The RAG

IN THIS ISSUE

Ulrich Jasper Seetzen and the Remains of the Past in Northwest Jordan
David Kennedy

The Middle East has undergone an enormous transformation since the First World War. The latter introduced twentieth century highly mechanised warfare to a region that had been a relative backwater of the fading Ottoman Empire. The subsequent carving up of the region into French (Lebanon and Syria) and British (Iraq, Transjordan and Palestine) Mandates brought about further changes largely unknown previously: aeroplanes were now a feature of the skies where they had been virtually unknown before; networks of surfaced roads were built; and efficient militaries created widespread security within a few years. Towns grew, deserted villages began to repopulate and overall populations grew. Despite that, by the early 1940s, Transjordan (= modern Jordan) still had only c. 340,000 people and Amman is estimated to have had 45,000 residents. Since then all of this has undergone a further shift of gear, the developments of the 1920s and 1930s massively eclipsed by those since the 1940s and especially the last 40 years.

The explanation – and the consequences, for Jordan and its archaeology can be summed up in two words: population explosion. The 340,000 of the early 1940s has given way now to c. 8 million, about half of them in metropolitan Amman.

Western travellers in the region in the 19th century routinely report passing ruined and uninhabited villages, riding alongside Roman roads often still marked by milestones, seeing decayed field boundaries and terracing every. The few people they encountered were nomads (beduin) or semi-nomads; Amman was an uninhabited ruin till c. 1870. By 1914 and the outbreak of the First World War, the landscape and its archaeological remains were changing but largely still as they had been for centuries.

A handful of westerners travelled 'East of Jordan' before the 19th century but their accounts are sparse in detail. That changed in the early 19th century with the start of a spate of western travellers. Not all such travellers in the region were equally observant and they did not all record their observations in the same detail. Fortunately, the very first of these travellers was especially inquisitive and much of what he recorded has survived, albeit largely in a confused state.

Ulrich Jasper Seetzen was a German-speaker from Jever in Frisia (modern Lower Saxony). At the time of his travels in Jordan, his homeland was actually a possession of the German-born Catherine the Great of Russia and when he died in 1811 it was part of the Kingdom

of Holland newly (and briefly) created by Napoleon.

Seetzen wrote in German (but see below) and took a keen interest in the language and culture, and the history and geography of the people and places he explored. (Including noting down the names and characteristics of the camels in a caravan with which he travelled!). In 1806 he became the first westerner in modern times to travel in Jordan. His route took him virtually the entire length of Jordan and he just missed Petra, the re-discovery of which was left to the Swiss Burckhardt in 1812. Like Burckhardt, Seetzen died in the East – in his case murdered by his guides while travelling in Yemen in 1811.

Seetzen was not just observant – he wrote in his journal, added details, updated his thoughts and frequently sent lengthy letters to colleagues and patrons in Europe. One of the latter was to a German prince – Baron Zach, a copy of which then circulated, reached London, was translated into English and published in 1810 as a short book (*A Brief Account of the Countries Adjoining the*

Mezzotint of Seetzen, first published 1818.

Lake of Tiberias, the Jordan and the Dead Sea) by the Palestine Association (forerunner of the Palestine Exploration Fund which thrives to this day). For the next 4+ decades, that short book was the only available account of Seetzen's travels in the Near East and only part concerned with Jordan. However, Seetzen has regularly arranged for his completed journals to be given to westerners he encountered and many in due course reached Germany and disappeared into archives. In the early 1850s, a tireless German scholar called Friedrich Kruse, undertook the mind-boggling task of deciphering Seetzen's hand-written journals, preparing them for publication in three large volumes and adding a fourth volume of commentary. 'Preparing them for publication' was no easy matter. Seetzen made notes, then might return and add to the note where he had written it or add it in later in his journal. The important list I give below, appears as a single item in Kruse's edition but he explains that the material was actually written by Seetzen in three different places in his journal.

Then there is spelling … Seetzen wrote in a Frisian dialect of German and his spellings as reproduced by Kruse are often different from how they appear in modern German (fortunately his works were not also printed in Gothic font!). Seetzen was keen to populate the landscape with places and their names, giving a huge impetus to the task of creating a map of what was largely unknown and certainly unmapped. He asked his guides and people he met to give him the names of the places he visited or which were nearby. Those people themselves were largely illiterate and spoke various dialects, so Seetzen had the task of trying to render in his Frisian German script the spelling he thought approximated to the names he heard and to which
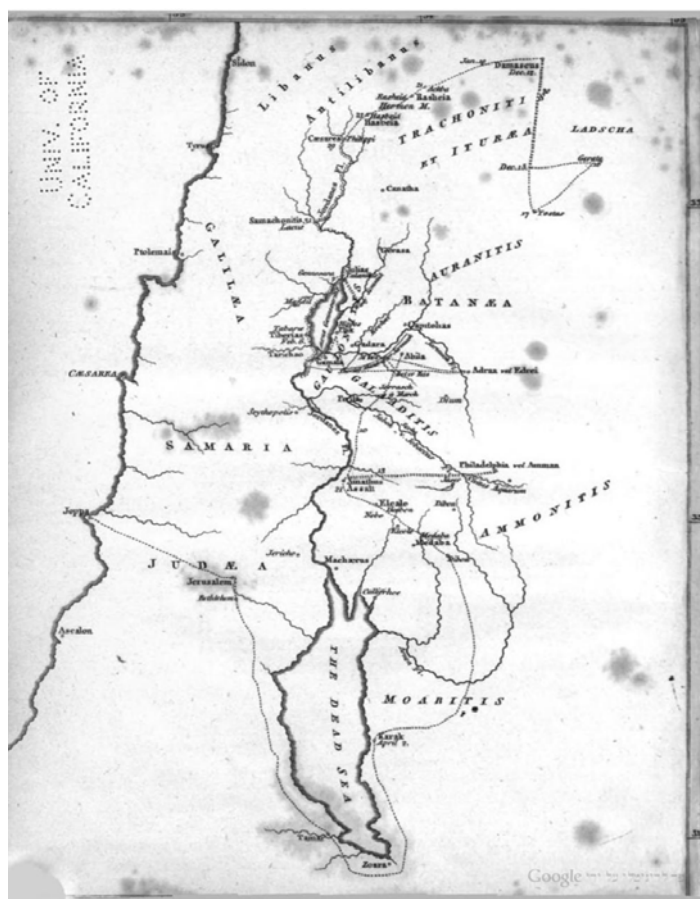
Map produced for Seetzen's publication *A Brief Account of the Countries adjoining the Lake of Tiberius, the Jordan, and the Dead Sea*

he added accents to aid in pronunciation. For further clarification, he often wrote the name in Arabic after his German version.

