

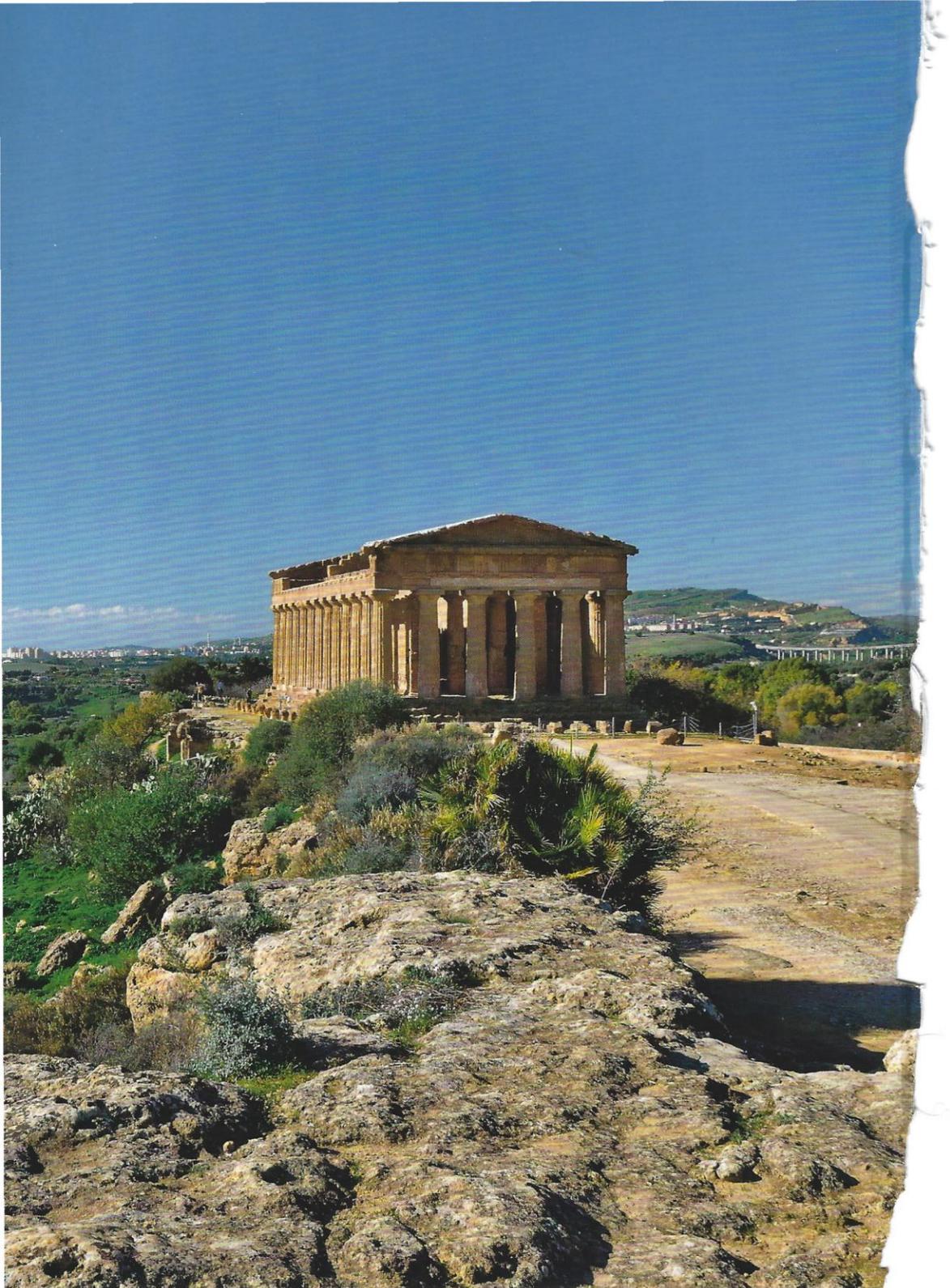
The Valley of the Temples of Agrigento and Heraclea Minoa

GUIDE



Polo
Culturale
Agrigento





Skira Guides

The Valley of the Temples of Agrigento and Heraclea Minoa

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Agrigento: Three Thousand Years of History

The history of a city is (also) made up of its names: in our case, the Greek name Akragas is followed by the Roman Agrigentum, the Arabic and Norman Girgenti, and lastly, since 1927, the modern-day name of Agrigento. A single name in different forms is undoubtedly the sign of a long and glorious history, but one that is also complex and troubled, filled with both glory and contradictions.

According to tradition, the Greek colony of Akragas was founded in 582 BC by the inhabitants of Gela, which had in turn been built a century earlier by colonists of Doric descent from Rhodes and Crete. Tradition has also handed down to us the names of two men, Aristonous and Pystilos, who were to lead the colonists, and who thus deserved the Greek title of oecists, i.e. “founders” of the city.

The oldest period in the history of Agrigento is linked to the rule of several tyrants, whose biographies are often a combination of historical truth and legend. The first of these is Phalaris, the tyrant who ruled the city for over fifteen years, between approximately 572 and 556 BC. According to some sources a native of the Greek island of Astypalaia (now Stampalia), according to others the descendant of a noble family from Rhodes, Phalaris arrived in Agrigento when the city was still a huge construction site, and where he was a tax collector. After obtaining an important tender for the construction of the Temple of Jupiter in the citadel, Phalaris used the money he received from the city to hire a small personal army thanks to which he was able to seize power. He would exercise this power with an iron fist, and not without a good dose of sadism. The most famous legend handed down about him concerns the bronze life-size statue of a bull, hollow inside and fitted with a door, which he is said to have used to eliminate his opponents. Locked inside the statue



placed over a lit bonfire, they died a horrendous death, burnt by the red-hot metal. And there was more still: legend has it that the tyrant especially enjoyed listening to their desperate cries, which, because of the metal, sounded like the grunting of a bull.

Among the most significant works undertaken by Phalaris was the construction of the first circle of walls, which eventually grew to as many as twelve kilometres. Featuring nine doors, the walls of Agrigento substantially followed the natural shape of the land, the city being built on a rocky platform that in several sites, especially in the south, overlooks the surrounding plain.

After Phalaris' death, in 555 BC, Agrigento went through a period of oligarchic rule, which lasted almost seventy years, about which there is little information. It seems that during that period the power was in the hands of an "Assembly of the Thousand", while in the city the powerful clan of the Emmenides was taking root, which in 488 BC seized the power as the tyranny of Theron began.

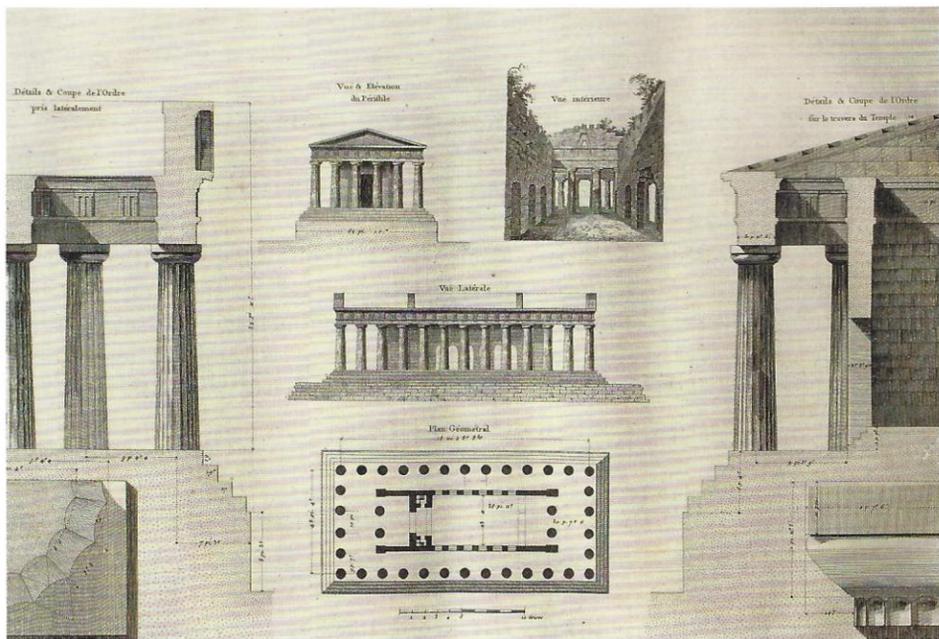
According to tradition, Theron remained in power for almost twenty years (until his death in 472 BC), reiterating in foreign policy the same aggressive approach as that of his predecessor, expanding the controlled territory from Agrigento towards Gela, Selinunte and Himera. These expansionist ambitions were, nonetheless, accompanied by a fervent diplomatic strategy culminating in the double wedding between his daughter and Gelon, the tyrant of Gela first and Syracuse later, who in turned offered Theron the hand of his granddaughter. In the meantime, however, a new threat loomed over the Greek kingdom: guided by King Xerxes, the Persians planned to invade Greece. This plan, after the victory at Thermopylae, was crippled by the defeat in the naval battle of Salamis, in 480 BC. At the same time, Carthage, which controlled the western part of Sicily

The Tomb of Theron
in an engraving
from *Voyage
pittoresque de
Naples et de Sicile*
by Jean-Claude
Richard de Saint-
Non, 1781–86

and whose throbbing heart was the colony of Palermo, decided to go to war against the island's Greek colonies in order to gain control. The ultimate battle was waged on the mainland, close to the ancient Himera. In this case as well, like in Salamis, victory went to the Greeks, and this allowed Agrigento, in spite of the fact that its relationship with Syracuse wasn't always peaceful, to rise to the role of a great power within Sicily.

Close to the Temple of Hercules a monument was erected that for centuries popular imagination identified as being the tomb of Theron: the truth of the matter is that it is a building from the Roman period. When Theron died, in 472 BC, power in Agrigento was handed down to his son Thrasydaeus, whose father had previously made him governor of Himera. According to the historian Diodorus Siculus (1st century BC), Thrasydaeus' power lasted only a few months: defeated in battle by Hiero, tyrant of Syracuse, he was deposed, and tyranny was replaced by an oligarchy. Thus began a rather chaotic period in the history of Agrigento, for which the ancient sources do not provide us with sound answers. What we do know is that economic prosperity was accompanied by a very tense political climate in the city, owing to the clashes between the oligarchic and the democratic factions. This period, characterized by great economic prosperity, saw the building of temples dedicated, based on tradition,





to Juno, Asclepius, Vulcan and Concordia. According to Diodorus Siculus, during this period the city's population rose to two hundred thousand, at least twenty thousand of whom were fully entitled citizens. After the failed Athenian expedition against Syracuse in the year 415 BC, the hegemony of Carthage was gradually imposed on the island, with the conquest of Himera in 409 BC and of Agrigento (completely destroyed) in 406.

In the following decades the city struggled to restore its lost prestige, at first joining up with Syracuse against Carthage in a lengthy conflict with varying outcomes. The refounding of Agrigento was led, according to tradition, by Megillus and Feristus at the head of the colonists from Hyele (currently in the province of Salerno). Following these events, the city witnessed a new phase of economic and architectural growth, proven by the archaeological finds relative to the so-called "Hellenic-Roman Quarter"; as instead concerns public construction, the new seats of the city government are also dated to this period; these were meant to host the citizens' assembly (Ekklesiasterion) and the city "government" (Bouleuterion).

Plan, elevation, and cross-sections of the Temple of Concordia in an engraving from *Voyage pittoresque de Naples et de Sicile* by Jean-Claude Richard de Saint-Non, 1781–86

The Roman City of Agrigentum

The 3rd century BC was a crucial period for the history of Agrigento. It began with an event of great symbolic importance, that is, the

destruction of the motherland Gela in 282 BC by the tyrant Phintias, and it continued with the defeat of the Syracusan army in 280. Several wars between Rome and Carthage were waged during this period, known as the First (264–241 BC) and the Second (218–202 BC) Punic Wars. Agrigento chose to be an ally of its Carthaginian enemies of the past, and suffered the consequences. In 262 BC, in fact, it was besieged by two consular armies which succeeded in conquering it after seven hard months of siege, during which the Romans underwent a Carthaginian attack from the outside as well, which they nonetheless managed to drive back in what is known as the “Battle of Agrigento”. The city was pillaged and over twenty thousand of its inhabitants were sold off as slaves. The little that survived was in turn destroyed by the Carthaginians when they recaptured the city in 255 BC.

During the course of the Second Punic War, Rome had to reconquer and once again pacify all of Sicily, which had been occupied by the Carthaginian troops in 213 BC. The recapture of Agrigento by the Consul Marcus Valerius Laevinus, in 210 BC, was indeed the last act of the campaign; the city was once again pillaged by the legionaries and once again many citizens were sold as slaves. Indeed, according to some of the sources, Laevinus is due the start of the transformation of the territory of Agrigento, as well as of all of Sicily, into what would eventually be referred to as the “bread-basket of Rome”.

It was agriculture, along with commerce, that allowed the city to maintain a fair amount of prosperity over the course of the last two centuries of the republic. Prosperity that underwent only three significant setbacks. The first two on the occasion of the slave rebellions that shook the whole of Sicily between 136 and 132 BC and again between 104 and 99 BC; the third occurred in the space of three years, between 73 and 71 BC, during which the infamous Gaius Licinius Verres had the praetorship of the island, earning a reputation for his abuse of power and thefts of all kinds. After Cicero’s thundering speech accusing him during his prosecution by the Sicilians in the year 70, Verres left Rome and Italy even before being sentenced, forgoing his political ambitions. Among the victims of his looting of artworks was the city of Agrigento, where he stole a marble statue of Apollo from the Temple of Asclepius. It was only the prompt reaction of the citizens that prevented him from stealing the bronze statue of Hercules, made by the famous Greek artist Myron in the 5th century BC, and preserved in the temple dedicated to the hero. Without mentioning the hundreds of “embezzlements” perpetrated inside private houses.

With Augustus' rise to power, forty years later, there came about the full assimilation in the imperial regime of the city of Agrigento, elevated to the rank of *municipium*: its citizens were thus given Roman citizenship. During this phase the city experienced great economic prosperity thanks to agriculture, animal breeding, extractive activities especially linked to the sulphur mines and, naturally, to the presence of a port, one of the few located on the island's southern coastline. The wealth achieved by the city's landowning and entrepreneurial aristocracy is especially visible in the various private homes unearthed by archaeologists, as well as in some of the tombs of the great necropolis that rose up south of the Valley of the Temples.

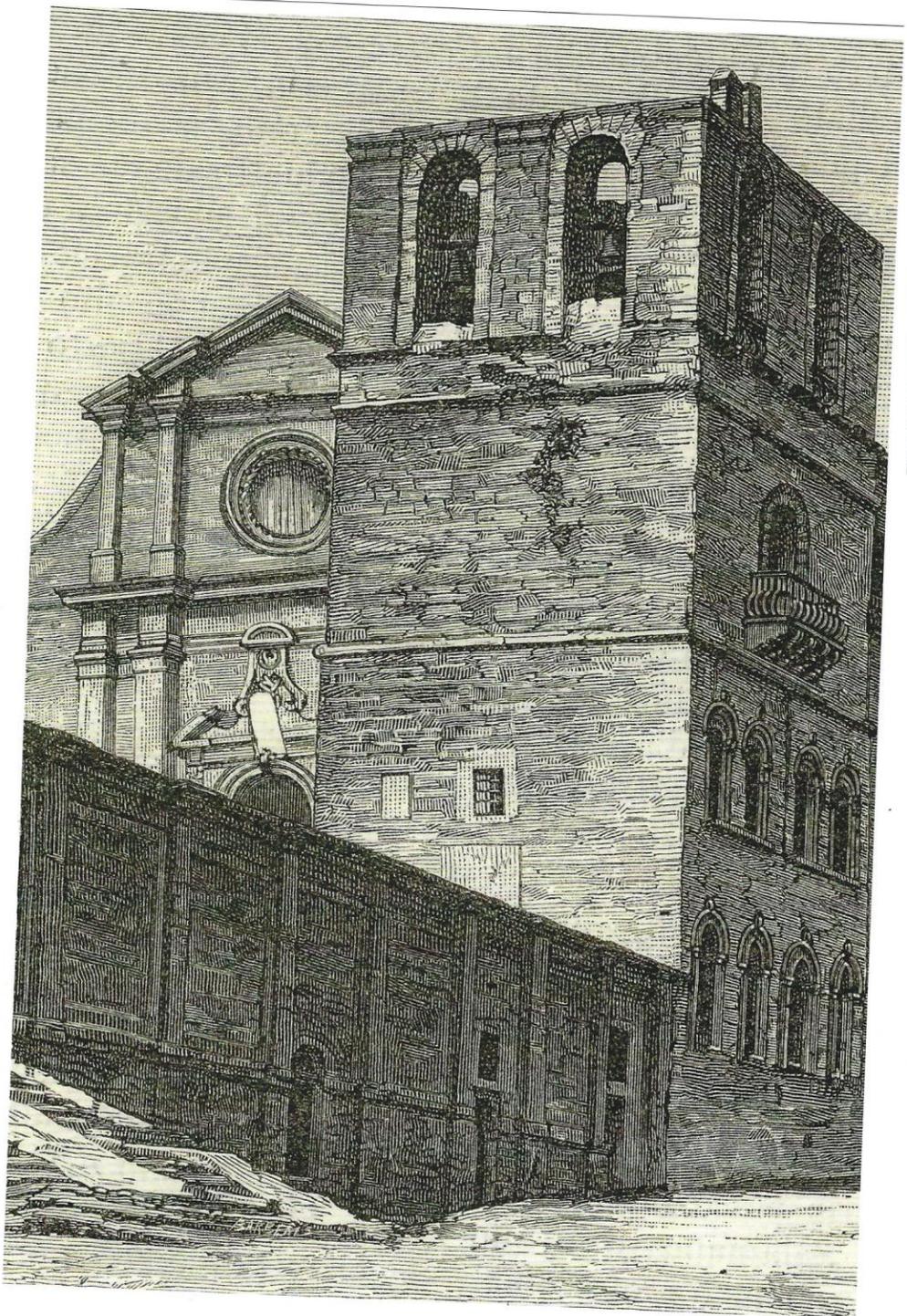
With the late empire and the subsequent fall of the Western Empire, 476 AD marked the beginning of the decline of the city, historically and archaeologically proven by the fact that most of the ancient urban area was gradually abandoned, the inhabitants returning to the hill of Girgenti, located in the north-western corner of the city.

From the Middle Ages to the Modern Age

Starting from 828–829, when it was conquered by the Arabs, Agrigento experienced a short period of economic and demographic rebirth, combined with the in-depth reorganization of the urban layout. The new occupants made it their capital and renamed it *Gergent*, Girgenti, the city's name until 1927.

Conquered by the Normans in 1087, the following year the city was elevated to a bishopric with the election of Bishop Gerland of Bezançon who presided over the diocese for twelve years (1088–1100). During his episcopacy he did not just promote the construction of the Cathedral (1096–1102), which was built in the most important part of the city and dedicated to the Virgin and Saint James, but he was also behind the fortification of the Castle of Agrigento for which the city was later named. Proclaimed a saint in 1159, he became the patron of the city and the Cathedral was dedicated to him. Subsequently, over the course of the 14th century, the powerful families of Chiaramonte and Montaperto built a new encircling wall which hosted the convents of Saint Francis and Saint Dominic.

A new period of demographic growth and urban expansion began in the 18th century. The elevation of Girgenti to capital of the province in 1817 was what sanctioned the rebirth of this ancient and glorious city.



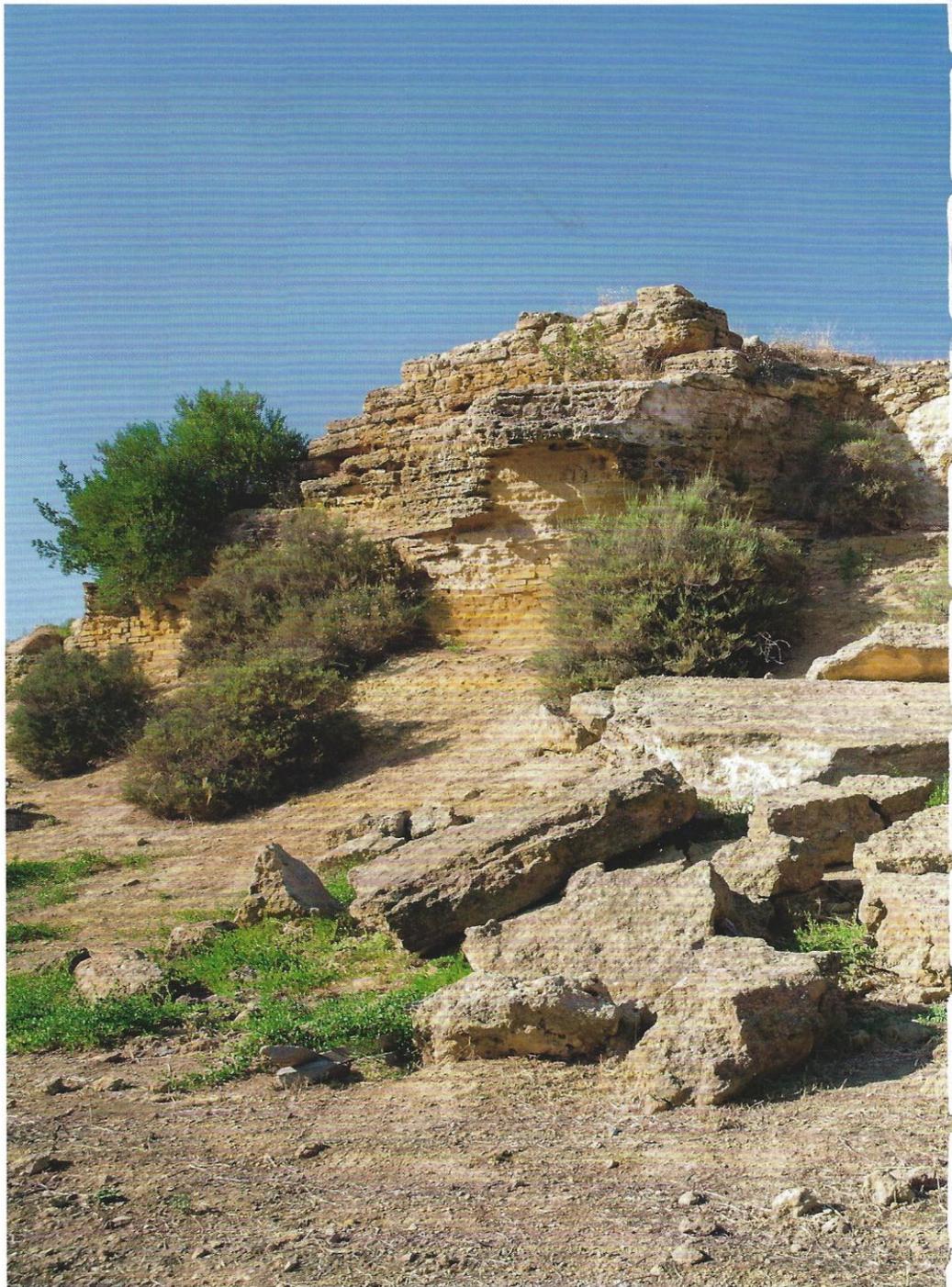


The Walls

The construction of the first walls of the city of Agrigento began almost certainly during the period of the first tyrant, Phalaris (572–556 BC), and it continued during the period of Theron (488–472 BC). Today, much of these massive fortifications no longer exists, following the development of the modern city; however, in ancient times, the circuit was as many as twelve kilometres in length and it enclosed a surface area of almost 450 hectares, from the Valley of the Temples, southwards, towards the hill of Girgenti, to the north-west. This was no doubt excessive with respect to the city's real urban needs, and as a result various areas within the walls actually remained uninhabited and were used for agriculture and pasture.

That particular situation was no doubt the result of propaganda, but also and above all of the fact that the walls were made by exploiting the natural elevation of the ground: Akragas was built on a calcareous plateau that rises up from the surrounding territory with walls that are generally rather steep. The natural defences, together with human intervention, thus offered the city an excellent defensive system, including watch-towers, which over the many centuries of the city's history guaranteed its salvation on numerous occasions, or in any case constituted a particularly difficult obstacle to overcome for its enemies. To the eyes of an outside observer the city must have appeared to be defended by an uninterrupted wall of natural rock, in some parts slightly shaped by human hands, integrated by evidently artificial sectors, made from blocks of limestone (calcarene).

Lacking detailed records on the different stages in the realization of the city walls, archaeologists have hypothesized that they began from the southern side of the plateau, the so-called Hill of the Temples, which is not as high and is thus more prone to being attacked. To





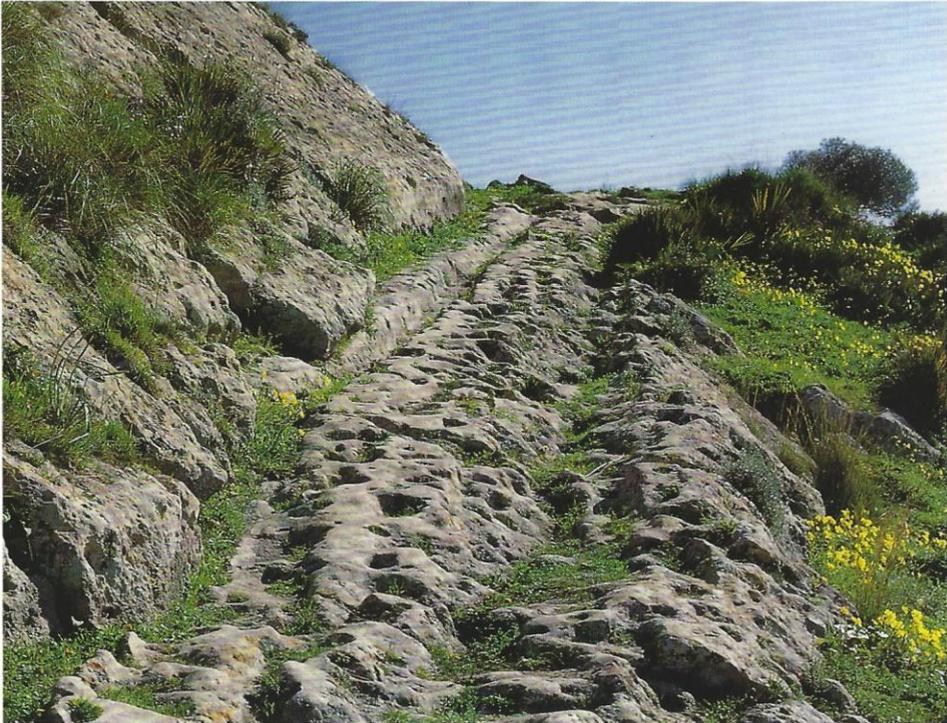
the north the plateau wall practically drops down vertically on the underlying plain, while to the east and west an excellent natural defence is guaranteed by the deep valleys excavated over thousands of years by the Rivers Akragas and Hypsas (now the San Biagio and Sant'Anna, respectively).

