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# PRINCIPLES OF DECORATION IN THE ROMAN WORLD

*Edited by Annette Haug and M. Taylor Lauritsen*

DECOR

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## Principles of Decoration in the Roman World

# **Decor**

Decorative Principles in Late Republican and Early Imperial Italy

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Edited by  
Annette Haug

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## **Volume 2**

# **Principles of Decoration in the Roman World**

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Edited by Annette Haug and M. Taylor Lauritsen

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## Preface

In late February 2019, the ERC-funded project DECOR convened the first of two research colloquia dedicated to the exploration of decorative phenomena in the Roman world. Held in the Institut für Klassische Altertumskunde at Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel, *Principles of Decoration in the Roman World* brought together a group of international scholars who sought to address a range of important, if sometimes overlooked, topics related to various forms of decorative media.

DECOR, which is supported by the ERC consolidator grant no. 681269, aims to provide a holistic analysis of the decorative principles employed in Roman Italy between the Late Republic and Early Imperial periods (2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. – late 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., broadly construed). In doing so, it is the first programme of research to move away from studies of visual media in isolation, focusing instead on the manner in which decorative elements interact with one another. This comprehensive approach is being applied to a range of spatial contexts, including houses, sanctuaries and streets. The goal of this volume is to expand the analytical scope beyond the geographical and temporal boundaries established by the project, while still adhering to its central principles. Although the papers collected in the book differ in contextual focus, they seek to engage with a theoretical concept situated at the heart of DECOR's research methodology: the relationship between the built environment, decorative media and human action.

The success of the colloquium itself can be attributed not only to this volume's contributors, but also to a number of individuals who provided important organisational and technical assistance. Many thanks to Ruth Bielfeldt, Jens-Arne Dickmann and Patric-Alexander Kreuz, who chaired the colloquium sessions and led discussions throughout the event. Thanks also to Manuel Flecker for helping to coordinate the keynote lecture and subsequent reception, which was held in the Antikensammlung at the Kunsthalle zu Kiel. We are grateful to Torben Keßler, who assisted in the production of various materials, including the colloquium flyer and programme, and to Julia Hagge and Rebecca Hannemann, who organised tea, coffee and snacks.

This book has benefitted substantially from the critical support of Bettina Bergmann and Jens-Arne Dickmann, as well as comments from two anonymous reviewers. Marcel Deckert, Katrin Götsch, Rebecca Hannemann, Daniel Nieswand, Iria Schmidt and Ruth Thormann were responsible for preliminary editing and the production of certain figures; to them we are extremely grateful. Thanks to Douglas Fear, who provided additional editing and proofreading support. We would also like to express our gratitude to De Gruyter, who established the DECOR series for the publication of the ERC project's results, and to Mirko Vonderstein, in particular, who has overseen the production of this book and the others in the series with great care.

Annette Haug and Taylor Lauritsen  
Kiel, Summer 2020



# Table of Contents

Preface — V

Annette Haug

**Introduction: Principles of *Decor* — 1**

Francesco de Angelis

**Decoration and Attention in the Forum of Augustus: The Agency of Ancient Imagery Between Ritual and Routine — 15**

Michael Feige

**Decorative Features and Social Practices in Spaces for Agricultural Production in Roman Villas — 33**

Domenico Esposito

**Decorative Principles Between the Public and Private Spheres in Pompeii: Contexts, Patrons and Artisans — 53**

Anne Kleineberg

**The Capitulum at Brescia in the Flavian Period — 71**

Johannes Lipps

**Ceiling *Decor* Contextualised:  
A Case Study from the ‘Casa di Augusto’ on the Palatine — 91**

Alexandra Dardenay

**From *Insula* to Dwelling: Architectural Transformations and Principles of *Decor* in *Insula V* at Herculaneum — 107**

M. Taylor Lauritsen

**Ornamental Painting on Campanian House Façades — 123**

Eric M. Moormann

**The Murals of the Synagogue at Dura Europos as an Expression of Roman *Koine* — 141**

Katharina Lorenz

**All the World’s a Stage: On the Interplay of Decoration in Pompeian Houses — 163**

Mantha Zarmakoupi

**The Intermediality of Landscape in the *Decorum* of Roman Villas — 177**

**Author Biographies — 193**



Annette Haug

## Introduction: Principles of *Decor*

The aim of this volume is to examine the interplay between decorative elements, architecture and action<sup>1</sup>. Architecture organises the perception of decoration and vice versa. At the same time, spatial contextualisation lends decorative forms their social quality, because ‘space’ is only constituted through concrete actions. Decoration thus acquires an orientating role in relation to and through the people who populate spaces. In antiquity, this interrelation was underpinned by the idea of *decor/decorum*.

### *Decor* and the notion of appropriateness

The concept of *decor/decorum* means that any kind of form should be appropriate (*πρέπον/aptus*) to its specific context<sup>2</sup>. The definition of form and context can vary considerably, however. With regard to architecture, Vitruvius considers *decor/decorum* to be a central design category alongside *ordinatio* (order), *dispositio* (arrangement), *eurythmia* (proportion), *symmetria* (symmetry) and *distributio* (distribution)<sup>3</sup>. He thus adopts a producer perspective on architecture, decoration and actors. In this context, he names three levels on which *decor* is effective: *decor autem est emendatus operis aspectus probatis rebus conpositi cum auctoritate. is perficitur statione, quod graece thematismo dicitur, seu consuetudine aut natura*<sup>4</sup>. The categories of *statio*, *consuetudo* and *natura* are then explained further<sup>5</sup>, revealing the following levels of reference:

- When describing the term *statio*, Vitruvius discusses the relationship between form and (semantic) content in the broadest sense, emphasising the atmospheric fit of individual decorative forms. Here he offers the example of appropriate temple design, recommending that the geometrically conceived Doric order should be chosen for temples whose deities possess *virtus*, such as Minerva, Mars and Hercules. For the deities Venus, Flora, Proserpina and the spring nymphs, the floral Corinthian order is deemed appropriate, since graceful buildings are better suited to their nature. The Ionic order, however, occupies a middle position (*ratio mediocritatis*), combining the strict character of Doric (*severus mos doricorum*) and the delicacy of Corinthian (*teneritas corinthiorum*).
- *Consuetudo* can be associated with the notion of *convenientia*: the quality (*magnificus* vs. *inhonestus*) of a building should be coherent. A magnificent entrance hall, for example, should be adorned with an elegant interior.
- The term *consuetudo* also makes reference to culturally accepted, habitual norms. From Vitruvius’ perspective, *decor* can be expressed by adhering closely to established traditions. As

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<sup>1</sup> The content of this introduction is based largely on the much more detailed theoretical reflections in my book on decorative principles in the Roman house (Haug 2020). Thanks go to Taylor Lauritsen for an intensive discussion on what structural form the text should take in this volume, as well as advice on the grammatical formulations that are appropriate in English.

<sup>2</sup> In recent research, the terms *decor* and *decorum* are frequently discussed: see Horn-Oncken 1967, 29–31; Knell 1985, 33 f.; Muth 1998, 54; Irmischer 2005, 31; Perry 2005, 31; Gros 2006; Sluiter – Rosen 2012, 6; Haug 2014, 219 f. In this context, the terms *decor* and *decorum* will only be used if the idea of ‘appropriateness’ is explicitly addressed. When it comes to forms of design, the terms ‘decoration’ or ‘decorative elements’ are used, which in English, unlike German (Dekor/Dekoration), have no aesthetically pejorative connotation.

<sup>3</sup> Vitr. De arch. 1, 2, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Vitr. De arch. 1, 2, 5: ‘*Decor* demands the faultless ensemble of a work composed, in accordance with precedent, of approved details. It obeys convention, which in Greek is called *thematismos*, or custom or nature’ (translation by Granger 1955, 27).

<sup>5</sup> Vitr. De arch. 1, 2, 5–7.

- an example, Vitruvius points out that the traditional orders (Doric, Ionic) should be applied purely, without the characteristics of one style transferred to another<sup>6</sup>.
- The positioning and design of buildings should be adapted to the natural setting (*natura*). For Vitruvius, this is especially evident with respect to sanctuaries in which the sick are healed. They should benefit from the natural conditions of a place, he says, by making use of healing springs, for example. Appropriateness can also be expressed in the orientation of a building's individual rooms towards the compass points: '[T]here will be natural seemliness if light is taken from the east for bedrooms and libraries; for baths and winter apartments, from the wintry sunset; for picture galleries and the apartments which need a steady light, from the north, because that quarter of the heavens is neither illumined nor darkened by the sun's course but is fixed unchangeable throughout the day.'<sup>7</sup> Here it is particularly clear that the notion of appropriateness encompasses both the architectural concept and its decorative features.
  - Connections between *decor* and nature are linked to a more far-reaching goal: appropriate design aims to achieve suitable conditions of use and perception. When Vitruvius claims that *pinacothecae* should be oriented towards the north in order to obtain steady light, he focuses on the users and perceivers of such rooms; in this case, the consistent lighting improves the perception of the images contained within<sup>8</sup>.
  - Finally, architecture (and its decoration) must be suitable for its (socially charged) use, as Vitruvius explains later in his treatise<sup>9</sup>. Houses with elaborate *vestibula* and *atria*, for example, need only be used by those who, by virtue of their profession, also have to reckon with public traffic in their house. Consequently, *decor* also becomes a social category.

Vitruvius thus recommends to architects that a building and its equipment should be 'appropriate'. Form should relate to content, individual decorative or architectural features should fit the appearance of the whole, decoration should be in accordance with traditional concepts of *decor*, architectural spaces and their *decor* should refer to the natural setting (in doing so they should match with modes of use and perception). Finally *decor*-spaces should meet the social needs of their users.

However, Vitruvius' remarks also suggest that what is regarded as appropriate can be highly controversial in each specific case. This applies in particular to his traditionalist view of wall painting. In *De architectura*, he adopts a rather critical attitude towards the late Second and early Third Styles<sup>10</sup>, offering an anecdote that focuses on the appropriate design and decoration of public buildings in two cities of Asia Minor<sup>11</sup>. In this passage, he recounts a tale about the painter Apaturius of Alabanda, who painted the *scaenae frons* of the small theatre in Tralles. As is typical of the late Second Style, the painting abandoned the naturalistic idea of supports and weights. This 'modern' style of decoration received enthusiastic approval from the citizens. At this point, Vitruvius intro-

<sup>6</sup> Vit. De arch. 1, 2, 6: *Ad consuetudinem autem decor sic exprimitur, cum aedificiis interioribus magnificis item vestibula convenientia et elegantia erunt facta. Si enim interiora prospectus habuerint elegantes, aditus autem humiles et inhonestos, non erunt cum decore. Item si doricis epistylis in coronis denticuli sculpentur aut in pulvinatis columnis et ionicis epistylis [capitulis] exprimentur triglyphi, translatis ex alia ratione proprietatibus in aliud genus operis offendetur aspectus aliis ante ordinis consuetudinibus institutis.*

<sup>7</sup> Vit. De arch. 1, 5, 7: *Item naturae decor erit, si cubiculis et bybliotheccis ab oriente lumina capiuntur, balneis et hibernaculis ab occidente hiberno, pinacothecis et quibus certis luminibus opus est partibus, a septentrione, quod ea caeli regio neque exclaratur neque obscuratur solis cursu sed est certa immutabilis die perpetuo.* Translation by Granger 1956, 31.

<sup>8</sup> Vit. De arch. 1, 2, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Vit. De arch. 6, 5, 3: *Ergo si his rationibus ad singulorum generum personas, uti in libro primo de decore est scriptum, ita disposita erunt aedificia, non erit quod reprehendatur; habebunt enim ad omnes res commodas et emendatas explicationes.*

<sup>10</sup> On the chronology of Vitruvius' treatise in relation to the chronology of the House of Augustus, see La Rocca 2008, 241f.; Ehrhardt 1991; Thomas 1995, 30f.; Lipps 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Vit. De arch. 7, 5, 5–7.

duces the mathematician Licynos, who criticises the painting by making a comparison to Alabanda. Its citizens were considered to be ignorant (*insipiens*) because they had violated what was proper and fitting (*vitium indecentiae*): they had erected statues of speakers in their gymnasium, while in the forum they put up statues of athletes. This argument, which clearly refers to the appropriateness of *decor*, convinced Apaturius, who then removed his painting. The fictive dispute reveals that what is considered appropriate by some may not be the same for others; indeed appropriateness is not subject to any socially uniform evaluation, and it does not correspond to invariable social norms<sup>12</sup>. In fact, Vitruvius' critical take was not necessarily representative of the majority opinion in his own time. The Third Style, with its slender vegetal columns, monsters and hybrid beings, was coming into fashion, seemingly to the approval of most people. Particularly high-quality examples can be found in houses and villas associated with the Imperial family<sup>13</sup>.

Vitruvius' anecdote shows that the introduction of new visual formulas could give rise to discussions and conflicts. *Decor* became a form of persuasion<sup>14</sup>. Consequently, appropriateness was not an abstract norm – it was held in the eye of the beholder. Cicero points out that discussions regarding form and content took place between artists (painters, sculptors, poets) and customers<sup>15</sup>. The notion of appropriateness was constantly being renegotiated between the producers of decorative media and their clients. The attitudes of the latter are likely to have depended on their individual backgrounds, particularly their cultural knowledge and social affiliation.

## The frames of perception: *decor* and its contexts

Given the preceding considerations, an understanding of *decor* cannot be deduced from the design of a single form (such as a capital). Instead, principles of design and perception can only be derived from the interaction between architecture, its decoration and actors. Each of these three elements in turn provides a 'frame' for the other two. From this general perspective, a more complex concept of *decor* and decoration can be developed. *Decor* receives its aesthetic quality and semantic meaning (and thus its potential to fit) through the medium in which it is produced, the architectural context in which it resides, its decorative setting and its association with particular actions or practices. In the following section, these four 'contextualising frames' will be considered further.

### The medium

Decoration has an object character<sup>16</sup> and thus possesses specific qualities such as size, material (including colour) and an extension in space. This character means that each medium possesses its own potential and limits of representation. A mosaic made of small stones, for example, has different aesthetic and representational qualities than a wall painting. Both media possess only a minimal extension in space, so they can be considered two-dimensional. Consequently, they differ considerably from three-dimensional decorative objects, such as altars or furniture. Above all, however, the medium itself produces a specific relationship to the spatial setting and the (body of the) human actor.

<sup>12</sup> Usually, *decor* is interpreted to represent such norms, see Perry 2005, 28–77; Hölscher 2018, 323.

<sup>13</sup> Galinsky 1996, 192.

<sup>14</sup> See Fitzpatrick Nichols 2017, esp. 148 f.

<sup>15</sup> Cic. Off. 1, 147.

<sup>16</sup> See more recent art historical approaches, e. g., Belting [2001] 2011.



## The architectural context

The material relationship between architecture and *decor* can take different forms:

- Decorative features can be considered an integral part of architectural constructions: examples include fluted columns, capitals and ornamental roof tiles<sup>17</sup>.
- Architecture can function as a carrier of decoration, as in the case of wall paintings, stuccoed ceilings and pavements. These elements are designed specifically for the architectural frame to which they are attached. Such decorative features can showcase the architectural order of a space (e. g., by simulating a real wall structure), or they can obscure such a reference (by evoking an illusion to ‘open’ the wall, for instance). Most often, decoration plays with both strategies. For example, the First Style simulates a real ashlar wall, but the allusion to this wall is at the same time obscured in multiple ways – by the insertion of ornamental bands, for example. Conversely, the Second Style unfolds an illusionist architectural image on the wall, and yet fictitious architectural elements, such as painted columns, often refer to the architectural structure of the room.
- The connection between semi-mobile decorative objects, such as sculptures, tables, *puteals* or altars and their architectural setting is somewhat looser. Their positioning can be planned in the course of the building and furnishing process, but objects can also be integrated later on, and, once installed, their location can be changed. Sometimes their placement is determined by functional conditions (*puteals*, for example, due to their association with cisterns). In any case, architecture works as a visual frame for the objects contained within and vice versa: decorated objects organise and structure the perception of the architectural setting.

In all three of these cases, decoration is created in a specific medium that, through its material, size and spatial placement, occupies a specific position within its architectural setting and enters into a specific relationship with the human body. If, for example, a smaller-than-life-size sculpture is presented in a line of sight or movement within a house, an adult viewer can easily overlook it and perceive it as an ‘ornament’ of the room. A figurative wall painting experienced at eye level demands a more intense perception and can be experienced as a ‘counterpart’ to the viewer, while small pictures on the dado or in the upper zone of the wall become ‘framing’ elements. Decorative elements that are connected to an architectural frame thus reckon with certain viewing postures. The relationship between semi-mobile objects and architecture is less defined. The former’s connection to the body of the perceiver is even more immediate: a *lectus* equipped with decorative elements is intended for a particular use, and a terracotta lamp must be taken in the hand.

## The decorative setting

Decorative elements not only have a concrete position in relation to architecture, they also interact with other decorative elements. In antiquity, this applied not only to individual ornamental forms, but also to images. At the same time, ancient decorative spaces were densely filled, so that single images took up subordinate positions, forming part of a broader ensemble. Yet research in the tradition of Erwin Panofsky focuses only on the iconography of individual images<sup>18</sup>. This emphasis neglects the images’ embedding into more complex decorative settings and consequently they are assigned a status that they did not possess in ancient perception. Against this background, it is important to consider the interplay of all decorative elements that provide a visual framework and

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<sup>17</sup> Andreas Grüner has criticised the separation of tectonically determined and purely decorative ornamentation made in research (Grüner 2014). In fact, this first category constitutes an ‘integrative’ relationship between architecture and its decoration.

<sup>18</sup> Panofsky 1939, 3–31; 1975, 36–50. On methodology, see Eberlein 2008, 179–182.

order for the perception of a space. This interplay not only achieves an aesthetic effect, but also becomes relevant on a semantic level, as meaning only arises from the interaction between the individual elements.

A visual structure and hierarchy is created by the spatial-architectural location of the decorative elements and their relationship to one another. Traditional research drawing on Immanuel Kant's reflections on aesthetics describes such hierarchies by referring to a particular notion of 'image' and 'ornament': the image becomes the central (research) object, the ornament its *parergon*<sup>19</sup>. This does not correspond to the ancient conception of these terms, however.

In antiquity, the term *ornamentum* assumed the meaning of 'adornment' in the most comprehensive sense. It was therefore not conceived of strictly as a counter-concept to 'image'. Statues could function as the *ornamenta* of a theatre<sup>20</sup>, *signae* and *tabulae pictae* could become the *ornamenta* of a city<sup>21</sup>. The ancient terms *imago* and *pictura*, unlike *ornamentum*, referred to the more specific phenomenon of representation. They were placed in a defined relationship to one another by Vitruvius<sup>22</sup>: while *imago* referred to what was depicted in an image, *pictura* described the skills and techniques employed to produce a pictorial object<sup>23</sup>. The two terms represented the difference between image and picture carrier. In ancient understanding, *imago* did not coincide with reality, but was defined, as Gottfried Boehm puts it, by its iconic difference<sup>24</sup>. Its meaning went beyond mimesis; it displayed something that was absent. Visual representations manifested themselves materially (as *picturae*), but they transcended the factual to produce meaning (as *imagines*)<sup>25</sup>.

Against the background of these ancient terms, it is not possible to identify a systematic difference between image and ornament (in their modern sense). Instead, the following features are important for the relational production of pictoriality<sup>26</sup>: the semantic complexity of the representation (e. g., a narrative mythical image vs. a single figure); the syntax of the image (a complex composition vs. repetitive patterning); the design of the image boundaries (frame vs. no frame); the position within the decorative ensemble (central vs. marginal); the size of the presentation; the colour range (bichromy vs. polychromy); the image volume (three-dimensional, relief, two-dimensional); the exceptionality or conventionality of the pictorial form.

In the same spatial context, even on the same wall, these modes of presentation can enter into diverse, even contradictory connections: 'images' with 'images', 'ornaments' with 'ornaments'. It is the visual location in relation to other decorative elements that generates image effects and image meaning, as well as decorative effects and decorative meaning. The interplay of decorative elements

<sup>19</sup> On the history of this dichotomy in modern times, see Beyer – Spieß 2012; Squire 2018, 16–22.

<sup>20</sup> Plin. HN 7, 34: *Pompeius Magnus in ornamentis theatri mirabiles fama posuit effigies, ob id diligentius magnorum artificum ingeniis elaboratas.*

<sup>21</sup> Cic. Verr. 2, 1, 58: *Dices tua quoque signa et tabulas pictas ornamento urbi foroque populi Romani fuisse.*

<sup>22</sup> Vitruvius. De arch. 7, 5, 1: *Namque pictura imago fit eius, quod est seu potest esse, uti homines aedificia, naves, reliquarumque rerum, e quibus finitis certisque corporibus figurata similitudine sumuntur exempla.*

<sup>23</sup> Belting [2001] 2011, 10 f.; Grave 2015, 29–35 traces the pair of terms from antiquity to the Renaissance. Edmund Husserl explicitly mentions the differentiation of physical image, image object and image subject – see Husserl [1904/05] 2006, 21; on the question of *pictura/imago* with a slightly different interpretation, see Mitchell [1984] 2008; on the differentiation of seeing-in and seeing-as, see Wollheim 2003, which refers to the psychology of form; an extensive critical discussion of Wollheim's model can be found in Grethlein 2017, esp. 154–168.

<sup>24</sup> Boehm 1978, 118–138; Boehm [1994] 2006, 30. For a short explanation, see Beyst 2010: 'Gottfried Boehm uses the term "ikonische Differenz" in two quite distinct senses. In a first sense, it refers to the opposition between the "material support" and the "meaning" or "sense" ("Sinn") – in the sense of "representation" [...]. In a second sense, it refers to the difference between the representation and its model in the real world (in terms of signs: the referent, in terms of mimesis: the original). Thus, he talks about the "imaginary" in the image as of a "difference with the real" [...], or he states that the "content" ("der Gehalt") that is conjured by the "iconic difference" "means something that is absent" [...].'

<sup>25</sup> Gadamer 2010, 143.

<sup>26</sup> Some of the aspects are also discussed in Hölscher 2018, 299–333; see also Haug 2020, 540 f.

stimulates different forms of aesthetic perception as well as manifold meta-discourses. Architecture, images and ‘ornamental’ decorative elements work together in the creation of *decor*-spaces.

The relational negotiation of pictoriality thus simultaneously confirms the significance of the decorative system for perception: decorative systems provide a visual organisation of the space and also guide the attention of a viewer. In doing so, they hierarchise the visual space and contribute to the definition of the ‘iconic relevance’ of single decorative elements. However, a viewer can withstand these visual hierarchies, directing his/her attention towards individual decorative elements, thereby giving them a pictorial status.

## The action context

The actions in which a viewer is involved create another important frame for the interpretation of decorative elements. Perception studies in the field of psychology suggest that the action context contributes significantly to the control of attention and motivates selective forms of perception<sup>27</sup>. Martina Löw understands perception as a ‘simultaneous process of emanation by social goods and people and the perceptual activity of bodily sensing’<sup>28</sup>. Both designed space and the perceptual disposition of the viewer play a decisive role<sup>29</sup>. As Andreas Reckwitz notes, ‘[p]ractices of reception are [...] connected with corresponding practices of production’<sup>30</sup>. The perceptual disposition of the acting observer can be accessed in two ways: human action can be analysed in a very general manner with regard to its body-related attitudes (static vs. mobile), or it can be considered with regard to more specific action scenarios.

## Mobile and static actors/viewers

The accessibility, size and lighting of a room are important for the spatial placement of decoration, as well as for its perception. These factors inspire certain modes of movement and viewing positions, because perception and action are rooted in the body of the observer. Architecture and decoration are thus inscribed with a bodily dimension. There is a fundamental difference in whether *decor*-spaces are designed for a static or a dynamic observer<sup>31</sup>. David Ganz and Stefan Neuner have argued for a historicisation of the habitus of viewing<sup>32</sup>. They understand the peripatetic conception of space as a modern idea, including corresponding practices, while in pre-modern times an ‘optic regime’ prevailed. However, they admit that the decoration of spaces could also refer more or less explicitly to spatial practices in earlier periods. In fact, architectural spaces have always produced specific accessibilities and visibilities that pre-structure physical actions and viewing options<sup>33</sup>.

The design of viewing options proves to be a highly cultural product. In antiquity, there was a pronounced awareness of the visibility and placement of buildings (Aufblick), the architectural experience itself (Durchblick) and the design of views (Ausblick). Ancient written sources, such as Cicero’s letter to his friend Atticus in which he discusses the quality of a window view, prove

<sup>27</sup> Goldstein 2008.

<sup>28</sup> Löw 2008, 41.

<sup>29</sup> Luhmann 1995, 17: ‘In der aktuellen Wahrnehmung und ebenso in der durch Imagination reaktualisierten anschaulichen Vorstellung geht es um das Ergebnis eines Simultanprozessierens einer Fülle von Eindrücken mit der Möglichkeit, Schwerpunkte der Aufmerksamkeit zu wählen, ohne anderes “aus dem Auge zu lassen”’.

<sup>30</sup> Reckwitz 2016, 176.

<sup>31</sup> Underlining the relevance of movement: see de Certeau [1980] 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Ganz – Neuner 2013, esp. 14.

<sup>33</sup> On the Renaissance court ceremonial, see Weddigen 2006, 37: ‘Räumlichkeiten werden mittels exklusiver und privilegierender Verhaltensnormen und Zugänglichkeitsregulierungen voneinander abgegrenzt und hierarchisiert’.

that great importance was given to static viewing postures and viewing axes<sup>34</sup>. The perception of decoration and architecture that arises in the course of movement carries somewhat less weight in the textual sources, but as Susanne Muth has shown for Late Antique mosaics, it can be identified in the placement and orientation of the decorative elements themselves<sup>35</sup>. Movement has immediate consequences for perception, as Heinrich Drerup has pointed out with regard to the Roman townhouse. The mobile observer is confronted with a visual ensemble ‘that does not communicate itself to an observer outside, but to those moving in the atrium, to the occupant of the house’<sup>36</sup>. In movement, architecture is generally perceived spatially, rather than pictorially.

What is decisive, however, is the fact that neither all urban spaces nor all functional spaces (as in a house) are equally suitable for both modes of perception. Rooms of leisure and their decoration privilege static viewing positions, encouraging an intense mode of perception, while spaces of movement refer to mobile and thus more superficial forms of perception. It is therefore to be expected that within a house, spaces of leisure (e. g., *tablina*, *alae*, *triclinia*, *oeci*, *cubicula*) exhibit different decorative strategies than spaces of movement (*fauces*, *atria*, *peristylia*) or the façade, which is decorated with the passer-by in mind.

### Action scenarios

If one wants to move beyond the basic postures that an observer assumes in space, more complex action scenarios must be analysed. In each scenario, a particular number of people are involved (creating a specific, socially-charged setting) who share a certain performative habitus (celebrative, as in ritual activities, vs. casual, as in daily cooking). They act within a synaesthetic environment (which includes noise and smell), and this complex arrangement is embedded in particular social discourses (sometimes several). These synaesthetic, social and semantic qualities of action scenarios are highly formative factors for the perception of *decor*-spaces.

In Roman archaeology, researchers have emphasised the ‘multifunctionality’ of various urban spaces time and again – especially with regard to the Roman townhouse. Assuming that potential actions provide an important framework for the perception of space and decoration, this means that one has to take the full range of possible actions and actor constellations into account. The atrium, for example, must have been perceived quite differently depending on the activity in which an individual was engaged. Thus, forms of (syn)aesthetic perception, as well as attributions of meaning, were dependent on the respective contexts of action. Precisely because of the complexity of conceivable actions, it cannot be assumed that all (or even some) activities were ‘mirrored’ in the decoration of a room.

However, some actions had a stronger impact on the ‘imagined space’<sup>37</sup> than others did, and their material arrangement took a more permanent form. In written sources, the *triclinium* is often described as a place of *convivium*, while everyday activities are rarely mentioned (although they must also have occurred). Consequently, one can assume that the decoration of such rooms was primarily conceived to be seen in convivial rather than everyday situations; daily activity disappeared from the scene. A similar phenomenon can also be seen in public spaces. The civic community considered the forum to be a place of ceremonial action. In this sense, state reliefs present the Forum Romanum as an imperial action context. Daily activities, such as legal undertakings, were not shown in these types of images (see de Angelis, this volume). But urban spaces may also

<sup>34</sup> Cic. Att. 2, 3, 2. See Drerup 1959, with a thorough discussion of ancient literary sources; also Haug 2020.

<sup>35</sup> Muth 1998, 61–63; 2018, esp. 412–419.

<sup>36</sup> Drerup 1959, 159.

<sup>37</sup> Lefebvre (1974) observes that urban spaces are socially produced spaces. On this basis, he considers the experienced space (*espace vécu*), the perceived space (*espace perçu*) and the imagined space (*espace conçu*) to be mutually interdependent.

have been shaped by ephemeral forms of design in response to specific situations and events. Paul Zanker showed this vividly with respect to the apotheosis of Roman emperors in the Forum. On these occasions, the monuments surrounding the forum piazza, such as the Temple of Divus Iulius, were perceived in relation to the *consecratio*, during which the entire forum transformed into a sort of ‘divine landscape’<sup>38</sup>. Depending on the context of the action, therefore, different meaning potentials of *decor*-spaces could be activated<sup>39</sup>.

### Different modes of attention

The varied viewing postures and action scenarios that we can identify have an important impact on modes of attention. For the ancient world, the sources are too poor to permit these modes to be historicised<sup>40</sup>. Instead, we can heuristically distinguish a range of prototypical (and thus potentially conceivable) attentional attitudes:

- *The interest-guided perception of an observer who is involved in an action.* In this case the action in which the observer is engaged has great influence on the direction of attention and interpretation of stimuli<sup>41</sup>. As actions are charged with affects, the place in which the action occurs is also emotionally charged<sup>42</sup>. The action setting leads to a specified and emotionally-occupied form of attention and creates a particular, situationally-induced understanding of *decor*. However, as various actions can take place in the same *decor*-space, different perceptions can be stimulated. Depending on the context of the action, distinct ‘meaning potentials’ of decorative ensembles can be activated.
- *The casual perception of a space in its entirety.* The viewer engages with a visually organised (and hierarchised) *decor*-space. His or her perception is guided by the architectural layout and the decorative arrangement – especially the placement of images. Visual contrasts help to organise perception. The attention directed towards the individual decorative element remains relatively weak<sup>43</sup>.
- *Focused attention on individual decorative elements.* Viewers are able to direct their attention towards individual decorative elements. The decoration of (urban) spaces is designed for this type of perception. Based upon their placement and eye-catching design, decorative elements (images, in particular) attract the attention of the viewer. An intense aesthetic and semantic perception of the decoration was probably intended (by both artists and their clients), but represents an unusual scenario in everyday life.

The differing modes of attention described above always relate to one another, but one of them usually comes to the fore; this depends upon the design of the space, cultural habits, the intensity of the action situation and the interests and emotional state of the actor.

<sup>38</sup> Zanker 2000, 216; 2004.

<sup>39</sup> Zanker 2000, 214: ‘Wer an einer feierlichen Prozession teilnahm, wie sie etwa aus Anlaß bestimmter Götter- oder Kaiserfeste stattfanden, erlebte die Stadt anders als ein normaler Passant, der sich im Alltag an einen bestimmten Ort begab’.

<sup>40</sup> For modern times, see Crary 2002.

<sup>41</sup> Goldstein 2008, 131–147, esp. 137.

<sup>42</sup> Reckwitz 2012, esp. 41 f.; Kamleithner 2016; on affect Reckwitz 2016, 170: ‘Affekte werden nun nicht – wie es klassischerweise der Begriff der Emotion oder des Gefühls suggeriert – einem Individuum gewissermaßen als eine innere Eigenschaft zugeschrieben, als ein “tiefes Gefühl” das nur der Introspektion zugänglich ist. Sie müssen vielmehr den sozialen Praktiken selbst zugerechnet werden. Es ist die jeweilige soziale Praktik, zu der eine spezifische affektuelle “Gestimmtheit” gehört’. On 173: ‘Dem Affektbegriff [...] entspricht ein Verb, das einen Prozess beschreibt: eben den des Affizierens und Affiziertwerdens’.

<sup>43</sup> This form of perception is structurally comparable to that of a flaneur in urban space, as sketched by Georg Simmel for modern city life, see Zanker 2000, 216–219; Brilliant (1984, 15) also assumes such unspecified attention (or even lack of interest) as a possible attitude of perception.

## Conclusion: conflicting categories

At the beginning of this introduction, I argued that Vitruvius defines the concept of *decor* as the appropriate design (including decoration) of architectural spaces. As shown above, appropriateness can refer to form and content, part and whole, spatial function, tradition, the natural setting or social needs. These categories are then organised, even hierarchised, by the interplay of medium, architecture, decorative setting and action context. Consequently, one aspect of appropriateness can come to dominate over another. Such conflicts can be examined from different perspectives – starting from the architectural context, from the decorative elements employed or from the action scenarios at play. This becomes clear when looking at some examples.

With respect to architectural contexts, a building's exterior decoration could be chosen for various reasons. The outer appearance of a temple, for instance, was typically defined by the colonnade at its front. The building's function was indicated by a conventional formula. But to what extent were the building's size, proportions and decoration (i. e., the order employed) related to its urban position, the deity venerated, modes of viewing or cult activities? If the design referred specifically to one of the options, others could recede into the background.

Regarding decoration, this book will show that in the Roman world a single image type, motif or ornament could appear in a broad range of contexts. As a consequence, the relationship between a particular image, its architectural/decorative setting and the action context took on a unique form in each case. This variety of possible embeddings of the same image attests to the different strategies employed to make *decor* appropriate to its context.

Finally, similar action scenarios could take place in a variety of spaces – the burning of incense at an altar, for example, occurred at both domestic and public *lararia*. However, these actions took on different aesthetic and semantic qualities as the spatial setting, its visual design and the potential audience changed.

As the medium, architectural context, decorative setting and action context equally contributed to the visual organisation of a space, the techniques employed to 'produce' appropriateness could vary in each instance. The forms of appropriateness outlined above could thus come into conflict with one another, overlap or reinforce each other.

## This volume

The papers in this volume consider the aforementioned contexts of *decor* (medium, architecture, decoration, action context), with at least one of these aspects coming to the fore in each instance. Throughout, the authors seek to link their respective research topics to the main theme of the book, namely the principles of decoration that structure the spatial contexts in which they work and the concomitant 'appropriateness' of the decorative features present therein.

The contribution by **Francesco de Angelis** emphasises the role of action and attention with respect to the perception of *decor*. The Forum of Augustus' decorative programme presents imperial rhetoric in one of Rome's most important public spaces. However, this complex semantic programme was not necessarily important for all the forum's users; rather, it seems that commonplace daily activities occupied the attention of many viewers. *Vadimonia* recorded on wax tablets from Campania indicate that the various statues and monuments were employed as meeting points for individuals engaged in legal actions, demonstrating that jurisprudence was one of the forum's most important functions. However, this daily practice is not shown in historical reliefs, as de Angelis points out when discussing the Forum Anaglyphs, which depict only those monuments that are semantically relevant for the ceremonial actions in the Forum Romanum. Likewise, the decoration of the Forum of Augustus does not refer in content and form to daily practices, but to the ceremonial significance of the square. Apparently, not all action scenarios of the Forum of Augustus were

equally part of the visual decoration. While the judicial activities had no monumental counterpart, ceremonial activities were reinforced by their visual ‘framing’. The semantic choice made in the Forum of Augustus is echoed by the state reliefs in general, which refer to *virtus*, *clementia* and *pietas* but omit the fourth quality mentioned on the golden shield dedicated to Augustus in 27 B.C.: *iustitia*. By referring to some, but not all, of the functional qualities of the space, here the *decor* proves to be an expression of social and cultural values.

**Michael Feige’s** paper explores the role of *decor* in economic action contexts using the example of *villae rusticae*, properties associated with oil and wine production in which one might not necessarily expect to find aesthetic enhancement. As it turns out, the productive operations that took place in these buildings were often hidden from public view. In some cases, however, the wine and oil-making facilities received particular decorative investment. In the Villa Magna near Anagni, the production space was arranged as a sort of theatre and outfitted with a floor of portasanta marble. The entire space seems to have been used for ‘ritual’ wine making and sacrifices, as well as for dining. In this case, the various functional apparatus associated with the production process became decorative features within a performative context. In other instances, production suites doubled as sales areas, and consequently the entire space was designed in an aesthetically pleasing way. Façade design also served as an external social marker of *villae rusticae*. Thus, economic spaces were decorated in a sumptuous way when they served as spaces for sale, with *decor* itself becoming a selling point. Against the backdrop of de Angelis’ contribution, it becomes clear that everyday activities such as production and sale could be aesthetically enhanced if these types of activities were intended to be the focus of actors’ attention.

**Domenico Esposito** reflects upon the choice of specific motifs and themes in Pompeian wall painting. His contribution shows that Nilotic scenes and representations of pygmies became particularly popular during the final years of Pompeii, when these subjects were produced by the Vettii workshop for elite homeowners and public commissions. The images appear predominantly in contexts where water or nature is involved: in public baths, but also in private *balnea*, *nymphaea* and gardens, as well as in *triclinia* and *cubicula* with garden views. Apparently, certain motifs and pictorial themes were selected for their ambient fit, rather than the public or private nature of the spatial context. The inclusion of a Nilotic scene (sometimes populated by pygmies) added an exotic component to the space, emphasising intermedial connections between real and fictitious water landscapes. However, these motifs also appear in other settings. In the Temple of Isis, Nilotic paintings can be associated with the broader Egyptian theme, indicating that the imagery could work on multiple levels. In contrast, the appearance of a Nilotic frieze in the Sanctuary of Apollo, where it was combined with battle scenes from the Iliad, possessed no obvious functional or semantic connection to the sanctuary. On the contrary, the pygmies may even have undermined the venerable atmosphere of the space. Thus, it seems that these types of images could adopt different meanings depending on the locations in which they appeared. The omnipresence of the Nilotic theme also shows how the repertoire of a single workshop shaped the visual landscape of the city.

**Anne Kleineberg** applies a phenomenological approach in an effort to understand a well-preserved sanctuary: the Flavian-period Capitulum at Brescia. Her contribution invites the reader to perceive, through the eyes of an antique supplicant, the architecture of this complex and the interplay of its various decorative elements. While an analysis of the ground plan alone would underline the strictly symmetrical layout of the sanctuary, Kleineberg’s approach shows that perspectives must have changed with every single step. If one entered the forum square from the south, the sanctuary could be seen on its central axis, enthroned high above. Approaching the wide, steep staircase at the north end of the forum, the temple disappeared from view. The sanctuary thus appeared all the more powerful when one reached the level of the upper terrace, where the individual encountered the symmetrical layout of the temple’s three *cellae* and flanking porticos to full effect. The deep *pronaos* created light and shadow effects, a technique also employed in the manufacturing of the capitals at this time. Entering the main *cella*, the *opus sectile* floor and rhythmic placement of pilasters on the side walls led the view along the axis towards the huge cult statue of Jupiter at the

back. All design elements were intended for the perception of the temple during a ritual act, where attention was focused on the main *cella* and the cult statue. Kleineberg's paper makes clear that this effect could be achieved not only by the sheer size and symmetry of the architectural setting, but also through the interaction of the various decorative elements that adorned it.

**Johannes Lipps'** contribution examines the relationship between architecture and *decor* in interior space, focusing primarily upon the tetrastyle *oecus* in the so-called House of Augustus on the Palatine Hill. This room possesses not only a sumptuous architectural arrangement, but also extravagant decorative features. With respect to the topic of *decor*, it is a particularly significant spatial context due to the interplay of wall, floor and ceiling decoration. Here, wall paintings work in conjunction with mosaics and elaborate stuccoed ceilings structure and organise the room visually. In particular, Lipps emphasises the important role that the ceiling, a rarely preserved feature, plays with respect to the overall aesthetic effect. Its three-dimensional stuccowork created light and shadow effects and its translucent white colour lent the room a feeling of airiness and luminosity. When considered alongside the other rooms with which the tetrastyle *oecus* forms an ensemble, it is clear that the design of ceiling decoration could vary dramatically, contributing to the creation of a social hierarchy of rooms. From Lipps' contribution it becomes evident that decorative elements possess a social quality. However, it is not the single decorative element but the entire decorative ensemble that creates the social value of a room.

The contribution by **Alexandra Dardenay** discusses the interdependence of architecture and decoration within *insula V* in Herculaneum. She analyses the role of *decor* in a dynamically changing architectural landscape, exploring how decorative principles work in a complex built environment. From this perspective, the following questions arise: where, and why, are decorative features of older phases maintained or new elements created? How do such decorative features refer to one another and to the broader architectural structure? As Wolfgang Ehrhardt already observed for room ensembles within Pompeian houses<sup>44</sup>, achieving visual coherence was an important principle in dwellings with multiple phases of decoration. In spaces that were reconstructed or adapted over time, some decorative features were retained, some were destroyed, and others were reproduced, mimicking earlier styles of decoration. These varied approaches are particularly visible when older spatial configurations were adapted, producing new visual connections between architectural and decorative elements. The symmetrical organisation of space was another diachronic principle of decoration – when new visual axes were established, the decorative response was typically adapted to the contemporary conditions. Thus, decorative elements proved to be extremely adaptable to diverse spatial configurations.

**Taylor Lauritsen's** paper focuses on Campanian house façades. In the traditional model of the Roman house, which conceptualises the dwelling as an open and (semi-)public space, one might expect façades to be the carriers of lavish designs that displayed the social status of the homeowner to the outside world. But this is not the case, as Lauritsen shows. The monolithic façade was interrupted only by narrow windows and an entrance that could be closed by solid doors complemented by complex locking mechanisms. Often consisting of a two-dimensional 'closed' design, the opaque decoration applied to it seems to have emphasised this architectural arrangement, which was designed for the purposes of 'control'. This phenomenon becomes particularly evident in the final phase of Pompeii, when façades were decorated with a monochrome dado topped by a white/light grey upper zone, or with checkerboard or zebra-stripe patterns. These designs communicated that the house was a territory closed off from the outside world. On an aesthetic level, the nonfigurative, repetitive patterns also suggest a relatively low financial investment. Inside the house, comparable decorative patterns are often found in garden areas and *fauces*. These simple and clearly arranged designs did not indicate the social status of the house owner, as one might expect in the traditional model. Rather they reacted to more superficial viewing conditions in spaces of movement. In the

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<sup>44</sup> Ehrhardt 2012, esp. 73–78.



case of the façades, appropriateness does not refer to the display of social status, but rather to the aesthetic reinforcement of the ‘closed’ architectural form on the one hand, and to the easy legibility for passers-by on the other.

**Eric Moormann’s** paper discusses the role of *decor* in a highly intercultural context: he re-evaluates the elaborate programme of painted scenes in the synagogue at Dura Europos. For the representation of central Jewish narratives, pictorial formulas are employed that are at home in the imperial visual language of the Hellenistic-Roman *koine*. The images thus fluctuate between two worlds: they give the Jewish narratives an appropriate visual form, but also serve the broader viewing habits of the population. Consequently, appropriateness of *decor* here lies in an ability to adapt to different, even competing cultural concepts.

**Katharina Lorenz** examines how various decorative elements interact not only on a single wall, but throughout an entire house. Using the Casa dell’Ara Massima as an example, she first analyses the interplay of mythological images within various rooms. With reference to the west wall of atrium (B), she draws on a different aspect of *decor*: the interaction not only of mythological images, but of all the decorative elements on a single wall. Here, real and painted architecture enter into a complex interaction. Three openings – the door to room (C), the pseudo-*tablinum* (D) in the centre of the wall and a niche-like space (E) – create real spatial depth. In the upper zone, this tripartite scheme is repeated by the figurative paintings: a faux window opening the view onto a landscape in the centre and two lateral projecting *aediculae* from which figures emerge. Thus, the wall plays a game with fictive and real architecture, as well as with fictive and real actors, the latter appearing on the ‘stage’ of the room. The interplay of decorative features becomes most effective in the lower register: a painting of Narcissus positioned within the pseudo-*tablinum* may have made reference to a water basin situated just below the panel. Here the architectural space not only organises intermedial references, but creates them; the space itself becomes a carrier of meaning. With regard to *cubiculum* (a) of the Casa di Pinarius Cerialis, Lorenz is able to show that this visual strategy can affect the design of mythological images: in this latter case, the mythological actors are no longer ‘contained’ within a picture field, but populate a painted *scaenae frons*.

**Mantha Zarmakoupi** addresses the relationship between built architecture, pictorial representations of architecture and architecture imagined in literary *ekphraseis* using the example of landscapes. All of these media are subject to ‘artialisation’, a process by which humans transform the natural environment into a cultural product. The physical landscape emerges through the process of viewing; images and descriptions of landscape emerge through the act of artistic creation. Their interconnectedness is testified by the appearance of similar elements in each medium (e. g., *villae maritimae*). In fact, artistic representations of villas grew substantially in popularity around the same time that their real-world counterparts began to populate the countryside in ever greater numbers (1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. – 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.). However, Zarmakoupi’s contribution is able to show that this medial interconnectedness goes beyond such basic parallels: The paratactic placement of landscape vistas alongside painted scenes was employed to create a *mise en abyme* effect in villa porticos, as at the Villa San Marco in Stabiae. This visual strategy refers to a particularly immediate idea of appropriateness, in which the real place, the framed landscape view and the painted scene are all directly related.

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Francesco de Angelis

## Decoration and Attention in the Forum of Augustus: The Agency of Ancient Imagery Between Ritual and Routine

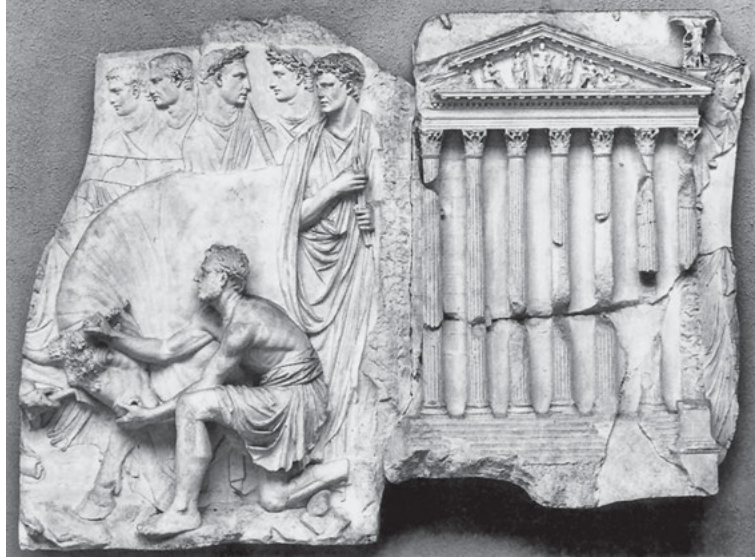
**Abstract:** The rich decoration of the Forum of Augustus has been convincingly interpreted as the expression of an iconographic programme conveying political, religious and cultural messages as they were promoted by the first emperor. This approach, while conducive to fundamental insights about Augustan ideology, does not explain how the decoration functioned in actuality. In particular, it fails critically to consider the relationship between the forum's pervasive imagery and the ritual practices and routine activities that were meant to take place within the forum's framework. With the help of well-known, but hitherto underutilised evidence, this paper argues that, in order to understand the kinds of attention commanded by the various components of the forum's imagery, and thereby to fully appreciate its impact, we need to focus closely on the interaction between space, decoration and viewers in the context of such practices and activities. Furthermore, by taking into account not only the correspondences, but also the discrepancies between decoration and social practices, this paper proposes a more complex interpretive model for understanding ancient *ornamenta* – one that both incorporates and goes beyond traditional iconological approaches.

Ancient Roman monuments had agency – or at least this is what the Romans thought. An exemplary instance of this claim is provided by the Claudian relief that Lucos Cozza reconstructed in the 1950s by assembling, with the help of plaster casts, two fragments incorporated into the façade of Villa Medici (Fig. 1)<sup>1</sup>. The scene depicts a sacrifice taking place at the Forum of Augustus in the centre of Rome. The location can be identified easily thanks to the representation of an octastyle temple with its architectural sculpture: it is the Temple of Mars Ultor – Mars the Avenger – inaugurated by Augustus in 2 B.C. The temple is, however, much more than a topographical indicator, let alone a component of the background. In fact, it is one of the main protagonists of the scene. The crowd of participants in the sacrifice opens up, parting in two, as it were, to permit the building to display itself in full magnificence. The temple thus becomes an actor, on the same level as the humans – something that is best demonstrated by the fact that, against any concern for perspectival or proportional verisimilitude, the temple overlaps with one of the togate figures on the right, just as the people on the left do with each other. In other words, the building, with its altar, has a presence of its own and stands on par with the other figures: it comes to life, almost elbowing its way towards the foreground in the crowd.

Most relevant, the temple's active prominence in the ritual is both echoed and reinforced by the careful and detailed rendering of its decoration, figurative and abstract alike – from the figure of Mars flanked by Venus, Fortuna and other mythological characters on the pediment to the *fasciae* and mouldings of the entablature, not to speak of the leaves, *helices*, volutes and abacus flowers of the Corinthian capitals. These details do not simply confirm the temple's identity; they also confer

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<sup>1</sup> Villa Medici relief: Hommel 1954, 22–30; Cozza 1958; Koeppl 1983, 98–101; Quante-Schöttler 2002, 34–41; Kaderka 2018, 145–162. A proper discussion of the role of ornamental detail in this scene should take into account the relief's own character as an image that originally decorated (together with other such images) a now lost monument. For reasons of space, and given the uncertainties concerning this structure, the present chapter will focus on only one of the possible layers of analysis. For the monument and the other reliefs that can be attributed to it, see Torelli 1982, 63–88; Koeppl 1983, 72–76, 98–116; La Rocca 1992; 1994; Quante-Schöttler 2002, 26–54; Maderna 2010, 75–77, 313 f.; La Rocca 2019, 132–134.



**Fig. 1:** Plaster cast reconstruction of a Claudian relief with the temple of Mars Ultor.

to the building a distinctive vibrancy as it becomes involved as a protagonist in the cultic activity. Decoration plays a key role in the constitution of the temple's agency.

In light of the prominence of the building in the image and the density of its decoration, it is all the more remarkable that no one within the relief itself appears to be looking at it. The profusion of ornamental details that characterises the temple does not seem to have been meant for an internal viewer, but rather addresses us as external spectators of the whole scene: we are implicitly invited to focus our attention on the temple, recognising it and appreciating the rich vividness of its decoration at the same time.

This relief thus appears to provide corroboration, from an ancient perspective, of theories of agency of images and things as they have been developed by art historians and other scholars over the past few decades<sup>2</sup>. Its value for us, however, does not reside so much in its alleged validating role of current scholarly trends: rather, it is its potential to modify and enrich our views and make us ask new questions that matters most for our purposes. In this respect, what is especially remarkable is the fact that, despite the absence of viewers within the scene, the relief does not present the temple's agency as an absolute element; the building comes to life insofar as it is a *participant* in the ritual, i. e., insofar as it is placed in relation to the other protagonists of the event. To use the notion discussed by Annette Haug in the introduction to this volume, the 'action context' is crucial for the building's decoration to express its full potential<sup>3</sup>. From this point of view, the presence of viewers within the scene is a variable of subordinate import. At the same time, and almost paradoxically, this perspective discloses the possibility of assessing in a more nuanced way the roles of viewing and perception vis-à-vis both the temple decoration itself and the circumstances under which this decoration was experienced. As this chapter will argue, the focus on the action context in which viewing took place allows us to treat the idea of appropriateness (which is constitutive for any ancient notion of decoration) as more than just a convenient hermeneutic device to reconstruct the abstract meaning of iconographic 'programmes'. Instead, and quite fundamentally, this focus invites us to understand appropriateness as a dynamic principle that, through its embeddedness in real social practices, governs the functioning of ornament in actuality – a quality of *decor* of

<sup>2</sup> As is well known, the notion of the agency of objects has gained traction in art historical studies thanks mainly to Gell 1998. Further relevant contributions have come from work on reception and response, thing theory, studies of materiality and research on embodiment: e. g., Freedberg 1989; Brown 2001; 2004; Bennett 2010. Two important collections of essays focused on classical antiquity are Bielfeldt 2014 and Gaifman et al. 2018.

<sup>3</sup> See Haug, this volume.

which the Romans themselves were well aware. Evidence for how this principle worked is provided by ancient images (the relief with the depiction of the Temple of Mars, but also, for example, the Forum Anaglyphs) as well as written documents, such as the charter of the Temple of Mars Ultor, which have been hitherto relatively neglected by art historians. In this perspective, even modes of viewing that are seemingly unconcerned with the intended ‘meaning’ of the forum’s decoration (specifically, those attested by legal documents from the Vesuvian cities), far from representing deviant or degraded forms of reception, can be seen as integral to the web of communicative strategies presupposed by the decorative apparatus of the space.

A key role in this context is played by the notion of attention. Attention has been investigated in other fields – e. g., in relation to the visual culture of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries – but still awaits exhaustive examination with regard to ancient art<sup>4</sup>. More generally, it has not been related systematically to studies of ornament and decoration. In a certain sense, this is understandable. Traditional readings of ornament suggest that it is secondary, superfluous, tendentially content-less and/or resisting interpretation, and thus not intended to draw focused attention. Its semantic charge is (or should be) low, or at any rate lower than that of the decorated object. As soon as we focus our attention on the details of ornament and examine its significance on its own terms, we *de facto* stop treating it as such. Treating ornament *qua* ornament and not paying focused attention to it seem to be tightly correlated. But is that really so? In fact, the situation is more complex. In ancient Roman thinking, the subordination of ornament to that which it decorates – its relational character – does not have pejorative connotations *a priori*; on the contrary, *ornamentum* (with cognate words) is understood primarily in terms of enhancement and expression of status, if not outright constitution of it; as for *decor* (and related terms), the emphasis is on the aspect of appropriateness, as already mentioned. Ornament in Rome, whether abstract or not, is meaningful almost by definition: in fact, it is precisely its specific relevance that makes it suitable to be attributed to an object, or a person<sup>5</sup>. In other words, meaningfulness – which is not necessarily always translatable into verbalised ‘meaning’ – is an intrinsic quality of ancient ornament, which therefore deserves, even requires, attention. But what kind of attention did decoration, thus understood, elicit? As this chapter will show, the range of possibilities is broad and conditioned by several factors, prominent among which is the relationship between the character of the decorative elements and the action contexts in which they are involved<sup>6</sup>.

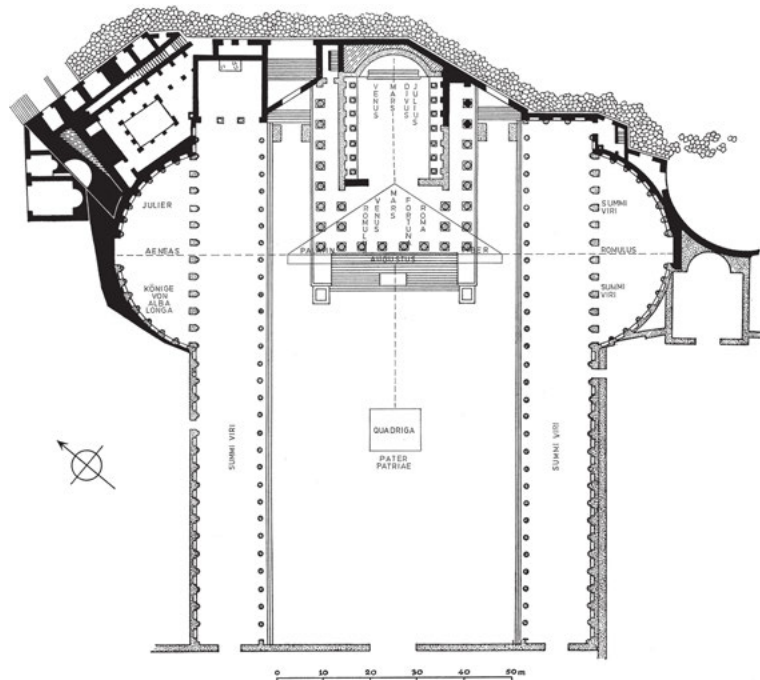
The best starting point for any discussion of the meaningfulness of the Forum of Augustus’ decoration is another representation of it: not an ancient one, though, but a modern one – in fact, what is arguably *the* most influential modern representation of the Forum of Augustus, namely Paul Zanker’s diagram visualising the forum’s iconographic programme (Fig. 2). Just over fifty years old (it was first published in 1968), this diagram has been adopted and adapted countless times in scholarly literature, irrespective of translations, new and more nuanced interpretations and even new developments with respect to the archaeological evidence<sup>7</sup>.

4 Of primary importance among art historical studies on attention are Crary 1990 and 1999; see also Arasse 1992; Zschocke 2006; Löffler 2014. In recent years, attention has also been an object of study in the fields of rhetoric, sociology, philosophy and literature: e. g., Assmann – Assmann 2001; Seebert 2012; Möller 2013; Schroer 2014; Wu 2014.

5 *Ornamentum*: cf. Moussy 1996; von Hesberg 1996; Thomas 1999; Gros 2006b; Moussy 2008; Estienne 2010. On *decor*, see footnotes 8 and 9.

6 In the following, the discussion will focus almost entirely on figurative decoration. A proper treatment of abstract ornament would require more space than is possible in this context. However, given the typical Augustan tendency towards the semantisation of ornamental motifs, the conclusions of the present chapter can claim a more general validity for this time period.

7 The diagram was originally published in Zanker 1968, Pl. A. Subsequent reproductions (and variants) include: Zanker 1987 and its many translations; Hoffer 1988, 198 Fig. 87; Kuttner 1995, Fig. 123; Favro 1996, 96 Fig. 50; Galinsky 1996, 198 Fig. 111; Spannagel 1999, Pl. 1, 2; Knell 2004, 80 Fig. 89; Barchiesi 2005, 283 Fig. 49; Pollini 2012, 22 Fig. 1.3; Goldbeck 2014, 207 Figs. 30 and 31; von den Hoff et al. 2014, 199 Fig. 50.



**Fig. 2:** Diagram with the iconographic programme of the Forum of Augustus, from Zanker 1968.

There are two main reasons for the ongoing success of the diagram. One is the fact that, in its insightful simplicity, it is based on a historically sound, sophisticated and overall persuasive understanding of the forum's imagery. Zanker manages to place the figurative decoration of the forum within the conceptual constellation of Augustan ideology by highlighting all of its relevant components. From the parallel stress on the origins of Rome and the Julian family (embodied by Romulus and Aeneas, respectively) to the celebration of Roman history in its exemplary fullness; from the many allusions to piety to its combination with the sphere of war, the forum functions as a perfect showcase for the ideals and values upheld by the first *princeps*. A number of themes – military valour and success, peaceful devotion, noble ancestry (both civic and gentilician), divine protection, reconciliation and the redressing of wrongdoing, the sense of the past – resonate from one corner to the other and from one image to the next, culminating in the figure of Augustus himself. Subsequent scholarship has modified, refined and added nuance to Zanker's interpretation, but no one has questioned it.

The second reason for the success of the diagram has to do with the fact that it is an early (and in many respects paradigmatic) incarnation of the 'iconographic programme', an idea that became popular in European scholarship focusing on ancient art in the 1970s and 1980s, when iconology provided a particularly influential hermeneutic paradigm. To be clear: the notion of a programme underlying the visual apparatus of the forum and its layout is not unsubstantiated. Ancient writers imply that Augustus himself was the author of the forum's inscriptions; anecdotes attest to the emperor's personal interest in the construction process of the complex. In other words, one can legitimately argue for the existence of circumstances in antiquity that are as close as one might hope to those that obtain in cases à la Erwin Panofsky, in which patrons (with or without counselors) are deeply involved in the production of meaning through imagery – regardless of the degree of credibility and accuracy that one may want to accord to particular pieces of evidence<sup>8</sup>. At the same

<sup>8</sup> On Augustus' involvement in the planning and construction of his forum: Plin. HN 22, 13; Macr. Sat. 2, 4, 9. A study that highlights the patronage dynamics underlying the creation of iconographic programmes in an exemplary fashion is Settis 2010. For a (partial) account of iconological approaches in Classical archaeology, see, recently, Isler-Kerényi 2015.

time, however, it bears emphasising that the popularity of this diagram is indicative of broader trends and attitudes in archaeological scholarship, and it is in this capacity that it is relevant for the present purpose. In particular, the reduction of the forum's visually abundant decoration to a series of verbal labels embodies in a powerful way the widespread idea of an encoded 'message' intended for the viewer (in the first place its scholarly representative, the art historian) to decipher.

Against this background, it is all the more interesting that the latest reproduction of Zanker's diagram is featured in the concluding chapter of Tonio Hölscher's *Visual Power in Ancient Greece and Rome*, a chapter devoted to '*decor*'. Given Hölscher's relativising of his own previous emphasis on semiology, his use of the diagram may appear surprising at first<sup>9</sup>. Yet, as a paradigmatic instance of a consistent, self-contained and carefully devised programme, the Forum of Augustus embodies Hölscher's notion of the autonomy, even autarchy, of ancient figurative decoration, the value and function of which does not depend on its full intelligibility by actual viewers, but rather its appropriateness to the space (building, monument) that it decorates<sup>10</sup>. From this perspective, the conformity of the Forum of Augustus' imagery to the celebratory functions of the complex is enough to justify its existence, regardless of how many (or few) historical viewers would have actually looked at all of the details, let alone understood them.

The main implication of such an approach, which makes a clear distinction between the expressive nature of figurative decoration and its communicative dimension (positing the primacy of the former aspect over the latter), is that the detailed reception of the imagery's content almost becomes a side-effect of its decorative function. As a consequence, a potential gap, if not a dichotomy, has to be posited between the original 'message' or 'messages' encoded in the decoration and their actual comprehension by the viewers and users of the forum. Only very few visitors to the forum in antiquity would have been interested in, let alone able to grasp, the thematic range of the imagery in its full complexity. This situation is heuristically productive insofar as it opens the space to consider a whole array of further potential 'readings' and 'gazes': partial, non-conformist, resisting, subversive and so on. At the same time, however, it is crucial that even the most radically alternative modes of reception be considered in relation to the official meaning and purpose of the decoration. It is in this respect that the circumstances of viewing – the action contexts – play a key role.

In the case of the Forum of Augustus we are particularly fortunate because we have evidence that provides information on precisely this subject. We owe to the Vesuvian eruption, among many other things, the preservation of a substantial number of testimonies about the reception of the forum's decoration in the context of judicial activity, namely the inscribed wax tablets found in Herculaneum and in the suburbs of Pompeii. As is well known, these tablets are legal documents that were part of the private archives of individuals living in the Vesuvian cities and in Puteoli. A certain number of them concerned *vadimonia*, the formal requests to defendants to appear at a certain place and time to engage in legal procedures. In several instances, either the nature of the disputed matter (e. g., freeborn status) or the amount of money involved required the case to be heard not by local magistrates, but by the *praetor* in Rome. These documents are highly relevant for the purposes of this chapter because they explicitly mention monuments and statues of the Forum of Augustus, where the *praetor* had his seat<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Hölscher 2018, 299–333 (esp. 329 for the diagram with the Forum of Augustus). Previous steps in Hölscher's engagement with the notions of *decor* and *decorum* are: Hölscher 2004, 21–23; 2009; 2015. For his semiological approach see, most famously, Hölscher 1987, as well as Hölscher 2000. Crucial for Hölscher's approach to decoration is the notion of 'presence,' on which see Belting 2001; Gumbrecht 2004; Fielitz 2012.

<sup>10</sup> The pioneering work revealing the fruitfulness of the principle of *decorum* for interpretive purposes was Neudecker 1988. Cf. moreover Perry 2005, 28–77; Bravi 2013.

<sup>11</sup> The authoritative editions of the tablets are Camodeca 2017 (Herculaneum, THerc: in progress) and 1999 (Sulpicii archive, TPSulp), both with a copious bibliography. On *vadimonia*, see Kaser – Hackl 1996, 226–231; Metzger 2000; Donadio 2011 (for *vadimonia* in the Forum of Augustus, see also Neudecker 2010).



In some cases, the agreed venue is the tribunal of the *praetor* himself. More often, however, reference is made to one of the monumental components of the forum. Understandably, the Temple of Mars is well represented in this context. So, for example, in A.D. 75 Calatorius Spondon, the legal representative of a woman from Herculaneum, Calatoria Themis, was summoned ‘to Rome in the Forum of Augustus, in front of the Temple of Mars Ultor (*Romae in foro Augusto ante aede Martis Ultoris*) at the third hour’ on March 12<sup>th</sup> in the context of a lawsuit in which another woman, Petronia Iusta, claimed to have been born free rather than as a slave of Calatoria Themis. On an unspecified year of the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., one Gaius Publicius Carus promised to appear ‘in Rome in the Forum of Augustus in front of the altar of Mars Ultor, near the steps (*Romae in foro Augusto ante aram Martis Ultoris proxume gradus*), at the fourth hour’ on 19 November<sup>12</sup>.

But the Forum of Augustus provided many other reference points. Another citizen of Herculaneum, P. Marius Crescens, promised to Q. Herennius Capito that he would appear ‘in Rome, in the Forum of Augustus, in front of the statue of Diana Lucifera, near the tenth column (*Romae in foro Augusto ante signum Dianae Luciferae ad columnam X*), at the fifth hour’ on an unknown day. On January 31<sup>st</sup>, A.D. 40, the Puteolan banker Gaius Sulpicius Faustus had to appear ‘in Rome in the Forum of Augustus in front of the statue of Gracchus, near the fourth column close to the steps (*Romae in foro Augusto ante statuam Gracci ad columnam quartam proxume gradus*), at the ninth hour’. In this latter case, the statue was one of the *summi viri* of Republican times (the consul of 177 and 163 B.C.) that belonged to the original programme devised by Augustus. Additionally, monuments set up in later periods could quickly become reference points. This is the case for a statue mentioned in *vadimonia* concerning an Alexandrian, Trupho, son of Potamo, who promises to Gaius Sulpicius Cinnamus (a freedman and *procurator* of the aforementioned Faustus) that he will appear ‘in Rome in the Forum of Augustus, in front of the triumphal statue of Gnaeus Sentius Saturninus (*Romae in foro Augusto ante statuam Cn. Sentii Saturnini triumphalem*)’ on March 17<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup>, and the 30<sup>th</sup> of September, at the fifth and the third hour, respectively. This statue was erected only in A.D. 44, to honour Saturninus for the important role he had had in the conquest of Britain the year before<sup>13</sup>.

