

# Classical Archeology with Dr. Darius Arya

## Ologies Podcast

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Oh heeey, it's your old Dad Ward Von Podcast, just slipping into your life to chat with you about ancient toilets, buried treasure, and Roman rulers! Oooh this episode! It's been simmering for millennia and if you listened to Egyptology, you'll already have kind of a wee primer on the hot empire gossip we're about to unleash.

But first, a quick thanks. Thank you to all the Patrons at [Patreon.com/Ologies](https://patreon.com/Ologies) for supporting for as little as a quarter an episode. A buck a month gets you in that club. Thanks to everyone getting merch at [OlogiesMerch.com](https://OlogiesMerch.com). And for no money you can support just by telling some friends, maybe some co-workers, some enemies about this show. Also, rating and subscribing on iTunes keeps this boat afloat. Reviewing just makes my day because sometimes I'm tired or sad and then I see a nice thing you said. This week I creaped the review of SaxyBitch. They say:

*You know that thing that happens when you meet someone at a party and realize that you both love the same science podcast and then you freak out and talk about it at a mile a minute while everyone around you is like, "What's their problem right now?" If the answer is no, you've never listened to Ologies. This episode list is like the menu at an amazing restaurant. Literally anything you choose is a good idea.*

Thank you SaxyBitch.

Okay, archaeology. Let's get into the etymology really quick: archaeology comes from the Greek *arkhé* for 'beginning', and Classical archaeology deals specifically with Ancient Rome or Ancient Greece.

Boy howdy, hot dang, this ologist knows his business! He's an American who lives in Rome, so the dude is literally walking the talk, and he's the Executive Director of the American Institute for Roman Culture. So, dude was a Fulbright scholar who got his master's and PhD in archaeology at the University of Texas, and he's the host of the PBS series called *Ancient Invisible Cities*, as well as the Italian series called *Under Italy*, where he crawls into cool tunnels and tombs and shit. It's very rad; season 2 is about to start.

He was in LA as a Getty Conservation Institute scholar at the Getty Museum, and my lovely friend – an equestrian by the name of McKenzie Rollins (hay gurl!) – introduced us via email. Then we met up, we chatted, we got a little geeky about the Greeks, but mostly, it's all about the Romans. A statement on his website just reads: "My passion is Rome," and it is not a lie. And like a plague in ancient times, it's infectious. So, hang on to your togas and recline on your laurels to hear all kinds of dirt with Classical Archaeologist, Dr. Darius Arya.

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**Alie Ward:** Darius Arya sounds like a superhero name.

**Dr. Darius Arya:** Yeah, it almost rhymes. I've gotten that a couple times.

**Alie:** Darius Arya.

**Darius:** Hello.

**Alie:** Also known as Dar. So you are in the United States right now, but you're based in Italy?

**Darius:** That's exactly correct. I get complimented here on my English all the time. They're like, "Oh my god, you're from Italy? But your English, you sound so, so... You're like a native speaker!" I'm like, "Well, actually, yes."

**Alie:** You're from New York originally?

**Darius:** I was born in Buffalo, but I grew up in Huntington, West Virginia; my dad was a coal miner.

**Alie:** Oh!

**Darius:** No. *[laughs]*

**Alie:** Okay, I believed you for one second. *[laughs]*

**Darius:** No, no, the Iranian coal miner – that's a good story though! I went to a boarding school in New Hampshire. So I had my New England experience. Then I stayed in the area; I went to University of Pennsylvania, so I had my Philadelphia experience, the city of brotherly love. Then I got my PhD in Austin, Texas, which is the surreal spot in all of Texas.

**Alie:** When did you start studying archaeology? I know your dad – not a coal miner – your dad was a surgeon?

**Darius:** Yeah, my dad's a surgeon, retired. My dad's Iranian, so he came over through a study in Vienna, met my mom there, worked in London, and then finally to Buffalo where he did his residency. My mom is American, German-American, so that's kind of the link up. But archaeology... I was always interested in ancient history. I was always interested in something old. I was lucky enough as a kid to travel to museums in the United States and I love the Smithsonian.

I mean, I think the Smithsonian has something for everyone, you know? It just strikes you in a certain way, whether it is air and space or natural history. For me it was these exhibitions on the ancient civilizations and there was a huge one on Darius the Great. I'm like, "Oh, who is this guy?" So I got a little bit of my history in there and that spurred it on.

**Aside:** If you're like, "Everyone knows who Darius the Great, the ruler of Persia around 500 BCE is, except me." You're not alone! I had to look this up. So, Darius – the dead one, not the alive guy that I'm interviewing – built the 1700-mile long intercontinental Royal Road. He had a ton of wives, and he also is known for having carved his autobiography into a limestone cliff face, including details about a bunch of wars he won. It was a baller move. It was kind of like a mix between Mount Rushmore, and a Barbara Walters-style interview, and some really good battle rap lyrics. Anyway, he had style.

**Alie:** You were named after him?

**Darius:** Uh, yeah... well, I mean...

**Alie:** Is it like John is a very common name?

**Darius:** Yeah, I'm John. John Smith is Darius Arya in Farsi, something like that. *[Alie laughs]*

**Alie:** It's great. Honestly, you sound like a superhero.

**Darius:** Well, when I studied Latin it was great because my name can decline, you know?

**Alie:** That is such a niche observation. As someone who studied Latin for four years, I very much appreciate the declining. Did you study ancient languages when you were getting your archaeology PhD?

**Darius:** When I was a kid in Huntington, we had this absolutely spectacular, nationally acclaimed Latin teacher. So that's why I didn't study French. That was the other option and I'm like, "Well, I've got to study with this person." She was just so dynamic and on fire, Lois Merritt. I mean she's still kicking around and whenever I go back home she's always, [*mimics female voice*] "Oh my, one of my favorite students!" and all that sort of stuff. She was just great, and that's what you want in any teacher is someone that really inspires you and someone you can go back to; someone that is really excited about their material.

**Alie:** Yeah, I bet as a Latin teacher she's like, "Yes! I turned one into a lifelong Roman enthusiast!"

**Darius:** An addict. And then I live in Rome! I was just blindly doing the Latin and Greek in junior high and then high school. I just really enjoyed it, but I didn't think career. I'm of that generation where you just didn't really talk about it, and then you'd move forward, and then you're in university, and your parents are like, "What are you going to be studying?"

"I'm going to keep studying classics, but I don't want to *do* that."

"Well, okay, maybe you want to look into a PhD?"

"No, no, no, I don't want to do that."

"Do you want to look at the sciences? You know, your brother's pre-med."

So I just was not interested in that. Then I decided... having studied a semester in Rome, Italy, that was the real kicker for me. That was when I really just opened my eyes to how much more I could do with the stuff I was studying. And so archaeology just became this thing like, "Oh, can I really do that?"

A lot of people fall in love with archaeology. It's just hard to do something with it because the field is very specialized and then you come out and there are no jobs. So it feels like just an uphill kind of battle. I wasn't even thinking about that when I decided to do it. I wasn't thinking about job prospects. This is not what I would tell my children. I would not tell them, "Go into something. Don't be responsible. Don't think about your future. Don't think about how you're going to pay for anything." I would never tell my kids to do that. I would be like any other parent like, "Oh my god, what are you doing with your life?"

**Alie:** You followed a passion though? Which is what got you to keep studying it through getting a PhD. It was what you were most passionate about.

**Darius:** Yes.

**Aside:** So, Darius says part of being a professional archaeologist is just figuring out the right job after you score the PhD. You might have to get a little creative; you might have to compromise a little. You might have to write a book in the day while waiting tables at Olive Garden at night. That's okay. For him, doing field work, plus scholarly work, plus hosting TV shows and podcasts has turned out to be the right combination. [*action/adventure music, "I'm Darius Arya, I'm an archaeologist off to explore three of the most amazing cities on the planet."*]

So, you know a field is potentially a little challenging when your side hustle is being a TV show host. But he's great at it and it's working for him, clearly. Imagine if John Stamos had a PhD and took over Mike Rowe's job, but in ancient catacombs. He's killin' it.

