

## *Cleopatra in Pompeii?*

by Susan Walker

Early in 2007, while reviewing the context of the two cameo glass plaques found in the large *oecus* (room 62) of the House of Marcus Fabius Rufus in the *Insula Occidentalis* at Pompeii, I had the opportunity to examine a wall-painting of considerable interest.<sup>1</sup> In this paper the painting is described and set within the context of the development of the house. With regard to its subject, I suggest that the principal figure does not represent the goddess Venus herself, but Cleopatra VII of Egypt as Venus Genetrix. The painting was most likely inspired by the dedication, in September 46 BC, of Caesar's temple to Venus Genetrix in his forum at Rome, where, according to Appian and (more problematically) Dio Cassius, Caesar dedicated a gilded statue of the Egyptian queen.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PAINTING

The painting covers, to the spring of the barrel vault, the east wall of room 71 in the House of Marcus Fabius Rufus (PLATE 1). As it now survives, the painted wall is a maximum of 2 m high. It was probably once crowned with a moulded stucco cornice, and is conserved in large part behind a second ancient painted wall, the latter now surviving to a height of 1.4–1.8 m.<sup>2</sup>

The earlier painting is an unusual example of Second Style work, in that the customary architectural scene, elaborately designed in perspective, serves merely as a backdrop for a centrally-placed female figure emerging from

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<sup>2</sup> For images of the development of the room, see: Bragantini, 1997: 1,109, nos. 317, 319 (moulded cornice); Grimaldi, 2006: 401–5.

double doors at its centre.<sup>3</sup> The figure, 57 cm high, peers out from the partially opened, high doors, which are panelled in metal, possibly unpatinated bronze, and decorated with projecting spikes on circular mounts, surrounded by studs. The doors are flanked by lower panels of warmer colour, perhaps intended as gilded false doors.<sup>4</sup> In front of the figure, barring the doors from frame to frame, is a partially preserved fence or gate (no opening mechanism is visible) with elegantly scrolled finials (FIG. 1). These architectural features are rendered in dark red, with the panels, frames, studs and spikes picked out in shades suggesting metals, as described above. Lintels, wall crowns and corner beams are shown in pink. Above each of the flanking panels is a pinax, 11 × 10 cm, of which the wooden doors fall open to reveal two silver spheres in beaded gold mounts with, at the corners of the brilliant red background, gold crescent moons and stars.

The building is fronted by a porch 1.47 m wide, with four gilded columns, their shafts fluted and their Corinthian capitals picked out in red and gold. The corner of a golden pedimented entablature is preserved on the left. It is not clear how the pediment above the central door was treated. The porch is closed at the sides by greenish grey panels: since they are topped by a pink moulded wall crown, they probably represent interior surfaces.<sup>5</sup> Above them four courses of red brick reach the coffered ceiling. At the sides of the scene, to the front of the tetrastyle porch, are red walls surmounted by golden moulded wall crowns, suggesting that the building was approached from an enclosed precinct. The red walls are fronted by white piers, which close the front of the scene at either side. In their current state of preservation, only the lower portion of the left pier capital is preserved. Mounted against a greenish grey background above the red wall on the left side are two silver shields. On the right side the equivalent part of the scene is lost above the level of the wall crowns.

The surviving scene on the east wall of room 71 is a work of high quality, competently rendered in perspective. However, the sense of perspective is lost on the north and south walls in front of the white piers, with a precipitously angled continuation of the moulding topping the brick wall. Above the clumsy transition on the right side of the main scene is another pinax, measuring 19 × 10 cm, with a scene of a religious procession on the bank of a lake or river. Here the wall crown changes from a single to a double moulding, separated by a narrow blue band with a green frieze below it. A golden vase is placed on this wall (Grimaldi, 2006: 406, upper plate). Beyond it and to the left is a pedimented façade with nine columns, with a portico emerging from it at right angles. The south wall of room 71 is decorated with two red panels

<sup>3</sup> The painting, first published by Cerulli Irelli (1981: 32 fig. 18), has attracted comment in general works on Pompeian painting (for example: Barbet, 1985: 45 with pl. IIA; Leach, 2004: 106–7, fig. 71). Recently good colour reproductions have been published by Mazzoleni (2004: 389, 399 (detail)) and Grimaldi (2006: 402–4).

