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

Alexandra Dardenay

Alexandra Dardenay

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

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

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

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

---

1 Vitr. De arch. 1, 2, 5. See also Haug, this volume.

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

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

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

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

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

---

3 Coralini 2011; Dardenay et al. 2016; Dardenay – Grand-Clément 2017.

4 Monteix 2010, 312 and Pl. VIII.

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

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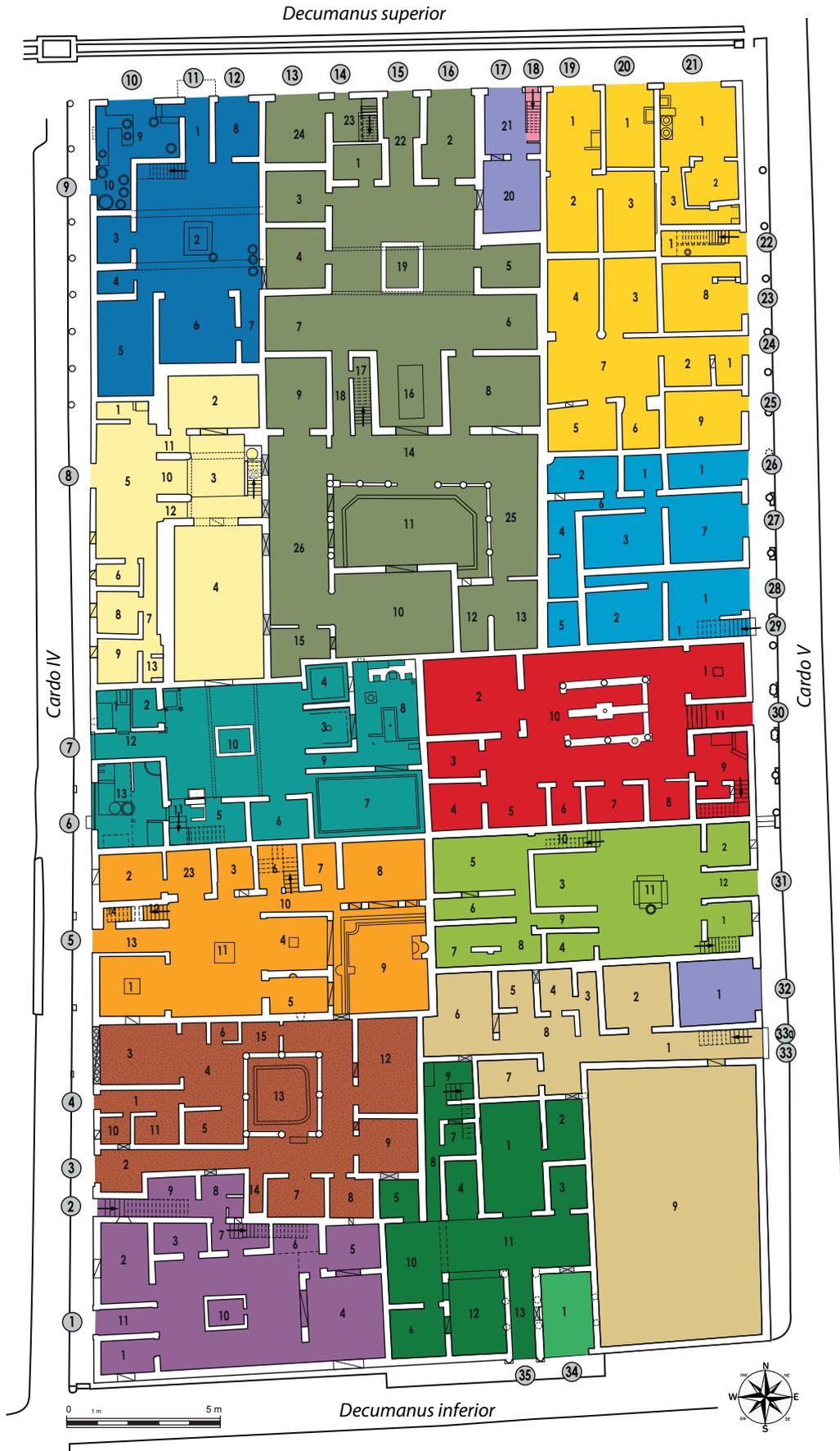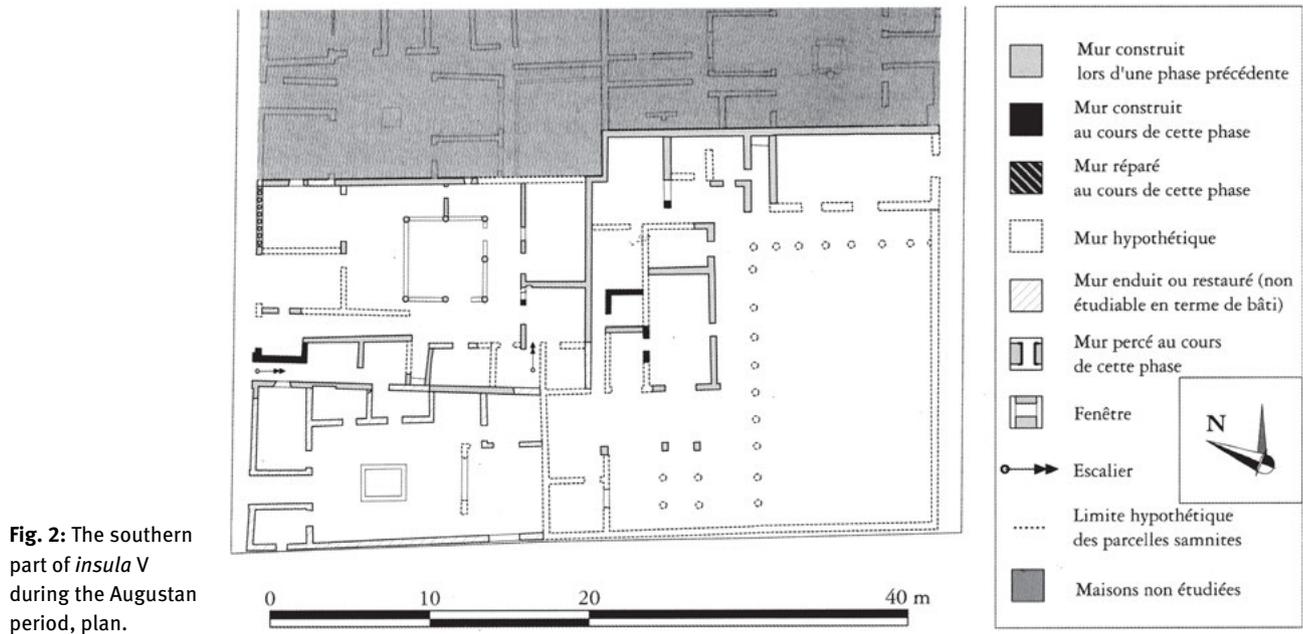
Decumanus superior