**Alie:** What does an archaeologist do? If someone says, "I'm an archaeologist." What does that mean? Because I feel like I think of dusty Chinos, and worn boots, and definitely a hat.

**Darius:** Yeah, most archaeology isn't spending your time in the field. I mean, I can qualify that and say that some people just do that all the time because they're contract archaeologists. There's always something going on in Italy where some house is being built, or some building is being restored, or some road is being put in, and so they're always out in the field doing the excavation in that sense; urban development or rescue operations.

But generally speaking, you're studying the past. So you're an Egyptologist or... I'm a Classical archaeologist, so I'm in the Mediterranean, I'm in central Europe, I'm where the Romans were. But generally speaking, the archaeologists will spend a lot of time in libraries. I'm here at the library using the resources of the Getty.

**Alie:** So, it's some part in the field, but a lot of it is spent also piecing together a lot of different parts of history to form, kind of, a narrative or try to piece together a narrative that has parts missing?

**Darius:** Yeah, exactly. You're getting a wealth of information when you're excavating or doing some sort of evaluative study maybe – it could be noninvasive nowadays – but then you need to sift through the data. What you've now come up with has to make sense.

**Aside:** Oh man, I love this part! Archaeology is like a fascinating parfait of abandoned junk.

**Darius:** If you're excavating, you've unearthed different strata, different layers, that people have left behind, and you've gone through the chronology backwards. So you're trying to piece it together, understanding it from the beginning to the end. Of course, you're actually in the most recent stuff first, so there's a bit of a puzzle there.

**Alie:** What kind of tools are you using? Take me through a dig.

**Darius:** Okay. So the first thing is, sometimes I'll talk to some little kid, rarely an adult, but someone will ask, "Have you ever found any dinosaurs?" [*Alie laughs*] Nooo, I'm not that kind of archaeologist. [*clip from Jurassic Park: Dr. Ian Malcolm, "God creates dinosaurs, God destroys dinosaurs, God creates man, man destroys God."*]

What I'm concentrating on professionally has been the Roman era, and because Rome is not a place that's abandoned and has continually been occupied there are various layers that can be quite late. So, for the top layer of a site, it will be modern. There's going to be something... Just people deposit stuff, people leave stuff behind, and it can be a Coke bottle, or a piece of barbed wire fencing, something like that. Then you're getting down into... Actually, in Rome and vicinity, the environs can be very, very rapid. Sometimes it's even as shallow as say, four or five inches. "Awesome. Boom! We're already hitting ancient material."

**Alie:** Where is this? Is this in a construction site? Is it a puddle?

**Darius:** My excavations have been in really historic places that are well known, like the Roman Forum, but then also, an archaeological site called Ostia Antica. Ostia Antica was the port city of Rome. Basically, Ostia was developed as the city at the mouth of the Tiber River. So, if you imagine this river flowing from the north, through Rome, and then dumping out into the Mediterranean.

**Aside:** So this is a city located right about at the kneecap of Italy. It's right on the sea and it's been abandoned for about 1,000 years. It now looks like grassland taking over a grid of crumbling brick structures, but in its heyday, it was this bustling port city and seaside tourist town filled with government buildings, military fortifications, amphitheatres, and

residences. Ships carrying grains and other supplies would offload tons of goods to be stored and cataloged in warehouses, and then tugged upriver by little boats, and then dragged into Rome itself by oxen or slaves. Because, yeah, Romans had plenty of slaves to cover all kinds of jobs, from hard labor, to sex work, to really specialized *and enslaved* physicians and accountants.

One very famous slave revolt was led by a gladiator. Um, what was his name? [*clip from Spartacus: group of slaves, each claiming, "I'm Spartacus!", "I'm Spartacus!", "I'm Spartacus!", "I'm Spartacus!", "I'm Spartacus!"*]

Okay, back to the port Ostia Antica, which means, alluringly, 'old mouth'. [*squishy splat*] This was a place of a lot of comings and goings, but once a newer port city nearby started getting more traffic, Ostia Antica became *so five minutes ago*. It was so over. It was like a hipster bar that your mom's friends started going to. But its abandoned ruins are a really, really, good place for archaeologists to piece together the past, because that's what they do. I just stated the obvious. Anyway, Ostia Antica.

**Darius:** So then obviously Ostia becomes a very, very, important place for the empire and it becomes a very multicultural city. It's great... it's like a mini-Rome. So, the fact that it gets abandoned and it's just there, that allows us to have really exciting and pretty immediate excavations as opposed to other sites that are continuously occupied like Rome. Obviously, Rome is much more complex to excavate because there's a modern city on top of it.

**Alie:** And what kind of stuff do you typically find?

**Darius:** You find a lot of pottery.

**Alie:** Yeah, I was gonna say I feel like it's gotta be a lot of vases.

**Darius:** Yeah. Imagine you have your house and you're living in your house for decades and decades and decades and you're producing, over that time period, a lot of garbage. Now imagine your rubbish heap, your dump, was right outside in your backyard. Just imagine what people would find.

**Aside:** [*slowed speed*] Personally? A bunch of kombucha bottles and empty bags of Cool Ranch Doritos. Let's be honest.

**Alie:** Oh, god!

**Darius:** Of course, obviously, if we're talking about today it would be a lot of plastic. So, for the Romans almost everything... I mean, sure, there's leather goods they're using, or baskets, or burlap bags, but really what's traditionally preserved and what was used for storage for pretty much anything was pottery. So, you're going to find that. That stuff is fired and it's basically indestructible, but it's kind of smashed up and those things can be pieced together. Then hopefully, if you're lucky, there's writing. They write on them oftentimes what the material is and so forth, or who owns it and so on. There's a big dump actually, in Rome called Monte Testaccio. It's like a hill...

**Aside:** Oh my god! A Google image search reveals just a huge grassy hill in an otherwise flat neighborhood, but then you get up close and it's like a ceramics graveyard. There's just piles and piles and piles of broken pottery. Like if a giant was so pissed and just smashed all your jars. [*upset, whining voice, "So pissed!" and shattering plates*] It's all the antiquated mystery of a creepy cemetery with none of the "I'm sad about all the lives that have ended," factor. It's great.

**Darius:** ... It's literally something like about 150 feet high and it's got a circumference of like a mile and a half, and they just dumped ceramics that are smashed. Primarily, the amphorae, these jars, were used for carrying olive oil. So, then you say, "Well, why don't they just reuse the jars?" Well, because if you have it filled with olive oil... Have you ever tried to clean a bottle of olive oil? It's a pain in the ass. So, what they did was they just smashed it. So, it gives you an idea of the volume, the sheer volume that's coming in.

And then keep in mind too... We love the ancient guys because it was all so sustainable. So even Rome was a big consumer city, and generally speaking, you'd take those jars and you'd smash them, and you stick them in the rubble for the mortar of a wall. They're reusing everything. But to be able to create a massive hill like that means they had so much volume coming into this mega city that was the ultimate consumer city that, "Oh, we can't even use all this stuff. We'll just dump it over here." And it just becomes this hill.

**Alie:** Oh my god! So, people have always been garbage people.

**Darius:** Oh yeah. [*Oscar the Grouch enthusiastically singing, "Yes, I love... I love... IIIIIIIII.... love traaaaaash!"*] Some of the greatest finds, I think in recent times, really adding to our knowledge of the ancient world is. For example, the drainage channels in Herculaneum, one of the cities destroyed by the eruption of Vesuvius, they found something like six tons of human feces. So you go, "Eww, that's not my kinda dig!" [*Alie laughs*] [*sarcastically*] "Oh, we hit the mother lode! Whoa, these guys were constipated!"

