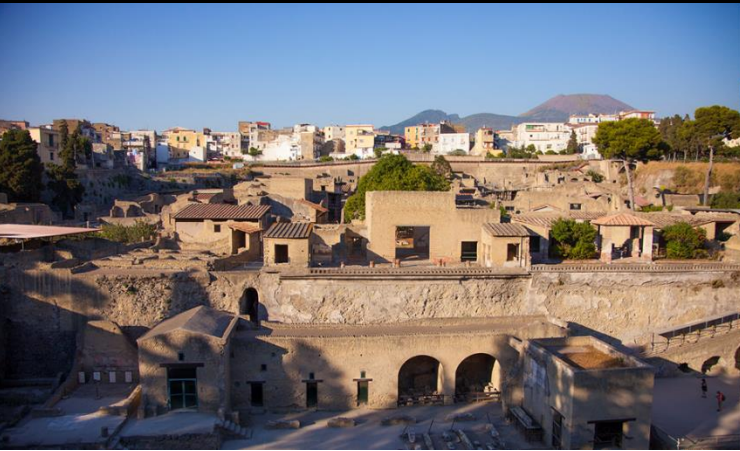




Expanded Interiors

Bringing contemporary site-specific fine-art practice to Roman houses at Herculaneum and Pompeii



Background
information



1

Background information

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

POMPEII AND HERCULANEUM



Pompeii (**image 1**) and Herculaneum (**image 2**) were two Roman cities near the Bay of Naples in Italy that were destroyed by the eruption of the Vesuvius in AD79.

The city of Pompeii was established in the 6th century BC. Occupied by the Samnites (ancient Italic people) during the 4th century BC, it became a major centre of the region during the 3rd and the 2nd centuries BC, boasting amenities such as a theatre, a *palaestra* (a kind of wrestling school), and a public bath. At this time, many of Pompeii's leading families lived in huge houses, luxuriously decorated with beautiful mosaics and colourful **frescoes**. The city came under the control of Rome following the Social Wars, becoming a Roman colony in 80 BC. In AD 62, the city was devastated by an earthquake, which caused the town to collapse. In AD 79, when the city was buried by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, many houses were unoccupied or under reconstruction,

and not all public buildings had been completely restored.

After the eruption, the city was lost for over 1500 years. Rediscovered in 1748, the city underwent a systematic plunder of its artworks carried out under the Bourbons that at the time ruled in Southern Italy. The city soon became an indispensable stop for those who visited Italy during the Eighteen and the Nineteen centuries as part of their **Grand Tour**. After the unification of Italy in 1861, a new vigour was given to the excavation of the site, this time with the aim of preserving the city and its finds thanks to the progress made by the archaeological research of the time. Today two thirds of the city remain uncovered and restoration projects continue to preserve the unique examples of domestic and public objects, art and architecture that have been revealed.

Herculaneum was a much smaller town than neighbouring Pompeii, with a population of

approximately 4,000 people. However, it was wealthier than Pompeii, possessing an array of fine houses with lavish decorations and furniture.

Researchers have been able to date back the earliest phases of the city to the 4th century BC.



Unlike Pompeii, the AD 79 eruption of Mount Vesuvius covered Herculaneum completely with 20m of volcanic material. The material came from the pyroclastic surge that hit the city with full force and with a temperature of 400° C, killing everybody instantly and carbonizing the objects. The city was spared the fall of pumice stone and of other materials that hit Pompeii: this explains why most of its buildings did not collapse as in the neighbouring city.

Because of the nature of the deposit and their quick carbonisation, materials that would not be normally preserved underground have been found almost completely unaffected. Incredibly, wooden furniture and sculptures and very fragile remains, such as food, have survived the disaster and are displayed and stored onsite and in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples.

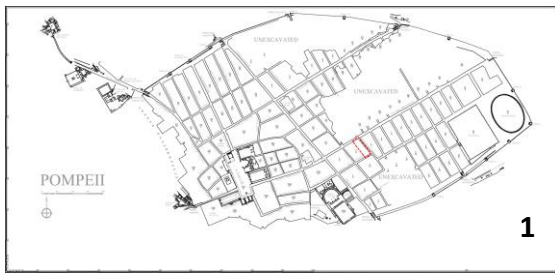
In 1738 underground digs began, following the digging of a well in 1709, using tunnels and ventilation shafts. In 1828 open-air digs were authorised, but ground to a halt in 1875. In 1927 **Amedeo Maiuri** was appointed Soprintendente of Naples and Pompeii and began a new phase in the exploration of the site, leading open-air excavations until 1958, by which time much of the area visible nowadays had been brought to light. Additional work was carried out in the city between 1960 and 1969, and the last twenty years have concentrated on exploring the ancient shoreline, corresponding to the southernmost strip of the archaeological area.

