history of the period, and that the island has a (genuinely interesting) history in this period, without having to pretend, e.g., that Roman conquest or government was necessarily either nice or inherently good.

Several different examples could be offered :

1. Suzanne Frey-Kupper (forthcoming) is in the process of presenting the extent to which, as tentatively argued by Crawford (1985), local coinages in the west of the island in the second century BC were in fact provincial coinages, minted under the supervision of a quaestor, in one or both of Lilybaeum and Panhormus. The consequences of this for local autonomy are significant when one considers that in the subsequent period (later second / early first century BC) there is a shift to a

32 Marcone, 1987, Bejor 1983, 1991 ; Wilson, 2000; Osanna, Torelli, 2006 (see esp. Torelli's introduction, the papers by Campagna and La Torre, and also La Torre, 2004).

33 Mazza, 1981, p. 21, and compare the comments of Curti, 2001, p. 24-25.

34 On housing, besides the papers in Osanna, Torelli, 2006, see, e.g., Wolf, 2003, Branciforti, 2003, Isler, Käch, 1997, Tsakirgis, 1984 ; for a survey of public architecture, see Campagna, 2006 ; note also the forthcoming *Ritorno a Segesta* (Pisa).

35 Perkins, 2007, p. 49-52; cf. Wilson, 1990, p. 329 suggesting the absence of a « Romano-Sicilian culture ».

36 See, e.g., Manganaro, 1963, 1964, 1972, 1996 ; more recently, in a similar vein, Prag, 2002, 2003, 2007b.

much greater number of apparently genuinely autonomous local mints³⁷. But the demonstration, by means not simply of stylistic analysis but rather of metal analysis, that the production of these « provincial » coins in Lilybaeum and Panhormus was being undertaken employing the same technical methods as the preceding (Hieronian) Syracusan issues is striking to say the least as a form of continuity, albeit a seemingly imposed continuity³⁸.

2. Giacomo Manganaro has long highlighted the Hellenistic nature of the epigraphy of Sicily in the Republican period. But what is also noteworthy is that this material is in fact quantitatively greater under Roman rule than in the preceding period, while Latin epigraphy does not become established before the Augustan colonization³⁹. This is not simply a question of ‘continuity’, but rather demands inquiry into what it might be about the Roman government of Sicily which encourages this particular aspect of what elsewhere would be classed as Hellenistic *polis* culture. One answer would seem to lie in the taxation system itself, which in contrast to other regions of the Republican empire actively encouraged the participation of local élites.

3. One model which combines aspects from both of these examples is the apparent use by Rome of local Sicilian civic militias, based most probably on the *gymnasia* of the island – local manpower, fighting primarily against piracy (as described in the last of the *Verrines*) but ultimately in the service of Rome – see above all Cic. *Ver.* 5.60-61. As the epigraphic record attests (e.g. *AE* 1973.265), but also the coinage referred to in example (1) above, this not only works in Rome’s interests (protecting the *vectigal* of Sicily, at minimal Roman expense), but also furthers local civic culture and identity. No less importantly, at this point Sicily begins to offer interesting models for our study of the Republican empire more generally⁴⁰.

4. Recent survey work (e.g. the Monreale survey) can be combined with the recent work on Graeco-Italic amphorae and the ancient wine trade to offer new perspectives on the interactions between Sicily and Campania, stretching back at least to the start of the Punic War period, rather than simply from the second century onwards⁴¹. Not only do settlement patterns appear to imply significant levels of continuity (and growth) across the fourth to second centuries BC, but the long-studied, if rarely advanced discussion of Italian / Roman migration into Sicily takes on a very different potential in this light⁴². The extensive work in recent years on Campanian

37 Overview in Frey-Kupper, 2006, p. 42-44 ; cf. Caccamo Caltabiano, 2000.

38 Frey-Kupper, Barrandon, 2003.

39 Prag, 2002 and 2003 for ‘quasi-statistical’ analyses ; see also the wider-ranging remarks of Salmeri, 2004.

40 Prag, 2007c ; cf. Pinzone, 2004.

41 See in particular Perkins, 2007 on the Monreale survey in this context ; on amphorae, the wine trade, and the place of Sicily, see Tchernia, 1986, p. 49-51, Vanderersch, 1994 and 2001, Olcese, 2004, and now Bechtold, 2007. For Sicily and Campania, compare the earlier remarks of Frederiksen, 1981, p. 274-275.

42 On migration, see Frank, 1935, Frascchetti, 1981, Pinzone, 1999.

mercenaries in Sicily should in turn be tied into this picture⁴³. All of this could then be linked to Roman Republican expansion and imperialism if we start to think about the Punic Wars and, for example, the *lex Claudia* of 218 BC⁴⁴; a reading of the First and Second Punic Wars that placed greater weight upon economic factors, with considerable emphasis upon the place of Sicily within those developments, would seem to be long overdue.

This brief survey has tried to suggest that there are therefore considerable grounds for optimism in the study of Sicily in the last three centuries BC, as well as to indicate several likely directions which that research is currently pursuing: optimism about the state of scholarship, publication and the available evidence; optimism about the directions that scholarship may be taking; and even, if perhaps more controversially, that some of the interpretations being developed may suggest an inherently optimistic view of the nature of life on the island during that period. Optimism about our abilities to keep up with the volume of scholarship and publication is, on the other hand, probably misplaced⁴⁵.

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43 Especially Tagliamonte, 1994 and 1997, but also, e.g., Tagliamonte, 2006, Péré Noguès, 2006, Fantasia, 2006.

44 See the remarks of Pinzone 1999 [1979], p. 32; I am currently at work on an article exploring the connections between the *lex Claudia*, associated legislation, and Roman expansionism.

45 The light at the end of the tunnel may in fact be the oncoming train...

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