

*(Photo: Graeme Barker)*

***Timothy William Potter  
(1944–2000)***

## **TIMOTHY WILLIAM POTTER**

**(6 July 1944 – 11 January 2000)**

Tim Potter's vigorous and enthusiastic contributions to the School, stretching from his arrival as Rome Scholar in 1966, through his excavations at Narce (1966–71), Mazzano Romano (1971), Ponte di Nona (1975–6), Ponte Nepesino (1982) and Mola di Monte Gelato (1986–90), to his Chairmanship of the Faculty of Archaeology, History and Letters (1991–6), and finally his inspiring role as Chair in the Tiber Valley Project, earn him a major place in the School's annals. His premature death deprives the institution of one of its most robust champions; but the generosity with which he encouraged younger scholars will ensure that his contribution will not be forgotten, and the lead he gave will be followed.

Tim's clipped and old-fashioned accent, audible in his English and his Italian alike, seemed to mark him as a scion of the Establishment. In fact, he came from a family of schoolmasters. His father, Cedric, was long headmaster of March Grammar School, near Ely in the Fens: himself the son of a headmaster, William, of the Roan School at Greenwich, he set an example of good organization and self-discipline, though the enthusiasm and generosity of spirit in which Tim was so abundant came rather from his adored mother, Phil. He grew up both in the shadow of and inspired by a brother older by five years, Christopher, who excelled as a classical scholar and later followed family tradition in becoming a headmaster. Chris led the way in discovering the excitement of archaeology: it was on his excavation of nearby sites in the Fens, especially Grandford (1958–64), that Tim as a schoolboy began to acquire the highly practical skills of fieldwork that continued to give him pleasure through his career.

Tim was less of an academic star than Chris; and it is perhaps in a childhood sense of academic insecurity that lay the roots both of a need for recognition and of the unflagging efforts made to merit it. Even if he did not share his brother's talents at Latin and Greek, he achieved distinctions in all three 'A'-levels (English, History and Archaeology), and received particular commendation for a paper on the Roman Fenland drawing on his own fieldwork: the essay provided material for the Royal Geographical Society Survey of Roman Fenland Sites, by Peter Salway and others. In 1963 he won a place at Trinity College, Cambridge, to read History, but soon changed to Archaeology and Anthropology, achieving a first in his Part I (and promotion to a College Exhibition), a first in prelims to Part 2 (and with it a Senior Scholarship), and a first in Part 2. Already as an undergraduate, he manifested his formidable energy in publishing: a note on his Fenland work and a substantial paper on the Roman pottery of Coldham Clump. The foundations for his later massive publication of *Stonea* were laid in this period.

Applying for a Rome Scholarship before his finals in 1966, he received notably glowing references from Joan Liversidge and Brian Hope-Taylor, who paid tribute not only to his already established talent for excavation, but to his amiability: it was recalled how camping on a site cut off from most amenities and in appalling

weather, he sustained the company by his 'unfailing good humour, fortitude and unselfishness'. Many others in later years were to be grateful for the same qualities. The references picked out another significant talent: that even if 'slightly woolly-minded' in conversation, 'his written work is consistently lucid and precise'. The sheer volume of his subsequent publication was made possible by the fluency with which he wrote 'lucid and precise' prose without the need to return for corrections.

His experience as Rome Scholar (for two years, as was then possible) was profoundly formative, and later, as the Chair of the Faculty awarding the scholarships, he would recall with passion the importance of the experience and display an almost paternal bond with 'his' Scholars, whom he would annually visit and take out to dinner. A vivid series of letters sent home to his family reveals both his instinctive skills as a narrator and much about the formation of his interests. He arrived without a fixed topic for research, and without Italian. He was at once impressed by the physical appearance of the School ('a pretty extraordinary place, with a great classical façade — all columns, steps and the like'), and pleased to find it had a bar at which a double gin and tonic cost less than 2s 6d (letter, 4 October 1966). He rapidly came to find the company of his fellow-scholars amiable, though noting the dominance of 'classics': his age-cohort was indeed a distinguished one, including Alastair Small, Katherine Dunbabin, Janet Huskinson, Lesley Steer (later Ling) and Nancy Hirschland (later Ramage), and in the years immediately following, while he was still working at Narce, Graeme Barker and Frank Sear.

