Excavation in the territory of Metaponto 1976
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Cover: A hydria from the tomb of a youthful Metapontine athlete, from the rural cemetery at Saldone. The vase, which shows “Zeus in pursuit of the nymph Aigina,” was painted about 440 B.C. by the Pisticci Painter, “the first Italiote artist.” Height: 32 cm. (Photograph by Margaret Harman.)
The Rural Population

The goal of The University of Texas at Austin's archaeological excavation in Southern Italy is to learn about the rural population—their homes, fields, industries, places of worship, and cemeteries—in the period when Greek and Roman civilizations transformed the area. This was a thousand year period, roughly speaking, from 600 B.C. to 400 A.D. It was a period which encompassed the formation of much of the Western intellectual and artistic tradition, which saw the growth of great cities like Taras, Metaponto, and Rome, where before had been only scattered villages of farmers and herdsmen.

For over a century, since the science of archaeology came into being, excavators have been revealing the life of these cities, where the artists and thinkers and their patrons made their homes. What of the villages and farms, the countryside around? The rural population was a mute, but certainly was not a passive witness of the opulent and sophisticated life of the city. What do we know about the ninety percent of the population of the classical world which lived outside the walls of the city, that sweated to support the brilliant urban culture?

The truth is we know next to nothing about it. Ancient writers, with their elite audience in mind, reveal little about real farmers, peasants and slaves and the life they led. It is only in recent years that classical archaeologists have interested themselves in the problem. This parallels a growing interest in other areas of archaeology in how ordinary people lived, and in social relationships. We can be proud that the University of Texas since 1974 has taken a leading role in bringing back to life the Greek and Roman farmer. Our work is helping to clarify the relationship between territory and city. A beginning has been made.

The University has demonstrated, in the work of such as Walter Prescott Webb and J. Frank Dobie, a deep commitment to the study of frontier populations. The University's tradition in classical archaeology and classical studies is long and distinguished. In the excavation at Metaponto, they are united.

Figure 1—Rescue excavation of the rural cemetery at Sakhone, left to right, workers Grieco, Matera, Gallitelli, the Director, Russo, Draftsman Bonner, Gain (in the background), MacGregor (hands on hips), UT Graduate Student Andrews, the landowner gesturing, UT Undergraduate Mariah Fayne.
Figure 2—The excavation of a child's grave, Tomb 4 at the Saldone cemetery, directed by Professor Gais, with the assistance of workers Grieco and Matera, interested on lookers.

**Metaponto**

The site chosen by the University is ideal for this investigation. Metaponto, founded about 650 B.C., was among the first colonial sites in the world’s first organized colonial movement, sent out from land-hungry Greece. By 500 B.C., the coasts of Southern Italy and Sicily had been claimed by prosperous new cities. The settlers brought a superior culture to an underdeveloped land. With them began the gradual transformation which produced a cosmopolitan Rome, and what we call Greco-Roman civilization. There is good reason to believe that, especially in Southern Italy, the rural population played an important role in the civilizing process. It was in the territory of Metaponto, and other colonies, that the initial contact and fusion of Greek and indigenous Italic populations began.
From a technical point of view, the territory of Metaponto is particularly well suited to an archaeological investigation of the rural population. From the end of the classical period, about 400 A.D., until the land reclamation projects of forty years ago, the area was practically abandoned, a swampland and breeding ground for malaria-carrying mosquitoes. Thus the ancient farms and rural settlements, though they have suffered initial destruction and decay over the ages, have been almost untouched by man, until this generation.

Through the pioneering efforts of the Superintendent of Antiquities for Basilicata, Professor Dinu Adamesteau, aerial photography has revealed the location of over three hundred farms in the territory of Metaponto. Even more surprising was the discovery of the parallel country lanes which divided the homesteads of the earliest colonists. These go back to the years around 575 B.C. The system of regular and equally divided plots (reflecting the regular division of lots inside the city of Metaponto) was the earliest ancestor of the system employed some twenty-five hundred years later, in the western United States. Nowhere else in the classical world is it possible to gain such a complete picture of territory surrounding an ancient city. There is good reason to worry, however, that this ideal situation will not remain so for long. Massive industrial development programmed for the coast of Italy, precisely at Metaponto and in the archaeological area, within a decade would obliterate this unique evidence. It would transform completely the one area in the world which for over twenty-five hundred years has maintained its rural landscape and character, and our only recently discovered link with our rural past and its culture.