2

Background information ROMAN HOUSES

THE HOUSE OF THE CRYPTOPORTICUS IN POMPEII

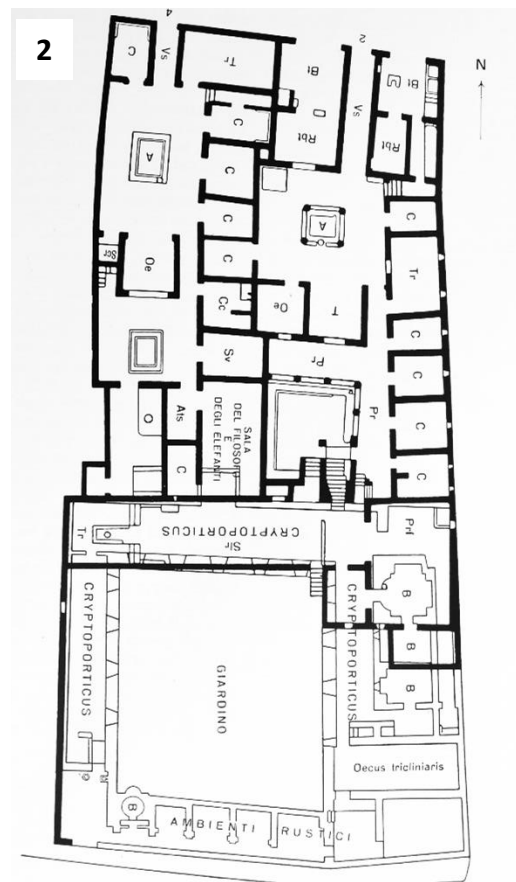
Located in one of the busiest areas of Pompeii along via dell'Abbondanza (**image 1**), and not too far from the Forum, the House of the Cryptoporticus was discovered in the early Twentieth century. Excavations of the house were initially carried out under the direction of **Vittorio Spinazzola** between 1911 and 1919 and completed by Amedeo Maiuri in 1927-1929.



The House of the Cryptoporticus (**image 2**) has a long and complex history that spans over more than three centuries. The house was part of Regio I, a popular area of Pompeii with houses, shops, a few workshops, and a small number of rich residences, such as the House of the Citharist, the House of the Menander and the House of the Cryptoporticus.

In the late 2nd century BC, the house, originally independent, became part of a much larger property that included the nearby House of the Trojan Shrine. The new property boasted a garden at the back (**image 3**), with a three-sided portico at ground level. During the years 40-30 BC the level of the garden was raised, and the porticoes were transformed into a **cryptoporticus**, with the main entrance at the back of the house (**image 4**). A small bath complex and a large room probably used as a dining hall (**oecus**), were added to the eastern side of the **cryptoporticus**. The house, the

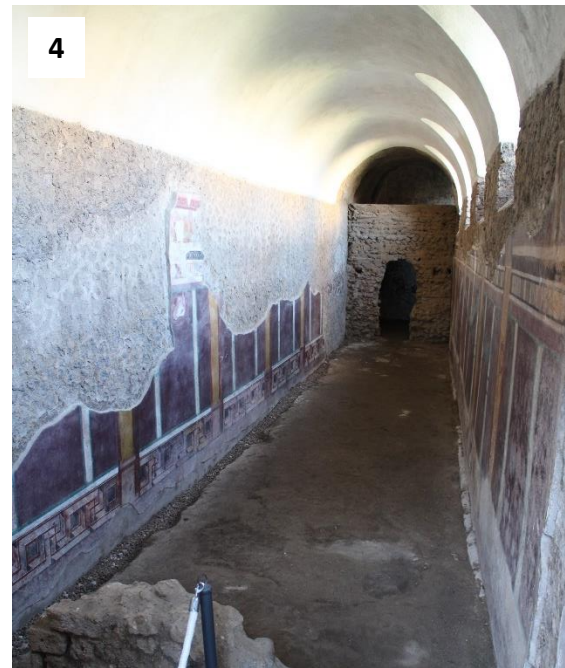
cryptoporticus the bath complex and the **oecus** were decorated with beautiful Second Style paintings. After the earthquake of AD 62, the two houses were divided again. A big triclinium was then created on top of the northern side of the **cryptoporticus** and the **cryptoporticus** itself was transformed into a cellar and partially interred. The east and west corridors of the **cryptoporticus** were walled up. Unfinished Fourth Style paintings in the Casa del Saccello Iliaco point to an interruption of the re-decoration works of the house at some point, although it is debated whether the break took place after the earthquake in AD 62, or because of the eruption in AD 79.



Cryptoporticoes (covered corridors and passageways) were a common feature of Roman luxury villas, providing villa owners with fresh and cool spaces for leisure and entertainment, much appreciated especially in hot Mediterranean summers. Cryptoporticoes were however rare features in Roman town houses and have been found only in a handful of residences in Pompeii and Herculaneum. The addition of a *cryptoporticus* to the House of the Cryptoporticus conferred therefore an elite status to a property that was set amongst some of the largest and richest houses of Regio I, such as the House of the Menander and the House of the Citharist.



Remarkably well preserved Second Style paintings still adorn the walls of the *cryptoporticus* (image 4) and of the surrounding rooms. Created around 40-30 BC, as part of the renovation works carried out in the now unified House of the Cryptoporticus and the House of the Trojan Shrine, the *cryptoporticus* provided a nice, fresh and shaded space for daily walks for the people of the house and their guests. The main access to the space was probably from the back door of the House of the Cryptoporticus, in Vicolo del Menandro, where a porter controlled the access to the house from a room located next to the entrance. Another staircased passageway, placed next to the baths, provided an access to the underground spaces from the house. Wide clerestory windows were placed on top of the inner walls of the *cryptoporticus*, allowing corridors to get enough light during the day while leaving the heat outside.



