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# Whose Forum? Imperial and Elite Patronage in the Forum of Pompeii

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Beginning in the principate of Augustus and continuing to 79 C.E., the forum of Pompeii communicated with Rome by displaying social, political, and religious connections as well as architectural allusions to the Imperial Family. This relationship with the capital and the Imperial Family has intrigued scholars and generated significant debate. Yet beyond a general sketch of the forum's history during the Imperial era, creating an exact chronology of the forum's associations to the Imperial Family proves difficult. This is because materials visible today preserve only the forum's appearance at the time of eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 C.E.

The current study seeks to examine Pompeii's connection to the Imperial Family as reflected in building projects on the east side of the forum and the ways in which this connection changed. From the reign of Augustus until 62 C.E., elite Pompeians dedicated buildings to glorify and define themselves as local parallels to members of the Imperial Family. After an earthquake in 62 C.E., the east side of the forum underwent a rebuilding project. This included repairs to three existing structures (Eumachia Building, Sanctuary of Augustus, and Macellum), the installation of the Imperial Cult Building, and a façade linking all four buildings on the east side. This rebuilding project standardized the Imperial presence at Pompeii emphasizing dynasty and creating visual continuity among the four structures. As it will be argued in this paper, Nero provided the relief for this rebuilding, exerting direct control over Pompeian public space. Thus, a chronology of construction on the east side of the forum can be formulated indicating a transition from elite, individual patronage to direct Imperial control over a unified space.

#### ELITE PATRONAGE AT POMPEII: FROM AUGUSTUS TO THE EARTHQUAKE

At Pompeii, a model of patronage emerged during the reign of Augustus essential for the perpetuation of Imperial image and ideology. In this model, elite members of society dedicated

structures honoring the Imperial Family while promoting their own prestige. The three buildings on the east side of the forum (Eumachia Building, Sanctuary of Augustus, and the Macellum) built before the 62 C.E. earthquake, as well as the large theater renovated during this time period, display this model.

This model of patronage emerged due to Augustus' assumption of absolute power and the establishment of the Imperial Cult. During the reign of Augustus, emperor worship became widespread throughout Italy and the provinces. Citizens made sacrifices and dedicated temples to the living emperor.<sup>1</sup> Prominent citizens in the municipalities played essential roles for the administration of the Imperial Cult.<sup>2</sup> No central authority dictated the practices of these cults. Rather, individuals holding the titles *flamen* or *sacerdos* served as leaders of these cults, distinguishing themselves in their respective communities.<sup>3</sup>

One such elite patron was Marcus Holconius Rufus. During the early Imperial period, he held the titles of *sacerdos* and *flamen*.<sup>4</sup> Rufus' well-documented restoration of the large theater of Pompeii provides an excellent case study of the model of elite Pompeian patronage. Rufus' addition of marble facing, tribunal, and a stage backdrop (*scaenae frons*) transformed the structure from a Hellenistic to a Roman Theater.<sup>5</sup> During the reign of Augustus, theaters served as spaces for civic renewal.<sup>6</sup> The theater at Pompeii draws strong comparisons to Augustus' restoration projects in which he famously turned Rome into a city of marble. Viewers would

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<sup>1</sup> Ittai Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 77.

<sup>2</sup> Ittai Gradel, "Mamia's Dedication: Emperor and Genius," *Analecta Romana Istituti Danici* 20 (1992): 47.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>4</sup> John D'Arms, "Pompeii and Rome in the Augustan Age and Beyond: the Eminence of the *Gens Holconia*," in *Romans on the Bay of Naples and Other Essays on Roman Campania*, edited by Fausto Zevi (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 422.

<sup>5</sup> John Dobbins, "Problems of Chronology, Decoration, and Urban Design in the Forum at Pompeii," *American Journal of Archaeology* 98.2 (1994): 654.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Zanker, *Pompeii: Public and Private Life*, trans. Deborah Lucas Schneider (Cambridge: University of Harvard Press, 1998), 112.

make the connection between Rufus' distinctive use of marble in the renovated theater and marble structures built by the Imperial Family in Rome.

Rufus further demonstrates a connection to the Imperial Family through a set of inscriptions in the theater. The first inscription honors Rufus himself. It reads:

M Holconio M.f. Rufo/ Iivir(o) i(ure) d(icundo) quiquiens/iter(um) quinq(uennali),  
trib(uno) mil(itum) a p(opulo),/ flamini Aug(usti), part(ono) colo(niae) d(ecurionum)  
d(decreto)

To Marcus Holconius Rufus son of Marcus, duumvir with legal power five times and twice again quinquennial, military tribune by the people, flamen of Augustus, patron of the colony, having been decreed by the decurions.<sup>7</sup>

The inscription dates from between 1 B.C.E. to 14 C.E. and includes Rufus' formal titles.<sup>8</sup>

Among the titles is *patronus coloniae* ("guardian of the colony") – a designation held by only one individual in municipal towns. In the large corpus of inscriptions and graffiti at Pompeii, Rufus is the only individual documented to have held the title.<sup>9</sup> Thus, it would be viewed as notable in comparison to Rufus' other distinctions. Additionally, the title *patronus coloniae* is relevant when viewed alongside another inscription engraved in the theater. This inscription is a dedication to Augustus presumably initiated by Rufus himself.<sup>10</sup> It reads:

[Imp(eratori) Caesari] Augusto patri/[patriae imp(eratori) XIV co(n)]s(uli) XIII  
pontif(ici) max(im)o trib(unica) [pot]est(ate) XXII

[To Emperor Caesar] Augustus, father of [the fatherland, emperor thirteen times,  
consul] thirteen times, pontifex maximus and in the twenty-second year of tribunician  
[po]wer.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> CIL X 838. All translations by author unless otherwise specified. This is in fact one of two inscriptions honoring Rufus in the theater. CIL X 837 is contemporaneous to CIL X 842 below and lists Rufus' titles and honors.

<sup>8</sup> D'Arms, "Pompeii and Rome in the Augustan Age and Beyond," 431.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 432.

