

## ABSTRACT

Weaver of Tales: Interconnected Imagery in the House of the Citharist

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Traditional approaches to Roman wall paintings in ancient Pompeii tend to focus on stylistic categories or consider the content of a single painting. In their original setting, however, these paintings existed in a greater architectural and social-historical context. My thesis examines the frescoes and their greater context in one of the houses, the House of the Citharist, in Pompeii. In particular, this thesis concerns the program of wall paintings as they existed after the earthquake of A.D. 62 but before the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in A.D. 79. My thesis explores the history of both the city and house, in addition to the political climate at the time and affiliations of the owner of the House of the Citharist with the Roman emperor Nero, in relation to the frescoes that decorated the House of the Citharist.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS:

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WEAVER OF TALES  
INTERCONNECTED IMAGERY IN THE HOUSE OF THE CITHARIST

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
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## INTRODUCTION

While traditional approaches to Roman wall painting tend to focus on stylistic elements or the subject of a single painting, recent scholarship has begun to shift to more comprehensive study. Works such as John Clarke's book *The Houses of Roman Italy 100 B.C.-A.D. 250: Ritual, Space, and Decoration* or Bettina Bergmann's article "The Roman House as Memory Theater: The House of the Tragic Poet in Pompeii" consider wall paintings in their greater context, architecturally, culturally, and politically.<sup>1</sup> These studies have proved much more enlightening than traditional methods, since paintings inform and are informed by their context.

This thesis performs a similar analysis of one house in Pompeii, the House of the Citharist. As a fully comprehensive study of the house is well beyond the parameters of this thesis, the following chapters focus specifically on the scheme of the mythological fresco panels in three rooms in the house: triclinia 20 and 37 and exedra 35. This study begins with the history of Pompeii and the House of the Citharist, considers the owner of the house, Lucius Popidius, and his political connections to the Roman emperor Nero, and identifies the subjects of each of the frescoes in these rooms before noting the thematic connections of the panels and their greater cultural significance.

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<sup>1</sup> John Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy 100 B.C.-A.D. 250: Ritual, Space, and Decoration* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991); Bettina Bergmann, "The Roman House as Memory Theater: The House of the Tragic Poet in Pompeii," *The Art Bulletin* 76, no. 2 (June 1994): 225-256.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The History of Pompeii and the House of the Citharist

When we meet someone new and interesting, we often ask that person about his or her past in an attempt to understand that person more intimately. One learns who someone else is now by investigating who he or she has been in the past. The same principle applies to studying a house in Pompeii. To understand better what it was when Mount Vesuvius erupted in A.D. 79, one must trace its birth and development and the environment in which it grew. By tracing the historical record of Pompeii, one sees how and why the House of the Citharist develops over the centuries, gaining a better understanding of the house before delving into a more in-depth study of its Neronian connections.

Archaeological records indicate that the settlement in Pompeii dates back to at least the sixth century B.C. The earliest settlers were most likely Ausonians, but in the sixth century B.C., the Greeks started to create a settlement. The location of Pompeii, with its bay, proximity to the Sarno River, and access to a well-travelled road made it accessible and a convenient trade route to many, offering the small settlement a well-established source of revenue and a secure position in Italy. Excavations have revealed that, while small, the Greek town at this time traded with both Athens and Etruria, and designed its architecture with this eastern influence in mind.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Larry Richardson Jr. *Pompeii: An Architectural History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 3-5.

In the fifth century B.C., there was a widespread Samnite conquest of Campania, the southern Italian region surrounding Pompeii. These were an Oscan-speaking people from the Apennine Mountains who came down to conquer the fertile coast. They had been Hellenized in the seventh or sixth centuries B.C. Rather than plunder and destroy the Greek settlements, the Samnites seem to have intermingled with their cultural cousins who already knew how to cultivate the land, fish the rivers and sea, and build cities. At this point, Pompeii was still a rather small settlement, as can be inferred from a section in Livy in which he mentions that the Roman fleet landing in Pompeii in 310 B.C. during the Second Samnite War. Rather than spend their time plundering Pompeii, the marines traveled inland to loot, indicating Pompeii was too small to interest them at that time.<sup>2</sup>

The First Punic War fought by Rome against Carthage from 264-241 B.C. brought with it significant changes for Pompeii. Rome, in search of bays and rivers to quickly build an impressive fleet, utilized the Bay of Naples and the Sarno River. Like any economy, an increase in demand leads to an increase in supply, and workers streamed into Pompeii and the surrounding cities to earn a living by building ships. This provided a huge boost to the economy of Pompeii, and, by the mid-second century B.C., the city had changed drastically. Pompeii transformed from a small Greek and Oscan settlement to a thriving city with formal streets, enormous houses, public baths, an impressive forum, defensive walls surrounding the city, remarkable trade connections, and an effective government. At this time, Pompeii's allegiance lay with nearby Nuceria, indicated by an abundance of Nucertian money in the archaeological record.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Richardson, *Pompeii*, 4-7; Livy 9.38.2.

<sup>3</sup> Richardson, *Pompeii*, 7-9.

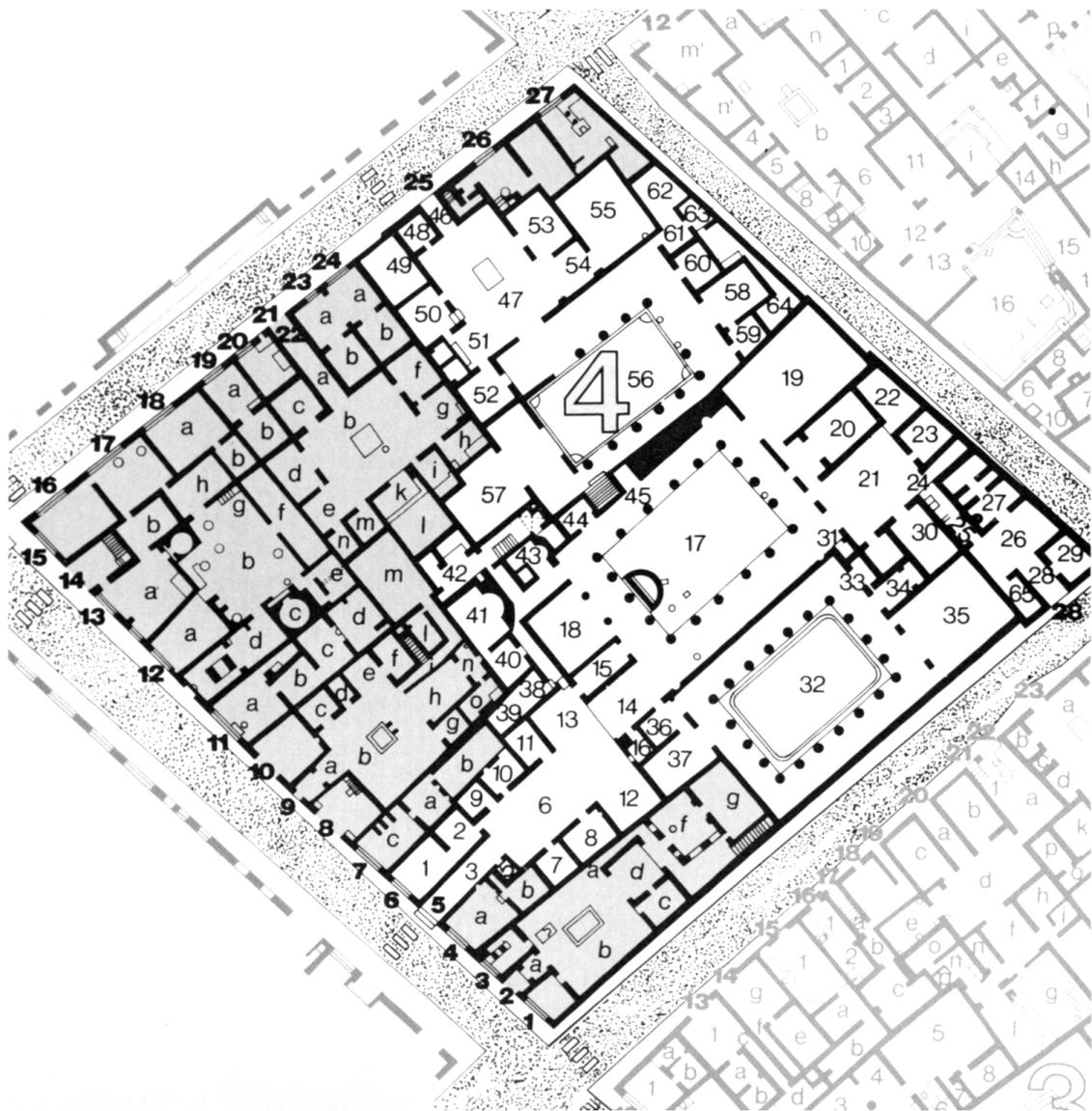


Figure 1: Map of the House of the Citharist<sup>4</sup>

This is also when construction on the House of the Citharist began. The limestone of its south atrium (room 6 in figure 1) and surrounding core of the house date to the third century B.C., possibly built in direct response to the First Punic War.<sup>5</sup> The

<sup>4</sup> de Vos, “Casa del Citarista,” 1:117. See the appendix for a list of the rooms by number, their function, and the frescoes they contain.

<sup>5</sup> Mariette de Vos, “I 4, 5.25: Casa del Citarista,” in *Pompei Pitture e Mosaici* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1990), 1:117.

house expanded immensely during the second century B.C., taking over the site of demolished houses. Both peristyles 17 and 32 date to this period, indicating that the owner was wealthy enough to own an ostentatious home with two peristyles instead of the typical, more modest single peristyle, found even in houses of wealthier Pompeians, such as the House of the Vettii.<sup>6</sup> While these peristyles were redecorated later, parts of the earlier core retain their First “Mason” Style decoration, perhaps best seen in *cubiculum* 11. Considering the timeline, this decoration seems logical, since the First Style appears as early as the fourth century B.C. and dominates Pompeian wall decoration until the first century B.C. when the Second Style starts to replace it.<sup>7</sup> Russian architect A. A. Parland created a watercolor of the wall painting scheme in this room, seen in figure 2. The base was yellow, had a green protruding stucco shelf, and an *opus quadratum* pattern of purple outlining on a white background in the middle.<sup>8</sup> While the frame from this time still stood at the time of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, most of the decoration had worn off or been replaced. What does survive of this period of construction testifies to the wealth of the owner of the House of the Citharist.

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<sup>6</sup> de Vos, “Casa del Citarista,” 1:117.

<sup>7</sup> Roger Ling, *Roman Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 12, 23.

<sup>8</sup> de Vos, “Casa del Citarista,” 1:121-122.

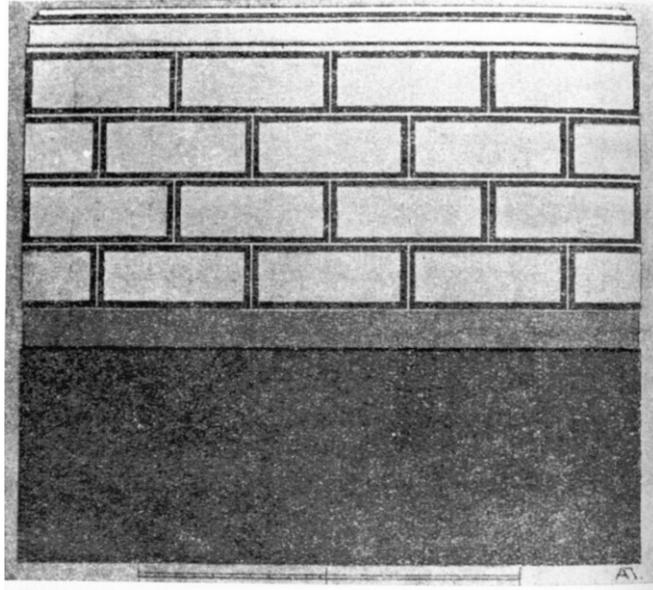


Figure 2: Diagram of the wall painting in *cubiculum* 11<sup>9</sup>

Ironically, this “Golden Age” of Pompeii both began and ended with war. In 91 B.C., the Pompeians decided to join with a number of Italian cities in revolting against Rome in the Social War. By 89 B.C., Rome took the offensive and the Roman army besieged Pompeii under the direction of Sulla. While surrounding cities such as Herculaneum and Stabiae fell to Sulla, Pompeii and nearby Nola continued to resist starvation and bombardment. Unable to break these two cities, Sulla moved inland to the Samnite mountain strongholds, defeating them and ending the Social War in 87 B.C. As was her custom, Rome offered citizenship to the Samnites. While it is unclear if Pompeii ever surrendered, it seems that she held out longest, but finally gave in after Nola in 80 B.C. Archaeological records indicate that the Romans, nevertheless, never looted or burned the city to punish her for her stubbornness. Rome’s punishment for Pompeii came in a different fashion: colonists. Romans, probably including some of Sulla’s

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<sup>9</sup> de Vos, “Casa del Citarista,” 1:22, fig. 6.

veterans, settled in Pompeii and named it *Colonia Cornelia Veneria Pompeianorum*. They redistributed larger estates, created a new constitution, and established a new local government run by two *duoviri iure dicundo* and two *aediles*. Although a few old families disappeared, probably from exile, most remained in Pompeii, somewhat suppressed under Roman control. Records of magistrates at the time show few Oscan names in the late republican era. This influx of colonists, however, was not purely detrimental to the Oscan population. With the Roman colonists came a mass of wealth and desire to build, both in the public and private spheres. Eventually, the colonists began to intermarry with the preexisting population and rights of the separate peoples started to equalize.<sup>10</sup>

While there is no literary evidence that the owners of the House of the Citharist were Roman or had Roman connections at the time, they seemed to have received some benefit from the influx of funds and building zeal. Most of the northern portion of the house, including peristyle 56 and atrium 47, was built after 80 B.C. as a separate home that would later be added to the House of the Citharist. In addition, some of the rooms, such as corridor 15 and *cubiculum* 36 were redecorated in the then popular Second Style.<sup>11</sup> *Cubiculum* 36, for instance, had a monochrome rug-like floor mosaic, and its walls were decorated with a yellow base and purple band.<sup>12</sup>

Along with the rest of the Roman Empire, Pompeii felt the effects of changing leadership with the Civil Wars and the rise of Augustus to power. Many of the city's residents had ties to Pompey, especially the descendants of Sulla's colonists. Those who

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<sup>10</sup> Richardson, *Pompeii*, 10-13.

