

THE PLEASURE OF RUINS

(A non-boring non-academic Fanzine devoted to archaeological trivia)

Issue #2 – January 2015

published by [R. Graeme Cameron](#)



FRONT COVER

Alyx J. Shaw contributes a sketch of SkullDigger, the God of Nightmares and Insanity, from her Fantasy Trilogy “A Strange Place In Time.”

“We are born unequal; we die equal.” – Seneca

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“I know whom to flee, but I don’t know whom to follow.” – Cicero

ARE ICKY GODS BETTER?

The Aztecs were a fun bunch, very civilized and sophisticated. Every house in Tenochtitlan, their capital, had a rooftop garden filled with flowers. Aztecs were nuts about flowers. Yet for some reason Aztec horticulture didn’t impress the Spanish all that much.

And dance! Hoo boy, them Aztecs could dance. Especially at the Netotellixtli ceremony which took place in the palace courtyard with as many as a thousand nobles “dressed in rich mantles woven of many colours, white, red, green, and yellow; in their hands bunches of flowers or plumes... others wear feather caps or masks made to represent the heads of eagles, jaguars, alligators... They dance in rings, hands joined, one ring within the other... all of them raise and lower their arms, their bodies, or their heads alone, at the same moment... so wildly do they dance, indeed, that it is quite amazing... Everyone who has seen this dance says it is a fine thing to watch, better than the Zambra of the Moors, which is the best dance we know.” THIS, the Spanish liked.

Poetry however, was a bit of a dead loss. The Conquistadores not interested in poetry. Pity, cause the Aztecs were intensely enthusiastic and were probably up for a poetry contest if asked. Some of their poems survive, having been written down in Spanish script shortly after the city was pulverized. Here is a sample which ties in nicely with their enthusiasm for flowers:

Oh you do not come twice upon the earth...
Let us be happy. Does one take flowers
Along to the land of the dead?
They are only lent to us.
The truth is that we go;
We leave flowers and singing and the earth,
The truth is we go...

It is only here on the earth
That there are flowers and singing,

Let them be our wealth,
Let them be our adornment'
Let us be happy with them.

Flowers? Group dancing? Poetry? Poetry about flowers and singing? Sounds like a bunch of god damned hippies to me. Tenochtitlan the San Francisco of Mesoamerica? The perfect tourist spot to idle away a vacation in peaceful bliss?

Not exactly.

When Cortes and his 400 strong contingent of tourists arrived the Emperor Montezuma generously wanted to show them the sights, so like any tour guide took them to the top of the highest pyramid/temple in the city so that they could see everything at a glance. They were impressed. A beautiful city, crisscrossed with more canals than Venice, sitting in the middle of a sparkling lake surrounded by a shoreline studded with cities almost as big and beautiful as Tenochtitlan itself.

But sharing space with them in the square atop the pyramid stood a temple. Inside “an apartment like a small hall, in which there were two altars. On each altar was a giant figure, very tall and very fat. They said that the one on their right was Huichilobos, their war-god. He had a very broad face and huge terrible eyes... he was girdled with huge snakes made of gold and precious stones, and in one hand he held a bow, in the other some arrows...”

“We then looked to the left and saw another great image of the same height, with a face like a bear and eyes that glittered, being made of mirror glass. Its body, like that of Huichilobos, was encrusted with precious stones... this Tezcatlipoca, the god of hell, had charge of the Aztec’s souls...”

“There were some smoking braziers of their incense, which they call copal, in which they were burning the hearts of the three men they had sacrificed that day; and all the walls of that shrine were so splashed and caked with blood that they and the floor too were black... the stench was worse than any slaughter-house in Spain... We could scarcely stay in the place.”

This is what is known in the tourist industry as an “Oh shit!” moment, the occasion of an epiphany wherein the traveler realises the tourist brochures had not been as comprehensive as touted and begins to wonder whether he can make it out of the city (indeed, country) alive.

In my case on seeing the interior of the shrine I think I would have come down with an instant migraine.

Cortez was cool though. He told Montezuma his gods were not gods but evil things. Rather gutsy I’d say. Especially since it definitely pissed the Emperor.

“If I had known you were going to utter these insults I should not have shown you my gods. We hold them to be very good. They give us health and rain and crops and weather, and all the victories we desire. So we are bound to worship them and sacrifice to them, and I beg you to say nothing more against them.”