He had come expressly to work with John Ward-Perkins, on a topographic survey of a still undefined area, and Ward-Perkins, then at the height of the South Etruria survey, assigned him the Ager Faliscus. Of course, Ward-Perkins was to become the figure on whom in one sense Tim modelled himself: yet their initial encounter was cautious, and some of the mutual reservations remained. The Director initially struck Tim as 'very helpful, though very difficult to work with. He has everyone very well organised, and is unpopular because of this' (letter, 19 November 1966). Reciprocally, Ward-Perkins's praise was grudging. After the first year of the scholarship, he reported to the Faculty: 'He is an intensely exasperating young man, with a firm conviction that he knows all the answers to all the questions, but he has good qualities and is improving'. Even Ward-Perkins had to concede that the excavation he was doing at Narce was excellent.

It was a stroke of luck that a flash flood at that site had exposed a section through an extraordinarily rich sequence, stretching from Bronze Age to Roman, at just the moment when a scholar with exceptionally good experience of fieldwork joined Ward-Perkins's team. Tim came into his element on site. His letters home from Narce show him at his most animated: recruiting a small army of local lads as assistants, and tireless in his efforts to promote public relations with the locals. He glowed with pleasure as his ability to communicate in Italian progressed, and reported back (blissfully unaware of the irony), 'I am now, very flatteringly, sometimes taken for a north Italian, where their accent is rather strange' (letter, 21 November 1968). The good humour with which he energized the team is detectable in the memories of his late appearances from his caravan in his silk dressing-gown, with chilled beer in one hand and cigarette in the other. But above all Narce was a classic of

stratigraphic method; it was an intense pleasure to be visited by Sir Mortimer Wheeler, even if he preferred the company of Lady Wheeler.

The work at Narce was to continue for several seasons after the end of the Rome Scholarship (extended into autumn 1968). Meanwhile, Tim set off on a new adventure, rather less happy than the visit to Rome, taking a temporary teaching job at Santa Cruz. It was a momentous time at which to visit California, with the student revolution at its height. Already Tim had experienced student revolution at close quarters in Rome in the riot that broke out around the Architecture Faculty on 1 March 1968: spellbound with horror, he vividly described and photographed the brutality of the police. In California, he found anti-Vietnam protest at its height, and students ‘uniformly bearded, be-jeaned, barefoot and longhaired almost to the man, not to mention drug-taking’ (letter, 7 November 1969). It was not Tim’s style. ‘Question: what do you do when someone bursts in, as happened last night, and announces he was on a “bad trip”? He had taken LSD, which can induce apparently devastating and very frightening hallucinations. Talking to someone under drugs is like speaking through a soundproof glass cage’ (letter, 28 February 1970). Although he evidently benefited from some aspects of the experience, including teaching that ranged back to Mesopotamia, what remained with him was the horror of the anarchy, so alien to the old-fashioned discipline and good order he espoused, and in later years he refused to set foot in the States again, even to cross over from Niagara Falls to Buffalo.

He returned to Rome for further work at Narce, supported by an Ellaina Macnamara Memorial Fellowship (1971–2), drafting the publication as Sir James Knott Fellow at Newcastle University (1972–3). The move northwards proved more lasting, and he secured his first permanent appointment (1973–8) as lecturer in Roman archaeology in the rapidly growing Department of Classics and Archaeology at Lancaster, where a vigorous group soon grew, including Ruth Whitehouse and Hugo Blake, of scholars with BSR connections. Tim flourished on the contact with young people, and used the opportunity to develop a programme of fieldwork in Italy, excavating the votive deposit of Ponte di Nona over two seasons (1975–6), and launching a new series of informally published reports of Lancaster’s activities in Italy. At the same time he developed a new programme of fieldwork in his new local area, the Roman forts of Cumbria, just as he had when domiciled in the Fens and in Rome: *Romans in North-West England* (1979) published the results with characteristic promptness.

