

## Stephen Instone Travel Report 2018

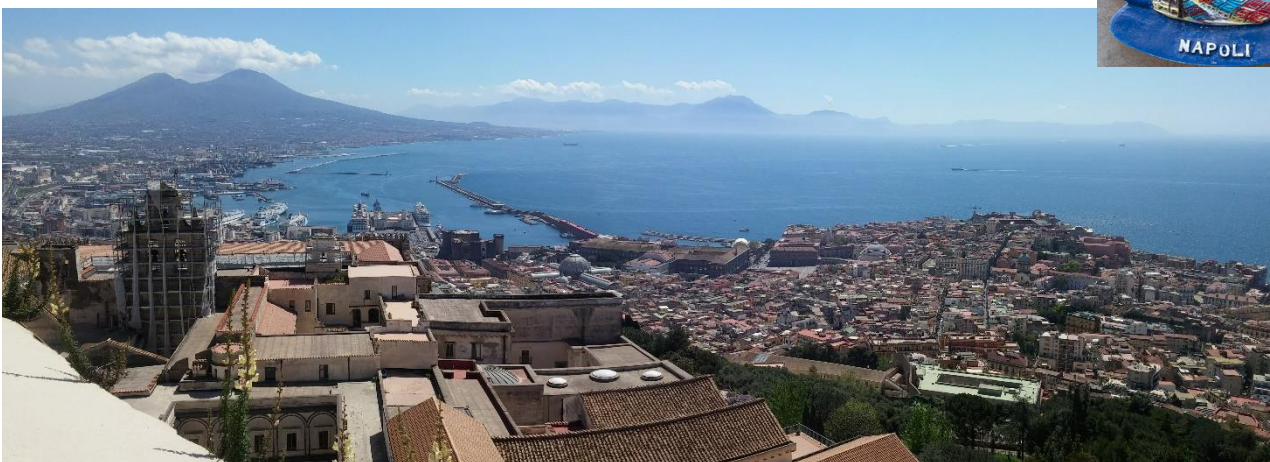
### Trip to Naples

In this Easter I had the privilege to travel to one of the world-famous homes for ancient ruins, Naples, under the generous support from the Stephen Instone family and the Greek and Latin department. As an Ancient World pupil, I have always been fascinated by the Mediterranean Sea which is deemed the cradle of Greek and Roman civilisation. During my study, there is one question that keeps recurring to me: why was the Mediterranean Sea, *mare nostrum* for the Romans, so important in ancient times? There have been many various scholarly approaches to the subject matter for decades; however, I decided to address this question in a different way, which was, to visit sites that blossomed around the Mediterranean in person.

Keeping this aim in mind, I chose Naples as my travel destination. This is because of its coastal position and the rich archaeological records yielded from Pompeii and Herculaneum, both of which are good to show how ancient Neapolitans interacted with the wider Mediterranean. My other aim was to examine the archaeological remains of Pompeii and Herculaneum, and specifically in relation to the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79. And lastly it was certainly a good chance for me to sample some authentic Neapolitan pizzas (and indeed I had four pizzas during my trip)...

I arrived at Naples International Airport in late afternoon two weeks after the Easter Holiday. Having dropped my backpack at a hostel at Toledo, I decided to go to the coast for a walk. Though it was drizzling by the evening, the Bay of Naples looked stunning to me: it extended smoothly to the Pozzuoli to the north, and to Sorrento to the south. And into the west it opened to the Mediterranean Sea: one could imagine what a prosperous province Naples was with her advantageous access to this maritime network.

On the second day I went up to Castle Elmo by tram. Situated on top of the hill, the medieval castle is strategically positioned to overlook Mount Vesuvius and the coastline of the Bay of Naples. It was interesting to see how these two features of Neapolitan landscape have become the hallmarks of Naples itself that half of the souvenir there have borne this motif. This revealed the significance of landscape in shaping its inhabitants' identity.



Panoramic view of Naples from Castle Elmo



*Montanara Starita, Pizzeria Starita, Naples*

After my lunch at Starita, I went to the National Archaeological Museum at Naples where I spent a wonderful afternoon. The collections of frescoes from Pompeii was spectacular: I was most impressed by colour and details preserved from the ancient settlement, based on which art historians could even work out the transitions in style in mural paintings.



