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AN INSCRIBED STELE FROM ARCHAIC MORGANTINA*

Introduction

In 1961, during excavations at Morgantina (Enna province) in Sicily, fragments of an inscribed limestone stele were recovered on a plateau just below and to the east of the Archaic settlement proper, which was the location of a sizeable *temenos* in the sixth century B.C.E., one of three at Morgantina. The incorporation of the fragments into a wall of the end of the sixth century B.C.E. provides a *terminus ante quem* for the inscription.[1] The fragments were joined and in 1984 the stele was placed on display in the newly-opened Museo di Morgantina in nearby Aidone (inv. no. 61-1258, Fig. 1), but it was never published. The Cittadella stele is in fact one of the very few inscriptions on stone of any period to come to light at this

1 Excavated by R. Ross Holloway under the direction of Prof. Erik Sjöqvist of Princeton University, from Tr. 20-7, Area III (Cittadella), re-used in the footing of walls of the late Archaic period. The notebook for this excavation season is on file in the Morgantina archive maintained by the Department of Art and Archaeology at Princeton. I thank Shari Kenfield and JoAnn Boscarino for their assistance there, and Prof. William Childs for his support. On the excavations of 1961, see the preliminary report by Sjöqvist, Excavations at Morgantina (Serra Orlando) 1961 Preliminary Report VI, AJA 66, 1962, 135–143, 141–142: the structure in Tr. 20-7 is interpreted as a guardroom belonging to a system of fortifications in the area of the destroyed former *temenos*, and dated to the last decade of the 6th century or first decade of the 5th. (The final publication of the settlement as a volume of the series Morgantina Studies from Princeton University Press is in my hands.)

site.[2] Only one other inscription on stone from the Archaic period has been recovered at Morgantina; except for a brief notice, it too has remained unpublished.[3] It sheds light on the uses of literacy of this hellenized Sikel community in interior Sicily during the sixth century B.C.E., and raises interesting questions concerning the ethnic affinities of the local population.

The stele

The fragments are of a fine white limestone and preserve a section from the middle of the shaft. The preserved height is 28.5 cm; it is 22 in width, tapering slightly from top to bottom, and 7.5 cm thick (Figs. 1 and 2).[4] The front surface features continuous vertical bands formed by two incised lines running parallel at each edge. The inscription, only partially preserved and unfortunately damaged as well, is carved in the left-hand band and reads from top to bottom. Breaks in the stone occur at both ends of the inscription and a fragment was inserted in mending; the total original height of the shaft cannot now be ascertained. Both sides of the stele are decorated with two

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[2]   One reported inscription on stone, built into the proskenion of the theatre in the agora in the Hellenistic city on the neighbouring Serra Orlando ridge, was read to name the city: see R. Stillwell, Excavations at Morgantina (Serra Orlando) 1962 Preliminary Report VII, AJA 67, 1963, 163–171, p. 164 (no illustration); cf. idem, The Theater of Morgantina, Kokalos 10–11, 1964–65, 579–588, p. 587. The inscription is now seen, however, to have been a mirage (though it is still listed in L. Dubois, Inscriptions grecques dialectales de Sicile, Rome 1989, p. 227). I thank John Dobbins (University of Virginia), who is publishing the theatre, for discussion of this matter. The only other inscription on stone of which I am aware is also from the theatre, on the tenth row of seats. It records the dedication to Apollo by Archelas son of Eukleides. See E. Sjöqvist, Excavations at Morgantina (Serra Orlando) 1961 Preliminary Report VI, AJA 66, 1962, 135–43, 138 (also unillustrated); cf. Stillwell, The Theater of Morgantina, p. 586.

[3]   The other stone inscription is found on an architrave reused in the 4th century phase of a chthonic sanctuary just to the east of Cittadella in Contrada San Francesco (see further below): cf. G. Fiorentini, Ricerche archeologiche nella Sicilia centro-meridionale, Kokalos 26–27, 1980–81, 581–600, p. 598 + pl. 85. For graffiti from archaic Morgantina, see C. Antonaccio and J. Neils, A New Graffito from archaic Morgantina, ZPE 102, 1995, 261–277; the other settlement graffiti are being prepared for publication by the same authors. For graffiti on ceramics from the cemeteries, see C. Lyons, Morgantina Studies V. The Archaic Cemeteries (Princeton 1996).