<sup>4</sup> For a similar arrangement, in which only parts of the side panels are shown, see Leach (2004: 122, fig. 78, *Iphigenia before the Temple of Artemis in the House of Pinarius Cerialis*). High doors flanked by lower false panels are seen in some Egyptian sanctuaries, such as the Trajanic ‘Roman Kiosk’ at Dendera (McKenzie, 2007: 145, fig. 255).

<sup>5</sup> *Contra* Barbet (1985: 45), who saw the panels as spaces open to the sky. Compare bedroom 16 of the Villa of the Mysteries, where there are veneered walls with pink crowns behind the projecting columnar order (Mazzoleni, 2004: 109).



FIG. 1. Detail of the torso of Venus, with an ornamental fence blocking the doorway in front of her. The fence is shown in red at the left and right, and in gold where it passes over the goddess's thighs. (Photo: Domenico Esposito. Reproduced courtesy of Prof. P.-L. Guzzo.)

divided by fluted columns. These are set on an imitation dado, faced in white marble with elaborate mouldings and inset panels of red porphyry. In the centre, spiked doors with ornate decoration open to reveal an elaborate lamp suspended above an altar, both elements set against a sky-blue background. The doors are approached by a flight of steps, with a bush planted in front of it. To the right is a narrow yellow panel, with a further red panel completing the scene, beneath which a projecting base changes the angle to meet the antechamber, which is decorated in similar fashion (Bragantini, 1997: I, 111–12, photo captions 323–4; Grimaldi, 2006: 405). Only a small part of the decoration of the north wall is preserved, to show a blue panel surmounted by a simple cyma moulding, the latter topped by a red frieze. The panel is edged at the left by a gilded pilaster. The original entrance to room 71, from an antechamber to the west, has been disturbed by later alterations (see further below; p. 38).

## THE ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT OF THE EARLIER PAINTING

We do not know who owned the house when the earlier painting in room 71 was commissioned. Whatever his or her identity, the owner at that time must have been a person of some consequence, for it was at this period that the property was first developed on several levels.

The house is named after its latest owner, Marcus Fabius Rufus, the subject of graffiti acclamations 'below stairs' and the owner of a signet-ring found on the site. However, the property had a complex history of development, most likely associated with changes of ownership. Our present understanding is based on excavations begun in the 1950s and still ongoing. A recent, as yet unpublished, thesis by Roberto Cassetta presents a detailed study of the walls and floors, together with their painted, mosaic and marble decoration.

Room 71 is a small cubiculum on the first or middle level of the house, measuring 1.96 m wide and 4.0 m long, with a cistern located behind the Second Style wall-painting adding a further 1.46 m to the length of the barrel-vaulted space. Cassetta (forthcoming) suggests it formed part of the original core of the house, dating roughly to 70–50 BC. The cubiculum was lit via an open antechamber opening across a corridor (72) to the triclinium (74), one of two grand salons to the west with a view to the sea, with other bedrooms arranged around them (PLATE 2). Room 74 has remains of Second Style architectural decoration on its walls, showing below bright yellow panels a red and white striped marble dado of similar height but more exuberant colour than that of room 71. This room appears to have remained in use until the eruption of AD 79, its Second Style floor and walls intact (Grimaldi, 2006: 407). With its painting of exceptional quality, room 71 might have been reserved for the master of the house, though its decoration suggests that it served more as a shrine than a bedroom.

The Second Style painting is carefully preserved behind a later wall with painted architectural decoration, which imitates the style of the earlier scene but is apparently devoid of any figured representation (only the lower part of this wall is now preserved — PLATE 1). The content of the blocking painting reprises that of the main scene of the Second Style painting on the south wall: in the centre is a marble altar set on a low red wall with moulded crown, the latter approached by three steps, before which is planted a bush. Beside the top step is a small tripod.<sup>6</sup> In subject and almost in colour tones this painting was evidently intended to match the Second Style paintings on the other walls of the room, which were left exposed, along with the original mosaic pavement. Though the date of the blocking wall has proved elusive — its construction not matching any of the building phases noted by Cassetta (2007) —, the associated painting has been dated most recently to the final years of the Second Style, thus before the end of the first century BC. In the years before the eruption, the entrance to room 71 from its anteroom was sealed, and the walls of the antechamber were whitewashed, the space becoming a store for agricultural products presumably grown in the former elaborate pleasure garden below the house to the west, which was turned over to productive agriculture at this time.<sup>7</sup>

