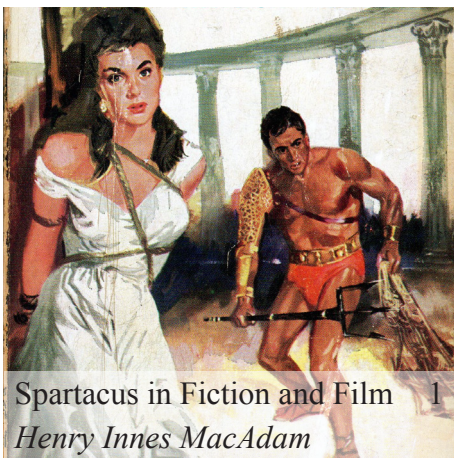
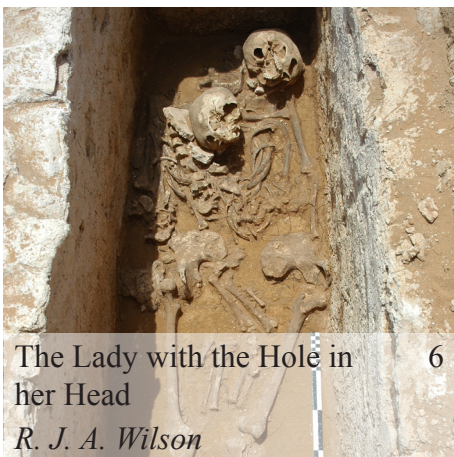


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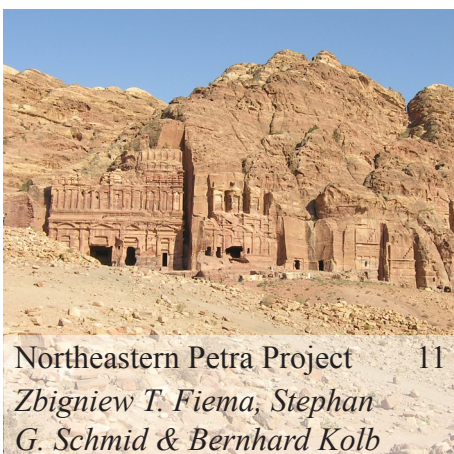
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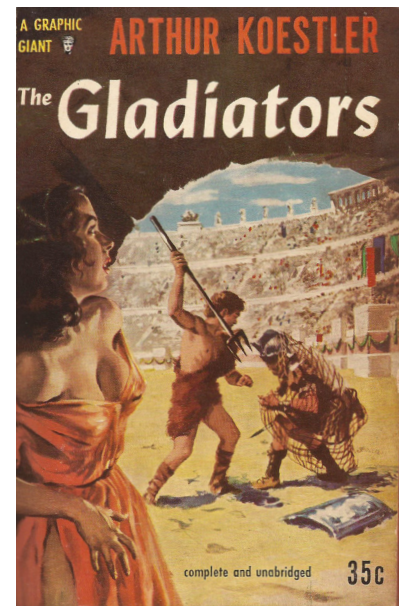
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Dramatizing Roman History: Spartacus in Fiction and Film

Henry Innes MacAdam



The anglicized version of the Italian film *Spartaco* (1952), and Arthur Koestler's novel *The Gladiators* (1954 & 1956).

Novels about ancient Rome became a staple of Victorian-era literature (in many languages), and the desire to film them goes back to the advent of cinema c. 1900. Stage plays with Roman Republican themes are as old as Shakespeare, but dramatizations of the Third Slave War (or Gladiators' War) that featured the historical figure of Spartacus did not appear until the Enlightenment. By the 1870s plays about Spartacus were surpassed in popularity by novels. Though there were at least four nineteenth century novels written about the Spartacus Revolt, only one had any impact beyond 1900. By contrast, two of the five twentieth-century novels about the Spartacus Revolt still engender debate about their political interpretation of that event. It is not my intent in this essay to survey *all* fictional and cinematic treatments of this topic. Though novels about Spartacus have been produced in just about every major language, very few have garnered international recognition. Nor is there any attempt here to include interpretations expressed through music, ballet, sculpture, or poetry. The same may be said for sports affiliations and political organizations, and gay cultural iconography derived from "Spartacus" imagery.

It is worth briefly reviewing the earlier novels in order to compare and contrast those of more recent vintage, especially those that enjoyed cinematic representation. We can begin with a novel that was *pre-*



Spartaco (Giovagnoli) - Spartaco confinato a servire fra i gladiatori.



Spartaco (Giovagnoli) - I giovani patrizi si arruolano contro Spartaco.



Spartaco - (Giovagnoli) Valeria si intrattiene con Mirra parlando di Spartaco.

Publicity stills for Giovanni Enrico Vidali's *Spartaco* (1913).

Victorian when it was published: Susannah Moodie, *Spartacus: A Roman Story* (1822). In spirit, if not in style and substance, Moodie was very much in tune with her close contemporary Mary Shelley, author of *Frankenstein* (1818). Both novels share the “master and slave” or “creator and creature” theme engendered by gladiatorial school and science lab, respectively. Moodie’s slender story owed its genesis to her personal reaction to the then-current Abolitionist movement in her native England, as well as the heroic tales of Haitian servile emancipation and political independence from French colonial rule during her youth. Her *Spartacus* is the doomed hero willing to sacrifice all for freedom, but hardly the Roman-trained auxiliary soldier-turned-gladiator who morphs into a military commander threatening Rome’s existence. Moodie’s novel had limited readership outside the UK then or later. It was the last novel in English about Spartacus for 70 years, odd indeed in light of a very popular Italian novel of the Spartacus Revolt that was translated into several *other* European languages during the 1870s but failed to find an English readership.

Raffaello Giovagnoli’s *Spartaco* (1874) grew out of the drive toward unification of Italy under Garibaldi. Within a decade there were French and German translations, and later yet a Hebrew and Finnish version. The startling lack of an English translation remains unexplained. Giovagnoli’s novel is one of the largest of all: two volumes of 800+ pp. in the original edition, and 900+ pp. when laudatory comments and lurid illustrations were added to later printings. Its melodramatic message was interspersed with lengthy romantic interludes. *Spartaco* became the basis of several Italian silent films, most notably the one of that name directed by Giovanni Enrico Vidali (1913). Almost forty years later, Giovagnoli’s dated novel was the inspiration for the non-epic remake *Spartaco* directed by Riccardo Freda (1952), dubbed into English and released in the USA under the vacuous all-inclusive title *Sins of Rome* (1954), and in other Anglophone countries as *Spartacus*. It ends with the death of its eponymous hero in the aftermath of the final battle, just as the ancient sources attest. In doing so it avoids the brutal, blood-drenched coda of mass slave crucifixions—a Roman response to insurrection that only one Roman author mentions but most novels before and after, and other film versions, readily emphasize.

