

Revealing Christian Heritage

Talks on the rediscovery of Christian
archaeology between 1860 and 1930



September 29, 2021, h. 15-17.30 (CET) online at
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ABSTRACT BOOK

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Discussion

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Reception of catacomb art in European culture and architecture

C. Cecalupo, Universidad Carlos III (Madrid)

In the 19th century, due to the incredible discoveries of early-Christian catacombs in Rome, the enthusiasm about Christian art exploded in Europe up to the point that several architecture and constructions inspired by the layout of Roman catacombs were built. Facsimile catacombs and structures built as catacombs (especially churches, crypts and museums) spread throughout Europe and as far away as the United States, even in countries with a notoriously non-Roman Catholic background.

This is a trending phenomenon that is definitely indicative of the wide impact of the discoveries of Roman catacombs (and their paintings in particular), which is a trans-geographical phenomenon involving different social classes.

The talk will start from the idea that Roman discoveries arouse the curiosity to excavate and investigate early Christian sites all over the Mediterranean and all over Europe, as well as triggering a real catacomb fashion in every country. It will start by identifying the roots of the phenomenon in museological situations already well established in Rome from the 18th century. Then it will show how some of the founders of this practice had strong contacts with the Anglo-Saxon world and how this impacted on the development of this phenomenon overseas as well. In this occasion it will present a partially unpublished case of translation of catacomb styles into the United Kingdom, that will help thinking about the socio-political use of Christian archaeology in Europe and its cultural impact.

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Inventing Medieval Caucasus: Between Colonialism and Orientalism

I. Foletti, Masaryk University (Brno)

This paper wishes to present and analyse a series of historiographical layers defining our understanding of the medieval cultures of the Caucasian and Sub-Caucasian regions. They have had, indeed, a complex and contested history throughout the period of modern art history's existence. Its historical situation has furthermore led to multiple colonial interests. In the 19th century – the period this paper will focus on – the region was divided between the Russian Empire and its Ottoman counterpart. Furthermore, Eastern Anatolia was from 1915 to 1921 the setting of an event that is considered generally as a genocide. During the whole of this period the “western” historiography was presenting the region as a provincial, peripheric and still very charming space, corresponding to all the orientalist stereotypes. The core question of this paper will thus be how this political environment impacted the construction of the art historical narrative.

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Byzantine artefacts vs. Classical antiquities in early Greek legislation on heritage protection

C. Mannoni, Università Ca' Foscari (Venezia)

In the early 19th century, the ancient heritage of Greece took on growing significance in European scholarship and art collecting, while accepting also value as symbol of independence and freedom for the Greek national identity. During (and soon after) the Greek wars of liberation from the Ottoman Empire in 1820s, the laws issued on the protection of the heritage, and the related initiatives launched to rescue it, dealt mostly with antiquities and classical monuments too.

However, the past history of Greece embraced not only the classical age and its relevant artefacts, but also subsequent epochs which left manifold evidences in the cultural landscape of the country. Byzantine, Venetian and Ottoman monuments, for instance, are only but a few examples of the different historical traces which were scattered in Greece in the early 19th century.

This paper intends to evaluate the gradual acceptance of Byzantine artefacts in the practices of heritage protection that developed in Greece from mid-19th century onwards. The difference between these artefacts and antiquities will be understood in the background of the political conflicts between the Bavarian rulers and the Greek nationalists at that time. Analysis will involve the laws issued by the Bavarians to safeguard Greek heritage in 1834 and 1837, together with their conceptual ambiguities on antiquities and medieval art implicating both Neoclassic and Romantic aesthetics. Examples concerning the city of Athens specifically, will include the restorations carried out in some archaeological sites, such as the Acropolis, and the defence of local byzantine churches, such as Panagia Kapnikarea. As will be observed, the discrepancy in the perception of classical antiquities and Byzantine artefacts will push towards the gradual expansion of artistic canons and scholarship, leading to the final establishment of the first Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens in 1914.



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Christian excavations in the Holy Land. The first explorations and the establishment of archaeological schools

D. Bianchi, Universität Wien (Wien)

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During the nineteenth century, an ever-increasing interest in the antiquities of early Christianity in the Holy Land developed both in Europe as well as in the United States. Indeed, in the wake of the flourishing season of archaeological excavations carried out in that period, Palestine became the region par excellence for the field of Christian archaeology. Alongside the monumental basilicas erected since the time of Emperor Constantine on the sites connected to the birth, preaching and death of Christ, this land is effectively rich in ecclesiastical buildings, such as monasteries and memorial churches and archaeological artefacts linked to the early Christian communities. Moreover, many of the Christian sites were known not only thanks to biblical and evangelical passages, but also due to the descriptions from travelogues - the so-called *Itinera ad loca sancta* - written by pilgrims, who in the Byzantine and medieval periods visited these holy places with devotion.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, the exploration of Palestine remained a private phenomenon which was often limited to the personal curiosity of aristocrats, wealthy erudite men and scholars, but this approach changed from the second half of this century when the first national research institutions were established. The oldest archaeological centre is the Palestine Exploration Fund founded by the British in 1865, in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire.

