

DECORATIVE EFFECTS AND ROOM FUNCTIONS. THE EVIDENCE OF THRESHOLDS STUDIED IN THE RESIDENTIAL QUARTERS OF INSULA V 1, POMPEII

BY

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Abstract

The present paper discusses the use of different types of thresholds in the Pompeian domestic architecture. The considerations proceed from observations made in three larger dwellings in Insula V 1 in Pompeii, the town quarter, which is under current investigation by the Swedish Pompeii Project. The thresholds are considered in the contexts of corresponding pavements and wall decorations as well as that of the related rooms. Differences will be studied between the areas around the atria and the zones around the peristyles. They indicate that while the thresholds around the atrium are of a homogeneous character, defined by the shape and decorations of the central room, the ones around the peristyle are defined by the decorations and dignity of each particular room opening up towards the central entity. It seems also that both the material used and the shape of the thresholds could be dependent on the taste defining the decorations, either of the floor or of the walls.

INTRODUCTION

As a part of the work of the Swedish Pompeii Project to document and analyse the development of Insula V 1, the thresholds of the houses have been studied in their own right.¹ The thresholds were first categorised according to material and shape,² and then considered in the contexts of corresponding pavements and wall decorations as well as that of the related rooms.

In this paper, I will concentrate on the thresholds in the three larger houses: Casa degli Epigrammi Greci, V 1,18,³ Casa del Torello, V 1,7⁴ and the Casa di Caecilius Iucundus, V 1,26.⁵ For natural reasons focus will be on the prestigious areas of the houses, thus leaving out domestic work areas as well as the areas around the secondary atria in V 1,7 and V 1,26, where very few thresholds are preserved.⁶ As has been shown in the analysis of the Insula of the Menander, normally the less important parts of the houses and simpler houses in general were equipped either with wooden thresholds⁷ or none at all (*Fig. 1*).⁸

Because of the differences occurring in the choices for the kinds of thresholds used in atria and those in peristyle areas, the presentation will start in the former and then continue into the latter areas. The atria will be reviewed according to an order decided by the chronology of the thresholds: thus, we will start with the Casa degli Epigrammi Greci (V 1,18), continue

with the Casa del Torello (V 1,7) and conclude with the Casa di Caecilius Iucundus (V 1,26).

In the presentation of the peristyle areas, most observations concern the thresholds in the Casa di Caecilius Iucundus. This is due to the fact that the rear area of the Casa di Caecilius Iucundus presents the largest amount of preserved thresholds. In the Casa del Torello, there are only a few doorways that open up towards the peristyle. Of these some are too heavily restored to yield any accurate information or have collapsed, as in the opening **b–f**. Since the pavement in room **g** was not laid out at the time of the eruption, there are few possibilities for a thorough analysis in that room. The situation in the Casa degli Epigrammi Greci is slightly better, which explains why more conclusions may be drawn. But before starting off the presentation, some basics concerning typology need to be pointed out (*Fig. 1*).

¹ I want to thank the Soprintendente, P.G. Guzzo, and the Director, A. d'Ambrosio, for giving me the possibility to make this study. The staff of the Direzione has been most helpful, not least in opening many normally locked houses. I also want to thank A.-M. Leander Touati, the Director of the Swedish project, for her extensive help with this text, A. Karivieri and R. Forsell for giving me the possibility to work in the Casa di Caecilius Iucundus and M. Staub Gierow for the same in the Casa degli Epigrammi Greci, as well as for her suggesting that I take on this study and for many inspiring discussions.

² For a short overview of thresholds in the Casa degli Epigrammi Greci (V 1,18), see Staub 2005, 387.

³ For general literature on this house, see Staub Gierow 2008a and Stročka 1995.

⁴ For general literature on this house, see Sampaolo 1991, 482.

⁵ For general literature on this house, see Karivieri & Forsell 2008a, Dentamaro 2001, de Vos 1991, 577, and Dexter 1975.

⁶ Only the Casa degli Epigrammi Greci has more thresholds in its domestic work area. This probably depends on the reuse, either *in situ* or replaced, of the thresholds from an originally independent dwelling with its main entrance from V 1,11, see Staub 2005. For the two original dwellings, their plausible extension and dates of unification see Staub Gierow 2008b, Staub Gierow 2008a, Staub Gierow 2005, 146–149.

⁷ There are of course hardly any traces left of these. Only in a few examples has the impression of the wooden threshold in the mortar remained *in situ*, as for example in the doorway between **v**⁷ and **u** in the Casa degli Epigrammi Greci.

⁸ See L. Ling 1997, 338.



Fig. 1. Plan of Insula V 1 (after E. Pinto Guillaume and van der Poel 1984).

THRESHOLD APPEARANCE AND FUNCTION

In the houses studied here, there are two kinds of stone thresholds: those made in one or several blocks carrying through the entire door opening and those consisting of side-plates only.⁹ Between these plates the floor surface from one or both of the adjacent rooms continued or some ornamental features were laid out. In some cases the side-plates and with them all features for the installation of a door are missing. Here an ornamental strip in the floor serves as a marker for the boundary between the two rooms.

Whole thresholds often display a rim and a lower surface over which the door opened—the rim would stop it from opening in the opposite direction—and boltholes for locking. In the variant with only side-plates, locking arrangements are

normally missing. In these cases the doors could have been locked either by cross-bars or a mechanical lock.¹⁰ Both in whole thresholds and in the ones with side-plates, carved indentations can normally be observed next to the jambs,¹¹ for the installation of the pivots for the door.¹² These carvings are normally rectangular and were used to house a pivot base. Along the jambs, often both inside the door opening and along the outer side (in the atrium area, for example, along

⁹ For a general description of thresholds and doors, see Ivanoff 1859.