<sup>10</sup> D'Arms, "Pompeii and Rome in the Augustan Age and Beyond," 426. D'Arms convincingly argues that Marcus Holconius Rufus' was the "instigator" of this inscription.

<sup>11</sup> CIL X 842.

As scholars have noted, the title “patri [patriae]” (“father of the fatherland”) is carved in larger script than any other of Augustus’ titles.<sup>12</sup> The inscription’s emphasis on the title “father of the fatherland” draws parallels to Rufus’ designation *patronus coloniae*. Thus, Rufus’ dedicatory inscription honors the emperor Augustus while positioning him as a local analog to Augustus.

This model of elite patronage is also observed in the dedication of the three buildings built before 62 C.E. on the east side of Pompeii’s forum. This includes the forum’s largest building, the Eumachia Building. It demonstrates architectural and ideological allusions to Rome and dates to either the reign of Augustus or Tiberius.<sup>13</sup> Based on evidence discussed below, a late Augustan date seems plausible. Despite a plethora of physical evidence (the building’s structure, several inscriptions, and multiple portraits) scholars have failed to reach a consensus on the building’s function, though the argument for its function as a mixed purpose space has gained general acceptance.<sup>14</sup>

The building’s patron, Eumachia, dedicated the structure to display her prominence as one of the wealthiest women in Pompeii. She did this while honoring Imperial Rome. Niches displayed statues of Romulus, Aeneas, and Augustan Concord – figures essential to Augustan imagery that were included in the Forum of Augustus in Rome.<sup>15</sup> Eumachia’s dedication itself exhibits a connection to the capital. As the dedicatory inscription in the building notes, Eumachia built the structure at her own expense, with her son, and consecrated a portion of the building to Augustan Concord and Piety.<sup>16</sup> Scholar Lawrence Richardson first compared Eumachia’s patronage to the benefaction of the empress Livia. He proves that the Eumachia Building shared

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<sup>12</sup> D’Arms, “Pompeii and Rome in the Augustan Age and Beyond,” 424.

<sup>13</sup> John Dobbins, “The Forum and Its Dependencies,” in *The World of Pompeii*, ed. by John Dobbins and Pedar Foss (New York: Routledge, 2007), 165.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>15</sup> Allison E. Cooley and M.G.L. Cooley, *Pompeii: A Sourcebook* (Routledge: New York, 2004), 98.

<sup>16</sup> CIL X 810.

a structural resemblance to the Porticus of Livia.<sup>17</sup> Both structures are a double porticus surrounding a rectangular space.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the empress alongside her son Tiberius dedicated the Porticus of Livia, as Richardson suggests, around 12 C.E. to Concordia.<sup>19</sup> Much like Marcus Holconius Rufus, Eumachia presents herself as a local counterpart to Livia – a woman of means fulfilling her civic duties alongside her son. As Richardson emphasizes, Livia’s building project demonstrated her autonomy and power in Rome. Therefore, in the process of honoring the Imperial Family, Eumachia created a connection to Livia in order to highlight her own power within the context of Pompeii.

Located to the north of the Eumachia Building is the Sanctuary of Augustus.<sup>20</sup> The building has been the topic of much debate due to an inscription ascribed to the structure. The inscription by the Pompeian priestess Mamia dedicates something to the *genius* of either Pompeii or Augustus.<sup>21</sup> Scholars have envisioned the inscription on the epistyle of the Sanctuary of Augustus because of the Sanctuary’s Augustan date and Mamia’s identity as an Augustan era priestess.<sup>22</sup> However, no archaeological evidence supports its placement in the Sanctuary of Augustus or anywhere else in Pompeii. Mamia’s dedication fits the model of elite patronage in the forum. Nevertheless, the inscription can only be used tentatively as evidence in association with the Sanctuary of Augustus.

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<sup>17</sup> Lawrence Richardson, “Concordia and Concordia Augusta: Rome and Pompeii,” *La Parola del Passato* 33 (1978): 268. Dobbins, “Problems of Chronology,” 661. Dobbins argues for a late Augustan date.

<sup>18</sup> For the Porticus of Livia as depicted on the *Forma Urbis*: [http://formaurbis.stanford.edu/fragments/color\\_mos\\_reduced/010opqr\\_MOS.jpg](http://formaurbis.stanford.edu/fragments/color_mos_reduced/010opqr_MOS.jpg) “Stanford Forma Urbis Romae Project” Stanford University. Accessed April 21, 2013. <http://formaurbis.stanford.edu>.

<sup>19</sup> Richardson, “Concordia and Concordia Augusta,” 266.

<sup>20</sup> This building is also referred to as the Temple of Vespasian or the Temple of the Genius of Augustus. Here it will be referred to as the Sanctuary of Augustus.

<sup>21</sup> CIL X 816.

<sup>22</sup> Duncan Fishwick, “The Inscription of Mamia Again,” *Epigraphica* 57 (1995): 42.

More substantially, the design of the Sanctuary of Augustus illustrates structural associations with Rome. The Sanctuary's lateral staircases at either side of the podium are unusual, but the temples of Venus Genetrix and Divus Iulius in Rome exhibit similar staircases. Likewise, other Imperial temples in the western empire during the Judo-Claudian period use this design.<sup>23</sup> This similarity does not imply direct architectural allusion, but it does imply the Sanctuary fits into a prototype modeled after a Roman original. In addition to John Dobbins' technical analysis of building techniques and materials, the architectural allusions of the sanctuary suggest an Augustan date.<sup>24</sup>

The marble altar in the Sanctuary of Augustus reveals further connections to the ideology of the capital. John Dobbins' technical analysis proposes two phases for the altar. He proves the altar's main panels date to the Augustan period; however, the crown and base moldings are either new additions, fitted to the altar after the 62 C.E. earthquake, or repaired originals.<sup>25</sup>

Each side of the altar bears a marble engraving. Three panels display sacrificial imagery such as an *acerra* (curved staff) and a *lituus* (box for incense).<sup>26</sup> The panels also show typical Augustan imagery such as laurel trees. The most distinct scene shows a hooded figure sacrificing a bull at an altar. Dobbins suggests the panel depicts Augustus himself performing the sacrifice.<sup>27</sup> Conversely, Gradel states the figure "must be the town's *flamen Augusti*."<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the figure's identity is possibly Marcus Holconius Rufus. If Mamia's dedication is ignored, the identification of Rufus as a patron of the sanctuary is reasonable. He held both the titles of *sacerdos* and *flamen*, showing a strong allegiance to Augustus. As one of the most powerful

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>24</sup> Dobbins, "Problems of Chronology," 663-668. Dobbins dates the masonry to the Augustan era.

