

CHAPTER 3: TEMPLES & THEATRES

Introduction

Status is the main theme here. As the richest and most powerful city of Sicily and, for certainly a number of years, in *Magna Graecia*, Syracuse ought to have possessed public monuments commensurate with its political and military position. However, before the reign of Hieron II was that the case at all? As the following comparative discussion will reveal, Syracuse had a modest series of temples, notwithstanding that fact, its late Hellenistic theatre and an altar to Zeus *Eleutherios* were indeed civic giants meant to proclaim, through their size and sophistication, Syracuse's pre-eminent place in Sicily. However, not as the leading city-state in *Magna Graecia*, but as the faithful ally of Rome. The majestic building projects of the earlier tyrants, Gelon's family tomb, Dionysius' acropolis, Agathokles' harbour towers were all lost even in antiquity.¹ Syracusan community pride was rebuilt by Hieron II, but for a new world in which there was a foreign dominant power. Prior to Hieron's rule the buildings of the city and its immediate surroundings although perhaps not as grandiose as those found, for example, at Selinous or Akragas (or in quite as dramatic natural settings as, for instance, the temple and theatre at Segesta, or the Tauromenion theatre) they nonetheless dominated the urban (and to a lesser extent) the rural landscape. As a result, their very presence affected the daily routine and thoughts of the people since their lives, in virtually all respects, revolved around their civic buildings to a far greater degree than is the case today. Both the sacred and the profane were celebrated together – or at least the one was constantly in gear with the other. Hence the subject of this chapter, for the temples and the theatres were inextricably related to cult practices and celebrations which brought the community together.

Temples

In and around its urban area, Syracuse today boasts the remains of three great Doric temples, two on Ortygia and one at Polichne, near the point of Daskon in the Great Harbour, and the remains of one of only three Ionic temples ever to be built in Sicily or throughout *Magna Graecia*.² We know from Cicero, among other ancient writers, that several other notable temples were to be seen particularly on the mainland section of the city. Their exact situation remains a point of conjecture, for they are buried beneath the modern suburbs of Neapolis, Akradina

1 A series of painting depicting Agathokles in military situations was preserved in the temple of Athena down to the late 70s when they were expropriated by Verres, Cic. *Verr.* 2.55.122. See also Chapter 5.

2 The other Ionic temples were at Locri and Hipponion while the temple of Athena at Poseidonia had interior Ionic columns.

and Tyche.³ The purpose here is to discuss and illustrate the temples of Syracuse, but also to compare these structures with those found elsewhere in Sicily, notably at Segesta, Selinous and Akragas, and in southern Italy. Syracuse was the most powerful and wealthiest city in Sicily during the Classical and Hellenistic periods and later, but were its temples an indication of its dominating position?

The temple of Apollo is the oldest Hellenic temple of the peripteral type in Sicily to have survived, and dates to the last years of the seventh century BC or the early part of the sixth, therefore about a hundred and twenty years after Syracuse's foundation.⁴ The temple was built of local stone, most probably quarried from Epipolai, and has a striking whiteness, compared to the more honey-coloured stone of Akragas and some, but not all, of the temples of Selinous.⁵ The stone is of better quality than that found at, for instance, Poseidonia. The height of the monolithic columns was just about eight metres (27 feet), just two of which stand to the height of the capitals. The temple is archaic in appearance, but is the prototype for later such hexastyle structures. The columns, seventeen along the length, stand on a steep four-stepped *crepidoma*, and the eastern end has a double colonnade and the additional feature of a stairway. The interior *cella* is narrow but contains an entrance porch, a *pronaos*, and a rear *adyton* or treasury. The *stylobate* is twenty-six metres (73 feet) wide and sixty metres (180 feet) long. The overall effect would have been one of length rather than width and the temple, though of a reasonable height, with teracotta tiles, would have been less conspicuous than its near neighbours higher up the hill on Ortygia.

The *Apollonion* has been considered jointly dedicated to Apollo and Artemis, but there is no ancient evidence for this assumption. Cicero mentions a temple to Diana (*Verr. 2.53.118*), but this reference may well be to the Ionic temple. On the eastern side of the *crepidoma* may be seen an inscription perhaps erected by the architect or his

3 We know from Cicero, among other ancient writers, that several other notable temples were to be seen, particularly on the mainland section of the city. Among those attested in the sources are a temple to Herakles, which lay outside the walls close to Lysimeleia, one or two temples to Demeter and Kore in Neapolis near the *Temenos* of Apollo, a temple to Ciane, with a cult statue of a woman, Aelian, *VH* 2.33, and a temple to Asklepios. Cic. *Verr. 2.5.184*, refers to a temple of Liber and Libera, but there may have been a sole temple to 'Demeter and the Kore', Freeman 1891, 2.213, 2.524. A shrine to the Anapos river may have been located in Lysimeleia, Aelian, *VH* 2.33. A Hellenistic temple to Zeus in the agora has also completely disappeared, and a temple to Hera on Ortygia may lie beneath the *Castello Maniace*. For a temple to Hera and a statue to Gelon perhaps having been located here, see Aelian, *VH* 6.11; Athenaeus, 11.462; Randall-Maclver: 1968, 164–165. The wealth contained in these temples had, on occasion, been plundered. For example, Dionysius I had stolen from the *Olympieion* at Polichne and the temple of Asklepios, Aelian, *VH* 1.20; Freeman: 1894, 4.197. Temple robbing became a common occurrence from the Hellenistic period but, if Cicero's evidence is to be trusted, Verres, governor of Sicily between 73 and 71 BC through his misappropriation of temple treasures attained new heights of avarice.

4 The dates vary: ca. 565 BC, Dinsmoor: 1951, 75–78; Guido: 1967, 176; Barletta: 1983, 72; 'around 600 BC' Holloway: 1991, 68; between 600 and 550 BC, Drögemüller: 1969: 41. CD Catalogue nos. 234–36, 493–94, 529, 651–53, 663.

5 While light does play a part in the colouration of the temple columns, local sandstone at Selinous was used for the *Heraion* and Temple F, but a whiter stone was used for the *Olympieion* (Temple G) and obtained from the now *Cave di Cusa*. At Poseidonia (Paestum) the 'poor-looking local stone' was covered with a 'layer of white stucco', Randall-Maclver: 1968, 15. The stone used at Segesta is also white, CD no. 127.

patron (*epistates*), a certain Kleomenes.⁶ The cult of Apollo was an important element in Syracuse, the lack of space for expansion of the precinct here may have led to the construction of a further precinct in which was erected a statue of Apollo in Neapolis. This may also be seen as a development of the cult away from the island which, by the Classical period, was largely inaccessible to the ordinary citizens of Syracuse.

The temple to Zeus *Urios* (*Olympieion*) at Polichne is about five kilometres (2–3 miles) from Ortygia, approximately three kilometres (9 000 feet) outside the city walls and south of the Anapos river. The temple faces the entrance to the Great Harbour; and its situation must be directly related to the fact that Zeus *Urios* was the protector of seafarers, and would have been the first sight to shipping as it entered the bay. Syracuse's main harbour lay to the right of the entrance and hence the temple would be on any ship's left-hand side as it came to anchor. The sailors would see the white of the six columns and the bright colours of the temple's entablature on its eastern end as they came to the safety of the harbour. The overall height of the temple would have been about twenty-five metres (75 feet), but this would have been enhanced by the hill on which the temple is situated.

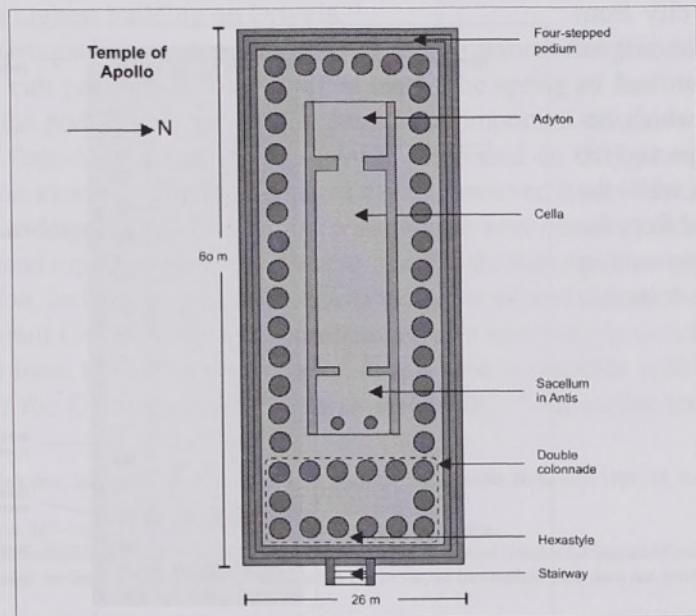


Figure 10: The Temple of Apollo on Ortygia

⁶ On the inscription and the variant readings see Holloway: 1991, 73, following M. Guarducci: 'Kleomenes the son of Knidieides made it for Apollo. And he included columns. They are fine works.' CD no. 651. Guido: 1958, 43; Guido: 1967, 178; Freeman: 1891, 2.443, are more cautious in their assessment of the text.

Syracuse in antiquity

The *Olympieion* is generally considered to be roughly contemporary with the Temple of Apollo, but constructed slightly later.⁷ This contention is based on the fact that the two standing columns, rising to a height of about seven metres (22 feet), are both monolithic. The temple was evidently completed before column drums became commonly employed; the columns of the peristyle at least were made of single pieces of stone. The columns themselves are the second left at the east end, and the corner of the west end. The *Olympieion* was a Doric peripteral hexastyle structure with seventeen columns along the length, with a double colonnade at the front, closely modeled on the *Apollonion*. Again, the fluting, like that on the columns of the temple of Apollo, is shallow. The three-stepped stylobate is high and an entry stairway may well have been an added feature here. The overall stylobate is seventy-one by twenty-seven metres (124 feet by 80 feet), which would have given emphasis to the length. The interior *cella* would also have been comparatively narrow. Any trace of the *cella* is lost since the interior of the temple has completely disappeared beneath the foundation level. The temple was richly decorated in antiquity when the cult statue was decorated with a cloak of woven gold (Aelian, *V.H.* 1.20). It was vulnerable to attack, as occurred on a number of occasions, but does not appear to have sustained massive pillaging. However, a fort was established at Polichne to protect both the approach to the city from the south and the temple. The *Olympieion* had its own precinct which occupied a large part of the hill at Polichne, while the main south road from the city ran in a deep cutting just below the temple's eastern end.⁸

