



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

A GAZE INTO THE PAST: EXPLORING POMPEII'S SOCIETAL STRUCTURES THROUGH THE MALE GAZE THEORY

Veer, Marlieke van der

Citation

Veer, M. van der. (2023). *A GAZE INTO THE PAST: EXPLORING POMPEII'S SOCIETAL STRUCTURES THROUGH THE MALE GAZE THEORY*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [License to inclusion and publication of a Bachelor or Master Thesis, 2023](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3715168>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

**A GAZE INTO THE PAST:
EXPLORING POMPEII'S SOCIETAL STRUCTURES THROUGH THE MALE
GAZE THEORY**

**by
Marlieke van der Veer**

**Leiden University
History - Ancient History
Dr. K. Beerden
20EC
August 21st, 2023**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction		1
	Main question	3
	Methodology	4
	Case studies and source criticism	4
	Thesis outline	5
Chapter I	Presenting the case studies	6
	Lupanar	6
	Couples engaged in sexual activities	9
	Erotic mythology	13
	Erotic graffiti	14
	House of the Vettii	21
	Couples engaged in sexual activities	24
	Erotic mythology	26
	Erotic graffiti	30
Chapter II	The masculine gaze	31
	Couples engaged in sexual activities	31
	The Lupanar series	32
	The Vettii series	34
	Erotic mythology	35
	Priapus	35
	The Vettii's decorative programme (other than Priapus)	37
	Erotic graffiti	44
	Category insults	44
	Category boastfulness	44
Chapter III	The female gaze	47
	Couples engaged in sexual activities	50
	Frescoes of both the Vettii and the Lupanar	50
	Erotic mythology	51
	The Lupanar's Priapus	51
	The Vettii's decorative programme (other than Priapus)	52
	Erotic graffiti	52

	Category insults	52
	Category boastfulness	53
	Female writers	53
Chapter IV	The intersectional gaze	55
	Couples engaged in sexual activities	56
	Frescoes of both the Vettii and the Lupanar	56
	Erotic mythology	58
	Priapus	58
	Hermaphroditus	59
	Erotic graffiti	59
	Category assessment	60
	Category news	60
	Category boastfulness	60
	Category insults	61
Conclusion		63
Bibliography		66

INTRODUCTION

An explosion. A muscular and striking man is being chased and he fires several gunshots at his opponent. The tension is rising, and the action is high. Then, when the man seemed to have solved the trouble he was in in a particularly clever and macho way, a woman enters the scene. She leans against the door frame. The camera lingers on her body.

The phenomenon that just took place inside the mind of the reader is what film historian Laura Mulvey discussed in establishing her theory of the *male gaze*. In this short scene it was not necessary for me to describe the woman for the reader to automatically imagine an attractive woman soon to be the love interest of the male main character. Mulvey argued in her article, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, that the typicality of this female side character is the result of a patriarchal society and therefore represents merely the view of men on women. She is passive, while he is active. What then emerges is that the film, book, or play is read or watched through the eyes of the dominant gender of the society, thus men.¹ In the theory of the *gaze* a light can be shined on the Other in a society, the *Out-group*, through messages about sexuality. Who is dominant, how does this relationship take shape, and what does this express about hierarchies in societies? Culture, art, and storytelling in general, but about sexuality in particular, function as representations of a society.²

Mulvey’s article started a trend and a discussion on the *gaze*, its interpretation and application in film studies. Later on, this was adopted in other fields of study, specifically those related to society. An example of a scholar who deepens her theory is scholar and author Todd McGowan. In his research into film directors, such as Orson Welles, Claire Denis, and Steven Spielberg, he demonstrates his version of the theory through cinematic forms that imply variation in terms of how the *gaze* functions. He suggests that the *gaze* can be interpreted not only from the point of view of its spectator, but from within the filmic image as well. Thus, this new position enables the *gaze* to disrupt one’s sense of identity through cinematic viewing.³ He challenges Mulvey’s theory in his reversed version of the *gaze*, but at the same time acknowledges in doing so that a female viewer can be put in the perspective of a male viewer through the identity disrupting feature of the *gaze*. Furthermore, McGowan

¹ L. Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, *Screen* 16.3 (1975) 6-18.

² For more on the original theory by Mulvey see also: C. Glenn, ‘Complicating the theory of the male gaze: Hitchcock’s leading men’, *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 15, 4: Special Issue on Laura Mulvey (2017): 496-510, and R. Sassatelli, ‘Interview with Laura Mulvey: Gender, Gaze and Technology in Film Culture’, *Theory, culture & society* 28, 5. (2011): 123-143.

³ T. McGowan, *The Real Gaze* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007) 23-211.

already states that the *gaze* could be a plural form instead of a singular noun. This multiplicity is an aspect I aim to explore.

Sociologist Elizabeth Monk-Turner applied the film theory of the *gaze* on other forms of representation in media, such as magazines and advertisements. She analyses why sexuality is used as a tool in addressing the public, or why not, and also in what manners. Many of the results of these analyses showed that no sexuality had been used as a tool. Yet whenever they did, objectification appeared to be largely of the female character within the content and with a male audience to address.⁴ Monk-Turner's research seems to generally go along the lines of Mulvey's findings, nevertheless expanding on the theory by providing tangible evidence and broadening the relevant sources from film to media.

It was only a matter of time, quite literally, before this 1970s theory would have been applied to historical studies into the field of the hierarchy in society as expressed in sexuality. Already in 1998 author and historian John R. Clarke discussed the representation of different Roman audiences for erotic art. He was against the stowing away of erotic art in depots as a result of certain taboos and assumptions that this art did not acquire further research. His research aimed to dismantle the twentieth century *gaze* upon these ancient works and instead analyze, and more importantly, view these through the eyes of a Roman.⁵

Then, in 2018, art historian Rosemary Barrow in her book, 'Gender, Identity and the Body in Greek and Roman Sculpture', reversed the *gaze* from male to female while analyzing an archeological finding from Antiquity. This finding was a richly decorated mirror cover. It must have cost the owner or giver a large sum and was not just an ordinary household object. The decorations however consisted of a noticeably suggesting erotic scene wherein the woman was displayed in a submissive position to the man in the picture. Barrow stated that the fact that it was found in a grave of a female Greek individual of high status indicated that, despite the submissive state the representation of her gender, there must have been a form of identification as it was buried with her. Thus, even though we cannot know in what manner the Greek woman, or her loved ones while burying her, had intended it, Barrow argues this finding can be of importance for the *female gaze*.⁶

Although much discussion can be had about the validity of this particular example – if the mirror was buried with her by her husband, things are completely different - I will

⁴ E. Monk-Turner, 'Who is gazing at whom?', *Journal of Gender Studies* 17.3 (2008) 201-209, at 201-207.

⁵ J. R. Clarke, *Looking at Lovemaking: constructions of sexuality in Roman art, 100 B.C.-A.D. 250* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), XV-4.

⁶ R. Barrow, *Gender, Identity and the Body in Greek and Roman Sculpture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) 2-15.

continue along the lines of Barrow's historical use of Mulvey's theory and argue that it could offer us insights on other time periods apart from modern times. I agree that it can be applied to the study of historical societies, such as that of the Ancient Romans. This has, however, only partially been done.⁷ Most significant in this are the works of John R. Clarke, 'Look Who's Laughing at Sex: Men and Women Viewers in the Apodyterium of the Suburban Baths at Pompeii' published in 2002, and principally his aforementioned 'Looking at Lovemaking: constructions of sexuality in Roman art, 100 B.C.-A.D. 250' from 1998. Lastly, Sarah Levin-Richardson's 'The Brothel of Pompeii: Sex, Class, and Gender at the Margins of Roman Society' published in 2019, for both these authors address erotic art from the point of view of male and of female spectators.

Main question

This leads me to my main question; how is 'the *gaze*' expressed in Roman Antiquity, the second half of the first century CE, and which insights about societal structures might we gain?

As mentioned above, I too aim to broaden Mulvey's theory from *male gaze* to incorporation of the *female gaze*. I thus will continue this research from the perspective of a female Pompeian. What were possible reactions to these works as viewed by women? Would they interpret these works similarly or differently, how, and why? I will search for an answer to whether there are suggestions for a *female gaze* and if so, what this could tell us about their perception of their societal position and possible acceptance, neutrality, or resistance.

However, I aim to expand on Mulvey's theory even further by introducing the *intersectional gaze* - I will discuss what is and also what is not depicted on the Pompeian sources. *The Other* is often not confined to only gender roles but can be found in for example physical disabilities or race. This version of the *gaze* will thus adopt a modern term coined by law scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, *intersectionality*. This term is defined as the phenomenon in which social inequality occurs along intersecting axes. Privilege or discrimination therefore is not bound to one characteristic but can be a meeting point of factors. Besides gender,

⁷ See for example B. Severy-Hoven, 'Master Narratives and the Wall Painting of the House of the Vettii, Pompeii', *Gender & History* 24.3 (2012) 540-580, L. Hov, 'The First Female Performers: Tumblers, Flute-girls, and Mime Actresses', *New theatre quarterly* 31 (2015), A. Serafim, George Kazantzidis and Kyriakos Demetriou ed. *Sex and the Ancient City: Sex and Sexual Practices in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2022), A. Staples, *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins: Sex and Category in Roman Religion* (London: Routledge, 1998), and A. Lardinois & L. McClure, *Making Silence Speak: Women's Voices in Greek Literature and Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

examples of these are class, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, disability, and weight.⁸ This term applied to ancient times results in questions such as what groups have not yet been found represented in the art? What reasons could there be to exclude them from representations? And how can we view aspects of their role in society? The heavily debated term *barbari* is an example of how Romans not only unconsciously discriminated, but also likely deliberately created out-groups, and thus of how the concept of intersectionality may indeed be relevant to ancient times.⁹

Methodology

Case studies and source criticism

I aim to discover new insights on Antiquity's (in)equality in society by using the *gaze*-theory of Mulvey on two case studies of collections of archeological findings depicting erotic themes in Pompeii during the early Roman Imperial era. These findings will serve as the tangible Roman versions of modern expressions of art as used by Mulvey, for the way these ancient artists have portrayed their characters allows us to analyze how and if representation was formed.

The first case study is then a collection of erotic art as found in the Lupanar, Pompeii's largest brothel. This decision was based on the idea that the dominant *gaze* would likely be manifested strongly in a place where it is commercialized and where sexuality is emphasized. The collection consists of several forms of artistic expressions with erotic themes, from professionally applied frescoes of differing sexual positions with still debatable function, to amateur quick graffiti on the Lupanar's outer walls done by its customers. A complication of this case study is then the lack of clarity about the function of the wall paintings. Scholars have proposed it is a menu of specialties of the prostitutes, but the series cannot be examined as such with full certainty. Furthermore, unfortunately not all have been preserved as well as others which complicates interpretation and also interpretation of the series as a whole.

Secondly, a case study will be formed by the erotic art in the house of Vettii, one of the homes excavated in Pompeii as a more common and everyday example of Pompeian life and households in addition to the brothel. Here a multiplicity of erotic scenes has been found, commissioned by one *familia* and placed on walls of ordinary areas such as the kitchen. The

⁸ K. Williams Crenshaw, *Intersectionality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 307-308.

⁹ See for example G. Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007), R. Hingley, *Globalizing Roman Culture* (London: Taylor & Francis 2005), and C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005) for the debate about 'barbarism' and 'romanization'.

variety of both case studies will enable the research to explore different makers, functions, and placements in the city of Pompeii as a comparison of more than one layer of Pompeian society and differing social situations.

Thesis outline

The main question as mentioned earlier will be discussed by means of research into the primary sources and literature research. This research will be divided into four chapters which will elaborate on the two case studies. The first offers key information on the two collections of primary sources needed for subsequent steps in this research. The latter three chapters each consist of an analysis of the primary sources for the presence or absence of indications of that chapter's relevant *gaze*. In this way I am able to demonstrate, compare and challenge differing perspectives on the subject of the (in)equality debate using relevant primary sources. Hence, equality will serve as core value and from there research into societal structures takes place. This means that apart from placing a relatively modern debate on an ancient time period, a second modern debate is interwoven herein. Present-day media, governments and civil movements are currently working on topics related to inequality, such as sexism and racism. The differing out-groups that are the subject of discussion will serve as the ground works for the third and fourth chapter. The second chapter will commence by means of its basis; the male perspective as coined by Mulvey. The analysis of the Lupanar and the Vettii for the *gaze* will be performed iconographically. The characters depicted in the art works are leading in this; the way in which characters are depicted, the roles they appear to have been assigned in the works, and how the works may be interpreted. Furthermore, I will take a look at the maker, if any information about them is known, and its placement, to reveal possible biases, functions, or additional information, and adjust interpretations of the *gaze* accordingly. After having discussed the *male gaze* in chapter two, I will broaden this *male gaze* theory with other perspectives. In the third chapter I focus on the female gaze; the same analysis will be performed, however, from the perspective of a female Pompeian. And finally, in a fourth chapter I introduce the *intersectional gaze*. An iconographical analysis of the case study will be performed for a third time, now from the perspective of the *intersectional gaze* – the emphasis on the display or absence of *Out-groups*.

CHAPTER I

PRESENTING THE CASE STUDIES

In this first chapter the case studies will be further elucidated. A necessary basis will be provided which allows for the main question to be asked. As mentioned above, both these case studies are formed by the collection of erotically themed art and expressions as found within two of Pompeii's buildings. The first a brothel, the Lupanar, the second a house, the House of the Vettii. It must be clarified that not all these expressions were interpreted by Romans in the same way as we would. This means that this research consciously examines along the lines of the modern definition of erotic, namely the objects that relate to or tend to arouse sexual love, desire, or excitement.¹⁰ Though it cannot be said with certainty how these objects would have been interpreted, used, or infused in Roman Pompeiian culture. Mulvey's perspective functions as a starting point from where the research examines the culture in question. Whether this definition was also applicable in Roman times is to be explored. This cultural aspect indeed is one of the aspects which will be examined, for possible contemporary function, interpretation, and aim could be telling about the main question: social roles in Roman Pompeiian culture.

Lupanar

The first collection of primary sources is the case of the Lupanar, Pompeii's biggest brothel. The Lupanar is important for my research due to the assumption that expressions of Roman sexuality are practically guaranteed in an environment where it is commercialized. This could offer insights on what *gaze* is predominantly present in the decorative plan and added graffiti of an intentionally sexualized situation, a brothel. This brothel has its location in Pompeii's *Regio* (region) VII.¹¹ Its placement is at an intersection of the streets Vicolo del Balcone Pensile and Vicolo del Lupanare. This region is near the city centre and is best described as highly urbanised. Roman life would have been dynamic here with many shops, eating facilities and taverns. The brothel thus had many aspects that could potentially draw in clients and in all probability was a lively business. It can therefore be labelled a public space that did not represent one individual in particular. Its owner and the prostitutes were generally the most frequently present in the brothel, however, a brothel's decorative programme is likely

¹⁰ "Erotic." Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, accessed March 22, 2023, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/erotic

¹¹ Clarke, 1998, 196.

aimed directly at its grand array of customers. It would most likely not have centered solely around the owner's persona.

The surrounding walls were constructed largely by using rectangular yellow tufa, while the brothel's composition consists of primarily gray tufa stones and blocks, and broken tiles. This composition could date it to after the first century BCE. However, the cityscape was changed continuously, especially in the final 17 years before the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE.¹² Thus, we cannot be fully certain of the brothel's date. The brothel's interior decorative plan however was dated 72 CE. This was possible because of an impression of a coin within the wall's plaster.¹³ This fits this research's time period of the second half of the first century CE.

The decorative plan was particularly little and its artist unfortunately unknown. The *cellae* did not contain any painted decoration. Even with damaged plaster, scholars have been able to determine so. These *cellae* are, due to this lack of decoration, established as informal or practical rooms.¹⁴ This case study thus focuses on the small decorative plan fitted for my subject that the brothel does offer: the atrium's frescoes. This plan is located on the ground floor which will be addressed as room *a* (fig. 1). It consists of eight erotic frescoes forming a U-shape (fig. 2). Each is placed above the doors on the lintels. Added to the collection is the large quantity of graffiti as placed by the brothel's clients. This decision is based on the expectation that it can broaden the perspective for it includes a point of view directly from the social group of clientele.

