

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORY OF THE BORGO EXCAVATIONS

The desolate location of San Giovenale may have been the reason why George Dennis (on his travels through Etruria from 1842–1847), in spite of a stop lasting for several days in the area of Vetralla, Bieda/Blera, Norcia/Norchia and his passing close by on the way to Corneto/Tarquini, apparently did not bother to go to San Giovenale.²⁹ In the 1870s and 1880s the archaeological and topographical investigations of G. Bazzichelli, G.F. Gamurrini and others touched on San Giovenale, its road system and its *necropoleis* and briefly noted remains of a small Etruscan village on the Borgo.³⁰

It was only in the 1950s that the topographical work of Admiral Erik Wetter, treasurer with a leading role of the Board of the Swedish Institute in Rome and a close friend of King Gustaf Adolf, led to an overall assessment of the potential of the site.³¹ It was Wetter and the director of the Institute, Axel Boëthius (Fig. 22) who, formally invited by the Soprintendente of Etruria Meridionale, Renato Bartoccini and encouraged by King Gustaf Adolf, then initiated the Institute's excavations at San Giovenale in 1956.³² In the first season soundings were made on the Borgo which were then continued the following year.³³

The work was concentrated on the area of the Borgo (then called Zone I). It was led by Axel Boëthius, Erik Berggren, Bengt Thordeman (1956) and the graduate student Birgitta Tamm (1957).³⁴ Of these activities, fairly little documentation remains and only a few finds have been preserved. The brief report of 1960 mentions the discovery of several walls, the excavation of a *pozzo* and the assumption that the walls were part of an entrance to the Acropolis with two flanking towers, later to be blocked by a transverse wall.³⁵ A number of photographs and preliminary plans document these early activities at the Borgo NW (Figs. 23–

24).³⁶ The archaeological plans of 1957 indicate that the major wall systems of Houses B, C and D had been followed and exposed, either on the surface or, in some cases, down to bedrock.

In 1961, the new field director, the ancient historian Krister Hanell of Lund University, assigned the north-west slope of the Borgo to Carl Nylander, a graduate student from Uppsala University. He was given the task of taking a closer look at the partly excavated remains from 1956–1957.³⁷ During four seasons, 1961–1963 and 1965, Nylander and five to six workmen excavated here (Fig. 25), partly assisted by King Gustaf Adolf (Figs. 26–28), Princess Margareta and members of the royal entourage and, occasionally, by the archaeologist Lars Gezelius from Uppsala, and fellow students.³⁸ The complexity of the unusually well-preserved architectural remains of the site led in 1962 to the initiation of a close collaboration between Nylander and the San Giovenale excavation architect Börje Blomé on the Borgo NW project. This collaboration was to last for 36 years until Blomé's death at the age of 76, in 1998.

The four seasons of 1961–1965 saw a complete excavation of the remains touched upon in 1956 and 1957, and an extension of the investigated area towards the north and the south so as to comprise, in the end, about 800 m². A number of house-like buildings and other structures were excavated, including a huge drainage canal, remains of an impressive terrace wall/fortification, and various enigmatic niche-like constructions, a water cistern and a number of hearths indicating workshop activities. Huge amounts of pottery, mostly for everyday use, were found. The area was documented photographically by Blomé, including the work with the so-called *giraffa*, which was a tall, three-legged metal photo tower allowing the taking of vertical photographs

²⁹ Dennis 1848, Chapter 17 'Bieda-Blera' and Chapter 16 'Norchia-Orcle'.

³⁰ Bazzichelli 1876–1877, 151–154; Gamurrini *et al.* 1972, 146 and pl. 16. Cf. also Pohl 1985, 47–49.

³¹ Wetter 1962.

³² *San Giovenale* I:1.

³³ Berggren & Moretti 1960, 3–6. In the San Giovenale archives there are the field director Erik Berggren's summaries, in Swedish, of the work of 1956 and 1958. Regrettably the report on the 1957 season is missing. But there is also a draft of a letter of E. Berggren from 1957, but undated, to A.W. Van Buren as a background information of the 1957 season at San Giovenale for his 'News letter from Rome'; Van Buren 1957, 380.

