
Interview with Dr. Giulia Vollono

2019-2020 IEMA Postdoctoral Fellow

Dr. Giulia Vollono is the current Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute for European and Mediterranean Archaeology at the University at Buffalo, SUNY. She received a Master's Degree in Archaeology from the Università degli Studi di Siena, as well as a Master's Degree in European Historical Archaeology from the University of Sheffield. Her Doctorate in Archaeology was completed in 2017 with a dissertation titled "Constructing Identity in Lombard Italy". Dr. Vollono's ongoing work focuses on the processes linked to identity construction in the Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.

Dr. Vollono, what are your current research interests and goals, and what projects are you currently working on?

My research interests mainly revolve around the processes of identity construction between the Late Antique and the Early Middle Ages. In particular, my research has been focused on ethnicity and gender through the funerary evidence of Lombard Italy but I also recently included evidence from written and iconographic sources. So far, I have considered wide geographical areas, however I am currently reducing the scale of my analysis and focusing on a more detailed study of specific Italian regions. In parallel, I am also very interested in the history of archaeology, especially examining the relationship between the historical interpretations and the socio-political environment in which they developed.

Your work as the IEMA post-doc has centered on identity construction during the Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. How did you get interested in this subject?

My interest in identity construction developed during my undergraduate years at the University of Siena. There, I began my long-lasting research on Lombard graves and cemeteries starting to reflect on the relationship between identity, particularly ethnicity, and the funerary evidence. I then had the chance to further explore issues surrounding identity across Europe between the Late Antique and the Early Middle Ages during my M.A. in European Historical Archaeology at the University of Sheffield. What I learned both in Italy and in the UK converged in my Ph.D. project, entitled 'Constructing Identity in Lombard Italy', which had at its core the study of gender

identity during the Lombard period through the analysis of grave goods assemblages, written and iconographic sources. Although questions of identity are relevant to all the periods, I believe that the socio-political situation that developed in Europe and the Mediterranean between the Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages makes them a very fruitful and important field to study.

Whose work did you find the most inspiring for your own?

The scholars that inspired me the most are definitely those that I encountered during my time as a Master and Ph.D. student at the University of Sheffield (UK). There, I was introduced to new themes and approaches to archaeology, which have been and still are the basis of my work. I also had the chance of encountering and collaborating with people from different departments and I was encouraged to apply a multidisciplinary approach to the study of the past that is, in my opinion, the most effective. My Ph.D. supervisors, Professor John Moreland and Professor Dawn Hadley, were invaluable guides supporting me during those years and teaching me what it really means to be a researcher.

What have been the most rewarding aspects of the IEMA Postdoctoral Fellow position? What have been the most challenging?

Looking back now at the months that I have been spending as the IEMA Postdoctoral Fellow, I realize that it has been a constant learning process and I feel that I have improved both professionally and as a person. A significant contribution to this experience has come from the members of the staff and the students of the Department of Anthropology and Classics. The exchanges that I am having, both within and outside the class, have been extremely interesting and thought-provoking. Also, seeing the enthusiasm that is put in the IEMA conference and the support that everyone is

providing is a fantastic feeling. Undoubtedly, the most challenging side of my position is the organizational aspect of the conference, managing all the logistics to make sure that everything will run smoothly. However, as much as it may seem difficult, this also is a great chance to learn.

What advice would you give current graduate students working on their dissertation?

My advice would be to have a research plan (i.e. research questions, dataset, type of analysis to perform, etc.) as clear as possible and try to break your work in smaller, manageable tasks. When I was writing my dissertation, thinking of producing a substantial piece of research, basically the equivalent of a book, was overwhelming and sometimes it seemed impossible. Focusing, instead, on single chapters and themes within the thesis was less stressful, much more rewarding and allowed me to have, at one point, the entire work done. I would also suggest finding some other activities that can give you quick results and satisfaction: working hard on the dissertation for a long time before seeing the outcomes can be frustrating. To counterbalance this feeling, for example, I did a lot of crosswords.

How do you think your work as the IEMA postdoctoral scholar will add to archaeology and related subfields?

I think that the 13th IEMA conference and the proceedings that will derive from that will provide a fresh perspective to the study of the period between the 3rd and the 8th century C.E.: it will be the chance to readdress traditional debates and bring to the fore new ideas and approaches. Extremely valuable will be the combination of papers by scholars from different disciplines and backgrounds. I also believe that discussions on the theme of encounters between cultures are very important in our contemporary society, so I hope that the conference would not only add to the scholarly debate but could ultimately

be a contribution to the wider society. Moreover, I hope that I am playing a part in the development of the discipline through the seminars that I am teaching by stimulating new ideas among the students who will become the scholars of the future.

What projects or research endeavors do you hope to pursue in the future?

Although I have been working for many years on the relationship between funerary evidence and identity in the Lombard period, I feel that there are still many facets to explore and I hope that I will have the chance to continue my research in this field in the future. I would also like to pursue further my interest in the relationship between historical interpretation, heritage management, and the contemporary socio-political environment.

Editor's note: This interview was conducted prior to the cancellation of the 2020 IEMA conference, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.