Figure 3—The contents of the tomb in Figure 2: a black-glazed, high quality, local imitation of an Athenian lekythos (oil bottle), and a black-glazed pyxis (box).
Since 1974 The University of Texas, in close association with the Superintendency of Antiquities for Basilicata, has excavated a site known as Pizzica-Pantunello (originally San Nicola) on the banks of the Basento River which flanks the territory of Metaponto. The site, which occupies a rise of ground about three kilometers from the city walls, has grown in importance with each excavation season. It now encompasses a ceramic factory of the late Roman Republican period, and a Greek rural sanctuary which flourished from the mid-sixth century B.C., to the end of the fourth century B.C.

Figure 4—The tomb of an adult (Tomb 8, the Saldone cemetery) with the grave offerings, a lekane (large two-handled vase) and a skyphos cup in place at the feet of the skeleton.
Rural Cemetery at Saldone

This year in addition to the work at Pizzica, the University team was invited to undertake an emergency rescue excavation in a small rural necropolis or cemetery on the eastern side of the territory, in the valley of the Bradano River. The area is known as Saldone, or San Salvatore.

On June 14, the assistant to the Superintendent, Antonio Indice, noted some fragments of ancient pottery in a field which was being leveled by a very large bulldozer for conversion to cropland. A small team of workmen, an archaeologist, and students were on the site the next day. The first tomb came to light almost immediately. Two nuclei of tombs were eventually identified and meticulously avoided by the bulldozer operator, to whom we owe a special debt. Sixteen tombs were excavated in nine days. Half of these had been robbed very recently—within the lifetime of a Marlboro cigarette filter (we found this evidence in all the robbed tombs). The clandestine diggers, known by archaeologists as the “night shift,” are unusually active, organized, and daring in this area. (They vie with the industrialization to block the archaeological investigation of the area. Most of the stolen vases reach the art market devoid of many of the associations that would give them lasting human value.)

The “night shift” had discovered the northern nucleus. Only one tomb, that of a young child, with a terracotta cover in the shape of a cradle, was untouched (figure 2). It contained a lekythos or oil bottle of the first half of the fifth century B.C., and a small pyxis or covered box (figure 3). Fortunately the *clandestini* had missed the southern nucleus completely. Here six tombs cluster together. Four belonged to infants and were covered with a single tile. The grave offerings which are generally modest consist of black glaze pottery of the mid-fifth century B.C. date. One of these tombs contained miniature vases; another, a bronze strigil, or scraper, used by Greek athletes to clean their bodies after a workout.

The tomb of an adult, probably a female (fig. 4) was exhumed on the north side of the cluster, while the grave of a youthful male came to light on the southern extreme. These tombs were covered with two or three heavy limestone slabs.
Figure 6—The contents of the Tomb in figure 5, after cleaning and restoration by UT Graduate Student Karen Irion (See also front cover). The hydria measures 32 cms. high.

The Tomb of the Young Athlete

The tomb on the south was discovered a few hours before sunset. Below the slabs appeared the rim of a cup with figural decoration. After two hours of feverish work with trowel and brush, the tomb was completely uncovered revealing (fig. 5) the boy's skeleton. At his feet, a hydria or water pitcher and two cups. Bronze strigils rested beside his head and with the vases. The hydria is of extraordinary interest. After cleaning and restoration (fig. 6 and 7 and the cover), it was recognized as a masterpiece of a vase painter known as the Pisticci Painter, the first painter of vases in the red-figure style in Southern Italy. It was painted sometime in the decade 440-430 B.C. The world authority on South Italian vases, Professor A.D. Trendall, believes that the Pisticci painter was an immigrant from Athens, and indeed the work compares closely, not only in style and subject matter, but also in quality with contemporary Attic work.
The central figure (figure 7) is Zeus with his thunderbolt, in amorous pursuit of the nymph Aigina. Zeus's approach to young ladies, as one scholar has observed, is indistinguishable from his stance as the implacable foe of the Giants. It was a popular subject in Athens at this time and in the previous generation, but this was the first and last appearance in South Italy.