Several gates were built into the encircling walls, connecting the city with its vast territory. Archaeologists have identified as many as nine gates: two to the east (Gate I and Gate II), three to the south (Gate III, Gate IV and Gate V), two to the west (Gate VI and Gate VII) and two to the north (Gate VIII and Gate IX). The existence of a tenth gate to the north has only been hypothesized until now.

Gates II and VI, also known as Porta di Gela and Porta di Eraclea, respectively, once linked Agrigento to the major artery that crossed southern Sicily, connecting the territory of Agrigento with that of Gela (to the east) and Selinunte (to the west). No doubt Gate II is particularly interesting. It could be reached by taking a street excavated directly into the rock on which the tracks of the cart wheels crossing it, carrying men and goods inside and outside the city, are still visible. This access was also defended by some three towers, a

Pages 16–17
View of the walls
from below

Partial view of a
portion of the road
excavated in the
rock

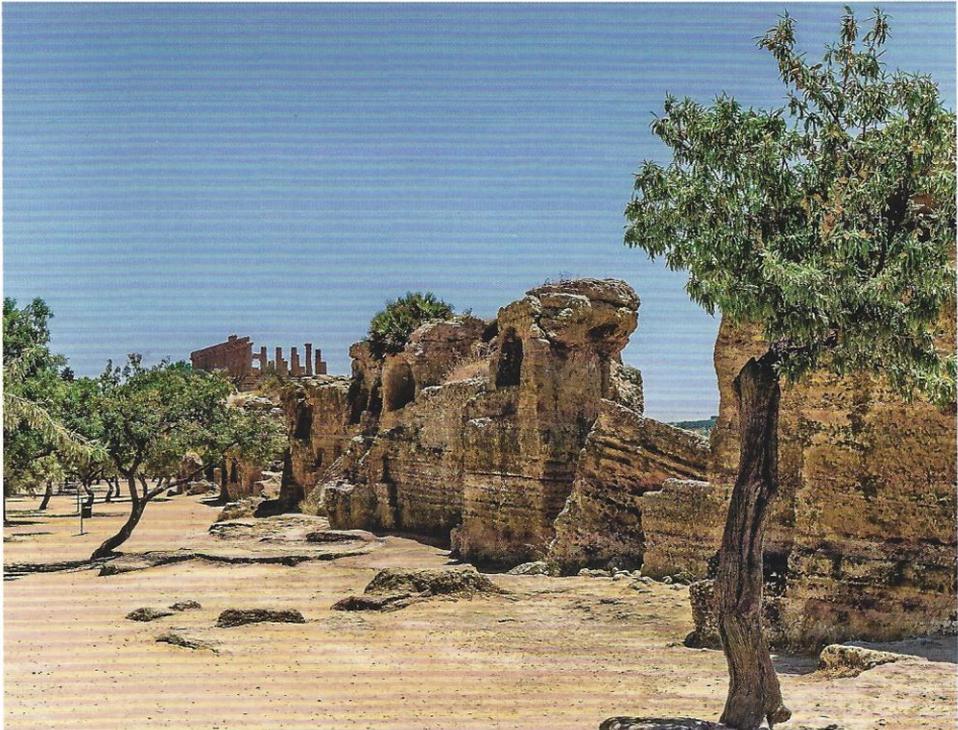


Arcosolium tombs
excavated in the
rocky wall

larger one and two smaller ones. The road connecting the city and the port began from Gate IV (already known as Porta Aurea, Golden Gate, perhaps as early as the Byzantine period), located in the garden of Villa Aurea, between the Temples of Concordia (to the east) and of Hercules (to the west).

Partially demolished after the Carthaginian conquest of 406 BC, the walls were rebuilt after 339 in the age of Timoleon. The circuit did not change with respect to the original one, nor did the materials to build it; different entrances to the city, such as Gate II, Gate III, Gate IV and Gate VI, were rebuilt and endowed with powerful defensive bulwarks and watch-towers. In particular, outside Gate II (Porta di Gela) a hornwork was built made up of two parallel massive walls that made it practically impossible for the enemy to get in.

New restructuring work was carried out in the 3rd century BC, this time using a technique from Roman tradition: two parallel curtains, one inside the other outside, filled with stones and rubble.





Temple of Juno

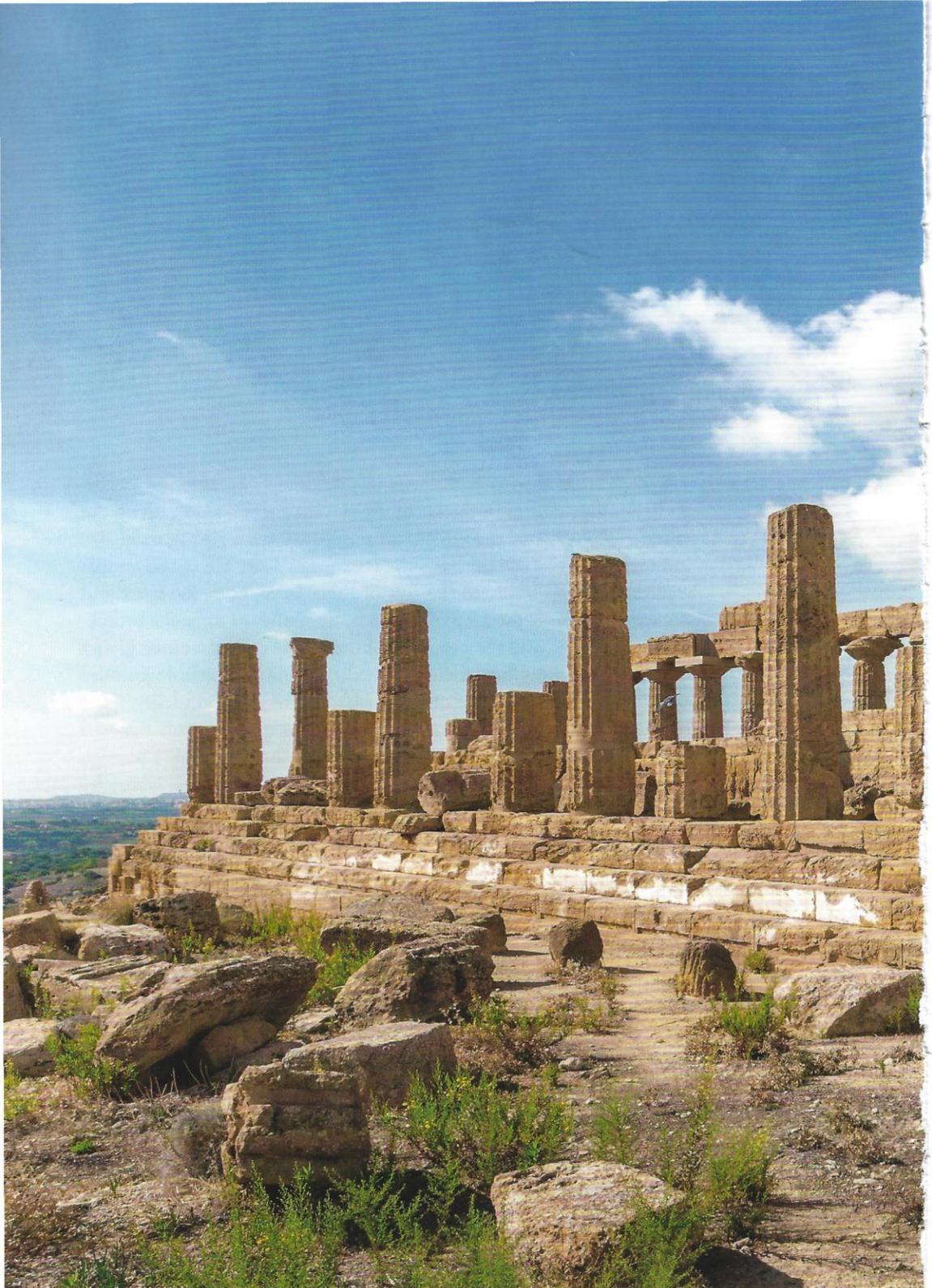
A path from the car park leads to the Hill of the Temples and to the ridge where, in the far south-eastern corner, rising up on the tallest rocky spur of the entire hill reinforced with strong defensive bulwarks and not too far from the remains of Gate III, is the temple traditionally attributed to the cult of Juno. Juno, both the sister and the wife of Jupiter, the king of the gods, was believed to be the protector of marriages, and the protector of the family and of women giving birth, while her myth particularly recalls the understandable jealousy that devoured her because of her husband's frequent infidelity.

In truth, there is no proof that the temple in question was devoted to Juno, and the origin of this tradition is probably due to a passage by the Roman writer Pliny the Elder in *Naturalis Historia* where he was actually referring to the Temple of Juno rising up on the Lacinio promontory (hence, the name Juno Lacinia) in Crotona, Magna Graecia.

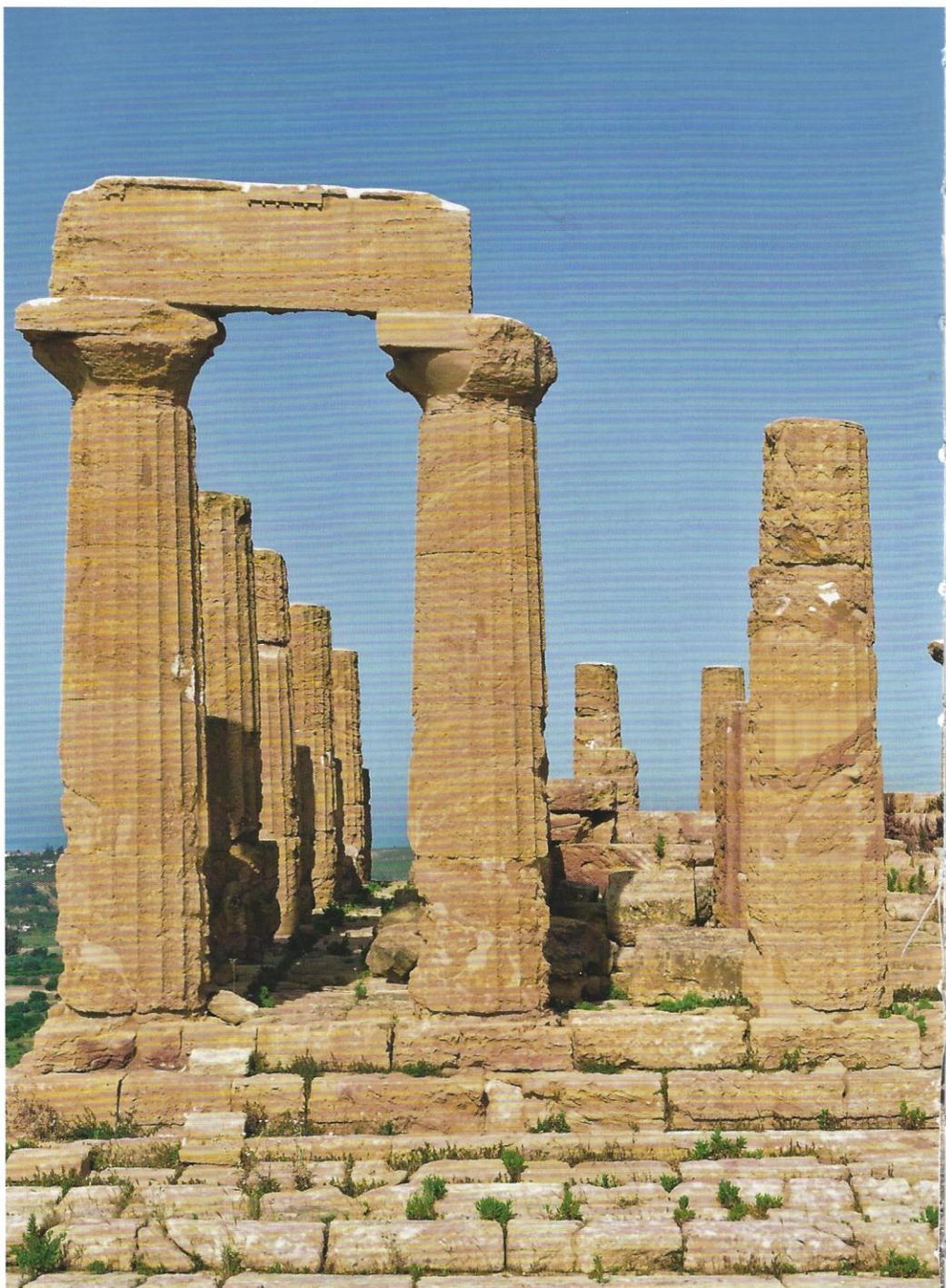
Built using local limestone blocks around the mid-5th century BC (between 460 and 440 BC), the temple featuring the Doric order (20.26 × 41.10 metres) stands on a four-step foundation, while the colonnade surrounding the cella has six columns on the short sides and thirteen on the long ones. The fluted shafts taper upwards and comprise four drums. Thirteen of the thirty-six original columns are still standing, complete with a capital; these formed the northern side of the temple and still support the smooth architrave, a remaining portion of the original entablature. The temple, which was badly damaged by a fire that broke out during the Carthaginian conquest of 406 BC, as attested to by several traces found on the walls of the cella, was restored during the Roman period. An earthquake that struck

The steps leading up to the Temple of Juno

Pages 22–23 and 24–25
Side and front views of the Temple of Juno









between the 6th and 7th centuries caused the structures to partially collapse; these were restored in the second half of the 18th century. The cella, still visible today, consists of a pronaos, a naos and an opisthodomos. The entrance to the naos was once flanked by two pylons containing two flights of stairs leading to the attic, akin to other temple buildings. The remains of the platform that served as a basement for the large statue of the goddess the temple was dedicated to were found in the naos, characterized by a taller floor. Fifteen metres from the entrance to the temple a large altar was discovered, which could be reached by climbing ten steps.

Temple of Concordia

From the Temple of Juno, head down the Via dei Templi in a westward direction and you'll reach the so-called Temple of Concordia. The identification is actually false and was formulated on the basis of a marble inscription from the first Roman imperial period (mid-1st century AD) with a dedication in Latin that reads *CONCORDIAE AGRIGENTINORUM SACRUM* [...]. The inscription, now preserved in the "Pietro Griffo" Regional Archaeological Museum, was observed in Agrigento by the Dominican historian and theologian Tommaso Fazello (1498–1570), who related it to a "temple not far from that of Hercules" in *De Rebus Siculis decades duae*.

Since then, the temple has been indicated as dedicated to Concordia, in spite of the fact that scholars have for some time now held that the inscription is unrelated to it, and should instead be referred to a lost artefact, perhaps a statue or an altar. The deity to which the edifice, which was built in the second half of the 5th century BC, was originally dedicated is still unknown today. Many hypotheses have been advanced by the experts, none of which has been proven; nonetheless, they all have one element in common, that is, they identify two gods as having been destined for worship. Hence, the Dioscuri, the twins Castor and Pollux, sons of Leda and Zeus (in Greek Dioscuri means "sons of Zeus", the Jupiter of the Romans), at times Hercules and Mercury, at others Hercules and Triptolemus. It is also worthy of note that a double dedication is suggested for the temple, not so much based on the events that involved the building in ancient times (which we have no knowledge of), but rather on those that occurred later when, in the late 6th century AD, the temple was turned into a Christian church consecrated to Saints Peter and Paul. The artificer of this transformation and ensuing dedication was Gregory, Bishop of Agrigento from 591 to 630, after he had liberated the ancient building from the demons of Eber and Raps, who had chosen to dwell in the



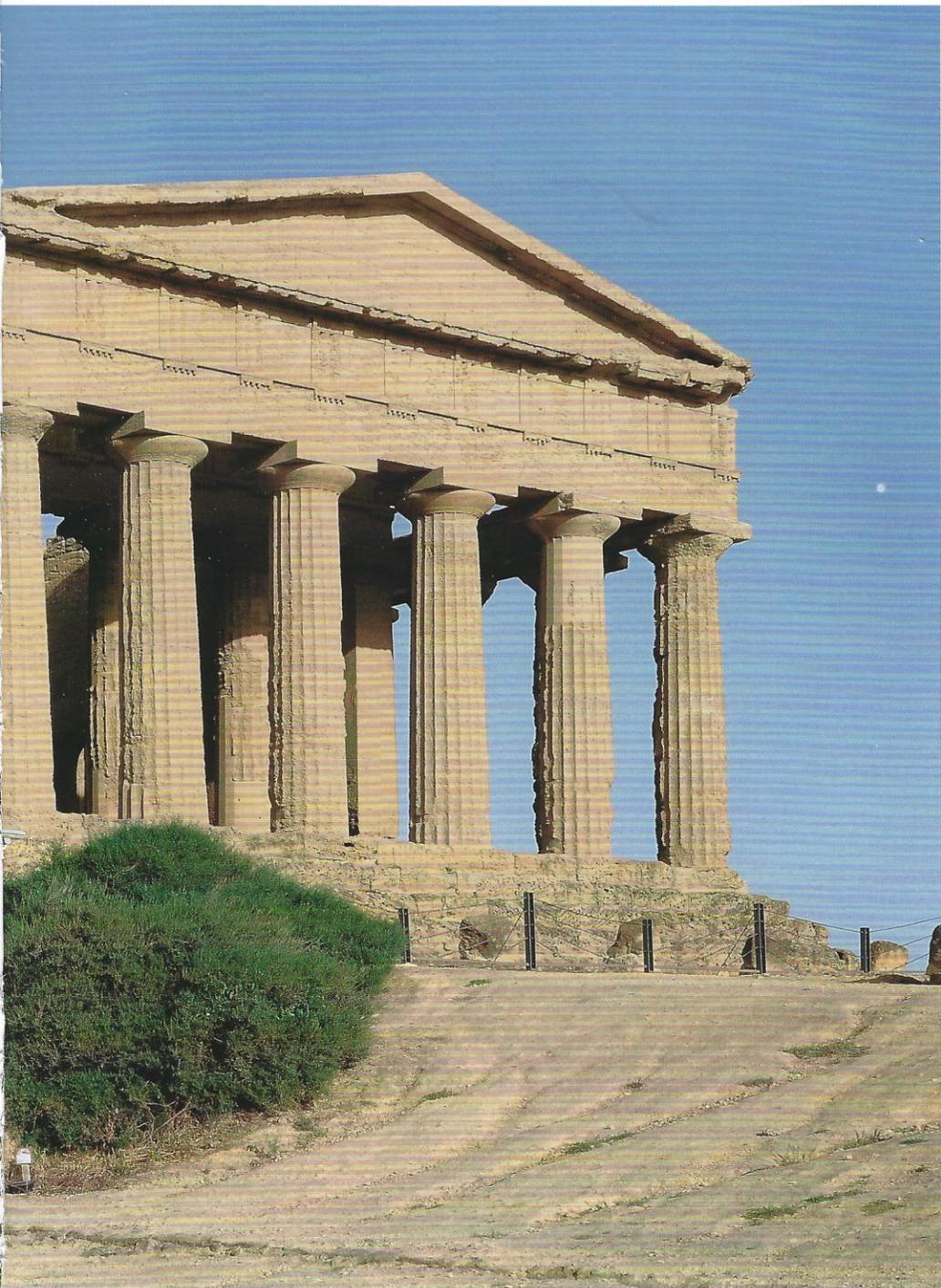
Front view
of the Temple
of Concordia

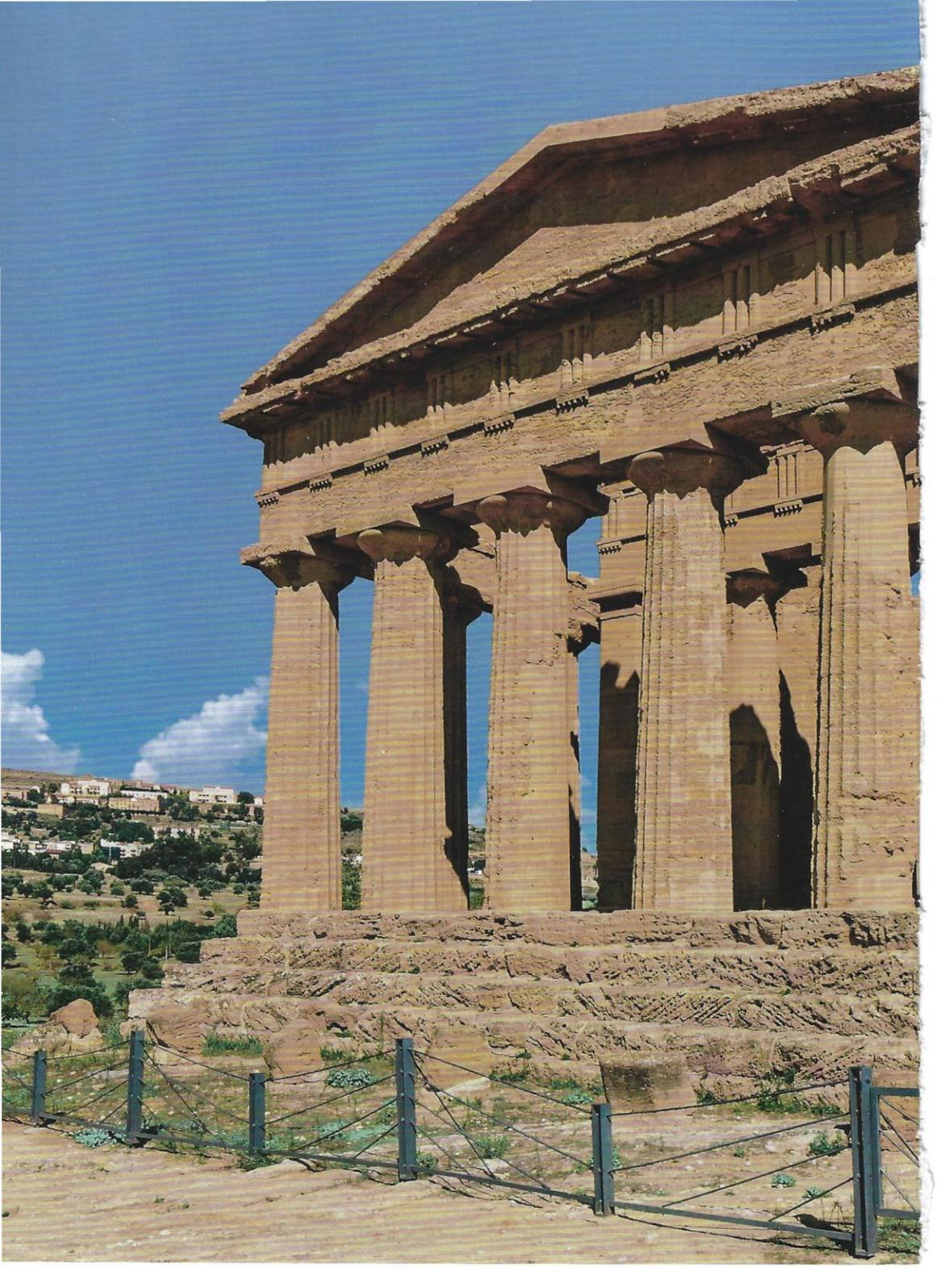
temple, as reported by the monk Leontius in *Vita del vescovo agrigentino Gregorio* (Life of Saint Gregory, Bishop of Agrigento). In essence, there are some scholars who, going back in time, wonder if there could be a relationship between the dedication to two saints, Peter and Paul, and the older one, as would be suggested by the news of the pair of demons expelled by the bishop. As we await further discoveries to be made, the large and best-preserved temple on the hill of ancient Agrigento continues to be described as dedicated to Concordia.

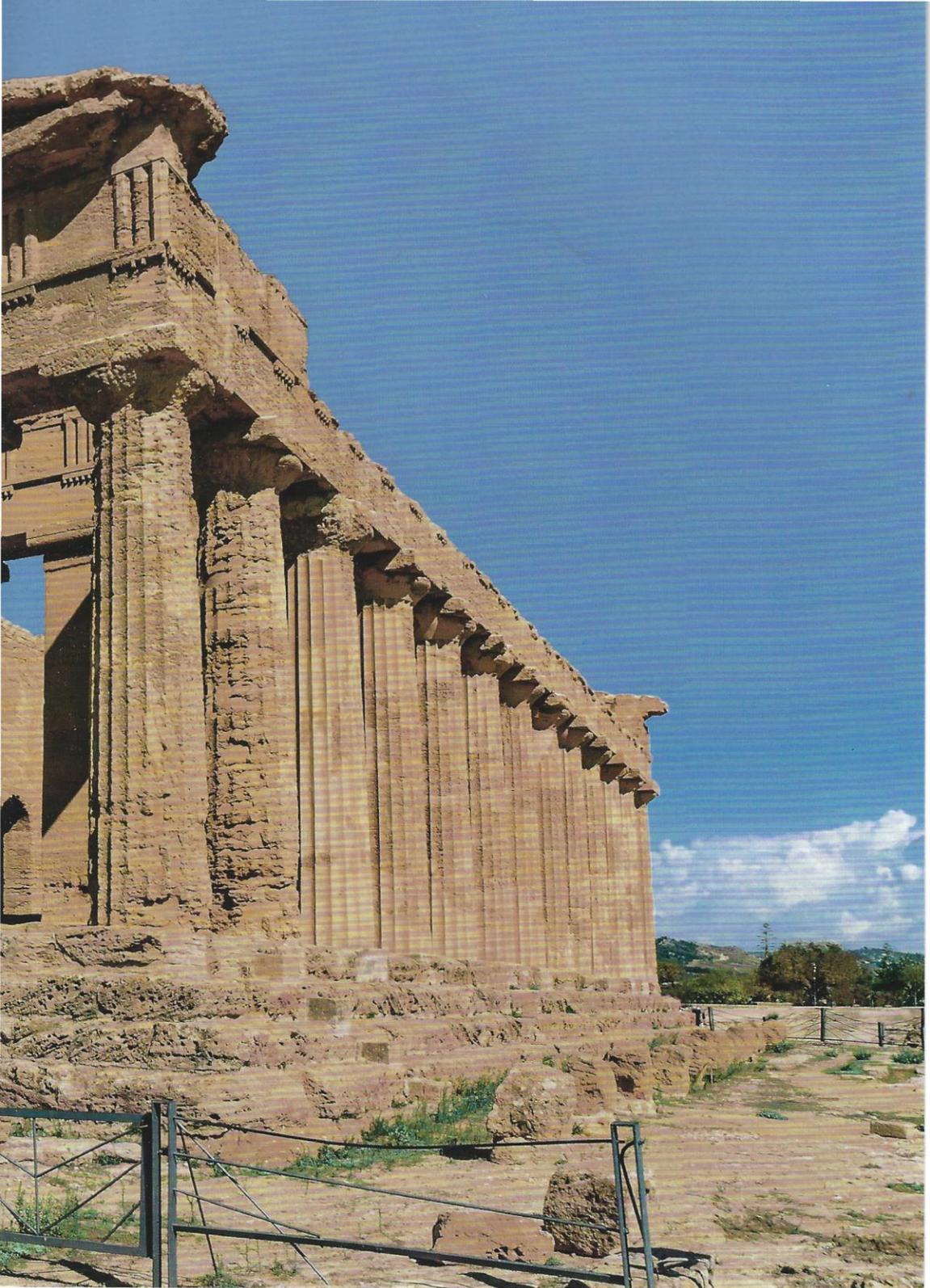
Built between 440 and 430 BC from local limestone, the Doric temple (19.75 × 42.23 metres) rises up on a tall four-step crepidoma, which in turn lies on a massive foundation created to even out the earth below it. The temple has six columns on each of its short sides, and thirteen on each of its long ones. Each column has a shaft that tapers at the top, and is characterized by twenty flutes and four drums, the lowest one of these set directly on the stylobate. Each column, including the capital, reaches a height of almost seven metres.