Cortez cheerily replied “If that is so, my lord, I beg your pardon,” and, perhaps whistling a cocky tune, slowly sauntered down the 114 steps to the plaza below. His men followed, some of them groaning, not out of fear, but because “the pustules and running sores on their thighs pained them as they went down.”

Little things like this lead me to believe the Conquistadors were NOT mistaken for shining white gods as some would have you believe. Most gods don't run with pus. Mind you, that would make them ickier than the Aztec gods, so maybe...

“There is a huge difference between the light of lamps and the light of day.” – Cicero

THAT OLD FUDDY DUDDY CICERO

Tara Wayne writes: “I tried to read Cicero four or five times, but gave up because he was a bore. “and the proper way to put up your melons is first have the cook boil them for six and quarter hours, do not beat her too hard if she over cooks them, etc.” or “the virtuous man rises early to count his socks before the slaves have a chance to steal them, then has an abstemious breakfast of three prune pits for the sake of his digestion, etc.”

Actually, sounds more like what Cato the Elder would have written, or Pliny the Elder, or any old Roman guy worried about increasing memory loss. Cicero not usually so mundane.

However, I admit Cicero's letters take some wading through in order to find the nifty bits, which do exist. Here are a few quotes I find particularly interesting.

From a letter dated 19th December, 51 B.C., Cicero reveals he knows how to show Roman soldiers a good time:

“For my part I marched on Pindenissum, a strongly fortified town of the Free Cilicians which had been in arms as long as anyone could remember. The inhabitants were wild, fierce folk, fully equipped to defend themselves. We drew a rampart and moat around the town, erected a huge mound with penthouses and tower, plenty of siege artillery and a large number of archers. In the end, with a great deal of labour and apparatus and many of our own men wounded but none killed, we finished the job. The Saturnalia was certainly a merry time, for men as well as officers. I gave them the whole of the plunder, excepting the captives, who are being sold off today. As I write there are about 120,000 sesterces [worth of slaves] on the stand.”

From a letter also dated 19th December, albeit 45 B.C., Cicero reveals he knows how to show Julius Caesar's 2,000 travelling companions a good time:

“Strange that so onerous a guest should leave a memory not disagreeable! It was really very pleasant... Camp was pitched in the open and a guard was placed on the house... he [Caesar] took his place at dinner. He was following a course of emetics, and so both ate and drank with uninhibited enjoyment.... His entourage moreover was lavishly entertained in three other dining rooms. The humbler freedmen and slaves had all they wanted – the smarter ones I entertained in style. In a word, I showed I knew how to live. But my guest was not the kind of person to whom one says ‘Do come again when you are next in the neighbourhood.’ Once was enough. We talked of nothing serious, but a good deal on literary matters. All in all, he was pleased and enjoyed himself.”

On 22nd April, 44 B.C., Mark Antony tried to show Cicero a good time, writing:

“Pressure of business and your sudden departure have prevented me from taking this matter up with you in person. On that account I fear that my absence may carry less weight with you than my presence would. But if

your goodness of heart proves to correspond with the opinion I have always entertained of you, I shall be very glad.”

Love birds cooing? Or do you find the above a little snarky, maybe even ominous? “sudden departure” may be a subtle accusation of cowardice. “I fear that my absence” may express frustration at not being able to threaten Cicero in person. And there’s the interesting line later in the letter, “We lay aside feuds started on public grounds with greater credit and more readiness than those of stubbornness.” Last chance for reconciliation?

In his reply of 26th April, 44 B.C., Cicero begins his response with what is either a masterpiece of sarcasm or an all-time record for political suckiness:

“For one reason and one reason only I would rather you had raised this matter with me in person than by letter. You could then have seen my affection for you not only in my words but in my eyes, written as the saying goes all over my face. That affection I have always felt, prompted by your own friendly disposition in the first instance and later by obligation actually conferred; and at the present time the national interest has commended you to my regard, so much so that no one is dearer to me. And now your affectionate and flattering letter has made me feel that I am not conferring a favour upon you but receiving one at your hands...”

