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Polzer Natalie

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Ancestral bodies to universal bodies – the ‘re-enchantment’ of the mummies of the capuchin
Catacombs in Palermo, Sicily

By: Dr. Natalie C. Polzer

Associate Professor of Jewish Studies and Religious Studies

Dept. of Comparative Humanities

University of Louisville

Louisville, KY 40292

natalie.polzer@louisville.edu

502 852-3406

Abstract: Based upon fieldwork conducted in the Capuchin Catacombs in Palermo, Sicily, this paper explores the way in which the disposition, display and commemoration of the dead create meaning for communities of the living. Using two theoretical frames, ‘the work of the dead’, of Thomas Laqueur, and the Weberian cultural-historical notions of ‘disenchantment’ and ‘re-enchantment’, the analysis centers on the recent reburial of one of the star mummies of the Catacombs, that of 2 year old Rosalia Lombardi. Rosalia Lombardi’s reburial, as well as recent forensic medical research undertaken in the Catacombs by teams of scientific experts, shows how the ideological influence and relevance of human dead to communities of the living are, in this instance, transformed from local, to transnational ideological and cultural arenas.

Keywords: disenchantment, re-enchantment, Sicily, mummies, burial rituals, Weber, nationalism and identity.

COVER SHEET

Dr. Natalie C. Polzer

Associate Professor of Jewish Studies and Religious Studies

Dept. of Comparative Humanities

University of Louisville

Louisville, KY 40292

natalie.polzer@louisville.edu

502 852-3406

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ANCESTRAL BODIES TO UNIVERSAL BODIES – THE ‘RE-ENCHANTMENT’ OF THE MUMMIES OF THE CAPUCHIN CATACOMBS IN PALERMO, SICILY

INTRODUCTION

This study, and the project of which it is a part, engage the critical theorization of the contemporary fascination the dead have for the living.¹ A steady stream of recent publications, both popular and expert, about mummies, mummification² and other mortuary practices,³ evidences an abiding Western attention to diverse ways of handling and responding to human remains. The project as a whole will compare contemporary expert and popular responses to the handling and display of different kinds of human remains, ‘soft tissue’ mummies, specifically, those in the Capuchin Catacombs in Palermo, Sicily, and the hard plastinated cadavers displayed in the contemporary, international *Body Worlds* exhibitions. The analysis presented here is but a preliminary step towards this larger project, based on my exploratory pilot fieldwork in Palermo, Sicily, in June 2015. It was only during this fieldwork that I was able to assess the feasibility of extending the project to further stages. Thus, the exploratory nature of my first fieldwork visit set limited parameters for the acquisition of data. The site did, indeed, prove to warrant further fieldwork to collect a variety of data from on site interviews and questionnaires of local and tourist populations, however this study relies only on the data gleaned during the project’s exploratory stage.

The analysis in this study uses a Cultural Studies approach. Cultural Studies is an interdisciplinary approach that examines specific cultural phenomena. Building upon Marxist, and other, critical theory, Cultural Studies is interested in the production and development of

cultural meanings, including the origins and genealogy of the development of both actual and possible interpretations that the meaning-making process generates. Two general theoretical notions frame the analysis of the preliminary data: sociologist Max Weber's notion of 'disenchantment' and cultural historian Thomas Laqueur's notion of "the work of the dead," namely, the idea that the ideological meaning and the social structure of living human communities is expressed and generated, on an ongoing basis, by the diverse ways in which living humans attend to human remains. The data gleaned from this stage of the project provides a critical investigation of a specific, localized cultural phenomenon, potentially leading to a detailed comparative analysis of the role of mummies in local and universal levels in human societies in future work. This paper is not concerned with religious beliefs or secular ideologies concerning the spirituality attributed to dead bodies, the process of death and the afterlife, or with the cultural history of changing Western practices of burial or commemoration (Laqueur 2015; Ariés 1981); rather, its focus is the response of living humans to the handling and display of human remains and the types of social meaning generated thereby. The specific focus is the 'work of the dead' performed by the mummies in the Capuchin Catacombs in Palermo, Sicily, with special attention to the child mummy, Rosalia Lombardo, whose recent, singular treatment invites detailed analysis. After undergoing intensive scientific investigation in the first decade of the 21st century (Panzer 2013, 2010), Rosalia's casket was moved to a new location in the Catacombs and put on special display. In my view, Rosalia's treatment is a concrete expression of how the Capuchin mummies are engaged in changing forms of ideological 'work'.

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

The fieldwork for this study was conducted in Palermo, Sicily in May 2015. It constituted the second part of the project's preliminary stage; the first was fieldwork conducted at the *Body Worlds* exhibit in Amsterdam in December 2014. No formal interviews were conducted during these preliminary stages. The analysis is based on fieldnotes taken during multiple participation-observation experiences that took place at the target sites, in which the following were noted: the type of displayed human remains, the displays' organization and arrangement, the movement of visitors within the physical sites and their response to the displayed human remains. I also conducted observation sessions in local cemeteries, three in the cemetery immediately adjacent to the Catacombs, and one in a larger public cemetery to serve as a means of comparison. Photography was prohibited in the Catacombs; however, photos were permitted by authorities in the adjacent cemetery. Fieldwork also included spontaneous, informal conversations with research librarians at the Palermo National Library and the Franciscan Library, and with two Capuchin friars who worked in the Friary's library. Casual information was gleaned by eavesdropping on tourist conversations, language comprehension permitting. Dario Piombino-Mascali, prolific scientist, the head of the Sicily Mummy Project and the curator of the mummies in the Capuchin Catacombs, has been a generous source of electronically communicated information. Finally, secondary literature from relevant fields has enabled me to situate the project in its disciplinary contexts.

