

Brief Guide to Herculaneum



paErco
Parco Archeologico di Ercolano



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Rules for visiting the excavations

Welcome to the Vesuvian archaeological areas.

In the archaeological areas the law D. lgs 81/08 is applied according to the historical and archaeological important heritage protection rules and restrictions, especially in the archaeological Vesuvian area.

We especially ask you to follow the rules* below for a more enjoyable and safer stay:

- 1.** Be extremely careful when moving about. Do not stand on the edge of the digs or climb the walls.
- 2.** Please respect all entrance and access restrictions.
- 3.** Please show respectful behavior; refraining from making unnecessary noise, writing on the walls, and littering. Please place all garbage in the containers provided.
- 4.** Photographs and movie filming are authorized solely for private use; you must contact the Parco Archeologico di Ercolano before filming with tripods, flash and artificial lighting, or for any commercial use.

5. Guides do not work for the Parco. They are official and authorized by the Regione Campania. They have to show their licence under request.

6. Please store all bags, knapsacks, umbrellas and other bulky objects in the wardrobe.

7. Smoking is not permitted.

8. Pets are not allowed.

People with motor difficulties and heart problems should be especially careful.

We suggest that you wear low-heeled shoes on your visit.

Visitors are informed that an audio tour service, authorized by the Parco, is available.

*from the Regulations for visitors to the Excavations (n. 213 dated 22.01.01)

Brief history of the ancient city and the excavations

Dyonisus of Halicarnassus attributed the founding of Herculaneum to Heracles returning from Iberia, while Strabo reports that the city first belonged to the Oscans, then the Etruscans and Pelasgians, and finally the Samnites. Like Pompeii and *Stabiae*, Herculaneum was also forced to enter the orbit of the Nocera confederation. When it rebelled against Rome during the Social War, it was attacked and conquered in 89 BC by the envoy of Silla, Titus Didius, and was thereafter involved in the municipalization process that affected all of central-southern Italy.

The city, equipped with only modest walls, was built on a volcanic plateau, on a sheer cliff over the sea at the foot of Vesuvius, limited by two streams in the east and west.

Two river bays formed natural, safe harbours.

Trials of deep excavations in several points seem to indicate that the city layout, divided into regular lots, was not planned until the first half of the 4th cent. BC.

A profound renewal of construction struck the city

during the Augustan period, when many public buildings were built or heavily restored, including the Theatre, the Basilica of Nonius Balbus, the aqueduct, the system of public fountains and the *castella aquarum*, the temples of the Sacred Area, the Suburban Baths, the Central Baths, the Palaestra.

The disastrous earthquake in 62 AD made many buildings hazardous, and Vespasian financed the restoration of the so-called Basilica (built in Claudian times) and of the temple, not yet uncovered, located near the palaestra and dedicated to the *Magna Mater*, but many other restorations are archaeologically documented.

The city was relatively modest in size. It has been hypothesized that the overall surface enclosed by the walls was approximately 20 hectares, for a population of approximately 4000 inhabitants; only 4.5 hectares

are visibly open, while a few important public or residential buildings, uncovered with tunnels in the eighteenth century, are inaccessible today (the Basilica of Nonius Balbus,

Brief history of the ancient city and the excavations

the so-called Basilica) or are located outside the archaeological park (the Theatre and the Villa of the Papyri).

The city layout appears to be divided along at least three "decumani" (only two of which have been fully uncovered), intersected by five cornerstones perpendicular to the decumani and to the coastline: the third, fourth and fifth are fully uncovered.

The digs began at Herculaneum in 1738, and continued using the technique of underground tunnels and exploratory and ventilation shafts until 1828, when the "open-air" digs were authorized, and carried out until 1875. After a very long interruption, in 1927 Amedeo Maiuri began the work once more, and continued to lead the digs until 1958. Additional work was done in 1961, in the northern sector of *Insula VI* and along the main street or "Decumanus Maximus", while the last twenty years have concentrated on exploring the ancient shoreline, corresponding to the southernmost strip of the archaeological area.

The limited size of the archaeological park and the lack, in the uncovered sector, of many of the buildings and places that normally made up the civil and religious panoply of monuments of a small city of Roman Italy in the 1st cent. AD (temples, public buildings, even the forum itself), at a first hurried glance might discourage a visit to Herculaneum, to the advantage of the better known, larger and monumental Pompeii.

However, the particular dynamics of the burial of Herculaneum - covered by flows of pyroclastic rock that solidified to an average height of approximately 16 meters - has led to a phenomenon of preservation that is absolutely original and nothing at all like Pompeii, providing us with organic artifacts (plants, fabrics, furniture and structural parts of wooden buildings, even the boat recovered from the ancient marina in 1982), but also and especially the upper floors of the buildings, and with them a precise idea of volumes and building techniques.