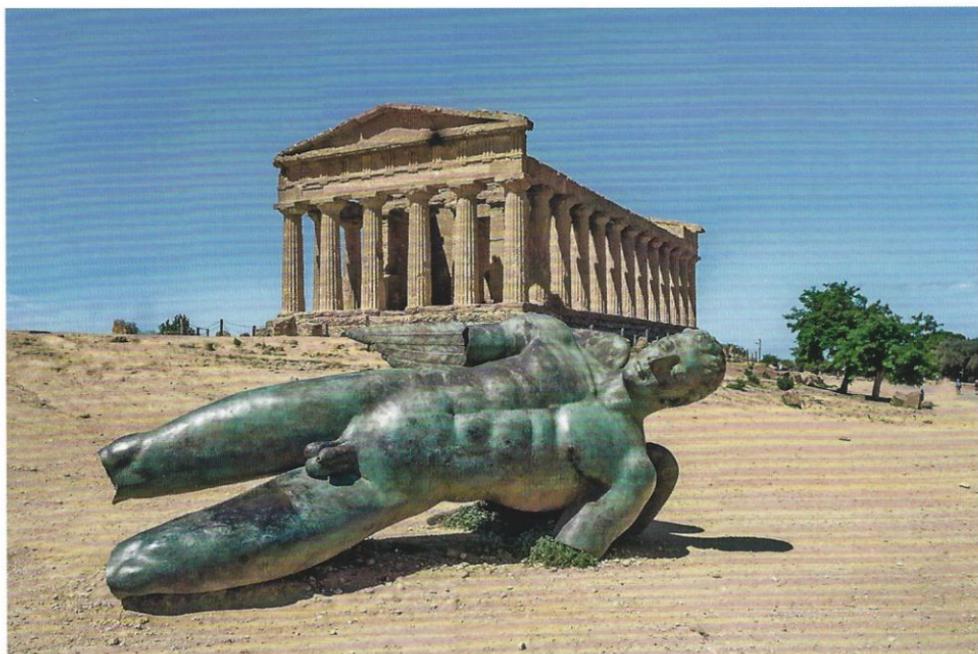
Unique among the temples of Agrigento, its entablature is intact, formed by a smooth architrave and a frieze that is clearly recognizable from the typical alternating metopes (sixty-eight in number) and triglyphs (seventy-two in number), an element typical of the Doric order. Furthermore, note how the metopes and the triglyphs located











at the farthest ends of the four friezes, are wider (1.67 metres) than the others: this is so as to solve the so-called “corner conflict” (a problem typical of Doric architecture related to the need to structurally and visually reinforce the points of contact between the different segments of the entablature). On the short sides, above the frieze, the horizontal cornice (called *geison* in Greek) projects outwards, together with the two oblique cornices framing the tympanum, thus constituting the pediment. The total absence of any trace of supports both inside the metopes of the frieze, and outside the two tympana on the pediments, has led to the hypothesis that they were all devoid of a sculptural decoration. Clearly visible is the fact that the columns are not perfectly vertical, but rather inclined a few millimetres inwards towards the monument; also visible at a third of the height of each shaft is a slight swelling (or *entasis*). Lastly, each intercolumniation (the space between the columns) gradually narrows from the centre to the corners of the peristasis, thereby creating a particular optical effect that makes up for the distorted vision of the temple when it is observed from a distance. After entering the temple and crossing the ambulatory, you reach the cella, which is set on a base with one step leading up to it. This is divided into a pronaos, a naos and an opisthodomos, the first and last *distili in antis* (that is, each with two columns situated between the *antae*). In the pronaos, to either side of the entrance to the naos, two

Pages 28–29
and 30–31
Views of the Temple
of Concordia

Igor Mitoraj,
Fallen Icarus, 2011,
bronze sculpture
placed opposite
the Temple of
Concordia

pylons rise up inside which two flights of stairs were built, making it possible to climb up to the roof of the sacred building to carry out maintenance work. Nothing remains of the roof which was traditionally double-gabled, supported by wooden trusses, and covered with terracotta tiles. As for the naos and the opisthodomos, these two spaces, which in ancient times were never connected, were instead made into a single space to allow for entry from the west when Gregory, Bishop of Agrigento, transformed the temple into a church in the late 6th century. In addition to reorienting the entrance to the building, the intercolumniation of the outer colonnade was walled shut, while six round arches were made in the masonry of the long sides of the naos. Hence, the entire building now resembled a church, characterized by the division of the internal space into three naves. This new use was recorded until 1748, when the church was deconsecrated. Later, in 1788, thanks to the intervention of the Prince of Torremuzza authorized by the Bourbons, the space between the columns of the peristasis was freed, and the original appearance of the exterior of the building was restored, while inside the ancient naos the side arches were left intact. Still today, they constitute an evident trace of the transformation of the ancient temple into a church. To this regard, we should not overlook the fact that we owe this 5th-century-BC temple's exceptional state of conservation to its repurposing. That could explain why, in May 2005, the Catholic Church Congregation for Divine Worship proclaimed Saint Gregory II of Agrigento (Bishop Gregory rose to the honour of the altars in the 15th century) patron saint of conservators of archaeological and architectural heritage.

Temple of Hercules

After the Temple of Concordia, continuing along past Villa Aurea and the Early Christian Necropolis, just before reaching Porta Aurea (Gate IV), we come to the ruins of the temple traditionally said to be of Hercules.

The identification of the building is based on a passage in Cicero recalling its existence near the Agora, the city's main square, just to the north. The son of one of the countless relationships between Jupiter and mortal women (in this case the lovely Alcmena, wife of Amphytrion, King of Thebes), Hercules was sentenced – at the request of Juno, jealous and vindictive bride of the king of the gods – to spend his entire life attempting to carry out impossible feats and fighting a whole range of monsters: in mythology these adventures are referred to as the “Labours of Hercules”. Killed by his wife Dejanira, who was tired of his constant infidelity, or, according to the tragedy *Women of Trachis* dedicated to him

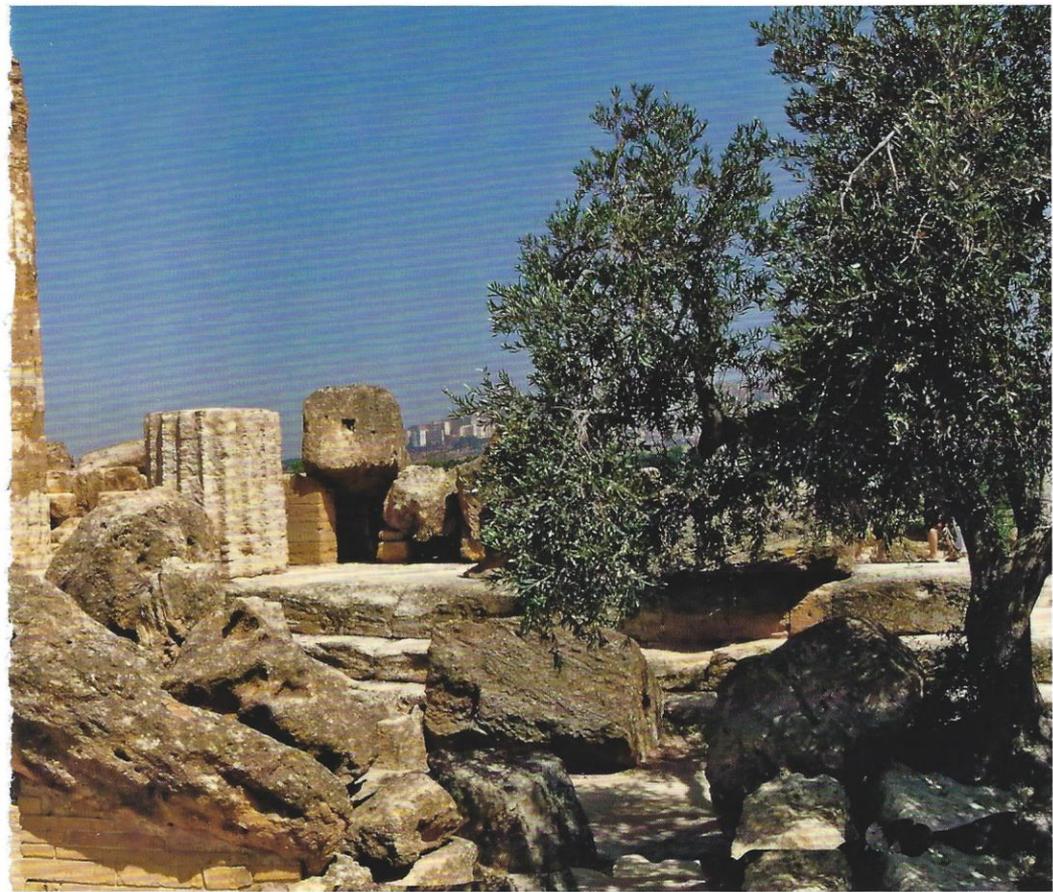


Side view of the eight columns of the Temple of Hercules

by Sophocles, owing to a magic potion (the blood of a centaur) with which his wife mistakenly believed she could win back his love, Hercules rose up to Mount Olympus where, according to several traditions, he married Hebe, the goddess of eternal youth.

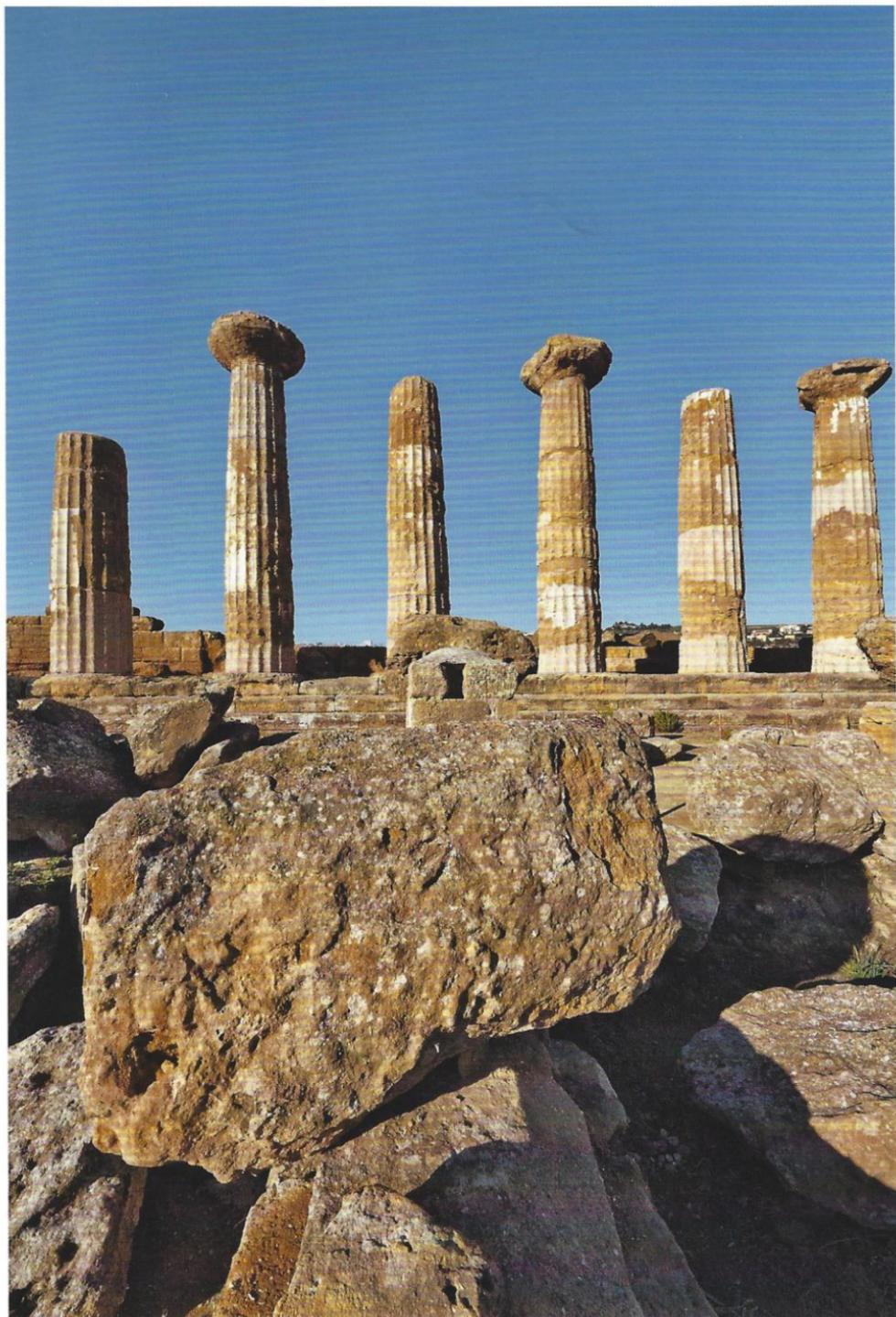
Most scholars believe that the temple dedicated to Hercules by the people of Agrigento was built around the late 6th century BC, making it the oldest in the city. There are, however, some who believe it was built later, 490–480 BC, and therefore associate it with the building activity promoted by the tyrant Theron. Exactly when the monument collapsed is still unknown, but the idea has been advanced, based on the position of the remains on the ground and their state of conservation, that the temple may have been destroyed in an earthquake.

Built on a three-step platform, the Doric temple (28 × 74 metres) is of the peripteral, hexastyle type, and made from local limestone. The



colonnade surrounding the cella consists of six columns on the short sides, and fifteen on the long ones. The columns (approximately ten metres tall) have shafts that taper at the top, and are made of four fluted drums; there is a deep gulf between the shaft and the capitals featuring an echinus and an abacus that are both short. These particular features of the columns can still be observed today especially along the southern peristasis, where there are eight columns, four of which complete with a capital: these were restored to their original position in the 1920s thanks to the generous intervention of the English Captain Alexander Hardcastle.

The cella features an elongated shape with a pronaos, a naos and an opisthodomos, the first and last of which with two columns located between the *antae*. At one time located inside the naos was a venerated bronze statue of Hercules on a plinth made by the Greek sculptor Myron.



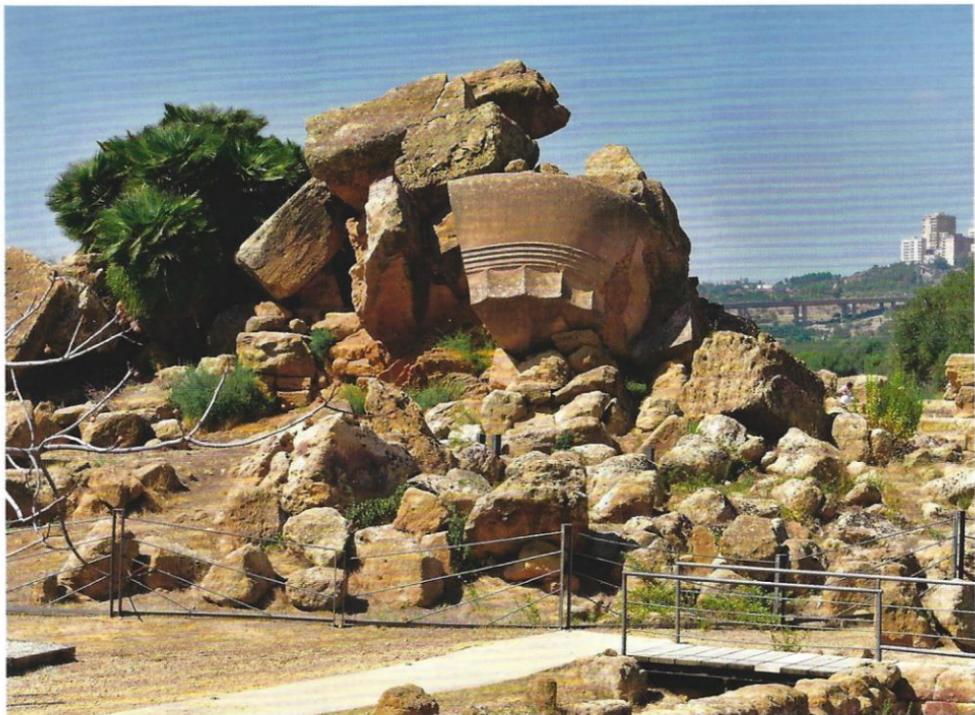
Verres' attempt to steal it unleashed the swift reaction of the people of Agrigento. Cicero wrote that the temple also housed a painting by the famous Greek painter Zeuxis, portraying the infant Hercules strangling in his cradle the serpents sent by Juno to murder him. Lastly, a statue of the god Asclepius from the Roman imperial period was discovered in the naos. No part of the roof of the building has survived, while several artefacts of great interest are now housed at the Archaeological Museum; these were a part of the ornamentation on the outside of the building, for instance, the limestone lion's head water spouts, some of them dating back to the time when the temple was first built (late 6th century BC), others to the following century. The remains of a sacrificial altar were found about thirty metres away from the entrance to the temple.

Temple of Jupiter

Having left the Temple of Hercules and examined the remains of the Porta Aurea (Gate IV), which connected the city with the territory towards the south in the direction of the coastline and the port, following the relief of the hill visitors reach the temple dedicated to the king of the gods, whom the Greeks called Zeus, and the Romans called Jupiter. Even from a distance the onlooker is struck by the majesty of these ruins, in spite of the fact that the temple, which was destroyed in a series of earthquakes, was used in the 18th century as a quarry while the docks of nearby Porto Empedocle were being built. This is still the largest Doric temple in the city and in the Western world (even larger than the Parthenon in Athens). And it could not have been any other way, given the god it was dedicated to.

According to mythology, Jupiter was the son of Saturn. Based on the prediction of an oracle, Saturn feared he would be dethroned by his own children, and thus swallowed them as soon as they were born. Only Jupiter escaped this horrible fate, saved by his mother Rhea. When he had finally grown up, the young god faced his father, defeated him, and banished him from Olympus, assuming the domination of the world together with his brothers Neptune (god of the sea) and Pluto (god of the Afterlife and the Underworld).

The temple in honour of Olympian Jupiter (that is, "lord of Olympus"), also known as Olympieion, was built in Agrigento after the grand victory of the tyrant Theron against the Carthaginians in the Battle of Himera in 480 BC. Hence, it was an *ex voto* (as we might refer to it today), but at the same time an instrument of propaganda, at least in Theron's plans, who wanted to offer a tangible sign of the power of Agrigento by beginning the project for what would become one of the largest temples in the Ancient Greek world. Recent studies have nonetheless cast doubt



over the traditional date, anticipating the opening of the immense construction site by a few years and establishing the start of the work as the earliest years of Theron's tyranny (488–472 BC).

The structure of the large Doric temple (56.30 × 113.45 metres), built of blocks of local limestone, is unlike traditional designs, and features architectural solutions that are unquestionably original. Its five-stepped foundation is colossal, and the top step is twice as tall as the others. The temple is also amazing because it is a rare example of the pseudo-peripteral heptastyle. This means that the cella was hidden from view, surrounded by a wall (and not a colonnade), to which were attached fluted Doric half columns: fourteen along the long sides and seven (*epta*) along the short ones; each half column was matched inside by a pillar with a rectangular plan. The half columns, which were particularly tall (somewhere between eighteen and twenty metres has been hypothesized), were set on a short base surrounding all of the masonry and made with small blocks of stone cut in a wedge shape. At the top of each column was a half capital featuring an echinus, consisting of two blocks of stone and decorated with four rings followed by an abacus, formed by three large slabs. The abacus was topped by the entablature divided into a smooth architrave and a frieze; as is typical of the Doric order, this was

One of the large capitals of the Temple of Jupiter

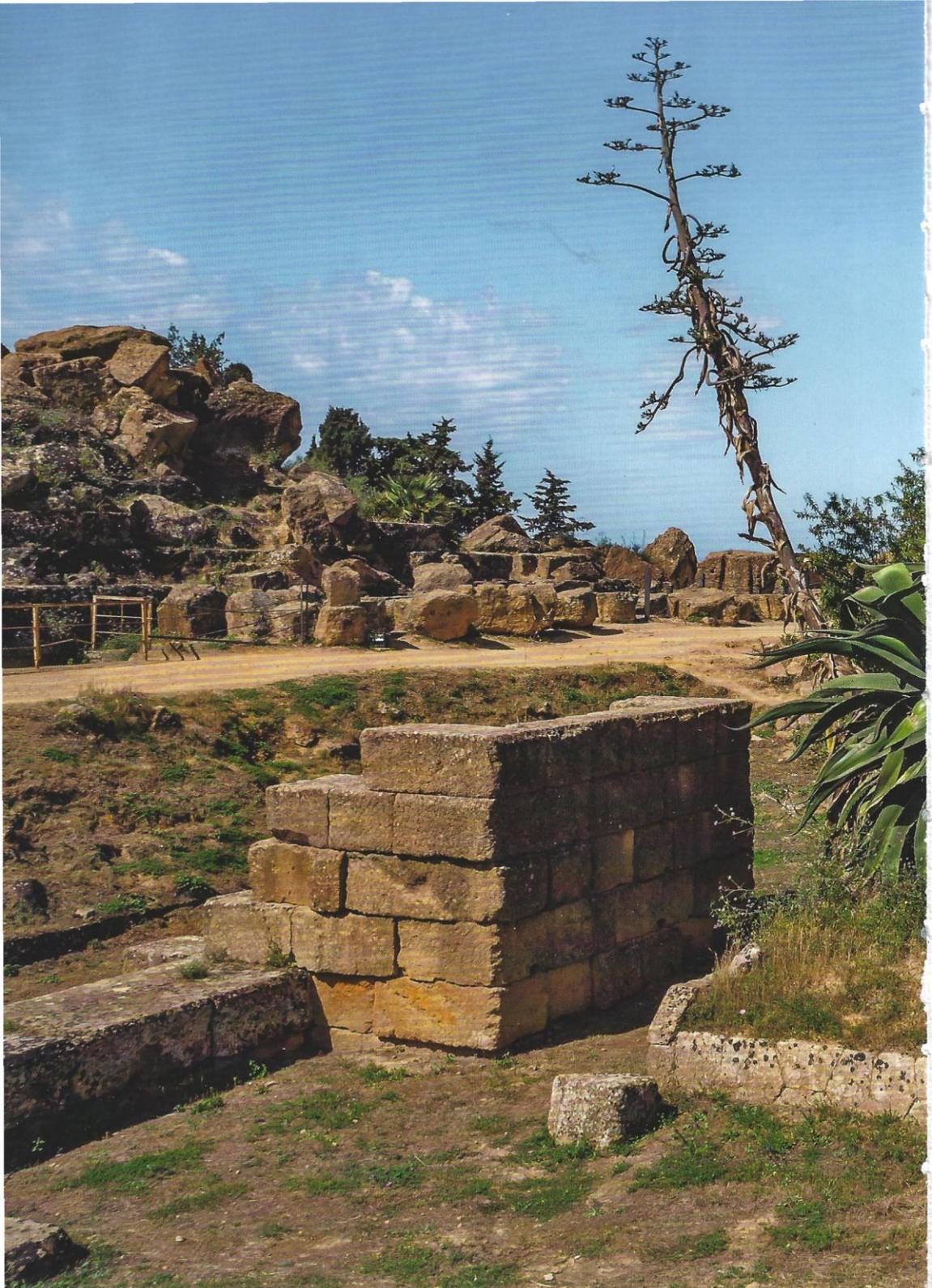


Copy of a colossal telamon that decorated the Temple of Jupiter

Pages 40–41
View of the Temple of Jupiter area

characterized by alternating metopes and triglyphs. Some of these are still visible amidst the ruins of the building, while fragments of the lion's head water spouts are now on display in the Archaeological Museum. As for the two pediments, which stood out on the short sides of the temple to the east and west, we know from Diodorus Siculus that the tympanum was decorated with sculptural representations of the battle between the Olympian gods and the giants (the so-called *Gigantomachy*) and of the Trojan War. Another element that has been the topic of discussion among the experts for centuries is the exact position of the colossal telamons represented with their arms bent at head level as if they were bearing a heavy object. These must have been positioned with their feet on shelves located about eleven metres up, their bodies fastened to the masonry between the columns on the outer side of the temple.

These remarkable *Giants*, as they are often referred to in the diaries and sketches of those who took the European Grand Tour, were rather tall (7.65 metres) and made from shaped blocks of stone that were especially suited to portraying their anatomical structure. Proof of this is the life-size reproduction that can be viewed, reclining, inside the ruins of the great temple, while the Archaeological Museum houses the only original exemplar, reconstructed in the 19th century. The last *Giants* managed





to remain in their original site until the early 15th century. Lastly, we cannot overlook the fact that not all the experts agree on the presence of the telamons along the entire perimeter of the temple: some affirm they were only present on the facade.

