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Jane C. Waldbaum Archaeological Field School Scholarship Field Report: The Coriglia/Orvieto Project

With great gratitude for the support of the Jane C. Waldbaum Archaeological Field School Scholarship, I was able to participate in the Coriglia Archaeological Project in May and June of 2017. In joining the Coriglia Project this summer, I anticipated an introduction to archaeological practices and important, in-person engagement with structures and artifacts. My experience during the 2017 season in Orvieto far surpassed those expectations. Not only was I able to become very well acquainted with the processes of archaeology, but I also met several scholars of Roman and Etruscan archaeology, history, and philology whose ideas have encouraged and shaped my own work. Needless to say, my experience with the Coriglia Project profoundly influenced my development as an archaeologist and student of Roman and Etruscan art and architecture.

The Coriglia Project is located in Orvieto in the Umbria region of Italy, under the direction of Drs. David George and Claudio Bizzarri. This year, the Coriglia Project excavated three sites in Orvieto, each with diverse goals and features, making it one of the most exciting archaeological projects I encountered in my search for field schools. The first was Coriglia, an Etrusco-Roman settlement just outside the city of Orvieto. At Coriglia, the team worked in six trenches, each with different and exciting finds and structures, including roads, vasca, walls, and baths. Vital to the excavation of Coriglia was not only expertise in one's own trench, but also an understanding of how all the features of the site relate to one another. As a result, the trenches often conferred with one another, which helped build a strong community among dig participants.

The Crocifisso del Tufo Necropolis was the second site excavated by the team during the 2017 season. A well-known Etruscan necropolis and the find spot of many important artifacts, work at Crocifisso del Tufo sought to reassess many of the tombs previously opened by earlier excavations and 19th century tomb raiders. In doing so, we were able to discover objects left behind or overlooked in the past while building an understanding of the use of the site and individual tombs.

The crew also worked at the so-called Cavità this summer. Located within the hill upon which the town of Orvieto sits, the Cavità is an Etruscan pyramidal hypogeum cut into the living tufa. Inside, numerous Etruscan objects were discovered, including a wealth of animal bone, brick, tile, and various types of pottery, such as bucchero and Attica, some of which appear to have been ritually broken. Although the space in many ways remains an enigma, the discovery of cut marks in the wall of the Cavità this season may help define how exactly the Etruscans used the space.

Many important experiences were also provided out of the field. In addition to working at Coriglia, Crocifisso, and the Cavità, dig participants were rotated through the pottery lab, where pottery, bone, and other objects were washed, sorted, and labeled, as well as the photo lab, where all finds were photographed and documented under the direction of lab specialists.

This summer, I was fortunate to be made vice caposaggio (vice supervisor) of the trench to which I was assigned at Coriglia, Trench A, the first area opened on site in 1993. As vice, my experience was enriched tenfold. Not only did I work closely with the caposaggio of Trench A, but I was also included in important discussions and deliberations about the site, interacted often with the site supervisors, helped complete paperwork, and was given vital experience helping to lead a team. In addition to my duties as vice, I was tasked with excavating a catch basin discovered within the trench. As the only person excavating in the catch basin, the pressure was high, but the rewards immense. During the course of excavation, I uncovered not only the bottom of the catch basin, but also two lead water pipes and a number of small artifacts. In doing so, I was able to help reconstruct the chronology of its creation, use, repair, and abandonment. Although working in a confined space (60 x60 cm) was challenging at times, it allowed me the chance to become very familiar with the archaeology of the trench, and to develop a good feel and eye for changes and anomalies in the soil. Working in the catch basin also helped me develop a familiarity with a wide variety of archaeological tools, ranging from trowels and brushes, to rock hammers and dental tools. Outside of the catch basin, I also learned the fundamentals of excavation and archaeological technique. Many hours were spent articulating, shoveling, sifting, counting and sorting tile, and making pick passes in the loci of Trench A. During the course of work in A many exciting discoveries were made, including a piece of stamped terra sigillata, coins, colored tesserae, and a solid bronze votive arm, as we worked to understand how all of the features in the trench related to one another.

While my experience in Trench A would have been plenty for one summer, I was also able to work at the two other sites associated with the project. In the Cavità I learned how to identify and sort the many terracotta fragments we discovered, and how to follow elusive loci. Work in the Cavità was also instructive in understanding Etruscan ritual practice and construction techniques and later medieval interactions with ancient spaces.

Work at the Crocifisso del Tufo Necropolis provided yet another diverse and exciting setting for archaeology. In addition to excavating within tombs, one of my predominate areas of interest, at Crocifisso I learned how to confront and work with previously disrupted archaeological sites. Though a meticulously detailed task, the team made important discoveries while learning about Etruscan mortuary practices and ritual. Working in Etruscan tombs was among the most exciting experiences of the summer, and has greatly affected my own work. While it is important to study tombs using textual sources, it is an entirely different experience to understand burials firsthand. Spatially, contextually, and visually, it is crucial to experience spaces in person. I am so fortunate to have been allowed such an opportunity this summer.

Archaeology is by its nature exciting and dynamic. Although it is impossible to know what will appear, the constant reshaping and reformulating of one's theories is the curse and joy of archaeological work. Much like how rain would inevitably stop as soon as we finished tarping, a new artifact or feature would often appear just as we thought we had figured things out. In this way, fieldwork allowed me to fortify my critical thinking and reasoning skills, all while leaving room for constant adaptation.

In addition to learning how to excavate, my participation in the Coriglia Project has been indispensable as I look ahead to my comprehensive exams. While on site, I learned to comprehend and identify various types of artifacts and assign a relative date to objects and structures. Such skills will be vital during my examinations. I have also begun to think deeply

about the topic of my dissertation, and have refined many of my ideas based on my fieldwork experience this season, most importantly, interactions between the Etruscans and Romans. In this way, as an Etrusco-Roman settlement, Coriglia served as an important catalyst for future work.

Perhaps more than anything else, my work in Orvieto this summer affirmed my study of the art and archaeology of the ancient Mediterranean. Having experienced the archaeology firsthand, I now understand the challenges and rewards of fieldwork, and look forward to a future as an archaeologist and scholar of ancient Roman and Etruscan structures and material culture. I cannot thank the AIA and Jane C. Waldbaum Archaeological Field School Scholarship enough for their support in allowing me such an essential experience this summer.

Photos from Orvieto



Part of the Trench A crew.



On site at Coriglia.



The catch basin week one.



The floor of the catch basin.



Me after a day in the field.



One of the lead pipes.



Me in the catch basin.