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## Graphic readings and digital configurations: Akragas, Girgenti and Agrigento

The study deals with a graphic analysis of the city of Agrigento through the identification of the territorial, urban and architectural peculiarities that have designed its evolution. Starting from the landscape representations realized since the sixteenth century, the views from the sea by Spannocchi, the glances on the apric territory by Pancrazi, the Hellenic ruins inside the medieval Girgenti by Martorana and the Grand Tour travelers' productions, the urban transformations of Agrigento are reconstructed starting from the points of view adopted by the draftsmen. The aim is to provide a description through images of the multiple points of view with respect to which the territory has been perceived and to tell the Akragas classicism, by the integration between the digital model and the iconographic sources.

The graphic analysis carried out on the multiplicity of the identified territorial and urban elements provides a series of coordinates through which the observer can frame and order the urban experience. The images produced make the historical-informative apparatus readable within the digital dimension as if it was an instrument of investigation supported by technological tools. The digital model and the historical iconography intertwine in an "elsewhere" that builds a new narration of facts. The ways of representation offered by the digital tool upgrade the possibilities of visualization, providing simultaneous points of view that allow the elaboration of unpublished images in which the territorial and urban elements convey the graphic elaboration and the cognitive approach, returning information cataloged with a greater wealth of implications and meanings.

Key words:  
Drawing; digital modeling; Agrigento; Grand Tour; iconography

## INTRODUCTION

With the aim of explaining those landscape-city connections that have defined the image of Agrigento over time in an iconographic and narrative corpus of often dreamlike suggestions, the essay is structured starting from the observation and the subsequent transcription of urban, streets and buildings elements in the digital model. The reading in parts focuses on the recognition of those landscapes and urban categories that have been told by the iconography to coincide with the identity of the city in history. The graphic categories deduced from the elaboration of the model and returned through new images, aim to trace integrated modes of observation of the territory-city system, experienced through the digital device and formulated according to the idea of the image “as a fact and as an act” (Bredekamp, 2015, p. 33). The *iconic-schematic* act that comes out, queries the observer involved in the iconographic investigation and relates it to the time and space of the drawing. The visual reconstruction that is configured in the iconographic-digital hybridization leads the gaze towards a heterogeneous heritage of graphic information, assigning to the perceptual facility the transition operation from the particular to the general.

## STATE OF THE ART AND METHODOLOGY

Iconographic heritage allows to read in drawings and *carnet de voyage* of scholars, geographers and travelers arrived in Sicily between the Seventeenth and the Eighteenth centuries some of the architectural and landscape features of Agrigento. Among the iconographic sources taken into account in this study, the text of De Saint Non, *Voyage pittoresque ou description des Royame de Naples et de Sicile* (1785), provides images of classical antiquities that have defined, over time, the identity of Agrigento, as well as in the far-away representations of Tiburzio Spannocchi or in the text of Pancrazi, *Antichità siciliane spiegate colle notizie generali di questo regno* (1752), a description of the Valley of Temples of Agrigento through the drawing. Another important iconographic resource is the text of Houel, *Voyage pittoresque des*

*isles de Sicile, de Malte et de Lipari* (1784), containing more than 260 illustrations on the Greek essence of Sicily, including numerous representations on the ruins of Akragas.

A first phase of the study focuses on the identification of the elements through the schematic syntax of the digital model highlighting the morphological-architectural correspondences of the urban settlement, subsequently observed by a greater spatial and temporal distance: the first one related to the point of view adopted in the representations of the city from the sea or towards the coast; the second one, linked to the historical moment in which these representations were elaborated.

The first phase of the digital model elaboration and identification of morphological and urban categories (road layouts, building fabric, courtyards) is followed by a second moment of iconographic finding on the representations of Agrigento in history, with the aim of recognizing those same elements in the visual of travelers who narrated within their perspectives to and from the sea the Greek and the medieval cities.

## LITERARY NARRATIONS EVOCATING IMAGES

The odeporic literature and the graphic descriptions of travelers, writers and poets on the numerous Hellenistic antiquity cities in Italy have allowed the configuration of a real historical-visual apparatus, a testimony of impressions told through words, annotations and drawings that, even today, represent an inexhaustible mine of approaches to the observation and representation of the landscape transformed over time and by time. Places of reality and memory, to be explored through the image of the past in a graphic-literary dimension in which figurative art and architectural design find consonance in the explorer's mimetic language, in search of expressions capable of shedding new light on the relationship between the real and its representation.

