

Topographical and Urbanistic Considerations Regarding Himera – New Evidence from the Piano del Tamburino

Elena Mango

The Piano del Tamburino, an elevated plain overlooking the lower town, has received little attention in more than 50 years of research at the Greek colony of Himera. The Piano del Tamburino is characterized by a relatively flat surface at its center and natural terraces at its perimeters, especially on the east side looking toward the Piano di Imera, likewise an elevated plain. A small valley separates the Piano di Imera and the Piano del Tamburino on their northern sides (fig. 1), while in the south they are joined together. The location of the Piano del Tamburino within the colony, as well as its topographic morphology, offered ideal conditions for urbanization – an urbanization which has begun to take on shape and dimensions through the work carried out by the University of Berne in collaboration with the Archaeological Park of Himera since 2012.

Following initial extensive study of the morphology and topography of these 40 hectares, a wide range of interdisciplinary methods were employed to examine the area: these included aerial and satellite remote sensing, wide geodetic measurements, different non-intrusive methods of prospection – such as geophysical investigations on a large strip 15 hectares in size in the east of the Piano del Tamburino (geomagnetic, georadar, geo-electric measurements and tomography were employed with little discernible results) and extensive & intensive surveys on the Piano del Tamburino. These investigations have been followed by seven excavation campaigns and several campaigns of material studies to date (2018).¹ The results achieved to date from this multidisciplinary approach have provided new insights about the environment and development of the Piano del Tamburino, especially with regard to the relationships and interactions between the natural surroundings and the ancient *polis*, between different urban spaces and, as a consequence, between different social activity zones, all of which will contribute to a new understanding of the cultural landscape of the city.

The above-mentioned surveys yielded an overview of the periods of use of the Piano del Tamburino in antiquity. Traces date back to *prehistoric times*, a large number of stone tools and tool scraps have been found but cannot yet be associated with structures or ceramics. However, they constitute the first tangible signs of human utilization of this area. Should they correspond chronologically with similar findings on the Piano di Imera, which date to the Copper Age,² this would suggest in pre-colonial time different nuclei of scattered settlements on both of the elevated plains (fig. 2). Further evidence of prehistoric settlements was found two kilometers away, but the majority of such finds were located more than four kilometers away and thus further distant from the elevated plains of Himera.³ On the Piano del Tamburino this period seems to be followed by a time gap marked by an absence of traces of settlements or object findings whatsoever until archaic times. The 6th and 5th cent. BC seems to have been the main phase, documented



Fig. 1: Himera, view from the lower town toward the south.

both by the quantity of material found during the survey and by its broad distribution on the Piano del Tamburino, extending with varying density over the whole elevated plain. After the 5th century BC there is once again a gap with an absence of traces of presence for the next centuries until early Imperial times (some sherds) and – increased in number – tiles and (glazed) ceramics from the Middle Ages, the latter concentrated in the northern part of the Piano del Tamburino.

Fluvial Landscape

Himera's geographical position, morphological characteristics and surrounding landscape constituted important elements that made this area suitable for settlement, beginning in prehistoric times. Not only its location on the northern shore of Sicily with its orientation towards the Tyrrhenian Sea but also its position at the center of a large bay that was easily reachable from the Sea, and, even more importantly, its location in relation to the fluvial systems in this part of the island and the corresponding hydric basins of the Imera Settentrionale and the river Torto (fig. 3)⁴ were key contributing elements. Rivers *do* influence settlement locations. They were simultaneously a source of life, a border or a communication line, a transportation route as well as of strategic military importance. The two rivers that border Himera provide fresh water and the plain of agricultural land along the rivers forms a fertile inland stretch ideal for pastures and livestock breeding. The watershed between the northern and southern part of the island also assured the passage from the Tyrrhenian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea on a land route. Complete social and environmental contexts evolve around rivers and develop over time⁵ – 'fluvial landscapes' are not a static backdrop to historical narratives, but a direct influence and determining factor.

