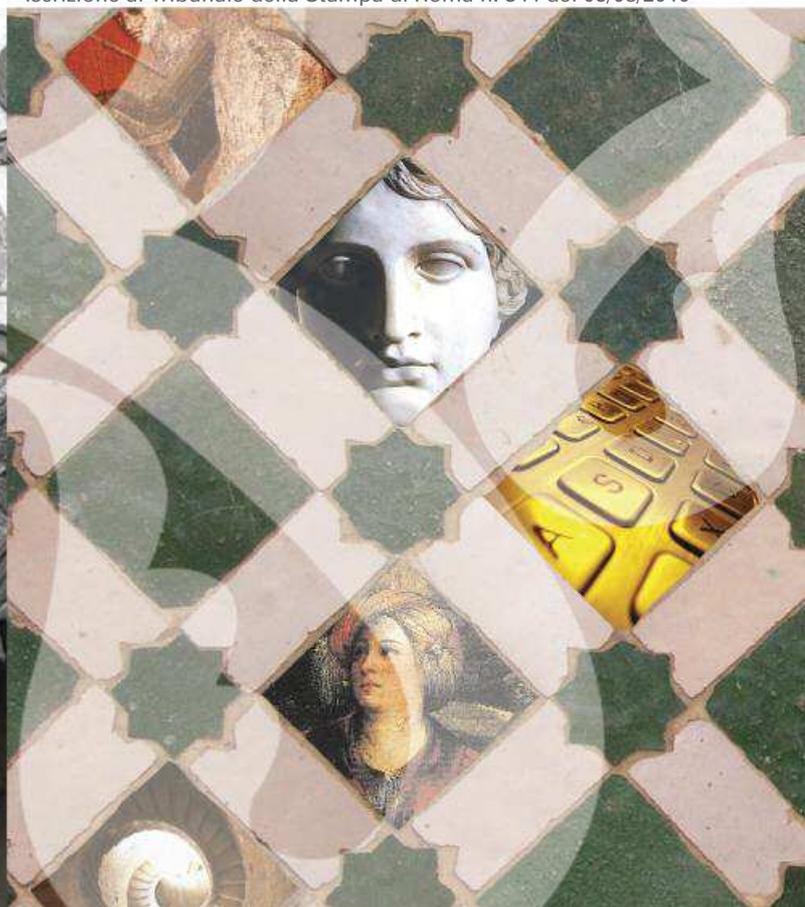




Centro Universitario Europeo  
per i Beni Culturali  
Ravello

# Territori della Cultura

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# Sommario



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<b>Comitato di redazione</b>	<b>5</b>
EXPO 2015 “Nutrire il Pianeta”: una grande opportunità per la Dieta Mediterranea Alfonso Andria	<b>8</b>
La “Commissione Franceschini” compie cinquanta anni (1964-2014) Pietro Graziani	<b>12</b>
<b>Conoscenza del patrimonio culturale</b>	
Claude Albore Livadie, Witold Dobrowolski L’antica Baia in un’opera di Henryk Siemiradzki	<b>16</b>
Luigi Taborelli Per l’archeologia di un farmaco. Produttori e contenitori di <i>Lykion</i> in epoca ellenistica	<b>26</b>
<b>Cultura come fattore di sviluppo</b>	
Rosa Anna Genovese Roberto Di Stefano: il contributo internazionale al tema della conservazione	<b>36</b>
<b>Metodi e strumenti del patrimonio culturale</b>	
Sergio Forcellino Some challenges facing the Tourism industry: a focus on the Amalfi Coast	<b>46</b>
Giuseppe Ferri Il Museo Lorenzo Ferri	<b>60</b>
Giuseppe Berardi Adeguamento liturgico e restauro: per una verifica di compatibilità	<b>70</b>
<b>Appendice</b>	
a cura della redazione Housing a trireme	<b>76</b>

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# Housing a trireme

*a cura della redazione*

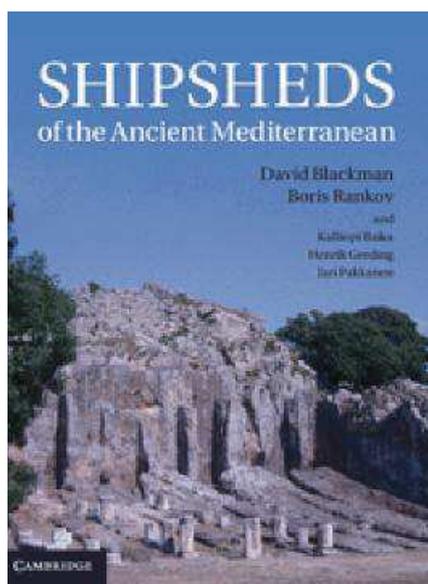
David Blackman comes of a Portsmouth family, with long links with the navy and the dockyard. He first became interested in the subject of ancient warships as a schoolboy when a Cambridge don John Morrison came to his school to lecture about the ancient trireme, bringing his model of the proposed midships section. Later Blackman was one of his last students at Trinity College, Cambridge, before he went off to build other colleges (and a trireme); and he encouraged Blackman to start his postgraduate research by looking at the evidence provided by shipsheds for the dimensions of the trireme. The trireme was the key weapon of the navies of the Greco-Roman world; but no remains of an ancient trireme had been found on the seabed, since it contained no cargo which would have held the hull in place. How the trireme was

configured had been the subject of scholarly debate for centuries - indeed it became the subject of a famous correspondence in the *Times*, giving Morrison contact with many naval experts, including John Coates, then recently retired as Chief Naval Architect at the British Ministry of Defence. David's work was published in Morrison's book *Greek Oared Ships* in 1968, and provided helpful information for the next stage in the trireme project.

Co-author Boris Rankov was also brought to the trireme by John Morrison, albeit at a much later date, when he was idly admiring the full-scale trial section of a reconstruction which Coates had designed for Morrison and which had been put on display at the 1985 Henley Royal Regatta.

Within half-an-hour, Morrison had persuaded Rankov, a Roman historian and famous oarsman, to recruit a crew to row the ship (named *Olympias*) once she herself had been built; and the trireme has been central to Rankov's academic interests and research ever since. The collaboration of the two authors in the present volume (dedicated to the two Johns) is thus a logical, almost inevitable, product of this joint legacy.

During his twenty years at The European Parliament Blackman kept an eye on developments, and in August 1987 was able to attend the commissioning ceremony for the *Olympias*, presided over by Melina Mercouri as Minister of Culture and an arch-





bishop scattering holy water. The *Olympias* remains a unit of the Hellenic navy, and the Trireme Trust, now chaired by Rankov, provides support and advice. Blackman moved to Athens from Brussels, to direct the British School of Archaeology, and became directly involved again. When he retired in 2002 he discussed a project with Rankov to conduct the first comprehensive study of the shipsheds which housed the great navies of the ancient world. These were some of the largest and most expensive building projects of antiquity; they were carefully designed to keep warships dry and out of reach of shipworm, prolonging the life of these crucial military assets, and making it possible to launch them quickly, easily and safely when required. They were an indispensable part of the maritime infrastructure of the cities of the Mediterranean, in antiquity as they were to be in the Renaissance.

The ever-increasing amount of archaeological evidence for shipsheds, especially in recent years, nevertheless meant that the project would have been too large for the two of them to tackle alone without the financial support provided by a generous grant from the Leverhulme Trust. This enabled them to employ a total of three research assistants and they were joined by a project co-director Jari Pakkanen, and sponsored by Royal Holloway, University of London. The newly published volume on *Shipsheds of the Ancient Mediterranean* is the product of their labours on the topic over the last ten years.

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