

Susan M. Dixon

 **ARCHAEOLOGY
ON SHIFTING GROUND**
RODOLFO LANCIANI AND ROME 1871-1914



«L'ERMA» di BRETSCHNEIDER

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On cover
Atrium Vestae, looking East, photograph, from Lanciani,
Ancient Rome in the Light of Recent Discoveries (1888), 133.

Susan M. Dixon

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INTRODUCTION

No serious study of ancient Rome's topography can be undertaken without consulting some of the vast scholarly production of Rodolfo Lanciani (1845–1929) (Fig. 1). As the city of Rome was upended in the decades after 1871 in order to be shaped into Italy's new capital, Lanciani was there to identify, record, and interpret the remains of ancient Rome. Most of those remains were only partially or temporarily revealed before their removal or destruction. His desire to capture what was found and what was then often lost was his primary driving force; his secondary was a long-held determination to succeed brilliantly as a way to discredit those who attempted to taint his reputation.

In 1871, Lanciani began his career in the new national archaeological service in Rome and soon thereafter was given major responsibilities. He became director of the excavations of the Roman Forum, whose level from the Capitoline to the Colosseum, and from the Palatine Hill to the adjoining fora, was brought down to its current state. Concurrently, as secretary of the city of Rome's commission on archaeology, Lanciani oversaw inspections of finds on private and municipal land. Thus, Lanciani had a near complete picture of all recently found evidence of ancient Rome. Well versed in classical literature and trained as an engineer, Lanciani had the right set of skills for the task. During the two decades in which he held these positions, he issued hundreds of publications: short scientific notices in the state's journal *Notizie degli Scavi di Antichità*, and longer essays in the city's *Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma*. Furthermore, as a valued member of the Accademia dei Lincei, he produced well-researched expositions on specific monuments. Among these publications are seminal works, including his studies of the aqueducts, the harbor of Portus, the Servian Wall, and Hadrian's Villa.

Although after 1890 he was no longer in the archaeological service, he retained a professorship of ancient Roman topography at the Università di Roma, and his publications continued. He was responsible for two major reference works: *Forma Urbis Romae* (1893–1901), the large map of all that was known of ancient Rome superimposed on a sketchy outline of modern Rome; and *Storia degli Scavi* (1902–10), a multi-volume collection of notices of archaeological activity in papal Rome, from 1000–1870. Meanwhile, he wrote many articles and books in English. By 1876, "Notes from Rome," an occasional column, appeared often in the London journal *The Athenaeum*, and from 1889 until his death, he issued seven books for an American audience. These English-language writings were popular in tone but no less informative about ancient Rome than his works in Italian and today scholars treat them as rigorous sources.

Lanciani's achievements were herculean in the midst of the tumultuous upheavals of late 19th-century Italy. Rome underwent a sea change in all ways: politically, socially, physically, economically,