Evidently this love fest later went awry in that, on the occasion of a full meeting of the Roman Senate on 1st September, 44 B.C., Mark Antony criticised Cicero, who was in Rome, for not showing up at the meeting. Antony threatened to send his bodyguard to pull down the walls of Cicero’s house (located on the Palatine hill and possibly in view of the Senate House in the Forum) and drag Cicero to the meeting. The next day Cicero showed up and delivered a mild rebuke of a speech which apparently sent Antony ballistic. Cicero promptly buggered off to his country estate to keep himself alive.

Come October, 44 B.C., Cicero circulated a political pamphlet in the guise of a speech as if delivered in the presence of the Senate. Really bad idea. Imagine you are Mark Antony. Imagine you are Mark Antony imagining his fellow Senators imagining listening to Cicero declaiming the following:

“Would you like us to consider your behaviour from boyhood onwards, Antony? I think so. Let us begin at the beginning. Your bankruptcy, in early adolescence – do you remember that? Then you graduated to man’s clothing – or rather it was woman’s as far as you were concerned. At first you were just a public prostitute, with a fixed price; quite a high one, too. But very soon Curio intervened and took you off the streets, promoting you, one might say, to wifely status, and making a sound, steady, married woman of you. No boy bought for sensual purposes was ever so completely in his master’s power as you were in Curio’s.”

And:

“For never, anywhere in the world, have there been stories of such depraved and discreditable conduct... You drank so much at Hippias’s wedding, Antony, that on the next day you had to be sick in full view of the people of Rome... here, in the assembly of the Roman people, was a man holding public office, a Master of the Horse – from whom even a belch would have been unseemly – flooding his own lap and the whole platform with gobbets of wine-reeking food he had vomited up... We cannot expect good judgement from someone who is never sober... What glorious eloquence that was – when you made that speech with no clothes on!”

It may not surprise you to learn that, on 7th December, 43 B.C., Mark Antony had Cicero hunted down and beheaded at his country villa, the head brought to Rome and nailed to the Rostra speaking platform in front of the Senate House with the tongue pulled out and a spike struck through it. Couldn’t take a joke I guess. Just goes to show, don’t mess with alcoholics.

Now, Cicero never attacked me personally, but even I find him mildly irritating. When asked by a correspondent whether he wasn't worried about what his enemies had to say about him, he wrote back (circa 24th April, 59 B.C.):

“And what will history say of me a thousand years hence? I am far more in awe of that than of the tittle-tattle of my contemporaries.”

Arrogant prick wasn't he? That he is still being read over 2,000 years after his demise is even more annoying.

Yet, astonishingly enough, one scholar describes him “as a relatively modest man” by the standards of the day, at least among politicians. One gets the impression politics was a lot more exciting back then.

On the plus side, he was in his time considered one of the funniest and wittiest men who ever lived. People flocked to hear his hilarious cross examinations at murder trials, for instance. And Julius Caesar even had the slaves manning his house in Rome write down any and all jokes uttered by Cicero and sent to him wherever he was busy slaughtering people in various lucrative wars. Guess old blood-sodden Julius felt the need for light entertainment now and then.

Anyway, getting laughs is all very well and good, but Cicero could never resist raising a laugh at other people's expense, and that's what got him beheaded. Sometimes humour is overrated as a social skill.

“Everyone hopes to obtain an advanced age; yet when it comes they all complain!” – Cicero

YET MORE ABOUT ROMAN SEX by *Tara Wayne*

Greatly simplified overview of Roman sex ... but I know you. You'll have an explanation, that it doesn't matter, just so long as you amuse the reader, which is true as far as it goes. But you can amuse the reader in simple ways ... or amuse simple readers ... or do something more challenging.

Just as I was about to dismiss the piece, you finally admitted that you were aware of the core of much of Roman morality. Self-control. The Roman of Cicero's time married from duty to his family, to increase its influence, wealth and prestige. One could have mistresses legally, but it was better to simply do your duty and make sacrifice to the gods. If you must have a mistress or force yourself on the slaves, you should know enough to keep it private. However, that did not quite make it all right... You were still giving in to base appetites that a better man would not. It was just as beating your slaves too much was in bad taste – showed poor management. Killing slaves unnecessarily, or working them to death, was prodigality, a vice no true Roman admitted to.

