

History and Legacy of the Mediterranean's Most Fam

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Synopsis

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It is hard to find an island on the map more central than Sicily. Located at the crossroads between Europe and Africa, and between the eastern and western Mediterranean, Sicily has rarely been governed as an independent, unified state. Nonetheless, the island has been the seat of some of the most important events in history, and nowhere is this more obvious than during antiquity.

After the Punic Wars, Sicily would remain a Roman domain until the end of antiquity, and affairs on the island dramatically affected the Romans at home. The First Servile War (135 - 132 BCE) and Second Servile War (104 - 100 BCE) both took place in Sicily, and they were perhaps the largest (temporarily successful) slave revolts in antiquity, demonstrating a great unease in the early stages of Roman imperialism.

In 70 BCE, the Roman orator and statesman Cicero gave a speech against Verres, the corrupt governor of the island, and over 2,000 years later, it still provides an invaluable glimpse into the way things were run in Sicily and the Roman Republic as a whole.

Although the conquest of Egypt in 30 BCE would strip Sicily of its central role as Rome's main supplier of grain, the island would remain an important part of the Roman Empire for about 500 more years. Sicily would only become independent again after the fall of the Western Roman Empire to barbarian tribes in the late 5th century CE, which ushered in the beginning of the Middle Ages. Over 1,500 years later, the largest island of the Mediterranean remains a complicated place with a fraught relationship to the Italian mainland. Separated by only the narrow Strait of Messina, Sicily feels like a different country in many ways, and the differences between Sicilians and Italians are much vaster than the tiny geographical region separating them might indicate.

There is also an ethnic difference between Sicilians and Italians. Most notably, many Sicilians have bright red hair and light eyes which is usually thought to be a result of the Norman invasions. However, some historians believe it is because of the strong presence of

the British during the Napoleonic Wars as well as the Anglo-American occupation of Italy during World War II. Even Sicilian cuisine varies from the Italian mainland.

Sicily is unquestionably unique thanks to its turbulent and rich history, but it shares the same qualities as the Italian nation overall, from its beautiful scenery, delicious cuisine, dazzling sunshine, and unparalleled cultural production to its problems with law and order, and its seeming impenetrability to outside visitors. Through it all, Sicily has been a true cultural melting pot, one that is responsible for some of the greatest contributions to Western culture.

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