



The Roman road

.....and the **yellow caps.**

by Stefano Cattani and Moreno Fiorini



TRANSLATION from the "handbook " : THE ROMAN ROADand the yellow caps"

Introduction:

Beyond the undisputed historical importance of the discovery of the so called Roman road of Bentivoglio , I wanted to write this semi-serious story to highlight the human side and the events of these last recent years spent together with a group of people, or rather, FRIENDS, the volunteers of the archaeological volunteer association HYDRIA (association of which I am pleased to be the vice-president) period which has anticipated the specific archaeological excavation on the stretch of the Roman road located between Castagnolo Minore and Santa Maria in Duno, that many peoples may have had the opportunity to visit.

Clearly, the work is not yet completed, the research of the road continues towards the north and sooner or later we will arrive at the river Po, where the friends of Ferrara archaeological volunteer groups are already waiting for us, prepared, we hope, to give us a hand.

This story began in 2016, when in the area now occupied by YOOX NET-A-PORTER GROUP, following archaeological investigations, a stretch of Roman road came to light, length of about 80 meters , width unknownbecause unfortunately a part of it remained buried under an adjacent private property.

Perhaps it's the " width unknown " fact that spurred us to begin this research, which started at first with empirical equipment, over time "implemented" to make it almost professional thanks to the help of the HYDRIA honorary member Mauro Maccagnani (aka MAC).

So, from 2017, with only a few months of interruption during which we washed tons of pieces of ceramics coming from the archaeological excavation of *Ponticelli di Malalbergo (but this is another story which merits another essay) the guys of HYDRIA social promotion and voluntary archaeological association have dedicated every Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning to drilling, in order to trace the route of the Roman road which goes from the Bologna highway to ... we will find out! During our " local county invasions" we have met a lot of people, not only very kind but also interested in our story, who have allowed us to "make holes" in their land. Among the many, I like to remember with great affection Giuseppe Trigari and Mrs. Nara, who on many occasions have welcomed us and heartily helped us regenerate in their home.

Our thanks go to all those who have supported us.

Enjoy the reading !

Summer 2017, one of the hottest of recent decades.

It's so hot that not only the smart ones sweat, the morons sweat as well (taken from a great song by the Italian singer Alfio Finetti).

While there are those who seek comfort from the heat in the cool of their homes or in the shade of trees, some people at the bottom of ditches and in the middle of fields are frantically busy sinking a hand drill into the ground. What are they looking for?

Hundreds of car drivers and truckers must have asked themselves this question while watching these poor folks dripping sweat with their back bent, engaged in turning a small jig, the "drilling auger".

This direct question comes from a smiling farmer who, approaching, candidly asks: *"C'sa fev? An stare megga zarcand l'acqua? What are you doing there? You're not really looking for water, right?"*

No, no ...and here is *Moreno's explanation: we are looking for a Roman road that may have passed through here or maybe there, or perhaps intersected with this one and maybe passed under the other one. In short, everything is to be assumed, all is to be discovered.

"But ... are you looking for it with that drill?" The farmer asks. *"But it's a great effort! With all the modern means available, you're going to be struggling with that thing?"* Of course it's a great effort, I confirm, if it were a pleasant, fun and relaxing pastime there wouldn't be three or four of us, there would be at least fifteen or twenty, guaranteed!

Clever person the farmer, big shoes and sharp brain. He's more than eighty years old, he says, and stays to watch as we stubbornly take the auger out of the ground and eagerly wait, hoping to find at least some trace of road presence.

He speaks to us with pride of his family, for 120 years they have been cultivating these lands, first his grandfather, then his father, then himself and now his son. I would not be surprised if he knew each and every clump of dirt... Then he says goodbye: *"I'm going to see if my wife noodles are ready"*.

He mounts his bike and leaves us with a joke: *"Let that one work, he has the biggest belly!"* We laugh through clenched teeth, the volunteer with the slightly protruding belly also laughs ... the joke is on him.

But this road, is it there or isn't it? It's there all right! While drilling, when you least expect it, you feel at the bottom of the hole the blade getting stuck between the coarse gravel and, moving the four meters of stainless steel rods you feel it, you

imagine it, you see it, you want to touch it and you are gratified. This feeling however is short lived, Moreno has already started looking for the next hole to drill. He does not even give us time to breathe, you have to pick up everything and leave. I, hallucinating, believe that from a cloud the Mother of God is calling, she holds out her arms and it seems like she wants to envelop me. I turn around and see Moreno moving away. I follow him. With his nervous legs it appears like he's flying over the ground, he stops, he extracts all the technological aids: Google maps, Google earth, Google... whatever, Wikipedia, scribbled maps and then begins to analyze, puts together in an imaginary line all the points where we felt the coarse gravel and declares: "*Here, we must drill here, it must definitely be here*". His conviction is such that nobody dares to contradict him and so the drilling starts again.

