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Unique insight into Egypt’s last queen

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It is an accepted fact that archaeology – the study of humanity through its material remains – is by design and necessity multi-stranded, and this demands a deeply embedded scientific rigour. This could include the careful drawing of a stratified section on a prehistoric site, the analysis of pollen to determine past habitats, assessing the characteristics of human and animal bones to establish diet, analysis of pot shards to ascertain economic patterns of trade, and so on. These may seem less exciting aspects of a subject many consider fascinating, but are nonetheless priceless for specialists, who are inevitably the minority. For the majority, there is perhaps no subject more interesting than the discovery of buried treasure, which can be defined more properly as cultural treasure because it typically has sublime artistic qualities. This could range from the relatively insignificant find of a peridot intaglio, to the major discovery of the Crosby Garret Helmet.

Cultural treasures can also be viewed from an ethical perspective: from art for art’s sake, to repatriation, the latter having necessitated relevant legislation. However, it is a fait accompli that cultural treasures rather than broken pottery provide the principal lure for museums. ‘I see beautiful things,’ Howard Carter famously said in the tomb of Tutankhamen, and beautiful things are what many people want to see when they walk into a museum gallery. Hence, the conspicuity of museum exhibition posters in public spaces, the commercial success of museum exhibitions, and the media furore when exciting artefacts are discovered. Museums have a duty to assemble this material to project an appropriate understanding of its cultural and social context. If this is done effectively, it can aid in the difficult task of understanding the human psyche: not just in the minds of patrons who commissioned the artwork, but also artisans who crafted it, and those who have admired it over many centuries.

Dr Mark Merrony

Archaeological discovery
perception, commerce and presentation

Spectacular discoveries have played a major role in how archaeology is perceived by the public, and significantly shaped the commercial identity of museums and the way they interpret such materials.
recent stories from the world of ancient art and archaeology

Petra cave painting restored

Experts from London’s Courtauld Institute of Art recently completed the conservation of a rare Nabataean wall painting at the World Heritage site of Petra in Jordan for the Petra National Trust, the Jordanian non-governmental organisation mandated to preserve the site. Conservators Stephen Rickerby and Lisa Shkedec from the Courtauld’s Conservation of Wall Painting Department worked on the project for three years.

Dating from around the 1st century AD, the painting is the most important surviving example of Nabataean wall art and a unique in situ example of figurative painting from the culture of the Nabataeans. Their trading and agricultural communities flourished in the borderland between Syria and Arabia, from the Euphrates to the Red Sea, until the area became part of the Roman Empire under Trajan in the early 2nd century AD. Petra flourished as an economic and religious centre from the 3rd century BC, its population peaking at some 20,000. The city was an important crossroads for the silk, spice and other trade routes that linked China, India and Southern Arabia with Egypt, Syria, Greece and Rome.

The paintings, among Petra’s most remarkable treasures, are in a cave complex at the canyon of Siq al-Barid in Beidha, known as ‘Little Petra’, about 5km from the main site. They are located within a bicaium, comprising a principal chamber and a recess, where ritual dining is thought to have taken place. The most outstanding painting covers the vault and the walls of the recess. When the Courtauld team started work, it was in a state of severe deterioration, blackened by smoke and damaged by graffiti and attempted thefts.

The painting was extremely fragile and susceptible to damage, and as it was believed that cleaning the mural would be impossible, the programme focused on stabilisation. However, in a major breakthrough in 2008, a safe and effective means of cleaning was developed by the British conservation specialists.

Stephen Rickerby describes what has emerged from the blackened layers as ‘really exceptional and staggeringly beautiful, with an artistic and technical quality that’s quite unlike anything else’. There are three different vines – grape, ivy and bindweed – all associated with Dionysus, while the birds include a Demoiselle crane and a Palestine sunbird with radiant colours. The scenes are populated by putti, including one with a fur cloak, playing a flute. Others pick fruit and fight off birds pecking at the grapes.

The painting is exceptional in its sophistication, extensive palette and luxurious materials, including gold leaf. The use of gilding to highlight the autumnal leaves of the vinescroll decoration was an outstanding discovery, adding to the value of the painting. Rickerby says: ‘The painting is as good as, or better than, some of the Roman paintings you see, for example at Pompeii, and has immense art-historical importance.’

Sophie Mackenzie

Donation to the British Museum

The Linbury Trust, a charitable trust established by Lord Sainsbury of Preston Candover in the 1970s, has agreed a grant of £12.5 million to the British Museum, to be paid over the next three years. Similarly, the Monument Trust, which was established by Lord Sainsbury’s late brother Simon, has made a grant of £12.5 million to the British Museum, thus creating a combined gift of £25 million for the museum’s much-needed extension.

The World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre will house state-of-the-art laboratories and studios for the conservation, preservation and research of the collection, a new special exhibitions suite, world-class stores for the study of the collection as well as facilities to support the museum’s national and international loans programme. These new facilities will enable the museum to enhance its educational role and greatly increase the amount of training it is able to provide to institutions and colleagues in the UK and internationally.

Minerva November/December 2010
The fruits of war

German archaeologists excavating a battlefield dating to the 3rd century AD, where Roman legions fought Germanic tribes, had to temporarily abandon the dig at the start of August when their investigations unearthed unexploded hand grenades and anti-tank weaponry. Despite being found among the detritus of an ancient battle, the live explosives date to World War II, providing a link to the hostilities that have been waged across this part of northern Germany over the centuries.

The battlefield, which came to light when metal-detectorists began unearthing Roman artefacts and eventually alerted the authorities to the finds in June 2008, has already yielded some notable finds, including Roman horseshoes, coins and good-luck charms carried by legionnaires. However, most remarkable of all is the quantity of military equipment found in the woodland near the town of Oldenrode. Iron axe-heads, spearheads and arrowheads have all been recovered from the woodland. More than 300 heavy iron bolts fired from Roman artillery pieces such as the ballista have also been discovered, and, according to Dr Henning Hassmann, Director of Historic Preservation for the State of Lower Saxony, ‘The bolts were found densely clustered’. This possibly indicates they had been fired at a specific enemy target by skilled Roman artillerymen.

What makes the find all the more remarkable is that there is no indication in the ancient literature that the Roman army was active in this part of Germany during the 3rd century – a period when the Empire was suffering hyperinflation and economic decline. Throughout most of the century the Empire has traditionally been regarded as being very much on the defensive as migrating tribes arrived from the north and east. These included Vandals, Goths, Carpians and Alamanni who all began to exert pressure on Rome’s frontiers, carrying out raids and even large-scale invasions that penetrated far beyond the Rhine and Danube, laying waste to large areas of some of Rome’s most agriculturally productive provinces and undermining the rule of the central government.

The finds from Oldenrode do, however, appear to prove that the Roman army of the 3rd century AD could also take the offensive, campaigning deep in territory held by enemy tribes and engaging them in pitched battle. According to Petra Loenne, archaeologist for the county of Northeim, ‘Evidently the Roman and Germans fought a bloody battle in the third century AD. Some 1000 Roman legionnaires may have been involved in the fight.’ There is, however, the possibility that finds may date to the punitive campaign led by Alexander Severus (r. AD 222–235), the last of the Severan dynasty of emperors. He is known to have led the legions across the Rhine in an effort to try and put a stop to German raiding into Gaul. It is not recorded that the emperor engaged the German tribes in any major action – indeed, Alexander Severus would lose his throne and his life when he lost the confidence of his legions because of his perceived reluctance to prosecute the war and his preference for negotiating with the tribes and bribing them into halting their raiding activities. However, the finds from Oldenrode might suggest the emperor was rather more belligerent than ancient reports imply.

The finds of unexploded grenades indicate that the site was the scene of another battle some 1700 years later, when Germans attempted to halt the progress of the American army as the allied forces pushed into the area in early April 1945. Such unexploded ordnance left over from World War II is often a problem across Germany. In June, only two months before the excavation at Oldenrode was brought to an abrupt halt, three members of a bomb disposal unit working in the city of Göttingen, about 45km to the south, were killed and two more seriously injured when a 500kg bomb they were attempting to diffuse suddenly exploded.

James Beresford

Discovery of ancient town in Egypt’s Western desert

It was announced during the summer that archaeologists from Yale University have discovered a major settlement site at El-Kharga Oasis, almost 180km to the west of Luxor, in Egypt’s Western desert. The site was located during the Theban Desert Road Survey that focuses on the overland transport route across the Sahara. According to Dr John Coleman Darnell, Professor of Egyptology at Yale and head of the archaeological mission, the remains cover a area that stretches for a kilometre, while large mudbrick buildings were discovered at the site that appear similar in layout to administrative structures found in the Nile Valley. The finds of large amounts of ancient pottery also indicate that it was probably used year-round. Deborah Darnell, co-Director of the mission has therefore noted that such large-scale ceramic production is something you wouldn’t find unless there was a settlement here with a permanent population, not just seasonal and temporary.’ The diversity of pottery found at the site also implies that it was part of a wide caravan trade network.

A large ancient bakery was also found during the archaeological investigation, and yielded huge amounts of artefacts weighing half a ton, suggesting the site was producing a food surplus with which to feed the administrators working at the settlement, and possibly also troops based in the area. Artefacts recovered from the site suggest it was established in the early part of the Middle Kingdom during the 11th dynasty (c. 2134–1991 BC), although the settlement appears to have reached its peak in the later part of the Second Intermediate Period, at a time when the 17th dynasty (c. 1663–1570 BC) were ruling in Thebes and the Hyksos controlled the north of Egypt.

Dr Darnell therefore has hopes that the archaeology from El-Kharga Oasis will help us reconstruct a more elaborate and detailed picture of Egypt during an intermediate period.’

James Beresford
Bringing legends to life

The ‘Ray Harryhausen: Myths and Legends’ exhibition at the London Film Museum continues to draw in the public, bringing visitors face-to-face with Greek mythological creatures that the films of this famous special effects creator brought to a cinema-going audience over five decades. The exhibition was launched on 29 June, coinciding with Ray Harryhausen’s 90th birthday. For the last 60 years, it has been Ray Harryhausen’s vision of the myths of Perseus, Jason and the Argonauts, and the stories of Sinbad the Sailor that have shaped the popular perception of these ancient and medieval tales.

Inspired by the film King Kong in 1933, Harryhausen began creating short features before working on the visual effects for The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms (1953), in which a dinosaur goes on the rampage along the east coast of America. It was a film in which Harryhausen developed the technique of splitting the background and foreground parts of a scene, allowing him to insert animated images of his model creatures into the movie in such a way that they could be made to appear to interact with other characters.

Harryhausen’s first historically themed film was The 7th Voyage of Sinbad (1958), taking as its hero the fictional Abbassid mariner whose epic voyages are usually included among the stories of The One Thousand and One Nights. Using a special stop-motion filming technique – marketed as ‘Dynamation’ – the film featured an animated Cyclops, a snakewoman, dragons, and the roc, a giant carnivorous bird which Harryhausen made even more intimidating by adding a second beaked head. On release the film proved extremely popular, and it continues to be well received when screened on television. In 2008 it was selected for preservation in the United States National Film Registry by the Library of Congress because it was deemed to be ‘culturally, historically and aesthetically significant’.

Harryhausen’s first foray into classical myth came in 1963 with Jason and the Argonauts. His depiction of Talos, the giant created from bronze to defend Crete against invasion and pirate attack, has since become the archetype for this part of the Jason myth, even though the film set the action on the Isle of Bronze rather than Crete. Moreover, the movie had Jason removing the plug on the giant’s ankle that released the ichor from his body, rather than Medea or the Argonaut Poesas, as is the case in ancient versions of the myth. Such is the enduring popularity of Jason and the Argonauts that more than 40 years after its release, Talos was ranked the second greatest movie monster of all time (beaten only by King Kong). Other memorable monsters Harryhausen created for the film include the animated hydra (the killing of which should really belong to the Second Labour of Herakles rather than the voyage of the Argonauts) and the warrior skeletons. Although in Apollonius Rhodius’ Argonautica the teeth of the dragon, once sewn into the ground, produced armed men, Harryhausen chose to portray them as skeletons, even though it would take him more than four months to create the stop-motion animation required for the four minute scene.

Taking liberties with how myths and legends are brought to the screen occasionally ruffles the feathers of purists, but Harryhausen remains unapologetic about the way he has brought ancient stories to life. Earlier this year he noted: ‘Most mythologies are rather fragmented... You can’t just take the Greek myths the way they are. You have to shape it and glamourise it... I think if you just took Greek mythology and put it on the screen you’d find it would be a big bore to everybody, because you don’t have a natural development of what is needed for a screenplay.’

Medusa from Clash of the Titans. As Harryhausen has noted: ‘With Medusa we needed to have a lot of snakes in her hair, otherwise she wouldn’t look right. After all who wants a Gorgon that’s skimpay on snakes! We ended up giving her twelve snakes, plus one on her arm... so I had to animate twelve snakes for each frame of film, plus the rattle of her tail, keeping all of that in synchronisation.’

Harryhausen’s last major film was Clash of the Titans (1981), based on the myth of Perseus and Andromeda. Once again, he deviated from the classical myth, most obviously in the film’s portrayal of Medusa who, in addition to the snakes in her hair, acquired a serpent’s body, a concept that Harryhausen derived from German Gothic depictions. Nevertheless, as with Talos, Harryhausen’s Medusa has remained the popular image of the gorgon, the result of careful attention to details such as the snakes writhing on her head, which helped make the monster as frightening as possible. The sea-monster, the Ketos, slain by Perseus during the rescue of Andromeda, was also changed from a huge sea-serpent into a large green-scaled humanoid creature with four arms, and is referred to as the Kraken, a monster from the medieval Scandinavian sagas. However, despite such changes, when Clash of the Titans was remade and released earlier this year, it followed the plot from the Harryhausen film rather than the story set down in the original myths, testament to the storytelling prowess of Ray Harryhausen, who has inspired the imaginations of young and old alike for more than 60 years.

James Beresford

The ‘Ray Harryhausen: Myths and Legends’ exhibition is on show at the London Film Museum until June 2011, after which the objects on display will move to a new permanent gallery at the National Media Museum in Bradford.

Entrance to the London Film Museum is £12 for adults and £8 for those under 15. Children under five enter free. For more details: 020 7202 7040; www.londonfilmmuseum.com

Minerva November/December 2010
Keep Ithaca in mind

Over the course of the year, two Greek islands have been locked in conflict over claims to the site of the Bronze Age kingdom of Ithaca, the island home of Odysseus. The modern island of Ithaki is the most easterly of the Ionian Islands, which lie off the west coast of Greece, and which, as the name suggests, has long been linked to the Homeric hero’s homeland. Following 16 years of excavation Greek excavators have recently claimed to have discovered the site of the palace where Penelope ruled while awaiting the return of her itinerant husband. According to Prof Thanasis Papadopoulos, leading a team of archaeologists from the University of Ioannina, the excavations have unearthed the remains of what appears to be a three-level palace complex, which features an interior staircase carved into the natural rock. A well has also been discovered, similar to those found from the great Bronze Age palace sites of Mycenae and Tiryns in the north-east Peloponnese. Shards of Mycenaean-era pottery have also been recovered from the site. According to Prof Papadopoulos, the finds match the description of the palace preserved in Homer’s Odyssey, and he has been convinced the site is that of the legendary king since 2006. However, there have long been problems reconciling Homer’s portrayal of Odysseus’ kingdom with today’s island of Ithaki. The principal difficulty comes from the description of his island kingdom that the wandering hero provides to Alcinous, king of the Phaeacians:

I am Odysseus son of Laertes, renowned among mankind for all manner of subtlety, so that my fame ascends to heaven. I live in Ithaca, where there is a high mountain called Neritum, covered with forests; and not far from it there is a group of islands very near to one another – Dulichium, Same, and the wooded island of Zacynthus. Ithaca lies squat on the horizon… towards the sunset, while the others lie away from it towards dawn.

Odyssey, 9.19-26
Translated by Samuel Butler

In Odyssey Unbound (2005) it was argued by Robert Bittlestone, with contributions from James Diggle (Prof of Classics, University of Edinburgh), that descriptions of the Bronze Age hero’s island home clearly indicate that the modern Ithaki cannot be the island that Homer had in mind: ‘Today’s island of Ithaca is not low-lying, it is mountainous. It is clearly not the furthest out to sea and it does not face towards dusk (i.e. west), nor do the adjacent islands face towards the dawn and sun (i.e. east). The geographical layout is almost opposite to that described by Homer, so how can his description of ancient Ithaca make any sense?’ Instead it has been claimed that the Ithaca of Greek myth was the Paliki peninsula on the west coast of Cephalonia, which corresponds far more closely to the description in the Odyssey – except for the rather obvious and important fact that Paliki is not an island. However, the argument put forward in Odyssey Unbound is that during the Bronze Age and on until at least the Archaic period, when Homer is thought to have composed the Iliad and Odyssey, Paliki was separated from the rest of Cephalonia by the sea, and a channel existed in what is today the Thini isthmus.

Robert Bittlestone, with sponsorship from the Fugro Group, which specialises in geological survey, has investigated the seismic upheaval in this tectonically active region of the Mediterranean, which might have led to changes in the coastline of the Ionian Islands. According to a recent report published in March: ‘Geological mapping reveals that most of Thini’s surface consists of loose rockfall material brought down by frequent earthquakes, some occurring within living memory.’

