

# **Increasing Diversity in Classical Archaeology: An International Collaboration. Excavations at the Horrea Agrippiana in the Forum Romanum (The Signum Vortumni Project)**

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Classical Archaeology has long lacked the demographic diversity<sup>1</sup> present in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) disciplines despite calls over the last decades to ‘decolonize’ the broader field of Archaeology and create a more reflexive approach that allows marginalized groups to be heard and responded to within the evolving theoretical and practical discourse.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, while Classical Archaeology necessarily incorporates the historical study of many diverse regions, peoples, and cultures, it is predominately taught by white male and female scholars – especially in the UK and America. The organization and subsequent publication of excavations undertaken throughout the Mediterranean basin is also frequently carried out by these same lecturers and professors while the students working on such projects are largely homogeneous groups derived from their own departments, or those closely related. Although this issue is fairly obvious to anyone working in the field, it is frequently ignored, since few tangible steps have been taken to deliberately increase demographic diversity in Classical Archaeology and Ancient History, despite the benefits it has been shown to provide in other research-oriented disciplines. As such, the need for new programs designed for this purpose remains, and in this paper I would like to outline the details and results of a new collaborative effort that I orchestrated between two non-profits – College Track and ISAR (The International Society for the Archaeology, Art and Architecture of Rome) – which aims to provide a sustainable, long-term approach to help solve this longstanding problem in the field of Classical Archaeology.

In the summer of 2018 a meaningful first step was taken by College Track and ISAR to increase diversity in Classical Archaeology via a novel international collaboration that saw three College Track students come to Rome, Italy to participate in an archaeological field school with American and Italian students in the Roman Forum. Founded in 1997 by Laurene Powell Jobs and Carlos Watson, College Track is an American non-profit educational youth organization with the mission of empowering students from underserved communities to graduate college by limiting loan debt, helping to secure internships, and limiting the need for students to work while in school.<sup>3</sup> Not only does College Track provide the guidance, mentoring, and facilities for underserved, low-income students (often students of color) to graduate high school and attend college, they also continue to provide important academic, financial, and emotional aid to these students throughout their college careers by making a ‘10-year promise’ of support to each student. To date, College Track has

served they were over 2,800 students: 96% of these students have gone on to 4-year colleges and were 2.4 times more likely to graduate college than the national average for low income, first generation students.<sup>4</sup>

Given this influential groundbreaking work, College Track is an ideal partner for The International Society for the Archaeology, Art and Architecture of Rome (ISAR), which is an Italian, non-profit association dedicated to the study, promotion, and preservation of Rome's cultural heritage. ISAR envisions a form of 'cultural tourism' that gives back to the places, on which it thrives and aims to bring its participants into contact with local culture in a way that supports and sustains it, offering a singular opportunity for cultural and social growth.<sup>5</sup> Founded by Dott.ssa Dora Cirone, Dr Tom Rankin, Dott. Alessio De Cristofaro, and Dott.ssa Marzia Di Mento in 2014, the staff of ISAR is composed of archaeologists, architects, art historians, restorers, and cultural heritage professionals, both Italians and foreigners, most of whom are permanent residents of Rome, Italy. The ISAR staff is dedicated to guiding and encouraging their students by providing hands-on training and detailed resources concerning research avenues and funding options to any participants wishing to investigate these subjects further.

The ultimate goal of this collaboration is to actively increase diversity in the field of Classical Archaeology by creating potential future career paths for young scholars who would otherwise not have any physical contact with the ancient world. By getting more historically marginalized students interested in archaeology at a younger age through hands-on experience, there is hopefully a greater chance that they will pursue such studies at the graduate level, and ultimately continue on to work in academia. To facilitate this goal College Track agreed to fully fund three college students within their program to participate in ISAR's six-week archeological field school by paying their travel costs, accommodation in shared apartments, tuition fees, and weekly stipends. Advertisements were circulated across College Track's 10 sites in California, Colorado, Louisiana, and the Washington D.C. metro area and following an application process three students (two female and one male)<sup>6</sup> were chosen from the applicant pool to attend this program. Although none of the students had been to Italy (or Europe) before and they each selected different majors that fell outside of Archaeology and Classical Studies (i.e. nursing, biology, sociology), they all shared a strong desire to have contact with the ancient world and to learn more about how the past affects their present lives.

