



**Auckland Classical Association**

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## Newsletter 3: November 2009

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### 1. SUBSCRIPTION

Subscriptions for **2010** are now due. Please forward \$20 subscription or inform the Secretary if you wish mail-outs to continue. Please make cheques in favour of the Auckland Classical Association.

Please remember to notify the Secretary of any change in residential or email address.

### 2. PROGRAMME

#### Important ACA dates for 2009:

**Thursday, 19 November** 2009, Clocktower room 029 (Old Arts Building)

Professor Bill Dominik: "*The Gates of Sleep in Virgil's Aeneid.*"

Professor Dominik, who has a PhD from Monash University, is the author and editor of several books and numerous other publications in such areas as Roman literature, especially of the Flavian era; Roman rhetoric; the classical tradition; and lexicography. He is also the founding editor of the journal *Scholia*. He has taught widely in Classics and the Humanities at a number of universities, most recently at the University of Natal, where he was Professor and Chair of Classics before coming to Otago.

**Tuesday, 24 November** 2009, 6.30 pm, 1 Wynyard Street, Dept of Classics and Ancient History, tea room.

Annual General Meeting. There will be a dinner to follow at the Café, the Hyatt Hotel. Please notify the Secretary if you will be attending the dinner.

### 3. NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF CLASSICS

All news articles were sourced by Kylie Burling unless otherwise cited, and have been abridged. Please send news articles of possible interest to the Association to the Secretary. These will be collated and edited for inclusion in future newsletters. Thank you again to the editing team for the time and effort expended on our behalf, especially Professor Gray and Miss Debenham.

#### Italian team to help restore Cyrus the Great's tomb

27 May 2009, Adnkronos International

<http://www.adnkronos.com/AKI/English/CultureAndMedia/?id=3.0.3365050216>

A team of Italian archaeologists will help restore the tomb of the ancient Persian Empire's founder Cyrus the Great under an agreement recently signed in the country's capital Tehran between Italy's culture ministry and Iran's cultural heritage body.



"I am most satisfied by this agreement. A team of highly competent Italian restorers armed with highly sophisticated equipment will restore Cyrus the Great's tomb to its former splendour," said Italy's culture minister Sandro Bondi.

"Once again, Italy's excellence in restoration work will contribute to preserving an extraordinary ancient monument which is an asset that belongs to humanity," Bondi added.

The tomb of Cyrus the Great is located in the ancient city of Pasargadae, the first capital of the Achaemenid Empire founded by Cyrus the Great in the 6th century BC.

It is also close to the ancient palace complex of Persepolis, founded by Darius I in 518 BC. Both cities are UNESCO world heritage sites.

"Cyrus the Great was a giant figure in ancient Persian history. While there are important Islamic sites, his tomb symbolises Iran's identity and its national spirit," said Proietti.

The famous ancient Greek warrior Alexander the Great visited Cyrus the Great's tomb in the 4th century BC as a sign of respect.

### **Knossos: Fakes, Facts, and Mystery**

By Mary Beard (heavily edited, but hopefully captures the spirit of the original)

24 July 2009, The New York Review of Books

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/22970>

The masterpieces of Minoan art are not what they seem. The vivid frescoes that once decorated the walls of the prehistoric palace at Knossos in Crete are now the main attraction of the Archaeological Museum in the modern city of Heraklion, a few miles from the site of Knossos. Dating from the early or mid-second millennium BC, they are some of the most famous icons of ancient European culture, reproduced on countless postcards and posters, T-shirts and refrigerator magnets: the magnificent young "prince" with his floral crown, walking through a field of lilies; the five blue dolphins patrolling their underwater world between minnows and sea urchins; the three "ladies in blue" (a favourite Minoan colour) with their curling black hair, low-cut dresses, and gesticulating hands, as if they have been caught in mid-conversation. The prehistoric world they evoke seems in some ways distant and strange—yet, at the same time, reassuringly recognizable and almost modern.

The truth is that these famous icons are largely modern. As any sharp-eyed visitor to the Heraklion museum can spot, what survives of the original paintings amounts in most cases to no more than a few square inches. The rest is more or less imaginative reconstruction, commissioned in the first half of the twentieth century by Sir Arthur Evans, the British excavator of the palace of Knossos (and the man who coined the term "Minoan" for this prehistoric Cretan civilization, after the mythical King Minos who is said to have held the throne there). As a general rule of thumb, the more famous the image now is, the less of it is actually ancient.