Giovagnoli’s novel was certainly known, in the original or in translation, by the two authors who borrowed its spirit of revolutionary fervor but also managed to subvert the event’s dramatic message by drowning it in a treacly morass of late Victorian romance: Ernst Eckstein, *Prusias: A Romance of Ancient Rome Under the Republic* (1884), and Alfred Clark, *Woe to the Conquered: 73-71 BC* (1893). Eckstein’s German original (three volumes totaling 912 pp.) features an “academic” approach that included 300 footnotes and an Appendix comparing Oscan and Latin. All of that baggage was carried over into the English translation. The fact that the novel actually centered on the Spartacus Revolt was successfully obscured by the colorless title, an approach that would be mimicked equally successfully by Monty Python’s gospel-inspired *Life of Brian* (1979). Less academic (only 15 footnotes) but equally ponderous in length (553 pp.) and romantic entanglements was Clark’s double-volume counterpart *Woe to the Conquered*. At least the subtitle focused chronologically knowledgeable readers on one historical event, even if it wasn’t specified. Similar to Eckstein’s “prince-to-pauper” charade featuring the eponymous “Prusias”, Clark introduced readers in the first chapter to a heroic Libyan tribal chief, Juba. His destiny was to become a “gigantic black gladiator” in the *ludus* of Lentulus Batiatus at Capua. We can see where Howard Fast may well have found “Draba” for his novel *Spartacus*, in the same way that his female heroine “Varinia” emerged from his misreading of an obscure footnote in C. Osborn Ward’s two-volume socialist study of pre-Christian slavery, *The Ancient Lowly* (1880 and endless reprints).

Between the 1890s and the early 1930s I know of only one novel about the Third Servile War, Baron Woldemar von Uxkull’s securely obscure *Spartacus: Ein Roman aus der römischen Gladiatorenzeit/A Novel about the Age of the Roman Gladiators* (1920). The Swedish-born Baron (1860-1952) was of Baltic (today’s

Estonia/Latvia) nobility, a wealthy and well-traveled businessman. He published historical fiction and non-fiction in German and Russian and was characterized in *Pearson's Magazine* (USA, 1910) as “a Russian capitalist.” He completed *Spartacus* in the summer of 1915, several years *before* the Russian Revolution and the short-lived *Spartakusbund* in Germany. In his *Vorwort* he offers no motivation for the novel other than WW I. The plot unfolds with strict attention to the known historical outline of the Spartacus Revolt, and thus can be seen as the transitional point in this genre of literature. We have left the stylized, discursive, blatantly entertainment-oriented and/or moralistic works beginning with Susannah Moodie. We now confront darker and brutal aspects of Rome and slavery, depicted by all subsequent Spartacus novelists through the prism of twentieth-century ideologies.

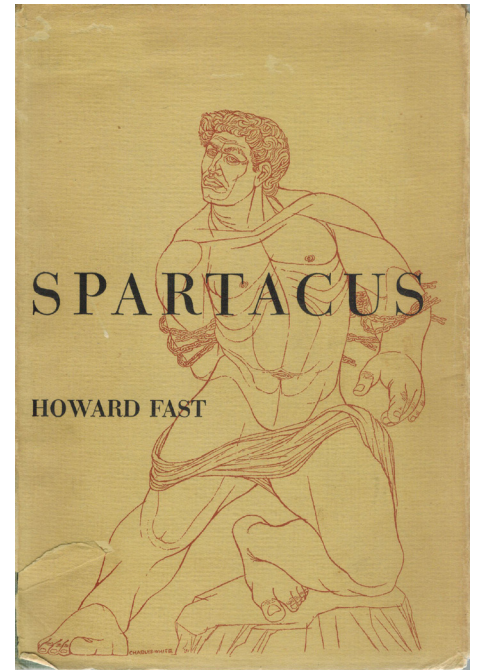
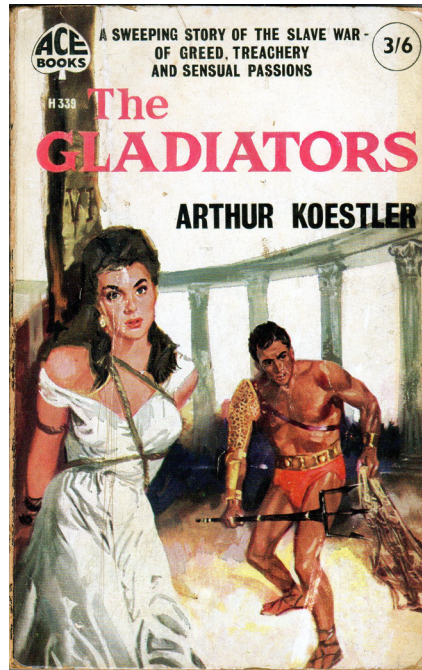
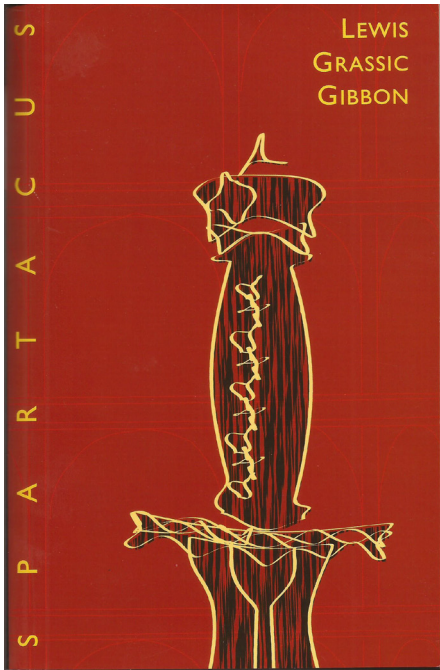
For that same period, there was no effort beyond the 1913 *Spartaco* to re-imagine the story for cinema. But then in a single year—1933—on opposite sides of the Atlantic Ocean, two very different works of fiction were published: Hugh Lewis' *The Gladiators' Revolt* (New York) and James Leslie Mitchell's *Spartacus* (London). Lewis aimed his story squarely at teen-age lads, as the “My Dear Boys” of his author's note attests. Nor was Lewis then enjoying a literary reputation of any dimension from which this novel was a diversion. On the other hand Mitchell—who also published under the name Lewis Grassie Gibbon—was gaining notoriety as a novelist outside his native Scotland, and had he not died at age 33 two years after the publication of his *Spartacus*, might have steered it to greater attention. Neither author was known to the other at the time of their respective publication. It is unlikely that, even had he lived, Mitchell would have come upon Lewis' juvenile adventure. The latter was subtitled in an appropriately didactic manner: *A Story of the Uprising of the Slaves in Italy in 73 B.C.*