In 2018, ISAR's field school was organized in conjunction with Rice University (Houston, TX) and under the direction of Dott.ssa Dora Cirone (ISAR), Dr John North Hopkins (Rice University)<sup>7</sup> and Dr Matthew J. Mandich (ISAR) and ran from June 18<sup>th</sup> to July 27<sup>th</sup>. In total, thirty American and Italian students participated in this field school from a variety of universities and colleges including Rice University (11), University of Rome Tor Vergata (9), Sapienza University of Rome (4), Swarthmore (2), West Chester University (1), Louisiana State University (1), Mills College (1), and Alameda City College (1). The first week of this six-week program focused on orientation and the history of Rome as students were taken on daily walking tours to key sites and museums around



Fig. 1: Aerial view of Rome (Velabro neighborhood) highlighting the location of the excavation site (in yellow) in respect to the Palatine and Capitoline Hills and the Roman Forum.

the city. The remaining five weeks were dedicated to the excavation of the site and students received multiple lectures and tutorials on the equipment used for excavation, the process of stratigraphic excavation and documentation, the identification and handling of material culture and organic remains, and the photographic and 3D analysis of the site (photogrammetry). Not only did this program allow College Track to continue empowering its students by providing them with powerful new experiences in a foreign country among diverse and dynamic peers and supervisors, it also exposed them to new cultures and environments, allowing them to form relationships with students from different nationalities, backgrounds, and disciplines.

### About the Excavation

The remains of the *Horrea Agrippiana* complex, which was a large, multi-story warehouse dating to the time of Augustus (27 BC–14 AD), were first brought to light in the years 1902–1904 and 1911–1912, in the course of excavations on the Palatine Hill directed by Giacomo Boni.<sup>8</sup> Following those investigations the building was restored several times and was the subject of additional topographical and architectural studies – the most complete being the works of Astolfi, Guidobaldi and Pronti<sup>9</sup> and Bauer.<sup>10</sup> These detailed studies of the standing remains made it possible to



Fig. 2: 3D overview of the *Horrea Agrippiana* site. Areas excavated in 2018 labeled in red. Viculus Tuscus is labeled in yellow.



Fig. 3: First day of 2018 excavations. Students removing topsoil in corridor Y in front of room K.



Fig. 4: Excavations in corridor Y (foreground) and in rooms M and N (background).

recognize multiple building phases ranging from the Augustan era until at least the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. However, the site was not the subject of stratigraphic archaeological exploration until the years 2003–2005 as part of the *Post aedem Castoris* Project co-directed by Dora Cirone (ISAR), Jennifer Trimble (Stanford University), Andrew Wilson (Oxford University), and Darius Arya (American Institute for Roman Culture). These preliminary probes attested to a rich stratigraphic sequence present below the remains of the *Horrea* that was seen as crucial for our understanding of the formation of the city.<sup>11</sup>

Given these previous results, in 2016 ISAR was granted an official excavation concession by the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali (MiBAC) for the *Signum Vortumni* Project, which aims to unveil evidence for Rome's earliest phases below the imposing visible remains of the *Horrea Agrippiana*.<sup>12</sup> The site, which is located at the base of the Palatine Hill's western slope, is bordered by the famed *vicus Tuscus* – one of Rome's oldest roads that ran between the Palatine and Capitoline Hills, connecting the Forum with the Circus Maximus and the Velabrum area<sup>13</sup> (figs. 1–3). According to the literary tradition the name *vicus Tuscus* was derived from the presence of an Etruscan quarter that originated sometime between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC.<sup>14</sup> A statue of the god Vortumnus, the god of change,<sup>15</sup> also apparently stood somewhere on or near the *vicus Tuscus* – seemingly in proximity to the later site of the *Horrea Agrippiana* – hence the name of the current project.<sup>16</sup> Although these earlier phases of frequentation are of significant interest to the project directors, smaller-scale excavations



Fig. 5: Students bagging finds after an eventful day.

