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HEFT 2



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1 Agnes and Dora Bulwer, *Genazzano*, 1890.
British School at Rome, Photographic Archive,
Dora & Agnes Bulwer Collection, inv. Bulwer(b).90

WOMEN IN RUINS

AGNES AND DORA BULWER'S LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHS IN POST-RISORGIMENTO ITALY

Martina Caruso

Introduction

The British photographers Agnes Bulwer (1856–1940) and her sister Dora Ellinor Bulwer (1864–1948) left a legacy of circa 1200 photographs and 890 negatives, as well as their collections of books and photographs by other authors to the British School at Rome.¹ The photographs are principally of landscapes taken in Rome and the surrounding countryside (the Roman Campagna) but also further afield in Italy and abroad. Many include archaeological and natural sites as well as monuments, art works, and homes and

gardens in urban or rural scenes. Other photographs were taken in France, Switzerland, Malta, Germany, and the United Kingdom.² The legacy also contains a series of photographs taken in Greece; however, these have been dated to the years between 1870 and 1875, when Agnes would have been a teenager and Dora a child.³ Antonella Bucci, who has written the main, if not the only, article on the lives of the Bulwer sisters, believes that the photographs from Greece were probably by Agnes and Dora's father, Archibald Redfoord Bulwer (1821–1904).⁴ In 1877, Archibald,

¹ Agnes and Dora Bulwer's photographs are held in two other repositories in Rome: there are forty-nine prints in the Fondo Rodolfo Lanciani manuscripts at the Biblioteca di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte, of which twenty-seven are initialled D.E.B. (Dora Ellinor Bulwer), and at least eighty-five prints in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana's collections of Lanciani's manuscripts (Antonella Bucci, "La collezione fotografica Bulwer e i manoscritti Lanciani", in: *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae*, XIV [2007], pp. 95–118: 106–108).

² These photographs are all available for consultation on the BSR Digital

Collections website, <https://digitalcollections.bsr.ac.uk> (accessed on 8 August 2022).

³ Bucci (note 1), p. 97.

⁴ Bucci, *ibidem*, cites the father as "Archibald Bedford Bulwer"; however, the spelling adopted by the National Archives of Ireland is "Archibald Redfoord Bulwer" (<http://www.willcalendars.nationalarchives.ie/search/cwa/details.jsp?id=I63944I038>; accessed on 8 August 2022). Antonella Bucci was employed as an archivist by the British School at Rome for a project sponsored from 2002 to 2005 by The Getty Foundation to

who worked for the British shipping company Holmes & Co. in Naples, where the sisters grew up, moved with them to Rome when his wife and their mother, Jean Hamilton Bulwer (1823–1877), died.

Bucci dated Agnes and Dora Bulwer's photographic production from circa 1890 to circa 1913,⁵ soon after which they would have returned to the United Kingdom in the foremath of the First World War. There is no evidence of the Bulwer sisters pursuing their photographic practice in the United Kingdom, and their little correspondence that has come to light dates from the late 1920s and early 1940s, while the period between 1913 and 1927 and the decade following 1931 remain obscure.⁶ No correspondence has emerged from their period in Italy, leaving only the photographs as clues to their lives, journeys, and pursuits. However, Dora left a generous portion of her bequest – one thousand pounds – at her death in 1948 to the British School at Rome.⁷ It is assumed that the Bulwer sisters left their collection to the archaeologist and photographer Thomas Ashby (1874–1931) before their departure at the outbreak of the war.⁸ Ashby, who was the director of the British School at Rome from 1906 to 1924, glued a number of original Bulwer prints into two of his albums.⁹ A number of the photographs in the Ashby albums are credited solely to Dora; if it is unclear which of the sisters took the photograph I cite them both as authors, otherwise I credit them individually.¹⁰

When the Bulwers moved to Rome, the *Risorgimento* had been successfully concluded with the unifi-

cation of Italy (1861) and the annexation of Lazio and Rome (1870) and was followed by a socially and intellectually effervescent period. The sisters then lived through the turbulent 1890s, which saw the dawn of anarcho-syndicalism and an increased social consciousness amongst intellectuals. Their connections to philanthropic organisations working towards the emancipation of women indicate that they were part of the progressive cosmopolitan circles of Rome. Although Italy lagged behind its Anglo-American counterparts in terms of the suffragette movement, the country represented a safe harbour for foreign women artists and intellectuals, who saw parallels between their struggle to free themselves with Italy's movement towards national unification. The Bulwer sisters appear to have chosen independent single lives at a time when the social expectations were to marry, have children, and be homemakers.

Agnes and Dora Bulwer's interests, both in Italian social issues and archaeological discoveries, emerge strongly in their photographic practice and indicate that the sisters were aware of the socio-political environment in which they lived. This curiosity and open-mindedness towards the foreign context would not have been common amid the members of the British expatriate community, in particular those who sought out a Grand Tour experience, in search of romantic pastoral scenes and picturesque views. Tourists were fond of traditional *vedutas* of Rome, and the trade in these images was a vibrant part of the emerg-

catalogue and digitise the Dora & Agnes Bulwer Collection. She dated (where possible) the Bulwer photographs and identified many of the places in which these were taken, contributing an invaluable amount of information to the archives. However, some items of the Bulwer Collection were not inventoried or digitised, in particular albums containing photographic prints which the sisters would have bought or collected from friends, as was the practice at the time.

⁵ The British School Digital Collections website suggests otherwise, dating them from "1890–c. 1930 [?]" (<https://digitalcollections.bsr.ac.uk/bulwer-collection>; accessed on 15 November 2022). In this article, I follow the date range proposed by Bucci.

⁶ These dates are established according to research conducted on Bulwer

correspondence at the Cotman archives, Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds, and at the Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

⁷ British School at Rome, Archive, Bulwer Bequest, uninventoried material.

⁸ This information was gathered informally as part of the institutional knowledge passed down from one librarian to the next at the British School over the years, with particular thanks due to Valerie Scott.

⁹ This is the reason why the British School Digital Collections website records many of the photographs as belonging both to the Ashby Collection and to the Bulwer Collection.

¹⁰ My descriptive titles for the image captions refer to both Bucci's titles and Ashby's album notes as reported in the Digital Collections,

ing tourist economy, as examined in numerous publications on photography in Italy during the nineteenth century.¹¹ On the other hand, archaeologists documented heritage sites in a style that aimed for documentary objectivity and often sought to eliminate the human figure. Working as female photographers in a male-dominated field, Agnes and Dora Bulwer infringed these restrictive rules and thus pioneered an unusual vision of landscape.

Although scholarship on women photographers from the nineteenth and early twentieth century has grown in the last two decades, female photographers who worked in the landscape genre at the time have not yet received the attention they deserve, with few exceptions such as the Americans Anne Brigman and Imogen Cunningham.¹² Female photographers and archaeologist-photographers who documented landscapes in this period in Italy are especially understudied, although Esther Van Deman's photographs have been the object of published research.¹³ By examining neglected material, this article aims to contribute a chapter to the history of landscape photography that pays particular attention to the gender divide. Woven into this analysis is a more detailed picture of the Bulwer sisters' practice and lives based on a reconstruction of their social networks, in particular their relationship with archaeologists, photographers, and women's groups, in Italy and the United Kingdom. In the first section, I conduct an overview of the Bulwer sisters' landscape photographs, paying attention to the proto-modernist style in a number of their shots.