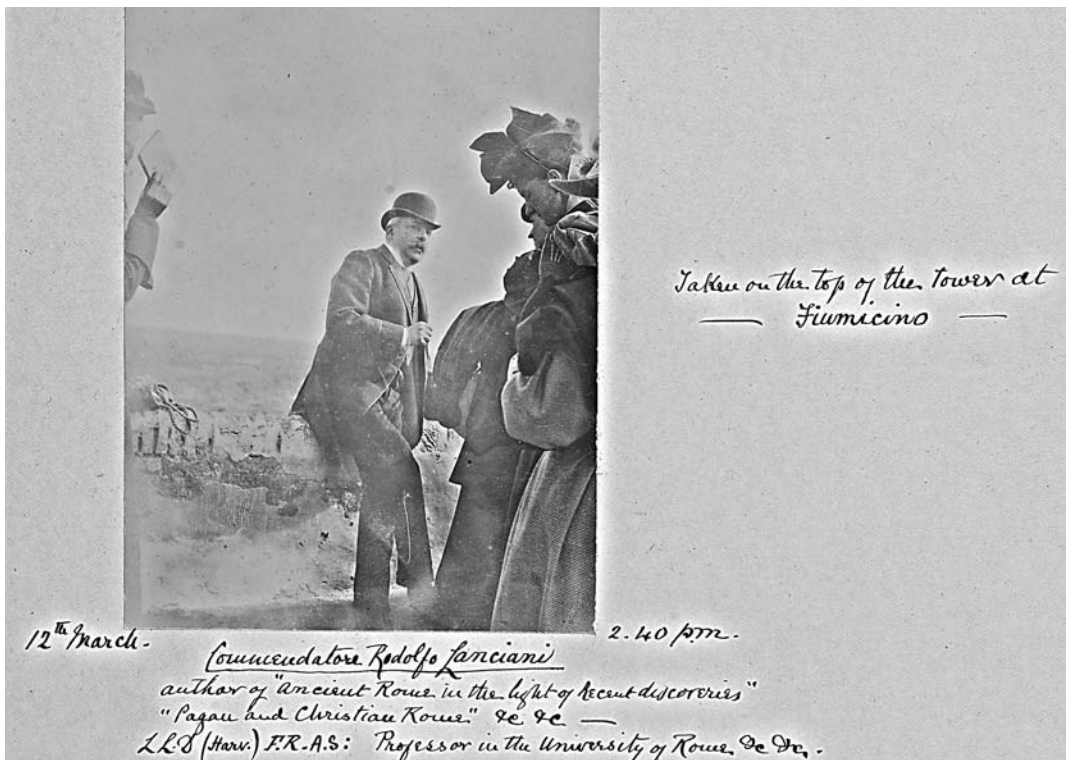


Fig 1. Rodolfo Lanciani, with a group of women, photograph. Photo credit: The John Rylands Library, The University of Manchester, Album Rome 1883/1894, Capt. J. Douglass Kennedy Collection.

and culturally. In 1871, the constitutional monarchy unseated the papacy as the political power in Rome and its territories, and indeed, in all of Italy. It established bureaucratic procedures to enact reforms in many areas, including public education, under which the archaeological service fell. Tensions among social groups, including between those loyal to the king and those to the pope, and between those of the old aristocratic families and those of the new bureaucratic classes, infused most workplace situations, including Lanciani's. Additionally, each new political election brought the potential for a reorganization of the offices in which Lanciani worked.

Meanwhile, the city's topography was altered dramatically. With Rome as the center of national operations, the population grew exponentially. Whole areas of Rome that were once undeveloped fields were turned into residential districts, and modern urban infrastructure was constructed to support them. Ministry headquarters, hospitals, banks, and other large institutional buildings marked their presence in the cityscape. Burgeoning technologies, such as the railroad and electric supply lines, left significant footprints in the city. The ancient seven hills of Rome were reshaped, as some valleys between them were filled in, to accommodate the workings of the new capital.

The practice of archaeology likewise underwent pronounced change. In general, ancient remains were now interpreted with more attention to the material evidence than to the primary texts. New methods of excavating, beyond the rescue archaeology of old, were required. This included

deciphering information from the position of an artifact in the earth's strata and within a broad topographic context. Lanciani was not trained as an archaeologist, and in fact, it was not a profession available in the academic curriculum at the time he entered the field. But he worked alongside those who were eager to use the new methods and to craft training programs for the discipline.

Alongside these transformations were heated cultural and political discussions about who got to own and display the nation's cultural patrimony. In addition to Lanciani's many positions, he held the directorship of the state museums and the oversight of new collections at the city's museum on the Capitoline Hill. Beyond the task of collections management, which was an onerous task given the sheer quantity of objects being unearthed at this time, Lanciani found himself among contentious parties, each staking a claim on the objects. There were state officials planning to build a national museum, city politicians scrambling to expand the Capitoline collections, private landowners aspiring to make a personal profit from artifacts found on their property, impoverished aristocrats hoping to sell their art collections, and foreign collectors and museum professionals dreaming of shipping classical art to their home countries. Despite the strife, however, there were moments of great achievement in Lanciani's career. He reconstructed and hung the Severan Marble Map fragments in the Capitoline Museum, rearranged the galleries dedicated to the remains of the ancient Roman horti in the same museum, and in particular, designed and realized the *Mostra Archeologica*, part of the 1911 *Esposizione Internazionale*, held in the Baths of Diocletian.

Furthermore, even as the state worked to curtail foreign practice of archaeology on Italian soil, foreign attention to what was happening in Rome at this time intensified. Easy travel and communication in the modern age intensified this interest. Lanciani worked at the nexus of an international community of scholars, dilettantes, tourists, antiquities dealers, and museum curators, all of whom showed curiosity about the new information and material goods from Italian finds. There was no restraint on them staking a claim in the discourse surrounding archaeological practice, and at times, on the antiquities it yielded. With his excellent English-language skills, Lanciani had strong connections with the British and the Americans, and made use of them in attempting to further his reputation, something for which he was recriminated by his Italian employer.