<sup>11</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:117, 125-126.

<sup>12</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:125-126.

showed loyalties to the victorious side, however, gained from shifting power, and many of these were the old Samnite families. In any case, Pompeii seems to have readily accepted Augustus' rule, building a temple to Augustus and creating an Augustan cult. The continued equalization of Oscan and Roman families and the creation of new political offices at this time created a new, multicultural middle-class elite that essentially ruled Pompeii happy and undisturbed until A.D. 59.<sup>13</sup>

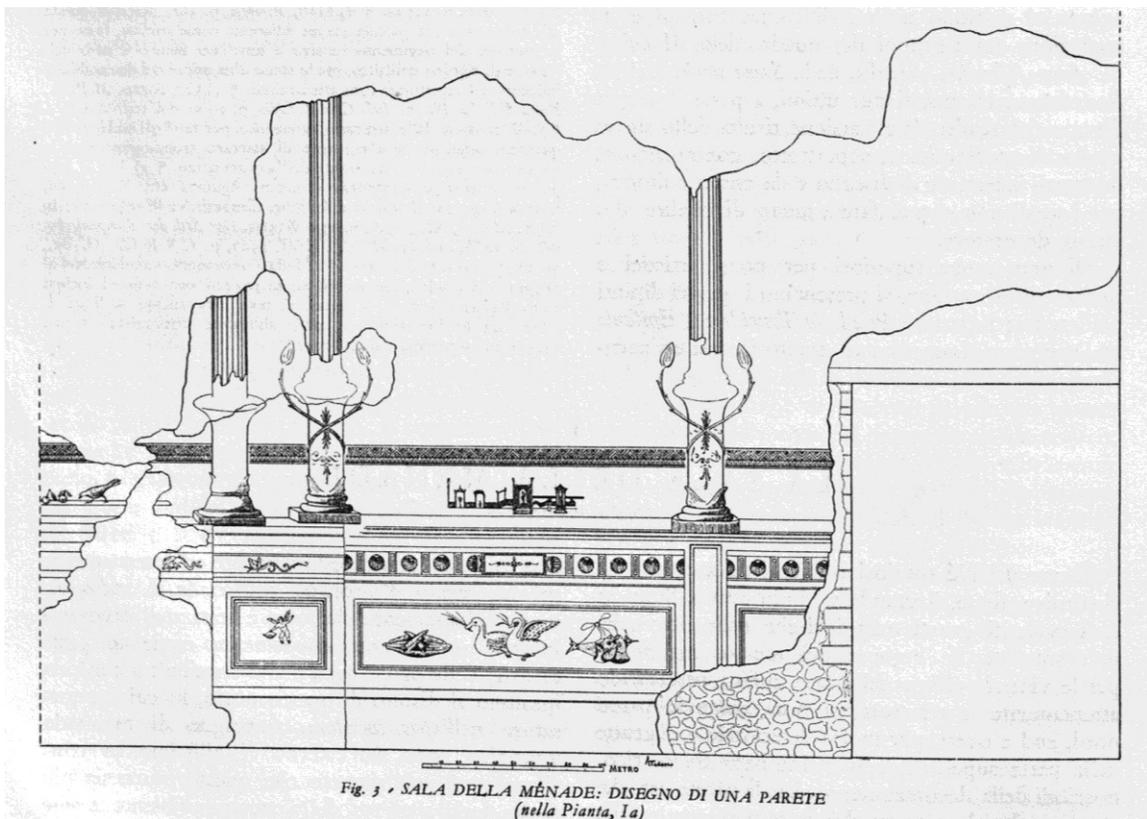


Figure 3: Scheme of the wall painting in triclinium 19<sup>14</sup>

A reflection of the political and economic atmosphere of the time, the House of the Citharist saw some improvements during the early Augustan Age, but little in

<sup>13</sup> Richardson, *Pompeii*, 13-17.

<sup>14</sup> Elia Olga, *Le pitture della "Casa del Citarist"* (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1937), 7, fig. 3.

comparison to those of the early colonization of Pompeii. From what remains of the house, it seems that its east portion (including triclinium 19, triclinium 20, *oecus* 23, and triclinium 30) was redecorated in the Second and Third Styles. These rooms included monumental paintings and intricate designs more characteristic of the Third Style. Although now damaged, a drawing from 1937 (fig. 3) shows the scheme of the painting on the walls of triclinium 19. It has the characteristic architectural elements with still-lives of cupids, green and purple shells decorating the frieze, and flowers encircling columns. The monumental paintings, which are discussed further in Chapter 3, are in triclinium 19 and room 23. On the south wall of triclinium 19 was a giant fresco of a maenad and Bacchus, while the north wall of triclinium 20 depicts a scene of Dido and Aeneas in the cave, as described in Book 4 of the *Aeneid*. These frescos stretch to nearly five by eight feet, making their figures nearly life-sized. On a less monumental scale, *oecus* 23 has a depiction of Apollo Citharoedus (fig. 4). The major indication of increasing wealth of the Popidii family, however, is that the north section of the house, which was originally a completely separate home, is connected to the House of the Citharist during this period. This nearly doubles the size of the house, adding a third peristyle and over a dozen additional rooms. Clearly, the Popidii were among those who benefited from Augustus' rise to power.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:117, 145-148.



Figure 4: A line drawing of the Apollo Citharoedus fresco by La Volpe<sup>16</sup>

Pompeii's social and political structure remained fairly undisturbed until A.D. 59, but the violence and destruction of the next few years compensate for Pompeii's dearth of turmoil for the past 70 years. In the midst of a theatrical performance in the amphitheater in Pompeii, a riot erupted between Pompeians and Nuceria that quickly escalated from insults to the use of weapons. The Pompeians won, killing many Nuceria, but the Nuceria appealed to Rome for justice. In the end, Rome forbade any gladiatorial games for the next ten years and disbanded the *collegia* that apparently contributed to the riot. In A.D. 62, however, Nero married his wife Poppaea Sabina, who either was from Pompeii or had Pompeian connections. With this marriage came an abundance of favors

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<sup>16</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:159, fig. 69.

on Pompeii, for which the Pompeians loved Nero, as indicated by numerous inscriptions. By A.D. 65 the ban on gladiatorial games was lifted.<sup>17</sup>

While the riot caused some trouble for Pompeii, it was nothing compared to the mass destruction caused by an earthquake in A.D. 62. This earthquake devastated the entire city, leveling both public and private buildings. Although it appears the Pompeians started clearing and reconstructing almost immediately, the damage was so extensive that much of the city was still in ruin seventeen years later when Mount Vesuvius erupted. Public buildings received preliminary aid, leaving private homeowners desperate for workers to rebuild their homes. There simply were not enough resources for the work needed to restore the city, especially since Rome stopped sending aid after her own disastrous fire of A.D. 64. Even houses of the wealthy, such as the House of the Vettii, remained unfinished in A.D. 79. In addition, many of the wealthier homeowners seem to have abandoned their city homes, which the mercantile class began to occupy. Businesses sprung up in the ruins of once-great homes, while others underwent slow repairs.<sup>18</sup>

Like every other building in Pompeii, the House of the Citharist needed reconstruction, especially in the core of the house. The south side of the house seems to have been restored by the time of the eruption in A.D. 79, including peristyle 32 and exedra 35. Two walls of exedra 35 had impressive monumental frescos in the Fourth Style, most likely painted as part of the restoration. The south wall had a depiction of Bacchus discovering Ariadne, and the east wall showed Iphigenia, Orestes, and Pylades

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<sup>17</sup>Miriam T. Griffin, *Nero: the End of a Dynasty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 102; Richardson, *Pompeii: An Architectural History*, 17-18.

<sup>18</sup>Richardson, *Pompeii*, 18-22.

in Tauris.<sup>19</sup> The state of the house after these restorations is the main focus of this thesis. As the following chapters demonstrate, these later frescoes in the House of the Citharist contain Neronian connections and political insinuations made by the then-owner of the house, Lucius Popidius.

In A.D. 79, in the middle of restorations, Mount Vesuvius erupted and covered Pompeii in lapilli and ash. While there were preliminary attempts to restore the city, eventually rescue attempts were reduced to looting excursions. Monuments and homes were stripped of anything valuable, from marble facing to jewelry to statues. A few simple huts were built on top of the ruins, but most of the survivors simply moved elsewhere.<sup>20</sup>

While the extent of looting in the House of the Citharist is unclear, some of the marble was taken from the *impluvium* in atrium 6 and a few sculptures were probably removed. Looters did not remove the bronze animal sculptures in the peristyle 17 and the bronze sculpture of the Apollo Citharoedus allegedly from peristyle 32. After these original lootings, the house remained undisturbed until modern excavation.<sup>21</sup>

In relation to the development of Pompeii over the centuries, the House of the Citharist shows how the city grew from a town of little concern to one of the great cities of Italy. With its small core from the third century B.C., huge additions in the second century B.C., renovations in the late republic and early Augustan eras, and finally restorations after the earthquake of A.D. 62, the House of the Citharist traces the fortunes of Pompeii and the Popidii family. Additionally, as concerns this thesis, the restorations

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<sup>19</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:117, 132, 134-135.

<sup>20</sup> Richardson, *Pompeii*, 22-27.

<sup>21</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:117-118.

to the house after the earthquake show how Lucius Popidius viewed his connections to Nero.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Nero and the *Augustiani*

Before Mount Vesuvius buried it in A.D. 79, the House of the Citharist underwent restorations after the earthquake of A.D. 62.<sup>1</sup> At that time, its owner was Lucius Popidius Secundus, a member of one of the most wealthy and important aristocratic families in Pompeii.<sup>2</sup> The Popidii family's wealth and social status are evident in the enormous size of their house, with its three peristyles and well over sixty rooms that encompass over half a city block, as well as the lavishness of the paintings inside. Some of the more prominent mythological panels rise two to three meters high with nearly life-sized figures and excellent workmanship. These paintings from both the Augustan era and restorations after A.D. 62 would have cost a significant sum because of their exceptional size and quality.<sup>3</sup> The house clearly stands as a monument to the wealth and importance of its owners.

L. Popidius Secundus, however, was more than just a wealthy aristocrat. According to some graffiti on one of the pillars in peristyle 32, Popidius was an *Augustianus*.<sup>4</sup> This would make him one of the original *Augustiani* or one of the approximately five thousand young men or *equites* that Nero added to their ranks in A.D.

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<sup>1</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:117.

<sup>2</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:117-118.

<sup>3</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:118.

<sup>4</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:118.

64.<sup>5</sup> Their main purpose was to praise him during his musical and theatrical performances, but they also served as a type of bodyguard.<sup>6</sup> As Suetonius writes:

Captus autem modulates Alexandrinorum laudationibus, qui de novo commeatu Neapolim confluerant, plures Alexandria evocavit. Neque eo segnius adolescentulos equestris ordinis et quinque amplius milia e plebe robustissimae iuventutis undique elegit, qui divisi in factions plausuum genera condiscerent – bombos et imbrices et testas vocabant – operamque navaret cantanti sibi, insignes pinguissima coma et excellentissimo cultu, puris as sine anulo laevis, quorum duces quadringena milia sestertia merebant.

[Nero] was greatly taken too with the rhythmic applause of some Alexandrians, who had flocked to Naples from a fleet that had lately arrived, and summoned more men from Alexandria. Not content with that, he selected some young men of the order of knights and more than five thousand sturdy young commoners, to be divided into groups and learn the Alexandrian styles of applause (they called them “the bees,” “the roof-tiles,” and “the bricks”), and to ply them vigorously whenever he sang. These men were noticeable for their thick hair and fine apparel; their left hands were bare and without rings, and the leaders were paid four hundred thousand sesterces each.<sup>7</sup>

Nero first encountered this form of rhythmic applause in Naples when a group of Alexandrians came to visit the theater, and clearly he loved it. He consequently taught the *Augustiani* to praise him in a similar fashion.<sup>8</sup> These young men were therefore Nero’s personal and professional flatters. Later Suetonius mentions the *Augustiani* again, this time accompanying Nero as he entered Rome in a victory procession after his first few public musical performances. Here Suetonius actually names them, writing that they called themselves Nero’s “*Augustianos militesque se triumphi*,” the “attendants of

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<sup>5</sup> Suetonius, *Nero*, edited by Jeffrey Henderson and G.P. Goold, translated by J.C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 38 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001) 20.3; Griffin, *Nero*, 113.

<sup>6</sup> Suetonius *Nero* 20.3; Griffin, *Nero*, 113.

<sup>7</sup> Suetonius *Nero* 20.3.

<sup>8</sup> Griffin, *Nero*, 113.

Augustus and the soldiers of his triumph.”<sup>9</sup> They were Nero’s adaptation of Augustus’ band of youths, shifting the military focus to a more musical one. If Popidius was, in fact, one of Nero’s *Augustiani*, he would have been politically well-connected.

Since there is little surviving written evidence of Popidius’ office, one of the best ways to understand his life and therefore his house is to study the man he would have idolized (at least publicly) as an *Augustianus* – Nero. In particular, Nero’s artistic penchants are of interest, as they concern Popidius and his house.

