

*The lack of tourists at Pompeii has
been a boon for archeologists*

ENGLISH

PRICELESS DISCOVERIES AT POMPEII

In normal times, Pompeii occupies second place in the list of the most visited attraction in Italy, after the Colosseum. But with the arrival of the pandemic, instead of attracting more than a million visitors a year, the excavations have stood strangely silent, closed off to visitors for several months. During this rare respite, a team of archaeologists has brought to light more extraordinary discoveries, almost 400 years after the first excavations took place.

The first major discovery occurred at a villa on the outskirts of the ancient city. The bodies of two men were uncovered in near-perfect condition in the same place where, in 2017, a stable containing the remains of three harnessed horses was found. Remarkably, archaeologists still use the same tried-and-tested technique of plaster casting that was used during the excavations of the 19th century. The method involves pouring liquid plaster through the layer of volcanic material that had encased the victims, perfectly preserving their shape.

According to the experts, one of the bodies was that of a young man aged between 18 and 23 who was wearing a short tunic. The compressed vertebrae suggest that he may have been a slave, because he carried out heavy manual work. The second man, aged around 40, belonged to a higher rank and may have been the slave owner, as he was wearing a woollen cloak as well as a tunic. Investigations are continuing to establish their precise roles inside the villa, which boasted terraces overlooking the bays of Naples and Capri.

The second significant excavation was revealed to the press on Boxing Day – a frescoed *thermopolium*, or street food counter, uncovered in its entirety. It is thought that there were 80 such food counters in Pompeii, but the exceptional condition of this latest discovery has enabled scientists to better understand the gastronomic habits of the citizens. The team found depictions of animals believed to have been on the menu, as well as duck bone fragments, fish, goats, snails, and even crushed broad beans used to modify the taste of wine.

2020 wasn't just good for new discoveries at Pompeii. Some items that had previously been stolen by opportunist visitors have been returned. One of the most highly publicised incidents concerned a Canadian woman who pilfered ceramics on a visit fifteen years ago. She sent them back with a letter of confession which read: "Please take them back, they only bring bad luck." Over the years so many relics have been returned to the site with expressions of guilt that park officials have opened a museum especially dedicated to them.

*The bodies of two men have been
found in near-perfect condition*

- ☐ **Le abitudini gastronomiche**
The gastronomic habits
- ☐ **Il sapore del vino**
The taste of wine
- ☐ **Quindici anni fa**
Fifteen years ago
- ☐ **Portano solo sfortuna**
They only bring bad luck
- ☐ **Nel corso degli anni**
Over the years

Image of thermopolium by kind courtesy of the
Archaeological Park of Pompeii, © Luigi Spina

*A frescoed street food counter
has also been unearthed*

GAZZETTA ITALIA!

In this edition of our bilingual feature, **Tom Alberto Bull** looks at how the lockdowns of 2020 have enabled archeologists to make further discoveries at Pompeii...

KEY WORDS

Useful Italian words and phrases to add to your vocabulary

- ☐ **In tempi normali**
In normal times
- ☐ **Stranamente silenziosi**
Strangely silent (masc. pl.)
- ☐ **Per parecchi mesi**
For several months
- ☐ **Ha portato alla luce**
Has brought to light
- ☐ **Nello stesso luogo**
In the same place
- ☐ **Secondo gli esperti**
According to the experts
- ☐ **Di rango più elevato**
Of a higher rank
- ☐ **All'interno della villa**
Inside the villa
- ☐ **Il giorno di Santo Stefano**
Boxing Day
- ☐ **Cibo da strada**
Street food
- ☐ **Completamente intatto**
Completely intact (masc. sing.)
- ☐ **Si ipotizza che**
It is thought that



SCOPERTE DI VALORE INESTIMABILE A POMPEI

In tempi normali Pompei occupa il secondo posto in graduatoria fra i luoghi più visitati dai turisti in Italia, dopo il Colosseo. Ma con l'arrivo della pandemia, invece di accogliere oltre un milione di visitatori in un anno, gli scavi sono rimasti stranamente silenziosi, chiusi ai turisti per parecchi mesi. Durante questa tregua inaspettata un'équipe di archeologi ha portato alla luce nuovi tesori straordinari, a quasi 400 anni dai primi scavi eseguiti.

La prima scoperta importante è avvenuta in una villa nella periferia dell'antica città. I corpi di due uomini sono venuti alla luce in condizioni pressoché perfette nello stesso luogo dove nel 2017 era stata trovata una stalla che conteneva i resti di tre cavalli bardati. È rimarchevole che gli archeologi continuano ad usare la tecnica collaudata durante gli scavi del diciannovesimo secolo. Questo metodo prevede l'introduzione di una colata di gesso liquido attraverso lo strato di materiale vulcanico che aveva avvolto le vittime, conservando perfettamente le loro forme.

Secondo gli esperti, uno dei corpi era di un ragazzo tra i 18 e i 23 anni che indossava una tunica corta. Gli schiacciamenti vertebrali fanno pensare che fosse uno schiavo perché svolgeva lavori pesanti. Il secondo uomo, di circa 40 anni, era di rango più elevato e possibilmente il padrone dello schiavo, dal momento che indossava un mantello di lana oltre alla tunica. Ulteriori indagini sono in corso per stabilire i ruoli precisi di questi individui all'interno della villa, che vantava terrazze panoramiche sui golfi di Napoli e di Capri.