Amid such upheavals, Lanciani's approach to ancient Rome was deemed old-fashioned and incompetent in short order. He was forced to resign his positions in late 1890 for perceived unethical behavior in the archaeological service: providing unofficial access to sites, and dealing antiquities to American museums, even in the age before strong antiquities protection laws. Additionally, some of his methods of operation were deemed not scientific enough, as he was too eager to consult the ancient textual evidence for interpretation of the remains rather than allowing them, and their context, to speak for themselves. (This, of course, one can do in the field of classical archaeology, and not in the study of prehistory.) He was noted for being too positivist, often naïve, in his assumptions about history. We see this best in his insistence of the Alban tribes as the first inhabitants of Rome, or the location of the graves of Sts. Peter and Paul. Some colleagues in the state archaeological service approached his work with skepticism and even ridicule. Some foreigners, like Richard Norton, the director of the American Academy in Rome, did as well, refusing to recommend one of Lanciani's English-language handbook for students as a source.

This biography provides a narrative of Lanciani's working life with attention to all these forces. It relies on Domenico Palombi's 2006 comprehensive biography, *Rodolfo Lanciani: l'archeologia a Roma tra l'Ottocento e Novecento*, the first monograph on the archaeologist and scholar. Palombi scoured the Italian archives for plentiful evidence of the various phases of the scholar's career. His account is particularly groundbreaking in treating Lanciani's years as a university professor and as a dignitary in the Parliament and the Municipal Council. My contribution to the story of Lanciani's

life, in this second biography, is to focus on his scholarly production; I mesh the facts of Lanciani's tumultuous career to his vast and assorted publications. For example, he published frequently in two very different types of Italian journals, each with different purposes. In the state's journal, *Notizie degli Scavi di Antichità*, the monthly entries in the main were highly objective observations of the archaeological discoveries; in the city's *Bullettino della Commissione Archaeologia Comunale di Roma*, the essays were longer and allowed for more synthesis of bits of information and thus interpretation. In addition, his English-language "Notes from Rome" were diary-like entries that appeared on an occasional basis in the *London Athenaeum*. These, along with his books for American audiences, delivered a popularized version of ancient Roman scholarship. They reveal Lanciani's desire to educate and appeal to British and American citizens, and to communicate to them what he conjectured was relatable or notable about ancient Roman culture. Although the kernel information in all venues might have been the same, Lanciani demonstrated that he knew how to identify and write for a specific audience. This trait, a chameleon-like ability in approaching people, comes through in his writings, as it did in person. Lanciani was extremely gregarious.

The book also aspires to allow Lanciani's personality to emerge. He was charming and eager to be the center of attention. His tours in the Roman *campagna* were well attended and remembered, as were his lectures. At the same time, he was socially ambitious. He was not born into an aristocratic family but rather into one that was attendant at the papal court. Nonetheless, he had aspirations to live the courtly life, and eventually married into the class at age 75. Because his social mores were impeccable, he was the johnny-on-the-spot to attend to foreign dignitaries who came to the city to see the ancient Roman sites. For the same reasons, his colleagues, especially those in the state archaeological service, found his behaviors irritating. His ego was large, and his obsequiousness to those in the old-world hierarchy was obvious.

His gregariousness was somewhat at odds with his keen abilities as a researcher. He was superb at collecting and organizing data on ancient Roman topography, and the pursuit of such data drove him to complete large-scale projects. His passion to accrue topographical information was undiminished throughout the tumult in his career, and in the city. The *Forma Urbis Romae* (1893–1901) the large map of a reconstructed ancient Rome, and the *Storia degli Scavi di Roma* (1902–10), the collection of historical notices of archaeological discoveries in Rome, demonstrate his steadfastness in amassing vast amounts of information. His fascination in particular was with the ancient city's infrastructure – its roads, its walls, its aqueducts – on which to hinge the topographic monuments. His methods of gathering data were unwaveringly methodical. He began with the textual sources, then consulted the visual sources – maps and views of ancient Rome throughout the centuries – to which he later added the tangible remains, the archaeological records of late 19th and early 20th Centuries.

Rodolfo Lanciani and his scholarship demands some attention now. Despite the quality and quantity of his accomplishments, they were overlooked after his death, even as his publications were routinely consulted. He resigned his last position, that of university professor, at the age of 77, just months before the March on Rome. Lanciani's contribution to the field of archaeology was thereafter diminished, overshadowed by the strong personalities among the next generation of archaeologists, those of the Fascist regime (some of whom were Lanciani's pupils).