### *Nero*

When Nero first came to power in A.D. 54, he was only seventeen. Technically, he was emperor, but his mother, Agrippina the Younger, held much power over him and the empire. She was a great-granddaughter of Caesar Augustus and the daughter of the Elder Agrippina and Germanicus. With the death of her father, supposedly by poison at the hands of his adoptive father Tiberius, Agrippina saw the depths to which the imperial family would sink. Griffin argues that this shaped her, making her the monster historians later say she became.<sup>10</sup> After Claudius divorced his second wife, she married him and began her campaign to see her son as Princeps. She eventually succeeded, upsetting Claudius’ natural son Britannicus. It was rumored that Agrippina poisoned Claudius, because of his timely death that left power to Nero right before Britannicus came of age. Even when her son became the Roman emperor, Agrippina maintained control over him. Her grip on Nero started slipping, however, when she disapproved of his relationship with Poppaea Sabina and intentions to divorce his current wife, Octavia. Agrippina made

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<sup>9</sup> Suetonius *Nero* 25.1.

<sup>10</sup> Griffin, *Nero*, 23.

it clear that would never happen during her life, which perhaps led to Nero's decision to plot her murder. Seeing her son's increasing displeasure, Agrippina attempted to restore relations with Nero. Ancient historians even suggest that she seductively approached him to keep his attentions, engaging in an incestuous relationship with her son, as evidenced by the state of their clothes after riding together.<sup>11</sup> Despite her efforts (incestuous or not), Agrippina and her son continued to grow apart.

Eventually, Nero arranged to have her ship sink in A.D. 59. When she survived by swimming to shore, her son ordered her to be killed by assassins, aiming their swords at her womb.<sup>12</sup> Nero's advisors, Seneca and Burrus, tried to help Nero cover up the murder as a suicide, but he had been so sloppy that this proved impossible. After Agrippina's death, Seneca and Burrus lost control over Nero and eventually fell out of favor with him because of their ties to Agrippina. Burrus died in A.D. 62 and Seneca asked to retire from public life to protect himself. Nero was now free to rule as he pleased.<sup>13</sup>

After the death of his mother, Nero began to perform publically. From a young age, he had loved music. Agrippina engaged the great philosopher and playwright Seneca as Nero's tutor, perhaps to make her son more like his adoptive father and emperor, the great philhellene, Claudius.<sup>14</sup> Nero certainly had a devout passion for music and the Greek arts. He especially loved singing, poetry, playing the cithara, painting sculpture, and chariot racing. He even dabbled in philosophy after the death of

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<sup>11</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, edited by Jeffrey Henderson, translated by John Jackson, Loeb Classical Library 322 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 14.2; Suetonius, *Nero*, 28.2.

<sup>12</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 14.8.

<sup>13</sup> David Shotter, *Nero Caesar Augustus: Emperor of Rome* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2008), 77.

<sup>14</sup> Griffin, *Nero*, 32.

Agrippina. From a young age, his tutor Seneca would praise him for his skills, saying that Nero equaled even Apollo in singing, playing the lyre, and beauty.<sup>15</sup> Nero, in fact, always considered himself an excellent artist. It is rumored that at his death, he exclaimed, “*Qualis artifex pereo*,” – “What an artist dies in me!”<sup>16</sup> When he became Princeps, Nero especially threw himself into the arts, leaving much of his political power in the hands of his mother and advisors Seneca and Burrus. He would continually have dinner parties for poets and ordered the greatest citharist of his time, Terpnus and Menecrates, to teach him to play.<sup>17</sup>

Although Nero loved the Greek arts, he recused himself from public performance, or at least until Agrippina was executed. This may be attributable to Agrippina’s disdain for public artistic performances, a view shared by many traditional Roman aristocrats. They viewed the Greek arts as acceptable pastimes for private amusement, but considered public performances degrading. The ruling Roman class saw the downfall of Greece as the result of, or at least not helped by, Greek emphasis on the arts and everything else that came with that, including the *erastes* and *eromenos* as well as incestuous relationships. In addition, the arena was a common punishment for criminals.<sup>18</sup> To associate oneself with a common criminal was horribly degrading, and was unacceptable behavior for an emperor. Even in private performance, it was not tolerable to try to excel in the Greek arts. Sallust once wrote that Sempronia, an upper class matron, “played and danced more

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<sup>15</sup> Griffin, *Nero*, 41.

<sup>16</sup> Suetonius, *Nero*, 47-50.

<sup>17</sup> Griffin, *Nero*, 41.

<sup>18</sup> Griffin, *Nero*, 41-43.

elegantly than was necessary for a respectable woman.”<sup>19</sup> While this stigma was less in Nero’s time than it had been early in the empire, the older the generation (and especially Agrippina) held on to a more traditional distaste of the Greek arts.<sup>20</sup> It was unbecoming of Roman aristocrats to devote themselves to Greek arts.

Nero, in seemingly direct defiance of this trend, pursued the arts with a passion.

Miriam Griffin writes,

For the sake of his voice he would lie down with weights on top of him in order to strengthen his diaphragm; he subjected himself to purges and extreme dietary restrictions. The Elder Pliny notes that on certain fixed days of every month Nero lived exclusively on a diet of chives preserved in oil. He was prepared to acquire the habits of a professional charioteer, learning to drink a concoction of dried boar’s dung in water, which was supposed to have a healing effect on the muscles.<sup>21</sup>

Nero wished not only to perform the arts, but to excel at them, which no respectable Roman would have done. According to traditional opinion, Nero was associating himself with Greek pursuits, and thereby putting himself on the same level as foreigners, criminals, and slaves. His mother refused to allow him to do this, as long as she held the power to do so. After her death in A.D. 59, Seneca and Burrus could merely compromise with Nero, and he began to perform publically.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Sallust, *The Catilinarian Conspiracy*, translated and edited by John Shelby Watson, Perseus, accessed April 9, 2014, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0124%3A>, 25; Jo-Ann Shelton, *As the Romans Did: A Source Book in Roman Social History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 289-299.

<sup>20</sup> Augustus passed a law forbidding senators and knights to appear publicly on stage. The enforcement of this law grew more lax through Augustus’ reign, but Tiberius reinforced it when he became emperor. During Claudius’ reign, there was again a slight shift to less strict views on aristocrats performing publicly. See Griffin, *Nero*, 42-43.

<sup>21</sup> Griffin, *Nero*, 42.

<sup>22</sup> Griffin, *Nero*, 43.

The death of Agrippina also marked a change in Nero's portraiture. Dubbed the "Terme-type" in sculpted portraits and "Coin-Type IV" in coinage, these portraits appeared in A.D. 59, showing Nero with much thicker hair with parallel, left-slanting waves that formed a chest on Nero's forehead. Suetonius wrote that he adopted this hairstyle, the *coma in gradus formata*, in person as well.<sup>23</sup> Diana Kleiner attributes this to Nero's celebration of his *quinquennium*, while Edward Champlin believes it shows Nero's attempts to associate himself publically with the Apollo.<sup>24</sup> Before A.D. 59, Nero's portraiture and coinage, and even the literature concerning Nero, seem to make no reference to his associations with Apollo.<sup>25</sup>

In particular, Nero would associate himself with Apollo Citharoedus, most likely because of his love of the cithara. He began to dress as a citharist in public, donning the *vestus cupido* at his Juvenalia in A.D. 59.<sup>26</sup> This is also when his *Augustiani* started calling him "Apollo."<sup>27</sup> Apollo Citharoedus even appeared on Nero's coinage in A.D. 62.<sup>28</sup> Suetonius writes that Nero, on his return to Rome, put statues of himself in the guise of Apollo Citharoedus in his private chambers, and that he minted a coin with a

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<sup>23</sup> Suetonius, *Nero*, 51. Diana E.E. Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 138; Ulrich W. Hiesinger, "The Portraits of Nero," *American Journal of Archaeology* 79, no. 2 (April 1975): 119.

<sup>24</sup> Edward Champlin, "Nero, Apollo, and the Poets," *Phoenix* 57, no. 3/4 (2003): 280.

<sup>25</sup> This statement is based on an alternate date for Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, as suggested by Jocelyn Tonybee and modified by Champlin. Tonybee asserts that the entire satire was written after A.D. 59, while Champlin suggests that only the sections linking Nero to Apollo date this late. See Jocelyn M.C. Tonybee, "Nero *Artifex*: The *Apocolocyntosis* Reconsidered," *The Classical Quarterly* 36, no. 3/4 (1942): 83-93 and Champlin, "Nero," 277-283.

<sup>26</sup> Tacitus *Annals*, 14.14-15.

<sup>27</sup> Dio Cassius, translated by Earnest Cary, edited by E.H. Warmington, Loeb Classical Library 37 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970) 20.1-5.

<sup>28</sup> Champlin, "Nero," 277.

depiction of these statues.<sup>29</sup> He believed himself to be an equal in singing and the cithara with Apollo, an idea that Seneca would reinforce.<sup>30</sup> Nero continued in his artistic performances, wishing to show his talent.

While the traditional elite might have disliked these public performances, it seems that the common people loved Nero for them. He would entertain the people with music, poetry, and chariot races. He seemed to care greatly what the people thought of him, and so would cater to his subjects' wishes. In addition to pleasing the people with his performances, Nero abolished taxes in a city and lavished gifts on those who attended games on multiple occasions. This might have been because his tutor, Seneca, urged him to show clemency, or it could have been because Nero simply loved praise.<sup>31</sup> Even after he blatantly had his mother murdered, the populace seemed to love him.<sup>32</sup> To the common people of Rome, he remained a popular emperor.

The people of Pompeii seemed to have had an even greater reason to love Nero. As already mentioned, in A.D. 59, a bloody riot in the amphitheater in Pompeii led to Rome's great disapproval of the city. The Senate consequently forbade Pompeii from holding any gladiatorial games for a period of ten years and disbanded its *collegia*. This was around the time, however, that Nero became romantically involved with Poppaea Sabina, who he married in A.D. 62. Poppaea was the wife of a rising young politician Salvius Otho when Nero met her. He allegedly was having an affair with her before appointing her husband as governor of Lusitania, essentially banishing him. Nero was

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<sup>29</sup> Suetonius, *Nero*, 25.2.

<sup>30</sup> Shotter, *Nero*, 46, 64.

<sup>31</sup> Griffin, *Nero*, 80.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Grant, *Emperor in Revolt: Nero* (New York: American Heritage Press, 1970), 77.

smitten with Poppaea, who was supposedly a very beautiful woman, and showered her with rich gifts.<sup>33</sup> Her family and likely Poppaea herself were from Pompeii, and Nero lavished favors on the city, probably to please her. By A.D. 63, Nero gave Pompeii the honor of becoming an official Roman colony, drastically shifting its favor in the eyes of Rome. In addition, he lifted the ban on gladiatorial games by A.D. 65. Inscriptions in Pompeii indicate that its citizens responded with overwhelming appreciation. They held gladiatorial games in Nero's honor, made a cult of Nero, and even gave the name *Neroneus* to April.<sup>34</sup> The Pompeians seemed to have loved him.

In the midst of this, an earthquake hit Pompeii in A.D. 62, causing massive destruction to the city and damaging much of the House of the Citharist. Judging from the inscription found on a pillar in the house, Popidius was probably already an *Augustianus* at this point, and Nero rapidly was growing in popularity in Pompeii. In this politically charged environment, Popidius made the repairs on his house evident in what remains today of the House of the Citharist.

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<sup>33</sup> Griffin, *Nero*, 102.

<sup>34</sup> Griffin, *Nero*, 102.

## CHAPTER THREE

### A Study of the Individual Panels<sup>1</sup>

Despite the extraordinary size of the House of the Citharist, only a few of the large mythological panels survive. In as much as this thesis concerns the thematic and contextual connections of the wall painting, only the panels from complete or nearly complete rooms are considered, which are the frescoes from triclinia 20 and 32 and exedra 35.

#### *Triclinium 20*

Triclinium 20 is the only room in the House of the Citharist with all of its mythological panels still preserved, although the execution and level of preservation of these paintings are generally the worst of the ones in this thesis. Although poorly preserved, they are still fascinating pieces that offer some illumination into the lives of the owners of the House of the Citharist.

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<sup>1</sup> One of the considerations in this chapter is the access I had to images. Thanks to the kind permission of Dr. Teresa Elena Cinquantaquattro, the Superintendent Archaeologist in Naples and Pompeii, I was able to study and photograph the frescoes they then had in storage and on display in the Naples National Archaeological Museum in the summer of 2013. In these cases, I could see more details in these frescoes and have a better understanding of the impression they convey in person, which is how a Roman individual would have seen them. Nevertheless, I viewed the paintings in their current state, which is quite degraded in some cases. I therefore chose to supplement my understanding of these paintings with other, earlier reproductions. These came in two forms: photographs and artistic reproductions. Some of the photographs revealed a few details no longer visible in the frescoes, but most of them depict frescoes of a similar quality to the ones I saw in 2013. The artistic reproductions, on the other hand, were usually very informative since they often date to the time of the excavations, when the frescoes were in a much better condition. For the frescoes that were not in the Naples National Archeological Museum during my visit, I rely solely on the photographs and artistic reproductions of others.

### *Aeneas and Dido*

One of the more debated paintings in the House of the Citharist is the one that sat on the north wall of triclinium 20 (fig. 5 and fig. 6).<sup>2</sup> It depicts a pair of lovers, whose identity is the source of the controversy.

The layout of this particular fresco is a bit different from most of the others. It has a hexagonal shape, imitating an angular arch rising above the scene. Like most of the other landscapes in the house, this one is characterized by rock. A large mass of stone rises behind the figures with a small tree near the top. There is a strange shape slightly to the right in the background, which de Vos interprets as a waterfall. It could be water, especially considering the mediocre skill of the artists, but it is difficult to identify the shape as such with much certainty. The landscape, however, is neither the focus of the picture nor the painter's skill.