Think of the strong imaginative power evoked in the description of Justus Tommasini [1] who, during one of his five trips to Sicily, described the island as follows: «in questa Esperia dorata la realtà supera il sogno. Qui per la prima volta ho goduto dello sfarzo ardente di colori della vegetazione meridionale e del fascino

infinito diffuso su tutta la natura... Si ha la sensazione di trovarsi di fronte non ad uno ma a diversi paesaggi approntati dalla mano sapiente del più grande dei maestri, tanto nette erano le gradazioni di colore del vapore che avvolgeva i vari oggetti... Le rovine dei templi, le case e perfino i monti erano di un rosso infuocato intenso, mentre sul mare si posava come un manto di porpora» (Carlino, 2009, p. 11).

The fascination provoked by ancient Greece, by the architectural vestiges and by the artistic testimonies in the Mediterranean places has generated a vast iconographic heritage of landscapes portrayed by the sea or cities represented towards the coast through which it is possible to reconstruct not only some highlights of the visited cities, but also to see, through the graphic expedients adopted, a linguistic register from time to time distinguished by the chosen observation point, by the landscape element in the foreground or by the chromatic gradations adopted to provide, through the evocative power of the drawing, the essence of the place, its sign, conceived in the Latin sense of *sigillum* (fig. 1).

The engravings by Pancrazi, Hoüel and De Saint Non, or even the long-distance representations by Tiburzio Spannocchi, define the image that, over time, has been shaped by the Sicilian city, starting from the detailed cataloging and, also literary, description of the ancient Akragas ruins. Rich of landscape evocations and impressions on the temples that look towards the medieval city is the journey-telling described by Cuciniello and Bianchi (fig. 2) in 1930: «e queste reliquie eziandio sono reliquie agrigentine. Le parti rimase a luogo e i frantumi ammocchiati nel recinto, i quali, ove maestra mano li raccolzasse insieme, darebbero pressocchè intero l'edificio, fanno aperto ch'esser doveva sacro, elegante, nobilissimo. Sinnalza all'estremo angolo orientale di quel grande e magnifico quartiere d'Agrigento che propriamente chiamavano la città agrigentina; accanto alle mura, sopra di un poggio, all'orlo di aspro scoscendimento [...] Loderemo pertanto la elaborazione del luogo, poiché da questa balza il tempio [di Giunone] sorgeva maestoso a dominare la soggetta città, e dal peristilio di esso poteva lo sguardo spingersi verso le spiagge di Gela e fino al mare di Libia; ed all'intorno abbracciare la campagna amenissima, il porto, il corso dell'Agraga,

le colossali muraglie, il Camico, l'Ateneo, e quasi tutto Agrigento» (Cuciniello, & Bianchi, 1829, pp. 11-12). With Giuseppe Maria Pancrazi, at the end of the eighteenth century, the city began to be observed and described in its harmony with the morphology of the territory (Pancrazi, 1751). In his work *Antichità Siciliane spiegate*, the author cites a description of the "diligent historic" Polybius, praising the "perfect manner" with which he refers to the morphological

and landscape apparatus: «Agrigento per le stabili fortificazioni, per la magnificenza dell'Opere, e per la bellezza sorpassa molte Città, imperocchè essendo ella lontana solamente diciotto stadi dal Mare, viene a godere di tutti quei commodi, che questo elemento suole apportare. Il di lei circuito è dall'arte, e dalla natura egregiamente munito, nella sommità della rupe viene ella ad avere un muro naturale composto di nudo, e durissimo sasso, e il rimanente della Città,

coll'arte, e coll'industria degl'Uomini è reso inaccessibile. Viene ella in oltre bagnata dai Fiumi: Scorre nel lato Austrino un Fiume chiamato Ipsa. In quel lato, che riguarda il Sole estivo, vi sovrasta la Fortezza, quale dalla parte esteriore da una voragine alta, e inaccessibile è circondata, alla quale volendo portarsi quelli che abitano nella Città, per un sol passo vi possono penetrare» (Pancrazi, 1751, pp. 45-46).



Fig. 1 - L. F. Cassas, G. B. Piranesi, *Vue Générale du temple de la Concorde à Agrigente*, 1801 (retrieved from: BnF Gallica, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6500291d/f1.item>).

The Hellenic landscape shown in the drawings reflects the debate between the exactness and the Greek perfection, celebrated by Winckelmann and the polychrome of Greek art as an imitation of nature supported by the young Quatremère de Quincy who, in 1814, published his reflections *Sur la restitution du temple de Jupiter Olympien en Agrigente*. The interesting aspect that arose from the point of view of graphic elaboration was the production of works such

as *Classical and Topographical tour through Greece* by Edward Dodwell, in 1819, *Le Antichità della Sicilia* by Domenico Lo Faso di Pietrasanta, in 1834, and *Architecture moderne de la Sicile* by J. B. Hittorff and K. L. Zant, who provided a comprehensive illustrative compendium on the monumental parts of the temples, on the statues, on the pictorial and plastic ornaments, on the materials, on the construction elements and on the architecture with an educational character rich in

annotations and descriptive-explanatory apparatus in relation to the measures, the nomenclature and the proportions between parts.