THE HISTORY OF THE CAPUCHIN CATACOMBS

The Catacombs of the Capuchin Friary in Palermo functioned as a place of burial from the early 17th to the late 19th centuries. The first corridor was opened in 1599 to serve as an underground burial site for Capuchin friars, dug into the hill immediately west of the Friary church Santa

Maria della Pace. (Farella 1982:72-74, 78-79; Da Castellamare 1938:22) The bodies of deceased friars were placed uncovered in the underground corridor, to accommodate current devotional practice of veneration of the dead. (Da Castellamare 1938:49) Apparently, the mummification process occurred spontaneously in early burials due to the constant temperature of the underground environment; later the friars began to prepare mummies anthropogenically. Corpses were placed horizontally on slanted slabs of stone in designated rooms, called 'collatoi', for approximately one year. This process caused desiccation by draining bodily fluids. (Farella 1982:100; Piombino-Mascali 2011:26) After mummification, bodies were arranged along the corridors, most often upright in wall niches, clothed in their religious habits. From the late 18th to the late 19th centuries the original corridor was progressively expanded, eventually into a large quadrant with four corner anterooms used as chapels. During this period, the site became a popular place of final rest for renowned members of the military and the local bourgeoisie; by the mid-19th century it had become a public cemetery open to all who could afford it. (Farella 1984:84-92; Da Castellamare 1938:31)

Sicily boasts other catacombs connected with religious orders (National Geographic Society 2009); but only the Capuchin Catacombs in Palermo were a place of public burial open to the lay population. After the unification of Italy in the late 19th century, mummification and disposition in the Catacombs were prohibited by municipal law due to hygienic rationales (Panzer 2010:1124) and an outdoor public cemetery, still in use, was opened immediately to the west. (Farella 1984:92-94) A recent count estimates 1252 mummies in the Catacombs, (Piombino-Mascali 2011:25) that have survived mold, bacterial infestation, fire, flood damage and the

bombardment of the invading Allied forces during World War II. (Farella 1984:102; Piombino-Mascoli 2012:342)

‘THE WORK OF THE DEAD’

This analysis presents a detailed example of Thomas Laqueur’s theoretical contention: ‘the work of the dead’ constitutes a powerful, abiding historical trajectory of human behavior through which living human communities generate social meaning and structure through the disposition of human remains. According to Laqueur, the human species is distinguished, not by mourning for the dead or by the treatment of the dead as more than inert matter – arguably, other mammalian species display such behaviors – but by a deep drive to ensure the social relevance of the dead to living human communities. (Laqueur 2015:8-11) Since the dead have a critical role in how living human communities constitute themselves, ‘the work of the dead’ will change corresponding to social, cultural and technological developments. According to the evidence marshaled by Laqueur, and supported by this study, human remains most often become socially disenfranchised over time; however, on occasions they can be re-integrated into webs of relevant social meaning, even in our ‘disenchanted’ age dominated by ideologies of scientific progress and instrumentality. (Laqueur 2015:27)

Arguably, the ‘work of the dead’ performed by the mummies in the Capuchin Catacombs has undergone a recent process of transformation. Since the Catacombs ceased being an active place of burial, the mummies’ status has progressively shifted from that of ‘ancestral bodies’ to ‘universal bodies’, as their sphere of cultural and ideological relevance has shifted from familial and local, to regional and transnational levels. The term ‘ancestral body’ designates human

remains that are enfranchised into the social fabric of local human communities; ‘universal body’ designates human remains that generate ideological meaning on a level transcending local community boundaries. In the case of the Capuchin Catacombs, the recent investigation of its mummies by teams of scientific experts has transformed them from the status of abject, ancestral bodies that have become disenfranchised from the local community, into that of ideologically significant universal bodies.

GENERAL SCHOLARSHIP

Many scholarly disciplines that investigate the scientific and cultural significance of human remains have informed this study: Mummy Studies (Aufderheide 2003; Cockburn 1998), Osteoarchaeology (the study of human skeletal remains) (Sofaer 2006:xvi, 32-39), the cultural history of burial, commemoration and display of the dead (Redman 2016; Laqueur 2015; Quigley 1998, Ariès 1981), Mortuary Archaeology (Rebay-Salisbury 2010; Rakita 2005; Downes 1999) and Paleopathology (the study of disease in ancient human remains). (Aufderheide 2003; Buikstra 2012)

The review of scholarly literature must be limited owing to the scope of this paper; however, overall, the published research confirms Joanna Sofaer’s recent critical observation of a ‘disciplinary divide’ in the study of human remains in the field of archaeology: (1) science based approaches, which ‘...are [assumed to be] necessarily fixed, universal and trans-historical’; and, (2) social theory based approaches that ‘...deal with the body as an object that is contextually and historically produced’. (Sofaer 2006:xiii, 10) According to Sofaer, current critical work on archaeological bodies show little methodological integration of these two approaches. (2006:10)

She attributes this gap, in part, to the authoritative role of the medical sciences in the sub-discipline of osteoarchaeology, the archaeological analysis of human bones, which is normatively executed by scientific experts with medical training. (2006:6, 9)

This gap is clearly evident in the research reviewed for this project. There are some exceptional publications in Mummy Studies that utilize both scientific and social science approaches; the thorough interdisciplinary treatment of the Greenland mummies by Hart Hansen and colleagues is a case in point. (1991) However, the major part of recent research under the aegis of Mummy Studies is ‘hard science’ dominated by medically related fields, Paleopathology in particular. This prevalent approach views mummies as cadavers that contain biological data to be uncovered through traditional practices of dissection and progressively more sophisticated medical technologies (CT scan, radiography). (Cockburn 1998; Aufderheide 2003) In the words of Arthur Aufderheide, pioneer in the paleopathological turn in Mummy Studies: ‘...[T]he biomedical data these mummies supply tells us how the diseases we presently suffer have evolved...[and] may provide clues to control of present and future affliction’. (2003:536) The gap between scientific and social theory approaches in Mummy Studies is blatant in his edited encyclopedic work, *The Scientific Study of Mummies*, which devotes more than 500 pages to the scientific study of mummies and a scant 50-odd pages to their social and cultural meaning. (Aufderheide 2003) A recent globally comprehensive volume devoted to the history, the achievements and the future of Paleopathology neglects the social sciences altogether; in this instance, the ‘work of the dead’ has evolved into a purely scientific discipline in its own right. (Buikstra 2012)

Mortuary Archaeology, a sub-discipline of anthropology, explores the behavioral and social aspects of mortuary practices in past societies, operating under the assumption that ‘mortuary ritual is a direct reflection of social organization’ that expresses the ‘belief and agency’ of living human communities. (Charles 2005:15) Although mortuary archaeology relies upon scientific bio-archaeological methodologies and evidence, in particular the work of osteoarchaeologists, it is primarily driven by social science disciplinary theoretical frames and methodologies.