But times change. Cicero's era came to an end, and with the later Julio-Claudians, the grimmer aspects of Roman attention to duty and self-discipline had eroded quite a bit. It became less of a scandal if the neighbors knew you shagged your slaves or cuckolded your best friend. It could still not be too blatant, though, nor come to any official attention. If it did, the magistrate would have to act as the law was written in the books, rather than how it was usually observed. This is hypocrisy at its finest, of course... all ages and nations have known it.

Similarly, the Roman attitude toward homosexuality was not as welcoming as some moderns claim it was. There were certainly no laws against it. The practice of homosexuality by individual might well be

overlooked. It all depended basically on maintaining decorum, which in practical terms meant seeming to be in self-control. Asparagus Magnus might well be porking Supinus Frequentus nightly, but as long as he was properly married, seen with his wife in public, and never cast goo-goo eyes at his male lover in the Senate house, nobody cared. But the moment Asparagus behaved like a lovelorn girl, he would be cruelly mocked.

It is not really known, for instance, whether Julius Caesar was bisexual. His enemies accused him of being Nicomedes' (King of Bithynia) bum-boy as a young man. But his enemies *would* say things like that, wouldn't they? They would ... if being another man's sex toy was injurious to your dignity. For, you see, it was all right to bugger anyone you wanted, but another thing entirely if you were the one buggered -- that is playing the female role. Hence it was fine to be the *irrumator*, but shameful to be a *fellator*.

Perhaps it is more convincing that Caesar's own troops sang bawdy songs about him during his triumph, upon returning to Rome from Gaul. They included episodes we would certainly call "gay." Unfortunately, that's not conclusive evidence of anything either, since it was traditional for the legion's to make filthy, boastful accusations about their commander-in-chief upon such occasions. It was a testament to how tough he was. Caesar just smiled and rode on, confident that nobody would believe a tenth of it! Pull a trireme with his Biggus Dickus? Nonsense.

What we do know about Caesar, though, is that he was highly sensitive about his reputation. Upon hearing that his first wife may have been cheating on him, he didn't even investigate -- he divorced her on the spot, saying in the press release "Caesar's wife must be above suspicion." I can't actually see this man jeopardizing his dignitas and auctoritas just for the sake of a little bed play. He also denied it all his life. He may have been in no position to refuse the advances of the King of Bithynia, but why make denials later unless it really mattered who poked whom, and how? The truth is, we'll never know. But this little excursion does, I think, illustrate how complicated the Roman attitude toward sex could be.

In fact, I suspect their attitudes toward sex were about as messed up and hard to comprehend as our own.

Let's not even get into the ancient Greeks ... a more vice-ridden bunch of woolly-headed perverts you can hardly imagine.

The Graeme -- I live in Vancouver. I can imagine a lot. Sorry, cheap joke, at the expense of many. Like Cicero I can never resist blurting out the first witty comment that springs to mind. He was notorious for converting friends into enemies, and enemies into even bigger enemies, because of his idiot lack of self-control. I need to remember this.

But yes, Homosexuality was considered normal in Ancient Greece. In fact, some philosophers argued that romantic love was *ONLY* possible among men. Certainly the attitude was casual. Xenophon's famous retreat of the Ten Thousand from Persia, for instance. To maintain morale among his soldiers Xenophon held foot race competitions and distributed young boys as prizes. And then there was the Spartan custom of brides wearing fake beards on their wedding night to make the grooms feel more comfortable. I tells yah, there was more than *ONE* reason why Spartan warriors were greatly feared in the ancient world.

And among the Romans, the habit of flaunting pretty boy slaves as "pets" until they began to grow stubble and were consequently banished to the kitchen or other drudge work was so common as to be a subject for satire. And just to show how even-handed the Romans were, the famous poet Ovid mentioned his preference for young girls ten or twelve years old in one of his published poems. In short, being a slave, especially a young slave, could be a fucking nightmare, literally.

Now, to this day, many complain that the advent of Christianity destroyed freedom of religion and multiculturalism to the extent of terminating classical civilization itself through shutting down the Olympics, closing the universities, demolishing temples or converting them into churches, banning books (“The Memoires of Pontius Pilate” springs to mind), murdering devout Pagans (just as many Pagan Martyrs as there were Christian Martyrs) and taking the fun out of sex. They were the Bolsheviks of their day, plotting to destroy the existing system and replace it with something dreary and draconian.

