

The RAG

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Roman Archaeology in 2016

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Tertullian, *On the Soul* 30

The world is every day better known, better cultivated and more civilized than before. Everywhere roads are traced, every district is known, every country opened to commerce. Smiling fields have invaded the forests, flocks and herds have routed the wild beasts, the very sands are sown, the rocks are broken up, the marshes drained ... Wherever there is a trace of life, there are houses, human habitations and well-ordered governments.

(trans. from Wells, C. *The Roman Empire*, 1992: 220)

Roman archaeological material is widespread and abundant. There is, of course, a great quantity of material – sites, structures and artefacts, from the Regal and Early and Middle Republican periods (c. 10th-3rd centuries BC) but it is from the period we call the ‘Empire’ (beginning in the 3rd century BC) that most material survives. The rapid change in gear comes in the 1st century BC and continues till the 5th century AD in the western Mediterranean and for a thousand years longer in the eastern (often referred to as the Byzantine Empire).

During the centuries of the Empire, the Roman World reached a level of sophistication not to be seen again until the Renaissance. Rome never made the breakthrough we call the Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions – nor for that matter did any of the other highly developed states of the world before Britain in the 18th century. (The question should perhaps be “Why DID Britain do so?” rather than “Why did the others NOT?”). Nevertheless, the scale of survival of archaeological remains of the period is immense and spread from Britain to Jordan and from the Crimea to the Sahara. The remains of cities, towns, villages, farmsteads, forts of all sizes, frontier works, roads, canals, quarries, mines, industrial sites ... It is not, of course, evenly spread – Britain had relatively few cities and fairly modest places; Italy and western Turkey had numerous cities with a wide range of impressive ‘architectural furniture’ (*fora*, temples, theatres ...). More than ‘places’, however, is the staggering scale of artefacts made and often readily available far down the social scale.

In 2005, Bryan Ward-Perkins published a book on *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (reviewed briefly in *RAG* Vol. 2 Iss. 3). It was a lively and provocative work which was excellent for quantifying ‘civilization’ and contrasting its collapse with what followed. The fine red glazed pottery we call Samian Ware (or its counterparts and



Roman glass vessels (Photo: David Kennedy).



A common Latin inscription from the Roman road network – a milestone (Photo: Jerash Hinterland Survey).



Samian Ware from excavations at Roman Binchester (Photo: <http://binchester.blogspot.co.uk>).

successors) was turned out from huge kilns by the hundreds of thousands and fragments often turn up on very poor rural sites, the result of a complex and very effective distribution system even for items of relatively low-value and high-bulk.

In Rome itself, the artificial hill beside the Tiber called Monte Testaccio is calculated to be ‘made’ of the broken pieces of about 53 million of the clay amphorae in which olive oil was exported from Spain to the capital (=3.78 billion litres).

Ward-Perkins ranges more widely including noting that zooarchaeologists – studying animal bones, have discovered that cattle in Roman times were larger than the pre-Roman and post-Roman centuries. Presumably the result of selective breeding to produce more meat.

In contrast he notes that the pottery found in even the graves of Anglo-Saxon ‘kings’ in post-Roman Britain was made by hand and from poorly prepared clay and that the superb jewelry in – for example, the Sutton Hoo royal burial, was rare in contrast to the hundreds, probably thousands, of high quality treasures in the Roman world.

At the more mundane level, Ward-Perkins examines the implications of clay roof-tiles. Millions were made, transported and – in later ages, often looted from collapsed Roman buildings and re-used. At a stroke people had significantly better roofs and from a manufacturing and distribution system that was very ‘modern’; certainly unparalleled for items until modern times.

Add in other ‘amenities’ – drainage, roads, canals, sewers, everyday baths, ... As Ward-Perkins put it amusingly, “with the fall of the empire, Art, Philosophy and decent drains all vanished from the West”.

We can add more to bring out the extraordinary richness of this world. For example, Romans did not invent glass-making but the scale of production during the imperial period was huge and not reached again until a thousand years later. In Egypt, the many millions of mummified birds, baboons, crocodiles, cats and other animals prepared and then deposited as offerings in great underground caverns is staggering.

We can see the evidence of literacy in not just the survival of works of literature but in inscriptions. The city of Rome alone has produced at least 60,000 inscriptions cut on stone. The ubiquity of writing whether graffiti, tombstones, edicts, milestones etc, implies a high degree of literacy – relatively at least, perhaps 10% of the population functionally literate.

The vast majority of papyri come from Egypt because the arid conditions preserve the material. Hundreds of thousands even after the likely loss of perhaps 99% of those created there. Even if less common in those provinces without the papyrus plant readily available, there is abundant evidence of similar perishable everyday documents even if some are written on other materials. One such material is skin (vellum); another is the wooden tablet on which people wrote in ink. Appropriately, it was in the reverse conditions that preserved tablets – waterlogged ground in northern Britain in particular. Several thousand survive at Vindolanda behind Hadrian’s Wall from which an order of magnitude can be surmised for the c.350 years of Roman Britain – ten to twenty million items even for one of the least developed provinces.

Another useful guesstimate is that by Keith Hopkins for the numbers of coins in circulation. Rome neither invented coinage nor used it for even the majority of its economic transactions. Nevertheless, the scale of minting dwarfed every previous and subsequent state till modern times. Hopkins suggested that at any one time during its life, there were in circulation in the Roman Empire, almost 7 billion coins including no less than 120 million gold *aurei*.

Finally, an oddity. ‘Games’ in the amphitheatres, theatres and circuses required a constant supply of wild beasts to fight or be displayed. At Rome in particular, even the rarest animal had to be shown to captivate and amuse the urban mob, including elephant, giraffe and lion. It requires little imagination to guess at the enormous logistical exercise involved in trapping, transporting ... and keeping alive, animals which were often hard to catch and likely to die in transit. Although our societies deplore the cruelty of the enterprise, again we can see the sophistication of the process from a feature reported by Kathleen Coleman of Yale University.

“In 1855 there were said to be 420 varieties of plants growing in the Colosseum in Rome. Most appeared nowhere else in Europe, and were assumed to have sprung from seeds mixed with fodder brought from Africa along with animals destined for slaughter in ancient Roman festivals.”