Surveys carried out from the air by helicopters fitted with sensors to measure magnetic and resistivity signatures of the Thini isthmus, as well as gravimetric and seismic measurements taken by specialists operating on both the land and the sea, have yielded provisional results. These indicate that it is possible the sea may have separated Paliki from Cephalonia during the Late Bronze Age, as well as at the time Homer was writing in c. 800 BC. Research is ongoing, with boreholes being drilled to investigate whether there is any trace of marine life buried in the Thini isthmus dating to within the last 3000 years. If firm evidence is discovered of a major upthrust of land in this area, then it will certainly add credence to the claims that the modern Paliki peninsula was Odysseus’ ancient island kingdom of Ithaca.

For more information on the geological research being carried out in western Cephalonia, see www.odysseus-unbound.org

James Beresford

The modern names of the Ionian Islands. Image: Landsat-7 false colour satellite mosaic, courtesy of NASA Applied Sciences Directorate

The marine survey off Cephalonia undertaken by the Fugro Group. Photo: John Underhill

www.odysseus-unbound.org
Flooding is far from a rare occurrence in the history of Pakistan. The Indus River flows from the north of the country before emptying into the Arabian Sea in the south, and forms the watery backbone of Pakistan. While it is common for the mighty river to burst its banks and cause flooding, with inundations expected once or twice every decade, 2010 has witnessed flooding on a scale not seen for 80 years. Record-breaking levels of rainfall in July dramatically raised the water levels of the Indus and its tributaries, quickly leading to the flooding of vast areas across all four provinces of Pakistan.

More than one-fifth of the surface area of the country has been submerged by the floodwaters (Fig 2). At least 2000 people have died and 21 million have been displaced from their homes (Figs 1, 3). On his visit to flood-affected areas on 15 August, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki Moon, commented, ‘I have witnessed many natural disasters around the world, but nothing like this.' It has been reported that in sheer scale the natural disaster surpasses the combined effects of the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, the Pakistan earthquake of 2005, and the earth tremors that caused so much destruction on the Caribbean island of Haiti at the beginning of the year.

Efforts have understandably been focused on bringing aid to the displaced population rather than evaluating the destruction visited on the archaeological and historic sites of Pakistan (Fig 4). Furthermore, floodwater continues to hinder travel, and communication routes across the country have been damaged, so it is difficult to assess the devastation caused to the country’s heritage. Reports have also sometimes been contradictory. There is, however, no doubt that great numbers of ancient sites, historic cemeteries, mosques, temples, shrines and tombs have been submerged across Pakistan.

In the province of Gilgit-Baltistan, in the far north of the country, numerous sites of cultural importance have been destroyed. Floodwaters inundated many villages and swept away people, livestock, bridges, houses and historical monuments. A lightning strike at

Preserving Pakistan

Basmah Sakrani takes a look at the damage inflicted by the recent flooding, and the effect of the natural disaster on the country’s internationally important archaeological sites
the village of Gais Bala also reportedly killed 45 people. Flooding of the Thui valley, high up in the Hindu Kush, has caused great damage to the area’s heritage. According to the Pakistan Daily newspaper, at the end of August the inundation ‘swept away monuments particularly the rock carvings depicting stone circles. The small boulders depicting animals were numerous at the mouth of the Thui valley that were, unfortunately, washed away by the floodwater. There were 14 stone circles on the right bank of Thui River, of which some collapsed under the force of the water. ‘

In the adjacent province of Khyber-Paktunkhwa, the UNESCO World Heritage Site at Takht-i-Bahi (‘Throne of Origins’), a Buddhist monastic complex which dates to the 1st century BC, has suffered water damage, although because of its location on the side of a hill, the well preserved monastery at least appears to have suffered only minor damage (Fig 5). Nearby, the archaeological site of Sahr-i-Bahloh, a fortified city that was also established in the 1st century BC, similarly appears to have escaped the worst of the flooding, with no reports of any damage to the site. Taxila, another UNESCO World Heritage Site located in Punjab province, has also been spared the destructive force of the flood. Established in the 6th century BC, the city was an important commercial centre, as well as a centre of Hindu and Buddhist learning, rising to prominence during the rule of Chandragupta (r. c. 322–298 BC) and the Mauryan dynasty.

Fears were expressed over the threat to the great Bronze Age city of Mohenjodaro, located in Sindh province in the south of Pakistan (Fig 6). At the start of August Jawad Aziz, a UNESCO spokesman in Pakistan, noted that, ‘The flood can prove devastating for the city’, adding, ‘This year’s floods, greater than any in living memory, may again destroy what remains of the ancient city of Mohenjodaro’. Constructed in about 2600 BC, the city would flourish until its abandonment midway through the 2nd millennium BC, and at its zenith covered an area of 240 hectares. Since its discovery in 1922, only 10 percent the site has been excavated. The structures that have been unearthed are made from unbaked mud brick, making them extremely vulnerable to damage by floodwater. Indeed, over the course of its thousand years of habitation, Mohenjodaro is known to have been destroyed and rebuilt at least seven times, with flooding thought to have been the principal reason for most, if not all, the destruction levels. The Indus River lies 2km to the east of the site, and in 1992 five large spurs, averaging 6m in height, were built along the river in an effort to protect the ruins at Mohenjodaro from further flood damage. UNESCO also invested eight million dollars in further flood prevention measures, which were completed in 1997.

While it was initially reported in late August that the floods had submerged many parts of Mohenjodaro and caused significant damage to the city, at the time of writing (middle of September), it appears that the site had escaped major destruction. Other historic sites have not been so fortunate and it was reported by the Daily Times that in the middle of August floodwater swept across the Pre-Harappan site of Amri, which flourished from c. 3600–3300 BC. Although details from the area remain unclear, it nevertheless appears that the museum associated with the site has been devastated by floodwater. Further to the south, the historic city of Thatta, lying close to Karachi, just escaped being washed away. Although its monuments such as the Jama Mosque, constructed by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1627–58), famous for building the Taj Mahal, were initially threatened by the floodwaters, the city escaped damage.

Pakistan is a country rich in heritage and culture, although in recent history has been tarnished with bloodshed, political crises, and economic setbacks. The floods have not only caused great physical damage to lives and infrastructure, but have put back development in the country for many years. With lands now barren and homes washed away, many of the country’s population have lost almost everything, and concern for the nation’s heritage obviously takes secondary importance compared to the more immediate problems of rebuilding and resettlement. In the middle of September the UN launched an appeal for $2 billion in flood relief, while corporations and charities from within Pakistan and abroad have been dispatching medical and food supplies to stricken regions. Yet even with aid arriving, Pakistan’s predicament is dire. However, despite the pressing concerns, the federal and provincial agencies responsible for the conservation of the myriad of archaeological and historic sites in Pakistan must look to the country’s heritage. Not only is it necessary for the long-term benefit of the country to encourage future tourism, but in the short-term it will also enhance the pride of the people of Pakistan, and such a morale boost is desperately needed at the moment.

Basmah Sakrani has been engaged with the flood relief efforts organised by Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS). Throughout the summer months students and staff of LUMS have been working tirelessly to help as many flood victims as possible. To donate, contact the LUMS Flood Relief Fund at http://lums.edu.pk/inside-lums/lums-flood-relief-fund.php
We could not live with your women – our customs are quite different from theirs. To draw the bow, to hurl the javelin, to bestride the horse, these are our arts. Of womanly employments we know nothing. Your women, on the contrary, do none of these things; but stay at home in their wagons, engaged in womanish tasks, and never go out to hunt, or to do anything. We should never agree together.’

(Herodotus, Histories, 4.114)

Amazons, the legendary female warriors, have provoked fascination since antiquity. Stories describe them fighting at the gates of Troy, laying siege to the city of Athens, and even encountering Alexander the Great. In the new exhibition ‘The Amazons – Mysterious Warrior Maidens,’ the Historical Museum of the Palatinate in Speyer, Germany, looks at representations of Amazons in art from antiquity through to the present day, and presents fascinating new evidence from the ‘Amazon graves’ excavated in the eastern Black Sea region and the steppes of southern Russia.

The source of the Amazon legend is hard to define, and the warrior women have been placed in a variety of areas. It was therefore noted by the late Prof Peter Walcot that, ‘Wherever the Amazons are located by the Greeks, whether it is somewhere along the Black Sea in the distant north-east, or in Libya in the furthest south, it is always beyond the confines of the civilized world. The Amazons exist outside the range of normal human experience.’ One of these far-distant regions was on the coasts of the Black Sea, in modern Turkey, where their legendary capital Themiskyra was situated on the banks of the Thermodon (Fig 4). In the tale related by Herodotus, a ship of Amazons was blown across the Maeotian Lake (modern Sea of Azov) to Scythia. After learning the Scythian language, they agreed to marry local men, on condition that they would not be required to follow the customs of Scythian women. According to Herodotus, the descendants of these Amazons and Scythians were the Sarmatians, whose women observed their ancient maternal customs, ‘frequently hunting on horseback with their husbands; in war taking the field; and wearing the very same dress as the men.’ Moreover, he said, ‘No girl shall...
wed till she has killed a man in battle.’ In the Geography, written by the Greek historian Strabo in the early 1st century AD, the women only reproduced once a year, when they visited the men of neighbouring tribes. When the children were born the women would keep the female infants and return the boys to their fathers. Another 1st century account comes from the Historical Library of Diodorus, who believed that the warrior women did live with men, but the men served the household.

Amazon women were often recorded as burning or cutting off a breast in order to make drawing a bow easier. According to the physician Hippocrates (c. 460–370 BC): ‘They have no right breasts… for while they are yet babies their mothers make red-hot a bronze instrument constructed for this very purpose and apply it to the right breast and cauterise it, so that its growth is arrested, and all its strength and bulk are diverted to the right shoulder and right arm.’ However, whilst Amazons are traditionally shown in art with one breast covered, they are not depicted as single-breasted.

One of the legendary tasks imposed upon Heracles by Eurystheus, king of Tiryns, was to obtain possession of the girdle of the Amazonian queen Hippolyta. He was accompanied by his friend Theseus, who carried off the princess Antiope, sister of Hippolyta, an incident which led to a retaliatory invasion of Attica, in which Antiope perished fighting by the side of Theseus. In some versions, Theseus marries Hippolyta; in others he marries Antiope and she does not die, and by this marriage Theseus has a son, Hippolytus. An entire genre of art, amazonomachy, is devoted to the battle between the Athenians and the Amazons (Fig 5), which is portrayed in marble bas-reliefs such as from the Parthenon and in the sculptures of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus (Fig 7).

Homer also reported the deeds of Amazons in the Iliad. Early in his reign over Troy, Priam was an ally of the Mygdonians and fought against the Amazons, who later became his allies when he purified their queen Penthesilea after she killed her sister Hippolyta during a hunting trip. Penthesilea led the Amazons in the last year of the Trojan War, where she was killed at the hands of...
Achilles, who in some versions of the story is said to have fallen in love with her as she died (Figs 2, 3).

The Amazons appear in connection with several other Greek legends. They invaded Lycia, but were defeated by the hero Bellerophon, who was sent against them by Iobates, the king of that country, in the hope that he might meet his death at their hands. The tomb of Myrine is mentioned in the Iliad, and later interpretations made her an Amazon: according to Diodorus, Queen Myrine led her Amazons to victory against Libya. Amazons also make an appearance in the Alexander Romance when their Queen, Thalestris, together with 300 of her warriors, visited the Macedonian king, in the hope that he would father a child with her.

The Amazons continued to have a role in Roman historiography and art (Fig 6), which carried into the medieval period, the Renaissance and beyond. Shakespeare has Hippolyta betrothed to Theseus in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and although her part in the play is small, she reveals her Amazonian spirit when she argues with the king in Act V, pointing out that the lovers’ stories would not tally with one another if they had imagined the events of the previous night. Artists continued to depict scenes from the Amazon legends into the 19th and 20th centuries, imbuing them with a flavour of eroticism (Figs 1, 12). The myth of the Amazons continues to inspire the pop culture of the present: the bestselling comic book character Wonder Woman is an Amazon warrior, while the popular TV adventure series Xena: Warrior Princess frequently featured the warrior women. Such female characters highlight the continuing ability of strong, independent women to fascinate and titillate modern audiences in much the same way as they did in antiquity.

Consorting with heroes, appearing on mythical battlefields – Amazons may be figures of legend, but the exhibition at Speyer suggests that female fighters did in fact exist in the ancient world. They roamed across what is now Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, but unlike the Amazons, they shared their lives and their graves with men, and were buried with their armour, weapons and jewellery.

Archaeological excavations in the Scythian/Sarmatian territory in the eastern Black Sea region and the Steppes of southern Russia have yielded surprising finds. Aside from the usual items such as cosmetic accessories, these kurgans (large funeral mounds), dating to the 4th/3rd century BC, were found to contain lances, swords, daggers, and most often of all, bows and arrows (Figs 9, 11). The female skeletons show evidence of long hours spent in the saddle and practising with the bow.

On display are reconstructions of a grave from the Altai Mountains of Central Asia (Fig 14), where the interment of a young female warrior was discovered under a burial mound. The grave contained weapons, jewellery and an elaborate horse harness (Fig 10). The exhibition stages the discovery of such a grave, allowing visitors a glimpse into a freshly opened excavation site. Documentary film footage of the excavations of Russian and Ukrainian graves is
also presented, along with reports of the analysis of the discovered skeletal tissue. Lars Börner, Curator of the exhibition in Speyer, explains: ‘From these remains, we can tell how these women lived and how they died. In places there are fatal injuries which they sustained in fights and there are injuries they survived, too. We can also deduce some behaviour. Their thighbones were curved from riding horses, and we can see where they had strong arm muscles from using a bow and arrow.’

Graves containing armed women are a phenomenon of the rider-nomad cultures north of the Black Sea. The Scythians of the Volga region had a higher prevalence of such graves than the Scythians, and of the 100 or so weapon burials that have been uncovered, 20 percent were associated with women. In Zemo-Avchala, a Georgian village near Tbilisi, the remains of a woman aged 30–40 were found buried together with a sword, lance, jewellery and ceramics (Figs 13, 17). Dating to the 2nd millennium BC, she is the earliest of these ‘Amazon’ burials.

Graves of female warriors have also been uncovered elsewhere. In the Alemannic burial complex of Niederstotzingen, near Stuttgart, a grave dating to the 7th century AD contained the remains of three people, originally assumed to have been two men and a young male. However, a recent DNA test revealed that the young man is actually a woman. The body was buried with arrow heads, sex, spatha, shield and belt buckles (Fig 15). This grave suggests the phenomenon of female warriors not only occurred in the legendary territory of the Amazons in the area of the Black Sea, but was part of different cultures throughout Europe.

Another of the prized artefacts on display in Speyer, on loan from the Mougins Museum of Classical Art, is the so-called Thetis fragment (Fig 16). This back plate fragment from muscled armour of the 4th century BC bears a Greek inscription that reads ‘For Athena – Loot from the Enemy’; it had been placed on a shrine dedicated to Athena at a battle scene. The armour is bronze and displays two warrior heads on the shoulder blades with long curly hair, thought to be those of Amazon warriors. The armour is anatomically accurate, but was clearly made for a small frame – perhaps that of a woman. Research into the ‘Amazon graves’ is still in its infancy, and connections between these burials and the Amazon legends are a source of debate. It has been proven that in the nomadic culture of the steppes between 600–300 BC there were women who were buried with weapons and other paraphernalia associated with military pursuits, and, in life, they may well have fought in battle and taken part in raiding expeditions. Although evidence suggesting an aggressive, male-hating collective of women or a gynocratic state has not been substantiated, it is possible that it was contact with the Eurasian nomads that inspired the Greeks to develop the Amazon narrative.

‘The Amazons – Mysterious Warrior Maidens’ runs at the Historical Museum of the Palatinate, Speyer, until 23 January 2011. A series of lectures and events is taking place alongside the exhibition. For more information, visit www.museum.speyer.de
Ancient religion

Alan Greaves takes a look at the peculiar representations of the goddess of Ionia

With around 1.7 million visitors visiting the ruins of Ephesus every year, the ancient city is a global phenomenon. During the middle of the 1st century AD, St Paul preached in the city for almost three years. Its iconic library of Celsus (Fig 3), together with the great theatre (Fig 1), are familiar to millions of modern tourists. Even in antiquity, the city’s great temple of Artemis was declared to be one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, yet the cult statue that stood at the heart of that temple remains a complex, challenging and enigmatic image.

Archaeologists digging in the city of Ephesus uncovered a number of statues of the goddess, buried by her erstwhile followers when the new faith brought by Paul swept aside the old religions of Ionia (the west coast of Turkey). In these statues, the great goddess of the Ionian Greeks is shown flanked by animals, bedecked with jewels and images, wearing a tall hat and with multiple breast-like appendages on her chest (Figs 2, 5).

To Western eyes, this might appear to be a foreign-looking aberration from the classical depictions of Artemis as virgin huntress and sister of Apollo (Fig 4). However, to be able to ‘read’ and understand this complex and multi-layered image is to understand the history of Ionia itself – a land that has always stood at the crossroads of East and West, where the cultures of Europe met and mixed with those of Asia.

The first thing to appreciate when viewing this image is its sheer antiquity. The precise origins of the cult at Ephesus are unclear, but deep excavations at the temple site indicate that activity here dates back to the Bronze Age (2nd millennium BC). At this time the settlement that would later become known as Ephesus was called Apasa, and was capital of Arzawa, a contemporary of the Hittite Empire of central Anatolia. A sacred spring, a recognised feature of the Hittite cult, has recently been identified near the temple site, suggesting that the place may already have been considered sacred at this early date. If there was indeed cult continuity from the Bronze Age to the Roman period – which has yet to be securely proven – then the use of this location as a place of religious activity may have spanned nearly two millennia – a period equivalent to that of the entire history of Christianity.