And yet, given the routine excesses and cruelty everywhere present in everyday life, the Christian precepts of restraint, abstinence, self-control and respect for ALL others (or at least, all fellow Christians regardless of station) came across not so much as prudery as something refreshingly different and positive. Throw in the concept of eternal life and the “obvious fact” that the world seemed to be coming to an end anyway, what with the decline of the empire and all, many jaded individuals, both high and low born, felt a sense of relief embracing Christianity.

Granted, the Christians abolished neither slavery till relatively recently, nor gladiator combat for at least a century or more after Christianity became the State religion. Further, the concept of Emperor quickly evolved into the absolute power of Christ Manifest on Earth, but hey, if not Christ, then the Sun God. Constantine tried both. Funny thing about Emperors. God is always on their side. Ask any Emperor. But I digress. Point is, the times were ripe for change. If not Christ, then Mithras, or Buddha, or – in the running for a while – Apollonius, whom some Christians thought greater than Christ. This made St. Augustine very angry.

But back to my main point which is that the influence of Christianity was not necessarily the great disaster for civilization that some people (like Nietzsche for instance) tend to think. I’d go so far as to say there is some good in Christianity. Shocking thing to say, I know, given that I am an atheist who digs the ancient world, but I am an Avatar of Perry Como after all, and I can readily see the attraction of giving up a mad and evil world for the peace and quiet of a monastery.

But we were talking about Roman sex. Bisexuality was common, but as long as you produced offspring and had a good army record (you couldn’t advance very far in politics without a stint as an army officer) you were okay. What the Romans couldn’t stand, felt downright revulsion towards, was an effeminate man exclusively devoted to homosexual sex. This outraged the sense of Roman duty to the state. It was un-Roman. In that sense the Romans were less permissive than the Greeks.

And those bawdy songs the legions sang as they marched in Caesar’s triumph? According to Suetonius the lyrics included:

Gaul was brought to shame by Caesar;
By King Nicomedes, he.
Here comes Caesar, wreathed in triumph
For his Gallic victory!
Nicomedes wears no laurels,
Though the greatest of the three.

And also:

Home we bring our bald whoremonger;
Romans, lock your wives away!
All the bags of gold you lent him
Went his Gallic tarts to pay.

His legions had his measure, methinks. And he of them, hence his famous comment “I don’t care if my troops stink of perfume, as long as they fight.”

I can't see President Obama in a similar exchange with the U.S. Marines. The world is a little different than it used to be.]

"If you would keep a lady by your side, make sure she thinks her beauty holds her fast." – Ovid

KIDS WILL BE KIDS

Every generation complains about kids lacking respect for their elders. The ancient Greeks had a solution. They *institutionalized* disrespect, as follows:

"In September of every year for a thousand years, worshippers walked west from Athens along the 14 kilometre (9-mile) Sacred Way to the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore. This was an occasion to which youths and scoundrels of Athens greatly looked forward. For on this day, they were allowed to stand on the Kephisos bridge and shout gross obscenities at their elders marching in silent procession, unable to speak back. We learn that to enjoy such sport, men and women, or perhaps men dressed as women, wore masks and veils to hide their faces as they harassed those crossing the bridge. This misbehaviour was ordained by the sacred rite and is typical of role-reversing cult practices in which people of lower rank are temporarily given license to mock their superiors. Such suspension of social hierarchies may have enabled participants in the Mysteries to approach Demeter and Kore with a fitting sense of humility. In any case, bridges and bad language went together. The Greeks even had a word for it, *gephyrismos*, or 'bridginess,' and in Plutarch 'bridge words' correspond to our 'four-letter words' today."

Sounds like a darn good idea. Normally, in countless visitor's galleries in Parliaments and Senates worldwide, any boisterous protestors are promptly evicted, and in some countries taken away to be tortured and executed. Suppose, instead, every hour on the hour people in the visitor's galleries are allowed to hurl shouted abuse and screaming insult at the seated legislators for a solid ten minutes before "business" resumes. The legislators are not allowed to leave their seats and must endure what comes their way. A small price to pay for allowing the public to vent its disgust and resentment on a routine, regular basis. Could be a wonderful safety valve. Might even prevent revolutions. At the very least it would make the dull and dreary public broadcasts of legislatures in session a hell of a lot more entertaining.