But Italy was far from forgotten, and it was now that he undertook his boldest and surely most widely read publication, *The Changing Landscape of South Etruria*. The South Etruria survey was in every sense Ward-Perkins’s project, conducted over two decades from 1954 to his retirement as Director in 1974 with the firm (if not always welcome) sense of authority on which Tim has remarked. Although component surveys were published in the *Papers*, there was evidently a major synthesis to be written; it should have been Ward-Perkins’s book, and his greatest at that. But he had much else on, and his final years at the School were dispiriting; he knew too, perhaps better so than the confident Tim, that much hard work needed to be done to pull the results together and that he had no longer the energy to do it. Yet it was Donald Bullough, not Ward-Perkins, who suggested the book to Tim, and though

Tim hastened to ask for his much-revered master's blessing, he underestimated the heaviness of heart with which permission was granted. *The Changing Landscape* is a remarkable achievement: it needed all Tim's facility with lucid English, his conviction that there was a story to be got out of a dig and his narrative talent, to pull together what is an extraordinarily ambitious and complex tale. He was not afraid to simplify in order to reach his audience: the series of remarkable and clear distribution maps successfully gives a clear structure to the tale of consistently changing landscape use, while detail is provided by the well-chosen and powerfully described case-studies. He knew that what he had written was not the final word on the subject; he came to recognize in 1980–1 when preparing his own survey of the Ager Faliscus for publication (in the event abandoned) that his pottery identifications had been 'over-confident',<sup>1</sup> and his enthusiasm was later to be a driving force behind the return to the study of the material in the Tiber Valley Project.

It was also while at Lancaster that he started work in North Africa, at Iol Caesarea (Cherchel), in which, as in his other work, he took a well-chosen collaborator, Nacéra Benseddik. That their excavations of 1977–81 were published over a decade later was due wholly to the procrastinations of the Algerian authorities, and he equally chafed at the delay and was delighted by the appearance of *Fouilles de Cherchel* in 1993, when he took care that the few copies that reached Europe were distributed to key libraries. And, even if the results were slow to appear, he took care to make them known in other publications, particularly *Towns in Late Antiquity. Iol Caesarea and its Context* (1995).

In 1978, he moved from Lancaster to the British Museum, to the Department of Prehistoric and Romano-British Antiquities, where he remained till his death, promoted to Deputy Keeper in 1989, and to Keeper in 1995. His enormous contribution to the Department is described in more detail elsewhere (*Journal of Roman Archaeology*, by his colleague Catherine Johns): what the museum benefited from in common with the School and Lancaster was his unshakeable belief in and dedication to institutions. It is exceptional for a scholar with such an extensive list of writings, and such an impeccable record for getting all his excavations published, to do so except at the cost of selfish dedication to research at the expense of colleagues. Tim was not only utterly loyal to and supportive of his colleagues, and unflinchingly public-spirited in taking on burdens, but also believed with real passion in the good which well-run organizations can do. Without that passion, or his electric excitement at the discovery of the Hoxne hoard of silver, he would not have been so effective in communicating enthusiasm to the Weston family, whose foundation generously supported the new Roman Britain Galleries.

The School's luck was that in finding a new focus for his loyalties, Tim did not slacken his old loyalties to Rome. In the late '70s and early '80s, his overseas excavations focused on North Africa; but in 1986 he returned to the heart of the Ager Faliscus at the charming site of the medieval mill of Monte Gelato, a beauty spot known to film-makers (this it had in common with Narce). For five vigorous sea-

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<sup>1</sup> *Excavations at the Mola di Monte Gelato* (1997), 4.

sons until 1990, by now with the important financial backing of the British Museum behind him, followed by a post-excavation season in 1991, Tim's team was a regular feature of British School at Rome summers, and there was a buzz of excitement as the more spectacular finds were brought back, culminating in the inscription from a funerary relief complete with portraits.

