GYMNASIUM OF AGRIGENTO
REPORT OF THE 2022 SEASON

The first excavation campaign in the Gymnasium of Agrigento took place from September 12 to October 7, 2022. It was generously funded by the Ernst-Reuter-Gesellschaft der Freien Unversität Berlin, the Freie Universität Berlin, and the Politecnico di Bari.

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The gymnasium of Agrigento has been excavated between the 1950s and 2005. While parts of a race-track section and a pool were revealed between two stenopoi, the extension of the gymnasium and particularly the existence of a palaestra as well as the construction date could not be securely determined. A project launched in 2019 in cooperation between the Parco Archeologico e Paesaggistico Valle dei Templi di Agrigento and the Freie Universität Berlin aims to solve these questions.

Based on the results of the architectural and geophysical surveys carried out in 2020 and published in 2022[1], a first excavation campaign was carried out and the architectural survey was continued. The geophysical survey suggested that a palestra building which is typical of gymnasia in the eastern Mediterranean might have been located in an olive grove to the north of the pool (fig. 1). Four trenches were excavated in this olive grove in a terrain that rises more than 4 m from south to north (fig. 2).

Trench 1 was located in the immediate vicinity of the pool to investigate the connection of the pool complex to the possible palestra building (fig. 3). Two ashlar walls, running parallel in a distance of 0.70 m from each other and roughly from east to west, were found as well as a wall running north-south perpendicular to the ashlar walls. The walls are consistent in orientation, building technique, and material with the previously exposed walls of the gymnasium. A pavement of large stone slabs was revealed in the southwest corner of the trench.

Trench 2 was excavated where the geophysical survey had identified an east-west oriented anomaly (fig. 4). A massive ashlar wall, running east-west, and a perpendicular north-south running wall were revealed. They correspond in orientation, type of construction, and material with the walls from Trench 1. The walls were built without a foundation trench directly on a clay bed. Therefore, their construction date could not be securely determined. The walls subdivided at least three spaces. A sima block found turned-over to the south of the walls suggests that there was a colonnade nearby, probably the peristyle courtyard of the palestra.

Trench 3 was excavated in the area of the hypothetical continuation of the western stenopos and where the geophysical survey had identified the highest concentration of anomalies (figs. 1, 5). The continuation of the stenopos was found, in perfect alignment with the remains to the

[1] M. Trümper – S. Kay – E. Pomar – A. Fino – Th. Lappi – P. Santospagnuolo, New Research at the Gymnasium of Agrigento, Archäologischer Anzeiger 2022, 132-167 https://doi.org/10.34780/cf2b-1itf (last accessed 04.12.2023).

west of the race-track section and the pool. The newly excavated part of the stenopos is 5.30 m wide and flanked by two parallel running ashlar walls. An ancient channel made of terracotta pipes and reused Punic amphorae was revealed running north-south in the center of the stenopos. A second channel of thin terracotta pipes running from northwest to southeast was dated to the 18th/19th century.

Trench 4 was excavated at the hypothetical crossing of the western stenopos with a plateia (fig. 6). The excavation revealed no built structures. Instead, several alluvial layers sloping from west to east were met. A comparison with similar findings in Agrigento suggests that, in ancient times, there was a course of water in the immediate vicinity to the north, which regularly flooded the area. This trench shows that the orthogonal grid plan of Agrigento was adapted to the topographical conditions.

The excavation provided important evidence for answering the key questions of our project. Several walls were found in trenches 1 and 2 that most likely belonged to the gymnasium and presumably to the hypothetical palestra. The western stenopos continued further north, but its crossing with a plateia has not been found. The area is bordered by relatively steep cliffs in the north and particularly west, which must have had an impact on the course of the street. It has been confirmed by all four trenches that the terrain of the excavation area slopes quite steeply from north to south and less significantly from west to east, which required significant terracing and leveling, particularly for large buildings like a palestra.

The results were published in a preliminary report in 2023[2].

Monika Trümper – Thomas Lappi

[2] M. Trümper – Th. Lappi – A. Fino – C. Blasetti Fantauzzi, The Gymnasium of Agrigento. Report of the First Excavation Campaign in 2022, Thiasos. Rivista di archeologia e architettura antica 12, 2023, 275-308 http://www.thiasos.eu/en/the-gymnasium-of-agrigento-report-of-the-first-excavation-campaign-in-2022/ (last accessed 04.12.2023).

Fig. 1: Schematic overview of the geophysical survey results (Trümper et al. 2022, 158 fig. 33).

