RES CLASSICAE

THE UMBC ANCIENT STUDIES DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER

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Executive Editor: David Rosenbloom

FROM THE CHAIR

David Rosenbloom

The UMBC Ancient Studies Department has joined other departments in the United States that focus on the ancient world in publishing its newsletter after the end of the spring semester for a lack of time during the teaching terms. There was a time when we could publish two issues a year; that time is now a distant memory. In addition to my duties as Chair and teaching course load of five courses in 2025-2026, including a new course on the Athenian Empire, I began serving a one-year term as President of the Classical Association of the Atlantic States in January 2026. This is a full-time job in itself. I enjoy the work and my colleagues in CAAS and look forward to making the organization more effective and enjoyable for its members in my time as President. UMBC is in the process of creating a new strategic plan and the Provost has convened a panel to re-envision UMBC's General Education Program. I am also a member of the Core Faculty Committee for Reenvisioning the General Education Program. As you know, the General Education Program is critical to the Ancient Studies Department and vice-versa, so I was more than happy to have a spot on this five-year committee; but the workload is high during the academic year and continues through the summer.

Detail from a 3rd or 4th century CE Roman mosaic from Ammaedara showing Sicilian Eryx as "Erycos." The mosaic may depics islands and island cities connected to Venus as houses of worship (Cyprus, Paphos, Idalion,) as venues for love affairs remembered in myth (Scyros, Knossos, Naxos, Rhodes), or as victims of the goddess' vengeance (Lemnos). Bardo Museum, Tunis.

The Ancient Studies Department has much to celebrate since the last issue. Dr. Michael Lane was named Elizabeth A. Whitehead Distinguished Scholar at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens for 2026-2027. This is a highly prestigious award, and Dr. Lane richly deserves it. Dr. Molly Jones-Lewis won the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Excellence in Teaching Award in 2025; her presentation at the 2025 Annual Meeting of the Classical Association of the Atlantic States, "How to Spin a Thread: Experimental Research in Greek and Roman Wool Processing" won a best paper award in the post-Ph.D. category. In 2026, Prof. Timothy Phin was promoted to Teaching Professor, the highest rank on the teaching track. Robert Le Barry (ANCS and VART, 2025), turned down a Fulbright Fellowship to enter the graduate program in Classical Archaeology at the University of Oxford, where he is investigating Neopalatial social identity in the Kairatos River Valley in Crete as his M.Phil. thesis topic. Ancient Studies majors were offered Fulbright Fellowships in 2023, 2024, and 2025. The ANCS Council of Majors won the 2026 Creativity Award from the Student Government Association.

Ancient Studies faculty continue to be productive. Dr. Michael Lane delivered a paper, "Evidence of Land Improvement and Water Management in Linear B: A Comparison with Recent Archaeological Discoveries," at the 16th Colloquium on Mycenaean Studies in Madrid in September 2025. Dr. Melissa Kutner's book chapter, "Numeracy," in J. Coogan, J. Howley, and C. Moss eds., *Writing, Enslavement, and Power in the Roman Mediterranean, 100 BCE-300 CE*, was published by Oxford University Press in 2025. Another chapter, "Slavery, School Texts, and Roman Accountants: Gaps and Contexts," in Senthil Babu D. and Roy Wagner eds., *Normative Texts and Occupational Practices –Towards New Social Histories of Mathematics*," will

be published by Springer as an open-access volume in August 2026. Dr. Kutner also presented an invited lecture at the University of Pennsylvania in April 2025, "Enslavement, Education, and Roman Accounting." In addition to giving invited lectures at Princeton University, Nankai, and Fudan Universities in China, Dr. Randolph Ford has been exceptionally productive in expanding the Ancient Studies curriculum. To date, he has added four new courses to the catalogue: ANCS 357, "Late Antiquity and the Fall of Rome"; ANCS 358, "Perilous Frontiers of China and Rome"; ANCS 359, "The Early Middle Ages"; ANCS 360, "Empires of the Silk Road." A fifth course, ANCS 460, "Roman Imperialism," awaits approval by the Undergraduate Council and the Senate. Randoph served as an expert on Icelandic history, literature for Smithsonian Journeys to Reykjavik and Aukureyri in May 2025; he has been invited to perform the role again. In addition to her teaching load of seven sections, Dr. Molly Jones-Lewis is a member of the Senate Executive Committee and has found time to participate in two performances of the UMBC Collegium faculty recorder ensemble, read the Book of John with a UMBC student, give a podcast on "Cannabis in the Ancient Mediterranean," and to deliver lectures on a wide range of subjects to a variety of audiences, including, among others, "The *Psylloi* in Pliny the Elder" (Classical Association of New England) and "Roman Wool-working, and Experimental Archaeology" (Medieval Academy of America). She also co-led study tours of Turkey in 2025 with Drs. Kutner and Ford and of Sicily with me in 2026. Prof. Phin has established himself as an expert on all matters AI, especially ethics and pedagogy, and serves on a Senate Committee devoted to AI and has conducted a number of workshops, all while teaching a 12 sections over the course of the academic year, winter, and summer in 2025.

