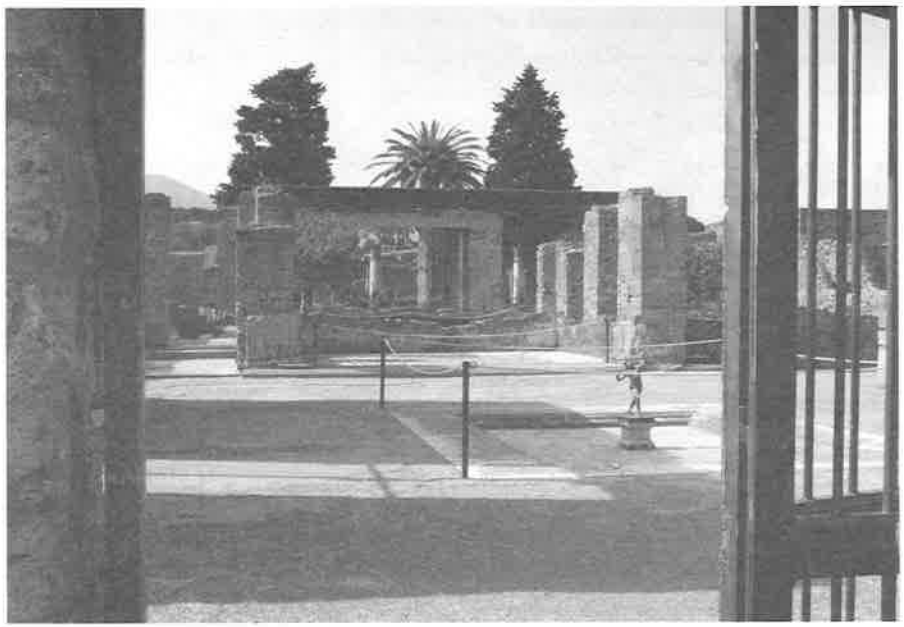
CHAPTER ONE

LIVING IN AN OLD CITY

Glimpses of the past

Down a quiet back street in Pompeii, not far from the city walls to the north and just a few minutes' walk from the Herculaneum Gate, is a small and unprepossessing house now known as the House of the Etruscan Column. Unremarkable from the outside and off the beaten track both in the ancient world and now, it conceals, as its modern name hints, a puzzling curiosity within. For lodged in the wall between two of its main rooms is an ancient column, its appearance reminiscent of the architecture of the Etruscans – who were a major power in Italy through the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, before the rise of Rome itself, with influence and settlements extending far beyond their homeland in north Italy to the area around Pompeii. The column almost certainly dates from the sixth century BCE, several hundred years before the house was built.

Careful digging under the house has thrown some light on this puzzle. It turns out that the column is in its original position and the house has been built around it. Part of a sixth-century BCE religious sanctuary, it was not a support for a building, but freestanding, possibly next to an altar and once carrying a statue (an arrangement known in other early religious sites in Italy). Sixth-century Greek pottery, presumably from offerings and dedications, was found in the area round about, as was evidence (in the form of seeds and pollen) for a significant number of beech trees. These were not likely to be natural woodland; for beech trees, it is argued, do not grow naturally on low ground in southern Italy. The speculation is, therefore, that this venerable old sanctuary had originally been surrounded by another of those characteristic features of early Italian religion: a sacred



12. The House of the Faun was one of the grandest, and by the first century CE most old-fashioned, houses of the town, though it is now sadly dilapidated. Here we look through its front door into the main atrium, with the dancing satyr (or Faun). Beyond lay two large peristyle gardens and the famous Alexander Mosaic (Ill. 13).

grove, here specially planted in beech. And by way of confirmation (rather weak confirmation, in my view) we are asked to compare a similarly ancient sanctuary of the god Jupiter in Rome, set in its own sacred beech grove: the 'Fagutal' as it was called, from *fagus* meaning beech tree.

However we imagine the column in its original setting, with beech trees few or many, woodland or artificial grove, the main lines of its story are clear enough. When the early shrine was eventually covered by housing, probably in the third century BCE, the standing column was preserved intact within the later structures, out of respect – or so we may guess – for its religious status. Centuries later, in 79 CE, it was still visible in the house that then stood on the plot: whether even at that date it retained some trace of special sanctity, or had simply become an interesting talking point for its owners in an otherwise nondescript house, we do not know.

The little story of this column is a reminder of a much bigger point: that by the time it was finally destroyed Pompeii was an old city, and visibly so. Although,

13. The most intricate ancient mosaic ever discovered, the Alexander Mosaic covered the floor of one of the main display rooms of the House of the Faun. This engraving shows the complete design. Alexander the Great (on the left) is fighting Darius the King of Persia. As his horses tell us (for they have already turned) Darius is about to flee in the face of the onslaught of the young Macedonian. There are all kinds of virtuoso artistic touches here – such as the horse in centre stage seen as if from behind. (See also Plate 15.)

to most modern eyes, the ruins appear homogeneously Roman, indistinguishable in date and style, they are in fact nothing of the sort. For a start, as we shall soon see, in 79 CE Pompeii had strictly speaking been a 'Roman' town for less than 200 years. But also, like most cities, ancient or modern, it was a sometimes messy amalgam of spanking-new building, esteemed antiques and artful restorations – as well as of the quaintly old-fashioned and the quietly dilapidated. Its residents would no doubt have been well aware of these differences and of the mixture of old and new that made up their town.

The most extraordinary example of a 'museum piece' is one of the most famous, and now most visited, of all Pompeian houses: the House of the Faun. This house is vast, the biggest in the city, and at some 3000 square metres is of positively regal dimensions (approaching the scale, for example, of the palaces of the kings of Macedon at Pella in northern Greece). It is now known not only for its bronze statue of the dancing 'faun' but also for its stunning suite of decorated floor mosaics. Prime amongst these is the so-called 'Alexander mosaic' (Ill. 13), one of the star exhibits of the National Museum in Naples, and painstakingly constructed from a countless number of tiny stones or *tesserae*: estimates have

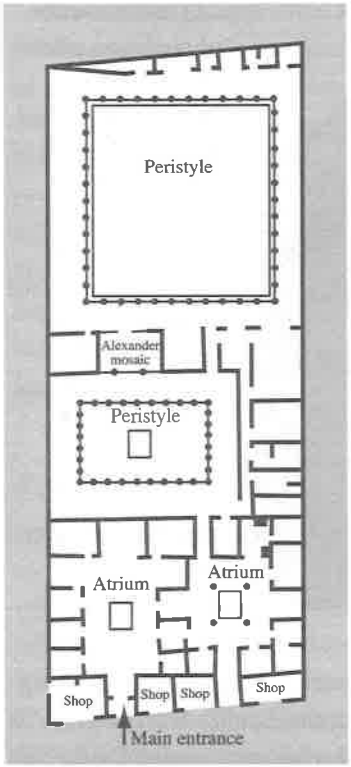


Figure 2. The House of the Faun. Though vastly over-blown (covering a whole city block), the House of the Faun still shows many characteristic features of more ordinary Pompeian houses. The street frontage, for example, is occupied by a series of shops. This version of the standard plan takes the visitor through a narrow entrance way into one of two atria. Beyond lie two peristyle gardens.

varied from 1.5 million to 5 million, no one ever having had the patience to count them one by one. When first excavated in the 1830s, its epic proportions and confused mêlée of fighting prompted the ingenious idea that it depicted a battle scene from Homer's *Iliad*. We are now convinced that it shows the defeat of the Persian king Darius (in his chariot, on the right; Plate 15) by the youthful Alexander the Great (on horseback, on the left) – perhaps, as is usually assumed, a virtuoso copy in mosaic of a lost masterpiece in painting, or perhaps an original creation.

