

Gracie Carrello  
10 August 2025

### The Scene:

Astypalaia, Dodecanese, Greece

Kylindra Cemetery

July 1-July 31

Director: Dr Simon Hillson

Head Archaeologist: Dr Carolyn Rando

Our lab was in Maltezana, on the east wing of the island. It used to be an elementary school, but has since been turned into the lab for this field school. It had lots of shaded outdoor areas and a playground.

We worked Tuesday-Sunday, 7am-3pm, with Monday off.

### Week One:

This week was all about lectures and familiarizing ourselves with what neonatal bones look like. Some are almost exactly the same as adult bones, but others vary significantly, especially when fragmented. We learned the entire neonatal skeleton within six days, which was intense but similar to my college experience in Human Osteology. We were paired off into groups of four to work with a supervisor after the initial lecture in order to ask questions and engage more closely with plastic replicas of neonatal remains. My supervisor was a student at this field school last year, so she understood exactly our positions and what tripped up students the most.

### Week Two:

The first half of this week was exactly like the week before, studying neonatal bones in order to identify and side them when they are out of context. There was a test in the middle of the week which showed where we were at with this skill, so the supervisors would know what we needed more help with. After the test, we were grouped into pairs to begin working on our first burial. My partner was one of my roommates, so I knew we would work together well. The burial we were given was a soil ball, which means that the soil was intact after the pottery was removed.

For context, all of the babies were buried in a Greek pottery vessel called an amphora. Sometimes these pots would shatter and displace the soil, and baby, that were inside it. Sometimes the pot would be completely intact with the baby still inside. And sometimes the pot would be mostly broken, but the baby and soil inside remained whole. The latter is what we were working with.

To begin, we learned how to map our baby on graph paper, as a way to keep the original context that the baby was found in mind. It also would be important to have a top layer map if there was a second baby underneath, which happened often enough to be on the lookout for.

After that, we were able to begin our excavation. We used specialized tools because the bones we were working with were so small and fragile. This was a long and tedious process, since neither of us wanted to break any of our baby's bones. We spent the rest of this week excavating.

### Week Three:

We finished the excavation, but our work was not done! It was time for our Greek ambassador, Lambrini, to break the soil ball. She was the only person allowed to do this. After she was done, we had to sieve the soil. First we start with a one centimeter sieve. This helps us sort through what is soil and what is rock. Our soil was very hard and coarse, which made it difficult to break up. But we persevered and eventually got to the next stage; the fine sieve. The fine sieve is two millimeters wide. This is for close examination, picking out bone/bone fragments, pottery sherds, marine shell, and charcoal. This was the most tedious and took nearly the entire rest of the week to finish. Every so often, our supervisor would come check our soil to make sure we hadn't missed anything. If we were cleared, she would take that portion of soil away and we would continue. If we weren't, however, we would have to re-sieve that soil. Luckily, we didn't have to on this burial. On our last couple days, my partner and I were able to begin the last step of the burial which is identification.

We identified and sided the bones and bone fragments to the best of our ability. When we had trouble, we were able to call upon our supervisor for help. There were several times we felt stuck with putting bone fragments together, but there was always someone available to help us. I really appreciated how the supervisors were able to find a balance between letting us struggle enough to learn but not letting us drown in frustration. We eventually labeled every bone we could and bagged our other finds (pottery, animal bone, marine shell, and charcoal).

The final stage of the burial is paperwork and photographing the pottery. My partner and I handled the paperwork, but Lambrini had to lay out our pottery. We learned how to set up the camera for the photo, including aligning the scale. After we took the picture, we were done!

### Week Four:

This week, I was tasked with working on my own burial. Lambrini opened the box, as she's the only person allowed to, and I knew immediately that it was a sieve job. The pottery was very broken and all of the soil was displaced. I started this burial by

removing all the big pieces of pottery. During this process, I found two intact long bones! This was very exciting, because that means I can measure them which gives Simon, the director of the field school, more data for his research. After I was finished with this step, I put all of my soil into a bucket and began using the big sieve. This didn't take too long, as this soil was fine and dust-like. However, fine sieving took me the entire week. There was so much soil to go through and it was very pottery heavy. Sieving became my life. I re-sieved twice during this burial, which is not a marker of my skill, but simply bound to happen. At the end of the week, I finally finished.

### Week Five: The Final Week

This week was a half week, ending on Wednesday. I absolutely had to finish my burial, because after the field school is over no one is working there until next summer. There was no missing the deadline. Luckily, I was doing identification which went much quicker than sieving. I felt so excited when I was able to identify bone fragments without help from a supervisor. I finished my burial, including all paperwork and pictures by the end of the first day.

The next day I spent my time helping other students complete their burials and cleaning up the lab. We had the final day of the field school off, as only the supervisors, Simon, and Carolyn, were needed to finish locking up the lab. So, I spent that day hanging out with my 11 new friends before we all went our separate ways.

### Other Thoughts:

This was truly a once in a lifetime experience, which I am so grateful to have been able to do. I made some amazing friends, which I still talk to now after the field school ended. I had some amazing experiences outside of work, like swimming in the clearest ocean I've ever seen and playing a one-shot D&D campaign on our day off.

I came into this field school thinking I wanted to be a Classical Bioarchaeologist and I left it knowing that's what I want to do. I have new ideas about my next steps for this career and a reignited passion to go for it.