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Sikels, who really were they? Their origin, their arrival in Latium and Sicily, their relations with other Italic populations, in Centro Studi La Runa

I have been dealing with the "Sikels" problem for over ten years, within the ethnographic and cultural framework of the Prehistoric and Proto-Historical structure of both territories, Sicily and Italy. I have just read a little about the essays published up to now and available in the University Accademies, and those ones have never satisfied my scientific curiosity. Although it was the sloppy carelessness of these scholars that made me take the initiative to give life to this great research work, because, to this day, it cannot be said to be definitively concluded; although the results have always been positive, abundant with data to the point of allowing me to reconstruct with such meticulousness the deep spirituality and the extraordinarily lively culture of the pre-hellenic inhabitants of Sicily: Sikels, Sikans and the Elymes.

My work was mainly based on the synoptic reading of ancient texts written in Greek and Latin languages (i.e. a reading simultaneously conducted on different texts placed side by side to carry out an immediate comparison): *Historiai*, or better known as *The Peloponnesian War*, written by Thucydides in the 5th century BC¹; *The Roman Antiquities* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, written in the 1st century BC²; *The Historical Library* of Diodorus Siculus, written in the 1st century BC³; Virgil's *Aeneid*, the great *opus* from the true "archaeologist" poet, and that in the true sense of the word, as well as many other texts.

The Sikels (named *Sikeloi* by the ancient Greeks of Sicily, better known these ones as *Sikeliotai*, and by Romans said *Siculi*) were a population of Indo-European heritage and Proto-Illyrian stock, which in the distant stone age, around the sixth-fifth millennium BC was still one with the other Proto-Illyrian tribes settled in the center of Europe, far above the middle course of the Danube, in the central and southern area located between the Elbe and Vistula rivers, bordering other Indo-European macro-groups (i.e. big groups), precisely to the West with that one which the Proto-Latins, the Osco-Umbrians and the Venetians (or better said "Paleo-Venetians", known by the ancient Greeks with the name *Enetoi*, and named *Ueneti/Veneti* by the Romans) emerged from; to the East and South-East with that one which the Hellenes, the Macedonians and the Phrygians emerged from; to the North with a small part of the Celtic group (at that time still Proto-Celtic) and a larger small part of the Germanic group, triggering some osmotic (cultural) process also with the Indo-European group defined by me as *Alteuropäisch* (i.e. "Old European") or "Paleo-European", or again "Indo-European A", which instead the Sikans belonged to.

¹ Thucydides, *Histories* (otherwise *The Peloponnesian War*), book VI, 2, 4-5.

² Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities*, book I, 22, 1-5.

³ Diodorus Siculus, *The Historical Library*, book V, 2-8.

This macro-group of Proto-Illyrians, growing in number, abandoned their ancestral central European sites, crossing the Danube in its middle course, in the region of present-day Hungary, and pouring into the Balkans during the fifth or the beginning of the fourth millennium BC, thus occupying the whole peninsula up to the extremity of Greece known in historical times with the name of Peloponnese.

Many tribes were created, starting from the northernmost offshoots of the Balkan peninsula, among which were the Liburnians, the Sikels, the Ausonians, the Daunians, the Peuketians, the Messapians, the Chaonians, the Chonians, the Pelasgians and the Enotrians.

The Liburnians and the Sikels (those ones closest neighbors and then relatives of the former Liburnians), occupied respectively the shores and the hinterland of Dalmatia, precisely the territories from present-day Slovenia to Albania, followed in succession by the Daunians, then by the Peuketians (these ones should have absorbed a certain part of the Enotrians once they arrived in Italy), the Chaonians, the Chonians, the Ausonians, the Pelasgians (and these reached Greece), the Messapians and finally the Enotrians, which had a maximum extension from Epirus to the Peloponnese.

Not long after, famines and other calamities pushed a part of all these tribes towards the coast facing the Adriatic Sea, that is our peninsula. The Sikels came first, together with the Liburnians, in the peninsular center, between Emilia-Romagna, Umbria and Marche, during the IV millennium BC⁴; then the Ausonians arrived, in the second half of the third millennium BC. from the South-East coast, going up to the present *Latium/Lazio* (where Roma is sited), so that Italy was said *Ausonia*; then again the Enotrians, who arrived around the eighteenth-seventeenth century. B.C., always from the South-East, and driving the Ausonians further North, mainly in Campania and Lazio, and giving a new name to that area, named since then *Enotria*.

