

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

Course ID: HIS 489

Aug 31–Sep 27, 2025

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, Dipartimento di Beni Culturali-Università del Salento, Italy (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 crossing routes between the Aegean and the Central Mediterranean and its topography was closely related to the protected Torre dell’Orso Bay. Maybe more importantly, the ancient site of Roca Vecchia includes the Grotta Poesia cave, an important 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.

Findings from the Middle Bronze Age levels (17th-14th century BCE) attest to the early involvement of Roca Vecchia within the Aegean trade & commercial network. Artifacts recovered at the site include

an unusual variety and peculiarity of products such as Lustrous-decorated, Burnished, Matt-painted and Minyan-type pottery imports, as well as locally manufactured Italo-Minoan ceramics. These findings indicate active & extensive trading along the southern Adriatic routes already at these early dates.

At its peak, Roca had complex fortification walls with at least five gates and a monumental main entrance. But by the mid-14th century BCE, Roca was attacked and destroyed by fire after a prolonged siege. 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 migrating elements.

Recent investigations carried out in Roca – in areas that include the “Cult Center” and the monumental buildings of the “Hut-temple” – suggest that extensive ritual practices took place at Roca. Ceremonial and ritual activities incorporated symbols of both local and Aegean origin, suggesting strong incorporation of local and external religious traditions and practices.

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. Indeed, Roca has the richest collection of gold items ever found in the Italian Bronze Age (including gold sun discs and ornaments), pointing to the important and prominent role Roca played in the central Mediterranean area.

During the forthcoming season, 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. For the 2025 season, we plan to investigate the area close to the internal wall of the Middle Bronze Age fortification, near the Postern C access. Students will excavate and document the multilayered stratigraphy and explore evidence related to the 14th century BCE battle which destroyed the earliest fortress of Roca. In addition, students will be engaged with documentation and analysis of artifacts and human remains recovered during the 2023 field season from the burial area of Grotta Poesia.

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER

The Center for Field Sciences 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 CFS 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 CFS takes risks seriously. A committee of leading scholars review each field school location prior to approval. Once a program is accepted, the CFS continually monitor conditions at the program’s site and so we can provide an experience that is as safe as possible.

The CFS 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, Squaremouth.com or 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 a CFS field program. CFS is not qualified to provide medical advice. For all other concerns, please consult with CFS staff members or program director(s) – as appropriate.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this field school is to provide students with a well-rounded understanding of archaeological fieldwork practice in the context of the ancient Mediterranean. Students will learn how research is designed and planned, its everyday routines on and off-site and ongoing scientific interpretation. As such, this experience aims to nurture students' 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. Students will receive lectures, where they will be provided with all the information needed to fully engage in the field activities. At the same time, students will help with opening the site. During the weeks of fieldwork, students will conduct excavation and laboratory work during weekdays. Weekends are dedicated to on and off-site documentation, museum visits and field trips.

More specifically, students will participate in the following activities:

Lectures: 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. The lectures will take place at the field school's accommodation facilities.

Excavation: Students will spend four weeks excavating at Roca Vecchia. The site's stratigraphy is complex, which will allow students to gain confidence in digging with every tool available to archaeologists. By working alongside expert trench supervisors, students will learn proper procedures for excavating a diversity of contexts, from large demolition deposits, to floor surfaces and to standing Bronze Age architecture. Students will be taught how to recognize, retrieve and document all artifact and ecofact types found at the site.

Laboratory: In the afternoons and (depending on progress) some mornings, students will participate in laboratory activities. Most of the finds at Roca Vecchia consist of pottery of various types and sizes. Students will learn to recognize different pottery styles and engage in classification and seriation. types present at the site. Roca Vecchia has also produced a wide array of other artifact classes, including metal ornaments, charred wood, faunal and human remains. Students will learn how to identify those artifacts and how to clean, catalogue, document and store them.

Documentation: Students will learn the different aspects of archaeological documentation. Students will learn how to keep an excavation diary, fill-out context sheets, use a level, draw sections and photograph excavation areas. During lab work, students will learn how to catalogue finds and photograph and draw special finds.

Seminars: This research project is multidisciplinary, directed by a group of specialized scholars who are specialists in different aspects of archaeological research. During the field season, project staff members will present seminars about their own research. These will include topography, stratigraphy, epigraphy, zooarchaeology, physical anthropology and archaeoethnobotany.

Field Trips: Field trips will take place during weekends. Trips will include: (1) visit to archaeological museums in the region to introduce students to the diverse ancient cultures of the region; (2) visit 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 step for 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.
- Understand the role of Roca Vecchia within the broader framework of southern Italian archaeology.
- Be able to engage with the theoretical underpinnings of research at Roca Vecchia, which include migration, culture contact and identity.
- Have gained familiarity with the culture of southern Italy, and particularly the Puglia region.

LEARNT SKILLS

We are aware that many students may not seek academic careers but will pursue employment in the private sector. To that end, we are following the example set by Twin Cairns with their Skills Log Matrix™ (<https://twincairns.com/skills-log-matrix>). 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 features, artifact & soil colors at various light and field depth conditions
Flotation	Able to use flotation machine to collect flora and fauna

Artifact Documentation	Ability to measure, record, photograph 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

SKILLS GRADING MATRIX

The school instructors will evaluate the level each student achieved on the list of skills provided above. Each skill will be graded on one of the following 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.

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.

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 the past to better understand our own present.

