



# BIRTH OF THE HERCULANEUM SOCIETY

**WELCOME** to the first edition of *Herculaneum Archaeology*, the newsletter of the Friends of Herculaneum Society. The Society was founded in 2004. Our aim is to bring everyone interested in or concerned about Herculaneum together into one organisation. Whatever one's views on the issues of the day, all can agree that there are opportunities of enormous potential at Herculaneum, existing alongside problems of gigantic proportions. Working together with the Italian authorities and organisations that share our aims, particularly the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Pompei (Soprintendente, Prof. Pietro Giovanni Guzzo) and the Centro Internazionale per lo Studio dei Papiri Ercolanesi (CISPE), directed by Prof. Francesca Longo Auricchio, we want to further the study and preservation of this extraordinary location. From little acorns and all that: the Egypt Exploration Society was founded in 1882 and is still with us, strong as ever; one may hope that what we are starting today might also enjoy so long a lease of life, and benefit generations of future scholars.

It's an exciting time. Advancements in technology mean that we can digitise and read papyri excavated and opened in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – as delicate as burnt newspaper. Over 30,000 pieces have been digitised by ISPART (Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts) at Brigham Young University in Utah. Professor Roger MacFarlane updates us on page 4.

With a feasibility study currently being conducted at Herculaneum there is a real possibility of future excavation. However, there are problems with site conservation which Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, director of the British School at Rome, outlines on page 2. Robert Fowler, Professor of Greek at Bristol University, provides the counterpoint argument and the reasons why further excavation is so important on page 3.

The Herculaneum Society wants to build an interactive membership, which is why, after the review of Shelley Hales' *The Roman House and Social Identity* on page 4, there is a call for members to send in their own reviews of books they have read, or which peers have written – or to offer contributions which would be of interest to the Society.

Finally, membership itself. The Society needs member support in order to continue its

work. There are a number of different levels of membership. Details can be found on the membership insert, along with the joining form.

We hope that you enjoy *Herculaneum Archaeology*, and that you will join us in the drive to protect and promote what is one of the most important and illuminating archaeological sites in the world.

Professor Robert Fowler (Bristol)  
Dr Dirk Obbink (Oxford)

*'opportunities  
of enormous  
potential'*

## OBJECTS OF THE SOCIETY

The objects of the Society are to advance the education of the public concerning the World Heritage Site of Herculaneum, in particular to create an archive of materials relating to the World Heritage site at Herculaneum and the work of the Herculaneum Society; to promote research into Herculaneum, including the continued investigation of the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum, and the publication of the useful results of such research; and to promote the conservation, for the benefit of the public, of the artefacts and buildings at Herculaneum.



Right: Vesuvius looms over the ruins of Herculaneum and the modern town of Ercolano.

# TO DIG OR N

ANDREW Wallace-Hadrill, Director of the British School at Rome, explains why further excavation is not appropriate at present.

**POMPEII** is a household name; yet in many ways Herculaneum is even more extraordinary as a testimony to ancient life. The significantly different character of its destruction, buried to a depth of up to 25 metres by a succession of pyroclastic surges and flows, means that here we can recover many things largely unknown at Pompeii: upper floors, even to two levels; wooden structures including beams, doors and flimsy partitions; wooden objects, cupboards, shrines, screens, beds, even a cradle; and fabrics, including papyrus scrolls and wooden tablets. Then there are human remains, preserved differently, but to the scientist more revealingly, than the famous casts of Pompeii. We can study the bones of this population, read their archives as well as their literature; and see them in a domestic context with far greater clarity than at Pompeii.

Nevertheless, and in spite of the fact that the majority of the excavations of Herculaneum are more recent than those of Pompeii, the crisis of conservation is more acute: restored roofs are in collapse, broken tiles litter mosaic floors, the precious carbonised wood crumbles constantly, rain pools on marble floors and against plastered walls, and the frescoed surfaces fade, leach salts, bubble up, explode and fall from their walls. Pigeons roost under the eaves, and the walls are smeared with

their excrement. These same phenomena can be observed in the new excavations of the 1990s as in Amedeo Maiuri's excavations of the heyday of the 1930s.