In sum, several documents attest to the reception of the forum’s components and imagery by ancient visitors to the complex. What is particularly striking about these testimonies is the combination of precision of detail with the apparent lack of interest in the subject matter (or the function) of the monuments decorating the forum. Quite likely, the choice of reference points was not completely random, but took into account their visibility and identifiability within a crowded visual landscape. It is even possible, although not provable, that the locations of *vadimonia* concerning specific categories (or sets of categories) of legal cases were relatively stable. What is evident in any case is that there was no strong intrinsic correspondence between the nature of the case and the subject or character of the chosen monument. The link seems to have been mainly an arbitrary one as far as ‘meaning’ was concerned, and was probably determined by mostly practical factors, such as the proximity of a monument to the tribunal of the competent magistrate. This is particularly true of the statue of Saturninus, which occurs in more than one *vadimonium*; as noted above, the statue was not part of the original programme and must have become a convenient venue mainly because of its prominent location within the forum. At least from the perspective of the documents cited – and therefore also that of the forum’s common users (that is, the historically attested users) – the actual content of the decorative imagery did not really matter; the identity of the statues was relevant only insofar as it ensured orientation, thus providing safe and shared reference points for the litigants’ meetings.

<sup>12</sup> For the examples mentioned in the text, see THerc 15 (*vadimonium* of Calatorius Spondon); TPSulp 15 (*vadimonium* of C. Publicius Carus). See also THerc 14 (*vadimonium* of Calatoria Themis, 3 December, A.D. 74: *Romae in foro Augusto ante tribunal praetoris urbani*).

<sup>13</sup> For the examples mentioned in the text, see THerc 6 (*vadimonium* of P. Marius Crescenes); TPSulp 19 (*vadimonium* of C. Sulpicius Faustus); TPSulp 14 (*vadimonium* of Trupho).

The documents pertaining to the legal life of the Forum of Augustus would thus seem to prove the point made above; in fact, they may even go beyond that. As concerns reception, the figurative decoration of the forum – its ‘iconographic programme’ – was experienced very selectively, in a process characterised by fragmentation and atomisation. The imagery served purely instrumental, utilitarian and practical purposes. Focused attention on details was combined with a lack of interest in their intended meaning, or even a disregard for any meaning at all.

There is, however, a risk inherent in this approach, and that is to perpetuate (albeit in a variant version and with a reversal of hierarchies) the same separation between conceptual content and experienced form that underlies the devaluation of ornament and its relegation to the realm of superfluous *parergon* in Kantian and neo-Kantian hermeneutic systems, such as the ones that ultimately are at the root of scholarly iconological paradigms<sup>14</sup>. If the actual reception of the imagery’s meaning was of subordinate importance for the ancient patrons of a monument or building (as a reductionist reading of Hölscher’s views would imply); if content and subject matter – i. e., the ‘message’ – could be so easily misunderstood or even ignored, as the legal documents from Herculaneum and Pompeii suggest, then we have to assume that the specific semantic charge of decoration was largely irrelevant from the point of view of its efficacy, and that the Augustan regime would have been able to live and thrive with much less wealth of ornamental detail. In this view, the communicative effects of figurative decoration are mainly to be assessed in terms of failure – failure to achieve the impossible goals set by the concept underlying their creation – and therefore to be understood as superfluous and ultimately dispensable. We would have to surmise that the Romans, due to an aprioristic adherence to their own understanding of *ornamentum* and *decor*, were either unaware of, or uninterested in, the actual impact of the imagery decorating spaces such as the Forum of Augustus. Even though this is not impossible *per se*, such a scenario is hard to reconcile with the evidence of the diffusion of the forum’s imagery beyond Rome<sup>15</sup>.

A way out of this quandary is provided by the very wax tablets that seem to support this narrative of failure. If carefully considered, they do not simply provide evidence for the *viewers* of the forum’s imagery, but also (and primarily), for its *users*. On the one hand, what we call ‘viewing’ is in fact a complex phenomenon that subsumes a whole range of more specific actions, such as counting the columns, locating the altar, reading the inscriptions, examining the iconography, scrutinising the portrait features and so on. On the other, viewing is itself part of a broader set of activities that are meaningfully carried out in the context of the judicial life of the forum. In other words, the *circumstances* under which the forum’s imagery was experienced – the ‘action contexts’, to use Haug’s terminology – as they were determined by the social activities and practices that took place within it, were just as important as the act of viewing, and affected it in decisive and profound ways<sup>16</sup>.

The artists of the Imperial period were very much aware of this aspect, even after Augustus. The most eloquent examples can be found in the Forum Anaglyphs, the famous reliefs from the Hadrianic period that functioned as balustrades flanking the entrance to a precinct, most likely in the Forum Romanum (Figs. 3–4)<sup>17</sup>. The reliefs show two scenes taking place in the Forum itself. In the first, Hadrian is announcing a distribution of largesse – *liberalitas* – to an audience of senators,

<sup>14</sup> Degler 2015 provides a stimulating recent discussion of the notion of *parergon* (for antiquity, see Platt – Squire 2017).

<sup>15</sup> On the diffusion of forum’s imagery in Italy and the provinces, see the bibliography cited in note 29, as well as Kockel 2005; Zevi – Valeri 2008; Dardenay 2011; Palma Venetucci 2011.

<sup>16</sup> In all likelihood, the exclusivity of the focus on the ‘viewer’ in so much art historical scholarship of the last thirty years is due not only to the need for analytical sharpness, but is also (at least in part) the consequence of the prevalence of the disembodied visual dimension – the virtual – in our contemporary world. Scholarship on viewers and viewing in Roman antiquity includes, with different perspectives and approaches, Bergmann 1994; Zanker 1994; Elsner 1995; Zanker 1997; Veyne 2002; Clarke 2003; Stewart 2003; Elsner 2007; Hölscher 2012; Perry 2015; Squire 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Forum Anaglyphs: Rüdiger 1973; Torelli 1982, 89–118; Koeppl 1986, 2–5. 17–24; Spinola 1990, 15 f.; Köb 2000, 130–139; Hölscher 2002, 141 f.; Quante-Schöttler 2002, 155–173; Sinn 2010, 184 f. 333 f.; Brown 2020. The date of the anaglyphs is not certain, even though most scholars prefer a Trajanic one: I argue for a Hadrianic chronology in a forthcoming article.



**Fig. 3:** Forum  
Anaglyphs: imperial  
*adlocutio* concern-  
ing the *alimenta*.

equestrians and plebeians gathered in front of him; in the other, he publicly sets fire to the tablets recording the debts owed to the state by Roman citizens. Quite remarkably, the same set of monuments occurs in both reliefs, namely a fig-tree and a statue of Marsyas. Their presence here is not accidental and is only partially owed to the fact that they were themselves part of the landscape of the forum. The fig-tree, the *ficus Ruminalis* of Romulus and Remus, was associated with the origins of Rome and the Comitium, the Republican place of political discussion: it was an emblem of Roman citizenship<sup>18</sup>. The statue of Marsyas, with broken shackles at his feet, was a symbol of *libertas*, or freedom. Perhaps not coincidentally, it was also related to debt, being the meeting point for usurers<sup>19</sup>. Both monuments were thus connected closely with the events concerning civic freedom (more precisely: freedom from need and freedom from debts) taking place nearby, which in turn were linked strongly to the idea of citizenship. The emphasis accorded to these monuments clearly depended upon the specific character of the activities staged in their proximity. Something similar can be said for the statuary group visible in the largesse scene, with a personification of Italia presenting children to a seated emperor. It likely celebrated Trajan's institution of the *alimenta*, a provision for the poor children of Italy, and is the only monument in the forum's central area to be singled out and represented in the relief.

What is especially interesting in these scenes, however, is not simply the way the activities represented resonate with the highlighted monuments, but the fact that other components of the forum's decoration are 'toned down' and thus recede into the background. The setting of the activities in the Forum Romanum is made certain by the representation of the *rostra* at both ends and by the various buildings and monuments that lined the Forum's southern border: the Arch of Augustus, Temple of the Dioscuri, Basilica Iulia (spanning both reliefs), Temple of Saturn, an arch framing the path leading to the Capitol, the Temple of Vespasian and the Temple of Concord (largely lost at the damaged end of the record-burning relief). Even though their identification is certain by virtue of their general appearance and their position in the sequence, if one looks at them more closely one notices that all have been stripped of their decoration: there are no *quadrigae* on the tops of the arches, no figures in the pediments and no *acroteria* on the roofs of the temples. Even the exact number of columns in the temple façades seems to have been an irrelevant feature in this context. So, for example, the Temple of the Dioscuri does not have eight columns, but five (not even six, which would at least have been an even number, as is normal for a temple façade). The entablature of the Temple of Vespasian has not only lost its frieze with sacrificial utensils, but also the three

<sup>18</sup> Fig-tree of the Comitium: LTUR 2 (1995) 248 f. s. v. *Ficus Navia* (F. Coarelli).

<sup>19</sup> Marsyas statue: LTUR 4 (1999) 364 f. s. v. *Statua: Marsyas* (F. Coarelli). Marsyas and the *faeneratores*: Hor. sat. 1, 6, 120–121 (with *scholia* of Ps. Acro and Porph. ad loc.).



**Fig. 4:** Forum Anaglyphs: burning of debt records.

*fasciae* of the architrave. The Temple of Saturn does not display any of the Tritons that decorated its *acroteria*, a detail we know from Macrobius<sup>20</sup>.

The oddly modernist flavour of this interpretation of Roman architecture stands in contrast with the careful rendering (twice) of the fig-tree and the Marsyas statue. It would be easy to conclude that, according to the conception of the sculptors of these reliefs, the activities staged in the forum triggered a selective focus on the surroundings. Such a view presupposes an understanding of attention as the crucial factor in a zero-sum game, one very much in line with current theories that conceptualise attention as a ‘scarce resource’, a precious good that is the object of competition; i. e., one pays attention to certain details to the detriment of others. However, one needs to be cautious about such an interpretation of the anaglyphs.

In the first place, this is because of the risk of anachronism. The theories described above are heavily permeated by an economic logic – a fact that is made explicit by the titles of several recent books<sup>21</sup>. This is not simply the consequence of the prominence, if not the tyranny, of economic paradigms in contemporary thinking; there are also deeper roots in modern European linguistic conventions. Here, attention can be understood as a kind of currency (‘to pay attention’, ‘payer attention’); it can also be talked about in terms of loans (‘to lend attention’, ‘prêter attention’, ‘prestare attenzione’) or as a toll (‘Aufmerksamkeit zollen’); and it can even be presented as a gift (‘Aufmerksamkeit schenken’). In all these cases, attention is conceived as a good with its own autonomous existence which can be made the object of exchange. In antiquity, the situation was radically different. Not only did those nouns that can be considered approximate equivalents of ‘attention’, such as *προσοχή* or *attentio*, have a more limited range of uses and applications, the act of paying attention (*προσέχειν τὸν νοῦν*, *animus advertere*) was conceptualised rather as an internal disposition of the mind, an attitude that affected the inner self. This attitude could be induced, no doubt (and much of ancient rhetoric focuses precisely on how to achieve this goal), but could not be the object of a transaction.

More fundamentally, just as in the case of the Villa Medici relief discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the Forum Anaglyphs do not show anyone looking at the monuments being represented. The focus of attention is in both cases placed upon the emperor and the actions he performs or orders, not the statues and other landmarks of the place. The purpose of the drastic reduction

<sup>20</sup> Temple of the Dioscuri: Nilson – Sande 2008; cf. also LTUR 1 (1993) 242–245 s. v. *Castor, aedes, templum* (I. Nielsen). Temple of Vespasian: De Angeli 1992; cf. also LTUR 5 (1999) 124 f. s. v. *Vespasianus, Divus, templum* (S. De Angeli). Temple of Saturn: Macr. Sat. 1.8.4; see also LTUR 4 (1999) 234–236 s. v. *Saturnus, aedes* (F. Coarelli).

<sup>21</sup> See, e. g., Franck 1998 (‘Ökonomie der Aufmerksamkeit’); Lanham 2006 (‘The Economics of Attention’); Wu 2016 (‘The Attention Merchants’).

in the ornamental detail of the surrounding architecture, therefore, is not to underscore the monuments' competition for a 'scarce resource' (in this case, the attention of the Roman citizens in the scene). Quite to the contrary, it is a way in which the various buildings lining the southern side of the Forum Romanum attenuate their individual identity – an identity that was made manifest through the architectural decoration – in favour of a *collective* definition of the forum as a civic space. In their lack of individual profiling, the buildings of the forum respond to the acts of *liberalitas* carried out in front of them, as do the Marsyas statue, the fig-tree and the group with Italia, her children and the emperor, by coming to the fore. In other words, the Forum Anaglyphs are permeated by that correspondence between ornamental content and the functions of a space that underlies ancient theories of *decorum*, as well as their reinterpretation by Tonio Hölscher. Most importantly, this correspondence is made manifest through the activities – the action contexts – depicted in the scenes. And just as in the case of the relief with the Temple of Mars Ultor, the absence of internal viewers of the monuments' decoration does not imply a devaluation of viewing; it is the external, 'real' viewer who is invited to establish the correspondence, and whose attention is guided in the process by the varying degree of detail.

At the same time, these examples allow us to go beyond Hölscher's model, helping us avoid a risk that is inherent in understandings of *decorum* in terms of abstract, 'programmatic' appropriateness. This risk can be described as follows: if we, as scholars, assume without further qualification the constant existence of a meaningful relationship between the imagery and the functions of a given space, we will always be able to find such a relationship, no matter how far-fetched. Quite apart from the danger of hermeneutic circles, the issue is that such a way of proceeding blinds us to the fact that the nature of the relationships thus established can differ widely from case to case, and that these relationships may be characterised by various degrees of intensity, semantic and otherwise. The representations of monuments and buildings on the Forum Anaglyphs remind us that the nature of any space ultimately is the outcome of the interaction between the physical features of that space (its layout, architecture and decoration) and the human activities, social practices and occasional actions that take place within it<sup>22</sup>. The dynamics of this interaction are by no means unidirectional: activities and social practices affect the understanding of the space and its imagery via the attention of the human actors; but, in turn, the imagery also affects the way in which activities are perceived and experienced. Moreover, this process is a complex phenomenon: some elements become more strongly emphasised, others are downplayed – and to different degrees, as well as at different times. In other words, any theory or model of *decorum* cannot focus solely on the correspondences between decoration and function, but needs to take into account and incorporate also the discrepancies, as well as all the varying levels of correspondence between these extremes. Appropriateness is not a given, but an ideal that needs to be actively produced and reproduced.

To illustrate this point, let us return to the Forum of Augustus<sup>23</sup>. It is quite striking, but perhaps not entirely surprising, that scholars interested in its ideological programme have generally failed to appreciate, and exploit for interpretative purposes, the strong relationship that exists between the forum's imagery and the Temple of Mars Ultor's charter – its *lex templi*. A substantial portion of this charter has been transmitted by a Byzantine excerpt of Cassius Dio<sup>24</sup>:

... Ἄρει, ἑαυτὸν δὲ καὶ τοὺς ἐγγόνους, ὅσακις ἂν ἐθελήσωσι, τοὺς τε ἐκ τῶν παιδῶν ἐξιόντας καὶ ἐς τοὺς ἐφήβους ἐγγραφόμενους ἐκέϊσε πάντως ἀφικνεῖσθαι, καὶ τοὺς ἐπὶ τὰς ἀρχὰς τὰς ἐκδήμους στελλομένους ἐκεῖθεν ἀφορμᾶσθαι, τὰς τε γνώμας τὰς περὶ τῶν νικητηρίων ἐκεῖ τὴν βουλὴν ποιεῖσθαι, καὶ τοὺς πέμψαντας αὐτὰ τῷ Ἄρει

<sup>22</sup> On the socially constructed and relational nature of space, see Lefebvre 1974; Löw 2001; Schroer 2006 (for theories of space, see also, more generally, Dünne – Günzel 2006).

<sup>23</sup> On the Forum of Augustus in general, see Zanker 1968; 1987; Hoffer 1988; La Rocca 1995, esp. 74–87; Ganzert 1996; LTUR 2 (1995) 289–295 s. v. *Forum Augustum* (V. Kockel); Spannagel 1999; as well as the literature mentioned in the following footnotes. On its functions: Köb 2000, 225–268; Carnabuci 2010; Neudecker 2010. For a presentation of the most recent excavations, see Meneghini 2009; Meneghini – Santangeli Valenzani 2007; 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Cass. Dio 55, 10, 2–5, translation by E. Cary 1917, 407.

τούτω και τὸ σκῆπτρον και τὸν στέφανον ἀνατιθέναι, και ἐκείνους τε και τοὺς ἄλλους τοὺς τὰς ἐπινικίους τιμὰς λαμβάνοντας ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ χαλκοῦς ἴστασθαι, ἂν τέ ποτε σημεῖα στρατιωτικά ἐς πολεμίους ἄλόντα ἀνακομισθῆ, ἐς τὸν ναὸν αὐτὰ τίθεσθαι, και πανήγυριν τινα πρὸς τοῖς ἀναβασμοῖς αὐτοῦ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀεὶ ἱλαρχούντων ποιεῖσθαι, ἧλὸν τε αὐτῶ ὑπὸ τῶν τιμητευσάντων προσπήγνυσθαι, και τήν τε παράσχεσιν τῶν ἵππων τῶν ἐς τὴν ἵπποδρομίαν ἀγωνιουμένων και τὴν τοῦ ναοῦ φυλακὴν και βουλευταῖς ἐργολαβεῖν ἐξεῖναι, καθάπερ ἐπὶ τε τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος και ἐπὶ τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Καπιτωλίου ἐνενομοθέτητο.

‘... to Mars, and that he [sc. Augustus] himself and his grandsons should go there [sc. to the Forum of Augustus] as often as they wished, while those who were passing from the class of boys and were being enrolled among the youths of military age should invariably do so; that those who were sent out to commands abroad should make that their starting-point; that the Senate should take its votes there in regard to the granting of triumphs, and that the victors after celebrating them should dedicate to this Mars their sceptre and their crown; that such victors and all others who received triumphal honours should have their statues in bronze erected in the forum; that in case military standards captured by the enemy were ever recovered they should be placed in the temple; that a festival should be celebrated beside the steps of the temple by the cavalry commanders each year; that a nail should be driven into it by the censors at the close of their terms; and that even senators should have the right of contracting to supply the horses that were to compete in the Circensian games, and also to take general charge of the temple, just as had been provided by law in the case of the Temples of Apollo and Jupiter Capitolinus.’

A series of common themes – citizenship, the succession of generations, time and history, projection outside of Rome, war and triumph, the care of the cult and of course the figure of the emperor – characterises both the images of the forum and the charter’s prescriptions, and helps us understand how the attention of the visitors to the forum could be directed towards certain features and connotations. Thus, the conspicuous sight of Augustus’ image in the *quadriga* in the centre of the piazza (as well as the colossal statue of his *genius* – if this is what it was – in the Hall of the Colossus) must have been vivified by his potential presence *in corpore*, which was favoured by the access privileges mentioned in the charter; the emperor’s name, gleaming in golden letters in the dedicatory inscription on the architrave of the Temple of Mars, provided a further connecting element in this respect<sup>25</sup>. The genealogical aspect present in the statues of the Julian *gens* and especially in the group with Aeneas rescuing both his father and his son (but also in the figure of Venus in the pediment) was mirrored by the emphasis placed on the presence of Augustus’ heirs and adoptive sons, Gaius and Lucius Caesar<sup>26</sup>. Through its obvious allusion to the imperial brothers, Apelles’ painting of the Dioscuri, which was likely displayed in the Hall of the Colossus, would have further underscored the relevance of the pair’s presence in the forum, while at the same time drawing attention to their exemplary role as *principes iuventutis*. Not coincidentally, the Roman youths about to become part of the citizen body through their enrolment in the army were granted the same privileges of free access and movement in the forum as the princes, in a hierarchically connoted parallelism<sup>27</sup>. Moreover, as they viewed the numerous statues of the cuirassed and togate *summi viri* populating the forum’s niches, the *tirones* were confronted with a sequence of historical incarnations of civic and military virtues, whose paradigmatic and didactic aspect was underscored by the *elogia* personally composed by Augustus<sup>28</sup>. The role of the forum as a setting-off point for generals and provincial governors helps us understand the presence there of the *tituli provinciarum*, attested both by literary sources and archaeological evidence. It also points to the *generative* dimension inherent within the prescriptions of the *lex templi*: the decoration of the forum was not conceived as frozen and immutable; quite to the contrary, it was explicitly open to the future and intended to organically grow over time<sup>29</sup>. The triumphal connota-

<sup>25</sup> For the *quadriga*, see Strocka 2009; for the Colossus, Ungaro 2008.

<sup>26</sup> On the genealogical aspect of the Aeneas group: Spannagel 1999, 86–255.

<sup>27</sup> On Gaius and Lucius as *principes iuventutis*: Mellado Ribera 2002; Wolters 2002. Painting of Apelles with the Dioscuri: Plin. HN 35, 27; 35, 93 f.

<sup>28</sup> *Summi viri*: Spannagel 1999, 256–358 esp. 317–344; Geiger 2008; Shaya 2013.

<sup>29</sup> *Tituli provinciarum*: Vell. Pat. 2, 39, 2; CIL VI, 31267. The significance of this aspect of the Forum of Augustus is confirmed by the replicas of its decoration in Italy and the provinces, on which see Goldbeck 2014 (also Gros 2006a; La Rocca 2011).



tions found in much of the imagery – from the shields on the attics to the Victories of the *acroteria*, from the image of Romulus with the spoils of Acron to the *quadriga* of Augustus – were matched by the many military and victory rituals mentioned in the charter, as a consequence of which the Temple of Mars competed with that of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitol<sup>30</sup>. The ritual of the nail insertion by the censors not only marked the passing of time (history being one of the great themes of the whole complex, as mentioned above), but also related to the censors' competence in granting citizenship and therefore controlling the composition of the citizen body, ideally visualised by the statues of the great Romans<sup>31</sup>. The clauses concerning the involvement of equestrians and senators in the ritual and cultic care of the forum have a counterpart in the series of pious Caryatids solemnly overlooking the *area templi*, as well as in the maidens carrying the festoons decorating the *cella* walls<sup>32</sup>. Nor should one forget that the now lost portion of the charter also seems to have regulated sacrifices and other cultic activities, as suggested by the extant words 'to Mars' at its beginning.

As is evident, the links between the charter's prescriptions and the imagery of the forum are manifold and strong. Especially when taken together, they constitute a complex and dense web of semantic relationships in which all components reinforce and augment their reciprocal meaningfulness. Crucial for our purposes is the fact that this web is not simply the outcome of the visual implementation of a conceptual iconographic programme (even though the existence of such a programme should not be denied), but results from the regulation of activities and social practices. The degree of proximity between these two sets of factors – actions and decorative elements – is all the more remarkable if we consider that, although the whole forum was an inaugurated space, it was distinct from the Temple of Mars, to which the *lex* specifically referred. The forum and temple had been inaugurated separately, and each must have had its own charter; but the decoration of the forum appears to have been planned mainly with an eye to the functions of the Temple of Mars<sup>33</sup>. Activities, practices and movements with strong ritual connotations thus found a rather direct visual echo and a monumental confirmation in the imagery of the whole forum, triggering a corresponding degree of attention.

At the same time, we should not expect a perfect equivalence between every formalised activity described in the temple's charter and each single detail of the forum's figurative decoration. Clearly, in each case it is possible to detect a surplus of meaning and significance on both sides of the equation. And in each case the relationship is established on a different level and in different ways. To take just one example, the significance of the Caryatids cannot be reduced to a reflection (and even less to a visualisation) of equestrian and senatorial involvement in the cult: rather than simply mirroring the ritual life of the complex, they complement (and engage with) it through the double reference to the female sphere and to Greece – both of them left unmentioned in the *lex templi* as transmitted by Cassius Dio.

In conclusion, the heuristic potential of this action-related understanding of the principle of *decorum* can best be appreciated if we focus on the main function of the Forum of Augustus, namely the exercise of judicature<sup>34</sup>. This set of activities was in all likelihood also mentioned in the forum's founding *lex*, but appears to be substantially de-emphasised when we consider the imagery of the complex. On the one hand, Suetonius explicitly attests that Augustus built his forum to provide an additional location for the exponentially growing number of judicial cases<sup>35</sup>. On the other, the only significant element in this respect is the epithet of Mars: Ultor, the Avenger<sup>36</sup>. By pointing to the idea of revenge and punishment, the epithet provides an association with justice that at least

<sup>30</sup> On the military functions of the Forum of Augustus, see Bonnefond 1987.

<sup>31</sup> On the relevance of the *census* in Augustan ideology, see Kondratieff 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Caryatids and maidens with festoons: Hölscher 2007, esp. 119 f.

<sup>33</sup> Separate inauguration of the Forum of Augustus and the Temple of Mars: Cass. Dio 55, ind. 6–7; Suet. Aug. 29, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Carnabuci 1996; Carnabuci 2006; Neudecker 2010.

<sup>35</sup> Suet. Aug. 29, 1–2.

<sup>36</sup> On the role of Mars as Ultor, see Siebler 1987; Barchiesi 2002.

in principle is not out of place in a space dedicated to lawsuits and judicial hearings. As a matter of fact, Augustus himself had explicitly linked the two notions in his *Res Gestae*<sup>37</sup>:

*Qui parentem meum [trucidaver]un[t, eo]s in exilium expuli iudiciis legitimis ultus eorum [fa]cin[us, e]t postea bellum inferentis rei publicae vici b[is] a[]cie.*

‘Those who slew my father I drove into exile, punishing their crime by lawful trials, and afterwards when they waged war upon the state I twice defeated them in battle.’

It bears stressing, however, that *ultio* is not a legal term, strictly speaking. The kind of justice that it implied had a different character from the justice that was normally administered in the forum. The military nature of Mars Ultor, as well as dedications like the Parthian standards in the *cella* of the temple, made this difference clear and must have prevented the users of the forum from linking these two dimensions, except on a very abstract level. Most importantly, no strong resonance was established between the judicial life of the complex and its decoration. The griffins heraldically framing a central vegetal stalk on the cult statue’s breastplate may have provided a visual counterpart to the concept of *ultio* thanks to their association with Nemesis. This connotation, however, would have been rather weak, since their attribution to the goddess of rightful vengeance, though not to be underestimated, was far from exclusive – particularly under Augustus, when the griffins’ links to Apollo would have been much more prevalent<sup>38</sup>. In other words, the judicial activities in the Forum of Augustus had no monumental counterpart that underscored their relevance, amplified the impact of their sight or reminded viewers of their existence whenever they did not take place. It is not coincidental that none of the modern interpretations of the iconographic programme of the forum refer to the judicial sphere.

What are the consequences of such a situation? By not being given a visually direct and semantically correspondent counterpart in the permanent furnishings of the forum, the sphere of justice was distanced from the ceremonial and the monumental and pushed instead towards the dimension of the everyday and the ordinary – towards routine rather than ritual. Hearings and lawsuits were the most common activity in the Forum of Augustus, and justice was therefore a visible feature of the space. But for all its frequency, this visibility was not accorded the same kind of monumental durability as that of other spheres, such as the military. This circumstance provides an adequate frame also for the reception of the forum’s imagery as attested by the Vesuvian *vadimonia*: their peculiar combination of focused attention to details and disregard for their meaning is not an example of haphazard banalisation, let alone of a failure of the Augustan decoration to fulfil its ideological purpose. As their very repetitiveness suggests, the practices attested in these documents follow a pattern that both acknowledges and reproduces the distancing of the experience of justice from the ceremonial level of the forum’s decoration. Thereby, they reinforce the subordinate character attributed to judicial life in the Forum of Augustus.

The significance of this situation – which is not restricted to the Forum of Augustus but concerns all the spaces of justice in Rome – is best appreciated if we focus on the figure of the emperor. As is well known, at the beginning of the Principate on January 16<sup>th</sup>, 27 B.C., the senators honoured Augustus with a golden shield that celebrated his outstanding virtues: valour, clemency, justice and piety<sup>39</sup>. Given the programmatic character of the shield, we should not be surprised to find these virtues visualised in subsequent imperial imagery, in particular in state reliefs showing the emperor while he is performing acts that offer a visual expression of his qualities. So, for example, several scenes depict the emperor demonstrating his *virtus* on the battlefield or celebrating it in the triumphal procession, performing an act of *clementia* by sparing the lives of enemies who submit

<sup>37</sup> R. Gest. div. Aug. 2, translation by F. W Shipley 1924, 347.

<sup>38</sup> See LIMC 6.1 (1992) 754 s. v. *Nemesis* (P. Karanastassi) and LIMC 2.1 (1984) s. v. *Apollo* (E. Simon), respectively.

<sup>39</sup> On the imperial virtues, see Wallace–Hadrill 1981; Noreña 2001; 2011.



to him, or, finally, displaying his *pietas* by sacrificing to the gods. Interestingly, however, none of the extant images depict him adjudicating or participating in any other activity thematising justice. *Iustitia* was not a subject of imperial state reliefs, despite the fact that this was one of the emperor's foremost occupations, if not the main one. More generally, it is only rarely a theme of official imperial imagery<sup>40</sup>. The emperor's justice never became an explicit subject of the symbolic dialogue conducted between the emperor and the *Senatus Populusque Romanus* through monuments and images, although such dialogue was fundamental in defining and fixing the respective roles and statuses of these protagonists in Roman official life. As a matter of fact, the emperor's jurisdiction and its relationship to the jurisdiction of traditional Republican magistrates was not formally determined from the outset, but grew and developed step by step over the centuries. It was a process that was not without tensions and one that required a great amount of flexibility and many compromises. This flexibility was favoured precisely by the lack of solemn confirmation of the exercise of law in the figurative decoration of public spaces: in other words, by the fact that, with respect to the administration of justice, the experience of the users of the Forum of Augustus rarely exceeded the dimensions of the everyday, due in large part to the agency of the complex's decoration.

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Fig. 2: Zanker 1968, Plate A.

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Fig. 4: Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel, Klassische Archäologie Fototek, inv. R73.

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<sup>40</sup> On the emperor's engagement with the exercise of justice, see Millar 1992, 3–12, 228–240, 507–549; Kaser – Hackl 1996, 445–451; de Angelis 2010. On the rare occurrences of *iustitia* in Roman official art, see Lichocka 1974; Noreña 2011, 61 f.; McClintock 2016. No scene representing the emperor as a judge is listed in Gabelmann 1984. By contrast, the imagery of personified justice in Western art is extremely rich from the Middle Ages onward: see, e. g., Pleister – Schild 1988; Jacob 1994; Kissel 1997; Prosperi 2008; Resnik – Curtis 2011.

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Michael Feige

# Decorative Features and Social Practices in Spaces for Agricultural Production in Roman Villas

**Abstract:** This paper examines the use of decorative features in the context of wine and oil processing facilities in the villas of Roman Italy. To this purpose, the investigation analyses the interaction of decoration with the central productive installations, the spaces surrounding them and the villa building as a whole. This relationship between utilitarian facilities, decoration and architecture makes it possible to draw conclusions about the social practices associated with these facilities and the potential motivations of the actors involved in their construction and management. The forms of decoration employed range from wall paintings to the use of representative architectural forms and innovative designs. These various techniques could be utilised to arrange production rooms to facilitate ritual acts, to provide a space for aristocratic leisure, or to emphasise the care taken in the production processes. Other owners took the opposite approach, hiding production areas with representative façades to create the impression of a luxury estate.

## Introduction

In the postmodern economic system of the western world, it is increasingly important for individuals, but also for companies, corporations and other businesses, to be visible, to stand out and ‘make the difference’ with their own products and services<sup>1</sup>. To this end, the results and goods of work are increasingly designed with the recipient in mind, who needs to be addressed by their novelty and specificity and thus encouraged to consume them<sup>2</sup>. Within this consumer culture and its economic strategies, the aesthetic design of products or services and their affective-sensual experience by the customer gain immense importance<sup>3</sup>. This process of aestheticisation includes on the one hand the design and perceptual qualities of the products themselves<sup>4</sup>. But on the other, the spaces in which the products or services are offered to the consumers are also aesthetically prepared to promote the desire to buy them<sup>5</sup>. To achieve this, the visual, haptic, acoustic and olfactory stimuli of sales rooms<sup>6</sup> are designed in order to create an appealing ambience that creates an affective connection between the consumer and the product by subliminally associating it with positive attributes<sup>7</sup>. In this context, the decoration of these spaces has the concrete task of generating an environment appropriate to the targeted group of consumers.

The spaces of production and the less appealing processes associated with them are mostly separated from the spaces of consumption and are withheld from the consumer’s gaze. In contrast to this approach stands the less common strategy of purposefully demonstrating the production processes, for example in the concepts of craft fairs, agrotourism or show kitchens. Here, the consumer gains insight into selected, sensually appealing work activities<sup>8</sup> from mostly traditional, (handi-)

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1 Reckwitz 2018, 184; see also Knox – Pinch 2010, 55.

2 Reckwitz 2018, 188–191.

3 Welsch 1965, 3 f.

4 Lash – Urry 1994, 14 f.

5 Venkatesh – Meamber 2008, 47.

6 Numerous tactics are employed, including the dimensions, colour design, lighting, surface materials and structures of the room and the furniture, the use of background sounds or scents and the control of movement.

7 Knox – Pinch 2010, 55. Theodore Schatzki defined the emotional influence of space on social action with the term ‘teleoaffective structures’; see Schatzki 2002, 80–85.

8 The presentation of aesthetically unpleasing or deterrent production processes, such as the work of butchers or tanners, logically occurs rather rarely or not at all.

craft, agricultural or gastronomic fields of work<sup>9</sup>. Afterwards, s/he can of course purchase the corresponding items. The more or less direct participation in the production process addresses the experiential shopping motives of the customer and thus builds a close emotional bond to the product<sup>10</sup>. Furnishings and decoration, although often completely artificial in character, again play a decisive role in creating an atmosphere appropriate to the production process, and thus affectively lending authenticity to it. In this way, the distinction between production space and consumption space is removed. The production process becomes the aesthetic motivator of consumption.

Although reaching an extent and level of systematisation never seen before, the aestheticisation of economic spaces and facilities through decoration is not a purely modern phenomenon, but can already be grasped in ancient contexts. The following study focuses on such situations in the agricultural production spaces of Roman villas. These are certainly not among the first contexts that come to mind when approaching the topic of decorative principles in the Roman built environment. However, decorative elements in the form of wall paintings, precious materials, sophisticated architecture or other non-production-related furnishings in rooms for the processing of agricultural goods are not as rare as one might expect.

The corresponding archaeological remains turn out to be a fruitful background for researching the effects and functionality of *decor*: on the one hand, as we will see, these production spaces each served a clearly defined production task, which had a strong effect on their architectural design. On the other, they were sometimes equipped with elaborate furnishings that had no immediate purpose with respect to these production tasks, or even obstructed them to a certain degree. This connection opens up a field of tension that offers ideal conditions for studying the interrelationship between decorative elements, their architectural context and the social practices taking place within the respective spaces.

At the same time, the decorative features provide insights into some ancient activities that would otherwise have remained archaeologically invisible and thus reveal that economic facilities were not 'only' workspaces, but part of a wider range of human actions. In contrast to the modern situations described at the beginning, these actions are not primarily connected with motives of consumption. Rather, they touch a broad range of practices from the context of everyday Roman 'villa life' and its different social actors. This paper attempts to shed light on the functionality of *decor* in the production contexts, the motifs and practices that led to its use, as well as its initiators and potential addressees. To address these questions, this study will investigate decorative elements in economic facilities that produced wine and olive oil in the villas of Roman Italy. These data are supplemented by single examples from the Iberian Peninsula and the town of Volubilis in North Africa. By analysing the forms and respective qualities of the decorative features applied, as well as their spatial disposition within the rooms, the paper tries to deduce the purpose of the decorations, the motivations behind their placement and finally the practices associated with them.

## Spaces of production

The production of wine and olive oil constituted the two central economic sectors of Roman market-oriented agriculture<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, many villas in Italy were (depending on their location) equipped with facilities for processing one or even both of these two crops<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Hibbert – Tagg 2001, 348 f.

<sup>10</sup> See Dawson et al. 1990, 409–413.

<sup>11</sup> Morel 2007, 506.

<sup>12</sup> See Feige, forthcoming.

The processing and refinement of wine and oil was time consuming<sup>13</sup> and required a considerable amount of fixed technical equipment. A market-oriented winery, for instance, needed installations for the treading (*calcatio*) of the grapes (*calcatorium*), a press (*torculum*) and a collecting and decantation vat (*lacus*), as well as vessels (*dolia*) and significant space for the storage and fermentation of the wine (*cella*)<sup>14</sup>. Olive oil workshops, aside from a press and storage facilities, required an oil mill (*trapetum*) and settling vats<sup>15</sup>. As the production of wine and oil promised considerable profits<sup>16</sup>, but at the same time was relatively prone to failure without constant supervision to prevent spoiling of the products<sup>17</sup>, great care was given to the furnishing and maintenance of the facilities. This is evident not only from the texts of Roman agricultural literature, most notably the works of Cato, Varro and Columella<sup>18</sup>, but also from the archaeological evidence.

The facilities for the market-oriented production of wine and olive oil relevant to this study consisted of the press rooms (*torcularia*), for the physical processing of the crops, and storage areas or rooms, where, in the case of wine production, the chemical fermentation processes also took place. Surviving examples of these spaces in Roman villas from all over Italy reveal a spatial structuring of the economic installations that followed a very similar basic scheme, adapted to the practical requirements of production<sup>19</sup>. The pressrooms mostly featured a long, rectangular ground plan and a structural separation into two functional areas: typically, a lower zone for the operation of the press mechanism, and a higher one where the actual processing was carried out (here called a ‘pressing floor’) (Fig. 1). The length of the *torcularia* was a consequence of the long lever presses installed here, which were by far the most common kind of presses used throughout Italy<sup>20</sup>. While the operation area mainly contained the apparatus for the handling of these lever presses<sup>21</sup>, the pressing floor was designed as the focal point for all production fittings: the *calcatorium*, the actual pressing surface (*ara*) and the collection system, as well as the rear anchors of the press (*forum*). In the villas of Roman Italy, these elements appear according to two recurring constructive and organisational configurations.

In configuration one (Fig. 1), every step of wine production took place in a separate installation: a treading vat, an *ara*, a collection channel (*canalis*) and finally the collection vat. This vat did not usually stand in the pressroom itself, but in an adjacent, roofed storage room. Here, the must obtained was transferred from the vat into *dolia* or casks. In configuration two (Fig. 2), known only from facilities around the Bay of Naples, a large basin combined the production steps into a single structure, which served as treading vat, pressing area and collection installation at the same time. The storage areas that were used in combination with these *torcularia* took the form of an open-air courtyard and most often did not possess a direct connection to the pressroom via a pipe or a channel<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Thurmond 2006, 126.

<sup>14</sup> See Brun 2004, 21–25.

<sup>15</sup> Concerning the working steps and equipment used for the processing of wine and oil: see White 1970, 225–246; 1975, 225–233; Brun 2004, 5–36; Teichner – Peña Cervantes 2010–2011, 378–384; on the presses specifically, see Baratta 2005.

<sup>16</sup> See White 1970, 241–246.

<sup>17</sup> Thurmond 2006, 108 f. 134–140.

<sup>18</sup> The three writers address the cleanliness and maintenance of agricultural equipment at various points throughout their works, e. g., Cato Agr. 10; Varro Rust. 1, 64; Colum. 1, 6, 9–11; 12, 18, 4; 12, 52, 2 f. A detailed compilation and discussion of the instructions passed on in the written sources concerning the hygiene and maintenance of production equipment can be found in Thurmond 2006, 80–85. 115–118.

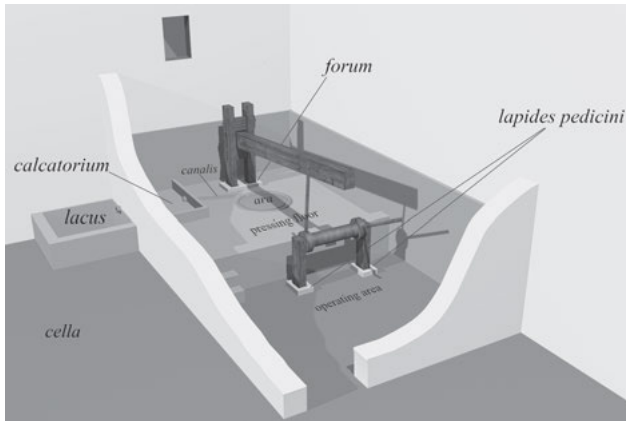
<sup>19</sup> Concerning the following considerations, see Feige, forthcoming.

<sup>20</sup> Baratta 2005, 139–144.

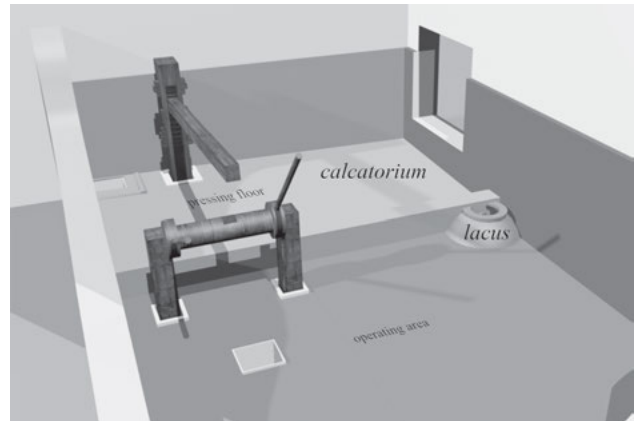
<sup>21</sup> The operational apparatus could take the form of a winch (*sucula*) or screw (*coclea*) that was fixed to the floor or to a counterweight; see Brun 2004, 14 f.

<sup>22</sup> There are a couple of examples of the piped configuration. The first is the famous Villa della Pisanella at Boscoreale (Pasqui 1897, 483–490). The second example known to the author is the winery of the Villa di C. Olius Ampliatus, located in the southeast district of modern Naples (Cascella – Vecchio 2014, 26–33).





**Fig. 1:** Reconstruction of a *torcularium* for winemaking, with separate structures for each step of the production (Type 1).



**Fig. 2:** Reconstruction of a *torcularium* for winemaking, combining the production steps in a single, large basin (Type 2).

In both configurations, the processing areas and the pressroom vats predominantly featured waterproof *cocciopesto* or *opus spicatum* floors. The operation areas for the presses were often equipped with simple beaten earth floors<sup>23</sup>, as were the storage spaces, which on rare occasions also show floors made of *cocciopesto* or brick tiles<sup>24</sup>. Irrespective of the different advantages and disadvantages of the two configurations, the working spaces, consisting of a combination of *torcularium* and *cella*, feature a clear and rational structure in their equipment and layout with a distinct focus on their economic tasks. The decisive attention in the planning of the installations lay in the logistical simplification of the production processes, as well as the appropriate hygienic conditions for the product. However, as a growing number of archaeological discoveries underlines, there were a significant number of production spaces for the processing of wine or oil that deviated from this strictly functional layout. They stand out through decorative elements that *a priori* do not fit into the rational environs of a production site. The spectrum of these elements includes unusual architectural forms for the spaces themselves, additional non-production-related installations, mural paintings and precious building materials.

## Spaces of representation and leisure

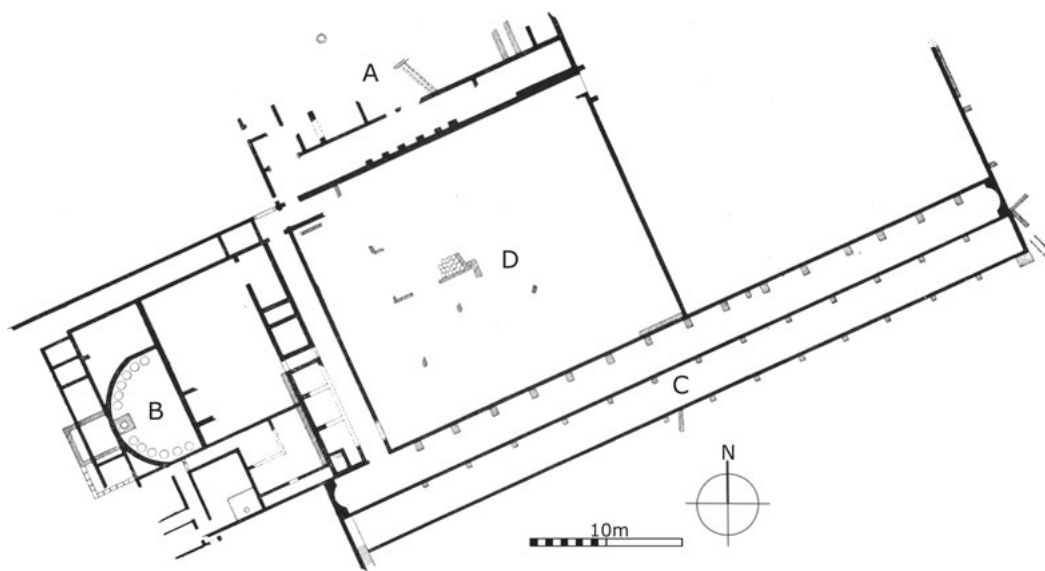
In 1995, Nicholas Purcell discussed the phenomenon of the display of agricultural production within Roman villas, employing an analysis of written testimonies supported by select archaeological examples<sup>25</sup>. One key complex that he addressed is the now-lost Villa della Muracciola, excavated in 1925 near the Via Cassia in the northwest part of Rome's *suburbium* (Fig. 3)<sup>26</sup>. The

<sup>23</sup> In the area around Pompeii, all the pressing floors were made of *cocciopesto*, e. g., in the Villa della Pisanella, Villa Regina and the Villa of N. Popidius Narcissus (see Pasqui 1897, 489–496; De Caro 1994, 42; De' Spagnolis 2002, 48–52). *Opus spicatum* floors were used in the *torcularia* of the Villa dei Volusii and the Villa di Castel di Guido near Rome (De Franceschini 2005, 156–161 no. 54; 274–286 no. 99).

<sup>24</sup> In most cases the *dolia* used for the storage of wine and oil were placed into beaten earth floors, as can be seen in many of the villas around Pompeii, e. g., the Villa della Pisanella (Pasqui 1897, 483–490), the villa in loc. Villa Regina (De Caro 1994, 63–69) and Villa of N. Popidius Narcissus (De' Spagnolis 2002, 62–68). A *cocciopesto* floor is preserved in the storage area of the Villa di Santa Maria di Canneto sul Trigno in Molise (Ferrara 1988, 53–67; Di Niro et al. 1995). A floor made of *bipedales* was found in the storage room of the winery in the Villa di Castel Giubileo 1 in Rome: see De Franceschini 2005, 56 f. no. 12; Ammannato – Belelli Marchesini 1987–1988, 466 Fig. 184.

<sup>25</sup> Purcell 1995, 157–173.

<sup>26</sup> Gatti 1925, 399–403; Baratta 2005, 219 no. 134; De Franceschini 2005, 75–77 no. 21.



**Fig. 3:** Villa della Muracciola, Rome, Imperial period. A: rooms with floors in *opus sectile*; B: winery; C: *porticus* or *cryptoporticus*; D: peristyle.

outstanding feature of this villa was its winery, which lay within a semi-circular room of about  $9 \times 14$  m (Fig. 3, B) and contained 12 *dolia*, arranged along the curved back wall on both sides of a centrally-placed treading basin<sup>27</sup>. The installations, which were set out in a wide arc and clearly visible in front of the round rear wall, framed a large free area in the eastern part of the room. Due to the unusual shape of the room and its specific layout, the winery's installations appear almost like a theatrical scene. Consequently, the purpose of the ensemble must have been to present the agricultural equipment as well as the production process.

Based on the written records, like the famous passage in Varro's *De re rustica* that describes villa owners dining in their fruit store rooms and enjoying the fruits like paintings<sup>28</sup>, Purcell sees complexes such as the Villa della Muracciola and others<sup>29</sup> as spaces for a demonstration of agro-economic capacities within strategies for the competitive self-presentation of the social élites<sup>30</sup>.

Since Purcell published his study, new excavations have extended the archaeological record of wine and oil producing villas in Roman Italy. At the same time, a series of extensive material collections made the large corpus of previously known production villas easily accessible for further study<sup>31</sup>. This newly available data makes it possible to gain a broader and more differentiated image of the motives behind the application of decorative features in production contexts, as well as the different practices and social actors associated with them.

Of the utmost importance in this context are the recently published excavations of the Villa Magna's winery near Anagni, excavated between 2006 and 2010<sup>32</sup>. The facility belongs to an enormous imperial villa complex (occupying an area of c. 11 ha) that dates back to the Late Trajanic

<sup>27</sup> Because of the poorly documented and unpublished excavations of the villa in 1925, there is no precise information about the furnishings of the winery or the materials used. The same applies for all chronological questions concerning the facility, so it is impossible to deduce whether the ensemble was planned in this way or if the winery was a secondary installation.

<sup>28</sup> Varro Rust. 1, 59, 2.

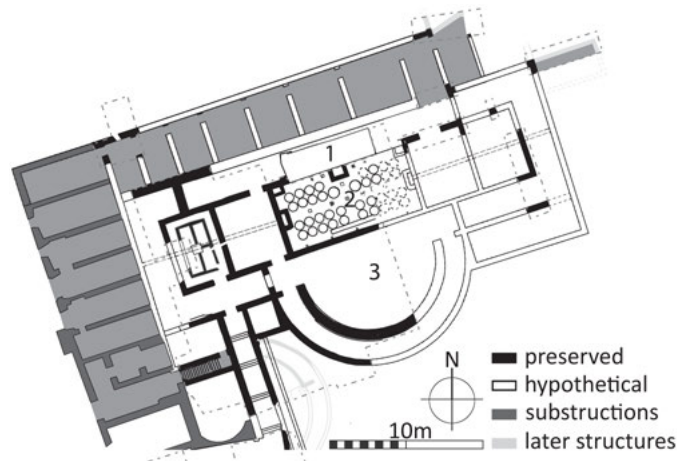
<sup>29</sup> Another example discussed by Purcell is the Villa of Cinecittà, loc. Subaugusta, where an apsidal room served as a *calcatorium*. For the villa, see Bellini – Rea 1985, 120 f. no. 5; De Franceschini 2005, 188–190 no. 67.

<sup>30</sup> Purcell 1995, 169–171; also Fentress et al. 2016, 203.

<sup>31</sup> Particularly helpful in this context are De Franceschini 2005; Baratta 2005; Marzano 2007.

<sup>32</sup> For the final report on the excavations at the Villa Magna, see Fentress et al. 2016. Preliminary reports can be found in Fentress et al. 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010; Fentress – Maiuro 2011.

**Fig. 4:** Winery complex of the Villa Magna, San Pietro di Villamagna, Trajanic–Hadrianic period. 1 *calcatorium*; 2 *cella vinaria*; 3 *exedra*



or Hadrianic period<sup>33</sup>. The winery is situated at the centre of a building erected on an extensive terrace located at the far south of the site<sup>34</sup> (Fig. 4). The facility was located in a  $12.4 \times 17.7$  m space and housed approximately 38 *dolia* arranged in four groups (Fig. 4, 2)<sup>35</sup>. The *dolia* were placed in a floor of *opus spicatum* made from portasanta marble, and each was bordered by a circle of green serpentine stone. A rectangular platform measuring c. 3.5 m wide ran along the entire north wall of the room – this most likely functioned as a *calcatorium* (Fig. 4, 1). A vat, also lined in portasanta marble, was installed in a central position at the front of the platform and served as *lacus*. Another basin was unearthed along the west wall; the excavators assumed that a matching vat was located on the east side of the room, but a modern building obstructed further investigation. No traces of the press mechanism were found.

South of the winery, the excavators discovered a semi-circular courtyard surrounded by a portico of arches and engaged columns (Fig. 4, 3). The exact form of the party wall between the two spaces is not clear, but as two steps have been preserved along the winery's side, there must have been one or more large openings that permitted visual and physical access from the courtyard<sup>36</sup>. The floor of the storage area was lower than the courtyard, and thus the *calcatorium*, positioned prominently against the room's back wall, was arranged like a stage. This interpretation of the ensemble can be connected to a letter written by the young Marcus Aurelius to his teacher Fronto, in which the future emperor depicts one of his sojourns at the Villa Magna in the entourage of his father-in-law Antoninus Pius<sup>37</sup>. Describing his day, he notes that he assisted in a sacrifice performed by the emperor, took part in the wine harvest with him, and then bathed and later dined in a winemaking room, where he was amused by the coarse conversations of the rural workers<sup>38</sup>. In light of the letter, Elisabeth Fentress, the lead excavator of the complex, convincingly demonstrates that the winery's ensemble probably served as a space for ritualised winemaking and sacrifices in the

<sup>33</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. complex overlies at least two older sites (Fentress et al. 2016, 196 f.).

<sup>34</sup> For the evidence concerning the overall plan of the villa, see Fentress et al. 2016, 61–69.

<sup>35</sup> For detailed discussion of the winery, its findings, layout and furnishing, see Fentress et al. 2016, 89–123.

<sup>36</sup> The editors propose a construction similar to the courtyard's portico (Fentress et al. 2016, 94).

<sup>37</sup> Fronto Ep. ad M. Caes. 4, 4–6.

<sup>38</sup> *Loti igitur in torculari cenavimus (non loti in torculari, sed loti cenavimus) et rusticos cavillantes audivimus libenter*: 'So we had supper after we had bathed in the oil-press room; I do not mean bathed in the oil-press room, but when we had bathed, had supper there, and we enjoyed hearing the yokels chaffing one another...' (Fronto, Ep. ad M. Caes. 4, 6, 2, translation by Haines 1919, 183).

worship of Jupiter or Bacchus Liber – both patrons of the vintage<sup>39</sup> – during the *vinalia* or at the beginning of the wine harvest in Latium. The semi-circular court south of the winery most likely functioned as an area for onlookers of the ritual practices<sup>40</sup> and, as Marcus Aurelius’ notes suggest, also as a dining area, which overlooked the installations of the winery like the *cavea* of a theatre<sup>41</sup>.

In the overall proportions and layout of the complex, as well as the choice of materials, foremost emphasis was placed on presenting and visualising the actions performed. A logistically reasonable arrangement of the installations, which would have permitted quick and easy processing of the wine, was of secondary importance. Compared to the production spaces discussed in the previous section, long distances had to be covered when transporting the grapes from the vineyard<sup>42</sup>. Furthermore, the building complex did not incorporate a mechanical press, which generally was an integral component of market-oriented wineries in Roman villas<sup>43</sup>. Instead, the individual production installations (e. g., the collecting basins) in the Villa Magna were placed along important visual axes. The overall structure was designed in such a way that each processing step could be viewed easily from the courtyard in the south. Thus, the functional elements themselves served as *decor* and became a part of the complex’s decorative ensemble. As in the winery in the Villa della Muracciola, in the centre of this visually-focused arrangement stood the *calcatorium*.

The *calcatio* was not only a central step in the winemaking process – by appealing to multiple senses, it also had good ‘entertainment value’<sup>44</sup>. Therefore, what the audience watched in the Villa Magna’s winery was not the everyday agro-economic reality, but more a ritually organised ‘peasant theatre’ (‘Bauerntheater’)<sup>45</sup>. The audience must have consisted of the emperor’s entourage and guests (i. e., the social elite of the empire) and thus a group of people who had little contact with real agricultural work. In the enjoyment of this bucolic romanticism, enhanced and staged with all available means of architecture, this urban noblesse could feel connected with the oft-invoked traditional life of the simple farmer<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> On the worship of Jupiter and Bacchus Liber in the context of winemaking, see Cazavone 1988; 1995; Baratta 2005, 120–122.

<sup>40</sup> A masonry base in front of the western end of the *calcatorium* might either be another basin or an altar for the libation of fresh must: Fentress et al. 2016, 96 f.

<sup>41</sup> For a detailed discussion of the text passage and its meaning within the framework of the structures discovered, see Fentress et al. 2016, 203–208.

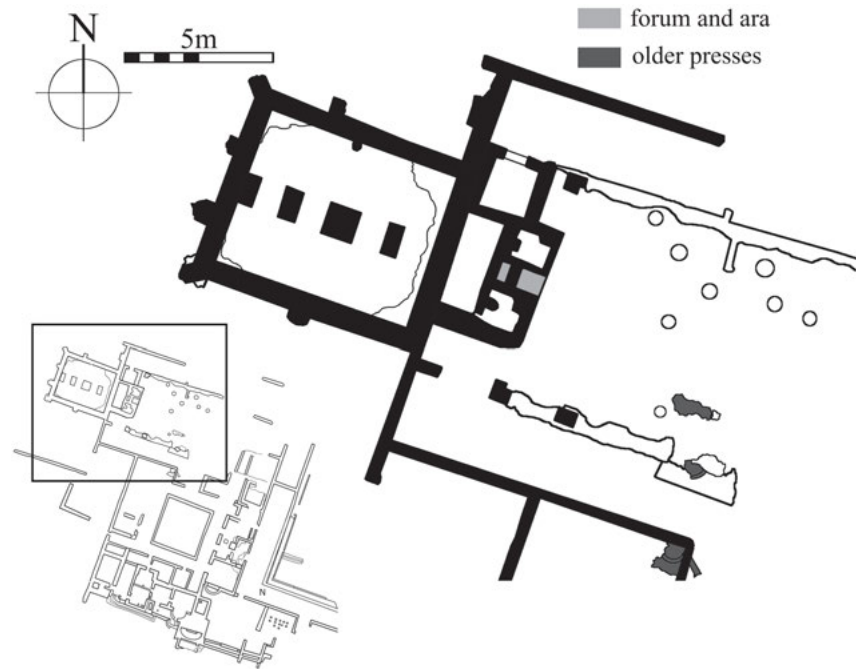
<sup>42</sup> The exact access and transportation route to the winery is not clear from the surviving evidence. But because of the winery’s position on a massive terrace, it is clear that the grapes had to be brought over a considerable distance and up some kind of stairway to reach the *calcatorium*.

<sup>43</sup> See Feige, forthcoming. Even if there was a real *torcularium* somewhere else on the estate, as the excavators assume (Fentress et al. 2016, 96), this would mean a considerable additional expenditure during the vintage that would be otherwise unnecessary.

<sup>44</sup> The treading of the grapes could be accompanied by music, as is testified in the famous agricultural mosaic of Saint-Romain-en-Gal: Lancha 1981, 208–225 no. 368. The picturesque quality of the *calcatio* becomes clear through its frequent representation in various forms of ancient art. Cf. Brun 2003, 49–70, who has collected a range of depictions. Even today treading is a public spectacle in grape harvest festivals throughout Italy.

<sup>45</sup> On this point see Fentress et al. 2016, 206–208.

<sup>46</sup> This romanticising of the simple, rural life is recognisable in the letter of the young Marcus Aurelius, who studies Cato’s *De agri cultura* in the morning, then later helps a little with the grape harvest and amuses himself by watching the farm workers in *torcularium*.



**Fig. 5:** Production area of the Villa of Val Melaina, Rome, 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. (Phase 2).

## Advertising spaces

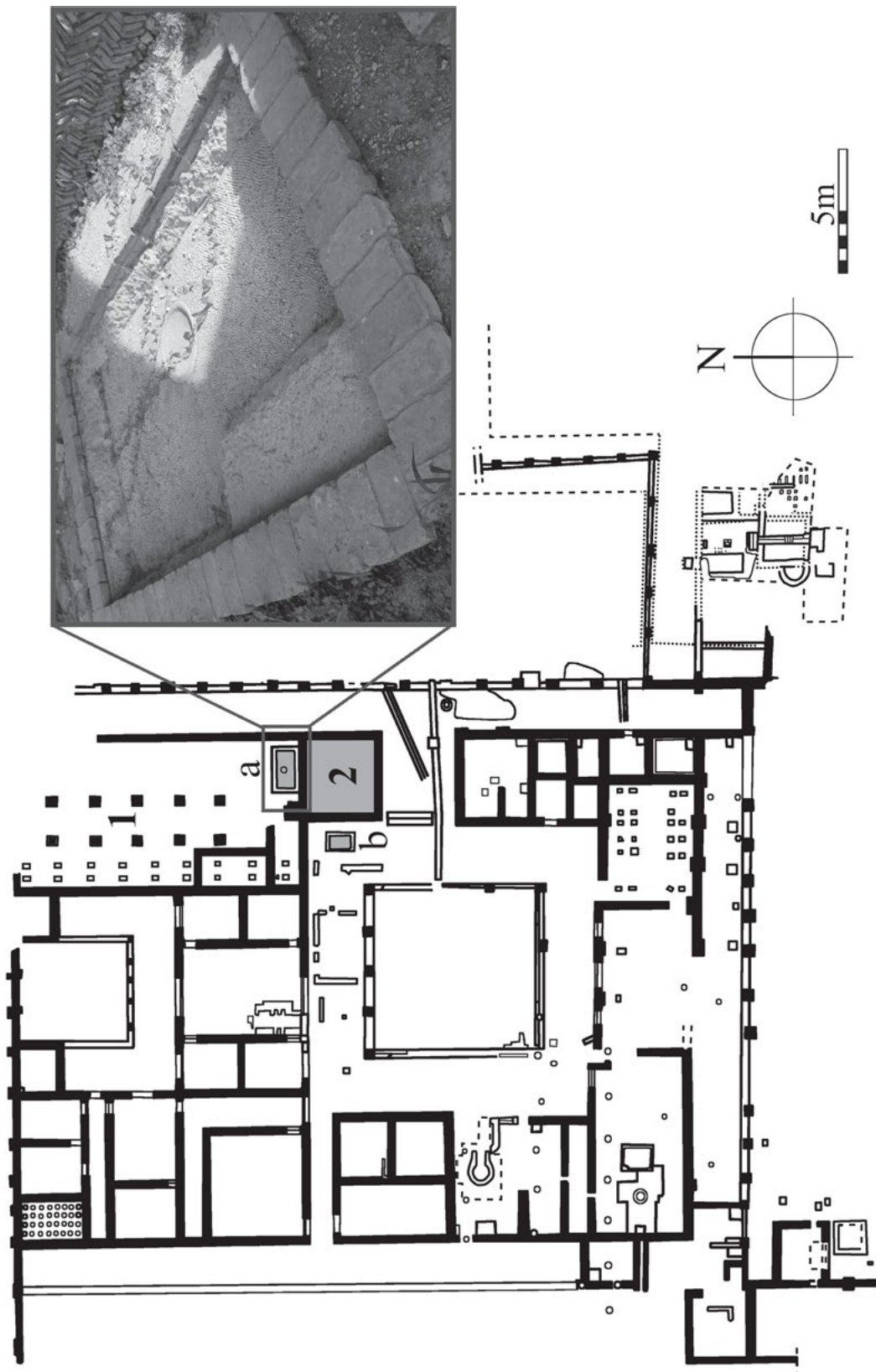
The situation at the Villa Magna, however, does not mean that the implementation of decorative arrangements and features within productive spaces always resulted in profound interference with (or negative consequences for) the functioning of the facilities. The winery of a villa excavated between 1980 and 1987 in loc. Val Melaina near the Via Nomentana<sup>47</sup> shows close similarities in its spatial layout with the two sites discussed above. The facility was situated in the northern part of the villa and had the form of a rectangular courtyard measuring about 10 × 13 m, originally flanked by pillar porticos along its northern and southern sides (Fig. 5). The southeast corner of the ensemble, which dates from the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.<sup>48</sup>, is lost. The winery consisted of a storage area that occupied most of the open space, as is attested by the widely scattered remains of eight *dolia*. A press installation mounted on the courtyard's longitudinal axis constituted the northwest limit of the area. It consisted of a lever press in the centre flanked by two lateral collection basins, placed symmetrically<sup>49</sup>. As in the two other villas, a single large space incorporated the processing facilities and a storage area, featuring an axially symmetrical layout of the main productive installations. The entrance to the ensemble is lost, but it must have been located somewhere in the southeast part of the yard. Seen from this vantage, in its basic visual composition and layout the facility functioned similarly to the winery of the Villa Magna. The lateral porticos created a frame and directed the view towards the press installation, situated in a prominent position at the centre of the courtyard's rear wall<sup>50</sup>. Again, the structural components were arranged in such a way that an observer could easily view all of the agricultural activities taking place here. The existence of a *torcularium* with a mechanical press, however, suggests that, despite its strong visual appeal, the ensemble was

<sup>47</sup> Cutuli et al. 1981, 161–163; a concentrated summary can be found in De Franceschini 2005, 81–83 no. 25.

<sup>48</sup> The winery was built over an older *torcularium* dating to the Republican period, documented by the remains of three *arae*.

<sup>49</sup> As there is no detailed description or photography of the installation in the excavation reports, its form can be deduced only from the published plans. From these, one can assume the presence of an anchor stone for the rear post of a lever press (*forum*) with an *ara*-block (later robbed) positioned in front of it.

<sup>50</sup> The excavation report gives no details about the fittings in the winery.



**Fig. 6:** Villa of Russi, Ravenna, late 1<sup>st</sup>/early 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. (Phase 2). 1: *cella*; 2: *torcularium*; a: *lacus* decorated with marble *tesserae*; b: recess for the counterweight of the press.





**Fig. 7:** Reconstructed oil production workshop in *insula* 16 at Volubilis, Morocco.

functional and dedicated to the tasks of a market-oriented agricultural business. Thus, the complex fits much better into Purcell's image of a proud owner and entrepreneur who wants to demonstrate his economic performance.

