

Lost Worlds of Ancient and Modern Greece

Gilbert Bagnani: The Adventures of a Young
Italo-Canadian Archaeologist in Greece,
1921-1924

D. J. Ian Begg



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Cover illustration: The burning of Smyrna as seen from a ship out in the bay, design by D. J. Ian Begg, drawn by Duncan Irvine

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To Prof. Thomas H. B. Symons, for his steadfast support and humanist par excellence

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Foreword

It is an honour to be invited to write a brief Foreword to this remarkable book about *Lost Worlds of Ancient and Modern Greece*. As the title indicates, the book deals with people, places, and events ranging over widely separated periods of time: from pre-classical and classical times to the early years of the 20th Century. Thus, while the stage, at least geographically, remains in much the same location, Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean, the focus is on two time-settings which are sometimes 3,000 years apart. The result might be seen as virtually two scholarly books within one cover – a double-decker in which the author does a superb job of linking and discussing the contrasts, relationships, and comparative relevance to one another of the people and events of these two historic eras on this shared great stage, even though there is such a vast time gap between them.

The volume records and examines an extraordinary litany of historical events and historical characters in the two time periods under scrutiny. The common thread linking such an immense spread of subject matter, in both geography and time, is the very lively curiosity and scholarly activity of one man, Gilbert Forrest Bagnani. The book is appropriately subtitled, ‘The Adventures of a Young Italian Archaeologist in Greece, 1921-1924’. Adventures, indeed! It reads at times like a highly imaginative picaresque novel as it follows Gilbert through a sequence of frequently amazing encounters ranging over the Eastern Mediterranean and sometimes beyond in pursuit of knowledge about the classical world. For the sheer fascination and delight to be found in these factual tales the book will be savoured and enjoyed by many readers for years to come.

But *Lost Worlds of Ancient and Modern Greece* is, of course, much more than a great adventure story. It is a well-organized and beautifully written work

of immense erudition, the product of very extensive and tireless research, and a good deal of profound thought, by the author. Its twenty-four chapters follow Gilbert's activities, investigations, and thought as he pursued his deepening interest in and commitment to the challenge and opportunities of archaeology and the study of relevant monuments, records, artifacts, and historical personalities. In so doing, he added immensely to knowledge and understanding of the classical world of ancient Greece and, indeed, to knowledge and understanding of the no less complex situation and events in Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean worlds in his own times.

Fortunately, Dr Bagnani had a remarkable talent as an expositor and teacher. He shared his knowledge with many others, inspiring and expanding interest and enthusiasm for the study of ancient Greece and many other facets of the classical world. His interests, enthusiasm, knowledge and gifts of exposition were shared with his talented and much-loved wife, Stewart, a very well informed and experienced appreciator, student and critic of painting and the visual arts.

It was Canada's good fortune when, in the face of the hostility of Mussolini and the darkening of the European world, Gilbert and Stewart returned to Canada where Gilbert became in due course a professor of classical history at the University of Toronto, and Stewart established and led a program of art education and appreciation at the Art Gallery of Toronto. Both were very highly respected by their colleagues and much beloved by many students.

The Bagnanis had also a long and special relationship with Trent University. I had had the good fortune to be a student of Gilbert's in his Greek and Roman history classes as an undergraduate at the University of Toronto and subsequently served with him in a very minor way as a tutorial assistant while I pursued my studies in Canadian and Commonwealth history. It was a constant delight to observe him at work and to see the lights go on as students warmed to the subject as classes progressed under his tutelage.

It was, consequently, an immense pleasure when, some years later, having been invited to found Trent University in Peterborough, I was able to invite Gilbert and Stewart to join in this venture which they did with great enthusiasm and steadfastness. The range and value of their contribution to the academic and collegiate life of Trent is remembered and honoured in a number of appropriate ways including: The Bagnani Medals presented annually at Convocation to students in the General Programme who achieve high overall standing on graduation; Bagnani Hall at Trent's Trill College in which portraits of Gilbert and Stewart preside over a significant collection of

furniture and artifacts which they left to the University; the Bagnani Lectures based at Traill College of which Gilbert and Stewart were Honorary and very active Fellows; the appointment of a Bagnani Fellow, the first of whom is the distinguished author of this volume; a substantial contribution of books to the University Library; and a massive bequest to the University Archives of documents, correspondence, notes, papers, manuscripts, memos, maps, plans, prints, published works, scrapbooks, postcards, and some 1,500 photographs, glass negatives, slides, and sketches, as well as other invaluable research materials, much of which has been of assistance to Dr Begg's scholarly research in preparing this volume and other publications.

