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## 'Archive archaeology'

## Dusting off records and digging up data on past archaeologies in Sicily (1861-1915)



a) Map of Sicily – Province of Messina

Excavating archives  
without shovel & pickaxe!

Can archives be used to reveal the history of past archaeological research? Archaeology is not just digging! Archives are not just dusty accumulations of paper generated by bureaucratic procedures... Many in fact hold remarkable records about the explorations of ancient sites, and about the characters – sometimes fascinating ones – who led the excavations. We can thus dig up the past inside as well as outside!



b) Central State Archive (Roma)

New area of research !

Records makes history – history is made by themes!

200+ records !

My aim is to reveal the range of previously unrecognised data on the history of archaeology during the post-Unification period (1861-1915) in Sicily, focussed on the province of Messina (a) and its classical heritage. New information can derive from substantial sets of unpublished archival records, comprising excavation journals, letters, photographs and sketches, financial accounts and legal documents. They come from the Central State Archive of Rome (b) and the Museum of Palermo (e). The proposed research will portray how such previously unexplored archives can be indispensable in reconstructing some of the earliest archaeological explorations in Sicily and emphasize the value of such studies elsewhere. Materials highlight three remarkable themes:



c) D. Lo Faso (1783-1863)



d) A. Salinas (1841-1914)

## 1) The noble antiquarian becomes the professional archaeologist

My research will focus on the differences between archaeological research during the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the post-Unification period in northern Sicily. The Commission of Antiquities and Fine Arts, which was founded in 1827, managed the island's cultural heritage, authorized the export of finds and excavations in Sicily during the Bourbon period. The Commission was reformed in 1863 and suppressed in 1875. Meanwhile, Antonino Salinas, Director of the National Museum of Palermo, became the first Sicilian professional archaeologist. A major aim of the present research is to examine differences between the previous antiquarians, who were noblemen and lovers of collecting archaeological finds (c), and the new archaeologists, who worked for the new Italian Reign professionally (d).

## 2) State → Region → Site

Another significant line of research is the relationship between the Ministry of Public Education (Level I: State-Italy), the Museum of Palermo (e) (Level II: Region-Sicily) and the local authorities (Level III: Site-Town). The Ministry coordinated cultural heritage preservation on the national territory, while the Museum of Palermo managed archaeology on the island. Local authorities, such as officials, mayors and custodians, took care of archaeological sites. A notable case study is *Tyndaris* (f), the ancient city founded by Dionysus of Syracuse (396 BC), where a keeper controlled the ruins and acquired small finds for the Museum of Palermo. Thanks to the archival research, records reveal substantial data on these complex relationships between government and local authorities.



e) Museum of Palermo



f) Tindari



g) Vase from Lipari (Glasgow)



h) Kelvingrove (Glasgow)

## 3) From Sicily to Scotland: digging and exporting finds

In 1870s Mr Sclarici, a landowner of Lipari (Aeolian Islands), excavated in the ancient graveyard of *Lipara*, a Greek and Roman site. He dug 20 graves and set up a collection of archaeological finds of the Hellenistic period (4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century BC), such as vases, plates and masks. In particular, a Greek vase (height: 0.50 m; diameter: 0.44 m) (g) depicted a female figure between two standing satyrs. Sclarici was desirous to sell and export the collection.

Thus, A. Salinas was charged by the Ministry to evaluate the collection and consider its potential export. Finally, Sclarici found a buyer, namely James Stevenson (1822-1903), a rich Scottish industrialist, interested in antiquarian collecting. He exported the Sclarici collection to Glasgow, where it is still conserved and displayed (Kelvingrove Museum & Art Gallery) (h). Tracking new archival records will lead to a faithful historical reconstruction on this significant episode of the history of Sicilian archaeology.

**Reference:** Crisà A. (2012), *Numismatic and Archaeological Collecting in Northern Sicily During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*. Oxford: Archaeopress (in press).

**Images sources:** a) Finley 1974 (modified); c) Pace 1935; d) Columba 1915; g) Murray 1886; b, e, f, h) by the author.