Field, sites and finds

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Images of archeological investigations and self-representations of antiquarians in
Early 18th century Rome

It is a fairly obvious assumption to speak of archaeology as "field-work" (French "activité de terrain"), and there seems no reason to think that is has ever been different. Everyone knows that the normal place where archaeologists exercise their activity is in most cases outdoor. This definition however, when given closer attention, appears to convey more than its plain meaning. The same word, "field" can also be used for other sciences which do not necessarily imply outdoor practice : if its ordinary, topographical meaning (French "terrain"), seems sufficient to speak of geology, for instance, as another "field-work", such notions as the "field of the historian" or even the "field of ethnology" imply another, metaphorical, interpretation. In such cases, as in both similar French terms "champ" (e.g. : "champ de l'historien") and "terrain" (e. g. : "terrain de l'ethnologue"), the "field" is not so much or not only the location, the geographical setting of a scientific activity, than the complex of questions, datas and methods which this science is embracing. And this metaphorical dimension is not completely absent from the epistemology of "field sciences" such as archaelogy. In all cases indeed, the idea of "field-work" implies a constant relation, a back and forth movement, both physical and intellectual, between two poles: on one side, the various places, the "sites" (wether these are real fieds for archeologists or geologists, or living societies for anthropologists...), where the datas are collected; on the other side, one central institution (which one might call the "laboratory") where these datas are given their scientific validation through processes of assembling, comparing, analysing in the light of a preexisting system of references, and where they are in their turn elaborated for and integrated into various forms of production and restitution. To receive its scientific legitimacy, the "field-work" must be conceived as an intellectual construction, a representation of sciences clearly organized around intellectual centres where all the available knowledge is concentrated, classified and elaborated for further use, while the dispersed "sites" form like a crown or a periphery. Ethnology certainly gives the clearest image of this model, with the whole world and its societies like as many "sites", and the Western academic institutions as the

only place of scientific legitimation and validation (1); but our practice of archaelogy follows the same model.

Our notions of "field" and "field-work" thus appear historically determined, since they are narrowly connected to a state of the scientific production where a common system of references has been elaborated, which allows all the preexisting knowledge to be made available and all the new datas to be validated and integrated into this central system, whatever the variety of sites these datas come from. How, then, can we think of the archaeological practice and of its material culture before such references were created, that is before archaeology existed as a science with its specific methodology and presentation ? Apparently, at the time of 16th-18th centuries antiquarians, the classical, traditionnal erudition dealing with texts, inscriptions, coins and medals, was the only common language, the only shared references which could produce a unified knowledge. How then the documentation on the excavations themselves, the more specifical archeological datas, could go beyond the specificity of each site with its own discoveries and produce a coherent material culture ? It is a fact that, whenever we leave aside the textual production of antiquarians with its strong erudite flavor, the material presentation of archaeological datas, and especially the graphic documentation, seems often totally hazardous, handed over as it was to people using very different technics with very unequal skills. One may find ground plans of the same buildings discovered in ancient excavations, for instance, represented in so radically different ways that their common identity can be hardly recognized through the distorted plans. One stricking exemple is the imperial villa at Anzio in Latium, a part of which was excavated in 1711 (Polignac 2000, p. 613-629). The building was interpreted as a temple by the Jesuit antiquarian Giuseppe Volpi who gave it a shape which has something of an italian church, while the famous Papal antiquarian Francesco Bianchini blew it up to the dimensions of a theater; the only accurate plan of the building seems to have been drawn by the artist Pier-Leone Ghezzi. Both distortions by Volpi and Bianchini in their respective publications are explained by the erudite interests of these antiquarians, who both picked up just one piece of the evidence and forced the plan to fit their interpretation : for Volpi, the building had to be the famous Esculapius' temple at Antium because a statue of the god had been found there; thence its religious inspiration. While for Bianchini, who was mainly interested by the fragments of the *Fasti Antiates* found in the same place and

mentionning various festivals of the Augustean dynasty, the building was necessarily related to these festivals and therefore interpreted as the place where theatrical representations were performed. Another well-known exemple of distortion due to preconceived ideas on ancient architecture is the Palatine, whose remains were interpreted by Bianchini as part of a perfectly unified and symmetrical imperial palace : though accurate, the many observations and measurings made by Bianchini on the spot were integrated into a compelling grid of interpretation (Oechslin 1976, p. 395-417, esp. 406-408; Oechslin 1979, p. 107-120) (2).

