

# herculaneum archaeology

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Wounded Aeneas. Iapyx extracts an arrow while mother Venus looks on, and son Ascanius stands alongside.  
From the Casa di Sirico, Pompeii; 1st C BC

## *News from Naples by Robert Fowler*

Friends who attended the First Naples Congress in 2006 will remember being admitted to the collection of frescoes from Pompeii, Herculaneum and other Vesuvian sites in a part of the Museo Nazionale then closed to the public. As of 29 April the renovations are completed (ten years in preparation), and the galleries are open again. There are more than 400 works representing the Second through the Fourth Pompeian styles of wall-painting, a unique and priceless collection. Portraits, landscapes, architectural scenes, still life, gods and heroes, whimsical Cupids, satyrs and ballerinas poised in mid-air delighted the senses of the Roman aristocracy. Years of careful restorations based on the latest scholarship and technical mastery have brought the pictures to an intensity of colour not seen since antiquity.

The new exhibition opens with a room dedicated to the technique of painting including drafts, colour pots and instruments. The second room treats the discovery of the paintings and their influence on neoclassical taste; on display is the first fresco removed from Pompeii in the eighteenth century. Successive rooms cover the three Styles, with the most famous paintings tending to come from the Fourth: the wedding of Hera and Zeus, Achilles and Briseis, the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, Peirithous and the Centaur, wounded Aeneas, Mars and Venus, Ariadne abandoned. A series of rooms with still life, portraits and landscapes concludes the tour.

We owe this news to Judith Harris (author of *Pompeii Awakened*), who draws our attention to the Electa website, where one can find the latest cultural notices. The link for this one is <http://www.electaweb.it/mostre/scheda/pittura-pompeiana-napoli-museo-archeologico-nazionale/it> which includes a link to a gallery of images. Electa has published the catalogue, which you can order online at: <http://www.electaweb.it/catalogo/scheda/978885100575/it>.

Finally, though it's not new news, it's worth mentioning the discovery of a spectacular new Dionysiac relief in the 'northwest Insula' in February during the course of restoration work in the area of the Villa of the Papyri. For details, see the Friends website.

## *An 18th-century traveller's account of his visit to the buried cities*

*translated by Nigel Wilson*

The discovery of Pompei and Herculaneum made a great impression on travellers. Leandro Fernandez de Moratin (1760-1828), an elegant stylist who made his name as a dramatic writer, spent some time as a young man in Italy. Here are excerpts from his description.

Under Portici and Resina the city of Herculaneum lies buried. The most important buildings that have been discovered so far are a forum and a theatre. In the forum were found the two equestrian statues of the Balbi, one of Vespasian, and others of various illustrious families. The theatre proscenium is a hundred and twenty feet wide, and it has been calculated that the twenty-one levels of seating and the other areas accommodated ten thousand people. The quantity of ash and lava that fell on the city was so great that its buildings are located at a depth of sixty, eighty or a hundred feet. This makes excavation very difficult, because apart from the density and bulk of matter that has to be hacked away the excavations need to be supported by pillars and buttresses, to ensure that everything does not collapse in ruins. And in addition, how is it possible to bore in terrain, on top of which so many buildings stand, without damaging them? As long as Resina and Portici remain there, the discoveries at Herculaneum cannot be advanced.

Beyond Resina, along the road which goes all the way directly to the sea, Torre del Greco and Torra Annunziata are situated; they are next door to each other with little or no space separating them, well situated and cheerful communities with a large population, full of houses in the fields, with gardens, orchards, and many crops cultivated. The road passes over a great torrent of lava that Vesuvius spewed out in 1760, mixed with ash and enormous rocks; it burnt the whole area, destroyed the buildings in its path, and came down to the sea with fearful destruction. A short distance from here are the ruins of Pompei, an ancient city which until the middle of this century was so hidden from human gaze that no-one ventured to define its location. The quantity

of ash that fell on it, filling every space in streets and buildings, raised the level of the ground, which in time became fertile for plants. Cultivation began, and today, above the temples, theatres and tombs of Pompei, one can see vines trained on black poplars, and the farmer reaps abundant crops. Excavation done on this site costs little effort, partly because what needs to be broken is ash, partly because the level at which the ruins lie is not nearly as deep as at Herculaneum.

