

# herculaneum archaeology

the newsletter of the Friends of Herculaneum Society - Issue 18 Summer 2014



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## The Fifth Herculaneum Congress<sup>1</sup>

Robert Fowler

Henry Overton Wills Professor of Greek  
Bristol University

One first-timer commented that you can tell this meeting is a success by the number of return attendees. Several veterans thought the Fifth was the best yet, and so it was said about all the previous ones. We like to think it's because we are learning to do things better, rather than that an Olympic-style ritual declaration of the 'best ever Games' is taking hold. Yet that would be no bad thing, either; the pronouncement, however much expected, always meets with gleeful and often justified assent.



I danni del maltempo

### Ercolano, percorso a ostacoli per il crollo di alberi e ringhiere Impraticabile il varco principale. La direttrice: «Tempi lunghi»

Things nearly got off to a very bad start. Something not far short of an official hurricane ('poco ci mancava', said my taxi driver, 'there wasn't much in it') struck the Monday before arrival and, though it miraculously harmed no one in Ercolano and damaged no archaeology, it did uproot trees, mangle safety barriers and create other hazards such that the site had been closed all week, only opening again on the morning we intended to visit. The Superintendency, which this year has been particularly disorganised in the matter of issuing permits, had not yet issued ours, and there was much anxiety Thursday night as to what would happen the next day. The

theatre, it was clear by then, was unfortunately off limits. Earlier in the week the Director of Excavations at Herculaneum, Maria Paola Guidobaldi, had arranged for us to see the Villa of the Papyri, but that whole part of the site, to the intense disappointment of those who had come especially to see it, was rendered inaccessible by the storm. At the last minute Dr Guidobaldi was able to secure permission for the Suburban Baths, the Boat Pavilion and the 'boathouses' where the skeleton casts are. Staff reductions of by 50% in the past decade have made it difficult to find the custodians needed for special access (our man was very busy on the day keeping tailgaters out of the Baths etc. while the Friends had their tour). We are very grateful to Dr Guidobaldi for her efforts on our behalf enabling us to see as much as we did. She stopped by briefly to say hello before departing for yet more emergency clean-up; formally, we were warmly welcomed by Sarah Court of the Herculaneum Conservation Project before heading down the ramp for the tour. This was at noon, later than the advertised start time of 10:00; some Friends filled in the time with a visit to the excellent Virtual Archaeological Museum in town, others to the Royal Palace at Portici, and others to the eighteenth-century Villa Campolieto. A more adventurous party led by Peter Spital went up the mountain for an impromptu visit to Oplontis.

A simple innovation this year brought a spectacular improvement in the experience: a radio microphone for the guide and headphones for the visitors, such as they use in museums. Instead of crowding around the guide, and hearing one word in three if you're on the edge, everyone could hear perfectly everything that was said (including questions asked by those standing close); moreover, you could listen to the guide while walking around looking at the exhibits, or simply resting on a bench. This will henceforth be mandatory gear.

<sup>1</sup> 'Congress' or 'conference'? It started out years ago as a congress (a smart word for 'get-together') and changed to a conference somewhere along the line. Fair comment was passed this time that 'conference' would imply rather more papers than we typically have. So perhaps we should hold firm with 'congress'. Or have more papers. Of course, congresso in Italian means.... conference.

Christian Biggi, Director of the Centro Herculaneum, and our man-on-the-ground for taxis, B&Bs, coach hire, guide hire, permissions, etc., did excellent guide service for the tour of the Boat Pavilion and other restricted sites on Friday.



1. (above) Christian Biggi expounding the finer elements of the Suburban Baths

2. (left) Herm of Apollo - Suburban Baths

3. & 4. The Boathouses where the skeletons of over 300 Herculaneum inhabitants perished in a pyroclastic surge during the eruption of Vesuvius



After a break we reassembled at the now familiar Villa Maiuri for opening talks and dinner. We were told at one point that the new Superintendent himself, Prof. Massimo Osanna, wished to greet us. One can understand that he could not make it in the end, given the circumstances that week complicating an already impossible schedule, but Friends should be aware of the significance of his stated desire to meet us. We are by now a long-standing and well-established support group, perhaps the longest, and we have done much to promote the welfare of Herculaneum. The Superintendent was acknowledging that, and we may hope that good things will come of this rapport.