"The greatest states were overturned by young people and restored by the old." – Cicero

MINI-MISSIVES AND MICRO-MONOGRAPHS

On November 7th, 2014 I posted the following on Facebook:

"Am vaguely contemplating launching a fanzine devoted to archaeology to be called "The Pleasure of Ruins" (not at all an original title, but I like it). Good idea or no?"

This met with the following responses:

From: [Lloyd Penney](#) – Nov 7/2014

If it doesn't work out, it may be the Ruin of Your Pleasure.

From: Bruce R. Gillespie Nov 7/2014

It wouldn't be very interesting to me unless it is mainly about the people who are interested in archaeology - or the kind of more casual article that could never be published in the formal journals.

To which I replied: *“Don't plan to replicate deadly dull & dry academic archaeology journals, but rather 'populist' works revealing the excitement and passion archaeology stirs in people like me. My sense of wonder is activated by archaeology as much as it is by SF. This is what I would attempt to convey via my personal take on aspects that interest me.”*

From: John Purcell – Nov 7/2014

Since RUNE has been taken, maybe RUINED could be a fun take.

From: Michael O'Brien – Nov 7/2014

Don't do it, or your career will be in ruins ... !

From: Taral Wayne – Nov 8/2014

No. You have too much to do already, and can't keep it up. If you want to write about ruins, just do it, and stick the result in one of the 8 or 9 zines you already publish. But since you'll publish it anyway, why not call it "Ruin Nation?"

From: John Purcell – Nov 8/2014

You need to be committed.

From: Kari McKern – Nov 8/2014

"The Pleasure of Ruin" has a more iconic touch.

From: Jenni Merrifield – Nov 9/2014

I'd totally read a zine like that. I've been interested in Archaeology since a very young age - my first Undergraduate degree was in Classics (Study of Ancient Rome & Greece) at UBC (and would have been in Egyptology if they'd offered such a degree)

Encouraged, I published issue (#1) November 12th, 2014, with the resulting responses:

From: John Purcell – Nov 12/2014

Egad Graeme! You've got to stop sniffing corflu!

From: Ned Brooks – Nov 12/2014

Excellent ezine! You are right - from Schliemann to Daniken the ancient past is fascinating.

(The Graeme – Schliemann was a destructive amateur typical of his time. Daniken is pure fraud, and racist to boot, since his underlying theme is that most “primitive” races are incapable of building what are, in fact, relatively simple constructions. But I suppose both can be credited with stirring interest in our ancient past.)

At the local Last Chance Thrift Store I recently found - Ancilla to Classical Reading - Moses Hadas - Akadine Press 1999 originally published in 1954. The preface opens with "A whimsical title is probably ominous in a book innocent of whimsy."

I have done very little "classical reading", but over the years have absorbed enough to be able to follow the excellent commentary to some extent.

From: Russ Crossley – Nov 12/2014

Very clever. I really enjoyed the story and the voice in the fanzine (It is clearly your voice <g>). Nicely done.

From: Dennis Callegari – Nov 12/2014

It certainly is the kind of thing I'm interested in. I look forward to your next issue.

You may already know that the Antikythera mechanism you mentioned briefly has recently been subjected to non-destructive testing that has revealed more about its function. Worth keeping an eye out for future developments.

(The Graeme – Yes indeed! And since the site where it was found is once again being investigated, maybe similar mechanisms will be discovered. That would be very nifty.)

From: Eric Mayer – Nov 12/2014

Except for my comments on Taral's zines which are made in the course of regular correspondence with him, this might be my first loc of the year. I've given up writing locs. Since I don't follow modern science fiction or attend conventions it has become almost impossible for me to find anything to say about fanzines. But The Pleasure of Ruins is something different, and pretty much exactly what I need - a fanzine that isn't about sf!

TPOR (Naw....that acronym isn't going to fly is it...) reminds me that I should make an effort to read more history. I tend to read it sporadically and in bits and pieces, often while researching for the historical mysteries Mary and I write. Like you, we are always on the alert for human interest, facts that illuminate how people lived, oddities, fascinating details we can work into our stories. Did you see, for example, this newly unearthed Roman clay lantern (dating from around 500 AD) shaped like a church and sending out [cross shaped rays?](#)

Cato's advice to sell the old and sick slaves is actually far more humane than today's business practice which calls for even slightly worn, older workers to simply be fired. (Oh, excuse me...we must say "laid off" these days.) Cato's old slaves at least had the happy prospect of a new owner working them to death rather than being left to starve.