Barrel Arches



These are vaulted rooms (port warehouses and boat storage) that open onto the beach, in the imposing support structures of the terrace above. In these, since they were discovered by G. Maggi in the spring of 1980, approximately 300 human skeletons have been found, terrible evidence of the eruption in 79 AD: here, along with any valuables they were able to recover, especially necklaces and coins, had sought escape the people of Herculaneum who escaped to the shore, where they were killed by the high temperature caused by the blazing clouds exploding from the volcano. In the same area (summer 1982) were found a well-preserved Roman boat, 9 m long, and the skeletons of the so-called rower and of a soldier; with belt, two swords, scalpels and a bag of coins. In Roman times, the coast of Herculaneum must have been much closer; indeed, one effect of the earthquake in 79 AD was to sink it at approximately 4 m, and the material erupting from Vesuvius added a strip of land to the sea, approximately 400 m wide.



Terrace of M. Nonius Balbus

2



Climbing the ramp against the walls brings you into a large rectangular piazza, in front of the complex of the Suburban Baths. Here stands the funeral altar, covered with marble, which by decree of the local senate was dedicated to the senator *M. Nonius Balbus*, praetor and proconsul of the provinces of Crete and Cyrene, tribune of the plebes in 32 BC and partisan of Octavian, the future 'Augustus' (27 BC.-14 AD). *M. Nonius Balbus* did good service towards the city of Herculaneum by restoring and building many public buildings: at least 10 statues were erected in his honor; and great honors bestowed upon his death, recalled in the long inscription engraved on the face of the funeral altar facing the sea. On the marble base next to the funeral altar was the armored statue of *M. Nonius Balbus* himself, also made of marble: the head was already found during the excavations led by A. Maiuri, while the large fragment of the bust was recovered in 1981.



Suburban Baths

3



Built between the walls and the sea in the early 1st cent. AD, this bath complex is one of the best preserved in ancient times.

The half-columned portal with tympanum leads into the vestibule *with impluvium**, bordered by 4 columns; water sprays into the circular fountain from the herm (portrait on the pilaster). The vestibule opens to the right, through a corridor, onto a waiting room with a floor in *signinum opus**, and to the *praeefurnium* (oven for heating). The bathing rooms as such include the *frigidarium* (cold bathing room), with a floor of white marble slabs and frescoes in fourth style*, the *tepidarium*, with a floor of slate slabs and stuccoes on the walls depicting warriors, the *caldarium* (hot bathing room), with walls decorated in fourth style*.

In this room one can see the impression of the *labrum* (tub for ablutions) in the volcanic material that came in through the window, which violently tore the basin from its support. Finally, the eastern sector of the bath complex includes an apsidal room, with a 'pool' heated using the 'samovar' system (a receptacle placed in the center of the room, below which the fire was lit directly), and the *laconicum* (steam bath room), with a black mosaic floor on a white background.



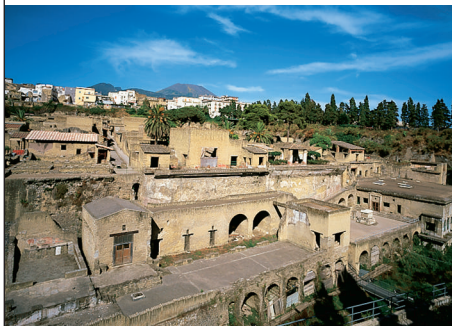
Sacred area

4



The western sector of the South Terrace, supported by heavy vaulted structures, is occupied by a Sacred Area containing various rooms and two temples side by side, dedicated to Venus and four divinities, respectively. Here, as recalled by an inscription, the board of *Venerii* held its meetings.

Two mythological frescoes were detached from the first vaulted room after entering the Sacred Area; the second was instead the source of two headless statues of women in togas, and a marble ara dedicated to Venus by a libertus of the *Marii* family. Architectural terracottas from a previous renovation have also been found in the area.



Sacellum of Venus

5



Completely restored after the earthquake in 62 AD by Vibidia Saturninus and his son A. Furius Saturninus, this small temple is dedicated to Venus. It is preceded by a marble-covered altar; and had a vestibule (pronaos) with grooved and stuccoed tufa columns, now stacked nearby; the vaulted cell contains the remains of frescoes with a garden motif: in the painted panel to the left of the entrance we can recognize a rudder, an attribute of Venus-Fortuna who guided sailors.