Secondly, I establish the international networks which may have influenced their practice and humanitarian vision of everyday life in Italy. Thirdly, I question the meaning of the frequent representations of solitary female figures in their work as both a form of emancipation and the legacy of a romantic vision connected to the British landscape tradition.

I. Agnes and Dora Bulwer's Archaeological, Natural, and Urban Landscapes

In 1871, Rome became the new capital of the young Italian kingdom, courting parity with its European and American counterparts. By the 1880s, the city was being transformed: large swathes of medieval and early modern Rome were being torn down and replaced with 'Umbertine'-style palazzi in order to give the city a more uniform and modern look, following the example of Haussmann's renovations in Paris. As its imperial grandeur was being resurrected with archaeological digs, the image of ancient Rome represented an antithesis to the papal tradition, which had opposed unification.¹⁴ Roman ruins had become the symbol of Italy's centuries of glorious history and its infancy as a unified country. Archaeology became a type of "state religion",¹⁵ while archaeological visits to classical ruins a form of "sacred pilgrimage".¹⁶ British tourists were drawn to the ruins for other reasons too: the British education in the classical tradition was "deemed to embody values similar to Victorian values" and "to augment British national identity as inheritors of the classical past".¹⁷

in an attempt to be as inclusive as possible of the information available about the subjects in the photographs and the locations in which they were shot.

¹¹ Chiara Dall'Olio, "'Ricordo di Roma': editoria, mercato e diffusione della fotografia", in: *Roma 1840–1870: la fotografia, il collezionista e lo storico*, exh. cat., ed. by *eadem*/Maria Francesca Bonetti/Alberto Prandi, Rome 2008, pp. 136–141.

¹² For an analysis of American female photographers in connection with U.S. imperialism, see Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism*, Chapel Hill, NC, 2000.

¹³ For an overview of Esther Van Deman's life, see Katherine Welch, "Esther B. Van Deman (1862–1937)", in: *Breaking Ground: Pioneering Women Archaeologists*, ed. by Getzel M. Cohen/Martha Sharp Joukowsky, Ann Arbor 2006 ('2004), pp. 68–108.

¹⁴ Marcello Barbanera, *Storia dell'archeologia classica in Italia*, Rome 2015, pp. 53f.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 57–59.

¹⁶ Deborah Harlan, "Travel, Pictures, and a Victorian Gentleman in Greece", in: *Hesperia*, LXXVIII (2009), pp. 421–453: 434.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

Rome, p. 265) and Nibby (*Analisi*, ii. 85) believed the decorations to be Ionic. From Visconti's drawing it would seem that there was a mixture of styles. The base looks Doric, while the fluting does not (cf. Abeken, *Ann. Inst.*, 1840, p. 31). The whole was constructed of blocks of Gabine stone (sperone), which was extensively used in Roman times (Strabo, v. 3. 10, p. 238),¹ originally covered with stucco, and now of a beautiful brown



FIG. 7.—THE TEMPLE AT GABII.

colour. The front and side walls are the thickness of a single block (0.585–0.595 m.) and 14 courses are preserved, each 0.55–0.595 m. in height, giving a total height (as at present existing) of 28 feet. The blocks are of various lengths. The whole cella² measures 13.54 by 8.38 m. inside: the doorway is 2.38 m. wide. Spurwalls project 2.14 m. on each side of the back wall, which is 1.15 m. thick. The floor was paved with white mosaic of "palombino"³ (now almost completely destroyed), assigned by those

¹ See also Tacitus, *Ann.* xv. 43. 4.

² See plan, Fig. 8.

³ A white marble from Asia Minor (marmor coralliticum, Plin. *H.N.* xxxvi. 62).

2 Dora Bulwer, "The Temple at Gabii", in: Thomas Ashby, "The Classical Topography of the Roman Campagna: Part I", in: *Papers of the British School at Rome*, I (1902), p. 183, Fig. 7

Agnes and Dora Bulwer would have belonged to both the worlds of the Italian post-Risorgimento and that of the British expatriates. Similarly, Thomas Ashby and his friend and colleague Rodolfo Lanciani (1845–1929), an archaeologist, engineer, and topographer, whose stellar career was crowned by his nomination as senator of the Kingdom of Italy in 1911, had a foot in both worlds. Ashby and Lanciani would both credit Dora Bulwer for conceding her photographs of archaeological sites for their publications.¹⁸ Moreover, in his book *The Roman Campagna in Classical Times* (1927), Ashby credited Agnes too,¹⁹ and in an article published in 1928 he wrote that he considered Dora a "valente fotografa" ("gifted photographer").²⁰ His inclusions of Dora Bulwer's work served to illustrate ongoing archaeological digs and, as such, aimed at scientific precision. Nonetheless, he also reproduced photographs of archaeological ruins in which locals or other archaeologists and travellers posed, such as a photo that shows four figures, either sitting or standing, in the ruins of the temple at Gabii near Rome (Fig. 2), published in one of the first issues of the *Papers of the British School at Rome* in 1902.

Both Ashby and Lanciani would also glue Agnes and Dora Bulwer's photographs into their albums. Ashby and Lanciani's albums have yet to be studied comparatively so that assumptions about their criteria of selection can only be made with caution. The Bulwer photographs of archaeological sites and landscapes did not conform to the traditional archaeological photography, which tended to adopt a romantic aesthetic in contradiction to its role as "a unique and objective record of the ancient, uncov-

¹⁸ Thomas Ashby, "The Classical Topography of the Roman Campagna: Part I", in: *Papers of the British School at Rome*, I (1902), pp. 125–285: 142, 171, 183, 190; *idem*, *The Roman Campagna in Classical Times*, London 1927, pp. 6, 99, 116, 118, 132, 139, 159, 192, 196, 213, 214, 218, 232; *idem*/William James Anderson/Phene Spiers, *The Architecture of Ancient Rome*, London 1927, p. X, pls. XLIII, LXVIII; *idem*/Samuel Ball Platner, *A Topographical*

Dictionary of Ancient Rome, London 1929, pp. 6f., 402f.; Rodolfo Lanciani, *Wanderings in the Roman Campagna*, London 1909, pp. 21, 92, 210.

¹⁹ Ashby 1927 (note 18), p. 6.

²⁰ *Idem*, "Scrittori contemporanei di cose romane: Rodolfo Lanciani", in: *Archivio della Reale Società Romana di Storia Patria*, LI (1928), pp. 103–126: 126.

