

# Journal of Asian Civilizations



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# **Journal of Asian Civilizations**

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Wooden panel with the figure of Maheśvara from Dandan Oilik  
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*Obituary*



**Antonio Invernizzi**  
**Turin, 1 January 1941 – 2 December 2021**



Clay sculpture; Square House, Old Nysa, Turkmenistan.

**Antonio Invernizzi**

(Turin, 1 January 1941 – 2 December 2021)

**Luca M. Olivieri**

On the second day of December 2021, as our fieldwork in Barikot was drawing to a close, we learned from Italy of the sudden death of Antonio Invernizzi.

Despite a generation separating Invernizzi and us, I and my colleagues in Barikot were deeply grieved by the loss of an archaeologist who was perhaps not well known in Pakistan but was a leading archaeologist working between Iraq and Turkmenistan, between the Euphrates and the Caspian, especially for those complex phases related to the Parthian history (the Arsacids, 2nd century BCE-3rd century CE).

President of the Centro Ricerche Archeologiche e Scavi di Torino until 2010, Antonio Invernizzi was professor emeritus at the University of Turin and a member of that city's Academy of Sciences.

The Centro Scavi was founded in Turin in 1963, on the initiative of the great archaeologists Giorgio Gullini, as an autonomous development of the previous Centro Studi e Scavi Archeologici in Asia of IsMEO and of Turin. Until 1963 Giorgio Gullini was in fact part of IsMEO, under which he directed the excavations in Swat at Udegram. Although the fortunes of the two institutes were separated, the relationship between them remained scientifically solid, the friendship between Giorgio Gullini and Domenico Faccena (the two Directors of the now separated Centres of Turin and IsMEO) remained intact, and the same can be said of the esteem between their disciples, first of all Antonio Invernizzi (who was also member of IsMEO/IsIAO), and then Carlo Lippolis, Pierfrancesco Callieri, Vito Messina, Anna Filigenzi. Although we worked on opposite sides of Alexander's oecumene, we were always united by a common understanding of things. One of the main points of contact is the understanding that the interpretation of artistic phenomena should only be attempted on the basis of solid and reliable archaeological foundations. Hence the importance we all attach to excavations and large-scale fieldwork, especially in settlements and urban centres: our long-lasting project at Barikot, his work at Seleucia and Nysa. Our common field of interest was and is associated with the contamination of Hellenism in the East, of its transformation beyond geographical limits and cultural frontiers (i.e. beyond the commonplace), between East and West, India and the Mediterranean. It is always worth rereading that brief masterpiece by Antonio Invernizzi, the "Réflexions sur les rencontres interculturelles dans l'orient hellénisé" published in 2014. Antonio Invernizzi began his career as a classical archaeologist. In 1964 he started participating in one of the most important archaeological works of the Centro Scavi, the dig at Seleucia on the

## Obituary

Tigris, Iraq. Seleucia was the ancient capital of the Seleucids, the most powerful of Alexander the Great's political successors in the East.

In 1968 Invernizzi became field director in Seleucia while teaching Archaeology and History of Greek and Roman Art at the University of Cagliari, then from 1970, full professor of Oriental Archaeology in Turin, where he remained all his life. Always very interested in the Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian phases – he was a disciple of Giorgio Gullini – he moved in 1975 to Iran (Khorasan) and then in 1977 back to Iraq at Tell Yelkhi. Here he explored a site whose stratigraphy dated back to the third and second millennium BCE. In 1980 he excavated the Roman fortress of Kifrin on the Euphrates, while in 1990 he moved to Turkmenistan, where his Centro Scavi of Turin Mission began working at the Old Nysa (“Parthian Nysa”), the ancient capital of the Parthian dynasty of the Arsacids. This was the beginning of a fortunate season of excavations that would last for decades and that produced extraordinary results published in excellent monographs and studies by Invernizzi and his students.

After 2000, Invernizzi, who had become Director of the Centro Scavi di Torino in 1990, resumed fieldwork in Iraq, making a significant contribution to the rescue of the country's immense archaeological heritage undermined by the conflict and the political turmoil that followed.

### **Further reading**

Antonio Invernizzi (ed.), *In the Land of the Gryphons. Papers on central Asian archaeology in antiquity*, Monografie di Mesopotamia, 5. Le Lettere: Firenze 1995.

A. Invernizzi, “Réflexions sur les rencontres interculturelles dans l'orient hellénisé”. P. Leriche (ed.) *Art et civilisations de l'orient hellénisé. Rencontres et échanges culturels d'Alexandre aux Sassanides* [Hommage à Daniel Schlumberger]. Éditions Picard: Paris 2014, p. 257-267.

### **Notes**

The biographical notes were taken from A. De Martino, “Il percorso di uno studioso: Antonio Invernizzi”, C. Lippolis, A. De Martino (eds) *Un impaziente desiderio di scorrere il mondo. Studi in onore di Antonio Invernizzi*. Monografie di Mesopotamia 14. Le Lettere: Firenze 2011, p. 13-15.

It was also Henri Colburn's idea to publish Nysa's clay sculpture as an ideal icon of Antonio Invernizzi (see <https://henrycolburn.hcommons.org/2021/12/03/in-memoriam-antonio-invernizzi-1941-2021/>: “Since I don't have a picture of Prof. Invernizzi, I instead share an image of a clay sculpture from the Square House at Old Nisa, an object which he published and helped to publicize, to all our benefit”).

On the history of the relationship between the Centro Scavi of IsMEO and the Centro Scavi of Turin, see Luca M. Olivieri, "Outline History of the IsIAO Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan (1956-2006)". *East and West*, 56, 2006, 1-3, p. 23-41 (in particular p. 31).