

Mentor Name:

School: J. William Fulbright College, University of Arkansas

Classification:

Grade Point Average

Area of Study: Classical Studies, Art History

Title of Project: Public and Private: Differentiation in Subject Matter of Wall Painting in the Pompeian *Domus*

Project Summary:

In A.D. 79, Mount Vesuvius erupted suddenly, leaving the southern Italian seaside town of Pompeii covered in ash. While many of its inhabitants fled, others were killed by a mixture of pumice and poisonous gases. While tragic, the burial of Pompeii provides a wealth of information about Roman life, although the early excavations of the town were lamentably unscientific. Pompeii became a Roman colony after the Social War of the 90s B.C., and subsequently became thoroughly Romanized. Pompeii is renowned for its many elegant houses, called *domus* (Latin, pl. houses), occupied both by native Pompeians and wealthy Romans. Excavations have revealed many wall paintings, remarkably well-preserved by the volcanic ash, in all four of the established style classifications. Many questions about their meaning and social purpose have been raised.

By focusing my investigation on differences in the fresco subject matter, I hope to underscore a distinction between public and private domestic space. Specifically, I will focus on decoration in the *tablinum* and *ala*. I hypothesize that the content here is different than that of the *peristylum*. I will draw from published catalogs, scholarly books, and articles as aids to my analysis. Also, I intend to travel to Pompeii and relevant surrounding sites such as Herculaneum and Oplontis. Assessing the architecture and decoration of the *domus, in situ*, is essential to understanding how the Romans understood public and private space.

Public and Private: Differentiation in Subject Matter of Wall Painting in the Pompeian *Domus*

In ancient Rome, freeborn members of the patrician class were expected to inhabit a home indicative of their rank, and their decorative habits were imitated by wealthy freedmen. As a Roman colony, Pompeii adopted the same system. Most of these elegant *domus* display remarkably well-preserved wall art in the form of frescoes. In this project, I will primarily address the urban *domus*, a house within the city. But I will also include a few examples of the *villa*, a house located outside the city.

John Clarke, professor of art history at the University of Texas, describes the Roman *domus* as the hub of social, political, and business activities. Ancient Romans conceptualized ‘public’ and ‘private’ differently than the modern individual, who considers his workplace to be the center of his public life, and his home to be the center of his private life. This distinction was not applicable to Roman aristocracy. Instead, it was crucial to the status of a Roman public figure to have large numbers of people visit his house for the purpose of conducting business.

Roman house decoration played a major role in establishing the Roman sense of self. If researched properly, the subject matter of these frescoes can reveal much about Pompeians’ daily lives. Wallace-Hadrill refers to the Roman *domus* as a ‘powerhouse,’ a place from which the *dominus* ruled his world. In theory, the decoration of the *domus* should indicate what kind of a man the *dominus* (master of the household) was. By looking at these wall paintings, we are able to get a sense of his status, and even the number of visitors he received each day.

The general layout of the patrician *domus* in the 1st century B.C. was as follows. In the front half of the *domus*, a door facing the street opened up into the *fauces* (entryway). An axis ran from the *fauces* through the *atrium* (main entrance hall). This axis continued from the *atrium* into the *tablinum*, or main reception space. For example, when a client would visit his patron's *domus* during the morning custom of *salutatio*, he would enter through the *fauces*, having a clear line of sight down the *fauces-atrium-tablinum* axis. Arranged around the *peristylum* were *triclinia*, or dining areas. *Cubicula* (bedrooms) flanked both sides of the *atrium*. Also, two *alae* (small, open rooms) flanked the *atrium*. The back half of the *domus* was centrally focused on an open-air, colonnaded garden, called the *peristylum*. The idealized layout mentioned above is highly important in that it reveals concepts of ideal domestic living; however, it must be noted that due to often irregular land plots in Pompeii, each *domus* I study will not fall within this ideal plan.

Research Overview

My research addresses the following major questions: First, what is different about the 2nd style architectural illusionist schemes found in more 'public' *atria* and *tablina* versus the more 'private' *triclinia* and *cubicula*? Second, did the myths depicted in 3rd and 4th style central paintings in the more 'public' *tablina* and *alae* differ from those in the more 'private' *triclinia* and *cubicula*? What do the results mean in the context of Roman society?

