

# herculaneum archaeology

the newsletter of the Herculaneum Society - Issue 26 Autumn 2021



The Samnite House Photo: Peter Spital

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## Herculaneum 2001–2021

Bob Fowler  
Chairman of Trustees  
The Herculaneum Society

Dr Francesco Sirano, Director of the Archaeological Park of Herculaneum, has recently published two articles giving an overview of work at Herculaneum in the last two decades. The creation of the Park in 2016, which handed over responsibility for budget, planning and execution to the local staff, unleashed a new wave of energetic activity, exploiting the excellent groundwork laid by predecessor Dr Maria Paola Guidobaldi. The articles were published in *Cronache Ercolanesi* volume 50 for 2020, the journal of our esteemed colleagues in the Marcello Gigante International Centre for the Study of the Herculaneum Papyri (CISPE). I give here a summary for the benefit of the Friends.

The first thing that strikes one upon reading these articles is the sheer scale and scope of activity. At the top of the list is the work of conservation on one building after another enabled by the Herculaneum Conservation Project, started in 2001 with major funding from the Packard Humanities Institute. Some 70% of additional buildings and site areas have been re-opened to the public. The emphasis now is on an ongoing programme of routine maintenance plus scheduled special interventions. Perhaps the most impressive of the latter is the multi-dimensional work on the House of the Bicentenary, in which the Getty Institute was also involved; the Friends had an inside look at this on their last visit. The building, closed since 1983, is now open again. In demonstrating how research, technology, restoration, conservation, and heritage management work hand-in-hand, this project has set new standards.

A spectacular example of what new technology can do followed on the opening of the ancient sewer along Cardo V, with the aim of improving the drainage on the modern site by piggy-backing on the ancient system. Given the remarkable conditions of preservation at Herculaneum, the contents were still there. Some 12,000 litres of sewage deposited by the kitchens and 88 latrines overhead were removed and microscopically analysed. Over 200 species of flora and fauna were identified, 163 of which were comestible; a very varied diet. Coins, jewellery and other household objects also came to light. Many new avenues of research have been opened up by these finds.

Improved imaging techniques allow detection of paint on ancient statues, and reconstruction of objects such as the coffers in the ceiling of the House of the Relief of Telephus (see Fig. 1). Further excavation of the ancient shoreline beneath this house, undertaken for conservation purposes, brought to light its remarkable roof (overthrown by the eruption) and enabled better understanding of the bradyseism that preceded the cataclysm of 79. Chemical analysis has identified the materials used for preservation not only by Amedeo Maiuri from the 1930s on, but also in the 19th-century excavations (paraffin in that case), so that appropriate restoration can be done. Minute examination preceding the highly successful restoration of the mosaic in the House of Neptune and Amphitrite revealed a coloured preparatory design beneath the tesserae, and tiny traces of a gold glaze, now almost totally lost. The wood used in the boat found on the ancient shoreline has been identified as spruce and cypress, matching other buildings in the site; a forest of these covered the slopes of Vesuvius in antiquity. Work on the skeletons is ongoing, with recent insights into the ancient diet revealed by Dr Silvia Soncin at a meeting of the Friends (see Issue 25 of the Newsletter for this, and for the amazing vitrified brain matter: [http://www.herculaneum.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2020-11/HercArch%2025\\_last.pdf](http://www.herculaneum.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2020-11/HercArch%2025_last.pdf)). In effect, Herculaneum has become a world-leading, open-air archaeological laboratory.

Backing up the hands-on work is the storage and analysis of data, in particular using GIS (Geographic Information System) software. This records a plethora of data about the site and its buildings: materials, decor, measurements; plans, 3D reconstructions (Fig. 2); a myriad of details about condition, risks, conservation—any and all data provided by research teams approaching the object from a multitude of perspectives. In other data-related work, the 32 volumes of Maiuri's work diaries are being digitized, and an online "Digital Museum of Ancient Herculaneum" offers 3D visualisations of 11 buildings. During the pandemic Dr Sirano conducted virtual online tours, and much new material has been posted on YouTube ([https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgpO\\_-ANFzIATc0CbObaQzg](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgpO_-ANFzIATc0CbObaQzg) ).