³⁴ The excavator happily remembers the old Axel Boëthius who often came back to the site and had many illuminating ideas and comments, expressed orally as well as in long and eloquent letters full of learning.

³⁵ Berggren & Moretti 1960, 3–4.

³⁶ Photographs by J. Mark and plans drawn by C.O. Deurell, B. Blomé and J. Asplund, all of 1957.

³⁷ Krister Hanell was a fine ancient historian with publications like *Megarische Studien* (Hanell 1934), *Das altrömische eponyme Amt* (Hanell 1946) and 'Das Opfer des Augustus an der Ara Pacis' (Hanell 1960), but with little field experience to guide the early steps of this group of young archaeologists. On the other hand, he insisted that the young archaeologists lift their eyes above their trenches to see the entire site of San Giovenale and its broader context. His seminars in the storeroom in Civitella Cesi were inspiring and important.

³⁸ It is easy to recall all the participants in the excavations during these four years, not least the Blera workmen, such as the skilled Mariano Bertocci, the fine huntsmen Bartolomeo Coletta and Giovanni Tedeschi with his son Antonio, the jolly brothers Aldo and Angelo Coletta, the thoughtful Francesco Pagliari, and the young, exceptionally strong Mario Perazzoni.



Fig. 22. Professor and director Axel Boëthius in 1957. Photograph by J. Mark.

from a height of c. 5 m (Fig. 29). It resulted in an extremely useful photographic plan of the entire excavation (Pl. 2).³⁹

Due to the character of the site, located in an inconvenient slope and ill-suited for cultivation, the walls of the Borgo NW were unusually well preserved, sometimes standing to a height of almost 2 m. The protection of the area with its tufa constructions against the weather, the destructive effects of which were rapidly demonstrated by the violent October–November rains, was soon necessitated. Thanks to the personal intervention of King Gustaf Adolf with the archaeological authorities, in 1964 a large roof was erected over much of the area by the Soprintendenza Archeologica dell’Etruria Meridionale (Fig. 30).⁴⁰ It is hard to overestimate the importance of this huge roof, the *Capannone*, which for 40 years has excellently protected and preserved the walls and other remains, thus allowing a continued study and a deepening understanding of this complicated site. It was replaced by a new one in 2002 (Figs. 31–32).

³⁹ Blomé 1969.

⁴⁰ Barbieri 1986.

In the context of the planning and the erection of the *Capannone*, the excavators tried to handle the issue of how to let the public walk through the site without causing damage to the fragile tufa walls. A large part of the 1965 campaign was devoted to this problem. Under the direction of Blomé, a 20-metre long walkway or balcony with a metal railing was built on the rock in the much higher, eastern part of the area so as to allow a good overview of the excavation in the slope below. Steps and a metal staircase were set up to lead visitors along the old Etruscan Lane K through the excavation up to the balcony. A metal information sign on the balcony showed a plan of the area and gave summary explanations. Terracing and filling operations produced unified levels in order to render the excavation less confusing to the visitor.

This organization of the walkways through the site was rather successful initially, but became partly superfluous in the later 1960s after the Soprintendenza had closed off the entire Borgo NW excavation area with a metal fence, which thus prevented visitors from passing through the excavation zone. During the



Fig. 23. The Borgo NW excavations 1957.

