

# Il Santuario Ritrovato at San Casciano dei Bagni: a project of “civic” and digital archaeology

Claudia Petrini

## Abstract

The excavations and research at the Etruscan-Roman sanctuary of Bagno Grande in San Casciano dei Bagni (SI), carried out under a permit to the Municipality of San Casciano, with the scientific coordination of the University for Foreigners of Siena and the protection of the Superintendency for the provinces of Siena, Grosseto and Arezzo, structurally integrate **archaeological research, dissemination of results and community engagement**. The research began in the 1990s, when the area was placed under protection following the request made by the local community itself, a process subsequently continued with a geophysical survey campaign that prepared the ground for systematic excavations beginning in 2019.

The archaeological investigations, launched by the Municipality, have brought to light a sanctuary connected to thermo-mineral waters and their healing properties, whose votive deposit has yielded bronze statues, hundreds of ex-votos, coins, and archaeobotanical remains. From the outset, the project developed a strategy that combined active involvement of the **local community with communication** methods capable of ensuring the site's protection while maintaining scientific rigor.

This methodological approach, resulting from synergy among the institutions involved, has generated an **integrated system that interweaves in-person events, publications, and digital media communication**.

Public meetings, educational activities, and guided tours are complemented by consistent editorial output, including three volumes dedicated to the excavation, exhibition catalogues, and outreach publications, which ensure the dissemination of results at multiple levels of depth. Alongside this, **social media are used consistently as a space for public documentation and dialogue**.

This experience illustrates how research and dissemination can be configured not as separate dimensions, but as components of a unified project, strengthening the bond between archaeological heritage and community.



Fig. 1: Public lectures for the local community in San Casciano dei Bagni

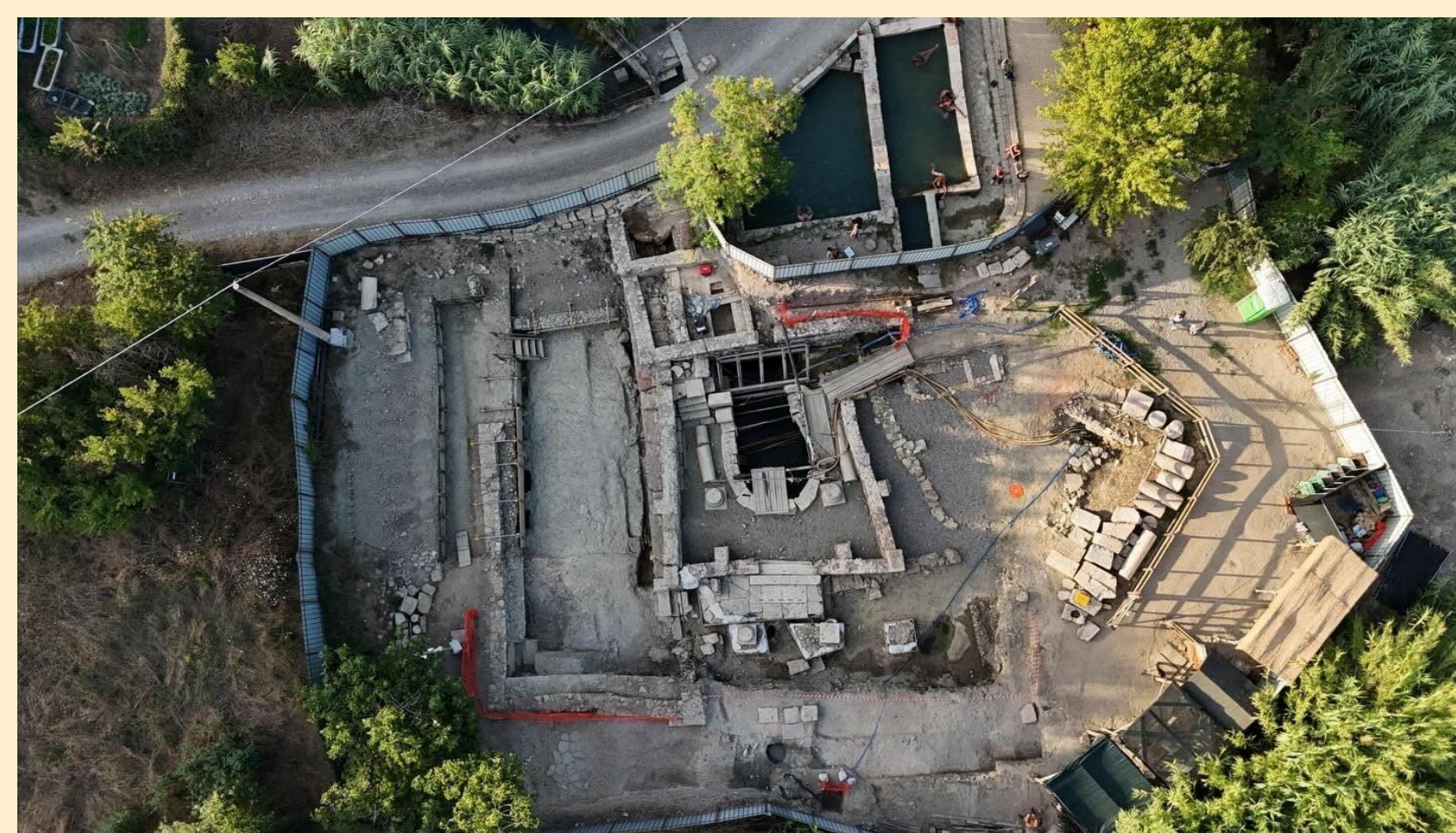


Fig.2 The thermo-mineral sanctuary at Bagno Grande, San Casciano dei Bagni



Fig.3 The museum housed in the entrance of the town hall and inaugurated in 2021

## From local participation to digital engagement

The San Casciano project aims to develop a model of “civic” archaeology in which the **local community** remains the primary subject of research, actively involved in the various phases of research and regularly updated on its progress.