When Quatremère de Quincy was in Agrigento he could deepen his studies on the temples of Juno, Concordia, Heracles, Aesculapius and, above all, on the temple of Olympic Jupiter, already started through the work by Diodorus Siculus, a rich literary source of landscape descriptions whose visual evocations

established a direct link between architectural identity and correspondence with what was described. To this regard Quatremère de Quincy in his work on the temple of Olympic Jupiter reported about the evocative power of the text written by the Greek historian: «quando vidi Agrigento nel 1779 non feci fatica a riconoscere l'identità del monumento distrutto e la sua conformità con quello descritto da Diodoro; la sola ispezione dell'area rende questo rapporto sensibile, soprattutto quando se ne misura la lunghezza» (Carlino, 2009, p. 53).

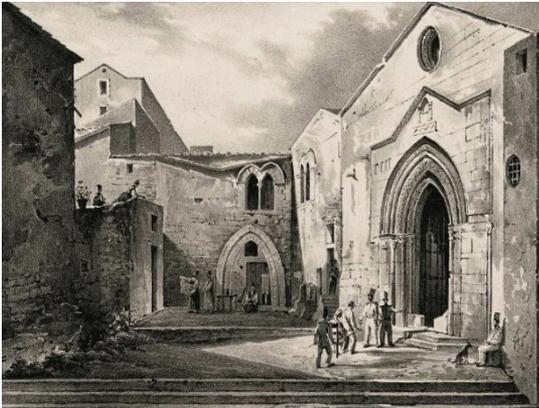


Fig. 2 - Above, *Veduta generale de' contorni di Girgenti*; below, *Ospedale militare in Girgenti*, litographs, 1829 (retrieved from: Cuciniello & Bianchi, 1829, pp. 25, 37).

In the following years Hittorff, pupil of Quatremère de Quincy and Dufourny, did a trip to Sicily that allowed him to approach not only the Hellenic classicism but also the architecture and monuments of the Island. Hoüel visited Sicily in 1770, but he carried out his work in 1777, also working with De Saint Non on the graphic elaborations of the temple of Jupiter. The work of these scholars translated into a many-voiced production of the Agrigento landscape observed through the eyes of their contemporaneity, although steeped in Hellenic quotations on the values of symmetry, proportion, eurythmy and geometry, clearly referred to Winckelmann's thought.

### IMAGES EVOCATING LITERARY NARRATIONS

The iconographic apparatus provided by the narration of journeys to Sicily, the medieval Girgenti and the rediscovered Greek Akragas, sheds light on some graphic-expressive issues that determined the structure, over time, of a city whose identity has taken shape even from its representations.

The methods of elaboration chosen by the writers and draftsmen who arrived in Agrigento give information not only on the interpretative suggestions related to the perception and the spirit of the place, but also on the morphological, landscape, urban and architectural features of the site. From the end of the sixteenth century, the city was described as a compact urban organism, surrounded by fortified medieval walls where some convent buildings stand out and the crest line on which the cathedral and the ancient castle of Girgenti stand. A deep valley separates the urban fabric in two parts and from the observation of some views made between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it is possible to read the orographic consistency of the territory through pseudo-axonomic representations (fig. 3).

The representation by Tiburzio Spannocchi in 1578 shows a long-distance city; the badlands at the edge of the cliff and the imposing fort guarding the harbor occupy the foreground of the scene, but it is still possible to recognize, on the upper part of the city, the bodies of the cathedral and the castle. In the development of the coastline, shown below as if it were a double orthogonal projection *ante litteram*,

Spannocchi enlightens about the spatial arrangement and the distances between the elements, also emphasizing the description of the ground roughness through the three-dimensional connotation of the pseudo-axonomic representation that reinforces the perceptive impact of the city and the fort, together with the unfolding of the coast. Also Gabriele Merelli recurs to the artifice of the pseudo-axonomic representation in 1677 placing the cathedral and the castle in a central axis of the drawing, giving evidence also to the mesh of the road layouts that follow the orographic pattern. The system of the fortified walls at the top and the harbor at the bottom constitute the visual margins of the view, but although the author's will to diversify some pieces of the city through the orientation of the road tracks, the urban fabric is still poorly differentiated (fig. 4).