Between roughly 10 BC and AD 30, the house was perhaps owned by Euplus and Pothinus, freedmen of the Julii, who had their names stamped on the lead pipes bringing water to the house from the Sarinus aqueduct. Euplus and Pothinus were not, of course, necessarily members of the *familia* of Julius Caesar and Octavian/Augustus, but none the less their association with the Julii is of potential significance (Grimaldi, 2006: 264, with earlier references). The date of their known period of ownership coincides with a considerable expansion in the scale of the house.

<sup>6</sup> A detail has been illustrated by Grimaldi (2006: 406).

<sup>7</sup> Grimaldi (2006: 401) follows Cerulli Irelli (1981: 27) in dating the wall as built after the earthquake of AD 62 and the painting as Fourth Style, but Cassetta (2007) implies an Augustan date, the room becoming entirely blocked very soon after AD 62, when it became a store. Esposito (forthcoming) suggests a late first-century BC date for the painting, following Bragantini (1997: 1,109, no. 317) in seeing it as late Second Style work. Strocka (2006: 88, n. 38) has dated the painting to the reign of Augustus, reading it as a Third Style version of Second Style.

## A GODDESS IN A TEMPLE? READING THE PAINTING

In her work on the social history of Roman wall-painting, Eleanor Winsor Leach read the architecture painted on the east wall of room 71 not as a temple but as the *scaenae frons* of a theatre, rightly noting its resemblance to the structure painted on the wall of *oecus* 13 in the House of Augustus on the Palatine (Leach, 2004: 98, fig. 58).<sup>8</sup> She also noted the regal appearance and puzzlingly tentative pose of the female figure, whom she identified as an actress playing a queen — from the covering wall, apparently without success (Leach, 2004: 106–7, fig. 71). However, no masks are shown within the architectural setting, as is the case in the House of Augustus, and the façade of room 71 is not articulated in the manner of a *scaenae frons*, examples of which are amply illustrated in Leach's book (Leach, 2004: chapter 2 *passim*).<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the paintings in room 71 have been interpreted more widely as religious, and it usually has been assumed that the figure in the temple on the east wall represents the local goddess Venus Physica Pompeiana. However, she lacks the rudder carried by the patron deity of Pompeii, whose surviving representations are all of later, first-century AD, date.<sup>10</sup>

The painting shows Venus in the doorway with the small winged figure of her son, Cupid, perched on her right shoulder (PLATE 3). Cupid clings to Venus's face and neck, thereby identifying her as the mother goddess Venus Genetrix. This aspect of the goddess was first celebrated in public by Julius Caesar, who dedicated the first temple of Venus Genetrix in his forum at Rome.<sup>11</sup>

In the painting Venus wears jewellery of a sort very fashionable in Pompeii, and indeed in the world of Greek Alexandria, in the middle years of the first century BC: a gold earring in the shape of a trident (the upper disc set with a jewel), a gold necklace with heavy pendants, and a body chain falling between the breasts and over the hips. Cupid, too, wears a miniature version of the body chain, and a golden circlet on his head. Just visible in a damaged area of the painting are snake bracelets on the goddess's wrists.<sup>12</sup> She appears to wear a transparent tunic (FIG. 1), and around her shoulders is draped a purple mantle — the latter garment might have had contemporary resonance, for Julius Caesar, while Dictator from 48–44 BC, is said to have been granted the right to wear a *toga* of this colour, variously described by ancient writers as his purple *toga*, purple or even regal dress.<sup>13</sup> There is no sign of a sceptre, which normally would be expected in

<sup>8</sup> Good colour illustrations have been provided by Carettoni (1983: plates between pp. 56 and 57).

<sup>9</sup> See also n. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Strocka (2006: 115–17) has offered a useful discussion of the various images of Venus at Pompeii.