¹⁰ For a detailed description and reconstruction of a door lock from Boscoreale, see Pernice 1904, 15–21.

¹¹ For a schematic drawing of a threshold with the different holes and their function, see Mau 1908, 254.

¹² For a drawn presentation of the connection of the different elements of the pivots, see Ivanoff 1859, Tav. d'agg. E.

the atrium wall), oblong slits can be observed in the thresholds. These served for the installations of wooden doorposts.¹³ Where the wall plaster is still preserved, the vertical lines against these now destroyed wooden parts are still visible, even if they are sometimes obscured by modern repairs.

Lava is the material most frequently used for stone thresholds. It was used in all building phases of the town, in the later periods mainly for simpler rooms, while travertine started to come into use contemporarily with the late First- and the Second-Style decorations.¹⁴ Marble, finally, was not used until the early Imperial period and then, mainly for side-plates only.¹⁵ For lava thresholds a typology has been established by Y. Hori, based on the placing of the rim on the threshold. In contrast to travertine thresholds, as will be shown further down, the change in design of the lava thresholds does not seem to have any chronological explanation. Also the remodeling of one type into another does not seem to occur.

The above-mentioned pivot bases were of either bronze or iron. In this base, in a circular indentation, a cylindrical pivot holder, mostly in the same material, was inserted. Finally the wooden pivot-pole was set into this holder.¹⁶ The door leaves were firmly attached to these pivots, which rotated in their bases,¹⁷ thus enabling the opening and closing of the doors.¹⁸ How exactly the leaves were attached to the pivots is still unclear. It is also possible, that the pivot was a part of the door. Only in a few cases have large, folded, bronze strips been found which probably served to attach these two elements to each other. But since they seem to be quite rare, it is not plausible that this was a general arrangement.¹⁹ Maybe these reinforcements were sometimes necessary at the top of the door since its weight could have made the pivot break away.²⁰ According to the testimony of doors in wall paintings from both the Second and the Fourth Styles, doors did not always cover the entire height of the opening. Sometimes the upper part seems to have been open, sometimes covered with a grille, allowing in both cases air and a little light to enter the rooms. It is still unclear how the pivot was attached to the upper lintel, but since the pressure at the top is much less than at the bottom, perhaps no special reinforcements were thought necessary. According to the double sets of pivot- and bolt-holes most doors must have had two leaves. In wider openings they were probably of a folding variety.²¹ The different parts of the folding doors were attached to each other with string hinges, mostly made of bronze or iron.²²

THRESHOLDS AROUND ATRIA

The thresholds around the atrium in the Casa degli Epigrammi Greci

The first atrium to be presented has door openings on only three sides. The unbroken southern wall bounds *taberna* V

1,20. The relevant thresholds in this area are the ones in the door openings **b-d**, **b-h** and **b-f**. In the opening **b-c**, the stone block is missing. The wide opening to *ala* **e** is marked by a row of *tesserae*, the one to *tablinum* **g** shows neither delimitation lines in the pavement nor side plates. The remaining three thresholds are made of lava blocks covering the complete width of the door openings. The blocks protrude into the floor of the atrium. In this part and inside the door opening, slits for the wooden door frames are cut into the thresholds. The doors opened into the rooms, as can be seen by the rims against which the doors closed, set deep into the door openings.²³ As is shown by the double set of pivot and bolt holes the doors were double-leaved. While the lava blocks in openings **b-d** and **b-h** are still quite well preserved, the one in **b-f** is damaged, which is probably partly due to the impact of the weather since the excavation.

An important question is to which building phase of the house these thresholds belong. For this the door frame in opening **b-f** is important. It is made of stretchers and standers of Sarno limestone that goes together with the kind of *opus incertum* used for the original building phase of this house. Since here also parts of the walls are standing on the corners

¹³ In other houses these holes could have a different shape. In the Casa del Labirinto, for example, two trapezoid holes on each side served for holding the doorposts. See Strocka 1991, 69.

¹⁴ See Mau 1882, 56, and Blake 1930, 15.

¹⁵ L. Ling 1997, 339; a rare example for the use of marble for the thresholds in an atrium can be found in the House of the Small Fountain, VI 8, 23. For the dating, see Fröhlich 1996, 79f.

¹⁶ In one pivot holder found in the Casa di Menandro, traces of wood were still preserved. See Allison 2006, 75, cat. no. 285.

¹⁷ Ivanoff 1859, 105, even suggests that the pivot plate was oiled so as to facilitate the rotation of the pivot holder.

¹⁸ Sometimes when pivot holes are missing in threshold, doors could seemingly have been attached directly to the door posts with strap hinges. For the houses discussed here, it seems impossible to locate such things, especially since the excavation reports are not detailed enough. For examples in the Insula of the Menander, see L. Ling 1997, 339.

¹⁹ In the insula of the Menander, where the excavation report seems to have been more extensive than in older excavations, only a few seem to appear. Allison has only four of them in her catalogue of the finds from the entire insula, see Allison 2006, 465.

²⁰ In the western entrance in room 18 in the Casa di Menandro, a bronze door reinforcement was found in a layer 2 m above the threshold level, thus clearly coming from the top of the doors. Allison 2006, 80, cat. no. 323, even attaches the function of hinge to the reinforcement, a function not necessarily intended.

²¹ On this, see L. Ling 1997, 339.

²² On these hinges, which in smaller versions were used, as well as bone hinges, for furniture, see Allison 2006, 30.

²³ For a typology of lava thresholds and their different shape, see Hori 1992.



Fig. 2. V 1,18, threshold b–f.



