Excavations in Sicily 2014: the Gerace project

The setting of the Roman archaeological site of Gerace, showing UBC excavations in progress in 2013

1. Introduction
A second season of archaeological excavation will, it is hoped, take place at the site of Gerace (province of Enna) between late May and early June 2014, co-sponsored by the University of British Columbia’s Centre for the Study of Ancient Sicily and the Soprintendenza ai Beni Culturali Ambientali di Enna. The proposed excavation will last four weeks, commencing on Monday 19th May and ending on Saturday 14th June 2014. It must be stressed that, although request for an excavation has been made, final permission from the Sicilian Regional Government has yet to be obtained. Although I am confident that this will eventually be forthcoming, the excavation must be regarded as only 95% certain until that a concessione di scavo comes through, which will probably not be before I arrive in Sicily.

2. The excavation site
The site is that of a Roman villa in the heart of Sicily, situated in fertile agricultural grounds surrounded to the north by an amphitheatre of gentle hills. The site was discovered by accident 20 years ago when a torrent burst its banks and cut through one corner of an ancient structure, exposing a mosaic. Subsequent limited excavation discovered the ground plan on the surface of a small structure with five rooms and an irregular L-shaped corridor. Trial trenching descending to floor level suggested that there were geometric mosaic pavements in at least rooms, well preserved beneath a tile fall at the time of the building’s destruction. This building was further partially investigated in 2007, but still has not been completely uncovered. Two further rooms and part of the mosaic paved corridor were uncovered in the 2013 season, and a new chronology for the building established: the villa was built c. 370 AD and destroyed a century later by fire.

In May 2012 UBC conducted further investigations at the site, involving a team from the British School at Rome, which conducted geophysical survey over a wide area of the site; this work was completed by a further survey that took place in October 2013. This research defined the location of further buildings apart from the villa-like structure excavated in 1994 and 2007. One (A2 M1 on the plan), apparently 50 m long, was partially excavated in 2013 and found to be paved with an intact stone floor; built c. AD 325/50, it probably served as a granary. It collapsed, possibly in an earthquake in 361/3, and never rebuilt. The discovery of a further building (M2) in the geophysical survey, and the location of five kilns (M4 and M5), have also added to our knowledge of the site, and these too will be investigated, both in 2014 and in future years of the project. Numerous tiles marked PHILIPPIANI were found in the 2013 excavations (they were used to roof the villa-like building of c. 370 AD) and may provide the name of the owner of the Gerace
Part of a geometric mosaic pavement uncovered at Gerace in 2013

estate at that time: it will be interesting to establish whether one of the kilns identified in the geophysical survey was producing them.

The aims of the project are therefore
(a) to excavate the Roman structures more extensively and to understand their function;
(b) to establish the chronology and building phases, and to determine the date of both original construction and destruction of the various different phases;
(c) to recover ceramic remains (pottery, lamps, amphorae, tile) with a view to understanding both local ceramic circulation in the Roman period, and to evaluate the extent of imported ceramics, so as to understand better Gerace’s trading links with other parts of Sicily and of the Mediterranean at this time;
(d) to recover faunal and carbonized seed remains in order to establish the range of plants grown and animals raised (or at any rate consumed) by the inhabitants of Gerace.

In 2014, work will concentrate on (i) establishing further details of the granary; (ii) exploring further the possible bath-house alongside it belong in to the villa of c. 370; (iii) putting a first trial trench in the building (to the NE of that excavated in 2013), the presence of which is indicated by geophysics (A-2 M2 in the geophysical plot below), to test whether that constitutes an earlier residential villa or is an outbuilding for agricultural use.

Very few Roman villas have been excavated in Sicily, and no project in Sicily has hitherto been designed to understand better the agricultural basis of the estate in which it lay. Understanding the overall economy of Gerace is therefore also a key aim of the project.

3. **Training excavation**

This will be a training excavation, and two site supervisors, experienced archaeologists, will be employed to supervise the excavation and to carry out the recording. Training will be given in such skills as trowelling; stratigraphy; context sheets; surveying; interpreting, recording and drawing archaeological sections; identifying and handling small finds; pot-washing and marking; photography. It is intended that excavation will take place for
6 days each week, a total of 24 days. There will be opportunities for two students to stay up to four days longer at no extra cost helping post-excavation work.

The site of Gerace (centre, beyond the buildings) seen from Il Mandorleto

Part of the geophysics plot of still-buried buildings (blue) and kilns (green). Red areas are floors or tile falls.
4. **Accommodation**

Accommodation, within walking distance of the excavation site (approximately 10 minutes), will be in a bed and breakfast (agriturismo) called Il Mandorleto: see [www.ilmandorleto.it](http://www.ilmandorleto.it). Dinner will also be provided there; lunch will be a picnic, eaten under shaded cover in the garden of Il Mandorleto after the conclusion of each morning’s work. Among other amenities, Il Mandorleto also has a swimming pool.