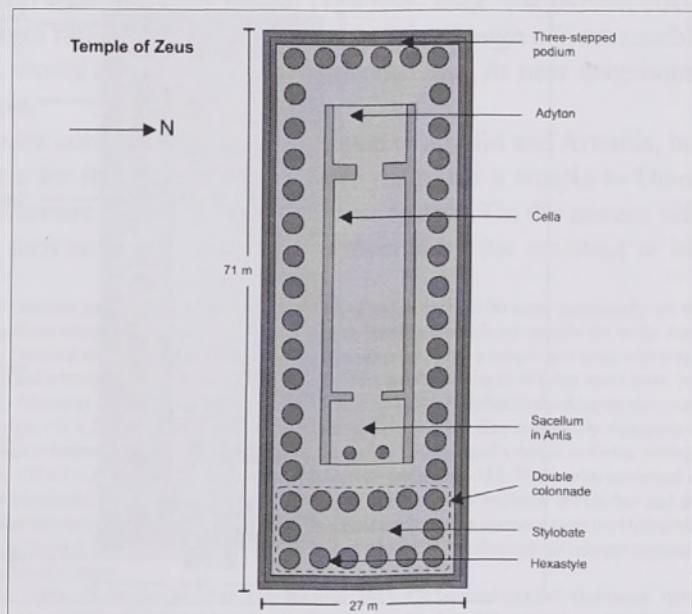


Figure 11: The Temple of Zeus Urios at Polichne

7 Drögemüller: 1969, 51; 'end of the seventh century', Holloway: 1991, 60; CD. No. 719.

8 CD. nos. 716, 97, 286–96, 300, 627–28.

The Ionic temple (Temple of Artemis), situated beneath the present-day *Municipio*, and north of the temple of Athena, was excavated only in 1963–64. It dates to the last quarter of the sixth century BC, and so is somewhat younger than the *Apollonion* and *Olympieion*. It was perhaps not entirely finished when Gelon began construction of the adjacent temple dedicated to Athena in 480.⁹ The temple's stylobate, although now mostly destroyed, can be detected with its three steps, and other remains – some of which are quite substantial – indicate a hexastyle temple with fourteen columns along the length, but without a colonnade at the east end. The fluting on the columns is also much deeper, and of a higher quality, than that of the temples to Apollo or Zeus *Urios*, indicative of a particular school or workshop of craftsmen, possibly even sculptors employed from elsewhere. Cicero refers to a temple of Diana (Artemis), and this may illustrate that this structure, even if unfinished, was actually in use in his day. Temples were clearly used in an unfinished state (compare the *Olympieion* at Selinous) and a lack of completion does not necessarily imply that a derelict building occupied this space.¹⁰ Unlike modern houses or commercial buildings, ancient temples took many years to build and evidently were often incomplete, but were in daily use nonetheless.¹¹ The columns of Ionic temples were usually much taller than those of the Doric order, hence this temple was almost certainly the highest building on Ortygia.¹²

Since Ortygia belonged to Artemis, it is safe to assume that this deity held a senior place in the cult practices of the island, at least. The spring of Arethusa nearby and a *temenos* of the goddess in that area all point to an important religious institution here. A nocturnal festival to Artemis – presumably celebrated on Ortygia within the temple precinct – was clearly an important annual event. However, it cost the city dearly in 212 BC, when a widespread drunken stupor caused by the over-consumption of wine without food, since food supplies had become scarce, allowed the Romans to occupy the walls near the *Hexapylon*, and a little while afterwards they entered and sacked the entire city.¹³

The tyrant Gelon ordered the construction of a new temple to Athena, just to the south of the Ionic temple, and the agreed date is said to coincide with the great Greek victory over the Carthaginians at Himera in 480 BC.¹⁴ An earlier temple was either

9 For the temple's date, lack of completion and remains, Barletta: 1983, 86–90; Holloway: 1991, 72. See also the CD nos. 496, 578, 616–21.

10 See the CD nos. 167–168, 174, 177–180 for this temple and the excavations.

11 A useful modern comparison would be with the still unfinished church, Antoni Gaudí's *La Sagrada Família* in Barcelona. Begun in 1882, halted at the death of Gaudí in 1926, restarted in the 1950s, its incomplete state does not preclude its use as a place of worship.

12 On the height of this temple, see Holloway: 1991, 72.

13 This was not the only time that a drunken festival is mentioned in the sources. According to Thucydides (7.73.2), following their famous sea victory over the Athenians in the Great Harbour, Nikias ordered a withdrawal of all troops from Epipolai down to the camp along the beach at Lysimeleia. Since this coincided with a feast day to Herakles, and the Syracusans may have retaken the precinct of a temple to this deity situated outside the city walls west of Apollo Temenites as a result of the movement of enemy troops, they held a drunken festival in celebration; and the Athenians could have escaped had they not delayed a further two days, misled by reports fed to them by Hermokrates and other Syracusan leaders.

14 On the date and its predecessor, see Guido: 1958, 36; Holloway: 1991, 69, 72.

Syracuse in antiquity

dismantled or had been destroyed.¹⁵ The *Athenaion* was classical Doric peripteral and hexastyle on a stylobate of three steps, and fourteen columns, with shallow fluting, along the length. The temple had been converted into a church by the middle of the seventh century AD, and subsequently became the cathedral. As a result the temple of Athena has been well preserved,¹⁶ and it is possible to make out much of the peristyle within the cathedral. However, the axis of the church is different to that of the temple so that the east end is lost in the high altar area, while the main entrance now comes from the rear or west. Outside the cathedral, in the *Via Minerva*, the northern side of the temple is easily identified, as is the north eastern corner on the three-stepped *crepidoma* (see the illustration). The southern columns of the temple have become interior supports because a number of small chapels have been added to that side. The columns of the *cella* now form the nave, or central section, of the cathedral. The baroque facade of the cathedral probably fairly reflects the original height of the temple, and since the former can be seen as the highest building on the island's skyline, the latter, with the Ionic temple next door, must have produced a similar effect.

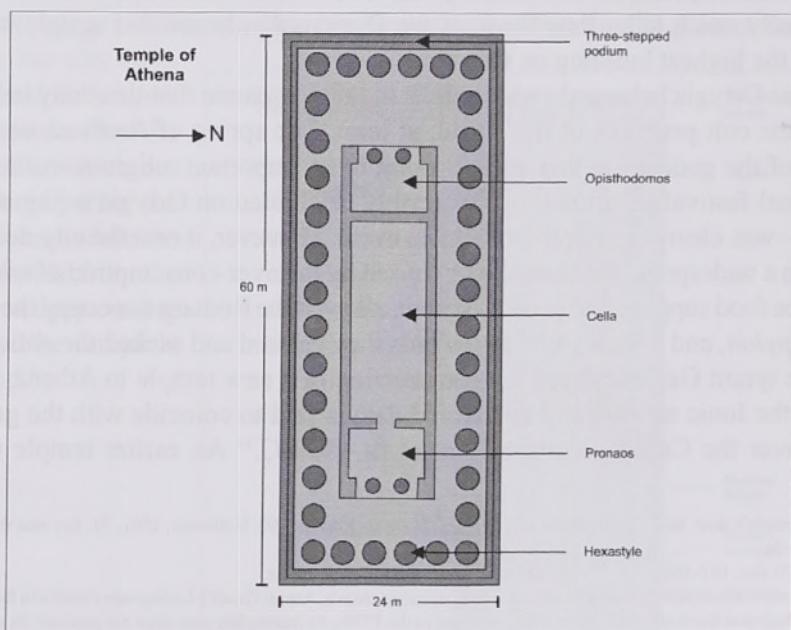


Figure 12: The Temple of Athena at Syracuse

15 Freeman: 1891, 2.14–15, recounts the story, told by Diodorus (8.11.1–2) of the architect Agathokles being fined for embezzling stones from the temple then under construction, but whether or not this is Gelon's building or a previous one is uncertain.

16 CD nos. 718, 25, 240–43, 309–10, 620–21. Not as well preserved as the Temple of Concord at Akragas or the *Hephaisteion* at Athens, however. CD nos. 200–206, 208, 212.

The Temple of Athena was lavishly decorated inside with inspiring portraits of various rulers, and by a portrayal of a battle scene in which Agathokles had participated on horseback. The temple doors – Cicero uses the word *valvae*, implying that these folded back – were made or rather gilded with gold and ivory (*Verr.* 2.4.124). On the east side, facing out to the Ionian Sea, a large shield of bronze was fixed – probably the apex of the *tympanum*.¹⁷ The rising sun would have caught the burnished surface and acted as a landmark for shipping. According to Cicero, some or all of these decorations were removed by Verres (*Verr.* 2.4.122).

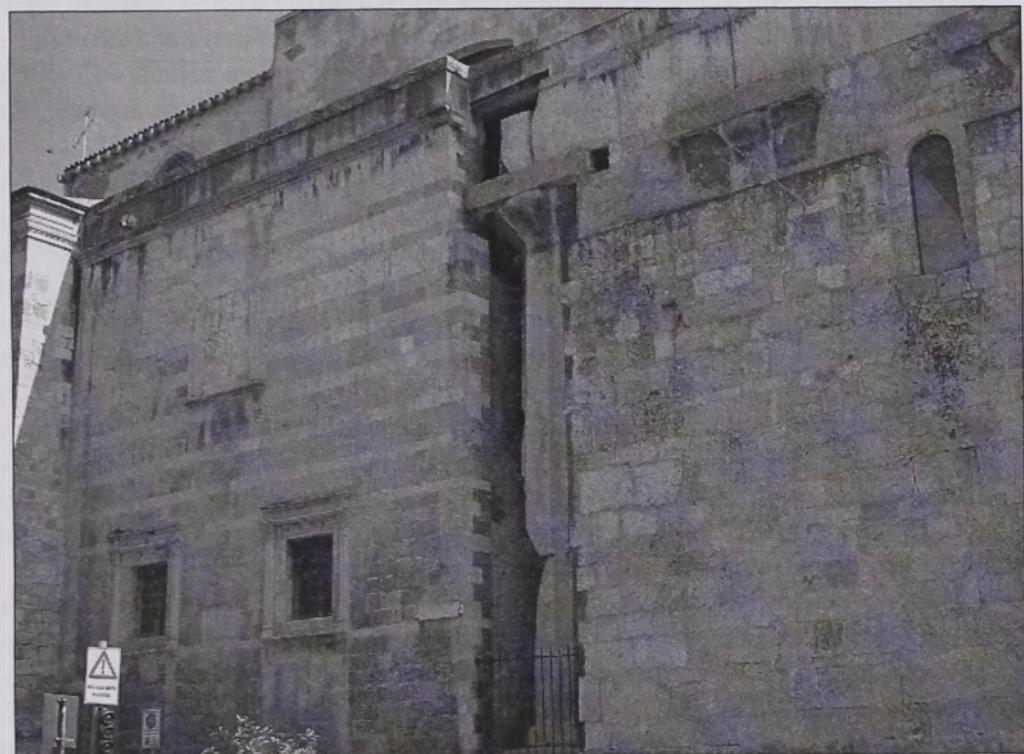


Figure 13: North-East end of the *Athenaion*

The unfinished temple at Segesta (Egesta) is probably the best known and remembered of all such sites in the entire Mediterranean.¹⁸ The perfect natural backdrop is either a reflection of the architect's genius or, on a more mundane level, an indication of a lack of

¹⁷ Models of the temple show simply a shield, CD no. 495, but some modern commentators believe a statue stood on the cornice, Freeman: 1891, 2.40; Guido: 1958, 39, although such decoration is not attested to elsewhere.

