

6 The excavation so far

6.1 Project history

Monte Polizzo is 6 km. northwest of Salemi, in Trapani province, western Sicily (37° 56' N, 12° 46' E). The site consists of an interconnected group of ridges. The highest point is 725.9 meters (2359 feet) above sea level.

Vincenzo Tusa is the most famous archaeologist of Sicily in the 20th century. There's a very sympathetic account of Professor Tusa, including his bravery in standing up to organized crime, developers, and politicians, in Gaia Servadio's book *Motya: Unearthing a Lost Civilization* (2000). He conducted major excavations all over the island. But when he took over as Superintendent of Archaeology for Palermo province in the 1960s, there was hardly any evidence from inland western Sicily. In 1970 Professor Tusa launched an ambitious campaign of excavations to change this. Monte Polizzo was one the main site that he chose. The residents of Salemi had known that there was an ancient site here at least since the nineteenth century, and had picked up bronze ornaments from graves, building up a small collection in the City Museum in Salemi. But there had been no systematic investigation. In 1970 Professor Tusa excavated several trial trenches, uncovering Iron Age remains, including a substantial part of a 6th-century BC house, just 70 meters from where we're digging.

These things remained for a quarter of a century, until 1996, when Sebastiano Tusa—Vincenzo Tusa's son, who just moved from being Superintendent of Prehistoric Archaeology for Trapani province to running a new Superintendency, for underwater archaeology—got together with Kristian Kristiansen, Professor of Archaeology at the University of Gothenburg, and then the President of the European Archaeology Association. They founded the Sicilian-Scandinavian Archaeological Project to explore the site and its region in more detail.

Fieldwork began two years later (fig. 3.5). Christopher Prescott of the University of Oslo excavated a 6th-century BC building (House I) in 1998-2001, a deeply stratified Iron Age deposit (the Profile) in 1998-99, and a series of soundings on the northwest slope of the acropolis in 1999 (<http://www.hf.uio.no/iakk/sicilia> and <http://www.eoec.org>). Sebastiano Tusa excavated Iron Age building remains at the Portella Sant' Anna in 1999-2000. Michael Kolb of Northern Illinois University surveyed around Monte Polizzo in 1998-2000, excavated a Bronze Age tomb on Montagna Grande in 2000-2001, and in 2001 excavated two trenches in Salemi, finding medieval and 4th-century BC deposits, and some material from the 6th century BC. A trench dug in 2003 recovered parts of a disturbed 5th-century-BC building (<http://www3.niu.edu/acad/anthro/programelymi.htm>).

In 1999 Michael Shanks and Emma Blake led a small group of Stanford students in analyzing the finds from the earlier seasons of excavation, and in 2000 Stanford began excavations on the acropolis. Ian Morris was Director, Trinity Jackman was Assistant Director responsible for excavation, and Emma Blake was Assistant Director responsible for the lab, as well as directing lab activities for the Scandinavian and Sicilian teams. A larger Stanford team returned in 2001, and Brien Garnand joined the staff as Assistant Director responsible for project management. In 2001 Jennifer Trimble also carried out a flux gradiometer magnetometry survey, detecting sub-surface features. A preliminary report on the 2000 season appeared in the *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 46 (2001) 253-271, and one on 2001 will be out this spring in *MAAR* 47 (2002) 153-98. The report on the 2002 season, by Ian Morris, Trinity Jackman, Emma Blake, Brien Garnand, and Sebastiano Tusa, will appear as *MAAR* 48 (2003) 243-315, and the 2003 report is currently under review for *MAAR* 49 (2004).

Professor Trimble's magnetometer survey will be published in *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 48 (2003).

Stanford's excavation at Monte Polizzo is funded by the Tressider Fund in the Department of Classics and the Undergraduate Research Projects program of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education. The American Academy in Rome is a sponsor.

6.2 Summary of results (2000-2003) and goals for 2004

We've identified 5 periods of occupation on Monte Polizzo.

I Bronze Age. We have found a dozen fragments of pottery that date to the Bronze Age, probably spread across the period 1500-900 BC. But we haven't yet found any intact traces of Bronze Age activity. 2 of the Bronze Age sherds came from very near the top of the hill; maybe there were Bronze Age huts there, which have been destroyed by erosion. Or maybe we just haven't looked in the right place yet. Survey work in 2003 also found a stone tool that could be Palaeolithic, pushing the site's history back by millennia.