Few modern visitors, who marvel at its size or admire its exquisite mosaics (there are nine others in the Naples Museum), realise quite how old-fashioned the House of the Faun would have seemed by the time of the eruption. The house was given its final form in the late second century BCE, when the mosaics were installed and many of its walls were grandly painted in the characteristic style of the time, and it remained more or less the same for the next 200 years. New paintings and restorations were done carefully to match. Who the rich owners of this

14. One of a series of terracotta reliefs (60 centimetres high) found re-used in the garden wall of the House of the Golden Bracelet – originally having adorned some sacred building, possibly the Temple of Apollo in the Forum. On this panel, the goddess Diana (Greek Artemis) stands on the right, and a figure of Victory on the left.

house were we do not know (though one nice suggestion is that they were a long-standing local family, called Satrius – in which case that bronze faun or 'satyr' is a visual pun on their name). Still less do we know what encouraged (or forced) them to keep it unchanged over the centuries. What *is* clear is that the experience in 79 of visiting the House of the Faun would have been not so far different from our own experience of visiting a historic house or stately home. Passing through its portals – stepping over another mosaic, this time blazoning the Latin word *HAVE*, meaning 'greetings' (though the entirely unintended English pun on possession seems appropriate for this vast mansion) – you would have found yourself back in the second century.

The House of the Faun is an extreme case. But all over the town the old was mixed up with the new. Distinctly old-fashioned styles of interior decor, for example, were lovingly preserved, or left to peel, next to the newest decorative fashions. The sundial in the exercise area of one of the main public baths, allowing busy bathers or exercisers to keep an eye on the time, was not only two centuries old by the time of the eruption, but it carried a commemorative inscription written in the native, pre-Roman language of the area – Oscan. By 79 probably only a few of Pompeii's inhabitants could have deciphered that it had been paid for by the local council, using money they had accrued from fines.

We can also glimpse other stories of preservation and reuse to rival that of the Etruscan column. One recent discovery has revealed the ultimate fate of a series of terracotta sculptures which (to judge from their subject matter and shape) must once have adorned a temple in Pompeii itself or its surrounding countryside, possibly even the temple of the god Apollo in the Forum (Ill. 14). Crafted sometime in the second century BCE, and decommissioned perhaps after the earthquake of 62 CE, they ended up built into the garden wall of a rich multi-storey house (the House of the Golden Bracelet) which overlooked the sea – with what must have been stunning views – on the western edge of the town. A nice piece of architectural salvage maybe, though a far cry from the religious sanctity of their original location.

Before Rome

Pompeii was an even older city than its visible remains suggest. In 79, there was no building in use – public or private – that was earlier than the third century BCE. But at least two of the main temples of the city, even if repeatedly restored, rebuilt and brought up to date, had a history stretching back to the sixth century. The Temple of Apollo, in the Forum, was one, as was the Temple of Minerva and Hercules nearby. This seems to have been in ruins at the time of the eruption, and had possibly been abandoned once and for all, but excavations have brought to light some of the decorative sculpture from its earlier phases, pottery from the sixth century BCE and hundreds of offerings – many of them little terracotta figurines, some clearly representing the goddess Minerva (Greek Athena) herself. Besides, as the explorations around the Etruscan column show, digging down under the surviving structures elsewhere in the city can also produce evidence of much earlier occupation of the site.

One of the boom industries in the current archaeology of Pompeii is, in fact, the story of the town's early history. The fashionable question for specialists has shifted from 'What was Pompeii like in 79 CE?' to 'When did the city originate and how did it develop?'. This has launched a whole series of excavations deep under the first-century CE surface to discover what was on the site before the structures that we can still see. It is a fiendishly difficult process, not least because hardly anyone is keen to destroy the surviving remains simply to find out what they replaced. So most of the work has been 'key-hole archaeology', digging down in small areas, where it can be done with minimum damage to what lies above – and to the attractiveness of Pompeii for visitors. For most of us, let's face

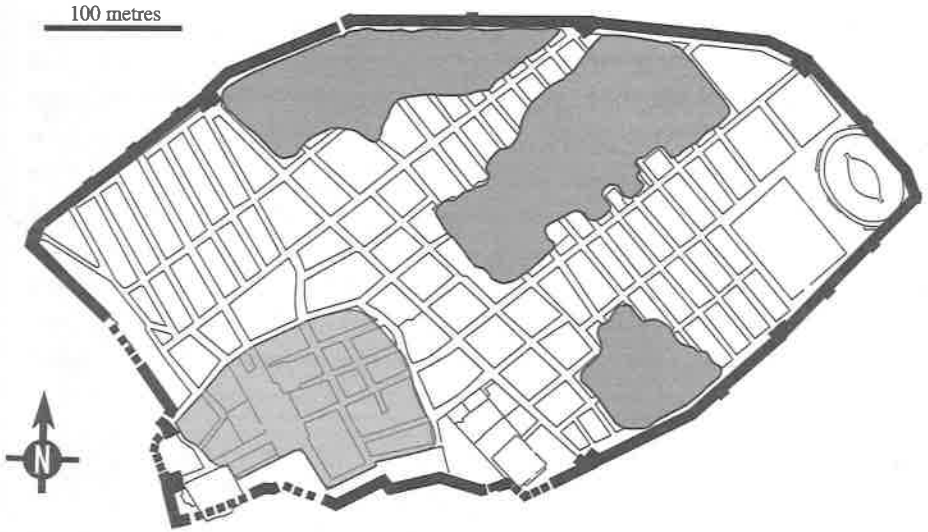


Figure 3. The development of the city plan. The chronology of the city's growth appears to be visible in the street plan. The 'Old Town' at bottom left (shaded) has an irregular street pattern. Other blocks of streets follow different alignments.

it, come to see the impressive ruins of the city overwhelmed by Vesuvius, not the faint traces of some archaic settlement.

The challenge is to match up these isolated pockets of evidence both to each other and to the hints of the history of urban development given by the city's ground plan. For it has long been recognised that the pattern of streets, with different areas having differently shaped 'blocks' and subtly different alignments, almost certainly reflects in some way the story of the city's growth (Fig. 3). The other key fact is that the circuit of the town walls on their present line dates back to the sixth century BCE – meaning that (surprising as this may seem) the ultimate extent of the town was established from this early period.

Given the tricky evidence, there is an unusual amount of agreement about the main lines of the history it reveals. Most people accept that, as the city's plan suggests, the original nucleus of the settlement was in the south-west corner, where the irregular pattern of streets points to something that archaeologists have rather grandly called the 'Old Town'. But, beyond that, the number of early finds, both pottery and the evidence of buildings, from all over the town has made it increasingly clear that Pompeii was already a relatively widespread community within the walls in the sixth century BCE. In fact there is hardly anywhere in the city

where deep digging under the existing structures has not produced some traces of sixth-century material, albeit in tiny fragments and sometimes the product of especially keen searching (one story being that Amadeo Maiuri, the 'Great Survivor', who directed the excavations on the site from 1924, through fascism and the Second World War, up until 1961, used to give his workmen a bonus if they found early pottery where he hoped – an archaeological tactic that usually produces results). It is also clear that there is a dramatic falling off in finds through the fifth century, a gradual build-up again through the fourth, until the third century marks the start of the recognisable urban development as we now see it.