¹² S. Levin-Richardson, *Sex, Sight, and Societas in the Lupanar, Pompeii* (Stanford: Stanford University Publishing, 2005) 376-381.

¹³ Levin-Richardson, 2005, 2-3.

¹⁴ J. R. Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy 100 B.C.-A.D. 250: Ritual, Space, and Decoration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) 57-68.

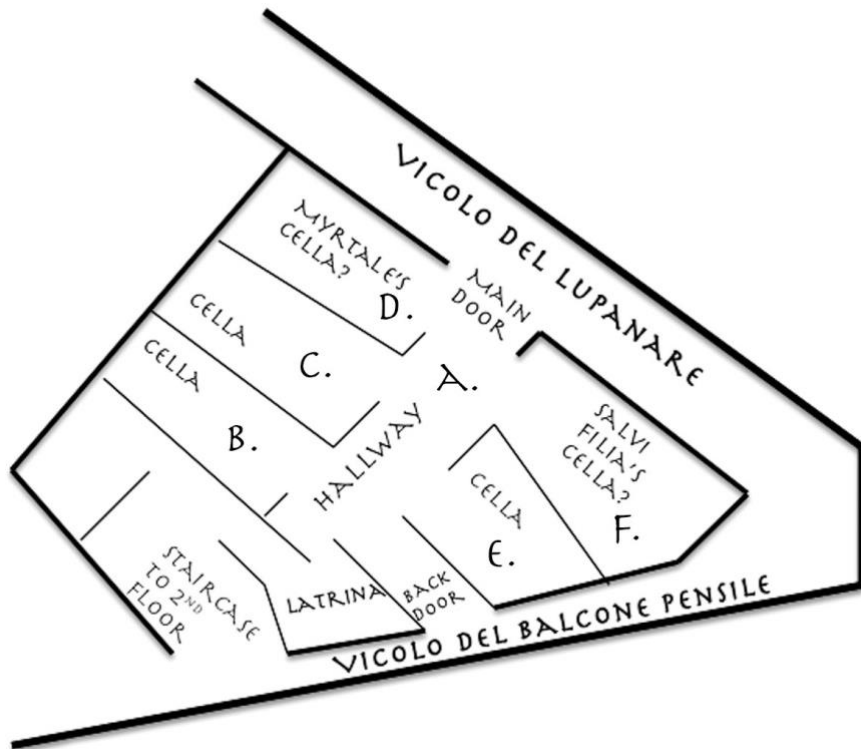


Figure 1. Floor plan of the Lupanar. [Underlying plan after Strong, 2016, 149]

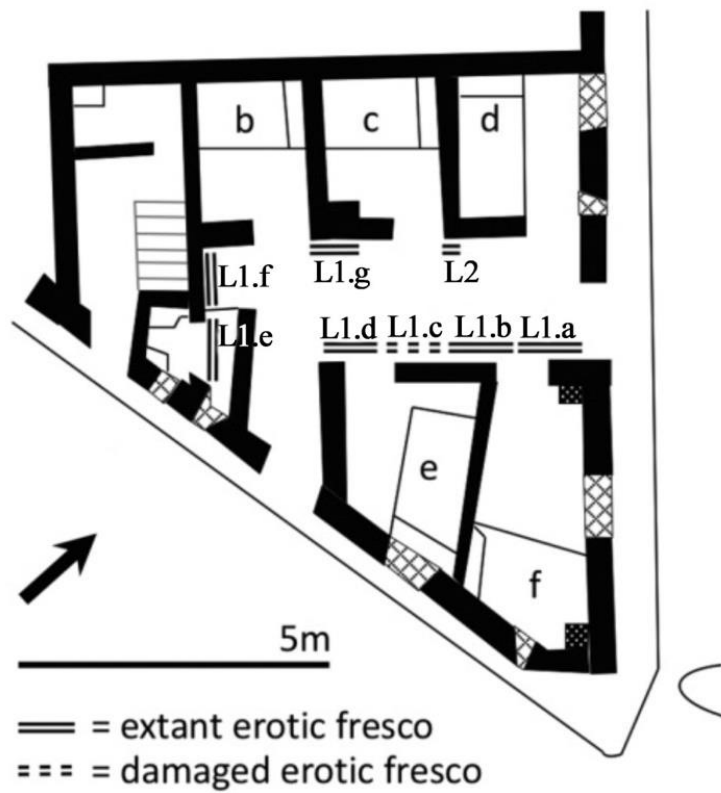


Figure 2: locations of the erotic frescoes in room *a*, the atrium. Each is coded with the case-study, the type or erotic art, and in alphabetical order. [Underlying plan after Levin-Richardson, 2019, 65, fig. 35]

Couples engaged in sexual activities

The fresco group, group *L1*, is heavily debated due to the series' unknown purpose (figs. 4-9). It has been suggested that it functioned as a menu for the brothel's clients to choose differing sexual positions. However, this suggestion has received much critique.¹⁵ The variety of options offered would be very slim as the seven frescoes do not all portray different positions but overlap in some cases. Furthermore, the positions shown are not of particular specialization but rather basic. The placement of the frescoes, which are not specifically aligned above each door acting as a crown of the door opening, indicates that a menu and thus assignment to the *cella* in question is hard to prove. J. R. Clarke coins a possible function for the frescoes as he states these could imitate amorous frescoes as found in elite houses. This imitation would imply a similar function as in elite houses, specifically in the bedroom, art like this may have been for the purpose of sexually stimulating and inspiring a couple.¹⁶

Six versions can be counted of male-female couples performing sexual acts. These frescoes depict the couples on a bed or couch made from wood and topped with a mattress and cushions in various shades but often with stripes. The bed or couch is in five of these frescoes accompanied by other furniture as well. Another aspect the series continuously depicts is a red garland surrounding the scene. A seventh is severely damaged but scholars interpret this piece through its context as almost certainly another addition to the series. This series of couples engaged in sexual activities will be addressed as group *L1* and individually labelled *L1.a-g*.

The viewer starts off the U-shape at their left when entering the brothel by fresco *L1.a*. From there on one continues step by step to the right ending with fresco *L1.g* (figs. 3-9). Each couple depicted is seemingly a different pair of people than the one before, and not two specific individuals. However, this cannot be said with certainty for it is not emphasized by the maker with strikingly differing features in appearances. This is an aspect of the series that is up for debate and relevant to this research as well.

Lastly, the aforementioned seventh fresco, *L1.c*, is interpreted by scholars as likely a continuation of the series through the context of its placement in the U-shape.¹⁷ This placement can be combined with a matching shape and size. Furthermore, a last matching aspect is the red frame surrounding the scenes (fig. 5).

¹⁵ J. R. Clarke, 'Look Who's Laughing at Sex: Men and Women Viewers in the Apodyterium of the Suburban Baths at Pompeii', in: *The Roman Gaze: Vision, Power, and the Body*, ed. D. Fredrick (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002) 151-152.

¹⁶ Clarke, 1998, 201-206.

¹⁷ S. Levin-Richardson, *The Brothel of Pompeii* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) 74.



Figure 3: fresco L1.a [image retrieved from <https://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R7/7%2012%2018.htm>]



Figure 4: fresco L1.b [image retrieved from <https://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R7/7%2012%2018.htm> Photo courtesy of Klaus Heese.]

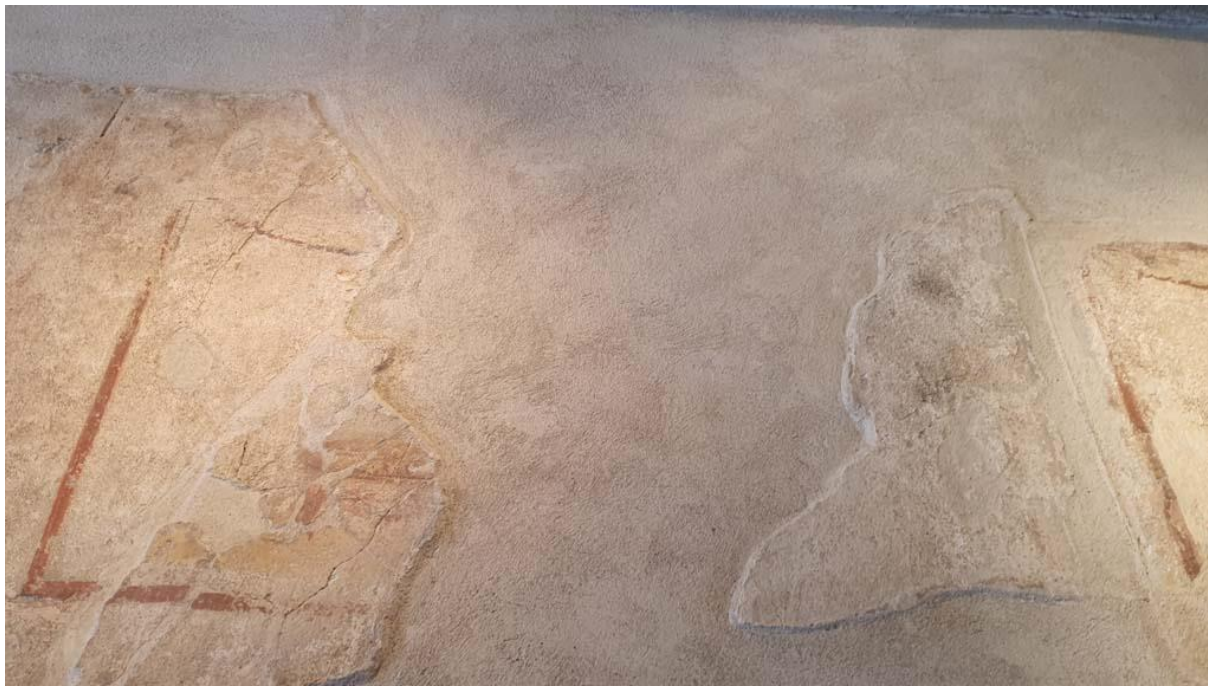


Figure 5: fresco L1.c [image retrieved from <https://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R7/7%2012%2018.htm> Photo courtesy of Annette Haug.]



Figure 6: fresco L1.d [image retrieved from <https://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R7/7%2012%2018.htm> Photo courtesy of Aude Durand.]



Figure 7: fresco L1.e [image retrieved from <https://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R7/7%2012%2018.htm>]



Figure 8: fresco L1.f [image retrieved from <https://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R7/7%2012%2018.htm>]

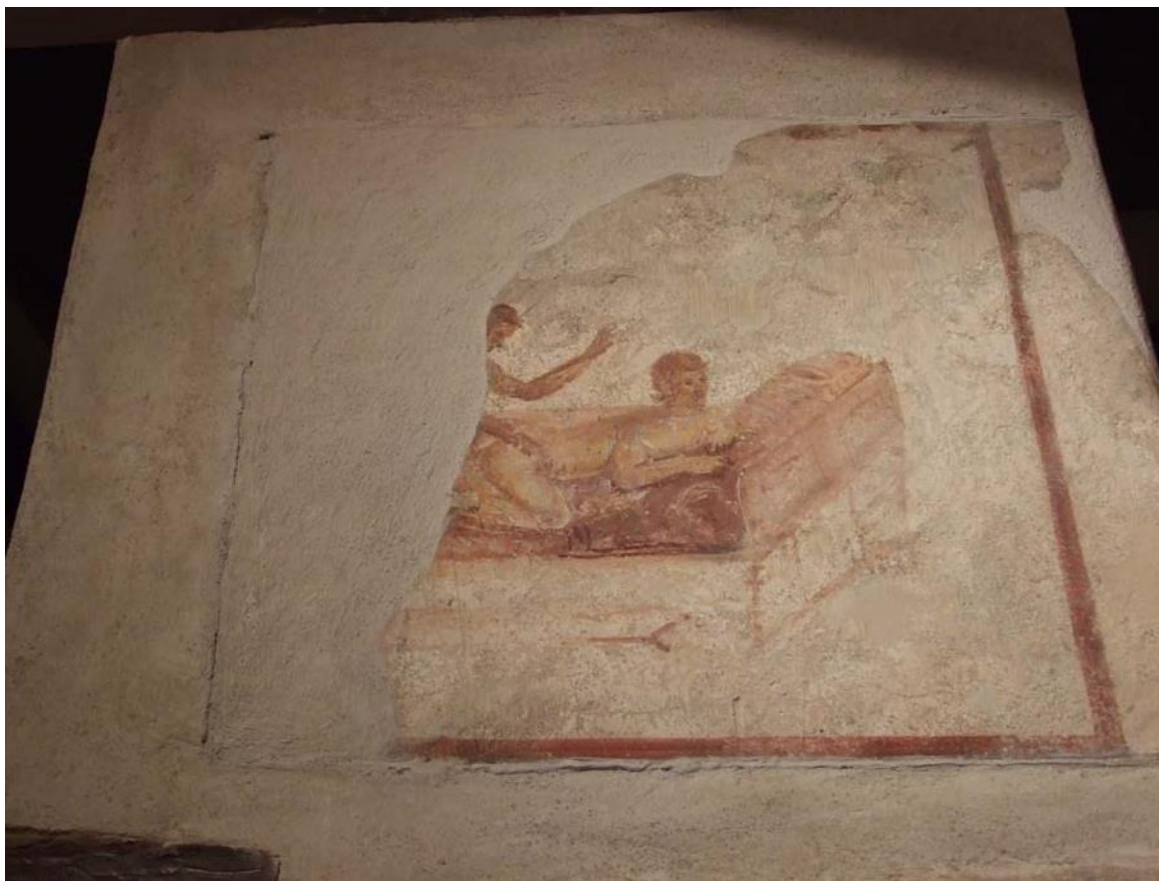


Figure 9: fresco L1.g [image retrieved from <https://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R7/7%2012%2018.htm>]

Erotic mythology

The fresco located at the final part of the U-shape in room *a*, fresco L2, I will examine separately from the series for it covers the same overall theme of erotic display, yet it is an entirely different scene (fig. 10). A customer would enter the brothel and immediately see this image on his right, between rooms *c* and *d*. In this image eroticism is depicted not through explicit sexual actions, but through mythology. We can recognize the god Priapus by his phallus of well above average size in erected state. The Priapus in the brothel is unique though, for it is bi-phallic.¹⁸

¹⁸ Levin-Richardson, 2019, 80.



Figure 10: fresco L2 [image retrieved from <https://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R7/7%2012%2018.htm> Photo courtesy of Aude Durand.]

Erotic graffiti

Added to the Lupanar's decorative plan are the innumerable graffiti as left there by its customers. The majority of these carry a corresponding theme of eroticism in their messages. They vary from happy clients assessing and advertising their experiences with certain prostitutes, to insulting, bragging, or random chatter and statements. This wide array of graffiti will be arranged into six categories.

The first category is that of *assessment*, whether it is expressed in advertisement, appreciation, or dissatisfaction. It is one of the categories of specific value to this research, since this is telling about what certain social groups viewed as admirable qualities in terms of sexual attraction and activity. Examples are *L3.a Felix | bene futuis*, “Felix, you fuck well” as found in room *f* (fig. 11). Or *L3.b calos Paris*, “beautiful Paris” in room *f* as well (fig. 12).

The second category, *insults*, is interpreted through what scholars, such as Levin-Richardson, claim as invectives in Roman society. These often consist of an element of force in the message and an absence of one's masculinity.¹⁹ Something very interesting for this research and a good counterpart to category one. The force that is penetration, an aspect one could threaten another with, similar to a sword, is considered masculine. Thus, being penetrated was considered emasculating and shameful.²⁰ Graffiti in this category were expressed by naming the person who allows penetration, for example *L3.c ratio mi cum ponis / Batacare te pidicaro* “When you hand over the money, Batacarus, I'll butt-fock you” (fig. 13). The graffito is accompanied by a sketched phallus, adding an element of threat to the message directed to presumably a client. A clearer example comes from the graffito *L3.d Myrtale / Cassacos / fellas* “Myrtale, you suck the Cassaci”, for this maker suggests that Myrtale is penetrated orally by a multiplicity of members of the Cassaci family (fig. 14).