<sup>11</sup> On the temple, see: Weinstock, 1971: 80–90; Amici, 1991; Ulrich, 1993; Westall, 1997; Strocka, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> See D'Ambrosio (2001: 50, no. 1) for an openwork gold diadem set with pearls from the Villa Imperiale, Pompeii; for a later version of the trident earring, found in the House of Marcus Fabius Rufus (p. 52, no. 9); and for snake bracelets (pp. 58–9, nos. 28–9). See also Walker and Bierbrier (1997: 35, no. 9) for snake bracelets of mid-first-century BC date on a painted coffin from Akhmim, Egypt.

<sup>13</sup> Caesar's purple: Weinstock, 1971: 271, n. 6, citing Cicero, *Orationes Philippicae* 2.85; Cicero, *De Divinatione* 1.119; Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 2.186; Valerius Maximus 1.6.13; Nicolaus Damascenus, *Vita Caesaris* (*Fragmenta der Griechischen Historiker* 90, F 170). Regal dress: Dio 44.6.1, 44.11.2.

a representation of the cult statue of the goddess: one appears, for example, in a later image of Venus without Cupid on the north wall of court 38 in the adjacent House of Maius Castricius (Varriale, 2006: 442), and another in the Second Style painting of Venus Genetrix in an apsidal niche on a wall of the villa at Terzigno (Strocka, 2006: 89 Abb. 6).

On her head, the goddess wears a transparent white veil over her mantle, and beneath the veil a golden diadem with a large red jewel set at its centre. The crown is edged with balls of gold, the doubled central element suggesting in outline the form of an Egyptian uraeus. Turning again to ancient accounts of Caesar's honours, the purple or royal toga is worn with a jewelled golden crown (Weinstock, 1971: 272). The edges of the veil are crinkled, suggesting that, behind the crown, Venus's hair is dressed in the 'melon' hairstyle favoured by Hellenistic Greek queens and other grand ladies of the middle years of the first century BC.<sup>14</sup> In front of her ear falls a slender coil of hair. The goddess's features are very reminiscent of Ptolemaic and Roman Alexandrian representations of deities: the rounded face, with long, aquiline nose, is set on a long neck, the skin is pale ivory, and the strongly-drawn features are dominated by the large, rounded, deep-set eyes.<sup>15</sup>

Most strikingly, the head of Venus in the painting bears a remarkably close resemblance to the marble head of Cleopatra in the Vatican Museums (PLATE 4). The marble portrait, which, like the painting, comes from a private residence, the Villa of the Quintilii on the Via Appia, was identified as being of Cleopatra by Ludwig Curtius in 1933. He suggested that the raised scar of marble on the queen's left cheek represented the remains of a figure of Cupid, thereby identifying the head as a replica of the statue of Cleopatra said to have been dedicated by Caesar in the Temple of Venus Genetrix (Curtius, 1933: 182–92). However, the scar also has been seen as the (unusually prominent) remains of a *puntello* or sculptor's measuring point (La Rocca, 1988), and even as a survival of the original surface in an area of intense water damage (Vorster, 2004: no. 67, plates 86–7). Indeed, a patch of similar damage can be seen on the chin, but not on the other side of the face, and it may be observed that all such damage on the left side of the queen's face and chin, including the projecting lump of stone, matches the points at which Cupid touches Venus in the painting, though the figures of Cupid are reversed. The large red jewel depicted in the painting might explain the curious lump of stone at the front of Cleopatra's diadem in the sculpture, like the remnants of Cupid never convincingly identified as part of the sculpting process. Indeed, these points of comparison between the painting and the sculpture support Curtius's interpretation of the latter.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> On the *Melonfrisur*, see, for example: Bartman, 1999: 35. A goddess wearing a radiate crown and transparent veil appears in a portal in a painting from bedroom M of the villa at Boscoreale, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York: Lehmann, 1953: pl. XIII. I thank Christopher Lightfoot for supplying me with a colour reproduction of the scene.

<sup>15</sup> For Roman representations of gods and heroes in painted pagan icons from Egypt, see: Mathews, 2000: 124–7, esp. p. 127 no. 82.

<sup>16</sup> Curtius (1933: 187) suggested that it could have supported a jewel. Kleiner (2005: 154–5) has interpreted the lump less convincingly as the base of a uraeus.