Yet, perhaps the greatest of the gifts and memories left at Trent by these two lifelong scholars is their belief that, despite the often laborious work involved, and the many dangers and difficulties they encountered, the pursuit of knowledge can be and, indeed, should be fun in the deepest meaning of that word. Gilbert's celebrated discourse 'Lucullus Dines: Food and Drink in the Roman World' conveying a sense of Roman high life, amounting at times to debauchery, by describing this occasion in extraordinary detail is an example of his sometimes playful but at bottom deadly serious deployment of humour in the service of scholarly reality.¹ He applied this talent also in his writing about *The Satyricon* and in his gossipy anonymous articles about Greek politics written for the *Morning Post* newspaper in London, England.

Gilbert and Stewart Bagnani were renaissance figures who are remembered with great affection by countless people – students, colleagues, and friends whose lives they enriched.

This volume is the first in a proposed trilogy. The next two volumes will be awaited with eager anticipation by the scholarly community and by many lay folk alike.

Thomas H.B. Symons, C.C., O.Ont., FRSC, LL.D., D.U., D.Litt., D.Cn.L., FRGS., KSS.,
Founding President and Vanier Professor Emeritus, Trent University
Trustee, The Gilbert and Stewart Bagnani Endowment
29 March 2019

¹ Prof. Bagnani delivered variations of this lecture in the mid-1960s at universities across Canada but no typescript of it has yet been found.

Preface

Lost Worlds of Ancient and Modern Greece relates three years (1921-1924) in the life of a young Italian archaeologist in Greece, based on his letters to his mother in Rome, at first as a non-partisan observer of, and later as an active participant in some of the most tumultuous events in modern Greek history.

After a brief account in Chapter 1 of the central event of the destruction of Smyrna in September 1922 and the creation of a million refugees, the story in Chapter 2 begins nine months earlier, with the arrival in December 1921 of Gilbert Bagnani in Greece, when the royalist government is vainly trying to extract itself and its armies from central Turkey. In ante-bellum Athens, only a relative few including young Gilbert could conceive of the potential catastrophe about to befall a million compatriots in Anatolia. Thus Chapter 1 is a flash forward to enable the reader better to appreciate Gilbert's insights. When he returns to Greece for his second year in December 1922, the city is filled with thousands of refugees and ruled by a military junta.

What were current events to Gilbert Bagnani a century ago, however, are forgotten histories today. So the Prologue of Odysseus vs. Achilles is intended to provide the interested reader with the relevant historical background preceding Gilbert Bagnani's arrival in Greece, but is not necessary in order to follow the narrative of his travels in and around Greece.

Gilbert himself thrived on contemporary politics, not to mention gossip about the rich and powerful, so much so that he wrote anonymous articles about Greek politics for the *Morning Post* newspaper in London. His sources and perspective were uniquely those of a foreign observer inside the upper echelons of Athenian society at a critical juncture in modern Greek history. His brilliant mind, near photographic memory and arrogant self-confidence belied his youth, being only twenty-one years old upon his arrival in Athens but displaying a maturity well beyond his years most of the time.

Prof. Thomas H. B. Symons, who kindly agreed to write the Foreward, was a student of Gilbert Bagnani's at the University of Toronto and later invited both Gilbert Bagnani and his wife Stewart to teach at Trent University, which Prof. Symons had recently founded in Peterborough, Ontario. Since the arrival of the Bagnani papers at Trent University two decades ago, when I discovered their unique historical material, Prof. Symons has always encouraged me in the research for writing an account of the lives of Gilbert and Stewart Bagnani. *Lost Worlds of Ancient and Modern Greece* is the resulting volume, the first of a projected trilogy about their lives in Europe and Egypt in the 1920s and 1930s before they immigrated to Canada.