Monte Gelato was an excavation conceived with a clear research agenda, reaching back to the South Etruria survey, of using stratigraphic data derived from excavation to control the chronological patterns suggested by surface survey. The Narce material had related to the earlier pre-Roman period. Monte Gelato was chosen to illuminate a later period, of continuity and change between the Roman and the medieval, and specifically to test the thesis of an early phase of *incastellamento* in the sixth to eighth centuries AD that he had tested earlier at Mazzano Romano (1971). In the event, Monte Gelato, far from confirming the hypothesis, demonstrates the classic creation of a castellated hilltop settlement formed in the eleventh century, and far from demonstrating continuity between the late Roman period and the early Middle Ages, points to phases of abandonment and discontinuity. It is characteristic of Tim to set out his research agenda so fearlessly, to expose the actual results of excavation so candidly, and to end up by throwing the question back for continued debate.

The return to excavation in Italy also brought Tim back into close contact with the running of the School. He started a second term on the Faculty of Archaeology, History and Letters (his first had been in 1975–9), starting in 1989, and becoming Chairman in 1991. Richard Hodges brought the Council to grapple with the inefficacy of its archaic structures, and Roddy Cavaliero brought the managerial skills of the British Council to bear on reform, culminating in the issue of a supplemental Royal Charter in 1995. As Chair of Faculty, Tim played a key role in the difficult reforms that have left the institution so much more manageable. He succeeded in getting the Faculty to streamline its own procedures (elections of scholars had been known to drag on for hours with fruitless arguments over candidates) and reconsider its own role. He persuaded it to invest in a report by a leading consultant in archaeological management, Gillian Andrews (by no coincidence a close friend — Tim knew how to recruit friends to his cause), and, following the report, to abandon its old policy of distributing small grants to a scattering of projects, in favour of the appointment of a figure to run an integrated archaeological programme for the School.

The Tiber Valley Project is the direct outcome of those reforms. His inspiration lay behind the decision to create a single umbrella project that could attract the collaboration of colleagues from several institutions, and the choice of an area which overlapped, but did not coincide with, that of the South Etruria Survey. When he stepped down from the Chair of Faculty, it was the natural thing to make him Chair over the organizing committees for the project. At three successive Tiber Valley workshops, he injected energy and common purpose into a substantial group of British and Italian colleagues by his bubbling enthusiasm, and impressed everyone by the modesty with which he urged that *Changing Landscapes* needed to be replaced. Of course, it will not be replaced, for it is a classic of its kind, and the more nuanced and differentiated picture that is likely to emerge from later study will with

difficulty match the original for clarity and narrative vigour.

Tim's contribution to Italian archaeology is a very substantial one. One would not wish to say that he changed the intellectual framework of the discipline, or that he generated new approaches. *Changing Landscapes* is valuable precisely because it grasps the importance of Ward-Perkins's ideas and is fearless in proclaiming them. He was generous in his openness to the ideas of others, and skilled in seeing both where ideas could be taken and what their limits were: his synthesis in his bold *Roman Italy* shows the balance and good sense that allied to the energy of his enthusiasm makes it such a helpful guide. His modesty and courage alike shine out in the initial sentence: a colleague shrugs his shoulders and says, 'syntheses are dangerous'. Tim took risks, because he believed in the importance of the cause.

What he did for Roman Italy, he did in parallel with work of no less importance for Roman Britain, notably the Fens. His colleagues in the British Museum saw Stonea as his biggest achievement, doubtless rightly. What was astonishing was that he finished off Stonea and Monte Gelato at precisely the same time, and did so because he sensed that his duties at the Museum would leave him no time for anything else. He was intensely proud of his promotion to Keeper, and saw it as a duty to be taken with supreme seriousness. He cleared his decks for action, academically speaking; even minor debits of publication like his survey of Aquaviva were disposed of, and it is characteristic that having been invited to contribute a survey of BSR work on landscape archaeology one month before his death, he used the Christmas break to write half of it.