But basically what happens is they sift through all this stuff and they find out they had parasites, and this is what they're eating, and this is their diet, and so forth. It's really, really fascinating. Again, I don't think I'd want to be known as the shit archaeologist or something like that. You know, "What's your specialty?" [*uncomfortable, evasive laughter*] "I've washed my hands."

**Aside:** Scatology, bioarchaeology, geoarchaeology, oh my! If you archaeo-poop people are out there, [*distorted, echo effect*] hollerrrrr.

**Darius:** Somebody's gotta do it, and you don't know what's going to happen when you dig. You always have these questions that you ask, and you get approval to pursue... to answer those questions in your excavation. But, of course, it's just like Murphy's Law. You're never gonna find what you sought out to find. You think these are shops and therefore you want to understand the commercial activities along this road. Oh, wait a minute! They're not shops there; it was a brothel or whatever instead of it being a wine shop or something like that.

So you will just not know until you excavate. That's part of the fun and the mystery and the puzzle work, because you never find everything intact. You're always going to find half the puzzle pieces are missing. So then you need to figure it out and you figure that out by talking to colleagues, and seeing things that are similar, and so forth. But that's a lot of fun.

**Alie:** Now when you've got, let's say, a crushed vase that you've unearthed and it's very exciting, whose job is it to physically put it back together?

**Darius:** Ah, yes. So that's the job of the conservator, which is very, very, important. So, you can carefully document and excavate... We actually had a number of tombs at our last dig so then we had a specific expert.

**Aside:** This expert he's talking about is the very, very, European-sounding Pier Paolo Petrone of the Laboratory of Human Osteobiology and Forensic Anthropology. This is near

Pompeii. This guy studies the victims of ancient disasters and just a quick tippy-tap on the ol' computer machine turned up a paper of his entitled, "A hypothesis of sudden body fluid vaporization in the 79 AD victims of Vesuvius." [*high-pitch, helium voice*] Sudden body fluid vaporization. [*slowed speed*] Whew! Sudden body fluid vaporization! So today I learned that a volcano can boil the blood right out of your body. Okay, anyway.

**Darius:** He's looking at some pelvic bone and he's telling you man or woman, and age, and dah, dah, dah. So, it was a lot of fun to have him on the site. You have to depend upon a good team of people from different backgrounds depending on what you're doing. Do you need a structural engineer because you're going deep? Do you need this forensic anthropologist? Do you need the numismatist for the coins?

But it really is exciting because what you're doing is recovering the remains of ancient cultures. That's what archaeology really is. You're doing that through the examination of the material remains. You know, it's not just the things, but it's the things that then indicate human activity, human lives. I mean, it really is the way to connect to those people of the past. Oftentimes, it's not the big, high and mighty, the emperors – like, I've done a lot of TV shows and it was like, "Do one more episode on [*emphatic, dramatic voice*] Caligula or Nero burning Rome," but it's also just that average person, those communities. Who were those people? They oftentimes remain anonymous because they don't have the funds to leave behind something great and massive and impressive. So, it's really the archaeological remains that can help unearth their story.

**Alie:** How did ancient Romans live?

**Darius:** There's different ways of looking at it because, on the one hand, I'm still in awe of the aqueducts that were constructed to bring all that water into a city. How do you maintain a million people? I mean, that's a megacity! Cities didn't get that large until after the 1700s. You gotta get the industrial revolution to have the sophistication to have those cities. Then you look at the cities of the industrial revolution and life for a lot of people is pretty shitty, you know, pretty bad. Then you look at ancient Roman times and a lot of people were just eking by; they're just barely making a living.

So, we're looking at our society today and saying, "Wow, the wealthy are becoming reeeally wealthy!" That one idea – boom. You know, that Uber, that whatever startup... but then everyone else, you kind of see this kind of crunch and say, "Oh, the middle class is suffering, and then the poor, boy they're *really* poor."

**Aside:** Darius points out with dismay that this mirrors today's culture in some countries. Some people can't afford healthcare while some are just drowning in coin. [*Kim Kardashian: "No big deal just taking a private 747..."*]

**Darius:** But when you go back to the ancient Roman times, you had a small class of people and boy, were they wealthy. I mean, they were sooo wealthy... just on another level, and I'm not even talking about the Imperial family. It's just that so much wealth was concentrated in the hands of a handful of families. There really was no middle class per se. It's hard to get involved and talk about what life was like when we try to look at it in our own terms, but it definitely was a hard life. I mean, if we think about childbirth, you have risks even today with all the modern medicine.

**Alie:** [*groans*] Ancient childbirth?!

**Darius:** Yeah, so you had the midwife, she was very important. It's actually really neat to see, this one guy has a plaque outside of his shop and literally it is a woman in a birthing chair that's being assisted. So literally like a cutout chair. These things exist today. The Romans wouldn't... they wouldn't go flat. That was something that was created in more recent times and now they're kind of going away from it. But basically, he has women giving birth in a chair with a cutout and someone is receiving the baby. This is the person you're going to contact to come to your house.

All these specializations, all these careers... like 'this is the person that makes the shoes'. I mean, in those times, there was the guy down the street that was making your shoes. Unless you get the import, right? More refined leather or whatever and it can be much more expensive. That's the way you're showing your own wealth. But the clothes that are being made everything is made by hand. But in a certain sense, things did get industrialized. You could go to the dry cleaners that could accommodate thousands and thousands of people. You drop off your toga and your toga would be cleaned, oftentimes being soaked in ammonium from urine to get those stains out. [*"No, thank you."*]

Afterwards, you'd rinse it out and obviously there are different ways in which you can have it clean and smelling good. So then life got really complicated, but then also sophisticated because you had the water, let's say, from the aqueducts coming in, and you had the bath complexes you could go to. You, who don't even have flushing or running water in your house or a toilet, could go to these publicly financed, subsidized spaces where you could have a Jacuzzi soak and a rubdown.

**Aside:** I looked up the amenities in Roman baths and they had heated floors, and dry saunas, and wet saunas, and furnace-warmed bathing water, and cold plunges and these soaring beautiful ceilings, and intricate mosaic floors, and they were public so they were pretty cheap to get into and on some holidays, they were just totally free. So I guess if I had a time machine and I could only pick one thing to do, I would definitely pop over to Germany in the 1930s and fatally kick a certain someone in the ball, but then I'd be like, "Hey, on the way back can we also hit an ancient Roman bath?"

While we're talking aquatic, the water systems in Rome were legendary. They were channels of water that went under the city or above it in these bridge-like structures and they were fed by springs and the flow was transported only via gravity. So all these aqueducts were built to be on some gradient, even if it wasn't too steep, it didn't even look steep, it still was enough to keep the water flowing just slightly downhill.

The first aqueduct began operating in 312 BCE and fed a cattle market in Rome. As the centuries passed, hundreds of these human-built rivers existed all over the Roman Empire and a lot of the water was used for the bathhouses. I mean, I'm mostly Italian and it's so weird to think of my ancestors just scrubby-dubby, nude jacuzzi chillin'. Probably naked, right? I think they were probably naked.

**Darius:** The Romans had incredible, different ways of benefiting from, yeah, conquest but also just a life standard that nobody else had. So then people were... Well, what are people doing today? We're going to the cities because cities give you more opportunities. What were they doing under the Romans? People were flocking to the cities. There were jobs, there were opportunities, there was a whole different lifestyle. And in more sophisticated studies right now, I would add that we are learning that, yeah, most people probably had lice. A lot of people – looking at our shit study – a lot of people probably had different kinds of parasites and worms and whatever. So, I mean, maybe not necessarily the best



thing to be in those cities. You talk about the spread of disease and so forth, of course some of the biggest outbreaks from antiquity were under the Romans.

