

PERSONAL PROLEGOMENA

“Needs must he sink who carries the great stones;
These stones I have carried as long as I was able,
These stones I have loved as long as I was able,
These stones my fate.”³

G. Seferis

Excavation is a fateful thing, for a piece of the past—and at times equally so for its excavator. Giorgos Seferis’s words on the stones of Mycenae feel very true, indeed, to the archaeologist responsible for the investigation of the Archaic Etruscan quarter in the north-west slope of the Borgo at San Giovenale. The main author of this report was neither an Etruscologist, nor much of an excavator.⁴ Yet, in the spring of 1961, a phone call from an official of the Swedish Royal Court and a student’s lust for adventure brought him, only temporarily he thought, to Etruria away from his Near Eastern and Greco-Persian interests. Thus, a singular fate made him end up *volens volens* with a life-long responsibility to pay for his youth’s affair with Etruscology by having to account for what became, through scant merit of his, an unexpectedly important excavation in Etruria.⁵

Every archaeologist knows that an excavation means not only increase of knowledge but also destruction of historical evidence. Thus it is the excavator’s inescapable obligation to save and to transmit that evidence in a new shape as fully and faithfully as ever possible. The archaeological world, however, is also sadly familiar with excavations that have remained unpublished or have only been preliminarily reported on. This is not surprising. The saying is true indeed that after one exciting day in the field, follow some 30 or more prosaic and demanding ones at the desk and in the storeroom. This is a heavy debt *post festum* that not every archaeologist is able or willing to pay. Yet, the obligation remains and will loom ever larger and more ominous with the passing of the years and, not least, with many new developments within archaeology threatening to make the old excavation appear ever more theoretically ingenuous and technically obsolete. In any case and however heavy, “the stones have to be carried”. With this volume the once young archaeologist tries, *post tot discrimina rerum*, to live up to that obligation and to pay at last, as far and as decently as possible, his long overdue

debt to that Etruscan field, into which he happened to trespass some 50 years ago.

Yet, this debt with its accumulated interest would have been almost impossible to handle but for a most exceptional situation, i.e. a regular presence every campaign of H.M. King Gustaf VI Adolf among the archaeologists on the site (*Fig. 1*). This is not the place to dwell on the problems that may occur when a royal court meets the archaeological academe on the latter’s home ground and on what particular difficulties there will have been for a young and inexperienced archaeologist to have an 80-year old, reigning monarch, however competent as an excavator and however tactful as an elder “colleague”, a beautiful princess and the members of the royal entourage, working away on his site with a queen and a lady-in-waiting washing his sherds nearby.⁶ It is, instead, the occasion to express a lasting gratitude to the memory of King Gustaf Adolf for having convinced, in 1963, the Italian Direttore Generale delle Belle Arti, Bruno Molajoli, and the archaeological Soprintendente of Etruria Meridionale, Mario Moretti, that a protective roof should be put up above the fragile Borgo NW tufa excavation so as to preserve that unique little Etruscan workers’ quarter, and another one above the more elegant Archaic houses on the Acropolis of San Giovenale. The impressive roofs were erected in 1964 and have ever since perfectly preserved the Acropolis and the Borgo NW excavations more or less as left in 1965. During the years 2002–2004, a new roof over

³ Seferis 1936, Seferis 1950, 83f. and Seferis 1960, 37f.

⁴ His main interest has been the Near East and its relations to the Classical world and in his scholarly work he has preferred an independent “Archäologie ohne Ausgrabung”, i.e. a close study, in the field and in the museum, of what others have excavated, and left to an “archaeology of the eye” less demanding of order and organization. He never thought of “a dig of one’s own” as the true symbol of full scholarly manhood and, admittedly and regrettably, often found selfless description and total submission to the evidence of strata and stones a little boring.

⁵ Still today, 40 years later, not many early Etruscan settlements have been explored and few as well preserved as the little quarter on the north-west slope of the Borgo at San Giovenale.

