“Venetian and Ottoman Colonial Empires on the Montenegrin Coast: An Archaeological Perspective”

The Montenegrin coastal cities (Kotor, Budva, Stari Bar and Ulcinj) are commonly known as Venetian strongholds, symbols of the power of the “Serenissima”. The Venetian-Adriatic architectural styles and the Italian material culture permeate the historical centers imparting them a specific identity. Today the historical identity of these centers is re-established also by recovering the “golden” Venetian time. On the contrary, the Ottoman phases are perceived in contrasting ways. The Turkish rule has been commonly seen as a period of decline, during which the Venetian ‘glory’ was replaced by Ottoman ‘dark ages’. It is obvious that this perception has been biased by the recent historical and political events in the Balkan area. The recent archaeological excavations in Stari Bar have helped a different way to define the Venetian and the Ottoman ‘rulers’. They both represented both string colonial powers which had deeply transformed the material culture of the coastal cities. These transformations yielded to new architectural hierarchies. How rich is the Venetian legacy on the material culture in the Montenegrin coastal cities? How define the Ottoman heritage that is still recognizable in that old cities?

Diego Calaon is a post-classical archaeologist and the site director of the archaeological excavation in Torcello (Venice, Ca’ Foscari University). The project aim is to investigate the Late Antique and Early Middle Age Origins of Venice. He has also been actively involved in the Early Medieval Comacchio project and in Venetian Colonial projects in Dalmatia. In Croatia and Montenegro his scientific focus has been the evaluation of the impact on the local communities of Venetian and Ottoman trade systems. In 2014, he has been awarded the prestigious Marie Curie International Outgoing Fellowship by the EU, for the project “Voices of Venice” to pursue his research in the anthro-ecological reappraisal of the Origin of Venice. For this investigation he will be hosted by Stanford University. The research will stimulate a critical reassessment of the one of the most well studied European historical and social phenomenon, the Serenissima. The proposed project will include a comprehensive environmental approach, and will help to implements innovative methods for re-interpret the formation of the new settlements in the Venetian lagoons.