Tim took much pleasure in life, and in return gave much pleasure to others. His enthusiasm for good food was such that the notebooks he kept to record (meticulously) mileage and fuel consumption on his digs also noted the relative excellence of each evening meal. His vices were purely ones of sociability: the image of the young Potter at Narce with a cigarette in one hand, and a drink in the other, rings true for many later situations. It took a toll on his body, which, under stress, cost him his life long before he had finished the contribution he had to make.

He came to marriage relatively late — he and Sandra met in 1984 and married soon after. Many friends had taken him for the classic bachelor, and he never ceased to regard the discovery of marriage and family life with the enthusiasm of a recent convert, as if he had stumbled by chance in an excavation on a most wonderful find he needed to tell others about. Simon was born as he finished off *Roman Italy*, and its dedication reflects not only his happiness, but his conviction that even a new-born babe could share in the excitement of Roman archaeology. Equally, when *Monte Gelato* was presented in Rome in 1997, he brought out the eight-year old Belinda, sat her through the presentation, and rounded it off by telling the assembled company that there was nothing more important than that the young should learn why the subject mattered, and take on the torch. He never forgot how young he was when he himself discovered archaeology. And many attest what they owed to his unfailing generosity and encouragement. There could be no better memorial to him than to encourage future generations of young people to discover the joys of archaeology in Italy.

ANDREW WALLACE-HADRILL

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<i>CWAAST</i>	<i>Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society Transactions</i>
<i>PBSR</i>	<i>Papers of the British School at Rome</i>
<i>PCAS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Cambridge Archaeological Society</i>

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## EXCAVATION AND FIELDWORK PROJECTS DIRECTED

- 1958–64 Grandford, March, Cambridgeshire. Romano-British village.
- 1960–2 Four other prehistoric and Romano-British sites in the March region, including Stonea.
- 1966–71 Narce, South Etruria. Bronze Age, Iron Age and Faliscan settlement.
- 1966–70 Ager Faliscus field survey. All periods.
- 1967 Crocicchie, South Etruria. Roman villa.
- 1971 Mazzano Romano, South Etruria. Medieval village.
- 1971–2 Braughing, Hertfordshire. Iron Age *oppidum*, Romano-British town.
- 1973, 1976 Bowness-on-Solway. Hadrian's Wall fort.
- 1973–6 Lancaster. Roman fort, medieval town.
- 1974 Tuscania, central Italy. Etruscan, Roman and medieval town.
- 1974–5 Watercrook, Kendall, Cumbria. Roman fort.
- 1974–5 Biglands, Cumbria. Roman milefortlet.
- 1975–6 Ponte di Nona, near Rome. Sanctuary, fourth–first centuries BC.
- 1976–8 Ravenglass, Cumbria. Roman fort.
- 1977–8 Heysham, Lancashire. Early Christian chapel and cemetery.
- 1977–81 Cherchel (*Iol Caesarea*), Algeria. Punic, Roman, early medieval, Islamic and French city.
- 1980–4 Stonea, Cambridgeshire. Prehistoric, Roman, Anglo-Saxon and post-medieval settlements.
- 1982 Lambaesis, Algeria. Sanctuary of Asklepios (project taken over by S.P. Roskams).
- 1982 Ponte Nepesino, South Etruria. Early medieval *castellum*.
- 1986–90 Mola di Monte Gelato, South Etruria. Settlement of the first–twelfth centuries AD.
- 1989 Meonstoke, Hampshire. Fourth century AD building façade.
- 1991–3 Nepi, South Etruria. Etruscan, Roman and medieval town.



FIG. 6. Results of the magnetometer survey in relation to the city walls, the 1969–75 excavations and the medieval church. The topography of the area outside the walls is based on the cadastral maps (contours in metres). Scale 1:2,000.