At the center of this composition sit the pair of lovers. Both are in a state of undress which would seem to suggest that they are engaging in a sexual encounter. The woman sits to the left, behind the man. She wears a light blue or grey robe draped over her legs just below her waist, with her torso and arms bare. Her hair is pulled up in a typical Roman aristocratic style, with a veil falling down her back. She appears to have gold sandals on her feet, gold bands on her right arm, and what might be pearl earrings dangling by her ivory neck. She is obviously a wealthy and beautiful woman. The man reaches behind her with his right arm, gently lifting her robe to undress her, while she leans in and embraces him with both arms, gazing into his eyes.

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<sup>2</sup> This painting is not among those I was able to study and photograph in Naples, and so I do not have access to high-quality images of it. My observations are based on a black and white photograph in de Vos' chapter (fig. 4), an image I found on the internet (fig. 5), and a line drawing by La Volpe (fig. 6). While I can distinguish some details, minute ones might not be visible.



Figure 5: De Vos' photograph of the Aeneas and Dido fresco<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:153, fig. 61.

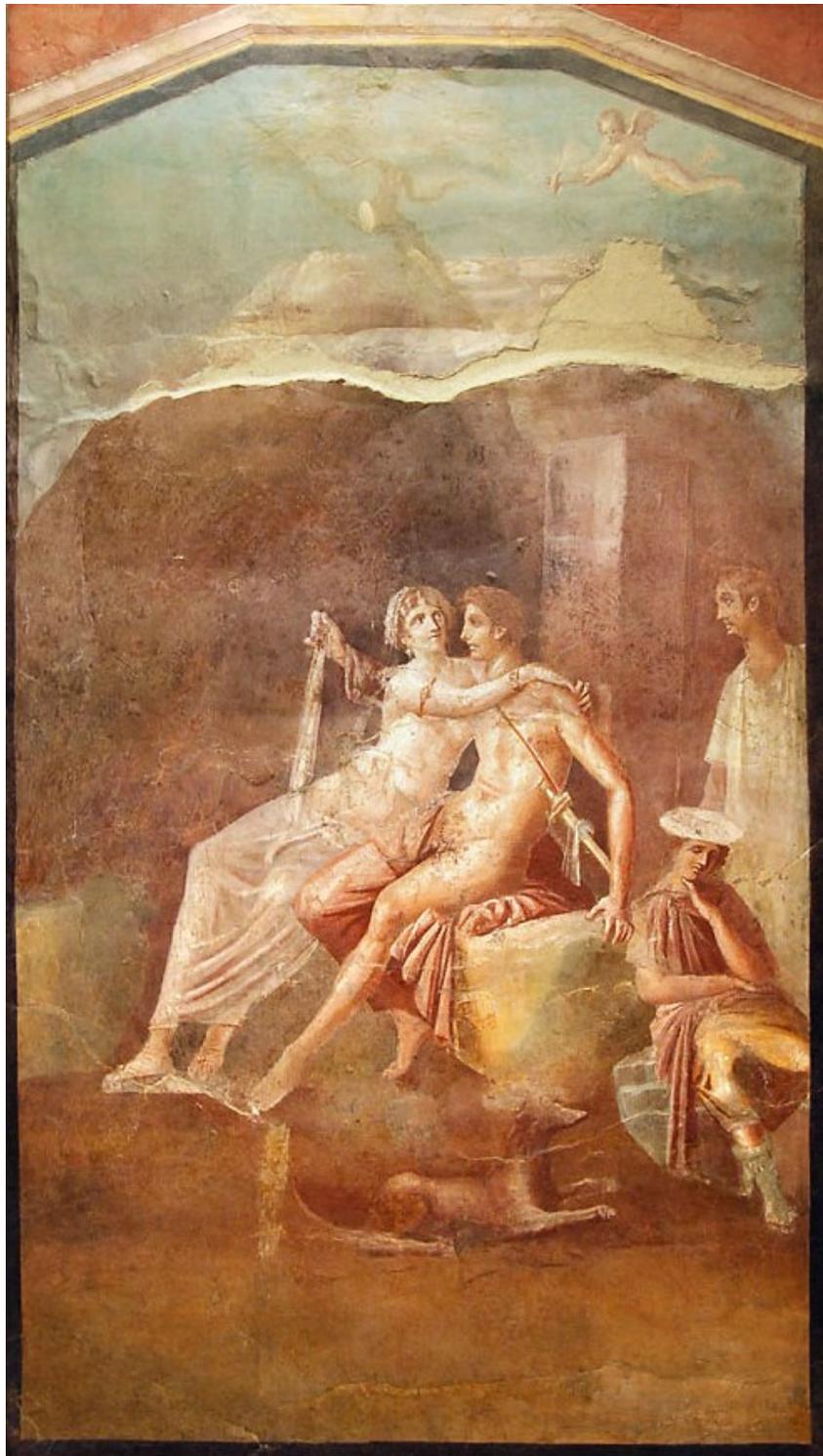


Figure 6: The Aeneas and Dido fresco<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bellabs, “Национальный Археологический музей Неаполя: Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli,” accessed April 9, 2014, [http://www.bellabs.ru/Italia/Italia\\_Musei\\_RossoPompeiano.html](http://www.bellabs.ru/Italia/Italia_Musei_RossoPompeiano.html).

In contrast to the woman's advancing posture, the man sits back, keeping his left hand on the couch. He wears nothing except a purple robe draped over his right leg and a sword that is strapped to his side by a string that wraps around his chest and right shoulder. He is beardless and youthful, but presented in a fashion that connotes heroism if not divinity.

There are four other figures in the composition. The sleeping man to the right of the pair sits on a rock, resting his head on his left hand. He wears a purple and yellow tunic with blue boots and a white petasus on his head. The other figure stands behind him, wearing a white tunic and watching the pair of lovers. In the sky, a nude cupid flies carrying an object that has the shape of a hammer, though the object's strict identification remains in question. The last figure is the brown hound that sits alert at the feet of the lovers.

Interpretations of this scene vary. Perhaps the most prevalent is the identification of Mars and Venus.<sup>5</sup> In favor of this interpretation, the male figure does feature several characteristics typically associated with Mars. For example, Mars often has a cloak draped over one of his legs in a similar fashion when he is with Venus and he sometimes carries a sword at his side. Against this identification, however, is the fact that this figure has no helmet. Even when he has removed it for his sexual encounters with Venus, there is usually a helmet set aside or conspicuously held by attendant cupids somewhere else in the composition with Mars. This fresco in the House of the Citharist has none, and so this figure cannot be identified as Mars.

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<sup>5</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:151, 154.



Figure 7: A line drawing of the Aeneas and Dido fresco<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Giovanni Pugliese Carratelli, Ida Baldassarre, Teresa Lanzillotta, Salvatorino Salomi, eds., *Pompei: pitture e mosaici*, accompanying volume *La Documentazione nell'opera di disegnatori e pittori dei secoli XVIII e XIX* (Rome: Istituto della enciclopedia italiana, 1995), 607, fig. 41.

Since the female figure is the dominant one in this rendition, the other identifications of Venus and Adonis or Venus and Anchises would seem more appropriate, since they are mortals and she is a goddess. There are nevertheless a few problems with these identifications. It would seem odd to depict Anchises with Venus in this fashion, barefoot and with a sword at his side. Additionally, when Venus first came to Anchises, he was with his cattle.<sup>7</sup> A shepherd's iconography then would be much more appropriate. Anchises is known in Roman literature as Venus' lover and Aeneas' crippled father, but not so much as a warrior. The sword, therefore, may suggest another identification.

The other possibility is the identification of Venus and Adonis, for which the weapon and submissive nature of the male are much more appropriate. With regard to the weapon, as a hunter, Adonis is often depicted with a spear or sword. Additionally, Venus was in love with Adonis, initiating the relationship. Another reason to support this identity is that the hound, which often accompanies the hunter Adonis, lies at the feet of the pair. Against this identification, however, is the fact that the woman wears sandals while the man does not. In Greco-Roman iconography, bare feet indicate divinity, with a few exceptions (i.e. Mercury). It would be odd then to put sandals on Venus' feet, while leaving those of Adonis bare. In light of this peculiarity, none of these identifications seems appropriate.

De Vos offers an alternate identification that seems particularly interesting. She suggests that this is a depiction of the encounter between Aeneas and Dido in the cave, described by Virgil in book 4 of the *Aeneid*:

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<sup>7</sup>Hesiod, *Homeric Hymns*, translated by H. G. Evelyn White, Loeb Classical Library 57 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), 5.53.

Intera magno misceri murmure caelum  
incipit; insequitur commixta grandine nimbus,  
et Tyrii comites passim et Troiana iuventus  
Dardaniusque nepos Veneris diversa per agros  
tectata metu petiere; runt de montibus amnes.  
speluncam Dido dux et Troianus eandem  
deveniunt. prima et Tellus et pronuba Iuno  
dant signum; fulsere ignes et conscius Aether  
conubiis, summoque ulularunt vertice Nymphae.  
ille dies primus leti primusque malorum  
causa fit. neque enim specie famave movetur  
nec iam furtivum Dido mediator amorem;  
coniugium vocat; hoc praetexit nomine culpam.

Meanwhile in the sky begins the turmoil of a wild uproar; rain follows, mingled with hail. The scattered Tyrian train and the Trojan youth, with the Dardan grandson of Venus, in their fear seek shelter here and there over the fields; torrents rush down from the heights. To the same cave come Dido and the Trojan chief. Primal Earth and nuptial Juno give the sign; fires flashed in Heaven, the witness to their bridal, and on the mountaintop screamed the Nymphs. That day the first of death, the first of calamity was cause. For no more is Dido swayed by fair show or fair fame, no more does she dream of a secret love: she calls it marriage and with that name veils her sin.<sup>8</sup>

Driven to the cave during their hunt, Dido and Aeneas engage in sexual intercourse. Dido and Juno believe this to be a marriage that will keep Aeneas in Carthage, but later Aeneas must continue his journey to Italy to found the Roman race. Based on the passage in Virgil, it seems at least possible that the couple depicted in this painting from the house of the Citharist is Dido and Aeneas. A mountain rises behind the couple with a torrent of water gushing from it. A hunting hound lies at their feet. The man is presented as a barefoot divine or an almost divine figure, while the woman is sandaled and clearly mortal, fitting with the characters of Aeneas and Dido. He is a warrior with a sword and she is a wealthy aristocrat with her fine jewelry. Dido is

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<sup>8</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, translated by H.R. Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library, volume 63 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916), 4.160-172.

enamored with Aeneas, fully embracing him, while Aeneas reservedly accepts her advances, knowing he must leave eventually. Cupid, Aeneas' half-brother and the god of erotic love, flies in the sky. De Vos suggests that he holds a torch, which is possible given the shape of the object in his hands. La Volpe's drawing of the fresco (fig. 7) actually shows the cupid holding two smoking torches. This would symbolize the "lightning torches," while foreshadowing Dido's fiery fate. Accordingly, there is sufficient evidence within this painting to suggest that it depicts Dido and Aeneas.

The two figures to the left of the lovers could then be attendants. One possibility is that the sleeping figure is Somnus. Certainly, with his head resting on his left fist, he is in a position typically attributed to this god. This seems to be an odd identification, however, since the figure has no wings, which are essential attributes of this character. The more likely interpretation is that he is one of Dido's attendants, wearing Parthian dress with his hat and boots. This scene, then, is that of Aeneas and Dido in the cave with their attendants.

### *Laomedon*

Of all the remaining paintings in the House of the Citharist, one of the most difficult to decipher is the one that sat on the east wall of triclinium 20 (fig. 8).<sup>9</sup> It measured 1.89 x 1.13 m<sup>10</sup> when cut out of the wall, but probably extended another 0.2 meters or so in its original painted frame.<sup>11</sup> It would have been visible from peristyle 17

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<sup>9</sup> This is also one of the paintings I saw in Naples.

<sup>10</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:149-150.

<sup>11</sup> The painting housed in the Naples National Archaeological Museum that both I and de Vos studied is rectangular, but with a red frame visible on only the sides and bottom, indicating the top of the painting was cut off when it was removed from the house. La Volpe's drawing depicts a top that is arched

and even exedra 18. This is one of the least well-preserved, having faded and chipped across the entire painting. A line drawing by La Volpe (fig. 9) shows significantly more detail, as does the photograph provided by de Vos (fig. 10). While La Volpe might tend to add his own flourishes and corrections to the original painting, this depiction seems to be a fairly accurate representation when compared to the photographs.

Comparing it to other paintings in the house, it is of a lesser artistic quality than most of the others. The painters had a fondness for harsh outlines, especially noticeable in facial features, and a tendency to oversimplify the shading in faces. There also appears to be a poor understanding of perspective in architectural elements seen in the throne. The most defining characteristic is the hands, which are proportionally large and long, with fingers simplified to the point of resembling an inflated rubber glove. In addition, the figures appear to be elongated, mostly in the legs. This is one of the least well-rendered mythological panels remaining from the House of the Citharist.

This painting depicts an eastern king receiving two nude male figures with attendants visible in the background (only two are still apparent, but the drawing shows a third). The three main figures and one of the attendants are under some sort of tent or awning, while the other two attendants peek out from behind. This pink-purple outer part of the tent is adorned with what might be shields and takes up most of the frame. Some bits of vegetation, probably trees, are visible above. The flaps of the tent appear to be pulled back, revealing a white interior and the central figures.

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like the other two paintings in the room. This mirroring of frame shapes throughout the room would have made much more sense aesthetically.