²¹ Christina Riggs, "Photography and Antiquity in the Archive, or How

ered past”.²¹ Archaeological photography from the period has been the object of a number of scholarly publications, with Michael Shanks uncovering a sensory, phenomenological aspect to the genre,²² as opposed to Stephanie Klamm’s more dispassionate conclusions on such photographs as “vehicles of thought” that “articulated knowledge about the past”.²³ Although the French author and archaeologist Prosper Mérimée claimed that “prohibiting the imagination is the archaeologist’s first duty”, this idea has since been questioned because of archaeological photography’s underlying “consciousness of loss” and “a melancholy of the past within the present”.²⁴ In his comprehensive overview of scholarship on the matter, Frederick Bohrer opts for the middle ground, observing that “almost no corpus of archaeological photography employed the ‘objective’ mode exclusively, but it is a measure of the scientific claim of modern archaeology that its photography largely eschews aesthetic or experiential effect for systematic, exhaustive documentation”.²⁵

Agnes and Dora Bulwer’s work subverts the scientifically rigorous spirit of archaeological photography by including social aspects in their photographs. For example, in a picture taken outside the ancient Roman walls of the city of Cori in Lazio (Fig. 3), local children and adults, some dressed in patched-up clothes, look attentively towards the photographer and her lens. This atypical approach to archaeological and landscape photography, which appears from the beginning of their photographic practice in the 1890s, sets the sisters apart from the work of well-known photographers such as Timothy O’Sullivan, Louis De Clercq, or Francis Frith, who would, at



3 Agnes and Dora Bulwer, *Cori, polygonal wall*, ca. 1890–1913. British School at Rome, Photographic Archive, Dora & Agnes Bulwer Collection, inv. DAB-II.061

Howard Carter Moved the Road to the Valley of the Kings”, in: *History of Photography*, XL (2016), pp. 267–282: 282.

²² Michael Shanks, “Photography and Archaeology”, in: *The Cultural Life of Images: Visual Representation in Archaeology*, ed. by Brian Leigh Molyneux, London/New York 1997, pp. 73–107: 100.

²³ Stephanie Klamm, “Reconfiguring the Use of Photography in Ar-

chaeology”, in: *Hybrid Photography*, ed. by eadem/Sara Hillnhuetter/Friedrich Tietjen, London/New York 2021, pp. 116–127: 124.

²⁴ Frederick N. Bohrer, “Edges of Art: Photographic Albums, Archaeology, and Representation”, in: *Art and the Early Photographic Album*, ed. by Stephen Bann, Washington, DC, 2011, pp. 221–235: 224.

²⁵ *Idem*, *Photography and Archaeology*, London 2011, p. 50.

most, include human figures for scale and rarely as valid subjects in themselves.²⁶

At this point, it is important to open a brief parenthesis on the genre of landscape photography, which, as has been argued in scholarship since Deborah Bright's seminal article published in 1985, was (and still is) a man's prerogative.²⁷ Landscape photography is synonymous with the invention of photography, which corresponded to a period of empire-building and a drive for nationalism among Western countries. It is constituted by a lineage of male, Euro-American photographer-surveyors such as the above-mentioned O'Sullivan, De Clercq, and Frith. These men would accompany state-funded expeditions into uncharted territories such as the American West, North Africa, or the Middle East as part of colonial quests to map and chart resources. Landscape photography, in the same way as archaeological and anthropological photography, was a tool of soft power within the colonial enterprise that helped claim 'visual ownership' of foreign territories through images.²⁸ Images of landscape, as W. J. T. Mitchell observed in his seminal book *Landscape and Power* (1994), embody political ideologies and act as agents of power, in particular in connection to imperialism.²⁹ How can we discuss the role of women working with landscape photography in the Victorian and Edwardian periods within a Western patriarchal society?

Cultural geographers have argued that landscape photography remains an "expression of a panoptic and repressive gaze upon the world, one which paralyses, stifles and constrains".³⁰ This gaze was identi-

fied as masculine by the feminist geographer Gillian Rose.³¹ While landscape photography was often used as an instrument of power and colonial domination, Agnes and Dora Bulwer's interaction with, and immersion into, landscape or ruins develops a visual language that questions the idea of ocularcentrism and human domination through the camera. Their work therefore arguably marks a shift away from a Western colonial view to a lived-in vision of the landscape. For example, their photograph of the sulphur mines (*solfatare*) at Torre Caldara near Anzio, glued into Ashby's ninth album, shows a close-up of the rock formations of the quarry (Fig. 4). The sisters, wearing the fairly constrictive clothing of the period, can be considered intrepid for venturing into an uncomfortable location such as hot and malodorous sulphur mines. The photograph's close-up framing and straight-on angle indicate they were not satisfied with surveying the mine from a distance. The image is split down the middle by the electrifying zig-zag of the opening in the rocks and earth.

Also judging by the photographs taken in perilous and hard-to-reach contexts during a summer trip to the south of France in 1897 (Figs. 5, 8), the sisters were undaunted by physical or atmospheric challenges. In the region around Brive-la-Gaillarde, they produced a series of photographs of cave dwellings, proving their physical adaptability as well as their dedication to the medium as they climbed up into the caves, taking pictures in darkness as well as from unexpected angles, as in the dramatically oblique view on the caves of Lamouroux (Fig. 5). This particular shot

²⁶ For further reading on colonial photography, see *Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place*, ed. by Eleanor M. Hight/Gary D. Sampson, London/New York 2002.

²⁷ Deborah Bright, "Of Mother Nature and Marlboro Men: An Inquiry into the Cultural Meanings of Landscape Photography", in: *Exposure*, XXIII (1985), 4, pp. 5–18. For a further discussion of photographic genres in relation to landscape, see David Bate, *Photography: The Key Concepts*, London 2016, pp. 122–126.

²⁸ For further discussion on the relationship between photography and

archaeology, see Frederick N. Bohrer, "Photography and Archaeology: The Image as Object", in: *Envisioning the Past: Archaeology and the Image*, ed. by Stephanie Moser/Sam Smiles, Malden, Mass., 2005, pp. 180–191, and Shanks (note 22).

²⁹ W. J. T. Mitchell, "Introduction", in: *Landscape and Power*, ed. by *idem*, Chicago/London 1994, pp. 1–4: 2.

³⁰ John Wylie, *Landscape*, London 2007, p. 51.

³¹ Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*, Minneapolis 1993.



4 Agnes and Dora Bulwer, *Solfatara at Torre Caldara*,
Anzio, ca. 1890-1913. British School at Rome,
Photographic Archive, Dora & Agnes Bulwer Collection,
inv. DAB-I.074



5 Agnes and Dora Bulwer,
Cave dwellings of Lamouroux,
Brive-la-Gaillarde, 8 July 1897.
British School at Rome,
Photographic Archive, Dora &
Agnes Bulwer Collection,
inv. Bulwer(e).15a

6 Esther Van Deman,
Path up to Pithecusa, Ischia,
1912. American Academy in
Rome, Photographic Archive,
inv. VanDeman.1469



7 Agnes and Dora Bulwer, *Group of scholars on excursion to Frascati*, 1903. British School at Rome, Photographic Archive, Dora & Agnes Bulwer Collection, inv. DAB[PHP]-9.62

has a disorienting effect on the viewer, translating as an experiential, sensory connection to the rock. The French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological thinking helps to describe the Bulwer sisters' immersive approach to landscape: "Visible and mobile, my body is a thing amongst things; it is one of them. It is caught in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing."³²

The similarities between the Bulwer sisters' practice and that of the archaeologist and photographer Esther Van Deman, who was working at the American School of Classical Studies (the forerunner to the American Academy in Rome) from 1895, can be seen

in the unusual and daring strategies that all three photographers adopted to occupy the space around them. In Van Deman's picture *Path up to Pithecusa* (Fig. 6), taken in 1912 from within a stratified ravine on Ischia, the grains of earth are visible to the right-hand side of the frame due to the proximity of the camera to the soil. A number of Van Deman's landscapes are characterised by such a proto-modernist vision that uses daring, close-up angles and a quasi-forensic approach to materials and geological strata. While Van Deman is only recorded as going on archaeological trips with Lanciani and Ashby,³³ a Bulwer photograph from 1903 in which Ashby, seated to the far left, and Van

³² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind", in: *The Essential Writings of Merleau-Ponty*, ed. by Alden L. Fisher, New York 1969, pp. 351–378: 356.