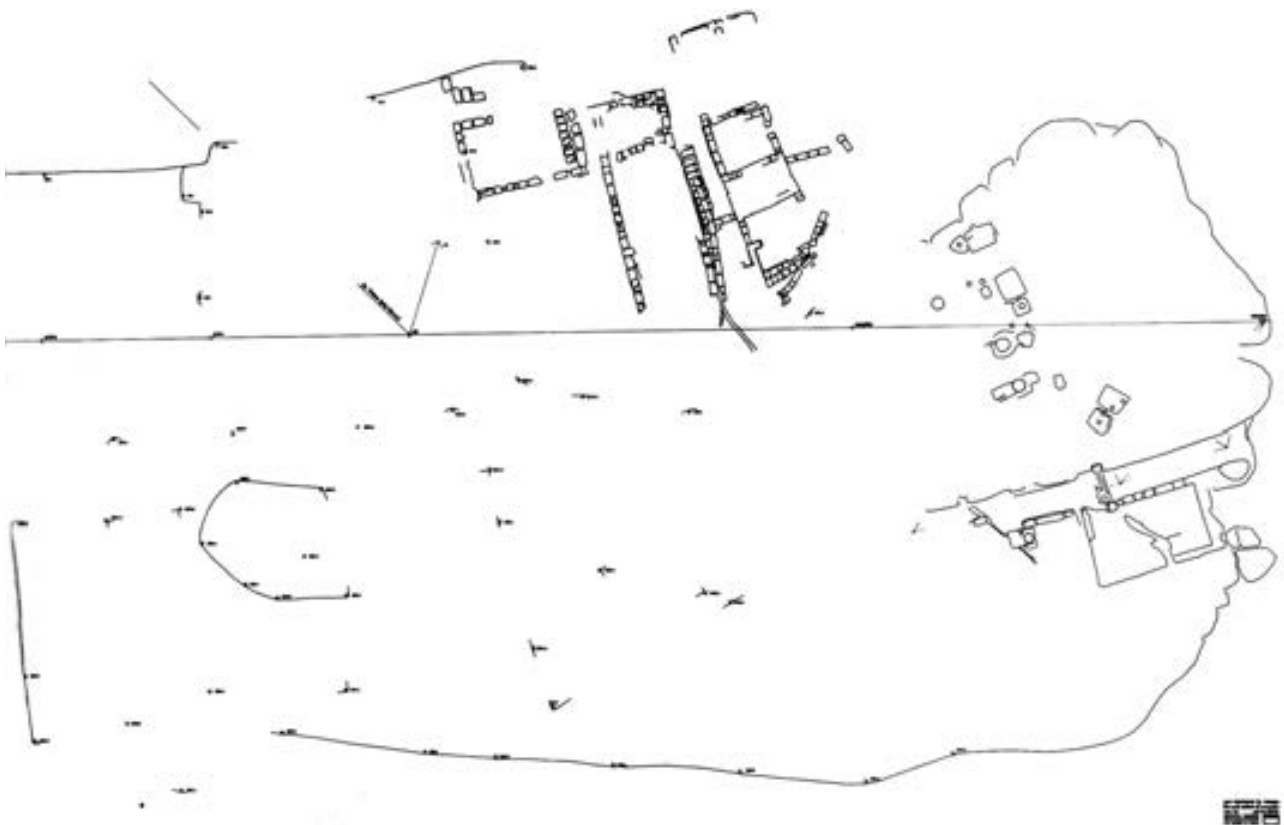


Fig. 24. Plan of the Borgo NW excavations 1957. In the centre right the road cut along the Borgo *Spina*. Drawn by C.O. Deurell, B. Blomé and J. Asplund.





Fig. 27. King Gustaf VI Adolf and *maresciallo* Onofrio at work in room Ba.

intensified documentation and study in the 1990s some of the now unnecessary features related to the walkways were eliminated, especially a terrace and several artificial fills, all of which had obscured the stratigraphy and complicated the close study of walls and foundations.

An important weakness of the San Giovenale project was that no preliminary reports had been published, beyond the brief re-

ports to the Soprintendenza and the 1960 report in *Notizie degli Scavi*.⁴¹ A further, even more serious problem was the economic difficulties of creating an efficient work structure for the demanding publication activity and of correlating excavation and post-excavation work with Swedish university curricula. The requirements on the PhD dissertations were, at that time, that they were supposed to discuss problems rather than producing the mainly descriptive work of regular excavation reports. Thus, when back in Sweden, the San Giovenale excavators, like their peers at Luni sul Mignone, had to concentrate on other academic work. This led to the delaying of the analysis and publication work of their excavations.⁴² The dissertations once finished, teaching and other research jobs tended to make the work on the San Giovenale excavations a *cura posterior*, handled only during too short summer vacations. Thus, the 15 years after the end of the field work in



Fig. 28. King Gustaf VI Adolf photographing the Borgo NW with *maresciallo* Onofrio.

⁴¹ The major volume *Etruscan culture* 1962, produced by the Swedish San Giovenale team, did not compensate for this lacuna and could report only summarily on the important results of the 1961–1962 seasons. A brief presentation of some aspects of Borgo NW was published in Blomé 1969.