<sup>25</sup> John Dobbins, "The Altar in the Sanctuary of the Genius of Augustus in Forum at Pompeii," *Mitteilungen Des Deutschen Archaologischen Institute Rom* 99 (1992): 255.

<sup>26</sup> For images of the altar please see: Dobbins, "The Altar in the Sanctuary," Appendix.

<sup>27</sup> Dobbins, "The Altar in the Sanctuary," 261.

<sup>28</sup> Gradel *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion*, 87.

citizens in Pompeii, that he dedicated a structure honoring Augustus seems likely – especially in the most conspicuous and politically conscious space in the city. Nevertheless, the figure cannot be distinguished as Augustus or a local priest, a phenomenon which illustrates the borrowing of Imperial imagery by local elites. However, whether Rufus or Mamia is identified as the patron, it is clear that a private citizen was responsible for creating a structure that was influenced by Imperial imagery and responsible for housing an institution of the Imperial Cult.

The Macellum is the most northern building on the forum's east side. Traditionally identified as a market place, scholars have recently recognized the Macellum as a multi-purpose space.<sup>29</sup> The Macellum's simple rectangular shape bears a colonnaded interior, shops on the north and south sides, and a central shrine on its east end. John Dobbins dates the Macellum to the 30s or 40s C.E. – making its construction later than both the Sanctuary of Augustus and the Eumachia Building.<sup>30</sup>

The Macellum's shrine demonstrates a connection to Imperial Rome. Alastair Small's study of the space focuses upon two portraits that were located in the shrine. Small argues that the space housed worship of the Imperial Family. He identifies the two surviving portraits as Agrippina II and Britannicus and argues the shrine held an entire ensemble of Imperial Family portraits dedicated to *Divus* Claudius.<sup>31</sup> Small's analysis makes a number of assumptions. Nonetheless, his identification of the space as part of the Imperial cult is likely: the shrine shows resemblance to Imperial structures elsewhere in Campania and holds multiple statue niches.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Dobbins, "The Forum and its Dependencies," 161.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Alastair Small, "The Shrine of the Imperial Family in the Macellum at Pompeii," in *Subject and Ruler: the Cult of the Ruling Power in Classical Antiquity*, ed. by Alastair Small, Portsmouth: Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement 17, 1996: 130.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 130-131.



In a more recent study, Katherine E. Welch argues the two portraits found in the shrine depict members of the Pompeian elite. She does concede, however, that the two portraits make direct allusions to images of members of the Imperial Family (Agrippina II in the case of the female portrait).<sup>33</sup> If Welch's conclusion is correct, it is indicative of a trend in which local elites modeled their portraits after highly circulated Imperial imagery.<sup>34</sup> This is seen in the portrait of Marcus Holconius that bears a decorated breastplate usually reserved for members of the Imperial Family.<sup>35</sup> Welch's argument seems plausible and demonstrates the similarity between elite and Imperial portraiture. In either case, the shrine was associated with the Imperial Family.

The Macellum, Eumachia Building, and the Sanctuary of Augustus illustrate how the Pompeian forum communicated with Imperial Rome. Individual elite Pompeians dedicated these structures in order to advance their own position in society. Moreover, these structures make explicit allusions to Roman architecture, establishing their patrons as local analogs to members of the Imperial Family. This model contrasts with the earthquake repairs taking place after 62 C.E.

#### CONSTRUCTION AND REPAIRS AFTER THE 62 C.E. EARTHQUAKE

In 62 C.E., an earthquake devastated Pompeii, damaging several buildings in the forum. The Roman historian Tacitus briefly mentions the earthquake when discussing major events of 62 C.E., saying, "An earthquake too demolished a large part of Pompeii, a populous town in Campania" (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.34). This earthquake prompted a rebuilding project that repaired

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<sup>33</sup> Katherine E. Welch, "Pompeian Men and Women in Portrait Sculpture," in *The World of Pompeii*, ed. by John Dobbins and Pedar Foss, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 562.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Zanker, *Roman Art*, trans. Henry Heitmann-Gordon, (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2010), 114.

<sup>35</sup> Welch, "Pompeian Men and Women in Portrait Sculpture," 557.

existing buildings, installed the Imperial Cult Building, and added a linking façade. The repairs sought to unite the four buildings on the east side, thus diverging from the pattern of individual statements of elite patronage established before 62 C.E.

John Dobbins' seminal work "Problems of Chronology, Decoration, and Urban Design in the Forum of Pompeii" published in 1994 is an essential resource for understanding the 62 C.E. earthquake's damage in the forum. Using building techniques and materials as evidence, Dobbins explores the nature of the post-earthquake repairs. There were major repairs to all three existing buildings on the east side of the forum. The outer walls of the Sanctuary of Augustus were replaced and its podium was raised.<sup>36</sup> As mentioned above, its altar's base and crown molds on all sides were either repaired or replaced. Thus, there was a concerted effort to preserve the religious function of the structure. Likewise, as the altar displays, the reconstruction sought to preserve existing Augustan imagery.

The Eumachia Building's interior and exterior were extensively repaired after the earthquake.<sup>37</sup> The repairs restored the building to its original form including niches embedded in the façade that held images of Romulus and Aeneas.<sup>38</sup> Several interior niches were modified and several additional marble portraits were installed. This includes a sculpture gallery that was placed in the chalcidicum.<sup>39</sup> These renovations sought to aggrandize the space and emphasize previously installed art and architecture.

The Macellum's central structure remained similar after renovations; however, renovations and construction of the main portal, northwest corner, and northern shops illustrate

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<sup>36</sup> Dobbins, "Problems of Chronology," 664.