¹⁸ Some might well argue for the temple of Apollo at Bassai, Poseidon at Sounion, Juno *Lacinia* outside Kroton, Zeus at Kyme, or Apollo at Delphi. For the most detailed and recent plans of the temple, see D. Mertens, *Der Tempel von Segesta und die dorische Templebaukunst des griechischen Westens in klassischer Zeit*, Mainz, 1984. CD nos. 124, 127, 129–132, 144–145.

space in the town across a narrow valley. The temple is sited beneath Mount Bernardo, from which it is separated by a spectacular gorge or ravine of the river (Pispisa) *Skamandros*, while the front or eastern side of the temple looks across a valley to the secular sector of the city beneath Mount Varvaro. The temple as it stands today is, therefore, viewed in splendid isolation. The eastern end faces the secular community on the acropolis of Mount Varvaro, not an entirely common feature for the Parthenon at Athens faces away from the Agora and the Pnyx. The western end overlooks the gorge, which was surely an integral part of the city's defences.¹⁹ The scene as a whole allows an interesting insight into construction techniques and practices in that a peristyle could be erected in its entirety over an unfinished stylobate up to and including the architrave and the cornice.

The temple is Doric peritperal, and hexastyle with fourteen columns along the length, nine metres high (27 feet) and two metres (over 6 feet) wide at the base, the stylobate is fifty-eight by twenty-three metres (174 x 70 feet). Given the context of its partial construction, it was perhaps intended to be dedicated to Athena, although two generations younger than its counterpart at Syracuse. The temple is clearly incomplete since none of the columns were fluted, and this suggests that there was never any intention of completing it. At Selinous, temple G (*Olympieion*) for example (another unfinished structure) there are clearly both fluted and unfluted columns. The fluting process was presumably started as soon as the columns were erected, and the exterior columns were fluted before the interior columns of the porch or the *cella*. There is no sign of a *cella* or *sekos*, but one was probably planned initially.²⁰ Furthermore, the lifting bosses on many of the blocks of the stylobate have not been chiseled away.²¹ This also indicates that they had only recently been laid when the work was halted and that haste was the order of the day, also that the main shell of a temple was thrown up rapidly even if there were great logistical problems in transporting the raw materials to a rather inaccessible site.

If construction is indeed associated with the arrival of ambassadors from Athens during the Peloponnesian War, and this has certainly found general acceptance, then Segesta's temple is one of the latest examples of the Doric style in Sicily, even throughout *Magna Graecia*. The date could then be pinpointed to between 427 and 415 BC, allowing a little more than a decade for the peristyle to be built or, more dramatically, to just 416/15, and the reawakening of Athenian interest in Sicilian affairs and the arrival of a major expeditionary force against Syracuse.²² The existence of the lifting bosses

19 Into this ravine, CD no. 133, were pitched eight thousand or eighty percent of the population of Segesta after the city was taken by Agathokles in 307. Diodorus relates the disaster (20.71.1–5), simply noting that the poorer citizens were massacred beside the *Skamandros*, the river running through the gorge. Since it would have been virtually impossible to move these people to the river, they were presumably thrown down.

20 For evidence of a *cella* see Holloway: 1991, 120. Note also Mertens: 1984, *Beilage* 27, where a clear *cella* is assumed on the plan.

21 For further discussion of the temple see Holloway: 1991, 119–120 and the suggestion that a *cella* was intended for the interior of the peristyle; Randall-MacIver: 1986, 220–221. For the existence of two other Doric temples here see OCD² 970.

22 On Athenian–Segestan relations, see Thuc. 6.6.2–3, 6.8.1, Dover: 1970, 220–222, Finley: 1979, 67–68. Its date of construction coincides with that of the temple of Apollo at Bassai.

and the absence of any fluting whatsoever might well support the argument for a very hurried construction, followed by a precipitate halt in the process. However, a note of caution should also be sounded, for Thucydides (6.6–8, 6.46.1–5), who gives a detailed account of the attempts of the Segestans to enlist Athenian help against Selinous, makes no mention of a building, which surely must have acquired a certain notoriety at the time, especially if, as some believe, the architect was Athenian. If the temple's construction was associated with the appearance of Athenian diplomats associated with the arrival of an invasion force from Athens, the remains, albeit unfinished, would surely have drawn comment then or later.²³

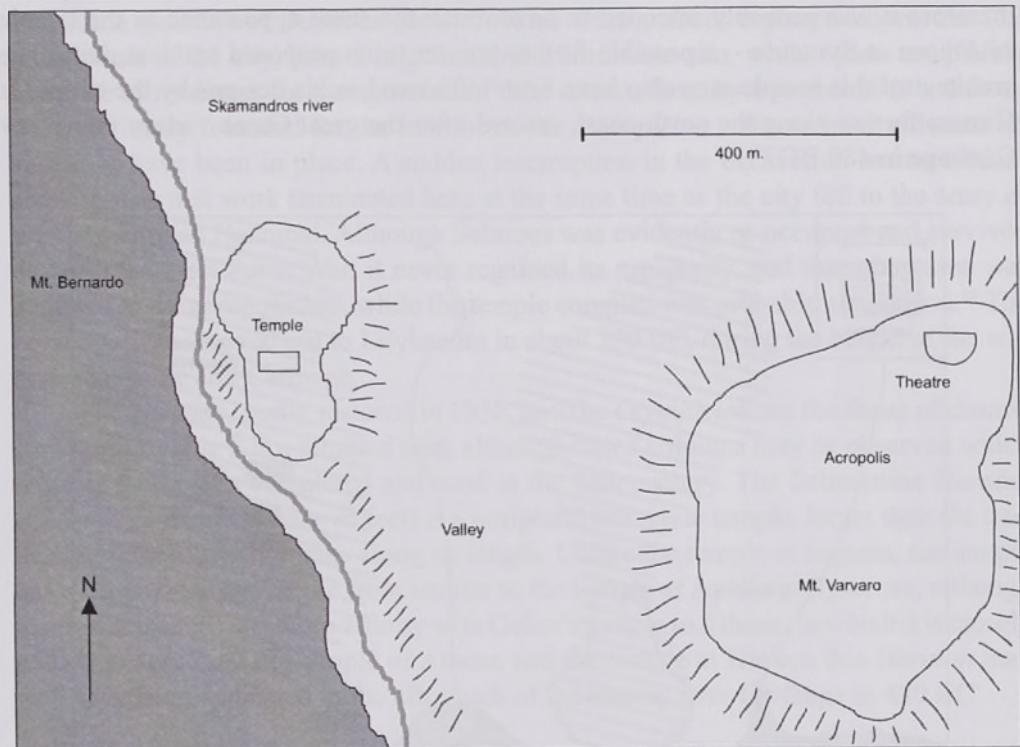


Figure 14: Map of Segesta

²³ See Guido: 1967, 70 (for a discussion of possible dates) who suggests the period 426–415. The lack of ancient comment is a possible puzzle, although it is worth noting that, for example, the Parthenon draws few comments in antiquity, and may point to an altogether different reason for construction and cessation. Unfinished temples were clearly a fairly common sight. There were unfinished cult centres in Syracuse, Akragas and Selinous and certainly elsewhere. The temple at Segesta could just as easily be associated with the battle at Himera in 480 or another event, and then building stopped because of (as in other cities) a shortage of funds. The intention may have been to restart, but that never happened.

Syracuse in antiquity

Segesta may have flourished as a city during much of antiquity, but it was never a wealthy place; and once this building programme had been interrupted it did not recommence. The unfinished temple graced the hillside while the Segestans became citizens of the Roman empire (Tac. *Ann.* 4.43), and remained intact even following the destruction of the city by Agathokles in 307 BC and the Saracens in AD 734, and numerous earthquakes then and since. The temple was not used as a place of Christian worship, as was the Temple of Concord at Akragas or the Temple of Athena at Syracuse. So its isolation rather than its continued use helped to preserve it. The temple at Segesta is slightly smaller than the much earlier temples now preserved at Syracuse. It is unlikely that a double line of columns forming a porch (as seen in the temple of Apollo) was ever contemplated and therefore it was probably intended to have much the same appearance as the temple of Athena at Syracuse – a possible further pointer to its proposed resident deity. The architect of this temple may also have been influenced in his designs by the temple at Himera further along the north coast, erected after the great Greek victory there over Carthage in 480 BC.²⁴

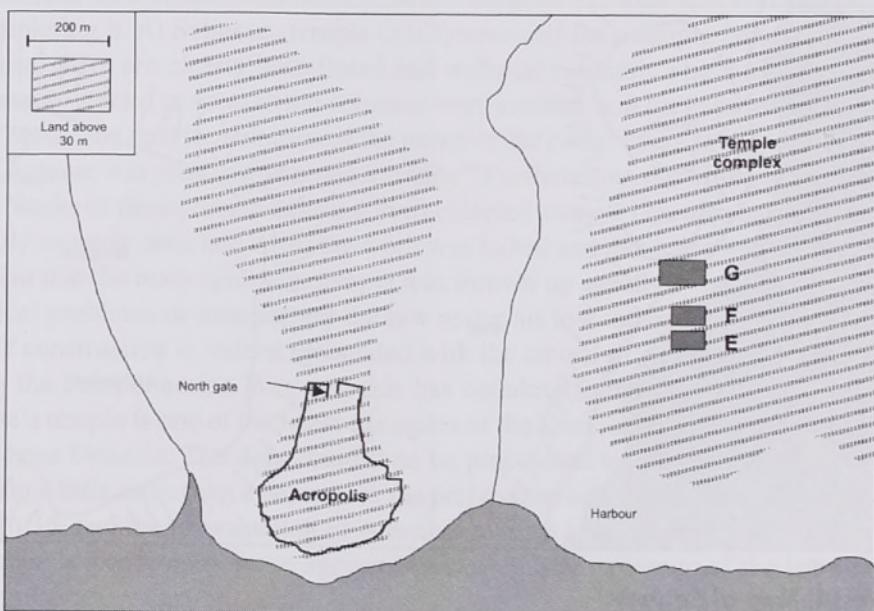


Figure 15: Plan of Selinus

²⁴ The temple of Athena at Syracuse, erected on the order of Gelon, the temple at Himera perhaps also to Athena by Theron of Akragas, where the temple of Hera dates to the same time and may well have been occasioned by the same event. These temples were all of more or less the same size and appearance, Holloway: 1991, 112–13. The temple of Athena at Himera may have been destroyed in 409 BC in retribution for the Carthaginian defeat in 480. Places of cult practices were not usually obliterated, however, and compare the fate, or rather survival, of the temples (or at least the structures) at Selinus at the same time.