There is much less agreement about exactly how old the original nucleus is, and whether the occasional finds of material on and near the site from the seventh, eighth or even ninth centuries BCE represent a settled community as such. And there are sharp differences of opinion about how the area within the walls was used in the sixth century BCE. One view holds that it was mostly enclosed farmland, and that our finds come from isolated agricultural buildings or cottages or rural sanctuaries. This is not implausible, except for the unconvincingly large number of 'sanctuaries' that this view seems to produce – some of them much less obviously religious sites than the 'Etruscan column'.

A more recent and rival position sees a much more developed urban framework, even at this early date. The main argument for this is that, so far as we can tell from the now scanty traces, all the early structures outside the 'Old Town' were built following the later, developed alignment of the streets. This does not mean that sixth-century Pompeii was a densely occupied town in our sense. In fact, even in 79 CE there was plenty of open, cultivated land within the circuit of the walls. But it does imply that the street grid was already established, at least in some rudimentary form. On this interpretation Pompeii was at that point a city already 'waiting to happen' – even if there was an uncomfortably long three centuries before that 'happening' was to come about

Equally debated is the question of who these early Pompeians were. It is not only the town's latest phases that have a decidedly multicultural tinge, with their Greek art, Jewish dietary rules, Indian bric-a-brac, Egyptian religion and so forth. Even in the sixth century BCE Pompeii stood at the heart of a region – known, then and now, as Campania – where, long before the Romans came to dominate, indigenous peoples speaking the native Oscan language rubbed shoulders with Greek settlers. There had, for example, been a substantial Greek town at Cumae, fifty kilometres away across the Bay of Naples, since the eighth century BCE. Etruscans too were a significant presence. They had settled in the region

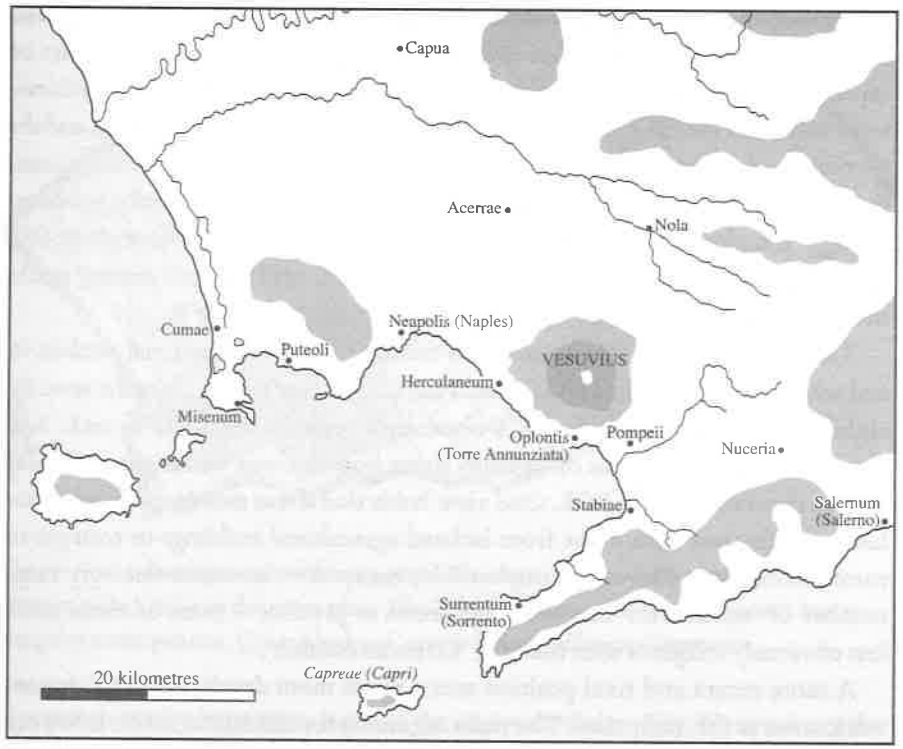


Figure 4. Map of area surrounding Pompeii

from the middle of the seventh century, and for 150 years or so rivalled the Greek communities for control of the area. Which of these groups was the driving force behind the early development of Pompeii is frankly anyone's guess, and archaeology does not provide the answer: a fragment of an Etruscan pot, for example, almost certainly shows contact between the inhabitants of the town and the Etruscan communities of the area, but it does not demonstrate (despite some confident assertions to the contrary) that Pompeii was an Etruscan town.

What is more, ancient writers seem to have been no more certain than we are about how to disentangle the city's earliest history. Some relied on marvellously inventive etymologies, deriving the name 'Pompeii' from the 'triumphal procession' (*pompa*) of Hercules, who was supposed to have passed this way after his victory over the monster Geryon in Spain, or from the Oscan word for 'five' (*pumpe*), so inferring that the town had been formed out of five villages. More soberly, the Greek writer Strabo, first-century-BCE author of a multi-volume

treatise on *Geography*, offered a list of the town's inhabitants. At first sight this matches up reassuringly with some of our own theories: 'Oscans used to occupy Pompeii, then Etruscans and Pelasgians [i.e. Greeks]'. But whether Strabo had access to good chronological information, as more optimistic modern scholars have hoped, or whether he was just hedging his bets in the face of uncertainty, as I tend to feel, we simply cannot be sure.

Strabo did not, however, stop with the Pelasgians. 'After that,' he wrote, 'it was the turn of the Samnites. But they too were ejected.' Here he was referring to the period between the fifth and third centuries BCE, when Pompeii began to take its familiar form. These Samnites were another group of Oscan-speakers, tribes from the heartlands of Italy, who feature in later Roman stereotypes – not entirely unfairly – as a tough race of mountain warriors, hard-nosed and frugal. In the shifting geopolitics of pre-Roman Italy, they moved into Campania and managed to establish control of the region, decisively defeating the Greeks at Cumae in 420 BCE, only fifty years after the Greeks themselves had managed to get rid of the Etruscans.

It is perhaps this series of conflicts that accounts for the apparent change in Pompeii's fortunes in the fifth century. In fact some archaeologists have concluded from the more or less complete absence of finds on the site at that point that the town was abandoned for a time. But only for a time. By the fourth century BCE, Pompeii was probably – though firm evidence for this, beyond Strabo himself, is virtually nil – part of what is now grandly known as a 'Samnite Confederacy'. At least, in a key position on the coast and at the mouth of the river Sarno (whose precise ancient course is hardly better known to us than the shoreline), it acted as the port for the settlements upstream. As Strabo noted, hinting at yet another derivation of the town's name, it was located near a river which served to 'take cargoes in and *send them out* (Greek: *ekpempein*)'.

'But the Samnites too were ejected'? Strabo had no need to explain who was behind the ejection. For this was the period of Rome's expansion through Italy, and of its transformation from a small central Italian town with control over its immediate neighbours to the dominant power in the entire peninsula and increasingly in the Mediterranean as a whole. In the second half of the fourth century BCE Campania was just one of the fields of operation in a series of Roman wars against the Samnites. Pompeii had its own cameo role in these, when in 310 BCE a Roman fleet landed there and disembarked its troops, who proceeded to ravage and plunder the countryside up the Sarno valley.

These wars involved many of the old power bases of Italy: not just Rome and

various tribes of Samnites, but Greeks now concentrated in Naples (Neapolis) and, to the north, Etruscans and Gauls. And they were not a walkover for Rome. It was at the hands of the Samnites, in 321 BCE, that the Roman army sustained one of its most humiliating defeats ever, holed up in a mountain pass known as the 'Caudine Forks'. Even the Pompeians put up a good fight against the plunderers from the Roman fleet. According to the Roman historian Livy, as the soldiers laden with their loot had almost made it back to the ships, the locals fell upon them, grabbed the plunder and killed a few. One small victory for Pompeii against Rome.

