

Fig. 21. Casa di Amarantus. Sampling areas.

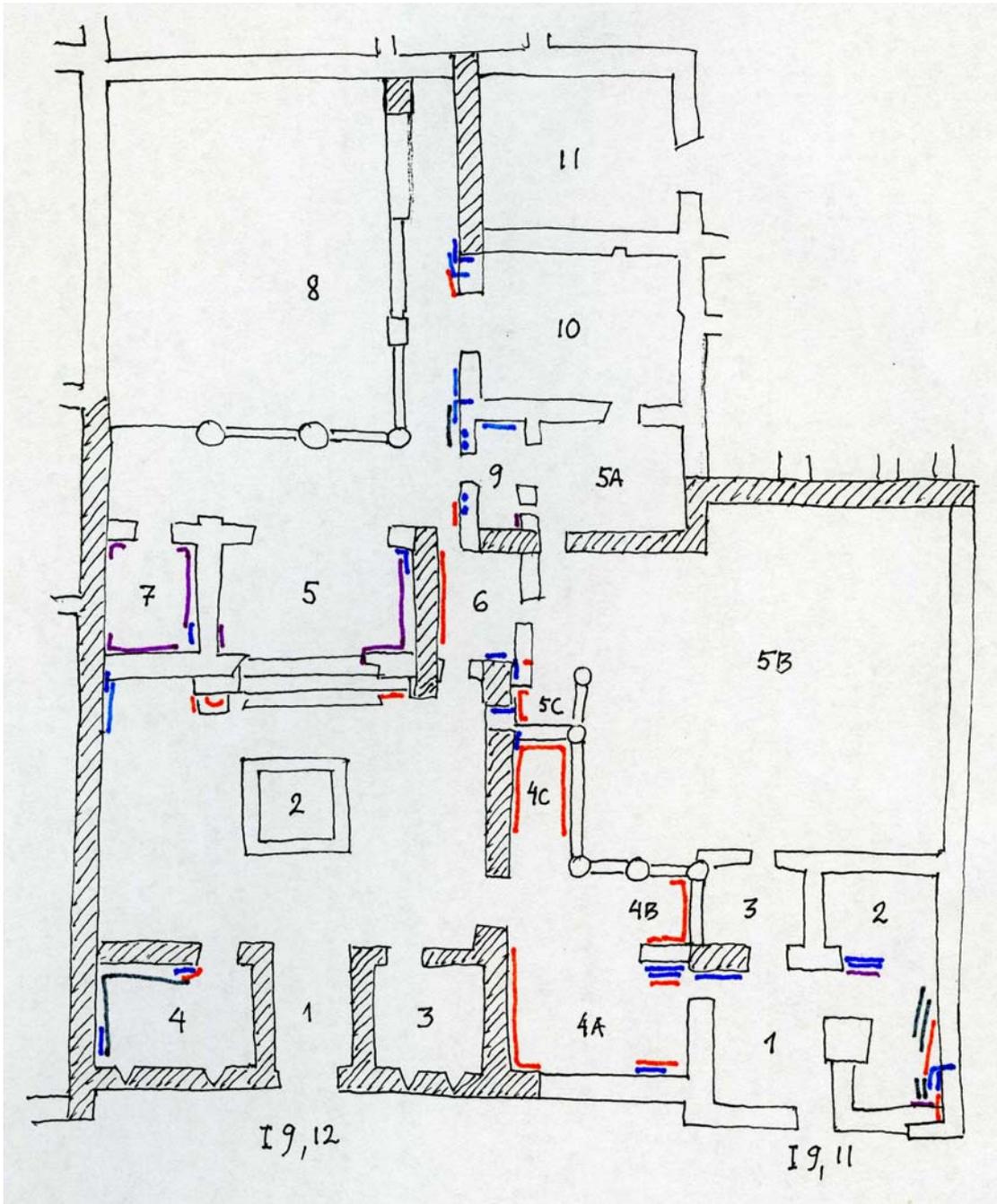


Fig. 22. Casa di Amarantus. Colour code.