He does not give himself respite, he does not give us respite.

Meanwhile, the archaeologists have finished the excavation in *Ponticelli, there are tons of pottery that the town of Malalbergo has a duty to guard. A premises has been found which will be used as a warehouse but now comes the fun, the huge amount of ceramics, before being stored, must be washed!

Obviously *HYDRIA has to do it ... US!!!

The months of July and August are dedicated to this task.

Fridays, every freaking Friday, I wait for the heartfelt and flattering message from Moreno detailing the weekend program. For the washing of ceramics in Malalbergo there are promises of 'happy hour', delicacies and gallons of drinks. He even promises 27 virgins for each male participant.

Every Saturday, when I arrive in Malalbergo, I always hope to see some new faces. Instead, there is only myself and few of the usual guys who fall for his bullshit.

Obviously of the 27 virgins there is not even a shadow, regarding the booze instead, no complains there.

Come on, let's drink to forget ... sooner or later we will complete this ancient path full of bottles of wine ... obviously empty!

It's **September**, the temperature is milder, the research goes on.

The drilling of the previous week yielded no results, we are slightly discouraged. We know the road reaches this point, but after 200 meters it disappears. Where does it go? Was it submerged by a swollen river or did it take a sudden turn?

We reduce the search distance to about 100 meters from the last interception, Moreno is restless, he wants to find it at all costs.

We set off with all the equipment until we reach the established point, we mark the previous road findings and... it must be here.

We find the sands, we find the water, we know that underneath there's clay, the surprise could be there ... SHOULD BE THERE!

We are at - 3.5 meters, we find the clay but in the middle only minor traces of the road. This is already a good result. Now we are at - 4 meters but everything disappears.

Do you remember Giuseppe the farmer, who asked us *“C'sa fev? An starè megga zarcand l'acqua ?”*

As we drill, I see him from afar, walking around the backyard of his house. He limps, leans on a stick, what did he do? Later he will tell us that he tore two toes with a chainsaw. Ouch... ..!

I see him taking a chair, turning it in our direction, he sits and watches us. I wave my arms to greet him, we all greet him and he responds by waving his walking stick in the air.

Work continues. A hole on the right and one on the left, the result is always the same: only minor traces of the roman road presence.

Moreno this time lets us decide where to drill the next hole. We starts with the auger, first segment, second segment, third and fourth and we are at the depth of the previous holes but this time, finally, the tip of the auger gets stuck between the coarse gravel of the road. *“Yes, we got it ... it's the ROAD ... HURRAY ...HURRAY!!!”*

I wrote the word ROAD in capital letters because the ROAD has become a myth, a goal, important from an historical point of view, important and satisfying for us every time we feel it under the tip of the auger. Well well, we are encouraged.

Again a hole on the right and we intercept it, one on the left and we intercept it again. Moreno returns to the car to take the metric cord, we must establish some reference points and pin the position correctly. I see him stop by our observer friend, chat a while then he takes the cord and comes back. Wow, we have an invitation, once the work is over, glasses of white and red wines awaits us at our friend Giuseppe's.

We set the coordinates, we take the measure between the two more distant holes on the road and we realize that we are above a highway. More holes will be needed for a better understanding, more effort unfortunately, but now we know it's there, it will not escape. End of the day.

Tired but happy we pick up the material needed for the surveys and go back to the cars. Our friend is waiting for us, there are two bottles ready. Actually, the bottles are three, there is also Moreno's Clinton wine. What to say, alcohol loosens the tongue and warms the hearts.

Memories of the past come back to our 82 years old friend: the war, the Germans, the girls and the parties in the biggest room of the house transformed into dance hall, the hemp soaking basin where he bathed from time to time, the labours, the sacrifices and the poverty. An amusing anecdote is the story of the winter bath that was usually taken in the barn, which was heated by cows.

The animals in this case functioned as a heater and on them were placed clean clothes which would then be warm when worn. In essence, the farmers came out almost in the same conditions in which they had gone in. We laugh but our friend is misty-eyed and feels blue. The memories of a long-lost youth veil his eyes with tears and we too are moved. Among the many stories one sentence struck us in a special way: *“ After the war there was such a great poverty, so palpable that one “could lean a bicycle against it”!* It makes you think, right? In the end, after so many stories and anecdotes, everyone laughs again, Lambrusco, Pignoletto and Clinton wines have won.

