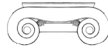


AIAC – Quaderni 1

ARCHEOLOGIA CLASSICA OGGI

Atti della tavola rotonda tenuta
in occasione dei 70 anni
dell'Associazione Internazionale
di Archeologia Classica (AIAC)

a cura di
Maria Teresa D'Alessio e Kristian Göransson



AIAC – Quaderni

1

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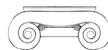
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Roma, Istituto Svedese di Studi Classici, 3 marzo 2016

a cura di Maria Teresa D'Alessio e Kristian Göransson



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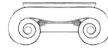
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Estratto

The British School at Rome and British archaeology in Italy*

Christopher Smith



Not many months before the writing of this article, it seemed as if archaeology in the UK was about to receive a blow with the abandonment of the A-level in archaeology. A pervasive sense of crisis was around, with dropping enrolments in universities and fears over funding. Yet from another point of view, archaeology seems to be extraordinarily buoyant in the UK, with an endless diet of television documentaries and headline grabbing discoveries.

British archaeology in Italy reflects this bifurcation. Academics like Mary Beard, Simon Keay and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill have made the archaeology of Italy one of the most recognisable television features, and major exhibitions such as *Life and Death in Pompeii and Herculaneum* at the British Museum have captured the public's imagination. Yet the number of successful and significant British projects in Italy is relatively few, and conditions are getting tougher.

This brief overview will outline the shape of British archaeology in Italy since the 19th century, and will emphasise the role of the British School at Rome (BSR). At the same time it will show that this history not only reveals that some of these problems are structural, but that history also contains some of the potential solutions.

British excavations in Italy in the 18th century reflected Grand Tour designs. As Ilaria Bignamini showed, excavations by men such as Thomas Jen-

*Text as of 2016.

kins, Gavin Hamilton, and Colin Morison, on the basis of papal licenses, were frequent and productive. They would be joined by Charles Townley, whose discovery of sculptures at the Villa Adriana formed a core of the British Museum's collection, and is representative of a desire to dig for sculpture and saleable artefacts. In Bigamini's world, digging and dealing went together.

19th century excavations in Italy do not show a great step forward. Without a significant professional training in archaeology, with considerable obstacles in the path of foreign excavators, and with the quantity of visible material already enormous, the 19th century continues to be characterised more by antiquarianism and the passion of highly educated amateurs. In Etruria, Lady Hamilton Gray and George Dennis are obvious examples, the latter more determined and systematic than the former, but still an untrained eye. Similarly in the 1880s, the excavations of John Savile Lumley, subsequently Lord John Savile at Nemi were driven by antiquarian curiosity, though his work was generally careful and the treatment of the finds shows the emergence of a new approach. 1,586 artefacts and a series of photographs of the dig were deposited by Savile in Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery, and a publication was widely disseminated.

Savile's work, and Italian excavations by Lanciani, were gathering significant interest amongst British and American visitors and residents in Rome. The British and American Archaeological Society of Rome, which contained many figures who would appear early in the history of the British School at Rome and the American Academy at Rome, avidly followed these excavations. Founded by John Henry Parker, it attracted a wide variety of members, and many like Parker were keen photographers, and their archives are important elements of the fototeche of several academies in Rome.

However, the pressure was mounting to professionalise the study of archaeology, and to formalise the British presence in Rome. The British School at Athens, established in 1886, was an important step in creating a link between museums and universities in the UK, and a Mediterranean country, and as universities themselves began to transform their curricula to include more

object-oriented study, the value of professional libraries and spaces overseas became clearer.

Hence, in 1901, the BSR was founded by public subscription. Critical in this early foundation was the Camden Chair of Roman History at the University of Oxford, Henry Pelham, who had been mesmerised by his visit to Rosa's excavations on the Palatine in 1870. His pupil and successor Francis Haverfield, was also one of those who promoted a cause which garnered substantial support.

The first two Directors headed in slightly surprising but very ambitious directions. Gordon Rushforth followed Lanciani into S. Maria Antiqua, and Henry Stuart Jones set up sustained projects cataloguing collections of sculpture in the major museums of Rome. However, the key figure was the third Director, Thomas Ashby, a pupil of Haverfield, and son of a leading member of the British and American Archaeological Society of Rome. Ashby already knew Rome well; he knew Lanciani; and he was brilliant. He became Director of the BSR in 1906, and served the BSR until 1925.

It is with Ashby that we arrive at the key strength of the BSR in landscape archaeology. Ashby was an indefatigable walker, and with his camera he criss-crossed Italy and beyond. His most evocative work is *The Roman Campagna in Classical Times*, and he outlines there a mission to preserve the traces of a countryside fast disappearing. This is critical to the whole of Ashby's work. He saw the past as connected to the present in so many ways. Antiquarian scholarship held clues to the understanding of buildings and landscapes. Festivals demonstrated surprising continuities. There was an urgency, and urgency that led him sometimes to be impatient, as when he criticised Giacomo Boni for not working harder in the Forum.