Systematic core sampling has established that the ancient town stretched at least 150 metres further south than the current limit of the excavations (i.e. underneath the car park), and probably not much further east than the Corso Resina (the "Golden Mile"). On the northern border of the main site,

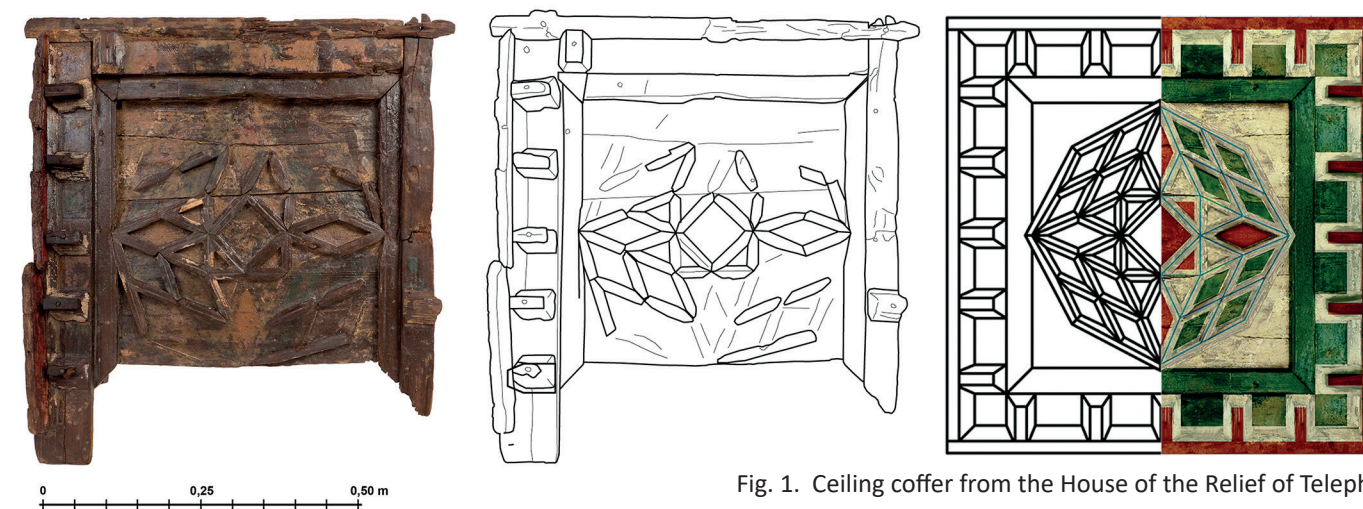


Fig. 1. Ceiling coffer from the House of the Relief of Telephus

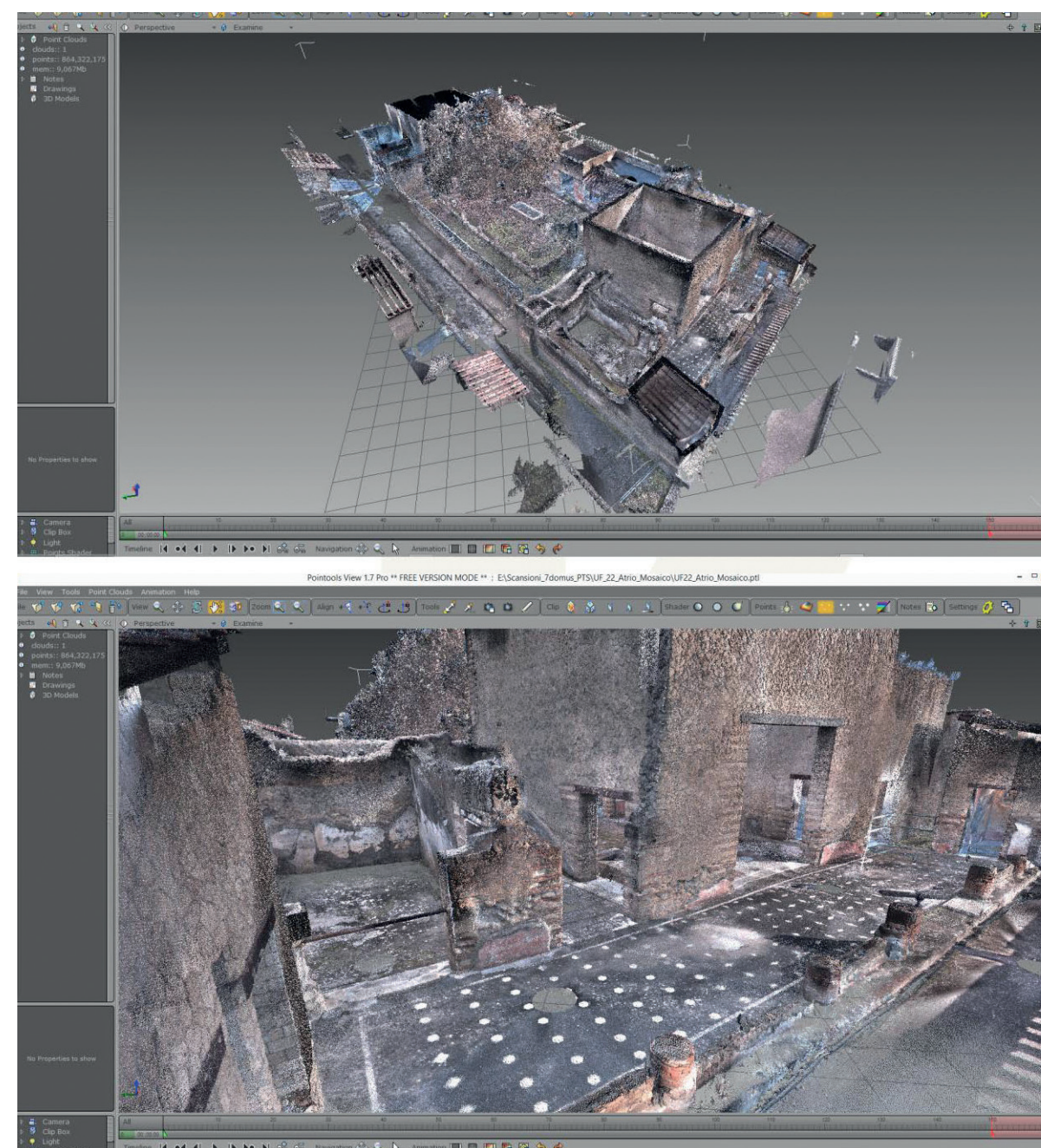


Fig. 2. 3D reconstruction of the House of the Mosaic Atrium

Illustrations from Francesco Sirano, "Dai papiri ai soffitti decorati. Gli scavi di Ercolano come laboratorio sperimentale: bilancio e prospettive," *Cronache Ercolanesi* 50 (2020) 259-72. Reproduced by kind permission of the Ministero della Cultura - Parco Archeologico di Ercolano. All rights reserved. Further reproduction in any medium prohibited.



the Basilica Noniana has been explored in a limited way, partly by means of one of the 18th-century Bourbon tunnels; others of these have been opened to see what they can teach us. Historical research has established that these were not the first; people were tunnelling here at least five centuries before the Bourbons. The Park has facilitated work on the site by outside groups such as the Ancient Graffiti Project (<http://ancientgraffiti.org/Graffiti/>, supported by the Friends' crowdfunding campaign), the Vesuvia project at Toulouse (<https://www.openedition.org/16344?lang=en>), and the Domus Herculensis Rationes project at Bologna (<https://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2015/2015.04.59>). The Villa of the Papyri and other buildings in the area of the "New Excavations" have been stabilized. Further excavations of the ancient shoreline are underway to connect the main site and the Villa, which will make access much easier and improve the visitor experience.

Speaking of which, the ground floor of the old store-room has been converted to an attractive exhibition space, housing a beautiful display of gold jewellery and other precious objects. The Boat Pavilion is open for many more hours than before. One can also now visit the legendary underground theatre. We await a green light for the proposed new Visitor Centre; in the meantime, perhaps a small cafe might be arranged on site?

Successive Directors have worked hard to build good relations with the modern town. Part of this is the programme to improve the run-down Via Mare along the northern edge of the main site, and open up lines of vision so that modern and ancient feel more connected. Another part is the highly successful twilight tours on Friday nights (<https://ercolano.beniculturali.it/eventi-e-news/>).