<sup>37</sup> Dobbins, "Problems of Chronology," 633.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 654.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 661.

new aspects added to the space.<sup>40</sup> A small entrance court was added with flanking statue niches.<sup>41</sup> Renovations to the northwest corner linked the Macellum's façade to an already existing arch and sculpture gallery.<sup>42</sup> The Macellum's renovations can be characterized as an attempt to monumentalize and expand the space.

In addition to repairs to individual buildings, the rebuilding project modified the east side in several ways. The addition of marble revetment to interiors and exteriors of all three existing buildings attempted to unify the forum's east side.<sup>43</sup> The design of the revetment can still be seen today on the north wall of the Sanctuary of Augustus. The abundance of marble altered the way in which Pompeians perceived these buildings. Marble signified wealth, contrasted with previous building materials, and alluded to the ubiquity of marble in the capital. Most importantly, the marble visually linked all three buildings. The presence of a collective and distinctive building material implies a coherent design among the three structures.

Like the marble revetment, the linking façade installed after the earthquake united the buildings on the east side of the forum. The cementation of buildings at major junctions illustrates the connection of the façade. One such junction joins the Imperial Cult Building and the Sanctuary of Augustus.<sup>44</sup> The construction technique *opus testaceum* constitutes the area on the far right of the junction (as seen in Dobbins' image) and dates to after 62 C.E. *Opus testaceum* is a facing technique in which a concrete core is covered with a surface of bricks. *Opus incertum*, a technique common to pre 62 C.E. building in Pompeii, makes up the middle section. *Opus incertum* is another facing technique, except instead of bricks rough stones are placed on the concrete core. The portion on the far right is part of the Imperial Cult Building's

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 668-685 for Dobbins' discussion on the Macellum.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 680.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 681.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 691.

<sup>44</sup> Dobbins, "Problems of Chronology," 640. Dobbins' figure 7 will be used in this discussion.

façade and is opus testaceum. This illustrates the vertical and horizontal seams connecting the various sections into a single façade. This façade joins the adjacent buildings.

Figure 2 illustrates how the linking façade connected all four buildings on the east side of the forum, while Figure 3 recreates the east side of the forum before the rebuilding project. Figure 3 demonstrates the façade's spatial effects. In Figure 3, several streets divide the buildings. This reflects the individual nature of each building associated with an elite patron. The post-earthquake repairs eliminated streets labeled "X" and "Y" as entrances to the forum. The portion of the façade connecting the Macellum to the Imperial Cult Building and the portion linking the Eumachia Building to the Sanctuary of Augustus eliminated these entrances. This forced viewers to access the east end of the forum from two prominent entrances (labeled "N" and "S" on Figure 1).<sup>45</sup> Entering from here, visitors observed the east façade as a continual space. This contrasts entering from "X" or "Y" in Figure 3, where the three buildings were viewed individually and separated from one another. The façade altered viewers' perception of the east side of the forum as it was spatially conceived, presented, and experienced. Viewers now looked at the buildings as one whole.

The installation of the Imperial Cult Building was instrumental in unifying the space on the east side of the forum. Its construction prompted the building of the façade creating continuity between what became the four buildings on the east side of the forum. Dobbins supplies a tremendous amount of data regarding the building's design, decoration, and relationship with adjacent buildings that prove a post 62 C.E. date. The most convincing piece of evidence is his observation that the building lacks earthquake repairs or damage seen in all three

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<sup>45</sup> Dobbins, "The Forum and its Dependencies," 173.

of the other buildings on the east side of the forum.<sup>46</sup> This makes the Imperial Cult Building the only structure on the east side of the forum constructed after 62 C.E.

In several ways the Imperial Cult Building is the creation of a distinct building project and a departure from pre-earthquake building designs. As seen in Figure 1, the Imperial Cult Building ignores the street grid plan of Pompeii. It awkwardly abuts several neighboring walls unlike the Eumachia Building, Sanctuary of Augustus, and Macellum that respond to surrounding urban structures.

Additionally, the Macellum's post-62 earthquake repairs anticipate the construction of the Imperial Cult Building. On the south wall of the Macellum, a seam divides two types of construction techniques: one side crudely utilizes opus incertum and rubble while the other uses finely made opus reticulatum (a facing technique using carved stone).<sup>47</sup> Due to its direct abutment of the Imperial Cult Building, the opus incertum and rubble portion of the wall was not exposed while the building was intact. Thus, the renovations to the Macellum were tailored to the future construction of the Imperial Cult Building.<sup>48</sup> This is indicative of the rebuilding project on the whole.<sup>49</sup> The linking façade as well as the structural repairs of adjacent buildings were designed in order to accommodate the installation of the Imperial Cult Building.

The Imperial Cult Building is further characterized as distinctive by its design. In the plan of the Pompeian Forum (Figure 1), the Imperial Cult Building displays prominent structural differences from its three neighbors. The curvilinear plan, exedra, and deceptively spacious interior differ from the rectangular buildings elsewhere in the forum. To achieve this design opus

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<sup>46</sup> Dobbins, "Problems of Chronology," 686-687.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 675.

<sup>48</sup> Dobbins, "Problems of Chronology," 675.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 640-645. See Dobbins' discussion of the critical junction between the Imperial Cult Building and the Sanctuary of Augustus.

testaceum is heavily utilized.<sup>50</sup> When the building is viewed from the east, the interior's shape is indefinable. The walls do not explicitly start or stop, challenging the viewer's notion of space. The building contains two transverse axes and one central axis. The central axis and the longer transverse axis are nearly identical in length revealing a centralized plan.<sup>51</sup> This centralized plan created an overwhelming sense of space as seen in a building such as the Pantheon.<sup>52</sup> The building's complexity and emphasis on interior space remain unique among buildings of the Pompeian forum.

