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Crowded or Empty Spaces? The Statuary Decoration of the ‘Palaestrae’ in Pompeii and Herculaneum

Summary

While the sculptural decoration of palaestrae and gymnasia in the eastern Mediterranean has received significant research attention, the topic has not been studied comprehensively for equivalent structures in the west. This paper investigates the sculptural decoration of the Samnite Palaestra and the Large Palaestra in Pompeii as well as the Palaestra at Herculaneum. It assesses the existence and character of sculptural programs and the much-debated question of whether the sculptures were appropriate for an athletic setting or are even adequate to confirm the contested identification as palaestrae of these buildings. The sculptural decoration of all three buildings is shown to have differed significantly from that of their eastern counterparts. This suggests that the appellation of these ‘palaestrae’ may merit a reconsideration.

Keywords: Pompeii; Herculaneum; Samnite Palaestra; Great Palaestra; Large Palaestra; sculptural decoration

Während die Skulpturenausstattung von Palästran und Gymnasien im östlichen Mittelmeer in der Forschung viel Aufmerksamkeit erfahren hat, ist das Thema für die westlichen Pendants bislang nicht umfassend untersucht worden. Dieser Beitrag analysiert die Skulpturenausstattung der Samnitischen Palästra und der Großen Palästra in Pompeji sowie der Palästra in Herculaneum. Existenz und Charakter der Skulpturenprogramme werden untersucht ebenso wie die umstrittene Frage, ob die Skulpturen angemessen für die Sportbauten waren und sogar die problematische Identifizierung dieser Bauten als Palästran bestätigen können. Es zeigt sich, dass die Skulpturenausstattung aller drei Bauten erheblich von der in östlichen Pendants differiert. Dies legt nahe, die Benennung dieser ‚Palästran‘ zu überdenken.

Keywords: Pompeji; Herculaneum; Samnitische Palästra; Große Palästra; Skulpturenausstattung

The inhabitants (of Alabanda, note of authors) were shrewd enough in politics, but they had the reputation of being stupid because of one not very great fault, inconsistency. In the gymnasium, the statues were all of politicians; in the public assembly, they were of quoit-throwers or runners or javelin-throwers. Thus the unsuitable disposition of the statues added a blemish to the city in public estimation.¹

This section of Vitruvius is frequently used by archaeologists as evidence of what was perceived as appropriate decoration for specific functional spaces in antiquity. Cicero also referred to such concepts of decoration when he commissioned a group of statues for the garden gymnasium at his villa in Tusculum.² Both quotations have often been interpreted as sufficient to reconstruct the appropriate decoration for gymnasia or, conversely, to identify a building based on its sculptural decoration.

Whereas the sculptural decoration in palaestrae and gymnasia in the eastern Mediterranean has received increased attention in recent decades,³ comparable studies for the western Mediterranean are lacking. The aim of this article is to focus for the first time on the sculptural decoration in western palaestrae and gymnasia. The situation in the west is a great deal more difficult than that of the east, because the identification of these buildings is considerably more problematic and often controversial. There are three different names in the literature for the buildings used for athletic-military training and intellectual instruction: palaestra, gymnasium, and campus. But the same building is often referred to with two different terms. Furthermore, so far only the campus type has received comprehensive study.⁴ This paper will discuss three examples of buildings that are referred to in the literature as palaestrae: the Samnite Palaestra built in Pompeii in the second century BCE, the Large Palaestra (Palestra Grande) built in Pompeii in the Augustan era, and the Palaestra at Herculaneum erected in

the late Augustan-Tiberian period.⁵ Three questions will be examined: 1. whether there was any statuary decoration at all, and how it should be characterized; 2. what role the sculptural decoration played in the identification of the buildings, i.e., whether, following Vitruvius and Cicero, a seemingly appropriate sculptural decoration is sufficient evidence for identifying a building as an athletic facility; and 3. the significance of sculptural decoration in the determination of the possible function of the buildings: whether it is possible to convincingly prove that the sculptures were suitable for certain functions. The concluding comparison of the three facilities is intended to show whether standards or striking differences in their sculptural decoration can be demonstrated and how these can be explained.

From a methodological point of view, the sculptures would need to be analyzed in context with other elements of interior decoration (wall painting, stucco, floors, furniture), but space does not allow for such analysis here. Instead, the focus will be limited to the decoration in general, in order to at least roughly situate the sculptures within that decorative ensemble. The following considerations are based solely on a critical reading of published literature.

1 The Samnite Palaestra in Pompeii

The Samnite Palaestra is located in Regio VIII of Pompeii, between the Temple of Isis, the theater, and the Foro Triangolare (Pl. 1).⁶ Originally constructed in the second century BCE, the building's current condition goes back to the imperial period (Pl. 2). The structure consists of a rectangular courtyard measuring 8 × 19 m, bounded on three sides by a portico with 5 × 8 Doric columns made of tufa; in the west, several rooms open onto the peristyle courtyard. The palaestra was accessible through a main entrance from the Via del Tempio di Iside to the north, and a narrower access with three steps

1 Vitr. 7.5.6: Alabandis satis acutos ad omnes res civiles haberi, sed propter non magnum vitium indecentiae insipientes eos esse iudicatos, quod in gymnasio eorum quae sunt statuæ omnes sunt causas agentes, foro discos tenentes aut currentes seu pila ludentes. Ita indecens inter locorum proprietates status signorum publice civitati vitium existimationis adiecit. Translation Granger 1985, 107.

2 Cic. *Att.* 1.6–8. Cf. Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 170–179.

3 Von den Hoff 2004; von den Hoff 2011; Mathys 2014; Kazakidi 2015; von den Hoff 2015a; von den Hoff 2015b; R. von den Hoff in this volume.

4 Borlenghi 2011.

5 Nowadays each of these designations is often put in quotes or preceded by “so-called”; such cumbersome solutions will be avoided here. The doubts about how to identify these structures are justified, however, and other appellations may be more suitable. Readers should bear these considerations in mind.

6 Cf., e.g., Coarelli 1990, 207; Pesando and Guidobaldi 2006, 60–62, and especially the recent Avagliano 2013, for more comprehensive discussion and older literature.

down from the Foro Triangolare to the west. Studies and excavations of the structure have recently confirmed that the Samnite Palaestra was renovated several times and reduced in size, especially in the east, in favor of the Temple of Isis. The time at which this massive intervention occurred is still under debate.⁷

The following arguments have been invoked to support the identification of the building as a palaestra:

1. The floor plan, with its peristyle courtyard and adjoining rooms, is reminiscent of Greek palaestrae.⁸

2. An Oscan inscription was found inside the structure, documenting the donation of a building for the Pompeian *vereiia*, a pre-Roman equivalent to the *iuentus*. This inscription is usually applied to the building, even if its exact find location, dating, and significance for the structure are disputed.⁹

3. A marble statue was found in the courtyard next to a statue base; it was identified as a copy of the Polyclitic Doryphoros and apparently was part of the decoration of the building in 79 AD.¹⁰ There was also an altar located in front of the base, and a staircase behind the base, with its last step higher than the base (Fig. 1).¹¹

This ensemble was interpreted as proof and provision for the cultic worship of the statue, which would have been crowned from the staircase and given sacrifices at the altar. Given this context, the Doryphoros was interpreted as the ideal image of an athlete.

4. In addition, the Samnite Palaestra was interpreted as part of a gymnasium or campus complex that would have been built in the second century BCE (Pl. 1). This complex is usually thought to have included the Foro Triangolare, the Terme Repubblicane, the Quadriporticus of the theater and a *domus publica*.¹²

The key question is what role to assign the statuary decoration in the discussion of the function of the structure, alongside the arguments from architecture and urban planning, as well as whether and especially when the statues were important during the approximately two-

hundred-year history of the building's use.

Of particular importance for this question is the statue of Doryphoros, which has often been cited as decisive proof of the building's designation and has as a result been ascribed to the initial decoration. But there are several problems:

– The stylistic dating of the statue made of Lunensian marble is disputed. The dating to the Augustan-Tiberian period is the most convincing, for material and stylistic reasons.¹³

– The statue's inclusion into the ensemble consisting of the base, staircase, and altar has also been frequently challenged. This is due to the discrepancy in shape and size between the cavity on top of the base, which measures 57 × 53 cm, and the plinth of the statue, which measures 55 × 66 cm.¹⁴ H. Weinstock's proposal to explain this difference by restoring the rear part of the base has received a mixed response in the literature and is not unanimously accepted.¹⁵

– Furthermore, the staircase of the ensemble is on top of the drain channel that conducted rainwater from the shed roof of the southern portico. Even if the water could flow under the stairs, this ensemble will hardly have been part of the initial decoration of the palaestra. It is certain, however, that the ensemble was set up before the palaestra was reduced in size: it was prominently built in the axis of the entrance from the Via del Tempio di Iside, which opened onto the exact center of the original peristyle courtyard. In addition, the ensemble of the base, staircase, and altar is predominantly and convincingly dated to pre-Augustan times because of the tufa used and the profiles.

7 On the research discussion, cf. M. Trümper in this volume, note 83.

8 Avagliano 2013 for older literature.

9 Vetter 1953, 49–50, no. 11. On *iuentus* i. a. see Della Corte 1924, 46–60; on *vereiia* i. a. Avagliano 2007, 155–170; Avagliano 2013.

10 Naples, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 6011. Found on 13 April, 3 and 17 August 1797. H. 2 m.

11 H. of base: 1.42 m; h. of steps: 1.87 m; h. of altar: 1.10 m. Cf. Weinstock 1997.

12 For detail and criticism see M. Trümper in this volume.

13 E.g., in Zanker 1974, 8; Zanker 1979, 298–299; and recently again in Avagliano 2013, 70–72 with older literature. Since the extensive refurbish-

ments in the area of the Foro Triangolare and in the Samnite Palaestra are usually dated to the Augustan era, the Doryphoros is most likely to have been erected in this context, i.e., in the Augustan era; it will therefore be assumed to date to this period in what follows.

14 The first to doubt they went together was Mau 1900, 184; cf. also Della Corte 1924, 48; Hartswick 1995; La Rocca, M. De Vos, and A. De Vos 1994, 166.

15 Proposal in Weinstock 1997, esp. fig. 73. 2; accepted by, e.g., Coarelli 2001, 103; Pesando 2000, 155–157; Pesando and Guidobaldi 2006, 61; Borlenghi 2011, 218; dismissed with detailed reasoning by Avagliano 2007, 137–144.



Fig. 1 Pompeii, Samnite Palaestra, ensemble with statue base, altar, and stairs, from the west.

Several options are conceivable in view of these complex findings:

1. The tufa base was already inside the palaestra in the pre-Augustan era and originally supported another statue, one that cannot be identified and in any case was no longer inside the building by 79 CE. This statue was replaced in the Augustan era by the Doryphoros figure.