(Williams 2016; Rakita 2005:1) A recent self-reflective turn in the field of Mortuary Archaeology correlates strongly with the aims of this project. (Williams 2016; Rakita 2005) Research engaging this approach highlights how the uncovering, analysis and display of human remains as archaeological objects operates in the construction of the affect and identities of both non-expert viewers and working archaeologists and the social contexts in which they operate. The mummies in the Capuchin Catacombs are not, strictly speaking, archaeological objects; nevertheless, their examination by scientific experts generates cultural meaning in similar ways to objects uncovered by archaeological excavation. The self-reflective approach attempts to bridge the gap between social science and ‘hard’ scientific approaches to the archaeological study of the dead by foregrounding how ‘the visceral shock of [confronting] the human body...gives us a new perspective on what it means to be human’. (Pearson 2016:vii) The role of the working archaeologist in the creation of meaning becomes an explicit focus of analysis. Archaeologists are viewed, not just as experts who excavate and interpret human remains to reconstruct the past; rather, they are viewed as proactive agents in the generation of contemporary ‘identity creation, memory reproduction and ontological condition’. (Giles 2016:ix) Even the scientific expertise of the osteoarchaeologist is recast, who assumes the social

role of a 'death expert', an active interpreter of social meaning past and present. (McClelland 2016)

Overall, the scholarship assumes the innate, universal appeal of mummies, yet never adequately theorizes this assumption. The social theory based scholarship on mummies and mortuary archaeology postulates the existence of a universal, strong human response to 'the visceral reality of the [dead] human body', (Pearson 2016:vii) distinguishing between the response to fleshy human remains (plastinated or mummified bodies), skeletal remains and to the soft, rotting tissue of the recently dead. (Anthony 2016:30-31) Although there have been recent critical and phenomenological studies on the response to human skeletal remains (Williams 2016; Inge 2014; Sofaer 2006), the response to mummified human remains has not received similar critical attention.

One factor explaining the special attraction of mummies is assumed to be their ability to engage imaginative empathy. Living humans are considered able to affectively and imaginatively engage with mummified human remains to a greater extent than with skeletal remains. Indeed, several of the self-reflective essays in *Archaeologists and the Dead* describe the difficulties involved in creating museum displays of skeletal human remains that effectively engage the imagination of contemporary audiences. (Williams 2016) Heather Pringle expresses her own imaginative empathy, experienced while attending a mummy autopsy: '[It] was...visceral and urgent..., an innate craving to connect with the long dead, to pass through some kind of portal of time. It was a desire to go beyond history and the dry, bloodless words on the page and make contact with someone who had lived in an alien world, who had worshipped strange gods....'

(2001:38) Indeed, the title of April Holloway's recent popular article on the Greenland mummies encapsulates this empathy: 'The Inuit baby that captured hearts around the world'.

(2014) The particular attraction of mummies may also be due to the fact that they do not provoke immediate disgust, because of the absence of the smell of putrescence, like recently dead cadavers. (Menninghaus 2003) Indeed, a comment frequently overheard during fieldwork in the Catacombs was surprise at the absence of the smell of rotten corpses. Early 19th century tourists recorded similar responses: "There is no offensive odor and the visitor would scarcely know, if he did not see them, that he was surrounded by the dead." (Browne 1853:25)

Perhaps imaginative empathy is evoked by mummies because they are material evidence of the long history of human care for the dead. Confrontation with mummified human remains can prompt an acute awareness of the time, energy, physical and economic resources and technical ingenuity that living humans have devoted to their dead to enable them to have a continued physical presence among the living. This awareness can be also felt upon confrontation with buried human remains that underwent spontaneous mummification due to environmental conditions. The remarkably preserved, spontaneously mummified bodies of John Torrington and other members of the doomed Franklin Arctic expedition (1845) are exceptionally haunting; perhaps this is because of their ability to evoke the awareness of the care taken by their shipmates to give them proper burial in a situation of extremity, in which the survivors themselves knowingly faced certain death by starvation and exposure. (Beattie 1988) Yet again, perhaps confrontation with mummified human remains stimulate self-referential empathy by evoking a wistful longing that one's own remains might, one day, receive similar care. Indeed, this sentiment is articulated in a published interview with a student, who expressed her reasons

for attending the 2017 Mummy Studies Field School: ‘Haley Carr is a Biomedical Science major at the Rochester Institute of Technology. She wants everyone to know that when she dies she wants her body to be donated to *Body Worlds*, under the stipulation that she be posed “doing something awesome like a flying jump kick or a handstand”!’ (University of Nebraska-Lincoln 2017)

THE MUMMIES OF THE CAPUCHIN CATACOMBS

Publications on the mummies of the Capuchin Catacombs fall into three categories: popular presentations, historical studies and reports of the recent scientific investigations under the aegis of the Sicily Mummy Project. The gap Sofaer perceives between scientific and social theory approaches in osteoarchaeology is evident here. Indeed, to date there has been only minimal consideration of the site or the mummies from the perspective of social theory.

The Palermo mummies are a staple subject in popular literature on mortuary practices and the history of mummification. (Crisp 2004) Indeed, the Capuchin Catacombs have been a well-known site of popular tourism since the mid-19th century, featured in Victorian travelogues. (Browne 1853; Stephens 1991 [1837]) Currently the Catacombs cast the allure of ‘Dark Tourism’, namely tourist attraction to sites featuring the bizarre and macabre, which has become an academic sub-discipline of Cultural Studies. (Sharpeley 2009) Indeed, the many ‘coffee table’ photo books and photo-rich web sites that are aimed at popular audiences highlight the mummies as objects of gruesome fascination. (Cenzi 2014, Fernandez 1980, www.PalermoFor91days.com 2011, Facchi 2010) Two historical monographs authored by Capuchin clergy have appeared in the past century that present diachronic histories of the site.

(Da Castellamare 1938, Farella 1982). Da Castellamare's work, heavily hagiographic, has an explicit theological agenda – to revive the lapsed practice of the veneration of the dead within the Capuchin order. (1938:7) To date, Farella's monograph remains the only publication that addresses the social and cultural history of the site in a critical way, despite its conservative historical methodology and the absence of any explicit social theory.