Most of the dolphin fresco was painted by the Dutch artist, architect, and restorer Piet de Jong, who was employed by Evans in the 1920s (and whose watercolours and drawings of archaeological finds in Athens, Knossos, and elsewhere were featured in a 2006 exhibition at the Benaki Museum in Athens, curated by John Papadopoulos). The "Prince of the Lilies" is an earlier restoration, from 1905, by the Swiss artist Émile Gilliéron. In this case it is far from certain that the original fragments—a small piece of the head and crown (but not the face), part of the torso, and a piece of thigh—ever belonged to the same painting.

It is perhaps no wonder that when Evelyn Waugh visited Heraklion in the 1920s he found a disconcertingly modern collection of paintings in the museum. "It is impossible to disregard the suspicion," he wrote in *Labels* (an account of his Mediterranean travels, published in 1930), "that their painters have tempered their zeal for accurate reconstruction with a somewhat inappropriate predilection for covers of *Vogue*."

The story of the ancient palace of Knossos itself is much the same. Instantly recognizable with its squat red columns, ceremonial staircases, and "throne rooms," it is the second most visited of all archaeological sites in Greece, attracting almost a million visitors each year. Yet none of those columns are ancient; they are all restorations (or, in his words, "restitutions") by Evans. As Cathy Gere crisply puts it in her brilliant study of the role of Knossos in twentieth-century culture, *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism*, the palace "enjoys the dubious distinction of being one of the first reinforced concrete buildings ever erected on the island." Evans's own house nearby, the *Villa Ariadne*, named for the mythical daughter of Minos and the bride of Dionysus, is another.

There is still debate about just how misleading Evans's reconstitution of the prehistoric palace is.

It is clear enough, as the title "Queen's Megaron" itself hints, that Evans's preconceptions about Minoan society—a peace-loving monarchy, with a powerful role for women and a mother goddess at the centre of the religious system—strongly influenced his reconstructions, not only of the architecture and decoration, but of the other finds too. A classic case of this is two famous faience figurines of "snake goddesses" (a key figure in Evans's Minoan pantheon) unearthed on the site. "Snake goddesses," or "snake priestesses," they may have been, but once again considerably less of the original objects survives than what you now see in the museum display. Everything below the waist of one is a restoration; most of the snakes as well as the head and face of the other are the work of Halvor Bagge, one of the other artists in Evans's team.

One enormous virtue of Cathy Gere's *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism* is that she leaves to one side the barren debate over whether Evans himself was a good or a bad character, either archaeologically or politically. Her subject is not so much the excavation of Knossos but the role that Minoan archaeology played within twentieth-century culture (and, conversely, how twentieth-century culture, from Evans on, projected its own concerns onto Minoan archaeology). It was at Knossos, she argues, that prehistory gave shape to a prophetic modernist vision, which repeatedly reinvented the Minoans as Dionysiac, peaceable protofeminists in touch with their inner souls.

Gere writes with clarity and wit, but she never sacrifices the fascinating complexity of her tale to a simple story line. She is excellent, for example, on the "blurry boundary between restorations, reconstructions, replicas, and fakes," insisting that there is no clear and undisputed line that separates the processes of archaeology from those of invention or forgery. One of her most telling examples is the so-called "Ring of Nestor." According to Evans's own account (which is suspiciously vague on some of the details), this gold signet ring had been dug up by peasants on the Greek mainland near the site of Pylos, the legendary home of King Nestor, one of Homer's heroes—hence the ring's nickname. On the death of the finder, it passed to a neighbour, at which point Evans got to hear about it and "thanks to the kindness of a friend" (as he put it) he was shown an impression of its design. He immediately went to Pylos to acquire it. For, although it was not strictly Cretan, he believed that the intricate image on its bezel represented the Minoan Mother Goddess among scenes from the afterlife; and he was particularly excited by the vague traces of what he interpreted as butterflies and chrysalises (of the common white), "symbols of the life beyond."

There are strong reasons to suspect that this ring was a forgery by the younger Gilliéron, who is actually supposed to have confessed to its fabrication. If that is the case, then there was—as Gere nicely observes—a bizarre sequel. For Evans employed Gilliéron to make a whole series of images of his new "find" in support of his own interpretation of the iconography, beginning with a photo enlargement, moving to a drawing of the figures enlarged twenty times, and finally transforming the scene into a full-colour fresco, in which all the little scratches and blobs in the original engraving were turned into faithful depictions of Evans's interpretations.