The relationship between antiquarianism and images however deserve more attention. Some images of 17th-18th century excavations in Rome, on which I shall turn now my attention, may help to understand which values the Roman antiquarians used to give to different kinds of evidence, how they would make them available to the public, and more generally how they would view their own practice within the society of their time. These images all represent excavations of tombs, the so many *camere sepolcrali* or *columbaria* which were frequently discovered around Papal Rome, alongside the ancient roads. Quite significantly, the first images of these discoveries appear in Pietro Santi Bartoli and Pietro Bellori's publications dedicated to the paintings found in these tombs, such as *Le pitture antiche del sepolcro dei Nasonii* (1680), *Gli antichi sepolcri overo mausolei romani et etruschi* (1697) or *Le Pitture antiche delle grotte di Roma* (1706). Besides the discovery of funerary inscriptions and offerings and the study of rituals, which interested primarily the antiquarians, the search for ancient painting was indeed one of the main incentives for this funerary archaeology. The tradition of study of ancient painting initiated by Raphael was renewed in the XVIIth century, first within the Barberini circle by Cassiano dal Pozzo, a generation later by Cardinal Massimo and Pietro Bellori with the help of the draughtman and engraver Pietro Santi Bartoli, and was eventually prolungated into the XVIIIth century by Francesco Bartoli, Pietro's son, and his workshop (3). It had been linked first to the exploration of ancient buildings, such as the Domus Aurea or The Villa Adriana in the XVIth century, or Titus's Baths in the XVIIth; but in a second time it became also closely associated to the excavation of tombs, especially since the discovery of the celebrated tomb of the Nasonii (wrongly identified to Ovid's family) in 1674, as shown by the above mentionned publications. One must await the early XVIIIth century to see the emphasis put again on the remains of paintings in buildings, with the rich discoveries in Palazzo

Rospigliosi on the Quirinal in 1709 (republican houses underneath Constantine's baths: Connor Bulman 1999) and in the Farnese gardens on the Palatine in 1720 (remains of a nymphaeum of Nero's palace, long known as the "baths of Livia": Bastet 1971, 1972; De Vos 1990) and 1724 (Aula Isiaca : Rizzo 1936; Iacopi 1997) ; a book like George Turnbull's *Treatise on Ancient Paintings* (1740), whose plates reproduce several of the discoveries made in these places, bears testimony of this shift.

Not surprisingly, therefore, many of the documents of that time illustrating discoveries of tombs - either watercolours forming magnificent collections such as the one formed by Richard Topham in Windsor between 1710 and 1730, now at Eton College, or engravings - are reproductions of the paintings found in these monuments. Some of them however give a more general, and apparently more technical view of the monuments and of their excavations, and form like an archive of archaeological activity in Rome. Especially interesting is the production of an artist who worked for a while for Francesco Bartoli, Gaetano Piccini (1681-1736); unlike the former, who concentrated himself on the copy and interpretation of paintings, Piccini extended his interest to the monument as a whole (4). This may be due to the influence of his first patron, the well known antiquarian Francesco dei Ficoroni. Piccini's career, indeed, started in 1705 when Ficoroni engaged him to draw the paintings he was discovering in the large excavation he was conducting in Vigna Moroni, along the urban part of Via Appia. In his publications, Ficoroni himself described this excavation which lasted from 1705 to 1710 and led to the unearthing of 92 tombs, which were visited by the painter Carlo Maratta and his pupils who admired their paintings ; Ficoroni also explained that, after a fruitless attempt to take the paintings off the walls, he asked Piccini to draw them, with the hope to prepare a complete publication of engravings (Ficoroni 1732, p. 35-38). This publication, far too expensive, never saw the light; a few preliminary plates however were prepared. The only copies still known of these plates are now at Eton College, in the former Topham's collection which also contains a set of Piccini's watercolours, while another album of Piccini's watercolours from Vigna Moroni, bought at first by Cardinal Filippo Antonio Gualtieri after the failed attempt of publication, was later adquired by Cardinal Neri Corsini and is now in the Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe in Rome (5).

