

2 | Hellenistic Pompeii: between Oscan, Greek, Roman and Punic

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Pompeii looks at once East and West. Culturally, it embodies the contradictions of the ‘Hellenistic West’. Undoubtedly a wave of influence from the eastern Mediterranean makes a profound impact on Pompeii in the second century BCE. Yet Pompeii had no need to turn to the East to access the Hellenic. Embedded in Magna Graecia, with the influence of the Greek colonies from Pithecoussae to Neapolis close to hand from its earliest history, it enjoyed easy contact with Sicily, with its double Greek and Punic heritage. The picture of a culturally virgin Italy transformed by Hellenistic influence in the wake of conquest works no better for Pompeii than for Latium.¹ In an earlier paper, I have suggested that already for the Pompeii of the archaic period, it does not help to separate the layers of influence, Greek, Etruscan and local: the identity of Pompeii lies not in one or other layer, but in its ability to bring them into communication with each other.² In looking now at Pompeii of the ‘Hellenistic’ period, I shall suggest again that the complexity of the layering has been underestimated. Dazzled by the glamour of the Hellenistic East, we have overlooked the importance of the western contacts, including those with the Punic world.

Hellenistic Pompeii

The period that stretches from the third century to the early first has long enjoyed a sort of double characterisation: from the ethnic point of view, it is seen as Samnite or Oscan, from the art-historical as ‘Hellenistic’. The term *Hellenismus* seems to have been used first in this context by Augustus Mau in 1908:

This chapter is a companion piece to my contribution to the Getty collection on Cultural Identities which focuses on the archaic period (Wallace-Hadrill 2011). Both papers develop in greater detail ideas offered in Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 129–37. Both publications have benefited from the stimulating discussion at the conferences in Rome and Los Angeles; my particular gratitude goes to Jo Quinn, without whose persistence this contribution would have fallen by the wayside.

¹ Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 73–143. ² Wallace-Hadrill 2011.

It definitely belongs in terms of steps of development to the Hellenistic period, that from Alexander the Great onwards. The tufo period is in terms of art history that of Hellenism in Pompeii, in political terms that of the Samnites since their Hellenisation; it ends with the founding of the Roman colony.³

The 1920s and 1930s saw the three monumental volumes of *Die Hellenistische Kunst in Pompeji* by Erich Pernice, examining successively bronze vessels, marble furniture and pavements and mosaics.⁴ One of the most influential, if briefest, contributions along these lines was Hans Lauter's essay entitled, 'Zur Siedlungsstruktur Pompejis in samnitischer Zeit', which rightly underlined the building boom of this period and its importance in shaping the town. From the outset, he identifies Samnite as Hellenistic: 'Pompeii's Samnite period, which essentially coincides with the Hellenistic age ...'⁵ This characterisation of third- and second-century Pompeii as 'Hellenistic' reached its fullest expression with Paul Zanker, whose collection of essays on *Hellenismus in Mittelitalien* offered the most wide-ranging study of the phenomenon in Italy; he discussed Hellenistic Pompeii in his influential essay, 'Pompeji: Stadtbilder als Spiegel von Gesellschaft und Herrschaftsform', subsequently translated and transformed into a book in Italian and English, each with interesting variants.⁶ Dividing the changing urban image of the town into a series of time-slices, he entitled our period in the original German, 'die Hellenistische Stadt der zweiten Jahrhunderts v. Chr.', though the English translation restores a bit of ethnicity by calling the chapter, 'The Hellenistic City of the Oscans'.⁷

'Hellenistic' is one of those categories that is particularly risky to invoke if you are not aware of its ideological presuppositions. Johann Gustav Droysen coined the term to characterise a particular epoch, from Alexander to (more or less) Augustus on the premise that there was a broad cultural movement which gave some sort of Mediterranean-wide coherence to the period, a *Verschmelzung* or fusion of Greek with

³ Mau 1908: 39: 'Er gehört seiner Entwicklungsstufe nach entschieden dem Hellenismus, der Zeit nach Alexander d.Gr. an. Die Tuffperiode ist kunstgeschichtlich der Hellenismus in Pompeji, politisch die Zeit der Samniten seit ihrer Hellenisierung; sie endet mit der Gründung der römischen Kolonie.' The reference to *Hellenismus* occurs only in the second edition of 1908, not in the first of 1900 or the translation by F.W. Kelsey. The change is perhaps due to the recent publication of the first volume of Delbrück's *Hellenistische Bauten in Latium* (Delbrück 1907–12).