The temple complex on Marinella hill, east of the main civic centre of Selinous,²⁵ consists of three temples known as temples E, F and G respectively, which is a sequential rather than a chronological order.²⁶ Temple F is the oldest of the trio. The deities worshipped in these buildings are not attested to, but temple E is usually known as the *Heraion*, while temple G, on account of its gigantic size, as an *Olympieion*, temple F may have been dedicated to Apollo, Athena, Artemis or even Dionysus.²⁷ All three temples are Doric, with temple F the smallest of the three. Temple E was evidently completed in the twenty years following the battle at Himera, while temple G (its close associate in age) was left incomplete either when Temple E was begun in about 480 BC or, more likely, seventy years later when the city was destroyed during a Carthaginian invasion. The stone quarries of Selinous (now *Cave di Cusa*), about eighteen kilometres (12 miles) west of the city, have a large number of drums in situ, while others are plainly in a state of readiness for transportation.²⁸ The drums, three by two metres (9 x 6 feet), were obviously intended for the interior of the *Olympieion* – the exterior columns all appear to have been in place. A sudden interruption in the excavation seems evident and suggests that work terminated here at the same time as the city fell to the army of the Carthaginian Hannibal. Although Selinous was evidently re-occupied and survived down to the First Punic War, it never regained its prosperity, and the urban area was confined to the acropolis hill, while the temple complex was probably abandoned.²⁹ The population was moved out to Lilybaeum in about 250 BC, during the height of the war between Rome and Carthage.

The *Heraion*, partly restored in 1958, and the *Olympieion* are the focus of discussion here. Temple F is a jumbled ruin, although fluted columns may be observed which indicate that it was completed and used in the fifth century. The Selinuntine *Heraion* (67.7 x 25.3 metres, 203 x 76 feet) is a peripteral hexastyle temple, larger than the Parthenon, with fifteen columns along its length. Unlike the temple at Segesta, the temple has a central stairway at the front similar to the temple of Apollo at Syracuse, although in other respects it has more affinity with Gelon's temple to Athena, to which it is closely related in age. Like the temple of Athena and the temple at Himera this *Heraion* may well have been dedicated in the aftermath of the victory over Carthage in 480 BC.

25 On the acropolis of Selinous stand a further five temples (A, B, C, D & O) dating from between ca. 600 to 480 BC. Temple C, built soon after 600 BC, was also dedicated to Apollo. See CD no. 164. A lack of space on the acropolis of Selinous is noted by Freeman: 1891, 1,427–28.

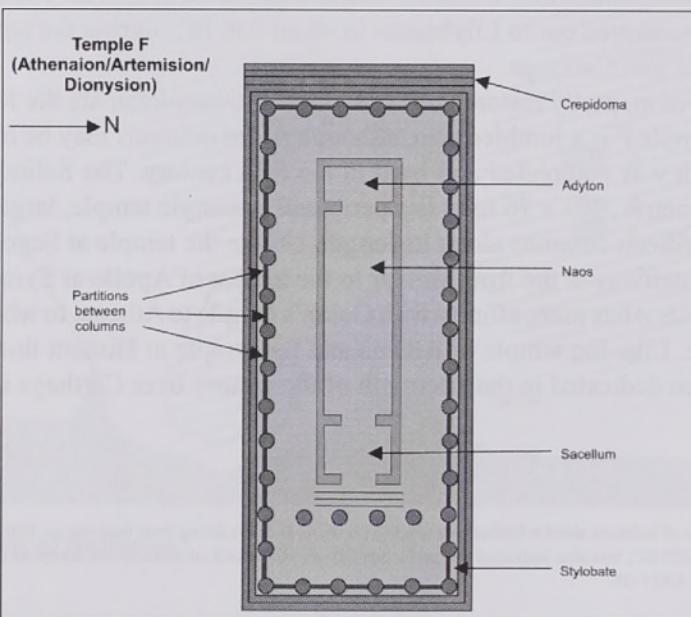
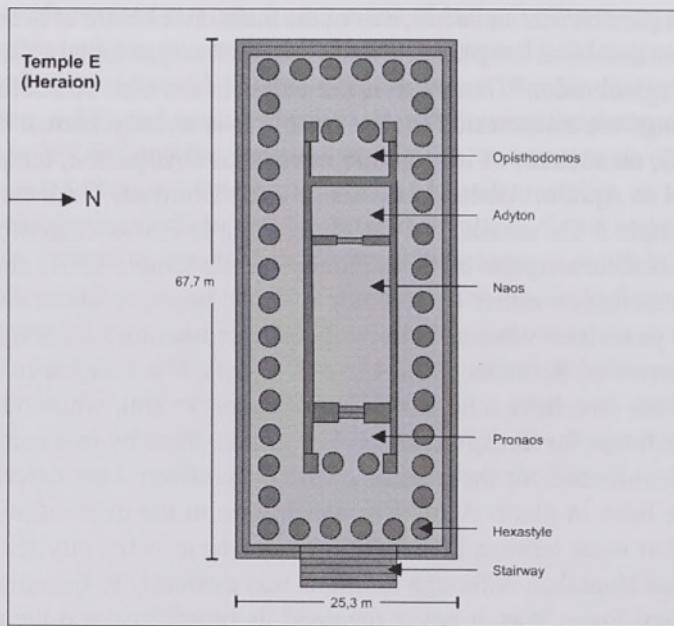
26 CD no. 184.

27 Temple E (*Heraion*), CD nos. 154–157, 159–63, 165–66, 169, 171, 175–76, 181–82; Temple F, CD nos. 158, 170, 173; Temple G (*Olympieion*) CD nos. 167–68, 174, 177–180.

28 See CD nos. 146–153; especially *Video clip: Selinous quarry*, CD no 150.

29 For further discussion of the fortifications see Chapter 5, and for illustrative material on the defences, see CD nos. 183, 185–186.

Syracuse in antiquity



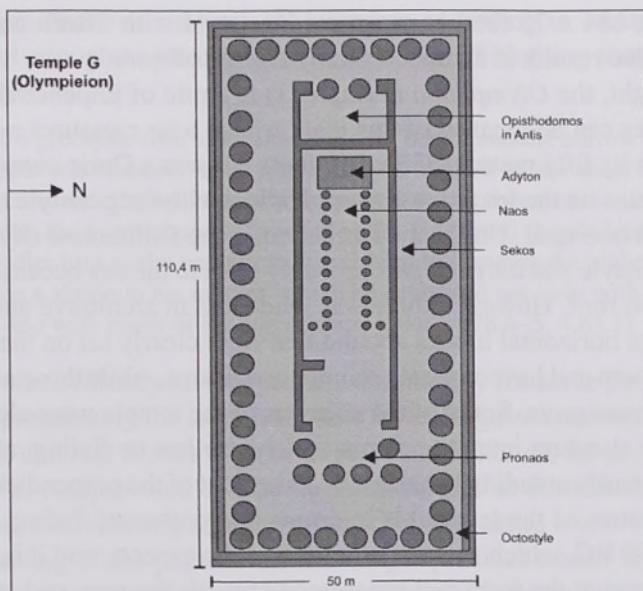


Figure 16: The Selinous Temples

The Heraion is larger than the temples of Apollo, Artemis and Athena on Ortygia, and only marginally smaller than the temple of Zeus at Polichne. The restoration of the temple allows an appreciation of the tapered fluted columns, with the topmost drum and *echinus* being a single unit, conforming to normal types of the Classical period. The columns are rather better preserved, or are of a better quality stone, than those to be seen at the Syracusean *Athenaion*. The interior *cella* is also unusually elevated and is reached by interior steps which add to the overall splendour of the building.³⁰ The temple had bronze roof tiles which would have created an imposing and dazzling sight for any shipping coming to Selinous harbour nearby. Its link with the activities of the harbour and agora could explain its prominent position.³¹

The cult celebrated in Temple F is unknown,³² but its highly unusual enclosure of the peristyle suggests rites which were not to be observed by the general population. Punic influences may also be present here. Until the columns were enclosed, the temple had all the usual features of an archaic Doric temple – much the same as the temple of Apollo at Syracuse with double frontal colonnade – although the columns are not monolithic. The entire structure is dated to the last decades of the sixth century and, therefore, at least fifty years younger than the Syracusean *Apollonion*. The temple (61.8

30 Some idea of the size of the uppermost columns may be seen on the CD nos. 160, 165–66, *Video clip: Selinous Heraion*.

31 See R. Leighton, *Tarquinia: An Etruscan City*, London 2004, 130, for the cult of Hera and its association with *emporia*.

32 For opinions about the cult and date of construction, see Holloway: 1991, 71; De Angelis: 2003, 137–138.

Syracuse in antiquity

by 24.4 metres, 184 x 75 feet) is peripteral hexastyle with fifteen columns along the length, which also results in an uncommonly elongated *naos*.