The walls of the *cryptoporticus* were decorated with Second Style paintings. A sequence of painted herms placed on top of narrow pillars gave a rhythm to the decoration that matched the function of the corridors as walking spaces (image 5 – a reconstruction by V. Spinazzola). However, interestingly, the spacing of the herms was not regular, but adapted instead to the spacing of the clerestory windows, creating larger and narrower intervals. Moreover, the positioning of the herms on both sides of the corridor was not symmetrical, conferring dynamism and movement to the decorative space.



The wall at the back of the herms was divided into a sequence of panels, with a meander motif at the bottom, painted in perspective, and a series of horizontal bands at the top. Together with the

meander and the 3D rendering of the pillars below the herms, green garlands placed between the herms as if holding from the back of the pillars, provided the walls with a sense of space and three-dimensionality.

A frieze ran on top of the wall, right behind the heads of the herms. The frieze was divided into individual panels, depicting scenes from the Iliad and from the Aethiopis, subjects that were deemed appropriate for walking spaces (Vitruvius, De arch 7.5.1-2). Much less known today than the Iliad, the Aethiopis was ascribed to the Greek poet Arctinus of Miletus. Its story followed on the Iliad and narrated the events until the death of Achilles and the funeral games held in his honour.

The *cryptoporticus* was transformed into a cellar during the first century AD. The east and the west wings were walled up and many panels of the Epic Cycle were damaged. After its discovery, it was severely damaged by the allied bombing of Pompeii in 1945 and some of the still surviving panels of the epic cycle were irremediably lost. Luckily, they had been already recorded and photographed. The surviving frescoes are still visible in situ and have been recently restored.

Among the most striking features of the House of the Cryptoporticus, frescoes helped fulfil a variety of purposes, not only providing a nice and colourful backdrop to daily activities, but also responding to specific notions and beliefs of the house owner and of the wider Pompeian society.

A variety of reasons could determine the choice of themes and subjects in the decoration of a Roman house: dimensions, position and function of a room could have a role in determining its decoration, as well as ideas about *decus* (appropriateness), status and personal identity. It is not surprising therefore that rooms with distinct functions are decorated in different ways. In the House of the Cryptoporticus, for example,

a paratactic scheme was adopted in the walking spaces of the *cryptoporticus*, while large panels with mythological scenes placed in front of the dining couches were deemed more appropriate to stimulate discussions among guests in the *oecus*. In the baths, a richer, and more complex design was adopted in the frigidarium compared to the bath's changing room, establishing a decorative hierarchy that matched the functional hierarchy between the two spaces.

Themes and subjects were also carefully chosen, according to the owner's taste and beliefs. The celebration of heroic values such as strength, military value and piety was deemed appropriate for some of the most important (and possibly more public) spaces of the house: scenes from the Iliad and from the Aethiopis decorated the walls of the *cryptoporticus*, celebrating the value of Greek and Trojan heroes, such as Achilles, Ajax, Diomedes and Hector. The epic cycle developed along the walls in a circular way: entering the room, visitors began a visual journey, beginning with the opening scene of the Iliad displayed on the top left of the wall: Apollo sending a plague to the Achaeans for not respecting his priest Chryses. Visitors then followed the story of Troy along the three sides of the *cryptoporticus*, to come back to the same entranceway. Here, a fresco representing Aeneas fleeing Troy with his father Anchises and his son Ascanius hinted to the future of Rome, according to a widespread Roman myth that celebrated Aeneas as the progenitor of the Roman people.

Placed on the east side of the *cryptoporticus*, the baths were lavishly decorated with Second Style paintings and colourful mosaics. Baths in Pompeii were a very rare feature of private houses: out of around 400 excavated houses in Pompeii, only 35 had bath suites. Unfortunately, due to the complex and long history of the House of the Cryptoporticus only a few rooms of the baths were still covered by frescoes at the time of its discovery: what was probably a changing room and the frigidarium or cold room (**image 6**).



Both rooms were decorated with complex architectural compositions that created a rich three-dimensional effect on the walls by skilfully using architectural perspective, alternating open views and closed surfaces, and by breaking up the wall into an endless series of vistas (**image 7**).



The complex of underground spaces was completed at the south-eastern corner of the *cryptoporticus* by a room that was probably used as a dining hall. Its long and back walls were decorated with a scheme of **caryatids** on top of which stood a series of panels, framed by folded wooden shutters (**image 8**).