**Alie:** Ooh, like what?

**Darius:** Oftentimes, it's identified as bubonic plague, and smallpox, and stuff like that, that were decimating in different periods of the Roman Empire, which had profound effects. So imagine one is so bad in the second century, that they say one out of five in the empire – this was an empire of about 50 to 60 million people – one out of five died. No one was spared from rich to poor. And they're like, "What the hell can we do? How can we stop this?" They faced very difficult things back then and of course medicine was really based upon observation. It wasn't based upon the sorts of things that we can do today. So yeah, I don't think I really want to go in a time machine and hang out in ancient Rome because you probably wouldn't live that long, you know?

**Alie:** You'd have a urine-soaked toga and a communicable disease.

**Darius:** Yeah. But I mean those guys were tough, too. I mean, it was all... Like children again, you know, maybe half of them died before the age of five. We've got catacombs, we've got tombs, cemeteries. We've got places filled with little, little sarcophaguses, little tombs. Because obviously everyone, just like today, if you lose a child, it doesn't matter what the age is, you love that child. But you see a lot of them and so you're getting the sense that boy, a lot of kids were dying.

**Aside:** Well, yay for vaccines, amirite? Also, the elderly, instead of just being made fun of for not using Snapchat, they were revered because you could go to them for advice and for wisdom. So, instead of just consulting a horoscope, or a Magic 8 ball, or the robot who lives on your countertop for life decisions, you would just ask the human being who loves you, and who created you with their own body and survived plagues and wars. And ask, "How do I be an adult?" and they would tell you.

**Darius:** That can be a world of experience because that person lived through x, y, and z that maybe the city or the state is now experiencing, and they can 'remember a time when' and that's a great asset.

**Alie:** They're like, "Look at all the things that didn't kill you, you must be a badass!"

**Darius:** Yeah, well you couldn't google the stuff. You'd have the elders talking. You'd have the documents, you had the libraries, you'd have those kinds of things that were written down, but having a person still alive would have been great. So that's the sorts of things that we can tease out from archaeology. Particularly with the Romans, we have so much literature; we have hundreds of thousands of inscriptions.

**Alie:** I have a very stupid question.

**Darius:** There are no stupid questions.

**Alie:** I am going to ask it anyway, as I do. If you had to describe, to like a second grader, the rise and fall of the Roman Empire in like a couple of sentences... How did the Roman Empire get so powerful and what the hell happened?

**Darius:** Yeah. Okay. Whew, that's a great one!

**Aside:** Okay, let's buckle up your butts for a whiz through space and time to get some highlights and a very, very, brief history of the Roman Empire situation. The history of Rome all starts around 753 BCE when a virgin named Rhea got knocked up by the god

Mars, legend has it. Mars is like, "I'm gonna put a couple babies in you." So she had twins, who were supposed to be tossed into a damn river, but instead got ditched under a fig tree and they were discovered by a she-wolf who kindly suckled them. Which seems weird and gross to be suckin' from wild dog breasts, but hello, I ate cheese yesterday which is from big old cow titties, so whatever.

Anyway Romulus – one of the twins – killed his brother Remus [*reverberating*, "What a dick!"] And he was like, "How 'bout this: I'm the first king of Rome now." Rome was ruled by a bunch of kings, a lot of whom were total dicks. Then it became a republic in 509 BCE aaalll the way to 45 BCE when it becomes an empire. So, that empire lasts about 500 years until its fall, which happened about 476 AD. So, I'm going to let Darius explain more and why.

**Darius:** They obviously had great things that nobody else did. They started off as a little village like everybody else, but they had a sense of themselves and what they could accomplish, and they did it against all odds. They end up having a better military. Basically, they had something... a good idea, a good mindset, that ends up over time allowing them, not just to defeat people, but to have relationships with those people in those communities. And they did it rather quickly. They end up having a great network, to the point that all these communities in Italy are now on their side and they're all becoming Romans. They actually get the citizenship.

Over time that relationship, like me to you, we speak each other's language, so we trade – this is after we've maybe gone to war – and then eventually allow you to intermarry with us. So now your people can marry our people, and eventually your community can have the right to vote. So, all these kinds of steps are the way they figured out how they would deal with other people.

If you go over to the Greek system just for a second – well there's no Greece per se, but there were Greek city-states – there are common gods, and shared cultural norms and language, but they frickin' hated each other's guts! So they'd all be like, "I'm going to enslave you and you're going to enslave me!" They were very jealous about the citizenship of their city-states. It was just almost impossible to become an Athenian or something like that. They would enslave you and so forth.

Anyways, I think that one of the core differences is, the Romans, in the end, were always navigating and negotiating with these kinds of terms. By about the 90s BC, even though Rome had already conquered the entire peninsula, the entire boot of Italy, the bulk of the people that were still fighting with them, and supporting them, and went against the Carthaginians (the big rival of Rome in the western part of the Mediterranean), they're not mostly citizens of Rome.

So finally, they're like, "Hey, we're out of here. We're going to do a basically a big-ass walk-out because you're not letting us be a part of you. At this point we're really... We've given enough." And so there's a civil war that ends up with the Romans giving all of the Italian allies citizenship. That's a big deal and that was a big bloody fight. But anyways, these things took place over time.

**Aside:** Carthage, by the way, is now in modern-day Tunisia in North Africa, and is just a hop and a skip over from Sicily. So these wars were called the Punic Wars. They were rough, long wars that lasted almost 100 years. But eventually, Darius says, Rome wins out around 146 BCE because they have this massive support from Romans all over Italy. They

destroy Carthage and the city of Corinth like, “Berbye.” But this power doesn’t last forever; it starts to crumble.

**Darius:** So the Romans just – they did kick ass, yes it’s true. But at the same time, they were very hesitant to use that power. But when they did use that power, it became quite awesome. And then the last hundred years of the Republic is really about a deterioration of the norms and the basic premises, let’s say, of their constitution. Where more and more it was about individual strong-men rulers... not rulers yet, but more like lead politicians that were also the generals and the generalships start getting extended more and more, breaking the norms.

**Aside:** So, weird rulers start to take over, starting with Julius Caesar, who crosses the Rubicon into Italy and ends the era of this people-led republic by becoming a dictator. This is around 45 BCE. So, a smaller, little body of rulers start kind of rotting it from the inside. Not to be dramatic... but the whole timeline is dramatic!

**Darius:** You’re really getting more and more of the concentration of wealth and power into not just these maybe 300 or 400 families, historically, now it’s into like three or four people that can really run it. And at a certain point it’s these guys named Crassus, Pompey, and Julius Caesar, so the triumvirate. If you ever heard of this term, the triumvirate, the three-man grouping, they’re the ones that conceived of this. Between the three of them, with all their clout and contacts and so on, now they’re running the Senate. But finally, it boiled down to just one guy, and the last man standing in that conflict was Julius Caesar. So, the republic had an empire in its last hundred years, but now it’s under the rule of one guy: Caesar – assassinated on the Ides of March.

**Aside:** We covered a little bit of this drama in the Egyptology episode, just FYI. To meet Caesar, by the way, Cleopatra, Egyptian Queen, reportedly had herself rolled into a carpet and then snuck into Caesar’s quarters and he was like, “Hot damn this teen queen has got some flair!” and despite being decades apart in age, they became lovers. Then they had a son that Caesar never acknowledged and then Julius Caesar got shanked by his own posse. [“*Et tu, Brute?*”] But the Empire marches on, thanks to nepotism.

**Darius:** The perpetuation, let’s say, of the one-man rule is continued by his great-nephew who is his adopted heir. That is Octavian, who changes his name to Augustus, who defeats his rival, Mark Antony, the former lieutenant of Julius Caesar that had kind of a falling out, and his now-girlfriend Cleopatra! So we have mixed in an incredible, historical figure.