All these initiatives have led to more and more visitors on site, except of course during the pandemic. The additional income creates opportunities for careful investment in development and sustainability. Success at Herculaneum will not mean unlimited numbers of visitors; part of its magic, as we all know, is that it is *not* overcrowded. The right balance needs to be struck between access, experience and preservation. No one knows this better than the current Director and we congratulate him, and Dr Guidobaldi, on their admirable endeavours.

## Flavian Literature (70-96 CE)

Joy Littlewood

Joy is a Trustee of the Herculaneum Society and a leading authority on Flavian literature.

Within a scant 50 years after the death of Augustus, founder of Rome's first imperial dynasty, the Julio-Claudian line had disintegrated ignominiously with the assassination of Nero. The first half of 69 CE saw the assassination of three aspiring successors: Galba, Otho and Vitellius. When secret negotiations at the highest level failed to avert a blood-bath of Vitellius' supporters and the conflagration of Jupiter's Capitoline temple, the fourth contender, Ti. Flavius Vespasianus, cannily dissociated himself from charges of instigating civil war by remaining in Egypt until his imperial status was formally ratified by the senate, entering Rome only in the autumn of 70 CE.

Vespasian at 60 was a competent and pragmatic military victor with a sense of humour, homely *mo-res* and a clear-sighted agenda of civic renewal and imperial expansion. He made clear his intentions by putting the inscription *Roma Resurgens* on the early coinage of his reign and his aspirations for a Flavian dynasty by saying that "he would be succeeded by his sons or no one." To this end he groomed his elder son and comrade at arms, Titus, in imperial duties through 7 shared consulates.

Titus succeeded his father precisely two months before the catastrophic eruption of Vesuvius on August 24th 79 CE, which engulfed the thriving communities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Already occupied with completing his father's amphitheatre, the Colosseum, the new emperor was soon actively engaged in the rehabilitation and restoration of communities around the Bay of Naples. He was visiting the region for the second time when, in 80 CE a fire raged through Rome for three days, destroying many public buildings, among them the Pantheon, the theatre of Pompey and the libraries of the Porticus Octavia. Most ominously Jupiter's temple on the Capitol, the focus of Roman triumph and the very symbol of Roman imperial power, was ablaze for the second time in a decade. This would become a powerful image of civil unrest in Flavian literature. The conflagration was followed by an epidemic which killed 10,000 people. For the new emperor, who himself died of a fever the following year, "sorrows came *not in single spies but in battalions*." Titus was succeeded by his younger brother,

Domitian, who advertised his interest in literature and public works in a much publicized cult of the goddess Minerva. His assassination ended the dynasty in 96 CE.

The stirring of a literary florescence under Vespasian was to reveal penetrating insights into the society, civic architecture and statuary and cultural currents associated with the Flavian dynasty. It was a truism variously dramatized in Roman literature, and nowhere more effectively than in the Neronian poet Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, that the deadliest threat to expanding the Roman empire was Roman Civil War. Accordingly Vespasian lost no time in creating a climate favourable to initiating new Roman conquests overseas. These introduced into Rome an influx of diverse people, cultures, luxury goods and exotic animals which stimulated intellectual curiosity in the far-flung regions which had become part of the Roman empire. This is reflected, above all, in the enormous (37-book) *Naturalis Historia* of the Elder Pliny, who died at Stabiae during the eruption of Vesuvius. The influx of wealth encouraged the cultivation of leisure, possibly for literature but more frequently for sybaritic dining and scandalous pursuits in the resort town of Baiae mordantly described in Martial's epigrams. By contrast the occasional poems of Statius' *Silvae* elevated the pursuit of *luxuria* in edifying vignettes of public works, such as Domitian's *Via Domitiana*, and the cultural refinement of exemplary patrons of villa society around the Bay of Naples. Perhaps the most intriguing of all Flavian literature are three epics whose poets introduce political comment, both subtle and direct, under the cover of three highly emotive narratives drawn from myth and Roman history: Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, Statius' *Thebaid* and Silius Italicus' *Punica*. Statius' choice of the legendary Theban war caused by the hate-fuelled rivalry of the twin sons of Oedipus dramatizes the destructive force of civil war. Valerius Flaccus and Silius, however, offer a more positive, triumphantly Flavian message in the form of a divine prophecy from Jupiter himself to reveal that Rome's empire would expand most gloriously and her literature excel under the Flavian dynasty.

