

Legally blind student makes unique discovery

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Phil Perkins

(PhysOrg.com) -- A University of Texas at Arlington graduate student in anthropology has helped to unearth a rare find: ancient images of a woman giving birth. What makes the discovery so unique is that it could be the earliest representation of childbirth in Western art, and the student, William Nutt, is legally blind.

The scene was discovered at an Etruscan site in [Italy](#) on a small fragment, about 1-3/4 x 1-1/4 inches (4 x 3 cm), from a ceramic vessel that is more than 2,600 years old.

“The image is unique because in the classical world, we don’t see a lot of birthing scenes,” said Nutt, who found the image in early July while

working on the Poggio Colla excavation site northeast of Florence.

“The real question is if we don’t see these types of birthing scenes anywhere else in classical art, then why is it on this pot? It obviously meant something to the people who were there and who made it,” he said.

Nutt became interested in civilization studies while taking an archaeology class at UT Arlington, which he attends on a National Science Foundation fellowship. The highly competitive fellowship provides tuition, travel expenses and a \$30,000 annual stipend that will help him study the Bronze Age collapse.

“A number of kingdoms broke down and changed over a short period of about 100 years,” Nutt said. “Looking at the culture change helps us to learn a lot about how societies adapt to stress, what being a part of a society means and it helps us to learn about ourselves.”

Shelley Smith, professor and chairperson of the UT Arlington Department of Sociology and Anthropology, feels fortunate to have Nutt in her program.

“He is a remarkable individual with intellectual curiosity covering a wide range of subjects,” she said.

While he cannot fully see, Nutt does not view his blindness as an impediment to his research. He described his excavation during the summer as very careful work.

“I used dental tools and a sharpened trowel to slide along the ground. I’d run my hands along the soil, feeling and uncovering different layers,” Nutt explained. “If I started to notice a soil change, I’d check with another excavator. I was really very fortunate to work with a great group

of people.”

The Mugello Valley Archaeological Project oversees the Poggio Colla excavation. It is a project of Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Penn., and the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and [Anthropology](#), in collaboration with The Open University in Milton Keynes, England.

A paper about the find will be presented at the annual meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America in Philadelphia in January.

Provided by University of Texas at Arlington

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