These examples reflect the preoccupations of much of Roman Archaeology today – society, economy and culture. Books and articles abound, not least the huge: W. Scheidel, I. Morris and R. Saller



The artificial hill of Monte Testaccio (Photo: Aronson 1979, Photographic Archive of American Academy in Rome).



Roman coins from the Frome Hoard (Photo: Portable Antiquities Scheme).



Mummified animals from Egypt in the British Museum (Photo: Mario Sánchez).



(Eds) *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World*, 2007, Cambridge (CUP).

The pre-occupations of a generation ago remain popular, however, as the recent Roman Frontiers Congress in Germany confirms – the series began in 1949 and this was the 23rd meeting, attracting, as usual, several hundred participants. The army, forts and warfare remain popular themes with scores of books and articles on the theme published annually.

An unwelcome development is the prominence of the great city of Palmyra in the news. The shocking destruction of some of its major components is unforgivable (see ‘Reading the Ruins of Palmyra’ in this Issue). Just this week it was reported that Russian bombing had struck the well-preserved Roman village near Idlib, a place on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Less prominent is the almost routine looting and damage to sites of every kind but – inevitably, the Roman ones being attractive because of the likely discovery of artefacts. The appearance today of the great Roman city of Apamea on Google Earth is of a pitted landscape, the work of illicit digging. The war in Syria and Iraq will continue and

Comparison of satellite imagery of the site of Apamea before and after the start of the Syrian Civil War (Source: Digital Globe, Google Earth).

Roman sites are likely to be damaged both deliberately and as ‘collateral damage’. We may query what has become of the Roman ruins at Singara, capital of the Sinjar Province populated till recently largely by Yezidis. Further west, right up on the frontier with Turkey is Ras el-Ain (Resaina), in the front line – literally of warfare between Syrian Kurds and Daesh. Like Singara, Resaina was a Roman legionary fortress and city.

Unseen is the continued erosion caused by population growth and development of the landscape for settlement, roads and farming. Even when the war is over, this process will continue.

An ironic positive sign for archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa is the plethora of projects stimulated internationally to record what has survived, gather up and digitise old photographs and try to create the kinds of database we should have had before the wars began.

We may end with a quotation from a reviewer of Ward-Perkins which seems particularly apt:

... Ward-Perkins seeks to demonstrate through literary, epigraphical, and archaeological evidence, first, that the prosperity and security of millions was abruptly lost, and, second, lost due to the invasions of less sophisticated, more warlike parasitical tribes who finally broke culture’s door and destroyed a millennium of civilization’s hard work that took millions of lives and left the survivors forever poorer.

(Victor Davis Hanson, ‘Collapse of a ‘Hyperpower’,’ *The New Criterion*, April 9, 2006)

I had a Dream

Rebecca Norman



The ancient fortress of Masada (Photo: Masada National Parks).

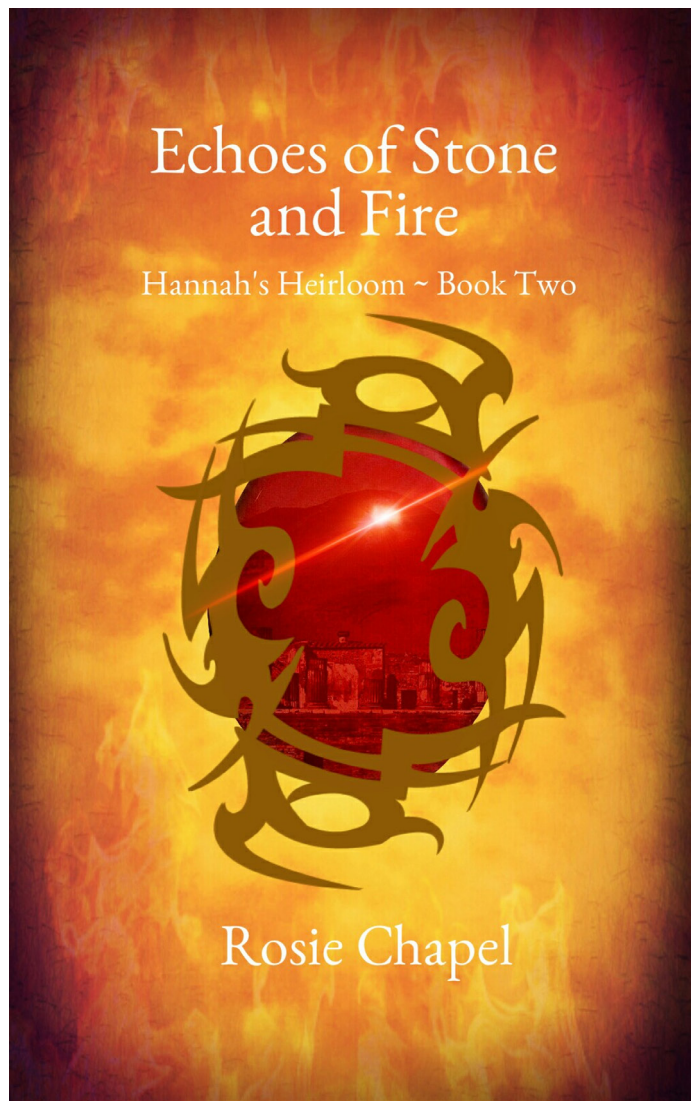
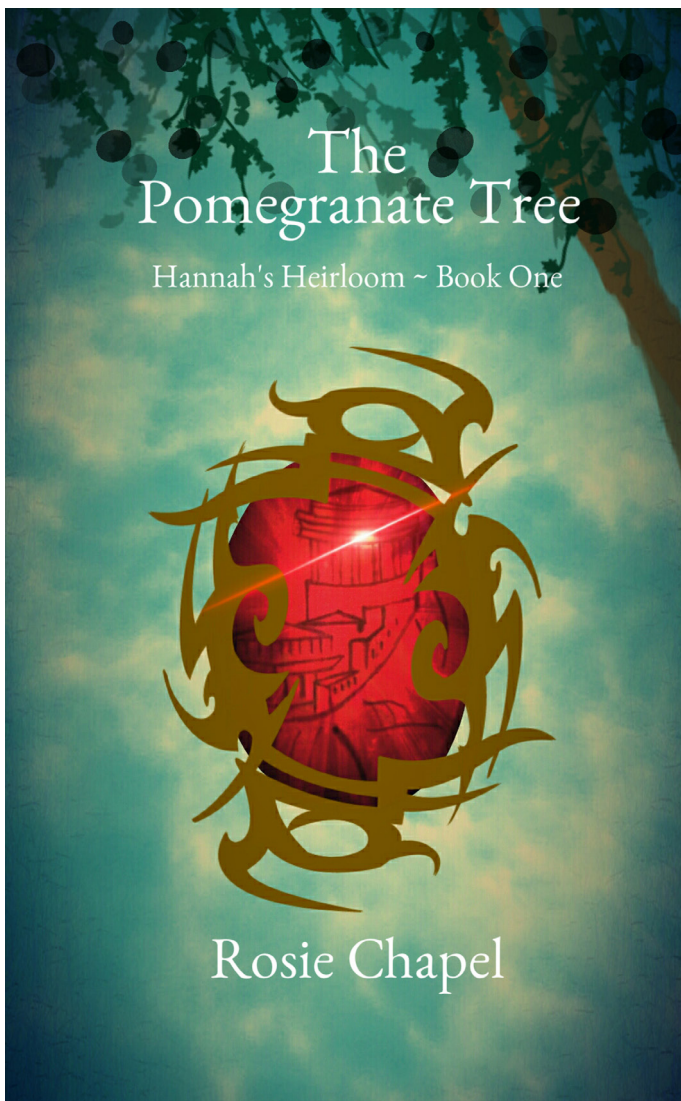
Ancient history in all its forms has always fascinated me and, a few years ago, I was persuaded to return to University so that I could immerse myself in it, rather than remain an armchair historian. A devotee of archaeology documentaries, initially I thought that this was my calling, however, two lectures and a tutorial convinced me otherwise (I realised that I really didn't care about seeds). Already signed up for a unit on Roman history, I was lucky enough to have a lecturer whose passion for her subject was infectious. Before long I was completely spellbound by the Julio-Claudians and their successors during the first century AD. Furthermore, within Classics and Ancient History there were archaeology units, giving me the best of both worlds.

