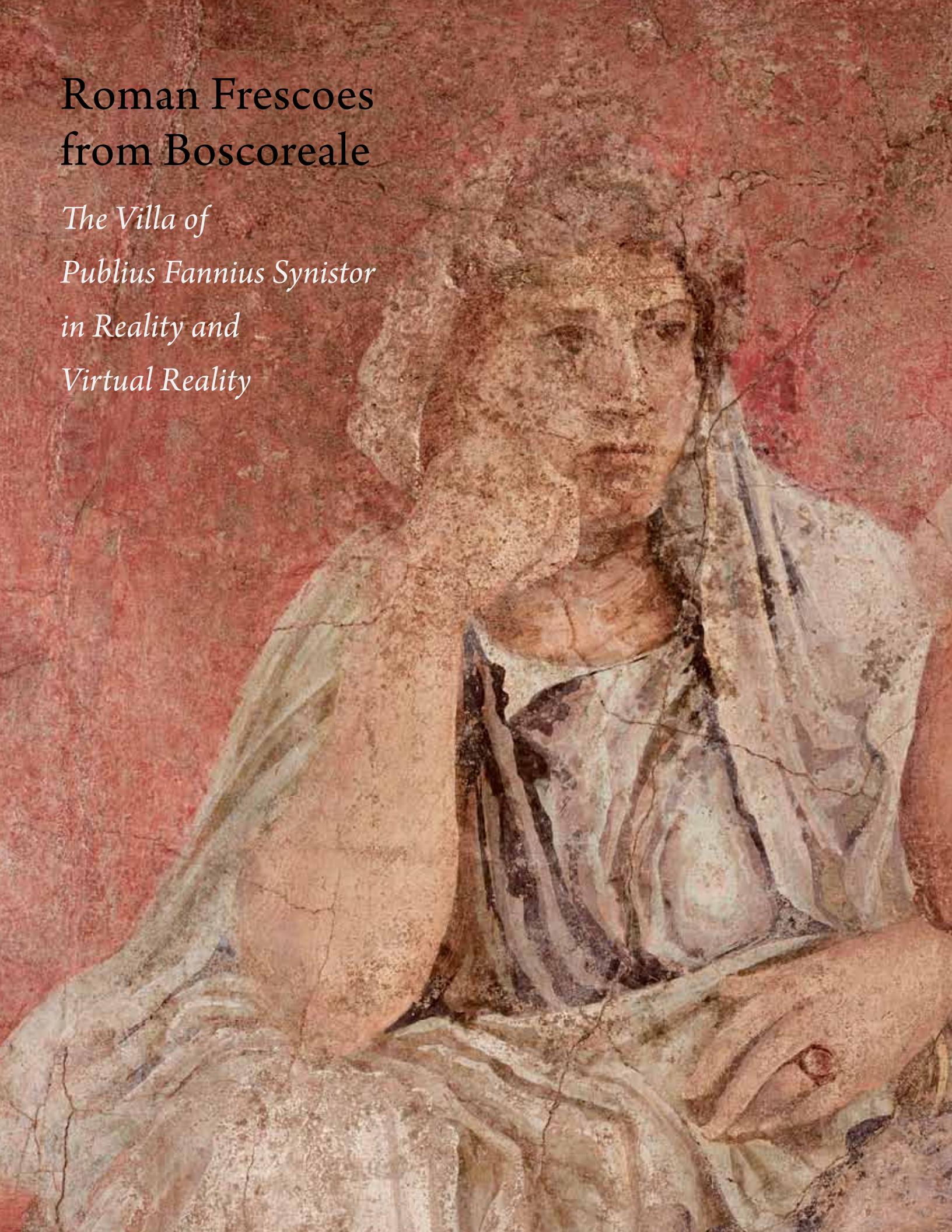
Roman Frescoes from Boscoreale

The Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor in Reality and Virtual Reality



Roman Frescoes from Boscoreale

The Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor in Reality and Virtual Reality

Bettina Bergmann, Stefano De Caro,
Joan R. Mertens, and Rudolf Meyer

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Contents

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Front cover: detail of fresco from Room H of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor; The Metropolitan Museum of Art (see fig. 41). Back cover and page 3: details of fresco from Room G; Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (see figs. 50, 51). Inside front cover: virtual model of the villa, looking north along west side of peristyle (see fig. 21). Inside back cover: winged guardian figure from peristyle; Musée du Louvre, Paris (see fig. 34).

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Director's Note

The reinstallation of the galleries of Greek and Roman art at the Metropolitan Museum, completed in 2007, particularly benefited the Roman collections, which had not been comprehensively exhibited since the 1940s. As part of the reinstallation, the wall paintings from the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale, which was buried by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in A.D. 79, received long overdue conservation treatment and an entirely new placement that brings together all of the Museum's panels from the villa, including those from the extraordinary cubiculum, or bedroom, which for forty years had resided in the Great Hall.

While the frescoes from Boscoreale have been studied by scholars and enjoyed by visitors for more than a hundred years (having come to the Museum in 1903), they now require fresh consideration. In this *Bulletin* Stefano De Caro, Director General for the Antiquities in the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, Rome, and a native of Boscoreale, introduces the history and importance of the site, and Rudolf Meyer, who with his colleague Christl Faltermeier conserved all the panels, discusses technical features of the frescoes. Bettina Bergmann, The Helene Phillips Herzig '49 Professor of Art at Mount Holyoke College and an authority on Roman wall painting, places the surviving mural decoration in its original context. To that end, Professor Bergmann's scholarly expertise and the imaging skills of King's Visualisation Lab (KVL) of King's College London have combined to produce the first computer model of the villa, with all the known frescoes situated on the walls of its virtual rooms. Joan R. Mertens, Curator in the Department of Greek and Roman Art at the Metropolitan Museum, organized the new photography taken for the *Bulletin* and served as coordinator of the project.

After the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor was excavated in 1899–1900, the site was reburied and the wall paintings removed from it were sold at auction. The new virtual model of the villa, though still a work in progress, is a major advance toward experiencing the ancient architectural complex and its painted decoration, which is now dispersed among nine museums. We are extraordinarily beholden to the directors,

curators, and administrators of the eight European museums who have joined in a particularly innovative and collegial venture to better understand an interconnected group of masterpieces of Roman art: Noël Mahéo of the Musée de Picardie, Amiens; R. A. Lunsingh Scheurleer, René van Beek, and Ron Leenheer of the Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam; Vincent Ducourau of the Musée Bonnat, Bayonne; Pacôme de Galliffet of the Villa Kérylos, Beaulieu-sur-Mer, as well as Antoinette Sinigaglia, Roland May of the Centre Interrégional de Conservation et Restauration du Patrimoine, Marseille, and Pierre Antoine Gatier, Architecte en Chef des Monuments Historiques, Paris; Cécile Evers and Natacha Massar of the Musée du Cinquantenaire, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels; Annie Verbanck-Piérard of the Musée Royal de Mariemont, Morlanwelz, Belgium; Pietro Giovanni Guzzo, Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei, and Maria Rosaria Borriello of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli; and Jean-Luc Martinez, Cécile Giroire, and Sophie Descamps of the Musée du Louvre, Paris.

At the King's Visualisation Lab, Richard Beacham and his colleagues Drew Baker and Martin Blazeby worked with unflagging professionalism, care, and patience. James Stanton-Abbott provided meticulous and generous assistance in preparing the model.

Philippe de Montebello, Director Emeritus of the Metropolitan Museum, supported this enterprise from the outset. In the Department of Greek and Roman Art we are beholden to Carlos A. Picón, Curator in Charge, and to Matthew A. Noiseux, William M. Gagen, John F. Morariu Jr., Jennifer Slocum Soupios, and Fred A. Caruso. The photographs of all the panels from the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor except those in Amiens and Beaulieu-sur-Mer were taken by Paul Lachenauer and Peter Zeray of the Museum's Photograph Studio; our thanks go to them as well as to Barbara Bridgers. Cristina Del Valle of the Counsel's Office has been unwaveringly helpful. In the Editorial Department, Sue Potter, Christopher Zichello, and Bruce Campbell brought a complicated *Bulletin* into being. Douglas Hegley and Koven Smith of Information Systems and Technology advised about computer issues. Daniel Berger facilitated arrangements with our colleagues in Naples. Rudolf Meyer and Christl Faltermeier shared their exceptional knowledge of the rooms in which the frescoes were situated. The late John P. O'Neill, formerly Editor in Chief and Publisher at the Museum, embraced the idea for this project. Gwen Roginsky, General Manager of Publications, helped unstintingly to bring it to fruition.

We wish to express our particular gratitude to The Honorable Sir David Gibbons and Lady Gibbons, who so generously supported both the conservation of the Boscoreale cubiculum and the King's Visualisation Lab model of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor.

The international cooperation that produced the computer reconstruction continued in a conference about Boscoreale held at the Musée Royal de Mariemont in April 2010. Bringing together curators, conservators, art historians, and archaeologists, the conference has opened yet another path for studying the breathtaking finds from the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor.

Thomas P. Campbell
Director, The Metropolitan Museum of Art


Rome
Adriatic Sea
area of main map
Pozzuoli
Cumae
Baia
Naples
Vesuvius
Pompeii
ITALY
Tyrrhenian Sea
Ionian Sea
14°30' E
14°35' E
41°00' N
Nola
40°55' N
Somma Vesuviana
Ottaviano
San Giuseppe
40°50 N
Mount Vesuvius
Herculaneum
Terzigno
Longola di Poggiomarino
Boccia al Mauro
Torre del Greco
Marchesa
Boscotrecase
Boscoreale
Spinelli
Villa of Agrippa Postumus
Villa della Pisanella
Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor
Villa of Numerius Popidius Florus
Villa Regina
River Sarno
Villa of Poppaea
area of detail
Oplontis (Torre Annunziata)
POMPEII
40°45' N
Nuceria Alfaterna (Nocera)
Fondo Iozzino
Sant'Abbondio
Bottaro
Bay of Naples
0
5 mi
0
5 km
Villa dei Misteri
Porta del Vesuvio
Torre di Mercurio
Villa di Diomede
VIA DELLE TOMBE
VIA DI MERCURIO
Villa di Cicerone
Regio VI
Porta Ercolano
POMPEII

The Villas of Boscoreale

STEFANO DE CARO

The possibility of using all the material from the area buried by the ashes of Vesuvius will allow us in the future to radically change our understanding of agriculture in ancient Italy. —Jerzy Kolendo, 1980

In the early years of the first millennium A.D. the area surrounding the city of Pompeii was part of the territory of the Colonia Cornelia Veneria Pompeianorum, the Roman colony established in 81 B.C. by Publius Sulla after his uncle, the Roman dictator Lucius Cornelius Sulla, conquered the city—called Pumpaiis—ruled by the Samnite people who had dominated the region starting in about the fifth century B.C. The city had been founded between the end of the seventh and the beginning of the sixth century B.C. on a lava-rock hill on the shores of the Bay of Naples near the mouth of the River Sarno, which was partially navigable in ancient times. The northern part of the territory of the *colonia*, which encompasses the modern towns of Boscoreale, Boscotrecase, Terzigno, and Torre Annunziata and the hamlet of Civita Giuliana di Pompei, occupied the steep southeastern slopes of Mount Vesuvius where they descend toward the river and the sea. The region had been inhabited since prehistory and had always been used for agricultural purposes.

The topography of Pompeii demonstrates the attraction this countryside had for the city. In the northwestern region of the city (labeled Regio VI by archaeologists) imposing blocks of buildings, or *insulae*, line the paved Via di Mercurio (fig. 1), which in the Archaic era began at the Forum, headed toward the gate under the later established Torre di Mercurio, and then continued outside the city to what are now Boscoreale, just over a mile to the north, and the towns around it. Major roads that left the city from the gates to the east and west of the tower, the Porta del Vesuvio and the Porta del Sale (in Latin, Porta Saliniensis, or Salt Gate), the gate that preceded the Roman Porta Ercolano, must also have led to this wealthy district.