carried out in 2016 and 2017 only uncovered re-deposited layers dating to the 6<sup>th</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC as the search continues for intact strata from the Regal and Archaic periods.<sup>17</sup> Much more ample were the remnants of Republican period structures dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC. Architectural remains from the mid-Republican period (mid-3<sup>rd</sup> to mid-2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC) constructed in ashlar tuff blocks (*opus quadratum*) have been tentatively identified as pertaining to a large house or public/religious building, while later walls dating to the late 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC constructed in *opus incertum* (in some cases incorporating the pre-existing *opus quadratum* walls) have been more solidly identified as the remains of an upper-class *domus* built during the late Republican period.<sup>18</sup> In the summer of 2018, large-scale excavations were carried out by the student group mentioned above (which included the three College Track students) in the *Horrea* under the Augustan floor levels in rooms K, L, M, N and O as well as in the corridor (Y) in front of rooms K, L, and M (figs. 4–6). The results of what proved to be a fruitful season will be published in due course; however, a preliminary synopsis is available through Italian news networks.<sup>19</sup>

### Outcomes

Overall, this six-week excavation experience proved to be a successful, positive, and influential summer for the College Track students involved. Their lack of previous experience in the field proved to be an insignificant issue as they carried out all the



Fig. 6: Students undertaking digital documentation on site.

necessary tasks to a high standard and were self-motivated students who asked frequent questions and actively engaged with the site's history and the excavation process. Their reviews of the program were also very positive and it was clear that they had learned a great deal about the field and themselves:

'I loved everything about my experience in Rome. I feel so thankful to have been selected to travel to Rome to excavate. What I loved most about the experience was being allowed to excavate in the Roman Forum. I constantly thought to myself „wow, I'm allowed to be a part of this moment in history.“ The artifacts that were uncovered amazed me. I never imagined that I'd get a chance to touch something so ancient, let alone be among the ones to discover them. I also enjoyed the experience of working alongside great scholars, professors, and students in the field of archeology. I learned many unforgettable things during this experience.'

'The site directors served as great teachers as I did not know much about archaeology. In the past I thought of archaeology as something that would be out of reach for me and other students from low-income households. The most important thing I learned from this trip is that people should not limit themselves, or fear the unknown. Prior to this trip I felt a little nervous about traveling so far to work on a project in a field that I had no previous experience in. However, I learned that my slight nervousness was actually me fearing the unknown. This trip allowed me to break free from my comfort

zone, which had always been my home, people that I'm familiar with, and studying things «I understand».'

'I learned about the importance of archaeology and how it has played a pivotal role in helping to shape society today. I loved how I was able to connect what I learned in the lectures with Rome itself. Through archaeology, I was able to see Rome's unique array of architecture. Although it is a modern city, it still tries to keep its roots by keeping many buildings that were built back when the Roman Empire still existed.'

However, the summer was not without its challenges as these students were faced with many new circumstances including interaction with a foreign culture and language, long periods away from home, making new friends, and (at times) difficult working conditions. Yet, all the field school participants were forced to confront such issues and the College Track students did an excellent job overcoming these obstacles and empowering themselves along the way:

'The most challenging part of the program was the amount of physical labor required on an archaeological excavation. Most days were spent outside in the summer heat working hard with my peers. Prior to this experience I had never spent so many hours in direct contact with the sun and the humidity of the mornings. Although the heat was challenging at times, I knew that it was a necessary part of the experience. Everyone worked well together and remained very encouraging to one another. After having experienced being in the sun for many hours every day, I feel that I can conquer anything. I love that I was pushed so far out my comfort zone. I feel inspired to encourage others like me so they can overcome challenges as well.'

The College Track students were also very grateful for their time in Rome and some saw it as a life defining experience that helped shape their future career and direction:

'I'd like to thank College Track for making this experience possible for me and the other students. Traveling to Rome was life changing for me. I feel in touch with myself again and motivated going into my next stages of college.'

'This experience is different from most. Having the opportunity to apply what one has learned in the classroom is valuable and important. This trip has helped me narrow down my career path.'

'I would recommend this program to any students interested in it. The program gave me a great opportunity to work and collaborate with amazing



people who are experienced in the field of archaeology. Along with learning more about the field, I also had a great opportunity to explore Rome and learn more about myself in the process.’