2. The base was not from the palaestra originally, but was brought there to be reused for the installation of the Doryphoros.

3. The Doryphoros was never installed on this base. A different marble statue stood on the base, one that by 79 CE was no longer in the building.

Serious objections can be raised to all these options: The first and second options do not explain the discrepancy between the base and statue plinth. Another argument against the second solution is that in the early imperial era, one would hardly have installed a high-quality

marble statue on a secondhand tufa base. The third option seems plausible at first, especially since the statue shows no signs of weathering, which one would expect if the statue had been exposed to the elements for seventy to a hundred years. The state of preservation of the statue thus suggests that it was installed in the shelter of one of the porticoes or in one of the western rooms.¹⁶ But it remains unclear why of all the statues, the one that was to be reconstructed on the tufa base and clearly had the most prominent position and significance in the building was the statue that by 79 CE was no longer in the palaestra. It may have been a presumably monumental, over-life-size marble statue depicting a hero, god, or emperor entitled to cultic honors. A monumental marble statue would have been possible in pre-Augustan Pompeii, if rather rare, and correspondingly valuable.

¹⁶ Avagliano 2007, 144, asserts that there are two holes on the back of the statue to attach it to a wall.

For the Doryphoros, then, it must be clarified where and how it was installed from the Augustan period until 79 CE. Even though the statue stands securely on the plinth and the plinth is smoothly worked, at least at the front, it is hardly likely that the statue was installed directly on the ground, especially since neither the porticoes nor the rooms in the west have permanent floors. But a suitable base – preferably reconstructed as an inscribed base made of or revetted with marble – has not been found. These conspicuously missing finds, which make option three problematic, have not been systematically addressed in the literature. Similarly problematic lacunas concern other parts of the building, so the problem will be summarized further below for all findings.

Finally, for the Doryphoros, it should be pointed out that this statue once again gained crucial significance for the identification of the building as a palaestra after another Doryphoros replica was found in the gymnasium at Messene. This replica was identified as a representation of Theseus based on the description by Pausanias.¹⁷ Others have interpreted the Doryphoros as Achilles,¹⁸ or as a generic statue of an ideal athlete. A recent proposal suggested putting a sword and shield in his hands.¹⁹ Even though no other Doryphoros statues have been found in palaestrae or gymnasia to date,²⁰ the two replicas in Pompeii and Messene are considered to be typical and appropriate decoration for such facilities.²¹ All the same, the findings in Pompeii show that the Doryphoros cannot be claimed to determine the function of the original building. Its “late” installation, however, could reveal much about the seldom discussed function of the building in the post-Samnite period, i.e., in Roman Pompeii.

The excavation reports suggest that another base with a statue was installed in the Samnite Palaestra dur-

ing the Augustan period. Only the inscribed marble revetment slab of a base was found, honoring Marcus Lucretius Decidianus Rufus. But today it no longer stands in the place where it was found.²² The offices and honors listed on this and other bases discovered in Pompeii attest that Marcus Lucretius Decidianus Rufus was one of the most important local elites in the Augustan period.²³ The inscription explicitly states that the statue was reinstalled (*reposit*), which F. Pesando has tied to repairs done after the earthquake of 62 CE: Marcus Decidius Pilonius Rufus may have restored the palaestra and the statue of Marcus Lucretius Decidianus Rufus after the earthquake, while Marcus Lucretius Decidianus Rufus could have financed the reconstruction of the palaestra in the Augustan period. This would testify to the palaestra’s uninterrupted significance for the Pompeian elite until 79 CE, which would also be reflected in the carefully maintained sculptural decoration.²⁴ Since the top of the base is not preserved, the decision cannot be made as to whether the statue of Decidianus Rufus was made out of marble or of bronze, as was much more customary for honorific statues in Pompeii. The exact location where the statue was erected cannot be reconstructed either, since conclusive remains, such as a masonry foundation or core, have not been preserved or documented.²⁵ The limited space in the Samnite Palaestra offers few possibilities. A marble statue would have been better off reconstructed in one of the porticoes or the rooms; a bronze statue could have stood in the open courtyard without a problem.²⁶

In summary, at least two, if not three statues can be reconstructed for the Samnite Palaestra,²⁷ each of which comes with its own significant problems: 1. a marble statue connected with the tufa ensemble of a base, altar, and set of stairs that was presumably installed in the Sam-

17 Paus. IV,32,1; Themelis 1998–1999.

18 Hauser 1909. On the discussion see Lorenz 1991; Schwarzer 1995; Franciosi 2013; Avagliano 2007.

19 Franciosi 2013, esp. 24 fig. 27b.

20 Kreikenbom 1990, 59–94, 163–180.

21 Cf., e.g., Yegül 1993, 382: “A slightly over-life-size marble copy of Doryphoros by Polyclitus found inside the palaestra (it might or might not have been set on the base) underlines the agonistic character of the building.”

22 Pesando 2000, 163–175. CIL X, 851: M[arcus] Lucretius Decid[ianus] / Rufus [duo]vor [tertium] quinq[ennalis] / pontif[ex] trib[unus] mil[itum] / a populo praef[ectus] fab[rum] / M[arcus] Decidius Pilonius / Rufus reposit.

23 Pesando 2000, 163–171; biography in Franklin 2001, 29–33.

24 Pesando 2000, 171–174.

25 Pesando 2000, 170, explicitly mentions that the inscribed marble panel belonged to a “base di statua in cementizio” whose exact find location in the palaestra is not mentioned in the excavation diary of F. La Vega.

26 The tufa ensemble preserved in situ, however, shows that marble statues were also installed in the open air.

27 Pesando 2000, 168, suspects that two herms, donated by Decidianus Rufus in the Augustan era, were additionally installed in the palaestra. They were supposed to have been reused in neighboring Iseion after 62 CE as framing for a niche. It would be striking in this case, however, had the sculptures associated with Decidianus suffered a different fate after 62 CE: whereas his honorific statue was specifically repaired and reinstalled in the Samnite Palaestra after 62 CE, his sanctified herms were removed from the palaestra.

nite period, but as an addition to the original building; 2. the statue of Doryphoros, probably dedicated in Augustan times, which was positioned in an unknown location or perhaps on the already existing tufa base; 3. the statue honoring Decidianus Rufus, which was consecrated by unknown benefactors in a similarly unknown location, perhaps in the Augustan period, and reinstalled by Marcus Decidius Pilonius Rufus after 62 CE. Because components of all three statue installations were found, and the statue of Decidianus Rufus should still have been standing after 62 CE, all three were probably intended to be seen simultaneously; this would mean that the Samnite Palaestra, which was relatively small from the start and was subsequently made even smaller, had a comparatively rich sculptural decoration, beginning in the Augustan period.

On the other hand, the state of preservation at the time of the excavation must be discussed much more critically than has occurred in the literature: Why has the marble statue from the tufa ensemble not been found, or the marble or bronze statue of Decidianus Rufus, or the masonry core of its statue base and the (masonry and marble-clad or even solid marble) base of the Doryphoros? The missing marble or bronze elements could be explained by looting right after the eruption of Vesuvius, even if there is no concrete evidence of this practice in the case of the Samnite Palaestra. In any case, the marble Doryphoros statue and the marble inscription for Decidianus Rufus would have evaded the grasp of the treasure hunters. Looting is not a conclusive explanation for the fact that no masonry core for a statue base has been found, however, since such masonry base cores have survived at the Forum, the site of intensive post-79 pillaging.²⁸

This begs the question of whether the Samnite Palaestra was even fully decorated, fit for use, or being used in 79 CE, and whether all the sculpture components found here really belonged to the building; perhaps they were only stored there, for reasons unknown. This primarily concerns the strangely isolated marble inscription to Decidianus Rufus, but would also theoreti-

cally apply to the Doryphoros statue. The statue-less tufa ensemble would suggest that the building had lost its original significance (and function?) around 79 CE.

Given this background, the statuary decoration of the Samnite Palaestra is to be evaluated with great caution and cannot be claimed to identify the function of this building with any certainty. The prominently placed, carefully planned, and – until 79 CE – well-preserved tufa ensemble proves only that a statue was erected here and was the object of cult worship, at least for a time. This statue could have been the only “decorative” element in the palaestra, which provides no evidence of any permanent floors and wall paintings, and only little other furniture.²⁹

2 The Large Palaestra in Pompeii

The Large Palaestra is located directly alongside Pompeii’s amphitheater (Pl. 3).³⁰ The 141.75 × 107.4 m complex, presumably built in the Augustan period, consists of a peristyle courtyard with a surface area of 127 × 100 m, framed on three sides by a raised portico of brick columns with composite capitals of tufa.³¹ In the center of the open space is a rectangular swimming pool (34.55 × 22.25 m) with a depth of 1 to 2.60 m. Trees were planted in double rows in front of the porticoes. The entire complex was surrounded by a crenellated wall. While the accessibility of the complex has not been fully clarified, at least three openings identified as main entrances led to the amphitheater and there were smaller entrances on the north and west sides.³² The vast peristyle courtyard was only partially framed by rooms, on two sides: a latrine to the south that was added later, and a centrally placed exedra to the west with a secondary room. This exedra includes a base in situ, placed at the center, which should be interpreted as the base of a statue because of its dimensions and location (Fig. 2). Only the masonry core of the base and the molded marble revetment at the foot of the base have

28 Cf. Kockel 2005; Flecker and Kockel 2008; Müller and Kockel 2011.

29 Avagliano 2013, 72 note 25 mentions a labrum that was found near the main entrance.

30 Maiuri 1939, 165–238; Delorme 1960, 436–439; Zanker 1995, 123–125; La Rocca, M. De Vos, and A. De Vos 1994, 266–268; Pesando and Guidobaldi 2006, 74–76; Borlenghi 2011, 45–47, 220–226. Maiuri 1939, 165–238, provides a detailed excavation report, but the building has not

yet been extensively studied or published.

31 The Augustan dating is based on the dating of walls (material and technology) and tree roots; Jashemski 1979, 160–161; Pesando and Guidobaldi 2006, 75; Borlenghi 2011, 224.

32 The number of access points varies according to the plans published; cf. Trümper 2008, 83 note 369; Borlenghi 2011, 220, describes ten entrances for the last use phase after 62 CE.



