

*Animals and Their Roles in the Medieval Society of Sicily from Byzantines to Arabs and from Arabs to Normans/Aragonese (7th–14th c ad)*. (Contributi di Archeologia Medievale 18. Premio Ottone d'Assia e Riccardo Francovich). By Veronica Aniceti. 21 × 29 cm. 195 pp, 274 colour and b&w pls and figs, 54 tables. Borgo Sesto (FI): All'Insegna del Giglio, 2022. ISBN 978-88-9285-139-9; epub: 978-88-9285-140-5 (ISSN 2035-5424). Price: €32.00 pb.

This book derives from a doctoral thesis completed at the University of Sheffield and represents the first comparative zooarchaeological study for medieval Sicily. Veronica Aniceti considers the role of animals in the island's dynamic and multi-cultural societies, during four transitional periods connected with regime changes: Byzantine, Arab, Norman and Swabian. Her aim is to investigate diachronic trends in animal husbandry, the introduction of new breeds, the development of stock and the varying role of meat in local diets. In this respect, the study focuses on cultural change within Sicily, although it does include some comparisons with specific trends in Italy, Iberia and North Africa. The dataset also contributes to a more holistic understanding of medieval Sicily's changing environment, particularly in relation to the Arab 'Green Revolution'.

The structure of the book follows a conventional zooarchaeological study. First, a general historical overview is presented, where each of the key cultural periods are defined. This is followed by a biography of Palermo from the Arab to Swabian periods, providing the context for the four faunal assemblages from the city included within the study. Chapter 3 starts with a very brief introduction to the individual sites which supplied faunal data for the whole study—a total of eight assemblages, comprising the four from Palermo, and material from an additional urban site (Trapani) and three rural sites. The chronological coverage of the four transitional periods is unevenly represented. For example, the Swabian period is only represented in Palermo, while material from the three rural sites is dated no later than the 11th century, with assemblages from two sites dating to no later than the 9th century. There is no sense here of the size of the assemblages, but in the following chapter this is indicated, with the total number of fragments amounting to a little over 7000. Later on, the author takes account of these discrepancies, which are of course purely dependent on the availability of material. The rest of the chapter contains a thorough presentation of the methodology, which includes both NISP and MNI methods of quantification, as well as a broad range of taphonomic factors.

The following Results chapter makes up the bulk of the volume. These are systematically presented, site by site, with detailed discussions of element representation, ageing, sexing, bone modification (particularly butchery) and taphonomy. This includes some commentary on both site-specific and comparative diachronic trends. Good use is made of log-ratio histograms to address the problem of variable biometrical data across the assemblages, as well as statistical significance tests. At times, some further metric details would have been useful, such as when referring to bones derives from dogs and/or wolves, even if it was not feasible to include all the raw data. Interpretations of the function of butchery marks could have also been represented in charts, rather than simply as chop/cut and butchered/non-butchered graphs. Finally, the individual sites are missing contextual information: their assemblages and phases are presented, but no detailed information is given about where exactly excavations took place, or what type of sites they are, beyond the broad categories of urban and rural. Some details do come in the early overview chapters and are also fleshed out more in the discussion, but could have been usefully included here.

The discussion, structured chronologically, brings all these data together. Here, Aniceti focuses primarily on diachronic, rather than inter-regional comparisons. Nonetheless, data from Byzantine period assemblages in Sicily are compared with Roman and Byzantine data from Italy and North Africa, and Arab urban sites are compared with those in Al-Andalus and North Africa. The almost complete absence of pigs during the Arab period is to be expected, although their notable presence within the assemblage from Castello San Pietro in Palermo and the three rural sites, prompts an interesting discussion on the variable tempo of Islamisation. This is combined with trends in ceramic use, pointing to both partial continuity and shifts in dietary regimes. The animal element of the 'Green Revolution' is most evident in changes in sheep size during

the Arab period, interpreted as the result of importing animals from North Africa and improved fodder for local breeds. The unsurprising re-appearance of pigs during the Norman period reinforces the historically attested de-Islamisation of Sicily, which was also a gradual process. Again, the limited number of porcine remains at Corso dei Mille in Palermo and the rural site of Rocca di Entella are connected with the endurance of Islamic foodways under Norman rule. At the same time, caprine husbandry shifted to a greater emphasis on meat production. Hunting remained a marginal pursuit, although other sources indicate that the Normans invested in parks and adopted a more continental European hunting culture. In this instance, the relatively low-social status of the sites included in the study could explain the limited number of bones deriving from wild species. Aniceti also makes an interesting case for the Swabian regime abandoning some of the innovations of the 'Green Revolution' on ideological grounds. The short, concluding chapter includes useful suggestions for further work, particularly highlighting the value of isotopic analyses and fuller study of related written sources.

The volume is well illustrated with graphs, photographs and maps. There is only one slight discrepancy, namely the differences between the chronological range presented in the title (from the 7th century) compared to the book (from the 6th century, and the earliest phase of Rocchicella dates to this period), and some minor typos, but these do not detract from the significance of this study.

In summary, this book is pitched as a 'launch-pad' for further zooarchaeological studies of medieval Sicily. It is surely that and more: alongside the detailed observation of site-specific and diachronic trends, Aniceti has tapped into broader debates relating to political, social and religious change, migration, cultural resilience and ideological drivers of environmental exploitation. While it does not include detailed comparisons with other regional assemblages, it does form an invaluable source of data for analysts working not just in Sicily, but around the Mediterranean and beyond.

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