

8 The lab

8.1 Finds processing

The finds from the excavations at all parts of the site are brought down at the end of the day to the lab in the dig house. Emma Blake oversees the processing. Monte Polizzo produces several tons of pottery each year, so there's a lot of material to sort through and record.

The vast majority of the finds are pieces of pottery (potsherds). Occasionally whole pots turn up, and other finds include bones and shells, stone tools, ivory, bronze, iron, amber, building material, and beads. The ceramics, bones, and shells need to be cleaned before they can be studied, but the metal is set aside for later study. **Do not wash metal.** Emma Blake will give some instruction at the beginning of the season on how to wash potsherds, and Tara Hnatiuk will do the same for bones and shell. If in doubt, consult one of them. As explained in section 7.5.2 above, the diggers wash that day's sherds in the afternoon after they get back from the site, or in the evening before dinner. The amount of finds of course varies from day to day but with everyone washing it should take no more than an hour to do. This is a good way to see what you dug up during the day: often, interesting decoration will be hidden under the grime of a couple of millennia.

Washing potsherds involves scrubbing them in water **gently** with an old toothbrush or nail brush (you don't have to use your own, we'll supply them). After you've washed a bag of sherds, you spread them out in a yellow plastic tray (a *cassetta*) to dry. You should put a label on the outside of each *cassetta*, copying out with details of trench number, layer, contents, date, etc., from the labels filled out onsite. Put the plastic bags that the potsherds came in (with the labels carefully wrapped inside, so that they don't get wet) inside the *cassetta*, weighted down so that they don't blow away. Then set them aside (grouped with the other sherds from the same layer) in a special area for drying. **Never, ever, mix finds from different layers.** Drying takes several hours or overnight depending on the weather. Once dry, the sherds are rebagged and are ready for cataloging.

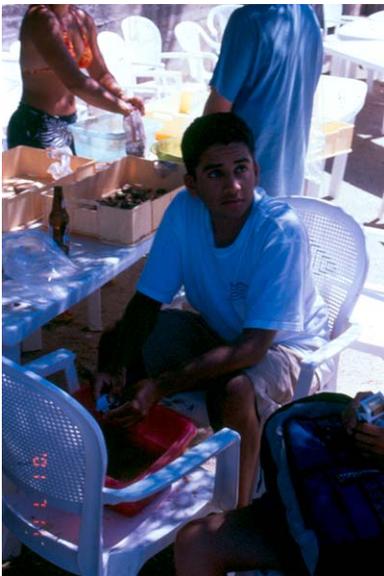


Fig. 8.1 *Stanford student Gautam Raghavan washing pottery, 2001*

As so much of what we find is pottery, pottery recording occupies most of our time. We sort all the sherds from the same layer into categories based on fabric type, i.e., groupings according to similarities in such features as clay color, clay composition, and sherd thickness. We then count and weigh sherds of each fabric type. We normally put the plain body sherds—those coming from the body of the vessel—back in their bag to be stored. There's little more we can do with them for the moment. But the whole or almost whole pots, and the interesting sherds, those ones with decoration or with a handle or rim (called "diagnostic"), are studied more closely. It's from the differences in decoration, or rim or handle shape, that we can, for example, attribute the pot to a particular time period, or determine that it was made by a particular group of people (local or imported, for example). In the case of complete vessels, we can tell what the pot was used for (such as perfume container, cooking pot, water jug, and so on). In this second stage of recording, we describe the decoration or the shape of the handle or rim, and any other pertinent information, and record this in the database. These diagnostic sherds will be photographed and drawn as well.



Fig. 8.2 Assistant Director Dr. Emma Blake (University of Michigan) in the lab, 2002

The trench supervisors have several responsibilities in the lab. They should always know where all the finds from their trenches are. They also need to record in their context sheets under the appropriate day and layer the numbers of any photographs of finds from their trenches, and to prepare drawings of selected finds.

After the experts in the lab have reviewed the finds, some of them will be tagged for drawing and photography, and the conservator may begin working on restoring some of the pots. Most objects, though, will be put back in their bags to be stored in the museum. But this isn't the end of the process, even for the humblest coarseware bodysherd. Over the next few years every object you find will be repeatedly re-examined by a series of specialists. Each of them brings special skills to the analysis of finds, and they also cross-check each other's interpretations. This will culminate in the publication of a series of final site reports, which go into the world's major research libraries, and the web-based digital publication. Even after this,

the finds will continue to be studied by archaeologists working at other sites or doing research on western Sicily. Restored pots and other significant objects will go on display in the museum in Salemi, along with photographs of the dig and perhaps reconstructions of one or more buildings, as has been done with Mokarta.

We can't take any of the finds (except soil samples) out of the country, so we do all recording and basic analysis in Salemi. Later, with the information in the database, we can do more advanced analysis back in California, asking what the finds tell us about life at Monte Polizzo, about who lived there, what they were doing, when they were doing it, and why. The patterns in the distribution of pottery and other objects can tell us a surprising amount. You're welcome to come by any time and ask questions about the finds and how we classify and analyze them, and just generally see what's going on. You'll be given updates of the lab's doings and more detailed information on this recording system during the field season.