Figure 11: Graffito L3.a *Felix / bene futuis*, “Felix, you fuck well”, found in room *f* [Levin-Richardson, 2019, 54, fig. 30]

¹⁹ S. Levin-Richardson, ‘Facilis hic futuit Graffiti and Masculinity in Pompeii's 'Purpose-Built' Brothel’, *Helios* 38.1 (2011) 68-72.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Figure 12: Graffito L3.b *calos Paris*, “beautiful Paris”, found in room *f* [image retrieved from Epigraphic Database Roma, accessed on March 22, 2023, http://www.edr-edr.it/edr_programmi/view_img.php?id_nr=145436]

Figure 13: Graffito L3.c *ratio mi cum ponis / Batacare te pidicaro* “When you hand over the money, Batacarus, I’ll butt-fock you”, outer wall [image retrieved from Epigraphic Database Roma, accessed on March 22, 2023, http://www.edr-edr.it/edr_programmi/view_img.php?id_nr=150010]

Figure 14: Graffito L3.d *Myrtale / Cassacos / fellas* “Myrtale, you suck the Cassaci”, outer wall [image retrieved from Epigraphic Database Roma, accessed on March 22, 2023, http://www.edr-edr.it/edr_programmi/view_img.php?id_nr=151037]

Category three is the collection of graffiti regarding *news*. Graffiti was also used as a tool to spread news, announcements, and even death notices. An example is graffiti *L3.e* which states: *Puteolanis feliciter / omnibus Nucherinis / felicia, / et uncu Pompeianis / Petecusanis* (fig. 15). This graffito is presumably written by three different hands and can be separated by the first line, “Good luck to the Puteolans! To all the Nucherians [= Nuceria], luck!”, continued by a second with “[But] an anchor for the Pompeians,” and in smaller letters a probable third writes “[and] the Petecusans [=Pithecusans]”. Besides the differing size and handwritings, Levin-Richardson detects differing grammatical constructions.²¹ This category allows for dating as well, as the messages can be linked to 59 CE when a riot broke out in Pompeii’s amphitheater. This riot was between the mentioned Nuceria, inhabitants of a city near Pompeii, and Pompeians themselves.²² An example of a death notice can also be found on the brothel’s outer walls in graffiti *L3.f: Africanus moritur / scribet puer Rusticus / condisces cui dolet pro Africano*, “Africanus is dying. The boy Rusticus writes. You will learn who mourns for Africanus” (fig. 16).

With the usage of graffiti as a means of communication platform, the sending and receiving of greetings via this method is an easy step to make. Therefore, the fourth category is *greetings*. Room *f* displays two notable versions of this phenomenon. The first, *L3.g*, says *Ias Magno salute*, “Ias [sends] greeting to Magnus” (fig. 17). It stands out for it is 45 centimeters tall, which is rather big in comparison to the rest of the graffiti in the room. Interestingly, the maker must have wanted it to attract attention. A second notable graffiti is *Sabinus Proclo / salutem*, “Sabinus [sends] greetings to Proclus”, graffiti *L3.h*, for it mentions both names, something that is not self-evident in Roman wall greetings (fig. 18). However, these names do not occur anywhere else in the brothel, according to Levin-Richardson.²³ Furthermore, both sender and recipient appear to be men. It is thus interesting for this thesis to explore possibilities surrounding their relationship.

Then, category five, *boastfulness*, is another of the categories of specific value to this research as it gives possible hints as to what people considered aspects of them and others worthy of bragging. In other words, what certain social groups viewed as impressive qualities or deeds. These vary from “I was here” or including a name, “I fucked here” to boasts about who had intercourse with whom calling the people included by their name. Two examples:

²¹ Levin-Richardson, 2011, 61-62.

²² Ibid.

²³ Levin-Richardson, 2019, 62-63.

graffito *L3.i Scordopordonicus hic · bene / fuit · quem · voluit* “Scordopordonicus fucks well here whom he wished”, and graffito *L3.j Arphocras hic cum Drauca / bene futuit denario* “Arphocras fucked well here with Drauca for a *denarius*” interestingly adding the price for her services (fig. 19).

The last category is that of *names and signatures*. A separate category from the previous category for, even though graffiti of this category can overlap with other categories, it is by far the most popular usage of the medium. Levin-Richardson states there are only 18 graffiti in the entire brothel without the mentioning of any names. Furthermore, 88 different names can be counted on its walls. The Latin name *Syneros* was written on the west wall of room *f*, graffito *L3.k* (fig.20). However, what is interesting about this is that seemingly the same hand wrote *Συνέρως | καλὸς βινεῖς*, “Syneros, you fuck good” in Greek. Perhaps unaware of Syneros’ preference or bragging about their multilingualism. A second example is graffito *L3.l* in room *f*, *Salvi filia*, “daughter of Salvius”, where the maker emphasizes the family relations within the brothel, one’s private life.

One must, in examining these, comprehend the situation it was written in, for we cannot know if someone is lying, pretending or in any way misleading for whatever reason. For example, a prostitute could perhaps have written about themselves from the perspective of a made up client for advertisement purposes. Or a man was bragging about his prowess or wealth. Assigning the graffiti to a certain maker is therefore impossible. Even though, factors such as their messages, placement, or their amount of characters does tell a lot.

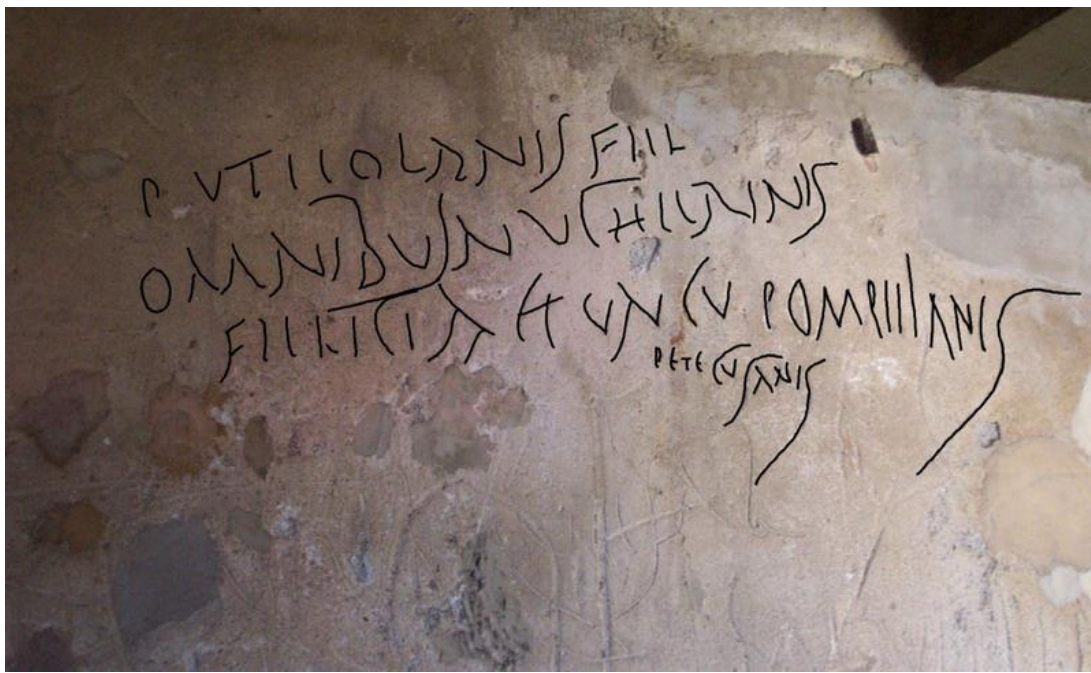


Figure 15: Graffito L3.e *Puteolanis feliciter | omnibus Nucherinis | felicia, | et uncu Pompeianis | Petecusanis* “Good luck to the Puteolans! To all the Nucherians [= Nuceria], luck!, [But] an anchor for the Pompeians, [and] the Petecusans [=Pithecusans].”, room *f* [image retrieved from Epigraphic Database Roma, accessed on March 22, 2023, http://www.edr-edr.it/edr_programmi/view_img.php?lang=en&id_nr=146000-2]

EDR - Epigraphic Database Roma

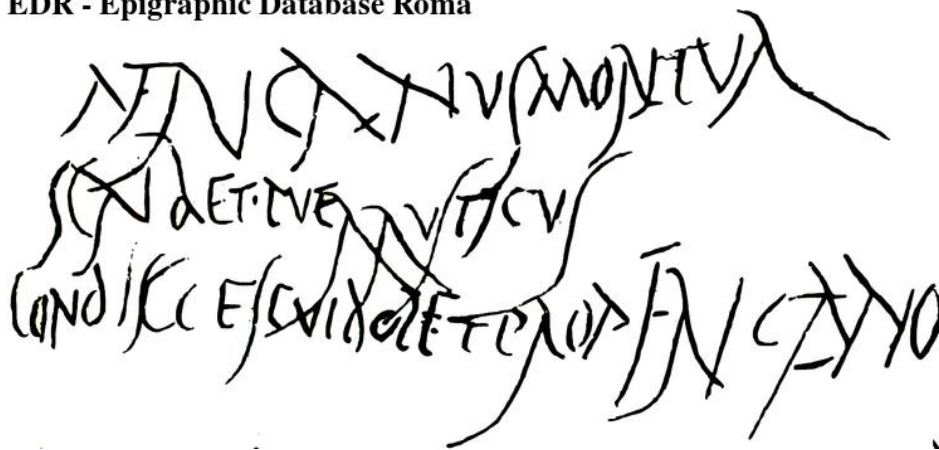


Figure 16: Graffito L3.f *Africanus moritur | scribet (:scribit) puer Rusticus | condisces (:condiscens) cui dolet pro Africano* “Africanus is dying. The boy Rusticus writes. You will learn who mourns for Africanus”, outer wall [image retrieved from Epigraphic Database Roma, accessed on March 22, 2023, http://www.edr-edr.it/edr_programmi/view_img.php?id_nr=152017]

EDR - Epigraphic Database Roma

Handwritten Greek graffiti in room f, consisting of three lines of text: 'Ias Magno salute(m)'. The script is a cursive form of ancient Greek.

Figure 17: Graffito L3.g *Ias Magno salute(m)* “Ias [sends] greeting to Magnus”, room *f* [image retrieved from Epigraphic Database Roma, accessed on March 24, 2023, http://www.edr-edr.it/edr_programmi/view_img.php?id_nr=149113]

Handwritten Greek graffiti in room f, circled in red. It consists of three lines of text: 'Sabinus Proclo saltem'. The script is a cursive form of ancient Greek.

Figure 18: Graffito L3.h *Sabinus Proclo (:Proculo) / saltem* “Sabinus [sends] greetings to Proclus”, room *f* [image retrieved from Epigraphic Database Roma, accessed on March 24, 2023, http://www.edr-edr.it/edr_programmi/view_img.php?id_nr=147140]

Handwritten Greek graffiti on an outer wall, consisting of two lines of text: 'Scordopordonicus hic bene / fuit quem voluit'. The script is a cursive form of ancient Greek.

Figure 19: Graffito L3.i *Scordopordonicus hic bene / fuit (:futuit) quem voluit* “Scordopordonicus fuks well here who he wished”, outer wall [image retrieved from Epigraphic Database Roma, accessed on March 24, 2023, http://www.edr-edr.it/edr_programmi/view_img.php?id_nr=146088]

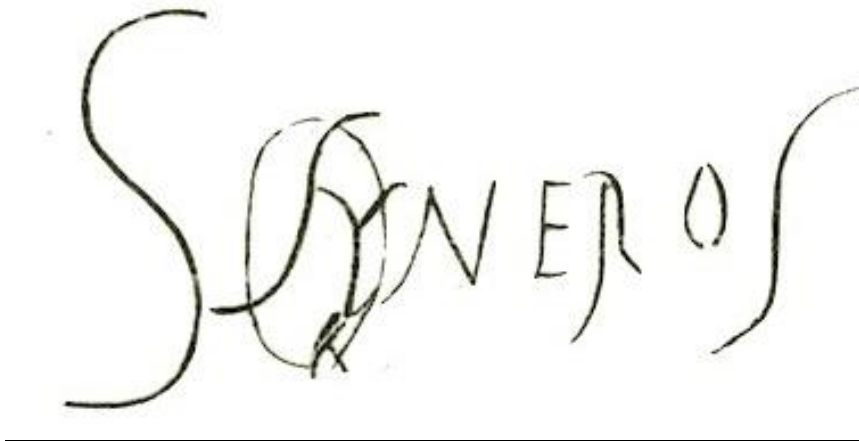


Figure 20: Graffito L3.k *Syneros* “Syneros”, room *f* [image retrieved from Epigraphic Database Roma, accessed on March 24, 2023, http://www.edr-edr.it/edr_programmi/view_img.php?lang=en&id_nr=149983]

House of the Vettii

The Lupanar will be joined by case study two: instead of sex being commercialized, sex is here fused into daily sights during everyday tasks, relaxation, hosting personal events or in a safe haven. I am talking about a residential building, the House of the Vettii. However, some scholars disagree on the purpose of this building and argue that instead it was built for religious reasons as the house lacks a *tablinum*, a room that is dedicated for family relics and business transactions, and also lacks an *alae*, a room where the family would keep their valuables.²⁴ However, other scholars, such as Beth Severy-Hoven, mention traces of a family, the Vettii. For example, two bronze seals were found inside the front hall that show us the names *A. VETTI RETVSTT*, or ‘of Aulus Vettius Restitutus’, and *A. VETTI CONVIVAES*, or ‘of Aulus Vettius Conviva’. Another finding strengthens this idea and identifies the latter man, a finding of a ring with the initials *AVC* carved in it.²⁵ I therefore will examine the house as a home and the art with erotic themes therein as situated and viewed in a home-like environment.

The House of the Vettii is located in northeastern region of Pompeii. A region with many large homes, yet still mixed with all sizes of houses and shops. The size of the House of the Vettii does stand out, for it occupies the entire southern end of the block. We enter the house via the main entrance leading to the atrium, room *a*, from the Vicolo dei Vettii and a

²⁴ E.M. Borja, C.G. Dilla, E.J. Nombre and C.P. Pinos, ‘The House of the Vettii: A Holy “Brothel”’, *Craving Ink*, April 19, 2017, <http://cravingink.blogspot.com/2017/04/the-house-of-vettii-holy-brothel.html>.

²⁵ B. Severy-Hoven, ‘Master Narratives and the Wall Painting of the House of the Vettii, Pompeii’, *Gender & History*, Vol.24 No.3 (November 2012) 545-546.

second entrance is located at the Vicolo di Mercurio (fig. 21).²⁶ Even though it is one of the larger houses, not the largest, its importance for this research does not stem from this. The largeness even brings a rather biased perspective for it may almost only represent the upper class who would have been able to afford this. A bias I will need to keep in mind while writing this. The importance stems from the preservation of a great collection of high quality Fourth-Style wall paintings.²⁷ A finding archeologists do not often excavate. These wall paintings are thought to have been painted by a single workshop and were dated as restoration after 62 CE's earthquake.²⁸ With a focus on the interior decorative plan and not the outer walls as with the Lupanar study case, a distinction is made between who is allowed to enter the house and who is not. An emphasis is created on domestic life, the family with slaves therein and invited visitors. Not whomever would roam the streets surrounding the house. This makes it possible to create a contrast with the Lupanar which can be labelled as a public space. Furthermore, both case studies can be dated between two major destructive disruptions done by nature in the second part of the first century. Thus, after the earthquake of 62 CE and before the eruption of the Vesuvius in 79 CE.

Important is to consider who the patrons of this large project were, which individuals were behind this house's grand decorative plan? Severy-Hoven states that the name Restitutus was commonly, and perhaps even exclusively, a slave name.²⁹ This highly suggests a history of slavery for the Vettii household. With his freedom, Restitutus gained the *praenomen*, or first name, and *nomen*, or family name, of his former master. The other Vetti's name, A. Vettius Conviva, has been found on a set of excavated business tablets. These were owned by a certain Q. Caecilius Iucundus. On these tablets Conviva appeared to have acted as a witness. Since his name was completed with the characteristics of free males, the *praenomen* and *nomen*, we can assume the second Vetti was by this time a freedman as well.³⁰ Lauren Hackworth Petersen agrees and adds the finding of a graffito about A. Vettius Conviva on the outside wall of the house. Herein he is presented as an *Augustalis*, a magistrate scholars have often regarded as suggestive of freedman status.³¹ Then, what considered the Vettii men of each other? The presupposed relationship as brother has yet to be proved. The fact that they share both their *praenomen* and *nomen* indicates, according to Hackworth Petersen, that they

²⁶ Severy-Hoven, 2012, 543.