³³ Welch (note 13), p. 71.



8 Agnes and Dora Bulwer,
The Tarn river valley, ca. 1890–
1913. British School at Rome,
Photographic Archive, Dora
& Agnes Bulwer Collection,
inv. Bulwer(misc).100

Deman, seated to the far right, are posing with others amid ruins (Fig. 7) proves that the women photographers would have known each other at least from that moment and probably exchanged ideas about their photographic practices.

However, the Bulwer sisters also played with the camera in ways that prefigure modernist perspectives,

as though learning from the technological eye rather than imposing a specific perspective on it. They seem to have placed the camera at uncommon heights or in unexpected places in order to achieve unusual results. Their experiments with landscape counteract the idea of the colonial Western gaze which affirmed itself as objective, authoritative, and accurate,³⁴ suggesting instead a merging with the environment. On the same trip to France in the summer of 1897, the sisters appear to have placed their camera close to a rushing gorge on the river Tarn. Due to the exposure time, in a section of the photograph the water appears blurred, giving the image a sense of speed and vigour (Fig. 8).

In their urban photographs, Agnes and Dora Bulwer adopted atypical perspectives and angles which tended towards de-monumentalising well-known landmarks. They achieved this effect through the deliberate inclusion of trees, plants or traces of working-class habitats in the foreground of Roman architectural grandeur. In their view of the Basilica of Saint Peter's (Fig. 9), half of the frame is occupied by washing lines at different heights, a patch of cobblestones, an overgrown hedge, and a wooden fence. The monumentality of the basilica is scaled back and the building is given a human quality with a focus on everyday lives. In another photograph, a majestic tree obstructs a remote view of the basilica of San Giovanni a Porta Latina (Fig. 10). The Tomb of Bibulus is surrounded by an array of building materials for the construction of the monument to King Vittorio Emanuele II (Fig. 11).³⁵ The angle renders the tomb and the Palazzetto Venezia in the background practically unrecognisable. These urban photographs play with touristic expectations of Roman landmarks by using the elements of surprise and obstruction, thus subverting the traditional picturesque views for which the city was famous.

³⁴ Wylie (note 30), p. 121.

³⁵ The connection to the construction of the monument is established

on the page of the BSR Digital Collections: <https://digitalcollections.bsr.ac.uk/islandora/object/BULWER:40> (accessed on 13 November 2022).



9 Agnes and Dora Bulwer,
Basilica di San Pietro
(Vatican City), ca. 1890-
1913. British School at
Rome, Photographic Archive,
Dora & Agnes Bulwer
Collection, inv. DAB-IV.016

10 Agnes and Dora Bulwer,
San Giovanni a Porta
Latina, ca. 1890-1913.
British School at Rome,
Photographic Archive, Dora &
Agnes Bulwer Collection,
inv. DAB-IV.006

11 Agnes and Dora Bulwer,
Remains of the so-called
Tomb of Claudii or
Tomb of Bibulus, Piazza
Venezia, ca. 1890-1911.
British School at Rome,
Photographic Archive, Dora &
Agnes Bulwer Collection,
inv. Bulwer(a).XI.02a



2. Archaeology, Women's Emancipation, and Social Photography

Women's mobility was limited at the time and, as Giorgia Alù observes, contemporary travel studies still tend to assume a "male traveller" and "male activities such as adventure, conquest, exploration and exploitation" when discussing travel photography.³⁶ While such journeys did, on the whole, tend to be undertaken by men, scholarship has brought to light women archaeologists and photographers who travelled and worked on site, such as Gertrude Bell and Esther Van Deman, whose activity is testified by their photographic archives.³⁷ In order to establish their role within the colonial period, these women deserve to be studied in further depth and in relation to one another.

Agnes and Dora Bulwer's expert use of the large format camera challenged expectations of women's behaviour in the Victorian era, as did the freedom with which they chose their photographic subjects. Dora Bulwer's photographs from the mid-1890s prove that she would accompany Lanciani and Ashby on archaeological walks into the Roman Campagna.³⁸ These walks provided occasions for encounters between social classes and have been interpreted as a way of embodying Britishness.³⁹ The British had (and still have) a "culturally ingrained belief in the value of outdoor walking" as "something common, shared and understood".⁴⁰ The walks also provided women with interesting occasions to socialise in and around Rome. Many of them were organised by the British and American Archaeological Society, founded by

British photographer and collector John Henry Parker in 1865.⁴¹ The society provided opportunities for expatriates to gather at lectures and tours and to learn from Italian and international archaeologists active in Rome.⁴²

At its peak in the 1890s, the society counted thirty-three full members, of which only one was a woman (Lady Luisa Legge, from 1884 onwards).⁴³ On the other hand, most of the ninety-two associate members were women. The difference between associate and full members remains unclear but may have been connected to the level of financial donations or to an individual's professional status. In 1891–1892, the British chemist and archaeologist Ludwig Mond was on the society's board of members, while his wife Frida and her friend Henriette Hertz were listed as associate members. Hertz, who worked towards founding the Bibliotheca Hertziana, a world-famous library for art history in Rome, is also documented as joining the British School at Rome in 1902. While I have not yet found other connections between Hertz and the Bulwers, what emerges from the membership lists is a tight-knit international community with philanthropic means and a shared passion for archaeology.

The network established by the society created a space in which women authors and scholars began to gain ground from the 1890s onwards. Among the women who gave papers at the British and American Archaeological Society were Countess Ersilia Caetani Lovatelli, whose salons were frequented by Nikolai Gogol, and Countess Florence Gautier. Gau-

³⁶ Giorgia Alù, *Journeys Exposed: Women's Writing, Photography and Mobility*, New York 2019, p. 27.

³⁷ For an overview of pioneering women archaeologists, some of whom used photography, see *Breaking Ground* (note 13).

³⁸ Many of these early photographs are held at the Fondo Rodolfo Lanciani at the Biblioteca di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte, Rome.

³⁹ Wylie (note 30), p. 130.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ For Parker's collection see Jean-Philippe Garric, "The Parker Collec-

tion: Beyond the Illustration of Roman Archaeology", in: *The Idea of Italy: Photography and the British Imagination, 1840–1900*, ed. by Scott Wilcox/Maria Antonella Pelizzari, New Haven, Conn., 2022, pp. 154–159.

⁴² Robert Coates-Stephens, "Rome in the Photographs of Father Peter Paul Mackey", in: *Immagini e memoria: Rome in the Photographs of Father Peter Paul Mackey 1890–1901*, exh. cat. London 2009, ed. by *idem*, Rome 2009, pp. II–37: 30.

