

ITALY & THE AEGEAN DURING THE BRONZE AGE: TRADE, MIGRATION & CONFLICT AT ROCA VECCHIA, SOUTHERN ITALY

Course ID: HIS 489

Aug 30 – Sep 26, 2026

Academic Credits: 8 Semester Credit Units (Equivalent to 12 Quarter Units)

School of Record: Culver Stockton College

DIRECTOR:

Prof. Teodoro Scarano – Associate Professor of Prehistory and Protohistory (SSD L-ANT/01),
Dipartimento di Beni Culturali-Università del Salento (teodoro.scarano@unisalento.it)



PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Bronze Age fortified settlement of Roca Vecchia is located on the Adriatic coast of South-Eastern Italy at the narrowest passage of the Otranto Channel. It was a strategic key-site for the crossing routes between the Aegean and the Central Mediterranean and its topography was closely related to the protected Torre dell'Orso Bay. Maybe more important, the ancient site of Roca Vecchia includes the Grotta Poesia cave, a key cult center since prehistory. The Bronze Age site was settled from the mid-17th to the late 11th century BCE and was protected by a massive wall, repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt over time.

Finds from the Middle Bronze Age levels (17th-14th century BCE) clearly attest to the early involvement of Roca Vecchia within the Aegean commercial network. Finds include an unusual variety and peculiarity of products such as Lustrous-decorated, Burnished, Matt-painted and Minyan-type pottery imports in addition to Italo-Minoan finds. These artifacts indicate active trading along the southern Adriatic routes already at these early dates.

Around the mid-14th century BCE, Roca was attacked and destroyed by fire after a siege. At that time, the fortifications had a complex plan with at least five gates and a monumental main entrance.

Among the extraordinary finds sealed under the collapse of the defensive stonework, it is worth mentioning a huge quantity of complete locally handmade stone-tempered vessels, the remains of a group of seven unarmed people who died by asphyxia while trying to hide in a corridor, and the remains of a young warrior armed with an Aegean bronze dagger. Despite the unquestionable local identity of the site, Late Bronze Age Roca yielded more Aegean-type ceramics than any other settlement in Italy (including a large variety of both imports and their imitations). Roca appears to have been characterized by cultural hybridization of the local Italian population with Minoan and Mycenaean elements.

Recent investigations carried out in Roca – in areas that include the so-called “Cult Center” and the monumental buildings of the so-called “Hut-temple” – suggest that extensive ritual practices were linked to collective ceremonial activities, incorporating rituals and symbols of both local and Aegean origin. Late and Final Bronze Age evidence from Roca also includes artifacts of local specialized craftsmanship of exotica such as ivory and amber, as well as metalworking activities in bronze and gold. The special role played by the core-site of Roca in the framework of the central Mediterranean area is also suggested by the richest collection of gold items ever found in the Italian Bronze Age, that include various gold sun discs and ornaments.

During the forthcoming seasons, we plan to continue investigating both Bronze Age fortifications and the settlement area, as well as funerary evidence dating to the second and first millennium BCE.

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER

The Anthropocene Research Center was established to support field training in a range of sciences at sites within the U.S. & across the world. Traveling and conducting field work involves risk. Students interested in participating in any ARC program must weigh the potential risk against the value of education provided by the program of their choosing.

Risk is inherent in everything we do, and the ARC takes risks seriously. A committee of leading scholars review each field school location prior to approval. Once a program is accepted, the ARC continually monitors conditions at the program’s site and so we can provide an experience that is as safe as possible.

The ARC does not provide trip or travel cancellation insurance. Students are encouraged to explore such insurance policies on their own. Post Covid 19, most basic policies do not cover trip cancelation due to pandemics. If you wish to purchase an insurance policy that covers such contingencies, explore Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) plans. [Insuremytrip.com](https://insuremytrip.com), [Squaremouth.com](https://squaremouth.com) or [Travelguard.com](https://travelguard.com) are possible websites where students may explore different insurance policies.

Students should be aware that conditions in the field are different than those experienced at home, dorms or college towns. Students will be exposed to the elements, live in rustic accommodation, and expect to engage in daily physical activity.

