

AMERICAN EXCAVATIONS AT MORGANTINA

SOUTH BATHS AND WEST SANCTUARY OF DEMETER AND KORE PROJECT MORGANTINA – CONTRADA AGNESE Area VI, 31

PRELIMINARY REPORT 2016 SEASON

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In cooperation with and supported by:



The 2016 season of excavations in the “West Sanctuary” in the Contrada Agnese area of Morgantina, designated area VI-31, ran from August 1 to August 28, 2016. The project was co-directed by Sandra Lucore (American Excavations at Morgantina) and Monika Trümper (Freie Universität, Berlin – FUB), with Christoph Rummel (FUB) and Henry K. Sharp (American Excavations at Morgantina) acting as field supervisors.

The project was generously funded by the Freie Universität Berlin and the Excellence Cluster Topoi Berlin.

Shelley Stone (UC Bakersfield) and Alex Hoer (FUB) carried out the ceramic and finds analysis for the project. For part of the season, they were aided by Thomas Lappi (FUB). Finds were conserved by Rafaella Greca (Enna). Teresa Arena (Paropos Archaeological Cooperative Palermo), the safety officer of the project, also assisted in the excavation – as in all other aspects of the project, regularly acting as area supervisor. Sebastiano Muratore (Paropos Archaeological Cooperative Palermo) created a top-view photo-mosaic of the site. The excavation team consisted of the following volunteer students: Kristina Bolz (FUB), Josephine Buchhorn (FUB), Jonathan Lefken (FUB), Philipp Leineweber (FUB), Max Peers (Humboldt University Berlin), Robert Stiehler (FUB), Rosa Torre (University of Messina), Carina Trabitzsch (FUB), Diletta Venturi (FUB), Matthew Sibley (University of Sidney). In addition, the team was at times aided by the workers Bruno Cristiano, Filippo Campanello, Luigi Campanello, Ferdinando Menicapilli and particularly Gaetano Camiolo, as well as a machine digger operated by Filippo Scivoli. Erik E. Thorkildsen (American Excavations at Morgantina) is the Project Architect; Jana Skundrič (FUB) completed the stone plan.