Despite the large number of archaeological excavations undertaken in this area we cannot, unfortunately, reconstruct the topography of the region with satisfactory accuracy.[1] The first, random explorations, occasioned by chance discoveries, were conducted in the eighteenth century, after excavations sponsored by the Bourbon king Carlos III of Spain began at Herculaneum and Pompeii in the 1730s and 1740s. Three sites at Boscotrecase, for example, just south of Naples, were unearthed during the Bourbon reign, in 1759, 1760, and 1764.[2] The majority of the excavations, however, including those of the Villa della Pisanella (also called the Villa del Tesoro delle Argenterie, or Villa of the Silver Treasure), the Villa of Numerius Popidius Florus, and the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor, all at Boscoreale (figs. 2–4), date to the end of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century. They were undertaken by private individuals with little concern for scientific method who hoped to discover archaeological objects and then sell them (preferably abroad). The excavations generally followed discoveries made by farmers working their fields, and they were most often limited to the interiors of ancient buildings, for the most part *villae rusticae*, or country houses. Their only real purpose was to find portable objects and removable decorations such as mosaics

1. Via di Mercurio, Regio VI, Pompeii, with the Torre di Mercurio in the middle ground and Mount Vesuvius in the distance, 2010

2. Excavation of the Villa della Pisanella, Boscoreale, after 1895. Note the *dolia*, or storage jars, some of them buried, in the foreground.

and paintings. The excavators never went beyond the building complexes to look for the roads that obviously must have connected these houses to each other and to the city or for tombs or other elements that would have revealed the general topography of the area. The scanty accounts of these campaigns do not include even simple notations, for example about the depth of the trenches, data that might have given us some idea of the morphology of the area, or any description of the objects or buildings they uncovered, information that might have suggested earlier activity on these sites. It was also typical to fill the trenches in when the excavation was finished and return the land, which was privately owned, to agricultural use. If the Villa di Diomede and the Villa dei Misteri (Villa of the Mysteries), which are closer to Pompeii and thus might in fact be considered part of the city, are excluded, the first villa in this area to be excavated using modern, scientific archaeological methods and left visible afterward was the Villa Regina at Boscoreale, in the 1970s.[3]

3. Excavation of the Villa of Numerius Popidius Florus, Boscoreale, 1906

As a result there is no trace of these excavations; all that remains to examine are a few partial site plans and some photographs that have no real value for understanding the configuration of this region. To add insult to injury, the maps indicating the general locations of the private excavations, compiled by Matteo della Corte, the inspector of the Soprintendenza di Napoli charged with monitoring them, were lost, and over the decades even the sites were forgotten. Recent efforts to relocate the sites have so far identified 102 villas, 21 necropoleis and individual tombs, and 3 rural sanctuaries.[4] Even though much information has been lost, the discovery of so many country houses spurred important studies, especially by English-speaking scholars, on the economy of Pompeii and Roman agriculture.[5]

A topographical reconstruction of the region must therefore be based primarily on the still scarce data from the more recent excavations undertaken largely in preparation for new public and private building projects. The most fundamental information this research has revealed is that the area around Mount Vesuvius was populated long before Pompeii was founded. Excavations in 1998–99 for a tunnel on the Circumvesuviana railway line at Boscoreale, not far from the Villa della Pisanella, revealed nine earlier strata beneath the layer of ash deposited by the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79.[6] Evidence of cultivation over a forest, perhaps of pine trees, was preserved in a sequence of early layers that date between what is called the Mercato eruption of Vesuvius, some 8,000 years ago, and the Avellino eruption, which occurred about 3,700 years ago during the Early Bronze Age. (Both are labeled "Plinian eruptions" after Pliny the Younger, who witnessed the similar eruption in 79 that killed his uncle, Pliny the Elder. In his *Letters* [6.16.5–6], the young Pliny likened the twenty-mile-high column of explosive gas that rose to the stratosphere to "a pine tree; for it shot up

4. Excavation of the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor, Boscoreale, with Mount Vesuvius in the distance, ca. 1901. Room C is at the far right, with Room D and then Room 24 to its left (see fig. 13).

to a great height in the form of a tall trunk, which spread out at the top as though into branches. . . . Occasionally it was brighter, occasionally darker and spotted, as it was either more or less filled with earth and cinders.") The layer just above the Avellino eruption (about 3500 B.C.) shows the successive presence of pens for domesticated animals and plow furrows. Above that are two more paleosols (layers of fossilized soil) with vestiges of crossed and ridge-and-furrow plowing also from the Bronze Age. And a layer dating perhaps to the Iron Age (about the tenth to the ninth century B.C.) preserves traces of cart tracks that run northwest to southeast.

These successive strata of human presence can today be connected with other evidence recently discovered both on the eventual site of Pompeii and beyond it. An especially large excavation at Longola in the territory of Poggiomarino has uncovered a village of buildings on piles built along the Sarno.[7] It dates originally to the late Bronze Age or early Iron Age, and it was inhabited from the late second or early first millennium B.C. until approximately the time Pompeii was founded in the late seventh or early sixth century B.C. A still fragmentary picture has begun to emerge of a difficult environment that was constantly being changed by volcanic eruptions but was used continuously by human beings, who found there a place to build both their settlements and a livelihood.

Although it cannot be associated with specific excavation data, more abundant archaeological evidence exists for the broad period stretching from the seventh to the second century B.C. The material comes from two pre-Roman necropoleis in the area of Boscoreale, one in the village of Spinelli, less than a mile northeast of Pompeii, and the other from near Marchesa, a little over three miles northeast of the city, and perhaps from a third burial ground in the hamlet of Pisanella (see figs. 5, 6).[8] The concentration of objects from the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. is especially interesting. This material, which includes impasto and bucchero ceramics, imported Greek vases, and Italic geometric pottery, suggests the presence of two villages that were part of the indigenous culture of the Sarno Valley that nurtured, probably through consolidation, the birth of Pompeii.[9] The discovery of South Italian red-figured ceramics and Gnathia ware derived from Greek

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7

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5–6. Two proto-Corinthian aryballoi and an Etrusco-Corinthian cup from a necropolis near Boscoreale. 7th–6th century B.C. Clay, h. of each 2⅜ in. (6 cm). Antiquarium, Boscoreale (57, 24, 179)

7–8. Votive offerings from a 4th-century tomb on the Via Chiesa, Boscotrecase. Terracotta; female head: h. 3¾ in. (9.5 cm), bird: h. 3⅝ in. (9.3 cm). Antiquarium, Boscoreale (37, 93)

prototypes in a fourth-century tomb on the Via Chiesa in Boscotrecase seems to indicate that some of these villages continued to exist for some time after the foundation of the city. The presence of votive items like small cups and statuettes (see figs. 7, 8) suggests, furthermore, that there were rural sanctuaries here in the late Classical and Hellenistic periods (ca. 490–90 B.C.). Until now such sanctuaries were known only to the south of Pompeii, at Fondo Iozzino, Bottaro, and Sant'Abbondio, but they must also have existed in the large area on the slopes of Mount Vesuvius.

The picture that has emerged of this landscape now also includes information about the pre-Roman period that comes from the first systematic excavation of the agricultural terrain around the farmhouse at Villa Regina in Boscoreale. The evidence there includes a ceramic fragment from the Archaic period (ca. 575–490 B.C.) and about thirty others that date from the end of the fourth to the second century B.C. They indicate the presence of agricultural activity in this area from at least the Samnite period, and this data is confirmed by evidence of a Samnite phase (dating to the second rather than the third century B.C.) in the building history of the Villa dei Misteri, about a half mile northwest of Pompeii.[10] The strongest, albeit indirect, evidence of agricultural activity in this area during the pre-Roman period is the discovery that the farmland was sectioned off into what was a true *limitatio*, long before the Romans used the term. This can be deduced from observing the alignment of the Via di Mercurio and the urban plan of Regio VI in Pompeii with the planimetric axes of certain villas, for example the Villa dei Misteri and the Villa di Diomede, that are known to have existed before the establishment of the Roman colony in 81 B.C. The dating of the Villa di Diomede to before 81 B.C. is based on the fact that its northern side is bisected by the construction, certainly in the early colonial period, about 81–70 B.C., of the so-called Via delle Tombe, which leaves the northwest corner of the city through the Porta Ercolano.[11]

All this confirms that the land that extends from the north side of Pompeii and up the slopes of Vesuvius was populated in the prehistoric and Archaic periods and was cultivated systematically before the founding of Sulla's Roman colony at Pompeii. A date at the end of the fourth or beginning of the third century B.C.—which corresponds with an important phase in the urban development of Pompeii—is plausible based on material excavated in the area around Villa Regina.[12] How far this agricultural division (a Samnitic *limitatio*) extended is not known. The farmhouse of Villa Regina, which dates to the colonial period, is included in it, but no equally useful information has come down from the earlier, private excavations. In other areas on the volcano's slopes—Torre del Greco–Herculaneum, Terzigno, San Giuseppe, Ottaviano, and Somma Vesuviana—settlements of farmhouses existed at relatively high altitudes (about 650 to 1,000 feet above sea level) on rises separated by the beds of streams that flowed from the base of the volcano's cone. One of them, at Somma Vesuviana, had a portico with tufa columns and four-sided Italic-Ionic capitals that dates to the end of the second or the beginning of the first century B.C. An inscription in Oscan, the language of the Samnites, from the area of Somma Vesuviana also documents the presence of a public road that traveled up the mountain.[13] Even though the inscription probably pertains to the *territorium* of Nola, north of Vesuvius, rather than Pompeii, it is without doubt evidence of a system of public roads in this area as early as the Samnite period (second century B.C.). It might even refer specifically to a section of road that came from Pompeii and followed a route on the mountainside that was later replicated by a modern, still existing thoroughfare.

Later archaeological evidence from the Roman period (first century B.C. to A.D. 79) indicates that these country houses were almost all dedicated to producing wine (and to a lesser extent olive oil), which would probably also have been the area's principal product in earlier times.[14] Evidence of locally made amphorae for wine survives from as early as the Hellenistic era, or the fourth to second century B.C. A varietal originally from Sicily (where it was called *Murgentina*) was grown so profusely in the region that it came to be called *Vitis pompeiana*. In the first century both Columella (*On Agriculture* 3.2.10, 27) and Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 14.22, 25, 34, 35) noted that *Gemina minor*, a grape from the Aminea family, flourished on Mount Vesuvius as well as on the hills around Sorrento and despite its limited production was judged to be the best in the world.[15] They also mentioned *Vitis holconia*, named for one of Pompeii's most prominent families, and *Vitis vennuncula*, which was found in the area between Sorrento and Pompeii as well. Both had good yields but were of middling quality, equal to *Murgentina* in the classification of ancient wines.

This evidence confirms the importance of wine making in the area around Pompeii from at least the late Samnite period (fourth to second century B.C.), a fact that is reiterated by the important presence of the cult of Dionysus at Pompeii: there was, for example, a sanctuary dedicated to the god of wine at Sant'Abbondio from at least the late Samnite period and perhaps earlier. Although the famous painting from the *lararium*, a shrine for holding images of household gods, in the Casa del Centenario in Pompeii that shows Dionysus standing before a vine-covered mountain has been called into question, the literary sources that describe Vesuvius as a mountain crowned almost to its summit with grapevines cannot be doubted. The vines were so plentiful that Spartacus's soldiers used ropes made of vines to escape from the Roman soldiers who had trapped them on the mountain.[16]

Even if the presses, wine cellars, and agricultural tools uncovered by the early, private excavations around Pompeii were not what they were looking for, these objects provide abundant information about the production methods at these country estates at the time of Vesuvius's eruption in A.D. 79. More recent excavations like the one at Villa Regina offer irrefutable evidence of the classic arrangement

9. Lever press used in wine making in the Villa dei Misteri, Pompeii, reconstructed ca. 1932

of grape vines supported by stakes. Ample written sources also record the details of grape cultivation, from the dates of the harvests to the type of wine produced and the number of stakes available.

Several of the rural complexes offer evidence that in addition to agricultural buildings they included at least part-time residences for the landowners. The houses were furnished with baths, porticoes, *triclinia* (formal dining rooms), and mosaic and painted decorations, some of great artistry and quality like the frescoes in what is called the Second Style of Roman painting (ca. 60–20 B.C.) in the Villa dei Misteri, the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, and the villa at Terzigno and the Third Style frescoes (ca. 20 B.C.–A.D. 20) at the Villa of Agrippa Postumus at Boscotrecase (several of which are also in the Metropolitan Museum). Decorative sculpture found at some of these villas indicates that as early as the first colonial period and perhaps also in the Samnite era (third to second century B.C.) they were more than just housing for agricultural workers and that the landowners lived in them for large amounts of time. Literary sources also tell of absentee owners, Roman aristocrats like Cicero or Agrippa Postumus, who had bought older villas, probably the ones with the best views, and remodeled or adapted them to be used for their leisure. Yet these cases were definitely in the minority. Pompeii was nowhere near as popular or influential as Puteoli (modern Pozzuoli) or Cumae (Cuma), to the north near Naples, and the countryside around Pompeii was not Baiae (Baia), where rich and famous Romans flocked to bathe in the healing waters of the Phlegraean Fields. Some of the owners of the country houses north of Pompeii were certainly illustrious Roman nobles who sought out the peace and quiet of the countryside, but the majority of those who decorated the walls of their residences with Second Style

10. Mosaic from the baths in a villa constructed after A.D. 79 at Boscoreale, 1901

paintings must have been prominent members of the new local colonial aristocracy. The houses ranged from the humblest agricultural residences to grand vacation villas. At one end of the scale was Villa Regina, which had only one *triclinium* in addition to the areas for living and wine production. At the other was the villa said to have been used by Poppaea Sabina, the emperor Nero's second wife, in Oplontis (modern Torre Annunziata), where the original *torcularium*, or wine pressing room, was greatly reduced in size to make room for residential quarters near the swimming pool. There were very few houses like Poppaea's villa in the region, however, and most of those were located along the coast. Certainly some villas were designed from the outset for pleasure rather than as working farms and were really pseudo urban villas. One example is the Villa dei Papiri at Herculaneum; if there was any agricultural activity there it involved raising fish. And unlike what happened at Oplontis, the owners of the Villa dei Misteri not only jealously preserved their old and splendid wall paintings but also maintained the villa's original function as a place to make wine (see fig. 9). It is a great pity that the villa's wine cellars have never been completely excavated.

The relatively modest dimensions of the majority of these villa complexes and their very numbers across this area (at Cava Ranieri, for example, in the hamlet of Boccia al Mauro near Terzigno, at least four farmhouses have been identified) indicate that they were the centers of relatively small farms.[17] Originally it was thought that the average size of these farms was 100 *iugeri* (about 60 acres), an area calculated on the basis of the number and capacity of the *dolia*, or wine jars, found in their cellars. This estimate, however, has been called into question with the excavation at Villa Regina, where there were only eighteen *dolia* and a vineyard estimated at 17 *iugeri*.