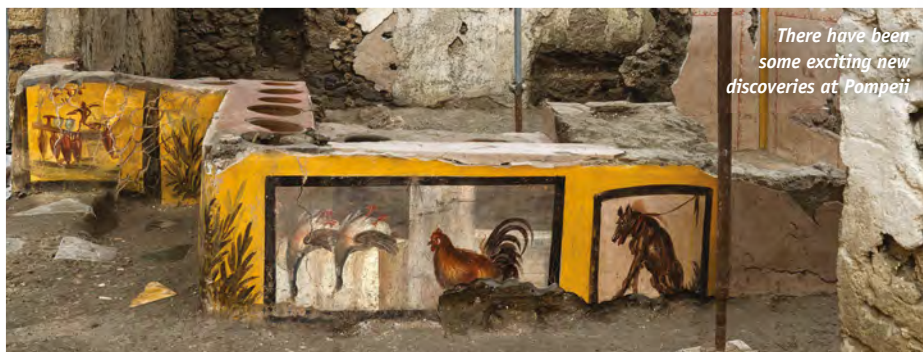
La notizia della seconda scoperta importante è apparsa sui giornali il giorno di Santo Stefano – si tratta di un *thermopolium*, o bancone di cibo da strada affrescato, ritrovato completamente intatto. Si ipotizza che esistevano 80 banconi simili a Pompei, ma le condizioni eccezionali di quest'ultimo ritrovato permetteranno agli scienziati di capire meglio le abitudini gastronomiche dei cittadini. L'équipe ha trovato dipinti di animali presumibilmente inclusi nel menu, oltre a frammenti di ossa di anatre, pesci, capre, lumache, e perfino fave schiacciate usate per modificare il sapore del vino.

Il 2020 non è stato un anno eccezionale per Pompei solo per le nuove scoperte archeologiche. Alcuni oggetti rubati precedentemente da visitatori opportunisti sono stati restituiti. Uno dei casi più eclatanti riguarda una donna canadese che aveva sottratto delle ceramiche durante una visita di quindici anni fa. Le ha rimandate indietro con una lettera di confessione che diceva: "Per favore, riprendete possesso di questi oggetti; portano solo sfortuna." Nel corso degli anni sono stati restituiti così tanti reperti con ammissioni di colpa che i responsabili del sito hanno aperto un museo specificamente dedicato ad essi.

THIS MONTH

News & Views

Image by kind courtesy of the Archaeological Park of Pompeii © Luigi Spina



There have been some exciting new discoveries at Pompeii

A taste of Ancient Rome

Pompeii visitors will soon be able to enjoy another incredible discovery unearthed during recent excavations. The latest find – a well-preserved ‘fast food’ shop, known as a *thermopolium* – was first discovered in 2019 and will be open to the public later this year. The shop, which would have served hot food and drinks to citizens, was decorated with bright frescoes, while large jars were discovered embedded in the counters. These frescoes and jars offer vital clues about the shop’s menus and the local diet – paintings at the site show some of the dishes on offer, while 2,000-year-old traces of ingredients such as fish, snails and beef have been discovered in the containers. Massimo Osanna, the archaeological park’s director, described the find as “extraordinary”, explaining that although other fast food sites have been unearthed here, this is the first time such an eatery has been entirely excavated at Pompeii. **To read more about this exciting discovery, turn to our dual-language Gazzetta on page 36.**

Online this month

We know how much our readers cherish Venice in all its glory, particularly in these disconnected times, which is why *The Venice Insider* is in our spotlight this time. A ‘Travel guide for frequent visitors to Venice’ which allows us to dream until we can return, its author Katia writes fascinating features on the city, giving the reader insights very much off the beaten track, and written from the heart. www.theveniceinsider.com



Sinkhole appears in Naples

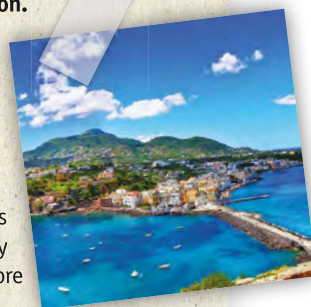
The year got off to a dramatic start in Naples when a giant sinkhole opened up in the carpark of a hospital in the city in January. Amazingly, nobody was injured when the 20-metre deep, 2,000-square-metre sinkhole opened outside the Hospital of the Sea, although several cars disappeared into the chasm. Despite the size of the hole and its proximity to the building, operations at the hospital were able to carry on largely as normal, though electricity and water services to a nearby residence for recovering Covid-19 patients were temporarily disrupted (back-up systems ensured that these utilities were maintained at the hospital itself). It is thought the event could have been caused by a build-up of water from recent heavy rains in the area.



Going up, going down...

↑ GOING UP ↑

- A celebrated 17th-century painting by Guido Reni has been returned to Rome’s Borghese Gallery after being bought from a private gallery. The work, entitled *A Country Dance*, was painted in the early 17th century and is believed to have disappeared from the Borghese collection in the 18th century. After the painting’s recent rediscovery, the gallery paid around €800,000 to see it returned to its original collection.
- Airbnb released its top trending destinations for 2021 at the end of last year and, according to Lonely Planet’s Travel News, Italy made the list. More specifically, the volcanic island of Ischia in Campania made the list, which was made up of the places that were most searched for on the site last year. As a result, picturesque Ischia looks set to be one of the destinations for which travellers are setting their compasses when travel restrictions start to lift.



↓ GOING DOWN ↓

- It’s hardly surprising (and fits with trends seen worldwide) but Italy’s tourism industry took a battering in 2020. The nation has just seen its worst year for tourism since 1969, according to the tourism federation Assoturismo and Confesercenti. The Covid-19 pandemic caused tourist numbers in Italy to drop by around 55%, with billions of euros lost in the hospitality sector.



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