The landscape and archaeological remains in north-western Jordan in 1806 were vastly different from the 1940s much less today. This is the core of the arable part of Jordan – the 6% with good soils and adequate water for dry-farming; the location of cities famous from the Bible and of several of the Decapolis cities of the Roman Empire – e.g. Philadelphia (Amman), Gerasa (Jarash), Gadara (Umm Qeis), Pella (Tabaqat Fahl) etc, and the location of the scores/ hundreds of villages which once surrounded those cities and of the network of roads linking them.

Seetzen is very useful in reporting on the few places in which there were inhabitants and gives some insights into the degree and nature of Ottoman control. He visited Jarash – the first westerner to do so that we know of since the Crusades. Especially useful are the two lists he produces of place-names in the adjoin regions of Ajlun (where Gerasa lay) and Belqa (the hinterland of Philadelphia). Most of the names can be identified with the modern places which are almost all now re-inhabited.

Seetzen 1854: 394-5. Here are his two lists – I have indicated where he included the Arabic version; most names can be identified but I have included in square brackets a few which are important.

Dschíhbal Edschlûn [= Jabal Adjlun]

Kalat (Arabic) er Róbbat, Edschlûn (Arabic), Ain Dschénneh (Arabic), Kuffr Rindsche [Riádsche?], Kaffr Láhbiá, Ain Dschérra (Anschará), el Chürbe (Chürrbe), Phára, Halláuweh, Szúra, Baáun, Ardschénn (Erschan?), Raszûn (Gaszûn), Szûf, Tkitte (Kitte), Dübbín, Dschesáleh, Búrma (Bûrrma), Remûn, Hhude (Hhûd). These villages are all inhabited. But the following are ruined and uninhabited: Náhhle, Abubeckr, Dscherrásch (Dschórrasch) [= Jarash], Mgêble, Phámne, el Manszuûra, el Merdsch, el Henk, Hassájeg, Nadschle, Charûd, el Húneh, Székeb, Aíszará, el Kassr, el Charâr, Ein Dscháuseh, Szuûfszâphe, Szûk, Arabûn, el Szúliéh, el Szájehh, el Siblije, Amámeh, Dschémle, Hómta, Alamûn, Szikka, Üm ed Dschelûd, Öbbîn, Számte, Bêt Afna, el Dschürehha, Lübbedije, Râdscheb, Mdschénne, Schemszîn, Rosslûn, Robbúe, Ailwáh, Dscháber, Bêt el Kûm, Kiddre.

In summary, Seetzen lists no less than 20 places that he says are inhabited in 1806 but he then lists 43 places which have names but which are 'in ruins and uninhabited'.

'El Belka'

Örrak el Emir, el Kürrszy, Tabtik, ed Der, Hössban (Hösseban), Kerm es Szamek, Chürbet Szömra, Kuffr el Malek, el Jedude, Erphesza, Maein (probably Meon of the Charte?), Schaua, Madaba, Der Echbar, Szir, Szar (Chürbet Szar), Bir er Rad, Sahher achmar, Chürbet es Szümmak, Ümm el Örszas (this ruined town lies north of the Serka and 3-4 hours eastwards of the Haj Road), Szacka, Merdsch indschasza, Naur, Sebbud, el Pherät, Maszuehh [= Masuh], ed Dillele, Schelul (Schellul), el Mschetta, Marka, Hhredin, Siba, Dschibbal Attartus, Mephra (or Meschra) el ismar, Diban. - Similarly el Aal, el Kastal, el Tschahaf, Hhmeime (this destroyed city is to be situated at the Serka (sic), southward 3 hours from Dscherrasch; this does not

correspond however with Büsching), Mahas (northwards from it is a water place). – Similarly Allan, el Sey, Em Dschause, el Satery, Alaguneh, Bejuda, Kuffrillme, Meszara, Kaffr Guda, Jerga, el Bire, Aijüb, Chürbet Szuk, el Begije, Schedur, Oschea. Almost all these places are destroyed, and chiefly only Szalt is excepted.

In this case 56 places are named but all said to be just ruins. He adds a 57th name – 'Szalt', as the only place inhabited.

Though problematic in places, these are invaluable lists both for identifying ruined places in 1806, some of which Seetzen described and as such giving at least a partial picture of the rural landscape. It is interesting, too, as revealing that there was a degree of re-population in the villages of the highlands of Adjlun and that many of these small settlements had notable Christian minorities living alongside Muslim familes; in contrast, apart from the town of Salt, not a single one of the 56 other places he identified in the good arable lands of the Belqa was occupied. The difference is surely that the latter is open plain, vulnerable to beduin raids while the highlands offered as measure of protection to farmers. He has summarised his impression of part in his letter to Baron Zach describing his journey from Salt to become the first westerner to visit Philadelphia:

> The whole way we travelled, we saw villages in ruins, and met numbers of Arabs with their camels, &c. Before we came to the sources of the Nahhr-Amman, which is divided into two branches, of which the first is the most beautiful, we found in the valley, the town of Amman (civitas aquarum) situated on both sides of the river, the further part of which is the most considerable, being on the rise of a hill. Although this town has been destroyed and deserted tor many ages, I still found there some remarkable ruins, which attest its ancient splendor.

Most of the places mentioned by Seetzen have long-since disappeared beneath the buildings of modern villages or overwhelmed by the massive expansion of modern Amman. What they may once have looked like to early western travellers can be seen from a rare example of a ruined village which has largely escaped re-population – Masuh, Seetzen's 'Maszuehh'.

The small modern settlement of Masuh lies 22 km southwest of Amman, a large ruinfield of c. 11.25 ha with a small scatter of houses around the fringes. Excavation has revealed two Late Roman churches with mosaics. The aerial view shows a dense pack of rectangular houses. The significance of the place is that today the ancient villages of the Belqa which Seetzen said were entirely uninhabited in 1806 are today in the region of densest modern settlement. It is one of only two places in the Belqa where a ruined village still survives – for the moment. All of the other 54 ruins of 1806 have been largely destroyed/ overlain by modern villages. Without Seetzen, we would be largely ignorant of the wider conditions of early 19th century Jordan.

Seetzen's *A Brief Account of the Countries adjoining the Lake of Tiberius, the Jordan, and the Dead Sea,* is freely available online: https://archive.org/details/briefaccountofco00seetrich.

The ruins of Masuh. APAAME_20090930_DLK-0031. Photographer David Kennedy. Courtesy of APAAME.

When in Rome...

Anyone who's visited Rome knows that however much you thought there was to see, there's always more. Some of those 'extras' are completely missed by the vast majority of visitors. Here you tell us what we need to keep an eye out for on our next visit to our favourite ancient city.

Ostia Antica

An easy trip from Rome and definitely worth a visit are the excavated ruins of Ostia Antica, ancient Rome's main seaport. The city was founded in the 4th Century BC and had a population of around 50,000 at its height. It was an important defensive and commercial centre. The ruins cover a huge area and there is so much to see. We found it a wonderful experience and regretted that we only had one day to try and see as much as we could.