Fig. 3. V 1,7, view into the atrium.

of the lava block, it is evident that this threshold and probably all others from this area of the dwelling belong to the first building phase of this house, although not all are still framed by the original masonry (Fig. 2).²⁴

Similar observations relating lava thresholds to the original construction have been made in other Pompeian houses. In I 10,4, the Casa del Menandro, the lava thresholds around the atrium belong to the first phase of the house.²⁵ The same phenomenon has been observed in the neighbouring dwelling I 10,11, the Casa degli Amanti.²⁶ This is also the case in VII 4,61, the Casa delle Forme di Creta, where even the faked

doors in the eastern wall of the atrium have lava thresholds.²⁷ A further example of lava thresholds forming part of the oldest building phase has been observed in the Casa del Labirinto,

²⁴ According to M. Staub Gierow, whom I thank for the information concerning the building history of V 1,18.

²⁵ L. Ling 1997, 338, on lava: "It is always the material of earlier or redundant thresholds." See R. Ling 1997, 265–269, for a description of the thresholds and the adjacent walls.

²⁶ R. Ling 1997, 300–302, for the House of the Amanti.

²⁷ On these thresholds, see Staub Gierow 2000, 105f.

²⁸ See Strocka 1991, 67f.



Fig. 4. V 1,7, threshold 4–10, seen from 4 (above) and from 10 (below).

VI 11,8–10.²⁸ It is important to note that in all these cases, the thresholds around the atrium were homogeneous both in shape and material.

The thresholds around the atrium of the Casa del Torello, V 1,7

The atrium in the Casa del Torello could be seen as a model for the ideal shape of an atrium. Its large proportions, the almost absolute symmetry and the height of its door openings (about 4 m) create the quite impressive and representative character, which one would expect of a Vitruvian atrium (*Fig. 3*).

In the Casa degli Epigrammi Greci we could notice that the, normally older, lava thresholds consisted of rectangular blocks with holes and cuttings for the different components of the door system. It was also evident that the adjacent wall was usually built on top of the narrow sides of the lava block, thus indicating that these thresholds must be either prior to or contemporary with the wall related to them.

The thresholds in the atrium of the Casa del Torello, however, consist of travertine blocks in the door openings to the *cubicula* and the *lararium* and in the niches for the blind doors to *taberna* V 1,6 and to room 18. The only exception is the

threshold of the small door towards room 6, which is probably due to the fact that this door was created in a later phase of the house. The adjacent rooms 6 and 7 originally constituted one larger room which was later divided into *cubiculum* 7 and *apotheca* 6 before being decorated with Third-Style paintings, and the new entrance towards room 6 was created.²⁹ The borders between the atrium (4) and the open rooms, the *alae* (9 and 14) and the *tablinum* (13), are marked by white *tesserae* inserted into the uniform *lavapesta* floor in geometrical patterns.

Here the thresholds all have the same shape.³⁰ They have cut-off inner corners towards the *cubicula*, so that the narrow sides are L-shaped. Thus the adjacent walls are not standing on the thresholds. Consequently they could be inserted into the door opening and put against the already existing walls (*Fig. 4*).

Here again, thin slits were cut into the travertine blocks in

²⁹ See Sampaolo 1991, 491. But cf. Dickmann 1999, 122, n. 412, who believes these renovations to be from an earlier time, referring to remains of First-Style decorations in that room. But since the only remains of these decorations are found on the W and E wall, mostly covered by the abutting dividing wall, it is evident that this wall was constructed later.

³⁰ These are the ones in the openings: 4–5, 4–7, 4–8, 4–10, 4–15, 4–16, and niches 4–V 1,6 and 4–18.

front of the atrium wall and along the door jambs for the wooden door posts. Since the doors opened into the *cubicula*, the surface of the inner part (towards the *cubiculum*) of the threshold was lowered, thus creating a c. 0.02 m high rim preventing the door from opening into the atrium.

All the Sarno limestone door frames have cut-off corners at their bases up to a height of 0.2 m above the travertine blocks. This feature can be observed in all houses where the original, first-phase walls are still preserved and the thresholds are not made of lava. That was done in order to facilitate the removal of the older thresholds and the insertion of the new ones.

Even if there is no evident proof of the existence of older thresholds, one might presume that these, in correspondence with most other contemporary³¹ houses, consisted of lava blocks,³² shaped like the ones in the Casa degli Epigrammi Greci. A second phase, when older thresholds were replaced by the ones still *in situ*, has been identified also in other houses. In the Casa del Labirinto, V.M. Strocka has observed the same phenomenon around the atrium.³³ In this house as well as in the Casa della Parete Nera, VII 4,59,³⁴ these changes have been dated to the time of the late First Style, around 100 BC. The same date has been proposed for the similar change in the main atrium of the Casa del Fauno, VI 5,3.³⁵ In this house the thresholds in the secondary atrium probably originate from the same period.³⁶ Also in the Casa di Sallustio, VI 2,4, the travertine thresholds were put in later, even if the traces of the cut-off door posts are hardly visible any more due to the heavy modern restorations. In this case, the thresholds *in situ* are certainly coeval with the wall decorations created around 100 BC.³⁷

A further proof that travertine thresholds belong to a secondary building phase in Pompeii has recently been provided by the excavations in the Casa di Marcus Terentius Eudoxus, VI 13,6. In this house a trench was opened between the *impluvium* and the door leading from the atrium to one of the *cubicula* (11).³⁸ In this trench an older floor level was found as well as imprints of the removed original threshold. Both the lower floor level and the traces left by the threshold were considered contemporary with the earliest building phase of the house, the middle of the second century BC. The travertine threshold belongs to a later phase, for which no dating proposal has been assumed yet.

