

RESEARCH REPORTS

A number of 2019–20 and 2020–21 awards had to be suspended or deferred due to the Covid-19 pandemic to late 2020–21 or 2021–2. Reports will be included in the next volume of Papers of the British School at Rome where this is the case.

BALSDON FELLOWSHIP

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Roman relics and Renaissance collectors 1350–1550

At what point does Roman rubble become a collectible? When do ancient coins gain worth beyond their metal value, and marble statues lose the taint of idolatry? These questions are at the heart of the research project *Roman relics and Renaissance collectors* that I undertook at the British School at Rome. It is itself a strand within a larger project that investigates the role of contemporary Christianity in shaping certain practices that we now identify as ‘Renaissance’ or ‘humanist’. As such I am interested in, for instance, concepts of and engagement with holy relics as a model for the Renaissance revaluation of ancient remains. The City of Rome was an obvious starting point.

My primary chronological focus was on the papacy of Martin V, since his election marked the end of the Western Schism and, from 1420, the return of the papal court to Rome. The curia, an international job market and melting pot of ideas, was indisputably a driving force in the renewed appreciation for the Roman heritage. At the same time, I was interested in the connections between curial employees and Rome’s municipal élites, and the ways in which both groups might variously construct their ‘Romanness’ and that of the City.

In the months leading up to my stay at the BSR I researched the availability of archival sources pertinent to my research questions. This made it clear that, for the late Trecento and early Quattrocento, the documentary record of Rome does not allow the systematic study of wills and inventories that I had prospected. I therefore changed the direction of the project to include more explicitly the Roman inscriptions that were collected from the turn of the Quattrocento, either physically (displaced stones) or in paper format (syloges). Secondly, I decided to approach my research as the reconstruction of a network of individuals and families with antiquarian interests. This allowed me to follow the documentary evidence that was available, and supplement it with other source types that bear witness to the creation of group identities through material and other means. Arguably this network-based structure of the research mimics the contemporary circulation of cultural capital.

This approach combined particularly well with the project’s increased turn towards inscriptions, since a key figure linking Rome’s curial and municipal élites, Martin V’s apostolic secretary Cencio de’ Rustici (who styled himself ‘Cincius Romanus’), was a close friend and colleague of the pioneering collector of inscriptions Poggio Bracciolini (‘Poggius Florentinus’, a subject of my previous and ongoing research). My first task, then, was to gather information about the key figures, Cencio, his in-laws the Della Valle, his correspondent (the future Cardinal) Giuliano Cesarini, and their cognates and

descendants. My understanding of these networks was immeasurably enhanced by the ability to situate them spatially, and retrace the steps of my protagonists through the City.

Simultaneously, I gathered evidence on Cencio as possible collector of inscriptions, using manuscript sylloges in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana and reproductions ordered from elsewhere, as well as the *CIL*, *ICUR* and (surprisingly) Gruterus catalogues available in the BSR. This was a rather labyrinthine process with several dead ends, including the unresolvable question of whether the attribution ‘Cinciorum’ refers to the Cenci family or may be a misreading for our Cencio. Nevertheless, it raised interesting questions regarding real versus ‘fake’, ‘forged’ or ‘Renaissance’ inscriptions, and whether epitaphs transmitted on paper ever had a stone counterpart.

During the final weeks of my Fellowship, I sought to complement this material evidence with a study of the literary descriptions of Rome produced in Cencio’s circle. After my return from Rome, I will analyse these comparatively, as well as in relation to earlier literary ‘walks through Rome’, ranging back from Petrarch’s letters via the *Mirabilia* to Virgil and Ovid. This will demonstrate shifting sensibilities regarding fragments and ruins, Christian and pagan antiquity, and the ‘idea of Rome’ — *caput mundi*, new Jerusalem, archaeological site — in the fifteenth century, which framed the lived experience of the cultural élites of Rome.

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ROME SCHOLARSHIP AND RESIDENTIAL RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP

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The movement of early medieval medical knowledge: exchange in the Italian peninsula

The thousands of so-called ‘miscellaneous’ remedies preserved in early medieval manuscripts present an untapped resource for investigating the evolution of medicine. Having previously identified ingredients in such remedies unrecorded in classical medical texts, my project at the British School at Rome focused on analysing the extant early medieval manuscripts containing miscellaneous remedies in Rome to investigate the introduction of new sources of pharmaceutical information in the early Middle Ages. My work explored how classical traditions were adapted and fused with a diverse range of material, especially from the east, and I have been particularly interested in tracing the movement of this knowledge in relation to sites in the Italian peninsula: to what extent did individuals in Rome, Ravenna or Venice, for example, play a role in introducing far-eastern ingredients to the Latin west in the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries? This research challenged the traditional emphasis on the inheritance and reception of classical texts, situating early medieval medicine within an Afro-Eurasian context.

Naturally, the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in some changes to various aspects of my research plan, but I am happy to report that, thanks to the digitisation of many manuscripts, I was incredibly fortunate in being able to continue with much of my work even when unable to visit libraries in person. Among the most exciting developments over the past two years has been the identification of many more manuscripts containing