Sacellum of the four Gods

6



Restored after the earthquake in 62 AD, the temple is dedicated to four divinities, as evidenced by the lovely archaistic reliefs, perhaps from the Augustan period (27 BC-14 AD), recently found and originally fastened to the front side of the podium standing at the back of the cell. These depict Minerva, Neptune, Mercury and Volcano, all divinities related to the world of manufacture, trade and crafts. The floor of the pronaos (vestibule) and the Corinthian columns are made of cipolline marble; the cell floor is in *sectile opus**. Part of the wooden structure of the roof was recently recovered, dragged onto the beach below by the force of the eruption.



House of Relief of Telephus

7



With the adjacent House of the Gem, it formed a complex that may have belonged to *M. Nonius Balbus*, and is the second largest in *Herculaneum* (1800 m² verified). Built in a scenic position, on the slop leading down to the marina, the house was built on three levels and held a rich collection of sculptures of the neo-Attic school, including the relief with the myth of *Telephus*, son of *Hercules* (mythical founder of the city). The structure current dates from the Augustan period (27 BC-14 AD), and was remodelled after the earthquake in 62 AD. The atrium is similar to a *peristyle**, with columns supporting not the slopes of the roof, but the rooms of the upper floor, as in certain Greek houses. Between the columns hang the plaster casts of the marble *oscilla* found here (discs or masks, generally in a Dionysian theme, used to ward off evil).



House of the Deers

8



Finding a loaf of bread with the stamp of *Celer*, slave of *Q. Granius Verus* freed shortly before the eruption in 79 AD, has made it possible to identify the owner of the house. The atrium is small, without a *compluvium** but with a gallery and servants' rooms on the upper floor: to the right a corridor leads to the *triclinium**, kitchen and an alcove, with fourth style* decoration and a marble floor; to the left is the large complex of public rooms. The windowed *cryptoporticus*, with white mosaic floor with colored marble shards and frescoed walls, encloses the large garden where the diggers found round marble tables and statues of deers attacked by dogs, the Satyr with a wineskin, a drunken Hercules (originals in the *Antiquarium*). Aligned with the garden and emphasized by the *tympanum*, with a blue glass paste mosaic depicting Cherubs riding sea animals and the head of Oceanus, is a large sitting room with a *sectile opus** floor and fourth style* frescoes; it is followed by the scenic terrace overlooking the sea, preceded by rooms with floor of prized *sectile opus**.



Taberna of Priapus

9



This *thermopolium* stands out among the numerous shops in the area for two reasons: the half-buried *dolium* (jar) near the hearth, in which some walnuts were found, and the small pantry covered with *signinum opus*, located in front of the counter. The painted Priapus behind the bar kept the evil eye away. From the shop the owner could directly enter his home, with 4-columned atrium and an upper floor. The *thermopolia* were public dining establishments that served hot food and drinks (whence the Greek-style name): it was customary to lunch (*prandium*=midday meal) outside the home.



Large Taberna

10



This is a pub with a marble-covered counter, in which *dolia* (jars) are inserted. On the staggered shelves, also covered with marble, were stored the containers for serving food and drink. On the partition in the back room are a painting of a ship and some graffiti, including a Greek maxim saying: "Diogenes, the cynic, in seeing a woman swept away by a river, exclaimed: "Let one ill be carried away by another." The *taberna* is connected to a small atrium-style dwelling, with two rooms frescoed in 'fourth style'*, partly preserved.



Taberna Vasaria



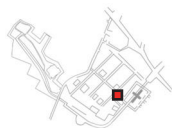
Opening onto Decumanus Inferior, the *taberna* is made up of a single room, with the mezzanine (*pergula*) used as living quarters. It does not have a sales counter; and the east and west walls have two shelves; in the back is the latrine, closed by a brick partition.

Here numerous wine amphorae were found, all of the same type and with an inscription in black Greek characters. It is therefore thought not to have been a 'tavern' for the sale of a special wine, carried only in a certain type of amphora, but a shop selling amphorae and other terracotta items that were manufactured in great quantities in the many workshops of ancient Roman Campania.



Palaestra

12



This gigantic building complex, used primarily for sporting activities, was built in the Augustan period (27 BC-14 AD). Developed on two terraces, the building has only been partly uncovered. One enters from *Cardo V* through the monumental vestibule, marked by two columns, mistakenly identified in the past as the temple of the *Mater Deum*. The lower terrace is made up of a large area with porticos on three sides and a cryptoporticus on the north side to support the terrace above. The long rectangular tub (fish-breeding pond) alongside the cryptoporticus was later eliminated and replaced by the large cross-shaped tub with the bronze fountain depicting Lerna's Hydra (a mythical, monstrous, many-headed snake: original in the *Antiquarium*). A series of rooms open along the western side of the portico, including the vast, rectangular apsidal hall, nearly 10 m high, with a niche at the back and marble table to be used in ceremonies of worship.