The talks were particularly impressive this year. As Richard Janko has provided an account elsewhere in this Newsletter, (see page 9) I can omit details here. It was a huge pleasure to welcome Brent Seales again, and to hear about his exciting collaboration with the Google Cultural Institute, represented by its director Steve Crossan. Federica Nicolardi and Luigia Bonaschi, two holders of Friends bursaries, gave an overview of their work; a delightful feature of our biennial visits is the opportunity to meet in person and hear those young scholars on the front line whom the Friends are supporting.

After the talks the group moved outside for an open-air buffet, at least as expected and as we had had on previous visits; on this occasion the repast was split into two parts, prosecco and canapés outside followed (on a very leisurely schedule) by the main feast inside, an arrangement that was unclear to many of us, so that, by the time we were invited to take our places, we had consumed more canapés than was wise. Nonetheless the sit-down dinner had its advantages for conviviality and the surroundings of the Villa were, as ever, perfectly serene.



5. Refreshments outside the Villa Maiuri

Saturday was the busiest day of the itinerary, opening with a general tour of the excavations led in two groups by able guides Benedetto and Francesca. For many people attending the Congress for the first time this was a welcome introduction, and for others there were, as ever, new things on offer: for myself, I had never been in the bakery we visited, nor in the House of the Beautiful Courtyard (Casa del Bel Cortile), which had always been closed hitherto. The success of the Herculaneum Conservation Project is very visible in the much larger number of buildings now open to general visitation than was the case a few years ago. It was notable too that more groups were already on site at 9:00 than I remember being the case before, and in the town too one now sees greater numbers of tourists who are clearly spending time (and money) there, rather than swooping down on the excavations in their big coaches and departing. This habit had been a source of resentment. Perhaps it is fancy, but each time I return I detect a friendlier attitude in the locals; at all events, the sandwiches a grocer offered to make for me Friday morning seemed good evidence of it.



6. Boathouses (bottom left) with Area Sacra (above left) and the Terrazza di M. Nonio Balbo in front of the Terme Suburbane (right)



7. Members determinedly approaching the entrance to the site



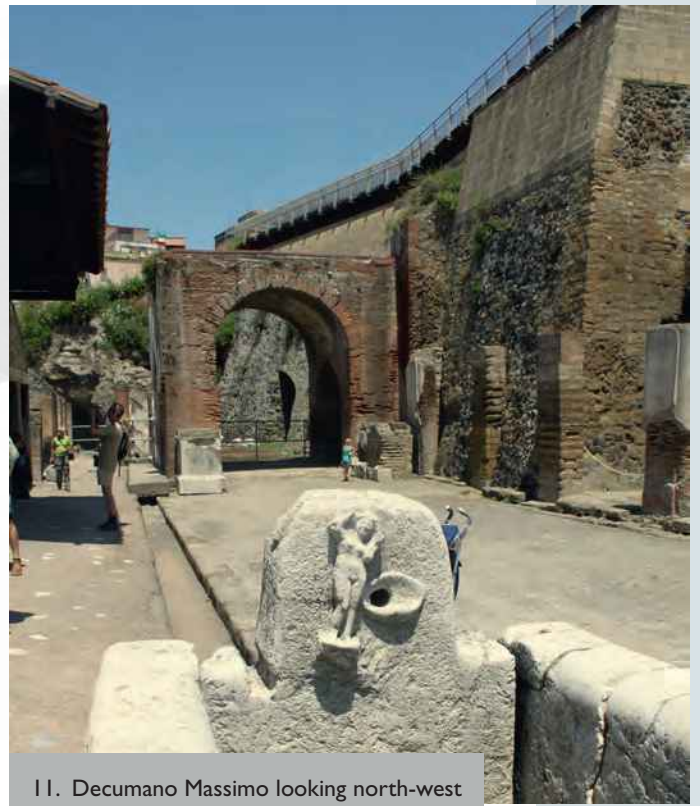
8. Ancient shoreline covered in greenery



