

## A (Re)assessment of the Statuary in the Forum of Pompeii

Today, Pompeii's Forum bears little resemblance to how it would have appeared in antiquity. In the centuries since the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE, the Forum has been picked over in antiquity by former Pompeians looking to salvage valuable arts and costly materials buried beneath the ash, as well as by the early excavators after the re-discovery of the city in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century searching for antiquities to display in the palaces of the Bourbons and the villas of the European aristocracy. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, excavators, including August Mau and Amedeo Maiuri, concluded from the barren appearance of the Forum that it had not returned to use as a public space after the devastating earthquake in 62 CE, and was still in the midst of reconstruction at the time of the eruption (e.g. Maiuri 1942, 215). However, as Dobbins (1994) has demonstrated convincingly with regard to the structures surrounding the Forum, a substantial building scheme was both designed and in many cases fully executed in the years between the earthquake and the destruction of the city in 79 CE. This same scrutiny has yet to be given to the statue bases that occupy the center of the Forum. In particular, the clusters of bases in the northwest corner and at the southern end of the Forum reveal a complex narrative of change and shifting social and political hierarchies in Pompeii from the late Republican era up to the eruption of Vesuvius.

Bare bases stand scattered throughout the Forum where gleaming statues once perched, nearly all stripped of their facing stones; lost with them are the names of those whose likenesses they bore. Of the over seventy statue bases and niches remaining on the Forum, only seven still bear their dedicatory inscriptions. In this paper, I will analyze the four extant dedicatory inscriptions from the northwest corner of the Forum in light of both their content and their context. I will propose an internal chronology for the erection of the statues as well as

demonstrate the impact of this chronology on our understanding of the reconstruction and reshaping of the Forum between 62 and 79 CE. These inscriptions, though they represent only a handful of cases, illustrate who was allowed to display his image in the Forum and give a minimum indication of the range of time that statues were allowed to remain in place. However, as Allison (2001) has warned, the temptation to reconstruct both political and social narratives has often suffered from a lack of adequate care for their contexts. While Castrén's 1975 prosopographical study is an invaluable resource in the identification of the individuals in question, these identifications based primarily on epigraphic evidence must be combined with the context in which those inscriptions are found. Close analysis of the extant remains reveals that contrary to the narrative put forth by the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century excavators, by 79 CE the Forum was even more ornate and decorated than it had been before the earthquake of 62 CE. Rather than abandoning the Forum, the Pompeians used the destruction caused by the earthquake to further aggrandize their most prominent public space.

#### Bibliography

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