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In Athens, Dr David Rupp, the Director of the Canadian Institute in Greece, and Dr Jonathan Tomlinson, the Assistant Director, provided unflinching and bemused help at critical points. At the British School at Athens, the librarians Penelope Wilson Zarganis and Sandra Pepelasis were always ready to come to my rescue. The then Director of the American School, Jack Davis, provided significant help in the search for Anna Kozadinou Levi. The archivists Amalia Kakissis at the British School, Natalia Vogeikoff-Brogan at the American School and Eleftheria Daleziou at the Gennadeion Library encouraged my enthusiasms in pursuing the research. At the Italian School, Prof. Emanuel Greco kindly gave me permission to study and publish from their Archives Gilbert Bagnani's report on Karpathos and Alessandro della Seta's letter of recommendation, while Stefano Garbin and Ilaria Simiakaki provided library and archival guidance. Archival discovery does not take place in a vacuum but in a community of like-minded scholars.

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Prof. Dr Alexander Papageorgiou-Venetas, Panagiotis Kousathanas, Dimitris Mavrideros and Mrs. Anna Manuelidou for reminiscences, conversations, and clarifications about their relatives and acquaintances mentioned in the letters. For detailed investigations I was helped by Eleni Stamatatou and Ioannis Georganas in Athens, John Younger in Lemnos, Eda Kacar in Izmir, Mehmet Ficici in Anatolia, and Emin Saatci in Istanbul, Chantal Courtois in Geneva, Fabio Bertolissi in Rovereto, Iuri Silvestri in Rome and Pisa, Domenico Pietropaolo in Toronto, and Matthew Eliot. In general, I have derived much benefit from academic discussions with Prof. Steven Dyson, Kostis Kourelis, Nikolas Terzis, and Archibald Dunn, who introduced me to Byzantine Mistra.

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To the editors at Archaeopress, Drs David Davison and Rajka Makjanic, I am grateful for their editorial expertise, sage advice and infinite patience. Philip Blair, Adam Matuzich and Duncan Irvine provided technical support, technical suggestions and artistic images respectively. The five maps were produced for me by Chris Brackley of As the Crow Flies Cartography of Limehouse, Ontario. As with everything else in this book, all errors of commission and omission are mine.

I am grateful also to several friends and colleagues upon whom I imposed to read through a penultimate draught of the text: Don Cosens, Bruce Flowers, Vern Marson, Steven McLarty-Payson, Larry Pfaff, Aristomenes Polyzois, Dr Brian Shaw, Prof. Ian Storey and Dr Roger McCleary, to whom I remain immeasurably indebted.

For permission to publish letters and photographs, I am grateful to Trent University and to the Trustees of the Gilbert and Stewart Bagnani Endowment. Indeed, the Trustees under the leadership first of Prof. Thomas Symons, the Founding President of Trent and Chair of the Trustees of the Bagnani Endowment, then of Prof. Leonard Conolly, his successor both as President at Trent and Chair of the Trustees, and now of Jon Grant, have been faithful and generous mainstays of my research and travels. Kathryn Matheson, their Executive Secretary, provided significant help in resolving the issue of copyright. My gratitude to Prof. Symons for his unwavering encouragement remains profound beyond words and so it is to him that I dedicate this first volume on the life of Gilbert Bagnani.

Introduction

An only child, Gilbert Bagnani was born in Rome 26 April 1900. It is not known where, when or how his Canadian mother and Italian father met. Florence Ruby Dewar was an heiress descended from a family of lawyers and doctors in Edinburgh. An ancestor had purchased the landed estate of Vogrie at Gorebridge near Edinburgh and a cousin had built a mansion there which he called Vogrie. Her father, Dr John Forrest Dewar, born in 1834, graduated in Medicine from the University of Edinburgh, visited hospitals on the continent and practiced in Turin, Italy, before immigrating to Port Hope, Ontario in 1859.¹ A well regarded surgeon and physician for Trinity College School at Port Hope, he married Anne Jane Hughes as his second wife in 1868 and died in August 1877, when Florence, their only surviving child, born 14 October 1872, was not yet five. Her widowed mother Anne, having lost her own father, brother, and two children within a few years, moved with Florence in April 1878 to Edinburgh. Her brother-in-law, Gilbert Innes Dewar, died 26 September 1879, leaving almost all of his estate to his young niece Florence. Anne raised Florence not only in Scotland but in Dresden (to study music) and Florence, Italy, as well with only occasional trips back to Port Hope, where the Rev. Charles Bethune, who was Headmaster at Trinity College School, was her godfather. Florence was very fortunate not only in being an heiress but in having such a capable and intelligent mother as Anne Hughes.

