

Fifth International Conference of Italian Archaeology. "Settlement and Society 1500 B.C. - 1500 A.D". Oxford 11th-13th December 1992.

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The Fifth Conference of Italian Archaeology took place in Oxford from the 11th to the 13th December, almost three years after the previous one. The Conference, which started off as a seminar in Lancaster back in 1979, has come a long way since then. Attendance this year amounted to 150 delegates (mostly British and Italian but also from the United States, Canada, Netherlands, Germany, and Denmark). Altogether circa 70 papers were presented in the two and a half days of the duration of the Conference. The organisers this time, N. Christie and P. Roberts, are to be congratulated for their success in making it a very informative, enjoyable and smooth-running conference in which, for a change, speakers kept to time. The need to keep down an already high conference fee (particularly as no student price was advertised), might have been the reason behind this 'action-packed' weekend with up to three sessions taking place simultaneously (I was among the many who regretted not being able to bi- or trilocate at times!), with the result that, sadly, many papers had to be missed.

An important point to be made is that, despite what the cause might have been, the fee and the relatively short notice given to the public on the Conference, resulted in a noticeable, and to my mind regrettable, absence of students. A further negative point made by some was the time span chosen for the Conference, which to all purposes cut the Bronze Age in two and left it unrelated to previous developments. Considering the tradition of prehistoric studies in Italian archaeology, it might have been more stimulating to make the Conference a further opportunity for scholars of early prehistory and those of later prehistory and the Classical period to come together and appreciate each other's methods and interests.

Something along those lines was brought about in the Inaugural Session by Prof. Andrea Carandini. Though we expected him to talk about *Archaeology in Rome: new aims*, his discourse went along the lines of the European spirit, of Anglo-Italian relations, and of the debt of Italian archaeology to British scholarship (something to be expected in a conference taking place in Britain, anyway). Professor Carandini did, nevertheless, speak of the need for a reconstruction of the discipline integrating the different traditions within Italian archaeology: the scientific and the humanistic (a task which he appropriately qualified, using an Italian expression, as an attempt to mix the oil with the vinegar). A call was made too for more practical training for archaeologists and even the creation of a centre which would combine all these aspects. Paraphrasing his words, in Italy doctors are trained in the operating theatre, archaeologists in the slide projection room.

The Plenary Inaugural Session was complemented on the British side by Prof. G. Barker, who talked about *Landscape Archaeology in Italy: goals for the 90s*, a very interesting but hurried talk (too vast a topic for 20 min) which, even if it did not open up new horizons, did nevertheless bring to light the need for extensive environmental and ethnographic studies in Italy.

After that, parallel sessions followed on the topics of Urbanism, Settlement and Society (two sessions: Pre- and Protohistory, Republican and Roman), Field Surveys, Belief and Burial (two sessions: Prehistoric to Roman, Roman to Medieval), New Research in South Etruria, Landscapes, From Roman to Medieval Towns, Technology and Industry, and Rural Settlement. The Conference closed with a Plenary Overview Session organised according to periods rather than themes.

It would be impossible to summarise the contents of the Conference and we will probably have to wait for the publication of the papers to appreciate it in its entirety. It was, nevertheless, stimulating to see not only the expected traditional discussions on typology of finds and the like, but also a new interest in other approaches (i.e., study of ethnographic material, environmental oriented analyses, social stratification, etc.) as well as new reviews of old material, this time by Italian colleagues.

For the Prehistoric period the overall feeling was that the subject was in great shape. It is not easy to choose specific papers, but particularly interesting because of their relative novelty, were reports on fauna associations and their bearing on environment and economy from the Middle Bronze Age to the end of the Iron Age by J. De Grossi Mazzorin; the results of the field-survey in the Ager Caeretanus by F. Enei (read by A. Zifferero); the analysis of ritual and social organisation in prehistoric and protohistoric Italy by R. Whitehouse; the study of the role of frontier shrines and cult areas in Etruria by A. Zifferero; an update on the research of urbanism in the Ager Faliscus by S. Stoddart; and the use of ethnographic sources in reconstructing residential structures in Etruria by Negrone Catacchio and M. Miari. New discoveries were also reported, most outstandingly the extremely rich new material from the Sardinian Nuraghi.

The papers presented for the Classical period departed slightly from what one is accustomed to hearing by concentrating mainly on settlement issues, including continuity in settlement patterns. There were still plenty of the more traditional analyses of monuments, villas and pottery distribution.

A completely fresh impulse was brought about by the papers on Medieval issues. There appeared to be a definite effort to place the countryside in context with the city, and to get rid of the catastrophic tinge attached to the Middle Ages as the period in which civilisation came to an end. It was interesting to sense an attitude to history which was not one of dependence. Papers of interest included that by S. Coccia and L. Paroli on the continuity and discontinuity in the *Portus Romae* between Late antiquity and Middle Ages, and the paper by C. La Rocca on minor centres in the Late Middle Ages.

An all-period conclusion evident from the days in Oxford is that, fortunately, it has become very difficult to separate papers into tightly defined themes. The interdisciplinary nature of archaeology, and the complex relationships between all aspects of human behaviour make it very difficult to separate economy from social factors, belief, and the like. That this has found its way into the Conference papers is a welcome and clear sign of the maturing of Italian archaeology away from the factual materiality of the find and into the explanation of human behaviour as a whole. The Conference, I am sure, would be qualified by all attendants, as a success. We only have now to look forward to the next conference and to wish good luck to whoever takes up this challenging task next.