The Eumachia building

General description
The Eumachia building is located along the East side of the Civil Forum of Pompeii.

It is a very notable edifice because of its vast size and its position in relation to the streets that lead to the public square. Indeed, it is the first building to be seen coming from the harbor through Via Marina, being announced by a large inscription over the corresponding colonnade of the Forum, whereas its Southern wall takes up a long stretch of Via dell'Abbondanza, one of the main streets of Pompeii.

The building consists of three structures, as stated by the dedicatory inscription, placed over the Southern entrance and repeated, as said above, over the Forum colonnade: the chalcidicum, the porticus and the crypta.

The first one is generally identified with the space in front of the façade: it appears as an elongated, open area, surrounded by columns and bases for statues, on three sides, and by the articulated front of the building, on the rear. The façade presents two rounded niches, two platforms accessible by stairs and four smaller niches, arranged symmetrically on either sides of the portal.

The latter gives access to the porticus, the huge interior colonnade that surrounds an unroofed court, ending in three rounded niches, the central of them being introduced by two pillars and provided with a pedestal for statues. A series of windows and two complete openings put into communication the porticus and the crypta, a sort of covered corridor running, too, all around the central court.

The entrance on Via dell'Abbondanza leads to the crypta in its Eastern side, right next to the niche containing the statue of Eumachia.

Intended Use
The priestess Eumachia is identified by the inscription underlying her statue, which says that this statue was donated by the fullers of Pompeii. Since the early descriptions of the building, such as those by Guglielmo Bechi and Ludwig Goro von Agyagfalva, talk about rectangular and prismatic stones, found in the central court, as tools for cleaning and carding clothes (Bechi 1820, p. 80), the building has long been interpreted as a fullonica, built at her own expense by Eumachia and given to fullers for their trades. Thus, the erection of the statue would have been a form of thanksgiving from the fullers.

Franz Christian Gau also thought that those architectural elements could have been used for washing clothes (Mazois 1812-38, p. 43), but he referred to the sacred robes belonging to the priests of the collegium of fullers, being the building used as headquarter of the powerful corporation. This hypothesis was
supported by later scholars such as Overbeck (Overbeck 1856, p. 101), Nissen (Nissen 1877, p. 287) and the same Superintendent Fiorelli, who claimed to have found ten basins, two washboards and ten mouths of tanks within the porticus (Fiorelli 1875, p. 260).

Pompeii is well known for its role in the ancient market of wool and the fullers were also involved in trade of textiles. The hypothesis of a cloth retail market was formulated by August Mau (Mau 1899, p. 110): he considered the building a sort of “bazaar for the sale of cloths and articles of clothing”, with goods inspected from the windows and well protected in the crypta, which could be entered only from three, narrow doors, perhaps closed at night.

Because of the wide open space, the lack of shops and the entrances too narrow for maneuvering of large quantities of merchandise, Walter Moeller suggested the building was not suitable for the retail market (Moeller 1972). Raw wool and finished cloths could have rather been sold in bulk at auctions held in the chacidicum, which could have been excluded from circulation by gates. Moeller agreed with Ernest Breton who had concluded that the Eumachia building housed a sort of stock market (Breton 1870, p. 124). It was the “marketplace for the city’s export surplus”, in addition to the headquarter of the Pompeian fullones and a “private place for transacting business and for relaxation” of Pompeian businessmen engaged in the wool trade.

However, scholars are increasingly convinced that it was just a building for public recreation, a majestic, covered space for walking, richly decorated with sculptures, marbles and paintings, very similar to the Porticus Liviae in Rome, which
was also dedicated to Concordia Augusta (Zanker 1993, p. 105). The reason why Eumachia decided to offer to the Pompeian citizenship this building, which was largely inspired by the imperial buildings in Rome, basically stands in the social and political advancement of her own family, particularly of her son M. Numistrius Fronto. The Eumachii were holders of extensive farmland in Pompeii, involved in wool and wine trade: this may be a sufficient justification for the statue erected by fullers (Catrèn 1975, p. 165).