# I 9,11/12, Casa di Amarantus

*“Casa di Amaranthus. This is the complex where our excavations have revealed most about relative chronologies. It is possible in many places to sample plasterwork that has been subsequently buried under raised flooring, notably in the shop area 11.1/2, and particularly in the tablinum 12.5, where an episode of 1<sup>st</sup> style plaster is covered by a later episode with 4<sup>th</sup> style decoration. It would be helpful to establish a clear relationship between the 4<sup>th</sup> style plaster in this room and in rooms 12.7 and 12.10.”*

## *Plasters and phases*

Casa di Amarantus is situated at the crossroads of Via di Castricio and the little lane that runs along the eastern part of the *insula*.<sup>1</sup> Originally two separate houses, the buildings were transformed into one complex. House 12 still maintains the characteristics of a traditional atrium house, while house 11 was turned into a commercial area with a bar at the southeastern corner, its counter decorated with pieces of coloured marble. The house has its name after a graffito on the bar wall, *Amarantus Pompeianus rog(at)*.<sup>2</sup> The name appeared also on amphorae found during excavations in 1995-96.<sup>3</sup>

Sampling started in house 12, where a 1<sup>st</sup> style painting remains below the level of the raised floor in the *tablinum*, room 5, (*Fig. 21*). It was made on a plaster belonging to group A. The 4<sup>th</sup> style decoration above the subsequently raised floor was made on a plaster belonging to group G. Belonging to the same period is the decoration in room 7, also here covering remnants of the earliest phase.

The long period of the 1<sup>st</sup> style is represented by two plasters, A and B, the earlier of which was found in the rooms mentioned above. In two other rooms, the atrium and the in the peristyle area (8) there were traces of type A below a plaster layer, type B. On the west wall in the atrium, an application of type A extends behind the north wall. A later plaster, type B, was used for the white and red decoration on the north and west walls. Layers blocked behind any construction are earlier than the construction. In this case, however, there are doubts as to how to interpret the blocked plaster layer, since, according to Wallace-Hadrill, the wall “butting against” the plaster, belongs to the earliest construction period of the building. A possible explanation is that some plaster was pressed into the cavity that runs along the north wall when the wall was plastered for the first time, i.e. at the time of the early 1<sup>st</sup> style. The constructions, one with a basin, flanking the stairs to the *tablinum*, belong to the last decoration period in the atrium. This decoration was made on a plaster type E, related to 3<sup>rd</sup> style paintings.

At the east side of room 8 (b and c), there are indications of several phases (*fig. 24*). Seams of the earliest phase, type A, appear on both sides of the original opening to room 10. This entrance was narrowed twice at its north side and once at the south. To the first reduction at the north belongs a plaster type B, subsequently concealed with a plaster type E, the latter also found on the south side of the opening. Several fragments of a 1<sup>st</sup> style decoration were used in the wall construction on the southern part of the east wall. These and other early periods are concealed by a late plaster, type H, which contains various kinds of crushed materials.

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<sup>1</sup> On the House of Amarantus, see Fulford & Wallace-Hadrill 1996, Bragantini et al 1981, 103f.

<sup>2</sup> Della Corte 1965, 340.

<sup>3</sup> Fulford & Wallace-Hadrill 1996, 89.

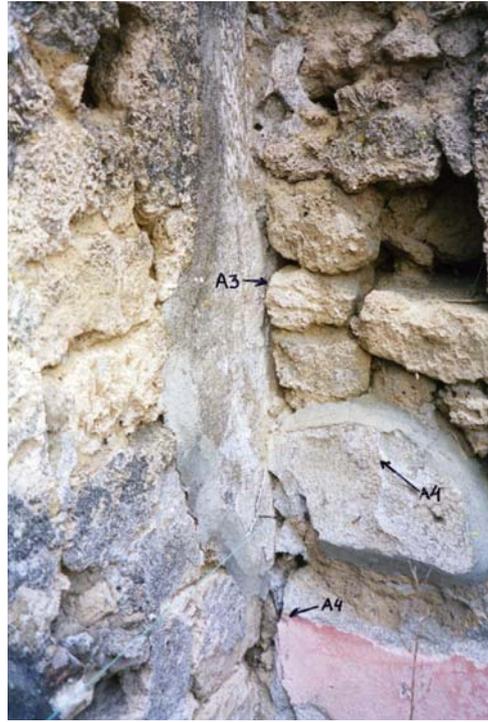


Fig. 23. To the left: Room 5, *tablinum*. 1<sup>st</sup> style decoration concealed by a 4<sup>th</sup> style painting.  
 Fig. 24. To the right: Room 2, atrium. Plaster layer on the west wall, trapped behind the north wall.  
 Fig. 25. Below: Room 8, peristyle area. Sampling areas.