At first sight, the *Olympieion* (Temple G) is a pile of impenetrable masonry, but the main features can be gleaned of this giant whose base measures rather more than a hundred and ten by fifty metres (335 x 150 feet).³³ It was a Doric octostyle temple with seventeen columns on the length, and thus identical with the peristyle of Parthenon, but there the comparison ends. Unlike the Parthenon, in the Selinuntine *Olympieion*, the gap between the peristyle and the *cella* was probably open to the sky because the dimensions were too large to roof. However, there was evidently an architrave and perhaps entablature since huge horizontal blocks abound that were clearly set on the top of columns, which at the eastern end have separate *echinus* and drums, while those at the western end have single topmost units. Some of the columns of the temple were clearly monolithic, such as the sole standing interior column which also has no fluting, although its close neighbour (still partly standing but slightly shaken out of the perpendicular by the earthquake which destroyed the temple) is in drums and possesses fluting. The temple was begun before 500 BC, which accounts for the archaic aspects, and it is seems clear that construction began at the front and progressed towards the rear, and only then was the work on the *cella* started; and as fashions changed so did the styles and building material. Both archaic and classical styles are represented here within the Doric framework, since in its earlier stages it was contemporary with the initial construction of the Ionic temple (*Artemision*) at Syracuse, while in its later stages it belongs to the same period as the Segestan temple. Thus on the eastern end *echinus* and *abacus* are separate and fixed to monolithic columns. A stranded *abacus* lies at some distance from the front of the temple where it was flung in the catastrophic earthquake. At the west end *echinus* and *abacus* are fused in usual classical Doric on column drums. Such ongoing construction and decoration suggests constant use, even if in entirety it remained unfinished. Temple G is the second largest temple in Sicily after the *Olympieion* at Akragas, and considerably larger than any religious building at Syracuse. The columns rose to a height of approximately sixteen metres (50 feet) with an entablature of fourteen metres (42 feet) above that: the total height was over thirty metres (over 90 feet). Whether or not it was abandoned after 409, or some time later during the reoccupation of the city, is currently still subject to debate.³⁴

For all its fame in antiquity (Cic. *Verr.* 2.2.22, 2.2.15; Vergil, *Aen.* 5.718), the temple of Aphrodite at Eryx/Erukina (modern Erice) has completely disappeared. Deser-tion of the site appears to have been early (Strabo, 6.2.6) and its ruin was not arrested once the temple had fallen into disrepair. This was the subject of debate in the Roman

33 Cf. De Angelis: 2003, 138: '50.7 m. by 110.12 m.' and the 'sekos measures 85 m. by 25 m.' and Video clip: *Selinous Olympieion*.

34 De Angelis: 2003, 138.

senate resulting in financial aid from the emperor, according to Tacitus (Ann. 4.43),³⁵ but evidently not enough to prevent a terminal decline.³⁶ Nothing more is heard of the temple's fortunes.

Eryx, where a precipice rose to an extraordinary height and the narrow space where Aphrodite's temple was situated, made it necessary to build it on the sheer tip of the rock. He (Daedalus) constructed a wall upon the very edge and by this means extended, in an astonishing manner, the overhanging ledge of the cliff. He (Eryx) founded a notable city, which was named after him, and it was situated on a high hill, and on the highest point within the city he set up a shrine to his mother, which he decorated not only with a beautifully built temple but also with many of his dedications. (Diod. 4.78.4–5, 4.83.1)

Although Eryx was evidently an independent community for some period of its history, the temple and presumably the town had come under Segestan management by the first century AD.³⁷ In contrast to sites such as Segesta and Selinous, the problem of the temple's survival was compounded by a strategic situation that dominates the surrounding countryside, and was relatively safe from attack. In later times it was occupied as a fort, and with the passing of the pagan cults the temple precinct would not have been safe from pillage. The present castle is medieval on previous Saracen fortifications. It is also apparent from the complete absence of Greco-Roman material that whatever building was there in the Classical and Hellenistic periods it cannot have been substantial either, for the space is simply insufficient for anything particularly noteworthy.³⁸ The cult and the hill draw comments but no details of the actual temple.³⁹

The wealth of Akragas was based on the land, rearing of sheep and horses and viticulture figure prominently in the sources. The land here is more suitable for agriculture than at Syracuse which needed also a thriving port. Although Akragas challenged Syracuse for supremacy in Sicily, except for short spells (often during *staseis* in its opponent's city) it had either to acquiesce to the other's dominance or responded to it by hostile neutrality. Akragas occupied an exceptional position above the south coast, and some astute town planning is evident in later urban developments.⁴⁰ And because the ancient religious sector lay outside the main ancient (and subsequent modern) residen-

35 Tacitus seems quite clear about the temple ownership which he ascribes to Segesta, and also describes the temple as an ancient ruin.

36 Claudius also sent financial aid to Eryx for the 'ruined temple of Venus', Suet. *Claud.* 25.5, and certainly suggests that this cult was in severe and by then constant financial difficulties.

37 Diodorus, 14.48.1, 55.4, certainly indicates an independent city in 397/6 BC.

38 One or two bits of fluted column drums may be seen on the site but their provenance must be doubtful, and almost certainly not the temple of Aphrodite as described by Diodorus who, however, may never have visited Eryx. For aspects of the site, see the CD nos. 187–193.

39 Durrell: 1977, 167, writes evocatively of the site: '... the most famous and most privileged temple to Aphrodite in the whole of the Mediterranean has vanished without trace. The one late head of Aphrodite is nothing to write home about. The holy shrine of Eryx has been blown out like a light, yet as at Delphi, one can still smell the sulphur in the air. You feel it in the burning sun like a cold touch on the back of the neck.'

40 On the site of Akragas see de Waele, J.A., *Acratas Graeca: Die historische Topographie des griechischen Akragas auf Sizilien*, 's-Gravenhage 1971, 3–9; Freeman: 1891, 1.431–432. On urban development see Guido: 1967, 114.

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tial areas, following the practice noted at Selinous, there are today a substantial number of easily accessible temple sites. From east to west along the main southerly ridge, the temples are: a *Heraion*, a temple traditionally known as the temple of Concord, a temple to Herakles, and another enormous *Olympieion*.

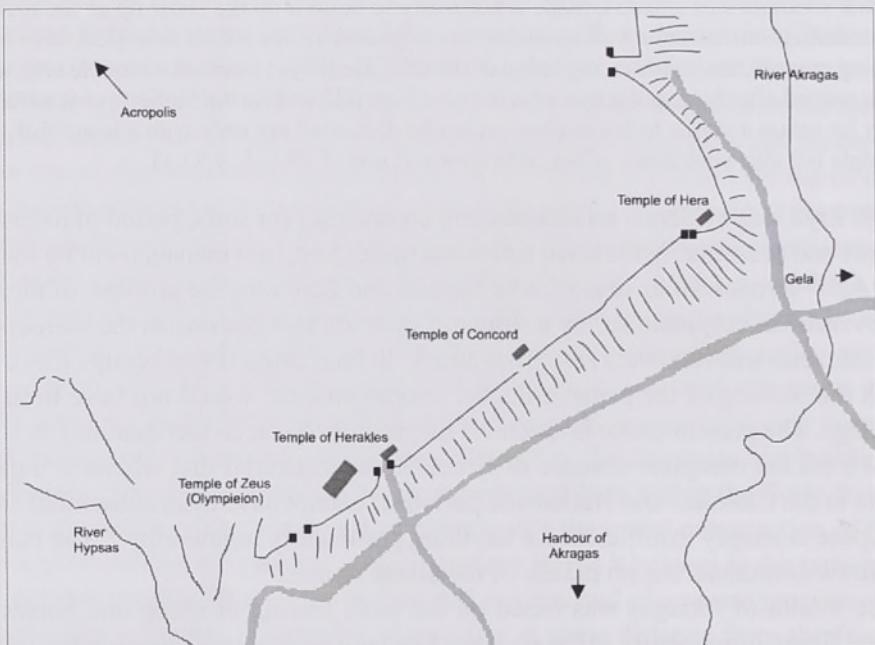


Figure 17: Map of the Main Temples at Akragas

The Temple to Hera stands on a high bluff on the one side overlooking the coast, and on the other across the valley to the city and its acropolis. The temple's construction dates to about 450 BC, and was built in classical Doric, peripteral hexastyle with thirteen columns along the length, *pronaos*, *naos* and an *opisthodomos distyle in antis*.⁴¹ This building is almost identical in size and design to the next major temple along the ridge, the Temple of Concord, one of the best preserved of all Greek temples. Like the *Hephaisteion* in Athens it was for long a centre of Christian worship, which involved some structural alterations, but for all that the essential architectural features have been preserved.⁴² Like the temple of Hera, on which it is closely modelled in design, in size it is modest being less than forty metres (120 feet) in length and rather more than sixteen

41 CD nos. 207–208, 226.

42 CD nos. 200–206, 208, 212, 227.

metres (50 feet) in width. It is again classical Doric, constructed in about 430 BC, hence roughly the same age as the Segesta temple, hexastyle with thirteen columns along the length. The entire architrave has survived together with the entablature at either end, while the cornice is intact as far as the *sema*.⁴³ The temple of Herakles, dating to about 480 BC, a direct contemporary of the *Athenaion* at Syracuse, stands on a high point at the other end of the ridge. It also has a steep-sided stylobate with a front stairway. In size it is similar to the temples on Ortygia, but in common with its neighbours here the temple of Herakles has interior stairs from the *pronaos* to the roof. The purpose of these stairs is uncertain.⁴⁴