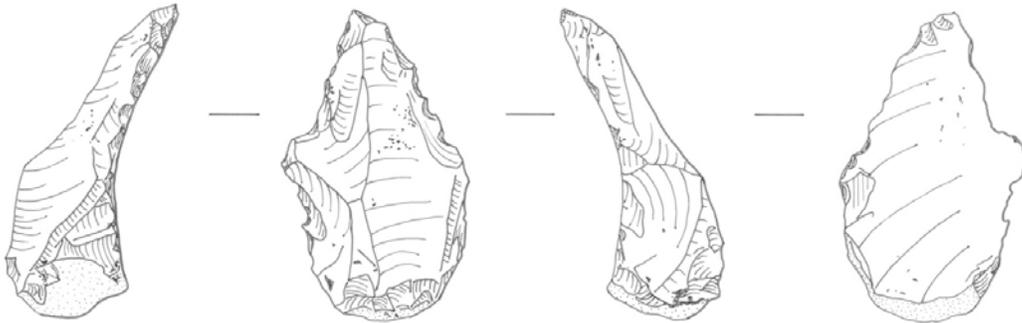


Fig. 6.1 Possible Palaeolithic stone tool, found in survey in 2003

II Archaic. Everywhere there's been digging on Monte Polizzo, people have found remains of this period, and particularly of the years 550-525 BC (sub-period II.c). In 2004 we'll continue doing survey and topsoil sampling to try to determine more accurately the size of the settlement. We currently think it's 15-20 hectares (roughly 20-30 football fields), with a population of maybe 1,000-2,000 people.

The earliest intact remains from period 2 belong in the 7th century (sub-period II.a): we've found a pit in zone C, perhaps a storage vessel in zone A, and stratified deposits in zone E (see fig. 3.6). It seems that there was quite a large settlement in the 7th century, but it's been almost entirely destroyed. The 6th-century occupants moved a lot of earth around, cutting new terraces into the hillside and building foundations on bedrock, and so far the only things that survive intact from the 7th century are pits cut into the bedrock and remains that got buried under the town dump in zone E (fig. 3.17). In 2004 we'll excavate more of the zone E deposits, and try to figure out what's going on with the possible 7th-century storage vessel in zone A.

The 6th-century remains, however, are abundant. The most substantial remains from sub-period II.b (600-550 BC) come from zone C, where in 2001-2003 we excavated one room

(C1/1) that had two destruction phases. It produced a lot of material, including numerous complete vessels. There are also remains of badly preserved 6th-century buildings in zone C.



Fig. 6.2 Part of a destruction deposit in room C1/1, c. 575 BC (excavated 2002)



Fig. 6.3 Artifact 2309, an indigenous grayware bowl with stamped decoration, from layer C1.24 in room C1/1. Diameter 14 cm, height 5.3 cm, c. 575. BC. Restoration Anne Haabu, photo Emma Blake



Fig. 6.4 Artifact 2424, an indigenous grayware bowl with incised decoration, from layer C1.24 in room C1/I. Diameter 18 cm, height 6 cm, c. 575 BC. Restoration Anne Haabu, photo Emma Blake.

In acropolis zone A, the large structure A5 was built on a terrace on the west side of the hill, perhaps around 600-575 BC (sub-period II.b; fig. 3.8). At that time, the summit of the hill was apparently open to the elements, and had a coating of white chalk (fig. 3.10). We excavated parts of A5 in 2003, and completing the excavation is the top priority for 2004. We're not sure yet whether A5 was a precursor of the later 6th-century hut-shrine A1, or whether it had a completely different function.

Around 550 BC (sub-period II.c) most of A5 was thoroughly cleaned out and deliberately demolished (fig. 3.9). Round building A1 was set up at the summit of the hill, perhaps reusing building stone from A5 (fig. 3.11). It had a tile roof, which was a novelty in



Fig. 6.5 Building A1, 2003 season

Sicily at this time, and inside there were two pits and a clay basin. Outside were an altar (A2) and a small stele, Rituals involving red deer went on around A1, and every so often the remains

of antlers and storage vessels were dumped down the hillside (fig. 3.14). A large deposit of ash and antler lies around the north and east sides of A1. We plan to complete excavating this in 2004. In 2002, we found the jawbone, some loose teeth, and a long bone from an adolescent human aged 12-14 years in this deposit, and it may be that one or more special humans were interred here as part of the deer rituals. The open areas around A1 (particularly area A1/4, against the southwest face) were used for sacrificial fires. The terrace west of A1, where building A5 had stood earlier, was now used in connection with A1's rituals, and a small rectangular room, A6, was built on it. We plan to excavate more of A6 in 2004, and to clarify the stratigraphic relationships between the west terrace and A1.