Ugo Giro Bagnani was born in 1863 in Pisa, son of Giuseppe Bagnani, a pharmacist, and of Emilia Franceschetti, who had nursed the Italian hero Garibaldi during his recovery from a bullet wound at Aspromonte in 1862.

¹ <https://www.accessgenealogy.com/canada/biography-of-john-f-dewar-m-d.htm> According to this same article, Ann Hughes 'was his second wife, he marrying before leaving the old country. His first wife lived only one short year after their settlement in Port Hope,' but according to <http://www.alivingpast.ca/inquests.htm>, there was an inquest into the death of Susette, an Italian servant of Dr Dewar's after she died of 'poor quality of blood' July 14, 1863. So far, there is no trace of any of them in any 1861 census.

Ugo had one older brother born in 1859, Arturo, an engineer who eventually immigrated to Descalvado, Brazil. The Bagnanis traced their ancestry back to 1201 in Tuscany and included a Jerusalem knight ennobled at the time of the Venetian-Maltese naval battles with the Turks in 1717. After Giuseppe Bagnani died in 1864, leaving the widowed Emilia with two very young sons, Ugo became a Second Lieutenant in the infantry by the age of eighteen, attending military school and entering the Bersaglieri, an elite corps of the Italian infantry, trained for speed, endurance, marksmanship and independent initiative. Ugo rose very rapidly through its ranks to become Italy's first Military Attaché in London from 1908 to 1911, an Aide-de-Camp to King Victor Emanuel III, and finally in 1917 Italy's representative at the British front at Cassel in northern France, where he died suddenly of pneumonia.

By a coincidence then, both of Gilbert's parents had been raised by their widowed mothers and never really knew their fathers. Also, Gilbert had ancestors on both sides practicing medicine, although he himself showed little interest in healing except with the workers on the excavations in Egypt when there was no one else to minister to the sick.

Florence Ruby Dewar married Captain Ugo Bagnani on Tuesday 14 Sept 1897 at the Chapel of Trinity College School in Port Hope, with a reception at 44 Augusta St., Port Hope. Although there were undoubtedly many marriages between Italians and English, there would have been relatively few between the educated elites, then a very small proportion of the general population.

Gilbert was born in Rome and his mother's mother, Anna Jane Hughes Dewar, seems to have lived in Italy near her daughter and grandson. She died in 5 July 1905 at the residence of her son-in-law Major Bagnani in Verona and was buried in the Protestant Cemetery in Verona. In order to settle her estate, Ugo, Florence and Gilbert together with their maid sailed to New York and traveled by train to Toronto. They stayed for a few days with the Rev. Charles Bethune. A second cousin of the famous medical missionary in China, Norman Bethune, Charles would go on to found the Canadian Entomological Society while teaching at Guelph University. A very large red album of postcards, invitations, and other ephemera documents the years 1900 to 1907, including their trip to Canada. Gilbert would have heard Port Hope mentioned countless times in discussions with his mother but what it symbolized to him in his early years remains unknown; three decades later he would choose to leave Italy and immigrate to Port Hope, Ontario.

Gilbert grew up speaking Italian to his father and their servants and English to his mother. Gilbert was attending elementary school in Peschiera near

Verona when his father was posted to London, England, in January 1908. For the next three and a half years, Gilbert was raised in a diplomatic environment while at the same time inheriting his father's military disdain for diplomats in general. Moreover, he and his family would have been outside observers of political and social events, detached from most of their neighbours and compatriots. Invitations to royal events at the palace indicating a dress code of 'feathers and trains' convey the elaborate protocol of the period, culminating with an invitation to the coronation festivities in June, 1911.

