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COLLECTING IN SICILY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Baron Judica and the Wonders of Ancient Acrae

Abstract

The first studies on the ancient Syracuse settlement in Acrae (663 BC Thuc. 6,5) date back to the 16th century, when Fazellus located the ancient Greek apoikia just west of modern-day Palazzolo Acreide (Syracuse). However, the actual archeological field study in the ancient Greek polis took place as late as 1809, thanks to Baron Judica's passion towards archeology. He devoted his life and all his wealth to ancient Acrae, where he brought to light its vestiges, thereby giving back to Sicily a piece of its ancient history. Thanks to his tireless effort, passion, and dedication, the Judica collection boasted over 3,000 artifacts, including 892 exquisite Greek vases. This paper will focus on how this very collection was formed.

Keywords: Acrae, Sicily, apoikia, Judica, Santoni

Among the numerous private collections that passionate aristocrats and rich collectors created in Sicily, Judica's one in Palazzolo Acreide stands out for the impressive number of items as well as the sequence of adventurous events surrounding its creation.

Before focusing on the Baron, it is important to discuss the history of the site, Acrae, present-day Palazzolo Acreide, where most of the items making up the collection were found.

Acrae was founded on the Val di Noto upland (700 masl), a pre-existing protohistoric settlement, between the Tellaro valleys to the south and the Anapo

river to the north (La Torre 2011: 46). The literary sources on Acrae are unfortunately quite penurious, thereby not allowing to retrace the complete history of the site in the ancient period.

Concerning its foundation, our most prominent source is Thucydides's (6, 5, 2) Sicilian archaiologia: Ἄκραι δὲ καὶ Κασμέναι ὑπὸ Συρακοσίων ᾠκίσθησαν, Ἄκραι μὲν ἑβδομήκοντα ἔτεσιμετὰ Συρακούσας, Κασμέναι δ'ἐγγὺς εἴκοσι μετὰ Ἄκρας (*Acrae and Casmenae were founded by the Syracusans, Acrae seventy years after Syracuse, and Casmenae nearly twenty years after Acrae*).

Thucydides claims that Acrae was settled at the behest of Syracuse, seventy years after the foundation of their own city, in 663 BC. As the sources make no mention of the names of the οἰκισταὶ,[1] Acrae might have been founded not as a genuine *polis*, but rather as a military outpost to defend Syracuse in the internal areas to the south and south-east[2]. Here, colonists from Rhodes and Crete established Gela in 689 BC, thus requiring protection in the internal area. Besides military objectives, we have to consider that around the same period, archaeological findings testify to a great shift towards Acradina following a sizeable demographic growth in Syracuse. This must have had ripples both in the political and social sphere, resulting in a genuine *stasis*, as corroborated by the sources. Thucydides reports that following internal conflicts in Syracuse, the Myletidae were expelled from the city, joined Zanclei, and eventually founded Himera in 648 BC. In the light of this incident, we can speculate that Syracuse – already in 663 BC – felt the need to relieve the political and social pressure over the city and to control the internal area; therefore, the *polis* decided to move 'unwanted' elements away by settling them in Acrae. This hypothesis would also account for the absence of founders: Syracuse did not intend to bestow the status of *polis* upon a settlement made up of politically inconvenient figures. The new settlement attracted a great many people, by virtue of the exploitation of vast and fertile fields in the Hyblaean area, which Syracuse had – previously and

1 Among the three sub-colonies of Syracuse, the sources mention the ecysts only for Camarina, Daxon and Menecolus, thus recognizing center as *ktiseis*.

2 The system of protection and control of the territories was made up of Eloro, which protected the southern border of the Syracusan domains and the Elorina route; Casmenae, which represented the extreme limit of Syracusan expansion towards the west and, as we shall see, Acrae. Camarinae was also part of this system. See Berbabò Brea (1956: 17). About Acrae see Garozzo, Marotta D'Agata, Moreschini 1994: 189–204; about Camarinae see Buongiovanni, Cordano, Pelagatti 1984: 286–314; about Casmenae see Moreschini, Marotta D'Agata 1989: 391–397.

progressively – secured after ousting the Sicels. Syracuse ousting the Myletidae in 648 BC (Thuc. 6, 5, 1) would also account for the peaceful settlement of Casmenae (644 BC); Syracuse aimed at the military control of the internal territory and, yet again, the relieving of social pressure in politically unstable Syracuse. Herodotus (7, 155) corroborates this hypothesis by stating that Acrae became a sanctuary for those *gamoroi* who were forced out of their city after yet another *stasis*, eventually finding refuge in one of these centers.