[4]   All photographs of the Morgantina stele were made by Chris Williams.
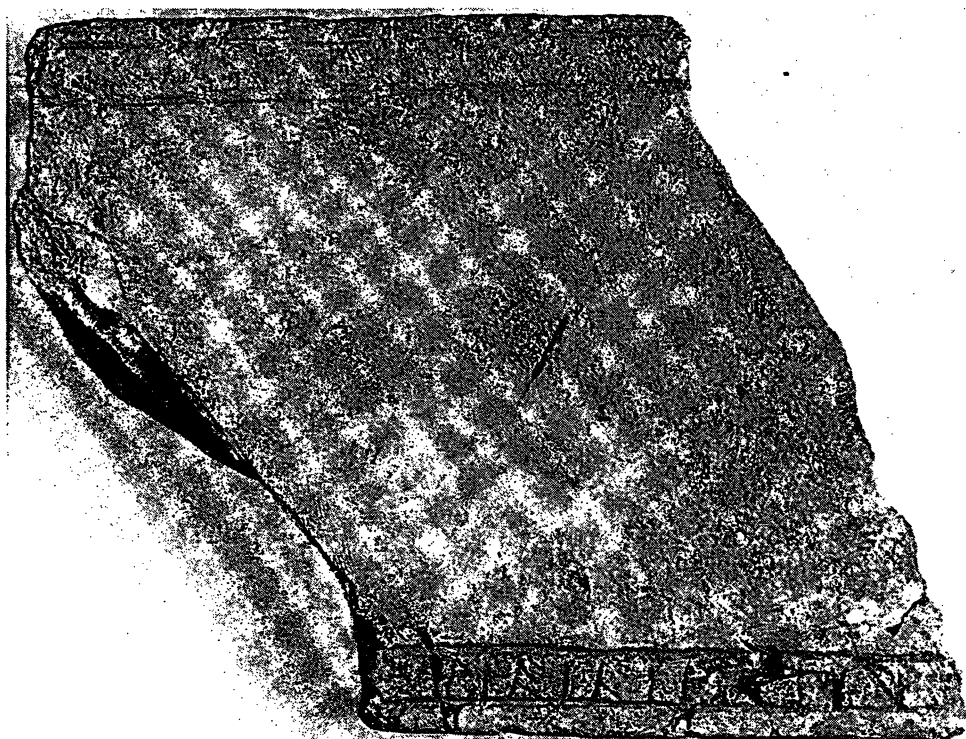
Fig. 1 Morgantina stele, Aidone Museum, inv. no. 61-1258 (photo by C. Williams): front face
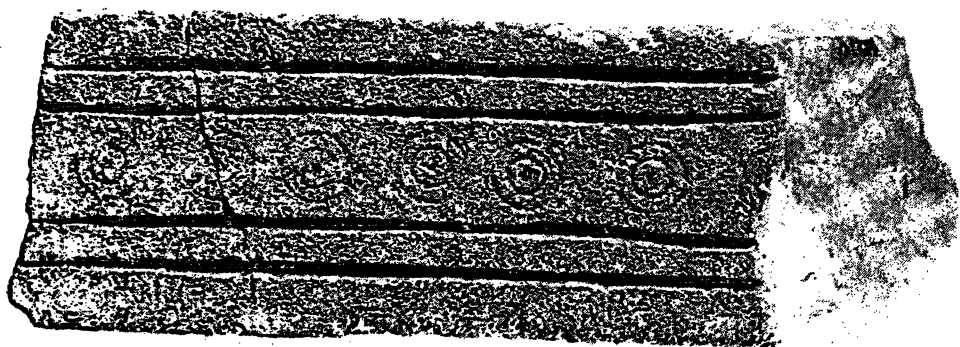