Since 2007, scientific research on the mummies has been conducted under the aegis of the Sicily Mummy Project, an ongoing enterprise of teams of scientific experts in various fields: paleopathology, paleogenetics, paleobotany, entomology and microbiology. (Sineo 2008) To my knowledge, only Dario Piombino-Mascali, the most publically visible expert on the Project, was trained as an anthropologist. The Project's publications fall firmly in the hard sciences and assume the goals, methodologies and investigative technologies relevant to scientific disciplines. Dubbed a 'precious bioanthropological resource' (Piombino-Mascali 2012:341), the mummies have been investigated as repositories of significant quantifiable biological data, both the mummies themselves (Panzer 2013; Piombino-Mascali 2012, 2011; Panzer 2010; Sineo 2008) and their physical environments. (Piñar 2014; Piñar 2013) This research shows scant interest in social meaning; indeed, a short section on Robert Hertz's notion of secondary burial (1978 [1907]), included in the initial report (Sineo 2008:26-27) and cited in several subsequent publications (Piombino-Mascali 2012 :342-343, 2011: 25-26), is the only attempt to view the Catacombs' mortuary practices in light of social theory.⁴ Overall, the goals of the Sicily Mummy Project are those of the 'hard' biological sciences: to advance medical knowledge by creating a database of biological information through scientific investigation.

THE MUMMIES – DISENFRANCHISED DEAD

When the Capuchin Catacombs functioned as a public cemetery in the 18th and 19th centuries, the mummies constituted a community of enfranchised ‘ancestral bodies’ that were part and parcel of the social fiber of the local living community. Their inclusion was achieved through a variety of commemorative and social practices. Since the notion of an open display cemetery is alien to current sensibilities, it may be difficult for contemporary visitors to imagine the Catacombs in their 19th century heyday. Judging from fieldwork conducted in contemporary Palermo cemeteries, in Sicily today the burial sites of ancestral bodies are vibrant, public social space shared by the stationary dead and the ambulant living. My observation of the daily activities in local cemeteries illustrated the intense social energy and activity that must have once filled the Catacombs. In contemporary Palermo, public cemeteries are veritable ‘booming necropolises’, in which the living interact daily with each other and with their dead in intense social activity. Unlike the ‘garden cemeteries’ of North America and Central and Northern Europe, which consciously remove the dead from the social space of the living to create quiet, contemplative environments (Laqueur 2015:271-312), Palermo cemeteries are micro-cosmic urban neighborhood that witness regular social interactions between the living and the living and the living and the dead. Visitors not only engage in private meditation and prayer, but also vocally converse with their dead. I witnessed a young child, perhaps four years old, who was being trained by her elders to converse vocally with her buried grandmother. Living visitors spend apparent leisure time, as well as moments anxiously stolen from work or lunch break, constructing and tending the visual montages and floral displays on gravesites, sitting in the shade of cyprus trees in the heat of the afternoon, reading, and fraternizing with neighboring living visitors to their dead. Indeed, the extravagant visual montages and grave goods displays

on recent gravesites suggests a healthy measure of social rivalry and artistic competition between the living families of the dead. There is no reason to doubt that the intensive social life enacted in the cemeteries of contemporary Palermo is but a continuation of earlier practices in the Catacombs.

Casual conversation with two Capuchin friars working in the Friary library confirmed that the Catacombs had once been an active arena of social engagement. After it ceased being a public cemetery, the mummies gradually became socially disenfranchised, as their living visitors died in turn and were buried in the new, outdoor public cemeteries. According to the friars, the last mummy to be actively visited by family was, predictably, Rosalia Lombardo, the last mummy to be interred in the Catacombs, who was visited by a niece until the 1970's. Currently, the mummies have become utterly disenfranchised from the local community; no longer active 'ancestral bodies', they are visited by tourists rather than descendants. They are 'abject', that is, irrelevant to the spheres of social meaning and to the structural organization of the local, living community. (Menninghaus 2003:365-366) Indeed, my casual conversations with Palermo residents evidenced a unanimous expression of the little interest that locals have in the Catacombs; they know that they exist, but never think to visit them. With one exception, a member of an NGO trying to foster international professional interest in Sicily, informants uniformly expressed surprise that my interest in the Catacombs was beyond that of the ephemeral curiosity of a tourist.

'DISENCHANTMENT' AND 'RE-ENCHANTMENT' – THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOCIAL MEANING OF THE DEAD

Although the mummies in the Capuchin Catacombs have become disenfranchised as ancestral bodies, they have, arguably, been reincorporated into broader regional and transnational levels of ideological meaning as universal bodies. Max Weber's theoretical notion of 'disenchantment' and its corollary, 're-enchantment' (reincorporation into new arenas of social meaning), inform this process. According to Max Weber (1864-1920), modern Western civilization is characterized by an ongoing process of 'disenchantment', which was an inevitable result of broad historical and ideological trajectories originating in the Enlightenment. Disenchantment is embedded in both ideological and structural social contexts. On the ideological level, 'one of the consequences of disenchantment is the undermining of our sense that our ultimate values are supported by secure foundations'. (Lassman 2000:97) In Weber's words, a disenchanted society is 'divested of the mythical and inwardly genuine' meaning of its beliefs and customs. (Weber 1989:23)

On the structural level, charged by the logic of hegemonic scientific world views, quotidian social life became increasingly dominated by ever more sophisticated, more easily available and more efficient forms of technology wielded by scientific experts. This process resulted in the rationalization, that is, the structuring to ensure maximum efficiency, of society and the diminishment of the practical and ideological bonds of local community life. (Schroeder 1995:228, 234, 246) All strata of social life became dominated by what Weber called 'instrumental rationality', giving rise to the prioritization of 'the technological use of scientific knowledge...determined by economic gain'. (Schroeder 1995:235) More specifically, 'an intellectual aristocracy' of scientifically trained specialists is a necessary component of this process; they 'become a privileged status in a world in which science is a privileged, hegemonic

ideological stance and world view'. (Schroeder 1995:235) Science has a determinant role in the process of rationalization, ostensibly 'undermining all forms of "mythical" ideologies, political thought and world views'. (Lassman and Velody 1989:175) The medical sciences, in particular, have gained an authoritative, influential ideological position and practical function in this instrumental rationalization of human life. (Laqueur 2015: 14; Ariés 1981: 583; Foucault 1975) The disenchanted state of modernity is not, however, devoid of ideological values. They are simply no longer 'enchanted', that is absolute, but are multiple and diverse as the 'quotidian reality of the pluralistic, often conflicting, [social] values is heightened'. (Lassman 2000:97) This ideological diversity leaves open the potential for a process of 're-enchantment', namely, for the emergence of new forms of ideological meaning that are manifested in new forms. The genealogy of social meaning generated by the mummies of the Capuchin Catacombs is an optimal illustration of this process.