Above the panels to the side of the doors of the cella the two pinakes containing globes set in square frames with crescent moons and stars at the corners suggest links not only with Venus, but also with Caesar.<sup>17</sup> To the right of the porch, another pinax shows a procession of adults, including women, children and armed men, all moving leftwards towards a temple (PLATE 5).<sup>18</sup> The composition of the procession fore-shadows the scenes carved 30 years later on Augustus's marble Ara Pacis.<sup>19</sup> In the centre ground of the painting, above the procession, are two Egyptian boats in a stretch of water; above them, a flight of steps leads to another temple, with two figures approaching it.

Literary sources, some as late as the third century AD, report that Caesar dedicated the Temple of Venus Genetrix in his forum at Rome in fulfilment of a vow made on the battlefield — Gaul and/or Pharsalus, the accounts vary.<sup>20</sup> Destined for the apse was a cult statue of Venus Genetrix by the distinguished sculptor Arcesilaus. The commission was not finished by the time of the temple's dedication on 26 September 46 BC, and Caesar may have had to make do with the sculptor's clay maquette. According to the historian Appian (*Bella Civilia* 2.102.424), writing in the second century AD, a gilded statue of Cleopatra was also set in the temple by Caesar; however, Dio Cassius (51.22.3), writing in the early third century, implied that Octavian placed it there as one of many spoils of Egypt ornamenting the sanctuaries of central Rome. Many art historians accept that the head from the Villa of the Quintilii is, as Curtius proposed, a contemporary copy of the statue of Cleopatra as dedicated by Caesar.<sup>21</sup> However, though temple-sharing between a deity and a royal personage was common practice in Alexandria, it was hitherto unheard of at Rome. Indeed, the historical references are hard to reconcile: Appian's veracity has been doubted, and with greater ingenuity than Appian it has been suggested that the meaning of the statue was 'repackaged' after Actium by Octavian.<sup>22</sup>

If we accept the identification of the figure in the painting as Cleopatra in the guise of Venus Genetrix, then the doorway in which she stands should surely represent the entrance to the cella of Caesar's temple. However, there are difficulties in identifying this building as Caesar's temple. Though the Corinthian order with fluted columns is a good match for what little is known of the decoration of the original structure, the temple has a tetrastyle porch rather than the octastyle of Caesar's temple in Rome. This deviation might be explained by the constraints imposed by the smaller scale of the painting in its domestic context. Behind the later blocking wall, a fence with ornamental finials — a feature of many Second Style architectural com-

<sup>17</sup> Compare this with a coin of Lugdunum celebrating Caesar and Octavian, with a star and a globe (Weinstock, 1971: pl. 25.17, 18, 20, and 28.3).

<sup>18</sup> Cerulli Irelli (1981: 32, fig. 19) interpreted the scene as a battle. The painting has been illustrated well by Bragantini (1997: 1,111, 322).

<sup>19</sup> Recently Kleiner (2005: 219–29) has suggested a link between the Ara Pacis and the temple of Hathor at Dendera.

<sup>20</sup> They have been summarized by Weinstock (1971: 83).

<sup>21</sup> The evidence has been summarized by Kleiner (2005: 151–3).

<sup>22</sup> Westall (1997) rejected robustly Appian's account; Williams (2001: 196–7) proposed a change in the statue's meaning after Actium.

positions — fronts the figure in the doorway (FIG. 1). This blocks only the doorway and may not necessarily suggest that the porch could have been approached only from the sides, an unusual feature that is to be found in Caesar's temple (Amici, 1991: 31). The shields seen on the precinct wall to the left of the building could well have been a reference to the military origin of the dedication of the temple in Rome. Critically, there is no sign of the distinctive arches flanking the temple, although they are featured in several other Pompeian paintings (Strocka, 2005). However, this discrepancy may be explained by the later date of the other Pompeian paintings, which most likely drew, in a very different political climate, upon the sanctuary as it was eventually completed by Octavian. In room 71 no attempt was made to show the interior of the cella, in contrast to the sequence of Second Style paintings at Terzigno, dated about 40 BC, which include a poorly-preserved representation of Venus Genetrix attended by two cupids in an apsidal niche, analogous to the arrangement of Caesar's temple in Rome (Strocka, 2007: 88–9, Abb. 5–7, pp. 115–17).

