

OBITUARY: Neil Adams

Neil Adams recently died of a heart attack at the tragically early age of 36, after suffering some years of ill-health. Neil was a person of enormous energy, keen intellect and sensitivity. While employed in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the British Museum, first as a student volunteer, then as a member of the team responsible for managing the stone collections, later working with the full range of the classical collections, Neil thought nothing of arriving at 7 AM or earlier to pack in research time before his routine duties began. Then after long and physically exacting hours he would resume his academic activities.

Neil was born on 9 November 1970. His mother remembers an engaging child with a compassion for others. He did not enjoy mainstream education and so left school at 16, taking a variety of jobs. He was particularly successful as a carer working with the elderly, who appreciated his warm smile and friendly interest in them. In his early twenties Neil discovered his



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vocation for archaeology, particularly Greek and Roman architecture and sculpture. He returned to formal education, obtaining a BA and an MA in his chosen field.

His appointment at the British Museum fulfilled for him an ambition to be around the beauty of the artefacts as well as a chance to study them in greater depth. It was while working with Dr Peter Higgs in the quaintly named 'Sepulchral Basement' that Neil developed a passionate interest in the sculptures from Cyrene in the British Museum collections. As records of the sculptures were digitised and the storage areas were improved with smaller objects moved onto rolling racks in dust-free conditions, it became clear that some items in the great influx of finds from major excavations at Halicarnassus, Carthage, Cyrene, Cnidus and Ephesus arriving at the museum in the late 1850s and 1860s had been confused by the nineteenth-century registrars. By very acute observation of the sculptures themselves, Neil identified an important group of Ptolemaic royal portraits from Cyrene that had not previously been recognised as such. These discoveries were published in an article entitled 'A New Portrait of Berenike II from the Temple of Apollo at Cyrene?' in *Quaderni di Archeologia della Libia* 18 (2003), devoted to the memory of Lidiano Bacchielli, who also died much too young.

While continuing to work full-time in the Greek and Roman department, Neil embarked upon a doctoral thesis at King's College London. His aim was to recontextualise the sculptures

from Cyrene in the British Museum collections, focusing upon the buildings in which they had been discovered by Smith and Porcher, and upon the associated finds, particularly epigraphic, that offered vital clues to the sculptures' original purpose. Neil eventually succeeded in obtaining permission to visit Cyrene, which he loved, and where his industry, energy and engaging personality were much admired by our Libyan colleagues. Some of the promise of Neil's thesis is captured in the article cited above, which contains important observations on the sculptures associated with the Temple of Apollo. Other important observations, again based on first-hand examination of sculptures and epigraphic texts in the British Museum and Cyrene, were published in *Libyan Studies* 34 (2003), 43–64.

Neil's published work demonstrates the strength of his vision, intellect and attention to detail. It would, however, be a mistake to assume that his was a life limited to dry and dusty scholarship. The surprised winner of a 'Jesus look-a-like' competition in a women's magazine, Neil was a successful musician with as energetic a social life as the night allowed. Neil played five instruments from guitar to mandolin, and occasionally played live on stage with friends. He had an appetite for learning languages, with Korean and Japanese being his interests at the time of his death. Well known for his home-made pizzas and bread in many parts of the world, Neil was beloved by his friends and family. He burned himself out much too soon; we are the richer for having known him, and the poorer for his early passing.

Susan Walker and Carole Adams