DISENCHANTED MUMMIES

The mummies in the Catacombs have, arguably, undergone three distinct, interrelated, processes of disenchantment: (1) they have ceased functioning as ancestral bodies for the local living community; (2) they have become rationally commoditized as an economic resource for tourist consumption; and, (3) they have become rationally objectified as archives of biological data able to be accessed only through the scientific mediation of expert specialists using increasingly sophisticated medical technologies. After losing their status as ancestral bodies, the mummies remained valuable as economic and scientific resources, exploited for instrumental goals by scientific and entrepreneurial experts. As such, their value, ostensibly, is reduced to both their touristic and scientific empirical qualities: macabre corpses to stimulate fascination for the

lucrative tourist trade and organic biological archives of data for scientific experts. Although future investigation may prove otherwise, the only current local relevance maintained by the mummies is strictly utilitarian: their ability to generate financial support for local Capuchin charitable enterprises.

The Catacombs began to be a tourist attraction in the 19th century for English and American travelers on the Grand Tour, reflected in travelogues of the period. (Browne 1853:23-25; Stephens 1991 [1837]:204-205) These accounts show that the fascination with the macabre now dubbed 'Dark Tourism' was a part of Anglo-Protestant early Victorian sensibilities. Indeed, the accounts evidence a Protestant fascination with the exposed bodies of the dead, particularly the female dead, as well as with ostensibly primitive Catholic practices. (Browne 1854:24) As a tourist attraction, the site has experienced increased economic rationalization over the past 20 years resulting in its commoditization into a money-making enterprise that is evidenced by changes in the site management and by its inclusion in 'Dark Tourism' itineraries.

(PalermoFor91days.com; Curran 2014) My friar informants related that up to the end of the 20th century, the Capuchin friars themselves had handled the site's day to day administration. There was no fixed entrance fee for tourist visitors; only voluntary donations were accepted and only a small array of souvenirs was sold. Around 2010, a professional manager was hired to assume all duties related to tourism: gift shop stock and sales, admission, signage, security and general maintenance. A fixed entrance fee, 3 Euros, was established and profits are used to fund social aid projects in local, poor neighborhoods: soup kitchens, emergency relief and immigration and refugee aid.

The site's recent commoditization as a tourist attraction is a process of disenchantment, inasmuch as a professional expert has imposed a rationalized system of control with the instrumental goal of economic profit. (Schroeder 1995:232) Correspondingly, the mummies have been transformed into objects with instrumental, economic value appealing to transnational tourists. The extent of the process of disenchantment requires further investigation in future formal interviews. The attitude of the living community of friars towards friars buried in the Catacombs should be investigated. In the 19th and early 20th century the friars used the Catacombs as a place of devotion and contemplation in communion with their dead. (Da Castellamare 1938) Perhaps, practices of devotion to the dead that once took place in the Catacombs have been transferred to the small Friary chapel in the adjacent cemetery, which has been the monastic community's place of burial since the early 20th century. Indeed, one of my friar informants implied as much when he suggested that I visit it to understand contemporary practice.

The recent scientific research conducted in the Catacombs under the aegis of the Sicily Mummy Project illustrates precisely Weber's concept of disenchantment: rationalized, scientific investigation controlled by specialized experts who wield sophisticated medical technology with the instrumental goal of furthering universally applicable medical knowledge. As objectified repositories of biological data, or 'biological archives', the mummies are a profitable commodity for the paleopathologists, forensic biologists and mummy studies experts who examine them.

The enhanced authority of the scientific expert wielding state-of-the-art medical technology pervades both expert and popular presentations, perhaps most concisely illustrated in the recent documentary on Sicily's mummies. (National Geographic 2009). Its film stars are both human

and machine: the scientists investigating the mummies and the sophisticated technology that exposes their biological secrets. The film effects dramatic suspense through its presentation of scientists maneuvering bulky radiographic machinery through tight corridors and down narrow stairs and positioning the fragile mummies for investigation.

RE-ENCHANTED MUMMIES

Although they have become disenchanting on the local level, the mummies have been re-enchanting on regional and transnational levels by being re-incorporated into new systems of social meaning. Paradoxically, the mummies are reinvested with regional and transnational meaning by the same agency that, in part, informed their disenchantment at the local level: their investigation by scientific experts using medical technologies. Through this means, the mummies are rendered significant ‘universal bodies’ by virtue of their potential contribution to the human race by providing biological data for medical research. Moreover, on the regional level, a peculiarly Italian form of identity politics is evident in current research, particularly in the work of Dario Piombino-Mascali, a founding member of the Sicily Mummy Project. Beyond his dedicated scientific interests, Piombino-Mascali’s proactive interest in the Capuchin Catacombs appears to be stimulated by the assertion of a uniquely Sicilian regional identity. Arguably, for Piombino-Mascali the mummies are ancestral bodies on a new level – regional ancestors of Sicily, rather than ancestors of a familial line.

The function of archaeology, particularly mortuary archaeology, in the articulation of 20th-21st century national identities has been a salient subject of critical focus (Jenkins 2016; Stutz 2016; Díaz-Andrew 1996), especially in publications that critically examine the relationship between

different European national identities and the archaeological process of the recovery and display of human remains. (Rajala 2016; Sayer 2016; Jenkins 2016; Stutz 2016) Recently, mortuary archaeology has also had a key role in a world-wide phenomenon: the political self-assertion of minority groups living in hegemonic nation states. For instance, in the United States, the re-appropriation of native burial grounds and ancestral human remains are currently a pivotal component of the ethnic and national self-identification and political self-assertion of American indigenous peoples. (McClelland and Cerezo-Román 2016:39) The discovery of ancient human remains has also challenged hegemonic nationalist history. For instance, the discovery of the Caucasian Charchen mummies in China in the 1970's challenged the assertion that ancient Chinese civilization developed in complete isolation from Eurasian contact. (Pringle 2001:136-142).