Fig 1. The great theatre of Ephesus. The original theatre dates back to the Hellenistic period, the remains that can be seen today date to the reigns of Cladius (AD 41–54) and Trajan (AD 98–117). The Roman theatre was capable of seating 24,000 people. Photo: Frank Kovalchek.

Fig 2. Marble statue of the Artemis of Ephesus, depicted with polos hat, c. 1st century AD. H. 2m. Museum of Efes (Turkey).

Fig 3. The iconic library of Celsus at Ephesus, (I. 1st century AD. L. 6.5 m. Museum of Efes (Turkey).
Where different elements of the cult image can be identified, they appear to originate from different cultures and periods. The tall polos hat was evidently a symbol of female divinity in the Iron Age Phrygian culture of central Anatolia (Fig 2). However, the city-like walls that rest on top of that hat and the string of zodiac symbols around the statue’s neck are probably Roman additions. So, although the Roman copyists literally carved Ephesian Artemis in stone to make the single image we see today, that image was a composite that had resulted from the steady build up of layer upon layer of cult practice and meaning that had evolved over centuries.

Even some of the less obvious elements that make up the image are now starting to be understood. The dome-like structures that flank one of the statues can be interpreted as inverted baskets, or ‘skeps’, used for bee-keeping, bees being a symbol of Artemis as goddess of wild nature (Fig 5). Even the enigmatic ‘breasts’ have now been securely interpreted. Although they may have the initial appearance of breasts, the copyists’ attention to detail is so fine in every other aspect, that it is hard to imagine that they would not have thought to equip their goddess’ breasts with nipples. This observation might appear to support the suggestion of one scholar that these orbs in fact represent the scrotal sacs of bulls, which were then hung around the neck of the xoanon in whose honour they had been sacrificed. However, following excavations within the temple in the 1990s a more secure, if more mundane, archaeological explanation has been proposed: they represent amber pendants, a number of which were found during excavations on the spot where the xoanon once stood.

But what can this tell us about the culture of ancient Ionia, which was so often a bridge, and also a flashpoint, between the empires of East and West? Perhaps the answer lies not in the meaning of this image but in the method of its interpretation. Seen as a single snapshot in time, the image of Artemis at Ephesus presents a single, challenging image of ‘foreignness’ within the Graeco-Roman world. Yet, when we view this image over a longer timescale, as the result of a millennia-long process of acculturation – nurtured by generations of Ionians living in a region that was such a cosmopolitan meeting point between cultures – a far more subtle understanding of the cult of this great city begins to emerge.

In a world of rolling television media coverage that is dominated by soundbites and image, perhaps this ancient icon still holds a valuable lesson for us today: that only by taking the long view can we see beyond the immediacy of images to find the deeper truth behind them.

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The gemstone known to ancient Greeks and Romans as *topazos* is the modern peridot, the gem variety of the mineral olivine ([Mg, Fe]_2SiO_4). This mineral varies from transparent to translucent and, as its name implies, typically has an olive-green colour. It is the large, transparent crystals of good yellowish-green colour that are called peridot. This was used sparingly in the Mediterranean region during the Hellenistic and Imperial Roman periods, with known artefacts ranging in age from 250 BC to AD 500. Most of these are plain or intaglio-cut stones for finger rings (Figs 2, 3, 5). It is commonly claimed that peridot was also used earlier in Pharaonic Egypt, but there is no credible archaeological evidence to support this.

The only known ancient source of peridot is Zabargad (or Saint John’s) Island, off Egypt’s southern Red Sea coast (Fig 4). The Greek historian and geographer Agatharchides of Cnidos (writing in the mid 2nd century BC but using 3rd-century BC sources) called the island Ophiodes (Snaky) in his *On the Erythraean Sea* (5.84) and said *topazos* was best found just after sunset, giving rise to the appellation ‘evening emeralds’, which is sometimes applied to peridot today, although it is a misnomer. Agartharchides’ account was largely paraphrased by Diodorus Siculus (1st century BC; *Library of History*, 3.39.3–9) and Strabo (63/64 BC – AD 21/24; *Geography*, 16.4.6). A final Hellenistic reference to Red Sea peridot is *topazion Aithiopias* in Job 28:19 of the Greek Septuagint Bible, where this gemstone is said to be of less value than wisdom.

The Roman writer Pliny the Elder (AD 23/24–79) in his *Natural History* (6.33.168–170, 37.32.107–108) called the island Topazos after the gemstone but said it was formerly known as Cytis. Still another name was applied to the island by the Alexandrian geographer Claudius Ptolemy (AD 90–168) who called it Agathonis (*Geography*, 4.5). The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, written around the mid 1st century AD by an unknown Greek-speaking Egyptian involved in the Eastern trade, does not mention the island but identifies *chrysolithos* (golden-stone) as the only gemstone exported from Egypt to India. *Chrysolithos* could well be an alternative name for peridot, given its ‘wonderful golden appearance’ as Agatharchides describes it (*On the Erythraean Sea*, 5.84) and Pliny’s recognition of the *chrysopteros* (golden-feathered) variety of *topazos* (*Natural History*, 37.32.109). Elsewhere, Pliny refers to ‘*chrysoolithos*… from Aethiopia’ (37.42.126), probably meaning Egypt’s southern Eastern Desert at the northern edge of Roman Ethiopia, but he apparently mistakenly thought this was something other than *topazos*. The only other gemstones mined in Egypt during the 1st century AD were amethyst (purple quartz), emerald (green beryl) and possibly turquoise, all the wrong colour for *chrysolithos* – although citrine (yellow quartz), made from heat-treated amethyst, is a remote possibility. Subsequent Roman and later medieval writers merely repeated, often in a much garbled form, what Pliny and others reported earlier about *topazos* and *chrysoolithos*. The modern term ‘chrysolite’ was derived from *chrysolithos* and has been applied to a number of yellowish gemstones, including peridot.

The modern Arabic name for peridot is zabargad, although there...
Ancient mining

are many variant spellings. Zabargad is referred to by several medieval Arab writers, who usually mean peridot but sometimes confuse it with emerald. Egypt's other green gemstone. Of these, the Turkish traveller Ibn Hawqal is the only one to specifically mention peridot's Red Sea source. In his *Face of the Earth*, written in AD 977, Ibn Hawqal stated that zabargad came from an unnamed island near the port of Aydhab (close to modern Halaib; Fig 4). Later, the Egyptian scholar Al-Tifaschi, in his *Best Thoughts on the Best Stones* written about AD 1240, said that in his day all zabargad came from the ruins of ancient Alexandria in Egypt. When the Portuguese explorer Juan de Castro passed by Zabargad Island in 1541, he identified it in his logbook as Zomorgete, a corruption of Zabargad and a name he must have learned from an Arab guide. Thus Arab mariners, if not scholars, were aware of Zabargad Island and its peridot at least as early as the 16th century.

The next recorded visits to Zabargad by Europeans were from James Bruce of Kinnaird in 1769 and James Raymond Wellsted in 1834. Both thought they had found emeralds on the island, which Bruce (in his 1790 *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile*) referred to as Siberget, while Wellsted, in his 1838 *Travels in Arabia*, called Saint John's. Wellsted was the first person to actually mention the ancient mine workings when he reported 'numerous and extensive excavations... made at a very early period'. After his visit, the island was forgotten until its final rediscovery about 1900. Peridot mining was initiated soon after by the Peridot and Egyptian Gems Company and continued sporadically until the 1950s, when the mine was closed by the Egyptian government. Since then there has been occasional surreptitious activity, and even now cabochons of Zabargad peridot can be found in some gem shops in Cairo's Khan Khalili bazaar.

Although Zabargad Island's geology and modern mine have been discussed in numerous published papers, with the exception of Wellsted's passing remark about early excavations, the Hellenistic-Roman peridot mine has not been identified or described until now. The senior author visited the island and found the ancient mine on its south-east shore, along with some associated ruins and a water well (Figs 6, 7). The mine workings occupy the lower slope of the 235m-high peak known as Peridot Hill. They consist of about 150 open pits, which are up to 20m across with tailings piles rising as much as 5m above the pit floors (Fig 1). These were excavated in serpentinised peridotite and include deep adits as well as open pits, are on the north-east side of Peridot Hill (Fig 6) with the rest on the south-east side but above the ancient mine, which has thus been left undisturbed (Fig 7). The latter workings also produced some garnierite, a valuable nickel-bearing mineral. Peridot crystal fragments up to 1.5cm across are commonly found on the ancient mine tailings (Fig 8). The modern mine has reportedly yielded whole crystals up to 20cm in length and crystal fragments nearly as large as this, although of poorer quality, were observed by the senior author. Similarly large peridots undoubtedly came from the ancient mine as well. Indeed, as Pliny says, although with some misunderstanding, ‘topazos is the largest of gemstones’ (*Natural History*, 37.32.109). This claim is certainly consistent with the large size of some of
the Hellenistic and Roman ring stones, such as that shown in Fig 5.

Two sites with ancient ruins were found on limestone terraces near the mine. The easternmost of these is located within an embayment between two low hills, which provided it with some protection from the wind. It is dominated by the remains of a large (10 x 17m), triangular building with massive walls (1–2m thick), which are now largely collapsed but still standing in places up to 2m high (Fig 9). This structure is partitioned into two rooms but, oddly, lacks an obvious entrance. Its north wall (at right in Fig 9) cuts into the backing hill slope. Adjoining this building is a smaller and more lightly constructed one (7 x 7m with walls less than 1m high and wide), which is divided into two rectangular rooms. The low walls of this structure probably served as footings for either animal-hair tents or huts with a timber frame supporting sides and top of brush or matting. The higher-walled building beside it would have been roofed over with similar materials. The western site has a low, rectangular enclosure (5 x 9.5m with walls less than 1m high and wide) set in an area cleared of all surface rubble and separated from the backing hill slope by a line of stones (Fig 10). The walls at both sites were made with unshaped, dry-laid (unmortared) pieces of locally available stones, mainly limestone cobbles and boulders. The paucity of material remains at these sites, as well as their possible reuse or modification by later visitors to the island, make interpretation of the ruins difficult. It seems likely, however, that the eastern site served as the principal camp for the peridot miners.

Between the western ruins and mine, and also on a limestone terrace, is a water well (Fig 11). Wellsted mentions seeing this in his visit 175 years ago, reporting that it was used by turtle hunters, whose three stone huts and mounds of turtle bone and shell can still be seen today near the eastern ruins (Fig 7). Only the upper 5m of the well remains open, and the lower portion (about 2m in diameter) is blocked by rubble collapsed from above. Beside the well is a shallow depression where it seems another well was started and then abandoned.

Ceramics are rare in the mine workings and both ruins, but abundant around the well. Although later periods may be represented in the pottery corpus, the several amphorae observed...
date mainly from the mid 3rd to 1st centuries BC, with the rest extending into the Roman period, according to ceramics expert Roberta Tomber.

Zabargad is the quintessential desert island, with no surface water, bushes but no trees, and no animals apart from those frequenting the shore – seabirds, sea turtles and crabs. The miners could have obtained food not only from these sources, but also from the sea life that abounds on the island’s fringing reef and in its lagoons. Turtle shell was a valuable trade commodity during the Roman period and this may also have been a by-product of the mining operation. Some supplies, such as plant-derived foods, must have been brought from the mainland. The size of the workforce is unknown, but judging from the limited space available in the eastern camp and the difficult supply situation, there were probably not more than 10–20 men working on the island at any one time. The large number of mining pits and their great sizes are more a testament to the longevity of activity on the island than its intensity. Mining was probably restricted to the late autumn and winter months, which provided comfortable working temperatures and occasional rainfall, essential for replenishing the groundwater tapped by the well.

The peridot miners and their supplies almost certainly came from the Ptolemaic–Roman port city of Berenike, 80km north-west of Zabargad Island (Fig 4). Berenike is the closest potential source, but there are also archaeological connections between the two sites. For example, numerous peridot crystal fragments have been recovered from the early and late Roman levels in excavations at Berenike, and the pottery on Zabargad is typologically similar to that at Berenike. Additionally, there is Pliny the Elder’s claim (Natural History, 6.33.168, 37.32.108) that the mine and port were started during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246 BC) and this is in accord with the archaeological record. Berenike experienced three peak periods of activity: the mid 3rd to mid 2nd centuries BC of the Ptolemaic period, the 1st century AD of the early Roman period (the zenith of the port’s commercial prosperity), and the mid 4th to 5th centuries AD of the late Roman period. It is likely that mining activity on Zabargad closely mirrored the rise and fall of Berenike’s fortunes. The port city was abandoned by the mid 6th century AD, and with it the peridot mine on Zabargad Island.

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Legend has it that the city of Carthage, located at the northernmost point of Africa on the Gulf of Tunis, was founded in the late 9th century BC by Phoenician colonists led by Elissa – more commonly referred to as Dido – daughter of the king of Tyre in Phoenicia. The establishment of the city just to the west of the Sicilian Strait enabled the Carthaginians to control the sea-routes that linked the eastern and western basins of the Mediterranean, and the city came to dominate trade in the central and western Mediterranean for much of the first millennium BC (Fig 3). Carthaginian merchants created trading colonies in Sardinia, Corsica, and along the coast of Spain. Outside of the Mediterranean, they made voyages on the Atlantic as far north as the British Isles, and sailed southwards following the coast of Africa. In c. 500 BC, a Carthaginian fleet of 60 vessels commanded by Hanno appears to have reached as far as modern-day Senegal and the Gambia, while some historians claim the expedition even sailed as far as Cameroon or Guinea.

By 300 BC, Carthage was the most powerful and sophisticated city in the central Mediterranean, dependent on its dominant navy and merchant marine for wealth and security (Fig 1). However, like its Phoenician founding state of Tyre, Carthage had rivals and enemies, foremost among which were the Romans. The three Punic Wars, fought between Carthage and Rome, began in 264 BC and lasted for more than a century. In 146 BC, at the end of the final campaign, the Romans levelled the centre of the city. However, following an ill-fated attempt by the Roman Tribune Gaius Gracchus to establish a colony at Carthage in 122 BC, a new city was founded on the site by Julius Caesar in c. 40 BC, and this would once again grow into one of the great commercial centres of the Mediterranean.

In his recent book Carthage Must Be Destroyed: The Rise and Fall of an Ancient Civilisation (2010), the historian Richard Miles has emphasised that most of the stories about Carthage have come to us through the filter of Roman reports – commentaries that were inevitably biased. One such story, which proved remarkably popular in Rome and endures through to the present day, is that the Carthaginians sacrificed their children to the god Baal.

Baal is a Semitic word that translates as ‘god’ or ‘lord’, and the deity was worshipped by the city-states of Canaan (Fig 2). In c. 2800 BC, the citizens of Byblos, one of the north-easterly Canaanite/Phoenician city-states, erected a temple to the goddess Balaat-Gebal, ‘the Lady of Byblos’, consort to the god Baal-Shamem. The generic nature of the name Baal, and his consistent association with female consorts, has led scholars to argue for the underlying synchronicity between Baal and other Middle Eastern gods, most notably the Babylonian Marduk.

Baal was subject to negative propaganda from the enemies of the Canaanites and Phoenicians. Disparaging references to the deity abound in the Bible. In the Book of 1 Kings (16:29–34), Jezebel, the Phoenician wife of Ahab, King of northern Israel, is accused of practicing the worship of Baal and converting her Jewish husband, earning the full scorn of the prophet Elijah, while in the Book of Hosea (2:8–13), Jews are accused of worshipping Baal rather than Yahweh. Some scholars argue that biblical references to Baal include allusions to the practice of human sacrifice. For example, in Jeremiah 19:5 it...
is said: 'They have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as offerings to Baal.'

The biblical references to burning children as part of Baal-worship are ambiguous. A few verses further along in the book of Jeremiah, it is noted that: 'They built high places for Baal in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to sacrifice their sons and daughters to Molech' (32:35). However, while it is usual to translate יָּהָבָר – or transliterated, lhā’āvir – into 'sacrifice', it can also be rendered as 'passed through' – possibly a reference to a form of 'baptism by fire', or to a symbolic, rather than fatal, human sacrifice. Additionally, such descriptions may refer to the practice of cremation.

The place where this 'child burning' took place, located in the valley of Ben Himmon, near Jerusalem, was the tophet. The practices carried out there came under repeated condemnation by Old Testament prophets, until Josiah had them discontinued in the 7th century BC (2 Kings 23:10). The name tophet was also given to the open-air child cemeteries situated at the edge of Phoenician cities. One of the largest and longest-used of these was in Tyre's colony of Carthage (Figs 5, 7, 8, 9).

While the Jewish prophets of the Old Testament had a clear interest in defaming rival gods, they were also caught up in internal battles surrounding how best to define the Jewish religion. The sacrifice and/or salvation of the first-born child is a powerful image in Judaic sacred texts and representative of the relationship between Yahweh and his chosen people. It defines the status of Abraham; it underpins the festival of Passover, and is echoed in the language of Jesus in the New Testament (Fig 4). Key to this religious trope is the power of God to give children as well as to take them away. Sacrifice is practised to reach God, although the 'correct' form is to sacrifice an animal in order that the child be spared.

Child mortality rates were very high in antiquity and it is therefore not difficult to understand how practices associated with the burial of children were intrinsically related to God’s power. If cremation was a rite associated with followers of the Canaanite Baal, it is also perhaps not difficult to see why it would have attracted the opprobrium of the Jewish prophets, desperate to consolidate a distinctive identity through religious belief and ritual.