⁶ For King Gustaf VI Adolf as an archaeologist, cf. Nylander 1992, Nylander 1993 and Nylander 1998a (on the 25th anniversary of his death). King Gustaf Adolf had studied and practised archaeology at Uppsala University in his youth, had published a couple of articles and had acquired, over the years, an unusually broad field experience in various types of excavations in Sweden, Greece, Cyprus, Italy and even Korea. The trenches in the Borgo NW excavated by King Gustaf Adolf were always meticulously dug and carefully recorded in his diary and he had a fastidious collector’s eye and memory for objects, even for sherds. In the early 1980s, in the context of a debate on the Italo-Nordic excavations at Ficana, there was some grumbling in Italian newspapers about royal Scandinavian amateurs having long been too tolerantly allowed to mess up important sites. It is essential to stress that, contrary to commonly held notions, King Gustaf Adolf never aspired to or had a leading or directing role in the Swedish excavations and that he always, loyally and respectfully, accepted the direction and decisions of the person, graduate student or other, responsible for a trench or an excavation area. On the other hand, it is equally true that without the interest and commitment of the king and his close friend Erik Wetter, San Giovenale, Luni sul Mignone and Acquarossa might well have remained what they were before the Swedish activities, just little-noted toponyms in the Viterbese countryside.



Fig. 1. The excavation area of Borgo NW in 1965. Carl Nylander and King Gustaf VI Adolf under the *Capannone*, a structure that was funded by the king.



Fig. 2. Börje Blomé and the workmen Aldo and Angelo Coletta from Blera arranging the photographic tower, *la giraffa*, in 1962.

the Borgo was constructed under the auspices of the Italian authorities and the soprintendente Anna Maria Sgubini Moretti. These roofs have produced a unique situation. Most archaeologists have to leave, after the last field season, their sites to time and attrition and some even have to refill them again. For their report they have to rely almost entirely on their field diaries and notes, on the photos and drawings and the finds. Had such been the case for the Borgo NW excavation it would have meant disaster. The young excavator had almost no field experience and the Borgo NW slope was a task, the complexity and difficulty of which would have taxed heavily the talents and the wisdom even of a senior field archaeologist.⁷ His knowledge of archaeological planning and documentation was little beyond Mortimer Wheeler's *Archaeology from the Earth*, and before he had understood the multiple character and behaviour of the ubiquitous tufa mate-

⁷ It would be too long to dwell on the not unproblematic setup of the excavations at San Giovenale and Luni sul Mignone and on the organizers' and the field directors' all too-optimistic confidence in the young people they threw headlong, alone and unguided, into archaeological situations and problems far beyond their maturity as scholars and their capacity as excavators.

rials of his site, he had found too many imagined floors and destroyed too many real ones.⁸ Ingenuously eager to reach the earliest strata and the "origin of the Etruscans" (an illusion that was still alive among the Swedish archaeologists in the early 1960s), he often neglected, at times even destroyed, the evidence of the later phases on his site. He knew little about pottery, and even less about that of Etruria. His diaries were hardly up to the archaeological reality, he was neither a good draughtsman, nor a photographer. Digging away, he never quite knew how to cope with, and understand, the many walls, floors, levels, strata and

⁸ All this was long before the "Harris matrix", the Italian "unità stratigrafiche" and other refinements within theoretical and practical archaeology of the 1970s and 80s. One should note also the excavator's lack of awareness, shared by many students of his generation, of ecological and technological aspects, a fact which made him neglect the implications of the hard-burned hearths and strange niche-like constructions in Area A, long thought to have some religious, cultic function. The author still remembers, with a happy smile, the visit to the site of the Swiss historian of ancient religion Karl Kerényi who, when seeing the grotto-like niche Ah, dwelled long and inspiredly on Dionysos and Fufuns. It was only in the early 90s that the author realized that—*exeat* the "Cult cave"!—he had actually excavated an early metallurgical workshop handling iron and bronze.



Fig. 3. Börje Blomé at work.

fills and the immense amounts of pottery, nor with the numerous people working in various trenches on his site and whose activities he was expected to direct, supervise and document. In addition, initially he lacked a real site plan for find references and the demanding architectural documentation. At first non-existent, these archaeological plans were initiated in 1962 by the excavation architect Börje Blomé.⁹ In short, the excavator never quite caught up with his excavation or got to understand his complex, sloping site as a whole, only bits and pieces. All these shortcomings of the field documentation—and of the “field understanding”—would have spelt disaster for a report in an ordinary excavation and site situation. But thanks to the great *Capannone*, the protective roof, his excavation with strata, stones and all was always there patiently waiting for him through the years, intact and generously preserving information that he had missed when excavating.¹⁰ And thanks to Blomé’s rich photographic documentation much of what the excavation obliterated had been documented and thus many memory gaps could be remedied (Fig. 2). And

now, the youthful fun has long since ended and the old bill has, at long last, to be paid, this very special situation has allowed the archaeologist/writer of the year 2013, the unusual privilege of a frank and fascinating dialectic relationship with the young excavator of the early 1960s.

