Hirsh Scholarships for Travel to Archaeological Projects

2016 Student Summaries

The Cornell Institute of Archaeology and Material Studies
The Cornell Institute of Archaeology and Material Studies (CIAMS) awards Hirsch Scholarships for Travel to Archaeological Projects to students at Cornell University in order to offset travel costs for participating in archaeological fieldwork during the summer. For the 2016 field season, our Hirsch scholarship recipients came from a variety of backgrounds. We awarded scholarships to undergraduates, MA students, and PhD students from Cornell’s departments of Anthropology, CIAMS, Classics, and History of Art. The recipients took part in a wide array of international fieldwork, from Central America to Wales to the Mediterranean to the Middle East, and their projects ranged from introductory field schools to independent thesis research.

After their fieldwork was complete, each Hirsch scholarship recipient wrote a brief summary of their time in the field and submitted photos their field project. Not only do the stories presented here highlight the work of promising young scholars, they demonstrate the importance of archaeology as a discipline with relevance to the concerns of modern society.

Hirsch scholars serve as ambassadors of Cornell University when they conduct research, creating face-to-face links between local people in foreign countries and the Cornell community. As a scholarly discipline, archaeology not only concerns the materials of the past, but it has meaningful impact on modern society through international collaboration, the preservation of global heritage, and public outreach.

We at CIAMS are very proud of the accomplishments of our 2016 Hirsch Scholarship recipients, and we look forward to continuing to provide support for promising young scholars in archaeology.

2015-2016 CIAMS Awards Committee:
Katie Jarriel (chair), Annetta Alexandridis, John Henderson

2016 Hirsch Scholarship Recipients:
   Sam Barber
   Gabrielle Borenstein
   Polly Anna Burnette-Egan
   Andrew Crocker
   Yuan Fang
   Kathleen Garland
   John Gorczyk
   Mikaela Hamilton
   Betty Hensellek
   Anastasia Kotsoglou*
   Angaelica LaPasta
   Jessica Plant
   Emily Stanton

*Anastasia’s project is unable to be shared publicly at present due to government restrictions.
This summer, a Hirsch Scholarship enabled me to participate in the Architectural Documentation and Analysis summer course at the American Academy in Rome. Through fieldwork at Largo Argentina on the Campus Martius, the programme focused on techniques of measuring, recording, and investigating ancient buildings: how we get from ruins to data – from stones to plans and elevations. We worked at Temple A, a structure with an extensive history including multiple temple-phases before it was converted into a church in the Middle Ages; it was fascinating to get to grips with the site’s undeniably complex phasing from the preserved architectural fabric firsthand. From a personal perspective, the programme’s focus on hand-drawing was extremely valuable: it highlighted that, though inevitably time-consuming, drawing by hand provokes a kind of critical visual engagement with an object for which, at times, there can be no substitute.

Our work recording the columns, pavements, and podia of Temple A was complemented by lectures and field trips to sites in and around Rome, including the Pantheon, the Area Sacra of Sant’Omobono, and the Sanctuary of Hercules Victor in Tivoli, in order to think comparatively about ancient building techniques and histories of architectural documentation and conservation. Indeed, I took these perspectives with me in visiting sites in Rome which were important for my work, such as the recently reopened Santa Maria Antiqua, an early imperial structure at the foot of the Palatine Hill which was converted into a church in the sixth century. Taken together, these activities were incredibly useful for developing methodologies and perspectives that I intend to put to use in my doctoral dissertation.

The photograph was taken at Santa Maria Antiqua on the Forum Romanum.
The 2016 Hirsch Scholarship supported my archaeological work in both Cyprus on the KAMBE Project and in Armenia on Project ArAGATS. While my time in Cyprus served as a foray into late Bronze Age archaeology and introduced me to a number of distinct archaeological methods, my work in Armenia directly contributed to the development of my dissertation project.

In Cyprus, I participated in excavations at the site of Kalavasos-Ayios Dhimitrios (KAD) under the direction of Kevin Fisher (UBC) as well as at the site Maroni Vournes under the direction of Georgia Andreou and Sturt Manning. These experiences trained me in the intricacies of LBA excavation, versing me in survey strategy, modes of interpretation, and methodologies for architecture of monumental scales. I acquired analytical skills in spatial statistics and learned integrative methods of spatial analyses and photogrammetry. My conversations with Kevin Fisher about the production and perception of the built environment have already enriched my understanding of the dissertation data I uncovered this summer in Armenia. Exposure to ground penetrating radar (GPR) with Tommy Urban and dendro coring excursions with Sturt Manning enhanced my understanding of techniques I had previously only studied in classroom or textual contexts.

