

## FROM MAINTENANCE TO EXCAVATION TWO PRESTIGIOUS DWELLINGS BROUGHT TO LIGHT IN *REGIO V*

### **THE HOUSE OF JUPITER** with **First Style paintings and unprecedented mosaic depictions** and **THE HOUSE WITH THE GARDEN** with **splendid Megalographs** and **AN INSCRIPTION WHICH THROWS THE DATE OF THE ERUPTION INTO QUESTION**

Two prestigious dwellings with precious decorations have been brought to light, and redefine the urban space in *Regio V* of Pompeii, thanks to maintenance and stabilisation works on the excavation fronts overseen by the Great Pompeii Project.

Re-emerging in their entirety from the lapilli, and with different furnishings, are the **House with the Garden**, with a beautiful frescoed portico and rooms decorated with **lively megalographs**, and the **House of Jupiter**, with **First Style paintings** and exceptional **floor mosaics with unprecedented depictions**.

Additionally, **inscriptions and further remains of victims** add details to the history of the eruption and of the ancient city.

In particular, **a charcoal inscription** - a tangible trace of everyday life - **supports the theory that the date of the eruption was October and not in August**. Indeed the writing is **dated to the sixteenth day before the Calends of November, corresponding to the 17th October**. The inscription appears in a room of the house which was undergoing refurbishment, while the rest of the rooms had already been completed; works must therefore have been ongoing at the time of the eruption. Furthermore, since it was done in fragile and evanescent charcoal, which could not have been able to last long, it is highly probable that it can be dated to the October of AD 79, and more precisely to a week prior to the great catastrophe, which according to this hypothesis occurred on the **24th October**.

The large scale intervention, which is focused on more than 3km of excavation fronts which run along 22 hectares of unexcavated areas, has the objective of reprofiling the fronts, remodelling the slope and stabilising them, in order to avoid the threatening pressure of earth on the already revealed structures.



In the area of the so-called 'wedge'; it was particularly necessary, on account of the need to protect the buildings which had been unearthed in the 19th century, to

proceed to a true excavation of over 1000m<sup>2</sup>, which would allow us to push back the fronts and guarantee the stability of the unearthed structures.

*"This vast maintenance intervention, which is fundamental for the safeguarding of the site - declares Director General Massimo Osanna - has also allowed us to relive the thrill brought by new and interesting discoveries, thanks to the excavations conducted today*

*according to the most advanced methodologies, utilising modern technology and employing a multidisciplinary team of professionals in continuous dialogue. It is also allowing us to observe and document, in great detail, the excavations carried out in the past, thanks to the many traces of Bourbon-era tunnels which we are detecting, and which tell us the story of an era of excavation completely different from our own methodological approach and objectives.”*

*“The intervention for stabilising the excavation fronts and mitigating the hydrogeological risk of Regione I, III, IX, IV and V of the archaeological site (GPPM) is one of the last four ongoing sites which form part of the Great Pompeii Project:*

*Published in August 2015 and awarded in May 2016, it has been entirely financed with funds from the 2014-2020 National ‘Culture and Development’ Operational Program.*

*It is - declares Director General of the Project Gen. B. CC Mauro Cipolletta - one of the most significant financial interventions of the Plan of Works, and one on which the monitoring operation is concentrating, as part of the steering committee, in order to ensure compliance with the timetable, which envisages the closure of the site by March 2019.*

*Despite its complex structure, the Directorate General of the project, in synergy with the Archaeological Park of Pompeii, is ensuring full compliance with the Legality Protocol via the control of access to the site and of payments, as well as via the constant monitoring of financial transactions.*

*Compliance with the procedures and obligations imposed by the Protocol are guaranteeing transparency in the execution of works, without hindering the progress of said works which, as both local and national media often report, continue to reveal parts of history which before now had only been hypothesised, shoring up the protection of what had already been brought to light.”*

## THE HOUSE OF JUPITER

The House of Jupiter takes its name from the fresco of the *lararium* located in the garden, in which the deity is depicted. The *lararium* had already been discovered during excavations conducted in the 19th century, when the house was one partially investigated.



At the moment of the eruption of AD 79, the dwelling was undergoing refurbishment.

The ongoing excavations have allowed us to identify various tunnels, which were dug in the eighteenth century and early decades of the nineteenth century in order to recover precious objects, which unfortunately compromised the structure of the house in various locations.

Despite this, the mosaic flooring, the frescoes and, in some rooms, the rich fictile and metallic furnishings, have been well preserved.

Today's excavation work has yielded the structure of a dwelling with a **central atrium surrounded by decorated rooms**, and with an entrance along Vicolo dei Balconi, and an open colonnaded space at the back onto which three other rooms face.

### First Style Paintings



The atrium and surrounding rooms have revealed a rich First Style (2nd century BC) decoration, with stucco panels imitating marble slabs (*crustae*), which are painted in bright colours (red, black, yellow & green) and frames with indented moulding.

The atrium, which retains its First Style decoration in the preserved section, was probably complemented by a Doric stucco frieze, with a blue and red finish, in the upper part, as evidenced by the numerous fragments that were recovered from the collapsed section.