Finds from the Villa of Russi near Ravenna (Fig. 6), dated by the excavators to the late 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., lead to a very similar interpretation<sup>51</sup>. A winery, consisting of a large storage room with three naves (1) and adjacent pressing installation (2), was located in the northeast corner of the complex. The only remnant of the lever press that once stood in room (2) is the rectangular pit used for the counterweight (b). The winery stands out owing to the use of unusual materials: the pressing floor in room (2) and the *lacus* (a) in storage room (1) were paved with marble *tesserae*<sup>52</sup> (Fig. 5). However, in contrast to the Villa Magna, this enhanced materiality was not paired with an architectural layout for a purposefully staged presentation of the productive processes<sup>53</sup>. Rather, with a large *cella*, an adjacent but separate *torcularium* and easy access from outside the villa, the equipment and the layout of this facility meet the necessities of a normal market-oriented winery. Therefore, the use of decorative elements here had a different objective.

This is indicated also by the selective use of the precious materials, which is explicitly limited to areas that had direct contact with the grapes and the must obtained from them. Obviously, it was not just a matter of presenting agricultural capacity<sup>54</sup>, but of showing the care and effort involved in processing the products – i. e., quality. As mentioned above, the agricultural writers gave great importance to the cleanliness of the production facilities. With that thought in mind, a pavement made of brightly shining marble provided an inventive way to visually underline and exaggerate the impression of a carefully cleaned surface; it thus attested to the good maintenance of the winery. Consequently, the *decor* here perhaps functioned as a means of advertisement.

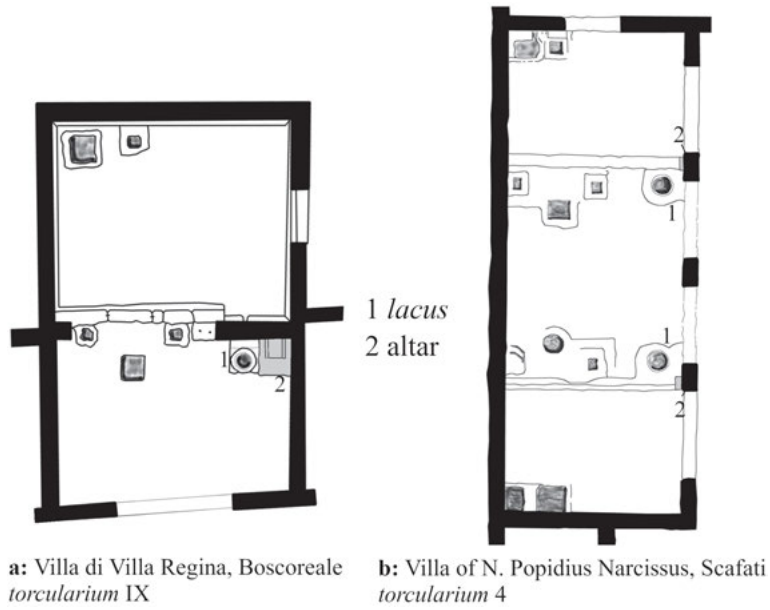
One possible occasion on which this might have occurred was a demonstration of the production facilities in the context of trade negotiations with potential buyers. Depictions in wall paintings

<sup>51</sup> The first systematic excavations began in 1953; see Mansuelli 1962; Bermond Montanari et al. 1975; Bermond Montanari 1981; Maioli 2001.

<sup>52</sup> Maioli 2001, 311f.

<sup>53</sup> Due to the press's location (in a corner of the large peristyle), the *torcularium* was visible from other parts of the villa, especially along the peristyle's north portico. However, the establishment of the *torcularium* in the annex of a *porticus* in a central courtyard was not unusual and can also be observed in other villas, e. g., the Villa of Carmiano A, or the villa in contrada Giuliana, fondo Zurlo (Sogliano 1897; Camardo – Ferrara 1989, 69–82). As such, it should not be evaluated as a specific visual display.

<sup>54</sup> Without question, this task was already fulfilled by the enormous size of the storage room (1), which measured approximately 560 m<sup>2</sup>.



**Fig. 8:** *Torcularia* discovered in the villa in loc. Villa Regina, Boscoreale (a) and the so-called Villa of N. Popidius Narcissus, Scafati (b).

and reliefs, such as the famous Cupid frieze from the Casa dei Vettii in Pompeii (VI 15,1)<sup>55</sup> and a funerary relief now in Ince Blundell Hall<sup>56</sup>, indicate that a buyer's personal visit to the villa, including a tasting, was not only usual, but also logically one of the central moments of wine production and trade<sup>57</sup>. The owner of the Villa of Russi, through the application of cost-intensive material *decor*, probably tried to demonstrate to the buyers his extraordinarily high degree of attention to the care of his equipment and goods. The geographical location of the villa, far away from the highest centres of power, in combination with its considerable size, indicates that this proprietor was a member of the local economic and social elite, showing off his capabilities whilst also focusing on economic necessities.

A similar entrepreneurial pride becomes apparent, albeit in a different and somewhat reduced way, in some urban oil-making workshops discovered at Roman Volubilis. In workshops in the House of Orpheus<sup>58</sup> and *insula* 16<sup>59</sup> (immediately east of the Baths of Gallienus), the walls mediating the 1 m difference between the level of the pressing floor and the level of the presses' operating area were decorated at their upper end with simple *cymata recta* mouldings (Fig. 7)<sup>60</sup>. Although this relatively simple moulding does not permit any definitive conclusions, it suggests that the two *torcularia* were perhaps open to a select audience on certain occasions, for the sale of oil or for other festivities.

Characterised by a more frugal and concentrated application of decorative principles that did not interfere with the functional interaction of the productive installations, the three examples from northern Italy and North Africa show a synergy between the decoration and the architectural challenges of systematic, market-oriented production. Thus, the facilities offer a glimpse of other social actors, different from those visible in the high-end complexes of the Villa Magna and Villa

<sup>55</sup> Cerulli Irelli 1990, Pl. 60. On the frieze as a whole, see de Angelis 2011.

<sup>56</sup> Angelicoussis 2009, 99 with Figs. 1 and 4. The relief's iconography clearly suggests that the tasting happened directly in the *cella* of the winery.

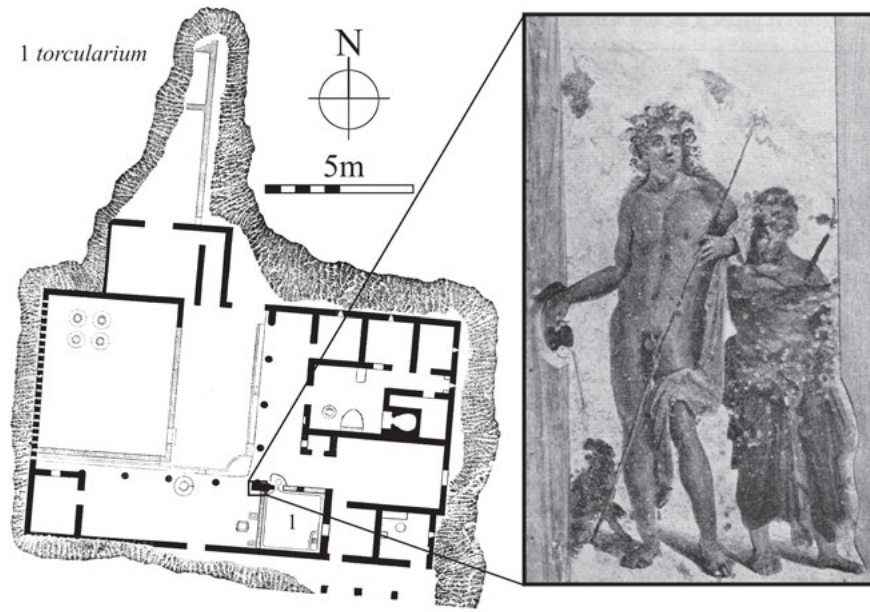
<sup>57</sup> Another (less well-preserved) depiction of such sales negotiations survives in the wall paintings of the Villa di Casal Morena: Rossi 1979, 108 f. Fig. 161.

<sup>58</sup> Panetier 2002, 94–97.

<sup>59</sup> Riße 2001, 103 f. Figs. 153 f.

<sup>60</sup> Further ornamentation of the moulding by means of painting cannot be ruled out. However, no traces remain visible on site.





**Fig. 9:** Wall painting of Bacchus, Silenus and a panther from the *torcularium* in the villa in contrada Giuliana, Boscoreale,

Muracciola. These are successful entrepreneurs, integrated into the specific regional and interregional economic networks and most likely important members of their local communities, showing off the capacity and quality of their enterprises.

## Spaces of worship

However, the decoration of production spaces does not only shed light onto the desires and activities of the facilities' owners; it also opens a window onto the everyday lives of the workers and inhabitants. In this respect, the material evidence for domestic cult practices in the context of wine-making, best preserved in the villas destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in A.D. 79, is particularly revealing.

The most comprehensive example for such cult activity is located in the *torcularium* of the villa in loc. Villa Regina at Boscoreale, excavated from 1978 to 1983. Directly east of the *dolium* that served as the *lacus* of the winery, a small, unadorned altar was set up (Fig. 8a). Mural paintings that show a temple façade with opened doors are preserved on the partition wall behind the two installations. The temple originally contained a figure of Bacchus<sup>61</sup>. The mural paintings were arranged so that the temple and Bacchus appeared directly above the *dolium-lacus*.

Two further altars existed in the *torcularium* of the so-called Villa of N. Popidius Narcissus Maior in Scafati, unearthed in 1993 and 1994. The symmetrically designed room was equipped with two antithetically placed presses. Each of the mechanisms had its own *calcatorium*, pressing floor and *lacus*, and each was equipped with an altar, placed directly above the *dolium* that served as a *lacus*<sup>62</sup> (Fig. 8b). Like the winery at the Villa Magna, the two ensembles were probably used during ritual acts for the god of wine, Bacchus-Liber or Liber Pater<sup>63</sup>. Liber, identified with Dionysus, was linked specifically to the winemaking process, where he was supposed to ensure the cleanliness

<sup>61</sup> De Caro 1994, 41 Pl. 3.

<sup>62</sup> De' Spagnolis 2002, 42–48.

<sup>63</sup> Baratta 2005, 120–122. For Liber, see DNP VII (1999) 136 f. s. v. Liber, Liberalia (F. Prescendi).

of the installations as well as the purity of the fresh must<sup>64</sup>, thus securing the economic success of the vintage<sup>65</sup>. In order to gain his support, Liber was offered sacrifices from the first must. As the example from the Villa of N. Popidius Narcissus suggests, this sacrifice was not only necessary for the overall vintage, but apparently also for the single, individual pressing processes.

However, the situation in other wineries throughout the region shows that a fixed altar was not obligatory for worshipping the god. Indeed, the marking of the facilities as a sacred place could also be achieved by attaching an isolated wall painting of Bacchus-Liber without additional fittings. Such a painting of the god was discovered in the *torcularium* of a villa in contrada Giuliana, excavated in 1897<sup>66</sup> (Fig. 9). Here, Bacchus, who wears only a wreath of vines on his head and a loose-fitting mantle, holds a *thyrsus* in his left hand while performing a libation using a small *kantharos* with his right. A small panther, his sacred animal, sits on the god's right side and drinks the sacrificial liquid – certainly wine. To the left of Bacchus, Silenus appears playing the lyre, wearing a cloth around his hips and a wreath of vines on his head. A similar depiction of the god came to light in the pressroom of the villa in fondo Agricoltura during excavations conducted in 1906<sup>67</sup>. The religious implications of this form of pictorial representation are evident. In both cases, the paintings were located on the wall directly above the winery's collection basin, which corresponds to the similar arrangement of the altars. The cult of Liber could also be situated alongside other domestic cults, as indicated by the frequent location of *lararia* and other niches in the vicinity of *torcularia*, e. g., in the villas of Carmiano A<sup>68</sup>, Via Motta Carità<sup>69</sup> and Pisanella<sup>70</sup>. In the Villa 'Las Musas' near Arellano in modern Spain, a *lararium* was even placed directly within the *cella vinaria*<sup>71</sup>.

This extraordinarily close spatial interaction between the decoration, productive and cult practices and the *torcularium* indicates that Liber's presence during winemaking was considered in a concrete spatial sense. The purpose of the decoration was to mark and fix the position of the god within the real space of the villa. In light of the fundamental importance of wine production for these estates, this close connection between religion and economy is hardly surprising. Especially in the small and highly specialised farms and villas of the Sarno valley, the success of the year's vintage was of the utmost importance not only for the owner of the property, but also for the individuals living and working there. After all, it represented one of the central sources of income and thus secured their subsistence.

Therefore, it is clear that these decorative features were not intended to create a separate, sacred space: the cult practices connected to them also took place in *torcularia* lacking the types of archaeological markers that make these activities visible to us. Rather, the application of *decor* was intended to highlight ritual acts through visual media and thereby accentuate their significance. So, the main addressee(s) of the decorative effort, aside from the villa's *familia*, was seemingly the deity himself, with the expectation that he would grant economic success to the facility.

<sup>64</sup> Liber was responsible for the production of profane wine for human consumption, while Jupiter was worshipped as part of the production of sacrificial wine; see Cazavone 1988.

<sup>65</sup> In the Villa of N. Popidius Florus, Liber is one of the gods to whom the owner consecrated a stele in the enclosure wall of his *cella vinaria*, recording the dedication with the following inscription: *N · Popidius · Florus · Ven · Lib · Herc* (Della Corte 1921, 444).

<sup>66</sup> Sogliano 1897, 400. The panel was cut out and today is in the British Museum, London (inv. 1899, 0215.1).

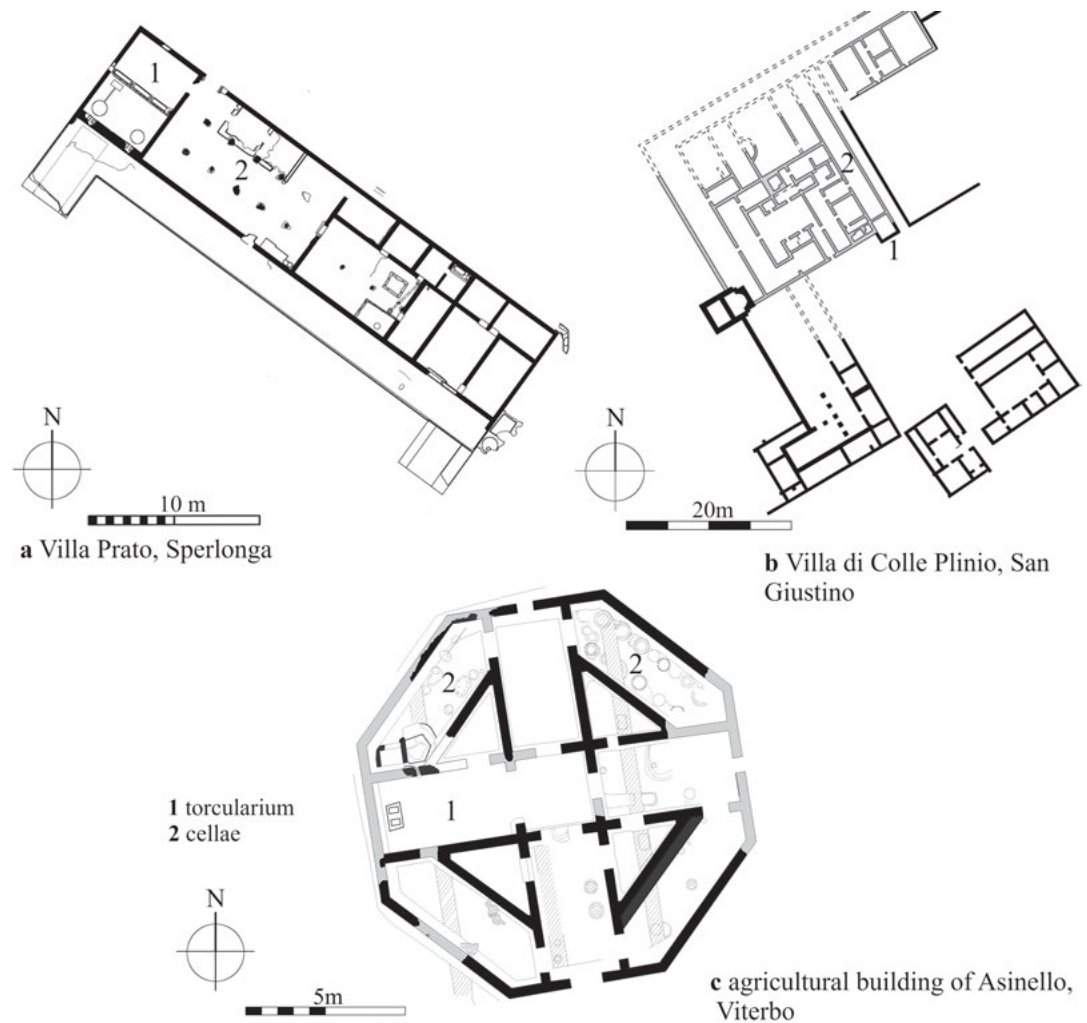
<sup>67</sup> Also called the 'villa in fondo di Palma' (Della Corte 1921, 461–467 no. VI; Stefani 2000). Another painting of the god was unearthed during the Bourbon excavations in the *torcularium* of the Villa di Sassole near Stabiae; see Ruggiero 1881, 346; Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. 9274.

<sup>68</sup> Camardo – Ferrara 1989, 69. 75 Figs. 75 f.

<sup>69</sup> On the Villa of Via Motta Carità: see Miniero 1988, 239 f. no. 15; Oettel 1996, 163–165.

<sup>70</sup> Pasqui 1897, 464 Fig. 51.

<sup>71</sup> Teichner – Peña Cervantes 2010–2011, 426–430 Figs. 37 f.



**Fig. 10:** a) Villa Prato, Sperlonga, 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. b) Villa di Colle Plinio, San Giustino, late 1<sup>st</sup>/early 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. (Phase 3) c) Octagonal building of Asinello, Viterbo, Augustan period.

## Invisible spaces

All the phenomena discussed thus far concern the interior of production spaces. However, decorative features were also utilised to influence the external perception of the economic facilities, as well as the villa as a whole. On some larger productive estates, façade porticos were erected along exterior sections of the villa. Prominent examples include the famous Villa of Settefinestre near Ansedonia<sup>72</sup>, the Villa of Grottarossa in Rome<sup>73</sup> and the Villa of Russi (cf. Fig. 5) mentioned above. This façade design is a well-known and prominent element in the architecture of luxury villas<sup>74</sup>, with the *porticus* serving as light-flooded porches for the outward-facing rooms located behind them. At the same time, however, these features created a uniform and rhythmic external appearance, and in this way united different parts of the building behind a visually indistinguishable curtain of columns.

This design is illustrated impressively by the Villa Prato near Sperlonga, which dates to the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.<sup>75</sup>. The villa building, investigated from 1979 to 1984, lies on a high terrace, and was built on a ground plan that resembles a *stoa* framed by a pair of lateral risalits

<sup>72</sup> Concerning the villa's main building: Carandini 1985, 149–156.

<sup>73</sup> For the Villa of Grottarossa, see Stefani 1944–1945; Cozza 1947; Becker 2006.

<sup>74</sup> E. g., in the Villa dei Papiri or the Villa of Oplontis A on the Bay of Naples: cf. Zarmakoupi 2014, 28–53. 75–102.

<sup>75</sup> The excavations are published in Broise – Lafon 2001.

(avant-corps) (Fig. 10a). The building was equipped with a large *torcularium* and a storage room that composed a significant part of the structure. On the outside, however, the villa was adorned with a stepped terrace façade that terminated in the *porticus* above. In the Imperial period, a comparable approach was taken at the Villa di Colle Plinio near San Giustino. During the second phase of the complex, which dates to the late 1<sup>st</sup> or early 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., the owner built a portico featuring symmetrical risalits at its corners with a small temple feature occupying a central position between the projecting elements<sup>76</sup> (Fig. 10b). This impressive façade, which mimicked the design of a sanctuary, hid a large part of the villa from the valley in which the property was located.

Thus, a number of well-to-do villa owners upgraded estates of a productive and agricultural character with elements of sophisticated luxury architecture. By enhancing the façade(s) of the building with porticos, they indulged themselves in the amenities of a sumptuous estate for their personal leisure, and also unambiguously made clear their assets and status from a distance. In doing so, the impressive façades visually marginalised or even hid the productive and agricultural aspects of the villa – either intentionally or as a side-effect.

The agricultural building of Asinello, which was built during the Augustan period, represents an exceptional example of this phenomenon (Fig. 10c). Built on a ridge above the ancient Via Cassia<sup>77</sup>, the building belonged to a nearby villa complex and stands out because of its octagonal form (and considerable size, as each side measured c. 10 m). Surprisingly, this monumental building contained a functional facility for the production of olive oil<sup>78</sup>. A rectangular room in the western part of the building was set up as a *torcularium* and contained a lever press (1), of which only the rear anchor survived *in situ*. A pair of unusually shaped rooms (2) along the outer perimeter served as storage spaces, as indicated by the presence of numerous *dolia* in each. In the *cella* immediately to the north of the *torcularium*, two decantation basins were found; these were connected to the press by a conduit. Through the creation of the octagonal layout – which at the time was quite rare – the production area was transformed into an appealing landmark on the villa's estate<sup>79</sup>. Annalisa Marzano sees the building as a monumental statement by the owner, showing off 'the worthiness of that type of production and the magnitude of the investment'<sup>80</sup>. However, in its visual function as a representative landmark, it was not recognisable as an agricultural building from the outside. Indeed, the size and unusual form of the structure no doubt fooled travellers along the Via Cassia (located c. 500 m to the east), who would have struggled to identify the building's true function<sup>81</sup>.

The building of Asinello marked its owner's personal status and capabilities in the landscape rather than his role as an entrepreneur. Indeed, the position and design of the monument emphasised two qualities of the owner in particular: (1) he was able to occupy a country estate at this prominent location; (2) he had the financial means and social contacts, as well as the education and cultural knowledge, to erect such a progressive building on his property. Therefore, he did not market himself simply as a successful businessman, but made every effort to distinguish himself clearly from other members of the local elite.

<sup>76</sup> In the first construction phase, which dates to the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., the villa already had a façade *porticus* that surrounded it on two sides. This portico was now massively enlarged on the front side of the complex. Based on this background and a group of stamps on lead pipes, the excavators deem the complex to be a part of Pliny the Younger's villa 'in Tuscis', at which he himself mentions the construction of such a temple: Plin. Ep. 9, 39. See also Braconi – Uroz Sáez 1999, esp. 102–104; Braconi 2007, esp. 97–100; Braconi – Uroz Sáez 2007.

<sup>77</sup> For the building of Asinello, see Broise – Jolivet 1986; 1995, 114; 2000; Baratta 2005, 163 f. no. 22; Marzano 2007, 645 L375; Broise – Jolivet 2008.

<sup>78</sup> It is not clear if the facility belongs the initial phase of the building: see Marzano 2007, 118 no. 65.

<sup>79</sup> Broise – Jolivet 2000, 376.

<sup>80</sup> Marzano 2007, 119.

<sup>81</sup> Marzano herself points out that the building's outer form is reminiscent of a mausoleum (Marzano 2007, 118 f.).

## Conclusion

The brief examination presented here highlights the versatile use of decorative elements within the production facilities of Roman villas. As is often the case today, spaces of production were generally hidden from the public eye. However, despite the study's focus on a small and specific group of installations, we have considered a substantial number of archaeological contexts in which elaborate forms of decoration appear. Thus, the (at least partial) aestheticisation of production spaces, while not representing a mass phenomenon in Roman antiquity, was by no means a marginal issue.

As in the case of many other aspects of the ancient world, economic matters were closely intertwined with other spheres of life. Accordingly, the spectrum of social practices, actors and motives that can be associated with the use of *decor* in this context is equally broad. An important observation in this regard is that the decorative upgrading of production spaces was not undertaken only by social elites. Rather, it was connected to the activities of a wide range of actors from diverse parts of Roman society, among them entrepreneurs of local importance and their customers, as well as simple farm workers. Each of these social groups engaged in the aestheticisation of production spaces through different practices, and experienced various emotions and motivations in their interaction with the ensembles. In addition to cult activities (which are archaeologically visible in the wineries, for example), the bucolic staging of productive processes for aristocratic leisure is discernible. In other cases, however, the visual concealment of such activities can also be seen. Of particular interest are the isolated instances in which the marketing of performance and quality are evident; these entrepreneurial strategies anticipate similar techniques that can be observed in the modern consumer-oriented aestheticisation of economic areas.

The decorative elements were employed with fine nuances in their form, materiality and positioning depending on the practices associated with them, as well as the socioeconomic status, aims and intended audience of the proprietors. Yet these decorative arrangements created no new spaces of action. Rather, they marked or accentuated select installations or activity areas, drawing visual attention towards them. The choice of *decor* thus reflected the meaning that the production facilities held for the owners and residents of the villas. The various techniques employed to present (or, in some cases, hide) the production rooms shed light on the subtle differences in the social perception of productive activities and the role of the villa owner as an agricultural entrepreneur. On the one hand, agriculture was stylised into a spectacle or was proudly presented to potential customers; on the other, owners tried to emphasise the luxurious character of a rural residence by visually concealing economic activities. The Villa of Russi, for example, shows that these strategies of presentation and concealment were employed simultaneously in the same building. Both the individual elements and the overall decorative programme of these complexes were thus designed to fit different situations, perspectives and addressees. As material indicators of these situation-related design strategies, the preserved examples of decorative elements are a reminder that *torcularia*, *cellae* and other agricultural facilities in villas and urban houses were far more than 'just' production spaces, and were in many ways closely integrated into the daily life of their inhabitants.

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Fig. 3: J. Rütten, after Gatti 1925, Fig. 14.

Fig. 4: M. Feige, after Fentress et al. 2016, Pl. 5, 5.

Fig. 5: J. Rütten and M. Feige, after Cutuli et al. 1981, Fig. 5.

Fig. 6: J. Rütten and M. Feige, after Maioli 1990, Fig. 1.

Fig. 7: M. Feige, after De Caro 1994, Pl. B (7a); after De’Spagnolis 2002, Fig. 23 (7b).

Fig. 9: M. Feige, after Sogliano 1897, Fig. 1; Fig. 10.

Fig. 10: J. Rütten and M. Feige, after Broise – Lafon 2001, Fig. 1 (10a); J. Rütten and M. Feige, after Braconi 1998, 158 and Braconi – Uroz Sáez 2008, Fig. 14 (10b); after Broise – Jolivet 1995, Fig. 5 (10c).

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Domenico Esposito

# Decorative Principles Between the Public and Private Spheres in Pompeii: Contexts, Patrons and Artisans

**Abstract:** This paper attempts to analyse the relationship between decorated spaces and the choices made by both patrons and painters with respect to the production of that decoration. As a case study, we shall focus here on the Nilotic theme, which was ever-present in Pompeii during the period of the Fourth Style, in both public and private settings. A discussion of the meaning (or of various potential meanings) of these scenes, particularly in relation to a room's entire decorative programme, permits us to consider the manner in which certain spaces were perceived by ancient observers. The interactions between patrons and painters, as well as the socio-economic and cultural implications of these relationships, should always underlie any discussion focusing on ancient decorative contexts and their viewers.

## Introduction

This paper analyses the relationship between decoration and architecture in the public and private contexts of Pompeii, with particular attention given to the relationship between decorated spaces and the manner in which they were perceived by ancient observers. In what follows, we shall focus specifically on the recurrence of Nilotic themes in certain spatial contexts. The choice to focus on this theme is not arbitrary, but derived from observing what is known (or what has been preserved) of the decoration of the city's main public buildings, along with what has been documented in private homes. The starting point, therefore, is the available evidence, as well as comparisons between the different types of buildings.

A useful *fil rouge* is the fact that much of this decoration was created by the same group of painters, members of the so-called 'Vettii Workshop'<sup>1</sup>, who decorated numerous public and private buildings in Pompeii between A.D. 62 and 79. This circumstance will permit us, at the conclusion of this paper, to offer some general considerations about the choices made by the painters in relation to the buildings they set out to decorate, as well as those made by the patrons who commissioned the work from them. In particular, we shall attempt to answer the following questions:

- 1) How did the design of a space itself act upon its viewers and users?
- 2) How might the 'action context' in which viewers were engaged affect the perception of decorative elements?
- 3) In what way did the intentions of patrons and artists influence the production of specific forms of *decor*?

## Themes and building types

In the following pages, we shall analyse the decoration of a series of public and private buildings, exploring the potential for shared meanings across the corpus, as well as new interpretations that

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<sup>1</sup> On the Vettii Workshop, see in particular Esposito 2009, 49–132, with a list of building complexes decorated by them on 49 n. 372. On the existence of painters' workshops (or in any case stable professional connections that tied decorators together), the proceedings of the 'Mani di pittori' conference (Moormann 1995) represents a fundamental contribution. For Fourth Style painters' workshops, see the numerous publications by the present author, as well as a recent contribution by Francesca Bologna: Esposito 1999; 2007; 2009; 2011; 2016, 2017; Bologna 2019.



**Fig. 1:** Stabian Baths, *nymphaeum* (F).



**Fig. 2:** Stabian Baths, *nymphaeum* (G), west wall: niche with mosaic.

might be applied to the decoration based on the perceived function of spaces or the actual activities that took place within them. The Stabian Baths<sup>2</sup> (VII 1,8) at Pompeii represent a central example in this discussion, because they exhibit a highly elaborate decorative programme that includes figurative themes comparable to those employed in other building complexes. The two large *nymphaea* (F, G)<sup>3</sup> that flank the *natio* (D) on the west side of the *palaestra* once presented very rich decoration<sup>4</sup>, which is today still visible to a limited degree due to its extremely poor state of conservation (Fig. 1). However, the decoration can be reconstructed thanks to numerous detailed drawings produced during the area's excavation and the so-called 'Plastico di Pompei', a 19<sup>th</sup> century cork model of the city preserved in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli<sup>5</sup>. A predella was positioned above a high marble dado and decorated by Nilotic landscapes populated with pygmies alternated with yellow panels showing sea monsters between pairs of dolphins. The middle zone presented garden views on a blue background with fountain statues resembling sphinxes. The landscapes were framed by red bands with plant motifs on which statues of satyrs and nymphs holding up fountain basins were painted<sup>6</sup>. The Nilotic surroundings displayed on this predella were also referenced in the mosaic panels showing marshlands with ducks that decorated the ceilings of the fountain niches on the back wall of the two rooms (Fig. 2)<sup>7</sup>. The decoration of the *nymphaea*

<sup>2</sup> On the wall and floor decoration of the Stabian Baths, see De Vos – De Vos 1979, 81–95; PPM VI (1996) 149–219 s. v. VII 1, 8, Terme Stabiane (V. Sampaolo) 149–150.

<sup>3</sup> The rooms discussed throughout this paper are described by the numbering and lettering systems employed in *Pompeii: Pitture e Mosaici*.

<sup>4</sup> PPM VI (1996) 149–219 s. v. VII 1, 8, Terme Stabiane (V. Sampaolo) 175 Fig. 20.

<sup>5</sup> See Lauritsen, this volume, 127 n. 23.

<sup>6</sup> PPM Disegnatori (1995) 572–776 s. v. N. La Volpe (I. Bragantini – V. Sampaolo) 658–659 Figs. 103–104. 662 Fig. 108.

<sup>7</sup> PPM VI (1996) 149–219 s. v. VII 1, 8, Terme Stabiane (V. Sampaolo) 176 Figs. 46–47.



**Fig. 3:** Stabian Baths, *palaestra* (C), stucco decoration on the west wall.



**Fig. 4:** Stabian Baths, women's *caldarium* (IX), north wall: detail of the stuccoed frieze presenting ducks in a marshy landscape.

was mirrored on the wall that faced towards the *palaestra* by a lively architectonic-illusionistic composition in polychrome stucco and paint (Fig. 3)<sup>8</sup>, in which water-related themes also made an appearance, including two panels depicting the myth of Hylas<sup>9</sup>. The decorative programme presented by the *palaestra* (C) and its annexes (*nymphaea* F and G) found parallels in the decoration of the adjacent bathing areas. The motif of the Nilotic landscapes, for example, is suggested also in the white stucco frieze that decorates the upper part of the walls of the female *caldarium* (IX)<sup>10</sup>, a design that displays ducks and other birds sitting on marsh plants (Fig. 4).

Many of the themes presented by the decoration of the Stabian Baths also appear in the Sarno Baths (VIII 2,17) and the Suburban Baths (VII, *Ins. Occ.* 16), both of which were partly decorated by the Vettii Workshop<sup>11</sup>. In the Sarno Baths, a blue frieze with Nilotic landscapes populated by pygmies (Fig. 5) runs around the border of the pool in the *frigidarium* (7). On one of the room's walls, which is decorated with a scheme that strongly recalls that found in the Temple of Isis (VIII 7,28), a panel with a purification scene performed by a fluvial deity appears<sup>12</sup>. On one of the polychrome

<sup>8</sup> PPM Disegnatori (1995) 238–431 s. v. G. Abbate (I. Bragantini) 419 Fig. 246.

<sup>9</sup> PPM VI (1996) 149–219 s. v. VII 1, 8, Terme Stabiane (V. Sampaolo) 169–170 Figs. 36–37; PPM Disegnatori (1995) 572–776 s. v. N. La Volpe (I. Bragantini – V. Sampaolo) 663 Fig. 109.

<sup>10</sup> PPM VI (1996) 149–219 s. v. VII 1, 8, Terme Stabiane (V. Sampaolo) 212–213 Figs. 115–117.

<sup>11</sup> On the attribution of the decoration of the *frigidarium* (7) in the Sarno Baths to the Vettii Workshop, see Salvadori 2018. Even today, the decoration of the Suburban Baths remains almost completely unpublished. Nevertheless, the decoration of the *frigidarium* (9) and the stuccoed ceiling of the *apodyterium* (6) can be attributed to the same painters that worked at the Stabian Baths.

<sup>12</sup> See PPM VIII (1998) 94–135 s. v. VIII 2, 17–21, Complesso a sei piani delle Terme del Sarno (V. Sampaolo) 110 Fig. 25.



**Fig. 5:** Sarno Baths, *frigidarium* (7), frieze with pygmies.



**Fig. 6:** Sarno Baths, *frigidarium* (7), decoration of lunette.

stucco panels that decorate the ceiling, meanwhile, the theme of Hylas appears once more, just as it did in *palaestra* (C) of the Stabian Baths<sup>13</sup>. Finally, a lunette on the north wall was painted with a panel that portrays a fluvial deity sitting on a rock, holding an amphora from which water gushes forth (Fig. 6)<sup>14</sup>.

The *frigidarium* (9) of the Suburban Baths presents a compendium that includes the decorative repertoire employed in the Stabian Baths. The room is dominated by a polychrome mosaic nymphaeum with a central panel depicting Mars in flight, his weapons taken from him by a crowd of cupids (Fig. 7). The frieze above it shows a maritime *thiasus* and views of shrines built along the coast. The walls of the pool itself are decorated by large panels in which various figures and scenes appear: seascapes with fish and figures of Nereids riding bulls and sea horses, Nilotic landscapes with pygmies and scenes of naval battles (Fig. 8).

Thus, the users of the public baths of Pompeii could admire visual themes associated directly with the world of the *palaestra*, such as depictions of heroes and gods, or objects and attributes alluding to sporting victories. In other spaces they found themselves immersed in an exotic world characterised by Nilotic landscapes, as well as depictions of seascapes, hunting scenes and *nau-machiae*. It seems significant that in all of the examples mentioned so far, the Nilotic imagery almost always had a direct connection to water, either actually present, as in the pools of the *frigidaria* or

<sup>13</sup> See PPM VIII (1998) 94–135 s. v. VIII 2, 17–21, Complesso a sei piani delle Terme del Sarno (V. Sampaolo) 111 Figs. 27–28.

<sup>14</sup> See PPM VIII (1998) 94–135 s. v. VIII 2, 17–21, Complesso a sei piani delle Terme del Sarno (V. Sampaolo) 107 Fig. 19, 108 Fig. 20, 109 Fig. 22.





**Fig. 7:** Suburban Baths, *frigidarium* (9), mosaic fountain.



**Fig. 8:** Suburban Baths, *frigidarium* (9), detail of the pool's east wall.

the fountains of the *nymphaea*, or merely evoked, through the imagery of marshlands, seascapes or gardens populated by fountains.

If we extend the scope of our analysis to private buildings, it becomes evident that the same themes can be found there, too, in spaces that have functions analogous to those of the public buildings, such as private *balnea*, and in spaces that have a different function entirely, such as porticos, gardens, *oeci* and *triclinia*. A particularly pertinent example appears in the *frigidarium* (44) of the Casa del Centenario (IX 8,3,7). Here, the swimming pool is surrounded by Nilotic landscapes with pygmies, inserted into wide red frames that contain images of gardens<sup>15</sup>. The choice to place

<sup>15</sup> See Scagliarini et al. 2014, 114 n. 38; PPM IX (1999) 903–1104 s. v. IX 8, 3,7, Casa del Centenario (V. Sampaolo) 1077 Fig. 326.



**Fig. 9:** Casa del Centenario *nymphaeum* (33).

the scenes with pygmies around the pool is an interesting one. It resembles precisely what we see in the *frigidaria* of the Sarno and Suburban Baths (Figs. 5 and 8). Here, partially-immersed bathers could examine the pygmy frieze at eye level, while the figures themselves shimmered upon the surface of the water.

There is another area in the Casa del Centenario that displays the same decorative themes as its counterpart in the Stabian Baths: the *nymphaeum* (33) (Fig. 9). This room is paved in *cocciopesto* and contains a pool positioned in front of a fountain-*nymphaeum* decorated in mosaic and furnished with a cascade made of marble-covered steps. Below the steps is a panel – today almost completely unrecognisable – depicting a river god, the iconography of which mirrors that of the fluvial deity in the *frigidarium* of the Sarno Baths. The pool is surrounded by a *crypta*<sup>16</sup>, which is decorated with a painted dado depicting garden shrubbery and climbing plants amongst which exotic birds appear<sup>17</sup>. A continuous frieze running above the dado shows maritime landscapes populated by fish and ducks<sup>18</sup> as well as marshlands with additional waterfowl<sup>19</sup>. The walls that enclose a terrace above the niche are occupied by two types of images: large hunting scenes with wild animals and garden scenes depicting statues that resemble sphinxes<sup>20</sup>. A comparison between the paintings found in *nymphaeum* (33) and *frigidarium* (44) in the Casa del Centenario and the decoration employed in the Suburban Baths shows how areas with analogous functions can present similar decorative themes and systems, whether in ostensibly public or private buildings. This fact leads us to hypothesise that the users of these spaces likely perceived them in a similar way, despite the different social context.

As noted above, however, these decorative themes were also adopted for spaces with entirely different functions, especially in private settings. One example of this phenomenon is the faux-grotto *triclinium* (83) in the Praedia of Julia Felix (II 4,3). Facing onto a large garden with a large *euripus* (8), the back wall of the *triclinium* (83) contains a stepped cascade from which water flowed directly onto the pavement, between the couches of the marble-clad *triclinium*

<sup>16</sup> PPM IX (1999) 903–1104 s. v. IX 8, 3,7, Casa del Centenario (V. Sampaolo) 1001 Fig. 185. 1007 Fig. 199. 1023 Fig. 233. 1024 Fig. 235.

<sup>17</sup> PPM IX (1999) 903–1104 s. v. IX 8, 3,7, Casa del Centenario (V. Sampaolo) 996 Fig. 176. 999 Fig. 180. 1007–1008 Figs. 199–201. 1013 Fig. 211.

<sup>18</sup> PPM IX (1999) 903–1104 s. v. IX 8, 3,7, Casa del Centenario (V. Sampaolo) 1007–1010 Figs. 199–205. 1013–1014 Figs. 211–214.

<sup>19</sup> PPM IX (1999) 903–1104 s. v. IX 8, 3,7, Casa del Centenario (V. Sampaolo) 1001 Fig. 184. 1002–1004 Figs. 186–192. 1017 Fig. 219. 1018–1019 Figs. 222–226.

<sup>20</sup> PPM IX (1999) 903–1104 s. v. IX 8, 3,7, Casa del Centenario (V. Sampaolo) 1000–1001 Figs. 182–185. 1004–1005 Figs. 193–194. 1010 Fig. 206. 1015–1017 Figs. 216–219. 1020 Fig. 228.



**Fig. 10:** Praedia of Julia Felix, *triclinium* (83).



**Fig. 11:** Casa dell'Efebo, garden (23), view of the *triclinium*.

(Fig. 10). The walls were decorated with a megalographic depiction of a Nilotic landscape populated by pygmies<sup>21</sup>, while the barrel-vaulted ceiling of the hall was covered in travertine incrustations, so as to suggest the surroundings of a natural grotto from which a spring flowed forth.

An analogous arrangement can be observed in the garden (23) of the Casa dell'Efebo (I 7,11)<sup>22</sup>. Here, between the couches of a masonry *triclinium* decorated with a Nilotic frieze depicting dwarfs and pygmies, runs a canal fed by a fountain that sprang forth from an *aedicula* positioned above (Fig. 11). Yet another example appears in a small *cubiculum* (1) in the Casa dei Pigmei (IX 5,9), which is decorated by a large-scale frieze – almost a megalography, like that found in the *triclinium* of the Praedia of Julia Felix – that originally extended across all four walls (Fig. 12)<sup>23</sup>. The frieze displays Nilotic landscapes occupied by pygmies engaging in a variety of activities: they fight with crocodiles and hippopotami, fish in the river, transport wine amphorae on ships, make votive offerings at sanctuaries and so on<sup>24</sup>. Furthermore, occupants of this *cubiculum* could catch glimpses of the garden (i) through a window located in the south wall, while the north and west walls were originally decorated with scenes of animals hunting one another within a river landscape.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See PPM III (1991) 184–310 s. v. II 4, 3, Villa di Giulia Felice (V. Sampaolo) 263–267 Figs. 135–141.

<sup>22</sup> Barrett 2019, with previous bibliography.

<sup>23</sup> At present, only the *tectorium* can be seen on the west wall, but it is possible to identify traces of red paint that indicate the presence of a dado and a terminal cornice, which demonstrates that this wall too was originally decorated with the same scenes.

<sup>24</sup> PPM IX (1999) 486–527 s. v. IX 5, 9, Casa dei Pigmei (I. Bragantini) 506–519 Figs. 36–61.

<sup>25</sup> The hunting scene can still be seen in a reproduction of the house in the Plastico di Pompei.





**Fig. 12:** Casa dei Pigmei, *cubiculum* (I), megalography with dwarfs.

More difficult to interpret is the recurrence of this Nilotic theme in other types of public buildings, such as temples. *Pinakes* with pygmies appear, for example, in the decorative programmes of portico (A) in the Sanctuary of Apollo (VII 7,32)<sup>26</sup> and portico (1) in the Temple of Isis<sup>27</sup> (Figs. 13 and 16). The original position of the scenes in the Sanctuary of Apollo is uncertain, because the paintings were not adequately documented and have almost completely disappeared<sup>28</sup>. From the brief descriptions that are available<sup>29</sup> and from the watercolour paintings by Francesco Morelli<sup>30</sup> and William Gell<sup>31</sup> produced a couple of years after the building's excavation, it can be deduced that the scenes were placed inside predelle located below panels containing mythological paintings that decorated the middle zone of the wall<sup>32</sup>. The pictorial fields of this middle zone were also framed by

<sup>26</sup> PPM VII (1997) 286–304 s. v. VII 7, 32, Tempio di Apollo (V. Sampaolo) 296 Fig. 15.

<sup>27</sup> PPM VIII (1998) 732–849 s. v. VIII 7, 28, Tempio di Iside (V. Sampaolo) 741 Fig. 10. 743 Fig. 14. 744 Fig. 16. 746 Fig. 19. 756 Fig. 37. 764 Fig. 50. 771 Fig. 61. 773 Fig. 64. 774 Fig. 66. 778 Fig. 73. On the decoration of the Temple of Isis, see Sampaolo 1992; 1994; 1995; Moormann 2007.

<sup>28</sup> The paintings in the Sanctuary of Apollo are now almost completely lost, but detailed watercolours were produced by François Mazois, Félix-Emmanuel Callet and Pasquale Maria Veneri shortly after the discovery of the building. Excellent reproductions are found in Heslin 2015, 42f. Figs. 6–7 and *passim*. On the decoration of the Sanctuary of Apollo, see Moormann 2011, 71–82, in particular 82. For another interpretation of the sanctuary's decoration, with which the current author does not always agree, see Heslin 2015, 27–193.

<sup>29</sup> Summaries can be found in Moormann 2011, 81f. and Fig. 28 and Heslin 2015, 119–122 Figs. 57–58.

<sup>30</sup> Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, ADS 697.

<sup>31</sup> Gell 1819, Folio 61a–b. 62. 64a–b.

<sup>32</sup> Morelli's drawings depict two long friezes that are almost complete, while Gell reproduces only some details: see Gell 1819, Folio 61a–b. 62. 64a–b.

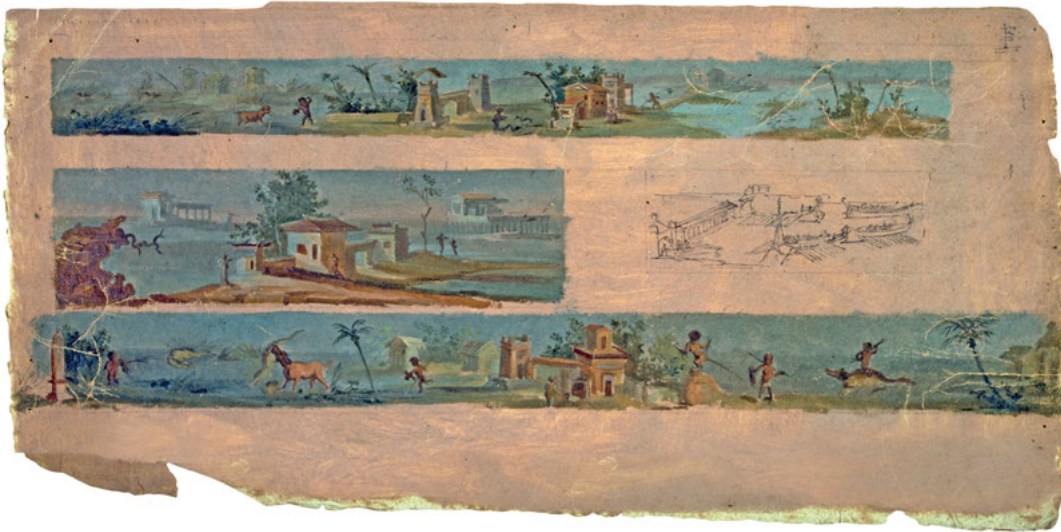


Fig. 13: Watercolour by F. Morelli depicting the predella with dwarfs in the Sanctuary of Apollo.

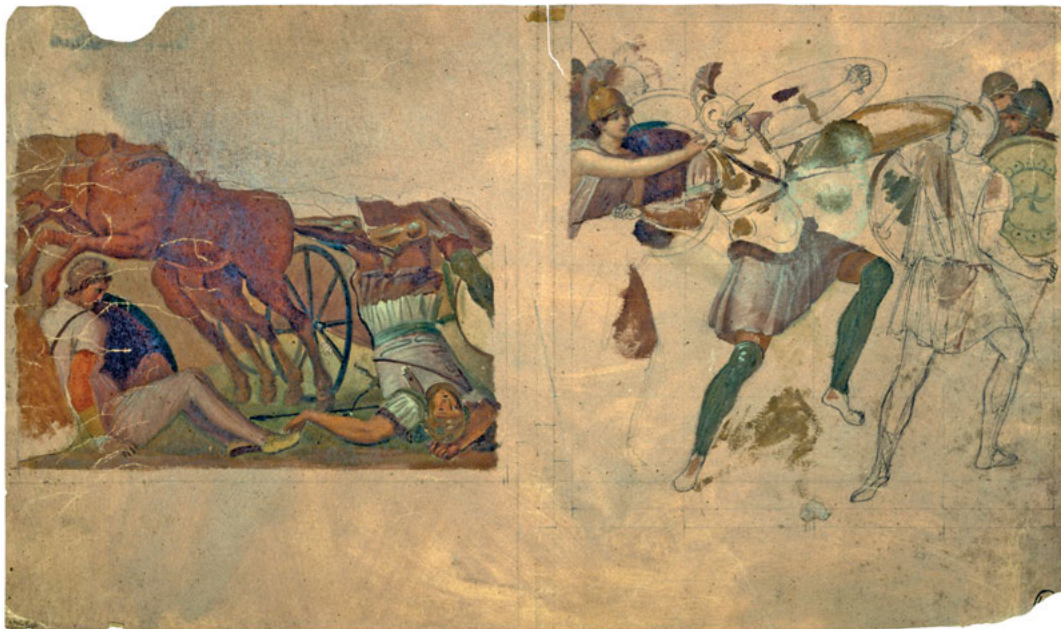


Fig. 14: Watercolor by F. Morelli recording panels from the Sanctuary of Apollo that depict scenes from the Iliad.

architectural vistas, the lower sections of which were themselves decorated by predelle depicting landscapes with small rustic shrines, villas and naval battles<sup>33</sup> (Fig. 13).

The mythological panels depicted episodes from the Iliad<sup>34</sup>, a subject undoubtedly appropriate for the decoration of a temple (Fig. 14). Vitruvius also points out how the *troianae pugnae* were a perfect subject for the decoration of porticos and *ambulationes*<sup>35</sup>. Walking along the porticos in the Sanctuary of Apollo, visitors' attention must have been drawn first by these mythological scenes. The painted architectural framework that enclosed them helped create the illusion that they were

<sup>33</sup> Gell 1819, Folio 60. 63a–b. 67. 71. 91.

<sup>34</sup> In 1818, Morelli reproduced some of the tableaux in watercolour; they also appeared in lithographs made by Anton von Steinbüchel (1833). Among those that are identifiable: battle scenes, the struggle between Achilles and Agamemnon, as well as Achilles dragging the body of Hector and Priam with Achilles. See Moormann 2011, 76–77; Heslin 2015, 51–138.

<sup>35</sup> Vitruvius, *De arch.* 7, 5, 2–3.





Fig. 15: Temple of Isis, portico (1), detail of the wall decoration.



Fig. 16: Temple of Isis, portico (1), panel with dwarfs.

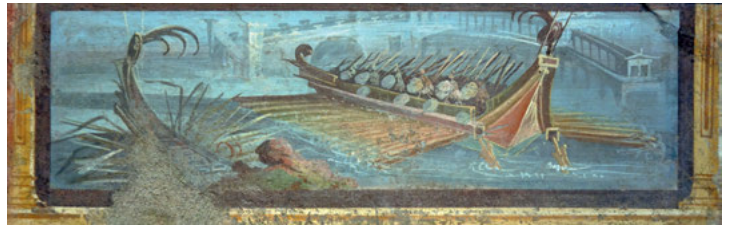


Fig. 17: Temple of Isis, portico (1): panel with *naumachiae*.

*tabulae pictae* hung upon the wall<sup>36</sup>. An emphasis on the figure of Achilles, a recurring protagonist in many of the scenes (Fig. 14), has led to hypotheses about a connection to a revival of this hero par excellence and the renewal of the Augustan *aurea aetas* during the reign of Nero<sup>37</sup>. If the choice of scenes from the Iliad for the decoration of the portico can be considered fully compliant with the political ideology of the time, the adoption of Nilotic themes for the predelle is perhaps less coherent with its broader pictorial programme. According to Eric Moormann, the Nilotic scenes, alongside the depictions of landscapes and *naumachiae*, belong to the standard repertoire of the Fourth Style, and it is therefore difficult to assign a specific meaning to them that is coherent with the decorative context as a whole<sup>38</sup>. Peter Heslin, on the other hand, follows an interesting hypothesis first formulated by Carlo Bonucci in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, according to which the Nilotic scenes containing pygmies could have functioned as a comic counterpart to the Trojan saga shown in the main panels<sup>39</sup>. Bonucci's astute interpretation permits, in fact, a better contextualisation of the Nilotic theme, which at first glance seems inappropriate for the decoration of a sanctuary: by depicting dwarfs and pygmies, the erudite subject matter presented in the mythological tableaux is subverted in a comedic vein.

<sup>36</sup> Heslin erroneously hypothesises that some panels were actually created elsewhere and subsequently inserted into the wall. See Heslin 2015, 173–178.

<sup>37</sup> On the importance and meaning of the Iliadic scenes, see Schefold 1975, reiterated by Moormann 2011, 78 f. On the *imitatio Achillis* in the Neronian era see Bragantini 2009, 196–200.

<sup>38</sup> Moormann 2011, 81 f.

<sup>39</sup> Heslin 2015, 121 f.; Bonucci 1827, 153: 'Nelle altre (pitture) si vede ricordata qualche scena delle battaglie de' Pigmei contro le Grù. Comico contrapposto, col quale il Pittore ha voluto forse tradurci in diverso linguaggio l'ironia con cui Omero solea contemplare le gagliardie de' topi e de' ranocchi'.

A similar procedure was employed for the decoration of the *plutei* in garden (g) of the Casa del Medico (VIII 5,28), on which a parody of the Judgment of Solomon appears, with the historical figures involved transformed into dwarfs. The effect is enhanced by the coupling of this episode with scenes of pygmies battling exotic animals and engaging in orgiastic banquets<sup>40</sup>. The predelle of the Sanctuary of Apollo demonstrate, therefore, how it is not always easy to reduce the complexity of a decorative programme and arrive at a correct interpretation of all its elements, including those that appear to be not coherent with the overall context.

The Temple of Isis presents a different situation. The organisation of the sanctuary seems to have been conceived above all to encourage the viewer to explore visually the full extent of the space. At the entrance to the temple complex, one's gaze is immediately drawn to the *purgatorium*, as well as the mass of the temple itself, built at the centre of the small courtyard. Gradually, visitors might have recognised the altars, inscriptions and statues erected along the aisles of the portico.

The paratactic decorative scheme in portico (1) was applied without adapting it to the architectural space that enclosed it<sup>41</sup>. The walls do not display mythological panels, but rather vignettes containing figures of Isiac priests<sup>42</sup> alternating with Egyptianising landscapes. All of them are small in size. The only pictorial element on which the attention of viewers could linger was a panel depicting Harpocrates, inserted into a large niche positioned on the back wall of the east portico, and preceded by a monumental *prothyron* aligned with the façade of the temple. Behind the temple, five arches gave access to the *ekklesiasterion*, a space decorated with large-scale sacred landscapes and mythological panels. These are the only mythological scenes discovered in the temple's vicinity, apart from those located in the priests' private *cubiculum*. A *sacrarium* located at the south end of the complex was decorated in a style entirely different to the portico and *ekklesiasterion*; it has been suggested that this is the work of one of the cult's followers<sup>43</sup>.

Thus, the decoration of the Temple of Isis seems to have been rigidly and hierarchically organised to direct the gaze towards the principal elements of the cult. The secondary decoration on the walls of the portico displays the same subjects present in the Sanctuary of Apollo: depictions of temples and shrines, *naumachiae* and Nilotic scenes with pygmies, as well as still lifes (Figs. 15–17). All of these represent forms of exotic imagery that we might generally characterise as 'Egyptianising'. In the landscapes, for example, Egyptian altars, obelisks and shrines often appear. The Nilotic scenes do not adopt a humorous tone as in the Sanctuary of Apollo and Casa del Medico, but rather display genre scenes similar to those in room (1) of the Casa dei Pigmei. The *naumachiae*— one of which includes not only ships in battle order, but in the midst of a genuine combat (Fig. 17) — may refer to actual battles, perhaps even *Actium*<sup>44</sup>. Finally, the still lifes, which represent one of the most pervasive elements of Fourth Style painting, may refer to the prosperity guaranteed by Isis<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> Clarke 2007, 98–105 Pls. 4–8.

<sup>41</sup> The decoration scheme does not take into account, for example, the large niche that occupies part of the portico's south wall.

<sup>42</sup> On representations of Isiac priests, see Moormann 2018.

<sup>43</sup> See Moormann 2011, 156 f. 162.

<sup>44</sup> On possible connections between the *naumachiae* and actual battles, see Avilia – Jacobelli 1989, 146–148; Moormann 2011, 159–161.

<sup>45</sup> Moormann 2011, 159–161.

## Spatial design and perception, patrons and artisans

After this long overview, we can now return to the questions posed at the beginning of this paper, starting with the first one: how could the design of a space itself have an influence on its viewers or users? The preceding pages have laid out how Nilotic imagery was one of the most sought-after themes for the decoration of both public and private spaces during the period of the Fourth Style, and resulted in a proliferation of depictions of fluvial landscapes populated by pygmies and dwarfs. These images, often analysed in isolation<sup>46</sup>, take on different meanings depending upon the spaces that they decorate, as well as their connection to other themes and decorative motifs within them<sup>47</sup>. Initially, the depictions of pygmies appear to relate directly to the function of the environment in which they are used, particularly in settings that are characterised by the real or suggested presence of water: in the *frigidaria* and *nymphaea* of the Stabian, Suburban and Sarno Baths, the *balneum* and *nymphaeum* of the Casa del Centenario, as well as the *triclinia* of the Praedia of Julia Felix and the Casa dell'Efebo and the garden of the Casa del Medico. In all of these contexts, water seems to have played a central role with respect to the perception of the imagery. Visitors to the baths, in particular, were literally immersed in a phantasmagorical and playful world, characterised by the presence of pygmies engaged in humorous (or outright obscene) activities just above the water level.

John Clarke is convinced that the small courtyard of the Casa del Medico, which was paved in *cocciopesto*, was perhaps kept continuously half-flooded so that the scenes depicting dwarfs and pygmies reflected upon the water's surface, and in a certain way appeared to be alive<sup>48</sup>. The same effect was achieved in the two *nymphaea* in the Stabian Baths, the *nymphaeum* in the Casa del Centenario and the small *euripus* that bisects the Casa dell'Efebo's summer *triclinium*. The effect must have been even more evocative in the *triclinium* in the Praedia of Julia Felix, where the diners, stretched out on their *klinai*, were surrounded by megalographic Nilotic landscapes, imagery that dramatically expanded the closed space of the dining hall. The entrance to *triclinium* (83), which faced onto the large garden with its pool-*euripus*, contributed to the effect, merging the Nilotic scenes evoked on the painted walls with the actual landscape of the garden. *Cubiculum* (1) in the Casa dei Pigmei must have achieved a similar effect. Despite the small size of the room, the Nilotic megalography extended the space beyond the boundary of the walls, and the large window facing onto the garden allowed viewers to contemplate the vista of a fluvial landscape.

As we have seen, in all of these examples there appears to be a direct connection between the choice of the decorative theme – Nilotic landscapes with dwarfs and pygmies – and water. This connection could be employed for the arrangement of different types of environments: *nymphaea* and rooms in bath suites, but also *viridaria*, *triclinia*, *oeci* and *cubicula diurna* inside the *domus*. The design of these spaces seems to have been conceived for the amusement and entertainment of the customers of the baths or for visitors to the *domus*. These decorated spaces stimulated different levels of attention. When entering the *palaestra* of the Stabian Baths, or the gardens of the Praedia of Julia Felix or Casa dell'Efebo, visitors were surrounded by a multiform decorative apparatus, in which the architecture, foliage of the garden, fountains, *euripi* and *nymphaea* with their accompanying array of sculptures, as well as the rich and varied pictorial decoration, were intended to impress the viewer immediately. During the visit to a bath house, or over the course of a *convivium*, viewers had the opportunity to let their gaze linger, fixing their attention on the various visual stimuli that surrounded them.

In other cases, the depictions of pygmies helped shape the semantic connotations of an environment in connection with other themes. This allows us also to address the second question posed at the beginning of this paper: how might the activities in which viewers were engaged affect their

<sup>46</sup> See Versluys 2002; Tybout 2003; Bricault et al. 2007.

<sup>47</sup> See Barrett 2017; 2019.

<sup>48</sup> Clarke 2007, 101f. Pls. 4–5.

perception of decorative elements? The best examples for analysing this aspect are the Nilotic friezes that decorated the Temple of Isis and Sanctuary of Apollo in Pompeii. In the Temple of Isis, the Nilotic theme played a secondary role in the overall programme employed in the sanctuary's porticos. The decorative scheme adopts a paratactic structure with large fields in red divided by slender architectural views that incorporate *pinakes* depicting various types of scenes: still lifes<sup>49</sup>, *naumachiae*<sup>50</sup>, landscapes with Egyptianising shrines<sup>51</sup> and images of pygmies<sup>52</sup>. The pygmies also appear on the long spiral frieze set above the middle zone of the portico's walls<sup>53</sup>. Eric Moormann has argued that the *pinakes* allude to the prosperity of the Roman Empire, which was placed under the protection of the goddess worshipped in the sanctuary and guaranteed by the military victories of Rome, perhaps evoked in the *pinakes* depicting *naumachiae*<sup>54</sup>. Therefore, the paintings with pygmies in the Temple of Isis contribute, together with all the other elements of the building's decorative programme, to evoke a vaguely Egyptianising atmosphere within a hybrid complex, in which Egyptian and Roman elements exist alongside one another<sup>55</sup>.

In the Sanctuary of Apollo, on the other hand, the predelle with depictions of pygmies constitute a comedic *variatio* of the Iliadic paintings placed in the centre of the middle zone. They therefore enrich the decorative context in which they appear with additional meaning. Visitors to the temple would have encountered numerous stimuli depending on whether they focused their attention on the mythological panels, characterised by the epic theme, or on the predelle, which presented, albeit indirectly, a parody of the same themes. In adopting this double register (cultured/serious for the main panels, comedic/satirical for the lower zone), the painters of the Vettii Workshop were taking part in a well-established figurative and literary tradition that dated back to the Late Republican period. The frieze from *triclinium* (C) of the Villa della Farnesina in Rome and the frieze depicting the 'feast of the dwarfs' found in the *triclinium* of the so-called Domus dei Bucrani underneath the Scuola di Traiano at Ostia<sup>56</sup> offer exceptional testimony of this custom. As Jean-Marc Moret has astutely demonstrated, such images can be connected to the dwarfs associated with Mark Antony and consequently to the conflict between Antony and Octavian (also fought through imagery) that culminated in the former's defeat at *Actium*<sup>57</sup>. Echoes of this practice, which recasts historical facts, religious rites or episodes derived from epic literature and mythology in a satirical or distorted manner, can also be found in Late Republican Pompeii. The Iliadic frieze from the Casa del Criptoportico (I 6,4)<sup>58</sup>, for example, sits in contrast to the depiction of the Olympic gods and heroes such as Theseus as dwarfs in *atriolum* (46) of the Casa del Menandro's bath suite (I 10,4)<sup>59</sup>.

However, the friezes with dwarfs and pygmies from the Late Republic represent an educated choice that remained the prerogative of high-status private clientele, who, in participating in the era's chief conflict, were adopting a political (or at least an ideological) stance that was potentially dangerous<sup>60</sup>. By including similar imagery in the Sanctuary of Apollo, the Vettii Workshop transposed this decorative choice into the public sphere, which in itself represents an interesting innovation. An explanation for this development can be found in the more relaxed political atmosphere

<sup>49</sup> There are at least three still lifes preserved on the walls of the east and west porticos.

<sup>50</sup> At least five naval battles can be counted, placed along all four sides of the portico.

<sup>51</sup> These appear at least four times.

<sup>52</sup> These can be seen only twice, both in the east portico.

<sup>53</sup> See PPM VIII (1998) 732–849 s. v. VIII 7, 28, Tempio di Iside (V. Sampaolo) 756 f. Figs. 36–39. 785 Fig. 85.

<sup>54</sup> Moormann (2011, 160 f.) discusses the various interpretations of the temple's decorative programme.

<sup>55</sup> Moormann 2011, 162.

<sup>56</sup> Villa della Farnesina: Bragantini – Pirelli 2007; Mols – Moormann 2008, 37–44. Domus dei Bucrani: Bocherens 2012; Moret 2012a.

<sup>57</sup> Moret 2012b.

<sup>58</sup> Spinazzola 1953, 905–970.

<sup>59</sup> Clarke 2007, 133–143. On the attribution of the friezes in the Casa del Criptoportico and Casa del Menandro to a single group of painters, see Esposito 2020.

<sup>60</sup> Moret 2012b.

of the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., at least two generations after the battle at *Actium*, when the empire was well-established and prosperous; circumstances, in short, that made it possible to include the types of iconographic elements that in the past would have (at the very least) caused a certain degree of awkwardness.

The decorative choices made over time with regard to figurative themes, and the potential hierarchical relationship between these themes and decorated spaces as a whole, urge us to consider the third and most elusive question: in what way did the intentions of patrons and artists influence the production of specific forms of *decor*? As noted above, many of the buildings considered in this paper were decorated by a specific group of painters known as the Vettii Workshop.<sup>61</sup> This is an important point of reference, because it offers the possibility to evaluate the production of a specific group of craftsmen in relation to the type (public/private) and the status (high/low) of the client.

The painters of the Vettii Workshop were able to propose a fairly large repertoire of images and decorative elements, which they could adapt to various spaces. In this sense it can be said that the decorators of the Vettii Workshop profoundly influenced the ‘decorative landscape’ of Pompeii during the Neronian-Flavian period. Visitors to the Stabian Baths, *Macellum* (VII 9,7), Sanctuary of Apollo and Temple of Isis were surely capable of recognising the decoration they encountered there. This is evidenced by the fact that the owners of some of the richest Pompeian *domūs* requested decoration clearly inspired by those of the public buildings decorated by the Vettii Workshop.

As we have seen, the Vettii Workshop was able to modulate its own decorative repertoire according to the building it was commissioned to paint. The Nilotic theme, with its depictions of fluvial landscapes populated by pygmies or dwarfs, was adapted each time to a specific setting and function. Thus, the friezes with pygmies in the *nymphaea* of the Stabian Baths and the *frigidaria* of the Sarno and Suburban Baths underline the atmosphere of escapism inherent to these places of relaxation and physical wellness. Water played a fundamental role in these surroundings, as was also the case in the *triclinia* of the Casa dell’Efebo and the Praedia of Julia Felix, as well as the garden of the Casa del Medico.