Fig. 26. House 11, the bar. Sampling spots and plaster groups: sample 27 = group A, 28 and 40 = B, 38 and 42 = E, 29 = G, 30 = H, 31 and 39 = H. Sample 43, on the south wall, plaster group G.

Plasters type E, related to 3<sup>rd</sup> style decorations, dominate the central area of the complex. This kind of plaster, found on the east wall in house 12, frequently appeared in house 11; on the west wall in room 6, and in various parts of room 4 and in 5c, sometimes covering remains of the earliest period (A).

In house 11, room 1 and its complex east wall and bar area, has been in focus (*Fig. 23*). This is the place where all plaster types in the house were represented, indicating that the room had been subject to several changes and redecorations. The earliest phases are represented by the two early plasters A and B, which raises questions. The results of the study on the standing structures show that the east wall was constructed later.<sup>4</sup> We have been discussing this matter, and it is not my intention to contradict the archaeologists, but since the plaster is there, there has to be an explanation. The earliest plaster, A, appears as a small remain on a large Sarno stone block, concealed by the later, B. There is also a layer of plaster B below the level of the raised floor. Plaster A can be explained

<sup>4</sup> Fulford & Wallace-Hadrill 1996.

as a remnant on a block that was reused in the wall. Plaster B may also be there accidentally, or there may be remains of an earlier construction below the present wall at the southwest corner.

In any case, the early plasters A and B are covered by a red and white 3<sup>rd</sup> style decoration, plaster group E. This decoration continues behind the step-like construction at the bar counter that is located in the southeast corner. The “steps-construction” was decorated with a plaster belonging to group G, also used for the 4<sup>th</sup> style decorations in rooms 5 and 7. Finally, the east wall was redecorated with a reused sandy plaster, H, which contains crushed materials such as glass and ceramics. This layer should be dated to post AD 62. There is one more partial plaster application of a slightly better quality, which has a red top layer consisting of lime and *cocciopesto*. These final applications are almost identical, and belong to the same group of reused plasters, H. They are, however, noted as two plaster types, simply because one is covering the other.

Traces of the early 1<sup>st</sup> style are also detectible at the socle level in room 1 on the north wall towards room 3, and in the opening to room 2, where there are four layers of plaster in a distinct stratigraphy below the floor level. Two of these, the second and the fourth, have paint layers. Layers one and two belong to the earliest period, A, the third belongs to group G, and the last layer is a reused plaster, H. In room 4A, an early plaster layer, A, situated below floor level, is concealed behind the plaster used for the 3<sup>rd</sup> style decorations of this area.

### *Discussion and concluding remarks*

The plasters in Casa di Amarantus are generally not of a very high quality. They have often been contaminated with soil, and with mosses growing in and on the fragments. Those situated below the floor level have been difficult to study. In a clean plaster one can observe the various components of the filler against the white or pale beige lime. When the lime is dirty, the clear colours and the crystals stick out, but some information may be hidden in the dominating opacity.

The four layers, mentioned above, raised some questions, not easily answered, and were therefore given particular interest. Samples from these layers were investigated at the ICVBC.<sup>5</sup> The earliest two applications were placed in group A. The third layer was placed in group G, and the fourth layer together with the reused plaster found on the east wall belongs to group H.

Summing up, in house 12 there are two main decoration periods, linked to the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> styles. In house 11 there are three main phases. These are connected with the 1<sup>st</sup>, the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the late 4<sup>th</sup> styles. In the central area of the complex there was a period of extensive redecoration during the period of the 3<sup>rd</sup> style. Finally there are traces of late repairs in both houses.

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<sup>5</sup> See appendix.

## *I 9, 11 Plaster types, groups, locations*

### **Room 11/1**

*Earliest phase:* type A 1, group A. North wall: layer at the socle, and east wall, plaster remains on a standing block.

*Second phase:* type A 4, group B. East wall: layer in the blocked door, continuing on the wall, covering type A 1.

*Third phase:* type A 6, group E. East wall: white plaster layer with white and red decoration, which continues behind a brick construction (bar).

*Fourth phase:* type A 2, group G. East wall: pinkish red layer with pick-marks, covering type A 4 and covered by plaster type A 8.

*Fifth phase:* type A 8, group H. East wall: plaster with inclusions of glass, ceramics, marble etc. layer covering type A 2.

*Last phase:* type A 31, group H. East wall: layer covering type A 8.