In the same way, but more markedly, a representation by Anonymous in 1686 seems to show the shape of the military plans of the city highlighting the ring of the walls with the fortifications that surround an urban plot consisting of streets and buildings arranged in an arbitrary way.

A more relevant verisimilitude with the urban settlement is recognized in the representation of Francesco Negro in 1640 which, from a longer distance compared to that one adopted by Spannocchi. He inserts the temples and places the fort of the harbor, within the drawing, in a position to better appreciate the orographic relief, providing greater depth to the view (fig. 5).

An interesting and exhaustive compendium of views of Agrigento was realized by Giuseppe Maria Pancrazi who, describing the city through wide perspectives towards the sea, represents the building organism as an integral part of the orographic irregularity almost mixing it with the ground and the Akragas river giving space to the "high and inaccessible chasm" that separates the summit of Mount Camico, on which the medieval city stands, from the valley of the Greek city.

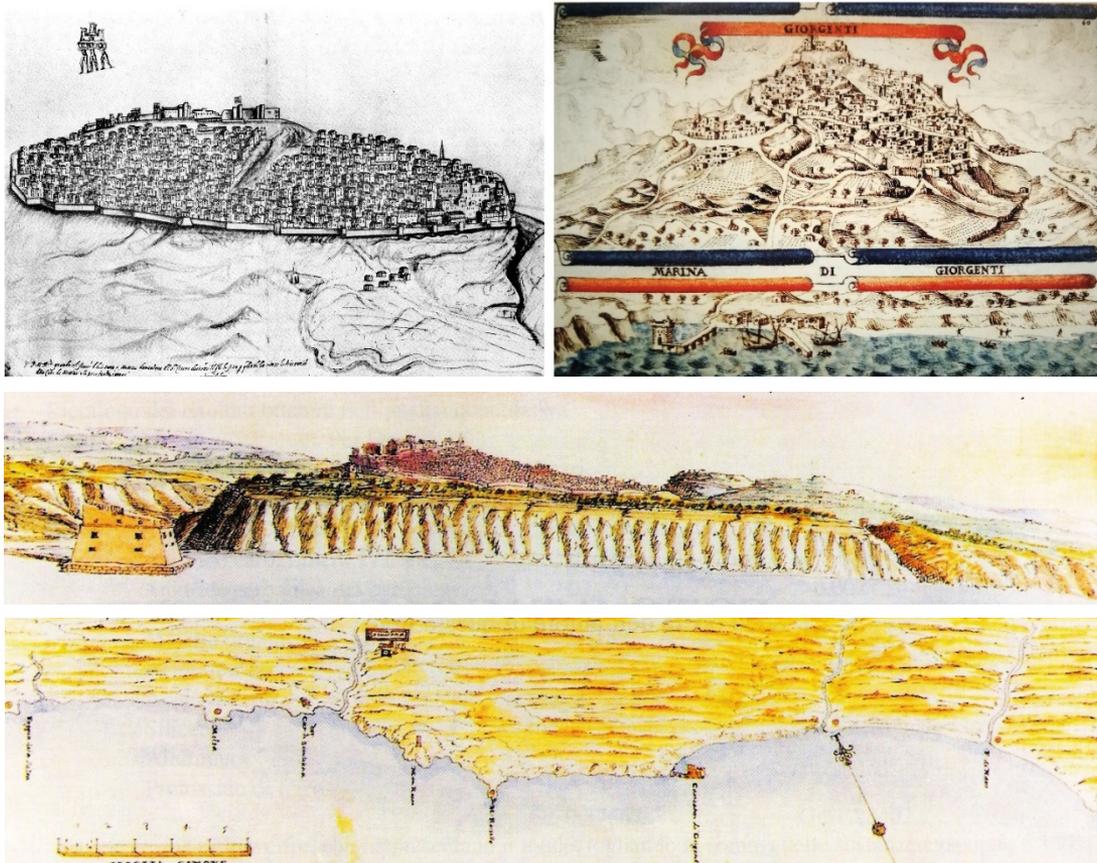


Fig. 3 – Above left, *Girgenti*, representation of the city of Agrigento inside the ancient walls, by Anonymous, 1584; above right, G. Merelli, *Giorgenti e Marina di Giorgenti*, 1677; below, T. Spannocchi, *Girgento*, 1578 (retrieved from: Dufour, 1992, pp. 389, 386).

To provide the reader with an overview of his journey to Agrigento, Pancrazi resorted to the use of a general chorography of the territory as a guide to the plates of its work (Pancrazi, 1751, p. 48) in which he maps fifteen areas graphically described through perspective views, enriched by further descriptive details of landscape and architectural character.



