

# herculaneum archaeology

the newsletter of the Friends of Herculaneum Society - Issue 11 Summer 2009



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Dr Laurent Capron, researcher at the Institut of Papyrologie de la Sorbonne, Paris displaying photocopied fragments of the Herculanean text he is working on.

## In the News by Robert Fowler

### News from Herculaneum

Friends, especially those who visited the site in June 2008, will be aware of the intensive work the *Soprintendenza* has been conducting recently on the Villa of the Papyri and other buildings unearthed in the 1990s excavation. Some aspects of this work, in particular the discovery (as was thought) of parts of a Roman solium, were reported in issue 8 of *Herculaneum Archaeology*, and the wonderful new Dionysiac bas-relief found in February 2009 is shown on the Society's homepage. The campaign is now drawing to a close, and the results are being written up. A full account will be published in the journal *Vesuviana*; a report on the Villa will appear in *Cronache Ercolanesi*. There will also be a photographic

record and commentary available online through Fasti Archeologici's 'FOLD&R' (Fasti Online Documents and Research), <http://www.fastionline.org/>: a website that will interest Friends for other reasons as well. Finally, Dr Maria Paola Guidobaldi, Director of Excavations at Herculaneum, together with Dr Domenico Esposito who co-directed the work, have written a brief account in the forthcoming volume *The Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum*, the proceedings of the Friends 2007 conference, edited by Mantha Zarmakoupi. This will appear in 2010 in the *Sozomena* series which De Gruyter publishes for the Society.

The purpose of the recent work, which was carried out mainly between July 2007 and March 2008, was to stabilise the site for conservation, to continue the 1990s excavation in order to reach a clearer understanding about the structures and their articulation, and to put measures in place to enable the resumption of visits. The main points of attention were 'Insula



Walking down to the Villa of the Papyri on a recent visit by the Society's members in 2008



l' and the 'northwest insula' (to one's right as one stands at the top of the great trench leading to the Villa; the latter beside the apsidal bathhouse), the bathhouse, the monumental structure in front and slightly south of the Villa, the atrium quarter of the Villa itself including the Bourbon tunnels, and the two lower levels of the basis villae. The Dionysiac relief was found in the northwest insula. The foundations to the south of the Villa appear to be a grand pavilion, part of the Villa complex and not separate, adjoining in its turn a large swimming pool and a slope providing access to the sea. The pavilion was probably built in the Augustan period, a few decades after the main Villa. It was in the pavilion's jumbled and confusing ruins that the fragments of what appeared to be an ornamental throne, a *solium*, were discovered; this would have been the first to survive from the Roman world. After further study in the laboratory it is now thought that the *solium* hypothesis is unlikely, but a certain diagnosis will not be available until all fragments are closely studied from various points of view, including resin reproductions of whole pieces of furniture with the help of 3D computer technology. The pieces so far discovered appear to come from no fewer than four different pieces of furniture. They could for instance be from tripods that were actually taken apart prior to the eruption. The wood used has been identified as ash, and in addition to the ivory veneer evident to the naked eye one leg has revealed traces of a thin layer of silver.

Work on the Villa itself has reinforced the view that the atrium quarter and its basis were conceived and built as a whole in the third quarter of the first century BC, with only slight modifications later. The painted decoration is predominantly Second Style, with some Third Style in the first lower level, and some Fourth style both there and on the main level: some work was still in progress at the time of the eruption, when it seems renovations were underway. Excavation in the first lower level revealed that the windows did not front a single corridor but a series of at least six separate

rooms. The decoration of these rooms is of great importance. Perhaps most interesting is a stucco frieze in Room I depicting a variety of military weapons, realised in precise detail; the weapons-frieze genre is well known, but the particular combination of features in this example is unique. The second lower level also appears to have been meant for residential use, not as storage or utility areas, but more work is needed to verify this hypothesis. The 1990s excavation uncovered a protruding two-storey apsidal structure at the north end of the façade; the more recent excavations revealed that there was a corresponding structure at the south end, articulating the Villa's profile particularly for sea-going passers-by.