Fig. 2 Morgantina stele, Aidone Museum, inv. no. 61-1258 (photo by C. Williams): side view
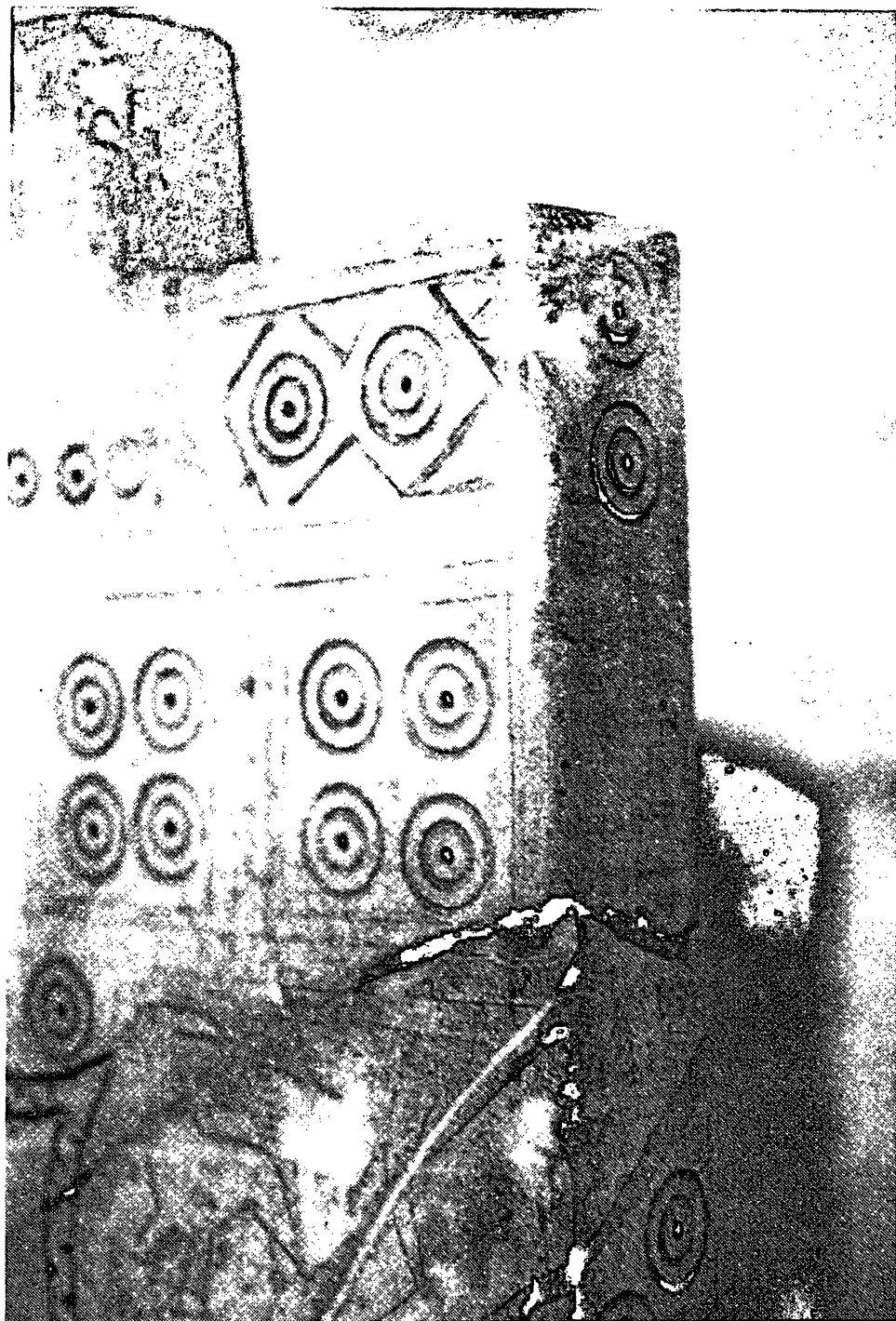
Fig. 4 Daunian stele, Mus. naz. Garganico, Manfredonia, inv. no. 1008 (photo by author)

sets of vertical parallel lines deeply etched into the stone, roughly cut without a rule. They frame a continuous series of two concentric circles surrounding a central dot. The back is smooth; no traces of paint are visible on any of the fragments. It is possible that the Morgantina stele originally served as a support for something carried on top, but no trace is preserved of a crowning member.