Whilst all three epicists recall the agony of past civil wars in striking imagery and poignant literary allusion, they also, like their Augustan predecessors, engaged with the spirit of the Flavian era. Silius' tendency to weave into his epic narrative wry or epigrammatic political reflections suggests that he saw his poem as a repository of political wisdom accumulated across a remarkable career. Mindful of the dangers of courting imperial displeasure, particu-

larly under the over-sensitive Domitian, the Flavian poets cultivated the art of "figured speech" which allowed them to present flamboyantly exaggerated but wittily elegant compliments on the emperor's achievements. Domitian's verses on "The Conflagration of the Capitol," claims Silius the politician, eclipse Orpheus and leave Apollo agog with admiration. Occasionally poets made humorous allusion to each other's work. Martial expresses the hope that his dear friend Silius will take a break from his writing for the Saturnalia, as Hannibal (catastrophically) indulged in wine and women during his winter in Capua!

Although there is no record of social contact between Silius and Statius, they evidently enjoyed making poetic allusions to each other's poems. An example will illustrate the intellectual wit inherent in one such exchange. Both poets were familiar with the historiographical nexus: Hercules-Alexander-Hannibal. Alexander the Great had promoted his career of conquest by publicizing his allegiance to the Greek Herakles whose worship in Carthage had merged with the Phoenician cult of Melqart, the patron god of Hannibal and his Barcid family. The identification was well-established. Indeed, Melqart was depicted on Punic razors with a lion-skin and club, even with the monstrous hydra slain by Herakles to which, according to Plutarch, one of Pyrrhus' advisors in 280 BC had compared Rome on account of her rapacious conquests in Italy. In such a context Hannibal might be represented as a new Hercules on the march to decapitate the Roman hydra's multiple heads. The Romans, however, were discomfited by Hannibal's attempt to appropriate Hercules whose cult, in Rome, celebrated victory and triumph; the titles Invictus, Victor, Triumphator are all associated with monuments to Hercules at the Ara Maxima, the god's most ancient and most sacred shrine in Rome. In Book 2 of Silius' *Punica* the poet describes Hannibal at the siege of Saguntum, ineptly praying to Hercules, Saguntum's divine Founder, to destroy his own city on the grounds that it is inhabited by men of Trojan descent, and the god is famed for his destruction of Troy. In a witty response Statius (*Silv.* 4. 6.) describes the adventures of a small bronze of Hercules, a table decoration, which has been transported on campaign by both Alexander and Hannibal who ply the god with offerings to ensure their conquests which include, perversely, Alexander's sack of the god's own birthplace, Thebes, and Hannibal's sack of Hercules' beloved Saguntum, where the little statue weeps with misery and frustration.



Such exchanges testify to the existence of vibrant and critical intellectual circles in Rome and Campania where Flavian literature could flourish, rich in the duality of its Greco-Roman heritage, its imagery and literary allusion to less propitious times. Today, no longer denigrated as “Silver Latin,” the varied and sophisticated literature of the Flavian period is currently enjoying its greatest popularity since the Italian Renaissance.



Vespasian Coin  
©The Trustees of the British Museum

# Going to Great Lengths with Philodemus

Richard Janko  
Gerald F. Else Distinguished University Professor of Classical Studies, University of Michigan  
Trustee of the American Friends of Herculaneum

Since 1985, with many interruptions and intermissions for other projects, I have been working with colleagues in the Philodemus Translation Project on Philodemus’ *On Poems*. This Epicurean poet-philosopher, who taught Vergil and influenced Horace, is our main source for Hellenistic literary and critical theory, filling the deep lacuna between Aristotle’s *Poetics* and Horace’s *Ars Poetica*. In 2007 I began to reconstruct Book 2, the most complete of all the rolls in this five-volume treatise. It was one of the first to be opened by Father Piaggio on his famous machine. I perused it in its entirety with the binocular microscopes in the Officina dei Papiri five times before I was satisfied with my transcriptions (if I even am—I dare not look back at them now).