It was during the Roman Republic and Imperial periods that references to children being burnt as offerings to Baal became explicitly equated with sacrifice as Roman writers were eager to blacken the reputations of the citizens of their greatest enemy. The account of Diodorus Siculus (c. 90–21 BC) is especially lurid: 'There was in their city [i.e. Carthage] a bronze image of Cronus [the titan from Greek myth, often equated with Baal], extending its hands, palms up and sloping toward the ground, so that each of the children when placed thereon rolled down and fell into a sort of gaping pit filled with fire' (Library of History, 20.14.6). According to Plutarch (c. AD 45–120) the citizens of Carthage sacrificed children in order to appease Baal (On Superstition, 171) while the early Christian writer, Tertullian (c. 160–220), a native of Carthage, noted that the practice of infant sacrifice only ended when Rome finally destroyed the Carthaginian state in 146 BC (Apology for the Christians, 9.2–3).

Despite the Roman propaganda,
which has coloured opinions of Carthaginian religious practices through to the present, no archaeological evidence from the North African city has emerged that directly proves such stories. The Carthage tophet was in use for over 600 years, and more than 20,000 cremation urns were deposited between 400 and 200 BC. Excavation and analysis of 6000 urns by Professor Piero Bartoloni at Universita’ di Sassari, Italy, has revealed that most contained the remains of still-born babies. It was also noted in the May/June issue of Minerva (pp. 4–5) that recent examination of skeletal remains from 348 urns by University of Pittsburgh researchers revealed that most of the children died in their first year, with a sizeable number aged only two to five months, and that at least 20 percent of the sample was prenatal. According to Prof Schwartz, Director of the University of Pittsburgh excavations, ‘The idea of regular infant sacrifice in Carthage is not based on a study of the cremated remains, but on instances of human sacrifice reported by a few ancient chroniclers, inferred from ambiguous Carthaginian inscriptions, and referenced in the Old Testament. Our results... contradict the conclusion that Carthaginians were a brutal bunch who regularly sacrificed their own children.’

The Carthage tophet was dedicated to Baal Hammon and his consort Tanit. Hundreds of stelae were erected at the site, with simple representations of Tanit, and inscriptions to the gods. It appears to have been a sanctuary, open to everyone. The stelae record offerings to the gods made by people from Sicily, while some are also carved in Greek. The burnt remains of children are sometimes deposited with burnt animal bone.

It would seem that, as in many cultures, the Carthaginians gave still-born babies a particular status. Never achieving life, they could not be said to have died, and so were returned to the heavenly realm where they belonged. The method for giving these babies back to the gods was cremation. Anyone who doubts the poignancy of the rituals captured in this evidence need look no further for contrast than to Ashkelon, the 4th-century Roman site in modern Israel. Evidence indicates that the Roman bathhouse doubled as a brothel, and excavations revealed the bones of over 100 children in the sewer running underneath the building. Analysis of these bones showed that the babies had been discarded within a day of their birth, and are most likely to have been strangled or drowned. Discarding female babies in the Roman world was relatively common, but the majority of the babies found at Ashkelon were male. Could it be that the girl children were kept, in order to supply the brothel in future years? Recent reanalysis of remains of 97 babies originally excavated from the Roman site at Hambleden in Buckinghamshire in 1912 indicated that site, too, had probably been a brothel, and the infants had either died or been killed very soon after birth. The contrast with the ways in which babies were treated at Carthage could not be starker.

Archaeology can help reveal truths that would otherwise remain buried, and allow us to gain new and different insights into Carthaginian society, presenting a different view from that which the classical texts would have us believe.

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Cleopatra
queen of a lost land

James Beresford reviews the high profile exhibition currently on display in Philadelphia that examines the life of the famous female pharaoh, and the drowned cities of Ptolemaic Egypt

Since it opened in June, ‘Cleopatra: The Search for the Last Queen of Egypt’ has been one of the largest exhibitions on display in North America. Staged at the Mandell Center in The Franklin Institute, Philadelphia, the exhibition undoubtedly aims to tap into the interest generated by the instantly recognisable and evocative name of Cleopatra, the queen who defied the power of Rome and seduced two of its most powerful leaders. With more than 140 artefacts on display, most of which relate to the Ptolemaic period, visitors to the exhibition are also provided with fascinating insights into the material culture of the Hellenistic state that flourished from the end of the 4th century BC until the suicide of Cleopatra in 30 BC.

At the heart of the exhibition is research undertaken by Franck Goddio, Director of the European Institute for Underwater Archaeology. For the past 18 years he has been investigating the coastline of Ptolemaic Egypt, much of which was lost to the Mediterranean Sea in the 6th or 7th century AD as a result of earthquakes and flooding. Goddio has concentrated on the Eastern Harbour of Alexandria and the area of the Bay of Aboukir, using new satellite recognition technology to look beneath the sea and sand to create electronic maps of the areas as they might have appeared in ancient times (Figs 3, 5). In 1996, his team of underwater archaeologists began their first excavations, and they have since discovered the submerged royal quarters of Alexandria, as well as the lost cities and monuments of Heracleion and Canopus. Despite diving in the region for the last 14 years, Goddio and his researchers have still only been able to work on about two percent of the ancient cities that once stood on the shores of the Mediterranean.

While this is ostensibly an exhibition focused on Cleopatra, three of the galleries are given over to the drowned Ptolemaic cities and the artefacts recovered from them during Goddio’s investigations (Figs 1, 4, 9, 11). These provide visitors with a fascinating glimpse of modern underwater archaeological techniques, as well as the topography of ancient Egypt.

The first of the lost sites is Canopus (modern Aboukir) which lies 25km east of Alexandria. The exact date of the foundation of the city is unknown, but Herodotus, writing in the 5th century BC, mentions that, even at this time, it was considered to be an ancient port. Greek tradition claims that the settlement was established by the mythical hero Menelaus who, on his wanderings back to Sparta after the Trojan War, landed on this part of the Egyptian...
are two huge statues of a Ptolemaic king and queen, carved from red sandstone (Fig 6). The king is depicted as wearing the double crown, uraeus and kilt, and stands about 5m in height and weighs 5 tonnes. The two statues were discovered during Goddio’s investigations of the Heracleion area, and removed from the seabed in 2000. They probably originally stood in the Temple of Amun at Heracleion.

The fifth gallery of the exhibition features finds from Alexandria, largest of the Egyptian cities on the Mediterranean coast, and the political and cultural capital of the country during Ptolemaic rule. It was at Alexandria that Cleopatra resided in her palace, and on display in the gallery is a sphinx with a head that possibly represents Cleopatra’s father, Ptolemy XII Auletes (r. 80–58 and 55–51 BC), which is thought to have come from the queen’s private temple attached to the royal palace (Figs 11, 12). The display includes photographs and video footage of archaeologists mapping and excavating parts of the vast underwater
Ancient Egypt

site, with many of the artefacts recovered from the seabed on display in the gallery. Also on view is a large head carved from granodiorite, thought to represent Caesarion, the son of Cleopatra and Julius Caesar, who was murdered in 30 BC on the orders of Octavian, shortly after his mother took her own life (Figs 1, 7).

In addition to the underwater investigations, archaeologists are also hunting for Cleopatra on land. At the temple complex of Taposiris Magna, almost 50km to the west of Alexandria, a large archaeological investigation is underway. Kathleen Martinez, Director of the dig, theorises that Cleopatra and Mark Antony are buried there rather than in Alexandria. Construction of the temple at Taposiris Magna was begun during the reign of Ptolemy IV Philopator (r. 222–205 BC). However, unlike most temple complexes in Egypt, there is little in the way of iconographic or inscriptive evidence left on the walls. The site was occupied from its foundation well into the Christian era and beyond, making stratigraphic analysis difficult. According to Prof David Silverman, Curator of the Egyptian collection at the University of Pennsylvania Museum and currently co-director of the University of Pennsylvania Museum Expedition to Saqqara, Egypt, ‘There really isn’t anything textually, iconographically or archaeologically that connects Cleopatra directly with the site… but it was close enough to Alexandria for her to have utilised the area. Unfortunately, because we don’t have evidence for the traditions that the Ptolemaic rulers used for burial, we really don’t know which way to go on this one’ (Fig 13).

On display is also a Ptolemaic papyrus that may well bear the handwriting of Cleopatra (Fig 10). The papyrus, which was later recycled for use in the construction of a Roman period cartonnage mummy case, was discovered by German archaeologists working at the Abusir necropolis near Cairo, in 1904. The text outlines a set of tax exemptions from 33 BC granted on behalf of Publius Canidius Crassus, one of Mark Antony’s trusted generals. It is the single Greek word, ginesthoi, ‘make it so’, written at the bottom of the document, that some scholars believe is in the hand of the Egyptian queen. Less than two years later, Crassus would command the land forces at the disastrous Battle of Actium. Here, the combined fleet of Antony and Cleopatra was defeated by Octavian’s forces, precipitating an end to the Ptolemaic dynasty and the suicide of the Egyptian queen and her Roman consort.

The very name of Cleopatra is, of course, synonymous with beauty, and this connection is emphasised in the Philadelphia exhibition. Writing in the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries AD, Cassius Dio described the queen as a woman of ‘surpassing beauty… she also possessed a most charming voice and knowledge of how to make herself agreeable to every one. Being brilliant
to look upon and to listen to, with the power to subjugate every one' (Roman History, 42.34). However, as the slide-show in the exhibition clearly highlights, the images of Cleopatra that have been preserved on coins, statuary and reliefs provide very different appearances of the legendary beauty. Prof Silverman emphasised the problem when he noted to Minerva, 'We do not have portraiture on a large scale that can definitely be identified as Cleopatra. There are coins that are supposed to represent her, but once you go beyond that, we don't really know... Even if we had more representations of Cleopatra, it would be difficult to know how accurate they actually were. We have two depictions of Cleopatra on the walls of the temple of Dendera where she is shown with her son Caesarion. But even here, mother and son are shown as being roughly the same age, so they're clearly not intended to be accurate representations. Take Tutankhamen as an example: we know from the recent DNA research and CAT scans that he had buckteeth and a recessed chin. He was also apparently club footed, had bone necrosis, and was suffering from the early stages of malaria. Yet none of this is depicted in his statuary or on his reliefs. Therefore, even if we had more depictions of Cleopatra, they probably couldn't give us much additional information as to what she really looked like.'

The exhibition ends with a look at the enduring interest in Cleopatra that has endured for two millennia, manifested in numerous paintings and theatre productions, most famously Shakespeare's play from the early 17th century. Cleopatra has also appeared in cinema from the earliest days of moving pictures, with the silent film star Theda Bara starring in the title role of Cleopatra in 1917, and Elizabeth Taylor portraying the queen in 1963. Perhaps the most enduring question concerning Cleopatra is that of her death. While several ancient sources refer to the queen, along with two handmaidens, dying from the bite of an asp smuggled into her chamber in a basket of figs, most scholars today reject this view. In the recent book Cleopatra the Great (2008), Joann Fletcher points out that the venom from an asp - a name generally applied to a viper - causes an agonising death, with searing pains throughout the body, vomiting and incontinence, and leaves disfiguring swellings. By contrast, venom from a cobra would have been less painful and provided a more dignified death. However, cobras containing sufficient poison to kill an adult human usually have to be at least 1.8m in length, making it difficult to fit one discreetly in a basket of fruit. Furthermore, a cobra expends all its venom in a single bite, so at least three of these serpents would have been required to kill the queen and her two attendants. It therefore seems more likely that Cleopatra and her servants administered poison to themselves, either orally, or possibly intravenously through hollow pins. Writing more than a century after the event, the biographer Plutarch (c. AD 45–120) would note of the causes of Cleopatra's death that 'The truth of the matter is that nobody really knows' (Life of Antony, 86.2). Such a conclusion remains as true today as in antiquity and, unless the excavations at Taposiris Magna do discover the mummmified body of Egypt's last pharaoh, Cleopatra's death is likely to remain a mystery.

'Cleopatra: The Search for the Last Queen of Egypt' runs at the Mandell Center at The Franklin Institute until 2 January 2011 after which it will travel to four other North American cities. For more information, see www.fi.edu
It is difficult to imagine what Roman Britain might have been like at any point during the almost four centuries of Imperial rule, let alone to try to convey the impression to others in a museum display. However, the British Museum aimed to achieve this with the refurbishment of the Weston Gallery of Roman Britain in 2007. A new book by Richard Hobbs and the author, which encompasses historical sources, archaeological evidence and the very particular testimony of artefacts, has just been released. This is intended to accompany and supplement the British Museum display, as well as to serve as a new short introduction to Roman Britain as seen through the lens of material culture. The new volume seeks to present a picture of Roman Britain that gives due weight to both the exceptional and the mundane, does not over-simplify a complex and evolving story, avoids over-interpretation and respects the primacy of the material evidence. Above all, it enthuses and encourages the reader to discover more.

Artefacts and material culture – today’s words for the vast array of objects that people made, bought, sold, used and sometimes cherished – are the lifeblood of museums. For the student of Roman Britain, they provide a glimpse into how some of the people lived some of the time in certain places, and on occasion allow us to imagine not just what those people did, but also their aspirations and beliefs. However, the density and distribution of settlements and occupation debris is very uneven.

Interpretations of the meanings of objects are often articulated against

Life at the edge of empire

Ralph Jackson attempts to gain a clearer understanding of British life under Roman rule
the backdrop of difference, whether in terms of wealth or culture. There has been a growing appreciation of the lack of uniformity, not just of the Roman army in Britain, but also of the civilian population. The province of Britannia can be envisaged as a patchwork of civitates, territories based largely on the pre-Roman tribal boundaries and ruled by a Roman administration. Within these existed a network of military installations, rural tracts only lightly touched by change, and enclaves of Britons owing allegiance to different tribal groups. Emblematic of that difference are the two-piece copper-alloy kits termed cosmetic sets (Fig 2). These kits are found almost exclusively in Britain, where they originated in the late Iron Age. Associated finds and wear-traces indicate that they were toilet implements for the preparation of powdered mineral cosmetics, most likely colourings for the eyelids and face. As a purely British type, which co-existed in Britain alongside imported Roman cosmetic paraphernalia, they appear to reflect a specifically British social practice and one which continued after Britain had become a Roman province. The cosmetic kits thus emphasise British tribal customs rather than Roman identity. Diversity is also apparent in the written records, and the Vindolanda writing-tablets reveal the mixed ethnicities of the military community. The Uley lead curse tablets from Gloucester, in which appeals are made for divine retribution against criminals and others who have committed some wrongdoing, also attest to the continued use of Celtic names and language, and possible bilingualism.

Britain, like other provinces of the Roman Empire, was therefore a complex mixture of native people and incomers, soldiers and civilians. United as subjects of the Roman government, and by the use of Latin as a lingua franca, they nevertheless preserved an array of different customs that, over the course of Roman rule, sometimes merged or evolved in a variety of new ways. By careful interpretation of the surviving material remains, we can reveal something of that mixture.

Perhaps most visible in Romano-British society were the military, with distinctive arms and equipment, and a relatively large disposable income. The chillingly serene face-mask of the Ribchester cavalry sports helmet symbolises the ruthless power of the Roman army (Fig 1). Yet the human aspect of individual soldiers...
is powerfully expressed in tender epitaphs on tombstones and in the correspondence preserved in Britain’s oldest handwritten documents – the Vindolanda Tablets, discovered at the Roman auxiliary fort of Vindolanda, just to the south of Hadrian’s Wall (Figs 3, 4). The Tablets provide fascinating insights into the wide range of activities of an auxiliary regiment on Britain’s northern frontier, and into the everyday life and personal aspirations of individual soldiers at work and leisure. We read of hopes for promotion, requests for letters of recommendation, and meetings scheduled with high officials. Ordinary soldiers receive parcels of socks and underpants, scold fellow soldiers for failing to reply to letters, seek leave to visit the ‘bright lights’ of nearby Corbridge, and buy themselves extra rations or luxuries for religious festivals. Officers also make requests for increased beer rations for their men, or correspond about hounds, nets and snares for hunting. Financial concerns are highlighted in the most complete text, an unpretentious business letter describing the acquisition and supply of goods on a huge scale. In several letters officers’ wives arrange a birthday party and other visits (Fig 3), and mention family matters such as children and illness.

Other excavated evidence at Vindolanda, such as leather footwear in smaller sizes, reveals the presence of women and children in the garrison settlement, some even within the fort itself. Such artefacts therefore provide an important corrective to the frequent ‘invisibility’ of women and children in past accounts of Roman Britain. It is also appropriate, in an age when medical treatment was unpredictable and ill health was an ever-present worry, that the subject of illness was raised in the Vindolanda women’s correspondence. A recent discovery from Cholsey, Oxfordshire, a wafer-thin sheet of gold, probably dating to the 2nd or 3rd century AD, is a forceful reminder of the dangers of childbirth (Fig 5). Originally tightly rolled and worn as a protective amulet (lamella), it is a unique and evocative object with a timeless message of concern for a mother-to-be. The incised text, which combines Greek cursive script with magical signs, was a charm, seeking and harnessing divine and magical aid, to ensure safe childbirth for an expectant woman, Fabia, daughter of Terentia.

Women feature again in the hoard of votive material found at Ashwell, near Baldock, Hertfordshire, that included some 27 gold and silver objects, one of which was a silver figurine of the ‘new’ goddess Senuna (seemingly likened to Minerva), and more inscribed gold votive plaques than from any other find in the Roman Empire (Fig 6). The simple texts on the inscribed plaques and on the base of the figurine comprise a precious ‘roll-call’ of Senuna’s devotees, six men and three women, with a mixture of Latin and Celtic names. Of the female votaries Flavia Cunoris fulfilled her vow to Senuna with the gift of...
the costly figurine; Lucilia Sena gave a large silver plaque, and Cariatia Ressa one of gold; and we may presume that a fourth woman dedicated the most valuable element of the hoard, a suite of gem-encrusted gold jewellery. The hoard is likely to represent the wealthy tip of a large votive iceberg, just the most valuable part of a very much larger collection of temple votives, selected for burial at a time of trouble or unrest and never subsequently retrieved. Furthermore, excavations at the site testify to a cult of long standing and of more than purely local significance, which may have held a particular appeal for women.