Mitchell's *Spartacus* (1933) doesn't begin the modern age of dramatizing that character in novels, but he created for the first time a coherent narrative free of romantic interludes and scenic travelogues. It was based on the fragmented ancient accounts, shaped by its author to reflect personal agendas and/or explore social and political issues of the present day. Mitchell was a committed Leftist, but even his wife couldn't characterize him more specifically as either a Marxist or Leninist or just a mixed-breed Socialist. His novel of the Slave War combines elements from all of those socio-political interpretations, and his discontent at British response to the Great Depression. What is clear is Mitchell's belief that Spartacus wanted to strike at the heart of Roman oppression by advocating an attack on the Eternal City. In that endeavour he was opposed to the advice of his closest advisor Kleon, a Greek slave learned in Platonic political thought. A character named “Cleon”, also a Greek who is part of the Spartacus Revolt, is prominent in Eckstein's novel *Prusias*, a book perhaps read by Mitchell.

It is known that London's Pinewood Studios briefly explored the idea of filming Mitchell's *Spartacus*, but a screenplay wasn't developed and a competent cast was beyond any Depression-era cinema budgets within the U.K. The literary merits of Mitchell's *Spartacus* were noted then by a few but recognized only much later by many. If the novel founders at the very end with a contrived apotheosis of Christian imagery, in structure and style and ruthlessness of vision it is an astonishing *tour de force* of raw energy and doomed purpose. The novel was reprinted as a paperback in 1937, and translated into Czech (!), but its sales thereafter were negligible even in Anglophone countries. That is evident from the astonishing fact that the London publisher Jonathan Cape, in the summer of 1938, agreed to print a similar novel about the Third Servile War, apparently unaware that Mitchell's *Spartacus* was still on sale in local booksellers.

What Cape had purchased was an English translation of Arthur Koestler's German-language novel he entitled *Der Sklavenkrieg* (*The Slave War*). At 398 pp. it was substantially larger than Mitchell's 270 pp. rendition of that event, and under the neutralized title *The Gladiators* it was published in the UK in March 1939 and in the USA in July. Among the five 20th century novels noted here (omitting the juvenilia-type adventure exemplified by Hugh Lewis), Koestler's is by far the most structured, with Prologue, Epilogue and four sequential Books that contain the main narrative. Koestler's Middle European (Hungarian, Austrian) Jewish heritage and his middle class lifestyle were severely shaken by WW I. His flirtation with Zionism and its Palestinian kibbutz experience was a disaster, but he succeeded as a journalist for several German news agencies and publishers. Seven years' membership in the German Communist Party, which included a lengthy tour of the Soviet Union, ultimately left him disillusioned with Marxism in general and its Soviet manifestation in particular. His reportage on the Spanish Civil War, and arrest by pro-Franco forces, led to imprisonment and a death sentence. International reaction saved his life and his unfinished novel *The Gladiators*.

It comes as no surprise that Koestler's interpretation of the Spartacus Revolt is the least heroic of the



Cover Art for (from left to right) James Leslie Mitchell's *Spartacus* (2001 ed.), Arthur Koestler's *The Gladiators* (1960), and Howard Fast's *Spartacus* (1951).

five twentieth-century novels. It is an exposition not just of the failure of the Russian Revolution under Stalinism, but the ultimate failure of *all* revolutions that ignore what Koestler termed the “Law of Detours”. The latter is the theme not just of *The Gladiators* but of his two successive novels (*Darkness at Noon*; *Arrival and Departure*)—a trilogy of “means vs ends” and expediency subverting idealism. *The Gladiators* received mixed reviews in the UK. George Orwell believed that Koestler’s Spartacus was “shadowy” as a character and “ambiguous” as an insurrectionist slave leader, apparently by not realizing that Koestler’s presentation simply reflected the views of the surviving ancient sources. Yet a committed Marxist such as Naomi Mitchison regarded it a compelling read.

The Gladiators was reprinted several times in hardcover directly after WW II, and in successive paperback editions from 1954 until the present. Koestler sold the movie rights in 1957 to a Hollywood production company owned by actor Yul Brynner. A screenplay was then developed by blacklisted director/writer Abraham Polonsky, and though the script was completed it was never filmed. A rival project to film Howard Fast’s *Spartacus* went into production in early 1959. In spite of its own protracted difficulties with blacklisted writer Dalton Trumbo, the McCarthy-era paranoia infecting Hollywood and the larger entertainment industry throughout the USA, and massive cost overruns after a change of directors, it was released to generally favorable reviews, impressive ticket sales, and (eventually) four Academy Awards in 1961. No film (cinema or TV) representation of the Third Servile War before or after Kirk Douglas’ *Spartacus* (1960) has enjoyed its success or its influence on the modern mind. In every study of cinema depictions of the ancient world published since then, a chapter on the making of *Spartacus* is prominent.

The same cannot be said of the novel from which it sprang. Howard Fast’s vision of the Spartacus Revolt, like Koestler’s, grew from association with the Communist Party. Fast had joined its American affiliate, the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA), in 1943. He remained a Party member in spite of the anti-Communist paranoia that swept the USA immediately after WW II and the growing knowledge of Stalinist purges of the old-guard Bolsheviks in the late 1930s. Fast was unrepentant until the beginning of the de-Stalinization process in the Soviet Union, and the Hungarian uprising, both of which played out during 1956. He began writing *Spartacus* just after release from a short (six-week) imprisonment for contempt of Congress in 1950. The idea for the novel came from reading Ward’s *Ancient Lowly* (1880) during his incarceration. There is circumstantial evidence that he had also read Clark’s *Woe to the Conquered*, and in some ways his sprawling, unedited, romantically centered novel is very Victorian.