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I hope you enjoy this issue of *Res Classicae*. Dr. Molly Jones-Lewis takes us to Priene and Miletos on the south-central coast of Turkey and rhapsodizes on these towns' theaters and Miletos' asphodel fields, which have strong associations with the underworld. Dr. Michael Lane, who in summer 2025 brought UMBC students to Greece once again to be part of his growing international excavational team at Aghia Marina Pyrghos, writes about the adventitious discovery of an amphora, which remarkably survived unscathed from a fire and the collapse of the second story and roof upon it, only to have its rim broken off later when a trash pit was dug out of the ruins. The collapsed second story which the pot eluded now occupies the same level as a large stucco courtyard that served as a forecourt to a building on the summit of Aghia Marina Purghos. This presents the possibility that beneath this later structure may lie an Early Helladic II "monumental building" (ca. 2500 BCE)— a palace? One of the UMBC students who worked on Trench 9 last summer, 2025 History major Daniel Saenz writes thoughtfully about the experience of the excavations and living in the village of Kokkino.

Ancient Studies major Neha Mathew reveals how the tour of Sicily in 2026 fueled her passion for "once-in-a lifetime experiences" and helped to strengthen her commitment to bioarchaeology. I recount features of our tour of Sicily that made strong and sometimes unexpected impressions on me: the Norman vision of a triumphant Christianity which includes scenes from the Book of Genesis and incorporates architectural structures and artistic traditions of Islam; the aspirations of Sicilian colonists to be bigger, better, more abundant, and more innovative than the cities they left behind; the interplay between two millennia of pre-Christian worship of goddesses of love, sex, and fertility in ancient Eryx and the figure of the breastfeeding Madonna of Custonaci, who both replaces them and continues their presence in Erice

Last but not least, Professor Esther Read details the fascinating twists and turns and consequential outcomes of the project "Discovering and Raising New Voices" funded by a Southern Maryland Heritage Area Grant in 2021 to explore the historical and archaeological resources of the 700 acres covered by the Maxwell Hall Parks. This multidisciplinary project had three dimensions: community engagement, archival research, and archaeological survey, which Professor Read led. She was also, sadly, project coordinator.

ANCS STUDENT AWARD RECIPIENTS, SPRING 2025 AND 2026

Award	Student	Year
Outstanding Senior in Ancient Studies	**Robert Le Barry**	2025
Outstanding Senior in Ancient Studies	**Ethan Stubbs**	2026
Sherwin Family Award	**Katie Bjerkaas**	2025
Sherwin Family Award	**Rebecca Lee**	2026
Robert and Jane Shedd Award	**Adele Hare**	2025
Robert and Jane Shedd Award	**Aerin Lang**	2026
William and Martha Christopher Award	**Rebecca Lee**	2025
William and Martha Christopher Award	**Fiona Wilfong**	2026
Diane Zdenek Award	**Fiona Wilfong**	2025
Diane Zdenk Award	**Rachel Hanley**	2026

THE GHOSTS OF THEATERS PAST: PRIENE AND MILETOS

Molly Jones-Lewis

An asphodel meadow is a prominent feature of the underworld in the *Odyssey*. I had never been in an asphodel field until our trip to Turkey in 2025, and the experience was hauntingly beautiful.

Those of you who went with us to Turkey in 2015 may recall that our time in Miletos was shorter than we had hoped for, though Priene and Didyma were highlights! During the department's tour of Turkey in 2025, Didyma's site was closed for maintenance, but we had extra time in Priene and Miletos just as the asphodel was blooming.

The Theater at Priene. Photo: Jacob Brunk

Dr. Jones-Lewis inside the skēnē *at Priene. Photo: Fi Wilfong*

Priene sits at the top of a hill forested with conifers. Its beautifully preserved agora includes a theater, *bouleutērion*, *prytaneion*, *gymnasion*, and streets of terraced houses facing the remains of a paved road. The spring wind carried the sounds of bell-wearing goats from the lower hills as we explored the site. A house where Alexander the Great reportedly stayed is a main point of attraction, but for me, the magic of the site is in the places of public business that we can walk into and inhabit. There are few places where you can sit in a *bouleutērion* and feel the way the sound of your voice behaves when you try some oratory or imagine that your companions are fellow participants in a cozy local democracy—although "cozy democracy" is probably an oxymoron.

UMBC has been to plenty of theatrical spaces in our travels, and at Miletos we would encounter a much larger venue. But Priene is tied with Thorikos for having my favorite theater. It's a beautifully intimate space built from fine-grained marble from Mt. Mykale, which has turned blue-grey over time; a stage house (*skēnē*) has been partly reconstructed. The early spring sunlight filtering through the branches made for a wonderful experience, and being allowed to enthrone one's self on the prestigious front row seats (*prohedria*) is a considerable bonus. I am sure the shades of the Prienians were thrilled to have a woman sitting there.

Theater at Miletos. Photo: Jacob Brunk

Miletos is probably familiar to you as the home of Aspasia, Hekataios, Thales, Anaximander, Alexander Polyhistor, or (if you are a hipster and want someone more niche), Monime, wife of Rome's least favorite monarch, Mithradates VI. The list of famous scholars from Miletos is much longer than that too! Although the harbor has long been silted over, in its heyday it was a hub of commerce, scholarship, and political power with colonies reaching deep into the Black Sea and its wealth from the Asian interior. Its population was diverse, cosmopolitan, and highly influential to my work in the history of science. We came to it under a clear, chilly sun, approaching the archaeological site via the massive theater. Prominent local populations who paid for blocks of seats inscribed their names on the seats, and we searched earnestly (but fruitlessly) for the area paid for by the local Jewish community. The next UMBC trip to Turkey should take up the quest!