If some kind of record of the excavation site appears at random in the Eton

collection (for instance on the drawing Bn IV, 24), it is much more systematically represented in the Roman album where each group of drawings dedicated to a particular tomb opens with a view of the monument in its topographical context. The opening view of the first tomb found in 1705 seems to give a very realistic view of the site, of its ruined state and of its unearthing, with almost a feeling of threat as the earth, the fragments of walls and columns and the tomb itself seem about to fall (GNS, 158 I 5, fol. 159; Fileri 2000., p. 142, n° 81) (**fig. 1**). The image produces some kind of dramatization of the discovery. Another view however, choosen to be engraved, conveys a different impression (Eton College Library, Bn 13, 17) (**fig. 2**). There, as in the plate I of Bartoli's and Bellori's publication of the tomb of the Nasonii (*Le pitture antiche del sepolcro dei Nasonii*) showing its unearthing at a great depth, the small size of the human figures giving the scale of the tomb of vigna Moroni produces an impressive idea of Ficoroni's painstakings and discoveries - impressive but overevaluated since these figures are in fact ridiculously small and give very exagerated dimensions to the excavation and to the monument. But the presence of these *amateurs* visiting the site and admiring the tomb to which they found access without apparent difficulty, gives another tone to the representation. The excavation thus looses some of its dramatic aspect as it appears as a part of a world of mundane entertainment and culture; it belongs to the *mise en scène* of an aesthetic pleasure and a cultural distinction shared by enlightened visitors, either artists as Maratta, antiquarians or rich connaisseurs and distinguished collectors, contemplating ancient paintings. A similar difference between two kinds of representations, where the emphasis is put either on the excavation itself or on its social interest, appears in images of another famous discovery, that of the columbarium of Livia's slaves and freedmen, found in late 1725 on the outer part of Via Appia. Two books were published almost simultaneously in 1727 to give an account of this important excavation which produced, among other things, some 400 inscriptions, a true epigraphic treasure which allowed the antiquarians to reconstruct the Augustean household. The first of these books was written by Francesco Bianchini, and the other one by the Florentine antiquarian Francesco Antonio Gori (6). In the last one, a single plate gives a general and very schematical view of the monument, with distinguished visitors again giving the scale (**fig. 3**): the lack of any allusion to the excavation itself and to the real state of the monument (here shown as if it were intact) is striking, and gives to the view a strangely clean

and abstract aspect. The visitors are there as in a museum, an impression which is reinforced by the content of the book, decorated with images of gems from the Vettori collection, and whose plates display all the content of the monument : sarcophagi, funerary altars, decorated urns, marble and terracotta fragments... The dedications of the plates to members of the toscan nobility and to influential and enlightened *amateurs* who suscribed to the book confirm that the social, mundane dimension of the taste for Antiquity blurs out the reference to actual archaeological work. Conversely, the engravings published by Bianchini (**fig. 4**), which will be later reused by Piranesi in the second volume of his *Antichità romane*, strongly insist on the archaeological work in both aspects of the actual excavation and, still more essential to Bianchini and his fellow-erudites, of the triple task of drawing the monument, locating and transcribing of the precious inscriptions : three moments corresponding to the three men shown studying the monument on plate IV (7). But Bianchini did not bother to illustrate the urns, altars and other finds, whose artistic value did not interest him as much as the historical value of the inscriptions he was publishing : his work was primarily one of erudition.