It would appear that remains of the oldest dwellings from the earliest period after the foundation of the colony in 649 BC navigate around the river, on the one hand, west (in the area of the lower town) and east of the delta of the Imera Settentrionale (the so-

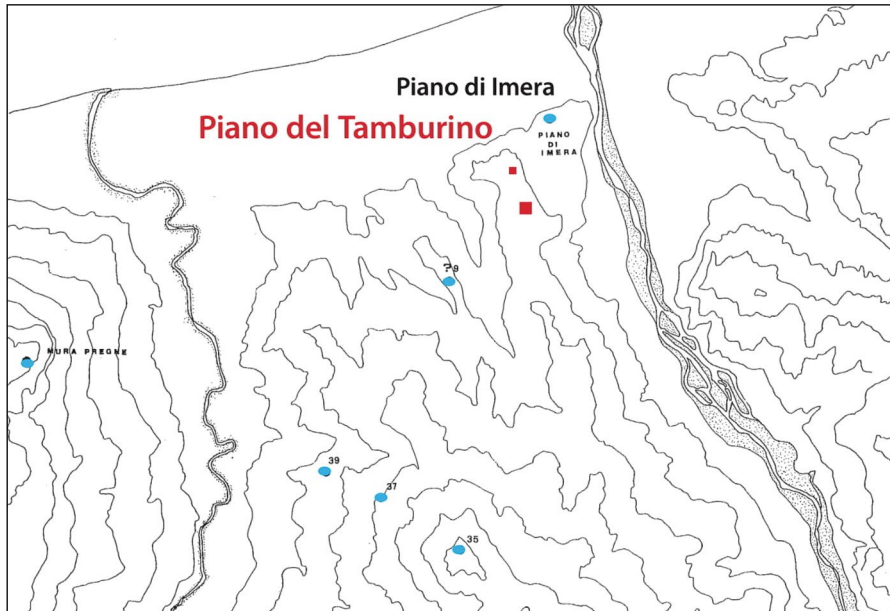


Fig. 2: Finds from prehistoric times in the territory.

called extra urban quartier, that according to Allegro,⁶ was bound to mercantile aspects), and on the other hand on the Piano di Imera where also a sanctuary and a regular urban system date back to this earliest period (fig. 4). The dwellings on both side of the river clearly indicate that the river did not mark the limits of the city; on the contrary, it *connected* the two parts and roads that lead along the coast to the east and west of the island connected the colony with other settlements. On the Piano del Tamburino, however, to date – aside from the presumed scattered villages from prehistoric times already referred to – no ceramics or structures from the first period of the colony have been found. This could simply be coincidental, or – if the river really had played such an important role in the context of the foundation – a significant element. During the first half of the 6th century BC all the areas with older dwellings from the 7th century BC (fig. 4) – according to the results of our project likewise on the Piano del Tamburino – a regular urbanistic system was developed that continued to be used until the destruction of the polis in 409 BC.

Piano del Tamburino – Area 11 and Area 12

The archaeological evidence from seven excavation campaigns to date has provided new insights into the environment and development of the Piano del Tamburino that are contributing to a new understanding of the cultural landscape of the city. After several contemporary fires that burnt the vegetation away, the existence of a water source on the Piano del Tamburino clearly came to light (fig. 5). There were earlier indications