So far two streets have been discovered, one of them with the city gate, also a number of tombs, a barracks, a temple of Isis, and two theatres. One cannot walk through this area without a kind of enthusiasm inspired by all these objects. This was the theatre; here the ordinary people sat, over there the nobility; over there the actors emerged, here the verses of Terence and Plautus were heard; these precincts echoed with the applause of the public. Humanity has disappeared; the place exists. This was the temple; there is the inscription, there the altars; the walls with paintings and stucco declare the attributes of the divinity. Here the victims' throats were slit; here, the priests hidden, they lent their voices to a mute image, and the people, full of fear, believed they heard the divinity itself announcing to ignorant humanity its future destiny. Here is a street; it is paved like those in Naples with lava spewed out of that volcano nearby; on either side there are pavements so that people can walk by without danger from carts – the marks of wheels can still be seen. You can see here the shops; here drinks were sold; the sign over the doors, the marks left by the base of the cups on the counter, and the little ovens alongside to keep drinks warm, prove this. Over there was another shop which sold models of Priapus; the shop-sign is a sculpture over the door; there is the shop-window with shelves where these trinkets were displayed to the public. These are the houses of rich families; this is the portico, supported by columns of brick covered by stucco, with Doric decoration; there is the patio with a gallery all around it; small rooms, tall, with mosaics on the floor and paintings on the walls; the bath, the stove with a hole in the wall to transmit the heat; the garden, the fountain, the cellar with huge earthenware vessels; the sitting-room, the dining-room, the alcove, the stone support where the bed was; everywhere sensual paintings, the triumphs of love. You see there tombs constructed by a grateful country for its famous sons; the inscriptions give their name and rank; there their ashes rest. What silence

reigns all around! And still Vesuvius throws up flames and its caverns roar with terrifying noise....

If one considers the proximity of this volcano and the imminent risk that one day it may explode in flames, create destruction on every side, and bury in fire and ash these delightful dwelling-places, centres of luxury and pleasure, it will be understood how easily men forget danger even when they see the threat in front of them. Portici is built over wealthy Herculaneum; Pompei is now being discovered after having remained hidden for long years under the ash that fell on it. In the king's gardens and various other places where deep excavations have been done there are as many as thirty distinct layers of lava, and six or seven of these are separated by fertile earth and mixed remains of buildings; in other words, this terrain, now inhabited by men in such security, has been flooded with torrents of fire over the centuries; six or seven times people have forgotten the last disaster, have cultivated and populated the area; equally often the horrors have been repeated, and yet men live above so many layers of destruction, without fearing that nature may in a single moment create such havoc once more.



House of the Black Salon,  
(Casa del Salone Nero)  
Herculaneum  
photo Peter Spital

## *Computer Modelling in Herculaneum An Interim Report by Peter Spital*

At the AGM of the Society in 2006 Professor Frischer told the Friends about the efforts of the Centre for Advanced Technology in the Humanities to develop computer models of ancient buildings. At the end of that talk he gently challenged the Society by suggesting that the Society might develop a computer model of Herculaneum. I spoke to Professor Fowler and agreed to take a look at the problem.

### **Strategy**

The first task was to develop a strategy for the work. It was necessary to agree a set of objectives which would exploit the strengths of Herculaneum relative to the other locations to which computer modelling has been applied. The major feature of Herculaneum is the quality of preservation of the

buildings, particularly the interior walls and the wall paintings. The models should focus on the interior of the buildings rather than showing those street scenes and overviews which are a feature of the majority of models of the ancient world.

Consideration was also given to the needs of the viewer. One of the objectives of the Society is education, so the model should be internet compatible and viewable using software which is freely available. For the same reason the model should be easy to use. The decision was made to use, what is referred to as, a 'walk through model' in which the viewer need only worry about going forwards or backwards and turning left or right.



*View of the Tablinum  
showing the walls in the  
their current state.*

### **Discovery**

Research revealed that there are three internet compatible 3D modelling systems, VRML, VRML 2000 and X3D. The first of these has very limited capability but is already implemented on some web browsing software, the second is a development of it which offers enhanced capability. This has been overtaken by X3D which is a development from VRML 2000. It was decided that X3D offered the best opportunity for the future and was adopted. This was a decision which has been regretted periodically but is probably still a good decision

for the long term.

It was soon found that the developers of the X3D standard were very capable of creating the modelling standards but that the software for displaying them had not achieved the same performance. It became apparent that there was a single software tool which is capable of displaying computer models of large structures such as houses. This should change as the technology becomes more widely used but progress has been slow.