The absence of a mint in the city and the presence of a massive fortification confirm Acrae's dependence on Syracuse and its lookout position – at least in the archaic period. The fortification, whose remains are scant but still visible in situ, is mentioned in inscription Kaibel 217 and was still visible until its near-complete destruction in the 1693 earthquake (Bonanni Colonna 1624: 90). The fortification (Frederiksen 2011) probably dates back to the archaic period and leads us to believe that Akai defended Syracuse's southern border. The ability to control the internal routes to Selinunte and Gela (Di Vita 1956: 182) and the vast and fertile Hyblaean fields helped the center grow wealthy and prosperous. As a result, Acrae lost its original military role, which was taken on by Casmenae, thereby assuming a grander economic role in agriculture and trade (Copani 2009: 11–21).

Whilst archaeological findings convey the image of a wealthy and flourishing city, the literary sources at our disposal are unfortunately insufficient to retrace the ancient history of the site. For instance, Plutarch (Dion 27) tells us that Dion chose the internal route, thus stopping in Acrae on his expedition against Syracuse in 375 BC. The sources do not mention the role of the center in the broader history of Sicily over the following period and particularly the historical events in which such eminent figures as Dionysius (the Old and the Young), Timoleon and Agathocles, played a huge role. Diodorus Siculus (XXIII 4, 1) informs us of the center at the time of the conflict and the subsequent 263 BC peace treaty between Rome and Syracuse: Hiero "[…] was to continue as ruler of the Syracusans and of the cities subject to him, Acrae, Leontini, Megara, Helorum, Neetum and Tauromenium". This passage leads us to believe that Acrae (Di Vita 1987: 79) had been steadily gaining an administrative autonomy, as shown by several fifth-century inscriptions. Its autonomy – or at least its freedom to autonomously rule over its territories and trades – supposedly persisted until Hiero II signed a treaty declaring its dependence from Syracuse: the inscriptions, the prosperity revealed by grave goods and monuments, and the presence of magistrates would explain Diodorus's describing Acrae as

a *polis*. In 213 BC Livius (24, 36) mentions Acrae in a passage describing the Acrillae naval battle between Rome, led by consul Marcellus, and Syracuse, led by Hippocrates, who would eventually find sanctuary in Acrae. After the Roman conquest of Syracuse in 211 BC, the territories and the cities under former Syracusan rule became part of the Roman province and Acrae was added to the lists of *stipendiariae civitates* (Plin. *N.H.* 3, 91). The center continued its existence into the Republic and the Empire, as witnessed by archaeological findings.

These were the historical events as conveyed by our incomplete literary sources, which show us but a morsel of the grander economic role that Acrae used to play in ancient times.

The first identification of ancient Acrae in the territory of present-day Palazzolo Acreide is owed to the passion and dedication of 16th-century historian Fazellus, a native of Sciacca. He was a persistent and curious researcher and his name is closely linked to such important findings as Selinunte and Heraclea. Fazellus put together the results of his research in *De Rebus Siculis Decades Duae* (1558), where the first decade concerns a thorough geographical and topographical description of places and monuments he visited in Sicily; the second decade focuses on the history of Sicily until Charles V[3].

His work would later become an important point of reference for scholars, antiquarians, and intellectuals who were invested in the study of the antiquities of Sicily.