Inscribed stelai are common in archaic Greek communities, but no examples from indigenous or colonial Sicily closely compare to Morgantina's in format. Early stelai may take the form of rough pillars or columns, some with bevelled corners, or square piers or thick planks. Inscribed stelai of the Archaic period that carry the inscription on the shaft (rather than on the base or crown) not only employ larger letters than those of the Morgantina stele, but tend to spread them across or down the main body of the shaft, rather than crowding them towards the margin. The ruled zones for both the inscription on the face and the dotted concentric semicircle ornament are not found on stelai from Sicily, nor is the general decorative scheme. Indeed, the use of a ruled line, whether horizontal or vertical, is relatively uncommon in Greek inscriptions.[5]

The concentric semicircle motif found on the sides, on the other hand, is common on ceramics in the indigenous decorative tradition, and regularly found on pottery from Morgantina. Local Siculo-Geometric pottery of the 7th and early 6th centuries features painted examples, and stamped examples occur on so-called Elymian ceramics found in central and western Sicily and at Morgantina. Thus, the motif could be regarded as part of a local, even Sikel, decorative repertoire, making the stele itself a Sikel artifact, rather than Greek. Despite this local parallel for the motif, however, there is no other Sikel inscription on a stone of this form.[6] It is Magna Graecia that provides better comparanda for both the decoration of the stele and the form. A stele fragment of Archaic date found at Metaponto in Basilicata employs ruled lines on the vertical sides and geometric decoration on one face, comparable to the scheme on Morgantina

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[5] For examples see M. Guarducci, Epigraphia greca I, Rome 1967.

[6] See P. Pelagatti in Kokalos 11–12, 1964–65, 245–252 for the primary publication; cf. L. Agostiniani, Epigrafia e linguistica anelleniche di Sicilia: bilancio di un quadrienno, Kokalos 30–31, 1984–85, 193–222, 204–207; van Compernolle, L'apporto dell'epigrafia e della linguistica anelleniche: lo *status quaestionis* nella prospettiva storica, Kokalos 39–40, 1993–94, 143–154.
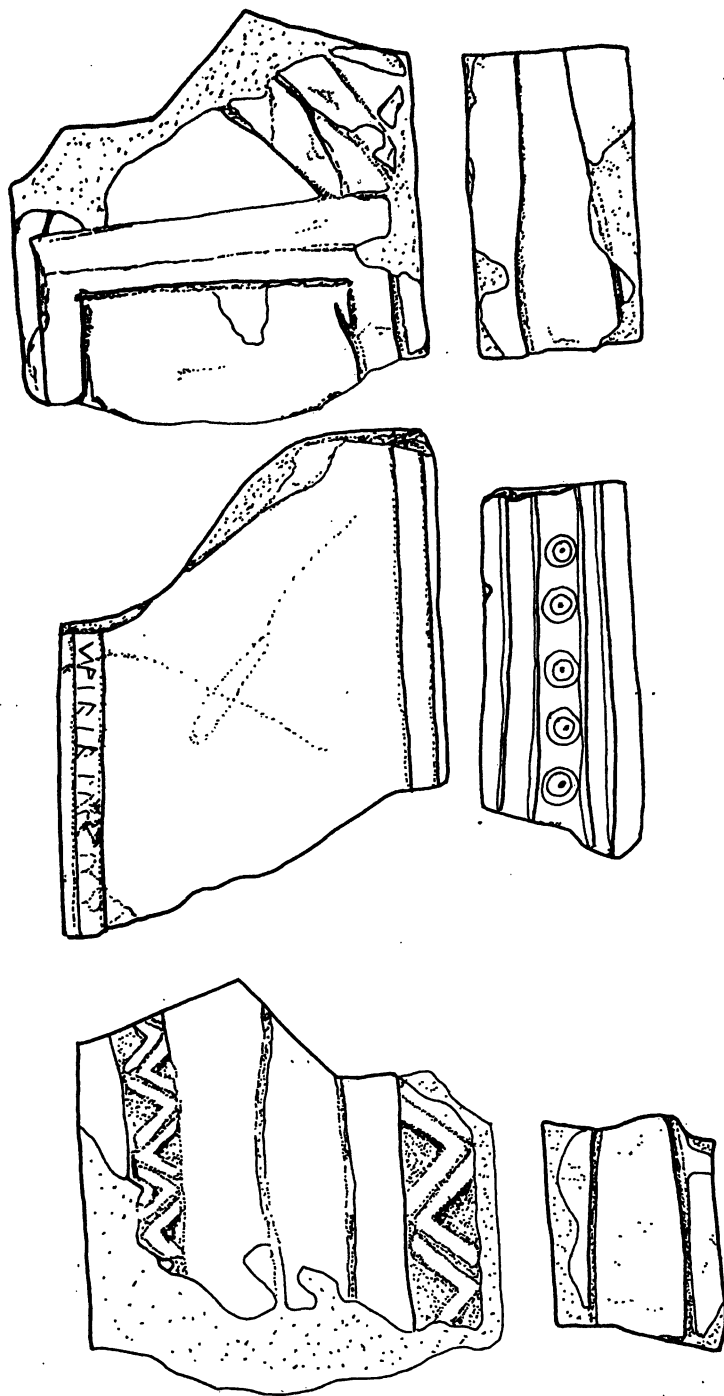
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Fig. 3 Composite drawing, Metaponto stele (top, bottom) and Morgantina stele (middle) (drawing by author, after Metaponto II (NSc Suppl. 1977 [1983]) p. 220, fig. 21)

