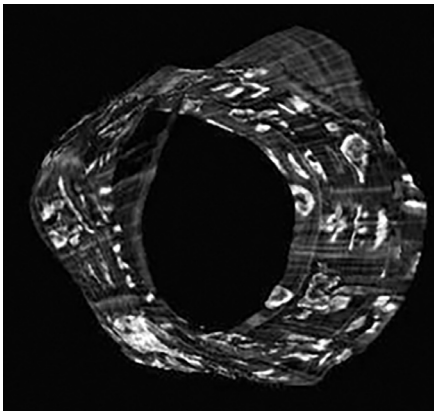
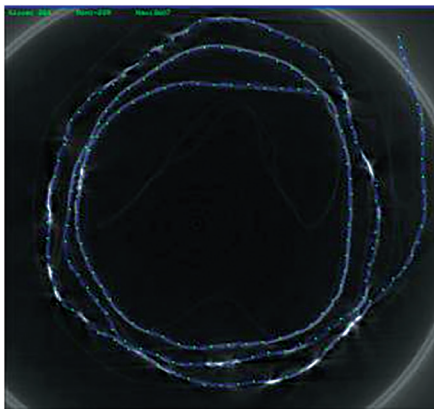


© Courtesy of Brent Seales,
University of Kentucky



Each salami slice clearly showed the spots of ink on the whorl

© Courtesy of Brent Seales,
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Cross-section showing dots of ink

based, and the metallic composition of modern ink is what makes it stand out. The ink on the Paris rolls remained hidden.

Further work will enable detailed navigation of the interior of Herculaneum papyri, where mangled layers intersect with each other, and bits from one or more layers stick to their neighbours. The near-molecular level of analysis involves enormous quantities of data, and not coincidentally, given Google's day-to-day business, Professor Seales has been joined in the latest phase of research by Steve Crossan of the Google Cultural Institute, Paris. Meanwhile, the second aspect of the problem, distinguishing the ink, formed the subject of other experiments in which Professor Delattre was involved, leading to a spectacular announcement in Nature Communications last January.

Scientists at the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility in Grenoble subjected one of the Paris rolls to X-ray phase-contrast tomography, looking for disruptions in the X-rays caused by the tiny differences in elevation between the ink and the underlying surface. The technicalities (well beyond the comprehension of the current writer) may be omitted here, but the interested can most easily consult the Nature article through the website of

the Herculaneum Society. Professor Delattre was able to reconstruct the scribe's complete alphabet (except for the relatively uncommon letters xi and psi), and identify peculiarities in the hand that resemble those in another Herculaneum Papyrus (no. 1471), enough to date the roll to the first century BC and suggest that it may be another Philodeman work.

The concept has been proved, but much work remains to be done. The letters are still very indistinct, and finding strings of connected letters depends on knowing, or making a shrewd guess, that the traces come from the same layer of papyrus. Future experiments, already in planning, will test variables in the beamline (energy levels, band-width, and resolution). Once these two prongs of the attack—the mapping, and the reading—have been sharpened to precision, they then need to be forged into one incisive weapon, enabling the transcription of hitherto inaccessible scrolls containing who knows what riches.

Beyond the Herculaneum scrolls beckon the many crates of papyrus mummy cartonnage in the storerooms of museums, for whose inner layers ancient texts, no longer wanted by their owners but precious to us, often provided the stuff. We stand on the edge of a new age of discovery.

WRITERS ON GREECE



© John Chapman

The late Patrick Leigh Fermor's house, Kardamyli, Greece

JOHN JULIUS NORWICH

© Camilla Pansgrvik



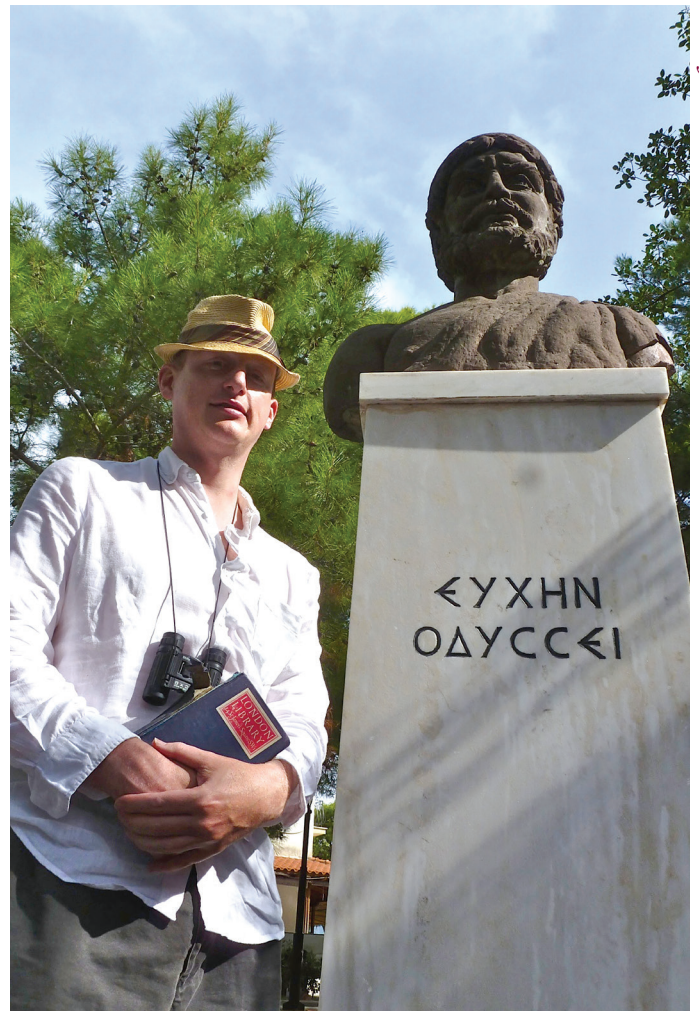
The place in Greece I feel most connected to has to be Kardamyli, deep in the Mani, the home of my dear-departed friend Paddy Leigh Fermor: a lovely, rambling house which he and his wife Joan built on the very edge of the sea in pure Greek vernacular style. Predictably, there was a glorious library. In good weather - which of course it nearly always was - all the doors were left open, as well as the windows. The important thing about the house, Paddy used to say, was that one shouldn't be remotely surprised to find a hen in the sitting room.

John Julius Norwich's Sicily, A Short History, from the Greeks to Cosa Nostra, will be published by John Murray in May

HARRY MOUNT

When I first saw the remains of Odysseus' palace on Ithaca last year, I felt almost sick with exhilaration. Even if the stones had been eroded down to neck height - and all on a footprint smaller than most British villages - enough remained. It wasn't just the thrill of visiting Odysseus' home, of coming to the end of his *Odyssey* and my own journey in his footsteps. It was also going back to the beginning: to a time before the *Iliad*, to the kingdom Odysseus ruled before the Trojan War broke out. It took me back, too, to the beginning of my school life, to the age of nine, when I started learning Latin, and a year later, when I started Greek; when the nouns, verbs, optatives, gerundives and all the rest of it first started flooding in. Here I am standing beside a statue of Odysseus on Ithaca. The inscription was originally found on an ancient mask in a nearby cave sanctuary in the Bay of Polis. "Euchen Odyssei," it reads: "My vow to Odysseus."

Harry Mount's Odyssey: Ancient Greece in the Footsteps of Odysseus will be published by Bloomsbury this summer



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