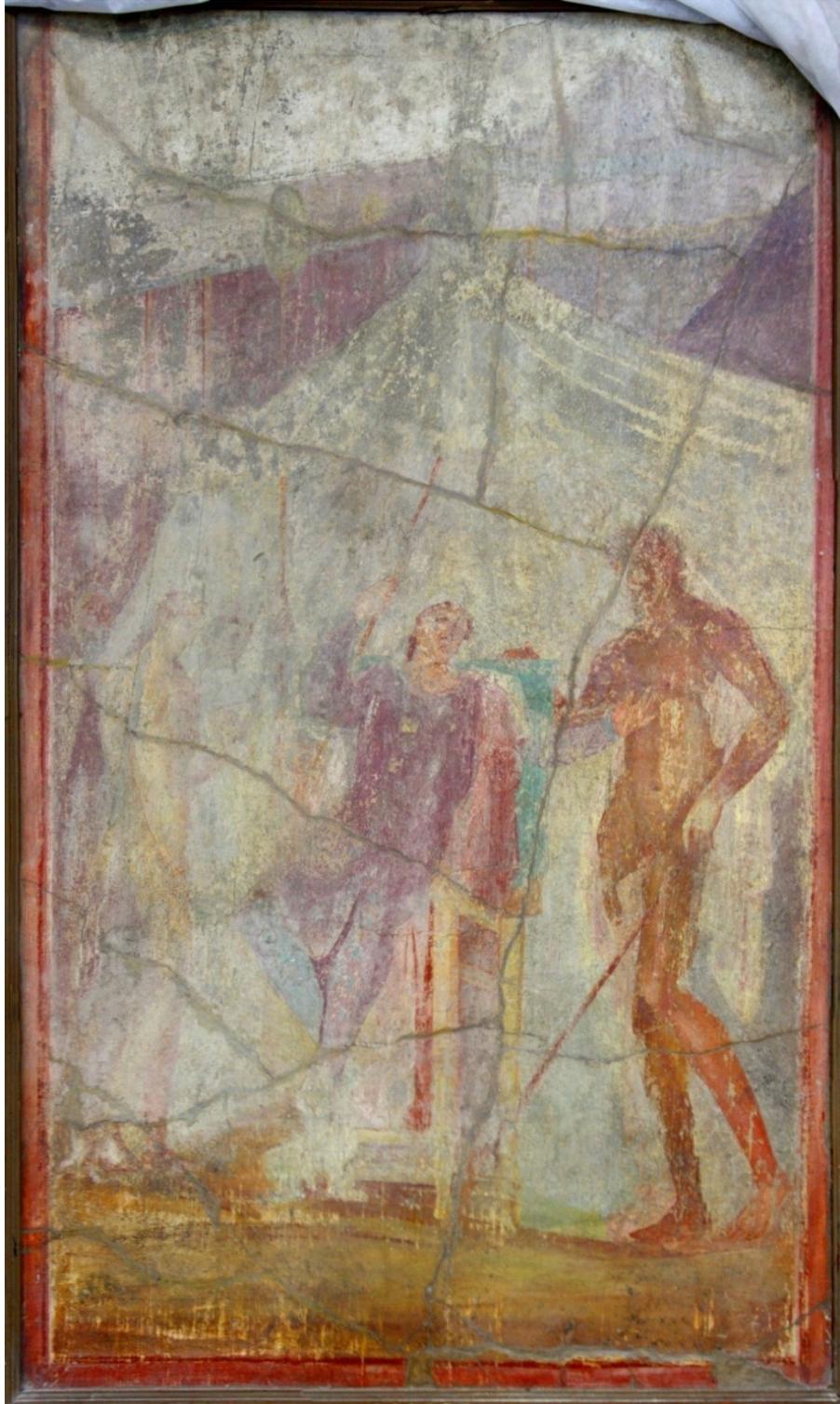


Figure 8: The Laomedon fresco<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Museo Nazionale di Napoli inv. 111472. Photo taken by permission of the Naples National Archaeological Museum.



Figure 9: A line drawing of the Laomedon fresco by La Volpe<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Carratelli, Baldassarre, Lanzillotta, Salomi, *Pompei 608*, fig. 42.

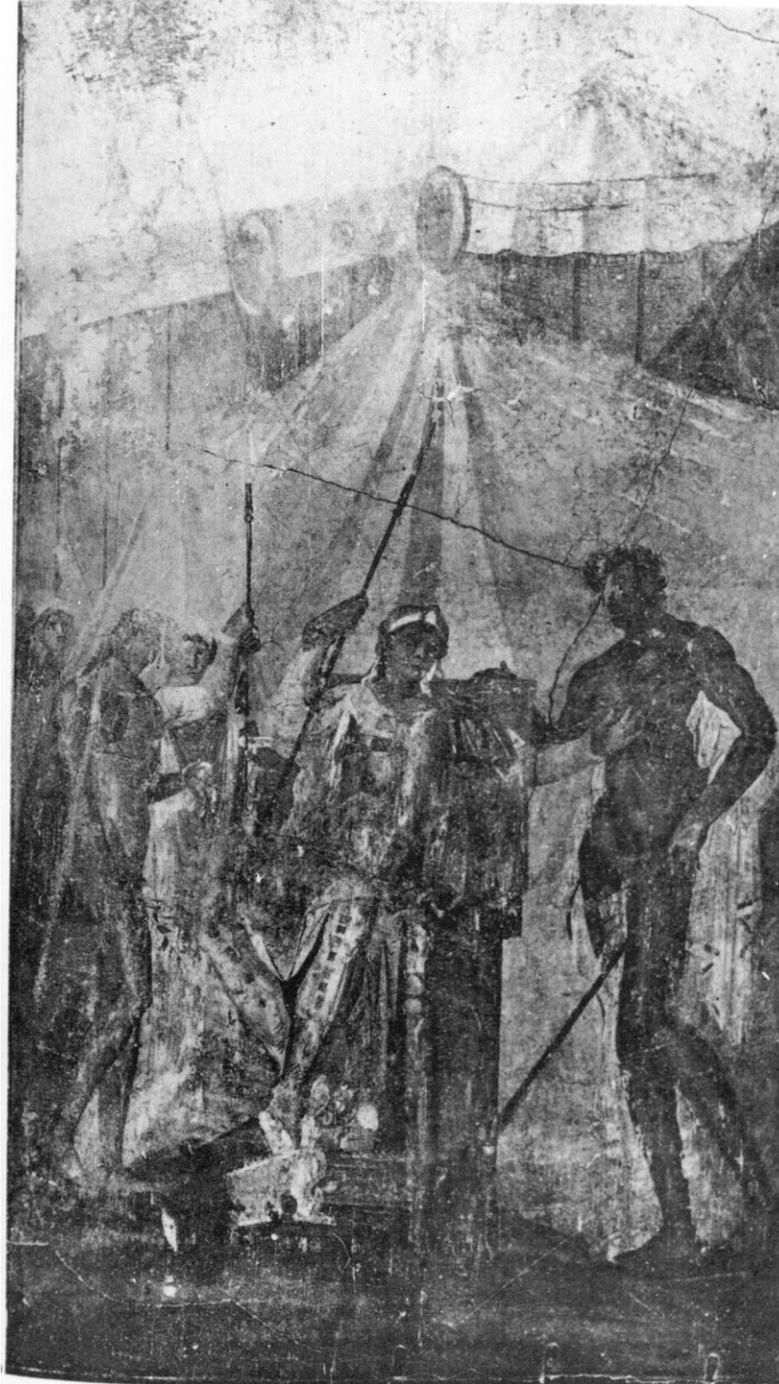


Figure 10: De Vos' photograph of the Laomedon fresco<sup>14</sup>

At the center of the composition, the king sits on a throne, with his feet resting on a stool. His dress is clearly eastern, with a short tunic and pants that no Greek or Roman

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<sup>14</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:151, fig. 59.

would have worn. He is also much paler than the figure to the right, emphasizing the effeminate characteristic of eastern men. His clothing is the same pink-purple of the tent, with the addition of blue pattern running up his leggings. La Volpe's drawing suggests that this is a pattern of squares that also runs down the center of his tunic. The presence of yellow on the king's chest suggests that this color might have alternated with the blue on his tunic. He wears an indiscernible object with white and yellow on his head, probably a crown as depicted in La Volpe's drawing. He turns to the figure standing to the right, extending a hand as if in speech, while he holds a spear in his other hand.

The figure to whom he gestures is a tall nude man with dark skin and a mature figure. La Volpe's drawing shows that he has a beard, and the lack of an evident jawline in the painting supports this. He has a pale robe falling from his shoulders to his feet and wrapping around part of his right thigh. In his left hand he holds a spear that is lowered to the feet of the king. With his weight on his right leg, he advances toward the king, resting his right hand on the back of the throne. He is certainly an imposing character, standing the equivalent of eight and a half to nine heads tall, where a person normally stands seven to eight heads high.

The figure in the left of the composition is also male, but smaller and much paler than the bearded one. He is also nude, wearing only a purple cloak that rests on his shoulders and falls behind him to his feet. His right hand is lowered to his side, holding a branch with leaves, probably laurel, (that is much more clear in La Volpe's drawing), while his left hand is raised. The drawing also shows that he holds a small object that looks like a small piece of cloth or string. It also shows both standing characters with

furrowed brows, which is slightly evident in the individual who is portrayed to the left side of the painting.

Had they existed alone, it would have been difficult to identify any of the figures. Clearly the standing characters are heroic from their nudity, and the seated person is an eastern king. Taken together, however, they represent a specific story. De Vos offers two identifications.<sup>15</sup> The traditional interpretation is that this is the moment when Telephus is beseeching Achilles to heal his leg wound. According to myth, Achilles wounded Telephus when he and his band of Greeks mistakenly landed at Teuthrania. The wound refused to heal, so Telephus sought the oracle at Delphi, who told him that only the one who wounded him could heal him. Telephus then went to find Achilles, who eventually agreed to heal him.<sup>16</sup> As the king of Teuthrania, Telephus is an eastern king, fitting with the representation in the figure. Kenner writes that he extends his wounded leg to be healed. He identifies the left standing figure as Achilles holding a laurel branch and the right figure as Phoenix, his teacher, who steps forward, realizing that it is the spear and not Achilles that must heal the wound. There are a few reasons that this interpretation seems wrong. First, the setting is incorrect. Kenner writes that Achilles and Phoenix were captured by Telephus, but Apollodorus wrote that Telephus traveled to find Achilles, even in rags.<sup>17</sup> This painting shows a king sitting on his throne, receiving guests, not bargaining in rags far away from home as the texts depict him. The

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<sup>15</sup> de Vos "Casa del Citarista," 1:149-150.

<sup>16</sup> Apollodorus, *The Library*, edited by G.P. Goold, translated by James George Frazer, Loeb Classical Library 121 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 2.7.4; Apollodorus, *Epitome*, translated and edited by James George Frazer, Perseus, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0022%3Atext%3DEpitome,3.20>.

<sup>17</sup> Apollodorus, *The Library*, 2.7.4; Apollodorus, *Epitome*, 3.20.

other oddity with this identification is that the left figure is far too pale and of too slight a figure to be formidable Achilles. This identification therefore is incorrect.

The other suggested identification is that of Laomedon refusing to pay Apollo and Triton. There are various classical sources for this myth. Apollodorus claims that Apollo and Triton took human form to test the infamous deceitfulness of Laomedon. They built the walls of Troy for wages, but Laomedon refused to pay them when they finished. In the *Iliad*, Laomedon even threatened to bind them and cut off their ears.<sup>18</sup> This identification seems much more appropriate. Apollo, often associated with laurel, is an effeminate god, which would account for the build and skin color of the left figure, as well as the laurel branch he holds. Triton is a powerful and mature god, often depicted with a beard, which fits well with the formidable, dark figure on the right. Laomedon is an eastern king in the comfort of his own throne, just like the central figure. This interpretation would also account for the infuriated expressions and aggressive stances of the two standing characters, as Laomedon tells them he refuses to pay their wages. It is a curious story to put in the House of the Citharist, but certainly the correct identification.

### *Leda*

The last of the mythological frescoes in this room is the one that decorated the southern wall (fig. 11). Like the other unusually large panels in this room, it has nearly life-sized figures in its 2.80 by 1.60 meter frame. It is also the worst preserved fresco of all the ones still extant, and so a line drawing by La Volpe (fig. 12) greatly informs the content of this fresco.

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<sup>18</sup> Apollodorus, *The Library*, 2.5.9; Homer, *Iliad*, translated by A.T. Murray, Loeb Classical Library, Volume 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924), 21.441-457.



Figure 11: The Leda fresco<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Museo Nazionale di Napoli inv. 120034. Photo taken by permission of the Naples National Archaeological Museum.