We were advised to go on a weekday and found very few people there, enabling us to wander at will and to examine and photograph the ruins without interference from crowds. Apparently it becomes very busy at weekends. We left Rome early and were at the gates when they opened, giving us the maximum time within the complex.

We found the easiest way to travel was to catch a metro train at Stazione Termini (cost €1.50) to Stazione Piramide then change to the Ostia Lido train from Stazione Porta San Paolo (next to Piramide metro station), getting off at Ostia Antica. Our Metro tickets were accepted on Lido train so no extra cost. The whole trip takes approximately 25 minutes. On arrival at Ostia Antica walk over the pedestrian bridge and the ruins are straight ahead. Audio information guides, available from the ticket office, are well worth the small rental cost.
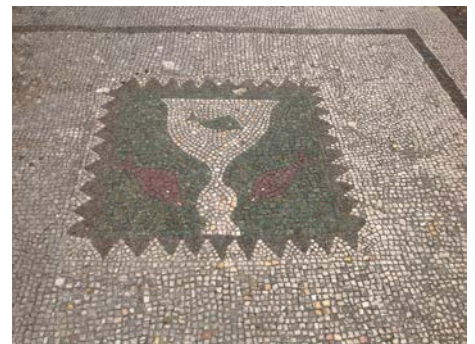
Jean Swanson

The Non-Catholic Cemetery

When Dean and I travelled to Rome last year, one of the places on my hit list to visit was the Non-Catholic Cemetery (*Cimitero Acattolico*), previously known as 'The Protestant Cemetery'. Apart from the fact that on our travels we often visit cemeteries (apparently this is called *taphophilia*), as they are wonderful (and sad) historical snapshots, my interest in this one had been piqued by purchasing a book that RAG had been selling – *The Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome: Its History, Its People and Its Survival for 300 Years* by Nicholas Stanley Price. The book quotes Percy Bysshe Shelley as stating that the cemetery was 'the most beautiful and solemn cemetery…ever beheld' (Stanley-Price 2014:1), and detailed that the poet himself was buried there after his drowning in the Bay of Spezia in July 1822. The book also has a wonderful selection of photos of some of the marvelous sculptures, which include 'the Pyramid'. For Ancient Egyptian fanatics this was definite bait, so we decided to stop in on our way to Ostia Antica, as it is on the same train line.

The cemetery is not large. The first impression when you go in is how green and cool everything is (or maybe that's because we come from hot and dry Perth!). The cemetery contains cypress and pine trees, camellias, wisteria, honeysuckle, lilies and roses amongst other plants. Many were planted by grieving relatives, and today are tended by the cemetery staff. The overarching impression is one of 'a green oasis of tranquility and peace' (Stanley-Price 2014:9).

Its earliest known burial is of an Oxford University student named

The pyramid.
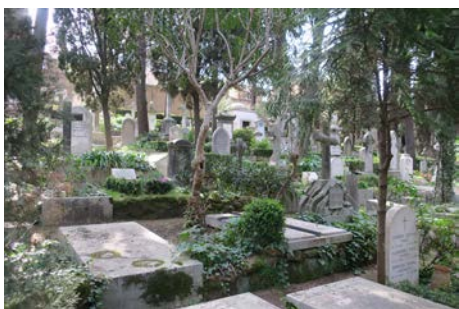
Looking upwards into the cemetery

Keats' unnamed gravestone (left)
next to Joseph Severn's. Severn
included Keats' name on his
gravestone to mark Keats'
burial plot.

Keats memorial plaque.

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Langdon in 1738. We made our way around to John Keats' grave. This was by an original 1821 entrance (now unused). Keats himself had specified that his grave was to be unmarked. This was rectified by Sir Vincent Eyre, a retired Army General and Keats' enthusiast, who raised a large amount of money from other devotees to have a plaque installed on the adjacent wall of the entrance arch (Stanley-Price 2014:64). The memorial plaque and its acrostic met with mixed reception when it was first installed, with Oscar Wilde labelling it 'a marble libel' (Stanley-Price 2014:64).

From there we moved to 'the Pyramid' - the tomb of Roman officer Gaius Cestius and probably built between 18–12 BC (Stanley-Price 2014:5). You can access the interior but the frescos are not well preserved, and the day we went there was an art exhibition inside (seriously?, and not a very good one either!).

We then meandered around the cemetery, stopping and looking at gravestones, sculptures and mausoleums as they caught our fancy. One of the most popular and well-known sculptures is that of 'The Angel of Grief' (1894) designed by William Wetmore Story for his wife Emelyn Story. To me, this has to be one of the most beautiful sculptures that we saw in Italy – and we saw many, including the Pietà. Her (aren't angels always female?) body language betrays utter desolation, and Wetmore Story is said to have been so devastated by his wife's death that this was his last piece of sculpture, and only completed at the behest of his children.

Our next stop was Shelley's grave – marked by a simple stone engraved with some lines from Ariel's Song from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

> Nothing of him that doth fade
> But doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange

Shelley's ashes were originally buried near the Pyramid, in what would have been the second site in the cemetery. However, Edward John Trelawny, biographer, and friend of both Shelley and Bryon, had the ashes removed and buried next to his proposed plot in the cemetery, as he felt that Shelley's grave was not visible enough. On Trelawny's death he had left instructions that his gravestone was to have Shelley's Epitaph poem recorded on it.

> These are two friends whose lives were undivided;
> So let their memory be, now they have glided
> Under the grave; let not their bones be parted,
> For their two hearts in life were single-hearted.

There are numerous photographers, painters, poets, actors and sculptors also buried in the cemetery, as well as diplomats, politicians and writers. These include: R. M. Ballantyne, the Scottish novelist; Antonio Gramsci, the leader of the Italian Communist Party; and Belinda Lee, the British actress. As W. W. Nevin notes, it is 'A silent congregation from all over the world' (Stanley-Price 2014:69). It is well worth a visit.

To get to the Non-Catholic Cemetery, you take the Metro (Line B) and get off the train at, you guessed it, Piramide. The cemetery is directly opposite the train station and the first thing that you notice is

the Pyramid. As with all things Italian (i.e. you expect something to be in one place and find it isn't), the entrance gate isn't actually next to the Pyramid, and you need to walk around to the street behind to physically enter the cemetery (but there are no signs to tell you this). The Pyramid itself is part of the southern boundary of the cemetery and was incorporated into one of the defensive circuit Aurelian walls of Rome.

Ann Butcher

Santa Pudenziana: a perfect Rome surprise

One of the many joys of visiting Rome is that there are the trademark famous sights but on nearly every street there is also an unexpected surprise. This little church, Santa Pudenziana on Via Urbana, just 250 m. north-west of the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, is one of these.

The Angel of Grief.