The building's date and design prompt its identification as a product of the Roman architectural revolution. Dobbins sees the design as a precursor to the Domus Aurea of the mid first century C.E.<sup>53</sup> The Domus Aurea's famous octagonal suite, one of the most innovative spaces in Roman architecture, shows parallels with the Imperial Cult Building. The architectural complexity of the octagonal suite goes beyond the Imperial Cult Building; however, both demonstrate an emphasis on interior space. The octagonal suite shows a centralized plan, yet does not supply a centralized point on which the viewer's eye can rest. Furthermore, the shape of the suite is obscure, creating an enveloping feeling for viewers.<sup>54</sup> The octagonal suite's most significant feature is its dome. The corners of the octagon appear to bear all the weight of the dome, although this is not the case.<sup>55</sup> The Imperial Cult Building did not have a dome, but similarly emphasizes interior space. Moreover, the use of opus testaceum to achieve a curved

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<sup>50</sup> John Dobbins, "The Imperial Cult Building in the Forum at Pompeii," in *Subject and Ruler: the Cult of the Ruling Power in Classical Antiquity*, edited by Alastair Small, Portsmouth: Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement 17, 1996, 110.

<sup>51</sup> Dobbins, "Problems of Chronology," 684.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 686.

<sup>53</sup> Dobbins, "The Imperial Cult Building in the Forum at Pompeii," 110.

<sup>54</sup> J.B. Ward-Perkins, *Roman Imperial Architecture* (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), 100.

<sup>55</sup> Larry F. Ball, *The Domus Aurea and the Roman Architectural Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 211.

interior space is a key feature of Neronian architectural innovation.<sup>56</sup> This design emphasized the interior space and was perceived as unusual only upon entering, while the building's eight marble column front visually connected with the linking façade.

The Imperial Cult Building's radical design is distinctive in the context of Pompeian architecture during the post-earthquake period. It is one of the few public structures in Pompeii built after the earthquake. Thus, the domestic sphere must provide evidence for local architectural design during this time period. Villas in Pompeii reflect a conservative response to the Roman architectural revolution, while other areas in the bay of Naples, such as Stabiae, display innovative villa designs employing the techniques disseminated from Rome.<sup>57</sup> Thus, Pompeians may have viewed the Imperial Cult Building's radical design as enigmatic in the context of Pompeian topography. Moreover, it demonstrates a departure from contemporary local architectural designs.

Besides its design, there is very little evidence associated with the Imperial Cult Building. However, August Mau first identified it as a religious space due to the abundance of statue niches, a central altar, and a pedestal for an altar positioned in the eastern apse.<sup>58</sup> Scholars Paul Zanker and John Dobbins have furthered this argument suggesting the building's connection with the Imperial Cult.<sup>59</sup> Dobbins associates the lavish interior, large size, prominent location, and the multiple statue niches with the Imperial Cult. The abundance of statue niches suggest the building housed several either elite or Imperial portraits. Moreover, due to the design emphasizing the building's interior, the niches were focal points for viewers. The Eumachia

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>57</sup> Lawrence Richardson, *Pompeii: an Architectural History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 347.

<sup>58</sup> August Mau and Francis W. Kelsey, *Pompeii, It's Life and Art* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1899), 103.

<sup>59</sup> Zanker, *Power of Images*, 308.

Building also bears several niches, but, due to the rectangular design, it does not emphasize the viewing of these spaces.

The construction of the Imperial Cult Building and associated renovations of the forum fundamentally differ from elite dedications occurring before the earthquake. The installation of the Imperial Cult Building as well as the addition of a linking façade created a unified space likely associated with the Imperial Family on the whole. Furthermore, renovations to the Eumachia Building, Sanctuary of Augustus and the Macellum preserved Imperial associations integrating them into a single statement of Imperial power. Moreover the Imperial Cult Building's departure from contemporary Pompeian architecture beckons the notion of external influence and raises the question of the building's patronage. No inscriptions, portraits, or artistic motifs link the building to an elite Pompeian – differing from three other buildings on the east side of the forum.

#### NERO AS BENEFACTOR: IMPERIAL PATRONAGE AND EARTHQUAKE RELIEF

The Imperial Cult Building's enigmatic nature as well as the scope and character of the rebuilding project imply direct influence from the Imperial circle itself. Dobbins suggests that the emperor Nero was the patron the Imperial Cult Building.<sup>60</sup> Nero's role as the patron of the entire rebuilding project seems plausible and should be further explored. His patronage would represent unprecedented control from the capital contrasting with the elite dedications before the earthquake. Additionally, with Nero as patron, the deliberate preservation of Imperial associations and unifying of spaces in the forum can be construed as an attempt to establish a dynastic statement of the Imperial Family.

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<sup>60</sup> Dobbins, "The Imperial Cult Building," 112-113. An examination of Nero's link to Campania as well as Imperial relief of natural disasters is beyond the scope of Dobbins' study.



On several occasions Roman emperors gave direct aid to provincial towns after earthquakes. The Greek historian Cassius Dio records Augustus' aid to a provincial town (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 54.23):

He... gave money to the Paphians, who had suffered from an earthquake...I record this, not that Augustus and the senators, too, did not aid many other cities also both before and after this occasion, in similar misfortunes, – indeed, if one should mention them all, the work involved in making the record would be endless...

Dio indicates the commonality for Augustus to provide direct assistance to cities and towns recovering from natural disasters. Similarly, Tacitus notes that Tiberius provided aid from his personal funds for rebuilding after an earthquake devastated multiple cities in Asia Minor (Tacitus, *The Annals* 2.47).

Roman historian Suetonius also records relief given by the emperor Titus to the bay of Naples after the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 C.E. (Suetonius, *Titus* 8.4):

He chose by lot supervisors for the reconstruction of Campania from any of the former consuls who were available. He allocated to the rebuilding of the afflicted cities the property of those who died in the Vesuvian disaster and whose heirs did not survive.

Suetonius' discussion reveals a trend for Imperial relief in Campania. Titus may even have responded to earlier emperors, such as Nero, who may have provided aid to Campania after previous natural disasters.

Moreover, Nero, too, was recorded as having aided provincial towns after major disasters. Tacitus records that Nero "alleviated the disaster at Lugdunum by a grant of four million *sesterces* to repair the town's losses" (Tacitus, *The Annals* 16.13). While Lugdunum's "disaster" refers to a fire, Nero shows a capacity for acts of substantial relief.