Even more obviously Athenian in inspiration are the owl cups, but here as in the case of the hydria, the color of the clay, a soft yellow red, is the decisive evidence that the vases were produced in Southern Italy, not in Athens. A number of vases by the Pisticci Painter are known in collections and museums around the world, but this group—the owl cups may be by him also—is one of the very few which has been scientifically excavated and recorded. It ranks as one of the most important discoveries of an early South Italian vase from a single tomb, by a painter who can rightly be known as "the founder" of the South Italian tradition.

Figure 7—A detail of the hydria in Figure 6 (see also front cover) which represents "Zeus with his thunderbolt in pursuit of the nymph Aigina". It was painted about 440 B.C. by the Pisticci Painter.
A Farm Family's Cemetery

On a slope near the tombs, there is evidence of a farmhouse, and there were probably others nearby. This was undoubtedly a family burying ground, much like those of the early plantations and farms in this country. These tombs can give us a more intimate knowledge of their occupants than the big, impersonal cemeteries of the city.

Strigils or scrapers were found in two of the tombs of this small cemetery. In the infant tomb they are the indication of the frustrated hopes and ambitions of the parents who desired their children to become athletes. In the tomb of the boy athlete, the choice of the amorous scene on the hydria may anticipate, in a similar way, a later stage of a male's life.

The occupants of the little cemetery are probably members of a single farm family—a mother who has died about the same time as her young children, and a son who survived them about ten years. Further study will help to clarify the chronology and relationships of these last remains of a family.

Though the cemetery has produced some fine artifacts, far more important is the precious evidence, saved by the University excavators from total destruction by clandestine excavators and the bulldozer, of the context and the associations of the vases, and the light they will shed on the social and economic situation of the Metapontine farm family at the height of the classical period.
Pizzica–Archaic Greek, Rural Sanctuary Beside a Modern Irrigation Canal

When excavation began on the site, Pizzica-Pantanello, where the Italian authorities generously invited the University to excavate, there were only a few indications, such as rooftiles, and ancient pottery on the ground, to indicate that there was probably an ancient settlement on the hilltop. In the course of the first trial season in 1974, thanks to the expertise of our foreman Giuseppe di Taranto, a second area of ancient occupation was revealed at the foot of the hill beside a modern canal. The presence of votive objects indicated that there might be a sanctuary of sixth century B.C. date in the area. In 1975, after several unsuccessful probes, the area of the sanctuary was located on the north bank of the canal, to the east of the earliest finds of votive objects.

In 1976, despite serious problems with water seepage, a part of the sanctuary—a well-built fieldstone foundation, nearly fifteen meters in length—came to light. Confirming earlier assumptions that a structure of architectural importance lay under the meter deep clay of the canal bank, a fine limestone anta capital (figure 8) of late sixth or early fifth century B.C. date was discovered at the west extremity of the wall. This date (proposed by Professor Lucy Shoe Meritt) corresponds well with the date of the ceramic material, consisting of innumerable "Ionic" cups, skyphoid cups, and large plates, which covered the extensive fieldstone pavement to the north and south of the foundation (figure 9).
At least three successive buildings occupied the site. There is now strong evidence that the area beside this canal maintained its religious character till the late fourth or early third century B.C. In the fifth century a structure built from large squared blocks of conglomerate replaced the archaic building, where walls of mudbrick probably rose over the fieldstone foundation. Finds from the latest phase of the sanctuary include many terracotta votive figurines (figure 10A).

Of greater interest was the evidence of at least two stone pavements preceding the late sixth century terrace. Here excavation was exceedingly difficult, since the present water table corresponds exactly with the late sixth century level. Excavation of the earlier levels was limited to hurried probes, as the walls of the trench turned to soupy mud almost immediately. Ceramic material and terracotta votive figurines (figure 10B) push the date of the sacred area back towards the middle of the sixth century B.C.

Next year, hopefully, it will be possible to employ a “well point” pumping system to keep the area dry while the earlier levels are excavated. There is every indication that early archaic levels have been little disturbed. Continued excavation in this area will reveal much about the worship of the rural population of Metaponto in the period just after the foundation of the city, its relationship to that of the city, and just possibly its links to that of the pre-Greek indigenous population.