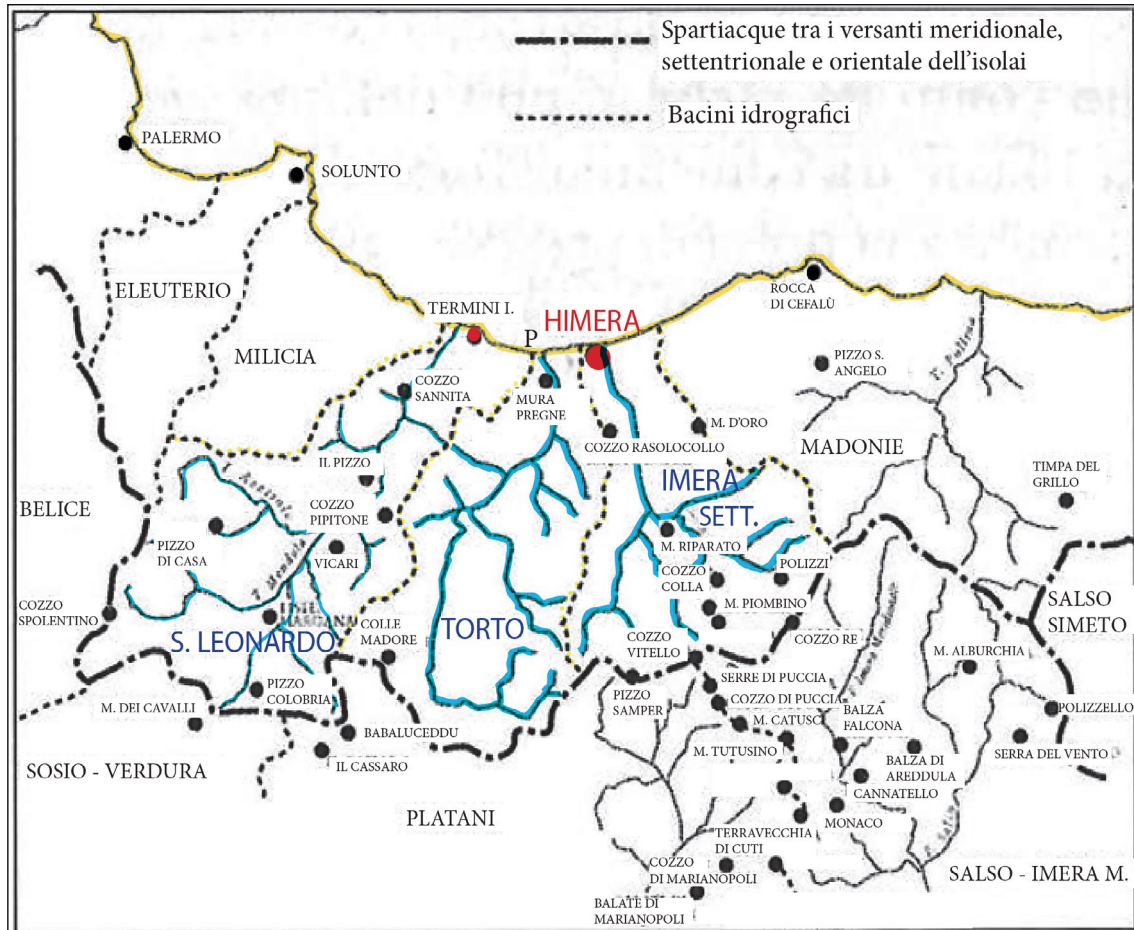


Fig. 3: Settlements in relation to hydric basins.

of the existence of such a source or a water vein, such as the presence of canes in the northern part of the Piano del Tamburino. The fires of summer 2017 made it possible to determine the exact location of the modern capture of the source, as well as the modern water channel that leads toward the lower town (fig. 5 lower right, leading to a Hotel). Water certainly was of *primary* importance for the city, especially given the fact that no water source exists on the Piano di Imera.

The evidence collected to date in so-called area 11 and area 12 – e.g. a large variety of types of deposits and altars – strongly suggests a sacred character of the two areas. Water would seem to be one of the determinant elements with regard to the position of these sanctuaries. The position of the source in antiquity and its exact relation to the sanctuaries, however, remains to be investigated.

Area 11 is characterized by an *astylos* temple, open toward the east, with an enclosure wall around it and a zone of votives west of it that seems related to a stone pile altar that was found south of this zone. The different types of deposits that have been found suggest that area 11 might be related to a female deity.

