

M. AYLWIN COTTON, O.B.E., HON. F.B.A., F.S.A.  
1902–1984

With the death on 31 May 1984 of Molly Cotton, it seems as though an era has passed. It is hard to believe that she will not be there when one next passes through Rome, and even harder to realise that her enormous personal contribution to archaeology is at an end.

Molly first began work in Italy in 1962, when she started excavating the villas of Posto and San Rocco at Francolise, not far from Capua. Behind her already lay a long and successful career. A doctor of medicine, she had been one of the first to be awarded a post-graduate diploma at the London Institute of Archaeology. In 1936, after the death of Tessa Verney Wheeler, she became deputy director at the excavations at Maiden Castle and followed this with campaigns on the defences at Silchester. During the war, she was at the Ministry of Economic Warfare and, in 1945, received the O.B.E. Before long she was back in the field again, at Verulamium in 1949, where she co-directed with Wheeler, and at Clausentum, from 1951 to 1954. At the same time, she was pursuing her interest in Iron-Age studies, which was to result in a series of papers, particularly on hill-forts and their defences; and she also played important roles in the administration of the Silchester (1954–58) and Verulamium (1955–61) excavations.

When Molly came to work in Italy, therefore, she knew as much as anyone about organising digs, about writing reports and about processing large collections of finds, particularly pottery. She must have seemed the ideal person to investigate the Francolise villas. A project conceived, as so often, by John Ward-Perkins (who himself had helped to pave the way in villa studies with his classic work at Lockley's in Hertfordshire), it had as its aim the very first 'scientific' examination of a Republican villa in Italy. It was to prove a major milestone for, as John wrote in his introduction to the first report 'our archaeological knowledge of the residential estates and farmsteads that played so large a part in the economic and social history of Republican Rome still remains quite absurdly limited'.

Molly was appointed field director, under John Ward-Perkins and Peter von Blanckenhagen; but essentially the project was hers. Over four seasons, between 1962 and 1965, the plan was revealed of two adjacent villas, Posto and San Rocco, and for the first time in Italy a historical sequence, based on stratigraphical evidence, was worked out. Now completely published, in two volumes, there were also full reports on the finds, including a detailed study of all the pottery. This itself was wholly novel for Italy, helping to create a trend, the full fruits of which are now beginning to be realised.

When her husband died in 1965, Molly made a clean break and moved to a flat on the Aventine in Rome. Soon she was running the School's archaeological work-room, the 'camerone'. This was an immensely busy task. Twice a year there would be a hectic period when the amazing array of finds from the Villanovan cemetery of Quattro Fontanili, at Veii, would come in, all needing treatment and storage; and then there was the enormous dump of Etruscan pot-sherds from Casale Pian Roseto, most of them laboriously pieced together by Molly herself. Meanwhile, the South Etruria project was in full swing, creating demands on time and space,

and even more material to sort. Nevertheless, the camerone was always a wonderfully jolly—and instructive—place to work, due in very large measure to Molly's happy and invigorating personality.

Other excavations took her away from Rome, either as director or to run the finds-shed. Much of this work was in the south of Italy, at Gravina, Cozzo Presepe and, in 1970, at Monte Irsi, in Basilicata; but, ever adventurous, in 1972 and 1973 she was heavily involved in the processing of the finds from the excavations in the earthquake-shattered town of Tuscania. Finally, she was to spend a lengthy period in 1977 at Otranto, where a prison cell in the castle was converted into one of her more makeshift finds departments. Countless directors, neophyte and not-so-neophyte, have reason to be grateful for her presence on a dig, or for her visits; this one can remember many more than one occasion when her tactful suggestions averted what might have been disaster.

It seems such a lot to have fitted in, particularly alongside the post-excavation work on the Francolise villas; but Molly was always busy, cheerful and amazingly full of energy—and always helpful towards the young, not least the School's artists. Very many now have cause to remember her as recipients of fellowship or publication grants from the Dr M. Aylwin Cotton Foundation, which she set up in 1972. Designed to promote scholarship in the archaeology, architecture, history, language or art of the Mediterranean, her Foundation's fellows make a distinguished roll-call. Italian archaeology in particular owes much to these generous bursaries, and it is good to know that the Cotton Foundation will survive her death and be a lasting memorial to her.

In later years, Molly retired from the camerone to the quieter life of the Churchill Room, producing the final draft of *Posto and San Rocco*, and working away on problems of Latian archaeology. But she still diligently attended conferences. She was the senior statesman at the 'come un archeologo lavora in campo' congress in Siena in 1981, and again at the third gathering of archaeologists working in Italy, at Cambridge in January 1984. She must have looked around with great pleasure at the huge audience, many brought there by her own influence and activities. Her long and distinguished career, culminating with an honorary fellowship of the British Academy, won her a host of friends—and us the chance to know and work with a remarkable lady. We all share a deep sense of loss: but to reflect on her is always to bring back happy and affectionate memories of a marvellous person, who did an enormous amount both for archaeology and for the School.

T.W.P.