Report on use of Roman Society Grant

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The award of £2,000 from the Society’s Donald Atkinson Fund was of great help during the second season of the ‘Casa della Regina Carolina Project at Pompeii’ (see http://blogs.cornell.edu/crcpompeii/introduction/the-site/).

In summer 2019, we undertook a 5-week excavation season, working in the garden of the house at VIII.3.14 (according to Pompeii’s traditional numbering system). We excavated a total of six trenches, revealing the ancient cultivation surface of the garden destroyed by the eruption in 79 AD (comprising planting pits and root cavities filled by lapilli) and, at lower elevations, more extensive remains of the earlier, Hellenistic building (probably a domus) already identified in 2018. From these discoveries and the study of the extant architecture and garden perimetral walls it was possible to infer that in the Republican period the plot now occupied by the garden of the Casa della Regina Carolina extended to the west, including part of what later became a neighbouring house. A probable house, showing different orientation than the Casa della Regina Carolina stood here; it had a peristyle which, at least on one side, presented engaged columns. This building was later destroyed, the ground level raised by levelling the debris, and a garden was created on top of it. Our current hypothesis, on the basis of the stratigraphy and diagnostic finds, is that the earlier building was seriously damaged in the earthquake of 62 AD and that sometime during the rebuilding period the plot was acquired by the owner of the ‘Casa della Regina’ and transformed into one of the largest private gardens in Pompeii.

The Society’s grant allowed me to offer a bursary to Reading doctoral student Lee Graña, who came to work on the project as trench supervisor and whose field archaeology expertise, coming from years of work in commercial archaeology, was of great benefit to the project. A contribution to travel expense was also offered to Edinburgh doctoral researcher Enzo Castaldo, who is the project pottery expert and who spent some weeks working on our finds in the storeroom of Pompeii’s archaeological Park during this past December. A small part of the 5-week accommodation costs for myself was also covered from the Society’s grant. The rest of the money was used to purchase additional excavation tools and the so-called Dragon skin, a high-quality silicon rubber to be used to cast the ancient root cavities discovered. The technique, which permits casting also the smaller root cavities, was pioneered and perfected by project co-director Prof. Kathryn Gleason during the excavation of the ancient garden of Villa Arianna at nearby Stabiae.