A Classical Garden
The history of Little Sparta

Celebrating Caligula
Maniac or media victim?

Meet the Moche
The uninhibited potters of Peru

The artist as Minotaur
Picasso’s journey into the labyrinth

Games for the Gods?
Well-oiled cheating, murder and mutilation at the ancient Olympics

Interview with the top-selling historian, writer and broadcaster Tom Holland
Manic or media victim?
2,000 years after his birth, is it time to reassess Caligula? Was he a sadistic psychopath, or did he simply suffer from a bad press? Kirsten Amor

Games for the gods?
Well-oiled cheating, brutal mutilation, even murder, all played a part in the Olympic Games in Ancient Greece. David Stuttard

The avant gardener
In Little Sparta, the garden of the late poet/artist Ian Hamilton Finlay, Classical pastoral and martial influences make their mark. Lindsay Fulcher

A gallop through history
The journey of the horse from the wilds of Kazakhstan to the Royal Stueds seen in a new exhibition at the British Museum. Philippa Scott

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Picasso used Classical antiquity as a portal into his creative unconscious as can be seen in his etchings in The Vollard Suite. Charles Darwent

Meet the Moche
A Peruvian people who built large earthen temples, had a taste for human sacrifice and produced extraordinary pots. Murray Eiland

The ‘rude highlanders’ of Samnium
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Topical themes

Although Minerva is inextricably linked with the past, we do find current events linking the old and the new – which is not unusual.

Love them or loathe them – no one will just be able to get away from the Olympics this summer – not even in Minerva – but we go far beyond Stratford to the original Games. International terrorism and performance-enhancing drugs were not a problem for the competitors in Ancient Greece, but they did have to contend with losing the odd ear or eye, or even their lives while taking part – especially if they competed in the pankration, the most violent event. David Stuttard gives you more of the gory details on pages 12 to 16.

Sometimes we plan themes in the magazine and, at others they just seem to appear. In this issue, for example, we report on the history of the horse and its relationship with mankind. Not only a four-legged friend, the horse has been an integral part of trade, warfare, invasion and empire-building. If Man had not climbed on to its back, our history would have been very different. The Arabian horse, which is especially prized, is currently being celebrated in an exhibition at the British Museum.

Talking of horse-lovers, we have a 2,000th anniversary piece on the Emperor Caligula who, portrayed him as a complete narcissist who did anything he liked (including murder, rape, incest, extortion, torture) just because he could. But is this a fair representation of this notorious Roman emperor? You decide.

In the last issue of Minerva our feature on operas inspired by Classical mythology and ancient history was illustrated by a picture of a Minotaur; in this issue, Picasso depicts himself as the hairy, horned bull-man in some of his wonderful etchings from the famous series known as The Vollard Suite, which is currently on show at the British Museum.

We take a look at the deep impact that the Samnites (‘rude Highlanders’) as Livy called them) made on the history of pre- and post-Roman Italy and, while we are there, one writer goes off the beaten track following in the footsteps of George Dennis, who discovered several Etruscan sites in the late 19th century. We also introduce you to the Moche, a Peruvian pot-making people, take an aerial view of Celtic sites in England and interview the best-selling narrative historian Tom Holland. Then, there is a report on a new French MuséoParc reputed to be on the site of Alesia, where the Gauls, led by Vercingétorix, fought a pitched battle against the Romans – and lost. But at Little Sparta, the late Ian Hamilton Finlay’s Classically inspired, radical garden in Scotland, the artist won the first of two battles against the Region. I stayed at Little Sparta for a nervous three days while I was interviewing this brilliant, but reputedly volatile, artist in 1980s. Luckily we hit it off and he did not set his vigilantes on me!
A gold crown presented to Queen Victoria in 1862 has always been thought of as a symbol of power from the Inca civilisation, but new research reveals that its origins may be even more intriguing.

Deborah Clarke of the Royal Collection, who began researching the crown’s history in preparation for the exhibition Treasures from The Queen’s Palaces, asked two experts at the British Museum to look at this extraordinary object. During testing and examination, it was established that the crown, excavated in Chordeleg in southern Ecuador in 1854 and later presented to Queen Victoria by the president of Ecuador, may not have been made by the Incas.

The crown was examined by Dr Colin McEwan, Curator for Latin American Collections, and Susan La Niece, Senior Metallurgist in the British Museum’s Department of Conservation and Scientific Research. They came to the conclusion that the style of the crown and techniques used to make it indicate that it was probably fashioned by skilled metalsmiths belonging to the Cañari ethnic group in the Cuenca region of southern Ecuador, where it was found.

The Cañari ruled a powerful confederation that was not conquered by invading Inca armies until the mid-15th century – one of the last areas to be added to their empire.

Dr McEwan has determined that this crown is part of an impressive hoard that includes objects now held in the National Museum of the American Indian, in Washington DC.

He explained that the crown ‘was clearly used by a person of high status as an emblem of lordly or royal authority, forming part of a suite of golden regalia, along with bracelets and anklets.’

‘Stylistic details suggest that the crown belongs to a pre-Inca Northern Andean gold-working tradition, which encompassed the coast and northern highlands of Peru and the southern highlands of Ecuador … the crown could have been worn by a Cañari lord well before the Inca invasion in the 15th century.’

The crown’s spectacular gold plume, though, suggests a second theory: it may have been made by local Cañari craftsmen employed by their royal Inca conquerors. This plume was designed to shimmer and move, to catch and reflect the sunlight, like the feathered plumes that Inca royalty wore in their crowns; it would have been a symbol of solar power and the Incas’ divine right to rule.

‘It’s a little bit of a detective story, and we have only one part of the jigsaw puzzle,’ explains Dr McEwan.

‘The plume raises the question of whether it was commissioned by the Incas and provides valuable clues to the relationship between the Inca and the Cañaris.

The application of innovative analytical techniques such as XRF [a non-destructive X-ray technique used to analyse metals] here at the British Museum allows us better to understand the technology deployed to make the crown, and also now to compare it stylistically with other far-flung objects in other museum collections.

‘We are planning a scientific paper that will finally reconnect the crown to the related body of objects from the same tradition for the first time.’

Lindsay Fulcher

The crown is on show in Royal Collection Treasures from The Queen’s Palaces at The Queen’s Gallery, Palace of Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh (0131 556 5100; www.royalcollection.org.uk) until 4 November 2012.
The spread of Stone Age agriculture

A collaborative research study between Uppsala University, Stockholm University and the University of Copenhagen has discovered that migrants spread agriculture across Europe during the Stone Age.

Four skeletons discovered on the Swedish island of Gotland were tested by DNA analysis. One skeleton was found to be a female farmer who lived during the Stone Age, 5,000 years ago.

The female skeleton has been named Gök4, and is believed to share genetic traits with modern-day people who live in the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and Asia. The other three skeletons were hunter-gatherers, all of similar age, whose DNA was found to match that of Finnish people of today.

‘We have been able to show that the genetic variation of today’s Europeans was strongly affected by immigrant Stone Age farmers, though a number of hunter-gatherer genes remain,’ says Assistant Professor Anders Götherström of the Evolutionary Biology Centre, who co-led the research project with Assistant Professor Mattias Jakobsson.

‘What is interesting and surprising is that Stone Age farmers and hunter-gatherers from the same time had entirely different genetic backgrounds and lived side by side for more than a thousand years, to finally interbreed,’ says Mattias Jakobsson.

Scholars believe agriculture originated 11,000 years ago in the Middle East, and spread throughout the continent until it reached mainland Europe 5,000 years ago.

How agriculture was spread across Europe is a source of contention among researchers, with some arguing that agriculture was adopted by Europe’s existing hunter-gatherer populations, spreading via cultural exchange with neighbouring tribes.

The latest findings from Götherström and Jakobsson, however, cast doubt on that alternative theory. Instead, the results of their study strongly support the thesis that migrants from Southern Europe helped spread agriculture into the northern sphere.

Farmers lived side by side with the hunter-gatherers for many generations and eventually interbred, which explains the patterns of genetic variation among Europeans today.

The project required researchers to use advanced molecular and statistical techniques in order to extract genomic DNA from the skeletons for examination. Researchers also needed to ensure the DNA was genuinely ancient and was not contaminated by modern DNA. The study involved thousands of genetic markers from the four Stone Age individuals. Researchers then compared their findings with a large amount of genetic data from living individuals.

‘Many attempts, including using genetics, have been made to come to terms with the problem since the significance of the spread of agriculture was established almost 100 years ago,’ says Anders Götherström. ‘Our success in carrying out this study depended on access to good material, modern laboratory methods and a high level of analytical expertise.’

Pontus Skoglund, a researcher at Uppsala University who also worked on this fascinating study, says: ‘The process appears in the end to have had the result that nobody today has the same genetic profile as the original hunter-gatherers, although they continue to be represented in the genetic heritage of today’s Europeans.’

Kirsten Amor

Jewellery hoard from Armageddon

At Tel Megiddo (Armageddon) in 2010 – the site prophesied in the Bible to be the place for the final battle between good and evil – archaeologists found an intact clay vessel which was then sent to be examined. On closer inspection the jug was found to contain a stash of Canaanite jewellery buried more than 3,000 years ago. The hoard consisted of gold and silver objects, beads, a ring, and a unique pair of earrings decorated with moulded ibexes, probably of Egyptian manufacture. On site, the archaeologists’ suspicions were not aroused, as intact vessels are surprisingly common (about 10 are unearthed every year), but it is very rare to find so many precious items. This trove is one of the larger and certainly one of the most interesting to have been found in Israel. The family to whom it belonged were undoubtedly wealthy, perhaps even royal, based on the quality and number of the artefacts. The context of the find is known as Iron 1 and is dated to around 1100 BC, roughly 150 years before the Israelite conquest of Canaan.

The highlights of the hoard are nine pairs of gold lunette earrings, a gold ring with a seal, over 1,000 semi-precious carnelian beads, and assorted silver objects.

Alexander Ekserdjian
Setting a good example in Sacramento

The first public art museum founded in the Western United States, the Crocker Art Museum in Sacramento, California, has recently received major gifts of antiquities from several supporters, including the Chris M Maupin Irrevocable Trust for Ancient Art (controlled by the owner of Clio Ancient Art & Antiquities, Chris Maupin). The Trust aims to give, or loan, antiquities and ancient art from the greater Mediterranean region to museums and public galleries seeking to expand or enhance their collections, or even to start collections from scratch. It also provides a much-needed service to small and medium-sized institutions that lack expertise in this field, assisting them in identifying pieces they may already hold.

In 2010, concurrent with the opening of the largest expansion project in the Crocker Art Museum’s history, the Trust made an initial donation of 33 antiquities and also assisted museum staff with identifying and cataloguing artefacts gifted from other private collections. In April of this year the Trust donated additional items, including a fine Roman limestone figure of a youth, holding a duck under his left arm with a chlamys (short cloak) draped over his left shoulder, from the 1st or 2nd century AD.

‘The Crocker Art Museum’s very small collection of antiquities grew exponentially in 2010 through the generosity of the Chris M Maupin Irrevocable Trust for Ancient Art, which donated examples of ancient Near Eastern, Egyptian, Cypriot, Greek, and Roman art,’ said the Associate Director and Chief Curator, Dr Scott A Shields. ‘This group of objects has attracted other donations which, today, combine to provide visitors and school groups with a rich historic sampling of antiquities.’

News from the Nile

Philae temple to reopen

The Temple of Hathor, an Egyptian goddess identified with Aphrodite by the Greeks and Venus by the Romans, is scheduled to reopen to the public this month. It is part of the huge temple complex, formerly situated on the now submerged island of Philae, moved to nearby Agilika before the construction of the Aswan Dam in the 1960s.

The temple has been undergoing extensive restoration work for the last year at the hands of a team of archaeologists and workers. A colonnaded kiosk with 14 pillars, each topped with the head of Hathor, was the centrepiece of the temple, which also has a pronaoi (vestibule), and a cult terrace facing the Nile.

The work has focused on the cleaning and restoration of the huge stone blocks used for the original temple built by Ptolemy VI. The temple was subsequently extended by Ptolemy VII, then again when Egypt was under the control of Rome by Augustus and Tiberius. The monumental blocks of stone have deteriorated over the past 2,000 years and the walls were subject to cracks. Those blocks that could not be salvaged have been replaced by new ones, while fallen blocks have been reused. These works are not the first modern restorations, and where the earlier repairs were found to be of poor quality they have been redone. The temple also features wonderful reliefs, not just of Hathor, herself, but also a very fine scene featuring musicians playing before assembled deities.

First ‘modern’ record of Ancient Egypt to be restored

Published in 1809, La Description de L’Egypte was written by the 160 scholars and scientists who accompanied Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt from 1798 to 1801. Many important figures of the day took part in this expedition, during which the Rosetta Stone was found and the publication of La Description had far-reaching effects. It gave rise to the popular fascination with the land of the Pharaohs and the development of Egyptology in Europe. The Egyptian Ministry of State for Antiquities has recently decided to restore its original copy of this important tome. It will be restored and cleaned in the laboratories of the Grand Egyptian Museum at Giza, that is expected to take more than a year because of the poor condition of the book, in part due to insect damage. The book is currently being inspected to ascertain how best to preserve it for the future.

Rosalind Smith

Royal Mongolian mother and child found in salt mine

The mummified bodies of a Mongolian queen and her baby have been discovered in south-west Mongolia, in the territory of Bayankhongor, near the Chinese border. The bodies were recovered from a salt mine by a team of researchers from the National University of Mongolia after the possibility of burial sites in rock caves was raised by the governor of the local administrative district. It was feared that the caves, which contain rock salt, could be exploited by miners with detrimental effect on the integrity of the sites. Thought to belong to the Yuan Dynasty, the dominant power in Mongolia and northern China between 1271 and 1368, the cave contained the mummified woman, and a child wrapped in a sheepskin. The burial was identified as royal by the presence of numerous high-prestige objects including a royal headdress with copper and pearl ornamentation, copper earrings, a mirror and a comb. The remains of a woman, reckoned to be aged 60, with remnants of clothes, a belt buckle, and a wooden bow was also unearthed. Experts are currently working to stabilise and preserve the objects and with a view to showing them in the exhibition, Chinggis Khaan and Archaeological Discoveries of Mongolians, which will be held to celebrate the 850th birthday of Genghis Khan later this year in Kharkhoran Museum.

Alexander Ekserdjian
A new museum for Chichester

Little pieces of history in

Discovered in 1864, Chedworth Roman Villa is celebrated for its large and beautiful mosaics, but seemingly there are yet more to be seen. The villa was bought from the Earl of Eldon in 1924 by the National Trust, making it one of its earliest acquisitions. Those at the time may have thought it would remain relatively untouched and as the Trust found it for evermore; they would be wrong, however! This summer has seen the turning back of time as an ambitious new project has uncovered and displayed more mosaics than ever before, along with the construction of a bespoke barn designed to protect the villa and make it as accessible as possible.

Thought to have been established in the mid 2nd century AD, it was the additions of the 4th century that brought the element of grandeur to what was a fairly functional house. The villa already had three wings (a south, a west and a north), but these were extended to meet each other and verandahs were constructed along the inside edges of each wing, with projected verandahs across the east side, creating an enclosed quadrangle. The most decadent addition was the extension of the bath-house to accommodate a dry heat and a Turkish-style bath, and it was here and, in the new 4th century dining room (triclinium), that the finest mosaics were laid.

Mosaic themes that would have impressed the diners as they spent their evenings in their host’s company include anthropomorphic depictions of the seasons, and panels of carousing satyrs and maenads, to evoke the spirit of Bacchus while the guests drank their wine. These had all lain unseen for over 1,500 years until their surprise discovery in 1864.

The original excavation of Chedworth is astounding in the foresighted methods used by the archaeologists. This comes as a breath of fresh air among all the stories of lamentably poor archaeological practice in the 19th century. The first signs of something out of the ordinary came when the gamekeeper on the Earl of Eldon’s estate noticed small pieces of pottery and small pieces of mosaic tiles (tesserae) that had been disturbed by rabbits. Further investigation by James Farrer, the Earl’s nephew, confined these were Romano-British, and over the next two years 50 men worked to clear the area of trees and expose what it soon became apparent was a Roman villa of considerable size.

With typical Victorian zeal and an added dash of philanthropy, the Earl funded the...
Lucretius book wins Pulitzer Prize

Harvard Professor Stephen Greenblatt (right) has been awarded the Pulitzer Prize in general nonfiction for his book *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*. The Pulitzer board described *The Swerve* as "a provocative book arguing that an obscure work of philosophy, discovered nearly 600 years ago, changed the course of history by anticipating the science and sensibilities of today'.

*The Swerve* tells how the Roman poet Lucretius's epic *On the Nature of Things* was rediscovered by a book-hunter named Poggio Bracciolini.

Despite being written 2,000 years ago, Lucretius's poetry discusses revolutionary ideas that shaped modern thought. Greenblatt argues that Lucretius' work was so influential that it changed scientific thought as well as anticipating many modern social beliefs. He also asserts that Lucretius' poetry encouraged the Renaissance, inspiring artists such as Botticelli and shaping the ideas of Galileo, Einstein, Shakespeare and, even, Thomas Jefferson.

‘Lucretius argued that the universe wasn’t created for human beings,’ says Greenblatt. ‘Humans are not unique. The Earth is not the centre of the universe. There are an infinite number of worlds. The soul is a material thing, just like the body. Therefore, there’s no afterlife and no judgement, rewards, or punishments. The moral order that we have exists simply because we need to organize societies as cooperative beings. And the highest goal in life would have to be not pain or piety but pleasure, which all creatures seek.’

‘It argues that the universe consists of atoms, void, and nothing else,’ he continues. ‘The atoms are eternal and always moving. Everything comes into existence simply because of the random movement of atoms, which, given enough time, will form and reform, constantly experimenting with different configurations of matter from which will eventually emerge everything we know, and into which everything we know will collapse.’

Kirsten Amor

Chedworth Roman villa

excavations, built a museum to house artefacts from the villa and erected two barns over the uncovered and exposed remains to protect them. This would be unusual enough, coming at a time when the trend was to pull archaeological material from its natural context and display it in a museum, but what was more extraordinary was that a good portion of the mosaics were re-covered and left in the ground.