How was this landscape dotted with villas configured? As evidence accumulates, the area seems more and more likely to have been what the Greek geographer and historian Strabo (ca. 63 B.C.–after A.D. 21) described in his *Geography* (5.4, 8) as a "continuous succession of buildings and cultivated fields." It has been assumed that this valuable economic region corresponded to the *pagus*, or district, called Augustus Felix Suburbanus in Pompeiian inscriptions, including one that attributes to its inhabitants the construction of a bank of seats in the amphitheater. Yet the case is not so clear and rests on inductive reasoning. Even if this *pagus* did exist as early as the Samnite period, it was certainly renamed along with the rest of the city when the new Roman colony was dedicated. Furthermore, though *Felix* (Latin for "happy," "fortunate," or "prosperous") was the epithet of Lucius Cornelius Sulla, the Roman conqueror of Pompeii, it would also have accurately described the fertility of the area. The other valuable Pompeiian territory, the coastal area including the port, was very likely called, as is suggested in inscriptions, (*pagus*) Saliniensis, or the Salt Makers District.

The eruption of A.D. 79 buried the city of Pompeii along with all of the surrounding territory. The villas, vineyards, orchards, and gardens, with their famous Pompeiian onions, all ended up under many feet of pumice and gray mud. The desolation of the countryside lasted only briefly, however. Although the city was not reconstructed, the land, now divided between Nocera and Nola, was returned to cultivation,[18] in part thanks to the fertile volcanic soil so well known to the ancients and extolled by both Strabo (*Geography* 5.4.3) and Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 18.110–11).[19] Here and there new villas, some of them luxurious, were erected on the outcroppings of ancient ruins (see fig. 10), but they looked out over a completely changed landscape. The new road built in the second century ran straight across the fields that now covered Pompeii, and for a long time the coast, with its once crowded port and sumptuous seaside villas owned by wealthy Romans, remained deserted and silent.

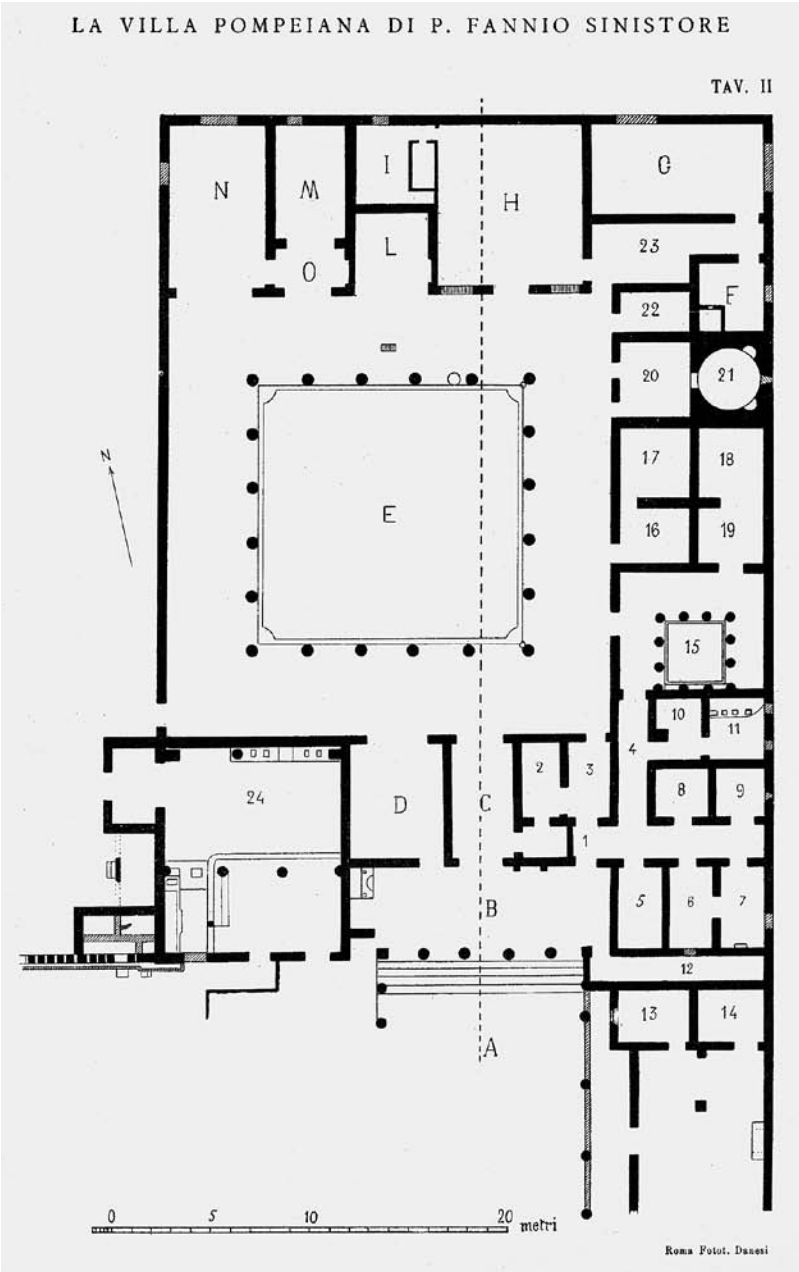
New Perspectives on the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale

BETTINA BERGMANN

As the grass grows over a deserted excavation, so the facts which come to light with an archaeological discovery are quickly overgrown with errors and insecure memories, if they are not immediately recorded," Otto Brendel wrote in his review of Phyllis Williams Lehmann's *Roman Wall Paintings from Boscoreale in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. "This, therefore, is a very useful publication," Brendel continued. "For the first time the *disjecta membra* of the villa of Fannius Synistor are exhibited together in good illustrations, and with well documented descriptions."[20] Published fifty-three years after the villa was dismantled and reburied in 1900, Lehmann's magisterial study remains unsurpassed for its meticulous observations and exhaustive iconographic research, through which she revealed the richness of the illusionistic frescoes. The nineteen fresco sections that were the subject of her book had instantly engaged the public when they went on display at the Metropolitan Museum in 1906, and they remain today among the most famous and paradoxical of Roman paintings.

In the half century since Lehmann's study, grass has indeed grown over the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor, and facts have become obscured. Yet knowledge has also advanced. In 1987 Maxwell Anderson published (in an issue of the Metropolitan's *Bulletin*) an axonometric rendering that showed, through black-and-white line drawings, the location of the various frescoes throughout the rooms. Since then, numerous excavations, articles, and exhibitions have enriched and altered our knowledge of social life in the Roman region called Campania, most notably the discoveries of the elaborate seaside villa at Oplontis (modern Torre Annunziata, less than two miles west of Pompeii), whose frescoes suggest a common workshop; the

11–12. Frescoes of Room H in the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, Boscoreale, ca. 1900 (see also fig. 41). Photographs: Antikensammlung, Berlin



13. Felice Barnabei (Italian, 1842–1922). *La Villa Pompeiana di P. Fannio Sinistore*, 1901

smaller, rustic Villa Regina at Boscoreale; the three villas at nearby Terzigno; and similar architectural frescoes at Baia and on the Palatine Hill in Rome. Scholarly work on contemporary dwellings such as the Villa dei Misteri and the Casa del Labirinto in Pompeii offers a wealth of comparative material. Despite evident similarities between these sites, every room in every villa possesses a distinctive character.

The impetus for this publication was the conservation of the Metropolitan Museum panels for the purpose of their installation in the new Greek and Roman Galleries that opened in 2007. In the process, further aspects of the painted walls emerged, and it was decided to bring the potential of modern technology to these insights, as well as to the fundamental picture drawn by Lehmann, by constructing a virtual model of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. All Roman frescoes were, of course, inseparable parts of a building. Since a physical reunification of the surviving fragments will likely never happen, only through a virtual model can one imagine experiencing the frescoes within the lived spaces of the villa. Here, for the first time, the painted walls and mosaic floors can be seen together within an architectural setting.

As often happens in the process of conservation, the act of reconstructing the villa, too, has brought to light several "modern errors and insecure memories" and demanded a return to the earliest records, thereby correcting our inherited picture of the villa. In addition to excavation reports and newspaper articles, the early records include photographs (now in the Berlin Antikensammlung) that were made in July and October 1900, before the frescoes were removed from the walls (see figs. 11, 12, and also figs. 84, 85). Above all, no study of the villa would be possible without the invaluable documentation made by the Italian archaeologist Felice Barnabei. He produced the only extant floor plan of the villa (fig. 13) and published a detailed description of the archaeological site and its frescoes in 1901, shortly after the villa itself was reburied. Two years later sixty-eight sections of the villa's painted walls were dispersed through auction in Paris to more than eight collections in Europe and the United States. Barnabei himself was actually engaged in an act of reconstruction. In the fall of 1900 he spent weeks examining the recently detached frescoes in a crowded storeroom at the Boscoreale train station, observing the frescoes left in situ at the excavated site, and studying comparable paintings in Pompeii and at the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples. This was far from the "eyewitness" account it is often assumed to be, making all the more remarkable Barnabei's ability to capture, at times in rapturous prose, the magnificent visual effects of the interior spaces of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor.

Anyone who has attempted to convey the experience of moving through the interior of the villa has inevitably marveled at the artful marriage of

painting and architecture. The recontextualization aims to evoke this experience by presenting new ways of looking at the villa and posing new questions. To date, scholars have focused on the north wing of the main floor (see fig. 37), from which the majority of the frescoes came. The frescoes, in turn, have been examined as individual panels and, in a few rare cases, as three-dimensional rooms, with attention directed primarily to the identification of the depicted buildings, objects, and figures or to the use of Euclidean perspective. The new virtual model of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor (fig. 14) re--creates a Roman domestic environment with an immediacy and accuracy that allows viewers to imagine themselves moving through the embellished rooms. Where the information was available, line drawings have been introduced to fill in the missing parts in the frescoes (see figs. 39–42, 49, 53). The effect of the frescoes within the original designs is quite different from the impression they make hanging as separate panels on the blank walls of museums.

Lehmann recognized that the illusionistic frescoes in the *cubiculum nocturnum*, or bedroom, from Boscoreale that are installed in the Metropolitan allude to the environment of a rustic villa (see figs. 55–57), but much less was understood of that environment in 1953. Today, evidence of plant, animal, and human life, all so well preserved by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in A.D. 79, is collected in Boscoreale itself in the Antiquarium of Man and Environment in the Territory of Vesuvius, founded in 1991. New attention to the broader physical context of the frescoes shows how in planning and executing their designs the Roman architects, painters, and landscapers thought in terms of inhabited spaces that were experienced *over time*. Factors such as season, time of day, and whether a person strolled, entertained, or slept in an interior affected its decoration.

The Villa of P. Fannius Synistor was only partially excavated. It consisted of three stories and included baths, agricultural quarters, and an underground passage with a stable. The surviving evidence indicates

14. Virtual model of the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor, Boscoreale

15. Fragmentary jug inscribed *P[UBLIUS] FANNI SYNISTORIS S[EXTARIOS] xxxiiii* inside the mouth, from the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. Bronze; h. 15⅛ in. (38.5 cm), diam. 7⅜ in. (18.8 cm). Antiquarium, Boscoreale (16994)

that the villa was built shortly after 50 B.C. The eponymous Publius Fannius Synistor, who is named in the inscription on a fragmentary bronze vessel found near the wine press in the agricultural section of the villa (fig. 15), was in fact probably not its owner but rather the producer of wine or oil at the establishment. Lucius Herennius Florus, however, whose name appears on a stamp found in the villa's baths (fig. 16), may indeed have owned the complex at one time.[21]

The house and its outbuildings sat surrounded by orderly rows of fruit trees and vines on a country road a mile and a quarter north of Pompeii. Nearby, the famous Villa della Pisanella nestled among further vineyards and orchards. By the late first century B.C. this area, the *pagus* (district) Augustus Felix Suburbanus, must have been one of the most intensively cultivated parts of Italy. The slopes of Vesuvius are barren today, but two thousand years ago the mountainside presented an array of scenery: thick green forests grew below the summit, farther down wild animals roamed through oak and beech groves, and on the lower slopes regularly planted fields exploited the fertile volcanic soil. The economic and social life of the region took place in a network of small landholdings, or *villae rusticae*, that were either run by families or overseen by slaves. In addition to buildings housing agricultural operations, mainly wine making and olive oil production and servants' quarters, several of these villas boasted richly decorated residential quarters for the occasional visits of landlords.

16. Stamp (top and bottom) inscribed *L*HER*FLO* (for Lucius Herennius Florus), from the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor. Bronze, w. 3⅜ in. (8.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1930 (30.11.2)

When Vesuvius erupted in the fall of A.D. 79, most of the inhabitants of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor appear to have escaped. A porter caught in the entry (Room C on the plan, fig. 13) was not so lucky, and a horse perished in the underground stable. The eruption destroyed the two upper floors of the villa,[22] which must have offered abundant light and ventilation along with sweeping views of surrounding estates, the blue waters of the Bay of Naples to the west, and the mountain ranges to the north, south, and east. The villa may have been larger than Barnabei's plan indicates. The agricultural section and the underground cryptoporticus were not fully excavated in 1899–1900, when the primary focus was the central level with its impressive Corinthian peristyle and lavish north wing housing rooms that must have accommodated the patron and his guests (see fig. 37).

Compared to nearby villas of the time, however, the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor was a compact complex with a relatively small farming operation that probably served the villa rather than producing exports for the market. The Villa della Pisanella and Villa Regina, both also in Boscoreale, boasted more extensive storage of wine and oil (see fig. 2), and the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor had no atrium, pool, or sculpture collection, as did the opulent seaside Villa dei Papiri at Herculaneum and the villa at Oplontis.[23] Yet to judge from its decor, the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor was far from modest. In addition to a fully heated bath complex and an interior garden with marble fountains, the excavations revealed that it was decorated with the highest quality Roman frescoes ever found.