⁴² It is a telling fact that none of the excavators wrote their dissertations on a San Giovenale topic but, instead, on a variety of other subjects, such as Late Roman history (B. Malcus), Roman topography and architecture (B. Olinder), Iron Age Latium (P.G. Gierow), the Sorbo necropolis at Cerveteri (I. Pohl), Linear B (M. Lindgren), Destruction dates in the Near East (S. Forsberg), Achaemenid architecture (C. Nylander), Conservation and restoration (B. Blomé) etc. The pioneering attempt by C.E. Östberg in his Ph.D. dissertation (Östberg 1967) suffered from a somewhat uneasy compromise between a preliminary excavation report and a discussion of major prehistoric issues.



Fig. 29. The photographic tower, *la giraffa*, in 1961. Photograph by B. Blomé.



Fig. 30. The old *Capannone* 1965–2002. Photograph by B. Blomé.

1965 did not see much progress regarding the major excavation zones, in particular the Borgo NW.⁴³

It was only in the late 1970s that the Borgo NW experienced a slow renaissance. In 1979, Carl Nylander became the director of the Swedish Institute in Rome and was thus better positioned to organize and encourage the study and publication work. The same year, Dr Ingrid Pohl, who through her earlier work at San Giovenale had become superbly familiar with the rich ceramic remains at the site, was entrusted with the study and publication of the ceramic and other finds from the Borgo NW.⁴⁴ The entire

⁴³ The *necropoleis* were published by P.G. Gierow, C.E. Östenberg, O. Vessberg and E. & K. Berggren between 1969–1972 and two minor excavation areas on the Acropolis by E. & K. Berggren in 1980 and 1981. In the years between 1977 and 1985 Ingrid Pohl, who had settled permanently in Italy, was able to publish two volumes and several important articles. During the 1970s, the main responsible Borgo archaeologist Nylander taught for seven years at Bryn Mawr College, Philadelphia, USA, and then at the University of Copenhagen. The architect Blomé, a prominent specialist in restoration theory and praxis, was restoring Swedish churches and taught architectural conservation courses.

⁴⁴ For Dr Pohl's important publications concerning San Giovenale and its problems, see the San Giovenale bibliography in Appendix 1.

group of San Giovenale scholars was reactivated and, in 1983, the Institute organized the symposium “San Giovenale: Materiali e problemi” with a review of the current state of the work and a discussion of crucial issues.⁴⁵ Within the framework of the comprehensive Italian “Progetto Etruschi” (1984–1986), including numerous exhibitions in various places, the Swedish Institute received the invitation to participate with an exhibition in Viterbo. It resulted in further research activity culminating in the exhibition and the catalogue *Architettura etrusca nel Viterbese. Ricerche svedesi a San Giovenale e Acquarossa 1956–1986*.⁴⁶

In the 1980s, Dr Pohl began studying the large amount of pottery from the Borgo NW in the laboratory of the Swedish Institute in Rome. She tried, by means of the excavation diaries and notes of the years 1961–1965, to understand the sloping and complex stratigraphy of the site.⁴⁷ It was only in the 1990s that the two responsible scholars, Nylander and Blomé, could begin

⁴⁵ *San Giovenale. Materiali e problemi* 1984.

⁴⁶ *Architettura etrusca* 1986.

⁴⁷ Her manuscript of some 800 pages and almost 1,000 drawings was finished in February 1995. It was published in 2009 as *San Giovenale* V:2.



Fig. 31. The new *Capannone*, from 2002. Photograph by J. Sigurdsson.



Fig. 32. Detail from the new *Capannone* in 2002. Photograph by J. Sigurdsson.