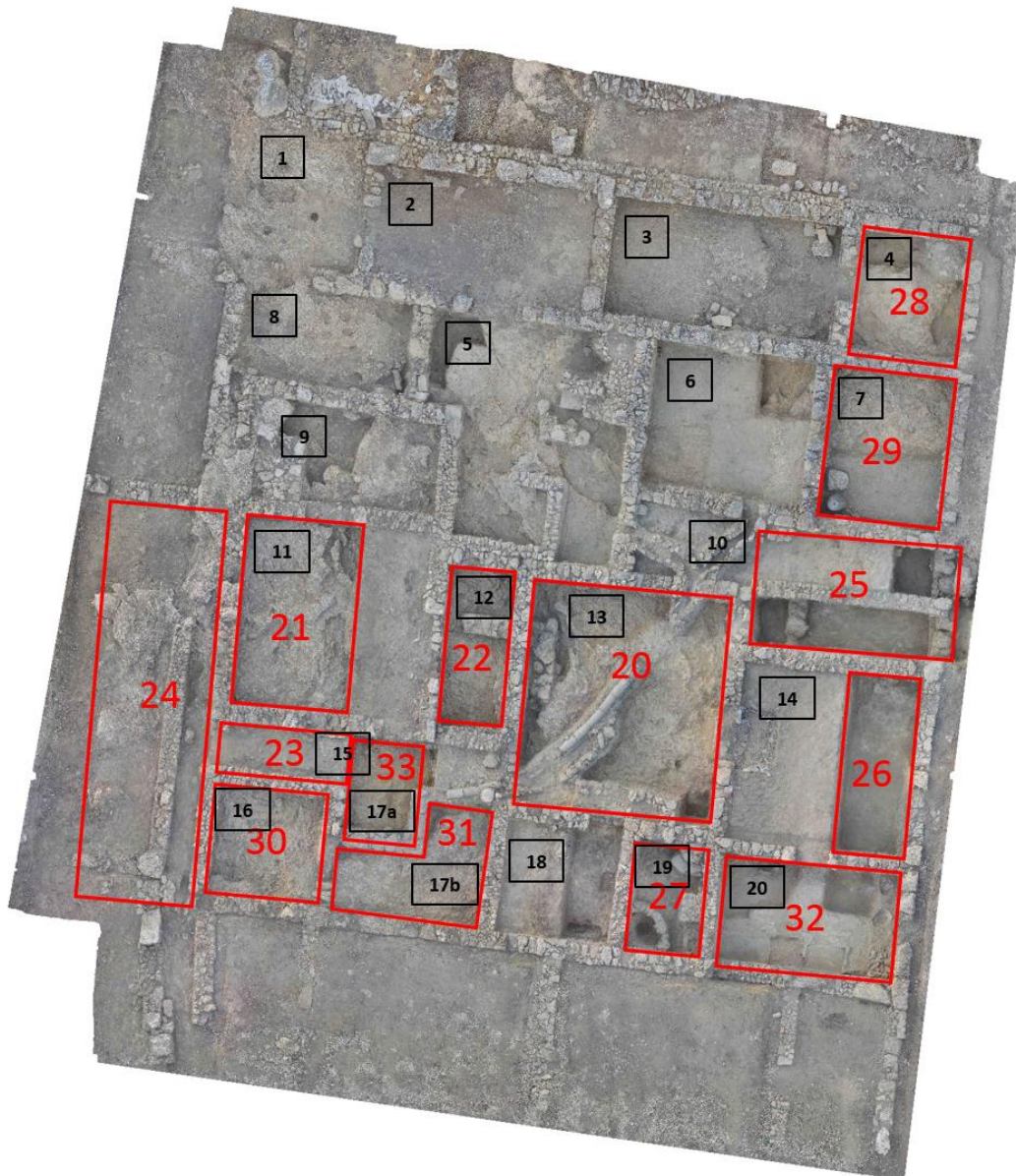
Excavation Team 2016

The aim of the 2016 season was the complete excavation of VI, 31, the building identified as the West Sanctuary. To this end, all rooms that remained unexcavated at the end of the previous season were dug fully or at least in half. Only rooms 2 and 3, which had been at least partially excavated in the course of previous excavations and/or were known to have been heavily disturbed by clandestine excavations, were not excavated. In addition, the disturbed

topsoil in the area W of the building was removed by a mechanical digger and cleaned by workers to wall-top level, in order to identify possible wall continuations that might indicate more extensive urban planning of the Contrada Agnese area.

The main focus of the excavations was on the southern half of the building, where all rooms were excavated down to bedrock in full apart from room 11 (only W half excavated), room 14 (only E half excavated) and room 20 (only locally excavated to bedrock due to complex archaeological remains in the interior). Room 18 was left in the state excavated in 2015 (with the E half fully excavated). In the NE part of the building, room 4 was fully excavated down to bedrock, while the lowest strata left by earlier excavations in room 7 were excavated only in the northern half. In room 6, bedrock was reached in two trial squares in the NE and SW corners, where the earliest fill and occupation levels were excavated.

The top-view photo-mosaic of the site shows that the building identified as the West Sanctuary consists of 20 rooms that roughly follow 4 E-W segments.



Ortho-Photomosaic of the “West Sanctuary” (VI, 31) showing room numbers (black) and trenches excavated in the 2016 season (red).

The most important finds were made in rooms 13, 16, 19, and 20:

Room 13: This is the central room of the entire building. It was accessed from the NE via the southern part of room 10, from the SW via corridor 15. Originally, it provided access to several surrounding rooms, notably rooms 12, 14, 18, and 19; the connecting doors were, however, either blocked or their thresholds were raised in later stages.

Excavation of the entire room down to bedrock showed that the E-W wall identified in room 12 in 2015 actually belongs to an earlier structure: it continues into room 13 and turns south at a right angle. The structure is placed directly onto bedrock and must predate the W wall of room 13.



W part of room 13 and room 12, from S: early wall with EW stretch visible to the left (in room 12) and with NS stretch visible to the right (in room 13)

Room 16

In this room, the bedrock appeared c. 30cm below the surface after topsoil removal, making it the shallowest room in the entire building. In the NW corner, a burial was found, with a skeleton lying on its right side, facing north. The legs were slightly angled; the left lower arm and hand were resting on the waist, while the right arm is folded upwards with the hand resting against/beneath the skull. The burial must have taken place after the main period of occupation of the building. As no special objects were deposited with the body, and there were few finds from room 16 in general, it is impossible to assess the precise chronological and cultural framework of the burial at present.



Room 16, Skeleton in NW corner, from N.

