

herculaneum archaeology

the newsletter of the Friends of Herculaneum Society - Issue 12 Summer 2010



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House of the Relief of Telephus, Herculaneum

The Third Herculaneum Conference

Robert Fowler



1. The Gardens of the Miglio d'Oro

The Friends met 11–13 June for their third gathering in Campania since 2006, in what is now an established biennial tradition. For repeat attenders it felt like a reunion, while at the same time it was gratifying to welcome a good number of newcomers. For the first two meetings we resided in Naples (hence the First and Second ‘Naples’ Congresses), but for this one we moved out to Ercolano itself, a prospect made enticing by the opening of the four-star Miglio D’Oro hotel, a spectacular, done-over 18th-century villa which made up in atmosphere—especially the garden—what it (so far) lacks in abundance of staff (in some areas). The experiment was judged successful both for its convenience and for the benefit we were able to deliver to the local economy, not just the Miglio D’Oro but to B&Bs and local businesses. It was a pleasure to have time to explore the town, and see the extraordinary collection of early modern villas. The potential of Ercolano is quite immeasurable.

Prior to the formal opening there was an opportunity Friday afternoon to see the latest work of the Herculaneum Conservation Project. The first highlight was the splendid multi-story south wing of the House of the Relief of Telephus, (see front cover) adjacent to the Suburban Baths, where excavation and cleaning have brought to light evidence of the effects of bradyseism preceding the major eruption of AD 79. The encroaching sea obliged the ancient occupants to erect sea-walls and abandon ground floors, which were filled in. Excavation also established that the tuff first laid down by an eruption 8,000 years ago was mined for building materials at all stages of the town’s existence. At the top of the building, an ingenious solution to a tricky conservation problem was found in ‘medium-term roofing’: the roof needed to last beyond the short-term, but anything dubbed ‘long-term’ would have to negotiate various planning obstacles and satisfy several interest groups. The design and engineering of the protective covering is a model for conservation elsewhere. Also on the agenda for Friday afternoon was a tour of the

Suburban Baths, not normally open to the public, and a peak inside the Bourbon tunnels in the Basilica—this was a particular treat, as one could see some quite breathtaking original frescoes in situ, untouched by any restoration. The narrow space could accommodate only three or four tightly squeezed people at a time.



2. 3. 4. The Suburban Baths



5. Waiting to see frescoes in a Bourbon tunnel in the Basilica



6. Evening reception at the Villa Maiuri

Friday evening we gathered at the striking Villa Maiuri in the Via IV Orogli for opening talks and a reception. The Villa now houses the Centro Internazionale Erculaneum, as it once housed Amedeo Maiuri's study centre for similar purposes: it was a delight to discover that one Friend while an archaeology student at Bristol University in the 1970s had lived and worked in the Villa in its previous incarnation. Robert Fowler welcomed the Society and its guests, saying a few words about the Friends' work and introducing the speakers.



8. Jane Thompson and Christian Biggi

Jane Thompson, Project Director of the Erculaneum Conservation Project, and Christian Biggi, Director of the Centro, gave a lively presentation on 'Understanding the Bigger Picture: Erculaneum and its Partners in Context', giving fuller details of the Project's work outlined in the afternoon as well as that of the Centro, and an overview of the problems facing the site. There followed a sumptuous reception and buffet, in the Villa forecourt under a velvety evening sky, attended also by some Erculanese and Campanian dignitaries.

Early the next morning we gathered again at the Scavi, first for an hour of free exploration then for a tour of the Boat Pavilion with Sarah Court of HCP. The Pavilion with its wonderful boat and maritime apparatus is a charming and thoroughly successful exhibition, a prelude one hopes to the eventual opening of the larger Museum on site.



7. Christopher Smith

Christopher Smith, Director of the British School at Rome, did us the honour of attending our opening in spite of a clash with an important event at the School, and spoke on 'Erculaneum: An Ancient Town in the Bay of Naples', providing also information about the School's portfolio of activities and his own exciting new plans (see following article).