devoting more time to the documentation and study of the site in the field. The task was made even more urgent by the sudden death, in 1993, of their younger colleague Stig Forsberg, the excavator of the bridge over the Pietrisco, and the realization of the increasing age and frailty, more than 30 years *post festum*, of the few remaining San Giovenale excavators. The Swedish Institute managed to obtain important grants from its permanent benefactors the Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation and the Fondazione Famiglia Rausing, making possible major efforts towards the final publication of the numerous unfinished San Giovenale projects, especially the so-called Area F East on the Acropolis, also protected by the *Capannone* which had been constructed in 1964.⁴⁸ Thanks to the generosity and hospitality of the Comune di Blera a small apartment was put at the disposal of the Swedish archaeologists in the village of Civitella Cesi, the traditional base for the Institute's work at San Giovenale and Luni sul Mignone, thereby facilitating long working periods in the field.⁴⁹ For Borgo NW, this increase in funds also enabled the bringing in of specialist help in various areas, including studies on architecture, geology, metal and chemical analyses and computer-aided-design (CAD). But it was mainly after retiring as director of the Institute in 1997, that Nylander was able to devote more time in the field, regularly a couple of months per year, together with Blomé. In 1998, when Blomé was expected to be again on his way to join Nylander in Civitella Cesi, he suddenly died in Stockholm on 15 October, with some unfinished Borgo sections spread out on the drawing table.⁵⁰ Blomé's task was then taken over by Nylander's old friend from the joint work in Persepolis in Iran, the architect Giuseppe Tilia and his associates Angela Bizzarro, Stefano

Tilia and Alessandro Tilia, who had already been involved in the production of two CAD-plans, one of the entire site of San Giovenale and the other of the Borgo NW excavation. Regrettably, Giuseppe Tilia died on 1 March 2001, in the midst of his devoted work on the documentation of the Borgo NW.⁵¹

In late spring of 1999, Dr Lars Karlsson, research assistant of the Swedish Institute in Rome, added another, important field phase to the work on the Borgo by proving the existence of an Archaic fortification and finding evidence of an unexpected predecessor palisade on the Borgo, a result of considerable importance for the understanding of Borgo NW, and of San Giovenale as a whole.⁵² Other important research has been conducted by Dr Yvonne Backe-Forsberg, who in 2005 made a preliminary publication of her PhD dissertation on the Bridge area at the Pietrisco.⁵³ Conservator Marie Klingspor Rotstein assisted with an analysis of a proto-cement-like substance found between masonry blocks in House B and fragments from a metallurgical activity in yard Ad. Her analysis is published as Appendix 3 in this volume. Another analysis concerning metallurgy was made by the chemist Dr G.F. Guidi.⁵⁴ Furthermore, Barbara Belelli Marchesini has made a study of the Borgo building techniques, which is published here as Appendix 2. Two Princeton University friends Prof. Sheldon Judson and Pamela Hemphill-Judson were involved in a survey of the Civitella Cesi–Monteromano area, which was published in 2000.⁵⁵ Sheldon Judson produced an analysis of the San Giovenale geology, which is included in Chapter One of this volume. Finally, Pamela Hemphill-Judson made an important contribution to the study of the Romans in the San Giovenale area in the article 'The Romans and San Giovenale'.⁵⁶

⁴⁸ This led to the publication of the Area F East in 2006, see *San Giovenale* IV:1. These projects also included the Pietrisco Bridge (Y. Backe-Forsberg), the Bronze Age material from the courtyard of the medieval castle on the Acropolis (P.G. Gierow), an impressive terrace building on the Acropolis edge (M. Lindgren), and the oval Protovillanova huts with their rich ceramic evidence (B. Malcus).

⁴⁹ In late 1999, this flat was sold and the Comune di Blera instead offered the Swedish Institute the hospitality of an apartment in Blera. The long-standing friendship between the Comune di Blera and the Swedish Institute has found many expressions ever since H.M. King Gustaf VI Adolf became an honorary citizen in 1962. In the early 1990s the planned Museo Civico got the name *Museo Re Gustavo VI Adolfo* and was supported by his grandson H.M. King Carl XVI Gustaf. On 5 June, 1994, the *Incontro Tornando a San Giovenale* and an exhibition of photographs were organized in the Communal Library in Blera. The Comune and Luciano Santella, Sindaco and archaeologist, have also offered generous assistance with manual help to liberate the site from vegetation and to further the on-going study of the remains.

⁵⁰ Nylander 1998b.

⁵¹ Nylander 2001.

⁵² Karlsson 1999.

⁵³ Backe-Forsberg 2005.

⁵⁴ Guidi *et al.* 2005.

⁵⁵ Hemphill 2000.

⁵⁶ Hemphill 1993. It is with warm gratitude that the author remembers the friendship and contribution of Sheldon Judson (who died in 1999) and his wife, and the many fine moments spent together at the site.