My work in Armenia on Project ArAGATS this summer exceeded all expectations. While I knew working at the site of Gegharot would provide me with the requisite training in Early Bronze Age material culture and site planning to carry out my dissertation work, I did not know that my operation would serve as the foundation – or original research component – of my dissertation work. After digging a series of 15 1x1 meter units on the unexplored western slope of the site, I opened a 4 x 4 meter unit that grew to 12 x 9 meters by the end of the season. This area appears to have been a communal mortuary context, with collective tombs, a hearth and enclosed spaces that seemed to house some sort of gatherings (based on the faunal and ceramic materials). The trench consisted of exclusively Early Bronze Age Kura-Araxes materials – the temporal focus of my dissertation. As a student interested in architectonics, iconography, and religion, my unit delivered! Based on the orientation of the exposed architecture and GPR, I have evidence that this mortuary complex continues north and south along the slope. My work this summer marked the beginning of research to come in the upcoming season(s). Equipped with data, I returned to Ithaca ready to begin the process of reformulating my research questions and the direction of my dissertation project writ large. The mentorship I received from Ruben Badalyan, moreover, versed me in the technical, methodological, and analytical intricacies of working on this Early Bronze Age cultural horizon. I left Armenia with a renewed sense of purpose and an awareness of the knowledge I need to hone in the upcoming year.
With the Hirsch Travel Grant, I participated in an excavation at the site Tel Abel Beth Maacah in Israel. The site is being excavated as a team effort led by Azusa Pacific University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, with participants from Cornell University and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. The site was in occupation from the Early Bronze Age II-III (third millennium BCE) to the Iron Age IIB, and the research questions center around establishing a chronology for the site and attempting to understand the nature of occupation and the identity of the inhabitants of the Iron Age city. As a participant, I acquired skills in excavation and interpretation in my region of focus.

My thesis research will involve the analyzing of faunal and spatial data from the site Tepe Farukhabad in Iran. Digging at a multi-layered tell site gave me a better understanding of what sites and recovered material look like in a Near Eastern context. One goal was to gain experience in interpreting depositional processes and the disposition of material remains in household contexts. Seeing firsthand how faunal materials are recovered from a similar region and site was enlightening towards my research goals. Additionally, I led a project in which I wet sieved soil samples and then picked and sorted microfauna for the zooarchaeologist.

The 2016 field season at Maacah yielded some exciting finds. A red-slipped head of a figurine was recovered in an Iron Age pit in Area B and an amethyst scarab in a gold setting was found in a destruction layer in Area A. Additionally, a Middle Bronze Age rampart was identified cut by Iron Age pits, and a large Iron Age pit with cultic vessels was found to have been dug down to the foundations of a Middle Bronze Age tower in Area F. Details of the stratigraphy were clarified in all areas excavated. Specifically, the area where I excavated yielded traces of bronze production in a building of unique architecture, dating to the end of the Iron Age I (late 11th-early 10th centuries BCE).
I traveled to Mili, Greece in order to participate in the Western Argolid Regional Project. Working at this project allowed me to gain experience in data collection through surface survey and in the practical uses of GIS in the field as well as archaeological database management. Gaining these skills has furthered my master’s thesis research using GIS to analyze survey data. As one of the field walkers, I collected artifacts in a wide variety of field conditions, getting first-hand experience that provided insight into quality assurance issues in survey methodology. I also had the opportunity to help identify and catalog artifacts as well as observe and discuss the production maps from these data. In particular, using ArcGIS in the data collection phase of an archaeological project has been valuable for reconsidering my thesis work and in developing professional skills.

While in Greece I also had the opportunity to travel around the survey area to ancient and modern sites and landscape features. This has also meaningfully contributed to my research on settlement patterns by giving me the opportunity to see evidence of changing settlement patterns in person. Seeing those changes encouraged me to view Mediterranean landscapes in a new light. Without traveling to the Argive plain I would not have had these rich experiences to draw upon when thinking about ancient interactions with and shaping of the landscape.
The Hirsch Grant allowed me to participate in a summer field school at the Yangguanzhai archaeological site in Xi’an, Shaanxi province, China. I spent the first week at Xibei University in Xi’an, attending lectures offered by local professors and archaeologists. I learned about Chinese archaeology, the archaeology of Shaanxi province, and the significance of the Yangguanzhai site. During the first week in Xi’an, I also visited the Banpo Museum, the Xibei University Museum, the Shaanxi History Museum, and the Museum of the Terracotta Army. These museum visits were led by Xibei University professors.