9. Group at Casa del Salone Nero



10. Decumano Massimo looking south-east



11. Decumano Massimo looking north-west



12. Emerging out of volcanic tufa tunnel to the ancient shoreline



13. Suburban Baths - frigidarium

The storm left benign weather in the wake of its fury, lucid light and delicious temperatures in the high 20s, but even so it was prudent to leave the visit to Pompeii for late afternoon, which is also after the huge crowds from the cruise ships have left. It was certainly lucky that we didn't go in the morning, since the

custodians staged a strike until 12:00, leaving hordes of tourists baking outside the gates with nothing to do. Monday's *Corriere della Sera* put this story on its front page, calling the travails of Pompeii 'Italy's ultimate shame' and 'emblematic' of the country: 'In the eyes of an English or German visitor there is no difference between Pompeii and Italy', thundered the writer. Before Pompeii we stopped at the Villa Sora in Torre del Greco, an enormous villa of the Flavian period, buried by the eruption of 79; at this location, exactly in the middle of the Bay of Naples, the modern shoreline is not much different from the ancient, and it was possible to gain a sense of the superb advantages enjoyed by these maritime villas, of which the Villa of the Papyri is another example. The construction of

14. Villa Sora with sea beyond



the Villa Sora on multiple levels, with docks and other outbuildings, is indeed very similar. Its dimensions are such that it must have belonged to someone very rich and high-ranking, perhaps of the Imperial family. A fine stretch of rare and costly blue paint on one of the walls, made with crushed lapis lazuli, added to the evidence. Unusually, there was a basilica on the site; local government was conducted here too. In this building many wonderful statues were found by the Bourbon excavators (whose tunnels can still be seen), now housed in the museum at Palermo. It is possible that this is where Pliny the Elder spent the night on his way to Stabiae, where he was killed by the volcano.



15. Excavated room at Villa Sora



16. Fourth style decorated cubiculum with light blue panels above a lower dark red frieze

At Pompeii our guides were Benedetto again, and, reprising his appearance two years ago, the effervescent Giorgio. In two hours there was time to see only a few interesting highlights such as the House of Menander. Highlight of the highlights for those in Leofranc Holford-Strevens' group was his recitation, in response to an invitation from Giorgio to test the acoustics, first of the opening of Euripides' *Medea* in the small theatre, then from the opening of Ennius' *Medea* in the large. Returning in the evening the group gathered in the familiar Tubba Catubba restaurant across the road from the Miglio d'Oro, where the proprietors lived up to their reputation, and added to it by not charging for the wine.



17. Small theatre. Pompeii



18. Stepping stones on one of the streets of Pompeii



20. Arch of Caligula in background with Vesuvius beyond



19. Stabian Baths - frigidarium. Pompeii



21. Plaster cast of a calcified dog, Pompeii



22. Tempio di Apollo

Sunday took us up the mountain for visits to Pollena Trocchia and Somma Vesuviana, guided by Girolamo De Simone, who is directing the Apolline Project managing these sites (<http://www.apollineproject.org/>). The 'dark side' of Vesuvius is often neglected, but there are fascinating sites here attesting the restoration of life after the eruption. At Pollena excavation of a villa is underway, with its own bath complex; particularly interesting aspects were the brick stamps revealing construction very soon after the eruption, a selection of ceramic finds, and the detailed vulcanological evidence. The project team has worked closely with the town from the start in order to make them partners in developing and understanding their heritage, an approach which is paying dividends not least in staving off the Camorra who wanted to destroy the site so they could build on it. After a coffee / ice cream stop in a splendid café, we proceeded to Somma Vesuviana. Here the investment of the University of Tokyo made very plain what a difference money makes to the possibilities of excavation and preservation. This majestic villa could very well have been the house on Vesuvius in which the emperor Augustus is supposed to have died. Dionysiac themes in the decoration link to the abundant evidence for viticulture and winemaking, and remind us of the wonderful fertility of this region.



22. Part of the Baths at the villa at Pollena Trocchia



23. Girolamo De Simone explaining the work of the Apolline project



24. Some of the finds on display at the Apolline Project



25. Somma Vesuviana Villa di Augusto - statue of the young Dionysus holding a panther cub in the niche in the background (left)

26. Stuccoed doorway decorated with symbols of Dionysus (below)





From Somma we snaked our way up the mountain in our full-sized coach (feats of manoeuvring on the switchbacks from the driver) to the delightful Fiume di Pietra restaurant, so named for the solidified river of lava nearby from the 1944 eruption. Several hours later, we snaked back down, and congratulated ourselves on the successful completion of another Herculaneum Congress—except that there was a coda, as 22 intrepid Friends made the additional trip to Paestum on Monday. This tranquil, idyllic site with its three late archaic and classical temples and extensive ruins of the once flourishing Poseidonium, like so many other cities in south Italy a quilt of Greek, native Italic and Roman cultures, is a perfect day out; the museum, renovated a few years ago, contains some spectacular finds, especially the stunning frescoes from chamber tombs, and statuary from the archaic temple of Hera at Foce del Sele. It is wonderfully well laid out and could serve as a model for the proposed visitor centre at Herculaneum.