Blacklisted as an author for his CPUSA and other Leftist associations, Fast self-published the novel in 1951 to little acclaim in America. But the novel was successful in the UK, other Anglophone countries, and was lionized within the Soviet Union and its satellite domains from the very beginning. Once Fast

had publicly denounced Soviet Communism and its American interpretation, his defunct literary career revived immediately. Purchase of the film rights to *Spartacus* in early 1958, and the ultimate success of that controversial production (in which he was directly involved), led to Fast's total rehabilitation by 1961. He lived just long enough (2003) to enjoy the sale of the TV rights to *Spartacus* as a mini-series for the USA Channel the following year.

The contrast of acclaim for Fast's *Spartacus* with the fate of Maurice Ghnassia's *Arena: A Novel of Spartacus and Crassus* (1969), the last of the five modern tales, is striking. In spite of simultaneously publishing English and French versions of the novel (the author was bi-lingual), sales were so abysmal that no paperback edition in either language appeared. *Arena* is therefore today, in spite of its appearance 36 years after Mitchell's *Spartacus*, the least referenced of the Third Servile War recreations. Ghnassia was a lifelong Marxist, fighting with the Free French in North Africa during WW II and incorporating that experience into his account of the last slave revolt against Republican Rome. Ghnassia acknowledges reading the Koestler and Fast novels while working on his own, but was ignorant of Mitchell's book. He had seen the Kirk Douglas film and perhaps the Italian *Spartaco* that preceded it. His writing style, much like Fast's, is turgid, overwrought, and tendentious. Quite unlike his three predecessors, Ghnassia enlisted the French Roman historian Jérôme Carcopino to write an Introduction to the novel. That it did nothing to spur sales may in part be due to Carcopino's known collaboration during the pro-Nazi Vichy regime in France and French territories during WW II.

Uxkull, Mitchell and Ghnassia even today are the relative unknowns among the five novelists who chose the Spartacus Revolt as an event worthy of dramatization. It can be argued that Mitchell's *Spartacus* is the best fictional treatment of all, and that Ghnassia's *Arena* is the least compelling. Fast's *Spartacus* is the best *known*, but primarily because of the epic film and not through any inherent literary value in that novel. Koestler's *The Gladiators* remains, in my estimation, the fictional recreation of the Third Servile War that best incorporates the surviving accounts into a narrative clearly critical of the darkest elements of revolutionary dynamics. It has been almost fifty years since the last "Spartacus novel", but academic interest in the Third Servile War and the career of its major Roman characters (Crassus and Pompey) has never flagged. In the past decade five serious academic studies—all available in English originals or translations—have appeared to favorable sales and reviews.

When *Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964), directed by Anthony Mann, proved to be a box office and critical failure, it signaled the demise of big-budget Roman-era epics. Not until its remake, titled *Gladiator* (2000), did Hollywood again find an audience eager for sword 'n' sandal dramas. A major factor in renewed interest was the use of Computer-Generated Imaging (CGI), a film-making technology that enables the wizards of cinema to create graphic images with amazing verisimilitude, enhancing the visual experience but at greatly reduced cost to the studios. The Spartacus Legend lives on in television. Fast's novel and a new screenplay gave us the mini-series *Spartacus* in 2004. First broadcast on the USA Channel, it was then released as a DVD movie by *Universal-International Studios*, the same company that distributed the 1960 film. The Starz Channel seasonal series *Spartacus* ran successfully between 2010–2014 (all seasons including a shorter "Prequel" segment are now available on DVD).

After more than fifty-five years there may be a new Spartacus movie. If media reports are accurate, GK [Graham King] Films will soon produce an independently conceived cinematic version of *Spartacus*. Press releases of July, 2011 announced that the studio was developing a feature film that (so the propaganda has it) would come closer to the truth of the Spartacus revolt than any earlier movie and take a "less fictionalized and more factual historic approach" which emphasizes Spartacus as a *revolutionary* (*Variety.com* 19 July 2011). Michael B. Gordon, who scripted the Spartan-era epic *300* (2006), is mentioned as the screenwriter, but I can find no information about who is to direct, and no indication of a planned release date. Little confidence in the film's accuracy is engendered by publicity statements noting that Spartacus "leads a band of 30,000 gladiators and 40,000 freed slaves in revolt against the Roman war machine" (emphasis mine). So far there is no indication of a scheduled production date.

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The Lady with the Hole in her Head: a Sicilian mystery, 1400 years ago

R. J. A. Wilson

Punta Secca is a sleepy village on the south coast of Sicily in Ragusa province (Fig. 1), principally known today as the film-set location of the house of police inspector Salvo Montalbano, star of a popular Italian TV series. Close by lie the remains of a late Roman and early Byzantine village, which was identified in the 1960s, mainly through surface clearance, by Paola Pelagatti, then of the Syracuse antiquities service. She thought the site was the ancient *Kaukana*, where Belisarius set sail for the conquest of Africa in AD 533, but Justinian's general surely needed a larger base and a bigger and better harbour for such a venture, and I am not therefore convinced that the identification is correct.



Figure 1. Location map of 'Kaukana' near Punta Secca.



Figure 2. View of the house at the close of excavation in 2010. The rooms furthest from the camera are (left to right) 4, 1 and 2, and the area containing the tomb (5) is at bottom left; the open yard containing the staircase to an upper floor (3) is to its right.



Figure 3a. Obverse of a copper alloy coin of AD 620/621 showing the head of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (diameter 14.5 mm).



Figure 3b. Reverse of the same coin showing the year of minting ('ANNO' to the left and 'XI' to the right), the mint (at CAT(ania) in eastern Sicily), and the denomination (I, standing for ten *nummi*).



Figure 4. Copper-alloy thimble.