House with Garden

13



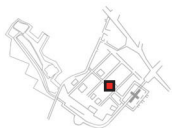
This is a rather poor dwelling, unadorned, made up of small rooms, but with a very large garden, probably annexed to the original residence during a later remodelling phase, sometime after the earthquake in 62 AD.

The long, narrow entrance leads into a landing that opens into the few residential rooms of the home. Among these, worthy of note is a large *oecus* (living room) in which the walls, perhaps blackened due to the work done here during the final stage of life in the house, still has remains of 'second style'* frescoes, with Nile landscape scenes. The house leads to a craftsman's shop (IV,32), with a small *lararium* on the back wall.



House with large Portal

14



The name derives from the lovely half-columned portal, with brick lintel and cornice, built after the earthquake in 62 AD, but which reuses the Hellenistic tufa capitals symbolizing Victory. The dwelling, whose unusual layout comes from an expansion of the building at the expense of the peristyle of the adjacent 'Samnite house', has the remains of grooved tufa columns and 2 pilasters with half-columns still encased in the walls, in their original position. Worthy of note within the dwelling are the 'fourth style'* frescoes; the small courtyard to the left of the entrance that gave the illusion of a yard, through the garden paintings that decorated the walls; the triclinium*, with the panel depicting Silenus seated between two satyrs, observing Ariadne and Dionysus.



Pistrinum of sex. Patulcus Felix

15



There are many shops along the northern section of *Cardo V* (the widest of the 3 uncovered); they are long and narrow, and their mezzanines were used as living quarters. Among these are the city's only two known *pistrina* (bakeries), both equipped with two millstones and smaller than those of Pompeii; the many manual millstones found in the digs also inform us that, in Herculaneum, most people ground their own flour at home.

The *pistor* (baker) *Sex. Patulcus Felix* is the owner of the *pistrinum* at n. 8, as evidenced by a signet ring found here. The oven (built behind the apsidal room of the Palaestra) was protected from the evil eye by two stucco phalluses at the entrance: the same ones appear on a slab in the laboratory.

The 25 round bronze baking pans found in the back room of the shop were used for baking the flat loaves (*placentae*).



House of the Corinthian Atrium

16



This is one of the most ancient residences, medium sized, expanded with an upper floor. It has an entrance with twin brick columns and the atrium with three brick Corinthian columns on either side, while the *signinum opus** floor is decorated with shards of polychrome marble; a low *pluteus* runs between the columns and borders the *impluvium**, which has a fountain with a marble *euripus* (tub). In the room to the right of the entrance is a mosaic of walls with towering battlements; the *diaeta* (living room) retains its coffered ceiling, painted in 'fourth style'* like the walls of this and the other rooms.



Plumbarius Shop

17



This shop, with a long counter of reused limestone blocks, belonged to a blacksmith or 'welder' (*plumbarius*); here we can see the smelting crucible and a few terracotta vats used to cool the forged pieces. Lead ingots, sections of piping, a bronze candelabrum, and a statuette in the process of being repaired, representing Bacchus with damascening (decorations) in gold, silver, and copper. Also note the wooden loft, still partly preserved.



House of the Black Room

18



An archive of 20 wax tablets, found in a room, informs us about the rich *libertus** *L. Venidius Ennychus*, who either lived in the house or managed it on behalf of the owner.

The entrance still has its frame, architrave and part of the door of carbonized wood.

The house follows the sequence vestibule, atrium, tablinum*, peristyle*: the latter has a black mosaic floor and columns arranged so that the garden could be seen from the rooms. The 'black room', on the western side of the peristyle*, and the two *diaetae* (living rooms), are painted in a sophisticated 'fourth style'*: in the 'black room', with its white mosaic floor, excavators found a marble table and a prized wooden *lararium* (aedicula), with marble capitals (now at the *Antiquarium*).

On a half column of the peristyle*, near the tablinum*, was graffiti listing the price (11 as) for purging a cesspool: *exemta ste(14r)cora a(ssibus) XI*.



Cucumas Shop

19



The pilaster at the entrance bear the painted sign, depicting four pitchers (*cucumae* the name has remained in a few dialects) of different colors, with the drinks sold here and a listing of the price of wine. At the top instead hovers the figure of *Semo Sancus*, a divinity often compared to Hercules and who was said to protect business, with the inscription *ad Sancum*. The panel at the bottom with the inscription *NOLA* in red letters is the announcement of a show: unusually, here we can also read the name of who wrote it: *scr(i)ptor Aprilis a Capua*. The shop may have been a *caupona* (inn), where drinks and food were served: in Roman cities it was not customary to have lunch (*prandium*=midday meal) at home.



Shop

20



Among the many shops of the area, this one is especially interesting due to the wooden loft and upper mezzanine accessible by means of a staircase, in which we can see the collapsed carbonized beam.