All is not lost. The world of archaeology owes an immense debt of gratitude to the Packard Humanities Institute, under the inspired leadership of Dr David Woodley Packard, which has undertaken a major project to help the Soprintendenza address these numerous problems. But let nobody imagine that even the advent of generous funding can solve these problems at a stroke.

One must understand first what caused the problems to arise in the first place. We can point to the uncontrolled ambition of the excavations of the 1930s, which assumed that the true challenge lay in exposing more to the sunshine, not in conserving it once exposed. We can point to the massive problems which confront a state richer in heritage and antiquities than any other, but without sufficient mechanisms to convert the vast profits of tourism into revenue for the sites. We can point to the legal entanglements that surround a bureaucracy beset with a thicket of legislation designed to keep at bay corruption and abuse, but which ends by rendering the entire system inoperative.

In the end, the vital point is this. Until we have demonstrated that we can find a way to manage this incomparable heritage and preserve it for future generations, and specifically so at Herculaneum, we can only add to the existing problems by undertaking new excavation. The Villa of the Papyri is indeed of exceptional importance. That is why it would be a scandal to expose it to the daylight now, before we can guarantee that it would be saved for the future.

*'we can only add to the existing problems by undertaking new excavation'*



ALISON CARTER

Left: A crisis of conservation. Scaffolding and piles of rubble at the site of Herculaneum today.



# NOT TO DIG?

ROBERT Fowler, Professor of Greek at Bristol University, tells us that *now is the time*.

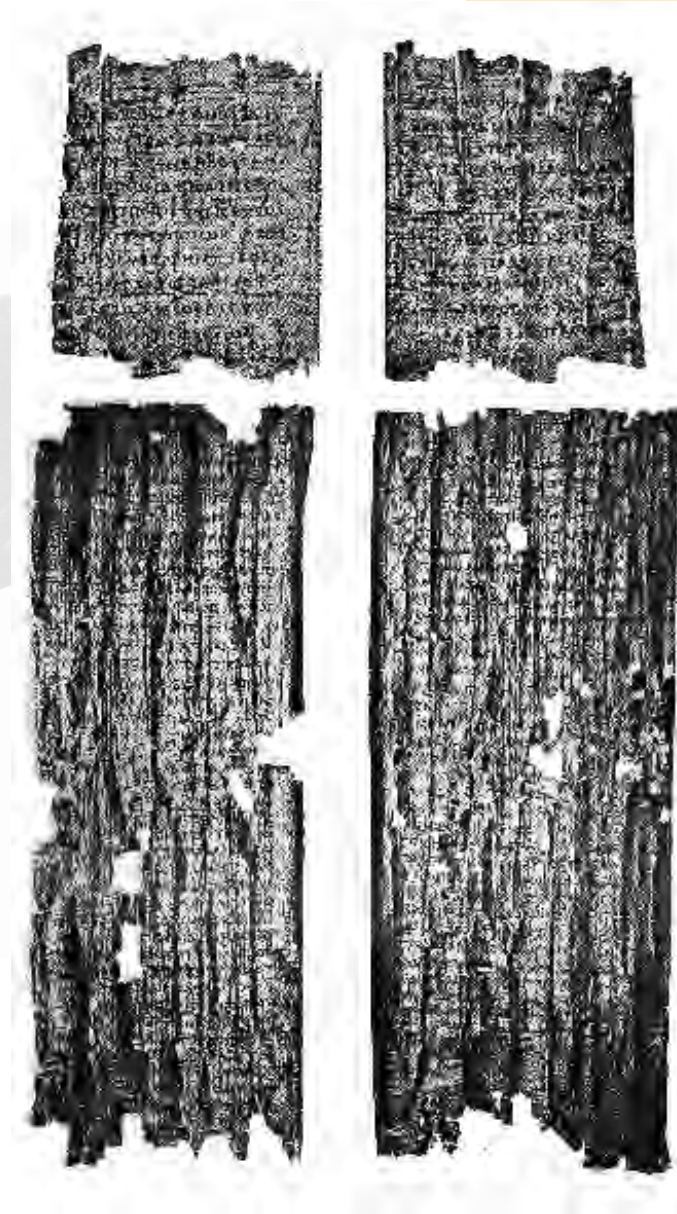
**INGENIOUS** detective work and perseverance led to the most spectacular archaeological discovery of recent years when Antonio De Simone and his colleague, one breathless day in 1986, entered the Villa of the Papyri for the first time in 221 years. Excavations were duly begun; but the money ran out, and now the Villa stands forlorn, its rump exposed to the elements. Should the resources be made available, the case would seem to be straightforward for resumption of the excavations. The Villa itself is of unique historical interest and importance, whatever artistic works or papyri might or might not still be hidden within it. In fact, the chances are very high that much remains to be found in the three newly identified and totally unexplored levels. The potential is staggering.

