

Samuel Powell – Final Report for Waldbaum Scholarship, 2019

During a 3 week period this past June, with the kind help of the Waldbaum Scholarship program, I completed an archaeological dig in Tivoli, Italy at the Villa Adriana. The site, once the summer home of the Emperor Hadrian, was discovered in 1461 and has influenced modern day renaissance and baroque architecture. Archaeologists and Classicists from Columbia University in the City of New York, began their excavation at Villa Adriana in 2014. I had the unique privilege of being a member of a team excavating for what would be the university's 5th season at this UNESCO World Heritage site.

As one of 26 new students and 16 veteran students, I daily excavated and attended on and off-site seminars. Under the guidance of supervisors I learned archeological techniques that helped us to uncover marble fragments and frescos on the floors and walls of ancient buildings. This summer we worked on 4 areas in the Macchiosso site, in which excavation began in 2014. Top soil was completely removed and buried rooms were revealed. Veterans led with the excavation, documentation and analysis of new structures. While aiding them through the search, we found marble slabs, plaster walls and ceiling paintings, and a furnace room in which slaves carried fire wood for heating.

While laboring alongside instructors and peers, we worked as a team to peer into the past. It was thrilling to help uncover plaster walls and floors that reveal, centuries-old, decorative colors. I saw, still lively, hues of vermillion, sea foam, white and yellow. The artwork, amazingly, is still intact and unharmed. While working through mounds of rubble I learned to distinguish marble from ceramic.

Although I have visited Europe on a few occasions, this was my first visit to Italy. Our supervisors led weekend excursions to Rome and other ancient Italian sites. Trips to see remnants of the Imperial Capital of Rome, ruins of ancient Latin cities Alba Fucens and Tibur, helped us to examine the functional and cultural elements of ancient imperial architecture. Along with my peers I made a further visit to Rome and the Vatican to explore how modern Italy had been built around and integrated into the remnants of the Roman Empire.

There is still much work to be done at Villa Adriana to have a complete understanding of how the buildings originally stood, Many of the rooms at the villa are large and complex and we still do not know their relationship to each other. So much more is laying below to be excavated, collected and analyzed. Although the excavation was extremely labor intensive, I was honored and excited when supervisors invited me back for 2020. I am grateful for this experience and honored to have attended this excavation on a Waldbaum Scholarship.