Fig. 2 Pompeii, Large Palaestra, base in the exedra, from the east.

survived.³³ Since the marble revetment of the base's corpus (which may have held an inscription) and the cover plate are missing, the number and nature of the statues that may have been installed here can no longer be determined. A colossal statue or a group of three statues could easily have been erected on the base, however.³⁴

The floor plan, with its large peristyle courtyard and swimming pool, is usually cited as a criterion for identifying the building as a facility for athletic activities, as are some of the abundantly preserved graffiti.³⁵ Although "Large Palaestra" (Palestra grande) has become established as its name, the building has been identified as a campus for training the Augustan *iuventus*, a "luogo destinato alla formazione fisica e intellettuale del cittadino-soldato."³⁶ But its intra-urban location and abundant and varied graffiti have given A. Borlenghi reason to assume that the complex was conceived from the beginning as a multifunctional structure, intended not only for *iuvenes* training and recreation, but as a public place for the entire population, "d'incontro deputato al divertimento e allo svago."³⁷

Against this background, the interesting and as-yet-undiscussed question arises once again of whether the hybrid concept – campus and luxurious portico-complex at the same time – is manifested in the statuary decoration, or whether the statuary decoration can confirm such a concept and perception of the building. Whereas the sculptural decoration of campi apparently remained largely limited to cult statues in exedrae or apses,³⁸ the portico-complexes (especially in Rome) were characterized by lavish decoration including sculptures, paintings, and other objects.³⁹

Only one finding indicates that statues were installed in the Large Palaestra: the aforementioned exedra, with the large base at its rear. Even with the evidence that elements of the building's decoration were renewed before 62 CE, and that repairs and additions took place after 62 CE, the exedra can be unequivocally identified as part of the original layout.⁴⁰ The intercolumnium in front of the exedra in the western portico was widened as well as decorated with pilasters and half-columns, its own staircase to the courtyard, and possibly even a gable,

33 Maiuri 1939, 174 does not specify dimensions for the surviving base, nor are these found in any later publication; according to the plan in Maiuri 1939, pl. IX, the base is 3.15 m wide and 1.30 m deep at the molded foot.

34 Cf. the dimensions of statue bases that are sure to have supported colossal statues, in Ruck 2007, 27–50 table 6–7.

35 Maiuri 1939; Zanker 1995, 123–124; Borlenghi 2011, 45–47, 220–226.

36 Pesando and Guidobaldi 2006, 75 (cit.); see esp. Borlenghi 2011, 45–47, 220–226.

37 Borlenghi 2011, 226; on the graffiti see also Langner 2001, 23, 117–118. The graffiti attest to amphitheater visitors, soldiers, slaves, teachers, doctors, hairdressers, and passersby.

38 Borlenghi 2011, passim, mentions only a few statues for the campi in the western Mediterranean; his synthesis devotes an individual chapter only to cultic sites and consecrations, Borlenghi 2011, 170–173.

39 These include the Portico of Pompey, the Porticus Liviae, the Porticus Metelli/Octaviae, and the Templum Pacis in Rome; Maucaulay-Lewis 2011; cf. also the Agora of the Italians in Delos; Trümper 2008. The Eumachia Building in Pompeii, in which few statues were set up, and the Basilica or Augusteum in Herculaneum, in which lavish sculptural decoration was found, are often compared to the rich portico-complexes in Rome; Allroggen-Bedel 2008; Trümper 2009, 49–55.

40 Borlenghi 2011, 224.

obviously to emphasize the exedra in the back.⁴¹ Borlenghi reconstructs a cult statue on the statue base and interprets the exedra as a cultic center of the complex and of the *iuvenes*, who would have worshipped Flora or another deity here.⁴² Others, by contrast, have reconstructed the statue of an emperor on the base, such as Augustus, who particularly favored the *iuvenes*.⁴³

The lack of other statues is conspicuous and requires an explanation. It is known that the complex was damaged in the earthquake of 62 CE and that renovations were still underway in 79 CE.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the discovery of the statue base suggests that this building was at least partially robbed of some of its precious materials (marble, metal) after the eruption of the volcano.⁴⁵ But neither of these phenomena can fully or satisfactorily explain the lack of decorative sculpture. If honorific statues⁴⁶ or statues of athletes, heroes, or gods had been set up here, some remains from the bases would at least have been found in or in front of the porticoes, in the intercolumniations, or out in the courtyard. As has already been explained above and has also been confirmed by the example in the exedra of the Large Palaestra, bases with masonry cores would not all have been destroyed in the earthquake and then systematically removed, nor would they have been overlooked in excavations or consistently destroyed. As a result, the lack of statuary decoration may illuminate how the complex was conceived, suggesting that it was primarily intended as a pragmatic-functional structure for athletic training. In the local context, the complex apparently had neither the function and prestige of public squares and structures such as the forum and theater (*loci celeberrimi*), where honorific statues were concentrated, nor the function and ambience of richly decorated public and private complexes

with porticoes and peristyles (*loci amoeni*), which were populated with “decorative” statues or even works of art.

The other decorations in the Large Palaestra confirm this as well: the porticoes and scarce rooms have only dirt floors; moreover, the porticoes were decorated with simple Third Style paintings, which date to the eras of Caligula or Claudius, and thus were not part of the original building. Repairs began after 62 CE, when ruined columns were mended and revetted with stucco. Some elements were highlighted architecturally, such as the entrance portals, the exedrae, and the crenelated perimeter wall. Thus, there was investment in decoration but the expense was largely limited to a pragmatic minimum. This demonstrates once again that while the structure was impressively monumental, it was conceived as a simply decorated functional building, rather than a luxurious portico-complex. This austere conceptualization does not seem to have changed during the building’s seventy to ninety years of use.

3 The Palaestra at Herculaneum

This palaestra is located east of *Cardo V*, at *Insula Occidentalis II*.⁴⁷ Although the eastern part of the complex has never been completely revealed, the various tunnel excavations have allowed the basic features of its layout to be reconstructed. The complex occupied an entire insula and extended over several terraces, following the south-to-north gradient of the topography. At the center of the palaestra is a peristyle courtyard measuring 118 x 80 m (9500 m²), framed on three sides by Corinthian columned halls and by a cryptoportico to the north (Pl. 4). The open courtyard held two large

41 Borlenghi 2011, 220.

42 Borlenghi 2011, 224.

43 Zanker 1995, 124; Pesando and Guidobaldi 2006, 76.

44 Borlenghi 2011, 224.

45 Maiuri 1939, 174 interpreted this finding as evidence that the exedra had not yet been completely restored after 62 CE with its stucco decoration and base. This is unlikely, at least with regard to the base, because the foot of the base would hardly have been installed prior to the stucco decoration, while the rest of the base’s marble revetment would have been added only later. It is likewise highly improbable that only the foot of the base had been installed when Vesuvius erupted.

46 Pesando 2000, 166–167 and Pesando and Guidobaldi 2006, 76, propose that the fragment of the inscription CIL X, 952, which documents the dedication of a public building by the duovir Marcus Lucretius Decidianus Rufus, could have referred to the Large Palaestra; Borlenghi 2011, 222, mentions two inscribed marble fragments found in the latrine and

possibly installed in the Augustan era above the middle entrance in the east wall; they also commemorate a donation to the Pompeians by two men: [– –]us C(ai) [f(ilius) M(arcus) Ge]miniu[s M(arci) f(ilius)] / p[ublice pom]peianis; Della Corte 1939, 303–304 no. 398 fig. 20; Della Corte 1947, 561. One could have expected that honorific statues were installed in the building for men such as these, especially since Decidianus Rufus received numerous statues in Pompeii; cf. Pesando 2000, 163–174 fig. 5.

47 Maiuri 1958, 116, 142–143; Yegül 1993; Devijver and Wouterghem 1984; Pagano 1996, 243–248; Pesando and Guidobaldi 2006, 382–384; for detailed descriptions that also take the newest research into account see Borlenghi 2011, 192–207; Esposito 2014, 47–54; Esposito 2015. Because the rooms are not uniformly designated (with numbers or letters) in the literature, the plan in pl. 4 in this paper provides letters for the rooms that are relevant for the discussion, for ease of understanding.

basins: a cross-shaped basin, placed in the center (Pl. 4: G; 5.8 × 5.5 m and 5.8 × 31.5 m, 1-1.2 m deep, with stairs in the northwest corner), and a long rectangular basin, located in front of the cryptoportico (Pl. 4: H: 30 × 3 m, 2.35 m deep). Traces of plantings were also found in the courtyard.⁴⁸ Only one small semicircular exedra (Pl. 4: D, I) presumably opened onto the south portico; the east and especially the better-known west portico, by contrast, were lined with numerous, sometimes two-storied rooms, including rooms with clear architectural emphasis (often referred to as *aula* or *aulae*, pl. 4: D, E, K).⁴⁹ The western *aula* extended over two levels and was built on the same axis as the cross-shaped basin. It had a raised apse to the west and was flanked by two symmetrical rooms (Pl. 4: J-M). The rooms to the west of this three-room group opened onto the *Cardo* as *tabernae*. The northern cryptoportico (Pl. 4: F) supported an open portico that was connected to other rooms, including a large *aula* with a vestibule that opened onto *Cardo* V (Pl. 4: N-O).⁵⁰ The peristyle courtyard, by contrast, was accessible through at least two monumental entrances in the southwest of *Cardo* V and in the northeast (probably from *Cardo* VI) (Pl. 4: A, N).

Based on the construction technique and especially the stamps on the bricks, the complex insula was interpreted as a uniformly planned and executed construction project begun in the late Augustan period and completed by 35 CE at the latest. Although it has been proved that the complex was altered after the earthquake in 62 CE, there is disagreement about the stages and exact extent of the reconstruction measures taken, which will probably not be clarified until the building has been

comprehensively studied and published.⁵¹ The main evidence for construction measures after 62 CE is a marble inscription that was found in the southwestern entrance area at *Cardo* V (Pl. 4: A-B). It dates back to 76 CE and documents that the emperor Vespasian had the Temple of Mater Deum restored after it had been destroyed in an earthquake.⁵² There is dispute over whether this inscription belonged to the palaestra, however, and where exactly it was installed, even though this information is key to understanding the function and designation of the complex.⁵³

Another imperial inscription, also found in the southwestern vestibule, memorializes two persons (*magistri?*) for restoring the sanctuary (*aedes*) of an unknown deity. The exact date of the inscription and its connection to the building complex are also unknown, as is its function; nevertheless, this inscription has been used to determine the function of the palaestra.⁵⁴

Given the floor plan's similarities with that of the Large Palaestra in Pompeii – and especially because of the peristyle courtyard with basins – the complex was initially identified as a palaestra or campus of the colonia. Even researchers who acknowledged substantial architectural differences between the two complexes in Pompeii and Herculaneum adhered to the interpretation of the site as a place for athletic training.⁵⁵ Only recently has a radically new interpretation been proposed, one which is principally based on Vespasian's dedication inscription and on the sculptural decoration:⁵⁶ that the complex served as a sanctuary for Near Eastern gods, who were worshipped here in various *sacella*; Cybele/Mater Deum, Dea Syria/Atargatis, and Isis are

48 Maiuri 1958, 136; Jashemski 1979, 162.

49 The rooms on the east side are not listed on the plan Maiuri 1958, 114 fig. 91 (here pl. 4); for these see Pagano 1996, 258 fig. 13; Borlenghi 2011, 192 fig. 86; Esposito 2015, 214 fig. 8.