The task proved very demanding, as this exceedingly long scroll (over 16 metres, consisting of exactly 100 sheets of papyrus or *kollemata*) was opened as five different “papyri.” Worse, the order of many fragments was hideously jumbled in the 1830s by that preposterous mountebank Bernardo Quaranta, who never finished his edition. I was able to reconstruct the majority of it partly by following parallel passages in Book 1, partly by making a paper model too long ever to unroll completely on any table that I am ever likely to own, and partly by deciphering fragment-numbers under erasure on the proofs of the old copperplates! I have a horrid feeling that it may be the longest literary papyrus ever to be entirely reconstituted.

In Book 2, it turns out that Philodemus rebuts the theories of two hitherto unknown Hellenistic critics, Heracleodorus and Pausimachus, whose ideas were transmitted by Crates of Mallos. Heracleodorus argued that the sound arising from the word-order (*synthesis*) is the source of poetic excellence, regardless of the content. Even more radically, Pausimachus held that pure sound, which varies in quality according to how sonorous it is, is that source. By putting together a mosaic of fragments from both the summary and the rebuttal of these theorists, we can form a very full picture of their thought, which belongs to musical theory as much as it does to poetics.

Philodemus began the Augustan poets’ reaction against such ideas by arguing that form and content are interrelated, and that well-expressed content, not pretty sound, is what makes poetry worthwhile. Book 2 reveals just how much and how inventively Horace drew on the ideas of all three writers in composing his wonderful *Ars Poetica*.

Nothing in the complex text, detailed critical apparatus, and convolutions of reconstruction, which my book presents in detail to help others succeed at similar projects (of which many remain to be done), can convey the fascination and excitement of this work—nor indeed the frustrations that I normally overcame by moving onto another problem and returning later, when there was often more evidence, to whatever I could not at first resolve. Nor can the book convey the pleasure of working in the Officina with the sounds of rehearsals at the San Carlo wafting through the open windows (a good reason to deplore the recent introduction of air conditioning), or of working on difficult passages with international colleagues more knowledgeable than myself. A whole decade on this *labor improbus*? I have no regrets!



Fig 3. Model of *On Poems* 2. Photo: Michèle Hannoosh

# Herculaneum at the Society for Classical Studies

Roger MacFarlane  
Professor of Ancient Studies, Brigham Young University

At the annual meetings of the Society for Classical Studies and the American Institute of Archaeology, convened (nominally) in Chicago on 6 January 2021, The American Friends of Herculaneum presented a superb panel of scholarly papers. AFoH President Carol Mattusch and Vice-President David Sider organized and moderated the event, entitled “Vesuvius: Texts, Objects, and Images.” The global pandemic restricting travel, several dozen individuals from across North America and Europe tuned in via Zoom for a very full morning of informative talks delivered also from remote locations by several of our most scholarly Friends.

Professor Richard Janko, who writes elsewhere in this Newsletter about his long experience of editing Philodemus, gave an illustrated talk entitled “Critics at Play: The Rearrangement and Rewriting of Verse in Philodemus’ *On Poems*.” Greek symposiasts had long enjoyed displaying their virtuosity by ringing the changes on a given verse, but literary critics sought to demonstrate how verses can be ruined by poor word order or choice of sounds—and how the great poets like Homer always got it right. Philodemus thought this a pointless game, but it is precisely from his work that we learn more about how this ancient party game was turned to serious purposes by critics. Outlines of works by two lost writers, Heracleodorus and Pausimachus, have been painstakingly extracted by Prof. Janko from the charred remains of *On Poems*.



Fig. 4 Ham-shaped sundial.  
Photo: Christopher Parslow

Professor Christopher Parslow, also like Prof. Janko an AFoH board member, presented advanced scholarship about one of Herculaneum’s most curious artifacts. In “Slicing and Dicing the Prosciutto Sundial from Herculaneum” Prof. Parslow reviewed historical background on the 1755 discovery of the ham-shaped sundial, including treatment of Antonio Piaggio’s unpublished manuscript “L’Orologio Solare del Museo Ercolanese” that offers “first-hand perspective on the Bourbon court’s struggles to interpret one of the most complex antiquities yielded by the[ir] early excavations.” Prof. Parslow’s explication of that letter enlivens our understanding of the fraught relationship between Piaggio and Camillo Paderni, but also much about other aspects

of scholarly life in Naples during the early development of studi ercolanesi. Astronomical interpretation of the artifact published in the 18th century by Nicola Maria Carcani informed Prof. Parslow's talk as well. The talk on the prosciutto was richly illustrated so as to help the audience understand the workings of the precious astronomical tool.