During the following four weeks, I had the opportunity to work on the Yangguanzhai site. Yangguanzhai was a prehistoric village dating from the Middle to Late Yangshao period (3200-3000 BCE). It is one of the largest settlements of its kind, with an abundant amount of artifacts excavated. I worked with three other students, excavating the southwest corner of a reservoir. We found a pit with pottery sherds and a piece of horse bone. Every day, we biked to the site, and experienced sifting, flotation, mapping, and recordation. I also got the chance to measure some reconstructed artifacts at one of the Shaanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology’s workstations. Thanks to the Hirsch Grant, which made my summer field school possible. This valuable experience not only significantly enhanced my current research, but also inspired new research ideas.
KATHLEEN GARLAND  
Classics PhD student

With the funds provided by the Hirsch grant I was able to travel to Italy and participate in the Marzuolo Archaeological Project (MAP). During this inaugural field season, the team was able to complete several key objectives, including determining the relationship of a large, multiroomed structure which was evident from geophysical survey, with a structure at the southern end of the site previously excavated by the Roman Peasant Project. We were able to determine that this structure had been built atop a levelling layer that had also been found in other parts of the site, establishing a relative chronology, and indicating large-scale investment in building up the area as a production center. Having achieved this, the team is well placed to excavate areas associated with the production of terra sigillata in the coming seasons.

The season was personally and professionally extremely rewarding. The team, a mix of graduate students, undergraduates, and specialists from Italy, Britain, the Netherlands, and the UK, was a pleasure to work with. The area I was in charge of supervising had its share of tile collapse, coins, nails and surprise monumental stones. Supervising first time excavators, learning the basics of photogrammetry, and taking responsibility for data recording, and working on a rural Roman site were all new learning experiences. I look forward to returning to Marzuolo next season.
I used Hirsch funds this summer for travel to Bulgaria for dissertation research. The project was at the Neolithic site of Slatina, in a neighborhood of Sofia that bears the same name. The site is well-known and unique, containing several large houses that are atypical for this region of Bulgaria for the early Neolithic. I went to Slatina initially to assess a) the potential for the site to produce a sufficient quantity of animal bones for my dissertation and b) the recovery methods of the field project and whether they would be rigorous enough to allow me to look at the spatial relationships of various domestic features and the animal bones contained within them. As with many excavations in Bulgaria, sieving is not a common practice and wasn’t at Slatina up until this year. This year I began a program of sieving selected contexts in order to increase the recovery of animal remains from smaller species (e.g. birds, microfauna) as well as younger individuals of species commonly recovered in the hand-collected portion (e.g. cattle, pigs, caprines).

In addition to the sieving, I also began organizing the faunal material from this season and previous seasons. Archaeofaunal materials have been collected from the beginning of investigation in the late 1980s, but the state of preservation of the documentation for these bones was highly variable. In many cases entire boxes or bags of bones were considered ‘extremely low priority’ due to lack of contextual information and will probably not be part of my dissertation. Nevertheless, the work this summer has convinced me that Slatina and its faunal collection have the potential to form the backbone of my research project.
This past summer, Hirsch funding allowed me to travel to the Campania region of Italy to participate in the Apolline Project, a project directed by Dr. Girolamo Ferdinando De Simone and Dr. Ben Russell. For three weeks, I carried out fieldwork at Aeclanum, an excavation which is being overseen by the Soprintendenza Archeologica della Campania, the Associazione Apolline Onlus, the University of Edinburgh, and the Comune di Mirabella Eclano. One of the aims of this project is to test the theory that despite being located in the mountains, Aeclanum, situated on the Via Apia, was actually highly economically interdependent with the Campanian plains, especially in terms of agricultural and wine trade. Before the Apolline Project, only a few insufficiently documented excavations had been carried out at Aeclanum, from 1910 to the present, and nothing has been formally published. This project therefore undertakes to explore an enormous and mostly uninvestigated area. Because this is a new site, I was able to learn about the excavation process from its beginning, from preparing an overgrown site to finding and identifying artifacts.