²⁷ L. Hackworth Petersen, *The Freedman in Roman art and art history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 5.

²⁸ Clarke, 1991, 209.

²⁹ Severy-Hoven, 2012, 545.

³⁰ Severy-Hoven, 2012, 545-546.

³¹ Hackworth Petersen, 2006, 61-62.

likely had the same master as slaves.³² Yet, it could also mean that Restitutus, who owned the common slave's name, had been Conviva's slave because Restitutus name would either way be completed with Aulus and Vettius.³³ Of course, brothers, father and son, or former fellow slaves are all possibilities and we simply have not as of yet found decisive proof. Severy-Hoven suggests Conviva had a more established status and would therefore have had the role of the *pater familias* of the household, while Restitutus was undeniably an important individual in this household and to Conviva. Either as a son, brother, or his freedman to whom Conviva would pass on his property after his death.³⁴ These statuses and roles in the household as well as in society need to be considered while analyzing the erotic art in the House.

The House is indeed large, but still an atrium-style Italian house. When entered through room *a* via the Vicolo dei Vettii one would directly have a view on both hallway *c* and the colonnaded and richly decorated garden *m* where most of the other rooms are circled around and connected to. Both *c* and *m* are roofless and thus provide light to enter as well as light to the rooms connected to these. Among the smaller rooms are two service areas in the northern corner and the eastern corner. Important is section *v-y*, for here we find a more plain decor suggesting it was not meant for guests but for servants. Yet, in the kitchen *w* one finds frescoes comparable with the Lupanar's series. These will thus be included in the research. Rooms *b*, *n*, *p*, *t*, *xI*, *v*, *a*, and *q* all contain imagery fitted for this research theme. Like the Lupanar they are classified into three categories: couples engaged in sexual activities, erotic mythology, and erotic graffiti.

³² Hackworth Petersen, 2006, 5.

³³ Severy-Hoven, 2012, 545-546.

³⁴ Ibid.

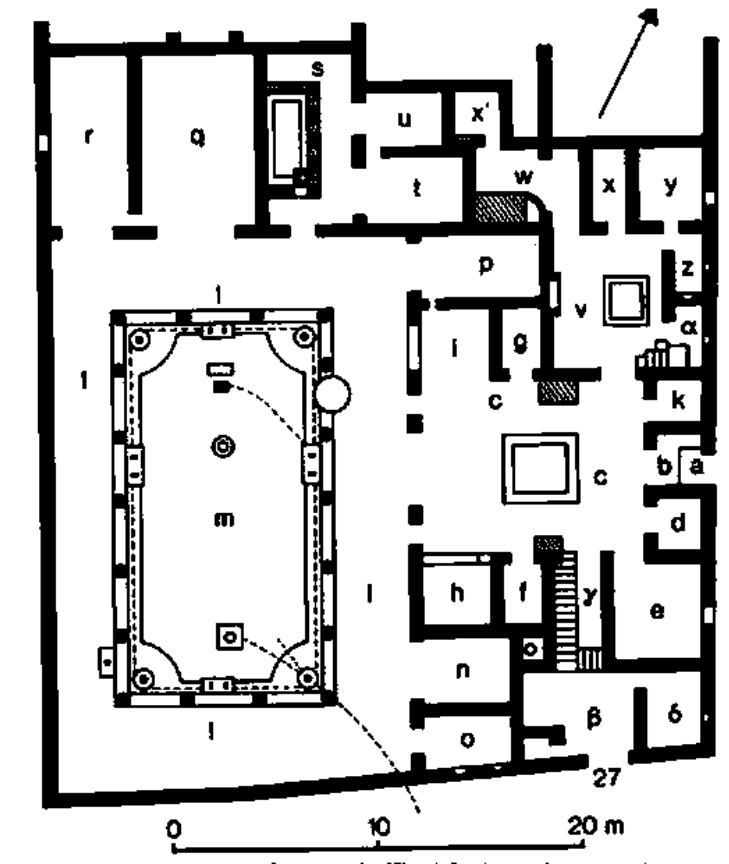


Figure 21: Floor plan of the House of the Vettii [Borja et al, 2016, fig. 6]

Couples engaged in sexual activities

In room *x1*, a service area, one would find a total of three frescoes of male-female intercourse, frescoes *VI.a-b*. One of which is unfortunately too heavily damaged but can, according to scholars, still be the third of this triptych (figs. 22-23).³⁵ The style strongly resembles that of the Lupanar series. However, these appear of poor quality and painted hastily. They are painted on white-ground and with a notably plain colour palette, which indicates much less money was spent on the ornament of this room.

Unfortunately, neither the patron nor the artist of this series can be determined. It stands out due to the large differences with the rest of the Vettii's decorative plan. Clarke states that 'rewarding' the cook, a servant, with this decorated room would not have been unusual as the masters were both former servants.³⁶ Furthermore, the cook or any other slave could have been the patron since some slaves could own a small amount of money if their masters would allow them to. It could have been given by the Vettii to their slaves in order to

³⁵ Clarke, 1998, 169-174.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

brighten up their working space. Another option, as it was so hastily done, it could have been done without the knowledge of their masters, which is unlikely.³⁷



Figure 22: fresco VI.1.a, room XI [Vout, 2013, 116]

³⁷ K. Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 102-103.



Figure 23: fresco V1.b, east wall of room *x1* [Clarke, 1998, 173]

Erotic mythology

In entering the residence visitors would immediately see fresco *V2*, which is located in room *b* and depicts a man wearing a Phrygian cap, a pair of high fur boots, a red mantle over his arm, a diaphanous yellow tunic with blue-green sleeves, and holding a *pedum*, or shepherds crook. He is weighing his rather large phallus on a scale with a bag of coins serving as a counterweight (fig. 24). We thus can interpret this as another Priapus. This version is comparable to the Priapus of the Lupanar which also stands directly in view of anyone entering. Also comparable is the fact that both are only visible once entered, not already from the street.



Figure 24: fresco V2.a, the god Priapus weighing his phallus, room *b* [Borja et al, 2016, fig. 3]

The second room, room *n*, is accessible from the garden and can be found on the eastern side. Here one finds an arrangement of mythological frescoes with from left to right, baby Hercules and Juno's snakes, Pentheus, and Dirce (fig. 25). Sexuality is not as apparent as both the Lupanar as the Vettii's series of couples engaged in sexual activities, however, it is likely implied in the second and third of the series. I will thus focus on these. This arrangement is comparable to the one in room *p* (fig. 26). Again, we see two punishments, the first of Pasiphae and the second of Ixion. The arrangement is complete with a fresco of Ariadne. Furthermore, in room *t* we find a diptych of Hercules and Achilles, *V2.h-i*. The decorative programme of these three rooms will be examined for erotic display, hidden meaning, and function. A last addition to the category of erotic mythology are frescoes of Hermaphroditus,

the child of Hermes and Aphrodite who is both male as female. Next to Ariadne in room *p* there is above the doorway fresco V2.j (fig. 27). A second, V2.k, is found in room *q* where the viewer stands in front of Hermaphroditus being gazed upon by Silenus (fig. 28).

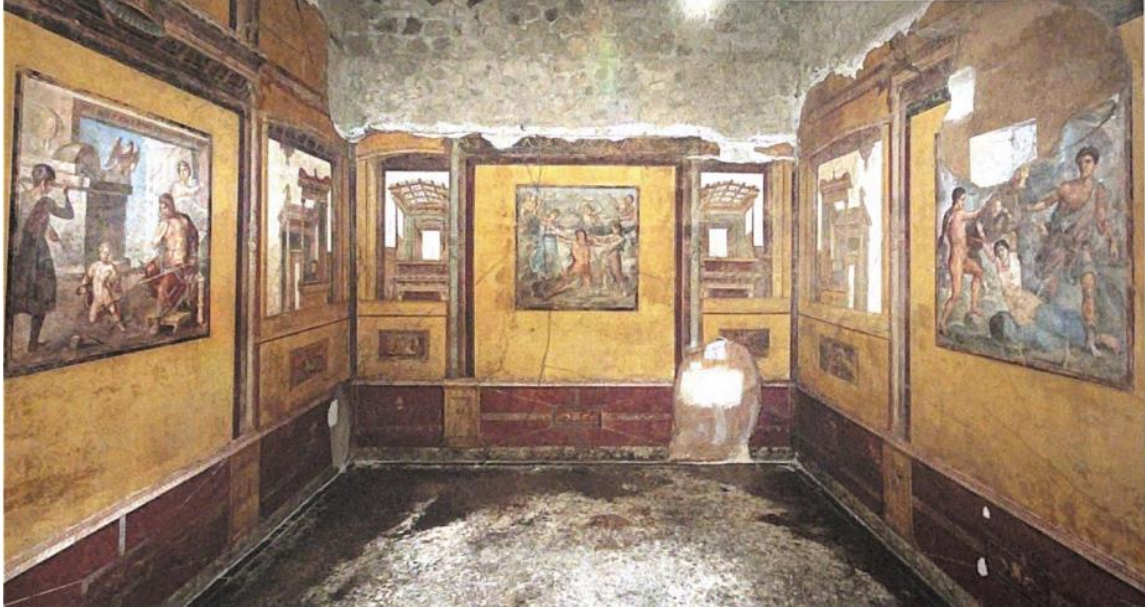


Figure 25: arrangement of frescoes V2.b-d in room *n* [M. Ranieri Panetta, ed., *Pompeii: The History, Life and Art of the Buried City* (Vercelli: White Star Publishers, 2004) 362]



Figure 26: arrangement of frescoes V2.e-g in room *p* [Ranieri Panetta, 2004, 362-363]



Figure 27: fresco V2.j, Hermaphroditus and satyr [image retrieved from <https://ancientrome.ru/art/artworken/img.htm?id=9160> Courtesy of Francesco Gasparetti]



Figure 28: fresco V2.k, Hermaphroditus and Silenus [Severy-Hoven, 2012, 569, fig. 16]

Erotic graffiti

Inside the House of the Vettii visitors can find two examples of graffiti with erotic subjects. The first, *V3.a*, is located in room *v* close to its doorway. *Eros cinedae*, or “Eros is a cinaedus”. The other graffito, *V3.b*, of the pair reads *Eutyichis <>a a(ssibus) II moribus bellis* and can be found in room *a* (fig. 27). This sentence translates to “Eutyichis, Greek, nice-mannered, for two asses”. As suggested earlier, names and signatures are a popular category, as both can be labelled in this category. Overlapping categories that can be found herein will be discussed in following chapters.



Figure 29: fresco *V3.b Eutyichis <>a a(ssibus) II moribus bellis* “Eutyichis, Greek, nice-mannered, for two asses”, room *a* [image retrieved from <http://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R6/6%2015%2001%20entrance.htm> Photo courtesy of Buzz Ferebee]

CHAPTER II

THE MASCULINE GAZE

As one thinks of Graeco-Roman art I dare say stunning, practically ideal, marble bodies quickly come to mind. Both male and female bodies were cut out of stone. Yet, the male body was generally regarded by Romans as an icon of vitality and phallic power. The females regularly depicted in the nude, on the other hand, were largely associated with prostitution and other erotic topics.³⁸ The latter thus does often seem to have been visualized for the purpose of the voyeuristic nature of the viewer's role. In other words, the viewer as the dominant *In-group*, men. This chapter will then be centered around Mulvey's original viewpoint, that of the *male gaze*. It shows how the *male gaze* is put into practice in the materials selected above.

A divide in social roles as discussed in the twentieth century theory, can be found in Roman culture as well, I will argue. However, to examine the dominant *gaze* in Roman society one cannot be guided solely by gender differences. For masculinity and femininity were factors that were a cluster of not only biology or gender roles, but sexual expectations as well. Sexualizing of an individual and representations thereof were found of both male and female genders. Here the active and passive divide comes to the table, for Roman mentality of sexualization was expressed and viewed through these factors. Masculinity was considered active while femininity was passive, indeed along the lines of Mulvey's theory. However, this means that both men and women could possess either one of these characteristics in their role as sexual partner. Gender roles were fluid and able to shift. Therefore, a man could express femininity and a woman masculinity.³⁹ Still, as previously noted, a passive role in art can mainly be found with the female characters therein. How can we interpret this? How is the Roman dominant *gaze* expressed?

Couples engaged in sexual activities

I will evaluate the sources iconographically and in search for hints, or absence of these, towards voyeurism along the lines of Mulvey's theory. This means that I will test them on what it exactly is that they depict. What specific sexual activities are shown or are not shown? But I will also look at who is involved in these activities and how they are portrayed. Are

³⁸ A. K. Lundgren, *The Pastime of Venus: An Archeological Investigation of Male Sexuality and Prostitution in Pompeii* (Oslo: Representalen, 2014) 13.

³⁹ Lundgren, 2014, 15.

there particular body parts depicted in the nude or emphasized in the artwork? Are there differences to be found in the portraying of men and the ones they gaze at? Importantly, Mulvey's question on who is passive and who is active herein. What does this division of roles say about the dominant *gaze*?

The Lupanar series

The heavily debated fresco group, group *LI*, depicts five sexual positions (figs. 3-9). All suggested positions are of heterosexual intercourse and can be defined through Mulvey's theory as an active role for the male figure since he is the penetrator and the female figure as passive. Frescoes *LI.b*, *d*, and *g* show positions wherein the male figure is on top, while only in *LI.a* and *LI.f* the female figure is on top. The positions differ only slightly. In order of the U-shape the frescoes were placed in, we see the female figure on top in *LI.a*. In the second, *LI.b*, we see the male figure between the legs of a female figure reclining on the bed. *LI.c* is the damaged fresco. Then in *LI.d* the female figure stands on hands and knees with the male figure on his knees behind her. *LI.e* is the only fresco wherein a couple is not having sexual intercourse, but rather seems to be discussing a painting on the wall besides them. It is suggested that the unfortunately now faded painting in this fresco used to depict yet another sex scene. In this way this particular fresco could have served to guide the brothel's clients telling them to look at the frescoes surrounding this one.⁴⁰ *LI.f*, the other fresco with the female figure on top while the male figure reclines on the bed, shows her facing the end of the bed instead of her partner. Lastly, fresco *LI.g* again shows the female figure on hands and knees with the male figure behind her. Likely on his knees, however the fresco is unfortunately too damaged to state this as a fact. There are no depictions of homosexual intercourse, nor is there any suggestion towards fellatio or cunnilingus. This is striking, for it seems to imply a societal accordance in what it does depict and possible taboos surrounding the topics that are not depicted. The same could be said about the amount of skin showing, in particular of the female figure. Mulvey's 20th century theory would point to daring outfits, emphasis on her body, and inviting nudity for its male audience. However, this series, even as it is found in a brothel and depicting intercourse, does not necessarily show as much skin as one would expect. A female figure is wearing a bra or breast band in frescoes *LI.a* and *LI.d* and is even completely dressed in fresco *LI.e* (figs. 4, 6, and 7). Moreover, the elements of the female body that are according to Mulvey generally emphasized in representations, such as breasts, genitalia, and buttocks, are in this series largely

⁴⁰ Levin-Richardson, 2019, 66.

covered. Not only through breast bands, but through perspective as well. The maker chose viewpoints wherein the positioning of a leg or arm stood in the way of these elements, as can be seen in *LI.f* and *LI.g* (figs. 8-9). Also, the act of penetration itself is covered and thus no genitalia are visible of both the female and the male figure. This occurs in each sexual scene of the series, a characterizing aspect of the series.

As previously discussed in chapter one, Clarke states that the art choices made for the fresco group imitate amorous frescoes as found in elite houses.⁴¹ This would explain the luxury ambiance the furniture depicted in the series make up. Additionally, the axial design of the room the series was shown in, is comparable to atrium houses in Pompeii. This could not only be distinguishable by Roman men rich enough to own such houses, but by the poorer classes as well since they could often see inside privileged homes simply through an open doorway, as a slave living in such houses, or because of the patronage system which allowed them to interact with the higher classes.⁴²

The inspiring of a couple of both genders at first glance does not suggest a patriarchal note to this series. There seems no emphasis on the female figure's breasts, genitalia, or buttocks, and she does not necessarily claim a role as 'supporting actor'. Instead, the couple seems rather equal in their share in the scenes, and she is even depicted on the foreground in *LI.e* where she partly overlaps the body of her male companion. However, as mentioned above, Mulvey's passive and active divide can be found in the series, even a hard divide between the male and the female figure. Besides the fact that every form of intercourse depicted is of a heterosexual form, thus the male penetrating the female, even the fresco wherein the couple discusses a painting allows for the man to be the active part. In fresco *LI.e* the man suggestively holds up his arm pointing at the painting, a gesture that implies he is speaking to the woman, possibly explaining or opinionating. The woman merely listens, a passive act in this scene (fig. 7).