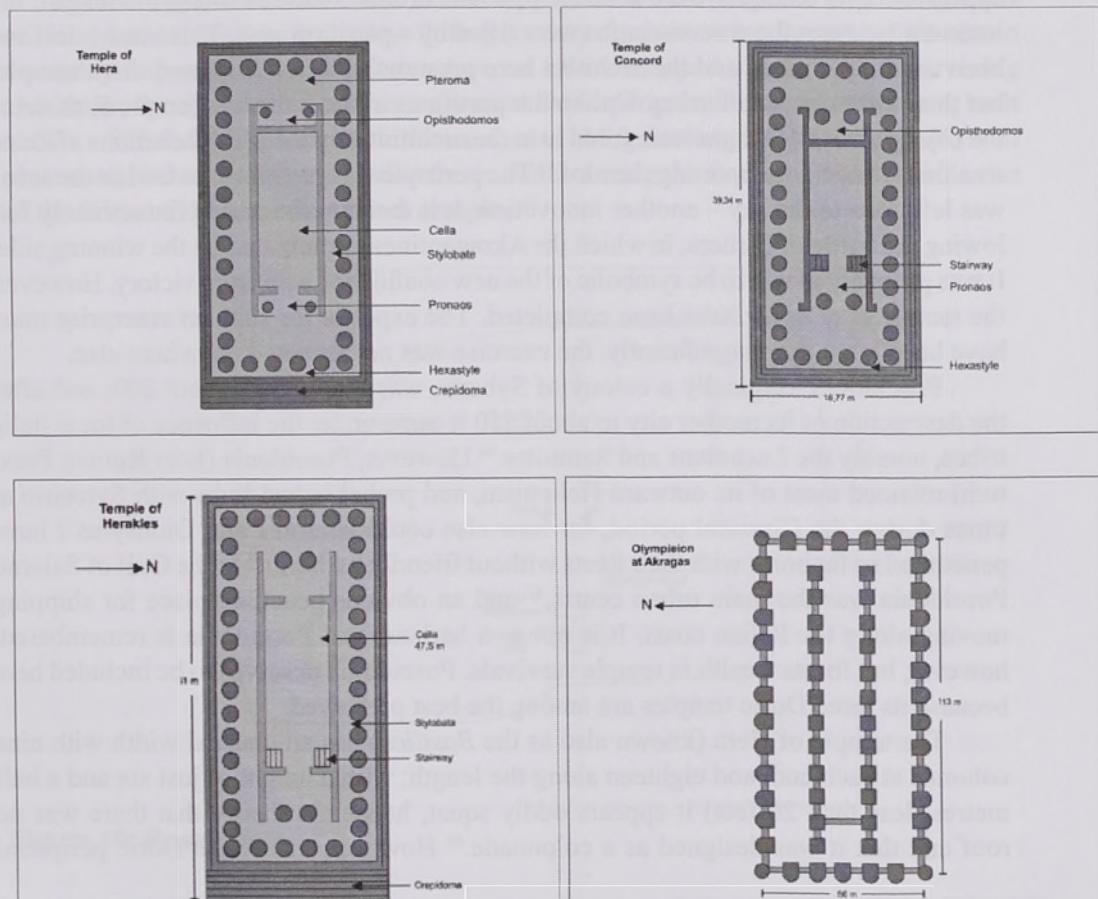


Figure 18: The Temples at Akragas

43 Guido: 1967, 118–120; Holloway: 1991, 116–117.

44 CD nos. 213, 217, 225.

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The temple of Zeus is one of the largest ever to be built by the Greeks, either in Ionia, Greece or in *Magna Graecia* and is, moreover, one of the most innovative constructions in this genre of cult buildings. Greek temples are remarkably uniform in ground plan and external appearance. Styles were also slow to change. However, the architect at Akragas (experimenting within the general conventions) aspired to something quite novel. Unlike the other temples on the ridge at Akragas, however, the Akragantine *Olympieion* is utterly ruined and a jumble of blocks and columns, although it is possible to walk around the interior of the stylobate. The size is impressive: 113 metres along the length (340 feet) and 56 metres in width (170 feet). Although the temple has a peripteral octostyle appearance, its columns were actually just half drums, fourteen along the length; the intervals between these semi-drums were filled by a partition wall. This innovation had been used at Selinous and the architect here presumably knew and used this example, but then went one step further. Unlike the partitions at the Selinous Temple F, those of the *Olympieion* at Akragas were filled in to the architrave by the use of telamons of Zeus, standing Atlas-like supporting the roof.⁴⁵ The peristyle was probably roofed but the *sekos* was left open to the sky – another innovation. It is dated to the period immediately following the battle of Himera, in which the Akragantines participated on the winning side. It was probably meant to be symbolic of the new confidence won from victory. However, the temple may never have been completed. The expense for such an enterprise must have been huge. And significantly, the exercise was not repeated anywhere else.

Poseidonia, originally a colony of Sybaris, was founded in about 600, and after the destruction of its mother city in about 510 it came under the influence of local Italic tribes, notably the Lucanians and Samnites.⁴⁶ However, Poseidonia (later Roman Paestum) retained most of its outward Hellenism, and probably had links with Syracuse at times during the Classical period, for how else could Hieron I and Dionysius I have penetrated so far north with their fleets without friendly harbours? In the Gulf of Salerno Poseidonia was the main urban centre,⁴⁷ and an obvious beaching place for shipping moving along the Italian coast. It is not as a harbour that Poseidonia is remembered, however, but for its wealth in temple survivals. Poseidonia deserves to be included here because its three Doric temples are among the best preserved.

The temple of Hera (known also as the *Basilica*) has an unusual width with nine columns at each end, and eighteen along the length; with a height of just six and a half metres (less than 20 feet) it appears oddly squat, hence the theory that there was no roof and that it was designed as a colonnade.⁴⁸ However, this was a Doric peripteral

45 CD nos. 218–19, 224 (telamons), 214–216, 220, 222–23.

46 On the history of Poseidonia see, for example Freeman: 1891, 2.164–165.

47 For details of Poseidonia's history, see Strabo, 5.4.13. Elea, closest town to Poseidonia, lies south and looks more to the Gulf of Policastro, Strabo, 6.1.1. For Elea, see further below.

48 Cipriani & Avagliano: 2000, 18–24, with reconstruction; Randall-MacIver: 1968, 19–20, who also suggests Demeter and Kore as the cult practiced here. CD nos. 422–24, 429–36.

temple on a three-stepped *crepidoma*, with columns which have noticeably shallow fluting (twenty flutes to each column).⁴⁹ Excavation work has revealed the foundations of the interior *cella*. It is the oldest of the temples here, with construction estimated to belong to the mid-sixth century BC.⁵⁰ The temple of Athena (or perhaps Ceres) is Doric, hexastyle, and a modest size (13½ metres in width, 31½ in length, 41 x 95 feet) with thirteen columns along the length, dated to after 550 BC.⁵¹ The columns rise to six metres (27 feet), and are tapered (1¼ metres at the base, 0.84 metres at the top). The columns of the *cella* are unusually Ionic but since this section of the building was completed last, it shows a sudden interest in new forms, as also occurred at almost precisely the same time in Syracuse, Hipponion and Locri. The Temple of Poseidon (Neptune or possibly Zeus or Hera) has columns with shallow fluting (twenty-four on each column), which rise to a suitably imposing height of nine metres, on a three-stepped stylobate, with surviving architrave, frieze and cornice. It is a classical Doric peripteral hexastyle structure, built between 500 and 450 BC, with thirteen columns along the length. The *cella* is also well preserved, and a ramp was added at the entrance during the Roman period. This is one of the finest of the surviving Greek temples.⁵²

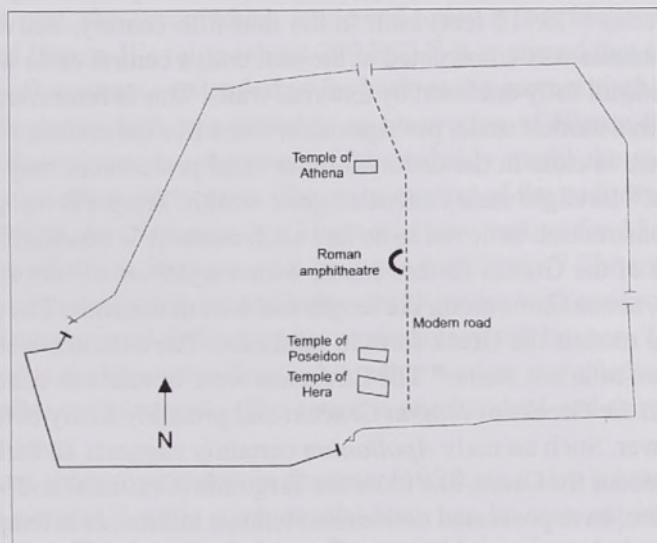


Figure 19: Poseidonia

49 The shallow fluting on each of the three temples probably points to poor quality stone which was covered in white stucco, Randall-MacIver: 1968, 15.

50 For the date and cult deity see D. Mertens, *Der alte Heratempel in Paestum und die archaische Baukunst in Unteritalien*, Mainz 1993, xviii and for excellent maps and diagrams (*end*).

51 CD nos. 426, 431, 462–69.

52 CD nos. 421, 425, 429–30, 432, 435, 437.

Syracuse in antiquity

Kyme (Cumae), the earliest Greek settlement in Italy, was one of the more powerful cities in *Magna Graecia* by about 600 BC. It began a long decline when it came into conflict with the Etruscans who were, however, defeated in 474 BC with aid sent by Hieron.⁵³ Its harbour, more beach than port, was superseded in importance by Roman Puteoli; thereafter Kyme retained its fame only as the seat of the Sybil. Two temples dominate the high acropolis of Kyme: at the summit stood an *Olympieion*, but the remains are notably Roman brickwork of a much later church rather than Greek columns. The temple occupied the highest point overlooking the harbour, and dominated the ancient skyline. It must have been as dramatic a sight for seafarers as the temple of Poseidon at Sounion. However, the extent of the shattered stylobate indicates a temple of modest proportions. Of similar size was the temple of Apollo, now mostly Roman brickwork on its stylobate, halfway down the hill and a little set back from sight of the west coast, but still with a good view of Cape Misenum and the island of Ischia.⁵⁴

The harbour of Argylla, later Pyrgi, was attacked by Dionysius I in 384 BC.⁵⁵ A complex consisting of two temples – one dedicated to Eilythia (cf. Strabo 5.2.8 for Leucothea), the other to Apollo – was ransacked and, if not destroyed certainly contributed to a terminal decline.⁵⁶ Temple A (Eilythia) possessed a stylobate of just twenty-four by thirty-four metres (72x112 feet) built in the mid-fifth century, but was not peripteral. A partial colonnade was constructed at the east end, a central *cella* with two adjoining rooms each side all fully enclosed by external walls. This is reminiscent of Temple F at Selinous but on a modest scale, perhaps rather more like the archaic *Heraion* on Samos. Greek influence is clear in the decoration but local preferences may have dictated the overall design.⁵⁷ Its slight scale concealed great wealth. Temple B was peripteral in form, with initial construction believed to be late sixth century. It was small in comparison to those temples of the Greeks further south, with a stylobate of twenty by thirty metres (60 x 90 feet), six columns along the length and four at the ends. The double colonnade at the east end models the Greek form in miniature. The columns were probably Doric but of plastered tufa, not stone.⁵⁸ The Etruscans were in constant contact, if not always amicable, with the Greeks of *Magna Graecia* and probably Sicily before the expansion of Roman power. Such an early *Apollonion* certainly suggests an early link with Syracuse.⁵⁹ The harbour for Caere, like those for Tarquinia (Gravisca) and Vulci (Regisvilla), would, therefore, have possessed noticeable Hellenic influences in temple construction.⁶⁰

53 See further discussion in Chapter 4.

54 For Kyme's situation, see CD nos. 480, 486–87; temple of Zeus, CD nos. 476–82; temple of Apollo, CD nos. 483–85.

55 See Chapter 4. For Agylla/Pyrgi see CD nos. 603–606; *Video Clip: pyrgi*. The *castello* at S. Severa, CD nos. 600–602, 607.

56 The temples seem to have been abandoned early in the second century BC, Ridgeway: 1990, 511–12.

57 See Ridgeway: 1990, 525–26, for discussion and plan.

58 Ridgeway: 1990, 517, also a plan, 515–16.

59 For links, see Leighton: 2004, 131.

60 For Hellenic influences on Gravisca, the port of Tarquinia, and by implication other Etruscan harbours, see Leighton: 2004, 128–31.

The temple sacked by the Syracusans was probably a familiar structure well known to the attackers and not a building of some unknown cult. Etruscan aid to the Athenians in the siege between 415 and 413 was of minor importance, but may be taken as an illustration of deep mistrust of repeated Syracusan intervention in middle Italy. On the other hand, Etruscan involvement in the Athenian siege may have provided Dionysius with justification for an attack thirty years later.