Thus, three components variously articulated can be recognized in these representations: the act of discovery itself, sometimes with a touch of dramatization; the study of the discovery by antiquarians; and the visits of amateurs and *virtuosi* interested by ancient art and antiquities. One might be tempted to draw a strict opposition between two types of images, according to the emphasis given to one or another of these components: on one side a category of realistic images of excavations, to be considered as a valuable archaeological record, and on the other side a category of more elaborated representations illustrating the social support, the cultural and artistic interest raised by the discoveries, thus helping the antiquarians to defend and promote their social role. And it would be also tempting to make this opposition coincide with an opposition between two kinds of medias, as most documents of the first category would be drawings and watercolours of limited and more specialized diffusion, while engravings, aiming to a larger public, would rather belong to the second one. This opposition however must not be pushed too far. The "realism" of the first category, for instance, is far from what we expect to be the realism of a true record; it is rather a conventional or generic realism. On many images for instance, a vine is represented on top of the ground, bending over the excavation. This detail gives a topographical clue, but only a very conventional one.

It is there to remind the viewer that all these excavations took place in the gardens and vineyards surrounding the Papal Rome, inside as well as outside the Aurelian walls, an area that was precisely the favourite playground of antiquarians : excavations in a proper urban context were indeed not very frequent, while the excavations made farther in the *Campagna romana* by landowners or rich amateurs were practically out of antiquarians' reach and escaped their "field" of activity. The relations published by Ficoroni show instead that the area immediatly within and beyond the Aurelian walls was the real core of the ordinary archeological activity in Rome, with its yearly regular flow of discoveries forming the basis of both antiquarian knowledge and trade. The antiquarian activity did not only find there its proper space; there too its social value was recognized, praised and given a strong support by the connaisseurs, travelers and collectors visiting the excavations. Beyond their rather vague topographical signification, the vines figuring on these images may thus have a more general and symbolic meaning and be considered as a signal, a conventional reference to the realm where antiquarians, influential prelates, noble travelers and rich collectors would meet in a common search for Antiquity.

Moreover, when it is possible, the comparison between drawings and engravings illustrating the same tombs shows that the real concern was rather how to combine the representation of sites and monuments as a whole, with particular images of all their decoration and contents. Besides the general views of the tombs found in vigna Moroni, Piccini for instance has produced many watercolours showing details of their decoration, since the paintings were the first concern of his collaboration with Ficoroni. But it was just impossible to print as many plates to give a full account of all these details, because of their cost; a compromise had to be found, and therefore a selection to be made. A few exemples drawn may give an idea of the various kinds of compromise and of the shift or loss of information they implied. In some cases, while the drawing give a general view of the decoration but in a very abstract, almost immaterial manner, without neither the architectural structure of the monument nor its surroundings (GNS, 158 I 5, fol. 19 : fig. 5), the corresponding engraving on the contrary recreate an idea of excavation and gives to the monument its architectural consistency and scale ; but it also cancels parts of the decoration - on this exemple, the landscape with temple on the upper part of the bottom wall has disappeared. In this case, the translation from drawing to engraving introduces some *mise en scène* of the discovery, at the cost of a small loss of details. In

another case (GNS, 158 I 5, fol. 49 : fig. 6), while the watercolour shows altogether the paintings on the walls, the mosaic on the floor (rather clumsily drawn), and two inscriptions giving the name of the family buried in this tomb (the family of Publius Acilius), the engraving again recreates a kind of archaeological context but reduces the monument to its bare architecture (Eton College Collections, Bn 13, 16 : fig. 7); all the contents of the tomb have disappeared. One may think that in this case another engraving was planned to show separately the paintings and the mosaic, while the other important find, the inscriptions, would have be left aside for a textual presentation, since it belonged to another kind of evidence which interested mainly the erudites and was handed over to the antiquarians for proper publication. In this case, the information conveyed by a unique drawing is split up in different medias for its complete and accurate treatment. Another device yet is used on the engraving Bn 13, 9, where the wall paintings and the floor mosaic of the tomb, while represented on two different drawings (BN 4, 25-26), are grouped on the same sheet, but shown separately and in a different perspective for a more accurate rendering.