A1 was modified several times between 550 and 525 (fig. 3.12, still within sub-period II.c). The spaces north and east of it were paved, covering over the deposits of ash and antler, but the paving was done in a rather peculiar way, and making sense of that process is an important goal for 2004. About 20 meters north of A1, we excavated an extraordinary concentration of storage vessels in several rooms in 2002 (zone D; fig. 3.15). These probably



Fig. 6.6 Collapsed storage vessel in zone D, c. 525 BC (excavated 2002)

date around 525 BC. We want to know the relationship between zone D and zone A. We may widen the excavation toward zone D in 2004, or that may have to wait for a future season. Between 525 and 500 (sub-period II.d), A1 was completely remodeled (fig. 3.13). The northern part of the round building was demolished, and a rectilinear structure, probably open-air, replaced it. The southern part of the old round building was remodeled, apparently forming a low platform against the outside of the new rectilinear structure. This final version of A1, combining curvilinear and rectilinear forms, is unique in 6th-century Sicily; although in more general terms its combination of elements parallels the famous site of Sabucina, where worshippers built a rectilinear shrine in the 7th century, replacing it with two round ones in the

6th century, then building a squarish porch with columns onto one of the round buildings, before replacing them all with a new rectilinear building in the late 6th century. The complex, rapidly changing religious practices at Sabucina and Monte Polizzo are important evidence in the debates over Hellenization. Some of the details of the architectural remodeling remain obscure, and we plan to clarify these in 2004.

Most of Monte Polizzo was abandoned by 500 or even 525 BC, but A1 continued to receive visitors across the 5th and 4th centuries BC. We've found very small amounts of imported Athenian pottery that definitely dates to these periods. We suspect that the sanctuary remained a sacred spot long after the town was abandoned, just like many of the rural churches that dot the Mediterranean landscape today.

III Late fourth century BC. In 2001-2002 we excavated a small rectangular shelter (A3; fig. 3.16) that was built on top of the ruins of A1 around 350 BC. It was poorly preserved, but it included imported Greek pottery and Punic (Carthaginian) artifacts, including a stele, a glass bead, and bronze coins. There were also several limestone dice, and very large amounts of wine



Fig. 6.7 Coins and dice from around building A3, c. 350-300 BC

amphora fragments. It was abandoned around 300. The builders of A3 also widened the flat area around it by laying a clay floor over the terrace where building A5 had stood a quarter of a millennium earlier. This pattern—of reoccupation of rural sites in the late 4th century—is common in western Sicily, and probably has something to do with the expansion of Carthaginian military control. Some archaeologists think that sites like this are watchposts.

IV Medieval. Zones B and C were reoccupied around AD 1000, and went out of use by 1150-1200. In zone B a 6th-century-BC room was reconstructed, and a second rectangular room added to it. Both had paved floors and tile roofs. A stone drain was installed, and a short enclosure wall. In zone C a new house (C2) was built, closely following the alignment of some of the 6th-century-BC walls. In 2003 we uncovered extensive remains of walls on the west

