

The RAG

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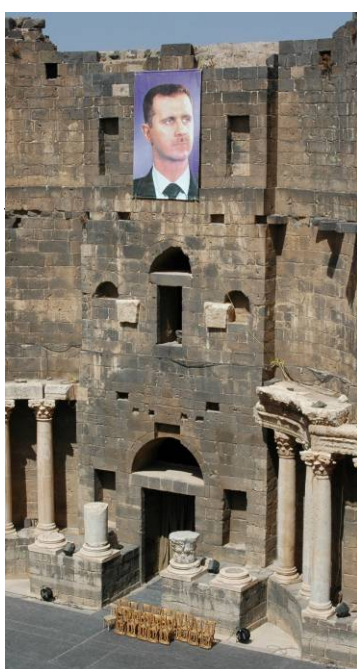
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Another 1600th Anniversary— AD 410, the Sack of Rome

Just as it was 1600 years ago that Roman rule ceased in Britain (see RAG 5.1), it was 1600 years ago that the city of Rome suffered the first of a series of foreign incursions that would culminate in the fall of Rome as the symbolic centre of the Empire.

Rome had been menaced by the Visigoths for some years prior to 410. So concerned were the Romans that they had moved the Western empire's administration centre from Mediolanum to the easier to defend Ravenna in north eastern Italy. As a forewarning of things to come the Visigoths had laid siege to Rome in 408.

The traditional date for the sack of Rome by the Visigoths led by Alaric is 24 August 410, 1600 years ago last month. (As to the reliability of such 'traditional' dates see the article in this issue at pages 2 and 3 by Professor John Melville Jones in relation to another traditional '24 August'). It is said that at the time Rome was formally a Christian city, and that Alaric was Christian too. However, what precisely we are to take from the description 'Christian' whether of Rome at the time, or of Alaric, is highly debatable.

In any event, there is no redemption for the defenders of Rome at the time of the sack in the nature of the Visigoths. The Visigoths were not a trained army; they are reputed to have been little more than a polyglot legion of thieves, interested only in pillage to make up for the pay they did not receive from the Romans when they had actually fought for them. It is said that the Visigoths gained entrance to the city, which they had approached by the route known as the Via Salaria—the 'salt road' by which Rome was accessed from the Adriatic—by some obliging Roman slaves who opened the gates for them. The Visigoths pillaged for three days and then, for the most part at least, left.

And so did some of the residents of Rome. They helped to spread the news that the inconceivable had happened; that for the first time since 387BCE, when the Gauls led by 'Brennus' (a name or a title?) sacked Rome

nearly eight centuries before, Rome had been sacked by foreigners.

The psychological impact, both for the residents of Rome and the rest of the Roman world, is said to have been substantial. Rome had become a symbol of Christian victory over paganism—did the Christian god not wish to protect his appointed city?

It was only 26 years before in AD 384 that Theodosius, whom Alaric had at one time accompanied in battle, in his edict *Cunctos populos* proscribed the worship of the pagan gods and established Christianity as the official religion of Rome. There was thus a ready argument for the disaffected that the ancient gods were showing their disdain for the new creed, and that the invalidity of the new god was demonstrated by the god's apparent impotence to protect Rome. It was arguments such as these that taxed the mind of Augustine of Hippo, distressed as he was to hear that Rome had fallen to the Visigoths. He would in due course publish his *City of God* to address these and other speculations.

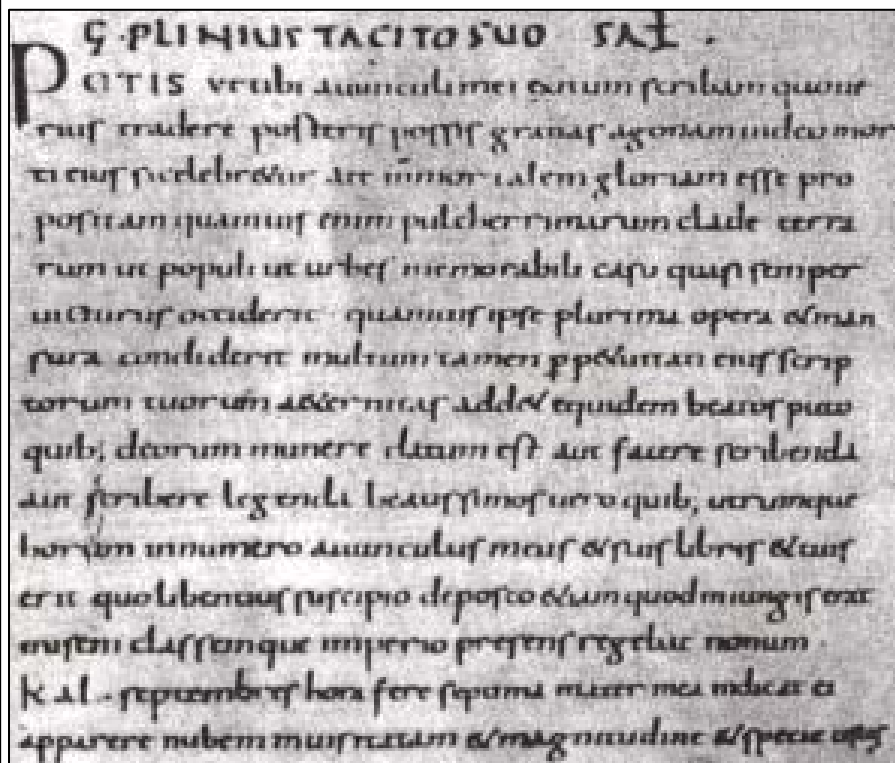
Some have seriously contended that an analogy can be drawn between the events of 24 August AD 410 and the attack on New York on 11 September 2001—that the attack on New York may one day be seen to have been the beginning of the end of US imperial power, just as the AD 410 sack has come popularly to be seen as the beginning of the end of Roman imperial power. Such an analogy is likely to be superficial to the point of being absurd, but it is at least a reminder that nothing lasts for ever.

Two important forthcoming conferences are to be held in Rome on the subject of the AD 410 sack of Rome: on 7 to 9 October, 2010, *The Fall of Rome in 410 and the Resurrections of the Eternal City*, organized by the Swiss Institute at Rome; and on 4-6 November, *The Sack of Rome: The event, its context and its impact*, organized by the Fritz-Thyssen foundation, the University of Munich, and the German Archaeological Institute.