Inside the temple, after the ambulatory and the pronaos, one reached the naos, perhaps under the open sky; shaped like an elongated rectangle, its long outer walls were divided by quadrangular pillars set four metres apart. The statue of the god must have stood before the rear wall, while the opisthodomos was probably located on the other side. Outside the temple, a few metres from the entrance, the remains of a gigantic rectangular altar used for sacrifices were found. Also in the outer area of the temple, close to the south-eastern corner, excavations have unearthed the presence of a small temple dated to the 4th century BC and a portico with a fountain. Towards the west, instead, the foundations of several houses were discovered, which were perhaps used by the priests, as well

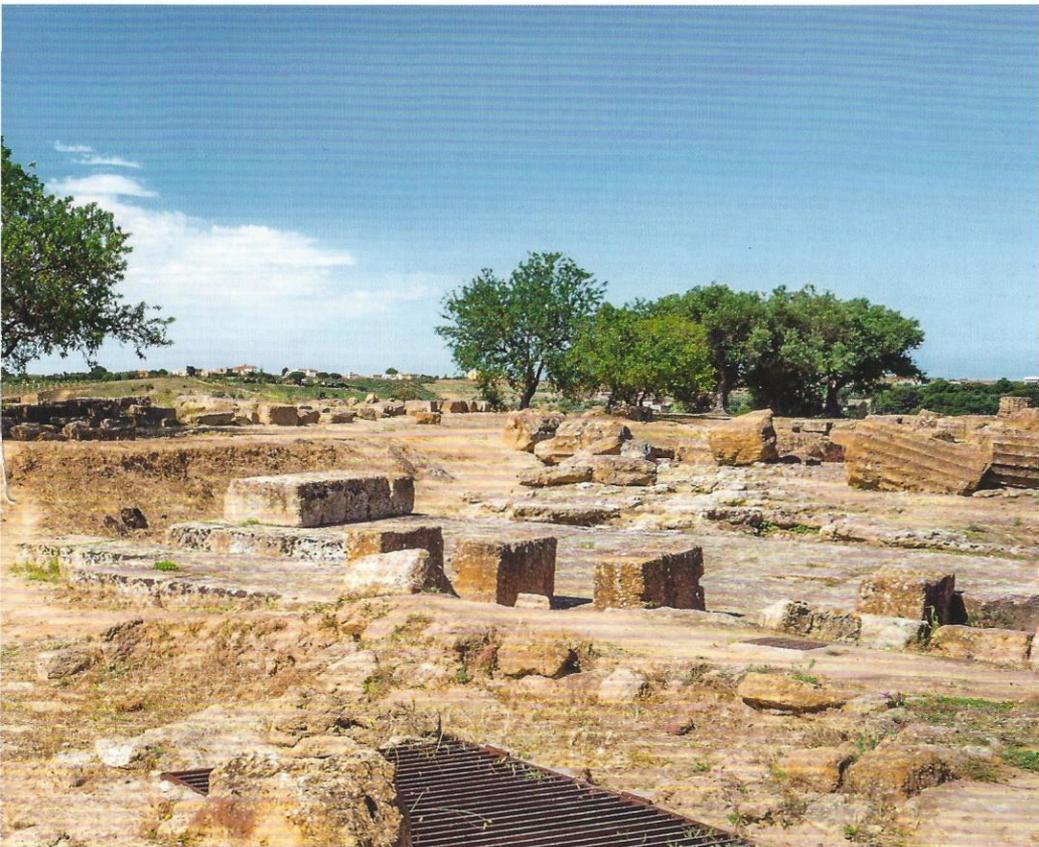
View of the
sanctuary area
near the Temple
of Jupiter



as structures identified as *thesauroi* (shrines used to preserve and display the offerings made to the god) and *leschai* (open public buildings where the poor and pilgrims could stay overnight or where they could meet to rest or be with company).

Sanctuary Area

Behind the Temple of Jupiter, beyond the built-up area and continuing in a westward direction is a sacred area located close to the remains of Gate V. This complex has been stratified over the centuries, from the Archaic to the Hellenistic periods. Two temples have been identified here, one with a circular plan, and one with an L-shaped portico having multiple functions. This broad area is bordered by rocks, where fortifications are partially visible today; by the remains of Gate V through which, starting from the coast, one could reach the ancient city; and, lastly, by an L-shaped portico on the other sides.





L-shaped Portico

The portico, made from blocks of local limestone, was built in the second half of the 3rd century BC (Hellenistic period), using part of a wall that already in the early 5th century BC surrounded the complex. The wall had two wings: a longer one that ran from south to north where it joined a shorter wing – at a forty-five-degree angle – that ran from east to west. In the 2nd century BC, this very last segment was extended over the remains of the walls of a previous archaic building with a rectangular plan, thought to be an assembly room.

The finding of different rooms, cisterns and a vat with a fountain inside the longer wing of the portico has led to the hypothesis that this portion was once used as a resting area for pilgrims, who could stop to eat and drink (*hestiatorion*) or find a place to stay the night (*katagogion*).

Oikos Temple

The most ancient among the constructions in this area is a small temple built in a tripartite, *oikos* (Greek for house) form (6 × 8 metres), characterized by the *pronaos*, *naos* and *adyton*, an inaccessible space (this is what the word means in Greek) to the general public and open only to priests. It is dated to the Archaic period (around the mid-6th century BC). In the first half of the 5th century BC, a quadrangular room with an altar was added to the building. In the second half of

Tholos temple

the same century an entrance structure characterized by the presence of columns and pilasters (known as a *propylaeum*) was built before the temple facade. This monumental access faced an open area bordered to the east by a sacred wood.

As the archaeological records show, in time the edifice had three different floors of which the first and the oldest was made up of a simple beaten layer of sandstone. Subsequently, in the second half of the 5th century BC, when the *propylaeum* was built at the entrance to the building, the square was raised and its stone flooring installed. Lastly, in the second half of the 3rd century BC (Hellenistic period), the square was again raised and its floor covered in slabs this time, but in a scenario that had changed by that time. The temple in *oikos* form was in ruins as it had no longer been reconstructed after 406 BC, the year the Carthaginians seized Agrigento. After that date, two monumental altars were built over the ruins of the *propylaeum*; these altars are known in Italian as *a dado* because they resemble a die, and each of them is located inside an encircling stone wall.

To whom the temple was dedicated is uncertain. Scholars have hypothesized that in its most ancient times the cult of Demeter and Persephone was alive here; the Chthonic Deities, as they are referred to, were highly celebrated in ancient Akragas. This hypothesis is supported by the discovery close to the temple in *oikos* form of rock carvings, interpreted as being an attempt to build a second sacred building on the same spot, on one hand; and by the presence of two altars with an enclosure built during the Hellenistic period when the area was by then in ruins, on the other. The altars would have served to perpetuate the sacredness of the place and the worship of the two deities.

As a matter of fact, that the area was believed to be sacred even when it had already in part been destroyed is also witnessed by the finding of several small sacred aedicules, which in the Hellenistic period (between the mid-3rd and early 2nd centuries BC) were built close to the exterior of the northern wall of the portico, the one overlooking the built-up area.

Tholos Temple

During the late Hellenistic period (2nd century BC) a temple with a circular plan (known as a *tholos* temple) with an altar at the centre was built, demolishing the southern portion of the longer wing of the L-shaped portico. Although the building's elevation has not survived, the stone blocks of its foundation do allow us to understand what the plan looked like and how big it was.

Temple of Castor and Pollux (Dioscuri)

After seeing the ruins of Gate V, continuing westward the visitor reaches the area of the Temple of Castor and Pollux. The myth that tells the story of the origins of the Dioscuri is one of the most curious of all those handed down to us from ancient tradition. According to the most popular version, it all began with the umpteenth affair on the part of Jupiter, the king of the gods, who fell in love with Leda, wife of the King of Sparta Tyndareus, and turned himself into a white swan so he could mate with her. During that same night her husband mated with her as well, and the result of this was that Leda gave birth to two swan eggs. When the eggs hatched, from one of them came the fruit of Leda's union with the god, a pair of demigods consisting of a girl, Helen, the femme fatale behind the Trojan War, and a boy, named Pollux (*Polydeykes* in Greek). From the second egg, instead, were born two "simple" human beings, again a girl, Clytemnestra, and a boy, Castor. Once they had grown up, the boys and the girls went their separate ways. Helen and Clytemnestra were destined to play important roles in mythology, as emblems of conjugal infidelity. Helen betrayed her husband Menelaus, King of Sparta, and fled to Troy with Prince Paris; Clytemnestra, who married Agamemnon, brother of Menelaus and King of Mycenae, was unfaithful to him with Aegisthus. She and her lover murdered Agamemnon as soon as he returned home when the Trojan War ended.

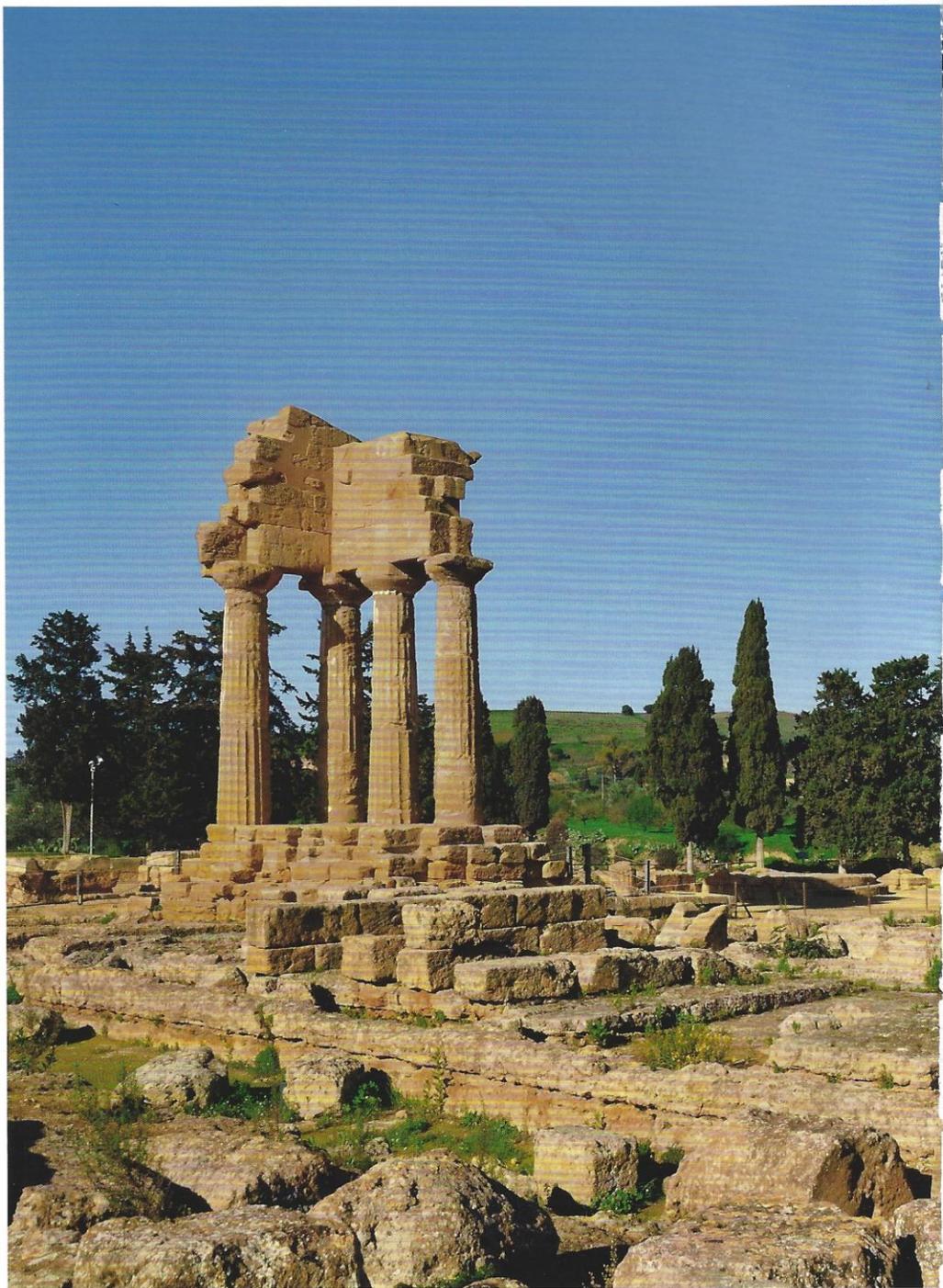
The two men had very different lives: so united were they that tradition recalls them together under a single name – Dioscuri. The two boys loved each other so much that when Castor was on the point of dying, Pollux was given permission by Jupiter to share his immortality with his brother; each of them was thus allowed by Jupiter to spend one day on Earth and one day in the Underworld. In ancient iconography the Dioscuri are often represented on horseback, which is why the Romans especially venerated them as the protectors of horsemen, one of the three classes that Roman citizens were divided into, in between senators and plebeians. Based on erudite reconstructions that were never archaeologically confirmed, this temple dated to around the mid-5th century BC was dedicated to the cult of Jupiter's twin sons. It is a Doric temple built of blocks of local limestone (16.43 × 33.99 metres), of the peripteral, hexastyle type (i.e. it has six columns on the short sides and thirteen on the long ones), and it was destroyed a first time when the Carthaginians conquered Agrigento (406 BC); after it was restored in the late Hellenistic period (around the 2nd century BC), it was destroyed once more, allegedly during an earthquake.

The elevation of the temple, of which we can only see the four columns

View of the four columns of the Temple of Castor and Pollux

Pages 48–49
The Temple of Castor and Pollux and the city of Agrigento today







of the north-western corner, is the result of the anastylosis (recomposition) carried out in 1836 by the Sicilian Board of Antiquity, with the intention of restoring the view of the building's articulation, albeit only partially.

The four columns feature shafts with three stone drums and are characterized by twenty sharp-edged flutes; this is followed by the capital (with the geometrical echinus and abacus) topped by the entablature, a smooth architrave and a frieze with the typical alternating metopes and triglyphs. The reconstruction of the angular portion of the edifice has allowed for the repositioning on the western side of part of the projecting *geison* (horizontal cornice) and the attachment of an oblique cyma. This at least gives us an idea of what the pediment and the tympanum inside it once looked like. Nonetheless, the anastylosis described, although still appealing today, was not carried out correctly: according to the experts, elements that were probably not part of the original edifice were used as well.

As for the interior, the cella featured the typical naos at the centre between the pronaos and the opisthodomos, with the latter *distili in antis* (that is, with two columns between the *antae*).

Temple L

Visible not far from the southern side of the Temple of Castor and Pollux is the perimetral development of the so-called Temple L.

What remains of the ancient sacred building is the cutting into the rock carried out on the occasion of the founding of the Doric temple (41.80 × 20.20 metres). It has been hypothesized that the peripteral building was built, like the nearby Temple of Castor and Pollux, around the mid-5th century BC and that, like its neighbour, it was destroyed in 406 BC, when the Carthaginians attacked Agrigento. Lying on the ground are numerous drums from the columns that made up the original peristasis. Not far from the entrance to the east are the remains of an altar, probably built during the Hellenistic period.

Sanctuary of the Chthonic Deities

After visiting the ruins of the Temple of Castor and Pollux (Dioscuri) and the so-called Temple L, one comes to the Sanctuary of the Chthonic Deities: Demeter and Persephone.

According to mythology, Demeter generated with her brother Jupiter a daughter named Persephone. Pluto, brother of Jupiter and Demeter, soon fell in love with her, so he abducted her and took her with him to the Underworld where he reigned over the dead. Demeter desperately looked for her daughter for nine nights and nine days, refusing to eat or



View of the remains of the Sactuary of the Chthonic Deities

drink until, disguised as an old woman, she reached the city of Eleusis ruled by King Celeus. During the period of time Demeter spent in Eleusis the land became sterile and unproductive, so Jupiter sent his son the messenger Hermes to tell his brother Pluto to restore Persephone to her mother. The young girl had eaten seven seeds from a pomegranate picked in Pluto's garden, however, and thus became indissolubly linked to her husband, who refused to let her go. Thereafter, thanks to Rhea's intervention, an agreement was reached by which Persephone would live nine months a year with Demeter on Olympus, and the remaining three months with Pluto in the Underworld.

The Archaeological Museum houses some interesting terracotta artefacts representing the two deities. In several statuettes dated to the 6th century BC, Demeter is portrayed standing wearing the typical headdress shaped like a modius (a cylindrical container that was used as a unit of measure for grain); in other objects she is instead portrayed enthroned. The complex of sacred buildings that here, on the western side of the Hill of the Temples, were stratified starting from the Archaic period (6th century BC), were dedicated to these two deities, protectors of the earth (on which the meaning of the word chthonian is based) and agricultural activities (particularly as related to sowing and harvesting). This terraced area overlooks the Kolymbetra.



The sacred area, discovered in the early 20th century thanks to the excavation work carried out by Pirro Marconi, shows the remains of various architectures, including two sacred enclosures (or *temenoi*) located at the northernmost end, which stand out for their antiquity (mid-6th century BC). The first of these, the so-called **Enclosure 1**, has a rectangular plan (15.52×10 metres) and is divided into several spaces connected by a narrow aisle characterized by the presence of a circular altar. Scholars say that the way this structure develops is comparable to the site plans for similar buildings found in Crete; this is particularly significant as it could attest to a place of worship built by the founders of Akragas, who, as we know, were from Rhodes and Crete. The second one, **Enclosure 2** (5.40×12.95 metres), built not too far from the first one but in a more southwards position, is a small temple with a rectangular plan that can be accessed from the east; the interior is divided into two spaces and completed by two altars, one circular and the other rectangular. Farther afield we can see the ruins of three small temples, also known as *thesauroi* or *donari* (where the people would leave their votive offerings to the deities), all of which are made from blocks of local limestone and dated to the 6th century BC: the first two, known as **Tempietto 1** (4.95×10.65 metres) and **Tempietto 2** (4.20×9.20 metres), are characterized by a tripartite

Circular altar of the Sanctuary of the Chthonic Deities, with the Temple of Castor and Pollux in the background

Pages 54–55
Garden of the Kolymbetra

structure with a pronaos, a naos and an *adyton*, an inaccessible space to the general public. A third building has been recognized next to the second one: it is known as **Tempietto 3** (10.45 × 9.30 metres). It has been hypothesized that initially the building was of the *oikos* type (*oikos* meaning house in Greek), i.e. with a single room serving as the naos, and that only later was completed with an entrance pronaos.

Close to the eastern side of the third temple are the traces of work that was done on the rocks which scholars have related to a project to build a large-scale peripteral temple. The attempt was made during two subsequent phases, in the second half of the 6th century BC, and then again at the start of the following century.

Moving towards the terraced area in the far western part, visitors can instead see the remains of several variously shaped foundations (elongated, quadrangular, semicircular), inside an enclosure for which several wall segments are visible. Between the late 6th and early 5th centuries BC, these must have been topped by altars for the open-air celebration of the cult or for the *donari*, i.e. objects such as statues dedicated to the deities, for example. Among the findings in this area, of particular interest is a terracotta head wearing a tall headdress dated to the late 7th century BC and believed to be a work of Rhodian or Cretan origin brought here by the city's founders.

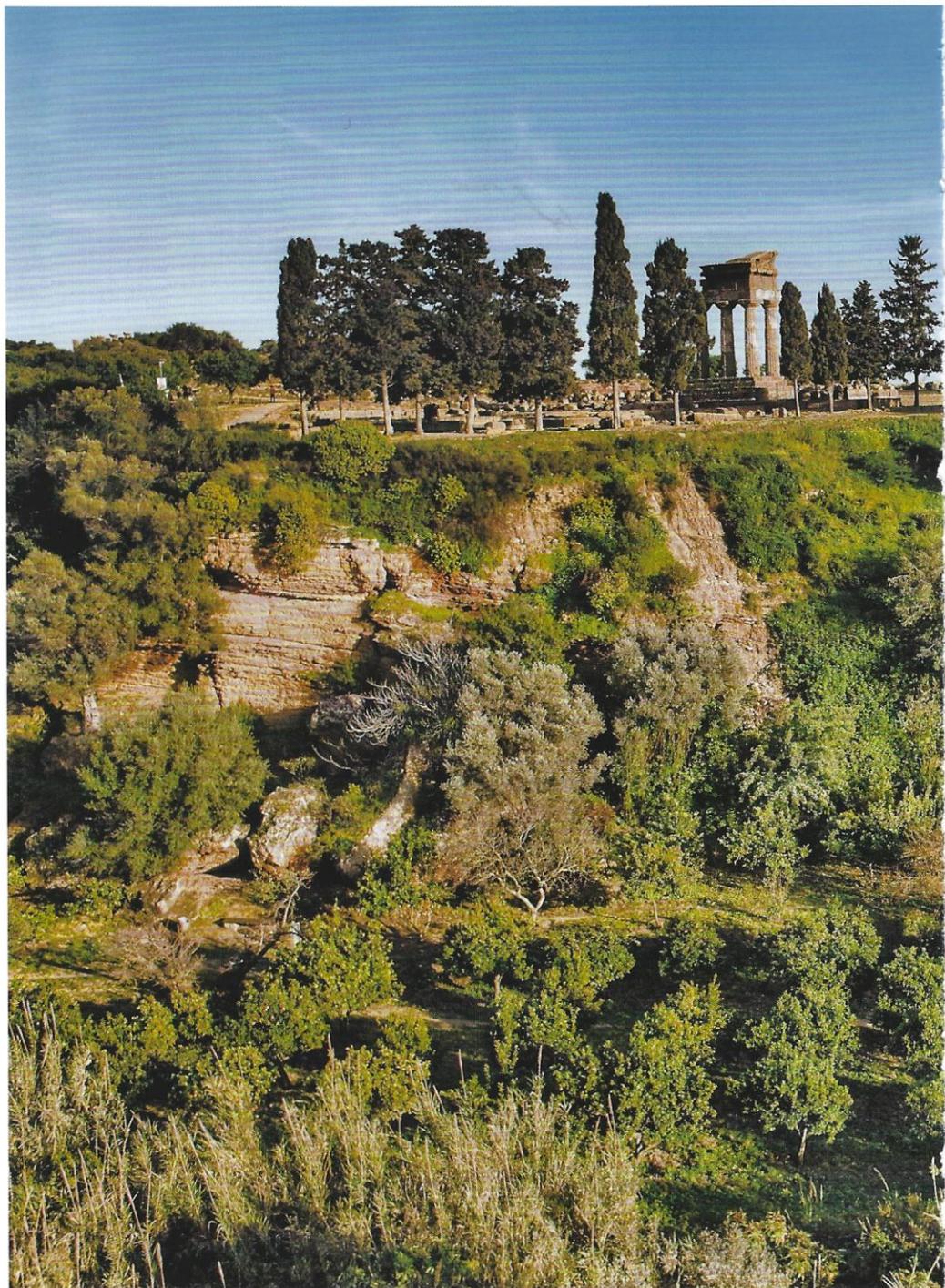
The Kolymbetra

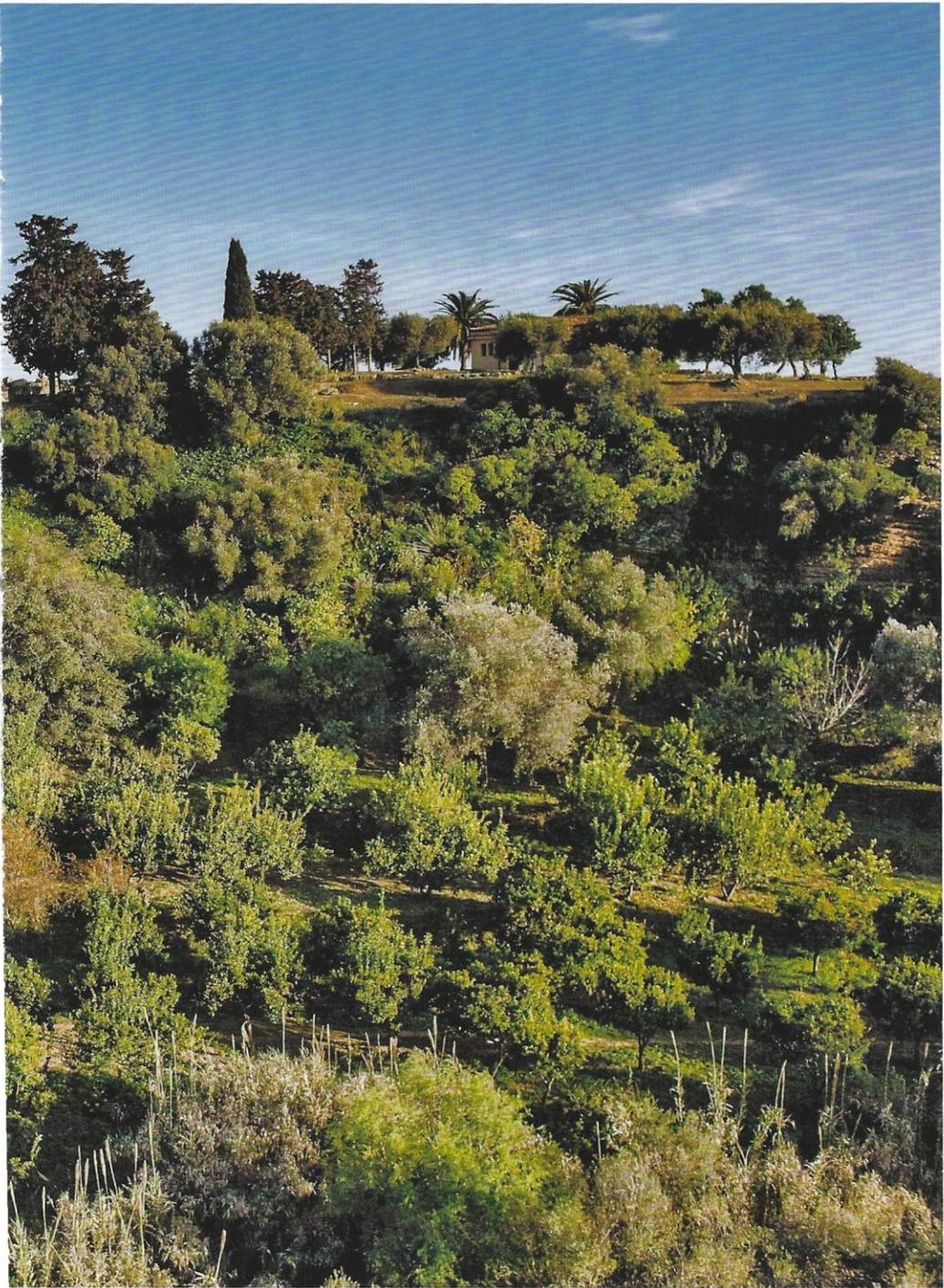
After visiting the Sanctuary of the Chthonic Deities, the Temple of Castor and Pollux and Temple L, moving westwards in the direction of the Temple of Vulcan, in the far south-western corner of the Hill of the Temples and down a slope is the Garden of the Kolymbetra.

The Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (1st century BC) tells the story of how, after the major victory against the Carthaginians by the Greeks of Sicily, guided by Agrigento and Syracuse in the Battle of Himera of 480 BC, a great number of fugitives sought safety in the interior of the island, ending up in the hands of the people of Agrigento.

Reduced to slavery, the surviving Carthaginians were exploited by the tyrant of Agrigento, Theron, as zero-cost labourers to make various public works in the city, such as the so-called Phaeax aqueducts and the large pool of water known as Kolymbetra.