There are huge difficulties, to be sure. The rest of the Villa lies under the modern town of Ercolano: laying the whole building open to the sky would cause enormous disruption, and involve astronomical cost. For this reason the feasibility of tunnelling, and of other approaches is currently under study; the results are expected within the year. Trickier is the problem of priorities. As Andrew Wallace-Hadrill writes in this newsletter, there is a serious crisis of preservation at Herculaneum. It is a very reasonable policy that there should be no new excavations until the preservation of parts already excavated has been put right.

In general I agree. But the Villa is in a category of its own. Of all the sites in the world one could wish to excavate, this one must be near the top of the list. We have the technology, and the West has never been richer: now is the time. I worry that the argument will rumble on for another century without anything happening. Eventually the Villa could be put beyond reach by seismic or volcanic activity, or a collapse in economic power. So long as there

is a chance of finding the rest of the library - and everyone admits there is a chance, however strong or weak they rate it - we owe it to the world to dig. Of course it must be a proper excavation; no one advocates a mere treasure hunt. Ultimately

*'the potential is staggering'*



Above: Finds like these? Fragments from Philodemus' (?) *peri aistheseon*, and two from Philodemus' *peri semeion kai semeioseon*.

it is a problem of finding enough resources for both excavation *and* preservation. That is one of the main reasons for founding the Herculaneum Society, so that all those interested in the welfare of this stupendous site can work together to find solutions.

# OUT OF THE ASHES

ROGER Macfarlane, of Brigham Young University, on digitally imaging the papyri from Herculaneum.

**Collaboration** between scholars in places as disparate as Naples and Provo, Utah would have once seemed unlikely. But common engagement in the multi-spectral imaging of the Herculaneum Papyri has united scholars from diverse places. In 1998, scholars from Brigham Young University's Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts (ISPART) were engaged by the late Professor Marcello Gigante, founder of CISPE, to apply space-age MSI technology to carbonised scrolls from Herculaneum. MSI had been used by BYU scholars in a variety of settings, and Gigante hoped it could render useful scrolls so black that the human eye often can discern no ink whatsoever. The Biblioteca Nazionale in Naples permitted ISPART researchers to run tests on the papyri in 1999. They enjoyed astonishing results.

The BYU team completed the creation of an archive of some 30,000 digital images of all opened papyri in the Biblioteca Nazionale in 2002. Students have used the images to read these newly legible texts, which have been made available on CD-ROM to scholars throughout Europe and the USA. Recent undertakings involve BYU, the BNN, and CISPE in developing web-based distribution of the images. As new editions are published, the MSI of related scrolls will be released simultaneously on mutually endorsed websites ([www.herculaneum.byu.edu](http://www.herculaneum.byu.edu)). The gradual release of images protects the privileges of scholars who have laboured long with the extraordinarily difficult papyri, but a general opening of the site is scheduled for January 2006.

