CHAPTER XII

THE MACELLM

The large building at the northeast corner of the Forum was a provision market, of the sort called Macellum. The name Pantheon, once applied to it, is now abandoned, and there is no longer the slightest doubt regarding its purpose, which is indicated by its general plan, the remains found in the course of the excavations, and the paintings upon the walls.

Such markets, where provisions, especially of the finer and more expensive kinds, were sold and in which a cook also might be secured, without doubt existed in the Greek cities after the time of Alexander; from the Greeks, as in the case of the basilica, the Romans took both the name and the architectural type.

The first macellum in Rome was built in 179 B.C. in connection with the enlargement of a fish market. In later times, as we learn from inscriptions, others were constructed in Rome and in various cities of Italy and the provinces.

A macellum built by Nero is shown on one of the coins of this emperor. It agrees in essential points with our building, having stalls or shops of more than one story in height, and at the middle of the court a structure with a dome-like roof. The central structure, the tholus, is mentioned by Varro as an essential part of a macellum, but its use is known to us only from the remains found at Pompeii.

The plan of our building is simple. A court in the shape of a rectangle, slightly longer than it is broad, is surrounded by a deep colonnade on the four sides. In the middle twelve bases, arranged so as to form a dodecagon, supported an equal number of columns on which a roof rested; underneath was a rectangular basin in the pavement, from which a covered drain led toward the southeast corner. Under this roof the fish that had been sold were scaled, the scales being thrown into the basin, where they were found in great quantity. Behind the colonnade on the south side, and opening into it, was a row of market stalls or small shops (3 on the plan). Above these were upper rooms, in front of which was a wooden gallery, but there was no stairway, and apparently the shopkeeper who wished to use his second story had to provide himself with a ladder.

There were shops also on the north side, but they opened upon the street bounding the Macellum on the north; a southern
exposure for the shop fronts seems to have been avoided on account of the damage that the heat in summer might cause to the stock. In the shops on this street — whether in those belonging to the building or those on the opposite side is not stated — the excavators found charred figs, chestnuts, plums, grapes, fruit in glass vessels, lentils, grain, loaves of bread, and cakes. A few shops behind the portico in front faced toward the Forum.

A large market room (4) opened on the colonnade at the southeast corner, the entrance being divided by two columns. Along three sides runs a counter for meat and fish, the surface of which slopes toward the middle of the room. That fish were sold on the left side is plain from the special arrangement made to carry off the water; the floor behind the counter here was raised and sloped toward the rear, where a gutter connecting with it, and passing across the room, led under the counter on the south side into the street.

In the little room or pen at the northeast corner of the colonnade (8) remains of skeletons of sheep were found. Such animals, then, were sold here alive; instead of buying the flesh of slaughtered animals, many purchasers no doubt preferred to obtain a victim which could be sacrificed as an offering to the household gods before it was used for food.

The paintings on the walls of the colonnade are among the best examples of the latest Pompeian style. Above the base are large black panels with a broad red border; between them, in the vertical spaces separating the border of one panel from that of the next, are light and fantastic architectural designs in yellow on a white ground, the parts designed to appear furthest from the eye being in green and red. In this way a rich development of architectural forms is united, in a consistent and effective decorative scheme, with large panels suitable for paintings.

Along the edges of the black panels run conventional plant designs; in the middle are paintings symmetrically arranged in a series in which a pair of floating figures alternates with a mythological scene enclosed in a painted frame. Among the mythological pictures are Ulysses before Penelope, who does not recognize him, Io guarded by Argus, and Medea plotting the

murder of her children. The whole arrangement is in excellent taste, while the execution is careful and delicate.

The treatment of the upper part of the wall is especially worthy of note. Generally in walls of the fourth style the portion above the large panels is filled with airy architectural designs upon a white or at least a bright ground. In this instance the fantastic architectural forms in the spaces between the black panels are continued upwards to the ceiling, and in the midst of each group a standing figure is painted on a blue ground — a girl with utensils for sacrifice, a satyr playing the flute; but the spaces above the panels are completely filled with representations of the things exposed for sale. Unfortunately only a few of these pictures remain. One contains birds, some alive, some killed and dressed; in another, different kinds of fish are seen; and a third presents a variety of vessels in which wine and other liquids could be kept. This departure from the usual style of decoration, strikingly suggestive, can be explained only as having a direct reference to the purpose of the building.