When, precisely, was Pompeii destroyed?

John Melville-Jones

In most books you will read that Pompeii was destroyed by an eruption of Vesuvius that began on August 24, A.D. 79. This date is derived from the description of the eruption by the only contemporary writer to report it, Pliny the Younger (*Epistolae* VI, 16). Our printed texts of this passage have the date (*ante diem*) *nonum kal. decembres*. This means ‘on the ninth day before the Kalends of September’. The Roman way of calculating dates was to count both the first and the last day in this subtractive system, and this makes the date August 24.



But there are some difficulties in accepting this date. The printed texts of this passage in Pliny's *Letters* follow the wording of a manuscript of the ninth century, copied from a lost earlier manuscript (pictured opposite), which is held in the Biblioteca Lorenziana in Florence (*Codex Laurentianus Mediceus* 47.36). Note the second and first lines from the bottom: *nonum kal. septembres hora fere septima mater mea indicat ei apparere nubem inusitata et magnitudine et specie* ‘... on the ninth (day before) the Kalends of September, at about the seventh hour (i.e., early afternoon), my mother informed me that a cloud of unusual size and shape was appearing to her ...’.

It is certainly the best surviving copy of this text, but there are others. One, now lost, gives a date of ‘three days before the Nones of November (i.e., November 3). The reference to the Nones (the fifth day of the month in the Roman calendar) may be the result of confusion between *nonum* (‘ninth’) and *nonas* (‘Nones’) Another has simply *kal. nov.*, or November 1.

There is obviously a textual problem here, and November, and even December, cannot be ruled out (in other words, the date may have been the ninth day before the Kalends of any month that ended in *-ember*). Therefore October 24 and November 23 (since November is shorter by one day than October) are also possibilities.

This is where we should take notice of a problem that puzzled even the early archaeologists (first discussed by Carlo Maria Rosini in a work on the excavations at Herculaneum *Dissertationis Isagogicae ad Herculaneum voluminum explanationem pars prima*, published at Naples in 1797). The remains of clothing found on the skeletons of the persons who died during the eruption seemed to be too voluminous to suit the summer climate of that area. This might be explained by their having wrapped themselves in more layers than usual for protection, but in addition, there was evidence that at the time of the eruption autumn fruit - for example peaches, pomegranates and fresh-picked olives - was being enjoyed. Also, ashes were found in some places where their location suggested that the fires had been used for heating rather than cooking. So the generally accepted dating of the eruption to August 24 has often been questioned.

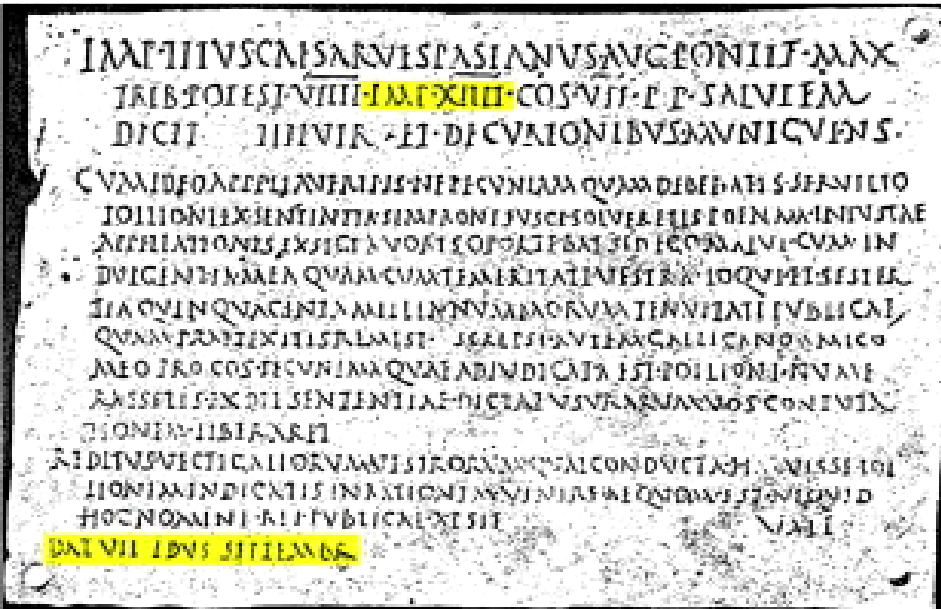
This is where a coin (pictured opposite) discovered in 1974 in the House of the Golden Bracelet (also known as the House of the Wedding of Alexander, street address Regio VI, Insula 17 no 42) becomes relevant. It was found, with other valuable items, by the body of a woman who had been trying to escape with some of her wealth. It is a denarius of the ruling emperor Titus (see below), and bears his name and titles. On the reverse of the coin, the titles read: TR(ibunicia) P(otestate) VIII, IMP(erator) XV, CO(n)S(ul) VII, P(ater) P(atriae), meaning ‘With tribunician power for the ninth time, Emperor for the fifteenth time, Consul for the seventh time, Father of the Country’.

The emperor's tribunician power was renewed for the ninth time on June 24 of A.D. 79, and he became consul for the seventh time at the beginning of that year, so these titles date the coin only to its second half. But the title IMP XV allows us to narrow the period to which it should be dated. We do not know when he was saluted by his troops as their commander for the fifteenth time after a victory in Britannia (which is what this title means), but there is clear evidence that it did not happen until at least the second



week of September. This evidence consists of two documents.

The first is an inscription (pictured below) which publishes an official letter sent by Titus from Rome to the city of Munigua in Spain. It is dated *VII Idus Septembr(es)* (seven days before the Ides of September), and this, using the Roman method of subtraction, means September 7, since the Ides fell on the 13th of that month. It gives the emperor the title IMP XIII, meaning that on that date he had not been saluted as commander of his troops for the fifteenth time.



Rectangular bronze plate, found in 1961 at Villanueva de las Minas (the ancient Munigua), now in the Provincial Museum, Seville. The inscription begins with the emperor's titles:

'The Emp(erator) Titus Caesar Vespasian Aug(ustus) Pontif(ex) Max(imus) with Trib(unician) Pow(er) VIII times, Imp(erator) XIII times.'

