

REDISCOVERING

SAN MICELI

In 1893, Sicilian locals found a gold coin in a field just north of the town of Salemi, Sicily. Excited about the find, local archaeology enthusiasts contacted Antonino Salinas, the director of the National Museum in Palermo. Salinas began excavating the site later that year in a whirlwind dig that lasted only a few weeks.¹

His findings—a church with three mosaics, tombs, buildings, monumental architecture, Greek and Latin inscriptions, and more coins—were published with equal rapidity. Salinas believed that the lower mosaic he had uncovered was from the earliest church in Sicily.



The site, known as San Miceli, became a subject of controversy, with scholars debating whether or not the church really could be the earliest. They questioned the credibility of Salinas' quick work, and since some of the

smaller artifacts had disappeared, it was impossible to come to any definitive conclusions. The beautiful mosaics of San Miceli were reburied and the site slipped into obscurity.

In 2012, Randall Younker, professor of archaeology and history of antiquity, director of the Archaeology PhD program and director of the Institute of Archaeology at Andrews University, began looking into the possibility of starting an excavation at a New Testament or Paleochristian (Early Christian) site.

Andrews University, through the Madaba Plains Project², has had a presence in Transjordanian archaeol-



The team at the 2015 San Miceli Conference in Sicily.

ogy for almost 50 years with digs at both Tall Hisban and Tall Jalul in Jordan. Although the digs began as strictly Old Testament excavations, archaeologists have recently expanded their research scope to include the Roman, Byzantine and Islamic periods. This is due to the fact that one must dig through remains from these periods in order to access the older material and that a more complete picture of the site emerges when all the data, rather than material from just one time period, is examined. Still, the digs in Jordan did not offer much by way of New Testament and Early Christian history.

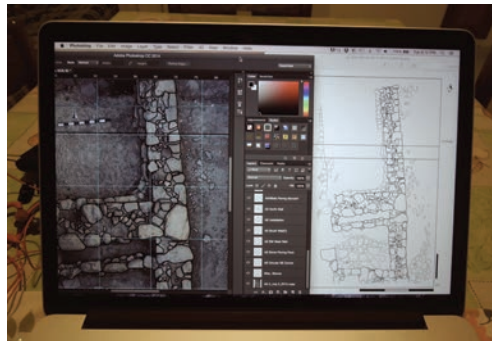
Elisabeth Lesnes, professor at Istituto Tecnico Statale per il Turismo Marco Polo, Palermo and a research associate of Younker's, had connections in Sicily, and suggested that Younker look for a site there. As Younker began reading literature on Sicilian archaeology, he came across Salinas' excavation of San Miceli. It seemed like a perfect fit. No one

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had excavated the site since Salinas' expedition and it was right in the time period that Younker was looking for.

"According to the ceramic evidence," Younker says, occupation of San Miceli "started in the Roman period in the 3rd century BC and continued to be occupied until the 7th century AD. That's almost 1,000 years of activity in this little village. It was occupied at the time when the pagan Romans converted to Christianity and Christians became the majority," making it a significant site for understanding Sicilian Paleo-Christian history.

In 2014, Andrews University launched its first excavation in Sicily. Younker assigned PhD students as directors to the three fields along with a supervising professor. Constance



ABOVE: Constance Gane's technical drawing in progress
RIGHT: Christopher Chadwick entering data on his iPad

Gane, associate professor of archaeology and Old Testament, and curator of the Horn Archaeological Museum, worked in Field A with student director Christopher Chadwick. This area, according to Salinas' findings, contained architectural remains that were thought to be the ruins of a village or town, as well as tombs. Re-excavation of Field B, the site of the basilica found by Salinas, was directed by student Shellie Cox, with supervision from Younker.

During the first excavation, the team was able to find the original mosaic that Salinas had found, discovering that he had excavated only a portion of it. The new section contains a bird, which is now part of the logo for the site.

"We found new tombs," Younker explains, "and the most exciting discovery was that there was not just one church with three separate floor phases," as previously thought, "but two churches built one on top of the other. We were able to find coins at the very bottom layer of the earliest church and at the top on the destruction layer which enabled us to date it to the time of Constantine II in the 4th century AD." This indeed makes it one of the earliest churches in western Sicily.

The team returned to San Miceli last summer from May 21–July 7 to continue their work along with supporting faculty, and participants from the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Brazil, Argentina and Peru, among others. Elisabeth Lesnes, co-senior



Randy Younker

project director and local liaison, and Giorgia Lanzarone, a ceramics specialist, organized the Italian participants.