I spent my first week learning how to clean and identify pottery, bones, frescos, lamps, and other various artifacts from a previous Apolline Project excavation of a bath complex in Pollena Trocchia, located in the foothills of Mt. Vesuvius. The following three weeks were spent in Aeclanum doing excavation interspersed with laboratory work. I mainly excavated what has been tentatively identified as a nymphaeum in the forum of Aeclanum, along with spending time unearthing what is most likely an ancient Roman marble dump. Two site supervisors provided instruction in technique and procedure. On free days, I was able to explore archaeological sites within the region, and Ferdinando De Simone lead private site tours of the baths at Pollena Trocchia and a villa located in Somma Vesuviana, which contains one of the largest Roman wine cellars found in Italy. From learning to document stratigraphy to working with finds as interesting as a Roman earring, this project was incredibly engaging and fulfilling, and was what I hope to be my first of many Classical archaeological experiences to come.
This summer, thanks to the Hirsch Graduate Travel Grant, I was able to travel to Tajikistan and Iran. I first flew into Tajikistan for ten days to participate in a jubilee conference for the Sogdian excavations at Panjikent. Unfortunately due to an unexpected mudslide effecting the northwestern side of the site, the conference was not able to take place in its planned capacity. Despite this, a smaller conference still commenced, and I was able to present my research project on the wall painting with banqueters in Object 10 Room 16. With the conference quite shrunken, I was the only American and, aside from an Italian colleague, the only Western European scholar in attendance. The remainder of participants were members of the Panjikent excavation team, which is comprised of Russian team members from the State Hermitage Museum and Tajik members from the Institute of Archaeology at the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan and also the National Museum of Tajikistan. It was nevertheless fruitful. Because of the decrease in the number of participants it was easy to quickly become acquainted, the atmosphere was very relaxed and we were able to have long conversation at the conference venue, in the city center, and also at the excavation site and dig house. Also, with the vast majority of the group being Russian and Tajik, the lingua franca quickly shifted from English to Russian, which was fantastic practice, especially considering that I will move to St. Petersburg this fall for dissertation research. Along spending time at Panjikent to visit the site and participate in the conference, I was able to visiting the archaeological collections held at the National Museum of Tajikistan in Dushanbe. Several of the wall paintings I will work on for my dissertation were on display, and it was an absolute treat to be able to scrutinize them in person as well as collect publication photographs.

After my time in Tajikistan I flew to Iran. There I met a fellow archaeologist and friend who I traveled with first to a few cities to visit museum collections and then a string of archaeological sites located in southern Iran. The highlight in Tehran was visiting the collection of National Museums of Iran for both antiquities and Islamic art, as well as the superb collections of the Malik and the Reza Abbasi museums. There I was able to see in person many Sasanian silver vessels, which are important for an article I am currently working on, and also early Islamic textiles and garments, several of which are superb case studies for my dissertation chapter on early Islamic eastern Iran. We visited Isfahan and Yazd and then were based out of Shiraz for the majority of the trip. Shiraz is located in Fars province and is a perfect jumping point for visiting the archaeological sites of Persepolis, Naqsh-e Rostam, Naqsh-e Rajab, Firuzabad and Bishapur. I was extremely impressed with every site, but I particularly enjoyed Naqsh-e Rostam and Bishapur. Naqsh-e Rostam’s large Achaemenid and Sasanian reliefs carved into the rock face was simply inspiring. It was marvelous to finally study many of the Sasanian period reliefs in person after long studying them only from books. It was also extremely important to finally understand the topographical relationship individual monuments at a site (especially Naqsh-e Rostam, which is poorly explained in publications) and between sites, especially Persepolis, Naqsh-e Rostam and Naqsh-e Rajab. Bishapur, located in the Zagros was also particularly memorable. Visiting the old city and the rock reliefs in the neighboring gorge was incredible to see, but particularly powerful was climbing to the cave of Shapur. Inside the isolated cave is a unique 7 meter statue of the second Sasanian King of Kings Shapur I. Besides its brief appearance in surveys of Pre-Islamic Iranian art, little research has been undertaken on this statue. After spending some time studying the statue and also having the opportunity to explore the cave in which it is located, I have a few ideas for a future article.

After visiting Sasanian archaeological sites, I participated in a 10-day course on Islamic art led by the Islamic School of Arts in Tehran, Isfahan, Kashan and Qom. This class in combination with my museum and archaeological site visits in Iran made a heavy impact on my studies. Not only was I able to see and experience sites and objects, but I was able to meet and converse with fellow Iranian art historians, archaeologist and conservators. In addition, I have been invited back by Iranian colleagues from the Islamic School of Art for a residency to undertake dissertation research. I hope that after my 10 months of research in Russia, I will be able to return to Iran for three months not only for my own dissertation project, but also to help build stronger and invaluable scholarly relationships with Iran-based colleagues, whom America-based colleagues typically have little opportunity to interact with due to a hostile political climate.
There is a saying in Italy that Neapolitans are crazy because they live literally between the devil, Mt. Vesuvius, and the deep blue sea, the aquamarine waters of the Mediterranean. During six weeks living in and around Naples, I found that not only are the Neapolitans wild, but they are also generous, hilarious, kind, and inviting. I also learned a thing or two about navigating between drastically different worlds, as I simultaneously negotiated the distant past I was digging and my equally foreign present. Despite complications and altered plans, my dig with the Apolline Project in southern Italy was one of the best experiences of my life.