9. The hull of the boat discovered on the ancient shoreline of Erculaneum



10. The Boat Pavilion

The morning concluded with a tour of the Villa of the Papyri with the Director of Excavations at Herculaneum, Dr Maria Paola Guidobaldi. Each time the Friends visit they are impressed with the substantial progress made since the last time, and this occasion was no exception: the work on stabilising and protecting the Villa and its environs is all but finished; the atrium quarter is now completely cleaned and conserved, its true awesome extent on view; and the heart-stopping room in the first level of the basis villae has been fully excavated. One member thought the sight of that room was worth the price of the whole tour; the rest was a bonus.



11. Dr Guidobaldi's tour of the Villa



12. 13. Stucco work in room on 1st level of the basis villae



14. Frescoes in room on 1st level of the basis villae



15. 16. Atrium of the Villa dei Papiri



To escape the heat of the day we headed by coach up the slopes of Vesuvius for lunch at the Fiume di Pietra restaurant, named for the frozen lava formation beside it. An aperitif preceded a generous four-course meal of local specialties, which left people wondering how they would possibly manage dinner. As we were outside taking coffee the pièce de resistance appeared in the form of a cake shaped like Vesuvius, complete with 'eruption' (a strategically placed sparkler).



17. 18. A convivial lunch at Fiume di Pietra





19. Sarah Court and Domenico Camardo

Back at the Villa at 16:00 archaeologist Domenico Camardo, with Sarah Court translating, provided a detailed and rivetting account of the work on the ancient shoreline. The two stipendiaries of the Society, Ciro Montella and Antonio Parisi, presented the results of the work which the Friends have been supporting, on the House of Argos in Insula II and Herculaneum Papyrus 831 respectively. It was very gratifying to see the important progress made by these talented young scholars in their research; the direct support the Friends can offer such work is very important. The afternoon ended with news from Daniel Delattre on Brent Seales' project to read the Herculaneum scrolls with a high-resolution CT scanner, which was the highlight of the Paris meeting in 2009; the interior of the rolls has now been mapped in incredible detail, but unfortunately the formula has not yet been discovered for distinguishing ink from papyrus. New methods are to be sought. This is the Holy Grail of Herculaneum papyrology; it will not be found overnight! After a break, the Friends gathered again at the intriguingly named Tubba Catubba restaurant (it turned out the name denotes a Neapolitan form of the tarantella). In spite of the ample lunch we did manage to consume the excellent dinner, and rolled back to the hotel (probably looking like tarantella-dancers), fortunately located across the street.

An even earlier start on Sunday took us by coach to Stabiae where we were met by the dynamic director of the Restoring Ancient Stabiae Foundation, Prof. Thomas Noble Howe (who addressed the Society at its First Naples Congress in 2006).



20. Prof Thomas Noble Howe

During an absorbing morning we toured the Villa San Marco, the Villa Arianna, and the Second Complex under Prof. Howe's lively and entertaining guidance. This was a stunning site, and new to many Friends. The monumental garden, over 100 yards long, was for many the highlight; archaeological science now permits full reconstruction, and with it the discovery of sophisticated landscape architecture at this date. To the east of the garden one could see the layer of pumice lapilli, perhaps six feet deep, that buried the villas, and on top of them a dark layer of hard volcanic deposit: this was the final pyroclastic flow that killed Pliny, seeking safety overnight in Stabiae when unable to sail back to Misenum from the bay below, owing to adverse winds and these same lapilli which clogged the waters.



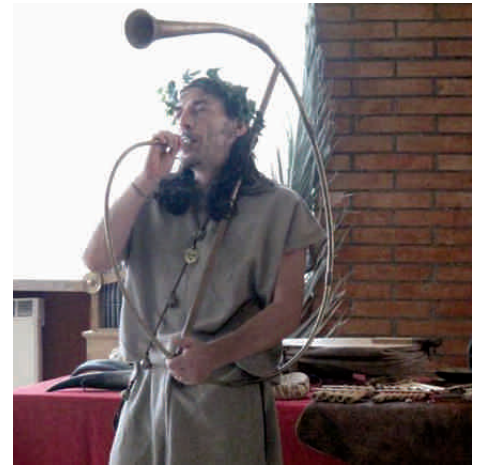
21. 22. Swimming pool (above) and garden (below) at Stabiae



The morning concluded with lunch at the Istituto Vesuviano, another excellent meal, accompanied this time by Roman music: a team of four musicians playing an impressive variety of meticulously reconstructed wind, brass, and percussion instruments, as well as an organ, gave a performance at stages throughout the meal which aimed at maximum historical authenticity and musical interest. Even the dance movements were based on ancient mosaics. Impressive research and craftsmanship lay behind this sophisticated concert, which mesmerised its audience.

