

## 2021 Season Report

The 2021 season at the Michigan State University Excavations at Isthmia, which began on 21 July and ended on 24 August, involved a range of research and site maintenance activities. The ongoing COVID pandemic continues to have a significant impact on work at Isthmia, largely due to the closure of the site to non-essential personnel for the majority of 2020 and the lingering effects of travel restrictions on the project staff. Therefore the 2021 team consisted of the following individuals.

- William Batson: scanning specialist
- Stephen Bush: archaeology student
- Alyssa DeTorrice: archaeology student
- Jon M. Frey: director
- Melissa Morison: ceramic specialist
- Stephan Song: scanning specialist
- Dan Trego: study program coordinator
- Lita Tzortzopoulou-Gregory: assistant director

1) Because of the long-term closure of the site in 2020, many of the monuments and facilities maintained by the MSU Excavations required substantial clearing of trees, weeds and other debris. This was especially the case in the area of the Roman Bath and the storage / study facilities to the northwest of the temple temenos, while other parts of the site will require further attention in subsequent months.



Two panoramic views of the excavation house before (above) and during (below) clearing of the heavy underbrush that grew during the pandemic.



Matthew Crum (U.C. San Diego) tackles the task of “weeding” the hypocausts in Room IX of the Roman Bath.



Theodore and Timothy Frey (St. Thomas Aquinas Elementary School) assisting in the clearing of brush from the walls of the Roman Bath between Rooms I and II.

2) The change in institutional sponsorship made the 2021 season an ideal moment to begin a thorough assessment of the artifacts and records held in secure storage at the site. Therefore, a main priority this summer was the completion of a “shelf audit” of all inventoried objects kept in storage on the ground floor of the “dig house.” By the end of the season, the team photographed and recorded the current location of nearly 1300 ceramic artifacts, many of which had been misplaced and therefore “lost” in storage over the past half-century of study at the site. In addition, in response to the request of the Ephoreia, all objects located on unsecured shelving were moved to temporary storage containers and placed in more seismically safe and secure locations. It is hoped that new shelving can be installed next season and these objects can be stored more safely and securely.



Daniel Trego and Alyssa DeTorrice (Michigan State University) enter the inventory numbers of ceramic vessels as part of the extensive shelf audit process.



Front room of the first floor of the excavation house after the relocation of artifacts to more secure locations.

3) As part of an ongoing effort to publish the Roman Bath, which was largely excavated in the 1970-1978 seasons, specialists from Prairie View A&M University, engaged in a project to digitally scan the standing remains of this important monument. Over the course of one week, the team carried out a total of 44 individual scans, producing well over 120 Gb of spatial data. Once processed in the fall of 2021, the resulting model will serve as the basis for both the digital reconstruction of the Roman bath and the initial plans to construct a protective roof over the structure. As an intermediate measure, and on the recommendation of the Ephoreia and site conservators, we will resume the practice of covering the bath mosaic in the fall.



William Batson (Prairie View A&M University) monitors the scan of Room VI of the Roman Bath.



Stephan Song (Prairie View A&M University) checks the point cloud from the previous day's scanning.



The scanning team on the day of the last scan. From l to r: Stephen Bush (Michigan State University), Stephan Song (Prairie View A&M University) and William Batson (Prairie View A&M University).

4) A smaller scale project to sample tiles from the hypocaust systems once in use at Isthmia was also carried out this season under the supervision of a representative of the Corinthian Ephoreia. For each of the 31 tiles selected for this study, a small section of ceramic material was removed using a wetsaw. All samples were transported to Athens and given over to the Fitch Laboratory, where they will be mounted on slides for future petrographic analysis. In conjunction with this study, a subset of these samples was subjected to XRF analysis.



Melissa Morison (Grand Valley State University) lays out tile samples (left) and conducts an XRF assay (right).



Jon Frey (Michigan State University) uses a wet saw to cut samples from the tiles under study.

5) The 2021 season represents a significant turning point in the history of research at the site of Isthmia. Along with the change in directorship and institutional affiliation comes a rare opportunity to assess the status of the physical facilities as well as ongoing research and digitization projects. In so doing, we look forward to future collaboration with the Ephoreia as we seek to pivot away from a traditional model of field research and toward a research format that emphasizes digitally enhanced study of the evidence already stored at the site and in the museum.



Kyras Vrysi and the Saronic Harbor obscured by the smoke from wildfires in the morning.