It ticks all the boxes for interested tourists to Rome:– it was a Roman house converted to a church, it has a Roman era mosaic, medieval and renaissance reconstructions and frescos, and is a short walk from other major sites.

Norah in front of the Church.

Santa Pudenziana is one of the oldest Christian places of worship in Rome having been used as such from the 2nd Century. It was built over a Roman house (dating from Hadrian's reign 117–138), with parts of the bath house including the Roman arches, columns and brick walls still visible both on the right side of the church and in the structure of the apse (the domed semicircular altar area). In the 4th Century, the building was converted into its present form of three naves.

There is a Roman era mosaic in the apse which dates from the late 4th Century and shows a clear influence of the subtle colouring of Pagan art, with a central figure of Christ, right hand extended in a Roman pose. He wears a gold toga trimmed with purple and is surrounded by apostles who are wearing senatorial togas. The mosaic was restored in the 16th Century with the loss of two of the apostles and the lower parts of the mosaic.

The church, like most Ancient Roman remains, is about 15 m. below the present-day street level with steps down to the small courtyard in front of the church. The façade was added and altered in the 11th Century and a belltower added in the 13th Century with further reconstruction in the 16th century.

Steps leading down to the façade of S. Pudenziana church from the present day Via Urbana; amd tje mosaic in the apse.

The wonderful name Santa Pudenziana is a conflation of the name of the owner of the house, the Roman Senator Pudente (Domus Pudentiana) and that of Pudenzia, who legend says, was the sister of another saint, Prassede, whose church is on Via Santa Prassede, 355 m. south-east from Santa Pudenziana. It is also a 2nd Century Roman building transformed into a church which has magnificent Byzantine mosaics and is another Rome surprise. In 1969, both Pudenziana and Prassede were declared invalid saints but their lovely churches remain and have retained their historic names.

I would like to thank Carolyn, Luan and Shai McGhee for their company in Rome, and Carolyn for the photos used here.

Norah Cooper
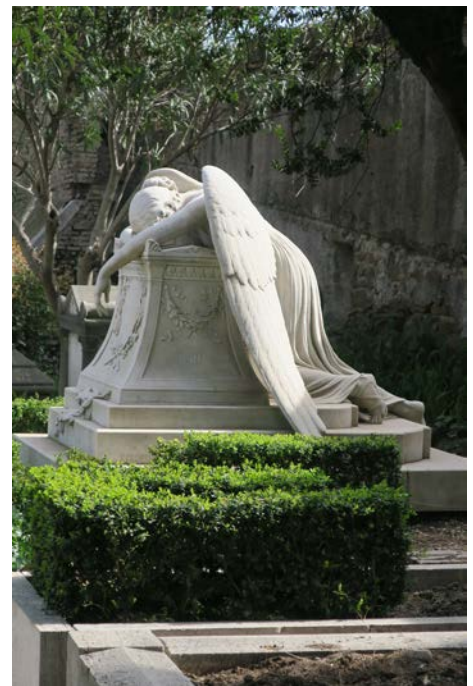
Amphorae and Trade: the amphorae in the Museum of Ancient Cultures
Penny Walker

Monte Testaccio in Rome.

The Amphora on display at the Museum of Ancient Cultures.

Before the development of glass and plastics, ancient civilisations used materials like pottery, ceramics and skins for holding everyday household items like wine, grain, oil, and fish sauce (*garum*). Goods such as these had been traded throughout the Mediterranean even before the Romans created their Empire and secured the trade routes.

Bulk consumable goods would be carried to a port in large skins from agricultural areas. Carried on the backs of donkeys, these skins would then have their goods transferred to huge pottery vessels known as trade amphorae, before being loaded onto ships. These trade amphorae, filled with goods like *garum*, olives, wine, oils, and dried fruit were carried by sea as far as modern day Spain, England and Turkey.

Although they were seen as a container rather than a commodity, trade amphorae can still be used as an indicator of the goods they once carried. Goods were unloaded by the dockside and then decanted before the amphorae were discarded in a spoil dump. An indication of the sheer amount of goods transported in this way is reflected in the famous man-made mound of discarded amphorae known as Monte Testaccio in Rome (pictured).

Unfortunately, a lot of artefacts, like the amphora in the Museum of Ancient Cultures, Sydney, often have no place of origin recorded. Passed down from collection to collection, records can be lost, or they may have never been collected in the first place. In cases like these, how then can we hope to re-discover their place of origin? There are a few methods we can rely on.

The first being the analysis of the clay used to make the amphora. Sources can be narrowed down to very specific locations making them like a mineral fingerprint. A clay source from one geological location will always be different to another location and in this way, we can narrow down the location of manufacture, especially if there is a known kiln site. In the past this has always been a destructive process, where you would take a sample from a pot, grind it into a powder and then vaporise it to get a reading. More recently, a collaboration between Macquarie University's Dr. Jaye McKenzie-Clark, and Prof. John Magnussen, led to the development of a new non-destructive technique using the hospital's CT scanner. Once the ceramic has passed through the CT, the results can be used to analyse the composition of pottery and compared to other known results. According to Dr. Mackenzie-Clark, this method allows you to say with some amount of certainty where the pottery has come from, how far it's travelled, and who was exchanging goods with whom in the ancient world. A very exciting development that could help more accurately track trade amphora back
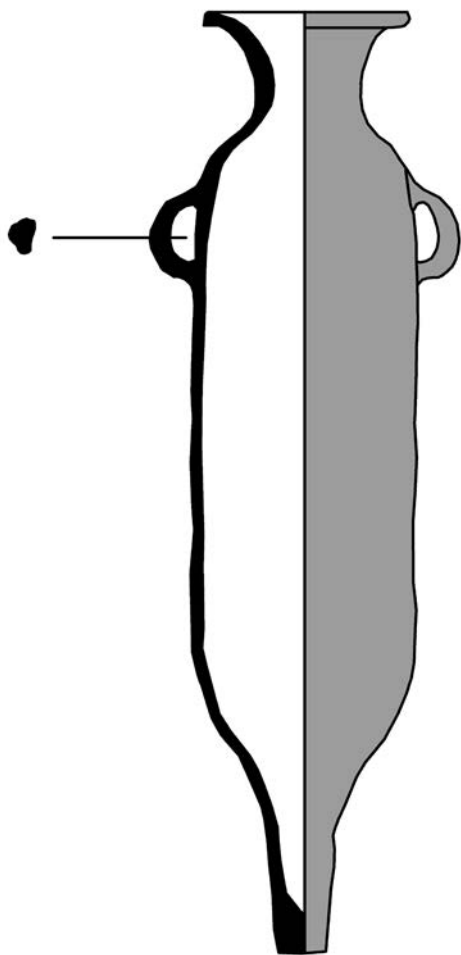
Technical drawing of MU 4518, possibly a Neo-Punic transport amphora.