Visitors entered a monumental forecourt on the south side of the villa and ascended five high steps of Vesuvian stone (A and B on the plan). At the top of the steps rose four tall "marble" columns (built of reticulate masonry and covered in white stucco to simulate stone). Frescoes between the columns on the parapet wall alongside the walkway leading to the

stairs depicted illusionistic trees, birds, and metal vessels, and garden frescoes also embellished the front wall of the villa, so that the exterior facade must have seemed to disappear into the natural plantings. Upon reaching the top step, an attentive visitor might have noted an inscription carved into the column just to the left recording that on May 9, A.D. 12, an auction had taken place, but whether this marked the public sale of a household slave, a beast of burden, or perhaps the villa itself is not known. In the west corner of the airy entry space (B), visitors could pay respects at the household shrine (*lararium*). It must have contained miniature statues of the domestic gods, which had apparently already been removed in antiquity.

From the entrance visitors entered Room C, the *fauces* ("jaws") of the house (figs. 17, 18), where the walls were painted to emulate white marble columns and thin slabs of imported precious stones, a new fashion that according to Pliny was introduced in Rome in the first century B.C. (*Natural History* 36.48–50).[24] From this entrance hall the light-filled heart of the villa came into view. The effect must have been spectacular. Majestic Corinthian columns supported a glittering ceiling that imitated ivory and gold leaf (so-called chryselephantine work).

17. Fragment of a fresco from the east wall of Room C of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. 5 ft. 8½ in. x 5 ft. 7 in. (1.74 x 1.7 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris (P102 [MND616])

18. Virtual model of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, looking north from inside Room C to the peristyle (E). The fresco fragments on the right wall are in the Musée du Louvre, Paris (P101 [MND615] and see fig. 17).

19. Virtual model of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, looking north across the peristyle (E). No attempt has been made in the model to re-create either the plants that would have filled the peristyle or the marble fountains.

20. Corinthian column with leaves, wheat, and pomegranates. Fragment of a fresco from the east end of the south wall of the peristyle (E) of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. 35¾ x 25½ in. (90.8 x 64.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1903 (03.14.1)

Underfoot, the pavement sparkled with tiny pieces of colorful stone. At the corners of the open space planted with hedges, bushes, and flowers, marble fountains spurted jets of water.

This was a place for movement, and the decor provided a rhythmic succession of prospects for the viewer. One of the most rewarding aspects of walking through a villa, Roman writers said, was the variety of views enjoyed during the customary *ambulatio*. Leafy or marine vistas framed by columns were coveted benefits of *otium*, that state of leisure, ease, and repose that combined physical pleasure and intellectual stimulation.[25] In the late first century B.C. the architect Vitruvius emphasized that attention should be paid to the experience of space, specifically through optical refinements of *eurythmia*, namely rhythm, direction, and structure (*On Architecture* 7.5.2). Through the harmonious arrangement of the individual parts of a building, a beautiful impression (*venustas species*) and a proper appearance (*commodus aspectus*) in turn engender pleasure of the senses (*voluptas*). In the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, axiality and symmetry coordinated the real with the simulated, the rational with the imaginative, to render views with appealing associations.[26]

Imagine strolling along the colonnades of the peristyle (fig. 19). Painted simulations expanded the space. On the walls, twenty-two fictive Corinthian columns replicated their built counterparts. The fragment that survives from the south wall (fig. 20) exemplifies the way that painters juxtaposed nature and the man-made. Green leaves, a sheaf of golden grain, and a cluster of reddish pomegranates materialize from behind the sculpted white acanthus leaves of a marble Corinthian capital. While the painted columns mirrored the actual columns standing in front of them, the golden wheat complemented the gilded rosettes glinting in the ceiling immediately above. Between the painted capitals of the twenty-two columns swung copious garlands laden with ripe fruits. At first glance, the steady sequence of vertical columns and horizontal garlands creates an impression of sameness. For the person who stopped to examine details, however, that uniformity quickly unraveled. This is best observed along the west wall, which unlike the other three sides of the peristyle lacked any door openings to interrupt the continuous design (fig. 21). Although painted high on the wall, each garland displayed a unique combination of branches, leaves, fruits, and flowers (see figs. 22,

23). Using varying brushstrokes and multihued pigments, the painters captured nuances of specific shapes and textures: white lilies with delicate petals, eye-catching red oleander blossoms, large vine shoots and shiny little globes of yellowish grapes, green and brown pinecones, all accurately depicted and gathered together in silver rings at the midpoint of each garland.[27] One wonders if on certain days in October the yield of the autumn harvest hung in fresh festoons between the real columns of the peristyle, swaying gently in the breeze and emitting sweet scents.

21. Virtual model of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, looking north along the west side of the peristyle (E). The three fresco panels at the top left are in the Villa Kérylos (see fig. 23). The floors would have been white with colorful pieces of stone.

22. Corinthian column and garland. Fragment of a fresco from the south end of the west wall of the peristyle (E) of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. 44½ x 106¼ in. (113 x 270 cm). Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (s.n. 2)

23. Garland and frieze with centaurs. Fragment of a fresco from the west wall of the peristyle (E) of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. 48⅞ x 96⅞ in. (124 x 246 cm). Villa Kérylos, Beaulieu-sur-Mer, France

A podium imitating yellow marble from North Africa (*giallo antico*) ran around the lower walls of the peristyle. On it was displayed an array of luxury vessels in gold, silver, copper, and bronze (see fig. 24), as well as marble basins and statues and even the hat and mantle of the god Mercury. The emphatic materialism attests the fashion during the Late Republic for collecting and also for commissioning

24. Vase (calyx krater) on a marble block with palm fronds behind. Fragment of a fresco from the west end of the north wall of the peristyle (E) of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. 58 x 46 in. (147.3 x 116.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1903 (03.14.3). The original jet black background has faded.

25. Virtual model of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, southwest corner of the peristyle (E). For the fresco fragments, see figs. 22, 26, 27. The fragment with the garland at the far right is in the Villa Kérylos, Beaulieu-sur-Mer, France.

26–27. Fresco fragments from the west end of the south wall of the peristyle (E) of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. Left: marble table with athletic prizes. 48⅜ x 87⅜ in. (123 x 222 cm). Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (s.n. 6). Right: globe with a gnomon on top. 28⅜ x 19⅝ in. (72.1 x 49.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1903 (03.14.2)

reproductions of exotic objects, both natural and man-made.[28] Set against a burnished black surface, these vivid objects simultaneously receded and threw back reflections. In the southwest corner of the peristyle (fig. 25), two large (painted) marble tables exhibited athletic prizes of a palm branch, victors' ribbons, and trophies (fig. 26). On a nearby wall a painted globe rendered with a gnomon on top and latitudes and longitudes along its sides (fig. 27) faced an actual, functioning marble sundial standing in the garden. (Examples of this novel state-of-the-art timekeeping device were found in a few other elegant Campanian villas; the current whereabouts of the sundial and the marble fountains removed from the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor are unknown.)[29] As sunlight shifted between the columns,

28. Virtual model of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, north side of the peristyle (E). For the fresco fragments, see figs. 24, 34, 35.

the play of shadow and reflection on the polished black walls must have blurred the difference between real and painted objects. What is more, the painted surfaces were so highly reflective of any light thrown upon them that viewers could never lose sight of themselves within the visual field.

From floor to ceiling the peristyle walls offered an infinite variety of animal, mineral, and vegetable forms. The lifelike movement did not end with the garlands but continued to the supposedly static architectural features in the frieze directly below, where agitated centaurs reared up on their hind legs, pawing the air to present a sacrificial dish or to brandish a staff. These white modillions (ornamental brackets typically found beneath a cornice in the Corinthian order) project forward, casting shadows onto a purple frieze. Such animated details recur again and again in the fictive architecture of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor.

On the north wall, however, the carefully crafted illusions of the peristyle were challenged by a series of wide doorways (fig. 28, and see figs. 19, 21). Column shafts suddenly terminated, exposing views through rooms into the real landscape beyond. Such contradictions might seem jarring to present-day viewers, but ancient Romans clearly enjoyed visual paradoxes. As Phyllis Lehmann explained, the ancient spectator "preferred to ignore those structural openings registered by his eyes and to maintain his intellectual concept. Decoratively speaking, those openings had ceased to exist for him. This cardinal point cannot be overemphasized to the modern spectator for whom this alien attitude constitutes a barrier to understanding, let alone enjoyment, that is seldom overcome. Yet, overcome it must be, if one is really to see this house."[30]

The peristyle was the heart of the dwelling that opened onto discrete spheres. Visitors entered through the impressive forecourt (A and B) and *fauces* (C) to circulate around the spacious peristyle (E), finally stopping at one of the northern reception rooms (N, M, H, G). Other persons such as workers, servants, or messengers probably followed alternate routes through small doors in the entry

29. City wall with a gate and two towers. Fragment of a mosaic from the small peristyle (15) in the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. W. 40⅛ in. (102 cm). Musée Royal de Mariemont, Morlanwelz, Belgium (Nr. B 100)

30. Virtual model of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, the exedra (L), looking north. The fresco fragment on the back wall is in the Musée Royal de Mariemont, Morlanwelz, Belgium (R61); the two fragments on the right are in the Musée de Picardie, Amiens (see fig. 32). For the left wall, see fig. 31.

31. Garland with a bull's head, a snake emerging from a basket, and a Silenus mask. Fragment of a fresco from the west wall of Room L of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. 77 x 107 in. (195.6 x 271.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1903 (03.14.4). This image shows the fresco with the modern restoration of the upper left corner in place.

space into the *pars rustica* (24), to a stairway leading upstairs (1), or to the steps down into the cryptoporticus (12). Servants could come and go from the outside through this underground area, which housed a horse stall and the hypocaust system that heated the entire wing. The objects found in the rooms (now dispersed) add to our knowledge of life in the villa.[31] The kitchen areas of the eastern wing (13, 14) were outfitted with a grain mill, an oven, a stove, frying pans, and many other utilitarian items. In the small peristyle in this section of the villa (15), near the latrine (11), was a black and white floor mosaic depicting a city wall with gates and crenellated towers (fig. 29). Toward the north end of the east wing was a complete set of baths offering hot and cold water (18–22), where a gold ring and the brick stamp naming the possible owner Lucius Herennius Florus (see fig. 16) were found. In the agricultural area, a wine press (*torcularium*), olive press (*trapetum*), and farming tools indicated active production. The functional objects could be quite ornate: one bronze container had a decorative appliqué in the form of Bacchus, god of wine, covered with silver leaves. Another bronze vessel, used as a measuring cup, bears the inscription on its lip stating its capacity as thirteen liters and naming the producer, P. Fannius Synistor, from whom the villa received its modern name (see fig. 15).

The quarters surrounding the peristyle thus housed a range of activities, with the areas devoted to the labor needed to sustain a farm and a home effectively masked by the visual unity and symmetry of the decor. An example of the carefully balanced layout can be seen in the so-called Room of Musical Instruments (D), on the south end of the house, and the exedra (L), a recess or niche on the north, which faced each other directly across the open garden space. Both rooms were laid with white floor mosaics, and the low-lying garlands painted on their walls echoed the visual rise and fall of festoons in the peristyle. The garlands and their accessories in the two rooms "spoke to each other," celebrating Bacchus with flora and objects specific to his cult. Near the center of each wall in the exedra, the fresco depicted a bull's head nailed to lavish red sheathing (see figs. 30, 31). The animal looks amazingly alive and quite unlike the traditional, skinned oxen skulls (*bucrania*) commemorating sacrifices at ancient shrines. The hole in the forehead and the slightly open eyes suggest that it has just been decapitated for sacrifice. A string of pearls is wrapped around the horns, and the heavy swags tied to the ears fall in long arcs across the walls, their thick clusters of grapes, pinecones, acorns, poppies, and oak leaves turning in the shifting light. The vegetation adds a temporary dimension that together with the ambient light produces the illusion of a moment, as the sun strikes objects, casting shadows and situating the viewer in an alternate reality. On the fresco fragment from the back (north) wall (see fig. 30), a satyr mask with startling eyes and gaping mouth presents an arresting contrast to the bull's head above. To the left a dead hare dangles beside heavy golden grapes, and a little farther on a shiny bronze cymbalum connects to illuminated brown pinecones above. And so it goes around the room. Below the bull's head on the left (west) wall (fig. 31) a snake with open eyes and jaws slithers from a *cista mystica*, a basket used in Bacchic initiation ceremonies. To the right of that, a laughing Silenus mask and a cymbalum catch the eye. On the opposite (east) wall a tympanum and cymbalum (fig. 32) evoke the music of Bacchic revelry.

32. Garland with a tympanum and a cymbalum. Fragment of a fresco from the left side of the east wall of Room L of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. 72⅞ x 43¼ in. (185 x 110 cm). Musée de Picardie, Amiens

33. Garland and crossed flutes. Fragment of a fresco from Room D of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. 49¼ x 46½ in. (125 x 118 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris (P100 [MND614])

34–35. Winged guardian figures. Fragments of frescoes from the north wall of the peristyle (E) of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. H. of each 49⅝ in. (126 cm). Left: Musée du Louvre, Paris (P23 [MND613]; see also inside back cover); right: Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam

As if in dialogue, Room D, across the courtyard, also presented colorful simulations of inlaid stones, but assembled to different effect, with yellow ocher predominating over cinnabar red. Swags of wispy green pine needles and bulbous pinecones swung across a light yellow background; lifesize musical instruments—pairs of flutes (fig. 33) and (now lost) cymbals, castanets, a trumpet, and a syrinx—dangled at eye level. Here, as elsewhere in the villa, objects awaited their agents, in this case Bacchus's satyrs and maenads, to initiate the festivities by picking up the instruments, playing the god's rousing tunes, and spinning around the peristyle. The moment is anticipatory.