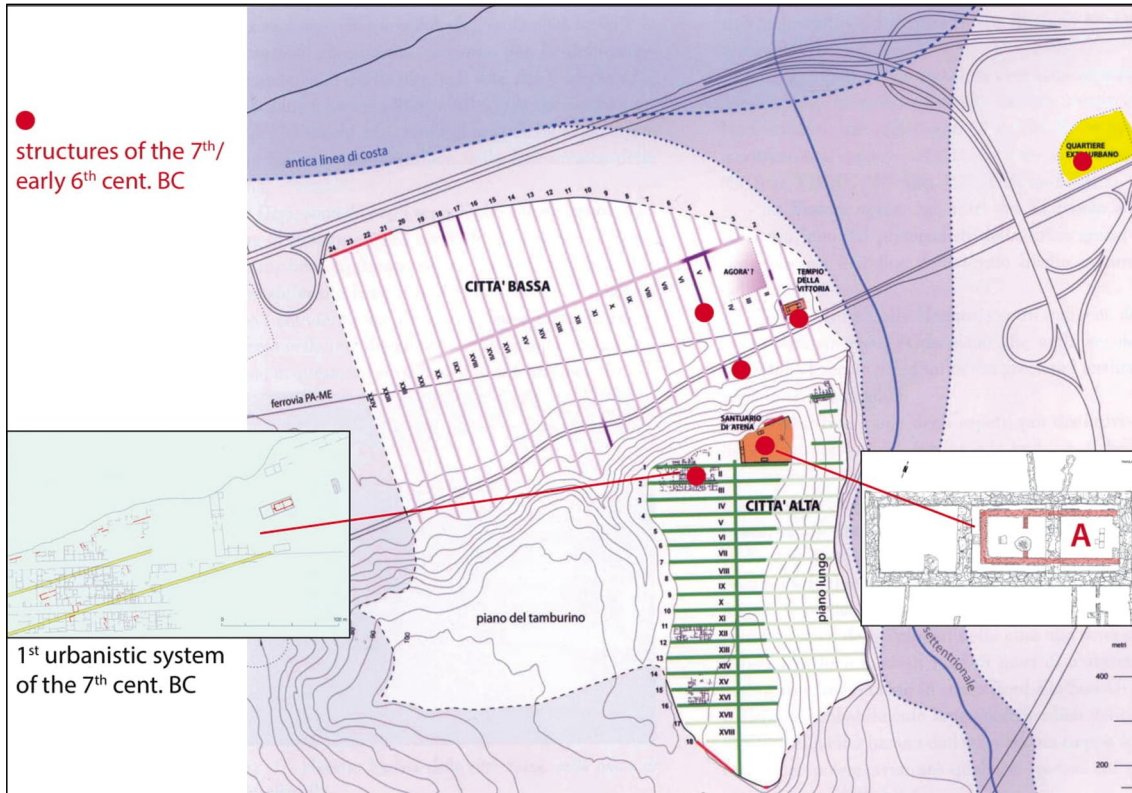


Fig. 4: Himera, urban plan with remains of structures of the 7th/early 6th century BC known to date.

Area 12, however, demonstrates a completely different architectural character in comparison with area 11 (fig. 6). The northern part consists of a large hypaethral space (open space) that is delimited to date on three sides: on the north by a wall running east-west; on the south by a partly excavated building with several rooms (A, B, C, D); and in the east by another building. Within the open space with a surface >100m² as delimited to date, three altars and numerous small deposition pits and *Bothroi* have been found (green and blue crosses, triangles, squares, fig. 6). A large variety of types of deposits, to date more than fifty in number, allow us to physically sense the materiality of the rituals: features from the numerous votive pits and bothroi, the manner with which specific objects were deposited, their frequent fragmentation (as if intentionally broken), the deliberate perforation of the bottoms of ceramic vessels, the positioning of vessels up-side-down and the vastness of the open space with various altars demonstrates parallels with sanctuaries of female divinities, e.g., chthonic divinities such as Demeter and Kore or the sanctuaries of the Nymphs, of Artemis or Aphrodite – the latter having a very close relation to water. Moreover, votive offerings such as an increased number of molds of terracotta figures, scoria, lead fragments as well as distance spacers in clay also reflect artisanal aspects that could have been

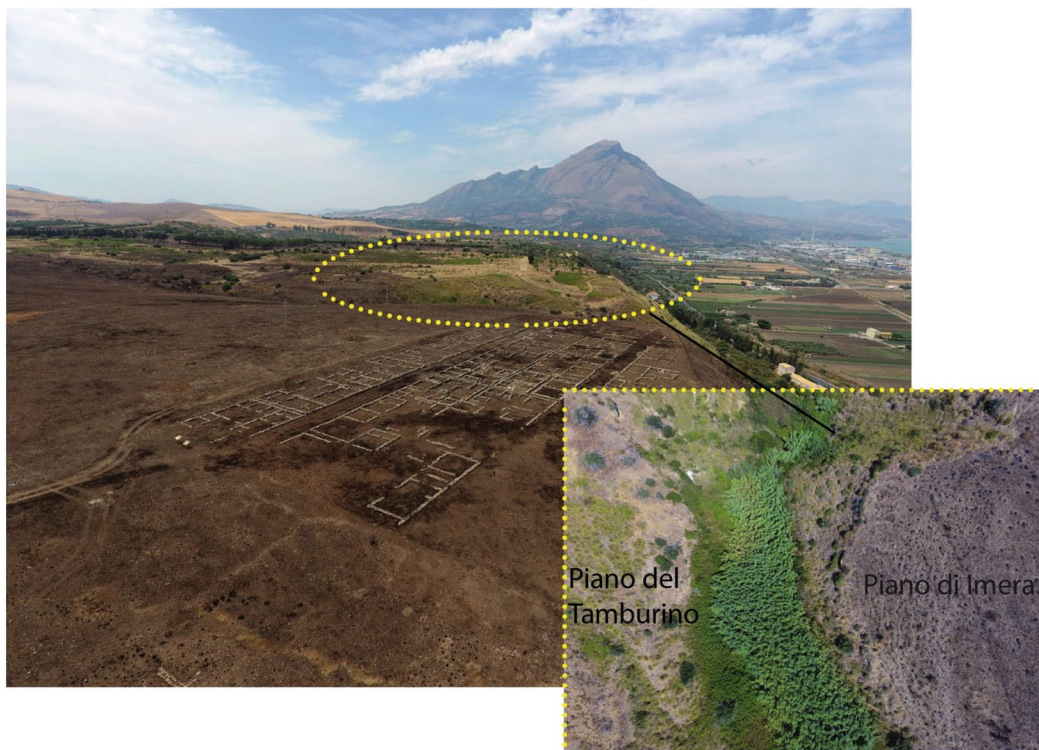


Fig. 5: View from the Piano di Imera toward the Piano del Tamburino, 2017.