We had, at the point in the trip, learned to sing Seikilos' *Epitaph*, a composition discovered on a stele in Tralles (Aydin, Turkey) and rehearsed in the friendlier atmosphere of Priene's theater. Our big performance, for which we were our own audience, was in the massive orchestra of Miletos. The ghosts chose not to comment: I will take that as a positive review.

The theater's upper tiers are well preserved. Those with sturdy knees and a good sense of balance can climb to the top and over the back wall; this is as far as we got in 2015. The top of the theater is also the top of a hill. As you, our Ancient Studies community, probably know, Greek theaters were built on natural slopes! The hill looks down on the low-lying wetlands that were once Miletos' harbor. The stones of the site are now part of an open meadow in a silent rural plain where local goats and their human caretakers are all that is left of a once-bustling metropolis.

It was here we found the asphodel blooming in a delicate, pale blanket. Your fingertips graze the feathery blossoms as you walk down the slope and enter the site of Miletos' agora. The wind makes the faintest sighing sound as it rips down the hill and the clank of goat bells follows you on your way to Miletos' still heart. Docks, marketplaces, temples, and monuments peek up from the fluttering whisps of ashy blossoms.

Asphodel meadow near the Theater of Miletos

The site was not deserted, though. We were lucky enough to encounter a friendly turtle near the Asklepieion. A good sign, though a snake would have been better. Although Priene and Miletos were empty of people, animal hosts were there to greet us. Besides the goats and turtle, there was a cuddly dog at Priene along with the traditional Turkish kitties, placid red-and-white spotted cows in Miletos, and an adorable snail in the damp remains of the harbor. The mythological asphodel fields of the underworld were both full of beings and lonely because those beings could not quite touch each. Our real-world asphodel had a similar atmosphere. We came as pilgrims from the future to visit the dead whose lives we work to understand and illuminate. Like Odysseus, we brought the price of passage, although in our case it was tickets and skritches for local animals rather than sacrificial blood. Each of us returned with the benefit of direct experience, tangible and intangible, a better storyteller for our dead Anatolian hosts.

Finding What I Wasn't Looking For: A Report from Aghia Marina Pyrghos in 2025

Michael Lane

Since the end of the excavation campaign of 2024 at Aghia Marina Pyrghos (AMP), the neck of a large storage vase had been sticking up out of the middle of the layers of thick compacted building debris in Trench 9. The debris is just some of the evidence of a huge fire that overwhelmed the site at the end of the Late Helladic (LH) IIIB period, around 1190 BCE. Now, at the end of the 2025 season, Daniel Saenz, an undergraduate at UMBC, Amy Craig, a recent graduate from the University of Winchester in the United Kingdom, and I have finally reached the floor on which the vase's bottom sits. Miraculously, this storage amphora, as the form proves to be, is standing upright on the ground floor of a two-story building, the ceilings and floor above it having crashed down over and around it in the catastrophic fire. It is missing only its rim and that only because somebody had dug a trash pit in the compacted ruins not long after the conflagration.

Nearly intact storage amphora uncovered in Trench 9

The puzzle pieces are coming together, although some join hither and others yon. It seems the two-story building represented in Trench 9 was erected about 100 years before the fire, around the beginning of the LH IIIB. The upper story appears to have been devoted to the spinning of fiber and its dyeing with pigments derived from the marine mollusks spiny oyster (*Spondylus sp.*) and so-called "murex" (*Hexaplex sp.*), the latter famous for producing "Tyrian purple." The lower story was used for storage of furniture, as well as possibly the boiling of the mollusks to render the dyes. It appears the fire erupted on the ground floor and spread quickly to the upper story, causing it to collapse and bring its contents down chaotically. One thing that comes as a surprise this summer is how the upper story of the two is at the level of a stucco-surfaced rectangular open area, extending about 30 meters from north to south and 20 meters from west to east, as far as we can tell from our excavated glimpses of its limits. Thus, this courtyard is retained by walls up to a meter and a half thick on at least to north, south, and east sides, and the ground floors of the buildings seen in Trench 9 and adjacent Trench 10 are on a lower terrace. A small stone column base found in Trench 10 suggests a formal entry from this terrace up to the south edge of the courtyard. What we had tentatively identified in 2023 as a drainage system involving a stone-lined erosion baffle in Trench 6,

near the northwestern corner of the court, now seems more certain. Rainwater would have been allowed to run off the court, through over the baffle, and then down the site's steep uninhabited northern slope through this conduit.

Most intriguing is how it seems very likely that to the east and partly under the medieval tower that puts the "Pyrghos" in AMP's name is a building occupying the summit for which the stuccoed expanse is a forecourt. This building may lie over a monumental construction of Early Helladic II date (ca. 2500 BCE; see *Res Classicae*, Fall 2024). Already, geophysical results from 2018 indicate a building some 15 meters on a side east of the court and southwest of the tower. In short, AMP is shaping up to be an important center of palace-type industries in north Boiotia in the LH IIIB, a complex into which an enormous amount of material and architectural energy was sunk to repurpose the site on the remains of the town that had been there since at least the Middle Helladic II period (ca. 1800 BCE). The degree of investment in the palatial phase has provided surprise after surprise.