Indeed, an otherworldly theme permeated the optically enhanced spaces of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. Nowhere is this more evident than at three separate entries to the peristyle, where a person moving around the colonnades would have encountered pairs of lifesize, half-human creatures guarding doors: at the *fauces* (C), at a small door in the southwest corner, and at the entry to the magnificent Room H on the north side. Only one of the pairs survives: the winged male and female who rose from the yellow podium on either side of the door from the peristyle into H (figs. 34, 35). With their inclined postures and alert gazes, the hybrid creatures stand at attention, challenging the entrant to make eye contact while proffering an object in an extended hand, she a dish of fruit, he a sacrificial dish (*patera*). Seen first from the forecourt through the entry and then again from countless points within the peristyle (fig. 36, and see also figs. 19, 28), the custodians drew attention to the majestic figure they framed, namely, the goddess Venus painted on the back wall of Room H. Visibility was paramount in the design of this central room, which could be seen through the door and also through the two large picture windows that were exactly the width of the space between the columns before them. Walking through the peristyle, viewers could glimpse shifting groups of figures—some human, others divine—turning and gesturing against vivid red walls. The rooms are inhabited, and not just by us.

The spell intensified inside the rooms for reception, entertaining, and relaxation in the north wing (fig. 37). Entering the spacious square hall (H) for the first time must have stunned visitors, who

36. Virtual model of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, entrance to Room H on the north wall of the peristyle (E). For the fresco fragments, see figs. 34, 35, 38–41, 44–46.

37. Virtual model of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, north wing, looking northwest

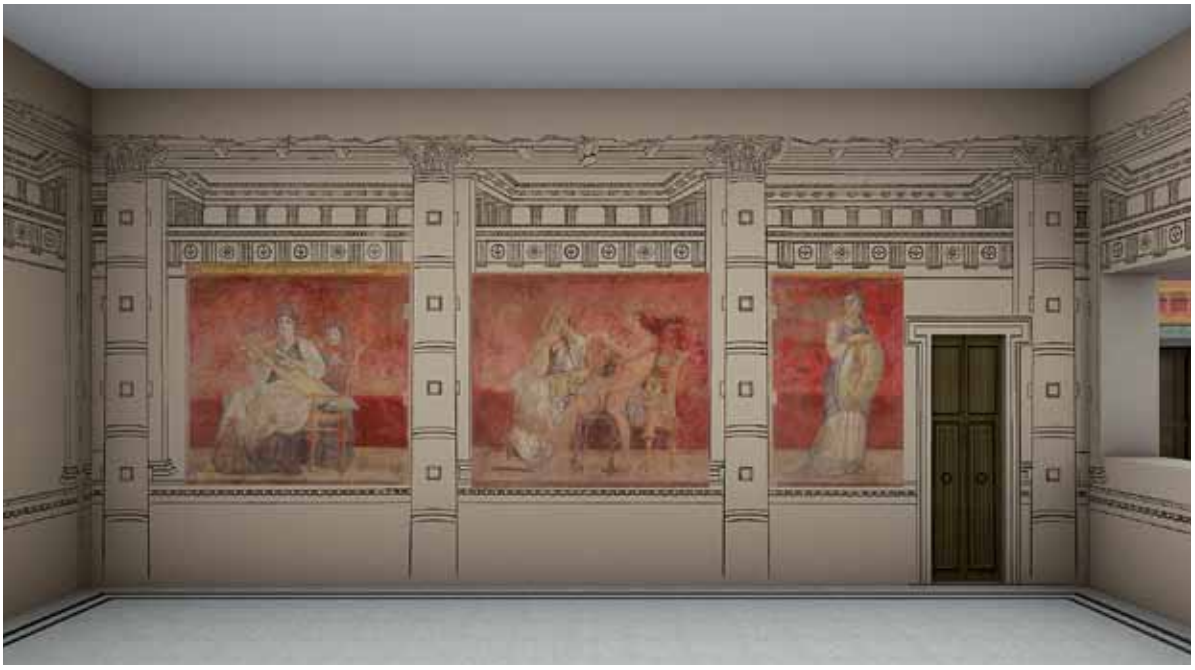
38. Venus. Fragment of a fresco from the north wall of Room H of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. 74 x 74 in. (188 x 188 cm). Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (s.n. 4)

39. Virtual model of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, Room H, looking north. For the fresco fragments, see figs. 38, 41, 44–46.

suddenly found themselves sharing space with lifesize illusions of living, breathing figures. Painted Corinthian columns continued the actual architecture of the peristyle, so that Venus appeared to step into the room. The statuesque, frontal figure in bright yellow and purple (fig. 38) was without doubt the focal point of the room. On her raised thigh the goddess balances a kneeling Eros who lifts his arm to hurl a dart, probably at Psyche, who stands before a round temple on the seashore in the right background. The two erotes beside Psyche are fishing. On the opposite shore the porch of another monumental building displays two female statues, one of them Fortuna with her horn of plenty. The rich dedications of the sanctuary testify to Venus's marine origins and to the ongoing worship of her.

Originally the picture of Venus was one of three scenes on the back wall, each set against an azure sky (fig. 39). Together, they presented a resplendent triad of divine beauty: on the left a languorous Bacchus, god of pleasure (who often joins Venus in Roman pictorial ensembles), reclined in the lap of a female companion, and on the right the Three Graces, Venus's frequent companions and the embodiment of her beauty, posed arm in arm in their customary embrace.[32] Against these cool, pastel scenes the brilliant cinnabar red walls to the east and west posed a dramatic contrast that signaled the human sphere. (A similar contrast of red walls and blue vista is found in the Villa dei Misteri, where the room with the *megalographia*, a large-scale painting depicting lifesize figures like these, opened onto a view of the

40. Virtual model of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, Room H, looking west. The fresco panel on the far wall is from the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (s.n. 5); for the fragment on the right wall, see fig. 44. When the eruption came in A.D. 79, the north end of the west wall was white and evidently still unpainted, possibly a sign of a renovation following damage from the earthquake of A.D. 62.



41. Virtual model of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, Room H, looking east. The three fresco panels are in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Rogers Fund, 1903 [03.14.5–7]); for a detail of the center scene, see cover illustration.

Bay of Naples.)[33] The large figures sit, stand, and look about as if hearing or seeing something. A few might be portraits of rulers of the Hellenistic East, but their identification continues to challenge scholars.[34] On the fresco from the west wall (fig. 40) a hunched older man, maybe a philosopher, leans on his crook and stares at a pair of elaborately attired women who seem to be engaged in conversation or a moment of mutual reflection. In the scene from the left end of the east wall (fig. 41), a seated woman in beautifully rendered white and purple garments strums a golden cithara as she and the young girl standing behind her chair look toward the entrance. In the central scene a stately, intent couple share a throne. Like their counterparts across the room they are lost either in conversation or reflection: the elaborately draped woman leans forward, legs crossed and chin on fist in a meditative pose, gazing at (or past?) the nude male, who sits back, his crossed hands resting on a golden staff. The young female

42. Virtual model of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, south wall of Room H. For the fresco fragment above the door, see fig. 43; for the panel on the right (west) wall, see fig. 40. The fragment of a painted column to the right of the door is in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Gift of C. & E. Canessa, 1908 [08.264]).

who stands facing the entrance on the right end of the wall turns her head to look back and up toward the ceiling above Venus. With her right hand she props a polished shield on her knees, and the nude youth reflected in the shield's convex surface also looks to the left, leading the viewer's eye again toward the north. The painted architectural details continued onto the south wall of H (fig. 42), framing the two large windows and the door that gave onto the peristyle, above which a grimacing, wide-eyed mask of the goat god Pan (fig. 43) formed part of the frieze that encircled the room.

43. Mask of Pan. Fragment of a fresco from the south wall of Room H of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. 16⅞ x 22½ in. (43 x 57 cm). Musée Bonnat, Bayonne (604)

The *megalographia* in Room H seems to have been not a narrative sequence but rather a series of scenes happening all at once. Figures gaze across the room, involved in a dynamic web of interaction, but the nature of that interaction remains elusive. Instinctively the eye tends to the center of an image, to things at eye level, and to the human form. In Roman rooms, however, viewers are rewarded by attending to apparently marginal details. In the upper zone of the north wall were three small pictures with wooden shutters (*pinakes*) propped on a golden cornice, each directly above a divine scene (figs. 44–46, and see fig. 39). This fascinating trio offers one key to the artful cross-referencing within the room's design. The *pinax* from above the reclining Bacchus depicts a seated female and an attendant with a shield between them, a miniature version of the central couple on the adjacent west wall, while the picture from above the Three Graces varies that grouping, with the woman sitting on a rock, a young male beside her, and an altar on the left. In the central panel of the upper register, directly above Venus, the shutters open to reveal a single female figure echoing the goddess below. The independent pictures thus corresponded to the "real" lifesize figures below. Visual links between the walls created by the echoing compositions and the gazes of the figures

44–46. Fragments of a fresco from the north wall of Room H of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor (see fig. 39). Top left and right: 16¾ x 16½ in. (42.5 x 41.9 cm), 17¼ x 17¼ in. (43.8 x 43.8 cm); The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1903 (03.14.9, 8). Below: 41¾ x 130¾ in. (106 x 332 cm); Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (s.n. 3)

are fully realized in the fictive illumination of the room, for a unifying shaft of light projects from overhead toward the entrance, introducing a permanent light source competing with the daylight filtering through that entrance. Transience is captured in a two-dimensional medium and remains frozen in place.

In the north wing the larger spaces for entertainment (H, N, and G) connected with smaller, more intimate rooms, forming three distinct suites. Within the suites lay hidden spaces (F and I) with their own windows and soothing, richly surfaced interiors (figs. 47–49). The designs of the larger rooms offered variations on the paintings of the peristyle. The east and west walls were apparent mirror images of each other, while the north wall, opposite the entrance, presented an ethereal outdoor view of grottoes and distant landscapes.

Both the builder and the painters exploited the orientation of rooms for light, air, and framed views onto fertile fields and the commanding mountain. Only the central hall, Room H, was closed to the outdoors on the north, instead receiving light through the columns of the peristyle and the large windows on the south that looked into the peristyle. In place of a window, the goddess Venus stepped from a cerulean seascape on the north wall—an arresting vision for someone walking by and expecting another real prospect through a window. The large corner rooms (N and G) made the most of their exposure, with two windows opening to the north and west and to the north and east, respectively. In both rooms, the viewer encountered successive layers of architectural illusion and contradictory visual cues.

The dining room (G) exemplified the purposeful confusion of the real and the simulated in four distinct and simultaneous prospects, two of them painted vistas and two actual views through the windows (see fig. 50).[35] The left section of the west wall (fig. 51), once illuminated by large windows on the north and east, captures essential aspects of the frescoes throughout the villa. The viewer's eye instantly meets the transfixed stare and gaping mouth of a tragic mask set upon a golden cornice. At first glance,

the green background appears to recede. On a second look, it is not airy distance but inlaid blocks of green marble on a solid wall, a Roman painter's typical play of color, space, and surface. Below, gold architectural elements project from a bright cinnabar wall. The white marble telamones and caryatids appear alive: each in a different pose, they gesture, stand, and run. From the top right edge of the adjacent wall three remarkable heads incorporated into the capitals of the Corinthian columns peer down on the viewer (fig. 52). The optical game begins again.

At the western end of the villa, Room N was painted with the familiar Corinthian colonnade, and red and yellow partition walls rose from a black podium to open into an imaginary precinct crowded with rows of large and small Doric columns. Crowning the red partition wall on either side of the large window on the north wall was a brilliant red monochrome frieze populated with temples and figures at shrines that stood above a purple frieze depicting Nereids, Tritons, erotes, and sea monsters (figs. 53, 54).[36]

Each room created an entirely different experience. The cubiculum, or bedroom (M), recently reinstalled in the Metropolitan Museum (see fig. 80 and also fig. 98), offers a rare opportunity to occupy a relatively complete interior from the villa. The room was divided into an antechamber (O), a central space, and a vaulted area for a couch. At first sight the east and west walls seem to be identical, but again, closer observation reveals them to be analogues rather than exact duplicates (figs. 55, 56).[37] Statues, buildings, masks, and endless other details

47. Virtual model of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, Room F, looking east. The three fresco fragments are in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Rogers Fund, 1903 [03.14.10–12]).

48. Fresco panel from the west wall of Room I of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. 6 ft. 11½ in. x 10 ft. 3¼ in. (2.12 x 3.13 m). Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels

49. Virtual model of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, Room I, looking north. The fresco fragment on the back wall (along with another, similar fragment from the south wall) is in the Musée Royal de Mariemont, Morlanwelz, Belgium (R58); for the panel on the left wall, see fig. 48.

50. Virtual model of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, Room G, looking southwest. The fresco fragment on the south (left) wall is in the Musée Royal de Mariemont, Morlanwelz, Belgium (R56; see also fig. 52); the three fragments on the west (right) wall are in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (s.n. 1; see also fig. 51).