*(Top) Sappho, fourth style fresco, Pompeii VI*



*(Bottom) Mosaic depicting the Battle between Alexander and Darius, House of the Faun, Pompeii*

This is such an iconic depiction of the battle between Alexander and Darius that it is one of the most frequently shown representation for labours of Alexander the Great. I was really excited when I finally saw it in person. Although it is probably a copy of the Greek picture painted by Philoxenos of Eretria in late 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, I was so glad that this copy has survived to us.



The other thing I really liked about the museum was the 3D model of the reconstruction of the town of Pompeii. It gave me a better sense of spatial configuration about the urban planning of the ancient city before my proper visit. The neatness of the city plan was striking to me: the clear delineation with streets and the extensive communication system of roads certainly proved the Romans' excellency in urban planning. I also went to see the display of scrolls excavated from the Villa of the Papyri from Herculaneum. I was dazzled by the enormous amount of textual and archaeological information that had been preserved to us after two millennia.



*3D model of reconstruction plan of Pompeii in 79 AD, National Archaeological Museum at Naples*

The next day marked the real start of my expedition. I woke up early in the morning to catch the train to Paestum, which has three of the best-preserved Greek temples in the world. It was a two hours journey from Toledo to Paestum; however, the Doric temples and museum there definitely worth the time travelling.



*Temple of Hera II, c.460-450BC*

The temple of Hera II is the most majestic and best-preserved temple on site. It was once mistaken to have been dedicated to Poseidon/Neptune, after whom the city was named. It has a Doric order of 6x14 columns. The cult status would have been placed in the central room. An altar is situated at the eastern end of the temple and only its foundations remains. The construction of a new altar is observed near the eastern front in the first century BC, showing the importance of the cult even in Roman times.



*Two rows of double columns divided the space into three naves. Hera II, Paestum*

A special feeling was growing in my heart when I entered the space, as if the temple had retained its sacredness and majesty from two thousand and five hundred years ago. In being able to visit the temple in person, I could somehow imagine how stimulating it would have been to one's senses in participating in cult activities back at the time: the sight of animals being sacrificed, the smell of blood stinking one's nostrils etc. The religious experience would have been so distinctively different from their mundane lives.

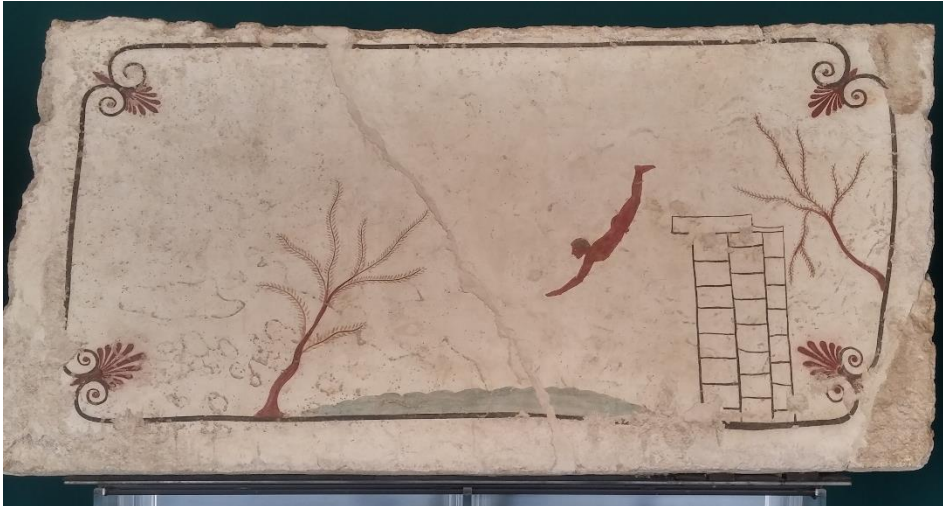


*Double columns, Hera II, Paestum*

Another highlight for me on the day was the National Archaeological Museum at Paestum. There I finally got to see the paintings from the Tomb of the Diver, which had been so frequently referred to in my Greek Art lectures. The use of colours on the tomb is extraordinarily vivid, considering it is dated back to the first half of the fifth century BC. This is regarded as one of the most important finds for the study of Greek Art. This is because even though we have textual evidence informing us of the many magnificent frescoes produced in the Classical period, none of them has survived to us. This means that it is the first and only mural painting we have found so far after the demise of Mycenaean palaces in Late Bronze Age.