Gere is also good at tracking the two-way influences between the restorations of the material at Knossos and contemporary art movements. Waugh was quite right to spot the similarity between what he saw in the Heraklion museum and the covers of *Vogue*, but the relationship between the two was surely more complicated than he thought. Art historians have been happy to concede that the influence on Art Nouveau of the frescoes from Knossos (albeit as restored by Gilliéron) was almost as strong as the influence of Art Deco on Gilliéron's restorations. Early-twentieth-century painters and sculptors were closely observing the newly discovered primitive masterpieces of Crete and incorporating them in their work.

A particularly intriguing artistic link with Knossos is found in the work of the painter Giorgio de Chirico. An Italian by origin, but born in Greece in 1888 and schooled there, de Chirico produced a series of Cretan paintings, focusing on the figure of Ariadne set within a bleak and troubling modernist landscape. His Ariadne is based on a famous Greco-Roman statue from the Vatican Museum, showing the Cretan princess sleeping after she has been abandoned by Theseus (whom she had helped to kill the Cretan Minotaur), though before the god Dionysus has arrived to "rescue" her. But as Gere notes, the setting in which she lies, with its industrial columns and open piazzas, is strikingly reminiscent of the concrete reconstruction of the palace at Knossos (see illustration on page 58). It turns out (and seems almost too good to be true) that as a child, de Chirico had been taught drawing by Emile Gilliéron, and when the de Chirico family moved to Munich in 1905, Giorgio attended the very art school where Gilliéron himself had been trained.

For Evans, the Minoans were emphatically not pure Greek, and he would have been irritated to learn that the "Linear B" tablets, which he excavated at Knossos (and which remained undeciphered in his lifetime), were actually written in an early form of the Greek language. In his view, as Gere summarizes it, Crete rose above the inertia of her northern neighbours as a result of successive waves of immigration from the south, including that of "negroized elements" hailing from Libya and the Nile Valley.

It is ironic, given his modern reputation as an out-and-out racist, that one of the most tendentious restorations of a Minoan fresco, carried out under his direction and partly to his bidding, actually introduced a pair of black African soldiers as major figures. Known by Evans as the "Captain of the Blacks" fresco, it was restored to show a Minoan warrior running ahead of two black comrades or subordinates. In fact the only evidence for the black soldiers is a handful of fragments of black paint, which need not have been from human figures at all.

But Evans was keen to find visual confirmation of his view that the Minoans used black "regiments" in their conquest of mainland Greece (these peace-loving people at home did not always hold back from military expansion overseas). He did not envisage an equal collaboration between black and white, of course. Even here, ideas of white racial superiority still hover awkwardly at the margins: not only in the very British military title given to the fresco but also in part of Evans's imaginative description of the restored scene. "There is no reason to suppose," he wrote condescendingly, "that negro mercenaries drilled by Minoan officers...were otherwise than well-disciplined."

The final act in this drama, however, has seen a strange reversal. Soon after the 1960s, when the Minoans had been conscripted into the popular imagination as a prehistoric version of hippie culture (lilies pointing to the ancient equivalent of flower power), the archaeological mood changed. Some controversial discoveries close to Knossos of children's bones (carrying suspicious marks of butchery) raised the nasty possibility that the peace-loving Minoans had actually been human sacrificers. New research projects in the 1970s and 1980s focused on the networks of roads and fortifications with which the prehistoric elite of the palace of Knossos had strictly controlled their home territory—while scholarly attention also turned to the high-quality state-of-the-art weaponry that had generally been ignored in favour of Evans's "lustral areas," "bull dancers," "saffron gatherers," and lilies. So much for the pax Minoica.

But for Gere, this change of emphasis was essentially a return to the state of play before the excavation of Knossos began in 1900. As she points out, Evans's first visits to Crete had been mainly concerned with the study of Bronze Age defences and the road network. It was only after he had started excavating the palace that he coined the term "Minoan" and that early-twentieth-century archaeologists, artists, and thinkers combined their efforts to create an image of a peaceable, prepatriarchal prehistory to match.