While the most impressive mosaics are in the bath-house and dining-room, those in the halls (including one 35-metre-long corridor mosaic) were carefully covered in toposoil, mortar and limestone, becoming the viewing paths between rooms which makes this an early example of deliberate archaeological preservation in situ.

The villa remained like this until March of this year, which saw the culmination of a £3 million project, partly funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, along with much support from local groups, trusts and individual supporters. The money has funded the construction of a new shelter of 385 square metres which has replaced the two Victorian ones and filled a gap between them, allowing more of the villa floor to be uncovered. The new shelters boast lightweight steel and timber walkways directly over the mosaics giving the best view and re-establishing the original route between rooms to provide an impression of what it would have been like in the 4th century AD. While the Victorian shelters were replaced, the museum from the 1860s has been retained, although its displays have been re-configured to tell the story of the discovery of the villa.

The biggest development, though, is the hidden corridor mosaics exposed by a new season of excavations. This is scheduled to finish in the summer, giving visitors to Chedworth Roman Villa a rare chance to see conservation in action.

National Trust archaeologist Martin Papworth explains that there are still unknown elements left for the excavation to uncover. ‘We hope that it might reveal a new design in the mosaics that we don’t know about. The walkways will provide ideal platforms for people to watch us this summer and see if we do find something exciting’.

Geoff Lowsley

Chedworth Roman Villa, Yanworth, near Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL54 3LJ (+44 (0) 1242 890256). (For further details visit: www.nationaltrust.org.uk/chedworth-roman-villa)
Maniac or media victim?

It is 2,000 years since the birth of Caligula, said to be the cruelest, maddest Roman emperor of all. But few people seem to be celebrating. Was he really the sadistic psychopath of legend? **Kirsten Amor** takes a look at the evidence and asks if he deserves his infamous reputation.

On 31 August few people, it seems, will be celebrating the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of the infamous Roman emperor Caligula. Apart from English National Opera, that is, which has just staged Detlev Glanert’s opera *Caligula* (first performed in 2006), in which the emperor tries to break free from the shackles of mortality by embarking on an orgy of sexual degeneracy and cruelty. And Tinto Brass, director of the notorious 1979 film *Caligula*, starring Malcolm McDowell and Helen Mirren (which continues to shock viewers today with its graphic sex and gruesome torture scenes), who is making a new cinematic Roman romp for us – a 3-D erotic comedy called *Chi ha ucciso Caligola?* (*Who Killed Caligula?*).

Despite two millennia, the notorious emperor’s alleged legacy of brutality, depravity and insanity continues to fascinate the public. But how much is actually known about the real Caligula and his life? After his rise to power, the Emperor Claudius allowed *damnatio memoriae* to be declared against Caligula, effectively erasing his image and leaving scholars with little material for study. The writers whose records on Caligula are the primary source of information for scholars had ulterior motives and contradict not only each other but also themselves. With so little evidence available, how is it possible to separate fact from centuries of fiction today? Was Caligula an insane tyrant, or the victim of a smear campaign created by ambitious rivals powered by revenge?

One of the most popular views of Caligula is that he was totally insane, a theory on which scholars continue to disagree. Some insist that his instability was caused by his traumatic childhood. The ancient historian Suetonius, writing several decades after Caligula’s reign, describes him as suffering from what we now call bipolar traits. Both Seneca and the Jewish philosopher Philo, who were contemporaries of Caligula, also describe his crazy behaviour. Given that ancient sources seem unanimous on his insanity, it might appear pointless to contest their authority, although some modern scholars do just that. They claim that Caligula was not mad but a persecuted victim of the Senate, which was desperate to regain the power it had enjoyed during the Roman Republic.

For the first two years of his reign, ancient sources make no mention of Caligula’s insanity. In fact, the Jewish historian Josephus writes: ‘As for Gaius, he administered the Empire quite high-mindedly during the first and second years of his reign.’ Then, quite abruptly,
in AD 39 these same sources reverse their opinions. ‘So much for Caligula as emperor,’ wrote Suetonius. ‘We must now tell of his career as a monster.’ None of the ancient writers explain what caused this sudden shift in opinion. Only Cassius Dio, a historian writing over 150 years after Caligula, makes vague reference to several high-ranking senators who were prosecuted for crimes in accordance with the law, many of whom owed their position to Caligula.

Aloys Winterling, Professor of Ancient History at Basel University, argues that this conspicuous silence and Dio’s records hint at a conspiracy. Ancient historians were aristocratic members of the Senate, who despised the Julian dynasty for depleting the power they had enjoyed during the Roman Republic. Since Senate members were both the historians and the perpetrators in this instance, it would have been advantageous for them to omit details of any failed conspiracy attempts that might endanger the position or lives of those who took part.

In the past, Roman emperors had simply executed those who conspired against them, but Caligula took an alternative approach. After denouncing the actions of the Senate in a speech made in AD 39, he embarked on a vengeful plan of lifelong humiliation and financial ruin against his perpetrators.

Caligula subsequently looked to the public for support and during his rule gradually eliminated the Senate’s role. After suffering years of humiliation, fear and poverty inflicted by Caligula, and after failing to regain its power through intrigue, the Senate did the next best thing and obliterated the legacy of his rule by claiming he was mad.

Caligula’s reputation for brutality goes hand-in-hand with accusations of insanity. ‘Let them hate me as long as they fear me,’ was supposedly one of his favourite sayings. This view was popularised by Tinto Brass’s film, which portrayed the
emperor absentmindedly wandering around torture chambers, raping newlyweds (both the groom and the bride), and murdering Tiberius. The origins of the stereotype can be traced back to historical sources, such as Cassius Dio, who said that Caligula’s reign was ‘nothing but slaughter’, and Suetonius, who claimed that hundreds of people were killed on the insane whims of the emperor.

While most scholars do not contest the fact that Caligula was a ruthless emperor, some do question the extent of his bloodthirstiness. Although he was accused of killing hundreds of people, only 25 names of those he executed are actually listed. Of those mentioned, most, such as General Gaetulicus, were convicted for conspiracies against the emperor. Others include Senate members with false charges of treason against their name, filed not by Caligula but by ambitious senators eager to win the emperor’s favour.

Admittedly, Caligula did execute Gemellus, his adopted son and Tiberius’s rightful heir, and Naevius Sutorius Macro, the praetorian prefect who was responsible for Caligula’s rise to power. Some might consider this purely sadistic, but Caligula feared that as long as Gemellus was alive, conspirators would constantly use his hereditary lineage to Tiberius as a reason to scheme to overthrow him. As for Macro, Caligula saw that he held too much power, and, after observing how the previous prefect, Sejanus, had used his position to conspire against Tiberius, feared he might do the same to him.

Announcing that he planned to give his horse Incitatus the political position of consul is one of Caligula’s most infamous acts, and the one, above all, that is said to be evidence of his insanity. Suetonius maintains that Caligula gave his favourite racehorse his own palace, servants and dinner service, so that he could receive guests. Cassius Dio reports that Caligula allegedly fed Incitatus barleycorn made of gold. Such crazed behaviour is the cornerstone of many a scholar’s argument over Caligula’s mental instability. However, original sources that claim Caligula intended to make his horse consul are not consistent, therefore, little truth can be found in the story. While Suetonius refers to rumour by cautiously stating, ‘It is said he planned to make him consul’, Dio asserts that Caligula ‘promised’ to make Incitatus consul, and would have done so ‘if he had lived longer’. This event occurred directly after the first alleged conspiracy on his life in AD 39, and Caligula was bent on taking revenge by humiliating the aristocracy.

In awarding Incitatus the trappings of an aristocratic Senate member, which marked their social status, Caligula was openly mocking senators, in effect comparing them to the horse he commanded. The position of consul was the highest office an aristocratic politician could be awarded, and some spent their whole lives attaining it. Incidentally, it was also the only political office solely appointed by the emperor. Awarding his horse a consulship was not only Caligula’s idea of a cruel joke; it was also a warning to human consuls that their careers and rank depended entirely on him.

In the opening scenes of the film Caligula, the emperor is frolicking naked in a forest with his sister Drusilla. But in the 1976 BBC television series I, Claudius, Caligula has an incestuous relationship with Drusilla, then, in the guise of

‘Let them hate me as long as they fear me,’ was a favourite saying of Caligula’s
Jupiter, cuts their unborn baby from her belly, and eats the foetus.

Claims of incest with all three of his sisters were made by historians and have been repeated in all the media representations to date. Suetonius and Dio, both of whom wrote their accounts many decades after Caligula’s reign, accuse him of sleeping with his sisters.

Josephus, on the other hand, maintains he slept only with one sister, Drusilla, whereas Caligula’s contemporaries Seneca and Philo make no mention of this whatsoever. It is possible that the excessive honours Caligula bestowed on Drusilla – he deified her and appointed her his heir – aroused suspicion. Seeking to destroy Caligula’s legacy and popularity among the Roman population, the Senate only encouraged such rumours after his death.

Caligula’s delusions of god-like grandeur are frequently presented as further evidence of his insanity. The English National Opera’s production of Caligula featured the emperor dressed as Venus in gold sequins and a blonde wig marrying the Moon, while ancient writers recorded that he erected temples to himself, and ordered that sacrifices be offered to him in the same way as to a god. Some historians perceive this as deluded and narcissistic, while others argue that his self-deification was politically motivated. After two attempts on his life, Caligula decided that, by making himself a god, he could abolish the Senate’s role and introduce a monarchy within the Roman Empire.

Caligula perhaps sought inspiration for his god-like position after observing the practice during his childhood travels in the eastern provinces with his family. People living in the eastern provinces believed that gods sometimes visited Earth in the guise of wealthy men, successful generals and leaders. By promoting himself as a god, Caligula could assert his authority without the consent of the Senate. In fact, Dio explains that it was actually Vitellius, a governor of Syria, who initiated the deification and worship of Caligula in a desperate attempt to save his own life.

It is also important to note that Caligula was not the first emperor to be worshipped as a god. Although Augustus refused divine honours, he allowed himself to be worshipped in conjunction with the capital city, Roma. Divine honours were also bestowed on Julius Caesar before his assassination, and Marc Antony allowed himself to be worshipped in the eastern provinces of the empire, and even dressed as the god Dionysus.

So, can Caligula be viewed as a victim of politically motivated reportage and media hype? Born to rule over an empire run by two contradictory forms of government, forced to spend his life working with people who condemned most of his family to death – and actively campaigned for his demise – it would appear that his fate was already decreed.

After a series of conspiracies against his life conducted by those as near to him as his sisters, Caligula was gripped by fear and paranoia, which made him more ruthless as he grew to distrust everyone around him. Near the end of his rule, the more isolated and helpless Caligula grew, the farther he pushed the limits of power. As seen with two recent modern dictators, absolute power allows them to do anything they want to do – because they can.

Was Caligula a maniac or a media victim? You decide.
In many respects, the year 1896 was a turning point. Clara Schumann and Alfred Nobel both died; Wallace Simpson and Oswald Mosley were both born; Queen Victoria became the longest-reigning British monarch; the use of X-rays was first reported; the Glasgow underground was opened; and not only was the first road speeding fine issued, the first motoring fatality was recorded, too. It was a year that (with hindsight) might be seen as being on the cusp of a new and modern age. How appropriate, then, that it was also the first year of the revived and reinvented Olympic Games.

Their Classical counterparts embodied an age, too – the age we call Antiquity, which spanned over 1,100 years, from the first Games in 776 BC, when only one event (the foot-race) was held, until their demise sometime in the late 4th or early 5th century AD (by which time a host of bizarre events had been added, including contests for heralds and trumpeters). In other words, they lasted from before the Iliad and Odyssey were written down to the age of St Augustine of Hippo; and during that time their nature changed.

For much of their existence, there were limited but important qualifications that entrants had to meet

1. Once an elegant round temple, the Philippeion, housing statues, not of gods, but of members of the Macedonian royal family, spoke of a chilling new world order. Photograph: David Stuttard

2. Roman bronze Zeus based, it is thought, on Pheidias’ renowned gold and ivory statue of the king of the gods that originally stood in the temple at Olympia. 1st-2nd century AD. H. 23.6cm.

3. Standing on his fragile chariot, the charioteer urges his horse on. Black-figure pottery, Athens, 410-400 BC. H. 6.75cm. Donated by George Dennis.

4. Holding a palm branch in his right hand and an olive wreath in his left, a judge watches a contest’s dying moments. Black-figure pottery, Athens, 332-331 BC. H. 77cm.

5. ‘A naked man can run more quickly than a clothed one’: oiled, naked and sprinkled with glistening dust, a sprinter races to victory. Painted pottery, Miletus, 530-500 BC. H. 34cm.

6. Two powerfully built boxers contend for the prize of a palm branch, held aloft by Athene, their judge. Black-figure pottery, Athens, cir. 336 BC. H. 83.8cm.
(apart, that is, from their athletic prowess). One was that they must speak Greek. Barbarians (non-Greek-speakers) need not apply, for this was no universal event but rather a celebration of Hellenism, of a shared experience, which linked the great diaspora of Greeks, not only on the Greek mainland but in cities and colonies from Marseilles to Byzantium, from Libya to what is now Albania.

At the heart of that shared experience was a common religion. Hence two other entrance requirements: contestants must be free from the pollution of blood guilt, and they must be male. In fact, not only the contestants but everyone attending the Games was male. Women (except for pre-pubescent girls) were barred on pain of death. The reason was simple. In the beginning at least, the Olympic Games were part of what was primarily a male religious festival, focused on honouring not only Olympian Zeus, the king of the gods, but two aggressively male heroes, Pelops and Herakles. Together, the three dominated the so-called Altis, the sacred enclosure at the heart of Olympia.

The labours of Herakles were shown on the metopes of the temple of Zeus, home to the great gold and ivory statue by Pheidias, one of the wonders of the ancient world; and the central day of the Games (which began at sunset) was dominated first by solemn rituals in honour of the spirit of the dead Pelops, then, after the night of the August full moon, by the sacrifice of a hundred oxen to Zeus. Just as the animals slaughtered at Olympia were required to be physically perfect, so the men who came to celebrate this festival of festivals would include the strongest or the fastest, the most virile of all Greeks.

To display that virility to best advantage, the athletes competed naked. Legend told how the tradition had begun early in the Games’ history when a runner had lost his loincloth as he competed in a race that he had then gone on to win. His streamlined, aerodynamic nudity had clearly helped him, and from then on, loincloths were abandoned. In fact, if we had seen them, the athletes would probably have looked more like moving statues than like naked men, as each was liberally doused in olive oil before being sprinkled with dust, which not only protected the skin from the harsh August sun, but also made it easier to get a hold on the opponent’s body in contact sports.

Of those contact sports, perhaps the most violent was pankration.
(which means ‘total power’), and there were scarcely any rules. Even the two we know of – no biting and no gouging out of eyes – seem to have been honoured as much in their breach as in their observation. We can imagine just how brutal the pankration was, if we reflect that a certain Androleus, a contestant in the more highly regulated boxing, was able to write of his career in the circuit of Greek games: ‘I left one of my ears at Olympia and one of my eyes at Plataea. At Delphi, they thought I was dead.’

Physical power was clearly crucial, and although we hear of no banned performance-enhancing substances in the ancient Olympics, boxers and other athletes did seek to give an edge to their capabilities through a high-protein diet. Perhaps the most famous was the sixth-century BC wrestler Milo of Croton, five times a victor at Olympia, who was said (somewhat improbably) to have enjoyed a daily intake of 20lb pounds of meat and 20lb of bread, all washed down with two gallons of wine.

Nor, for the first 350 years of their existence, do we learn of any overt cheating at the Games, though some did exploit loopholes in the rules. Early in the fifth century BC, the wrestler Leontiskos, the so-called ‘Bone Cracker’ from Sicilian Messene, discovered that there was nothing to prevent him bending back the fingers of his opponents until the pain was such that they conceded defeat.

Curiously, however, cheating lay at the very heart of the history of the Games, for Pelops, worshipped as a hero at Olympia, was himself an arrant cheat. Legend told how as a young man he had left his native Anatolia and come to Greece. Here, near Olympia, King Oinomaos was challenging all his daughter’s suitors to a chariot race. Whoever defeated him could marry her. Whoever failed would die.

By the time Pelops reached Olympia, the heads of 13 suitors grinned lifelessly from wooden stakes in Oinomaos’ palace. Pelops himself decided to take no chances. To ensure his victory, he resorted to guile. With extravagant bribes, he persuaded Myrtilos, Oinomaos’ charioteer, to replace the bronze Lynchpins, which fixed the wheels onto the axle, with lynchpins made from beeswax. In the race that followed, as Oinomaos’ wheels rotated ever faster, the friction caused the wax to melt, the chariot disintegrated and the dying king was dragged behind his bolting horses.

Pelops had won. He claimed the princess as his bride, but rather than rewarding Myrtilos for helping him, he threw him off a cliff into the sea. Despite this clear breach of the rules of fair play, there were reminders of Pelops everywhere in Olympia. The eastern pediment of the temple of Zeus proudly depicted Pelops and Oinomaos with their horses, and Pelops’ statue dominated the hippodrome, the venue for one of the most exhilarating of all the events in the Games, the chariot race.

It was in this contest that it became clear that there was one other important prerequisite for taking part in some at least of the Olympic events: wealth.

To be able to own and maintain a chariot and horses, as well as to afford the best drivers available, was to be extraordinarily rich. Some cities never managed to enter a chariot at Olympia at all, but in 416 BC an Athenian, Alcibiades, entered seven.

Flamboyant, ambitious and dangerously amoral, Alcibiades sought fame not only for his city but also for himself, and he saw in Olympia the ideal venue to achieve it. Already a force to be reckoned with, he was feted as a hero by city states eager for his patronage. The citizens of Ephesus donated a silken tent, a pavilion of almost royal pretensions, for his comfort at the Games; the aristocrats of Chios...
donated fodder for his horses, and the islanders of Lesbos sent wine and other supplies for the lavish entertainments that he hosted.