Co(n)s(ul) VII times, F(ather of his) C(ountry) ...'

It ends with the date:

'Dated VII (days before) the Ides of September.'

The second is a military diploma (a certificate of honourable discharge) (pictured below), now in the British Museum. It is dated six days before the Ides of September (*i.e.*, September 8), and again records only Titus's fourteenth salutation as emperor. In addition, its official nature is emphasised, because it states that it was *descriptum et recognitum ex tabula aenea quae fixa est Romae in Capitolio*, 'copied and authenticated from the bronze tablet that is affixed at Rome to the Capitolium (the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill)'. This provides further corroboration of a later date for the eruption than August 24.

Military diploma, found in Egypt and now in the British Museum. It begins with the emperor's titles (a few letters have been erased):

'The Emp(erator) Titus Cae(sar) Vespasian (Ponti)fex Maximus (with Tribunician Pow)er VIII times, Imp(erator) XIII times, F(ather of his) C(ountry), Cens(or), Co(n)s(ul) VII times ...'

At the end of the formal preamble, the date appears:

'Dated VI (days before) the Ides of Sept(ember).'



What is the right answer? Since one of the variant readings in the manuscripts of Pliny's *Epistolae* introduces the name of the month of November, the most likely date for the eruption is October 24, eight days before the calends of that month (although December has also been suggested, which would give us a date of November 23). But the traditional date of August 24 is now so well established that it will continue to appear in almost all publications, and will be believed by all except a few *cognoscenti*, who of course will include the discerning readers of this publication.

Note: This discussion of the subject depends for the most part on two articles, G. Rolandi *et al.*, 'The 79 AD eruption of Somma: The relationship between the date of the eruption and the southeast tephra dispersion,' in *Journal of Volcanology and Geothermal Research* Volume 169, 1-2, 1 January 2008, pp. 87-98 and Grete Stefani, 'La vera data dell'eruzione', in *Archeo*, 260, October 2006, pp. 10-14.

Coin Hoards

David Kennedy

The recent (April 2010) reports in the British media of yet another coin hoard discovery is a convenient moment both to point readers to the reports and say something about such hoards.

First that new discovery. It is one of the very biggest ever found – 52,503 and has already become the subject of a Wikipedia page – a sure sign of respectability! (See Wikipedia Frome Hoard—inquest and valuation).

Almost all are of bronze or debased silver – common by that period when the Roman denarius of the Republic and Early Empire which had been nearly pure silver had been progressively debased in the later 2nd century onwards till it had become a copper coin with a silver wash (that fooled no one). The dates of the coins in the hoard range from AD 253 to 305.



The hoard is interesting for several reasons: The scale – over 52,000 coins and the clay pot in which they were buried is 45 cm in diameter and would have been a hefty item to move. Second, in a period in which silver coins had all but disappeared from circulation, this hoard includes 5 that are pure silver. Third, about 5% were struck by Carausius, a short-lived usurper who ruled as emperor in Britain and, for a time, over adjacent parts of Gaul from AD 286-293. Fourth, despite so much seeming wealth in this store it included no gold coins or other items in precious metals. Strange that the owner had not converted the coins to larger denominations. (Could that be a clue to why it was buried?).



The hoard was found by a metal-detectorist – as they are now called: someone who, as a hobby, goes out with a metal detector to look for metal objects, sometimes (with permission) on private land. That is important as so many finds are now the result of such activity. Not so long ago, detectorists were anathema to archaeologists. The latter saw them as irresponsible, locating objects – sometimes on known archaeological sites, then digging them out. In addition to the damage to the site and tearing

the object from its context, it might then simply disappear onto the antiquities market unseen by scholars. Today there is a much more harmonious relationship of which the recent find is a good example. Responsible detectorists certainly still locate and sometimes dig down to objects but now they are far better educated in what to do next. As in this case the digging stopped when the nature of the find was revealed, the local archaeologist was called in to conduct a scientific excavation and he in turn called on the expertise of the coin department of the British Museum.

It is worth describing this process and explaining what happens next in such cases as it helps explain why we hear so much about such discoveries in Britain (and in some of its neighbours) ... and why we hear almost nothing about hoards in other countries. This find led within a few months to a Coroner conducting an inquest into what could be said about the circumstances of the buried

coins. In essence: did the buriers (presumably the owners) intend to return to retrieve them or was it, for example, an offering being deliberately ‘sacrificed’? It was determined to be the former and because some of it was precious metal, it was declared to be Treasure Trove. The Crown has the option then of having it independently valued and buying it for the state. In this case the Somerset Museum is proposing to buy it. The value is paid in equal shares to the landowner and the detectorist. In short, the finder in such cases has every incentive to declare his/ her find and have it properly investigated: they not only receive the full market value but the credit for being public-spirited.



In the Middle East where I normally work, and in a good many other countries, the law is far less generous. The result is the reverse: one seldom hears of such finds and reports of rich hoards on the antiquities market “said to have been found in **** reveal a discovery, quietly sold to an intermediary who then sells it onwards without provenance. The finder often gets only a fraction of its worth and scholarship has no provenance, often no opportunity to study the material and sometimes can see the hoard has been split up for easier sale. We can only guess at how much is lost in this way. Sadly it is often precisely for those parts of the Roman Empire about which we know least already.

The classic recent instance of what can happen concerns the Sevso Treasure which appeared on the antiquities market in 1980 in pieces which were finally (maybe – see opposite) assembled in a collection as a rich collection of decorated silver dishes, the largest weighed 9 kg. They were first said to have been found in Lebanon but other countries laid claim to a possible origin and at the latest reading, Hungary seems to have the best claim to this late 4th/ early 5th c AD hoard. In the meantime the collection



had been acquired by a private consortium which has made various moves to auction it. Those have been blocked and, amongst other twists in the story, the consortium successfully sued its lawyers for a reported out of court settlement of £15 million. At time of writing a further group of objects has emerged which are thought may have been part of the same treasure. There has been limited scholarly access to the material for 30 years now and the consortium denied access to it for a Time Team programme in 2008. You can get a brief survey and references at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sevso_Treasure and there was a swift scholarly article

published in 1994: M. M. Mango and A. Bennett — "The Sevso Treasure" in *Journal of Roman Archaeology* Suppl. 12:1, 1994.



