

## **Transcripts from the travel journal of Thomas Orde relating to Naples, Mount Vesuvius, Pompeii and Paestum, 3 December 1772 [NYCRO ZBO IX 1/2/2]**

### **The Bay of Naples**

On Thursday 3 December 1772, after arriving in Naples, Thomas Orde describes the view from their lodgings: *"I am never tired of looking at all times of the day on the prospect which lays directly before our window, and to which the gulph of Naples is in the foreground, the two sides of the picture are framed by the mountains that stretch behind Portici, in the midst of which is Vesuvius, which at present is pretty quiet, though it sends out always vast volumes of smoke and serves as a weather cock to all the mariners, and out the other side by the mountain of Pausilippe on which stands Virgil's Tomb, and through the middle of which is the grotto that leads to Pozzuoli, Baia &c. The bottom of this mountain to its furthest promontory is a suburb which completes the form of an immense and magnificent amphitheatre which the city presents from the sea."*

### **Mount Vesuvius**

*"Vesuvius continually threatens an eruption, which the Napolitans rather wish to happen from time to time, for fear the stifled furnace should occasion an earthquake which they dread much more. The lava has a certain channel in which it will flow, so they only fear the cinders which have fallen so thick here as to block up the houses and to endanger a conflagration in the town. Pliny mentions the circumstance of ashes falling in the streets of Rome at the time of that great Eruption which destroyed his uncle [in AD 79]. Their direction depends upon the winds, I am assured they have been blown as far as Constantinople."*

### **Pompeii**

*"It was these ashes, that destroyed Pompeii as it was the lava that ruined Herculaneum. On this account it is that Pompeii, which was discovered in the year 1737, has not been so much damaged as Herculaneum. It is also easier work, for there is nothing to do, but to remove the cinder and earth, whereas at Herculaneum, it is as difficult to dig as through a rock. In the first, much is to be seen, in the latter nothing. Pompeii is at 16 miles from Naples, Herculaneum runs under Portici, on which account it is, that they pile up the ground, they have dug through, as soon they take out what they discover. They shew nothing underground but a ruin, which they call a Theatre. At Pompeii, I cannot express what pleasure I had to see so perfectly the way of living of the Romans, there are even streets cleared away in which one may walk, the parapets on either side are raised for foot passengers. Their shops, their private houses, their brothels, known by the sign of a Priapus, their theatres, temples, baths, their villas, the utensils for domestic life, everything in short is to be seen here or at Portici, where the most precious things are carried and placed in the museum. I think it a great pity that they have removed every thing but the bare walls, nay in some apartments they have cut out any little painting, that has been better than ordinary. I could wish to see one house left completely furnished, a better idea might be had of the use of every thing, than seeing them separate at Portici. It is to be observed that though the drawings of the figures &c here are not very fine, they make a great effect, when seen at a little distance, and the ornaments are most beautiful, the colours being brilliant beyond conception, though upon a stucco, that is polished like marble. These are to be particularly admired in the villa, which they have discovered near Pompeii, in following the Appian Way, which past close by it. This villa is quite perfect, except the upper storey which was beat in. The lower apartments were many of them unhurt, especially one which was cleared about 10 days*