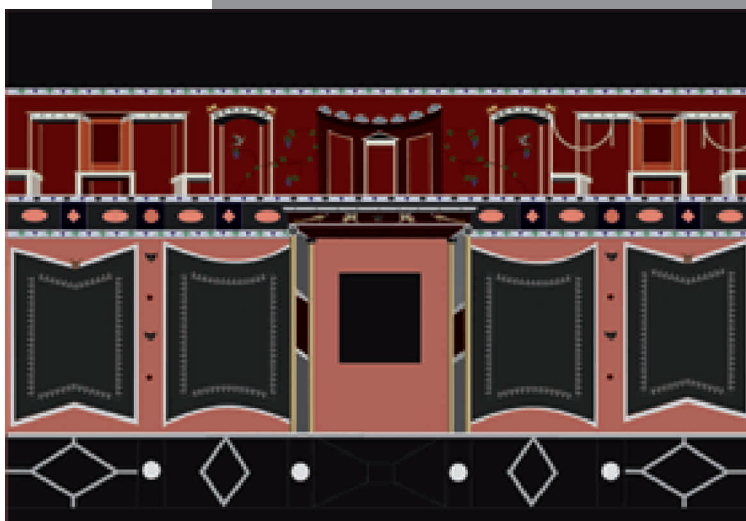


*View of the Triclinium showing the reconstructed paintings and furniture.*

In order to test the ability of the tools to computer model a Roman house it was necessary to construct a model of a house. Dr Shelley Hales of Bristol University kindly suggested that the building used for the test should be the House of the Wooden Partition in Herculaneum.

Just as a journey starts with a single step so the construction of a computer model of a house starts with a single room. It was necessary to find out whether to build the walls and ceilings of the house such as to form a room - this is the process which is used in a real house - or to model the rooms by creating the image of the walls around the space which is the room. It was found that, because it was desired to display the wall paintings, modelling the space was preferable to modelling the walls. In effect all that is modelled is the layer of paint on the walls. Curiously, in the modelling software this layer of paint is only visible from one side so that if one accidentally places it in the wrong position it can become invisible. Whilst constructing the model the outside walls are left off so that one can walk around the outside seeking a lost wall by looking into the building through the other walls. It is a slightly surreal experience.

There are also not yet any high quality tools for constructing the computer model although these are under development. Fortunately the great majority of the building can be constructed without them because the range of elements used is relatively small. For each room the layout of the room was drawn and dimensioned on cartridge paper using traditional techniques and it was then converted to a computer model by cutting and pasting elements of the computer model and altering the dimensions in the selected elements to match those on the paper drawing. It is probable that three features of the modelling software were used on a daily basis. The lack of high quality tools will become a more serious problem when it becomes necessary to computer model statues but this has not been required yet.



*Painted wall of the Triclinium showing the quality of reproduction which is attainable.*

### **Progress**

At present the house has been constructed, the door linings and doors have been installed, the doors open and close, some furniture has been installed and there is a certain amount of paint on the walls. There are certain notable omissions. The impluvium has been removed. As the model was developed it was necessary to undertake a virtual walk around the property in order to see how things were progressing, the impluvium

and its cartibulum were always in the way and so they were deleted from the model. There are no door handles, the doors operate with a click of the mouse so research into roman door handles has been delayed, possibly indefinitely. There are no excavation records for that part of the house which was excavated in the 19th century so that it will probably be never more than just a collection of walls. But the most notable omission is the recreation of the roman painted walls, each wall is currently taking around three weeks to reproduce and so far only six walls have been completed, two paired walls and two unpaired walls and these need some artistic improvement.

The quality of reproduction available from the software tool permits an impression of the wall paintings to be obtained but it is not yet possible to view the details of the paintings using the model viewing software. As computers gain more memory it should be possible to assign more to this purpose. It is also noticeable in the photographs that the software tool does not yet finish the ends of the mattresses on the couches correctly. It is hoped that this error will be corrected soon.

### Summary

In the longer term the modelling technique will almost certainly be developed to become a useful tool and that it will be possible to produce an interesting experience for the computer user but it should be assumed that this piece of research will require a period of time before it matures.

*The Society ran its first Schools Competition earlier this year. We asked our junior members to imagine that fateful day in 79 AD and describe the experience through the eyes of a slave in Herculaneum. Madeleine Taylor-Laidler, aged 12, of Redland High School, Bristol won 1st Prize.*

*I was sitting outside on the hill when Helena called.*

*"Cleo, come here. The Mistress wants you."*

The Mistress is actually our master's mother; his wife died many years ago. I was sad when she died, she had always shown me great kindness, even though I am a slave.