(Fig. 3). Its dimensions are also comparable.[7] Interestingly, this type of stele is unusual in Basilicata, and better known in northern Puglia, ancient Daunia. Most of the Daunian stelai are at least roughly anthropomorphic and served as grave markers, rather than having a votive purpose, but the dotted concentric semicircle motif, as well as the use of ruled zones of decoration, are very typical (Fig. 4).[8] Although the Morgantina stele differs somewhat in form and dimensions from most of the Daunian stelai, and its inscription is not typical of Daunian examples, the elements that it does share with the south Italian monuments are intriguing, and bear on the questions of the stele's origin, function, and of the language of the inscription.[9]

Since it was not found *in situ*, it is now impossible fully to reconstruct the stele's original setting, but its purpose appears to be votive rather than funerary. Its immediate context is a *temenos*, and while Archaic period burials are located close by in the chamber tombs of Necropolis II, on the slopes below the *temenos* plateau, they do not feature the use of stone markers (but see below).[10] The stele was meant to be visible on the three decorated sides and could have stood against a wall, and a large terrace wall was in fact partially excavated a short distance to the east of the stele's findspot.[11] Although no trace of any base or cutting for a stele was recorded, a parallel for this setting is to be found at one of several sites located near Marianopoli, northwest of Morgantina in the further interior of Sic-

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[7] From Site A, Area 10, Phase IIA (late 7th or early 6th century B.C.E.): see. E. Macnamara, The Excavations at Cozzo Presepe (1969–1972), in Metaponto II (NSc Suppl. 1977 [1983]) 191–257, 221, 223 (with references) + fig. 21 no. 13. It is comparable in proportions to the Morgantina stele. The geometric decoration on this example takes the form of a zigzag pattern, but see·the following note.

[8] Manfredonia, Mus. naz. Garganico inv. no. 1008; photo by author. See M. L. Nava, ed., Le stele della Daunia (Milan 1988), e.g. p. 20, figs. 3–4, Type II–III.

[9] The Daunian stelai, which were produced as funerary monuments mostly in the 7th and 6th centuries B.C.E., often have a rudimentary human form, including modelled heads late in the series, and features such as arms, hands, details of dress and ornament or accessories are incised on the surfaces, rather than modelled. They also sometimes carry mythological or narrative scenes in incision as well as the occasional inscription. They are generally wider, and less thick, than the Morgantina and Metaponto examples, however. See previous note.

[10] Lyons, op. cit. (n. 3) p. 6 + n. 6.

[11] See Sjöqvist op. cit. (n. 1) pl. 34 figs. 27 and 28 for aerial photograph and map; cf. idem, Excavations at Morgantina (Serra Orlando) 1959 Preliminary Report IV, AJA 64, 1960, 125–135, 134–135 on the "massive terrace wall built of ashlar blocks" excavated on the lower plateau, with photograph pl. 30 figs. 40 and 41. See also Sjöqvist's Sicily and the Greeks (Ann Arbor 1973) p. 29 and fig. 16.

ily. There, in Contrada Balate, a terrace cut into a slope of the prob-
able acropolis was used to display two stelai "ad obelisco" in an
apparent votive or commemorative dedication (a third was found
just outside the area). This terrace commands a panoramic view, just
as at Morgantina.[12]

The inscription

The sense of the inscription is impossible to recover, given its condi-
tion (Fig. 1). Eight letters, the last badly damaged, are certainly pre-
served; no letters on the inserted fragment are legible, but there is
room for four more. Punctuation is not used in the existing frag-
ments. The preserved inscription is as follows:

.]YPIEIAIP[. .]I[.]