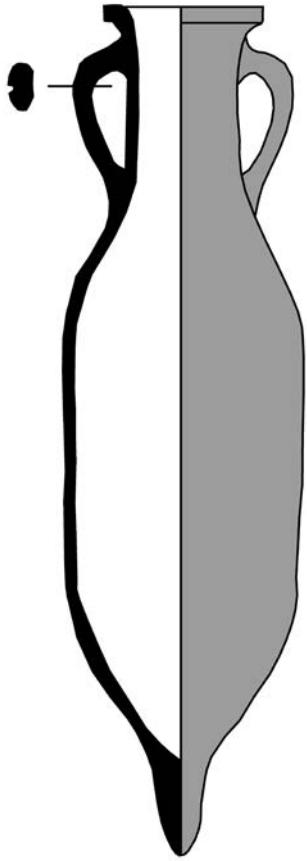MU 4518 on display at the Museum of Ancient Cultures.

to their place of origin without ever having to damage whole vessels.

Some styles of amphora are so area specific, that they were only made in certain areas. One of Museum's amphora known as MU 4518, is thought to be a Neo-Punic transport amphorae, likely a Van der Werff 2 type, made in Carthage around the 2nd Century BC. Its general form has a long cylindrical body with two small handles on the side and a flaring rim. Maña (1951) distinguished two types, labelled C1 and C2 but van der Werff (1977-78) has reviewed the evidence and divided the form into three categories: his Type 2 has a rim similar to Type 1 but it is shorter and has less flaring. The handles are attached on the upper third part of the body and the body is terminated by a hollow spike. This type also corresponds to the Martin-Kilcher (1999) form B and to the Ramón (1995) Type T-7.5. When analysed, the fabric suggests a Tunisian origin (Martin-Kilcher, 1994: 447). This form was sparsely distributed in the western Mediterranean and northern Europe, Pompeii, Vindonissa, Augst and was thought to contain garum.
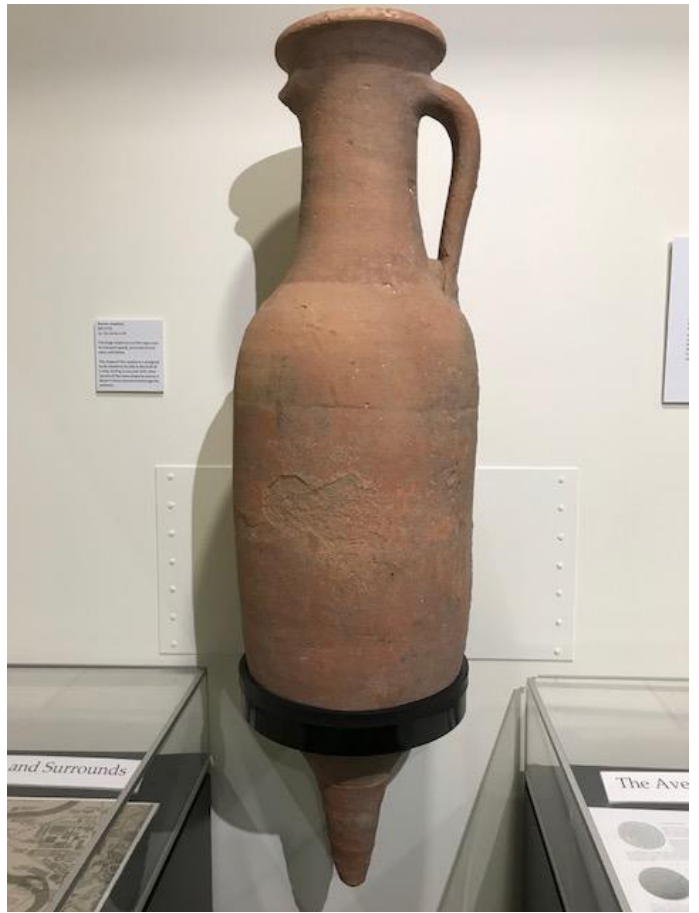
The Museum of Ancient Cultures has some wonderful examples of typical, well known trade amphora. MU372 is an example of Roman Amphora, distributed during the 1st century AD. The shape indicates that this amphora type was probably made in Spain and used to transport garum. It is currently on display in the Museum's 'City of Rome' Exhibition.

My personal favourite of the amphora in the Museum is the 'bag shaped' vessel MU 4507 that has a flat edge on it's bottom. After speaking to ceramics expert Dr. Jaye Mackenzie-Clark, it became clear that this amphora had been dropped by the manufacturer before it was fired, leaving a permanent dent in the base of the vessel. Because these were such a great commodity, the vessel was fired in this condition and used anyway. It is typical of the Squat amphora with ribbed surface, known to have been distributed through the Late Roman and Byzantine eras, that Dressel classified as 'Palestinian' type.

If you would like to see any of the vessels, they are all on display in the Museum of Ancient Cultures, Sydney (open Mon-Fri, 10 am–4 pm). I would love to build them a hull to sit inside for greater authenticity of display, but in the meantime, they are a wonderful treasure trove in the window display.

Technical drawing of MU 372, a 1st century AD Roman amphora.

MU 372 on display at the Museum of Ancient Cultures.
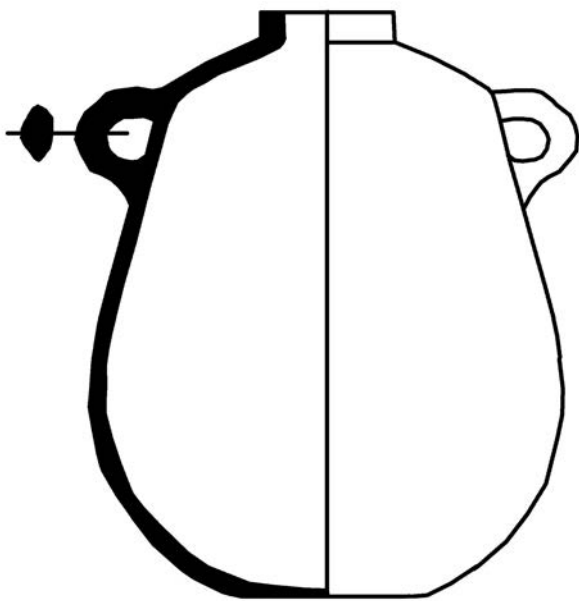
'Bag shaped' amphora, MU 4507, technical drawing above, and on display, right.

Roman Villas in the Bay of Naples: Part I. Villa Poppaea
Norah Cooper

I first visited Herculaneum and Pompeii in 1974, having just graduated, and took part in a two-week archaeological course there with a friend. At that time Pompeii, which had been a tourist Mecca since the eighteenth century, was very busy but Herculaneum was relatively unknown and as a result, was a particular delight. Wandering through this Roman town, almost deserted except for an occasional guard, brought this first century Roman town to vivid life for us. On a return visit to Herculaneum in 1979, just before we emigrated to Australia, there were a few more visitors there, but this did not detract from the pleasure of being there.

