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AIA Jane C. Waldbaum Archaeological Field School

Scholarship Final Report

While studying Evolutionary Biology of the Human Species at Columbia University, I have been exposed to many aspects of biological anthropology, which has slowly strengthened my deep interest in the subject. My course work has taken me from primate behavioral studies to conservation to human osteology and along this path I discovered what I am most passionate about. I resolved to concentrate my studies in bioarchaeology and set out to gain the necessary field experience. This summer I accomplished that goal by attending the Astypalaia Bioanthropology Field School. Through this field school I gained experience and knowledge essential to excel in my chosen field while also confirming my love for this work. I am so grateful for this opportunity because it has allowed me to amass a large range of valuable skills that will help propel me into a promising career.

The skills I have gained in Astypalaia go far beyond standard excavation techniques. The unique remains found at this site require highly specialized knowledge; the first week focused on learning the distinctive skeletal system of neonatal infants. Using both plastic and archaeological specimens to assist with this training, we worked our way through each bone of the developing skeleton. Our study culminated in a practical lab exam to test our ability to recognize these unique elements, which are remarkably dissimilar to their adult counterparts. Few archaeologists are afforded the opportunity to study the remains of young children,

making this a truly invaluable experience. Following this portion of the course we began excavations of individual burials. Because of the nature of these remains, the excavation techniques were also highly specialized. Neonatal remains are some of the smallest and most fragile remains many archaeologists will encounter, and therefore, the techniques used to excavate these remains need to reflect the special condition of the bones. Special care is taken to choose the appropriate tools for this job, which are often not the same as those used for excavating mature skeletal remains. Finally, the excavation methods employed reflect the size, visibility, and state of preservation for each individual bone. Learning to excavate under such challenging circumstances gives me confidence that I can excel in this role and successfully apply the knowledge I've gained on this field school to a multitude of archaeological settings.

While the main focus of our work in Astypalaia was excavation and identification, we were also offered two other valuable learning opportunities. First, we were taught to plan each intact burial using a triangulation technique to plot all major bones. Once a scaled plan of the burial was completed we computerized this data using GIMP and Inkscape software. Finally, to further enrich our experience, weekly, student-led seminars were held to broaden our knowledge of the field. Because of my personal interest in the subject, I chose to report on sex differences in the infant skeleton. Presenting on this topic allowed me to gain a much greater understanding of both past and current research in this area of study, while also fueling a deeper curiosity and prompting further research questions.

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