

### *Acknowledgements*

The geophysical survey was undertaken thanks to the fundamental support of the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per l'area metropolitana di Roma, la provincia di Viterbo e l'Etruria Meridionale with particular thanks to Dott.ssa Rita Cosentino, Dott.ssa Monica Arduini and the Soprintendente Dott.ssa Alfonsina Russo. The magnetometry survey was undertaken by Stephen Kay (BSR Archaeological Officer) and Elena Pomar and was funded by a donation by Charles Williams II.

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## **POMPEII: PORTA NOLA NECROPOLIS PROJECT (COMUNE DI POMPEI, PROVINCIA DI NAPOLI, REGIONE CAMPANIA)**

doi: 10.1017/S0068246218000090

Since 2015 the research project at Porta Nola has explored different aspects of the necropolis ranging from the excavation of individual tombs to the study of the plaster casts made of victims of the AD 79 eruption. The aim has been to draw together the various strands of information, including archival material and publications, in order to provide a new synthesis of the necropolis.

The 2017 season of excavation focused on two areas within the necropolis: the burials of Praetorians identified during the 1970s clearance of the area between the city wall and road which ran alongside the city wall; the area immediately north of the tomb of Obellius Firmus (excavated in 2015, Kay *et al.*, 2016), between the rear wall of the tomb and a tufa wall (possibly delimiting the funerary area) 5 m to the north.

On the steep slope that lies between the city wall of Pompeii and the paved road that ran alongside, a series of marble *columellae* were discovered during the clearance

of the AD 79 eruption layers in the excavations of the 1970s (De Caro, 1979). The four burial markers, placed in a line and set back approximately 7.5 m from the road, each had an inscription recording a Praetorian: Sextus Caesernius Montanus, Lucius Manilius Saturninus and Lucius Betutius Niger. The fourth *columella* was discovered broken, possibly in antiquity, with only the line *Annos XI* (Eleven years). The aim of the 2017 excavation was to relocate the positions of these burial markers and to recover the associated cremations, as only two were recorded as having been removed during the earlier excavations. The tomb of Betutius Niger, a soldier in the second Praetorian cohort who served in the military for 2 years before his death at the age of 20, was the only burial to previously be fully investigated and from which two cremation urns had been recovered (Stefani, 1998, 39), one hypothesised by the excavators as belonging to an earlier burial (De Caro, 1979, 88). The new excavations located a further cremation in a burial cut 0.30 m to the south of the tomb of Betutius (Fig. 1a). The new burial was in a deep cut filled with ash, burnt human bone, the spike of an amphora and a lamp decorated with a dancing satyr (Fig. 1b), dating approximately to the Tiberian period. A further 2 m to the west the second burial was identified, where only the broken inscription had been recovered. The new excavation revealed a further fragment of the marble burial marker behind which at a depth of 0.85 m was the cremation urn, placed in a deep fill of ash. The third burial, belonging to Manilius Saturninus who served in the military for 5 years before dying at the age of 24, was located at a distance of 2.2 m further to the west. Similarly, the excavation identified the lapilli-filled cut of the 1970s excavation where the marble *columella* had been recovered. The cremation urn had been placed up the slope to the south 0.40 m behind the burial marker. The fill around the cremation urn was once again composed mostly of ash, although large pieces of wood and numerous nails were also recovered, presumably



Fig. 1 (a). Cremation burial to the south of burial of Lucius Betutius Niger; (b) disc of a lamp decorated with a dancing satyr. (Photos: S. Kay).

part of a grave goods assemblage. The fourth cremation, located a further 2 m west, belonged to Caesernius Montanus who had served for 9 years, and had been significantly disturbed by the earlier excavation. In a similar pattern to the previous two burials, the urn appears once again to have been placed behind the burial marker.

The 2016 excavations to the west and north of the tomb of Obellius Firmus had identified a number of deposits associated to the cleaning of an *ustrinum* (Kay *et al.*, 2017). In particular a shallow cut (measuring 0.79 m by 0.5 m and 0.2 m in depth) filled with ash, charcoal and small fragments of burnt human bone had been identified. This area was fully excavated in 2017 with the aim of better understanding the nature of the deposit and the chronology of the stratigraphy in this area, as results from the previous season had indicated the creation of an artificial platform, possibly associated with the construction of the tomb of Obellius Firmus. The shallow cut, although more extensive than other deposits, appears to have also been the result of the cleaning of an *ustrinum*. Within the deposit several ceramic fragments were recovered, including the disc of a lamp illustrating Ganymede with Zeus disguised as an eagle.

Further excavation behind the tomb of Obellius Firmus revealed an extensive deposit of ash and charcoal, amongst which were recorded over a hundred fragments of a funerary bed. The elongated distribution of the deposit and the presence of large pieces of burnt wood suggest that this was part of the frame or leg of the wooden funerary bed which would have been decorated with delicately carved animal bone (Fig. 2). The cleaning and reconstruction of the piece will be undertaken during the 2018 study season.



Fig. 2. Carved bone fragments of a decorated funerary bed. (Image: Pilar Mas Hurtuna.)

The excavation in this area also revealed a further two cremation burials. The first lay 0.5 m to the north of the tomb of Obellius Firmus, the cut of which was defined by a fill of large pieces of tufa. The coarseware cremation urn was covered by an upturned vessel, and the lid of the urn was covered by a thick layer of lime or chalk. The cremation urn had been broken due to the pressure of the stone fill and the passage of large tree roots, therefore the urn was excavated in situ to allow for a subsequent analysis of the cremated bone fragments.

The second cremation burial recorded behind the tomb of Obellius Firmus was placed directly against the northern foundation of the tomb, and similarly had no visible burial marker. The cut of the cremation deposit indicates that the tomb was placed alongside the foundations after its construction, although no burial was recorded within the deposit. The anthropological study of the six new cremations will be undertaken during a study season in 2018.

### *Acknowledgements*

The Porta Nola Necropolis Project is jointly directed by Stephen Kay, Llorenç Alapont Martin and Rosa Albiach in collaboration with the Parco Archeologico di Pompei. The project is grateful for the support and assistance of Professor Massimo Osanna (Direttore Generale) and Dott. Fabio Galeandro.

The programme of conservation and restoration is led by Dott.ssa Trinidad Pasiés Oviedo, head of restoration of the Museo de Prehistoria de Valencia. The research team is comprised of many specialists who are gratefully acknowledged for their work: Joaquin Alfonso, Victor Revilla Calvo, Letizia Ceccarelli, Pedro Corredor, Ilaria Frumentis, Tomas Jirak, Monika Koroniová, Pasquale Longobardi, Pilar Mas, Fabio Mestici, Ana Maria Miguelez and Antoni Puig Palerm. The project is indebted for the logistical support provided by the Parco Archeologico di Pompei excavation assistant Sig. Vincenzo Sabini.

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