Furthermore, in the century between Lanciani's death and today, some of his many pronouncements or conclusions have been the subject of revision or criticism. I will give just a few examples. Jan Stubbe Østergaard traced Lanciani's comments on the Licinian Tomb, from

different published sources, only to find them frustratingly inconsistent.¹ David Karmon takes offense at Lanciani's attention to gathering up evidence of the destruction of Rome during the Renaissance, as opposed to any of the age's attempts at preserving the ancient.² And Katherine von Stackelberg finds Lanciani's unfavorable comparison of rigidly planned ancient Roman gardens to the "romantic naturalism" of the English garden to impede the appreciation of the former.³ These scholars are correct in taking Lanciani to task. My book, however, aims to give them some framework to understand the nature of his published statements, including the chaos in which archaeological finds were recorded, the desire to preserve that which would be lost, and his predilection for gearing some of his writings to his foreign audience.

Lanciani has been getting more scholarly visibility in the past four decades or so. In this time, Lanciani's scholarship has been edited or translated, and re-issued frequently. In 1988, Anthony Cubberley collected and edited Lanciani's English-language journal entries from the *London Athenaeum*, allowing us to read all the entries from 1875 to 1914 in one place.⁴ In the early 1970s, Lanciani's popular English-language books were made available in Italian. Furthermore, efforts to make public Lanciani's archival materials began in earnest in the early 1990s. To the Vatican Libraries, he had donated sketches and personal notes on major monuments, many accumulated during his employment in the archaeological service. After some wayward notes were found and catalogued with the originals, Marco Buonocore edited and published five volumes of a majority of the items.⁵ Now, without going to Vatican City, one can see what Lanciani recorded about, e.g., the Servian Wall. After Lanciani's death, the Biblioteca dell'Istituto di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte purchased Lanciani's collection of visual evidence of ancient Rome that was captured by artists, architects, and archaeologists of centuries past, but the inventory was published only in 1991.⁶ And recently, approximately one third of those prints, drawings and photographs have been digitized and are available online.⁷ And if that is not enough, a team of scholars from three universities are updating Lanciani's *Forma Urbis Romae* with archaeological finds made in the following century, and creating interactive links to the citations related to the illustrated topographical feature.⁸ Lanciani's scholarship has never been more accessible.

Those who love the topography of ancient Rome, or who have been engrossed in the pages of one of Lanciani's texts, will enjoy learning about the man behind the extraordinary scholarship. They will get a fuller sense of this charismatic and ambitious individual, who despite great obstacles in his life and career, left much behind for us to contemplate and to build upon.

¹ KRAGELUND, MOLTESEN and ØSTERGAARD 2003, 55–60.

² KARMON 2011, 8.

³ VON STACKELBERG 2009, 3–4.

⁴ CUBBERLEY 1988.

⁵ BUONOCORE 1997–2002.

⁶ MUZZIOLI and PELLEGRINO 1991–92 and 1994.

⁷ <https://exhibits.stanford.edu/lanciani>

⁸ <http://mappingrome.com/NFUR/>

CHAPTER 1

A CAREER IN ARCHAEOLOGY

BEGINNINGS

According to Rodolfo Lanciani, his interest in archeology was stirred at a young age. His earliest years were spent in the care of a wet nurse, whose cousin was the famous self-taught geologist and paleontologist, Abate Carlo Rusconi (1814–68).¹ Rusconi took the young Lanciani into the local campagna to hunt for fossils.² These outings awakened Lanciani's fascination with exploring the earth for old things with rich histories. They also kindled the passion to understand the topography and history of the campagna, a project he would embrace fully in the last decades of his life.

During those early years, Lanciani lived in Montecelio, the land of his ancestors, where the Lancianis had owned property on which stood some remains of Corniculum, the stronghold of Servius Tullius, sixth of the ancient kings of Rome.³ This familial association shaped Lanciani's desire to elucidate early Rome's history using material evidence.

As a child, Rodolfo Lanciani was the youngest in his extended family who resided together in a palace on via di Ripetta in Rome, near the Tiber River. His parents, Pietro Lanciani and Lucia Galardi de Jugellis, were both in their mid-40s when he was born. The household also included three adult half-brothers from Pietro's earlier marriage, some older paternal relations, and his sister Carlotta, five years his senior. Carlotta and Rodolfo remained close all their lives.⁴

Since the 16th century, Lanciani family members had distinguished themselves, excelling at medicine, jurisprudence, and science, among other professions.⁵ Rodolfo's father Pietro was no exception. He was an engineer, and eventually a hydraulic engineer, at the papal court, from 1826 to his death in about 1868. He produced two very important publications on methods of managing

¹ SPERANDI and PETRARA 1993, 167. Francesca was Guadenzio's cousin. Guadenzio was the prior and consellor of the commune of Montecelio, when Pietro worked there. Gaudenzio's wife Giacinta was Lanciani's mother's godmother. Carlo Rusconi was Francesca's cousin (although unclear if he was also Gaudenzio's cousin). Rusconi's collections were recently exhibited: <http://www.isprambiente.gov.it/en/archive/news/year-2014/rusconi-legit-the-rediscovered-collection>.