We do our best to follow schedule and activities as outlined in this syllabus. Yet local permitting agencies, political, environmental, personal, and/or weather conditions may force changes. This syllabus, therefore, is only a general commitment. Students should allow flexibility and adaptability as research work is frequently subject to modification.

All students must consult medical professionals to ensure they are fit to participate in an ARC field program. ARC is not qualified to provide medical advice. For all other concerns, please consult with ARC staff members or program director(s) – as appropriate.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the field school is to provide students with a well-rounded understanding of archaeological fieldwork practice in the context of the ancient Mediterranean, from how research is designed and planned, to its every-day routines on and off-site, to its ongoing scientific interpretation. As such, this experience aims to nurture student's long-term interest in Mediterranean archaeology, and to allow them to develop the broader skills necessary to work in this and related disciplines, including self-confidence in field data-capture, hypothesis formulation, critical thinking, and teamwork. During the first week, by means of lectures, short lessons, seminars and guided tours, students will be provided with all the information necessary to fully participate in both laboratory and field activities. During the following three weeks of fieldwork, students will conduct excavation and laboratory work during weekdays, while weekends will be dedicated to on and off-site documentation, museum visits and field trips.

More specifically, students will participate in the following activities:

Lectures & lessons: these will be concentrated in the first week and cover the fundamentals of Italian archaeology and history, provide background on the excavation history of Roca Vecchia, and introduce students to the stratigraphic method of excavation and its single-context recording system.

Excavation: students will spend four weeks excavating at Roca Vecchia. The site's stratigraphy is highly variable, which will allow students to gain confidence in digging with every tool available to archaeologists. By working alongside expert trench supervisors, they will learn proper procedures for excavating a diversity of contexts, from large demolishment deposits, to walking surfaces, and standing Bronze Age structures. They will also be taught how to recognize and retrieve all artifacts and ecofacts found on site.

Laboratory: laboratory activities will take place alongside excavation work. Each day, students from the field school and Italian students will be divided into groups: some will work on the excavation, while others will focus on laboratory activities. The groups will be rotated daily, so that by the end of the field season, every student will have experience with both excavation and laboratory work. Most of the finds at Roca Vecchia consist of pottery, which can be hand- or wheel-made, local or imported, plain or decorated. During lab hours, students will thus learn to recognize the different pottery types present at the site. Roca Vecchia has also produced a wide array of other finds, including metal ornaments, charred wood, faunal and human remains. Students will learn how to identify these finds and to clean, catalogue, document and store them.

Documentation: students will learn the different aspects of archaeological documentation, including how to keep an excavation diary, fill-out context sheets, use a level, draw sections, and photograph and draw the contexts that they excavate. During lab work, they will also be taught to catalogue bulk finds and photograph and draw special finds.

Seminars: the research project is multidisciplinary, directed by a group of specialized researchers, who have focused on different aspects of the excavation and/or on specific topics related to the archaeology of the site. During the field season, several of them will be invited to give a more in-depth seminar about their own research to the students: topography, stratigraphy, pottery analysis epigraphy, zooarchaeology, physical anthropology and archaeoethnobotany. This is an opportunity to introduce them to the realities of day-to-day research in the area, and to allow them to hear about the most recent developments there.

Field trips: field trips will take place during weekends. Trips will include: (1) visit to archaeological museums in the region to allow students gain familiarity with the local ancient material culture; (2) visit to archaeological sites and other ongoing archaeological excavations; and (3) sightseeing of some of the regional cities of historical and archaeological interest, including Lecce.

At the completion of the field school, students will be able to:

- Master with confidence all aspects of stratigraphic excavation, at different levels of detail, using a variety of tools (from brushes to trowels, pickaxes, and shovels);
- Independently conduct every standard step for proper single-context sheet recording, including mapping with survey equipment, context description and interpretation, and drawing and photography.
- Know what the proper procedures are for processing, documenting, and storing finds in the lab and how to effectively carry them out.
- Have a solid grasp of the basics of ceramic analysis, found at Roca Vecchia.
- Understand the role of Roca Vecchia within the broader framework of southern Italian archaeology.
- Be able to engage with the theoretical underpinnings of the research at Roca Vecchia, which include migration, culture contact and identity.

