

The ceramic repertoire of Motya: origins and development between 8th and 6th centuries BC

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Past archaeological research and renewed excavations by Sapienza University of Rome at Motya allows us to outline the development of the ceramic corpus of this site since its foundation in the 8th century BC until its abandonment in the second half of the 4th century BC, when Lilybaeum definitively took over the political, economic and religious role once played by Motya.

Diachronic transformations in the ceramic repertoire of a settlement – changes in decorative patterns, in vessels' morphology and function, in surface treatments and manufacturing methods – may result either from internal evolution or external factors, such as commercial contacts and flows of migration. Thus they can be used as markers of new styles or processes of acculturation that sometimes reflect profound changes in the customs of a community. In the case of Motya, various factors affect the reconstruction of those dynamics and the distinction between the different kind of phenomena. One is the paucity of long ceramic sequences for the 1st millennium BC in Western Sicily, since most of the excavated sites are only occupied during the 6th-4th centuries BC. Secondly, little data from 9th and 8th centuries BC contexts permit us to define the local cultural horizon of indigenous settlements, and therefore documentation from sites founded later than Motya and from settlements located in Eastern Sicily is usually used for this purpose. Finally, a better knowledge of the landscape of Motya (starting from the small ancient town nowadays corresponding to Birgi) could allow us to reconstruct systems of exploitation of the hinterland at that time.

This paper – after a short preliminary methodological and theoretical discussion – provides a synthetic diachronic presentation of the changes that occurred in the pottery repertoire of Motya between the 8th and the 4th century BC. Then the analysis focuses on the earlier phases (ca. 8th-6th centuries BC) and I propose an interpretation of the complex historical background of the Phoenician settlements and of the commercial network of the central Mediterranean.