Whilst the identification of Acrae is attributed to Fazellus, from an archaeological standpoint the finding and promotion of ancient Acrae from the early 19th century are ascribed to the efforts of Baron Judica. His tireless and passionate research was already praised by Giuseppe Turturici in "Considerazioni sull'opera del Barone Gabriello Judica da Palazzolo" (1822: 217–231): *Possano di siffatti travagli prodursi in buon numero dai nostri antiquari che saprebbero onorare come ha fatto il Judica, il nome siciliano, e farci alzar con decoro la fronte in faccia agli stranieri.*

The Judica family originated in Spain. Upon moving to Sicily, the family split into two branches: the first settled in Palermo, the second moved to Grammichele (Catania), and its members immediately stood out in the political sphere and held very prestigious posts.[4]

Michele Judica, a physician, moved from Grammichele to Palazzolo Acreide, where he married Carmela Danieli, heir to one of the wealthiest families in

3 About Fazellus and his work see Vitale 1971; Sanfilippo 1973; Uggeri 2003: 97–128.

4 Calendario d'oro, Istituto araldico italiano. Roma 1901, 516.

town. As a result, Michele gained greater economic resources, which would allow him to start up an intense entrepreneurial activity in agriculture and to purchase the Baulì estate – thereby obtaining his title (Lombardo 1998: 171). Michele's son Gabriele was born in 1760 in Noto, but his name would be inextricably linked to Palazzolo Acreide. From a young age he developed a passion for the study of the ancient history of his homeland. He regarded the past as a living thing, as stated in the preface to his 1819 *Le antichità di Acre: i nostri vetusti monumenti protesi al suolo, qual trofeo degli anni, saranno proposti alla gioventù studiosa per contemplarne le proporzioni, le forme e le vetustà. Allora si potrebbe dire con franchezza da noi Siciliani all'Europa: noi fummo e fummo, fummo grandi: eccone i testimoni della nostra antica possanza, e non assai meno degli avi nostri potremmo noi essere splendidi e doviziosi, ove intiepido non fosse stato e nol sia tutt'ora ne' nostri petti santo amor di patria.*

His education was strongly influenced by cultural neoclassicism, whose most prominent figurehead was Winchelmann, and whose works allowed the Baron to delve deeper into topography, numismatics, epigraphy, iconography, and restoration. At the same time, Fazellus's opus and the latest archaeological findings in Pompei and Ercolano spurred the young aristocrat to actively participate in the discovery of the ancient vestiges of Sicily.

After earning a degree in law, he served as a civil judge and was involved in the political life of his town by holding several elected offices (Lombardo 1998: 181). However, his enthusiasm for archaeology pushed him to devote his whole life and resources to researching a region of the Valle di Noto that promised to bring to life a unique and extraordinary past. This enthusiasm was further fostered by the fascinating experiences of the Grand Tourists, heirs to the wealthiest families in Europe, such as Houel, Saint-Non, Wilkins, De La Salle. In a cultural euphoria stoked by Europe-wide intellectual thriving, Judica was neither an isolated nor an exceptional case. It was a period of great bustle for archaeological research in Sicily, albeit lacking any scientific method, and the aristocracy was eager to promote it: Prince Biscari, for instance, committed his resources to researching the Mount Etna area, while Cesare Gaetani Della Torre, Giuseppe Logoteta and Saverio Landolina devoted themselves to Syracuse.[5]

Among these figures, Gabriele Judica stood out as the embodiment of the bohemian romantic spirit, yet fulfilling his aristocratic role by ignoring those who

5 About private collections that were formed in Sicily between the late 18th and the 20th century, see *Catalogo della Mostra Musei nascosti. Collezioni e raccolte archeologiche a Siracusa dal XVIII al XX secolo,* Napoli 2008.

were tasked with protecting his land's cultural heritage. Through his unwearying research, Judica meant to rediscover an illustrious identity and a memory to be passed down from generation to generation. He claims that: "*A voi presento la narrazione di alcuni cavamenti da me intrapresi, per rimenare alla luce un'antica colonia greca quasi obliata; ma che tanto riguardo merita quanto di onorateza ha diritto di riscuoterne la madre, la più illustre delle metropoli della Sicilia che fiorirono ne' bei giorni della Grecia*" (Judica 1819: I)

His official activity[6] as archeologist began in 1811 with permission[7] from the competent authorities. In fact, he carried out his first excavation in 1809 in Contrada Colle Orbo, within his estate, where he unearthed a Hellenistic necropolis. He claims to have discovered the site by chance while strolling around his estate. The discovery would eventually bring to light several figure vases, statuettes, two medals depicting Emperor Vespasian and Trajan, and Eumachius's epigraph.

