SOUTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

BROWN WORKING PAPERS IN THE ARTS & SCIENCES

Volume VII

(2007)

THE STABIAE PROJECT: CHANGING THE MANAGEMENT OF WORLD ARCHAEOLOGY

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Recommended Citation:

Howe, Thomas. (2007) "The Stabiae Project: Changing the Management of World Archaeology," Brown Working Papers in the Arts & Sciences, Southwestern University, Vol. VII. Available at: http://www.southwestern.edu/academic/bwp/vol7/howe-vol7.pdf.

RAS
Restoring Ancient Stabiae
FOUNDATION

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"Stabiae Project, The Global Unified Approach, 2007"
Brown Working Papers
Southwestern University, May 2007

With accompanying PowerPoint presentation "StabiaeLaunchingWork2007"

The following gives a brief outline of the current status of the Stabiae project.

It is a little hard to understand why the site of ancient Roman Stabiae has not been turned into a major archaeological project much earlier. The site is a staggering treasure, and is very different from the famous townsites at Herculaneum and Pompeii. It is the largest concentration of excellently preserved Roman villas (preserved in the Vesuvian eruption of AD 79) in the entire Mediterranean. The remains are not only some of the finest examples of Roman art, but also the villas of the Bay of Naples were also the environment where some of the most critical events of the Late Roman Republic and early Empire.

The Stabiae project was launched in 1998 and in 2002 became first foundation under a 1998 Italian law which permits the creation of a type of non profit cultural foundation which can both receive and spend both state and private funds both from Italy and abroad. Its general brief from the Superintendancy of Archaeology of Pompei is the historic charge gradually to take over the management of a major Italian cultural property (the site of the Roma villas at Stabiae) in a managed partnership with the Italian government. The overall projected budget is some €140 million, which would make it the largest archaeological project in modern Europe.

The core concept of the management of the project is that this particular site, in order to succeed, needs a convergence of several disciplines beyond archaeology: architecture, urbanism, conservation, engineering, museology, business training and development, etc. Or put another way, archaeology can be the lynchpin to the cultural and economic revival of the region. Both

The result of this is that the master plan for the site (developed by myself et al. in 2000-2001) presents the full range of the disciplines needed for the excavation, conservation and presentation of the site, and in addition, the RAS Foundation has taken under its innovative legal umbrella a wide variety of other cultural projects for which it is the most convenient cover.

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Database development:
SU is taking the lead in pursuing initial funding, with work subcontracted to University of Maryland, to develop a single database for the entire region, including some 250 years of archaeological records. The database is to GIS based, and is incorporating as much as possible from previous projects, including the Hacı Musalar and Annapolis excavations and Herculaneum Conservation project. Work will begin this fall under Tim Goddard, UMd alumnus, with a partial grant from UMd alumnus Eric Young. The database is seen as the administrative and scientific "glue" which will allow a widely dispersed interdisciplinary international team to work together and execute projects and produce joint publications.

Conservation survey.
Another priority project is to develop a long term conservation master plan. Long term costs of maintenance need to be known before RAS takes on extensive excavation and leaves a large amount of newly uncovered remains to be maintained by the Republic of Italy.

Preliminary Geophysical survey, sondages and first excavations.
In 2002 RAS sponsored a geophysical feasibility study by Meg Watters and Superintendancy staff. It gave the first clear indication of detectable architecture under the deep Vesuvian eruption deposit and among other things indicated that a 30 m excavated peristyle court in fact continued for a length of some 113 m. Sondages laid out according to these surveys discovered the tops of this peristyle in 2006, confirming the validity of the methodology.

In 2007 the first major new excavations since the 1960's will begin, re-excavating the presumed entrance peristyle of the so-called Villa San Marco. (The villas were first partly explored by tunnels between 1749 and 1782, reburied, and a small part of that area was reexcavated from 1950.) The excavations were planned by RAS and will be directed by the Superintendancy.

Earth Sciences Program
The site of Stabiae is conceived of as being much more than the immediate area of the site of the villas. The zone from Pompeii to the mountains of the Sorrento peninsula may have one of the best records of the brilliant use and abuse of a rich environment by humanity of any place on earth.

Scientific research in one field often produces unexpected critical data for another. Recent undersea survey for engineering in the Straits of Messina recently discovered an unknown population of a rare species of whale. Under the RAS umbrella an international team is being put together to create teams which usually consist of one Italian and one non-Italian (usually US or European) specialists. The fields to be covered consist of geophysics-remote sensing, geology, geomorphology, geo-engineering, petrology, vulcanology, paleo-environment, and hydrology. Researchers for this program,

tentatively or fully committed, consist of Meg Watters of the University of Birmingham, Maurizio Fedi, Enzo Morra, E. Calcaterra and others from the University of Naples Federico II, Mariano Mercurio recent alumnus of Univ Naples who functions as Italian liaison, Andrew Whittle of MIT, Loretta Gratani of the University of Rome la Sapienza, and others.

LiDar Scanning

In November, 2006 a team from the University of Birmingham did a feasibility study in one day on site and produced a three dimensional model of three very complex rooms of the Villas San Marco (PPT, slide 60). Given funding, the project has now the ability to do a full 3d scan of all of the upstanding exposed architecture of the site which will be more accurate and complete than any kind of conventional drawing. The results can be modified with subsequent observation and hand drawing. These scanning projects are now a priority for the database development.

Marine Archaeology

The RAS Foundation has recently begun to develop an international marine archaeology survey of the central Mediterranean which will use a 37 m. ocean-going tug converted to "archeo-tourism" and fully equipped for undersea surveillance. It will partly support itself with archeo-tourism, and provide free monitoring of undersea sites to the Italian cultural properties police, and its principal research program will probably have its first season this coming December, lead by Dr. Brendan Foley of Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. The key to Dr. Foley's long term survey of the rise of Mediterranean civilization is to survey a vastly larger number of sites than previously possible using small and efficient Autonomous Underwater Vehicles developed by Woods Hole and MIT. Other partners are likely to be the University of Naples and the Superintendancy of Marine Archaeology of Sicily.

The Vesuvian Institute of Archaeology and Humanities.

This month (May, 2007), the RAS Foundation is taking over a 100 room former Salesian college in Castellammare di Stabia as a multi-level research institute, the only such institute south of Rome. The Institute has a panoramic view of the Bay of Naples, is right over the Castellammare commuter rail station, and has numerous function rooms (dining room, theater, etc.) and free internet access. Several college groups will be in the Institute this summer, and other US foreign programs from centers such as Rome and Florence will be using the facilities for the base of study visits this fall. In the next year or two numerous other programs will be added. At present, there are available for booking certain standard educational events, such as hands on training in making "Roman" frescoes and mosaics, and visits to sites. Other programs may offer seminars in marine and terrestrial archaeology, and a program for professional qualification for US high school classics teachers. For inquiries on possible academic use of the facilities, contact howet@southwestern.edu.

Construction of the Visitors' Center

The first phase of the visitors' center, designed and funded by RAS, is due for start of construction immediately. The site has recently been cleared.