The subject matter of the tomb painting is also intriguing in many ways. The cover slab depicts a young man diving from a ladder into water, which act can be viewed as a representation of the moment of death, when the soul dives from life into the sea of eternity. Considering other Attic funerary art such as stelae which often include scenes like the dead passing an object to the living, the tomb provided a different dimension in understanding the Greek concept of death in the Classical period.



*Scene showing a young man diving. Tomb of the Diver. ca. 450BC. Paestum*



*Stele of Glykyllos. ca. 430-400BC.  
British Museum*

The two long sides of the tomb show scenes of a different focus. They depict scenes from a symposium, and within which the aspect of homosexuality has been explored. To the right are a pair of homosexual lovers. The older man is recognised by his beard, while the younger man with the lyre is touching the chest of his partner.



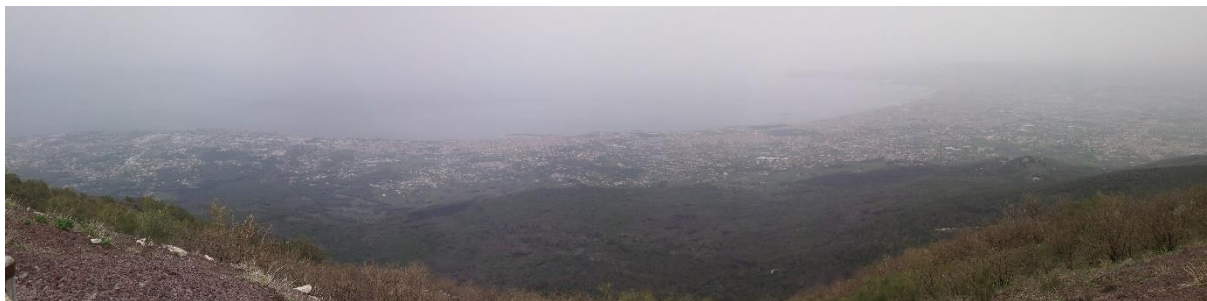
*Scene showing a symposium. Tomb of the Diver. ca. 450BC. Paestum*

From a museological perspective I very much appreciated the video the museum made in introducing the tomb of the Diver. They show what the tomb looked like when it was first excavated and use computer-modelling to reconstruct the process of how the tomb was painted with true fresco technique. And they also highlight different interpretations of the scenes depicted. With this additional visual and information aid I felt my understanding about the tomb had been broadened a lot.

After seeing those picturesque Doric temples at Paestum, I couldn't imagine how much more impressive would Pompeii look. So without delay, I gathered up all my gears (sun cream, bug repellent, my blue cap, sunglasses and 1.5 litre of water) and got on the train that would take me to the ancient Roman city on the next day.

Once my train arrived at Pompeii station, I didn't rush to the admission entrance of the Pompeii Archaeological Park with the tourist crowd. Instead I took a right turn on the main road and boarded a bus that would take me to the culprit for that destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum in AD 79, that is, Mount Vesuvius. After 40 minutes bus journey, I set foot at the car park of Mount Vesuvius National Park which sits at an altitude of 1000m above ground. Although the crater is only 200m above the car park in height, the trail took me half an hour walk to climb to the top.

It was a pity that the morning was so misty that I could barely discern the contour of the Bay. Yet venturing up to the edge of a volcanic crater was a peculiar experience, especially knowing that this was the volcano which had erupted and buried Pompeii under 9.2 feet of pumice and ashes in AD 79.



*Panoramic view of the Bay of Naples from Mount Vesuvius*

Although Mount Vesuvius is still considered an active volcano after its last eruption in 1944, there is no bubbling lava lakes as one would usually associate with volcanoes. Instead it has a moon-like landscape and occasionally has sulphur gases steaming from vents at the bottom and walls of the crater.



