

A PUNIC-ROMAN SANCTUARY ON MALTA

AZZOPARDI (G.) *Ras il-Wardija Sanctuary Revisited. A Re-assessment of the Evidence and Newly-Informed Interpretations of a Punic-Roman Sanctuary in Gozo (Malta)*. Pp. x + 82, ills, maps. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2017. Paper, £19. ISBN: 978-1-78491-669-5.

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The sanctuary of Ras il-Wardija has long been known as a place of contact between Mediterranean cultures. This recently published reassessment of the sanctuary on the island of Gozo helps to increase our knowledge and add nuance to the growing body of work on ancient Malta from the Punic (for lack of a better term) and Roman periods. The archaeological evidence from Malta often provides a tantalising glimpse into the rich and varied ancient landscapes of the central Mediterranean island. The overall impression from this publication reflects commonalities that apply to other islands of the central Mediterranean. These include a connection with the wider Phoenicio-Punic regions in the Mediterranean, continuities into the Roman period and many distinct or local practices as well. The sanctuary is interpreted as a sea-facing religious centre in use from third century BCE to at least the second century CE (and possibly as late as the fourth). The site was first excavated between 1964 and 1967 by the *Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta*, who published four short interim reports on their research, but never the full excavation. The stated aim of this publication is the reassessment of the existing evidence and contextualisation of the sanctuary in order to bring the unique nature of the site to light. This short volume developed out of a case study that formed part of A.'s Ph.D. on *Religious Landscapes and Identities in the Maltese Islands*.

The volume is illustrated with a variety of plans, photographs, chronologies and comparanda that provide much to consider in terms of the assessment of the function of the site, its development and transition over the period from Punic to Roman times. The volume is composed of four chapters and two appendices. Chapters 1 and 4 make up the brief introduction and conclusion while the focus of the study resides in Chapters 2 and 3. The appendices deal with further locations of comparanda on Malta and the human skeletal remains respectively.

The role of the sanctuary as a contact point between North Africa and Sicily is elaborated on in Chapter 2. The site's location on a promontory that sits between two known ancient harbours, Xlendi and Dwerja Bay, plays a key role in its interpretation. The sanctuary is assessed as a point of navigation and aid to seafarers; this is much needed, considering the evidence for shipwrecks from the area (p. 9). The identity of the object of veneration at the sanctuary is unknown, and A. creates a hypothesis for a connection to versions of the god Dionysus, deity of fertility and seafaring, who existed in many forms across the Greco-Punic-Roman world. Links between the island of Gozo and the cult of Dionysus and his Punic counterpart Shadrappa are explored at the end of this chapter. This in turn sets up the case made in Chapter 3 for one of the possible identities of the deity worshipped at the sanctuary and the nature of the rituals practised there.

The third chapter engages with a number of broader issues including the structural remains and spatial organisation of the landscape and the function of its architectural features including the temple and rock-cut cave. By exploring ideas around both ritual and veneration A. is able to outline the complexity of some of the possible processes involved. There is a close examination of the temple complex uncovered during the excavations in the 1960s with the site plans reproduced (pp. 23–4). The continued use of the temple well into the Roman period is confirmed, with the possibility of use as late as the fourth century

CE investigated. A number of hypotheses dealing with the relationship between the temple and rock-cut cave are discussed including processions, assembly and ritual communal meals within the broader landscape. An exploration of the use of the natural slope between the two architectural features is a point of interest and illustrates how A. has employed an innovative approach to the site overall (pp. 18–19).

The new interpretation of a pyramidally shaped stone found during the original excavations as a *betyl* is convincing, and the comparative material presented helps to confirm the argument and to emphasise the possible aniconic nature of the deity venerated here (pp. 43–9 with reconstruction). There is also an argument made for a Christian phase of use in the rock-cut caves although the nature of the carved figures upon which this interpretation is based remains somewhat uncertain. Chapter 3 includes the detail and analysis of a dense amount of material, along with new interpretations, and this leaves the reader with the impression that further elaboration would have been helpful. The material could have been divided into two separate chapters, one dealing with the landscape and one with the re-interpretation around the excavations.

The fourth chapter consists of an update on the state of the site today and some concluding observations. This short overview is another area where there seems more to do. The conclusions are very brief, and although they engage with some of the complex ideas presented in previous chapters, the aniconic aspect of the sanctuary especially, the reader is left wanting more to be made of this very useful study. As it stands, the reassessment of the evidence from Ras il-Wardija makes for an important addition to the overall understanding and interpretation of the site. The use of a range of approaches to the material helps to illuminate much about the neglected site and the volume pulls together the various phases of Malta's history and many aspects of current theories about Mediterranean connectivity and continuities. If anything, A.'s publication presents more questions than it answers and serves to create further interest in the exploration of these points of contact across the Mediterranean. The reassessment of the site only confirms Malta's importance as a meeting place between cultures and communities through religious worship, agriculture and navigation.

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NEW DISCOVERIES ON KALE AKTE

COLLURA (F.) (ed.) *Studia Calactina I. Ricerche su una città greco-romana di Sicilia: Kalè Akté – Calacte*. Con contributi di Sergio Cascella, Emiliano Arena e Benedetto Carroccio. (BAR International Series 2813.) Pp. viii + 460, ills, colour pls. Oxford: BAR Publishing, 2016. Paper, £69. ISBN: 978-1-4073-1480-8.

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This book is a valuable volume on the archaeology of Kale Akte, a small ancient city that corresponds to modern Caronia (Messina). As reported in the title, the book appears to be the first volume of a presumed thematic series on the site. C.'s book, which is much to be