The next holes will be done in the same area and our friend will be expecting us for another chat and few sips of wine together. Really a great day, see you next time!

We work a lot with the arms but with the brain as well. At some point we get the idea to find something that identifies us, something that every member of HYDRIA must wear when working outdoors. We thought of a shirt of a certain colour but in the end we opted for a cap.

What colour?... Yellow ! When we are in a group, everyone with their nice yellow cap, we look like kids going to summer camp, we almost inspire tenderness. The difference between us and the children is the backpacks, theirs have a bottle of water and a snack, ours instead have bottles of wine, focaccia and deli meats. Alas, do not take us for drunkards, we drink just a glass at the end of the workday and we recover from the efforts by savouring Moreno's focaccia, which he brings every Saturday. Back to the cap, whenever you see people in the middle of the fields with the yellow cap on their heads, you will know that it's us, the proud members of the HYDRIA group.

Winter is upon us, research continues successfully and we are just outside Bologna. We identify an area where the Roman road may be passing and where, obviously, it's possible to carry out our drilling without causing damage or disturbance. We are in an abandoned area near the Bologna - Arcoveggio expressway tollbooth and we hear a voice: GOODBYE. The first time we are astonished but pretty soon we understand that it's the recorded voice that greets the drivers who have paid the toll. Try to imagine the many cars that pass through the Arcoveggio tollgate and every time: GOODBYE!

Before tracing the road 3 weeks have passed and we have been overwhelmed by a slew of goodbyes that will suffice for the rest of our life but now that we have found the road, it's us who say goodbye to the tollgate registered voice. SEE YOU LATER!!!!

Meanwhile, the possibility of being able to carry out an excavation directly over the blessed roman road and finally see it becomes a reality. Contacts with the administration and the town of Bentivoglio are established, we obtain the permits but sponsors are needed.

Moreno, our president, begins a frantic search which I won't relate here and in the end we manage to attain what's necessary to start the work.

It's **May 2018**, the excavator arrives and we start to dig.

We are at the level of - 2.20 m with respect to the decking. We know that the long yearned road is just 20 centimeters below. Now it's a matter of days and we'll see it. We are all excited, there's a lot of work to do.

What are 20 centimeters? Not much, roughly the length of a spaghetti, but 20 centimeters of earth is quite another matter: tons of earth to bring out of the chasm by climbing up the rickety ladder made in the 45 ° inclined wall. What a struggle. I think our arms are a few centimeters longer, I even had to move back the car seat to feel at ease.

Clearly, all this swarming of people around the great excavation has attracted the attention of many passersby who stop to browse. I remember one in particular, Mr. Bruno, who after parking his van approached asking if he could take 2 bins of the earth coming from the Roman road excavation..... for his garden. He went down into the excavation, asked some questions and afterward was holding a trowel with which he started to empty the Roman road truck path with an incredible mastery, as if this were his day job. We looked at each other in disbelief and just let him go on.

A tireless worker who, whenever he could, parked his van and started working. Our thanks to him too.

Under the scorching sun, despite the shading net, dehydration was a risk every day. Luckily there was someone who thought about it. Remember the farmer at the beginning of the story? Well, our dear Giuseppe occasionally arrived with cold drinks. Unforgettable the time he showed up with a huge cold watermelon that we all ate with our hands. Nothing better to end a hard day's work.

.....

The news of the excavation of the Roman road begins to spread, the interest grows and this means new friends are showing up. Let's start with Emine Burket Tusavul, a very kind and nice lady with a passion for the archaeology that came from Istanbul (Turkey); she decide to "sacrifice" her summer vacation and came to help us in the excavation. In our eyes she was looking like an angel coming from Troy, to help few desperate crazy Italians. Then Stefano and Maurizio from the "Il Saltopiano", a group of guys engaged in archaeological volunteering excavations. I understand they are tantalised because this road should pass through Maccaretolo, a village of Roman origin near San Pietro in Casale where they have a magnificent venue. Once the excavation has been completed, we resume drilling starting exactly from Maccaretolo towards Castagnolo Minore. We discover on this occasion that we're not the only crazy people scattered around the area randomly drilling holes. There are others and they are strong. Raffaele, a solid man and his son Dante, a rugby player. In their hands the augers (now we have two) turn so much that we are thinking we need to add a "cooling circuit". We don't however because after a few meters we always find the vein of water that cools the tip. These guys put so much energy into it that we have to reinforce the thorns that hold the auger wands together. We are experiencing a moment of great euphoria. By joining forces, HYDRIA's and Saltopiano's, the work proceeds quickly and leads us to very interesting discoveries that at the moment, for confidentiality reasons, I rather not divulge. I prefer instead to underline the human aspects and those small events that cement friendships. The Saltopiano guys treat us very well. At the end of the working days we gather at their headquarters at *Casa Frabboni where we dedicate ourselves to the welfare of our body. For months, in the past, we have eaten day-old donuts donated by the *Piadineria Birreria and Cucina da Angelo in Bentivoglio (Bologna). In order to finish them we forced Giulio, one of HYDRIA volunteers, to eat at least six or seven every we were celebrating our