Participants to the banquets could recline on the couches and look at the short wall in front of them. Here two mythological panels, one with the scene of Oedipus meeting his father Laios (a scene that clearly prelude to the killing of Laios by Oedipus) and the other with the killing of the Niobids by Apollo, flanked a central panel decorated with what was probably an idyllic scene. One could wonder why such gruesome scenes were considered appropriate for a banquet hall. Both myths were linked to the story of Thebes, each depicting a story from the mythic cycle of events of that city (Niobe was queen of Thebes and Laios was king of the city). They both represented the story of innocent people, challenged and punished by the gods. Both stories, however, are better understood if we look at the overall decoration of the underground

spaces of the house: the paintings of the *oecus* and of the *cryptoporticus* celebrate the tragedy of two cities, Troy and Thebes. At the same time, however, there is an underlying Apollinian theme that develops across this whole underground sector of the house. From the entranceway to the *cryptoporticus*, where Apollo is represented punishing the Achaeans for their hubrys, to the recurrent Apollinian themes in the baths

(expressed in more symbolic ways by the Delphic tripod, the sphynxes and the baetylus) to the more complex representations of myths that celebrated the power of Apollo, the avenger of his mother Leto (in the killing of the Niobids) and the god who presides over human destiny (when he met Laios, Oedipus was returning from Delphi, where he had heard by the oracle that he was going to kill his father).

THE HOUSE OF THE BEAUTIFUL COURTYARD IN HERCULANEUM

Located in the Regio I, Insula V, south of the *Decumanus Maximus* of Herculaneum, the House of the Beautiful Courtyard was excavated by Amedeo Maiuri between 1931 and 1938. The house is the result of the fractioning of a much bigger property that originally comprised the Casa del Bicentenario and the Casa dell'Apollo Citaredo. During the second half of the 1st century A.D. the House of the Beautiful Courtyard was separated by the Casa del Bicentenario: as a result of that, and because of the lack of space, the house had to develop vertically, rather than horizontally, and its plan and layout differed considerably from some more traditional house schemes that it is possible to see in Herculaneum.



With the exception of the *oecus* (**image 1**), which is one of the largest reception halls found so far in the city, the rooms of the House of the Beautiful Courtyard were quite small. The entrance to the house was placed on the side, from *Cardo V*, and led to a rectangular room that was unusually placed transversally. A small room,

possibly a kitchen, was placed to the left of the entrance (**image 2**), while a group of three cubicles and a small latrine opening along a narrow corridor was placed to the right.



However unusual the design, the axial disposition of the rooms of the house was still maintained. Therefore, along the main (albeit short) axis of the house, right in front of the entrance, a small room was placed that acted as a filter between the entrance room and a small courtyard to the back. At the end of the visual axis, the masonry staircase (one of the few found in Herculaneum, **image 3**) led to the rooms of the first floor. The courtyard also acted as the centre of the building, creating a second transverse axis that linked together a big reception hall (the *oecus*), the courtyard and a large room at the back (possibly a triclinium).

The first floor was organised around two sets of rooms: the first, simpler and decorated with white panels and small decorative elements, opened towards the courtyard. The other, more

richly decorated, set of rooms, was still accessible from the staircase but opened with a balcony on the street below, and was decorated with mosaic floors and elaborate Fourth Style paintings in two of the rooms.



As with many other houses in Pompeii and Herculaneum, the decoration of the House of the Beautiful Courtyard varied in quality and nature. Interventions occurred during the life of the building that resulted in rooms being decorated at different times and to respond to the diverse functions of the spaces in a house. Therefore, while the room placed north of the courtyard of the House of the Beautiful Courtyard (possibly a triclinium) was still decorated with a Third Style scheme, a new Fourth Style redecoration was applied to most of the remaining house during the 1st century AD. Particularly striking is the decoration of the large *oecus*, opening to the south of the courtyard: the walls were entirely covered by a late Third Style monochrome decoration with carefully placed architectural motives.

Among the many artefacts found in the House of the Beautiful Courtyard many were commonly found in Roman houses. Although there is no record of where exactly in the house the artefacts were found, it is likely that pots for cooking, such as pans and cauldrons, could be used in the small kitchen that was placed next to the entrance. Vessels for serving food and drinks, refer to the meals that took place in one of the reception rooms of the building. A small bronze **patera** with

a beautiful representation of Leda and the swan, jugs, and large bronze basins, could refer to the ritual of washing hands before banquets. Jugs and cups are also used as tiny decorations on the walls of the *oecus*, possibly referring to some of the activities that were carried out in the room. During the eruption, Herculaneum was hit by a huge pyroclastic surge that reached temperatures of around 4000⁰ C. This caused the immediate death of all those who had remained in the city and the carbonization of many organic materials, such as the small three-legged wooden table with beautifully decorated legs and the basket made with woven vegetable fibre that were found in the house.

The House of the Beautiful Courtyard was excavated by Amedeo Maiuri between 1931 and 1938. In 1956, Amedeo Maiuri opened a small museum in the house, the idea being to display objects found during the excavations in Herculaneum, rather than sending them to the National Archaeological Museum in Naples as it had happened in the past. The new Antiquarium displayed objects that were chosen in order to suggest the daily life in the ancient city before the eruption: a candelabrum was placed in the big room next to the entrance, while organic finds were displayed in the so called tablinum, together with two statues found in the excavation of the Area Sacra, a small herm from the Casa a Graticcio, some food remains, fragments of a musical instrument, the sole of a sandal, fragments of fabric and a wooden box for coins and jewels. The exhibition continued in the large reception room of the building, where artefacts were displayed in small cases and grouped according to their typology: among others, candelabra, lamps, sculptures, bronze and terracotta vessels, small statuettes (among which were displayed an Isis Lactans and a small statue of the Egyptian god Bes), marble and glass artefacts. The display was continuously enriched by finds discovered during the excavations carried

out after 1956, such as a bronze statue of Bacchus from the Bottega del Plumbarius and a statue of the Egyptian god Atum, found in the Palestra, but

also by fragments of frescoes that were brought back to Herculaneum from the National Archaeological Museum in Naples.

