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# The relationship between wall-decoration and room-type in Pompeian houses: a case study of the Casa della Caccia Antica

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This examination of the wall-paintings of one Pompeian house, the Casa della Caccia Antica (Allison 1986)<sup>1</sup> aims to demonstrate the close relationship between decoration and room-type in Roman houses. I hope to show that, when architectural room-types are considered independent of any presumed function, there is a general correlation between space and the overall arrangement of decoration. These correlations are dependent on room-type rather than on the contemporaneity of paintings.<sup>2</sup>

Although a general relationship between decoration and room-type has been widely acknowledged in recent years (e.g. Strocka 1975; Bastet 1979, 5; Ehrhardt 1982, 578; Barbet 1985, 36 f., Wallace-Hadrill 1988), wall-painting chronologies pay little heed to it (e.g. Bastet 1979; Ling 1990, esp. 98; Schefold 1990), even those in which its importance in governing the schemes of wall-decoration is stressed (cf. Wallace-Hadrill 1988, 49). Also, as has been noted for classical archaeology in general (Dyson 1989, 131), studies concerned with room-type and room-use often rely too heavily upon textual evidence to interpret material evidence. A correlation between decoration and room-function is often proposed starting from the assumption that the conventional text-based nomenclature, applied to specific room-types in Pompeii, is a reliable guide to their functions. For example, A. Wallace-Hadrill, after criticising such labelling (1988, 48), proceeds to use rooms so labelled to illustrate the complexity of the associations of decoration with public and private spaces within the house (1988, 71 f.). M. C. Van Binneke (1991, 140), while stressing the importance of the position and proportions of a room in identifying its function, bases room function on conventional terminology and, to a certain extent, on the decorative arrangement itself. J.-P. Adam (1989, 232-38) is more systematic and cautious in his use of both archaeological and architectural data to assign functions to various spaces in Pompeian houses. But he also assumes that the traditional Latin terminology defines room-use at Pompeii. Such studies suppose that we are already well informed as to the function of rooms in Roman houses. In fact, the conventional nomenclature, derived from the ancient written sources and applied to specific rooms in houses, above all at Pompeii, is to be treated with caution (cf. M. Jameson 1990, 93). It should also be noted that the function foreseen in the original architectural design of a room in a Pompeian house may well have changed by the time it received its final third- or fourth-style decoration (cf. Ward-Perkins and Claridge 1978, 52).

The works of A. Barbet and D. Corlàita Scagliarini have relied on the architectural evidence to explore the relationship between decoration and the organisation of space. The former noted the structural divisions in first- and second-style decoration (Barbet 1985, 57 f. and 123 f.). The latter argued (1974/76, 18 f.) that, for all four styles, schemes in rooms in which the occupants, or visitors, tended to be stationary had fixed perspectives, whereas those which formed passageways had more dynamic decoration lacking complex figured themes. She also demonstrates how centralised schemes were used on short walls, which could be taken in from a single viewpoint, while paratactic schemes were used on long walls, which cannot be so viewed.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, she also assumes that the conventional nomenclature indicates the functions of these rooms.

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1 The Casa della Caccia Antica is one of the houses being studied by the Australian Expedition to Pompeii (Descoedres and Sear 1987, esp. 21). This expedition is taking part in an international project (cf. Strocka 1984, 9-11).

2 The relationship between room use and iconography, another important aspect of Roman wall-painting typology, will not be discussed here.

3 C. Watts (1987, 6) claims to have "systematically tested" Corlàita Scagliarini's ideas in Herculaneum and Pompeii, but her analyses and conclusions are not useful for the concerns of this paper.