There is, as yet, no unequivocal clue to the identity of the divinity worshipped here, nor anything to exclude the possibility that it might be the shrine of Artemis on the banks of the Basento, mentioned in Bacchylides’ victory ode for a youthful Metapontine athlete.

Figure 11. - Foreman Di Taranto, and qualified worker Gallitelli reopen 1975 trenches in the canal area. In the background our most frequent and numerous visitors.

Figure 12. - Excavation of a deposit of pottery over clay pits just to the north of the sanctuary area. Graduate student Jack Irion supervised the crew of Bacciani, Plati, Matera, and Russo.
Excavation of the hilltop site at Pizzica was to be limited to clarifying the tile kiln and rustic villa of Roman Republican date, unearthed last year. This it did, but several new discoveries added significantly to the picture of this rural industrial center.

The tile kiln (figure 13 and back cover) is one of the best preserved and most carefully constructed examples ever found in Italy. Soundings in and around it indicate that it, unlike most kilns which are abandoned after a relatively short lifetime, may have been in use for a century or more, and was remodeled at least once.

The reconstruction (back cover), the work of the excavation's skilled architect, Bruno Perini, is based firmly on the extensive remains. Only the upper cylindrical structure, with its domed roof, is conjectural. A permanent structure to contain the tiles or heavy coarse ware vases manufactured here was suggested, in view of the very clear evidence of an entrance to this area from the north. This door connected the kiln to the rustic villa, or warehouses and work area to the north (figure 14), which, as our excavation this year showed, was planned as a single unit with the kiln—kilns, in fact!

Just to the south of the tile kiln, a small pottery kiln in a near perfect state of preservation came to light. The little kiln bears out the assumptions made about the form of its larger sister. Here, in all likelihood, was manufactured the characteristic grey pottery of the Roman Republican period at Meta-ponto, as large quantities of its were found nearby in a deposit overlying abandoned clay pits.

In the minds of the Greeks and Romans, malfunctions of the kiln, such as too hot a fire resulting in the destruction of the potter's work, were the work of evil demons. The ceramic manufacturers therefore required divine or magical assistance to protect the kiln during firing. The practice of setting up a phallic image of the God Hermes beside the kiln is document ed in Greek vase paintings of pottery workshops, but before this year no ancient kiln had been found with this insurance against disaster.

After the excavation season had closed, a protective roof was placed over the two kilns. This was immediately put to the test by the torrential rains of early August. It just might be that the kiln was also protected by the miraculous power (undiminished after two thousand years) of the stelae (figure 15) which came to light, miraculously, thanks to the rain.

All the aspects of the hilltop site—kilns, warehouse and work area, clay pits, pottery deposits, and stelae—combine to provide a uniquely complete picture of an ancient ceramic industry.
Italian Colleagues

Much of the credit for the success of the excavation, as in the past, is due to our hosts, and, above all, to the Superintendent of Antiquities for Basilicata, Professor Dino Adamesteanu. His moral and material support of the University's efforts have earned him our deepest gratitude. For giving true meaning to the term "international collaboration" we are indebted to Dottoressa Elena Lattanzi, the Vice-Superintendent and Directress of the National Museum at Matera, to Antonio Indice, the Assistant to the Superintendent, Aldo La Capra, the Photographer and Antonio Paolucci, the Surveyor of the Superintendenty. All made valuable contributions to the project. To the Ente Irrigazione of Bari, and Ing. Dedone we wish to express our thanks for hospitality over the years at Pizzica.
The excavations' technical staff this year was unusually talented. It included Texas artist Robin Bonner, who drew tombs and countless pottery profiles. Architect Bruno Perini, whose major responsibility was the fine and accurate reconstruction of the kiln complex, and Anahuca Marini, Draftsman, who, as last year, was responsible for the sections and the detailed plans of the canal site.

Professor Ruth Gais, of Syracuse University, returned to Metaponto for a second year of excavation. She acted as assistant field director and was in charge of much of the excavation at Saldone.

Margaret Harman, a graduate student in art, made most of the fine photographs of the site and of objects.