In other houses the use of the travertine thresholds appears to be contemporary with rebuilding or redecoration contemporary with the Second Style, even though a somewhat earlier date cannot be excluded with total certainty. In the Casa del Torello the change most probably took place together with the redecoration of the atrium and other parts of the house in the Second Style.³⁹ The floor in *lavapista* with inserted white and coloured marble pieces probably belongs to the same period.⁴⁰ Even if the floor surface is poorly preserved, it can be seen by threshold 4–10 that the floor abuts the travertine block, which proves that the threshold cannot have been put in later than the floor. In the channel dug for a water pipe,

running from peristyle **b** through corridor **10** and towards the *impluvium* in **4**, faint traces of an earlier floor in *cocciopesto* are visible. The door between the atrium and room 18 was blocked and the room became oriented towards the peristyle.⁴¹ The earlier door opening was transformed into a blind door for reasons of symmetry and appearance.⁴²

Since in the Casa di Caesius Blandius, VII 1,40, the black-and-white mosaic floor which seems to be contemporary with the thresholds around the atrium is usually attributed to the Second Style,⁴³ the same dating would be adequate here as well. Correspondence between a change of thresholds and a redecoration in the Second Style can be observed in the Casa delle Colombe a Mosaico, VIII 2,34,⁴⁴ in the Casa del Marinaio, VII 15,2,⁴⁵ and in the Casa delle

³¹ This house is to be dated at around 150–120 BC, because of its façade in big tufa blocks and especially the eastern figured capital, with its stylistic dating (see Mercklin 1962, 72–73).

³² See L. Ling 1997, 336, and Strocka 1991, 67, on the same alterations in the Casa del Labirinto.

³³ Strocka 1991, 66f.

³⁴ On Casa della Parete Nera: Staub Gierow 2000; on these thresholds and their dating, see esp. 67.

³⁵ See Dickmann 1999, 54, and note 33; Pesando 1997, 86f; Hoffmann 1986, 495.

³⁶ This part of the house underwent further extensive rebuilding during a later period. The results of this rebuilding will be discussed further below.

³⁷ See Sampaolo 1993, 87, and on the house, Laidlaw 1993.

³⁸ For a preliminary report of this excavations, see Gobbo & Loccardi 2005, 191f.

³⁹ Since there are hardly any traces left of these decorations, we have to rely on the descriptions by Mau 1882, 252–254. For a first description of these decorations, see Schulz 1838.

⁴⁰ See Beyen 1960, 80f. A further indication for a dating of the floor to a redecoration phase of the house is given by the evidence of the floor surface running through the opening between *fauces* **3** and room **2**, which was created in a later phase by diminishing *taberna* V 1,8.

⁴¹ On this phenomenon in the Pompeian private architecture and its interpretations towards an upgrade of the peristyle area in relation to the atrium, see especially Dickmann 1999, 144–151.

⁴² Beyen 1960, 81, does not consider the decorations in room 18 and in the atrium contemporary because on the atrium side they do not cover the closed door. But since the niche proves that it was a blind door made with stucco which has fallen down, it is evident that it must be contemporary.

⁴³ See Bragantini 1996, 385; *PPP* III, 1986, 43. Dated to the Second Style already by Blake 1930, 60f.

⁴⁴ See Sampaolo 1998b, 264; *PPP* III, 1986, 315. Blake dates the meander decoration of the floor by the *impluvium* to the time of the Second Style, Blake 1930, 84.

⁴⁵ *PPP* III, 1986, 222, for the Casa del Marinaio, see also Franklin 1990. He states that the walls in the atrium were painted in Third Style, quoting A. Mau's excavation reports in the *BdI* 1874, 149f.; however, the passage Franklin refers to concerns the peristyle area. On the atrium, see Mau on page 153, where he dates the remains of the decorations to the Fourth Style. According to Blake 1930, 78–79, nearly all mosaics from this house are from the same time in the first century BC, in the later Hellenistic phase.



Fig. 5. V 1,26, threshold **b–d**, seen from **b** (above) and from **d** (below).

Nozze di Ercole, VII 9,47.⁴⁶ In other houses,⁴⁷ it is more difficult to establish a clear relationship between the new thresholds and an identifiable period of redecoration. Because of the bad state of conservation of the wall and pavement decorations, no stylistic reference is possible.

The thresholds in all the examples above have another feature in common with the ones around the atrium of the Casa del Torello: in all cases the doors formed a quite deep niche seen from the atrium. Further, another common feature of nearly all these houses is that the floor consists either of a *lavapesta* or of a black-and-white mosaic where black dominates, which means that the whitish travertine thresholds added a contrasting element. It is my hypothesis that the use of that material for thresholds was meant as a decorative element in the design of the pavements.

The thresholds in the atrium of the Casa di Caecilius Iucundus, V 1,26

The atrium of the Casa di Caecilius Iucundus presents a similar first impression as the one in the Casa del Torello. It is a very large room with high door openings and, again, creating symmetry by parallel door openings and, when necessary,

fake doors instead of real ones.⁴⁸ The thresholds once again consist of travertine blocks with similar arrangements for the hanging and closing of the doors as described above. Again the lower parts of the door posts are cut away to enable a change of threshold blocks. However the thresholds in the Casa di Caecilius Iucundus differ in an important way from the ones already described: the position of the doors within the opening was changed. The original door-stopping rim was cut away, and a new one was positioned almost in line with the face of the atrium walls (*Fig. 5*).

By this change in position, the niches for the doors were nearly obliterated and the wall itself appeared (at least with the doors closed) as a flat surface. Whether this work was

⁴⁶ Sampaolo 1997, 360, following Pernice, 1938, 88–89, the floor in the atrium belonged to the phase of the Second Style.