In sacred contexts, on the other hand, the painters of the Vettii Workshop used the Nilotic theme to evoke a different atmosphere, as in the Temple of Isis, where they sought to recreate or suggest an ‘Egyptian’, or at least vaguely ‘Egyptianising’, milieu. In the Sanctuary of Apollo, the Nilotic panels accompany the main theme developed in the Iliadic friezes of the portico, playing on the ironic reversal of the epic itself through the humorous struggles of the pygmies with hippopotami and crocodiles.

The great versatility of the Vettii Workshop’s repertoire is not, however, sufficient to explain the specific choices made in the various types of spaces that required decoration. These choices must in all likelihood be attributed to the will of the clients, and thus the reasons for them are often difficult to specify, not least because these individuals often remain rather shadowy figures. Even if we take the Temple of Isis as an example, a place for which we have precise epigraphic data (constituted by the dedicatory inscription that recalls the temple’s reconstruction by the Popidii), questions about the identity and the choices of the patrons remain open. Who chose the type of decoration for the walls of the portico? Was it Numerius Popidius Ampliatus, who, together with his son Celsinus and his wife Corelia Celsa, financed the reconstruction and decoration of the building? Was it the Isiac priests who indicated the themes appropriate for the redecoration of the sanctuary? Or was it perhaps the result of an agreement between the Popidii and the priests? To these questions there are obviously no straightforward answers. We can only respond with speculation. Emblematic is the example of the painted figures in the *sacrarium*<sup>62</sup>, which are judged to be of poor ‘artistic quality’ and therefore viewed as the work of an amateur, perhaps a local follower of the cult of Isis who frequented the sanctuary. What has not been considered, however, is that these paintings were

<sup>61</sup> See Esposito 2009.

<sup>62</sup> See PPM VIII (1998) 732–849 s. v. VIII 7, 28, Tempio di Iside (V. Sampaolo) 813–21 Figs. 170–176. 178–179. 182–183.

executed by artisans specialised in painting *lararia* and façades<sup>63</sup>. The manner in which the *agathodaimones* and the ship of Isis were rendered should be enough to dispel any doubts. Whoever commissioned the work in the Temple of Isis, then, turned to a workshop quite popular in this period for the decoration of the most important and representative spaces, while entrusting in the execution of the paintings in the so-called *sacrarium* to individuals specialising in façade and *lararium* paintings.

In many of the contexts analysed above, therefore, the role of the painters seems to be limited to satisfying the desires of the patrons and adapting their own rich decorative repertoire from one instance to the next. In conclusion, it can be said that the decorators were allowed a certain degree of freedom, especially with regard to the architectural frame and the secondary decorative motifs. The choice of the elements that carried semantic significance within the decorated space nevertheless remained up to the patrons. It was the patrons, in fact, who requested in each individual instance that the schemes be adapted to the function of the spaces requiring decoration, according to their own requirements, the message (cultic, cultural, ideological or political) they wished to communicate and their own taste. One can therefore agree with Annette Haug when she asserts that the notion of ‘appropriateness’ must have been constantly renegotiated between patrons and painters<sup>64</sup>. This relationship nevertheless seems to tilt in favour of the former, the patrons, who dictated the guidelines, even if only in the form of their *desiderata*. The latter, the decorators, were charged with the task of following these choices by relying on their own technical skills and the richness of the decorative repertoire that they were able to offer.

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<sup>63</sup> On this type of painting, see Fröhlich 1991.

<sup>64</sup> Haug, this volume.



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Anne Kleineberg

## The Capitolium at Brescia in the Flavian Period

**Abstract:** The Capitolium at Brescia is one of the rare well-preserved examples of this temple type in Roman Italy. Large parts of its architecture, interior design and the forum area to which it was connected, can be reconstructed. This case study will provide a systematic analysis of the Capitolium, focusing on the aesthetic and semantic effects of its decorative elements, as well as their correlation and interaction in the creation of specific spatial qualities. Consequently, various aspects – such as the urban setting, architecture and layout, different features of the interior design and the framework of action, i. e., that of ritual performances – will be taken into account.

Temples located in the forum helped to define the political and religious centre of Roman cities. At Brescia (Roman Brixia), located between Milan and Verona<sup>1</sup>, the Capitolium was rebuilt during the reign of the emperor Vespasian, a process that was completed in A.D. 72/73<sup>2</sup> (Figs. 1–3). Distinctive features of the temple were its position on a high terrace on the southern slope of the Colle Cidneo and its transverse layout, which included three large *cellae* (dedicated to Jupiter, Juno and Minerva), two rooms of unknown function<sup>3</sup> and lateral porticos. The elongated forum was situated directly to the south of the Capitolium area, enclosed by porticos at the sides and a basilica at the end of the square. The two areas were separated by a remarkable difference in height and by the elevated *decumanus maximus*, which crossed the city in an east-west direction. In recent decades, numerous studies and new excavation projects have helped to delineate the development and architectural design of the temple and the forum<sup>4</sup>. Apart from a few exceptions, the individual decorative features that adorned the exterior and interior spaces have been analysed only in isolation<sup>5</sup>.

According to Vitruvius, the urban setting of Roman temples, and especially Capitolia, guaranteed their visibility in the ancient cityscape<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, certain principles of *decor* – including symmetry, consistent proportions and a certain set of *ornamenta* – were appropriate for the design of such a temple<sup>7</sup>. As a result, the perception of the temple was affected by the building's proportions, rhythm, the tectonic structure, as well as the decorative features applied to the columns, entablature and pediment. From Vitruvius' point of view, all forms of *decor* were related to one another.

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1 The city, which was located in the former territory of the Cenomani, was given the rank of a *colonia civica Augusta* in the Augustan period. For the history of Brescia, see Albertini 1979, 152–171 and Rossi 2012.

2 The Flavian date is confirmed by the inscription preserved on the architrave (CIL V, 4312): cf. Panazza 2012. The interpretation of the temple as the Capitolium is secured by a dedicatory inscription belonging to an altar, which has been fragmentarily preserved. See Gregori 2014, 319 f. Fig. 1.

3 For the room next to the eastern *cella*, see Dell'Acqua 2014, 346–348.

4 The first excavations in the area of the temple were carried out between 1823 and 1826. For a history of research, see Dell'Acqua 2012, 80–82. In addition to the important studies of Hanns Gabelmann and Antonio Frova, which concern the layout and architecture of the temple and the forum, the results of excavations carried out during the 1990s are fundamental; see Mirabella Roberti 1961, esp. 256–259; Gabelmann 1971, 124–145; Frova 1979, 218–240; 1990; Rossi 1995; Gros 1996, 168–170. 214 f.; Rossi 1996; 1998; Bacchetta 2008; Sacchi et al. 2011; Dander 2014d. Antonio Dell'Acqua has presented detailed studies on the architecture and ornamentation of the temple: see Dell'Acqua 2012 and Dell'Acqua 2014.

5 Gabelmann (1971, 142 f.), in particular, focused on the interplay between decorative features in the architectural design of the forum and the Capitolium, describing the effects of the built architecture and the materials used. Despite numerous new and important insights into the design of the building's interior, floors and walls (Angelelli – Guidobaldi 2002; Angelelli – Dell'Acqua 2014), cult images and additional furnishings (Gabelmann 1969; Franken 2002; Locatelli 2002; Slavazzi – Invernizzi 2014) are only treated separately.

6 Vit. De arch. 1, 7, 1.

7 See the essential categories provided by the introduction to this volume by Annette Haug.



Fig. 1: Brescia, Capitulum.

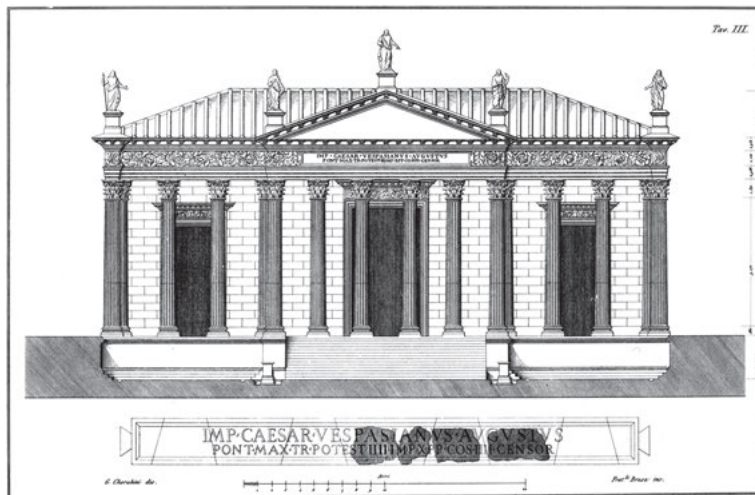
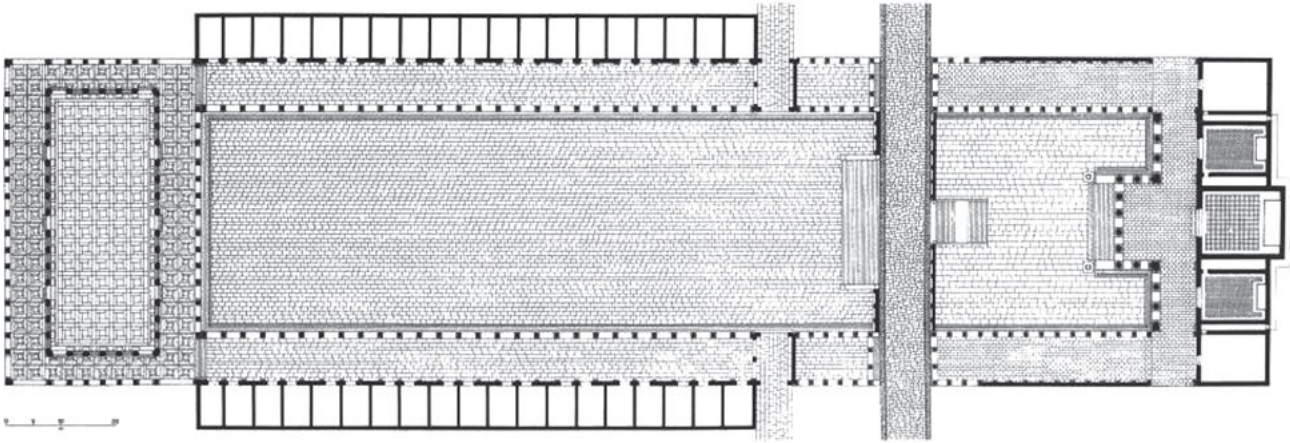


Fig. 2: Brescia, Capitulum, reconstruction.

Apart from these recommendations, some of which remain ideal, the perception of Roman temples was determined by their architecture, their urban setting and the different forms of ritual activities associated with them. However, neither the complex ritual actions of the *sacra publica* that took place in front of *and* inside the temple<sup>8</sup>, nor the possibility of private animal sacrifices performed in honour of the Capitoline Triad at Rome (as described by Juvenal)<sup>9</sup>, can be treated in detail here. Instead, this case study aims to explore how the architectural design and spatial organisation of the Capitulum, as well as the materials employed in its construction, affected the perception of indi-

<sup>8</sup> On the primary components and various aspects of the Roman sacrifice (procession, pre-offering, animal sacrifice, *lectisternium* inside the temple, etc.), cf. Rupke 2001, 137–153; Scheid 2003, 79–100; 2005, 44–57; Prescendi 2007, 31–51; Linke 2014, 21–31. 112–116. Among the most important ritual acts that took place inside the temple were the ritual purification and crowning of the cult statue(s): cf. Ov. Fast. 4, 135–138; 3, 253 f. and the overview given in ThesCRA 2004 s. v. Rites et activités relatifs aux images de culte; Couronnes végétales, guirlandes, rameaux et bandelettes pour l'image cultuelle (C. Lochin – N. Blanc) 451–456 esp. 452 f. nos. 301–309. 319; 455 f. nos. 338–352.

<sup>9</sup> In gratitude for the salvation of his friend, Juvenal (Sat. 12, 3–19) describes the arrangement of a sacrifice in front of the temple of the Capitoline Triad with sacrificial animals for Jupiter (a white bull), Juno and Minerva (a white lamb each).



viduals approaching the temple from the forum. Here we shall follow in the footsteps of a prospective supplicant, who proceeds from the lower forum piazza towards the temple, before eventually entering the *cella* to make a private prayer or offering<sup>10</sup>.

**Fig. 3:** Brescia, layout of the Capitolium and the forum area.

## Exterior design: the forum and Capitolium area

A person entering the forum from the south (i. e., by passing through the basilica)<sup>11</sup> could perceive immediately the architectural and spatial extension of the forum square (120 × 40 m)<sup>12</sup>, the lateral porticos (home to *tabernae*) and the essential elements of the Capitolium, high on the slope of the Colle Cidneo. It is evident that the arrangement of the buildings was influenced by these types of distant viewing positions. The location of the Capitolium on axis with the square and the forum's symmetrical porticos, which were situated in line with the lateral porticos of the temple, staggered the architectural features in a fixed spatial reference system. Due to the difference in height between the Capitolium and the forum piazza (Figs. 4–5), an aesthetically spectacular impact was created<sup>13</sup>. The porticos at the sides of the forum established a heterogeneous frame for the square and directed the viewer's gaze towards the Capitolium. The scenographic effect created by the Capitolium was emphasised by its central location and its higher position in comparison to the porticos located on the terrace (see below). The enormous scale of the complex was emphasised by the large number of columns across its front, with the temple's main entrance enhanced by a distinctive, projecting pediment and the staircase leading up to it (although from the southern end of the forum, the depth of the extended *pronaos* would hardly have been visible). The Capitolium area was further emphasised by the white limestone employed in its architecture, which reflected the light and distinguished the building from the green, verdant backdrop of the hill.

The contrasting architectural design of the Capitolium and forum areas also created a sequence of different spatial impressions. The porticos that enclosed the forum piazza on the east and west

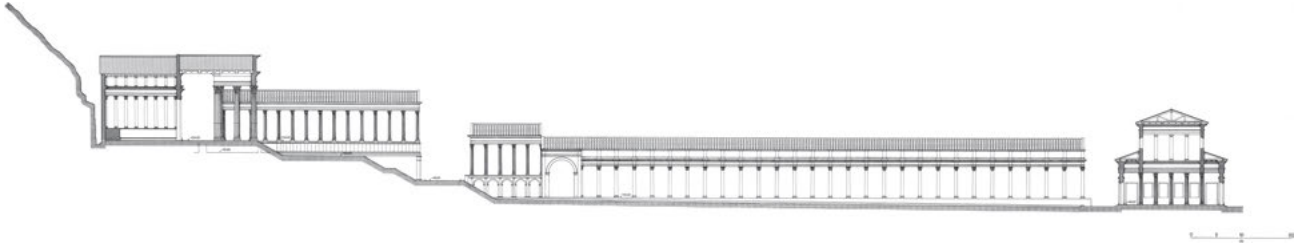
<sup>10</sup> In principle, access to Roman temples appears to have been granted for private prayers addressing the gods, including the deposition of votive offerings inside the temple: cf. Mattern 2001, 57. Access to the Capitolium in Rome was special in the sense that a priest was solely responsible for announcing the name of the visitor to Jupiter Optimus Maximus. Furthermore, the gods are said to have been called upon to act as guarantors, to receive statements of claim submitted to them and to have disputes performed in front of them: Aug. Civ. 6, 10; cf. Pekáry 1985, 117 n. 21.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Mirabella Roberti 1961, 256–259; Rossi 1995; Sacchi et al. 2011. For a detailed analysis of the basilica, see Rossi 1998, 17–41.

<sup>12</sup> Rossi 1995, 330. Previous data indicating 140 × 41 m are no longer valid.

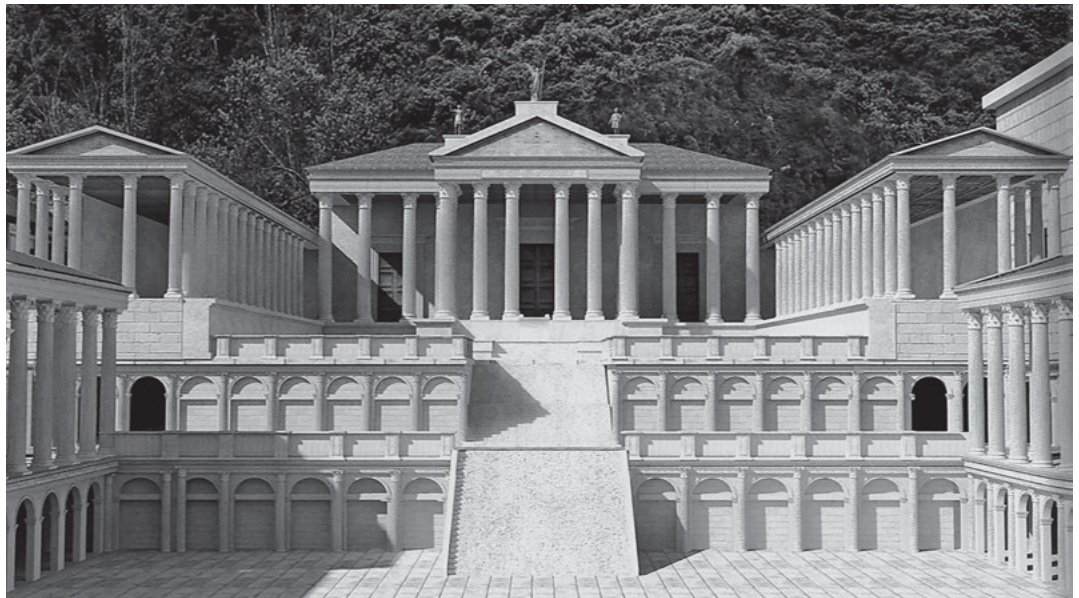
<sup>13</sup> The difference in height between the forum pavement and the running level of the terrace is 8.5 m (Sacchi et al. 2011, 116).





**Fig. 4:** Brescia, the various levels of the Capitulum and the forum area.

were elevated above the pavement of the square, accessible by three steps (Figs. 4; 6–7)<sup>14</sup>. Apart from the column shafts and bases, which were produced in coloured and white marble, respectively, white Botticino limestone was used for the architectural features of the porticos<sup>15</sup>. The columns, which measure 6.33 m in height, were set on Attic bases and plinths and topped with Corinthian capitals<sup>16</sup>. The shafts were produced from single pieces of grey marble<sup>17</sup>; they lacked flutes, making the irregular veining on their surfaces easily visible. The entablature above consisted of various decorative features, including an architrave with three *fasciae*. Judging by the technical treatment of the upper side of the blocks, the porticos were probably topped by an attic zone (Fig. 7)<sup>18</sup>. In correlation with the columns, parts of the architrave and the entablature projected slightly outward. As Gabelmann correctly pointed out: ‘Auf diese Weise werden die horizontalen Linien der Hallenarchitektur durch Vertikalakzente unterbrochen, die die Säulenachsen betonen’<sup>19</sup>. While the porti-



**Fig. 5:** Brescia, reconstruction of the Capitulum and the terrace, as seen from the forum.

<sup>14</sup> Rossi 1995, 338. The pavement of the forum is not preserved.

<sup>15</sup> Sacchi et al. 2011, 117.

<sup>16</sup> Filli Rossi (1995, 330) assesses the height of the columns including the base and capital. According to Mirabella Roberti (1961, 256), the lower diameter of the columns is 0.67 m, the intercolumniation is 2.90 m and the depth of the porticos is approximately 5 m. The floor consisted of white and grey marble slabs arranged in a rectangular pattern, similar to the one used inside the basilica (Rossi 1996 and Morandini 2006, 34). For detailed discussion of the porticos' architecture, see Sacchi et al. 2011.

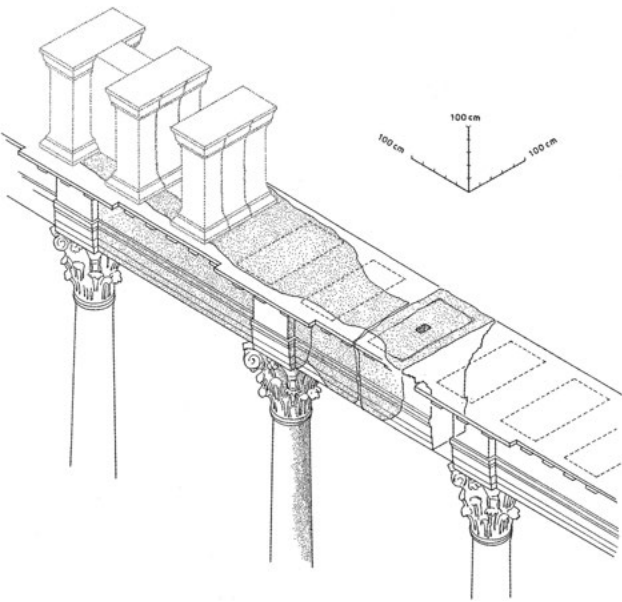
<sup>17</sup> Described as cipollino by Gabelmann (1971, 131) and Rossi (1995, 330), as pavonazzetto by Mirabella Roberti (1961, 254) and possibly as proconnesian marble in Sacchi et al. 2011, 122f.

<sup>18</sup> Rossi 1996, 81; Sacchi et al. 2011, 119f. Figs. 9. 10. Cf. also Frova 1979, 225 and Stella et al. 1979b, 90–94 cat. IV 2–6. Gabelmann (1971, 131) had previously proposed two-storey porticos.

<sup>19</sup> Gabelmann 1971, 127. On intensified illusionism as a decorative principle employed in Flavian architecture, see Gabelmann 1971, 128 and Strocka 2010, 98–104 esp. 99f. 113, 122 with further literature.



**Fig. 6:** Brescia, reconstructed section of the eastern portico.



**Fig. 7:** Brescia, reconstruction of the portico's attic zone.

cos did not frame the entire length of the forum, their colonnades added a uniform rhythm to the space and directed the viewer's gaze towards the higher Capitolium. At the north end of the forum, however, this rhythm was disrupted by monumental arches and (possibly) raised loggias (Fig. 4)<sup>20</sup>. The north wall may have been decorated in the same manner as the façade of the terrace above, with pilasters and arches (Fig. 5)<sup>21</sup>.

As one crossed the square, the perception of the temple changed with the decreasing distance. The vast forum piazza, *decumanus maximus* and the level of the terrace were connected via two

<sup>20</sup> Sacchi et al. 2011, 116–118.

<sup>21</sup> Rossi 1995, 330.



sets of stairs<sup>22</sup>, which defined a specific direction of movement and directed the gaze towards the temple's façade. Passing through these different levels, a rhythmisation of spaces – from wide, open expanses to narrower passages – would have become apparent. From the forum, the stairs led to the *decumanus maximus*, which formally separated the forum and the Capitolium area<sup>23</sup>. At this point, the high terrace wall, which extended to the west and east, would have come into view. This wall was rhythmically structured through the use of engaged arches and pilasters (set in low relief), with a balustrade probably positioned above them (Fig. 5)<sup>24</sup>.

The temple, upper porticos and altar<sup>25</sup> were only visible upon reaching the level of the terrace, which was accessible via a wide staircase positioned on axis with the temple's front. From this point of view, the viewer was confronted with the outstanding architectural design of the area. On the one hand, the structural unity of the Capitolium area was obvious. The columns of the temple and the flanking porticos enclosed the terrace on three sides and were connected by a podium of the same height<sup>26</sup>. The coherence of the architectural design was emphasised by a comparable set of architectural features and the use of white Botticino limestone throughout, which created a bright impression through its light-reflecting properties. On the other hand, the temple was highlighted as the featured element of the complex, not only by the sheer dimensions of the façade<sup>27</sup>, but also by its projecting *pronaos* and staircase<sup>28</sup>, which sat on an axis with the middle *cella* (Fig. 3). Reaching the monumental staircase of the temple, the viewer was directly confronted with the monumental architecture of the temple, with a total height of slightly more than 20 m (Fig. 2).

The columns that decorated the front of the hexastyle Capitolium sat on Attic bases and were topped with Corinthian capitals. They were fluted, although on the lower part of the columns, these flutes were partially filled (so-called 'Rundstabfüllung') and thus were actually convex<sup>29</sup>. This decorative feature introduced an additional horizontal plane throughout the complex. As vertical elements, the columns directed the view upwards towards the finely decorated entablature and pediment. The architrave, with its three *fasciae*, was heavily embellished with ornament, which consisted of running dog, astragal and stirrup-framed leaf and dart motifs, among others, while the frieze displayed elaborately worked leafy tendrils<sup>30</sup>. Above the extended *pronaos*, the Capitolium's inscription, probably framed by a *tabula*, was especially emphasised, occupying most of the frieze zone and topped with dentils, egg and dart, and stirrup-framed leaf and dart mouldings, which continued upward to the modillion cornice. The same sequence of ornaments was employed for the decoration of the pediment<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Even though no archaeological remains have survived from the northern part of the forum, the differences in height must have been overcome by stairs. In Fig. 5 presented here, it is assumed that the width of the stairs in the forum area is identical to the width of those on the terrace.

<sup>23</sup> The street was approximately 3 m wide and paved with limestone slabs: see Mirabella Roberti 1961, 243 f. and Stella et al. 1979b, 90 cat. IV 1.

<sup>24</sup> Gabelmann 1971, 129; Dell'Acqua 2014, 321.

<sup>25</sup> Only the foundation of the altar has survived (Dander 2014d, 313 Fig. 1). In Fig. 1 presented here the altar is missing.

<sup>26</sup> The podium (3.03 m in height) was structured by vertical limestone slabs. Dell'Acqua 2014, 323 f. Figs. 2, 3.

<sup>27</sup> A length of 40 m, a width of 10 m and a total height of 8.30–8.50 m are assumed for the porticos. The height of the columns was presumably about 5.20 m: Dell'Acqua 2014, 343, 345 f.

<sup>28</sup> The staircase is 14 m wide: (Gabelmann 1971, 142) and was framed by the extended podium and two small fountains: Dell'Acqua 2014, 322 Fig. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Dell'Acqua 2014, 325, 326–329 Pl. 1, 1–4.

<sup>30</sup> Compared to the temple, the number of decorative elements used in the entablature of the lateral porticos seems to have been reduced: two architrave blocks show only three *fasciae* without additional ornament (Dell'Acqua 2014, 343–347 Figs. 11, 12 Pls. 7, 1–8; 8, 2–7).

<sup>31</sup> Dell'Acqua 2014, 329–339 Figs. 5–7 Pls. 2, 1–5; 3, 1–8; 4, 1–3; 5. Moreover, the pediment was probably crowned by three statues. Cf. Mirabella Roberti 1961, 253 n. 6: 'Sul timpano erano tre statue: ne restano almeno due resti di basamento sporgenti al livello del tetto'.

## The transition from exterior to interior space

As one approached the temple from the terrace, the transition from outside to in was clearly accentuated. While ascending the stairs, essential design elements of the *pronaos*, such as the floor and walls of the *cella*, gradually came into view. Passing through the columns that established the Capitulum's façade marked the transition into a more clearly defined space. Passing through the *pronaos*, white limestone continued to dominate the view: this material was used for the floor, the façade of the *cella* and the door jambs. Pilasters were included in the design of the façade, modelled on the columns of the *pronaos*<sup>32</sup>. Naturally, the doors of the *cellae* were a decisive factor in separating outside from inside. While the massive doorjambs were simple in their design, the lintels they supported contained numerous decorative features, including a tendril frieze adorned with small flowers and birds, a modillion frieze with an egg-and-dart-moulding, a stirrup-framed leaf and dart moulding and a pipe frieze<sup>33</sup>. The hierarchical organisation of the temple's *cellae* was indicated by the height of the doors, with the largest reserved for the centre, thereby underlining Jupiter's supremacy.

## The interior design of the Capitulum

When entering one of the temple's *cellae*, the viewer was confronted with entirely different lighting conditions<sup>34</sup> and decorative features. In particular, the various types of marble used for the walls and floors created strong colour contrasts to the bright external architecture. The central *cella* was characterised by its dimensions (11.8 × 14.8 m), the decoration of the walls, floor and ceiling and the cult statue of Jupiter<sup>35</sup>; indeed, one of the chief decorative principles of Roman temples was the extensive use of precious marbles. At Brescia, an elaborate *opus sectile* floor bridged the space between the entrance area and the colossal cult statue, which was highlighted by its placement on a high podium against the rear wall. The marble revetment on the walls created a uniform rhythm through its incorporation of horizontal elements and pilasters above a high dado. The wall design was also decisive for the perception of the depth and height of the space. The vertical pilasters directed the gaze upwards to the ceiling (of an unknown design) and emphasised the overall height of the *cella*.

The floor was dominated by a large square (10.20 m<sup>2</sup>) in the centre, bordered by narrow strips of dark grey bardiglio; the latter also appeared in the entrance area, just beyond the threshold<sup>36</sup>. In contrast to this rather dark frame, the central square was decorated with colourful pieces of pavonazetto framed by rectangles of giallo antico, with smaller squares of pavonazetto posi-

<sup>32</sup> If Ionic-Corinthian capitals can be assigned to the pilasters of the façade, the shift in the architectural order would have been distinctive (Dell'Acqua 2014, 340 Fig. 8). The reconstruction reproduced in Fig. 2 depicts isodomic blocks that structure the façade of the temple.

<sup>33</sup> Dell'Acqua 2014, 340 f. Pl. 4, 1–5; Angelelli – Dell'Acqua 2014, 385. Apart from the pipe frieze instead of dentils, these ornaments are also employed for the entablature and the pediment (see above).

<sup>34</sup> When the door of the *cella* was closed, the interior would have been much darker than the *pronaos*. However, the presence of candelabra and lamps should be considered. Fragments of a monumental candelabrum (c. 3.5 m in height) made of limestone (Fig. 8) have been found in the central *cella*; see Slavazzi – Invernizzi 2014, 398 f. 397 Fig. 13. On the use of Roman marble candelabra in temples or sanctuaries and their role as lighting equipment or *thymiateria*, see Cain 1985, 12–22 esp. 15–19. Some aspects of lighting are emphasised in Mattern 2001, 59 with n. 16.

<sup>35</sup> The decoration of the lateral *cellae* will not be discussed in detail. The hierarchical organisation of space indicated by the different size of the doors correlates to the size of the interior. The *cellae* for Juno and Minerva were smaller (8.80 × 12.25 m) (Fig. 2). Moreover, the podium for the cult statue of Jupiter (8.55 × 3.80 × 2.35 m) was almost twice as large as the lateral *cellae* (western *cella*: 4.48 × 1.87 × 1.60 m). See Angelelli – Dell'Acqua 2014, 369. 371. 375. 378.

<sup>36</sup> Angelelli – Guidobaldi 2002, 202.



**Fig. 8:** Brescia, central *cella* of the Capitulum.

tioned at the corners (Fig. 8)<sup>37</sup>. The contrast between the two marbles – one a cold, blueish white and the other an intense, bright yellow – must have been striking for the visitor<sup>38</sup>.

The size, pattern and surface structures of the marble floor also evoked various effects. The rectilinear character of both the constituent elements and the overall pattern was disrupted by the contrasting character of their material properties, including the colour and veining of the stones, as well as their polished and reflective surfaces. These impressions would have been intensified by the glistening light provided by lamps or a number of *candelabra*. A similar situation can be found in the western *cella* (Fig. 9), where africano, pavonazzetto and giallo antico were combined to form diagonal patterns<sup>39</sup>. Here again, the three types of marble were characterised by strong colour contrasts and their heterogeneous surfaces features.

Compared to the floor, reconstructing the wall decoration is more a difficult task, due to its poor state of conservation. Nevertheless, some conclusions can be drawn. At the bottom of the wall, slabs of greenish cipollino are completed by a moulding of white marble, forming a low kickplate. The design of the adjoining dado is not known, but likely corresponded to the height of the podium of the cult statue. Marble revetment seems to have covered the walls above this dado, although only a few fragments have been preserved. These include Corinthianising capitals, plinths and parts of an architrave adorned with three *fasciae*<sup>40</sup>. The pilasters, described above, served only an aesthetic

<sup>37</sup> Angelelli – Dell’Acqua 2014, 369. 372 Fig. 1. This area displays numerous antique and modern repairs; as a result, many of the pieces are composed of small fragments, sometimes containing different types of marble in the same slab; see Angelelli – Guidobaldi 2002, 203–211 Figs. 2–10. For further examples of *opus sectile* floors in various contexts, cf. Angelelli – Dell’Acqua 2014, 374 f. The mosaic in the centre is modern; see Angelelli – Guidobaldi 2002, 201.

<sup>38</sup> On the use of coloured marbles, their possible interrelation in terms of colours and surface effects, as well as their strategic use in the creation of specific spatial hierarchies in public spaces, see Grüner 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Angelelli – Dell’Acqua 2014, 371 f. Fig. 4. Only a small part of the pavement in the eastern *cella*, in the area around the podium, is preserved. A similar arrangement is proposed in the centre of the western *cella* (although in bichrome), thanks to the presence of pavonazzetto and bardiglio in the area next to the podium; cf. Angelelli – Guidobaldi 2002, 210 f. Fig. 12; Angelelli – Dell’Acqua 2014, 373 f. Fig. 7.

<sup>40</sup> Angelelli – Dell’Acqua 2014, esp. 380–385 Figs. 15–16 (Vgl. Anm. 41. 43. 44) Pls. 1–4.



**Fig. 9:** Brescia, western *cella* of the CapitoliuM.

function; while their exact number and position is unknown (as well as the design of the areas that they enclosed), the horizontal and vertical decorative elements employed here seem to have created a consistent rhythmic wall design with a slight expansion in depth<sup>41</sup>.

The podium of the cult statue (Fig. 8) was substantial (8.55 × 3.80 × 2.35 m), occupying almost the entire width of the *cella* and thus defining the rear section of the room. Fragments of the marble revetment suggest that parts of the front were fashioned from africano and the sides from cipollino<sup>42</sup>. The cult statue of Jupiter was emphasised through its placement on this high podium, as well as the considerable dimensions of the statue itself and the precious decoration that may have adorned its throne – Norbert Franken has demonstrated that gilded bronze sheets with rosettes and floral motifs probably belonged to the latter<sup>43</sup>. The statue itself was produced in white-greyish marble (Fig. 10). The surviving fragments suggest a fairly standard representation of the god, in which his head was turned to the right, his left arm raised and his upper body naked aside from a hip mantle<sup>44</sup>. Comparanda for such representations of Jupiter can be found in a wide variety of media<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> A parallel for such an arrangement can be found in the Harbour Temple at Xanten, where the wall design above the dado was executed in stucco. Numerous fragments, indicating two scales, belong to fluted pilasters and an architrave. Other pieces can probably be assigned to a frieze. The rectangular areas framed by the pilasters were probably white and red fields and bordered by multicoloured lines. See the detailed analysis in Peters 1989, 159–170 Figs. 1–2 and Pls. 17, 1–4; 167 f. cat. K 20. 28–31. The reconstruction of the dado with narrow slabs of red stone (Fischer 1994, 87 Fig. 33 and Zelle 2000, 45 Fig. 52) is hypothetical. For the Harbour Temple, see also Zelle 2000, 42–46 Figs. 43–52 and Schalles 2008, 311–316 (Hadrianic) with further literature.

<sup>42</sup> Further details are discussed in Angelelli – Dell’Acqua 2014, 375 f. 378. 373 Fig. 8.

<sup>43</sup> Franken 2002, 191–195 Figs. 1–2. 6–7.

<sup>44</sup> The height of the seated statue is estimated at about 4.70 m: see Locatelli 2002, 175–183. 187 f. Figs. 1–4 Pls. 1–3 and Slavazzi – Invernizzi 2014, 393–396 Figs. 3–4. The feet of the statue were positioned on steps made of Botticino limestone (Fig. 8). According to Gabelmann (1969, 222. 224 n. 18 Pl. 72, 1), the preparation of the upper side of the second step suggests the existence of a third. Other fragments cannot be safely assigned to the cult statues of Juno and Minerva. Slavazzi – Invernizzi 2014, 396 f.

<sup>45</sup> Locatelli 2002, 181. 183. 186 f. Figs. 6. 8; Slavazzi – Invernizzi 2014, 393 f. with further literature.



**Fig. 10:** Brescia, fragments belonging to the cult statue of Jupiter.

Prayers to the deity could be accompanied by other ritual acts, such as burning incense<sup>46</sup>. Four altars made of limestone were found in the central *cella*, and may have been used for such ritual performances. The smallest altar was adorned with fruit garlands attached to *bucrania*<sup>47</sup>, while the other three (A, B and C) belonged to a series, as indicated by their size and standardised decoration. On the front of these altars, a pair of *erotes* appear, holding a garland with fruit. Assorted cult instruments, including a *paterna*, jug and *aspergillum*, decorate the sides in various combinations<sup>48</sup>. Altars A and B were found *in situ* at the edges of the podium during excavation<sup>49</sup> and therefore Gabelmann suggests that the cult statue was flanked by the pair of altars on the podium, along with the third on the floor in front of it<sup>50</sup>. The additional furnishings of the *cella* included *mensolae*, small tables on which dedications or monetary gifts could be placed<sup>51</sup> and *thymiatheria*, for burning incense<sup>52</sup>. The position of the altar(s) and/or tables no doubt organised movement within the space.

## Temples and *fora*: convention and diversity

The case study of the Capitolium in Brescia has shown how a Roman temple located in a city's forum could be distinguished by its urban setting, placement in a purposefully designed area and by the splendour of its architectural decoration. It is evident that the arrangement and orientation

<sup>46</sup> According to Ovid (*Fast.* 4, 305–328. 343f.), small offerings and prayers attracted the attention of the gods and could lead them to act. The burning of incense and the offering of wine, in particular, were a means of attracting the gods and calling them down from heaven (Rüpke 2005, 230).

<sup>47</sup> Gabelmann 1969, 220. 225. 230 Pl. 71, 1; Slavazzi – Invernizzi 2014, 396. 398 Fig. 11..

<sup>48</sup> Gabelmann 1969, 219–238 Pls. 68–71 and Slavazzi – Invernizzi 2014, 393 f. Figs. 1–2; 396–398 Figs. 7–10. 12. The altars were of considerable size, with heights of 1.34, 1.24 and 1.35 m (Slavazzi – Invernizzi 2014, 397 f.).

<sup>49</sup> Slavazzi – Invernizzi 2014, 394 Figs. 1–2.

<sup>50</sup> For further details, see Gabelmann 1969, 221–226 Figs. 1–2 Pl. 72, 1; 1971, 143 Pl. 22, 1; Slavazzi – Invernizzi 2014, 394 Fig. 2. This hypothesis could explain the reworked upper sides of the altars. To account for the flat preparation of the upper side and three dowel holes in altar A, Gabelmann suggests that it was transformed into a base (1969, 220 f. Pl. 71, 2). Consequently the two altars on the podium may have had a purely decorative function. According to Fabrizio Slavazzi and Rosanina Invernizzi (2014, 398), the positioning of the altars on the podium is considered to be secondary. Therefore, in the reconstruction provided by Rossi and Francesca Morandini (2015, 137) the altars are positioned on the floor.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Liv. 10, 23, 11–13, on placement of silver vessels on three tables in the *cella* of Jupiter Optimus Maximus at Rome. See also Rüpke 2001, 141.

<sup>52</sup> Supra 72 n. 8 and 77 n. 34.

of the buildings, decorative features, materials and surface structures on display were adjusted to specific viewing positions. The reconstruction of a specific form of action – moving from the forum into the temple for a private prayer – demonstrates how the perception of these spaces was calculated for visual impact from remote distances or positions nearby. Some decorative elements also underlined the architectural unity of the complex. The Corinthian order, for example, was employed across the forum and Capitolium area<sup>53</sup>. Architectural unity was also emphasised to a certain degree by the colours of the materials. White Botticino limestone and white marble were employed for the construction of the Capitolium and various elements in the flanking porticos, while the column shafts of the forum porticos were produced in grey marble, accentuating these important architectural features through colour<sup>54</sup>.

The alignment of the temple, altar and forum piazza on a central axis corresponded to conventional decorative principles applied to imperial *fora*. The separation of the forum from the temple by a broad street was also not unusual, and parallels can even be found for the enormous difference in height between the Capitolium and the forum piazza<sup>55</sup>. The temple itself is special for a variety of reasons, however. On the one hand, the Capitolium continued certain decorative trends popular since the early Imperial period, evident in the richly decorated entablature (including numerous ornaments positioned between the *fasciae*), the decoration of the pediment and the use of different coloured marbles to decorate the *cellae*<sup>56</sup>. On the other hand, in comparison to other Capitolia, the temple's transverse layout and connection to the lateral porticos was unusual<sup>57</sup>. These features, along with the extended *pronaos*, can be compared to the *Templum Pacis*, erected slightly later by Vespasian at Rome<sup>58</sup>, and to the Flavian phase of the sanctuary of Minerva at Breno<sup>59</sup>. In contrast to Brescia, the Flavian temples at Rome and at Breno were incorporated into enclosed squares framed by porticos. In all of these instances, however, the perception of the temple from the square was purely frontal, with the volume and depth of the building itself hidden behind a screen of columns<sup>60</sup>. At Brescia, the temple, in combination with the lateral porticos and extended *pronaos*, can be linked to the intensified illusionism employed in Flavian architecture<sup>61</sup>. This is also true for the interplay between light and shadow, an effect evoked by the elongated front of the Capitolium and its characteristic arrangement of columns<sup>62</sup>, as well as by the temple's frieze, in which the use

53 Dell'Acqua 2014, 328 f. 327 Pl. 1, 1–6.

54 This must also be considered for numerous decorated cornices made of bronze, as well as the bronze sheets that were attached to various architectural features. Some of these elements are described by Alberto Bacchetta (2008, 47) as 'cornici architettoniche in bronzo, appartenenti all'originaria decorazione del Capitolium'; cf. Bacchetta 2008, 44; Giacobello 2008, 245 f. 253; Stella et al. 1979a, 77 f. cat. III 46 n. c ('rivestimento metallico di altare o base'). They were part of a large-scale deposit of bronze objects that was found on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1826 in the space between the western *cella* and the adjoining room. The deposit included, among other finds, the Victoria of Brescia (mid-1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.) and several gilded bronze portraits from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. The sculptures are discussed in detail in Salcuni – Formigli 2011, 5–50 cat. B1–B11 Figs. 1–213. The former location of the statues can no longer be determined. The forum, the Capitolium area and the theatre must be considered.

55 For further comparisons between Roman cities, the so-called 'Forum-Basilica complex' and Hellenistic models of such public squares, cf. Gabelmann 1971, 129–136. 142; Frova 1979, 219–221; 1990; Gros 1996, 169 f.; Dell'Acqua 2014, 322. The case of Verona is discussed below.

56 Dell'Acqua 2014, 329. 331. 336.

57 Gabelmann 1971, 132 n. 25 and Dell'Acqua 2014, 321 f. For Roman temples with transversely positioned *cellae*, see Dell'Acqua 2014, 322 with n. 22 and more recently, in detail, Marcattili 2016/17. Usually, the layout of a transversely positioned temple also prefigured a horizontal layout of the *cella*. At Brescia this was not the case, as the three large *cellae* were positioned next to one another. The connection of the temple with the elevated porticos can now be associated with the Augustan phase of the Late Republican sanctuary (see below).

58 Gabelmann 1971, 132–134 and Dell'Acqua 2014, 325 with n. 52 and further literature.

59 Dander 2010, 139–148 Figs. 1–19 and Sacchi – Piziali 2010, 155–175 Figs. 1–3. 9–34.

60 For additional (also earlier) comparisons, see Sacchi – Piziali 2010, 155–158 and Dell'Acqua 2014, 325.

61 Gabelmann 1971, 128. 136.

62 Strocka 2010, 98 f.

of high relief and drilling of stems and leaves helped to achieve this result<sup>63</sup>. At Brescia, however, two important questions remain: (1) how did the extant urban structures and geographical setting affect the Capitolium's Flavian layout, and (2) what innovations were created in relation to previous periods?

The Flavian building's various predecessors were erected in the same location, on the southern slope of the hill, set apart by a broad east-west street (the later *decumanus maximus*). Thanks to their location and elevated position, these earlier temples were a particularly prominent part of the cityscape. The first sanctuary of substantial size was fashioned from a local white limestone and erected during the early 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. It consisted of four prostyle temples arranged next to one another on a single podium. From a decorative perspective this sanctuary featured a range of contemporary elements, including Attic bases, pilasters topped with Italic Corinthian capitals in the *pronaos* and lavish Second Style wall paintings inside the *cellae*<sup>64</sup>. There are a few arguments to suggest that the forum piazza was present during the Late Republican period<sup>65</sup>, but the area was first monumentalised during the reign of Augustus, when new and elaborate architectural structures enclosed the square. These included a transversely positioned basilica to the south and, presumably, porticos to the east and west, although little is known about the architectural features of these buildings<sup>66</sup>. The older sanctuary remained largely unchanged during the Augustan phase, especially with respect to the interior design. The addition of elevated lateral porticos, which were directly connected to the sanctuary, accentuated the unity of the building ensemble and established a central axis, as only three of the four *sacella* were still visible<sup>67</sup>. The redevelopment of the area during the Flavian period maintained many of the elements from these previous arrangements, but transformed them into a more uniform design, with increased monumentality. At the same time, the architectural design of the forum area and the Capitolium reflected the main decorative principles of Flavian architecture<sup>68</sup>.

Symmetry, axiality and the central position of the temple were conventional decorative principles of Roman *fora*. However, the implementation of these principles did not necessarily guarantee aesthetic uniformity in different urban settings; indeed, variability was fostered by local adaptations to these general decorative conventions. Two brief comparative studies will illustrate the extent to which architectural ensembles could be adjusted to local circumstances, as well as the designs that were considered particularly appropriate by the respective cities' elites<sup>69</sup>. In the *fora* at Verona and Pompeii it is possible to explore how older temples were intentionally preserved and restaged in a manner suitable to new urban environments. In the following, observations are limited to the main features of the exterior design, which shaped the perception of the temple as seen from the forum area.

<sup>63</sup> Gabelmann 1971, 144 f. Pl. 32, 1. 2.

<sup>64</sup> The Late Republican sanctuary, which dates to around 80 B.C., was covered by the Flavian complex and therefore preserved in large parts; cf. Cavalieri Manasse 2002; Dander 2014b; Sacchi 2014b. For the earlier, modest sanctuary of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., see Dander 2014a and Sacchi 2014a.

<sup>65</sup> Gabelmann 1971, 141; Rossi 1995, 335 f. Fig. 5; Rossi – Garzetti 1995, 80.

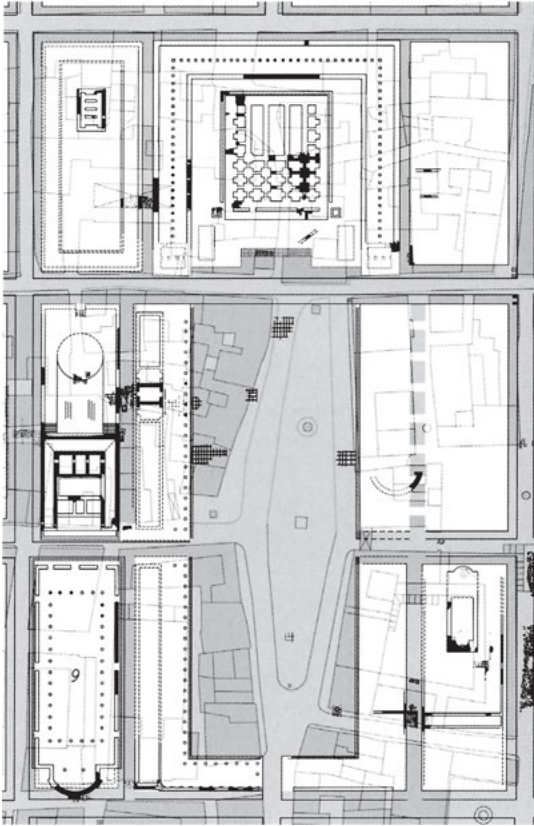
<sup>66</sup> Cf. Dander 2014c; Sacchi 2014c, 292–301 Fig. 7.

<sup>67</sup> The western portico was placed directly in front of the western *sacellum*. For the Augustan phase, see Cavalieri Manasse 2002, 98. 107 f.; Dander 2014c; Sacchi 2014c. Rossi (2012, 366) and Furio Sacchi (2014c, 297) argue for a cult of the Capitoline Triad located here (at the latest) from the Augustan period. For the western *cella*, in which one of the four Republican deities was venerated, there is no evidence of any other use. Therefore, it must remain an open question as to whether the cult of the deity worshipped there continued or was abandoned. Sacchi (2014c, 297 with n. 34) considers the possibility that it was later used by the imperial cult.

<sup>68</sup> Gabelmann 1971, 145.

<sup>69</sup> A critical and detailed analysis concerning various aspects of Capitolia and Roman *fora* as a concept of an urban model, which includes numerous examples from Italy and the provinces as well as a discussion of criteria for identifying Capitolia, is provided in Quinn – Wilson 2013, 117–173 with Tab. 1.





**Fig. 11:** Verona, layout of the Capitolium and the forum area.

At Verona (Fig. 11), the forum and Capitolium were built along a bend in the river Adige sometime after 49 B.C. As at Brescia, the elongated forum and the Capitolium area were separated from one another by the *decumanus maximus*<sup>70</sup>. The monumental temple, erected during the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., was positioned on a high platform and thereby elevated in relation to the forum piazza; the Capitolium was also framed by a three-sided portico. Due to their respective architectural decorations, the temple and the portico stood in stark contrast to one another. The columns of the two-aisled portico were topped with Doric capitals along the exterior colonnade and Ionic capitals along the interior. The entire structure was positioned on an elevated podium and contained a *cryptoporticus*, in line with contemporary models<sup>71</sup>. The monumental Capitolium, on the other hand, adopted the Tuscan *peripteros sine postico* form, with a deep *pronaos* and three *cellae*. The outdated character of this design is evident not only in the building's layout and proportions, but also in its architectural decoration, which was produced partially in terracotta<sup>72</sup>. The choice of certain decorative elements, such as the combination of Attic bases with Tuscan capitals and Ionic columns with architectural terracotta, was definitely a local *pasticcio*<sup>73</sup>. The design of the temple should be seen as an intentional choice on the part of the local elite, as no buildings of this type

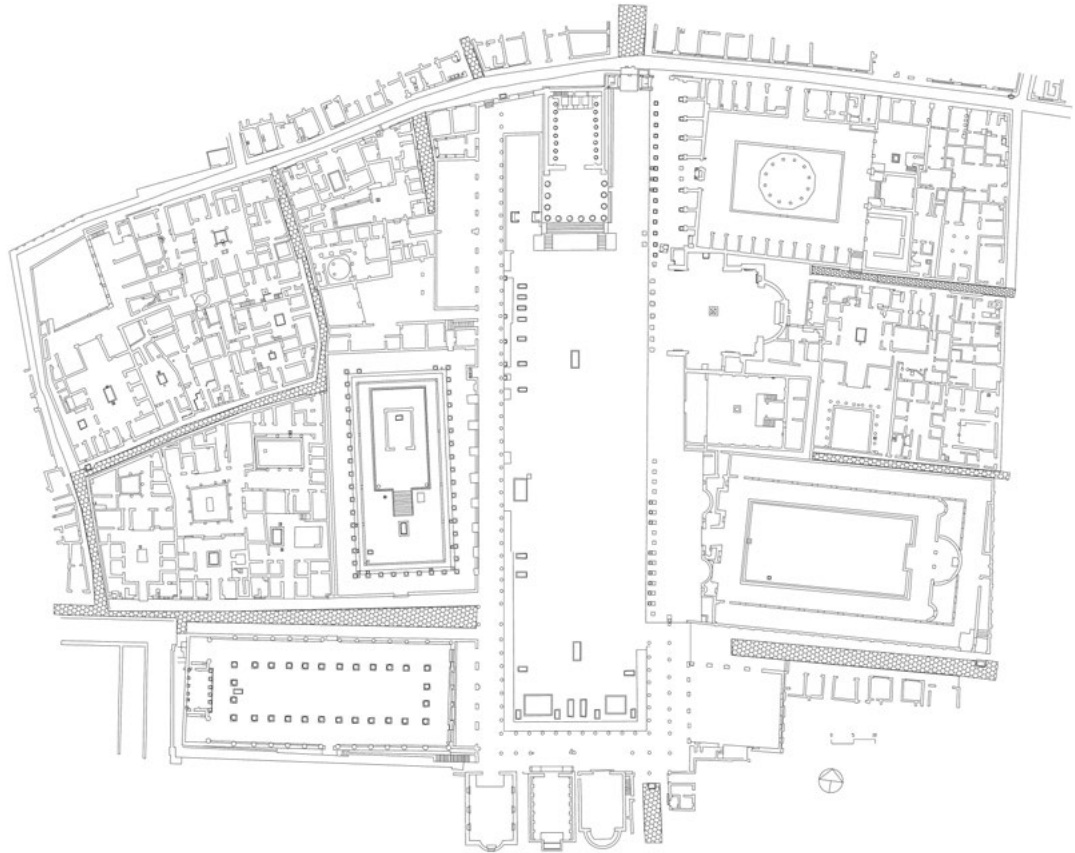
<sup>70</sup> Apart from the location and size of the forum, however, no reliable information can be given about its surrounding buildings. Cf. Cavalieri Manasse 2008b, 293.

<sup>71</sup> Cavalieri Manasse 2008a, 85–103; 2008c, 320–326; 2012, 250.

<sup>72</sup> Cavalieri Manasse 2008a, 76–85 esp. 82–85; 2008c, 307–319; Strazzulla 2008; Cavalieri Manasse 2012, 250 with fig. The Capitolium of Verona was approximately 30 % smaller than the Capitolium in Rome; see Cavalieri Manasse 2008c, 307.

<sup>73</sup> Bianco 2008, 174 f.; Cavalieri Manasse 2008a, 83; Strazzulla 2008.





**Fig. 12:** Pompeii, layout of the Capitulum and the forum area in A.D. 79.

were built in northern Italy at this time<sup>74</sup>. Moreover, the old-fashioned Capitulum continued to exist throughout the Imperial period without major interventions<sup>75</sup>.

In contrast to the Capitulum area, the forum piazza and porticos were later refurbished, probably during the Claudian period<sup>76</sup>: the east and west sides of the forum were occupied by new structures, which stood in opposition to the antiquated temple on the terrace. While remains on the east side are limited, they suggest the presence of heterogeneous buildings, including a monumental apsidal structure<sup>77</sup>. The elevated portico on the west was characterised by a richly decorated entablature and, above all, the range of materials used for the columns. Attic bases of Greek marble were combined with capitals fashioned from Botticino limestone, while various polychrome stones – cipollino, giallo antico, africano and bigio antico – were employed for the smooth column shafts<sup>78</sup>. The forum itself was repaved in white and pink slabs of local limestone, in an irregular, but colour-intensive pattern that covered the whole of the square<sup>79</sup>.

<sup>74</sup> Cavalieri Manasse 2008a, 103; 2008c, 316 f.; Kreuz 2013, 459 f.

<sup>75</sup> Fragments of a marble revetment may have been part of the interior decoration of the *cellae*. It is uncertain whether they were part of a renewal dating to the Imperial period or already part of the original building; see Cavalieri Manasse 2008a, 106 f. In the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., new structures were created in the immediate vicinity of the temple, which accentuated its front. The erection of a small edifice (interpreted as a *sacellum*) on the terrace in the southwest could indicate the presence of a second symmetrical building in the southeast. Cf. Cavalieri Manasse 2008a, 106 f. and 85 Fig. 21. In addition, two large statue bases, perhaps Tiberian in date, were placed at the corners in front of the temple podium: see Cavalieri Manasse 2008a, 107.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Bianco 2008, 211 f.; Cavalieri Manasse 2008b, 298; 2012, 254 f.

<sup>77</sup> Cavalieri Manasse 2008b, 301 f. Fig. 12.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Bianco 2008, 210 f. Pl. 16, 2; 125, 1–4; 128, 2 and Cavalieri Manasse 2008b, 298. For the numerous decorative elements of the entablature, see Bianco 2008, 210. 212 f. Pl. 16, 3; 126, 3–4; 127, 5; 128, 1–2.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Cavalieri Manasse 2008b, 297 f. Fig. 8 ('calcare bianco e rosato di misure variabili').

The situation was different in Pompeii (Fig. 12), where the layout of the forum was already determined before the Imperial period. The impression made by the temple was enhanced by its monumental dimensions (17 × 37 m) compared to those of the square (142 × 38 m), with the building occupying a large part of the northern forum area. The temple was erected no later than 80 B.C., and thus the Corinthian hexastyle design and the single *cella* followed contemporary models<sup>80</sup>. When it was erected, the temple appeared amidst a growing list of building types visible around the forum, all of which differed significantly with respect to their size, height, orientation and architectural decoration<sup>81</sup>. Only in the southern part of the forum the buildings (consisting of the basilica on the west and presumably houses and *tabernae* on the south and east sides) were screened from the piazza by the two-storey colonnades of the so-called Portico of Popidius<sup>82</sup>. The presence of the latter led to a more uniform enclosure of the square in the south. Nevertheless, individuals in this area who looked northward towards the Capitolium – during cult ceremonies, for example – would have been presented with a vista in which the temple was flanked by the irregular designs of the Sanctuary of Apollo to the west<sup>83</sup> and a row of *tabernae* and the *macellum* to the east.

This heterogeneity in the spatial organisation of the forum was reduced during the early Imperial period. The Corinthian hexastyle temple of the early 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. remained largely unchanged – the only modifications involved the altar, which was positioned on a platform integrated into the stairs leading up to the top of the podium (having been located previously in front of the temple), and two statues that were placed on either side of the podium, thereby accentuating the symmetry of the building's façade. The stuccowork applied to the exterior of the Capitolium also seems to have been renewed at this time<sup>84</sup>.

The forum area, in contrast, was altered quite profoundly, with the entire piazza paved in bright white slabs of travertine<sup>85</sup>. On the forum's west side, a two-storey portico built in travertine concealed the irregular façades of the buildings behind, and the Doric and Ionic orders that were employed borrowed from visual themes that had already been established by the Portico of Popidius<sup>86</sup>. To the east, the situation in front of the new buildings (the reconstructed *macellum*, two buildings linked to the imperial cult and the Eumachia Building) is more complex<sup>87</sup>. At least in

<sup>80</sup> The predecessor was transformed into a Capitolium no later than 80 B.C., when the city of Pompeii became a Roman colony: cf. D'Alessio 2009, 51; Wolf 2009, 303; Lippolis 2017, 122–125, 129 f. An earlier date for the Capitolium (c. 100 B.C.) was considered in Lauter 1979, 431–434. Valentino Gasparini (2014, esp. 59–66) argues for a different chronological development. On the main elements of the temple's layout and architecture, see D'Alessio 2009, 51–53; Wolf 2009, 299–303; Lippolis 2017, 123–125.

<sup>81</sup> The chronological development of the forum between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. and the Imperial period is complicated, with the dates of some buildings still up for debate. A good overview of the current research regarding the forum's development is presented by Fabrizio Pesando (2016, esp. 53–59 with Fig. 5). Cf. Kockel – Flecker 2008, esp. 275–277; Olivito 2013, 88–156. The chronology of the forum's eastern buildings was considered in detail by Kurt Wallat (1997).

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Kockel – Flecker 2008, 277–288 and Kockel 2012, 16 f. Fig. 10. For the new results concerning the so-called *comitium* and the previous structures located in this area, see Kockel – Flecker 2008, 296–300 Figs. 23–24 and Flecker et al. 2015.

<sup>83</sup> The possibility of an older continuous colonnade on the forum's west side is discussed in Olivito 2013, 95 Fig. 68.

<sup>84</sup> D'Alessio 2009, 53–55; Wolf 2009, 299–304; Lippolis 2017, 125–127.

<sup>85</sup> In addition, an inscription made of bronze letters was embedded in the pavement; see Kockel 2005, 53 f. with n. 9. The numerous honorific statues are analysed in Kockel 2005, 54–63 Figs. 4–5; esp. 61; Kockel – Flecker 2008, 284 Fig. 12; 290 f. Figs. 19–20; Olivito 2013, 139–147 Figs. 102–110.

<sup>86</sup> While the southern and the eastern parts of the older colonnade remained in place, the area in front of the basilica was rebuilt. In contrast to Brescia, the porticos flanking the forum in Pompeii were not characterised by a uniform design. To the west, the Ionic capitals of the colonnade were adapted to the individual forms of the older portico. In addition, the entablature above the Doric columns of the new colonnade did not include a frieze with metopes and triglyphs, but instead an architrave with *fasciae* and a frieze zone; see Lauter 1979, 416 f. Fig. 13 and Kockel – Flecker 2008, 278 with n. 35.

<sup>87</sup> The older *tabernae* on the forum's east side were removed and replaced by representative buildings with elaborately designed façades opening on the forum piazza (Wallat 1997).

the final phase, the individual components were characterised by different forms of architectural decoration. The colonnade in front of the Eumachia Building, for example, was built of travertine in the Doric style, while the colonnade in front of the *macellum* was produced in the Corinthian order using white marble<sup>88</sup>. Thus, the architectural ensembles erected at the forum's sides created a new urban setting for the Capitolium, but one that was far from homogeneous in its aesthetic and representational design<sup>89</sup>.

## Concluding thoughts

Roman temples, with their monumental and lavishly decorated architecture, set the stage for the ritual practices that took place there. These activities included the *sacra publica* (during which sacrifices were made at the altar in front of the temple), as well as personal prayers and offerings that were made inside the *cella*. The architectural arrangement of the temple and the urban setting in which it appeared affected individuals' perception of space. At Brescia, distinctions in the design of the forum and Capitolium were manifested by the use of varying materials, with their particular colours and surface structures on display, as well as the difference in height between the two areas. Distinct spatial qualities were created through the Capitolium's decorative programme, with the white limestone employed on the exterior contrasting dramatically with the polychrome arrangements that appeared inside. Once inside the *cella*, the colossal cult statue, which was placed in an axial position on the rear wall, immediately drew the attention of the viewer; the position of the statue on a high podium must have made this effect even more impressive.

Thus, the Capitolium shows how certain Roman decorative principles – symmetry and axuality, openness and unity, polychromy and monochromy, large and small-scale design – could relate to one another. It is evident that these principles were conceived for specific viewing positions and could be adjusted to a moving viewer. Naturally, ritual activities represent the chief actions associated with Capitolia in particular, and thus must be considered when seeking to understand perceptions of the built architecture from various locations. However, symmetry, axuality and the temple's position in the forum did not necessarily guarantee architectural uniformity. The brief comparison between the Capitolia of Brescia, Verona and Pompeii has shown that these temples, despite being symbols of Rome's imperial domain, did not necessarily follow a canonical type. On the contrary, these examples demonstrate that temple design and the urban setting could differ from city to city, influenced by the respective whims of urban elites.

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<sup>88</sup> Different solutions regarding the architectural design of a two-storey colonnade have been discussed: cf. Wallat 1997, 33 f. Pls. 6–14; 217 f. and 153. 156. 224 Pls. 83–86; 87 Fig. 181. A continuous colonnade in front of the various buildings is not certain; see Wallat 1997, 129. 220. 222. A recent proposal by John Dobbins suggests a one-storey colonnade consisting of eight columns in front of the building next to the *macellum*, the so-called Sanctuary of the Public Lares, which would have underlined the heterogeneous architectural design on the eastern side; see Dobbins 2007, 161–163; Olivito 2013, 119–122 Fig. 86.

<sup>89</sup> For a limited period of time, the newfound frontal emphasis on the temple was reinforced when arches were erected on either side of the building. This architectural ensemble existed only temporarily, however, as the eastern arch was soon removed. The two arches are analysed in Müller 2011.

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 Fig. 5: After Rossi – Morandini 2015, 134 with fig.  
 Fig. 6: After Bacchetta 2008, 43 with fig.  
 Fig. 7: After Sacchi et al. 2011, Fig. 10.  
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 Fig. 11: After Cavalieri Manasse 2012, 254 with fig.  
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Johannes Lipps

# Ceiling *Decor* Contextualised: A Case Study from the ‘Casa di Augusto’ on the Palatine

**Abstract:** The ‘Casa di Augusto’ was intentionally filled in after 36 B.C. for the construction of a temple dedicated to Apollo Palatinus. Because of this, much of the room decoration has survived. Besides the (plundered) *opus sectile* floors and the wall paintings, the ceiling decorations from multiple rooms have been preserved. During past decades, some of these have been painstakingly reconstructed from thousands of fragments. Thanks to this work we are able to examine an unparalleled ceiling ensemble from a lavish Late Republican house in ancient Rome. The case study of the ‘Casa di Augusto’ allows us to answer some important questions about the role that Second Style ceilings played in domestic architecture. How were they used to hierarchise rooms together with wall paintings and floor decoration? Which strategies were used to suggest different levels of depth? How were different lighting methods used to stage the rooms? And, finally, how did they evoke specific atmospheres or moods?

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Of all ancient architectural decoration, we know the least about ceilings. While floors and wall paintings are frequently preserved, the ceilings of temples, porticos and private buildings are usually lost. The absence of ceilings prevents us from having a complete image of ancient architecture, which is regrettable, particularly when it comes to the grand architecture of the Hellenistic period<sup>2</sup>. This deficiency is especially poignant in the context of the many contemporary studies on ancient space and its interconnected relationship with people<sup>3</sup>. The goal of this paper is therefore to analyse the ceiling decorations from the ‘Casa di Augusto’, a building complex located on the west side of the Palatine Hill on the slope facing towards the Circus Maximus<sup>4</sup>. For years, scholars have been involved in a heated discussion as to who the owner of this building was and when it was erected<sup>5</sup>. In any event, it is clear that the house belonged to an extremely affluent and influential member of the highest elite. Soon after 36 B.C. the property was levelled and filled in for the construction of the Temple of Apollo Palatinus and so the whole complex is exceptionally well preserved. For once, multiple ceilings can be studied within the context of a complete ensemble of rooms decorated in the Second Style. This extraordinary complex highlights the immense importance of ceiling decoration in Late Republican and Early Imperial Italy.