A bronze spear head found in Tench 9

Meanwhile, back in Trench 9, we have removed the amphora and taken samples of the material preserved inside it for both chemical residues that may appear in laboratory results or small objects and organic remains that can be recovered through flotation. The latter process has not yet yielded plant or animal remains, though a soapstone whorl for spinning thread was found, which had fallen from above. So the working hypothesis is that the isostatic pressure of the liquid contents kept the vessel from breaking when the two ceilings above caved in on it, the liquid perhaps then boiling away with the surrounding fire…. Someone interrupts my thoughts. Daniel has found something on the floor with the amphora – a bronze spearhead. What now?

Archaeological Fieldwork in Greece, Summer 2025

Daniel Saenz, History BA, Fall 2025

This summer I had the opportunity to excavate as part of a group of a few dozen based in the hillside village of Kokkino. After about an hour and a half of driving towards the Kopais basin from Athens, the town of Kastro appears from a distance. Also nestled between some of the nearby hills is Akraifnia, which we occasionally visited for groceries. But our destination was even smaller than these minor towns.

View of Gla and the Ptoion Chain from AMP

Kokkino is a shrinking village, but everything necessary (besides groceries) to conduct an excavation is present, which isn't too much: a place to sleep, showers, and space for lab work after a day's work of excavation. Every morning before dawn we gathered in front of the church, from which we were ferried to the hill atop which sat our excavation site. As was often pointed out, Mount Parnassos was visible, if a bit hazily, in the distance. The impressive site of Gla interrupted the fields surrounding our and other hills in the area. What a striking view to appreciate while taking bathroom breaks!

But amid these idyllic surroundings, complete with occasional sheep herd crossings, was the hard work often concealed in our historical imagination by these pastoral scenes. While I arrived only in time for the second session beginning in July, the first-session team had to clear any growth since last year before the digging could begin. Being completely new to this, I had to rely on the guidance of the handful of supervisors along with more experienced fellow excavators. Some were more experienced than others, but everyone's contribution was valuable: the work continued to the last minute.

The work, while far from glamorous, was purposeful. Every scrape of a trowel, swing of a pickaxe, or sweep of a brush came with the possibility of revealing another clue to the lives and fates of the inhabitants of this millennia-old site.

I spent most of my time on site in Trench 9. Given that name, one might assume that there were at least 9 active trenches. This was not the case. Some of the total 15 had hit bedrock early, others turned out to be false positives from earlier surveying and sensing. The remaining trenches were scattered across the hill; footpaths eventually connected them all. Not everything about the site was intuitive, but with time we learned the ropes. A rhythm eventually set in. It was simple work for most of us: dig, scrape, clean up loose dirt, sift the stuff for anything of note. The routine made it easy to forget the sheer volume of material that was coming out of the ground. The amount of pottery, bone, building material, and the like on display in the lab soon became remarkable.

The people of Kokkino were friendly, and there were more than enough fellow excavators to keep me company and remind me what a privilege it was to be there. But more than anything, trips to the local and national museums in Boeotia and Athens during and following the excavation really drove home the significance of our seemingly minor project. Bronze-Age artifacts were on display, from humble pot sherds to bronze weapons, indistinguishable from the ones we had just helped to unearth. How many can say they were the first to hold a bronze spearpoint in over 3000 years?

Daniel Saenz in Trench 9

IN PURSUIT OF ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME EXPERIENCES

Neha Mathew, Ancient Studies Major

*Jesus Christ Almighty (*pantokratōr*), Norman Monreale Cathedral*

L to R: B. Turgot, N. Mathew, G. Schoeffler, C. Raff, A. Barnes, O. Santos, S. Braun, J. Labuda

As an Ancient Studies major, I had some idea of the history I would encounter in Sicily. I had learned about sites like Agrigento and Syracuse in discussions about the Punic Wars and early Christianity and have since looked forward to seeing those places. It is safe to say that my expectations were exceeded. I felt as if wherever I turned, there was even more ancient history than the last place our group visited. There were so many different cultures that we were able to experience in one place:, Greek, Roman, Carthaginian, and more.

A woman, often considered a personification of India, appears on the southern apse of the Great Hunt Mosaic in the early fourth-century CE Villa Romana del Casale.

I saw a mosaic (right) of a woman who probably personified India in the Villa Romana del Casale, and was happy to see my own culture so far from its origin.

Some of the artifacts we saw during our visits to archaeological museums resembled objects that I had encountered in classes. I was able to see an intaglio of the Gnostic "God above all Gods," Abraxas/Abrasax, in the form the Egyptian child god, Horus-Harpocrates, a significant variation from the one I saw in my Ancient Mediterranean Witchcraft and Magic class, which showed Abraxas *anguipedes*, "snake-legged," with a rooster head, and a human torso. It is one thing to learn about an artifact in class, but it is another to see one in person, mere inches away from you. I even had a go at translating Greek inscriptions on objects in the museums with the knowledge of the language I have acquired so far. A lot of the material I learned in my classes became so much more real to me during my visit to Sicily. Additionally, seeing active research sites around the island was encouraging and gave me hope to someday be a part of that type of project.

