

SIMON KEAY (1954–2021)



The death of Simon Keay on 7 April 2021 has deprived the British School at Rome (BSR) and Roman archaeology in the Mediterranean of one of its most significant scholars at a time when he was still at the height of his energetic career.

Born in London on 21 May 1954 to a British father and an Australian mother, he came from a family with strong connections across western Europe. After a year off between school and university (during which a period working in Australia contributed some distinctive phrases to his vocabulary), he arrived to study at the Institute of Archaeology (then an independent research institute within the University of London) in October 1974. It was there on our first day, queuing to register, that we met. The Institute then had few undergraduate students (our year comprising about fifteen), with those of us interested in the Roman world taught in very different styles by Richard Reece, Mark Hassall and John Wilkes. Teaching was informal, and we were left with much time to explore the libraries (with that of the Roman Society and Institute of Classical Studies (ICS) then also in the same building) and to discuss ideas over tea. Simon developed a deep interest in the Roman economy and the late Roman world, and I well remember him one day enthusiastically introducing me to Testaguzza's volume on Portus. The basement tea room was often populated by visitors as well as refugees from the ICS library, and the academic environment was further enhanced by a variety of other researchers (like John Lloyd and Tom Blagg) and visitors, bringing us into close contact with active research. The Institute also required students to complete sixteen weeks of fieldwork before graduation, and Simon embraced this opportunity to the full, gaining experience digging in Italy, including work at the Via Gabina villa (with his contemporary Paul Arthur), establishing his first links with the BSR (as well as digging with me at Neatham in Hampshire). He was recruited as a digger on

the epoch-making Anglo-Italian Sette Finestre villa excavation where he made a series of lifelong friendships with those in Italian archaeology. I travelled with him in Rome in the summer of 1977, when he already had a tremendous knowledge of the city.

On graduating in 1977, Simon stayed at the Institute and was awarded a British Academy Scholarship to study for his PhD. But, rather surprisingly, he headed off to work on the economy of late Roman Spain under the supervision of John Wilkes. This was only two years after the death of Franco, a period of immense change in the country, which was only just beginning to open up, and was still dominated by very traditional forces. Simon went to work in Catalunya, I believe partly as a result of some family links, and his postcards to me described how he spent many days just sitting around and waiting for people to allow him access to the museum stores. Living in Barcelona for his research, Simon developed a strong network of friends and colleagues amongst the upcoming generation of Catalan archaeologists as well as a good knowledge of their language and culture. He worked with them on the excavations at Empúries with Enric Sanmartí-Greco, and, through that network, Simon quickly went on to establish a collaborative Anglo-Catalan excavation on the Roman villa at Vilauba, Banyoles in the province of Girona. The Catalan co-directors were Josep Maria Nolla i Brufau and the local museum curator, Josep Tarrús Galter. From the UK he was joined by Tom Blagg and Rick Jones, then just appointed as a lecturer at Bradford, who brought his students to the project. Simon had dug with me at Cowdery's Down in Hampshire at Easter 1978 and, in reciprocation, I had agreed to dig for him at Vilauba. The excavation (Simon's role in which continued until 1984) embraced contemporary archaeological methods, and the project developed to include the application of geophysical survey (led by Dave Jordan) and field-walking survey in the region (Jones *et al.*, 1983; Roure i Bonaventura *et al.*, 1988). With my appointment to a lectureship at Durham in 1981, I also brought students to work on this excavation, amongst whom, in 1982, was Nina Inzani whom Simon married in 1986.

Simon's PhD thesis on late Roman trade in the western Mediterranean included his typology and chronology of late amphorae. Its publication marked a milestone in the subject and firmly established Simon's reputation in the field when published (Keay, 1984) — the Keay typology remaining in wide use today. Simon completed his PhD in 1983, during the doldrums of cuts in university funding of the Thatcher years, and whilst working part-time in Waterstones bookshop in Regent Street ('Witherspoons' as he called it). He seriously contemplated giving up the subject and applying to join the civil service, but then the government threw a lifeline to the academic world by providing funding for a series of 'new blood' lectureships designed to create posts in areas that were hitherto unrepresented in the UK. One such post in Iberian archaeology was created at Southampton University, where Simon was appointed in October 1985. At Southampton, where he remained until his retirement in 2020, Simon thrived especially through his relationship with

David Peacock with whom he shared many interests. He was elected as a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1986, promoted to a senior lectureship in 1994 and then to a personal chair in 1997, and served two terms as Head of Department. Although not always in sympathy with Peter Ucko's controversial approaches to world archaeology as Head of Department at Southampton in the 1980s, Simon undoubtedly broadened his academic horizons in this period.

