

Andrea FABER – Adolf HOFFMANN, Die Casa del Fauno in Pompeji (VI 12) 1. Stratigraphische Befunde der Ausgrabungen in den Jahren 1961 bis 1963 (von Andrea Faber). Bauhistorische Analyse (von Adolf Hoffmann nach Vorarbeiten von René von Schöfer und Arnold Tschira). Archäologische Forschungen Bd. 25. Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag 2009, 340 S., 109 s/w-Abb., 5 farb. Abb., mit 12 farbigen Falttafeln als Beilage sowie einer DVD mit Bilddaten

Despite its traditional prominence in handbooks on Roman art and architecture, and despite its emblematic role in the popular perception of Pompeii, the actual remains of the House of the Faun have received relatively little serious attention from the scholarly community. Yes, its architecture and – particularly – its floor plan have been discussed, and, of course, its first-style wall-decoration and its astonishingly lavish mosaics have played their due roles in specialist discussions, but a true, lengthy, and in-depth discussion of the house, its rich material record and its long history is still lacking. The publication of the work of Faber and Hoffmann therefore should be welcomed as an important first step towards filling in this remarkable gap. Their work is the first monograph devoted to the house, and the book under review here is announced as the first part of a series of two volumes. It provides us with an analysis of the building history of the house, and with a discussion and overview of the pottery assemblages found during excavations below the AD 79 floor level in the early 1960s. A second volume will focus on the standing remains.

It is an understatement to say that this book was long-awaited: generations of students have been staring at those awkward walls in *oecus* 25 in the back of the house wondering what precisely they were looking at, while they were being told that decades ago, there had been some Germans digging in the house looking for clues about the history of the house and the *insula*, but that they had not yet published their definitive results. Well, after nearly half a century, the scholarly community finally has all the details it needs to solve the riddle, and the *oecus*, which is still about the only freely accessible place in Pompeii where one can really look underneath the AD 79 floor level, can now fully become a showcase of the dynamic history of Pompeian urban space, even though what one sees, actually, belongs to earlier phases of the house of the Faun rather than to its predecessors – some guidebooks, such as that of Pesando and Guidobaldi, will need to be updated on this issue.¹

¹ PESANDO, F. & GUIDOBALDI, M.-P. 2006: *Pompeii Oplontis Ercolano Stabiae* (Rome, Laterza).

The volume is divided into two main parts. The first part is written by Hoffmann and focuses on the building history of the house, with chapters on the individual parts of the house, the excavations, and a chronological overview of the house's main phases. The second, and more substantial, part of the book is written by Faber and focuses on the finds from the excavations. It is divided into four parts. The first two are chapters dedicated to the relative and absolute dating of the finds and phases and to the analysis of the structural remains discovered respectively; then follows a final discussion co-authored by Faber and Hoffmann, and a long and detailed catalogue, which in fact takes up about half the length of the entire book. All pictures, maps and drawings are in the back, and while a few more photographs and detailed maps would have been helpful, the drawings of finds are ubiquitous, of good quality, and well-linked to the catalogue. With the volume also comes a cd providing scans of the (hand-drawn) profiles of the trenches dug in the 1960s, a couple of which also have been included as loose plates in the back.

The (unfair) question some specialists will be tempted to ask, of course, is whether Faber and Hoffmann's work lives up to the expectations raised by the long time it cost them to produce it. The response to that question must be twofold. On the one hand, the book will undoubtedly prove a highly valuable contribution to Pompeian debates for decades to come; on the other hand, as one might expect, the length of the process in the end turns out to be a handicap rather than a blessing: the excavations in the House of the Faun were executed in a world that technologically was profoundly different from the present day, in a time when scholarly knowledge of the archaeological record underneath AD 79 levels was by and large restricted to a few Italians who had been digging with Amedeo Maiuri himself, and in a scholarly culture in which archaeologists asked different questions and reasoned differently than nowadays. Seen within that context, the authors have done a very decent job, but scholars expecting this book to contribute substantially to current debates or to provide exciting new angles of interpretation, will be disappointed by it. The book does not really enhance the discussion on the House of the Faun to a higher level, and its discussion of the history of the complex essentially corroborates and reiterates ideas that have been circulating among Pompeian scholars for several decades.² Yet, that in itself is an achievement that should not be underestimated, and that a book does not deliver what one perhaps would like it to

² See, for example, DICKMANN, J.-A. 1997: The peristyle and the transformation of domestic space in hellenistic Pompeii. In Laurence, R. & Wallace-Hadrill, A. (eds.), *Domestic Space in the Roman World: Pompeii and beyond* (Poutrsmouth, JRA). See also Hoffmann's own contribution (pp. 493-495) in KOCKEL, V. 1986: Funde und Forschungen in den Vesuvstädten. *Archäologischer Anzeiger*, 1986, 443-569.

deliver – given the current state of research about the house – does not in itself affect the quality of what is delivered.