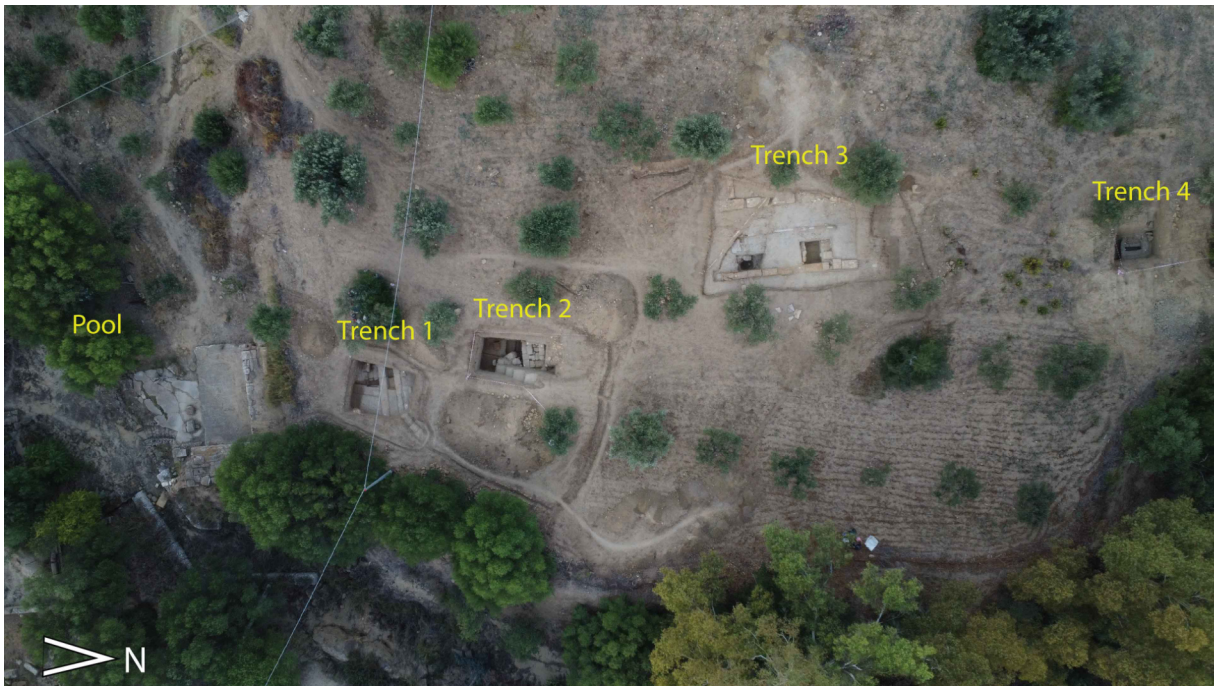

Fig. 2: Location of trenches in 2022 (Monika Trümper, © Freie Universität Berlin).

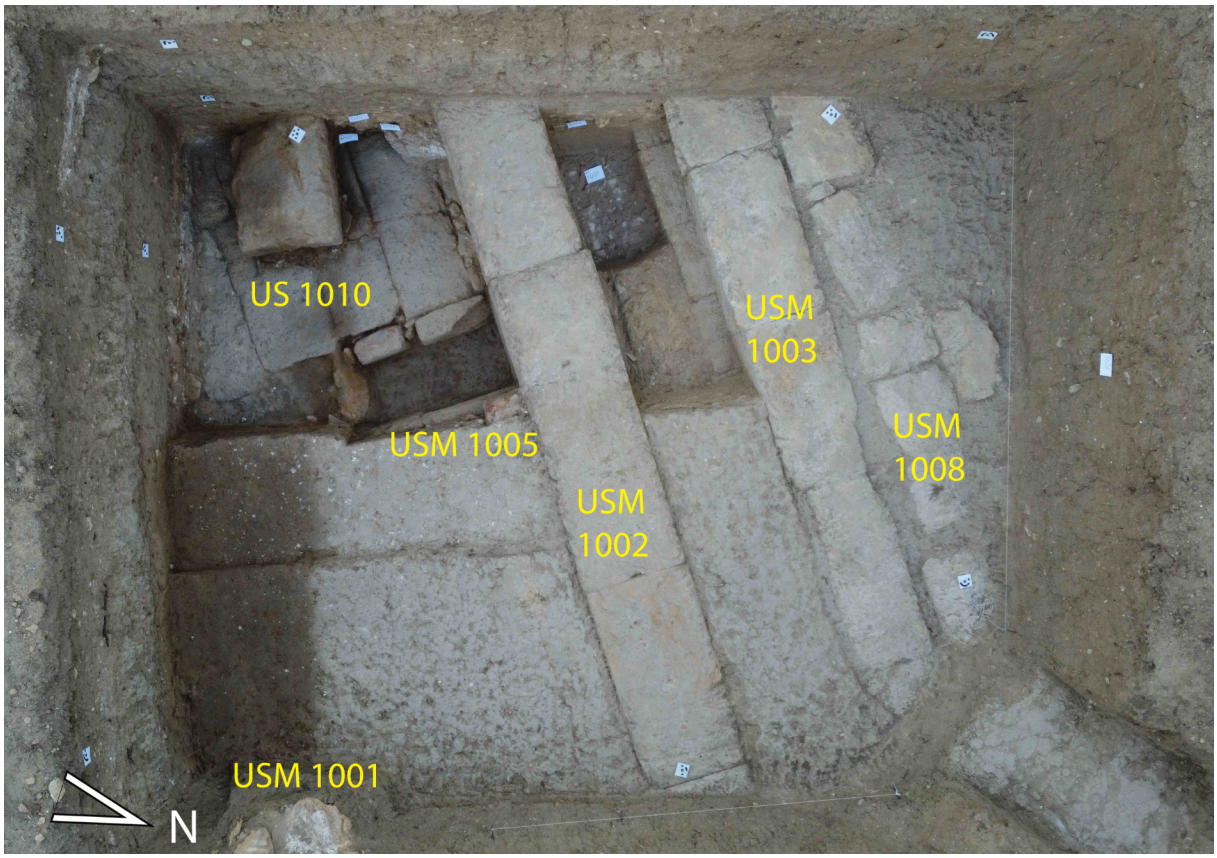

Fig. 3: Trench 1, drone photo at the end of excavation (Thomas Lappi, © Freie Universität Berlin).

Fig. 4: Trench 2, orthophoto at the end of excavation (Florian Birkner, Monika Trümper, © Freie Universität Berlin).

Fig. 5: Trench 3, orthophoto at the end of excavation (Blanca Kupke, Francesca Spadaro, Monika Trümper, © Freie Universität Berlin).

Fig. 6: Trench 4, drone photo at the end of excavation (north it at the right side) (Thomas Lappi, © Freie Universität Berlin).