From his new academic base, and establishing his new home with Nina in Winchester, Simon turned to a fresh project in Spain. We visited Tarragona together in the summer of 1984 at the invitation of his close friend Xavier Dupré i Raventós who was then the provincial archaeologist of the Servei d'Arqueologia at the Generalitat de Catalunya and went on to establish an innovative centre for urban archaeology (the Taller-Escola d'Arqueologia). Discussion with Dupré led to our archaeological survey of the hinterland of Tarraco (1985–91), the first systematic field-walking survey in Roman Spain, jointly directed with Josep Maria Carreté (Carreté, Keay and Millett, 1995), which also involved a new generation of Catalan archaeologists. Simon's ability to speak both Catalan and Spanish and to engage constructively with the local administration was fundamental to the success of this project, which was also methodologically innovative.

Simon's work at this period also included his synthesis *Roman Spain* (Keay, 1988; translated into Spanish, Keay, 1992a) which marked a widening of his geographical focus which was then further reflected in his fieldwork. He built on his economic interests and focus on urbanism in leading a major excavation at Peñaflor in Andalucía (1987–92) jointly with John Creighton (Keay, Creighton and Remesal Rodríguez, 2000b, 2001). As in his Ager Tarraconensis work, Simon's Peñaflor publication made a very significant contribution through his work on the pottery sequences. He also developed in Andalucía the use of geophysics in a pioneering survey of the town of Italica (1991–3) near Seville jointly with John Creighton and José Manuel Rodríguez Hidalgo (Creighton *et al.*, 1999). He subsequently widened his work in the region with a series of studies of Roman urban sites in southern Spain, innovatively deploying a range of survey and digital methods such as GIS and the semantic web to understand the visual and other connections between Iron Age and Roman towns and nucleated settlements (Brughmans, Keay and Earl, 2012). This stage in his work also involved the broader contextualization of urbanism, both culturally and spatially, and continued his application of geophysical and landscape survey approaches to understand urban forms in their geographical contexts (Keay, 1992b, 1998; Cunliffe and Keay, 1999; Keay and Terrenato, 2001). As well as leading fieldwork projects, Simon also did an immense amount to draw archaeologists from Spain and Portugal into broader debates, heroically editing a series of volumes (including Díaz Andreu and Keay, 1996, and Abad Casal, Keay and Ramallo Asensio, 2006) — often also undertaking translation work for some of the contributors. Simon's engagement with Spanish archaeology continued through the remainder of his career. He also increasingly held a series of roles in academic administration, being involved for

instance with the Institut Català d'Arqueologia Clàssica from its establishment in 2000. However, from the mid-1990s the focus of his interest returned to Italy where he had always remained involved through various initiatives (including the Roman landscape conference (Keay, 1991) and the Populus project (Keay, Alcock and Cambi, 2000a)).

Soon after the appointment of Andrew Wallace-Hadrill as BSR Director in 1995, Simon and I visited Rome and discussed ideas for developing a project on Roman towns in the Tiber valley, memorably visiting Otricoli together in 1996. This led to trial seasons for geophysical surveys at Otricoli and Falerii Novi in 1997. Negotiating access at Otricoli proved very difficult, but the work at Falerii was highly successful and we were welcomed there, leading to a complete magnetometry survey of the town in 1997–8 (Keay *et al.*, 2000c). The spectacular results of this work led to further similar surveys on a series of sites over the next few years, undertaken as our contribution to the BSR's Tiber Valley Project (summarized in Keay and Millett, 2016). These provided new perspectives on the urban archaeology of the region, but also signalled Simon's broader role within the Tiber Valley Project in which he was always a leading figure, supporting the work of Helen Patterson and her team, and taking an especial interest in the work on the pottery. This work also led to a developing cooperation between the BSR and Southampton University where Simon had taken a key role in putting geophysical survey work onto a professional footing through the establishment in 2001 of Archaeological Prospection Services of Southampton (APSS) and establishing their close working collaboration with the BSR for a number of years. This resulted in a couple of surveys on which he himself worked, at Teano (Keay, Hay and Millett, 2012) and Fregellae (Ferraby *et al.*, 2008).

However, the most significant long-term consequence of the success of the Falerii work was the initiation of the Portus project. Early in 1998 at dinner in the BSR following an informal presentation of the first Falerii results, Simon and I were asked by Lidia Paroli whether it might be possible to do similar work with the Soprintendenza at Portus. She explained that they needed to complete a rapid assessment of the archaeological remains in the area around the harbour. Work was initiated in the grounds of the villa belonging to Duke Sforza Cesarini at the end of that year. The archaeological success of this work, together with Simon's diplomatic skills in negotiating with the Duke, led to the extension of the geophysical survey to cover about 200 ha of the site over a series of seasons and the publication of a completely new account of the site (Keay *et al.*, 2005). This survey work was subsequently expanded across the Isola Sacra, resulting in the mapping of a new quarter of Ostia itself on the northern bank of the Tiber (Keay *et al.*, 2020).