**Alie:** And Cleopatra was Julius Caesar’s ex, right? She had a baby with him?

**Darius:** Yeah, Caesarion. So basically Julius Caesar is back in Rome. He’s consolidated his power, his foreign – not wife, but you know, his foreign lover who is a queen, it’s pretty good, you know? He’s got something over all the other guys in the Roman Senate. Like, “Who’s your wife? Who’s your girlfriend? Because *my* girlfriend, let me tell you man: Queen of Egypt.” And that’s pretty good. So she’s in power, she’s hanging out in Rome and then he’s killed, and so she’s like, “I gotta get outta town.”

She goes back to Egypt, but then she’s a very powerful person, and who comes next is Mark Antony going, “Hey, give me a chance.” So, they end up shacking up and he ends up living in Alexandria with her, and it seemed like a legitimate affair that grows into a real relationship and lots of kids and so forth.

**Aside:** So Cleopatra does an Ariana, [*snippet from Ariana Grande song, “Thank you, next...”*] and she and Mark Antony have some kids.

**Darius:** He thinks he's going to be ruling the Empire with her, even potentially from Alexandria, just kind of abandoning Rome as the prime city. But then that's all thwarted when he goes off head-to-head against Octavian and loses in a big naval battle called Actium. From that point on, you get these dynasties. Julius Caesar's grandnephew, Augustus, is the emperor. He changed his name to Augustus. I mean, how many people are famous today and it's not their real name? They've changed their names. Augustus did that over 2,000 years ago! He's like, "I gotta leave behind this bad legacy. I'll just change the name and start afresh!"

**Alie:** A little rebranding.

**Darius:** Totally amazing rebranding. Then of course he gets the best poets and historians of the day to write new histories, and poems of praise, and so on, and that's what you learn as a child when you're learning Latin.

**Aside:** So Augustus, Caesar's nephew, becomes Rome's first emperor and he commissions this great literary figure, Virgil, to write some epic, soft propaganda. Kind of like if terrible news anchors just read glowing poetry over the air. But Virgil croaks getting off a boat and has instructions to burn the piece, as it's just a rough draft. He's like, "Ugh, don't publish this. Oh my god, it's so bad." But Augustus is like, "Naaah, looks good to me, let's just publish this bitch." It becomes, of course, *The Aeneid*, which contains lots of swords, and blood, and one line that you are free to bellow as you enter your next debauched party, "Let me rage before I die."

**Darius:** So then the Empire chugs along, ups and downs. Down would be like a Caligula. Up would be Trajan, who builds a kilometer-long bridge across the Danube and kicks butt in Romania. So, you have a lot of high points, but then you get to a moment when there's crisis, and the crisis is from 235 to 284 AD. It's just bad, where emperors last about as long as a prime minister of Italy, which is around two years. It's just bad, bad, bad; assassinations, and invasions, and outbreaks of plague and runaway inflation. It's like Venezuela. I mean, really bad stuff. I mean, as bad as you can imagine. Then we get Constantine, and of course Constantine is the famous emperor to really give legitimacy to Christianity, but he establishes Constantinople, which we call Istanbul today...

**Aside:** [clip from *They Might Be Giants* song, *Istanbul*: "Every gal in Constantinople, lives in Istanbul, not Constantinople. So if you've a date in Constantinople, she'll be waiting in Istanbul."] Thank you, *They Might Be Giants*, for your contributions to historical literacy.

**Darius:** ... as the new prime location of the empire. And that half of the empire, the eastern half, actually lives on another thousand years; but in the west, it really kind of disintegrates fully in the fifth century. It kinda gets won back just briefly in the beginning of the sixth century. Each one of these moments I'm just rattling off, I mean, they're all incredible moments of history, just unbelievable, mind boggling sagas.

**Aside:** Ultimately, hundreds of years after Caesar, around 476 AD, the Western Roman Empire falls. ["I've fallen! And I can't get up!"] And then, its last emperor, a dude by the name of Romulus Augustus, loses a battle with some Goths, which I like to imagine was just a big tussle with invaders wearing fishnet shirts and cat collars, blasting Sisters of Mercy until Rome was like, "Fine, fine! We're done. We're done here." Rome, interestingly, started with a Romulus, its first emperor was an Augustus, and it ended with a Romulus Augustus. [clip from *Sisters of Mercy* song: "First and last and always... Till the end of time."]

**Darius:** But Rome ends up still having this voice. I mean, Rome today still has a voice as well. It's the capital of a country. The country's only been around since 1870, 1860, thereabouts as modern Italy. There was no modern Italy before; there was all city-states.

**Aside:** So, Italy's a brand-new country?! I did not know this! And again, I'm Italian. Okay, so how does this relate to the archaeology?

**Darius:** We had all kinds of rich history in Italy, and that is all going to leave behind layers, strata, which is going to be part of your excavation. So you know, "We're in the 1500s still because we're finding this kind of pottery," or whatnot. Everyone leaves behind something and that's, again, part of the fun.

**Aside:** So what types of things does Darius find on digs? There aren't a lot of old diaries or papers laying around, but there are tombstones and inscriptions on marble; and there are old coins, and those give archaeologists some dates to work with. PS: People who study coins are called numismatologists. Heeey!

A lot of the tombs that archaeologists poke around have already been disturbed so they mostly find modest, everyday articles like a hairpin made from bone. But I kept probing for drama, and I asked about the less-everyday things. Darius said his favorite discovery his team has made is a statue of a man made in red-veined marble. It had one bronze eye, the other went missing. Now, the subject of the sculpture is based on an old myth and he's depicted in this blood-red stone for a reason.

**Darius:** Marsyas, is this foolish satyr that challenges Apollo, the god of music, the god of enlightenment, the god of many things, god of light. He challenges him to a musical contest and then he loses. So, he is skinned alive.

**Alie:** Oh, no!

**Darius:** Oh, yeah. So, you usually see him in this scene where he is strung up on a tree or a tree trunk and it looks like he's in pain and so forth, and there's a seated Apollo with his lyre, and then you have a slave attendant, the Scythian, who is a sharpening a knife. That's the kind of scene that you get. So, we found the Marsyas figure... There are many of these and some of them are white stone, and some of them are in colored red marble. We found one of red marble. So you can have that sense of him being skinned alive like in *Predator*, you know? Schwarzenegger?

So it's that kind of look; it looks just horrific. I mean, his face looks very tortured and contorted and so on. Just a lot of energy there, which I kind of like. I'm more interested in that than say the classical kind of 'classicizing', some sort of nice, [*classical music begins playing in the background*] unemotional kind of gaze. Like, "I'm above all of this." That doesn't get me going. [*record scratch*] But when you see drama and [*deep, distorted voice*] bulging, contorted figures and so on, like, "Wow, that's drama!"

**Aside:** And some drama that Darius is not into?

**Darius:** Then of course you have the whole other side of collectors and looting and looted art. Like right now, please don't buy anything that's from Syria on the market, because it's stolen. Do you know what I mean? Like, don't do it, museum. Don't do it, individual. But there's a huge market for materials and that's, again, part of that space in which I'm interested. It's not just the archaeology excavation, which is destructive, it's also the preservation side.

**Alie:** In terms of your career, what would you say your biggest goal in archaeology is?

**Darius:** The preservation side is definitely... How do we treat these sites better? How do we get more people interested? How do we communicate the values of preservation? Because I mean, people right now, we're probably traveling more than ever. Flights can be cheaper. I don't know, you're Airbnb-ing it. You do anything you can to save money to get to these places, but when you're going to a place, chances are a big part of your experience will be, what? Food. Contemporary society. But it will also be something that's old and so that's the part where you've got to look at that and say, "What's being done? Is it being done well? How's it being preserved? Who's involved? Is the local community benefiting from it?" and so forth.