Fig. 4 - Anonymous, *Girgento*, 1686 (retrieved from: Dufour, 1992, p. 387).



Fig. 5 - F. Negro, *Perspettiva di Giorgenti*, 1640 (retrieved from: Dufour, 1992, p. 390).

The compendium of plates provides a graphic-literary overview of the area conceived to slow down the look on some places, to capture altimetric and spatial relationships and to deepen the historical events that led to the construction or to the landscape and urban transformations, through a series of references to legends. It is from the planimetric representations that we can obtain more information on the fortified walls

extension; in some cases it is the distinction between undifferentiated parts of the territory with a compact pattern and sharp chromatic contrasts between the area circumscribed by the walls and the outer one, as in the plan drawn by Spannocchi in 1578 in which the double line of fortifications constitutes the demarcation margin between the two parts (fig. 6). Francesco Negro, in 1640, although not focusing yet on the detail of the urban fabric, adds the portion called “Borgo” of the city outside the walls, treating with greater accuracy the difference in height between the city and the surrounding area through a thickening of discontinuous lines to indicate the high difference, with a sort of “survey of the glance” revealing the irregularity of the ground. In the drawing it is possible to read the traces of urban plot borders near the ancient walls with the identification of the castle, the prison and the eight gates of the city. Less detailed from the point of view of the orographic texture, the Merelli’s plan, of 1677, brings information about the location of the gates and the castle with the inclusion of a double dashed line to probably indicate the main street of the ancient medieval city without no connections between the Girgenti’s gate and that one of the Borgo (Dufour, 1992, p. 395).

Following the renewed interest in the study of the Greek Akragas between 1700 and 1800, the landscape views from the sea to the military plans were replaced by the prospective representations from the city to the sea; the Hellenic vestiges occupied the foreground of the drawing and the architecture-landscape relationship became an element of spatial control and restitution of the depth between the parts with the aim of restoring the classical values of measure, proportion and geometric control (fig 7). Objective descriptions on the architectural body and its parts alternated with a vast production of graphic works on the construction details and color relationships, as a direct consequence of the European debate around the polychrome of ancient temples. The reconstructions of the travelers to deepen their studies on architecture and classical art enriched the iconographic heritage of information on the life habits, on religious customs and on study and survey campaigns carried out. The use of double orthogonal projections with the insertion of annotations on the

nomenclature and measures of the architectural elements allowed to construct graphic compositions with the combination of different methods of representation: plans, sections and perspectives constituted the mosaic tesserae of metric and spatial references.

Views of imaginary landscapes, in which the architectural object represents the only real element of the scene and a far horizon allow to return with manifest intensity the temporal distance of the object represented with respect to the observer, favoring the value of harmony among the elements through a gradual distribution of colors (fig. 8).

In many cases the draftsman uses orthogonal projections into perspective views by dedicating a short graphic space to a hint of the metric and proportional values typical of classical culture, a sort of “representation inside representation” that makes the architectural object a document of itself: a great sheet containing the plan of a temple unrolled on the perspective plane by establishing a correspondence between two dimensions of the representation (fig. 9). The characters identified in the graphic descriptions of the travel diaries reveal a geography of the look that ranges between digital hybridizations and iconography, giving back another modality of cataloging for the knowledge of the landscape. Recognizing the points of view, tracing the graphic expedient for the effective rendering of the object, elaborating new representations are operations belonging to the observing act that contribute to understand a city narrated for centuries by geographers, writers and poets circumscribing a topical temporality integrated with the iconographic heritage through the digital means.

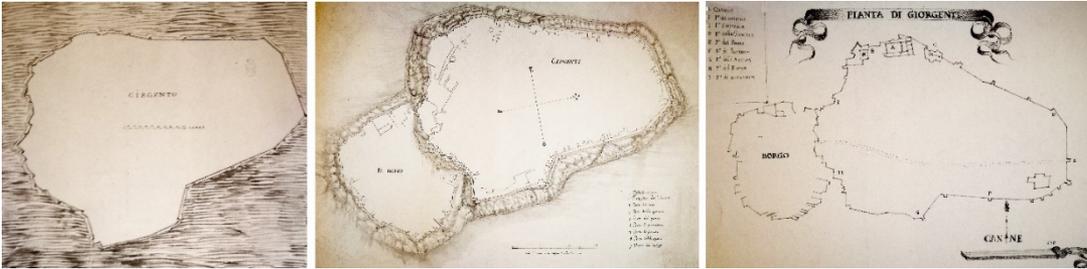


Fig. 6 - From the left, T. Spannocchi, *Girgenti*, 1578; F. Negro, *Girgenti*, 1640; G. Merelli, *Pianta di Giorgenti*, 1677 (retrieved from: Dufour, 1992, pp. 388, 391, 394).