In the same year, he read works by Bonanni and the Abbot Amico (Judica 1819: 13), thus directing his researches towards the Acremonte, more specifically the area known for its Santoni. He began works without permission and brought to light vases, coins, Emperor medals, and women's jewelry. The annotation on bas-reliefs carved on stone depicting life-sized men, women, children, and horses is of particular interest[8].

He carried on his archaeological activity in the vicinity of Acremonte and Colle Orbo, in the Intagliatella quarry, where he found a Christian necropolis and an epigraph. The Baron then transcribed the epigraph from Greek to Latin. The epigraph – dedicated to Marciana – turns into a pretext for the Baron's erudite philological considerations. Moreover, it is worth noting that whenever the Baron describes any artifact, he digresses by drawing a comparison with Pompei and Ercolano (Judica 1819: 18–24).

The Baron's intense unauthorized activity disquieted Mario Landolina, Regio Custode delle antichità in Noto, who would write to Marques Paolo

6 To reconstruct his activity as an archaeologist, see the documents preserved in Archivio di Stato and in Biblioteca Alagoniana of Siracusa. The documents are published in Agnello 1965: 78–136.

7 A law enacted in 1787 tried to halt unauthorized excavations and the sale of eventual findings on foreign markets. Nonetheless, the extremely rare inspections contributed to depriving Sicily of numerous artifacts as early as the eighteenth century.

8 It is a rock sanctuary in honor of Cybele. The bas-reliefs had already been described by Paternò Principe di Biscari (1781: 83) and by Houel (1785: 111), who had reported the sketches in his work. See Sfameni Gasparro 1996: 51–86.

D'Albergo, his caretaker in Palazzolo. This first notification did not mention the Baron. Nonetheless, Landolina claims to have had wind of some unauthorized activity and the subtraction of valuable artifacts. He demands a stronger vigilance to avoid further unauthorized excavations. This very incident marked the beginning of a series of disputes with Landolina, which would oftentimes trouble the Baron. The tension grew so high as to push the Baron to ignore Landolina's authority and appeal directly to the King: in a letter, he requests the authorization to make further excavations at his own expense and to keep the artifacts in "a private hall" for posterity; the latter request implies the desire to start a private collection. In fact, from later correspondence (Agnello 1965: doc. VII), we learn about Baron Judica asking the permission *di fare degli scavi a sue proprie spese ne' contorni di detta terra, con conservare in di lui potere ciò che di antico si rinviene per lasciarli in memoria ai suoi posteri senza volere essere impedito dai dai particolari de' fondi, prontuandosi egli ad indennizzare i danni che recherà*. Furthermore, he pled the King not to authorize excavations led by foreign-born archaeologists, to avoid dispersing the archeological and artistic heritage. Nonetheless, the King forwarded this appeal to the competent authority, Landolina, who denied it on the grounds of previous unauthorized excavations; moreover, Landolina accused the Baron of failing to hand over the artifacts to the Museum of Syracuse, as mandated by the laws in force at the time. Consequently, the Baron had to temporarily halt his archaeological activity and report all the artifacts found in his research. The penalty was particularly harsh as around the same time such personalities as Fagan, Makensin, Lamberti and Lord Valentin (Musumeci 2008: 34) were allowed to excavate.

The Baron's position changed abruptly between June and August 1811 as a letter from Donato Tommasi authorized him to excavate as long as the Baron took on the administrative duties and the obligations to the landowners (Agnello 1965: doc. XV, 105). Therefore, the Baron never turned in his artifacts, which he kept in his Palazzo al Corso, under the pretext that the Museum of Syracuse was not "Regio" (Agnello 1965: doc. XVIII, 107). Judica committed to notifying the authorities of his discoveries and if any of the artifacts were to be of interest to the King, he would give it up under such compensation as established by the Intendenti (Agnello 1965: doc. XV, 105).

His refusal to deliver the artifacts to the Museum of Syracuse and the request not to entrust the excavations to foreign scholars confirms his great desire to keep in Palazzolo what belonged to Palazzolo. As will become clear later, he intended to prevent small towns from losing their rich ancient history and

identity to the great museums in Palermo and Syracuse, which had been accumulating the bulk of Sicily's latest archaeological findings.

We are unable to account for the Secretariat of State reconsidering its initial decision. Regardless of its motives, from then on, Judica was enjoying greater autonomy, which even made him a *persona grata* before the Secretariat.