The fresco group could thus be interpreted as to sexually stimulate the customers. A customer of any status is indulged in this elite fantasy which they are able to bring to reality in here. A form of early consumer manipulation, one could say.

⁴¹Clarke, 1998, 201-206.

⁴² A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Patronage in Roman Society: From Republic to Empire,' in: *Patronage in Ancient Society*, ed. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 63-87.

The Vetti series

The Vettii's triptych, VI, even though in an entirely different context and of less quality, can be compared with the Lupanar series (figs. 22-23). This triptych depicts the same form of intercourse, solely heterosexual. Again, the act of penetration is hidden through the scene's viewpoint and therefore both male and female genitalia are covered. Homosexual intercourse, fellatio, and cunnilingus are in this series not depicted either. The active-passive divide is here thus once again detectable in gender differences not through a visual emphasis on the female body, but more narratively.

Furthermore, a striped cushion, similar to those in the Lupanar series, is painted in two of the three, the third being too damaged to determine. Art historian Caroline Vout explains these symbolize the Greek symposium or resemble fifth century BCE Attic vases. The latter had often shown Greek revelry with couples engaged in sexual activities. With this in mind, the frescoes could, other than pure desire and lust, also aspire knowledge, humor, vanity and escapism to the fifth century BCE.⁴³ Both these explanations indicate knowledge of Greek traditions and being up to date on trends. This then refers to upper class interior as these Romans would often want to flaunt this knowledge in their houses through artistic choices. Again, as suggested by Clarke, this kind of art was often placed in bedrooms to stimulate couples.⁴⁴ This seems in accordance with the way couples are presented in both series. Even though scholars have suggested the women in the frescoes are prostitutes, the couples notably make eye contact. This is commonly seen as signifying a romantic connection between the two figures in the scene.⁴⁵

Interestingly, as an elite ambiance is set for the visitors of the Lupanar, both upper and lower classes, using comparable factors, one could find another similarity between both series. The household of the Vettii might have wanted to create an elite fantasy setting through the room's ornamental paintings in the same manner as the decorative programme of the Lupanar's entry. Thus, the *male*, or rather *masculine*, *gaze* in these frescoes depicting couples during intercourse can be found, yet, slightly more subtle in comparison with the twentieth century theory as genitalia, other generally emphasized body parts, and the deed itself are here largely covered. There seems to be more emphasis on passiveness and

⁴³ C. Vout, *Sex on Show: Seeing the Erotic in Greece and Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013) 116-117.

⁴⁴ Clarke, 1998, 201-206.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

activeness, suggesting a certain normality to this division of roles among the male and female figure and thus possibly Roman society.

Erotic mythology

For the subject of mythology, the brothel offers but one source, the Priapus (fig. 10). As the Vettii House contains a Priapus as well, I will combine these two frescoes and compare their features. Are there similarities to be found even within such distinct contexts? What differences are noticeable? How can we interpret both frescos and what does this interpretation tell us about the *male gaze* and social roles?

The latter question I will also test against the remainder of the mythologically themed frescoes within the Vettii's decorative programme.

Priapus

Upon entering both the Vettii house and the Lupanar brothel one would encounter a fresco of Priapus. *L2* does not seem out of context as his large phallus conveys the impression of sexual arousal and a penetrating ability, thus emphasizing masculinity. However, to a modern eye the second, *V2.a*, seems less appropriate for its surroundings of a family home. Clarke states that placing the image of Priapus on one's wall was in Roman times not considered vulgar. The god's presence brings good fortune and sexual pleasure. He suggests that visual representations of Priapus served many functions. Examples are indicating prosperity, promoting fertility, or warding away the evil eye.⁴⁶

This suggests an alternative reading of the entrance of the brothel as well. Levin-Richardson proposes three options. Priapus could promise a client of the brothel good fortune in sexual pleasure and even doubling the protection against the evil eye therein. Another option is more specific, for the Lupanar's Priapus two phalli seem to each point towards the entrance to a room. This might suggest that Priapus is protecting these doorways and those inside from the evil eye. Something necessary as they would have been in a most vulnerable state: nude. A third option is formed due to its background. The outdoor setting created by the trees and the manner in which Priapus is standing on a circular base suggests him being a garden statue commonly used to ward off garden thieves. The god is shown as a threat of penetrating the thief, this being considered emasculating and shameful in Roman times. This function of statues of Priapus placed in gardens could also be seen as him protecting the

⁴⁶ Clarke, 1998, 199-201.

salable goods, the prostitutes, from lusty or violent clients. Levin-Richardson claims these three options very well could work together and do not necessarily have to exist separately from each other.⁴⁷

As for the Vettii's Priapus, this interpretation could be less sexual as well. The chosen elements surrounding the god are telling herein. The overfilled bag of money could be interpreted as satire as it suggests the phallus must be remarkably heavy, however, at the same time it could symbolize good fortune and financial prosperity. These factors are worth mentioning for, as discussed in chapter one, wealth was reasonably new for the Vettii.⁴⁸ The Phrygian cap is explainable by tracing Priapus' mythological origins for he was originally an Eastern deity of agriculture. Later on, he was adopted and adapted to Hellenistic needs. He is then found in Hellenistic art and literature as the son of Dionysus and Aphrodite. I have discussed his function as a protector of gardens, which in all probability derived from his original Eastern godly purposes. Moreover, its placement in the entry of the house opens up to the Vettii's garden. A possible function could therefore be as a protector of the Vettii's garden against garden thieves and warding off the Evil Eye. The god is standing next to a basket of fruit and is covered in gold jewelry. These factors symbolize *luxuria*. According to Clarke the god also represents fertility and abundance, which could explain this symbolization. He states that visual representations of Priapus were popular in aristocratic wall paintings.⁴⁹ Another function of the Priapus wall painting could thus be the owner's aspiration to fit into the aristocratic class. Furthermore, even the fruit inside the basket suggest every choice was made with much thought. Almost all the fruits can be associated with gods of love, sex, and fertility. We see pears, quinces and apples, which all are associated with Venus, and we see grapes which are associated with Dionysus. Likely not coincidentally as these two gods are in Hellenistic terms Priapus' parents.⁵⁰ In addition, the grapes serve a second symbolization as the Vettii's wealth came from wine trade. A second symbolization towards Dionysus is visible as his staff is placed against the wall Priapus is leaning on. The fresco thus includes many hints towards their fortune and wealth. Importantly, a visual representation usually contains a multiplicity of functions and could therefore be an assembly of these factors.

⁴⁷ Levin-Richardson, 2019, 80.

⁴⁸ Hackworth Petersen, 2006, 5.

⁴⁹ Clarke, 1998, 48-49.

⁵⁰ B. Kellum, 'Weighing In: The Priapus Painting at the House of the Vettii, Pompeii,' in: *Ancient Obscenities: Their Nature and Use in the Ancient Greek and Roman Worlds*, ed. Dorota Dutsch and Ann Suter (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015) 199-207.

Thus, even though the frescoes of Priapus do not specifically exist for the purpose to arouse one sexually, it does point out a societal role of masculinity again through the activity of penetration, even as a threatening aspect to male ill minded clients or thieves. However, in a different manner, it still fits the *male gaze* theory.

The Vettii's decorative programme (other than Priapus)

The House of the Vettii has, besides Priapus, a large collection of mythological art. Many of these suggestive of sexual arousal or activities. I have already mentioned the status of the Vettii men has altered from slave to freedman. Important herein is that societal alterations were in Roman times also suggesting of an alteration of their role in the bedroom as from now on the shameful passive role was replaced by the active penetrator. They were expected to now as master perform a part that was no longer frowned upon and fit for the higher classes. Severy-Hoven states that slaves were put in the passive category of Roman sexuality, regardless of their gender or age, while male masters were put in another, the active one. To quote Ancient historian Ellen Oliensis: "penetration is the prerogative of free men, sexual intercourse is an enactment and reflection of social hierarchy, and conversely, social subordination always implies the possibility of sexual submission".⁵¹ This new active role would likely be a factor the Vettii men wanted to display in their decorative programme as, even though the wall paintings were designed for a domestic area, this does not mean they were only meant for privacy. Classicist Eleanor Winsor Leach states that domestic wall paintings were rarely intended for personal viewership of their patrons. Impressing guests was a large aspect of the decorative plan of a Roman's residence. Chosen subjects and manners of display were indeed personal and specific, however, strongly aimed at not only the patron(s) but also potential visitors.⁵² The choices made by the Vettii could therefore be telling about not only personal preferences and individual Romans, but due to their image and role in society also telling about values in Roman society.

Firstly, starting with the fresco of Ariadne in room *p* (fig. 30). After she is abandoned by Theseus whom she had helped in the Minotaur's maze, she is discovered by Dionysus, whom she marries. In some versions though, the story of Ariadne concludes in the rape by Dionysus.⁵³ Ariadne's narrative can be linked to the aspect of sadistic voyeurism in Mulvey's

⁵¹ E. Oliensis, 'The Erotics of Amicitia: Readings in Tibullus, Propertius, and Horace', in Hallett and Skinner, *Roman Sexualities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) 154.

⁵² E. Winsor Leach, *The Social Life of Painting in Ancient Rome and on the Bay of Naples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 7.

⁵³ Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, 1.527-564.

theory. She is passive in the way that both these men, Theseus and Dionysus, decide on the continuation of her story. They have the power while she remains static.⁵⁴ Furthermore, she is depicted in the nude as a satyr lifts her drapery up for Dionysus to see what is underneath, sexualizing her for the (male) viewer at the same time.

At the northern side of the house, in room *t*, a diptych of Hercules and Achilles can be found. The first, *V2.h*, depicts Hercules while assaulting a priestess of Athena, Auge (fig. 31). Auge comes across frightened, on her knees, her clothing falling off and revealing her naked body. The second, *V2.i*, depicts Achilles disguised in women's clothing on Skyros where he is hidden from the fight for Troy (fig. 32). In this scene it is revealed that he is in fact Achilles as he is interested in the weaponry instead of the jewelry Odysseus brings. One of the king's daughters, likely Deidamia, his lover, rushes towards Achilles. In other versions however, his true identity is revealed due to him raping Deidamia. What these scenes have in common is two factors. Firstly, both these relationships, forced or not, produce heroic offspring, namely Achilles Neoptolemus and Telephus.⁵⁵ A second factor is a theme of masculinity, emphasized as better than femininity. We see this as the heroic figure of Hercules approaches Auge with his iconic club extended towards her to rape the girl. Furthermore, we see this as the heroic figure of Achilles loses the feminine disguise as he is already presented as rather masculine in his pose and body. Interestingly, his clothing falls off similarly with that of Auge. Yet, however victimizing this is for her, this is not the case for Achilles. A factor that links Hercules, and thus perhaps Achilles as well, to the previously discussed rooms is his desire. Hercules desires Auge, who is a virgin priestess and who he forces into losing this sacred state. A possible interpretation could be that the Vettii might have wanted to represent their own humble origins and climb up the social ladder to where they are now, wealthy aristocrats, 'heroes of society'.

A comparison can be made between the pairing of frescoes *V2.d* and *V2.c*, and the pair of *V2.e* and *v2.f*. The first pair is that of Pentheus and Dirce in room *n* (figs. 33-34). Pentheus' myth tells us he has refused to accept the god Dionysus. Consequently, this angers the god who sends female family members of Pentheus as maenads to tear the poor man limb from limb like wild animals as the maenads are under the influence of a drug. The latter fresco depicts another punishment, that of Dirce after she had forced her mother, Antiope, into years of slavery. Zethus and Amphion, the sons of Zeus and Antiope, kill Dirce. Antiope thus is

⁵⁴ D. Fredrick, 'Beyond the Atrium to Ariadne: Erotic Painting and Visual Pleasure in the Roman House', *Classical Antiquity* 14 (1995) 273.

⁵⁵ Severy-Hoven, 2012, 565-566.

reunited with her sons. Interestingly, one would view Dirce as an erotization of her exposed female body held by two men, yet Pentheus is presented in an identical pose and held by two women. This combination thus nullifies any hierarchy in gender for the patron of this decoration. I see the emphasis on gender through the frescoes' mirroring of each other as suggestive of a warning. Severy-Hoven argues that this creative choice was made due to the Vettii men's alteration of rank and newfound joy in the punishment of others, regardless of their gender.⁵⁶

The second is that of Pasiphae and Ixion in room *p* (figs. 35-36). Pasiphae, the queen of Crete and wife of King Minos, receives a cow apparatus from Daedalus. The myth follows Minos who became king thanks to Poseidon. The god wanted a bull offering in return, the bull he had sent from the water to Minos. The king then offers a bull of his own as Poseidon's bull was too beautiful. Again, this angers a god and Poseidon seeks revenge by seducing the queen to fall in love with the divine bull. The fresco depicts the part of the myth wherein Cretean inventor Daedalus gives the queen a cow apparatus which she could use to get to the bull. The centre fresco of this room depicts Ixion. He fell in love with Juno. Zeus then tricks the man by shaping a cloud after Juno's image. The man 'rapes' the cloud which would have been Juno. Zeus thus punishes Ixion for his deeds by binding him to an always moving wheel. We see the god Hephaestus tying the wheel in the background and Hermes and Juno overseeing the punishment. The second female sitting on the ground is likely the goddess Nephele and the third is, according to Clarke, the goddess Iris.⁵⁷ Both these first frescoes in the arrangement thus are stories of punishable acts of sexual desire with figures considered out of bounds and both result in the birth of monsters, the Minotaur and the centaurs.

The similarities between rooms *p* and *n* are according to Severy-Hoven because these were both dining rooms, or *tricilina*, and were thus linked together by means of the themes in their ornament. She states that a banquet was where there was a large amount of contact between slaves and master or guest.⁵⁸ Furthermore, by hosting a banquet one could display their social status through providing their guests with the right amount of luxury.⁵⁹ The decorative plan of dining rooms was thus of great importance. For freedmen this area would be of even more importance as their wealth and social status were fairly new and still needed to be proved or secured for society.

⁵⁶ Severy-Hoven, 2012, 560.

⁵⁷ Clarke, 1991, 224.

⁵⁸ Severy-Hoven, 2012, 561-562.

⁵⁹ Severy-Hoven, 2012, 59.

The decorative programme of the Vettii House thus shows that not only suggestive erotic art can point towards societal roles, but art sometimes contains a similar hierarchic division of roles in their messages as is a prominent feature in the *male gaze* theory.