During the second excavation, re-used Doric columns were found in the walls of



the first church, indicating that an earlier pre-Christian building, perhaps a pagan temple, previously stood in the same place or nearby. The second church, built after Vandal invaders demolished the first church in the late 5th century AD, was destroyed in the mid-7th century AD, probably by Arab invaders. "We found two coins, including one gold coin found by Christopher Chadwick, that date to 652–653, right in the destruction layer in perfect condition," says Younker.

In addition, a large destruction layer from the 5th century was found in Field A. "Even though archaeologists have been digging in Sicily a long time, very few have found such a large destruction layer intact. It went across the entire field around the basilica," enthuses Younker. "We have entire rooms where the roof collapsed and we found roof beams and nails. Underneath, we found contemporary amphorae, which are storage jars for trading. This might indicate that the church community was involved in trading. The archaeology specialists were very excited about that."

In the same area, a 7th century destruction layer was found. Michel Bonafe, one of the top ceramic specialists, was particularly excited about this find. "He told me that archaeologists have never found a 7th century layer intact. That's one of the weakest areas in Sicilian archaeology, we don't know much about the ceramics," says Younker.

Diagnostic artifacts, such as coins and pieces of broken ceramics called potsherds, are important for excavations because they allow scholars to date the various archaeological layers. Paul Ray Jr., associate professor of Old Testament and biblical ar-

chaeology, director of archaeological publications, and associate curator for the Horn Archaeological Museum, notes, “We find a lot of western terra sigillata³ and African red slip. These kinds of wares have been known for a long time in Europe.”

Due to the “long history of imported wares,” scholars are able to date ceramic remains down to 25-year increments. “We have experts that come in and tell us exactly what part of a specific time period the artifact is from,” says Ray. The team also uses 3D scanners to scan the objects.

Photography and drawing top plans are another important part of the data collection process. Jacob Moody, a PhD student, took photos of each field every day using an industrial camera pole, which functions like a glorified selfie stick. After taking photos of the fields from several different angles, he used special software to stitch the photos together, creating a 3-D geo-referenced panorama of the field.

The Andrews’ team members are not the only ones excited about what they were discovering. “The local people are very much interested in archaeology,” says Younker. “The press came out several times and we were in several newspapers.” “They are so excited that we care about their history, their ancestry, and their world,” agrees Gane. The local archaeology

group has shown their support for the project by putting together an evening conference at the end of each season to highlight the excavation.

Findings from the excavation have also been presented at the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) annual meeting in a special session dedicated to Sicily. “This year we are having a second all-Sicily session and we have some important speakers including Lorenzo Negro, the director of digs at Jericho and Sicily,” says Younker.

Younker is also working with contacts in Sicily and ASOR to set up an ASOR-run archaeology research institute in Sicily similar to ASOR’s American Center of Oriental Research (ACOR) in Jordan. This would provide visiting and resident archaeology scholars with a central location for relevant books, articles and other resources relating to Sicilian archaeology. It would also function as a place for visiting scholars to stay during extended research periods.

The team returned to Sicily this summer with the goal of learning more about the history and inhabitants of San Miceli. Younker plans to continue opening up a large structure, which they now think is a villa, in Field A and excavate more of the basilica in Fields B and C. “We hope to find some houses,” he says, particularly “earlier houses during the transition” from the Roman period to Christianity.

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1 Randall W. Younker, “San Miceli 2015,” The Institute of Archaeology Siegfried H. Horn Museum Newsletter, Winter 2016, 1–2

2 <http://www.madabaplains.org>

3 Fine red Ancient Roman pottery with a glossy slip

Deep Text

Developing a Canonical Theological Method

“Divine love is a central component of God’s character, with abundant implications regarding all areas of theology.”¹ So begins the opening chapter of “The Love of God: A Canonical Method” by John Peckham, associate professor of theology and Christian philosophy.

“The Love of God” was born from Peckham’s dissertation, which he completed at Andrews University. Peckham was originally interested in working on the problem of evil, but found that it was too large to engage in a dissertation. “At the center of the problem of evil is the concept of God’s love,” explains Peckham. Peckham decided to focus on divine love, “not just love itself, but what it is in the context of the God-world relationship, which has implications relative to determinism and other essential theological concepts.”

However, in order for Peckham to study the biblical concept of divine love, he needed a methodology. Adventist systematic theology is still in the developmental stages, so Peckham “had to think carefully about how to construct a model systematically that was consistent with our well-established exegetical models.”

Peckham began by inverting the standard methodology of investigating from “first principles” to the text. Instead, he attempted to begin with the text, searching for what it could tell him about the first principles. Building on the work of Fernando Canale, professor emeritus of theology and philosophy, Richard Davidson, J.N. Andrews professor of Old Testament interpretation, and eminent scholar Brevard S. Childs, Peckham developed an approach he calls the “canonical theological method.”

continued

BELOW: Shelly Cox excavating a tomb at San Miceli