50 Borlenghi 2011, 192–207, labels this part as the upper terrace, and the peristyle courtyard section as the lower terrace. For critical remarks on the plan and function of the upper terrace see Esposito 2015 with older literature.

51 For dating see Borlenghi 2011, 202; Pagano 1996, 243 reconstructs only one renovation after 62 CE; Monteix 2010 posits two phases, one immediately after 62 CE and one in 70–75 CE. Despite extensive recent research, the building has to be fully published.

52 CIL X, 1406; marble slab, 3.25 × 0.56 m; IMP CAESAR VESPASIANUS AUG PONTIF MAX / TRIB POT VII XVII P P COS VII DESIGN VIII / TEMPLUM MATRIS DEUM TERRAE MOTU CONLAPSUM RESTITUIT; Guadagno 1981, 135 no. 72; Horster 2001, 281–283 no. Ib 3, 1. On the find location, see drawing by Karl Weber in Ruggiero 1885, 231–232.

53 Arguments against linking the inscription and the building include

Maiuri 1958, 190 note 59; Pagano 1996, 245–246; Horster 2001, 282. Suggested explanations for the find location included displacement by the pyroclastic flows, as well as the inscription being stored in the vestibule. On the pyroclastic flows see Guadagno 1995.

54 AE 1980, 248: Haec op[era et ?] / aede[m...] / peq[unia] s[ua...]/ D[ecimus] Clau[dius...] / Sex[tus] Spu[rus.../.....]. On the various additions and interpretations see Borlenghi 2011, 198, 205, who notes that the inscription could possibly be dated to the Augustan period and would then have referred to the repair of a late republican sanctuary that had been here before the construction of the palaestra. But this does not explain why this inscription was located in the vestibule of the palaestra in 79 CE (perhaps reused as a spoil in the construction of the palaestra?). For a summary of the research discussion see Borlenghi 2011, 203–204; Esposito 2015, 224–226.

56 Karl Weber proposed the interpretation as a sanctuary (“Palacio della Venere ó Vespasiano ó Madre de los Deos”) in 1757; cf. Ruggiero 1885, 231–232, but Maiuri rejected it after the complex had been comprehensively uncovered; Maiuri 1958, 118.

| No. | Object | Designation | Find location (references to rooms from fig. 6) | Dimensions | Dating | Material | Literature |
|-----|--------------------|--|---|-------------------------------------|--|----------------------|--|
| 1 | Statue | Hermes Richelieu type with portrait head | Courtyard, north corner | 1.76 m | Flavian | Marble | Pagano 1996, 247, 260 fig. 16; Borlenghi 2011, 198, 200 |
| 2 | Statue + base | Aphrodite Fréjus type | Portico, northeast corner (E) | 1.76 m; base: 1.15 x 0.55 x 0.455 m | Mid-1st cent. CE | Marble | Pagano 1996, 247, 260 fig. 17; Borlenghi 2011, 200 |
| 3 | Base | ? | Portico, southeast corner (D/E) | ? | ? | Opus vitatum | |
| 4 | Base + inscription | Isis or Hygeia? | Portico, southwest corner (C/D) | Statue: 0.60 m; base: 0.55 x 0.45 m | ? | Marble, opus vitatum | Ruggiero 1885, 39; Pagano 1996, 247–248 |
| 5 | Sculpture | Serpent (hydra?) | Center of cross-shaped basin (G) | 2.42 m | First half of 1st cent. CE | Bronze | Guidobaldi 2005, Pappalardo 2005, Borlenghi 2011, 200 |
| 6 | Fragment | Hand with object | Between basin and aula | 26 cm long; 8 cm diameter | ? | Marble | Pagano 1996, 248; Borlenghi 2011, 200 |
| 7 | Statue | Atumn | South of rectangular basin; from upper level? | 0.90 m | Ptolemaic (Borlenghi), 18th Dynasty (Botti, Tran Tam Tinh) | Basalt | Botti 1963, Tran Tam Tinh 1971, 51–52, fig. 1–2; Pagano 2000, 85–86 no. 17; Gasparini 2006, 126 no. II.82; Borlenghi 2011, 200 |
| 8 | Statuette | Isis | Entrance area (B) | 0.095 m | 150–100 BCE | Bronze | Tran Tam Tinh 1971, 61–62 no. 7; Gasparini 2006, 127 no. II.86; Borlenghi 2011, 201 |
| 9 | Statuette | Harpocrates | Entrance area (B) | 0.08 m | 1st cent. CE | Bronze | Tran Tam Tinh 1971, 69–70 no. 25; Gasparini 2006, 126 no. II.86; Borlenghi 2011, 201 |
| 10 | Statuette | Bes | Northwest portico | 0.195 m | 2nd cent. BCE (Tran Tam Tinh), Claudian-Neronian (Pagano) | Bronze | Tran Tam Tinh 1971, 76 no. 46; Pagano 2000, 105–106; Gasparini 2006, 127 no. II.85; Borlenghi 2011, 201 |
| 11 | Statuette | Aphrodite | Entrance area (B) | 0.175 m | ? | Bronze | Accademia ercolanesi 1771, 52–53, pl. 14–15; Borlenghi 2011, 201 |
| 12 | Statuette | Hermes | Entrance area (B) | 0.11 m | ? | Bronze | Accademia ercolanesi 1771, 123–125, pl. 33–34; Borlenghi 2011, 201 |
| 13 | Statuette | Hercules | Entrance area (B) | 0.13 m | ? | Bronze | Accademia ercolanesi 1771, 83–85, pl. 22–23; Borlenghi 2011, 201 |

Tab. 1 Sculptures from the Palæstra at Herculaneum

named. Vespasian's dedication inscription would have been located above the southwestern entrance (Pl. 4: A) and consequently would have been relevant to the entire complex, even though the Mater Deum was worshipped only in the western *aula* (Pl. 4: K), whereas Isis's sanctuary has been allocated on the upper terrace or on the lower terrace, perhaps next to the Mater Deum.

Borlenghi even reconstructed a chronological sequence of the cults: the first to be venerated would have been Cybele, popular under Augustus, along with Dea Syria, who was frequently associated with Cybele and whose worship would have been supported primarily by the northern basin used for fish farming (Pl. 4: H); Vespasian would have reestablished this sanctuary – in deliberate imitation of Augustus – and at the same time associated it with the imperial cult; he also would have introduced the cult of Isis during his reign, a cult that had still been unpopular under Augustus. The monumentality of the complex in the small town of Herculaneum, however, suggests that even under Augustus, the imperial cult may have been associated with Cybele's.⁵⁷

The complex nature of the function of the Palaestra at Herculaneum cannot be discussed in detail here. Instead, the focus below will be on the question of what an analysis of the sculptural decoration can contribute to the discourse on how to determine the function of the complex: whether there are clear indications of use as a sanctuary, an athletic facility, or even some other concept. For a better understanding of the discussion to follow, all documented and published sculptural finds have been compiled in a table and their find locations mapped (Tab. 1; Pl. 5).⁵⁸

Statues were installed in three corners of the portico: in the northeast, a statue of the Aphrodite Fréjus type was found next to an opus vittatum base (Tab. 1 no. 2, fig. 7 no. 2; Fig. 3).⁵⁹

In the southeast corner is another base in situ,

but neither the inscription nor the statue have survived (Tab. 1 no. 3, Pl. 5 no. 3). There is also a base in the southwest corner which has been connected with a marble inscription fragment (Tab. 1 no. 4; Pl. 5 no. 4): IULIA HYGIA/EX VISU.⁶⁰ According to the inscription, Julia Hygia acted as the donor of the statue. It can be gathered from the formulation *ex visu* that a statue of the gods was being donated.⁶¹ An under-life-size statue, now missing, was discovered in close proximity to the base by Karl Weber in 1757. He described the statue as a female holding a serpent in her hand, meaning that she could have represented Isis or Hygieia.⁶²

A statue of the Hermes Richelieu type was found with a Flavian portrait head in the northwest corner of the open courtyard (Tab. 1 no. 1; Pl. 5 no. 1; Fig. 4).⁶³

A five-headed bronze serpent winding around a narrow tree trunk had been installed in the center of the cross-shaped basin (Tab. 1 no. 5; pl. 5 no. 5). This has been identified as the hydra of Lerna and, in the context of the palaestra, considered it to be an incentive for the youths to emulate Herakles.⁶⁴ There have also been suggestions of ties to Rome, where Agrippa used a hydra statue to decorate a fountain next to the Basilica Julia, the Lacus Servilius.⁶⁵

In addition, a colossal left hand made of marble, holding an object painted reddish-brown, was found between the cross-shaped basin and the western *aula absidata* (Tab. 1 no. 6; Pl. 5 no. 6; Figs. 5–6).⁶⁶ The hand's find location and size suggest that it belonged to a statue installed in the western *aula* (Pl. 4: K). The location, size, and decoration of the *aula* and the raised apse are unanimously acknowledged in the scholarly literature as evidence that this room had a cultic function. Not only was this room located in the precise axis of the cross-shaped basin, but it was also accentuated by the design

57 Borlenghi 2011, 204–207.

58 Cf. the discussion of the decoration in Gasparini 2010; Borlenghi 2011, 198–202 with plan of distribution 199 fig. 90; Esposito 2014, 47–54; Esposito 2015.

59 Naples, National Archaeological Museum, inv. no. 5997.

60 CIL X, 929.

61 On *ex visu* see Noy 2004.

62 "...una estautita de marmol de mujer bestida con una camisa que le cubre solo el cuerpo, los brazos desnudos y las piernas; es alta de 2 pal. y 4 on. bien conservada, con la mano derecha tiene en la barba y el otro brazo como cruzado debajo del derecho y tiene con la mano izquierda una serpiente y las piernas tiene como cruzadas estando en pié." Weber cited in Ruggiero 1885, 249; Borlenghi 2011, 200.

63 The matching base was missing, which led Guidobaldi 2005, 145 to suspect that the statue had come from the upper floor.

64 Herculaneum, Deposito archeologico Inv. 3945/79242. Dazu Guidobaldi 2005; Pappalardo 2005, 70–71.

65 Festus 372L. Guidobaldi 2005, 145; Borlenghi 2011, 206, argues that the hydra may have had no symbolic function, and therefore a purely decorative one.

66 Magazzino archeologico di Ercolano inv. 1623. Pagano 1996, 248; Borlenghi 2011, 200. No images of the hand have been published until now; the authors are grateful to Domenico Esposito for pointing out that this hand was in the magazine, as well as for his help with the request for publication rights.