The main contribution of the work lies in the detailed publication of the excavation finds. While many research projects have been investigating the archaeological record below the AD 79 floor surface over the last fifteen years, the amount of publications discussing finds assemblages from pre-AD 79 phases to great detail is still relatively limited, though quickly increasing as we speak: many of these publications are being prepared at this very moment. Obviously, for the specialists involving in these projects, this book, its catalogue of finds assemblages and the drawings of pottery fragments are obligatory literature and is a welcome addition to existing reference works, such as Bonghi Jovino's 1984 study of the pottery from *insula* VI 5, and Coarelli and Pesando's 2006 publication of their excavations in *insula* VI 10.³ The same will be true for the drawn profiles, even though, awkwardly, these have been included in rather rudimentary form – hand drawn, in pencil, uninked, on millimetre paper, and with handwritten labels – as if they were made in the field and never really finished. While the documentation gives a valuable insight into mid-twentieth century German excavation practice, it does look a little bit clumsy compared to what has been published over the last ten years.⁴ Some of the handwriting is not so easy to read, e.g. on Blatt 33, and one cannot help spotting places where erasers have left their traces – the contrast with the finely drawn pottery could not have been bigger. Arguably, in times when computer technology allows people to digitalize such drawings without any loss of quality, and in a fairly short time, these hand drawn profiles should not have been the only form of documentation provided as far as the trenches are concerned. Nevertheless, the large amounts of data published, and the high degree of detail make this volume a must-have for any research library that maintains a (basic) Pompeii collection and a key reference work for those making sense of material from below the AD 79 floor levels.

As far as the historical argument is concerned, the book provides most of the information scholars need to reconstruct some of the most basic steps in the development of the house, which was constructed in the second quarter of the

³ BONGHI JOVINO, M. 1984: *Ricerche a Pompei. L'insula 5 della Regio VI dalle origini al 79 d.C.* (Rome, 'L'Erma' di Bretschneider), COARELLI, F. & PESANDO, F. 2006: *Rileggere Pompei I. L'insula 10 della Regio VI* (Rome, 'L'Erma' di Bretschneider).

⁴ See, e.g. the documentation accompanying the reports in GUZZO, P.G. & GUIDOBALDI, M.P. (eds.) 2008: *Nuove Ricerche Archeologiche nell'Area Vesuviana* (Rome, 'L'Erma' di Bretschneider). See also GUZZO, P.-G. & GUIDOBALDI, M.-P. (eds.) 2005: *Nuove ricerche archeologiche a Pompei ed Ercolano* (Naples, Electa).

second century BC and was adapted and enlarged with a second peristyle a century or so afterwards. There is a picture (fig. 23) showing the original back wall of the house along the south side of the second peristyle, and there is another one with the wall that separated the two shops that originally occupied the location of the present corridor between the street and the second *atrium* (fig. 15); indeed, the two best known adaptations to the house are now backed up by hard data and visual documentation. Yet, reading through Hoffmann's reconstruction of the history of the house, one cannot help to develop a certain amount of discomfort. This has not only to do with the fact that there is barely any engagement with recent scholarly literature (it is, for example, as if the entire *Häuser in Pompeji* series does not exist!), but also with the fact that the whole argument in the end seems to be primarily based on an analysis of the standing remains of the walls, which is announced as part of the planned second volume of the series. By consequence, at this point, Hoffmann's reconstruction is, strictly seen, not falsifiable and, thus, must be regarded an expert *opinion* rather than an expert analysis – at least until the second volume appears.

More problematically, the rather schematic framework within which the building history is reconstructed sometimes feels too rigid. Hoffmann neatly divides the house into six room groups and assumes a history consisting of three main phases – CdF 1, CdF 2 and CdF 3 – but fails to provide convincing arguments that support these subdivisions. In fact, the framework often raises questions rather than that it provides answers. Why, for example, do the substantial interventions in the service quarter during CdF 1 (p. 49) not constitute a separate phase? They may not have been very visible to the outside world, but the addition of a private bath constitutes a major upgrading of the house. Hoffmann may have had good reasons for this decision, but he does not really share them with the reader. More fundamentally, why do we necessarily need to assume that the construction of the second *fauces* and that of the second peristyle were not only broadly contemporary but also part of one and the same big plan (p. 50f.)? The data presented by Faber later in the volume (p. 86f.) do not at all exclude the possibility that there was a gap of five, ten, or even twenty years between the two interventions, and it will be exceptionally hard to prove that they belong together on the basis of the standing walls. The point is that the subdivision in phases, which dictates the subdivision of the paragraphs throughout the book puts the wrong emphasis: one should start with understanding situations on the micro level and then critically consider the possible relations between individual changes, weigh the different options and then see whether or not different coherent phases can be recognized. In this respect, Hoffmann and Faber may to a certain extent be accused of doing things

the wrong way round: their approach marginalizes other scenarios before they even can be seriously discussed.