In our context, the western peristyle and its surrounding rooms are of particular interest<sup>6</sup>. The full extent of the building is unknown, as its location on the slope meant that large parts of its

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<sup>1</sup> For help with the translation, I have to thank Taylor Lauritsen (to whom I also owe numerous references regarding content) and Elise Tacconi-Garman.

<sup>2</sup> Lauter 1986, 252.

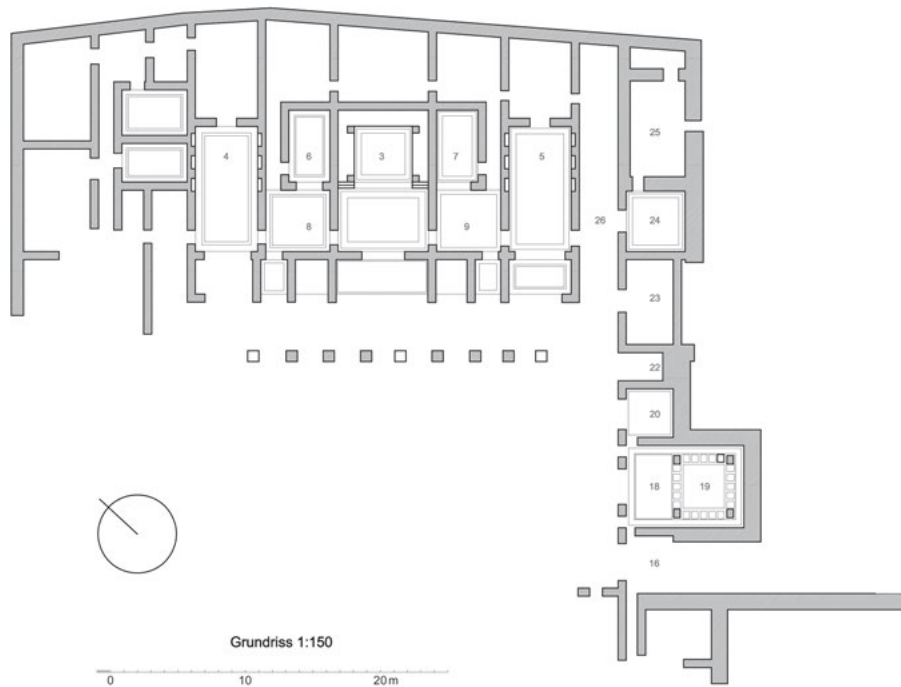
<sup>3</sup> Studies conducted in Germany include Muth 1998; Lorenz 2008; Haug 2014.

<sup>4</sup> For a summary of the excavations, see Cassetta – Sisani 2006, 72–74; Borrello 2009; Tomei 2014.

<sup>5</sup> This is not the place to enter into the lively debate surrounding the work of Iacopi – Tedone 2005/2006 on the identification of the complex (for the most recent summary of the discussion of the identification of the owner and the dating of the house, cf. Lipps 2018, 74–89 with bibliography). At the request of the editors, the building, whose owner is not known with certainty before 36 B.C., is referred to as the ‘Casa di Augusto’ in the following.

<sup>6</sup> Tomei 2014, 41–192.





**Fig. 1:** Plan of the western peristyle in the 'Casa di Augusto'.

southern and western rooms fell victim to landslides (Fig. 1). The well-preserved north-facing side includes multiple mirror-image rooms grouped along either side of a central *oecus* (Fig. 1, 3–9). A so-called 'Dreiraumgruppe' made up of a ramp, a tetrastyle *oecus* and two *cubicula*, on top of one another, can be found on the east side of the peristyle (Fig. 1, 16–20).

The first part of this paper focuses on the architecture of the tetrastyle *oecus*, with an emphasis on its ceiling decoration (Fig. 1, 19). This will make the aesthetic and representational qualities of stuccoed ceilings obvious. Second, the ceilings from the neighbouring 'studiolo' (Fig. 1, 20, upper floor), the ramp (Fig. 1, 16) and small blocks of stucco from the ceilings of rooms on the north side of the peristyle (Fig. 1, 3–9) will be added to the equation, in an effort to outline the space-differentiating and hierarchising effects of ceilings in a broader residential context. Finally, based on earlier examples and ancient texts, the significance of ceiling decoration for the presentation and perception of antique architecture is outlined. On this basis, I will model the staging of the *oecus tetrastylus* and its ceiling in the context of an evening event.

## The tetrastyle *oecus*

Thanks to the research of the past few decades, the tetrastyle *oecus* in the 'Casa di Augusto', which consists of a central nave and two side aisles, is today one of the few ancient rooms outside Pompeii and Herculaneum that has been almost completely reconstructed (Fig. 2). This allows us to understand the sophisticated strategies by which different areas of the room were separated from one another by means of decoration and design<sup>7</sup>. In particular, one can see how the wall painting, floor and ceiling design were coordinated in detail.

The wall paintings are mirror images of each other. On either side of the room, a bottom border runs along the entire length of the wall. In the vestibule, brown podia decorated with green mouldings rise to a height of 1 m above the floor; these are topped by a field of red orthostates and an intricate

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Clarke 1991, 399.



Fig. 2: Hypothetical visualisation of the *oecus tetrastylus*.

crowning entablature. Above is a frieze zone, adorned with rinceaux painted on a black background and green aedicular elements with coffered ceilings inspired by theatrical architecture. The vestibule is separated from the actual *oecus* by painted pilasters, which correspond to the load-bearing pillars that support the ceiling. Beyond the painted pilasters, inside the room, an offset podium seems to emerge from each wall. Above, aedicules with Corinthian columns and broken pediments stand in front of a spacious red background. Between the columns, masks and other sacral motifs appear<sup>8</sup>.

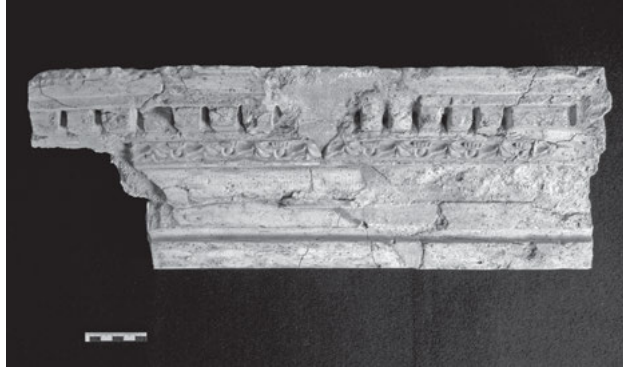
The pattern of the floor decoration can be deduced from the negative imprints left behind by the robbed *sectile* tiles. Remains of the floor itself and finds throughout the rest of the ‘Casa di Augusto’ suggest that the area below the vaulted ceiling was originally decorated with pavonazzetto and giallo antico. Other parts of the floor, however, seem to have been covered with slate<sup>9</sup>. The nave of the *oecus* was further separated from the vestibule and the aisles by the use of different tile patterns. We can see, therefore, that the wall paintings and floor decoration were used to separate the vestibule and the *oecus* from one another, while also differentiating areas within the *oecus* itself through the composition, virtuosity and sheer number of individual decorative elements.

The decoration on the suspended ceiling also varied depending upon its position within the room<sup>10</sup>. The central vault was adorned with double-recessed coffers containing intricate central motifs. In contrast, the flat parts of the ceiling built over the aisles were decorated only with single-recessed coffers. The staging of the area below the barrel-vault is particularly striking, partially because of the great attention to detail in the stucco decoration. At first the strategies used to distinguish the different zones seem similar to those employed in the floor decoration and wall painting, at least in terms of the differing densities and broad spectrum of decorative elements and compositions. The cornice in the side aisles connects the walls to the ceiling and is trimmed only with dentils, stirrup-framed leaves and darts (Fig. 3). The stucco decorations of the central nave stand in clear contrast, as numerous decorative elements are brought together in considerably more

<sup>8</sup> Carettoni 1983, 52–60.

<sup>9</sup> Gallochio et al. 2017, 462f.

<sup>10</sup> For the reconstruction, see Lipps 2018, 15–74.



**Fig. 3:** Ionian *geison* from the nave of the *oecus tetrastylus*.



**Fig. 4:** Doric *geison* from the *oecus tetrastylus*.

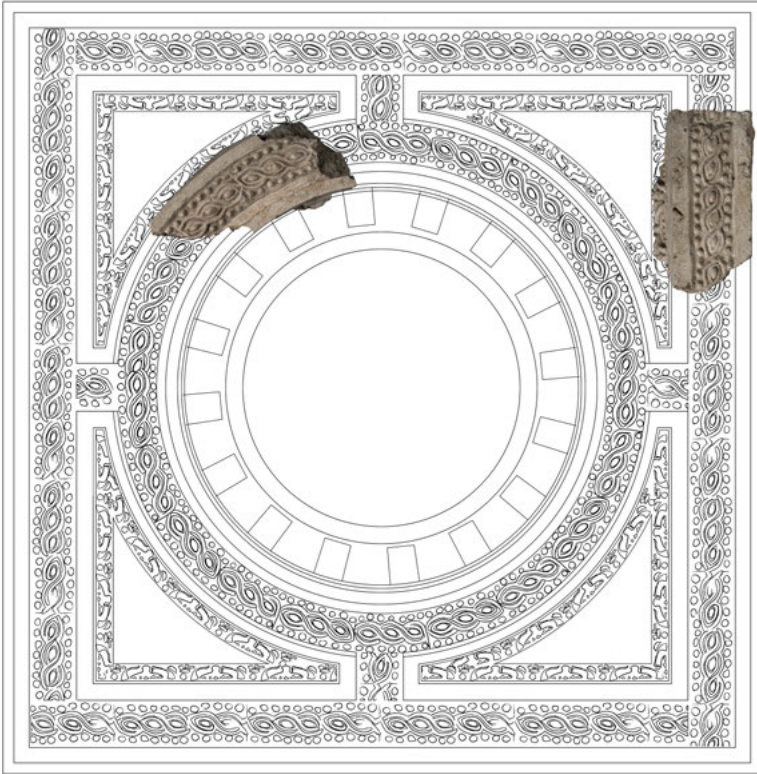


**Fig. 5:** Fragment of a stuccoed diamond coffer from the *oecus tetrastylus*.

virtuosic compositions. For example, on the lowest part of the vault, a more intricately designed entablature was used, consisting of a Doric frieze and *geison*, as well other unique types of *geisa* (Fig. 4). The greater attention to detail becomes especially clear when comparing the coffers, which are double-recessed, in addition to the egg-and-dart *cyma* framed by stirrup-framed leaves and darts. Here, most of the strips are decorated with ornamental bands, such as ‘running dog’ or s-loop motifs (Fig. 5). Besides the sheer mass of ornamental elements, the broad range of decoration used and the addition of figurative ornaments (including depictions of griffins) enhance the central nave. Thus, the decoration of the walls, floor and ceiling worked together to subdivide the interior space of the room. At the same time, however, the varying colours and materials employed positioned these elements in contrast to one another.

## Aesthetic and representational qualities of the stuccoed ceiling

A major distinction between paintings, mosaics and stuccoed ceilings is the differing approach to the utilisation of light. While paintings and mosaics are only capable of imitating shadows, stucco can create real light and shadow through variations of depth. These effects are heightened in the central nave compared to the side aisles, due to the double-recessed coffers, and further enhanced through the use of circle motifs with additional consoles framed by a band of interlace (Fig. 6). An attempt to imitate these effects can be observed in the *nymphaeum* mosaic on the Via degli Annibaldi (Fig. 7)<sup>11</sup>.



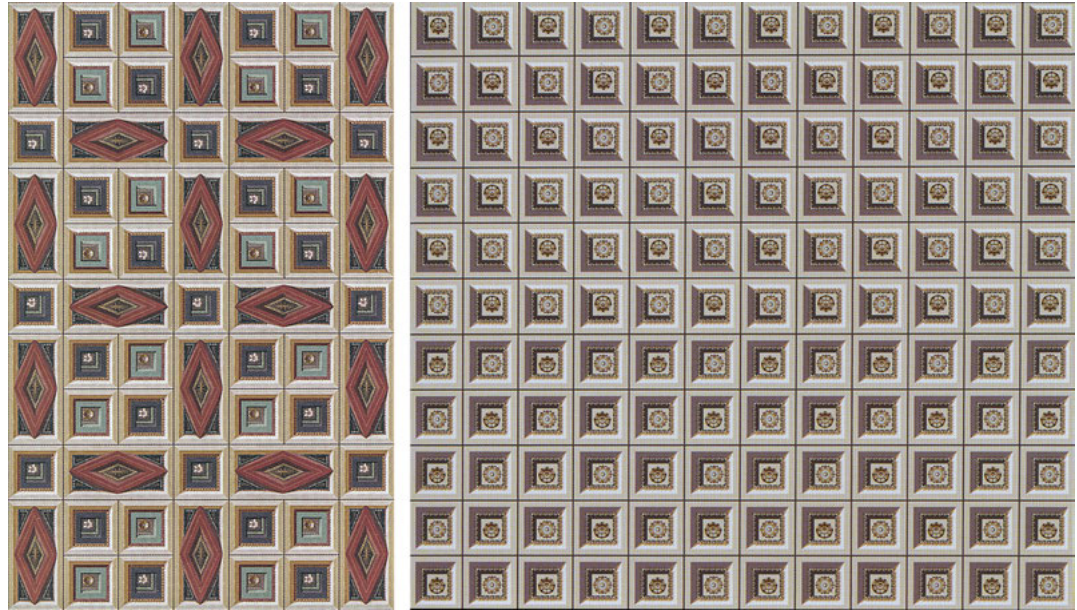
**Fig. 6:** Hypothetical reconstruction sketch of the circle motif with narrow plaited band from the *oecus tetrastylus*.



**Fig. 7:** Wall mosaic from the *nymphaeum* on the Via degli Annibaldi, Rome.

<sup>11</sup> On the mosaic in the *nymphaeum* from the Via degli Annibaldi, cf. Sear 1977, 54–56 Pl. 7, 1. On the importance of light, especially in the Second Style, cf. Ascherl 2002, particularly 8–20 with literary sources.





**Fig. 8:** Ceiling paintings from the front (left) and back (right) parts of the ramp.

UV-VIS absorption spectroscopy conducted on the stucco by Heinrich Piening confirms that the use of depth was especially important. Contrary to the common assumption that stuccoed ceilings were left unpainted in Republican Italy<sup>12</sup>, analysis of the fragments from the tetrastyle *oecus* has shown that they were painted white and covered at least partially in a gloss coating, which added to the sheen of the ceiling and therefore most likely also enhanced the spatial effect<sup>13</sup>. Additionally, this must have influenced the lighting of the room, keeping in mind that the walls were mostly painted in quite dark colours. The analysis shows a clear desire to enhance and emphasise the ceiling's depth through the use of paints and glossy finishes, a conclusion that fits well with the goals of the Second Style, which sought to create a sense of height and space<sup>14</sup>.

## The interplay of ceilings in a broader context

However, the *oecus tetrastylus* is not the only space in the 'Casa di Augusto' that permits the reconstruction of decorative ensembles of the Late Second Style. Indeed, a whole suite of Late Republican rooms that document the interplay of ceilings with one another has been preserved around the western peristyle.

The ramp passing to the south of the *oecus* (Fig. 1, 16) consists of a slightly wider entrance area, which leads to a comparatively narrow hallway. In the entrance area, the ceiling is decorated with a pattern of painted coffers and diamonds (Fig. 8, left). The two-dimensional coffers are designed to look as if they are double-recessed, and employ imitative shadow-effects that trick the viewer into thinking that the source of light comes more or less from the entrance. The decorations toward the back of the room are clearly more subdued (Fig. 8, right). Here one encounters only simple painted coffers, and the broad, bright colour palette is reduced to a limited collection of dimmer tones. But even in this area, the painting achieves the impression that the light source is coming

<sup>12</sup> Ling 1991, 42; Rozenberg 2004, 107.

<sup>13</sup> Piening 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Tybout 1989.



**Fig. 9:** Reconstructed stuccoed ceiling from the 'studiolo'.

from the entrance, casting shadows across the ceiling<sup>15</sup>. The vaulted ceiling in the 'studiolo' (Fig. 1, 20 upstairs), however, is characterised by alternating painted and stuccoed areas (Fig. 9). The long sides at the beginning of the vault are decorated with friezes of rinceau and depictions of victories. Between these, a centre-oriented composition is displayed<sup>16</sup>.

When comparing the ramp, tetrastyle *oecus* and 'studiolo', it becomes clear that the three ceilings differ greatly from one another (Figs. 2–6; 8–9). The ceiling in the ramp was painted, while its counterpart in the tetrastyle *oecus* was covered in white stucco; the ceiling in the 'studiolo' represents a combination of the two techniques. Nevertheless, contrary to previous opinions, the decoration of these rooms must have been designed and executed around the same time<sup>17</sup>. Verana Bigalke, who studied the characteristics and styles of painting in the house, was able to prove that the same craftsmen worked on multiple rooms<sup>18</sup>. Additionally, by analysing the stucco, Gianna Musatti and Laura Thiemann showed that the ceilings in the 'studiolo' and the *oecus* were decorated at the same time, as the composition of the material is identical<sup>19</sup>. In the same way that the central nave and side aisles of the *oecus tetrastylus* were meant to add a certain hierarchy to the different areas, the ceilings of the three rooms were designed in different ways, but at the same time<sup>20</sup>. They were used mainly to evoke different moods. The ceiling in the 'studiolo' is characterised by a weightless and intricate structure, which Vitruvius describes as especially valued by his contemporaries<sup>21</sup>. The individual elements can only be connected associatively. In addition, some of the stucco panels here were even gold plated, which, archaeologically speaking, is extremely rare in the context of

<sup>15</sup> Carettoni 1983, 50 f. Fig. 6. 7 Y3. Z; Iacopi 2007, 57–60.

<sup>16</sup> For the ramp and the 'studiolo,' see Musatti 2009, 41–52. 57–61. 63–68. 70–74; Tomei 2014, 131–151. 174–192.

<sup>17</sup> Carettoni 1983, 90–92; Bruno 2008, 162. Falzone (2011, 197) describes the decoration from the 'studiolo' as having been executed later. Ehrhardt 1988, 647 f. argues against this hypothesis.

<sup>18</sup> Bigalke 1990, esp. 245–247.

<sup>19</sup> Musatti 2009, 27. 44–46; Thiemann 2018, 64 n. 119.

<sup>20</sup> The interplay between these different ceiling designs within the same architectural context highlights the limitations of attempts to date late Roman Republican stucco ceilings solely on the basis of form. The appearance, complexity or variation of formal elements within stucco ceilings appears not only to reflect chronological developments, but also depends substantially on the respective functional, social and environmental context of these ceilings.

<sup>21</sup> Vitr. De arch. 7, 5; cf. La Rocca 2008.



**Fig. 10:** Reconstructed ceiling block from room (3).

private houses<sup>22</sup>. The dominance of geometric designs and patterns on the ceiling in the tetrastyle *oecus*, which was completely covered in stucco, may have provoked states such as tranquillity, order, severity or solemnity<sup>23</sup>. The ceiling of the ramp remains comparatively less elaborate in terms of the material and geometric design. It is only painted with a simple diamond pattern.

The rooms on the north side of the peristyle are also grouped around a central *oecus*<sup>24</sup>. Many of the rooms likely incorporated vaulted ceilings, of which multiple sections clad in stucco have been discovered (Figs. 1; 3–9). The large central *oecus* (Figs. 1; 3) had a suspended ceiling in a manner similar to the *oecus tetrastylus*. The excavators have restored one of the blocks that probably belonged to this ceiling and incorporated it into their *anastylosis* (Fig. 10)<sup>25</sup>. Sadly, today this *anastylosis* makes it quite difficult to examine the fragment, as little of the original surface has survived and the original curvature can no longer be determined. But it seems that the excavators correctly identified the decorative pattern based on the small patches of the surface that had been preserved. According to their work, the ceiling was decorated with a pattern consisting of square coffers surrounded by diamonds and circles, which combined to form a symmetrical composition. All elements seem to have been double-recessed.

Another fragment can clearly be placed in the wall between *cubiculum* (6) and the narrow corridor that runs to the west of it (Fig. 11). This reconstruction is certainly correct, as the remains of the bottom sides of two curving vaults, a wall mount and a flat surface are attached to the fragment. This evidence shows that the ceiling over the anterior part of the room was decorated with square coffers, while the posterior area was covered in a hexagonal pattern; the coffers and hexagons were single-recessed and framed by an egg-and-dart *cyma*. The centres of the coffers were decorated with specially inlaid applications, perhaps made of metal, as attested by dowel holes in the middle of both the squares and hexagons<sup>26</sup>. However, the bottom side of the vault, which points towards the western corridor, displays a smooth, plastered surface.

<sup>22</sup> Carettoni 1983, 81–85.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Gombrich 1982; Haug 2014. On the ceilings, cf. Lipps 2018, 176. Ursula Mandel (2010) also recognised the colour white as being a key ingredient in evoking tranquillity.

<sup>24</sup> Tomei 2014, 59–130. See also Lipps 2018, 154–167, with further images.

<sup>25</sup> Borrello 2009, 12 and nos. 45 f.

<sup>26</sup> Metal fragments found at Olympia may have been bronze ceiling decorations. Adolf Furtwängler published them in 1890 and hypothesised that they once adorned the ceilings in the temple's *cellae* (Furtwängler 1890, 193 no. 1232–1239 Pl. 66). A Hellenistic example for the application of bronze embellishments in coffers was found in the *cella* of the Hieron on Samothrake (Lehmann 1969, 142–144 Figs. 93–94).





Fig. 11: Block 1 from room (6).



Fig. 12: Block 2 from room (4).

Two other blocks are well preserved enough to determine the diameters of their original context, and can therefore (on the basis of where they were discovered) be attributed to room (4). Both fragments are also adorned with decoration of identical size, indicating that the same moulds were employed in their production (Figs. 12–13). These fragments suggest that the vaulted ceiling in room (4) was decorated in a manner similar to that in the central *oecus* (3), consisting of strips with a middle ridge framing double-recessed coffers, diamonds and circle motifs. Some fragments also display elongated fields containing weapons. These recessed ornaments are bordered by stirrup framed leaf-and-dart and egg-and-dart *cymae*. The coffers, circle and diamond motifs are bedecked with various kinds of flowers. The decorations on the vault fragment from room (4) are almost a mirror image of those from the eastern room (5) (Figs. 14–15). The only variation is that different moulds were used for the detailing. Three blocks attest to this, but in contrast to the fragments discussed previously, they are not attached to a piece of *opus caementicium*, but instead cling to curved blocks of tuff. This proves that the ceiling in this room was constructed partially, or even completely, of walled vaults. Two fragments show the start of a frieze depicting weapons, and another displays a square coffer with a six-leaf blossom. The latter decorative element is again double-recessed, and each level is bordered by a stirrup framed leaf-and-dart and an egg-and-dart *cyma*.

If we add the fragmentarily preserved ceiling remains from the rooms to the north of the peristyle into the equation, we can complete the previous observations on the pointed hierarchisation and variation of the ceilings in the neighbouring rooms. The most lavishly decorated ceiling was probably located in the central *oecus* (3). It was possibly of the same calibre as the ceiling from the tetrastyle *oecus*. As far as we know, this room was the only one with a suspended ceiling, apart from





Fig. 13: Block 3 from room (4).



Fig. 14: Blocks 4 and 5 from room (5).

the tetrastyle *oecus*. According to Enrico Gallochio, Stefano Musco and Patrizio Pensabene, this room and the tetrastyle *oecus* were also the only ones in which colourful marble was used for the floors<sup>27</sup>. Considerably less effort was put into the ceilings in the connecting corridors, such as those adjacent to *cubiculum* (6) or those linked to the ramp. These were merely painted with patterns of varying intricacy. Other rooms, such as *cubiculum* (6) or the ‘studiolo’, take a middle position in terms of the variation of depths. The ceiling of *cubiculum* (6) separated the room into a front and a back area by means of a hexagonal pattern and square coffers. Although the stucco motifs were only single-recessed, additional ornaments were added, maybe in a different material, likely metal, and in the ‘studiolo’ the only evidence for gilded stucco in the entire complex was found. Finally, rooms (4) and (5) are characterised by higher decorative variability and double-recessed coffers.

Ceiling decoration was therefore used to achieve decorative variability and to create exclusive, sometimes surprising types of rooms, each with its own atmosphere. In other examples, the *decor* simply followed spatial guidelines. So along with the floors and walls, the ceiling played a decisive role in the creation of these room-specific moods, which today can rarely be reconstructed<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Gallochio et. al. 2017, 463.

<sup>28</sup> Similar observations have been made for floors and wall painting over the last few decades, e. g., Wallace-Hadrill 1988; Strocka 1991; Tybout 1993; Muth 1998, 5–27. 48–53; Dickmann 1999, 240–252; Lorenz 2008; Anguissola 2010, esp. 289–388; Haug 2014.



Fig. 15: Block 6 from room (5).

## Ancient ceiling decoration and perception

The hierarchisation of ancient building complexes according to their ceilings, as has been shown for the ‘Casa di Augusto’, is not an invention of Late Republican domestic architecture, however. Both archaeological evidence and literary sources show that this phenomenon can, at the very least, be traced back to the Greek Classical period<sup>29</sup>. Buildings such as the Erechtheion in Athens<sup>30</sup> or the *tholos* in the sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidaurus<sup>31</sup> show a much larger number of elaborately executed ornaments in the ceilings of their *cellae* when compared to those located in outside galleries. The tendency towards more lavishly decorated ceilings in *cellae* is also indicated by the use of precious materials. Flavius Josephus records that the ceiling in the inner sanctum of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem was a sight to behold: it was decorated with gold, while the ceilings of all other rooms were simply made of cedar wood<sup>32</sup>. Building records, such as those for the Sanctuary of Asclepius in Epidaurus, also confirm that gold and ivory were used to decorate *cella* ceilings. Although they were usually much smaller than those in the rest of the temple, the decoration applied to these ceilings could be worth up to five times as much, as attested by the inscribed building invoices discovered in Epidaurus<sup>33</sup>. The only archaeological evidence for the gilding of a *cella* ceiling was found in the Temple of Apollo Sosianus in Rome, which hails from the early Augustan

<sup>29</sup> For more details, see Lipps 2018, 91–142.

<sup>30</sup> Stevens 1927, 27–30. 87–91. 115–117.

<sup>31</sup> IG IV2 103 Z. 125. 162. On this see Roux 1961, 131–200; Seiler 1986, 80–84; Lambrinouidakis 1988, 225–348; Prignitz 2014, esp. 219–223.

<sup>32</sup> Jos. Ant. Iud. 8, 68.

<sup>33</sup> Prignitz 2014, 70 f. The inscriptions suggest that the literary sources attesting gold ceilings in temples are also referring to the more protected *cella* ceilings and not those in galleries. For a compilation of the literary sources, see Lipps 2018, 113–117.

period<sup>34</sup>. The ceilings in the temple's gallery, in contrast, are decorated with single-recessed coffers produced in marble or stuccoed travertine<sup>35</sup>.

In domestic architecture, the ceilings in large reception or dining rooms tended to be more elaborate in comparison to those located in other spaces<sup>36</sup>. Although few complete ceilings have survived from pre-Augustan times<sup>37</sup>, numerous literary sources describe ceilings in rooms hosting *symposia*. Their accentuation through the use of decoration can be traced back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., as one of Aristophanes' characters describes the ceiling in an *andron* as being particularly praiseworthy<sup>38</sup>:

Βδ: Τὰ γόνατ' ἔκτεινε, καὶ γυμναστικῶς  
ὑγρὸν χύτλασον σεαυτὸν ἐν τοῖς στρώμασιν.  
Ἔπειτ' ἐπαίνεσόν τι τῶν χαλκωμάτων,  
ὄροφὴν θέασαι, κρεκάδι' ἀύλης θαύμασον:

BDELYKLEON: Extend your legs and pour yourself out on the coverlets in a fluid, athletic way. Then praise one of the bronzes, gaze at the ceiling, admire the room's curtains.

The tendency to emphasise the importance of particular rooms through ceiling decoration is also attested by the literary accounts of luxury 'yachts' in Alexandria and Syracuse. Much like *cellae* in temples and sanctuaries, the ceilings of the dining rooms were especially elaborate<sup>39</sup>. The same applies to the extravagant ceiling in the palace of Cleopatra VII<sup>40</sup>:

*Ipsa locus templi, quod vix corruptior aetas  
exstruat, instar erat laqueataque tecta ferebant  
divitias crassumque trabes absconderat aurum*

The palace itself was the size of a temple, such a temple as a corrupt age would hardly rear; the panels of the ceiling displayed wealth, and the rafters were hidden beneath a thick coating of gold.

Most of the other textual sources, including papyri<sup>41</sup>, describe ceilings in dining rooms of the elite during the Late Republican and the Early to Middle Imperial periods. Some of them must have been extraordinarily beautiful, as Manilius even compares them directly to temple ceilings<sup>42</sup>. The first references to gilded ceilings in private houses appear in the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. But it was also a common topic during the Augustan period, when sources describe the additional use

<sup>34</sup> Lauter 1986, 249 f.; Viscogliosi 1988, 138 f. (g); Mattern 2001, 59 Figs. 6–7.

<sup>35</sup> Coletta 2011, 183–185.

<sup>36</sup> Little is known about the ceilings in *atria*, peristyles and smaller rooms of private houses before Augustan times. Vitruvius describes the different kinds of ceiling constructions made of wood in *atria* rather matter-of-factly (Vitr. De arch. 6, 3, 1–2). According to him, the ceiling in the *tablinum* was characteristically high. (Vitr. De arch. 6, 3, 6). Those in the peristyle, however, were to be made from carved wood or decorated with stucco (Vitr. De arch. 6, 7, 3).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Spinazzola 1953, 458–465 (on the Casa del Criptoportico) or Guidobaldi et. al. 2009, 145–153 Figs. 110–116 (for a stucco ceiling from the Villa dei Papiri).

<sup>38</sup> Aristoph. Vesp. 1215. Text after Wilson 2007, translation by Henderson 1998, 377. See also Philipp 1968, 34; Kiderlen 1995, 127 f.

<sup>39</sup> On the Nile yacht: Ath. 5, 205e–f. See also Caspari 1916, 1–74; von Normann 1996, 153–155. 158. On the yacht from Syracuse: Moschion = Ath. 5, 207c–e; Persson 1935.

<sup>40</sup> Lucan. 10, 111–122. Text after Badali 1992, translation by Duff 1962, 599. On the passage, see amongst others Leach 2004, 56.

<sup>41</sup> A scene from a Zenon papyrus dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C., for example, describes a person offering to decorate ceilings in dining rooms with specific designs: P CZ 3 59445; translation by Hunt – Edgar 1970, 396–399 no. 171. On the papyrus, see amongst others Wesenberg 1971/1972, 8 f.; Nowicka 1984, 256–259; Andreou 1988, 15 f.; Altekamp 1990, 56 f.; Walter-Karydi 1994, 44 with n. 39.

<sup>42</sup> Manil. 5, 291–292.

of ivory and movable equipment for the ceilings in feast halls<sup>43</sup>. This wealth of material was often condemned from a social and moral point of view, especially during the Late Republic and the Early Empire<sup>44</sup>. Here, in this discussion about the appropriateness of ceiling decoration in the private sphere, the social dimension of *decor* is particularly well-documented.

## The action context: staging the stuccoed ceiling in the tetrastyle *oecus*

Returning to the start of this paper, the ceiling in the tetrastyle *oecus* can probably be dated to the era just before the installation of gilded ceilings in private houses became increasingly common (Fig. 2). The function of this room can be deduced from literary descriptions, as well as the typology of its floor plan and location within the house<sup>45</sup>. Its central position, size and accessibility via multiple doorways<sup>46</sup> make interpretations such as an advisory, reception or dining room plausible<sup>47</sup>. For example, it would have been possible to receive guests through one door and then escort them out through the other<sup>48</sup>. Therefore, more effort was put into the ceiling of the tetrastyle *oecus* than the adjoining ramp, as guests would have spent considerably more time admiring the ceiling in the former.

This ceiling would have been appreciated especially during evening receptions, when visitors would have awaited the arrival of the house owner. Perhaps there were even *klinai* or other seating arrangements placed between the pillars, where guests could rest and marvel at the room. In the winter, the light at sunset would have shone in from the *porticus* through the open doors. But the ceiling must have produced an even greater effect in the flickering light of torches after night set in. Because of the depth of the stucco and the reflection of light upon its shiny finish, shadows would have been cast throughout the room, in a way that could not have been achieved using two-dimensional media. It was exactly this glinting of light in the central nave that would have first caught the eye when walking in from the peristyle. Perhaps the *oecus* seemed to emerge straight out of a painting in the Second Style, except that here one could actually enter the aedicule. The exclusiveness of the room became clearer the closer one got to the entrance from the peristyle<sup>49</sup>. It seems that we have encountered here a decorative phase in which it was not yet common to install (the often criticised) gilded ceilings in houses, a trend that became more popular during the Augustan period. But a special visual effect was achieved in a different, yet clever, way: through the creation of deeply recessed reliefs, bright white (marble-like) painting and a glossy finish.

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<sup>43</sup> See the compilation of sources in Lipps 2018, 136–141.

<sup>44</sup> See Lipps 2018, 182–184.

<sup>45</sup> Dickmann 1999, 164. 213 f.

<sup>46</sup> On the doorways: Borrello 2009, 14.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Borrello 2009, 14 and Musatti 2009, 21 with different hypotheses on the function.

<sup>48</sup> On such *salutationes* see Goldbeck 2010.

<sup>49</sup> On the staging of such rooms from the peristyle (and vice versa), see Dickmann 1999, 359–364.

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Alexandra Dardenay

# From *Insula* to Dwelling: Architectural Transformations and Principles of *Decor* in *Insula V* at Herculaneum

**Abstract:** The city of Herculaneum offers an exceptional analytical laboratory for the study of decorative elements in domestic environments and a reading of images in their architectural contexts. This paper is focused on the case of *insula V* at Herculaneum, which was a truly mixed habitat (class/families). The analysis of the paintings in context is approached on several scales (*insula*, house, room, wall) throughout the dwelling, in order to provide a diachronic analysis of the decoration. As I shall demonstrate, the houses were modified several times in response to the changing needs of the occupants, to accommodate different activities (economic activities, in particular) or to accommodate additional inhabitants (i. e., newly-married sons, freed slaves who were granted an apartment). These renovations to the ground floor could be combined with the addition of an upper level (where one could move, for example, the living quarters of the proprietor). What were the consequences of these architectural transformations on the decoration of the dwellings? What aesthetic choices were made to include old decoration in the new decor of the renovated houses?

The principles of decor in the domestic sphere, as theorised by Vitruvius<sup>1</sup>, aimed to establish harmony between architecture, decoration and the social status of the familia; within the dwelling, these principles were also intended to orchestrate the articulation between different spaces and prioritise their setting according to the uses that could be made of the different rooms<sup>2</sup>, taking into account their visibility and the people to whom they were accessible.

Very often, however, these theoretical principles came up against the constraints of urban architecture and the development of dwellings within the plot. Indeed, during the Imperial period, the construction of houses *ex nihilo* was the exception rather than the rule. It was possible, of course, to acquire one or more lots within an *insula*, destroy the old buildings and build a new house. But in the vast majority of situations observed, the new owners retained the architectural structure of older dwellings and all (or at least parts) of their decoration. In the analysis of houses of the Roman period, it is therefore important to distinguish between those in which the owner was able to implement newly chosen decoration, and those in which the owner had to deal with pre-existing architecture and decoration and integrate them (as best as possible) into his project. This is why the study of Roman dwellings makes it possible to distinguish the implementation of 'chosen *decor*' (created *ad novo*) from that of 'constrained *decor*'. The term 'constrained *decor*' is used when the planning of decoration must integrate constraints, either architectural (part of an older dwelling that must be preserved) or decorative (part of the older decoration that must be preserved). 'Constraints' are therefore architectural or decorative elements that must be taken into account when planning the future layout. These constraints limit the architect's (and decorator's) freedom of action. However, modifications can be made to the pre-existing architecture and decoration that limit the impact of 'constraint' on the new project. In the case of 'constrained *decor*', then, one might wonder how the old elements (decoration and architecture) were integrated into a new project. According to what modalities? And for what intended result?

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<sup>1</sup> Vitr. De arch. 1, 2, 5. See also Haug, this volume.

<sup>2</sup> The spaces of the Roman house were multifunctional, and the activities that took place therein varied according to the time of day and even the seasons: Laurence 1994, 154–166; Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 8–10. On the consequences of this multifunctionality on the decoration of the rooms, see Annette Haug's remarks in the introduction on 'action scenarios'.

Discovered at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the city of Herculaneum has been the subject of many successive programmes of excavation and restoration; it is therefore a ‘multi-layered’ site in which the built environment and the architectural decoration visible today are products of a slow process of hybridisation between the Classical and the modern<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, in order to rediscover the original state (that predating the eruption of A.D. 79), it is crucial to identify the distinct phases of this history by combining insights obtained from archival documents with the analysis of the walls, floors and decorated surfaces as they exist today. An approach that combines the study of architecture with the analysis of decoration is extremely productive, even at the scale of a single building. The advantage presented by Herculaneum is that the site allows such an approach to be expanded to the scale of an *insula*. In other words, a diachronic, combined study of building and decoration in a larger space permits a consideration of the effects of architectural developments on the decorative programmes, not only at the scale of a single structure, but several adjoining buildings. Furthermore, the conservation of upper floors at Herculaneum improves our understanding of the habitable space of dwellings, augmenting the interest of the study.

## Transformations of dwellings and their *decor* in *insula V*

The study of the architectural and ornamental evolution of the *insula V* should enable us to highlight the choices made by the successive owners: as far as decoration is concerned, what is preserved and what is modified? How was the older setting exploited to serve the ‘appropriateness’ of *decor*? We will retain here only the most significant elements for our demonstration. Between the Samnite period and the eruption of Vesuvius, *insula V* was subject to several particularly substantial modifications to the boundaries of its lots<sup>4</sup>. Accordingly, it is convenient to divide the *insula* into two sections: a northern part in which the original parcels were oriented along a north/south axis and a southern part in which the parcels were oriented east/west<sup>5</sup>. The orientation chosen for the lots in the northern part of the *insula* allowed the edifices located on the northern border to open their principal façades onto the *decumanus superior* (Fig. 1). This layout can also be found in *insula VI*.

For the original allotment of the *insula*, which occurred between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., Roger de Kind suggests a division into six strips<sup>6</sup>. Unfortunately, the lack of extensive stratigraphic excavations deprives us of a global and reliable understanding of the original architectural structures of the *insula*. Nonetheless, a study of the built environment offers numerous (if incomplete) insights. My objective here will be to explore some exemplary cases of modifications to the allotment layout and to the interior architecture of the edifices, demonstrating the utility of a diachronic approach that combines the study of the built environment with the analysis of decorative programmes.

<sup>3</sup> Coralini 2011; Dardenay et al. 2016; Dardenay – Grand-Clément 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Monteix 2010, 312 and Pl. VIII.

<sup>5</sup> Like previous researchers, I use a grid north rather than geographic north throughout this text.

<sup>6</sup> De Kind 1998, 62–64 and 198. The same hypothesis is evident in Ganschow 1989. On pre-Roman Herculaneum see also Tran Tam Tinh 1977, Johannowsky 1982, Pagano 1993 and Formola 2013. The study of the urban development of Herculaneum and the new study of stratigraphic data led Simona Formola to postpone the date of construction of Herculaneum’s central quarters to the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., due to natural boundaries (coastline and river). He also attributes the limited dimensions of each *insula* to the geomorphology of the site and its position on a promontory, both of which conditioned the allotment; he prefers a mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century date for the creation of *insula V*, based on geomorphological arguments.

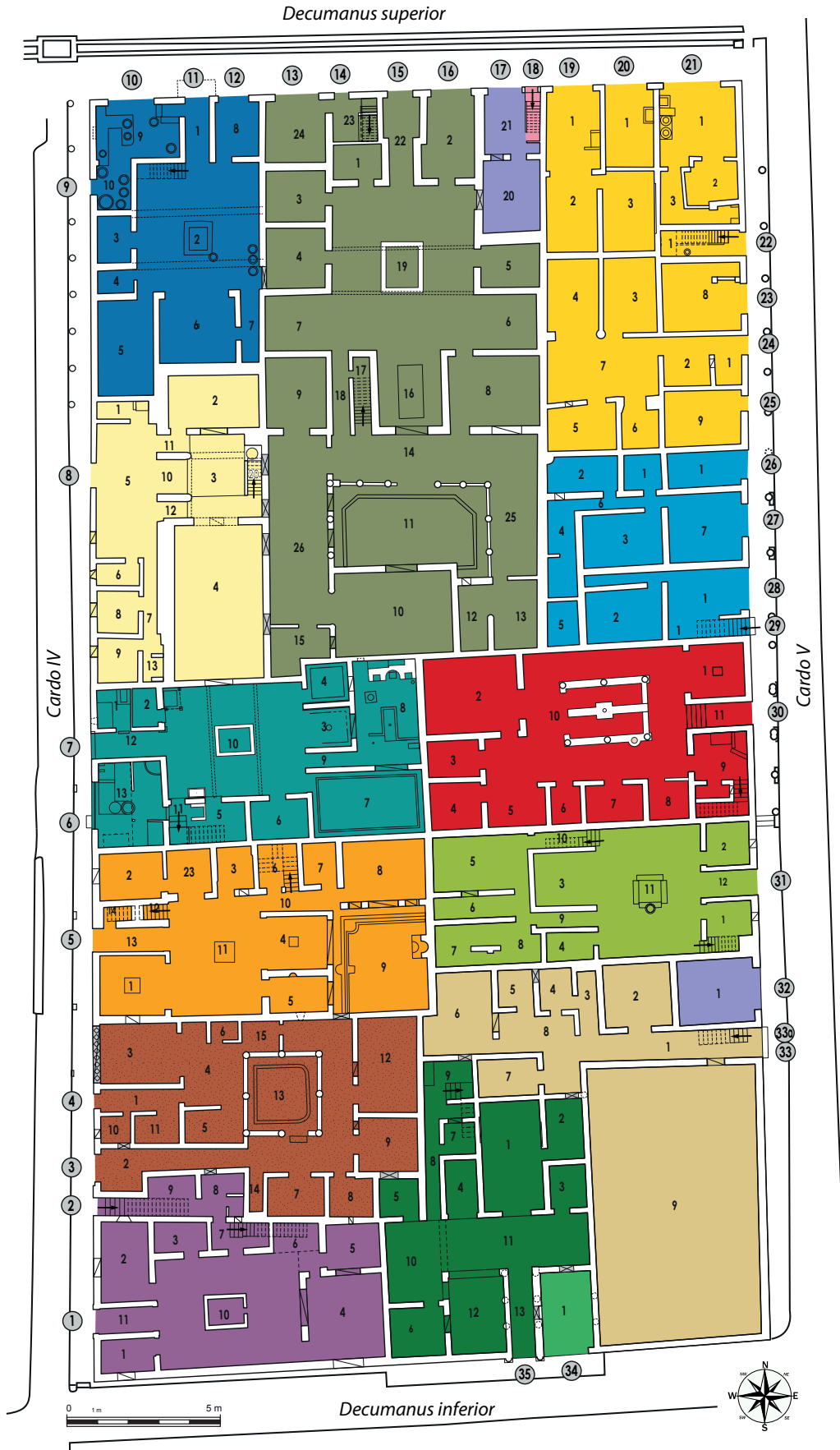
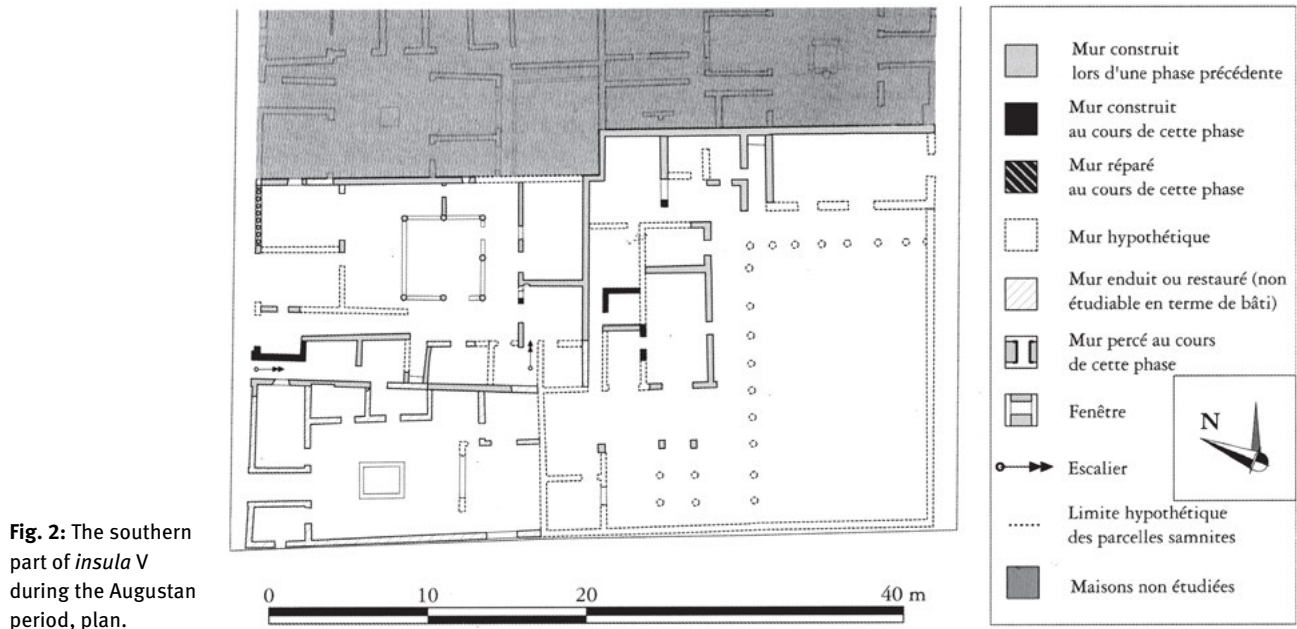


Fig. 1: Plan of *insula* V in A.D. 79.



## The southern part of *insula V* after the construction of the Casa con Giardino

At the dawn of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., a large home was erected in the current location of the Casa con Giardino (V 33) and the Casa del Gran Portale (V 35) (Fig. 2). I will not address all phases of building and decoration in the southern sector of the *insula* here<sup>7</sup>, but will expound only on the consequences of the division of this large dwelling into two houses (the aforementioned Casa con Giardino and Casa del Gran Portale) between A.D. 62 and 79. The analysis of the structure, paintings and mosaics of the Casa del Gran Portale illustrates the successive transformations that occurred in this part of the *insula*. The large house from the Augustan period was damaged considerably by the earthquake of A.D. 62<sup>8</sup>. This damage was repaired, and later, after a period of undetermined length, the edifice was divided into the two independent housing units.

The configuration of the Casa del Gran Portale made advantageous use of the pre-existing structures. According to the studies conducted by Thomas Ganschow and Nicolas Monteix, a part of the peristyle was repurposed to create an entrance hallway (*fauces*) flanked by a *taberna*<sup>9</sup>. The garden, on the other hand, was incorporated into another dwelling, whose modern name is derived from it: the Casa con Giardino. However, within these new houses some of the older decoration was preserved. The Casa del Gran Portale is a useful case study for the strategies implemented by an owner who sought to remodel a house on a constrained plan. With great skill, the owner (or the architect with whom he worked), was able to exploit the potential of the house, both by rethinking the planimetry and by preserving some of the older decoration. This articulation between old and new *decor* aimed at a harmonious result, in accordance with the principles of decorative ‘appropriateness’. Indeed, it was the respect for these principles that gave the house and its owner a certain level of social prestige.

<sup>7</sup> For a complete study of the buildings of the *insula*, one can refer to my habilitation thesis: Dardenay 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Monteix 2010, including a detailed account of the destruction and reconstruction on 318. The entire western section was clearly reconstructed with rubble recovered from collapsed walls. In conjunction with this repair work, the door jamb of the entrance to room (6) of the Casa con Giardino was restored in *opus vittatum*, just prior to being sealed with red tuff rubble in order to complete the separation between the two houses.

<sup>9</sup> Monteix 2010, 318.



**Fig. 3:** Casa del Gran Portale, view of the entrance from the *decumanus inferior*.

First of all, the house was provisioned with a new entrance (onto the *decumanus inferior*) built within the portico of the ancient peristyle and set on axis with the *triclinium* (1). Thus, the portico was transformed into an entrance corridor (*fauces*), an arrangement that allowed the reproduction of the traditional axiality (*fauces* – atrium – *tablinum*) visible in most Italic houses (Figs. 1; 3). The portal was framed by semi-engaged brick columns (once covered with stucco) that supported unusual historiated limestone capitals, decorated with figures of Victory with outstretched wings flanked by acanthus leaves (Fig. 3). In an effort to enhance the dignity of the house, a sidewalk – the only one on this part of the *decumanus inferior* – was built along the entire façade of the dwelling<sup>10</sup>. The enhancement of the façade aimed to give the house a certain level of prestige<sup>11</sup>: the *decor* implemented was intended to compensate for the exiguity of the place and especially the absence of a large vestibule or atrium, which could be used to stage the social status of the *dominus*.

The figures of Victory on the entrance capitals of the Casa del Gran Portale are perhaps also a distant echo of the ancient Republican tradition that permitted victorious generals to hang trophies on the door of their house to evoke their victory. Moreover, Livy<sup>12</sup> clearly states that this practice was not reserved for victorious generals, nor for magistrates, since others did not hesitate to usurp this honour in order to ennoble their houses; Polybius<sup>13</sup> also specifies that some soldiers had earned this right for having accomplished valiant acts on the battlefield. The decoration of the façade of the Casa del Gran Portale can then be seen as a project to enhance the prestige of a house with a narrow and atypical planimetry, with the size of the entrance portal operating in a compensatory

<sup>10</sup> Hartnett 2017, 141 Fig. 34. Before this dwelling was developed as an independent unit, during the last decade of the site, there were no house entrances on this side of the *decumanus*,

<sup>11</sup> On the role of the façade in staging the social prestige of the *dominus*: Dickmann 1999, 151–162; Helg 2012, 146 f.

<sup>12</sup> Liv. 38, 43, 9f. describes the house of M. Fulvius Nobilior following the capture of Ambracia in 187 B.C.; Liv. 23, 23, 6 recounts a Senate session during the Second Punic War in which those who posted *spolia* on the façade of their house without holding an office were denounced.

<sup>13</sup> Pol. 6, 39, 10f.





**Fig. 4:** Casa del Gran Portale, room (6). West wall, detail of the upper zone with masks framing a trophy.



**Fig. 5:** Casa del Gran Portale, room (1).

manner. Moreover, the image of Victory perfectly echoes the ornamental programme of room (6), a *diaeta* that opened onto a small garden (12), which was beautifully decorated with paintings on a blue background. In this room, the trophy motifs that adorn the upper zone also belong to the repertoire of martial images (Fig. 4).

*Triclinium* (1), which was located on axis with the new entrance, and thus visible from the street, now occupied the symbolic position of the *tablinum* (Fig. 3). During the Augustan period, this room, richly decorated with paintings in the Third Style with red backgrounds and Dionysian themes, was doubtless a large reception room opening onto the peristyle of the large house (Fig. 2)<sup>14</sup>. When the house was subdivided, however, the room became part of the Casa del Gran Portale. The doorway in the west wall was closed over and camouflaged by paintings made in a style identical to the rest of the wall decoration. The floor of the room, cocciopesto with stone inlays, dates to the late Third Style and is contemporaneous with the original paintings; it was therefore also conserved voluntarily. The owner thus preserved the unity of the decoration of this space, such as it was thought to have been initially, when it was a luminous *triclinium* opening on the peristyle of an expansive home.

<sup>14</sup> The niches for *klinai* in the east and west walls confirm that the room could have been used as a *triclinium*.



**Fig. 6:** Casa del Gran Portale, Fourth Style painting on the west wall of *ala* (10).

The same phenomenon can be observed in room (7) of the Casa con Giardino, which was originally decorated with paintings in the Third Style on a white background (datable on stylistic grounds to the years between 50–25 B.C.<sup>15</sup>) (Fig. 5). During the earthquake of A.D. 62, this room suffered a collapse of large sections of the walls, which were later reconstructed<sup>16</sup> and redecorated with frescoes imitating the partially conserved mural paintings of the Third Style. This speaks to the prestige associated with the presence of such wall paintings in the house. These frescos were also conserved during the next phase, when the large house was subdivided and this room became part of the Casa con Giardino<sup>17</sup>. Consequently, the decoration of room (7) is contemporary with that of room (1) in the Casa del Gran Portale, and presumably belongs to the same ornamental programme. It is therefore appropriate to study them simultaneously. Unfortunately, the rest of the Casa con Giardino has been completely destroyed, so it is not possible to carry out a similarly thorough study of the *decor*.

In the Casa del Gran Portale, the aesthetics of the old and new wall paintings were close enough that their coexistence felt balanced and coherent<sup>18</sup>. This was clearly the case with respect to the paintings of *triclinium* (1) (Third Style) and *ala* (10) (Fourth Style)<sup>19</sup>. The black panels of the *ala* (Fig. 6) are sober and refined, even somewhat austere, and are in perfect harmony with the red panels of the Augustan period in *triclinium* (1)<sup>20</sup>. It was also important that the paintings in the *ala* were in accordance with the floor of this space, which was *cocciopesto* with lithic inserts, dating to the First Style. This is the original floor of the peristyle in the Casa Sannitica (V 1), which was preserved until the final phase of the site, despite the many structural alterations that took place in

<sup>15</sup> Esposito 2014, 112f.

<sup>16</sup> Ganschow 1989, 306 f.

<sup>17</sup> The floor of this room was destroyed or is not currently visible.

<sup>18</sup> The coexistence of multiple decorative phases has been studied in detail by W. Ehrhardt (Ehrhardt 2012, esp. chapter 5). He suggests that economics and pragmatism are the two chief factors in owners' decisions to conserve older decoration, while acknowledging that aesthetic harmony and coherence with current fashion were also important.

<sup>19</sup> On these paintings see Esposito 2014, 135 f. (Third Style) and 162 f. (Fourth Style). See also Dardenay 2019, chapters 2–4. On fusion between the Third and Fourth Styles, see W. Ehrhardt on the Casa di C. Iucundus (V 1,26) in Pompeii (Ehrhardt 2012, 138).

<sup>20</sup> This is because the association between the red and black panels was also characteristic of the Third Style. For examples, see Dardenay 2018, Figs. 6–8. This trend continued in the Fourth Style, but with more expansive colours and motifs.



the intervening years. The conservation of this ancient floor in the Casa del Gran Portale indicates both an economic concern and a need to ennoble the *decor* of this dwelling. Its constrained plan and the absence of a large reception hall had to be balanced by the use of older decoration. There seems little doubt, then, that the repainting of *ala* (10) was intended to match the original decorative styles and materials employed throughout the dwelling.

The paintings of the *fauces* and of the transverse corridor (11) have unfortunately been destroyed, but we know that both of their floors predate the establishment of the Casa del Gran Portale<sup>21</sup>. These older floors were located along the visual axis of the entrance and reception area of the house. And like the monumental entrance and Third Style decoration of room (1), which were also located in this area, they contributed, with their ‘archaistic’ aesthetics, to reinforcing the dignity of the house. Moreover, the visual coherence of this ornamental programme helped to underline the suitability of the *decor*.

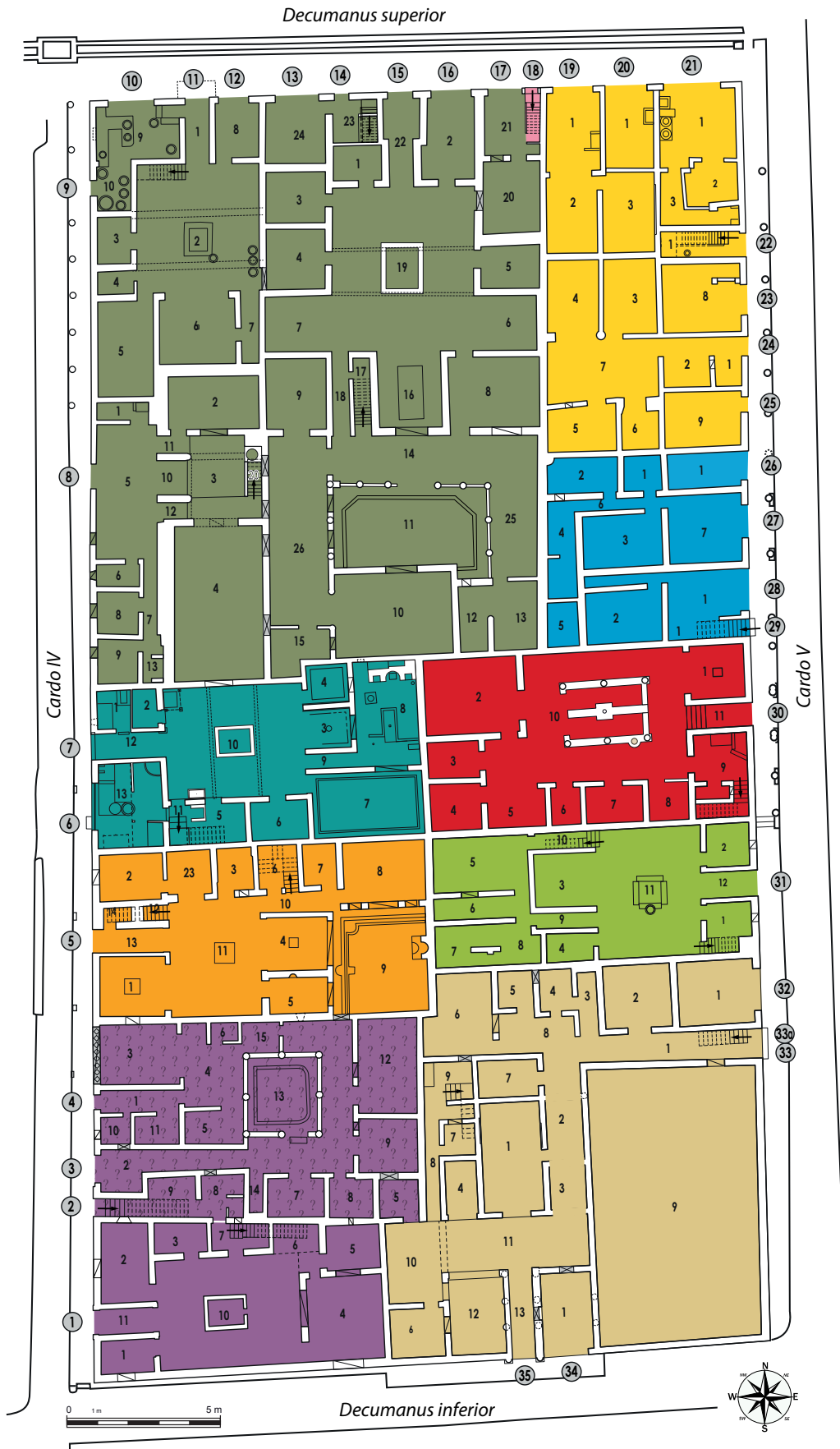
Other paintings and mosaics were completed during the final phase of occupation, following the subdivision into two dwellings. This is the case for the Fourth Style decoration in rooms (4) and (6), as well as *ala* (10). Some of these rooms present decorative programmes that are stylistic hybrids, such as *ala* (10), with its First Style floor and Fourth Style wall paintings. In its final phase, then, the layout and *decor* of the Casa del Gran Portale reveal a veritable patchwork of architectural and decorative elements dating to different epochs, intentionally preserved, displayed and supplemented. The older decoration was judiciously combined with new wall paintings in order to create a harmonious aesthetic that respected the principles of domestic *decor*. Moreover, this ‘constrained programme’ was the result of the exploitation and improvement of the architectural elements, paintings and mosaics of the different structures that succeeded one another on the lots of the southern sector of the *insula*. Thus, the concurrent study of these different buildings, from a diachronic as well as synchronic perspective, is clearly essential.

## The northern part of *insula V* after the construction of the Casa del Bicentenario

Let us turn now to northern part of the *insula*. Substantial and successive structural modifications had a lasting impact on the morphology of the plots in this area. The most definitive of these modifications are related to the construction of a large *domus* in the northwest corner of the *insula*, the central nucleus of which was occupied by the Casa del Bicentenario (V 13–16) (Fig. 7). In its initial layout, the Casa del Bicentenario also extended to the west, where the rear part of the house – the *posticum* – provided access to *cardo IV* (Fig. 8). In the final phase, this *posticum* was detached from the rest of the large *domus* to form the Casa del Bel Cortile (V 8) (Fig. 1). Originally, that is to say in the Augustan phase, there was no stairway in the *cortile* (3), around which a *triclinium* (2), a fine *oecus* (4) and a few service rooms were arranged. The *oecus*, based on its proportions, was one of the largest and most prestigious rooms in the Casa del Bicentenario and opened onto the dwelling’s peristyle. After the partitioning of the property, the Casa del Bicentenario lost this prestigious reception room, a deficiency that was compensated for in part by the construction of a new *oecus* in the southern wing of the peristyle<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> In both spaces, the floor was produced in mortar with stone inlays, and dated to the Late Republican or Augustan period (Guidobaldi et al. 2014, 336). There is a stratigraphic difference of around 12 cm between the oldest (*fauces*, vestibule and *ala*) and the latest floors in this house.

<sup>22</sup> This could also have occurred earlier: Monteix (2010, Fig. 175) dates the construction of the new *oecus* between A.D. 62 and 70/75 (between the two earthquakes).



**Fig. 7:** Plan of *insula* V during the Augustan period.



**Fig. 8:** Casa del Bel Cortile, Second Style mosaic in corridor (11).

Following a process similar to the one we have seen in the Casa del Gran Portal, the ‘constrained layout’ of the Casa del Bel Cortile was adapted to make it possible to achieve decorative effects that aimed to enhance the prestige of an atypical dwelling. The study of the building reveals that some elements that belonged to the original dwelling, notably the floors, were integrated into the Casa del Bel Cortile and conserved until the final phase of occupation. Some of them are very old, like the floor of hallway (11), which presents an extremely rare black and white mosaic of the Second Style (Fig. 9).

As in the Casa del Gran Portale, the owner took care to reorganise the planimetry of the entrance of the house. In the absence of an atrium, a new entrance door was opened on the axis of the *cortile*. In order to achieve an arrangement that conformed with the principles of domestic *decor* and the canonical organisation of the traditional *domus*, a small space (10) was created between the vestibule and *cortile*, which occupied the position of the *tablinum* in the canonical design. It is much more modest in size, however, so there is no doubt that its function was purely symbolic (Fig. 8).

Regarding the ornamental programme of the entrance area, the strategy seems to have been different from that observed in the Casa del Gran Portale. Rather than exploiting the older decoration (in this case Second Style) to offer the visitor an austere and dignified vision, the reception area was largely repainted in the latest fashion. On the other hand, the original floors were preserved in a number of rooms, including hallways (11) and (12) (located on either side of the pseudo-*tablinum*) and hallway (7). They are residual vestiges of the ‘proto-Casa del Bicentenario’, which was constructed at the dawn of the Augustan period, and belong to the same ornamental programme as the wall paintings in rooms (2), (5) and (6) (schematic Second Style), which were covered by later paintings (Figs. 8–9). There is a similarity between the Second Style decoration in these spaces and that of room (2) in the Casa del Bicentenario, which presents a fairly similar pattern of architectural elements outlined in red against a white background (Fig. 10). All of the wall paintings and mosaics discussed above were associated with the same Second Style programme, but since they belonged to two distinct dwellings during the final phase of occupation, it is very easy to overlook their original relationship, particularly if one does not study the construction chronology in detail.

The older floors were harmoniously included in the new ornamental programme of the Casa del Bel Cortile, thanks to the aesthetic choices made when new floors were laid. Throughout the



**Fig. 9:** Casa del Bel Cortile, view of entrance area from vestibule (5).



**Fig. 10:** Casa del Bicentenario, Second Style paintings in room (2).vestibule (5).

dwelling's reception area, including the vestibule (5), pseudo-*tablinum* (10) and *cortile* (3), the mosaic floors make reference to the Second Style design found in corridor (11). The mosaics in the pseudo-*tablinum* and *cortile* display black crosses on a white background (Fig. 11). Although a more modern style, they are perfectly coordinated with the floor in corridor (11), which also presents a simple bichrome design (Fig. 9). In vestibule (5), the owner chose a white mosaic with a black border, also perfectly matched, but more economical for a large surface. The same mosaic was also chosen for room (2), a reception space located opposite *oecus* (4). Often interpreted as a *triclinium* (despite numerous uncertainties about its actual function) the paintings that adorned the walls of this room are typologically coherent with Third Style designs of the Claudian period<sup>23</sup>. The floor of this room, however, was re-laid in the final phase of occupation, in an effort to match both the older paintings and the other mosaics in the house.