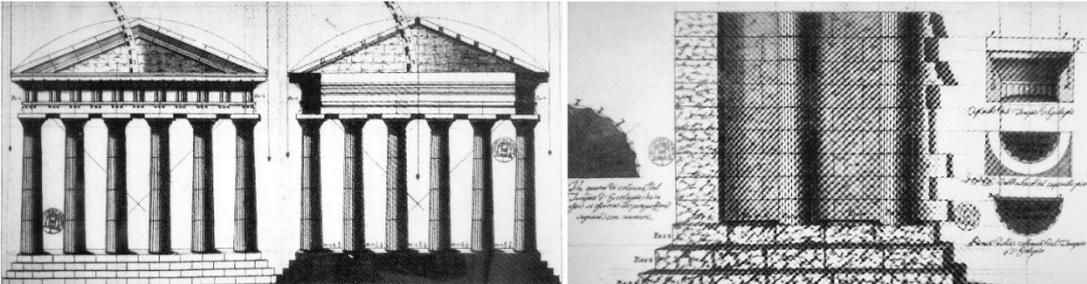


Fig. 7 - Left, M. Vella, *Monumenti cavati dalla vetusta Città d'Agrigento*, facade and section of the Concorde temple; right, part of the facade of the Asclepius temple with architectural details in double orthogonal projection (retrieved from: Carlino, 2009, pp. 146, 150).



Fig. 8 - Left, P. H. de Valenciennes, *View of the ancient city of Agrigento*, 1779; right, J. Ph. Hackert, *Landscape with a temple of Agrigento*, 1794 (retrieved from: Carlino, 2009, pp. 203, 204).

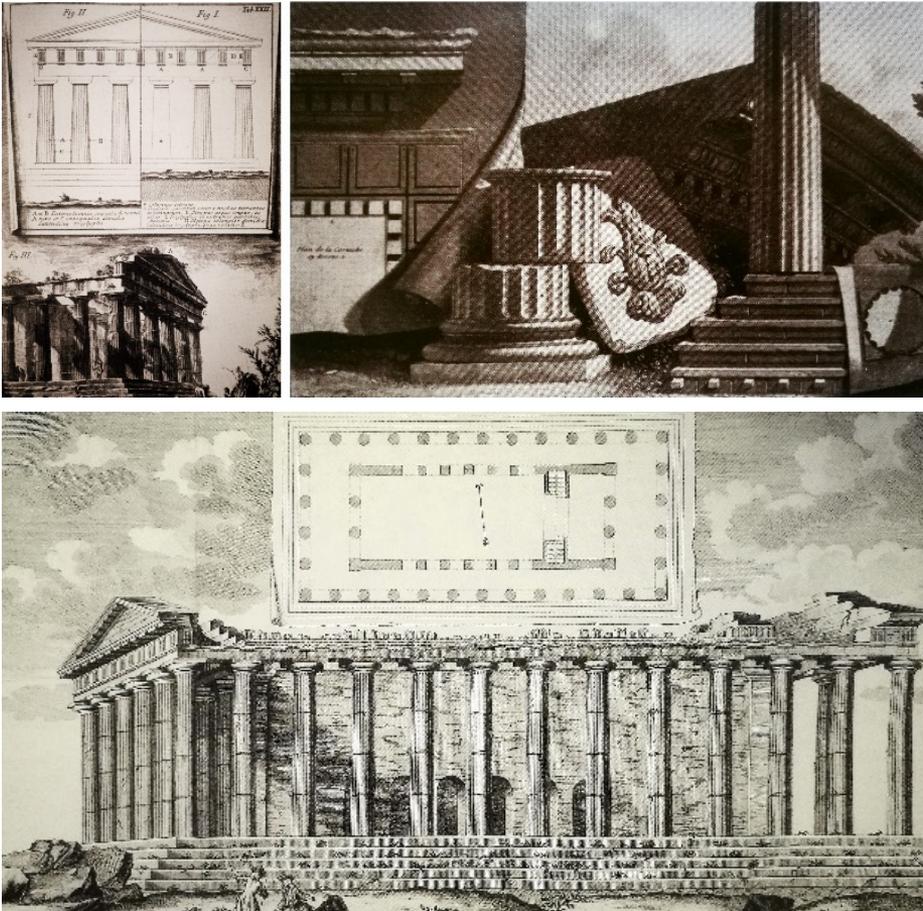


Fig. 9 - From the left, G. B. Piranesi, *Scenographia reliquiarum aedis quae Concordiae asseritur, Agrigenti in Sicilia*, tav. XXII, 1761; J. Houël, *frammenti di un bagno antico e del tempio di Castore e Polluce*, tav. CCXXII, 1787; below, J. P. d'Orville, *Ichnographia integerrimi, in ruinis urbis Agriganti*, 1764 (retrieved from: Carlino, 2009, pp. 129, 190, 121).