52. Three column capitals with human heads. Detail of a fresco fragment from the south wall of Room G of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor (see fig. 50)

51. Fresco panel from the west wall of Room G of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. 11 ft. ⅝ in. x 3 ft. 11¼ in. (3.37 x 1.2 m). Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (see fig. 50 and back cover)

show the immense variety to be found within the scenes. For someone standing in the room, the overall framework of a podium, Corinthian columns, and a cornice creates a coherent space, yet relations between nearby objects and distant structures challenge the putative boundaries between inside and outside. Masks and ritual offerings operate as "shifters," transition points between realms. This is clearest on the north wall (fig. 57), where on either side of the window is an outdoor scene with a grotto, a hill, and a trellised arbor supporting clusters of ripe

53. Virtual model of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, Room N, looking north. The fresco fragments are in the Musée Royal de Mariemont, Morlanwelz, Belgium (R59, R60; see fig. 54).

purple grapes. With the wooden shutters open, the scenes either contrasted with or continued views of the real landscape outside. The window seems to sever the top of a yellow panel that recalls materials such as parchment, marble, or metal; on its ambiguous surface emerges a mirage of bridges, colonnades, towers, and fishermen, another alternative to the landscape offered through the window.[38] Outside and inside, reality and simulation vied for attention. Indeed, the frescoes in this small room exhibit an entire range of materials derived from nature: wood, gold, silver, ivory, marble, glass, ripe fruit, along with the virtuoso human craftsmanship that shaped them.

54. Fragment of a fresco from the north wall of Room N of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. 31⅛ x 28⅜ in. (79 x 72 cm). Musée Royal de Mariemont, Morlanwelz, Belgium (R60)

One of the continuing puzzles of Boscoreale is the fact that some of the painted simulations seem to prefigure the existence of actual architecture and artifacts. Just to the right of the window on the north wall of the cubiculum is a bowl filled with peaches, quinces, green almonds, and twigs (fig. 58), all visible thanks to the technology of transparent blown glass, which had not yet been introduced in Italy. The detail recalls the observation Seneca made in A.D. 65, decades after these frescoes were painted, that "fruits are much larger when seen through a glass" (*Naturales quaestiones* 1.3.9).

The luxury of detail can only be appreciated over time. Again and again, lines converge in a sacred edifice, leading us to the image of a goddess. Everywhere one looks there are signs of worship and sacrifice in progress: glowing coals for burning incense on altars, columns bearing statues of Diana-Hecate and wrapped with yellow ribbons, sacred portals strung with garlands, "Adonis gardens," broken terracotta

pots planted with lettuce and fennel, ribbons and fruit left as offerings at thresholds. Miniature friezes over painted doors depict women partaking in religious ceremonies. Parading along the tops of gates and walls is a continuous row of phalluses.[39] In the painters' art of repetition and echoing, the same things appear at varying scales and in different planes of reality. The subject of the decor is the moment, and it is a moment of celebration. Upon exiting this space, a visitor passed through painted walls framing the door to the peristyle (figs. 59, 60) that offered a contrast to these spatial illusions; the solid walls of purple, red, green, and yellow stonework each display a vertical arrangement of an elegant metal amphora and a suspended garland with ribbons, ritual signs seen elsewhere in the room.

In the villa, distinctions among sacred, urban, and domestic spheres were obscured. The rich

55–56. Fresco panels from the west and east walls of the cubiculum, or bedroom (M), of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. W. of each 19 ft. (5.79 m). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1903 (03.14.13a–g)

57 (above left). Fresco from the north wall of the cubiculum (M) of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. W. 10 ft. 10 in. (3.3 m). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1903 (03.14.13a–g)

59–60 (above right). Fresco panels from either side of the doorway on the south wall of the cubiculum (M) of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor. H. of each 9 ft. ¼ in. (2.75 m). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1903 (03.14.13a–g)

vocabulary of architecture and objects transported the viewer into a magical world, where bejeweled red columns wound with golden tendrils emerge from calyxes of gilded acanthus leaves. Such forms had decorated the festive constructions of Hellenistic kings, but more immediate parallels are found in dwellings in Italy of the late first century B.C.[40] Similarly bejeweled monoliths, for example, adorned the contemporary villa at Oplontis. In the cubiculum from Boscoreale the metallic vines wind around the column right beside the "real" vines growing wild over the rocky grotto. But look closer: even the grotto is artifice, for the marble basin is fed by a jet whose plumbing travels back under the hill.[41]

58. Detail of fig. 57

The frescoes in the villa were never painted over and may have been on view for more than a century. What would it have been like for a person to see these walls every day over a period of months, years, decades? These paintings speak to us today because they are about experience and perception, and just as Roman inhabitants did, we can place ourselves within their finely crafted illusions. With exposure over time, the painted interior promotes different modes of seeing and of being in space, in this case a space also inhabited by gods.

More than a century ago, Felice Barnabei captured his own experience of the frescoes from the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor in exalted prose. Fifty years later, Phyllis Lehmann added learned insights to the picture. This visualization of the frescoes in their architectural context offers a fresh view and invites future exploration of a lost, now reimagined, Roman villa.

The Conservation of the Frescoes from Boscoreale in the Metropolitan Museum

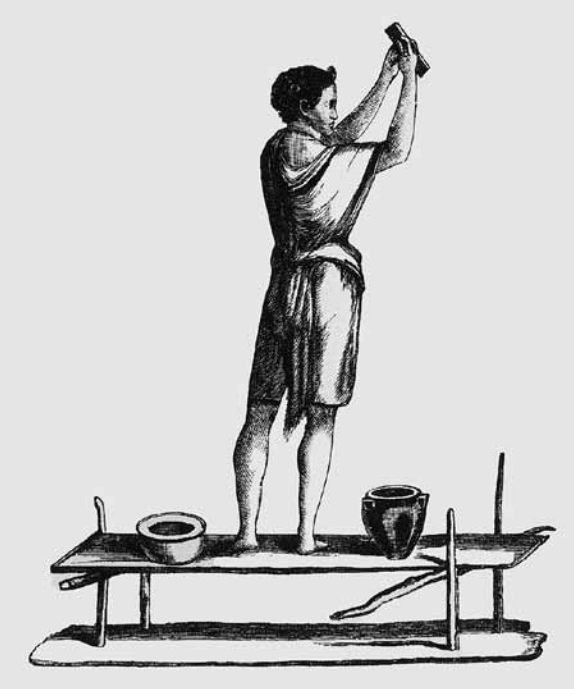
RUDOLF MEYER

The frescoes from the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale are beautiful examples of superb craftsmanship and technical perfection in Roman wall painting. They were executed in the *buon fresco*, or "true" fresco, technique by painting the colors onto a freshly applied damp plaster ground. The liquid lime in the plaster (calcium hydroxide) combines with the paint and in the process of drying turns into carbonate of lime, which is chemically the same as limestone or marble. The pigments fuse permanently with the plaster, and the painting becomes remarkably durable.

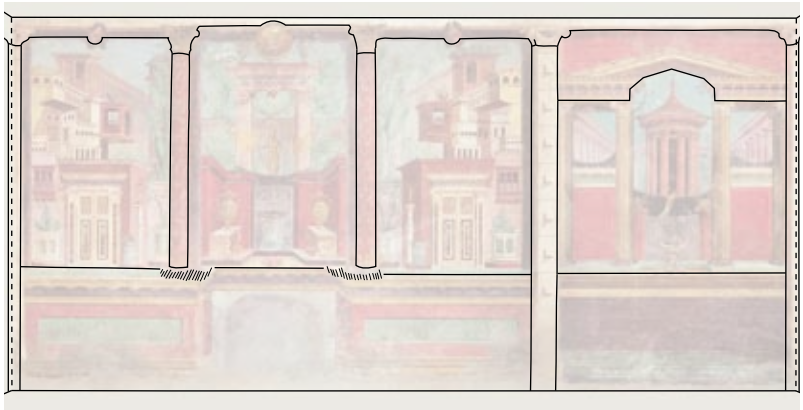
Roman frescoes of good quality like those from Boscoreale typically have a perfectly smooth and shiny surface. This important feature is lacking in frescoes of later periods. At least three or four layers of plaster were necessary to achieve the desired result. In the first century B.C. the Roman architect Vitruvius described the process of applying and polishing up to seven layers of plaster with trowels and floats similar to modern-day tools. The lowest layers consisted of sand mortar, followed by plaster containing marble or alabaster dust to enhance the luster of the painting. The surface had to be impeccable before the paint was applied. After the painting was completed the fresco was burnished again, which forced lime solution to the surface and sealed the painting with a protective film. The polishing tool was a floatlike instrument called a *liaculum*. A plasterer using such a tool was depicted in a painting in Pompeii that is now lost (see fig. 61).

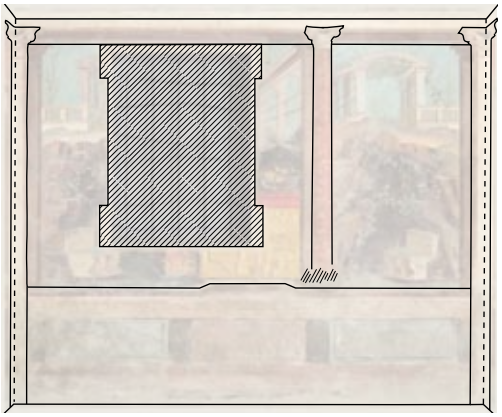
A telltale sign of *buon fresco* is evidence that a wall was divided into sections that could be plastered and then painted while the plaster was still damp, all in a *giornata di lavoro* (day's work), so to speak. How long the plaster stayed damp enough to paint a *buon fresco* is not known, however, and could have been more than a day. Slightly protruding edges or cracks often betray the seams between these so-called *giornate di lavoro*, which were applied starting at the top of the wall. To render the seams less conspicuous, the edges of the sections were usually carefully placed along straight lines in the decorative scheme, as they were in the cubiculum, or bedroom, from Boscoreale that is installed at the Museum (see fig. 62).

A painter began the decoration of a wall by tracing the design onto it. His tools included a plumb bob, rulers, and compasses. Long continuous lines were plotted with string that might have been colored with chalk or charcoal or impressed into the damp plaster, as in the dado of the window wall in the Boscoreale cubiculum (the wall is panel D on the diagram in fig. 63, and see fig. 64). The two

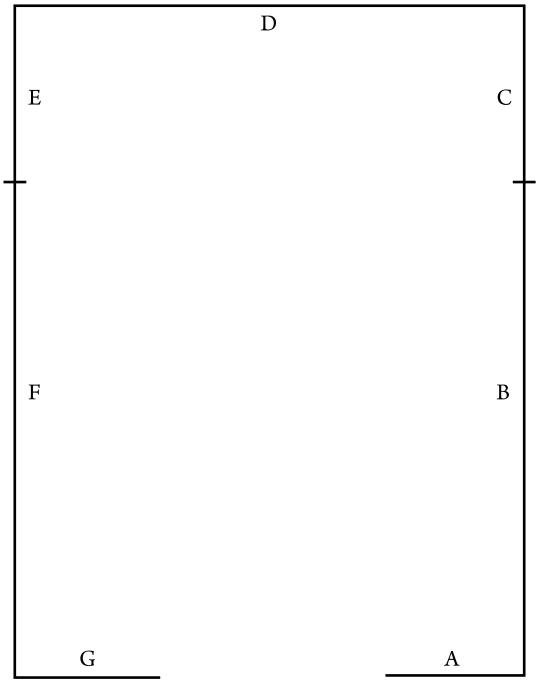


61. Plasterer polishing a wall with a *liaculum*, after a painting (now lost) found at Pompeii in Regio IX, building 5, room 9





62. *Giornate di lavoro* ("days of work") on the west, north, and east walls of the cubiculum (Room M) from the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor, Boscoreale (see figs. 13, 14, 55–57, 80, 98). So that the frescoes could be painted while the plaster was still damp, the walls were worked on in sections (indicated here with black outlines).

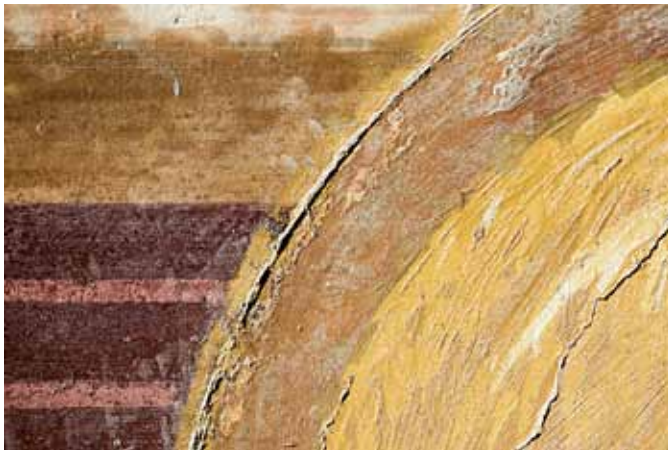


63. Diagram of the fresco panels removed from the cubiculum in the villa and reinstalled in the Metropolitan Museum. The room measured 19 ft. x 10 ft. 10 in. (5.79 x 3.3 m). The height of the frescoes up to the molding was originally 9 ft. 2¼ in. (2.8 m). It is now 9 ft. ¼ in. (2.75 m). The walls themselves were much higher.

Macedonian shields in panels B and F are outlined with the incisions of a compass (fig. 65, and see also fig. 76). Pointed tools were used to incise guide lines in the plaster, and preparatory markings with paint are also quite common (figs. 66, 67). On the whole the Boscoreale frescoes in the Metropolitan reveal remarkably scant traces of such preparation, however. No clue could be found, for instance, as to how the same townscape was rendered four times onto the walls of the cubiculum (see figs. 55, 56). The general dimensions of all four compositions are identical, although two of them are mirror images and the architectural details vary greatly.