Despite the political unification of Italy in the late 19th century, to this day, Italian political identities have maintained strong a regional profile compared to other Western European nation states (Guidi 1996:108; Levy 1996) due to historical, legislative, political and linguistic factors. (Guidi 1996:33-34; Lepschy 1996; Lyttleton 1996:34) Regionalism is very evident in the Italian practice of archaeology (Guidi 1996:116), owing, in part, to a reaction to the nationalistic exploitation of Roman archaeology by mid-20th century Italian fascism. (Rajala 2016:78; Guidi 1996:112-115) In line with a current global trend of claims for political and cultural sovereignty by small, ethnically and/or linguistically distinct regions (Minahan 2016:xviii), contemporary Sicily manifests Italy's tendency to regionalism in a movement towards cultural and political self-determination. In recent years, a Sicilian political movement seeking independence from Italy has gained strength, reflected not only in a struggle for political and social autonomy, but

also in various regional enterprises seeking to strengthen Sicilian regional identity, culture and economy. (Minahan 2016:383; Mendola 2014)

Both popular and the critical presentations of the Sicilian mummies evidence a focus on regional Sicilian identity. Predictably, the National Geographic documentary stresses the regional character of Sicilian mummies and the process of mummification that is related in the dramatic tone usually featured in the presentation of cultural practices alien to normative American sensibilities. Mummification is deemed a ‘distinctively Sicilian phenomenon’, a unique local practice of the veneration of the dead. (National Geographic 2009) The scientific research under the aegis of the Sicily Mummy Project also stresses Sicilian regional identity, but only selectively. The Project’s preliminary publication has a marked regional focus, with its three first authors hailing from the University of Palermo. (Sineo 2008) The paleo-genetic analysis of the mummies is deemed to enable ‘us to trace back the origins of the Sicilian population’ and to determine the relationship between genetic inheritance and local historical epidemiological demographics. (Sineo 2008:159-60) Anthropological analysis will ‘provide...a deeper knowledge of the ancient Palermo inhabitants and their social and emotional responses to death’. (Sineo 2008:161) The conclusion invites public funding by stressing the importance of the site ‘for Sicilian history and culture’. (Sineo 2008:162)

Largely speaking, subsequent research conducted under the aegis of the Sicily Mummy Project fails to continue a regional focus. However, attention to local and regional contexts continues through the leadership of Dario Piombino-Mascali. His involvement with the mummies is multifaceted: scientific research, university educational programming, popular engagement and

expert advisor and administrator of Sicilian sites featuring mummies. Piombino-Mascali has, arguably, assumed the public face of the Project, due to his central role in the National Geographic documentary (2009), his prolific presence on social media (Linked In 2017) and his unflagging commitment to preserving the mummies as a significant Sicilian cultural resource. Perhaps owing to his early training in anthropology, (University of Pisa: MA Anthropology 2002, PhD Physical Anthropology 2007), his academic work on Sicilian mummies has been broader in disciplinary scope than that of his colleagues. Beyond his involvement in paleopathological investigations of the mummies (Panzer 2013; 2010) and reports on the Sicily Mummy Project (Piombino-Mascali 2013, 2012; Sineo 2008), Piombino-Mascali has published popular (2009, 2008) and expert (2009) publications on a uniquely Sicilian contribution to the history of modern medical science, namely, the development of embalming practices in the 20th century. Indeed, he was instrumental in the rediscovery of the embalming formula of local chemist, Alfredo Salafia (1869-1933). (National Geographic 2009; Piombino-Mascali 2009) He has also published on another 20th century Palermo embalming innovator, Oreste Maggiore. (Piombino-Mascali 2008) His interest in Salafia and Maggiore illustrates his drive to publicize the potential of Sicilian cultural enterprise to the world at large, by focusing on significant contributions made by local Sicilians to the transnational world of medical science.

Piombino-Mascali is also engaged in proactively educating a transnational public about the Sicilian mummies. He has recently founded and co-directed an annual undergraduate Mummy Studies Field School, first held in July-August 2016 (UNL Announce 2016) with a second session taking place in the summer of 2017. (My World 2017) Co-Sponsored by regional and transnational organizations (University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Sicily Mummy Project,

Archdiocese of Messina, Sicilian Region, the city of Santa Lucia del Mela), the project publicizes the Sicilian regional profile on a transnational level by inviting international students to engage in a hands on research experience with mummies in Sicily. Piombino-Mascali's LinkedIn profile page encapsulates his prolific role as administrator and institutional advisor in many specifically Sicilian regional capacities, most notably his role as Director of the Sicily Mummy Project (2007-2017). (LinkedIn.com 2017) The fact that Sicilian is identified, along with Italian, as his mother tongue on his CV, evidences his strong commitment to Sicily, his 'native island,' and to the Sicilian regional identity that permeates his career profile. (Academia.edu 2017)

Laqueur describes the paradoxical influence of innovative technology in the transformation of how the dead generate social meaning in the modern period. For instance, in the late 19th century technological advances in cremation, and its promotion to the public at large, show how pragmatic modernism aimed to strip the human body of ideological and religious significance. Indeed, in 1874 a Zurich physician deemed cremation 'the final triumph of reason and common sense'. However, the practice of cremation resulted in novel, more individualized, ways of re-enchanting the dead. (2015:485-548) This study supports Laqueur's view of the paradoxical role of technology. Both popular and expert accounts highlight the role of medical technology in the re-enchantment of the mummies. The National Geographic documentary dramatically visualizes state of the art medical technology, wielded by scientific experts, which invests the mummies with a renewed aura of ideological meaning. Indeed, several film scenes visually foreground the technological equipment, rather than the human scientific experts. (National Geographic 2009) The universal, trans-historical authority of technology and medical science

(Sofaer 2006:xiii) transform the mummies from ancestral bodies, which have lost relevance to the local living community, into universal bodies, with relevance to humanity as a whole.

The sense that the mummies were preserved to be a valuable medical resource for unborn generations is an implicit trope that underlies both expert and popular discourse. Obviously, historically speaking, this assumption is extremely unlikely; however, it is a strong, imagined ideological projection that reflects the contemporary prestige of the medical sciences as a proactive agent in the purposeful improvement of the quality of human life. Perhaps this trope can be compared to ideologies underlying the science of cryonics, which developed in the 20th century. Cryonics is a technological process for the integral preservation of recently deceased human remains by freezing. Future resuscitation of the human remains is anticipated, at whatever time medical science will be sufficiently advanced to heal conditions that caused initial death. (McKie 2002) Although mummies can scarcely be resuscitated like carefully prepared, frozen cadavers, the notion that the medical data stored in preserved bodies was prepared in the past to be accessed in the future, is similar in the two cases. However, the preservation of human cadavers through the cryonic process aims for the future resuscitation of the individual. As ‘biological archives’, the mummies conceal data with universal application.