It is highly probable that the owner of the house deliberately kept this older decoration in the First Style in these spaces, while in other Pompeian dwellings, it was frequently replaced by more modern decorations.

### The Flooring and Mosaics decorated with figures

The floors of the *domus* are primarily fictile based cements (so-called 'signinum' or 'cocciopesto'), sometimes with white marble mosaic tesserae laid at regular intervals, or with irregularly positioned marble flakes.



In two rooms, however, the central part of the floor is decorated with exceptional **rectangular mosaic panels of great artistic quality, with incomparable and extraordinary depictions, and which**, at first glance, appear to refer to seldom represented myths, probably of an astrological theme.

Lastly, traces of a fire were discovered in a room of *domus* which borders the House of the Silver Wedding, and which had already been largely investigated in the past. The fire blackened the frescoed wall, and also affected furnishings, among which was probably a bed, as the fragments of carbonised wood and cloth would appear to suggest. This is an extraordinary find, considering how rare it is to find fabrics at Pompeii.



## **THE HOUSE WITH THE GARDEN**

The House with the Garden takes its name from the large open space with portico, within which paleobotanical analyses have been carried out on the plant traces found, and which

are providing a complete picture of the plant species present there at the moment of the eruption.



The house, although compromised by tunnels, has fortunately preserved most of the decorative elements, which bear traces of being works in progress at the time of the eruption, well.

#### **The entrance from Vicolo dei Balconi**

The residential complex was primarily accessed from Vicolo dei Balconi, via a monumental door with two 'dado' capitals and a masonry cornice; the

narrow entrance led into an atrium - which in turn was connected via an open portico to the garden - supported by masonry columns resting on a plinth decorated with frescoes, which had a black background upon which were depicted flowering plants.

#### **The Room of the Skeletons**

Inside one of the rooms which faced onto the portico, which unlike the others, survived the initial phase of the eruption (the shower of lapilli), to then be destroyed and filled by the pyroclastic flow, **skeletal remains** of at least five individuals were found, who evidently had sought refuge in the innermost room of the house, but found only death there. The investigation of this room, which is still ongoing, has revealed the presence (which had been indicated by suspect holes in the walls) of one or more tunnels from earlier excavations (which may pre-date the onset of official studies in 1748), which caused a disturbance of the intercepted skeletons, whose bones were displaced at various points in the room.



#### **The Frescoes of the Portico and of the Rooms**

Both the portico and the rooms which face onto it are richly decorated with frescoes. One room in particular has yielded a **small sacral idyllic painting** at the centre of a wall with false architectural decoration. The painting depicts scenes of worship within a wooden environment. Similar paintings, which are sadly in worse states of preservation, decorated two other walls of the same room.

## **THE MEGALOGRAPHS**

The adjacent room was, however, decorated with scenes of larger dimensions, almost true megalographs. In one we can recognise Venus with a male figure (perhaps Adonis or Paris) and with Eros, while in another painting we see Venus depicted in the act of fishing with Eros.



There is also a **highly refined portrait of a woman** in this room, which perhaps depicted the *domina*.



In the two aforementioned rooms, and in another room with a simple wall decoration, the remains of a frescoed ceiling have been discovered in a collapsed position on the floor, with traces of the lattice upon which the plaster was made to stick; although naturally in a highly fragmented condition, the entire recovery of preserved pieces will allow us to reconstruct the decorative motifs, yielding a notable contribution to our knowledge of Roman painting, given that the ability to reconstruct frescoed ceilings in their entirety is notoriously rather rare.

The house, as previously noted, was likely undergoing refurbishment at the time of the eruption; this may explain why, alongside rooms with frescoed walls and ceilings, and cement flooring with marble slabs or tesserae in certain instances, there were some rooms with walls which had simply been plastered, and even without any flooring, such as in the atrium and entrance corridor.

### **Graffiti and charcoal inscriptions**

The walls of the atrium and entrance corridor have preserved a considerable amount of graffiti which is currently being studied, and which contains phrases of an at times obscene character, and drawings (including some stylised faces).

Drawings traced with lime or chalk have also, unusually, been well preserved, including one depicting a caricatured human face in the profile. There are others in charcoal, also depicting human faces. Among examples of the latter case, there is also a charcoal inscription, which would support the hypothesis that the eruption of AD 79 may have occurred on the 24th October, rather than the 24th August.

## **THE FURNISHINGS**

In both dwellings, various furnishings have been recovered, including objects of daily life, which attest to the life that went on, unaware of the imminent tragedy, as well as objects of particular value.

Two bronze jugs (oinochoai) with handles decorated with figurative designs, and enriched with small silver inserts, come from the House with the Garden, along with an iron brazier discovered in the portico together with a biconical terracotta container. The furnishings discovered within the House of Jupiter are richer, and primarily concentrated in two rooms. Of particular note is the floor of the room decorated in the First Style, which was completely covered with fictile and bronze vases of various kinds, which had probably been carefully placed there due to the ongoing refurbishment works inside the *domus*.