Dr. Ambra Spinelli joined the conference from Rome, where she serves on the faculty of the Intercollegiate Center for Classical Studies. Dr. Spinelli was the 2018 recipient of the AFoH graduate student fellowship, in which she studied the triclinia of Herculaneum and Pompeii. In her illustrated paper, "Spectacle and Society: The Tablinum's Imagery in the Houses of Pompeii and Herculaneum," Dr. Spinelli based her talk on some 160 atrium-houses and investigated connections between theatrical performances and wall paintings. She corrected a common perception that *tablina* should be considered principally "public" spaces within private homes. This false emphasis has "prevented a fuller discussion of this space [and wrongly] conditioned" scholarly interpretation of the space's decorative schemes. Rather, as Dr. Spinelli's nuanced reinterpretation demonstrated, "the analysis of wall decorations associated with this room ... reveals how the *tablinum* was a highly flexible space, which served for multiple social and familial activities."

Co-authors Dr. Michael McOsker (Ohio Wesleyan) and Dr. Nathan Gilbert (University of Durham) then presented "Epicurus and the *Kriterion*: New Evidence from Metrodorus, Opus Incertum." An ongoing joint project aiming to produce a new, and the first complete, anglophone edition and commentary of works by Metrodorus of Lampsacus (5th/4th Cent. BCE) will begin to "document the work and importance of a group of several early Epicureans between Epicurus and Lucretius" underappreciated in the development of Epicureanism. The authors diagnose in Metrodorus' activity "the systematic establishment of a coherent Epicurean position, which [later] developed into orthodoxy." McOsker and Gilbert developed the view that intellectual activity in the Epicurean Garden (Kepos) differed from that manifest in Aristotle's Lyceum or the Platonic Academy. The *kriterion* (κρίτηριον) is a "conceptual tool used commonly by Hellenistic philosophers to make epistemological and practical decisions," but McOsker and Gilbert see in a newly read papyrological fragment "plausibl[ly] reconstructed" evidence that Metrodorus was attempting "to define and crystalize Epicurus' achievements [on the way to establishing] an orthodox Epicurean history of philos-

ophy." The paper clearly whetted appetites for more extended readings of PHerc. 1788 and PHerc. 418.

The morning's final paper was presented by another AFoH trustee, Dr. Kenneth Lapatin. Building on the energizing Getty Villa exhibition he had recently curated in 2019, Dr. Lapatin detailed new understanding of the well-known bronze female statues from Herculaneum in "The Appiades of Stephanos in Herculaneum and Rome: A New Identification of the Bronze 'Dancers' from the Villa dei Papiri." Dr. Lapatin succinctly reviewed the formal familiarity of the five bronze sculptures unearthed (1754–1756) at the Villa dei Papiri and also gave a survey of interpretations varying from Weber ("draped women") to Winckelmann (dancing "nymphs") to "priestesses, vestal virgins, maidens, matrons, actresses, *kistophoroi* (basket carriers), *kanephoroi* (also basket carriers), *hydrophoroi* (water carriers), and Danaids." Citing recent scholarship by Kyoko Sengoku-Haga et al., which documents formal resemblances between a marble athlete by Stephanos (active 1st Cent. BCE in Rome) and the bronzes at the Villa, Dr. Lapatin suggested further interpretive links between the Roman artworks and those in the Villa. In particular, he suggested, the Appiades Fountain at Julius Caesar's Temple of Venus Genetrix, where Stephanos' nymphs of the Aqua Appia were displayed, and bronze sculptures from the Herculaneum property may provide a key to identifying more certainly the owner of the Villa dei Papiri as Julius Caesar's father-in-law, L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus.

After each paper, the presenters took numerous questions from the audience. All told, these five exceptional papers and the various insights gained in Q&A made for an extraordinarily informative morning of learning. All left edified and eager to return to Herculaneum as soon as conditions permit.

For more information about the Herculaneum Society, or if you have any comments, suggestions or ideas for articles for the next edition of *Herculaneum Archaeology*, please feel free to contact the office at:

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