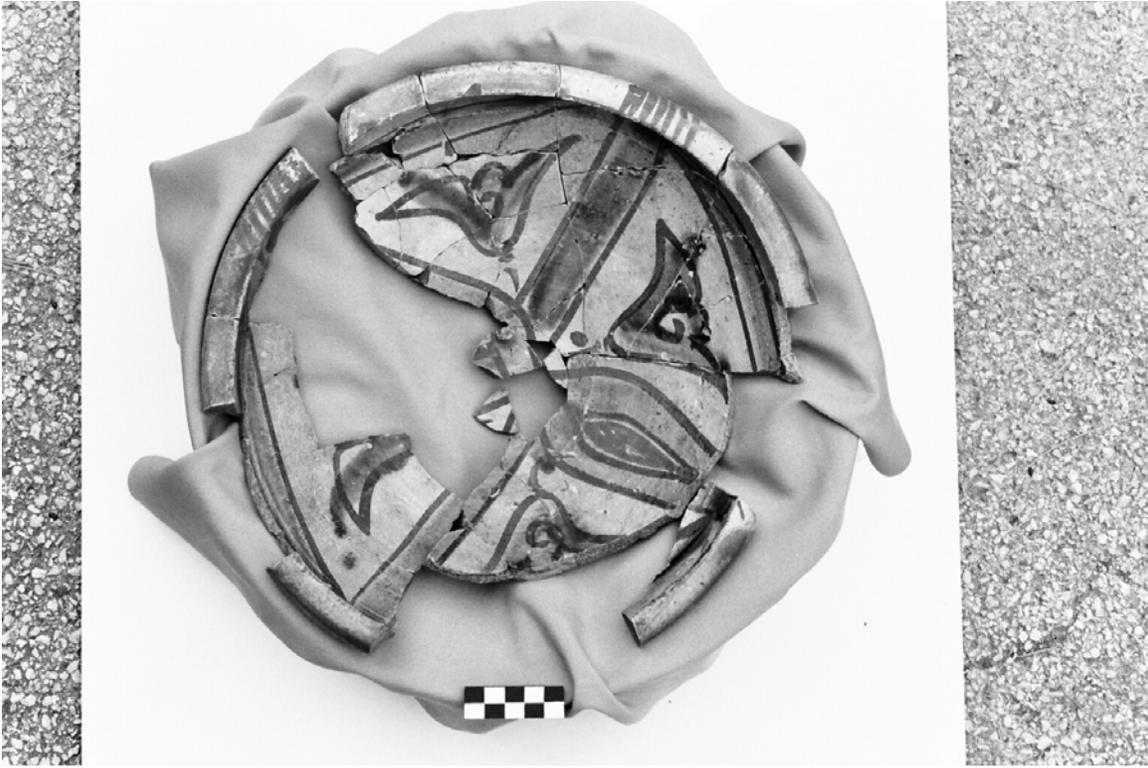


Fig. 6.8 *Green-glazed bowl from building C2, dating c. AD 1100-1125. Restoration, Anne Haabu; photo, David Connolly*

slope of the hill, which look like a planned settlement, and in two places in zone F (trenches G105 and G109; fig. 3.6) we excavated small trenches to find out whether these walls are medieval or Iron Age (or both). It looks like they're medieval, but we'll do more digging in 2004 to confirm this. We'll also continue survey work to find the limits of the medieval settlement. At the moment it looks like it was much smaller than the Iron Age town, and was restricted to the west slope of the acropolis ridge.

In 2003 the study of seed remains from the zone B medieval buildings produced interesting results. The 6th-century-BC settlement had a mixed economy, based on barley and several different kinds of wheat, and it looks like they weren't very efficient at cleaning the grains of chaff and weeds. By the 12th century AD, though, the people using the house in zone B seem to have switched over entirely to one kind of wheat, which was very carefully cleaned. This pattern of wheat monoculture aimed at export markets was probably introduced by the Romans in the 3rd century BC, and apparently continued or revived in the Arab-Norman periods, but it contrasts strongly with the 6th-century-BC finds, which seem much more typical of subsistence agriculture. This is important, because one of the major theories about the Elymian population boom and rising living standards in the 6th century BC is that they were involved in a profitable export trade, selling grain to the Greeks.

V Modern. We've found no traces of activity datable between 1200 and 1950. At that point, the entire hill was plowed in a series of tree trenches that often disturb earlier deposits, and tree saplings planted in the furrows. When we excavate the tree trenches, we regularly find fragments of the flowerpots that the saplings were transported in. In zone A, a small shepherd's shelter (A4) was built on top of A1 and A3, causing severe damage to the ancient remains. Some people in Salemi say that this was a German observation post in 1943, but the earliest

datable remains are coins and beer bottle fragments from the late 1970s and 1980s. The only rabbit bones from the site come from layers associated with A4, along with numerous shotgun cartridges. We suspect that the rabbit hunters who still frequent Monte Polizzo each spring built A5 around 1975-80.