In London, Gilbert attended Charles Herbert Gibbs' Pre-Preparatory School, which was located at 37 Sloane St in the 1911 census. Re-established in 1918 at 134 Sloane St, Gibb's School was attended in the late 1930s by the sons of American Ambassador Joseph Kennedy as after the war by Prince Edward and Viscount Linley. In the Bagnani Archives at Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario, Gilbert's notes on Napoleon dating from about 1911 suggest an early interest, possibly prompted as a school assignment, which continued into his adult life. At some stage in his schooling, Gilbert played the title role of Euripides' Iphigeneia. But his mother was equally influential. Decades later Gilbert recalled that she 'presented me on my eleventh birthday with Macauley's essays. It was a turning point in my life. I devoured them avidly. They confirmed my interest in history, & gave me the passion for the eighteenth century' that never deserted him.

In the 1911 census, Lt. Col. Ugo Bagnani was living at 15 Onslow Square with his wife Florence, son Gilbert aged ten, visitors Amedeo, aged twelve, and Aimone di Savoia, aged eleven, and servants Italia Ballardini, parlour maid aged forty, Vittoria Ballardini, cook aged twenty-three, and Santina Venturini, housemaid aged eighteen, all single. The Duke of Aosta, 1st cousin of King Victor Emanuel and at that time heir to the Italian throne, had sent his sons Amedeo and Aimone to London at this time, and Gilbert's father served *in loco parentis*. The two royal brothers may have had little to do with the commoner Gilbert, and he seldom ever referred to them later in life.

After his family moved back to Italy, Gilbert attended the Nobile Collegio del Nazzarino in Rome but his father's duties and whereabouts as General are less clear. There is a file of about thirty letters written to him from 1910 to 1913 by his commander, the Duke of Aosta, but the Duke's handwriting was so notoriously illegible that the King was said to have placed his letters on the floor and walked around them to determine which side was up. There is also a thick file of telegrams between them. It was during this period that Italy seized Libya and the Dodecanese islands in the Aegean from Turkey.

In the Spring of 1915, just before Italy entered the war against Austria, Gilbert wrote several letters from 4 Via S. Martino Rome to his mother who was elsewhere in Italy with his father. Gilbert would not have been at home alone in Rome since there were at least two servants in the apartment. He was not only following the current political events avidly but even taking part in violent anti-Austrian demonstrations. Gilbert's father was serving as an Italian observer at the British front in France when he died suddenly of pneumonia in February 1917. The small funeral procession attended by his widow was observed and movingly described by a Canadian officer, General George H. Mitchell, who later became a good friend of Gilbert's in Canada as the Dean of Applied Science and Engineering at the University of Toronto. Gilbert seems not to have attended the funeral and, in the absence of any surviving correspondence between Gilbert and his father, little is documented about their relationship, nor in what ways Ugo may have influenced his son.

Gilbert began studying at the University of Rome in November 1917 but had to attend the Royal Military Academy in Turin for six months from September 1918 until March 1919 just as the First World War was ending. Becoming an officer had little appeal for him. While it was undoubtedly elite, Gilbert's letters home leave no doubt that he could not wait to get out and back to academia. Surrounded as he was in Rome by history and historians, it is hardly surprising that Gilbert eventually concentrated his studies on ancient history and archaeology.

Even before he graduated, Gilbert had given public lectures and published two articles. In 1920 he used his connections in Rome to arrange to lecture to the Hellenic Society in London on recent Italian excavations at Cyrene, and various ambassadors' wives and a Roman princess were in attendance. When he lectured in August at Cardiff in Wales to the British Association for the Advancement of Science, he met the famous Egyptologist, Sir Flinders Petrie, and even drew satirical sketches of characters he met there.

Always fearless, in June 1921 he sailed on his own via Syracuse and Malta to visit the Italian excavations in Cyrenaica in eastern Libya. Cyrene was an early Greek colony, an important city under the Romans, and highly prized by archaeologists for the sculptures discovered in its public markets and baths, but the region was potentially dangerous. It was a politically sensitive place and time because the Italians had seized Libya from the Ottoman Empire in 1911 and were still encountering resistance from the local Senussi tribesmen.

