

# Roman wall-painting in southern Gaul (*Gallia Narbonensis* and *Gallia Aquitania*)

Alexandra Dardenay

In the Greek world, the practice of decorating walls with painted stucco emerged in the 5th or 4th c. B.C. and was at first limited to public and religious monuments and the palaces of rulers, later spreading to the houses of the aristocracy. In the homes of the nobility, painted decoration enhanced the ornamentation of rooms used for receiving visitors, such as the dining room (*andron*), in which the floors were sometimes decorated with mosaics, most often with geometric motifs. In the wealthiest abodes, as seen at Pella in the 4th c. B.C., Alexandria, or on Delos in the 2nd c. B.C., a mosaic picture called an *emblema* sometimes lay at the centre of the mosaic. In the realm of domestic art, in the Hellenistic age images were restricted to the mosaic floors. The walls were ornamented with architectural elements that imitated, in stucco relief, the fashions that could be seen in the masonry and marble veneers of temples and palaces. This type of décor, established in the homes of Greek nobility throughout the Hellenistic era, is traditionally known as the masonry style or incrustation style.<sup>1</sup>

Over the course of the 2nd c. B.C., with the Roman conquest of Hellenistic kingdoms, Roman aristocrats discovered not only the marvels of Greek art but also the comfort of Greek homes. The example of Pompeii allows us to document the gradual transformation of the traditional Italic *domus* into a Greek-style residence, more oriented toward pleasure and leisure (*otium*). The richest citizens of Pompeii added to the atria of their houses a peristyle onto which several dining rooms (*triclinia*) opened. To complete the transformation, they commissioned mosaics for the floors and painted-stucco décor for the walls. One of the most grandiose examples of these early Greek-style houses in Italy is the Casa del Fauno at Pompeii, which, at 3,000 m<sup>2</sup>, was the largest at the time of the eruption in A.D. 79.<sup>2</sup> Under the influence of the Greek models, and doubtless also because the first artisans and workshops to decorate Roman houses came from Greece, the same type of décor seen throughout the Hellenistic world was reproduced in the Roman world.<sup>3</sup> The masonry style, with its architectural elements such as orthostats sitting atop a socle, developed further in Italy, where it is known as the First Pompeian Style<sup>4</sup> (fig. 1). It was in the 19th c. that A. Mau established this four-style classification, based on wall-paintings in the region of Vesuvius.<sup>5</sup> Because most of his examples came from Pompeii, the classification became known as the “Pompeian Styles”. For the most part, his system of classification is followed to this day, although subsequent work has refined the chronology of the phases and the transitions between them. Even so, as is the case with all typologies, it must be applied

---

1 On the Greek antecedents, see R. Ling, *Roman painting* (Cambridge 1991) 12-14; F. Alabe, “Vocabulaire et syntaxe de décors pariétaux hellénistiques,” in G. F. La Torre and M. Torelli (edd.), *Pittura ellenistica in Italia e in Sicilia. Linguaggi e tradizioni* (Rome 2011) 39-48.

2 See A. Hoffmann and A. Faber, *Die Casa del Fauno in Pompeji (VI 12). Bd. 1* (Wiesbaden 2009); S. De Caro, *I mosaici: la Casa del Fauno* (Naples 2001); F. Pesando, “Autocelebrazione aristocratica e propaganda politica in ambiente privato: la Casa del Fauno a Pompei,” *CahGlötz* 7 (1996) 189-228; G. Sauron, *L'art romain des conquêtes aux guerres civiles* (Paris 2013) 22-38.

3 V. J. Bruno, “Greek antecedents of the Pompeian First Style,” *AJA* 73 (1969) 305-17.

4 Ling (supra n.1) 12-22; A. Laidlaw, *The First Style in Pompeii* (Rome 1985).

5 A. Mau, *Geschichte der decorativen Wandmalerei in Pompeji* (Berlin 1882).