Fig. 3 Herculaneum, Palaestra, Aphrodite Fréjus type.

of the west portico (its own staircase, a broadened intercolumniation, etc.), like the exedra in the Large Palaestra of Pompeii. The dimensions of the apse (4.1 m wide) suggest that a monumental statue or a group of statues was installed here; Cybele/Mater Deum and the emperor have been proposed as subjects of cult worship.⁶⁷ The question is whether the interpretation of the marble hand can be of more assistance with this question. The hand was previously interpreted as part of an acrolith



Fig. 4 Herculaneum, Palaestra, Hermes Richelieu type.

statue and therefore a colossal statue of the gods, which was installed in the apse.⁶⁸ The question of whether it is an acrolith statue is of particular interest, since such statues are only expected to be found in a sanctuary. But the hand does not favor the acrolith statue interpretation, since the surviving part extends well beyond the wrist suggesting that a garment had covered the arm up to this point.⁶⁹ In addition, the dowel hole at the end of the fragment is formed in the way one would expect

67 Maiuri 1958, 124; imperial cult; Borlenghi 2011, 160; Mater Deum.

68 Pagano 1996, 248. A more detailed discussion is needed as to why the hand was not found inside the apse and why only part of the statue was preserved.

69 On acrolith statues and attachments in general see Claridge 1990; Häger-Weigel 1997; Despinois 2004; Schäfer, Schmidt, and Osanna 2015, 761–

763. A cut above the wrist is rather unusual for acrolith statues; usually the entire arm is attached. See Häger-Weigel 1997. An example of an acrolith statue with the hands preserved to above the wrists is one of the archaic acrolith statues from Morgantina, but the dowel holes are designed differently and the marble hands were probably attached to the wooden frame with wooden dowels; cf. Marconi 2008, 9–10 figs. 5–10.



Fig. 5 Herculaneum, Palaestra, marble hand.



Fig. 6 Herculaneum, Palaestra, marble hand.

of stone attachments for marble or limestone statues:⁷⁰ the surface is smooth and the dowel hole very narrow. A marble arm from Pantelleria with comparable attachment points can be cited as a parallel to the marble hand from Herculaneum.⁷¹ Since this arm of the Pantelleria statue has been interpreted as an intentional addition to a marble statue, an analogous interpretation is also possible for the hand from Herculaneum.

The reddish-brown painted object in the hand merits special attention as well:⁷² it is a flat, rectangular object surrounded by three fingers (middle finger to little finger) in such a way that it can only be seen on the palm of the hand under the bent fingers (Fig. 5). The continuation between the extended index finger and the outstretched thumb, by contrast, is easy to see. The object juts out between the index and middle finger in particular, as well as between the thumb and index finger,

and the reddish-brown paint has been well preserved in both these parts. Because the hands and fingers of statues survive so rarely and are often substituted with modern additions, it is not easy to find comparisons for this hand position. Numerous conceivable attributes can be excluded, however, such as a lance, a bow, a lightning bolt, a club, a sistrum, a patera, and even a plectrum, which was usually held in the right hand. Two narrow edges of the object have no reddish-brown color: next to the little finger, and on the slanted edge between the thumb and index finger; by contrast, there are traces of color on the straight edge between the thumb and index finger and the straight edge between the index and middle finger. Since the surface of the unpainted edges has been smoothed, however, these edges cannot be reliably identified as broken edges of a partially preserved object without closer study. The partially preserved object may

70 Cf. Häger-Weigel 1997, 46–55; Claridge 1990, esp. 147–151 with pictures; more recent work on acrolith or marble statues is in Schäfer, Schmidt, and Osanna 2015, 761–763. The closest resemblance is in the surface treatment Claridge 1990, 150 fig. 21a. It should be noted, however, that previous research has dealt primarily with the heads of acrolith statues. Attached limbs, particularly hands, have rarely been addressed because of

the state of their preservation.

71 Schäfer, Schmidt, and Osanna 2015, 738 no. 20 fig. 20a–d, with discussion 761–763.

72 Pagano 1996, 248 refers to this as a “tavoletta colorata” without further explanation or discussion.

be able to be completed as a sword, which a male statue would hold in his left hand. The sword blade would have continued below the little finger and palm; where exactly the pommel of the sword was and how it was held would have yet to be clarified.⁷³ Even if only the complete publication of the hand can clarify the questions raised here, the following must be noted for the question being posed: The hand can be interpreted as part of a colossal marble statue; although the object held by the statue cannot be determined with certainty, typical attributes of some gods (Cybele, Isis, Herakles) can at least be excluded. If the object was a sword, the statue may have depicted an emperor.

A black basalt statue of the sitting Atoum was found south of the northern basin, in the peristyle courtyard, and assigned to the upper terrace (Tab. 1 no. 7; Pl. 5 no. 7).⁷⁴ An inscription in hieroglyphics names the statue as Atoum, god of Heliopolis and Aha. Unusually, there is a hole underneath the left shoulder, which may have been used for transport or as a waterspout. This is uncommon among Egyptian statues and would therefore have come from a Roman redesign.⁷⁵

In addition to the listed statues, several statuettes were found, which have mainly been used to interpret the complex as a sanctuary of Isis. In the southwestern entrance, a group of statuettes was uncovered whose exact positioning in the large room cannot be reconstructed:

- Isis (Tab. 1 no. 8; fig. 7 no. 8)⁷⁶
- Harpocrates (Tab. 1 no. 9; Pl. 5 no. 9)⁷⁷
- Aphrodite (Tab. 1 no. 11; Pl. 5 no. 11)⁷⁸
- Hermes (Tab. 1 no. 12; Pl. 5 no. 12)⁷⁹
- Herakles (Tab. 1 no. 13; Pl. 5 no. 13)⁸⁰

Furthermore, a Bes statuette was found in the west portico (Tab. 1 no. 10; Pl. 5 no. 10).⁸¹ The objects with Egyptian connotations (Atoum, Bes, Isis, Harpocrates) have been grouped with other compatible objects to substantiate the theory of an Isis sanctuary. Examples include the statue donated by Julia Hygia in the southwest corner of the portico, which could have represented Isis; a small bronze base with hieroglyphics (Pl. 5, no. 15) found in *Cardo V* in front of the southwestern entrance (Pl. 4: A); a gold amulet from the western entrance area (Pl. 5, no. 14);⁸² and statuettes found in the *tabernae* in *Cardo V*.⁸³

What statements can be made about these largely heterogeneous sculptures that would help to identify the function of this building? From a methodological point of view, it would be important to examine several questions much more precisely, which cannot be done here in the detail necessary but will be briefly discussed:

- The dating of the sculptures with regard to the question of whether they can be assigned to particular phases of use of the building; whether there were uniform sculpture programs, for example; or how the process of setting up and consecrating sculptures can be reconstructed. The Flavian portrait head, for instance, shows that the mode of decoration was changed and that new or modified sculptures could be installed during the use period of the building.
- The relevance of the find locations, which so far have been variably assessed: When (and why) are finds classified as belonging to the building, as opposed to being considered as secondary deposits or translocations occurring in the Vesuvius eruption? Which finds can justifiably be claimed to have been used for the decoration of the building and can there be used

73 On the holding of swords cf. the discussion and pictures in Spalthoff 2010, pl. 81 fig. 242; Marcadé 2000, fig. 6, 7.

74 Antiquarium Herculaneum inv. 2168/2169. H. 90 cm. Tran Tam Tinh 1971, 51–52 no. 1, fig. 1–2: 18. in dynasties; Pagano 1996, 245; Ptolemaic; Gasparini 2010, 234; late 4th/early 3rd cent. BCE..

75 The hole is not mentioned in the literature; the use of the statue as a waterspout would make the suspected cultic connotation obsolete.

76 Antiquarium Herculaneum inv. 1421/76699.

77 Antiquarium Herculaneum inv. 1420/76698.

78 Naples, National Archaeological Museum inv. 5133.

79 Naples, National Archaeological Museum inv. 5227.

80 Naples, National Archaeological Museum inv. 5270.

81 Antiquarium Herculaneum inv. 1429/76707.

82 Base: Naples, National Archaeological Museum inv. 1107; 1st cent. CE; H. 0.082 m; Tran Tam Tinh 1971, 52–55 no. 2, Gasparini 2006, 126 no. II.83, Borlenghi 2011, 202; bulla d'oro: Naples, National Archaeological Museum inv. 24606; Tran Tam Tinh 1971, 81 no. 54; Gasparini 2006, 122; Borlenghi 2011, 202.

83 Sculptures from rooms that did not connect to the interior of the complex, i.e., the palaestra area, are excluded here; on this see Borlenghi 2011, 199 fig. 90, who also includes these (on p. 206) in the considerations of the function of the building. The bronze base (27 × 19 × 8 cm) would have supported a statuette or a lightweight cult object; Borlenghi 2011, 202.

for its interpretation?⁸⁴ Critical discussion is needed on what is missing here and how it can be explained. Attempts must be made to explain why the palaestra decoration has been preserved in so fragmentary a fashion, particularly in view of the fact that considerably more extensive and more completely preserved sculptural decoration has been found in numerous other buildings in Herculaneum.⁸⁵

- The relevance of the find collections: Which criteria – the quality or the quantity of certain sculptures, for example – influence the interpretation? Statuettes of Isis and Harpocrates were found in the southwestern entrance area (Pl. 4: B), but so were figures of Hermes, Aphrodite, and Herakles. Although the latter at least numerically outweighed the Egyptian gods, they have been given scant consideration in the literature.⁸⁶ Another issue in need of critical interrogation is the installation of five differently sized statuettes measuring 8 to 17 cm. What effect could small objects of this kind have even exerted on visitors within the monumental entrance hall (7.75 × 21.65 m), and should they really be used to determine the function of the entire building complex?⁸⁷ Such groups of variously sized statuettes are more typical of shrines or *lararia* in domestic or commercial contexts, but not in monumental entrances to large public buildings (palaestrae, sanctuaries, and others).⁸⁸
- There is much debate in research about whether sculptures had a “decorative” versus a “cultic-sacred” function and how to identify and prove this.⁸⁹ The “Aegyptiaca” are particularly worthy of mention in

this context; their importance has long been discussed in the scholarship. Recently it has been argued on a number of occasions that Egyptian motifs and depictions were not chosen for cultic reasons and should not be ascribed to the specific religious interests of those commissioning them. Rather, the introduction and dissemination of such motifs should be interpreted as an exotic fad or attributed to the practice of collecting luxury objects and works of art.⁹⁰ There must be corresponding critical interrogation of how the broadly scattered objects with Egyptian connotations and Egyptianizing elements in the wall paintings of different rooms are to be interpreted for the Palaestra at Herculaneum.⁹¹

In sum, extreme caution should be used when enlisting the heterogeneous assemblages of sculptural decoration, with their depictions of gods and heroes as well as portrait statues, to determine the function of the building. Such statues permit neither a clear confirmation nor a definitive refutation of the sanctuary thesis. In any case, however, it should be emphasized that the sculptural decoration here is significantly more extensive than its equivalents in the small Samnite Palaestra and the Large Palaestra in Pompeii.