The letters which survive best, upsilon, rho, three-barred epsilon,
and straight iota, are not particularly diagnostic, unfortunately, for
any of the Greek or indigenous epichoric scripts.[13] The sixth letter's
vertical stroke and one slanting bar are clearly legible; part of an
upper slanting bar is faintly to be seen, and a stroke closing these
two is more doubtful. If all these strokes are present they may possi-
bly be read as Jeffery's α3 form of the alphabet used by the Achaian
colonies established in southern Italy, or the α3 of Euboia and its
colonies.[14] However, it is also possible that the letter is not alpha,

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[12] Fiorentini, op. cit. (n. 3) p. 593, pl. 78–79; see also eadem, Bibliographia topografica
della colonizzazione greca in Italia e nelle isole tirreniche (BTCG), G. Nenci, G.
Vallet, ed. Pisa/Rome 1991, IX, 360–364 (s.v. Marianopoli), p. 362 for the stelai,
and Recenti scavi a Marianopoli, Kokalos 30–31 II.1, 1984–85, 467–474, 471–
472 (M. Balate) (these last reporting fragments of a third stele; they are dated to
the 5th century). In a visit to the museum at Marianopoli in July, 1995, not only
the personal names mentioned by Fiorentini, but also the word *polemarchos* could
be clearly read on one of the stelai. See further on this area Fiorentini in BTCG X,
1992, 300–307 (s.v. Monte Castellazzo di Marianopoli located just to the north-
east, and possibly to be identified with the ancient Mytistratos or Mytisteratos).
The context at Marianopoli, in fact, is reminiscent of both *temene* at Morgantina
that have yielded inscriptions.

[13] L. Jeffery, The Local Scripts of Archaic Greece (2nd ed.), Oxford 1990, 23–40 and
passim.

[14] Jeffery, op. cit., p. 23 (there Achaian is example 6, and dated to between 500 and
450) and p. 248 for Achaian α3, "normal at Poseidonia . . . and frequent else-
where". A rhomboid omicron (o 2) is also frequent in Achaian inscriptions (p.
249). Cf. Guarducci, op. cit. (n. 5), 108–118 on the Achaian alphabet. For Euboian,
see Jeffery 79 ff., Guarducci 217 ff. Neither Guarducci nor Jeffery show the rhom-
boid rho in the Achaian alphabet. Comparanda at Morgantina for letter forms in

but digamma; it is closest to the Euboic F2 of Jeffery, in use around 525.[15] The seventh letter is badly damaged, but it is probably another rho (Jeffery's type 2).[16] There follows a hiatus for at least the space of two letters, followed almost certainly by another straight iota, then another letter's space, and finally a probable lambda of Euboian type.[17]

The Morgantina stele inscription is not obviously in Greek: even the use of the Greek alphabet would not necessarily indicate that the Greek language is involved. Inscriptions mixed in script, dialect, and even language (e.g. Greek and Messapic) are not uncommon in southern Italy and Sicily.[18] The letter forms are certainly Archaic, but it is difficult to assign them to a particular alphabet, and none are certainly diagnostic for a script other than Greek, as discussed above. Given the region in which Morgantina is located, and the graffiti known from the site, the script and language could be Greek, Sikel, or perhaps Sikan.[19]

Given the characteristics of the stele itself, the language is unlikely to be Greek, but that is not impossible. Sikel, the most likely candidate, is itself an Italic language, supporting the sources that place Sikel origins in southern Italy.[20] Sikan is not out of the question:

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material already published may be found for the forms of epsilon and iota: cf. a kylix reading ΠΙΒΕ retrograde, inv. no. 60-1738 (illustrated in Antonaccio and Neils, op. cit); the Lakonian type krater with inscription reading ΚΥΠΑΡΑΣΕΜΙ, inv. no. 90-61, however, uses different forms of upsilon, rho, and alpha (Antonaccio and Neils, op. cit.).

[15] Jeffery, op. cit., p. 79. This could only be a digamma in Greek or Messapic (or perhaps an alpha in the latter); in J. Whatmough's table (Prae-Italic Dialects of Italy, Harvard 1933) Sikel does not use this sign. Cf. A. Zamboni in Prosdocimi, ed. (below n. 19) table on 953.