Between 2008 and 2010, one house in the settlement, previously cleared only to the tops of the walls, was chosen by the writer for detailed investigation, with the help of a team from the University of British Columbia (Vancouver, Canada). A rectangular building of 18.40 m by 13.30 m, it was shown to be not earlier than *c.* 580/600 AD, and despite showing evidence of six separate building phases, it had a short life (Fig. 2). Rooms 1 and 2 were the principal living rooms, with floors of white mortar and plastered walls, and there was a further pair of rooms above, reached by a staircase from the yard. Room 4, with a rough floor and unplastered walls, was added later, possibly to serve as a storeroom. Areas 3a–b and 5 were open to the sky. The occupation of rooms 1 and 2, on the basis of pottery and coins (Fig. 3), does not extend much beyond *c.* AD 625, and the house seems likely to have been abandoned about then as a dwelling. Finds included an amphora which brought wine from the Nile Valley in Egypt, and a copper-alloy thimble, one of the earliest known anywhere in the Mediterranean world (Fig. 4). The deserted rooms rapidly filled up with sand, which blew in through the open doors from the yard. In time the floor joists in the upper storey rotted, and the white mortar floors there slumped down onto the accumulated sand in the ground-floor rooms below (Fig. 5).

The building was not completely given up, however. In the south-west corner of the yard, an imposing tomb, not sunk into the ground but built up from floor level, was constructed (Figs 6-7). In it were found two skeletons (Fig. 8). One was of an adult female, who died about the age of 25. At a later stage her defleshed bones had been partly displaced to make room for another burial, that of a child aged about 4, who had been added later to the tomb. DNA analysis has shown the child to be female, and consanguineous with the adult female: they are almost certainly mother and daughter (Fig. 9). There were no grave goods, as the tomb had been later opened and rifled by grave robbers. In the subsequent tidying up, presumably carried out by the family, some of the child's smaller bones had ended up inside the lady's skull, which had been used as a kind of impromptu trash-bin. A great quantity of calcite and some large stones were then dumped in the tomb, and a very



Figure 5. Room 1 on the north side of the house showing the ground floor (left) and the unexcavated half of the slumped upper floor *in situ* (right).

The RAG

large and heavy new cover slab was prepared to help seal it. The family clearly did not intend the burials to be disturbed again, and they were not, until our intervention in 2008.

Contemporary with the construction of the tomb, a cross-wall was built to screen off this part of the yard, and in addition an offering table and a bench were provided (Fig. 10). Plentiful associated finds included dishes of African red slip ware, African lamps (one with a unique design on the discus, possibly the earliest known representation of a backgammon board (Fig. 11)), kitchen casseroles, and amphorae for wine and probably also for oil (Fig. 12). A ring was found with the design of a stylized, roaring lion on the bezel (Fig. 13): one can imagine the frustration of its owner who lost it during a visit to the tomb, no doubt kicking the sand



Figure 6. The slabs covering the tomb, as first found. A drawing of the underside of the one with white mortar on it (right) is shown in Figure 14 below.



Figure 7. The tomb on completion of the excavation.



Figure 8. The two skeletons in the tomb, as found.



Figure 9. Detail of the two crania (that at upper right is the mother's, at lower left, set upside down, is the daughter's).



Figure 10. The offering table (left) and the bench (the tomb is in the foreground).



Figure 11. African red slip lamp (c. AD 550/625) with a design on the discus that might represent a board game (backgammon?).



Figure 12. Sicilian oil amphora deposited upside down near the tomb in area 5.



Figure 13. Copper-alloy ring lost in front of the tomb, with a stylized roaring lion below a crescent moon (height of bezel 12 mm).

around in vain in the hope of finding it. It was clear that the whole area around the tomb was used for the staging of parties which included the consumption of food and wine in honour of the dead, presumably on important anniversaries. A libation hole in the large cover slab on the tomb implies that offerings were on occasion made to the deceased as well.

How long such periodical tomb-side reunions continued we do not know, but it was probably only for a few years, after c. 625/30, when the tomb seems likely to have been built and the house ceased to be used any more as a residence. By about 650, however, and probably before, the continual fight against the relentless invasion of wind-blown sand was given up, and the whole building left deserted.

But why was the tomb placed here, inside a house (presumably the woman's home)? What had she done to deserve ritual feasting in her memory? In antiquity, burials were normally to be found in cemeteries located outside the area of the living, or else, in the early Christian period, set in or near the local church if the deceased was a Christian. We know from various indications that our lady was indeed Christian: there is a cross engraved on a grave slab, crosses scratched on pots, and an alpha and omega incised on an amphora, the last (the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet) a Christian slogan referring to Jesus' reference to himself as being the first and last, the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end (*Rev. 22.13*). The most telling indication of Christianity, however, comes from a cover-slab on the tomb, inscribed in Greek 'holy, holy, holy', within an unusual four-armed, probably magical design (the inscription is also written backwards, for greater magical efficacy) (Fig. 14). A little church was excavated at Punta Secca, 200 m east of the newly-found tomb, and there are burials in and around it – so why was the lady not placed there?

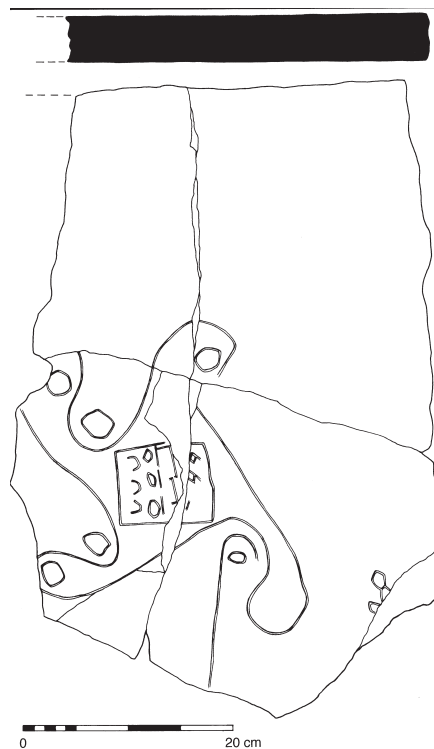


Figure 14. One of the cover slabs of the tomb inscribed (on the underside) with 'holy, holy, holy' in Greek, written backwards, surrounded by a curious magical design (paralleled only in Bronze Age Mycenae and in Iron Age rock art in northern Italy).

The answer may lie in her medical condition. On the median line at the back of her cranium there is a small hole – not a man-made one but a natural opening that she had from birth, situated at the bottom of a shallow 'valley' (Fig. 15). It was only about 3mm in diameter, but enough for part of the meninges, the lining of the brain, to protrude slightly from it. In addition pressure from a likely abnormality within her skull resulted in an elongation of her cranium towards the rear (Fig. 16), and the presence of several 'wormian plates' of bone, nature's repair mechanism when the skull is unnaturally extended,



Figure 15. View of the cranium from the rear showing the small natural hole at the base of a slight depression, and also the wormian plates.