Have gained familiarity with the culture of southern Italy and in particular the Puglia region.

LEARNT SKILLS

We are aware and strongly support students who seek employment in the Cultural Resource Management sector – whether with private CRM companies or in government compliance agencies. CRM employers seek to understand the skills students learn at the field school, so listing (and ranking) those should help students secure CRM employment. To that end, we are listing all the skills students will learn during this program. At the end of the field school, students will get a Certificate of Completion, where each skill will be ranked at one of three levels:

- ✓ **Basic:** Can perform the skill/task with some supervision.
- ✓ **Competent:** Can perform the skill/task without any supervision.
- ✓ **Advanced:** Can perform the skill/task and teach others how to do it.

Students will be trained in the following skills:

Skill	Skill Definition
Stratigraphy	Ability to identify, measure and describe stratigraphic layering of a site
Soil Identification	Ability to identify, describe and record different types of soil and depositions
Artifact Identification	Ability to identify archaeological artifacts and ecofacts, from both pre contact and historical context
Artifact Processing	Understand how to assign artifacts to accepted cultural/geological spheres, across space (classification) & time (seriation)
Data Recording	Ability to use printed or digital sheets to document & record field data
Excavations-General Principles	Know how to excavate in cultural or arbitrary layers, document and record all excavation activity
Grid & Trench Layout	Ability to lay excavation grid and generate reliable trench outline for excavations
Photography	Ability to take clear images of various feature, artifact & soil colors at various light and field depth conditions
Artifact Documentation	Ability to measure, record, photographed and classify various artifact types in the lab/post ex setting
Screening	Ability to use general & geological screens to identify, collect and record small scale finds

COURSE SCHEDULE

The archaeological site of Roca Vecchia offers an excellent opportunity to study ancient Italian archaeology and Mediterranean interaction dynamics. For this reason, most of the training in the field school will focus on how local developments in the life of southern Italic communities intersected with the large-scale patterns of Mediterranean exchanges and migration. We will explore, in multiple settings, the ways in which local communities took advantage of their long-distance connections to shape their own social organization; how encounters between people shaped the built environment of Roca Vecchia; how archaeologists have studied these processes; and what we can learn from them to better understand our own present.

TYPICAL WORKDAY

During the first three weeks of excavation, three training seminars are scheduled to provide students with the knowledge necessary to understand the country they are in, the characteristics of archaeological research in the area, the site they will be excavating, and the methodology they will use to carry it out.

Day 1 & 2 of the program

Day	Time/Activity	Length	Comments
Day 1 (Sun)	8:00 pm Welcome Dinner	90 min	At field house
Day 2 (Mon)	09:00 am Breakfast	1 hour	At field house
	12:30 pm Lunch	1 hour	At field house
	3:00 pm Travel to site	3 hours	Presentation of excavation activity
	4:30 pm coffee break	30 min	At site
	6:00 pm Return to field house	30 min	Using project vehicles
	8:30 pm Dinner	1 hour	At field house

Day 3 & Forward

Time/Activity	Length	Comments
6:50 am Departure to site	10 min	Using project vehicles
7:00 am Breakfast	30 min	At the site
7:30 am Start excavation	8 hours	Two 15 minutes coffee break, one 45 minutes lunch break
11:30 am lunch break	30 min	
4:00 pm Finds processing	60 min	Documentation review and storage organization
5:10 pm Back to field house	10 min	Using project vehicles
8:00 pm Dinner	60 min	At field house

Seminars will take place during the workdays in the morning or in the afternoon, after the excavation activities

Monday through Friday are full days of excavation, while Saturday morning will be dedicated to field trips. Saturday afternoons and Sundays will be devoted to-sightseeing and resting.

Course structure may be subject to change upon directors' discretion.

