

## Pompeian Plasters

The study presented in this database concerns plasters used for wall decorations in Pompeii. Earlier experiences in the field showed that plasters compositions change over time. My hypothesis was that there is a connection between the typology and the relative chronology in which the plasters appear on the walls, and that these factors are related not only in single houses or quarters but over the site. I also assumed the variations are related to technology, craftsmanship and fashion. Focus has been set on materials and styles. See:

A. Freccero, Pompeian Plasters. Insula I 9 and Forum, Rome 2005. Webb: [www.isvroma.it](http://www.isvroma.it)

A. Freccero, Pompeian Plasters. Buildings in regions I, V, VI, VII, VIII, and IX, Rome 2012. Webb: [www.isvroma.it](http://www.isvroma.it)

### *Database*

The database has three sections: Houses, Samples and Types. Below follows a short description of information collected under each heading and, when necessary, further information on details.

### *Houses*

Houses contains information on the building's name and its location in the city (region), the archaeological team working with excavations in the period of the present project, and the year in which sampling took place. A plan of Pompeii with the insula indicated is shown at the top, below which a plan of the insula and the house, and a photo representative of the house.

### *Samples*

Samples contains verbal information concerning the sampling spot and the sample, beginning with the house, room and the location of sampling area, the plaster layer, the sample identification number, the group to which the plaster belongs and the date of final checking, as will be further explained below.

As sampling spot is noted the official name of the room which may be a letter or a number, followed by the wall (north, east, west or south) or, in some cases, at the north-east corner, at the doorframe. Together with the photo of the sampling area, it should be possible for anyone to find and re-check the indicated areas.

The plaster layer is noted as first layer on the wall, the second layer etc. Being the first layer sometimes means the plastering is contemporary with the wall construction, but not always. If an old decoration was totally removed when the later plastering was made, the first plaster visible on the wall is not contemporaneous with the wall. If the first layer is covered by a second layer with decoration, these may be part of a decoration technique and therefore made at the same time, but the two layers may also represent different periods. If the first layer carries a decoration, and there is a second layer on top, these obviously represent two periods. In such cases, the earlier decoration often has marks of indentations, pick-marks, made to make better adherence for the new plaster.

The sample identification consists as a principle of one or two letters and a number. The letter may be A for Amarantus, or TJ for Temple of Jupiter. The first sample in a building receives number 1, followed by 2, 3 etc. Therefore A44 is sample number 44 in the house of Amarantus, and TJ 3 is the third at the Temple of Jupiter. Sample number 1 is always a reference sample, just by being the first identified type in a house. Every time a different kind of plaster appears, that becomes a reference sample too. In the Temple of Jupiter samples TJ1, TJ2, TJ3, TJ8 are reference samples. These are later compared to reference samples in other buildings. All reference samples of the same kind, with the same characteristics belong to the same group, and are in a typological sense of the same kind.

The plaster groups are indicated A-H. During this final research period I have added group 0 (Zero), which contains the earliest plasters identified. Group A, which contains early First Style plasters, has been divided into subgroups Aa and Ab, Aa containing plasters from decorations or building periods that are dated earlier than plasters in group Ab. Sometimes such subdivision has not been possible to do, and then the plaster is just placed in group A. The plaster description starts with a brief identification, such as “Black and white...”, which gives an idea of how the plaster looks under the microscope. The characteristics of the binder are then briefly described, followed by a summary of the components of the filler, which principally consists of volcanic materials defined as compact, porous, or crystalline particles. Compact volcanic grains appear as black, various kinds of grey, and brown, but there are occasionally inclusions of compact grains which are fragments of limestone or marble. These are white, yellowish or of a yellow ochre hue. Porous grains generally are red, but sometimes wine-red or slightly purple. These differentiations have not been noted in the schedules, porous is noted as red. The crystalline group consists of crystals and glassy particles. The crystals are black and of a kind that may be augite. The glassy particles appear in a number of colours such as various shades of yellow, orange, and green, or they may be un-coloured or grey.

If there is stucco on the sample, its thickness and composition is noted too.

In a separate area there is information on the grain-sizes of the fillers, and other kinds of information that may have importance.

Further, if the sample was analysed at CNR/ICVBC in Florence, there is a summary of the results. Photos showing cross-sections were made at ICVBC. The complete laboratory investigation is available at [www.icvbc.cnr.it/diagnostica/pompei.htm](http://www.icvbc.cnr.it/diagnostica/pompei.htm)

### *Types*

The types are sorted according to the system of types which is 0, A-H and the additional X, a group that contains other kinds of materials, such as cocciopesto, modern restoration materials, or waterproof plaster, just to mention some. Therefore, all samples defined as 0 come first, followed by all in group A, then B etc.