After, for centuries, maintaining the appearance of a lush "garden", the term used in Sicilian tradition to refer to a citrus grove, the Kolymbetra was essentially abandoned in the 20th century owing to a lack of water, which resulted in its becoming an area overrun by brambles. In an attempt to regenerate it, the Sicily Region in 1999 decided to license it free of charge for twenty-five years to FAI (Fondo per l'Am-





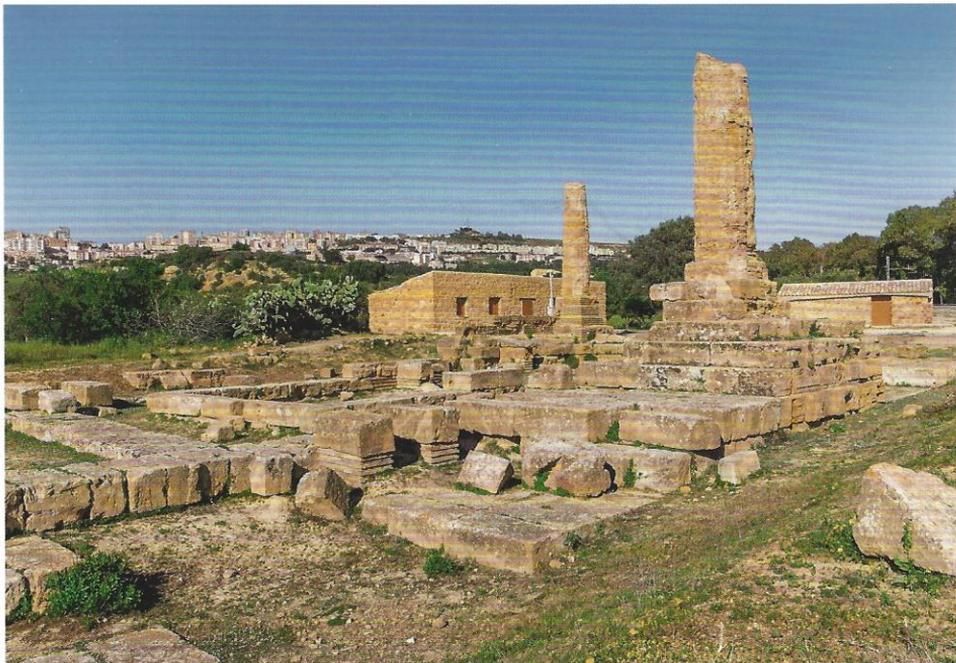
biente Italiano, Italian Environmental Fund), which in the month of November 2001 finally reopened this splendid corner of Agrigento to the public. Spread over a surface area of five hectares, growing in some of the steeper internal areas are plant species such as broom, terebinth, myrtle, lentiscus, all of which are typical of the Mediterranean maquis. In the flatter land along the river, weeping willows and poplars grow, while a lush citrus grove has various ancient plant species – orange, tangerine and lemon – that have essentially disappeared today. Saracen olives, almonds and prickly pears, but also mulberries and carob trees thrive in the drier areas.

Temple of Vulcan

Leaving the lush Kolymbetra behind and following the path westwards, visitors reach a hill that closes off the ridge of the Valley of the Temples in the far south-western corner. Here, on a sloping upland plain overlooking the valley of the River Hypsas (now Sant'Anna), are the remains of a temple traditionally dedicated to the god Vulcan – although there is no archaeological proof of this.

Vulcan, son of Jupiter, was born, for once, not as a result of an extramarital affair, but from a proper marriage between the king of the gods and Juno. According to a very ancient tradition, also told in Homer's poems, his father hurled him down from Olympus for having sided with his mother during an argument between the divine couple. The young god landed on the island of Lemnos where he survived but developed a limp as a result of his fall. Another version of the myth is that it was Vulcan's mother who threw him down to Earth, irritated because he was born lame, and that he was saved, taken in and nurtured by some nymphs. According to a very famous tradition Vulcan married Venus, the goddess of beauty and love, but was soon betrayed by her when she fell in love with the handsome Mars, god of war. After catching the two lovers making love, Vulcan chained them to the bed they were lying on to the great amusement of the other gods. A deity associated with fire and blacksmithing, but also with volcanic phenomena, for which Sicily was also famous in Antiquity, the cult of Vulcan was very widespread on the island, especially near Mount Etna, where, according to tradition, the god's "workshop" was located.

The Doric temple (20.66 × 42.82 metres) was erected in the second half of the 5th century BC (430 BC) on top of a four-step basement. Originally built of blocks of local limestone, nothing remains of the temple today except for two fluted columns without a capital, which in any case allow us to reconstruct approximately what the structure



Temple of Vulcan

must have been like: peripteral, hexastyle, hence with six columns on the short sides and thirteen on the long ones.

It is probably the most recent of the sanctuaries built along the southern edge of the Hill of the Temples. Its rather late origin is proven by the mixture of Doric and Ionic elements that distinguish it: the columns that have survived are no doubt of the Doric order, while the flattening of the fluting is an example of the Ionic style, as is the typical ovolo and dentil motif that completed the upper part of the cornice, just under the pediment, for which traces were found during archaeological excavations. Inside the colonnade was the cella, divided into a pronaos, a naos and an opisthodomos, the first and last *distili in antis*. This large temple had englobed the remains of a more ancient, smaller temple (6.50 × 13.25 metres), prostyle (that is, with a row of free-standing columns before the access to the pronaos), dated to the mid-6th century BC. Several polychrome terracotta elements that once decorated the roof of this earlier Archaic sacellum have been discovered, and are now housed at the Archaeological Museum.

Temple of Asclepius

After leaving through Gate IV (the ancient Porta Aurea) and crossing Strada Statale 115, a path leads to the remains of Temple H, known

Partial view of the
Temple of Asclepius



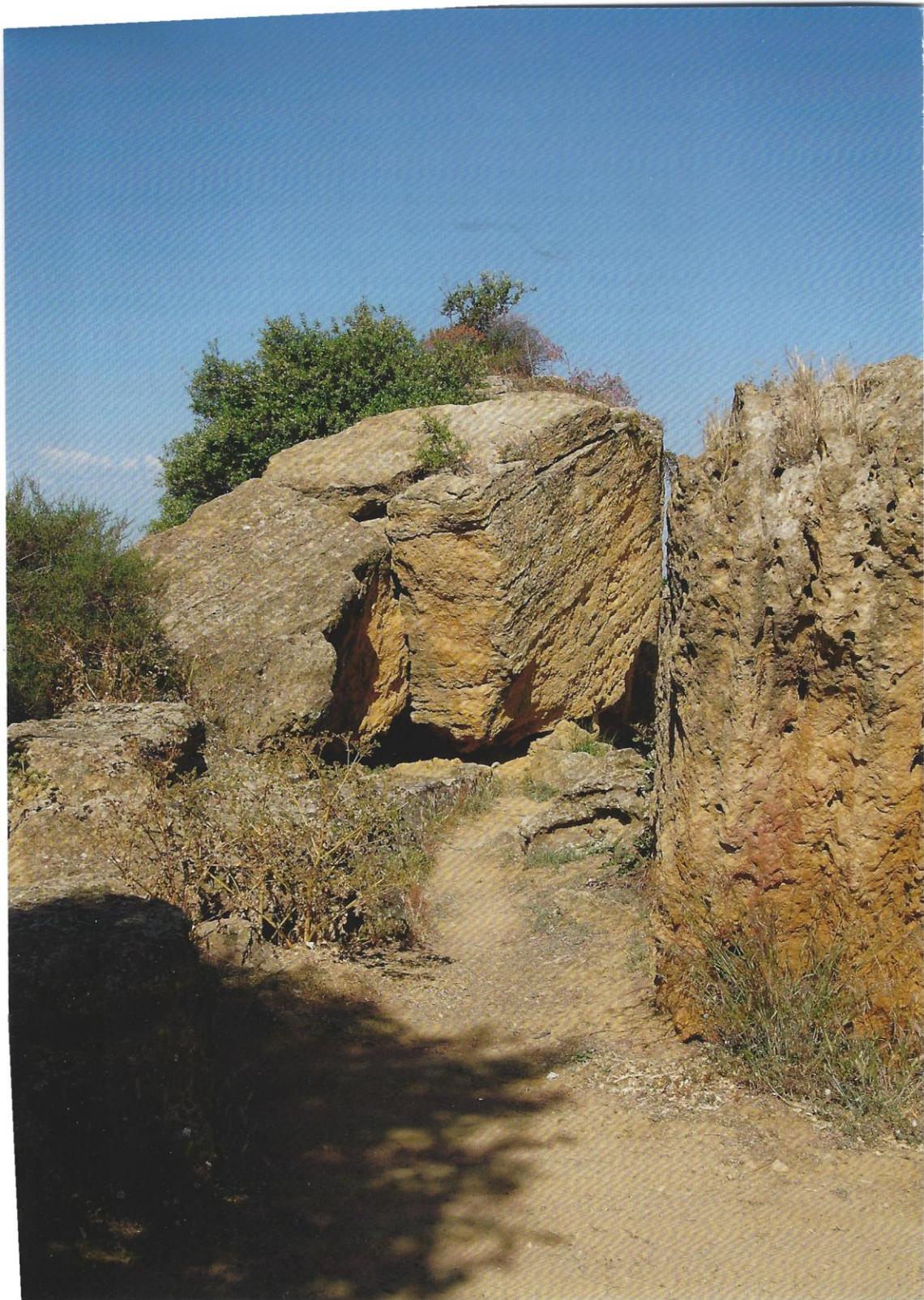
as the Temple of Asclepius, the god of medicine, son of Apollo. The building is located outside the walls near a bend in the River Akragas (now San Biagio), in an area where the archaeological finds indicate that it was already frequented in the Archaic period.

What can be seen of the temple today, dated from the late 5th century BC, and of the area of the sanctuary, monumentalized in the following century, allows us to get some idea of the religious centre identified in 1926 when, on the initiative of Pirro Marconi and thanks to the funding of the English Captain Alexander Hardcastle, a farmhouse that engulfed the remaining elevations of the templar edifice was demolished. Surrounded by a wall, the monumental complex features the foundations of two colonnaded porticoes that, according to scholars, had areas

where the pilgrims travelling to the sanctuary of the god of medicine to ask to be healed could be welcomed and cared for. Healing might be achieved by ritual bathing or by following the indications that Asclepius delivered when he appeared to the devout as they slept, inside a sacred and inaccessible space (*abaton*) that archaeologists believe can be identified as a space discovered in the portico.

The remains of an altar with an enclosure and a small temple with a pronaos and a cella were also found in the open area at the centre of the complex; they contained several terracotta ex votos that generally reproduced the anatomical part that needed to be healed and for which the god's intervention was requested. Also discovered were the remains of a large cistern that could contain up to fifty thousand litres of water, as well as the basin of a fountain.

Rising up amidst these edifices is the temple of Asclepius: it is a *distilo in antis* temple which could be reached by climbing up a ramp that allowed one to enter the pronaos, and also solved the problem of the unevenness of the three-step foundation (*crepidoma*). After crossing the pronaos, before coming through the door of the cella, there was access to two side staircases that could be used to climb up to the roof. Continuing along, one entered the god's naos, a rectangular space of which all that is visible today is a portion of the posterior wall with, on the exterior, two fluted half columns attached to the masonry ending with angular pilasters. The semi-columns were supposed to simulate the presence of the opisthodomos, which is actually missing (and for this reason the building is also referred to as a pseudo-opisthodomos). Between 2000 and 2006 the Park of the Valley of the Temples, in collaboration with the Monuments and Fine Arts Services, submitted the building to interventions aimed at the static consolidation of the structure and the washing of the stone surfaces.



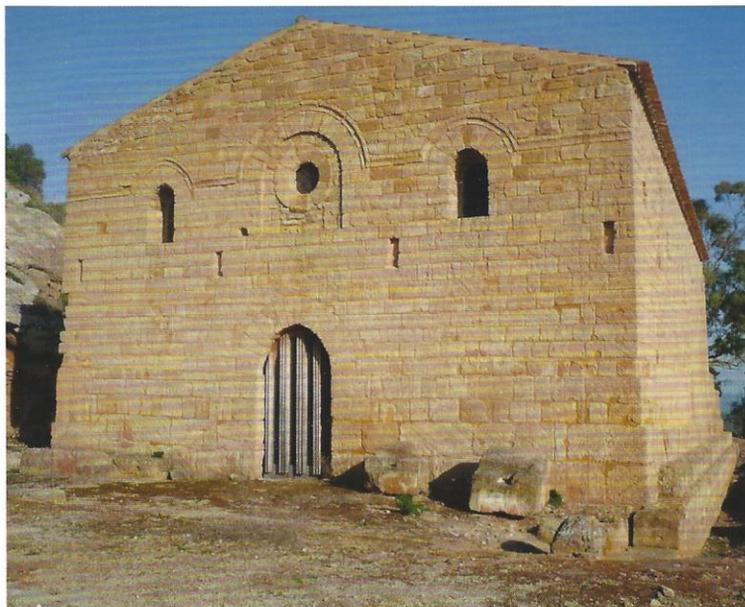
Another sacred site, in addition to the one located on the Hill of the Temples, was identified on the southern side of the Rupe Atenea overlooking from the east the ancient built-up area in the valley. On this rocky, naturally fortified ridge, the remains of two towers were found, dated to the late 5th century BC, one of which was destroyed in the 4th century BC when a terraced wall was built to support and reinforce a structure used to process and press olives. By walking down Via Demetra you reach the square opposite the Cemetery of Bonamorone: from this point, after crossing the entrance to the archaeological area of Rupe Atenea, it is a short walk along the unpaved road that climbs up towards the church of San Biagio. The remains of an ancient furrow carved in the rock with evident tracks left by the cart wheels are still visible.

The **Church of San Biagio** is a medieval building from the Norman period (12th century) with a single nave and a semicircular apse looking east. It lies over the foundation of an ancient temple dated to around 470 BC and made of blocks of local limestone. The church, characterized by a simple facade with an entrance portal featuring a pointed arch, occupies by its entire width and over half of its length the area of the ancient Doric temple *distilo in antis* (13.30 × 30.20 metres) using its naos, while the foundations of the entrance pronaos are still clearly visible on the outside of the church apse.

Scholars have hypothesized that the temple was consecrated to **Demeter**, based on the finding, close to the perimeter wall, of a pair of altars with a circular plan and a votive well containing offerings related to the cult of the goddess and the rites connected to her such as, for example, numerous lanterns. These are now housed at







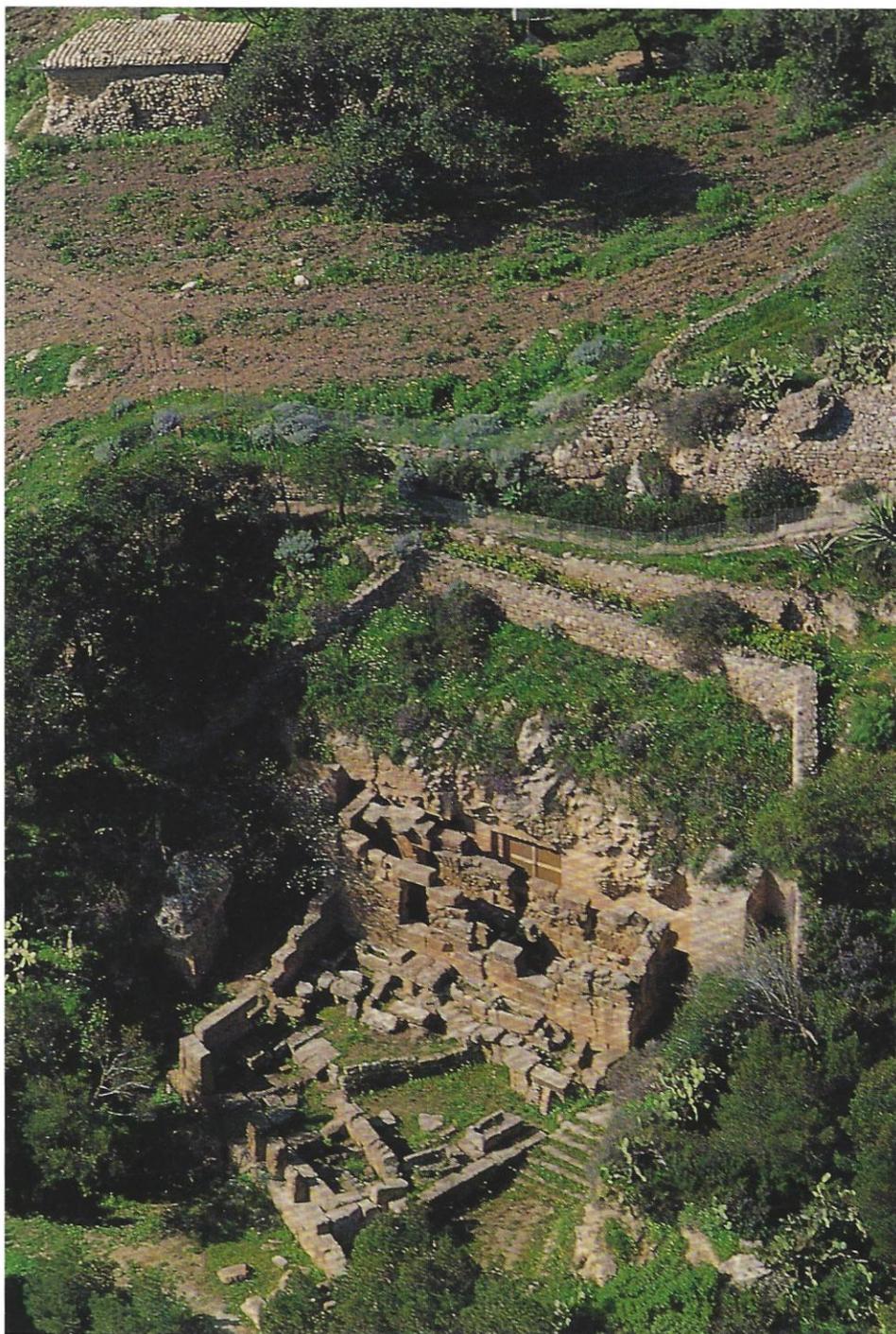
Facade of the
Church of San
Biagio

View from above
of the Rupestrian
Sanctuary of
Demeter

the Archaeological Museum along with a part of the cyma (cornice) featuring lion's head water spouts which characterized the ancient development of the pediment outside. Inside the church, instead, are some parts of the templar *geison*. These architectural artefacts were discovered on the occasion of the excavations carried out in the 1920s.

Also worthy of note is the fact that just south of the area of the ancient temple, the famous statue known as *Ephesus of Agrigento* (now at the Archaeological Museum) was found inside a cistern in 1897. Between the 15th and 16th centuries, the Church of San Biagio was modified internally by the addition of four columns to support the round arches in the centre, and the small arcades to the sides, as well as the raising of the area of the presbytery.

During the restoration work carried out in 2000, under the direction of the Archaeological Park of Agrigento and the Monuments and Fine Arts Service, some interesting discoveries were made beneath the church floor. In particular, in the north-western corner an ancient cistern excavated in the rocky embankment was found, which can be related to the ancient templar edifice and whose presence aroused discussion among the scholars in regard to the possibility of the cult of water in ancient times, perhaps also pursued in Post-Antiquity with the dedication to San Biagio (Saint Blaise) who, according to tradition, also used water due to its medicinal properties.





Rupestrian Sanctuary of Demeter or San Biagio (Saint Blaise)

As you leave the Church of San Biagio-Temple of Demeter, walk back in the direction you came from and you'll find a steep set of steps carved in the rock. This leads to the remains of the so-called Rupestrian Sanctuary of San Biagio.

The complex, which was excavated in the 1920s by Pirro Marconi, is located outside the city walls on the north-eastern slopes of the Rupe Atenea and beneath the rocky platform where the Church of San Biagio-Temple of Demeter are situated.

Located to the west, close to a rocky wall featuring natural grottoes, are the remains of a building with a rectangular plan; this is the main body of the complex. This eastwards-facing building overlooks an enclosed trapezoidal area, thought to be a square.

Although scholars have always agreed on the area's sacred function, their ideas as to whom the cult was dedicated to differ. Traditionally, the complex is said to have been dedicated to the Chthonic Deities Demeter and Persephone; not just because the Temple of Demeter stands above the Rupe Atenea, but also because several votive offerings and terracotta busts related to their cult have been found. Another hypothesis says that the complex was dedicated to the cult of the nymphs, given the abundance of water in the area. Lastly, recent

The main body
of the Rupestrian
Sanctuary
of Demeter

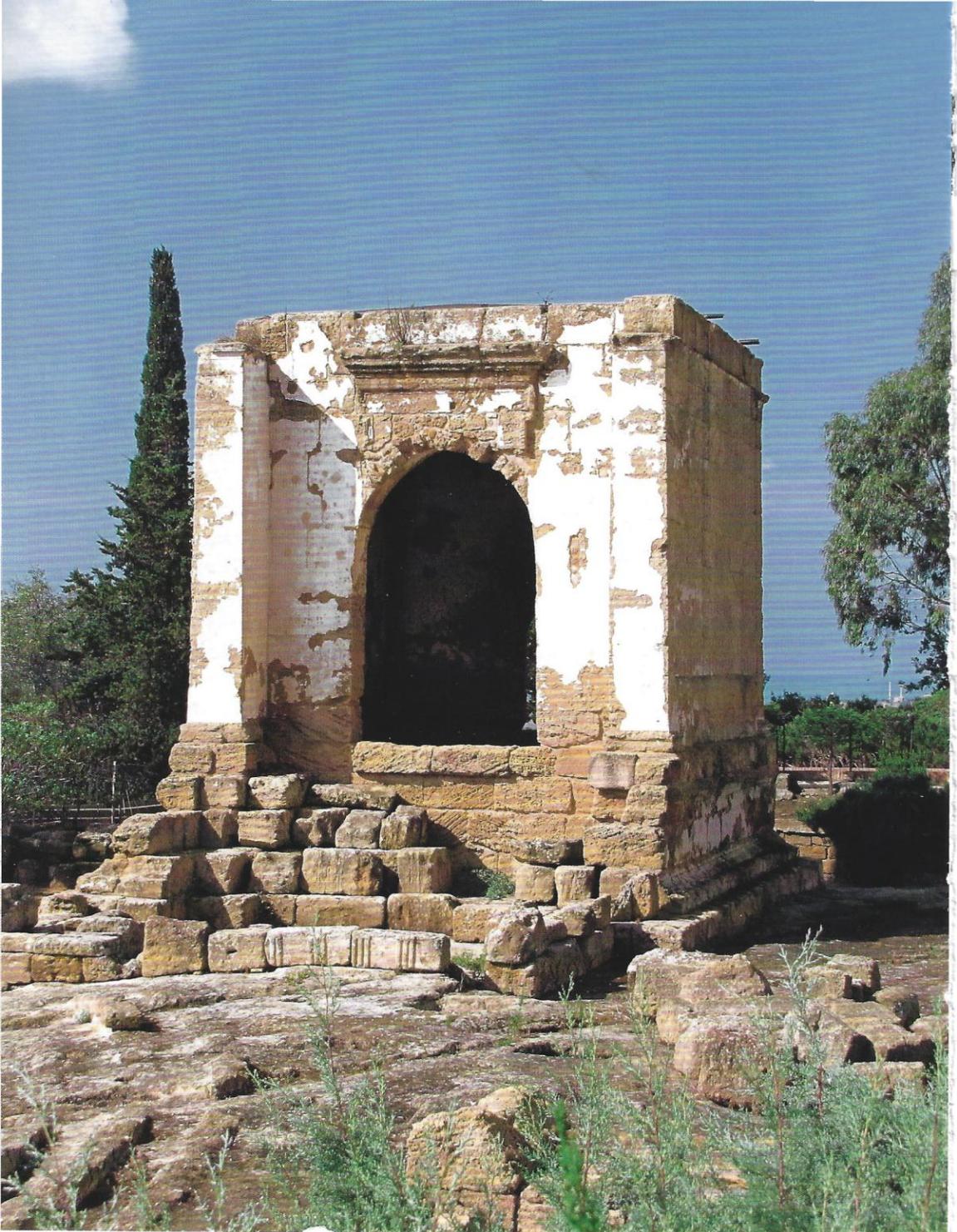
studies instead suggest that the complex was an articulated fountain from the Hellenistic period.

What is visible of the complex today is a building with a rectangular plan (3.02 × 12.32 metres) made from blocks of local limestone. One of its long sides leans up against the rocky wall and engages, almost in the middle, with the entrance to two grottoes that mark the start of the same number of connecting galleries where numerous votive offerings were discovered.

Based on the studies, this structure is believed to develop on two levels; the lower one, featuring two spaces separated by a low wall, was used as an area to collect water flowing from a nearby source thanks to a conduit carved in the rock that opened in the north-western corner. Hence, the lower part of the building was meant to serve as a basin to collect water divided into two cistern-rooms: depending on what was needed, the water could be drawn either directly from the cistern-rooms, which could be reached from the east where the front of the edifice opens onto the square, or from the western side through the cavity wall situated between the masonry of the edifice and the rocky wall.

During a subsequent phase, a conduit was built that brought the water directly to the outside of the building, flowing out of the eastern side close to where a trapezoidal square encircled by a wall was situated. The plan differed from that of the main body also owing to its direction, and has been interpreted by the experts as a choice made when constructing the work that would have followed the natural shape of the area. Moreover, it was also affected by episodes of instability and the actual "slipping" of this portion of the complex in a north-easterly direction.

Inside the square communicating pools at different heights were discovered, on the bottom of which the water was collected when it reached the end of its course.



The Greek Archaic, Classical, Hellenistic Built-Up Area

Archaeological excavations have confirmed that by the end of the 6th century BC in the Valley of the Temples the most ancient built-up area of Akragas had already been implanted and organized according to the orderly orthogonal development that the city would then maintain and further develop in the following centuries. As early as the Archaic period, the east-west axes (*plateiai* in Greek) constituted the regulating elements of the entire built-up area intersecting with the north-south axes (*stenopoi* in Greek). The city plan thus developed in long, narrow blocks, intersected by the road system. The end date for the urban composition has traditionally been set at around 480 BC, when the Temple of Jupiter was built, whose position corresponds to the city plan.

Several interesting infrastructural interventions are dated to the following century, under the government of the tyrant Theron (from 488 to 472 BC); one of these is the grandiose hydraulic work designed by Phaeax. Phaeax conceived a system to capture the water flowing from the reliefs of the Rupe Atenea and the Hill of Girgenti, which canals dug into the rock then led to the various parts of the valley. Some of these ended their course by flowing into the Kolymbetra, located at the end of the Hill of the Temples to the west. Diodorus Siculus (1st century BC) wrote that in order to realize this complex of **Phaeax aqueducts**, Theron used the Carthaginian prisoners who had been captured after his victory in the Battle of Himera (480 BC).

In the 5th century BC, on the **hilltop of San Nicola**, in the Upper Agora, several sacred and civil buildings were erected. At the end of the century, in 406 BC, the city was conquered and destroyed by the Carthaginians. Subsequently, based on the peace agreements between Carthage and Dionysius I of Syracuse (405–404 BC), the people of Akra-

gas were allowed back into the city, but they were forbidden from building defensive walls and burdened by a tax they had to pay to Carthage. From that moment onwards, and until the mid-4th century BC, began the slow recovery of the ancient built-up area; according to the experts, this phase might be related to the Punic portion of the built-up area located close to Gate II, on the eastern slope of the Rupe Atenea. In the second half of the 4th century BC, during the phase that coincides with the period of Timoleon, there was a general revival of the built-up area. This phase coincides with the repairs made to the encircling walls and with the revival of the monumentalization on the Hill of the Temples, in particular in the western sector located close to the Temple of Jupiter. The Rupestrian Sanctuary of San Biagio was built outside the walls, on the slopes of the Rupe Atenea.