If Nero sponsored the rebuilding project and the Imperial Cult Building, this act of patronage at Pompeii reveals a level of involvement that goes beyond a monetary donation. This seems plausible considering Nero's documented familiarity with Campania and the Bay of

Naples. Nero and his second wife Poppaea often resided in Campania. Moreover, Poppaea inherited land in Campania and members of the Poppaei family lived in the greater Pompeian area.<sup>61</sup> Scholars have also noted the presence of Nero and Poppaea in the graffiti at Pompeii. Three similar graffiti, dating between 62 and 65 C.E., ask for good fortune to the judgments of Nero and his wife.<sup>62</sup> Scholars have failed to supply an explanation for these “judgments.” It is possible the judgments refer to aid given to Pompeii after the earthquake.

Additionally, the aedile A. Suettius Certus donated a game in association with Nero. An inscription notes, “omnibus Nero[nis mun]eribus feliciter” (“happily to the all the *munera* of Nero”).<sup>63</sup> Scholars Ittai Gradel and Henrik Mourusten interpreted “munera” to be gladiatorial games.<sup>64</sup> This is suitable for the last line of an advertisement for a hunt with awnings. However, “munera” may refer to gifts or services Nero provided to the city of Pompeii. In the context of this advertisement, the author may be referring to the amphitheater that was repaired after the earthquake.<sup>65</sup> Thus, the plural *munera* may refer to Nero’s repairs on a grand scale at Pompeii, both in the amphitheater and the forum.

Nero’s identification as patron adds meaning to the nature of the rebuilding project. The linking façade, use of marble, and the limiting of entrances suggest the design intended for the buildings to be viewed as a unit. Thus, the buildings, which individually honored emperors, were linked together. Zanker discusses one method in which the Julio-Claudian Family honored themselves. He says:

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<sup>61</sup> Patrick Kragelund, “The Temple and Birthplace of Diva Poppaea,” *The Classics Quarterly* 60.2 (2010): 556.

<sup>62</sup> CIL IV 3726. CIL IV 1074. CIL IV 3525.

<sup>63</sup> CIL IV 1190.

<sup>64</sup> Henrik Mourtsen and Ittai Gradel, “Nero in Pompeian Politics *Edicta Munerum* and Imperial Flaminates in Late Pompeii,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 87 (1991): 152.

<sup>65</sup> Richardson, *Pompeii: An Architectural History*, 136.

It had long been usual in the Greek East to honor entire families (including the female members) with statue-groups. In the West, this form of honor was especially popular among the members of the Julio-Claudian house. Its advantage was that...it registered the idea of a dynamic succession.<sup>66</sup>

This form of honoring may be seen in the rebuilding project. The Macellum, Eumachia Building, and the Sanctuary of Augustus all showed ties to individual members or facets of the Imperial Family. The rebuilding project emphasized and preserved certain Imperial portions of these buildings. In the Sanctuary of Augustus, the Augustan themed altar and the religious function of the buildings were preserved. In the Eumachia Building, niches were restored that held portraits of Augustan themed figures and additional niches and portraits were added. The Macellum's shrine and an added grand entrance with statue niches furthered the possibility of glorifying the Imperial Family. Finally, the Imperial Cult Building's abundant niches possibly held statues for multiple members of the Julio-Claudian Family – making it a focal point for honoring the Imperial Family. Thus, the rebuilding project was a standardization of Imperial honor in the forum of Pompeii. The block of buildings was created to emphasize the notion of dynasty connecting the structures that were built in chronological succession.

Nero's identification as the patron of the building project in the forum of Pompeii has far reaching implications for viewership as well as the conception of the project. Nero's role as a benefactor contrasts with the patronage of elite Pompeians before the earthquake. Nero's relief represents a gift to the people of Pompeii – a gift that comes from outside the community and from the most powerful member of the Imperial Family. Thus, the Imperial Family displayed direct control over space in the forum at Pompeii in an attempt to create a dynastic statement. This contrasts with the dedication and construction of the Eumachia Building, Sanctuary of Augustus, and the Macellum in which elite Pompeians performed their civic duty while

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<sup>66</sup> Zanker, *Roman Art*, 73.

associating themselves with the Imperial Family. The rebuilding represents a single vision of Imperial presence in Pompeii. Whether this single vision derived from Nero himself or another member of the Imperial inner circle, it is unlike the earlier, competing, individual building projects of the Pompeian elite.

## CONCLUSION

The forum of Pompeii presents many difficulties in study. There is much speculation due to a lack of evidence that prohibits concrete conclusions. In his book *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion*, Ittai Gradel states, “The sweeping claims of Imperial presence in Pompeii’s main forum are not necessarily wrong, but they are unfounded. Pompeii’s forum is simply too badly preserved to support – or reject – them.”<sup>67</sup> Gradel finds flaw in many of the findings in the forum of Pompeii and his argument should be acknowledged. Cautious scholarship and asking the question “how much do we actually know?” are critical.

This current study focuses not on this question, but rather seeks to create a dialogue and reframe the way in which the history of the Pompeian forum is viewed. The east side of the forum initially displayed a clear pattern of dedication that involved elite Pompeians providing individual statements of their loyalty to the Imperial Family while promoting their own social standing. The post-earthquake repairs conceive the space in a different manner. In this rebuilding, the block of buildings were presented as a singular unit. It is possible that the emperor Nero served as the patron of the rebuilding; however, only reasonable circumstantial evidence can link him to the project. Ultimately, it can be concluded that after the earthquake the way in which public buildings on the east side were viewed and structured fundamentally changed in respect to their previous history.

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<sup>67</sup> Gradel, *Emperor Worship*, 107.