If the Forbes guide was in its ninth edition in 1903 does that mean it was a Victorian production? The Victorians did love their cupids so a cupids temple would have struck their fancy. (Then again am I confusing this with their love of those cupid-like chubby baby angels?) But why not a huge temple in the middle of a shopping mall, a temple not just to cupid but to cupidity? At any rate, Mary says all the best history books were written during the Victorian age, usually by eccentric English vicars.

Wow. That image of the diver descending to the sea floor in his old fashioned diving helmet and finding himself surrounded by classical statuary is wild! One wonders, however, exactly what they dropped off into deeper waters. Might be retrievable today, wouldn't you think?

(The Graeme – Possibly. But probably prohibitively expensive. Maybe someday as technology improves.)

"Is it not plain lunacy to lose ten thousand on the turn of a dice, yet grudge a shirt to your shivering slave?" - Juvenal. And to think he never met Wall Street speculators!

The ruins of Simons' shop sound too good to be true. A little like that ossuary of Jesus' brother. What are the chances of a piece of cup with Simon's name on it turning up? Did people put their names on their cups? As cool as it would be I find it hard to swallow. They didn't find half a bottle of hemlock somewhere in the city did they?

(The Graeme – Actually, putting your name on a piece of property very common back then (even branding it on your slave's forehead) since, especially in Greece, people were generally so material-poor they were notorious for borrowing items and never returning them. Cobblers shops and other "stores" ubiquitous in ancient times. Depends where archeologists dig. So the shop not unusual. The cup not unusual. But that it belonged to THE Simon and that it was HIS cobbler's shop is pure speculation. Can't be proven. Still...)

By the way, the cup I'm using right now says Sands Hotel and Casino. If someday archaeologists happen to find my cup and it is the only physical evidence left of Las Vegas they will have got the city on the wrong side of the country.

(The Graeme – Or proof of vigorous trade between the two locations, or that one conquered the other, or that England still ruled (because the inscription is in English), or that King Sands had the hots for the Goddess Casino... depends on how much background knowledge of the era still exists in the far future.)

I do like the idea of Socrates shooting the breeze with the cobbler and whoever passed by. But was it good for business or bad? I can see someone complaining, "I came to have my sandal strap sewn, not for a philosophical debate." Others might have relished being entertained while they waited. That might have been a good way for very minor philosophers and poets to earn a living, buy entertaining customers of cobblers and the like while they waited for repairs.

(The Graeme – Since Socrates tended to prove everyone he talked to was an idiot most people avoided him. Simon may have relied on him to prevent hangers on and similar riff raff from cluttering up the shop.)

That certainly is an evocative poem. It's interesting to ponder Britain in the centuries after the Romans left, and particularly the lives of the Romans who remained. Presumably it was no longer economically possible to maintain Roman cities after a while. And yet ties remained with the empire, even down to the days of the Eastern Roman Empire so probably it was not any dramatic plunge into darkness but a gradual change. The Dark Ages were not all that dark.

(The Graeme – No, but they were often depressing.)

Obviously this concept appeals to me. I'll be anxious to learn what sort of response you get.

From: Arnie Katz – Nov 13/2014

Thanks for the fanzine – and best of luck with this intriguing new venture.

From: Francis Payne – Nov 13/2014

Yes, I'd love to see an ezine on ancient history, which is one of my ongoing fascinations. My special 'area of interest' is the more obscure aspects of the Graeco-Roman world. I'd be happy to send locs on anything I'm competent to comment on.

(The Graeme – Oh, you don't have to be competent. Certainly I'm not. Opinions and impressions will do just fine. Enthusiasm especially counts.)

Loved your reference to the Temple of Venus and Rome. It must have been one of the great sights of the ancient city. It was the largest temple in Rome (145m by 100m) as well as one of the most magnificently decorated. Ammianus Marcellinus talks about Emperor Constantius II being astonished at the sheer scale of the building when he visited Rome.

It tends to be less remembered today because there is so little left of it in comparison with buildings like the Pantheon or the Coliseum.