In contrast the Hoxne Hoard found by a detectorist in Suffolk in 1992 had a happier outcome – It is now a prized exhibit in the British Museum. It was the subject just this year by the expert on the subject: Johns, Catherine (2010), *The Hoxne Late Roman Treasure: Gold Jewellery and Silver Plate*, London (British Museum Press). There is an extensive Wiki page and numerous superb illustrations online: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoxne_Hoard



In a subsequent issue I shall discuss the potential importance for scholarship of hoards – including their context and completeness.

LAW AND CULTURAL PROPERTY

A good general reference for those interested in pursuing the sort of issues raised in the above article by David Kennedy is Hoffman, Barbara, T. (2006): *Art and Cultural Heritage—Law Policy and Practice*, Cambridge.

Ed.

Latin Inscriptions

Sandra Ottley

Latin epigraphy is the study of Latin inscriptions. That may seem an unusual area of specialization for an ancient historian or archaeologist but there are good reasons for it. First, although our own society certainly inscribes a great deal, it was used even more widely in the Roman world. Second, there are lots of them: the number of Latin inscriptions now known or known about runs into the hundreds of thousands and each year a considerable number of inscriptions continue to be unearthed. An exact number is not known; there are about 60 000 from the city of Rome alone and an overall figure from the entire empire of around 500,000 seems quite possible. Thirdly, they are often not easy to read... or understand; the text may be damaged but even if well-preserved, the Romans routinely abbreviated words and even entire phrases, sometimes to just a succession of letters. They knew what they meant – we are sometimes stumped. And lastly, they are in a language few people now read.

They are found in all parts of the Roman Empire from Scotland to southern Egypt, from Portugal to Arabia although the distribution is uneven – there are just a few thousand from Britannia but tens of thousands from the province of Africa. While many remain *in situ* even more are scattered throughout museums and in private collections around the world. The range in time of Latin inscriptions is considerable, with the earliest possibly dating from the 6th century BC, continuing to the end of the Roman Empire in the West (5th century AD) and beyond. The majority of Latin inscriptions that remain today are those that have been cut in stone of some kind (tufas, travertine, limestone and marble). However, inscriptions also remain which were cut, scratched or stamped on metal (bronze, lead, gold, silver, iron), bricks, tiles, earthenware or glass, incised on wax tablets, painted on walls or pottery, formed by small stones set in mosaics, or even written on wood (Vindolanda Tablets).

Latin inscriptions provide us with invaluable information on a wide variety of subjects and help us in some measure to compensate for the incompleteness of the literary sources on Roman civilization. From the 2nd century BC up until the end of the Roman Empire there is hardly any aspect of Roman civilization which is not illuminated for us by inscriptions. Indeed it is largely through inscriptions that historians are able to reconstruct the main lines of the social and economic history of the Roman Empire.

Official documents of the Roman Republic and Empire were regularly inscribed for permanent record and we have extant inscriptions of treaties, laws and plebiscites, decrees of the Senate, edicts and communications of Roman magistrates and foreign powers, pronouncement and enactments of Roman emperors and dedications to them, military documents (especially discharge certificates - *diplomata*) and calendars. A great many inscriptions provide information about the powers of the Roman emperors, the imperial civil service and the growth and administration of the emperor's personal domains.

Our understanding of Roman law has been greatly enriched by inscriptional evidence. Inscriptions have shed great light in the areas of international affairs, the administration of Rome, Italy and the provinces, the careers of major and minor Roman officials, taxation and other fiscal matters, the extension of Roman citizenship and the progress of urbanization. They have provided

valuable information on religious institutions and the spread of Christianity. Many dedications, building inscriptions and epitaphs reveal information about public policy as well as private ambition. They afford insights into the private lives and occupations of the common people.

The commonest private inscriptions and by far the largest category are tombstones – c. 40,000 from Rome alone. They have been misused in an attempt to reconstruct supposed life-expectancy tables but there are ways in which their information can be used and there are lots of them.

All inscriptions have in common the purpose of expressing and communicating to the reader an intelligible text or message, long or short, official or unofficial. Today what one usually sees of an inscription is a modern printed copy, provided with punctuation and an explanation of any abbreviations which may occur in the original and explanatory notes on the provenience of the inscription, its contents and its date. Occasionally, we are lucky enough to view the original inscription, perhaps on a building in Rome or in a museum in New York. It is then that the inscription seems alive and crying out to be read. Perhaps even more than our literary sources, these inscriptions are a direct link to a world long past.



The ability to fully understand and analyse these inscriptions requires many years of dedicated study. However, fortunately, Latin inscriptions are usually formulaic and rely heavily, as noted earlier, on the use of abbreviations. In fact, abbreviations are one of the first features of any Latin inscription to strike anyone trying to read them. Again, fortunately, many of the Latin abbreviations are regular, common and ubiquitous.

Arguably one of the most recognizable and viewed inscriptions is that which appears on the Pantheon in Rome.



The inscription on the frieze reads:

MAGRIPPA L F COS TERTIVM FECIT

There are a number of common Latin abbreviations and words in this inscription:

M: abbreviation of the Roman name Marcus

L: abbreviation for the Roman name Lucius, however, in this inscription the genitive form of Lucius – Luci – is the correct translation.

F: abbreviation for filius (meaning son).

COS: abbreviation for consul.

TERTIVM: Latin for 'third'

FECIT: Latin for 'he/she/it built.'