² PICCOLINI 1929-30, 436–437.

³ PALOMBI 2006a, 37–38, and especially n. 20 and 21.

⁴ SPERANDI and PETRARA 1993, 171. Lucia Galardi de Jugellis (b. 1801) married the widowed Pietro (c. 1800–c. 1868) in 1839. Rodolfo's half-brothers – Filippo (b. 1818), Camillo (b. 1821) and Cesare (b. 1823) – were adults by the time he was born.

⁵ SPERANDI and PETRARA 1993, 173–176, citing the work of A. G. Picchetti.

the flow of rivers, and specifically the Tiber River.⁶ Rodolfo as well would conduct intense research on water flows in Rome early in his studies.

Rodolfo followed very closely in his father's career footsteps. From 1865 to 1868, he studied mathematics, earning credentials as a civil architect in 1867, and as a civil engineer in 1868, from the Scuola speciale degli ingegneri, at La Sapienza.⁷ Pietro encouraged him in this pursuit by employing him as a teen to help measure the steep thoroughfares of Montecelio.⁸ Given the family roots in that hill town, Pietro served as its communal engineer. At Pietro's death, just as Rodolfo was finishing his schooling, he assumed his father's position, holding it until 1878 when his responsibilities in Rome became so laborious that they required all his attention.⁹ Water and earth, rivers and mountains, the art of measuring and the pursuit of ancient objects: these are the things that preoccupied the young Lanciani.

Archaeology was not a profession that Lanciani studied at university, because it had not yet become a sanctioned field of study.¹⁰ Prior to his training in civil architecture and engineering at university from 1865–68, he was a well-read classicist who earned a degree in philosophy from the Collegio Romano in 1863. This solid training shaped Lanciani's archaeological practice as much as his mastery of engineering. He brought to the investigation of the physical remains of ancient Rome an acute understanding of literary sources. Like Poggio Braccolini or other Renaissance humanists,¹¹ he visited many European libraries throughout his life. In them, he sought and found written and visual evidence of ancient through medieval Rome's topography and monuments.

Family connections also aided Lanciani in his career. He easily found work among his father's colleagues at the papal court. Count Virginio Vespignani (1802–82), a papal architect and an erstwhile illustrator of archaeological texts, including one of the excavations at Pompei, was his sister's father-in-law.¹² Furthermore, Giovanni Battista de Rossi (1822–94), a papal archaeologist best known for his investigations of the Christian catacombs, mentored Lanciani while he was still a student. De Rossi, referred to as the father of Christian archaeology, compiled three volumes of plans of the catacombs and a corpus of Christian inscriptions.¹³ In the late 1860s, de Rossi explored the ancient site of Portus, with Lanciani at his side.

⁶ PALOMBI 2006a, 36 and n. 14. His works include: Pietro Lanciani (with Verne L. Roberts), *Del Ponte Senatorio, ora ponte Rotto* (Rome: Puccinelli, 1826); Pietro Lanciani, *Sulla necessità di rimuovere l'impedimento al corso del Tevere formato dallo scarico delle immondezze alla penna...* (Rome, 1829); and Pietro Lanciani, *Puntone ad Aratro, macchina per lo spungo de' porti, ecc.*, 4 vols (Rome, 1837). In 1829, he wrote of the need to clear the Tiber river of its alluvial deposits, and in 1837, of the methods and instruments needed to clear ports of debris.

⁷ PALOMBI 2006a, 41, and n. 27. The Collegio Romano, the Jesuit college, was suppressed in 1871, and La Sapienza, the papal university, was transformed into the University of Rome.

⁸ SPERANDI and PETRARA 1993, 168–169; LANCIANI 1924, 88.

⁹ In this role, Lanciani was involved in designing of the chapel that today stands in the cemetery of Montecelio. It is of Neoclassical design. See SPERANDI and PETRARA, 169, and Tav. XLV and XLVI. He kept the family house on via del Sole until 1894, often renting it out. The Lanciani family had made Rome their primary residence about a century before Lanciani's birth.