Figure 30: fresco V2.g, Ariadne [image retrieved from <https://ancientrome.ru/art/artworken/img.htm?id=9163>

Courtesy of Francesco Gasparetti]



Figure 31: fresco V2.h, Hercules and Auge [image retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auge#/media/File:IX.5.6_Pompeii_Room_5_ala_west_wall_Wall_painting_of_Hercules_and_Auge_Now_in_the_Naples_Archaeological_Museum_inventory_number_115397.jpg]



Figure 32: fresco V2.i, Achilles on Skyros [image retrieved from <https://isaw.nyu.edu/exhibitions/pompeii-in-color/objects/achilles-island-skyros-1> Photographic Archive, National Archaeological Museum of Naples]



Figure 33: fresco V2.c, the punishment of Pentheus [image retrieved from <https://ancientrome.ru/art/artworken/img.htm?id=1324> Courtesy of Alfredo Foglia and Pio Foglia]



Figure 34: fresco V2.d, the punishment of Dirce [image retrieved from <https://www.artichaeology.com/the-house-of-vettii-pompei>]

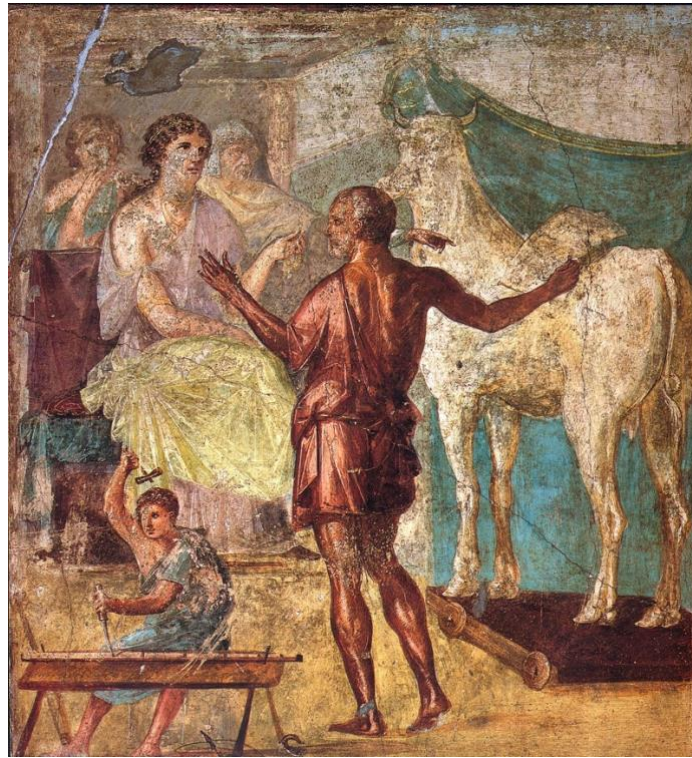


Figure 35: fresco V2.e, Pasiphae [image retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pompeii_-_Casa_dei_Vettii_-_Pasiphae.jpg Courtesy of Wolfgang Rieger]



Figure 36: fresco V2.f, Ixion [image retrieved from <https://ancientrome.ru/art/artworken/img.htm?id=1322> Courtesy of Alfredo Foglia and Pio Foglia]

Erotic graffiti

For the last subject of this chapter, I will discuss a selection of the graffiti as mentioned in chapter one and I will pay explicit attention to how the *gaze* can be expressed through words. Can we see a division in social roles as enforced by the *gaze* in everyday messages and conversations? Through the categories *insults* and *boastfulness*, I aim at what features are mentioned as worthy and which are not. Thus, what features are worth showing off and which are useful in degrading a person. I have established that activeness or passiveness of a person largely determines their social position. Is the phenomenon of activeness and passiveness detectable in the Pompeian graffiti?

Category insults

As explained in chapter one, the graffiti of the Lupanar, *L3.c ratio mi cum ponis / Batacare te pidicaro* “When you hand over the money, Batacarus, I’ll butt-fock you” and *L3.d Myrtale / Cassacos / fellas* “Myrtale, you suck the Cassaci” can be considered explicitly insulting someone through the force of penetration of a person then considered lower in Roman societal hierarchy (figs. 13-14). The insults thus often came through the downgrading of the other person’s honor. A possible way to do this was by associating them with sexual taboos since status was inherently connected to sexuality in Roman times.⁶⁰ A graffito of the Vettii can be assigned to this category as well. Namely, *V3.a, Eros cinedae*, or “Eros is a cinaedus”. This can be explained through the definition of these *cinaedi*. These were men who wore perfume, curled their hair, wore bright colours and most importantly, liked being penetrated. The name, Eros, was common for male slaves. It is thus possible for a slave named Eros to have worked in the House.⁶¹ The carving could also have functioned as an advertisement for this Eros. However, I disagree given the fact that the graffito was remarkably scratched out by someone who likely disagreed with the statement on this wall. This could have been the Eros mentioned carrying out a quick and angry response to the graffito.

Category boastfulness

The fact that so many men visiting the brothel felt a need to boast, implies that there was a certain competitiveness among Roman men. They boasted about their visit, their sexuality, and their masculinity indicated by their role as the penetrator. Trying to outdo each other even

⁶⁰ M.B. Skinner, *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2014) 280.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

by using a hierarchy of having had intercourse with more people or having done a better job at intercourse.⁶² A good example hereof is graffito *L3.i, Scordopordonicus hic · bene / fuit · quem · voluit* “Scordopordonicus fucks well here whom he wished”, as he uses both factors to amplify his masculinity.

Boasts were possibly made by men of any status and with even the weakest literary skill. By simply inscribing one’s name, a suggestion is made of having been in the brothel and the implication of having experienced the role of the penetrator. In totality about thirty to forty messages consisting of only a name were written on the walls of the Lupanar.⁶³ Some of these include a drawing of a phallus, something understandable for both literate as illiterate. In this way the larger amount of the brothel’s clients could take part in the competitive discourse.

Interestingly, naming a prostitute in these boasts could be one of the female gender, such as the graffito *L3.j, Arphocras hic cum Drauca / bene futuit denario* “Arphocras fucked well here with Drauca for a *denarius*”, but could easily be a male prostitute as well. As long as it was made clear that the maker of the boast was the penetrating party of the people involved in the intercourse. Having been the penetrator of a male or of a female body were thus equally masculine.⁶⁴

The dominant *gaze* in Roman society of the first century CE can be assigned to men, thus indeed a *male gaze*. However, not all men were considered masculine and therefore a part of this societal group. Eroticizing was done to both men and women while these images were aimed at only men. Distinctively, those men who performed the penetration during sexual intercourse, as seen in the series of couples engaged in sexual acts of both the Lupanar and the House of the Vettii. This sets apart two categories of men, the active and passive category. Besides, this is showing that gender alone was not the driving force behind the hierarchy in Roman society. The importance of this hierarchy and proof that it was something of societal impact wherein people wanted to progress up this hierarchy, is provided by the competitive discourse of graffiti at the Lupanar. Furthermore, the voyeurism surrounding a passive figure as mentioned by Mulvey, seems a recurring factor in the decorative programme of the Vettii wherein not implicit sexual acts are shown, but where the *gaze* takes on a more narrative shape. A viewer in Pompeii would be looking through the eyes of an active Roman man.

⁶² Levin-Richardson, 2011, 65-66.

⁶³ Levin-Richardson, 2011, 62-63.

⁶⁴ Levin-Richardson, 2011, 66-67.

Therefore, I adjust the theory's *male gaze* as it does not fit the context of Roman society properly. Instead, the dominant Roman *gaze* I will refer to with a new term, the *masculine gaze*.

CHAPTER III

THE FEMALE GAZE

Having established a dominant *gaze* in Roman society of the first century AD, thus the *masculine gaze*, it is necessary to look at who then fulfilled the role of the Other. As Mulvey's theory points at the women of a society, and as femininity forms an opposition of masculinity, this chapter will focus on the role of women in Roman society. I will seek the *female gaze* in the primary sources, thus aim to look at them from the perspective of a female Pompeian. What role or roles could women have in society and how could this affect their point of view? How are women represented in art? And as part of the group of Others opposite the group of masculine Roman men, are there moments of power or resistance to be found within the sources?

Ancient literary sources seem to paint a picture of the ideal woman, the *femina bona*, as a wife. She is faithful and fertile. She is loyal to her family members, most of all her husband, or, if not yet married, the father or other male family members. Ancient historian of gender and sexuality, Anise K. Strong, points out the seven most common adjectives in Roman epigraphy that are used to describe women: “*dulcissima* (sweetest), *pia* (dutiful), *bene merens* (well deserving), *sua* (his), *carissima* (dearest), *optima* (best), and *sanctissima* (holiest)”.⁶⁵ Especially the terms *pia*, *sanctissima* and *sua* are telling of female roles. The latter seemingly implies the being of possession of a man, the husband, is a characteristic worth mentioning and an indication that this adjective thus held positive associations. Strong emphasizes that the fact that these seven adjectives together show that important virtues for women were measured by the relationships she had with her family and the gods, not by individuality, not by who she was.⁶⁶ Ancient historian on women and gender, Emily A. Hemelrijk, notes the few public roles a Roman woman could fulfill. The female values of unselfishness, generosity and giving are to be found in the role as a benefactor. She financed the erecting and maintaining of public buildings, but could also host feasts, games, or make any other donations with her wealth in loyalty and generosity to her city. The second is the role of the priestess in which we find devotion as a virtue. Lastly, a female Roman could be elected as patroness of her city. This meant that she acted as a mother, one could say, over her

⁶⁵ A. K. Strong, *Prostitutes and Matrons in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) 18-19.

⁶⁶ Strong, 2016, 19.

city and the civic associations therein.⁶⁷ The likeliness of fulfilling any of these public roles was rather small as wealth was necessary. Only women who were a member of the elite could participate in these benefactions. The role of patroness or priestess is of a limited number and could therefore not be fulfilled by the larger part of the female inhabitants. We thus see that the ideal Roman woman is largely defined as a being of private matters, having duties and virtues set around the privacy of the house, and less likely around the public sphere. Idealistic female features partly shape the image for women to pursue, similarly to the modern *female gaze*. How women look at models and actresses demonstrating expected behaviour and body image.

Another important virtue, less likely to be mentioned on the epitaph of a deceased loved one, but presumably one of the greatest values for measurement of female ideals and the *female gaze* – and therefore the subject of this research, is *pudicitia*. Sexuality, as it is shaping masculinity, it shapes femininity as well. However, for women modesty and chaste behaviour is expected. Standing directly next to the value of *pudicitia* is fertility as the producing of offspring was the duty of a wife. They were expected to behave in modest ways and at the same time readily and willingly participate in sex, yet, exclusively in their own homes and with their husbands only. Thus, in private spheres.⁶⁸ An example comes from the *Laudatio Turiae*, a fragmented funeral eulogy. A now unfortunately nameless Roman wife, nick-named ‘Turia’ by scholars, is commemorated by her husband. In this ‘Turia’ is praised for her actions as a devoted wife, daughter, and sister. She displayed the virtue *pietas* towards her father as she preserved his estate after his death according to the terms of his will. The wealth from him and his estate she then uses to support her relatives and provide dowries for her sisters. Moreover, during the exile of her husband she remained faithful to him and displayed *pudicitia*, they stayed married afterwards and most significantly, when she could not bear him any children for medical reasons, she offered to invite another woman into the *familia* to produce offspring. Even as the husband refuses this and they stay married without offspring, she displays female virtues ideally during her life, doing whatever necessary to perform her duties as a wife and as an eldest daughter.⁶⁹ Again, expected behaviour is described and Turia’s worth is measured by it. A woman reading this, thus performing the

⁶⁷ E. A. Hemelrijk, ‘Public Roles for Women in the Cities of the Latin West’, in: *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, ed. Sharon L. James & Sheila Dillon (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Blackwell Publishing, 2012) 479-480.

⁶⁸ Strong, 2016, 118-119

⁶⁹ J. Bodel, *Epigraphic Evidence: Ancient History From Inscriptions (Approaching the Ancient World)* (New York: Routledge, 2001) 196-198.

female gaze, could perhaps compare this to her own actions, relate to Turia, or feel somber due to any of her own ‘shortcomings’. She would likely learn from a passage such as this one what preferred is in a woman, a wife.

The opposite of the *femina bona* then was the prostitute or any other sex worker, such as actresses and dancers. The girls and women one would find in the Lupanar. In comedic theatre plays depicted as greedy instead of giving, displaying her sexuality openly on the streets or as attendees of dinner parties instead of in private spheres, neglects duties, even any ties or loyalties with the *familia*, and, despite her sexuality, is never described as fertile.⁷⁰ Legitimate marriage was hardly ever an option for these girls and women. Even though they could earn a living and sometimes save up and for slaves, which were many of them, to buy their freedom, a harsh life was set up for them. This type of career was largely chosen, if not forced as a slave, by people in poor circumstances, such as a lack of familial support, poverty, and a wish for quick economic solutions.⁷¹ A phenomenon that demonstrates the opposition of the ideal Roman woman and the prostitute rather well is the punishment for women who broke Augustus’ *Lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis*, passed in 18 AD. This law outlined the terms of adultery, which differ tremendously for male and for female members of Roman society as it was defined as ‘sex with a married woman’. This means that a husband cannot be prosecuted if he cheated on his wife with an unmarried woman. The wife, however, if caught cheating with any person was punished in public by an obligation to wear the dark-colored toga, the garment that prostitutes wore.⁷² There was a distinct link drawn with prostitutes if a Roman woman betrayed the expected virtues as an ideal wife. We thus see two sides of the same coin, the woman in ideal form and her opposite. What women might aspire to and could benefit their social position, and what might be used as an insult and possibly a lowering of social position. Roman society contained both types and any women in between, with characteristics of both. The *female gaze* therefore will be treated as a spectrum, features of the *femina bona* and of her opposite will be taken into consideration for her point of view.

⁷⁰ Strong, 2016, 41.

⁷¹ J. Böttiger, “Emancipation or Forced Labour?”, *Nomen Nominandum*, accessed April 11, 2023, <https://nomen-nominandumdotblog.wordpress.com/2021/12/26/female-sex-workers-in-pompeii-during-the-roman-empire-emancipation-or-forced-labour/>

⁷² T. A. McGinn. *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 146-166.

Couples engaged in sexual activities

Relevant primary sources of both case studies will be analyzed in the same manner as the previous chapter. This time with a new point of view, the *female gaze*. Yet, the opposition of activeness and passiveness remains a key factor throughout this iconographical analysis as it sets the In-group opposite the Out-group and defines the people therein.

Frescoes of both the Vettii and the Lupanar

The series of the Lupanar depicting couples making love and the triptych of the same subject in the Vettii's service area could provoke anyone with a libido. However, as established, they were aimed at men. Still, women, especially the female prostitutes in the Lupanar, would have certainly seen these. Even though only normative sex, not applicable to taboos, is depicted in the frescoes, a large amount of the graffiti speaks of an active female sex partner to be found in the brothel. I will elaborate on graffiti further in a later paragraph of this chapter. The active and passive roles as discussed in chapter two thus seem to have lesser gender related boundaries within the brothel than in the public sphere outside its doors. This adds to the phenomenon of the punishment for adulterous Roman wives as they can be viewed as actively committing adultery.

Interestingly, both the series and the triptych display a variety of sexual positions wherein the female participant is the active performer of the deed. The connotation of active versus passive is puzzling here. In fresco *LI.a* the female figure is kneeling on top of her male bed partner, facing him, her arm seeking support on the bed's headboard (fig. 3). The male figure cannot in this image perform the deed as we see his legs resting on the bed with his right foot hanging off of it and not receiving the support needed for an upwards movement of his pelvis. A second fresco of the Lupanar series displaying this is *LI.f* (fig. 8). Here, due to damage, it is harder to establish a division of roles. The female figure again kneels on top of the male figure, this time facing the other way and seeking support with her underarms resting on the end of the bed. This could be an active pose but can only be determined by the male's pose. He has lifted his shoulders off the mattress, a leaning position against only one of his arms. The other arm is lifted, resting on his head, thus not showing a need of support. This could again be suggestive of an active role of the female figure.

The Vettii triptych does not consist of solely active male performances either. Fresco *VI.a* depicts similarities to the pose in *LI.a* as she kneels on top of her partner facing him (fig. 22). However, there is an uncertainty of who is actively performing and who is not. The male figure is again lifting his upper body from the mattress and again needing support of only one

arm. Still, both his feet are on the mattress and his knees slightly bent, ready for action. A noteworthy difference in this fresco with any of the other frescoes of couples engaged in intercourse is the hand of the female figure. She rests it on the male figure's head. This is hardly a sign of passiveness or submission.

These frescoes thus do primarily display the active role as the penetrator, but in doing so can assign an active role to women as well. An explanation for this could be the blurred boundaries for prostitutes who were not expected to comply to these role divisions as explicitly as Roman wives were. However, as the Vettii House displays a similar situation there can be an emphasis detected on not only a prostitute's promiscuity and sexuality, but also a wife's fertility and willingness to perform intercourse with her husband.

Erotic mythology

For this topic, I firstly selected the Priapus in the Lupanar, as it is the sole source from that case study offering a mythological scene. The mythological fresco can be interpreted by all persons inside the building's walls, thus the female prostitutes as well. Would their view be differing from that of male clients? Furthermore, the remaining part of the Vettii's decorative programme offers a wide range of female representation in mythological scenes. This representation and the reception thereof by women will be examined.