I hate nothing more than when somebody says they did something in Rome and says, "Yeah, but I saw it looked really, really overgrown or didn't look like anyone really cared." That's not the kind of walkaway you want from Rome. It should be a blazing postcard to the world. Like, "This is where we take care of history." If you're never been to Rome, you need on some level to experience the Colosseum; you need on some level to experience the Vatican.

Now, if you just drop in and say, "I'm gonna go to the Vatican," and you didn't get your ticket online ahead of time or whatever, then you're kind of in trouble. I mean, it's just going to be difficult. You might wait hours. That would be a shame. But then you need to experience the real Rome. How do you do that? A lot of it is just carving out some spaces and just seeing the city go by. Sit down on the Piazza and enjoy that kind of reality. I want you to slow down when you come to Rome. Otherwise you come away from Rome with, "I did this and there was a huge line," or "I did this and there was a huge crowd." I mean, that's just really gonna eat into the authenticity of the experience.

**Alie:** What about something archeological while you're in Rome?

**Darius:** Oh my god, if you don't go to the Roman Forum, you're in big trouble. That's the most... That's one of the most historic sites in the world, Roman Forum. So sure, there's the Colosseum, which is iconic, but the Forum is where it all happened. I mean that's where the Senate was. That's where the riots were. That's where the voting took place. That's where, you know, Cicero made his career.

**Aside:** Cicero, by the by, was one of the most famous Roman prose writers. He was also an orator, he was a lawyer, and he spoke out against the dictatorship of Julius Caesar. He's like, "I think this guy's a knob." He also later spoke out against Mark Antony. But instead of just exchanging Twitter clapbacks, Mark Antony had him killed and then displayed his head and his hands in the Roman Forum. I'm telling you: they love drama. Italians love drama.

**Darius:** I mean anyone that's famous that you think of in the ancient Roman world, you're literally going to walk where they walked. You just have to go there. You just have to go there, no excuses. And there are tons of other places, you know: Trajan's markets, and the Column of Trajan, and the Largo di Torre Argentina where Julius Caesar was assassinated. There are many other things to see. The Pantheon, of course. You've gotta go to the Pantheon. Those are 'must see', 'must experience', you must *be* in that space.

**Alie:** So you should block out like at least a week or so?

**Darius:** Oh yeah! I mean, I live there. I lived there for 20 years and I do not think that I've seen everything. I haven't seen a fraction, but you're coming back because Rome is so rich in history. How do you rival a place with hundreds of churches? It's the capital of an empire

that basically formed Europe. I mean, in all of these civilizations around the world, everyone, when we're making something extraordinary, historically speaking, "Sure I'm going to glorify myself because I'm the patron of that, but I'm glorifying God." All those statues and all those museums from the ancient world, in one way or another it's religiously motivated.

**Alie:** I never thought about it like this, but yeah, it's so weird that ancient art is just like fan art to God.

**Darius:** Yeah.

**Aside:** So every time you see a statue of a god or a painting of an angel, it's just like a binder-paper pencil drawing of Taylor Swift or some Lady Gaga lyrics embroidered on a pillow.

**Darius:** So you walk around the streets of Rome, or any city in Italy, and at all these street corners is a little shrine to Madonna... to Mary. And you're just like, "What the hell?" Why? She's everywhere, right? She's like a rock star. Then you realize that that tradition came from the Romans, and the Romans then believed that... you know, what's a crossroad? It's a meeting point, things can happen, you go left, you go right and so forth. So, you'd want these local deities in your neighborhoods overlooking you and you'd pay your respects to them because they're taking care of you. "If I go here at this intersection, if I turned left and a roof tile slides off and bashes me in the head, I'm dead. [*cartoon bonk noise*] But if I go right and I walk along, well then I just met my wife," or something like that. So, you know, you've really got a sliding-doors kind of concept.

**Alie:** Can I ask you Patreon questions?

**Darius:** Yeah!

**Aside:** The first Patreon question was asked by a few people including: Richard Ruggiero, Neal Williams, John Murray, Ellen Alexander, and Ashley Hamer.

**Alie:** Ashley Hamer wants to know: What is the deal with all the lead in Rome? They had it in their pipes. They sprinkled it in their wine. Considering how long they used it, you think people would have noticed their effects. Did they?

**Darius:** Absolutely, yes. You just read the Vitruvius's *Ten Books on Architecture* from the first century BC where he says, "Yes." When those guys are making the lead pipes, he was like, "Look at their condition, look at their health. It's terrible. So you, educated Roman, keep your distance!" But they wanted the lead. Why? Because it is a huge derivative from the refining process of silver. When you find silver in Spain, you usually get it with a lot of lead. So you separate the lead from the silver. Now you've got literally tons and tons and tons and tons of lead.

What do you do with the lead? Well, it has a low melting point, it's malleable, let's use it for piping. In addition to piping in ceramics, piping in stone, even piping in wood, but it's lead that is used and is okay in Rome because the water always flows through it. It doesn't sit. The people today in, let's say, Washington DC, I mean they have a lot of lead pipes. They say run your tap for 15 minutes before you use that stuff.

The lead is also not going to affect you in Rome in the same way that you would think because the water is hard. The piping all gets coated with calcium very rapidly, so people don't die from lead poisoning, per se. It's like an old wives' tale. But yes, they did use lead and other things. We talk about it in rouge or even putting in food sometimes. So, bad idea.

Bad idea. Don't do it. Obviously, you have some things you read about you're just like, "I don't understand why they would do that." But the lead pipes, I understand now why they did it, why they used the lead. They were a little smarter about it than, let's say, we are.

**Alie:** Is there any truth to the fact that that's why Caligula was kind of crazy? That's why people were so bananas?

**Darius:** Nahhh, I mean, that guy was messed up. I mean, watch my show *1400 Days of Terror*. The thing with Caligula, the insanity part, we can't ever quite figure out what the deal is. But here's a guy who, his relatives were being killed left and right. He's held hostage by the previous emperor, Tiberius, on the island of Capri, doing god knows what for like 10, 15 years. Then when Tiberius is finally dead, now he's the last relative still standing, so he's now the emperor, has no experience, never really dealt with society. He's just been living on a private island living in fear of being killed, because one by one, his other relatives are being put to death. So, that's going to mess you up and it's going to also make you not trust anybody.

When we do look at legitimate sources that talk about him and show him interacting with this one particular delegation that comes from, I think, Jerusalem. He seems to be very sharp and witty. Maybe cruel, maybe ironic, but he didn't seem crazy. So, I don't know. But the thing is he has absolute power and he does end up doing some pretty strange things. Then the rest of the stories are apocryphal.

They said that he did this, they said that he did that, but how can we prove that stuff? But the bottom line is he was killed by his own bodyguards, so he rubbed people the wrong way. It's like your secret service just turning around and shooting you. And that means you're probably... you know, you got some major issues there.

**Alie:** Because he was really known for being, I feel like, very incestuous. Quite kinky, he was a bit kinky.

**Darius:** Again, it's more how the stories come out. Once you're dead, people can say whatever they want, there's no tape, there's no recording. So it's a little difficult to sift through it, but he definitely did some over the top things. Whether or not he was having sex with his sister? We don't know.

**Alie:** Well, back then I feel like that wasn't that weird. [*Darius laughs*] I mean FDR married his cousin, so whatever. They're like, "You're alive. I'm alive. Why not?"

Jake wants to know: Is Rome a big archeological minefield with ancient stuff below the ground everywhere? How does anyone build anything without ruining some of the sweet mosaic under the ground?

**Darius:** You're absolutely correct. Rome was the megacity, the greatest city of the ancient world, a million people living there. So everywhere you dig, you find something ancient. That's exactly correct. Now, in different time periods, people cared less. So, when Italy was unified, the Savoy family wanted boulevards and new buildings and they uncovered tons of stuff, then said, "Oh look, we'll keep the statues or whatnot. We'll document this, but we'll knock everything down." So, there are those issues where you lost a lot of material but also made a lot of discoveries.