The colors available to a Roman painter consisted mostly of naturally occurring earth pigments like red and yellow ochers, green earth, and calcium carbonate (chalk). Black was produced from soot or charcoal. The blue was Egyptian blue (named for its land of origin), which is artificial and consists of ground blue glass frit. Bright red cinnabar, a natural pigment consisting of toxic mercuric sulfide, played a special role. Its rarity made it so costly that only wealthy patrons could afford to pay for it. Cinnabar was used profusely in the Boscoreale frescoes. Even panels from the small, modest Room F contain sizable areas painted with cinnabar (see fig. 47), and cinnabar was applied as a ground layer, followed by a white wash, on the large pink panels in Room L, the exedra (see figs. 30–32). Pigments were mixed to obtain the numerous shades necessary for the details in the decoration. Additional pigments known to the Romans, such as azurite, malachite, and lead white, were not detected in the Metropolitan's frescoes,

64. Long horizontal line marked by the impression of a string (cubiculum, panel D)



65. Macedonian shield on which the outline was incised with a compass (cubiculum, panel B)

66. Egg-and-dart frieze on which the outlines were incised with a pointed instrument (cubiculum, panel G)

67. Outline of an alcove window marked by painted line (cubiculum, panel B, left townscape)

and neither were organic dyes such as indigo, red madder, oak gall, and the fabled true purple.

The decoration of a Roman house required teams of plasterers and painters working side by side. The cubiculum was undoubtedly the product of a succession of painters, one or more of whom laid the ground with others adding details. All the bushes and trees were certainly painted by the same person (see fig. 68). The many small figures on the friezes and altars and in the yellow landscape (see figs. 69–72) can be attributed to another painter. It was not customary for Roman craftsmen to sign or initial their work, and no signatures were found on the Metropolitan's Boscoreale paintings.

Roman wall paintings in villas situated near Mount Vesuvius show much ancient intervention after a strong earthquake that occurred in A.D. 62. The event may have required the repair of an area about a foot wide and five and a half feet long along the bottom of panel B in the cubiculum. The area was restored in the fresco technique to match the older painting but remains clearly discernible (fig. 73). There are countless cracks of varying sizes, and one can assume that an earthquake caused the long continuous cracks as well as the opening of seams between the *giornate* (fig. 74).

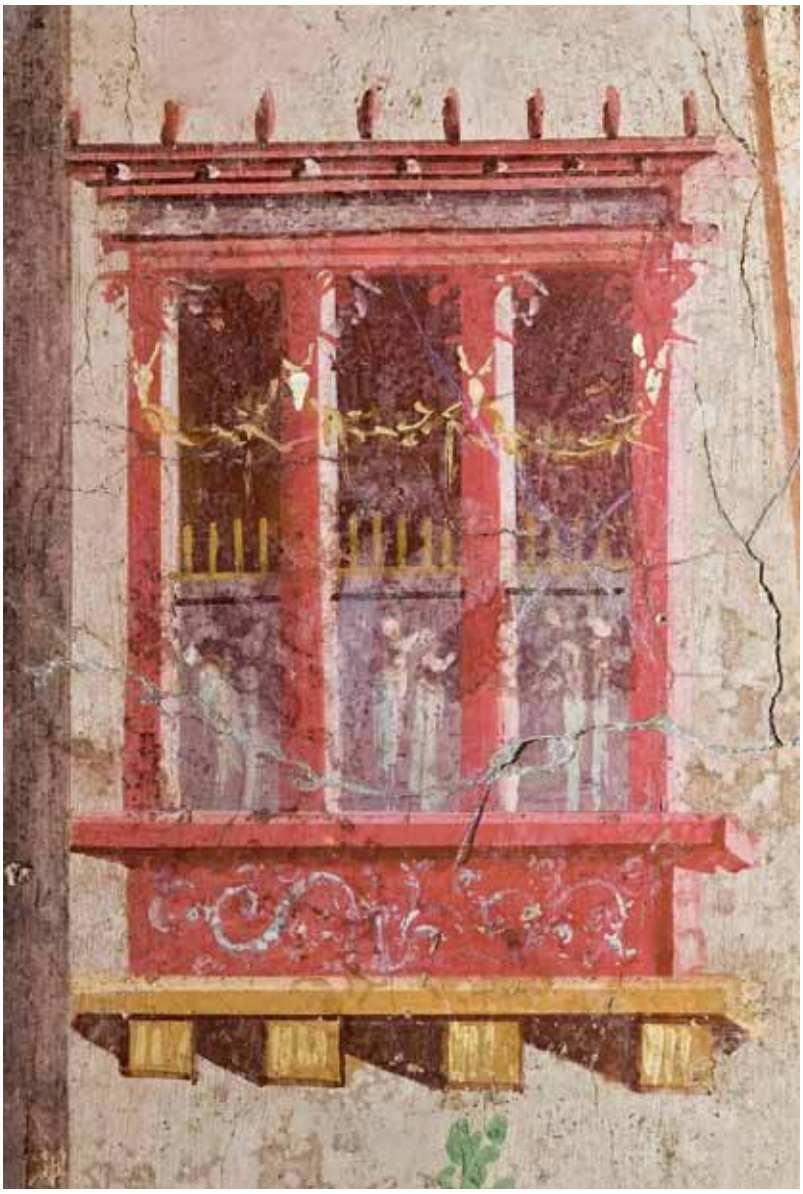
Most of the panels from the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor came from the centers of walls and therefore show few signs of daily wear and tear. By contrast, the walls preserved in the cubiculum reveal considerable abrasion in the dado sections, especially in panels B and D. This is not surprising

68. Detail of panel B in the cubiculum (see also fig. 56). All the bushes and trees in the frescoes in the cubiculum were painted by the same artist.

considering that the villa was occupied for well over a hundred years. The eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79 caused extensive damage but also conserved the remaining paintings until their discovery in 1900. The eruption occurred in two phases. During the first, or Plinian, phase, ash and pumice fell for eighteen hours, burying the area in a layer of coarse dust that was as much as 9 feet deep in Pompeii. This ash rain also contained stones up to 4½ inches in diameter, which could explain numerous scratches in upper areas of walls. The evidence in the cubiculum occurs mostly on panels B and F (see fig. 75). It seems that after a ceiling had caved in under the weight of the ash deposits, exposed areas of fresco were hit by falling debris. Deeper scratches could have been caused by collapsing roof beams (fig. 76). The ash rain was followed by the Peléan phase, an eruption lasting several hours during which glowing avalanches of hot ash, or nuées ardentes, streamed from the crater at enormous speed. There could have been several of these absolutely lethal pyroclastic flows of very hot volcanic gas and ash. In Herculaneum wood was heated to at least 750° Fahrenheit, and bones have been found that had been exposed to heat of more than 900°. It is more than likely that shutters and other wooden objects in the villa at Boscoreale were charred or burned, but accounts of the excavation fail to mention any such remnants.

The heat of the pyroclastic flows seems to have loosened plaster and paint, resulting in clearly discernible sequences of losses (see figs. 77, 78). Except for yellow ocher, the colors seem to have been unaffected by the heat. Yellow ocher when heated to at least 572° turns red. This chemical reaction in Pompeiian wall paintings is well documented, and the Metropolitan's panel with a garland from Room L of the Boscoreale villa (the exedra) contains a good example (fig. 79).

Further damage and losses must have occurred when the paintings were taken from the villa in the early twentieth century. Excavations at that time were far from scientific, and the method for the removal of wall paintings was less than perfect. A painting to be detached was faced by gluing cloth to the surface. The front was further reinforced with boards before the back of the fresco was cut away from the wall. (The original layer of plaster that remains with the Boscoreale paintings is



69–72. Clockwise from top left: frieze on a portal (cubiculum, panel F, left townscape); altar (panel B); monochrome yellow landscape (panel D, right of window); alcove window (panel F, right townscape). The many small figures in the frescoes in the cubiculum can be attributed to one painter.

73. Ancient repair, using the fresco technique, in panel B of the cubiculum, probably after the earthquake in A.D. 62

approximately ⅜ inch thick.) Once freed from the wall, the painting was laid facedown on the floor. A heavy chestnut frame with a wooden grid inserted in it and metal reinforcements was placed over the painting, and the wooden grid was filled in and covered with plaster. The thickness of the plaster bed depended on the size of the panel; for large panels it was approximately 6 inches deep. As the frescoes were detached original areas were lost. For instance, large parts of the six tall white pilasters in the cubiculum (see fig. 86) were sacrificed to extract the existing seven panels. The columns framing the Metropolitan's three panels from Room H (fig. 41) also seem to have been sacrificed, along with areas

74. Opening of the seam between two *giornate* in panel C of the cubiculum (see also fig. 62), probably after the earthquake in A.D. 62

75. Scratches in the fresco made by falling debris (cubiculum, panel B)

76. Deep scratch possibly made by a collapsing roof beam (cubiculum, panel F)

77–78. Sequences of losses in the frescoes in the cubiculum caused by pyroclastic flows of lava. Left: the east wall (panel B); right: the north wall, facing Mount Vesuvius, where hot debris apparently streamed through the window

from dado sections. There must be remnants of paintings in the villa, but the site was backfilled following the excavation in 1900.

During the recent reinstallation of the Metropolitan's Greek and Roman Galleries, the cubiculum was relocated to a gallery adjoining the eastern side of the Roman Court (fig. 80). The new location is the fourth since the fresco panels came to the Museum. Initially the cubiculum panels were installed in what was called the Roman Gallery, surrounded by other paintings from the villa (fig. 81). There was no ceiling, and black boards framed the panels. In 1909 a small annex adjoining the gallery was built for the cubiculum (fig. 82). Daylight came in through the window and through a skylight in the vaulted ceiling. There was a molding, and boards covered the edges of the panels. The cubiculum was again newly installed in 1963 in the southeastern part of the Great Hall (fig. 83). The bright red ceiling was vaulted in the area above the bed and flat over the rest of the room. Artificial light came through the window. The six tall pilasters dividing the scenes on the walls were restored according to photographs from the excavation (see figs. 84, 85). The imprecise placement of the panels was corrected in the most recent move. The room is now 2½ inches narrower and 2 inches shorter, and the painted walls are 1⅜ inches higher, although the original walls could not be reconstructed. The missing parts of the six pilasters were re-created (figs. 86–88), and the ceiling, which resembles that of the previous installation, was painted in light, neutral colors.

79. Detail of a fresco fragment from the west wall of Room L of the villa (see fig. 31), where the heat of the pyroclastic flows turned the yellow ocher pigment to red

The condition of the paintings from Boscoreale ranges from beautifully preserved sections to fragile or badly damaged areas. For the latest reinstallation

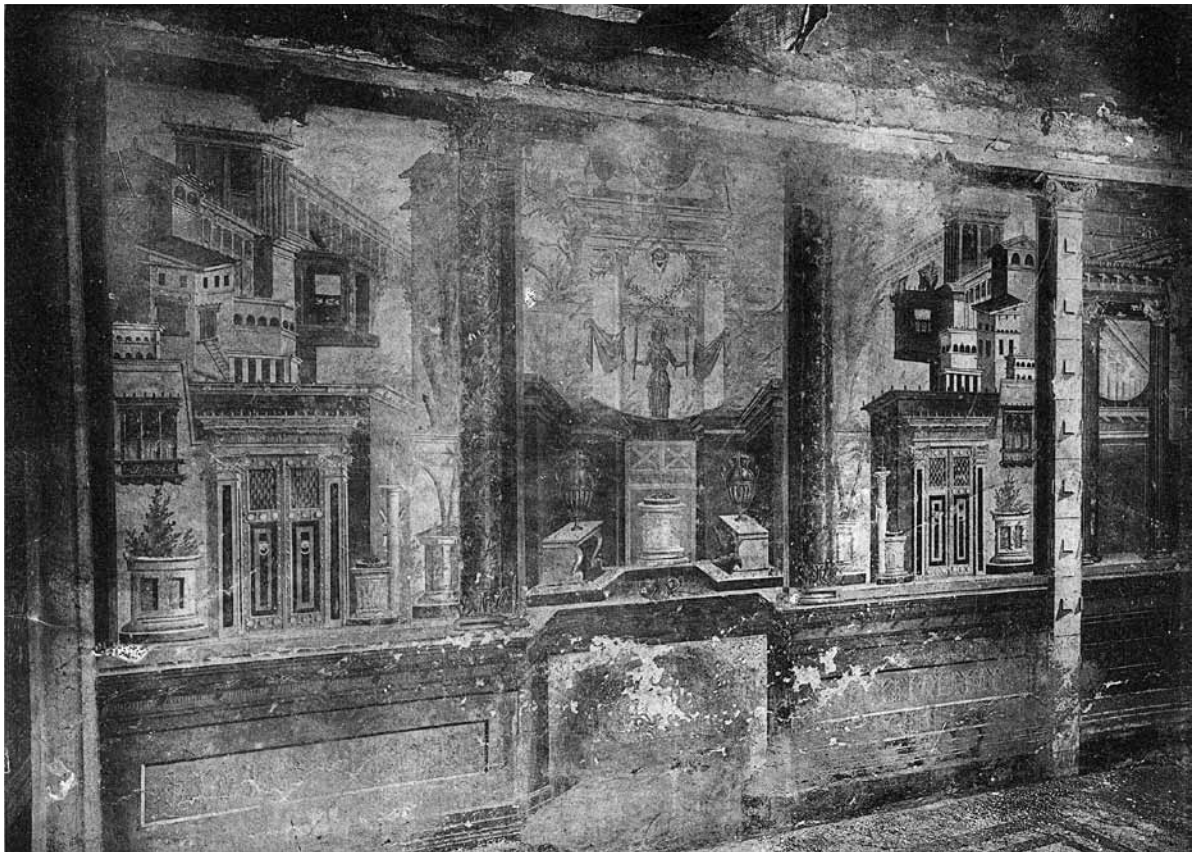
80. The cubiculum reinstalled in the New Greek and Roman Galleries, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007 (for the frescoes, see also figs. 55–57)