The lunch concluded the conference; on the return journey some Friends disembarked at the Circumvesuviana to continue on to Sorrento for an afternoon at the seaside, while others returned to Ercolano and during the rest of Sunday and Monday morning made their way to the airport. The gathering was another success for the Society, which could not have happened without the help of many people, especially in Ercolano itself. We would like to give our warmest thanks to all the speakers and guides who gave up some of their weekend, and most particularly Christian Biggi and Sarah Court who put in a great deal of voluntary time behind the scenes on logistical arrangements before, during, and after the meeting. The whole thing went off without a hitch and we are very much in their debt.

Robert Fowler



23. 24. 25. Roman musicians and instruments



26. Archaeologist at work on a mural at the College of the Augustales

Herculaneum: an Ancient Town in the Bay of Naples

Christopher Smith

The British School at Rome is now just over a century old. Funded by the British Academy, we are arguably Britain's leading humanities research institute abroad, given the range and breadth of the research undertaken in Rome. We award a dozen scholarships and awards a year; and we are involved in as many as twenty archaeological sites every year. Our major funded programmes include the excavations at Portus and the survey of the Tiber Valley. With over 500 visitors and 30 major lectures a year, as well as a wide range of conferences and exhibitions, a Library with 60,000 volumes, and an important new online digitisation project, the British School at Rome is an extraordinarily vibrant community and an important link between the intellectual and cultural interests of the Commonwealth and Italy.

Portus has been one of our most exciting projects, with the major discoveries around the most important port site in the Roman empire. At the same time, it has been a privilege for us to be involved as one of the partners with the Packard Humanities Institute and the Soprintendenza Archeologica Napoli e Pompeii in the Herculaneum Conservation Project, which the Friends of Herculaneum Society now know well.

From these and other activities we have distilled six major research areas: Rome: History, Place and Imagination; Landscapes and Urbanscapes; Connectivity in the Western Mediterranean; Studying the past; Church, State, Religion and Nation; Rethinking the Bay of Naples; and Conservation, Heritage Management and Sustainability. Each theme can be populated by projects from prehistory to the contemporary, from archaeology to fine art. The BSR was created as an interdisciplinary centre and that remains at the heart of our mission.

These last two themes are intimately connected with the outstanding work done by my predecessor as Director of the British School at Rome, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, and colleagues in HCP. They allow us ways of collaborating across disciplines, countries and subjects, and I hope to see more projects connecting through the BSR to deepen our knowledge of this fascinating area.

For instance, we are currently interested in thinking about how to link visual and written culture both in antiquity and in the reception of antiquity. What are the sorts of relationships between literary production and the visual environment in which it takes place? How was that visual environment recreated in the eighteenth century and afterwards? And what impact did that then have on the way that ancient texts were read and contemporary texts themselves produced?

The Bay of Naples is fascinating because the evidence is uniquely strong, for human demography for instance, for ancient technologies, for the application of modern technologies – witness for instance the recent advances in the recovery of ancient carbonised papyri; and for the collection and reception of ancient art from the Grand Tour on. There are huge questions still waiting to be solved, and the Bay of Naples continues to provide one of our best contexts for arriving at solutions and formulating new questions.

Through the Herculaneum Study Centre, the BSR is able to bring resources for continuous professional development, support of research students, and for the highest quality of research. Thus we in many respects offer the capacity to add impact and value to projects, and bring them to a wider and more international public.

The BSR is a jewel of British intellectual life. Anyone with a serious interest in the ancient world is welcome to become a subscriber, to visit and stay, and to become one of our friends and subscribers too, and thereby help sustain an institution which has done so much for our knowledge of the ancient world, and is currently proud of its part in the conservation of that fascinating and wonderful site, Herculaneum.