RELIGION AT HOME

“In a corner I saw a large cupboard containing a tiny shrine,
wherein were silver Lares, and a marble image of Venus, and a large golden box,
where they told me Trimalchio’s first beard was laid up”
(*Petronius, Satyricon*, 29)

Roman domestic religious practices were not necessarily a simplified version, reduced to superstition, of official religious practices. They reflected on the contrary complex and articulated notions and beliefs, deeply rooted into archaic practices and visually enriched by elements often derived from Greek culture. Gods presided over a variety of aspects of the daily lives of those who lived in the house, the *pater familias* (head of the house), his wife and children, and the numerous slaves and servants that lived in the house. In addition to embodying the owners’ status and social position, houses were also at the heart of their private devotion: they contained the physical spaces for worship (the earth and the altars) and the paraphernalia used to carry out the daily rituals, but they also held the memory of the rituals and the ceremonies performed by the household.

Lares were among the many divinities worshipped by the Romans in the private realm of the house that protected the household, together with the *Genius* (the spirit of the *pater familias* and later of the emperor himself). Their origin was unclear to the Romans themselves, who worshipped them as protectors of the fields and as household and family gods. As such they had special honours in every house and a key role in family affairs.

As benign, deified ancestors, the Lares watched over the main family activities and presided over the most important moments and on the passages of *status* in the life of its members: adolescents offered their *bulla* to the Lares when becoming adults (Persius, *Satires*, 5.30-31); brides offered a coin to the Lar of the new home (Varro, *De Vita Populi Romani*, 1.2 in Nonius 33.L) or burned incense and dedicated garlands of flowers to the Lares who protected the nuptials (Plautus, *Aulularia*, 385-287); Ovid even mentions the gift of weapons to the Lares by an old man, not fit for war anymore (Ovid, *Tristia*, 4.8.21). The written sources also record their various epithets designing their various areas of oversight: Lares *familiares* (of the family), *compitales* (guardians of crossroads), *praestites* (guardians of the city), *agrestes* (protecting the fields), *viales* and *permarinis* (watching over travellers by road and by sea respectively).

If their origin has to be found back in the religious world of Archaic Rome, their image, as we know it from the evidence provided by sculptures and paintings found across the Roman world and in particular at Pompeii and Herculaneum, developed in the Late Hellenistic period and is modelled on other divine figures that shared with the Lares a similar protective role, such as for example the Dioscuri, from which they likely derived their twin nature. Among the earliest

images of the Lares are those painted outside the houses in Delos. They date to the second half of the 2nd century BC when the Roman authorities granted the Greek port duty-free status and where many Roman merchants lived and operated. The Lares are usually represented while dancing or standing, with a young appearance, wearing garland of flowers or leaves, a short tunic, high shoes made of feline fur and a mantle, raising the drinking horn (*rhuton*) or a cornucopia in one hand, and a bucket, an offering plate (*patera*) or a branch of laurel leaves in the other.

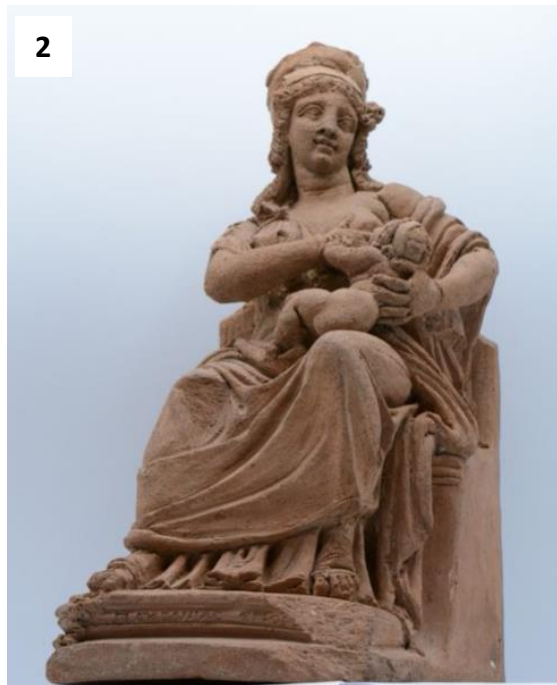


Gods and goddesses entered the private realm of Roman domestic contexts for different purposes. Fertility and life expectancy were, for example, of huge concern in the ancient world. Symbols of fertility therefore abounded in the houses and the gardens of many families in Pompeii and Herculaneum, embodied by statues and paintings

of the god Priapus, with his large phallus, and of Venus, the goddess of erotic love, sexuality, and fertility. Venus could appear in a variety of ways and attitudes and with a variety of attributes, that changed over time and according to type of cult. The naked Venus, represented standing while covering her modesty with her right arm and holding her drapery in the left, was an incredibly popular model in antiquity. Her origin lays in the artwork of the Athenian sculptor Praxiteles (active around 375-330 BC), who produced a sculpture of Aphrodite to be set up in the shrine of the city of Cnidus. From the 2nd century BC, the model became incredibly popular and was replicated endless times, in life-size copies and in smaller versions, in marble, bronze, silver, terracotta, with many variants, all across the Roman empire. Pliny describes the Aphrodite as the best work by Praxiteles and the best sculpture in the world, so that visitors travelled to Cnidus on purpose to see it as a tourist attraction (36.20-21).

