

PortAnta
Program Ideology:

Drawing on Site and in the Museum: a Global Studio and Field Experience

THE SITE

The archaeological site of Torre de Palma is home to the largest excavated Roman villa in Iberia as well as one of the largest and most unique Paleo-Christian basilicas from the Roman world. This site is well known for settlement phases from the 1st-7th century although recent discoveries have proven that this site began during the late Bronze Age (1st millennium) and continued, in various areas, until the 16th century. The longevity of such a site is not only rare but provides researchers the opportunity to observe the macro and micro changes in this region of the world by observing the economic consumption patterns and the architectural changes and refurbishments for over 2000 years. Few archaeological sites can offer such an ocean of archaeological materials and architectural complexes to examine.

It is, for students, one of the few sites that allows instructors and participants a chance to discuss, while viewing, the chronological changes over major historical phases that are, in fact, very difficult to explain to students. The researchers, archaeologists and professionals involved at the work on this site have come together to involve students of all ages and put together a curriculum that will teach the following to students and give them a more global vision of history:

1. Development of culture and history through architectural and material artifacts
2. The ability for young students to see, feel and study these materials allows for a permanent and comprehensive understanding of the historical phenomenon
3. Learning within an environment that is rich, culturally different and historically fertile will assure that all participants are learning from their instructors as well as from their peers
4. The opportunity to learn in a geographical area with visual access to such archaeological sites and living monuments from these important historical phases:
 1. Prehistoric and Protohistoric cultures
 2. Iron Age and Greco-Roman cultures
 3. Late Antiquity and Paleo-Christian cultures
 4. Visigothic and Islamic cultures
 5. Reconquista and Medieval cultures
 6. Exploration period and the contemporary cultures of Iberia

5. All participants will be taught, through hands on exploration, the skills to understand chronological changes as well as given the time to reflect and store their experiences using yoga and meditation. Students will benefit from the organization, daily regimen and nightly yoga and meditation practices that will give them an experience which will positively and permanently create an indelible mark on their lives and deepen their comprehension of the material discovered each day.
6. Combining hands on experiences with drawing and on site lectures with the computerization and graphic reconstruction of the site will, indeed, give the participants a new perspective on history and visual perception.

Our summer programs aim to provide students with new opportunities that will encourage them to be above average thinkers who are able to incorporate their newly learned skills into their daily lives at home. Our students create a solid foundation for these new experiences in life and are better able to share these new connections with the world. We believe that giving students the option of creating positive experiences for themselves will help them to avoid creating negative experiences later on in life.

THE HISTORY OF THE EXCAVATED SITE

This site was first discovered in 1947 by a local farm hand on the estate of Torre de Palma in the Alto Alentejo region of Portugal. From this initial discovery until 1964, the site was excavated by the then director of the National Museum of Archaeology in Lisbon Portugal, Dr. Manuel Heleno. Because of the strenuous relationship between this archaeologist and the government authorities of a Fascist regime, M. Heleno was forced into retirement and upon his departure from the museum, he took with him all of the notes and important maps from this and many other archaeological sites in Portugal.

In 1983, an American excavation began the re-excavation of the site which lasted until 2000. Currently, the monographic volumes for these works are being prepared with the first volume due to be published in the spring of 2009 and the second volume in November of 2009 by the director of PortAnta, Maia M. Langley.

In 2000, this researcher began a reassessment of the collections from the National Museum as the notes from M. Heleno's excavation had been returned to the museum. Since this time, all of the materials, which had been kept in storage at the museum and had no provenience, have been reassigned to their appropriate areas and strata and have been merged with the later excavation to form one readable matrix. From this new

research, the evidence of eastern influenced Bronze Age occupation, Iron Age occupation and reoccupation, 1st century Romanization and later Paleo Christian and Visigothic vestiges have prevailed with archival records that attest to the continuation of the chapel here until the 16th century.

THE IDEA

Because of the complex layers of occupation and the centuries of history that exist here – both on the site and in its collections – Torre de Palma is the ideal site to teach students, from several disciplines, about art, history, archaeology, materials analysis, ecology and geosciences, geography, architectural preservation and materials conservation. Because of the wealth of architectural complexes, and the now provenienced materials that were once housed here, this researcher sees an opportunity to invest in a larger, more important project: the 3D reconstruction of the archaeological works.

What is essential is the involvement and education of students as well as the collaborative efforts of professionals who are willing to take a keen interest in the site and the educational opportunities at hand. ***This site provides both instructors a chance to teach hands on as well as students a chance to “see” and “feel” history rather than merely being taught theory.***

This program is a unique opportunity for teaching complicated processes to young minds and for enriching the education of young minds. It is, in fact, the only program of this kind available to young students and taught using a “hands on” methodology.

THE FUTURE

The aim is to involve legitimate and dedicated instructors and students in the reinterpretation of this important archaeological monument. In doing so, we hope to make available to the scientific and non-scientific community an interpretation of this site that all viewers can digest and understand. The building for the center is complimented with a lab and gallery where much of the work will take place.

A 3D reconstruction of this site, one that is available to international viewers and visitors, that is generated from the floor up using student involvement and participation, will both enrich the minds of the participants (students and instructors) and will add to the enrichment of the site and will be a permanent addition to the newly developed interpretation center.

THE BEGINNING

In 2008-10 we are forming additional partnerships with museums and institutions of higher learning. Students will be working in the collection of the National Museum of Archaeology, Lisbon, Portugal as well as working on site at the archaeological station of Torre de Palma. Our team consists of archaeologists, computer animators and graphic design experts and professional artists and we are constantly looking for qualified new professionals and opportunities to enhance the learning experience for young minds.

We look forward to receiving applications for the summer of 2009 and are excited to begin work with the young minds of the future.

Maia Langley and Cindy Ludlam
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