Just a few miles from Ashwell is the site of Barkway, where, in the early 18th century, a similar hoard of votive material was discovered (Fig 9). These two finds serve as a reminder of the all-pervading influence of religion, whether in the physical presence of temples, shrines and objects of devotion, or in the constant religious observances that formed an integral part of daily life. The Barkway votives were dedicated principally to Mars, a popular Roman deity in Britain, where he was often conflated with native equivalents – at Barkway these took the form of the deities Alator and Toutatis. Another new find, from Stow-cum-Quy, Cambridgeshire, also links to the worship of Mars (Fig 7); it is the latest and arguably the finest of a series of bronze figurines depicting a mounted warrior, a British version of the Romano-Celtic rider god (who was probably another conflation of Mars with a native deity), with a regional cult centred in eastern England.

These are a few of the new finds that take their place alongside craftsmen’s tools, agricultural equipment, domestic utensils, religious objects, arms and armour, and personal paraphernalia as well as famous and spectacular finds including the tomb of Classicianus, the bronze head of Hadrian, the treasures from Corbridge, Mildenhall, Thetford, and Hoxne and the early Christian finds from Lullingstone, Hinton St Mary and Water Newton. Together, they help us to visualise in an ever more sophisticated way aspects of the rich and fascinating material culture of Roman Britain.

Life and death in early Byzantine Sicily

Punta Secca is a sleepy village in Ragusa province on the south coast of Sicily, known to millions of Italians as the home of TV cop Salvo Montalbano. In the 1960s it expanded eastwards along the coast as a demand for holiday villas grew. But the developers soon encountered a problem: a late Roman seaside village had occupied the very land earmarked for modern building. In one instance, in fact, a modern house had already been built right on top of an ancient one. The Archaeological Soprintendenza at Syracuse intervened, and Dr Paola Pelagatti and her assistants identified through surface clearance some 25 ancient buildings, scattered haphazardly along the coastal strip. Some were then partially excavated, including the village church. Most appear to have been houses, with rooms ranged around an open yard containing a staircase to an upper floor. Pelagatti suggests, on the basis of coins, that the village was occupied between the mid 4th and the mid 7th centuries AD. She also believes that the site is to be identified with the ancient Kaukana, listed by Ptolemy, but also mentioned by Procopius, who says that the emperor Justinian’s great general Belisarius (c. AD 500–565) set sail to conquer Africa from here in AD 533. The identification is far from certain (there is no harbour today, for example), but the name has stuck, and is universally used to refer to the site today.

In 2008 a team from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, under the direction of the writer, started a new three-year project to find out more about the settlement. The work was carried out in close collaboration with the Soprintendenza per i Beni Culturali of Ragusa province and its archaeological director, Prof Giovanni Di Stefano. Financial support came almost exclusively from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Fund of Canada. The aim of the project was to learn more about the evolution of the settlement over time, studying the material culture recovered from the site to develop a better understanding of both the nature of the local economy and the site’s links with the wider Mediterranean world.

One building, 6 in Pelagatti’s numbering system, was selected for detailed examination. On the surface, where just one course of walls was visible before the start of excavation, the building appeared to consist of four rooms ranged around a larger area interpreted as an open yard. Excavations in 2008–10 have confirmed this, and found that the whole structure is remarkably well preserved in drifting sand, the walls standing up to 1.9m high (Fig 1). But its survival from antiquity was a close-run thing. The new excavations found that a bulldozer had at some stage made a single sweep into the heart of the building from the beach, demolishing everything in its path. Rather shame-facedly, it seems, the razed part of the south wall was then skillfully rebuilt. No contemporary record is known of this vandalism, presumably the hand of a developer intent on building a modern house here in the 1960s.

The structure went through a number of changes in the course of a
Life and death in early Byzantine Sicily

Sicilian archaeology

extra room was added on to the north-west corner (4), constructed in a different style of masonry; unlike the other two rooms, its walls were never plastered. Later still the yard was extended westwards to meet room 4. The area (3a–b and 5) was also partitioned into three sections by two cross walls, one of which was almost completely removed by the 1960s bulldozer. All these different phases were compressed into a few short years, probably 40 or 50 years at most. Coins and African red slip ware, particularly those found in 2010, have helped to define closely the period of total occupation, from initial construction to final abandonment, as being c. AD 580/600–640. There is one worn coin of Tiberius II (r. AD 574–582) struck at Ravenna, four of Maurice Tiberius (r. AD 582–602) from the mint of Catania, a coin of Phocas (AD 602/3) issued at Kyzicus on the Black Sea (Figs 3a, 3b), and, of particular importance, on the floor of one room (2), three coins of the emperor Heraclius, the latest of AD 620/1, also from the mint of Catania (Figs 4a, 4b). There are no issues of the mint of Syracuse, which started operation in the 640s, and it seems that by then the building had already become enveloped in wind-blown sand and abandoned.

Everything about the plan of the building and the occupation material suggests that it was constructed as an ordinary house, probably around AD...
600, and lived in for perhaps 25 years at most. Then sand blew into the abandoned ground-floor rooms (1 and 2), and after a while, room 2 had some builder’s waste (including a broken-up concrete floor) tipped into it, before more sand blew in. Eventually the joists supporting the upper rooms rotted and the heavy mortar floors collapsed on top of the accumulated sand below: their sloping profile shows, unsurprisingly, how the accumulation of sand was highest close to the doorways leading into the open yard beyond (Fig 5).

While all this was happening, activity continued in the yard. It was here, in Area 5, that the most extraordinary discovery of all was made. A monumental, built tomb, standing 78cm above the mortar floor, had been inserted in one corner (Fig 6). Inside two bodies were found – a woman aged 20–25 years, who was 30 weeks pregnant, together with a child aged about 4, who had been interred afterwards (Fig 8). DNA analysis at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, has proved that the two are related, and that the child is female: almost certainly they are mother and daughter. The child was buried after her mother’s skeleton had defleshed, because part of it (her vertebral column and her sacrum) had been displaced to make room for the child. But the sepulchre had been opened later by tomb robbers looking for grave goods (if there had been any, none remained after their visit). The skeletons were then tidied up (the woman’s skull rather bizarrely contained some of her own foot and hand bones as well as parts of her child too), and covered by a substantial quantity of calcite, before the tomb was resealed. Intriguingly, the largest slab covering the tomb was pierced by a hole for the pouring of libations. Only one other libation hole in Sicily in a late Roman burial is known, and that was found in the S. Giovanni catacombs in Syracuse as long ago as 1893.

Other structures were also found in Area 5: a low platform, almost certainly an offering table (mensa), and a substantial bench (Fig 9). These are unique in Sicily, but are paralleled elsewhere in the Mediterranean (especially in North Africa) in funerary contexts. The finds associated with them were numerous: a Sicilian wine amphora and an oil amphora, also local, on top of the tomb; two locally-made cooking pots, one jammed inside the other; various examples of an African red slip ware dinner service; African lamps; a copper-alloy ring with a stylised roaring lion engraved on it, lost in front of the tomb; and three superimposed amphorae in one corner. One of the last, almost intact, has a graffito on it with an abbreviated name, NAEV(ius?), with a small alpha and omega scratched above and below it (Fig 7). This is a clear hint that the owner of the amphora, at least at some stage, was Christian – Jesus says (in Book of Revelation): ‘I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end.’

One African lamp also calls for special comment: the design on its discus appears to be unique (Fig 12). What does it show? Could it just possibly be the earliest depiction anywhere of the game we today call backgammon? We know that two-line boardgames existed in late antiquity (earlier Roman examples had three lines), because a poem in the Greek Anthology describes in detail a game (then called table, Latin tabula, ’[dice]-table’) played by the Emperor Zeno in the late 5th century AD. Moreover, the pointed lines (‘houses’) of the modern backgammon board go back at least to the 11th century AD, because surviving examples from such a board were found in a castle ditch at Gloucester. If this lamp does indeed depict a backgammon board, the design has changed little since the original introduction of the game in late antiquity.

The bench, the mensa and the libation hole suggest that feasts took place in Area 5 (which was open to the sky) in honour of the deceased. Cooking initially was done outside in the adjacent area of the yard: the base of a broken amphora there (marked on Fig 2) was used as a firepit, and there were other signs of extensive burning, as well as more broken vessels, including Late Roman 1 amphorae from the Eastern Mediterranean, and even a wine amphora from the Nile Valley. However, the visitors to the tomb encountered a constant problem...
with wind-blown sand, and rather than sweep it clean, they just continued their partying on top of the last accumulation. That visitations were periodic, rather than continuous, is suggested by alternating bands of clean and dirty sand noted in section in Area 5. Gradually the bench became covered with sand and was no longer serviceable. At that stage it was partially robbed, and some stones from it were used to build a little cooking hearth in one corner. Preliminary analysis of its contents shows the presence of charred remains of triticum aestivum, wheat, barley, millet, peas, eggs and lentils. Still the sand came in, but one smaller hearth was later built higher up in the sand, by which time the top of the tomb was scarcely visible. Wine glasses, a knife and some shellfish were found in niches in one wall above the mensa, presumably left there after the last gathering. At the opposite end of the yard, another cooking hearth was discovered at a high level, after most of the staircase leading to the upper floor had already silted up (Fig 10). By about AD 640/645, the fight with the advancing sand was given up, and the structure forgotten until the 1960s.

The alpha and omega on the amphora are not the only sign that both the visitors to the tomb and its occupants are likely to have been Christian. Several jugs have crosses scratched on them, while a Christian cross was also inscribed on one of the grave slabs. Another of the cover slabs on the tomb, reused upside-down in the final sealing, is even more fascinating: a framework of curving lines and small circles, very probably of magical significance, encloses a rectangular panel in which was inscribed ΑΓΙΟΣ, three times: hagios, hagios, hagios, ‘holy, holy, holy’. This is the trisagion, the beginning of a chant in the Byzantine liturgy (the equivalent of the sanctus in Latin), and a quotation from Isaiah 6.3. It provides clear evidence that the lady in the tomb was Christian. It was also written backwards, presumably likewise for magical reasons, in the hope of greater efficacy against possible tomb robbing. Sadly (as we have seen) the spell did not work.

We must assume, incidentally, that rooms 1 and 2 were not occupied at the time the tomb was inserted, because otherwise we have the uncomfortable scenario of the living and the dead cohabiting (unlikely except in a monastery). If this assumption is correct, the tomb was built c. AD 625, and visited for about 15 years at most. However, without clear coin evidence from Area 5, such a conclusion is not provable.

The biggest puzzle is why this woman and her daughter were buried here at all, in what appears to have been a house, presumably her own home. As is well known, burials took place in antiquity, except in exceptional circumstances, in cemeteries outside the settlement of the living. From the later 4th century onwards that rule began to break down, as martyrs were brought inside towns and villages to be buried in churches newly erected in their honour. From then onwards, even if martyrs were absent, it became fashionable for the great and the good in Christian communities to be buried in or near the church. The church at Kaukana, excavated by Paola Pelagatti and Giovanni Di Stefano, is no exception: there are burials in and around it. So why was our lady not laid to rest there too?

She might of course have belonged to a non-catholic Christian sect, and so not been welcome at the local church. But there is another possible explanation. Study of her skeletal remains by Carrie Sulosky of the University of Virginia has revealed that the woman’s cranium had a defect which she had had from birth – a tiny hole 3mm in diameter from which the meninges, the lining of the brain, would have partially protruded (Fig 11). This would have given her permanent headaches and a tendency to have periodic seizures. Was it just possible that this woman, who from time to time appeared to fall ‘dead’, and then to rise again, was treated by her friends and family as a holy woman, and so the object of veneration after her death – but was perhaps regarded by others as a strange and scary, witch-like individual, and so was avoided by the rest of the Christian community at Kaukana? We will probably never know for certain, but her medical condition (meningocele) does provide a possible explanation for the most extraordinary aspect of the Kaukana excavation – the presence in early Byzantine times of a tombe privilégée, the focus for veneration and funerary feasting, inside what looks to have been a private house.
Imperial imagery at Caernarfon

Abigail Wheatley reassesses the manner in which the medieval castle drew inspiration from both Roman architecture and Arthurian legend.

Caernarfon Castle, founded in 1283 by the English king Edward I (r. 1272–1307), is one of Britain’s most impressive surviving medieval castles (Fig 1). Its 13 tall, polygonal towers, emphasised by alternating bands of reddish and pale sandstone, still loom impressively over the town, the estuary over which it stands guard, and the ruined Roman fort of Segontium, which lies close by. Such an imposing structure – its design unique among castles built in Wales, or indeed anywhere else at this period – has naturally attracted a good deal of scholarship over the years, not least because the surviving documentary evidence associated with the castle is almost as impressive as the building itself.

In pioneering research published in 1967, the eminent castle scholar Arnold Taylor was able to identify by name a great many of the craftsmen associated with the construction of the castle, and also to offer an explanation for the very unusual design of the building. Taylor cited medieval documents suggesting that Edward I was aware of links between the Roman remains found at Segontium and the emperors Constantine (r. 306–312) and Magnus Maximus (r. 383–388). Taylor argued that Edward had sought to incorporate these imperial associations into the design of Caernarfon Castle, and that the polygonal towers and polychrome banding of the medieval building were specifically intended to bring to mind the Theodosian land walls of Constantine’s city (modern Istanbul, referred to here as Constantinople) (Fig 2), which are studded with polygonal towers and constructed using the characteristic Roman technique of masonry interspersed with courses of red tiles (Fig 3). Carved stone eagles perched on the battlements of the prominent Eagle Tower at Caernarfon Castle, the stumps of which can still be seen in situ, reinforced this imperial imagery for Taylor, with the eagle seemingly understood as a symbol of imperial power and Romanitas in the medieval world as clearly as it is today.

Taylor’s research remains a tour de force, and recent developments in the field of castle studies support the idea that the distinctive appearance of Caernarfon might have carried associations with Roman imperial figures...
such as Constantine and Magnus Maximus, or even with home-grown Welsh heroes such as King Arthur. These studies also suggest that imperial imagery was far more widespread in medieval castle architecture than Taylor realised, and cast some doubt on the specific associations he made between Caernarfon and the walls of Constantinople.

The Constantinople connection

The polychrome banding present at Caernarfon does indeed look similar to the tile-laced Theodosian walls still standing in Istanbul, even though the two construction techniques are very different in execution and scale. The Roman structure features polygonal towers similar to those at Caernarfon, but Taylor omitted to point out that the polygonal towers along the Theodosian wall are far outnumbered by those with a squarish section, which bear no resemblance to the towers at Caernarfon.

A still more fundamental objection to Taylor's comparison of the walls of Caernarfon with those of Constantinople arises when one considers how many medieval visitors to the castle in north-west Wales would really have appreciated a similarity to the walls of the capital of the Byzantine Empire, 2800km (1750 miles) away. Edward I himself, although crusading in the Holy Land in 1271–72, never visited Constantinople, and Taylor was only able to come up with one figure from Edward's court who might possibly have seen the Theodosian Walls in person. This would matter less if it could be demonstrated that contemporary descriptions of Constantinople made a great feature of the city's banded land walls. However, amongst numerous surviving medieval descriptions of the city, I have not been able to identify any that mention polychrome banding or polygonal towers. The surviving evidence seems to suggest that most medieval visitors to Caernarfon may not have appreciated any connection between the castle and the imperial city. Yet the undoubted expense involved in creating polychrome banding, and the additional effort of introducing a new and distinctive shape for the towers at Caernarfon (most other Edwardian castles in Wales have unbanded polygonal towers) nevertheless demand an explanation.

Home-grown alternatives

It is not necessary to look as far afield as the shores of the Bosphorus to find tile-banded Roman walls: these still stand in many parts of Britain to this day, at locations such as Pevensey, Portchester, Colchester and London (Figs 4, 5, 6, 7, 8). During the 13th century, when Caernarfon was built, it is fair to assume that these structures, and others like them which survived until 700 years ago, would have been far more prominent in the British landscape than they are now, standing out for their stone construction as much as for their distinctive polychromy.

There are even a few surviving examples of Roman polygonal towers to be found in Britain. Several unbanded polygonal towers still stand around the outer wall at the Roman town of Caerwent in south-east Wales. One tile-banded polygonal tower also survives in York, but perhaps the most interesting example is the banded Roman lighthouse that stands close to the key within the walls of the medieval castle at Dover (Fig 9). It originally tapered inwards to the top in eight neat steps, but these have been eroded over the years and as it now appears, at half its original height, there is only one obvious step, which is reminiscent of the stepped plinth or batter that skirts the exterior wall surfaces at Caernarfon Castle (Fig 3). Edward I must certainly have been aware of this structure as he knew Dover Castle well, not least from his imprisonment there during the Barons' War of 1264–67. Medieval documents show that this structure was correctly identified as Roman during the Middle Ages, and its foundation was sometimes even attributed to Julius Caesar himself. What better architectural precedent could the designers of Caernarfon Castle have found, in attempting to create a new style of castle architecture that would evoke the might of imperial Rome?

With local British architectural precedents for both the polychrome banding and the form of the towers at Caernarfon, there seems no need to invoke links with remote Constantinople. Yet this does not invalidate the links Taylor made between the castle, the nearby Roman fort at Segontium, and the imperial figures of Constantine and Magnus Maximus. Indeed, recent research has shown that

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Fig 3, The Eagle Tower at Caernarfon Castle. The remains of carved stone eagles still sit atop the battlements. Photo, and those that follow: Abigail Wheatley.