PLEASE NOTE:

- Saturday dinner, Sunday lunch and dinner are not provided by the project.
- In case of rainy days, lectures and lab work will be performed.
- Three field trips are planned: Torre Guaceto State Natural Reserve and Marine Protected Area, Castromediano Archaeological Museum (Lecce) and MARta - National Archaeological Museum of Taranto¹.

¹ The excursion schedule may be subject to change based on logistical needs, weather conditions, or site availability.

- Please send us your detailed travel plan as soon as possible (flight number from where and time of arrival, train number and time of arrival in Lecce and departure from Lecce) to better organize all your transfers of arrival and return.

Please write to project director if there is any problem or if you need further information or questions

ACADEMIC GRADING MATRIX

Students will be graded based on their work as follows.

- 70% participation: active involvement in all activities fostered by the field school, both onsite and offsite.
- 30% field notebook: all students will be asked to keep a journal of their excavation activities, thoughts, and discoveries.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

The required minimum attendance for the successful completion of the field school is 85% of the course hours. Any significant delay or early departure from an activity will be calculated as an absence from the activity. An acceptable number of absences for medical or other personal reason will not be considered if the student catches up on the field school study plan through additional readings, homework or tutorials with program staff members.

PREREQUISITES

According to the Italian Soprintendenza (National Heritage Authority) rules, participants must provide the following documentation:

1. A letter from your physician stating that your health permits you to participate in all school activities, including excavations.
2. Certificate that you had an obligatory tetanus vaccination or up-to-date booster.

There are no academic prerequisites for this field school. This is hands-on, experiential learning and students will study on-site how to conduct archaeological research. Fieldwork involves physical work and exposure to the elements and thus requires a measure of understanding that this will not be the typical university learning environment. You will have to work outdoors and will get sweaty and tired. Students are required to come equipped with sufficient excitement and adequate understanding that field work requires real, hard work, in the sun and wind. The work requires patience, discipline, and attention to detail.

PROGRAM ETIQUETTE

This project is carried out by an international team of researchers, many of whom are Italian. Italian culture is very hospitable but somewhat different from American culture. Students are expected to be respectful to local dress codes, open to share new experiences with local students and staff and adapt to the different rhythms of southern Italian life. In particular, we enjoy later and longer dinner times, where we often engage in lively conversation.

EQUIPMENT LIST

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| ▪ Steel-toed boots | ▪ Sunscreen (high protection) |
| ▪ Food supplements (for example magnesium, potassium...) | ▪ Sunglasses |
| ▪ Appropriate clothing for excavation (shirts, light sturdy pants) | ▪ Rain jacket |
| ▪ Hat or handkerchief to protect from the sun | ▪ A notebook, pen, pencils, and an eraser |
| ▪ Work gloves if you use them | ▪ Hiking boots or sturdy sneakers for sightseeing |
| | ▪ Insect repellent |

- Bathing suit if you want to enjoy the swimming pool or the sea
- Prescription medication for the duration of the field school – if you need any

TRAVEL & MEETING POINT/TIME

We suggest you hold purchasing your airline ticket until six (6) weeks prior to departure date. Natural disasters, political changes, weather conditions and a range of other factors may require the cancelation of a program. The ARC typically takes a close look at local conditions 6-7 weeks prior to program beginning and makes a Go/No Go decision by then. Such time frame still allows for the purchase of deeply discounted airline tickets while protecting students from potential loss of airline ticket costs if ARC is forced to cancel a program.

Students will be met on the first day of the field school (Sunday), 5:00pm at the [Lecce Chamber of Commerce/Camera di Commercio di Lecce](#) ([Viale Gallipoli 39, 73100 Lecce, Italy](#))(Fig 1). The building is a six minutes' walk from Lecce main train station (Fig 2).