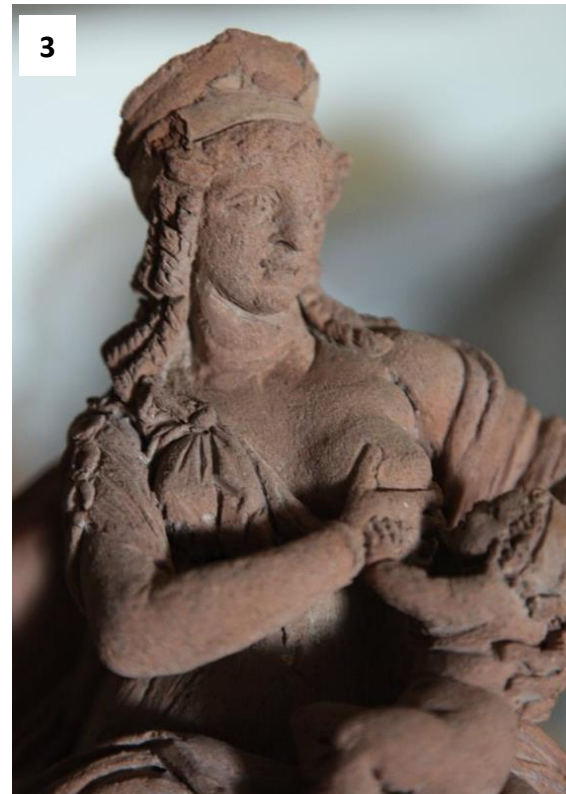
But the realm of domestic worship was also quickly penetrated by numerous gods and deities of foreign origin, such as Attis and Cybele, of Eastern origin, and gods and goddesses of Egyptian origin (**Image 1**, god Bes), that have been found in numerous houses in Pompeii and Herculaneum. The love of the inhabitants of the Italian peninsula for Egypt is a long lasting one: Egyptian objects and decorative elements are found in Italy from the 7th century BC but it is only from the second half of the second century BC that the passion for Egypt became increasingly widespread across the Italian peninsula. Egyptomania increased with the victory of Augustus against Marc Antony and Cleopatra at Actium in 31 BC and the definitive annexation of Egypt as a province to the Roman empire in 30 BC. This Egyptomania can be seen in numerous wall-paintings and mosaics with landscapes of the Nile and in the adoption of luxury Egyptian furnishing in Roman domestic contexts. During the second half of the first century BC, the cult of Isis and

Serapis had become so popular that Augustus ordered a series of restrictions against their worship within the sacred boundaries of Rome in 28 and 21 BC.



Isis was an Egyptian goddess, originally associated with mourning and funerary practices. During the 4th century BC the worship of Isis spread across the Greek world: she was assimilated to the Greek goddess Demeter and could also be associated to Artemis and Aphrodite. The Romans probably got in touch with the cult of Isis thanks to their increasing role in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the 2nd century BC there was a large temple of Isis in the Greek island of Delos, a large Mediterranean trading centre, with a diverse community that included numerous rich Italian merchants. The first temple to Isis was built in Pompeii in 80 BC. The veneration of Isis was a mystery cult and the initiated were sworn to secrecy: we know however from the works of Plutarch and Lucian and from wall-paintings found in Herculaneum that the cult included a process of initiation, including bathing, fasting, receiving a special garment, experiencing and celebrating the revelation of the goddess.

Statues of Isis appeared in various domestic contexts, both referring specifically to Egyptian cults but also among other deities that made up the *Penates* of a **lararium**. Here they appeared in the form of Isis-Fortuna (standing, steering a rudder in her right hand and holding a cornucopia with her left arm) or as Isis Lactans, seated on a throne and holding or nursing her son Horus/Harpocrates.



The statue of *Isis Lactans* or *Isis Kourotrophe* (Inv. 1446/76724, **images 2 and 3**) was found in 1936 at the first floor of shop 5, in the Insula Orientale, II in Herculaneum. The statue is made of terracotta and shows the goddess sitting on a throne while nurturing Horus. It has been dated between the end of the first century BC and the beginning of the first century AD. Her feet, wearing sandals, rest on a foot stool. She wears a short-sleeved chiton (Greek dress) and a mantle that covers her legs. She wears a wide band, adorned with flowers above the temples and crowned by a high **diadem** on which the two horns of the moon crescent are represented in relief. Harpocrates is sitting on her knees, naked,

and wears a band on the head which still bears the remains of the pschent, the pharaonic double crown, now lost. An inscription in Greek bears the name of the artist who made the statuette: *Pausania(s) epoiesen*.

Although numerous are the statuettes of Isis (especially in the variant of the Isis-Fortuna) and of Harpocrates found in Herculaneum, the statue of the Isis Lactans is an *unicum* in the city, as no other statue of the same type (even the Egyptian version) has been found so far (see Bailey, D.M., 2008. Catalogue of the terracottas in the British Museum: Ptolemaic and Roman terracottas from Egypt, vol. 4. British Museum Publications Limited).