At the race itself, where the drivers in tight-belted robes (they alone of all the athletes were clothed) crouched low in lightweight chariots, built for speed not safety, the reins clenched in their hands, their feet tight in the leather straps that would allow them to lean out and back in counterbalance at the crucial moment of the dangerous turn Alcibiades’ chariots came first, second and (some say) third. At Olympia only the winner counted. There were no prizes for coming second, and the fact that for this one race history uniquely records the runners-up is thanks in no small measure to Alcibiades himself. For, once back in Athens, he commissioned a victory ode from the shrine of Delphi, ‘Nothing in temple at that other pan-Hellenic shrine of Delphi, ‘Nothing in excess'; he seemed to have forgotten the opposite, for at Olympia, that most quintessentially Greek of all festivals, Alcibiades had behaved in a startlingly un-Greek way; he entertained, added, ‘Achievements such as these always honours'.

In fact, they were soon to bring the opposite, for at Olympia, that most quintessentially Greek of all festivals, Alcibiades had behaved in a startlingly un-Greek way; he entertained, added, ‘Achievements such as these always honours’. For, once back in Athens, he commissioned a victory ode from the shrine of Delphi, ‘Nothing in temple at that other pan-Hellenic shrine of Delphi, ‘Nothing in excess'”}

By 388 BC, the Games were disrupted by a pitched battle fought in the Altis between two opposing armies, some soldiers even hurling terracotta tiles from the temple roofs as missiles. When the Romans annexed Greece, they saw Olympia as the venue for a ‘heritage’ event to be patronised by emperors like Nero, or a treasure house to be plundered of its valuables. By the time the last Games were held, in the late 4th or early 5th century AD, there was little left to loot. The rapacious tribesmen of Heruli and Goths had seen to that.

The shameful break-in and looting of Olympia’s Mausoleum this year had an ancient, if barbaric, pedigree. Like the barbarian invaders, it is doubtful that the thieves of 2012 had much real understanding of the historical context of their booty and, if this ignorance is shared by the majority of the billions who will watch the London Games this year, that may be no bad thing.

For, if the modern Games are to define a modern age, may it not be better if they do so with a clean slate? The ancient Games, exclusive in their Greekness and their masculinity, and bloody in their brawn and sacrifice, belong to a bygone age. If the values that inspired Baron de Coubertin to create the new Olympics of 1896 seem almost naïve in their idealism, they do at least provide the modern world with a refreshing dream of universal harmony — something unimaginable to the contentious ancient Greeks.
As in Nature, the fierce and the tender, the brutish and the refined, the cruel and the nurturing, all feature in work of the late Ian Hamilton Finlay as exemplified in his Scottish garden, Little Sparta. A passionately loyal friend and a relentlessly implacable enemy, this revolutionary concrete poet and artist began to create his now world-famous garden with his second wife, Sue, in 1966. It was in that year that they bought Stonypath, a semi-derelict five-acre farm on the edge of the Pentland Hills, south of Edinburgh.

But, in the 1980s Ian re-named his home Little Sparta. He did this as an act of defiance towards Strathclyde Regional Council (with whom he was ‘at war’ at the time) and as a gesture of derision towards Edinburgh, popularly known as ‘the Athens of the North’ (as Finlay said, ‘Sparta was traditionally the enemy of Athens’). Edinburgh’s literary elite had never appreciated his poetry and, now, adding injury to insult, this internationally acclaimed visual artist was being persecuted by the regional council.

The argument began when a barn Finlay had converted into what he saw as a Garden Temple, was judged by ‘The Region’ (as he referred to the council) to be a commercial art gallery. As a result they demanded higher rates from him, he refused to pay them, and the outcome was the First Battle of Little Sparta. On 4 February 1983 the Sheriff’s Officer arrived to apprehend Finlay. But the artist had called in the media and some of his friends and supporters to act as vigilantes and to help protect Little Sparta. The cameras rolled as this battle/art event took place. Finlay eluded...
capture and the Sheriff’s Officer went away empty-handed. But a few months later, on Budget Day, when the media were distracted, he returned unannounced, bringing back-up with him.

This time, he successfully confiscated works of art in lieu of payment – some of which did not even belong to Finlay. This was the Second Battle of Little Sparta, and the ensuing legal battle rumbled on for years.

This was not the first, or last, example of a strongly martial element in Finlay’s life and work. Ceramic dryads dressed in

3. Poetic lines from Pythagoras: When the winds blow Venerate the sound, ceramic pan-pipes on a stone plinth, with David Ballantyne. Photo: Joan Hughson; Hughson Gallery.

camouflage smocks perching in
trees in the garden that day were
only part of a larger body of work
with more than a hint of the mili-
tary about it.

Much earlier, in 1977, at a major
exhibition of his work at the
Serpentine Gallery in London,
Finlay had exhibited prints of a leaf-
covered tank named ‘Arcadia’;
Apollo armed with a machine-gun,
and Daphne, pursued by Apollo,
dropping her SS camouflage wrap.

Central to the exhibition was
Finlay’s homage to Poussin Et In
Arcadia Ego, in which shepherds in
a pastoral paradise discovered, not
a tomb, but a tank.

This uneasy juxtaposition of the
pastoral and the martial that seems
to run throughout Finlay’s work
was reflected in his life. Born in
Nassau, Bahamas, in 1925 of
Scottish parents, he was sent back
to boarding school at the age of six. His grandfather, who
worked at Hopetoun House, near
Edinburgh, designed by William
Bruce, then altered and extended by
William Adam in the early 18th cen-
tury, took the young Ian there when
he was a boy. This may, the artist
later speculated, have awakened his
interest in Neo-Classical architec-
ture and garden design.

Later, after leaving school at 13
and spending only a year at Glasgow
School of Art, Finlay was evacuated
to a family in the countryside. In
1942, aged 17, he was called up and
went into the Royal Army Service
Corps, seeing service in Germany.
After military service, he worked as a
shepherd in Orkney, which he
described as ‘Arcady’. There he had
his dream of ‘Sweet Philosophy’, in
which he found ‘visionary happiness
in discoursing with classically clad
philosophers in a kind of bright
green-grassed groove’.

The martial and the pastoral
impressed themselves upon him like
two sides of the same medal.

Although being caught between such

Minerva July/August 2012
opposites is an uncomfortable position, it fired Finlay’s creative imagination for the whole of his life. So it is no surprise that he said, ‘Certain gardens are described as retreats when they are really attacks,’ and defined Nature as ‘the universal camouflage’.

The garden at Little Sparta is divided into several areas, including the Roman Garden, the Sunken Garden, the Temple Pool Garden, the Woodland Garden, the English Parkland and the Wild Garden, where a red cut-out figure of Apollo pursues a green silhouette of Daphne – the pastoral (the green) and the martial (the red) are brought together here in a potentially amorous encounter.

In these many gardens are all the Classical elements you could hope to find – and a few more besides: busts, urns, herms, capitals, columns, temples, obelisks, sundials, pools, bridges, a small pyramid and, of course, the famous Garden Temple to which ‘The Region’ took exception. Its exterior is decorated with painted Corinthian columns and the dedication ‘To Apollo: His

Music His Missiles His Muses’. Elsewhere, on Altar to Apollo, stands a bronze statue of the god carrying a machine-gun, while hidden among the ferns is a large gold head on which is inscribed ‘Apollon Terroriste’. The nature of Apollo is a potent mixture of beauty, truth and power: he can heal with his music or blast with his light of truth.

Do not be alarmed when you arrive at Little Sparta and see a sign warning: ‘Achtung: Minenfeld’ or, once in the garden, come across stone hand-grenades poised on top of columns where pineapple finials are usually found. For, despite these traces of the battle zone, you will also discover peace and beauty and wit and intelligence in every leafy corner. Stone pan-pipes bear lines from Pythagoras, ‘When the winds blow, Venerate the sound’, and mossy stone paths lead to bowers and vistas. Yellow flags edge Lochan Eck, and water lilies decorate the Temple Pool. The wind stirs the leaves, sounding like the sea, while clouds scurry across the sky.

Writing in the 4th century BC in a sacred grove, the humanistic philosopher Epicurus, who cultivated ideas of serenity, intellectual pleasure and an individual’s rights, was an early hero of Finlay’s. ‘Blest youth, set sail in your bark and flee from every form of culture’ was one of his favourite Epicurean sayings. Ovid, Virgil and Dante were poets he kept close to him, as were the artists Dürer, Poussin, Claude and Corot, references to whom feature in different parts of Little Sparta. Another, later influence on Finlay was the French Revolution and its leaders, especially Saint-Just.

In the 18th century the poet and gardener Alexander Pope wrote, ‘All gardening is landscape painting’, and in an interview, Finlay once said: ‘Before we had the garden, I considered myself to be a poet and I wrote things in notebooks or I did prints. But with the garden, one makes this astonishing discovery that you can actually change a bit of the actual world by taking out a spade of earth. And this, to me, was really… a momentous discovery.’ Known as the ‘Capability Brown of Conceptual Art’, Finlay was nominated for the Turner Prize. Sir Roy Strong has described Little Sparta as ‘the only really original garden made in this country since 1945’.

Works of art by Finlay (and his collaborators – he always worked in tandem with other artists) can be seen in galleries and gardens in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain and Switzerland, and also in San Diego, California, as well as in the UK.

Ian Hamilton Finlay died on 27 March 2006; Little Sparta is now managed and maintained by the Little Sparta Trust.

The last work he created before he died was called Four Muses. In it three bronze heads face the past, while the mysterious fourth looks towards the future.

- Little Sparta, Stonypath, near Dunsyre in Lanarkshire, is open to the public from 2.30pm to 5pm, on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday afternoons, from 1 June to 30 September. Admission costs £10. The garden is not suitable for children under 10.
Exhibition

**Philippa Scott** visits an exhibition at the British Museum that traces the journey of the horse from the wilds of Kazakhstan some 5,500 years ago, to the thoroughbreds in The Queen’s Royal Studs today

*If somebody in the distant past had not been brave enough to get on to a horse’s back, someone else – a mounted Steppes nomad, in fact – might not have invented trousers. But trousers aside, we owe an infinite debt to the horse. Without this magnificent creature, human history, including the spread of culture, language, trade, warfare, invasion, colonisation, and empire, would be a very different story.*

The British Museum’s current exhibition, entitled *The Horse: From Arabia to Royal Ascot*, does not attempt to present an all-inclusive history of our four-legged friend; the focus is on the Arabian horse and the horse in the Ancient Near East.

The pure Arabian horse has a highly distinctive appearance, a neat head with a dished, or convex profile and large eyes. They carry their tails high, like floating banners, and their gait, too, has been described as floating. They are famous for their stamina when travelling over long distances and for their agility and speed, useful for ‘hit-and-run’ warfare. To those of a more romantic bent, though, these horses seem like magical creatures from a fairytale, with an almost unreal beauty. Look, for example, at the exquisite drawing by Benjamin Robert Haydon of the horse of Selene (the moon goddess’s mount) from the east pediment of the Elgin Marbles.

But the journey from wild animal to such a refined beast has been long. To date, the earliest evidence of horse domestication is found on pottery from the Botai culture of Kazakhstan circa 5,500 years ago – researchers have found traces of mare’s milk. They have also noted wear on horses’ teeth found in the area, indicating ‘bit damage’. Obviously a mare cannot be milked unless she is tethered and amenable, and a mare with milk has a foal at foot, which then becomes accustomed to being handled by humans. Mare’s milk is still drunk in Kazakhstan, usually fermented into a slightly alcoholic drink called *koumiss*; it is also made into cheese.

Domesticated horses first reached the Near East around the mid-third millennium, via the Caucasus, Anatolia, then Mesopotamia and Egypt, where there were already native donkeys and onagers. By the first half of the third millennium, donkeys or donkey/onager hybrids, were used to draw cumbersome two- or four-solid-wheeled wagons throughout Mesopotamia. These are shown on the oldest item in the exhibition, the ‘Standard of Ur’, circa 2600 BC, from Sumeria. This small, tapered wooden box (probably the sounding-box of a musical instrument) was discovered by Sir Leonard Woolley during his excavation of the Royal Cemetery at Ur. It is decorated with an inlaid mosaic made of shell, lapis lazuli (from Afghanistan) and red limestone set in bitumen, which make up a...
series of consecutive images, like a cartoon, including a four-wheeled chariot or battle-car harnessed to a team of four male asses (count the ears) yoked to a central draught-pole. The lower register shows four chariots, each drawn by a team of four. Control is by nose rings with reins threaded through terrets.

The introduction of the use of horses resulted in lighter, faster chariots with a pair of spoked wheels, so that from about 1600 BC the fast chariot reached its full military potential, with a wide range of armour for horse, vehicle, mounted and foot combatants. This was the dominant type of warfare for around a thousand years. The powerful Hittites, whose capital was at Boghazköy in central Turkey, were highly literate and have left us a number of their cuneiform texts dealing with the training of horses, such as the chariot-specific Kikkuli text written by the Master Horse Trainer of the land of Mitanni.

Fine horses have always been favoured as diplomatic gifts. The lovely wall painting of Asiatic

3. The Godolphin Arabian by Thomas Butler (circa 1730-circa 1760), oil on canvas, circa 1750-5. H. 63.6cm, W. 76.4cm. Royal Collection Trust® HM Queen Elizabeth II 2012.

4. Egyptian wall-painting of Asiatic tribute-bearers with horses and a chariot, circa 1400 BC, 18th Dynasty, New Kingdom, Egyptian. TT63, Thebes, Egypt; acquired 1852. L. 60cm, W. 58.5cm. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

5. Standard of Ur, circa 2600 BC, Sumerian. PG 779, Royal Cemetery, Ur, Mesopotamia. Shell, lapis lazuli, red limestone and bitumen. W. 21.6cm, L. 49.5cm, D. 4.5cm (end, base), D. 2.5cm (end, top). © The Trustees of the British Museum.
tribute-bearers with horses and a chariot, *circa* 1400 BC (identified as being from 18th-dynasty Thebes) is probably from the tomb of Sobekhotep at Luxor, a treasury official to Thutmose IV. His duties including overseeing the reception and delivery of foreign gifts. This fragment shows a chariot, a pair of slender-limbed, high-stepping horses with arched tails suggestive of the Arabian type, accompanied by two figures with Asiatic hairstyles and dress.

Another painting from Thebes includes a chariot with two horses, one black, one chestnut, and on the lower register an identical chariot drawn by asses. Again, the horses have arched necks and tails. A horse with Arabian features has been found in a burial at the Egyptian fortress of Buhen, dated at around 1675 BC. Mummified horses have also been found in high-status graves but have not, as far as I know, been analysed for type.

Among the British Museum’s many treasures are carved stone reliefs from the walls of Assyrian palaces. Originally painted – faint traces of blue and red have been identified – these finely worked scenes are so intricately detailed that harnesses used at the time can be reconstructed. There are hunting scenes and battle scenes with mounted horses and horse-drawn chariots. But as Assyria’s barren uplands were unsuitable for horse-breeding, horses had to be imported. Cuneiform tablets known as ‘horse reports’ provide us with a great deal of information, such as the fact that large ‘Kushite’ chariot horses were acquired from distant Nubia.

We do not know when horse-riding began. The first saddles, cushioned pads secured with a girth and breast band, evolved slowly, and the transformative stirrup was a late invention. The earliest known image of Scythian horsemen with their feet in stirrups is on the finials of a 4th-century BC gold torque now in the Hermitage Museum – but the use of stirrups did not become widespread until centuries later. Many early bits were savage metal constructions that controlled the horse through pain. The exhibition displays bits with elaborate cheek-pieces, some based on the jointed snaffle design (still used today) and many decorative elements from harnesses, some in ivory and gold, as well as ancient branding-irons.

Between 539BC and 331BC the Persian Achaemenid dynasty dominated the Ancient Near East. In his *Histories*, Herodotus wrote: ‘The Persians teach their sons, between the ages of five and 20, only three things: to ride a horse, use a bow, and speak the truth’. To administer the vast Achaemenid Empire the Persians built the so-called Royal Road, from Sardis in eastern Turkey to Susa in south-west Iran, along which a system of post horses travelled in relays, the original Pony Express. Parts of this ancient road can still be travelled. The Persian ‘Great Nisean’ horses were the ideal warhorses of their time; carvings show them as powerful beasts with so-called ram’s-head profiles. On the Apadana reliefs at Persepolis delegations from all parts of the empire are shown bringing gifts, including horses. The chariots here resemble the model gold chariot of the Oxus Treasure. The horses drawing the chariots are small, which has led to suggestions that they might be Caspian horses, a small, refined breed long considered extinct, but rediscovered in the 1960s. It has been suggested that the Caspian horse is a possible ancestor in the Arabian’s development. The Oxus team, however, are shown, strangely, with the distinctive ram’s-head profile of the much larger, heavier Nisean horse. So it is still a mystery.

From *circa* 250 BC the Parthians, a tribe of Iranian nomads, held sway in Persia. Dressed in trousers, often with leggings underneath, they almost lived on their horses. Skilled archers, they gave their name to the expression ‘parting
played an important role.

The beauty and superior qualities of Arabian horses are extolled in Islamic literature and poetry, especially from the 9th century onwards. From the 11th century the Arabian horse came into its own, with its extraordinary stamina over long distances, its swift bursts of speed and agility, and its courage. It has been suggested that the Mamluk victory over the Mongols was due in part to their use of Arabian horses.

Although the Ottomans used, and greatly admired, Arabians, the Turks arrived on horseback riding their Turkoman breeds, which were highly refined, fleet horses. For this exhibition, the Royal Armouries have loaned an impressive set of late 15th-century Turkish armour for horse and rider, which gives an idea of both the size and strength of these warhorses. Underneath the armour, both man and horse were protected by quilted fabric ‘undergarments’.

In Turkish, as in Arabic, there are many words with subtle nuances specific to horses, allowing comparisons and appreciation of their fine qualities and differences, and treatises dealing with veterinary issues, horsemanship, training and riding. Training for war included taking part in sports such as polo and jirit, another game played on horseback.

The British Library’s beautifully illustrated manuscript Furusiyya (Horsemanship), dating from AD 1371, and probably copied in Egypt or Syria, is in the current exhibition.

Reflecting the value placed upon them in Islamic societies, horses, invariably with riders, are often depicted on high-quality, prestige objects – paintings, ceramics, metal-ware and enamelled glass.