I loved my time at Uni and had no intention of leaving. I considered continuing along the academic path right up to a doctorate. I even had an idea for my thesis. Something shifted however in my last semester, all sorts of things changed bringing my decisions into question. Deciding to take a break and see where the wind blew, I placed everything on hold. It was at this point my husband suggested that I might like to write a book set in antiquity, putting my love for history to a different use. Although the idea appealed to me – writing a book has long been a dream of mine – I didn't think I had it in me and wasn't I too old anyway? Even if I decided to give it a go, what would I write about? How did I come up with an original storyline?

Finding the Idea

I let the concept of writing a book play around in my head for a while, jotting down possibilities, ranging from the sublime to the absolutely ridiculous. Then one day, while perusing my assignments for inspiration, I came across one on the ancient port city of Caesarea Maritima. The background to this essay covered information on King Herod's entire building program, including his restructuring of an isolated citadel in the Judean desert. A spark flickered; this was the fortress at Masada, where in the first century AD there had been a rebel ambush, a massacre and a Roman army bent on revenge. All great scenarios around which I could base a story, could I make something from this?

Devouring every piece of information I could find on the history of this fortress and the archaeological excavations, the spark became a little brighter and an idea started percolating, one that intrigued me, but one I struggled to pin down. Then I remembered that according to the only surviving ancient source, seven people – two women and five children – had survived the massacre and inspiration hit. One of these women could be my heroine; I just needed to work it backwards to determine how she was able to avoid being slain. Then



I added a further complication by deciding to include a modern heroine, related to the woman who survived and that somehow was connected across time. Not time travel in the accepted sense, she wouldn't actually disappear from her own world, more that her sub-conscious mind would meld with that of her ancestor. She would see the events as they occurred and could use her knowledge of what would happen to save those she loved.

Building the Story

It was all very well having the idea, but how did I turn this into a story? How did I create characters that I believed in? That others would believe in? My plot line should include all those things I researched – the ambush, the massacre, the Roman army and the woman who lived. Then within that plot line I wanted a romance, no, not just one – two – one in the modern era and one in ancient Masada. I had to choose names, come up with back-stories and I had to find a solid reason why someone would suddenly decide to travel to Masada. Even though it is close to the Dead Sea, it's still quite isolated.

Characters turned out to be quite easy. I based them, loosely, on people I know, but only described them enough for the reader to build up their own picture, preferring to leave something to the imagination.

While researching Masada, I came across an article about some skeletal remains that had been discovered under a pile of debris on the lower tier of the Hanging Palace. Initially assumed to be one of the Zealots, further examination has suggested that it may well have been one of the Roman soldiers killed in the ambush of AD 66. Interested, I started to play with the notion that one or two soldiers might have survived the rebel attack. Wounded, but rather than killed, they were treated and once healed, held as captives to be used as bargaining tools should the need arise. All well and good, but how were they cared for? Who would treat their injuries? These men were an enemy; the Zealots would more likely prefer to finish them off.

Enter my ancient heroine. Choosing to call her Hannah, meaning 'favour' or 'grace,' I decided that she would not be a typical Hebrew woman. Brought to Masada by her brother, Hannah was a young, single woman, trained in the art of healing by an indulgent uncle, himself a physician. Holding a unique status in the burgeoning community at the fortress, she would be central to the survival of the Roman soldiers.

Past and Present Collide

So far so good! Now I had to determine why my modern heroine, also called Hannah, would want to visit Masada. She receives a ruby clasp, a surprise birthday present from her long dead grandmother and the accompanying letter tells her that it was a gift from a grateful soldier at Masada. Hannah decided to try and trace its origins and by sheer coincidence (hmm) her best friend, male – of course – is already going to the fortress as part of the season's current archaeological excavation.