⁴³ *Journal of the British and American Archaeological Society of Rome: With List of Members*, II, 5 (1894–1895), [p. ii]; *ibidem*, I, I (1884–1885), [p. ii].

tier is recorded as participating on the same walks in the Roman Campagna on which Dora Bulwer, Lanciani, and Ashby went, sometimes accompanied by the art historian, archaeologist, and woman of society Eugénie Sellers Strong, Ashby's future assistant director at the British School at Rome.⁴⁴ Gautier is the first woman recorded to have delivered her lecture by herself in 1895. Before then, as can be elucidated from the society's proceedings which document the trips, events, lectures, and readings organised, women's lectures would be read out by men, whereas the men appeared free to personally lecture their audiences. The first woman to feature as a contributor was Caroline Cardinali in 1887, yet her paper was read by Captain Richard Moore of the Royal Navy.⁴⁵ As revealed by the increasing presence of women at the British and American Archaeological Society between 1884 and 1912, Agnes and Dora Bulwer belonged to a social group in which women were gaining space while still remaining subaltern in many respects.

In the wake of the radical changes brought about by industrialisation and urbanisation in the United States and Britain, "there was an interest in raising the level of women's education", which meant that a number of middle-class women began seeking ways to widen their personal horizon.⁴⁶ While there is no evidence to date of Agnes and Dora Bulwer being associated to the suffragette movement, there are a number of indications that they leaned towards progressive values, such as not marrying, travelling extensively to physically challenging areas, and frequently photographing women, with no apparent distinction between their social standing.

Many of their photographs of working women – such as washerwomen, women baking, drawing water



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12 Agnes and Dora Bulwer, *Washerwomen at the fountain, Subiaco*, 1893. British School at Rome, Photographic Archive, Dora & Agnes Bulwer Collection, Bulwer Album B, inv. Bulwer(b).80

from fountains, or holding market stalls, and mothers minding children – offer an anthropological and even feminist view on the ways in which working-class women lived. The documentary intent behind a photograph of a public wash fountain in Subiaco (Fig. 12), for example, is clear from the space dedicated to the large white sheets hanging at different heights. They are strung across the ancient fortification walls of the city or draped over the ruins to the

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, II, 5 (1894–1895), [p. ii].

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, I, 4 (1887–1888), pp. 129–131.

⁴⁶ Marina Picazo, "The First Women Archaeologists in Crete", in: *Excavating Women: A History of Women in European Archaeology*, ed. by Margarita Díaz-Andreu/Marie Louise Stig Sørensen, London/New York 1998, pp. 198–213: 200.

13 Agnes and Dora Bulwer,
Grape-pickers, Amalfi,
ca. 1890–1913. British
School at Rome, Photographic
Archive, Dora & Agnes
Bulwer Collection,
inv. Bulwer(misc).039



left of the photograph, indicating how contemporary Italians had repurposed the city ruins.

This perspective, which collapses the passing of time and shows how lived-in the ancient ruins were, recalls the Bulwers' representation of certain revered monuments as dwarfed by trees, animated by washing-lines or hidden by construction materials (Figs. 9–II). A characteristic that often returns throughout their work is the awareness that Italians did not consider ruins in splendid isolation or museified. On the contrary, they were part of their everyday lives,

an attitude which Agnes and Dora Bulwer documented with what I have previously argued was equivalent to an early humanitarian gaze.⁴⁷

The sisters' interest in local life emerges not only in their archaeological photographs, but also appears in portraits of peasants, such as that of the grape-pickers pausing under the vines for the time of the shot (Fig. 13). The relationship between the photographers and their sitters is hard to define. An important aspect of this exchange, as the historian David Hopkin observes in his study on Rachel Busk, a folklore enthusi-

⁴⁷ Martina Caruso, "Agnes and Dora Bulwer's Photographs of Everyday Italians", in: *The Idea of Italy* (note 41), pp. 222–227.

ast who lived in Rome, was that “British women writers in Italy [...] had stepped out of the obligations of the British class system” and “felt enabled to enjoy associations with peasants and workers that they would never have encountered at home, except with servants”.⁴⁸ Incidentally, Busk may have known Agnes and Dora Bulwer through her sister Frances Rosalie Vansittart, who had moved to Rome with her four children after an acrimonious divorce.⁴⁹ Vansittart is cited as a member of the British and American Archaeological Society in 1895, and her relative (perhaps daughter) Emily Christina Vansittart was a close friend of Agnes and Dora Bulwer, as proven by the numerous dedications

from “E. C. Vansittart” in the Bulwer book collection held at the British School at Rome.

The Bulwers’ interest in workers and peasants, possibly motivated by an anthropological, political, or philanthropic interest, can be paralleled to that of the Italian realist movement with authors like Giovanni Verga and artists like Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo and Giovanni Segantini. The Italians of the post-Risorgimento generation were seeking to dignify common people and give them a voice previously not afforded to them. Photographers like Giacomo Caneva and Count Giuseppe Primoli were among the first Italians to photograph street life, beggars, and peasants.⁵⁰



14 Esther Van Deman, *Anna Salvati standing, Tivoli, 1913 (?)*. American Academy in Rome, Photographic Archive, inv. VanDeman.1259

⁴⁸ David Hopkin, “British Women Folklorists in Post-Unification Italy: Rachel Busk and Evelyn Martinengo-Cesaresco”, in: *Folklore*, CXXVIII (2017), pp. 189–197: 196.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 190.

⁵⁰ For further information on Italian photographers’ representations of their fellow countrymen, see Beth Saunders, *Developing Italy: Photography*

The 1890s in Italy were a time of social upheaval, when labour unions and anarchist movements were founded, workers and miners went on strike and agrarian revolts ensued, announcing the dawn of anarcho-syndicalism. This period of unrest was further defined by the resounding defeat of the First Italo-Ethiopian War (1895–1896), which reinforced a nationalist feeling of shame and the colonial desire for a rematch. In light of this avenging spirit, progressive Italian intellectuals focused on a different type of social change by reading Marx, Hegel, Tolstoy, and Gorky, which inspired a revolutionary humanitarian socialism.⁵¹

Supported by the *Unione Femminile Nazionale* (National Women's Union), one of the first official Italian women's associations founded in 1899, the feminist author Sibilla Aleramo, shocked by the abject poverty of the *Agro Romano* (the rural surrounds of Rome), joined forces with Anna Fraentzel Celli to fight malaria and illiteracy. Together with artists, poets, and men of letters, they set up humanitarian schools for children and adults who lived in miserable conditions.⁵² A note from Dora Bulwer to the *Federazione Femminile di Roma* dated 23 March 1902 attests to her connection to this association for the promotion of women's activities, which had been founded in 1900.⁵³ This federation in turn engendered the *Industrie Femminili Italiane* (Italian Women's Industries), an organisation founded in 1903 by, among others, the photographer, writer and suffragism promoter Countess Maria Pasolini Ponti, the writer Amelia Pincherle Rosselli (the future mother of the antifascist brothers Carlo and Nello Rosselli), and the American philanthropist Cora Slocomb, who

was married to the Italian Count Detalmo Savorgnan di Brazzà. The *Industrie Femminili Italiane* sought to support craftswomen and to free women from brutal domestic exploitation by allowing them to become actionists in the cooperative.