During the 17th and 18th centuries a great many Oriental horses were imported into Britain, but it was not until the late 19th century that a husband and wife team set out to track down, purchase, import, and set up a breeding stud of the finest Arabian horses they could find.

Part of the exhibition is devoted to this couple, Sir Wilfred Scawen Blunt, and his wife, Lady Anne, founders of the Crabbet Stud. On display are letters, pedigrees and photographs from the Crabbet archive. Lady Anne was convinced that the origins of the Arabian horse lay in a ‘wild blood horse’ from Central Arabia, and in 2011 archaeologists working in the south-west of Saudi Arabia found a number of carved stones, including what appears to depict the head and foreparts of a haltered horse-like animal. Flint arrowheads and scrapers found at the site have been carbon-dated to the Neolithic period, circa 5,000 BC.

The second body of new evidence for the introduction of the horse into Arabia has been discovered in rock art throughout the region and the Syrian desert, illuminated by the use of a new technology called GigaPan photography – there are many depictions of horses, riders, even chariots. One shows a man standing holding the rein of a large horse which has the dished face and arched neck and tail of an Arabian. Accurate dating for this image has not yet been established, so at present the 4th century BC is still the earliest proven date for the horse in the Arabian Peninsula. Further scientific analysis will no doubt reveal more about the long association between horses and humankind.

Having told the tale of the Arabic breed and its role in producing the English thoroughbred, the final part of the exhibition focuses on the modern racehorse. Aptly, this show is timed to coincide with the Diamond Jubilee of our horse-loving monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, and the Olympic Games, in which her equestrian daughter has a great interest and her grand-daughter takes an active role.

The Horse: From Arabia to Royal Ascot is on show at the British Museum until 30 September. The catalogue is by John Curtis and Nigel Tallis (British Museum Press), hardback £40, softback £25.
During the last century the academic discipline of archaeology expanded its scope so that its primary objective became not so much the search for spectacular finds as a quest for greater knowledge about the past. Once archaeologists relied on sequences of finds to date a site; now, if proper funding is available, carbon-dating is also used.

Another method is the exploration of archaeological sites viewed from the air – the information we can obtain from a good aerial photograph is vast. It shows how people interacted with their environment, and also indicates what steps are needed to preserve a 'cultural landscape' today. Civilisations that built stone monuments are of course easier to appreciate than those that did not. Nowhere is this more apparent than when considering the pre-Roman population of Britain. Far from being savages, these people had extensive powers to control and organise society – the aerial evidence of their monumental earthworks shows this very clearly.

A number of recently published books underline what the British landscape can tell us. Bob Clarke's Prehistoric Wiltshire uses a range of aerial images. Timothy Darvill's Prehistoric Gloucestershire focuses on Celtic culture as seen from the air, and Rebecca H Jones' Roman...
Camps in Britain examines a very different tradition of fortification.

Bob Clarke’s book is really an excellently illustrated catalogue of early sites, including the well-known ones, such as Stonehenge and Avebury (2, 3), Silbury Hill and Kennet Long Barrow (1), as well as a range of smaller monuments best revealed by aerial photography.

Timothy Darvill presents the monuments of Gloucestershire in a chronological narrative, while Rebecca H Jones divides her book into chapters about the chronology, layout, use, distribution and survival of Roman forts. Caesar first encountered hillforts, oppida, in Gaul. The Romans used a grid plan and certain distinctive structures when constructing their own forts; the same cannot be said of their ‘barbarian’ counterparts, but that does not mean that Roman forts were superior militarily.

In England many settlements that have ‘-bury’ as a suffix started life as a ‘fort’. In Wales, fort settlements are named cyiau or have a name that contains caer. Hillforts were not limited to Britain and Gaul, they are found also in the ‘Celtic’ cultural zone in central and western Europe. A few hillforts date from the Neolithic period, but many more appeared during the Late Bronze Age. A good example is Liddington Castle (10, 11), a site of about three hectares, within sight of Barbury Castle about four miles to the southwest. Its excavation in 1976 suggested that, during the Late Bronze Age (attested by pottery finds), it was the site of an earth rampart supported by timbers. Half a mile away is an enclosure – which now appears as a crop mark – suggesting that the hillfort was abandoned during the mid to late Iron Age. This means that Liddington Castle could be the earliest hillfort in Britain.

It is also the supposed location of the battle of Mons Badonicus (Mount Baydon), where King Arthur fought the Saxons sometime in the 6th century. Pottery finds from the end of the Roman period (mid-5th century) suggest that this story may have some validity.

As a rule, before this period settlements were near farmland, and round houses were set in enclosures. During the early Iron Age, there seem to have been a number of...
significant changes, notably in burial styles.

Hillforts were constructed over a long period of time, roughly from the first millennium BC, but most were built between 70 BC and 43 AD. There have been a number of theories to explain this, from climate change to the movement of peoples from the Continent. Hillforts could have been built by indigenous people or by invaders.

Some theorists think the use of iron instead of copper changed society. It led to the demise of the elites who controlled sites where copper was found. As the theory goes, iron would have also led to a sizeable shift in military technology.

Archaeologists such as Barry Cunliffe have suggested climate change (between 1,000 and 600 BC) to colder, wetter weather led to a shorter crop-growing season and a struggle for survival. So defence was necessary to protect people, animals and grain.

But there may have been many other reasons why hillforts were constructed – for secular ceremonial purposes related to chieftaincy, or for religious use, or a combination of the two. Clearly, an imposing edifice with a controlled entrance could be used for a variety of purposes, and these forts were used for long periods of time. Some Iron Age hillforts were built close to Bronze Age burial mounds.

The archaeological record contains many fortified areas that use naturally defensive features, such as hills, which have been augmented by earthworks such as walls and ditches. Hillforts are rather difficult to characterise, as they use natural features as an integral part of their structure. During the Iron Age, the heyday of the hillfort, most were designed to sit, as the name suggests, on the top of the hill, following its contours so that the approach would be limited by the slope. If the slope was steep enough, then little fortification was required.

Hillforts can also be isolated by cliffs or rivers and may occupy a commanding position on a promontory. Others, located in plains, were built on a raised area or plateau, usually surrounded by banks and ditches (6, 9, 10). The soil excavated from the ditch was used to build up the bank, which was topped by stone or, more likely, a wooden palisade. Many of the larger so-called hillforts contained houses and formed the basis of later towns (2). Some smaller fortified enclosures (now known as ‘hill-slope enclosures’) seem to have been used for keeping animals.

The Romans, in contrast, usually chose flat ground on which to construct their forts. Latin texts make it clear that camps were often occupied for a short time, and that fortifications were used as a method of keeping troops busy as well as for defence. Britain is the European country with the largest number of temporary Roman camps recorded in a relatively small territory – about 500 in all. Roman fortifications would present a difficult target for attack, as well as demonstrating the extent of Roman control.

While earlier archaeologists saw hillforts as purely military, later theorists claim that they symbolised...
wealth and power. This would have been of critical importance to a tribal chief. It is clear that these structures served a variety of functions. Some may have been occupied only during periods of strife, others (the very large structures) were probably used to protect animals. British hillforts varied in size. Most covered an area of less than three acres. Some larger examples could be as large as 30 acres, while there a few of up to 200 acres. Bindon Hill and Bathampton Down are fortified enclosures covering more than 50 acres.

Post-holes show that structures inside forts can vary from guard-houses through long houses (perhaps for opulent display) to huts for the storage of food (with pits), graves and perhaps temples. Burials may also be found outside the structures, and may be associated with warfare (and associated finds such as weapons and armour). This leads naturally to a reappraisal of the term ‘hillfort’. Given that they may have been used for a variety of different purposes, some authors have suggested that they should be referred to as ‘enclosed places’.

On the other hand, the term ‘defensive enclosure’ gives some clue as to their military significance. Both terms shy away from any mention of a hill, as not all so-called ‘hillforts’ are located on hills.

It has been estimated that there are more than 2,000 hillforts in Britain, with a high percentage – perhaps 600 of them – in Wales. It is notable that in areas that had less or no Roman influence (such as the Highlands of Scotland), they continued to be built for several centuries, perhaps as late as the 8th century. In fact, there seems to be an increase in hillfort construction on the margins of Roman control.

As a general rule, hillforts were abandoned by about 400 BC, which seems to have accompanied a change in the economy as well as identity. In the Thames and Severn Valleys at least, settlements expanded and specialised. Some produced cereals, others concentrated on stock breeding or mixed agriculture. This specialisation suggests that exchange must have taken place.

At the other extreme, ‘family space’ seems to be marked. Timothy Darvill writes: ‘Even with the new styles of hillfort of the period, there is evidence of internal subdivision with the creation of compounds inside the ramparts. In areas where settlements were unbounded, it is not unusual to find one or two individual houses enclosed by a modest earthwork whose scale goes beyond the functional needs of drainage; perhaps a few individual families were considered sufficiently different to mark themselves out on grounds of status, wealth or conferred power.’

After the Roman period, the invading Anglo-Saxons did not reuse hillforts for defensive purposes, on the whole, as their military was not organised along those lines. But the use of hillforts during this period is not unknown in northern or western Britain. A good example is South Cadbury Hillfort (South Somerset). The site of the Iron Age hillfort was occupied from the Neolithic until the late Saxon period. Excavations by Leslie Alcock in the 1960s found an ‘Arthurian period’ hall, which fits in well with traditions dating from the 15th century that the site was King Arthur’s Camelot. The construction of hillforts was a large-scale undertaking that would have involved considerable planning and organisation. There was apparently no need for this kind of structure during the early Middle Ages.

Monuments, such as the henges, continue to attract many visitors. They are approachable even if their exact function is not fully understood. In contrast, ancient earthworks require aerial photography to be appreciated. Wooden or stone structures now lost can be recreated in the mind. Their overall size, the height and depth of their features, represented an enormous output of work, as is clear from the photographs. The only thing that remains is to see the site, and experience walking there, for oneself, and these books are the perfect stimulus for such adventure.

_Aerial archaeology_  
Timothy Darvill, 2011, £16.99;  
It takes only 35 minutes to cross under the English Channel (or la Manche) to France. Yet the Channel remains a cultural chasm. I spent much of the latter part of my career as an archaeologist working for the French Ministry of Culture and for English Heritage. Attitudes and practices are, to say the least, different. The English are convinced that they are uniquely fascinated by their past and that they protect more of it than anyone else. At times they say that the country is like one big museum. This is a complete fantasy; in reality, the English are in love with the wrecking ball, the bulldozer and the plough. Compare London with Paris and it is obvious which city clobbers its old buildings and chaotically throws up new ones.

But the English approach to heritage also has its virtues. The quality of archaeological recording is mostly excellent; this includes minor sites and the elements that articulate ancient settlement patterns, such as fields and trackways. English archaeologists are quick to broaden their view of heritage. For example, at English Heritage much effort went into studying relict 20th-century industries, defences and buildings, and new scientific techniques are rapidly adopted. In contrast, I find French archaeology slower to change and adapt, and more fixed on iconic or ‘important’ sites.

Yet English culture is dogged by a persistent philistinism; give the Gradgrinds who govern England an excuse to slash and burn the modest heritage budgets and they will usually leap at the chance. It has happened in the wake of the ongoing economic slump. Heritage is seen as a luxury that should be rationed in times of austerity.

The French view is different. You do not feel the need to justify an interest in the heritage or, more positively in French, le patrimoine. It is an essential element of national identity and a bonus for the economy, particularly for regional tourism. So, obviously when times are tough, you should invest in it!

Back in April I took a spring pilgrimage, leaving London to drive to my home in the south of France. The River Seine is the natural routeway from north to south. From Troyes and Bar-sur-Seine, with its timber-framed buildings, to Châtillon-sur-Seine, the river gradually narrows. North of Châtillon, an Iron Age hillfort dominates the

1. The MuséoParc Alesia interpretation centre, designed by the architect Bernard Tschumi, opened earlier this year. Photograph: Iwan Baar.

2. Aerial photograph of the excavated Roman town which was built, later, within the defences of Gaulish Alesia.
modern village of Vix. In a Gaulish cemetery close to the river, archaeologists discovered the so-called Vix Krater, the most magnificent Greek bronze vessel found anywhere. Greek traders transported the vessel (in fragments) along with wine, which it was meant to hold, from southern Italy, up the Rivers Rhône and Saône and over the watershed into the Seine basin. This would take them into northern Gaul and up to the Channel.

Their impressive diplomatic gift smoothed the path for traders from the Mediterranean, gave them access to the navigable Seine and helped to introduce the Gauls to the pleasures of wine. But beware of Greeks bearing gifts. In their tracks came the bloody Romans.

A few kilometres further south the river becomes no more than a stream. My six-year-old grandson and I stood with a foot on either bank. The source is not far away, springing from a grotto in which stands a statue of a nubile river goddess. The source of the Seine is itself a well-known archaeological site, where excavations revealed a Gallo-Roman shrine. This was the focus of a health cult situated on the boundaries of five Gallic tribes and devoted to the river goddess Sequana. Almost 2,000 years ago people came to take the waters and deposit votive offerings. Sinister wooden statues, which now reside in the Archaeological Museum in Dijon, guarded the waters. In this remote natural amphitheatre surrounded by woods, the grotto is incongruous. It was built at the command of Baron Haussmann, who besides demolishing and rebuilding Paris in the 1860s for Napoleon III, was also prefect of the Seine department (He said that rather than ‘Baron’ he should be known as ‘Aqueduc’ – that’s a French joke!) Haussmann decided to purchase the site of the Source for the City of Paris – hence the rather pretty goddess who now guards the flow for the benefit of distant Parisians.

Pagan pilgrims must have followed this route to the source for centuries. Christians did not want to waste a good opportunity. So they canonised the river and changed its sex. Nearby is the Abbey of Sainte-Seine. On the narrow road by the Source a signpost directs the pilgrim...
out of the deep valley, over the lime-

tone downs to the next shrine. This

is one of the most signifcant in

France, not only for Christians but

for French politicians.

The village of Alise-Ste-Reine

clings picturesquely to the steep

slopes of Mont Auxois. St Reine

was supposedly a 3rd-century vir-
gin beheaded for her devotion to

Christ. Where her blood soaked

into the ground a spring emerged.

Her iconography sounds like that of

a typical Celtic head cult. If I had

to put money on it, I would bet

that St Reine was invented when

a pagan water shrine was adopted

by Christians. Nevertheless, in

the Middle Ages every respect-
able Burgundian girl was expected

to make the pilgrimage to pay her

respects to St Reine.

Today St Reine is no longer the

main attraction. Her modest white

statue stands largely ignored by the

roadside below Mont Auxois and

her church has seen better days. At

the top of the hill, dominating the

countryside, stands the giant fig-

eur of an impressive mustachioed

warrior. He is Vercingétorix, hero

of the Gauls. A new shrine has just

been built for him, a €52 million

Interpretation Centre, the focal point

of what is intended to be the largest

archaeological park in Europe.

So why is all this effort being

made in the Burgundian countryside

40 kilometres north-west of Dijon?
The person who is most to blame

is Julius Caesar. One of his most

vivid and detailed accounts of any

ancient battle is to be found in his

De Bello Gallico (The Gallic Wars)
– Caesar’s account of the conquest
of Gaul between 58 and 50 BC. In

Book VII, Caesar describes how

Vercingétorix, the young Arvernian

prince and leader of the alliance of

Gaulish tribes, took his forces into

Alésia, an oppidum (what in English

we usually call a hillfort) belong-

ing to the Mandubii tribe. Caesar

says that the stronghold had a river

on each side and that the top was

defended by a ditch and a high wall.

Caesar had previously, and unsuc-

cessfully, besieged Vercingétorix, at

the massive oppidum of Gergovia,

near modern Clermont-Ferrand. At

Alésia he took no chances.

The troops were ordered to con-

struct a titanic system of fortifica-

tions around the entire hill, a total

of 14 miles, and an even larger

outer concentric line to protect

the Roman rear. The ditches and

trenches were flooded with water or

filled with thorny scrub and sharp-

ened stakes. The soldiers erected

timber palisades, towers and for-
tified camps. Caesar intended to

trap Vercingétorix and his follow-
eres inside until they starved or,
in desperation, came out to fight.

The plan worked. The Gauls

were slaughtered or enslaved, and

Vercingétorix was dragged off,
eventually to Rome, where six years

later he appeared as the star prize in

Caesar’s triumphal parade. Then he

was taken to a prison off the Forum

and strangled. Vercingétorix’s

defeat was more or less the end of

Gaulish resistance. For over 400

years Rome ruled.

This miserable episode has

become a potent French myth. After

centuries in which he was ignored,

the French Revolution in 1789 put

Vercingétorix on a pedestal. He

represented the ordinary people

of France, the blood of the natives

– ‘Nos ancêtres les Gaulois’ in the

famous French phrase. In contrast,

the aristocracy were supposedly
descended from invading Germanic

barbarians, those nasty foreign

overlords the Franks.

With its varied languages and

strong regional identities, France

is not a natural entity. In the

decades following the Revolution,

the state worked hard to create a

national culture inside accepted

national boundaries. Vercingétorix

was part of that ‘imagined com-

munity’. Napoleon I established

the Académie Celtique in 1805, to
emphasise the continuity of ancient Gaul and modern France – and justify his imperial expansion into once-Celtic territories.

It is hardly surprising that the short-lived Second Republic, under Napoleon III, also sought to promote this national story. The discovery of a cache of weapons at Alise Ste-Reine attracted the attention of the emperor in 1860.

Thanks to the relatively new science of archaeology, the subsequent excavations provided firm evidence that a specific place in the landscape could be associated with Caesar’s dramatic events. Mont Auxois became Alésia – a historical ‘memory factory’ for the nation in the words of Michael Dietler (World Archaeology vol 30 1998, 72-89). And in 1867 history and Vercingétorix became a compulsory part of French primary education. Julius Caesar was equally admired, as an empire-builder and spreader of civilisation. But France’s imperial fantasy was about to run into the buffers of Prussia and Napoleon III ended his days in England.

