

# The early development of concrete in the domestic architecture of pre-Roman Pompeii

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## Introduction: pre-Roman Pompeii and Roman architecture

Because of its exceptional state of preservation, Pompeii has traditionally been viewed as an ideal site at which to study the early development of Roman architecture. Scholars have looked to the Pompeian evidence in order to provide parallels for periods and classes of buildings that in Rome are less well documented archaeologically. The focus of recent debate has been on the Mid- to Late Republican transition, with an emphasis on building types whose introduction at Pompeii would demonstrate a direct cultural link with practice at Rome. The prevailing view is that both the town-planning and the architecture of Pompeii in the 3rd-2nd c. B.C. were strongly influenced by Roman models or prototypes.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, there has been a tendency to refer to the Pompeian materials as the missing link for the high dating of early Roman concrete architecture in Rome, which would have been introduced around the same period. In a recent review of the evidence from Rome,<sup>2</sup> I have argued for a later chronology, which, inevitably, prompts a reconsideration of the development and cultural significance of concrete construction at Pompeii.

In the sphere of public building, a popular idea based primarily on the Pompeian pattern is that Roman-style baths, the freestanding theater, the basilica, and the quadriporticus — the most representative types of what we identify as Roman Republican architecture<sup>3</sup> — were all developed by making extensive use of mortar-and-rubble construction (for vaults, retaining walls and foundations). The assumption, then, has often been that at Pompeii, just as at Rome, there ought to have been a previous phase of experimentation, which would in turn suggest that the building medium was in use by the mid-3rd c. B.C. at the latest.<sup>4</sup> Continued research on early bath architecture (just to mention one well-understood case) is consistently showing that concrete played little rôle in the formative stages of the building type in that period.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the results of a recent

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1 Most explicitly in F. Pesando, "Il secolo d'oro di Pompei. Aspetti dell'architettura pubblica e privata nel II secolo a.C.," in M. Osanna and M. Torelli (edd.), *Sicilia ellenistica, consuetudo italica. Alle origini dell'architettura ellenistica d'Occidente* (Rome 2006) 227-41; see also A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome's cultural revolution* (Cambridge 2008) 127-36; J. Sewell, *The formation of Roman urbanism, 338-200 B.C.* (JRA Suppl. 79, 2010) 120 and 130. For this school of thought, the pattern would reflect the political goals of the Pompeian ruling class, who wished to demonstrate to Rome that Pompeii should be recognized as a peer urban entity, refashioned along Roman lines. P. Carafa ("*Minervae et Marti et Herculi aedes doricae fient* [Vitr. 1.2.5]. The monumental history of the sanctuary in the Triangular Forum," in S. R. J. Ellis [ed.], *The making of Pompeii* [JRA Suppl. 85, 2011] 89-111) assigns key developments in the Forum to the 2nd c. B.C.

2 For an overview of the intellectual problem, see M. Mogetta, "A new date for concrete in Rome," *JRS* 105 (2015) 2-7.

3 A. Boethius, *Etruscan and Early Roman architecture* (Harmondsworth 1978) 136-215. Cf. J. B. Ward-Perkins, "Taste, tradition and technology. Some aspects of the architecture of Late Republican and Early Imperial Central Italy," in *Studies in classical art and archaeology. A tribute to Peter Heinrich von Blanckenhagen* (Locust Valley, NJ 1979) 198, who sees the architecture of Late Republican Italy as a "stream of many local currents" that can hardly be categorized as a single entity.

4 See W. Johannowsky, "La situazione in Campania," in P. Zanker (ed.), *Hellenismus in Mittelitalien* (Göttingen 1976) 270-72.

5 As demonstrated by the case-studies collected in S. K. Lucore and M. Trümper (edd.), *Greek*