House of the Tuscan Colonnade

21

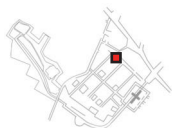


The original core of the dwelling (Republican period), centered around the atrium with its floor in *signinum opus**, was remodeled in the Augustan period (27 BC-14 AD): that may have been when the peristyle* (the 'Tuscan colonnade') was added, incorporating an adjacent house, the *impluvium** covered with marble, some floors renovated with mosaics or *sectile opus**, the walls decorated in a lovely 'third style'*, which in the *oecus* (living room) still hold two paintings, depicting a seated Maenad preceded and Pan conversing with two women, respectively. The *tablinum** (restored after the earthquake in 62 AD) has panels painted red and blue, with an Apollo in the upper area: other examples of 'fourth style'* are found in the *triclinium** and in a *cubiculum* (bedroom). From the upper floor comes a small treasure of coins, worth 1,400 sesterces, and a bronze seal.



Thermopolium

22



Characteristic and very widespread, the *thermopolia* were public establishments that served hot food and drinks (whence the Greek-style name): it was not customary to have lunch (*prandium*=midday meal) at home.

This is a typical, simple structure:

one room opening onto the road, with a brick tap - often decorated - into which were sunk the *dolia* (jars) containing the goods: at times, one could sit down in the back rooms to eat one's meal. In this *thermopolium*, note the dense tunnels dug in the Bourbon period, to recover archeological material.



Sacellum

23



A small rectangular sacellum with podium in the back wall, facing the Decumanus Maximus, probably related to worship at the adjacent Hall of the Augustals.



Hall of the Augustals

24



For the *liberta* (freed slaves), becoming Augustals meant entering into the dynamics of upward mobility. Their 'board', dedicated to worshipping the emperor Augustus, held its meetings in the area of the Forum, where all political, religious and commercial life took place. This is a building with a quadrangular layout, with walls separated by blind arches and four central columns: the floor is in *signinum opus**; that of the upper floor was in *opus spicatum* (bricks arranged in a herringbone pattern). Later, a cell was built aligned with the entrance, which partly retains its original floor and wainscoting covered with marble, and 'fourth style'* frescoes: on the left wall is depicted the entrance of Hercules in the Olympus, accompanied by Jupiter, in the form of a rainbow, Juno and Minerva; the one on the right alludes instead to the battle between Hercules and the Etruscan god Acheloo. In the back, to the right of the sacellum, is the caretaker's room in *opus craticium**, whose skeleton was found lying on the bed. An inscription now placed on the wall reminds us that the building, dedicated to Augustus (27 BC-14 AD) while still living, was built by the brothers A. *Lucius Proculus* and A. *Lucius Iulianus*, who offered a luncheon to the members of the municipal senate and the Augustals on its inauguration day.



Double Atrium House

25



The lovely façade, almost entirely in opus reticulatum*, on the gate has a terracotta Gorgon mask against the evil eye. There was an upper floor extending for the length of the house, with light provided by two atria: one, in front of the entrance, tetrastyle (with its roof supported by four columns); the other, farther inside, with impluvium* and two well-heads, which also acted as a garden. Note the small window in the façade, one of which still has its original ironwork.



Men's Baths

26



The Central Baths, located in 1873 and fully uncovered in 1931, have the typical division into men's and women's sectors. This bath facility, originally fed by a large well, was built during the second half of the 1st cent. BC. The entrance to the men's section is in *Cardo III*. A corridor leads to the *apodyterium* (dressing room), with niches for storing one's garments; west of here is the circular *frigidarium* (cold bathing room), with red walls and four niches painted yellow beneath the blue dome; to the east we instead find the *tepidarium* (warm room), with a black-and-white mosaic depicting a Triton (sea god) among dolphins, an octopus, squid and a cherub with a whip, and the apsidal *caldarium* (hot room).



Women's Baths

27



The women's section of the Central Baths is entered from *Cardo IV*. Passing a waiting room with masonry seats along the walls, one enters the *apodyterium* (changing room) with a strigilate barrel vault, and where we find the 'final version' of the mosaic with Triton present in the men's section. This is followed by the *tepidarium* (warm room), with shelves for storing garments and its meandering mosaic floor, and the *caldarium* (hot room), with vaulted ceiling and two sumptuous seats, one of white marble, the other dark red. Behind these rooms are the heating furnace and the well, which drew water from 8.25 m deep. To the south the bath complex is connected to the palaestra, an outdoor courtyard surrounded by porticos, with brick ionic columns covered with stuccoes.