Sicily was also the first place I had visited where I did not speak the local language, and the experience was unique and enlightening when it came to exploring Sicilian culture. I was able to observe gestures and tones, and tried my best to pick up words that I could understand. This specific focus on

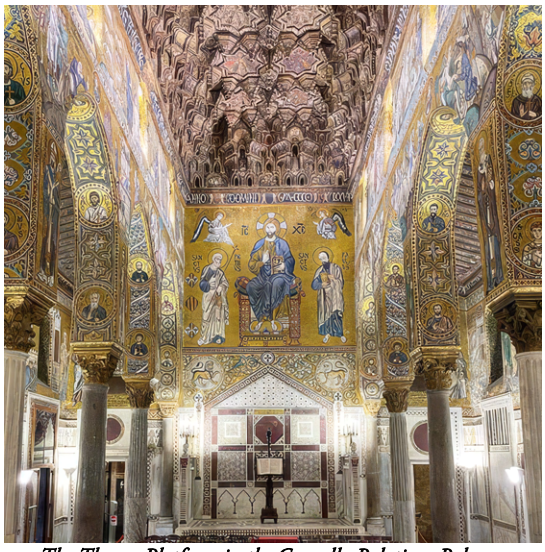
human behaviors and the environment also emphasized how distinctive Sicilian culture is from wider Italian culture. The architecture was much more coastal, and there was a strong emphasis on citrus, especially in souvenirs, and the cuisine involved a lot more seafood, with special desserts unique to specific cities.

Being in new surroundings was bound to be a learning experience, but this trip to Sicily was also very inspiring for me. I had been torn between pursuing a career in medicine, as my parents expected, or trying to become a bioarchaeologist, which is what I am genuinely passionate about. Because of this conflict, I found myself not fully dedicating my time to pursuing opportunities that I actually found interesting in an attempt to placate others who have different expectations of me. Seeing the opportunities within the classics in Sicily encouraged me to apply to be a part of KOCECOLA this summer. I never thought I'd be able to have the opportunity to have this kind of experience; but what I saw and felt visiting Sicily galvanized me to actively grasp once-in-a-lifetime experiences. I hope that participating in this upcoming excavation will give me prepare me further for the research that I hope to undertake in the future.

Competition, Change, and Continuity in Sicily

David Rosenbloom

The Ancient Studies Department tour of Sicily in March 2026 was a long-deferred homecoming for me. My mother's father arrived at Ellis Island from San Cataldo, Sicily on October 26, 1903. My grandmother joined him some two years later. This tour, however, was more about understanding the experiences of the many immigrants to Sicily and the vicissitudes of the outsiders who competed to rule the island. The earliest migrants — considered indigenous by the Greeks who followed them there — were Elymians, Sicels, and Sicanians; Ionian and Dorian Greeks and Carthaginians followed in close succession in the eighth-century BCE; the latter were Phoenician immigrants who founded Carthage in what is today the territory of Tunisia during the late ninth century BCE. After Sicily became the first Roman province in the period 241-212 BCE, tides of colonists were joined by waves of foreign rulers: Romans (241-476 CE), Odoacer/Ostrogoths (476-535), Byzantine Empire (535-827), Arabs (827-1072), Normans (1072-1194), Hohenstaufen Dynasty/Holy Roman Empire (1194-1266), Angevins (1266-1282), Aragonese/Spanish (1282-1713), and Bourbons (1735-1861). Sicily came under Italian sovereignty in 1861.



The Throne Platform in the Cappella Palatina, Palermo

In the first phase of the tour, from Palermo to Erice, the Norman presence dominated. The Normans freed Christian Sicily from almost 250 years of Arab/Muslim rule and occupied the Castle of the Emirs of Sicily in Palermo. Prior to Arab rule, the capital of Sicily was Syracuse. The Normans renovated the Castle and made it their palace. The Cappella Palatina (left), built on the first floor as a royal chapel between 1132 and 1140 CE, was lavishly decorated with mosaics of glass tesserae infused with gold leaf; they were completed in the 1170s. The Chapel promotes a vision of divinely ordained Christian Norman rule over Christians, their defeated predecessors as rulers of Sicily, Muslim Arabs, and their superseded predecessors as Christians, Jews; it contains architectural, decorative, and narrative elements from all three traditions.

The "Metamorphosis" of Christ

The Chapel's inclusiveness is remarkable. Its domed basilica design, exaltations of Jesus Christ the Almighty (*Pantokratōr*), golden mosaics, nimbus-clad Christ, Mary, archangels, angels, saints, and prophets assert the Cappella's Byzantine heritage. Its mosaics recapitulate the Book of Genesis from the creation of the world to the benediction of Jacob as "Israel." The Cappella's structure and decoration incorporate Fatimid arches, extensive Islamic geometric designs, and, most famously, a muqarnas ceiling carved from local wood and ornamented with secular Islamic imagery suggestive of royal pleasures and a blissful afterlife, which echo the larger themes of the Cappella. From the throne platform, the king looked at the Transfiguration Mosaic, the "metamorphosis" of Christ (right). That the enthroned Christ, flanked by Peter and Paul, hover above the enthroned king on the platform, suggests the analogous stations of the divine and human kings.