But the Romans – as was always the way – won in the end. By the early third century BCE, Pompeii and its neighbours in Campania had been turned, like it or not, into allies of Rome. These allies retained more or less complete independence in their own local government. There was no concerted attempt to impose on them Roman-style institutions, nor to demand the use of Latin rather than their native Italic language. The main language of Pompeii continued to be Oscan, as it had been under the Samnites. But they were obliged to provide manpower for the Roman armies and to toe the Roman line in matters of war, peace, alliances and the rest of what we might anachronistically call 'foreign policy'.

In many ways Pompeii did very well out of this dependent status. From the end of the third century, the population of the town increased dramatically, or so we conclude from the tremendous expansion of housing. In the second, an array of new public buildings were erected (baths, gymnasium, temples, theatre, law courts), while the House of the Faun is only the largest of a number of grand private mansions that made their permanent mark on the urban scene at this period. It was now that Pompeii, for the first time, began to look like what we would call 'a town'. Why?

One answer may be Hannibal's invasion of Italy at the end of the third century. As the Carthaginians pressed south from their famous crossing of the Alps, Campania became once again a major arena of fighting – some communities remaining loyal to Rome, others defecting to the enemy. Capua to the north was one of those which defected, and it was in turn besieged by the Romans and dreadfully punished. Nuceria, on the other hand, just a few kilometres from Pompeii, remained loyal and was destroyed by Hannibal. Even if it can hardly have remained entirely unscathed in the middle of this war zone, Pompeii was not directly hit and must have been a likely refuge for many of those displaced and dispossessed in the conflict. This may well account for some of the striking growth in housing at this period, and the spurt in urban development. The town,

in other words, was an unexpected beneficiary of one of Rome's darkest hours.

Another answer is the onward expansion of Roman imperialism in the east and the wealth that came with it. Even if the allies were not free agents in Rome's wars of conquest, they certainly took some share in the profits. These came partly from the spoils and booty of the battlefield, but also from the trading links increasingly opened up with the eastern Mediterranean and the new avenues of contact with the skills and artistic and literary traditions of the Greek world (beyond those offered by the Greek communities that still remained in the local area).

At least one plundered showpiece, captured when the Romans and their allies sacked the fabulously rich Greek city of Corinth in 146 BCE, seems to have been on display outside the temple of Apollo in Pompeii. What exactly it was we do not know (a statue, perhaps, or luxury metalwork), but the inscription in Oscan recording its gift by the Roman commander, Mummius, on that occasion still survives. Further afield, family names found at Pompeii are recorded also in the great Greek trading centres, such as the island of Delos. It is impossible to be absolutely certain that any of the individuals concerned were actually native Pompeians. Nonetheless, the impact of trading contacts like these is clear to see – right down to the daily bread and butter of (at least) the Pompeian elite. Carefully collecting seeds and the microscopic traces of spices and other foodstuffs, archaeologists exploring a group of houses near the Herculaneum Gate have suggested that, from the second century on, the inhabitants were enjoying a more varied diet, drawn from further afield, including a good sprinkling of pepper and cumin. And even if the House of the Faun was hardly a typical Pompeian residence, its array of mosaics – especially the *tour de force* that was the Alexander mosaic – attest to the high level of Greek artistic culture that could be found in the city.

In short, second-century BCE Pompeii was an expanding and thriving community, doing very nicely out of its relations with Rome. But, though allies, the Pompeians were not Roman citizens. For the privileges of that status, and to become a truly Roman town, they had to resort to war.

Becoming Roman

The so-called 'Social War' broke out in 91 BCE, when a group of Italian allies (or *socii*, hence the name) went to war with Rome. Pompeii was one of them. It now seems a peculiar kind of rebellion. For, although the allied motives have

been endlessly debated, it is most likely that they resorted to violence, not because they wished to turn their back on the Roman world and escape its domination, but because they resented not being full members of Rome's club. They wanted, in other words, Roman citizenship, and the protection, power, influence and the right to vote at Rome itself which went with it. It was a conflict notorious for its savagery, and in effect – given that Romans and allies had become used to fighting side by side – a civil war. Predictably enough, the vastly superior force of Romans was victorious in one sense, but the allies were in another: for they got what they wanted. Some of the rebel communities were bought off instantly by the offer of citizenship. But even those who held out were enfranchised once they had been defeated in battle. From then on, for the first time, more or less the whole of the peninsula of Italy became Roman in the strict sense of the word.

During this war, Pompeii itself was besieged in 89 by the famous general Lucius Cornelius Sulla, who was later to become – albeit briefly – a murderous dictator in the city of Rome itself (between 82 and 81 he put a price on the head of more than 500 of his wealthy opponents, who were brutally hunted down if they didn't manage to kill themselves first). And in the ranks of Sulla's army, so we are told by his biographer, Plutarch, was the young Marcus Tullius Cicero, then in his late teens, and years away from the oratorical triumphs in the Roman law courts that would launch his political career and become the 'set-books' for budding orators and students of Latin ever after.

Sulla's handiwork is still visible at Pompeii, in the shape of numerous lead bullets and ballista balls (the Roman equivalent of cannon shot) found on the site, and a smattering of small holes in the city walls where shots that had presumably been aimed to clear the defences fell short and left their tell-tale mark. Inside the city, houses close to the walls at the north came off particularly badly. The House of the Vestals – so called because of a fanciful eighteenth-century notion that it was the residence of a group of virgin priestesses, the 'Vestal Virgins' – suffered serious damage, even if its wealthy owners managed to turn the chaos and destruction to their own advantage. In the aftermath of the war it seems that they got their hands on some of the neighbouring property, rebuilding their house on a much larger scale. By an uncanny coincidence, the House of the Vestals was again a victim of warfare almost 2000 years later, when it was hit by Allied bombs in September 1943. Excavations now turn up pieces of modern shrapnel alongside the Roman sling bullets.

How vigorously or how long the Pompeians resisted the Roman fire we do not know. A series of notices in Oscan, painted up at street corners, may give us some

hint of their preparation in the face of attack. These are usually thought to go back to the time of the siege, preserved under layers of later plaster, which has since fallen off to reveal them. The translation is by no means certain, but they very likely give instructions to the defending troops on where exactly they should muster ('between the twelfth tower and the Salt Gate'), and under whose command ('where Matrius, son of Vibius, is in charge'). If so, they suggest a fair degree of organisation, as well as a community literate enough to make use of written instructions in an emergency. There was also help for Pompeii from the outside. One ancient account of the Social War describes how a rebel general, Lucius Cluentius, came to relieve the town. In the first skirmish, he actually came out ahead, but Sulla returned to the fight and decisively defeated him and chased his army off to the nearby rebel stronghold of Nola, killing more than 20,000 of them, according to (not necessarily reliable) ancient estimates. Pompeii must have fallen soon after.

It did not suffer the violent treatment meted out to some other allied towns in their defeat. But less than a decade after the war had ended and the Pompeians had been granted citizenship of Rome, Sulla got his revenge in another way. Needing places to settle his veteran soldiers, brought home after long wars in Greece, he chose to plant some of them – at a conservative estimate a couple of thousand, plus their families – at Pompeii. This was a substantial and sudden addition to the population, perhaps increasing the number of inhabitants by almost 50 per cent. But the impact was even bigger than that. The town was formally converted into a Roman 'colony' and its local government was reformed accordingly. Its annual elected officials were given new names and, no doubt, new duties. The old Oscan chief magistrate, the *meddix tuticus*, was replaced by a pair known as *duoviri iure dicundo*, literally 'two men for pronouncing the law'.