Ashby was trained in excavation – he worked at Caerwent and in Malta. But he was not able to dig in Italy, and the strict exclusion of non-Italian excavators in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was a serious constraint. It explains much of the focus of Ashby and others at the BSR. The most qualified archaeologist after Ashby and before the Second World War was Ian Rich-

mond, and even he had to associate himself with topographical and conservation work, an interested early reflection of subsequent BSR projects.

Thus while Italian archaeology became ineluctably sucked into the justification of a political regime, British archaeology was forced to look from the sidelines to an extent. Topography and antiquarianism were forced to the forefront in Italy, whereas in Greece and elsewhere, scientific archaeology developed fast. Hence, when after the Second World War, the BSR appointed one of its greatest Directors, J.B. Ward-Perkins, he entered into both a tradition of strength in landscape studies and with the advantage of substantial archaeological experience outside Italy. It was this that encouraged him to undertake the BSR's most significant archaeological project to date, what would become known as the South Etruria Survey.

Ward-Perkins was beyond everything an administrator of genius. A Monuments Man, co-founder of both the *Unione Internazionale degli Istituti di Archeologia, Storia e Storia dell'Arte* and the *Associazione Internazionale di Archeologica Classica* in the immediate aftermath of the war, with experience of working in Malta and north Africa, he brought a modern view of excavation as well as the capacity to take advantage of a more systematic approach to survey. Hence, as he worked his way through South Etruria, what began to some extent as a traditional topographical survey developed into a proper field survey, during which massive amounts of data were collected and plotted. At the same time, he worked with his Swedish colleague Erik Sjöqvist to overturn the exclusion of foreign work in Italy; three days together at San Salvatore in Spoleto in December 1946 were a symbolic first step.

Critically, Ward-Perkins combined survey with selective excavation, with Veii being a site where he made a hugely significant contribution, not only in terms of the finds, but through a highly international approach. The work was a collaboration with Rome La Sapienza, and established a principle of collaboration. This was not wholly altruistic; Ward-Perkins ran the BSR on a tiny budget, and it was largely thanks to his old teacher Sir Mortimer Wheeler that the British Academy stepped in to save the near destitute network of British foreign institutes.

Another major feature of Ward-Perkins directorship, and that of others too, was his longevity in post. Director from 1946 to 1974, Ward-Perkins was able to drive forward long-term strategies across Italy. Colleagues and award-holders were encouraged to take on projects which fitted Ward-Perkins' priorities. His judgement was often good, and he was aided by Molly Cotton, who led a number of projects and organised those around her. British, Commonwealth and Italian scholars found themselves coalescing around increasingly careful analysis of ceramics, and the so-called "Camerone" was the centre of much activity.

The result was a huge array of projects from the north to the south of Italy, most characterised by my survey, and therefore mostly multi-period. This a third characteristic of the BSR's archaeology, that it has not been bound in time. Ashby and Ward-Perkins were equally interested in prehistory and the medieval and all points between. For a time, it was the medieval which would predominate, with the remarkable work of Ward-Perkins' successor David Whitehouse. Again driven by the ceramic evidence, but with a stronger theoretical slant than Ward-Perkins had deployed, Whitehouse built on work encouraged by his predecessor (for instance Charles Daniels' excavation at Santa Cornelia), and the BSR also pioneered the use of osteological evidence for the medieval period.

Richard Hodges' work at San Vincenzo al Volturno would carry the medieval focus further. Marrying substantial archaeological investigation by large teams, with archival research and a strong theoretical drive, Hodges built a major team at the BSR. This trend had begun with Ward-Perkins and carried on under Whitehouse and through the relatively brief but productive directorship of Graeme Barker, which kept alive the BSR's interest in prehistory with work in South Etruria and the Molise.

However, the days of largescale Italian excavation projects were drawing to a close. As excavation costs spiralled, and budgets tightened, it was necessary to rethink the BSR's approach. One way forward was to move outside Italy and towards the end of his time as Director, Hodges had started to explore Butrint in Albania. That project, as well as being a major excavation, also

led to a complex project of conservation and heritage management. This was a theme picked up by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill in over a decade of work at Herculaneum, sponsored by the Packard Humanities Institute and in close partnership with the Soprintendenza Archeologica Napoli e Pompei. This project utterly transformed a site which was in a desperate state, but from practical conservation would emerge solid archaeological discoveries. The reconnecting of the ancient drains of Herculaneum for the purposes of water management required the first investigation of their contents, a treasure trove of organic material, which was just one part of Herculaneum's contribution to the exhibition at the British Museum mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

Another development has been the use of geophysics, largely in collaboration with the Archaeological Prospection Services of Southampton. Simon Key of the University of Southampton and Martin Millett, now at Cambridge University, saw the opportunity to carry on the work of survey and landscape which had characterised the BSR for so long, but using the increasingly efficient techniques of geophysics. Their Roman Towns Project has produced a number of important results, including the publication of the site of Otricoli, but it is the now famous map of Falerii Novi, which revealed a complete Roman townscape with entirely non-invasive mechanisms, which catches the eye.

