

VIII.—*An Account of a recent Excavation at Pompeii; in a Letter from ROBERT ALLAN, Esq. Advocate.*

[Read to the Society 10th January 1831.]

*Naples, November 5, 1830.*

THE Pompeii Excavations, which proceed as slowly as ever, only 30 men being now employed upon them, have lately extended to a house, the decorations of which present unusual indications both of the taste and opulence of its original possessor. It is situated in a narrow street, facing the magnificent remains of the public baths, and behind the Temple of Fortune, which was excavated in 1823. The entrance from the street is formed by two square pilasters, with capitals, &c. to correspond, and united by a light and elegant frieze, all carved in soft tufa, covered to the depth of half an inch with stucco, that has acquired the hardness and sharp appearance of marble. Then comes the porch, a sufficiently spacious vestibule, whose pavement is upon an inclined plane, and formed of triangular portions of various-coloured marbles, arranged in a regular pattern. At the extremity of this, leading to the atrium or square court, into which the different apartments opened, is the threshold, consisting of a large mosaic of unusually fine workmanship, and representing two masks, surrounded by wreaths of flowers, fruit, corn, &c. The central court is not of such large dimensions as some others that have been discovered: its pavement is of the usual hard composition, mixed with small portions of marble; and in the centre is a square compartment, where a small marble pedestal was found, with a bronze statue upon it. The walls both of the portico and court were painted in imitation of various-coloured marbles, and the doors leading into it, though of the ordinary width, were unusually lofty. It is usual, when, in clearing the court of a house, any thing handsome is found, to leave the side rooms, where the most interesting objects have generally been discovered, or at all events the earth for 3 or 4 feet above the flooring, until some particular occasion, when it is removed in presence of a few distinguished individuals. From the general appearance, therefore, of this house, much more was expected; and upon a farther investigation of the premises, the following interesting articles were brought to light.

In the corner of the court, to the right on entering, were found 5 bronze vases, all standing upright, and close together. They were all nearly similar in form and dimensions, being about 18 inches high, and capable of holding perhaps two gallons of liquid. Each of them had a single handle, rising from the upper part of the side, and spreading into three branches, two of which surrounded a portion of the rim; while the centre one, which extended over it, resembled a finger, with an evident mark for the division of the nail. The base, the handle, which had been flattened out for the sake of soldering it to the side of the vessel, was ornamented in three instances with a crescent or Turkish moon, and in the other two by a delicately wrought bas relief, with apparently Bacchanalian figures upon it. No other ornament appeared upon these vases. They were all similar in size, form, and proportion; and, except one, were in good preservation. In the same corner were found the remains of various agricultural implements, among which could be distinguished at least a dozen heads of spades, which were lying together, and many of them, by heat and oxidation, closely united. In form they were precisely similar to those now in use in this neighbourhood, and well known by the name of *zappas*. They are fixed on a short wooden handle, placed in the same direction as an English hoe, so that the individual at work must always draw the earth towards him, instead of throwing it from him as in using the spade. There was also discovered a kind of rake, consisting of three teeth, about four inches long, similar to those of a dung-fork, but in what direction the handle had been placed could not easily be ascertained; and in the same situation the bones of a bird, probably those of a common fowl, or some other domesticated bird, that had sought shelter among the vases from the falling ashes. On the opposite side of the court were turned up three or four circular moulded bronze ornaments, which were evidently once fixed on the panels of the door by a large screw or nail passing through the centre, as many such were also found, each with a well-wrought circular knob or head; the whole together forming an ornament in size and shape very similar to some of our modern brass curtain pins.

In the first room to the left, which might be about 10 feet square, the floor was covered with common coarse earthen jars, and amphoræ; the former arranged in rows probably as they were originally placed, the latter smashed to pieces and strewn about as if they had fallen from shelves or stands, and had been crushed by the weight of the superincumbent ashes, &c. Here also were

found the bronze hinges of the door, which were circular, with a round socket in the middle that would admit of the pivot revolving within it; two rings, supposed to have been the handles of a chest; a bronze door-plate, with an aperture for the handle or key; about a dozen more of these circular ornaments for fixing on the panels of doors, with about a similar number of corresponding knobs; and a lot of corroded pieces of iron that had served for hooks, cramps, nails, &c. Except in the bottom of one of the amphoræ, a mass of dried up matter which smelt bituminous, and in consistency and appearance resembled a piece of dried turf, nothing remarkable was observed in any of the earthen vessels. This apartment was without ornament, and from its contents appears to have been the general store-room of the house.

The next on the same side was much more showy, being painted in compartments, and having among others a narrow border of the most brilliant lapis lazuli blue colour. There were two narrow apertures opposite the door to admit air, resembling the loop-holes of our ancient castellated buildings, but without any appearance of glass. In this room were collected several curious utensils, particularly one, evidently used for boiling water or some other liquid, and very possibly serving a similar purpose to that of a tea urn. In exterior appearance it was conical, bulged out in the middle, and sloping to the top like the neck of a bottle; and interiorly was divided into two distinct compartments, that for the fire, which was supplied from an opening about two-thirds of the way up, and that for the water, which must have been put in and taken out at the top. On turning up the vessel, 7 or 8 cross bars were observed for placing the fire upon, and at the same moment several handfuls of broken charcoal fell out at the opening on the side. This compartment for the fire was shaped like a cone, and round it came the other, exposing a very considerable surface, for warming the water. The top had a lid similar to one of our *pint stoups*; and when forced up, a long-handled ladle was found inside, just large enough to pass out and in when the lid was opened, and evidently used for the purpose of taking out the water. The whole vessel had been elevated upon a ring, to which three feet were attached, very elegantly ornamented, with wings standing off from each side by way of supports. It was composed of bronze, and, as well as the ladle, which had apparently been plated, was quite fresh and perfect; an elegant but not very large



handle united the rim to each of the sides; but, except by the top, there was no outlet for any liquid. Without the stand it was about 24 inches high, and must have answered very well for heating a small quantity of water quickly.

Along with this were discovered a large round lock, in every respect the same as those used upon the folding doors of this country at present, with double latches, a key, several rings, and hooks; 3 round bronze tubes about 5 inches long, but for what purpose it is difficult to imagine; and another 2 feet in length, ornamented with wings standing off at each side, and very possibly the mouth of a small fountain. In this room were many remains of wood, particularly about the locks, and in one place the evident remnants of some coarse cloth. Likewise two round terra cotta jars of very common workmanship, one of which was half full of lime or plaster; and last not least, was dug up a small bronze statue 7 inches high, elegantly finished, and, from something like a snake in its hand, supposed to be intended for Esculapius.

On the pavement of a third room was a small but beautiful mosaic, formed of minute stones, and very finely finished; and in the fourth and last which was excavated, was a regular *glazed* window, the first that has been distinctly observed at Pompeii. It was about 14 inches high, by perhaps 6 in width, forming a long slit, which was filled up by one pane of glass. The lower portion of the pane had been broken away, so that its thickness could easily be ascertained to be about a line and a half, and its quality by no means bad. Instead of putty, it had been put in with lime—must have been placed there from the inside—and had a small iron pin on each side to keep it fast. This window did not look into the middle court, as almost all those in the other houses of Pompeii did, but must have been directed either towards a back street, or another court which has not yet been excavated.

*Extract from a subsequent Letter, dated Naples, 29th December 1830.*

I was out there [at Pompeii] again the other day, and saw the rest of that house uncovered, but the things found were merely some more of the door ornaments and fastenings, and a little bottle, besides a third very beautiful mosaic, representing a cat with a bird in its mouth, made like the other two, of very small stones.