After the last season in 1965, the demands of Swedish academic life made the excavator put aside his Etruscan responsibilities to work on his dissertation on Achaemenid architecture and, for almost 15 years, to teach Near Eastern and Classical archaeology in various countries and universities, mentally far away from Etruria even though the memory and the irking conscience of his “youth’s sin” always lurked in the background and, in the end, conditioned his scholarly career.¹¹ When, in 1979, he became director of the Swedish Institute in Rome, he soon managed to find a good collaborator and specialist in Ingrid Pohl. She handled the study and the publication of the great amounts of pottery and other finds from the site, a complex work necessitating also a difficult, basic reconstruction of the entire stratigraphy mainly

⁹ Actually, it was not even complete and finished when the excavation architect B. Blomé, always a perfectionist, died in 1998.

¹⁰ It was his early interest in Troy and its problems that had made him learn, with immense later gratitude, from Heinrich Schliemann and Carl W. Blegen the great importance of leaving many stratigraphic or unexcavated baulks for later inspection or for new excavators.

¹¹ Without this obligation he might never have ended up as an institute director in Rome, leaving the chair in Classical and Near Eastern Archaeology at the University of Copenhagen and, to a great extent, giving up his Iranian and Near Eastern interests and research projects on Achaemenid art and architecture; cf. Nylander 1996.



Fig. 4. Ingrid Pohl.

built on his old diaries and field notes.¹² This taxing activity, understandably quite frustrating, almost amounted to a second excavation, at the desk, of the entire site. He also managed to entice the excavation architect Börje Blomé to leave, every now and then, his university teaching of architectural conservation and his much acclaimed restorations of old Swedish churches and to return to his plans and sections of the Etruscan walls of the Borgo. The Borgo excavations were patiently handled by Dr Pohl in the archaeological laboratory of the Swedish Institute in Rome and by Professor Blomé in the field. However, the manifold duties and interests of the excavator's position as director of an institute and as an active member of the Roman international scholarly community long allowed him many excuses to put off his own, necessary and inescapable face-to-face confrontation with his 30-year old excavation.

Yet, all this time, there it was, waiting under the huge roof, walls and fills and floors and stratigraphic baulks and all. But it was only in the early 1990s, towards the end of his long directorship, that he began, in close collaboration with Blomé, to seriously and systematically go back to the site and work *in situ* on the documentation, the interpretation and the excavation report (Fig. 3). This meant, to a great extent, to "excavate" the Borgo NW anew. Thirty years ago, there had been the youthful work of the excavator in the early 1960s. Then, during the 1980s and early 90s, Dr Pohl's painstaking analysis of the finds and their stratigraphic context, mainly based on hundreds of boxes of pottery and on the excavator's old diaries and field notes, was pre-

pared (Fig. 4). What now followed amounted almost to a third, mental re-excavation from scratch, *Archäologie ohne Ausgrabung*, concentrating less on the imperfect documentation and the theories of the 60s, but more on the well-preserved remains and useful stratigraphic baulks left there in 1965. Above all, Blomé's ongoing architectural documentation and the joint analysis of the remains, including extensive work with the levels, helped in establishing relationships between strata, floors and constructions that the sloping ground and the numerous walls had so far obscured. This joint work produced both new insights and not a few revisions of old theories and conclusions, put forth both by the excavator, and by Dr Pohl, on the basis of the excavation diaries and notes.¹³

The death of Börje Blomé (1922–1998) left part of his documentation and drawing work unfinished and his way of working manually has made it impossible to retrace his steps and to complete his innumerable sketches with their immense amount of measurements and notes. The same is true for the stratigraphic profiles and, above all, for his intended reconstruction on paper of the Borgo NW slope. The resulting deficiencies of this report can, at least to some extent, be alleviated by Blomé's extensive photographic documentation with his faithful old

¹² Swedish classical archaeology suffered in those days from a conviction that an excavator should be able to handle everything on his site, stratigraphy, architecture and finds, all by himself, an illusion which has hardly accelerated the appearance of final excavation reports. Ingrid Pohl, through her previous work and publications on Cerveteri, San Giovenale, Veii, Ostia and elsewhere, had a unique experience and expert knowledge of Iron Age, Etruscan and later pottery. Even so, she spent the better part of some ten years on this Borgo material.

