

Fig. 31. *Above*: Basilica. The north wall, detail.

Fig. 32. *Below*: Basilica. Sampling areas and colour code.

Basilica

“Basilica. Interior. North wall. Date. Controversial. Standard date is ca. 120 B.C. The PFP dates the Basilica to the Roman colony, i.e. 89-80 B.C.”

“Comment. It would be useful to see if the plaster of the Basilica and the Temple of Jupiter (1) is similar; and (2) falls into your middle or late First Style group.”

Two rows of large stucco panels at the top level and smaller ones at the lower part, decorate the Basilica walls (*Fig. 32*). The panels, separated by simple flat borders, were painted in red, yellow and green. Fluted white pilasters interrupt the horizontally oriented pattern. This 1st style decoration seems to belong to one period, contemporaneous with the construction period. A graffito incised on one of the Basilica walls states that Caius Pumidius Dipilus was there on the 3rd of October the year when Marcus Lepidus and Quintus Catulus were consuls, i.e. in 78 BC.¹ Stamped tiles and finds at stratigraphic excavations indicate that this building, centre of Pompeian commerce, was in use before the city became a Roman colony.²

Plasters and phases

Sampling was made at the north wall, where the decoration is well preserved but has relatively large damaged areas with falling plaster. In addition, two of the columns were sampled. Sampling started at an area where the wall plaster butts against the pilaster; sample 1 was taken from the wall and sample 2 from the pilaster. There were two different kinds of plaster. The pilaster plaster was fine-grained and the wall plaster large-grained. Both samples had two layers, the lower more large-grained and the top layer fine-grained. On top was the stucco. This could either be explained as illustrating a plastering technique, where one type of plaster was used for the pillars and another for the wall panels, or as two decoration periods. Samples taken at each column base did not confirm this hypothesis, since one had an extremely fine-grained and the other a large-grained plaster. A new sample, taken from a layer treated with a pick-hammer, at the north-western part of the wall, was of the fine-grained type A, and it was partially concealed by the large-grained plaster type B, indicating that there were two decoration periods. Analyses at ICVBC resulted in sample B2 being placed in the same group as the earliest plasters in the temples of Jupiter and of Apollo. Sample B1 was placed in a different group of more large-grained plasters, type B.

Discussion and results

During the final phase of crosschecking at the Forum in June 2005, I was fortunate to have the opportunity of discussing this problem with Professor Filippo Coarelli. His comment, it was not impossible, that there were two phases, was of decisive importance. Returning to the site I looked for evidence of two phases, and found that such was the case. The wall plaster at the lower row of large panels is a later application, since this layer butts against the pillars, and also covers the edges of the upper panel decoration (*figs. 33,34*). I would say that the pillars and the upper rows of small sized panels belong to the original decoration, and that the large panels at the lower part are a redecoration.

¹ Maiuri 1954, 24.

² La Rocca & de Vos 2002, 115.

Basilica, Plaster types, groups, locations

Plaster type B 2, group A.

This sample was taken from the first pilaster seen from the NW corner, partially concealed by plaster type B 1. The filler has very small grains between few large and many long black crystals. The top layer has extremely fine grains, and the stucco consists of clean, slightly yellowish lime and very small uncoloured crystals. Similar plasters were used for 1st style decorations at the Casa del Frutteto and Casa di Successus.

Plaster type B 1, group B.

The sample was taken from the wall panel. The filler has mainly large rounded grains. The wall stucco has yellowish lime and contains large and medium sized uncoloured and greyish crystals and many small yellow particles. Plasters of this kind were used for 1st style decoration in the Casa del Bell'Impluvio and early 2nd style decoration in the Casa di Cerere.

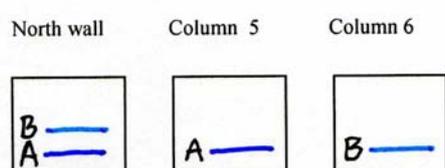


Fig. 33. *To the left*: Panel plaster layer butting against column stucco.

Fig. 34. *To the right*: Area of a large stucco panel, which conceals part of the earlier stucco decoration. Small traces of paint remain on some areas.

List of examined plaster samples

Basilica

Pompeii Forum 2004-2005

No	Sample location	Comments	Brief description, plaster	Stucco	Decoration	Type	Group
1 CNR	North wall, panel. Close to the first pilaster from NW corner.	Upper layer with stucco decoration. There are two plaster layers on the wall, plus the stucco layer. <i>Same group: TJI.</i>	Black and white. Much lime, clean. Large and small grains, mainly rounded. Black, grey, beige, few red-brown. Few bright yellow, small, and red "dust". Transparent uncoloured crystals, few grey, yellow.		1 st style decoration	B 1	B
2 CNR	North wall, pilaster. On the first pilaster from NW corner. New sample: same result.	Brick pilaster with white stucco. Two applications without interruption, the upper has extremely fine grains. The wall stucco butts against the pilaster at the lower level. <i>Same group: TJB, TAI.</i>	Black and white. Clean lime, slightly beige. Small grains, between few large. Mainly black, some grey, dark grey. Many long black crystals. Some very small red and bright yellow particles. Top layer: extremely small grains, mainly crystals	Yellowish lime. Transparent uncoloured crystals.	1 st style decoration	B 2	A
3	North wall, panel. On the wall between the second and third pilaster.	First plaster layer applied.	Clean lime, slightly beige, small airbags. Some very large black. Some pale grey.			B 2	A
4	North wall, panel. On the wall between the second and third pilaster. (NW)	Upper layer with decoration. Traces of red paint. This stucco continues on the pilaster.	Large grains, some beige. Smooth stucco, very hard. Yellowish lime.	Uncoloured and grey crystals and lots of small yellow grains.	1 st style decoration	B 1	B
5	North wall, panel. On the wall between the second and third pilaster. (NW)	<i>Arriccio.</i> Similar to filler no 1. <i>The same composition as Jupiter 4.</i>	Filler: large black, grey, brown-red grains. Lots of small "dusty" particles.		Preparation		
6	Column. Fifth column from NW.	Brick column with white stucco. Sample with plaster and stucco. Similar to no. 2, smaller grains.	Black and white. Clean lime. Lots of crystals. Extremely small particles. Mainly black, some grey and red-brown. Beautiful sample!	Clean white lime, large and small uncoloured crystals and few yellow grains.	1 st style decoration	B2	A
7	North wall. Between the double column and the first pilaster, at the floor level.	Layer with pick-marks. Two layers in continuity, fine-grained plaster, the upper very small grains.	Clean lime, very small particles, some large. Same as no 6.			B 2	A
8	Column. Sixth column from NW.		Large grains. Some beige. Same as B1. Powder sample.			B 1	A
9	North wall, panel. After 1 st pilaster	First layer on the wall.	Large grains. Some beige. Same as B1.			B 1	A