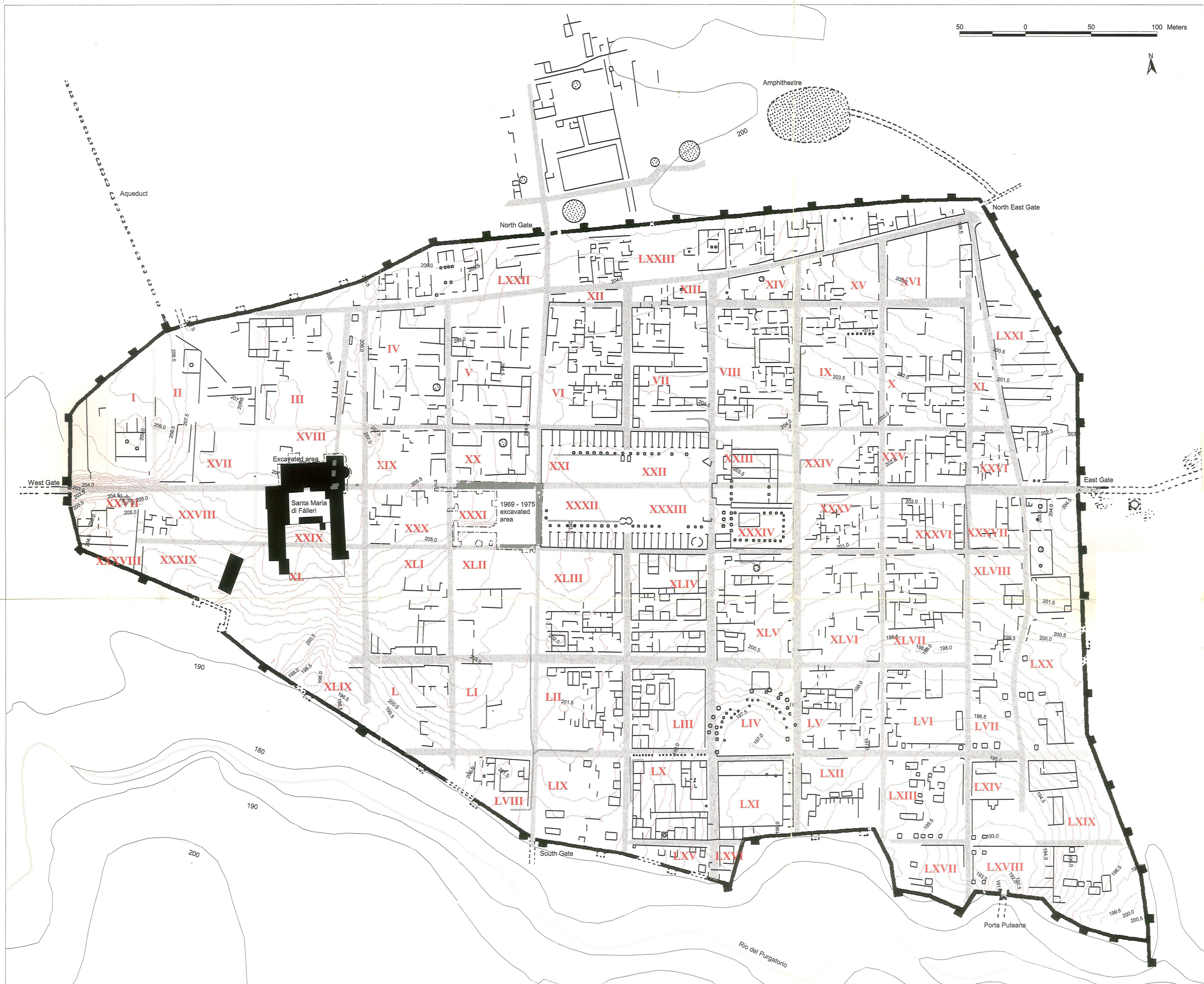


FIG. 7. Interpretation of the magnetometer survey in relation to the city walls, the 1969-75 excavations and the medieval church. The topography of the area outside the walls is based on the cadastral maps, whilst the contour survey of the interior, overprinted in red, is the product of our own survey. The plan of the city walls is based on that published by Di Stefano Manzella (1979), modified slightly at the North Gate on the basis of our own survey. Scale 1:2,000.