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AIA Jane C. Waldbaum Archaeological Fieldwork Scholarship: Final Report for Summer Fieldwork with Saint Anselm College's excavations near Castel Viscardo and Orvieto

I worked with St. Anselm College's excavations in and around Orvieto, Italy directed by Prof. David B. George and Dr. Claudio Bizzarri. Our excavations were largely focused at Coriglia, a site near the town of Castel Viscardo, which was active in the Etruscan, Roman, and Medieval periods. Over the six weeks of the dig season, small groups rotated through the other four sites: a medieval burial site near Allerona, Etruscan tombs near Castel Giorgio, a series of pyramidal hypogea beneath the city of Orvieto, and the Lab.

Our daily schedule included getting to the site around 8 am, working until a noon lunch break, and continuing to work until 4:30 or 5. Before dinner, each trench and/or site gave a short podcast report on the day's work, including special finds and progress. This served the dual purpose of keeping each trench at Coriglia aware of each other's context and keeping people who were on rotation up to date with their trench's progress.

Over the course of the season, I was able to rotate through all the sites and learn the specific techniques associated with each one. This included perfecting my fine articulation skills at Allerona while searching for grave goods below the feet of one of the burials, washing and sorting finds from Coriglia in the Lab, picking out the artifacts from every single shovel of dirt in the Cavita, and picking and shoveling to my heart's content at Coriliga. The Cavita is full of Etruscan pieces, no later than the 5th century BCE, including commonware, attic pottery, grey and black bucchero, tiles, bricks, animal bones, and architectural terra cotta. At Coriglia, I was a member of Trench F. This trench is located on the northwest corner of the site and is dominated by a series of vasca (large waterproof basins used to generate water pressure), walls, and drainage features. In relation to the rest of the Coriglia site, it appears that this area was used to create pressure and supply water to the bath facilities in trench C (North of trench F) during the Roman phase of the site. We are still excavating the medieval phase of the trench, which provides evidence that the site was repurposed for industrial use. We discovered a portion of a vaulted ceiling, indicating a high arched roof over one of the vasca. This vasca also has an interesting floor; over top of the coccio pesto (hydraulic cement used for waterproofing) floor, inverted pan tiles appear to have been used as floor tiles. Much of this floor remains intact. We finished the final pass exposing this floor on the second to last day of the season, which made for quite an exciting closure. In the neighboring room, which lacks the coccio pesto of a vasca, we discovered a cluster of wells or cisterns. They are lined with tuffa and linked by cappuccina and fistula, both to each other and to the vasca with the vaulted roof. One of the wells is sealed with concrete, but we excavated the other two in an effort to date their use. No pottery to this end was found, so this muddy job ended once the wells were about 5 feet deep.

I heartily enjoyed every aspect of archaeology, both in and out of the field. Outside the field, we had a few lectures on Roman painting, fresco and construction practices. Had the weather troubled us with more rain days, we would have had more lectures and contextual experiences out of the field (area museums and sites of interest). We were able to visit the Etruscan necropolis just outside the walls of Orvieto and learn about Etruscan burial practices and societal shifts. We learned to use pickaxes, trowels, shovels, and brooms to make passes of various depths in the trench. We also learned to do fine articulation with wooden tools while working on the Medieval burials near Allerona. Learning to keep a record of loci, special finds, and our daily trench work was also an indispensable skill. I hope that I will continue to add entries to my dig journal for years to come.

This experience has proved to be invaluable. Not only did I discover and enhance my love of Classics and ancient engineering feats, but also a new passion for archaeology and excavations of all sorts. I loved the atmosphere in the trench, where we spent our time pondering what our finds mean for the locus, what the overall site was like in each of its phases, our life trajectories, the true meaning of our favorite 90's pop hits, and the infinite ways in which we could move and understand dirt. This time of discovery and digging would not have been feasible without the Waldbaum Scholarship. My gratitude for the experience and the opportunity is difficult to articulate, but the archaeological lens and context will assuredly contribute to any future work I embark on. I am excited to continue studying and weaving my twin interests of engineering and Classics together, with the additional thread of archaeology.