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FIGURES

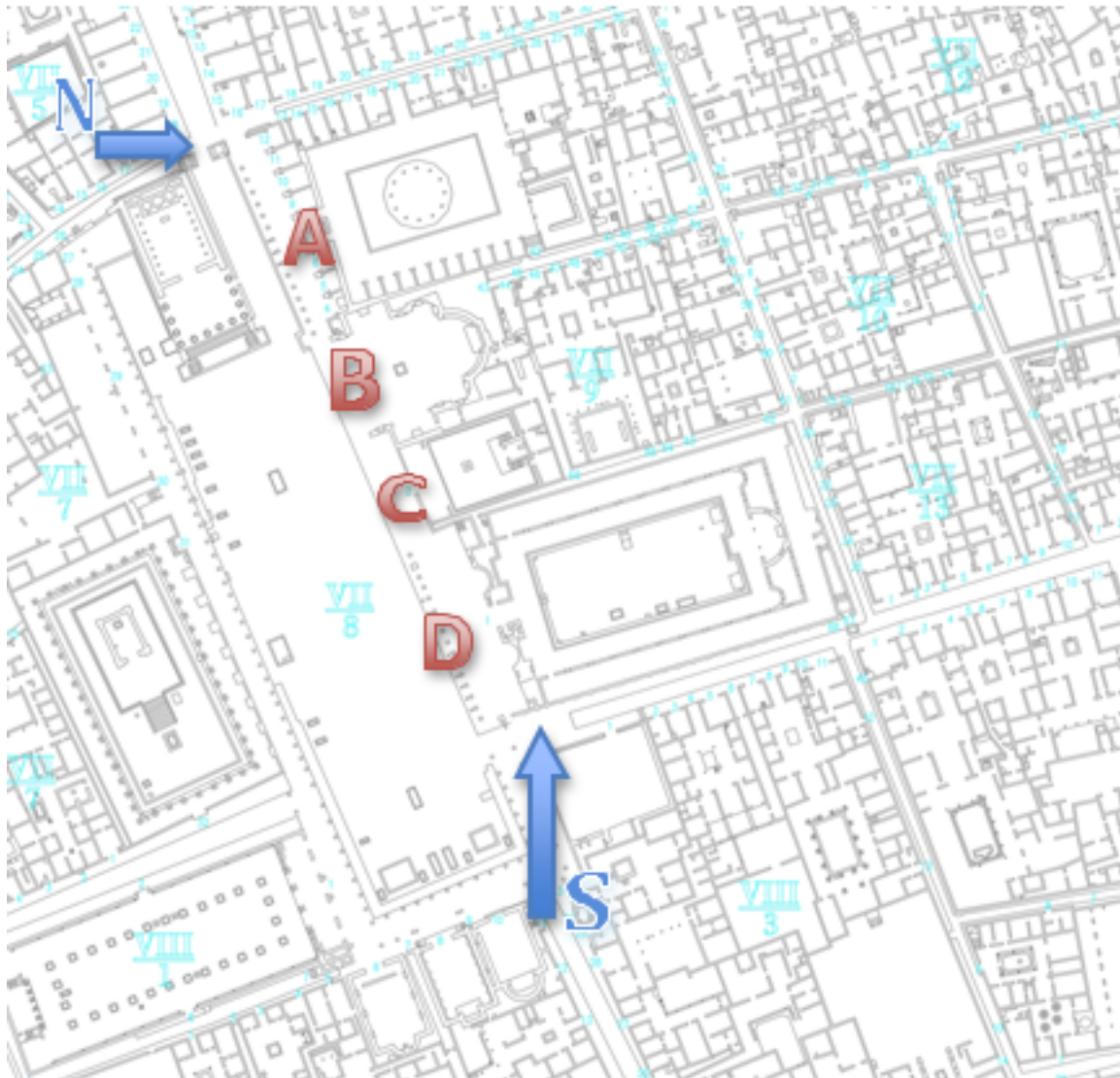


Figure 1  
Grid Plan of Forum at Pompeii. A. Macellum B. Imperial Cult Building. C. Sanctuary of Augustus D. Eumachia Building N. North Entrance S. South Entrance. Adapted from *The World of Pompeii*, edited by John Dobbins and Pedar Foss. New York: Routledge, 2007: Supplementary CD.