#### THE DATE AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE PAINTING

The temple scene on the east wall of room 71 is regarded as a mature work of the Second Style (about 50–40 BC), on grounds of the colour palette, the assured sense of perspective, the accuracy in rendering complex architectural detail, and the lack of vegetation entwined around the architecture, the latter a typical feature of the final stages of the Second Style in the 30s and 20s BC. The painted wall has been compared to the architectural scenes in the Villa of the Poppaei at Oplontis; the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale is also very similar, while the paintings from the villa at Terzigno appear to be marginally later.<sup>23</sup> A date close to the middle of the first century BC would fit the architectural context of the wall.

Such a date would allow the interpretation of the major figure as Venus/Cleopatra proposed above. Moreover, if Cleopatra were equated with Venus Genetrix following the birth in 47 BC of Ptolemy Caesarion, her future consort and alleged child of Caesar, then the pinax showing a procession of men, women and children in an Egyptian setting might record a celebration of the prince's birth in Alexandria.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the event was marked by Cleopatra herself, who minted a commemorative coin on Cyprus — Venus's native island, recently restored to Egypt by Caesar — on which she was likened to the goddess, dressed in a high diadem and bearing a sceptre, the infant a blob before her breast (Walker and Higgs, 2001: 178, no. 186). In the principal scene on the east wall of room 71, the infant Caesarion is represented, following conventional images of the goddess with her child, as Cupid to Cleopatra's Venus. From 46 until Caesar's assassination in 44 BC, Cleopatra was said to have spent two years in Rome as a guest

<sup>23</sup> See: Barbet, 1985: 45 with pl. IIA; Leach, 2004: 106–7, fig. 71. On the dating of the style, see: Ling, 1991: 25–31, figs 24–8, pl. III A and B. For Terzigno, see: Strocka, 2006.

<sup>24</sup> On the representation of Caesarion on temple walls and in statues, see: Ashton, 2003.



in Caesar's villa on the west bank of the Tiber, her extended visit again coinciding roughly with the date of the painting in the house at Pompeii.<sup>25</sup> This is the likely context for the commission of such a painting, which may be understood as one of a number of related private commissions: the head of Cleopatra from the Villa of the *Quintilii*, and perhaps also the smaller head of Cleopatra now in Berlin, found near Genzano.<sup>26</sup> These royal images prefigure the Claudian image of the emperor's mother, Antonia Minor, Antony's daughter by his Roman wife Octavia, who also appears as *Venus Genetrix* in a marble statue found in the nymphaeum of a grand villa at Baia.<sup>27</sup> Finally, the interpretation of the central figure in the painting as Cleopatra in the role of *Venus Genetrix* reconciles the iconographical problems noted above (p. 38): the figure's unexpectedly tentative pose, the decision not to show the goddess in her rightful place in the apse at the back of the cella, and the sense of role-playing noted by Leach (2004) may be explained as the result of Republican Roman unfamiliarity with the Ptolemaic Egyptian practice of setting images of rulers within the temples of the gods.<sup>28</sup>

Maureen Carroll's interpretation of her recent finds on the platform of the nearby Temple of Venus at Pompeii indicates that, at about the time the painting was commissioned, there was significant building activity in this temple, including the planting of a sacred grove on the temple platform.<sup>29</sup> Emmanuele Curti has discovered beneath the temple some terracotta reliefs, said to be of much earlier date, which depict Cupids wearing body chains.<sup>30</sup> Thus, while it is suggested here that Caesar's temple in Rome provided the primary inspiration for the painting, local cult activity also may have played a part.

## WHY WAS THE SECOND STYLE PAINTING CONCEALED?

It cannot be discounted that the remarkable painting in room 71 was walled up for private rather than political reasons. None the less, the form of concealment is unexpected: in the neighbouring House of *Maius Castricius*, discarded Second Style paintings were replastered and the wall painted anew; or if part of an earlier painting was required for a later scheme of decoration, it would simply be framed within the later scene (Varriale, 2006: 455, 458, 472). Moreover, the

<sup>25</sup> For Cleopatra in Rome, see: Grant, 1972: 83–94.

<sup>26</sup> For the collection history of the Berlin head, see: Higgs, 2001: 204–7.