ago, and which is the most beautiful thing I ever saw. I do not mean with regard to the size of the room, for from all that have been discovered, the ancients had not the usage of building spacious rooms, there is no door to them, but one in the middle, not any window but one over the door, no fireplace is seen anywhere. Indeed the rooms work perfect stores, and perfectly dark for before almost all ran a sort of narrow gallery that communicated with the whole suite of apartments. There is indeed in the better houses a sort of gallery, which is a largish room but not larger than a small parlour in London. The bed chambers are many of them so small, that to place a bed across them, the wall, which is always very thick, was obliged to be hollowed. The bath in this villa is up stairs and perfectly preserved, as are all the little apartments about it, even to the temple of Cloacina [his reference to the toilet], which by way of curiosity I made use of. In these necessary actions the Romans were truly luxurious, below the seat ran a sort of stone gutter, where the votary p-----d, while he dropped his golden tribute behind. Water was conveyed by pipes through every room, so that nothing could be more cleanly. Many of these pipes though of lead are yet to be seen, though fire has melted even the iron bars to the windows and all the glass, nay what is most curious, there are preserved in the ground, the roots and part of the trunk of some of those fruit trees that grew against their houses. The mosaic pavements are exceedingly pretty and infinitely varied, no two being alike. The private chapels or temples are very curious, the holy walls are surrounded by others, that form a case to the sacred building, in which is seen at the end the great altar, and before it the small one on which the sacrifices were killed. Many of the public temples are remaining, adorned on the outside with basso relievo in stucco, in which though there are faults, these are often surprising beauties. The shrine to which none but the Priests ascended discovered the juggling tricks, which were practised by them to impose on the people, who heard below the voice of the Oracle and never saw the priest, who was hid behind the altar. The private rooms of these Priests are preserved, the secret cells are discovered, and a charming stream of most transparent water is opened at about 10 yards underground. The shops are small but very neat, and ornamented with a profusion of beautiful marble, of which the very counters were made. The brothel as I observed above has a Priapus without, it has a serpent with it to signify, that one may consult health as well as pleasure in frequenting these houses. In the outward walls of these shops are little marble busts and statues many of which are very beautiful. The little gardens are laid open surrounded with columns, as they always did in towns, as with trees in the country. The streets have in many places the marks of the wheels of carriages. These must have been narrow, the wheel rather large. The barracks for the soldiers are very curious, there are to be seen their names wrote by themselves in the walls, and many droll figures, which they amused themselves in drawing. A great many skeletons have been found in all parts of the town. One fine lady with gold ear rings and other rich ornaments was surprised in a soldier's apartment. The attitudes and situations in which these bodies are found mark the suddenness of the eruption, and the attempts made by the wretched inhabitants to escape from the danger. It is impossible to particularise all these. One soldier had an axe in his hand with which he had beat through part of the wall of his chamber. A man was found near the garden door of a private house with the key in his hand. Priests were surprised at the altars, cooks at their stoves in the kitchen, puddings over baked and kettles boiled half away are still to be seen. I handled the skulls of many a Roman soldier, and can scarce think they were very tall fellows. But of all these things it is impossible for me to write at large. It is indeed unnecessary for many printed accounts much more correct ought to be had. However I scribble for amusement whatever comes uppermost and shall perhaps write more on this very subject in another place and at another time, for I pay no regard to correction in my rambling word. I will not however now leave off without taking notice, that the very streets of this town of Pompeii, which was thus destroyed by an eruption of Mount Vesuvius, nay the walls of almost all the houses are built of the lava, which has flowed from this or some other volcano in the neighbourhood, yet we hear of worse that happened, by which I should suppose the place of

very great antiquity, nay indeed this appears by the wearing of the pavement in the streets. The Appian Way where it is above ground, and over which carriages jostle still even now, every day, is hardly more used. Martial, who speaks of Vesuvius as having been a beautiful and a cultivated mountain, does not hint at this. I should suppose this town to be of great antiquity, and Vesuvius to have been so too. For we see that over the town of Pompeii are flourishing vineyards and olive groves, and for many, many ages nobody had known where to find that town, which as history told them, was buried by an eruption from Mount Vesuvius and which is still full of the cinders from it. The earth that has since been increased over it is very distinguishable as a stratum that lays all along over the area, nay the whole ground between these ruins and the sea, which is a considerable distance now, is all of a cindery foundation, for it is certain that the sea washed the walls of Pompeii before the eruption. It must then have been a delightful spot, it is so yet. What a shame that the Court of Naples only employ 30 or 40 men to clear away these noble remains. Nobody is allowed to draw here or to take a plan of anything. But we may hope to see them one day in print, though the discovery of one half the town, as they go on, will not be made in a century."

### **Paestum**

"We made an excursion to Peste, which is about 60 miles from hence and passed through Salerno, the situation of which and the country near it particularly for some miles before you come to it is beautiful and romantic beyond conception. The little hills, that intersect each other all the way down to the sea, and are covered with olives, oranges, myrtles, and every beautiful and odoriferous shrub and tree, the villages and towns, and country houses, that are scattered about on all sides, on the tops of the higher mountains, in the sloping sides of the lower ones, at the shore of the sea, at the points of the promontories, the noble gulph of Salerno larger than that of Naples, the promontory of Palinurus, the noble town of Salerno placed on the shore between two hills. In short a collection of beautiful objects, which I can scarce recollect, and could never adequately describe from the delights of this enchanting coast, the road along which is very good as far as Salerno, and which is half way. Afterwards, it lays over a common, which is rather wild, though fed by numberless herds of buffaloes &c, and full of wild myrtles &c.

Peste is situated in a plain near the sea. It never was a very large place being but two miles round as is known by the walls which are yet standing and the 4 gates are nearly intire [whole/intact]. The three temples are the curious objects of the journey to this place. They are nearly intire [whole/intact] and are of the old Doric, or perhaps of the old Tuscan order before the times of the Romans. It is pretty certain that this was an old Greek colony called Posidonia, and was in ruins even in the time of Augustus. Ovid speaks of the Rosina Peste that is all I know of the antiquity, though I believe there are some books wrote on the subject. I sketched out these buildings, so I say nothing more about them here. The way of going there is by taking a coach if you are more than two, and at Salerno you are furnished with 2 wheeled chaises that carry you to and bring you back from Peste the same day paying about 4 ducats for cash."