*Caldera, Mount Vesuvius*



Looking at this rather lifeless caldera, I was astonished by the power of nature over human civilisations. There were countless glorious empires and cities wrecked by natural disasters like the Thera eruption, and Pompeii was only one of them. From this I could really see that the prosperity of a civilisation was intricately linked to its natural landscape in which in the case of Pompeii, Neapolitans have been benefited from its fertile soil and excellent maritime network under the shade of Mount Vesuvius.

After my morning hike at Mount Vesuvius, with all my eagerness to make the most out from Pompeii Archaeological Park, I entered the ancient city through Marine Gate. Before I move to narrate my journey there, I must say the site itself is massive compared to other Greek settlement sites I have been to. The site has an approximate area of 66 hectares, of which 45 hectares have been excavated. The city is divided into 9 regions by excavators, in among which Regions III, IV, V and IX remain largely unexcavated.



*View of Region VII and Marine Gate*

The city looked breath-taking as I entered through the Marine Gate. I couldn't find any words to describe my excitement at that point as the whole experience was almost unreal to me. As an Ancient World student, I cannot think of anymore that could have moved me as much as seeing this: it was just like I have time-travelled back to 79 AD before the eruption happened, when all the architecture and buildings were still intact and well in place.

When I managed to keep my excitement under control, I started looking into the site map to plan my route. The pamphlet was packed with information about each regions and structures. Despite arriving at the park at around 2pm, I decided to challenge myself to the limit and opt for a 7-hours route instead of a 5-hours one.

The first building I went to explore was Antiquarium next to the Marine Gate. In 2016 it was reopened as a visitor centre and a museum. There I saw plaster casts of victims from the AD 79 eruption: their fear and agony in the moment of death were conveyed in the most expressive way with their distorted posture. This once again reminded me of the vulnerability of human in the natural world.



*Plaster casts, Antiquarium, VIII.19*

When I moved on and was doing my best to follow the suggested itinerary (since I had a great tendency to be drawn to other building remains and hence to diverge from the planned route), I wandered into the Basilica, the most sumptuous building of the Forum. It has an area of 1500 m<sup>2</sup> and was the space for business activities and administration of justice. The interior is divided into three naves with two rows of Ionic columns. It is dated back to 130-120 BC, making it one of the oldest examples of this type of building in the Roman world.



*Ionic colonnades, the Basilica, VIII.2*



Then I entered the Forum through the eastern side of the Basilica which doorways were framed by tuff pillars. The Forum is the most crucial part of the city and is surrounded by all main public buildings with commercial, administrative and religious purposes. To the north of this open space stands the Temple of Jupiter, which is aligned with Mount Vesuvius. When the excavation began in early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the excavators quickly noticed that the area had already been looted in ancient times. Without its decorations it was perhaps difficult to recognise its past significance, yet buildings around the Forum gave me a glimpse of the hustle and bustle of the area.

*Forum, VII.6a*



*Temple of Jupiter with Mount Vesuvius in the background, VII.8*

The Sanctuary of the Public Lares can be entered from the west side of the Forum. This space was used for imperial worship, with a central hearth where sacrifices could be made for the emperor and the city's Lares. This illustrates the religious/ political function of the area around Forum.



*Sanctuary of the Public Lares, VII.13*



*Mensa Ponderaria, VII.6b*

For the commercial aspect of the Forum one could turn to the *Mensa Ponderaria*, which sits next to the Granaries and was built into the east wall of the Temple of Apollo. It is a counter that was used to check weights and measures of goods in trade according to the local Oscan system in the 2<sup>th</sup> century BC, which was later standardised to the Augustan system as evident by the inscription engraved on the front, dated to around 20 BC.

To the west of the Forum stands the Forum Granaries, which was intended to be a fruit and vegetable market, a *Forum Holitorium*. The building was built after the AD 62 earthquake, but was not finished or, was not put in use by AD 79. It now serves as an archaeological warehouse of the city and holds more than nine thousand artefacts from the excavations in Pompeii since late nineteenth century. It shows objects that were used in the last decades of life of the city, such as cooking pots, amphorae for transporting oil and wine around the Mediterranean, marble tables etc. Although objects on display during my visit were something one would normally expect in a museum, it gave me a completely different impression compared to those I saw through glass panels under carefully arranged spotlight. For me the display setting certainly resembled the use context of these daily objects more than modern museums. Hence it became easier for me to relate these archaeological finds with their past cultural context.