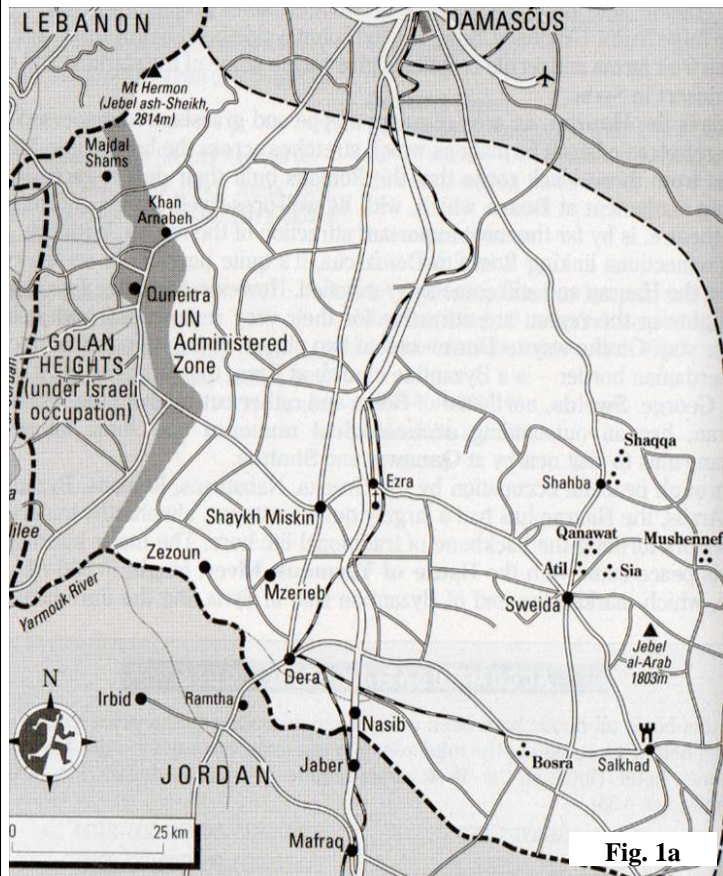
Hence the inscription, if written in full, would read: **M(ārcus) AGRIPPA L(ūcī) F(īlius) CO(n)S(ul) TERTIVM FECIT** ("Marcus Agrippa, son of Lucius, thrice Consul built this." Translation adapted from Lansford, T., (2009). *The Latin Inscriptions of Rome. A Walking Guide*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa (c. 63 – 12 BC) was the long time friend, son-in-law and, prior to his death, the successor of the Emperor Augustus (27 BC – AD 14), serving as consul in the years 37, 28 and 27 BC. The consulship was the highest magistracy of the Roman Republic. It was an annual office and held jointly with a colleague. Under the Empire, it was the emperor who appointed the consuls. The Pantheon itself was completed around 25 BC and was totally rebuilt in its present form under the emperor Hadrian (AD 117 – 138). Rather than advertise his role in the rebuilding, Hadrian chose to reproduce the original inscription in a piece of ostentatious (but transparent) modesty.

Bostra Gloriosa! The Capital of Roman Arabia

Francesca Radcliffe

In the 1st century AD Bostra in southern Syria seems to have been a significant city of the Nabataean kingdom. When the latter was annexed by Rome and became part of the new province of Arabia, the Romans seem swiftly to have decided that Bostra was a more suitable centre than the old royal capital of Petra which was far to the south and it became the capital – seat of the governor and location of the principle garrison, the *Legio III Cyrenaica*. Modern Bosra was built on and amongst the extensive ancient ruins but it is today re-emerging as a significant tourist destination.



On the morning of 24th September 2005 with a small group of friends I was heading south from Damascus towards the Hauran (Fig. 1a) to visit Bosra (Fig. 1b) on the first day of our tour of Syria, the start of an adventure that had begun some years before at my home in Dorset.

In 2000 I had come across William J. Bankes’ drawings.¹ Between 1812 and 1820, as part of his Grand Tour, Bankes, a native of Dorset, travelled extensively across Egypt and the Middle East. He left numerous sketches, drawings and watercolours of the many ancient sites he visited and was especially skilful and accurate in transcribing ancient inscriptions. He rode his way through the Hauran on two occasions: in the Spring of 1816 when heavy snowfalls made it impossible for him to go beyond Bostra, and again at the end of January 1818. This time his journey, although no less adventurous, was “*more extensive and complete*”. He did reach Umm el-Jimal (now in Jordan) and spent a few more days in Bostra. This is how he described the Hauran: ‘...*One of the most singular countries that I ever saw...a bare desert... all covered with great stone as black as ink ... a vast plain producing abundant crops in fruitful years. No feature of the whole province, however, is so remarkable, as the prodigious number of antique villages scattered over it, with the dwelling-houses of a thousand years old and more, remaining quite entire.... No other material having being employed besides this black stone, even to the very planking of the ceilings, doors and shutters, which still turn upon their pivot-hinges*’ (Finati 1830: 161-2).

The modern countryside, whizzing past our minibus windows, has somewhat changed over the two centuries and in places hardly matched this description but in others it was still recognizable.

Bankes had to pay 300 piastres to the Sheik of the Hauran for an escort so that he could ride safely through the region, this being “*by no means safe, ... much infested and overrun by the Bedouens*”. In Bostra itself he was twice robbed, once while staying with the Sheik of Bostra, probably in one of those antique dwellings! We had no such worries, the trip from Damascus on the highway took only a couple of hours and our guide and driver were both kind and honest.

This ancient small town lies some 50 miles from the Jordanian border, on the southern edge of the Hauran plain. The dreary and sombre volcanic landscape was enlivened by the autumn sunshine and brilliant blue sky. In Roman times this province was rich and productive, one of the granaries of the Empire. In AD 106 Bostra – as it was then called, the last capital of the Nabataean Kingdom, became the headquarters of the Romans’ newly created *Provincia Arabia*. Its importance grew during the time of the Emperor Trajan (AD 98-117) who particularly favoured the town (he renamed it *Nova Trajana Bostra*). He also famously built the *Via Nova*

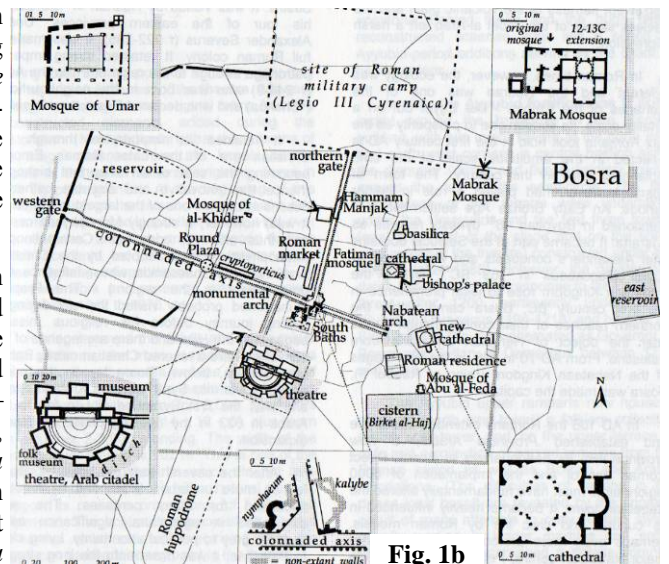


Fig. 1b

Traiana, the great new highway running the length of Roman Arabia, connecting Damascus to Aila (modern Aqaba), on the Red Sea. And so Bostra, at a crucial cross-road, became a rich town and home to 5000 legionnaires (Burns 1999: 65).