Around this time, the Baron started works in Contrada Pinita, where he brought to life a necropolis and an impressive number of furnishings: children's objects, bracelets, balm and unguent jars. After thorough analyses and comparisons with necropoleis in Athens and Rome, this necropolis was shown to predate Inglatella. The graves appear extremely regular as though each block were carefully polished. (Judica 1819: 25; Bernabò Brea 1956: 118).

The King's support through the words of the Archbishop of Heraclea Don Alfonso Airoldi led the Baron to resume works in Intagliatella, where he found the inscriptions of Eutichia, Claudianus, Clodius, and other sepulchers, some Roman coins, vases and lamps, and urns that the Baron believed to contain holy water or other balsamic and odoriferous waters (Judica 1819: 35 ss.). In August 1814, the Baron unearthed an inscription of masculine names bearing the gymnasiarca title "*Sub Atemidoro – Gymnasiarchi (fuerunt) – Archedamus – Nimphodorus Policlides*". This led Judica to believe that Acre had a gymnasium (1819: 80). Therefore, he rallied a great number of workers and continued his research with renewed enthusiasm. This new excavation was bound to bear fruit, as the Baron brought to life a half-span Christian-age bronze laurel wreath; several seals, one of which in the shape of human foot palms and another in the shape of a whole foot along with an epigraph lacking Christian emblems; a goblet and a bronze patera; a bronze statuette unearthed in December portraying a young man in a sitting position, probably Arcadius. This excavation provided us with the evidence of an uninterrupted human settlement in this area. The Baron states that the upper strata contained Byzantine vases as well as Arabic and Roman coins, thus spanning from the 5th to the 8th century BC; in the lowest strata he found coins depicting Syracusan tyrants and other cities of the Greek period.

In 1815, Regio Custode Landolina once again attempted to halt the Baron's excavations, to no avail, as the Baron had meanwhile become a prestigious figure for the Secretary of State, who confirmed the previous authorizations and permitted him to work in Modica and Caltagirone. In the same year, Judica resumed works in Inglatella, which had been suspended for two years. There, he found another inscription dedicated to the memory of Stephanus Diaconus, as well as a fragment of a Greek inscription (Judica 1819: 89); he would finally

claim to have discovered an underground road. On 1 September 1815, Duke Lucchesi Palli, impressed by the Baron's activity and by his important findings, appointed Judica as Regio Custode and granted him permission to keep a portion of the artifacts he would find: as a result, his collection would finally enjoy official status and would eventually include pottery, inscriptions and coins, jewelry and statuettes.

In 1816, the excavations in the Grotta di Senebardo catacombs brought to light a marble head that Judica recognized as Minerva (1819: 99); in addition, he dug up a limestone bust; a Roman-style marble statue missing all its limbs; a huge stone hand and head that Judica believed to be part of a public building, as well as several other statuettes. In 1817, he turned his attention to Contrada Pinita, where he managed to bring to light several tombs, some bas-reliefs, rare medals, and a bronze medallion depicting the triumph of Bacchus (Judica 1819: 118), the frontispiece of a Doric order temple and a vase depicting Hercules. Judica believed this implied that Venus worshippers had inhabited the area, which is further corroborated by an inscription describing the temple itself.

The Baron's excavations grew more and more expensive due to costlier manpower and increasing compensations to landowners. At the same time, the Baron was completely engrossed in his research, thus ignoring his private affairs and depleting a sizeable portion of his fortune.

Nonetheless, his efforts were rewarded in 1820 as he discovered the Bouleuterion – mistaken for an Odeon – and the theater in Acrae, whose discovery was made public in a letter to Agostino Gallo published on the Rivista Giornale di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti per la Sicilia.

The letter details his most impressive findings: the Baron describes the entirety of the theater and measures it in spans; he counts 24 steps and 6 cunei; he describes proscenium and scene, which he was forced to purchase as they lay on privately-owned land.

In 1828, the Baron's new unauthorized works and his growing private collection stirred another wave of controversy. In January 1829, the Mayor of Palazzolo accommodated the Intendente's requests by providing him with a defense of Judica and the collection inventory, which at the time amounted to 2,847 artifacts (Agnello 1965: doc. XXXVI, 119).