The theme of the urban development of the built-up centre, of how it came about and how long it took has for decades been at the centre of studies that began in the 1950s with Pietro Griffò and Giulio Schmiedt who, also using what was considered to be pioneering aerial photography at the time, tried to understand and reconstruct how the city grew.

In recent years, thanks to the use of new technological applications in the field of cultural heritage, the Park of the Valley of the Temples together with the University of Catania and Bari Polytechnic have presented a new design for the site plan of the ancient built-up area. Thanks to the studies conducted in the field using high-precision instruments such as a GNSS (*Global Navigation Satellite System*) and a laser scanner, all the elements required to be able to reproduce an accurate, detailed plan (for instance, detecting and positioning the remains of ancient masonry not previously inserted and known of), processed thanks to GIS (*Geographic Information System*) technology, have been determined.

Among the most interesting results was the identification in 2016 of the **Ancient Theatre**, architecture that had been sought for centuries, also based on the testimonies of those who, like the Dominican friar Tommaso Fazello, said they had seen the ruins. Albeit limited to a few remains of foundations and works of containment, today we can safely say that the theatre of the ancient city of Akragas was located on a slope that descended along the southern side of the Agora and was thus part of the scenographic realizations during the Hellenistic period. From the cavea of the theatre the spectators could enjoy a broad view of the Hill of the Temples and in particular of the Temple of Concordia. As they await further results of the studies on the site, scholars have already observed that the theatre was built using a mixed system: a complex system of constructions was created in order to compensate for the area where the natural slope of the land prevented it from being functional.

Pages 72–73
 General view of
 the Ekklesiasterion
 with the Oratory
 of Phalaris in
 the background

Thanks to several ceramic and numismatic items found in the foundation pit, it was possible to date the start of construction to between the late 3rd and early 2nd centuries BC.

Poggio San Nicola and the Agora

In the 5th century BC the Agora on the hilltop of San Nicola was endowed with buildings used for sacred purposes. Between the 4th and 3rd centuries BC, the Ekklesiasterion and the Bouleuterion were built. They are not far from the Church of San Nicola (constructed in the 13th century by Cistercian monks in an area occupied by an older building from the Norman period) and the monastery where the Archaeological Museum is now located. On the southern side of the plateau the **Ekklesiasterion** was built, a construction that hosted the citizens' assembly (*ekklesia*). Dated to between the 4th and 3rd centuries BC, all that remains of the ancient structure today is part of the cavea excavated in the tuffaceous rock and sloping just slightly southwards; at the end of the nineteen rows of seats the remains of an ambulatory (1 metre in width) bordered by a parapet were brought to light. The discovery of several cavities in the rock have led to the hypothesis of the presence of a portico supported by wooden posts, completing the structure. Although the cavea is limited to a semicircular portion, this was enough to calculate the maximum diameter of the original circular complex (48 metres) as well as the maximum capacity (about three thousand people). Remains of the podium, from which the orators took turns speaking during the assemblies and that must originally have been located at the centre of the Ekklesiasterion, have not been found.

During the Roman period, when the Ekklesiasterion was no longer in use, the area was in part occupied, between the late 2nd-early 1st centuries BC, by the building erroneously referred to as the **Oratory of Phalaris**, in the past believed to be the remains of the palace of Phalaris (a tyrant of Agrigento from 572 to 556 BC), but also a *heroon* or funeral monument of a rich Roman family. It is actually a Roman-type temple (13 × 9 metres) built on a shaped podium (1.60 metres tall) which could be reached by climbing a set of steps at the front.

A prostyle temple, with four Ionic columns (tetrastyle) leading into the pronaos, it ended with the naos (6 × 5.30 metres), which is the only portion of the ancient temple to have survived, thanks to its use during the Norman period as the chapel of the monastery located on the plateau of San Nicola. This explains why the environment appears to have been tampered with (enlargement of the access to the cella ending with a pointed arch) and modified (a barrel vault in the interior and the construction of an apse in the eastern wall).







On the other side, towards the south, between the late 4th and early 3rd centuries BC, the **Bouleuterion** (seat of the *boulè*, assembly of representatives of the people) was built. It has a semicircular cavea that was originally situated inside an enclosed rectangular area with a roof supported by columns. To the side of the building a portico was built next to the north-south axis, intersecting with the nearby east-west axis, giving this area a regular plan as well. The sandstone cavea has six rows of seats which can be reached by four paths with steps. In the Roman period, the building (perhaps later transformed into an odeon, a building used for singing performances) was characterized by a mosaic floor in both the orchestra and porticoed areas.

In the Augustan age, after work to reinforce the masonry and artificially enlarge the area, a temple on a podium of the Roman type was built at the centre over a broad area (60 × 36 metres) situated to the north and bordered by a U-shaped portico. The building, excavated in the late 1990s by Ernesto De Miro and thought to be an *Iseion*, has more recently been studied by the Bari Polytechnic which, also thanks to the new technological aids made available for studies related to cultural heritage, has been able to more accurately establish the date of the monument and identify two distinct constructive phases. The first phase,

View of the
Upper Agora

dated to the 1st century BC, involved the realization of an *oikos*-type temple set on a podium with steps in front. In actual fact, the building was not completed before the 1st century AD (hypothetically starting from the Tiberian period, 14–37 AD).

The building was completed in this second phase, but with changes to the earlier project. Elements were added that had not initially been planned: for example, a tribune with side steps, built on the front of the building in place of the original access flight of steps, and a wall structure with a single room not preceded by either a colonnade or a pronaos.

The structure became the centre of an area used for forensic purposes surrounded by four porticoes supported by columns and a Doric entablature. Three of the four porticoes leading outwards featured simple, linear masonry without ornamentation. The southern portico, instead, must have had masonry on the outside separated by pillars, framing the entrance to the square at the centre. This could be reached by a flight of stairs that also made up for the change in level between the street and the centre of the area.

During the course of the excavations various architectural elements were recovered (for example, the lion's head water spouts probably arranged on the outer masonry of the porticoes), making it easier to graphically reconstruct the temple. Also found were four marble statues representing four toga-clad men. Thanks to the style of the toga, the statues, all of which headless, were identified as being coherent with the overall date corresponding to the Julio-Claudian phase.

In 2005, two statues were found close to the *avant-corps* of the temple, while there are still no records concerning the place where the other two works were found, which are in any case also attributed to the temple. Experts have hypothesized that the statues represented a tribute to figures, perhaps local ones, who had distinguished themselves for public activity and that the city wanted to celebrate. These findings are now preserved at the Archaeological Museum.

The building of the **Ginnasio** has been identified southwest of the Agora, on a lower terrace. The interesting remains of a large porticoed area of the complex have been found, parallel to a *stenopos* of the city, which was thought to be a sort of covered palaestra where physical exercise could be done. A long track was identified, whose final northern segment was flanked by a double row of stone seats.

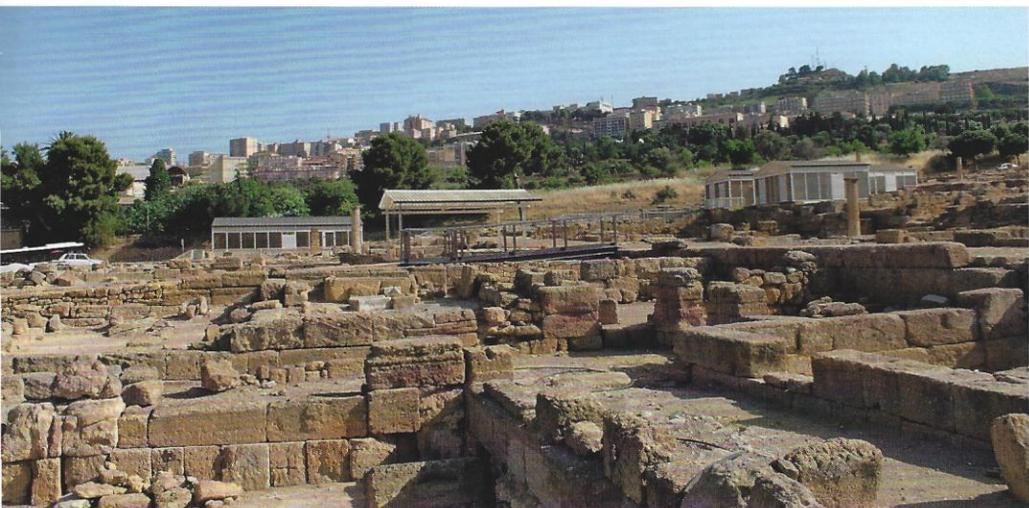
Whereas in the 1950s a portion of these seats was discovered with an inscription dedicated to Mercury and Hercules (now in the Archaeological Museum), in more recent years an inscription has been found with an acclamation to Augustus, to whom the maintenance and renovation were due. In the early 4th century a part of the area was destroyed and,

in the place where there were seats, a building with a circular plan was erected flanked by rectangular buildings. After a long period of abandonment starting from the Early Middle Ages, a kiln to make pottery and a press to make wine were installed here.

Hellenic-Roman Quarter

With the Roman age and the period of peace following the two Punic Wars, a new building and regeneration phase took place in the built-up area: this was particularly observed on the occasion of the excavations of the **Hellenic-Roman Quarter** identified in Contrada San Nicola. The quarter, dated from the 2nd–1st century BC, is characterized by four blocks (*insulae*) framed by orthogonal intersections between *plateiai* and *stenopoi* overlapping the older routes. Furthermore, it was during this phase that the blocks were divided longitudinally by canals (*ambitus*) which, in addition to separating the individual houses, were functional to the management of water drainage. The buildings were built by assembling sandstone blocks without a binder, as attested to in past constructions; however, the use of binders (but not of *opus coementicium*) has on rare occasions been recorded.

Until the 4th century AD the Roman quarter was populated and bustling with life, and had many shops (*tabernae*) and other commercial activities located along the streets. During the imperial period, particularly between the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, the built-up area prospered thanks also to the flourishing extraction and sale of sulphur, as documented by archaeological studies. The excavations have brought to light about thirty homes that were catalogued and studied based on their site plan and development: houses with a peristyle (Hellenistic type), houses with an atrium characterized at the centre by a pool to collect rain and surrounded by a peristyle (Roman type), and, lastly, houses with an aisle between the entrance atrium and the various rooms. The houses excavated until now have led to the discovery of precious details inside, such as, for example, the floors. Depending on how wealthy the owner was and the function of the room, these could consist of a simple layer of *opus signinum* (broken tiles and other fragments mixed with lime and mortar) with a few decorative marble tiles, by black and white mosaics featuring essential, simple geometric or plant motifs (especially during the 1st–2nd centuries AD), or, starting in the 3rd century AD, polychrome mosaics with figured scenes (zoomorphic and plant-like decorations); some of the designs were almost abstract (one example can be found in the **House of the Abstract Master** so called for the mosaic found there in which the tiles are arranged to imitate marble tarsias). In addition to the floors, in many cases the remains of



Partial view
of the Hellenic-
Roman Quarter

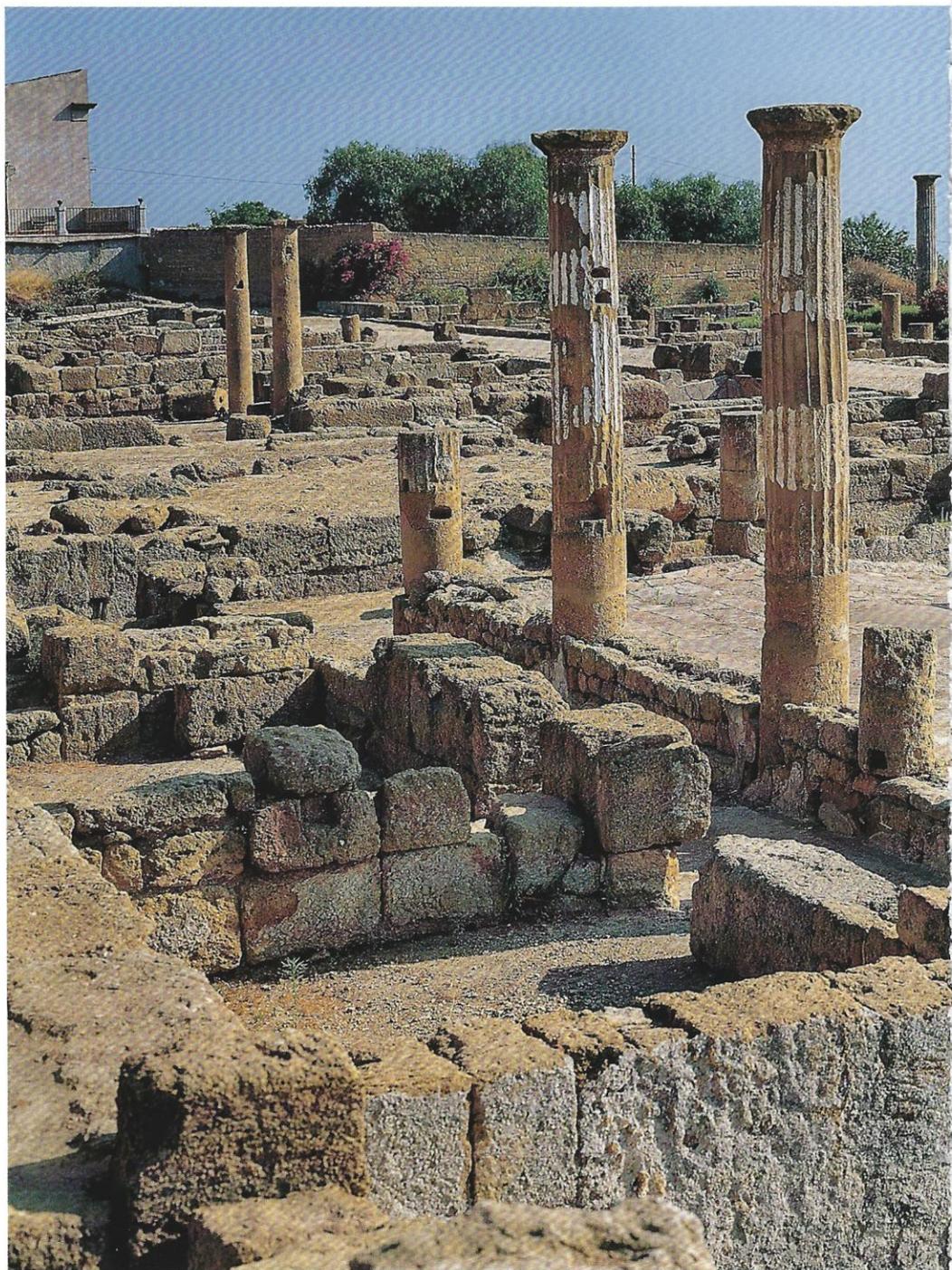
Pages 78–79
Remains of the
patrician homes
in the Hellenic-
Roman Quarter

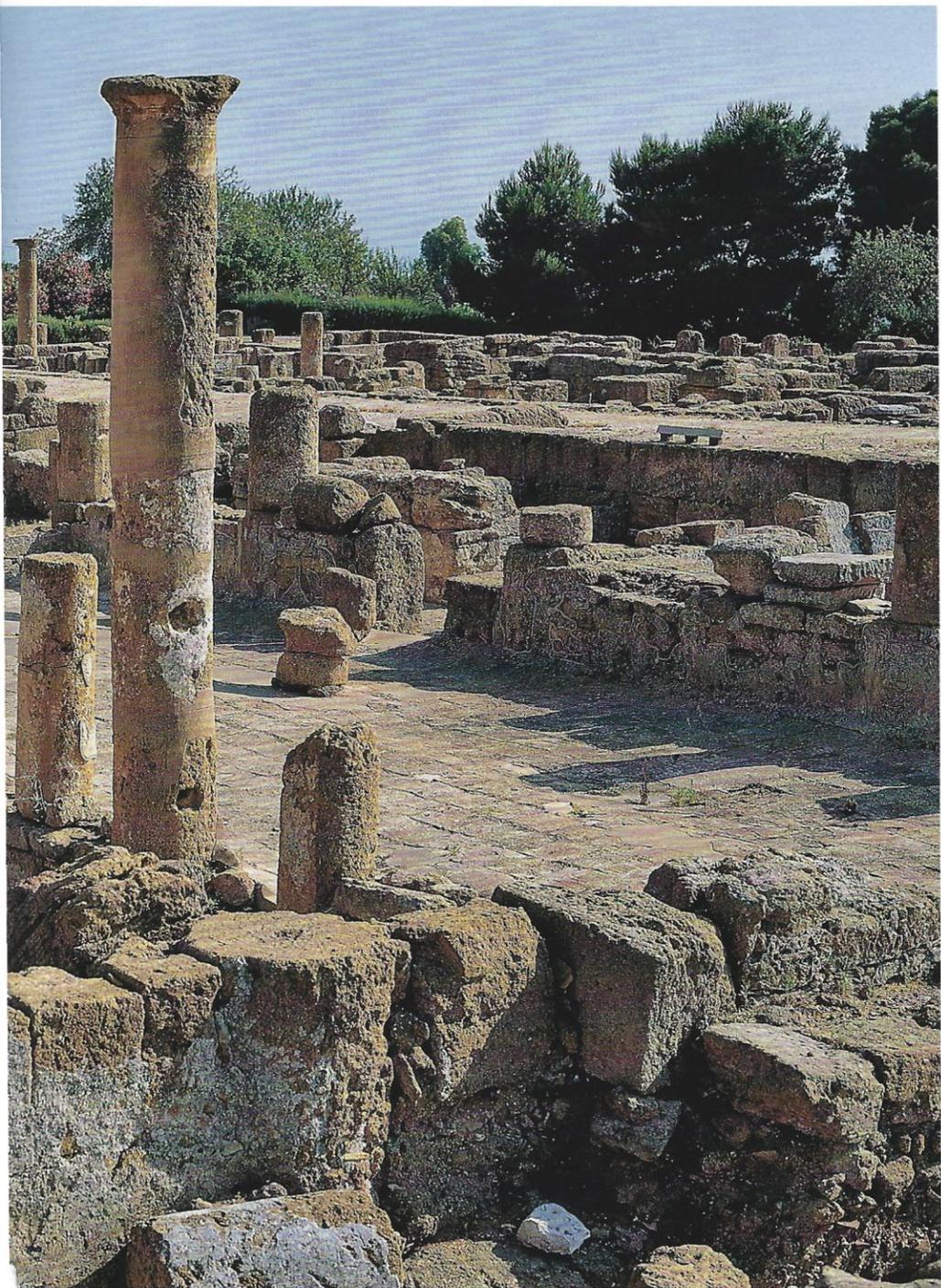
layers of plaster and traces of wall painting were found, indicating the great care and attention that went into decorating and looking after these houses. The excavations document that there was a moment in time when many buildings were restructured and modified, for example, by dividing rooms that were originally large into several smaller ones, but also by closing the peristyle surrounding the entrance atrium with walls built between the columns of the portico (an example of this is the **House of the Cryptoporticus**). These changes, along with the raising of the floor levels, the destruction of some lavish floors and their replacement with simpler, poorer finishing that the experts have observed in many houses, reached a peak in the 5th century.

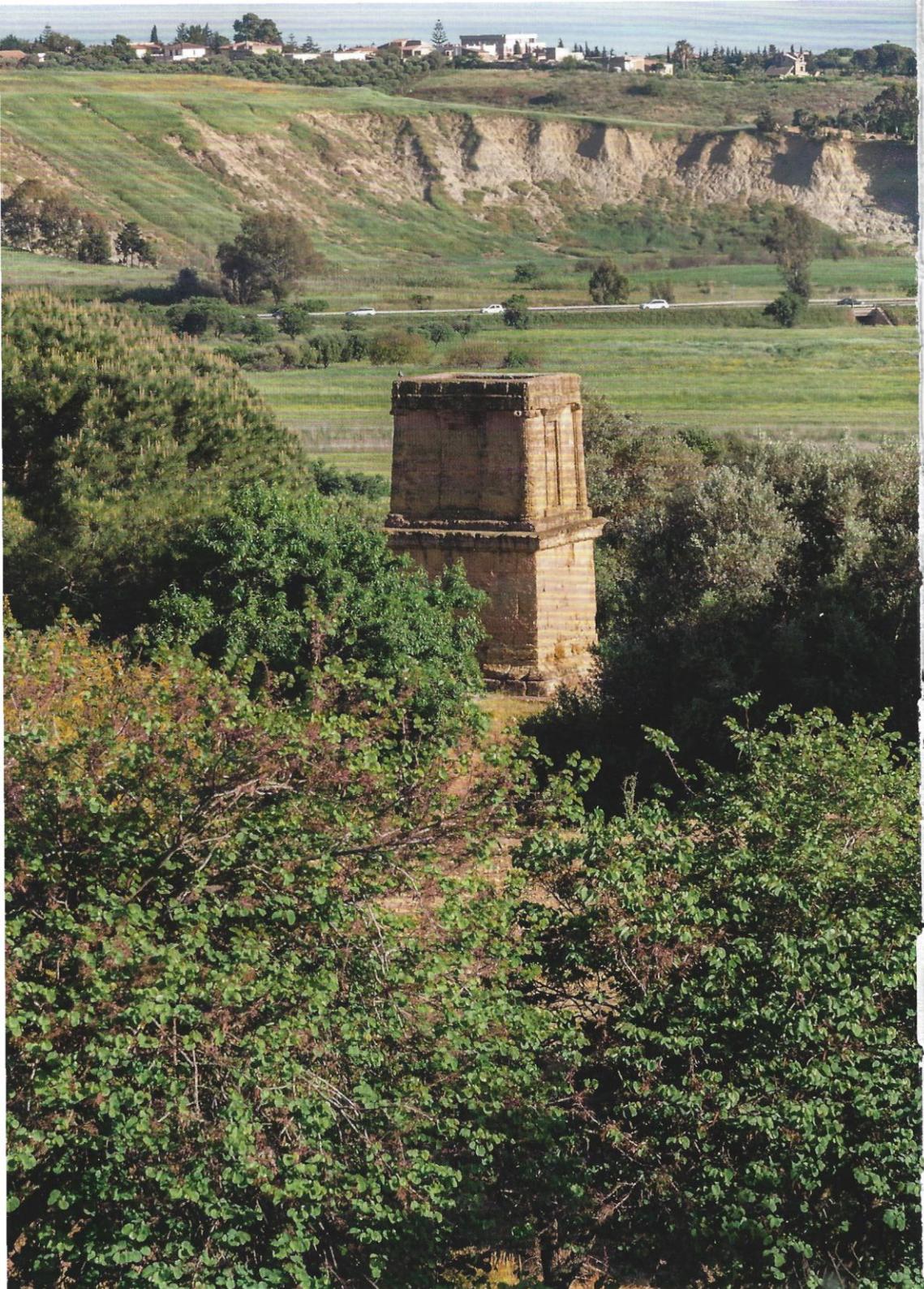
In the Early Middle Ages, the quarter was occupied by several graves, at times excavated directly in the earth, at others made from a stone coffin. From the 8th century the built-up area in the Valley of the Temples was abandoned and on the Hill of Girgenti a new chapter began in the millenary history of the city of Agrigento.

The Abandonment of the Ancient Built-Up Area

From the 4th century onwards, the city began a slow decline. In particular, in the 5th century, a small Early Christian cemeterial basilica was built in the deep valley of San Biagio, while a Christian church is recorded to have existed in the sources and based on several architectural findings. In the late 6th century, Gregory Bishop of Agrigento (from 591 to 630) consecrated the Temple of Concordia to Saints Peter and Paul.







Greek Necropoles

According to ancient tradition, several necropoles were discovered outside the city walls. These were the ancient cemeteries of the Greek and Roman ages, that is, the “cities of the dead” based on the etymology of the Greek word.

Akin to the excavations conducted inside the walls of ancient Agrigento, studies carried out in these areas until the present time offer scholars useful elements not just to learn more about the history of the city and its inhabitants, but also to further our own knowledge, for instance, as concerns the painted pottery imported from Attica. A remarkable number of these objects can be viewed at the Archaeological Museum.

As concerns the funeral rite, there are records of the type of burial that called for the inhumation of the deceased, who was lain inside ditches dug into tufaceous rock lined with sheets of stone or large tiles, as well as of cremation, where the ashes of the deceased were stored in terracotta vases, which were in turn placed inside wells that were generally quadrangular in shape, also dug into the tufa.

Among the necropoles that can be referred to the oldest period (6th century BC) is the one discovered in **contrada Maddalusa**, located to the west of the outlet of the River Akragas (now San Biagio). This is characterized by interesting burials dated from the first half of the 6th century BC which are related to the presence of a built-up area connected to the *emporion* (trading post) that was established near the mouth of the river.

Another necropolis was found in **contrada Pezzino**, west of the River Hypsas (now Sant’Anna), in a vast area outside the city between Gates VI and VII. Already identified in the late 19th century, it be-



gan to be excavated in the 1980s. Archaeological studies tell us that there were four phases in the use of the area, from the 6th century BC (Archaic period) to the 4th–3rd century BC (Hellenistic period). The necropolis has two unique features: it is organized into two areas separated by a regulating street axis and it is characterized by several “clusters” of burial sites that have led scholars to hypothesize an arrangement of graves for families. This method was already attested to during the most ancient period (6th century BC), to which are dated, for example, two cremation graves located inside a single pit divided into two parts: the remains of each of the two deceased were contained in a large amphora used as a cinerary urn. More than the actual burial types, the grave goods found inside the tombs have allowed scholars to date the necropolis in phases, and to determine trade-related contacts between ancient Agrigento and the various centres in the Mediterranean, first among which Greece. To this regard, of particular interest, for instance, are the Corinthian ceramics with plant or animal decorations from the 6th century BC (phase I), as well as the beautiful Attic *lèkythoi* (vases with a narrow body, one handle and a flared lip, generally used to hold perfumes, employed in the funeral rite) dated to between the end of the 6th and the early decades of the following century (530–480 BC; phase II). For phase III (480–430 BC), the period when the cemetery area underwent the greatest development, there are records of inhumation graves dug into the rock, as well as of cavities containing ceramic kraters used as cinerary urns. The extraordinarily artistic red-figured and black-background vases of Athenian provenance are dated to the five central decades of the 5th century BC. What stands out among them is an Attic calyx krater (500–490 BC), attributed to the Kleophrades Painter, now in the collection of the Archaeological Museum. As for the fourth and last phase when the burial area was used (late 4th–3rd centuries BC), scholars have noted that grave goods were more modest as compared with those of the previous period, with structures now limited to simple earth pits or the reuse of older graves. As part of the picture of the overall decline that characterized the area during this phase, we should recall the episode described by the historian Diodorus, according to whom in 406 BC, when the Carthaginians besieged Agrigento, Hannibal and Himilco were said to have destroyed the funeral monuments to get the material they needed for their task: scholars have hypothesized that the destruction was to the detriment of the necropolis in Pezzino. Another necropolis of great interest is the one identified in **contrada Mosè**, along the street that used to connect ancient Agrigento (from

Gate II) with Gela. The scholars date the oldest grave goods to the 6th century BC, when most of the graves were built *alla cappuccina*, i.e. featuring a leaning tile roof instead of a horizontal slab. Also dated to this Archaic phase are some interesting Attic black-figure amphorae recurrently portraying military, heroic, or mythological figures. What the archaeologists have identified as a “purification pit” is instead dated to the 5th century BC. This type of grave was found to contain numerous terracotta statues of Demeter from the Archaic period.