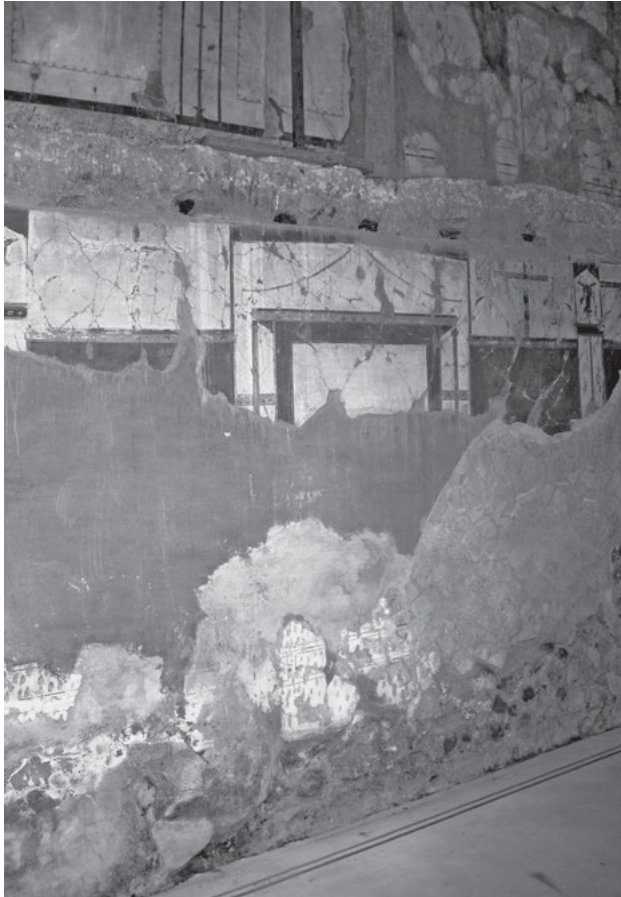
With regard to *oecus* (4), only the final state of decoration is known. The Fourth Style renovation was achieved only in A.D. 62, at a time when the room was still a formal reception space in the Casa del Bicentenario. It presents an architectural style organised around central *aediculae* on the east and west walls, which present alternating panels adorned with flying figures (cupids) and architectural vistas (Fig. 12). The owner of the newly established Casa del Bel Cortile made the choice to conserve the old mural paintings in this, the largest room of the house. The global study of the decoration in context reveals that this choice was not isolated, and that in reality he preserved the majority of the paintings that were extant when the property was separated from the Casa del Bicentenario. With regard to the floors, only the mosaics in the main rooms of the house were entirely re-laid; in hallways (7) (11) and (12), the floors from the grand house of the Augustan period were retained.

<sup>23</sup> Esposito 2014, 127.





**Fig. 11:** Casa del Bel Cortile, view of cortile (3) from the upper floor.



**Fig. 12:** Casa del Bel Cortile, room (2).

Altogether, a quick survey of the ground floor reveals that only some of the decoration was redone by the new proprietor. Specifically, these spaces are the entryway (5), *cortile* (3) and pseudo-*tablinum* (10), that is to say, the entire reception area of the house<sup>24</sup>. Whether the owner intended to redecorate the other rooms of the house, we will never know<sup>25</sup>, although refurbishment work on the paintings in the *cortile* had started, as indicated by the layers of paint on the east wall. In the end, the structural and architectural history of the building shaped the decoration of the spaces within it. The decorative programme was adapted to the *decor* that was already in place at the moment that the Casa del Bel Cortile was established as an independent dwelling. The choices reflected in its final composition were either made due to a lack of time, or by a desire to maintain older decoration that contributed a certain character to the space. In the Casa del Bel Cortile there was therefore a consistent attempt to ensure that old and modern styles coexist harmoniously. It is also notable that in the reception area, the older decoration was preserved only when it contributed to the magnificence of the house<sup>26</sup>. For this reason, the Second Style paintings in the vestibule, which were deemed too simple and ordinary, were covered with Fourth Style decoration in the latest fashion.

As noted above, between the years A.D. 70–75, the Casa del Bicentenario was partially deconstructed and cut off from certain rooms that then became independent housing units<sup>27</sup>. The example of the Casa del Bel Cortile is not an isolated one, as demonstrated by the study of the construction sequences. Another notable transformation is the conversion of shop V 17 and the rooms located above it (V 18) into two discrete living spaces<sup>28</sup>. During this transformation, the doorway connecting the back room (20) to the atrium (19) of the Casa del Bicentenario was sealed off. The doorway is covered by Fourth Style decoration that differs slightly from the paintings found elsewhere in the atrium, indicating that the modification postdates the production of the main decorative programme. At the time of the eruption, shop V 17 was also appointed with refined mural paintings in the Fourth Style, at least some of which were completed after the subdivision of the Casa del Bicentenario<sup>29</sup>. This can be deduced from the doubling of the west wall in room (21) and south wall of room (20), which covered the sealed doorway known to post-date the second earthquake<sup>30</sup>. With regard to the structural modification of these rooms, it is worth noting that the mezzanine of room (21) was installed after the paintings (the pipes from the latrine run over the painting). The *decor* is homogenous between the two rooms of V 17.

Apartment V 18, on the upper level, is an ensemble of three rooms with a fairly modest footprint (c. 38 m<sup>2</sup>). It was accessible from the street, via a stairway constructed against the east wall of room (21) in the ground-floor apartment<sup>31</sup>. Contrary to what is indicated by the current state of preservation of the room, there was a partition that isolated the stairway completely from the ground floor apartment in A.D. 79. The Fourth Style decoration of the apartment is of high quality, elevated by

<sup>24</sup> On the upper floor, the decoration of the rooms located above room (2) likely corresponds to a phase dating to A.D. 62–75 (Monteix 2010, 325 f. and no. 65); it is possible that the rest of the second storey was not decorated until after 70/75, when the house became independent (Monteix 2010, no. 65; Andrews 2006, 208–210).

<sup>25</sup> This could perhaps explain why the door to *oecus* (4) was not concealed, even provisionally.

<sup>26</sup> See Ehrhardt 2012, 139.

<sup>27</sup> According to N. Monteix, even though the damage caused by the second earthquake in this part of *insula* V was fairly minor, it did not prevent substantial structural rearrangement (Monteix 2010, 329). I wonder if, in reality, there was a cause-and-effect relationship between the earthquake of the years A.D. 70/75 and the subdivision of the house. Indeed, certain indications suggest that this process was planned (at least partially) during the A.D. 62–70/75 phase, when the new *oecus* in the peristyle of the Casa del Bicentenario was constructed; this development leads one to believe that the proprietor already anticipated the loss of this reception area in the *posticum*.

<sup>28</sup> Monteix 2010, 330.

<sup>29</sup> On this decoration: Eristov 1994, cat. no. 98.

<sup>30</sup> Andrews 2006, 243: ‘On this basis, the Fourth Style wall paintings in room 26, which cover the blocked doorway, must post-date the separation’. Regarding the doubling of the walls, see Monteix 2010, 329 Fig. 180.

<sup>31</sup> See the isometric reconstruction of these two apartments in Monteix 2010, 329 Fig. 30.



**Fig. 13:** Apartment V 18, upper floor. Archival photo following the removal of the tableau in room (53).

a pictorial piece of great rarity (Fig. 13). A tableau inserted into a wooden frame embedded in the mural painting was found during the excavation of the room located at the rear of the apartment<sup>32</sup>. It depicts *Erotes* decorating a Delphic tripod with attributes of Apollo, and is probably an old work, taken from another wall painting and inserted into this one. This technique, of which few attestations are known<sup>33</sup>, enhanced the refinement of the *decor*: apart from this old tableau, the whole decoration of the apartment was new.

These structural transformations are the product of a large-scale campaign of segmentation that split the proto-Casa del Bicentenario into smaller units of occupation. This case demonstrates the value of studying buildings and their decorative programmes not at the scale of a single dwelling, but in larger units that include, at a minimum, the adjoining structures and, as far as is possible, the entire *insula*. Only at this scale can one take into account all of the sequences that led to the creation of the observable *decor*, from both a synchronic perspective (at moment M) and a diachronic point of view (from phase to phase). One can hardly understand the architecture or the decorative programme of the Casa del Bel Cortile without considering that it was initially a part of the Casa del Bicentenario. Likewise, the architecture and *decor* of the Casa del Gran Portale (V 35) cannot be correctly interpreted without a concomitant study of the adjoining dwellings, in both their final and previous phases.

## Conclusion

At the scale of the *insula*, the detailed study of houses and their *decor*, from a diachronic perspective, presents entirely new opportunities to approach the evolution of living spaces and their 'decorative programmes', animated by a more dynamic perspective. In other words, constructing the identity of a dwelling and situating it within the *longue durée* are prioritised in such analyses. The notion that certain buildings display a careful conservatism with regard to older decoration may be, in some cases, an illusion created by the interruption of works in progress. Whatever the case, one must interrogate and attempt to clarify the relationship between the owners and the past, real or imagined.

<sup>32</sup> Parco Archeologico di Ercolano, inv. 149336; see also Maiuri 1938.

<sup>33</sup> A group of paintings (Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. 9019–9022) discovered at the foot of a wall in the *palaestra* were also seemingly waiting to be inserted into a new decorative ensemble (Allroggen-Bedel 1983, 145 f.).



The dwellings studied in this contribution offer examples of the strategies developed by proprietors to make the most of ‘constrained decor’. By retaining some older decorative forms, and by carrying out limited architectural transformations, they managed to design a new form of decor, appropriate to the standing of their social class<sup>34</sup>. Finally, it should be noted that, when carrying out these transformations, the emphasis was often placed on the entrance area of the house, either by exploiting the prestige of the older decoration or by integrating residual parts of the dwelling into an ornamental programme in the latest fashion. Thus, the examples of dwellings analysed in this contribution reveal the types of adaptations that could create coherence within ‘constrained decor’, in order to respect the rules of ‘appropriateness’ that governed the ordering of domestic space<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> Also highlighted by Ehrhardt 2012 (esp. 142).

<sup>35</sup> Concerning the concept of ‘appropriateness’ see Haug, this volume, esp. n. 2.

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M. Taylor Lauritsen

## Ornamental Painting on Campanian House Façades

**Abstract:** Since the late 1980s, studies of decoration in Campanian houses have emphasised the importance of painting schemes for the organisation of social activities and movement, examining the *domus* and its *decor* primarily from the perspective of the non-resident. At the same time, painted decoration on façades – particularly the non-figurative variety – has been ignored almost entirely in scholarly literature, despite its obvious communicative disposition. After an historical introduction, this paper considers a selection of common schemes employed in ornamental façade painting, exploring their relationship with similar designs found inside the house. The discussion concludes with some preliminary thoughts on the relationship between interior and exterior decoration, access and privacy in the dwellings of Pompeii and Herculaneum.

In the modern world, the exterior decoration of urban buildings plays a central role in the visual experience of the cityscape. Through the implementation of various decorative techniques, façades can draw the attention of the viewer and communicate information about a property's function, its occupants and its status within the community<sup>1</sup>. This transfer of information is successful due primarily to the knowledge and expectations of the viewer, which help him/her decipher the visual language presented and thus complete the semantic circle, as it were<sup>2</sup>. The situation was little different in antiquity, although for the modern researcher, deciphering the relationship between perceiver and material is considerably more challenging, because (1) identifying the expectations of ancient pedestrians is, naturally, quite difficult and (2) the material record with which they engaged has largely been destroyed.

In Roman cities, these problems are particularly apposite with respect to townhouses (*domūs*), which, unlike temples, *basilicae* and other public buildings, typically lacked characteristic exterior forms of architectural elaboration. Their primary decorative apparatus consisted of painted plaster, a perishable material that survives only in unique taphonomic circumstances<sup>3</sup>. Likewise, Roman writers, who often have much to say regarding the decoration of domestic interiors, are uncharacteristically quiet when it comes to façades. The only area to receive consistent attention in ancient texts is the house door, which is said to have been adorned with garlands and ribbons to mark important life events, such as births, marriages and deaths<sup>4</sup>. Material evidence from well-preserved archaeological contexts confirms that the door was often a point of emphasis within the overall decorative scheme. But there are no descriptions of façade paintings or architectural ornamentation, even in the sources that we might expect to focus on such topics, such as *De Architectura*<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, while

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1 Moughtin et al. 1999, 25–31.

2 Recent studies conducted in the fields of neurology and cognitive psychology have shown that prior beliefs and experiences can modify the neural pathways in the brain (de Lange et al. 2018; Sohn et al. 2019), which seems to accelerate the process of visual recognition (Pinto et al. 2015).

3 In the Vesuvian cities, façades built using drafted ashlar of Nocera tuff were sometimes left unplastered, particularly during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> centuries B.C. (infra 125). There is little evidence for this phenomenon outside Campania, but one can imagine a similar situation occurring at Rome, where various friable stones were readily available.

4 Births: Juv. 6, 77–81; Stat. Silv. 4, 8, 35–40. Marriages: Juv. 6, 51f.; Luc. 2, 354f. Deaths: Plin. HN 16, 139; Serv. Aen. 3, 64. During the mid-Republican period, victorious generals sometimes adorned the doorposts of their houses with the *spolia* of battle (e. g., Liv. 10, 7, 9. 38, 43, 9f.; Plin. HN 35, 7), and Suetonius points out that many old houses still displayed these materials in the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. (Suet. Ner. 38, 2).

5 The only passage that provides a holistic depiction of a domestic façade is found in Martial's epigrams, in which the satirist gives directions to his patron's house on the Palatine: *Protinus a laeva clari tibi fronte Penates / atriaque excelsae sunt adeunda domus*; 'Straight ahead on the left, the shining façade and atrium of an eminent abode await your arrival' (Mart. 1, 70, 11 f.; translation by author).

Vitruvius dedicates considerable time to both the architectural layout and decoration of interior space<sup>6</sup>, the same consideration does not extend to the façade, which he fails to mention even in passing.

As a consequence of these lacunar textual and material records, studies dedicated to the exterior decoration of Roman houses are rare, even in Pompeii and Herculaneum, where the archaeological evidence is most robust<sup>7</sup>. Here, a lack of attention can also be attributed to the wealth of decorative media discovered inside Campanian dwellings, which has generated considerable interest in the semantic characteristics of Roman interior design<sup>8</sup>. This paper represents an attempt to fill the gap between inside and out, offering some preliminary thoughts on the communicative role that façade painting played in the daily lives of the towns' inhabitants. The focus here is primarily on 'ornamental' designs, which I define as the non-figurative decorative techniques that were employed to cover the full breadth of the façade. Particular emphasis will be given to those patterns and motifs that appear in both interior and exterior wall painting.

## The Casa del Poeta Tragico

One could argue that the modern emphasis on Roman interior decoration found its genesis in the discovery of the Casa del Poeta Tragico (VI 8,5). In the autumn of 1824, excavators working along the Via delle Terme in Pompeii came upon the remains of this extraordinarily well-preserved house. Laid out in the traditional Campanian style, the dwelling gained almost immediate notoriety following its discovery, not on account of its size – which was modest by Pompeian standards – but rather its exceptional decorative programme<sup>9</sup>. After suffering considerable damage during the A.D. 62 earthquake, the entire property was redecorated in the Fourth Style, and much of this decoration was in excellent condition upon discovery<sup>10</sup>.

During the decade preceding the Poeta Tragico's excavation, public interest in the Roman world generally, and Pompeii specifically, had grown rapidly throughout Western Europe. This new wave of attention was spurred in part by the publication of William Gell's *Pompeiana* in 1817, a comprehensive two-volume work documenting many of the buildings that had been excavated at the site to date<sup>11</sup>. By the mid-1820s, popular artists, inspired by Gell's words and images, had begun to produce their own works of art focusing on the ancient city, and more specifically, on its catastrophic final hours<sup>12</sup>.

These apocalyptic compositions anticipated what was, until this century at least, the most famous literary work set in the city. Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii*, published in 1834, was an immediate international sensation; it was reproduced in numerous editions over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and inspired theatrical and musical interpretations of its content<sup>13</sup>. When Bulwer-Lytton was seeking an appropriate abode in which to situate his protagonist, the affluent Athenian Glaucus, he chose none other than the Casa del Poeta Tragico for the task, going so far as to describe the dwelling and its paintings room-by-room<sup>14</sup>. In the decades that followed, the house

<sup>6</sup> On layout: Vitruvius, *De arch.* 5, 2–5. On decoration: Vitruvius, *De arch.* 7, 3–5. See also Haug, this volume.

<sup>7</sup> However, the subject has begun to receive more attention in recent years: see Hartnett 2017, 146–194; Helg 2018.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Esposito, Lorenz and Dardenay, this volume.

<sup>9</sup> For contemporary accounts of the discovery and description of the house, see Bonucci 1827, 112–124; Fiorelli 1862, 116–141; Gell 1832, 142–178.

<sup>10</sup> PPM IV (1994) 527–603 s. v. VI 8, 3,5, Casa del Poeta Tragico (F. P. Badoni – F. Narciso) 527.

<sup>11</sup> Gell 1817. For a detailed study of Gell's publications and their impact, see Sweet 2015.

<sup>12</sup> These include John Martin's painting *The Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum* (1822), Giovanni Pacini's opera *L'ultimo giorno di Pompei* (1825), and Karl Bryullov's painting *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1833).

<sup>13</sup> Bulwer-Lytton 1834.

<sup>14</sup> Bulwer-Lytton 1834, 20–26.



**Fig. 1:** Photo-grammetric model of the Casa del Poeta Tragico's west façade.

and its decorative ensemble were immortalised in numerous drawings, watercolours, lithographs and scale models<sup>15</sup>. The images of the Trojan cycle that adorned the atrium, the panel depicting the sacrifice of Iphigenia found in the peristyle and, of course, the 'Cave Canem' mosaic decorating the floor of the *fauces* have been reproduced time and again in both popular and scholarly literature, and they remain central features of any introduction to Roman art today.

Despite the significant interest in its interior decoration, however, the paintings discovered on the façade of the Casa del Poeta Tragico have received comparatively little attention. Integrated into the southwest corner of *insula* VI 8, the house presented two elevations to the street. The south façade consisted of the house door (VI 8,5) and a pair of *tabernae* with characteristically wide entrances (VI 8,4 and VI 8,6)<sup>16</sup>. The jambs of these doorways, built in *opus testaceum*, offered comparatively little space for decorative elaboration, and no paintings or architectural sculptures were documented here during the process of excavation. But the dwelling's west façade, which measures around 40 m in length, offered a more expansive canvas with which to work (Fig. 1). Pierced only by a series of high, small windows and a narrow *posticum*, the paintings discovered here represent one of the most vibrant examples of exterior decoration from the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. At this time, a number of well-appointed houses throughout the city began to adopt certain aspects of the First Style schemes employed inside Campanian houses during the Late Samnite period.

In canonical First Style arrangements, interior walls were covered with a thick layer of stucco, which was sculpted to imitate the large, rectangular blocks employed in ashlar masonry (*opus isodomum*). These 'blocks' were then painted with swirling designs that mimicked the variegated stones used to build monumental public buildings throughout the Greco-Roman world. The aim was presumably to imbue the house with a sense of wealth and influence through the execution of these elaborate *trompe l'oeil* schemes<sup>17</sup>. On façades erected during the Samnite period, however, the ruse was often unnecessary, as many of the largest pre-Roman dwellings in Pompeii were constructed using drafted ashlar of Nocera tuff. These properties remained unplastered and unpainted at least through the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., a conclusion confirmed by the presence of *programmata antiquissima* painted directly onto the surface of the stones<sup>18</sup>. In the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., however, First Style decoration began to appear on the façades of properties built in less aesthetically pleasing masonry techniques, such as *opus incertum* and *opus africanum*. The typical arrangement consisted of a high, monochrome dado, topped with an upper zone of stuccoed isodomonic panels set in low relief. Rather than imitating coloured marble, the mock ashlars were painted uniformly white, a decorative technique that also began to appear on public buildings throughout Pompeii and Herculaneum at this time<sup>19</sup>. The scheme was completed through the addition of various mouldings and cornices, as well as sculpted pilasters topped with cubic capitals and an architrave around (and above) the house door.

<sup>15</sup> Bergmann 1994, 227–232.

<sup>16</sup> These doorways measure 5.3 and 4.4 m wide, respectively.

<sup>17</sup> Clarke 1991, 39; Leach 2004, 61–63; Lorenz 2015, 256–258.

<sup>18</sup> *Programmata antiquissima* is the term used to describe electoral prescriptions dating to the years immediately following the installation of the Sullan colony at Pompeii in 89 B.C.

<sup>19</sup> Van der Graaff 2018, 95–97. Mock ashlar from the Late Samnite and colonial periods can be found on the city's walls, gates and towers (extant examples are visible around the Porta Ercolano and Towers VI, VIII and X), as well as the façade of the Sanctuary of Apollo (VII 7,32) and the lateral faces of the Capitolium.

Over the course of the next century, styles of façade painting changed significantly, mostly without reference to the similar stylistic progression that occurred inside the Campanian house. Certain aspects of the Third and Fourth Styles occasionally appeared on house frontages (these include the use of vegetal motifs, an emphasis on the vertical – rather than horizontal – organisation of the wall, and the integration of some aedicular elements)<sup>20</sup>, but, in general, the design movements that dominated domestic interiors were not replicated on exteriors. In the period following the A.D. 62 earthquake, however, the First Style re-emerged on house façades. Unlike the Samnite-period examples, the entire façade was embellished with colourful ornamental flourishes. On the Casa dei Dioscuri (VI 9,6), for example, the dado was adorned with red panels framed by thick black bands; above, the joints between the mock ashlar were painted dark blue – perhaps to enhance the relief – while the draft-lines were embellished with a thin trefoil and flower-petal moulding (Fig. 2).

The west façade of the Casa del Poeta Tragico followed this ornamental trend, but pushed it even further. While the use of stucco helped to retain a sense of three-dimensionality elsewhere, here all pretence at realism disappeared. The lower part of the wall was divided into 22 red panels, separated from one another (and the upper zone) by thick yellow bands (Fig. 3). Above this dado (recorded as 4.5 feet high in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>21</sup>, six or seven courses of rectangular blocks were painted on a white background. Each ‘block’ was simply outlined in dark blue, with the boundary between the block’s worked face and the draft represented by a thin red line. This was the First Style extended to a highly simplistic, representative extreme. The fundamental components and general organisation of the scheme remained intact, but its chief aim – to convince the viewer that the components were real – was no longer a concern.

That such a forward-thinking arrangement appeared on the façade of the Casa del Poeta Tragico, a house dominated by elaborate Fourth Style ensembles throughout its interior, seems entirely appropriate. Yet descriptions of the west façade are absent from accounts of the building written immediately following excavation, as well as more recent treatments that focus on the overall dec-



**Fig. 2:** Mock ashlar design on the façade of the Casa dei Dioscuri.

<sup>20</sup> The best examples of these schemes can be seen on the exterior of the Casa dei Cinque Scheletri (VI 10,2) (Spinazzola 1953, Fig. 274) and the Casa di Nettuno e Anfitrite (V 8) at Herculaneum (Dardenay et al. 2018, 11–13).

<sup>21</sup> Dyer 1868, 73 f. At 4.5 imperial feet (ca. 1.3 m), the Casa del Poeta Tragico’s dado is one of the lowest in Pompeii (cf. *infra* 128 n. 27).





**Fig. 3:** 19<sup>th</sup> century depictions of the Casa del Poeta Tragico's west façade.

orative programme<sup>22</sup>. Indeed, the only extant records of the dwelling's exterior appearance are an etching published by Gell in the second edition of *Pompeiana* (published in 1832) and a pair of cork models produced during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Fig 3)<sup>23</sup>. The fragmentary nature of the west façade's documentation is no doubt a consequence of the dramatic deterioration of paint and plaster over the course of the last two centuries. Like many façades in the Vesuvian cities, no effort was made to protect the decoration discovered here, and consequently the combination of sun, wind and rain have reduced a once vibrant composition to a handful of faded fragments (Fig. 1).

The Casa del Poeta Tragico is, of course, not the only house in Pompeii to have suffered this fate. While many of the paintings discovered in domestic interiors were preserved, either via their removal to museums or through the construction of roofs for their protection, façade decoration has largely been left to the elements, with the result that much of what was visible upon excavation has now been destroyed. To make matters worse, the emphasis on recording and analysing interior painting, for which the Casa del Poeta Tragico set an unfortunate precedent, seems to have inhibited the implementation of similar practices with respect to façades. This, in combination with the absence of figurative decoration, is perhaps one of the reasons that scholarly engagement with façade painting has been so limited.

## Austere exteriors?

One could also argue that in recent times the theoretical model that has dominated the study of the Roman house bears some responsibility. This model, which finds its roots in the scholarship of the late 1980s and 1990s, holds that the *domus* was first and foremost a social entity, and consequently its interior decoration was organised primarily with the non-resident in mind<sup>24</sup>. It characterises the house itself as a status symbol, and suggests that dwellings were, to a certain degree, 'open' to the public<sup>25</sup>. Thus, conspicuous consumption, generated in the form of wall and ceiling painting,

<sup>22</sup> E. g., Bergmann 1994; PPM IV (1994) 527–603 s. v. VI 8, 3.5, Casa del Poeta Tragico (F. P. Badoni – F. Narciso).

<sup>23</sup> The latter of the two models, which resides in the Museo della Civiltà Romana, reproduced the house in section, including reconstructions of the interior paintings and mosaics, a hypothetical rendering of the second storey, and the exterior decoration on the south and west façades. More authentic to the appearance of the dwelling in Gell's day is the representation found on the so-called 'Plastico di Pompei', a cork model initiated in 1861 by the new director of the site, Giuseppe Fiorelli. It took more than 50 years and a series of model-makers to complete the Plastico, but the earliest phases of its construction were dedicated to the areas around the forum and the Via delle Terme/Via della Fortuna, an expanse that included the Casa del Poeta Tragico.

<sup>24</sup> Clarke 1991, 4 f.; Dwyer 1991, 27 f.; Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 44 f.; Zanker 1998, 9 f.

<sup>25</sup> Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 45; Zanker 1998, 10; Fagan 2006, 377; Beard 2008, 85 f.





**Fig. 4:** Remains of the dado on the façade of Maison VI O, Delos.

mosaics and sculptural ensembles, served to reinforce the social position of the *paterfamilias* and other members of the household. But if this reading of the house is accurate, then why are façades – which presumably offered the first and best opportunity for the homeowner to communicate his status to the public – entirely absent from the model? The answer seems a rather inconvenient one: it is largely because façade painting, which is typically described as ‘reserved’, ‘staid’ or ‘austere’<sup>26</sup>, is incongruous with the comparatively flamboyant programmes of interior decoration and, as a result, with the model itself.

But were the façades of Campanian houses truly ‘staid’ and ‘austere’? One could perhaps make this argument for the pre-Roman period and the years immediately following colonisation. As noted above, when a house was built in tuff ashlar, the façade was often left entirely unpainted, creating an impression of solidity and *gravitas*. When constructed utilising a style of masonry that incorporated cement, such as *opus incertum* or *opus reticulatum*, properties were typically covered with thick layers of plaster and painted in two horizontal registers: a lower zone that rose to a height ranging from 1.6 to 2.5 m<sup>27</sup>, and an upper zone that occupied the remainder of the façade. Generally speaking, the lower zone was painted in a darker hue and the upper in white or light grey, with the latter area offering a ‘blank canvas’ of sorts upon which figurative images or electoral *programmata* might be later added.

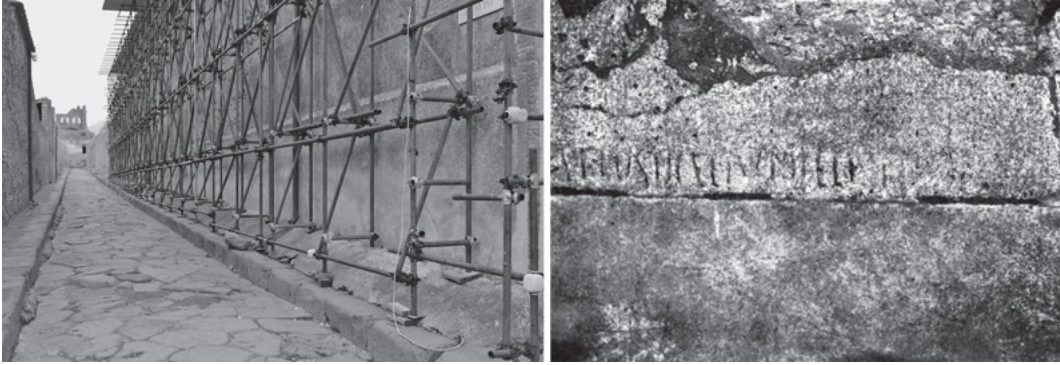
The earliest evidence for this bifurcated style of façade decoration can be found on Delos, where it was used widely following an influx of south Italians to the island after it was declared a free port by the Roman senate in 166 B.C. The quality of building materials available to the members of this insular community was quite limited, and thus many of the houses were constructed utilising irregularly shaped blocks of schist and granite, much of it quarried on nearby Mykonos<sup>28</sup>. The preservation of these materials from the elements necessitated covering both the internal and external faces of walls with layers of mortar and plaster. Consequently, façade decoration was fairly standardised: first, a layer of white lime plaster was applied to the entire face of the wall; this was followed by a thick hydraulic mortar (*opus signinum*) that typically reached a height of around 2 m<sup>29</sup>. The latter protected the bottom part of the wall from wind and rain, as well as the pools of water that tended to form around the foot during heavy precipitation. The lower mortar was naturally pink on account of the ceramic material that it contained, and this natural hue was often accentuated with a thin layer of red paint applied to its surface. As a consequence of this quite functional design, there was a noticeable difference in the thickness of the dado, which in some cases protruded more

<sup>26</sup> E. g., Amery – Curran 2002, 97; Adam 2007, 99; Hartnett 2017, 164, 180; Helg 2018, 89.

<sup>27</sup> Measurements of the dado (near house door) from select residential façades: Casa dei Ceii (I 6,15): 2.42 m; Casa di Meleagro (VI 9,2): 2.33 m; Casa del Centauro (VI 9,3): 2.12 m; Casa dei Dioscuri (VI 9,6): 1.80 m; Casa del Labirinto (VI 11,10): 1.89 m; Casa dei Vettii (VI 15,1): 2.09 m.

<sup>28</sup> Rauh 1993, 59.

<sup>29</sup> Chamonard 1922, 87.



**Fig. 5:** Casa dei Vettii, west façade (left); detail of CIL IV, 3572 (right).

than 5 cm from the surface of the wall, and the plaster applied to the elevation, which clung tightly to the façade (Fig. 4).

Examples of a similar phenomenon can be found at Pompeii, although most date to a later period. On the façade of the Casa dei Vettii (VI 15,1), for example, the final pre-eruption plastering involved the application of a thick layer of *opus signinum* to the dado on all three sides of the dwelling (Fig. 5). A *terminus post quem* for this event is offered by a *programma*<sup>30</sup> discovered underneath this layer of *signinum* advocating for the election of Lucius Rusticelius Celer, a duumviral candidate who was active in the A.D. 50s<sup>31</sup>. Whatever the precise date of its application, we can be certain that the primary purpose of this waterproof mortar was to protect the house from the weather, as confirmed by the inclusion of small ‘masonry ramps’ along the south and west façades. These features were added to channel rainwater away from the foot of the wall and into the street, at the cost of eliminating the narrow sidewalks that flanked these two sides of the house.

As was the case on Delos, the owners of many Pompeian properties reinforced the natural pinkish hues of the *opus signinum* applied to the dado with a layer of red paint, but the extent to which this rather banal technique was employed has perhaps been overemphasised in both scholarly and popular publications. First, in the part of Pompeii where building façades were excavated most carefully – in the eastern Via dell’Abbondanza, which was explored by Vittorio Spinazzola during the 1910s and 20s<sup>32</sup> – it was not houses that regularly employed the ‘white over red’ design, but *tabernae*<sup>33</sup>. Spinazzola’s excavations also revealed the fluid and flexible nature of exterior decoration, for as layers of paint and plaster fell from the walls over the course of the last century, they often revealed the remains of previous decorative schemes underneath. While some figurative images – *lararia* in particular – were painted time and again in the same style<sup>34</sup>, broader decorative schemes could change significantly.

This phenomenon is visible on the west façade of the Praedia of Julia Felix (II 4,10), where at some point between 1964 and the mid-2000s<sup>35</sup> a large section of plaster collapsed from the wall, revealing a plain white surface below, upon which a *programma* calling for the election of Lucius Ceius Secundus to the office of aedile was painted<sup>36</sup>. This recommendation probably dates to the

<sup>30</sup> CIL IV, 3572: *L(ucium) Rusticelium Celerem Ilvir(um) i(ure) d(icundo) iter(um) d(ignum) r(ei) p(ublicae) o(ro) v(os) f(aciatis)*.

<sup>31</sup> Van Buren 1932, 27.

<sup>32</sup> Spinazzola 1953.

<sup>33</sup> Lauritsen, forthcoming.

<sup>34</sup> Examples of *lararia* with multiple layers of paint can be found at I 11,7 (Della Corte 1913, 478 f.) and IX 11,1 (Della Corte 1911, 417–424).

<sup>35</sup> The dates are established by two photographs: one taken by Stanley Jashemski in 1964 (No. J64f0971, University of Maryland’s Jashemski Archive) and another taken by Bob and Jackie Dunn in 2005 (visible at [http://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R2/2%2004%2010\\_files/image007.jpg](http://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R2/2%2004%2010_files/image007.jpg)).

<sup>36</sup> To my knowledge, this inscription has not been published. It reads: *L(ucium) Ceium Secundum aed(ilem) Orpheus facit*.



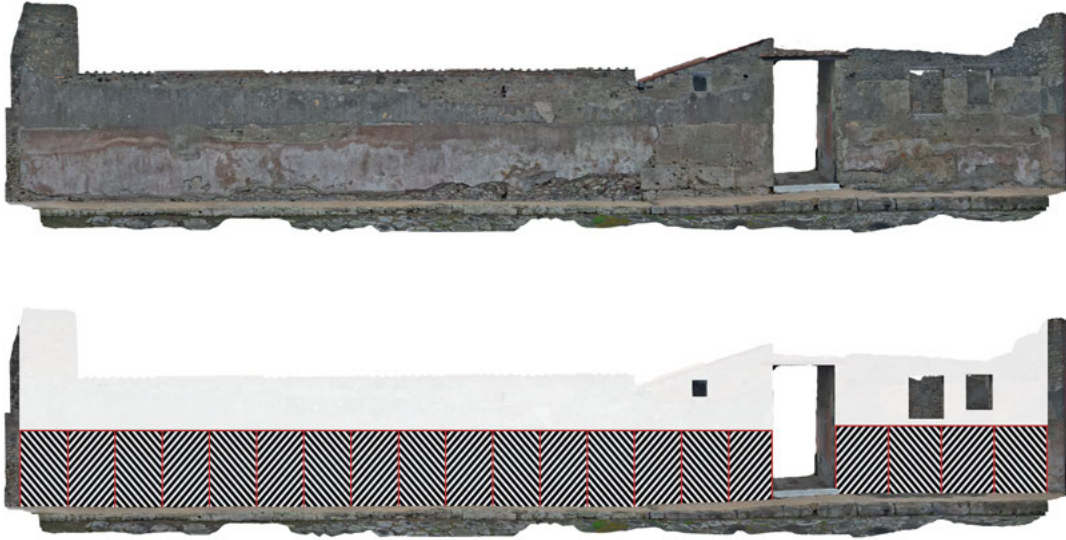
**Fig. 6:** Praedia of Julia Felix, west façade.

late A.D. 60s or early 70s, indicating that the top layer of plaster, upon which rectangular ‘blocks’ were drafted using thick red lines, dates to the years immediately preceding the eruption (Fig. 6)<sup>37</sup>. The modern disintegration of this surface serves to remind us why regular re-plastering and repainting was necessary for Pompeian homeowners: if simply left to the elements, façade decoration could deteriorate relatively quickly. This process of deterioration is the other main reason that the execution of the ‘white over red’ design on house exteriors has been somewhat overestimated. One particularly telling example offers some insight into how poor conservation can affect modern interpretations of exterior painting schemes.

Our case study will be the Casa di Meleagro (VI 9,2), one of the largest dwellings in Regio VI. Positioned on the east side of the Via di Mercurio, a wide thoroughfare leading directly towards the northeast entrance of the forum, it is best known for the panel paintings that decorated its interior, including the image of Meleager and Atalanta in the *fauces*, from which the property takes its name. The house is arranged around two primary circulation areas: an atrium accessible from the street via doorway VI 9,2, and a peristyle, positioned just to the atrium’s north. The distinction between the two areas is visible also in the exterior masonry, with the older southern section of the façade built using ashlar of Sarno limestone, and the peristyle area in *opus incertum*. The thick layers of plaster applied to the exterior were clearly intended to hide this incongruity, and their remains can be identified across the full width of the property today (Fig. 7, top). Like many of the houses considered thus far, the decorative scheme was divided into two registers: a dado produced in pink *opus signinum* and an elevation rendered in light grey plaster. With virtually all traces of the paint that once covered these two zones absent, one could be forgiven for making the assumption that the Casa di Meleagro was once bedecked in the white-over-red design. Once again, however, a 19th century cork model and a handful of photographs taken during the 1920s provide clear evidence to the contrary. While the dwelling’s elevation was indeed painted white, the dado was adorned with 20 panels containing alternating black and white diagonal stripes; each panel was framed by thin red bands (Fig. 7, bottom)<sup>38</sup>. With the panels rising to a height of 2.33 m above the pavement, the arrangement would have been particularly eye-catching for pedestrians passing along the west side of the street, where it could be seen in full.

<sup>37</sup> For an example in which two forms of decoration are visible at the same time, see the exterior of the Thermopolium di Assellina (IX 11,2–3). Here a black socle (1.61 m), crowned with a red band and divided into panels by thin white lines, was covered by the white-over-red design. Both layers are still visible in the vicinity of doorway IX 11,3.

<sup>38</sup> Due to the present state of the remains, precise widths for the panels (which vary slightly to the north and south of doorway VI 9,2) are impossible to determine.



**Fig. 7:** Photogrammetric model of the Casa di Meleagro's west façade (top), with reconstruction of decorative scheme (bottom).

## Checkerboards and zebra stripes

As the façade of the Casa di Meleagro suggests, by the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., a broader range of decorative schemes was being applied to the exteriors of houses in the Vesuvian cities. At this time, the rigid boundary between interior and exterior decoration was breaking down and ornamental patterns, in particular, were being used with less regard for the spatial context in which they appeared. In the following section, we will consider two particularly conspicuous instances of this phenomenon.

One of the most ubiquitous motifs employed on the walls of Pompeian dwellings was the so-called 'checkerboard' design. It seems to have appeared first on the walls of peristyles, gardens and other unroofed interior spaces before migrating outside to façades. Along the north wall of the garden in the Casa di M. Lucretius Fronto (V 4,a), the design appeared atop a series of megalographic panels depicting wild animals (Fig. 8). Both the panels and the checkerboard frieze are traditionally dated to the Fourth Style<sup>39</sup>. Here the 'board' consisted of equal-sized squares painted red, green, yellow and white, staggered so that each colour followed a diagonal from the upper left corner of the field to the bottom right. In other houses, the white squares were elongated to form stretchers, as was the case in the Casa di Trebio Valente (III 2,1), where the checkerboard conspicuously adorned the rear wall of a summer *triclinium* (Fig. 9, left).

On façades, a similar design was often employed. Around the *posticum* of Casa IX 5,6, for example, the checkerboard pattern appeared above a black-panelled dado. On the front of the Casa di M. Fabius Ululitremulus (IX 13,5), positioned along the north side of the Via dell'Abbondanza, it adorned the zone between the dado and a second-floor balcony (Fig. 9, right). Etchings produced in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries also document the checkerboard on a pair of high-status dwellings near the town's western escarpment. It appears on the façade of the Casa di M. Fabio Rufo (VII 16,22)<sup>40</sup>, a multi-level residence built atop Pompeii's circuit wall (to maximise views over the Bay of Naples), as well as the exterior of the Casa delle Vestali (VI 1,7), a large house located just to the north on the Via Consolare<sup>41</sup>. The most notable example of the motif in 'elite' contexts can be found not in Pompeii, however, but in neighbouring Herculaneum, where it was applied to the

<sup>39</sup> PPM III (1991) 966–1029 s. v. V 4,a, Casa di M. Lucretius Fronto (M. De Vos), 967; Peters – Moormann 1993, 310–312.

<sup>40</sup> Mazois 1824, II, Pl. 55.

<sup>41</sup> Piranesi 1804, Pl. 13; Hamilton 1777, Pl. 14.





Fig. 8: Checkerboard pattern on the north wall of garden in the Casa di M. Lucretius Fronto, reconstruction.



Fig. 9: Checkerboard pattern in the Casa di Trebio Valente, summer triclinium (left) and on the façade of the Casa di M. Fabius Ululitremulus (right).

upper zone of the Casa del Bicentenario (V 15), one of the largest and most elaborately decorated houses in the city.

If the checkerboard scheme calls into question the designation of façade painting as ‘austere’, the next example explodes this myth entirely. In the traditional reading of the Campanian house, certain decorative motifs served as a guide for visitors to the dwelling, indicating the function of various rooms, and delimiting those spaces to which guests were permitted access<sup>42</sup>. Arguably the most (in)famous of these motifs is the so-called ‘zebra stripe’, the colloquial term employed to describe the black and white stripes that alternate in orientation, as found on the façade of the Casa di Meleagro. The best known example of the design hails from the ‘slave peristyle’ of Villa A at Oplontis, where the stripes, divided into roughly equal-sized panels separated by red or yellow bands, appear on the walls, columns and even the ceiling of the porticos and dependent spaces of this circulation area (Fig. 10, left)<sup>43</sup>. Until the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the stripes were generally thought to play a functional role in the organisation of the villa, demarcating to individuals unfamiliar with its layout an area that served as the hub of interaction for the household’s servile population<sup>44</sup>. As a consequence of this association, earlier descriptions of the design typically refer to

<sup>42</sup> Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 39–44.

<sup>43</sup> Cline 2014.

<sup>44</sup> De Franciscis 1975, 54; Jashemski 1993, 290; Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 39. For a recent publication advocating the same principle, see Joshel 2013, particularly 115–117.



**Fig. 10:** ‘Zebra stripe’ in Campania: ‘slave peristyle’ at Oplontis (left); façade of the Casa dell’Altare di Giove (right).

the stripes as ‘crude’<sup>45</sup> or ‘inferior’<sup>46</sup>. In the early 2000s, however, articles written by Crispin Goulet and Lara Laken called this reading of zebra stripe into question, suggesting that it should not be connected with ‘low-status’ areas in particular, because the design appears in a great variety of spatial settings, including the hallways of bath complexes and villas, as well as in gardens, shops and public buildings, such as the amphitheatre at Pompeii and the *palaestra* at Herculaneum<sup>47</sup>. Goulet even went so far as to emphasise the decorative nature of the design, arguing that in its original state, zebra stripe attracted attention and was particularly ‘pleasing to the eye’<sup>48</sup>. Both of these studies (and indeed a handful of others that followed them)<sup>49</sup> were written without definitive evidence for the common occurrence of the design on façades, however. Indeed, the combined catalogues of Goulet and Laken omit no less than 13 exterior locations that were adorned with zebra stripe in A.D. 79, including the Casa di Meleagro (Table 1, in bold).

In total, zebra stripe has been documented in or on 33 Campanian buildings, and more than a third of these are houses that employed it for façade decoration. Further, most of these properties were situated in the top 50 % of Campanian dwellings when ranked by size. At Pompeii, for example, only Casa VII 7,21, Casa VII 7,19 and Casa V 4,b measured under 350 m<sup>2</sup> in total surface area (Table 2). House size is, of course, not the only metric one could employ when estimating wealth and status, but in this case it offers clear enough evidence that zebra stripe cannot be associated with one particular end of the social spectrum – it is found on a broad range of houses in a variety of socio-economic and geographic settings. Its appearance on the exteriors of dwellings that are generally classed as ‘high-status’, such as the Casa di Meleagro, also offers further confirmation that the motif should not be connected solely with service (or servile) areas.

<sup>45</sup> Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 39.

<sup>46</sup> Clarke 1991, 25.

<sup>47</sup> Goulet 2002; Laken 2003.

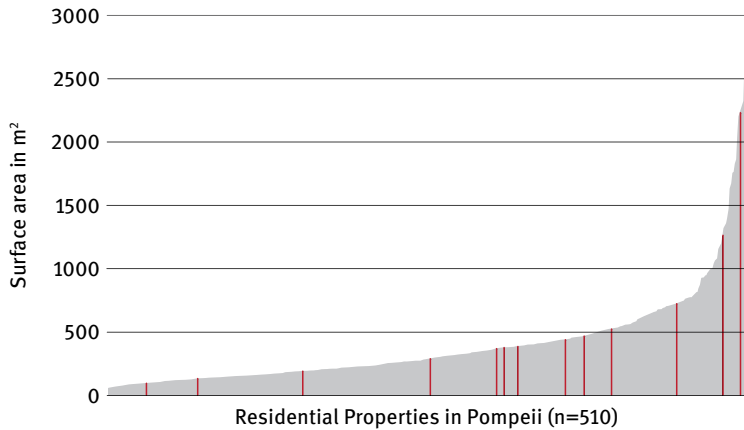
<sup>48</sup> Goulet 2002, 53.

<sup>49</sup> E. g., Cline 2014; McAlpine 2014, 195 f.; Rauws 2016.

**Table 1:** Instances of zebra stripe in the Vesuvian cities (after Goulet 2002, 62–89; Laken 2003, 177–186). Previously unidentified examples in bold.

Site	Property	Address	Location
Herculaneum	Palaestra	<i>Insula Occidentalis 2</i>	Northern <i>porticus</i>
Herculaneum	Casa dell'Albergo	III 19	Corridor (A)
<b>Herculaneum</b>	<b>Casa dell'Ara Laterizia</b>	<b>III 17</b>	<b>Façade</b>
Oplontis	Villa di Poppea		Anteroom (1), corridor (3), room (4), corridor (6), room (27), peristyle (32), corridor (45)–(46), corridor (52), corridor (53), room (63), corridor (76)
Pompeii	Taberna I 6,10	I 6,10	South wall of shop
<b>Pompeii</b>	<b>Taberna I 11,3</b>	<b>I 11,3</b>	<b>Façade</b>
Pompeii	Caupona di Euxinus	I 11,10–11	Garden (4), room (5)
Pompeii	Casa I 12,11	I 12,11	<i>Fauces</i> (1), atrium (2), corridor (5), room (7)
<b>Pompeii</b>	<b>Casa dell'Augustale</b>	<b>II 2,4</b>	<b>Façade (doorway 4)</b>
<b>Pompeii</b>	<b>Praedia of Julia Felix</b>	<b>II 4,10</b>	<b>Façade (doorway 6), hortus (8), room (89), latrine (90)</b>
Pompeii	Amphitheatre	II 6	Main gallery and corridors
<b>Pompeii</b>	<b>Caupona II 8,2</b>	<b>II 8,2</b>	<b>Façade</b>
Pompeii	Casa di M. Lucretius Fronto	V 4,a	Façade
<b>Pompeii</b>	<b>Casa V 4,b</b>	<b>V 4,b</b>	<b>Façade</b>
<b>Pompeii</b>	<b>Casa di Meleagro</b>	<b>VI 9,2</b>	<b>Façade</b>
Pompeii	Casa dell'Altare di Giove	VI 16,26–27	Façade (doorway 27) and <i>fauces</i>
Pompeii	Casa del Bracciale d'Oro	VI 17,42–44	Stairway to second lower floor
Pompeii	Stabian Baths	VII 1,8	Corridor (H), corridor (J), passage (N5), latrine (O)
Pompeii	Suburban Baths	VII A,2	Entrance (A), stairway (B), corridor (22), passage (27)
Pompeii	Suburban Baths, Apartment A	VII A,2	Entrance (12), passage (13)
Pompeii	Suburban Baths, Apartment C	VII A,2	Corridor (34)
Pompeii	Forum Baths	VII 5,24	East entrance corridor
<b>Pompeii</b>	<b>Caupona di Lucius Numinius</b>	<b>VII 7,18</b>	<b>Façade</b>
<b>Pompeii</b>	<b>Casa VII 7,19</b>	<b>VII 7,19</b>	<b>Façade</b>
<b>Pompeii</b>	<b>Casa dell'Altare di Giove</b>	<b>VII 7,21</b>	<b>Façade</b>
<b>Pompeii</b>	<b>Casa di C. Julius Primigenius</b>	<b>VII 7,23</b>	<b>Façade</b>
Pompeii	Sarno Baths	VIII 2,17	Ramp (1), corridor (35)
Pompeii	Villa Imperiale	VIII 1,A	Stairway at Porta Marina
<b>Pompeii</b>	<b>Casa IX 5,6</b>	<b>IX 5,6</b>	<b>Façade (doorway 17)</b>
<b>Pompeii</b>	<b>Casa IX 5,11</b>	<b>IX 5,11</b>	<b>Peristyle (N)</b>
<b>Pompeii</b>	<b>Casa IX 6,5</b>	<b>IX 6,5</b>	<b>Façade</b>
Pompeii	Casa di Giulio Polibio	IX 13,1–3	<i>Fauces</i> (3), <i>vestibulum</i> (A), passage (E)
Stabiae	Villa Arriana		Corridor (26)





**Table 2:** Rank-size distribution of Pompeian houses; houses with zebra stripe on the façade indicated by red lines.

Unlike the checkerboard design, zebra stripe was applied exclusively to the dado and usually topped with a plain white upper zone. The owners of the Casa dell'Altare di Giove (VI 16,26–27)<sup>50</sup> went one step further, outfitting the upper part of the façade with ashlar and draft lines in dark colours (perhaps red and blue) in a manner similar to the Casa del Poeta Tragico (Fig. 10, right)<sup>51</sup>. But in most cases, the focus of the decorative programme was placed upon the zebra stripe panels themselves, which were typically arranged in contrasting diagonal and/or vertical orientations. When Amedeo Maiuri first recognised this design in the *palaestra* at Herculaneum, he assumed that the panels were intended to replicate marble revetment, specifically bardiglio, a grey stone with white veins hailing from Tuscany<sup>52</sup>. While Goulet wholeheartedly agreed with Maiuri's assertion<sup>53</sup>, Laken dissented, pointing out that the high-contrast nature of zebra stripe did not replicate the bardiglio available at the time<sup>54</sup>. More recent publications have continued to disagree about this attribution. Lynley McAlpine, Lea Cline and Regina Gee supported Maiuri's reading of the design, offering examples of bardiglio discovered in Oplontis as evidence<sup>55</sup>, whereas Jacobus Rauws suggested that zebra stripe should be viewed as a 'Fifth Style' of Campanian painting, employed as a contrast to the more elaborate schemes of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.<sup>56</sup>. Although the original intention of zebra stripe may have been to produce a faithful copy of a real material, most of the examples visible in Campania today are too abstract, and their locations too impractical, to fulfil this aim. The ensemble found in the 'slave peristyle' at Oplontis offers compelling evidence to support this conclusion: here the stripes wrap around columns and splay across the ceiling, locations in which the use of real marble was either extremely unusual or outright impossible. The preponderance of zebra stripe on façades offers additional corroboration, for there is no evidence that stone revetment was ever applied to the exteriors of Vesuvian houses.

## An alternative reading

The aim here is not simply to criticise previous interpretations of the zebra stripe design, nor the general concept that lies at the heart of its association with servile quarters, viz. that decoration was employed by Campanian homeowners to offer guidance to non-residents regarding the func-

<sup>50</sup> Not to be confused with the Casa dell'Altare di Giove (VII 7,21), which was also bedecked in zebra stripe.

<sup>51</sup> The precise colours are unknown, as only a single greyscale photograph of this façade exists and no record was made of its decoration upon excavation. Today, all traces of paint in the upper zone have disappeared.

<sup>52</sup> Maiuri 1958, 134.

<sup>53</sup> Goulet 2002, 61.

<sup>54</sup> Laken 2003, 172.

<sup>55</sup> Cline 2014, 567; McAlpine 2014, 195; Gee 2019.

<sup>56</sup> Rauws 2016.

tion of certain rooms. There can be little doubt, for example, that utilitarian spaces like kitchens and latrines were decorated in a manner simpler than circulation areas and dining rooms. Rather, the purpose of this paper is to point out that, as a consequence of the collective fixation on interior decoration (which arguably began with the excavation of the Casa del Poeta Tragico and continues to this very day), we have a quite limited understanding of how Campanian dwellings were decorated on the outside, and, by extension, what that decoration was trying to say. And clearly both the checkerboard and zebra stripe designs were intended to say *something*.

While it is true that some houses adopted a conservative approach to façade painting, we have seen that many others moved in the opposite direction, employing colours and motifs that rivalled some of the displays found inside the *domus*. By the post-earthquake period, even the ashlar façades of ‘traditional’ houses, such as the Casa del Fauno (VI 12,2), were covered with plasterwork<sup>57</sup>. Other forms of decorative media, such as plaques and architectural sculpture (not to mention figurative paintings), were also incorporated into façade design. In the final decades of the cities’ existence, then, the exteriors of Campanian houses were anything but ‘staid’ and ‘austere’, and thus attempts to link domestic decoration with the social status of the residents should naturally take façade painting and other forms of exterior display into account.

To do so, however, reveals the inherent tensions present in traditional readings of domestic decorative schemes. If the wall paintings, mosaics and sculptural programmes that adorned the inside of the *domus* were employed as a status designation, and if houses were to a certain degree ‘open to the public’, either visually or physically, then why did a similar degree of luxury not extend to the façade? Recently, Jeremy Hartnett has tried to resolve this contradiction by arguing that the disunion between the schemes was precisely the point: *decorum* dictated that the public appearance of a Roman citizen (and, consequently, his house), should be controlled and reserved, with *ostentatio* and conspicuous consumption banished to the private sphere<sup>58</sup>. But this interpretation doesn’t really deal with the presumed ‘openness’ of the Campanian house. If the traditional reading of the *domus* is correct, then not only the façade was offered up for public view, but also the *fauces*, atrium and other internal spaces. In an attempt to resolve this conundrum, I would like to briefly sketch an alternative take on the nature of façade decoration and its relationship with the domestic interior.

If no description of the *domus* was offered by Roman authors – or indeed if those authors and their works simply did not exist – our interpretation of houses in Pompeii and Herculaneum would be quite different<sup>59</sup>. This is because, from an architectural perspective, the exterior of a Campanian dwelling seems designed to *control* access to the spaces beyond. The typical façade consisted of a long, high curtain wall pierced by small, square windows positioned far above the pavement (Fig. 7, top). Too high to grant visual access from the street, these were purely functional openings, providing light for the range of rooms that flanked the *fauces*<sup>60</sup>. Indeed, the only opportunity for passers-by to obtain a view into the residence was via the main door, which also provided the lone pedestrian access through the façade. In virtually any other cultural context, archaeologists would regard this imposing street frontage as an indicator that the residents were seeking to separate themselves from the outside world, controlling interaction between the community and their residential unit by limiting points of access between the street and the house proper<sup>61</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> Hoffmann 1990, 491.

<sup>58</sup> Hartnett 2017, 161. For a critical assessment of this position, see Holleran 2019.

<sup>59</sup> Vitruvius is the primary source for information about the Roman house; a significant portion of the sixth book of *De Architectura* is dedicated to the layout of the *domus*. Naturally, references to houses appear in a great many other ancient sources, many of them emphasising the importance of social rituals and conspicuous consumption in the dwellings of the capital.

<sup>60</sup> In many cases, bars were placed in the windows as an additional measure of security.

<sup>61</sup> E. g., Rapoport 1969, 79–82.



**Fig. 11:** Entrance and *fauces* boundary in the Casa dei Ceii during excavation. Cast of the transom visible at rear of *fauces*.

The house door consisted of two or three leaves, which were secured with a range of locking mechanisms, including padlocks, horizontal beams and props. Beyond the door, at the end of the *fauces*, some houses were equipped with a secondary boundary that regulated access to the atrium<sup>62</sup>. The typical design of this ‘*fauces* boundary’ required the installation of a wooden frame that occupied the lower half of the doorway. There were varying designs, but the most common was similar to that of the partition discovered in the Casa del Tramezzo di Legno (III 11) at Herculaneum, in which a transom spans the width of the doorway at a height of ca. 2.5 m. Additional framing beams were installed along the corners of the door jambs and the doors, typically hinge-hung, were attached to these vertical elements<sup>63</sup>. In the Casa dei Ceii (I 6,15), the effectiveness of the *fauces* boundary as a visual regulator was enhanced by the slope of the entryway, which rises steeply from the house door towards the floor of the atrium (Fig. 11).

Once a visitor moved beyond the *fauces* boundary, s/he would have encountered another series of closure systems, employed to regulate access to the atrium’s dependencies and the spaces beyond. The presence of these boundaries, which include bi- and multi-valve doors, partitions, screens and curtains, has often been overlooked (or wilfully ignored) by scholars of Campanian houses. However, an architectural survey of interior doorways in 31 houses revealed that around the atrium in particular, most doorways were occupied by some form of closure system<sup>64</sup>. It is possible that these systems remained open most of the time, offering a view from the street into the atrium and perhaps a bit further<sup>65</sup>, but this does not negate their role as regulatory mechanisms. The house door might have stood open, with the curtains of the *tablinum* drawn, but only if the residents wished it to be so. This was the defining feature of the *domus*: it was a structure designed for the purposes of control, particularly in the direction of outside to in. Consequently, gaining access to the interior was a status signifier in its own right, and the elaborate painted and sculptural decoration that surrounded the guest upon entry served to confirm both his/her own social position and that of the property owners.

In this reading of the house, the decorative systems applied to exteriors are entirely appropriate, because they consistently reinforced the monolithic nature of the façade, emphasising its defensive posture and impenetrability. Ashlar masonry – or ornamental interpretations of this

<sup>62</sup> Proudfoot 2013; Lauritsen 2014, 212–219.

<sup>63</sup> Lauritsen 2014, 212.

<sup>64</sup> Lauritsen 2011; 2012.

<sup>65</sup> There is evidence to suggest, however, that many of the doors around the atrium remained closed throughout the day: see Lauritsen 2012, 106–108.

form – connected the house with the past, with tradition, with the power and influence of public architecture. The horizontal division of the façade into two zones occupied by large monochrome blocks of colour also reinforced its solidity and two-dimensionality; that the break between the two often occurred just above the height of an average Campanian helped to emphasise the scale of the property<sup>66</sup>. Even the owners of houses that adopted some of the more ostentatious decorative forms, such as the checkerboard or zebra stripe designs, only employed schemes that were two-dimensional. As a final point, the single part of the façade that received special decorative attention also happened to be the place that permitted access through it: the house door. In this way, painting and other forms of decoration worked hand-in-hand with the architectural design of the façade, enhancing its role as a regulatory mechanism that offered a controlled separation between the residents of the dwelling and society at large.

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Fig. 3: Gell 1832, Pl. 38 (left); *Plastico di Pompei*, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (right).

Fig. 5: M. T. Lauritsen (left); Van Buren 1932, Pl. 5, 2 (right).

Fig. 8: After Peters and Moorman 1993, Fig. 228.

Fig. 9: SAP Neg. C1066 (left); SAP Neg. C753 (right).

Fig. 10: M. T. Lauritsen (left); SAP Neg. C52 (right).

Fig. 11: SAP Neg. C815.

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<sup>66</sup> Studies of osteological material from Pompeii and near-intact skeletons from Herculaneum indicate that the average height of adult males in Campania at the time of the Vesuvian eruption was 1.63–1.69 m, while adult females measured between 1.52 and 1.55 m tall (Lazer 2009, 179–184). As noted above (supra 128 n. 27), dados in Pompeii generally ranged from 1.6 to 2.5 m high.

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Eric M. Moormann

# The Murals of the Synagogue at Dura Europos as an Expression of Roman *Koine*

**Abstract:** The figurative decorations of the synagogue in Dura Europos have aroused questions about their significance and reading strategy. They have been seen as expressions of different Jewish currents in Late Antiquity. In many contributions, detailed analyses are provided, which may be correct as such but tend to leave out the greater context, such as the interplay with the architecture, the connection with the cultural *koine* of the world outside Dura, and the international Jewish community. The question of what the murals represent often overshadows the question of how adequate affects were achieved. In this paper it is argued that an integrated view, that is, a connection of the scenes with the Greco-Roman world of images, does greater justice to the paintings and solves the problem of their isolation as a unique case of religious decoration. Without reflecting a purely theological programme, the decorations match perfectly the room's shape and function, demarcating religious space, and thus enhance the prestige of the Jewish community at large. They constitute sacred *decor*, but at the same time make the synagogue a place of memory, connecting with Roman traditions in public and private decoration that display decorative narratives<sup>1</sup>.

'They began to paint pictures on walls [of synagogues] and he did not hinder them'<sup>2</sup>.

## Introduction

Upon its discovery in 1932 by Count Robert du Mesnil du Buisson, one of the 'shocking' aspects<sup>3</sup> of the Dura Europos synagogue was its mural decoration, which displayed a wide array of biblical scenes, further enriched by 'pagan' motifs on the dado and on the tiles of the ceiling. They seemed to 'unsettle traditional notions central to the ordering of the "Judeo-Christian" tradition' and violate the Second Commandment (Exodus 20.4; Deuteronomy 5.8)<sup>4</sup>.

In the Jewish world especially the decorations have kindled a fierce debate about their meaning. Their heterodox character has been interpreted as a 'conformity to local custom'<sup>5</sup>: Dura Europos was a special locus due to its assumed isolation. Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, many more figurative monuments (especially mosaics) that contradict the Second Commandment have come to light in synagogues. For this reason, scholars have been eager to find solutions, either by

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1 Many thanks are due to the organisers of the Kiel round table, who were so kind as to stimulate me to write this paper. I am very grateful to Lisa R. Brody and Megan Doyon from Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven for generously providing me with excellent photos. Doyon informed me about the old pictures in an email on September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019: 'Alas, we don't have any colour images of the synagogue walls overall. The images that we have are from the 1930s excavations, and colour film was too expensive/hard to process in Syria etc. I can only offer you black and white images (...), they were scanned almost 20 years ago, when we had all the negatives on site (currently at another art gallery storage facility).' The director of the Museum am Dom in Trier, Markus Groß-Morgen, was kind enough to provide an image of a model (Fig. 2) of the synagogue. Further important input was offered by Lucinda Dirven, Jan-Willem van Henten, Paul Meyboom and Miguel John Versluys.

2 Avodah Zarah 33, 48d (Palestinian Talmud), words of Rabbi Jochanan. Cited in Kraeling 1956, 344; Gutmann [1973] 1992, XXVIII.

3 Weisman 2012, 4: 'earth-shattering'. According to Archer St. Clair (1986, 109) the paintings 'revolutionised our concept of Jewish art'. For that reason, these Jews were considered heterodox or even 'aberrant' in older publications. Du Mesnil du Buisson published the first full monograph on the synagogue in 1939. On him, see Hopkins 1979, passim.

4 Wharton 1994, 6 f.

5 Matheson 1982, 25; cf. Gutmann 1984, 1328–1330.

observing that the worshippers did not respect the Second Commandment so severely in daily life, or by assuming that the mixing of Jews with Romans and Greeks created a new practice. Clearly among the Jews a practice of making images existed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries A.D.<sup>6</sup> that continued in later times, including the production of figurative mosaics in synagogues<sup>7</sup>. Some scholars have pointed out that Jewish culture was embedded in the Greco-Roman tradition, in which imagery was a general feature. As stressed by Tonio Hölscher time and again<sup>8</sup>, Greco-Roman society was more of a visual culture than a culture of scripture. The age-long integration of the Jews within that society encouraged them to adopt its customs and practices<sup>9</sup>. Importantly, paintings and mosaics were not the carved images at stake in the Second Commandment. At Dura Europos, the multitude of scenes depicted in the synagogue made them inappropriate for veneration, since it was difficult to concentrate upon a specific scene, given the sheer mass of images<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, there was no opportunity to contemplate the images in detail during services, as worshippers sat on benches positioned along the walls, with their backs to the narrative scenes. This internal seating disposition offers further evidence that the images served no cultic function.

Yet the synagogue's Jewish audience had peculiar wishes concerning art, which has caused Uzi Leibner and Catherine Hezser to observe that 'ancient Jewish art can therefore be understood properly only within the context of ancient Jewish history, tradition, and religious practice'<sup>11</sup>. Lee I. Levine suggests that such art can only be 'Jewish art' if it has a clear connection with the religious environment in which the artistic product functions<sup>12</sup>. However, such a statement would equally be true for temples serving similar groups of initiated or *mystai* (such as the *mithraeum*) – it does not mean that the products related to these cults were uniquely Jewish, Christian, or Mithraic in nature. Since specific audiences were composed of more than Jewish believers, including members of the Greek, Aramean, Syrian and Roman communities in addition to many others, they were surely familiar with other forms of religious art in their living spaces. Even if we do not know whether the adherents to different cults visited each other's shrines, or if the shrines were open to outsiders at all (which is not very likely), within the small community of Dura Europos the inhabitants may have had some awareness of the existence of temples or sanctuaries dedicated to different sects; artists working within the spaces, however, would not necessarily have been drawn from the same group<sup>13</sup>. The stylistic correspondence between the murals of contemporary cult rooms betray a reciprocal familiarity and common patronage between Jews and other Durene citizens<sup>14</sup>. Maybe Jaś Elsner's conclusion that there existed no Jewish art at all except for iconography might be too radical, but he has made an extremely good point about not excluding Jewish monuments from their contemporary culture<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Leibner – Hezser 2016, 1 f., with bibliography; Talgam 2016, 98 f.; see already Kraeling 1956, 340–346.

<sup>7</sup> Matheson 1982, 26 f.; Prigent 1990, 1–35; Gutmann [1973] 1992, XXXI–XXXII. For figurative depictions in synagogues, see i.a. Levine 2012; Hachlili 2013, 251–276; Talgam 2016; Leibner – Hezser 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Most recently Hölscher 2018, 1–13.

<sup>9</sup> Eristov 2018, 114 f. They were 'ni iconodules, ni iconoclasts,' a point also observed by N. Kaminski-Gdalia in 1995 (quoted in Moormann 2011, 198 no. 35). Still valuable for the characterisation of Durene mural painting is Perkins 1973, 33–69. Ling 2014, 397–399 aptly discusses the paintings as part of Late Antique Roman mural painting. For a recent assessment of Durene art, see also Dirven 2016b, 76–87.

<sup>10</sup> Hachlili 2013, 388 observes that there was 'no sanctity ascribed to a painting'. See also Hachlili 1998, 135–155. 178–182. 193–197; Hachlili 2013, 283 f.

<sup>11</sup> Leibner – Hezser 2016, 3. On the *mithraeum* see Dirven 2016a; Gnoli 2016. On decorated *mithraea* see also Moormann 2011, 163–182 (Dura: 179 f.).