These exemples confirm that representing the site of the excavation, its depth, the ruined state of the monument, was more an aesthetic and symbolic convention than an accurate archaeological record when it was reintroduced on engravings aiming at a large public : it made the image more attractive, the feeling of discovering a hidden treasury more powerful, the cultural entertainment more thrilling. Technical realism is not the first concern here. But these images clearly raise a much larger problem. They give the feeling that Ficoroni, Piccini and their engraver have tried different ways of selecting and combining three levels of information : on the whole excavation and its social and cultural impact, on each tomb as a piece of evidence, and on the details of the contents (paintings, mosaics, inscriptions, cinerary urns...). They are therefore at the very heart of a major concern common to the whole antiquarianism of that time. The antiquarians were facing a continuous flow of discoveries; they had the greatest difficulty in recording as much as possible of the finds; their writings show that their main preoccupation was to determine how they could and should make them available, especially through images, to promote the advancement of learning and the progress of arts in the society of their time. Typologies had not yet been elaborated, no common references existed that allowed to classify most artifacts into determined categories; each artifact was, in a way, singular and had to be considered in its singularity. Images of

each find were then necessary to allow the diffusion of knowledge and to make comparisons possible. The collaboration of artists to draw and keep a memory of the discoveries was therefore a fundamental feature of that time, as shown by the important part played by the Bartoli, Piccini, Ghezzi, Campiglia, and so many others in the archaeology of ancient Rome. The large amount of drawings they left is a most valuable source of information on the discoveries made at their time. Though, they all faced the same difficulty: how to make this information universally available by transfering it from a great number of scarcely diffused drawings to a limited number of more widely diffused engravings ?

This contrast can not be more clearly illustrated than by the comparison between two exactly contemporary enterprises, both inspired by the same desire to get as an exhaustive knowledge of Antiquity as possible, but operating on different grounds : Bernard de Montfaucon's *Antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures* and Richard Topham's collection of drawings. The former was a first attempt both to get as close as possible to a complete catalogue of images and to introduce some kind of order in this mass of images and to create a grid of references, though not on a typological, but on an iconographical basis (Vaiani 1998). This huge task, completed in six years (1713-1719) with the help of a dense erudite network, did not quite reach the expected result : instead of having new drawings for the majority of pieces, a work which he could have carried only with the help of a important team of artists all over Europe, Montfaucon was in most cases compelled to reuse and transform previously published engravings, at the cost of a frequent simplification and of the resulting loss of information - volumes, contexts, scales, materials were thus frequently sacrified on the altar of pure iconography. Since no way had been still found to go beyond the singularity of each item, the wish of exhaustivity implies a strategy and choices paid with the disappearance of other kinds of information.

Richard Topham (1671-1730), wealthy stateman who stood at Parliament for Windsor from 1698 to 1713, started his own collection of drawings exactly in the same years than Montfaucon's enterprise but with very different scopes and means (Quarrie 1993; Connor 1993). His first idea, inspired by John Talman, was also to have drawings of all the sculptures and gems in order to create an exhaustive corpus - a kinf of "paper museum" devoted to Antiquity. But he quickly moved towards a more realistic, though ambitious, objective, by selecting the sculptures he wished to have copied on an inventory of the Roman collections established purposedly by the

painter Francesco Ferando d'Imperiali, whose pupils (including the young Pompeo Batoni) were employed to produce the drawings. He simultaneously adquired from Francesco Bartoli's workshop watercolours representing most of the paintings discovered in Rome in the first quarter of the century (as well as other paintings whose authenticity may be dubious). Thus, instead of erudites and collectors, it is a well defined and active group of artists who made the collection possible, thanks to a geographical specialization : though not strictly limited to Rome (there are also drawings of other italian collections, especially from Florence), the 2342 drawings and watercolours provide an unique and unvaluable documentation mainly on the state of the Roman collections and on the discoveries made in Rome in the early XVIIIth century. But, though intended to "be of use to learned and skilful persons" and "to be placed in a public repository", the collection was obviously not intended for proper publication. And it does not seem that is was used as a source of knowledge on ancient art until Robert Adam and the artists of his workshop came and copied the watercolours around 1760 to enrich their own decorative répertoire (Harris, 2001, p. 4, n. 31).