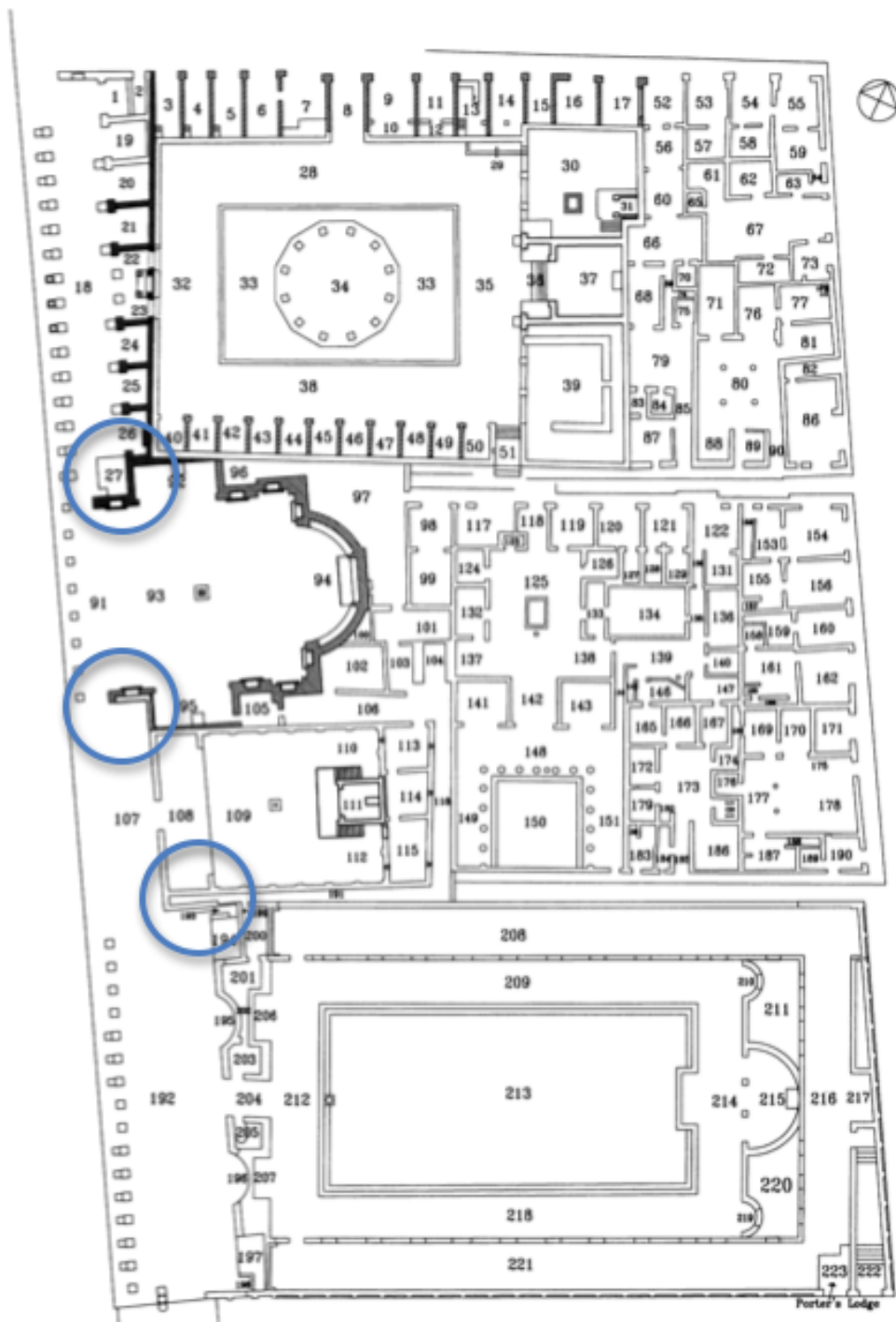


Figure 2  
 East side of forum with linking façade circled at points of connection. Adapted from John Dobbins, "Problems of Chronology, Decoration, and Urban Design in the Forum at Pompeii," *American Journal of Archaeology* 98.2 (1994): 633.



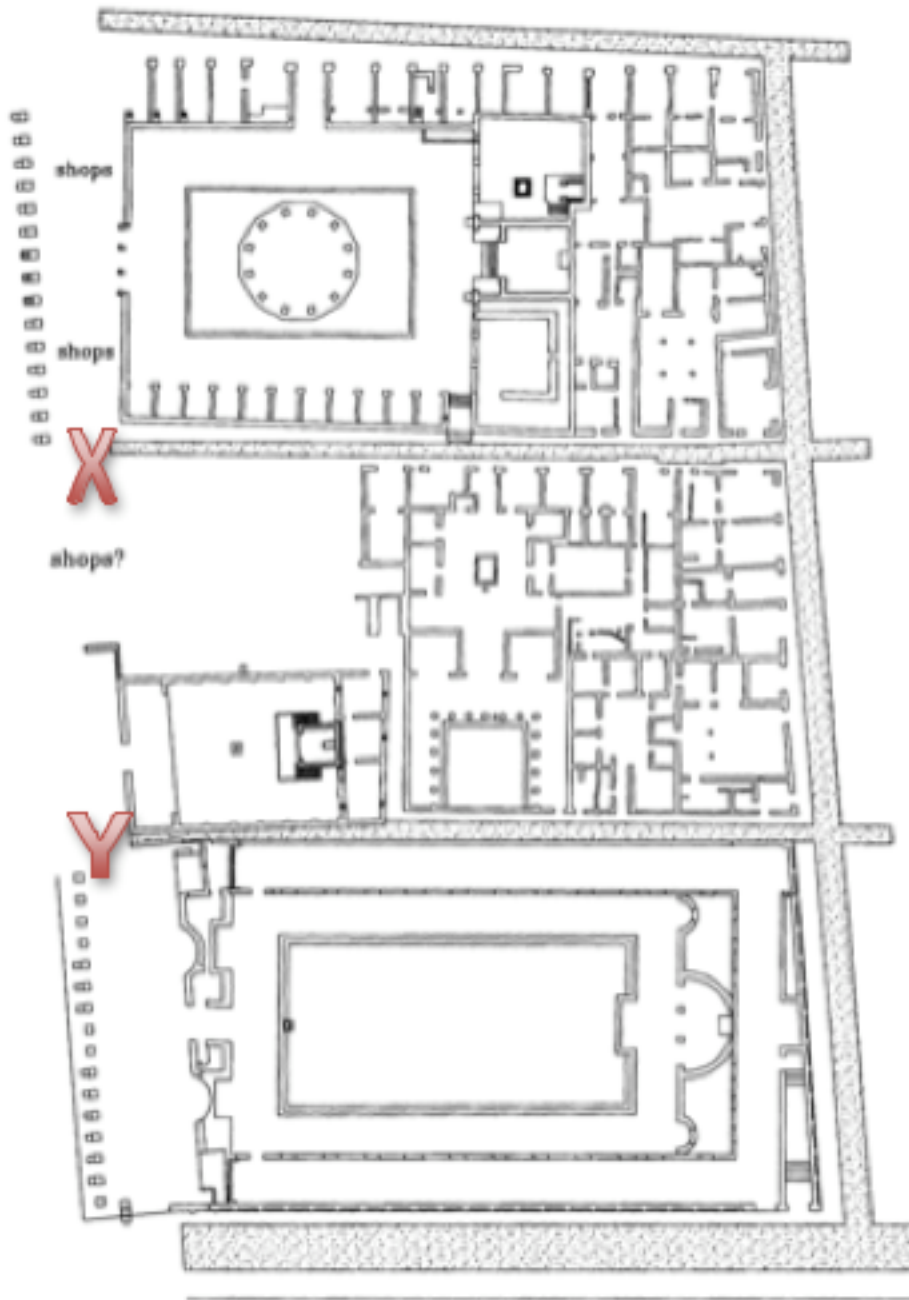


Figure 3

East side of forum pre-62 C.E. X. Street 1 blocked off after repairs. Y. Street 2 blocked off after repairs. Adapted from John Dobbins, "Problems of Chronology, Decoration, and Urban Design in the Forum at Pompeii," *American Journal of Archaeology* 98.2 (1994): 602.