

Michaela Morgan (Classics) – Italy, Summer 2016

On the 31st August I departed for a week in Italy spent studying Roman art and architecture related to the idea of 'otium' and especially upper class leisure on the bay of Naples. I had planned to spend the first two days in Rome as the largest collections of ancient art in Italy are naturally here. Visits to the Vatican museums and the National Museum of Rome (specifically the Palazzo Massimo alle Terme) proved useful, not only because they house many stunning works from Pompeii, but because they helped me to situate the art from the bay of Naples in its wider Roman artistic context.

After travelling by train down to Naples, I spent two nights in the town of Pompeii to allow easy access to the ruins. A long day was spent in the archaeological site itself, with wonderful views of Vesuvius at every turn, and the villa of the Mysteries was a particular highlight. Although, unfortunately, many of the houses were closed for restoration and preservation, I was very pleased to be able to see the new installation in the Grand Palaestra of frescoes from a site not far from Pompeii called Moregine, and the recently opened Praedia of Julia Felix was also of particular interest.

On my way back to Naples to find my accommodation for the final three nights of the trip I managed to fit in a trip to the Villa Oplontis, in the modern day town of Torre Annunziata, which has some beautiful, well-preserved wall paintings. As it was the first Sunday of the month I was happy to discover that entry was free, as was entry to the Naples Archaeological Museum. Again, disappointingly, some of the rooms in the archaeological museum were closed at that point, and yet the wealth of ancient art and material culture there kept me busy taking notes and pictures for hours. With Naples as my base, it was easy to subsequently take the Circumvesuviana train back out to visit Herculaneum and the Stabian villas Arianna and san Marco, now quite remotely located. The majority of the artwork from these sites has been removed to the museum in Naples, and yet it was invaluable to experience the architectural plan of the villas Arianna and san Marco in particular and to gain a sense of how the owners of these domiciles were cultivating a certain lifestyle and consciously projecting it through images and design to an audience.

I would like to offer my sincerest thanks to Pembroke College and the Faculty through which I was offered grants that made this trip possible.