⁴⁷ Casa di Pansa VI 6,1; Casa di Ercole, VI 7,6; VII 14, 9.

⁴⁸ Dexter 1975, 13, states that both the opening towards tricladium **u** (in her text tricladium 9) and the opening between the atrium and shop V 1,25, had been walled off and adorned with false doors to preserve the symmetry.

⁴⁹ Blake 1930, 64–65, states that the thresholds of the atrium are older than the floor of the Third Style, which could indicate a reworking of the thresholds *in situ*. But since no reasons for the chronology are given by her, its use as an indicator is unsure.

done with the blocks already lying in the door openings, as the much rougher surface of these re-cut parts of the thresholds would seem to indicate, or whether the blocks were reworked before being put in their present location is difficult to say.⁴⁹ That the impressive side of the door openings was the outside—that is, as seen from the atrium and not from the inner rooms—can clearly be seen from the uniformity of the layout of the thresholds and the openings. This impression is strengthened by the insertions of the faked doors on the atrium sides of the closed-off earlier doors. In cases where side rooms have several doors, no such attempt to achieve uniformity can be observed.⁵⁰

Since the excavation reports by A. Mau,⁵¹ it is known that the atrium and other parts of the house (including the famous *tablinum*) were redecorated in Third-Style decoration, both the walls and, probably, the floor.⁵²

Once more we have comparable situations in other Pompeian houses. In the Casa del Fauno, VI 12, 1–8, we have already noted the change of the thresholds in both atria. While the main atrium preserves the deep door niches, the thresholds in the secondary one are remodelled like in V 1, 26. Here again, this atrium (room 7) was in places reconstructed and redecorated in the Third Style,⁵³ while the main atrium conserves its late First-Style decoration. Also in the Casa della Parete Nera (VII 4, 59) the same alteration has been observed, this time in connection with a rebuilding phase around AD 35.⁵⁴ In the Casa di Championnet, VIII 2, 1, with the same kind of thresholds, no traces of wall decorations remain, but nearly all pavements in and around the atrium are considered Third-Style decoration.⁵⁵ Thus it is probable that this part of the house was totally redecorated at one and the same time.⁵⁶ The same can be said about the Casa di A. Umbricius Scaurus, VII 16, 12–15,⁵⁷ and the main atrium in the Casa del Centenario, IX 8, 3–7.⁵⁸

These examples show that the impression given by the door openings, defined by the form of the thresholds, changed, maybe in connection with the Third-Style redecoration of floors and walls. Since the Third Style differs from the late First, the Second and the Fourth style in its relation to the presentation of depth and space in the paintings,⁵⁹ it seems plausible that the architecture would have aimed at achieving the same effects.⁶⁰

Thus one might say, that the thresholds so far discussed are not only functional architectural elements but also reflect the different trends and tastes which govern the overall decoration. The use of white stone consciously chosen to contrast with dark floor surfaces in the first phase of the travertine thresholds reveals them as part of the pavement decorations. Maybe a change in conception occurs with the second phase of these thresholds. Here the shape of the threshold seems related to the shape of the wall paintings, which means, that that part of the inside architecture is dependent on mural decoration.

THE THRESHOLDS IN THE PERISTYLE AREAS

The Casa di Caecilius Iucundus with some contributions from the Casa di Torello

In contrast to the very homogeneous arrangement around the atria, the rear part of the houses had a wide variety of thresholds. For Insula V 1, the Casa di Caecilius Iucundus is the best example, since there are many thresholds in different materials and diverging forms preserved in the back area (*Fig. 6*).

The variations may be connected with the different floor decorations and maybe with the function of the different rooms, and probably also with the history of the building. The ongoing analyses of the structures and the wall plaster will probably reveal more information about the different decorative and building phases in the house.⁶¹ In some cases, the stone blocks did not function as real thresholds but more like markers for the borders between different rooms.

Both *tablinum i* and the large *exedra o* have a row of white marble plates as a border towards the peristyle. The choice of that material is probably due to the floors, which in both

⁵⁰ A further confirmation of the outside as the more important side of the doorways can be observed in the painted representations of doors. These are always depicted from the outside, in some cases this effect is heightened by the perspective depicting of one of the door wings opening up towards the back. See Tybout 1989, 260–263, on the painted doors of the Second Style.

⁵¹ Mau 1876, 163–166.

⁵² See Pernice 1938, 96, and de Vos 1991, 575–577, 580–584. The latest results of investigations in this house are found in Karivieri & Forsell 2008c with further literature.

⁵³ See *PPP* 2, 1983, 254; Dickman 1992, 54; Zevi 1996, 39.

⁵⁴ See Staub Gierow, 2000, 69.

⁵⁵ For the pavement of the atrium in this house, see Fant 2007, 339f.

⁵⁶ Sampaolo 1998a, 26–37.

⁵⁷ Bragantini 1997, 848.

⁵⁸ Sampaolo 1999, 903.

⁵⁹ See Thomas 1995, 73, about the change in the style between Second and Third Styles: “Er ist durch das Bestreben gekennzeichnet, die Architekturform und die architektonische Gliederung der Wand durch eine dekorative Form und eine abstrakte Gliederung zu ersetzen. Damit gehen eine Veränderung der plastischen zu linearen Formen sowie eine Reduktion der räumlichen Tiefe einher.”

⁶⁰ Cf. Clarke 1991, 63: “If Second-Style representations of spatial depth in both floor and walls made unusual demands on the viewer, requiring special viewing positions and acceptance of *trompe-l’oeil* perspectives, the Third-Style ensemble relaxed these demands by asserting the flatness of floors and walls”, and Clarke 2007, 329: “This reduction to utter flatness of the substantial architecture and daring, deep perspectives of the Second Style emphasizes the wall as a spatial limit rather than one that opens up through perspectival illusions.”