Decumanus inferior

Cardo IV

Cardo V

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

0   1 m   5 m

Mur construit lors d'une phase précédente

Mur construit au cours de cette phase

Mur réparé au cours de cette phase

Mur hypothétique

Mur enduit ou restauré (non étudiable en terme de bâti)

Mur percé au cours de cette phase

Fenêtre

Escalier

Limite hypothétique des parcelles samnites

Maisons non étudiées

N

0   10   20   40 m

Fig. 2: The southern part of *insula* V during the Augustan period, plan.

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

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

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

---

7 For a complete study of the buildings of the *insula*, one can refer to my habilitation thesis: Dardenay 2019.
8 Monteix 2010, including a detailed account of the destruction and reconstruction on 318. The entire western section was clearly reconstructed with rubble recovered from collapsed walls. In conjunction with this repair work, the door jamb of the entrance to room (6) of the Casa con Giardino was restored in *opus vittatum,* just prior to being sealed with red tuff rubble in order to complete the separation between the two houses.
9 Monteix 2010, 318.

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

13 Pol. 6, 39, 10 f.

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

---

15 Esposito 2014, 112 f.

16 Ganschow 1989, 306 f.

17 The floor of this room was destroyed or is not currently visible.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

22 This could also have occurred earlier: Monteix (2010, Fig. 175) dates the construction of the new *oecus* between A.D. 62 and 70/75 (between the two earthquakes).
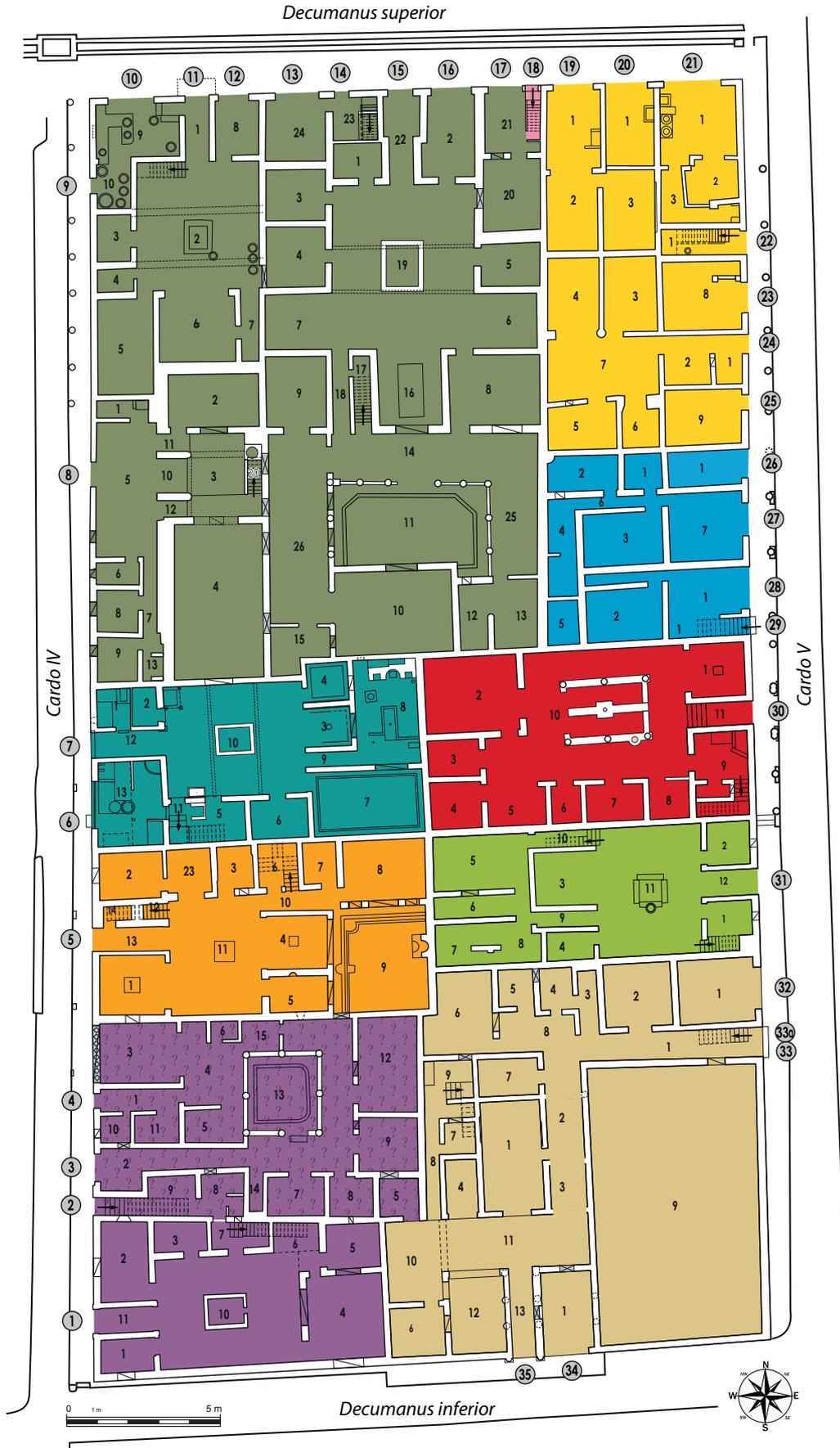
Fig. 7: Plan of *insula* V during the Augustan period.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