Christopher Smith
Director, British School at Rome

Details of subscription and donation opportunities are all available on our website: www.bsr.ac.uk

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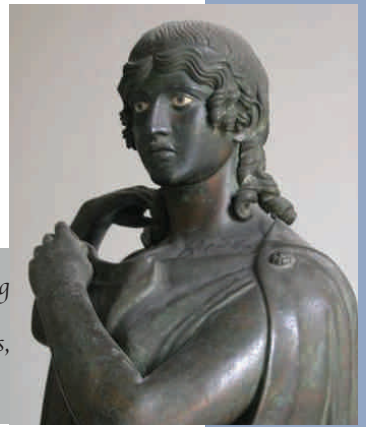
Krystyna Cech: 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 4, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22

Charles Leigh-Smith: 3, 18, 23, 24, 25

Peter Spital: 3, 4, 9, 13, 26

OTHER NEWS

Classicizing bronze statue of a girl adjusting her peplos, from the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum, Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale
5619



“Pompeii and the Roman Villa: Art and Culture around the Bay of Naples” opened at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, (October 2008 – March 2009) and traveled to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (May – October 2009) and to the Archaeological Museum of Mexico City (November 2009 – February 2010). Sculptures, paintings, mosaics, and luxury objects, both long-familiar works from Herculaneum, Pompeii, and Stabiae, and recent discoveries from Oplontis, Pozzuoli, and Moregine recalled the high culture of the coastal villas of Campania. 18th- and 19th-century books, paintings, sculptures, reproductions, and jewelry recorded the rediscovery and the impact of Herculaneum and Pompeii. Carol C. Mattusch of George Mason University conceived of and curated the exhibition, and is the principal author of the catalogue. She is a board-member of the U.S. Friends of Herculaneum Society, as is Kenneth D. S. Lapatin, who took charge of “Pompeii and the Roman Villa” during its stay in Los Angeles.

Visitors to the exhibition at the National Gallery of Art took a hypothetical tour of a magnificently appointed Roman villa, passing through the re-imagined atrium, tablinum, courtyard garden, and dining room, as well as a full-size re-creation of the exedra from the House of the Faun in Pompeii containing the Alexander mosaic. The décor in these rooms consisted of sculpture, relief, wall painting, fountain figures, silverware, lamp stands, jewelry, mosaic and opus sectile.

The Archaeological Museum in Naples generously granted loans of a number of bronzes from the Villa dei Papiri which had never before left Naples: a lifesize bronze archaizing bust of a kouros (NM 5608); the most famous of five lifesize bronze statues of peplophoroi (NM 5619; fig.); a large bronze bust of a victorious youth (NM 5594); a small bust of Epicurus (NM 11017); and two bronze fountain-figures piped for water - a Silenus riding a wineskin (NM 5015) and a baby carrying a dolphin under one arm (NM 5021).

Works from the town of Herculaneum included an exquisite drawing of a centauromachy on a Thasian marble plaque (NM 9560); a rectangular Pentelic marble relief of Achilles and Telephos (NM 286787); a marble relief of a Dionysiac procession (NM 6726); a delicate bronze statuette of Aphrodite wearing gold jewelry (NM 5133); the well-known bronze statuette of Alexander the Great on horseback (NM 4996); and a lifesize marble sculpture of a young woman (NM6248), one of the family-members of Herculaneum’s great patron, Marcus Nonius Balbus.

The eruptions of Mt. Vesuvius in AD 79 and then again during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries formed the backdrop for the final section of the exhibition, concerning the rediscovery of Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Stabiae during the eighteenth century. The first formal excavations conducted anywhere in modern times began at Herculaneum in 1738, and at Pompeii ten years later. From the beginning, the work was documented, plans were drawn, and a scientific committee studied the finds and published 8 volumes (1757-1792) entitled *Delle Antichità di Ercolano*, where the excavations had begun.

Carol Mattusch Mathy Professor of Art History, George Mason University

For an exhibition nearer to home for most members, “Volcano: Turner to Warhol” runs until Sun 31 October at Compton Verney in Warwickshire www.comptonverney.org.uk. “this is the first exhibition to celebrate the extraordinary artistic outpourings that volcanic eruptions have triggered over the past five centuries.”

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.

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