The concept of ‘biological archive’ can have regional focus, for instance, in regional genetic demographic history (Sineo 2008:159-160); however, its relevance is usually postulated as universal. Heather Pringle expresses this notion with explicit reference to mummies: ‘In years to come, medical researchers struggling to outwit all manner of deadly parasites – from viruses to bacteria, rickettsia to amoeba, fungi to protozoa – could turn to the mummified dead in search

of new weapons. Sealed in their preserved cells is an astonishing molecular archive of disease, a record of misery and malady far more ancient and far more complete than any noted on rice paper, papyri, clay tablets, or stone.’ (2002:81) As biological archives, mummies perform the work of the dead on a transnational level, through the imagined connection of purpose between the care for the dead in the past and the health related needs of future humanity. This connection makes human mummies active agents in an evolutionary process of salvation; however, mummies retain this special status only insofar as they are objects of scientific research.

THE RE-ENCHANTMENT OF ROSALIA LOMBARDO

Rosalia Lombardo, the last mummy buried in the Catacombs, has recently undergone a process of transformation that has rendered her a prime example of the process of re-enchantment through scientific, technological investigation. The recent changes to her display can be understood in light of the practice of second burial, a cross cultural mortuary practice in which human remains are transferred from one physical place to another, normally during a ritual sequence of events involving the processes of mourning, commemoration and the gradual disintegration of the corpse. (Hertz 1978 [1907]) Rosalia’s ‘second burial’ has concretely marked her transformation from an abject ancestral body to a re-enchanted universal body. This transformation has been achieved in three stages: (1) the scrutiny of her body by scientific experts using state of the art medical technology; (2) the subsequent move of her casket to a new location in the Catacombs; (3) by a new mode of display.

Rosalia was embalmed by Dr. Alfredo Salafia after she died of pneumonia, aged 2 years old, in 1922. Wrapped in a satin blanket, her body was laid to rest in a glass topped, wooden casket and

was placed in the Catacomb Chapel of Santa Rosalia, which remained there until after Rosalia underwent two stages of scientific investigation in the first decade of the 21st century. (Panzer 2010, 2013) Subsequently, her wooden casket was placed in a larger, sealed chrome and glass custom-built display case⁵ and was moved to ‘the Family Room’, a chamber at the opposite periphery of the Catacombs. This room features a variety of mummies of men, women and children that are displayed on the walls and window ledges, alone and, less frequently, in nuclear family groups. I was unable to discover whether those displayed in family groups were actual biological families, or whether unrelated mummies had been arranged thus for the purpose of display.

Although the entire Catacombs constitute consecrated burial space, Rosalia’s recent translation has moved her from more explicit sacred space, the Chapel, to more ambiguous sacred space, the Family Room. Indeed, the notion of special rooms for the use of nuclear families has a very secular, contemporary ring to it (e.g. Youth Hostel family rooms, family toilets). The architectural layout of the Catacombs developed gradually and haphazardly, to adapt to changes in burial practices from the 16th to the late 19th centuries. (Farella 1982:72-74, 78-79) Generally speaking, the mummies were placed in an arrangement following a sacred-profane spectrum correlating with the mummies’ status and gender. Capuchin friars and other clerics reside in the holiest space, that is, in the corridors nearest to the Church. Lay males reside in the next branching corridors; important military figures and wealthy male members of the bourgeoisie are closer to the church than other, presumably less socially significant, lay males, while women and children reside in the corridors farthest from the Church. The display of the mummies in the Family Room is singular; its occupants are the farthest from the sacred space of the Church and

only here are they displayed as family groups rather than according to sacred and/or social hierarchy. Thus, after residing in sacred space devoted to her eponymous saint, Rosalia is now displayed as a child in a family context. From the perspective of cultural theory, she has been moved from one ideological arena to another; from one dominated by religious hierarchy to one dominated by hegemonic secular family values.

The treatment of Rosalia's body exemplifies Laqueur's claim that modern technology has re-enchanted the dead in unprecedented ways. (2015:485-548) Rosalia has always been a unique resident of the Catacombs. Her burial in the Catacombs in 1920 required special permission, since burial in the site had been prohibited since the late 19th century. It is not clear why this exception was granted, whether it was owing to the fame of her embalmer, who had already achieved international prominence by 1920, or to the social influence of Rosalia's family.

Lying in her glass-covered wooden casket with her head and face visible, and covered with a satin sheet as though she were asleep (Panzer 2013:402), her doll-like appearance and her remarkable state of preservation earned her the nickname 'la Bella Dormante' (the Sleeping Beauty). (National Geographic 2009) A long standing major tourist attraction, she was the mummy star of the National Geographic documentary, in which Piombino-Mascalì and his research team, as well a representative of the Capuchin order, rhapsodize about her 'life-like' state of preservation. (2009)

Due to regulations imposed by the Capuchin Order and the State (Piombino-Mascalì 2011:224-25), the mummies can only be scientifically examined using methods that preserve their bodily integrity. Rosalia's mummified remains have been the unique target of such scientific

investigation. During the past decade, she has been examined twice by Sicily Mummy Project teams. The first investigation was conducted with radiographic technology in 2008 (Panzer 2010), cinematographically represented 'live' in the National Geographic documentary. (2009) Her mummy was reexamined in 2010 using multidetector CT technology. (Panzer 2013) Subsequently, Rosalia was moved to the Family Room and her wooden casket placed intact in the state-of-the-art display case made of glass and a shiny silver alloy, marked with an enigmatic, highly visible logo (the trademark of the glass manufacturer). (Dario Piombino-Mascali, electronic communication, March 27, 2017) I could not ascertain why Rosalia's body was moved in the sources reviewed for this study. The move may be connected to the recent development of the Catacombs as a destination tourist site. Located on the outside periphery of the Catacombs, the Family Room is a large chamber, well-lit by many high windows, in contrast to the dark, confined space of the Chapel. The new location enables the large display case to be viewed to advantage by many people at one time.