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Shortly thereafter, the establishment of the American School of Oriental Research, later renamed the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research, and the Deutsches Evangelisches Institut für Altertumswissenschaft des Heiligen Landes were to follow.

Alongside these institutions mainly characterized by a lay or evangelical inspiration, the Catholic confessional world also decided to establish theological faculties devoted to the study of the Holy Scriptures in the Holy Land. So the École Biblique et Archéologique Française and the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum were respectively founded by the order of the Dominicans and by the Franciscan friars of the Custody of the Holy Land. Their intention was not only limited to the study of biblical texts, but also to the investigation of the monuments and sites where the biblical episodes took place.

The demanding settings, specializations and chronological interests of these archaeological schools made it possible to bring to light a great number of archaeological sites and to understand and outline many aspects of the religious and daily life of early Christians.

After a rapid review of the different schools, attention will be focused in particular on the main discoveries of the Byzantine era made by the Franciscan archaeologists of the SBF.

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On behalf of Her Majesty: unveiling the Early Christian Heritage of the Aksumite Kingdom (Horn of Africa) in the 19th century

G. Castiglia, M. Ciliberti, Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana (Rome)

The Horn of Africa – and, mostly, its Aksumite heritage – has represented a key area of interest for the (re)discovery of the origins of the African church, rooted already in the 4th century. The first researches and exploration carried out mostly in the territories of present-day Ethiopia and Eritrea have been, at the beginning, an exclusive of the British Empire, but have been followed later on by other missions. Especially in the first decade of the 20th century, in fact, the German archaeological mission to Aksum, led by Enno Littmann, represented a benchmark in the progress of studies on the Aksumite past, as well as the Italian expedition by Roberto Paribeni in Adulis in 1906, that brought back to light two early Christian churches.

It is quite interesting to note that none of the researchers who were in charge of these missions were specialised in Christian archaeology and that their approach was not exclusively focused on revealing the Christian past. This happened quite as an accident, since their main goal was to look for the most monumental and spectacular buildings and churches indeed responded to these requisites. The early Christian Aksumite heritage is today an extraordinary archaeological testimony of the origins of the Miaphyriste church, strictly related since the beginning to the patriarchate of Alexandria of Egypt (a link that endured until the 50's of the last century) and at the same time represented the prelude to the monumental and famous rocky-cut churches of medieval Ethiopia, most of all those in Lalibela.

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Christian Archaeology and French Devotion to Martyrs in Nineteenth-Century Tunisia

B. Effros, University of Liverpool (Liverpool)

In 1874, Alfred-Louis Delattre (d. 1932) joined the Société des missionnaires d'Afrique (White Fathers) in Algiers. From 1876, he received permission from Archbishop Lavigerie to dedicate his time to archaeological exploration in and near Carthage. Lavigerie was enthusiastic about the potential of the ancient city, with its wealth of martyrs, not only to advance research on early Christianity but to support the conversion of the Berber and Arab populations from Islam. Inspired by the example of Giovanni Battista de Rossi in the Roman catacombs, Lavigerie and Delattre believed that religiously grounded archaeological research would hasten the restoration of Christian Africa as it was in the time of Augustine of Hippo (d. 432). My interest is in understanding Delattre's excavation and modification of the Carthage amphitheater and the impact of faith-based research in the development of nineteenth-century archaeology in the French Protectorate of Tunisia (established in 1881). The amphitheater and other martyrial sites were not just static archaeological monuments but living and active lieux de mémoire which might be revived to promote conversion and popular religiosity.



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Medieval church art and nation building in Norway during the nineteenth century

J. E A Kroesen, University Museum of Bergen (Bergen)

Norway is among the youngest independent nations in Western Europe. In 1814, the first Norwegian Constitution was drawn up and signed in Eidsvoll. In the same period, museums were founded in several Norwegian cities in order to document and exhibit the country's cultural history. The Middle Age, particularly the period before unification with Denmark in 1380, when Norway had been a sovereign kingdom, were considered the nation's age of glory. Thus, medieval art works were regarded as authentic and truly Norwegian. For example, woodcarvings from the stave churches were closely associated with Viking traditions and viewed as relics from the 'land of the sagas'.



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ccecalup@hum.uc3m.es



twitter.com/ChiaraCecalupo