For this reason, only the plan and typology of the entire installation can be used to identify the complex. These were already decisive for its designation as a palaestra, but received scarce consideration for interpreting it as a sanctuary of Near Eastern gods. Sanctuaries with large porticoes had been well known in the Mediterranean since the Hellenistic period and were also represented in the Vesuvius cities.⁹² The corresponding sanc-

84 For examples see, e.g., Borlenghi 2011, 202, who invokes the objects with Egyptian connotations for the reconstruction of an Isis sanctuary on the lower terraces, despite different find locations.

85 Cf., e.g., the so-called basilica or Augusteum, the so-called Basilica Noniana, the theater, or even the Villa dei Papiri; cf. the various articles in Guidobaldi 2008; some questions arising with respect to the palaestra are where the other marble limbs of the colossal (acrolith) statue reconstructed in the western *aula* (Pl. 4: K) have remained, and whether they have not yet been published or found (and why).

86 Often the Egyptian statuettes are the only ones mentioned, e.g. Tran Tam Tinh 1971; Gasparini 2006; Borlenghi 2011, 206 even establishes that the presence of the bronze statuettes of Aphrodite, Hermes, and Heracles “potrebbe essere casuale all’interno di questa sala, ma potrebbe anche denunciarne l’appartenenza, insieme alle statuette in bronzo di Iside e

Arpocrate, ad una serie di immagini sacre disposte all’entrata dell’area santuariale.”

87 The two Egyptian statuettes were the smallest, the Aphrodite statuette the largest. They are unlikely to have been conceived as a single ensemble; see table 1.

88 Fröhlich 1991; Kaufmann-Heinimann 1998, 184.

89 Decorative with possible sacred connotation; cultic as votive or cult statue; on sculptures cf., e.g., the discussion in Kreeb 1988; Neudecker 1988; Kunze 1996; Rumscheid 2006.

90 Cf., e.g., Tronchin 2006; Tronchin 2011; Pearson 2015.

91 Cf., e.g., the wall paintings in the rooms flanking the *Aula absidiata* (Pl. 4: J, M); Esposito 2014, pl. 158 fig. 1.

92 In Pompeii: Sanctuary of Apollo; Sanctuary of Venus; Sanctuary of Isis.

tuaries in Pompeii, however, included a centrally placed temple with an altar, and their landscaped open courtyards were not decorated with large basins. So far, no fixed typology has been established for sanctuaries of Cybele/Mater Deum, and no example has been clearly identified that could serve as a parallel to the Palaestra at Herculaneum.⁹³ A similar situation applies for the Dea Syria, the worship of whom can hardly be convincingly confirmed by the existence of a basin suited to fish farming; in addition, the basin was found filled with rubbish, and so was probably no longer in use after 62 CE.⁹⁴ Since Vespasian had the sanctuary renovated in 76 CE, a basin that was pivotal to the cult would certainly not have been filled with debris. Certain parallels can be invoked with respect to the Isis sanctuaries, which are the best studied among the sanctuaries of Near Eastern deities.⁹⁵ The Iseum Campense in Rome is the most salient: its Flavian construction phase has been reconstructed with a large semicircular water basin and a sizeable but paved courtyard; the numerous assigned finds, however, point much more clearly to Egyptian deities than do those in the Palaestra at Herculaneum.⁹⁶

Even though the Palaestra at Herculaneum seems to have been significantly destroyed in the Vesuvius eruption, and furthermore has been neither completely uncovered nor comprehensively published, it is important to emphasize the lack of key elements that one would expect to find in a large sanctuary with several shrines and cults: altars in particular, but also objects such as cult statues, cultic equipment, and votive deposits.

The architectural differences between the Palaestra at Herculaneum and its counterpart in Pompeii have already been widely discussed and need not be repeated here.⁹⁷ Only the striking difference in the decoration merits emphasis: the simple decoration in the Large Palaestra in Pompeii remained unchanged during its use period. The Palaestra at Herculaneum, by contrast, at least in its last phase of use, was richly decorated with various floors (*opus signinum*, *opus tessellatum*, *opus sectile*), various wall decorations (marble, Third and Fourth

Style paintings with figural picture panels) and sculptures. The Palaestra at Herculaneum clearly had more in common here with the luxury portico-complexes in Rome listed above than with the Large Palaestra in Pompeii and *campi*. Cult worship absolutely played a role in the complexes of Rome. It was practiced in centrally placed temples or *exedra*-type shrines, or could be limited to evoking a sacral atmosphere through decoration and garden and landscape settings.⁹⁸ It is important that these complexes also or even mainly served the population as “primary locations for leisured walking” in an atmosphere of *amoenitas*.⁹⁹ Shady porticoes at various levels, gardens, water basins with various functions (decoration, fish farming, swimming and wading, boating) and luxurious decoration were also typical for villas of the time, such as the nearby Villa dei Papiri, and even for townhouses, such as the Pompeii house of Octavius Quartio/Loreius Tiburtinus (II 5, 2).¹⁰⁰ Perhaps the best example to compare to Vespasian’s generous donation is the *Templum Pacis* in Rome, which included a prominently placed shrine to Pax but was also or even chiefly conceived as an extravagant complex with gardens and porticoes for the people. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Vespasian chose to restore a complex with a comparable design and designated the entire complex as a *Templum Matris Deum*. Only the complete publication of the complex can show how much was actually restored or conceptually changed in the Vespasian renovation and whether the late Augustan construction was already planned to be a portico-complex with shrine(s).¹⁰¹

At present it cannot be determined with any certainty whether the facility was ever used for athletic training; the sculptures and inscriptions provide no clear indication, at least.¹⁰² Since the cross-shaped basin in the uncovered parts had at least one staircase, apparently it could and would have been well used. The basin depth of 1–1.10 m was no lap pool by today’s standards, but it would have allowed for simple swimming and

93 Pedrucci 2009.

94 Maiuri 1958, 137; Borlenghi 2011, 160, 203, interprets the basin as evidence of the Dea Syria.

95 Kleibl 2009.

96 Kleibl 2009, 260–264.

97 Especially Yegül 1993.

98 Cf. the list of the portico facilities and portico temple facilities of this type in Maucaulay-Lewis 2011 277 Tab. 11. 3.

99 Maucaulay-Lewis 2011, 277 (cit.); 278.

100 This house was even designated a “miniature villa”; Zanker 1995, 150–162; Tronchin 2006; Tronchin 2011; Dickmann 1999 has proven that such “villa” elements were being adapted and integrated into townhouses, in various forms, from as early as the 2nd/1st cent. BCE.

101 On renovations after 62 CE, cf., e.g., Monteix 2010, 226–231 fig. 17.

102 Strikingly little graffiti were found in the building, none of which points to *iuvenes* or athletic activities; Borlenghi 2011, 198.

certainly immersion baths.¹⁰³ The question of whether such baths were to be taken as part of athletic, cultic, or leisure activities, however, must remain unanswered. In all cases, clarification is needed on who took these baths and when, as well as the form (naked, clothed), society, and context (e.g., with or without onlookers) in which the bathing could have or should have occurred, and whether other equipment and spaces were also required (e.g., changing rooms).¹⁰⁴

4 Analysis

A comparative analysis of the questions posed at the beginning of this paper yields the following picture: A statue can certainly be demonstrated to have been present in the Samnite Palaestra, and as many as three statues may have been there after 79 CE. The Large Palaestra only has evidence of one base for a statue or group of statues. Only in the Palaestra at Herculaneum did the finds of bases, large sculptures, and statuettes illustrate a relatively broad spectrum of numbers, formats, and representations, which presumably would only increase if the building were to be completely uncovered.

The two facilities in Pompeii were definitely not as lavishly decorated with sculptures and other objects as reconstructed for gymnasia in the east, based on archaeological and epigraphic finds.¹⁰⁵ With their austere functional decoration, the Pompeian buildings offered rather “empty” spaces that were eminently suitable for the *vereiia* and *iuvenes* activities that are attested in inscriptions.¹⁰⁶ Their “spartan” decoration is not necessar-

ily attributable to cultural conventions and customs in Samnite-Hellenistic Pompeii or the Roman colonia of Pompeii, as a comparison with safely identified facilities in Solunt and Agrigent proves. From a typological standpoint, the completely excavated “gymnasium” of Solunt (the structure is more of a palaestra) and the only partially uncovered gymnasium of Agrigent exhibit significantly more commonalities with Greek gymnasia in the east than the Pompeian facilities, but no evidence of sculptural decoration has yet been found in either. Thorough investigations in the future will be needed to determine whether austerity was typical in athletic facility decoration throughout the western Mediterranean and how to explain this phenomenon. For Pompeii, what is clear is that the floor plans and sculptural decoration in the Large Palaestra show that “campus” would be a better designation for this site. Although the Samnite Palaestra differs from palaestrae in the Greek east, this designation still seems to be the most appropriate, since no Oscan terms are known that would be fit to describe *vereiia* meeting places or training locations.¹⁰⁷

The Palaestra at Herculaneum appears on the whole to have been more sparingly decorated with sculpture than the eastern gymnasia; it does not exhibit a single “appropriate” sculpture or any “suitable” object that would clearly suggest the context of an athletic facility.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, the sculptural decoration in the local context in general is modest, to a rather striking degree, and would certainly not be classified as a space “crowded” with statues.¹⁰⁹ Since Vespasian explicitly called attention to the restoration of the facility through his inscription in 76 CE, it must have been in a usable

103 On the criteria for the use of “swimming” pools see Trümper 2017; Trümper 2018. The basin in the Large Palaestra of Pompeii was markedly deeper, up to 2.60 m, but its bottom dropped out only gradually, from the west (1 m) to the east (2.60 m). The pool was accessible via a three-step staircase that extended over the entire west side and was decidedly inimical to the swimming of laps in the longer east-west direction; Maiuri 1939, 188 fig. 14.

104 These questions would also need to be discussed in much greater detail for the Large Palaestra in Pompeii than has been the case in the literature so far.

105 Von den Hoff 2004; von den Hoff 2011; Mathys 2014; Kazakidi 2015; von den Hoff 2015a; von den Hoff 2015b; R. von den Hoff in this volume. Particularly revealing is the inventory of Kallistratos, which lists the inventory of the Delian Gymnasium (or even a part of it) for the year 156/155 BCE, including 41 marble herms, 12 bronze torches, 10 bronze shields, 60 gilded shields as girders of portraits, numerous life-size and under-life-size sculptures, and many other objects; ID 1417, A., I, l. 118–154; Morretti 1996; Morretti 1997.