I will collect numerical data from the invaluable *Pompei: Pitture e Mosaici* encyclopedia. After transferring this information onto large maps of Pompeii, I will determine whether a topographic correlation exists between the location of a room and

the myths used in its decoration. Emulating Riggsby's approach to researching the *cubiculum*, I will search for passages in classical literature that mention the *tablinum* and *ala*. And for the analytical component, I will explain the numbers, and relate them to daily Pompeian life. I hypothesize that there is a contrast in the subject matter of the public and private zones of the house. I think this will be true for 2nd, 3rd, and 4th styles, although the ways in which they differ would change from style to style, due to the inherent characteristics of each style. One would expect this hypothesis to be true, based on the writings of Wallace-Hadrill and Clarke, however, no systematic study has been done at this point.

Weekly research agenda

I will work for 12.5 hours a week for 16 weeks. I will begin working January 1st and end May 1st. A typical week would consist of the following: 3 hours writing thesis drafts, 5 hours using the *Pompei: Pitture e Mosaici* series to collect data, 3 hours reading important scholarly works that have shaped the field, and 1.5 hours working on Pompeian maps. This would vary from week to week, depending on the actual distance to my thesis defense date. For instance, in April, I will no longer spend time writing drafts, collecting data, or reading scholarly works. Instead, I would devote all the research time to implementing final edits to my thesis and constructing a PowerPoint presentation.

Monthly research agenda

In January, I will finish my assessment of 2nd style *atria*, *tablina*, and *alae*. In addition, I will read *Roman Painting* by Roger Ling. After this, I will begin to write the background information section of my honors thesis. This section is meant to give a history of Pompeian excavation and the research that has been done in the field so far. I

will draw from the works of John Clarke, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, Andrew Riggsby, Eugene Dwyer, and Theodor Kraus, as well as primary sources like Vitruvius and Petronius. Taking inspiration from Andrew Riggsby's approach to the *cubiculum*, I will search for classical literary passages that mention the *tablinum* and *ala*, using the Tufts University Perseus Project, TLL (Latin Thesaurus), and TLG (Greek Thesaurus).

During February, I will complete my assessment of 3rd and 4th style *tablina* and *atria*. At this point, all data will be collected, and I will divide the raw information into categories for analysis, including the total *tablina* and *alae*, the proportion of 2nd, 3rd, and 4th style decorations, and the specific myths used. I will break down these numbers into more refined categories, such as the number of *alae* that depict Venus and the number of *tablina* that create the illusion of the infinite continuum of space, and so on. On the weekend of February 9th through 11th, I will travel to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York so that I can view the 3rd style fresco from a *cubiculum* from the Imperial Villa at Boscotrecase, and the reconstructed 2nd style *cubiculum* from the Houses of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale. Viewing these frescoes in person will give me a more thorough understanding of the spatial impact these works have on the viewer.

Moving into the analytical component of my research, March will be devoted to developing the numbers I have gathered from the encyclopedia into applicable statistics. I will then situate the results in the context of current research on domestic space and decoration in Pompeii. I will draft the main body of my thesis in March. Using the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, I will trace additional examples of the most popular mythological scenes on Pompeian walls. I would use LIMC to determine if certain mythological subject matter on the walls might also show up on pottery and

sculpture of the same period. Around mid-March, I will make large copies of detailed maps of ancient Pompeii, and then mark out the data I have gathered in order to see if a topographic correlation exists. During spring break, I will travel to Pompeii to view the houses. I will also visit nearby Herculaneum and Oplontis, other relevant cities preserved by the Vesuvius eruption.

And finally, in the first week of April I will write the conclusion section of my thesis. After this, I will consult with my mentor to make final edits. Subsequently, I will develop a PowerPoint presentation to include the following information: history of ancient Pompeii, history of Pompeian excavation, styles of frescoes, the current status of the field, numerical data on the rooms I have chosen, and conclusions. I will defend my thesis between April 16th and 25th.

Conclusion

SURF grant funds would enable me to travel to Pompeii, surrounding archaeological sites, and select museums with Pompeian fresco collections. These experiences would give me the opportunity to see frescoes and often entire houses firsthand, and to take photographs and video footage to support my analysis. I would also be able to purchase additional necessary books and make large copies of maps of ancient Pompeii. I will continue analyzing my findings and working with my mentor to compose a 40-60 page honors thesis. I also intend to submit all or a portion of this thesis for publication to the undergraduate research magazine *Inquiry*. I anticipate traveling to the SURF Conference in order to give a PowerPoint presentation of my findings to the state. Further, I will attend graduate school in the fall of 2007, continuing my research in this field, and pursue a Ph.D. in classical art.

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