



View of Theorychia: Sulphur was extracted mostly in the south-east of Melos.

Theorychia was the most important centre for sulphur production and the remains of the mines, harbour and associated buildings can still be seen.

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Abstract

Sulphur deposits were exploited during the last two centuries on Melos while archaeological, literary and geological evidence suggest sulphur exploitation also took place in the Classical and Roman periods. Similarly archaeological and/or literary evidence indicates that Sicily, the Aeolian Islands, Pozzuoli and Anzio may also have taken advantage of their natural resources of sulphur during these periods. This paper reviews the evidence for sulphur exploitation in these areas and juxtaposes the two geographical locations. It proposes that similar techniques for sulphur exploitation were utilised in Melos and Sicily, while archaeological and literary evidence for the Aeolian Islands, Pozzuoli and Anzio imply different methods of exploitation.



FIG. 24. Sulphur refining (Agricola, 1556).

This scene from Agricola shows sulphur ore being placed in large pots heated from the side and below.

The pots possessed tightly fitting lids, since sulphur when heated in oxygen produces the gas sulphur dioxide. The sulphur melted and ran to the bottom of the container where small perforations allowed the sulphur to escape, while preventing the solid gangue to follow.