The Pelasgians were the last to arrive, at the beginning of the second half of the second millennium BC, first reaching the mouth of the Po river (North-East coast of Italy), covering most of the peninsula following the Apennines towards the South and joining Proto-Latin groups of the "Terramare" centers (placed in the North-centre of Italy, a well known cultural *facies* of the bronze age coming from centre of Europe), with which they chased the Sikels and Liburnians out of those territories, making the Liburnians sail away and pushing the Sikels further South into *Latium/Lazio*.

⁴ Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, book III, 14, 112.



On the left, reconstruction of the funerary chamber of an artificial cave tomb of the Sikelian culture of the Eneolithic *facies* of Rinaldone at the Luigi Pigorini National Prehistoric Ethnographic Museum, Rome (the tomb, known as “tomb of the widow”, was found in Ponte San Pietro, along the river Flora, in the territory of Viterbo, Lazio); on the right, an example of a flask pottery, typical of the Rinaldonian-Sikelian Culture in the center of peninsula and Lazio, exhibited in one of the museum display cases.

The Sikels undertook the escape for safety, finding the hostility of many other tribes, especially those ones from oscan stock (the heirs of the pit-tombs Culture), arriving then in the territory of their “cousins” Enotrians, who gave them a welcome, at least in the first time. There, in present-day Calabria, the Sikels became numerous and very powerful, to the point that one of their king, whose name was *Italus/Italo*, name that means “Young Bull”, took possession of the whole *Enotria*, but causing after his death the unavoding fall into hatred of his people among the Enotrians, to the point that they had to flee back to Sicily. That was the year 1270 BC. and the Sikels, “a vast army”, as Thucydides specified, conquered the entire eastern sector of the island, giving life to *Sikelia*, that means the “Land of the Sikels”; devastating and repelling with a long and bloody war the Sikans, that Paleo-European group (therefore always Indo-European), those who had settled on the island around the second half of the third millennium BC (the well known Castelluccio Culture), arrived from Italy (and not from Iberia) as well due to the arrival of the Ausonians in the peninsula⁵.

Shortly afterwards the Elymes arrived in Sicily, always of Proto-Illyrian lineage, because, like the Morgetians, they were the result of a fragmentation of the Enotrian group, among which other ethnic elements converged by synecism, such as a small part of the Sikans and a larger part of Hellenes.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Diodorus Siculus, both lived during the first century. BC, as already mentioned, diligently and fortunately (for us) reported large parts (*lectiones*) of the now lost texts of these much older Sicilian historians (better said *Sikeliotai*, i.e. the Hellenes that settled in Sicily), who, being also in direct contact with these older inhabitants, could certainly dissert much more about them; referring again to Antiochus and Philistus of Syracuse, who lived respectively in the fifth and

⁵ And this is also confirmed by: Pausanias, Ἑλλάδος Περιήγησις (*Description of Greece*), book V, 25, 6; Strabo, Γεωγραφικά (*Geography*), book VI, 2, 4.

fourth centuries. BC, or Hellanicus of Mytilene, who lived in the fifth century. BC, and Timaeus of Tauromenium (now Taormina, in North-East of Sicily), who lived in the third century. B.C.

Antiochus claimed the Iberian origin of the Sikans, the Trojan and Greek origin of the Elymes and the peninsular and Enotrian origin of the Sikels; Hellanicus claimed the peninsular and Enotrian origin of the Elymes, as the peninsular and Ausonian origin of the Sikels; Philistus, very close to the Sikels' culture, being a general under Dionysius I and having in the army a large group of Sikels (the foundation of colonies in central Italy, such as Ancona⁶, is a proof of this), supported the Iberian origin of the Sikans and the peninsular origin of the Sikels, but wrongly considered Ligurians, well knowing instead that those 'Liburnians', very close relatives of the Sikels, were considered Ligurians by the oldest copyists, making then such a mistake, and thus the only one who had understood the truth very well, he was considered instead the worst. And finally, Timaeus, who very reported many errors instead, but accusing all of the above mentioned of ignorance. He affirmed that the Sikans were indigenous, as 'sprung out of the earth', and that the Sikels were always of peninsular origin.