81. First installation of the cubiculum in the Museum, in the former Roman Gallery, 1903 to 1909

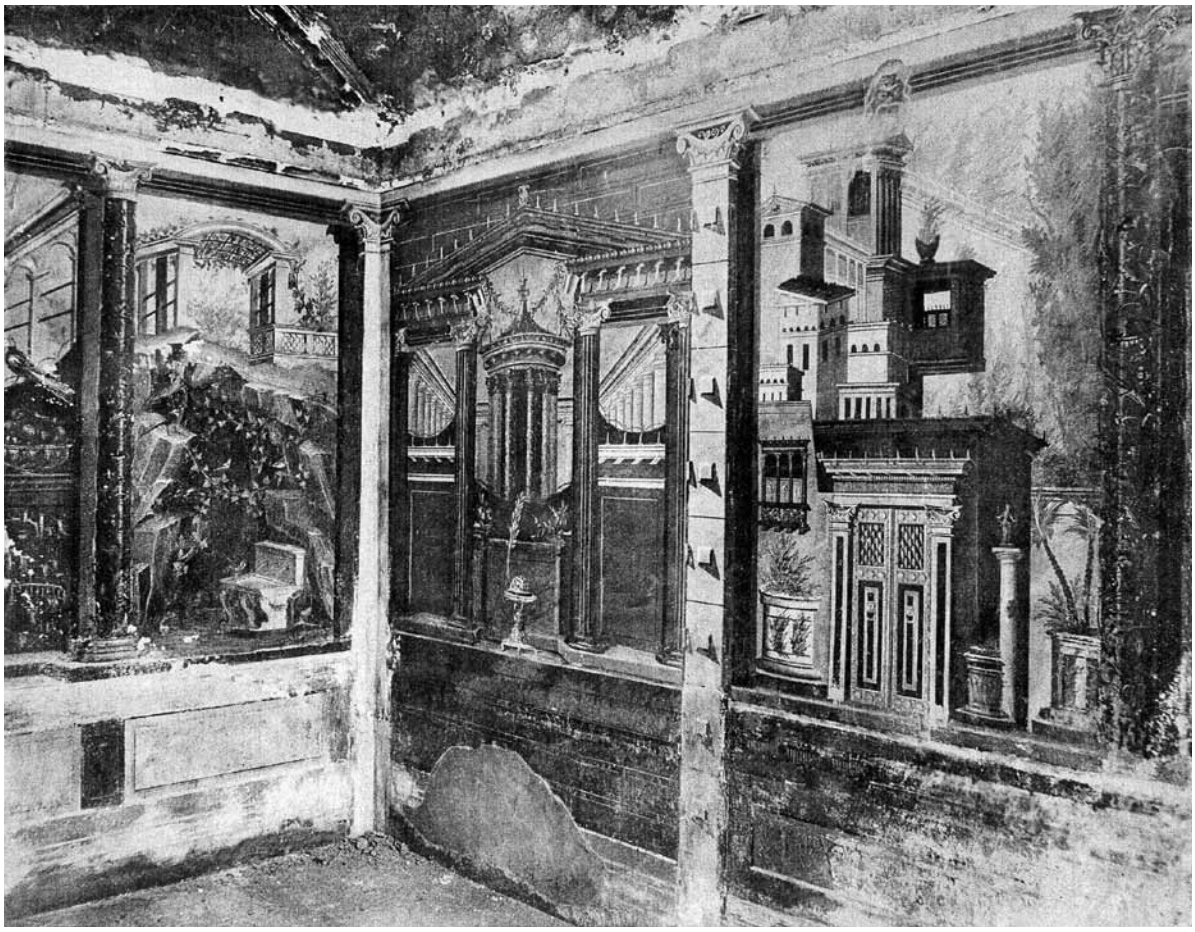
82. Second installation of the cubiculum, in an annex adjoining the former Roman Gallery, 1909 to 1962

83. Third installation of the cubiculum, in the Great Hall, 1963 to 2004

84. West wall of the cubiculum in situ during the excavations at Boscoreale, ca. 1900



85. Northeast corner of the cubiculum in situ during the excavations at Boscoreale, ca. 1900. Photograph: Antikensammlung, Berlin



86. The pilaster between panels B and C in the cubiculum (see fig. 56) was sacrificed when the paintings were removed from the villa. The discrepancy in the heights of the panels was corrected in the new installation in 2007.

the panels in the Metropolitan were thoroughly restored. The campaign lasted, with some interruptions, from early 2002 to April 2007. The consolidation of brittle plaster and paint layers had become necessary. A cleaning of the frescoes was also overdue, and layers of dirt and wax or varnish that had accumulated over the years were cleaned away (see fig. 89). The inadequate inpainting of losses was removed as well. The latticework of the balustrade in panel D, for instance, had been wrongly restored with squares, and this was corrected by replacing the missing arches (figs. 90, 91).

A major part of the restoration focused on improving old fills of losses. For the initial restorations in Italy, cement had unfortunately been used as a filling material, producing unpleasant uneven surfaces with cement overlapping original paint. Many fills had cracked or lost sufficient adhesion and had to be replaced. Cement is not reversible, and it was only with great difficulty that necessary improvements could be made (figs. 92–95). The new

87 (far left). Pilaster between panels B and C in the cubiculum, during restoration

88 (left). Restored pilaster between panels B and C in the cubiculum, completed April 2007

89. Detail of a fresco fragment from the south wall of Room F of the villa (see fig. 47) during the removal of modern layers of wax and dirt

inpainting of losses was done in the so-called *tratteggio* manner, whereby the original painting is faithfully matched but with short, vertical brushstrokes so that at close range viewers can distinguish restorations from the ancient original (fig. 96).

Cement fills also obliterated the original window opening in the cubiculum, which must have contained a wooden frame with shutters. Thanks to the beveled edges on the frescoes that were revealed below the cement fills, the window's outlines could be reconstructed, although for safety reasons the modern frame could not be removed. There is sufficient evidence to reconstruct the window as comparable to the painted example with shutters on panel F in the cubiculum (fig. 97). This has been done in the virtual model (fig. 98), but it was decided not to install a modern reconstruction on the actual window opening. The model shows that with the frame

90–91. Detail of the balustrade in panel D of the cubiculum (see fig. 57), as it was previously incorrectly restored (above) and with the new inpainting completed in 2007 (below)

92. Cement fills in panel E of the cubiculum (see also fig. 55), before restoration

93–95. Detail of the center of the dado on panel F in the cubiculum (see also fig. 55), showing (top right) old fills of losses, including a large cement fill near the bottom; (left center) new fills of losses; and (right center) the completed restoration

96. Detail of a column capital on panel E in the cubiculum (see also fig. 55) that was restored in the *tratteggio* manner, in small vertical brush-strokes that are easily distinguished from the original painting

97. Detail of a window and door with shutters on panel F in the cubiculum (see also fig. 55)

and shutters in place the composition of the wall decoration becomes remarkably more balanced. The grille that is on the window in the reconstructed cubiculum at the Metropolitan (see fig. 80) was reportedly found in the excavation, but it must have belonged elsewhere because it would not have fit into the cubiculum window with its wooden frame still intact.

98. Virtual model of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, cubiculum, looking north (for the frescoes, see also figs. 55–57)

NOTES

1. See Stefani 1994, pp. 86–92, and Casale and Bianco 1979, a pioneering contribution to understanding the topography of suburban Pompeii.
2. See Ruggiero 1888.
3. See De Caro 1994.
4. Zevi 1991, pp. 94–95.
5. See Rostovtzeff 1926, Carrington 1931, Day 1932, Castaldi 1950, Étienne 1982, D'Arms 1984, De Martino 1991, and Jashemski 1993.
6. Fergola et al. 2001, pp. 207–8, 217.
7. See the reports at http://www.fastionline.org/record_view.php?fst_cd=AIAC_832.
8. Lupo 1991–92.
9. D'Agostino and Gastaldi 1979, Lepore 1989.
10. De Caro 1994, pp. 132–40, nos. 1–36, fig. 32.
11. Zevi 1982; Kockel 1986, pp. 546–47.
12. Zevi in De Caro 1994, p. 13.
13. De Caro 1999.
14. Tchernia 1986. For the suggestion that there was a *gens pompeiana* who were active in making and selling wine as early as the Samnite period, see Heurgon 1952 and Brun 2004, pp. 12ff. The opinions on this topic of Jongman (1988), who supposed that cereal production played a major role in the agriculture of Pompeii, are to be taken with a great deal of prudence.
15. Tchernia 1986, p. 176.
16. The story is told by Livy (Titus Livius; 59 B.C.–A.D. 17) in his history of Rome, *Ab urbe condita libri* (Books from the Foundation of the City, 2.8.4–5); by the Roman historian Lucius Annaeus Florus in *Epitome of Roman History* (2.8), compiled in the first or second century, chiefly from Livy; and by the Roman aristocrat Sextus Julius Frontinus (ca. A.D. 40–103) in his military treatise *Strategemata* (Stratagems, 1.5.21).
17. Cicirelli 1989.
18. Testament to this are the many small late Roman graves discovered at Boscoreale and Boscotrecase where the dead were interred in tile cists and cut African amphorae, with small stashes of oil lamps and money. See Cerulli Irelli 1975.
19. Jashemski in De Caro 1994, pp. 106–9.
20. Brendel 1954, p. 406.
21. The identities of the villa's owners remain unclear; see Herbert Bloch, "The Owners of the Villa near Boscoreale," in Lehmann 1953, pp. 214–17.
22. Barnabei (1901, p. 18) noted that only one small fresco fragment survived from the upper stories. Its whereabouts are unknown.
23. Stefani 2003, De Caro 1994. On the sizes of villas and groupings of rooms, see Dickmann 1999. D'Arms 1970 remains invaluable for a general understanding of the growth of the area under Roman rule.
24. Drerup 1957. On *luxus*, or the concept of luxury, in imperial Rome, see Dubois-Pellerin 2008.
25. O'Sullivan 2006.
26. McEwen 2003. The effects of these principles on Second Style painting have been much discussed, notably in Beyen 1938–60, Tybout 1989, and Ehrhardt 1991, pp. 42–46.
27. Similar garlands appear in sculpture and painting in the so-called House of Augustus on the Palatine Hill in Rome (Carettoni 1983, Settis 1988). Castriota (1995, p. 29) identifies such copious garlands as "pankarpia." On the three garlands from Villa Kérylos, see Barbet 2009.
28. Bounia 2004, Bergmann 1995. On new modes in art and literature in the Late Republic, see Grüner 2004.
29. The finds are listed in Oettel 1996, pp. 272–73.
30. Lehmann 1953, p. 13.
31. The farm tools and other bronze and iron implements belong to the Field Museum in Chicago (De Cou 1912, pp. 208–11).
32. On the popular pairing of Venus and Bacchus in Roman art, see Zanker 1998.
33. The comparable *megalographia* was found at the Villa dei Misteri in Pompeii in the early 1900s, a few years after the discovery of this villa. More recently, strikingly similar paintings, however with smaller figures, were found in a rustic villa at Terzigno (Moormann 2006, Strocka 2005–6).
34. Müller 1994, Smith 1994, Virgilio 2000, Torelli 2003 (with earlier bibliography), Sauron 2007.
35. Cagiano de Azevedo 1952, Verbanck-Piérard 2008.
36. Beyen (1938–60, vol. 1, pp. 223–27) recognized some mistakes in Barnabei's drawing of the west wall. On the red monochromes, see Bruno 1993.
37. That nearly identical objects and sections of painted architecture appear in the Casa del Labirinto and the Villa dei Misteri at Pompeii and in the villa at Oplontis attests to the use of adaptable schemes by fresco workshops (Bragantini 2004, Strocka 1991, De Franciscis 1975; and see http://www.oplontisproject.org/index.html).
38. Similar monochrome landscapes on yellow panels appear in the Casa di Livia on the Palatine in Rome and in Triclinium 14 of the villa at Oplontis. On the ambiguity of painted views, see Drerup 1959, Scagliarini Corlàita 1974–76, Bek 1980, and Bergmann 2002b.
39. On the miniature monochrome friezes as depictions of Dionysiac rituals, see Turcan 1993. On the phalluses, see Turcan 1960, especially p. 177.
40. The heated debate about whether the frescoes depict theater, palace, or villa has subsided lately, with scholars acknowledging multiple associations and a pervasive "theatricality" in the decor. Columns "gilded and studded with gems and silvered" supported a pavilion of Alexander, while golden columns entwined with tendrils of golden acanthus decorated his hearse (Diodorus Siculus, Library 18.272, Athenaeus, *Banquet of the Learned* 12.538d). On architectural precedents in Alexandria, see McKenzie 2007, pp. 80–118, and McKenzie 1995. On the popularity of theater motifs, see Webster 1995. On the absorption of sacred into private land, see Coarelli 1983. On the new luxury in Roman home building, see Wiseman 1987. In Book 6 of his *De architectura*, Vitruvius recommended that elite Romans emulate public architecture in their homes.
41. Lavagne 1988, Bergmann 2002a.

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