The dig that I expected to work on in Italy is a post 79 A.D. bath complex, sandwiched between a highway and an unfinished apartment building in a tiny town outside of Naples called Pollena-Trochchia. The site has been mostly excavated, leaving only a few questions unanswered, many of which cannot be answered in the small area which was allotted to the dig site. During my one-month dig, I eagerly anticipated working on this little bath. Unfortunately, the bureaucracy that rules the area around Pompeii was too slow to process our request, which left the project scrambling to find somewhere to dig.

The project had a very exciting dig scheduled, but it was not supposed to begin until the fall. The new site was a jackpot for any archaeologist: an entire ancient city. Aeclanum, a city with a rich history, was captured in 89 B.C.E by Sulla and quickly recovered under Roman rule. It was a really rewarding place to dig, with a beautiful view and helpful, kind colleagues. The mayor of the modern city Aeclanum even brought the team pastries and champagne when we arrived. Though the best part was, admittedly, the site dog, Bella.

Never having worked on an archaeological site before, I was taught the process from the ground up. I learned to painstakingly draw features and slowly dig layer after layer of ancient dirt. I worked most of the time on a latrine adjacent to one of the town’s bath complexes. Although I ended up digging only backfill, with the result that my most interesting finds were a cow tooth and about fifteen suspensura tiles that had been discarded by a previous dig, it was fascinating. My experience in Italy this summer was absolutely invaluable for my development as an archaeologist, a classicist, and a person.
This summer I had the good fortune to participate in the archaeological expedition of Sardis. I participated in the field season as the primary recorder for the full ten weeks of excavations. In my capacity as site recorder I had the opportunity to preliminarily study newly excavated objects from the field, as well as record and study retro-inventoried objects for publication. My original interest in the site coincided with my thesis project, on late antique Western Asia Minor ampullae; many of which were found (and continue to be found) at Sardis. I had the opportunity to examine those ampullae catalogued and stored in Sardis (those of which remained, and were not sent to the museum) over the past five decades. Thus, the Hirsch fellowship also allowed me the opportunity to further my research beyond Sardis’ depot to other important sites in Asia Minor. In this way, I was able to begin my trip in Istanbul and examine the incredible collections of the city. I was also able to travel to Ephesus, Bergama, Nevşehir, Priene, Miletus, and Didyma on my days off throughout the field season. These trips were invaluable in my research of ampullae this summer, as I was able to examine displayed objects, (such as at the Ephesus museum in Selçuk – photo included), and consider the standardization and variation of the flasks’ form and images. My travels also enabled me to further contextualize the archaeological sites where other ampullae have been discovered. This travel and research continues to inform my thesis project, as I further consider the possibilities that ampullae reveal about late antique travel and (local) religion and economy in Western Asia Minor.

The photos are taken from the Sardis acropolis below the Byzantine Fort (top) and from the Ephesus museum in Selçuk (bottom).
I spent two weeks conducting field research for my Master’s thesis in North Wales. The Hirsch Graduate Travel Award program allowed me to travel to Wales and conduct phenomenological, archaeological, and historical research as I hiked the last 50 miles of the North Wales Pilgrim’s Way. In addition to discussing the history and modern relevance of this medieval pilgrimage route with my fellow hikers, I photographed archaeological sites and medieval monuments, and kept detailed journal entries about my experiences along the Pilgrim’s Way each day. The second week of my research involved participating in an intensive residential Welsh language course at Nant Gwrtheyrn Language Centre; many of the foundational sources for my thesis are available only in Welsh.

The opportunity to physically visit the sites and landscapes that have been in use since the middle ages in Wales has provided me with insights into some of the experiences of medieval pilgrimage, both positive (camaraderie, historic sites, and beautiful landscapes) and negative (blistered feet, sunburn, and dangerous sea-crossings!).

Because of my experiences in Wales, I feel that I have a more vested interest in the project, a more personal attachment to the subject, and a more supportive stance for the efforts of the North Wales Pilgrim’s Way Committee in re-establishing this medieval pilgrimage route.
For more information about the Cornell Institute of Archaeology and Material Studies (CIAMS), please visit ciams.cornell.edu.