Fig 4, Roman tile-laced walls surviving at Pevensey. These walls now surround the medieval castle of Pevensey.

Fig 5, Standing Roman walls at Portchester, with visible tile-lacing. Here, too, Roman walls enclose a medieval castle.
the designers of Caernarfon Castle were not alone in choosing polychrome banded stonework for castle architecture sited in close proximity to Roman remains, and associated with various imperial figures ranging from Julius Caesar to Constantine.

Other banded castles
The 12th-century keep of Dover Castle features massive bands of alternating dark Kentish ragstone and light Caen stone, quite unlike the tile-laced Roman pharos nearby, but equally striking in appearance (Figs 10, 11). The 11th-century keep of Colchester Castle is actually built on the tile-banded plinth of a Roman temple, and the medieval stonework incorporates courses of distinctive red Roman tiles, often laid in neat rows resembling the Roman remains standing to some height in nearby parts of the town. The Tower of London, though now devoid of banded masonry, seems to have sported a banded gate of alternating courses of greeny-grey Purbeck and creamy Reigate stone, parts of which, dated to around the year 1240, were discovered during recent excavations in the moat, not far from the tile-laced Roman wall that can still be seen standing close to Tower Hill tube station (Fig 8).

It could be argued that the use of polychrome banding in these medieval castles may not be related to the Roman structures nearby – in two cases, after all, the appearance of the banding is not very similar to the Roman remains. However, at the Tower of London and Colchester, as well as at Dover and Caernarfon, surviving medieval documents show that the sites were linked by local legends to important imperial figures. The White Tower, the vast keep of the Tower of London, was thought to have been founded by Julius Caesar or by Brutus, descendant of the Trojan hero Aeneas, who has been regarded as the legendary founder and first ruler of the Kingdom of Britain. Colchester Castle was also sometimes attributed to Julius Caesar, while in the medieval period it was also thought that the castle may have been founded by the emperor Constantine’s grandfather.

These foundation legends are in one way quite different from those at Caernarfon and Dover, as they seem to associate the actual medieval castles, rather than the nearby Roman remains, with imperial figures. Modern archaeologists, with their firm grasp of stratigraphy and secure systems for dating architectural remains by typography and style, may be tempted to dismiss such medieval legends as ludicrous. After all, it is now accepted that castles are a characteristically medieval type of building, introduced to Britain at around the time of the Norman Conquest. Yet legends like these are valuable precisely because they demonstrate that, for medieval observers – who had no rules for establishing the date of different phases of construction – castle architecture could plausibly be seen as having ancient origins. In each of the cases discussed above, it can be argued that it was the close proximity of actual Roman structures that sparked off medieval speculations about the ancient origins of the site, and led some observers of the Middle Ages to confuse genuine ancient remains with earlier medieval structures nearby. It therefore seems possible that the medieval banded stonework at these sites may have been intended to imitate, or at least evoke, the Roman remains close at hand, and to reinforce the sites’ associations with impressive imperial figures.

King Arthur
A medieval awareness of, and interest in, Roman remains has long been noted by scholars of medieval literature such as J.S.P. Tatlock, who as early as 1950 suggested that the impressive Roman remains of the 1st-century AD Roman legionary fort at Caerleon in south-east Wales were behind the long-standing medieval literary tradition that King Arthur held court there. Caerleon was not the only Roman site to generate such Arthurian associations. Dover Castle and the Tower of London feature in various medieval Arthurian romances, and it is clear from the texts that the actual medieval structures are the ones referred to. Just as medieval legends claim classical figures founded specific castles, these

Arthritic romances backdate these castles by suggesting they were already in place at the time of King Arthur; once again, it seems that nearby Roman remains were probably behind such associations. The same pattern can be found at Caernarfon.

While the remains of the Roman fort of Segontium, near Caernarfon Castle, are today not as imposing as those at Caerleon, Segontium was nevertheless the largest Roman fort in Wales. The vast majority of the legionaries based at Caerleon had been relocated to Britain’s northern frontier soon after the fort was constructed, but the auxiliaries at Segontium were still carrying out major building work in and around their fort at the beginning of the 3rd century. It is not clear what state the ruins at Segontium were in during the Middle Ages, but various medieval
texts suggest impressive standing remains were still to be seen at the site, while coins and other Roman artefacts were regularly being unearthed at the fort. As well as a strong tradition of local legends associating the site with the Roman emperor Magnus Maximus, some of which even suggest that he founded the fort, it is surely no coincidence that the site sparked its own series of Arthurian legends involving knights of the Round Table, dragons, jousting and magic.

Magnus Maximus and King Arthur were particularly significant figures to the population of medieval Wales. Magnus Maximus was a 4th-century Roman general who, while stationed in Britain, rebelled and was declared emperor by his troops, leading them to the Continent in AD 383 and defeating the Western Roman Emperor, Gratian. Later he went on to rule most of the western half of the Empire for the next five years, until his defeat by Theodosius I and Valentinian II in 388. While some early medieval Welsh texts styled Maximus a tyrant, by the later Middle Ages he was regarded as a triumphant figure who successfully led British troops against the might of imperial Rome. (Constantine sometimes shares this association, Welsh histories occasionally styling him the son of Magnus Maximus, despite the fact that he was born some 60 years before Maximus.) Aspects of Magnus Maximus’ life also mirror those of Arthur: during the medieval period, both were very much accepted as Welsh in origin, while some of the tales surrounding the legendary king speak of him defying Roman demands for tribute and leading victorious British forces to Italy to challenge the Romans.

Edward I and the politics of power
Understanding the symbolic role of Maximus and Arthur may at first make it seem less likely that the new castle at Caernarfon, built to celebrate Edward’s conquest of Wales in the wars waged between 1276 to 1283, might invoke two Welsh national heroes. However, absorbing local legends in this way was very much part of Edward’s strategy of conquest and power-politics, and he frequently appropriated local legends when attempting to consolidate his hold over Wales and later Scotland. His strategy was to absorb such symbolism and remake it as his own, thereby neutralising any power it had in the cause of Welsh nationalism, while at the same time drawing on the traditions of such legendary heroes to heighten his own status as a conqueror. Edward’s political capitalisation on Arthurian legend is well known: in 1287 he participated in the ceremonial reburial of the supposed remains of King Arthur and Queen Guenevere at Glastonbury Abbey. He thereby associated himself with Arthur’s power, while demonstrating to the Welsh that Arthur, their ‘once and future king’, was most definitely dead and would never return to save them from English rule. It seems significant that in 1283 – the year in which construction began at Caernarfon Castle – Edward had participated in a similar ceremonial reburial held among the ruins of the Roman fort at Segontium, in which a body claimed to be that of the father of emperor Constantine, possibly the remains of Magnus Maximus himself, were interred. Once again, the political symbolism is clear: Edward honoured a local hero, while demonstrating his own power over the legend.

It is in this context of local Roman remains, ancient legends and power politics that the unique design of Caernarfon Castle seems to fit most comfortably. The polychrome banded walls and distinctive polygonal towers should no longer be seen as an evocation of exotic Constantinople, but as something much more powerful, local and real for medieval observers: the remaking of Roman remains in Britain – an architectural style associated with home-grown heroes who had taken on and defeated the Romans; men whose legendary deeds were in turn symbolically usurped and defeated by the wiliest of medieval kings.

Additional details of the material covered in this article can be found in Abigail Wheatley’s ‘Caernarfon Castle and its Mythology’, in The Impact of the Edwardian Castle in Wales, edited by Diane Williams and John Kenyon (Oxbow, Oxford, 2010). (See the review of the volume on pp. 58–59)
A small exhibition in south London uses the legend of St George to examine the differences between Western and Eastern representations of dragons.

A dragon dwelt in a lake in Libya and could only be appeased by the inhabitants of the nearby city of Silene feeding their children to the beast. One day, the king’s daughter was selected for sacrifice, and, as she awaited her fate by the waterside, a gallant knight happened to ride past. Although she urged him away, the soldier lingered and as the monster appeared from out of the water and advanced on the princess, the knight ran it through with his lance, wounding the creature. Leading the dragon into the city, the hero finally killed the beast in front of the inhabitants, after receiving the promise that they would all convert to Christianity.

The story of St George and the Dragon has proved to have enduring popularity and, ever since its inclusion in the *Legenda aurea*, the *Golden Legend*, written by Jacobus de Voragine (c. 1230–1298), the archbishop of Genoa, the legend has been instantly recognisable to most people in the West. However, the portrayal of the dragon in this hagiography is very different to how such creatures are represented in the cultures of the East. In a recently opened exhibition at the Museum of Croydon, in south London, ‘Dragon Tales’ takes the traditional story of the Christian saint and seeks to contrast the depiction of his scaly opponent with how these mythical beasts are regarded in Chinese myth and legend. The exhibition, limited to the small Riesco Gallery, is aimed primarily at children, encouraging them to explore the differences between Eastern and Western dragons. However, there are a number of exhibits from the museum’s wonderful collection of Chinese ceramics, together with loans from the British Museum, that will prove interesting to all age groups.

**Western tradition**

The tale of George and the Dragon predates the *Golden Legend* by several centuries. Depictions of the saint battling the dragon date back to the early 11th century, while George himself is thought to have been a soldier in the Roman imperial guard of the emperor Diocletian during the later 3rd and early 4th centuries, who was martyred for his refusal to sacrifice to the pagan gods. Unsurprisingly, the concept of a warrior saint proved popular with medieval soldiers on Crusade, and, on returning...
from the Holy Land, they introduced veneration of St George across Europe. He remains Patron Saint of England, Portugal and Malta, and his battle with the dragon is the most enduring story of an early Christian saint.

Two icons on loan from the British Museum reflect this classic version of the George and the Dragon legend. The earliest of these is a 17th-century Greek wooden panel, painted with egg tempera, which was originally part of a diptych or triptych (Fig 1). In the lower half of the panel, St George, mounted on a white horse and dressed in a cuirass and flowing red cloak, spears the dragon through the mouth. Above the dragon-slaying scene, St Athanasius (c. 293–373), one of the great theologians of the early church and a staunch opponent of Arianism during the First Council of Nicaea in AD 325, makes a gesture of blessing with his right hand.

The second icon comes from the Russian Orthodox tradition and features a scene very similar to that depicted in the earlier Greek painting. It shows St George, this time mounted on a grey charger, riding down a grey-black scaled dragon, which has red out-stretched wings and a long serpent-like tongue (Fig 2). Once more, the beast is depicted as skewered through the mouth by a lance, the other end of which bears a Russian Orthodox cross, the short top bar representing the plaque hung above Christ’s head; the middle bar the crossbeam to which Christ’s hands were nailed; and the slanted lower bar the footrest. To the right, the princess stands near the tower guarding the entrance into the walled city beyond, while the king and queen look down from the battlements. The princess’s girdle is tied about the neck of the dragon, allowing George to drag the wounded creature into the city and slaughter it after converting the population to Christianity.

The last of the images of the legend, painted in vibrant reds, blues and whites, comes from the Christian Ethiopian tradition (Fig 3). St George uses two spears to slay a snake-like dragon, while, to the right, the maiden Birutawit avoids the battle by hiding in a tree. Upon the death of the dragon, a small demon emerges from the body of the beast. In the upper portion of the painting, the infant Christ is held by Mary, while sword-wielding archangels Gabriel and Michael stand to the right and left.

The icons and paintings on display at the Museum of Croydon are stylistically very different, but they are all instantly recognisable depictions of the story of the late Roman knight conquering the evil dragon; a battle often regarded as symbolic of the triumph of Christianity over paganism. However, despite the indelible links to Christianity, a number of ancient myths have also been put forward as forming the basis upon which the later medieval tale of George and the Dragon was founded. For example, Terhub, the Hittite god of the sky and thunderstorms, was said to have fought and killed the dragon Illuyanka, while the Babylonian god Marduk was the slayer of Tiamat, the great monster of chaos who dwelt in the ocean. The Greek myths of Perseus killing the sea serpent Cetus and so saving Andromeda, or Bellerophon slaying the Chimera, have also been regarded as ancient antecedents for the George and Dragon story.

There are also medieval claims for the origins of the story of George and the Dragon. The most famous of these is the tale of the ‘dragon’ of Worminford, in the English county of Essex. The monstrous creature, a crocodile brought back from the Holy Land by king Richard I, Couer de Lion, brought terror to the area at the end of the 12th century. The crocodile had been placed in a cage in the Tower of London, from which it subsequently escaped, crawling into the River Thames and eventually finding its way along the coast to a small village on the River Stour, where the terrified inhabitants pacified the creature with human sacrifices. When the supply of
Mythical creatures

Chinese tradition

In the Eastern tradition, both the physical appearance and the character of the dragon are very different from those commonly envisioned in the West. Chinese dragons generally tend to be far less aggressive than their Western counterparts and, rather than displaying a proclivity for incinerating gallant knights or dining on swooning maidens, in Chinese myths the dragon is regarded as a highly auspicious creature whose presence is to be welcomed. As one of the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac, the years associated with the dragon have also proved to be those with the highest birth rate – many couples, limited by the country’s one-child policy, have chosen to have babies born in the auspicious years associated with the dragon’s powerful nature.

The ‘Dragon Tales’ exhibition draws on the museum’s impressive collection of Chinese ceramics, built up by Raymond Riesco in the first half of the 20th century and bequeathed to the people of Croydon on his death in 1964. Consisting of 230 objects of porcelain, earthenware and stoneware, ranging in date from c. 2000 BC through to the 19th century, those ceramics with depictions of dragons have been separated from the rest of the collection and displayed on the lower shelves of the Riesco Gallery to allow younger visitors to better see the images of the mythical beasts.

One of the earliest ceramics from the collection is a green glazed container featuring a moulded and carved dragon across the upper portion of the jar, and a bird perched on the top of the lid (Fig 4). Made in the Longquan area of Zhejiang province during the Southern Song dynasty (AD 1127–1279), this would have been one of a pair of jars buried in a tomb and originally held an offering of grain. The dragon is intended to represent the cast, and would have been positioned on the eastern side of the tomb. The other jar would have portrayed a tiger, symbolising to the west, and stood on the opposite side.

Although the dragon from the tale of St George dwells in a lake, in Western legend dragons are generally fire-breathing monsters and are closely associated with that element. By contrast, the Chinese dragon is a creature of the water, associated with rivers, streams and other watery environments, as well as with rainfall – when angered the creatures had the capability to deliver downpours and floods. A Chinese alms bowl from the Riesco collection highlights the connection between dragons and the weather, with the creature depicted as flying through blue clouds while chasing a flaming pearl (Fig 5). The inscription reads: ‘Given on an auspicious day in the spring month of the first year of the Tianqi period of the great Ming dynasty’, dating the bowl to 1621.

Chinese dragons, especially when coloured gold or yellow, were also closely linked to royalty. Two wine cups on display in the Museum of Croydon make reference to such royal associations: a stemmed Ming dynasty (AD 1368–1644) goblet features an inscription on the base which reads ‘A gem for the palace on the Road’, indicating it was probably used by the Chinese royal family and their household (Fig 6). A later porcelain cup was made during the last two decades of the reign of the Qing emperor, Kangxi (AD 1661–1722), whose 61-year rule was the longest in Chinese history. Decorated with a sinuous dragon, covered in golden scales and with a red head and claws, this wine cup was also intended for use by the royal household (Fig 8).

Like the earlier Ming dynasty dragon, the creature painted on the Qing wine cup has five toes on each of its feet, another indication that it was associated with royalty.

Between East and West

Straddling the traditions of the dragons as portrayed in East and West is a peculiar lead and copper alloy statue of a winged beast that comes from the Helmand region of Afghanistan (Fig 7). Though included in the dragon exhibition, the small statue could perhaps be better described as a griffin, with the head of a lion rather than that of an eagle. The statue also has the body of a lion or other large cat, rather than the lithe form of a serpent found on Chinese dragons or that of a lizard common to the dragons of the West. Its wings resemble those of a bird rather than a bat.

While various dates have been put forward for the statue, the winged beast was probably created in the late antique period; the stylised leaf decoration on the chest is closely paralleled on figural copper alloy Roman and Sasanian furniture legs, while the profile of the tail is similar to handles on Roman skyphoi and some post-Sasanian metalwork and ceramics.

The acanthus leaf decoration on the chest also points to a Partho-Sasanian date. Thermoluminescence testing of the metal also indicates the statue dates to the 1st millennium AD.

The current exhibition is very much focused on the George and the Dragon story and representations of Chinese dragons, with no examination of the more positive portrayal of dragons in Western countries such as Wales, nor of their representation in different Far Eastern cultures. However, according to Brigid Bradley, Assistant Exhibitions Officer at the Museum of Croydon, ‘After this loan, which will go on until the end of the year, we’ll hopefully have a rolling programme of loans from the British Museum, so all next year will continue with the dragon theme, and we hope to go deeper into the different interpretations of the dragon in myth and legend.’

‘Dragon Tales’ runs in the Riesco Gallery, the Museum of Croydon, Croydon Clocktower, until 31 December. Entry is free. For further information: +44 (0)20 8253 1022; www.museumofcroydon.com. See p. 62, for accompanying lectures and presentations.

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Fig 4. Ming dynasty porcelain wine cup with stem features a dragon coloured a deep red, with a long flowing mane trailing from his head. c. 1500–1600, H. 8.7cm; Diam. 10.2cm.

Fig 5. Leaded bronze figure of a winged beast. Parthian or Sasanian, about 3rd century AD. Said to have been found near the Helmand River, Afghanistan. The body has been purposely roughened to create the impression of fur. H. 24.9cm, L. 32cm.