The partnership between new friends in Provo, Naples, and elsewhere has resulted in a multitude of interactions. The Naples project led to BYU's imaging the PHerc-Paris scrolls housed at the Institut de France. Ongoing negotiations regarding the PHerc scrolls in London will hopefully result in collaboration between BYU and the British Library. Steps have been taken toward linking the images of PHerc facsimiles archived at Oxford's Bodleian Library with those from Naples on one website. Besides significant exposure in the international press, the Herculaneum Papyrus Project has featured in numerous academic conferences. This spring the Smithsonian Institution at Washington, DC featured the Project as the opening of a multivalent exhibition about Campania. While academics have enjoyed such opportunities to share their research, graduate and undergraduate students have also benefited tremendously. Dott. Gianluca Del Mastro (Naples) was a visiting research fellow at BYU in 2003 teaching on Herculaneum and the Papyri, and the bridge between Provo and Naples, begun by the late Prof. Gigante, has continued to be built as colleagues in Provo host one of his most promising students.

Private donations have created the BYU-CISPE fellowship, allowing a BYU graduate to study papyrology with scholars in CISPE for one year. BYU undergraduates will study in Naples this summer, and Prof. Antonio De Simone, who excavated the Villa of the Papyri in the 1990's, has invited BYU students to participate in the preparation and excavation of a new site near Naples in the summer of 2005.

Brigham Young University's motto is 'The World is Our Campus'. The university lies in a valley surrounded by towering mountains, a place settled by 19th Century pioneers who enjoyed its geographical remoteness. Involvement with the Herculaneum Papyrus Project, however, has made it possible for BYU students to overcome their boundaries in exciting ways.

*Out of the Ashes*, the documentary story of the collaboration between BYU and CISPE, has been screened across the USA and is being translated into Italian. It is available as part of Society membership.

## DIXIT DOMUS

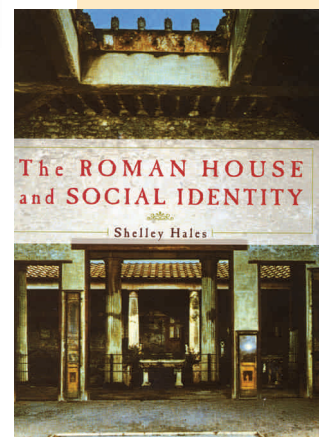
"The Roman's house, it might be said, was his forum", and Shelley Hales argues that the decoration of the domus is pivotal to the expression of a Roman's identity within the family, the senate, and the city. This book looks at the social function of domestic residences as far from Rome as Petra and the Greek east.

She explores in depth the houses of Pompeii. She sees these houses as having a façade of access. Marked by political graffiti, used by shop owners, outside walls were given over to the public world; and doors, as the way into the family, were used to impress that public – with bolts, locks, insignia. The lack of windows was not simply about weather, instead presenting a deliberately secretive exterior. Indeed, it seems impossible for the viewer to sneak a look into the private life of the Pompeian elite:

one follows set interior paths, and looks at framed 'views' of the house and family. Appearances of axial symmetry are just that, and Hales believes that interior access was in fact delineated by decoration. Mosaics of closed gates, warnings – *cave canem* in the House of the Tragic Poet being the most famous – stop the viewer in his tracks. Reality is interchangeable with the impression of reality.

Hales is interesting on the nature of 'looking into' the private, but of course the family will have a "different slant on the experience of worship and dining than the viewer looking on" Their social identity is manifest in the surroundings they choose. This is a book about the way the rich man lives. Then, as now, the "poor remained invisible and 'private' even when living in public" – and Hales herself admits that wider social range of evidence would illuminate more clearly what it really meant to be Roman.

Anna Collar



Shelley Hales, *The Roman House and Social Identity*. CUP 2003.

We hope you have enjoyed the first edition of *Herculaneum Archaeology*. For more information about the Society, or if you have any comments, suggestions or pieces for inclusion in the next edition please contact the editor. We look forward to hearing from you.

Edited by Anna Collar

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