### **Room 11/1-2**

*Earliest phase:* type A 1, group A. Found at entrance between rooms 1 and 2, below floor level, 1<sup>st</sup> layer of 4.

*Second phase:* type A 1, group A. 2<sup>nd</sup> layer of 4, with decoration.

*Third phase:* type A 2, group G. 3<sup>rd</sup> layer of 4.

*Last phase:* type A 8, group H. 4<sup>th</sup> layer of 4, with paint layer.

### **11/4a**

*Earliest phase:* type A 1, group A. North, south and east walls: layer continuing below floor level.

*Last phase:* type A6, group E. North, south and east walls: decoration covering type A1.

### **11/4b**

*Last phase:* type A 6, group E. East and south walls: decoration continuing behind south wall.

### **11/4c**

*Earliest phase:* type A 1, group A. West wall: layer blocked behind north wall.

*Last phase:* type A 6, group E. West and north walls: layer covering type A1.

### **11/5b**

*Earliest phase:* type A1, group A. North wall: blocked behind west wall.

*Second phase:* type A 4, group B. North wall: blocked behind west wall.

*Last phase:* type A 6, group E. West wall: plaster seam towards room 5c.

### **11/5c**

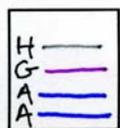
*Earliest phase:* type A 1, group A. Plaster seam.

*Last phase:* type A 6, group E. West and north walls, and SW corner: covering type A1.

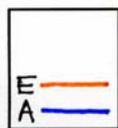
Room 11/1



Room 11/1-2



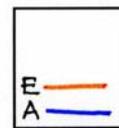
Room 11/4a



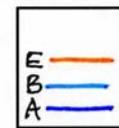
Room 11/4b



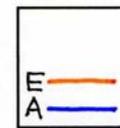
Room 11/4c



Room 11/5b



Room 11/5c



## *I 9, 12 Plaster types, groups, locations*

### **Room 12/2**

*Earliest phase:* type A 1, group A. West wall: layer blocked behind north wall

*Second phase:* type A 4, group B. North and west walls: layer with white/red decoration, covering type A1.

*Last phase:* type A 6, group E. North wall: at the constructions flanking the opening to room 5, covering type B.

### **Room 12/4**

*Earliest phase:* type A 1, group A. North and west walls: layer with pick-marks.

*Second phase:* type A 6, group E. North wall: at the entrance, covering type A1.

*Last phase:* type A 8, group H. North and west walls: layer covering types A1 and A6.

### **Room 12/5**

*Earliest phase:* type A1, group A. North and east walls: layer with yellow decoration, below floor level.

*Last phase:* type A 2, group G. East, south walls, and part of west wall: 4<sup>th</sup> style decoration on covering type A 1.

### **Room 12/6**

*Earliest phase:* type A 1, group A. South wall: layer below and above floor level.

*Last phase:* type A 6, group E. West wall: layer covering the wall.

### **Room 12/7**

*Earliest phase:* plaster type A 1, group A. East wall.

*Last phase:* plaster type A2, group G. 4<sup>th</sup> style decoration on all walls, covering type A1.

### **Room 12/8**

*Earliest phase:* type A 1, group A. East wall: layer blocked behind later construction and continuing on the wall (original entrance, north side). South of the entrance: plaster seam (original entrance, south side).

*Second phase:* type A 4, group B. East wall: layer blocked behind later construction and continuing on the wall (1<sup>st</sup> reduction of entrance, north side). Fragments, white profiles, red decoration in the south part of the wall: covered by plaster type A 8.

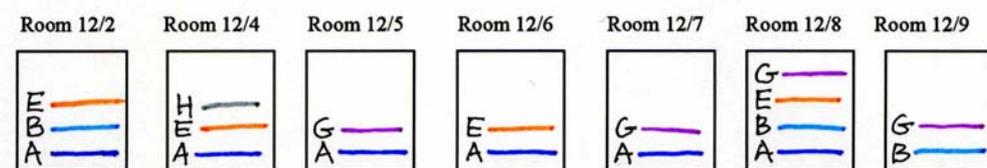
*Third phase:* type A 6, group E. East wall: in the niche and continuing on the wall (2<sup>nd</sup> reduction of entrance, north side), covering type A4. South side of opening covering plaster fragments in the wall.

*Fourth phase:* type A 8, group G. East wall: layer with rough surface, covering earlier periods.