¹³ Ingrid Pohl's publication of the pottery appeared in 2009, see *San Giovenale V:2*. While there is substantial agreement on most essential points, there are also, quite understandably, some disagreements between us. It should be kept in mind that Pohl's work on the finds, completed in 1995 and ready for publication, through no fault of hers was, as it were, out of phase with the excavator's efforts which only about that time began. Whatever the resulting differences of opinion between Pohl and the author, often caused, *culpa excavatoris*, by the insufficient documentation of the 1960s, they should in no way obscure his profound respect and admiration for her broad and deep knowledge of ancient pottery and his warm gratitude for her long commitment and fundamental contribution to the arduous task of making some sense of the complex Borgo situation.



Fig. 5a. Alessandro Tilia and Angela Bizarro.



Fig. 5b. Giuseppe Tilia.



Fig. 6. Lars Karlsson.

Leica. It has been an immense relief to the excavator/author that his friends Angela Bizzarro and Giuseppe, Stefano and Alessandro Tilia have done their utmost to remedy this difficult situation (*Fig. 5a & 5b*).

Between 2000 and 2005, I had the valuable assistance of Julia Sigurdsson. She took many new photographs for this publication and indicated the names of walls and blocks on the photographs published here.

Thus the Borgo has, as it were, been excavated three times and in different ways. This, however and regrettably, does not mean that everything has been seen and understood, all questions asked and answered, all problems resolved. The past is and always remains “a foreign country”, with a language and a logic all its own, and not least so the Etruscan. The Archaic architecture and masonry of the Borgo, uncanonical and experimental, eminently practical and crudely fresh, is easier to respect and to like than to understand. A further problematic point may well be this report’s character of site-centric “micro-history” with little looking beyond the north-west slope of the Borgo and hardly ever beyond San Giovenale. It should be remembered that the non-Etruscologist author’s prime obligation, that of trying to make some sense of the strata and the stones of his excavation, has been demanding enough. Others will, hopefully, assess and discuss the place

of the Borgo quarter and its evidence in broader Etruscological and other contexts.¹⁴

It will be noted that the author of this report mostly speaks of the distant excavator of the early 1960s as “he” and only rarely in first person. This is, in no way whatsoever, intended to save the author from legitimate criticism for its shortcomings. But, after 40 years, the excavator and the author do not really feel like the very same person (*Fig. 7*). The author, at the age of 80 and at the end of his archaeological career, at times feels very much the father of that distant young student and inexperienced excavator of the Borgo, sad and severe at his mistakes, yet not lacking sympathetic understanding and benevolence in view of the young man’s honest and at times quite respectable efforts to handle, according to his limited lights, a rather difficult field situation. The father/author himself has relished the joy of returning to those exciting experiences of his impressionable youth and to that wise old landscape with its fresh, mint-scented air, with its misty dawns

¹⁴ The very lateness of the discovery, in the mid-1990s, of the character of a part of the Borgo as a metallurgical *officina* has not allowed the author to penetrate the problems of *Etruria mineraria* and of Etruscan metallurgy so as to profit from and to integrate this interpretation in the ongoing, vital discussion on such issues.



Fig. 7. Carl Nylander.

and its sunsets warmly reddening the tufa walls, with seasons and time all its own, marked by the quiet bells of horses and long-horned cows grazing among the nearby Etruscan tombs. Yet he too has often been painfully torn between the stimulus and excitement of the scholarly challenge, the stern demands of the task and, at times, the frightening feeling of never quite rising to the challenge to make sufficient sense of “the great stones”.

Now, at last and for what it is worth: these stones I have carried as long as I was able, these stones I have loved as long as I was able! If, in the end, commitment, perseverance and some

archaeological love have not been enough to take us the entire way, there is comfort in knowing that others, with this report as a guide, may and will perhaps articulate new and better questions and answers where the excavator/author, son and father, remain silent, obtuse or in error. The impressive, beautiful site is still splendidly there for scrutiny and study, safe under its *Capanzone*, richly complete with strata, structures, stones and all. The archaeologists come, work for a while, say their thing, age and disappear. *Saxa manent*.