At the same time, the BSR began a restudy of Ward-Perkins's South Etruria Survey, focussing on the Tiber Valley. A re-examination of the pottery data and reconsideration of the methodological problems underlying survey did not overturn Ward-Perkins' findings, although it has clarified and changed some aspects; in fact, it demonstrated how fortunate we were that Ward-Perkins acted when he did. Deep ploughing had brought to the surface an abundance of finds, but the continuation of that action has substantially diminished the evidence now available. As so often, our archives are some of our richest resources.

The Tiber Valley led inevitably to Portus, and a major project, by far the most substantial British project in Italy, to investigate the area of the Trajanic harbour and what Lanciani called the Palazzo Imperiale. This project, funded

by the AHRC and run by Simon Keay, has deployed geophysics, excavation, mosaic conservation, virtual reconstruction and now cultural heritage management, and led Keay to a further project, funded by the ERC, called *PortusLimen*. This major collaborative programme is gathering evidence from ports across the Mediterranean, their layouts, organization and the connections between them.

Geophysics has also allowed the BSR to conduct smaller scale and low cost activity across a wide range of sites, from Sudan to Montenegro, and up and down the Italian peninsula into Sicily. Each year sees a dozen or so collaborative projects in all at the BSR, and we are also revisiting an early focus, with work at Roman basilicas and churches, including St Peter's, S. Maria Antiqua, and recently with Ian Haynes at the University of Newcastle, S. Giovanni in Laterano.

This is an account of a century of success, made possible only by the support of countless partners in Italy and beyond, and including other foreign academies. Yet it is a success which nonetheless masks some more worrying trends. The number of projects in total is relatively few, and the majority are driven by geophysics, with very little large scale excavation outside *Portus*. Not all British archaeology in the UK happens through the BSR, but we see no evidence of any strategic research in Italy – projects are highly individual or tailored to departmental needs; whereas the BSR has been able to evolve its own approaches over decades of continuity.

For archaeology more generally, the danger in the UK at any rate is the steady instrumentalization of archaeology as a producer to what the research assessments call impact. University Archaeology UK, discussing the Impact Case Studies in archaeology from the last Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 praised the tremendous diversity of impacts arising from archaeological research with case studies from every continent except Antarctica; the way that archaeology can make a difference to communities at the local, regional and international level; how archaeology is committed to sustaining cultural heritage in many innovative ways; how archaeological research influences policies and guidelines governing the management of cultural heritage;

and how archaeological evidence can challenge contemporary views about people and the past helping to promote cultural understanding.

This is an admirable set of claims but there is a danger that the drive for impact, and the need to link with other disciplines for the sake of student numbers which is evident in UK universities may be returning archaeology to the status of the ‘handmaiden of history’, and of cultural heritage management, in its most immediate and least sustainable forms. It is this which underlies the more pessimistic picture with which we began, where archaeology as a long term study of artefactual typologies and the marriage of that with high level research questions is eroded into television’s need for instant answers.

The history of the BSR’s engagement in Italy perhaps points to some potential ways forward. British archaeology has performed best when it has performed alongside a strong BSR. Reductions in our funding and capacity are widely damaging. Although Italy does not operate a concession scheme such as that which operates in Greece, the foreign academies still have a vital role to play because of their long term presence and strategic approach. At the same time, Italian archaeology is often at its best when it is collaborative, and at its worst when it is not. It is essential for Italian archaeology to develop its own strategic identity, but it is also critical for there to be a conversation which we can all participate in. This requires stable Italian entities, and an openness to international partners. And yet we should not see this as a one way relationship. The enormous richness of the material record in Italy would permit detailed work on artefacts and long term high level engagement with serious research questions which an impact-driven agenda may otherwise obscure.

Where this has worked well, it has brought international partnerships and international funding to bear on local strategic priorities, from Veii, to Portus, from largescale operations such as the Herculaneum Conservation Project to small scale projects such as our work at Segni which has linked to a local museum. The story of British archaeology in Italy is shaped by our shared history, and indeed by our institutions, but it speaks to a wider aspiration for collaboration and interdisciplinary which unites the best of different

traditions, and surely remains the best way forward for archaeology in the twenty-first century.

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