Two strategies, two different skills, networks and audiences, two kinds of knowledge intended to be exhaustive but meeting each its proper limits : one can hardly find a more striking parallel and simultaneously a sharper contrast between two contemporary projects. But this opposition does not mean that there was no attempt to escape these limits and the contradiction between singularity and completion. Let us turn back one moment to the columbarium of Livia's household. We saw that, in terms of images, the publication by Francesco Gori is the most detailed and complete, though his views of the architecture of the columbarium, as we saw, are rather unhappy. But such an enterprise, supported by a strong and wealthy group of suscribers, could not be repeated every time. In a later publication, Camere Sepolcrali dei Liberti di Livia ed altri Cesari (1732), illustrating the same monument (with a newly excavated chamber) as well as other columbariums excavated along the via Appia, Pier-Leone Ghezzi tried another solution (8). In his very precise views of the monument, he carefully represents the various sarcophagi, altars, funerary monuments, at the very place where they had been found. One can thus identify most of the famous pieces discovered there, especially the valuable sarcophagi and Bathyllus's funerary urn, a small monument of small size but great historical importance since it proved the existence of a temple of "divine Augustus"

on the Palatine, of which Bathyllus was the keeper (Arata 1998). But Ghezzi also carefully records the presence, on the floor, of inhumations covered with tiles *alla cappucina*, totally neglected in Gori's publication. Ghezzi's plates thus provide much more accurate informations from the archaeological point of view. Other plates show the inscriptions found in the columbarium, but as if they were disposed on the wall of a gallery, a kind of epigraphic museum (fig. 8). Though indicating some breaks here and there, this presentation is does not intend to be realistic : it is rather a device invented by Ghezzi to replace the text (there is not text in his book, only plates), and the image in this case clearly functions as a text.

In the light of these few exemples, it appears that the "field" of the antiquarians, if conceived, as said previously, as the complex of questions, datas and methods which their practice was embracing, has but very loose relations with the "field" understood as the "site". Many people were interested by the discovery of antiques, but for very different reasons: rich collectors in search of works of art, artists looking for models, landowners hoping to find hidden treasuries, and naturally all kinds of merchants. The erudite antiquarians had to defend their own approach, their own way of dealing with discoveries, by cooperating and simultaneously competing with all these people, and their challenge in that context was to find and promote an adequate expression and diffusion of their knowledge. As long as this challenge had not been met, as long as the science of artifacts had not created its own system of references, the interpretation and presentation of finds was too big a problem to leave space to a more accurate study of sites. Archaeology as field-work, as a science of sites, with its proper representations, could not emerge before the science of artifacts had been elaborated.

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Notes

1. Much attention has been devoted to the definition of the "field" in anthropology : e.g. Marcus 1995; Gupta and Ferguson 1997.
2. Oechslin' paper of 1979 is unknown to Millon 1993, which does not add much to the former's studies.

3. A useful synthesis of this story is provided by De Lachenal 2000.

4. Piccini's career is retraced by Connor Bulman 2001, though with some confusions and unaccuracies in the history if excavations.

5. This album (158 I 5) has now been published : Fileri 2000.

6. F. Bianchini 1727. Gori 1727. An excellent study of these publications is given by Battaglia 1996.

7. Interesting observations on these plates have been presented by Prof. Valentin Kockel in his paper, "Wie soll man eine Ausgrabung publizieren ?", presented at the conference *Francesco Bianchini und die europaïsche gelehrte Welt um 1700* he organized in Augsburg in september 2003 (proceedings to be published).

8. Much attention has been recently devoted to Ghezzi and his publication : Polignac 1993, p. 56-59 and fig. 8, 9 ; Fusconi 1994 ; Battaglia 1996 ; Fusconi and Moteldo 1997.

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