The Lupanar's Priapus

There is a curious aspect to be found in one of the Lupanar's Priapus' probable functions. The Vettii's Priapus, as previously discussed, could perform as a protector, warding off garden thieves, and warding off the Evil Eye. Levin-Richardson states that this could be interpreted for the Lupanar's Priapus not only with the male owner or its male clients in mind, but also specifically as protector of the prostitutes working and also living in the brothel.⁷³ Priapus, *L2*, could thus be warding off the Evil Eye in service of the prostitutes (fig. 10). He could protect them from thieves or any other person with bad intentions. A brothel might be a public building, welcoming whoever was willing to pay for its services, its workers and thus residents also wanted the same godly protection as the residents of the upper class Vettii House.

⁷³ Levin-Richardson, 2019, 80.

The Vettii's decorative programme (other than Priapus)

The similarities in frescoes V2.b-i in rooms *n*, *p* and *t* are remarkable and at the same time challenge modern, but also Roman, gender related distinctions. Women would have seen these frescoes, either as a household slave or as being invited to the banquets the Vettii men could host. The first of these similarities is found in a comparison of Auge and Achilles (figs. 31-32). Both of them have clothing falling off their bodies, yet, for the female figure this is a display of submission while for the male figure it is a way of showing his returning to a heroic state. In displaying these comparable scenes masculinity is seen as better and a female viewer would have been put back in her low position within this hierarchy.

Another comparable pose is visible in the frescoes of Pentheus and Dirce, V2.c-d, however, in a completely different manner (figs. 33-34). For as the female figure, Dirce, is again showing a state of submission, so as is Pentheus depicted in this state. Even more so, he is put in this position not by other men, but by women, women of his own *familia*. If Severy-Hoven's argument about the Vettii men's joy in punishment is true, the reaction to these frescoes of female viewer would thus more rely on their status and their relationship with the Vettii men, rather than on their gender.

Additionally, an interesting effect of frescoes V2.e-f, and V2h-i is the offspring the pairs within them produce (figs. 31, 32, 35 and 36). The heroes Achilles and Heracles produce with their virtuous spouse the children Achilles Neoptolemus and Telephus. However, the sexuality in the frescoes depicting punishable acts produce monstrous offspring, the Minotaur and the centaurs. The choice for these pairs, either an example of virtues or an example of consequences of bad behaviour, thus seem to have been made consciously and emphasize virtues, remarkably fertility and the wifely duty of producing offspring.

Erotic graffiti

In the same manner as the previous chapter, I will examine the categories *insults* and *boasts* to find positive and negative mentions of women in the discourse between men on the Lupanar's walls. Then, I will study two of the very few finds of possible female writers.

Category insults

Insults were not only done from man to man, but the female prostitutes working in the Lupanar were occasionally involved in this category as well. However, the usage of penetration as an insult is directed at women in a different way, emphasizing more on female virtues. The shame that comes from being penetrated is even detectable in a brothel where

most female virtues are inherently dismissed. The maker of graffito *L3.d* thought it necessary to tell the world that Myrtale was orally penetrated by the entirety of the male members of the Cassacii, even directly addressing her by her name (fig. 14). Graffito *L3.l* exhibits the family bonds of one of the prostitutes, thereby both insulting the woman in question and her father, Salvius. As we have seen, private and public are important matters in the virtues of women. By exhibiting private information on her family bonds, shame is inescapable.

Category boastfulness

However, insults rarely occur by using the subject of normative man-woman, or vaginal, intercourse. The act of penetration in these graffiti is not used by men for the fact that they place one of the pairs lower in the hierarchy than them, but rather it puts themselves higher as it assigns them to a masculine role. The difference with insults can for example be spotted in graffito *L3.j* in which the maker almost seems to leave a positive review of his experience and the costs thereof for other future clients (fig. 19). Furthermore, *Ias cum Mag/no ubique*, ‘Ias with Magnus everywhere’, shows how the emphasis is not on Ias’ status as a penetrated female, but rather a boast about the frequency of their intercourse (*CIL* IV 2174).⁷⁴ Men thus likely used vaginal intercourse as a tool for boasts.

Female writers

There are only few graffiti of which scholars assume they were written by a female hand. However, one of the Vettii’s, *V3.b*, is commonly attributed to a woman (fig. 29).⁷⁵ The female name in the graffito, Eutythis, probably was a female slave of the Vettii household. The woman seems to advertise her services as a prostitute with this graffito. If it was truly written by her, it thus does show female sexual agency and her making a living for herself, possibly trying to buy her freedom.⁷⁶

Secondly, graffito *L3.g* most likely could be attributed to Ias herself. The couple, Ias and Magnus, occurs a second time, yet now Ias sends the message (fig. 17). As mentioned, the graffito is rather large. The woman seems to have wanted the attention of this Magnus. This too can be interpreted as a prostitute at work for herself, keeping track of contacts with her clients.

⁷⁴ Levin-Richardson, 2011, 71-72.

⁷⁵ A. Varone, *Erotica Pompeiana: Love Inscriptions on the walls of Pompeii* (Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2002) 143.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

The relationships that Roman women had with her family and with the gods were the measurements with which society viewed her. On the complete other side of this ideal image of the wife stood the prostitute. Oppositions were drawn not only between passive or active, but also public or private, fertile and modest or merely promiscuous. The role of elite women in Roman society was largely behind closed doors, producing offspring in private settings with their husbands. They were almost an extension of their male spouse, not equal in any way.

However, we have seen uncertainty in the distinction between passive and active roles during intercourse as it is depicted in the sources discussed above. The only established active role is that of the penetrator, yet a woman could be active during the deed without being the actual penetrator. A female partner, specifically of elite status, was expected to be willing and this is observable occasionally in frescoes depicting intercourse. Especially, when laying her hand on her male bed partner's head, the female figure is put in a position that can very much be described as willingly. Even putting the male figure in a more submissive position than is common in these depictions. An unconscious line thus seems to have been drawn between normative sex, man on woman, vaginal, and other forms of intercourse. Insulting both men and women was often done by exhibiting their participation in oral or anal intercourse, while vaginal intercourse was more often used as a tool for the men's own boastfulness in establishing their manliness rather than insulting the women involved. Of this normative intercourse it cannot be forgotten that it is the manner in which people can produce offspring. It thus was a necessary and dutiful act for the wife. This could be a partial explanation as to why a line was drawn there.

The *female gaze* was thus towards an ideal image to pursue, yet, from viewpoints along a spectrum, from the *femina bona*, to middle class, all the way to the prostitute. Women found small power positions for example in the protection of a god, Priapus in this case, in writing their own graffiti, and in actively participating in intercourse. The latter showing the virtue of willingness together with activeness, combining ideal expected behaviour with female empowerment.

CHAPTER IV

THE INTERSECTIONAL GAZE

Through Mulvey's *gaze*-theory I now have established two key aspects of Roman society of the first century AD. Firstly, the active and dominant *gaze* is rather interpreted as *masculine* instead of *male*. Secondly, the role of the Other herein is thus defined by gender as femininity was indeed considered passive, similarly to Mulvey's 20th century theory. However, the *masculine gaze* allows for male Romans to still unqualify for the dominant group, the *In-group*, and this factor was being used in insults and as threats to other male Romans. Gender thus is not the sole factor in creating *In-* or *Out-groups* in Roman society. As previously discussed, privilege or discrimination is not bound to one characteristic but can be a meeting point of a multiplicity of factors. It can be *intersectional*.⁷⁷ In this chapter I will thus focus on what other factors distanced people from a place in the dominant social group of 'masculine' male adults. And at the same time, were there any means for members of an *Out-group* to gain back some control, or dominance?

Passiveness versus activeness continues to play an important part in the organization of Roman social groups. The hierarchical distinction thus put women in a lower position, who were as wives expected to be willing and carrying offspring as soon as possible, the receiving end of the deed as it were. Yet it also put slaves, children, and non-citizens in lower positions within this hierarchy, all regardless of their gender. Moreover, elite adult men who were thought of as fulfilling the passive role with their partners could end up as the subjects of gossip and ridicule, thus passiveness could lower even them in social position. Passiveness could have effect on someone's legal status and result in social marginalization.⁷⁸

As I now have further elaborated on the main themes of sexuality and gender, the term *intersectionality* as coined by Crenshaw addresses many other factors as well. I will discuss the factors of gender and sexuality, but also physicality, whether handicaps or physical appearance and ethnicity, age, and class. The absence of particular factors is of interest as well.

⁷⁷ More on Crenshaw's term Intersectionality, see: P. Hill Collins, *Intersectionality as critical social theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), T. Moeller, *Intersectionality: Concepts, Perspectives and Challenges* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2020), R.A. Wilchins, *Gender norms & Intersectionality: connecting race, class & gender* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd., 2019), and A. Carastathis, *Intersectionality: origins, contestations, horizons* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016).

⁷⁸ Levins-Richardson, 2019, 66.

Couples engaged in sexual activities

The frescoes of couples during intercourse in both case studies all have one thing in common, they solely depict heteronormative sex. None of them depict sex with people of the same gender. Furthermore, the people in the frescoes are depicted in a relatively ambiguous manner. None of them have disabilities, exotic appearances, show explicit signs of high or low class, or of an elder or younger age. They seem to have been deliberately kept vague. What is not depicted and who is not represented?

Frescoes of both the Vettii and the Lupanar

The main characters in the Lupanar's frescoes might be of unidentified ethnicity, their skin colours do differ. However, this is tied to gender, not the place from where they or their ancestors came. For it is exclusively the female figure that has a lighter skin colour, and exclusively the male that has a darker skin colour. His hair seems to have been painted in a similar colour, instead of a black or brown tint to match with existing ethnicities. The custom of painting women with light and men with darker skin might be the result of their social roles, as wives were expected to spend most of their time at home with activities indoors, while men's days were largely filled with the public, outdoor activities. The differences in skin colour thus sets apart the two figures through their gender, not displaying a form of racism, and ties them then to their passive or active role. Interestingly, there does seem to have been a demand for prostitutes of faraway regions. Many prostitutes were indeed slaves from other regions. In contrast to the Lupanar series the male and female figure of the Vettii's frescoes, *VI.a-b*, do not have differing skin colours. Yet, this could simply be due to the plain colour palette that was used for the triptych. In short, while there must have been variation in skin color in practice, this was not depicted.

Besides being unclear about whether the female figure was a prostitute and a slave, and also the male figure being of an undefined class, there too is never someone clearly depicted as a slave present in the frescoes of both the Vettii House and the Lupanar. This could not have been due to lack of space as there is plenty surrounding the painted furniture. The depiction of slaves in scenes like this were not uncommon.⁷⁹ The absence in frescoes *L1a-g* and *VI.a-b*, however, adds to the anonymity and classlessness of the couples. It allows for any customer of the brothel to feel represented, as none of them actually are. They are

⁷⁹ Levins-Richardson, 2019, 79.

depicted in a conscious manner so that they are open for one's own interpretation. By doing so, maximizing the brothel's target audience of clientele.⁸⁰

As I have addressed in the previous chapter, some of the women in these frescoes were depicted rather dominantly, specifically *VI.a* wherein the male figure allows the female figure on top of him to put her hand on his head. This dominance is even more apparent in what is not depicted: female-on-female intercourse. As stated earlier, this resulted in male anxiety and a taboo surrounding the subject. Not necessarily due to 'pollution' by penetration, but because a woman now plays an active part, something regarded as exclusively assigned to a member of the *In-group* and inherently masculine. Something thus threatening the *In-group* and the corresponding Roman social system. Fountoulakis explains this as "female indifference towards male authority expressed in male sexual domination".⁸¹ This would seem like a form of power over men, however, the taboo surrounding the subject and insults such as 'unnatural' and 'monstrous' resulted in shame and discrimination.⁸²

For homosexual men on the other hand, they could have been represented in the Lupanar's fresco series, as this form of intercourse was highly likely performed in the brothel. Scholars, such as Antonio Varone, have acknowledged the presence of male prostitutes in the Lupanar. They were treated by the brothel's owner, and the rest of society, in the same unpleasant manner as female prostitutes.⁸³ Yet, there were two differences. The *masculine gaze* was not only aimed at women, at men too. However, a specific group of men. *Paederastia*, or the sexual and even love affairs between a male of adult age and a male adolescent, was the other side of the coin.⁸⁴ A consequence of the erotic fantasies of these older men towards adolescents was that male prostitutes could age out of their 'profession'. Prolonging this was done by shaving or plucking, their owners sometimes dressed them in women's clothing, and sometimes they were even castrated in hopes of keeping their youthfulness. There was for example a razor from iron and bronze found inside the Lupanar.⁸⁵ These men might not have been female, they were still not regarded as masculine, rather as feminine. They were of lower class in the same manner and were treated likewise. However,

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Fountoulakis, in Serafim et al., 2022, 112-117.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Levin-Richardson, 2019, 129.

⁸⁴ M. Spanakis, 'Fell in Love with an Anus: Sexual Fantasies for Young Male Bodies and the Pederastic Gaze in Rhianus' Epigrams', in Serafim A., G. Kazantzidis and K. Demetriou ed. *Sex and the Ancient City: Sex and Sexual Practices in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2022) 89-90.

⁸⁵ Levin-Richardson, 2019, 130.

as they were not depicted and thus not represented, this could through an *intersectional gaze* be interpreted as confirmation of their ‘shameful’ aspects.

Remarkably, female homosexuality, instead of the ridicule male homosexuals had to face, was a subject regarded not to be spoken of entirely. This contrast is for example visible in comic poetry wherein the passiveness in male-on-male intercourse was often used for humoristic reasons. Intercourse between two women, however, is a subject not to be found.⁸⁶ Historian Andreas Fountoulakis assigns this taboo to male anxiety. The *In-group* experiences an aspect of themselves, activeness, that is largely defining their role in the upper part of social hierarchy, in people who are naturally from birth a permanent member of the *Out-group*, women. This act of masculinity performed by women was thus considered unnatural and unlawful, even monstrous, by male ancient writers.⁸⁷ Again, the bigger a taboo is acted out, especially in absence of representation, the more an *Out-group* could gaze at this as shameful and unworthy.

Erotic mythology

Priapus

However, the second difference was a male prostitute’s ability to threaten others, for he did own the ‘weapon’ that is a phallus. Levin-Richardson claims the male prostitutes, the intersectional *Out-group* of low status men who perform the passive role, might have been represented in the Lupanar’s decorative programme nonetheless. As the main threat of the Priapus fresco against any ill minded people is indeed his penetrating power, so as was this the main threat a male prostitute could use.⁸⁸

Furthermore, the Vettii’s Priapus is depicted with his Phrygian cap, linking the god to his foreign roots. This was, however, not necessary for the god is mostly recognizable through his excessively enlarged phallus. The choice of either artist or patron to emphasize his foreignness leaves for questions, since the Greeks and Romans regarded their region as the center where the people were at their best, civilized. Thus, creating an *Out-group* of foreign people. Perhaps the threat of a god from former ‘uncivilized’ territory was greater, as the people therein were often considered aggressive and cruel. However, this is debatable.

⁸⁶ A. Fountoulakis, ‘Silencing Female Intimacies: Sexual Practices, Silence and Cultural Assumptions in Lucian, Dial. Meretr. 5’, in A. Serafim, G. Kazantzidis and K. Demetriou ed. *Sex and the Ancient City: Sex and Sexual Practices in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2022) 111-140, at 112-113.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Levin-Richardson, 2019, 130-139.

Hermaphroditus

An *Out-group* already in ancient times: inter- and transsexual people. I will address this group by analysis of the mythological figure of Hermaphroditus. The House of the Vettii contains two depictions of Hermaphroditus, in rooms *q* and *p*. The first, fresco *V2.j*, is placed next to Ariadne above the doorway (figs. 27 and 30). The guests of the Vettii's banquet would perceive Hermaphroditus laying down, similar to Ariadne's pose, both revealing their body optimally with one hand up, yet in opposing settings. Both are accompanied by a satyr or the god Pan, again, in a similar pose. However, the one accompanying Hermaphroditus is depicted covering his eyes after supposedly having seen their male genitalia. The second Hermaphroditus, *V2.k*, is accompanied by Silenus (fig. 28). In this scene Hermaphroditus is once again the passive object of desire and again placed in a room for dining purposes.⁸⁹ Yet, there is no question of sexual assault here. Gender differences and masculinity interestingly seem of less importance in this case. Severy-Hoven suggests that including Hermaphroditus in the Vettii's decorative programme could once again, as seen in the frescoes of Pentheus and Dirce, *V2.c-d*, be regarded as a neutralization of genders. As it was possible for a Roman to move along the scale of class, so too were they able to move from 'feminine' to masculine for example just by growing up. Romans thus could have consciously considered this scale and normalized it within society.⁹⁰

Not depicted in either case study is the *Out-group* handicapped people. A god not depicted either is Vulcan, the god of metalworking, craftsmen, fire and of course, ironically for Pompeii, volcanoes. More importantly, he was a handicapped god. Vulcan walked with a limp due to a congenital impairment, or according to other ancient sources, due to his mother Hera throwing him off the Olympus. Interestingly, he did become a member of the Twelve Olympians, making him among the highest of gods. He may not have been included in the decorative programmes, it would not have been regarded as unworthy. He was often depicted with his hammer and anvil, yet, rarely in a manner that showed his handicap.

