

With the support of the Archaeological Institute of America's Jane C. Waldbaum Scholarship, I participated this summer in the American Excavations at Morgantina's Agora Valley Project. This excavation took place in central Sicily near the town of Aidone. The American Excavations at Morgantina began in 1955 and have since uncovered many elements of the site's long history from the Bronze Age to its capture by the Romans in the Hellenistic Period. The Agora Valley Project focuses on the social and cultural changes that occurred in Morgantina following Roman occupation. The 2023 field season opened trenches in the lower agora, where there is evidence of religious activity and cult worship. I am interested in pursuing research focused on the cultural effects of regime change and warfare, so participation in the Agora Valley Project allowed me to gain invaluable experience in conducting field research focused on these cultural shifts.

The project began with a tour of past excavations. The project director led our team around the site, showing us the finds of the excavations in a Hellenistic Era house during the Contrada Agnese Project. Through this tour, we were given insight into how the project's previous seasons had conducted research and gathered evidence. As the tour concluded, we returned to the freshly-cleared, new trenches where we would begin searching for our own evidence. The area we were excavating had been previously excavated over 50 years ago, but we sought to explore the area with better documentation and from a new perspective. While the centuries of Morgantina's history following Roman occupation have previously been understood as simply a period of decline, we wanted to observe the more nuanced shifts in the city's culture during this period. Through changes in religious practices, material exchanges, and architecture, the project sought to construct a more in-depth narrative about the city's culture under Roman rule.

The season was full of excitement and energy from the start. It was the beginning of a new project after a hiatus and many of the volunteers were participating in their first excavation. We began with warnings to pace ourselves as my trench mates and I wielded our pickaxes and trowels zealously. Our supervisors were aware of the exhaustion brought about by the hot Sicilian sun and wanted to make sure we did not lose our steam. However, it never ceased to be exciting to follow architecture as it descended under the soil, uncovering a crumbling stone wall, or brushing free a gravel floor. Slowly, our trench which had started as a simple plot of dirt began to shape into a narrative of how the space may have been used. Our trench supervisor guided us through his methodology and asked us guiding questions to help us better understand archaeological reasoning. As the season progressed, we were given more agency and became more comfortable coming to our own conclusions. We began finding pottery sherds and learned how to classify them as coarse ware and fine ware, diagnostic and nondiagnostic pottery. We learned how to wash and catalog our pottery finds. We were given the opportunity to learn about soil analysis and environmental research, dating and categorizing ceramics, and geospatial analysis.

The funds from this scholarship made the expenses of travel and supplies affordable. This made it possible for me to gain my first experience in the field. This trip was my first time traveling abroad and allowed me to experience archaeological sites I am passionate about in person. On our weekends off, I traveled to many of Sicily's archaeological sites, such as the Valley of the Temples in Agrigento and the ancient Greek theater of Taormina. Morgantina additionally connected me with a supportive community of scholars that inspired me to continue to expand my research and studies as an archaeologist. I am incredibly grateful for the generous

Jane C. Waldbaum Scholarship and the Archaeological Institute of America for supporting me in this experience.



My trench mates and I triumphantly wielding our tools during cookie break.



The Agora Valley Project volunteers receiving our tour on the first day.



My trench mates and I on our first day of excavation, preparing to begin digging in our trench.