Today, of course, the process is very meticulous, very refined, and very time consuming. So, "I'm going to put an elevator in this building, or I want to gut this building and put in a department store," which happened with Rinascente. They literally found a whole slice of



a neighborhood. It's all been fully documented, and they left one wall exposed, but for me, the tragedy there is that they should have made them spend an extra million or two to make that whole slice of neighborhood of Rome with homes, and fountains, and streets accessible. I think it should have been mandated; that's borderline crime. I think it's a tragedy. It's a tragedy.

So, sometimes I think they do it well in Rome and sometimes they could do it better. I mean, it's packed in dirt. Maybe you can get back to it, but it's in the sub-basement of the store where you've got... 25 feet below you it's just packed dirt for walls and homes and mosaics. Everything just packed in, you know,. It's all there in situ, on site.

**Alie:** Wow. Lloyd Parlee has a bathroom question.

**Darius:** Alright! Sponge on a stick.

**Alie:** Yep! The whole wiping their butts with the public shared sponge on a stick.

**Darius:** Yes. Actually, there's a nice mosaic that was found. I can't remember where. I want to say...

**Aside:** A recent mosaic of this item which is known as a xylospongium was recently uncovered in modern Turkey, and let's just say it was humorous in nature and it confirmed that for millennia, people have enjoyed toilet humor and comic strips while in the john.

**Darius:** They find a mosaic with a guy with a little stick and a sponge on it. What's with that? So the idea is... Do you have any idea how much paper cost back then? Oh my god, it was made by hand! It was made from papyrus! Oh god, I mean, you can't waste that on your ass! Not going to happen, so you do what...

Let's talk about kids. Let's talk about diapers. Let's talk about menstruation. [*snippet from Salt-N-Pepa song, "Let's talk about sex, baby"*] I mean seriously, all the modern things we have today and we're a throwaway society and it's convenient. I mean, my parents, you know, they washed our diapers. And if you were rich, you can have a diaper laundry service even back then. But I mean, who could afford that?

So then the disposables came out and you're like, "Well I'll splurge on those every once in a while." You know, my parents would, just to have it if they traveled or whatever. But I mean, the things that we take for granted today... It's the same thing with sponge on a stick. I mean, what do you expect them to do? [*Alie laughs*]

The fact that you can go to these spas and these incredible, sophisticated, experiences in the ancient world, and you're going to the theater, and you're going to gladiator games, and you're going to concession stands and so forth. But then at Circus Maximus, you saw the chariot racing, now 200,000 people gotta take a leak. Where are they gonna go? Where are they gonna go?? We struggle to figure out where all these people are going to go to the bathroom. But you know, these are big issues. So sponge on a stick, thank you very much.

**Alie:** [*laughs*] Didn't know about that until this moment.

**Darius:** Oh yeah.

**Alie:** Oh god...

**Darius:** God forbid you had diarrhea or something. [*laughs*]

**Alie:** Oh god, you're gonna have to be like, "Can I just take this stick with me?"

**Darius:** Exactly. "I'm going to need someone to rinse that out, please. Thank you!"

**Alie:** Oy vey, “We’ve got an aqueduct!” Okay, let’s see. Christopher Barley and Lloyd Parlee both wanted to know: Was Roman concrete indeed stronger than ours now?

**Darius:** It is. Why is the dome of the Pantheon still standing after, let’s say, 1,800 years? How is this possible? We can’t build anything that lasts 1800 years. But, I mean, how do you have anything last that long? How come we’re excavating stuff and we’re finding these really well-preserved structures? It’s because they built them in a different way. For us to do it today, it’s just not time... It’s just not, what do you call that? It’s not efficient. It’s not cost efficient. So we cook the lye. The processing is different, so the material is weaker.

**Alie:** Oh, I didn’t know that!

**Darius:** So that doesn’t last as long.

**Aside:** Much like a coveted recipe for BBQ sauce, Roman concrete recipes are exciting to people, including myself. The secret ingredients? Volcanic ash and seawater. The seawater broke down the ash and then this other mineral, Phillipsite, crystallized in its place, and that hardened the concrete over time. So instead of breaking down, it just kinda got better and better. Still, you know what? I would take our shitty concrete over their xylospongia, really any day.

**Alie:** Kimberly wants to know: What’s the origin or history of the saying, “Rome wasn’t built in a day”?

**Darius:** Ohhh... well, gosh darn it. You know, I guess we could google that...

**Aside:** I looked into this in case you ever get on *Jeopardy*, or if you just truly run out of things to talk to your relatives about over the holidays, and the saying comes from some medieval French poems from the year 1190. Okay, so pass the potatoes and please don’t ask about my ex-boyfriend getting married.

**Darius:** ... but you know, how about, [*enthusiastically*] “All roads lead to Rome”? Or how about the emperor Augustus – this is one of my favorite sayings, I think, because I say it all the time – he used to say, “Make haste slowly.”

**Alie:** What does that mean?

**Darius:** Exactly. It’s great! It’s perfect.

**Alie:** [*slowly, contemplatively*] Make haste slowly.

**Darius:** Yes.

**Alie:** I’m going to need a minute to digest that.

**Darius:** “Rome wasn’t built in a day,” is that kind of idea that this is not a prefab society. This is not something that happened overnight. There were ups, there were downs, but we’re measuring... How do we measure time today? I mean, that tweet that came out an hour ago is no longer relevant. But back then, think about it, were we talking about civilizations that had a good year? No, they had a good century. It’s that kind of idea. It’s like the measure of time is totally different. And that’s another way I guess you could say why Rome, as an empire, lasted so long.

I mean, how long do empires last today? How long did the British Empire last? How is America doing? I mean, we don’t have an empire, per se, but we’re a dominant global force. You’re not going to be the big dog on the block forever. You know, you’re not going to be dominant forever. I personally, tell my kids, “Don’t worry, America will still be

America. As long as you're alive and well, don't worry about it." But things are changing, definitely. There's change in America, as in Rome, and it will change and adapt as well.

**Alie:** It's interesting to look at the rise of autocrats as leading to a [*singing*] downfall. Just saying.

**Darius:** Well, yeah, but we have a very strong constitution. I mean, I love Rome, I love the Roman Republic, and it lasted 500 years, but they don't have the checks and balances and so forth that we do. So, have faith in the Constitution! It's a good, basic, document and I think we'll be fine. [*"The More You Know" theme plays*]

**Aside:** This next question floored me.

**Alie:** Jamie Peterson wants to know: Is it true that marble statues were originally painted brilliant colors and the paint disappeared over time to reveal the natural stone color that we see today?

**Darius:** Yes, absolutely! [*airhorns play X-Files theme*] Because the materials were biodegradable! If you bury something, it's gonna come off. We in the field, we know this, but most people, they're not involved directly in the field of Classical studies or ancient archaeology and so on, so they use tempera or they use encaustic. They actually use a hot wax kind of paint that was translucent. So, the whole dynamic of what it actually really looked like? We're not exactly sure. When you see a reconstruction, always take those reconstructions with a grain of salt, because they're usually not very good. To recreate what must have been there has not really been done.

**Alie:** When did they stop painting them, do you think?

**Darius:** Ah, that's a good question. I mean, all throughout antiquity they were painting them. It wouldn't just necessarily be the full body. It could be the clothing, the drapery, the hair, paint the pupils, maybe the ring on your finger, etc. Even inserting a metal necklace or a crown or earrings. So, they got to be quite dynamic and lavish. But then, of course, I was telling you I found, the Marsyas, he was already made of a colored stone. Then you don't even need to paint him because you're using the beautiful veining and the color of the marble itself. That becomes really prevalent from the second century AD and onward, to use that kind of colored stone. Quite sophisticated stuff.