*"Cleo!"* Helena called. I could hear the annoyance in her voice.

*"Coming."* I replied and ran towards the house.

In the Mistress's room, Helena began brushing the Mistress's hair and tying it into complicated patterns. I had been surprised that at sixty-five, the Mistress should have such thick coppery hair until Helena told me it was a wig.

Helena looks after me. Her job is to apply the Mistress's make up and dress her hair. The other slaves grumble and say she has it easy, but I don't know, looking after the Mistress can be quite a trial! Anyway, the Master has promised Helena her freedom so she is training me to do her work. My thoughts were interrupted by the Mistress saying, "Child, you are getting powder on

my stola!" I looked down at her beautiful lilac stola and then looked at my yellow slave's tunic and sighed. Helena said to me "Cleo! Look what you've done. You should be more careful. Really Cleo, you're ten. You should know better." In fact Helena does not know that I am ten as I was found by the cook as a baby. The cook took me home and, as I did not have a bulla, the Master agreed to take me in as a slave. That is what Helena meant when she told me he saved my life, but it was really his wife who persuaded him to take me in.

It was the day of the feast. Herculaneum is full of wealthy Romans and there are banquets all the time. For me this generally meant having to take more time over getting the Mistress ready. However, today I was to play my flute at the banquet.

The cook, Clemens, made me a flute and taught me to play. One day the Master's wife heard me playing and bought me a beautiful cherry-wood flute. The Master remembered that I played the flute and told me to play for his guests today. I was flattered that he considered me good enough, but I was also very

nervous, never having played before an audience. The banquet and music were going well. I played again and again with another slave named Julia, until my lips hurt. The slaves brought in a roast peacock; there had been many splendid dishes such as stuffed dormice, dried figs and snails, but the peacock put them all to shame. It looked as if it was still alive, the colours vibrant blues and greens. I knew I would not get to taste it but seeing it was enough. The guests were tucking into the peacock when suddenly the earth trembled and shook. Everything shifted or fell over, food tumbled to the mosaic floor and people began screaming and shouting in pani. Finally the earthquake stopped and the guests quickly departed.

A few days later, Helena and I were shopping in the Forum. There had been many earthquakes since the first one at the banquet and the people of Herculaneum, who remained in the city, were quickly learning to adapt. Many had fled. Helena and I were discussing a new way to dye old tunics so they would be as good as new. Suddenly people started screaming; it had gone dark in the middle of the day. No one knew what was happening. We started for home when it began raining rocks. Everyone was running for shelter but one man ran out and starting laughing, "Look! It's only pumice. It can't hurt anyone." he said. People started coming out from their shelter but then a large piece of rock fell and hit a woman on the shoulder. Blood soaked her tunic – I stood in horror as blood trickled down her shoulder, pooling on the ground. "Get back!" Helena cried, pulling me aside as a huge rock landed where I had just been standing. Trembling, we ran the short distance home. The house was in pandemonium. No one knew what to do until the Master instructed everyone to meet at the household shrine. The seventeen slaves, the Master, the Mistress and the Master's son and his wife gathered around the shrine. The Master said to pray to any god. I prayed to Jupiter; as king of the gods if he could not stop this, no god could. Others prayed to other Roman gods and I am sure some prayed to gods from other religions. No one seemed to care to whom we prayed so long as our prayers were answered! Breaking the silence, the Master said, "Now is the time for decisive action. We shall wait ten minutes and if our prayers are not answered we shall leave, or be buried by the rocks. "But where shall we go?" A slave asked.

"I hear that many are going to the beach. We shall go there. "The Master answered. It was a long ten minutes. The sight of the beach was heartbreaking. There were huddles of people and no one seemed to have any hope left. I crept closer to Helena and asked in small voice, "Helena, how will we get to the Underworld? We won't have had proper burial." "Don't worry, the gods will let us in." Helena whispered. Suddenly it was hot. Too hot. I gasped for breath. I covered my face with my hands and tried ... I took one last look at my body. Perhaps it would be discovered in years to come. Would my hands still cover my face? I turned around and began my long journey to the Underworld at Helena's side.