The Cappella Palatina and the more magnificent Cathedral of Monreale, completed in 1189, contrast sharply with the Porta Nuova (left), which was built at Charles V's triumphant entry point into Palermo after his defeat of the Ottoman Empire

Left side of the Porta Nueva, Palermo

at Tunis in 1535. This gated archway, through which we entered the city, features a pair of defeated Moors on each side, one with arms folded in a gesture of capitulation, the other with arms lopped off as if punished for theft. These Moors served as telamones, male equivalents of caryatids, decorative and functional supports used in the portico of the Erechtheum on the Athenian Acropolis. The Moors seem to bear the burden of Charles V's triumphal arch and the five-arch loggia above it on their turbaned heads.

Loosely reconstructed Telamon at Acragas

Telamones originated in the Greek colonies of Sicily and southern Italy long before the Porta Nueva. The fifth-century Temple of Olympian Zeus at Acragas (Agrigento), the largest Greek temple in Europe at the time of its construction, boasted a footprint nearly three times that of the Parthenon; it employed solid walls and colossal Telamones alternating with pillars to bear the load of the massive entablature and roof (above right). Unlike the Moors on the Porta Nueva, telamones raise their arms to bear their load. For this reason, they were also called "atlantes" (i.e. "Atlases").

The ruins of the colossal Temple G in Selinus

Surviving material culture in Sicilian cities expresses a clear aspiration: to be bigger, better, more abundant, and more innovative than their mother cities. This is true among primary colonies, such as Syracuse, a colony of Corinth, which built the largest known altar in the ancient world to Zeus, and secondary colonies, such Acragas, a colony of the colony Gela, and Selinus (Selinunte), a colony of Megara Hyblaea in eastern Sicily. Indeed, secondary colonies may exhibit an even greater impulse to outshine their mother cities than their primary counterparts. Temple G (left) on the eastern hill outside the fortified acropolis of Selinus like that of Zeus in Acragas, was also nearly three times the size of the Parthenon.

Erice, a town in northwest Sicily, was named after Aeneas' half-brother and son of Venus, Eryx. Built on a hill that rises 751m above sea level, ancient Eryx had been a center for the worship of Elymian, Phoenician, Greek, and Roman goddesses of love, sex, and fertility for two millennia. The Normans acknowledged the centrality of Venus here when they built the Castle of Venus over the ancient temple atop Monte Erice in the twelfth-century CE. The spirit of the pagan goddesses continued to cast a spell over the Christian town, like the dense fog that suddenly blankets Monte Erice, called today "the veil of Venus." In antiquity, beacon fires blazed from the temple, guiding sailors to safety from the murky sea. The temple was said to have housed sacred-slave prostitutes.

A 1974 copy of the 18th-century copy in the Church of San Cataldo, Erice

Copy of the Madonna of Custonaci, 1700-1750 CE in the Matrice Duomo of Erice

The breastfeeding Madonna of Custonaci mediated between traditions of pagan and Christian worship. In the fourth century CE, Erice built a temple to the Madonna as "our lady of the snow" in the precinct of Venus Erycina, initiating the transformation by lowering the temperature of the temple and foregrounding the purity of the object of adoration. Yet worshippers continued to visit the remnants of the pagan temple during feasts for the Madonna. The fourteenth-century Duomo Matrice incorporated stones from the pagan temple. Even as the Council of Trent (1563) discouraged exhibitions of breastfeeding Madonnas as incitements to lust, Pope Gregory XIII authorized Erice to determine over whom the painting of the Madonna would be patron in 1574. In 1630, the Madonna became chief patron of Monte Erice. We did not see the image (above right) on display at the Matrice Duomo in Erice. Rather, we saw a 20th-century rendition of it in the Church of San Cataldo (above left). It was signed and dated 15-8-1974 by a painter who seems to be "S. Crimili." I have been unable to identify a painter of

this name. The date corresponds with the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, which the painting itself anticipates, with its angels, crowns, and, in the twentieth-century version, keys around the Madonna's neck. This painting probably replaced a wider and shorter baroque painting—that fit the frame built for it.

The origin story of the cult of Madonna of Custonaci derives from a 15th or 16th century painting (right) held in the Sanctuary of the Most Holy Mary of Custonaci, about ten miles from Erice The myth of the painting's arrival incorporates myths and images of pagan goddesses and of Isis; its cult narrative features bovine guides common in ancient and later foundation stories. Like Isis, who was syncretized with the goddesses worshipped in Eryx, the Madonna of Custonaci arrived from Egypt (perhaps an allusion to a subgenre of paintings of the breastfeeding Madonna, which are set during the flight to Egypt narrated in the apocryphal Book of Matthew). Like Aphrodite and Isis, the Madonna arrives by sea. In the Erice-held versions of the Madonna on the previous page, the Madonna's complexion is dusky. In both depictions, the Madonna breastfeeds her infant son, just as an enthroned Isis did with Horus in extant images that appear to the archetype of the depiction. Finally, this Madonna saves sailors at sea—like Isis and Venus Erycina,

Madonna of Custonaci in Custonaci.

