

University of
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THE HOUSES OF *INSULA III* OF *HERCULANEUM* A Contextual Study of the Roman Housing Culture

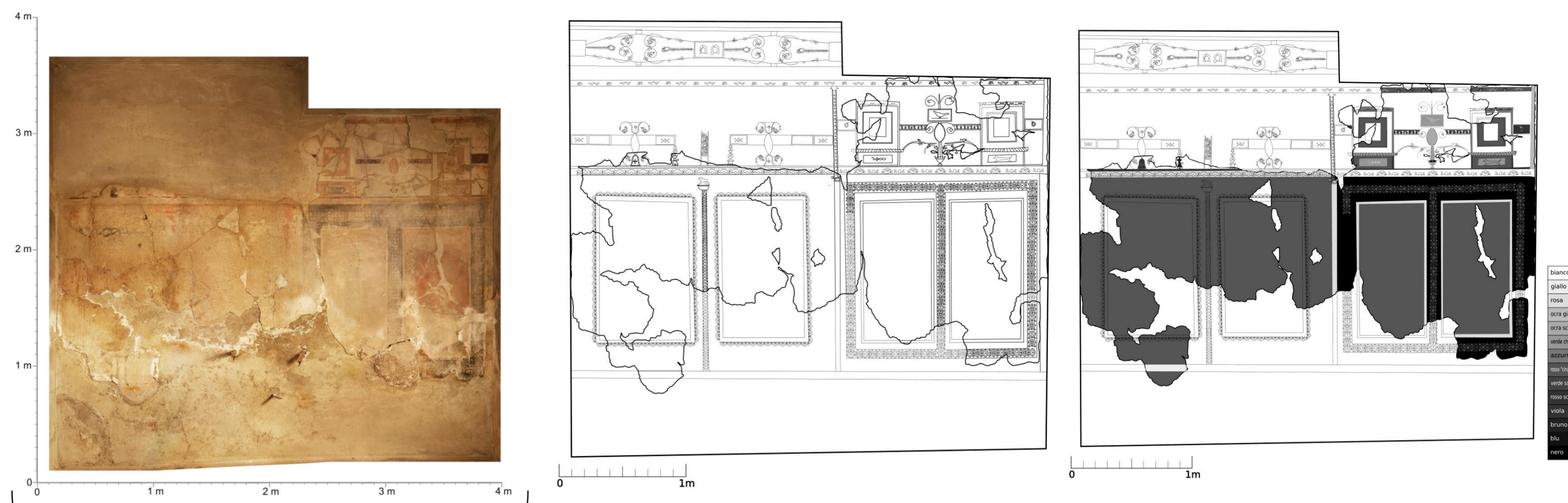


Fig. 3 Casa del Tramezzo di Legno, room 2, north wall. Graphic reconstructions of wall paintings (By inkscape, open source vector graphics editor)