As well as transforming understanding of this key site, the survey formed the platform for what was the crowning glory of Simon's academic work. Portus did not then figure greatly in archaeological narratives about Roman Italy, largely because it had been firmly closed to researchers for such a long time. (Simon was fond of telling the story of his first visit to the site in the period

during which part of Portus was an open-air zoo and safari park, when a pair of baboons copulated on the bonnet of their car to the amazement of a distinguished archaeologist in the vehicle!) Not satisfied with simply surveying the site, Simon wanted to excavate and had the vision and energy to make this happen. He put great effort into bringing together a truly collaborative international team and raising research funds to undertake excavation on the scale needed. This involved considerable diplomatic skill in drawing various parties together and resulted in an outstanding project that was ahead of its time in encouraging a very broad range of perspectives, creating at times a community on site of more than 100 archaeologists, artists, scientists and technologists from nearly a dozen countries. The archaeological results were extraordinary too. The excavation revealed an amphitheatre, ship sheds and important aspects of the so-called Palazzo Imperiale, whilst the finds and environmental work provide one of the best sets of data for any site in the Mediterranean. He also deployed state-of-the-art methods of analysis and digital presentation, providing a model of contemporary archaeological practice and illustrating with great clarity the complex and sophisticated infrastructure on which the city of Rome relied. There is already a large series of major publications on this work in print or at press (Keay, Hay and Millett, 2012; Keay 2013, *in press*),¹ with the second of the final reports nearing completion at the time of Simon's death (Keay, *forthcoming*). His passion for communication of the past resulted in the groundbreaking Archaeology of Portus online course, and a series of television documentaries that captured something of the encyclopaedic knowledge he shared so modestly with innumerable visitors to Portus.

In 2006 Simon took up a partial secondment as Research Professor of Archaeology at the BSR, a post he continued to hold (in an honorary capacity) until 2018. In this role he continued to help shape the work of School in a variety of ways.

Building on his work at Portus, Simon went on to run a major European Research Council-funded project (Portus Limen) from 2014 to 2019 designed to address questions relating to the capacities of and interconnections between 30 ports across the Mediterranean, and understand their role in integrating the Roman world. This project applied suites of existing techniques in archaeology, ancient history and palaeo-environmental studies to the sites, contributing to knowledge of the economic and social convergence of the Roman Empire. Characteristically, it also supported a team of young scholars who were given space and encouragement to embrace the daunting breadth and complexity of the project. The scale and vision of this work well exemplifies Simon's broad academic vision (Keay and Arnaud, 2020).²

¹ For a full list of the numerous publications for the project see www.portusproject.org/ (accessed 23 April 2021).

² For a full list of the publications from this work see <https://portuslimen.eu/> (accessed 23 April 2021).

In recognition of his outstanding academic contribution Simon was elected as a Fellow of the British Academy in 2016, and continued to make a very active contribution to its work until only a few weeks before his death. In 2018 he was also appointed to the scientific advisory committee of the Parco Archeologico di Ostia on which he served with great enthusiasm and scholarship. This role well reflects the high esteem in which he was held in Italian archaeology. As with his work in Spain, his Italian colleagues' appreciation was based on his respect for other people and their academic traditions as well as their work, promoting knowledge and understanding in the broadest sense. He was always keen to communicate (he was master of a variety of languages) and to learn from others, whilst having a deep knowledge of the Mediterranean world.

It will not just be for his academic achievements that Simon will be remembered. He was not at his most comfortable lecturing to undergraduates, although he was careful and assiduous in this role, but he had an unparalleled record for supporting his students and younger colleagues on his field projects. His kindness, generosity and willingness to listen and encourage helped innumerable people from across the world to achieve their potential in archaeology in this way. His fieldwork projects were always enormous fun. Simon had a very sharp and quick sense of humour, with the ability to make some awful jokes (especially puns), to mimic, as well as a great sense of the absurd. He also believed in conviviality, so at the end of many a long day in the field the meal was something to be looked forward to and enjoyed to the full.

But for Simon too there was so much beyond archaeology: he was extremely widely read, had a deep love of music and greatly appreciated art. As a frequent visitor to Rome he also became a much-loved and admired member of the BSR's wider community of scholars and artists who shared his passion for Italy. But it was his home life with Nina and their sons James and Leo that was always at the centre of everything for him. He was immensely proud to talk of their achievements if asked, but was equally protective of their home lives together.

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