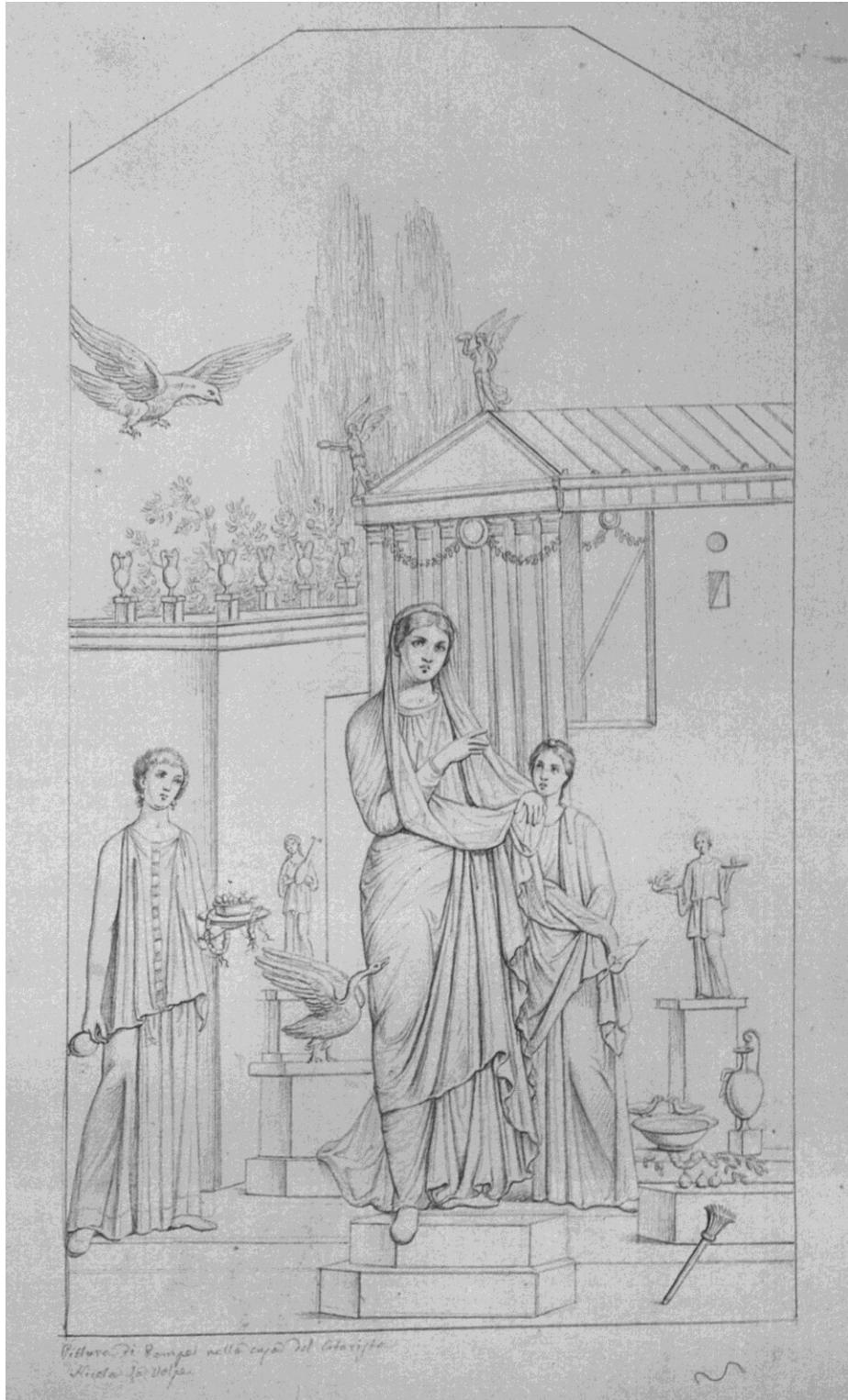


Figure 12: A line drawing of the Leda fresco by La Volpe<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Carratelli, Baldassarre, Lanzillotta, Salomi, *Pompei*, 609.

As de Vos speculates, this panel shows the rape of Leda or Nemesis by Jupiter.<sup>21</sup> This scene seems to show myth in which Jupiter rapes Leda, since the Nemesis version involves Nemesis transforming into a goose, where Leda remains human. In this story, Jupiter falls in love with Leda and plots with Venus to rape her, disguising himself as a swan while Venus chases him as an eagle. He seeks refuge in Leda's lap, whom he then rapes. Having conceived a child, Leda lays an egg, which eventually hatches the most famous of ancient beauties, Helen, and her brother Pollux.<sup>22</sup> In this panel, Leda appears as the central character with two attendants flanking her. Jupiter as a swan stands on a pedestal as he stretches his neck toward her, apparently escaping Venus, who is the eagle in the top left corner.

### *Triclinium 37*

In the southern portion of the house of peristyle 32, a small room identified as a triclinium contained a number of interesting paintings. Only one survives to this day, although all three walls had mythological scenes when they were excavated.

### *Io*

The first of the paintings in this triclinium depicts the myth of Io on the north wall.<sup>23</sup> This is among the most well-preserved paintings from the House of the Citharist, with most of its details and colors still visible (fig. 13).<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, it has chipped

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<sup>21</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:150-151.

<sup>22</sup> Edward Tripp, *The Meridian Handbook of Classical Mythology* (New York: New American Library, 1974), 341, 392; Apollodorus, *The Library*, 3.10.7.

<sup>23</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:130.

<sup>24</sup> This fresco is among those I was able to study in the Naples National Archaeological Museum, and so the photograph reproduced here is my own.

and faded to a degree since its discovery in the middle of the nineteenth century and certainly since its creation. Two line drawings, one by Giuseppe Abbate (fig. 14) and the other by Nicola La Volpe (fig. 15), show the fresco in better condition.<sup>25</sup> The one by Abbate is pencil on tissue paper, measuring 700 by 647 centimeters, with a one-to-one scale to the original painting, suggesting that Abbate traced it. La Volpe's painting is smaller, measuring 586 by 465 centimeters. While Abbate seemed concerned with an accurate depiction of the scene, La Volpe seems to have added a few details that were not in the fresco.<sup>26</sup>

This painting shows a specific scene from the myth of Io described in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.<sup>27</sup> After Jupiter transforms Io into a cow to hide his infidelity from Juno, Juno is struck by Io's beauty and requests that the cow be given to her. Jupiter grants this request and Juno leaves the cow in the care of the hundred-eyed shepherd Argus. Io begs Jupiter to free her from this torment, and he sends Mercury to kill Argus. Mercury disguises himself as a shepherd, charming Argus with his lullabies that he plays on the reed pipes. Argus has never seen this instrument before, so Mercury tells him the story of how Bacchus created it. When Mercury finally lulls Argus to sleep, he cuts off his head, and frees Io. At this point, Juno realizes that Jupiter fooled her, and she drives Io to Egypt with a gadfly, where Jupiter finally convinces Juno to let Io return to human form. This scene shows Argus greeting Mercury and asking about his instrument before Mercury sits down to play for Argus and kill him.

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<sup>25</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:129; Carratelli, Baldassarre, Lanzillotta, Salomi, *Pompei*, 369, 602.

<sup>26</sup> Carratelli, Baldassarre, Lanzillotta, Salomi, *Pompei* 369, 602-603.

<sup>27</sup> Wolfgang Helbig, *Wandgemälde der vom Vesuv verschütteten Städte Campaniens* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1868), 40.



Figure 13: The Io fresco<sup>28</sup>

Of all the figures in this fresco, Mercury is the most recognizable. He has the darkest skin of all the figures with a stocky body and short red-brown hair. On his feet are laced sandals, clearly indicative of Mercury's identity. What are more difficult to distinguish are the wings on his sandals, given the somewhat degraded state of the fresco. The line drawing by Abbate clearly shows wings on Mercury's sandals, but the one by La Volpe does not. With or without the wings, however, this character is clearly still

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<sup>28</sup> Museo Nazionale di Napoli inv. 9557. Photo taken by permission of the Naples National Archaeological Museum.

Mercury. Mercury stands nude as a full-length figure in the right portion of the fresco, leaning on a staff draped in a red or purple cloth. Ovid calls this staff Mercury's wand. In this story, the wand allows Mercury to pretend he is a shepherd, since it looks like a shepherd's crook. In addition, Mercury extends his right arm to Argus, seemingly handing over or showing an object to Argus. Although it is difficult to distinguish what Mercury is holding since the fresco has faded considerably, Ovid's description of the reed pipes that Mercury uses to put Argus to sleep suggests that this might be what Mercury is holding. In addition, both line drawings clearly show that the object in that scene is a set of reed pipes. Considering the central nature of the pipes this part of Io's story, it is fitting that the artist placed the pipes near the center of the composition.



Figure 14: A drawing of the Io fresco by Guiseppe Abbate<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Carratelli, Baldassarre, Lanzillotta, Salomi, *Pompei* 369, fig. 185.



Figure 15: A drawing of the Io fresco by Nicola La Volpe<sup>30</sup>

Mercury's figure is an excellent part of the fresco with which to analyze the technical skill of the artist, since he was able to show his understanding of perspective in the way Mercury stands. Mercury's left arm folds away from the viewer under his right arm, hiding his left hand. He supports himself on his left leg, which is slightly foreshortened and receding into the background. The artist adds to this receding effect by blending the color and shading of the lower leg with the background – an application of atmospheric perspective. While the artist renders most of these perspective techniques well, he fails a little with the left arm by placing it too far from the chest and making it proportionally smaller than the right arm. The artist therefore comprehended the

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<sup>30</sup> Carratelli, Baldassarre, Lanzillotta, Salomi, *Pompei* 602, fig. 36.

principles of foreshortening and atmospheric perspective, but still had room for improvement in rendering the human figure.

The other easily identifiable figure given the context of this scene is Argus, seated on a rock in the lower left corner. Although he does not have the hundred eyes Ovid mentions, depictions of Argus characteristically show him with only two eyes.

While Mercury and Argus are easily recognizable in this fresco, the identities of the other two figures, those of the woman and cow, are more difficult to ascertain. The cow seems to be a brown heifer lying between the feet of Argus and Mercury. Although it is difficult to see the cow's eyes from what remains of the fresco, it appears that the cow is looking over to Argus' lap with either a sad or a very angry expression. The other figure, a woman, sits in the central portion of the composition with a white robe draped over most of her body and head, revealing her right and part of her left breast. Her brown hair is tied up in braids or curls, but her most interesting feature is her eyes, with which she stares directly at the viewer with a look of terror. Even in paintings in which a female character faces the viewer, it is very rare for her to engage so shamelessly the viewer with her eyes.

Considering the context of the story and house, there are three possible combinations of identities for these figures. First, the woman could be Io and the cow simply an animal, the woman and cow could both represent Io, or the cow could be Io and the woman Juno. There are no other women in this portion of Ovid's tale, so it is very unlikely that this woman represents a third party.

The identification of the female figure as Juno also seems unlikely. If she were Juno, it is possible that the look on her face is one of anger instead of terror, which is

certainly plausible, considering the sound but not masterful skills of the painter. Juno's dominant personality would also explain her direct stare at the viewer. Nevertheless, there are a few problems with this identification. First, Juno often is represented as a more mature woman, where this character is clearly very young. In addition, her breasts are exposed, which seems to be taboo in representations of the goddess Juno. Both of these are significant issues with identifying the female figure as Juno.

On the other hand, there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that the woman is Io. Many other depictions show her seated in a similar manner, even with her right arm clutched to her breast, and she often is draped in a cloth that reveals her breasts. White also seems to be a color often associated with Io, both while she was a heifer and after she returns to human form. In addition, a look of terror would fit well with Io's horror at discovering she has transformed into a cow.

Determining the identity of the cow aids in the interpretation of the female figure. If the woman is not Io, the cow must be Io, since Io needs to be present in her own story. This would be a perfectly acceptable interpretation, except that the cow is brown. Every story of Io clearly describes her as a white cow. Ovid mentions this twice in his account, writing that her father, Inachus, embraces *cornibus et nivea pendens cervice iuvencae*, "the weeping heifer's horns and snow-white neck"<sup>31</sup> and again, describing her transformation back into human form:

fugiunt e corpore saetae,  
cornua decrescunt, fit luminis artior orbis,  
contrahitur rictus, redeunt umerique manusque,  
ungulaque in quinos dilapsa absumitur ungues:  
de bove nil superest formae nisi candor in illa.

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<sup>31</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, edited by T.E. Page, translated by Frank Justus Miller, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 1.52.

The rough hair falls away from her body, her horns disappear, her great round eyes grow smaller, her gaping mouth is narrowed, her shoulders and her hands come back, and the hoofs are gone, being changed each into five nails. No trace of the heifer is left in her save only the fair whiteness of her body.<sup>32</sup>

There seems to be too much attention to details in Ovid's descriptions of the pipes, rocky and shaded terrain, and even in Argus' seated and Mercury's standing figure for the artist to have unintentionally neglected such a significant point. The cow, then, is just a heifer, perhaps placed in the scene to ensure the viewer understands this is a depiction of the Io myth.<sup>33</sup>

Although most of the evidence points to this identification, there are a few iconographic anomalies in this depiction of Io. One oddity is that she has a veil covering her head. While other images of Io sometimes represent her this way, most do not include this feature. A much more troubling peculiarity is that Io does not have horns. All other representations of Io depict her as a cow, half-cow, or a woman with horns. Even when paintings show Io after she has become human again, they always show her with horns to confirm her identity. Identifying this woman as Io, therefore, is problematic.

De Vos offers a curious explanation for this oddity. She suggests that this fresco depicts a portrait of the matron of the house in the guise of Io.<sup>34</sup> With her center part and curls close to her forehead, Io's hairstyle certainly seems to coincide with the fashions of the late Julio-Claudian women.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, her veiled head would suggest the

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<sup>32</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1.739-1.743

<sup>33</sup> Helbig agrees with this identification. See Helbig, *Wandgemälde*, 40.

<sup>34</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:130.

<sup>35</sup> Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 139-141.

modesty appropriate to a Roman matron. Although it might seem odd to a modern viewer, her exposed breasts do not necessarily negate this modesty, as it was not uncommon for even Roman women to employ nudity when portraying themselves in the guise of a goddess.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps this also explains the lack of horns. If Io's face is that of the matron of the house, she might have preferred to depict herself without horns, instead placing the cow in the scene to help viewers identify this as a depiction of the Io myth.

### *Luna and Endymion*

For the remaining two major mythological panels in this room, the only evidence of their existence is two line drawings. Both of these frescoes were fragmentary, as reflected in the drawings, making identifications more difficult.

The first of these sat on the west wall of triclinium 37 (fig. 16). It depicts a nude male lying in the upper central portion of the fresco, with two spears lying across his lap. His limp left arm indicates he is unconscious. In the lower right corner of the composition a semi-draped female figure sits staring at the central man, while a third, probably male, individual sits in the lower left corner. The combination of the two figures to the right leads de Vos to identify this scene as Luna watching the sleeping Endymion.<sup>37</sup> In this fable, as related by Apollodorus, Luna falls in love with Endymion for his beauty. Jupiter granted him one gift, and Endymion in his vanity chose to sleep forever, remaining eternally youthful and beautiful.<sup>38</sup> Sappho writes that Luna came to

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<sup>36</sup> Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 178.

<sup>37</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:130.

<sup>38</sup> Apollodorus, *The Library*, 1.7.4

the Latmian cave where Endymion was sleeping, which is the encounter depicted here.<sup>39</sup>

It is unclear who the third figure is.