The name of the town was also changed to reflect its new status. Pompeii was now officially known as *Colonia Cornelia Veneria Pompeiana*: *Cornelia* from Sulla's family name, Cornelius; *Veneria* from his patron goddess, Venus. It became, in other words, 'The Cornelian Colony of Pompeii, under the divine protection of Venus' (a mouthful in Latin as well as in English). As that title hints, the official public language of the town now became Latin, even though in private contexts Oscan continued to be used by some of the locals – an ever-dwindling minority no doubt – up until 79 CE. It was these few who would have been able to decipher those ancient Oscan inscriptions still on view. And in the final years of the city one of them, a client presumably, left his name scratched on the wall of the brothel – in the distinctive letters of the Oscan alphabet.

These 'colonists', as they are now often called, changed the face of Pompeii. A large new suite of public baths was erected near the Forum, and improvements were made to others – including a new sauna – funded by two of the early *duoviri*. Most dramatically of all, existing housing was demolished and an Amphitheatre was erected in the south-east corner of the town, the earliest surviving stone Amphitheatre anywhere in the world. This was put up, as the inscriptions displayed above its main entrances declared, thanks to the generosity of another pair of prominent newcomers, who also sponsored – though did not pay for out of their own pockets – the construction of a brand-new Covered Theatre (or 'Odeon', as it is sometimes now called). There is good reason to think that one of these grandees, Caius Quinctius Valgus, was a man also known to us from his walk-on part in Latin literature: 'Valgus', the father-in-law of one Publius Servilius Rullus, whose attempt to redistribute land to the Roman poor was the target of Cicero's invective in his three speeches *Against Rullus*. If so, and if we can trust half of what Cicero says about him, then the man who bankrolled the Pompeian Amphitheatre was not (or not only) an altruistic benefactor of his local community, but a nasty piece of work who had made a considerable financial killing out of Sulla's reign of terror in Rome.

It is not so clear where this influx of new inhabitants lived. In the absence of any signs of an obvious 'colonists' quarter' inside the city, one recent idea is that they largely had their property and land, smallholdings or grander villas, in the surrounding countryside. This is a convenient solution to a nagging problem, but only a partial one. Some of the colonists must have lived within the walls. Good candidates for the property of the richest among them, though certainly not the rank and file, are the range of houses built on the coastal side of the city (the House of the Golden Bracelet and its neighbours). These were sited directly over the city wall – no longer a strategic necessity once Pompeii was part of a supposedly peaceful, Roman Italy – multi-storey structures, built onto land sharply sloping down to sea-level, with a total floor area sometimes not far short of the House of the Faun. Magnificent entertainment suites, with large windows and terraces, opened onto what must once have been a spectacular beach and sea view (Ill. 15). Sadly these houses are not regularly open to visitors. For, with their many levels, their labyrinthine corridors and stairways, not to mention the panoramic vistas (whoever said Romans did not care for scenery?), they offer a dramatic alternative to the standard image of a Roman house. They must have been some of the most fashionable pieces of real estate in the town.

In some ways, the arrival of the colony simply speeded up a process

15. Located on the western edge of the city, above the old city wall, the House of Fabius Rufus enjoyed a enviable view over the sea. It was designed to make the most of this, with large windows and terraces.

of 'Romanisation' that was already underway in the town. After all, unless that particular mosaic is a later insertion, the owner of the House of the Faun had chosen to greet his visitors in Latin (*HAVE*) as early as the second century BCE. And some of the wave of early first-century public buildings may actually have predated the arrival of the colonists, rather than (as is often assumed) being their initiative. The truth is that, unless there is firm evidence in an inscription, it is very hard to be precise about the date of these buildings, one side or the other of the foundation of the colony. The argument for making many of them the work of the colonists is almost entirely circular, even if not necessarily wrong (the colonists were avid builders; all buildings of the early first-century BCE are therefore the work of the colonists; this in turn proves that the colonists were avid builders). It is still disputed, for example, whether the temple of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva which dominates one end of the Forum was a colonial foundation (one archaeologist has recently claimed that its unit of measurement appears to be the 'Roman foot', suggesting a Roman construction), or whether it was an earlier temple already dedicated to Jupiter alone, later adapted to that characteristically Roman

divine triad. There was, unsurprisingly given Rome's growing influence, a good deal of 'self-Romanisation' going on in 'pre-Roman' Pompeii.

Yet, true as it is, that picture tends to underestimate the degree of conflict which existed in the first years of the colony between the Roman newcomers and the Oscan inhabitants. This was partly a cultural clash, no doubt; though I suspect that the view, held by some modern historians, that the sophisticated, theatre-loving Pompeians found the brutish Amphitheatre-loving veterans a bit hard to take, is as unfair to the veterans as it is over-generous to the Pompeians. More to the point, the incomers seem, for a time at least, to have seized day-to-day political control of the town, to the exclusion of its old residents.

There are signs of this exclusion on the site itself. The names of the town's elected officials that survive from the first decades of the colony include none of the traditional Oscan family names, but are solidly Roman. And the inscription commemorating the building of the new Amphitheatre declares that Valgus and his co-benefactor donated it 'to the colonists'. Of course, 'to the colonists' would in a technical sense include all the inhabitants of what was now formally known as the *Colonia Cornelia Veneria Pompeiana*. But, technically correct though it may have been, it is hard to imagine that this formulation would have sounded inclusive to the old families of the town. And, in fact, the idea that in popular talk 'the colonists' and 'the Pompeians' were treated as separate and rival groups in the town is confirmed by a speech of Cicero's delivered at Rome in 62 BCE.

Cicero was defending Publius Sulla, the nephew of the dictator, against the accusation that he had been an accomplice of Lucius Sergius Catilina, an indebted aristocrat and luckless revolutionary, who had died earlier in the year in a botched attempt to overthrow the Roman government. Twenty years earlier, this young Sulla had been the man on the ground in charge of establishing the colony at Pompeii. At one point – in answer to the, not wholly implausible, allegation that Sulla had driven the Pompeians into Catilina's plots – Cicero treats his Roman audience to a discussion of local Pompeian politics. It is a suspiciously tortuous defence, focusing on the disputes in the town between the 'colonists' and the 'Pompeians'. These are now over, he claims, thanks in part (believe it, or not) to the interventions of Sulla himself; and both groups – still operating separately, we should note – have sent delegations to Rome in Sulla's support. But what had the disputes been about? Cicero talks vaguely about Pompeian grievances over 'their votes' and over *ambulatio*, a Latin word which can mean anything from 'walking' to a place in which to walk, i.e. 'a portico'.

It is easy enough to see what the arguments about 'votes' might have been. Put

this hint together with the absence of local names from the first magistrates of the colony, and it seems certain that the new political arrangements somehow disadvantaged the old inhabitants. Some modern scholars have even imagined that they were completely debarred from voting – though other less extreme forms of disadvantage are possible, and more plausible. But an enormous amount of ingenuity has been deployed in trying to work out what the dispute about *ambulatio* could have been. Had, for example, restrictions been placed on the Pompeians' right of movement about the city (*ambulatio* in the sense of 'walking')? Was there a particular portico that was out of bounds to them, which caused offence? Or was Cicero not talking about *ambulatio* at all, but (as one manuscript of the speech has it) about *ambitio*, i.e. 'bribery' or 'corrupt practices' – which might again refer back to a problem with the voting system?