¹⁰ BARBANERA 1998, 55–77.

¹¹ GREENBLATT 2011, on Bracciolini's 1417 discovery of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*. For a list of libraries Lanciani visited, see PALOMBI 2006a, 290–291, and n. 459.

¹² Arguably, Vespignani is best known as the architect responsible for the 1869 rebuilding of the church San Paolo fuori le Mura in Rome. His son, the architect Count Francesco Vespignani (1842–99), was Lanciani's brother-in-law.

¹³ BAUMGARTEN 1892. De Rossi's publications include: *La Roma Sotteranea Cristiana*, v. 1, Rome, 1864; vol. 2, 1867, and vol. 3, 1877; and *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae septimo saeculo antiquiores*, vol. 1, Rome, 1861; vol. 2, 1888. This series was continued by others after de Rossi's death.

Portus was one of the major ports that served ancient Rome, conceived and constructed under the Julio-Claudian emperors. Located on the Tyrennhian coast, just north of Ostia, it was intended to alleviate some of the traffic through the neighboring port. In the post-antique centuries, Portus had been the property of the papacy. In the Renaissance period, it was a site of interest because of the artistic treasure and the reusable building materials it yielded. In Lanciani's day, the Torlonia family owned the site, after Prince Alessandro, the second prince of Civatelli-Cesi (1800–86), and papal banker, purchased it. It was mined primarily for ancient sculptures and other artifacts to enhance the famous Torlonia collection.¹⁴ As part of the process, trenches were opened and then back filled, once the treasure was extracted. Between 1863 and 1867, the papal archaeologist Pietro Ercole Visconti (1803–80) supervised this work. Visconti was a third-generation papal archaeologist, and served as prefect of antiquities under the papacy from 1836 to 1870.¹⁵

Under de Rossi's mentorship, Lanciani published an account of what he believed to be a major find on the site, the Xenodochio, or hospice for early Christian pilgrims mentioned in the letters of St. Jerome.¹⁶ Lanciani identified the apsidal wall of the building, located within the confines of ancient Portus and at its southernmost point. As an aside, Lanciani noted that the wall appeared to be that of a basilica or Christian triclinium; in fact, today the building is identified as a Christian basilica.¹⁷ He argued that the building was constructed or possibly reconstructed in the first half of the fourth century, and was inhabited until about the end of the ninth century. The bricks it was built from provided evidence for his position, as did the coins, lamps, and other material evidence found on site. He also collected and interpreted the epigraphic evidence, both near the site and elsewhere, including an inscription from a late eighth- / early ninth-century restoration of the building by Pope Leo III (750–815).

In a subsequent essay, Lanciani accounted for the topography of ancient Portus (Fig. 2). It was published in the 1868 issue of *Annali dell'Istituto di Corrispondenza Archaeologica*, the scholarly journal of the eponymous institute.¹⁸ This organization was founded in 1823 for the purpose of collecting and disseminating information about archaeological discoveries among scholars from all parts of the world, but most of the scholarship came from France and Prussia.¹⁹

In the essay, Lanciani built on the scholarship of de Rossi and Wilhelm Henzen (1816–87), a pre-eminent German expert in Latin epigraphy and philology.²⁰ Because the Portus site had been plundered for centuries and it was therefore difficult to clear and to measure, Lanciani relied heavily on historical documents. Substantial visual evidence of the topography and monuments of Portus was available in the maps and drawings of past centuries. These included the 16th-century maps of Baldassarre Peruzzi and Salvestro Perruzzi, Pirro Ligorio, Sebastiano Serlio, Antonio Labacco, and

¹⁴ VISCONTI 1883.

¹⁵ RIDLEY 1992b, 149–150.

¹⁶ The Xenodochio was said to be built by Pammachio, the late 4th-century Roman senator, and friend and correspondent of St. Jerome. See LANCIANI 1866; Jerome *Letter* 77:10.

¹⁷ https://www.southampton.ac.uk/archaeology/research/impact/the_portus_project.page

¹⁸ LANCIANI 1868a.

¹⁹ DYSON 2006, 30–5, 43–44, 100. The institute was dissolved, and from its membership emerged the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut under the sponsorship of the Prussian (1871) and then after the unification of Germany, the German (1873) government. In 1886, the *Annali* was replaced by *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Institut Römische Abteilung*.

²⁰ DYSON 2006, 43–44; BARBANERA 1998, 29 and n. 132.