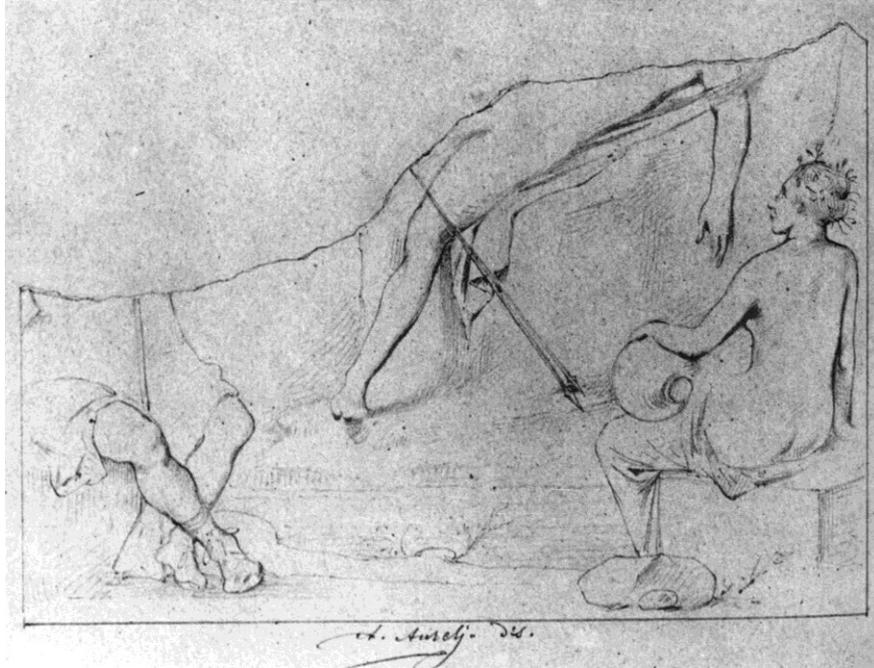


Figure 16: A line drawing of the Luna and Endymion fresco by A. Aurelio<sup>40</sup>

### *Adonis*

The last fresco in this room lay on the south wall of triclinium 37 (fig. 17). Also fragmentary, it seems to depict a male individual reclining in the lap of another figure, only evidenced by a pair of feet in the lower right portion of the composition. This appears to be a depiction of Adonis dying in the lap of Venus, as many depictions of Adonis show him reclining in a similar manner, half-draped, with his hunting spears or hounds nearby. In the myth related by Ovid, Venus fell in love with young Adonis for his beauty. He was a hunter, and Venus warned him to be careful of the dangerous game,

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<sup>39</sup>Robert Christopher Towneley Parker, "Selene," in Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, eds., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), Electronic Edition.

<sup>40</sup>de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:128, fig. 19.

but Adonis continued to hunt recklessly. As Venus feared, a boar gored him in the groin, and she rushed to him before he died.<sup>41</sup> This fresco shows Adonis dying in Venus' lap, an identification that de Vos supports.<sup>42</sup>

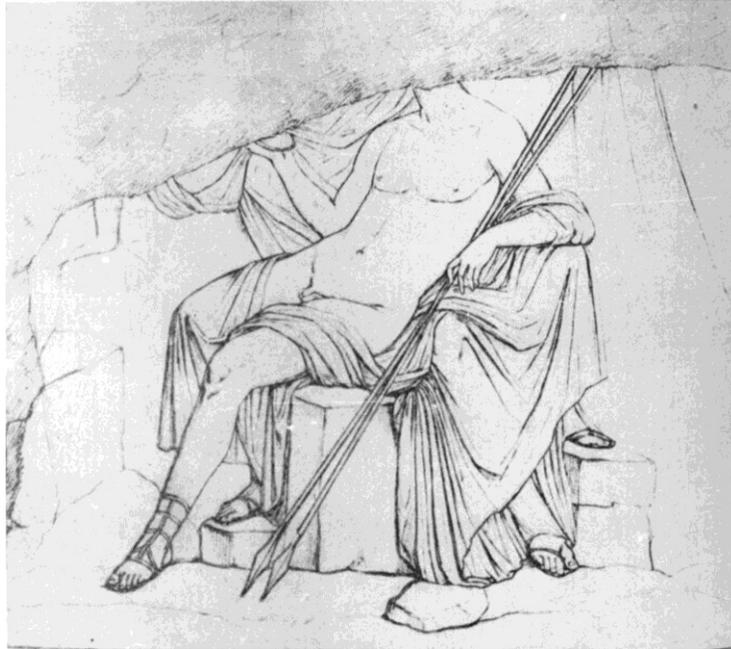


Figure 17: A line drawing of the Adonis Fresco<sup>43</sup>

### *Exedra 35*

The last room this thesis concerns only has two paintings. However, stylistically and iconographically they are important to understanding the House of the Citharist as it stood in A.D. 79. Of all the paintings in the house, these are the most beautifully executed, with figures rendered by a clearly skillful hand.

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<sup>41</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 10.519-559, 10.705-739.

<sup>42</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:131.

<sup>43</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:130, fig. 24.

### *Bacchus Discovering Ariadne*

One of the most prominent remaining paintings in the House of the Citharist was on the southern wall of exedra 35, depicting the discovery of Ariadne by Bacchus (fig. 18). It measures 1.92 by 1.64 meters, with figures approximating two thirds of life-size. Like the Io fresco, this is among the better-preserved scenes.<sup>44</sup> It still has faded some, as revealed by a few details in a pencil and pastel drawing by La Volpe (fig. 19) that are no longer visible in the fresco.

This scene illustrates a specific version of the myth of Ariadne. After falling in love with Theseus at Minos and helping to save his life in the labyrinth of the Minotaur, Ariadne sails off with her lover. The two then sail to the island of Naxos, where Theseus leaves Ariadne and sails home to Athens. The myths vary as to the reasons Theseus leaves Ariadne and her fate after. Apollodorus writes that Bacchus fell in love with Ariadne and Theseus was forced to leave her.<sup>45</sup> Hesiod claims that Theseus left her for another woman and that Bacchus then married her.<sup>46</sup> It seems that the painting in the House of the Citharist depicts the more popular version of the myth as told by Ovid and Catullus.<sup>47</sup> In these, Theseus leaves Naxos, forgetting about Ariadne while she sleeps. She awakes to find him gone, and roams the island, devastated, with anger comparable to that of Medea. Neither myth actually describes the marriage of Bacchus to Ariadne, but

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<sup>44</sup> It is also one that I studied and photographed in Naples.

<sup>45</sup> Apollodorus, *Epitome*, 1.9-1.10.

<sup>46</sup> Hesiod, *Catalogue of Women*, translated by H. G. Evelyn-White, Theoi, <http://www.theoi.com/Text/HesiodCatalogues.html>, 76; Hesiod, *Theogony*, translated by H.G. Evelyn-White, Loeb Classical Library, volume 57 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), 947-948.

<sup>47</sup> Catullus, *Poems*, 64.50-266, Ovid, *Heroides*, 10.

Ovid alludes to Bacchus and Catullus depicts Bacchus seeking for Ariadne with his entourage.



Figure 18: The Bacchus and Ariadne fresco<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Museo Nazionale di Napoli inv. 9286. Photo taken by permission of the Naples National Archaeological Museum.



Figure 19: An illustration of the Bacchus and Ariadne fresco by La Volpe<sup>49</sup>

The painting in the House of the Citharist shows the moment when Bacchus discovers the sleeping Ariadne, surrounded by his typical troupe of characters. He stands in the left portion of the composition, with a blowing blue cloak forming a divine halo

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<sup>49</sup> Carratelli, Baldassarre, Lanzillotta, Salomi, *Pompei* 601, fig. 35.

behind his head. His skin is effeminately pale, especially in contrast with the dark satyrs and Silvanus behind him. He has small horns protruding from his forehead, a common attribute of Bacchus. He also wears his ivy crown and holds the *thyrsus* in his right hand. He directs his free hand, *thyrsus*, and eyes at Ariadne lying in the lower right portion of the composition, leaving no doubt as to the object of his attention.

Ariadne is lying with her head resting in the lap of a winged individual. A cupid pulls back her purple cover, revealing her naked body to Bacchus. With Ariadne's backside to the viewer, her position is somewhat unusual, although not unprecedented. The two paintings are clearly related, since both feature Ariadne lying in the lower right corner with her back to the viewer and her right leg bent, Bacchus standing on the left side. The similarity of composition suggests that the painters of one were relying on the other painting or copying a third image.

The third striking figure is the winged individual on the far bottom left of the composition. It has been suggested that this is Aurora, the goddess of the dawn, to signify that Ariadne is awakening from her deep sleep, or that it is Nyx, the goddess of the night, to indicate that Ariadne remains asleep.<sup>50</sup> Both these identifications were made under the assumption that the figure is a woman. The iconography is, however, much more indicative of Somnus, a male deity. This winged figure is pale, has longer hair, and wears a long robe, making it easy to mistakenly believe this individual to be female. Nevertheless, Bacchus has equally pale skin and long hair even though he is male. The physical features of this winged figure are therefore androgynous. By accepting that this character may be a young man, the items he holds are the only true indication of who this

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<sup>50</sup> Sheila McNally, "Ariadne and Others: Images of Sleep in Greek and Early Roman Art," *Classical Antiquity* 4, no. 2 (1985): 179, 185.

is. These items seem to be characteristic of the Roman god of sleep, Somnus. The Oxford Classical Dictionary describes Somnus as “a winged youth who touches the forehead of the tired with a branch. . . or pours sleep-inducing liquid from a horn.”<sup>51</sup> He clearly holds a dish in his left hand, and a close inspection of the painting reveals that he also is holding a branch in his right hand. In addition, he wears an ivy crown along with most of the other figures to show his relation to Bacchus, with whom he is often associated. He is a young and gentle deity who rarely sees the sun, and thus it is fitting for him to have pale and effeminate skin. The presence of Somnus in the painting also helps to emphasize that Ariadne is sleeping when Theseus abandons and Bacchus discovers her.

Somnus shares a few traits with the last central figure, young Cupid, nude except for a purple cloak. Both are winged and both look to Bacchus, as if awaiting his decision to take Ariadne. Unlike Somnus, Cupid stands between Bacchus and Ariadne, pulling back Ariadne’s robe to show her body to Bacchus. His position physically unites these two figures, with Bacchus’ hand brushing his wing and Cupid’s hands touching Ariadne’s robe. This compositional unity suggests the marital unity in which these two characters will soon engage, tied together by love that Cupid represents.

Other figures in the background include Silvanus, identifiable by his balding head and relation to Bacchus, various satyrs, and some maenads playing instruments. They are the typical members of Bacchus’ retinue, who are present in this story as told by Ovid. The background also shows some of the landscape, although some of it is now difficult to see. There is clearly some sort of rocky terrain in the upper left portion of the

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<sup>51</sup> George M. A. Hanfmann, “Hypnos,” in Hornblower and Spawforth, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*.

composition. No seascape is visible, nor are the sails of Theseus' ship. This rocky terrain is consistent with the literary descriptions of the island, particularly those of Ovid and Catullus.

### *Iphigenia at Tauris*

The second painting (fig. 20) in exedra 35 is from the east wall. Like the Bacchus fresco, it was a giant scene, measuring 1.54 by 1.63 meters with almost life-sized figures.<sup>52</sup> It is also of equally magnificent quality.



Figure 20: The Orestes and Pylades in Tauris fresco<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:134.

<sup>53</sup> Imago, "The Roman Centenary Image Bank," Last modified 2014, <http://www.romansociety.org/fileadmin/images/imago/3375.jpg>, image 3375. For some reason, this picture was inverted on the website. The image I present has been flipped to correctly represent the fresco.

This fresco illustrates the scene of Orestes and Pylades before King Thoas at Tauris. In the story, Orestes and Pylades land at Tauris in their flight from the furies after Orestes murders his mother, Clytemnestra. When they land, they do not realize that the custom of the island was to sacrifice any visitors to Diana. They also fail to realize that Orestes' lost sister, Iphigenia, is the priestess of Diana. She recognizes her brother and plots to help him escape.<sup>54</sup>

In this panel, Orestes is shown nude to the far left of the composition, recognized as the central character by placement in the foreground and the fact that all other figures turn in his direction. He wears a laurel crown, which marks him as a sacrificial victim. His faithful companion, Pylades, stands just behind him. Both characters have been captured at this point in the story and are presented with bound hands. King Thoas appears at the bottom right of the composition, seated on a throne and crowned. He is presented in direct opposition to Orestes, as both figures wear purple and directly confront each other with their gazes. The figure of Iphigenia is in the center, mediating the conflict between Orestes and Thoas. Her upper torso has been lost, but her figure is identifiable by the garments of a priestess that she wears. Also in the composition are a few attendants in the background and a burning altar.<sup>55</sup>

### *Conclusion*

All of these frescoes illustrate mythological stories that a visitor to the House of the Citharist would have recognized. The iconography in each panel testifies to the identification of each figure and the myths they represent. More importantly, an intimate

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<sup>54</sup> Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, edited by Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill, translated by Robert Potter (New York: Random House, 1938).

<sup>55</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:134

knowledge of the characters and their stories is central to understanding how each panel relates to others and to the scheme of wall painting in each of the rooms.

## CHAPTER 4

### Interpreting the Frescoes in Context

As Bettina Bergmann suggests in her article “The Roman House as Memory Theater: The House of the Tragic Poet in Pompeii,” Romans would have connected their houses with memory. Cicero, Quintilian, and the author of *Ad Herennium* were rhetoricians who all associated the memory of speech with parts of a house, identifying certain ideas with the concrete images in the architecture and decoration. By imagining himself standing at a specific point in this house, a person could move throughout the speech and his ideas like walking around a room, connecting them in a multifaceted way that resembles more of a ramble through various parts of the interior than a steady walk from the *fauces* to the interior of the house. A person could move down the walls and across the rooms in more than one direction, continually linking ideas in new ways.<sup>1</sup>

Bergmann’s article illustrates this idea in the frescoes in the atrium of the House of the Tragic Poet. She chose this room in part because of the thematic relation of the paintings, but in part because it is an atrium and thus would have been viewed while moving.<sup>2</sup> A person would have wandered the atrium while looking at the paintings, thereby physically moving in a way that mimics memory.

