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# The maturing of the Fourth Style: the Casa delle Nozze d'Argento at Pompeii

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The Casa delle Nozze d'Argento (V 2, E) is one of the best known houses of Pompeii. It is most frequently cited as a particularly vivid reflection of late republican tastes in domestic architecture and wall decoration, as expressed in the stately proportions of its tetrastyle atrium, generous expanse of its Rhodian peristyle, and restrained elegance of its decorations in the later Second Style. The house also has much to reveal concerning the Fourth-Style decorations that occur in the majority of its spaces. These paintings are for the most part poorly preserved and unpublished.<sup>1</sup> They offer valuable insight nonetheless into the nature of the last Pompeian style during its initial decades by virtue of both the unique circumstances for dating that exist here and the distinct stylistic character of the decorations themselves.

## The Fourth-Style paintings in the house

The Fourth-Style paintings in this house can be dated before A.D. 60 on the basis of a graffito, now all but lost but recorded at the end of the last century, that includes the names of the consuls of that year that was scratched into the plaster covering the central column of the N portico of the peristyle.<sup>2</sup> The NE and NW corner columns of that space are joined to the E and W walls by arches painted in conformity with the Fourth-Style scheme of the peristyle (fig.1). These define the space of the N portico and mark the limits of its decoration, which is similar but not identical to the common system on the other peristyle walls. The continuity of the painted plaster from columns to arches to walls and absence of seams suggest a uniform process of preparing and decorating those surfaces and the assignment of a date for the execution of all of the paintings of the peristyle consistent with the evidence provided by the graffito.<sup>3</sup>

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1 The Casa delle Nozze d'Argento and its decorations will be the subject of a forthcoming volume authored by W. Ehrhardt in the series *Häuser in Pompeji* published by the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut. The thorough documentation of the decorations in the house that will be included in that study has been assumed in the descriptions and illustrations that accompany this article.

2 A. Mau, *RömMitt* 8 (1893) 30, and A. Sogliano, *NSc* 1896, 428, cited the graffito as follows:

N | | R O N | | C A | | S A R | | A V G V S T O  
C O S S O L E N T V L O C O S S I F I L C o S  
V I I I I D V S F | | B R A R I A S  
D I | | S S O L I S L V N A X I I I | | S N V N C V M I S V N V N P O M P | | I S

Only the first 4 letters of the first word, visible in the yellow socle on the W face of the column shaft, are still legible. The purpose of the graffito would appear to have been simply to record precisely and in great detail the date on which it was made by indicating not only the consular year, but also the day (February 6), which is documented first by calendar date, then by day of the week, then by day of the lunar cycle, and finally by its correspondence to the *nundinae*, or market days, of Cumae and Pompeii. See Mau for a fuller analysis. A graffito also including consular and calendar dates in an ala of the Casa del Centenario (IX 8, 3.6) painted in the Third Style has been similarly interpreted as evidence for a *terminus ante quem* for all of the Third Style decorations in that house. A. Mau, *BdI* (1881) 122; F. L. Bastet and M. de Vos, *Proposta per una classificazione del terzo stile pompeiano* (Den Haag 1978) 9-10; W. Ehrhardt, *Stilgeschichtliche Untersuchungen an römischen Wandmalereien von der späten Republik bis zur Zeit Neros* (Mainz 1987) 4.

3 While A. Maiuri, *L'ultima fase edilizia di Pompei* (Roma 1942) 116, and others had applied the evidence of the graffito to date only the semi-independent system of the paintings of the N portico of the peristyle, V. M. Strocka, *Casa del Principe di Napoli* (VI 15, 7-8) (*Häuser in Pompeji* I,