connected to cults (Athena?) and/or to the presence of artisanal workshops within or next to the sacred area.

To date, three altars have been located within the open space, suggesting that either several cult deities or different aspects of the same divinity were venerated; or perhaps a sizeable sequence of rituals. The discovery of an apsidal altar (ST43, fig. 6) introduces other possible elements and aspects: This altar contained a consecration deposit consisting of a large number of complete as well as intact objects, including two seated female terracotta figures. One of them, dating to the second half of the 6th century BC, features a mother-goddess sitting on a throne, with diadem and very high polos on her head and had been broken to pieces before the deposition. The other terracotta of younger date (end of 6th/beginning of 5th century BC) was not broken but on the contrary, deposited carefully horizontally within the consecration pit. This one is also seated but wears only a bond in her hair and has no polos, but shows on her breast a *crescent moon* between two discs, a motive well known in the Phoenician-Carthaginian area. These two female terracotta figurines of different dates, one broken in pieces deposited in different parts of the deposition, the other intact and carefully placed down – do they represent two different manners of consecration within the same deposit or are they to be connected to different cults? Or do they possibly represent a succession of cults? At this stage of study, it is not possible to favor one hypothesis or the other; however, the presence



Fig. 6: Himera, Piano del Tamburino, Area 12, schematic plan and photo of absidal altar, details of the consecration deposit of the altar.

of the motive of a crescent moon within a sanctuary in Himera and as *a consecration element of an altar* make it a particularly interesting feature for further study of possible aspects of cults as well as regarding the significance and function of this sacred area for the colony of Himera. Other aspects concerning the ceramic vessels used and deposited in the sacred area and within this altar are also of significance and might point to very specific choices of vessel types (e.g. so-called Castulo-Cups).

Urbanistic Aspects

Once again with regard to urbanistic aspects, as the title of the paper suggests, all the walls discovered to date in area 11 and area 12 show the same alignment as the 2nd urbanistic plan on the Piano di Imera that was implemented beginning in the second quarter of the 6th century BC. The southern bounding wall of area 12 is in alignment



Fig. 7: Himera, Piano del Tamburino, detail with satellite photo and results of the geomagnetic and electric prospections, showing the correlation of the urbanistic system between insula XII on the Piano di Imera and insula XII' on the Piano del Tamburino (Area 12) as well as the delimited area of the insula (light blue) as known to date.

with the south wall of the Insula XII on the Piano di Imera (fig. 7). Not only the alignment but also the width of the *insulae* on the Piano di Imera and the Piano del Tamburino seem to correspond; it is therefore designated as Insula XII' (fig. 7). The area delimited by test trenches of Insula XII' had a surface of about 1500m², with a north-south extension of 32 meters and an east-west extension of some 48 meters (fig. 8). These dimensions have to be corroborated or relativized by enlarging the test trenches in forthcoming campaigns. Significant questions such as if the regular Insula system continued to the west, north and south and, related to this, if streets bordered the Insula XII' (and if so, what was their width) remain to be investigated. Likewise not yet determined is the question if the delimited surface of about 1500m² was occupied solely by a sanctuary and various buildings related to a sacred function, or if it also consisted of dwelling and artisan houses. An example of the latter in Himera is provided by the extra-urban quarter situated east of the river Himera Settentrionale, where sacred areas are combined with open spaces and houses. Differently from the latter, that ceased to exist at the beginning of the 5th century BC, the areas on the Piano del Tamburino continued until the end of the century. Although the expanse of the area of Sanctuary 1 in Area 11 is not yet known, it can be stated that the sacred building in it was placed exactly in the center of what would correspond to Insula IX on the Piano di Imera (therefore called Insula IX'). Given the findings that have been investigated to date, the development of area 12 was contemporaneous to the second urbanistic plan on the Piano di Imera and therefore clear proof of the fact that the