At the Art Gallery of Ontario there are perhaps three hundred photos of eastern Libya from this tour, many remaining to be identified. Some photos

show the two-storeyed tomb of Menechrat outside ancient Barka or Merdj with plans and sections. This tomb might have been the subject of a university project and the immediate reason for his trip but he never published these documents or his photos of the tomb and these did not appear in its later publication.

In the relatively few letters written from Libya to his mother he described the personalities of the local Italian archaeologists, who were arguing among themselves. While he was at Cyrene, three skeletons were discovered in the ancient marketplace where they had been crushed in the earthquake of 365. This was also the same season that the famous inscribed edicts of Cyrene were discovered which clarified the imperial powers legally held by the first emperor Augustus.

He also met military officials and ventured southward out into the desert with local police but was forced to turn back by some unidentified political or military incident which Gilbert did not feel comfortable making explicit in his letter while there. His photographs do portray Italians and Arabs together, including Omar al Mukhtar, who was soon to lead the revolt against the Italians.

Upon his return to Rome, he published an article about the sculptures previously found at Cyrene and displayed in the British Museum, which he would have seen the previous summer (Bagnani 1921: 232-46). This subject also might have been a component of his university requirements. His interest in classical sculpture would continue in Greece. In addition, he wrote another article for the Roman Society about the discovery of an underground neo-Pythagorean Basilica in Rome (Bagnani 1919: 78-85).

His main academic thesis was on the depiction of Greek fountains as painted on Greek vases. An English version of this paper survives at Trent. It reveals, however, that he was unaware of Greek publications during the war, an understandable though important omission.

Gilbert graduated from the University of Rome in November 1921, having changed his focus from law to ancient history and archaeology. Serious and precocious, he had been given every advantage by his doting parents but he also had several very influential academic mentors who recognized his exceptional gifts and offered him guidance. Gilbert's connections in Rome were with the archaeological and diplomatic establishments. He once said he considered himself more Roman than Italian, socializing with the old 'black aristocracy' whose families had been ennobled by the popes long before Rome was incorporated into modern Italy in 1870. Gilbert and his mother lived in a fairly spacious apartment in a palazzo, now the German Embassy, at 4 San

Martino, only a five minute walk from the Terme Museum. His mentors were not only Thomas Ashby, the Director of the British School at Rome, and Mrs. Eugénie Sellers Strong, the Assistant Director, but also Federico Halbherr, the *éminence grise* of Italian archaeologists, and Roberto Paribeni, arguably the most politically influential Italian archaeologist of his generation: he was in charge of Italian Archaeological Missions in Asia Minor and the Levant for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is little wonder that Gilbert obtained a scholarship to attend the Italian School of Archaeology at Athens.

William Miller and his wife lived at 36 Via Palestro, just around the corner from Gilbert's mother's apartment. Certainly after the death of Gilbert's father, if not before as well, Miller was very influential in Gilbert's early life. Miller was a foreign correspondent for the *Morning Post* newspaper in London and for him political journalism was a 'treatment of modern history.' (Hetherington 2009: 156) Miller became interested not just in the medieval history of Greece but particularly in the evidence for the western crusaders or 'Latins' in the east, so much so that his two major publications, among hundreds, were *The Latins in the Levant. A History of Frankish Greece (1204-1566)* and *Essays on the Latin Orient*, which had just appeared. At least as early as 1919, Gilbert was asking Miller for his opinion on the latest developments at the peace conference negotiations in Paris, but Miller, writing from Tuscany, feared that his letters might be opened and preferred reluctantly to 'defer the question till we can meet on your comfortable divan.'² Within weeks of arriving in Greece, Gilbert would reveal a thorough comprehension of Greek politics, embark upon political journalism and develop a burgeoning interest in evidence for western Latins in the East.

When Gilbert first traveled to Greece in December 1921, he was uniquely prepared for more than archaeology. His family's military, diplomatic and social background as well as his own precocious mind and keen interest in current politics assured that archaeology would not be his only occupation.

² Letter to 'my dear Bagnani' dated August 17, probably 1919. Although Gilbert was only 19 and Miller about 55, Miller wrote to him as an adult. I am indebted to Paul Hetherington for emails regarding his research on Miller.