### **Room 12/9**

*Earliest phase:* type A 4, group B. North wall: on the door frame of the blocked door.

*Last phase:* type A 8, group G. East wall.



## *List of examined plaster samples*

I 9, 11/12 Casa di Amaranthus (A)

2003 – 2004 - 2005

Nr	Room	Sample location in metres	Order of layer	Brief description	Decoration	Remarks	Type	Group
1 CNR	12/5	East wall H. 0.45, 0.80 from NE corner. Below floor level.	1 <sup>st</sup> with yellow decoration. Covered by A 2.	Black and white. Some green, red and pale yellow particles. Grainy lime.	Presumably 1 <sup>st</sup> style	Small particles between large grey	A 1	A
2 CNR	12/5	East wall H. 1.25, 0.03 from NE corner.	Upper layer with decoration. Covering A 1.	Large and small black, brown, a few yellow particles. Lots of red. Some uncoloured and green crystals.	<b>4<sup>th</sup> style</b> Decoration on E, N, S walls. Small area on W wall.	Extremely dirty. Lime with sand, white lumps	A 2	G
3 CNR	12/2	West wall H. 0.70, 0.63 from NE corner.	Layer blocked behind N wall and over pilaster.	Large and small, grains, some very large grey. Small crystals.		Unclean lime same as A1	A 1	A
4 CNR	12/2	North wall H. 0.95, 0.04 from NW corner.	Layer with red decoration at socle level.	Black and white. Large and small grains, few crystals.	AM3bis and AM4 (CNR)	Lack of small particles	A 4	B
5	12/4	North wall H. 0.78, 0.14 from SE edge.	Covered by A 6.	Black and white. 2 green. More lime than A 1.		Some very large grey	A 1	A
6 CNR	12/4	North wall at the N side of door. H. 0.52, at the edge.	Layer with red stucco. Covering plaster type A 1 and covered by A 8.	Black and white with orange, red, yellow grains. Filler with warm colours, unclean lime.		Repair? Applied on very small area	A 6	E
7	12/4	West wall H. 1.23, 1.10 from NW corner.	Layer with smooth surface and pick-marks. Covered by A 8.	A 1 with dirty lime. Very large grey.		The same as A 1	A 1	A
8 CNR	12/4	North wall H. 0.58, 0.13 from NW edge.	Layer covering A 6 and covering the wall.	Large and small particles, black, grey and brown. Red dust and some larger. Crystal dust.	Not so many red particles as A2, similar but more lime	Extremely dirty with large lime lumps. Paint flake?	A 8	H
9	12/7	East wall H. 0.73, 0.24 from SE corner.	Layer covered by no. 10.	A 1 with much lime and lumps of lime.		Same as A5 Similar to A1, more lime, lumps	A 1	A
10	12/7	East wall H. 0.63, 0.24 from SE corner.	Layer with decoration. Covering no. 9.	Extremely dirty.	<b>4<sup>th</sup> Style</b> Decoration on all walls	Same as A2	A 2	G
11	12/8B	East wall H. 1.87, 1.05 from S edge, N of entrance to room 10.	Layer in blocked door (orig. opening) and continuing on the wall.	Black and white.		Same as A1	A 1	A
12	12/8B	East wall H. 1.73, 0.95 from SE edge, N of entrance to room 10.	Upper layer in blocked door (1 <sup>st</sup> reduction). Covering no. 11.	Black and white. Large grains, mainly round. Few crystals.		Larger grains than A4, more grey	A 4	B
13 CNR	12/8B	East wall, in the niche. H. 0.08, 0.10 from S edge H. 1.68, 0.12 S of niche, N of entrance to room 10.	Layer continuing on E wall (2 <sup>nd</sup> reduction).	Large and small grains, many yellow, red, few very large black	Very similar to A6.	Unclean lime with white lumps	A 6	E

