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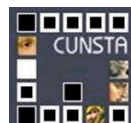
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Recensioni

Nigel Pollard (2020), *Bombing Pompeii. World Heritage & Military Necessity*, Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 321 pp.

Excavation undoubtedly represents a major activity for archaeologists who mostly aim to reconstruct the historical phases of past civilisations through the analysis of material culture. This process, which is certainly costly, can be carried out only by a team of expert researchers operating in the field. Nevertheless, it is possible to analyse past excavations and the history of archaeology by exploring archives. Documents help us reconstruct how methodology evolved or better understand the role of archaeologists, safeguarding authorities and local communities involved in managing sites, performing excavations or dealing with casual discoveries. Furthermore, combat archaeology, a recent field of research focusing on the material traces of past conflicts, has roused interest among scholars performing interdisciplinary investigations at the intersection of history, military, social and cultural heritage studies. Archives also preserve substantial sets of

records on the protection of antiquities and museums in early twentieth-century Italy, where the safeguarding of archaeological sites and collections was monitored by two essential state regulations, namely the Law of 20 June 1909 n. 364 and the Law of 1 June 1939 n. 1089. What happens when sites and museums are put at serious risk due to extenuating circumstances like World War Two? Can we assess the impact of war on Italian antiquities by examining two crucial case studies in southern Italy and the Campania region, a major theatre of military operations following the success of Operation Husky in Sicily?

Bombing Pompeii. World Heritage and Military Necessity is a recent book authored by Nigel Pollard, Professor of Archaeology at the Department of Classics, Ancient History and Egyptology at Swansea University (United Kingdom). This essay focuses on the consequences of two crucial events which occurred around Naples during World War Two. The first is the intensive Allied bombing on the archaeological site of Pompeii carried out by the British Royal Air Force, the Royal Canadian Air Force and the

United States Army Air Force in August and September 1943: over 160 bombs hit the ancient city. The second is the military occupation of the National Museum of Naples conducted by the British Army between 17 November 1943 and 29 June 1944. Pollard seeks to analyse these events in the wider frameworks of World War Two studies, cultural heritage protection, the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives commission and its role in Italy. The book opens with an introductory section (pp. 1–11). The author presents his work and explains the concept of ‘military necessity’ and ‘military convenience’, two key aspects which are strictly related and can often clash with the protection of antiquities. Overall, Pollard’s book is divided into three major parts containing 13 chapters.

Part One: The Bombing of Pompeii, August–September 1943 (13–104) represents the longest section of the work. The first two chapters fully analyse the historical events of the Allied bombing of the archaeological site reporting a detailed assessment of military data documented by archival sources. The bombing process is described day by day, mentioning all damages caused by explosive devices in Pompeii and also in nearby areas (see the scheme on page 17). In chapters 3–6 Pollard explains why Pompeii was bombed, the accuracy of the bombing missions carried out by the Allied forces, the ‘military necessity’ of this action – carried out despite the undeniable risk of damaging the vast archaeological site – and the hypothetical, substitute explanations used to interpret (or justify) these war operations in the contemporary context of World War Two. In particular, the author describes the role of military and local authorities in dealing with these circumstances. Interestingly, chapter 6 considers the contemporary debate on

bombing of Pompeii, outlining the role of radios and newspapers in presenting the events with different points of view.

The second section *Our Common Task* (107–67), which includes chapters 7–10, forms a core book segment which helps contextualise the events of Pompeii and the Museum of Naples in the wider international context of cultural heritage protection in dangerous military conditions. Pollard offers some strict terms of comparison taken from the Mediterranean war theatres, like the northern Africa frontline and Sicily – the latter directly involved in Operation Husky (July–September 1943) and finally occupied by the Allied as ‘Region I’ of the military government (AMGOT). Chapter 8 examines the establishment of cultural heritage protection in wartime between 1942 and September 1943, detailing the Robert Commission, the Harvard Group, the ACLS Committee and lastly Captain Mason Hammond, the first Monuments officer acting in Sicily. Pollard assesses a series of war events, mostly caused by aerial bombardment, that occurred in Italy between 1943 and 1945 which testify how bombs put monuments and heritage at serious risk despite the recent events at Pompeii. As described in chapter 10, Allied forces implemented some reforms to better plan bombing on Florence, Siena and Venice; the success of this new practice was publicised by the Allies. However, collateral damage occurred anyway (166–67).

As previously noted, the British troops occupied the National Museum of Naples for seven months (17 November 1943–29 June 1944): Pollard analyses all historical events in the last book section (169–211). Part three’s title is emblematic and points out how the museum requisition was really a ‘military convenience’ or could have been unavoidable.

Monuments officer Joseph Paul Gardner (1894–1972) reported on the museum's conditions on 19 October and assured that the structure was quite well preserved: Italian authorities had previously installed sandbags and scaffolding to protect ancient artefacts (187–88). However, Gardner deplored the museum requisition in November, but his protests were unsuccessful. There were some responses to a series of undeniable problems derived by the military occupations (190–200). A wider contextualisation of the events is provided in chapter 13, entitled *Responses, Failures and Success*, where the author outlines military occupations of other Italian historical buildings which occurred during World War Two.

A short concluding section (212–17) outlines the core points of this essay. In particular, Pollard considers the effects of Pompeii's bombing and the occupation of the Museum of Naples on the wider debate regarding cultural protection in wartime. It is evident that evaluation and the change of essential measurements should be 'modified regularly in light of experience' (214) and be effected to ease subsequent reconstructing process once the conflicts end (216–17).

Documentary appendices (219–40) include a selection of archival records or schemes which are complementary to the body text. In particular, Appendix A (221–25) and B (226–31) report all bombing operations and damages of the archaeological site of Pompeii. Notes are fully listed following the appendices (241–98), as well as the bibliography (299–304) and index (305–21).

There are minor defects/lacks which however do not invalidate the value of the essay. One would have probably preferred footnotes than endnotes which are easily consultable. Furthermore, there is

no list of images and tables which would have been useful for tracing schemes and pictures in the body text.

On the whole, why can we consider *Bombing Pompeii* a valid essay? First, it sheds new light on two peculiar episodes of World War Two for the first time, merging interdisciplinary perspectives taken from history, archaeology, archival analysis, museum and military studies, in order to obtain a full historical (and critical) reconstruction of events. Second, it contextualises the bombing of Pompeii and the requisition of the Museum of Naples in the complex framework of heritage protection in wartime, providing wider reflections on post-war and current debates.

Finally, Pollard's *Bombing Pompeii* is an essential piece of work which can be profitably appreciated by a variety of readers: World War Two, museum, cultural heritage studies experts and also archaeologists broadly interested in the history of the discipline, the safeguarding of antiquities and conflict archaeology. With an understandable style, essential clarity and highly valuable scientific approach, the book will be also enjoyed by the wider public which constantly demonstrates a deep appreciation for World War Two history.

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