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Field Report for Waldbaum Scholarship (2019)

Upon arriving in Vescovado di Murlo, Italy, I was instantly made aware of the town's connection to their ancient ancestors: the Etruscans of Poggio Civitate. The town's mascot is known as the cowboy—a statue portraying a man wearing a large, sombrero-like hat. In 1993, the people of Murlo were the subjects of genetic testing which linked them as direct descendants of the ancient Etruscans—while many question the accuracy of these tests, the habitants of Murlo believe in the lineage wholeheartedly. The people of Murlo and surrounding communes take great pride in their possible connection to this ancient community. Every year, there is the Blu Etrusco Festival, which runs from July until October. The townspeople cook food for the guests, lectures are given by professors and others connected to the excavation, and sometimes artifacts are even passed around (with the supervision of students, of course). Included in the artifacts passed around were two clumps of clay that had been preserved by the fire which destroyed most of the site in ancient times. The masses of clay still happened to have the handprints of the sculptor; although they were formless, the fired clay captures a moment in time which would have otherwise been lost forever. In my opinion, the most interesting aspect of the excavations at Poggio Civitate is the depth in which the ancient Etruscans are portrayed and memorialized as real people. In class, it is often difficult to emphasize the fact that the ancient people were truly just humans as well; people trying to get through life, feed their families, etc. The staff at Poggio Civitate, as well as the people of Murlo, made this detail the most important aspect of all learning experiences. I have found that it is easy, and in many cases the norm, to glorify ancient civilizations when in fact they were not so different from us.

The Waldbaum scholarship was extremely beneficial to my experience—the cost of the program as well as travel costs would have been difficult to cover on my own. I am very grateful to have been given support for this incredible opportunity and hands on experience. It is often difficult to grasp exactly what an archaeologist does unless you are pushed into the thick of it. Throughout the six weeks, there were many dead ends, but also many important finds—I quickly learned this is merely the life of an archaeologist. This summer, the excavations of Poggio Civitate mainly focused on the non-elite members of the civilization. The foundations of two small huts were excavated, where weaving equipment, remains of metalworking, and an abundance of tile and pottery sherds were all found. Additionally, there was a supposed votive deposit excavated—this deposit yielded large quantities of weaving equipment, pottery sherds, antler bones, grape seeds, and stone tools made from non-local stone (see photos I-IV). The “special finds” included incised pottery and weaving equipment, a terracotta sculpture of the face of a cat, various metalworking objects, and bronze objects. When students are shown images of artifacts in class, it is easy to forget that hours, days, or even weeks of labor went into the excavation and conservation of any given object. This experience gave me an incredible and deep appreciation for every aspect of archaeology: excavation, photographing, drawing, conservation, cataloguing, etc. The field season at Poggio Civitate gave me experience in each of these categories. I feel especially grateful that the excavation also included the aspect of Public Archaeology—seeing the townspeople's enthusiasm gave the excavations even more importance and a deeper meaning. Overall, I have the generosity of the Waldbaum scholarship

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Figure I: Bulk finds from "votive deposit"



Figure II: Bulk finds from "votive deposit"



Figure III: Bulk finds from “votive deposit”



Figure IV: example of imported, non-local stone—likely used as pestle  
Found in “votive deposit”