*Madeleine receiving her prize of a certificate, pen and postal order for £40 from Robert Fowler at a school assembly at Redland High School, Bristol in March.*

*Second Prize went to Robyn Creedon and 3rd Prize to Jenny Whitby (King Edward VI School, Southampton). Ciaran Doyle and Rohin Atharvale (Birkdale School, Sheffield were Highly Commended and Caitlin Brown (King Edward VI School, Southampton) and Thomas Aird (Birkdale School, Sheffield) were Commended. Read all the winning entries on our website.*

## OTHER NEWS

There are several exhibitions currently running which may be of interest to members.

### **“Pompeii and the Roman Villa: Art and Culture Around the Bay of Naples”**

Exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, May 3 - October 4, 2009 Organizing Curator: Professor Carol Mattusch, Mathy Professor of Art History at George Mason University and member of The Friends of Herculaneum Society. The exhibition is accompanied by a book of the same title that also serves as the catalogue. The excellent illustrated articles include the Introduction by Professor Mattusch, ‘The Roman Villa on the Bay of Naples and Its Influence on Urban Domestic Architecture’, by Stefano De Caro, ‘Luxus’ by Kenneth Lapatin, ‘Staging the Supernatural: Interior Gardens of Pompeian Houses’ by Bettina Bergman, ‘Art Collections on the Bay of Naples’ by Mary Beard and ‘Archaeology around the Bay of Naples: Past, Present and Future’ by Pietro Giovanni Guzo. Finds from Herculaneum included in the exhibition are: a portrait statue of a daughter of Marcus Nonius Balbus, a silver disc of Pan playing a lyre, ornaments from a dining couch in the form of mules’ heads, a fresco ‘Dionysos with kantharos and maenad’, a marble panel with a Dionysiac procession (thiasos), a bronze fountain figure ‘Silenos riding a wineskin’ found in the atrium of the Villa dei Papiri, a bronze fountain figure ‘Eros holding a dolphin’ found in a room at the Villa dei Papiri, The Telephos Relief, a bronze imaginary portrait of Epicurus found at the Villa dei Papiri, a bronze bust of kouros/Apollo found at the Villa dei Papiri, a bronze statue of a ‘Girl fastening her peplos (Peplophorus)’ found at the Villa dei Papiri, an encaustic on white marble of ‘A Greek, a centaur, and a Lapith woman’, a fresco ‘Theseus, he Minotaur, and the Athenian children’, a bronze bust of a ‘Victorious youth’ found at the Villa dei Papiri, a bronze statuette of Alexander the great on horseback and two bronze horse heads from public monuments. See [www.lacma.org/art/ExhibPompeii.aspx](http://www.lacma.org/art/ExhibPompeii.aspx) for details and also [www.nga.gov/exhibitions/pompeiiinfo.shtm](http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/pompeiiinfo.shtm) for subsidiary materials relating to the exhibition.

### **“Herculaneum. Three Centuries of Discoveries”**

Exhibition organized by *Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, Regione Campania* and the *Soprintendenza speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei* at the National Archaeological Museum, Naples until 1 June, 2009.

See <http://www.pompeiiisites.org/Sezione.jsp?titolo=Herculaneum>

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### **Saturday 20 June 2009**

The Friends of Herculaneum Society jointly with Institut de Papyrologie, Université Paris IV Sorbonne, Paris is having a meeting on Saturday 20 June at the Sorbonne, 1, rue Victor Cousin, near métro Cluny - La Sorbonne. In the morning we will be taken to see some of the Sorbonne’s collection of papyri and this will be followed by a tour of the Louvre. In the afternoon we will have two papers, one by Brent Seales of Kentucky on the progress of his project to read manuscripts through 3D scanning, and one by Agathe Antoni of the University of Paris on her new edition of one of the Herculaneum Papyri. On Sunday Friends can take in an exhibition at the Bibliothèque Nationale - there is always something of interest (in this case, history of games: [www.bnf.fr](http://www.bnf.fr)); or pursue private agenda in the City of Light.

The **AGM** of the Friends of Herculaneum Society will take place in the afternoon on Saturday 3 October at the Classics Centre, 66 St Giles, Oxford OX1 3LW. Details will be distributed soon.

### **Schools Competition**

We are planning another competition for next year. Details will follow once they have been finalised.

*For more information about the Society, or if you have any comments, suggestions or ideas for articles for the next edition of *Herculaneum Archaeology*, please feel free to contact the editor. We hope you have enjoyed this edition, and thank you for your interest.*

*Dirk Obbink - Editor*

*Krystyna Cech - Production Editor*

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