In light of these associations, Agnes and Dora Bulwer's photographs of women at work, like Van Deman's photographs from the same period, indicate that their choice of subjects may have been driven by more than anthropological curiosity of the 'other'. Katherine Welch, who comments on Van Deman's humanitarian orientation and keen observation of peasant women, conjectures as to the reasons behind the archaeologist's propensity to take portraits such as the one of Anna Salvati striking a powerful, quasi-formidable pose before her grapevines (Fig. 14).⁵⁴ Welch suspects that Esther Van Deman perhaps "permitted a 'gentler' side of her personality to emerge when she was outside of the competitive archaeological circles of Rome" and goes on to ask: "Could she have had a farmwoman's natural feeling of kinship for *contadine* (peasant women)?" Welch suggests the photographer may have taken these portraits out of politeness, in order to "gain access to the material she wished to study".⁵⁵ Possibly, both the Bulwer sisters' and Van Deman's attention to rural women's lives were part of the raised awareness of female roles promoted by the phil-anthropic feminist movements in the *Agro Romano*.

In one of Dora Bulwer's early photographs taken in 1894 near the archaeological site of Gabii, children pose for the camera in front of huts built from mud and straw (Fig. 15). The photograph was glued by Ashby in his ninth album. No doubt, Ashby must

and National Identity during the Risorgimento, 1839–1859, PhD diss., City University of New York, 2016, and *Roma 1840–1870* (note 11). For more on British photographers' representations of Italian folklore and poverty, see Maria Antonella Pelizzari, "Staging the Tourist Site: Photography, Performance, and the British Encounter", in: *The Idea of Italy* (note 41), pp. 68–87: 84f.

⁵¹ Nicoletta Cardano, "La mostra dell'Agro Romano", in: *Roma 1911:*

catalogo, exh. cat., ed. by Gianna Piantoni, Rome 1980, pp. 178–188: 183.

⁵² Richard Drake, "Sibilla Aleramo and the Peasants of the Agro Romano: A Writer's Dilemma", in: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, LI (1990), pp. 255–272: 260.

⁵³ Bucci (note 1), p. 100.

⁵⁴ Welch (note 13), p. 94.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.



15 Dora Bulwer, *A village of straw huts at Conca di Castiglione near Gabii, Campagna di Roma*, 16 March 1894. British School at Rome, Photographic Archive, Dora & Agnes Bulwer Collection, inv. DAB-II.004

have been struck by the fact that contemporary Romans were still building primitive huts like their distant proto-Roman ancestors. However, perhaps the Bulwer's interest in photographing the children in the foreground was due to their philanthropic desire to raise awareness about the abject living conditions in the Agro Romano, indicating a humanitarianism inherent to much of their work.

In conformity to this vision, the sisters also had an interest in irregular dwellings, as can be seen in particular in their urban photographs. In a picture taken

at the Aurelian Wall (Fig. 16), a mesh of buildings, trellises, roof tiles, and trees obscures the Roman wall in the background, nearly entirely filling the image. Van Deman's photograph of a similar theme (Fig. 17) shows a shack clearly standing out against the Aurelian Wall as an alien addition. The Bulwers' image, on the contrary, with its blended architectures and the erasure of differences between the monumental and the vernacular prioritises an abstract quality. The casual way the local inhabitants integrated their built environment with ancient historical monuments suggests



16 Agnes and Dora Bulwer, *Houses and terrace near the Aurelian Walls (?)*, Rome, ca. 1890–1913. British School at Rome, Photographic Archive, Dora & Agnes Bulwer Collection, inv. Bulwer(a).XI.02

an idea of a temporal continuity with the past. This perspective, humanitarian in its inclusivity, counters the traditional view that such buildings were unsightly. Eugénie Strong, assistant director at the British School, articulates this latter opinion in her review of the archaeological exhibition within the *Esposizione Internazionale* in 1911, where she comments the recent restoration of the venue: “In 1907, at the instigation of Corrado Ricci [...], a law was passed allowing the expropriation of the miserable hovels which disfigured the ruins.”⁵⁶ Although the Bulwer photographs are not

dated, they record a reality that would soon have disappeared altogether under the fascist reconstruction projects which aimed to clean up any such buildings, considered unhygienic and non-aesthetic. Pasolini Ponti, who in 1903 helped found the *Associazione Artistica fra i Cultori di Architettura* with the aim of preserving vernacular architecture in the changing Roman cityscape, promoted a different approach to these ‘miserable hovels’.⁵⁷ The *Associazione Artistica* sought to reach as wide a public as possible through exhibitions and publications, in particular with a large

⁵⁶ Eugénie Sellers Strong, “The Exhibition Illustrative of the Provinces of the Roman Empire, at the Baths of Diocletian, Rome”, in: *The Journal of Roman Studies*, I (1911), pp. 1–49: 2.

⁵⁷ Lindsay Harris, *Picturing Progress: Photography, Primitivism, and the Modern Italian Landscape, 1910–1955* (forthcoming).



17 Esther Van Deman, *Aurelian Walls*, 1911. American Academy in Rome, Photographic Archive, inv. VanDeman.74

photographic show at the Farnesina in 1905.⁵⁸ Once more, it is unknown whether Agnes and Dora Bulwer knew Pasolini Ponti; however, their interest in vernacular architecture may have been influenced by her extensive public outreach endeavours.

3. Solitary Female Figures in the Landscape: Romantic Throwback or Feminist Emancipation?

Agnes and Dora Bulwer's photographs frequently feature solitary women as subjects in the distance or turned away from the camera. In a picture taken in

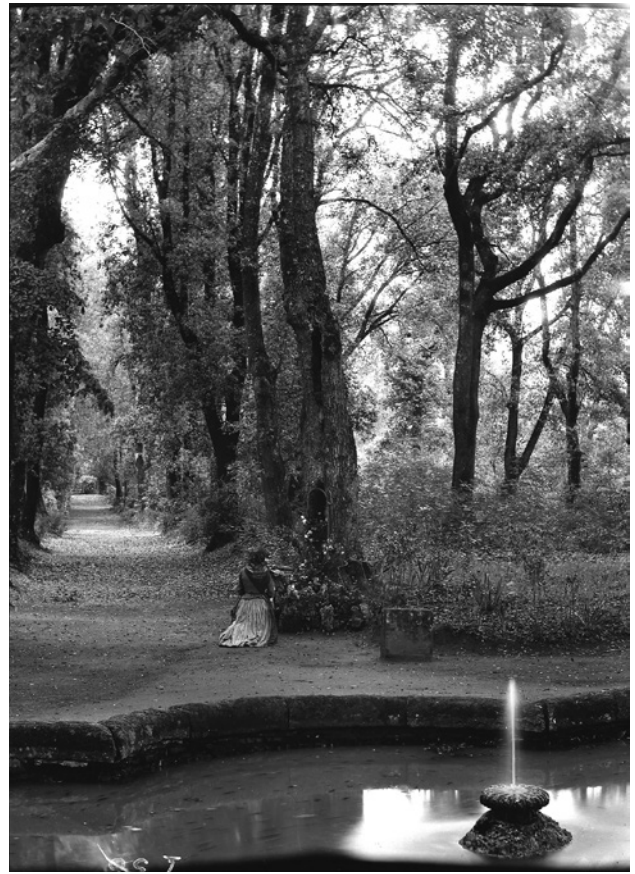
the Palazzo dei Papi in Viterbo (Fig. 18), a woman half-hides from the camera as she perches on the edge of a fountain in ruins, as though she were a part of the foliage that has taken over the once thriving religious centre that was the papal palace from the thirteenth century. The restoration of the fountain began in 1897,⁵⁹ so the shot would date to the mid-1890s at the latest. In the same album, a photograph taken at Villa Lante in Bagnaia shows a woman kneeling before an old tree which appears to host a shrine (Fig. 19). She has turned her back to the viewer, while

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*. Photographs were the preferred modern medium to push for the conservation of archaeological ruins.