Figure 16. Side view of the cranium of the adult female showing abnormal expansion towards the rear (left).

are detectable. Her condition is known as atretic cephalocele, and this is the only archaeologically attested example of it, in both Old World and New, of any period. The pathology of such a condition suggests that the woman would have suffered from headaches for much of her life, and likely also to have been liable to periodic seizures. In such an epileptic episode, she would have lain as if dead on the floor for a few minutes, only miraculously to rise again, like Jesus Christ. Perhaps such behaviour was decidedly scary for the rest of the Christian community at Punta Secca, who rejected her and branded her as a type of witch; but for her close friends and family such extraordinary occurrences, in an age when medicine was so poorly understood, could only mean one thing – that she was a holy woman, deserving of reverence both in life and death. Atretic cephalocele is not a fatal condition, and we cannot ascertain why she died when she did, but we do know an extra dimension to the personal tragedy of her family – she was 30 weeks pregnant when she died, and her condition might have been a contributory factor in her death. All this is of course speculation. Without the survival of soft tissue, certainty is impossible; but the hypothesis does serve to explain the most extraordinary feature of the Punta Secca excavation – the discovery of a substantial tomb, and of associated feasting, inside what is otherwise a perfectly ordinary early Byzantine house.

Acknowledgments

Many people contributed to this project, too many to list here; but a special mention must be made of Giovanni Distefano (Camarina), whose collaboration and grant of an excavation permit through the Regione Siciliana are here gratefully acknowledged; and Carrie Sulosky Weaver (Pittsburgh), who discovered the condition and researched the pathology of the deceased woman. The assistance of the Social Studies and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Ottawa) is also gratefully acknowledged, without which the excavations would never have taken place. Figure 14 was drawn by Sally Cann; the photos were all taken by the author.

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Exploring an Ancient Palatial Complex: the Northeastern Petra Project

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Although many archaeological sites in the Near East have for long attracted the imagination of visitors as well as the interest of archaeologists, Petra, in southern Jordan, has generated most public attention. That capital of the ancient Nabataean Kingdom (2nd c. B.C.–106 AD), subsequently the principal city of the Roman and Byzantine provinces – *Arabia* and *Palaestina Tertia*, respectively – is particularly famous for its spectacular, monumental tomb façades carved out of brilliantly coloured sandstone. More importantly, however, the ancient inhabitants of the city and the kingdom became well known through their participation in the long-distance caravan trade between South Arabia and the Mediterranean, which involved one of the most coveted ancient products – incense.

Yet, despite all attention and the intensive archaeological exploration of Petra in the past 20 years, the city still holds many surprises. Of interest here is the northeastern part of the city, located between the Wadi Mataha and Wadi Musa drainages, on the high ground overlooking the Petra Valley, and directly west of the Palace Tomb carved in al-Khubtah massif (Fig. 1). The area measures over 380 x 330 m and is generally known as Rujm Umm al-Cunaydiq. Stephan G. Schmid (Berlin), Bernhard Kolb (Basel) and myself (Helsinki), veterans of the archaeological exploration of Petra, have on many occasions traversed that part of the ancient city, and were always surprised by the number of ruined, monumental structures located there. Yet, these structures were never properly documented and, most surprisingly, the modern maps of Petra hardly feature any of them. Therefore, we have decided to undertake an intensive survey of the area, documenting and interpreting the extant remains. For this purpose, the Northeastern Petra Survey Project (NEPP) began its investigations in 2010, being sponsored by the German Research Foundation (DFG), the Cluster of Excellence “Topoi” and Humboldt University in Berlin, and co-directed by the three of us.

Even before the exploration of the area commenced, some factors, significant in the history of the NEPP area, need to be considered. At first, the NEPP area forms a separate quarter of the city, roughly triangular in shape, defined by the two natural water-conducting depressions (the Wadi Musa and the Wadi Mataha) and the vertical cliff of al-Khubtah massif which encloses the Petra Valley on the eastern side. This is a “by-product” of the original Nabataean redirection of water flowing to the Petra Valley. Secondly, the NEPP area enjoys a unique geo-strategical location in the valley as the site clearly dominates the entire city and its main communication axis, offering an excellent view in all directions. Likewise, the NEPP area is visible from all over the city centre; it clearly is the most prominent part of it. The monumental steps to the top of al-Khubtah, which begin in the northeastern corner of the NEPP area, provide access to the cultic installations on top of the massif but could also have served as an emergency exit from the city. To access the steps one had to pass through the area that was clearly topographically separated from the rest of the city. Furthermore, the NEPP area is directly connected to one of the six fresh water aqueducts of Petra, namely the al-Khubtah conduit, which enters the city at a point in the NEPP area and meets there a large cistern utilizing the water catchment



Figure 1. View of Petra from the southwest. The NEPP area is marked as ‘4’ (Photograph by Stephan G. Schmid).