Our team of professional workers, led by foreman Giuseppe Di Taranto, consisted of: Leonardo Bacciani, Alfredo Gallitelli, Alfredo Grieco, Vincenzo Matera, Cosimo Russo, Raffaele D’Ascanio, Nunzio Di Pierro, Santino Plati, Mimmino, and Giuseppe Santorsola. Di Taranto, Gallitelli, and Grieco, who have worked since the first year, 1974, at Pizzica, deserve special credit for their contribution in putting the site on the archaeological map of the territory.

Volunteers provided valuable assistance in 1976: Professor James MacGregor in the pottery shed and the field; Giles Chabannes with roof tiles.

The excavation owes much to the efforts of Dean Stanley Werbow and to the unselfish devotion of members of the Classics Department staff, to Professor Galinsky, the Chairman, Leoda Anderson, Marsha Pehrson, and Peggy White, and to student volunteer Don Settle.

*Figure 14—Reconstruction of the tile factory of the Roman Republican era. The kilns seen in figure 13 appear in the lower right corner of the drawing. The architect in charge was Bruno Perini.*
Student Participation

The excavation is an integral part of the University's graduate program in Classical Archaeology (which because of it, and the University's fine Classical Archaeological library, has unusual potential for growth). It provides students with an opportunity—one becoming ever rarer in these times—for firsthand experience in the field, and a chance to do research on materials excavated by them, in the classroom. A course, CC 682—Field Archaeology, carries three or six credit hours. Enrolled in 1976, and acting as trench supervisors, were Classics graduate students Susan Andrews and Jack Irion. Art History graduate student Nancy Jircik, a veteran of the 1975 campaign, took charge of the pottery shed, which this year, thanks to the generosity of the Superintendent, was magnificently accommodated in a branch of the Museum at Casa Teresa. Mrs. Jircik was ably assisted by U.T. undergraduate Mariah Payne, who earned three credit hours in the undergraduate field archaeology course, CC 323. The restoration of pottery finds was performed at Casa Teresa by Classics graduate student Karen Irion.

The students began projects on special aspects of the excavation, such as the typology and chronology of roof tiles (Susan Andrews) which they are following up in written reports, as a part of an excavation-oriented seminar in Austin, CC 680A. Thus the students are involved, at least for part of their graduate careers, with topics that are in the forefront of research in their field. They have the opportunity to make valuable contributions and begin their serious, scholarly careers before they receive their degrees.
Donors

The excavation this year was made financially possible by grants from the University: from the President, the University Research Institute, and the Dean of the College of Humanities. A substantial part of the budget was provided by generous gifts of private donors in Texas. Support from the private sector was the margin of excellence. Our donors kept us in the field twice as long as we would otherwise have been possible. The nature of discovery in archaeology is such that a disproportionately large share of the "finds" came at the end of the season. It should be added that the University's excavation at Metaponto is one of the very few American excavations in classical lands this year, and in terms of results, one of the most productive. Our donors can feel especially proud of these results. Our debt to them is acknowledged individually on the inside cover.

We are especially grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Ralph S. O'Connor, for their continued and very generous support of the excavation.

Exhibition and Symposium in Austin, Fall 1977

Professor Adamesteanu has generously offered to loan the University a selection of art and artifacts excavated in the Territory, including many of the more important objects found by the University. An Exhibition is planned for donors and interested public for the late autumn of 1977. This would be the first such loan of recently excavated materials from the Mediterranean in a very long time, and would therefore be of international significance.

In conjunction with the Exhibition, a Symposium on the theme "The Rural Population of Classical Italy" is being projected with the participation of internationally renowned experts, including Professor Adamesteanu. If we cannot take our public to Italy, we can bring the excavation through its most significant results and personalities to Texas.

Plans for 1977

1977 will be a very important year for the project. The first priority in excavation will be to complete the excavation of the archaic sanctuary at Pizzica. This will be a costly effort because of the technology required, but it will be repaid with a unique insight into the worship of the rural population in antiquity. The University has been invited to continue the excavation of the Saldone cemeteries, and the Greek farmhouse nearby. The excavation of a dwelling from the Greek period is necessary to complete the picture of the territory of Metaponto in classical times.
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Back cover: Reconstruction of the Roman tile kiln at Pizzica
(Bruno Perini, architect)

Booklet design by Tom Cunningham