This extraordinary collection was the result of years of authorized and unauthorized excavations as well as purchases from antiquarians.

Nonetheless, in 1828 the Baron had to face his first drawback, as the legal representatives of Cardinal Tommaso Arezzi, commendatory Abbot, started foreclosing proceedings on the grounds that the Baron failed to pay emphyteu-

tic taxes. A prolonged negotiation ensued, as the Baron was unwilling to dispose of his collection. We have but scant information concerning this incident, but it did strongly worsen the finances of the Baron, who was allegedly forced to sell part of his collection to visitors in Palazzolo.

The Baron's weakened economic situation negatively impacted his public image. This was further aggravated by the Commissione di Belle Arti di Palermo revoking his title of Regio Custode. Judica reacted by arguing that all the artifacts were to be considered as private goods, as they were found at his own expense in his own estates. By doing so, he disclosed the entirety of his discoveries thus far. A suspicion also remains that Landolina was responsible for the Commission's hostility towards Judica.

French traveler Gonzalve De Nervo witnessed the Baron's dire economic situation first-hand. In the spring of 1833, when de Nervo visited the Baron at his Palace in hopes of meeting the most educated and wealthiest man in Sicily, he found him burden with debt. As reported in his journal, De Nervo was ushered in by a ragged servant, who led him up a filthy run-down staircase, into a hall where hens scratched about the chest emblazoned with the Judica coat of arms. The traveler was met by a grey-haired elderly man, donning a worn-down coat, who tried to sell him ancient artifacts. The Frenchman ended up buying, inter alia, Greek medals, women's toilette accessories, a terracotta patera adorned with artful reliefs and two lacrymatories. So we can conclude that the Baron spent his waning years alone and indebted. On May 3, 1835, he was visited by the bailiffs and the relatives who aspired to inherit his assets.

Shortly thereafter the authorities seized the entirety of his collection, including the museum. A mere two years after his death, the rightful heir, don Cesare Judica suggested selling the collection to the Regio Domanio as debt repayment, to no avail. (Lombardo 1998: 194–195; Agnello 1965: 93–94; Bartolo Di 1996–2004: 128–129; Musumeci 2008: 35).

The collection was then completely abandoned, as reported by a note in the Bulletin de l'Institut de Correspondance Archéologique (1857: 54). Following prolonged clashes between the Judica family and the Government, the Palazzo fell into absolute disrepair: artifacts were boxed and scattered across cluttered exhibition halls and part of the Palace was even turned into a stable.

Retracing the fate of most objects in his collection appears a tall order; it is established that the Baron's works described just a small portion of his collection, which comprised more than 3,000 objects spanning from the prehistoric age to the late Empire. A great number of artifacts were unfortunately lost or

smuggled and sold to foreign antiquarians, as witnessed by artifacts described by Judica circulating in the New York antiques market and by a skyphos portraying Dionysus and two flute players on display at the British Museum.

Gaetano Judica, one of the Baron's descendants, attempted to rebuild the whole collection in the early 20th century. Besides the original collection, which was still unique for dimension and variety, Gaetano added other artifacts he had previously bought in the antiques market, as shown by artifacts coming from different areas. Following Gaetano's death, Paolo Orsi helped draw a second inventory (Gabriele compiled the first inventory in 1929: Agnello 1965: doc. XXXVI, 119–122). The scholar pointed out that some artifacts were unfortunately counterfeit, presumably the work of a forger.

The discovery of forged objects among the originals and the Baron's great attachment to his collection could suggest that Judica had commissioned a craftsman to forge copies of the valuable items that he was not willing to give up. The sale of these forgeries to foreign travelers would have made the Baron able to cope with his vast financial problems.

However, what remained of the original collection was safeguarded under law no. 1089 of 1939 and entrusted to the Soprintendenza di Siracusa, which between 1980 and 2003 committed to purchasing several artifacts from the Baron's descendants.

In 2015, at last, Baron Judica's dreams came true: the artifacts he found in Acrae earned a deserving spot in the halls of a Museum in the Palazzo Cappellani in Palazzolo. This attests to Gabriele's efforts and the greatness of a distant yet not forgotten past.

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