23 Esposito 2014, 127.

Fig. 11: Casa del Bel Cortile, view of cortile (3) from the upper floor.
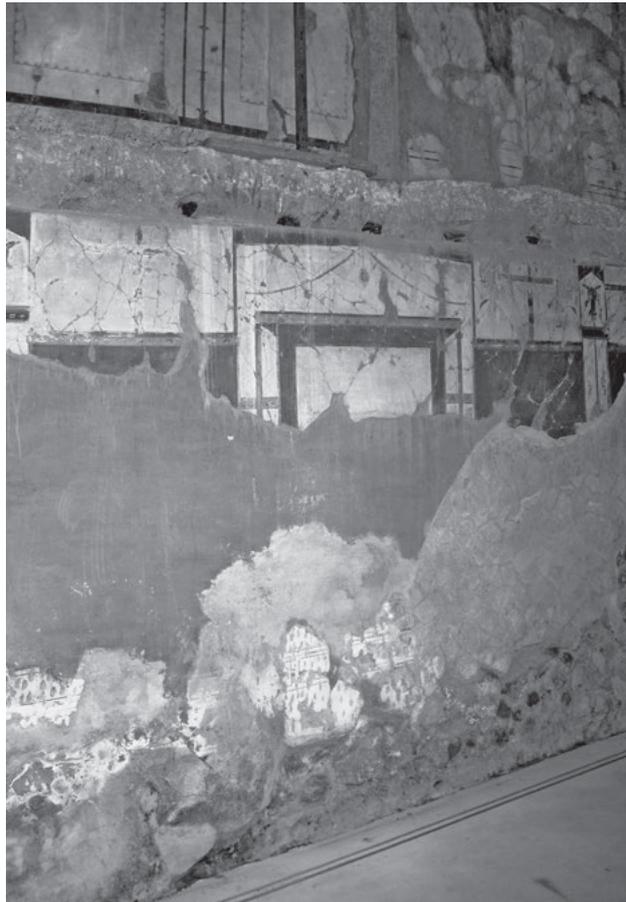
Fig. 12: Casa del Bel Cortile, room (2).

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

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

Apartment V 18, on the upper level, is an ensemble of three rooms with a fairly modest footprint (c. 38 m²). It was accessible from the street, via a stairway constructed against the east wall of room (21) in the ground-floor apartment[31]. Contrary to what is indicated by the current state of preservation of the room, there was a partition that isolated the stairway completely from the ground floor apartment in A.D. 79. The Fourth Style decoration of the apartment is of high quality, elevated by