Nr	Room	Sample location in metres	Order of layer	Brief description	Decoration	Remarks	Type	Group
14	12/8B	East wall S side of entrance to room 10. H. 1.25, 0.19 from W edge.	Small remain on a block.	Black and white. Similar to A4 and to A 1. A4 has whiter lime.			A 1	A
15 CNR	11/4 A	South wall H. 0.29, 1.83 from SE corner.	1 <sup>st</sup> layer with white surface. Continuing below floor level.	Mainly black, small particles between large. Green, red, broken black.		Similar to A1 and A14, more red.	A 1	A
16 CNR	11/4 A	South wall H. 0.29, 1.34 from SW corner..	Upper layer, red decoration. Continuing on W wall.	Yellow, bright yellow, particles. White lime with airbags.		Same as A6, same red stucco.	A 6	E
17	11/4C	West wall H. 0.67, 0.13 in the middle of closed opening.	Layer blocked behind later construction. Covered by A18.	Very similar to A1.			A 1	A
18	11/4C	West wall H. 0.55 at the NW corner.	Layer with red decoration. Covering A 17.	Large orange grains.		Same as A6, same red stucco.	A 6	E
19	12/6	South wall H. 0.52, 0.49 from SE corner. H. 1.03, 0.46 from SE corner.	Seam, between block and wall. Below floor level. Above floor level.	Black and white. Small particles between large. Large grey-beige grains.		Very similar to A1, same as no.14.	A 1	A
20	12/6	South wall H. 2.18, 0.71 from SE corner.	Upper layer. Small area. Repair?	Similar to A2, just as sandy brown but not so many red particles.	Different. Seems to be clay.	Preparation		
21	12/6	West wall H. 1.40, 1.05 from NW edge.	Layer covering the wall.		Some very large dark grains.	Similar to A6, smaller grains.	A 6	E
22	12/9	East wall H. 0.65, 0.55 from NE edge.	Upper layer.			Same as A8.	A 8	H
23	12/9	North wall H. 1.58, 0.21 from NW corner.	Layer on door frame and as seam, blocked door.	White lime, large particles, very large grey. Frail.		Same as no.12	A 4	B
24	11/5C	West wall H. 0.95, 0.19 from NW corner.	Layer blocked behind later construction.	Black and white. Small green crystals, few red particles.		Same as nos.14, 19. White lime.	A 1	A
25	11/5C	H. 1.07, at the NW corner.	Layer continuing over the corner, covering no. 24.	The same as no. 13, clean lime.			A 6	E
26	11/5C	West wall H. 1.29 at the SW corner.	Layer at the corner.	Big lime lumps, a lot of yellow and red grains.	A6 with much lime.	Same as no.25.	A 6	E
27	11/1	East wall H. 0.75, 1.17 from SE corner.	Layer in blocked door.	Black and white. Small particles	same as no.15	Similar to A1, more red grains.	A 1	A
28 28B	11/1	East wall H. 0.44, 0.93 from SE corner H. 0.86, 1.18 from SE corner.	Layer in blocked door. Covering no. 27.	Black and white, large particles, lack of small.		Dirty sample. Same as no.12.	A 4	B
29	11/1	East wall H. 0.58, 2.85 from SE corner.	Third layer. Covering A 28	Very dirty. Good proportion large/small particles.	Pink plaster, with pick-marks.	Same as A2.	A 2	G