For the Samnite Palaestra: the controversial Oscan inscription Vetter 1953, 49–50, no. 11; the indications in the Large Palaestra include graffiti with the verb *ludere*, a reference to various *magistri* (in charge of the *ludi iuvenales*?) and the names of centurions as well as a painted edictum munerum on the northern outer wall that gives notice of *ludi atletici*, *inter alia*; Borlenghi 2011, 225.

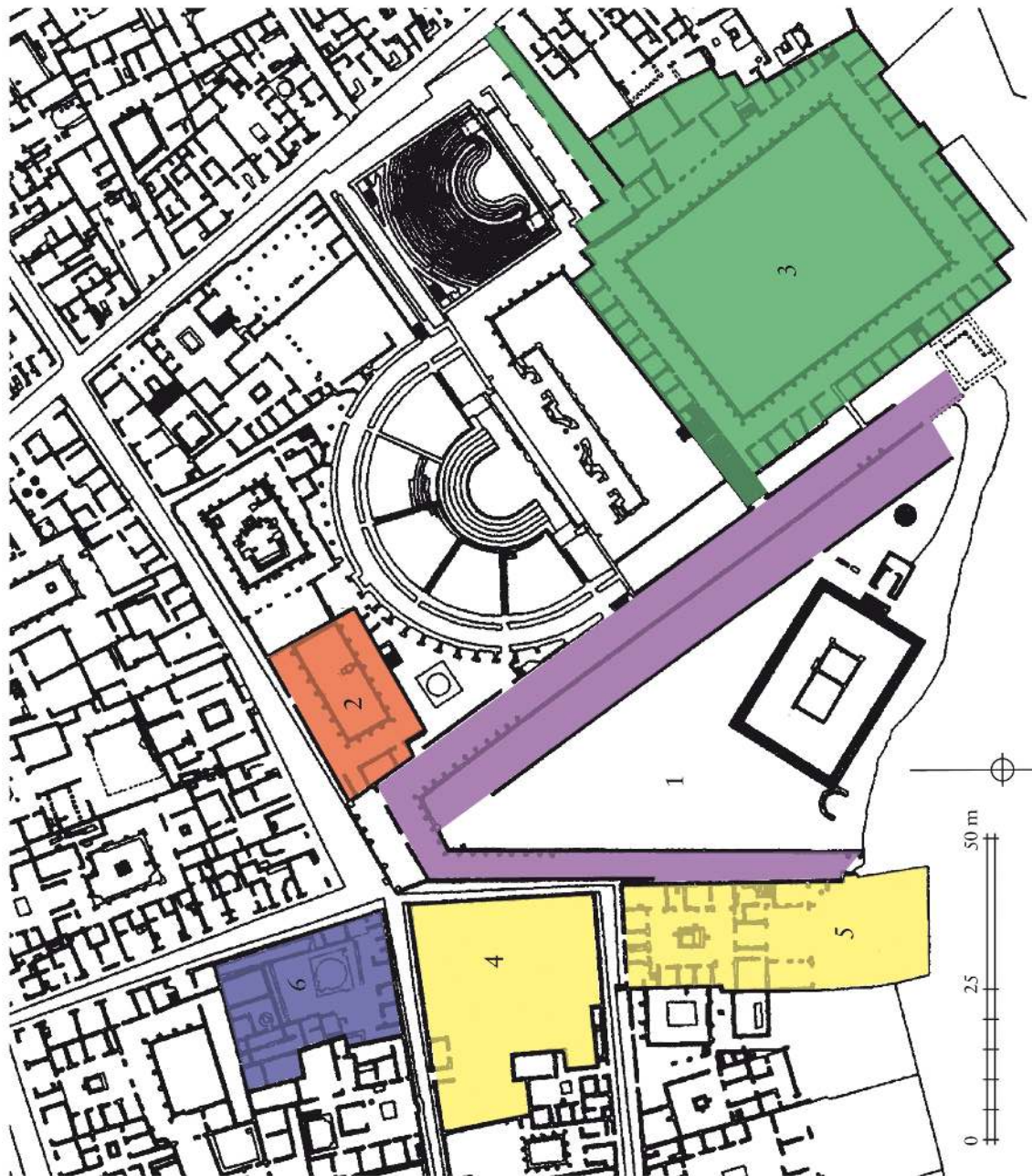
107 Cf. M. Trümper in this volume.

108 E.g., donations/statues of/for *iuvenes* athletes or officials; objects like *labra* and *strigiles*; or consecrations of victory like the torches in Delos, etc. Statuettes of Hermes and Herakles (Tab. 1 no. 11–12) are appropriate to the context of a Greek gymnasium, but were also popular far beyond; their find context and their socialization, moreover – in the western vestibule (Plate 4: B) together with statuettes of Aphrodite, Isis, and Harpocrates – does not provide a clear and convincing determination of the function and identification of the building.

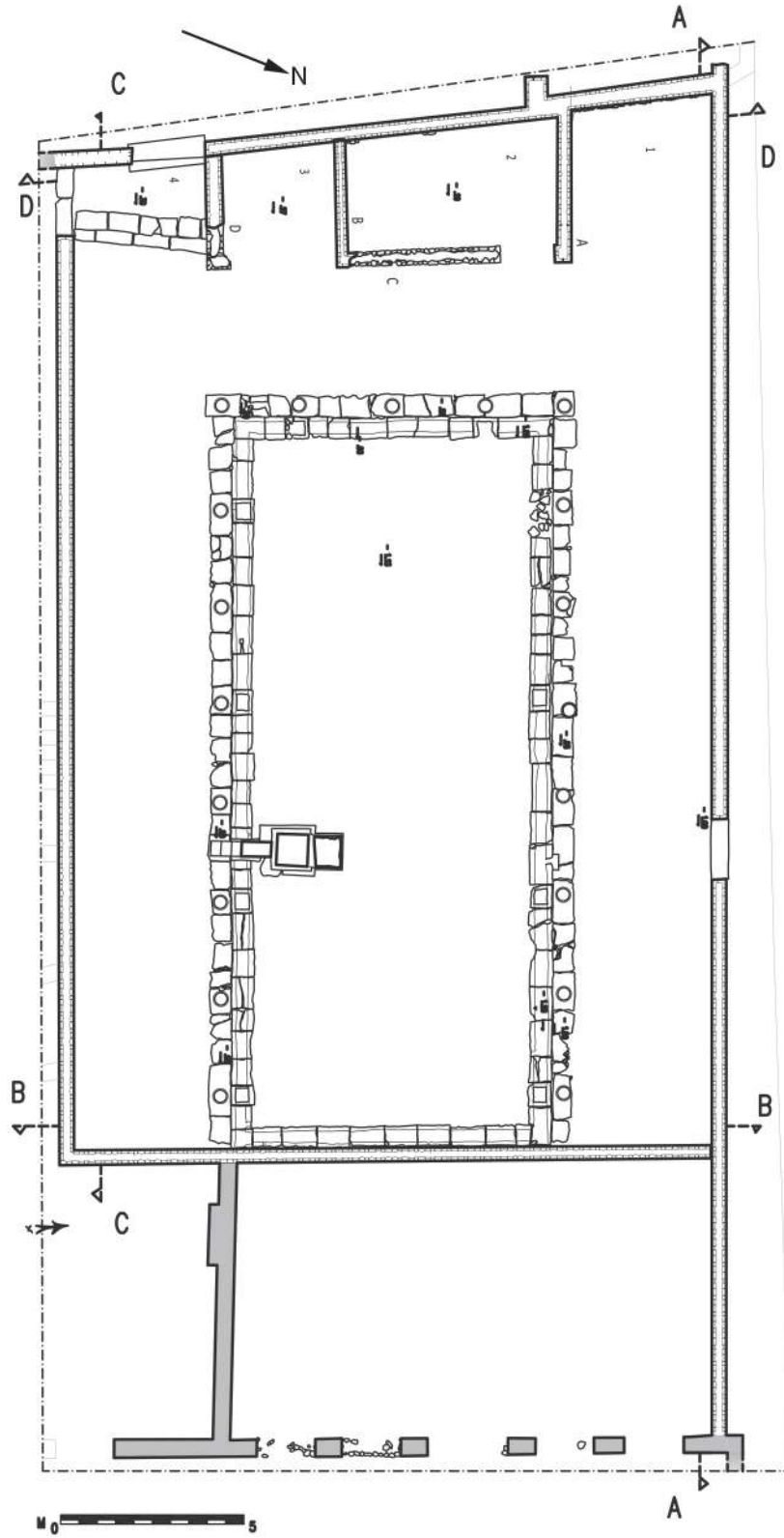
109 Cf., e.g., the galleries of statues found in the theater, the Basilica Noniana, the Augusteum (or so-called basilica), and the Villa dei Papiri; Guidobaldi 2008.

state at this point, even if it was not yet completely renovated. The sculptures should therefore be thoroughly representative of the functional concept of the Vespasian complex. The plan of the complex suggests that it was designed as a portico and not as a palaestra or campus. This does not rule out a sacred function, or even a (Vespasian

