

Foreword: Reflections on Aquileia

Anna Maria Reggiani

Representative of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities

The Aquileia Foundation Council

Introduction

Fernand-Paul Braudel, in his extensive work devoted to the historical and economical frameworks of the Mediterranean basin, claims that the Adriatic sea exhibited a great deal of coherence, since by its remote antiquity was ruled by a unique leading city located on the Northern side: Aquileia first, then Ravenna and Venice...and one could also mention the less-known cities of Spina and Adria!

As far as Aquileia is concerned, one can say it was born as a frontier outpost, but rapidly evolved towards a strategic commercial hub, as well as a passage city for the emperors travelling towards the borders of the Roman Empire.

Aquileia today

The identification of the ruins of Aquileia has fed a remarkable archaeological heritage still to be brought to light, as outlined by the motivations for the inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1998: "Since most of the ancient Aquileia is still untouched and buried, and is the most complete example of a city of the ancient Rome in the Mediterranean basin". As a matter of fact, only 30 ha have been excavated - over a grand total of 85 ha. A great deal of knowledge has still to be acquired about the monuments – the public buildings, the harbor, the necropolises - with respect to the private buildings, since their rich heritage is still to be explored, and the original locations of the sculpted works uncovered.

Research and perspectives

No doubt that Aquileia is a major attraction towards the Northern Italy and the Friuli-Venezia Giulia (FVG) region. Its insertion into the UNESCO list contributed to increase the number of visitors.

When the Aquileia Foundation was established, managing the Cultural Heritage was recognized as a strategic choice, to be undertaken by co-

operating with the Institutions in the area. The route of the Foundation started with the approval of the Law 18/2006 by the Friuli-Venezia Giulia Regional Council, but the idea of an Institution for Aquileia traces back until the early sixties of the last century. Indeed, the project has come to life thanks to the funds made available by the Friuli-Venezia Giulia Region.

Recovering of the ancient memories is a hard job, but an essential requirement to increase their value; as a matter of fact, although no protocols are at work about “the re-use of the antique ruins”, many people agree on the opportunity to avoid, in any case, the strict confinement of the archaeological sites, which would cause the lapse of interest and their unavoidable decay.

Reflecting about the sense of the fragmented archaeological systems is a part of the so-called “non-place”, as it was called - in the realm of the debates about the use of the Urban Archaeology – the area devoted to the archaeological memories; such a definition is an anthropological one and is due to Marc Augé about the anonymous places in the contemporary society: railway stations, airports, motorways. The same concept can be extended to different cultural contexts, wherever a sort of ‘religious space’ emerges, as it can happen for a Museum or an archaeological site, which paradoxically may become anonymous places, crowded by similar - but lonely - individuals.

In the light of the previous reflections, the goal of the Aquileia Foundation is fully integrating the archaeological area into the surroundings, by means of a management plan, i.e., the tool UNESCO required to include the city into the World Heritage List, with the aim of achieving an integrated governance of the region. In fact, the full plan combines a strategic economic plan as well as those for communication and the territorial enhancement.

Final observations

The path outlined for Aquileia envisages an innovative approach, in which the ancient and modern cities coexist and permeate each other. The area that suffered from a period of expropriations - to which did not follow an equivalent period of ‘Great Works’ - can be that ideal site to experiment novel projects: in this way, increasing the value of the area can be achieved both by structural interventions – restorations, coverings, reconstructions – and

communication initiatives, in co-operation with other cultural Institutions.

The work in Archaeology receives an invaluable support by the non-destructive technologies, that allow to extract a great deal of data and prepare the excavations. The first workshop on “The New Technologies for Aquileia”, took place at the Aquileia Archeological Museum in may 2011 and was organized by the university of Udine. Scholars and experts from Italy, Slovenia, Germany, Australia have brought their contributions and emphasized the potentialities of the multi-disciplinary research work combining Archeology with the new technologies. The workshop has gained credit as a significant contribution to the progress of knowledge, conservation and enhancement of the heritage of the ancient roman city.