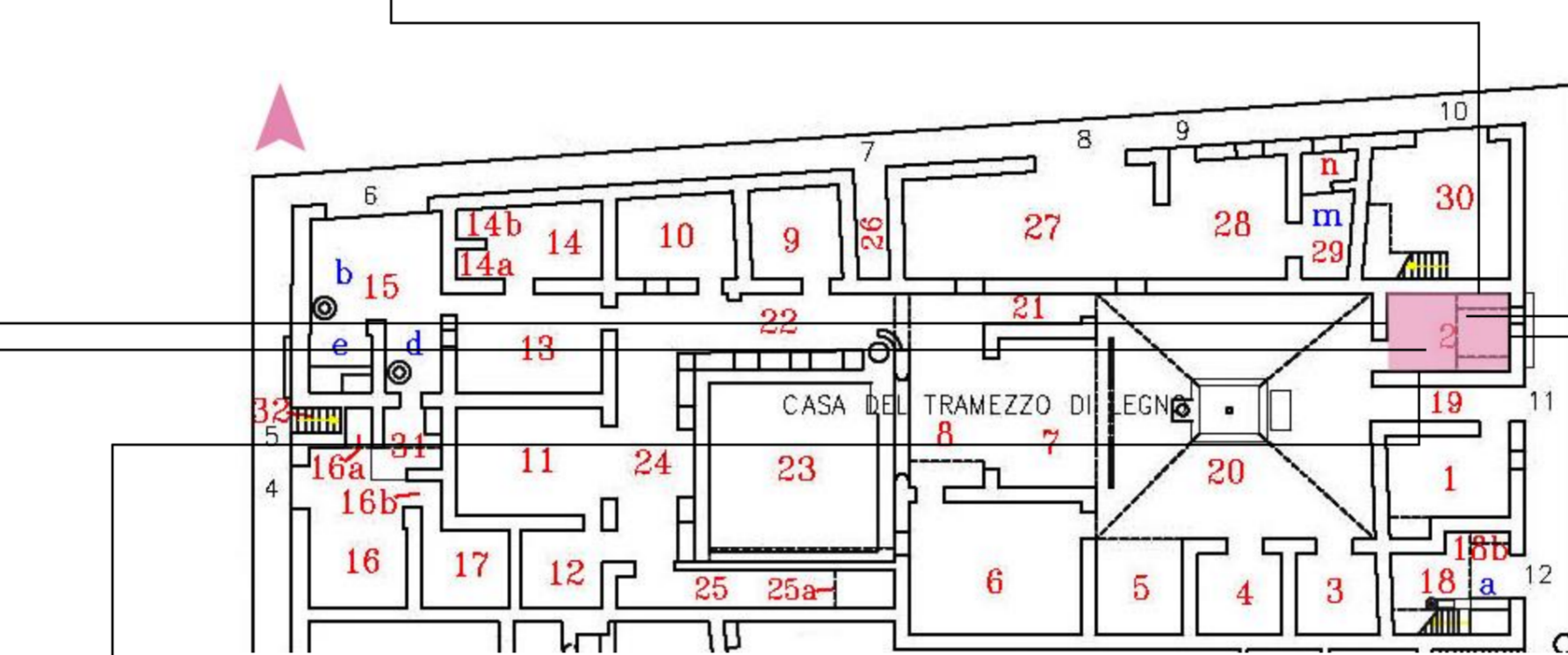


Fig. 2 Casa del Tramezzo di Legno, room 2. Rectified images of wall paintings, mosaic floor and ceiling (By Photometric 2009)



Fig. 1 Plan of Herculanum. In pink the Insula III

In view of recent studies on the forms and ways of living culture it has been firmly established in the theory and practice of research that the analysis by sectors and classes of materials, namely architecture, decorations, furnishings, grave goods, *instrumentum*, must always converge towards the reconstruction of ancient contexts of production and use. Therefore, an integral approach and a "global" study of living documents are essential not only for a correct research and knowledge of an ancient city, but also to plan conservation and communication with the public.

This is the line followed by the DHER Project "*Domus Herculansensis Rationes*", carried out from 2005 by the Dipartimento di Storia Culture Civiltà (DiSCi), University of Bologna, under the scientific direction of Antonella Coralini and by the PhD Project "Pitture e mosaici delle abitazioni di Ercolano. Rilievo, analisi, ricostruzione, contestualizzazione" (the University of Padova, in partnership with the University of Bologna) that falls within the framework of the activities of the DHER.

Like the DHER Project, the PhD research has as its main goal the contextual study of houses' decorations as a component of the *Herculaneum* housing culture.

For this reason, it is also aligned with the relatively recent revival of interest in the study of architectural and decorative buildings of the ancient city, both those founded by the Borboni, and those discovered later.

The aim of this research is an analysis of the 6 individual buildings of *Insula III* (fig. 1), selected as a case-study for their rich and varied material and documental evidence. *Insula III* is one of the first areas affected by the twentieth-century excavations conducted in "open air"; furthermore, it is characterized by the presence of different housing types and there are houses that still preserve the top floor, for example, the 'Casa del Tramezzo di Legno'. In this perspective, all the artifacts have been analyzed both as elements of complex sets (a room, a sector, a building), and, when possible, in their diachronic dimension, with the aim of explaining the role of the decorative system in the overall plan of the house and, on a larger scale, of the whole *Insula*.

Special attention has been given to wall painting, because of its documentary wealth and because of the importance of the role it played in the living spaces.

The study has been conducted by creating a new geo-referenced photogrammetric corpus of painted walls, ceilings and mosaics floors, existing *in situ*, out of context, or historically documented (from graphic, photographic and textual sources) (fig. 2); this has been enriched with an analytical database of decorations and graphic and supplementary reconstructions of the domestic decorative assemblages (fig. 3).

The implementation of systematic documentation is a prerequisite for the categorization of decorations, for their correct interpretation, and to better monitor and assess the specificity of the pictorial language of *Herculaneum*.

The intent of this research project is to contribute to the study of the use and perception of Roman domestic space at *Herculaneum*, through the comprehension of relationships between contexts and decorative choices, viewed as historical documents of a specific community and a specific culture in a specific era.