In 2012, Roger and I, and Yvonne and Peter Broome (RAG

Map of the Bay of Naples.

members), retraced the steps of millions of tourists, and we visited both Pompeii and Herculaneum. The latter was no longer the quiet forgotten Roman town. It was still a wonderful place to visit with much more of the ancient town having been excavated but there were many, many tourists. Of course, we too were tourists, but we would have preferred to be alone to enjoy the atmosphere.

Most tourists flock to these two most famous sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum, but few seem to venture further. There are several Roman villas in the Bay of Naples and we were lucky enough to be almost the only visitors to them.

Roman Villas in the Bay of Naples, and the Eruption of Vesuvius

The eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79 not only preserved the towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum, but also many other small towns and country and seaside villas to the southeast of the volcano. Some of the famous villas rediscovered and partially rebuilt are now open to the public, and they give an excellent idea of their architecture, size and plan, and the wonderful artistry in the spectacular frescoes and mosaics. They give an insight into the luxurious way of life for wealthy Romans in the first century. There are three major villas at Stabiae, south of Pompeii and two at Oplontis, north of Pompeii. In this first article describing villas in the Bay of Naples, I will describe the Villa of Poppaea in Oplontis. The second part will cover three buildings, collectively known as the Stabiae villas.

The eruption of Vesuvius continued over several days or even weeks starting on the first day with an explosion of steam and fine ash falling to the east of Vesuvius, described by the eyewitness Pliny as looking like an 'umbrella pine'. For the next 24 hours, pumice and rock fragments were blown southeast by prevailing winds and showered Pompeii, Oplontis and Stabiae with pumice at a rate of 15 cm per hour. Further pyroclastic surges (fluidized masses of turbulent gas and rock fragments ejected during some volcanic eruptions) followed over the next few hours, until early on day two temperatures of 100-400ºC overwhelmed the remaining population in the towns, and the continuous falling of pumice, ash and lava buried them.

The Villas at Oplontis

The name Oplontis probably originally referred to the Roman baths in the area of the modern town of

Oncino; today the name is used to refer to the group of villas in the middle of the modern town of Torre Annunziata (there is a train station at Torre Annunziata on the *circumvesuviana* line). Oplontis is a small town c. 5 km from Pompeii. From 1964 to the present, two villas (known as A and B) have been excavated here.

The 'Roman Villa'

The Roman villa (as opposed to domus, a town house) was outside a town. There were seaside *villae maritimae*, and *villae rusticae*, farmhouse estates. Columella (AD 4–70) in *De re rustica* and the elder Cato (234–149 BC) in *De agricultura* described features of villas in the Campagna, the area around Rome. Pliny the Younger (AD 61–112) in his *Letters* described the villa as a spiritual retreat for Romans and gardens and a loggia could open up the dark interiors of a villa to the rural landscape. Wall paintings also counteracted the claustrophobic nature of the small, windowless rooms of Roman houses by giving the impression of opening rooms to nature and the bright outside world. The Roman architect, author and engineer, Vitruvius, (Marcus Vitruvius Pollio c. 80–70 BC–c. 15 BC) described a typical atrium house in his *De Architectura*.

Vitruvius documented three Roman fresco painting styles up until the end of the first century BC. On the basis of this description and from excavations of frescoes at Pompeii, the German historian, archaeologist August Mau (19th century) identified four painting styles in different chronological periods; these have been refined by modern scholars and are referred to as Pompeian styles. Vitruvius was not alive to describe the fourth of these styles. I will not describe in detail the four styles here but from the photos that appear here you

Entrance stairs to Villa Poppaea showing depth of lava/pumice. Photograph: Y. Broome.

View of Villa Poppaea from entrance kiosk. Photograph: N. Cooper.

Southern garden peristyle. Photograph: N. Cooper.

can see how complex, colourful and beautiful these first century Roman frescos and mosaics are.
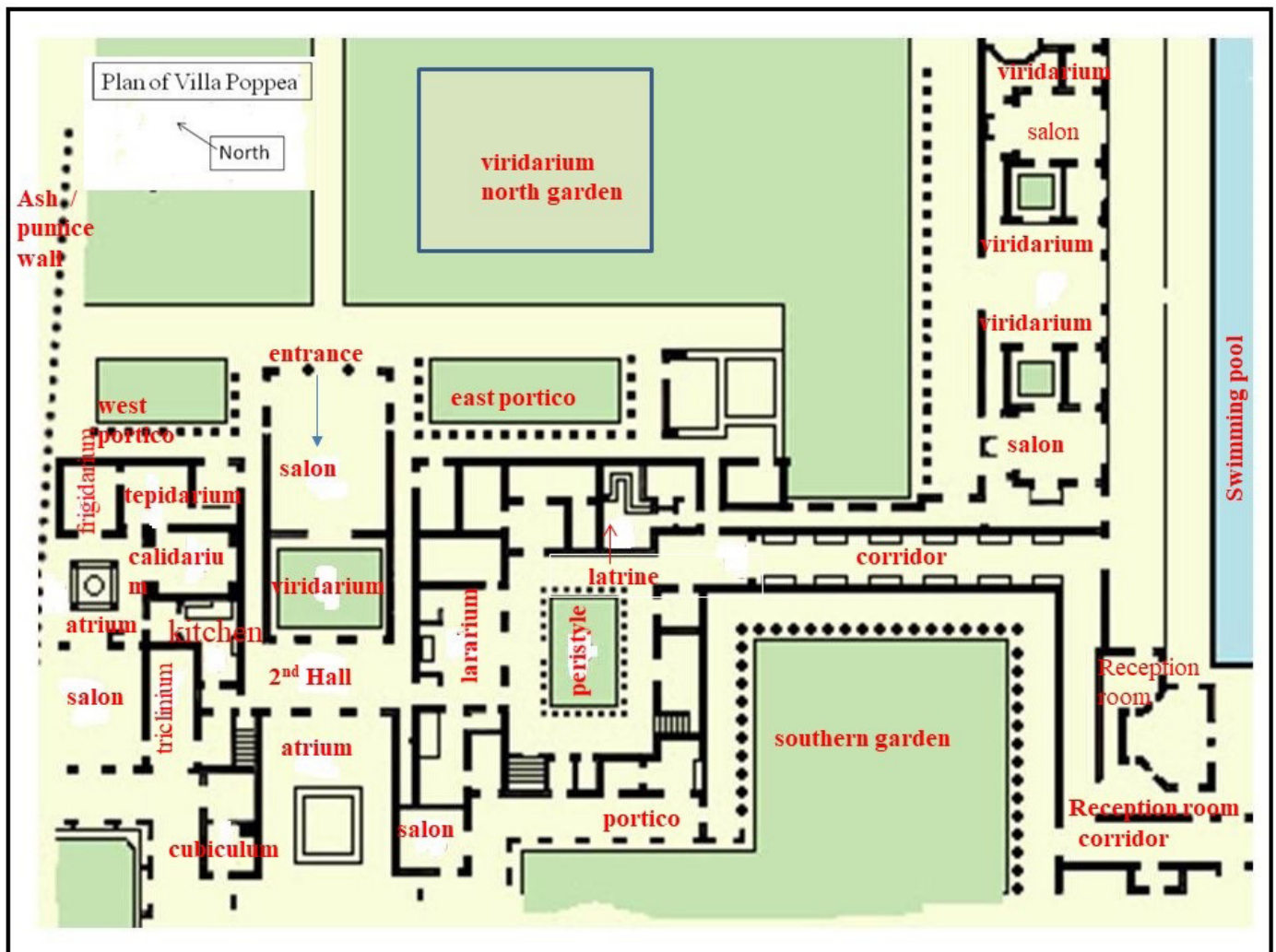
Villa B

