

The background of the journal cover features a dark green and black color palette. It is decorated with various geometric shapes, including triangles and lines, some of which are semi-transparent. A prominent silhouette of a coronavirus particle is visible in the center, with several smaller, fainter virus silhoules scattered throughout the lower half of the cover.

ARCHEOSTORIE®  
JOURNAL *of* PUBLIC  
ARCHAEOLOGY

**VOLUME 4 / 2020**

*Topic of the Year: Connective (T)issue*

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# Review: Archeologia pubblica. Metodi, tecniche, esperienze

Luca Peyronel

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**Archeologia pubblica. Metodi, tecniche, esperienze (Studi Superiori 1203)**, G. Volpe, 2020, Carocci, 258 pp.  
ISBN 978-88-430-9987-7

 Open Access

 **Keywords:** public archaeology, community archaeology, Italy, cultural heritage, public engagement

Giuliano Volpe's volume can be considered both the result of a very intense decade of projects, reflections and initiatives related to public archaeology in Italy and the beginning of a new, more mature, and conscious phase of a field that is still marginal in our country's academic environment.

It is certainly also the personal crowning achievement of Volpe's efforts during these years, which were marked by profound changes in the vision of cultural heritage. These transformations took place in a social, economic, and political context traversed by crises and restructuring, at the national level and even more in the Euro-Mediterranean context, which eventually entered the emergency caused by the pandemic, precisely in the very months in which the book was going to press.

In this respect, an important result was reached with a PRIN 2015 (Research Projects of National Interest) project funded by the Ministry of University and Research entitled 'Archaeology to the Future. Theory and Practice of Public Archaeology for Knowledge, Protection and Enhancement, Participation, Social Cohesion and Sustainable Development', which has been carried out by the leading Italian research groups involved in public archaeology (Volpe 2019).

The time was therefore ripe for one of the most qualified scholars, who has always been at the forefront of affirming the 'public' role of archaeology, to take stock of the situation, producing a first 'handbook', written in Italian and certainly designed especially for university students, but which is also a review and survey of the most significant communication and

enhancement strategies and initiatives of public participation.

Thus, the first part of the volume is structured as a handbook, with a definition and introduction of public archaeology and a history of studies in Anglo-Saxon and European contexts (pp. 25-33), which is followed by a more specific analysis of Italian characteristics and peculiarities (pp. 34-46). This overview, for necessary brevity, does not address other important research contexts, such as the South American one, where community archaeology has long been the basis of any archaeological research project and where the role of 'indigenous archaeology' is now established and recognized (Nicholas 2014), or those debates on the role of postcolonial archaeology in Africa and Asia (Lydon & Ritzvi 2010).

In Italy, a crucial role in the development of the discipline is exemplified by the initiatives of the University of Florence's medieval archaeology group led by G. Vannini, which resulted first in the exhibition "From Petra to Shawbak. Archaeology of a Frontier" (Florence 2009), then in the First National Congress of Public Archaeology in 2012, whose proceedings were published with a significant delay only in 2019 (Nucciotti, Bonacchi & Molducci 2019; see the review by R. Menegazzi in this issue). This first phase of development is exemplified above all by the work of C. Bonacchi, starting with the seminal article that appeared in a monographic volume of the journal "Ricerche Storiche" (Bonacchi 2009) in which some serious delays of Italian archaeology with regards to the relationship with the public were already specified, and which stemmed mainly from a

reticence to a theoretical and methodological reflection.

Volpe rightly recognizes in the work especially of Riccardo Francovich a previous fruitful phase which we might define as 'foundational' for some primary strands of Public Archaeology in Italy. The efforts of the school of medieval archaeology of the University of Siena recognized crucial issues such as those of communication and community engagement for the enhancement of the historical-archaeological heritage and the reflection on the value of archaeological landscapes. These themes were addressed in a holistic way, through the carrying out of multidisciplinary research which also lead to very relevant spin-offs in terms of experimentation with the management of archaeological parks (Casini & Zucconi 2003).

But the idea that archaeology should have a central role in society, a role that would place it at the forefront in fundamental processes of the country's cultural policies, is already found in Bianchi Bandinelli, and then in Andrea Carandini, authoritative exponents of classical archaeology. These theories, however, were not fully gathered and developed within the discipline, which was more interested in a reflection on the history of studies, as highlighted by the excellent works especially of M. Barbanera (2015).

Volpe considers four different sectors as specific for the characterization of Italian public archaeology, devoting a chapter to each of these: communication (Chapter 2), profession, work and relationship with volunteerism (Chapter 3), sustainable economic development (Chapter 4) and public engagement (Chapter 5).