---

24 On the upper floor, the decoration of the rooms located above room (2) likely corresponds to a phase dating to A.D. 62–75 (Monteix 2010, 325 f. and no. 65); it is possible that the rest of the second storey was not decorated until after 70/75, when the house became independent (Monteix 2010, no. 65; Andrews 2006, 208–210).
25 This could perhaps explain why the door to *oecus* (4) was not concealed, even provisionally.
**26** See Ehrhardt 2012, 139.
27 According to N. Monteix, even though the damage caused by the second earthquake in this part of *insula* V was fairly minor, it did not prevent substantial structural rearrangement (Monteix 2010, 329). I wonder if, in reality, there was a cause-and-effect relationship between the earthquake of the years A.D. 70/75 and the subdivision of the house. Indeed, certain indications suggest that this process was planned (at least partially) during the A.D. 62–70/75 phase, when the new *oecus* in the peristyle of the Casa del Bicentenario was constructed; this development leads one to believe that the proprietor already anticipated the loss of this reception area in the *posticum*.
28 Monteix 2010, 330.
29 On this decoration: Eristov 1994, cat. no. 98.
30 Andrews 2006, 243: 'On this basis, the Fourth Style wall paintings in room 26, which cover the blocked doorway, must post-date the separation'. Regarding the doubling of the walls, see Monteix 2010, 329 Fig. 180.
31 See the isometric reconstruction of these two apartments in Monteix 2010, 329 Fig. 30.
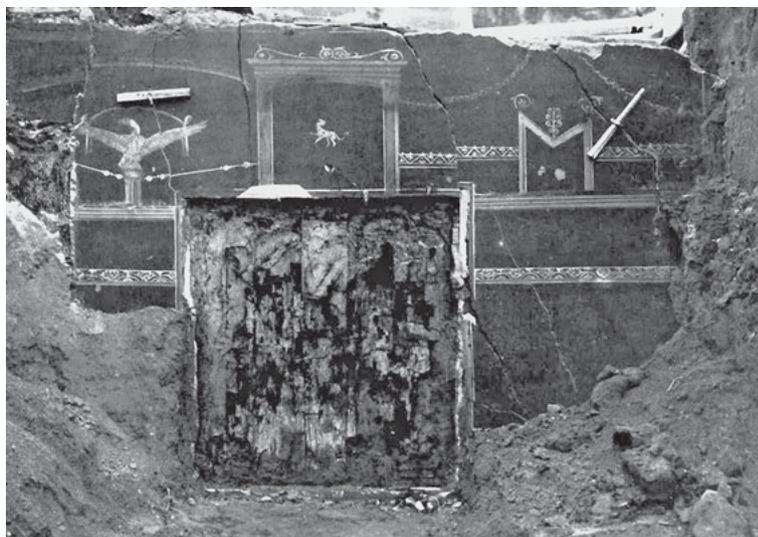
Fig. 13: Apartment V 18, upper floor. Archival photo following the removal of the tableau in room (53).

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

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

Conclusion

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

---

32 Parco Archeologico di Ercolano, inv. 149336; see also Maiuri 1938.
33 A group of paintings (Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. 9019–9022) discovered at the foot of a wall in the *palaestra* were also seemingly waiting to be inserted into a new decorative ensemble (Allroggen-Bedel 1983, 145 f.).

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

Alexandra Dardenay
UFR Histoire, Arts et Archéologie
Université de Toulouse II Jean Jaurès
5 allées Antonio Machado
31058 Toulouse cedex 9 – France
alexandra.dardenay@univ-tlse2.fr

Illustration Credits

Fig. 1. 7: ANR VESUVIA.
Fig. 2: Monteix 2010, Fig. 167.
Fig. 3. 5. 8. 9: A. Dardenay.
Fig. 4: H. Eristov.
Fig. 6. 11. 12: M.-L. Maraval.
Fig. 10: N. Monteix.
Fig. 13: Maiuri 1938, Fig. 2

Bibliography

Allroggen-Bedel 1983: A. Allroggen-Bedel, Dokumente des 18. Jahrhunderts zur Topographie von Herculaneum, CronErcol 13, 1983, 139–158

Andrews 2006: J. N. Andrews, The Use and Development of Upper Floors in Houses at Herculaneum II (Ph.D. diss. University of Reading 2006)

Coralini 2011: A. Coralini (ed.), DHER. Domus Herculanensis rationes. Sito, archivio, museo, Studi e scavi 30 (Bologna 2011)

Dardenay et al. 2016: A. Dardenay – A. Allroggen-Bedel – H. Eristov – A. Grand-Clément – M.-L. Maraval – C. Marotta – N. Monteix – E. Rosso, Herculanum. Des archives aux restitutions architecturales et décoratives, Chronique des activités archéologiques de l'École française de Rome, 2016 <https://doi.org/10.4000/cefr.1588> (08.04.2020)

Dardenay 2018: A. Dardenay, Roman Wall-Painting in Southern Gaul (Gallia Narbonensis and Gallia Aquitania), JRA 31, 2018, 53–89