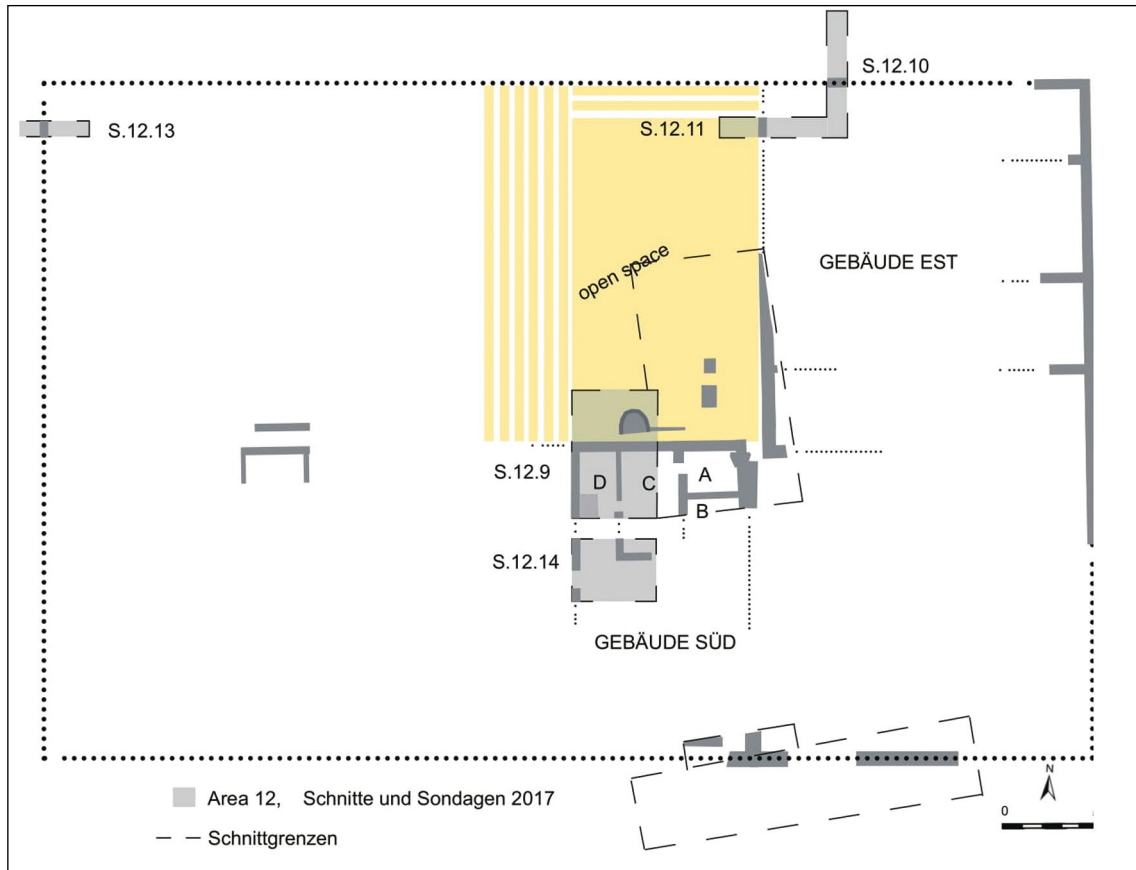


Fig. 8: Himera, Piano del Tamburino, schematic plan of insula XII as currently known (2017).

colony’s extension to the Piano del Tamburino goes back to the flourishing phase of the colony in archaic time.

These latest findings give rise to two significant questions: Was all of the Piano del Tamburino systematically urbanized with *insulae* as the Piano di Imera? And, was this urbanization, regardless of its nature, located inside or outside the colony’s city walls? The question whether the Piano del Tamburino was “intra- or extra-urban?” is more than 150 years old and began with Luigi Mauceri in 1877 who included the Piano del Tamburino in the perimeter of the city walls.⁷ Later excavations by the University of Palermo brought to light part of the southern wall on the Piano di Imera,⁸ which is consistent with Mauceri’s observations. Since Mauceri researchers have oscillated between complete inclusion, complete exclusion, or partial inclusion.⁹ The inclusion of merely a part of the Piano del Tamburino to the urban area of the Greek colony would make Himera one of the largest colonies in Sicily. Following an initial extensive study of the existing literature and of the morphology and topography of the Piano del Tamburino that began in 2012, investigations employing varied geophysical methods

(geomagnetic, geoelectric, electric tomography, georadar) followed. In 2017 we began to investigate the question of ‘intra- or extra-urban?’ archaeologically – an investigation that is ongoing and that will provide new insights for the better understanding of the colony of Himera.¹⁰

Notes

¹ Cf. the yearly appearing preliminary reports: Mango 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018.

