

BOOK REVIEW

A Review of *Passionate Patron: The Life of Alexander Hardcastle and the Greek Temples of Agrigento*

By Alexandra Richardson, Oxford: Archaeopress, 143 pages, 2009, ISBN: 9781905739288

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Richardson's 143-page book provides an interesting account on the life of Alexander Hardcastle (London, 1872 – Agrigento, 1933), a rich English patron and archaeologist, who operated in Sicily during the early twentieth century. Son of Hernt and Marie Sophie Hardcastle Herschel, Alexander took his military service in the Royal Navy, gaining a thorough technical knowledge, which he successfully used in Sicily. After he obtained a passport in December 1920, Hardcastle moved to Girgenti (now Agrigento), where he purchased a new house, the so-called *Villa Aurea*, and allocated private funds to perform excavations and massive renovation works at the nearby Greek temples of *Akragas*. In particular, he restored eight columns of the Temples of *Herakles* and *Demetra*, and excavated part of the ancient city walls in the 1920s. His activity caused a great sensation in both Sicily and Great Britain, as articles in newspapers clearly testify.

Hardcastle quickly gained contacts with the most esteemed contemporary Italian archaeologists, notably Paolo Orsi (1859–1935), Ettore Gabrici (1868–1962), Roberto Paribeni (1876–1956) and Pirro Marconi (1897–1938). Hardcastle's life was cut short on 27 June 1933 at the Asylum of Girgenti, to which he had been admitted less than two months before.

Richardson offers a detailed reconstruction of Hardcastle's work, based on the study of letters and archival records; unfortunately, they are not fully transcribed. The monograph comprises an 'Introduction', 'Epilogue' and 24 short chapters, which follow the biography of Hardcastle and his busy life at Agrigento. Richardson provides information on Hardcastle's family (chapters 2–3), his education and military career (4–5) and on his preparation for the move to Sicily (6–8). Then follow introductory sections on the historical context of early twentieth-century Sicily (9–11), relationships between Hardcastle and contemporary archaeologists (12), and renovation and excavation works at Girgenti (13–14, 17–18). The latter accounts can be considered the most remarkable part of the monograph in terms of enhancing the history of Sicilian archaeology. Chapters 15–16 cover Hardcastle's activity at Ferento (Viterbo) on mainland Italy, while the last chapters (21–24) outline the final years of his life and his death at Agrigento.

In summary, Richardson's essay is a most useful work, which improves our knowledge of the history of early twentieth-century Sicilian archaeology and presents an exemplary case study of one of the rich foreign patrons, who operated in Sicily during the early stages of Fascism.

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How to cite this article: Crisa, A 2014 A Review of *Passionate Patron: The Life of Alexander Hardcastle and the Greek Temples of Agrigento*. *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology*, 24: 21, p.1, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/bha.2421>

Published: 07 November 2014

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Bulletin of the History of Archaeology is a peer-reviewed open access journal
published by Ubiquity Press.

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