<sup>12</sup> Levine 2012, 4–6.

<sup>13</sup> See Dirven 2016a on possible objections. In a personal communication, Lucinda Dirven has expressed her doubts about my suggestion of relationships between the communities and the artists. Cf. Elsner 2003, 118 f.

<sup>14</sup> See Dirven 2016b, 82–88.

<sup>15</sup> Elsner [2001] 2007, 124 (historiography 119–124). On Jews and the Roman world, see Schwartz 2010.

In this contribution I want to look at these unique decorations as part of a Greco-Roman *koine*, or globalised Roman world<sup>16</sup>. I will argue that an isolated, Jewish-centred view of the synagogue's paintings – and of related works of art in synagogues – leads to a dead end, for this approach separates the sanctuary from the socio-cultural environment of the worshippers<sup>17</sup>. We observe a familiarity between Jews, Christians and other religious groups with respect to decorative practices within the town, whereas 'pagan' elements in the synagogue, known from other painted shrines as well, form a trait d'union with other citizens' centres of worship. There existed a willingness to cope with these same practices in their own religious centres, in which people from all over the Roman Empire, but especially from the east, came together<sup>18</sup>. The questions addressed in this paper focus on the form and function of the various decorations, their intermediality and their connection with the synagogue's architecture<sup>19</sup>, rather than the discussion of religious disputations and interpretations of specific scenes from the Torah<sup>20</sup>. The paintings certainly constituted sacred *decor*, but at the same time served as instruments of historical memory while also forming a connection with the Roman figurative *koine* in both public and private decorative practices. As a figurative set, both the mural decoration and tiles on the ceiling were barely visible in detail, and consequently an overwhelming sense of bewilderment at this rich decoration within a comparatively simple setting dominated. The viewer, whether participating in a liturgical service or strolling like a 'flâneur', could try to focus his view and read specific scenes, however. In domestic contexts, the superposition of figurative scenes often caused individual images to lose their significance, thereby functioning only within the entire decorative scheme. In the synagogue, this multivalent decoration underlined the historical and religious traditions of the Jews within their *beth*, their ritual common house.

## A box full of images

When the Sassanians threatened to conquer the garrison town in A.D. 256, destroying part of the western fortification wall, the synagogue was partially preserved within the debris and backfill that covered the adjacent buildings (Fig. 1)<sup>21</sup>. Dura was a multi-cultural community of Roman citizens from all parts of the Empire, especially the east. Citizens lived together with people from other areas who probably had a good existence here<sup>22</sup>. Commercial and military activities prevailed<sup>23</sup>.

The town's synagogue and the Christian church are especially interesting for several reasons. First, because they are the oldest buildings of their kind from which we possess parts of the original,

<sup>16</sup> On this aspect, see Versluys 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Remarks in that direction can be found in Kraeling 1956, 321–363.

<sup>18</sup> See most recently Fine 2011; Stern 2012; Peppard 2016 (on the church, with many references); Sommer 2016, 57–61, 63 (on the synagogue); Talbot 2016; Stern 2019.

<sup>19</sup> See also Haug, this volume.

<sup>20</sup> It must be said that study of the material, which is located in the National Archaeological Museum of Damascus, is hampered nowadays by its inaccessibility (cf. Wharton 1994, 5f.). I saw the murals in person in October 1985, and now have to rely on the photographic dossier in Yale. The last *in situ* research on the paintings known to me was conducted by a team from the CNRS in Paris as part of the Mission Franco-Syrienne d'Europos-Doura in 2007. They observed various layers of modern varnishes and traces of deterioration. See Leriche – Coqueugnot 2011, 31 Fig. 1.18; Leriche 2016 (on that work, see Dirven 2019).

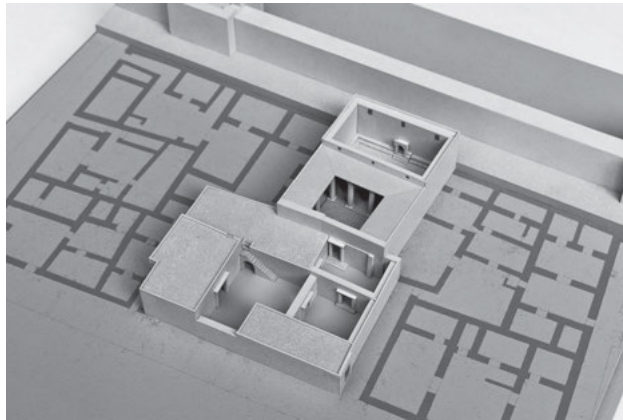
<sup>21</sup> On the discoveries in Dura Europos, see Hopkins [1973] 1992, 11–21; Hopkins 1979 (for the synagogue, 140–177); Matheson 1982; Chi – Heath 2011; Baird 2018 (see also the extensive review by Dirven 2019, 917–922). For older overviews, see Rostovtzeff 1938 and Du Mesnil du Buisson 1939. The basic publication remains Kraeling 1956. See also Gutmann [1973] 1992; Schneid 1976; Prigent 1990; Hachlili 1998, 97–197; additional publications quoted in the following. A good summary of work done until the early 1980s is Gutmann 1984.

<sup>22</sup> See most recently Kaizer 2016b; James 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Regarding the military character of Dura Europos, see James 2019.



**Fig. 1:** Dura Europos, plan. Location of the synagogue indicated by arrow.



**Fig. 2:** Model of the synagogue at Dura Europos, produced for the 2007 Constantine exhibition in Trier.

figurative mural decorations, and, second, because the iconographic programmes are considered to be unparalleled. We should not, however, be led astray by the alleged uniqueness of the decorations, for ‘absence of evidence does not necessarily mean that there is evidence of absence’<sup>24</sup>. Third, these buildings were the ritual centres of specific groups of religious people, all relying on a strong tradition of reading holy texts within a theological context rather than following oral and non-theological traditions, as is the case in other cults that addressed specific groups of believers<sup>25</sup>.

The synagogue was built in the back part of a private house. There exists a great discrepancy between the exterior of the hall and its interior (Fig. 2): the outside does not give any clue as to the function, content and importance of the space, a feature found in other Durene shrines as well<sup>26</sup>. The effect of the paintings for the visitor may have been startling: he or she entered a wonderful world of pictorial representations. The room measures 13.65 × 7.68 m and was approximately 7 m high, with two entrances on the east side. The central doorway is positioned almost in front of the main feature, the Torah shrine located in the centre of the west wall; this door served as the

<sup>24</sup> Weiss 2016, 127, reacting to the rarity of murals in synagogues.

<sup>25</sup> On mysteries, see Bowden 2010; Bremmer 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Allara 2002, 31. 38. 47. For an overview of the Dura religious decorations, see Moormann 2011, 189–201.



**Fig. 3:** Torah niche located in the west wall of the synagogue.

entrance for the male members of the community (Fig. 3). The second door, positioned just to the south, provided access to the women<sup>27</sup>. Windows were constructed in the upper parts of the long east and west walls, and moveable candelabra probably provided additional light. Low concrete benches were installed along all four walls, accommodating approximately 60 to 65 worshippers. If there was space for standing or additional benches located in the centre of the room, even more people could have attended the services<sup>28</sup>. Next to the Torah niche a seat, or *bema*, was installed for the leader of the ceremonies<sup>29</sup>. As in other synagogues<sup>30</sup>, the niche was directed towards Jerusalem, so that the worshippers prayed towards the lost Temple (Figs. 2–3). This niche might have accommodated the *aron*, or shrine for the Torah, which is represented on top of the niche itself<sup>31</sup>.

The existing arrangement was created c. A.D. 244–245, when an earlier assembly space was replaced. Parts of the older synagogue were found under the walls of the new room. The older building contained two areas for religious activities: a smaller room associated mostly with women, and a larger one located more or less under the later hall. Its decoration, reconstructed on the basis of some remains *in situ*<sup>32</sup>, consisted of a yellowish dado adorned with diagonal hatches in green and red, imitating *giallo antico*. Parallels of this ‘incrustation style’ have come to light within various complexes in Dura, which confirms Carl Kraeling’s conclusion that the murals found here were ‘entirely conventional and traditional’<sup>33</sup>. The paintings follow a fashion of interior decoration

<sup>27</sup> According to Steinberg (2006, 473. 481), women sat on the benches along the south wall. Cf. Hachlili 2013, 580.

<sup>28</sup> Kraeling 1956, 17. 334 f.; Steinberg 2006, 473. Rosenfeld and Potchebutzky (2009, 205) assume up to 124 people, whereas Weisman (2012, 2) gives a number of more than 120 people. Levine (2012, 99) suggests 60–65 persons for the first phase and doubles that for the second phase. A number of 60–75 persons is assumed for the Christian church (Dirven 2008, 48). The total population of Dura in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. numbered between 6,000 to 8,000 people (Levine 2012, 71 no. 23). Gutmann (1984, 1315) has suggested that there were only 65 Jews in Dura Europos.

<sup>29</sup> I use the phrase ‘leader of the ceremonies’ in a broad sense, designating the person who could teach and preside over the gatherings. This was not necessarily the rabbi or one of the leaders of the community (Hachlili 1998, 23; Hachlili 2013, 191. 219 f.). For some (e. g., Gutmann 1984, 1328), he was none other than Samuel, known from the ceiling’s texts (*infra* 151). On rabbis see also Schwartz 2010, 110–165.

<sup>30</sup> Seager [1973] 1992, 79–116; Branham 1992, 384; Hachlili 1998, 67 f. Since this niche had been there in a previous phase as well (see below), this custom must have already existed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. Prigent 1990, 45 f. connects the custom with the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. On these niches, see Hachlili 2013, 182–184.

<sup>31</sup> Prigent 1990, 47–49. 55 Pl. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Kraeling 1956, 34–38 Pl. 49; Hachlili 1998, 96–98; Rosenfeld – Potchebutzky 2009, 197–205. Here I am leaving out the less preserved decoration in the small secondary room.

<sup>33</sup> See various cases in the eastern part of the Roman empire, as illustrated in Zimmermann 2014, Pls. 69 (Sardes). 75–78 (Hierapolis). 90 (Sagalassos). 82 f. (Antandros). 128 f. (Herodion); see also Eristov 2018, 106 (Near East).

practiced all over the Empire, which does not reflect at all the ‘limited repertoire of the local artists’<sup>34</sup>. Mock veneer was a widespread type of wall painting in Greek and Roman sanctuaries that enhanced the interior’s prestige by creating an elevated atmosphere<sup>35</sup>. The ceiling of this first phase also drew reference from architectural concepts: it was covered in square blue coffers ornamented with yellow circles, surrounded by a red grid.

When the Jewish community constructed its second, larger synagogue, apparently thanks to the euergetism of the patrons mentioned on the ceiling, the new space received mural decoration in two phases. The Torah shrine and wall section above it were the first parts to be decorated. The niche (Fig. 3) has paintings similar to those found in the earlier synagogue: mock veneer, embellished by some almost abstract figurative elements<sup>36</sup>. Its ‘pediment’ is an oblong rectangle (partially cut by the niche’s arch) decorated with a painting of the Ark of the Covenant, or perhaps the Second Temple, alongside symbolic figures of the menorah, *ethrog* and *lulav*, and the Sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, known as the *Aqedah* (Genesis 22)<sup>37</sup>. The tree that appears on the wall above this field shows various stages of repainting, in which other figurative scenes were added. Here we see two representations of Jacob: one shows him lying on a *kline* surrounded by his sons, the other depicts him with Joseph and his two sons. A third scene portrays David playing the lyre<sup>38</sup>. Kraeling ascribes to this stage the columns painted in the corners of the room, which served as mock supports for the ceiling. To this phase a first outline of the dado has also been ascribed. This sober ensemble reflects the decorative fashion of the earlier synagogue<sup>39</sup>.

The lion’s share of the decoration belongs to the second phase. Some 60% of the original murals have been preserved: the west wall is complete, the north and south walls (Figs. 4–10) are cut diagonally and the east wall (Figs. 11–12) retains only dado and part of the lower register. All walls originally displayed four horizontal friezes up to around 4.6 m, crowned by a white surface reaching the total estimated height of 7 m.

The dado contains 44 panels. 14 are filled with lozenges embellished by circles, displaying yellow, red and green patches of mock marble (e. g., *giallo antico*; green and red porphyry) in the technique of *opus sectile* veneer, while another 14 contain masks; the final 16 panels present images of animals. Walking felines occupy further rectangular spaces<sup>40</sup>. The dado follows decorative models known throughout the Greco-Roman world during the Imperial period. Its ‘pagan’ character might have been chosen as an ideal decoration for the section against which the seated worshippers could lean without damaging the figurative scenes. Its pictorial quality is high; a real specialist in mock veneer and quasi *opus sectile* must have been at work here<sup>41</sup>. The same is true for the frames of the panels in the three figurative friezes, which consist of meticulously designed undulating bands. They show a refined execution in comparison to the somewhat crude figurative scenes.

<sup>34</sup> Both quotations from Kraeling 1956, 38. Taken up in the same way by Levine 2012, 74 and Levine 2016, 57 f.

<sup>35</sup> Some early examples are found in synagogues dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., including Magadala, which is still unpublished (Talgam 2016, 98) and Umm el-Umdan (Talgam 2016, 98 n. 9 f.). Other complexes mentioned in Prigent 1990, 175 n. 1; Hachlili 2013, 249 f.; Michaeli 2018, 168 f. For later instances cf. Weiss 2016, 126 f.

<sup>36</sup> See the description in Kraeling 1956, 55 Pl. 15, 2–3

<sup>37</sup> Rostovtzeff 1938, 104 f.; Kraeling 1956, 56; Hopkins 1979, 146 f.; St. Clair 1986, 112; Branham 1992, 388. All these motifs appear in addition to an Aramaic inscription mentioning Uzzi as the maker (Kraeling 1956, 269 inscription 2). On differences between the depiction and Genesis 22, 13, see i.a. Hopkins 1979, 144 f.; St. Clair 1986, 110 f.; Prigent 1990, 112–123. For a summary of the debate, see Hachlili 1998, 100 f. (contra St. Clair 1986). Talbot (2016, 95) sees the ensemble as an expression of the hope for the Temple’s resurrection and the return of the Jews to Jerusalem. On *Aqedah* depictions in Dura and elsewhere, see Hachlili 2013, 390–401.

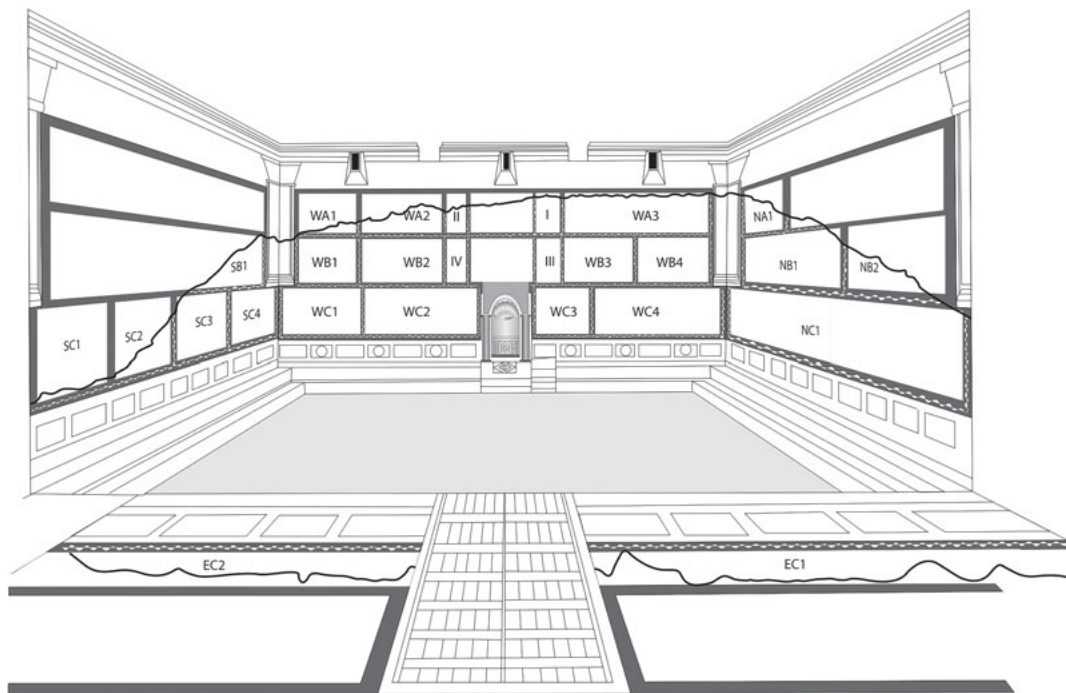
<sup>38</sup> It is not relevant to expand these few notes to a discussion of the various proposals made in the scientific literature, but see Rostovtzeff 1938, 109; Du Mesnil du Buisson 1939, 19–29; Kraeling 1956, 214–227; Hopkins 1979, 145 f.; Gutmann 1983 and 1984; Prigent 1990; Flesher 1994, 181 f.; Fine 2005; Talbot 2016, 95; Xeravits 2017, 115–117.

<sup>39</sup> Kraeling 1956, 65 f.

<sup>40</sup> There is no need to connect them with the Second Sophistic, for they are a rather banal filling motif (contra Talbot 2016, 99 f.). On Second Sophistic and the Near East, esp. Jewish culture, see Levine 2012, 86–91.

<sup>41</sup> Perkins 1973, 57. Hachlili (1998, 134 f.) offers a similar verdict.





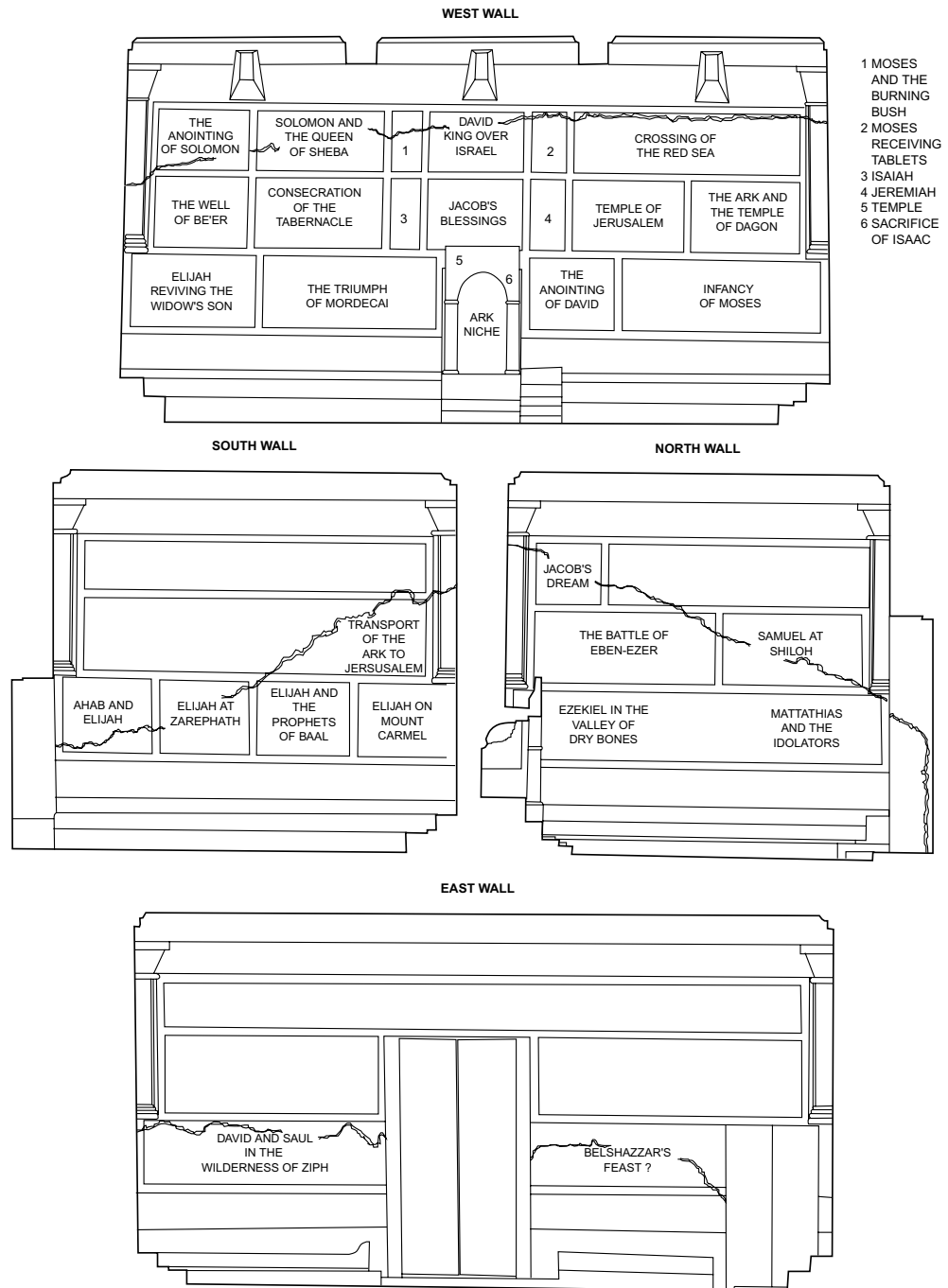
**Fig. 4:** Organisation of the wall decoration in the synagogue.

There follow three zones (from top to bottom labelled A, B, C; the four walls are indicated with W, N, E and S; this formula, e. g., WC3, is used in what follows) of irregularly positioned panels, arranged as large oblong or square isodomes (Fig. 4). The registers do not reach an identical height on each wall, so they must have been planned separately. 58 narrative scenes fill 28 panels (Fig. 5). The articulation of the figurative scenes resembles that of a comic strip (without speech bubbles), but does not incorporate a chronological order or display a consecutive narrative in each register<sup>42</sup>. The viewer was intended to adopt an 'itinerant' view, associating images according to his or her personal choice; recognising overarching themes would not have been easy. Visibility of details is limited and the general effect was seemingly much more important than an analysis of minutiae<sup>43</sup>. But the viewer did receive some assistance in distinguishing certain narratives, thanks to certain eye-catching features. Some protagonists, especially Moses, Aaron and Daniel, are recognisable by their size and dress, while some fields are filled with large architectural structures probably intended to depict the Second Temple or the Ark of the Covenant. The size and position of the scenes and scale of the figures depicted in them helped the onlooker to pick out certain themes within this wilderness of images (suggestions of sets are presented in Fig. 6). The visitor could cast a glance at scenes that he or she recognised or associated with memories or personal preferences. However, we do not find here specific theological anchors intended to help the worshipper practice their beliefs. Therefore, as noted above, I think that this set of images was not intended as a ritual instrument or set of ritual explanations to be used during services, but rather a means of enriching of the space.

Moses features on the west wall, located in WC3 and WA3 at the right side of the Torah niche (Fig. 7) and in WB1 on the extreme left side (Fig. 8), that is, in each horizontal zone, but not in the

<sup>42</sup> On the basis of his interpretation of the scenes, Du Mesnil du Buisson (1939, 15–17 Pl. 7) suggested that there was a clear reading programme. According to him, the scenes were arranged as a series, in pairs or otherwise, to be seen from the outside towards the centre. Since he read the two panels with isolated men and the seated David as Moses representations, his suggestion holds up well for the upper register of the west wall. In contrast, he did not recognise WA1 as a scene depicting Solomon in association with WA2.

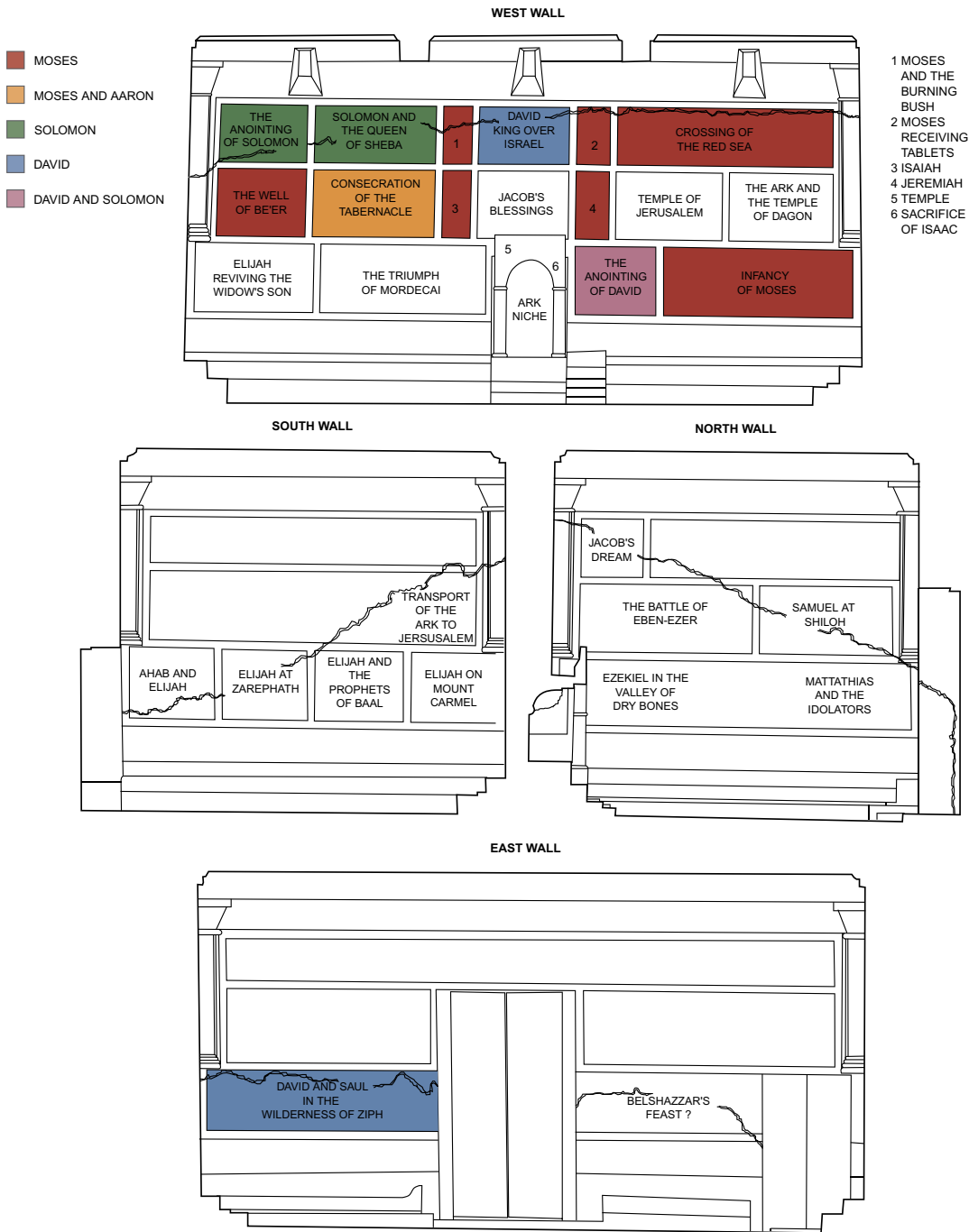
<sup>43</sup> See Hölscher 2018, 299–333 on the 'aporia' of this difficult recognisability regarding what belongs to *decor*.



**Fig. 5:** Distribution of themes in the synagogue.

same position. He also probably appears four times in the narrow panels flanking the central space with the tree. If we accept the interpretation of the four solitary figures as portraits of Moses, each depiction represents a specific aspect of his biography; exegetic details can be found in various discussions of the figures<sup>44</sup>. Moses' collaborator and successor Aaron sits in WB2 (Fig. 8), right next to WB1. As the saviour and lawgiver of the Jews, Moses is clearly the protagonist of the decorations

<sup>44</sup> For more on this interpretation, see i.a. Goodenough 1953–1968, IX, 110–123; Hachlili 1998, 111–113; Fine 2005, 178–180; Levine 2012, 103f. 114f.; Talbot 2016, 96f.; Xeravits 2017, 117f. For other readings see Kraeling 1956, 227–239 (Moses, Ezra and Abraham twice); Gutmann 1984, 1317; Kessler 1987; Weitzmann – Kessler 1990, 153. 170–173 (Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah); Kessler 1994, 302–347; Talbot 2016, 96.



**Fig. 6:** Locations of some of the primary themes: Moses (A), David (B), Ezechiel (C), texts (D).

and, at the same time, pre-founder or *ktistes* of the new 'state' in the Land of Israel. Solomon occupies WA1–2, while he also appears in WC2, anointing David. This king is also represented with Saul in EC2 (Fig. 11) and presides on the west wall above the Torah niche. Elijah features in four panels on the south wall (SC1–4) and in the adjoining fifth panel on the west wall (WC1), which work together in a narrative sequence (Figs. 8 and 10). The Ark of the Covenant and the Second Temple occupy three panels (WB2–4), only separated by Jacob's Blessings on top of the Torah niche (Fig. 8); two more Arks are present in SB1 and NB1; thus all depictions of the Ark feature in the same register (B) (Figs. 9–10).

There are texts in Aramaic, Greek and Middle Persian. While the Greek and Aramaic ones are explanations and are associated with the images, those in Persian are written on top of the deco-



Fig. 7: West wall of the synagogue, southern section.



Fig. 8: West wall of the synagogue, northern section.

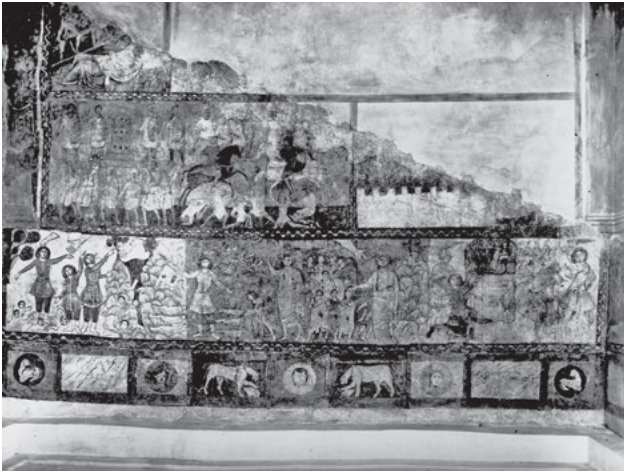


Fig. 9: North wall of the synagogue.

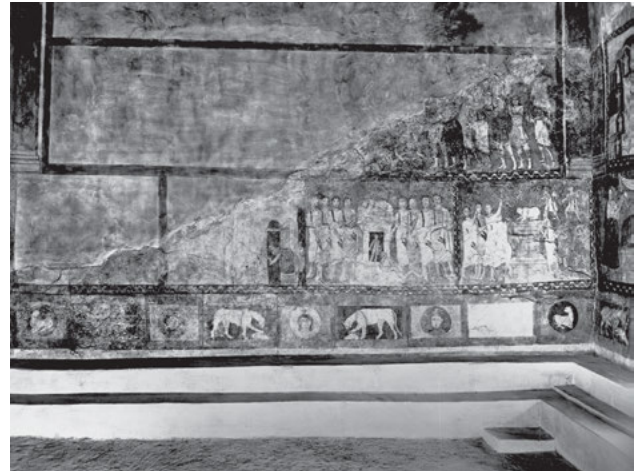


Fig. 10: South wall of the synagogue.



Fig. 11: East wall of the synagogue, northern section.



Fig. 12: East wall of the synagogue, southern section.





**Fig. 13:** Ceiling tiles found in the synagogue.

rations. They contain brief comments, and sometimes tag the author by recording his name and function. They are testimonies of visitors in A.D. 253–254, evidently applied with the consent of the synagogue’s keeper<sup>45</sup>. This is a procedure we rarely encounter in religious monuments. It exemplifies the phenomenon of ‘tagging’, i. e., the application of graffiti by visitors who wanted themselves to be recorded next to the gods<sup>46</sup>. At the same time, these graffiti are not expressions related to active worship or specific religious activities, and therefore strengthen the idea that people also visited the synagogue at moments other than religious services.

Although the decoration of the ceiling is barely visible because of the hall’s height, much attention was paid to it. The 234 tiles that have been preserved represent around half of those required to cover the entire ceiling (Fig. 13)<sup>47</sup>. In addition to 23 images of female heads, which are typically seen as personifications of nature, there are 40 zodiac signs, 39 animals, 119 vegetal elements, two apotropaic eyes and three inscriptions surrounded by wreaths<sup>48</sup>. The motifs lack biblical connotations and some simultaneously occur in non-Jewish Durene contexts<sup>49</sup>. The names of the *euergeteis*, the priest and *archon* Samuel and the treasurer Abraham, are exceptional<sup>50</sup>. We might ask the purpose of these markers, since it was impossible to decipher the texts, which were located more than 7 m above the floor. The tiles displayed ‘an artificial sky and landscape that suspended the synagogue assembly hall in biblical times and prompted supplication of the divine by Jews, *proselytes*, and other acolytes in that space<sup>51</sup>. They prove how the Jewish population was embedded in the cultural sphere of ‘Persian West and the Graeco-Roman East’<sup>52</sup>. The coffered ceiling follows an old tradition in the Greco-Roman world<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> Kelley 1994, 60. An interpretation of these texts as the names of painters has been dismissed on account of their position (Kelley 1994, 69 n. 7). Fine 2011, 290 f. esp. 300: ‘Inscriptions form the first layer of interpretations of the Dura-Europos synagogue paintings’. Wharton (1994, 20 f.) calls the Persian texts ‘disruptive’.

<sup>46</sup> On this phenomenon, see Stern 2012.

<sup>47</sup> Kraeling 1956, 41–54 Pls. 8–9.

<sup>48</sup> The total, deduced from Kraeling’s description and table (Kraeling 1956, 51) is at odds with Kraeling’s total number, probably due to confusion regarding broken pieces. On the ceiling, see also Stern 2010.

<sup>49</sup> Stern 2010, 490–498. She observes that some motifs are known from ceilings, others from wall decorations. She sees the ceiling as a symbolic representation of the ‘suspended sky’. Zodiac signs frequently occur in Jewish religious contexts (Hachlili 2013, 339–388).

<sup>50</sup> Kraeling 1956, 263–268 inscriptions 1 f.; 277–279, inscriptions 23–25.

<sup>51</sup> Stern 2010, 498. 501. On 483, she calls it a ‘large aerial mosaic’.

<sup>52</sup> Stern 2010, 502. Contra Elsner (2003, 119), who stresses the non-religious character of the tiles. He does so correctly, following Kraeling (1956, 54).

<sup>53</sup> I do not see the need to look for parallels in Babylonia (e. g., Kraeling 1956, 53), while the dossier of ‘classical’ cases is abundant.

The undecorated floor of the building consisted of ‘a layer of pebbles mixed with plaster’<sup>54</sup>. This soberness may have to do with the costs of the complex, since mosaics occur in other synagogues of the same period, or perhaps it suggests ‘that there were rugs, although the presence of holes in the floor – which may have accommodated lamp stands, fences, and the feet of wooden *bemata* – indicates otherwise’<sup>55</sup>.

## Ways of interpretation: Jewish views

*Communis opinio* suggests that the synagogue’s decoration illustrates how the God of Israel led the Jews to their safe home, providing (notwithstanding the many obstacles to overcome) an eternal shelter. This explains the emphasis on struggle, victory and establishment of authority in many scenes. Perhaps during the service, the Rabbi pointed at determinate scenes to illustrate or explain his sermon, but they never formed objects of worship and would, as we have seen, not contradict the Second Commandment<sup>56</sup>.

Much attention has been paid to the ways the paintings were read, including the question of whether the images should be recognised as a solid iconographic programme based on Holy Scripture, and if so, which part was the artists’ starting point. In reality, many of the scenes differ from the textual versions with regard to specific details. Readings made by the ancient visitors include rabbinic and messianic approaches, which build on different interpretations of the Bible<sup>57</sup>. The first emphasises a close reading of the Torah, the second sustains the non-rabbinical view of an upcoming arrival of the Messiah. The latter’s emphasis on the notion of hope is sometimes connected with the concurrence of Christianity’s growth; this, however, cannot be established<sup>58</sup>. Therefore, it is not likely that the images served as a response to the Christian New Testament<sup>59</sup>. Or perhaps the set of scenes expressed a form of Jewish nationalism, in which a Messianic vision was combined with opposition to the contemporary tendency towards gnosticism; there would then be ‘national-religious’ items situated next to ‘assimilationist’ elements<sup>60</sup>. The stories encircling Esther and the daughter of the pharaoh, which are located in highly visible positions on either side of the Torah niche (register WC; Figs. 7–8), have been regarded as instruments to attract non-Jewish women to enlarge the community<sup>61</sup>.

One of the most famous and influential approaches defined the synagogue’s paintings as expressions of Jewish mysticism. Three of the 13 volumes of Edwin R. Goodenough’s *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* are dedicated to a meticulous analysis of pictorial motifs as symbols of mysticism based on Jewish traditions, Philo’s late 1<sup>st</sup> century writings and insertions from the non-Jewish world<sup>62</sup>. Regardless of the veracity of his interpretations, which have been used as a

<sup>54</sup> Kraeling 1956, 17.

<sup>55</sup> Kraeling 1956, 255 f.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Gutmann [1973] 1992, 149: ‘The biblical scenes serve here as pious anchors to secure the continued function of the ark and its salvatory power within a new context.’

<sup>57</sup> E. g., Garte 1973, who describes resurrection as an expression of Messianism. See also Prigent 1990, esp. 251–253; Weitzmann – Kessler 1990; Steinberg 2006 (although she rejects Kessler’s conclusion at 488 no. 3); Fine 2009, 131–134. On rabbinic practices, see Schwartz 2010.

<sup>58</sup> See Dirven 2004 and 2008.

<sup>59</sup> As proposed by Talbot (2016, 98 f.). For overviews of the interpretations, see also Gutmann 1984, 1322–1324 (concluding in favour of a rabbinic reading); Moormann 2011, 196–198; Levine 2012, 102–111.

<sup>60</sup> Schneid 1976, 100–102 (English summary; I am not capable of reading the Hebrew text); Weitzmann – Kessler 1990, 178–183. This proselytism might be explained as a reaction against the rising power of Christianity. Contra: Levine (2012, 107), who also gives examples of possible polemic representations on 373–379.

<sup>61</sup> Steinberg 2006. On the rather limited status and relatively scarce depictions of women in the synagogue, see Hachlili 2013, 567–581.

<sup>62</sup> Goodenough 1953–1968, IX–XI.



thought-provoking basis for further readings<sup>63</sup>, Goodenough tends to isolate the paintings from their larger cultural context, excluding alternative agendas<sup>64</sup>. The mere fact that Jewish narratives feature in combination with ‘pagan’ elements (comparable to those that appear in other Durene complexes as well) should warn us against an exclusively ‘Jewish’ interpretation. ‘Pagan’ motifs such as the zodiac signs on the ceiling tiles and the animals and masks on the dado might provide evidence for a holistic programme<sup>65</sup>. It is the decorative character of the paintings and ceiling tiles that is essential, not the depiction of religious motifs to be observed during prayer.

Various interpretations suggest that the painters possessed a certain biblical learnedness, and were cognisant of the Torah and the themes chosen for the images. This suggestion excludes the possibility that the painters had some form of manual (either figurative or written) displaying the iconography in their hands as they stood on the scaffolding. We know nothing about the existence of image books (*‘Bilderbücher’*) and that option, therefore, does not help us further. A certain command of the Holy Scriptures must have existed amongst the craftsmen, but they may also have received oral suggestions or incorporated examples from other synagogues in the area (or perhaps material from some alternative, unknown template). So the question as to what was first, text or image, seems to be answered best by assuming that the painters activated their knowledge of the stories, as told to (or read by) them, but without a textbook, let alone a *‘Bilderbuch’*<sup>66</sup>. At the same time, we are warned against a ‘rabbiniisation’ of Jewish art, which could work independently from textual sources<sup>67</sup>. Furthermore, the correspondence with other painted religious complexes in Dura Europos sustains the hypothesis that a single workshop produced all of contemporary cultic monuments<sup>68</sup>. And, if we adopt the position of the viewer, responses to the images could differ depending upon an individual’s attitude, knowledge, background and other factors.

## Ways of interpretation: Greco-Roman views

An example of a Greco-Roman interpretation of the decorative programme is Warren Moon’s analysis of various details as inspired by Classical art. His approach runs the risk of losing the thread by singling out quite specific details, such as statuary motifs employed in Classical Greek art that were barely visible to the synagogue’s visitors and lacked importance within the overall ensemble. Moon’s interpretation of the large menorah in the panel above the Torah niche provides a useful example of this phenomenon. To him, the shape of the candelabrum suggested a connection with Roman military signs and, therefore, with military victory. In contrast with the *menoroth* in other panels, it is studded with round disks, a design found also on the *semeion* or *signum* of a legion—this, he suggests, might be associated with the presence of Jews in the Roman army. Yet *menoroth* both in other images within the synagogue and other contexts also possess branches or feet full of roundish disk-like elements<sup>69</sup>.

A purely Greco-Roman reading of the complex would do little justice to the stories depicted. But viewing the paintings as part of the Greco-Roman *koine* rather than as an expression of an

<sup>63</sup> I.a. Schneid 1976.

<sup>64</sup> On Goodenough’s reading, see i.a. Avi-Jona [1973] 1992, 117–135; Prigent 1990, 178 (‘interpretations excessives’); Wharton 1994, 7; Leibner – Hezser 2016, 7; Xeravitz 2017, 120 f.

<sup>65</sup> Leibner – Hezser 2016, 13, with references.

<sup>66</sup> Gutmann 1984, 1327 f.; Wharton 1994, 19 f.

<sup>67</sup> Leibner – Hezser 2016, 4 f. 141; Prigent (1990, 251) concludes ‘qu’en plusieurs occasions nous avons pu constater que le peintre ne cherche pas à illustrer la Bible’.

<sup>68</sup> I.a. Elsner 2003, 118 f.

<sup>69</sup> Henig 1983; Dirven 2004; Rosenfeld – Potchebutzky (2009, 207–214) point out connections with *legiones* I, II and IV *Parthica*. For other *menoroth* with disks, see Hachlili 1998, 324, 334; Levine 2012, 151 Fig. 70, 2, 4. On menorah depictions, see Hachlili 1998, 312–344; 2013, 286–324; 2016, 196–206.

exclusively Jewish character<sup>70</sup> has a great significance, if we accept the Jews' integration in Dura's community. They belonged to a globalised Roman political and cultural system in which *koine* 'can be called the software of Roman visual culture'<sup>71</sup>. That is why I suggest that we should focus less on details taken from one specific set of religious images or the other, and argue instead for an integrated reading of the images. Greco-Roman components give shape to the biblical content and respond appropriately to the demands of various users, whose presence we can infer from the graffiti in various languages described above. The audience included religious Jews of Babylonian tradition as well as itinerants, who were often associated with the Roman military. The fact that most scenes display activities in the past, or to use the Roman word, *gesta*, implies that the scenes symbolised the virtues important for Jewish Romans as well as the holy history of the Jews, from the time of Abraham to the Kingdom of Israel. As in the case of other polyvalent or multi-layered monuments, like the sculptures from Late Hellenistic Commagene, the synagogue's decoration displays a bricolage of diverse iconographical sources and a style that betrays influences from various regions, including the traditions of the Roman Empire<sup>72</sup>. The painters narrated their stories with the help of motifs familiar to them, both in respect to the content and the manner in which they were represented<sup>73</sup>. What these expressions of visual culture have in common is the agency of the past, the representation of forerunners who strengthen the position of their successors: whether successful personally or not, the Durene Jews knew that they had a splendid history, just like (other) Greeks and Romans, for which reason the visualisation of memory was relevant<sup>74</sup>.

Unfortunately, we cannot establish a relationship between the sacred and the private realms, for we have no figurative decorations from houses that belonged to Jews. Consequently, we cannot establish whether the *decor* of houses and sanctuaries was governed by principles shared by both the private and religious spheres or whether they were organised under their own rules<sup>75</sup>. When we look at 'pagan' sanctuaries throughout the Empire, we encounter similar or even identical figurative images in both shrines and houses. In both instances, the images served as references to myths associated with the venerated deity or proprietor, to metaphoric values, or were included as part of a colourful decorative ensemble<sup>76</sup>.

A clear example of visualising memory can be found in one of the largest images, the Crossing of the Red Sea, located in WA3 (Fig. 7). This endeavour is presented as a continuous narration in three sections within the same frame. In the Biblical story, the Jews stole away from Egypt and were almost captured by the Pharaoh's troops when they arrived at the borders of the Red Sea. God and Moses then parted the waters and created a pathway for the fleeing crowd. In the frieze, however, we see three episodes presented in a continuous narration in a manner similar to depictions of

<sup>70</sup> As is the case in many studies, e. g., Du Mesnil du Buisson 1939, passim; Kraeling 1956, 385–402, to cite the two fundamental publications only.

<sup>71</sup> Versluys 2015, 158. His paper is a plea for viewing the different currents within Greco-Roman art as expressions of a 'globalizing *koine*' (159). On *koine*, see also Dietler 2017.

<sup>72</sup> For the methodology and theory on a more 'holistic' reading of mixed styles, such as the synagogue's paintings, see Versluys 2017, 185–248; Versluys 2019 (he speaks of 'creative appropriation' on 220). On the style debate concerning Dura, see Wharton 1995, 52; Dirven 2008, 50 f. (with a focus on the Christian church); 2016b (contra the traditional characterisation as 'Parthian' art). We may also refer to the fruitless negation of the notion of 'provincial Roman' art by Richard Brilliant ([1973] 1992), on which see Moon [1992] 1995, 285 and Dirven 2016b, 83 no. 87.

<sup>73</sup> See Hachlili (2013, 428–434) on the simultaneous visual and written traditions of transmitting the biblical stories. She calls the depictions 'folk art'.

<sup>74</sup> For memory and the representation of the historical past, see Hölscher 2018, esp. 95–150.

<sup>75</sup> On the complexity of *decor*, see Haug, this volume.

<sup>76</sup> See the many examples discussed in Moormann 2011, e. g., the Augusteum and Sacello degli augustali in Herculaneum, as well as the Temple of Apollo and Temple of Isis in Pompeii. I do not believe in the interactions between Christians and pagan imagery as proposed in various studies by David S. Balch (e. g., Balch 2008, with my review, Moormann 2009).

Roman military campaigns<sup>77</sup>. On the right (1), the Jews depart a Roman-style city dressed in military attire, following a giant Moses clothed in civilian dress. The central section (2) depicts the Red Sea full of drowned Egyptians, the result of an unfought battle, with Moses pointing at the scene. At the far left (3), the Israelites proceed under the guidance of Moses in an *adventus* towards freedom, thanks to the great *virtus* shown. In religious terms, this depiction would be considered false, since the exodus was no military operation. But in practice, the artists must have had in mind military representations like those that appear on Roman commemorative reliefs. Regarding Moses' biography, there is one more significant episode: Moses' infancy in Egypt, which is shown in the lowest register, just to the right of Torah niche (WC4). This scene is part of a foundation myth analogous to that of Romulus and Remus in Roman art: its conspicuous position near the Torah niche testifies to Moses' importance as the forefather of Israel.

Similar references, but of devotional nature, pertain to the many offering scenes. Elsner sees them as definitions of the cult's specific character, setting Jews at a distance from the religious imagery of the ruling Romans, which he defines as a sort of cultural resistance<sup>78</sup>. Géza Xeravits characterises each offering scene as a 'message of consolation', suggesting that the Durene Jews were an oppressed minority. This impression cannot be substantiated by the context, however<sup>79</sup>. In contrast, the sacrifices express the positive Roman notions of *religio*, *devotio* and *pietas* (religious commitment, devotion and piety towards the gods), qualities fundamental for both emperors and citizens during the Imperial period. Whilst emperors stressed these virtues in their public imagery, citizens displayed them on sarcophagi of the *vita privata* genre, produced throughout the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.<sup>80</sup>. In the synagogue, the Jews behaved like pious worshippers, fulfilling their ritual duties like their Roman counterparts elsewhere in town, as seen in the Dura *mithraeum*, the Temple of Bel and the shrine dedicated to the Palmyrene gods, for example<sup>81</sup>. Inside the synagogue, these *exempla* strengthened their religious zeal and motivation. Here, *decor* did not function as a sacred tool used during services, but rather as an historical backdrop that enhanced the self-esteem and prestige of the worshippers. For this reason no images of prayer or the reading of holy texts appear, and the Commandments given to Moses by God are absent as well: these subjects would have been too close to the Second Commandment's indiction.

The military character of various scenes may connect the Synagogue's patrons with the military, a dominant force at Dura Europos. Support for this notion can also be found in the iconographic details that might have escaped the attention of onlookers. In panel NB1, the Battle at Eben-Ezer (I Samuel 4.1–11), Stefanie Weisman observes a correspondence between the military gear depicted in the scene and weapons found in Dura (Fig. 9)<sup>82</sup>. That we cannot really distinguish between the two groups of combatants, Jews and Philistines, might have to do with the use of the same equipment by both groups and the mixture of people in the city itself. The Jewish defeat should be viewed together with the adjacent panel WB4, the Ark of the Covenant near the Temple of Dagon: this defeat is a necessary step towards the eventual victory over the Philistines (Fig. 8). For Weisman, the preponderance of military scenes suggests that military personnel had an influence on the character of the iconography. The images display brave deeds similar to an emperor's *gesta*, in which he appears as a virtuous military commander in public space, demonstrating that military imagery played an important role in self-representation throughout the Roman world. The anoint-

<sup>77</sup> An analysis of the military details is provided by Weisman (2012, 14–17). On Moses' paramount prominence, see i.a. Levine 2012, 113–116; here Fig. 6.

<sup>78</sup> Elsner [2001] 2007. See also Baird 2018, 141.

<sup>79</sup> Xeravits 2017, 122f. Gutmann (1984, 1325) suggests that paintings in the synagogue, Christian church and other shrines were intended 'to gain converts', which seems a far-fetched idea, lacking sound evidence.

<sup>80</sup> E. g., a sarcophagus from the Via Latina in Roma dated to around A.D. 270–280, which I have recently analysed (Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo, inv. 40799; see Moormann, forthcoming, Fig. 5). For emperors and citizens offering sacrifices, see Hölscher 2018, 35–40.

<sup>81</sup> See Moormann 2011, 190–192; Tortorella 2014, 319–329; Kaizer 2016a.

<sup>82</sup> Weisman 2012, 6–12 Figs. 2–5. Hopkins (1979, 152f.) calls the *loricati* Gaulish.

ing of David by Solomon<sup>83</sup> acquires a Roman touch (and Imperial importance) if we acknowledge its military character, as observed by Tommaso Gnoli, who reads the ceremony as a kind of military initiation<sup>84</sup>. Here the Jews had no parallel, since the investiture of a Roman emperor was never depicted in public imagery.

It is by no means necessary to interpret the paintings as a kind of opposition against other religions (especially the Christians) present in Dura. Perhaps the images represent a sort of challenge to their Durene peers, but I fail to see the aggression of these cult scenes towards the reigning Romans, as argued by Elsner. Although the decorations display defeats of enemies, these groups do not include Romans or other local groups who might be offended, unless we view the violent Dagon scene (WB4), in which a cult statue is destroyed, as an insult to the Romans. Indeed, the military actions betray the pride of the Jews, but this is self-inclusive in their sacred space. Instead, I would rather turn the argument around: by displaying their *pietas*, *virtus*, *iustitia* and the like, the Jews are acting like good Romans. These abstract values had become common place over the years and had replaced mythical imagery in both the public and private realms by the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.

The *columnae cochleatae* of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius represent good counterparts for compressed depictions of sequential events in Roman art. They are similar to the synagogue paintings, in that they arrange long and short scenes side-by-side and include bewildering multitudes of figures (amongst which the emperor is frequently highlighted). Triumphal arches often adopt a similar approach; sequential scenes appear on the Arch of Trajan in Beneventum (A.D. 109–114), which depicts six horizontal layers of figurative representations, as well as the arches of Septimius Severus in the Forum Romanum and in Lepcis Magna (A.D. 202–203). Farther to the east, we can also recall the large frieze of Antoninus Pius from Ephesos, unfortunately from an unknown setting and date. Galerius' arch in Thessaloniki, built at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., provides a final example of superposed figurative scenes. Although these monuments employ a different medium (i. e., relief sculpture) and feature in dissimilar contexts, they retain a certain connection with the Durene images. The reliefs were originally painted, and their representations depended on earlier forms of figurative imagery, such as the canvases carried around in triumphal processions<sup>85</sup>. Our Jewish community, or at least the Jews involved in military activities, may have been familiar with this genre of monuments, which – admittedly – are remote from Dura in both time and space. And, as noted previously, the messages conveyed in the synagogue relied upon the presentation of the whole decorative programme, not only its constituent parts.

The interest in large figurative scenes in Late Antique painting is a well-known phenomenon, and examples of the technique appear both at Dura and other sites<sup>86</sup>. A near-contemporary parallel is the tetrarchs' shrine in the Temple of Luxor. Its articulation is similar<sup>87</sup>: the four tetrarchs are displayed in a niche located in a wall opposite the entrance, with the decoration serving as a form of 'social memory'<sup>88</sup> or even a 'triumphalist homage to the majesty of the Tetrarchy'<sup>89</sup>. Although the

<sup>83</sup> WC3, after 1 Samuel 16, 13. The content is indicated by an Aramaic inscription. Debate has risen concerning the number of men depicted. According to 1 Samuel 16, 10, there should be eight sons. Here we see a representation based on 1 Chronicles 2, 13–15 and Flavius Josephus, AntJud 6, 161–163. Cf. on this mix of sources, Kraeling 1956, 168. 351–358; Gutman 1983, 96–98; Fine 2005, 173. 182; Kalimi 2009, 123–132; Stern (2010) suggests a midrash tradition. Kalimi rightly rejects this link with a midrash version, since, as noted by Wharton, this work originated only in the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. See Wharton 1994, 19; 1995, 38–51; Levine 2012, 110.

<sup>84</sup> Gnoli 2016.

<sup>85</sup> Moon ([1992] 1995, 312f.) suggests 'placards' as sources of inspiration. However, these would remain restricted to a limited group of users. He includes 'sign paintings' sent by Septimius Severus to Rome, which documented his eastern campaigns, and refers to Brilliant's equation of the reliefs of the Arch of Septimius Severus with the Dura paintings (Brilliant 1967, 224).

<sup>86</sup> Ling 2014, 414–419 (however, excluding Dura, discussed previously at 397–399).

<sup>87</sup> See the fine description in Jones – McFadden 2015, 104–133.

<sup>88</sup> Jones – McFadden 2015, 32–37 quotation 37.

<sup>89</sup> Jones – McFadden 2015, 105.

rites performed in Luxor and Dura Europos differed, references to the images were relevant in both circumstances. Both displayed a memory of a glorious past in combination with the virtual presence of powerful figures, in Luxor honouring the Tetrarchic emperors and in the synagogue at Dura offering thanks to the God of Israel<sup>90</sup>. Memory was virtually omnipresent in ancient culture. Durene Jews responded to this sentiment with their figurative scenes and by doing so acted as the Romans did. We observe here what has been called a ‘process of referentialism’ between expressions of religious art – in which the setting creates specific features (such as objects, dress, stories) – and a wider cultural environment<sup>91</sup>. And, what is more, the specificity of the iconography in the synagogue served as an expression of Jewish identity both within the Durene community and beyond.

What strengthens this suggestion is the presence of various other religious groups who participated in their own cults in designed spaces at the same time. Naturally we can also find a large number of cults in other places (e.g., Rome), but the similarity of Dura’s cult spaces, with their interest in multiple figurative scenes (e.g., the Temple of the Palmyrene Gods, the Christian baptistry and the *Mithraeum*) suggests a sort of *aemulatio*, or representative rivalry, rather than a severe ‘segmentary opposition’<sup>92</sup>. The choice of narrative scenes was familiar to Christians, Jews and followers of Mithras, and corresponded to the religious narratives of their cults<sup>93</sup>. Thus, the synagogue was not an entirely innovative and ‘rebellious’ monument of isolated Jews, but rather an ensemble to be seen within the context of similar story-telling cults, as well as part of the broader Roman context of sacral buildings. The narrative stories depicted refer to the glorious past and show the fundamental role that memory played.

In both Dura Europos and beyond, complex decorations were employed in religious and official buildings to illustrate the prominence of the group depicted (here the Jews of Dura Europos), and to establish the importance of the past as a solid foundation for the present. This implies that at Dura Europos we do not see a dispute between Jews and Christians on one side and pagans on the other<sup>94</sup>, or between Jews and Christians themselves<sup>95</sup>. Rather we observe a local fashion of temple decoration that ties in with the *longue durée* tendencies of Greco-Roman art<sup>96</sup>.

## Conclusion

The figurative paintings of the synagogue in Dura Europos do not constitute a *rara avis* in the realm of the Roman Empire and its art. The Jewish population of Dura opted for a form of interior decoration that did justice both to their own demands and to their environment, in which the full decoration of sacred spaces with figurative scenes had become customary by the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. The community included citizens, soldiers and civilians who knew the Roman world (or at least the oriental part of it) and did not see themselves as separated by virtue of their belief. The patrons of the paintings singled out motifs from the past to display their roots and historical virtues. In doing so, the narrative scenes display qualities similar to those found on public and private ‘pagan’ art throughout the Roman world. Even if non-Jewish visitors never entered the synagogue, the Jews of Dura felt at home in a familiar atmosphere that corresponded with sacred spaces frequented

<sup>90</sup> Stern 2019.

<sup>91</sup> Elsner 2011, 126.

<sup>92</sup> Elsner [2001] 2007, 271. Above, I hinted at the possibility of a single workshop, a suggestion that should be worked out on the basis of autopsy and excellent photographic material.

<sup>93</sup> As is the case with the decoration of Isis shrines. On these particularities in contrast with the interior design of purely Roman cult buildings, see Moormann 2011, 204 f.

<sup>94</sup> Elsner [2001] 2007.

<sup>95</sup> Weitzmann – Kessler 1990, 153–183.

<sup>96</sup> Dirven 2004; Levine 2012, 74–79, 97–118.

by other citizens in their town. This decorative programme was neither alien nor unique, as we can deduce from other complexes known from the Land of Israel and elsewhere – it belongs to the Greco-Roman cultural *koine* of Late Antiquity. We are not, however, able to define possible relationships between the sacred *decor* of the synagogue and the private realms of its patrons and users, simply because we have no such material at our disposition.

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## Illustration Credits

Fig. 1, 3, 7–13: Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Archive Collection.

Fig. 2: Museum am Dom, Trier.

Fig. 4: After R. Hachlili 1998, III-6.

Fig. 5: N. Laos, after Weitzman – Kessler 1990, Fig. 2.

Fig. 6: E. M. Moormann, after Kraeling 1956, Pls. 9–12.

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## All the World's a Stage: On the Interplay of Decoration in Pompeian Houses

**Abstract:** The juxtaposition of three or four mythological figure panels within individual rooms is a key characteristic of wall paintings in Pompeian domestic contexts from the Augustan period onwards. While the mechanisms employed to create meaningful connections between the individual panels are well understood, appreciation of the relation of these panels to other elements of the decoration has been more limited. Concentrating on the wall decorations in one Pompeian dwelling, the Casa dell'Ara Massima, this paper examines the patterns of intermediality shaped by the choices made on the walls of this house, which was decorated in the period of the Fourth Style. For its interpretative framework, the discussion draws on parameters gleaned from Roman stagecraft, specifically the mechanisms of Roman pantomime, and applies them to describe and interpret the interdependency of *decor*, architecture and human practice.

The juxtaposition of figural scenes within individual rooms is a key characteristic of the wall paintings that feature in Pompeian domestic contexts from the Augustan period onwards<sup>1</sup>. Across Pompeii, the set of scenes chosen for such combinations is only rarely repeated exactly<sup>2</sup>. This high level of variation is indicative of individual decisions taken by those in charge of decorative design. The wide spectrum of decorative decisions evident for a town such as Pompeii hints at the inadequacy of a traditional argument in the scholarship of Roman painting, which proposes that patrons picked the designs for their houses virtually free of specific intention, dispassionately selecting pre-fabricated schemes from pattern books, or *Musterbücher*<sup>3</sup>. While pattern books may have provided a portfolio of material from which Pompeian customers chose, the evidence of the interior decoration intimates that the selections made from this pool of motifs led to highly individualised – and highly intentional – arrangements.

Heinrich Brunn was among the first scholars to pick up on the juxtaposition between mythological scenes in Roman painting, and more specifically, in paintings situated in Pompeian domestic contexts. Brunn argued for the deliberate conception of these arrangements by the designers, noting the absence of consecutive narrative displays and emphasising that the positioning of the panels in individual rooms facilitated comparative viewing and shaped narratives fuelled by analogy<sup>4</sup>. Brunn's early endeavours in this field have been expanded by Bettina Bergmann, who mapped out key mechanisms in the Pompeian juxtaposition of myths and their rootedness in Roman aesthet-

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1 My warmest thanks to Rona Johnston Gordon for her keen eye and for rectifying linguistic vagaries. This paper expands arguments presented in Lorenz 2013a and Lorenz 2018.

2 Notable exceptions are the Fourth Style decorations of room (15) in the Casa del Poeta Tragico (VI 8,3–5) and room (h) in the Casa di L. Cornelius Diadumenus (VII 12,26–27); in both rooms, pictures of Ariadne abandoned (in the former, Theseus is shown as leaving; in the latter, his ship has already departed), Artemis, Kallisto and the cupid's nest are combined: PPM IV (1993) 527–603 s. v. VI 8, 3.5, Casa del Poeta Tragico (F. Parise Badoni) 566–581; PPM VII (1997) 565–593 s. v. VII 12, 26, Casa di L. Cornelius Diadumenus (I. Bragantini) 571–581.

3 For Roman *Musterbücher*, see the summary of recent debates in Schmidt-Colinet 2009 and Clarke 2010. Ghedini 1997, esp. 834 f., provides a comprehensive survey of modes of transmission.

4 See the quotation of Brunn in Schefold 1952, 32 (without reference to its location in Brunn's work): 'The ancients were not at all keen to present in freely juxtaposed pictures temporally closely related facts, in which one would, as it were, constitute the continuation of the other. Such proximity would curtail the suggestive in the broadest sense and trap it within confines too narrow. The only exceptions were those comprehensive cyclical displays. Otherwise, they rather chose to combine narrative moments that were distant from each other, that would relate to each other as if beginning and end, or cause and effect; they even preferred sometimes when choosing pendants to pick elements from different mythological cycles and so contrast one scene with a poetic-mythological analogy from another cycle.'

ics<sup>5</sup>. The placement of pictorial information is now habitually tackled with descriptors borrowed from Roman rhetorical writing. Terms such as parallelism, intensification and contrast (*similitudo*, *uicinitas* and *contrarium*) are employed as if they designate formal devices and tropes that characterise potential combinations of mythological pictures within the Roman house<sup>6</sup>.

In this examination of aesthetic and semantic connections at play in Roman interior decoration, I explore the juxtaposing of pictures not by pinpointing individual rhetorical tropes, but by teasing out how such formal features are layered in order to generate meaning. The placing of these features is not a matter of parataxis; rather, it facilitates rhetorical modes of a more general type – syncrisis, or *comparatio* – that is, it enables the viewers' lasting comparative engagement with the figures depicted on the walls. Concentrating on the wall decorations in one Pompeian house, the Casa dell'Ara Massima, I consider how we might think about both the juxtaposition of mythological panels and the panels' relationship to other elements of Fourth Style wall decoration within individual spaces in the Pompeian houses. Finally, by drawing on additional evidence from the Casa di Pinarius Cerealis, I apply an interpretive framework gleaned from Roman stagecraft, specifically the mechanisms of Roman pantomime, to describe the interdependency of *decor*, architecture and human practice

## The Casa dell'Ara Massima

The Casa dell'Ara Massima (VI 16,15.17) is a small Pompeian dwelling decorated entirely in the Fourth Style (Fig. 1)<sup>7</sup>. Closed off from the other areas at the back of the house, room (G) combines on its walls four mythological panels<sup>8</sup>. Endymion and Selene on the south wall (Fig. 2) and Dionysus and Ariadne on the west wall (Fig. 3) are depicted as they become acquainted: in contrast to other Pompeian renderings of the myth, Endymion is wide awake and looks towards Selene; Dionysus is physically moving towards the sleeping Ariadne. Meanwhile, on the north wall, Mars and Venus are depicted in a tight embrace, already closely connected (Fig. 4)<sup>9</sup>. These scenes present stages in a relationship, both contrasting and consecutive. Each of the three images also articulates the attraction of bodily beauty: both men and women are largely undressed, which makes for a particular focus on the physical appeal of their bodies. This aspect is played out in side panels that frame the mythological frescos, with busts of attractive women looking out of the picture. Only the scene on the east wall evades the presentation of a normative relationship. This scene, which shows Heracles and two companions in front of an altar, inspired the modern name of the house, but the mythological episode underpinning it cannot be unambiguously identified, beyond being evidently charged with male *virtus* and sacrality (Fig. 5)<sup>10</sup>.

The set of three pictures and the panel on the east wall feed two different moods, juxtaposing ideals of male-female romantic companionship with a representation of male status. With these two trajectories, the decoration of room (G) presents in a single room the type of mythological design found throughout spaces within the three-room groupings that commonly appear in Pompeian

<sup>5</sup> Bergmann 1994.

<sup>6</sup> For a critical review of these practices, see Lorenz 2014, esp. 183–188.

<sup>7</sup> For the house: Schefold 1957, 156–158; Stemmer 1992; PPM V (1994) 847–886 s. v. VI 16, 15.17, Casa dell' Ara Massima (K. Stemmer).

<sup>8</sup> Strocka 1989; Stemmer 1992, 53 f.; cf. Strocka 1997, 131 f.

<sup>9</sup> For the myths cf. Lorenz 2008, 216–218 (Endymion and Selene); McNally 1985, 181; Fredrick 1995; Lorenz 2008, 111–123 (Dionysus and Ariadne); Strocka 1997; Lorenz 2008, 149–185 (Mars and Venus).