Chapter 3 (pp. 47-81) discusses various aspects of communication in archaeology, too often misleadingly reduced to the realm of popularization. In the current context, however, a gradual change of course is emerging, aided in part by the new paths opened by the digital and social media revolution. Volpe underlines four indispensable 'know-hows' for effectively carrying out communication in archaeology: communicating globality and complexity; proposing storytelling narratives; using the tools of technology; and arising interest by stimulating the active participation of the audience (pp. 65-67). This last aspect is fundamental in our opinion, and on this the author rightly denounces the very serious delay

in Italy, due to problems related to data access and their free circulation, and to a certain widespread reluctance on the part of scholars to make the results of archaeological research understandable. As a result, the emergence of democratic forms of participation in knowledge is still very difficult in Italy.

The focus of Chapter 4 (pp. 83-92) is on issues related to archaeology as a job. It is in this section that the author develops a concise but timely analysis of the Italian situation and highlights the complicated path to the recognition of archaeology as a profession and the difficult relationship between archaeology and volunteerism.

The next chapter (Chapter 5, pp. 93-110), connects to the previous one by analysing the 'economic' function of archaeology. The author dwells mainly on the modes of sustainable development that are most effective when the involvement of all stakeholders is possible, and where active participation ensures a community's sense 'of belonging' to its past.

Issues related to the relationship with the public, from the involvement of local communities in archaeological projects, to the active participation in the decision-making processes of the various stakeholders are finally discussed in Chapter 5, as an ideal conclusion to a journey through the different topics of public archaeology (pp. 111-136).

The second part of the volume offers a rather comprehensive and certainly illustrative overview in terms of type and geographic coverage of the most important public archaeology initiatives and projects, several of these still in progress. As many as 24 initiatives are in fact discussed (including the 'Archeostorie' project with the birth of our Journal...), including museums (such as Villa Giulia in Rome and the Salinas in Palermo), archaeological and nature parks (Valley of the Temples in Agrigento, Val di Cornia Parks, Appia Antica), but also activities in larger territories (Elba Island, north-eastern Italy, Sardinia) or linked to excavation projects (Terramara di Pilastrini di Bondeno, Vignale, Poggio del Molino, Salapia). Almost all these projects, although specific, are characterized by a marked attention to aspects of public participation and communication to the wider audience, and are even linked to experiences of experimental archaeology and re-enactment (e.g., the Archaeodrome of Poggibonsi).

This situation makes Volpe's survey also a tool, so to speak, for assessing current trends in public archaeology through the identification of some (good) practices and not just an overview of 'case-studies'. Certainly, the author selects the material based on his views on public archaeology, enunciated in the previous chapters. It is still early for an analysis of the overall impact of these projects on the discipline, although the problem of the lack of adoption of shared methodologies and practices emerges and there is a limited theoretical reflection. The latter is hardly justifiable in the case of planned projects of long duration. Volpe is rightly a strong proponent of the importance of 'bottom-up' management of cultural heritage (pp. 98-101) and he organized in 2019 'the States General of bottom-up management of cultural heritage' at TourismA in Florence, promoting a reflection on the value of the principles of the Faro Convention related to heritage communities and advocating the creation of a network of the actors promoting these initiatives (Dal Maso 2019).

However, it is perhaps in this dichotomy between cultural policies of strongly centralized management, albeit in a changing landscape marked by the introduction of autonomy for many museums and archaeological parks, and the 'spontaneism' of the many public archaeology projects bringing out a new protagonism of local communities, that we glimpse at a public archaeology in many ways still undefined and at times fragile in its theoretical-methodological framework.

The weak link is perhaps the result of the lack of structured university research, although there is a change in direction, for example with the introduction of public archaeology courses in post-graduate programs in several universities.

In conclusion, the book marks a turning point in Italian public archaeology studies, offering a precise and well-documented synthesis of the current situation, collecting and systematizing a countless series of insights that have recently emerged in the broad but certainly also fluid panorama of projects, applied research, and field experiments. Therefore, it marks the pace of the times in some ways and provides a critical mass of materials and views that make it an indispensable work for those who wish to approach the issues of public archaeology in Italy. It would certainly deserve an English translation, a fact that would ensure its wider dissemination in international scholarly circles as well. If, in fact, publications related to themes of public archaeology are increasingly numerous in Italy, one cannot but emphasize the prevailing use of the Italian language and their editorial placement in journals and volumes which do not always have an international circulation. Thus, Italian research does not easily manage to fully insert itself in the international debate on crucial themes such as those of social inclusion, participation, post-colonialist studies, offering a significant contribution to the development of public archaeology in a global perspective.

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