Villa B at Oplontis was a *villa rustica*, an agricultural villa specialising in the production of wine, oil and other agricultural goods; in fact, 400 amphorae were recovered in the excavation here. Unlike the sumptuously decorated Villa Poppaea I will describe below, this was a two-story structure with the living quarters on the upper floor. The ground floor was used for manufacture and storage, and many of these rooms were unplastered and had only earth floors. Because of the discovery of a bronze seal during partial excavation between 1974–
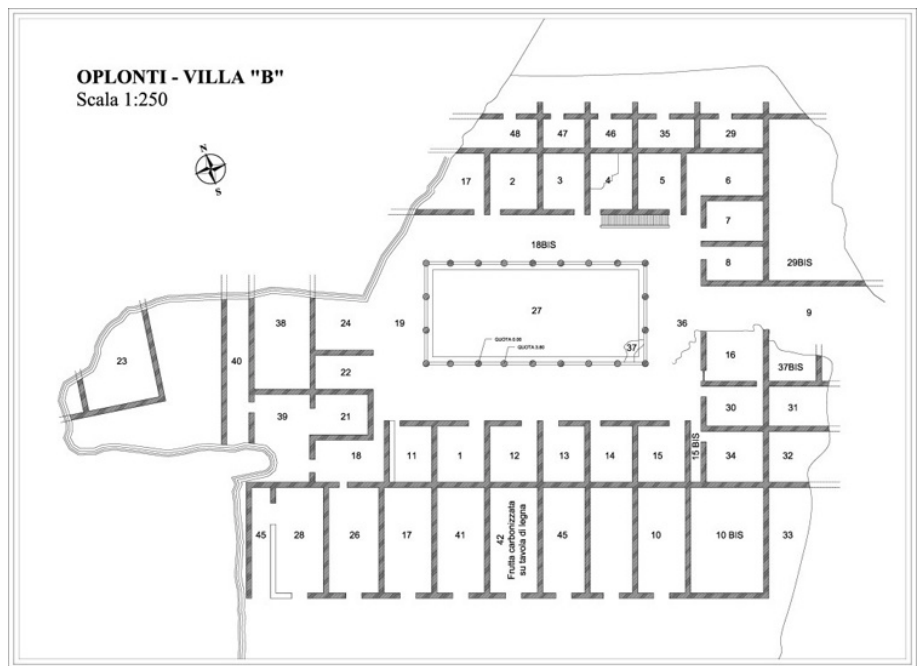
Plan of excavated remains of Villa 'B. Plan: V.V. Gaito.

1991, it is assumed that the villa belonged at the time of the eruption to a certain Lucius Crassius Tertius, thus Villa B is referred to as the Villa of L. Crassius Tertius. The skeletons of 54 people, of all ages, with many of their belongings including jewellery, silver, and coins (a total of about 10,000 sesterces), were found in the

Plan of excavated remains of the Villa Pompaea.

villa. They had been overcome by the first pyroclastic surge. This villa is still closed to the public.

Villa Poppaea

The first villa, Villa A, was a luxury seaside villa and is thought to have been owned by Poppaea Sabina, the second wife of Nero. It is generally referred to as Villa Poppaea and sometimes as Villa Oplontis.

The so-called Pompeian styles were in vogue in Roman villas from 150 BC until well after AD 79. In the Villa Poppaea there are examples of all of the four styles. It is impossible to date a villa from the painting style alone. As with all residences, styles change with fashion, with the artists' abilities and proclivities, and redecoration could take place. Therefore it is common that villas can contain more than one style.

The earliest styles vary from imitations of coloured marble blocks with plaster mouldings vertical columns and parallel lines which draw the eye and give us a feeling of stage façades, which in the Villa Poppaea would be appropriate considering her husband Nero had dramatic aspirations. This evolved into more elaborate frescoes with architectural features and *trompe l'oeil* compositions using relative perspective. A more ornate style then developed along with a loss of perspective, unrealistic architectural details framing a central painting often with mythological scenes. The final style was a combination of the three previous styles and was much more intricate in design. From the photos in this article, the range and complexity of styles in the Villa Poppaea can be seen.

As with many houses in Pompeii and Herculaneum there is evidence here of rebuilding and of repainting of wall decorations as a result of the earthquake in AD 62, 17 years prior to the Vesuvian eruption. The house during this period was extended with the addition of many reception and service rooms and also many gardens and a huge swimming pool. In fact, the rebuilding may have been in progress at the time of the eruption of Vesuvius, as no human remains have been discovered in the Villa Poppaea, so either the residents had already fled or the villa may been uninhabited. Perhaps, as no furniture has been found and there was building material in many rooms only the builders and artisans were in the villa at the time of destruction.

To enter the villa on leaving the ticket kiosk, you walk down stairs alongside c. 10 metres of lava/pumice. As you walk through the entrance salon you are immediately entranced by the gorgeous colours of the frescos, and wandering through the villa is a magical experience.

In the reception rooms alongside the swimming pool there are frescoes of birds and nature with representations of apertures to internal gardens. This reflects the Roman delight in illusion imitating nature, with real birds and flowers surrounded by frescoes illustrating them.

From the plan of this huge maritime villa it is obvious that it was owned by a very important Roman, with all the usual accoutrements of persityles, baths, atria etc. But it is the beauty of the frescoes that really impresses today's visitor, and the visit is enhanced because there are few other tourists venturing to see it. There is light, space and calm to imagine life in the villa in the 1st Century.

Many thanks to my fellow travellers Roger Cooper and Yvonne and Peter Broome.

Read more about the excavation projects on 'The Oplontis Project' website: http://www.oplontisproject.org/. *The virtual tour of the exhibition 'Leisure and Luxury in the Age of Nero: the Villas of Oplontis near Pompeii' showcases some of the amazing artefacts from the excavations:* http://exhibitions.kelsey.lsa.umich.edu/oplontis-leisure-and-luxury/index.php.