It was during this period that this cemetery area developed the most, also in terms of its monuments.

Various cremation graves are documented for this period, with ashes stored in kraters, which were in turn placed inside well tombs. Worthy of interest to this regard is an elegant bronze krater, dated to the late 5th century BC, now in the collection of the Archaeological Museum: featuring swans’ heads handles, it was used as a cinerary urn inside a well tomb filled with ceramic vases.

Inhumation graves are also documented in this necropolis, located in structures made of square hewn sandstones. A marble box-like sarcophagus was found inside one of these graves, featuring a lid with sloping surfaces and *acroteria* at the angles; this too is on display at the Archaeological Museum.

Several groups of grave goods found in **Poggio Giache di Villaseta**, not far from the western side of the necropolis in Contrada Pezzino, have been dated to the 5th century BC. Excavations, carried out in the 1960s and directed by Graziella Fiorentini, have led to the finding of precious grave goods inside well tombs lined with plaster walls. Among the finds mention should be made of a decorated Attic bell krater (c. 420 BC) attributed to the Kleophon Painter, now in the Archaeological Museum.

A necropolis with chamber-like tombs, dug into the rock and introduced by architectural facades, was created in the 4th century BC outside the city, near Gate IX in **contrada Sottogas** (now Via Manzoni).

Roman Necropolis and the Tomb of Theron

Outside the city walls, leaving from Porta Aurea (Gate IV), in the area that extends southwards towards the sea and crosses the lowlands of San Gregorio, a vast suburban cemetery area has been identified; since the end of the 19th century, this area has been known as the “Giambertoni necropolis”. The sector is located on the slope of the Hill of the Temples, below the Temple of Concordia, in an

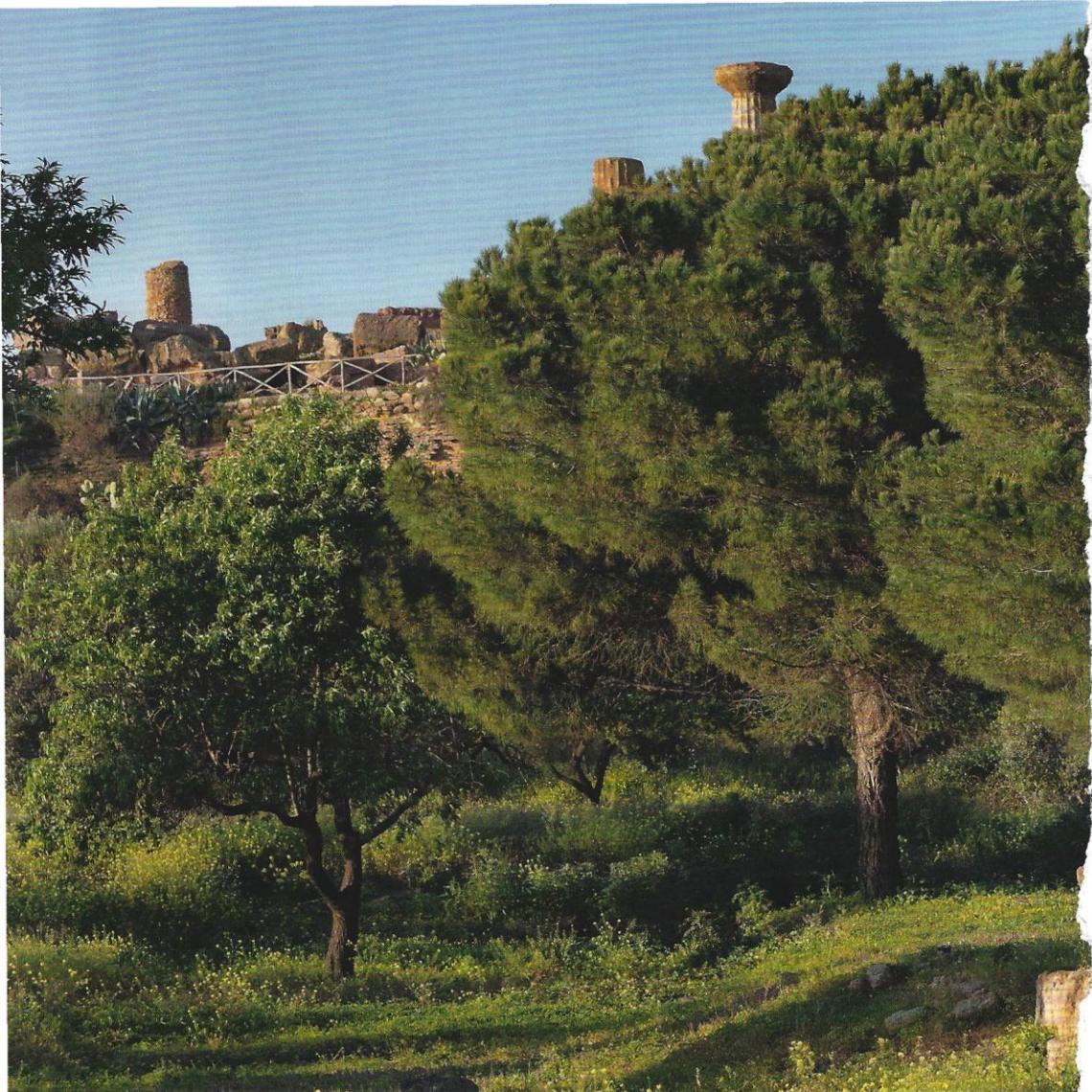


The Roman
necropolis

Pages 86–87
The Tomb of Theron
and the columns of
the Temple of
Hercules in the
background

area not far from the Fragapane Grotto where a large catacomb was later organized.

Most of the graves identified are dated to the Roman imperial period (1st–3rd centuries AD) and some of them, especially the ones located in the Giambertoni area, were reused in the Late Roman-Early Christian period (4th–6th centuries AD). In addition to the traditional burial in the ground, a box-like grave was also found, made up of blocks of local stone with a lid often complete with a grave marker (for example, a small-column stele), and a type of enclosure containing several tombs that may have belonged to the family circle. Among the most important findings in these burial sites and their grave goods are, for instance, the marble sarcophagus (second half of the 2nd century AD) that held the tomb of a child: this is an artefact of great interest, decorated in relief on all four sides with heart-rending scenes in memory of the deceased's short life and sudden death. Also among the tombs in the suburban necropolis from the Roman age is the so-called **Tomb of Theron** which rises up in the lowlands of San Gregorio and can be reached by crossing SS 115. The structure, according to an unconfirmed tradition, hosted the remains of the great Agrigento tyrant (who ruled from 488 to 472 BC) as well as his horse thanks to which in 470 BC he had achieved victory in the competition in Olympia.





Standing on a base with a square plan made from blocks of stone is a tall podium in the shape of a marble parallelepiped (3.90 metres tall and 4.80 wide) ending with a shaped projecting cornice where the actual tomb is located. It is a substantially cubic structure in the form of a temple, with a false door featuring a relief in the Doric order placed at the centre of each of the sides, and four Ionic angular columns.

The upper part of this little temple consists of a Doric entablature, which has only partially survived. Characterized by a smooth architrave and a frieze with triglyphs and metopes, this was meant to support the pyramid-shaped roof. None of this has survived.

Early Christian and Byzantine Necropolis

Along the route connecting the Temple of Juno, the Temple of Concordia and the Temple of Hercules, several sepulchral areas have been identified which were in use between the 4th and 5th centuries AD. These are interesting funerary relics from the Early Christian and Byzantine periods which were stratified in areas previously located inside the encircling walls. In particular, in the garden of Villa Aurea three Christian hypogea were identified with small sepulchral chambers that may have been linked to families and the open-air tombs of a vaster Christian-Byzantine sepulchral area; farther along a series of rectangular tombs dug into the rock are also visible.

Not far from Villa Aurea, on the other side of the street is a catacomb known as **Fragapane Grotto**: this hypogeal zone was already known of in the 18th century and was built by excavating a rocky embankment and repurposing the area of the ancient cisterns from the Greek period. Excavated starting from the late 19th century, the catacomb, which is reached via an open-air corridor, close to which the sepulchres of the open-air necropolis are located, is characterized by a north-south route.

Carved out in the walls of the corridors, as well as in those of the circular spaces along the way, are arcosolia (cells with a barrel vault) and cubicula (containing sarcophagus tombs), some of which still show traces of the wall paintings with ribbon-like or plant decorations. In the sector to the south the catacomb has direct access to the Roman necropolis in what was formerly the Giambertoni fund. Lastly, below the Temple of Juno, along the south-eastern side of the Hill of the Temples, during the Early Christian period, a small church known as of the Vallone di San Biagio was built.

Made from hewn sandstone, the building, whose eastern entrance is preceded by a narthex, consisted of a small rectangular room with a

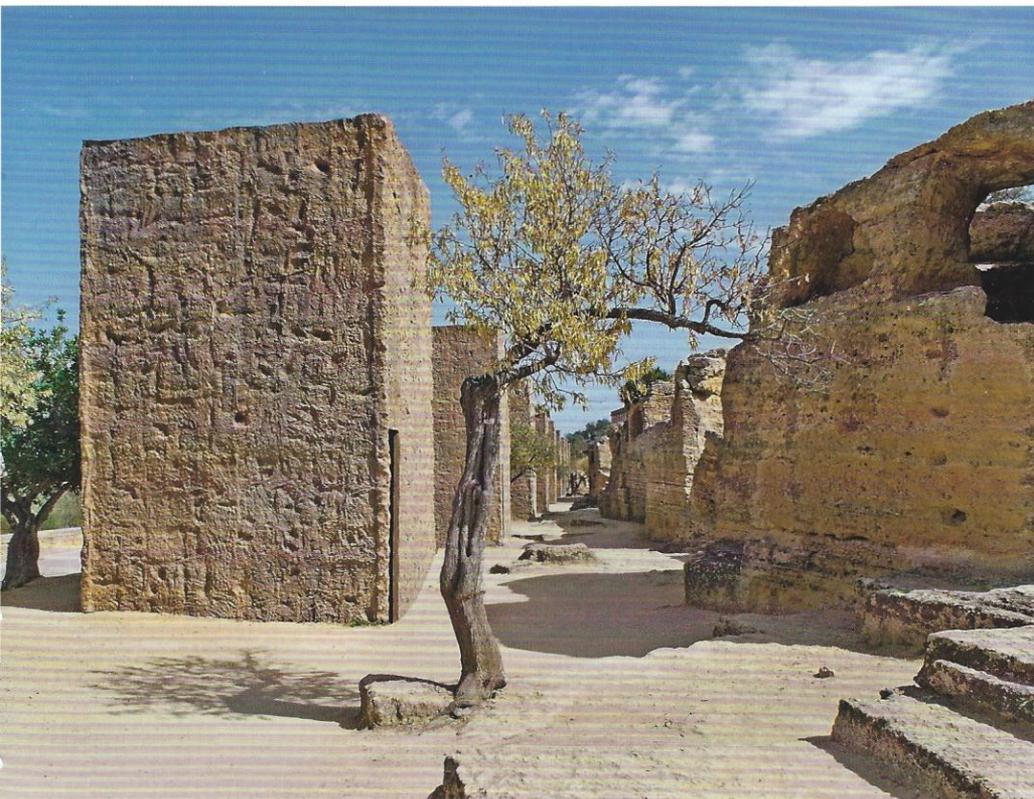
The Byzantine
necropolis inside
the encircling wall

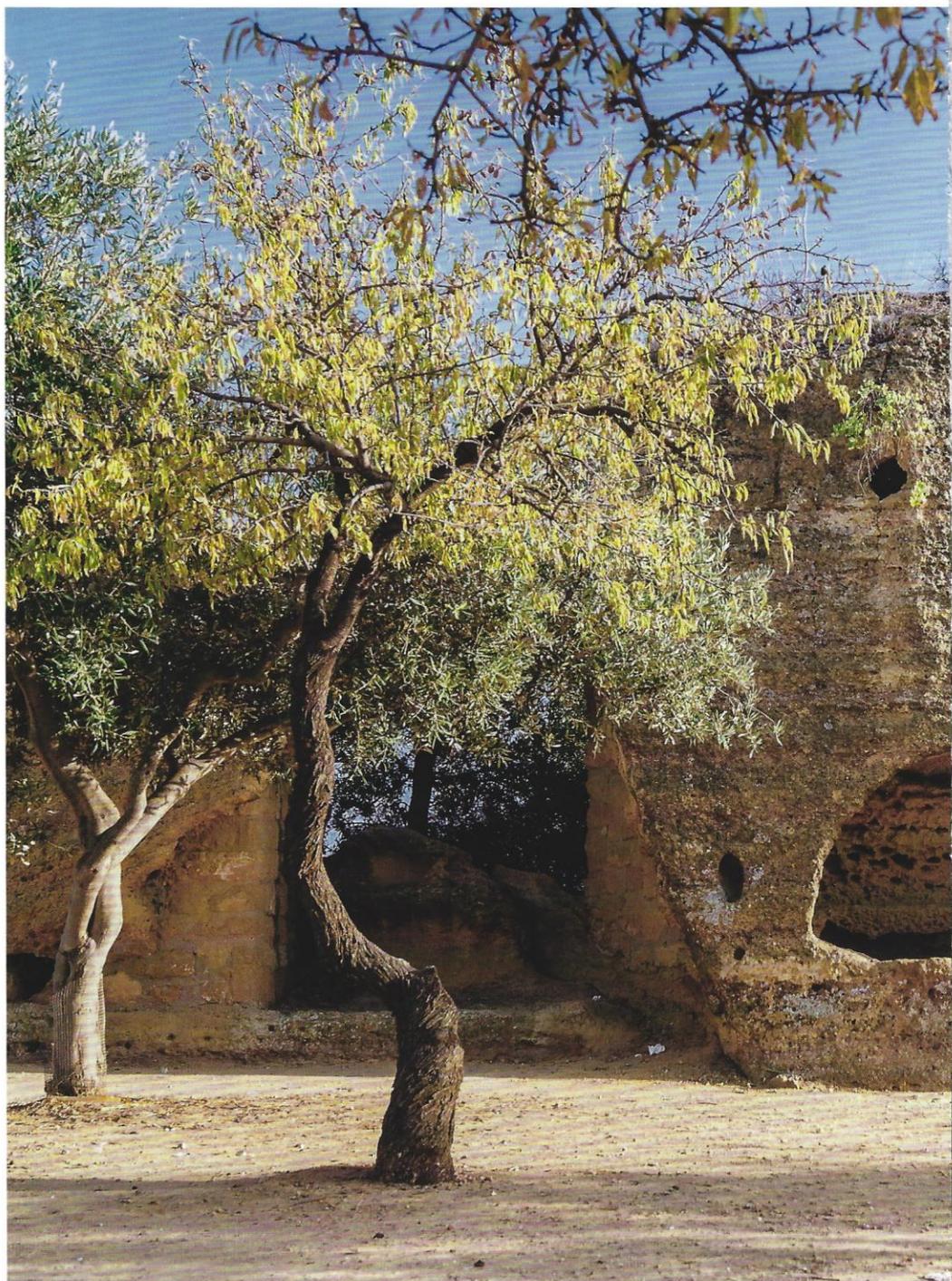
Pages 90–91

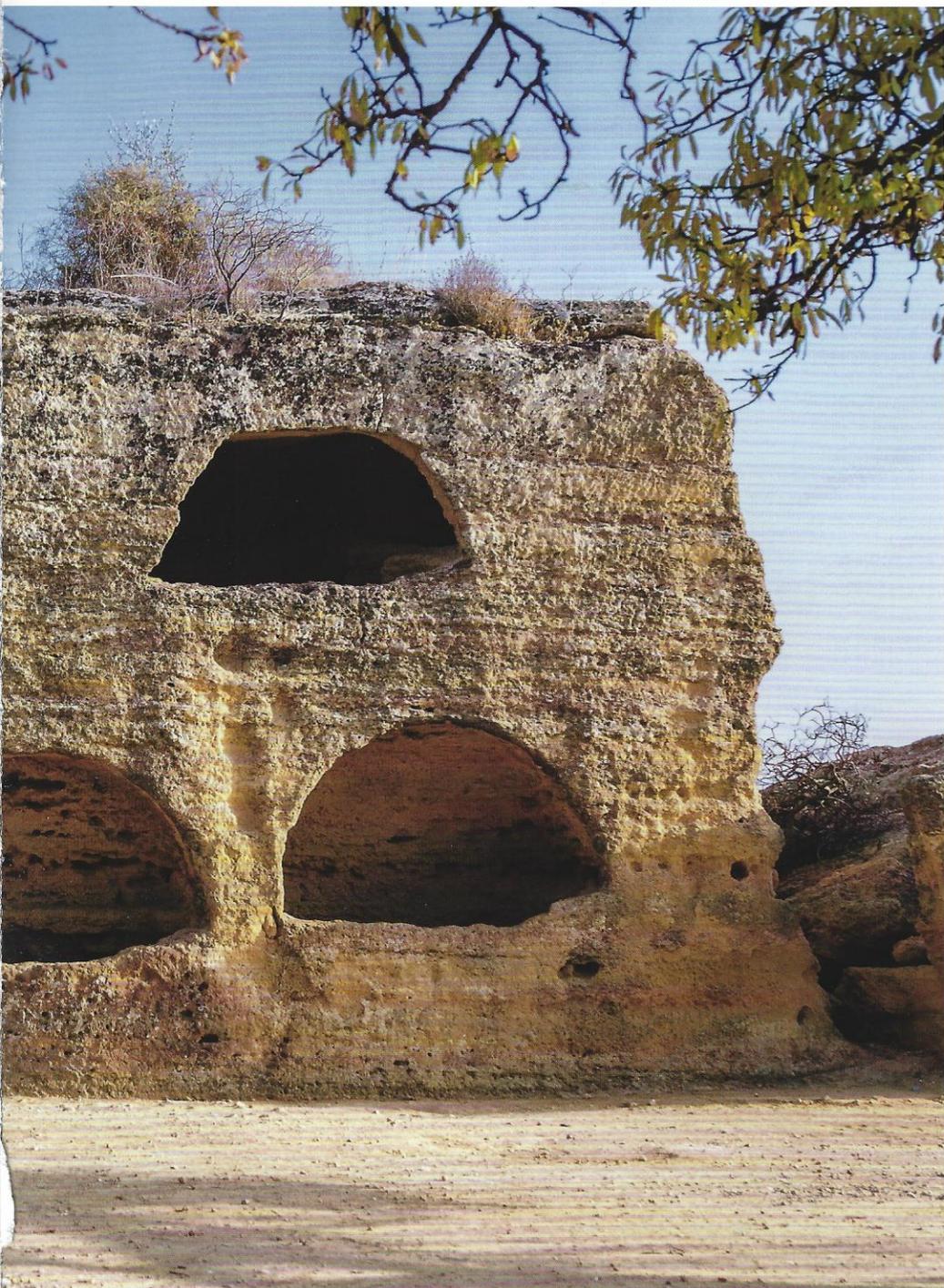
The arcosolia
viewed from the
front

semicircular apse against the wall at the rear. Englobed in the floor of the room two tombs were found, which led scholars to hypothesize that the building was once a *martyrium*, that is, a mausoleum in memory of Libertinus and Peregrine (who both lived in the 3rd century AD). Destroyed in the first half of the 5th century (perhaps when the city was involved in Vandalic invasions), the church was later rebuilt between the late 5th and early 6th centuries.

Those interested in seeing what was found in the Early Christian and Byzantine necropoles, should visit the Antiquarium set up in Villa Aurea.







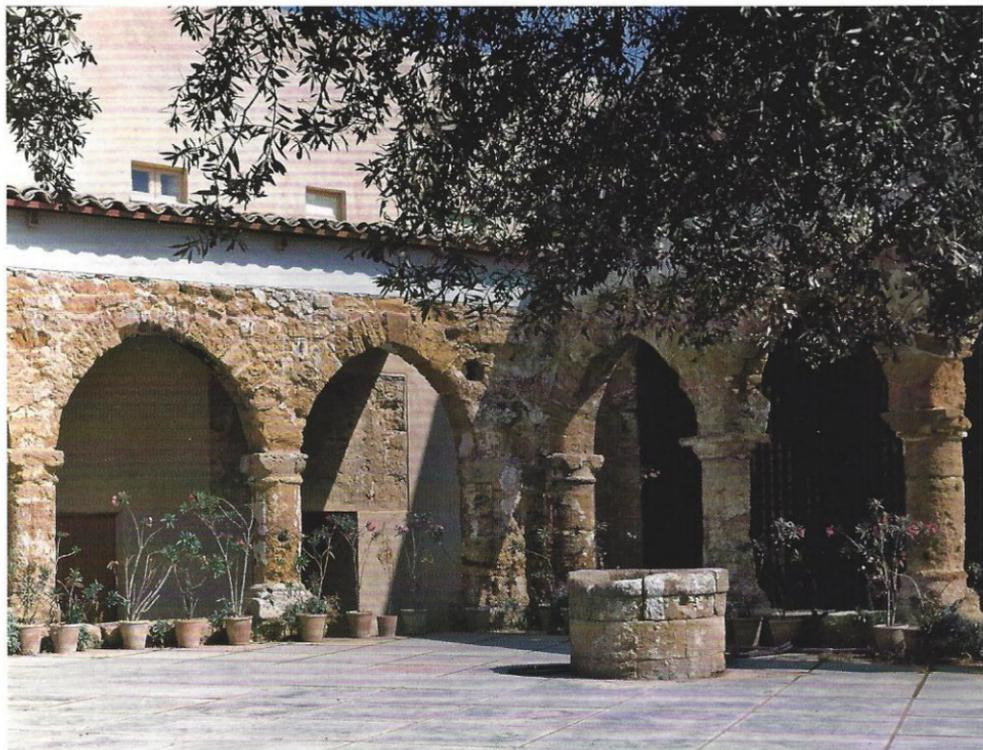


“Pietro Griffo” Regional Archaeological Museum

Located inside the archaeological area of the Valley of the Temples, on the hilltop of San Nicola, is the “Pietro Griffo” Regional Archaeological Museum. A portion of the museum is situated inside the remains of a Cistercian monastery that is still used today by the order that settled in this area in the 13th century, and gave rise to the construction of the Church of San Nicola. The church is still visible today and can be visited as you enter the area. The museum in the heart of the ancient city of Akragas is an essential part of the visit, as it allows guests to enjoy the many art objects discovered over decades of study and research in the vast surrounding archaeological area. Inaugurated in June 1967, this museum designed by the architect Franco Minissi was named after Pietro Griffo, an archaeologist and the director of the Agrigento Monuments and Fine Arts Service from 1941 to 1968. Griffo did not just encourage research in the vast area of the Valley and the Hill of the Temples; with great authority he also coordinated the excavations carried out by Italian and foreign scholars during the two decades following World War II, which cannot have been easy given the political and civil life of the nascent Republic.

The museum offers two visit itineraries, organized in a total of seventeen display rooms, which allow visitors to learn more about the different phases of the history of Agrigento and its surrounding territory: a great deal of space particularly concerns the development of the ancient city of Akragas, which the first eleven rooms are devoted to; the second itinerary, instead, exhibits finds from the Agrigento province as well as two others, Caltanissetta and Enna, at one time under the jurisdiction of the Central Southern Sicily Antiquity Services. Along the two routes the finds are more or less displayed based on chronology and the category of the material used to make them, providing evidence of

Partial view of
Room VI dedicated
to the Temple
of Olympian Zeus



the amazing wealth of the city's built-up area and monumental sites with sacred and civil functions.

After a first introductory room in which the literary and iconographic sources are presented, Room II exhibits findings that offer proof that humans were present in the Agrigento territory during the pre-Hellenic period, as well as in the various phases of the Copper and Bronze Ages, i.e. the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC. Also on display in this room are artefacts from the motherland of Gela and from its emporia, in the areas of Licata and Palma di Montechiaro, along with the artefacts related to the first decades of the history of the new large colony of Akragas: the grave goods found in the necropolis of Montelusa, the oldest and the closest to the sea, and the first objects discovered in the westernmost part of the Hill of the Temples.

Room III is entirely devoted to pottery, the most important of which are Attic red-figure vases with a black background: the krater attributed to the Kleophrades Painter (500–490 BC) discovered in the necropolis in Contrada Pezzino, with scenes of the deposition of a man who has been identified as Patroclus, or the one attributed to the Kleophon Painter (c. 420 BC), with scenes of sacrifice to the god Apollo, from

Cloister and facade of the Church of San Nicola



"PIETRO GRIFFO" REGIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM



View of Room III
with the collections
of vases

Kleophrades
Painter, *Krater*
Depicting Patroclus'
Death, 500–490 BC



"PIETRO GRIFFO" REGIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM

the cemetery area of Poggio Giache near Villasetta. Also of great artistic value is the calyx krater with polychrome painting on a white ground representing Perseus and Andromeda (c. 440–430 BC), attributed to the Boston Phiale Painter. In the section devoted to the architectural sculptures in the civil and religious buildings, of particular interest are the lion's head water spouts on display in Room IV. This ideally leads into Room VI, which contains one of the stunning telamons from the Temple of Olympian Zeus. The telamon is shown here in an upright position, supposedly its original one, along the exterior perimeter of the building constructed after 480 BC.

On display in Room V are numerous finds from urban and extra-urban sanctuaries dedicated to the Chthonic Deities Demeter and Persephone: most of these are ex votos offered by the faithful to the gods.