⁵⁹ Cecilia Piana Agostinetti, *Fontane a Viterbo: presenze vive in città*, Rome 1985, pp. 102f.



18 Agnes and Dora Bulwer, *Fountain in the loggia of the Palazzo dei Papi, Viterbo*, ca. 1890–1913. British School at Rome, Photographic Archive, Dora & Agnes Bulwer Collection, inv. DAB-I.024



19 Agnes and Dora Bulwer, *Villa Lante, Bagnaia*, ca. 1890–1913. British School at Rome, Photographic Archive, Dora & Agnes Bulwer Collection, inv. DAB-I.050

a fountain foregrounds the avenue of trees beyond. In a photograph made near Tivoli, a woman, whose clothes seem to dissolve into the landscape, is resting on her side in the shade of an olive tree (Fig. 20). She wears a casual bowler hat and a knapsack on her back and stares into the distance, in an atypically relaxed stance for a woman of this time. Given the facial resemblance, this person could be the same woman as the one photographed in 1890 sitting on the outskirts of Genazzano, possibly Agnes or Dora Bulwer (Fig. 1). The comparison between these two last photos highlights the problems arising from the desire to identify the sitters in order to gather more

details about the lives of the Bulwer sisters. Writing at a time when computerised facial recognition has been proven biased, it is necessary to relinquish this type of hypothesis until factual information can ascertain specific identities.

Many mysteries shroud the Bulwer photographs. Not only do we not know who their female subjects were, which sister took which photograph, or how they printed their work, but we also have little idea of where they may have learned their skills. Bucci traces their photographic passion to their association from an early age with two prominent British photographers who were friends of their parents: Robert Macpher-



20 Agnes and Dora Bulwer, *Villa of Ventidius Bassus, substructions, Tivoli*, ca. 1890–1913. British School at Rome, Photographic Archive, Dora & Agnes Bulwer Collection, inv. Bulwer(a).XI.42

son and James Graham, well-known for their picturesque views of Rome.⁶⁰ Beth Saunders suggests that the photographers would have stayed at the Bulwers' neoclassical home, the Villa d'Angri in Posillipo in the elegant coastal neighbourhood of Naples, in the 1850s and 1860s.⁶¹ Their acquaintance would have served as Agnes and Dora Bulwer's introduction to the world of photography. Corroborating this hypothe-

sis, the British School holds two views of the Villa d'Angri by Macpherson and sixty-two by Graham.⁶² Graham also took the *Portrait of Mrs Jean Hamilton Bulwer with her daughter Agnes* from circa 1860 which is held in the Fratelli Alinari Collection and shows Agnes as a child, sitting at her mother's feet.⁶³

The British expatriate network played an important role in the sisters' Italian lives. Their British lives

⁶⁰ Bucci (note 1), p. 98.

⁶¹ Beth Saunders, "Following the Paper Trail: British Calotypists in Italy", in: *The Idea of Italy* (note 41), pp. 28–47: 43f.

⁶² Bucci (note 1), p. 98.

⁶³ This discovery was made by Maria Antonella Pelizzari and published by Saunders (note 61), p. 43.

however, which began around the start of the First World War, are not the subject of much documentation. There are only a few photographs of the United Kingdom, taken at Devonport, Dartmouth, Maidenhead, and Ingatestone in Essex, which can presumably be dated to before 1913 and would have been taken on occasional trips north. One of these photographs, taken at Saint Leonard's Grange in Essex, is a pictorialist experiment, as though directly influenced by Peter Henry Emerson (Fig. 21). The image, bathed in a sepia light, shows a swan nesting in the rushes on a peaceful lake with a country house in the far distance.

However, it is impossible to ascertain whether the sisters had come across Emerson's work as a result of their trips to the United Kingdom. The only clear indication that the Bulwers had photographic relationships with their homeland lies at the National Archives in Kew, where documents signed by Agnes on 15 August 1910 indicate that she accessioned ten photographs of an embroidered cope in the treasure of Anagni cathedral to the archives for copyright reasons.⁶⁴ This series of pictures, taken on 16 April of the same year, also attests to Agnes' tangential involvement in the British Historical Section of the



21 Agnes and Dora Bulwer, *St. Leonard's Grange, Ingatestone, Essex, United Kingdom*, ca. 1890-1913. British School at Rome, Photographic Archive, Dora & Agnes Bulwer Collection, inv. Bulwer(b).43

⁶⁴ Kew, The National Archives, COPY I/548/214-223.

Rome exhibition in 1911, where two of these photographs were exhibited.

Agnes' photographs of the Anagni cope detail the front, the back, the neckline, and the sleeves of the vestment (Fig. 22).⁶⁵ The two exhibited pictures were not reproduced or given inventory numbers in the catalogue *Souvenir of the British Section: International Fine Arts Exhibition Rome 1911*, which covered all the British contributions to the 1911 Rome exhibition.⁶⁶ However, they are described in the annual report of the British School at Rome as having been "coloured by Miss Pulley" and "placed in the British Historical Section of the Rome Exhibition".⁶⁷ Agnes Bulwer's collaborator was Rosamund Fanny Pulley, an artist who had graduated from the School of Art Kensington⁶⁸ and who "continued her study of English embroideries in Italy, visiting Anagni, where some especially interesting thirteenth-century work is preserved".⁶⁹

Agnes, however, was active herself as a painter, at least in her youth, leaving seven of her early drawings to the British School at Rome collections. A drawing of the Colosseum (Fig. 23) is dated to 1874, when Agnes would have been eighteen. The style is pastoral-romantic with ruins covered in a classical landscape. It is possible that Agnes continued her drawing activity in later years: she might in fact be the woman photographed sitting on a painter's stool turned away from the viewer in front of the Ponte Nomentano (Fig. 24) – an unwitting, or perhaps knowing, reference to Giuseppe Primoli's famous photograph of two women posing in front of the same bridge from 1896.