The statue is part of one small group of Egyptianizing objects that was found around the so-called "Palaestra" in the Insula Orientalis II of the city. Some of objects can be clearly related to domestic and private worship, such as the statue of Isis Lactans, together with eight pendants including three made of bronze representing Harpocrates and a wooden sistrum (musical instrument related to the cult of Isis) that were found in the shops that overlooked the main street (cardo V). However, many other objects, including a beautiful basanite statue of the god Autun, dating to end of the 4th-beginning of the 3rd century AD were found in or nearby the Palaestra, a space that has been suggested could have been a sanctuary of Isis and of the *Mater Deum* (Mother of the Gods).

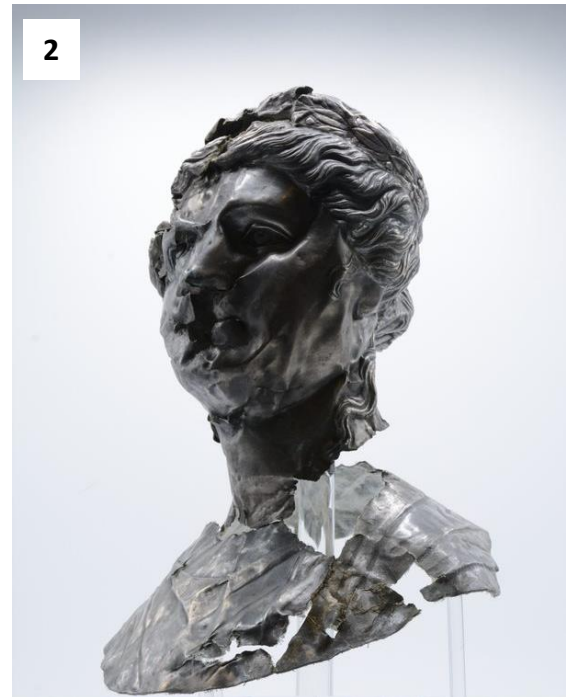
ROMAN FACES

With the exception of the portraits from the Villa of the Papyri, more than sixty portraits have been found in Herculaneum since the time of its discovery. Most of them are private portraits and honorary statues but there are also portraits of the emperors and members of the imperial family.



This is the case, for example of the bust of Livia, a small portrait (36 cm. high) of the empress made of a thin silver foil, accurately shaped to represent the features of the wife of Augustus (**images 1 and 2**). The portrait comes from the old sea shore of Herculaneum, in proximity of the Area Sacra Suburbana (inv. 4205/79502), where it was probably originally displayed and from where it was displaced by the violence of the volcanic flow that caused the dislocation of most of the portraits found in Herculaneum from their original context. The sculpture was badly damaged by the eruption and the features of Livia are merely recognisable: the thin silver foil used to make the statue did not resist to the weight of the debris of the Vesuvian eruption. The silver foil was supported inside: fragments of cloth and a small wooden plank were found inside the bust.

They were originally meant to support the portrait.



The empress is portrayed wearing a diadem of laurel leaves, with long, wavy locks, parted at the centre of the head, and tied to the back with a band. Two curly locks fall on the shoulders. The diadem of laurel leaves is particularly interesting, as laurel leaves were commonly associated with the celebration of martial virtues and used as male attributes in Roman imperial contexts. So, why is Livia portrayed with such an unusual attribute? The use of the laurel crown as a female attribute is considered an innovation of the Augustan era, as there are no examples of Hellenistic queens wearing adopting a similar attribute. It is likely that the adoption of the laurel in the portrait of Livia had to do with the role that laurel gained within Augustan ideology: since 27BC Augustus had obtained by the Senate the right to decorate the front of his house on the Palatine with two bay trees and had gradually taken on himself the right to associate himself to laurel, by excluding anyone else from triumphal celebrations with the exception of the members of his family. A wood of bay trees also decorated

the villa of Livia ad Gallinas Albas, from which the emperor used to take branches while celebrating his triumphs. At the death of Augustus, in AD14, and in the delicate aftermath of the succession of Tiberius to the throne, Livia was bequeathed the posthumous adoption by Augustus, becoming an effective member of the *gens Iulia* and a descendant of *Venus*. Livia could then be portrayed wearing a laurel crown, a powerful symbol of her belonging to the *gens Iulia* and of her role as the mother of the new emperor.

If the bust of Livia reflects notions and ideas about power as reflected in the official context of imperial propaganda, small wooden statues charred by the surge of the Vesuvius reflect the other end of the spectrum but nonetheless can offer an insight into the use of figurative art in domestic and religious contexts.

Because of the fragility of the material with which they were made, wooden statues rarely survived up to modern times. However, we have plenty of literary and documentary evidence that confirm their role in the context of public and private displays across the Roman empire. We know for example that wooden statues could be carried across the streets of Roman cities during processions and religious events. The portraits of the kings were carried alongside images of the gods during the processions that preceded the *ludi* and other public spectacles or during religious ceremonies. It is likely that many of these statues were made of wood (if not entirely, at least some body parts): a document from Arsinoe, dating to the Severan age, recalls the costs for paying those who transport wooden statues during a procession in the theatre.