5. **Daily routine**

Work begins on site at 0630. Pause on site for ‘second breakfast’ at 0900. Digging stops at 1400. After lunch, siesta until 1630. 1630-1830: one group will wash and mark the day’s finds; a second, larger group will return to site for further excavation. Dinner 1900. Bed: 2200. We will be working a six-day week. On the seventh day there will be optional excursions (at no extra charge) to other archaeological sites in Sicily, provided that additional transport can be arranged, to Agrigento, Gela, Syracuse, Piazza Armerina, Morgantina etc.

6. **Numbers**

The party will consist of a maximum of 20, including the director, a draughtsman, a surveyor, a palaeobotanist, and two site supervisors. There is also an archaeozoologist for the project (Professor Michael MacKinnon) but he will not be on site in 2014. There are vacancies for up to 13 UBC students. Preference will be given to those with prior archaeological experience. No application for a period less than the full excavation season of four weeks will be considered. Applications are invited on the attached form, which must be filled out and handed in to the CNERS office, Buchanan C 227 (for placing in my box), not later than 12 noon on Tuesday 11th February. If you have any questions before you apply, please contact the Director, Roger Wilson, at roger.wilson@ubc.ca or telephone 604-221-9407; fax: 604-822-9431. Interviews of all applicants will take place thereafter, probably between 24th and 28th February. I hope to let applicants know of whether or not they have been accepted by 1st March 2014. The Director’s decision on the composition of his team is, of course, final.

7. **Cost**

The cost for the four weeks will be CDN$2300. All meals and the accommodation are included in this price, except for lunch and dinner on Sundays (see below). In addition you will be required to register with GoGlobal and to pay their registration fee (approximately $300); they will be handling all payments, and in addition suitably qualified students will benefit from a GoGlobal grant to support their expenses for the project (it was $1000 in 2013). Students will in addition have to make their own way out to Sicily and pay for that. The nearest airport is Catania; Palermo is an alternative. From the airport you should take a bus to Enna Bassa; I will arrange collection from there. There will be no extra charge for the Sunday excursions (see above, section 5), but meals each Sunday will be payable by the participant, irrespective of whether the excursion is taken. Pocket money for incidental expenses, e.g. drinks, ice-creams, postcards, stamps, telephone, should also be borne in mind. Successful applicants are strongly advised to obtain insurance cover in case of medical emergencies. A tetanus injection is also essential. Neither the Director nor the University of British Columbia can be held responsible for any mishap that may occur either during the excavation or at any time during the whole expedition: you are required to sign an indemnity waiver on the application form.

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Roof tiles stamped Philippiani found at Gerace in 2013
Two lamps of African red slip ware made in Tunisia, found in 2013; second half of the fifth century AD. The discus of both shows Christian motifs.

8. Additional note

Excavation is exhausting and often tedious work, and the Sicilian heat is intense and oppressive in May and June. Every member of the team is expected to be in reasonable physical shape and capable of sustained manual labour. Excavation is an expensive business, and extracting the maximum possible results within the time and limited resources available will be our unswerving goal. There will be a lot of fun, certainly, but the regime will be a tightly disciplined one. Complete dedication to the excavation programme, and constant and consistent hard work, will be expected. Any intending volunteer who has doubts about this, or who thinks that the expedition to Sicily will be an excuse for a holiday in the sun, should not apply.

January 2014

R. J. A. WILSON
APPLICATION FORM FOR THE SICILY EXCAVATION 2014

Surname...........................................................  First names...........................................................

Date of birth...................................................... Male or female...........................

Contact address............................................................................

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Home address (if different from the above)

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Please indicate here your whereabouts if I need to contact you between 1st and 19th May

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Year in University (and state whether BA, MA or PhD)

Previous archaeological experience (indicating any special skills)

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Do you have any history of medical illness or any other associated factors (e.g. dietary needs) which you think the Director ought to know about?

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Are you interested in volunteering in the post-excavation study session after the completion of the excavation (no extra cost)?    YES  /   NO

If your initial application is unsuccessful, do you want to be considered for the reserve short-list?    YES   /   NO

I,..................................................., understand, if I am accepted as a volunteer for the Sicily 2014 excavation, that neither the University of British Columbia nor any representative of the same (Professor R J A Wilson) will be held responsible in any way, whether legally or financially, for any personal injury, loss or mishap that may occur, to myself or my possessions, through whatever cause.

Date.............................................               Signed.............................................................................