Fig. 2

Bostra is considered the most important town of Roman Arabia, after Petra. Its major attraction is the Roman theatre (Fig. 2) but other Roman remains abound: the *Nymphaeum*, the South Baths, a market area nearby and the *Cryptoporticus* - a huge underground storage area, rediscovered in 1968. We admired the Western Arch, a sober but perhaps aptly named Gate of the Wind (Bab-al Hawa), dated to the second century AD, and the earlier Nabataean Arch (Fig. 3). We also visited the 6th century remains of the Cathedral dedicated to SS Sergius, Bacchus and Leontius, as well as the Basilica, originally a civic Roman building, converted into a Christian church in the 3rd century AD.

The theatre is one of the most complete of the Roman world.² Bankes left some 31 sketches of Bosra of which 17 are of the theatre, some on small torn pieces of paper. The more complete is a plan of the theatre (Fig. 4).



Fig. 3

The visit to this spectacular Roman theatre leaves you breathless, almost literally: modern visitors enter through a doorway which has been restructured at least three times - it has three lintels. Then on and up through a maze of claustrophobic passages and stairways finally to arrive on the upper parapet of the theatre. The view from there is stunning: the degree of preservation astonishing, even if one realises that the theatre has been greatly restored after WW II. The space is enormous: the stage is 102 metres wide, there are 37 tiers of seats and some surviving seats on the top tier are quite surprising! (See Figs 5a and 5b on page 11).

The theatre survived earthquakes and the ravages of time because the exterior was incorporated into the fortifications built around it, initially in the late 8th century AD by the new Umayyad rulers (661-750) and then in the first half of the 13th century, during the continuing wars against the Crusaders, it was converted into a fortress under the Ayyubids (the dynasty founded by Saladin in the 12th century, 1176-1260). The fortress includes two large corner towers and five smaller ones along the circular wall of the theatre, best seen from the air (Fig. 6, next page). Unlike most other Roman theatres there was no hillside or natural slope to use in order to accommodate the auditorium; this one is free-standing, a tribute to Roman engineering skills. In addition a palace complex and a mosque were built within the auditorium and

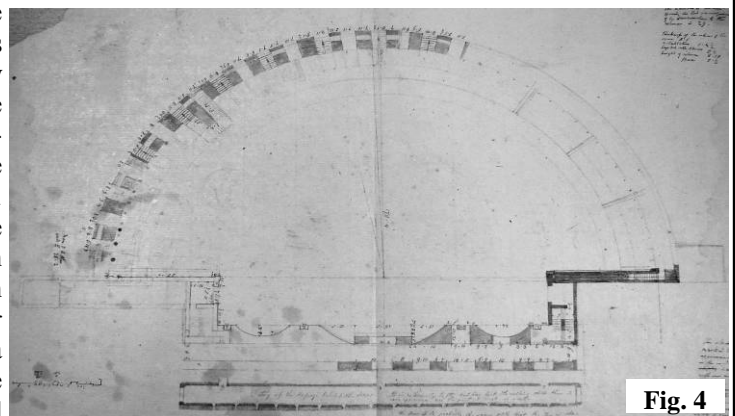


Fig. 4

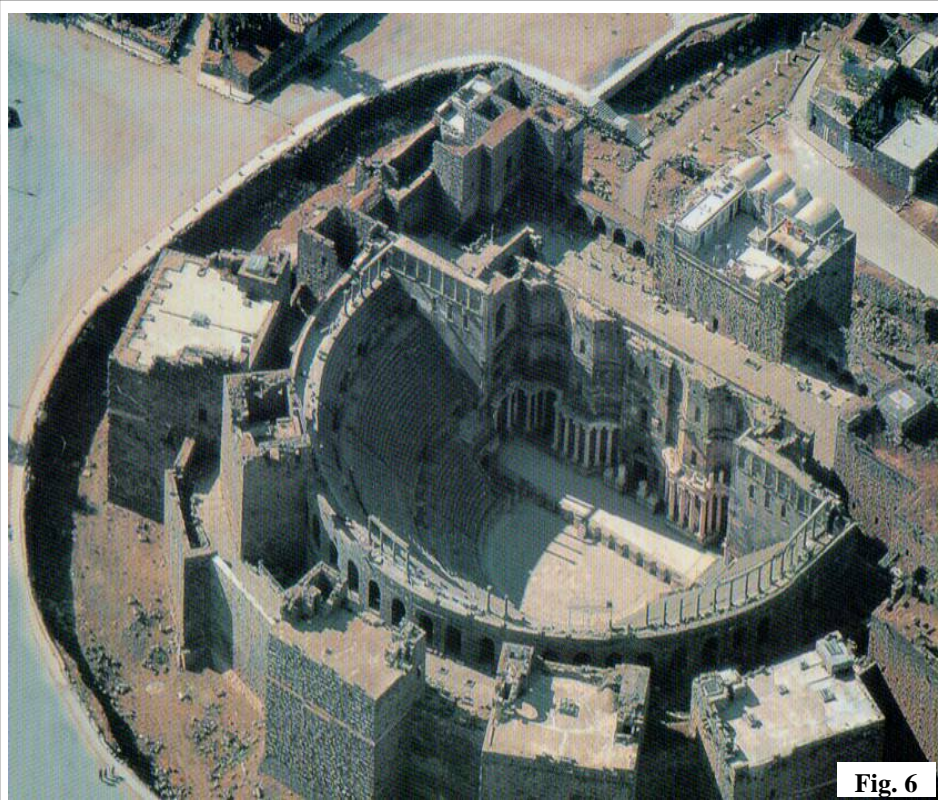


Fig. 6

the theatre was transformed into a citadel. Finally, over the ages, sand and earth filled the lower part of the theatre: this too helped its preservation until major restoration work, from 1947 to 1970, removed most of these accretions.