Room 19

Aside from room 18, partially excavated in 2015, this room was the only room in the “West Sanctuary” building that had an intact tile fall, identified beneath the bottom levels of disturbed top soils. Room 19 and the adjacent eastern room 20 originally formed one large room, which was subdivided into the narrow room 19 and the larger corner room 20 in a second phase. Room 19 includes a small rock-cut well in the SW corner, which is the only water supply in the entire building. In the second phase, room 19 was used as a kitchen with a cooking surface in the SE corner and cooking ware dump in the NW. After the second phase, the level in the room was raised twice, the cooking surface was covered, and a new stone surface / platform (of unknown function) was constructed against the central part of the E wall. In these last two phases, the well went out of use, and it remains unclear how the building was then supplied with water.



Room 19, from N: well in SW corner; second phase cooking platform SE corner; third phase platform along E wall

Room 20

This room had been disturbed by clandestine excavations, as was evident from a large pit dug into the center of the room. This cut through several archaeological features, including the S wall of room 20. Despite this significant disturbance, key features of the original room interior, dating to the first phase of occupation of this part of the building, remained intact.

Along the S wall, the floor runs up against two opus signinum basins that must have held water in their original function – although this cannot be reconstructed. The western of the basins actually forms the lower courses of the southern part of the W wall of room 20. This clearly suggests that rooms 19 and 20 were originally not separated but formed one large room in the SE corner of the excavated building (see above). Remains of an opus signinum floor identified north of the basins and associated with these indicate a continuous strong floor in the room, which only survives in the central part of the room, belonging to the period of use with basins.

In the NW corner of this room, a second burial, very similar to the burial in room 16, was found; the skeleton was lying on its right with angled legs, with the head in the E looking N. The left arm was lying over the stomach, while the right arm and hand were angled to cover the lower skull. As in room 16, there were no associated finds with this skeleton.



Room 20, view from E: two opus signinum basins along S wall, burial in NW corner



Room 20, Skeleton in NW corner, from S

As a result of research in 2016, the building is now understood in full.

The area as a whole was first utilized as a quarry, on top of which several structures developed. The phase plan as reconstructed in 2015 needs to be modified and revised in several places. Currently, it is possible to reconstruct the following four main phases of use of the site:

1. The lot was fully developed; the building had its main entrance in the E (room 10, undivided); there were certainly rooms in the north (1-4, 7) and rooms in the south (19/20 as one large room, further room(s) on the terrain of 16-18). As yet it is unclear how the center of the building was organized; room 14 seems to have existed and may have had an equivalent in the W, as indicated by the above-mentioned early wall in rooms 12/13.

The bedrock level varies enormously in the lot of the “West Sanctuary”, for more than 1.60 m (e.g. from e.g. 601.75 m a.s.l. in the NW corner of room 1 to less than 600.12 m a.s.l. along the N wall of room 14 where bedrock was not reached). In general, the terrain slopes from the north down to the south and from the west down to the east, but there are several steps, gaps and cracks in-between, partially as a result of the quarrying, but also due to the natural formation of the rock. As there are no signs of systematic levelling of bedrock, there must have been significant differences in the floor levels of the building from the beginning. The rooms with high bedrock levels were far less well preserved than those with low bedrock level.

The plan of the building at this time indicates some form of central planning: it follows the general lot size of Morgantina, the northern and southern rows of rooms are symmetrical in term of layout. The extension of surface removal to the W has shown that these main construction lines continue into the next building to the W, indicating a large degree of central planning across the Contrada Agnese area and showing that planned urban development extended even further W than the lot of the South Baths and “West Sanctuary”. While the ambitus between the “West Sanctuary” and its western neighbor was partially respected in the southern part of the lots, it must have been built over in the northern part of the lots from the earliest phases of occupation onwards.

2. A first remodeling of the “West Sanctuary” may have included construction of rooms 9 and 11, which must have entailed the destruction of the early walls in 12/13, but otherwise no major raise of floor levels. It remains open and problematic how the interiors of these rooms were laid out and used in the first phase. As such, the specific aims and character of this phase cannot be determined. Other (differentiating) changes, such as the subdivision of rooms 19 and 20 may also have occurred at this time, but cannot be related stratigraphically to changes in the NW part of the building.
3. The most major redesign of the entire building probably had two aims:
 - a) to raise the levels in many of the lower rooms (10, 12, 13, 14?, 17a?, 19) to around 601.20-601.30 and so adjust some of the dramatic differences in level between the various rooms.
 - b) to subdivide the building into two separate units with a partition wall between rooms 5 and 13 and a partition wall in room 10. As a result, the northern part had a separate entrance in the northern half of room 10 (10a) and was further differentiated (changes in rooms 5/6; see 2015); the southern part had its entrance in the southern half of room 10 (10b) and was also further differentiated (creation of room 12, probably subdivision or creation of rooms 17a/b).
4. The final major phase of use is characterized by yet another raise of levels in some rooms (5, 6, 10, 12, 13, 15, 19?) and by the installation of a system of terracotta pipes that most likely drained water from rooms 5 and 6 via room 10, 13, and 15 to the western ambitus. Since the partition wall of room 10 was at least partially suppressed in this phase, the two separate units seem to have been reunited again. It remains unclear how many of the other rooms that do not provide evidence of elevated floor levels were still in use during this phase. Constructions in several doorways may signify that these rooms were blocked off and no longer used, but could also be seen as the remains of makeshift stairs that provided access to rooms with lower floor levels (e.g., between rooms 5 and 8, 6 and 3, 6 and 7, 13 and 14, 13 and 18, 13 and 19). Minor modifications occurred at the end of or after this phase: most notably, the conduit was partially destroyed in the SW corner of room 13 and some of the pipe fragments were rearranged or reused for some rudimentary construction.