Livy mentions two statues made of cypress wood that were displayed in the temple of Iuno Regina in Rome and that were carried in procession through the Roman Forum and the streets of Rome to end up into the temple of the goddess (Liv. XXVII,37,12). We also know that a cult statue

of Veiove made of cypress wood was put 192 BC on the Capitoline hill and that it was still intact at the time of Pliny (*N.H.* 6.216). The cult statues of Diana Aventina and of the *Fortuna Muliebris* in Rome were also made of wood. That wood was perceived as a valuable material for the making of statues is also suggested by the celebration of its sacrality in the context of Augustan poetry: when Vergil describes the meeting between king Latinus and the Trojans, he sets it in the old palace of Picus Laurentius, alongside a long series of portraits of the ancestors that are carved from cedar wood (*effigies avorum e cedro*, Verg. Aen. VII.177-178).

One of the most striking examples for the use of wood in Roman sculpture is provided by ritual depositions in Gallo-Roman sanctuaries: 300 statues, both male and female, comprising busts, heads, animals and body parts, were found in the sanctuary of *Fontes Sequanae* near Dijon, dating to the Augustan age. More than 1500 statues dating to the first century AD were also found in the sanctuary of Chamalières (Clermont-Ferrand). Other finds come from various Gallo-Roman sites, including Luxeuil, Bourbonne-les-Bains, Saint-Amand. The types of wood employed for making the sculptures are not among the most valuable or the hardest ones, but those who could be more easily found in the area (mainly oak and beech, but also fir, ash, birch and chestnut).

In Herculaneum, wooden artefacts underwent a process of carbonization, caused by temperatures reaching up to 400 °C during the eruption of the Vesuvius. The carbonization of wooden artefacts caused the survival of a small group of wooden statues (**image 3**). Two of them were found in the south terrace of the Sanctuary of Venus, a religious complex with at least two shrines (A and B) and possibly a third one, and additional rooms attached to the main sanctuary. The remains of the statues (inv. 2157 and 2158) were found in room VI that had a space for cooking. According

to Catalano (1957) one is a female statue and the other is a statue of Priapus with a hole in the middle of the body to house the **apotropaic** phallus. Two small bases for wooden images (scarce remains were found during the excavation) were also found on a podium at the bottom of shrine B.



The best-preserved example of wooden statue in Herculaneum comes however from a domestic context, the Casa del Graticcio di Legno (III.14.13-15). The Casa a Graticcio di Legno (III.14.13-15) had two floors and was divided into three separate areas: a ground floor apartment with two rooms upstairs (entrance from nr. 14), a shop attached to it (entrance from nr. 15) and a separate, first floor apartment that had an independent access from the road through a steep wooden staircase (entrance from nr. 13). The entrance staircase opened into a landing with a small window that gave light to the space from

the courtyard of the ground-floor house. A tall chest partially filled the space. From the landing a narrow corridor connected the remaining spaces of the house, with two rooms that opened onto it and a balcony (*maenianum*). Two additional rooms opened onto the balcony and a small, windowless room opened into the corridor. Among the artefacts found in the first floor flat there is an inscription: *Philad(e)lp(hi)a Cn(aei) Octavi fili(a)* on a small base of black marble and the fragment of a large, circular, marble **oscillum**. Some elements of the original furniture were also found: an earth, placed in the corridor, and a series of beds in three of the rooms. One bed was found in room 3 together with objects belonging to the feminine sphere, such as two perfume bottles, two bronze spindles, a bird water feeder, a golden bead and an onyx. Remains of a bed were also found in room 4, together with a marble table. Room 5 was the largest in the flat and had two beds, one for an adult and one for a child. The wooden female head (inv. 322/75598) was found in this room, together with the wooden pediment of a *lararium* that was found under one of the beds.

The head has a simple, rather graphic rendering of the facial features, with deeply carved lines for the eyes, the nose and the mouth, and a simple hairstyle, combed in large parallel strands that are gathered to the back in a small bun.

Wooden statues were also found in the *lararium* of the House of the Menander in Pompeii, where they did not survive but casts of them were taken of the hollows left in the lava. Art historian Pollini (2007) suggests that the sculptures from Pompeii portrayed the ancestors of the family and that the wooden sculptures were originally covered with a layer of wax, with modelled facial features. It is difficult to say if the statue found in the Casa a Graticcio di Legno in Herculaneum was indeed a portrait (of which therefore we would miss the details lost in wax) and if it represented an

ancestor of the family that lived in the house. We know that the display of the *imagines maiorum* (portraits of the ancestors) in Roman houses remained the exclusive right of the nobility and the bust from the Casa a Graticcio di Legno was found in one of the rooms of a first-floor flat and not in a space where it would be publicly displayed (like for example the *lararium* in the peristyle of the House of the Menander in Pompeii). The flat itself was not the property of a

rich, aristocratic family: its position, lack of elaborate decoration and absence of large reception rooms make it likely that it was inhabited by a family of modest income if not by people that separately rented its rooms. It is however likely that the statue was kept as an object whose value was determined by its function and meaning that are unfortunately now lost.