<sup>27</sup> See Rose (1997: 82, cat. 82,1, figs 60–1) for the statue of Antonia Minor from Baia. See p. 195 with fig. 2 for the Ravenna relief, a public portrayal of the recently-deified Livia as *Venus Genetrix*, both images drawn from the figure of the goddess in the pediment of Augustus's temple of Mars Ultor in his forum at Rome (fig. 100).

<sup>28</sup> With specific reference to Cleopatra VII, see: Quaegebeur, 1988. See also: Ashton, 2003: 16–18.

<sup>29</sup> I am grateful to Maureen Carroll for sharing her report in advance of publication.

<sup>30</sup> I thank Emmanuele Curti for allowing me to cite information from an unpublished paper given in Rome in 2007. His recent publication of inscriptions from the temple convincingly argues for Augustan recasting of the Pompeian cult (Curti, 2007: 66). I am grateful to Domenico Esposito for this reference, and for advance sight of his own paper suggesting political influence in the painted wall decoration of the adjacent House of the Golden Bracelet (Esposito, forthcoming).

construction of the blocking wall in room 71 may coincide in date with the aftermath of the defeat of Cleopatra in 30 BC. However, the statue of the queen remained in Caesar's Temple of Venus Genetrix until at least the early third century AD: why, then, the need to obscure a provincial painting of it? As noted above, it has been suggested that, after Actium, the statue was 'rebranded' as booty from Alexandria (Williams, 2001: 196–7). It may be the case that the cover-up in Pompeii was aimed less at concealing Venus/Cleopatra than Cupid/Caesarion, who, as her adolescent co-ruler, was murdered by Octavian's men in Alexandria in 30 BC.<sup>31</sup> The elimination of Cupid/Caesarion might also explain how the statue in Rome could survive with changed meaning, and indeed why Cupid disappeared from the marble head in the Villa of the Quintilii, as suggested by Kleiner (2005: 153). The latter is now widely regarded as an original of the 40s BC, and on its discovery was found associated with a torso of Ceres, suggesting that modification to the image had occurred in antiquity (La Rocca, 1988: no. 143; Vorster, 2004: 125).

## CONCLUSION

In the painting from the House of Marcus Fabius Rufus, we see reflections of the life and times of Cleopatra and Caesar refashioned for private consumption. This was not a static process, but one that evolved with changing tastes and changing politics. In the interpretation offered here, the earlier painting celebrated the worship of Cleopatra as Venus Genetrix, following the birth of her first son, widely regarded as the result of her liaison with Caesar. Following the defeat of the queen and the murder of Caesarion by Octavian's men, this scene was concealed behind a wall. The politically sensitive painting in the House of Marcus Fabius Rufus prefigured slightly later scenes in the House of the Golden Bracelet and the villa at Terzigno, both recently interpreted as supportive of Octavian (respectively, Esposito, forthcoming; Strocka, 2006). The close relationship of the painting to a contemporary sculpture fore-shadows early Imperial sculptured representations of leading women of the imperial family as Venus Genetrix, and, in the pinax, the representation of the extended imperial family on the Ara Pacis Augustae. Its controversial subject made the painting a hostage to political fortune, though the later owners of the house — possibly the imperial freedmen Euplus and Pothinus — hedged their bets by preserving this remarkable scene behind the innocuous concealing wall.

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<sup>31</sup> On the murder of Caesarion, see: Grant, 1972: 229–30.

