

## Antiquity's Ghosts: William Gell's *Pompeiana* and Nineteenth-Century Visions of Rome

The rediscovery of Pompeii and Herculaneum in the mid-eighteenth century afforded, for the first time, a glimpse into the private dwellings of everyday Romans. By the early nineteenth century, tourists, artists, poets, and scholars alike added Pompeii to their Italian itineraries in search of a closer connection with a lost past. Among those captivated by the monuments of Pompeii was British illustrator and amateur archaeologist William Gell (1777–1836). In collaboration with architect and archaeologist J. P. Gandy, Gell wrote and illustrated *Pompeiana*, the first English-language guide to the discoveries at Pompeii, published in 1817–19. A second edition, written by Gell alone, was published in 1832; the two-volume updated version contained information about new discoveries that had been made since the publication of the first edition, including the popular House of the Dioscuri and House of the Tragic Poet. This paper focuses on depictions of domestic interiors in the 1832 edition of *Pompeiana*. I examine the images themselves as well as their social and cultural context to reveal the ways in which the Pompeian interior was used to convey nineteenth-century values and views about the ancient world.

Gell strove for objectivity and accuracy both in his depictions of the ruins and in his reconstructions of their ancient appearance, using archaeological and literary sources as well as the newly-invented *camera lucida* to inform his work (Gell and Gandy 1817–18, xvi; Wallace-Hadrill 2006, 288; Sweet 2015). The accurate recording of the monuments of Pompeii was important not only to make the archaeological discoveries available to a larger audience but also to preserve them for posterity. Already in the early nineteenth century, artists and archaeologists noted the rapid deterioration of recently excavated paintings and lamented the policies that imposed a waiting period on foreign artists wishing to draw them (Gell 1832, vii; Lyons and

Reed 2007, 145). However, despite the scientific accuracy for which Gell strove and their importance in understanding the nineteenth-century excavations, the drawings of the Pompeian interiors also betray nineteenth-century concerns with the monumentality of the ruin, the importance of the individual, and the melancholy of loss. Gell's *Pompeiana* engravings reveal a passionate admirer of antiquity attempting to reconcile the actual state of the Pompeian remains with his own vision of the past, resulting in work that is as much product of its own time as the objective document that Gell intended.

### Bibliography

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