**Dating and History of the Building**

Although Mau suggested to date this building in the early Principate of Tiberius (Mau 1899, p. 110), presently scholars are almost unanimous in attributing the Eumachia building to the Augustan Age (Zanker 1993, p. 105). The clues that lead to this conclusion are numerous. M. Numistrius Fronto, son of Eumachia, probably corresponds with the duumvir, one of the chief magistrates of Pompeii, recorded in 2-3 a.D. Besides, the dedication of a building, in particular a porticus, made by him in conjunction with his mother, reminds the case of the Porticus Liviae in Rome, which was dedicated by Livia and his son Tiberius in 7 B.C.

The frieze now encircling the front entrance is similar to the relieves of the Ara Pacis Augustae, and the portrait of Eumachia is completely idealized, such as other statues in the late classical style, adopted by the official art of the Augustan period. Most of all, the two inscriptions celebrating Aeneas (Fiorelli 1875, p. 258) and Romulus (Fiorelli 1875, p. 259), found in the chalcidicum, and probably once placed in two of the small rectangular niches of the façade, are believed to be a conscious citation of the gallery of portraits of the summi viri in the Forum Augustum in Rome, inaugurated in 2 B.C.

Excavations made by the Superintendent Amedeo Maiuri (Maiuri 1941-42, Maiuri 1942) revealed the presence of a line of rooms open towards the Forum, under the level of the chalcidicum. Their uniform arrangement indicates an overall plan, including shops on the East side of the square, which underwent an actual change only with the construction of the Eumachia building, as evidenced by the numerous restorations and the long lives of the shops.

The analysis of the structures made by Dobbins (Dobbins 1994; see: Pompeii Forum Project website), showed that the North-Eastern corner,
the South perimeter wall, its Western end, the façade and both of the Western ends of the crypta were rebuilt, maintaining the original design. The Augustan masonry is still visible in the South exedra, in the South circular niche and, partially, in the North exedra. The restored structures were also adorned with colored marbles and mural paintings.

The hypothesis proposed by Dobbins that also the colonnade of the porticus was newly erected, by replacing the previous tufa architectural elements with Corinthian elements in marble and travertine stones, needs to be further verified.

Dobbins links those restorations to the damages produced by the earthquake of the 62 a.D., but at present there are not stratigraphic proofs both for the construction and for the restoration proposed date.

**History of knowledge and hypothetical reconstruction**

The Eumachia building was already known in 1816: the chalcidicum and the façade are illustrated in a plan drawn by William Gell (Gell 1801-31, Pl. 82), depicting the section of the Forum excavated at that time. Information on the proper building, named “calcidico”, appear later, in 1817, in the excavation diaries collected and transcribed by Giuseppe Fiorelli (Fiorelli 1860-64, I, p. 198), and earlier than the discovery of the dedicatory inscription mentioning the constituting parts of the building, placed over the Southern entrance. This is a further confirmation that the front of the building, with the inscription carved over the colonnade of the Forum, had already emerged. Probably it came to light during the exploration of the street leading from the Forum to the theatres, started in 1815, so that the chalcidicum was discovered earlier than the Southern side. Then the porticus (Fiorelli 1860-64, I, p. 210) and, finally, the crypta (Fiorelli 1860-64, II, p. 16) came to light.

Although for a long time scholars, architects and artists have been devoting themselves to the identification of the three structures named after the inscriptions, on the basis of the theoretical guidance contained in ancient literary sources, their drawings and prints provide important evidences of the state of the ruins at the moment of the excavations. Some of them even reveal an early attempt of interpretation and reconstruction of the building.

Firstly, are to be mentioned the plans that begin to appear immediately after the end of the excavations, already containing interpretations of the archaeological remains. Those of Guglielmo Bechi, Félix Duban and François Mazois show different configurations of the chalcidicum and of the porticus. The chalcidicum appears bounded by a row of bases for statues both in Bechi’s plan and in the view by Luigi Rossini, dating respectively to 1820 and 1831, the anastylosis of the columns not having perhaps already been carried out. However, a column coupled to a base marks off the chalcidicum to the South, whereas the corresponding column on the North is not visible today, nor it was in Rossini’s print.