The actual site of Alésia remains contentious for some. Many alternative Alésias have been put forward – especially in the Jura (for example, Alaise, near Besançon). When the new visitor centre opened in March, detractors assailed the French newspapers. ‘It’s an imposter,’ claimed Danielle Porter, one of the Juraphiles. So, not surprisingly the new MuséoParc, as it is called, wheeled out the big guns – Michel Redde, the director of the most recent excavations, Christian Goudineau, Professor at the Collège de France, and Claude Gropin of Mission Alésia – to proclaim that ‘for the scientific community Alésia is without doubt Alise-Sainte-Reine’.

And I think they are right. The evidence is compelling: from the most recent Franco-German excavations, the superb campaign of aerial photography revealing the Roman siege-works, the coins and weapons, including slingshots inscribed TLABI (Titus Labienus was Caesar’s chief lieutenant) and a dedicatory inscription including the name ALISIIA. These provide support for Napoleon III’s conviction.

In 1865 the emperor monumentalised Alésia by erecting an impressive statue of Vercingétorix, which now dominates the hill. It was sculpted by Aimé Millet with a base designed by Viollet-le-Duc. The face and facial hair were modelled on Napoleon III’s own, providing us with what is now everyone’s idea of a Celt. Actually the 1860s was the high point of the fashion for male facial hair. In reality, Vercingétorix may have been sufficiently Romanised, as shown on his coins, to have been hairless. This is how he appears during his patriotic performance in the MuséoParc’s cinema, housed in Alésia’s impressive Interpretation Centre, which was designed by the French architect Bernard Tschumi (who was also responsible for La Villette, the science park on the outskirts of Paris, and the recent Parthenon Museum in Athens).

‘Impressive’ is probably the wrong word, because this circular building clad in a herringbone of timber beams sits discreetly in the landscape. The building symbolises the Roman wooden siege-works and provides a 360-degree view of the battlefield. Inside, the designers have tried to provide displays with broad appeal, modelled on British interpretation centres. Outside, in the reconstructed fortification area, I found ‘Roman’ soldiers, who confided to me that they couldn’t fight for more than 10 minutes because it was too hot in their armour. Tell that to Julius Caesar!

There are two other oppida associated with Vercingétorix and Caesar that have been monumentalised by French politicians – Gergovia was claimed by Marshal Pétain and the Vichy government. Petain probably deliberately avoided Alésia because of its Republican, anti-German associations. On the other hand, President François Mitterrand adopted and spent a fortune on the third oppidum – Bibracte, in the Morvan. Mitterand’s project was meant to symbolise the common purpose of the European Community. The message has changed recently.

MuséoParc Alésia was opened a few days before my visit, not by Sarkozy, but by the then Prime Minister François Fillon, who likes the Celts so much that he married a Welsh woman. Prophetically he proclaimed: ‘It is perhaps striking that the myth is one of defeat. Alésia is a symbol of courage despite failure.’ As at Masada and the Alamo, some people seem to gain satisfaction from courageous failure.

For details of MuséoParc Alésia visit www.alesia.com.

Most finds from Alésia have gone to Napoleon III’s National Museum of Archaeology, founded in 1862 at Saint Germain-en-Laye (www.musee-archeologienationale.fr).

The museum’s new Celtic galleries include an Alésia room; in this, its 150th anniversary year, the museum announced, ‘Les Gaulois reviennent’.
As a boy, the author Tom Holland had the inevitable obsession with dinosaurs, but he soon moved on seamlessly to a passion for the Ancient Greeks and Romans. Now 44, but still boyish, tall and slim, with neatly cropped grey hair, he explains their attraction: ‘The appeal of the Romans particularly was that they were like dinosaurs – big, fierce, extinct and inherently glamorous.’

Success as a writer came early for him, beginning in 1995 with a series of vampire novels before he moved on – seamlessly once again – to write his highly successful narrative history books. Rubicon: The Last Years of the Roman Republic came first in 2003 and won him widespread acclaim. This was followed, two years later, by Persian Fire: The First World Empire and the Battle for the West, in which Tom chronicles the tumultuous struggle between the ancient Greeks and the Persians. In 2008, in Millennium: The End of the World and the Forging of Christendom, he charted the birth of the modern world, exploring modern Europe’s roots in the early Middle Ages. Now his latest, In the Shadow of the Sword: The Battle for Global Empire and the End of the Ancient World (about the decline of Roman power and the rise of the Arab Empire), has recently topped the non-fiction best-seller list.

Books played no small part in Tom’s passion for history. A vividly illustrated children’s book by Peter Connolly on the Roman army fired his imagination; he shows me his copy inscribed with his name written in a youthful hand. ‘I also had a book on the Greek gods which my mother bought for me when I was sick in bed,’ he recalls. But it did not end with the Greeks and the Romans. ‘I became interested in all periods of history, but I preferred the medieval world to the modern and the ancient world to the medieval world. I grew up outside Salisbury, where history was all around me – from Stonehenge to Roman villas. So I got a sense of history early and an understanding that a landscape could bear witness to a great variety of eras.’

But it was two books that he read later that propelled him towards his career as a writer of narrative history.

‘At 13, I read A Distant Mirror by Barbara Tuchman about Europe in the 14th century and discovered that history could be written in a narrative, entertaining way while conveying a lot of academically sound material,’ he explains.

Then, after graduating (he got a double first in English and Latin at Queen’s College, Cambridge), he was browsing in Kensington Library and came across Peter Green’s Alexander to Actium, which was like a revelation. As Tom says, ‘It reignited my passion for antiquity and made me want to write with a sense of that distant mirror at the back of my mind.’

It was the need to bring history vividly to life that led him to abandon academia and turn to writing.

‘I was doing a doctorate on Byron but I wasn’t enjoying it. Then, when the film Interview with the Vampire came out [in 1994], I had the idea for a novel with Byron being a vampire. I wrote it in about six weeks and it did very well.’

The Vampyre was published in 1995 to great acclaim and he went on to write four more novels, although history still played an important part in the writing process.

‘These books were all historical. The last one was set in Egypt in three timelines. I was proud of it but no-one paid any attention to it, so I decided to devote my research to something in which it would be recognised.’

Through writing fiction he gained experience in handling plots and characters and...
preparing for twists and turns in the story, all of which proved useful when he moved on to narrative history. Writing *Rubicon* also provided him with a terrific opportunity to explore Rome, as he explains:

‘Freud said that the human mind was like Rome, with many layers existing in it simultaneously. In Rome more than anywhere else, you have to know what you are looking for, as you can see something different in the same place. In the Pantheon you can see a temple or a church. Do you see the Forum as a meeting-place in the time of the Republic or in the Imperial age, or as a cow pasture in the Middle Ages? When I was working on *Rubicon* I wasn’t interested in Trajan’s Column or the Colosseum.’

His excellent knowledge of Latin stood him in good stead during his research. Writing about the end of the Roman Empire opened up a world of high drama and larger-than-life characters, he also found that he had no competition in the field. ‘No-one was writing a popular narrative history of the Roman world then,’ he recalls.

During his work on *Rubicon*, when he was writing about the massacre of some 80,000 Romans and Italians in Asia Minor, the tragic events of 9/11 occurred. ‘There were parallels between the Roman and American republics; Artaxerxes was like a Saddam Hussein figure.’

His next book, *Persian Fire*, also allowed him to immerse himself in passions that first stirred in childhood.

‘I absorbed the details of the Persian wars like blotting-paper when I was about 10. Also, Peter Green had written a book about Greek armies that gave me a romantic idea of Thermopylae. Being able to write a book about this was a dream come true.’

Tom decamped with his wife and two daughters to Greece for six months to work on the book ‘It was a very idyllic time that had a *My Family and Other Animals* quality to it,’ he recalls.

Once again, real events provided echoes of the past. ‘We drove out to Greece just as the Iraq war was starting,’ he tells me. He and his family lived on the island of Euboea, within striking distance of the ancient battlegrounds of Thermopylae, Plataea and Salamis.

‘Being there added a lot in the sense of understanding the terrain when you are describing battles, even though the material is contested and we don’t know exactly how the landscape has changed.’

When he was considering the path the Persians took around Thermopylae to overwhelm the Spartans, he followed three possible routes – at night – fortunately finding them less hazardous than he imagined.

The popularity of his books shows an interest in ancient history that has grown tremendously of late. Why does he think it has happened now?

‘That interest has always been there but for a long time studying history was an elite activity associated with public schools and imperial values,’ he says. ‘So there was a bit of a campaign against the Classics, which drove them into the margins in the 1970s, and many people were disenfranchised in relation to that area.’

He credits the film *Gladiator* as one of the influences that changed attitudes.

‘From then on that old association of public schools and cold showers was no longer there. Now we have lots of associations with the ancient world from films and books to computer games.’

In his next two books, *Millennium* and *In the Shadow of the Sword*, he moved out of the ancient world.

‘I’d spent years in the Classical mindset, but that world is still very alien to us and I was interested in where it all went. How did it mutate into the modern world? I hadn’t thought in any serious way about any link between the two, how the Roman Empire collapsed and how its power was transferred to the Christian and Muslim worlds.’

But it was not all plain sailing. *In the Shadow of the Sword* turned into a tricky enterprise. Although it is claimed that much detail is known about the life of the Prophet Mohammed, Tom was surprised to discover that much of the accepted information was unreliable. ‘I found I had to question the fundamentals of Muslim belief,’ he says.

Questioning the veracity of ancient texts and beliefs however, was not new. ‘For *Persian Fire* I’d researched the lives of people like Lycurgus and Solon.’ Such heroes are built into systems of law and state but, actually, stand poised somewhere between history and myth. ‘That’s what cultures and empires do. They claim these people were great lawgivers, but what do we really know about them?’

Was he concerned about the reactions his latest book, *In the Shadow of the Sword*, would generate? ‘I didn’t believe that the Koran came from God but I assumed that Muslims wouldn’t care what a non-Muslim said,’ he explains.

Currently he is translating Herodotus for a new Penguin edition; this involved full immersion in ancient Greek.

‘I tried to teach myself Greek when I first read Herodotus and, when I was working on *Persian Fire*, I got a bit further. Basically I’m being paid to study ancient Greek – which is wonderful. Herodotus was the first classic I ever read and was one of the reasons I became obsessed with the Persian wars, but I also have a gun at my head which helps,’ he admits. ‘It’s like training for a marathon. You must work on it every day.

‘But I’m very fortunate that the notes are being written by Paul Cartledge [AG Leventis Professor of Greek Culture at Cambridge University], who can keep a beady eye on my translation.’

Tom believes firmly that more courses in Greek, Latin and ancient history should be available in schools. The school attended by his daughter is about to start teaching ancient history at A-level and is going to expand the study of Latin.

‘This is very encouraging. Lots of children would like to study Greek, Latin and ancient history, but there is a lack of teachers and the time for the study of these subjects is limited. Unless you study these subjects you can’t see how many humanities subjects link up. They are as fundamental to the study of humanities as maths is to the study of the sciences,’ he argues.

Would he like to have lived in any of the periods he has written about?

‘Certainly not! All you have to think about is dentistry,’ he replies, adding on a more serious note that he believes it is easier to live in a culture where monotheism prevails. ‘In these cultures people tend to be less innocently callous and you start to get hospitals and orphanages.’

If he could go back in time, who would he like to meet?

‘I’d love to meet Herodotus. He seems to have been insatiably curious and he must have been amazing company. I’d love to ask him how he got his information and if he really visited all the places he wrote about. Doing the translation I find a different kind of clarity characterises his vocabulary and use of language when he is describing something he knows well. I think he definitely visited Egypt and Babylon.’

Tom has adapted Herodotus, Homer, Thucydides and Virgil for BBC Radio 4; he also presents Radio 4’s *Making History*. Always busy with new projects, now he is working on a television documentary, which he will present, although the details are still under wraps. He has just served two years as the Chair of the Society of Authors and is currently on the committee of the Classical Association – and he has more books in the offing. His next is a narrative history of the Julio-Claudians that should be an absorbing and racy read; he says he is going to enjoy immersing himself in the ancient Roman world once again.

‘It will be nice to return to Rome, which had gods people don’t believe in any more!’ he says with a wry smile.

In *In the Shadow of the Sword: The Battle for Global Empire and the End of the Ancient World* by Tom Holland is published in hardback by Little, Brown at £25.
On the trail of the Etruscans

‘We are apt to regard Italy as a country so thoroughly beaten by travellers, that little now can be said about it: still less do we imagine that relics of the olden time can exist in the open air, and remain unknown to the world. Yet the truth is, that vast districts of the Peninsula, especially in the Tuscan, Roman and Neapolitan States, are to the archaeologist a terra incognita. Every monument on the high roads is familiar, even to the fireside traveller: but how little is known of the bye-ways! Of the swarms of foreigners who yearly traverse the country between Florence and Rome, not one in a hundred leaves the beaten track to visit objects of antiquity …’

George Dennis, The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria, 1848

When the British antiquarian George Dennis (1814-1898) explored southern Tuscany with his friend, the painter Samuel Ainsley, 150 years ago, he was the first to discover and describe important Etruscan sites in the hinterland and on the coast of a region that is known as the Maremma. Although no longer terra incognita, the Maremma is still untamed, unspoilt, and off the beaten track for most visitors.

This part of Etruria, in the heartland of central Italy, was once ruled by a large number of independent and prosperous city-states linked to each other by religious and commercial alliances, criss-crossed by land, sea and riverine trade routes, during a good part of the 1st millennium BC. It remained like this until being conquered by Rome.

The origins of the Etruscans and their language are still matters of scholarly dispute – one of the latest theories is that Sardinia might be one of their possible homelands – as is their relationship to Rome, which is continuously in need of revision. Current archaeological evidence provides new insights into the character of this still somewhat enigmatic culture that never seems to be entirely conclusive. ‘The Etruscans are not a theory or a thesis. If they are anything, they are an experience,’ wrote DH Lawrence in his Etruscan Places: Travels through forgotten Italy in 1932.

We set out to follow the original

Following in the footsteps of the adventurous 19th-century British antiquarian George Dennis, Dalu Jones explores the by-ways of the Maremma, a little-known corner of Etruria, in southern Tuscany.
itinerary of George Dennis by car, on almost empty roads – and on foot, as he did – encountering the extraordinary sights that met him almost daily. The pleasure of these archaeological discoveries, away from better-known Etruscan cities such as Volterra, Cortona and Chiusi, is enhanced by the surrounding landscape – wooded hillsides, cliffs, ravines, clear streams, wheatfields, an abundance of wild flowers and vineyards, producing famous wines such as Brunello di Montalcino and Morellino di Scansano. In Parco dell’Uccellina, one of the region’s many nature and wildlife reserves, we saw the native long-horned cattle herded by local cowboys, or butteri. So skilful were the butteri that they even outshone Buffalo Bill at a rodeo when he visited Italy in 1901. Here, excellent local produce – wine, olive oil, cheese, crostini (toasted bread laced with oil and garlic, or spread with venison and mushroom patés), wild boar sausages – is served in a wide range of trattorias and there is accommodation to suit all wallets, from suites in luxurious castles and stylish aristocratic villas to simple rooms in family-run farmhouses.

There is hardly a village or a small town here that does not have its own antiquarium displaying Etruscan objects found in neighbouring fields. The list of major sites ranges from the excavated city of Roselle, near the capital of the region, Grosseto, where in summer you can enjoy concerts in the Roman theatre built over the original Etruscan settlement, to Ghiaccio Forte, a fortified city from whose acropolis we gaze out over the wide panorama of the coastal plains and the lagoon of Orbetello and Talamone, where a great 4th-century temple once stood. The temple’s terracotta frontage, one of the masterpieces of late Etruscan sculpture, is now displayed in a museum at Orbetello. Also worth a visit are ancient Saturnia, with its thermal waters, and Pitigliano, set high on a cliff with tombs cut into the rock that are now used as wine-cells. But, above all, you must not miss Sovana, Vetulonia and Populonia. The most important discovery of the two 19th-century explorers was the necropolis of Sovana, of which George Dennis wrote:

‘Nearly every rock here speaks Etruscan... In the spring of 1843, Mr. Ainsley, my former fellow-traveller in Etruria, was making a third tour through this interesting land,
and, not content with beaten tracks, he penetrated to Pitigliano and thence made an excursion to Sovana, in quest of antiquities. Being aware that that place was known only as the site of the Roman Suana, he had no reason to expect relics of Etruscan times; yet, having established such an antiquity for Pitigliano, he shrewdly suspected the same for the neighbouring site. Here he inquired for antiquities. Antiquities?... Nobody had ever heard of such "stuff" at Sovana. From the provost to the hind, all were alike ignorant. But his curiosity was excited by some columbaria and rock-hewn tombs of familiar character, and he proceeded to explore the surrounding ravines.

"His suspicions were soon confirmed. Here were tombs with rock-hewn façades as at Norchia and Castel d’Asso... following the range of cliffs, he came to a monument in the form of a temple, in a style both unique and beautiful. The villagers who accompanied him led him on from one rock-hewn monument to another, which excited his surprise and admiration more and more by their multitude, variety, and novel character, and afforded him convincing evidence of the Etruscan origin of Sovana. He returned day after day to the spot, and in defiance of a midsummer sun, and its noxious influences, persevered till he had made finished drawings of the most remarkable monuments, and taken their dimensions with the fullest detail. Mr. Ainsley justly observes, that after "having visited nearly all the antiquities of this kind known to exist in Etruria, I can truly say that I have seen no place which contains so great a variety of sculptured tombs as Sovana."

Well-marked pathways now lead visitors from one Etruscan monument to another and through the Vie Cave, corridors hewn through the high tufa cliffs. The Vie Cave must have created a cosmological and ritual map whose overall significance is still somewhat of a riddle for archaeologists.

Across a ravine from the necropolis and over a ridge stands medi-

eval Sovana, a pretty, well-restored small walled town, the birthplace of Pope Gregory VII (circa 1020-1085), whose house has recently been excavated. The remarkable Romanesque duomo has an excellent bookshop which is also the headquarters of Cooperativa La

shores, huge domed mounds. Here is the site of Populonia, once a settlement where wealthy aristocratic merchants and metalworkers lived. Today it is protected by a vast archaeological park that comprises the whole of the headland topped by the city’s acropolis and a medieval castle. A network of paths and roads lead through oak woods up to the acropolis, a cluster of tombs and, should you fancy a swim, on to a secluded, unspoilt beach.