House of the Beautiful Courtyard

28



The currently visible building dates from the middle of the 1st cent. AD, but from its previous existence it still retains the 'second style'* wall decorations at the entrance and in a room to the east of the tablinum*. The building's layout is rather unusual: the atrium is replaced by an interior, mosaic-embellished courtyard, which acts as a landing leading to the various rooms that open onto it, and containing a staircase, with a gallery painted with ornamental motifs, leading to the upper floor. The remodelling, perhaps related to a change in the building's function (a boarding school?), also led to the creation of new mosaic floors in the tablinum* and the adjacent room, which was also painted in 'third style'*. On the back wall of the large sitting room, perhaps used for group meals, are two neo-Attic marble reliefs representing Dawn and Dusk, found in fragments along *Cardo V*.



House of Neptune and Amphitrite

29



This dwelling draws one's attention due to the rich decoration of the summer triclinium*, glimpsed even through the window of the tablinum* aligned with the entrance.

The conventional name of the residence derives from the glass paste wall mosaic depicting *Neptune and Amphitrite*, which adorns the east wall of the room, while the north side is occupied by a nymphaeum, also covered with a glass paste mosaic, with shells and lava foam and topped with marble theatrical masks. Above the niche area is the tank that fed the fountain. In the lararium (aedicula) of the atrium were discovered two shattered marble slabs painted with red lines, one of which bearing the artist's signature in Greek: "Alexander of Athens painted".

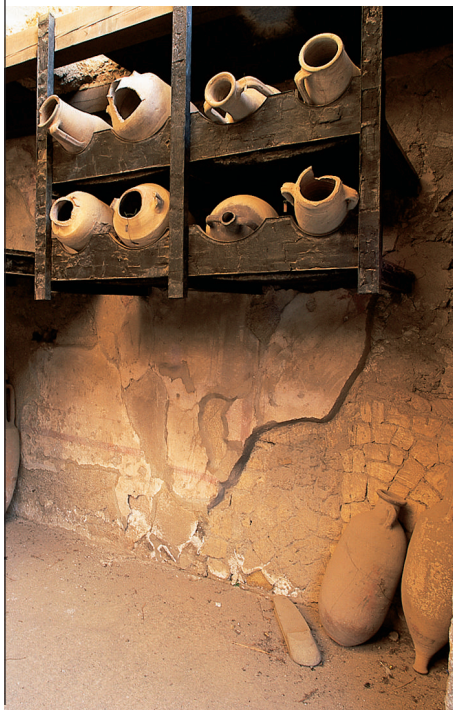


Shop

30



This food shop is annexed to the House of Neptune and Amphitrite, whose good state of preservation it shares: in addition, the collapse of part of the ceiling allows us to observe the kitchen and a few of the rooms on the upper floor of the house. The shop is completely furnished in wood: shelves, a transenna loft for wine amphorae, and a partition.



Samnite House

31



This dwelling, built in the 2nd cent. BC., originally occupied all of the south side of *insula V*. Its currently visible appearance is the result of changes made over time.

The residence at first ceded its garden space to the adjacent House with Large Portal (V,35) then, after the earthquake in 62 AD, the rooms on the upper floor were separated from the house and rented out, creating an independent entrance at n. 2. The lovely view frames the portal topped by tufa capitals supporting the wooden architrave: the entrance is decorated in 'first style*', with a coffered 'second style*' ceiling. The splendid Hellenistic-style atrium, with walls painted over in 'fourth style*', is crowned at the top by an arcade closed on three sides by false columns and transenna, with one open side. The floor is *signinum opus**, dotted with white tiles, while that of the *tablinum** is adorned with a rosette of diamond shapes centered around a round copper tile. During the final remodelling, the *impluvium** was covered with marble and a room painted with a green background, with the painting depicting the rape of Europa.



House of the Alcove

32



The residence opens onto the street with two doors, one of which is raised, and is the result of combining two separate ancient houses, connected by means of an entrance opening onto the vestibule. In one room is the painting with Ariadne abandoned, the only one left by the first Bourbon diggers. From the vestibule, descending two steps, one enters a second and larger vestibule onto which opens a triclinium*, with preserved wooden beds and two windows with wooden frames and iron bars still in place, as well as a triclinium* with fair remains of the marble floor (*sectile opus**). A corridor with mosaic floor leads to an out of the way apsidal room (alcove), preceded by a vestibule.



House of the Mosaic Atrium

33



This is an aristocratic residence built in a scenic position, elegant in both its painted decorations and architectural space. The conventional name derives from the geometric black-and-white mosaic, with a checkerboard motif in the atrium, while the vestibule is inspired by the coffered ceilings. The ancient tablinum*, aligned with the entrance, was converted into a hall with three naves, similar to a basilica (*oecus Aegyptius*), a room of extraordinary architectural significance that represents the only known example thus far discovered throughout the Vesuvian area. The garden, with its marble-covered fountain, is surrounded on three sides by porticos, and a windowed veranda on the north side: its floor is of *sectile opus** and the walls bear figurative 'fourth style'* paintings, as in the rest of the house.