⁶¹ The study of the house is being undertaken by A. Karivieri and R. Forsell, the analysis of the wall plaster is being made by C. Pettersson. For the ongoing study of the house, see Karivieri & Forsell 2008b.

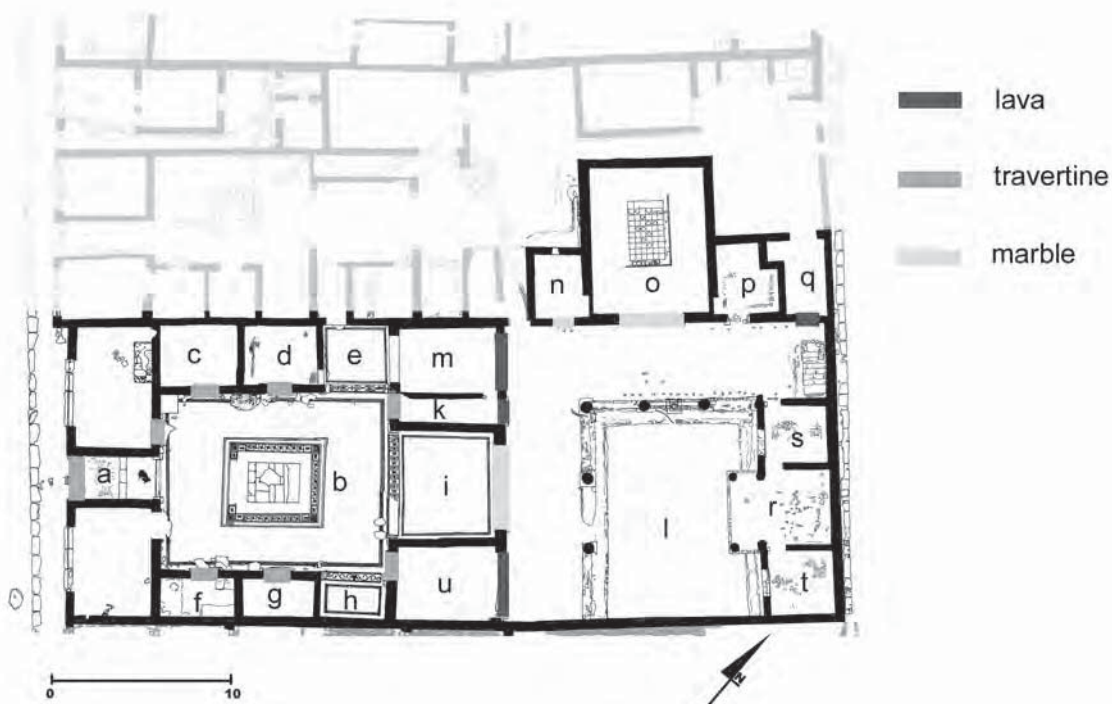


Fig. 6. V 1,26, plan of the house with markings for the different threshold materials. Drawing by E. Pinto Guillaume.

rooms mainly consist of white marble mosaics with black decoration. In the side plates shallow hollows are visible, slightly broader than the ones for the door posts in the thresholds around the atrium (the latter measure *c.* 8 × 8 cm, the former, *c.* 11 × 11 cm). Whether these holes served as pivot holes is uncertain, since there are no other arrangements for the doors. The width of the openings (the opening in *i* is 4.15 m wide, the one in *o* 3.40 m) indicates that the required doors would have had to be quite large and thus presumably too heavy to be hold up by the usual arrangement. Maybe a wooden frame was inserted, on which curtains could be attached, or maybe a portable wooden screen could be placed here, like the one found in the Casa del Tramezzo di Legno, III 11,12, in Herculaneum.

A similar situation is found in the opening between *tablinum* 13 and peristyle *b* in the Casa di Torello, V 1,7, (width 4.20 m). In this case, the position of a twin set of fountains in the viewing axis from the atrium towards the rear wall of the peristyle clearly shows that this opening was normally not blocked by a door.⁶² If there had been doors, and if they had been kept open, they would have opened outwards, from *tablinum* 13 towards the peristyle, since there is a difference of about 45 cm in floor level between the *tablinum* and peristyle *b*, surmounted by two steps in 13. Since they would have impeded the passage in the southern portico, it is possible that the holes in the side plates of this threshold did not serve for

the hanging of doors but for a purpose similar to that proposed above (Fig. 7).⁶³

The thresholds in the two rooms next to *tablinum* *i* in V 1,26, room *u* to the south and room *m* to the north, show quite an unexpected feature: they are both made of lava. The threshold in the opening *u–i* consists of two blocks. The southern block is probably a late repair, since it is in a much better state of preservation than the northern one. Especially in this opening the use of a lava threshold is quite unexpected, since such thresholds in such a prominent position in the peristyle usually belong to the oldest building phase of the Pompeian houses.⁶⁴ This room is supposed to have had an original orientation towards the atrium and not the peristyle through the door that was later to become a blind door in the eastern wall of atrium *b*.⁶⁵ This would contradict an early orientation of this room towards the peristyle, as it seems indicated by these thresholds. The difference of the floor levels in the atrium and the peristyle would make openings towards both of these rooms at the same time improbable. So, in this case the time and reason for the choice of the material is still unclear (Fig. 8).

⁶² For the fountains, see Andersson 1990 and Staub 2008.

⁶³ For a different opinion, see Dickmann 1999, 153.

⁶⁴ See Strocka 1991, 67, n. 67.

⁶⁵ For the discussion of these changes in Pompeii, see Dickmann 1999, 144–151.



