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History and Archaeology of Morgantina

1. Introduction

THE ANCIENT CITY of Morgantina was an important regional center in southeastern central Sicily from the second half of the 4th into the late 1st century BCE, and then survived as a small village into the first half of the 1st century CE. Excavations at the site have recovered an enormous amount of pottery dated between ca. 350 BCE and ca. 50 CE. Given its location fifty miles from the east coast of the island, Morgantina was not exposed to the degree of foreign influence that a port would have seen, and its ceramics give us a picture of the material culture in the interior of Sicily during the Hellenistic and Republican periods, and, to a lesser extent, the early imperial age.

The ancient city has been excavated by various American teams from 1955 until the present.[1] This volume presents the fine wares and tablewares—defined as vases bearing gloss or molded decoration and often, but not exclusively, used on the table for dining—from the second half of the 4th century BCE through the early Roman imperial period, to around 50 CE, when the city was abandoned. Another volume in this series will present the plain or utilitarian pottery from the same period, as well as the terracotta lamps. These two monographs will publish around 75% of the inventoried pottery from the period found at Morgantina.

Because of the scale of the excavations of Morgantina, it has not been possible to publish all the pottery from the period covered by this volume that has been found at the site. The vases and fragments presented here have been selected mainly on the basis of their findspots in datable fills ("deposits" or "contexts"), which allows an internal assessment of the position of the vases in a chronological sequence.[2] All inventoried fine wares that were found in deposits and contexts are presented in the catalogue and are keyed to their findspot. Beyond the material from these datable fills, some vases and fragments from broadly dated fills (e.g., "3rd through 1st century BCE") have been included because they are interesting either for their shape or their decoration. These additional vases range from a relatively small number in chapters 2, 3, and 6, which cover the fine wares that bear gloss (and some with subsidiary decoration), to a much larger number in chapters 4 and 5, which presents the pottery with molded decoration.

An effort has been made to present all known fragments of certain types of pottery. These include vases from eastern Sicily with polychrome painted decoration (often called "Centuripe" ware, but

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[1] Princeton University excavated the site from 1955 to 1967, the University of Illinois from 1968 to 1971, and the University of Virginia from 1980 to the present. Wesleyan University (1990–2005) and Duke University (2005–present) have also participated in the project.

[2] These are discussed in depth below, pp. 27–71.

here called East Sicilian Polychrome ware), Eastern Sigillata A, Early Italian terra sigillata (including regional southern Italian sigillatas), and all vases with molded decoration. This effort to include all of the examples of these classes has resulted in their numbers seeming to be greater in proportion to the plain fine wares than was the case in antiquity. In fact, all the imported (often luxury) wares presented in this volume were relatively rare. In addition, it should be pointed out that pottery excavated after about 1990 has been presented selectively, with only a few pieces included because they are of extraordinary quality or significance, or to complete the presentation of a class of fine ceramics.

Deposits

Analysis of the pottery at Morgantina and its chronology is greatly aided by the large number of datable fills. As mentioned above, these fills can be divided into two types. The first is the deposit, a fill that shows no signs of later disturbance after being closed. These are most often cisterns or wells that were abandoned due to a catastrophe (deposits Ii.2, IJ.2, and IIE.1) or that were filled during clean-up activities after a catastrophe (deposits IF.1, IF.2, IH, IR.1, IIF, and IIG). In the latter case, the fill is more extensive, since it includes the debris that was deposited in the well or cistern when the building was rebuilt or dismantled. There are also some destruction fills, which sealed the debris of a building beneath its collapsed walls and the roof, and which then seem never to have been disturbed (deposits IB, IG, IL, IM, IQ, and IID). Other kinds of deposits are associated with building or remodeling. There are also two sealed fills from the 3rd century that were created when buildings were constructed (deposits IA and IC). In the first quarter of the 1st century BCE, the inner basin of the Fountain House in the Agora was deliberately filled due to a failing water supply (deposit IIB).

The value of these deposits is that they seem to provide us with secure dates for their material, and the date at which the fill was closed is assignable to a specific span of years. Thirteen deposits at Morgantina date to the 3rd century BCE or the earliest years of the 2nd century BCE. Of these, all but two building fills can be associated with the Roman capture of Morgantina in 211 BCE (Livy 26.21.17), which occasioned a great deal of destruction at the site. From the period after 200 BCE there are another six deposits of ceramics, one of which is a small fill created during the early 2nd century BCE (deposit IIA), and another is the early-1st-century BCE deposit in the inner basin of the Fountain House, mentioned above, while the other four date broadly between 40 and 15 BCE (and, as will be argued below, more precisely, around 35–25 BCE), when a fire or series of fires caused another wave of destruction at Morgantina that either ended the life of the houses or necessitated the cleanup of debris before the houses were rebuilt.

There are no deposits of pottery from the last period of habitation at Morgantina (ca. 25/15 BCE–ca. 50 CE), since the site was abandoned peacefully, and there are few signs of destruction. All the fills from the last period of habitation therefore remained open after the last inhabitants left, and, while there is little sign of later disturbances, none of the fills can be considered to have been sealed. The fills from this period are therefore all "contexts" (see below).

