

Waldbaum Scholarship Final Report 2019, Laura Smith

I attended the Makounta-Voules Field School in Cyprus. We excavated from June 2 to July 3. The site is a Bronze Age and Chalcolithic site and one of the project's aims was to understand the transition between these periods. I am not a Bronze Age scholar; I study the Eastern Roman Empire. This was my first excavation and it contributed greatly to my understanding of how historians get their evidence. In the past, I have worked primarily with literary and documentary evidence. While I have used archaeological evidence, I have been reliant on the interpretation of the excavator and the explanation provided in articles. Because I had no background in archaeology, this made it difficult sometimes to understand how the researcher reached a certain conclusion, particularly for more technical articles.

After sifting through dirt for seven hours a day, five days a week, I have a better understanding of how archaeologists reach their conclusions and what the evidence actually looks like on the ground. It was important for me to understand the stratigraphy of a site and how the different layers relate to each other. In my trench, we put in a sounding to understand how one feature was connected to the other features in the trench, and although we did not reach a conclusion during the dig, it was wonderful to see the stratigraphy and glimpse how the site had changed or been changed over time. This will be helpful with my research because I frequently look at site plans and cross sections of stratigraphy and now I know how to read these plans, as well as what they mean. Additionally, the dig directors discussed different methods of excavating a site, and this will be helpful as I read field reports for sites in the Eastern Roman Empire.

Handling bagfuls of pottery each day also brings a greater sense of the reality of people in the past. The people I study can sometimes feel very far removed, not just in time but in the fact of their existence. Picking potsherds out of the ground and smoothing a finger over a surface that was last handled between 2,500 and 3,000 years ago really brings home the fact we are studying people and their habits more than anything else. These people can begin to spring to life again as you realize you are standing inside their roundhouse and can see some of the features where they lived their lives every day, and these once voiceless people can begin to speak again.