⁴ Pernice 1925–38.

⁵ Lauter 1975: 147, 'Pompejis samnitische Zeit, die im wesentlichen mit der hellenistischen Epoche zusammenfällt ...'.

⁶ Zanker 1976a, 1988b, Italian translation 1993a, English translation 1998.

⁷ Zanker 1988b: 5, 1998: 32, where the words 'of the Oscans' are taken from the first words of the section.

Oriental culture.⁸ He was, as Luciano Canfora (1987) showed, influenced by Niebuhr, who in turn was influenced by the Danish ethnographer Father Carsten, who studied cultural fusion in the colonialist situation of the West Indies, and specifically Creole languages and cultures. Droysen's *Hellenismus* is a sort of creolisation of Greek culture, fused with the Oriental. The most perverse thing about this construct is the violence it does to the Greek usage of *hellenismos* and *hellenizein*, which invariably refer to the insistence on pure Greek in foreign contexts: the anxiety of the grammarian is that Jews, Egyptians, Syrians or Carthaginians should speak an uncontaminated language, the very opposite of the fusion which Droysen posited.⁹

It may seem safe to speak of 'Hellenism' in a neutral sort of way simply to refer to the cultural *koine* that we can recognise both in the Greek eastern Mediterranean and in the Roman West: yet that is the product not of Greek/Oriental fusion, but of Roman conquest. Unconsciously, Orientalism lurks in the background. Take Zanker's discussion of the figured capitals from the Casa dei Capitelli Figurati. One shows the owner and his wife, while a second capital shows a drunken satyr (or Silenus) and a maenad.¹⁰

The men are naked to the waist, the women swathed in the usual modest robes, but their expressions and embrace make it clear that here, too, they are enjoying wine and an amorous encounter. Through this juxtaposition the owner announces in the most explicit manner his identification with the Dionysiac, hedonistic lifestyle celebrated by Oriental monarchs ('Könige des Ostens') and characteristic of contemporary Greek cities. The portal thus proclaims his adoption of a specific form of Greek culture. (Zanker 1998: 37)

The discussion is closely linked to his analysis of the contrasting styles of Octavian and Antony, and the attempt to discredit Antony by association with the 'oriental luxury' of the Hellenistic kingdoms: the rhetoric of Asiatic luxury and excess, with its roots in fifth-century Athenian writing, and cheerfully recycled by the Romans of Cicero's generation, underpins the characterisation of the 'Hellenistic'.¹¹ Yet the image of the drunken Silenus was familiar in the West from the archaic period onwards, on Etruscan sarcophagi and mirrors, on terracotta antefixes, on the coinage of Sicilian Naxos, on the decorative plaques of bronze beds and so many contexts: why

⁸ Droysen 1836, 1843, 1877–8. See Momigliano 1970, Bichler 1983.

⁹ See my discussion in Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 20–2.

¹⁰ Staub Gierow 1994: 48 describes it as Silenus and maenad; p.73 gives a date of c. 120 BCE and questions Zanker's association with the Bacchanalia of 186.

¹¹ On the links between Asiatic style, Dionysus and Orientalism, Zanker 1988a: 64.

should this image now evoke the kingdoms of the East? It is remarkable how tenacious is the assumption that the Dionysiac is somehow 'Oriental', when it is a persistent characteristic of Greek art and culture at all periods.¹²

For Zanker, the Oscans are enthusiastic newcomers to Hellenistic culture:

In the case of the palatial tufa houses of the second century B.C., by contrast, the proportions had been correct. The Oscan landowners and merchants who built them were newcomers to Hellenistic culture, but nonetheless full participants in it, indistinguishable from the Greeks of the mother country and Asia Minor except perhaps for a slight degree of excess. When their successors began taking the great Roman aristocrats' villas as their point of orientation, however, Pompeii lapsed into cultural provincialism. (Zanker 1998: 75)

That is to say, the Oscans of the second century were discovering Greek culture for the first time, despite living in a city which for a good five centuries had been in close contact with the Greek cities of the Bay of Naples; and their contact with the Hellenistic East was unmediated by contact with the Romans, in spite of the fact that it was with Roman armies that they went East to fight as *socii*, and in the wake of Roman conquest that they operated as *negotiatores*. I suggest we might replace this picture of unmediated Hellenisation restricted to a single moment with a picture of a Pompeian cultural negotiation: just as in the archaic period it is difficult to distinguish Greek from Etruscan influence, in this later period we should beware of separating the Hellenistic from the Roman.