Engagement of local residents - within a municipality of only 1,500 inhabitants - has been fostered through a series of coordinated initiatives: **regular public presentations in the village and on-site, educational activities with schools, site access managed by local volunteers** trained by professionals, and, since 2021, the creation of a museum space with free access inside the town hall. This venue, which showcases the community's ancient past, has rapidly become a landmark for both residents and visitors. An anthropological study carried out by the University for Foreigners of Siena has further explored the relationships between the population, local memory, and archaeological finds, helping to clearly define the social and cultural context in which the project operates.

This territorially-based engagement is complemented by a **digital communication strategy that extends dialogue beyond physical boundaries** and keeps the narrative of the excavation and its archaeological reconstruction alive even during the months when fieldwork is paused. The Facebook and Instagram profiles, active since 2022, were developed after a preliminary analysis of existing projects. Their purpose is to create a stable, recognizable, and scientifically reliable online space, making the research comprehensible and accessible without oversimplifying or instrumentalizing its content. The digital strategy is based on a methodology refined over time and adapted to the specific characteristics of different communication contexts. To avoid provisional or scientifically unreliable interpretations, during the excavation the focus is placed on behind-the-scenes storytelling - the daily life of the international research team through interviews, photos, and videos - rather than on the immediate publication of discoveries and the display of artifacts. Data are presented in a contextualized form at the end of each field season, while throughout the year conferences, exhibitions, and publications are systematically documented, maintaining a constant dialogue with different audience segments. Work has been undertaken to build a communicative style capable of alternating between institutional content and more informal tones, using clear yet scientifically accurate language and adapting content to the specific features of each platform. Consistent posting throughout the year and careful attention to user interaction have contributed to the formation of a **highly engaged and interested community**. Significantly, some of the most active followers are citizens of San Casciano, who follow the project closely, promote it, interact with it, and even step in to “defend” it when necessary.

## An ongoing process

The experience of San Casciano dei Bagni demonstrates how “civic” archaeology can develop along both **physical and digital dimensions**, keeping the **local community at its center** while progressively expanding its audiences. Communication through social media, originally conceived to inform residents about activities on-site and throughout the year, has evolved into a channel capable of reaching students, scholars, and publics at national and international levels, extending the impact of the project without undermining its civic aims. **Social media profiles have taken on the role of a shared memory of the research**, preserving the stratification of activities and interactions over time. Each post becomes part of an ongoing narrative that accompanies the project, documenting not only discoveries but also the people, contexts, and processes that make them possible. The community that has formed around the project, where the citizens of San Casciano remain active interlocutors who themselves share and produce content and narratives circulating within their own networks, illustrates the potential of digital platforms when integrated into a strategy that unites scientific rigor, heritage protection, and public participation. Data confirm the effectiveness of this approach: **online interactions continue to grow steadily, while guided tours bring dozens of visitors to the site each month, demonstrating how digital storytelling translates into concrete local engagement**. Published materials, systematically collected, will flow into the project website as an integrated archive of the project's work. The activities at the Bagno Grande will increasingly interweave with those of the **CADMO - International Hub of Research of the University for Foreigners of Siena**, which coordinates the excavation alongside other research projects. The hub will be headquartered in San Casciano, further strengthening the territorial anchoring of the research and creating new opportunities for dialogue. The challenge for the coming years will be to consolidate this model in which civic archaeology and digital communication mutually support one another, adapting to technological developments without losing focus on the relationship with communities and promoting an increasingly democratic and participatory relationship between cultural heritage and society.



Fig.4: Kids from local schools visiting the archaeological site

## REFERENCES

BONACINI E. 2023, *Storytelling culturale e piattaforme digitali*, Palermo.  
 Council of Europe, *Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention)*, Strasbourg, 2005.  
 DRAGONI P., CERQUETTI M. (eds) 2019, *L'archeologia pubblica prima e dopo l'archeologia pubblica* in «Il Capitale Culturale: Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage», suppl. 9.  
 FALCONE A., D'EREDITA' A. (eds) 2018, *Archeosocial. L'archeologia riscrive il web. Esperienze, strategie e buone pratiche*, Verona.  
 FALCONE A. (ed). 2022, *Archeosocial 2.0. L'archeologia riscrive il web: esperienze, strategie e buone pratiche*, Verona.  
 MARIOTTI E., SALVI A., TABOLLI J. (eds.) 2021, *Il Santuario Ritrovato. Nuovi Scavi e Ricerche al Bagno Grande di San Casciano dei Bagni*, Livorno.

MARIOTTI E., SALVI A., TABOLLI J. (eds.) 2023, *Il Santuario Ritrovato. 2. Dentro la vasca sacra. Rapporto preliminare*, Livorno.  
 MARIOTTI E., SALVI A., TABOLLI J. (eds.) 2025, *Il santuario Ritrovato 3. Oltre il bronzo. Rapporto preliminare di Scavo (2023-2024) al Bagno Grande di San Casciano dei Bagni*, Livorno  
 MONTANARI T. 2022, *Costituzione italiana: articolo 9*, Roma.  
 MOSHENSKA G. (ed) 2017, *Key concepts in public archaeology*, London.  
 NUCCIOTTI M., BONACCHI C., MOLDUCCI C. (eds) 2019, *Archeologia Pubblica in Italia*, Firenze.  
 PALLECCHI S. 2023, *Ritessere e raccontare. Appunti sulla comunicazione dell'archeologia*, Firenze.  
 VOLPE G. 2020, *Archeologia pubblica. Metodi, tecniche, esperienze*, Roma.