

SIMON KEAY AWARD IN MEDITERRANEAN ARCHAEOLOGY

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Revisiting the sculptures of Sperlonga: new research and community engagement

My work generally focuses on Greek and Roman sculpture and its ancient display contexts. During my time as the 2023 Simon Keay Fellow, I conducted research related to Sperlonga, a site associated with the Emperor Tiberius. Sperlonga is located in the aptly named 'Riviera de Ulisse' about an hour and a half south of Rome. Known archaeological remains comprise a maritime villa and marine cave/grotto used for fish farming, the latter of which seems to match literary accounts describing a rockfall in a marine cave that nearly killed the emperor. Not mentioned in these sources is the elaborate decoration of the grotto, which included colossal marble sculptures depicting Odysseus and his crew's adventures around the Mediterranean, attributed by signature to three Rhodian artists.

These sculptures, the focus of my project, are now highly fragmentary; there are over 7,000 marble fragments housed in the museum and storerooms. Researchers were able to partially reconstruct several complex multi-figure sculptural groups from these thousands of fragments, including the famous scene of the blinding of the Cyclops Polyphemus, the harrowing journey past the sea monster Scylla, and the theft of the Palladion. The incredibly high level of carving and presence of a signature naming an attested Hellenistic workshop on one of the marble fragments makes the grotto at Sperlonga one of the most important sites in Italy for art historians and classical archaeologists interested in ancient sculpture and the overlapping traditions of Hellenistic and Roman art. Yet, a significant percentage of the fragmentary sculpture from the site remains unpublished and unstudied. My Keay research project was driven by several unresolved questions about the composition, adaptation and interpretation of the ancient sculptural programme. To begin to address and answer these questions required both a close study of the existing reconstructions in the museum galleries and of the many unjoined marble fragments that remain in the museum's storage facilities.

At the British School at Rome, I was able to resume and forward research begun at Sperlonga in 2021. These efforts took several forms over the course of the spring: I began my time with the residential phase of the fellowship in Rome, allowing for a programme of in-depth library research. The residential phase also provided opportunities to share the results of research-to-date through presentations including talks delivered at the British School, American Academy and Finnish Institute. During this period in residence, I was able to connect with the impressive and welcoming archaeological community of the British School and attend several lectures and networking events at other venues. These events were ultimately very productive in terms of creating connections for the field project. In the second part of the fellowship, I continued my work with the unpublished fragments at the site itself. This phase culminated with the collaborative organization of programming for 'open days' at the Sperlonga Museum where members of the public were able to go 'behind the scenes' to

tour the storerooms and learn about work in progress. These tours were executed with the help of the Sperlonga Museum staff and sculpture researchers Federico Figura (PhD student, Scuola Normale Pisa) and Giovanni Colzani (postdoc, Milan).

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