

UQ archaeology digs into the life behind Pompeii

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Brisbane may be 2000 years and half-a-world away from Pompeii, but it hasn't stopped a UQ archaeologist from digging up some hidden treasures.

Dr Andy Fairbairn, a senior lecturer in archaeology with UQ's School of Social Science, is working on a project looking at the life inside one of the world's most famous dig sites.

“The archaeology at [Pompeii](#) has moved on over the last 30 years, away from the big ticket items of the temples and the like to the minutiae of what everyday life was like in the ancient Roman city,” Dr Fairbairn said.

He does this by collecting samples from what would have been the toilets of the day to see the types of food were eaten.

“This type of archaeology is a bit slower than unearthing buildings, but it is very valuable as it allows us to piece together a picture of the economic and social development of the city,” he said.

“Even if we have to go through 2000 year old excrement to do it.”

He said his team of volunteer archaeology students patiently go through hundreds of bags of samples collected in Pompeii, looking for seeds and other plant material to build up a picture of what was being eaten and traded.

“Samples come from an excavation near one of the main entrances to the city led by Australian ex-pat Dr Steven Ellis (Cincinnati, USA), on the way to the theatre and gladiators,” he said.

“And what the excavation is showing so far is that the city was moving away from the production of goods in dispersed cottage industries to more specialised industrial production and trading,” he said.

Dr Fairbairn said while it may seem strange to have an Australian archaeology team working on ancient Roman sites, UQ's reputation in the field was strong, especially in archaeological science.

“Across UQ we have a very strong [archaeology](#) group doing work all over the world, including Turkey, India, Africa, Hawaii and Central America” he said.

“Due to the profession being quite small in Australia, we often specialise in a particular area and then collaborate with other groups around the world as appropriate.”

Provided by University of Queensland ([news](#) : [web](#))

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