<sup>10</sup> See Coralini 2001, esp. 194–196, who interprets this scene as one of Hercules and Admetus; for other interpretations, see Strocka 1989, 29–31; Stemmer 1992, 53 f.



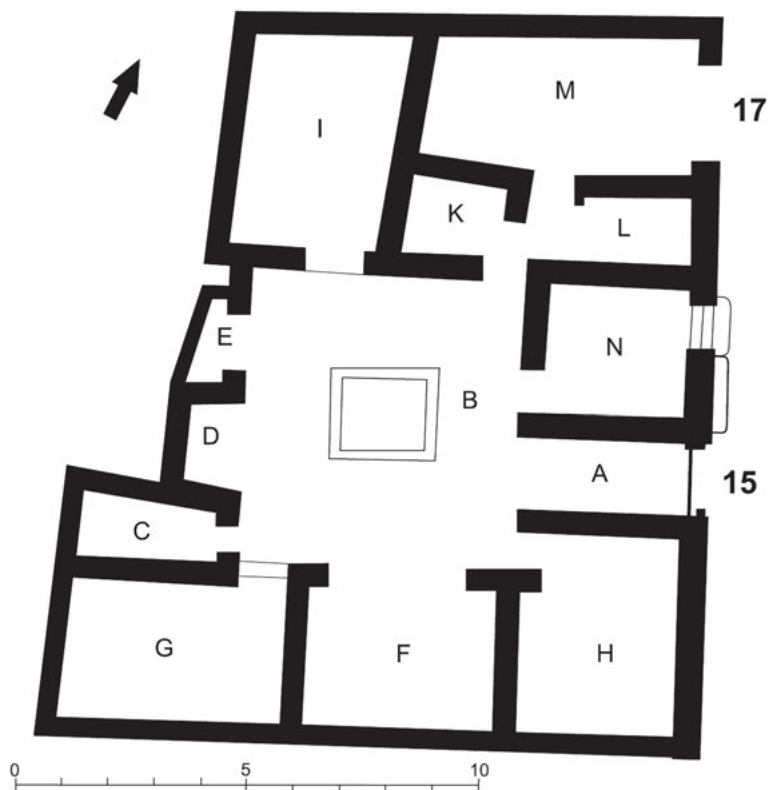


Fig. 1: Pompeii, Casa dell'Ara Massima, plan.

houses. Frequently, a single mythological fresco within a room accompanies the semantic connections formed by the other panels, as if triggering a paratext to the text generated by the rest of the decoration<sup>11</sup>.

But this form of representation generally appears on three walls that could be appreciated in a single vista, whereas in the case of room (G), navigating the two trajectories of text and paratext requires a physical journey on the part of the viewer. Upon entering, the viewer comprehends the room and the panels depicting male-female companionship as a homogenous tableau, encountering a type of mythological decoration that accords with the typical atmosphere of smaller rooms in Pompeii, one that is thus in tune with the size and the secluded location of the room within the dwelling's configuration. But once the viewer has fully entered the room and looks back towards the entrance, the paratext of male *virtus* on the east wall comes into view, changing the tone of the arrangement and replicating associations more commonly found in larger reception rooms of grander houses.

While room (G) is more difficult to access, the second room featuring mythological panels, room (F), opens fully onto atrium (B), the dwelling's primary circulation area (Fig. 6). The room's openness is matched by the symmetrical arrangement and homogeneous thematic choices presented in the mythological panels that decorate its lateral walls: on the west wall Endymion (this time asleep) is once again visited by Selene (Fig. 7), while on the east, sleeping Ariadne is approached by a maenad (Fig. 8). Here the sleeping Endymion is presented in correspondence with the sleeping Ariadne, a connection underlined by the attending female characters. Although the maenad might herald the imminent arrival of Dionysus, the choices made in both pictures underscore the solitude of the two protagonists (Ariadne's partner is yet to arrive; Endymion cannot perceive his partner's presence) and their vulnerability in a state of slumber. With this focus on individual figures, viewers can engage with these frescos in a way that is characteristic of many Fourth Style mythological panels.

<sup>11</sup> Lorenz 2008, 361–379.



**Fig. 2:** Pompeii, Casa dell'Ara Massima, room (G), south wall: Endymion and Selene.



**Fig. 3:** Pompeii, Casa dell'Ara Massima, room (G), west wall: Dionysus and Ariadne.



**Fig. 4:** Pompeii, Casa dell'Ara Massima, room (G), north wall: Mars and Venus.



**Fig. 5:** Pompeii, Casa dell'Ara Massima, room (G), east wall: Hercules.





**Fig. 6:** Pompeii, Casa dell'Ara Massima, atrium (B) and room (F).



**Fig. 7:** Pompeii, Casa dell'Ara Massima, room (F), west wall: Endymion and Selene.



**Fig. 8:** Pompeii, Casa dell'Ara Massima, room (F), east wall: Ariadne.



**Fig. 9:** Pompeii, Casa dell'Ara Massima, pseudo-tablinum (D). Narcissus.

The display of figures in a reflective state in room (F) is matched by the depiction of Narcissus in the atrium proper (Fig. 9). In this panel, Narcissus sits in front of a large votive pillar gazing into the space beyond the picture's frame, his reflection staring up at him from the pond at his feet. This panel is set into the alcove of the atrium's west wall, a tiny space that is habitually referred to as pseudo-tablinum (D)<sup>12</sup>. The depiction works with the mythological panels in room (F) to create a connection across the extended area of the atrium, a decorative technique characteristic of the smaller rooms in Pompeian houses that were set aside for familiars. During the Fourth Style, these spaces were frequently decorated with combinations of Narcissus, the fishing Venus, Endymion and Selene, as well as Apollo and Daphne<sup>13</sup>.

### Other decorative elements

In terms of its mythological decoration, the Casa dell'Ara Massima displays patterns that are also found elsewhere in Pompeian houses painted during the period of the Fourth Style. Yet within this small house, certain decorative strategies are mixed anew to generate experiences greater than might be expected of spaces in a house of this scale. The atrium's extensive west wall is the most comprehensive example of a 'remixed' design (Fig. 6, right). Facing the entrance of the house, this wall permits a particularly rich case study of the interplay of decorations in a Pompeian domestic context. A bountiful assortment of visual stimuli are combined across the wall's surface, which measures c. 35 m<sup>2</sup><sup>14</sup>. The wall is divided into a low, yellow dado, a central zone in red and a large upper field painted yellow in the centre and red at the sides that is greater in height than the two lower zones put together. The lower register of the wall is broken up by three openings: the door

<sup>12</sup> On the myth, cf. Zanker 1966; Balensiefen 1990, 130–166; Prehn 1993; 1997; Elsner 2007, 132–176. esp. 156–160.

<sup>13</sup> Lorenz 2008, 380–390.

<sup>14</sup> Careful analysis of the layers of plaster has shown that the whole wall was decorated in one phase during the Neronian period, thus invalidating the later Vespasianic date that had been proposed by Ludwig Curtius and Karl Schefold. See Stemmer 1992, 42. 46.

to room (C), the pseudo-*tablinum* (D), which contains the Narcissus fresco, and another niche-like space, room (E).

In the upper register, the tripartite scheme is continued by the figurative paintings: the lower part of the tall central panels serves as a faux-window looking out onto a landscape dominated by a temple structure, a *schola* held by a caryatid and further sacred architecture in the background. Either side of this central image, projecting *aediculae* are occupied by doorways and staircases. The central panel is surrounded by a series of devices set to enhance its spatial presence: a broad frame in brown, white and yellow sets it off from the upper part of the opening, with a blue curtain hanging from above, billowing on top and behind this frame and thus vouching for the opening's alleged physical existence as a window.

At the bottom of the window, a stuccoed cornice (of which little remains today) protrudes from the wall, enhancing the notion of spatial depth. Serving in effect as a funnel, the flanking *aediculae* also suggest depth, with their primary visual function underlined by the *imagines clipeatae*, or framed portraits, hanging from their sides. The portrait *protomes* on these shields are not alone in turning towards the central panel: female figures positioned on the staircases also look towards the window, as do the theatrical masks positioned inside the *aediculae* and the tall figures of the two gods, Neptune (left) and Victory (right), who stand on pedestals at the outer edges of the scene.

Serving the designer as an essential tool across this area, the viewers entering this space initiate a range of mechanisms that generate virtual spatiality. Two attempts to bring multiple perspectives into the physical space over which the west wall presides are indicative of their deployment. First, there is a notable discrepancy in the alignment of the west wall's built architecture with its niche and door opening and the decoration of its upper register – the former is aligned centrally to the room, whereas the perspectival axis of the latter is shifted to the north. Second, the lower register's decoration is oriented slightly to the south, with the pseudo-*tablinum* (D) offset to the left in comparison with the central panel of the upper register.

A shifting perspectival axis is a common feature in the built environment of Roman houses; with negated or displaced vanishing points, individual spaces can be made to appear more extensive than they physically are. Condensed into the space of the atrium and executed in two modes (architecture and decoration), a complex visual environment is created, characterised by attempts at virtual spatial extension and multi-perspectivity – a powerful means of supporting a variety of viewing situations and entralling viewers, not least by continuously frustrating their viewing experience. When infused with the experience of the upper part of the wall, the visual counterpoint provided by the decoration of the pseudo-*tablinum* (D) reframes the meaning of the mythological panel depicting Narcissus at its centre and in doing so demonstrates the interaction between decorative elements (Fig. 9). The mythological panel sits above a faux-marble pedestal and is surrounded by wooden shutters, with the whole ensemble embedded in a white background that stands out clearly against the rest of the west wall.

In a cunning game of visual double-crossing, the shutters and the marble pedestal signal a venerable Greek pedigree, locating the niche in a world of precious wooden panels and Hellenistic cultural sophistication, while the panel itself heralds another type of visual transgression. The theme of Narcissus embodies the lure, and the dangers, of spectatorship. In the Casa dell'Ara Massima, that risk may have been explicit, protruding into the space in front of the pictorial surface, for a travertine water basin was perhaps originally positioned inside the niche, adding an actual reflection of the tragic youth to the painted counterpart. Considering the mythological fresco alongside the other decorative elements of this wall thus highlights matters of visual trespass beyond the communicative possibilities of the mythological panel alone.

## Intermingling as intermediality

The unique decorative solution developed on the atrium's west wall, with its focus on aspects of nature, is modelled not on a passage into a garden, but rather on windows that provide views into the distance, such as those in the large *triclinium* of the Casa di Fabius Rufus (VII 16,22)<sup>15</sup>. On the west wall of the Casa dell'Ara Massima, these windows open not only onto nature (albeit a fictitious version), but also onto the realm of the mythological, as the niche with the Narcissus fresco demonstrates. The atrium displays a pervasive notion of space that is also evident in depictions of nature during this period, as in Villa A at Oplontis<sup>16</sup>. The notion of space here finds itself extended, however, with the incorporation of the mythological. It therefore no longer serves simply as a way to resolve the contradiction between nature and architecture, but instead fuses these different planes to create an experiential sphere where the real and the virtual are blended also on the level of narrative.

It would be a mistake to see this layering strategy solely as a mechanism intended to lend smaller houses the same credence as larger dwellings. In his seminal 1979 article, Paul Zanker argued convincingly that in the Imperial period the design of Pompeian houses was based on a construction kit inspired by Roman country villas, with water features and landscape vistas layered with picture and sculpture galleries even in the most restricted spaces; for example, in the garden of the Casa di Octavius Quartio (II 2,2)<sup>17</sup>. However, the layering phenomenon we observe in the Casa dell'Ara Massima cannot be fully explained as a mere symptom of the decorative aspirations of Pompeii's lower and middle classes. Rather, our focus on the intermediality of decorative elements helps us recognise that this layering is equally a result of a distinct notion of the modalities of space and new understandings of space as a conceptual framework for the communication of content that developed in the Neronian period.

The layering of different moods in the Casa dell'Ara Massima is to a considerable degree achieved by decorative strategies that match those employed in Roman stage sets, or *scaenae frontes*. These include (1) actions that take place on different spatial levels combined in a single panoramic vista, (2) figures that emerge out of the architectural background, (3) decorative elements that reach into the space in front of the façade and (4) views onto spaces beyond the architectural frame<sup>18</sup>. This alignment with stagecraft suggests an implicit intermediality, which is enhanced by an intermingling with elements of nature and mythology that also featured in the theatre setting. This intermediality produces a space that is non-homogeneous in the sense that the technical (the architecture) and metaphorical (the references to nature, mythology and other thematic spheres) characteristics of the space are not aligned. But, despite their heterogeneity, these features are welded together in various ways to overcome the dichotomy of reality vs. artificiality, creating a mood-scape that permeates the space.

This specific type of *skenographia* puts a considerable burden on the viewers, for it falls to them to perform the vital act of homogenising and, in turn, synthesising the differing elements on display. In the process, it is also the viewers' responsibility to explore a new form of pervasive virtual reality, deconstructing this spatial mood-scape down to its individual constituents. Elements of the theatre stage would seem especially suitable for stimulating such behaviour, given that the homogenisation of perspective is precisely what is required from theatre audiences, who have to negotiate plot, performance, costumes and setting. But as the evidence of the Casa dell'Ara Massima demonstrates, other decorative elements might function in a similar way.

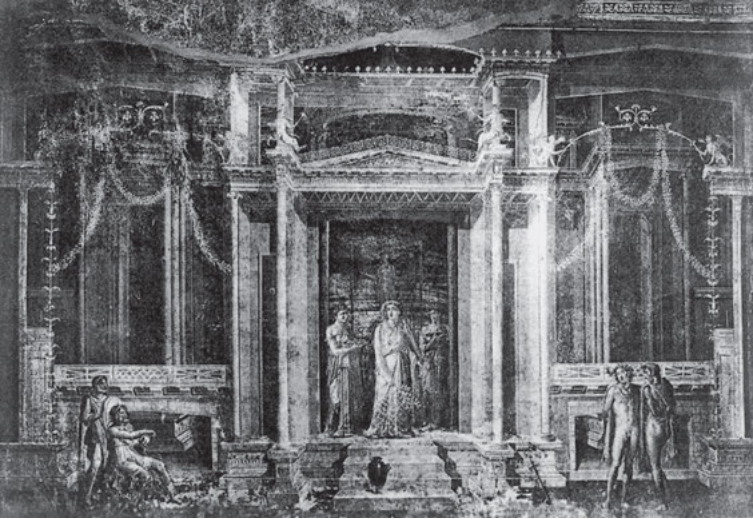
<sup>15</sup> PPM VII (1997) 947–1125 s. v. VII 16, 22 (Ins. Occ.), Casa di Fabius Rufus (I. Bragantini) 1077–1097.

<sup>16</sup> Bergmann 2002, 96–118; cf. Lorenz 2013a, 365 f.

<sup>17</sup> Zanker 1979, esp. 522 f.; cf. also Lorenz 2013b, esp. 245–247.

<sup>18</sup> On the house's decoration, cf. Moormann 1983, 112–114; for Roman *skenographia*, cf. Leach 2004, 114–122; Small 2013, 117–123.





**Fig. 10:** Pompeii, Casa di Pinarius Cerialis, *cubiculum* (a): Iphigenia among the Taurians.

The use of *scaenae frons* decorations is not an innovation of Neronian wall painting. Vitruvius identifies it as an element of representational domestic art as early as the last quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.<sup>19</sup>, and indeed, Second Style wall painting frequently features elements from theatre architecture, as visible in well-known examples from Villa A at Oplontis or the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor in Boscoreale. After a short spell of relative insignificance during the Third Style, the *scaenae frons* returns during the Fourth Style in a thoroughly remodelled guise. These paintings now habitually fill entire walls and incorporate elements of purely fantastic architectural reverie, such as masonry architraves resting on floral tendrils.

If the theatre paintings of the Second Style extend space into the wall, opening vistas onto distant architectural landscapes, in the Fourth Style, it is more common to progress forward into real space, creating an almost tangible form of pervasive virtuality. This apparent incursion is enhanced by another feature that clearly separates the *scaenae frontes* of the Fourth Style from earlier adaptations: the inclusion of figures within the scene. These individuals either look outwards towards the viewer or act within the virtual space, and in doing so create a false physical reality. They also serve to remind the external onlooker of their own act of viewing, and can be activated as narrative agents.

*Cubiculum* (a) in the Casa di Pinarius Cerialis (III 4,4–6), decorated in the A.D. 50s, offers a striking example of this new use of *scaenae frons* decorations (Fig. 10)<sup>20</sup>. Adjacent to a depiction of Attis with the nymphs of Sangarios, a scene from the myth of Iphigenia among the Taurians is set within a particularly outré *scaenae frons* arrangement. This scene is packed with fantastic building elements, stacked upon one another without concern for static loads or the rules of logic: the priestess stands in the centre of an elevated *aedicula*, accompanied by servants and holding the cult statue; on the right stand Orestes and Pylades, both with their hands tied behind their backs, and on the left sits King Thoas, with a companion standing behind him.

Ten additional examples of this particular episode have been found on Pompeian walls, more frequently in compositions of the Fourth Style than those of the Third Style, and always within self-contained mythological panels located in grand reception rooms. In these scenes, Iphigenia is always depicted in the central role, elevated on the steps of the temple, and in most cases the triangle between Orestes, his companion Thoas and Iphigenia is explored; only once is Thoas not depicted. The scenes are located within a sacral-palatial setting and generate an atmosphere of ceremonious piety (particularly with regard to Iphigenia) and male *virtus*, *amicitia* and friendship,

<sup>19</sup> Vitruvius, *De arch.* 7, 5, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Moormann 1983, 76–84; PPM III (1991) 435–477 s. v. III 4, 4, Casa di Pinarius Cerialis (A. de Vos) 460–473.



embodied by Orestes and Pylades' standing in for one another, which hinders Thoas from establishing who is the real Orestes<sup>21</sup>.

Spreading out the figures in a *skenographia*, as on the *cubiculum* wall, allows for two variations from standard mythological frescos of the type that decorate the Casa dell'Ara Massima. First, it brings the figures closer to the sphere of the viewer. They are not enclosed within their own demarcated picture field, but are instead distributed across the whole wall, in this case on a level with their audience; this proximity is enhanced by one of the youths' frontal posture. Second, the arrangement renders the narrative on display more accessible to the viewer, as if the figures can form a relationship with the viewer external to their roles within the depicted scene. In supporting this form of individual symbolisation, the mythological figures fulfil the role of a gateway into the scene, much like the spectator figures in the Casa dell'Ara Massima.

Meanwhile, in terms of the actual physical boundaries of the built environment, the architectural space established in *cubiculum* (a) remains unchanged. The walls do not extend outwards, as they would in a painted garden scene. But on a conceptual level, a range of possible connections can extend the viewer's imagination, a process comparable to the functioning of the Narcissus panel in the Casa dell'Ara Massima.

Whilst older scholarship saw the renewed appearance of *scaenae frons* in paintings of Fourth Style as a direct and ideological reference to Nero's interest in the theatre, Eric Moormann, among others, has shown that the appearance of these scenes can be explained by an increased interest in the theatre, and with it in issues of spectatorship on a much wider social scale<sup>22</sup>. Analysis of the decoration in the Casa dell'Ara Massima underscores precisely that position, as does investigation of the scene in the Casa di Pinarius Cerialis.

However, the interest in theatre and spectatorship seems to be only a symptom of an even more profound theme displayed by these paintings within the context of Pompeian houses: the modalities of space, including the potential of space to act as a carrier of meaning. Here again we can draw on theatrical practices to help us understand the cultural milieu within which this discourse emerged. Since the early Imperial period, the dramatic form of the pantomime had risen to great prominence across all social strata (not least in Campania), and included even the emperors among its fans<sup>23</sup>.

In Roman pantomime, a solo dancer enacted all parts of the play in silent dance, using masks and props as required while being accompanied by music, percussion and a choir or spoken libretto. The plotlines were taken from Greek myths and could be loosely stitched together, as for a revue. Ancient texts emphasise the versatility of the performers, who were able to use their hands and limbs while dancing to convey the narrative as effectively as if they were 'speaking'<sup>24</sup>. Each dance sequence would end with the performer 'freezing' into a tableau-like pose, the so-called *schemata*, before carrying on with the next part.

The make-believe of the pantomime used the space of the theatre to accentuate its characters' dynamic movement through the architectural levels of the stage building, as well as to anchor them in the moments of pause. The *schemata* on display were thus offered up for syncretic (and therefore homogenising) consumption by viewers alongside all the other visual stimuli – sculpture, painting and architecture – that composed the Roman stage<sup>25</sup>. Just like the elements of *decor* on the walls of Roman houses, the dramatic strategies of the pantomime presupposed that viewers were able to appreciate the *modus potentialis* of the scene, especially the static displays, and were keen to

<sup>21</sup> Leach 2004, 118; Bielfeldt 2005, 241–251.

<sup>22</sup> Moormann 1983, 116 f.

<sup>23</sup> For the dramatic genre, cf. Hall 2013; for its potential impact on Roman art, cf. Dunbabin 2016, 85–113.

<sup>24</sup> For Lucian's detailed discussion of the effects of pantomime, see Lada-Richards 2000; 2004; 2013.

<sup>25</sup> For a recent comprehensive 3-D reconstruction of the visual effects of this stagecraft on the basis of the evidence from Augusta Emerita (modern: Mérida), one of the best-preserved Roman theatres, see Vergel Martínez – Mesa Hurtado 2018.

activate in their minds individual aspects of the bountiful offering in front of them<sup>26</sup> (while deselecting others), thus customising individual performance trajectories from a corpus of predesigned *schemata*.

## Conclusion

Unravelling the relationship of mythological panels with other elements of wall painting allows us to discern how decoration of the Fourth Style, as it appears in the Casa dell'Ara Massima and Casa di Pinarius Cerialis, addresses the dichotomy between fiction and reality. It does so by scaffolding and constantly re-framing virtual spaces that blur the distinction between the real and the virtual with representations of the strictly fictitious – such as sacral landscapes or mythological settings – all the while featuring multiple points of connection that enable viewers to enter into a discourse firmly anchored in reality. Within these tableaux, as the viewers' expectations vis-à-vis the depicted spheres advance, they are constantly reframed by the painted surfaces. This type of semanticised aesthetic is facilitated by syncretic arrangements, such as the combining of mythological panels and other decorative features that renders the boundaries of those panels elastic, both in the literal sense, as with the faux-wooden frame of the Narcissus panel in the Casa dell'Ara Massima, and in a figurative sense, as with the Gorgoneia alongside the sleeping Endymion and Ariadne.

These syncretic arrangements, along with the non-homogeneous spaces they orchestrate, invite, even coerce, their viewers to synthesise the individual elements on display, just as the dramatic genre of the pantomime would have required its audience to do in a Roman theatre. This form of decoration appears to explore an intermixing of the technical and metaphorical aspects of space. The mathematical dimension of spatial representation – the technicalities of displaying objects, vanishing points and all – is considered alongside and with regard to its interdependency with the creation of meaningful relationships, whether they are narratives or conceptual descriptors in the shape of affirmative ideals embodied in the acts of mythological figures.

This exploration was driven not by the creation of an inverted, unreal world, but by an interest in generating and upholding reality and artificiality, as well as the wide areas in which these concepts overlap. A key parameter is the assumption that space creates a framework within which the relationships that are generated are not absolute, but rather relative and dynamic; these include relationships between objects (such as *decor*) and human practice (which incorporates ideas and emotions). The results are externalised, almost tangible 'experience-scapes', such as those found in the Casa dell'Ara Massima and the Casa di Pinarius Cerialis. These forms of decoration may exude confinement, reducing the fictional to mere subject matter for human consciousness, but for that very reason they also expand human consciousness, which functions as a vessel for the virtual.

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<sup>26</sup> For the term *modus potentialis* in reference to portraiture, see Boehm 1985, 29. 98 f.

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Mantha Zarmakoupi

# The Intermediality of Landscape in the *Decorum* of Roman Villas

**Abstract:** This paper analyses intermedial relationships between different systems of representation of landscape to tackle the role of medium in the principle of *decor/decorum*. I focus on representations of nature in wall paintings as well as framed views of nature within and beyond villas together with contemporary literary *ekphraseis* in order to shed light on the interconnectedness between representations and views of nature in Roman decorative contexts. I argue that the paratactic placement of intermedial landscape representations was an appropriate design strategy in villa architecture and decoration that fabricated a *mise en abyme* effect in the villas' spaces. These landscape representations and designs, together with contemporary literary *ekphraseis*, point to the cultural processes by which Romans articulated their notions of landscape. The intermedial representations of landscape and their paratactic arrangement were appropriate design strategies in Roman villa decoration.

*Decor/decorum* – that is, appropriateness – was an essential Roman value that was vaguely defined in rhetorical literature, because the concept responded to many shifting spheres and could become a topic of controversy and debate<sup>1</sup>. Vitruvius's discussion of *decorum* underscores the volatility of the concept in architecture and decoration<sup>2</sup>, and this paper tackles the role of medium in *decorum* by focusing on the intermedial representation of landscape in early Roman villas. Intermedial references in Roman wall paintings introduced intrinsic features found in other media, as well as connotations beyond traditional media boundaries, and impacted upon questions of perception, experience and meaning<sup>3</sup>. I focus on intermedial relationships between different systems of representation of landscape in villa decoration: in miniature landscape paintings, framed views of the landscape around villas and their 'side-by-side', or paratactic, placement in the villas' spaces. I argue that the intermedial representations of landscape and their paratactic arrangement were appropriate design strategies in villa decoration, and that these representations structured the experience of and articulated ideas about landscape in Roman villas.

On the one hand, landscape is a medium. As William J. T. Mitchell puts it, 'landscape is itself a physical and multisensory medium (earth, stone, vegetation, water, sky, sound and silence, light and darkness, etc.) in which cultural values and meanings are encoded, whether they are *put* there by the physical transformation of a place in landscape gardening or architecture, or *found* in a place formed, as we say, "by nature"<sup>4</sup>. Embedded in a tradition of cultural signification and communication and able to serve as a medium of social and economic exchange, '[l]andscape is a medium in the fullest sense of the word'<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, representations of landscape provide a 'missing link' between mental images and physical images, mediating the perceptual and socio-cultural processes by which landscape is seen<sup>6</sup>. For landscape is a way of seeing, an active 'looking' that

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<sup>1</sup> Cicero (De or. 70–74) indicates that the content and language of a speech must be appropriate to the subject matter, audience and historical situation: see Perry 2005, 36; Fitzpatrick Nichols 2017, 146–162; see also Haug, this volume.

<sup>2</sup> Vitruvius (De arch. 1, 2, 5) indicates that works of art and architecture must be suitable to their circumstances and both the overall form and the details of the architectural elements and ornament must suit the conditions that have given rise to the building.

<sup>3</sup> Scholars are increasingly exploring the ways in which intermedial relationships between different systems of representation operated in Roman art and architecture: see Elsner 1995; Bergmann 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Mitchell 2002, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Mitchell 2002, 14.

<sup>6</sup> On mental images, see Belting [2001] 2011, 9–36.



is historically determined. A ‘land’ becomes a landscape through a process that Alan Roger calls ‘artialisation’. Roger employs the word artialisation to describe the processes by which human intervention transforms nature *in situ* (the work of gardeners, landscapers and land artists), or that which operates indirectly *in visu*, through the intermediation of models that mould the collective glance (the work of artists, writers and photographers). It is through this process that *paese* becomes *paesaggio* in Italian, *pays* becomes *paysage* in French, *land* becomes *landscape* in English, *Land* becomes *Landschaft* in German and *topos* becomes *topio* in ancient Greek<sup>7</sup>. The intermedial relationships between different systems of representation of landscape in Roman villas point to this process of artialisation in villa architecture, decoration and landscaping.

The intermedial relationships between painted landscapes and real landscapes were a feature of *decor* in Roman villas. These paintings have been studied from quite different perspectives in the past – e.g., ‘sacral-idyllic’ versus ‘villa landscapes’ – but I am approaching them as part of a coherent intermedial and paratactic design strategy employed in a villa’s *decor*, which constructed ideas of landscape and power while also making references to the newly conquered Hellenistic world. I draw on examples of real villas from the Bay of Naples, including Villa Oplontis, Villa San Marco and Villa del Sorrento, and real Hellenistic landscapes from across the Mediterranean, such as Delos. In analysing the interplay between painted landscapes and real landscapes in Roman villas, this paper addresses the ways in which the intermediality of landscape was an appropriate design strategy in villa decoration.

## Miniature landscape paintings: contrasting attitudes of man towards nature

Vitruvius and Pliny the Elder described a type of painting – the miniature landscapes of the Second, Third and Fourth Styles – that was integrated into the decorative schemes featured on walls of Roman villas and houses between the late 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. and 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.<sup>8</sup>. These miniature landscapes were part of a contemporary appreciation for and broader cultural preoccupation with nature represented as landscape during the Late Republican and Early Imperial periods<sup>9</sup>. The names given to these paintings are *topia*<sup>10</sup>, the plural of *topion* (the diminutive of *topos*) and *topiaria opera*<sup>11</sup>. The use of the diminutive for these representations correlates with their miniaturisation, a characteristic that is noted on a number of occasions by Pliny<sup>12</sup> and by Vitruvius<sup>13</sup>, who compares them to megalographies. Both authors describe distant views of landscape, featuring buildings of various kinds<sup>14</sup>. The fact that both descriptions catalogue the components that are featured in these landscape representations suggests that they are not depictions of specific places but conceptual representations constructed by the painter and painting<sup>15</sup>.

The paintings were classified in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by Michael I. Rostovtzeff (Michail Iwanowitsch Rostowzew) into a pair of thematic groups, corresponding to two broad categories of subject matter: inland scenes and littoral scenes. This typology has permeated the study of landscape painting ever since<sup>16</sup>. The inland scenes, called ‘sacral-idyllic landscapes’ by Rostovtzeff,

<sup>7</sup> Roger 1997, 16–24.

<sup>8</sup> Ling 1977, 4 f.; Rouveret 2004, 331. Contra: Malaspina 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Zarmakoupi 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Vitr. De arch. 7, 5, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Plin. HN 35, 116.

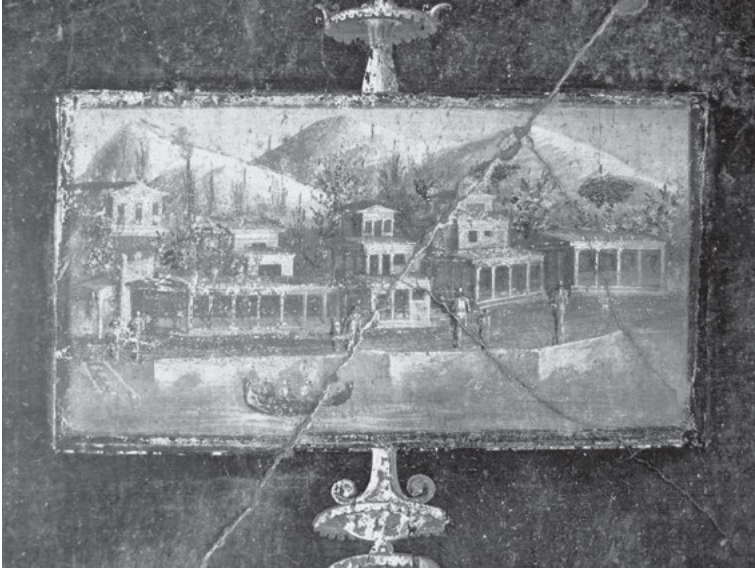
<sup>12</sup> Plin. HN 35, 112: *minoris picturae*; 35, 116: *amoenissimam parietam picturam*.

<sup>13</sup> Vitr. De arch. 7, 5, 2: *varietatibus topiorum... signorum megalographiam*.

<sup>14</sup> See discussion in Rouveret 2004, 331 f. Contra: Malaspina 2011; 2012; 2013.

<sup>15</sup> See discussion in Zarmakoupi 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Rostovtzeff 1904; 1911.



**Fig. 1:** Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto, south wall of *tablinum*, right *pinakas*.

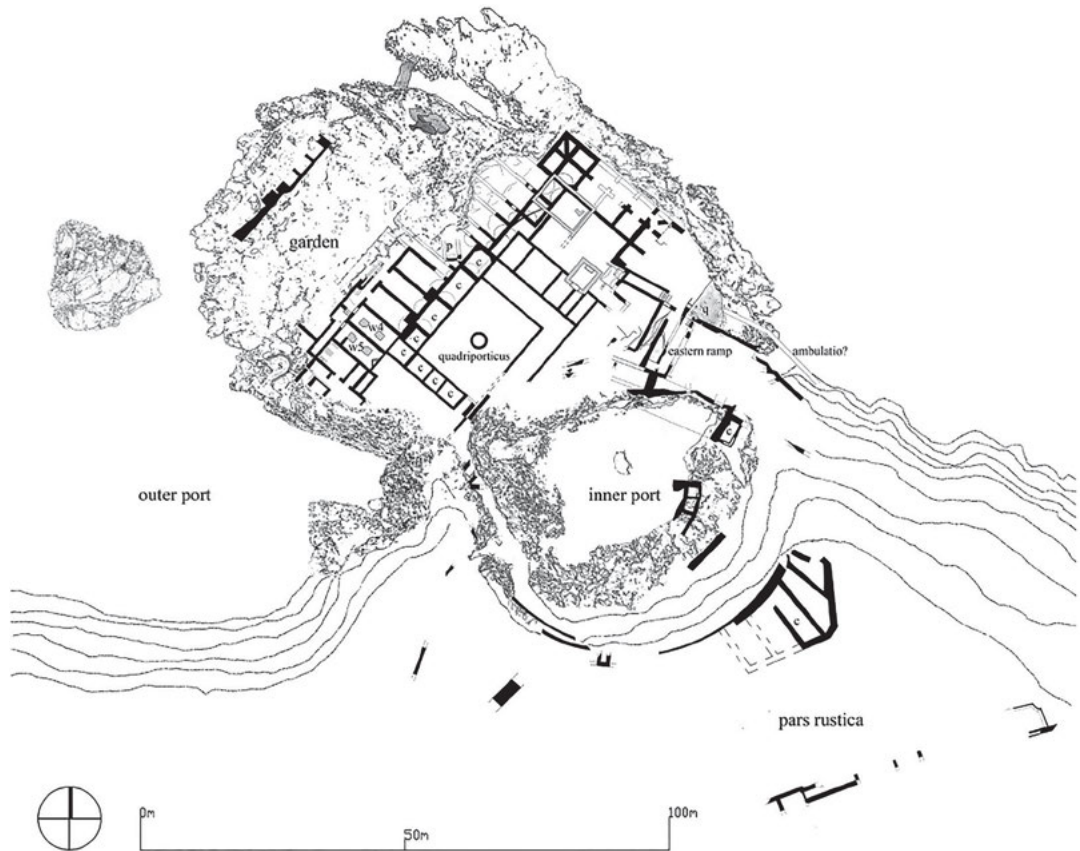
feature groves, woods, hills, mountains, freshwater rivers and springs, and are often populated by shepherds and their flocks. The littoral scenes, which Rostovtzeff called ‘villa landscapes’, depict beaches, promontories, straits, harbours and rustic villas. As Phyllis Williams Lehmann and Bettina Bergmann have rightly pointed out, although Rostovtzeff aptly classified the two main themes of these paintings, the terms ‘sacral-idyllic’ and ‘villa’ are misleading, as they suggest that the images portray sacred and profane subjects respectively<sup>17</sup>. In reality, both inland and maritime scenes feature sacred buildings, arches, columns and statues. The islands, shores, ports and promontories, with their altars, columns and *aediculae*, indicate veneration of the sea-gods; for example, in the representation of a port from Gragnano (Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. 9514)<sup>18</sup>. Both types of scenes thus belong to a single tradition of landscape representation. The addition of seaward-facing villa façades featuring prominent *bases villae* (artificial terraces) to the iconographic repertoire of the ‘sacral-idyllic landscapes’ points to a shift of emphasis in landscape simulations in domestic wall paintings.

While the paintings featuring inland scenes were popular from about 60 B.C. to the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., the littoral scenes gained in importance only from the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. Images of villa façades, bays and harbours comprised a new mode of landscape, entirely different from the earlier grove scenes. The best known (and best preserved) examples of this new mode of landscape representation are the *pinakes* discovered on the lateral walls of the *tablinum* in the Casa di M. Lucretius Fronto (V 4,a) at Pompeii (Fig. 1)<sup>19</sup>. These ‘villa landscape’ paintings present prominent seaside villas and emphasise the rhythmic succession of their colonnades, which cast shadows on the façades behind them. They remind us of Statius’ slightly later description of the water-facing villas located along the Bay of Naples, which he discusses in an account of his trip

<sup>17</sup> While Lehmann (1953, 163 f. no. 109) and Bergmann (1986, 57–64, 164–180; 1991, 50 f.; 1992) have challenged Rostovtzeff’s categories, these classifications continue to direct the study of Roman landscape paintings (e. g., Hinterholler 2007; Kotsidu 2007, 15–28, 47–68; La Rocca 2008, 34–38; Colpo 2010, 158–177; Croisille 2010, 121–126; Hinterholler-Klein 2015, 171–498 esp. 175–192 and 329–347).

<sup>18</sup> Peters 1963, 152; Pekáry 1999, 180, cat. I–N 36; Fähndrich 2005, 104 cat. W 3; Giardina 2010, 100. It has been proposed that this scene represents the harbour of Puteoli, but it is more likely a synthesis of heterogeneous elements taken from reality, as Lehmann-Hartleben (1923, 224–227) has suggested. See the catalogue entry in the Arachne online catalogue: <http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/item/relief/300150971>.

<sup>19</sup> Peters 1963, 114 f.; Peters – Moormann 1993, 188, 219–223, 273–275.



**Fig. 2:** General plan of the *pars maritima* of the Villa del Capo di Sorrento.

from Naples to visit the villa of Pollius Felix at Surrentum<sup>20</sup>. As he approaches the property, Statius identifies it as ‘a lofty villa looking out upon the Dicarchean deep’ (*celsa Dicarchei specularix villa profundi*). Coming closer, he describes the site in more detail: ‘Curving cliffs on either side pierce crescent waters, making a calm recess. Nature provides space. The watery beach interrupts the heights, running inland between overhanging crags’<sup>21</sup>. Such crescent-shaped bays and beaches at the base of high cliffs are indeed popular schemes in these paintings.

The villa of Pollius Felix in Surrentum may well have been one of the villas on the three capes of Sorrento<sup>22</sup>. Recent investigations at the so-called Villa del Capo di Sorrento have shown that the landscape was shaped in such a way so as to present similar impressions of ‘curving cliffs that pierce crescent waters’ and ‘watery beaches running inland between overhanging crags’ (Fig. 2). Here, a natural opening in the rock gave way to the inner port. This entrance was monumentalised by a series of rooms positioned on top of massive overhanging rocks (which have since collapsed), while a colossal bronze statue appeared to visitors opposite the landing pier. Ramps connected the port and lower parts of the villa with the *quadrivorticus* above, while a garden area featuring a *piscina*, created by levelling the bedrock and channelling open sea water into it, further accentuated the transient ambience between man-made and natural landscapes. As the excavators of the

<sup>20</sup> On Statius’s description and its relationship to the landscape paintings featuring villas, see Bergmann 1991.

<sup>21</sup> Stat. Silv. 2, 2, 3. Translation by Shackelton Bailey 2003, 103.

<sup>22</sup> On the resemblance between Statius’s description and the structures on the three capes of Sorrento (Punta di Sorrento, Punta della Calcarella, Capo di Massa), see Beloch 1890, 269–274; Mingazzini – Pfister 1946, 54–70; D’Arms 1970, 220–222; Bergmann 1991, 56–60. On the remains in detail, see Mingazzini – Pfister 1946, 121–142. On the Villa del Capo di Sorrento, see Russo 2006, with review by Camardo (2006). For recent work on the villa, see Filser et al. 2017.

villa have pointed out, the Villa del Capo di Sorrento not only testifies to the existence of *villae maritimae* with elaborate harbours and gardens bordering the seashore, it also yields detailed evidence concerning their embellishment, encouraging a comparison with the wall paintings<sup>23</sup>.

Villa landscape paintings that depict prominent seaside villa façades appeared at a time of intense construction in the Italian countryside and around the bay of Naples – a building boom that created the houses in which these wall paintings were located. The Villa del Capo di Sorrento was built between the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. and the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., but the coast between the village of Aequa (near Vico Equense) and the far side of the Sorrentine peninsula was crowded with *villae maritimae*. In fact, maritime villas in southern Latium developed in relation to the *coloniae maritimae* of the region and then spread down to Campania<sup>24</sup>. The end of the civil wars led to the development of the open façades of maritime villas in this region and the diffusion of this villa type in Campania<sup>25</sup>.

The intense construction in Campania was propelled by the spread of luxurious villas in the countryside and by the increasing economic importance that the Bay of Naples and its commercial port, Puteoli, acquired. This building activity generated conflicting views about man's relationship to nature, adopting and expanding upon Hellenistic interest in themes of cultivation, irrigation and construction<sup>26</sup>. Historical texts show that these subjects were viewed both as signs of human progress and mankind's destructive attitude toward nature<sup>27</sup>. Authors praised the strength and power of architecture over natural forces, while also criticising the excessive and unnatural character of new buildings<sup>28</sup>.

The landscape paintings visualise the contrasting attitudes of man towards nature in the 1<sup>st</sup> centuries B.C. and A.D., expressing both his veneration of it, as well as triumph and domination through acquired *techné*. Land and sea are depicted either as natural and untouched, with man-made elements overwhelmed by the power of the place ('sacral-idyllic landscapes'), or they are built, planted and dominated by modern architecture ('villa landscapes') – compare, for example, the medallions from the portico of Villa San Marco in Stabia (Figs. 3–4)<sup>29</sup>. In so doing, both landscape representations ('sacral-idyllic' and 'villa') codify and mediate the economic, socio-cultural and perceptual processes of the profound changes that the Italian landscape underwent in this period. The miniature landscape representations were mental images intertwined with the contemporary cultural conception of landscape as a medium of social and economic transformation, and as such they became media of cultural communication in Roman villas.

<sup>23</sup> Filser et al. 2017, 87–90.

<sup>24</sup> The building boom of maritime villas along the coast of southern Latium occurred between the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. and mid-1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. with the construction of 49 villas, some of which already existed and were monumentalised at this time (Lafon 2001; Ferritto 2019, 38–41, 69–95).

<sup>25</sup> While 16 new maritime villas are attested in this region between the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. and the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., a total of 29 new villas were built between the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. and the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. (by comparison 25 new maritime villas were built in Latium at this time). For the first three centuries A.D., Campania became the preferred location for this type of villa, with 73 new maritime villas constructed. In contrast, 14 new sites were built in Latium during this period (Lafon 2001; Ferritto 2019, 83–88).

<sup>26</sup> Von Hesberg 1981.

<sup>27</sup> For example, Cic. Nat. D. 2, 60, 147–152; Plin. HN 31, 42; see discussion in Bergmann 1986, 171–178.

<sup>28</sup> For example, Sen. Ep. 89, 21; see discussion in Edwards 1993, 142–149.

<sup>29</sup> Barbet et al. 1999, 206 f.



Fig. 3: Villa San Marco, medallion (copy of Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. 9511) set in the decorative scheme of the north wall of the *porticus* (20).



Fig. 4: Villa San Marco, medallion (copy of Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. 9409) set in the decorative scheme of the north wall of the *porticus* (20).

## Mediating mental images of landscape

The miniature landscape paintings of the late 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. and 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. mediated cultural referents to the Hellenistic world and perceptions of the countryside's physical transformations during this period. These images provide the 'missing link' between mental and physical images of landscape, codifying the perceptual and socio-cultural processes by which landscape was seen.

The 'sacral-idyllic landscapes' – picturesque representations of natural and untouched bays, in which man-made elements are overwhelmed by the power of place – make reference to scenic Hellenistic harbour-scapes visible at places such as Delos and at Lechaion, which featured prominently in contemporary sources on villas and the Bay of Naples and in the conceptualisation of villa life. Recent underwater surveys have provided evidence for these Hellenistic harbour-scapes. At Lechaion, it seems that the natural inner basin served the needs of the port in the Hellenistic period<sup>30</sup>, which contrasts with the intensification of harbour infrastructure in the early Roman period, when the outer basin's western and middle moles were probably built<sup>31</sup>. New research and underwater surveys at Delos have shown that in addition to the main harbour, small anchorages around the island facilitated the busy *emporion* during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.<sup>32</sup>. These investigations

**30** The minor geographer Dionysius Calliphontis, writing in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., mentions that Lechaion had a natural harbour (χωστός λιμὴν) and he names the site a city (πόλις) (Dion. Calliph. 108f.). The earliest datable building in the inner harbour is the rectangular islet foundation, built in the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., probably in conjunction with a general construction project organised by the Romans in order to rebuild Corinth and its two harbours. The lack of any other harbour works in the inner harbour should not be surprising, since the calm waters and the low banks of the bay required neither protective moles nor quays. See Georgiades 1907, 4 f. Pl. 1; Skias 1907, 147 Pl. 1; Pâris 1915; Theodoulou 2002; Güngör – Lovén 2018.

**31** Lechaion most probably suffered the same fate as Corinth during the Roman destruction of 146 B.C. and must have been rebuilt along with the city when a Roman colony was established at Corinth in 44 B.C. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., Pausanias mentions the presence of a sanctuary and a bronze statue of Poseidon, but nothing more (Paus. 2, 2, 3).

**32** Zarmakoupi 2015, 124–126; Zarmakoupi – Athanasoula 2018.



provide evidence for the use of natural and untouched bays in the Hellenistic period, in which man-made elements were minimal. Such natural settings bear much resemblance to the kind of bays depicted in the picturesque landscape paintings found in Roman villas and houses on the Bay of Naples, as well as the natural looking landscape carefully crafted in the Villa del Capo del Sorrento. In the paintings, land and sea are depicted as natural and untouched, accentuating the power of place over man-made elements. At the Villa del Capo di Sorrento, the natural rock is shaped to give carefully crafted views of a natural bay leading to the peaceful retreat of the villa.

Places like Lechaion and Delos featured prominently in the imagination of villa owners and visitors in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. and 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. The Campanian satirist Lucilius referred to the mighty port of Puteoli as ‘a lesser Delos’<sup>33</sup>. And indeed, the Bay of Naples and its inhabitants now enjoyed the economic might from which the island of Delos once benefitted. Delos was destroyed twice during the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., and although it continued to operate as a harbour throughout the Roman period, it had lost the economic importance that it had held as a major trading point in the Aegean. This substantial change of circumstances on Delos invited its depiction as a deserted island – a literary *topos* that gained currency in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. Antipater of Thessalonica, writing under the patronage of Lucius Calpurnius Piso in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., composed several poetic sketches on the image of the deserted island and in one he speaks of ‘deserted islands’ as ‘fragments of land which the Aegean wave’s loud-sounding cincture holds within’:

νήκοι ἐρημαῖαι, τρύφεια χθονός, ἄς κελαδρινός  
ζωστήρ Αἰγαίου κύματος ἐντός ἔχει,  
Cίφνον ἐμμήσασθε καὶ ἀύχηρὴν Φολέγανδρον,  
ἢ ῥ’ ὑμᾶς ἐδίδαξεν ἐὼν τρόπον ἢ ποτε λευκὴ  
Δῆλος ἐρημαίου δαίμονος ἀρξαμένη.

‘Deserted islands, fragments of land which the Aegean wave’s loud-sounding cincture holds within, you have copied Siphnos and parched Pholegandros; poor wretches, you have lost your ancient splendour. Surely you have been taught her own ways by Delos, once so bright, the first to meet a doom of desolation’<sup>34</sup>.

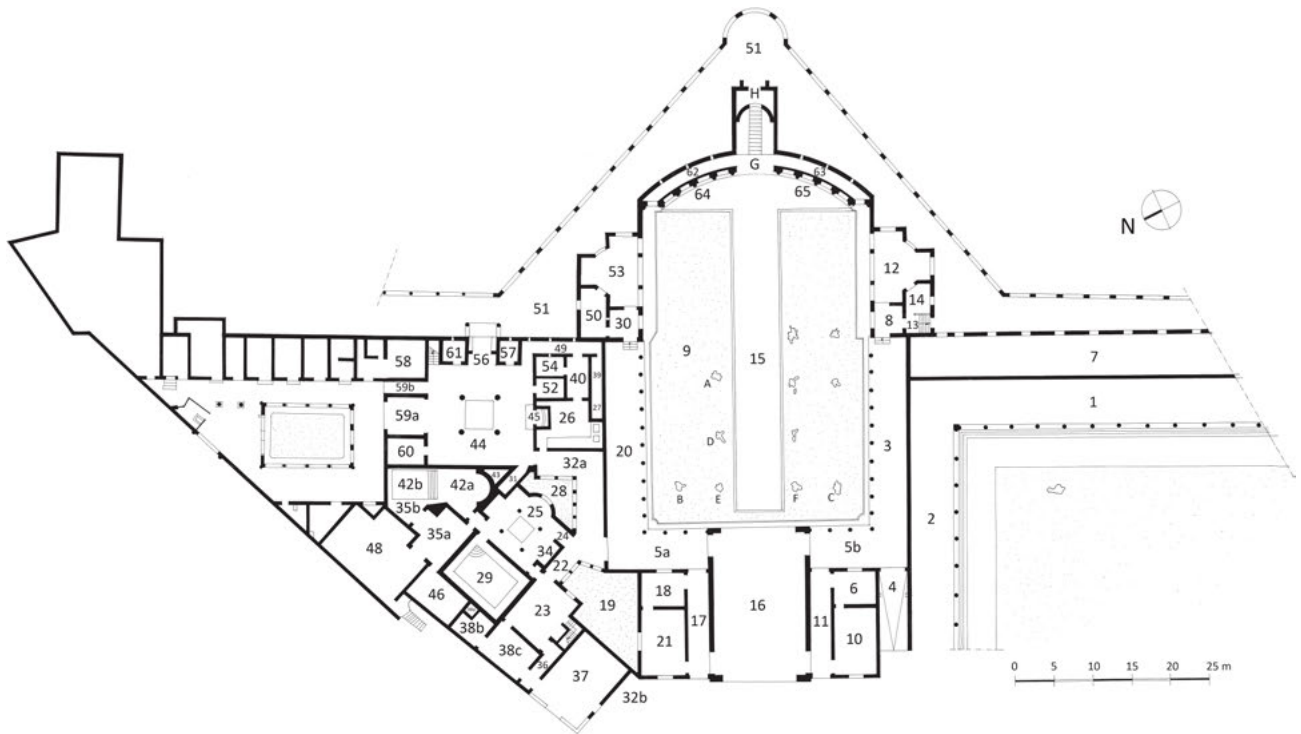
The Villa del Capo di Sorrento, a building that appears as if it is floating off the peninsula of Sorrento, with inner and outer harbours that play with the bay’s loud-sounding waves, evocatively mirrors the image painted by Antipater. Furthermore, detached pavilions around villas such as the Villa dei Papiri – whose owner might have been Lucius Calpurnius Piso – when seen from the sea evoked the theme of the deserted sacred island, whose economic might the Bay of Naples and its inhabitants now enjoyed. During the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. the image of the deserted island not only evoked the picturesque image of places like Delos, but also the potential use of such deserted islands as places of exile<sup>35</sup>.

Comparisons and references to Greece, its islands and harbours abound in literary *ekphraseis* of landscapes around villas. In Statius’s account of his trip from Naples to visit the villa of Pollius Felix in Surrentum, he compared the walk from the harbour through a *porticus* towards the villa to the road connecting the port of Lychaeum and Corinth (Ephyre), thus evoking the wild rugged path from the inner harbour of Lechaion to the city of Corinth:

<sup>33</sup> Paul Fest. 88, 4: ‘*Minorem Delum*’ *Puteolos esse dixerunt...unde Lucilius- inde Dicarchitum populos Delumque minorem* (=Lucil. 3, 118), c. 140 B.C.

<sup>34</sup> Antipat. 28, 231–236. Translation by Gow on 30f. Other poems on Delos: Antipat. 94, 113.

<sup>35</sup> For instance, Juvenal, writing in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., called the Aegean islands ‘rocks crowded with our noble exiles’ (Juv. 13, 246). For translation and further discussion, see Constantakopoulou 2007, 130–132.



**Fig. 5:** Villa San Marco, plan.

'From that point a colonnade creeps zigzag through the heights, a city's work, mastering the rugged rocks with its lengthy spine. Where formerly sunshine mingled with foggy dust and the path was wild and ugly, 'tis pleasure now to go; like the covered way that leads from Ino's Lechaemum if you climb the lofty height of Bacchus' Ephyre'<sup>36</sup>.

Sitting in contrast and juxtaposition to literary *ekphraseis* of rugged seascapes and scenic representations of undulating harbour-scapes are the maritime villa façades that gained importance in miniature wall paintings from the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. and pointed to the importance of the villa phenomenon in this period. These prominent villa façades positioned over stretches of water feature modern architectural structures, such as large porticos, which overlook and command the landscape. For example, 10 of the 13 landscape medallions (Figs. 3–4) located in *porticus* (20) of Villa San Marco in Stabia (Fig. 5) are dominated by such architectural features, and all date from c. A.D. 40–50<sup>37</sup>. Writing in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., Pliny the Younger fills a substantial portion of his letters describing the *porticus* structures that dominate the landscape around his villas<sup>38</sup>.

While picturesque representations of harbour-scapes mediated mental images of Hellenistic harbours, depictions of prominent maritime façades pointed to the transformation of the Italian countryside in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, when it became increasingly dominated by extensive colonnaded villas. As noted above, the paintings featuring inland scenes were popular from about 60 B.C. to the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., while the littoral scenes gained in importance from the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. The insertion of villa-scapes into the earlier iconographic tradition of landscape paintings was a means of affirming the villa phenomenon. The sacral-idyllic themes referred to the conquered Hellenistic world, from which villa life and architecture also drew inspiration<sup>39</sup>, while

<sup>36</sup> Stat. Silv. 2, 2, 30–35. Translation by Shackleton Bailey 2003, 105.

<sup>37</sup> Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. 9408 (three medallions); inv. 9409 (three medallions); inv. 9511 (one medallion); only three follow the earlier approach (inv. 9501 [three medallions]). See Barbet et al. 1999, 206 f.

<sup>38</sup> See Zarmakoupi 2014, 75–102.

<sup>39</sup> Zarmakoupi 2014, 17–19.



the representation of colonnaded villa façades over shaped waterfronts introduced the villa itself into this view of the shared world as landscape, and in so doing asserted the villa as a cultural phenomenon<sup>40</sup>.

## Parataxis as an appropriate strategy for intermedial representations of landscape

The paratactic arrangement of these contrasting representations of landscape ('sacral-idyllic landscapes' – 'villa landscapes') in wall paintings of the later 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. was a favoured decorative choice for porticos and an appropriate strategy for intermedial representations of nature in Roman villa decoration. I am using the term 'paratactic' to describe the arrangement of depictions and framed views of landscapes, because the arrangement seems to be a key design strategy in the *decorum* of villas. The term 'paratactic', first used by Gerhard Krahmer to describe the non-perspectival representation of space and the 'side-by-side' arrangement of objects in Egyptian and archaic Greek art, is borrowed from the grammatical term 'parataxis', which refers to an organisation of clauses without connectives<sup>41</sup>. To carry over the analogy to the depicted and framed views of landscape, the absence of connectives between the representations leaves it up to the mind to form logical relationships – to interpolate the processes by which landscape is seen.

When discussing Second Style wall paintings, Vitruvius informs us that the paratactic arrangement of landscape representations was a favoured decorative choice for porticos:

*postea ingressi sunt ut etiam aedificiorum figuras, columnarum et fastigiorum eminentes proiecturas imitentur, patentibus autem locis uti exedris propter amplitudines parietum scaenarum frontes tragico more aut comico seu satyrico designarent, ambulationes vero propter spatia longitudinis varietatibus topiorum ornarent a certis locorum proprietatibus imagines exprimentes – pinguntur enim portus, promunturia, litora, flumina, fontes, euripi, fana, luci, montes, pecora, pastores – nonnulli locis item signorum megalographiam habentes deorum simulacra seu fabularum dispositas explicationes, non minus Troianas pugnas seu Ulixis errationes per topia, ceteraque, quae sunt eorum similibus rationibus ab rerum natura procreata.*

'Later, they also began to imitate the forms of buildings, and the projecting grandeur of columns and pediments. Moreover, in open spaces such as *exedrae*, because of the size of the walls, they began to draw stage settings in the tragic, or comic, or satiric mode. At the same time, they began to decorate ambulatory spaces, on account of their great length, with varieties of landscape, modeling their pictures on the true characteristics of places (for there are paintings of harbours, promontories, shores, rivers, springs, straits, shrines, groves, mountains, livestock, shepherds), with some in places even including paintings of statues, likenesses of the gods or the organised unfolding of stories, and even the battles of Troy, or the wanderings of Odysseus through landscape, and other things which, in ways similar to these, were begotten by nature'<sup>42</sup>.

Landscape painting was not merely common as a display in porticos, but also an appropriate choice for the architectural setting of the portico. As Timothy M. O'Sullivan has pointed out, Vitruvius 'posits a "natural" relationship between the subject of wall painting and its architectural setting (and by extension, its viewing context): spaces that are enclosed and offer the viewer a chance for stationary contemplation are more suited to architectural displays, while longer spaces invite the strolling viewer to appreciate the subtle variations of landscape along a longer wall'<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> Zarmakoupi 2019.

<sup>41</sup> Krahmer 1931; see also Krahmer 1927. See discussion in Zupnick 1962–1963.

<sup>42</sup> Vitr. De arch. 7, 5, 2. Translation by O'Sullivan 2011, 133. See also discussion of the passage in Tybout 1989, 55–107.

<sup>43</sup> O'Sullivan 2011, 134.



**Fig. 6:** Villa San Marco, view within *porticus* (20) from the west. To the left is the north wall on which the medallions (Figs. 3–4) are set; to the right is the garden with plane trees.

The Vitruvian passage quoted above refers to Second Style wall paintings, which he approves of for their commitment to depictions of elements drawn from the real world. Odyssey landscapes, which date to the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.<sup>44</sup>, fit well in Vitruvius' genealogy of landscape, as do the miniature landscape panels of the Third and Fourth Styles, although they would perhaps have attracted a moralising aesthetic reaction. The appropriateness of the 'landscape' theme in wall paintings decorating porticos continued during the Third and Fourth Styles, and the miniature quality of the paintings correlates with the use of the diminutive for describing these representations<sup>45</sup>. The miniature landscape panels departed from reality in the same way that Third Style architectural frames departed from the real architecture and, as we have seen, provided the 'missing link' between mental and physical images of landscape. Their paratactic placement on the walls of porticos was juxtaposed with framed views of the surrounding landscape, thus structuring the experience of landscape in the villa's spaces. Framed views to the landscape beyond, or to organised gardens within, created yet another 'representation' of landscape, as the architecture carefully presented scenes to the viewer. As Verity Platt and Michael Squire have shown, frames do not merely articulate boundaries but also negotiate them. Frames 'activate shifting ways of conceptualising – indeed, of *seeing* – the visual field'<sup>46</sup>. The framed views of the profoundly transformed landscape around the villa mediated the perceptual and socio-cultural processes by which landscape was seen.

The term 'paratactic' is particularly apposite in the case of the arrangement of landscape panels of the Fourth Style as well as the paratactic arrangement of views to the natural landscape beyond the villas or organised landscapes within the villas. Someone walking in the central *porticūs* (Fig. 5, 3–5–20) of Villa San Marco, for example, could appreciate the miniature landscapes in the medallions (Figs. 3–4) that were arranged paratactically in the Fourth Style decorative sections of the back walls of *porticūs* (3) and (20) (Fig. 6), juxtaposing these with successive views of the central

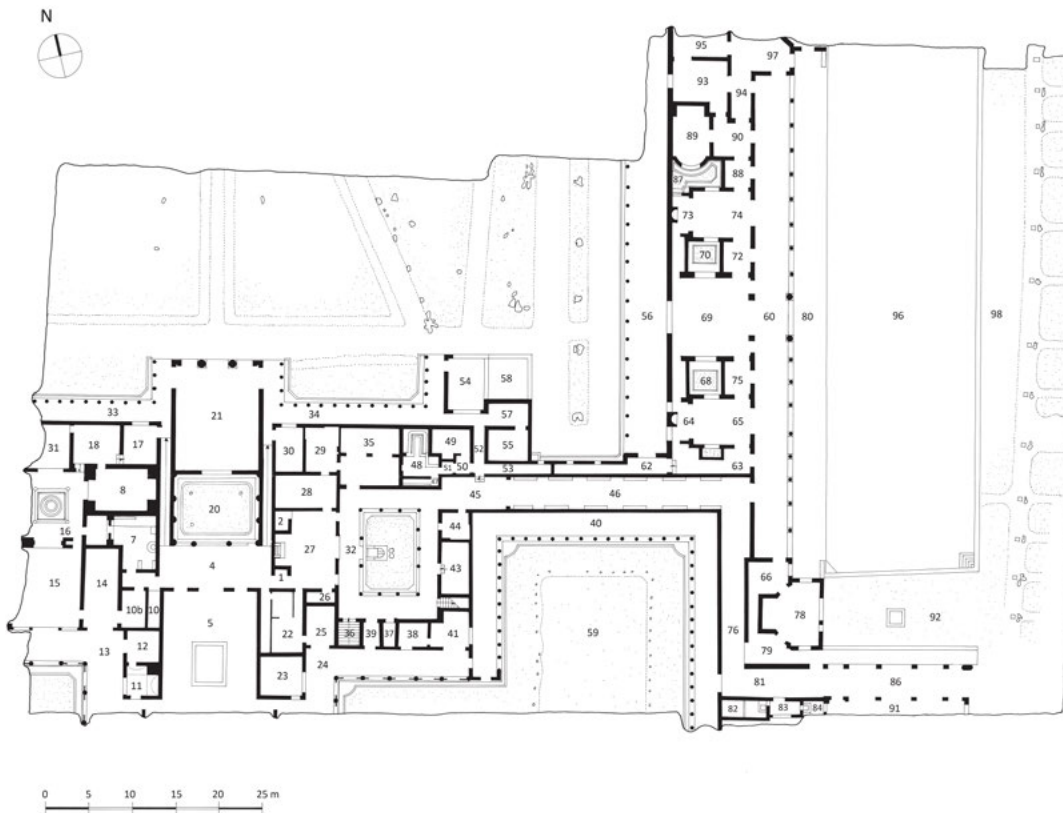
<sup>44</sup> Von Blanckenhagen 1963; Coarelli 1998. See also Biering 1995, who dates the fresco to the last decade of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. (contra: Coarelli 1998, 26–30; Tybout 2001, 35 f.).

<sup>45</sup> See discussion in Zarmakoupi 2019.

<sup>46</sup> Platt – Squire 2017, 47.



**Fig. 7:** Villa San Marco, view from *porticus* (20) towards the garden (9).



**Fig. 8:** Villa A at Oplontis, plan.

garden, which featured plane trees and a *euripus*, as well as views of the Bay of Naples framed by the columns of *porticus* (5) (Fig. 7). In Oplontis' Villa A (Fig. 8), the tiny landscape panels ( $24 \times 7$  cm) on the walls of *porticus* (60) of the east wing alternate with *xenia* (still lifes depicting food). The latter subject was not chosen by accident, since these images alluded to the hospitality of the owner, and toyed with the imagination of the dinner guests in the halls of the east wing. The landscapes and still-life panels are placed on an almost bare wall (Fig. 9). Seen by a viewer standing on the east side of the pool looking towards the *porticus*, the colonnade of the east wing frames these walls and the *propylon* of *oecus* (69), which interrupts the colonnade itself (Fig. 10). This view bears similarities to the Second Style wall painting in room (15) from the villa's first decorative



**Fig. 9:** Villa A at Oplontis, view of the west wall in the east wing of *porticus* (60). The landscape panels and food still-life panels are placed on an almost bare wall.



**Fig. 10:** Villa A at Oplontis, view of *porticus* (60) from the east side of the pool.

phase.<sup>47</sup> The view of the *porticus* next to the garden is a variation on the same theme: monumental architecture combined with a garden. Zooming in on the *porticus* of the east wing and the central *oecus* (69), we notice the fabrication of the *mise en abyme* effect on the other (west) side of the wing. The large window on the west side of *oecus* (69) opens on to the villa's north garden and frames the *propylon* of room (21), which is the largest entertainment space in the villa (Fig. 11). In fact, the framed view through the west window of *oecus* (69) can be compared with the landscape *pinakes* decorating the walls of the *porticus*, which feature prominent *propyla* set within a landscape. And while the colonnade of the portico and Fourth Style schemes frame the miniaturised landscapes, the *porticus* itself leads to the interior of the villa's east wing, where the rooms enjoy views of painted gardens in the light wells positioned between them.

In conclusion, the paratactic arrangement of painted scenes with framed views of real landscapes and gardens structured and mediated the concept of 'landscape' in Campanian villas. As in a paratactic phrase, in which words are joined without conjunctions, the placement of the miniaturised landscape panels in the wall painting schemes of the Fourth Style and the framed views of gardens and landscapes placed the burden of interpolating the composition on viewers and their

<sup>47</sup> See discussion in Zarmakoupi 2014, 75–80.





**Fig. 11:** Villa A at Oplontis, view of *propylon* (21) from *porticus* (60) through the large window at the west side of *oecus* (69).

perception. The intermedial landscape representations and literary *ekphraseis* discussed in this paper point to the cultural processes by which these visual, textual and material representations of landscape were shaped – Alan Roger’s artialisation<sup>48</sup>. It is this process of artialisation that we have discussed in this paper through the analysis of miniature landscape panels as mental images and their paratactic juxtaposition to framed views of gardens and landscapes in villas’ spaces. The intermedial relationships between the different systems of representation impacted upon questions of perception, experience and meaning of landscape. The paratactic arrangement of these intermedial representations was an appropriate design strategy for the decoration of Roman villas, where notions of landscape could be tested and explored<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Roger 1997, 16–24.

<sup>49</sup> See discussion in Zarmakoupi 2014, 240–243.

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