Erotic graffiti

For graffiti, of both the Lupanar as the Vettii House, has proved to have functioned as a, one might say, 'masculinity-competition', allowing us to focus specifically on men, thus in this chapter the homosexual men in and around the building. Can we find proof of male prostitutes? Or of any clients preferring the passive role? If so, what messages do these *Out-*

⁸⁹ Clarke, 1998, 49-55.

⁹⁰ Severy-Hoven, 2012, 569-570.

group men convey or do others tell us about them? How was this discourse on the walls used for or against them?

Category assessment

In room *f* of the Lupanar we find graffito *L3.b* telling us of the beautiful Paris, *calos Paris* (fig. 12). I begin with this graffito for, besides its subject being a male name, the word that was used to describe him, *calos* was generally used to describe young boys. Originally, according to Levin-Richardson, specifically young male Greeks in possession of citizen rights within the *polis*. However, this part of the definition was lost in later use. The part that was left was purely about physical beauty of young men. Other mentions of the word *calos* in Pompeii are to describe a tavern boy, actors, prostitutes, and some are used for women.⁹¹ The word thus seems in this period more associated with the lower classes and with femininity. A compliment that puts one in an intersectional *Out-group*.

Category news

The graffito *Africanus moritur / scribet puer Rusticus / condiscus cui dolet pro Africano*, *L3.f*, at first glance does not show a strong suggestion towards eroticism (fig. 16). However, Rusticus describes himself with *puer*, a term the Latin jurist Paulus defines as: “*unam, cum omnes seruos pueros appellaremus; alteram, cum puerum contrario nomine puellae diceremus; tertiam, cum aetatem puerilem demonstraremus*”, or: “first, all those whom we call slaves; second, a male in contradistinction to a girl; and third, that which we characterise as one in his boyhood years”.⁹² These boys were often used by their owner for their sexual desires.⁹³ Africanus could have been a client or the (former) owner of the brothel and the slaves therein. Interestingly though, Rusticus does not seem to have had a negative relationship with Africanus or the passive role that came with his position, as he mourns Africanus. Acceptance of this ‘degrading’ role could thus also occur.

Category boastfulness

A remarkable fact about several of the graffiti on the brothel’s walls is the use of masculine pronouns instead of feminine. For example, graffito *L3.i*, *Scordopordonicus hic · bene / fuit ·*

⁹¹ Levin-Richardson, 2019, 135-136.

⁹² Paulus, Dig. 50.16.204. Translation by: J. Pollini, ‘Slave-Boys for Sexual and Religious Service: Images of Pleasure and Devotion’, in: *Flavian Rome*, ed. A. Boyle and W. J. Dominik (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002) 150.

⁹³ Pollini, 2002, 149-152.

quem · voluit (fig. 19). The word *quem* was used for men or a group of people containing both men and women.⁹⁴ If the graffito was perhaps about a *convivum* the second manner of use could explain his choice. Yet, Levin-Richardson states the use of masculine pronouns appeared more often and even in cases where the writer specifically mentions a singular person, such as *Bellicus hic | futuit quondam*, “Bellicus fucks here a certain one” (CIL 4.2247).⁹⁵ This could thus be part of the proof for male prostitutes inside the Lupanar.

Category insults

Importantly, with being an *Out-group* comes invectives. As stated in chapter two, I interpret the Vettii’s graffito *V3.a* as such. A certain Eros is described as a *cinaedus*. These men are interesting for this chapter as they bridged gender roles. These men with their feminine traits and customs may have had the negative association with fulfilling the passive role in homosexual intercourse, they also were said to be seducers of (married) women, and above all adulterers.⁹⁶ These could merely be rumours as they were part of an *Out-group*, yet this does show how Romans, again, could move along a scale of social groups and their characteristics.

Lastly, graffito *L3.c, mi cum ponis / Batacare te pidicaro* “When you hand over the money, Batacarus, I’ll butt-fock you”, shows a rare power move of a male prostitute towards a male client (fig. 13). As Batacarus is asked to ‘hand over money’, he must have been the client, while at the same time this suggest that he is willing to perform the passive role in homosexual intercourse.⁹⁷ Or at least, is threatened in this role. The phallus drawn next to the graffito strengthens the writer’s message to Batacarus. The only weapon a male prostitute had.

We find numerous proof for the qualities of gender, sexuality, age and class to be qualities that can sort one into the *Out-group*. Crosses are drawn specifically with children and adolescents if they are also of slave status. For women the same intersection can be noticed. The brothel’s prostitutes were largely female slaves. Women of any status could experience an intersection due to their sexuality, not the usual passive role, but instead the active role that threatens male authority. Furthermore, in *pueri* we find an intersection of slave status, a sexual passive role, and a young age. The latter quality being something the male prostitutes

⁹⁴ Levin-Richardson, 2019, 131.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ For more on *cinaedi*, see: T. Sapsford’s *Performing the Kinaidos: Unmanly Men in Ancient Mediterranean Cultures* (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2022).

⁹⁷ Levin-Richardson, 2019, 138-139.

seemed to have kept a close eye on to withstand the test of time, as shaving materials found in the building demonstrated.

Less proof is found for physicality. Depictions of handicaps or differing appearances due to ethnicity are rarely found. Yet, one of the Twelve Olympian Gods himself was handicapped and the dyeing of the hair of prostitutes tells us foreign looks were popular among the brothel's clients. This feature thus is still unclear and requires further research. However, this thesis has still shown that through an *intersectional gaze* not only underrepresentation and thus reinforcing taboos are visible. This *gaze* could also demonstrate how certain *Out-groups* had qualities of power, most importantly the threat of penetration or female appropriation of the active role.

CONCLUSION

This thesis commenced as I pondered the archeological finds of Pompeii and the reception of differing social groups within the city. To find answers I applied the modern *gaze* theory of Mulvey to the first century AD. This resulted in my main question; how is ‘the *gaze*’ expressed in Roman Antiquity, the second half of the first century AD, and which insights about societal structures might we gain? Iconographical analysis of the primary sources within both case studies helped mapping individual aspects of the *gaze* in art. Accompanying the iconographical analyses was the literary research, and with these combined research methods I was able to demonstrate possible functions, interpretations, and links to be drawn.

Since the first chapter had provided the necessary information to open the case studies for debate, the second chapter focused on establishing the *In-group*. The primary sources proved that, similar to Mulvey’s theory, they were aimed at a male audience. However, the Roman dominant *gaze* requires adjusting the theory for it was not bound strictly to gender. A distinction was drawn between the passive and active role during intercourse, especially demonstrated in the Lupanar’s frescoes of couples engaged in sexual activities, *L1.a-g*, in which only the latter role was regarded as masculine (figs. 3-9). The passive was regarded as feminine, regardless of a person being male, female, or intersexual. A hierarchy in this phenomenon was observed in the competitive graffiti discourse surrounding masculinity on the walls of the Lupanar, demonstrating that masculinity was something men aspired to. Therefore, the dominant Roman *gaze* in Pompeii of the first century CE can rather be termed the *masculine gaze*.

The *female gaze* as the direct opposite, following along the lines of research by Barrow, Strong, Levin-Richardson, and Clarke, to continue and deepen the original theory of the *gaze*, was the focus of the chapter thereafter. A role of the ideal (elite) woman, the wife, the *femina bona*, was evident in the sources, simultaneously creating an antagonist that was the prostitute. This resulted in not only passive versus active, but also the opposites of private versus public, and modest but fertile versus promiscuity. Yet, these opposites put together could form a power position for women as with the expectancy of the *femina bona* came the virtue of willingness. During intercourse this willingness could be performed in a less modest, more active manner, as seen in fresco *VI.a* (fig. 22). Other primary sources that allowed for women to have small power regardless of being the *Out-group* is the Lupanar’s Priapus protecting the prostitutes in the building, and the graffiti attributed to female writers thereby being able to voice their agency. The Roman women, either elite, middle or of low classes,

gazed towards an ideal image of the *femina bona*, nevertheless they thus found small ways of resistance to the dominant *In-group*.

In my last chapter I expanded on Mulvey's theory through the addition of the *intersectional gaze*. I examined which social groups, besides that of women in general, as done in the previous chapter, experience the role of the Other due to (intersecting) features of their being. Underrepresentation as the result of taboos frequently occurred for those who were in intersectional *Out-groups*. However, the *intersectional gaze* also demonstrated power moments for these, specifically the threat of penetration or performing the masculine active role during intercourse regardless of one's gender.

We thus have seen how masculine adult Roman men take the place of the dominant *In-group*, the main audience, performing a *masculine gaze* towards *Out-groups* such as women, children and adolescents, and slaves. Intersectional features gender, sexuality, age and class proved to be prevalent in sorting a Roman into an *In-* or *Out-group*. Furthermore, one's position in social hierarchy could increase or decrease due to the crucial aspects of passiveness or activeness. These were of such value that it was not uncommon to use them as boast, insult, or threat. However, these uses also often formed the tools for power of the *Out-groups* of Roman society.

This research can be expanded through applying the theoretical framework to a more extensive source study, including archeological sites of more differing social surroundings besides a home and a brothel. A focus on class distinctions can also be applied, this often resulting in intersectional *Out-groups*. Furthermore, research on a larger scale would allow for performing a more complete iconographical analysis including interpretation of background items such as the sandals and stools in the Lupanar series as they possibly refer to erotic meanings, the roles of the figures in the background of the Vettii's frescoes, or the larger context of the graffiti. Lastly, it might be so that the concentration around solely Pompeii resulted in a bias, and an entirely different experience can be drawn from the findings of other places in the Roman Empire. Another future research possibility is thus the expanding of territory. Still, this thesis provided new perspectives as the research into the *female gaze* was deepened and the *intersectional gaze* was introduced. The combination of art historical research as done by iconographical analysis and the literary research of the works of (ancient) historians, primarily Levins-Richardson and Clarke, created a differing research approach, fusing strengths of both disciplines. The future of this debate is important for it helps deepen our understanding of Roman ways, what Roman society might have looked like, and how it functioned in daily life. Through the discussion of ancient societal structures, we might learn

to keep questioning also our own modern societal structures and continue enhancing them. We humans have been growing, developing, and advancing for centuries. Let us keep growing.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barrow, R. and M. Silk. *Gender, Identity and the Body in Greek and Roman Sculpture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Bodel, J. *Epigraphic Evidence: Ancient History from Inscriptions (Approaching the Ancient World)*. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Böttiger J. ‘Emancipation or Forced Labour?’, *Nomen Nominandum*, accessed April 11, 2023, <https://nomen-nominandum-dot-blog.wordpress.com/2021/12/26/female-sex-workers-in-pompeii-during-the-roman-empire-emancipation-or-forced-labour/>
- Bradley, K. *Slavery and Society at Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Carastathis, A. *Intersectionality: origins, contestations, horizons*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016.
- Clarke, J. R. *The Houses of Roman Italy 100 B.C.-A.D. 250: Ritual, Space, and Decoration*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
- Clarke, J. R. *Looking at Lovemaking: constructions of sexuality in Roman art, 100 B.C.-A.D. 250*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Clarke, J. R. ‘Look Who’s Laughing at Sex: Men and Women Viewers in the Apodyterium of the Suburban Baths at Pompeii’, in: *The Roman Gaze: Vision, Power, and the Body*, ed. D. Fredrick. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002.
- Fredrick, D. ‘Beyond the Atrium to Ariadne: Erotic Painting and Visual Pleasure in the Roman House’, *Classical Antiquity* 14 (1995), 266–287.
- Glenn, C. ‘Complicating the theory of the male gaze: Hitchcock’s leading men’, *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 15.4 (2017) 496-510.
- Hackworth Petersen, L. *The Freedman in Roman Art and Art History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Halsall, G. *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Hemelrijk, E. A. ‘Public Roles for Women in the Cities of the Latin West’, in: *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, ed. Sharon L. James & Sheila Dillon. Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Blackwell Publishing, 2012.
- Hill Collins, P. *Intersectionality as critical social theory*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.
- Hingley, R. *Globalizing Roman Culture: Unity, Diversity and Empire*. London: Taylor & Francis, 2005.

- Hov, L. 'The first female performers: tumblers, flute-girls, and mime actresses', *New Theatre Quarterly* 31.2 (2015) 129-143.
- Kellum, B. 'Weighing In: The Priapus Painting at the House of the Vettii, Pompeii,' in: *Ancient Obscenities: Their Nature and Use in the Ancient Greek and Roman Worlds*, ed. Dorota Dutsch and Ann Suter. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015.
- Lardinois, A., and L. McClure. *Making Silence Speak: Women's Voices in Greek Literature and Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.
- Levin-Richardson, S. *Sex, Sight, and Societas in the Lupanar, Pompeii*. Stanford: Stanford University Publishing, 2005.
- Levin-Richardson, S. 'Facilis hic futuit: Graffiti and Masculinity in Pompeii's 'Purpose-Built' Brothel', *Helios* 38.1 (2011) 59-78.
- Levin-Richardson, S. *The Brothel of Pompeii*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- Lundgren, A. K. *The Pastime of Venus: An Archeological Investigation of Male Sexuality and Prostitution in Pompeii*. Oslo: Representalen, 2014.
- McGinn, T. A. *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- McGowan, T. *The Real Gaze: Film Theory after Lacan*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007.
- Moeller, T. *Intersectionality: Concepts, Perspectives and Challenges*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2020.
- Monk-Turner, E. 'Who is gazing at whom? A look at how sex is used in magazine advertisements', *Journal of Gender Studies* 17.3 (2008) 201-209.
- Mulvey, L. 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* 16.3 (1975) 6-18.
- Oliensis, E. 'The Erotics of Amicitia: Readings in Tibullus, Propertius, and Horace', in: *Roman Sexualities*, ed. Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Pollini, 'Slave-Boys for Sexual and Religious Service: Images of Pleasure and Devotion', in: *Flavian Rome*, ed. A. Boyle and W. J. Dominik. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002.
- Ranieri Panetta, M. *Pompeii: The History, Life and Art of the Buried City*. Vercelli: White Star Publishers, 2004.
- Sapsford, T. *Performing the Kinaidos: Unmanly Men in Ancient Mediterranean Cultures*. Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2022.

- Sassatelli, R. 'Interview with Laura Mulvey: Gender, Gaze and Technology in Film Culture', *Theory, culture & society* 28.5 (2011) 123-143.
- Serafim, A., G. Kazantzidis and K. Demetriou ed. *Sex and the Ancient City: Sex and Sexual Practices in Greco-Roman Antiquity*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2022.
- Severy-Hoven, B. 'Master Narratives and the Wall Painting of the House of the Vettii, Pompeii', *Gender & History* 24.3 (2012) 540–580.
- Skinner, M. B. *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2014.
- Staples, *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins: Sex and Category in Roman Religion*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Strong, A. K. *Prostitutes and Matrons in the Roman World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Varone, A. *Erotica Pompeiana: Love Inscriptions on the walls of Pompeii*. Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2002.
- Vout, C. *Sex on Show: Seeing the Erotic in Greece and Rome*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.
- Wallace-Hadrill, A. 'Patronage in Roman Society: From Republic to Empire,' in: *Patronage in Ancient Society*, ed. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill. London and New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Wickham, C. *Framing the early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400-800*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Wilchins, R.A. *Gender norms & Intersectionality: connecting race, class & gender*. London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd., 2019.
- Williams Crenshaw, K. *Intersectionality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Winsor Leach, E. *The Social Life of Painting in Ancient Rome and on the Bay of Naples*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.