Once on Masada, Hannah begins to have dreams or visions about the AD 66 ambush and its aftermath. She realises she is seeing the events as they unfold through the eyes of her ancient counterpart. At the same time, while assisting on the dig, she finds artefacts that link her to the past. Artefacts that she, or rather her ancestor, has discarded or lost.

Now we needed the magic, something that would connect these two women, merging them into one, without either of them physically travelling through time – I did say I wanted it to be believable! I also wanted whoever read this book to believe in the love these two couples shared, hoping that they each had a chance of a happily-ever-after.

Right then – how about this – the best friend who has travelled with her, believes what Hannah is experiencing is real and not her imagination and that this same best friend has loved her for a long time. Then, maybe, allow one of the Roman soldiers to fall in love with the Hebrew woman who is treating him – a forbidden love and one that could have fatal consequences. Finally, I just had to arrange for Hannah to slip through time and then add a dash of rebellion, a jealous would-be suitor, an avenging army and one woman in love with two men across millennia. What could possibly go wrong?

In Search of a Title

The Pomegranate Tree was born. A strange title I know, but I decided to call it this for several reasons. Firstly, it seems that pomegranate trees can grow in the most arid of places and against all the odds often survive even the harshest weather. My story revolves around two couples who found each other in the most unexpected place, fall in love and against all odds survive. Secondly, Yigael Yadin's first excavation team planted pomegranates during a Jewish New Year festival and apparently the bushes flourished. Thirdly, it confirmed Josephus' claim that the citadel was capable of supporting all manner of growing things – I do like it when an ancient source is proven correct. Finally although pomegranates are quite scrubby trees, their fruit is delectable and I like that a rather coarse tree can produce such flawless fruit. This synthesis reflected the characters of Maxentius and Hannah. A battle hardened and, now captive, Roman soldier meets a petite and beautiful Hebrew woman, trained in the art of healing. By rights they should be sworn enemies, yet they complement each other perfectly.

Finding My Place Among The Other Books

I believe that historical fiction has become one of the most popular genres in the main because people want to imagine what it was like to live during a particular time period. Readers are especially drawn to those that include an element of 'time travel' because it gives them an opportunity to live vicariously through the characters. The chance to see how people really lived, not how the historical sources tell us they lived: How they interacted in their daily lives? How much of the world beyond their own doorstep did they know about? What were their fears? What were their joys? What kinds of restrictions were placed on them because of traditions and tenets? The list goes on.

There are so many amazing authors writing in this genre. Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander* series (and now a major television show, although I think the books are much better) is a sweeping saga with Claire, the heroine, physically travelling through time from a post WW2 Scotland. Taking us from Jacobean Scotland to France, then onto pre-revolutionary America, Gabaldon's attention to detail and her compelling characters enthrall the reader.

The *Time Travel* Series by Christopher David Petersen is another, where the hero ends up in a different

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historical period in each book, with the added twist that this time the general public get to hear about it. His third novel in the sequence starts in AD 9 and moves from the battle of the Teutoburg Forest in Germania, to Rome, Alexandria and Judaea.

James Michener's *The Source*, is a journey through time rather than time travelling, but begins with an archaeological discovery. Michener weaves an extraordinary tale of the lives of the inhabitants of Makor, his fictitious city, over thousands of years, based on the artefacts being unearthed. Time travel without going anywhere!

These are only three authors, a drop in the ocean of incredible literature available for those of us who are continually fascinated by anything related to history. If these writers do nothing more than inspire their readers to look beyond the novel into worlds long past, then they have done their job!

Living the Dream

Finally – let's be honest, if you had the chance to go back in time, physically, to your favourite era of history, if there was a way to do so, without giving up your modern accoutrements, I bet you would do it – in a heartbeat. This is why I chose to write historical fiction, it is a way for me to do just that. In fact I became so involved in the story and my characters, that one book was never going to be enough, so – as you do – I decided to try for a trilogy.

When I am writing I lose myself in the world of Maxentius and Hannah, I can smell, taste and touch the ancient world and I hope that whoever reads my books, can do the same.

Rebecca Norman (Rosie Chapel)

www.rosiechapel.com

Now available worldwide from Amazon on Kindle and in paperback

'*The Pomegranate Tree*' Book – Hannah's Heirloom ~ Book One

'*Echoes of Stone and Fire*' - Hannah's Heirloom ~ Book Two – Released 1/3/16

Further Reading

Masada by Yigael Yadin

The Building Program of Herod the Great by Duane W Roller



A word from DLK

From an earlier generation I can attest to the power of historical novels on an adolescent mind. In my very early 'teens it was the novels of Henry Treece on Vikings but especially that involving Miklagard (Constantinople). Better still were all the novels of Rosemary Sutcliffe especially those involving the same family in Roman Britain and beyond. I for long owned a copy of the first, in hardback (!), *The Eagle of the Ninth*. Later teens it was Nevil Shute's *An Old Captivity* – linking the present (1930s) with the Viking past. I have often re-read it and was pleased to find my accommodation in Oxford is very close to where the archaeologist in the novel lived in the book. It is also a novel about – amongst other things, Aerial Archaeology (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_Old_Captivity). My Bucket-List includes a trip by seaplane from Scotland through the Faroes, Iceland and Greenland to the Viking settlement ruins in Canada at L'Anse aux Meadows at the northern tip of Newfoundland Island. Finally – when I was a trainee accountancy apprentice in 1967, and with regular 'auditing' trips to other places and staying in hotels, the big book Rebecca mentions filled many hours – *The Source*.

For the next edition of *RAG* perhaps Members would like to recommend a book or two, fact or fiction and preferably Roman, they have enjoyed. Naturally you will all want to say it only came in 2004 with the publication of Kennedy and Bewley's *Ancient Jordan from the Air*. Let us assume that is everyone's choice, so go for the book that came (a poor) second.

Please send book recommendations to the Editor - contact email on the back page of the *RAG*.