Moving inland towards Siena, little is visible of the excavations at the site of Poggio Civitate that dates back to the 7th and 6th centuries BC. The outstanding objects found here are on view in the archaeo-

logical museum at Murlo, a tiny, impeccably preserved medieval vil-

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Poggio Civitate was one of the earliest attested Etruscan proto-

urban environments and is one of the most important archaeological discoveries in recent years for the study of this culture. In the summer excavation season, the town hosts an international cast of scholars
who travel there to conduct research directed by the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

One endearing trait of the Etruscans seems to have been their consideration for women – much criticised by dour Roman historians. Women of high rank were endowed with prestigious symbols like thrones and light chariots drawn by mules. They attended public performances alongside men and went to banquets where wine was drunk. They were literate and could also read omens, which meant they played an important role in religious practices.

Although the extent of their freedom may have been exaggerated in the wake of the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, there is evidence to support the fact that their lives were different in many ways from those of their more demure Greek and Roman sisters.

Unlike the more austere members of the modern sisterhood, Etruscan women wore magnificent jewellery and paid great attention to the care of their bodies, using perfumes and ointments. Italian archaeologists have recently discovered a cosmetic lotion that is over 2,000 years old. It was found in an Egyptian alabaster unguentarium in a cosmetics case that belonged to an aristocratic Etruscan lady buried near Chiusi. Dating to the 2nd century BC, the tomb was sealed by a large terracotta tile on which an inscription painted in red reads: ‘Thana Presnti Plecunia Umranalisa’. The name of the deceased woman tells us she was the daughter of a lady named Umranei, a member of one of the most important aristocratic families of Chiusi. The ashes of Thana rested nearby in a small travertine (lime-stone) urn, decorated with luxuriant foliate designs and motifs, including the head of a goddess, probably the Etruscan Earth goddess Cel Ati, in bone, ivory, tin and bronze. It stood on feet carved in the shape of Sirens, a popular motif in Etruscan art, and was filled with precious personal objects: two bronze finger rings, a pair of tweezers, two combs and the unguentarium whose contents, after chemical analysis, were found to be a mixture of vegetable oil and natural resins prepared in Egypt.

If you hurry, you just have time to catch a fascinating exhibition entitled Etruscans: The heroic ideal and the sparkling wine at the Palazzo Mazzetti in Asti, near Turin. It focuses on the historical role played by Etruscan culture in acting as a bridge between the Greek world, the Italic peoples and the Celts in the first millennium BC.

Travel log

- Etruscans: The heroic ideal and the sparkling wine (www.etruschiadasti.it) is on show in Asti at Palazzo Mazzetti (www.palazzomazzetti.it) until 15 July. (See images 1, 3, 4, 6, and 7.) Further reading:
  - George Dennis, The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria, Cambridge University Press, 2010;
  - DH Lawrence, Italy: Sketches from Etruscan Places; Sea and Sardinia; Twilight in Italy, Penguin Classics, 2008;
  - For information: on Maremma visit www.maremma.guide.com or www.maremma-tuscany.com; on Sovana visit www.sovanaguide.it; on Vetulonia visit www.parcodeglietrusci.it; for accommodation visit www.agriturismo.regione.toscana.it; for food and wine visit: www.maremmawinefoodshire.it


10. The coastal site of Populonia, beside the beautiful Gulf of Baratti, was once home to wealthy Etruscan merchants and metalworkers. Photograph: Dr Filippo Salviati.
Art exhibition

A Minotaur in Montparnasse
Anyone planning to visit the British Museum's first showing of its newly acquired *Vollard Suite*, a set of 100 etchings by Picasso, might want to pass by the Freud Museum in Maresfield Gardens en route. There, in the room that was once Sigmund Freud's study and is now the centrepiece of the museum, is the great man's collection of antiquities — among much else, a Roman figurine of Pallas Athena (which its owner mistook for a 5th-century Greek original), a Late Period Egyptian bronze of Isis Suckling the Infant Horus and an Athenian red-figure *hydria*. At the heart of Freud's practice, and thus of psychoanalysis, is his taste for the antique — what the American critic Donald Kuspit has called 'the mighty metaphor of archaeology'. So it is with Picasso.

When Picasso made his famous suite of etchings for the celebrated Parisian art dealer Ambroise Vollard, in the years from 1930 to 1937, he had already been introduced to the Freudian concept of the unconscious via André Breton and Surrealism. Picasso and Freud had corresponded; in 1936, he telegraphed his congratulations to the old man in Vienna on the occasion of his 80th birthday. But Freud's influence on Picasso was specific as well as general. The Spaniard's work did not simply delve into his own unconscious, it did so in the way that Freud himself had done, through the medium of Classical antiquity.

If you are looking for something suitable to read before seeing the British Museum show, then, you might do worse than track down a copy of AE Watts' translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* from 1930. Its illustrations are by Picasso. The artist was commissioned to produce these 30 etchings by the Swiss publisher Albert Skira: the effect on him of doing them was electrifying. Or, rather, transforming, since the experience not only changed the kind of work that Picasso was making but left him with a fascination for the whole idea of transformation. This new obsession was to find its full flowering in *The Vollard Suite*.

By the start of the 1930s, Picasso was living and working at Château de Boisgeloup, 50 miles from Paris, in the Eure. As at other critical moments in his life, he had turned away from painting to concentrate on sculpture. The back-and-forth
between two- and three-dimensional art was uppermost in his mind. So, too, was the subject of his sculpting – his young and unsophisticated mistress, Marie-Thérèse Walter, who lived with him in Normandy while his wife, Olga, stayed in Paris. With Ovid fresh in his thoughts and Marie in his bed, Picasso was preoccupied with ideas of inconstancy, of mutability. And, with plaster-casts of Classical sculpture in his studio, this preoccupation found a natural focus in Ovid’s most memorable story of metamorphosis, that of the Cypriot sculptor Pygmalion.

Thus the pairing of etchings numbers 46 and 47, made in 1933 and known respectively as Young Sculptor at Work and Old Sculptor at Work. In the first, the figure of the youthful artist with vine leaves in his hair models a clay maquette of the bust of a woman. The second etching tells the same story, although now the direction of the action is reversed – from left to right rather than from right to left – and the sculptor has aged. So, too, has Picasso’s style, which is notably more Classical and frieze-like.

It is always dangerous to read biographical detail into an artist’s work, although here it is hardly possible not to. The sculpted bust in both etchings is clearly recognisable as that of Marie-Thérèse Walter, her aptly Grecian profile already well established as a prototype in the portraits Picasso had painted of her since their first meeting in 1927. Given the 31-year age gap between the artist and his mistress, it is inevitable that we should identify the older sculptor as Picasso himself, even if the bearded figure bears no obvious resemblance to him. The figure might be meant as an archetype of Pygmalion as artist-king, or it may be a broader allusion to the bearded face that appears next to three profile drawings of Marie-Thérèse at etching number 33. That face belongs to Rembrandt.

Although the 100 etchings of The Vollard Suite vary wildly in style between the Flaxman-like simplicity of number 7 (Tieo Sculptors in front of a Statue) and the painterliness of number 27 (Faun Uncovering a Sleeping Woman), after 1932 they unanimously dispense with drawn borders. Picasso’s intention is clear. In the creative explosion that The Vollard Suite represents, there are to be no rules or edges. Time and inspiration can shift from 5th-century Athens to 17th-century Netherlands, between sculpture and painting, style and style, myth and reality, youth and old age – and between genders.

One of the things we all know about Picasso is that he was an unreconstructed Spanish macho, a seducer of ever-younger women, a Minotaur in Montparnasse. When he eventually took up with Dora Maar in 1935, he suggested that she and Marie-Thérèse fight each other for him. The sight of them wrestling on his studio floor was, Picasso said, one of the happiest memories of his life – and yet the artist that emerges from The Vollard Suite is altogether more complex than all of this suggests.

In the etchings of the young and old sculptors, it is the woman who triumphs, who stays unchanged while the man ages. In the first, it is...
the Picasso figure who is pretty and small-featured, his Galatea who has the strong-nosed Grecian profile. In number 26, Boy and Sleeping Woman by Candlelight, it is the boy who takes the maternal role, watching over the child-like woman. In the etched corridas, it is always the female horse that triumphs over the male bull. The Picasso we see developing in this magnificent suite of prints is the one who, in six febrile weeks in 1937, painted what remains one of the greatest images of war ever produced, Guernica; a work that owes its black-and-white palette, and its genius, to its genesis in this series of etchings.

Picasso Prints: The Vollard Suite is on show in Room 90 of the British Museum (www.britishmuseum.org) until 2 September. Admission is free. This exhibition is the first time a complete set of Picasso’s most celebrated series of etchings has been shown in a British public institution. An illustrated book, Picasso Prints: The Vollard Suite, written by the show’s curator, Stephen Coppel, to accompany the exhibition, is published by British Museum Press in hardback at £40, paperback £16.99.

7. Two Sculptors in front of a Statue.
Etching, 22.2 x 31.3cm. (No. 7)

8. Faun Uncovering a Sleeping Woman.
Sugar aquatint, scraper and burin engraving,
31.5 x 41.5cm. (No. 27)

Aquatint worked with scraper to resemble mezzotint, drypoint and burin engraving,
24.7 x 34.5cm. (No. 97)
Murray Eiland examines a civilisation in Peru that built large earthen temples, had a taste for human sacrifice and produced magnificent gold objects and extraordinary pots, some of which are sexually explicit.

The Moche civilisation of northern Peru (AD 100-800) has long been studied by a small band of academics who homed in on the collections of Moche art in the Peabody Museum at Harvard University. There are few books on this subject for the general reader, not because the culture is not artistically brilliant, but because the region was not the subject of intensive academic study until relatively recently. Now anyone interested can become better acquainted with this lively culture by reading Jeffrey Quilter’s well-written book *The Moche of Ancient Peru*. The word Moche is derived from the Moche Valley, in which two large earthen structures known as the Huacas de Moche (Temples of Moche) stand. Muchik was the language of the region at the time when the Spanish arrived, but it died out sometime in the 18th century, and no one can be certain whether the ancient Moche people...
spoke this language. It did, however, provide the basis of a working hypothesis.

The culture was largely the preserve of academics until 1987, when the ‘royal’ tombs in Sipán were discovered. The richest burials ever found in the Western Hemisphere, they signalled to the population at large that an opulent culture once thrived in the desert, and showed that the Moche were more advanced than even the specialists thought.

Their culture was limited to a narrow band along the Pacific coast, but instead of lush tropical forests – as inhabited by cultures in the northern part of the land mass – the area where the Moche lived was a desert. This meant that irrigation was required for the cultivation of all their food crops – maize, beans, and squash. It was the command and control of irrigation that led to the formation of a complex culture, as in Egypt and the Near East, with monumental architecture and beautiful, well-crafted objects produced in both metal (particularly gold) and clay.

There is some debate as to whether the culture can be seen to represent one empire, or if it can even be considered as a cultural continuum, since it was no longer in existence by the time of the Spanish conquest. Many of the Moche sites, however, proved irresistible to the conquistadors, who plundered them for funerary objects made of gold. The Huaca del Sol (Temple of the Sun) was the largest pre-Columbian structure in Peru before being badly damaged by looting, and since the Second World War looters have targeted artefacts other than those made of gold.

The result is that many museums have objects without being certain of exactly where they were excavated. For example, while Moche ceramics can be identified as a group, using art-historical criteria, until recently the concept of regional styles could not be approached because of the lack of scientifically excavated objects. Happily, the sites less attractive to looters were left intact and therefore available for scientific study, and they remain so to this day.

The northern coast of Peru is not as dry as the southern coast, which yields much more organic material, including textiles (8). One of the distinctive features of Moche culture is the use of moulds to mass-produce intricate
The Moche used a limited range of colours (2, 4, 5) on their ceramics – basically red and white and possibly black for outlining. The pottery appears to have been traded over some distance, as small villages have yielded elite pottery from their grave sites. Some of the human figures are of a highly stylised form, and some appear comical to the modern eye.

Famously, some of the ceramics show an uncensored attitude towards depicting sexual activities (9, 11). High collector demand for these pieces – particularly those depicting homosexual acts – has led to a huge trade in fake vessels, which are as artistic as the original. This difficulty has even led to a huge trade in fake vessels, depicting homosexual acts – has led to a huge trade in fake vessels, depicting homosexual acts – has led to a huge trade in fake vessels, depicting homosexual acts – has led to a huge trade in fake vessels, depicting homosexual acts – has led to a huge trade in fake vessels, depicting homosexual acts – has led to a huge trade in fake vessels, depicting homosexual acts – has led to a huge trade in fake vessels, depicting homosexual acts – has led to a huge trade in fake vessels, depicting homosexual acts.

Vessels that are made from the same mould are always decorated differently, even if only slightly so. This has led to speculation about the concept of the interplay of opposing forces, representing light and darkness (like the Chinese idea of yin and yang), found in Inca art and religion.

Human figures are portrayed in a way that is naturalistic enough to suggest that they represented real people, especially as some are shown with physical disabilities (such as a cleft lip). Other figures have been a variety of developmental defects, including dwarfism. It could be that in a highly ordered society, those outside the norm were accorded some form of attention, and it seems that it was positive rather than negative. Whatever the truth, to the modern eye the ceramics made by this culture are easily appreciated. Figures of people and animals may be easily identified, as they show a high degree of realism.

At the same time huge questions remain. Do the figures represent gods or mortals? What do the scenes represent? It seems that the most elaborate pottery may not have been highly valued by the super-elite of Moche society. For example, the richest grave (in terms of how much gold was found in it) of the Lord of Sipán contained 1,137 pottery vessels, but most of these were simple jars in the form of seated or standing men. They were not well-made, nor were they carefully painted. While some were arranged so that prisoners or musicians were facing what seem to be higher-ranking persons, they were probably present for a symbolic purpose. In contrast, many ‘middle-class’ tombs contained very elaborate pottery.

Worthy of particular comment are the vessels that depict sexual activity. There is no literary evidence to shed light on the social context of these aptly called ‘sex pots’, but it seems that sodomy, masturbation and fellatio were commonly depicted, whereas vaginal intercourse was rare. Scholars have suggested that while fellatio involved an elaborately dressed, dominant figure, other sexual activities were between individuals dressed in much the same way.

Examining a particular series of scenes on pottery involving anal sex between a man and a woman, the anthropologist Mary Weismantel notes that the figure of the woman may be accompanied by a breastfeeding baby. It may be that this is a reference to the transmission of essence from the father through the mother to the infant. This practice exists in cultures scattered across

7. Frieze with Degollador God at Huaca Cao Viejo (early building stage of the huaca). Photograph: Jeffrey Quilter.

8. Border fragment from tapestry mantle. Tiwanaku, 10.4 x 1.6 x 102.5cm. Photograph: Mark Craig.

9. A couple covered by a blanket. 12.2 x 17cm. Photograph: Mark Craig.
One of the most notable researchers was not an archaeologist, but the owner of a large hacienda, Rafael Larco Hoyle. Working from the 1930s to the 1960s, he excavated many sites and compared what he found there with what the local population was still using in the area. Although he also built and funded a large museum, he is best known for coining the term ‘Mochica’, which replaced the earlier term ‘proto-Chimú’ found in many older textbooks about South American archaeology.

Perhaps because of his education in the USA, Larco naturally assisted Americans in their research. With the ease of international travel after the Second World War, Harvard University sent several teams south to explore the Moche culture and, over time, Peruvian teams began their own large-scale excavations.

Meet more Moche
Harvard University has one of the most comprehensive collections of Moche artefacts in the world. Many of the vessels were acquired by an undergraduate named Julio C Tello. Other collectors donated examples dating from before the 1940s. A large group of vessels, many described as objects thrown away by looters, was exported with permission from Peru in 1944. Since then no antiquities have been acquired except with permission from the Peruvian government.

Rome’s rise as an imperial power first began with its conquest of Italy during the 4th and 3rd centuries BC. At this time, Italy was a diverse assemblage of independent peoples, tribes and states with many different cultures and languages. Among them were the populous and war-like Samnites of southern Italy, who spoke Oscan, a language related, yet distinct from Latin. The Samnites were regarded as the progenitors of many other South Italic peoples, such as the Apulians, Campanians and Lucanians.

From the beginning of the fourth century BC they formed a powerful tribal confederation whose territory lay among the mountains of the south-central Apennines in the modern regions of Abruzzo and Molise. Samnium was a rugged land with steep limestone mountains that acted as a natural obstacle to invaders. Throughout Samnium massive polygonal fortifications called oppida were strategically situated in commanding positions as places of refuge. The Samnites had a reputation as fierce fighters, Livy described them as ‘rude highlanders’ living in mountain villages who used to ‘ravage the regions of the plain and coast’ (Livy, IX.13). The threat of their expansion into central Italy brought them into conflict with Rome, who fought three wars against them from 343 to 290 BC. These Samnite Wars went on to involve practically all the peoples of Italy and, ultimately, resulted in Roman hegemony. Yet despite the important role they played in pre-Roman Italy and the development of the Roman army, the legacy of the Samnites and other South Italic peoples is not readily apparent. During the 5th century BC Samnites migrated into the coastal and lowland regions bordering the Apennines. By the start of the fourth century BC they had conquered nearly all of the Greek and Etruscan cities in southwestern Italy. These coastal Samnites became known as Campanians and Lucanians, and a great deal of archaeological evidence has been recovered from the numerous warrior burials found in these regions. One of the most important archaeological sites is the Greek city of Poseidonia, which became known as Paestum after the Lucanians captured it in 410 BC. Lucanian burials excavated there contained not only complete panoplies of armour, but also numerous tomb paintings, which depict warriors departing and returning from battle or engaging in duels. Although some of the armour from these burials is Greek, most of it is South Italic in origin, and

The ‘rude highlanders’ of Samnium

Mountain men with a reputation as relentless warriors, the Samnites had a greater influence on the history of pre-Roman Italy than is appreciated, says Dr Mike Burns

1. South Italic warriors liked well-crafted, ornately decorated armour – such as this fine Phrygian-Attic helmet, with incised wings, coiled feather-holders, spined dorsal crest and cheek pieces adorned with Nike and Artemis, goddesses of victory and prowess in arms. Southern Italy, 4th century BC.