In two small pictures in the black panels of the north entrance Cupids took the place of men. The Pompeians were very fond of the representation of Cupids as engaged in human occupations; it gave opportunity for the poetic treatment of everyday
untimely death was lamented by Virgil in those touching verses in the sixth book of the Aeneid. An arm with a globe was also found, doubtless belonging to the statue of an emperor that stood on the pedestal at the rear. The chapel contains no altar; sacrifice was probably offered on a portable bronze coal pan in the form of a tripod. Several beautiful examples of these movable altars have been found, and there are numerous representations of them in reliefs and in wall paintings.

The Macellum in its present form was at the time of the eruption by no means an ancient building. While finished and no doubt in use at the time of the earthquake of 62, it had been built not many years before, in the reign of Claudius or of Nero, in the place of an older structure which dated from the pre-Roman period. The earlier Macellum, of which scanty but indubitable traces remain, could not have contained a chapel for the worship of the emperors; this was probably introduced into the plan of the structure at the time of the rebuilding. The most reasonable supposition is that the chapel was built in honor of Claudius, and that his statue with the globe as a symbol of world sovereignty stood on the pedestal at the rear, while in the niches at the left were his wife Agrippina and adopted son Nero.

We can hardly doubt that Claudius was worshipped in Pompeii during his lifetime; it is known from inscriptions that even before the death of Claudius Nero was honored with the services of a special priest. That Octavia and Marcellus, another mother with a son who was heir to the throne, should be placed opposite Agrippina and Nero, was quite natural. Claudius, who through his mother Antonia was the grandson of Octavia, had great pride in this relationship, through which alone he was connected with the family of Augustus; and from Octavia, Agrippina and Nero also were descended, the former as a daughter of Germanicus, Claudius's brother, and the latter through his father Gnaeus Domitius, who was a son of the older daughter of Octavia, also called Antonia. This thought was suggested by the grouping of Octavia and Marcellus with Agrippina and Nero: Octavia's descendants are now on the throne, as Augustus intended that they should be; and Nero is the pride
and hope of the emperor and the Roman people, as once Marcellus was.

The room at the left of the imperial chapel, with a wide entrance divided by two columns (6), was also consecrated to the worship of the emperors. It contains a low altar (shown on the plan) of peculiar shape. A slab of black stone rests on two marble steps; it has a raised rim about the edge with a hole in one corner. Evidently this is an altar for drink offerings; in this room sacrificial meals were partaken of, at which the long estrade at the right, like a counter, nearly three feet high, was perhaps used as a serving table. Such meals had an important place among the functions of the Roman colleges of priests, and some priesthood connected with the worship of the emperors apparently had its place of meeting here; but whether this was the college of the Seviri Augustales, composed of freedmen, or a more aristocratic priesthood modelled after the Sodales Augustales at Rome, cannot be determined. The purpose of the niche in the corner, with the platform in front of it approached by steps, is unknown.

In this room, also, there were two pictures containing Cupids. In one they were represented as drinking wine and playing the lyre; in the other, as engaged in acts of worship—both appropriate decorative subjects for a room intended for sacrificial banquets.

The Macellum was entered from three sides. At the front, facing the Forum, was a portico consisting of two orders of white marble columns, one above the other, supporting a roof. Fragments of the Ionic or Corinthian columns belonging to the lower order, and of the well proportioned intermediate entablature, have been preserved. Statues stood at the foot of the columns, as also at the ends of the party walls between the shops at the rear of the portico, and beside the two columns of the little vestibule at the entrance; between the two doors was a small shrine, and here, too, was a statue.

The difference in direction between the front of the Macellum and the side of the Forum is concealed by increasing the depth of the shops from south to north, so that the depth of the portico remained the same. The room at the extreme right,