Cultural identity is not just about who you are, but who you do business with: the Pompeian necessarily did business with the Greek world of south Italy, with the Oscan-speaking world of central Italy and Samnium, and the Latin-speaking world of Rome. We could ask for no better symbol of this triangulation than the dedication to Mummius in the temple of Apollo that was revealed from its plaster by Andrea Martelli (Martelli 2002, cf. Yarrow 2006). The Oscan lettering and name forms are coherent with the overwhelming use of Oscan in public inscriptions in Pompeii in the second century, and with an implicit association with the Oscan speakers of the interior. The celebration of the conqueror of Achaëa spells out Pompeii's role as an ally of Rome in the eastern campaigns, from whose booty they were benefiting; while the location of the temple of Apollo, which is rebuilt at this time in the finely cut tufo of the Hellenistic *Tuffperiode*, decorated with bronze statues of Apollo and Artemis that might themselves be part of the loot of Corinth, point not to a first encounter with Hellenistic culture

¹² On supposed 'Oriental' cults, see Beard *et al.* 1998: 246–8, and 92–6 on the cult of Bacchus.

(Achaea, after all, is scarcely eastern), but to the potential of war booty to update and embellish a sanctuary that had from the outset made an engagement with the Greeks explicit.¹³

In thinking of the Hellenistic in Italy, we should wean ourselves from the Droysenian obsession with the Oriental, and focus more on the western Mediterranean, and in particular on its Punic cultural background. For a snapshot of what Pompeii's Mediterranean-wide links looked like in the pre-imperial period, you need look no further than its coinage. Clive Stannard, who started by analysing the 180 or so coins found in the British School at Rome (BSR)/University of Reading excavations in Region I insula 9, then compared our sample to other finds in Pompeii, Gagnano and large numbers of finds by metal detector from the Liri river around Minturno (Stannard 2005). The distribution pattern that comes out, subsequently confirmed by Richard Abdy's study of the larger sample from the Anglo-American project, is strikingly consistent: a good number of local Campanian mintages, especially Naples itself; a certain number of South Italian, Sicilian and Punic issues; a substantial presence from Massalia; a massive presence of the extraordinary small bronze pieces of Ebusus (Ibiza), with the type of the Punic god Bes; and a tiny handful from the eastern Mediterranean. That is to say, not surprisingly, that Pompeii looks West more than East, and links to the Greek cities of Neapolis and Massalia, and the once-Punic Panormus, more strongly than to central Greece, let alone Asia. And it is in this western Mediterranean context that the Punic is a more potent player than the Hellenisation model is ever prepared to admit. Piero Guzzo (2007: 76) has recently suggested that Ebusus might have played a role analogous to Delos for trade with the western Mediterranean. If so, that increases the chances of a cultural engagement with the Punic.

From this point of view, it is worth thinking again about the typical *facies* of the domestic building of the third and second centuries, what Mau called the *Kalksteinperiode*. Its characterising feature was the use of local Sarno travertine ('limestone' is technically a misnomer), both in ashlar blocks and in the arrangement of chains of alternating vertical and horizontal elements referred to as *opus africanum*. Despite its Vitruvian ring, the term is not Roman but modern, and rightly points to its frequency in Punic North Africa.¹⁴ There is a close association between this building technique

¹³ Cf. Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 131–3.