² Cf. Belvedere 1976, *passim*; Epifanio 1976, 367–372.

³ Cf. Belvedere 1988, 191–195. Fig. 191.

⁴ Cf. Allegro 1999.

⁵ Current knowledge of the rural landscape of Himera and of its hinterland is the result of years of research through surveys, paleo-ambiental, geo-morphological and geo-archaeological studies as well as toponomastic studies. Thanks to the research started in the 1960’s by Achille Adriani, Nicola Bonacasa and Giulio Schmiedt (1970), but especially pursued by Oscar Belvedere, Rosa Maria Cucco, Aurelio Burgio and others, the archaeological landscape of Himera up to the watershed between the two rivers Imera and Platani, the valleys of Torto and of San Leonardo is one of the best known in Mediterranean archaeology (with a correspondingly rich literature); for a brief overview cf. Burgio 2017 (with bibliography).

⁶ Allegro 2014.

⁷ Mauceri 1907, 390ff.

⁸ Bonacasa Carra 1974, Taf. 3, 3; Himera II, 20 Taf. 105, 1–2.

⁹ Schmiedt 1970, 27–29. Bonacasa in *Quaderno Imerese 1*; Himera II, 661f.; Vassallo 1996; Allegro 1999; Belvedere 2001; Vassallo 2005; Mertens 2006; Vassallo 2010; Vassallo 2013. For a summary of the question, cf. Allegro 2016; Mango 2018, 111–113.

¹⁰ Cf. see for now Mango 2018. For further considerations and results, cf. Mango 2018 (forthcoming); Mango 2019 (forthcoming).

Image Credits

Fig 1: Photo E. Mango. – Fig 2: Belvedere 2002, 193 fig. 191; color elaboration E. Mango. – Fig. 3: Allegro 1999, 272 Abb. 45; color elaboration E. Mango. – Fig. 4: Combination of different plans and color elaboration E. Mango. – Fig. 5: University of Bern, IAW, Archäologie des Mittelmeerraumes. – Fig. 6: Photos University of Bern, IAW, Archäologie des Mittelmeerraumes, plan E. Mango. – Fig. 7: University of Bern, IAW, Archäologie des Mittelmeerraumes, plan elaboration E. Mango. – Fig. 8: Plan E. Mango.

References

Allegro 1999

N. Allegro, Imera, in: E. Greco (ed.) *La città greca antica. Istituzioni, società e forme urbane* (Rome 1999) 269–301.

Allegro 2014

N. Allegro, Himera. Il quartiere portuale alla foce del fiume Imera, *Mare Internum* 6, 2014, 11–36.

Allegro 2016

N. Allegro, Riflessioni sulla topografia di Himera, in: E. Lattanzi – R. Spadea (ed.), *Se cerchi la tua strada verso Itaca. Omaggio a Lina di Stefano* (Rome 2016) 41–48.

Belvedere 1976

O. Belvedere, Isolato III. Le strutture, in: N. Allegro – O. Belvedere – N. Bonacasa – R.M. Bonacasa Carra – C.A. Di Stefano – E. Epifanio – E. Joly – M.T. Manni Piraino – A. Tullio – A. Tusa Cutroni, *Himera II. Campagne di scavo 1966-1973* (Rome 1976) 223–258.

Belvedere 1988

O. Belvedere, Topografia storica, in: V. Alliata – O. Belvedere – A. Cantoni – G. Cusimano – P. Marescalchi – S. Vassallo, *Himera III.1. Prospezione archeologica nel territorio* (Rome 1988) 189–225.

Belvedere 2001

O. Belvedere, Il territorio di Himera e il problema della chora coloniale in Sicilia, in: *Problemi della chora coloniale dall'Occidente al Mar Nero. Atti del Quarantesimo convegno di studi sulla Magna Grecia, Taranto 29 september – 3 ottobre 2000, CMGr 40* (Taranto 2001) 707–755.

Bonacasa Carra 1974

R.M. Bonacasa Carra, Le fortificazioni ad aggere della Sicilia, *Kokalos* 20, 1974, 92–118.

Burgio 2017

A. Burgio, Cinquant'anni di ricerche e prospezioni nella chora imerese. Bilanci e prospettive, *Sicilia Antiqua* 14, 2017, 59–68.