*Forum Granaries, VII.7*



*Palaestra of the Iuvenes, VIII.6*

After exploring the area around the Forum I spent a good amount of time looking round Region VII and VIII, venturing into less popular areas (and I came across the amazing frescoes and mosaics of athletes in the Palaestra of the Iuvenes when I got lost in the southern alley in Region VIII!). Then I moved on to explore Region VI, which would finally lead me to the Villa of the Mysteries. It would have been a twenty-five minutes walk from the Forum to the Villa if I hadn't been exploring other structures on my way. Considering the distance it is approximately equivalent to a walk from the main quad to China Town, this again shows how big a settlement site Pompeii was two thousand years ago.

The Villa of Mysteries is named after the frescos depicting the mystery cult found there. It is a Roman villa locating on the outskirts of the city and it overlooks the sea. The building sustains minor damage in the AD 79 eruption miraculously, and the majority of its walls, ceilings, and most importantly its frescoes survive largely undamaged. In the hall of mysteries, a large continuous fresco that covers three sides of the wall was found in early twentieth century. Even since its discovery it has been considered one of the most well-preserved paintings of the ancient world. The most widely accepted theory about the subject matter of the painting believes that it is depicting an initiation of the cult of Bacchus, as evident by the dancing Maenad.

When I walked around the villa I really had the impression that I was walking into someone's home. Seeing all the mosaics, frescoes in place was a really touching experience for me. I could really see how hard the curators and site team strived to let visitors see the original form of the villa while restraining themselves from over-interpreting and hence over-reconstructing the picture. Whilst some of the precious artefacts were removed to other off-site museums, they would make a replica of the original and put it in its original place in the building: for example, a replica of the Alexander mosaic



was made and put back to the House of Faun (VI.1). So the charms of Pompeii are not only about their spectacular finds but also the remarkable attempts of people to restore and present the site in its original form.



*Fresco of the Mysteries, Villa of the Mysteries, Northwest Suburbium, VI.19*

After this fruitful yet exhausting venture (I had been walking so much that at the end of the day I couldn't feel my legs anymore), I felt the need to reward myself. Since Naples is close to the sea, I decided to have seafood at night back to Toledo. And I must say the food was AMAZING. It was definitely the best seafood linguine I had ever had in my life. The Neapolitans certainly knew their resources well to make the best out from them...



*Seafood Linguine, Toledo*

On the next day I decided to give myself a proper holiday break from my inquisition into the ancient world and time for my legs to regain their strength. So I jumped onto the train to Caserta, to where the one of the largest palaces in Europe from the 18<sup>th</sup> century belongs.

The construction of the Royal Palace of Caserta started in 1752 for the Bourbon kings of Naples. It is now considered the largest royal residence in the world as it has a volume of 2 million m<sup>3</sup>. It covers an area of about 235,000 m<sup>2</sup>.

