CHAPTER XVIII

THE TEMPLE OF VENUS POMPEIANA

For some years it had been known that a temple once stood in the rectangular block south of the strada della Marina; and in 1898 workmen excavating here began to uncover the massive foundations. When the volcanic deposits had been removed it was seen that the court of the temple, with the surrounding colonnade, occupied the whole area between the Basilica and the west wall of the long room now used as a Museum. On the podium (Fig. 55) was found a part of a statuette of Venus, of the familiar type which represents the goddess as preparing to enter the bath; it was probably a votive offering set up by some worshipper. In the subterranean passageway entered near the southeast corner (Fig. 54, IV) the excavators found another votive offering, a bronze steering paddle of the kind shown in paintings as an attribute of Venus Pompeiana; an example may be seen in Fig. 4 (p. 12). From these indications, as well as from the size of the temple and its location, near the Forum and on an elevation commanding a wide view of the sea, we are safe in assigning the sanctuary to Venus Pompeiana, the patron divinity of Roman Pompeii.

Prior to the founding of the Roman colony the site of the temple had been occupied by houses, built in several stories on the edge of the hill, which here slopes sharply toward the southwest; remains of the houses, which must have resembled those farther east (an example is the house of the Emperor Joseph II, p. 344), have been brought to light in the course of the excavations. In less than a century and a half the temple was twice built, twice destroyed; a third building was in progress at the time of the eruption.

The first temple was erected in the early years of the Roman colony. An area approximately 185 Roman feet square was prepared for it by levelling off and filling up, terrace walls being built to hold in place the earth and rubbish used for filling. The foundations of the walls about the court (A-B, C-D-E) can still be traced except on the south side, where, perhaps in conse-
carried below the Roman level, a part of the foundation of the temple itself having been removed. These walls conformed to the direction of the walls of the Basilica, the corners, as those of the Basilica, showing a noticeable divergence from a right angle.

The front of the earlier colonnade is outlined by the gutter (F–G–G', G''–H–I), constructed of blocks of tufa, which show signs of long use, and the foundation of the stylobate behind the gutter, which is plainly seen (Fig. 55); in places (as indicated in the plan), the layer of mortar spread over this foundation shows the impressions made by the blocks of the stylobate which rested on it. At the middle of the north side (G'–G'') both the gutter and the wall under the stylobate were removed when the foundations of the third temple were extended in that direction.

Along the gutter were basins for water used in cleaning the floor of the court, which was made of fine concrete. The entrance to the court was at the northeast corner.

On the east side of the court were six rooms, the rear of which was formed by the wall A'B'. Two of these opened on the colonnade in their whole breadth, and four with narrow doors, the thresholds of which, of whitish limestone, are still in place. Their purpose cannot be determined. The cross walls shown in the plan on the west side (x, y, z) belonged to an earlier building, and have nothing to do with the temple.

In front of the temple are remains of a large altar of whitish limestone (III). On the east side of the court is the base of an equestrian statue (V), of the same material, which was afterwards veneered with marble; near it is a pedestal of a standing figure (VI), of masonry covered with stucco, and behind this is the small base of a fountain figure. Near the southeast corner is the entrance (IV) to a subterranean passageway which runs toward the south; it probably led to rooms of earlier houses which were preserved, when the area was filled up, for the use of the attendants of the temple.

The temple itself, as the other edifices, religious and secular, of the first years of the Roman colony, must have been built of common materials and coated with stucco. Of the existing remains only the inner part of the podium (I, II on the Plan) can be assigned to it; a series of small blocks of tufa at the rear end is perhaps a remnant of the cornice which was carried around the upper edge of the podium.

To the Pompeians of the Empire the modest structure of Republican days seemed unworthy of the tutelary divinity of their city. On the same podium they built a temple of marble. Of this are preserved the foundations of the door posts of the cella (Fig. 56 a) and the core of the pedestal (D) on which stood the statue of the divinity, besides some bits of the cella floor, which consisted of a border of white mosaic (b), a broad strip of pavement of small flags of colored marble (c), and an ornamental centre (a) now entirely destroyed. The only remains of the superstructure that can be identified are in a storeroom north of the temple of Apollo. They consist of fragments of large
marble columns, nearly thirty-two inches in diameter, and of an
entablature of corresponding dimensions.

After the completion of the temple the Pompeians set about
rebuilding the colonnade, on a scale of equal magnificence.
First of all they enlarged the court by removing the old walls
to the foundations, and constructed new outside walls
(a–b–c–d), the corners of which form right angles. The
wall on the north side, of reticulate work, can be distin-
guished in Fig. 55. That on the east side is also well
preserved, but of that on the south side no trace remains. The deep foundation of the wall on the west side forms the farther wall of the present Museum, the roof of which very nearly represents the level of the floor of the ancient court. The colonnade was to be single on the north,
double on the east and west sides. The principal entrance
was at the northeast corner (K), with a smaller entrance (L)
at the end of the narrow street south of the Basilica.

How far the work had progressed before the earthquake of
the year 63 it is not easy to determine. The new gutter along
the front of the colonnade had not yet been laid, but the foundations
of the rows of columns (e–f–g–h, e′f′, g′h′) were for the most part
ready. From the Corinthian capital and fragments of shafts and entablature lying about the court it is clear that these
members were fitted and in place when they were thrown down.
Part of the colonnade was therefore finished. It was in two
stories, probably without an intervening floor, like the porticoes
in front of the Macellum and the building of Eumachia. Not less
than three hundred marble columns must have been required to
complete the work; undoubtedly the wall back of the colonnade

![Plan of the second temple, restored.](image)

was divided off by pilasters below and half columns above, the
intervening spaces being filled with marble. In point of size,
the temple with its court formed the largest sanctuary, in rich-
ness of materials the most splendid edifice of the entire city.

The great earthquake felled to the ground alike the finished
temple and the unfinished colonnade. But the Pompeians, in
their time of trouble least of all disposed, we may assume, to
forsake their patron goddess, soon commenced the work of
rebuilding. Postponing the renewal and completion of the col-
onnade as of secondary importance, they cleared away the débris
of the temple, and on the podium where the cela had stood
constructed a temporary place of worship, a small wooden build-

![Plan of the second temple, restored.](image)

ing strengthened at the bottom by a low wall around the outside.
Then they proceeded to enlarge the podium; the third temple
was to be even more imposing than its predecessor. The old
steps were removed from the front. The existing podium was
cut back five Roman feet on each side, and four inches at the
rear, to form the core of the new podium; on all sides of this
a massive foundation wall was commenced, five and a half Roman
feet thick, made of large blocks of basalt carefully worked and
fitted. A similar wall was carried through the old podium (b–b′),
to serve as the foundation for the front wall of the cela. The
relative size of the component parts of the new temple is thus
clearly indicated. The cela was to extend over the space
b–c–c′–b′, the portico over that marked a–b–b′; how far the
steps were to project in front is uncertain.

At the time of the eruption five courses of basalt had been
laid, reaching a height of more than four feet, the space between
the core of the old podium and the outer wall being filled with
concrete as the work progressed. On the north side of the court
are still to be seen a number of blocks of basalt not yet trimmed
and fitted, just as they were abandoned by the workmen when
the work was stopped forever.