8.2 *Finds from Monte Polizzo*

All the portable objects found while excavating may be divided into two broad categories, **artifacts** and **ecofacts**. Ecofacts are organic and environmental remains whose presence may be a byproduct, sometimes an unintentional one, of human activity: animal bones, seeds, pollen are examples.

Artifacts, objects that have been intentionally produced or altered by humans, fall into several main categories based on material.

Metal artifacts: bronze, iron, and silver have been found on the site. Metal objects may take the form of jewelry (chains, brooches, beads); tools (such as an iron cleaver from zone A) and weapons (such as arrowheads or spears). Coins are also found (see fig. 6.7).



Fig. 8.3 *Bronze fibula (safety pin), early 6th century BC, from zone E*

Worked bone: when bone is carved it becomes an artifact. Bone beads, gaming pins, and worked antlers have been found on site.



Figure 8.4 Bone ring or bracelet from building A1. Restoration and photo Anne Haabu

Worked stone: stone artifacts at Monte Polizzo range from big slabs used as grindstones, to polished stone axes, to weights, to dice (see fig. 6.7), to a 4-century-BC religious stele of Carthaginian type.



Figure 8.5 Punic stele, c. 350-300 BC, found in 2001 built into the wall of shelter A4

POTTERY: pieces of pottery (sherds) make up the overwhelming majority of the artifacts from the site. Fired clay was easily obtained and durable, and thus used widely in antiquity. Clay objects at Monte Polizzo have included a figurine and a fragment of a larger frieze or mask, as well as loomweights and spindlewhorls used in processing wool, but for the most part

pottery is the material for containers of all types. At Monte Polizzo we find the following forms, which we divide into Coarse, Medium and Fine wares based on the quality of the clay:

I Coarseware forms

a. Storage vessels. Thick (c. 3cm) reddish brown or gray sherds, with rough surfaces, are pieces of large storage jars that would have held surplus foodstuffs, and would have been moved only rarely. These are made locally for many centuries, and are found in all contexts on the site. Often referred to as pithos (plural pithoi) after the Greek word for them (see fig. 6.6).

b. Transport amphoras. These are tall closed vessels of dense, high-fired clay in a range of colors and textures, with walls of perhaps 1 cm thick. They were used for transporting liquids, usually wine or olive oil, around the Mediterranean in antiquity and in the Middle Ages. All major production areas produced their own containers, and the origins and ages of these containers can be recognized by the appearance of the clay and by details in the shape of the vessel. At Monte Polizzo we have found Etruscan, Phoenician, western Greek, and Eastern Greek amphoras.

c. Cooking pots. Rough handmade pots, made of crumbly clay blackened from direct exposure to flames, were used for cooking. They were made locally and are found in the 6th c BC levels at the site.

d. Roof tiles. these are curved rectangular slabs of pottery, whose shape closely resembles modern-day roof tiles. These are several centimeters thick and have rough surfaces, but differ from the storage vessel clay in color and density. The most common roof tiles are light colored: pink/buff/peach. These date to the 10th – 12th c AD and are typically known as Norman roof tiles. There are a few examples of roof tiles from the 4th c BC contexts as well, though they differ in fabric from the Norman examples.

II Mediumware forms

This pottery is usually undecorated, but generally thinner walled and with a smoother surface than the coarsewares. There are locally made and imported mediumwares. Mediumware vessels were often used in food preparation and serving: jugs, large serving and mixing bowls, and water pitchers are typical forms. The locally made mediumware vessels have a wide range of color and texture, though many are in the same polychrome gray and red clay of which the storage vessels are made. A common imported mediumware in the 6th c BC and 4th c BC phases of the site is Greek buffware. The clay is a pale yellow or buff color, undecorated, and the forms are often jugs or jars.

III Fineware forms

Finewares have had the impurities removed from the clay, and the clay is often decorated with paint or incisions.

a. Local finewares. At Monte Polizzo these are most frequently gray colored, and decorated with incisions and impressions in the clay (see figs. 6.3, 6.4). The graywares date from 8th through the early 5th c BC. There are also local vessels covered with a diluted white paint or slip, with designs in black, red and orange paint. These date from the 7th and 6th c BC.

b. Greek finewares. These date from the 7th-4th centuries on the site and may be imported from the Aegean (Corinth, Attica, Ionia), or from Greek colonies in southern Italy and Sicily. These sherds are quickly identifiable. The clay is generally a shade of buff and has been decorated in a thick shiny black paint or, more rarely at our site, red paint. The vessels with the glossiest paint are generally Attic in origin and the paint is referred to as Black Glaze, (though the treatment is not technically a glaze). The Greek finewares can be dated quite closely because of the number of stylistic changes they underwent in short periods of time. The vessels are often drinking cups though other forms such as perfume bottles and oil lamps are also known from the site.



Fig. 8.6 *Artifact 2441: East Greek B2 cup from the A5 terrace, c. 550 BC*

c. Etruscan bucchero. We have found two sherds belonging two vessels from Etruria, made of the black shiny clay known as bucchero. Bucchero sherds date to the 7th-6th c BC.

d. Medieval finewares. Bowls dating from the 10th to 12th centuries AD have been found on site, decorated in green, brown, blue and white glazes, that is, coatings of glass. This decorative style originated in North Africa and is known as Arab or Arab-Norman (see fig. 6.8).