Fig. 7. Herculaneum, Casa del Tramezzo di Legno.



Fig. 8. V 1,26, threshold l–u.

Another unusual feature of these two thresholds is the closing arrangements for the two folding doors in each opening (there are four boltholes cut into each threshold). Obviously both doors opened into the peristyle and not, as would be expected, into the rooms, as can be seen by the door rims. The boltholes show that they were locked from the peristyle side. Although rare, the same arrangements have been observed in *triclinium* **8** in the Casa degli Amanti, I 10,11,⁶⁶ and in *oecus* **m** in the Casa della Parete Nera, VII 4,58–60;⁶⁷ both rooms have a similar position next to the *tablinum*. The size and the location of these rooms state their importance so that the probability of their having been used as storage rooms, the only rooms where an outside locking of the room would seem plausible, is quite low. The reason for that construction feature still seems unclear. At least in room **m** in the Casa di Caecilius Iucundus this closing arrangement probably belongs to an early phase in the building history of the house. An open door at the northern side of the opening would probably have disturbed the

passageway to the annex house V 1,23, which was in all probability created in the northern wall of the peristyle when this house was acquired during the Third-Style period. Perhaps the original closing arrangement for this room passed out of use and in consequence changed in some way.

In the opening between peristyle **l** and corridor **k** three lava stones constituted the border, one on each side and one a bit separated in the middle. In the space between the stones the floor surface of the peristyle or the corridor probably continued. In the pivot holes on the side plates, metal remains from pivot sockets were observed. Since there are no bolt holes, the door with two leaves might have been closed by some kind of a door cross-bar or a lock.

The door between **l** and the small room **n** seems to have

⁶⁶ On the thresholds of this house, see R. Ling 1997, 301, and L. Ling 1997, 337–341.

⁶⁷ See Staub Gierow 2000, 39, 67.

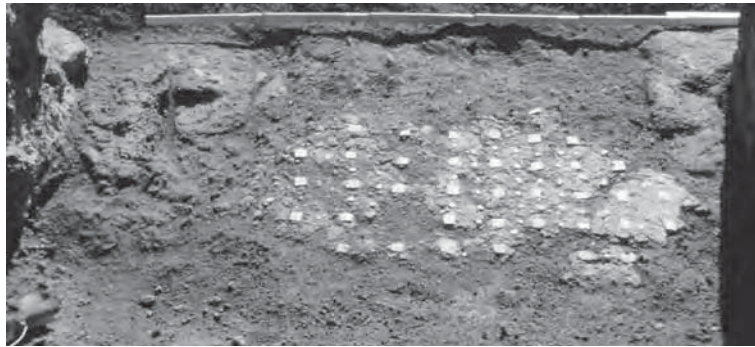


Fig. 9. V 1,26, threshold l-p.

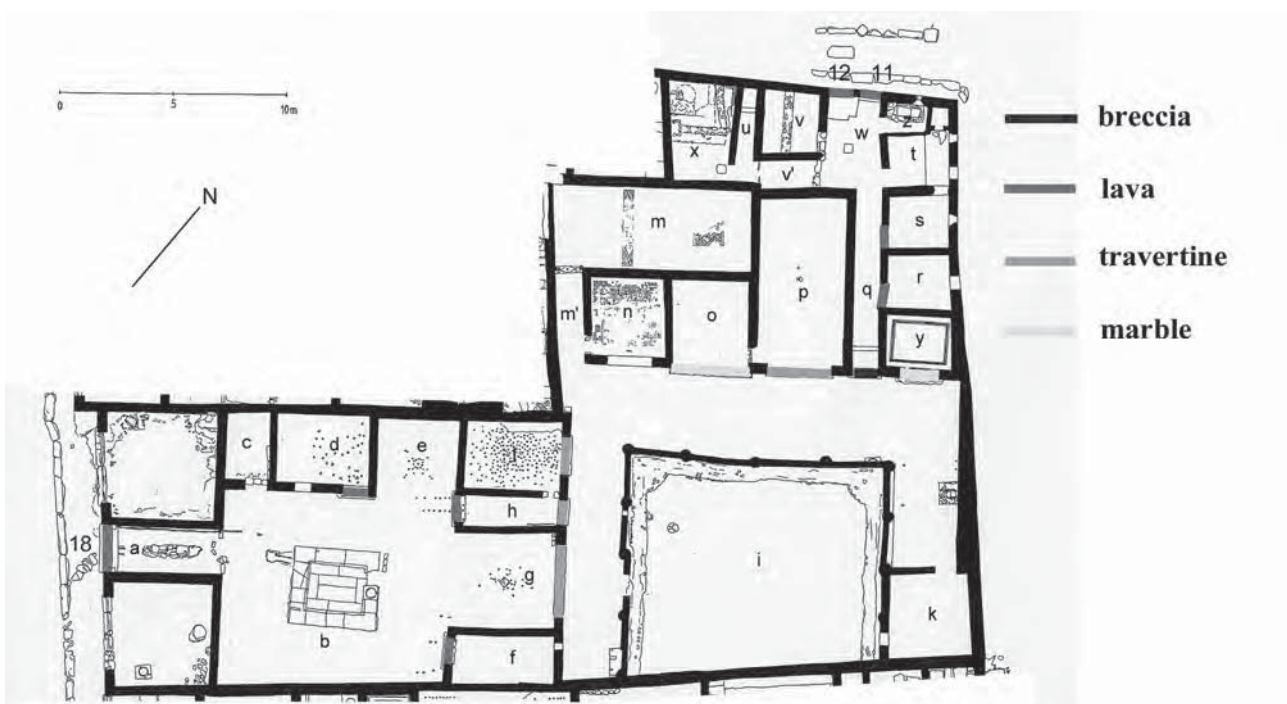


Fig. 10. V 1,18, plan of the house with markings for the different threshold materials. Drawing by E. Pinto Guillaume.