The campaign has produced significant results and led to a much better understanding of the arrangements of the Villa, including the structure and stability of the Bourbon tunnels. Inevitably, many readers will wonder whether further excavations might now be contemplated. There remains, however, much other work to do in the already exposed areas. In her article for the *Sozomena* volume, Dott. Guidobaldi gives the list: 'the completion of the excavation, together with the restoration of the decorative apparatus and the study and publication of all the rooms of the first lower level of the basis villae; the repair of the bay-window pertaining to the second lower level of the basis villae; the complete excavation of the façade of the Villa at these two levels; the identification of the foundation of the basis villae through minor excavation surveys; the repair, cleaning and documentation of the tunnels leading towards the rectangular peristyle; as well as the excavation, and contextual anastylosis, of the collapsed structures of the terrace [pavilion]'. Digging further into the atrium and peristyle will of course require a solution to the small problem of the modern town lying on top of it. Nevertheless, we are a lot closer now to the ultimate goal of a complete excavation, whether subterranean or open-air, of the Villa than we were before these indispensable preliminaries, so excellently conducted.

# Paris Meeting June 2009 by Richard Janko

The meeting of the Society in Paris was a fine opportunity for exciting intellectual and social exchanges. On the preceding days (17-19 June) there was the 4th annual meeting of TELEPHe, a scholarly group organized by Daniel Delattre of the Sorbonne to edit and translate the Herculaneum papyri. For two days many scholars were able to study together a draft text and digital images of P. Herc. Paris. 2, one of four Herculaneum papyri that were given to Napoleon and are now in the Institut de France. Found in a very poor state, it was opened and dismantled by Prof. Knut Kleve in the 1990s, using a solution of alcohol and gelatine at 89° C, with the result that it now needs to be reassembled from 283 fragments. Since this is the first papyrus that was opened in this way to be reconstructed, its study has entailed the development of new techniques to meet this challenge, including a digital 'rainbow' invented by Dr Laurent Capron for marking the successive circumferences (more layers of this papyrus have stuck together than is usually the case). The French researchers' efforts have been crowned with success: the roll turns out to contain the final portion of a new book of Philodemus, *On Slander*, which was part of his ten-volume work *On Vices*. So far the team has reconstructed its last 13 columns. During the seminars those present learned that the final subscriptio has survived; the text quotes the first line of a lost play by the comic poet Aristophanes, which Ben Henry ably restored on the spot. Philodemus' method of argument already emerges clearly from this new and very exciting text.

On 20 June we convened at the Académie des Inscriptions et des Belles Lettres to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the CISPE (International Centre for the Study of the Herculaneum Papyri). Prof. Graziano Arrighetti, one of its co-founders, spoke both of its aims and history and of the importance of the papyri for understanding the philosophy of Epicurus. Dr Maria Paola Guidobaldi then provided to us an excellent view of the current state of play at the Villa of the Papyri, illustrating beautifully the magnificent new discoveries (notably the ivory throne carved with Dionysiac scenes) while indicating clearly that there are at present no plans for further excavations, given the difficulties in conserving what has already been found. Next Dr Agnese Travaglione, Director of the Officina dei Papiri, presented a very clear account of the conservation of the papyri, which was lacking only a picture of the ferocious-looking red mites which, years ago, would occasionally wander across the papyri into the field of the microscope when one was reading them (I am happy to say that that problem is now in abeyance).

In the afternoon the Herculaneum papyri were the topic of the weekly meeting of the members of the Institute, which is held in unforgettably grand surroundings. First, Dr Brent Seales of the University of Kentucky described his project, called 'Educe', to scan the Institute's as yet unopened papyri with non-invasive X-ray technology, in the hope that they can be read without being physically unrolled. The Institute still has two such papyri; there are perhaps 100 in Naples. The first images, posted to the Educe web-site in mid-July, show clearly the structure of the roll, with a central umbilicus bent and twisted by the eruption; we will have to wait a while longer to see whether the ink appears. Dr Seales' technique can already read iron-based ink, as he proved on a piece in the Papyrology Collection of the University of Michigan, but we do not yet know how the technique will work on the carbon-based ink in which our papyri are written. Dr Delattre then presented the results of his team's reconstruction of Philodemus' *On Slander*, before we relaxed at a wonderful reception.



Dr Laurent Capron lecturing to the Society's members in the Institut de Papyrologie at the Sorbonne