Fig 6. Ming dynasty wine cup, decorated with a golden dragon, used by the household of emperor Kangxi. The cup dates to AD 1700–1722, H. 4.9cm; Diam. 6.1cm.

Fig 7. Leaded bronze figure of a winged beast. Parthian or Sasanian, about 3rd century AD. Said to have been found near the Helmand River, Afghanistan. The body has been purposely roughened to create the impression of fur. H. 24.9cm, L. 32cm.

Fig 8. Porcelain wine cup, decorated with a golden dragon, used by the household of emperor Kangxi. The cup dates to AD 1700–1722, H. 4.9cm; Diam. 6.1cm.
Although today Qatar is rising to prominence as one of the wealthiest of the Arab Gulf states, historically the country is something of an enigma. For example, the Qatar peninsula, which points northwards from the middle of the Arabian Gulf (Fig 1), did not routinely appear on maps until the mid-19th century. Before then the towns and villages of Qatar were shown as part of a gently curving coastline which continued unbroken from Kuwait to Abu Dhabi. Similarly the history of Qatar is less well known than that of its neighbours, although recent research and documentation have begun to place the country within its historical context.

The first scientific archaeological fieldwork in Qatar was carried out by a Danish expedition in the 1950s, which focused on prehistoric remains. In 1973 the British archaeologist Beatrice di Cardi carried out a rapid survey of archaeological sites of all periods, and this has formed the basis for subsequent fieldwork in the country. Later in the 1970s and early 1980s, a series of French missions conducted excavations and surveys in the region of al-Khor on the east coast.

The results of this first phase of fieldwork provided a fascinating glimpse at the archaeology of Qatar. For example there is little evidence for human occupation in Qatar prior to the Neolithic, and the earliest excavated settlement of al-Shagra on the south coast has been dated to 6000 BC. Other sites from the Neolithic period include the site of al-Da’asa on the west coast, where shards of ‘Ubaid pottery from Iraq indicate contacts with the ancient civilisations of southern Mesopotamia as early as the 5th millennium BC. French excavations in the vicinity of al-Khor revealed a number of Bronze Age sites from the 2nd and 3rd millennium, including a series of installations for producing purple dye from the shells of sea snails. The most significant late prehistoric remains discovered thus far in Qatar are in the vicinity of Umm al-Ma’a on the west coast, and comprise a large number of burial mounds. A small proportion of these have been excavated to reveal burials with iron swords dating from the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD. From the Islamic period the most significant work has been the investigation of the Abbasid site of Murwab by a series of French expeditions. The site includes a fort, a mosque, and more than 250 houses, and is one of several 8th-century Abbasid sites known in the Arabian Gulf.

In recent years, the Qatar Museums Authority, under the leadership of Abdullah al-Najjar and the Head of Antiquities, Faisal al-Naimi, have begun a vigorous programme of archaeological research aimed at providing a firm base for understanding Qatar’s unique archaeological heritage. Several archaeological excavations had been undertaken in Qatar in previous years, although the majority of these were quite small in scale, and were predominantly concerned with prehistoric settlement and connections with the ancient civilisations of Mesopotamia, which controlled the north-western shores of the Gulf. However, Qatar also has a rich heritage from the Islamic period (AD 630–1900), and the country contains interesting sites that were virtually unknown before the recent initiatives carried out by the Qatar Museums Authority.

One of the most significant features of the Qatar coast is the presence of the world’s largest pearl bank, which lies off the north-west shores of the country. The location of this pearl bank, together with the availability of fresh water around the northern coast, led to the development of a large number of settlements during the 18th and 19th centuries. Some of these sites are mentioned in historical documents, but neither their date nor size is generally recorded in the literature. However, the largest of the coastal settlements was the ancient city of Zubara located near Ras al-Sharig on the north-west coast of Qatar. The large and abandoned site was also one of the few settlements to...
The mosque is located at the highest point of the site in the centre of the settlement, and faces west towards the sea. It comprises a small rectangular building with a courtyard, portico and prayer room with a recessed mihrab (prayer niche) and minbar (pulpit). A series of rooms were also attached to the rear of the mosque with their own separate entrance. The mosque appears to have been built in several phases, the last of which saw the structure supported by exterior buttresses. Finds within the mosque complex included an inscribed piece of plaster from near the mihrab and a hoard of silver Indian rupees hidden in the wall of one of the rooms in the rear (Fig 2).

The fort is located to the south of the mosque and comprises a large rectangular enclosure with at least one corner tower (the excavation is incomplete and it is anticipated that more towers will be located). The masonry of the enclosure wall and the corner tower are of high quality, though no more than two courses high. This suggests that the stones were removed for use in other (later) buildings on the site (Fig 3). One of the more interesting finds from this part of the site is an iron cannonball, which was found next to a collapsed section of wall (Fig 4). It is thought that the cannonball dates to the bombardment of the site by British ships in the late 19th century. Cannonballs were also found elsewhere on the site and may account for the final destruction of the settlement.

The third main element of the site to be excavated was a large courtyard house at the northern end of the site. This building was evidently in use for some time, and at least four different phases of construction were identified. In addition there were several destruction levels, which appear in the dramatic form of thick, burnt layers. The earliest phase of occupation at this site is represented by a series of post-holes cut into the bedrock. Neither the date nor function of these is known, but their presence clearly indicates human activity prior to the construction of the stone buildings.

The finds from the excavation included a variety of artefacts, ranging from Chinese coffee cups to bronze bells and wooden smoking pipes (Fig 5). The date range of this material appears to be 18th–19th century, though as yet there are no definitive dates for the earliest phase of the site.

One of the most interesting aspects of the site is the presence of more than 15 date-presses (Fig 6). A date-press (madbassa) is a specialised storage area where dates are stored in sacks for several months, during which time date syrup seeps through the sacks and is collected in special jars or tanks. Date-presses are known from at least the 3rd millennium BC, and have been found near date palm plantations in most countries of the Gulf, from Oman to Kuwait. However, date palms are not numerous in Qatar today, suggesting that the fruit may have been imported to the site from neighbouring regions such as al-Hasa in Saudi Arabia, or the islands of Bahrain. Alternatively, date palm plantations in the area may have disappeared due to a change in the groundwater conditions in northern Qatar.

This excavation, together with the other archaeological projects in northern Qatar, will significantly change our understanding of the late Islamic period in the Arabian Gulf. From being an area largely unknown to archaeologists, Qatar will become a key component in understanding how the Gulf became integrated into international trading systems from the 15th century onwards.

Dr Andrew Petersen is a lecturer in Islamic archaeology at the University of Wales, Trinity St. David, and has carried out fieldwork across the Middle East.
The landscape and the people who inhabit it, as well as the history that has unfolded within it, have been at the heart of many of Michael’s documentaries, and the books that he has written. However, with globalisation, many areas are losing their local distinctiveness. ‘The world is a wonderful place, but all differences are being eroded, and these encoded identities that have taken millennia to build up are steadily being destroyed. However, a place like Tamil Nadu is very interesting because the colonial missionar­ies didn’t manage to destroy the traditional way of life. Their classical civilisation, with a living classical language and the literature that goes with it – older than any European literature apart from Greek, and more extensive than any ancient European literature – is still alive, and the people still worship in the ancient cult centres. It is one of the few places in the world where you can still see an ancient civilisation which survives side-by-side with a modern lifestyle.’

In addition to his background as a researcher of Anglo-Saxon history, Michael also benefited from working in current affairs. ‘As a journalist back in the 1970s, covering issues like the nuclear industry, you had to constantly talk and listen to people. I’ve tried to carry that into the historical documentaries, and I always like making films where we travel through the landscape and engage with the local people. When we were making In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great (1997), and were crossing the Hindu Kush (Fig 6), we stayed in the house of a local warlord and he showed us this inscription with the strange Bactrian/Kushan script, with its strange mix of Greek, which he had dug up. It’s since been deciphered and has enabled the reconstruction of the Kushian Empire, their King Lists, and their chronology.’

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Beginning with In Search of the Dark Ages in 1979, which focused on Britain from the collapse of Roman power in the early 5th century though to the establishment of a united Anglo-Saxon England, Michael’s work has proved extremely influential, and helped bring about a major change in how historical documentary films were presented. ‘There were some absolutely wonderful, groundbreaking programmes being made in the 1960s and on into the 70s, but they all tended to be very formal and were dominated by upper-middle class men talking down to the audience. When we made In Search of the Dark Ages, we tried to bring a slightly devil-may-care, dynamic approach to the filming, with scenes set down in sewers, or flying in helicopters. We were fortunate to receive good critical reviews for that series, and this “looser” style seems to have set a trend for many later historical documentaries’, he says.

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the audience requires a delicate balancing act; one that Michael admits seldom keeps everyone happy. ‘Sometimes academics accuse filmmakers of being too simplistic in how we portray history. They’re right in that history is never black and white, and there’s always at least two versions to the story, and you do therefore find yourself ironing out some of the complexities of history. However, we’re trying to strike an emotional chord with the viewer – if we can gain their interest and enthusiasm for a topic, then we’ll hopefully motivate them to go and look elsewhere to supplement their knowledge. A TV programme would die if it were just dry historical fact; equally, it wouldn’t survive if it was just fluffy historical romance – you’ve got to try and combine the two. I feel that’s always been the case, not just for TV documentaries, but also in the great literary works of history.’

During the last three decades, there have been changes in how historical documentaries are made. ‘When we were filming In Search of the Trojan War (1985), we spent a whole programme looking in detail at inscriptions on Late Bronze Age Hittite tablets recovered from central Anatolia (Figs 2, 3). We probably couldn’t really do that today because there’s far more pressure to cover ground more quickly. TV is a transient medium and you make programmes primarily to popularise a topic and inspire people. I was asked recently by the BBC about releasing In Search of the Dark Ages on to DVD, but I’m very wary about doing so because they’re now 30 years old and were shot on 35mm film, and we made them very quickly on a very low budget – I remember once holding a blow torch under the camera to make the air wobble when we were trying to give a sense of Eric Bloodaxe burning Ripon! I didn’t want them to be packaged and resold because they were made so cheaply and everything is far more sophisticated now.’

Michael still writes academic articles on early medieval England, with a particular interest in the period of Alfred the Great and his successors. ‘There’s a great deal about these people in the 10th century that isn’t at all attractive: that combination of piety and war-like cruelty; their strange agonising over masculinity, or their perception of kingship, and the pull between the demands of the Christian church and the dictates of the older Germanic traditional society. However, I suppose the person I’d most like to meet from history would be Shakespeare. I was lucky enough to make a four-part documentary about him in 2003 (Figs 4, 5), and I find English history of the late 16th century just so interesting. As a film-maker I’m also influenced by all manner of things. Cultural myths and stories like Shangri-La, or the legends surrounding King Arthur are extremely interesting. That combination of myth and history is also very popular with TV audiences and documentaries such as In Search of Myths & Heroes (2005) can generate large viewing figures’ (Fig 7).

Carrying out research and filming in many politically unstable parts of the world has occasionally led Michael into some tense situations. ‘In the mid 1980s I visited the Congo while working on Great River Journeys, and there were one or two dangerous moments back then, with the director and myself held up at gunpoint once. There was also a mild exchange of gunfire up in the Hindu Kush when we were filming In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great. Since we were making that film in the mid 1990s, Afghanistan has become far more dangerous, and while we always used to think that making documentaries and being a journalist brought with it some form of safe conduct, and provided some form of protection, that’s no longer the case. I’m not a particularly brave person, but I do get curious, and there’s a danger that curiosity will sometimes lead you too far. I couldn’t resist the invitation to go to Iraq in 2006. I was contacted by General Fry, the commander of British troops in Iraq, who asked if I was interested in accompanying him to the north of the country to try and locate the battlefield of Guagamela, where Alexander the Great’s final great battle against the Persian king Darius took place. So I took a small film crew, flew into Kuwait, went from there into Basra, and on into the rest of Iraq. Fortunately we didn’t have any problems – although I didn’t tell my mother I
was visiting the country until after I got back! I still have a strong connection with Iraq. I filmed in the country in the late 1980s and early 90s when we made *Legacy* (1992), a documentary that focused on the early civilisations – probably the only film of its kind that’s ever been made in Iraq. I also became involved in human rights issues in the country, and in 1989-90 we filmed *Saddam’s Killing Fields*, which documented the destruction of the Marsh Arabs. That meant I became persona non grata in Iraq and couldn’t go back to the country until after the Saddam Hussein era. However, at some point I’d love to do a really big film on Iraqi civilisation, especially since what’s happened over recent years has been so awful, so to make a positive film about the country and its fascinating history would be fabulous.

As this issue of *Minerva* went to press, Michael and the rest of the documentary team at Maya Vision in central London were still working on the latest project, *The Story of England* (Fig 9). As Michael explains: ‘Over six episodes we focus on a single village – Kibworth in Leicestershire – through which we can follow the whole of English history. It has wonderful literary evidence relating to the medieval period, with records of the people who lived in the village from then through to the present, so we were able to reconstruct peasant family trees spanning 12–15 generations. The village also has a strong industrial heritage, with 18th-century canals, railway tracks and framework knitting. Although we knew virtually nothing about the community from before the Norman Conquest, we carried out a large archaeological dig, with 55 pits (Fig 10), which came up with artefacts from the prehistoric, Roman, Anglo-Saxon Migration period, as well as medieval objects.

‘Communities only exist because of the group feeling and solidarity. By looking at a single village like Kibworth, you can see how communities function throughout history. How they organise their grassroots education, law courts, their work, and their charity. It’s a chance to see how history percolates from the bottom up, rather than just from the top down… Looking at a small village like Kibworth, you can read of individual peasants participating in Simon de Montfort’s revolution (1263–64), becoming Lollards, or being executed in London. We get all this in one village.’

Michael has a number of other projects on the horizon. ‘Since making *The Story of India* (2007) (Fig 8), there has been pressure to do *The Story of China*, but that’s going to be a massive undertaking. We do have plans to make three short films on the Anglo-Saxon kings, Alfred the Great, Edward and Athelstan. The idea stemmed from a flippant remark I made during the recent exhibition “Henry VIII: Man and Monarch”. During a BBC meeting I happened to mention that all the talk of Henry being the most important ruler in British history was nonsense – it was Alfred the Great and his successors who were the progenitors of England. I’ve also long held an ambition to write a book about the epic of Gilgamesh – about how one story transmutes through millennia into the literature; through Homer, and on into the stories of the *Arabian Nights*. This “after-life” of a story, which gets transmitted through time and across cultures, is fascinating.

*The Story of England* will be shown on terrestrial television in Britain at the end of this year, and will be out on DVD in the next few months. A book of the same name is also available. For more information on Michael Wood, and the work of his production company, Maya Vision International, see the website www.mayavisionint.com
It is fair to say that the great majority of metal detectorists take up the hobby in pursuit of the dream of finding buried treasure. In May, this became a reality to an anonymous – but no doubt jubilant – treasure-seeker in north-west England, with the find of a lifetime: a splendid Romano-British cavalry helmet. Known now as the Crosby Garrett Helmet, after its point of discovery in Cumbria, the spectacular find was unveiled at Christie’s in London in September, where it is being readied for auction as we go to press (Fig 1).

In an exclusive interview, Georgiana Aitken, Head of Antiquities at Christie’s, London, told *Minerva*: 'Under the 1996 Treasure Act, the Crosby Garrett Helmet, as it is made of bronze, is free to be sold on the open market... Having informed the relevant authorities about the discovery, he [the finder] then contacted Christie’s and brought it to London for us to examine. The frenzied level of interest has been unprecedented on both a national and international level, and I am delighted that a discovery as important as this is making headline news. ' The sale of this unique item of militaria immediately sparked a fierce debate about its future custody, and led to the rapid inauguration of the Tullie House Museum Appeal, whose aim is to raise sufficient funds to purchase the helmet for the ‘Tullie House Museum in Carlisle, Cumbria.

The find from Crosby Garrett comprises the main bronze helmet together with a tinned bronze face-mask. The helmet is especially elegant, formed as a Phrygian-style cap, with a forward-curved tip surmounted by a solid-cast griffin depicted with outstretched wings and its right paw resting on an amphora (Fig 2). This latter feature is unique to this example in Britain, although Ralph Jackson, Senior Curator of Romano-British collections at the British Museum, points out that the griffin crest may parallel a lost bronze figurine of a sphinx, which might have originally been attached to the Ribchester Helmet. Even more enigmatic is the face-mask of the Crosby Garrett Helmet, which has a youthful countenance, openwork eyes, incised lashes, arching eyebrows of a herringbone pattern, pierced nostrils, and partially open lips, with tight curls of hair falling over the brow.

Obviously military in character, Roman helmets of this kind were not intended for use on the battlefield, but were worn for *hippika gymnasia* (sports events involving cavalry). In the 2nd century AD, the biographer and
military commander Arrian, writing in his *Ars Tactica*, describes how teams were divided into defence and attack, and that headgear such as the Crosby Garrett Helmet characterised the wearer as a man of rank and accomplished horsemanship. For Georgiana Aitken, the helmet is testimony to the might and wealth of the Roman army in Britain at this time. ‘A mark of rank, this helmet would have been a high-status object. It is now patinated to a mossy green colour, but originally the ethereal bright white tinned bronze face-mask, contrasting with the golden hair and helmet, would have been a formidable sight as it shimmered in the light galloping towards you.’