**Alie:** I had no idea! Rachel Marshall wants to know: Were people openly LGBTQ in Roman culture?

**Darius:** Ah, yes. That's very interesting. They didn't have a term like 'homosexual'. They didn't have this term, but they had, obviously, a homosexual practice. Generally speaking, in the Greek world, it was pretty normal, standardized, no big deal. In fact, it became for the Spartans... You know "This is Sparta!" from *300*? Well, the typical thing was, you pair an older soldier with a young soldier and when they initiate you and kind of get you into the whole military experience, part of it is also a sexual bond, and this is kind of normal.

The philosophers would be debating about this in Athens and talk about it like it's the highest form of love. Of course, the higher form of love is between a man and a man, rather than a man and a woman, because the man and the woman is where you're going to have a child; but man and the man, it's not about that. It's about real love, right? So anyways, lots of interesting conversations.

**Aside:** Darius also explained that the way Romans regarded sexual preference was really more about dominant versus submissive. So who's giving, who's receiving? It was acceptable to be a giver, but was frowned on to be a receiver, no matter what sex or

gender someone was. Not frowned upon, however? Having sex with slaves or children. So yeah, they were progressive in some ways and very whack in others. They also didn't seem to give tons of consideration to female enjoyment or sexuality. But yes, it was expected and acceptable for a Roman guy to just swing a bunch of ways.

**Darius:** For the Romans though, it's not that big of a deal. The bigger deal would be, say in the Imperial period, "You're a Christian?! Oh, you're a Christian! You're denying the existence of the gods that hold together the fabric of the empire!" That's bad. You don't want to be a Christian in certain periods and there are waves of persecution. So that's the worst thing.

**Alie:** Last two questions I always ask: Worst thing about your job? Thing that sucks the most? Shittiest thing about being an archaeologist?

**Darius:** Yeah, probably that there's no money in archaeology. You do it because you love it! You do it because you love it. It's not like I have a hedge fund or something like that. I guess I'm just griping here; I've got no complaints. I think there's a lot that's great. You meet people, diverse cultures, get to travel, get to always have a little bit of a tan, you know?

**Alie:** Well, that was my next question. What's the best thing about being an archaeologist?

**Darius:** My work is outdoors. My work is outside. My younger daughter used to say, when she was really little, she said, "Daddy's office is the Colosseum." Which is a nice thing to say. And it's kind of like, "Yeah! Yeah, sure." I want to be in contact with this as much as possible. And the other beautiful thing again to underline is there are collections around the world in museums which do a phenomenal job to promote all this history and stuff like that. But remember, they're pretty much all collections you've acquired, you bought, you purchased. And nowadays we're really scrutinizing where this stuff is coming from because a lot of stuff is looted.

**Aside:** Darius says preservation is really important, as is knowing where the objects came from.

**Darius:** Right now, I'm at the Getty, and the Getty has a beautiful, fantastic relationship – wasn't always the case, but right now – with the Italian government, and they're sharing, and they're working, and they're preserving monuments and so forth. So it's great to see when those things can really work and it doesn't just benefit the monuments themselves, it benefits the local community, the local governments, and so forth. That's the kind of things I'm involved in and I want to be more involved in.

**Alie:** So, a little bit of karma with your history?

**Darius:** Yeah. *[laughs]*

**Alie:** And now, could we find you across many social media platforms with the same handle?

**Darius:** Yep! Same handle: DariusAryaDigs. You just gotta figure how to spell my name, but yeah, DariusAryaDigs. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, my website. It's all pretty much there.

**Alie:** Smart branding!

**Darius:** Yes, thank my wife!

**Alie:** Thank you so much for doing this!

**Darius:** Thank you very much, this was great!

**Alie:** This was amazing!

**Darius:** Yeah!

**Alie:** I've got to go to Rome! [*Italian mandolin music plays softly*]

**Darius:** Okay, just let me know when you're coming to Rome! We'll plan some stuff.

**Alie:** Okay, we'll get an Aperol spritz... [*voices fade out as music becomes louder*]

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So, keep asking smart people stupid questions and go check out some Roman ruins. Eat some pizza while you're there. You can find Darius Arya all over: he has tons of beautiful photos and links up at his website, that's [DariusAryaDigs.com](http://DariusAryaDigs.com), and his [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) are also @DariusAryaDigs. Special thanks to his amazing wife Erica, a writer, for encouraging him to have one handle everywhere. That is a great strategy! So, DariusAryaDigs, you can find him everywhere. You can check out his show, *Ancient Invisible Cities* on PBS, and the premiere, this week, of season 2 of his Italian show, *Under Italy*, and that's at [RaiPlay.it](http://RaiPlay.it). His American Institute for Roman Culture is at [RomanCulture.org](http://RomanCulture.org), and he's working on a new podcast. Follow him on social media to get all the news on that because that's going to be cool as hell.

You can find me @Ologies on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#), @AlieWard on [both](#), and [AlieWard.com](http://AlieWard.com) has more links. [OlogiesMerch.com](http://OlogiesMerch.com) has all kinds of shopping fun, from pins to winter hats to *Ologies* sweatshirts to keep you warm. Thank you, Shannon Feltus and Boni Dutch for all the amazing help with that. All of those links are in the show notes.

The Ologies podcast [Facebook group](#) is a great place full of wonderful people and that's all thanks to Erin Talbert and Hannah Lipow, who admin it. Thank you, Nick Thorburn of the band Islands who wrote and performed the theme music. Also, of course, thank you to Steven Ray Morris, host of the *Purrrcast* and *See Jurassic Right*, and he edits this every week, and deserves a wheelbarrow full of kittens and muffins for doing so.

Now at the end of each episode I tell you a little secret, and this week's is just a little self-help nugget for anyone who ever gets down on themselves. You know how sometimes you walk around and think "Wow, I am such a turd. I bet no one will invite me to their holiday parties and everyone secretly thinks I am smelly and stupid," and then you look for evidence to support that hypothesis? Like a friend maybe didn't text you back right away, or maybe you got a bad gift in the office present exchange, and you're like, "See? Look!" The problem here is that you're perhaps trying to prove the wrong hypothesis and then you're just collecting data to support something that isn't really factual. So you may need to change your hypothesis to, "I'm pretty fucking cool," and then you'll start to realize, "Hey there's a lot of evidence to support that!"

This feeling, lately, has been working really well for me. Having a bad day? Maybe just switch around my hypothesis. So, if you need some evidence right now, I'm going to tell you right now: if you're still listening to this, not only are you curious about the world but you are also very patient and kind to listen to the last dregs of this podcast episode. So, you're pretty fucking cool. So say I, old Dad Ward Von Podcast.

Okay, berbye!

*Transcribed by Laura Kinney, Tacoma, Washington USA*

***Some links which you may find to be of use:***

[A helpful Roman history, written for bb children](#)

[Darius's the Great's stone cold graffiti flex](#)

[God creates man...](#)

["Ancient Invisible Cities" trailer](#)

[Ostia Antica: what it was like CGI style](#)

[Aquaducts were cool](#)

[RIP a bunch of pottery](#)

[Paleo poo is a viable business plan](#)

[Rome: powered by slaves](#)

[Teleport me to a Roman bath plz](#)

[Caesar's kid that he pretended wasn't his?](#)

[Cleopatra hot goss](#)

[Cicero: outspoken and not forgotten](#)

[Are you also obsessed with "Sliding Doors?"](#)

[Nope, lead didn't make the Romans cuckoo](#)

[Phillipsite: What doesn't kill us makes us stronger if we were concrete](#)

[Rome wasn't built in a day, a phrase that is very duh](#)

[Toilet joke mosaics: timeless](#)