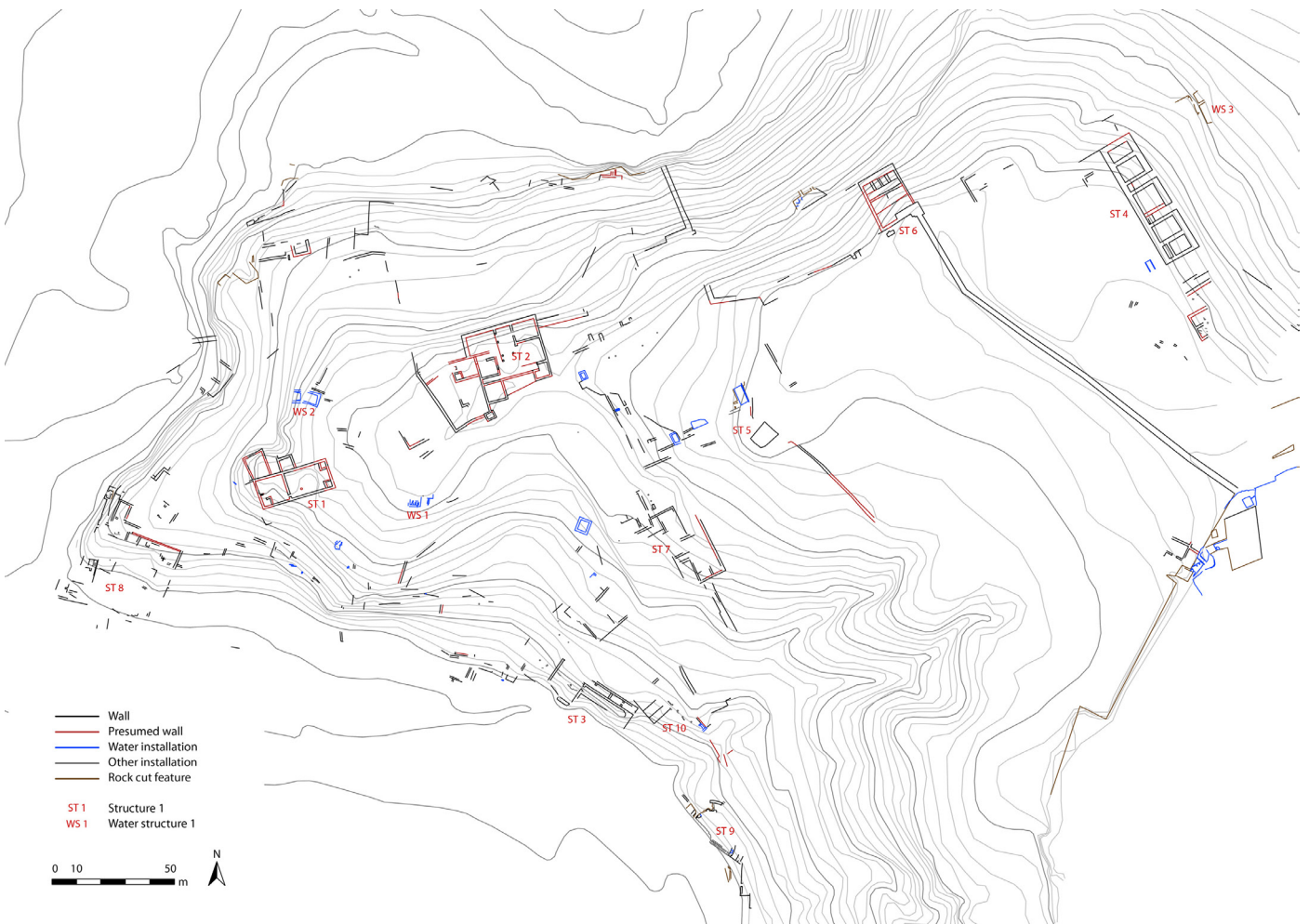


Figure 2. The plan of the NEPP area (Plan by J. Falkenberg and M. Holappa).

system of the Khubtah massif. These two systems (aqueduct and runoff water collection) could be used both separately and together. This direct and exclusive access to one of the city's aqueducts is particularly notable. Finally, it is significant that at the spot where the Khubtah massif borders the survey area, there is the so-called Palace Tomb - the largest and the most decorated façade of Petra.

Following the six seasons of fieldwork (2010-2015), it became apparent that while the occupation in the NEPP area is dispersed and the density uneven, there are at least ten monumental buildings or clusters of structures there as well as several water conservation and distribution installations (Fig. 2). Some monumental structures are located on the often terraced top of the elevated area. Other, highly decorative, façade-like structures or pavilions, located on different levels of the steep edges of the NEPP area obscuring the natural stone formations (Fig. 3). The numerous surface finds of architectural elements (up to 600 at this point of time), such as column drums, capitals, cornices, voussoirs, friezes, pilasters, door jambs, stylistically dated to the early 1st c A.D., indicate that the buildings were highly decorated with such elements and of highest artistic quality (Fig. 4). Undoubtedly, the extant remains in the NEPP area should be considered as a large architectural complex from the early 1st century A.D. the fact also confirmed by the dating of the surface ceramics.

Among large, monumental structures, three are briefly described here.

Structure 1, ca. 30 x 20 m, located at the western tip of the area, was initially a rectangular building consisting of one large hall. Judging from the outstanding location, overlooking the entire Petra Valley, and the opulence of architectural decoration, the building might have been a highly representative audience/reception hall. Architectural members of different sizes were found, indicating an upper storey, a fact also supported by large stone tumbles.

Structure 2, ca. 40 x 30 m, is located in the northern part of the NEPP area. Numerous architectural blocks found there include an impressive array of decorative elements. Characteristic of Structure 2 is the consistent and unmixed use of architectural decoration which follows the same homogeneous concept datable to the 1st century A.D., and with parallels in Petra and elsewhere in the Hellenistic-Roman East. The building was



Figure 3. The southern slope of the NEPP area, featuring the facade-like structures (Photograph by Zbigniew T. Fiema).

constructed on a massive substructure, with the main façade on the northern side (Fig. 5), where two entrances were also located, including one monumental. The central component of the structure is a large, asymmetrical rectangle featuring a colonnade running N-S, which possibly turned eastward, having an L-shaped plan. That room was flanked by two other rooms, one of which had a black-and-white mosaic floor. The second storey is attested by the presence of different sizes of columns and many fragments of architectural decoration of the highest quality.

Structure 9, in the southeastern part of the NEPP area, was considered a “theatre” by the early explorers of Petra, but no elements, such as steps, seats, cunei, which could indicate the theatrical function, were noted during our investigations. Thus the building should rather be interpreted as a highly decorative, leisure-related pavilion (Fig. 6). It is located exactly in the point of Petra’s topography where the N-S approach axis from the outer Siq is dramatically changed into a more E-W axis of the center of the city, as represented by the Colonnaded Street. Therefore, the main function of Structure 9 was to visually ease the significant change in the axially of the area. The building itself is not a perfect semicircle, as previously reconstructed, but rather a “teardrop” in shape – again an intentional visual effect. Some 3-dimensional decorative elements inside the structure, such as semicircular niches and water basins, were also noted during the survey. It is apparent that



Figure 4. Decorated doorjambs in the vicinity of Structure 1 (Photograph by Zbigniew T. Fiema).



Figure 5. The façade of Structure 2 (Photograph by Stephan G. Schmid).



Figure 6. Structure 9 (Photograph by M. Dehner).

in addition to the interplay of light and shadow, water also played an important decorative role in the building.