Contexts

Contexts of pottery are also useful for evaluating the development of pottery, although they are less conclusive than deposits for chronology. Contexts are fills that appear to have been assembled at a certain date but which may have been disturbed at a later date or preserve evidence for or likelihood of later disturbance. In some cases, the reason for considering a fill to be a context rather than a deposit is slight, usually its proximity to later human habitation or use (i.e., context IIC) that may plausibly have allowed later material to enter the fill, or the fact that the fill was very thin or was not considered by the excavator to have been sealed beneath debris (i.e., contexts Ii, IK.1, IK.2, IP, IIA, IIC, IIH, and IIi). In many contexts, however, there is clear evidence of later material in the fill, such as a later overfill in a cistern that followed the settling of the original fill (see contexts ID, IE.2, IVA) or the presence of a later object in the fill (contexts IJ, IJ.1, IN, IO, IR, IIE).[3] But in all contexts the original material is dominant, and the later material sparse. There are ten contexts from the 3rd century BCE (ID, IE.2, Ii, IJ, IJ.1, IK.1–2, IN, IO, IP, and IR), all of which are fills that seem to have stopped accumulating around 211–200 BCE except for slight evidence of later disturbance. Seven of these fills include some clearly later material or evidence of use, while three others are considered to be contexts because of their thin fill and the likelihood of later visitation from nearby habitation. Four contexts date between ca. 175 and 35 BCE, three of which (IIC, IIH, and IIi) were abandoned, while the other (IIE) was open to later disturbance, although no disturbance can be identified at present. As noted above, all fills after ca. 35 BCE at Morgantina are contexts (IIIA–IIIi, IVA).

Deposits, Contexts, and Chronology

The deposits and contexts allow the ceramic history of Morgantina to be divided into three phases: the Hellenistic period, the Roman Republic, and the early Roman Empire. The definition of these periods is the subject of the historical essay that forms the next section of this chapter. After the historical outline are capsule discussions of the archaeological evidence for each deposit and context,

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[3] It is clear that cisterns and wells were filled in antiquity very soon after they ceased being used as a source of water. Only one well has been found at Morgantina, in the North Baths, apparently because the Serra Orlando ridge has natural springs. Cisterns in houses at Morgantina were often filled even after the houses had been abandoned (see contexts ID, IH, and IID). The well in the North Baths (deposit IR.1) was also filled soon after the baths ceased functioning. The reasons for filling them so precipitously were practical: abandoned cisterns and wells are not only useful receptacles for refuse, but are also deep holes that could present danger to children and animals. See Peña 2007, 283. Two cisterns at Morgantina had large architectural blocks jammed into their mouths to close them off (see contexts ID and IH).

Cistern fills often appear to have settled a considerable amount (up to 3 meters?) over time, creating a dangerous new hole that was then often "overfilled" (contexts IE.2, IIH). The same situation apparently existed in the Athenian Agora, where cisterns and wells often contained superimposed fills of different periods: see *Agora* XXIX, 434, A 18:1 (cistern), 435, B 13:1 (cistern), 435, B 13:7 (well), 438, B 20:7 (well), 439, B 22:4 (cistern), 441, D 4:1 (cistern), 443, D 17:4 (cistern), 443, D 17:5 (cistern), 443, D 17:11 (well), 445, E 6:1/E6:2 (cistern), 447, E 15:3 (cistern), 448–449, F 9:2 (cistern), 451, F 16:1 (cistern), 453, G 13:4 (well), 461, M 20:1 (cistern), 464, N 20:7 (cistern), 465, N 21:4 (cistern), 466, O 17:7 (cistern), 466, O 18:2 (well).

followed by a discussion of the major regional fabric types. Chapters 2–6 then present major categories of fine ceramics in order to define the ceramic history of Morgantina. Chapter 7 presents a catalogue of the pottery discussed in the preceding five chapters, along with an outline of the format and terminology used in the catalogue.

Throughout the text and catalogue, consideration has been limited as much as possible to vases found in deposits and contexts in order to maximize the chronological value of the material. However, to create the fullest possible picture of ceramic typology and decoration at Morgantina during the period under consideration, some vases that were not found in closely dated fills have been included in the catalogue in order to present a fuller picture of the pottery characteristic of the three broad periods studied in this volume. The contexts of these additional vessels are cited briefly in their catalogue entries by location (in Morgantina terminology, "area," "trench," and stratum). For most of these additional vases, the date of their fill may be characterized simply as "mixed fill of the 4th through the 1st centuries BCE." In a few cases, for example, on the West Hill and in the northwestern Agora, the fill may be "mixed fill of the 4th century BCE through the first half of the 1st century CE."

One archaeological note needs to be added. The first stratum of fill in any deposit is likely to have been disturbed by later agriculture. The vases and fragments identified in the catalogue as coming from the first stratum of a deposit should be regarded as having slight chronological significance, and their exact findspot should be viewed as suspect. They have been included in order to give a complete presentation of the ceramic material found in the deposit or context. A final note: the manuscript of this volume was initially submitted in December of 2004, and the revised text was completed in late 2007; publications that appeared after 2005 have been incorporated into the notes when possible.

2. Historical Sketch of Morgantina, 340 BCE–ca. 50 CE

The chronology of pottery at Morgantina in Sicily from the second half of the 4th century BCE through the first half of the 1st century CE is largely defined by the political fortunes of the city. During these four centuries, Morgantina's history can be divided into three phases. The first embraces the second half of the 4th century and the 3rd century BCE and may be referred to as the Hellenistic period. During these years Morgantina reached its zenith and was closely attached culturally and politically to the Hellenistic Greek kingdom of Syracuse. This phase of Morgantina's history ended in 211 BCE, when a Roman army captured Morgantina (Livy 26.21.17), with resulting destruction and depopulation. CONTINUED...