House of the Bronze Herm

34



A small dwelling centered around a Tuscanicum style atrium (roof supported by beams), with *signinum opus** floor; a central tufa tub, walls decorated with 'third style'* paintings. This room displays the casting of the bronze herm (portrait on pilaster) of the homeowner. Of great interest are the *tablinum**, for its *sectile opus** floor, and the *triclinium** behind, which retains paintings renovated during the 'fourth style'* period, among which the most outstanding is a seascape painting.



Trellis House

35



This is a boarding house, with the upper floor intended for use by several families, built almost entirely of *opus craticium**, a low-cost technique considered not to be very solid and easily subject to fire, which in Pompeii is never used for supporting walls, while it is tried experimentally in Herculaneum - a more 'advanced' town, more open to innovations from nearby *Neapolis*. The balcony over the street, supported by brick Ionic columns, partly holds a room of the separate first floor apartment, with its own entrance at n. 13. Numbers 14 and 15 lead instead into the house on the ground floor and the adjacent shop. This residence is the source of conspicuous carbonized remains of wooden beds, wardrobes and a portrait.



House of the Wooden Partition

36



The entrance to the dwelling is flanked by two masonry seats, a waiting room for *clientes* (the 'protégés' of a gens, or family).

The conventional name derives from the wooden partition, a sort of folding gate that shields the atrium towards the tablinum*, to maintain privacy. The partition has profiled panels with rings and supports for hanging oil-lamps. The floor of the large atrium is *signinum opus** decorated with white tiles, dating from the most ancient stage of the residence.

The marble covering of the *impluvium** tub, the wall paintings and the geometric mosaic of the room to the right of the entrance date instead from a restoration from approximately the mid-1st cent. AD. Behind the tablinum is the area of the peristyle*, which extends to the western edge of the *insula III* on *Cardo III*.



Lanarius Shop

37



In the years prior to the eruption in 79 AD, shops were created in the side rooms of the House of the Wooden Partition. Among these is the one at n. 10: this is the shop of a fabric merchant (*lanarius*), inside of which one can observe the only remaining example of a wooden screw press (*torcular or pressorium*), used to iron clothes. A staircase leads to the craftsman's small dwelling, consisting of two rooms, created over the vestibule of the House of the Wooden Partition.



Thermopolium

38



The *thermopolia* were public dining establishments that served hot food and drinks (whence the Greek-style name): it was not customary to have lunch (*prandium*=midday meal) at home. This is a typical, simple structure: one room opening onto the road, with a brick counter decorated with marble or terracotta slabs, into which were sunk the *dolia* (jars) containing the goods: at times, one could sit down in the back rooms to eat one's meal. Many amphorae were found in the back room of this *thermopolium*, one of which bore an inscription painted by a Herculaneum craftsman: *M. Livi Alcimi Herclani*.



House of the Genius

39



Uncovered between 1828 and 1850, this house is accessible only through its back entrance, with small portico, which opens onto *Cardo III* at n. 3; the main entrance was instead supposed to open onto *Cardo II*, but has not been uncovered, since the dwelling is still largely buried beneath modern-day Vico Mare. The conventional name derives from a statuette found here, depicting a *Genius* (protective idol of people, places, activities), which was part of a marble candelabrum. Among the rooms, note the large and elegant peristyle* with its central marble-covered fountain, and the floor of *signinum opus** and mosaic.



House of Argus

40



The main entrance of the house opened onto *Cardo II* (not uncovered); today one enters either through an opening made by the Bourbons in the north wall of the atrium of the adjacent House of Aristides, or through its secondary entrance at n. 2 along *Cardo III*. The name comes from the painting, no longer present, depicting Argus guarding Io, the nymph beloved by Zeus and turned into a heifer. Onto the large three-armed peristyle* with stuccoed columns open the triclinium* and other residential rooms and, on the western side, the passage through a second, smaller peristyle, whose columns are partly visible through the partially reopened Bourbon tunnels. The upper floor, lost after the open-air digs were abandoned in 1875, had small rooms used as a warehouse and facing the porticoed garden: here the excavators found an actual pantry, with flower and loaves ready to bake, as well as terracotta jars containing spelt, legumes, olives, almonds, and fruit.