[16] Jeffery, op. cit., p. 34.

[17] Λ3; Jeffery, op. cit., p. 79, ca. 475 in examples on lead from Styra (p. 88 no. 26, pl. 6).

[18] C. Ampolo, ed., Italia omnium terrarum parens (Antica madre 12), Milan 1991, 453, concerning the inscriptions of pre-Roman Italy: "Non bisogna tuttavia credere che l'attribuzione di un'iscrizione a un dato gruppo etnico sia sempre evidente." The same may be said of Sicily.

[19] On the indigenous languages, see J. Whatmough, op. cit.; U. Schmoll, Die vorgriechischen Sprachen Siziliens, Wiesbaden 1958; O. Parangeli and C. Santoro in A. Prosdocimi, ed., Popoli e civiltà dell'Italia antica vol. 6, Lingue e dialetti, Rome 1978, and further below.

[20] Ampolo, ed., p. 461 points out that while Sikel may be considered another part of the Italic group, the possible comparanda for Sikel from southern Italy can only come from the period before the influx of Oscan mercenaries beginning in the early third century B.C.E. Oscan uses an Etruscan-derived script or the Greek alphabet, although later Oscan employs a Latin alphabet.

Sikan territory lies close to Morgantina, and a Sikan name, *Teutos*, may be read on a graffito from the site.[21] Of the three native languages of Sicily, Sikan is the least understood: it may not even be Indoeuropean, according to some scholars; according to others, however, it may not exist at all as a language separate from Sikel.[22] The affinities of the stele's decoration with Puglian (Daunian) examples also raise the possibility that the inscription has some connection with Messapic. Messapic is Indoeuropean, but not Italic, and seems to be related to Illyrian, reflecting the apparent origins and affinities of the population of ancient Puglia across the Adriatic.[23] Moreover, there are many ancient sources on the origins of the Sikels in just this part of Italy. They are said to have been driven out by the Iapygians or Messapi and crossed over to Sicily, where they settled the eastern part of the island (including Morgantina). According to Jeffery, some inscriptions in what may be Messapic used the Achaian alphabet; as we have seen, the Morgantina stele lettering bears some similarities to the Achaian script, though Morgantina is far from the Achaian sphere of colonization.[24] Excavations at Morgantina have, in fact, suggested connections with the mainland in the material culture of the Iron Age settlement, and recently Robert Leighton has identified possible affinities in the incised and painted pottery with Calabrian

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[21] Inv. no. 60-1256, unpublished. The name is attested as that of a Sikan ruler in Polyaenus' account of the reduction of the Sikanian town Ouessa by Phalaris tyrant of Akragas (Strat. 5.1,4).

[22] There are several inscriptions from Montagna di Marzo, to the west of Morgantina, one of which is given as an example of Sikan, and classified as non-Indoeuropean: Ampolo, ed., p. 458 with figs. 317, 318; cf. R. van Compernolle, op. cit., on the question in general. On this inscription see n. 27.

[23] "Nel primo millenio, l'Italia appare come un mosaico di popoli, un mosaico di lingue" (Ampolo, ed., p. 435; on Messapic, cf. Whatmough, op. cit., 258–430; O. Parangeli and C. Santoro in Prosdocimi, ed., 917–947; C. de Simone, La lingua messapica oggi: un bilancio critico, in I Messapi. Atti del XIII convegno di studi sulla Magna Grecia 1990, Taranto 1991, 297–322 with extensive bibliography.

[24] Jeffery, op. cit., p. 259 on non-Greek inscriptions in the area of Achaian colonization: "All these come probably or certainly from southern Italy, use the Achaian alphabet, are neither Greek nor Oscan, and should therefore be pre-Italic, possibly Messapic." (See eadem, Further Comments on Archaic Greek Inscriptions, BSA 50, 1955, 67–84, 78–81 with fig. 4.) For the Messapic alphabet, which Whatmough characterized as "Tarentine-Ionic", op. cit., 530–540, 537 (continuing): "We have a script clearly later than the adoption of the Ionic alphabet, which in the main it follows, but there are survivals of the Tarentine or Laconian alphabet."

Iron Age ceramics.[25] To these connections may now be added the Morgantina stele.

