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### Field Report: Villa del Vergigno Archaeological Excavation 2017

Due to the generosity of the Archaeological Institute of America's Jane C. Waldbaum Archaeological Field School Scholarship, I was able to participate in the Villa del Vergigno Archaeological Project. This was my first opportunity to put the knowledge I gained while attaining my B.A. in Anthropology from Mississippi State University to the test and my first opportunity to travel abroad.

Villa del Vergigno is located outside Montelupo Fiorentino, Italy about 20 km from Florence in the Arno Valley. The site dates approximately from the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E to approximately the 4<sup>th</sup> century C.E. and may be associated with the Roman colonization of Florence between 82 - 30 B.C.E. However, the site may possibly have been constructed by the Etruscans before or during this time, as well because black gloss pottery associated with the Etruscans is also found at the site. Excavations at the site had first begun in the early 1990's, but did not last long. The site was reopened in 2012 as a field school led by Dr. McKenzie Lewis, as a collaboration between Cooperativa ICHNOS, Sistema Museale di Montelupo, Concordia College, and University of Wyoming.

The site consists of a residential area with a bath complex and an agricultural sector. This season we excavated areas 1,000, 4,000, 5,000, 7,000, 11,000 and 13,000. Areas 1,000, 4,000, 5,000, and 7,000 were all part of a large Roman trash pit located in the agricultural sector that may have been later filled in with bricks and tiles during the dismantling of the Villa. 11,000 and 13,000 were located in the residential sector with 11,000 next to the outer

walls of the bath complex and 13, 000 within the walls in an area which held the furnace for the bath complex's hypocaust system. During the season I was assigned to area 13,000.

Since this was going to be the first season that 13,000 was going to be excavated we began by cleaning the area of any loose dirt and debris using trowels, brushes, and vacuums, I have to admit that the idea of vacuuming dirt off of dirt was and still is an amusing idea to me. Once the area was cleaned we were met with a beautiful, yet, perplexing stratigraphic conglomeration. Years upon years of bright orange concotto ( fired clay from the floor and walls of the furnace), black charcoal, and white ash. There was also another layer which seemed to predate the hypocaust furnace that consisted of a rusty-brown soil rich in iron slag, but we did not have time to excavate this layer during the 2017 season.

We then had to identify which layers were the youngest and, therefore, had to be excavated first. This was no easy task. My trench supervisor even mentioned that this was the most complex stratigraphic situation that he ever had the opportunity to dig. During the season we ended up excavating more than 20 different stratigraphic units from our trench layer by layer. While the assorted orange, black, and white swirls all looked the same at first glance, with enough practice, I was eventually able to recognize different layers depending upon the consistency, color, and contents of the soil. While not much was found in this area during the 2017 season, we did uncover a small colatura rossa pottery sherd, which is diagnostic to the 4th to 7th centuries C.E. This was quite a significant find because the area we found the sherd in was thought to be associated with the Roman period of the Villa's use. Besides excavating area 13,000 I was also tasked with being the dig's photographer.

It was my duty to photograph each area and stratigraphic unit before and after excavating, as well as any interesting artifacts that may have been found. As an avid photographer, I thought that this was going to be a fairly easy assignment. However, I could

not have been more wrong. Setting up the shots in order to have the best exposures was quite complicated, since I could not control the ambient lighting and the angle from which I had to take the photographs. Everyday, I had to constantly be on the ready to set up and capture the shots, running back and forth across the site from one area to another, all the while keeping up to date on the progress of area 13000. However, it was not all just hard work.

During our off time we lived in the small town of Montelupo Fiorentino. This was a lovely city set among the hills of the arno valley. The city is famous for being the center of ceramics production during the Middle Ages. The people were all very welcoming, and, during the week, I had the opportunity to talk to them as well as take photographs of the town and the surrounding area. I also had the opportunity to experience many different Italian cities and their unique cultures and history such as Florence, Rome, Naples, and Siena. The excavation team took an excursion to the latter in order to observe il Palio, a historic horse race between the different neighborhoods of the city. Experiencing il Palio has been one of the most unique experiences I have yet to witness.

Although the work was arduous, the excavation awarded me with an amazing opportunity to learn archaeological field methods while at the same time having a opportunity to experience a different culture. Thanks to the generosity of the Archaeological Institute of America's Jane C. Waldbaum Archaeological Field School Scholarship, I was able to participate in the Villa del Vergigno Archaeological Project while being immersed in another culture. These experiences in turn allowed me to grow as an aspiring archaeologist.



The Discovery of a Handle



Setting Up the Shot



Archaeology Dan



Vacuuming Dirt off Dirt



Archaeologists Hard at Work... Well, One Archaeologist Hard at Work.



Excavating



The Crew Heading to Siena for il Palio



Il Palio, Siena



Roman Trash Pit - Villa del Vergigno



Unknown Vessel in Area 1300



Base of an Unknown Vessel in Area 1300



View from Villa del Vergigno, Tuscany



On Our Way to Work