

I used the Jane C. Waldbaum Scholarship to pay for a portion of my tuition for the Gabii Project, which took place in Italy in June and July this summer. Gabii was a Latin city-state which was occupied from the 8th century BCE until the Middle Ages. The site is no longer occupied today, and thus offers an unparalleled opportunity to excavate a central Italian site without the obstructions posed by modern urban architecture. Since 2009, Gabii has been excavated by the Gabii Project. In undergrad, I wrote my senior honors thesis on millet found at Gabii, so I was thrilled to have my first excavation experience there.

The Gabii Project's excavation is divided into 10 areas, Area A through J. This summer, we split into groups and excavated in Area C and Area J. I was part of the team that excavated Area C, which is one of the oldest parts of the settlement and included multiple Iron Age huts. There were no Iron Age structural remains in Area C, making it difficult to determine what our stratigraphic units (SUs) were. As an archaeology major, I had some understanding of archaeological methods, but I had no field experience, and nothing could have prepared me for how difficult it was at first to tell different SUs apart when everything looked a uniform shade of brown under the hot Italian sun. Thankfully, I had wonderful trench supervisors who quickly explained how to use the three C's (soil color, compaction, and composition) to tell different SUs apart.

I spent most days in the field excavating. This was done by trowel and occasionally by pickaxe. After taking soil samples for the environmental team, we carefully sifted the remaining soil from each SU to check for smaller finds. These typically included pottery sherds and animal bones, but we occasionally found special finds such as small pieces of bronze. However, a few days out of the week I got to do one of several lab rotations instead of working in the field. In the finds lab, I learned how to clean different materials such as pottery and tesserae. I also learned

how to differentiate between different types of pottery and the dates associated with each style. I had no former experience working with pottery, so I found it highly educational - especially for my work in Area C, where pottery was often our only dateable material. In the enviro lab, I got to float several soil samples. This consisted of dumping soil into a flotation machine, agitating the sample by adding water pressure, and catching the charred material which floats to the surface in a smaller mesh. The millet I used for my thesis was collected in this way, but floating archaeobotanical material myself gave me a much deeper understanding of the process. I also did a one-time rotation with the topography team. The Gabii Project does an extensive amount of GIS work and photo-modeling, and I was able to see the whole process - from taking photos and points to putting them together to create a model. In all, the lab rotations helped me to see the bigger picture and the reasons for our specific processes and methods in the field.

As the weeks went by, I found myself becoming more confident in my excavation skills. I began recognizing things such as the minute differences in the soil and the best places to take soil samples. The language of excavation - the soil changes, the methodology, the archaeological jargon - was no longer a complicated mystery to me. Discussions with some of the staff of the Gabii Project - both in the field and at our weekly lectures - further solidified my understanding of the entire excavation process.

My experience at the Gabii Project this summer provided me with the hands-on skills that are crucial for my future career in archaeology. The skills I learned helped me understand my past research better and at the same time set me up for success with my future archaeological research. I left Italy not only with a deeper understanding of the excavation process, but of archaeology itself. I am extremely grateful to the Archaeological Institute of America for their generous gift of the Jane C. Waldbaum Scholarship and for making this trip possible for me.



The view on our morning walk to the site.



Some fellow University of Michigan students and I at the Temple of Juno on the acropolis of Gabii.



Me standing in one of the Iron Age huts in Area C. The large holes in front of me are post holes, and the cut to my left is the outline of the hut.



Another picture in Area C. Most of the soil behind me is natural, but the lighter patch to the left represents another Iron Age hut.