Nr	Room	Sample location in metres	Order of layer	Brief description	Decoration	Remarks	Type	Group
30	11/1	East wall H. 0.60, 2.80 from SE corner.	Layer covering no. 29.			Same as A8	A 8	H
31 CNR	11/1	East wall H. 0.88, 0.57 from SE corner. H. 0.76, 0.28 from SE corner.	Upper layer. Covering no. 30 Pink plaster. Layer below has rough surface.	Dirty lime with some lumps. Small particles between large.	Crushed materials. Yellow and orange grains.	Similar to A8 and A2. Kind of A8.	<b>A 31</b>	H
32	12/8B	East wall H. 2.57, 0.73, S of entrance to room 10. Outside room 10.	Layer blocked behind later construction (reduction of entrance).	Small grains, mainly black.			A 1	A
33	12/8B	East wall H. 1.65, 1.20, S of entrance to room 10. Between rooms 9-10.	Upper layer. Covering area below no. 32 and covering no. 34.	Pieces of glass, ceramics and marble in the plaster.		Same as no. 30.	A 8	H
34	12/8B	East wall H. 1.24, 1.75, S of entrance to room 10. Between rooms 9-10.	Layer, covered by A 33. S of previous layer (33).	Small grains, mainly black.		Similar to no.12.	A 4	B
35	12/8B	East wall H. 1.66, 1.85, S of entrance to room 10, N of entrance to 9. Outside room 9.	Upper layer, S of previous layer (34).			Same as no.34.	A 4	B
36	12/8 A	East wall H. 0.42, 0.73, N of entrance to room 9. Outside room 9.	Fragment with red decoration.	One of many fragments in S part of E wall, rooms 12/8A+B.		A 1 with more lime, A 12.	A 4	B
37	11/5B	West wall H. 1.22, 0.40 from door edge to room 5C.	Seam in the wall, on S part, towards room 5C.	Smaller particles than A4 and no.36. Same as no. 13.			A 6	E
38	11/1	East wall H.1.95, 0.57 from SE corner.	Layer blocked behind later construction. Covered by 39.	Lots of yellow grains. Clean lime.	White and red decoration.	Very similar to A 6, same as no.13.	A 6	E
39	11/1	East wall H. 1.97, 0.85 from SE corner.	Layer covering no. 38, covered by type A 31 (pink plaster).	Plaster with a lot of large particles – glass, marble etc. Similar to 12/8B, E.	This plaster is also on S wall, W of door.	Same as no.33.	A 8	H
40 (28b)	11/1	East wall H. 0.40, 2.20 from SE corner. Below floor level.				Same as no. 28. Same as no.12.	A 4	B
41	11/1	E wall H. =.85, 0.94 from SE corner.	On the standing block with layers 27, 28. S of seams.	Black and white.	Powder, no good sample.		?	
42	11/1	E wall, above standing block. H. 2.20, 1.32 from SE corner.	White layer above standing block. Covered by no.39.	Black and white. Many yellow grains. Some very large grey.	Similar to A6, 16. Dirty lime Same as no. 18.		A 6	E
43	11/1	S wall H. 0.78, 0.02 from SE corner.	Layer at lower level. Covered by no.39.	Looks like decoration in 11/4A.	red decoration	Same as no.29.	A 2	G
44	11/1	N wall H. 0.30, 0.48 from NE corner.	Plaster layer at the socle level.	Black and white. Lime lumps.			A 1	A

Nr	Room	Sample location in metres	Order of layer	Brief description	Decoration	Remarks	Type	Group
45	11/5	W wall, plaster seam, applied on N wall, at entrance to 5A. H. 1.38, 1.56 from NW edge.	Layer with smooth surface. Covered by no.46.	Black and white. Unclean lime.			A 1	A
46	11/5	W wall, seam. Plaster applied on N wall. H. 1.32, 1.40 from NW edge.	Covering no.45. Layer with stucco. 2 layers in the seam.	Black and white. Small grains. White lime lumps			A 1	A
47	12/8	E wall, S of entrance to room 9. H. 0.98, 0.50 from NE edge.	Fragment. Covered by no.48.	Black and white. White lime lumps. Stucco layer.	Stucco with profile		A 4	B
48	12/8	E wall, S of entrance to room 9. H. 1.20, 1.62 from NE edge.	Covering fragment no. 47.	Black and white with red and few green grains.			A 6	E
49	12/2	N wall. H. 0.64, 0.63 from NW edge.	Plaster seams, each side of opening to room 5 and behind later construction.	White stucco decoration.		Same as A 3, few green. Same as no.47.	A 1	A
50	12/2	N wall, brick constructions at the entrance. H. 0.20, 0.14 from W edge of basin.	Construction covering no. 49. The same plaster in the basin (with red decoration).	Lots of yellow grains.		Same as no. 42.	A 6	E
51	12/2	Impluvium.					A 1	A
52A CNR	11/1-2	Between rooms 1-2, below floor level.	Layer 1 of 4.	Black and white. Dirty plaster.		Same as nos.15, 27.	A 1	A
52B CNR	11/1-2	Between rooms 1-2, below floor level.	Layer 2 of 4. With paint layer.	Black and white. Dirty plaster.			A 1	A
52C CNR	11/1-2	Between rooms 1-2, below floor level.	Layer 3 of 4.	Black and white. Dirty plaster.	Crushed, reused plaster?		A 2	B
52d CNR	11/1-2	Between rooms 1-2, below floor level.	Layer 4 of 4. With paint layer.	Dirty plaster.			A 8	H
53a	11/4	N wall, below floor level.	Layer 1 of 3.	Black and white. Dirty plaster.		Same as nos.15, 27.	A1	A
53b	11/4	N wall, below floor level.	Layer 2 of 3.	Black and white. Dirty plaster.		Same as nos.15, 27.	A1	A
53c	11/4	N wall, below floor level.	Layer 3 of 3.	Dirty plaster.	Many yellow		A 6	E