The congress takes a lot of work and I would especially like to thank Krystyna Cech, Kate Starling, Christian Biggi, Maria Paola Guidobaldi, Girolamo De Simone and the Gruppo Archeologico Vesuviano for their efforts and assistance. The enthusiasm of those attending was palpable and I am happy to close by reiterating ‘best ever’. As always your feedback is welcome including ideas for the next congress, when we hope to see all of you, and others, again.

## Talks at the Villa Maiuri as part of the Fifth Herculanean Congress

Richard Janko

Gerald F. Else Distinguished University Professor of Classical Studies, University of Michigan



27. Bob Fowler presenting Brent Seales and Steve Crossan

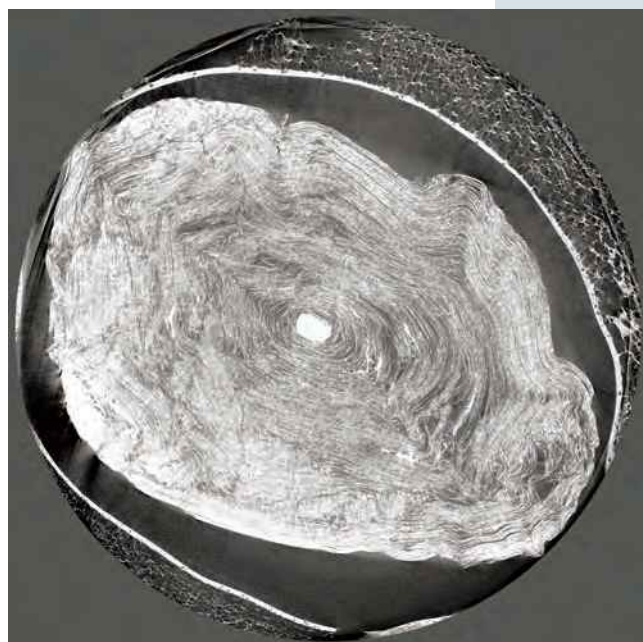
On 20 June, in the wonderful setting of Amedeo Maiuri’s eighteen-century villa at Ercolano, we heard three lectures that illustrate the exciting prospects for Herculanean studies.

First, we heard from Brent Seales of the University of Kentucky and Steve Crossan of the Google Cultural Institute (in Paris!). The Herculaneum papyri contain as many words as the whole of Shakespeare, yet we have trouble recovering and reading them. In 2009 Prof. Seales applied industrial CT-scanning to two scrolls that were given to Napoleon in 1806. They are now in the Institut de France in Paris, and, like about 280 other

volumina in Naples, have never been unrolled. The scans look rather like sections through an onion shaped like

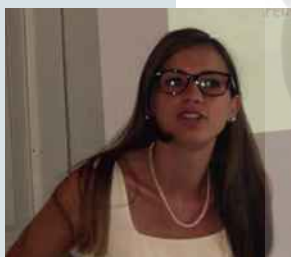
28 . External laser-based surface scan (below)

29. Micro CT-slice showing scroll structure (right)



a sausage, where the onion-layers are distorted and broken by the tremendous force of the eruption. The X-ray tomography revealed everything about the papyri—their number of layers, length, constituent sheets, central rod or lack of one—except what we most want to know, viz. THE TEXTS! The ink was unaffected by the volcanic eruption, but seems to be similar to the material support to be revealed by this particular method. However, Prof. Seales is convinced that it is only a matter of time before a technology is found that will reveal the ink. When this happens—and it may be very soon indeed—we will face a further very large problem, where he and Dr Crossan will be able to offer their help: we will need to be able to follow the surfaces of each successive spiral and flatten them out digitally, so that the text can be seen as letters rather than as illegible sets of slices through letters.