The surprise is, however, that some discoveries of this latest period of archaeology have actually come to Evans's support. As Gere reports, one of the most striking of these is a gold ring found in an excavation of a tomb at the site of Archanes, not far from Knossos. It carries a design that bears a clear resemblance to the "Ring of Nestor," even featuring those otherwise unattested chrysalises. Is this proof then that, despite Evans's suspicious story of the acquisition and despite the rumours of Gilliéron's confession, the "Ring" was actually genuine?

Perhaps. And indeed some recent studies of the technique of its manufacture have tentatively pointed to a similar conclusion. But a rather more troubling explanation is also possible. Perhaps these early excavators and restorers of the site had so internalised the prehistoric culture they were partly uncovering and partly reinventing that their forgeries occasionally turned out to be accurate predictions of what would one day be discovered. That would be a yet more radical blurring of the boundary between authentic Minoan artefact and Minoan fake than even Gere has in mind.

Notes

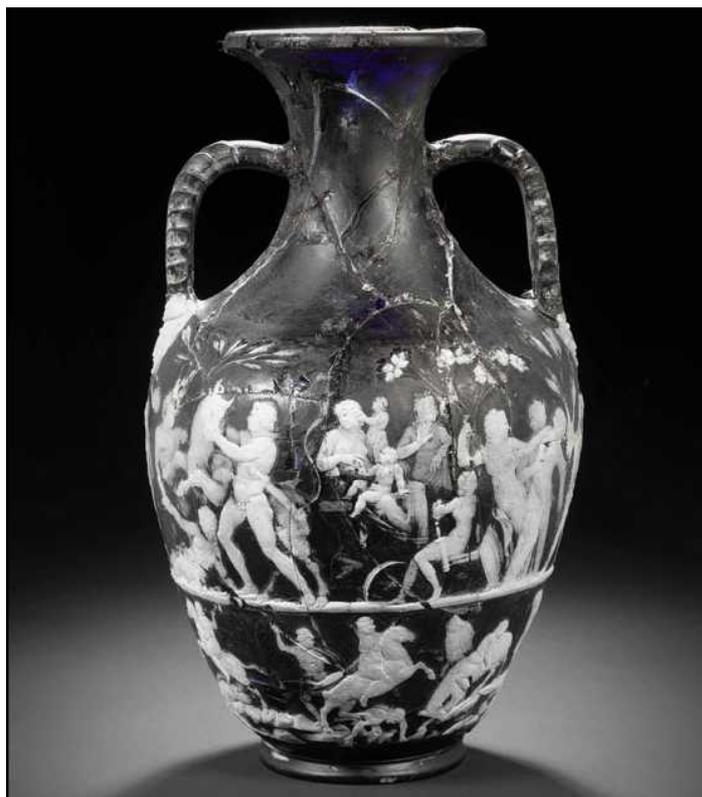
[1]Mysteries of the Snake Goddess: Art, Desire, and the Forging of History (Houghton Mifflin, 2002).

[2]Yannis Hamilakis, "What Future for the Minoan Past? Rethinking Minoan Archaeology," in Labyrinth Revisited: Rethinking "Minoan" Archaeology (Oxbow, 2002), p. 3.

## Roman treasure – Bonhams unveil rival to British Museum's Portland Vase

13 October 2009, [antiquetrade gazette.com](http://www.antiquetrade gazette.com) UK

<http://www.antiquetrade gazette.com/news/7312.aspx>



SPECIALISTS at Bonhams have just announced that they have identified a magnificent Roman cameo glass vase, which may be the most important of its kind in the world.

Strikingly similar to the Portland Vase, one of the British Museum's greatest treasures, it is larger, in better condition and with superior decoration, say Bonhams.

Chantelle Rountree, head of antiquities at Bonhams, said: "It is of major international importance. Academically and artistically it is priceless. Scholars will be evaluating this find for decades."

The vase dates from between late First Century B.C. to early First Century A.D and stands 13in (33.5cm) high. Only 15 other Roman cameo glass vases and plaques are known to exist today.

These very rare vessels were highly

artistic, luxury items, produced by the Roman Empire's most skilled craftsmen. They are formed from two layers of glass – cobalt blue with a layer of white on top – which is cut down after cooling to create the cameo-style decoration.

Items of this kind were produced, it is thought, within a period of only two generations. They would have been owned by distinguished Roman families.

Until now, the most famous example has been the Portland Vase, held by the British Museum. This is smaller, standing at only 9in (24cm) high. It is also missing its base and has been restored three times.