“Happy Hours”. We couldn’t take it anymore. Recently we have been dining on a beautiful table full of trays with focaccia, deli meats and wine in an environment where we can breathe art and history at the same time. A pleasure for the body and the spirit. To give you an idea of the solidarity that has developed, try to imagine a very cold and foggy Sunday morning, six or seven people busy around two drilling augers and imagine a lady bicycling through a field of alfalfa to reach us. From a bag she extracts a thermos with hot tea and a magnificent and sweet apple pie. In front of these episodes/demonstrations I ... get emotional! Thanks Cristina, the cake was fantastic. Who knows if the next one you'll bake will be as good. We're looking forward to it!

Jokes aside, it has been a wonderful experience. I do not want and I cannot dwell in geoarchaeological descriptions, it's not up to me, those who were present on the evening of Friday, March 1, 2019 at the Roman Road CONFERENCE in Bentivoglio had the opportunity to listen to knowledgeable people who have drawn conclusions about the work done.

Now I just like to thank those who had the patience to read so far, and those who supported and guided us.

So I thank all the friends of the administration of the City of Bentivoglio, Dr. Tiziano Trocchi of the SABAP-BO Archaeological Superintendence, the Prof. Stefano Cremonini of UNIBO (Stef for friends).

I thank the sponsors IMA Spa, YOOX-NET-A-PORTER, the management of EMILBANCA, Andrea Meloncelli, Claudio Baschieri, the Padiateria Birreria da Angelo in Bentivoglio for all the pasta, sandwiches and homemade beers and for all the times they let us get away with all the noise we made.

I thank all the friends and members of HYDRIA and the group Il SALTOPIANO for the friendship, the availability and the sympathy shown:

Marco Palmieri, Florio Pezzoli, Mirko Bandiera, Moreno Fiorini, Marco Mei, Giulio Cosseddu, Mattia Franceschelli, Giacomo Sereni, Clemente Quarantotto, Ovidio Zucchini, Gigi Ruzu, Alessandro Gadignani, Luca Grandi, Pietro Cavina, Maurizio Molinari, Olti Merkaj, Giuseppe Cavana, Marco Cavana, Cristina Failla, Giovanni Cuda, Maurizio Gozzi, Sergio Dalpozzo, Elisabetta Nanni, Bruno Taddia, Stefano Grassi, Raffaele Barletta, Dante Barletta, Eleonora Rossetti, Alessandro Melega, Giovanni Soffritti, Chiara Guadagnino, Dino Chiarini, Mauro Maccagnani, Claudio Zotti, Enrico Fiorini, Veronica Fiorini, Stefania Piancastelli, Elio Tedeschi, Nerio Fiorini, Emine Buket Tusavul, Gianni Ganzaroli, Filippo Finotti, Cristina Pulga, Fiorella Golfieri and last but not first in our hearts, Giuseppe and Nara Trigari.

A GREAT, GREAT THANK YOU TO EVERYONE ... and ... the adventure in search of the Roman road CONTINUES!

.....End of the first season.....

- 1- ***HYDRIA:** social promotion association with approximately 60 students and other members, well known for been engaged in archaeological volunteering excavations.
- 2- ***Ponticelli:** Ponticelli di Malalbergo, a village located North of Bologna , where Bronze Age archaeological excavations have been conducted during the year 2016.
- 3- *** Moreno Fiorini:** the Chairman of the association HYDRIA.
- 4- ***Casa Frabboni:** a local museum located in the the town of S. Pietro in Casale (north of Bologna town).
- 5- ***Piadineria Birreria e Cucina da Angelo:** a pub located in the town of 40010 Bentivoglio – Via Saliceto n° 11/2E (BO).