(The Graeme – I remember looking out from the uppermost surviving vaults of the Coliseum at the cavernous holes in the façade of the platform underneath the temple when I was in Rome in 1970. It's thought that the elaborate stage sets and machinery for "shows" in the coliseum were stored there. Conjures up visions of the items being trundled across the square during the night prior to the opening games, with perhaps eager fans trying to catch a glimpse of what was hidden under the tarps, seeking "advance knowledge" of the next day's events, in order to impress their friends.)

One aspect of its design has always struck me as deliberate. It was a very rare double-ended temple with two cellae, back to back, and an entrance at each end: essentially it was two temples, one to Venus and one to Rome. It was, in short, an architectural palindrome. Why is this important? In Latin, Rome is ROMA and Venus, goddess of love, could be referred to as AMOR.

A palindromic temple to ROMA and AMOR? I think the architect was having a bit of fun.

(The Graeme – Hadrian himself is known to be the architect. However the current remains date from a rebuilding by Maxentius after a fire in 307 A.D. The original design had two cellae back-to-back, but no apses or vaulted roof, the original roof being flat. The palindrome is Hadrian's. He was a bit of a smart ass.)

(By the way, have you discovered Beachcombing's Bizarre History site? It's updated daily and perusing it has become part of my breakfast routine. You'll find it at [Strange History](#))

(The Graeme – Yes. Now that you've introduced it. I check it from time to time.)

From: Kathleen Freeman – Nov 14/2014

Just read your zine. In a word, yum! Especially the interspersed off-beat classical quotations.

I was born about ten thousand years ago....

From: Felicity Walker – Nov 16/2014

Just finished reading it. Nicely done! It has the breezy, informal, readable style you were going for.

From: Dave Haren – Nov 16/2014

We could probably learn a lot by looking at the ruins left by humans. However, I'm not about to hold my breath waiting for it to happen.

Poor Socrates was quite a shill for the agendas of others as near as I can tell. The reason Plato has been inflicted on multiple generations is because of the death of Socrates. The whole story has always seemed a bogus coverup story to me. A quick look at Alcibiades escapades has to ring a few alarm bells. If you were his teacher at any point the idea you made him into the character he was would be hard to believe. Unless you're dumb enough to identify him as a compliant lad easily led astray. I prefer my version in which it took sixteen strong men to hold Socrates down and get the Hemlock into him. Then Plato can apply the spin after the fact.

(The Graeme – Plato preferred to avoid the “gadfly” label. Quite stuffy compared to Socrates. Wanted to live I suppose. As for Socrates, I believe he chose to die. Greeks still very enamoured of Homeric concepts, and you couldn't be a proper “Hero” unless you died in action. To accept the offer to slink away in voluntary exile would have condemned him as a coward. In fact, I believe Socrates was grateful for the opportunity to die for his beliefs. The likelihood of NOT meeting such an end a problem that had probably worried him constantly.)

If you're looking for humour early Archeology has quite a bit. A circus strong man whose methods were to use a lot of dynamite. That isn't the current nutpick and toothbrush layer peelings. Another epic was a middle aged German businessman running around a tell (city mound) with his copy of Homer to see if it matched the epic of the Trojan War.

(The Graeme – Ah yes, Belzoni and Schliemann, two charming rogues who caught popular imagination. But the science of archaeology hadn't been invented yet, so they can't really be blamed for the damage they did. In seeking public acclaim (and government sponsorship) they were definitely a step above basic tomb robbers.)

From: Dale Speirs – Nov 17/2014

Just read your newest title. I don't follow archaeology that much but palaeontology runs in the family. My mother Betty was a specialist in the Palaeocene of central Alberta (63 megayears ago just after the dinosaurs died out) and I have a quarter-basement full of fossils. She had several species named after her.

One wonders how much further ahead in technology we would be if Rome had never fallen. Alternative histories in such a timeline usually portray the Roman Empire as much the same, with little more than the addition of steam technology and Zeppelins. I'm certain though, that they would have been in space a couple of centuries before the Russians.

As far as going to Athens to play Socrates at Simon's shoe shop, you could just as easily do it at any suburban mall food court. Instead of being forced to drink hemlock, you would be escorted to the parking lot by Security.

From: Kari McKern – Nov 17/2014

I liked the poem, and the sex.

(The Graeme – Me too.)