2. The breast plate of the Italic anatomical cuirass was similar to the Greek muscle cuirass, but smaller and with separate side and shoulder plates – a lighter form suitable for cavalrymen or infantry that moved rapidly. Southern Italy, 4th-3rd century BC.
sheet-bronze horns, wings, and various types of elaborate crest-holders. Feathered crests, associated with Mamers, the Samnite version of Mars, were a popular helmet adornment and were intended ‘to make their stature appear greater’ to intimidate enemies (Livy, IX.40).

Although some of the Greeks’ equipment was used, their fighting methods were not: the javelin remained the South Italian warrior’s preferred weapon. The javelin, typically between one and two metres long, was thrown using a looped leather thong called the *amentum* that was tied around the centre of the weapon. The *amentum* gave the javelin a rotary motion that increased its accuracy, range, and velocity upon impact.

Alexander, King of Epirus, who was fighting on behalf of the Greeks of Tarantum, was killed at long range when a Lucanian ‘cast a javelin which transfixed him’ (Livy, VIII.24). From the 4th century BC onwards, more specialised types of javelin were used, such as the *pilum*, which had a long, slender iron shank specifically designed for piercing shields and armour.

The mountain-dwelling Samnites were insulated from direct contact with the Greeks and tended to use more traditional forms of Italic equipment, including a large oblong shield called a *scutum*. Measuring circa 120cm long and 60cm wide, the shield was ideal protection against thrown weapons. Its robust construction from strips of wood covered in hide, with a central wooden spine or spina, also made it suitable for use in close combat.

The Samnites’ equipment shows they employed versatile tactics, which combined the capability of light troops to attack from a distance with the protection and defensive capability of a close-order phalanx formation.
distance with the cohesiveness of heavy infantry to fight hand-to-hand. Their discipline is reflected in a passage from Livy: ‘There was fearful bloodshed around the Samnites’ standards, but nowhere was there any sign of retreat, so determined were they to be overcome only by death... The Romans admitted they had never fought a more tenacious enemy’ (Livy, VII.33).

The Samnites were renowned for the distinctive appearance and fine craftsmanship of their armour. Livy describes how, in battle, ‘the Samnites advanced their standards, and the army followed in its ornate armour, a splendid spectacle even for Roman eyes’ (Livy, X.40). Samnite body armour was essentially a type of harness composed of breast and back plates suspended by separate shoulder and side plates. The earliest form consisted of a pair of bronze discs, 18cm to 28cm in diameter, known as kardiophylakes, or ‘heart protectors’.

Samnite armour was designed to protect only the most vital parts of the torso, the heart and the thoracic blood vessels; consequently, it was much lighter than Greek armour and allowed a greater degree of flexibility that was better suited to their more open style of warfare. Greek influence is most evident in the appearance of anatomical features on the breast and back plates of Italic cuirasses.

The triple-disc cuirass, which first appears at the Samnite necropolis of Alfedena in the Abruzzo during the 5th century BC, is an abstract representation of the pectoral and abdominal muscles. Later forms of South Italian armour had rectangular breast and back plates, with either stylised or realistic anatomical features of the male torso. It is interesting that Roman soldiers of the second century BC are described using similar cuirasses that were ‘a brass breast plate placed in front of the heart and called a kardiophylakes’ (Polybius, VI.24).

Roman tradition maintained that much of their equipment and tactics derived from their wars with the Samnites. Sallust claims that ‘our ancestors... were never too proud to take over a sound institution from another country. They borrowed most of their armour and weapons from the Samnites’ (Sallust, Catiline 51. 37-38).

Other sources are even more specific, stating: ‘The Samnite oblong shield was not part of our national equipment, nor did we have javelins, but fought with round shields and spears... But when we found ourselves at war with the Samnites, we armed ourselves with their oblong shields and javelins...’ (Ineditum Vaticanum).

It is difficult to determine the true extent of any Samnite influence as the Romans did not bury their dead with arms and armour. But literary sources state that at some point during the 4th century BC there was a dramatic shift in Roman equipment and tactics from the close-ordered hoplite phalanx to a more flexible...
Ancient warfare

formation that made greater use of the javelin and scutum. This transition probably occurred during the Samnite Wars against an enemy that proved the value of such weapons and tactics.

One of the most distinctive items of the Samnite warrior’s panoply was the broad bronze belt. Many of these show evidence of numerous repairs, suggesting that they had symbolic value, perhaps representative of status as a warrior. In many South Italic tomb paintings, bronze belts figure prominently as spoils taken in battle, stripped from the bodies of slain enemies and suspended from javelins, often with bloody tunics.

These images reveal a culture fixated on symbols of military triumph and the acquisition of trophies as visible proofs of valour. There was a strong heroic ethos in South Italian warfare and an obsession with not only defeating an enemy but destroying his will to fight.

In 321 BC, during the second Samnite War, the Romans suffered one of their most devastating defeats when they were trapped by the Samnites between the mountain passes of the Caudine Forks. Unable to break free, ultimately they were forced to surrender and to agree to a shameful peace treaty. The entire Roman army was then disarmed and sent under a yoke made of spears, before marching back to Rome. Passing beneath the yoke was ‘a final confession of absolute defeat’ (Livy, III.28). To the Romans, who venerated the virtues of valour and skill in battle, there could be no worse humiliation, and some committed suicide rather than endure it. At the Caudine Forks the Samnites ‘had won a victory which would be lasting as well as glorious, for what they had overpowered was... the Roman courage and fighting spirit’ (Livy, IX.6). The Samnites, however, underestimated the mettle of the Romans, who were every bit as tenacious as themselves. The blow to Roman prestige actually served as a goad for revenge, and the Samnites soon found themselves locked in a desperate struggle with a relentless enemy. In the years that followed, the tide turned against the Samnites as the Romans built a powerful cordon of alliances with other Italic peoples to hem them in.

By 290 BC the Samnites had been defeated and forced into an alliance on unequal terms, made to cede territory for Roman colonies and to provide troops to fight for Rome when required. The Roman conquest of Italy was long and hard-fought but, despite their subjugation, the Samnites were ever poised to revolt if they saw a chance of regaining their independence. Both Pyrrhus and Hannibal found them to be willing allies who, even as late as the 1st century BC, were to be found in arms against Rome.

They would eventually be crushed after the Social War (91-86 BC) by the Roman dictator Sulla, who persecuted them relentlessly, ‘until he had destroyed all the Samnites or driven them from Italy’ (Strabo, V.4). But even the Romans grudgingly admired the bravery and resolve of the Samnites, who ‘shrank not from war, and so far were they from wearying of even an unsuccessful defence of their freedom, that they preferred to be conquered rather than make not the effort to win’ (Livy, X.31).
The famous Egyptian 18th-Dynasty glass face inlays from the collection of Achille Groppi (1890-1949) attracted record prices at the Groppi Collection sale, part IV, at Christie’s in London on 26 April. All of the pieces in this sale were collected in Egypt by Mr Groppi, the proprietor of the famed Maison Groppi, during the 1920s and 1940s. Six pages of the catalogue were devoted to a pictorial history of the Groppis.

Most of the objects in the catalogue were exhibited in the Antikenmuseum, Basel, and the Kestner Museum, Hannover, in 2008 as Köstlichkeiten aus Kairo!

The first three sales, held at Christie’s London in 1992 and 1993, were titled the ‘Per Neb’ collection. A superb turquoise glass face inlay of either Akhenaten or Nefertiti (4) – it was difficult to ascertain if it was male or female – (H. 4.3cm) was estimated at £80,000-£120,000, but brought in a record price of £277,250 from a London dealer. Again with an estimate of £80,000-£120,000, an exceptional Amarna turquoise glass face inlay of Akhenaten (2) (H. 4.2cm) was sold for almost double – £205,250 – to another English dealer. But it was a European collector who paid £103,250 for an opaque red glass face inlay of Akhenaten (3) (H. 4.2cm), estimated at £70,000-£100,000.

An elegant Egyptian bronze Wepwawet (the jackal god) used as a standard terminal (7), circa 7th-6th century BC (L. 16cm, H. 14.5cm), with an estimate of only £30,000-£50,000, went for £115,250 to another European collector.

A brilliant blue 19th-20th Dynasty faience representation of Khonsu as a baboon (6) sold for £97,250, within its estimate of £70,000-£100,000, to a London dealer.

Small Egyptian mosaic glass inlays of mae- nads and animals all brought very healthy prices. A Ptolemaic mosaic glass falcon-head inlay (8) (measuring only 2.3cm x 1.8cm), with an estimate of £20,000-£30,000, achieved a stunning price of £85,250 from an English dealer, who acquired a number of other mosaic glass lots. A large (L. 51cm) 26th-Dynasty Egyptian wooden and bronze ibis (5), estimated at £80,000-£120,000, brought in £97,250 from another European collector.

The only Classical object in the sale, a small (H. 34cm) but voluptuous Hellenistic marble torso of Aphrodite (1), circa 3rd-1st century BC and said to be from Alexandria, sold for £121,250, well above its estimate of £40,000-£60,000, to yet another European collector.

This very successful sale of 107 lots totalled £1,861,862, with 99% sold by value and 97.2% by number of lots.

It may be interesting to note that Ms Laetitia Delaloye, the associate specialist in the Antiquities Department of Christie’s, is the great-great-granddaughter of Jacques Groppi (1863-1938), the father of Achille Groppi, who was the founder of the Maison Groppi.
An unusually large (H. 25.5cm), Attic black-figure skyphos by the Theseus Painter (left), circa 510-490BC, depicting Herakles at a symposium with Hermes, was published by A Emmerich in Masterpieces of Greek Vase Painting in New York in 1964. At the time it was priced at a mere $4,800. Now estimated at £30,000-£50,000, it realised £63,650, a record price for a Greek skyphos, at Bonham’s Antiquities sale on 25 April. It is interesting to note that the 1964 Emmerich catalogue featured a large number of fine Attic vases from Dr Herbert Cahn priced from about $1,500 to some $3,000 but that would sell today for about $50,000 to $100,000 and more.

But the rest of the sale was disappointing: the only two featured pieces, a Roman bronze head of an emperor (estimated at £200,000-£300,000) and a Sasanian silver dish (estimated at £120,000-£150,000) did not sell. Except for the skyphos, the highest prices realised were £39,650 for a fragmentary Romanesque marble relief of the Virgin and Child (which really should not have been in an antiquities sale) and £20,000 for a Hellenistic bronze statue fragment, the cover piece, that sold (obviously without a reserve price) far below its estimate of £50,000-£80,000. The sale of 220 lots totalled only £863,488, with just 56.5% sold by value and 68.8% by number of lots, a far cry from the several fine sales that Bonham’s has conducted over the past few years. The large percentage of bought-in lots was nearly the same at both Christie’s and Bonham’s. Perhaps this signifies the reluctance of some potential buyers to part with their funds in these difficult economic times.
**Dioscuri relief makes headlines**

In Christie’s Antiquities Sale held on 26 April, the most important piece was a large (97.5 x 54.5cm) Roman, 2nd century AD marble relief of the two Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux (1), the twin sons of Zeus and Leda, featuring the two heroes with their horses, accompanied by a bull, a wild boar and a rooster, around a flaming altar. Part of the Hubertus Wald collection exhibited and published in Hamburg in 1998 and now offered by Christie’s (with four pages of publicity for the consigner), it was acquired in 1961. Estimated at an inexplicably low £60,000-£80,000 – perhaps due to its somewhat rough surface – it nevertheless occupied four pages of the catalogue and brought in a resounding £313,250 ($507,465) from an American dealer.

A fine, mid 2nd-early 3rd century Roman cuirassed marble torso of an emperor (11) (H. 122cm), from the Wright S Ludington collection, de-accessioned by the Santa Barbara Museum and sold at Sotheby’s New York in June 2000 for $98,500 (now estimated at £200,000-£300,000) realised £241,250 from a European collector.

Then a small Roman marble group, *Mithras Tauroctonus* (`Mithras Slaying the Cosmic Bull’) (12), 2nd century AD (L. 37cm), though estimated at only £30,000-£50,000, was acquired for £79,250 by an American collector. A well-draped Roman marble torso of Aphrodite (13), 1st-2nd century AD (H. 42cm), estimated at £40,000-£60,000, was acquired by a European collector for £121,250. A very sensitive 1st-century Roman marble head of Eros (14) (H. 24.1cm), probably after an original 4th-century BC Greek sculpture by Lysippus, was estimated at a surprisingly low £10,000-£15,000, but that did not deter a London dealer from finally buying it for a hefty £169,250.

Next, an imposing Roman marble head of Germanicus (3), adoptive son of Tiberius, father of Caligula and grandfather of Nero, first quarter of the 1st century AD (H. 30cm), was acquired by a German collector in 1929. Estimated conservatively at £50,000-£80,000, it sold for £109,250 to the European collector who had already acquired the Roman marble torso.

An archaistic Roman marble female herm head (2), dating from the early 1st century AD (H. 25.5cm), from the collection of the photographer Bob Willoughby (1927-2009) was published in the *Taste of Angels* exhibition at the Otis Art Institute of Los Angeles County in 1966. Now, with an estimate of £60,000-£80,000, it brought in £91,250 from a European collector.

Originally from the Hever Castle
Collection of Lord Astor, a Greek gold myrtle wreath (7) (D. 21cm) was sold at Christie’s London in December 1987 as ‘possibly Hellenistic’ for £15,400. Dated to the 3rd-2nd century BC and estimated at £100,000-£150,000, it brought in a healthy £181,250 from an English dealer.

A superb limestone bearded Cypriot male head (9), circa 460-450 BC (H. 34cm), from the collection of the prominent French architect Hector-Martin Lefuel, 1840-1880, with an estimate of only £40,000-60,000, was taken up by a London dealer for £103,250.

The upper part of an Egyptian wood sarcophagus from the 26th Dynasty (8) (H. 72.5cm), estimated at only £15,000-£20,000, was finally purchased for a surprising £73,250 by a European collector. A large (D. 34cm) Seleucid ribbed silver plate (10), circa 3rd-1st century BC, from a Munich collection, 1950-1960 (estimated at £100,000-150,000), sold to a London dealer for £121,250.

A silver bowl from the Elymais Dynasty of southwestern Iran (D. 25.5cm), circa 2nd century AD, depicting Ganymede and Zeus as an eagle (6), with an Elymaean variety of Aramaic inscription on the exterior rim, was estimated at £150,000-£250,000; it received a winning bid of £181,250 from an anonymous bidder. The same person also bought a Marlik silver cup from northern Iran, with three striding bulls, their heads in high relief (5) (D. 13.2cm), estimated at £100,000-£200,000, for £109,250.

While there were two other lots that brought over £60,000 each, there were also nine lots estimated at more than £60,000 that did not sell, including an important Egyptian limestone cult statue of Nectanebo I, estimated at £600,000-£900,000, and a large rare Corinthian black-figure column krater with an estimate of £350,000-£550,000.

The 396-lot sale totalled £3,911,587, with only 60.3% sold by value and just 67.9% sold by number of lots.

(All prices quoted in these reports include the buyer’s premium.)

* The next Antiquities Sales will be held at Christie’s (www.christies.com) on 25 October and at Bonham’s (www.bonhams.com) on 24 October.
Ancient Near Eastern artefacts and symbols and their use in contemporary society to enforce and lay claim to cultural heritage for political ends. This is traced from early anti-quarianism in the 16th century to the present day. With good references to the major works of the past on this matter, from Sir Isaac Newton’s lesser-known *The Original of Monarchies*, through to V Gordon Childe’s *Man Makes Himself*. The question is raised as to whether our interpretation of the Ancient Near East has been limited or skewed by these early definitions.

Wengrow’s approach to this discussion is firmly contemporary, opening, as it does, with references to the looting of the Baghdad Museum. It is a clearly structured and thought-provoking book that is made even more accessible by several charts and maps for reference as well as several leaves of photographs to the centre. The bibliography is broken down by chapter and suggests clear paths for continued study.

This is a very approachable, well-written book that is unlikely to tie up any reader’s time for too long. The only drawback is that it is perhaps erring on the slim side for such an interesting topic.

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Religions of the Ancient Near East

Religions of the Ancient Near East

The stage is set even before the reader opens this book, by the cover depicting Brueghel’s *Tower of Babel*. It is obviously closely associated with a mythical dispersal of ancient peoples and hence the creation of many cultures in tandem, and as such it is a highly apt representation of many of the ideas Wengrow sets out to explore. On a purely aesthetic level, it just makes for an engaging and appealing book, and avoids the trap of having a staid cover concealing what turns out to be a rather interesting book.

Wengrow is concerned with reappraising the way we consider the civilisations of the Ancient Near East, and in particular Egypt and Mesopotamia. One of the principal ideas throughout the book is that the cultures of Ancient Egypt and Ancient Mesopotamia should not be considered with the isolated identities they have historically been given. While the book focuses largely on the 3rd millennium BC, much of the evidence is presented to show how these cultural identities were ascribed to Egypt and Mesopotamia in the last few hundred years for political and imperialist reasons.

The first half of the book is less discursive and demonstrates the cultural similarities between the two civilisations, with chapters on religious and cultic practices and the nature of kingship. This exploration of kingship forms part of the reasoning behind the use of the Brueghel image on the cover.

The second part of the book examines and society of the times and influenced the formation of Western religious thought.

Each chapter opens with slightly fanciful fictitious scene-setting, where Snell turns his hand to historical fiction. While this does allow him to indulge his imaginative side a little, the basic idea of giving a social and historical context to each new idea explored is a very good one; as an entry-level book for the informed amateur this also makes it very approachable and engaging.

While the slightly fanciful approach does have its charms, one if its pitfalls is the lack of clarity of chapter titles. I appreciate that this is not intended to be a weighty tome for scholars, but titles such as ‘Gods, Gods, Gods’ and ‘The Turning’ do not provide enough of a reference point to encourage the reader to dip into those particular sections.

