

## GYMNASIUM OF AGRIGENTO REPORT OF THE 2023 SEASON

The second excavation campaign in the Gymnasium of Agrigento took place from August 28 to October 7, 2023. It was generously funded by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft).

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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 a geophysical survey carried out in 2020 and published 2022<sup>1</sup>, in four trenches were excavated in 2022 in a field to the north of the pool where the palaestra was most likely located. In addition, an architectural survey begun in 2020 was continued in 2022 to examine the little studied architecture. The results were published in a preliminary report in 2023<sup>2</sup>.

In 2023, excavation continued in the field to the north of the pool, where four trenches (1–4) had been excavated in 2022. Trenches 1–3 were reopened and extended, and further trenches were made. The main goal was to further investigate the extension and design of the palaestra as well as the chronology, particularly the construction date of the gymnasium. The following trenches were made (fig. 1).

- Trench 5: the connection between the deep trenches in Trench 3N and 3S (fig. 2).
- Trenches 6 and 7: extensions to the south and north of Trench 1 (fig. 3).
- Trench 8: an extension of Trench 2 to the north and east (fig. 4).
- Trench 9: an extension of Trench 3 in the stenopos, to the south (fig. 5).

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

<sup>2</sup> 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).

- Trench 10: an extension of Trench 3 to the north, searching for the northwest corner of the insula and a plateia (fig. 6).
- Trench 11: a pavement to the east of Trench 3/8, which was met at a high level, identified as a modern pavement (18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century) and cleaned and documented
- Trench 12: a new trench on the upper terrace to the north of Trench 8 (fig. 7).
- Trench 13: a sounding in the stenopos, to the west of the sounding in Trench 3S
- Trench 14: a new trench on the upper terrace, between Trenches 8 and 12.

In the following, the results of both seasons are briefly summarized.

The continuation of the stenopos, which runs west of the race-track complex and the pool, was found and excavated for a length of 23m (Trenches 3, 5, 9, 13). Two street surfaces can be distinguished, with a conduit made of clay pipes and reused Punic amphorae laid on the upper one. The northwest corner of the insula of the gymnasium was found 13m south of the point where the recently reconstructed hypothetical city plan shows a junction between a plateia and the stenopos (Trench 10, fig. 6). The lot between the northwest corner of the insula and the north wall of the pool is 62.50m long and extended at least as far as the stenopos that was found east of the race-track complex (35m wide). Eight monumental walls made with calcarenite ashlar were found in this lot (Trenches 1–2, 6–8, 10, 12, 14), distributed on two terraces: four east-west running and two north-south running walls on the lower terrace to the south, the other walls on the northern terrace that is c. 4–5m higher. Two of these walls, built perpendicular, support the upper terrace. A monumental threshold (2.60m wide) on the upper terrace led from the stenopos to the building (Trench 12, fig. 7).

Several factors suggest that the uncovered structures belong to the palaestra: 1) In terms of material, technique, and orientation, all the walls are aligned with the structures of the race-track complex and pool. 2) A stamped roof tile with the letters ΓΥΜ was found in the destruction layer of Trench 6, right to the north of the pool. 3) In a room directly north of the pool (Trench 6), evidence of a valve system and lead pipes were found that served to supply the pool. 4) Two blocks of a monumental sima were found on the lower terrace (Trenches 2, 8), which may have come from the peristyle of the palaestra and can be dated to the 2nd century B.C. based on typological and stylistic grounds. 5) Again, on the lower terrace, two rows of blocks were discovered, which may have belonged to monumental benches, typical of rooms of palaestrae. 6) Two more molded architectural elements were found on the upper terrace, possibly from a monumental base or doorway.

From a chronological point of view, so far two phases can be identified in the stenopos, palaestra, and pool. The abandonment of the palaestra can be dated to the late 2nd/early 3rd century AD, based on the finds from the destruction layer. The first structures found on top of this layer can be dated to the 18th/19th century and include several canals and simple floors that were built at the level of the upper terrace. Foundation trenches were discovered for some of the monumental walls, but their fills contained no diagnostic finds. For the time being, therefore, the construction date of the gymnasium can only be determined from the architectural elements, which suggest construction in the second century BC.

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Fig. 1: Location of trenches in 2023 (Thomas Lappi, © Freie Universität Berlin).



Fig. 2: Trench 5, photo at the end of excavation (Blanca Kupke, © Freie Universität Berlin).



Fig. 3: Trench 06/07, drone photo at the end of excavation (Thomas Lappi, © Freie Universität Berlin).



Fig. 4: Trench 8, drone photo at the end of excavation (Thomas Lappi, © Freie Universität Berlin).



Fig. 5: Trench 9, drone photo at the end of excavation (Thomas Lappi, © Freie Universität Berlin).



Fig. 6: Trench 10, drone photo at the end of excavation (Thomas Lappi, © Freie Universität Berlin).



Fig. 7: Trench 12, drone photo of the treshhold at the end of excavation (Thomas Lappi, © Freie Universität Berlin).