The charter myth of the cult goes as follows: a French vessel sailing from Alexandria, Egypt carried this painting of the Madonna. When the sailors encountered dire conditions at sea, they prayed to the Virgin Mary for salvation. The ship was miraculously led to safety in the Bay of Cornino near Custonaci. In gratitude, the sailors donated the painting to the locals, who decided to build a sanctuary for it. They loaded the painting into an ox-driven cart to haul it up the hill. After the ascent, the oxen succumbed to exhaustion; a spring erupted at the spot, and the locals decided to build a sanctuary to the Madonna of Custonaci there.

Putti on a Baroque frame for the 1974 copy of Madonna of Custonaci in Erice

The painted Madonna held in Custonaci differs from those in Erice in complexion, the pattern of her dress, lack of a crown on the baby's head, and background (is it land or sea?). The terrain behind the Erice Madonna is mountainous. The Erice Madonna gazes and smiles lovingly upon her feeding baby; the Custonaci Madonna presents a pensive, less joyous visage; she seems to look beyond the infant. The crowning figures in both paintings are angels, and both infants hold a strand of wheat, symbol of the eucharist (in another depiction, the Madonna holds the baby and a cluster of grapes, but does not breastfeed). The ornate frame of the Madonna in Erice has *putti* fashioned as playful cupidons (above left). The voluptuous, earthier Madonna in Erice reveals her ancestry in the pre-Christian goddesses venerated atop Monte Erice.

The Castle of Venus was the terminus of our trek up the winding, cobbled streets of now deserted Erice (population: 300). As we approached the summit, a heavy fog, the "veil of Venus," descended upon us. When we began the journey up the mountain, we had hoped to enjoy a commanding view from the summit, something like the image to the right. The image to the left is what we saw: dense fog blanketing the landscape.

The "veil of Venus" at the Castle of Venus

View from the Norman Castle of Venus

A significant part of Sicily's story are processes of replacement and retention. As they remembered Muslims and Jews in the Cappella Palatina and the Monreale Cathedral, the Normans evoked the memory of Venus Erycina even as their castle replaced the temple that had guided sailors in the fog and perhaps performed other services. The inhabitants in and around Erice did not forget the millennia in which goddesses of love, sex, and desire presided over the mountain and the town. The Madonna di Custonaci replaced them; but she also retained some of the qualities of her pagan predecessors in Erice.

Discovering and Raising New Voices: An Archaeological and Historical Survey along the Patuxent River

Esther Doyle Read

Shortly after the COVID shutdown began, I joined several of my colleagues virtually to discuss a possible project near Benedict, Maryland. What resulted from that conversation was the multi-year "Discovering And Raising New Voices" project that explored the historical and archaeological resources of the Maxwell Hall Parks. Maxwell Hall Park and Maxwell Hall State Park include just under 700 acres that are managed jointly by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Charles County. Traditionally, as well as today, the landscape is part of a community that crosses jurisdictional boundaries and includes southern Prince Georges County, northern St. Mary's County, western Calvert County and eastern Charles County. The Maxwell Hall Parks are along the Patuxent River and Swanson and Smith Creeks. Over 300 acres of agricultural fields on the floodplain and lower terraces are leased to local farmers by DNR. The interior portions of the park are a mixture of deciduous forest and open meadow land on landforms that rise steeply above the river and creeks. There are also 14 miles of hiking and equestrian trails that wind through both parks.

Professor Read surveys plowed fields.

The project was funded by a Southern Maryland National Heritage Area grant, which we received in 2021. "Discovering and Raising New Voices" included community engagement, as well the more traditional archaeological and archival studies. Each of these areas was led by a member of our team. Julie Hawkins Ennis, who had recently been one of the leads on the GU272 project, headed community outreach.[1] Franklin Robinson, an archivist with the Smithsonian Museum of American History, dug into the archives in an attempt to discover the names of the enslaved people who lived on the land. I conducted the archaeological survey, looking for new sites in an area of Charles County that had never been surveyed before. In the entire 700 acres there was only one recorded archaeological site, which had been found in the 1950s. The fourth member of our team, George Gazarek, was the President of the Friends of Maxwell Hall. George had the unenviable job of keeping track of the grant money and keeping the rest of us on track. He was also our biggest cheerleader. Sadly, George was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer very early in the project and died shortly thereafter. For several months we grieved, and then realized that George would be most annoyed with us for spinning our wheels. The Friends of Maxwell Hall took over the grant coordination and I became the project coordinator.

Franklin traced the histories of all the property owners in the area and then he worked with museum consultant Dean Krimmel to identify enslaved people living within and around the parks. The final list includes almost 100 individuals who lived on the Smith, Maxwell, Dorsey, and Morton farms. The problem we ran into was connecting these individuals to their modern descendants. Julie spent three years attending church services and suppers and giving talks to various scholastic and civic groups, all in an attempt to meet descendants. However, the people she met were more interested in talking about their ancestors who had escaped enslavement and joined the United States Colored Troops (USCT) during the Civil War. The recruiting and training camp was at Camp Stanton in Benedict, just south of the parks. We decided to go with these stories instead of concentrating on stories of enslavement. The result was a documentary film produced by the Charles County media department: *Training for Equality: The Story of Camp Stanton.*[1] The film features interviews with two USCT descendants, as well as commentary by Julie and local historian and author Garth Bowling. Garth is a descendant of Confederate soldier, while Julie's ancestors were, to her surprise, enslaved on the Dorsey farm on the north edge of Camp Stanton. Last August our documentary won the Audience Award at the 2025 Southern Maryland Film Festival.