Theatres

Syracuse's finest archaeological treasure is its theatre. A theatre was first constructed on the hill at Neapolis in about 475 BC, and the remains of a steep-sided linear structure slightly to the south may be either this building or a predecessor.⁶¹ The theatre must have been well received by the citizen body since festivals, which included plays, were evidently in great demand and attracted the best playwrights. Aeschylus, whose tragedies *Women of Etna*, *Persai* and *Prometheus Bound* were all performed here, died in nearby Gela. As we know from Plutarch (*Nic.* 29.2), Euripides was a particular favourite of the discerning Syracusan theatre-going public at the end of the fifth century. In the course of the next six hundred years numerous alterations and renovations were undertaken but, for the most part, the *cavea* which is viewed today is late Hellenistic, dating to the second half of Hieron II's reign (about 230 BC).⁶² It is argued that the Timoleonic theatre – mid-fourth century – extended as far back as the current sixth row above the ambulatory or *diazoma* which was probably an innovation of Hieron II. At that sixth row a drainage channel may be observed which probably marks the rear of the older *cavea*, of a little more than thirty rows. The restructuring of the auditorium in the third century BC, therefore, doubled capacity. There was now seating for 15 000 spectators in fifty-nine rows, of which forty can still be made out clearly.⁶³ The rows themselves were divided into nine wedges above and below the *diazoma*, with connecting stairways. Along the ambulatory several dedicatory inscriptions may still be seen. The central section was dedicated to the Olympian Zeus, while other wedges were dedicated to Hieron, and various members of his family. The *cavea* is one hundred and thirty-eight metres (415 feet) in diameter.

The orchestra, thirty-five metres in diameter (105 feet), today is horse-shoe shaped rather than semi-circular,⁶⁴ while a trapezoidal form can be seen cut into the bedrock around the orchestra. This is regarded as a Roman addition for a *kolymbetra* or ornamental garden complete with fish pool, giving a touch of realism to the stage. Unlike the theatre at Tauromenion where gladiator contests were obviously staged after the removal

61 See CD nos. 115–117.

62 For a comprehensive history of the theatre see Guido: 1957, 65–71.

63 Today the theatre seats an audience very much smaller than its original capacity, and smaller audiences than the theatres at Epidaurus and Athens. CD nos. 103–106, 317–28, 506–508, 510, 592–96, 658–62.

64 Semi-circular orchestras are rare. One such may be seen at Akrai, a late construction, CD nos. 31–35.

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of the first nine rows, no such innovation appears to have occurred at the Syracusan theatre. However, alterations in the seating are very noticeable. The first twelve rows have been re-cut, which may have enlarged the orchestra somewhat. Row thirteen is therefore slightly raised above the lower tiers. It is possible that when gladiator fights were staged here (and there does seem to be general agreement about such entertainment here) then the audience sat above the twelfth row, out of danger – the same principle as was applied at Tauromenion. It is also possible that an arena occupied the area between the rocky outcrops; holes and ditches cut into the bedrock in the orchestra may have been used to erect a protecting screen. The orchestra is also raised above the lowest tiers, which may point to a use other than dramatic acting. Row seventeen has been entirely removed, perhaps creating a secondary ambulatory, which may just indicate that rows thirteen to sixteen were for the honoured guests, when tiers one to twelve were not in use. A VIP box seems to have been excavated out of wedges five and six just below the *diazoma*, with access via one of the stairways. Whereas in other theatres – see Pompeii for example – special guests were seated in boxes above the *paradoi* or entrance ways, this practice was not initially adopted here.⁶⁵ If the amphitheatre at Syracuse can be correctly dated to the early first century AD, and not later as some suggest, it may well be that the original role of the theatre was not overly altered, and that renovations seen here were simply changes in taste and alterations to suit individual productions.⁶⁶

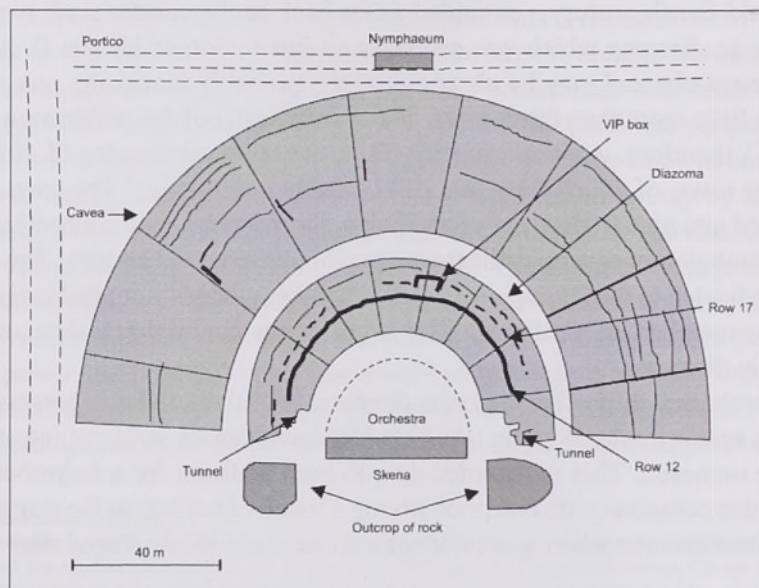


Figure 20: The Theatre at Syracuse

65 However, see CD nos. 317–18, 320, 323, 592–93, 595, for the *paradoi*, and what is certainly seating above these entrances.

66 For the amphitheatre, see Chapter 6.

Today, from the highest tiers, the view extends over the Great Harbour, and is one of those memorable moments in a visit to Syracuse.⁶⁷ In antiquity this view was largely concealed by an elaborate proscenium and *scena* which, if it was anything like the surviving structure at Tauromenion, rose to a considerable height.⁶⁸ This was an original and perhaps innovative part of the theatre of Hieron II, which over time (and especially during the Roman period) underwent considerable embellishment and decoration.

The theatre formed part of a complicated collection of buildings, all of which have disappeared. From about row forty the tiers of the theatre were no longer carved out of the rock but built up, which means that the highest tiers rose perhaps as much as two storeys above the level land at the top of the hill. The appearance standing here would have been rather like standing outside the Colosseum or Theatre of Marcellus at Rome, but the rear of the theatre adjoined two porticoes – one to the north, the other to the west. This would have been the place to shelter from rain or heat, and also where street sellers had stalls, and where dedicatory inscriptions to ancestors were placed in niches in the rock wall at the top of the hill. The festivals in the theatre may have connected with the precinct of Apollo, which was also situated just behind the western portico. The performances, the social gatherings, and the inscriptions are clearly all inter-related. Directly behind the central wedge of the theatre and carved in the highest part of the hillside which gives onto Epipolai lies the Nymphaeum – an ornamental fountain, again an integral part of this complex of buildings. It is fed from the Galermi aqueduct which originates near Pantalica, which brings water supplies across Epipolai a distance of thirty-three kilometres (a little more than 20 miles) into the city.⁶⁹

The sole surviving theatre in Sicily to match the grandeur of Syracuse is that found at Tauromenion (modern Taormina).⁷⁰ Tauromenion was originally a Sikel community but was refounded with Greek citizenry in 358 BC. Timoleon received aid from Andromachos, tyrant of Tauromenion, and the town was therefore spared any involvement in the instability of the 340s. The town was added to the kingdom of Hieron II, but became an independent *civitas* in the Roman province of Sicily after 212 BC. The town continued to be favoured, especially by Augustus under whom it acquired colonial status, and it remained an important centre in the Roman Sicily.⁷¹

The theatre at Tauromenion is a contemporary of that at Syracuse; and Hieron II was presumably the benefactor. The rear of the theatre, again as at Syracuse, had a portico although here the backdrop was the spectacular north-eastern coast of Sicily. Unlike at Syracuse, the *scena* has survived to an imposing height, mostly Roman brickwork with

⁶⁷ See also the CD nos. 322–323.

⁶⁸ The actual height can only be guessed at. Guido: 1958, 70, believes that the *proscenium* was two storeys high, the *scena* several storeys high. For the possible appearance of the *scena*, see Holloway: 1991, 153–54.

⁶⁹ See CD nos. 102, 509 (nymphaeum), 5–6 (aqueducts).

⁷⁰ CD nos. 409–411, 417–420, *Video clip: Tauromenion*. Diodorus, 16.83.3, claimed that the theatre of Agyrion, his home town, was nearly as large as that at Syracuse.

⁷¹ It was notably the last Sicilian town to fall to the Arabs in AD 963, nearly a century after Syracuse had been captured. With its fall came the end of Greco-Roman civilisation in Sicily.

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niches for statuary. Restoration work from the 1860s which involved a random erection of Corinthian columns at the back of the *proscenium* betrays more an enthusiastic endeavour than any real desire for authenticity, but the effect has been to recapture something of the ancient atmosphere. This is, of course, much enhanced by the natural setting: to the east the Ionian Sea and the bay of Naxos at the base of the steep hillside, to the south and west the dramatic heights of Mount Etna. From below in Naxos it is possible to make out the theatre in a dip of the hills which make up Mount Tauro. The *cavea* itself was excavated out of a south-facing slope on this hill, the lower rows were carved out of the rock, and the seating was arranged in nine wedges – again the same as at Syracuse.