The recently identified vase is also more complex than others of its kind, being decorated with around 30 figures and a battle scene around the lower register. By comparison, the Portland vase has just seven figures.

Bonhams' experts believe that this magnificent artefact could rewrite the history books on cameo vases. Unlike the Portland Vase, it still has its base and lower register and will therefore add significantly to the archaeological understanding of these vessels.

The vase is thought to have resided in a private European collection for some time. The collector is a long-term client of Bonhams.

In co-operation with leading experts in the field and with the present owner of the vase, Bonhams say they will be carrying out detailed research over the coming months into the historical background of the vase and its miraculous survival as well as into its more recent history and chain of ownership.

The vase was presented publicly for the first time at a the 18th Congress of the International Association for the History of Glass at Thessaloniki in Greece in September, where it was viewed by around 200 of the world's leading glass specialists.

"The presentation created huge excitement among delegates, who were drawn from the world's leading museums and cultural institutions," said a Bonhams spokesman, "and there is no doubt about its authenticity."

## **Emperor Hadrian's auditorium unveiled at digs for subway in downtown Rome**

21 October 2009, Star Tribune

<http://www.startribune.com/world/65172837.html?page=2&c=y>

ROME - Archaeologists on Wednesday unveiled the remains of an ancient auditorium where scholars, politicians and poets held debates and lectures, a site discovered during excavations of a bustling downtown piazza in preparation for a new subway line.

The partially dug complex, dating back to the 2nd century A.D., is believed to have been funded by Emperor Hadrian as a school to promote liberal arts and culture.

Known as the "Athenaeum" and named after the city of Athens, which was considered the center of culture at the time, the auditorium could accommodate up to 200 people, experts said.

"Hadrian, who was a cultured emperor, wanted to re-establish the tradition of public recitation, conferences and poetry contests, as it used to happen in classic Greece," Roberto Egidi, an archaeologist overseeing the digs, said during a tour.

Egidi said the identification of the auditorium as Hadrian's is "a likely hypothesis" due to the building's specific structure, as well as references in ancient texts. The digs have turned up two terraced staircases used for seating, a corridor and marbled floors, Egidi said.

Egidi also said the building's upper floors are believed to have crumbled during an earthquake. The auditorium was discovered during excavations at Piazza Venezia, a busy intersection in the heart of Rome, just a few meters (yards) from the Roman Forum.

Archaeologists have been probing the depths of the Eternal City for months to pave the way for some of the 30 stations of the city's planned third subway line. Many of the digs are near famous monuments or on key thoroughfares and several archaeological remains — including Roman taverns and 16th-century palace foundations — have already turned up at Piazza Venezia.

Francesco Giro, a top official with Italy's culture ministry, said the entrance to the subway would be close to the auditorium, but in an area where digs turned up only ancient sewers.

The archaeological investigations are needed only for the subway's stairwells and air ducts, because the 15 miles (25 kilometers) of subway stations and tunnels will be dug at a depth of 80 to 100 feet (25 to 30 meters) — below the level of any past human habitation.

However, most of the digs still have yet to reach levels that date back to Roman times, where plenty of surprises may be waiting.

Rome's 2.8 million inhabitants rely on just two subway lines, which only skirt the city center, leaving it clogged with traffic and tourists.

Plans for a third line that would serve the history-rich heart of Rome have been put off for decades amid funding shortages and fears that a wealth of archaeological discoveries would halt work.

## **4. ACA WEBSITE**

[www.classics.org.nz](http://www.classics.org.nz)

If you have photos of classical sites which you would like to offer for the website, please send these to the Secretary for consideration. It will not be possible to use all photographs for the website as there are certain criteria which must be met (including rights to publication), and there is a size limit to the site, however all donations will be gratefully received and contributions not used for the website may well be utilised in other ways.

Also, if you have Greek or Latin phrases (and their translations), classical cartoons, or other things which could be of interest to our members and/or stimulate interest in non-members, please feel free to send these to the Secretary.

**5. SUBSCRIPTION FOR 2010**

The subscription for 2010 is \$20. This may be paid at a meeting or by mailing a cheque with this form to the Secretary at 52 Kohekohe Street, New Lynn, Waitakere 0600.

Membership is free for students and for graduates of less than one year's standing, however the return of the form would be appreciated in order to maintain the database of members.

Please make cheques payable to 'Auckland Classical Association'.

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