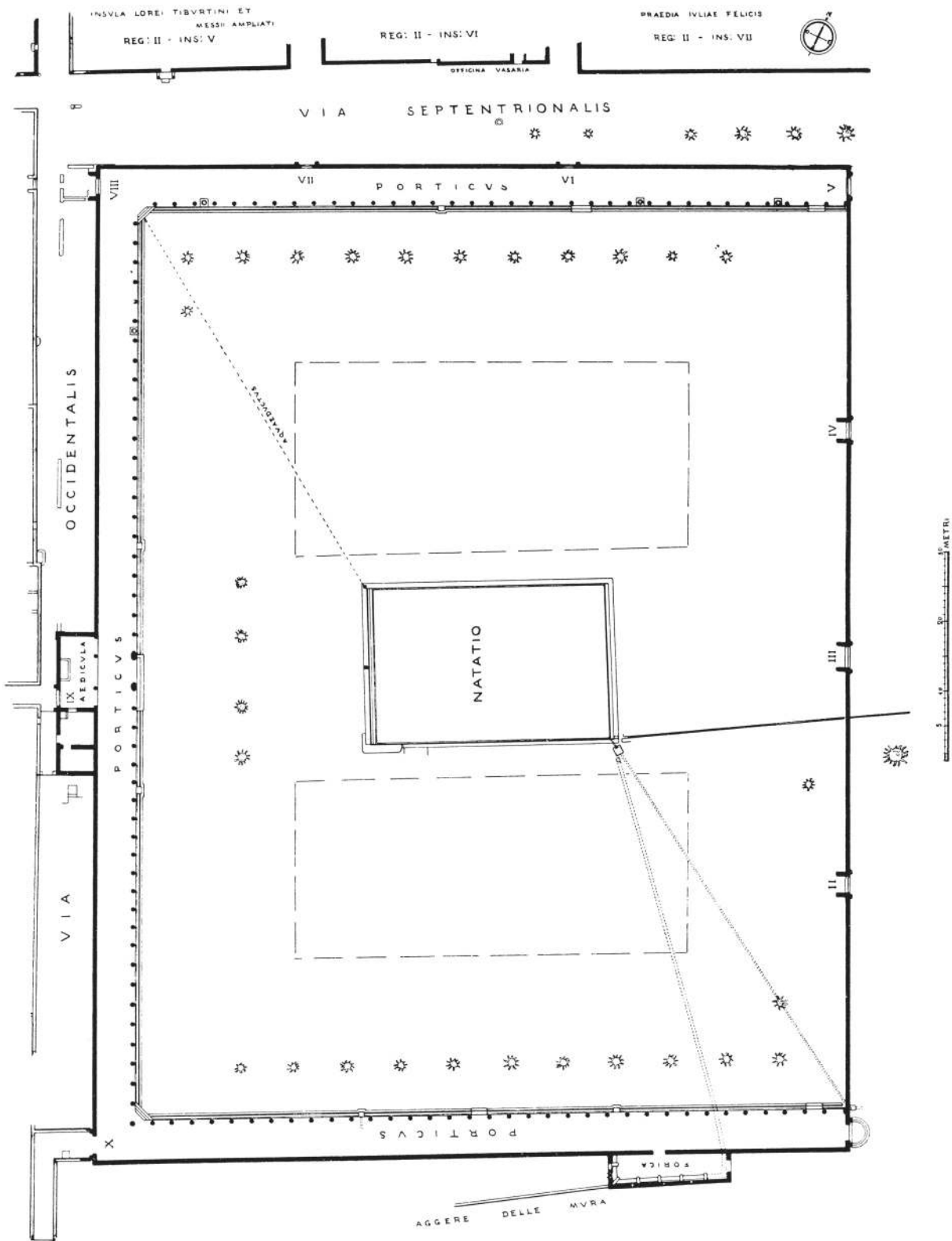
re-)designation as a *Templum Matris Deum* – following the model of the *Templum Pacis* in Rome. The sculptural decoration falls short of the usual reconstructions of portico-complexes in Rome, but does not contradict the function or designation proposed above.



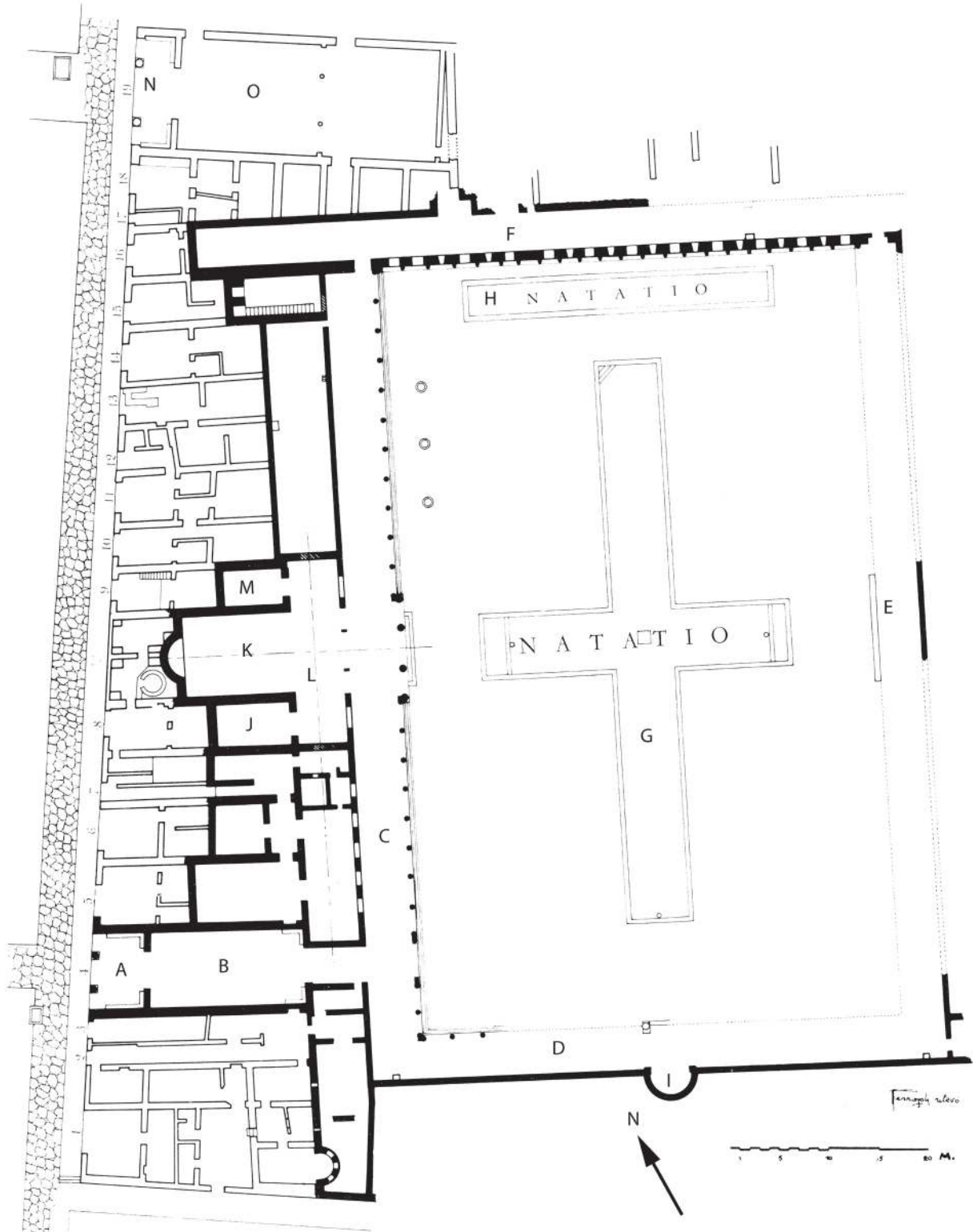
Pl. 1 Pompeii, "campus complex" at the Foro Triangolare. 1.z. 1 Foro Triangolare (porticoes, racetrack?); 2 Palaestra Sannitica; 3 Quadriporticus; 4 Lot VIII 6, 5 (domus publica?); 5 Casa di Giuseppe II (domus publica?); 6 Republican Baths.



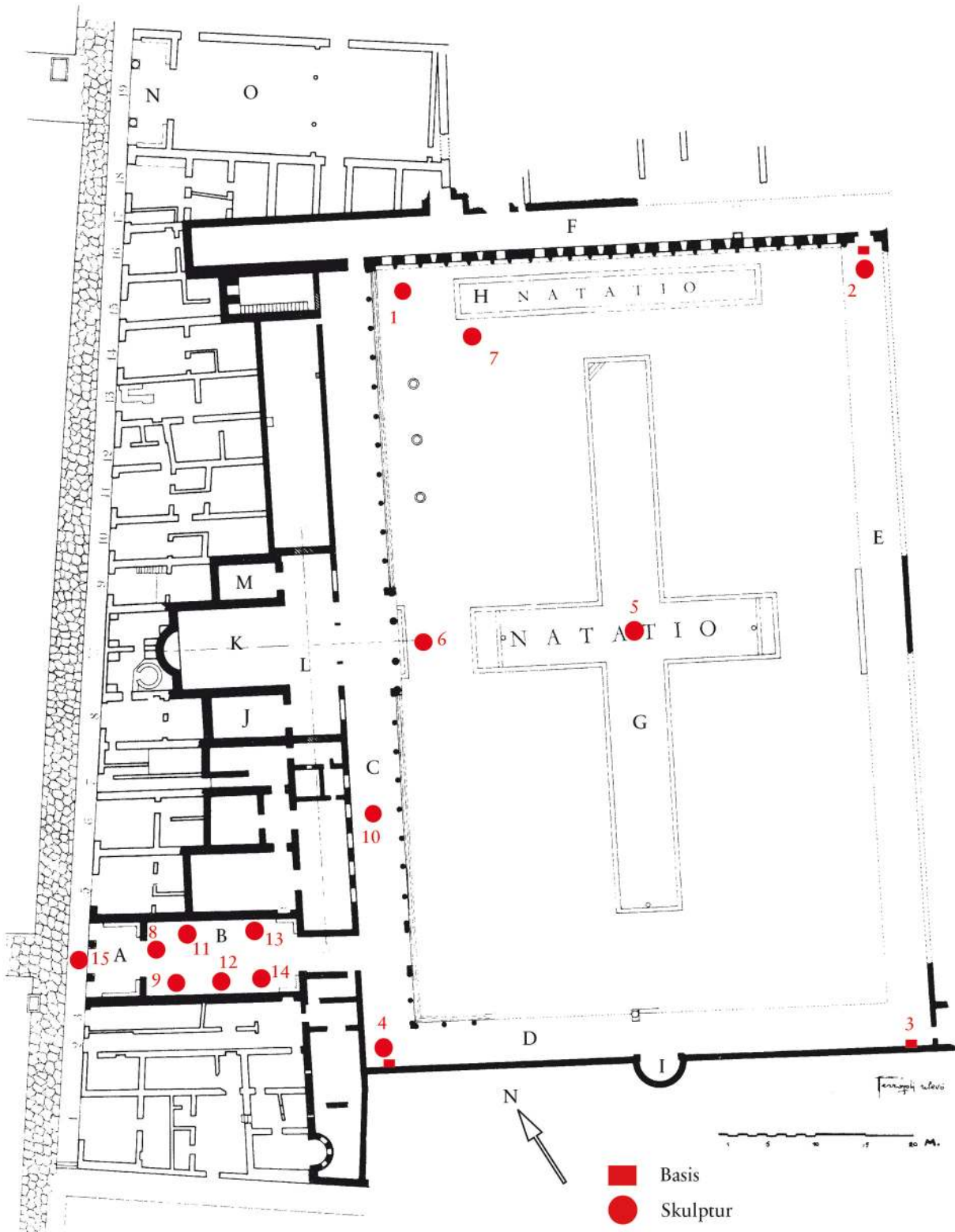
Pl. 2 Pompeii, Samnite Palaestra, plan.



Pl. 3 Pompeii, Large Palaestra, plan.



Pl. 4 Herculaneum, Palaestra, plan.



Pl. 5 Herculaneum, Palaestra, plan with find locations of the sculptures, rectangular: bases in situ, round: approximate find location.

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