There is, frankly, something of a mystery here. But whichever solution we find least implausible, one thing is clear. Temporary though the troubles were (within a couple of decades, those absent Oscan names start to reappear in the local government), the first years of Pompeii's life as a fully Roman town cannot have been happy ones for its old population.

Pompeii in the Roman world

There is a well-established myth that Pompeii was an insignificant backwater in the Roman world. Its main claim to fame was its production of fish sauce (*garum*). Praised, in passing, by the elder Pliny ('... Pompeii too has a good reputation for its *garum*'), the Pompeian version of this delicacy clearly enjoyed brisk sales throughout Campania, to judge from all its distinctive pottery jars which so often turn up in excavations. It has even been found in Gaul. But the isolated discovery of a Pompeian jar may not necessarily indicate a thriving international export market, so much as culinary supplies, or even a gift, taken on his travels by a wandering Pompeian. Next to its fish sauce came its wine – admittedly a mixed bag. There were some distinguished labels, but Pliny warned that the local plonk was liable to give you a hangover until midday the next day.

The usual idea is that the people of Pompeii went on with their lives, untroubled, as the big events of Roman history unfurled; first as the free quasi-democratic Republic of Rome collapsed into dictatorship and bouts of civil war, until Augustus (31 BCE–14 CE) established the one-man rule of the Roman empire; then later as one emperor succeeded the next, some like Augustus himself or Vespasian (who came to the throne, after another bout of civil war, in 69 CE)

gaining a reputation for probity and benevolent autocracy, others like Caligula (37–41 CE) or Nero (54–68 CE) decried as mad despots. For the most part the centre of action remained a long way from Pompeii, though occasionally it came a little too close for comfort. In the late 70s BCE, for example, not long after the foundation of the colony, the slave rebels under Spartacus temporarily made their encampment in the crater of Vesuvius, just a few kilometres to the north of the town. This is an incident perhaps immortalised in a rough painting discovered in a house at Pompeii under layers of later decoration which shows a scene of combat including a man on horseback labelled, in Oscan, 'Spartaks'. It is a nice idea. But more likely the painting shows some kind of gladiatorial fight.

Very occasionally, too, Pompeii itself made an impact on the capital and on Roman literature, whether because of some natural disaster, or because of what happened in 59 CE. In that year some gladiatorial games got out of hand, a murderous fight ensued between the local inhabitants and the 'away supporters' from nearby Nuceria, and the wounded and bereaved ended up taking their complaints to the emperor Nero himself. By and large, however, the usual line is that life in Pompeii went on its sleepy way, without making much of a dent on life and literature at Rome – or, vice versa, without being much affected by international geopolitics and the machinations of the elite in the capital.

In fact, Cicero could even joke about the doziness of local Pompeian politics. On one occasion, he was attacking the way that Julius Caesar would appoint anyone of his favourites to the senate, without the usual processes of election. In a quip reminiscent of all those modern disparaging references to Tunbridge Wells or South Bend, Indiana, he is supposed to have said that while it was easy enough to get into the senate at Rome, 'at Pompeii it is difficult'. Eager students of Pompeian local government have sometimes seized on this to argue that the political life of the town really was buzzing with competition, even more so than Rome itself. But they have missed the heavy irony. Cicero's point is along the lines of 'It's easier to get into the House of Lords than to be mayor of Tunbridge Wells' – in other words, it is even easier than the easiest thing you can think of.

Archaeologists have greeted the insignificance of Pompeii in two ways. Most have, openly or privately, lamented the fact that the single town in the Roman world to have been preserved at this level of detail should be one so far from the mainstream of Roman life, history and politics. Others, by contrast, have celebrated the fact that the city is so unremarkable, seeing it as a bonus that we here get a glimpse of those inhabitants of the ancient world who are usually unnoticed by history. No deceptive Hollywood-style glamour here.

But Pompeii was by no means the forgotten backwater that it is usually painted. True, it was not Rome; and, to follow Cicero, its political life (as we shall see in Chapter 6) can hardly have been as cut-throat as that in the capital. It was in many ways a very *ordinary* place. But it is a feature of ordinary places in Roman Italy that they had close bonds to Rome itself. They were often linked by ties of patronage, support and protection to the highest echelons of the Roman elite. We know, for example, from an inscription that once adorned his statue in the town, that the emperor Augustus' favourite nephew and would-be heir, Marcellus, at one point held the semi-official position of 'patron' of Pompeii. The histories of communities like this were bound up with that of Rome. They provided a stage on which the political dramas of the capital could be replayed. Their successes, problems and crises were capable of making an impact well beyond the immediate locality, in the capital itself. To put it in the jargon of modern politics, Roman Italy was a 'joined up' community.

Pompeii lay just 240 kilometres south of Rome, linked to it by good roads. An urgent message – provided the messenger had enough changes of mount – could reach Pompeii from the capital in a day. For ordinary travel, you would allow three days, a week at dawdling pace. But it was not just that, in ancient terms, Pompeii was easily accessible from the capital. The Roman elite, and their entourages, had good reason to make the journey. For the Bay of Naples, then as (in parts) still now, was a popular area of relaxation, holiday-making and often luxurious 'second homes' in the lush countryside or, best of all, overlooking the sea. The town of Baiae, across the Bay from Pompeii, had become by the first century BCE a byword for an upmarket, hedonistic resort – more or less the ancient equivalent of St Tropez. We have already spotted the young Cicero, serving as a raw recruit in the siege of Pompeii during the Social War. Twenty-five years later, he acquired – for slightly more than he could afford – a country residence 'in the Pompeii area', which he used as a bolt-hole away from Rome and, while he vacillated in the run-up to the Civil War between Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great in 49 BCE, as a convenient place from which to plan his getaway by sea. Eighteenth-century scholars were convinced that they had identified the very building, in a substantial property just outside Pompeii's Herculaneum Gate (and since covered over again) (Plate 1). Based on a minute analysis of all Cicero's references to his 'Pompeianum' and combined with a good deal of wishful thinking, their identification is – sadly – almost certainly wrong.

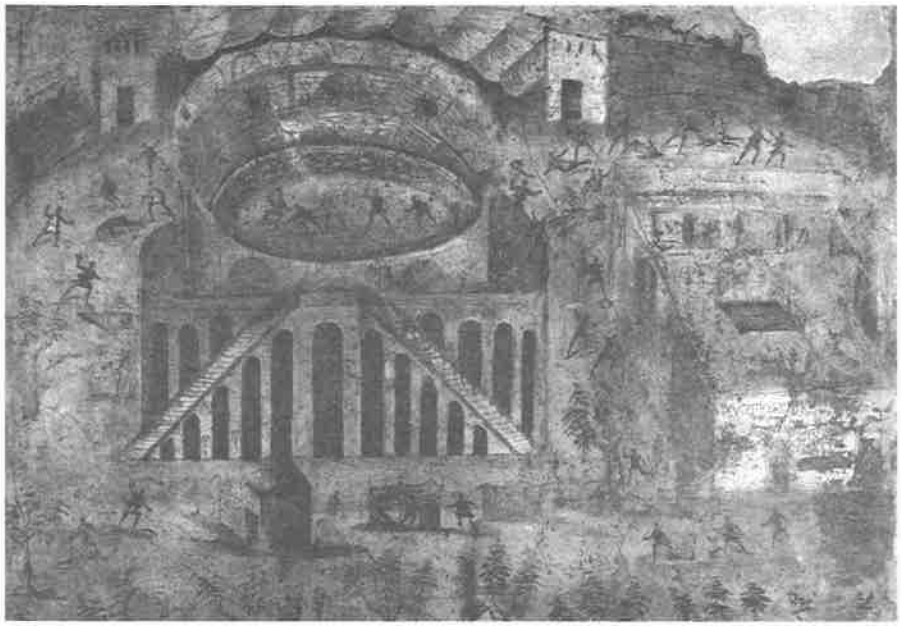
Their twentieth-century followers became almost equally excited about pinpointing the property of another grandee in the area near the city: this time,