Dardenay 2019: A. Dardenay, L'*insula* V d'Herculanum. Transformations spatiales et diachroniques de l'architecture et du decor des habitations, (Mémoire inédit du dossier d'Habilitation à Diriger des Recherches soutenu le 28 novembre 2019, Université de Toulouse II Jean Jaurès 2019)

Dardenay – Grand-Clément 2017: A. Dardenay – A. Grand-Clément, Restituer Herculanum au XXIe siècle. L'apport des archives, Anabases. Traditions et réceptions de l'Antiquité 26, 2017, 55–66

De Kind 1998: R. E. L. B. de Kind, Houses in Herculaneum. A New View on the Town Planning and the Building of *Insula*e III and IV, Circumvesuviana 1 (Amsterdam 1998)

---

34 Also highlighted by Ehrhardt 2012 (esp. 142).
35 Concerning the concept of 'appropriateness' see Haug, this volume, esp. n. 2.

Dickmann 1999: J.-A. Dickmann, Domus frequentata. Anspruchsvolles Wohnen im pompejanischen Stadthaus, Studien zur antiken Stadt 4 (Munich 1999)

Ehrhardt 2012: W. Ehrhardt, Dekorations- und Wohnkontext. Beseitigung, Restaurierung, Verschmelzung und Konservierung von Wandbemalungen in den kampanischen Antikenstätten, Palilia 26 (Wiesbaden 2012)

Eristov 1994: H. Eristov, Les éléments architecturaux dans la peinture campanienne du quatrième style, CEFR 187 (Rome 1994)

Esposito 2014: D. Esposito, La pittura di Ercolano, Studi della Soprintendenza archeologica di Pompei 33 (Rome 2014)

Formola 2013: S. Formola, Ercolano prima della municipalizzazione. Geomorfologia, urbanistica e scavi stratigrafici, Vesuviana 5, 2013, 29–90

Ganschow 1989: T. Ganschow, Untersuchungen zur Baugeschichte in Herculaneum, Antiquitas 30 (Bonn 1989)

Guidobaldi et al. 2014: F. Guidobaldi – M. Grandi – M. S. Pisapia – R. Balzanetti – A. Bigliati, Mosaici antichi in Italia. Regione prima. Ercolano (Pisa 2014)

Hartnett 2017: J. Hartnett, The Roman Street. Urban Life and Society in Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Rome (New York 2017)

Helg 2012: R. Helg, Transformation of Domestic Space in the Vesuvian Cities. From the Development of the Upper Floors and Façades to a New Dimension of Intimacy, in: A. Anguissola (ed.), Privata Luxuria. Towards an Archaeology of Intimacy. Pompeii and Beyond. International Workshop Center for Advanced Studies, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (24–25 March 2011), Münchner Studien zur Alten Welt 8 (Munich 2012) 143–161

Johannowsky 1982: W. Johannowsky, Problemi urbanistici di Ercolano, CronErcol 12, 1982, 145–149

Laurence 1994: R. Laurence, Roman Pompeii. Space and Society (London 1994)

Maiuri 1938: A. Maiuri, Note su di un nuovo dipinto ercolanese, BdA 11, 1938, 481–489

Monteix 2010: N. Monteix, Les lieux de métier. Boutiques et ateliers d'Herculanum, BEFAR 344 (Rome 2010)

Pagano 1993: M. Pagano, Ricerche sull'impianto urbano di Ercolano, in: L. Franchi Dell'Orto (ed.), Ercolano 1738–1988: 250 anni di ricerca archeologica. Atti del Convegno Internazionale Ravello-Ercolano-Napoli-Pompei 30 ottobre – 5 novembre 1988 (Rome 1993) 595–608

Tran Tam Tinh 1977: V. Tran Tam Tinh, A la recherche d'Herculanum préromaine, CronPomp 3, 1977, 40–56

Wallace-Hadrill 1994: A. Wallace-Hadrill, Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum (Princeton 1994)