Conclusions

The Morgantina stele was almost certainly a votive monument, set up in a *temenos* of the 6th century, a date supported by both letter forms and by comparison to Daunian stelai. It may have been placed against the monumental retaining wall excavated on the east side of the *temenos*, which probably supported a terrace with several *naiskoi* and an altar. The appearance of this stylistically anomalous artefact, with distinctly Daunian affinities, in a temenos of Greek type at 6th century Morgantina is surprising and apparently unique. As with other categories of culture in post-colonization Sicily, it raises the issue of the ethnic identification and political and cultural ties of the inhabitants in the Archaic period.

Recent studies have emphasized the "social context" of literacy in the archaic Mediterranean.[26] The stele's affinities and probable language are also interesting clues to the uses of literacy in 6th century indigenous Sicily. Most inscriptions are graffiti or dipinti, usually short declarations of ownership.[27] The majority of inscriptions on

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[25] On the Messapians, Whatmough, op. cit., 262 with references; see also M. Nafissi, Le gente indigene: Enotri, Coni, Siculi e Morgeti, Ausoni, Iapigi, Sanniti, in G. Pugliese Carratelli, ed., Magna Grecia, Il Mediterraneo, Le metropoleis e la fondazione delle colonie, Milano 1985, 189–208. On Iron Age Morgantina and connections with Southern Italy, see R. Leighton, Morgantina Studies IV. The Protohistoric Settlement, Princeton 1993, 57–58 + n. 5, and chart fig. 25 on p. 58, 63 + n. 20, and personal communication.

[26] Cf. S. Stoddart, J. Whitley, The social context of literacy in Archaic Greece and Etruria, Antiquity 62, 1988, 761–72; I thank J. Whitley for providing a copy of his paper, Cretan Laws and Cretan Literacy, AJA 101, 1997, 635–61, in advance of publication.

[27] There are two exceptions: a long inscription on an askos from Centuripe: see Whatmough, op. cit., 444–49; Schmoll, op. cit., 25–30, and Zamoni, op. cit. The other is a dipinto on a hydria from M. di Marzo: Una nuova iscrizione anellenica da Montagna di Marzo, Kokalos 24, 1978, 30–62 (cf. G. Manganaro, in Kokalos 22–23.1, 1976–77, 255–56); V. Pisani, L'iscrizione <sicula> di Montagna di Marzo, StEtr 49, 1981, 363–65; cf. van Compernolle, op. cit., 148–149. This is not included by R. Arena, Iscrizioni greche archaiche di Sicilia e Magna Grecia, Iscrizioni di Sicilia II. Iscrizioni di Gela e Agrigento (Milan 1992), who discusses another hydria from the same site, p. 54 no. 120. Arena points out the parallels between an apparent proper name (Αχα) on this local vase, and with another local artifact from Terravecchia di Cuti, a loomweight (p. 51 no. 115). It may also be a variant of Ἀχίς, called by Arena "idronimo siculo". Another loomweight from Terravecchia

stone are funerary and therefore "private", but as F. Cordano observes: "Scrivere su pietra significa, infatti, fare un monumento e proporre l'iscrizione alla pubblica lettura" – if public means outside the household, and open therefore to the eyes of non-kin.[28]

Reconstructing the context of the Morgantina stele and understanding its meaning require bearing in mind all these issues, since nearly all other examples of writing at Morgantina are "occasional" and casual, in the form of graffiti. The parallels for the concentric circle motif make it possible that the stele is a local, Sikel artefact. It is not impossible, however, that the stele represents a Messapian dedication. It is also just possible, given the funerary uses of these stelai in Daunia, that the Morgantina stele is funerary after all, marking the grave of a Messapian who died in foreign territory. Whatever the case, the erection of this unique monument was intended to have meaning to the inhabitants of 6th century Morgantina, a population engaged in transforming its culture in response to the coming of the Greeks. The form of the stele, as well as the inscription, had readers in this population. It is an artefact of the rich hybrid culture that emerged in Sicily during the Archaic period.

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provides a parallel for Morgantina's Κυπαρα. He does not mention any possibility of specifically Sikan in inscriptions from this site, however.

[28] At Hybla Heraia, examples combine a Greek lament combined with Sikel names. F. Cordano, L'uso della scrittura in Italia meridionale e Sicilia nei secoli VIII e VII a.C., Opus 3, 1984, 281–309, 287, and cf. Zamboni, op. cit., 957 + n. 25.