Nero's second wife, Poppaea, the celebrity beauty for whom the emperor killed both his mother and his first wife, Octavia, and who was herself eventually to die at her husband's hands, inadvertently (he kicked her in the stomach while she was pregnant, but had not meant to kill her). As with Cicero, we have clear evidence that she was a local proprietor. In this case, some legal documents discovered in the nearby town of Herculaneum record 'the empress Poppaea' as owner of some brick- or tile-works 'in the Pompeii area'. Her family may have come from Pompeii itself, and it has even been suggested that they were the owners of the large House of the Menander. Although it is nowhere directly stated in any of the ancient discussions of Poppaea's (bad) character and background, the brick-works, combined with plenty of evidence in the town for a prominent local family of 'Poppaei', makes her Pompeian origin quite likely.

That is enough on its own to illustrate again the strong connections between this area and the world of the Roman elite, but the temptation to find the remains of Poppaea's local residence has proved just too strong, even for hard-headed modern archaeologists. The prime candidate is the vast villa at Oplontis (modern Torre Annunziata, some eight kilometres from Pompeii). Perhaps it was hers; for it is a very large property, on an imperial scale. But, despite the fact that it is now regularly called the 'Villa of Poppaea' as if that were certain, the evidence is extremely flimsy, hardly going beyond a couple of ambiguous graffiti, which do not necessarily have any link with Poppaea or Nero at all. Take the name of 'Beryllos', for example, scratched on one of the villa walls. That may, but just as easily may not, refer to the Beryllos who is known from one reference in the Jewish historian Josephus to have been one of the slaves of Nero. Beryllos was a common Greek name.

Connections of a different kind between Pompeii and Rome are seen in the account of what is for us the second most famous appearance of Pompeii (after the eruption itself) in the narrative of Roman history: that riot in the Amphitheatre in 59, as described by the Roman historian Tacitus:

> About the same time, there was a minor skirmish between the men of Pompeii and Nuceria, both Roman colonies, which turned into a ghastly massacre. It happened at a gladiatorial show given by Livineius Regulus, whose expulsion from the senate I discussed above. In the unruly way of these inter-town rivalries, they moved from abuse, to pelting each other with stones, until they finally drew swords. The Pompeians had the advantage, because it was in their town that the show was being put on. So many Nucerians were taken off to Rome, with their terrible injuries and mutilations, and there were also many who lamented the deaths of their children or parents in the affray. The emperor instructed the senate to clear the matter up; the senate referred it to the consuls. When it came back to the senate again, the Pompeians were forbidden from holding any public gathering of that kind for ten years, and their illegal clubs were disbanded. Livineius and the others who had stirred up the trouble were punished with exile.



16. This painting shows the riot in the Amphitheatre in 59 CE in full swing. The Amphitheatre itself on the left is carefully depicted, with its steep external staircase, the awning over the arena and a variety of stalls set up outside. On the right the fighting is spreading to the next door exercise ground or *palaestra*.

Amongst those exiled with Livineius, were the serving *duoviri* of Pompeii; or that at least is a reasonable inference from the fact that the names of *two* pairs of these officials are known for this year.

This story is made even more memorable because a painting survives from the town, in which for some reason – jingoistic lack of repentance, perhaps? – the artist has chosen (or been instructed) to illustrate the notorious event (Ill. 16). What might at first sight appear to be gladiators fighting inside the arena are presumably the rioting Pompeians and Nucerians, who are also doing battle around the outside of the building.

Modern, as much as Roman, obsession with gladiatorial culture has put this incident centre-stage. But there is more to Tacitus' account than a vivid glimpse of a gladiatorial display gone wrong. He notes, for example, that the Pompeian show in question was given by a disgraced Roman senator, who had been expelled from the senate some years earlier (frustratingly, the portion of the narrative where Tacitus discusses this 'above' no longer survives). It is hard, however, to resist the conclusion that a rich man, out of favour in Rome itself, was looking to Pompeii as a place where he could play the part of benefactor and grandee. More than that, it is hard not to wonder whether there was some connection between the shady, and perhaps controversial, sponsor of the show and the violence that it sparked. Tacitus also hints here at the ways in which the local communities might be able to foster interest in their own problems at Rome. For it is clear that the Nucerians (though in other circumstances it might have been the Pompeians) could go off to the capital and get the emperor himself to take notice and initiate a practical response. How they met him (if they did) is not stated. But this is where a Roman 'patron' of a town (like Marcellus at Pompeii) would come in, either arranging for his 'clients' an audience with the emperor or with one of his officials, or perhaps more likely taking up the case on their behalf. The rule was that local Italian issues did matter at Rome; the imperial palace was, in principle at least, open to their delegations.

This kind of delegation to Rome may lie behind a later intervention by an emperor into the affairs of Pompeii. A series of inscriptions have been found outside the gates of the city, recording the work of an agent of Vespasian, an army officer by the name of Titus Suedius Clemens, who 'made an inquiry into the public land appropriated by private individuals, carried out a survey and restored them to the town of Pompeii'. What lies behind this is a common cause of dispute in the Roman world: state-owned land illegally occupied by private owners, followed by the efforts of the state (whether Rome or a local community) to recover it. In this case, some historians have suspected a spontaneous intervention by the new emperor Vespasian, who seems to have played the part of a new broom in the matter of imperial finances. More likely the local council of Pompeii had approached the emperor, as the Nucerians had earlier, asking for his help in recovering their state property and this Clemens had been dispatched. A long-serving army professional, he had played an inglorious part in the civil wars that ushered in Vespasian's rule, written up by Tacitus as a trigger-happy NCO, ready to trade in proper standards of military discipline in return for popularity with his men. Whether he was a reformed character by the time he arrived to sort out

Pompeii's land disputes, we can only hope. But he certainly interfered (by request or not) rather more extensively in the town's affairs. A number of notices survive in which his public support is paraded for one of the candidates in the forthcoming elections: 'Please elect Marcus Epidius Sabinus as *duumvir* with judicial power, backed by Suedius Clemens.' How long he was active in the city, again we do not know, but he seems to have escaped the eruption. In November of 79 CE we find him carving his name on the so-called 'singing statue of Memnon' (in fact a colossal statue of a pharaoh, which produced a strange sound at daybreak), a Roman tourist hot-spot deep in Egypt.

The fact is that Pompeii existed very much in the penumbra of the city of Rome, and the history, literature, culture and people of the capital were embedded in the life and fabric of the small town, in sometimes surprising ways. If part of Mummius' booty from the sack of Corinth ended up in the town, so too did at least one part of the property of one of the assassins of Julius Caesar. Discovered in the garden of a small house is a magnificent marble table support, with sculpted lions' heads, inscribed as being the property of Publius Casca Longus (Ill. 17). This is almost certainly the man who was the first to put his dagger into the dictator, and it may be that the house was owned by one of his descendants. But it is much more likely (particularly given the house's small size) that this was not an heirloom, but part of the property of Longus and the other guilty parties, auctioned off by the future emperor Augustus, who was Caesar's great-nephew, adopted son and heir, after the assassination. However it found its way to Pompeii, it was presumably – like the Etruscan column – a curious historical talking point for the house's visitors.