Tuchydides also maintained that the Sikels had been driven away by the Oscan population of the Opicians (*Opici* in Latin, *Opikoi* in ancient Greek), who lived in Campania, and that the migration had taken place in the 11th century. B.C.; while Antiochus claimed that the Sikels had been driven away by the Enotrians, but he did not know how to place this migration precisely; then Philistus, that affirmed that in the eightieth year before the destruction of Troy, therefore in 1264 BC, the migration of the Sikels to Sicily took place due to the Enotrians; and then Ellanicus, who placed this migration with great precision in the twenty-sixth year of priesthood of Alkion in Argos (Greece), therefore in 1289/88 BC (counting three generations of 35 years old each, and then 105 years from the destruction of Troy, considering that the Ancient ones counted from 30 up to 35 years per generation), but with that different version consisting in the expulsion of the Elymes always due to the hostility of the Enotrians, who would have arrived in the westernmost part of the island, and just five years later the Sikels fled from the Iapigians (Daunians and Peuketians) who inhabited the North of Puglia, considering then the Sikels if not the Ausonians. As far as the Sikans, Virgil in fact recalls in the *Aeneid* the *veteres* "old" Sikans and the bloody battle against the Ausonians, who put an end to the Golden Age⁷. The Sikans, once arrived in Sicily in the middle bronze age, gave birth to the *facies* of Castelluccio and Thapsos from 2200 to 1270 BC (both Cultures characterized the middle Bronze Age of Sicily, especially the eastern coast).

I can afford to give an end to this short (and pleasant, I hope) issue by saying that the Sikels were the Proto-Illyrians who occupied the eastern part of the island, incorporating some Ausonian elements (already entered into the cultural orbit of the Proto-Villanovian, between Ausonius I and II of the Aeolian archipelago), flanking the Enotrian tribe of the Morgetians from the beginning of the 13th century. BC, and through other subsequent migration phenomena (up to the 11th century BC), and above

⁶ Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, book III, 13, 111: *Numana a Siculis condita, ab issdem colonia Ancona.*

⁷ Virgil, *Aeneid*, book VIII, vv. 322-332.

all who called themselves with such a name, *Sikuli*, already starting from their first Balkan settlement (otherwise, Pliny the Elder would never have spoken of Balkan Sikels in his *Naturalis Historia*, still present there in his time⁸); that the Sikans were the Indo-Europeans A of sub-Carpathian origin who migrated from Italy to Sicily at the end of the third millennium BC; that the Morgetians were a fractionation of the Enotrian nation, therefore always Proto-Illyrians, and that once they reached eastern Sicily they kept a certain distance from the Sikels, even if the “feathered” pottery was found in the vestiges of their most famous foundation, namely Morgantina; that the Elymes were also Proto-Illyrians, because they detached from the Enotrians, welcoming over time other ethnic elements and in minimal quantities, so little to never distort their language, and that they occupied the western side of Sicily shortly after the arrival of the Sikels; and finally the Ausonians, always Proto-Illyrians, were really driven out from the North-East by the arrival of the Illyrians Iapigians (Daunians and Peuketians), migrating in part towards the South and thus reaching the Aeolian Islands and then the coasts of northern Sicily. Therefore Sicily was first called *Trinakria* “Trinacria” (i.e. “Three Capes”), then *Sikania* “Land of Sikans” and then *Sikelia*, today said “Sicily”.

The name of Italy comes from the name of the Sikelian king *Italus/Italo*, being first *Ausonia* and then after *Enotria*.

Even the Adriatic Sea has a distinctly Sikelian-Illyrian origin in the name and so does the name of the person that derives from it, Adriano: both names have the common origin from the God *Adranòs* (in Sikelian language *Hatranus*), God of Heaven, of Light, of Thunderbolt and Fire, praised by the Sikels (i.e. the ancestral Indo-European *Djēus Pətēr*), directly from the Sikelian root-word *hat-* “fire/heat”, of clear indo-european filiation, being the ancestral one *aidh-*.

The Greeks born in Sicily called themselves *Sikeliotai*, i.e. “Greeks of *Sikelia*”, but they were not Sikels at all; just as the Greeks born in southern Italy, later called *Magna Grecia* (Latin)/*Megale Hellas* (ancient Greek, and both meaning “Greater Greece”), were called *Italiotai*, i.e. “Greeks born in the land ruled by the Sikelian king Italo”. But the denomination of “Sicilians” where does it come from then?

Simple, the suffixation in *n* reveals the mystery: they are all those who come from *Sikelia*, the island that was conquered by the great Sikels.

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⁸ Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, book III, 22, 141.