The Roman Barge at Arles, Southern France

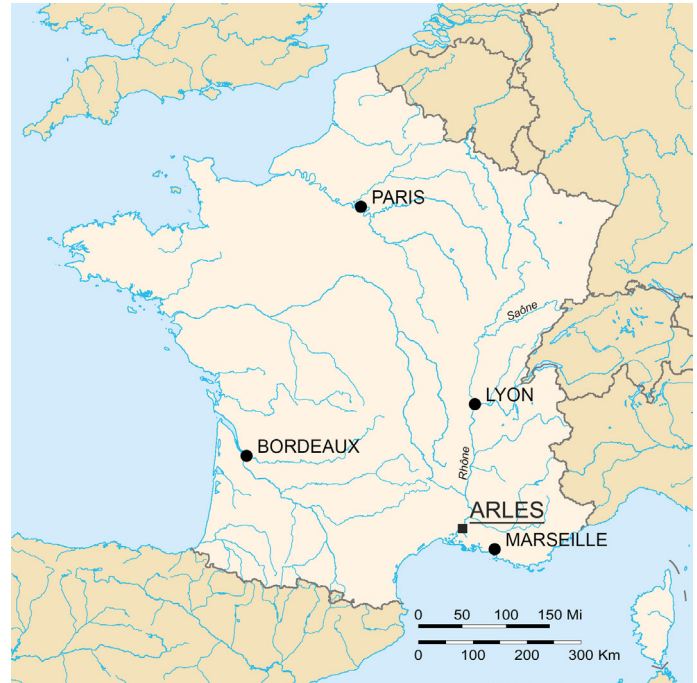
Norah Cooper

Roman barges were vessels crucial for the transport of goods to the populous cities situated on the major rivers of the Roman Empire – the Rhône, the Rhine, Nile... and, of course, the Tiber to supply the megalopolis of Rome itself. Goods which arrived from around the empire were transferred from larger coastal or open sea ships to the smaller river-going barges. In recent years many of these barges have been discovered, excavated and displayed in museums in Europe. In 2004, a 31 m barge (*chaland* in French; *navicula* or *linter* in Latin) was discovered in sediment in the Rhône, in the centre of Arles, and is now on display in the Archaeological Museum of Arles.

The Romans used two main types of sail-rigged, sea-going ships for long-distance travel: the *navis longa* or war galley and the *navis oneraria* or merchant vessel, used for transporting foodstuffs and commercial goods which had no battle capabilities. The most common of the *navis oneraria* type was the *corbita* (see mosaic from Ostia) which had a round hull and was up to 60 m long and up to 14 m wide. *Corbitae* could carry 60-300 tons of cargo (often made up of amphorae, from 3000 up to 10,000 on large *corbitae*) as well as passengers. *Corbitae* had a large square sail on the main mast with a couple of triangular sails and a small mast at the bow with a smaller sail and two connected side rudders.

Roman *corbitae* (see photo of the *corbita* in Arelate port model) were used on nearly all trade routes through the Mediterranean carrying grain, garum (fish sauce), metal, silks, olive oil, wine, luxuries or wild animals from all Roman provinces. Smaller *corbitae* could travel on major rivers but frequently the freight was transferred to barges to travel up the rivers to major cities and from production areas down to the sea.

Rome with its population of possibly one million required enormous quantities of supplies from throughout the empire which were delivered to the mouth of the Tiber at Ostia and the new town of Portus nearby. Canals were dug to supplement the area for sailing on the Tiber because of this volume of shipping. Here there were roughly-built river boats (*naves caudicariae*) which were suitable for sailing



Rudder and stern area of the Arles-Rhône 3 (Photo: R. Schmidt).



Corbita mosaic from Ostia (Photo: Norah Cooper).



Mosaic of barge at Ostia showing oars in use and containers of produce (Photo: Norah Cooper).

up the Tiber as far as Rome. These were supplemented by barges which could be towed along the canals by oxen or slaves.

Many Roman sea-going ships have been found but only about 30 Roman barges have been discovered in recent decades in north-western Europe including Croatia, The Netherlands and Germany. Roman barges are flat-bottomed boats with a small mast and sail. They were manned by up to 12 rowers and this allowed the Romans to navigate strong currents.

In 2004, Luc Long, an archaeologist who had previously found evidence of two other barges, found the third in the sediment of the Rhône at Arles and so it is named the Arles-Rhône 3. The seven-year extraction process of the barge began with the vessel being cut into three ten metre sections and then being lifted by crane from the sediment prior to conservation and reconstruction. The barge went on display at the Archaeological Museum of Arles in 2014.



Middle section of Arles-Rhône 3, showing cargo of limestone slabs (Photo: R. Schmidt).



Detail of Arles-Rhône 3 with ceramic oven and utensils (Photo: Norah Cooper).



Rear half of Arles-Rhône 3 with rudder at stern (Photo: Norah Cooper).



Arles-Rhône 3 prow (Photo: R. Schmidt).

The barge was found almost intact 2000 years after it was buried under 4 m layers of mud and amphorae. The last cargo and a few personal effects left behind by its crew, as well as dishes, utensils and a ceramic oven left in the little kitchen aft of the boat, suggest that this was an unexpected sinking.

It was carrying 33 tons of building stones; flat, irregular slabs of limestone, from 7 to 15 cm thick. They had come from a quarry at St. Gabriel, less than 16 km north of Arles, and may have been going to a construction site on the right bank or in the Camargue, the marshy farmland just south of Arles. The boat was pointed upstream, indicating that it had been tied up at the quay when it sank.

Arles was originally known as Theline, a town established by Greeks and Phoenicians in the sixth century BC. The name was changed to Arelate in 535 BC when the *Saluvii* tribe captured it and this is the name the Romans used. In 102 BC Gaius Marius constructed a canal which connected the town with the Mediterranean, making Arelate an important trade centre. In 46 BC, Julius Caesar named Arelate as a *colonia*, the capital of the Roman Provence and conferred Roman citizenship on the people of the town as a reward for their military support against Pompey. Veterans of the *Legio VI Ferrata* were settled here and the city was now called *Colonia Iulia Paterna Arelatensium Sextanorum* (ancestral Julian colony of Arles of the soldiers of the Sixth). A bust of Caesar was discovered in the Rhône in 2007 and is on display in the museum.