Room 13, from E: terracotta pipes

Some general remarks:

- Water supply remains a major problem of the building. Except for the small rock-cut well in the SW corner of room 19, no other means of water supply could be identified. This well may have functioned in phases 1 and 2, but seems to have been abandoned in phase 3. Since in phase 3 both units would have needed a water supply and the drainage system in phase 4 clearly suggests the use of water, water must have been provided in some manner that remains unclear.
- In Rooms 16 and 20 there is evidence for only one occupation level (16) and two directly superimposed floor levels (20), respectively. It is therefore not possible to determine when the burials were deposited in these rooms, (in which of the large phases of use, phases 2-4 or even later), nor whether the rest of the building remained in use concurrently or following the burials. The doors between rooms 16 and 17b as well 20 and 14 were not blocked, however.
- There is little evidence that allows for closer determining the function of the various rooms. In rooms 5 (see 2015) and 19 there was evidence for cooking, albeit not pertaining to the original phase of the building, but rather the various subsequent phases. The two basins in room 20 are the only other distinct built features. While these were connected with a water supply (well in 19) in the first phase, the later subdivision of rooms 19/20 and final abandonment of the well in room 19 must have affected the use of the basins. Furthermore, there is no identifiable means of drainage in room 20. The basins certainly did not function as bathtubs, but probably served some unknown industrial or household use.
- While the relative chronology of the various structures and changes can be distinguished, the absolute chronology, particularly with a view to the crucial date of 211 BC, cannot be

reliably determined at present. Some of the contexts identified in 2015 contained material cautiously dated to the early 2nd c BC. In 2016, only a single context (26, in room 13) may have included post 211 BC material, and this belongs to the very last phase of the room (the spoliation of the conduit). Some of the earliest levels include 4th c BC material, but they either also include 3rd c BC material or are closely connected with contexts including 3rd c BC material. Contexts in rooms 4 and 10b suggest that the building was constructed around or shortly after the mid-3rd c BC. Several contexts of the third occupation phase include material dated to the 2nd half of the 3rd c BC, suggesting that phase 3 was realized in the later 3rd c BC. But the material does not allow for any distinction whether this occurred before or after 211 BC. As mentioned above, the skeletons currently cannot be connected with any historical events or catastrophic scenarios that may have provoked the unusual practice of “deviant” intramural makeshift burials.

- There is no clearly identifiable structure or context that suggests an interpretation as a sanctuary in any of the building. In terms of finds, the spectrum is remarkable insofar as it seems that the structure, which was repeatedly modified with an ever-rising ground level, was regularly cleared out. The only areas that can be identified with some characteristics are the cooking area and the industrial facility in room 20. To all intents and purposes, this may make the building no more than a typical residential quarter. Finally, the crucial find assemblage of room 2, which had caused the identification of this building as a sanctuary in 1971, is not a votive assemblage buried in situ under a collapsed tile roof (intact tile fall). Many of the finds from 1971 (pottery, inventoried and not-inventoried finds) were reassessed in the magazines of San Domenico and the Museum in the 2016 campaign. While they are still awaiting full study, a first overview confirms that most of the finds (terracotta figurines, altars, vessels and pots, etc.) are heavily fragmented and cannot, for the most part, be restored to full pieces. This suggests that room 2 contained a dump, and not a fully preserved (if then violently destroyed) find/votive assemblage. The genesis and composition of this assemblage (date, reason, function) remain to be identified.
- In sum, the label “West Sanctuary” should finally be abandoned. With a view to the only significant find, the building could be called “House of the Two Skeletons”.