

## POMPEI

### History

The extent of Pompeii was about 66 hectares, of which two thirds have been excavated so far. Situated at the intersection of the two important streets that are at the origin of the foundation of the city, the present forum (38 x 142 m) does not date to earlier than the 2nd century BC. Its buildings, all public, seem to have been built there without any unified plan, before being regularised by the construction of a monumental portico. This portico does not exist in the north, where the short side is occupied by an arch, now completely stripped of its marble covering and its statues, next to which stands the temple of Jupiter that dominates the square, with a high podium typical of the Etruscan-Italic tradition; the sanctuary is divided into three parts corresponding to the deities of the Capitoline triad, Jupiter, Juno and Minerva. The opposite part of the square is occupied by three public buildings. On the long eastern side of the square, the *macellum*, the meat and fish market, whose wide courtyard is occupied in the middle by a circular building that encloses a fountain. The "temple of Vespasian" actually seems to have been dedicated to the imperial cult. This is followed by the Eumachia building (perhaps a slave market) and by the *Comitium*, where elections were held. The long west side was occupied by the temple of Apollo, the oldest in the city, and by one of the first examples of a three-nave basilica, datable to around 125 B.C. Of the various public buildings built near the forum, the most remarkable are the large baths and the Stabia baths in the northeast, dating back to the 2nd century B.C. To the south-east of the forum, a second public square, the triangular forum, was developed around a Doric temple from the second half of the 6th century BC. To the east, the large theatre, which could accommodate 5,000 spectators, is flanked on the right by a smaller performance building, originally covered, probably an *odeon*, with a capacity of about 2,000 people. Carefully placed on the edge of the city centre, the amphitheatre of Pompeii, dated around 70 B.C., is one of the oldest examples of this type of building. The large parapet surrounding the scene had depictions of hunting and gladiators, known today only from watercolours of the 19th century. During the hottest days, a large *velum* was stretched out to shield its approx. 12,000 spectators from the sun.

### Rediscovery and restoration

The buildings in Pompeii were plundered in Roman times, immediately after the eruption, and for a long period of time. Even if the site was already known in the 16th century, when Charles of Bourbon, in 1748, began the first excavations there it was thought to be the ancient Stabia. Only in 1763, the discovery of an inscription revealed the true identity of the city. Soon, given the interest of the ruins that were gradually coming to light, the site was considered an essential landmark on the Grand Tour: in 1770, Mozart visited Pompeii, whose temple of Isis inspired the setting for the first performance of the *Magic Flute* in Vienna in 1791. The wealthy foreign visitors could follow the light of the ruins from a colourful group of chained slaves, children and women, whose incessant activity essentially resulted in the considerable enrichment of the collections of the King of Naples. The first scientific excavations took place in 1860, and the buildings brought to light from this date eloquently testify to the improvement in restoration techniques over the last two centuries. Around 1900, the already evident problems posed by the conservation of the site led to covering its remains, but this decision was not enough to stop its deterioration. No solution has so far been found to slow down the rapid crumbling of the buildings, further weakened by the violent earthquake that struck the nearby Irpinia region in 1980. For these reasons, an attempt is currently being made to study, consolidate and restore the structures already found, rather than dig up the part of the site that has not been explored so far, despite its interest. Pompeii was

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