Figure 1: Main entrance to the Lecce Chamber of Commerce/Camera di Commercio di Lecce

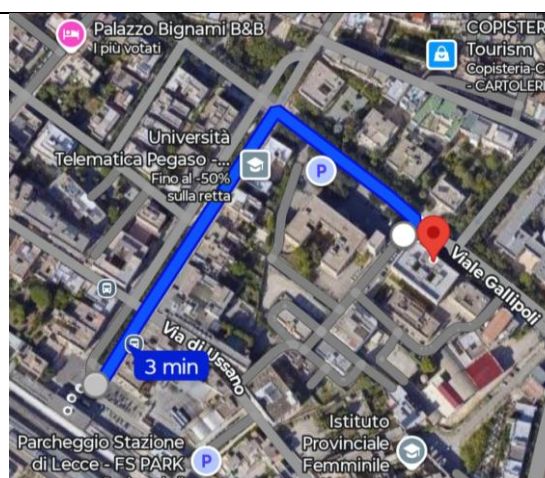


Figure 2: The walking path from Lecce train station to meeting point

Lecce is in the Apulia Region of southern Italy – the heel of the Italian boot. It can be reached by flights to Bari (BRI) or by train from Rome (travel time is approximately 6 hours).

Students & staff will stay at a set of apartments located at [Hotel Belvedere](#) in Torre dell'Orso.

If you missed your connection or your flight is delayed, please call, text or email the project director immediately. A local emergency cell phone number will be provided to all enrolled students.

VISA REQUIREMENTS

There are no special visa requirements for American citizens travelling to Italy, as long as they do not stay longer than 3 months. Passport's expiration date should exceed the stay by at least 3 months.

Citizens of other countries are asked to check the Italian Embassy website page at their home country for specific visa requirements.

MEALS & ACCOMMODATION

Students will be accommodated at [Hotel Belvedere](#) in Torre dell'Orso. Torre dell'Orso is a charming town in the region of Melendugno (Lecce), located on the Adriatic coast of Salento, not far from the archaeological site of Roca Vecchia. Rooms are comfortable and bright and

equipped with single and double beds, wardrobes, chairs, wi-fi, TV and air conditioning. On the terrace of the structure there is a swimming pool overlooking the Bay of Torre dell'Orso.

Breakfast and dinner are provided by the hotel and students will travel with project vehicles. Dinner is based on Italian cuisine and includes a daily choice of a first and a second between two alternatives that change daily plus fruit or dessert. Water is included but other drinks are not paid by the program. Students with special diets or food allergies must communicate directly with program staff to explore the possibility of accommodating their diet in this position.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

International dialing code: +39

Money/Banks/Credit Cards: Italy's currency is the Euro. Banks can be found located in the central square of Torre dell'Orso, 15 minutes' walk from our accommodation. Most shops/supermarkets accept major credit cards (with the exception of American Express, which is not always accepted). However, credit cards are not commonly used for small purchases in Italy and students should carry small amount of cash for such purchases (for example coffee at a café).

ATM Availability: ATMs can be found in any town in our vicinity and at some gas stations.

Local Language: Italian. Our field school is multi-lingual: we speak French, Italian and English.

Measure units: degree Celsius (°C), meter (m.), gram (gr.), liter (l)

ACADEMIC CREDITS & TRANSCRIPT (ARC text – do not change)

Attending students will be awarded 4 semester credit units (equivalent to 6 quarter credit units). Students will receive a letter grade for attending this field school based on the assessment matrix (above). This program provides a minimum of 80 direct instructional hours. Students are encouraged to discuss the transferability of credit units with faculty and the registrar at their home institutions prior to attending this program.

Students will be able to access their transcripts through our School of Record – Culver-Stockton College. C-SC has authorized the National Student Clearinghouse to provide enrollment and degree verification (at <https://tsorder.studentclearinghouse.org/school/select>). Upon completion of a program, students will get an email from C-SC with a student ID that may be used to retrieve transcripts. The first set of transcripts will be provided at no cost; additional transcripts may require payment. If you have questions about ordering a transcript, contact the C-SC office of the registrar at registrar@culver.edu.

REQUIRED READINGS

Anna Maria Bietti Sestieri (2020). Peninsular Italy, in H. Fokkens, A. Harding (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of The European Bronze Age*. Oxford University Press.