had two leaves as well, even though the threshold, which consists of three marble plates, is only 0.90 m wide. This is indicated by the two pivot holes on the side plates; again, there are no holes for bolts. Iron remains observed in the northern hole indicate that the pivot settings were not made of bronze, as is generally suggested for marble thresholds.⁶⁸

The opening between **p** and **l** shows a “threshold strip” of *cocciopesto* with an inserted geometric pattern, set with larger (c. 0.03m²) and smaller black and white *tesserae*, a pattern which, because of the larger marble pieces, would belong to the Fourth Style of decorations, thus corresponding with the wall paintings in room **q** (Fig. 9).

Also openings **s-l** and **r-t** show a floor surface in *cocciopesto* carried through from one room to the next and side

plates for the pivot holes. In both cases the rectangular cutting for the pivot sockets is still visible, even if most of that part of the plate is missing in the door between **r** and **t**.

The threshold between **l** and **q** is made of a lava block with a higher rim towards the peristyle and the southern doorpost, indicating that this door must have opened into the room. This threshold is very battered, so nothing can be told about the locking system. As it is a bit less wide than the doorway and since the door frames do not rest on it, it seems plausible that this block is reused from another door or that the wall was reconstructed. The choice of the material could in this case

⁶⁸ For this suggestion, see L. Ling 1997, 338.

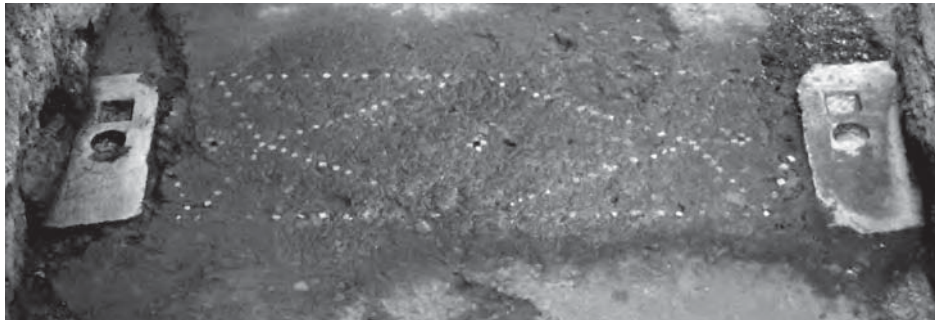


Fig. 11. V 1,18, threshold $m'-m$.



Fig. 12. V 1,18, threshold $i-q$, to the left a detail showing the stone material.

be explained by the simpler function of the room as a side room towards the domestic work area in the rear part of the annex V 1,23.

The Casa degli Epigrammi Greci (Fig. 10)

Looking at the peristyle area in the Casa degli Epigrammi Greci, the same kind of variety in the thresholds can be observed. In openings $i-g$, $i-h$, $i-l$ and $i-p$ the thresholds are made of travertine. Openings $i-h$ and $i-l$ had double-leafed doors, whereas the form of the closing towards *tablinum* g and *triclinium* p is unclear. The threshold towards m ($m'-m$) consists of marble side plates with the *cocciopesto* floor going through. In the floor surface a geometrical design was formed by black and white *tesserae*, similar to the ones in the floor of room m (Fig. 11).⁶⁹

The opening between i and o was marked by a low step made of white marble, the main colour of the mosaic floor in that room.⁷⁰ Also the mosaic strip with black and white ornamentation between the side plates in the opening between i and the eponymous room y ,⁷¹ is defined by the white mosaic floor with black borders in that room. The threshold in the opening $i-q$ shows a rare material, some kind of *breccia*

stone, probably from a local quarry.⁷² Since q is the corridor leading to the kitchen and domestic work quarters, in this case the choice of a nobler and more decorative material should be due to the importance of the peristyle and maybe the neighbouring elegant room y (Fig. 12).

On the whole it is evident, that there is a marked difference between the systematization of the thresholds around the atria and the ones around the peristyle. In the atria it was obviously important to create a homogeneous impression. The same observation can be made in many other houses in Pompeii. Even in the houses where the lava thresholds are preserved around the atrium, a homogeneous impression was sought after. In some houses, broken or damaged lava thresholds were repaired by fitting new pieces of stone, instead of being replaced by a new threshold, which probably would have been easier. In the Casa del Torello and in the Casa di Caecilius

⁶⁹ For these ornaments, see Staub Gierow 2005, 146f.

⁷⁰ The exact form of this threshold could not be studied, since it is covered by a modern protecting floor.

⁷¹ See Strocka 1995, 272f, for this mosaic strip and the door opening.

⁷² So far only one other example of a threshold in this material is known to me, the one in the entrance of VIII 2,22 (after a reference by E. Pinto Guillaume).

Iucundus the homogeneity was enforced by the creation of the blind doors. It was evidently important to emphasise the symmetrical aspect of the atrium.

In the area around the peristyle the design of each threshold was defined by the room it belonged to, and not by a unifying entity as was the case for the ones around the atrium. This would signify that the principles of uniformity and harmony seen in the atria were not evident and did not apply to the peristyles. In the rear area the functions and level of prestige of the different rooms might also have dictated the material chosen for the thresholds: the simpler lava threshold in the entrance towards the kitchen area (l–q) and the expensive marble plates towards the *tablinum* (i) and the large exedra (o) in V 1,26, and ranking in between in importance, the smaller rooms with their floor surface carried through the door openings.

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