From the feedback received it seems clear that each of the students gained significantly from this experience, both personally and academically. It helped them break down preconceived notions and barriers and allowed them to form their own interpretations of the past, thereby providing perspectives that are currently lacking in the field overall. Given the mixed international group of participants, knowledge spillovers also occurred as students shared ideas and life experiences that served to broaden each other’s horizons and skill-sets. Although none of the students explicitly stated that they would be changing their majors imminently, it is certainly possible that their participation will influence their career choices moving forward. Their positive reviews of the program demonstrate how influential such an experience can be, and work as a ‘proof of concept’, showing that this type of collaborative project has traction in the field and should be seen as a model that can be repeated on a larger scale and at multiple archaeological excavations to achieve greater results.

### **Future Directions**

Having completed a successful first season it is ISAR’s goal to continue working with College Track to bring more students from marginalized communities to Rome to excavate and engage with Classical Archaeology and Ancient History. The repeatability of this project is key to its long-term growth and success and, at the time of writing, ISAR and College Track are in talks about the potential for a greater number of students to attend the field school in the summer of 2019.<sup>20</sup> While this pioneering collaborative effort can be seen as a solid step towards actively creating more diversity in the field of Classical Archaeology, it should also work as a prototype for additional programs. If there is serious interest in increasing diversity in these fields, especially in the academic sector, immersive programs need to become more commonplace and universities and private entities need to reach out to (non-profit) educational institutes/funding bodies for resources and/or students. Although university departments have tried to respond to this issue by attempting to hire a more diverse faculty, the pool to choose from remains small since underserved groups are not receiving, or do not have access to, the information or tutelage they need at an earlier age. By introducing students from historically marginalized communities to Classical Archaeology through an immersive, hands-on program while they are still undertaking their undergraduate degrees, ISAR and College Track are creating a greater opportunity for them to excel in the discipline and are actively working to give these students a voice that has so far been

absent, especially in important and evolving debates on identity, colonialism, and marginalization in the ancient world.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Particularly regarding ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic background.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. Hodder 2005; Smith – Martin Wobst 2005; Hodder 2008; Haber – Shepherd 2016; Hamilakis 2018.

<sup>3</sup> <<https://collegetrack.org/who-we-are/>>

<sup>4</sup> <<https://collegetrack.org>>

<sup>5</sup> <<http://isarome.org/about/>>

<sup>6</sup> These students self-identified respectively as bi-racial, African American, and Asian.

<sup>7</sup> Now Assistant Professor of Art History at New York University.

<sup>8</sup> Astolfi et al. 1978; Cirone et al. 2018 n. 49. 50.

<sup>9</sup> Astolfi et al. 1978.

<sup>10</sup> Bauer 1978a; Bauer 1978b.

<sup>11</sup> The results of this project will be published in 2020 by D. Cirone, A. De Cristofaro, and J. Trimble.

<sup>12</sup> Cirone et al. 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Coarelli 2012, 84–87.

<sup>14</sup> Liv. 2.14.9; Dion. Hal. ant. 5.36; Varro ling. 5.46; Prop. 4.2.79 f.; Platner – Ashby 1929, 579 f.; Coarelli 2012, 80–87.

<sup>15</sup> Varro ling. 5.46; Prop. 4.2.79 f. consider this god to be of Etruscan origin.

<sup>16</sup> Putnam 1967; Coarelli 2012, 84–87; Cirone et al. 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Cirone et al. 2018 n. 10.

<sup>18</sup> Cirone et al. 2018 n. 16, 28 f.

<sup>19</sup> <<https://video.repubblica.it/edizione/roma/roma-storie-dal-palatino-apre-il-cantiere-degli-horrea-agrippiana/313817/314446>>; <<http://www.romatoday.it/eventi/cultura/ritrovamenti-domus-foro-romano.html>>.

<sup>20</sup> At the time of publication the 2019 field season of the Signum Vortumni Project had been successfully completed with another three College Track student participants. College Track and ISAR are aiming to continue this fruitful collaboration in 2020.

### Image Credits

Fig. 1: ISAR Website. – Fig. 2: Google Earth. – Fig. 3: by Tom Rankin, ISAR. – Fig. 4: by Tom Rankin, ISAR. – Fig. 5: by the author. – Fig. 6: by Tom Rankin, ISAR.

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