DeGrazia, D. (2017). The Definition of Death. In *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, ed. E.N. Zalta. Stanford: Stanford University. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/death-definition/>

de Tienda Palop, L., Currás, B.X. (2019). The Dignity of the Dead: Ethical Reflections on the Archaeology of Human Remains. In: Squires, K., Errickson, D., Márquez-Grant, N. (eds). *Ethical Approaches to Human Remains*. Springer, Cham. Pp. 19-37. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-32926-6_2

T. Scarano (2012). *Roca I. Le fortificazioni della media età del Bronzo. Strutture, contesti, materiali* (with abridged English summary). Foggia.

T. Scarano, G. Maggiulli (2014). *The golden sun discs from Roca (Lecce, Italy): archaeological and cultural context*, in: H.H. Meller, R. Risch, E. Pernicka (eds.), *Metals of power. Early gold and silver. 6th Archaeological Conference of Central Germany, October 17-19, 2013, in Halle (Saale)*, 11/I-II 2014 Tagungen des Landesmuseums für Vorgeschichte. Pp. 505-525.

I. Spada, F. Cesaria, F. Chionna, M. Cucinelli, T. Scarano (2016). *The Virtual Reconstruction of Torre Guaceto Landscape (Brindisi, Italy)*, *Conservation Science in Cultural Heritage*. Vol. 16, pp. 277-294.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

M. Pacciarelli, A. Crispino, T. Scarano, *The transition between Copper and Bronze Ages in Southern Italy and Sicily*, in: H.H. Meller, R. Risch, R. Jung, H. W. Arz (eds.), *2200 BC - Ein Klimasturz als Ursache für den Zerfall der alten Welt? | 2200 BC - A climatic breakdown as a cause for the collapse of the old world? Proceedings of the 7th Archaeological Congress of Central Germany of the State Office of Heritage Management and Archaeology Saxony-Anhalt (LDA), October 23-26, 2014, in Halle (Saale)*, 12/I-II 2015 Tagungen des Landesmuseums für Vorgeschichte Halle (Halle 2015), pp. 253-281.

A. Raveane, L. Molinaro, S. Aneli, M. R. Capodiferro, L. De Gennaro, L. Ongaro, N. Rambaldi Migliore, S. Soffiati, T. Scarano, A. Torroni, A. Achilli, M. Ventura, L. Pagani, C. Capelli, A. Olivieria, F. Bertolini, O. Semino, F. Montinaro, *Assessing temporal and geographic contacts across the Adriatic Sea through the analysis of genome-wide data from Southern Italy*, *Genomics* 114 (2022) 110405.

G. Mastronuzzi, M. Milella, A. Piscitelli, O. Simone, G. Quarta, T. Scarano, L. Calcagnile, I. Spada, *Landscape analysis in Torre Guaceto area (Brindisi) aimed to the reconstruction of the Late Holocene sea level curve*, *Geografia Fisica e Dinamica Quaternaria* 41 2018, 65-79.

F. Cesaria, T. Scarano, M. Cucinelli, G. De Prezzo, Spisso, N., I. Spada *Interactive Archaeological Storytelling: Using Immersive Technologies to Visit the Ancient Site of Roca Vecchia (Lecce, ITA)*. In: L. De Paolis, P. Bourdot (eds) *Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, and Computer Graphics. AVR 2020. Lecture Notes in Computer Science 2020*, vol 12243, pp. 32-52. Springer, Cham.

T. Scarano, *Refuge or dwelling place? The Middle Bronze Age fortification walls of Roca (Lecce): spatial and functional analysis of Postern C*, *Rivista di Scienze Preistoriche* LXI 2011, pp. 95-122.

Jung, R., Guglielmino, R., Iacono, F. and Mommsen, H. (2021) *Neutron Activation Analysis of Aegean and Aegeanising Ceramics from Roca Vecchia and the Circulation of Pottery in Southern Italy*, in: R. Jung (ed.), *Punta Zambrone I. 1200 BCE-A time of breakdown, a time of progress in Southern Italy and Greece*, OAW, pp. 459-490.

Guglielmino, R. 2006, *Roca Vecchia (Lecce): New Evidence for Aegean Contacts with Apulia During the Late Bronze Age*, *Accordia Research Papers* 10: 87-102.