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My research interests revolve around Sicily, the largest island in the Mediterranean. Sicily has always been a melting pot due to its perfect location, conveniently connecting not only Europe and Africa, but even more so—the Greek and the Latin worlds. In antiquity, Sicily was a promised land for many peoples, attractive because of its natural resources and central situation in the Mediterranean world, as well as an area where various cultures fused. Through this mutual permeation of countless elements, the island became a cradle of diverse phenomena, whose testimony is the complexity of multi-layered settlement in Sicily and the abundance of its monuments. When the Greeks arrived on the island in the 730s BC in their quest for soil and familiar landscapes, they settled tentatively in the eastern part, leaving the western edges to their future foes—the Phoenicians. As a consequence, the Greeks subdued a local tribe, the Sicels, thus seizing fertile lands for centuries to come. The island witnessed an onset of significant transformations, which were later continued by the Romans, who were fully aware of Sicily's wealth long before the first Punic War. When they captured the best part of the island in 241 BC and later the whole island in 212 BC, they had no consistent vision of how to govern and cultivate the island. But they knew perfectly well how to use natural resources, not only for their domestic needs, but for the Rome's benefits as a whole. Ancient inhabitants of island successively wrestled the land away from nature, and more and more integrated with it.

The 'landscape' category within my area of study is most often associated with the subcategory of 'historical landscape'. First and foremost, it encompasses research on cultural landscape and all related kinds of past human activity, including spatial arrangement. In my opinion, however, this term has an unlimited capacity, especially from the archaeological perspective. Landscape studies include, as far as I see it, researching past natural landscapes and reconstructing the natural environment, human diet, geological structure of the land, and human interference with the primordial landscape. I also fully appreciate the aesthetic approach—understood as influence exerted by general visual features of the island on its ancient inhabitants and their daily activities. Landscape seen from the archaeological perspective may be defined as a given space but also as a relationship between this space and humans (in the past), which consisted of material and immaterial components, the visible and the invisible, which may be brought to light thanks to archaeological

excavations. It is not, however, limited to the Vidalian understanding of (cultural) landscape, i.e. only to social activity in a given environment. Archaeology also explores the influence of landscape on humans—the way landscape affected human behaviour, how humans depended on it, and how they perceived it (Tilley 1994).

My personal observations and changing perceptions help me in my studies of landscape in Sicily, particularly the landscape of the ancient Greco-Roman town Akrai and its vicinity, as I carry out a comprehensive scientific project. I gladly converse with the local inhabitants, because their perception of the ambience facilitates a better understanding of the historical landscape. People in the interior of the island are much closer to their own nature and heritage.

2.

Despite the numerous possible definitions that archaeology could afford, in-depth and multifaceted landscape studies are rather rare in the field. Although the term of ‘landscape archaeology’ was introduced in the literature already in the 1970s, and it subsequently underwent a thorough transformation in the 1990s, the label of ‘landscape studies’ usually continues to designate hermetic archaeological papers on GIS, aerial photography, or broad-scope 3D modelling, spanning a whole region, or a narrowly defined region—focusing on a single archaeological site, for instance. Their authors, while emphasizing the interdisciplinary nature of archaeological studies, fail to notice that they present mere techniques, applications, and tools which should be used to *assist* such studies. Mapping sites (settlements, necropolises) is but an introductory stage, not the end result of landscape studies. On top of this, archaeological papers often lack methodological foundation, which should be a mainstay of any kind of scholarly activity. Taken together, all this results in archaeological research being perceived as methodologically unsound and incomprehensible. Therefore, landscape data obtained through archaeological excavations are rarely quoted by other landscape researchers (e.g. cultural geographers, historians).

However, I believe that archaeology has much more to offer to landscape studies. It is a field which allows exploration of different aspects of landscape, from its geographical features to cultural or sociological significance. The heritage left by ancient cultures seriously affects where we live now and how we perceive our surroundings. Thanks to archaeological research, we can understand physical, non-physical, and cultural change. We may identify patterns of landscape transformations and understand how individuals and societies viewed their habitats. Cultural heritage also teaches us how to perceive the space we currently occupy. Fernand Braudel (1902-1985), one of the most prominent historians of the 20th century, once wrote:

We are too inclined to think of Mediterranean life as *la dolce vita*, effortlessly easy. But we are following the charms of the landscape to deceive us. Arable land is scarce there, while arid and infertile mountains are everywhere present [...]. Rainfall is unevenly distributed: plentiful when the vegetation is hibernating in winter, it disappears just when plant growth needs it. [...] Human labour is not relieved by the climate: all the heavy work has always had to be done when the summer heat is at its fiercest, and the resulting harvest crop is all too often meagre. (Braudel 2002, 77)

This is why human relationships with the environment are worthy of being mentioned here.

The landscape is a witness to all changes, it is an enduring observer of history, from the beginning until the present day. If we are able and we want to 'read' it—the landscape can speak to us. The stone walls, terraces, the remains of houses, theatres and temples, the lost horseshoe of a donkey on a mountain path, a coin or a brooch are all traces of people in landscape. We need to remember that nothing exists and can be analysed without the past, here understood as distant past, but also yesterday. Each person, each civilization left their own sign/signs, while just as archaeology landscape has its own stratigraphy, therefore archaeology could play a tremendous role in landscape studies. Furthermore, in view of the above arguments, archaeology is in part a history of landscape.

3.

The study of landscapes is not an easy task. Simple generalizations make such a broad and complex matter shallow, especially in the context of historical landscape. To reconstruct an environment and create an image in which an ancient people are actively portrayed, one has to combine different scientific sources and methods; it needs to be an interdisciplinary approach.

Landscape studies delve into multifaceted research problems which definitely exceed any single scholarly discipline. Approached from an archaeological perspective, they retain this status, especially given that landscapes studied by archaeologists are something completely different from those we see today, which are alive or simply more substantial to us than to the ancient inhabitants. Research into past cultural processes, landscape transformations, and the perception of environment in antiquity cannot be undertaken by experts in a single field since it restricts potential results from the very start. As with present times, such processes in the remote past were not simple. On the contrary, they had diverse origins and combined a variety of elements.

The ancient *Akraï* in Sicily and its neighbourhood may be quoted again as an example of interdisciplinary studies. These studies rely naturally on archaeological artefacts gathered in the course of excavations and surveys, but the research is

supplemented by osteological analyses of bones, biological examinations of floral remains and stable isotope analyses of bones of wild animal species. Geological and topographical studies of the area are also considered. Besides that, anthropological and ethnographical observations are performed as well. The data collected in this transdisciplinary process enables a better and fuller understanding of ancient processes, daily life in an ancient town, human-environment relation and the degree of environmental exploitation over the centuries.

4.

Education is desirable here. But interdisciplinary education is the most desirable. Learning landscape should combine different disciplines and perspectives, to be a collaborative initiative, and try to build a bridge between theory and practice. *The Polish Journal of Landscape Studies* is certainly an excellent first step. But to bring this knowledge to a wider community in Poland (teachers, students, university academics and leaders) it is essential to develop a common and uniform curriculum of fundamental landscape studies. Higher education in Poland needs a practical and conceptual framework of learning about landscape (it has already been accomplished in many countries, as demonstrated by e.g. *Learning Landscapes in Higher Education. Clearing pathways, making spaces, involving academics in the leadership, governance and management of academic spaces in higher education*, University of Lincoln, 2010). Landscape education in Poland should most definitely be a part of holistic thinking about university teaching.

Bibliography:

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- Tilley, Christopher. 1994. *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments*. Oxford: Berg.