My portion of the project involved walking miles of plowed fields and digging dozens of small shovel test pits. It became obvious at the beginning of the project that we were not going to able to cover all 700 acres; instead, we decided to concentrate our efforts in the southern two-thirds of the park on the old Smith farm. Even then it was a challenge as this is where most of the agricultural fields are located. I had to work around the farmer's planting and harvesting schedule and often only had three

[1] The GU272 Project was an effort to reconnect the descendants of enslaved people sold in 1838 to locations in the Deep South by the Jesuits at Georgetown University. Many of the individuals sold were originally from Southern Maryland and were forcibly separated from their families. GU272 identified descendants and was followed by the Reclamation Project, which hosted gatherings to bring the families back together. The documentary is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAJTM1ljOvM) and https://reflect-charlescountymd.cablecast.tv/CablecastPublicSite/show/1072?site=1).

weeks to access a field between the time that the soybeans were harvested and the winter wheat crop went in the ground (or vice-versa). In the end, I was only able to cover 125 acres over a two-year period.

I was aided in the survey work by volunteers who were primarily from the Charles County Archaeological Society of Maryland. They were out walking fields in 104-degree weather (without the heat index!) or shivering in blasts of arctic air coming off the Patuxent River. But there were also the days that were perfect for field work or shoreline survey, and there was the day we watched a white deer dance across one of the fields. We also had lots of lab work that needed to be done: washing artifacts, weighing oyster shells, and countless other tasks. Some of this was done at the archaeology lab at UMBC by our students. Between August 2022 and our last lab day in early December 2024, these amazing volunteers gave 637 hours of their time to the project.

Projectile points and stone tools, late Archaic Period (3,500-1,000 BCE)

During the course of the survey we identified 11 new archaeological sites that were registered with the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT) and two others that are pending registration. An older site (identified in the 1950s) was also relocated and documented. The sites range in date from ca. 4,500 BCE to the late 20th century. The earlier sites are base camps with oyster shell middens where Native American groups spent time hunting ducks and geese, fishing, or gathering oysters and other maritime resources from the river and creeks. The interior woodlands were teeming with game – deer, bear, eastern cougars, bobcats and numerous small mammals. The area was also rich in plant resources. Native peoples continued to live in the area long after the arrival of the first European colonizers; their descendants are still there today. Not only that, but they were in the area much earlier than 4,500 BCE. Finds at a site a few miles north of the park indicate that people have been living in the area for at least 10,000 years.

Other archaeological sites that we located included parts of a road system dating back into the late 18th century. Franklin's research of early maps indicates that at least one of these roads was probably used by the British in 1814 when they marched on Washington, D.C. from their encampment in Benedict. According to local tradition, the British burned the home of Charles Somerset Smith for attempting to poison several of their officers with tainted wine. Smith invited them to a dinner party at his home shortly before the battle. We spent some time searching for the remains of the house, which was known as Mount Arundel, but never located it. I have come to the conclusion that it is probably just outside the park on a high promontory overlooking the river. We did, however find several areas in the park that were probably the quarters for the enslaved held by the Smith, Maxwell, Dorsey, and Morton families. Two of them are fairly close to the ruins of a 19th-century house on the high ground above the river. The other is located on the flood plain, well away from any of the large plantation houses, in the middle of a plowed field. We're lucky that our survey transect even found it, as it consisted of two small fragments of late 18th-to early 19th-century ceramics.

There were also three 20th-century sites. Two of them were tenant houses and one of them had the remains of a pier along the shoreline. The latter may be associated with the home of a waterman and his family. There were several oyster- and crab-packing houses in Benedict in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Later, during the 1940s and 1950s, there were seafood restaurants and casinos catering to tourists escaping the heat of Baltimore and Washington, D.C. The final site was a 20th-century farmstead. It comprised some foundation ruins and a lot of modern bottle glass, tin cans, and household appliances (including a kitchen sink). Among the trash, we found a radio antenna lightning suppressor from the early 1930s, a reminder of how radio connected rural Americans to their urban counterparts in the 1920s and 1930s. Radio revolutionized communication systems long before the internet arrived.

The final project report was submitted last July. We know that we have barely scratched the surface; there is more field to survey and more to find in the archives. Julie has ideas to continue the search for descendant communities. I plan to return someday and continue our survey in the northern portion of the park and hope to select a site or two for further exploration with larger units. The MHT and the Archeological Society of Maryland, Inc. (ASM) held a field session in May at the Teagues Point site, a 17th-century site identified by a local collector who came forward with the information at the beginning of the project. Because the MHT decided to explore the site, we did not include it in our survey universe. Go the ASM web site for more information (https://marylandarcheology.org/).

We have, in addition to the documentary film mentioned earlier, placed more publicly accessible information from the survey on my blog – Findingcharlescounty.blogspot.com – Archaeology Along the Patuxent (October 2023), Freedom and Enslavement in Charles County, 1817 (March 2024), and The Golden Age of Radio (September 2025). Stop by and visit us! If you're interested in volunteering for future projects contact me at eread@umbc.edu.

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