The theatre has the usual three entrances; on either side of the stage are the huge and cavernous *vomitoria* (corridors/staircases) to help today the exiting of great crowds, and as they did in the Roman times, the capacity being for up to 9000 people, 6000 seating and 3000 standing. The acoustics are exceptionally good and shows are still performed (hence the huge picture of the Syrian President in my photo). It is possible that the auditorium was originally covered by a retractable roof made of cloth (*velum*). The date of the theatre has been debated: some believe it was built in AD 117 under the Emperor Trajan (AD 98-117), others, on stylistic grounds, half a century later (Burns 1999: 64).

A collection of interesting inscriptions (one example in Fig. 7 opposite), statues and mosaics are displayed on a terrace, once part of the fortifications, and now turned into a museum. From the southern rampart we also had a good view over the modern town and of the area once occupied by the hippodrome, now sadly a wind-blown piece of wasteland.

To the northeast of the theatre runs the *Decumanus Maximus*, the main east-west Roman road. At its intersection with the *Cardo* (the north-south street), still flanked by the remains of rows of black columns, placed at an angle between the two streets, are four columns with handsome Corinthian capitals: this is what is left standing of the *Nymphaeum*, a public water fountain, (see Figs. 8a and 8b, page 11), probably built in the second century AD.



Fig. 7

Opposite, we were told, once stood a *kalybe*: an open-air shrine, of unique style found only in Roman Syria and Palestine, usually placed in public squares or *fora* with a monumental statue in its central niche or apse.

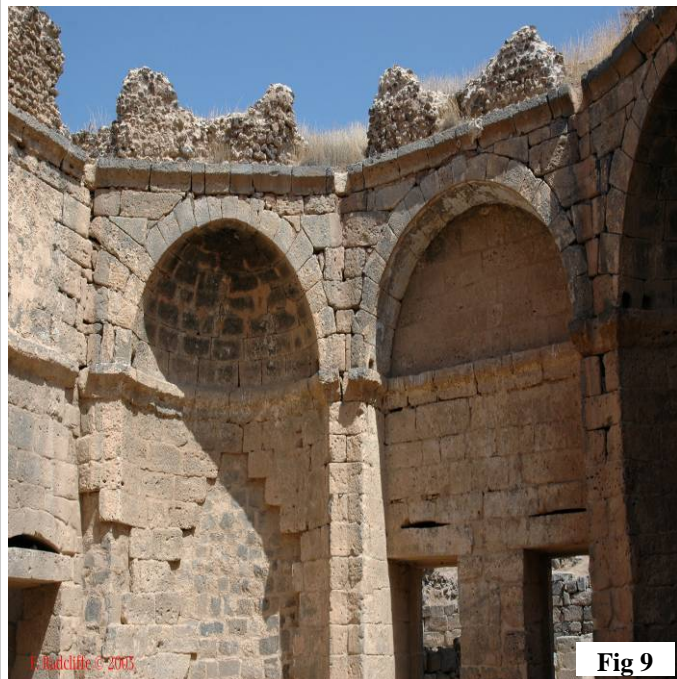


Fig 9

The Roman town is slowly re-emerging as more excavations are undertaken. Close to the theatre the South Baths have recently been brought to light. They are impressive: the five rooms are laid out in a T-shape with the remains of an eight columns porch facing the main entrance on the *Decumanus*. This leads into a vestibule (*apodyterium*) (Fig. 9), an elegant room with four niches on the four corners and a great dome, now collapsed, built of volcanic scoria. The next room is a *frigidarium* (cold room) and from there one steps into the *tepidarium* with two *caldariums* on either side. All the walls were beautifully and solidly built and the floors covered in mosaics, small patches of them

emerging from the dust. The Baths have been excavated and restored by the French Archaeological Institute.