Arelate was a thriving Roman city and there are still many Roman monuments in Arles today. The port stretched half a kilometre or more along the right bank and was a gateway to Roman Gaul, receiving goods from all over the Empire and thus the port financed the prosperity and the monumental building of the city. Still in use today are the Roman theatre built by Augustus and a first century amphitheatre. The remains of a circus (*hippodrome*) have been found alongside the river Rhône. There is an aqueduct (see *RAG* Vol. 5 Iss. 4, Dec 2010. 'Barbégal, Provence- a Roman industrial site') and a part of the city's wall has survived. For a time, Arelate was the residence of emperor Constantine I (306-337) and the remains of his Baths still stand. A large Roman necropolis, now named Les Alyscamps, still has many *sarcophagi* in situ. In the fifth century, the Roman Rhine frontier collapsed and Arelate became the seat of the government of the Prefecture of Gaul. It remained one of the capitals of the western empire until it was



Model of the port at Arelate from Arles Archaeological Museum (Photo: Norah Cooper).



Model of Arelate from Arles Archaeological Museum (Photo: Ωμέγα, Flickr).



Bust of Julius Caesar (Photo: Norah Cooper).

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captured by the Visigoths in 471.

In the port of Arles, seagoing vessels and river barges were moored side by side. Even up until the 19th century only small vessels could navigate the mouth of the Rhône so cargo was transferred to barges which could then travel up the Rhône as far as Lyons. The Arles-Rhône 3 is typical of the barges which were flat-bottomed with no keel and a small mast and sail.

I would like to thank my fellow travellers Roger Cooper and Marilyn and Rob Schmidt, and thanks also to Hugh McGhee for information on ancient ships.



The amphitheatre of Roman Arles (Photo: Norah Cooper).



View of Theatre at Arles (Photo: R. Schmidt).



Baths of Constantine (Photo: Norah Cooper).



Les Alyscamps (Photo: Norah Cooper).

Reading the Ruins of Palmyra

Rebecca Banks



From left to right: The Temple of Bel (Photo: Manfred Schweda, thisfabtrek.com); the Temple of Baal-Shamin (Photo: Bernard Gagnon); and the Lion of Al-Lāt (Photo: Wikimedia Commons).

One of the biggest regrets in my life is that I never saw the Temple of Bel in person. In 2007 as an undergraduate honours student at UWA pondering which topic to write a research thesis on, the Temple of Bel at Palmyra loomed large amongst all the monuments of the Roman East, vied for my attention and ultimately became my focus (see *RAG* Vol. 3 Iss 1). I remember one of my markers noted that my description of the site was incredibly precise considering I had never visited. Never in my wildest imagination did I think that it would not be there for the ‘next time’ I travelled.

The Islamic State/Da’esh forces occupying Tadmor deliberately blew up the Temple of Bel’s *cella*, situated in the monumental *temenos* precinct in the east of the ancient city on August 28, 2015. The destruction was confirmed by UNOSAT analysis using satellite imagery on August 31 after word of a large explosion at the site was reported. The satellite imagery shows that the entirety of the temple’s superstructure and colonnade were reduced to rubble with the exception of the platform, and the monumental entrance that had been restored using reinforced concrete in 1932. The act was followed by an international public outcry against the practices of Da’esh against cultural heritage. How much more heinous an act it must have been for the local community of Tadmor who two generations before had shared walls and lived in a mud brick village within the ancient religious precinct.

The destruction of the Temple was preceded by the deliberate destruction of Muslim shrines, the monumental Lion of Al-Lāt that stood outside the Palmyra museum, detonation of explosives throughout the Temple of Baal-Shamin, and the brutal beheading of Khaled al-Asaad, long respected head of antiquities at Palmyra. The Monumental Arch, located at a bend in the city’s main colonnade near the Temple of Nebo, has also been damaged by explosives (a replica will soon be displayed in Trafalgar Square in homage to cultural heritage at risk). Reports have also emerged that the ancient theatre has been used for mass executions, several tombs have been demolished, and that landmines have been laid in areas around or through the site. Da’esh took the city on May 20, 2015 and held the city for 10 months.

Their crimes are perhaps viewed as more atrocious because of the deliberate and methodical process by which they target ancient and cultural monuments. Unfortunately it was not until Da’esh’s activities targeted heritage of importance to a wider international audience that the media collectively shone a light on their practices. Underreported were acts systematically targeting monuments of import to local Shi’ite and minority groups such as shrines, mausoleums and churches – part of a wider policy of what has been described as cultural genocide.

An over emphasis on one act of damage by one group is misrepresentative however of the level of damage that has been both purposefully and indirectly perpetrated since the start of the civil war. These acts compounded the problem of disturbance already occurring to heritage sites due to unprecedented levels of development caused by population growth and modernisation in the region. The site of Palmyra is a lens through which this heritage crisis that continues to unfold can be viewed.

The destruction of the Temple of Bel by Da'esh was one of many acts of 'disturbance' or 'damage' to the monuments that make up the sprawling ruins of the ancient city and hinterland since the start of the civil war. The American Schools of Oriental Research have been closely monitoring sites in Syria using satellite imagery alongside groups such as the Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology through their Cultural Heritage Initiatives program. Their published reports detail the disturbances at the site over the period of February 4, 2012 until May 20, 2015 while the Syrian Army was deployed to the city. These include:

- Bulldozing for road access, military placements and the building of defensive levees through several areas including the Northern Necropolis, the Valley of the Tombs, Citadel, Gabal al-Hussiyniat and Diocletian's Camp, and the land around the spring of Afqa. This has caused major disturbance to archaeological layers, and damage, and in some cases destruction, of features including defensive walls, towers and tombs.
- Repurposing of stone from ancient tombs and monuments, including in the northern and southeastern necropolises, for the construction of defensive features for vehicle and artillery placements.
- The use of the citadel as a fortified locale by occupying forces. There is no report of direct damage from artillery to the citadel structure but the surrounding area was bombed during the fighting between Syrian and Da'esh forces starting May 14, 2015.
- Wide-ranging artillery damage to the archaeological site with direct and indirect hits (including resulting fire damage) causing both superficial damage and areas of collapse. These included at the Temple of Baal-Shamin, the walled structure and colonnades of the temenos and propylaeum of the Temple of Bel as well as the Temple itself, the monumental colonnade of the city, and at the Baths of Diocletian.
- Looting and ransacking over the ancient city. This has mostly targeted modern features and infrastructure, possibly in the hope of finding archaeological stores. Sites targeted have included two holes in the walls of the Temple of Bel *temenos* allowing entry to a modern guesthouse and a storage area; a break-in at the restored amphitheatre; a warehouse west of the Temple of Bel; and amenities and service buildings including bathrooms and ticket offices. The overall electrical network of the site has also been severely damaged. Traditional looting that has effectively targeted antiquities for resale, such as Palmyra's iconic funerary busts, has been worst in the necropolis areas despite efforts to protect the tombs by backfilling. Illegal excavation, including the use of heavy machinery, has included at least five monumental tombs. The report states that 125 archaeological items most likely from Palmyra have been reclaimed by authorities between 2012 and May 2015. What proportion of those that have reached the market this amounts to is unknown. It is known that some looted artefacts have been captured and destroyed by Da'esh.

Relocation of some items from the Palmyra Museum to Damascus and other centres did occur before Da'esh entered the city. The fate of the collection will not be known until a time when the various components can be reliably itemised.

It is important to remember that although the monumental ruins of Palmyra are principally considered 'Roman', the events of disturbance that are written on the site are testament to a multitude of periods, just as the act of building the monumental Roman era Palmyra was an act of disturbance to what came before. These events tell the story of the passage of time, one that ancient historians, historians, archaeologists and heritage specialists do their best to unravel in a multitude of ways: reading texts, the trowel, sifting soils for the tiniest of traces, 3D reconstructions etc. Eras of history that can plainly be seen in Palmyra's fabric include the different styles of building evident in the ancient city walls from numerous events of sacking and rebuilding in antiquity, fortification of the *propylaeum* and *temenos* of the Temple of Bel in 1132-3, the building of the citadel (the Fakhr-al-Din al-Maani Castle) c. 1230, the conversion of the Temple of Bel into a mosque, the clearing of the mudbrick village inside the temenos complex to make way for excavations under the French Mandate government in 1929-1932, and excavation and restoration, such as that of the Temple of Baal-Shamin in 1954-1956.

Ruins are not quarantined entities in the landscape and the natural process is progression, if still actively in use, or to decay, if abandoned. Their interaction with people very much determines whether the rate of decay will be accelerated or mitigated. Unfortunately, while Syria's Civil War continues, Palmyra's ruins and those of many other heritage sites are accelerating towards new levels of destruction. But in the future, when this horrid civil war is past, Syrian heritage specialists and archaeologists will read the signs of the passage of civil war and Da'esh in the ruins of this ancient monument, as other conflicts have been. The bullet holes

in the Theatre from the mass executions, the stone turned to dust from the explosives used in the destruction of the Temples of Bel and Baal-Shamin ... These scars will act as an important reminder of what is now a tumultuous and harrowing passage of history for Syria, just as the Roman ruins remind us of a civilization that has now passed. Neither can erase the record or memory of the other.

As I finish writing this (March 2016), Syrian Government forces are in the process of recapturing the city of Tadmor and the ruins of Palmyra from the occupying Da'esh forces. Time will only tell whether this battle will be the last fought over the isolated city in this civil war. The Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) has vowed to rebuild Palmyra's destroyed monuments – time and opinion will tell whether this act, yet another disturbance to the site, is the best approach in the process of healing not just a ruined city, but a country.

Aerial footage by a Russian drone during the retaking of the city has just been released at the time of writing: 'Drone footage shows ruins of Palmyra as Syrian forces recapture it' (source: Associated Press), March 27, 2016: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2016/mar/27/drone-footage-palmyra-retaken-syrian-forces-isis-video>

A statement from the Director General of the Syrian DGAM on the recapture of Palmyra from Da'esh: Dr. Maamoun Abdelkarim, 'Restoring Syria's pearl of the desert', The Guardian Opinion, March 26, 2016: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/mar/26/palmyra-syria-isis-maamoun-abdelkarim>

Further reading that was of use in the creation of this summary are the following:

A. Cuneo et al., 'The Recapture of Palmyra', ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives, April 5, 2016: <http://www.asor-syrianheritage.org/4290-2/>

A. Cuneo et al. 'Special Report: Update on the Situation in Palmyra', ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives, Sept 3, 2015: <http://www.asor-syrianheritage.org/special-report-update-on-the-situation-in-palmyra/>