House of Aristides

41



Travelling north along *Cardo III*, this is the first building we come across, protruding towards the marina. The Bourbon diggers passed through this dwelling to carry the valuable furnishings from the nearby Villa of the Papyri to the surface. The conventional name comes from a statue found in that sumptuous residence, mistakenly identified as representing Aristides (an Athenian politician), although it actually depicted Aeschines, a famous Athenian emperor. The atrium and adjacent rooms are built of *opus reticulatum**, against what is now Vico Mare, on the extreme slopes of the hill of Herculaneum. The residential complex rests on a powerful support structure of *opus caementicium**, with a surface of bricks and *opus reticulatum**.



House of the Skeleton

42



The front of the building was explored by C. Bonucci in 1830-1831, who found a skeleton on the upper floor; but the excavation was completed by A. Maiuri in 1927. The current layout combines three existing houses in an elongated shape, of which the central one has a covered atrium. The nymphaeum to the left of the entrance has the back wall covered with lava, imitating *opus quadratum**, and a mosaic-covered frieze. A mosaic lararium is also present in a small courtyard, protected by a metal grate. A few rooms have floors in *sectile opus** and frescoed walls.



Inn House

43



Built in the Augustan period (27 BC-14 AD), the dwelling develops to the south with a scenic terrace extending out towards the sea, and supported by vaulted structures, in which rooms were created with floors of *signinum opus** and *sectile opus**. The excavation was undertaken by C. Bonucci (1852), but not completed until the 1930s by A. Maiuri. Because of its large size (2,150 m²) and the presence of spa facilities, it was identified as an inn. The most ancient elements belong to the baths themselves, decorated with frescoes from the late 'second style'* and black-and-white mosaic floors. The western wing of the large peristyle* and some of the attached rooms have a mosaic floor; the portico behind the garden is supported by heavy pilasters of *opus vittatum mixtum* (alternating rows of brick and squared blocks).



Papyri Villa and Insulae septentrionales

44 45 46 47



The area of the New Excavations opens up into the heart of the modern city of Ercolano. There are several monumental sites only partly excavated: 1) a part of the Insulae septentrionales including structures still belonging to the city, among which the thermal complex with a pool heated by a "samovar" system; 2) a small area of the suburban Villa dei Papiri (Papyri Villa), investigated by tunnels in the 1700s, of which the vestibule area, a part of the first floor and a curvilinear forepart belonging to a second level, already noted by the 18th century planimetry, have been recently excavated; 3) the collapsed remains of a monumental structure, probably the seaside entrance of a residential complex. The decorated female statue imitating those of the Greek Classic Age and the head of Amazon, a replica of the original attributed to the Greek sculptor Policleto (circa middle of the fifth century B.C.), come from this area.



Glossary

bi-triclinium: dining room, where people ate lying on couches along 2-3 sides of the room

compluvium: opening in the center of the roof of the atrium in the house, which conveyed water into the *impluvium**

first style: painted wall decoration (3rd cent. BC - early 1st cent. BC), also known as 'structural', which imitates stucco architectural elements decorated to imitate marble

fourth style: painted wall decoration (second half of the 1st cent. AD), also known as 'fantastic', which expands the architectural imagination of the 'second style'* and the decorative tone of the 'third style'*

impluvium: a low basin in the center of a household atrium, into which rainwater flowed down from the roof through the *compluvium**

libertus: freed slave, whose children were free citizens

opus caementicium: building technique in which the mortar was made up of a mixture of sand or crushed stones and lime

opus craticium: economical

building technique with square wooden frames filled with crushed rocks, bound together with lime and mud

opus incertum: building technique in which the structure was made up of 2 outer beds of medium-sized stones - all the same kind or mixed - and filled with opus caementicium*

opus latericium: building technique with a core of opus caementicium*, in which tiles or bricks of different sizes were laid in regular, overlapping rows

opus quadratum: building technique in which square blocks were laid in regular ashlar courses, without mortar

opus reticulatum: building technique with a core of opus caementicium*, covered with small pyramidal blocks

arranged with their points embedded in the wall and exposed square bases forming a net-like diagonal pattern

peristyle: garden surrounded by a colonnade of porticos

second style: painted wall decoration (early 1st century BC - 20 BC), also known as 'architectural', which recalls some elements of 'first style'* - not with stucco, but using

Glossary

lines painted artistically, making them more complex and realistic, with regard to perspective

sectile opus: decoration of floors or walls with marble tiles that outline geometric or figurative patterns

signinum opus: powdered terracotta, mixed with lime and sand, used to cover floors and walls to keep out moisture

tablinum: a public room of the home, between the atrium and the peristyle*

third style: painted wall decoration (20 BC-50 AD), also known as 'ornamental', that divides the surface into precise vertical and horizontal sections by means of plant or linear architectural elements, in the center of which are decorative motifs and decorated panels

This small guide
collects short
introductions for
visiting the most
important dig sites.
Some of them can
be temporarily
closed.

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