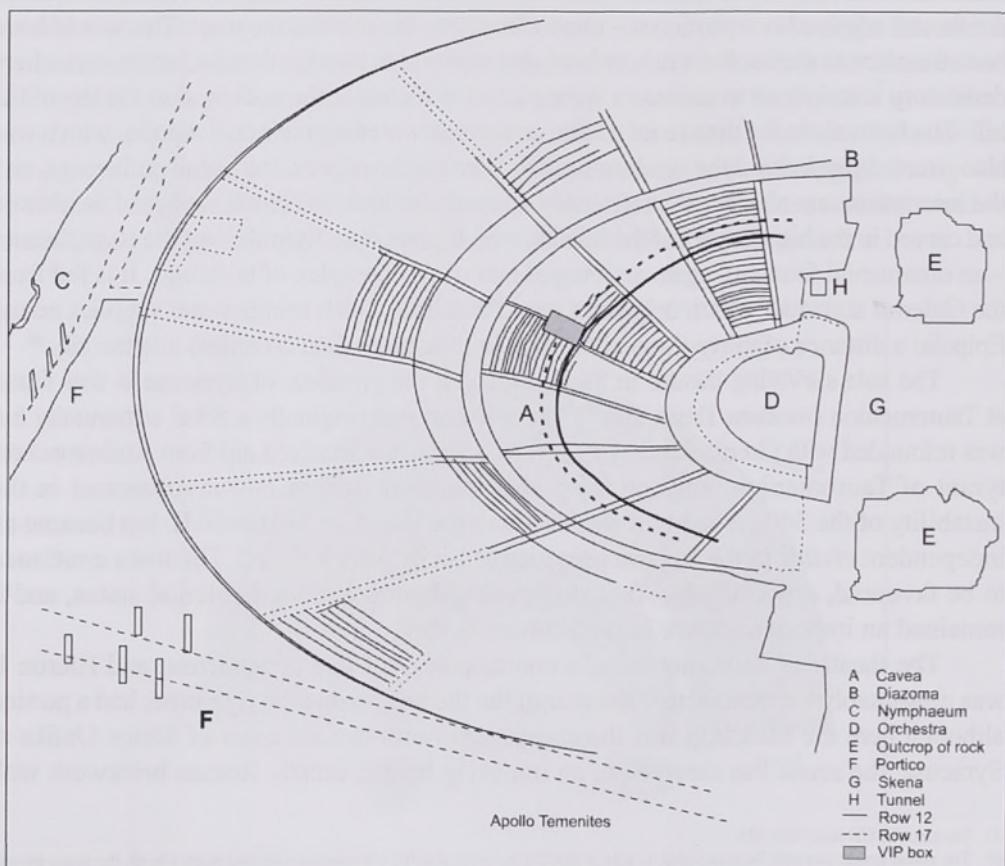


Figure 21: Plan of the Theatre Complex at Syracuse

With a diameter of one hundred and nine metres (327 feet), the auditorium could probably accommodate between five and six thousand, although as a result of renovations during the first or second century AD, that total was reduced when the first nine rows of the *cavea* were removed. The removal was the result of a lack of space on the hill on which the town is situated (and perhaps a lack of sufficient funds for a completely new building project). But the audience was then able to enjoy gladiator fights and beast hunts without being in danger. A central rectangular well in the roughly semi-circular arena floor – thirty-five metres (105 feet) in diameter – allowed wild animals to be brought up from the cellar holding area by a pulley system, and a covered way under the lowest rows of seating provided refuge for gladiators, their trainers and slaves.⁷²

The theatre, located just over the summit of Mount Varvaro, the acropolis of Segesta, is a much more modest affair, with seating capacity for an audience of about seven hundred and fifty. What it lacks in proportion, however, is more than compensated for by its good state of preservation, although some restoration work has recently been carried out here,⁷³ and its view, which is unusually to the north. The original theatre was Hellenistic (perhaps dating to that period of calm and prosperity in the mid-fourth century BC, brought about by Timoleon's rule and political settlement in Syracuse) and made more elaborate in the third century.⁷⁴ The Segestans at that time obviously had sufficient funds to complete this latest project, which was less demanding than the ambitious plans for a temple. The *cavea* is sixty-three metres in diameter (189 feet), and the seating is arranged in seven wedges, the lower tiers being carved from the rock, the uppermost tiers probably an extension above the level of the hill with blocks of stone. During the Roman empire a *proscenium* was added, the foundations of which can easily be viewed.⁷⁵ Similar in size and date is the theatre at Akrai. Initially this site had been an outpost for Syracuse, but it prospered during the rule of Hieron II who may have indulged here too in a show of *euregetism* by providing the funds for this structure. Although the town's fortunes declined in the Roman empire, clear evidence shows a long settlement.⁷⁶

The theatres of *Magna Graecia* are, for the most part, unexceptional. Lupiae and Elea possess modest establishments,⁷⁷ while if one existed at Poseidonia it has yet to be discovered. I have included Ostia here which was, of course, not a Greek town at all, but its Greek-style theatre and the proximity of this structure to its associated temple allows

⁷² 'However blasé one is, however much one has prepared for the aerial splendours of the little town, its freshness is perennial, it rises in one like sap, it beguiles and charms as the eye turns in its astonishment to take in crags and clouds and mountains and the blue coastline,' Durrell: 1977, 208.

⁷³ Compare the illustrations in Holloway: 1991, 154; Kos & Angelis: 1999, 92–96, with those taken more recently and which appear on the CD nos. 134, 136–142.

⁷⁴ For the date of the theatre see Guido: 1967: 72 'in the III or early II'; Grady: 2003: 184: 'mid-3C BC or possibly earlier.'

⁷⁵ No theatre has been excavated at Selinous or Akragas. Messene presumably had a theatre, now lost. For the theatres at Katane, Akrai, Heraclea Minoa, Morgantina, Ietas and Tyndaris see Holloway: 1991, 151–154.

⁷⁶ For the theatre, see *Video clip: Segesta Theatre*.

⁷⁷ For Lupiae's amphitheatre see Chapter 6. For Elea see CD nos. 439–42.

Syracuse in antiquity

for a greater understanding of the Odeon and its temple at Syracuse.⁷⁸ Moreover, the spatial connection of temples and theatres, and the link between religious observances and dramatic performances is often overlooked. At Ostia and Syracuse that relationship can be seen more clearly than at many other sites where the theatres may have survived, but where the cult buildings have been demolished. The theatre complex at Pompeii stands adjacent to the old agora of the town in which there was a temple of Herakles and a number of shrines. The larger of the two theatres dates from the mid-third century BC, and so is another contemporary of the theatre of Hieron II.⁷⁹ Roman control of Italy had become permanent from 275 BC, but Greek culture was evidently dominant in Oscan Pompeii. The theatre could seat about 5 000 spectators, and the nineteen rows were arranged in five wedges. An elaborate *proscenium* was added in the first century AD, but it is worth noting that the original theatre of this provincial town preceded the first stone theatre at Rome by two hundred years,⁸⁰ and indicates the extent of the prosperity in southern Campania – prosperity brought about by Roman control and a Roman peace.

During the Classical period, when the city aspired to be an imperial power, the theatre of Syracuse was only of modest size. The theatre which Cicero described as ‘very great’ (Cic. *Verr.* 2.4.119: *theatrum maximum*) was a late addition to the urban landscape of the city. It seems to come almost as a consolation for the loss of political and military power, yet it enhanced the fame of Syracuse. The theatre of Hieron II was a true giant among its rivals, only exceeded by some of the more famous sites in mainland Greece: Argos, Epidaurus and Athens.⁸¹ The construction of a number of the larger theatres in Sicily and *Magna Graecia* at roughly the same date does beg the question of whether or not Hieron’s benevolence extended beyond the boundaries of his own kingdom. Tauromenion, Agyrion and Akrai certainly appear to have benefitted from his patronage. And it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that building programmes as far away as Segesta, or even Pompeii, if not directly financed from Syracuse, took their inspiration from the activities there.⁸²

The temples of Ortygia and Polichne, in keeping with their early foundation, are also significant in the overall history of Hellenic Sicily, hence they must have achieved exceptional status as cult centres as a result. The temple of Apollo was a pioneering and highly successful effort, and became a prototype for many of those structures which came later in, for example, Selinous. However, in comparison with many of these subsequent cult buildings it was of modest proportions. The *Olympieion* was a greater venture, more

78 For the theatre and its construction, see R. Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*, Oxford 1997, 42–43, 420–425. Dating from the time of Augustus, the theatre with seating for about 3 000 is small but larger than some of the Sicilian sites. See CD nos. 681–86. For a reconstruction of the theatre and its suburb see Carpiceci: 1991, 75–77. Its foundation date coincides with that of the amphitheatre at Syracuse. See also Chapter 6.

79 CD no. 673.

80 The theatre of Pompey built only in the 50s BC.

81 Rome at a later date was to have greater venues of entertainment, but even then provincial towns such as Syracuse, Verona, Capua and Puteoli could boast sizable amphitheatres.

82 Hieron’s influence was extensive. His relations with Ptolemaic Egypt were cordial. His lavish gift of a merchant ship to Ptolemy II illustrates the sort of wealth at his disposal.

lavishly endowed both in its construction and in its contents. It was certainly famous throughout the Greek world. Its strategic position just outside the city in a spot highly desirable as a base for enemies wishing to capture Syracuse, makes the temple of Zeus *Urios* probably the most mentioned of any Greek temple in the ancient literature.⁸³ Still, it does not compare favourably in size to the *Olympieion* at either Selinous or Akragas, or even to the Selinuntine *Heraion*. The temples of Athena and Artemis on Ortygia were plainly very important cult centres, and dominated both the island's topography and the city's everyday life. The temples of Syracuse may not, therefore, have been extraordinary, but some did possess great antiquity and hence seniority. The Ionic temple should have attracted more ancient comment for it was almost a unique building in Sicily. It is surprising that the Syracusans did not make more of it. Other cities, it is true, possessed great temples – especially Selinous and Akragas – but were they as famed or as venerated as the temples on Ortygia or at Polichne? The ancient evidence seems to grant only Eryx a special position, and the cult of Aphrodite was not copied anywhere else in Sicily to the same extent. The cults venerated in Syracuse were present in most *poleis*. In temple treasures, however, Syracuse certainly exceeded all its rivals in Sicily and *Magna Graecia*; and this is where the question of status can be answered. Syracuse's territorial ambitions, and military role in Sicily (and beyond) brought with it far greater wealth than that possessed by any of its neighbours or competitors. Its temples may have been rather understated – they did not have bronze but terracotta tiles for example – but their treasures contributed to making Syracuse the first city of Sicily.

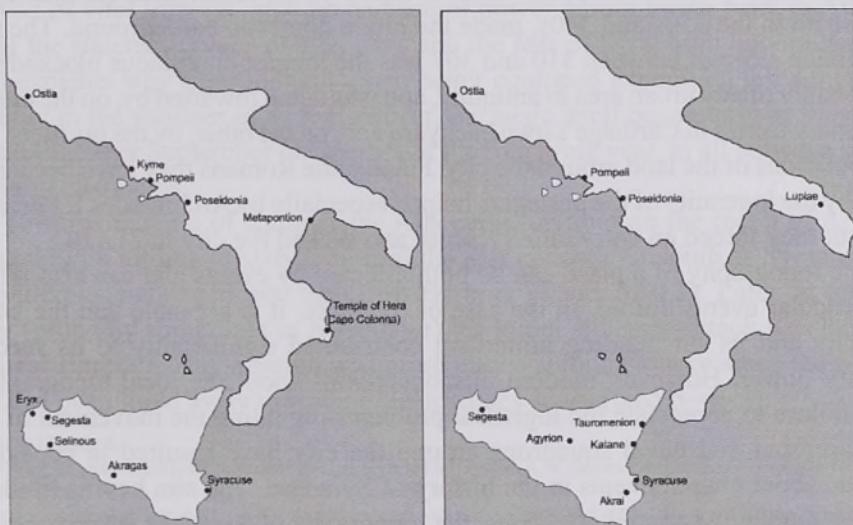


Figure 22: The Main Temples and Theatres of Sicily and *Magna Graecia*

⁸³ With the possible exception of the later temple to Jupiter *Optimus et Maximus* on the Capitoline Hill at Rome.