

Sicily, the largest island in the Mediterranean, has for millennia attracted visitors, settlers and invaders with its strategic location and fertile land. In Antiquity, the tribes of Elymes, Sicels, Sicanians, but also the Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Byzantines, and later in the Middle Ages the Arabs and the Normans, all succumbed the island's charm, each contributing to the creation of an exceptional, cultural melting pot. The multiethnic mosaic of the island is reflected in the architecture of Greek temples, Hellenistic theaters, and Roman aqueducts, but also in less spectacular finds of material culture, such as terracotta figurines. In this project I will focus on the study of terracotta objects from the Greco-Roman city of Akrai in southeastern Sicily. This ancient city is located near the modern Palazzolo Acreide. The site itself is approximately 30 km from the ancient metropolis of Syracuse, with which it has been intrinsically linked since its foundation in 664/663 BC.

Archaeological studies at the site have been ongoing since the nineteenth century, revealing the structures in the public part of the city: the theater, the agora, the *bouleterion* and the temple of Aphrodite. However, it is only the excavations carried out since 2009 by the University of Warsaw in the residential zone of the city that allow to give a glimpse into the daily lives of its inhabitants, adding new pages to a previously unknown history of the city. One of the groups of discovered archaeological materials are the terracotta figurines. Widely known and valued for their artistic qualities, they also are a wealth of information that testify to their ancient makers and users. They served a variety of functions in Antiquity, from temple votive offerings, to grave gifts, to ornaments in a household. The terracotta material discovered to date offers a unique opportunity to explore this group of finds. The site also offers a unique opportunity to study finds from domestic contexts, which have been preserved in smaller amounts at other Sicilian sites.

This project aims to reconstruct the *chaîne opératoire* (chain of production) of terracotta artefacts and their place in the cultural landscape of the city, as well as to identify the domestic cults of the ancient inhabitants of the city, the circulation of terracotta finds within a single agglomeration, but also in the Mediterranean. The main research objectives are as follows:

1. Preliminary technical, iconographic and typological identification of terracotta material from a residential area in Akrai.
2. Archaeometric and technological analyses as a means of reconstructing the influx of coroplastic (made of terracotta) material and figure types into Akrai and the interior of southeastern Sicily.
3. A multifaceted analysis of terracotta figurines from Akrai.
4. Mapping the religious landscape of Akrai by identifying domestic cults and their locations in specific domestic spaces.

The study of domestic cults in Sicily is often difficult due to the limited number of sites where ancient residential areas have not been absorbed by modern cities. It is important to remember that urban buildings in Sicily evolved to their most impressive forms during the Hellenistic period. Since the residential architecture of Syracuse, the mother colony, is almost completely covered by modern construction, the Akrai case study can serve as a "small mirror" of the dynamics in private contexts that were developing at the same time in Syracuse. This will enrich the knowledge of the micro-region as a whole, as well as the southeastern part of the island. Chthonian cult terracottas were found mainly in domestic contexts, which allows us to assume that the cult moved from public practice to private, individual rituals before the Roman conquest, reflecting the religious appeal of the late Hellenistic period.

In addition to the necessary cataloguing, descriptive work, and photographic documentation, the research proposal presented here also involves archaeometric and dactyloscopic analyses, in order to obtain useful data informing us about the makers themselves, as well as the *chaîne opératoire* of the technological and social aspects of terracotta material. The comprehensive analysis of Akrai terracottas will result in an open database of local and imported terracotta types and the clay from which they were made, enriched by a comprehensive iconographic and typological analysis; the *chaîne opératoire* of terracotta production in Akrai will be elucidated; and by identifying and analyzing the preferences of Akrai residents for terracotta wares, it will be possible to observe changes occurring in the religious landscape of the city.

The significance of the proposed project is threefold. The proposed research is the first project devoted entirely to ancient terracotta finds of the Sicilian area, which will be carried out by a Polish researcher at an early stage of his scientific career. Secondly, due to the nature of the material, it is a project of great importance and prestige due to the challenges and scope of the scientific problems undertaken. Finally, the results of the project will constitute a contribution to European science and archaeology, as it will be carried out at multiple levels using new research methods (archaeological and archaeometric), without neglecting the traditional methodology of archaeological analysis.