Further aspects of the Bulwer sisters' lives can be elucidated from the architect and amateur water-



22 Agnes Bulwer, *Detail of embroidered liturgical cope in the treasure of Anagni cathedral*, 16 April 1910. British School at Rome, Photographic Archive, Dora & Agnes Bulwer Collection, inv. Bulwer(misc).006

colourist Sydney Kitson's *Cotmania* diaries.⁷⁰ Kitson was a collector of works and memorabilia by, or connected to, the well-known artist John Sell Cotman (1782–1842).⁷¹ Cotman was a friend of Agnes and Dora's grandfather James Bulwer, a clergyman, ornithologist, and artist. It emerges from the correspondence in *Cotmania* that the Bulwer sisters had

⁶⁵ The National Archives, Kew, own ten photographs while the British School at Rome has eight in the Dora & Agnes Bulwer Collection. Presumably the two missing are the ones that were coloured and exhibited.

⁶⁶ Isidore Spielmann, *Souvenir of the British Section: International Fine Arts Exhibition Rome 1911*, exh. cat. Rome 1911, London 1911, pp. 531–538.

⁶⁷ *British School at Rome: Annual Report. 1910–1911*, London/Rome 1911, p. 7.

⁶⁸ *British School at Rome: Annual Report. 1906–1907*, London/Rome 1907, p. 12.

⁶⁹ *British School at Rome* (note 67), p. 7.

⁷⁰ The *Cotmania* diaries can be consulted online: <https://cotmania.org/> (accessed on 15 November 2022).

⁷¹ For further reading on Cotman, see: Marjorie Allthorpe-Guyton/Miklós Rajnai, *John Sell Cotman, 1782–1842: Early Drawings (1798–1812) in Norwich Castle Museum*, exh. cat., Norwich 1979; Andrew Moore/Norma Watt/Timothy Wilcox, *John Sell Cotman Master of Watercolour*, Norwich 2005; Timothy Wilcox, *Cotman in Normandy*, London 2013.



23 Agnes Bulwer, *Colosseum*,
1874. British School at Rome,
Dora & Agnes Bulwer Collection

inherited a vast collection of both Cotman and James Bulwer's works, some of which Kitson described on a visit to the Bulwers, who were living in Sussex in 1928.⁷² Both Cotman and Bulwer had a predilection for landscape drawing and painting and followed in the romantic style pioneered by, among others, John Constable (1776–1837) and William Turner (1775–1851). Kitson's account provides a little more context to the Bulwer sisters' visual culture and family background, which is further enriched by a photograph by Dora Bulwer showing the remains of the aqueduct near Tor Fiscale (Fig. 25), in which Bucci

has hypothesised that the elderly man reclining in the distance might be Archibald, the sisters' father.⁷³ The man's relaxed pose in the shade of an olive tree brings to mind the photograph of the young woman lying next to the remains of the villa of Ventidius Bassus (Fig. 20).

Conclusion

While the last century was characterised by the fight for the emancipation of women, on closer inspection, in many cases women's voices are still muted in the histories of art and photography today. It is use-

⁷² Sydney Kitson, *Cotmania*, 1927–1928, Leeds, Leeds Art Gallery Archive, n.p.; <https://cotmania.org/archives/sdk/1/2/1/2/47> (accessed on 8 August 2022).

⁷³ <https://digitalcollections.bsr.ac.uk/islandora/object/BULWER%3AI23> (accessed on 14 December 2022).



24 Agnes and Dora Bulwer, *Ponte Nomentano*, ca. 1890–1913. British School at Rome, Photographic Archive, Dora & Agnes Bulwer Collection, inv. Bulwer(misc).065

ful to think of the way in which the Bulwers' images helped produce an 'imagined community' that moved beyond that of the world of archaeology. While it is unclear how far their photographs circulated or were disseminated beyond archaeological treatises, books, and lectures, it is time to acknowledge the Bulwer sisters' curious and roving gaze.

The presence of the female subjects in their photographs can be interpreted both as a romantic heritage of the solitary dreamer who tends to be partly merged with the landscape and as a wilful placing of the female figure into spaces previously occupied by men. The Bulwer sisters were thus developing a practice of landscape photography, a principally male prerogative, on their own terms. They were in charge of heavy technological equipment and possibly of developing and

printing their photographs too, all the while dressed in the more constrictive clothing women wore at the time. One can evince from their wide-ranging travels and the physically challenging areas they reached that they were exceptionally, for the period, determined, courageous, and adventurous.

Although little is known of the sisters' practice and lives, the subversive perspectives of their photography nevertheless allows us to situate them in a counterhistory of landscape photography. They introduced women subjects outside the domestic space, thus offering an alternative to the traditional masculine gaze implicit in archaeological and landscape photography. Their photographs minimise or subvert the grandeur of ancient monuments by including vernacular architecture or by photographing



25 Dora Bulwer, *Remains of the aqueduct near Tor Fiscale*, ca. 1890–1913. British School at Rome, Photographic Archive, Dora & Agnes Bulwer Collection, inv. Bulwer(a).XI.73

them from a distance or behind trees or bed linen. Through their lens, the monuments and ruins, like their female subjects, tend to be woven into the landscape. This early experimental approach to an already established genre needs to be considered in a wider perspective.

The story of Agnes and Dora Bulwer and their acquaintances is only just starting to be written. As Griselda Pollock observes: “The canon is held in place by the power of the stories it tells about artists.”⁷⁴ The overlooked aspect of British photograph-

ic history taking place in post-Risorgimento Italy analysed in this article also reveals a number of nodal points of contact between the foreign and Italian elites. Italian and Anglo-American scholarship tends to focus on their national photographers operating in Rome as though in a solipsistic vacuum, often not acknowledging the rich tapestry of exchanges that took place within its international circle of liberal intellectuals which influenced the burgeoning humanitarian and feminist movements and their impact on visual culture.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*, London 1999, p. 40.

⁷⁵ I am grateful to the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art for supporting this research with an individual grant and to Valerie Scott and

Beatrice Gelosia for invaluable help with the archives at the British School at Rome. Moreover, I would like to thank Flora Roberts, Peter Campbell, Karin Ruggaber, and my anonymous readers, as well as Samuel Vitali and the editorial team of the *Mitteilungen* for numerous insights and enrichments.

Agnes and Dora Bulwer's landscape photographs of the Roman countryside from the 1890s through to circa 1913 offer a vision that challenged the dominant gaze as developed in Grand Tour photography, traditional vedutas of Rome and surrounding environments, or documentation of archaeological sites. Unfettered by the archaeologist's need for ascetic facts or the romantic's aspiration to isolated ruins, their extensive body of work offers an unusual perspective of urban views of Rome as well as landscapes of the Roman Campagna and beyond. Living within the progressive international environment of post-unification Italy, Agnes and Dora Bulwer often photographed women, whether Italian peasants or travelling companions from their own social group, adopting a socially engaged and gendered gaze. The analysis of their photographs helps us to reconsider their work in the light of a dawning international humanitarianism. In spite of their legacy of more than 1200 original prints and nearly 890 nitrate negatives to the British School at Rome, Agnes and Dora Bulwer remain relatively unknown in the growing group of rediscovered early female photographers connected to archaeology or travel photography. This article discusses their work within a cross-cultural and art historical analysis and seeks to contribute to the history of British landscape photography in Italy at the turn of the century.

British School at Rome: Figs. 1, 3–5, 7–13, 15, 16, 18–25. – From Ashby 1902 (note 18): Fig. 2. – Courtesy of the American Academy in Rome: Figs. 6, 14, 17.