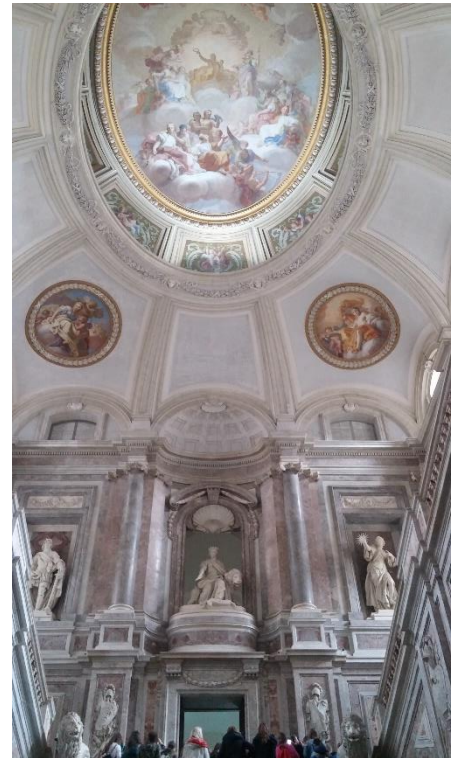


After passing through the ticket gate I was directed to the Grand Staircase. It was such a masterpiece of architecture and scenography: when I went up the stair I saw two marble lions flanking the end of the staircase, with three beautifully carved statues of the Royal Majesty, Merit and Truth standing in the background. When I turned back to face the way I entered the staircase split into two parallel staircases leading up to a space framed by high vaulted arches and columns, which resembled a temple. The scenography on the ceiling also looked absolutely stunning to me.

For the following hour I explored the royal compounds and I was really impressed by their grandeur and elaborate decorations. Yet what I found the most breath-taking was the royal garden, where I had the pain and joy to go on a 3.3km long walk (one-way!) to see this vista.

The Royal Garden was designed by the same architect of the palace, Luigi Vanvitelli, who took inspiration from traditional Renaissance gardens and the gardens of Versailles. The path leads visitors toward the Great Waterfall from the palace and is met by five fountains along its way.

Although I didn't know much about European art history, I could see a keen interest in the architect in creating mythic narratives in his fountain designs. For example, at the end of the park stands the Great Waterfall, below which the basin is adorned with the famous sculptural group of Diana and Actaeon. Back in the time the cult of Diana was in fact very popular in Caserta, which was noted for its forest and wild animals. This makes it suitable to decorate the last fountain with her myth.



*The Grand Staircase, Royal Palace of Caserta*



*(top) The Great Waterfall and the Fountain of Diana and Actaeon.*

*(Bottom) view of the vista and the palace.*



As time flew I was on the penultimate day of my trip. Before marking an end to my expedition in Naples, I visited another site which was also buried in the Vesuvius eruption in AD 79, that is, Herculaneum. After seeing the impressive urban planning of Pompeii, Herculaneum looked less impressive in scales. The city was enclosed with modest walls which is still visible nowadays, with an enclosure area of approximately 20 hectares, yet only a portion of the city has been uncovered so far.

In contrary to the elaborately decorated houses yielded from Pompeii, the buildings in Herculaneum looked rather modest. Yet they have been considered significant finds from the ancient times because they are some of the very few multi-storey structures that have survived to us with their upper floor still intact when discovered.

When I was wandering across the site I stumbled upon the Trellis House. The structure was built with square wooden frames filled with crushed rocks, which were then bound together with lime and mud. This was a very economical technique called *opus craticium*. Judging by the amount of effort to hold it together nowadays with scaffolding one could easily tell that the structure was not very solid and stable in itself. And indeed this technique had never been used for supporting walls in Pompeii. Yet inhabitants of Herculaneum were very innovative, and the city was perhaps more advanced in experimenting on different building techniques.



*Trellis House, Herculaneum*

After spending hours exploring the ancient city, I navigated my way to the Papyri Villa with such excitement; however, to my disappointment the area was closed. It was such a shame that I couldn't visit the villa which library is the only surviving library from the Graeco-Roman world that exists in its entirety. But then at the evening I decided that I didn't want to end my trip in dismay so I went to one of the most famous pizza places in Naples. And there I had the best pizza I had ever tried in my life (it definitely worth queuing for an hour)!



*Margherita Bufala DOP, Pizzeria Gino Sorbillo*

So here ends my report of my venture in Naples. Again I must express my utmost gratitude to the Instone family and the Greek and Latin Department for their magnanimity. Without their support my trip would otherwise have been impossible. It is this trip that makes me realise that travelling is not just about learning new things but it is also about reflection on how our study is related to the wider world. In my journey I have encountered different people who interacted with remains of the Classical world in their own ways; and this once again reminds me that my study on the Greek and Roman past shouldn't be confined to libraries. The reception of Classical studies shifts over time as various cultures interpret them with their own understanding. For me these thousands and thousands of interpretations of the ancient world over time have left thick brush strokes on the picture of the Classical past. To examine these brush strokes shall be the new aim in my further study. And once more, I would like to thank the Instone family and I wish you all the very best.

Valerie Yeung