¹⁴ Adam 1999: 120–1. Peterse 1999 is the fullest analysis of the use of this building technique in Pompeii.

and plasterwork in the *faux marbre* of the first style, and flooring in *cocciopesto*, with a red background of crushed ceramics, and decoration in its simplest form of rows of white marble chips. The BSR/Reading project met this combination in the house of Amarantus (I.9.12), excavating half a metre below the remodelled *tablinum* with its fourth-style decoration (Wallace-Hadrill 2005: 105). Subsequently, the pattern has been found repeatedly in Filippo Coarelli's ambitious series of excavations focused in the north-west quarter of the town (Region VI). As his recently published volume, *Rileggere Pompei*, shows in detail, there are two major phases of development (Coarelli and Pesando 2005). The first, broadly in the third century, defines the layout of the house plots, and creates a series of solidly built atrium houses in Sarno stone, with so-called *opus signinum* floors of red *cocciopesto* with white marble chips, and walls decorated in first- or masonry-style plaster, typically with yellow socles. The second phase, in the second century, transforms several of the houses, raising them by as much as half a metre, but still uses travertine, *cocciopesto* and first-style plasterwork. The House of the Centaur is a particularly clear example.¹⁵

Coarelli's team, in a total of over eighty trenches, have repeatedly found situations in which third- or early second-century structures are buried beneath raised floors with this repetitive typology. This suggests we might think again about the use of this highly characteristic construction style, which is so widespread in Pompeii, and has such a limited distribution pattern in the Mediterranean, in Punic and Roman North Africa (as its name suggests), in Punic Sicily (Mozia from the fourth century, Punic Selinunte and, perhaps above all, Solunto), and in Sardinia (e.g. Nora).¹⁶ *Opus africanum* is a rarity in mainland Italy beyond Campania, and far from being a standard Italic building technique. The distribution pattern has been provisionally mapped by Lisa Fentress, and the association of *opus africanum* with areas of Punic domination or Punic contact is so strong that she has suggested that the use of the technique in Campania might be attributed to Carthaginian prisoners of war.¹⁷ That must remain at the level of speculation, but the fundamental point is that the links between Campania and the Punic world, whether direct or mediated through the Sicilian Greeks, reflect the continued cultural complexity of the area.

It is therefore with particular interest that I have learnt from Will Wootton, who has studied the flooring of Euesperides under Andrew

¹⁵ See in detail Pesando 2008. ¹⁶ On Solunto see Wolf 2003.

¹⁷ I am grateful to Lisa Fentress for allowing me to refer to an unpublished paper delivered at the British School at Rome; see also Fentress (Chapter 6) in this volume.

Wilson, the importance of Punic flooring in the technology of *cocciopesto* technique as practised in Italy. Part of the story seems to be a Punic obsession with bathing: *cocciopesto* flooring has water-resistant properties, and was much used for bathing facilities, especially at Kerkouane. The route for transmission of these very specific technologies, of wall-construction and flooring, is presumably through Sicily, with surely Panormus as the key point of contact.¹⁸ The link between the Bay of Naples and Palermo has remained historically tenacious, and it makes sense that Pompeii looked in this direction too. If there is a Hellenistic fusion that is reaching Pompeii in the third and early second centuries, it is that of Greek and Punic which characterises Sicily, not the supposed Greek and Oriental of the eastern Mediterranean.

This is not to deny eastern contact, but rather to downgrade it. The sack of Corinth does seem to mark a change. The tufo period at Pompeii does seem to belong to one quite specific episode. The distribution of ashlar tufo façades is quite localised. They chase down the via dell'Abbondanza as far as the Stabian baths, chase uphill up the via Stabiana, then head back to the Forum along the via della Fortuna.¹⁹ It is hard to explain such a distribution in terms of mere fashion, and it looks strongly like an act of communal will to renew façades in certain streets to embellish the city. The tufo façades are not integral to the construction of the houses behind them, but stuck on. They climaxed at the top of the via dell'Abbondanza with a monumental gateway of tufo, right opposite the temple of Apollo. It seems that we are looking at a major urban renewal in the wake of the sack of Corinth.