Throughout the book the arguments make extensive reference to a wide range of modern philosophical, sociological and theological thought, which helps clearly trace the changing interpretations of ancient religions. These are supported by an in-depth and analytical examination of a variety of sources.

The evidence examined throughout the book has a leaning towards written sources, owing to Snell’s credentials as an enthusiastic ancient linguist. This has the benefit of offering some literal translations of phrases in Sumerian and Akkadian, helping to put names, places and practices in their correct context.

The religions of the Ancient Near East were so numerous and broad, both geographically and chronologically, crossing four millennia and four continents, that it is wise that Snell deliberately limited his focus. Readers should be aware that the book is intentionally focused on the religions of Egypt, Israel, Iran and Mesopotamia and doesn’t (for example) delve with any depth into eastern cult practice in Ancient Rome, or Syrian religions (to cite two equally fascinating areas of religious practice from the Ancient Near East).

Snell closes his history with an apt example of how our knowledge of ancient religions is heavily biased towards the formalised written religious law, rather than the belief sets as practised by the common man, owing to the nature of the extant evidence. The book provides a good introduction to specific areas of religion in the Ancient Near East, and contextualises these well both within their own social history and with modern interpretation.

With the comprehensive bibliography at the end, curious readers will find this book a useful entry point from which they can easily undertake their own further reading into specific areas.
It is no surprise that books about ancient warfare are popular. A spate of blockbuster films on the subject have been produced to popular acclaim and academics are no less interested in the subject. Just about any appreciation of the ancient world must on some level discuss war. Perhaps the ancient culture that is most closely associated with war is Sparta, which is the subject of Scott Rusch’s easy-to-read *Sparta at War*. This book is excellently illustrated with maps, and presents the history of the period 500-362 BC in an engaging and lively manner. While many people are familiar with the wars against the Persians and Athenians, the decline of Sparta is not usually well covered, yet is perhaps the most interesting.

As Rusch suggests: ‘Sparta had risen and fallen in the world of the Greek city-state. Led by its chieftains, it has conquered its Messenian neighbours, but failed against the Argives and Arcadians. The triple threat of Messenian revolt, war with the Argives and Arcadians, and internal strife brought about the creation of the political and social system attributed to Lycurgus. This system maintained concord among the Spartiates and turned them into a fit, fierce, and disciplined hoplite militia army’ (p212). As other Greek city-states trained their soldiers, hired mercenaries and formed alliances, Sparta’s unique position was challenged and ultimately overthrown. The rise of Macedon was characteristic of the later republic. Happily, material culture is at the core of the book. But this is no catalogue: the author is not shy of making suggestions as to the why changes occurred.

For instance, after the first two Punic Wars and the conquest of the Gauls of the Po Valley, the Roman soldier adopted from experience weapons that worked. These included the large shield that covers the body, the *pilum* (javelin) and mail shirts that were copied from their Gallic allies and foes. However, the first two Punic Wars were not fought with the well-known *gladius Hispaniensis* (‘Spanish sword’) which was characteristic of the later republic.

‘During the sack of Syracuse, Archimedes fell victim to the sword of a common Roman soldier; perhaps he had the dubious honour of being among the first of the many thousands who would die by the new Roman weapons. By the end of the Second Punic War it appears to have been in general use among infantry and cavalry alike’ (p80). This raises the interesting issue of just how ‘Spanish’ these swords were. Double-edged blades with a ‘waist’ come from Celtiberian cemeteries and are from the 5th to 3rd centuries BC. However, these weapons are very different from their Roman counterparts. Iberian blades were shorter, some about 300mm long, though others range in size from 400mm to 500 mm (16-20in). In contrast, Roman blades were 450mm to 550mm (16-20in) long.

The Romans made major changes to the hilt as well, which in Iberian weapons were of solid iron. Roman hilts were typically made of wood and bone, and were already divided into the separate parts of guard, grip, and pommel. Roman blades of the period were already double edged and typically waisted. James suggests that while the Roman sword may not have looked particularly ‘Spanish’, when it was sheathed in a ring-mounted frame scabbard it did.

The *pugio*, a dagger worn with the sword, was completely Iberian. ‘The Romans took the *pugio* almost unaltered from its Iberian prototypes, retaining for centuries the blade shape, complex layered grip, ring mounted metal frame scabbard and contrasting inlaid decoration.’ (p82). This, to the author, suggests how the Romans adapted material culture to suit them.

Material culture studies can also be used to flesh out what is known about the demise of the Roman Empire. Some of the best-known barbarians are the Huns, who Ammianus records entered close combat...
Roman Imperial Armour

David Sim & Jaime Kaminski

Oxbow Books, 2012

180pp, 123 black and white illustrations, 8 colour plates

Paperback, £25

with a lasso and sword. A new type of blade appears at the end of the 4th century in the Danube area and spreads as far as Spain. Blades average about 830mm (33in) and can exceed 900mm (3ft). While it is known that the Huns were also archers, and may have found that their cavalry benefited from an asymmetric composite bow, the author suggests it may only have been an incremental improvement over the Parthian and Sasanian bows known in the East and West via the recruitment of federated soldiers. Their skill with the horse, as well as ‘moral ascendancy’, may have decided the outcome of battles rather than a new secret weapon.

While James so artfully covers the sword, other books deal with Roman armour. Roman Body Armour by Hilary and John Travis takes a close look at archaeological evidence – sculptures and finds – as well as reconstructed objects to form a picture of the past. The particular focus is on determining the kinds of field damage that could be expected, as well as what would be found in the archaeological record.

This is the read of the year for anyone with an academic interest in armour, or someone who is keen to re-create historical replicas. At the same time, these authors tease out important new information. For example, they suggest that now it is rather difficult to tell from sculpture if the figure wearing mail or covered in scale armour would have required more regular repair than mail, which could explain why mail is more frequently noted by ancient authors. Mail is more flexible, and does not require attachment to a cloth or leather base (which can take on water and gain weight). If sleeves are required, as in the later Roman Empire, the underarm area of scale armour would be uncovered and thus vulnerable.

In contrast, from field tests, it appears that segmentata armour was better suited to heavy duty protection against overhead barrages of projectile weapons. It is likely that, contrary to the equipment supplied by modern re-enactment groups, segmentata was worn close, with minimal padding. It also may have been form fitted to the soldier. As the book so aptly demonstrates, there are many areas where there is no consensus opinion, and there are many areas where further research is needed.

This leads naturally on to the most technical book which highlights the science behind the art of the blacksmith, Roman Imperial Armour from the First and Second Centuries AD by David Sim and Jaime Kaminski. Their particular focus is upon reconstructing techniques that would have been used to create armour for the hundreds of thousands of infantrymen under arms during the first and second centuries of the Western Empire. The main issue the authors address are the methods and materials used to make the iron. With so much armour, how was it possible to roll out sheet metal without the use of machines?

The evidence suggests that the iron used in armour was of a very consistent thickness, and it does not bear tool marks. The authors suggest that the Romans must have used rollers (although long lost) to obtain iron with these characteristics. However, it seems there would be no short cut in the making of chain mail. It would require about 40,000 rings, assuming a ring of 6mm in diameter. Making the solid and riveted rings would require about 200 days of work. Assembly of a coat of mail would take about 30 days. Lorica hamata was clearly only for the elite.

In contrast: ‘Experiments have shown that people with no knowledge of metalwork can be taught to make armour in less than two hours, and can be fully competent to work alone after a single working day. Individual scales are very simple to make and require only the simplest of tools and moderate skill to produce’ (p109).

When taken as a whole, these four books offer wonderful reading for anyone interested in ancient warfare. It is a testament to an interdisciplinary approach that the study of this subject has broadened from the analysis of textual sources alone to much more detailed, even hands-on, analysis.

Murray Eiland
Superhuman
From Ancient Egyptian prosthetic toes, to the Whizzinator, an artificial penis to help fake doping test results, this idiosyncratic and esoteric display at the Wellcome Collection takes a holistic approach to the history of human physical enhancement. It explores the ideas through science, myths and culture, as well as original Marvel comic-book heroes.
Wellcome Collection +44 (0) 20 7611 2222 (www.wellcomecollection.org/brains). Until 17 June.

Design Stories: The Architecture behind 2012
While the world eagerly anticipates the pomp and spectacle of the Olympic Games, RIBA has delved deeper to examine the designs behind some of the new Olympic architectural commissions. Taking centre stage here is a 14-metre mural showing the contrasting styles of the new buildings. The exhibition space will also become a streaming area to watch the games as they unfold, no doubt being one of the more erudite locations at which to enjoy them.
RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) +44 (0) 20 7307 3888 (www.architecture.com). Until 21 September.

Stadia: Sport and Vision in Architecture
As many eyes focus on London’s Olympic arenas this summer, the Soane Museum looks back at the stadium in the ancient world. From the Coliseum, described by architect Sir John Soane as the ‘magnificent and mighty structure in its perfect state’, to the most modern designs as seen at Stratford, the influences behind the monumental architecture of sport are explored.
The Sir John Soane Museum + 44 (0) 20 7405 2107. (www.soane.org). From 6 July to 23 September.

Victorian Visions: Pre-Raphaelite and Nineteenth-Century Art from the John Schaeffer Collection
In this ravishing show of 19th-century art displayed in Lord Leighton’s opulent Orientalist home, we can see the ancient world through Victorian eyes – as in Waterhouse’s 1887 painting Mariamne Leaving the Judgement Seat of Herod (shown above). Other painters represented include: Lord Leighton himself, Holman Hunt, Solomon J Solomon, and GF Watts. John Schaeffer is one of the world’s most prominent collectors of 19th-century British art.

MIDDLESBROUGH
Julian Stair: Quietus
One of the world’s most acclaimed ceramicists presents a solo exhibition which investigates how we see death, whether it be from a secular or a sacred point of view. His large terracotta sarcophagi and amphorae recall the ancient world.
Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art +44 (0) 1642 726 720 (www.visitmima.com). From 13 July until 11 November.

UNITED STATES
CAMBRIDGE, Massachusetts
Storied Walls: Murals of the Americas
Through photographs, drawings and original mural fragments, this exhibition explores the meanings and social uses of wall paintings in certain pre-Columbian cultures, focusing on the Pueblo, the Maya and the Moche. The stories behind their discovery and the conservation challenges of in situ remains are also examined.
Peabody Museum, Harvard University +1 (0) (617) 496 1027 (www.peabody.harvard.edu). Until 31 July.

BOSTON, Massachusetts
Seeking Shambala
Following recent conservation work, the museum’s collection of 25 thangkas, sacred Tibetan Buddhist painted wall-hangings, are redisplayed alongside ritual
objects and other Buddhist artefacts. The set was acquired in 1906 and depicts many in a line of kings, they are juxtaposed with contemporary Buddhist prints by Gonkar Gyatso and Tadanori Yokoo.

Museum of Fine Arts Boston
+1 (0) 617 267 93 00

NEW YORK, New York
The Dawn of Egyptian Art
In collaboration with 12 other museums around the world, this exhibition draws together 175 examples of very early Ancient Egyptian art. Dating from circa 4000-2650 BC, the exhibits include wall-paintings and reliefs from tombs and sculpture, showing the type of stylistic renderings of animals (below), people and landscapes that led to the development of hieroglyphs in the Nile Valley.

Metropolitan Museum of Art
+001 (0) 21 25 35 77 10
(www.metmuseum.org). Until 5 August.

Babylon. Highlights range from detailed monumental stone reliefs (below) to fine gold jewellery.

Melbourne Museum
+61 3 8341 7777

AUSTRIA
VIENNA
Art and Wine
This fascinating exhibition looks at the role of wine and drinking in various cultures, from the Ancient Greeks onwards. A wide range of exhibits, including a large amount of drinking paraphernalia, made from gold, wood, ceramic and glass and other more esoteric materials, shed light on the different interpretations of this social activity. From the orgiastic drunken Bacchanalia of the Classical world to the sacred Eucharist and Passover in the Christian and Jewish faiths.

Kunsthistorisches Museum
+43 1 525 24 0 (www.khm.at). Until 2 September.

CANADA
ONTARIO
Shahnama: The Persian ‘Book of Kings’
In collaboration with McGill University, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, this exhibition brings attention to the thousand-year-old epic poem from North Eastern Iran. Fragments of copies of the Shahnama (above) help explain this story of kings, conquests, power and fate.

Royal Ontario Museum
+ 416 (0) 586 8000 (www.rom.on.ca) Until 3 September

FRANCE
STRASBOURG, Alsace
An Art of Illusion
To celebrate the return of the extensive collection of frescoes from Roman Gaul held in the archaeology museum, this special exhibition focuses on the conservation work done. With detailed insights into the materials, pigments and techniques used, as well as the themes and iconography, this is a welcome opportunity to get reacquainted with an important collection.

Archaeology Museum Strasbourg
+ 33 (0)3 88 52 50 00 (www.musees.strasbourg.eu). Until 31 August 2013.

TOULOUSE, Midi-Pyrénées
Niel: Crude Excavation!
Here the first findings from the preventative excavations in Niel (a former barracks) are presented. Many of the finds are on display before all the post-excavation work is even completed. Exhibited is evidence of 6,000 years of continuous occupation, with a strong insight into the life of 2nd-century BC Gauls through their trade and craft.

Musée Saint-Raymond, Musée des Antiques de Toulouse
+ 33 (0)5 61 22 31 44 (www.saintraymond.toulouse.fr) Until 11 November.

GERMANY
BERLIN
Cy Twombly & The School of Fontainebleau
With new hangings and new contexts, this is the perfect time to reappraise the series of Twombly’s work held in the Marx Collection. Shown alongside works from the 16th- and 17th-century school of Fontainebleau, known for its love of allegorical scenes depicting myths, this is a good chance to identify the Classical themes that inspired Twombly’s work.

Museum für Gegenwart, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
+49 (0)30 266 42 42 42. (www.smb.museum) Until 7 October.

Ceramic and Glass
Following a redisplay, many items that have never before been on public view are currently exhibited. These include some of the earliest Byzantine glazed wares, including many with notable champlevé, sgraffito and plaster-work decoration. This gives an insight into the wide variation and changes in trends for these conspicuous status items.

Bode Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
+49 (0)30 266 42 42 42. (www.smb.museum) Until 7 October.

MUNICH
Lost We Forget: Font and Text in Ancient Egypt
This exhibition is a celebration of Egyptian script over 4,000 years, showing papyri, statues, stelae, reliefs, ostraca, coffins and shabtis. Also represented are different types of written text – from the sacred to the secular. An audio-guide is
available for this exhibition. + 49 (0) 89/28 927 630 (www.aegyptisches-museum-muenchen.de). Until 6 January 2013.

Women: Pablo Picasso, Max Beckmann, Willem de Kooning
With paintings from around the world – as well as unseen items from private collections – this is the biggest exhibition ever held at the Modern Pinakothek. These works on the subject of women by three major 20th-century artists are displayed across five rooms. Often the objects of male desire, they also reflect an autobiographical element in their creation, as well as influences from the Classical world.
The Modern Pinakothek Museum +49 (0)89 23853 360 (www.pinakothek.de). Until 15 July.

SPEYER
Discovering Egypt's Treasures: Masterpieces from the Egyptian Museum in Turin
On public display for the first time in Germany are many objects from the Egyptian Museum in Turin. The exhibits range from monumental sculptures of priests and pharaohs, to more humble everyday craft objects and jewellery dating back 3,000 years. In addition, the latest results from the ongoing excavations at Asyut are displayed.

LEIDEN
100,000 hours archeology – gather at the Veluwe
This is the extensive and diverse collection of Eduard Zuiderweg is presented. Acquired in 2010 by the museum, the exhibits range from Roman coins, medieval wine-bottles, ancient pottery and axes. At first just a curious boy, Zuiderweg grew into a 20th-century antiquarian spending over 100,000 hours (over 60 years) foraging for new finds.
The National Museum of Antiquities +31 (0) 70 3381111 (www.gemeentemuseum.nl). Until 4 November.

LONDON
The Trojan War and Peace
Based on Aeschylus' Oresteia, a new trilogy of plays is being performed by Steam Industry Free Theatre to honour the Ancient Greek spirit of the Olympic Games, from Thursday to Sunday, from 5 July to 5 August. You can see all three plays (The Trojan Horse, Agamemnon and Orestes) at 6.30pm, 8pm and 9.30pm, each night on the South Bank, between London Bridge and Tower Bridge, next to City Hall (below), with post-show discussions on 8, 15, 22 and 29 July. There is no need to book – just turn up and take a seat. There is room for 1,000 people at each performance. Admission is free. (www.steamindustryfreetheatre.org.uk)

Summer events at the Petrie Museum
19 July – Archaeological Ghost Stories: MB James
21 July – Egyptian Mausoleum: SW London Walk
Petrie Museum +44 (0)20 7679 4138 (events.petrie@ucl.ac.uk)

Festival of British Archaeology – 14-29 July
14-15 July – Billingsgate Roman houses and baths (11am to 4pm).
20 July – Roman fort visit (2pm-2.30pm and 3pm-3.30pm). Not suitable for wheelchair users.
9-13 and 16-20 July – Become an archaeologist and unearth the secrets of Syon Park, Hounslow
The two identical training excavation sessions will be held from 9.30am to 5pm. They are structured, hands-on, five-day courses, suitable for all levels, covering aspects of site survey, excavation and recording and costs £195. Minimum age: 18 years. Booking is essential.
The Museum of London +44 (0) 20 7001 9844 (www.museumoflondon.org.uk) is coordinating all these events. For further details contact: Jane.Hill@somersetwildlife.org.

SOMERSET
Festival of British Archaeology in Mendip Hills
14-29 July – Events for all who want to learn about their local heritage.
For further details contact: Jane.Hill@somersetwildlife.org.

DENMARK
COPENHAGEN
A series of summer tours at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek includes:
1 July – Greece: The Cradle of Democracy
15 July – Rameses II and Other Important Kings
22 July – Danish Golden Age Paintings
29 July – Gods and Belief in Antiquity
5 August – Mesopotamia, the Land Between Two Rivers
12 August – Roman Sculpture: Copy and Original
26 August – The Egyptian Pantheon
The Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek +45 (0) 33 41 81 41 (www.glyptotek.dk).

Minerva July/August 2012