Left: Entrance Salon. Photograph: N. Cooper.
Above: Wall fesco. Photograph: Y. Broome.
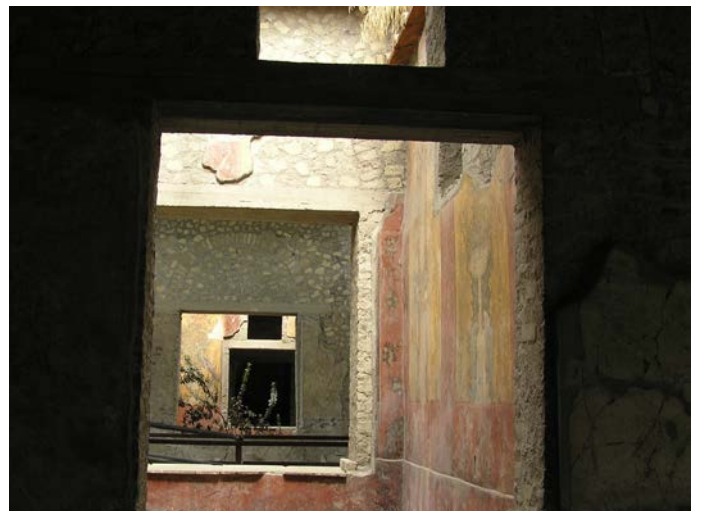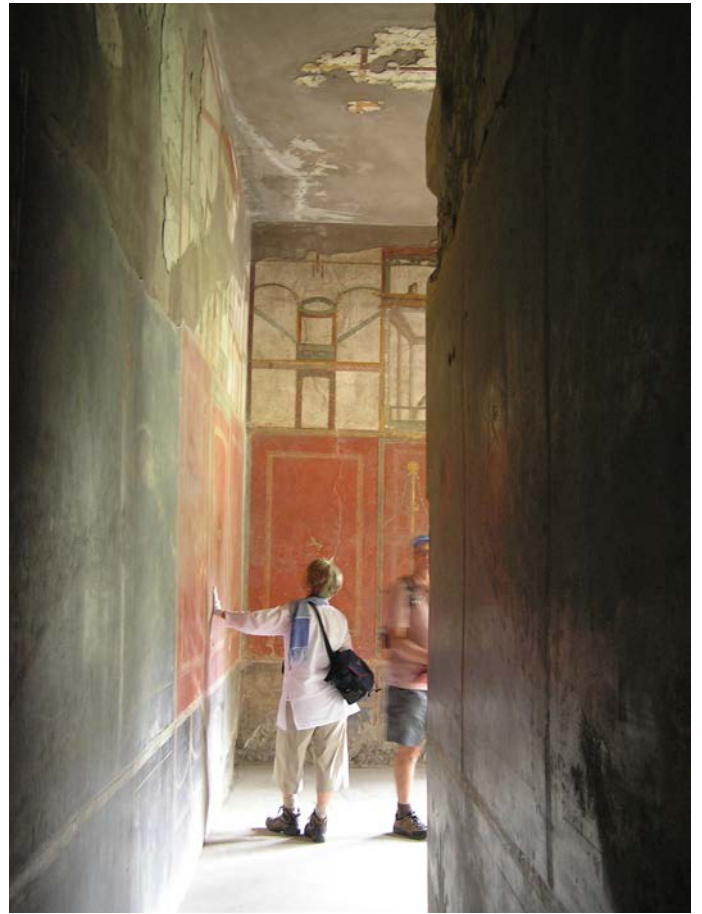
Wall Frescos. Photographs: N. Cooper.

Architectural views inside the Villa Poppaea.
Photographs: N. Cooper.

RAG News

Introducing Christopher Mallan

Chris Mallan joined the Classics and Ancient History staff at UWA at the beginning of 2018. Prior to this, Chris was based in Oxford where he studied and taught. Chris is an Ancient Historian whose main research interests lie in the areas of Greco-Roman historiography (and its transmission/reception in Byzantium), and Roman intellectual history, especially of the first three centuries AD.

He is currently working on a commentary on Books 57 and 58 of Cassius Dio's Roman History, covering the reign of the Emperor Tiberius.

Chris is taking on the co-ordination of the Roman History units at UWA and will be looking at ways of integrating new units into the existing syllabus. The first of these new units, Religion, Society, and the Divine in the Roman World, from Augustus to Augustine, will be running in 2019.

Outside of academe, Chris is a keen cinephile, and enjoys music (listening) and cricket (watching).

We hope the RAG community will make Chris most welcome to Perth.

A not so retired David Kennedy

It seems we were quite right to expect great things to come out of David Kennedy's retirement (*RAG Magazine* Vol. 12 Iss. 2). David Kennedy spent the month of March in the skies above Saudi Arabia in the first field season of the Aerial Archaeology in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia project. David was accompanied by RAGer Don Boyer, and the project's Research Fellow Dr Hugh Thomas.

The project is the result of a grant of almost AU\$900,000 over two years awarded by the Royal Commission for Al-Ula towards investigating the heritage and archaeology in the region. Hugh Thomas will join the UWA Classics and Ancient History Department in July (he is currently working remotely). The project is also joined by Research Assistants RAGer Rebecca Repper, Dr Melissa Kennedy, and our very own Don Boyer.

Hugh and Melissa are Greek and Near East Bronze Age archaeologists (respectively), and will be valuable additions to the repertoire of archaeology at the School.

The next season of aerial archaeology is planned for November, and will be joined by Rebecca. In the mean-time, David Kennedy is, once again, based at the University of Oxford.

RAG Scholarships

Another year, another round of the Don Boyer and Roman Archaeology Group Travel Scholarships! This year we have received a few strong applications. We look forward to hearing about the experiences of the successful applicants.

The UWA Classics Society

Enthusiastic Undergraduates of UWA's Classics and Ancient History programme have their own society, The UWA Classics Society. Their elected officials for this year are:

President: Morgan Crockett
Vice-President: Christina Gorevski
Secretary: Natasha Tonga
Treasurer: Hayden Collis
OCMs: Sophie Roberts, Alina Evans, Connor Wood, Danielle Ratcliffe, Hasan Ezati, and Karl Robinson

UWA students can follow the society's events on their Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/uwaclassoc/

The RAG Inc

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

https://ragwa.wordpress.com/

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Membership

\$25.00   **Standard Membership**

\$35.00   **Family Membership**
2 adults

\$10.00   **Student Membership**

Membership includes biannual copies of the RAG Magazine, regular email updates on Roman news and reduced cost of afternoon tea.
Annual memberships are from July 1st to June 30th.
Please download the Membership form from the website (see above) or see one of the RAG team at the Saturday lectures.