This timing nicely suits the chronology of the most famous 'Hellenistic' house of Pompeii, the House of the Faun. Its tufo façade ties it into this phase of urban embellishment. Its spectacular mosaics point explicitly to the East, to Alexander's campaigns, and to Egypt as represented by the Nilotic which in their turn tie in so closely to the late second-century monumentalisation of Praeneste. In this context, we may welcome the suggestion, made simultaneously by Fabrizio Pesando (1996) studying the House of the Faun, and by Meyboom (1995) studying the Palestrina mosaic, that the owners of the house were the Satrii, a well-attested family in Oscan areas, and that the choice of the Faun, or rather Satyr, to decorate both their

¹⁸ On so-called *opus signinum* paving in Sicily, see Palmieri 1983, Tsakirgis 1990 and the contributions to the Palermo conference of 1996 by Camerata Scovazzo 1997, C. Greco 1997, Isler 1997 and Joly 1997. See further the chapters by Lisa Fentress (Chapter 6), Andrew Wilson (Chapter 5), and Roger Wilson (Chapter 4) in this volume.

¹⁹ See Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 134.

atrium and their master-bedroom, was a play on their name. It is not difficult to imagine a Satrius leading the Pompeian *socii* into some eastern engagement, sacking some innocent centre, and coming back fancying himself a proper Alexander triumphant over the East.

At the entrance to the House of the Faun is a stretch of *cocciopesto* flooring with white marble chips spelling out the Latin greeting, *HAVE*. This has caused some concern to those who want Oscan to be the only visible language in pre-colonial Pompeii, and Latin to be the exclusive language of the Roman colony. But, as Zevi has argued (1998), there is no need to downdate the inscription to after 80 BCE. Latin, of necessity, was the *lingua franca* of the Roman and allied armies; the local élites must have mastered it, and so too might their troops. Public inscriptions were put up in Oscan in Pompeii not for ignorance of Latin, but in awareness of a separate cultural identity that is marked throughout central Italy in the second century. But to infer from this that they were culturally out of contact with Rome is absurd. Consider only Lisa Fentress's demonstration (2003a) that the early second-century House of Diana at Cosa was built to exactly the same ground plan, down to quite small details, as the House of Sallust at Pompeii. We can add that there are many similarities between the row-houses of Cosa and those studied by Nappo (1997) at Pompeii. It is no coincidence that Pompeii is the type-site for the Roman atrium house. The Pompeians were building their houses on models familiar in Roman colonies long before they themselves became one, even if they were using building technologies that pointed to the Punic world.

I have underlined the ambivalence of the cultural affinities met in Pompeii. For a final example of how difficult the boundaries are, we may consider the small theatre or Odeion at Pompeii. As is well known, it is extraordinarily close in design to the theatre at the sanctuary site of Pietrabbondante, that ultimate symbol of Samnite separatism. But it was erected, according to its dedication, by C. Quinctius Valgus and M. Porcius, the same Sullan colonial magistrates who built the amphitheatre, that ultimate symbol of the Roman. The same theatre design, then, might be Samnite in Pietrabbondante, and Roman in Pompeii. But of course it was also potentially Samnite in Pompeii – we cannot exclude that it had been projected before the Social War, and only finished off by the Sullan *duoviri*. And on the other hand, it was also Hellenistic, with its elegant sphinx finials and Atlas supports. The design could come from the East, although as Roger Wilson shows (Chapter 4, this volume), there are plenty of parallels to find in Sicily too. But since the same design was also found at Sarno, the model might be more local, even Capua.

Conclusion

'Hellenistic' Pompeii, as it emerges from this discussion, is a great deal less coherent, culturally, than imagined. Far from being a simple Italic city that experiences a single acculturating transformation from the eastern Mediterranean, it enters the period with a long history of influences, from its Greek and Samnite neighbours, and from the dominant powers of central Italy, Etruscan or Roman. The third and second centuries see the material prosperity and urban fabric of the city transformed. But we can distinguish, it would appear, separate waves of influence. In the third century, Pompeii belongs in the ambit of Magna Graecia, with features of material culture that point to Sicily and, beyond that, to the zone of Punic influence. 146 BCE, with the simultaneous destructions of Carthage and Corinth, may mark a real turning point: a western cultural *koine* that emerged from a dialogue between western Greek and Punic is finally displaced by an eastern Mediterranean *koine*. It marks a quantum leap in material culture, what the Romans called *luxuria* and the Greeks *tryphe*. It coincides with what the Romans described as the end of *metus hostilis*, once Carthage was no longer there to be a bogey man. It is the direct result of Roman imperialism. The Pompeians, like the Romans themselves, looked for a new expression of cultural identity in the larger Mediterranean they now together controlled.