The apparent grand location, opulence of architectural decoration and the monumentalism of design indicate that the NEPP structures should be interpreted as an outstanding palatial residential complex, not unlikely of the Nabataean monarchs. The palaces of the Nabataean kings at Petra were generally not a major focus of modern research. Several tentative propositions have been made with regard to some ruined structures in Petra, none, however, plausible. Yet, two passages in Flavius Josephus (*JA* 14, 4 [16] and *BJ* 1, 2 [125]) clearly imply that by the mid-1st century B.C., Petra was considered a capital city where their kings resided. In fact, the Greek word *τα βασιλεια*, used by Josephus, does not only designate a “palace” where the king resided but rather implies the existence of an area of a city where the royal quarters, administration, cultic installations etc. were concentrated. Such urban royal residences are known from the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East during the Hellenistic (late 4th–1st century B.C.) and the Early Roman periods, and these usually follow certain rules, as in case, for example, of the royal residences of the Seleucids. The *basileia* quarters are built in a location peripheral to the city centre, often occupying roughly a quarter of the urban space, being often surrounded by water (sea, rivers, channels) on at least two sides. Not only a royal residence but also administrative and infrastructural installations, sanctuaries, gardens and parks as well as tombs or *heroa* of the founders of the dynasty and/or the city are included within the limits of a *basileia*. Perhaps the most famous was the Ptolemaic *basileia* in Alexandria in Egypt, but other examples include e.g., Antioch-on-Orontes and Seleukia-on-Tigris, both in the Seleucid kingdom.

Combining the preliminary observations with the survey results, it is then more than a speculative interpretation that the NEPP complex could be identified with the Nabataean royal quarters. Being a large sector separated from the rest of the city and enjoying clear advantages, in terms of the dominant location, water supply, visibility, defensibility, access, etc., the NEPP complex strongly resembles the *basileia* - the royal quarters - in the Hellenistic capitals. Also, the Palace Tomb would ideally be the tomb and/or heroön of the kings of Petra within the *basileia*, exactly as in other Hellenistic royal quarters (Fig. 7). Particularly striking in the case of the NEPP complex, is the skilful and purposeful utilization of the landscape. The high ground and the relatively disarticulated, often steep terrain were most successfully adapted through the massive use of retaining walls and artificial terracing, and the location of structures on different levels, in order to create a highly attractive palatial complex. The result, however, is not overwhelming. In fact, the monumentality, emphasized here, lay not necessarily in the specific structures built at the site but rather in the overall design of the entire area.

The parallels, however, include not only the royal urban residences, and the influence of other types of

luxurious residences of the Hellenistic-Early Roman period should equally be considered. For example, in addition to the places occupied by highly representational buildings, such as Structures 1 and 2, the NEPP complex also features smaller, more private units, such as pavilions, porticoes, basins and pools, enclosures, and probably gardens. This arrangement resembles other palatial residences, not necessarily built in cities, such as those built by Herod the Great in Palestine. Given the relative dispersal of NEPP structures across the landscape, late Republican Roman villas outside Rome, and even the early imperial palaces in Italy should also be considered as possible parallels. Thus it may be suggested that the NEPP complex, i.e., the presumed royal quarters in Petra, most skilfully combines the functional and locational aspects of Hellenistic *basileia* with the spatial organization of luxurious Herodian residences and grand Roman suburban villas. The NEPP complex in Petra is not only a monument of royal might and power, which utilizes fashionable Hellenistic-Early Roman architectural designs but it may probably be also understood in terms of a virtual microcosm of the Nabataean world, which combines the official and utilitarian with the fashionable, leisure-related and traditional aspects.

The NEPP has successfully accomplished its survey phase of investigations, gaining significant information concerning not only the potential residence of the Nabataean kings but also directly related to the history of urbanism in the Petra Valley. In the future, the project hopes to expand the scope of its fieldwork activities. After all, as we have learned through the NEPP, there is still much to be discovered about the ancient Petra.

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Figure 7. The Palace Tomb (center left) with the NEPP structures in the foreground (Photograph by Zbigniew T. Fiema).

Roman Archaeology at UWA

RAG Update

The final Saturday session for Winter 2015 will be on Saturday 12 December. Plans for Summer 2016 Saturdays is underway. As has become a pattern in the last two years, we will have sessions in late January and in February then our old friend Guy de la Bédoyère will talk to the group on 9th April before heading for the airport. The other dates have yet to be fixed.

The Group was established in 2004 so 2016 will be our 12th year. Members can again look forward to a programme of lectures and two issues of the RAG Mag. As always the Group depends heavily on the generous involvement and donations of time and resources of individuals.

Aerial Archaeology in Jordan

The 19th season of the AAJ project took place in October – still the only such project in the entire Middle East. The team included RAGers Don Boyer and Rebecca Banks. About 30 hours were flown and 9995 photographs taken. Many were of non-Roman sites but in a landscape part of the Roman Empire for several centuries, Roman sites abound. Always of interest – not least because you only seem to find them when you are not looking(!) are the traces of Roman roads. Images are posted on the **APAAME** Flickr site once cataloged - <http://www.flickr.com/APAAME/collections>

APAAME now has over 102,000 items, including the recently digitized Stein collection from The British Academy. If you are interested in its, and AAJ's 'doings', you can subscribe to the Blog: <http://www.apaame.org/>.

Transcribing

Part of my research on the western travellers 'East of Jordan' before 1914 has involved reading the journals written by these people often en route. Many were never published and survive as – usually, hand-written documents in archives. I have obtained copies of several of these latter and Norah Cooper has been doing stellar work transcribing them. Next time you see her be sure to ask her how her friend Augustus is doing on his trip across Sinai to Petra. You can follow developments on the Blog: <http://eastofjordan.wordpress.com/>

Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa

EAMENA is based at the University of Oxford and includes Rebecca Banks (now Mrs Repper). A central purpose is to document ALL archaeological remains throughout the region so that governments can factor 'heritage' into development plans, and impact of disasters/threats can be better understood.

The remains in the region are often still remarkably well-preserved. For obvious reasons, though, projects in Syria and Libya have effectively stalled and – in the case of Syria, sites are sometimes being deliberately destroyed. Many others are being looted. Western governments are effectively powerless to prevent the destruction of even such famous high-profile structures as the ancient temples of Palmyra.

You can follow the project and keep up to date on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/EAMENAPROJECT/>, and Twitter @EAMENA123.

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 \$35.00 **Family Membership 1**
 2 adults
 1 copy of RAG magazine
 \$10.00 **Student Membership**

Annual memberships are from July 1st to June 30th.

Please download the Membership form from the website (see below) or see one of the RAG team at the Saturday lectures.

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