The rigid chronological framework becomes particularly problematic when the finds assemblages are discussed. Faber starts with a long chapter in which the assemblages are assigned to the predefined phases and sub-phases in the history of the house. While this in itself is useful documentation, it often lacks detailed argumentation, and is subsequently used in a rather strange way. Statistics is invoked to prove that the apparently similar assemblages are statistically similar as well, which, unfortunately, is then also taken as an indication that they are chronologically related as well and, thus, *must* belong to the same phase, even though these assemblages often come from completely unrelated places in completely different trenches, and even though the date ranges for these assemblages are, as is admitted by the authors, in centuries rather than decades. After all the evidence assigned to one phase is mashed together in this way, stylistic analysis of the pottery is used to discuss the absolute dates of the phases. This results in the remarkable fact that Faber ends up using evidence from the trenches in the front part of the house to discuss the date of the construction of the second peristyle fifty meters to the north in the back part of the house (p. 87). This is contrary to logic: no statistical magic in the world will be able to make up for such an unwarranted decontextualization. Frustratingly, the methodological basis of this approach remains tantalizingly obscure: no justification is presented, not even in the form of references. One cannot help the feeling that this analysis would have been easier to follow, more credible and more relevant for the scholarly community if it had focused on understanding the micro scale historical developments on trench level, which is, for example, the format chosen by Coarelli and Pesando.⁵ One gets the feeling as if the research agenda set by Hoffmann's ideas about the house's history have seriously limited the ways in which the excavated evidence actually has been explored, and that is a pity.

Yet, one should not be too unfair with this book. It is very easy to criticize its approach and methodology from a postmodern, early twenty-first century perspective. This book simply does not belong to the twenty-first century, and it should not be judged by its standards. It is important that the book is finally there, and we are already looking forward to the second volume. To be completely fair with Hoffmann and Faber's work, one should approach it as a product of the 1980s. The methodology, the writing style and the way of engaging with scholarly literature all echo this recent past, when statistics had consi-

⁵ See above, n. 2.

derably more authority than they have now, literature was much less easily accessible, scholarly debates much more than nowadays were nationally oriented, and the dramatic upsurge in Pompeii studies of the last twenty years had not yet happened. One should not forget that the core ideas and methodologies behind the historical analysis presented in this book antedate Strocka's publication of the *Casa del Labirinto* (1991) and Dickmann's *Domus Frequentata* (1999) by a decade or more.⁶ Seen in this way, this book may be seen as one of those standard reference works, which today's scholars do not always take at face value any more, but which they nevertheless use frequently because they most fully express a 'traditional' point of view, which is about to be challenged and refined. In that sense, the position of the book may be comparable to that of Jongman's *Economy and Society of Pompeii*, or Mouritsen's *Magistrates, Elections and Municipal Elite* (which both were published in 1988).⁷ In other words: finally, we have a fully expressed 'traditional' view on the history of the largest house of Pompeii. That is a great contribution to scholarship. Now, let's use it, and challenge it.

BONGHI JOVINO, M. 1984: *Ricerche a Pompei. l'insula 5 della Regio VI dalle origini al 79 d.C.* (Rome, 'L'Erma' di Bretschneider).

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KOCKEL, V. 1986: Funde und Forschungen in den Vesuvstädten. *Archäologischer Anzeiger*, 1986, 443-569.

⁶ Hoffmann has indicated that the historical analysis of the house was already finished in 1981; cf. Kockel 1986, 493. DICKMANN, J.A. 1999: *Domus Frequentata. Anspruchsvolles Wohnen im pompejanischen Stadthaus* (Munich, Pfeil), STROCKA, V. 1991: *Casa del Labirinto. VI 11, 8-10* (Munich, Hirmer).

⁷ JONGMAN, W. 1988: *The Economy and Society of Pompeii* (Amsterdam, Gieben), MOURITSEN, H. 1988: *Elections, Magistrates and Municipal Elite. Studies in Pompeian Epigraphy* (Rome, 'L'Erma' di Bretschneider).

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- STROCKA, V. 1991: *Casa del Labirinto. VI 11, 8-10* (Munich, Hirmer).

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