Room VII is entirely devoted to the display of finds from the so-called Hellenic-Roman Quarter; the artefacts reveal that the settlement lasted a long time, from the 6th century BC to the Late Ancient Roman and Byzantine periods. The rich numismatic section (Rooms VIII-IX) showcases coins produced by the ancient mints of Akragas and Syracuse, as well as coins from other cities in Sicily, from Magna Graecia and from Continental Greece. Punic and Roman coins are exhibited as well. Also



Roman coin,
late 3rd century BC

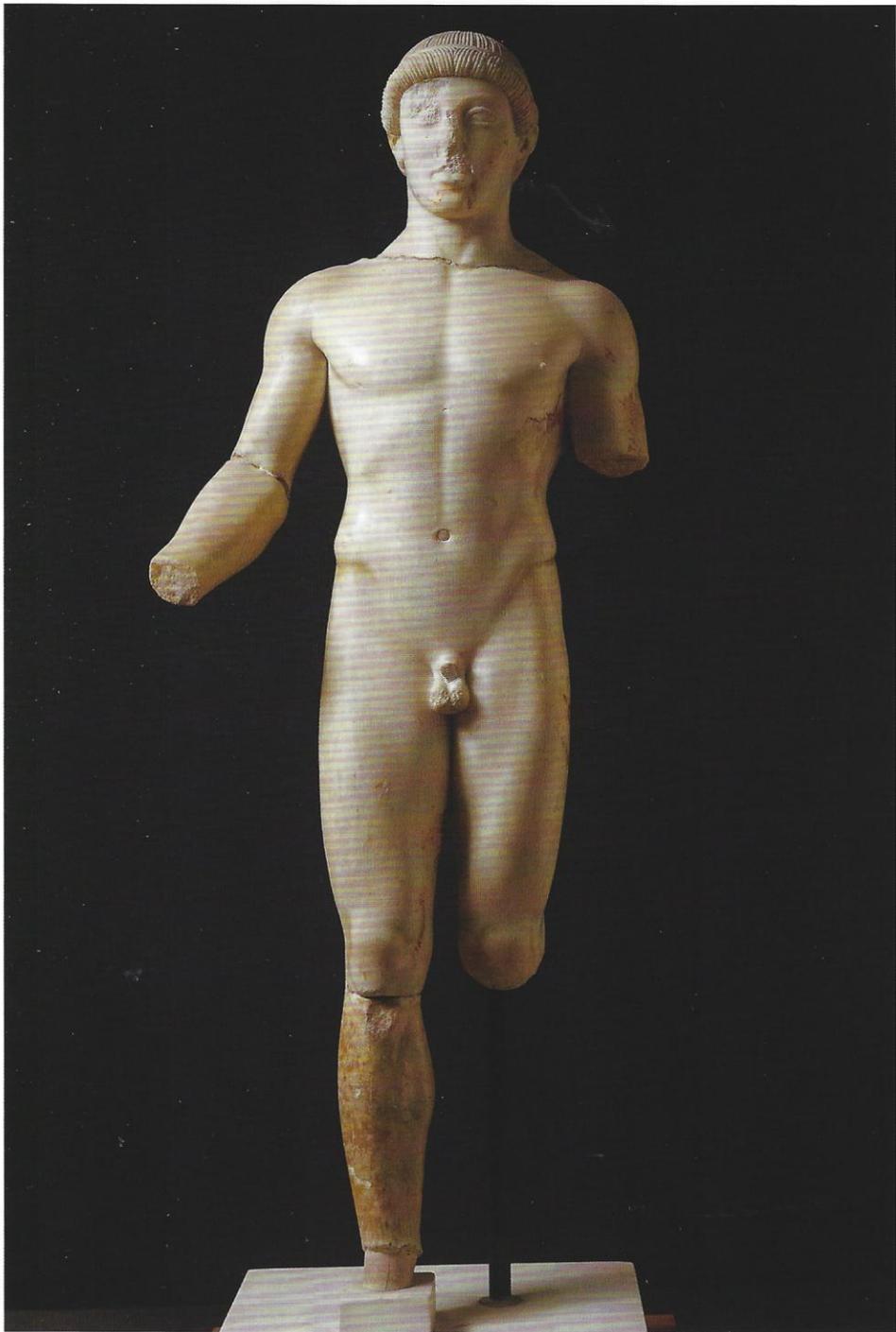
Coin from Akragas

Opposite
Ephebus of Agrigento,
c. 480 BC

on display are the gold coins from the treasure discovered in 1987 while research was being conducted in the area of the Bouleuterion, just north of the museum, and dated to the late 3rd century BC.

Room X is devoted to sculpture, and the highlight here is the famous *Ephebus of Agrigento*, a marble statue dated to around 480 BC, which was discovered inside a cistern located south of the ancient Temple of Demeter identified below the Church of San Biagio on the Rupe Atenea. This is followed by a small section with busts from the Roman age, together with a long display case with objects from the public buildings of ancient Akragas: the Ekklesiasterion, the Bouleuterion and the Agora. Of particular interest in the epigraphic section is the inscription that begins with the words *CONCORDIAE AGRIGENTINORUM SACRUM*. This led to the attribution of the large temple located at the centre of the Hill of the Temples to Concordia (because it was found close by). The *tegulae sulphuris* on display are dated to the Roman imperial period and were used to brand sulphur blocks with the name of the owner of the quarry where the mineral was extracted and then sold, or of the person who oversaw its distribution.

Of great value are the many grave goods found over decades of excavation in the numerous necropoles; in Room XI the materials are accompanied by several monumental sarcophagi, including a marble one used for a child, discovered in the Roman necropolis and dated to the second half of the 2nd century AD. The necropolis room ends the first itinerary, the one that exclusively deals with finds from the ancient



city. This is followed by the section devoted to the territory: the first two rooms (XII and XIII) showcase prehistoric materials pertinent to the sites of the province of Agrigento, the most notable of which are those of Palma di Montechiaro (Piano Vento and Monte Grande), Ribera (Ciavolaro e Scirinda), Favara (Ticchiara grotto), and Sant'Angelo Muxaro (monumental necropolis).

On display in Room XIV are findings from the Greek and Roman periods pertaining to the province of Agrigento, especially from the sites of Heraclea Minoa (near the mouth of the River Platani) and Monte Adranone (near Sambuca di Sicilia), with interesting artefacts that are both native and imported.

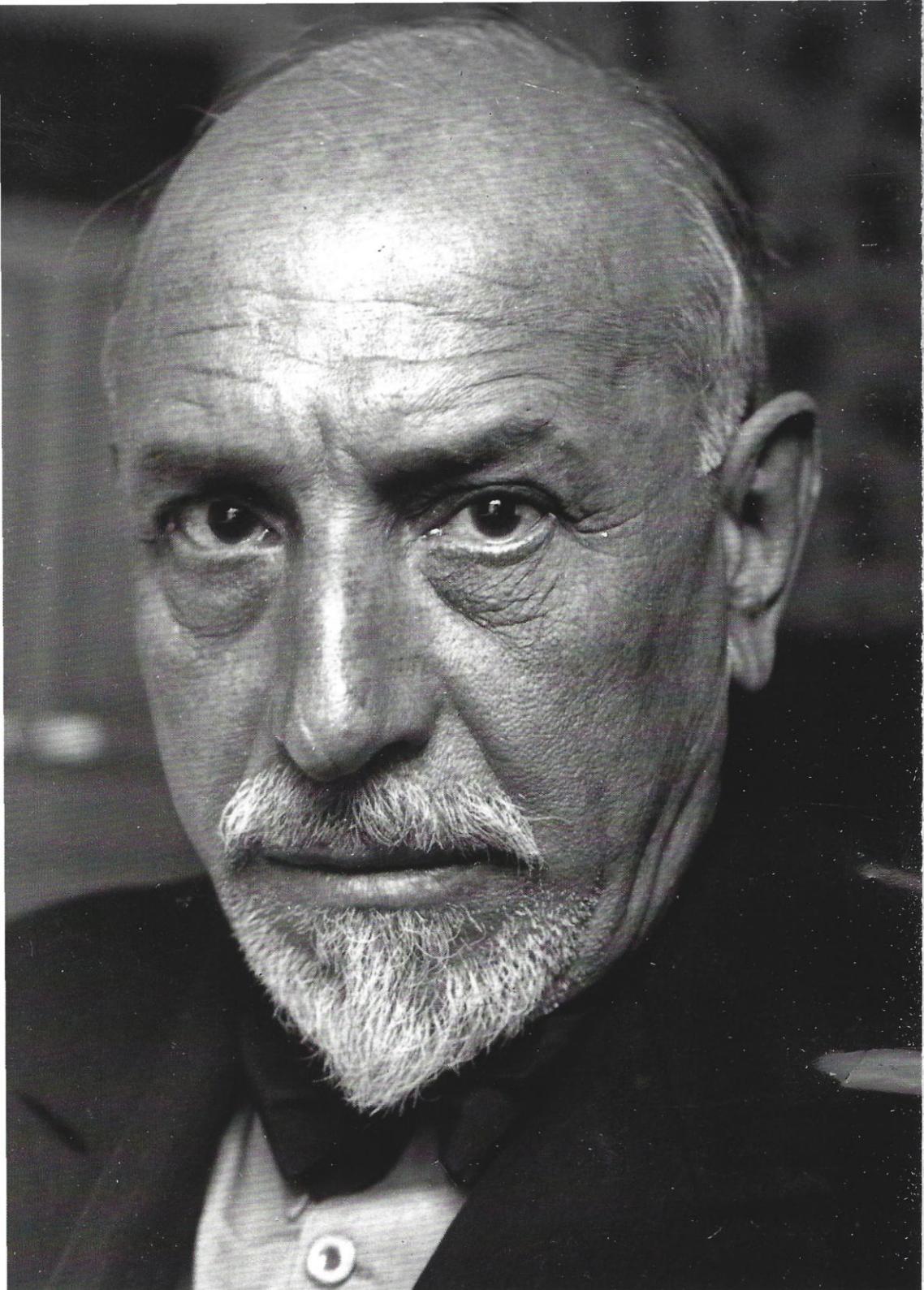
Room XV is devoted to Gela, the motherland of Akragas. The images on the walls recall the sites excavated in the city and the materials preserved in the local museum; at the centre, in dramatic isolation, is a large red-figure krater by the Niobid Painter (470 BC), depicting, with an abundance and wealth of details, the episode of the slaying of Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons, by Achilles. The last two rooms are reserved to findings from the territory of Enna (site of Montagna di Marzo), and Caltanissetta (site of Vassallaggi, for which artefacts from the built-up area, the sanctuary and the vast necropolis are on display), and Monte Raffè.

Row of display cases in Room V dedicated to sanctuaries

Opposite
Terracotta female head (Athena?)







Regional House-Museum of Luigi Pirandello

I am a child of Chaos; and not just allegorically, but in true reality, because I was born in our countryside, located near an entangled wood, named Càvasu [meaning Chaos in Sicilian dialect] by the inhabitants of Girgenti.

Luigi Pirandello was just twenty-five years old when he introduced himself in an imaginary autobiography which he dictated to his friend Pio Spezi in the summer of 1893.

Caos is indeed still the name of the country *contrada* on the outskirts of Agrigento where the home of the great playwright and novelist still stands, a simple 18th-century rural building that belonged to the writer's mother, Caterina Ricci Gramitto. It was there that she had taken refuge to escape the cholera epidemic that spread across Sicily in 1867, and it is also where Luigi was born on 28 June of that same year.

The House-Museum

The current appearance of the building is the result of the various phases of restoration sponsored by the Sicily Region since 1952, after acquiring it. Although it had been declared a National Monument in 1949, the large farmhouse still bore the signs of the terrible event that had taken place in 1943 when an American army ammunition depot exploded, causing severe damage to many of the buildings in the area. On the top floor visitors can see a collection of objects related to Pirandello's private life as well as to his work as a writer: these range from the posters for some of his most famous plays to the first editions of his books with autographed dedications, to letters, photographs, and other family heirlooms. One of these in particular is the first container for his ashes: a splendid Attic red-figure krater dated to 460 BC and decorated with a scene from the myth of Tereus chasing his wife



Procne and his sister-in-law whom he intends to murder. The bottom floor instead hosts temporary exhibitions aimed at stimulating further knowledge about the figure of the writer and his prolific activity. Since 1987, the mission of the House-Museum has been shared by the “Luigi Pirandello” Library of Agrigento which preserves other interesting documents such as play scripts and manuscripts.

The House-Museum
seen from the
garden

Pirandello's Pine Tree

Pirandello's relationship with his birthplace was as strong as it was problematic, much like the writer's personality. As an adult he hardly ever went there, but this is where he wanted to be buried when he died, in Rome on 10 December 1936, two years after being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

These were his final wishes: *Let my death pass in silence. I beg both friends and enemies not to speak of it in the papers, not to give any indication of it. No announcements, no get-togethers. Dead, let me not be clothed. Let me be placed, naked, in a sheet. No flowers on the bed, no lighted candle. Carriage of the lowest class, of the poor. Naked. Let no one accompany me, neither relatives, nor friends. The carriage, the horse, the driver, and nothing more. Burn me. And let my body, as soon as it is burned, be dispersed. Because I don't want anything, even ashes, to continue on after me. But if this is not allowed, let the urn be carried to Sicily and be walled up in*

The bronze bust of the writer before the stairs leading up to the House-Museum

one of the rough stones of the countryside of Girgenti, where I was born. The writer's final wishes were clear, but respecting them proved to be a difficult feat. Immediately after his death, the ashes, after remaining in the Roman cemetery of Verano for a short time, were buried near the writer's birthplace inside a Greek urn, owned by the family, and currently visible in the House-Museum.

The ashes were subsequently translated in 1947, and placed in a coffin according to the orders of the Bishop of Agrigento, Giovanni Battista Peruzzo, who also wanted to officiate a mass for the great writer's soul. Finally, in 1962, Pirandello's ashes were placed inside a metal urn in turn enclosed in a modern stone sculpture by the artist Marino Mazzacurati and placed in the shade of a pine tree, still referred to as "Pirandello's pine" today.

The tree we see today is not the original one, which was badly damaged in a storm that struck in 1997. Engraved on the stone is a short autobiographic fragment: *One night in June I fell like a firefly under a solitary pine in a field of Saracen olive trees facing the edge of a blue clay plateau overlooking the African sea.*





The History

After leaving the Valley of the Temples, head down the SS 115 from Agrigento towards the west to visit another interesting archaeological area in south-western Sicily known as the ancient city of Heraclea Minoa. The ruins of the settlement lie atop a calcareous rocky spur called Capobianco, which to the south stretches seawards, to the east drops straight down to the shore, and to the west slopes down towards the valley of the River Platani (at one time the Halykos), and the mouth of the river itself. An analysis of the historical sources and the archaeological studies conducted *in situ* have allowed for a reconstruction of the various phases of the settlement. Already before the city was founded, in the 6th century BC, it seems the area was inhabited during the prehistoric period; during the Metal Ages, there was a village there, dated to the Late Copper Age-Early Bronze Age. The location of the proto-historical village is seen as being related to the presence of sulphur, bitumen and salt mines, which were already active in the valley of the Platani at the time. The area's geophysics were excellent and the potential for trade had not escaped the Phoenicians, who named one of their emporia located there Makara; it was later destroyed when the Cretans arrived on the heels of King Minos. The king founded a new city there and named it Minoa.

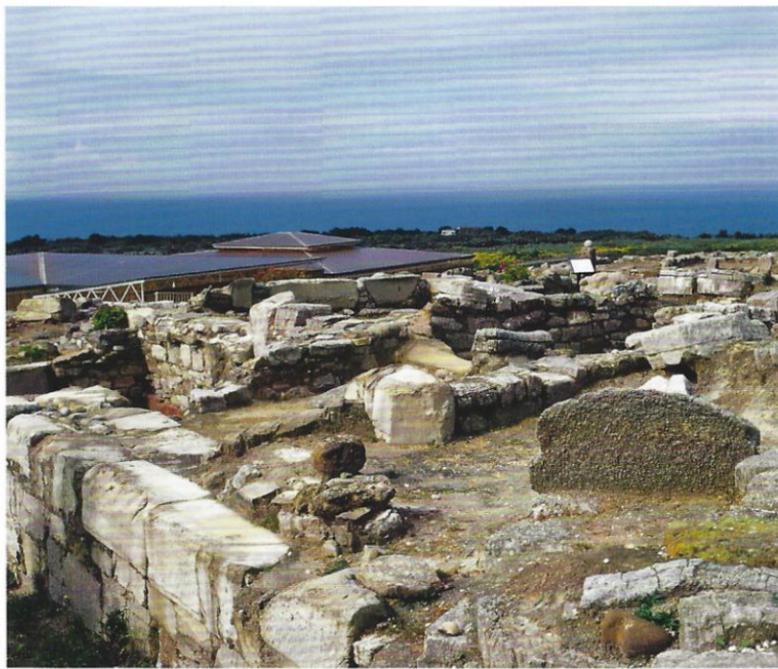
However, not all the sources agree that it was King Minos who founded the city. Herodotus, for instance, attributes the founding of a colony named Minoa to the inhabitants of Selinunte, probably for the purpose of protecting their territory towards the east from the expansionist ambitions of Akragas. Herodotus also recounts that later Minoa was occupied by a group of Spartans led by Euryleon who escaped from the colony of Heraclea that lay at the foot of Mount

Female heads in terracotta found *in situ* and displayed in the Antiquarium

Pages 108–109
Bird's-eye view of the settlement of Heraclea Minoa



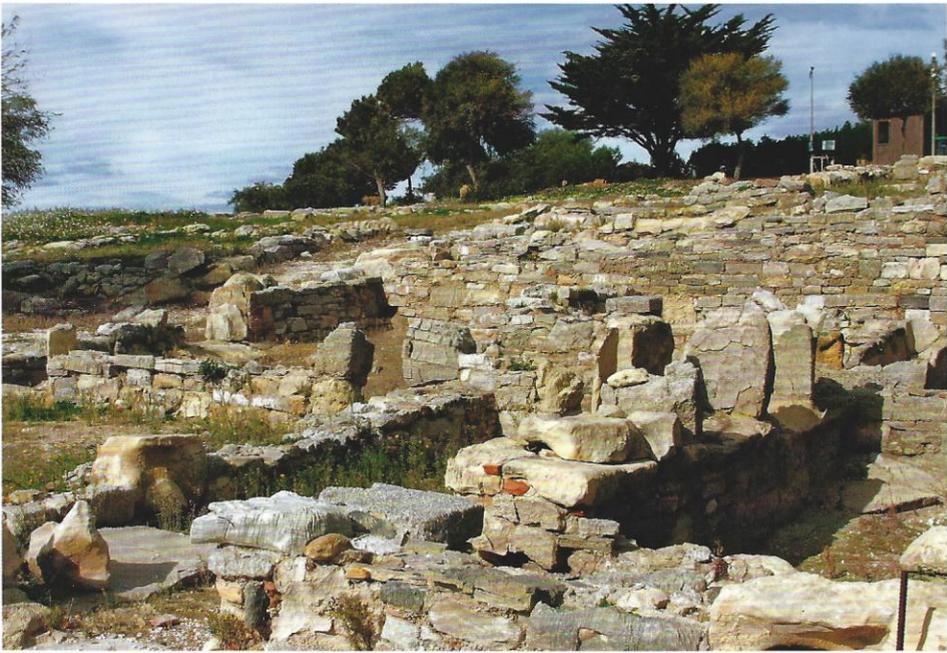




View of the
archaeological area
of Heraclea Minoa

*Pages 111
and 112–113*
Remains of the
built-up area

Erice, in the territory of what was once Drèpanon (now Trapani). Euryleon is said to have settled in Minoa around the end of the 6th century BC and that he changed its name to Heraclea, in memory of the colony he had come from, destroyed by Segesta and its allies. In the following century (5th century BC), after a period when it was fought over by Selinunte and Agrigento, the city definitively came under the control of the latter and shared the same fate. For the second half of the century the sources do not provide us with any information, but scholars have hypothesized that the city was occupied by the Carthaginians soon before they also conquered Akragas in 406 BC. Throughout the 4th century BC, the city was again at the heart of a long war: this time it was between Carthage and Syracuse, while we also know that after that, in 277 BC, it was seized from Carthage by Pyrrhus, King of Epir, whom the Greek cities in Sicily had asked to come to the island to drive out Carthage. When the First Punic War began (264–241 BC), Heraclea Minoa once again came under the rule of the Carthaginians, who used it as a strategic base for their troops and their fleet. A few years later, after the Romans conquered Agrigento in 210 BC, Heraclea also came under their definitive control. From the second half of the century the sources are silent: it seems the city was gradually abandoned due to the landslides that



affected the promontory it rose up on. The archaeological research also indicates a lack of finds datable to the Roman imperial age. The ruins of a farm, a basilica and an Early Christian necropolis are dated to the 4th–5th century AD.

The Archaeological Area

Visitors are encouraged to begin their visit from the highest part of the area, where they will be able to appreciate the development and features of the encircling walls that north of the built-up area are better preserved, and at the same time observe from above the remains of the settlement organized in terraces on the promontory as it slopes down towards the sea.

The Walls

The remains visible are part of the impressive encircling walls that were built at the end of the 4th century BC to protect the built-up area dated to the Hellenistic period (4th–3rd century BC). The surrounding walls, which must have been six kilometres long and completed by a series of quadrangular towers (eight of them have survived), followed the natural development of the highland, in certain areas overlapping the remains of a clay brick wall that is dated





to the 6th century BC and was part of a settlement from the Archaic period. They were probably never built in the southern segment, where the promontory of Capobianco drops straight down over the sea, serving as a natural defence. In the wall to the north-west a door has been identified (now known as Porta Marina) that allowed for access to the city from the valley of the River Halykos.

The Theatre

Built around the mid-4th century BC, exploiting the natural slope of a small hill according to the Greek tradition, the theatre has a *cavea* (known as *koilon* in Greek) that opens up scenically towards the south, and the sea. It comprises ten orders of seats made from marlstone blocks, which were originally well shaped, and it is divided into nine sectors by eight accesses with steps that allowed the spectators to reach their seat. The seats in the first row, reserved for the authorities, must have been particularly comfortable, as they also have a back and armrests.

The first row and the following steps were separated by an *ambulacrum*. The *orchestra* pit is a semicircular space (16.70 metres in diameter), where the chorus danced and sang, while the actors performed on a raised stage (*skenè*). This must have been made of wood as nothing has survived, except for a few traces that would indicate it was engaged with the rock.

As soon as the *cavea* of the theatre was brought to light, the rapid decline of the structure became evident; it had been made from friable local marlstone. A transparent shaped Plexiglas cover was created to protect the steps. Later, after seeing that the cover did not let the monument "breathe", another Plexiglas cover was made, this time in sheets. This new cover reproduces the layout of the *cavea* underneath, shielding the building from the weather, while at the same time letting the visitor see it.

The Sanctuary

In the sector to the north-west of the theatre are the remains of a sacred area, elevated above the built-up area, which presents the foundations of two different buildings: a temple, which is oriented north-west/south-east, and, more towards the south, a *sacellum* divided into two spaces for which the stone foundations have survived. This had probably been built over the remains of a previous building used for worship, seeing that the remains of several amphorae which may have been used for ritual offerings were found underneath it. The deity to whom it was dedicated is unknown.

The Built-Up Area

The built-up area is distributed across terraces that slope down towards the sea and the River Platani to the west, and it is organized in a sequence of long blocks with an east-west direction, marked by internal roads on a north-south axis, according to a Hippodamian plan already seen in ancient Agrigento.

In the stratigraphic sequence archaeologists have defined the level of the built-up area that was identified first during the excavations, i.e. the most recent one, as Layer I, while Layer II lies underneath it: the former corresponds to the Roman-Late Republican period (2nd–1st century BC), the latter to the previous Hellenistic period (4th–3rd century BC). Two dwellings are dated to this last period, now protected by a cover that guarantees the integrity of the restored remains of the walls: Houses A and B. The buildings have a square plan and develop around a central courtyard.

House A (19.50 × 13.40 metres) has a single floor, with access from a single entrance on the southern side.

As for the rooms, the one located towards the north is thought to have been a domestic sacellum. On the walls are the remains of a stucco decoration, and the floor made of *opus signinum* (broken tiles and other fragments mixed with lime and mortar) is decorated with small white tiles. In the north-western corner is a square altar, while the eastern wall has a niche that contained artefacts related to the family's ancestors.

House B, whose surface area is smaller, must have had two floors. Here again access was from a single entrance facing southwards. The actual living quarters must have been located on the upper floor, and the findings document a certain amount of splendour: the walls probably featured plaster and stucco, the floors were made of *cocciopesto* decorated with mosaic tiles, and the thresholds were made of stone slabs. During the Roman-Late Republican period the built-up area appears to have been smaller than it was during the Hellenistic period, bordered on the east by a wall, built after the landslides that had taken place in this area.

The buildings built during this period once again feature a natural brick elevation on a foundation of gesso-like blocks of stone; however, these are more modest and less articulated.

Although the Roman built-up area respected the urban layout from the Hellenistic period, it appears to have been more sparse southwards, leaving some areas free from settlements, while towards the north there were buildings used as residences or for commerce close to the cavea of the theatre, which was probably no longer in use at this point in time.





The Antiquarium

The exposition of the findings bears witness to the different phases in the occupation of the area of Capobianco and the surrounding territory starting from the prehistoric period, with stone and ceramic materials, to then move on to the many artefacts that are dated from the 6th century BC onwards, mostly ceramics and sculptures in terracotta or stone. The archaeological finds come from all the areas of the excavation: the theatre, the built-up zone, and the Archaic and Hellenistic necropoles discovered outside the city walls.

Particularly interesting are a stone altar from the late 6th century BC featuring a relief of a lion attacking its prey; a stone antefix from the 4th century BC with the face of a Gorgon, and a beautiful female head in terracotta. Several ceramic artefacts, amphorae and utensils were discovered as well. Numerous objects are included in the grave goods found in the tombs excavated outside the city, in the necropolis discovered close to the river, and in other parts of the surrounding territory. These are vases of particular prestige and interest, such as the ceramics from the Archaic period of Corinthian or Attic provenance (black-painted vases), or the locally produced ceramics featuring geometric decorations. Some of the finds from the excavations of Heraclea Minoa are also exhibited at the Archaeological Museum in Agrigento.

The Antiquarium also exhibits ceramic finds such as this red-figure vase and the *Head of Medusa* sculpted in relief on stone





Archaeological and Scenic Park of the Valley of the Temples of Agrigento

The Valley of the Temples is characterized by the mesmerizing remains of some ten temples, three sanctuaries and a vast area of necropolises; hydraulic works, fortifications; part of a Hellenic-Roman Quarter. All this corresponds to the ancient city of Akragas, the monumental and original colony of modern-day Agrigento. The whole area has been on the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites since 1997.

“Pietro Griffo” Regional Archaeological Museum

Over five thousand objects are displayed in chronological and topographical order illustrating the history of the territory of Agrigento from the prehistoric age to the Greco-Roman period.

Must-sees of the museum are the *Ephebus of Agrigento*, the colossal telamon of the Olympieion, and a collection of pottery that boasts the *Krater Depicting Patroclus' Death*.

Regional House-Museum of Luigi Pirandello

Exhibited in the home of this Sicilian playwright, author, and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature is a collection of objects from his private and literary life: from the posters of some of his most famous plays to the first editions of his books with autograph dedications, letters, photographs, and other family heirlooms.

Heraclea Minoa

The ruins of this settlement lie atop a spectacular calcareous rocky spur, which stretches seawards to the south, drops straight down to the shore to the east, and to the west slopes down towards the valley of the River Platani and the mouth of the river itself.

First settled in prehistoric times, the city developed during the Mycenaean period and was later colonized by the Greeks. The view of the theatre overlooking the sea is breathtaking.

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