## CONCLUSIONS

The identification of the territorial, urban and architectural elements constitutes the next step for the realization of the model and the production of new drawings. In relation to the elements that characterize the site from a landscape and urban point of view, the adoption of methods of representation by isolation

and stratification, through the digital model, provides images that establish a new temporal relationship between digital and historical cartography.

The images produced make the historical-informative apparatus readable within the digital dimension for an easier understanding of the historical-iconographic-architectural data, as if it was the “closed and raised window” referred by Lefebvre from which «[...] la città

possa essere vista da una certa altezza e distanza, in modo che si possa osservare allo stesso tempo chi va e chi viene. La finestra, dunque, è sia un luogo reale che consente di osservare la giustapposizione di ritmi differenti, sia uno strumento di indagine, presumibilmente affiancato da strumenti tecnologici come mappe, disegni, testi, foto e film» (Amin, & Thrift, 2005, p. 39).

Digital elaborations are added to the representations of places often imagined with the aim to make understandable the relationships between things: the morphological aspects of the territory, the sea-city relationship, the landscape arrangement of the architectural elements, the perceptive aspect determined from the point of view, the chromatic impact on the senses.

The digital model and historical iconography intertwine in an “elsewhere” that builds a new narration of facts, a sort of “method construction”, as said by Gregotti, «[...] di correlazione tra problemi specifici e la loro organizzazione significativa: significativa per rapporto anzitutto all'essenza del problema stesso e alla relazione speciale che il soggetto con esso instaura; per rapporto poi alla discussione intorno ad alcuni valori della modernità, sia pure variamente interpretati» (Gregotti, 2002, p. 95). In this regard, starting from the possibilities of

graphic elaboration offered by the digital tool, a mesh of glance coordinates, observation suggestions and spatial annotations is configured leading to frame and reorder the urban experience. Views orbited around the digital object establish a «metafora cibernetica, connessione tra spazio costruito e spazio virtuale [...] uno spazio architettonico come metafora dello spazio informatico, in una forma di libera interconnessione continuamente flessibile, adattabile, che si apre all'importanza della simultaneità e della idea di spazio coincidente con la comunicazione istantanea a distanza» (Gregotti, 2002, p. 65).

In the new images, the territorial and urban elements, recognized and isolated during the reading phase of the site, return the information cataloged with a greater richness of implications and meanings. The diegetic method of graphic expression adopted by the draftsmen of the time has widened the range of descriptive-informative-narrative possibilities offered

by the representation, from the reproduced object to the *imitatio* process of the nature model, in a symbiotic temporality-spatiality correlation system.

The identification of the elements that characterize the morphological complexity of the site is the beginning for a graphic analysis that looks at “representing” to know, recalling the “eminently conceptual and formal structure” (Ugo, 1994, p. 13) of the German term *Vorstellung* that Vittorio Ugo refers to seal the meaning of the word “representation”.

The views towards the sea, the city drawn from it, the relationship between architecture and landscape, the metric control by parts of the represented object, suggested how to orbit the digital model, the places to be hybridized, in the virtual dimension, with the graphs of the past to re-propose that richness of intersection between the methods of representation adopted by the travelers who narrated the city and its unfolding in the territory.