At the start of the excavation campaign, students will engage in intensive training that will provide the necessary background to understand the country they are in, the characteristics of archaeological research in the area, the site they will excavate, and the methodology that they will use to do so.

DAY	INTERACTION WITH COURSE CONTENT/ACTIVITIES	TIME ON
Day 1 (Sun)	8:00pm Arrival & Welcome Dinner	90 min
Day 2 (Mon)	9:00am Breakfast	1 hour
	9:30am Lectures	3 hours
	12:30pm Lunch	1 hour
	3:00pm Travel to site	3 hours
	4:30pm coffee break	30 min
	6:00pm Return to field house	30 min
	8:30pm Dinner	1 hour

From 3rd day until the end of the four weeks

During the afternoons of the second- and third-days, seminars will be held on the methodology of research, beginning daily at 4:30pm.

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

TYPICAL WORKDAY

Monday through Friday are full days of excavation, while Saturday morning will be dedicated to documentation on site and in the lab. Saturday afternoons and Sundays will be devoted to field trips, sightseeing and resting.

Course Content/Activities	Time to Task	Comments
6:45am: Departure to site	45 min	Using project vehicles
7:00am: Breakfast	30 min	At the site
7:30am: Excavation begins	8 hours	Two 15 minutes coffee break One 45 minutes lunch break
3:30pm: Return to archaeological area	30 min	
4.00 pm Lab work ¹	60 min	Ceramic washing and recording, floatation and sifting of organic material, photography
5:15 pm Return to field house	30 min	Using project vehicles
8:00 pm Dinner	60 min	At field house

¹ *Laboratory activities, scheduled for the afternoon, could also be carried out during excavation time.*

PLEASE NOTE

- Saturday's dinner, Sunday's meals (breakfast, 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 Taranto.

The above schedule might be changed pending on organizational needs.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

The required minimum attendance for the successful completion of this 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 reasons will be considered if the student catches up on the field school study plan through additional readings, homework or tutorials with program staff members.

PREREQUISITES

Medical: According to the rules of the Italian Soprintendenza (National Heritage Authority), each participant must provide us with a letter from their primary care physician confirming that their health is such that they can withstand field conditions. The certificate should also confirm that students had an obligatory tetanus vaccination or up-to-date booster.

Academic: There are no academic prerequisites required to participate in this field school. All the necessary information will be provided in the introductory lectures and through hands-on learning during fieldwork. Students should, however, be prepared to participate in physical work in the sun & wind for several hours each day.

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. We enjoy later and longer dinner times, where we often engage in lively conversation.

EQUIPMENT LIST

- Steel-toed boots (mandatory)
- Food supplements (for example magnesium, potassium...)
- Appropriate clothing for excavation (shirts, light sturdy pants)
- Wide brim hat to protect from the sun
- Work gloves if you use them
- Sunscreen (high protection)
- Sunglasses
- Rain jacket
- A notebook, pen, pencils, and an eraser
- 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 CFS 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 a time frame still allows for the purchase of deeply discounted airline tickets while protecting students from potential loss of airline ticket costs if CFS is forced to cancel a program.

Students will be met at 5:00pm at the Lecce Central Train Station (Stazione di Lecce) on the first day of the program (Sun). Our meeting point is at the Grandcaffé Bar (Piazzale Oronzo Massari, 73100 Lecce LE) just outside the main entrance to the train station (see Fig. 1). Lecce is in the Apulia Region of southern Italy – the heel of the Italian boot – and can be reached by flights to Bari (BRI) or by train from Rome (travel time approximately 6 hours).

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



Figure 1: Meeting point -- Grandcaffé Bar outside the main entrance to the train station

VISA REQUIREMENTS

There are no special visa requirements for American citizens travelling to Europe, if they do not stay longer than 3 months. Passport's expiration date should exceed the day of departure 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 stay at Hotel Belvedere in Torre dell'Orso (hotelbelvederesalento.com). Torre dell'Orso is a charming town in the region of Melendugno (Lecce), located on the Adriatic coast of Salento. The hotel is very close to the site of Roca Vecchia.

Rooms are comfortable and bright, and equipped with single and double beds, wardrobes, chairs, wi-fi, TV and air conditioning. The hotel has its own swimming pool and overlooks the wonderful bay of Torre dell'Orso, where students can sunbathe and swim during off hours.

Breakfast and dinner are provided by the hotel and lunch is provided by the project at the Boca Vecchia site. Dinner is based on Italian cuisine and includes a daily choice of appetizer, main dish & desert (usually fruits), which will change daily. Sugary or soda drinks are available to purchase and are not covered by the project. Students with special diets or food allergies must communicate directly with program staff to explore the possibility of accommodating their diet in this program.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

International dialing code: +39

Money/Banks/Credit Cards: Italy's currency is the Euro. Local banks are in the central square of Torre dell'Orso, 15 minutes' walk from our hotel. Most shops/supermarkets accept major credit cards (except for American Express, which is not always welcomed). However, credit cards are not commonly used for small purchases (for example coffee at a café) and cash is preferred for such purchases.

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 Italian and English.

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

ACADEMIC CREDITS & TRANSCRIPT

Attending students will be awarded 8 semester credit units (equivalent to 12 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 160 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 transcript 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. Pg 19-37. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-32926-6_2

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

T. Scarano, G. Maggiulli, 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 (Halle 2014), pp. 505-525.

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