

## RESEARCH REPORTS

### BALSDON FELLOWSHIP

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#### *In search of the White International: Catholic-Communism between the Wars*

The project I developed as a Balsdon Fellow at the British School at Rome focuses on the interplay between religion and political radicalism in early twentieth-century Italy. The understanding of politics during that period often has been distorted by a polarization between Communism and Fascism, which has led to the neglect of the complex political and cultural area between these two extremes. The aim of my research was to explore another strand, Catholic-Communism, and the attempts by anti-Fascist exiles in the 1930s to found a White International to represent it. The project reconstructs the biography of some of the protagonists of this movement. Most of them had been organizers of peasant Catholic unions in Italy against both intervention in the Great War and Fascism. After 1922, they fled into exile and developed a network of political contacts across Europe, addressing the perennial longing of the peasant masses for emancipation by emphasizing the Communist message that they believed lay at the heart of Christianity.

During the three months of my Fellowship I visited the Archivio Centrale dello Stato, the Biblioteca Nazionale, the Biblioteca di Storia Moderna e Contemporanea; and the research libraries of the Fondazione Lelio e Lisli Basso, the Istituto Luigi Sturzo, the Fondazione Gramsci, and the Senato della Repubblica. At the Archivio Centrale dello Stato I was able to consult the police files of a number of Italian Catholic-Communists in the Casellario Politico Centrale; prefects' reports and Catholic anti-Fascist publications in the Direzione Generale Pubblica Sicurezza; and prefects' reports on the First World War period in the areas where the Catholic League movements were strongest. At the Biblioteca Nazionale and the Biblioteca di Storia Moderna e Contemporanea I consulted mostly secondary sources that cannot be found easily in the UK, which allowed me to engage with the recent historiography on my subject. In the four research libraries, I found a number of invaluable primary sources, in particular contemporary publications (pamphlets, books, newspaper articles) written by the protagonists of the Catholic-Communist movement both before and during the years of exile. Although I had started the research for this subject before my stay at the BSR, and had already visited archives in Rome, Paris and Berlin in the past years, this three-month period was extremely fruitful in terms of research findings. My work in the four research libraries in particular has revealed to me the existence of some contemporary writings that have now made me expand the section of my project on the pre-exile years: they illuminated the importance of the Catholic-Communist project in Italian society during the 'Red Biennial' (1919–22), an experiment that was halted by the Fascist seizure of power. I also unearthed publications of the 1922–4 period, which reveal the extent of the latest attempts at fighting Mussolini's government before the violence escalated to the point of forcing Left-wing Catholic leaders to either leave Italy or abandon politics altogether. Through these publications, I also discovered the existence of some Catholic-Communists of whom I had been unaware

previously, and I was able to find further material on them at the Archivio Centrale dello Stato. Without the Balsdon Fellowship, which allowed me to consult all those different libraries and archives for three months, I could not have completed my research for this project.

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#### HUGH LAST FELLOWSHIPS

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#### *Tombs and the art of commemoration in second-century CE Rome*

Tombs and burial customs are an exceptional source for social history, as their commemorative character means that they express much about the ideology and value system of a society. My current project aims to present a holistic view of the funerary culture of Rome and its surroundings during the second century CE. This focus takes into account the fact that the situation in the immediate vicinity of the capital is quite different from that elsewhere in Italy or the Roman Empire, not least due to the presence of the emperor and the institutions of government.

Previous studies of Roman tombs and burial customs have been devoted mostly to just one type of evidence (architecture, wall painting, sarcophagi, epigraphy, literary sources, for example), to particular cemeteries, or to the freedmen class. The latest surveys and more general treatments of the subject are by now over twenty years old, and cover the entire Roman Empire. While most studies address social questions in some way, their results are either rather limited or very general, depending on the limitations or breadth of the evidence considered, so that there is ample scope for further research. Moreover, my previous research on the third century suggests that a holistic approach does much more than present a convenient synthesis of what is known already. Integrating a wide range of evidence but focusing on an area characterized by a common social structure can result in major challenges to generally held assumptions, and opens up new potential for approaching questions that had been regarded as unanswerable.

The main objective of the project is a better understanding of the ideologies and attitudes of different groups in society. While the freedmen class has received much attention recently, there has been little distinction between different kinds of freedmen, especially between the majority of *liberti* and imperial freedmen, who had a prominent role in translating imperial preferences and *habitus* — such as portrait representations *in formam deorum* or the use of temple tombs — into wider society. Research on equestrians has been very limited, and the senatorial class has gone somewhat out of fashion in recent years. While their tombs were prominent, and are well-researched for the first centuries BCE and CE, the general belief is that we do not, and can not, know much about them from the late first century CE onwards. Moreover, because of the absence of senatorial tombs, which are not nearly as well preserved as the freedmen tombs, it often has been assumed that they were never very conspicuous in the first place.