As regard the colonnade of the porticus, the plan drawn by Duban, dated between 1823 and 1828, and another print by Rossini show only some bases kept in place, being the position of the others just hypothetical. Indeed, drawers and scholars provide very different reconstructions of the colonnade, considerably varying the number of columns, their mutual distance and the symmetry of the short sides of the porticus. If the long sides
are generally composed of fourteen or sixteen columns, the short ones vary from six/eight columns on the East, to eight/ten columns on the West, or else eight columns on both sides.

Also the upper part of the building has been variously reconstructed depending on the finds of architectural decoration taken into account. Both the chalcidicum and the porticus have a Corinthian colonnade with a single order of columns in the longitudinal section conceived by Mazois: his hypothesis is based on a single base of column found in the chalcidicum, on three bases and some Corinthian capitals from the porticus. The building is crowned by a monumental tympanum which terminates the apse, as in the cross section proposed by the same author.

In Mau’s reconstruction (Mau 1892) the entire building shows a second order of columns: a Doric colonnade in the chalcidicum, whose fragments he identified in other buildings of the Forum, by analogy with the porticus of the Forum; a Corinthian colonnade in the porticus, due to the detection of two sizes in the fragments of the epistyle and of the cornice. Besides, the West side of the porticus is thought by Mau to be higher than the other sides and than the same chalcidicum, since columns have a larger diameter, and it has angular pilasters at the ends with demi-columns leant on. Finally, four additional columns are placed in the East side for static reasons (Mau 1899, p. 110).

At least in its final phase, the Eumachia building received a sumptuous decoration with polychrome marbles and mural paintings. Indeed, in addition to the aforementioned architectural elements in travertine, there are traces of marble revetment on the façade and on the baseboard of the internal walls. Also the South and the East exterior walls were coated with fine stucco containing marble dust, which formed a series of bays framed by Corinthian pilasters and alternating triangular and segmental pediments.

Mural paintings are almost completely disappeared. However we can get an idea of their appearance through the iconographic apparatus of the XIX century scholarship. The cross and longitudinal sections published by Mazois show paintings of the third style all along the porticus: above the flat, black baseboard, black panels with little scenes at the centre, framed by red bands decorated with stylized candelabra and egyptianizing motifs, filled the gaps between the windows.

According to Mazois and Duban, the crypta was decorated with alternated red and yellow panels, framed by black bands with slender columns and containing little landscape scenes, above the black baseboard with plants. Their prints, along with those of William Gell, can be compared with paintings of the East wing, that are the best preserved: here, in the niche of the portrait of Eumachia, the central red panel is flanked by clear panels surmounted by a green tympanum, as well as in the flight accessible from the Southern entrance.
References


**FIORELLI** 1875 - Fiorelli G., *Descrizione di Pompei*, Napoli 1875.


Credits:

3D PDF document created in 2012 by the staff of the research project *La Fortuna Visiva di Pompei* (Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa, IT). Designed, delivered and funded within the EU project CARARE.

The 3D model integrated in this document was created in 2008 by the Politecnique of Milan within the Pompeii Project, in agreement among ARCUS SpA (funding institution), Scuola Normale Superiore and Archaeological Superintendency of Pompeii.

Disclaimer:

The rights holder of this 3D PDF document is the Scuola Normale Superiore. Every use or re-use of this document must be authorized by the rights holder.

The rights holder of the 3D model is the Archaeological Superintendency of Naples and Pompeii. Every use or re-use of the 3D model integrated in this document must be authorized by the rights holder.

**3D PDF edited by:** Maria Emilia Masci (Scuola Normale Superiore)

**Author of texts:** Annamaria De Santis (Scuola Normale Superiore)

**Authors of 3D model:** Gabriele Guidi (Politecnico di Milano) and staff: Fabio Remondino, Fabio Menna (Fondazione Bruno Kessler)