Other mummies in the Catacombs have been investigated by the Sicily Mummy Project and bear labels as visible signs of the experience. During fieldwork, I observed that the labeled mummies were not located together; thus I assume that they had been returned to their original locations of display after examination. Thus, only Rosalia has been marked explicitly by a process of second burial that has incorporated her into a new framework of social meaning. Her mummy has been translated from the ideological arena of religious hierarchy to that of secular ideology, a process made concretely visible by her double casing: the wooden casket within the larger glass and chrome display case. Now the centerpiece of the Family room, she is viewed daily from all sides by many people at once; her popular display requires traffic control, and is roped off so that

tourists file around it. The contemporary design of the outer display case blatantly communicates the new ideological arena of modernity and science in which she now resides. Its chrome and glass radiate a futuristic allure; indeed, it strongly resembles the space caskets and individual escape pods featured in the *Star Trek* science fiction franchise. Its fresh, metallic sheen sharply contrasts with the inner wooden casket, and also with the deteriorating mummies arranged along the walls, who are dressed in disintegrating Victorian clothing.

Rosalia's second burial blatantly represents a process of re-enchantment achieved through scientific investigation and technology. Indeed, Rosalia's unique history illustrates an evolutionary process in the history of science. She was embalmed by an innovative pioneer in the science of embalming; she underwent the two stages of scientific investigation by the Sicily Mummy Project; finally, she alone has been moved and become the centerpiece of display. The stark contrast between the outer display case and the inner wooden casket broadcasts evolutionary ideologies of scientific human progress. Arguably, Rosalia Lombardo is unique in yet another way. Alone among the mummies of the Capuchin Catacombs, she has maintained the status of an ancestral body, although on a regional, rather than a familial, level. Rosalia's history and her recent popular fame (National Geographic 2009) render her a mummified spokesperson for the construction of regional Sicilian identity. Her state of the art, futuristic display case not only exhibits her to advantage; it also constitutes a monument of sorts to Dr. Alfredo Salafia, Sicilian scientific pioneer. Symbolically speaking, the glass cover of the wooden casket suggests a window into the Sicilian past; the shiny technologically sophisticated outer case suggests the potential of the Sicilian future, a future that must be achieved by exploring and framing Sicilian past identities.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper prompts specific and general avenues for future research. The next stage of this project will involve fieldwork to collect data from sources requiring ethical clearance and a multi-lingual research team. Relevant data will be obtained through interviews and questionnaires with: (1) members of the local Palermo population (including individuals whose biological ancestors rest in the Catacombs); (2) representatives from the Capuchin order (especially those living in the adjacent Friary); and (3) tourist visitors. The experts constituting the research teams of the Sicily Mummy Project will also be interviewed. Discourse analysis of postings on Dark Tourism websites will be conducted. Finally, I hope to attend the UNC Sicily Mummy Field School as a participant-observer.

As far as broader research topics are concerned, analysis of the response of living humans to mummified, as opposed to skeletal, human remains must be critically theorized rather than remaining received assumption. Moreover, my findings recommend a comparative study of how mummies in particular, and the dead in general, work in the formation of local, regional and transnational identities in different contemporary geographic and cultural contexts; for instance, the cultural role of mummies in contemporary Chile, Peru, Myanmar and Sicily. Such comparison would prove a fruitful, and as yet minimally addressed, way in which to understand cultural difference in our age of transnational globalization, as the dead continue their work from beyond the grave.

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Author Statement – *Cogent Humanities* 2018

Dr. Natalie C. Polzer is an Associate Professor of Jewish and Religious Studies at the University of Louisville, who received her academic training in Jewish Biblical Interpretation and Rabbinics at McGill University and Cambridge University, England. Several of her research and teaching interests intersect in the research project on the mummies of the Capuchin Catacombs, constituting theoretically informed, critical analysis of discrete religious and cultural phenomena including: Holocaust tourism, the care for the dead, beliefs and practices of purity and impurity, and theory of disgust, human emotions and sensory perception. She teaches a variety of undergraduate courses in Jewish Studies and World Religions, Religious Studies and Gender, and graduate courses in Theory of Religion, Materiality Theory and Theory of Repulsion and Disgust. She is currently working on a book project for the Feminist Commentary on the Babylonian Talmud series, a feminist commentary on the Mishnah tractates Avot and Eduyot as well as the fieldwork for the project in this article.

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Public Statement

“Ancestral Bodies to Universal Bodies – the ‘Re-enchantment’ of the Mummies in the Capuchin Catacombs in Palermo, Sicily”

In different ways, the dead have always maintained an ongoing, significant presence in living societies. In contemporary developed cultures, deceased loved ones are mourned, buried and commemorated in increasingly diverse ways as these practices have become more personal and less ritualized. The dead are also very much physically present in contemporary communities, both urban and rural, in graveyards, public cemeteries and family plots. The fact that the dead are granted so much physical space among the living and the attention and care given to maintaining this space, shows that living human beings have a powerful drive to care for the dead. The treatment of the mummies in the Capuchin Catacombs of Palermo, Sicily, illustrates this drive. No longer visited by loved ones, the mummies are endowed with new relevance to contemporary humanity through scientific investigation of the physical data they bequeath to medical research.

ENDNOTES

¹ I thank the University of _____ for providing the IRIG funding to conduct this stage of the fieldwork.

² For recent popular publications on mummies (excluding the many publications on mummies aimed at a juvenile audience) see: Quigley (1998); Pringle (2001). Popular publications on the mummies in the Capuchin Catacombs comprised of photographs with brief descriptive texts include: Fernandez (1980); Facchi (2001); Cenzi (2014). Recent scientific Mummy Studies publications include: Beattie (1988); Hart Hansen (1991); Cockburn (1998); Beattie (1999); Aufderheide (2003).

³ Recent popular books on pre-modern ossuaries and the display of human skeletal remains include: Kondouraris (2013); Inge (2014); Redman (2016). For critical scholarship on the same and on practices of excarnation and partial body burial see: Rebay-Salisbury (2010).

⁴ While Hertz's theory is brilliant and certainly relevant, the use of more recent theoretical frames are in order – Robert Hertz, a French national and student of Émile Durkheim died 100 years ago fighting in World War I.

⁵ A photograph of her double casket can be accessed at the blog site of the UNL Mummy Studies Field School at Sicilymummystudies.blogspot.com, entry for Monday July 11, 2016.