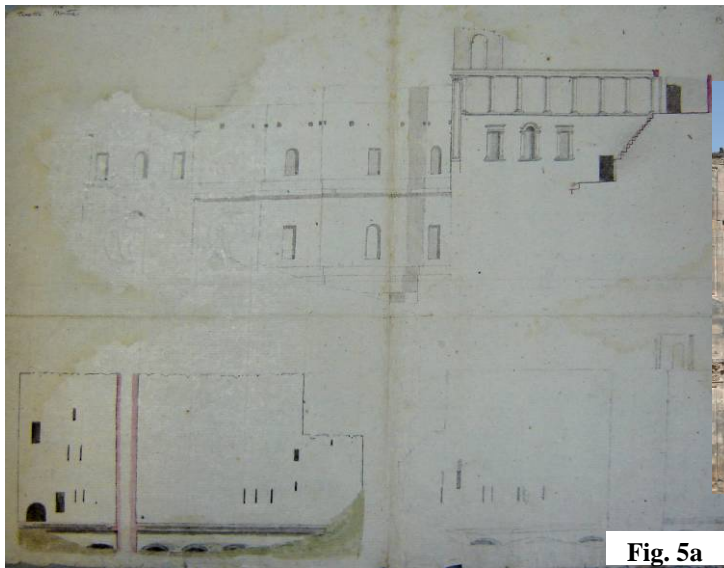


Fig. 5a



Fig. 5b

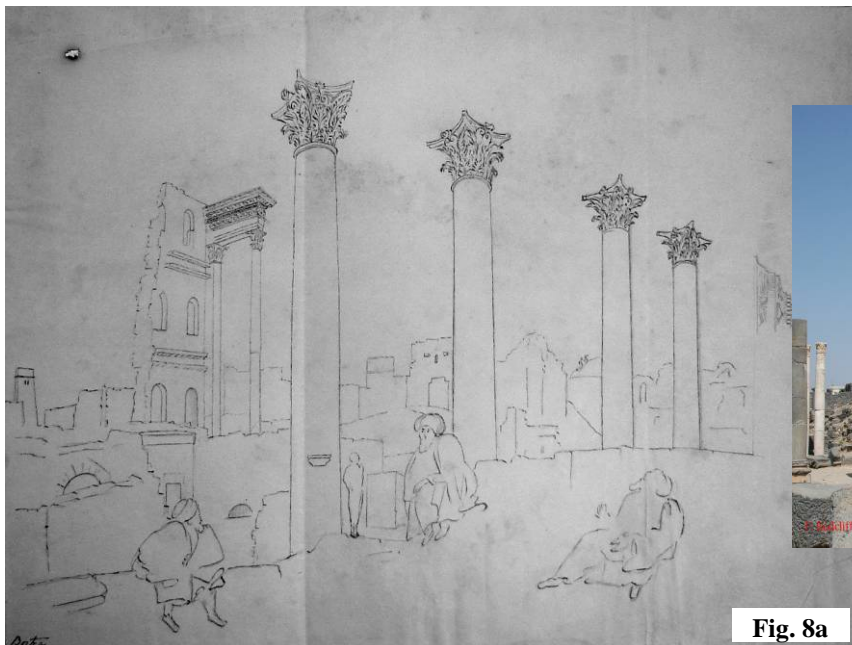


Fig. 8a



Fig. 8b

We were not able to visit any of Bosra's early mosques (one of them, the mosque of Umar, was once considered to be one of the oldest) because our tour was concentrating mainly on Roman and Byzantine Syria; time was getting short and we had to be on our way. But we did manage to catch a glimpse of the huge Roman reservoir on the eastern side of the town before heading off towards Qanawat, one of the Roman Decapolis cities, also in the Hauran.

Footnotes

1. The National Trust holds the Kingston Lacy Bankes' archive which is stored for safekeeping at the Dorset History Centre, in Dorset, in Dorchester.
2. Bankes' in 1818 believed it to be "*the most entire antique theatre remaining in Syria*", although of course he had seen it "*converted into the castle.*"

References

Ross Burns (1999) *Monuments of Syria, An Historical Guide*, I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd,
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 Annie Sartre-Fauriat (2004) *Les Voyages dans le Hawrân (Syrie du Sud) de William John Bankes (1816 et 1818)*, Bordeaux & Beyrouth,

PS by DLK: there is now a superb new book by the French team which has worked at Bosra for many years. Dentzer-Feydy, J., Vallerin, M., Fournet, T., Mukdad, R. and A. (2007) *Bosra. Aux portes de l'Arabie*, Damascus (Guides archéologiques de l'IFPO 5). The hundreds of (mainly Latin) inscriptions were published by Maurice Sartre who also wrote a history. Sartre, M. (1982) *Inscriptions Grecques et Latines de la Syrie*, XIII. 1: *Bostra*, Paris (BAH113); Sartre, M. (1985) *Bostra. Des origines à l'Islam*, Paris

Roman Archaeology at UWA

Membership of The RAG

Notes and News

Pompeii

The major event of this quarter was the Pompeii Session run by RAG on 28 August. We normally expect an audience of 50-70 for Saturday sessions but this special session saw at least 150. Of the newcomers, at least 30 asked to be added to our e-mail list, and we had ten Memberships renewed or new. Thanks in particular to the guest speakers Glenys Wootton and Nathan Leber and to the tireless Members (alphabetically: Emilia, Jane, Maire, Mike, Natalie, Norah, Rodney) who took care of all the logistics and supplied all of what we modestly call 'tea'.

These sessions are important because they often raise interesting questions, and sometimes bring out new areas of expertise. This time was a surprise, with Jackie and Bob Dunn introducing themselves as the people who have set up a vast archive of photographs of Pompeii on a web site as follows: www.pompeiiinpictures.com.

RAG Winter Programme

Saturday 2 October

Michael Page

Michael Page will provide two illustrated lectures on the theme:

"Why Battles are Won." A Comparative Study of the Ten Principles of War against two Classic Roman Battles - Cannae and Actium.

As always: Social Science Lecture Theatre at 1.30. And please be sure to tell us you are coming if you want tea.

Fieldwork

One of our previous Travel Scholarship winners, Karen Henderson, is to carry out a session of fieldwork in Jordan for her PhD in October this year. She will be assisted by another previous winner, Felix Hudson, and by Don Boyer.

Don will be in Jordan for the 2008 Season of the Jarash Hinterland Survey which runs this year from 25 September till 5 November. Jointly directed by David Kennedy at UWA and Fiona Baker in Scotland, it will consist of ten staff this year, including several current RAG

Members (Anne Poepjes, Andrew Card, Don and Ann Boyer). As in 2005, the season this year is only possible because of a generous donation by Don Boyer.

In parallel will be the second part of the 2010 season of Aerial Archaeology in Jordan, co-directed by David Kennedy and Bob Bewley (in the UK).

Ancient Saudi Arabia

The 2010 grant from the Packard Humanities Institute for the Aerial Archaeology in Jordan project included funds to allow the more detailed exploration of high resolution 'windows' in Google Earth of parts of Saudi Arabia. The potential of Google Earth over Saudi Arabia is immense as the landscape is barely known.

To help kick-start that new component, Dr Michael Bishop is to come from the UK to spend about 8 weeks from late October working on the material. Those of you who participated in either of the Tours of Roman Britain will remember him as our expert guide at Housesteads and Vindolanda. His web-site is <http://www.mcbishop.co.uk/index.htm>

RAG 2010 Winter

Lecture Programme

Remainder of Programme

Social Science Lecture

1.30-5.00

Saturday 2 November

Kevin O'Toole

The Divine Emperors of Rome

Annual General meeting

David Kennedy

What's new in Roman Britain - 2010

RAG 2011

Summer Lecture Programme

Social Science Lecture

1.30-5.00

To be advised in the next issue.

\$25.00 Ordinary membership
 \$35.00 Family membership 1 (2 adults; 1 copy of RAG magazine)
 \$50.00 Family membership 2 (4 family members; 1 copy of RAG magazine)
 \$50.00 School membership (2 copies of RAG magazine)
 \$10.00 Student membership
 Complete and post the form with this edition of the RAG or contact The Treasurer at the email address below.

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