Epifanio 1976

Isolato III. I materiali, in: N. Allegro – O. Belvedere – N. Bonacasa – R.M. Bonacasa Carra – C.A. Di Stefano – E. Epifanio – E. Joly – M.T. Manni Piraino – A. Tullio – A. Tusa Cutroni, *Himera II. Campagne di scavo 1966–1973* (Rome 1976) 259–372.

Himera I

A. Adriani – N. Bonacasa – C.A. di Stefano – E. Joly – M.T. Manni Piraino – G. Schmiedt – A. Tusa Cutroni, *Himera I. Campagne di scavo 1963–1965* (Rome 1970).

Himera II

N. Allegro – O. Belvedere – N. Bonacasa – R.M. Bonacasa Carra – C.A. di Stefano – E. Epifanio – E. Joly – M.T. Manni Piraino – A. Tullio – A. Tusa Cutroni, *Himera II. Campagne di scavo 1966–1973* (Rome 1976).

Mango 2013

E. Mango, *Hypsikremnos Himera. Erster Vorbericht zu den Forschungen der Universität Bern* (2012), *AntK* 56, 2013, 131–142.

Mango 2014

E. Mango, Zweiter Vorbericht zu den Forschungen in Himera (2013), *AntK* 57, 2014, 152–161.

Mango 2015

E. Mango, Dritter Vorbericht zu den Forschungen in Himera (2014), *AntK* 58, 2015, 191–203.

Mango 2016

E. Mango, Vierter Vorbericht zu den Forschungen in Himera (2015), *AntK* 59, 2016, 112–122.

Mango 2017

E. Mango, Fünfter Vorbericht zu den Forschungen in Himera (2016), *AntK* 60, 2017, 113–123.

Mango 2018

E. Mango, *AntK* 61, 2018, 111–122.

Mango 2018 (forthcoming)

E. Mango, New Evidence for Sacred Structures and Practices in Himera, Piano del Tamburino – Urbanistic Considerations, in: N. Sojic – C. Portale – M. De Cesare (ed.), *The Akragas Dialogue – Nuove ricerche sui santuari di Sicilia. Colloquio internazionale sulla dimensione architettonica, rituale e sociale dei santuari greci di Sicilia, Agrigento 29.–30.9.2016* (forthcoming).

Mango 2019 (forthcoming).

E. Mango, Himera – Reflections Regarding its Role and Importance within the Network of Colonial Settlements in Sicily, in: *Comparing Greek Colonies. Mobility and Settlement Consolidation from Southern Italy to the Black Sea (8th – 6th century BC)*, Proceedings of the International Conference, Rome 7.–9. november 2018 (forthcoming).

Mauceri 1907

L. Mauceri, Cenni sulla topografia di Imera e sugli avanzi del Tempio di Bonfornello, *MonAnt* 18, 1907, 385–436.

Mertens 2006

D. Mertens, *Städte und Bauten der Westgriechen. Von der Kolonisationszeit bis zur Krise um 400 v. Chr.* (Munich 2006).

Quaderno Imerese 1

N. Allegro – O. Belvedere – N. Bonacasa, *Quaderno imerese, Studi e Materiali* 1 (Rome 1972).

Schmiedt 1970

G. Schmiedt, Sguardo all'antica situazione geo-topografica di Himera, in: A. Adriani - N. Bonacasa – C.A. di Stefano – E. Joly – M.T. Manni Piraino – G. Schmiedt – A. Tusa Cutroni, *Himera I. Campagne di scavo 1963–1965* (Rome 1970) 21–50.

Vassallo 1996

S. Vassallo, Il territorio di Himera in età arcaica, *Kokalos* 42, 1996, 199–223.

Vassallo 2005

S. Vassallo, Nuovi dati sull'urbanistica e sulle fortificazioni di Himera, in: P. Attema – A. Nijboer – A. Ziffero (ed.), *Papers in Italian Archaeology IV. Communities and Settlements from the Neolithic to the Medieval Periods* 1, *BARIntSer* 1452, 1 (Oxford 2005) 325–333.

Vassallo 2010

S. Vassallo, Himera alla luce delle recenti indagini nella città bassa e nelle necropoli, *Mare internum* 2 (Pisa 2010) 45–56.

Vassallo 2013

S. Vassallo, Considerazioni sul sito di Himera: gli spazi dell'abitato, l'acqua, l'argilla, in: S. Bouffier – A. Hermary (ed.), *L'Occident grec de Marseille à Mégara Hyblaea: hommages à Henri Tréziny*. Bibliothèque d'archéologie méditerranéenne et africaine 13 (Arles 2013) 265–276.