Treasures from *A Day in Pompeii*

*A Day in Pompeii* tells the story of life in the ancient city – from food and dining to shopping, medicine, and religious practices – with more than 250 priceless objects, many never shown before in Australia. Highlights include:

**Garden fresco**

Painted plaster
House of the Golden Bracelet, Pompeii
This large fresco covered the entire back wall of an outdoor dining room, creating the illusion of a lush garden populated with birds. The central niche may have framed a fountain.

Pompeii’s climate favoured outdoor living and people sometimes dined in their gardens. A covered path along the garden’s perimeter allowed people to walk in the shade during the heat of the day. An abundant supply of water, fed by a complex system of aqueducts, gave rise to garden fountains, pools and canals. These enabled many types of plants to thrive — flowers, shrubs, fruit and nut trees, and vines.

**Gladiator’s suit of armour: Shoulder guard**

Bronze
Quadriporticus of the Theatres, Pompeii
Embossed with the head of the hero, Hercules, this shoulder-guard (*galerus*) would have been worn by a *retiarius* gladiator. His cladding of loincloth and light armour allowed the *retiarius* more agility and stamina – but less protection – than the heavily armoured *secutor* against whom he traditionally fought.

**Gladiator’s bronze and silver shield**

Bronze and silver
Quadriporticus of the Theatres, Pompeii
A *hoplomachus* fought with a lance, a long dagger and a small shield like this one. Encircled by laurel wreaths for victory, the medallion in the centre bears the head of the legendary Gorgon, Medusa, whose look is said to have turned men into stone.
**Gladiator’s helmet**
Bronze
Quadriporticus of the Theatres, Pompeii
This helmet was worn at Pompeii’s amphitheatre by a heavily armoured gladiator called a *murmillo*. Missing from the crest is the splendid plume of feathers or horsehair. Of the figures depicted on the helmet, the central one represents Rome, flanked by kneeling barbarian prisoners and trophies of war. The *murmillo* also carried a tall shield and wore an arm-guard on his right arm, and leg guard and short shin-guard on his left leg.

**Gladiator’s shin guard**
Bronze
Quadriporticus of the Theatres, Pompeii
Some gladiators’ armour included shin-guards to protect the lower leg during combat. Decorating this shin-guard is the figure of a victorious gladiator, crowning himself and holding a palm frond as trophy.

**Jewellery: armband/bracelet**
Gold with glass paste eyes
Muregine
These armbands are in the shape of coiled snakes. Found in the ruins of a building believed to have been a brothel, they were still on the arms of the skeletal remains of two young women.

**Bust of a woman**
Marble
Oplontis
This bust illustrates one of the similar hairstyles worn by Pompeian women around A.D. 79. More elaborate styles featured very high and full crowns of curls, and women often added hairpieces to achieve these fashion dictates. Slaves who were experts in hairdressing were highly valued house servants, but ladies could also frequent hairdresser shops which were known to exist in Pompeii.
**Body casts**
Perhaps the most poignant among the ruins of Pompeii were the hollows in the ash resulting from the burial of victims of the Mount Vesuvius eruptions. The casts, made by pouring plaster into the hollows, gives us a glimpse into the human tragedy that unfolded.

**Cast of a guard dog**
Plaster  
House of Orpheus, Pompeii  
This dog was left chained to a post to guard the House of Orpheus when the occupants fled. The bronze studs around its neck are all that remains of a collar. As the pumice fall-out deepened, the dog climbed higher – until eventually it ran out of chain and was suffocated.

**Cast of a young woman**
Plaster  
Pompeii  
Like most victims of the eruption, this young woman died of suffocation. Fleeing along the Stabian Way, she fell and pulled up her tunic to cover her face against the fumes and falling ash. The imprint of her long-sleeved tunic, bunched around the waist, is preserved in the plaster cast.

**Casts of two young women**
Plaster  
House of Cryptoporticus, Pompeii  
These two women were among nine victims unearthed in the garden of the House of Cryptoporticus, excavated in 1916. This home of a wealthy Pompeian was named for its underground passageway, or crypt, with richly decorated walls.

**Cast of a crouching man**
Plaster  
Pompeii  
This victim of Vesuvius was discovered during excavations at the southern walkway of Pompeii’s Large Palaestra, or athletics ground. When he died the man was wearing boots and a hooded cloak. He had covered his mouth with the edges of the cloak as the toxic fumes and volcanic ash overcame him.
A Day in Pompeii will be on display at Melbourne Museum from 26 June to 25 October 2009. For more information visit museumvictoria.com.au or phone 13 11 02.

The Melbourne Winter Masterpieces series is now firmly established as a must see cultural event. This year A Day in Pompeii will join Salvador Dalí: Liquid Desire at the National Gallery of Victoria to make Melbourne an unmissable cultural destination. Melbourne Winter Masterpieces is a Victorian Government initiative that brings outstanding exhibitions from around the world exclusively to Melbourne, and in its first five years has attracted more than 1.34 million people.

A Day in Pompeii is presented in association with the Soprintendenza Speciale per I Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei (SAP). Adults $20, concession $14, children $12, family $54 (all tickets include entry to Melbourne Museum).

- ENDS -

For further media information, interviews or images, please contact:
Jessica Bendell, Public Relations, Melbourne Museum on 03 8341 7726 or jbendell@museum.vic.gov.au