Prof. Seales' software for 'flattening' digitally pages of parchment manuscripts, like that of Beowulf, will be an invaluable basis for this process. It will need huge amounts of computing and close collaboration between engineers, computer scientists and scholars. It is wonderful for a scholar like me to know that technology will soon once again help us to recover and read these texts.



30. Federica Nicolardi

The second lecture was on the reconstruction of a roll of Philodemus' multi-volume work on rhetoric. Federica Nicolardi from the University of Naples, who has won a bursary from the Society, told us about her very impressive work (which was only a Master's thesis!) on Rhetoric I. Until now, only the last

seven columns of this book have been reconstructed; the rest consists of disordered fragments from the exterior that are preserved only in drawings. Two 'papyri' in the same handwriting as these last seven columns, nos. 250 and 1612, cite passages from Plato's dialogue Gorgias, and must be from the outer parts of the same book, which was 15.3 m. long. Ms. Nicolardi used joins between these passages to establish the sequence of these fragments. The scribe wrote a stichometric sign every 180 lines, so that his pay could be calculated; these help her greatly in reconstructing this lost book. I greatly look forward to the publication of her work.

Our third speaker was Luigia Bonaschi, who has also won a bursary to study Maiuri's methods in another kind of restoration—that of the frescoes from Herculaneum. It was wonderful that she was to tell us about this in the beautifully frescoed salone of Maiuri's own villa, with its view across to the site and to the Bay of Naples. She is now an intern at the Getty Conservation Institute. Unfortunately, however, her permit to access the archival materials that are essential to her study had been delayed and had arrived only just before our conference; so she was in no position to present the results of her



31. Maria Luigia Bonaschi

work. None the less, the audience showed warm appreciation towards all our speakers, before we spilled out onto the steps of the Villa Maiuri for a prosecco and a wonderful dinner in the lava-paved courtyard.

Paestum 32. and 33. Temple of Athena





34. Busts of Ptolemy Lathyros (left) and Ptolemy Alexander (right)

Since the Society's last visit to Herculaneum in 2012, the entrance and ticket hall of the Herculaneum site has benefited from a generous donation by the Chiurazzi foundry. Fonderia Chiurazzi, established in 1870, was one of the leading makers of replicas. The foundry quickly assembled one of the richest collections of moulds, which to this day remains a valuable historical record, and for many years had a shop in the arcade opposite the National Archaeological Museum in Naples. Last year 13 bronze statues were unveiled in a ceremony in Herculaneum. These statues are made from the moulds off the originals that once decorated the Villa's atrium, one of the few areas of the luxury residence that has been fully excavated. There are satyrs and cupids that decorated the fountain and were placed around the impluvium basin as well as busts of the Hellenistic kings identified as "Ptolemy Alexander" and "Ptolemy Lathyros".



35. Statuette di Putto con rhyton (above)

36. Statuette di Putto con maschera (below)



37. Statuette di Satirico con pantera

## Other News

We look forward to receiving a report from the American Friends of Herculaneum on their conference : **From Ancient Roman Herculaneum to the Ringling Museum: Handmade or High-Tech?** which took place at the Southeastern College of Art in Sarasota on 8 - 12 October, 2014. The papers given were:

David Sider, New York University. Papyri as Archaeological Objects  
Ascanio D'Andrea, Herculaneum Conservation Project. Herculaneum's Timber Roof: From Conservation to Reconstruction  
Erika Zimmermann Damer, University of Richmond, and Rebecca Benefiel, Washington and Lee University. Herculaneum Graffiti for the (Twenty-) First Century  
Carol Mattusch, George Mason University. All Those Sculptures: How Herculaneum Changed the History of Art

Christian Biggi was in touch recently with news of a first step in an ambitious urban regeneration project aiming to revitalise the run-down area around the Scavi. The initiative involves first and foremost the residents and children of the neighbourhood, as well as community leaders, the anti-Camorra Radio Siani, the writers of Collettivo Spazio, the Herculaneum Conservation Project, the Superintendency and the Packard Foundation. The first fruits were realised on 22 July with the opening of a playground for children and team sports in an abandoned area of the Via Mare, the street that separates the Scavi from the Villa dei Papiri. The children, past masters at street art, have been involved in planning and construction from the start, as you can see from one of the pictures opposite.



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Peter Spital: 8, 6, 12, 15, 17, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26

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