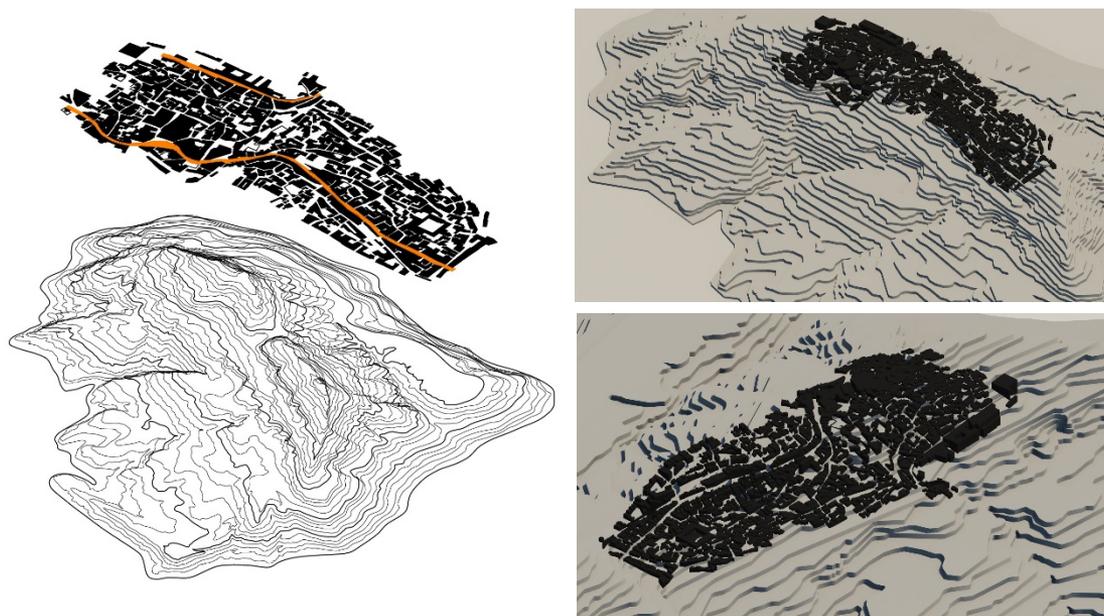


Fig. 10 - The two axonometric views and the exploded view show the relationship between the orographic complexity of Agrigento and the urban expansion. The building pattern allow to read the islamic urban configuration characterizing the medieval city of which the two main paths are highlighted.



Fig. 11 - Rendering axonometric view of the digital model. Right, perspective view by P. Martorana on the ruins of the Jupiter temple on the mount Camico, 1803 (retrieved from: Miccichè, 2006); left, *Chorographia Antiqui Agrigenti*, vol. I, part II, p. 1 (retrieved from: Pancrazi, 1751).

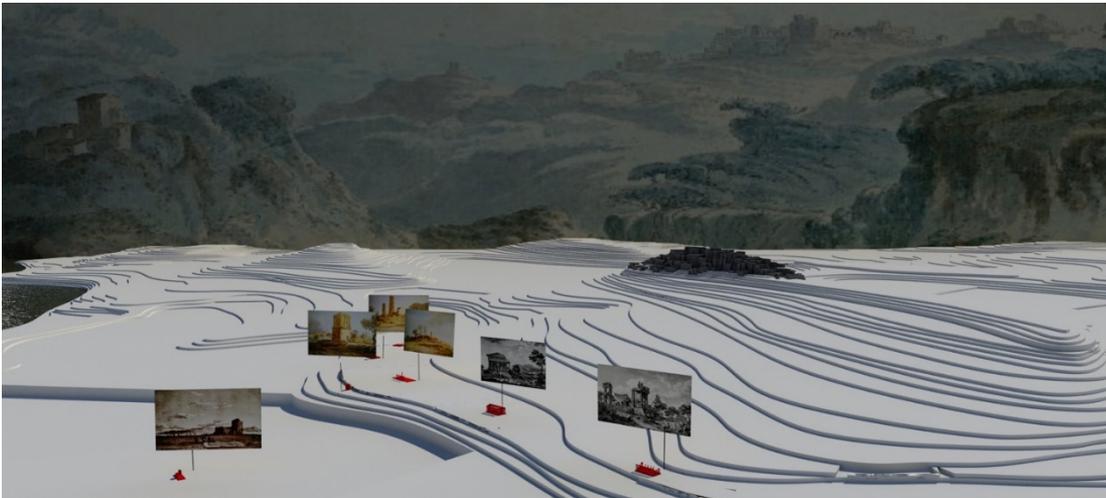


Fig. 12 - Digital model of the city of Agrigento. On the background, perspective view realized by R. de Saint-Non (1782) and other perspective views on the temples of the ancient Akragas.



Fig. 13 - Perspective view of the digital model. On the background general plan of the historic center of Agrigento, at the bottom, photo of the historic center, 1930 ca. (retrieved from: Musei Civici, Agrigento, n. 98, fotografic archive G. Zirretta).

## NOTES

[1] Johann Heinrich Westphal, known under the pseudonym of Justus Tommasini, he was a geographer, mathematician, traveler-writer who in 1822 started a journey to Egypt, moving to Naples and Sicily. Between 1825 and 1828 he produced two works *Letters from Sicily (Briefe aus Sizilien)* and *Walk through Puglia and Calabria (Spatziergang durch Apulien und Kalabrien)*. See: Scamardi, T. (2009). *Passeggiata attraverso la Puglia e la Calabria*. Soveria Mannelli (CZ): Rubbettino editore.

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