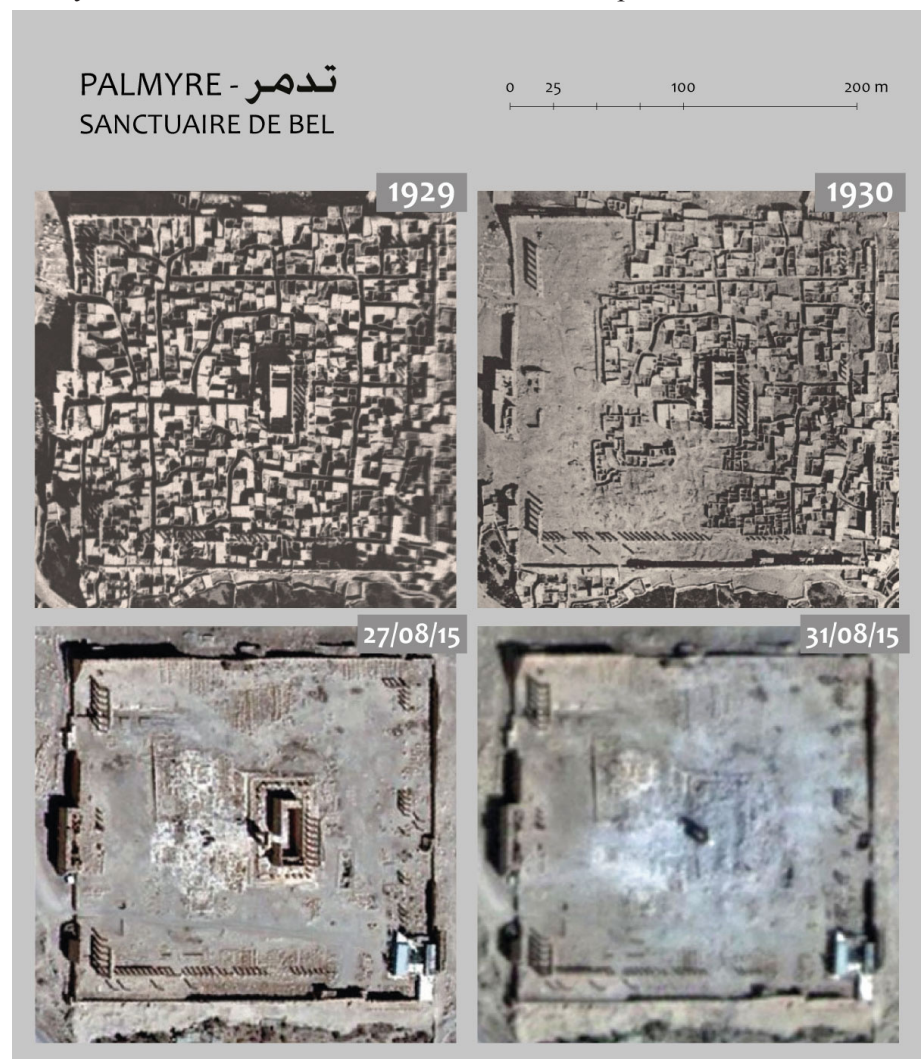
E. Cunliffe, 'Should we 3D print a new Palmyra?', The Conversation, March 31, 2016: <https://theconversation.com/should-we-3d-print-a-new-palmyra-57014>

C. Durand et al., 'So long, Bel. In memoriam, Palmyra (6 April 32 – 28 August 2015)', Les Carnets de l'Ifpo. La recherche en train de se faire à l'Institut français du Proche-Orient (Hypotheses.org), November 6th, 2015: <http://ifpo.hypotheses.org/7101>

Michael Danti, et al. 'Special Report on the Importance of Palmyra', ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives, June 2, 2015: <http://www.asor-syrianheritage.org/special-report-on-the-importance-of-palmyra/>

Cheikhmous Ali, 'Palmyra: Heritage Adrift. A Special Report from the Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology', ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives, June 29, 2015: <http://www.asor-syrianheritage.org/palmyra-heritage-adrift/>

Kanishk Tharoor, 'Life Among the Ruins', *The New York Times Sunday Review Opinion*, March 19, 2016: <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/20/opinion/sunday/life-among-the-ruins.html>



The evolution of the Temple of Bel complex (Compiled by Th. Fournet from IFPO and Unitar-Unosat imagery (see C. Durand et al. 2015)).

RAG News



RAG Saturday Lectures

RAG had the pleasure of a double lecture session from Michael Birrell (pictured above) on the 19th March who kindly came from Sydney, largely at his own expense (though Norah generously hosted him while in Perth). The first was on The Roman Villa at Piazza Armerina, and the second on Roman Jerusalem.

For the third consecutive year we have been able to benefit from Guy de la Bédoyère's fondness for WA. He and Rosemary will again spend a few days staying with Norah before his lecture on the way to the airport and home. Guy's next book is now with Yale University Press and likely to be published later this year – *The Praetorian Guard*.

Plans are underway for the Winter sessions which will be two Saturdays in – probably, October and November.

Travel Scholarships

As Members witnessed in our Saturday session earlier this year, the Don Boyer/RAG Archaeology Travel Scholarship in 2015 went to a superb candidate. Sharna Trigg plainly gained an enormous amount from her participation in an excavation in Spain and was a very worthy recipient. The 2016 round is now open and I expect to report on the outcome in the next RAG Mag.

Applications are invited for the next round of Don Boyer/RAG Archaeology Travel Scholarships – covering up to \$2,500 of travel costs

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from Australia to participate in Roman archaeological fieldwork. The closing date for applications is 30th April for any given year. For further information visit <http://goo.gl/bl1g3G>.

Donations

As always we are indebted to several Members for their quiet generosity. Thank you to Iain and Marlene Carmichael for the donated wine for the raffles.

RAG Magazine

Members will have enjoyed Roger Wilson's article arising from his excavations in Sicily and a message today was full of praise for the quality of its preproduction and on fine glossy paper. Roger prefers hard copies of his articles so this is a key feature for him.

Where in the world is David Kennedy?

After a difficult start – Qantas got me but not my suitcase to Mumbai for two days, the latter arriving just an hour before we boarded the cruise ship. However, we then set sail on the *Aegean Odyssey* for ports in northwest India, Oman, Jordan, and Cyprus, then the Greek Islands and the Peloponnese. I had been asked to give '3-5' lectures but ended up with ten so was kept busy. An excellent experience, however, and we enjoyed the company of so many passengers who had signed up for a 'Voyage to Antiquity'.

Now in Athens taking the opportunity to explore Roman Greece. It is often overlooked that Greece was part of the Roman Empire for a thousand years. Athens in particular was a major beneficiary of Augustus and Hadrian in particular. I plan to offer articles in future RAG Mags on Roman Athens and the Roman colony of Corinth.

Later this month I am to give a paper at a conference in Vienna. The subject – 'Christianity in the Landscape of Philadelphia', is one I gave in a different form to RAG earlier this year.

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\$25.00 **Standard Membership**

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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.

The RAG Inc

<http://www.humanities.uwa.edu.au/research/cah/roman-archaeology>

<https://ragwa.wordpress.com/>

Chairperson

Professor David Kennedy

M204 Classics and Ancient History

University of Western Australia

CRAWLEY WA 6009

e-mail: david.kennedy@uwa.edu.au

Tel: 08 6488 2150

Fax: 08 6488 1182

Deputy Chairperson

Don Boyer

donboyer@iinet.net.au

Secretary

Norah Cooper

coopsathome@optusnet.com.au

Treasurer

Travis Hearn

travii@me.com

The RAG Newsletter

Editor

Rebecca Banks

rebecca.banks@graduate.uwa.edu.au