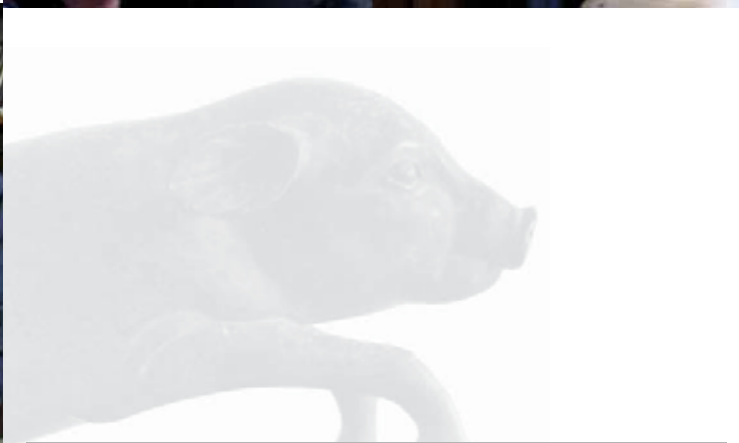
On the day of the Society's own meeting (20 June), we convened in the Institut de Papyrologie at the Sorbonne. Dr Laurent Capron, treated us to a magnificent display of its greatest treasures, including the papyrus of Menander's Sicyonius, and offered a very informative commentary. There followed a tour of the Louvre, and after lunch we had two lectures. First, we learned of the results of Agathe Antoni's study of P. Herc. 1384. She has made a very significant discovery: this papyrus is a work of Stoic ethics, the first such work known among the rolls from the Villa dei Papiri. Secondly, Dr Seales presented a fuller account of his project, and took many questions from the members, which we could not ask at the Académie, where by custom only its own members were permitted to speak. Finally, of course, we enjoyed together some very fine French vintages, which admirably oiled the wheels of multi-lingual conversation before an excellent Parisian dinner.

The variety and excitement of these events is a clear testimony to the vitality of studies of the Herculaneum papyri in France and in other countries of Europe (participants came from Italy, Greece, Spain and Germany), as well as of the unique potential of the papyri to yield insights into antiquity that we could never derive from any other source.



Members examining papyrus fragments, cartonnage, Egyptian texts and Greek texts from Egypt held at the Institute





*Members delighting in a hands-on examination of texts*





(Above) Members on a tour of the Greek and Roman antiquities at the Louvre



(Left) Dr Brent Seales delivering his lecture on the "Non-destructive Unwrapping of Manuscript Text applied to the Herculaneum Papyri" at the Meeting

Refreshments at the end of the meeting



## OTHER NEWS

### Two Studentships for work on Herculaneum

1. Once again in conjunction with the International Centre for the Study of Herculaneum, the Society is pleased to announce an **award of £1,000** to support travel to and time spent on the site. The award is open to registered postgrads both in the UK and abroad, and the deadline for applications is 15 October 2009. For further details and an application form please visit our website: <http://www.herculaneum.ox.ac.uk>

2. An **award of up to £1000** plus travel expenses is offered to registered students both in the UK and abroad. Applications, consisting of a letter of application, a 1-2 page description of the project, and at least one letter of recommendation, should reach the Society's office by 15 October 2009 (The Herculaneum Society, The Ioannou Centre for Classical and Byzantine Studies, 66 St. Giles, Oxford OX1 3LU).

### Scanning of Herculaneum scrolls

Members may have been following the links on our website this summer to the EDUCE (Enhanced Digital Unwrapping for Conservation and Exploration) project (headed by Dr Brent Seales) of the University of Kentucky's Center for Visualization. The aim of the project is to test the effects of 3D X-ray scanning of two carbonized papyrus scrolls from Herculaneum. The scrolls in question have never before been opened or read and are now located in the French National Institute in Paris. Scanning is now over and Dr Seales' group recently returned to Lexington taking with them two terabytes of stored computer data generated from the scans. Next, they must subject all that data to sophisticated computer processing at the University of Kentucky's Center for Visualization and Virtual Environments, aimed at producing 3-D images of the scrolls. The researchers hope that ultimately this will allow them to digitally "unroll" the scrolls, and see what's written on them. Please visit the links on our website to see images of the scans and equipment used.

### News from Herculaneum

Sarah Court writes from Herculaneum:

"The National Museum at Naples has re-displayed the statues from the Villa of the Papiri, following their inclusion in the recent "Herculaneum: 300 years of discovery" exhibition. To celebrate this, they have also produced an exhibition catalogue of the finds, published by Electa, edited by Valeria Moesch."

The link below leads to the cover photo:

<http://gallery.electaweb.it/albums/userpics/10002/cop.jpg>

**Finally, the splendid Boat Pavilion** has been opened at Herculaneum housing some of the finds of the 1980s excavations at the ancient seashore. Visiting hours are Saturday and Sunday 10:00-12:30 and 14:00-17:00. For plentiful information and photos go to <http://www.pompeisites.org>, click on 'English' and then follow the link for 'Herculaneum Boat'. The .pdf document found on the site is particularly informative about the eruption, the victims discovered in situ, the boat, its preservation and associated artefacts.

*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*

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