More generally, people from Rome came to Pompeii for business or pleasure. A group of four tombstones commemorating soldiers from the praetorian guard has recently been found in one of the Pompeian cemeteries, adding to half a dozen praetorians known from the 'signatures' they left in graffiti on the walls. Some were in relatively senior ranks; one of the dead was a young recruit, who at the age of twenty had served just two years. We can only guess at what they were doing in Pompeii – perhaps, like Clemens, on missions from the emperor, perhaps taking time off from guard duty on members of the imperial family staying in the area, perhaps even accompanying the emperor on a 'royal visit' to Pompeii itself.

In fact much scholarly energy has recently gone into re-creating the details of a visit by Nero and Poppaea in 64 CE, soon after the major earthquake and when Nero is known to have performed on the stage at Naples. It is, of course, possible that the imperial couple did make a visit, but the evidence for it is predictably

17. What is the connection between Pompeii and the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BCE? The name of one of Caesar's killers is inscribed on this table support, found in a small house in the town. The most likely explanation is that it ended up in Pompeii when the possessions of the guilty parties were auctioned off in Rome.

much less firm than is usually admitted. The strongest indication is a couple of scrawled pieces of graffiti from inside one of the large houses in the town. Not easy to decipher or interpret, they *may* refer to gifts of jewels and gold to Venus by the imperial couple, and possibly a visit to Venus' temple by 'Caesar' (that is, Nero) – even though, inconveniently for this interpretation, the temple of Venus, if we have identified it correctly, was in ruins at this point. All the same, this is much better evidence for Nero's links with Pompeii than the paintings discovered in a building with an elaborate series of dining rooms, recently discovered at Moregine just outside Pompeii. Starting from the observation that a painting of Apollo on its walls looks distinctly like the emperor himself (Plate 3), archaeologists have claimed that this was the staging post, or temporary imperial residence, where Nero stayed on his visit to the town. This is a fantasy worthy of the most inventive eighteenth-century antiquarian.

Just how canny we have to be in interpreting this kind of evidence is illustrated by another graffito. It reads, in Latin: *Cucuta a rationibus Neronis*. The position of *a rationibus* is roughly the equivalent of the English 'accountant' or 'bookkeeper'. So this has been seen as a simple signature of 'Cucuta Nero's accountant', writing his name on a wall, perhaps while accompanying his master on the visit to Pompeii. But this might be to miss the joke. For *cucuta* (or more regularly *cicuta*) is the Latin word for 'poison'. This is much more plausibly a satirical squib at Nero's expense than the autograph of a man with a slightly odd name. 'Poison is

18. On the outside wall of a Pompeian fullery were paintings of two of the founders of Rome. Here Romulus, carrying his defeated enemy's suit of armour, matched another which depicted Aeneas carrying his father out of Troy. Both were based on sculptures which stood in the Pompeian Forum – which were in turn based on sculptures in Rome itself.

Nero's accountant' looks like a joking allusion to those accusations which claimed that, in his financial difficulties, Nero put people to death to get his hands on their money. Someone in Pompeii was up with this kind of imperial gossip.

But for a visitor in 79 CE, the most striking aspect of the connections between Rome and Pompeii would have been the various ways in which the fabric of the town, its buildings and art, replicated or reflected the concerns or even the very architecture of the capital. These ranged from the layout of the Forum, with its temple of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva standing at one end as a symbol of 'Romanness', through a couple of sacred buildings dedicated to the religious cult of the emperors, to self-conscious copying of celebrated Roman monuments. Outside one of the largest buildings in the Forum, the Building of Eumachia (so-called after the woman who sponsored it in the first years of the first century CE), are two particularly striking 'quotations' from the capital. The function of this vast structure remains disputed (suggestions have included a guildhall for cloth workers and, recently, a slave market), but in its façade, under the portico which lined the Forum, two large inscriptions were set into the wall, beneath niches which must once have displayed statues. One inscription gave a detailed, if mythical, account of the achievements of Aeneas (the hero of Virgil's epic poem, who escaped from the fall of Troy to found the city of Rome as a new Troy). The other expounded the deeds of Romulus, another of Rome's mythical founders. Both of these texts were derived from similar inscriptions, lauding the

achievements of hundreds of Rome's heroes, Aeneas and Romulus included, that once stood in the Forum of Augustus in Rome, the showpiece monument of the first emperor. A visitor from the capital would have felt at home.

Such a visitor to Pompeii would have spotted less-formal resonances to this famous monument too. Decorating the façade of a fullery (a cloth-working shop, plus laundry) along the main street, which we now call Via dell'Abbondanza, were two striking paintings. One showed Romulus, carrying a trophy of victory (Ill. 18), the other Aeneas, carrying his elderly father away from the burning city of Troy. Some wit in Pompeii not only recognised that this second image was a scene described by Virgil but also scrawled underneath a parody of the first line of the *Aeneid* ('Arms and the man, I sing …'): 'I don't sing of arms and the man, but of the fullers …'. But these paintings must have been recognisable in a more specific sense too. For, to judge from the surviving descriptions of the decoration of the Forum of Augustus in Rome, the images on the fuller's shop front were based on two famous statuary groups – one of Aeneas and one of Romulus – which took pride of place there. There is no reason to suppose that the painter had copied them directly from the Forum in Rome itself. The best guess is that he had based them on the statues that once stood above the inscriptions outside the Building of Eumachia – presumably Aeneas and Romulus, which in all likelihood (just as the inscriptions) were themselves copies of the famous Roman models.

Here the little town of Pompeii has the last laugh. For the original statues from the Forum of Augustus are lost too. These paintings, copies of copies, decorating a shop wall in a small town, are now the best evidence we have for a major imperial commission and decorative scheme in Rome itself. It is a good illustration of the complex and inextricable links there are, even now, between Rome and Pompeii.

CHAPTER TWO

STREET LIFE

Beneath your feet

Every modern visitor to Pompeii remembers the streets: their shiny surfaces pieced together out of large blocks of black volcanic rock; the deep ruts formed by years of cart traffic (and perilous to twenty-first-century ankles, as they must surely have been to first-century ones); the high pavements, occasionally as much as a metre above street-level; and the stepping stones carefully placed to allow pedestrians to cross the road without an inconvenient jump down, while being just far enough apart to let ancient wheeled transport through the gaps.

It is the sense of immediacy that makes the Pompeian street scene so memorable. The ruts are almost the equivalent of an ancient footprint, the indelible mark of human movement and of the passage of carts that once went about their daily business down these very streets. And when we hop across the stones, from pavement to pavement, part of the fun is knowing that we are treading in the very same path as thousands of Roman pedestrians before us. Or at least, it is part of the fun for most of us ordinary visitors. When Pope Pius IX made a celebrity visit to the site in 1849, it was thought best 'to save His Holiness from a long walk in the ruins', so a number of the stepping stones were removed to allow his cart – which obviously had a different wheel span from its Roman ancestors – to pass through. Some were never put back.

This chapter will take a close look at the streets and pavements of the ancient city. As so often in Pompeii, the tiniest traces preserved beneath our feet, often unnoticed by most of those who now wander through the town, can be pressed into service to reveal all kinds of intriguing and unexpected aspects of Roman