

Introduction

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Over the last few years, the archaeological and architectural investigation of ancient Akragas (modern Agrigento) in Sicily has gained new momentum. Scholars from various Italian and international institutions have joined forces to enhance the level of individual investigations as well as the wider field of research. Inspired by Akragas' ancient landscape of cultural encounters, the aim is to collaborate through a diversity of research approaches. This diversity arises from the different levels of preservation of the material record, the range of research traditions, and the state of research in the respective fields – as studies of ancient Akragas date as far back as the age of Hamilton and Winckelmann. The present work thus promotes an exchange of views and compares fresh fieldwork data with the well-established academic discourse dedicated to the detailed study of material objects. Our current state of knowledge and our interpretations are greatly enriched by new approaches and methodologies, while our historical sources and cultural remains continue to be challenged. This results in a multitude of perspectives for researching the wealthy city state of Akragas, which was politically powerful and culturally influential throughout the Archaic and Classical periods. Crucial in this respect is the productive research environment that has been fostered at the UNESCO world heritage site by the Parco Archeologico e Paesaggistico Valle dei Templi di Agrigento, in collaboration with the Museo Archeologico 'Pietro Griffo' di Agrigento.

An international conference was held at Leiden University in 2014 to reflect upon the current issues of research and to bring together various scholars who investigate the remains and artifacts from the Greek period at Akragas. The conference offered a stimulating environment to compare and contrast the methodological and theoretical approaches currently

applied to the site's material culture. Specific problems related to individual case studies also underwent a critical examination from the speakers' different perspectives. The outcome is presented here in thirteen articles, which cover topics of collecting-history, urban sanctuaries, housing, extra-urban survey, and the suburban sanctuary at S. Anna.

In her contribution, Donatella Mangone discusses the structure and collecting history of the Museo Archeologico 'Pietro Griffo' di Agrigento, a process contextualized by the role of Akragas as an important travel-destination on the Grand Tour in the 18th century. Many archaeological artifacts were taken home by travelers as souvenirs and are today displayed in Northern European museums, creating considerable lacunae in the Agrigentine exhibitions. Past activities and the proto-archaeological endeavors are also dealt with in two contributions focusing on the Olympieion, the enigmatic building that held the imagination of many 18th century travelers. The representational value of this temple can finally be judged to a greater degree with the help of Heinz Beste's reconstruction, which takes all former and oftentimes controversial propositions into account. Furthermore, the area south of the Olympieion, which has been recently excavated by Monica De Cesare and Chiara Portale, sheds new light on the infrastructure and buildings surrounding the temple. Their contribution allows an appropriation of associated religious activities on the grounds of archaeological finds. This theme is taken up on a more general level in a contribution by Gianfranco Adornato, who carefully reconstructs the early Archaic layout of Akragas' inner city's religious centers; the interpretation and semiotic reading of iconographically complex finds like pediment sculpture makes this layout more comprehensible. To this knowledge new facts are added with the

help of the scrutinizing approach of building archaeology: Clemens Voigts' investigation of an altar's foundations and architectural elements opens up a functional and developmental understanding of one of the most prominent religious spaces of Akragas in the so-called sanctuary of Chthonic Deities. At the same time, archaeology today moves beyond the investigation of elite representational remains of ancient Akragas. Thus, Maria Concetta Parello investigates living quarters, housing, and the city's little known street system that was not targeted by previous research. The basis for a better general understanding of Akragas' economic and political success is only possible with the addition of extramural data. In his contribution, Oscar Belvedere presents the recent GIS-based mapping of Akragas and its territory. Besides presenting this essential research tool, he also raises and answers questions about the development of the city and its relation to the hinterland. Several contributions engage with a long known but mostly neglected suburban site, the sanctuary of S. Anna. Caterina Trombi undertakes a reappraisal of the votive-finds from this sanctuary based on a detailed study of the ceramic material, some of which has not been published before. Also for the first time, the bronze objects deposited at S. Anna are investigated in depth by Holger Baitinger, who interprets their relevance in the context of similar depositions that occurred all over Sicily. Building upon the evidence from S. Anna, the area to the north of the sanctuary has been subjected to an archaeological survey and to a geophysical prospection by a Leiden University project. These new results, which are presented here in four contributions by Linda Adorno, Kenneth Kvamme, Natascha Sojc and Johanna Stöger, demonstrate that the sanctuary area was larger than previously thought and extended closer towards the city. Furthermore, a continual frequentation period from the late 6th to the end of the 5th c. B.C. can be established for the sanctuary space.

within and beyond the city walls, the investigation of ancient Akragas demonstrates its potential to greatly advance our knowledge of Western Greek cities.

All contributions in this volume emphasize that, even though Akragas has held a prominent place in the mental image of ancient Sicily since the 18th century, this city continues to offer incredible discoveries. Be it the magnificent remains of public architecture, buildings of the private sphere, or finds