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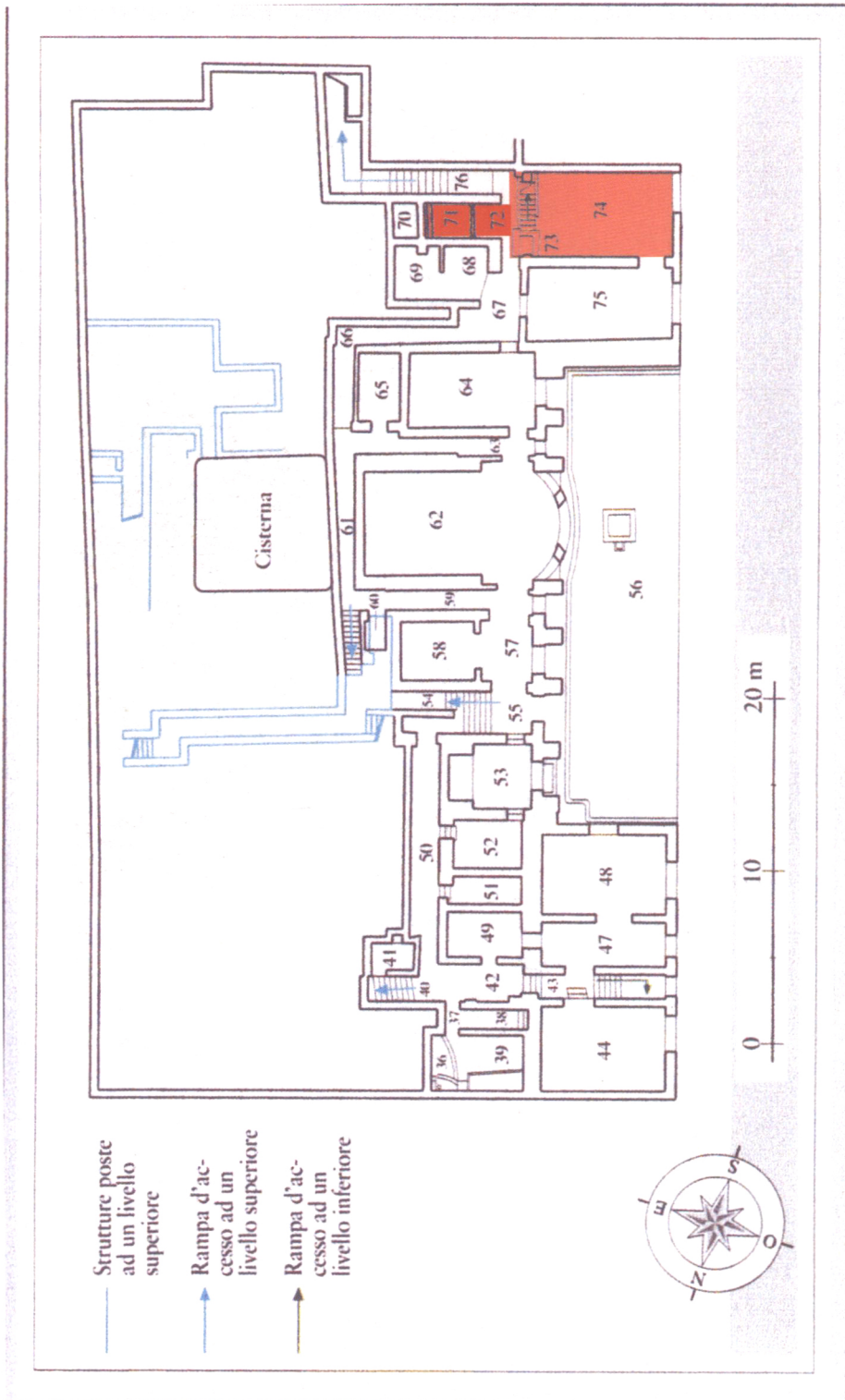
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Walker — PLATE 1. Blocked Second Style painting on the east wall of room 71 in the House of Marcus Fabius Rufus.  
(Photo: Domenico Esposito. Reproduced courtesy of Prof. P.-L. Guzzo.)



Walker — PLATE 2. Plan of the second, middle level of the House of Marcus Fabius Rufus. Room 71 and its antechamber (72) are shaded in dark orange, and room 74 in a lighter shade. After Aoyagi and Pappalardo, 2006: 271 tav. 9. (Reproduced courtesy of Prof. U. Pappalardo.)





*Walker – PLATE 3. Detail of Venus and Cupid in the door of the temple. (Photo: Domenico Esposito. Reproduced courtesy of Prof. P.-L. Guzzo.)*



*Walker* — PLATE 4. Head of Cleopatra VII from the Villa of the Quintilii on the Via Appia, height 39 cm. Vatican Museums, inv. 38511. (Photo: author. Reproduced courtesy of the Musei Vaticani.)

*Walker* — PLATE 5. Procession scene in the pinax to the right of the porch from the Second Style painting in room 71, House of Marcus Fabius Rufus. (Photo: Domenico Esposito. Reproduced courtesy of Prof. P.-L. Guzzo.)