When interviewed by *Minerva*, Darren Bradbury, an eminent conservator and restorer of ancient art, provided an extraordinary insight into the condition and restoration of the helmet. ‘The Crosby Garrett Helmet must be within the top five most impressive artefacts that I have ever worked on. However, having been found on British soil, this is most important historically and to me personally. The mask was incredibly intact with just minor damage to the surrounding locks of hair and the chin, where only a handful of fragments had broken away. The helmet, however, was in a flattened and crushed state and in 30 fragments. As restoration progressed, the true shape of the helmet, an impressive Phrygian-style cap, became apparent. Once reworked, the helmet and mask only required light removal of earth to reveal a fine surface patina. It really is a privilege to have been involved with such a truly magnificent object.’

The extraordinary artefact is the most splendid example discovered in Britain, and displays remarkable artistic qualities and a state of preservation that would normally be associated with more arid regions, such as Egypt. Its celebrated predecessors were the Ribchester Helmet, found in Lancashire in 1796 and presently displayed in the Romano-British gallery of the British Museum (see p. 30, Fig 1), and the Newstead Helmet, Roxburghshire, discovered c. 1905 and now on public view in the Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh.

In terms of artistic parallels, similar helmets are depicted on Trajan’s Column in Rome. As for tangible remains, H. Russell Robinson, former Curator of the Royal Armouries, has identified a fragmentary helmet of Phrygian style, discovered at Ostrov in Romania (AD 150–200). From the same region, and dating to the mid 2nd–3rd century AD, is a splendid example of a Roman cavalry parade helmet in this style, in the collection of the Mougins Museum of Classical Art. In this case, the helmet terminates in the form of an eagle’s beak (Fig 4). Parallels for the face-mask are Robinson’s Cavalry Sports Type E helmets, especially an example from Nola, southern Italy, in the British Museum (AD 75–125). Face-masks of similar character, such as the bronze mask of a youth from the early 1st century AD, are also an important part of the collection of the Mougins Museum (Fig 3).

As the fate of this helmet is now being decided, Georgiana Aitken is confident it will generate substantial interest from bidders: ‘This is an exceptional object and it will find its right price at auction. Antiquities are now starting to make the prices they deserve. In the economic downturn, people who may have lost faith in markets and financial products and are looking to diversify: investing in art is a tangible way of doing that. Antiquities are a hugely rewarding and enjoyable investment and as exceptional objects become scarcer, I see this upward trend continuing.’

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**Fig 1.** Bronze parade ground cavalry helmet found at Crosby Garrett, Cumbria, England, c. late 1st–2nd century AD. H. 40.7cm.

**Fig 2.** The Phrygian-style cap of the Crosby Garrett Helmet is surmounted by a griffin depicted with its right paw resting on an amphora.

**Fig 3.** Roman bronze face-mask of the Silistra type, 1st–2nd century AD. 23.5cm. MMoCA.91.

**Fig 4.** Roman bronze Phrygian-style cavalry helmet, mid 2nd–3rd century AD. H. 36.2cm. MMoCA.492.
Sotheby’s

Sotheby’s New York on 11 June, offered a wide selection of Egyptian art, Greek pottery, Classical marble sculpture, Near Eastern antiquities and Islamic works of art. A total of 102 lots were offered, with 79 sold for a grand total of $17,479,940. Antiquities specialist at Sotheby’s New York, Florent Heintz, told Minerva: ‘Although the June sale was very successful overall, it was outstanding in that it included three of the top ten lots ever sold at auction in New York or London.

‘The first of these, a cuirassed torso, had so much power and grace, combined with exquisite detail. It is without debate the finest object of its kind ever to come to public auction.’ The torso (Fig 1), from a marble statue that had once borne a depiction of one of the Julio-Claudian emperors – probably Augustus, Tiberius or Claudius – had been in an Austrian family collection since the mid-19th century. Carved in two parts, the figure stands with the weight on his right leg. He wears a tunic, leather corselet with fringed lappets falling at the waist and shoulders, bronze cuirass, and paludamentum falling from the left shoulder over the back. The breastplate is decorated in relief, with the god Sol emerging from the waters in a frontal quadriga carved on the chest. On the abdomen two Victories flank a trophy and hang shields upon it. Below is a large inverted palmette with scrolling acanthus and rosettes on either side. The upper row of pteryges is decorated with alternating feline heads above lotus flowers and rams’ heads above palmettes; the lower row with alternating gorgoneia and palmettes, a bearded head interrupting the sequence on the right hip, the neck carved out for insertion of a portrait head. It had an estimated price of $800,000–1,200,000, but sold for a highly impressive $7,362,500.

From the same collection came a unique c.1st-century AD marble group of three satyrs battling a serpent (Fig 2). Florent Heintz comments: ‘This is not only a highly dynamic composition and the only such group to have survived from antiquity, it also has the oldest and most prestigious provenance we were ever able to establish for one of our objects: Lorenzo de Medici (1449–1492) himself. The figures are important from an art-historical point of view, as a source of inspiration for one of Michelangelo’s earliest works, The Battle of the Centaurs.’ With an estimated price of $300,000–500,000, the group achieved a remarkable $3,442,500.

An enchanting Roman marble bust of Athena, dating from the 2nd century AD (Fig 3), derives from the Greek prototype known as the Athena Giustiniani, named after another Roman example now in the Vatican museum. It sold for $4,114,500. Florent Heintz describes the piece as, ‘Simply mesmerising… It is all Athena should be, both beautiful and commanding.’
Fig 8. Four pottery vessels, north-western Iran, c. 1st half of the 1st millennium BC. L. 31.1–35.6cm. Sold for $16,250. Lot 93.

Fig 9. Persian bronze lamp in the form of a hare, Khurasan, c. 12th century AD. H. 13.3cm. Sold for $2250. Lot 100.

Fig 10. A Bactrian variegated hardstone disk, c. late 3rd/early 2nd millennium BC. Diam. 43.2cm. Sold for $21,250. Lot 80.

Fig 11. A Cycladic marble figure of a goddess, Early Bronze Age II, early Spedos, c. 2600–2500 BC. H. 22.2cm. Sold for $446,500. Lot 14.

Other highlights of the sale included an Egyptian limestone relief fragment of a queen, from Amarna (Fig 4), which achieved $230,500. Created during the reign of Akhenaten, the relief shows the head of a royal consort, probably Queen Kiya, her graceful hands raising an offering to the Aten. The existence of Queen Kiya, ‘great beloved of the King… beautiful child of the living Aten’, was only recently rediscovered. According to Dorothy Arnold’s The Royal Women of Amarna: Images of Beauty from Ancient Egypt (New York, 1996, pp. 14–15, 105–106), this rather enigmatic ‘other woman’ in Akhenaten’s life was virtually eradicated from official records later in his reign, her name and figure changed to those of a daughter of Nefertiti, either Meretaten or Ankhesenpaaten.

An Egyptian bronze head of the goddess Isis (Fig 7), from the stern of a sacred barque, fetched $22,500. The object dates to the 21st/30th dynasty (c. 1069–945/c. 380–343 BC), and shows the goddess wearing a ribbed tripartite wig, vulture headress and diadem of uraei. The missing horns, disc and uraeus were cast separately, and the interior would possibly have been filled with lead.

A number of zoomorphic pieces from various periods were sold. An Egyptian black serpentine figure of a baboon (Fig 5), sacred to the moon-god Thoth and dating from the 18th–26th dynasty, (c. 1570–1293 BC/664–325 BC) sold for $37,500, more than three times its estimate. A bronze figure of a cat (Fig 6), seated with its long tail curled around the front of the forepaws, the body bearing traces of gilding, sold for $16,250. The piece was formerly in the collection of the German poet, dramatist and essayist Dr Arthur Drey (1890–1965). Four pottery vessels in animal form, comprising three rhytons with ram-headed spouts and tripod feet and a fragmentary pouring vessel in the shape of a stylised duck (Fig 8), sold for four times their estimate of $3,000–5,000. The vessels originate from north-western Iran, c. 1st half of the 1st millennium BC. A Persian bronze lamp in the form of a hare (Fig 9), probably dating to the 12th century AD, with wick holders flanking the shoulders and its tail forming the filling hole, the body decorated with guilloche and scrolling vine, fetched $22,500 – below its estimate of $3000–5000.

Two of the earliest pieces in the sale were a Bactrian variegated hardstone disc (Fig 10), dating to c. late 3rd/early 2nd century BC, and a Cycladic marble figure of a goddess, dating to early Bronze Age II, c. 2600–2500 BC (Fig 11). The goddess is depicted lying with her knees slightly bent, forearms resting beneath her breasts. The spinal column is indicated by a wide shallow groove and traces of red pigment mark the neck, chin and hairline. The piece achieved $446,500 – well in excess of its estimate of $180,000–250,000. Amongst the more modern pieces were several Persian hookah pipes and cups, from the mid 19th century, embellished with polychrome enamel and gilt. Lot 53, decorated with three registers, each containing four medallions ornamented with floral bouquets, embracing couples in European dress, and portrait busts, its deep blue background ornamented with richly gilded relief floral motifs (Fig 12), sold for $16,250.

The highest price achieved for an Attic vessel was $230,500, for a black-figured amphora, depicting a scene from the gigantomachy and attributed to the Swing Painter, c. 540–530 BC (Fig 13). It features an echinus foot, cylindrical handles, and shows Athena and Ares fighting two giants. The goddess wears a peplos and holds a shield emblazoned with a bird; Ares wears a chlamys and Corinthian helmet, the reverse painted with a man preparing for battle. The amphora has been exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum and Yale University Art Gallery. See the January/February 2010 issue of Minerva for more antiquities sales reports.
The Impact of the Edwardian Castles in Wales
Edited by Diane Williams & John Kenyon
Oxbow books, 2010
211pp, 16 colour plates, 124 b&w illus
Hardback, £35

From the construction of the castle at Builth in 1277, to the start of work on the defences at Beaumaris in 1295, the English king Edward I (r. 1272–1307) built or refurbished 14 castles in Wales. As Professor Huw Pryce notes in the foreword of this new book on the subject: 'The Edwardian castles of Wales are remarkable monuments of European significance. Most obviously, their unprecedented scale and consummate design represented the determination of Edward I to secure the Welsh territories he had conquered in 1279 and 1282–83 by imposing a new military and political order.'

This new publication stems from a conference held at Bangor University in September 2007, commemorating the lasting legacy of Edward's castle building programme that took place following his two wars against the Welsh Prince Llywelyn the Last. While conference proceedings are all too often random collections of papers intended only for academic consumption, the essays brought together in this volume should appeal to anyone with an interest in castles and medieval history. Even readers unfamiliar with this period of medieval history will find this to be a highly readable volume, unfettered by the sexism and chauvinism that was so prevalent in earlier scholarship.

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Despite the unquestioned importance of another prominent individual who also played a crucial role in the construction of the mighty castles of Caernarfon and Conwy, Richard was also working at Rhuddlan Castle a year before Master James arrived on the site. His skills as an engineer were also put to other uses in Edward's service, building a siege engine for use against Dryslwyn Castle in Carmarthenshire in 1287, and constructing a bridge of boats across the Menai Strait during Edward's campaign in 1282 and again in 1295.

As expected from a publication such as this, there are essays focused on detailed aspects of the construction process of these mighty structures, such as Dr Graham Lott's research into the 'Building Stones of the Edwardian Castles' (pp. 114–120). Close examination of everyday life within the castles is approached in essays such as 'The King's Accommodation in his Castles', by Jeremy Ashbee (pp. 72–84), and Peter Brears' 'Food Supply and Preparation at the Edwardian Castle' (pp. 85–98). Abigail Wheatley also emphasises the complex mythology and imperial imagery that was purposely built into castles such as Caernarfon (see Minerva, this issue, pp. 38–41).

In 'Welshmen in the Armies of Edward I' (pp. 175–182), Adam Chapman provides a fascinating investigation into the prominent role of Welsh soldiers who fought with the English during Edward's conquest of Wales, and were also influential in the king's later campaigns against the Scots. It is Edward's series of campaigns in Scotland that are scrutinised in Wayland's Work?, and the various sources of evidence, the book is divided into five major sections: 'Barbaric Style', 'Style and Evolution', 'Crafty Smiths', 'Wondrous Works', and 'Reading the Record'. Within each of these sections are major subdivisions, so that the contents list is a virtual index. The bibliography and index provided in the end matter are also valuable. Five appendices cover summaries of pottery stamps, buckles and wrist clasp typology. A fourth, a late addition covering taxonomy, features the recently discovered and much publicised Staffordshire Hoard of Anglo-Saxon gold and silver, keeping the book up-to-date.

As the authors rightly point out, Anglo-Saxon art and objects have, for many years, been the Cinderella of artistic and archaeological studies – so much that has been written is often available only in scattered references and
by Chris Tabraham in 'Scottorum Malleus: Edward I and Scotland' (pp. 183–192), a paper that takes as its title Edward’s famous soubriquet ‘Hammer of the Scots’, which is inscribed on the king's tomb in Westminster Abbey. Dylan Foster Evans' 'Twr Dewr Gwncerwyr (A Brave Conqueror's Tower)' (pp. 121–128), also provides an examination of Welsh poetic responses to the Edwardian castles. Perceived in a number of ways in medieval and early modern Welsh poetry, the castles were sometimes praised, in other poems their destruction was prophesised, while others highlighted the racial tensions that existed between the English colonists and the native Welsh in the surrounding countryside.

The book is dedicated to the memory of Richard Avent, Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings for Cadw, the Welsh historic environment service. In his posthumously published 'The Conservation and Restoration of Caernarfon Castle 1845–1912' (pp. 140–149) is an examination of how the mighty castle was saved from decay after a report in 1815 noted: ‘The whole castle is in a most ruinous state... and every part is on a great dilapidated State, without roofing.’ Yet less than a century later, the castle had been restored and provided the setting for the ceremonial investiture of the Prince of Wales – the future Edward VIII.

However, it is not only the fabric of the Edwardian castles that requires careful restoration. In ‘King Edward I’s Castles in North Wales – Now and Tomorrow’ (pp. 198–202), Alun Ffred Jones, the Minister for Heritage in the Welsh Assembly Government, provides a fascinating insight into how the power and authority the English warrior king invested in the walls of his castles continues to generate feelings of resentment and oppression among sections of the Welsh population, even after the passing of more than seven centuries.

Dr James Beresford

The Land of Ionia. Society and Economy in the Archaic Period

Alan Greaves

Willey-Blackwell, 2010
xvi+269pp, 38 figs and 6 tables
Hardback, £65

Alan Greaves follows up his earlier book, Miletos: A History (Routledge, 2002), with this new volume, in which he takes a broader look at the region of Ionia – the central west coast of modern Turkey. The area will be well known to many readers for its rich archaeological remains, such the city of Ephesus. Many of the visible remains today belong to later periods, but this book is concerned with the archaic period (c. 700–480 BC). It was a time of many developments, for which the region is – and was – justly famed. This book is welcome as one of the very few in English on the region, and although it is not designed to be a survey per se, its accessible overviews make it a very useful introduction and handbook to Ionia’s archaeology. Greaves is at pains to show that the popular image of archaic Ionia as a culturally and politically coherent region of ancient Greece is at least partly a fallacy – a product of a classicist bias, which relies almost wholly on ancient texts to contextualise the archaeology, rather than the long-term or medio-historical data that can be supplied by other disciplines such as geology, climatology, and paleobotany. This is starting to change, and although data for these aspects is not yet fully available, Greaves’ book is aimed at pushing this agenda forward. The author offers sample cases showing how attention to the geographic context of Ionia in particular can illuminate aspects of its archaeology and history.

In accordance with the annales approach, the book has a pyramidal organisation, starting with the long-term (but not fixed) characteristics of geology and geography, and moving up through more medio-historical aspects such as settlement patterns, subsistence and trade to the architecture, art and ornament of the region. What becomes abundantly clear through the book is that Ionia in the archaic period can only really be appreciated as resulting from its geographic context: river mouths along a coast with abundant harbours, but most importantly, in Anatolia. The author claims not to overburden the reader with footnotes, but there are plenty of references for those who want further details – particularly recent excavation results. The clear explanations of theory and thematic divisions of the chapters make the book useful for teachers looking for readings on specific topics. The perspective of Ionia as a region of Anatolia, rather than an isolated Greek enclave, understandable in terms of the literary sources which are so much more abundant for ‘mainland’ Greece, makes this an important contribution to the scholarship of Ionia. Its accessibility and organisation provides a much-needed bridge between Classical and ‘mainstream’ archaeology, and brings both the ideas and this intriguing region to a wider readership.

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Anglo-Saxon art is especially intricate in the splendid manuscripts that survive, as well as the metalwork and sculpture. Much of it has hidden meanings and references that are simply not visible to the uninitiated, and much still defies interpretation. Close study of the actual objects, or of good photographs, has made it possible to bring out new evidence, and also to correct previous errors and oversights in interpretation. The large series of splendid detailed line drawings presented in this volume open windows on aspects not hitherto noticed. This is well brought out in the specific sections as styles are analysed and placed into context, the various techniques used are explained, and metal artefacts are described and examined by type. There is also a review of non-metallic objects.

It is in Section V, ‘Reading the Record’, that all these many threads of interpretation and description are brought together, the mythology of Britain during this period, and the intricate designs and compositional elements that include zoomorphic and anthropomorphic elements, notably in the latter the various male aspects. The works of earlier authors in this field have been closely studied and weighed up in view of later finds and developments. Indeed, the book is built ‘on the shoulders of giants’, those who in earlier years ventured into a field of study that was all too frequently overlooked or dismissed.

The heading of Section IV, ‘Wondrous Works’, can well be applied as a description to this book – it is a wondrous work that will long be referred to as a ready source of information for the 300 years under consideration. Wayland’s Work does indeed fulfil its stated objective.

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