

Digital Restoration: The Casa del Citarista in Pompeii (I.4.5)

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The Casa del Citarista was the grandest house in Pompeii, with three enormous peristyles and lavish reception rooms. Soon after discovery in the 1860s, seven large mythological panels were detached from their walls. Painted in the Augustan and Neronian periods, these have long been regarded as among the finest Roman frescoes. Yet they, as well as the house as a whole, remain little studied. Thanks to the exhibition “Pompeii. Gods, Myths and Man” (Bucerius Kunst Forum, Hamburg 27. September 2014 -11. January 2015) the panels have now been cleaned and restored. This paper presents a new digital reconstruction showing the paintings in their rooms. Because the walls are today faded beyond recognition and early documentation of the house is lacking, one source --the cork model of Pompeii made in the 1860s --proved invaluable for visualizing the lost décor.

The new reconstruction suggests some of the visual effects of the surrounding wall designs on individual panels, notably color. In the largest room (21), a stunning picture of a maenad lying in a landscape was surrounded by entirely black walls, an expensive surface popular in the Augustan period. In a spacious room painted in a Neronian phase (35), bright yellow, blue, and red color fields would have highlighted certain features within scenes of Bacchus and Ariadne and Iphigenia in Tauris, linking the disparate stories into a unified whole.

The reconstruction also presents interesting combinations of pictures. In a small room with an antechamber (20), three narrow panels presented Leda and the Swan, a couple (Dido and Aeneas or Venus and Mars), and King Laomedon instructing Apollo and Neptune to build the walls of Troy. The Trojan theme, perhaps inspired by Vergil's *Aeneid*, continued in the next space (21) with The Judgment of Paris. Later rooms display the same two themes as the Augustan spaces: contacts between western and eastern parts of the world (Troy and eastern kings) and *amor* of gods for mortals. The most obvious thematic ensemble (37) showed mortals and immortals together in a landscape: Endymion and Selene, Venus and Adonis, and Io with Argus and Mercury, the last scene apparently inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

Unlike a miniature cork model, modern computer technology can place the viewer *inside* a room and clarify not just the spatial relationships between scenes but relationships between the viewer and the scenes. The novel combinations of stories must have sparked multiple readings and responses. With shifting daylight or the flickering of lamps, these pictures were never static but formed part of a dynamic, changeable environment.



Figure 1 The Casa del Citarista in Pompeii (I.4.5) Reconstruction of Room 20



Figure 2 The Casa del Citarista in Pompeii (I.4.5) Reconstruction of Room 35