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<sup>1</sup> Bergmann, “The Roman House,” 225.

<sup>2</sup> Bergmann, “The Roman House,” 226.

### *The Triclinia*

While Bergmann's article is a brilliant piece of scholarship, her particular method does not apply in the same way to the triclinia in the House of the Citharist. This type of room would have been lined with couches (*klinai*) on which guests could recline to eat or enjoy entertainment. There would be three couches in the room, the *summus* on the right wall when looking into the room from the entrance, the *medius* on the back wall, and the *imus* on the left wall. Each couch would seat three people reclining on their left side, fitting nine individuals in the room.<sup>3</sup> Although a person entering the room would see it from different perspectives, the paintings were meant to be admired while reclining on the couches. According to Clarke, these rooms would have complex imagery that guests were meant to study and perhaps discuss while reclining. Included in this imagery and of primary importance was the view out of the room.<sup>4</sup> A further consideration is that Romans would always reserve the spot (the *locus consularis*) on far left of the *medio* for the guest of honor, while the spot next to him, furthest from the entrance on the *imo* was for the host. The *locus consularis* was designed to have the best view, as the guest, reclining on his left side, could easily observe the entire room and view outside.<sup>5</sup> Figure 21 demonstrates how the guest of honor would have had the most advantageous views from the triclinia in the House of the Citharist. These concepts are essential to understanding the program of paintings in triclinia 20 and 37 in the House of the Citharist.

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<sup>3</sup> Clarke, *Houses of Roman Italy*, 12-13, 16-17.

<sup>4</sup> Clarke, *Houses of Roman Italy*, 16.

<sup>5</sup> Clarke, *Houses of Roman Italy*, 17.

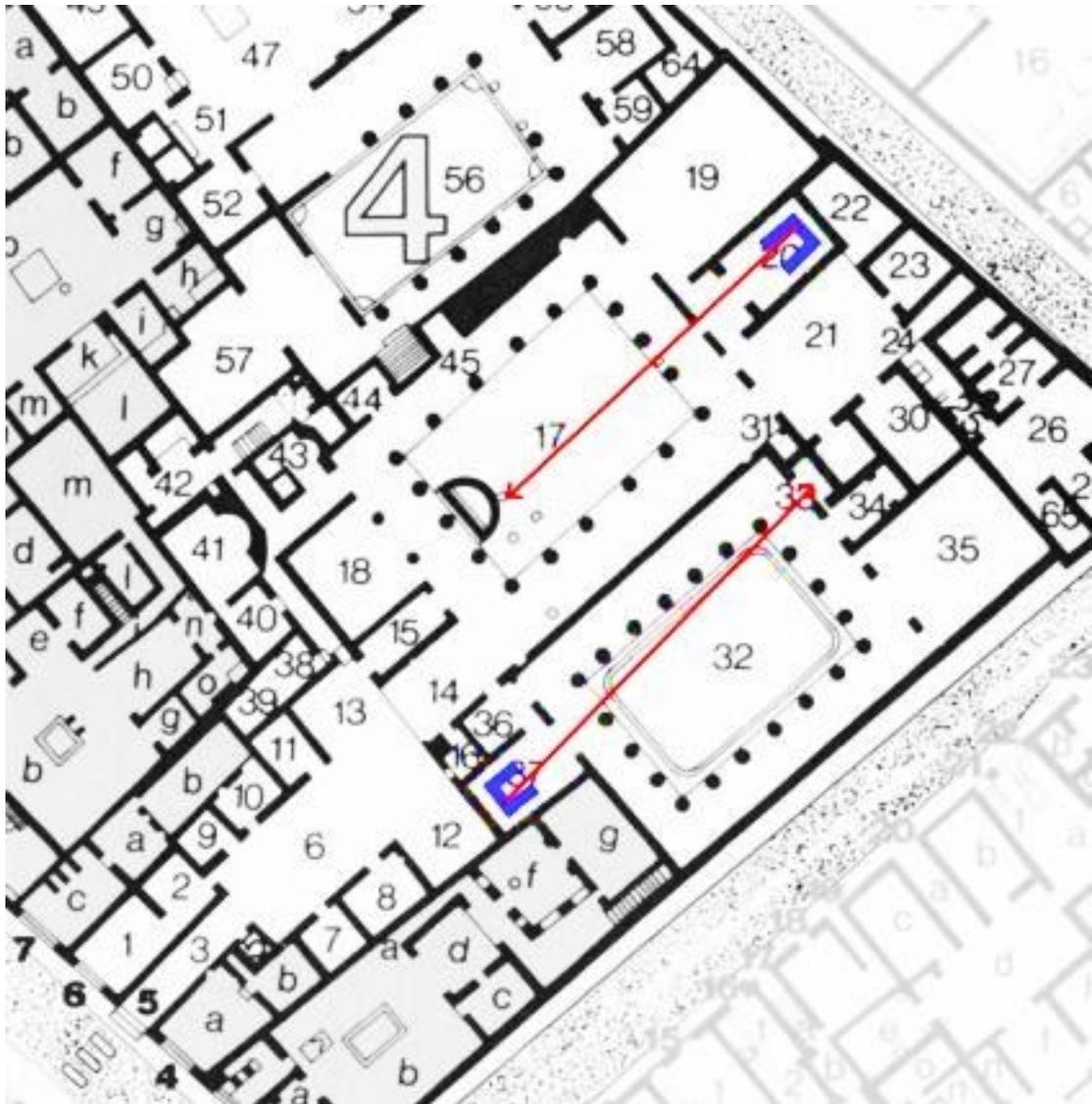


Figure 21: Views from the *loci consularium* of triclinia 20 and 37<sup>6</sup>

### *Triclinium 20*

The walls of triclinium 20 were decorated with three mythological panels. Looking into the room, the Leda fresco was on the right, the Laomedon scene was on the back wall, and the Aeneas and Dido painting was on the left. The connections in these paintings were multifaceted, perhaps intentionally designed so to spark conversation.

<sup>6</sup> My adaptation of de Vos' map (fig. 1).

All three paintings revolved around Troy. To the Roman mind, especially during the growing popularity of Virgil's *Aeneid* in the Augustan age when these frescoes were made, this Trojan theme sparked memories of the story of the founding of Rome. Perhaps reclining in this room, looking out to the grand peristyle, guests could contemplate the events that led to the golden age in which they were living. The view from the *locus consularis* would have been especially grand, since the guest of honor had a direct line of sight to the sculpture that most likely adorned the slightly odd extension of the semi-circular fountain at the western end of peristyle 17 (fig. 21).<sup>7</sup>

Further reflection on the three paintings reveals other connections. The striking similarity of Aeneas' and Laomedon's figures, especially in the position of their legs and the color of their purple cloaks, suggests that the two are to be compared. On one hand, Laomedon is a notoriously dishonest king, while Aeneas is one of the most dutiful and pious of mythological men. While Aeneas' intent gaze is directed forward, Laomedon's is turned backwards, representing the foresight of one man and the foolishness of the other, and resulting in the former fathering the Romans race and the later dooming his city to destruction.

Likewise, the two women in these scenes sit directly across the room from each other. Both are presented in a sexual context. While Dido assumes the role of the active sexual partner and forces herself on Aeneas, Leda is the passive sexual partner when Jupiter rapes her. Dido immodestly reveals her nude body while Leda covers herself like a proper aristocratic Roman woman would have. If de Vos' suggestion that Leda's face is a portrait of the lady of the house is correct, this might explain the contrast of her

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<sup>7</sup> This line of sight might also explain the existence of the small extension to the fountain. The walls and columns block the guest of honor's view of the central portion of the fountain, but shifting the focal point of the fountain slightly to the south allows him to view it with ease.

proper modesty to Dido's scandalous behavior, especially considering the importance of Augustus' moral laws at the time these frescoes were made.<sup>8</sup> It is, nevertheless, an odd identification as this scene depicts a woman who is about to be raped.

### *Triclinium 37*

It is much more difficult to draw similar conclusions from the mythological scenes adorning triclinium 37 because only one, the Io fresco, survives. The only images that remain of the other two, the Luna and Adonis scenes, are fragmentary line drawings (figs. 16 and 17).<sup>9</sup> Entering the triclinium from peristyle 32, the Io painting would be on one's right, the Luna and Endymion fresco on the rear wall, and the Adonis fresco on the left. As figure 21 shows, when seated the guest of honor could also see through peristyle to the niche 33, which probably housed an important piece of sculpture. Currently, this niche is the location of a replica of the bronze statue of Apollo Citharoedus, after which the house is named.

The most obvious connection between the three images is divine love of a mortal, as de Vos suggests.<sup>10</sup> It is also interesting to note how the figures of Adonis and Argos would have appeared to be seated facing the peristyle, almost mirroring each other, even in the direction of Adonis' hunting spears and Argos' shepherd's crook. Additionally, both are depicted right before their deaths. Endymion's sleeping figure and the angle of his spears imitates the positions of Adonis and Argos as well, perhaps showing the play of sleep and death. As Cicero writes in his *De Finibus*, "Endymion's fate we should

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<sup>8</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:130, 118, 151

<sup>9</sup> There is no indication that these frescoes were removed to the Naples National Archaeological Museum with the rest of the mythological panels, and they are no longer on the walls of the House of the Citharist. Either another party removed them and left no record or they have been lost to the elements.

<sup>10</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:131.

consider no better than death.”<sup>11</sup> Again, in his *Tusculanae Disputationes*, he writes that the closest resemblance to death is sleep, specifically citing Endymion’s myth, in which Endymion chose to sleep forever.<sup>12</sup> This theme seems particularly appropriate to a room primarily used in the winter, when the land experiences a sort of death or sleep. These paintings might lead to a conversation about the cycles of life and death in these myths and in nature.

### *Exedra 35*

Although two frescoes remain from exedra 35, this is the most difficult of the rooms to assign a theme because there is no indication of what might have been on the third wall. Looking into the room from peristyle 35, the Epiphany of Bacchus fresco would have been on the right wall, and the Orestes and Pylades at Tauris fresco would have been on the back wall. Perhaps one connection between the two is that the most commanding figures of each scene, Bacchus and Iphigenia, are presented right before they rescue the individuals whom the myths concern, Orestes and Ariadne, both of whom are nude with a purple cloak draped over them. In contrast to Ariadne’s sleeping posture, Orestes stands alert and confident in a manner any Greek or Roman man could respect. Orestes’ nudity is heroic, where Ariadne’s is intended to seduce a man who will leave her. The comparison of these two figures serves to emphasize the Orestes’ heroic quality.

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<sup>11</sup> Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, translated by H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 40 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 5.20.55.

<sup>12</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, translated by J. E. King, Loeb Classical Library 141 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 1.38.

The most striking features of this room, however, are the figures of Orestes and Pylades. As de Vos suggests, the face of Orestes (fig. 22) resembles that of Nero.<sup>13</sup> Presented in profile, it is remarkably similar to images of Nero on his coins (fig. 23). Orestes is shown as a beardless youth, somewhat fleshy but not yet corpulent, as Nero appears on his earlier coins. In addition, his hair is much like that of Nero, with a tuft of hair at the nape of his neck and curls forming a sort of crest over his forehead, crowned with the laurel that Nero seemed so fond of wearing. Orestes' facial features are also similar to those of Nero, with small eyes and lips and protruding ears.<sup>14</sup> De Vos views this identification as particularly appropriate, since Orestes and Nero both committed matricide, and since Nero actually performed the part of Orestes on stage.<sup>15</sup> In doing so, Nero was most likely attempting to justify Agrippina's murder by relating it to that of Clytemnestra. It seems likely then, that this is a portrait of Nero as Orestes.

As an *augustianus*, it seems appropriate that Lucius Popidius would want to display his connection to Nero, which certainly was an important aspect of his public identity. It has been speculated that he even placed his own portrait in this fresco, portraying himself as Pylades, the faithful companion of Orestes.<sup>16</sup> This would be a clear declaration of his social status, painted on the central panel of the grandest *oecus* in Popidius' house. In addition to the iconography in this fresco, its quality is outstanding and certainly cost quite a bit. Popidius was displaying his status politically and financially. It is doubtful that any guest walking through the room, familiar both with the

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<sup>13</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:135.

<sup>14</sup> Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 138; Suetonius, *Nero* 21.4

<sup>15</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:135.

<sup>16</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:135.

faces of Nero on his coinage and the owner of the house in which he stood, would have missed the implications.



Figure 22: Orestes and Pylades<sup>17</sup>



Figure 23: Denarius of Nero and his mother Agrippina the Younger<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Elia, "*Casa del Citarista*," plate A.

<sup>18</sup> Roman Numismatic Gallery, "The 12 Caesars of Suetonius: The Julio-Claudian Dynasty," NumisBids, last modified 2014, <http://www.romancoins.info/12C-JulioClaud.HTML>.

## CONCLUSION

The House of the Citharist reveals an intriguing story to the observant scholar. Dating to early in the development of the colony at Pompeii, its architecture illustrates the changing fortunes of the city through its expansions in times of prosperity and evidence of damage in natural disasters. Its frescoes represent all of the Pompeian Styles, showing the gradual changes from the First Style to the Fourth. The three of its rooms that were the focus of this thesis, triclinium 20, triclinium 37, and exedra 35, each display a different set of themes, not relating to each other as part of a grand narrative, but acting as islands of thought, connected through their outside views to the greater context of the House of the Citharist. They were designed not only to please the eye, but also initiate a conversation.

While these rooms act as individual spaces of thought, there is a discernable connecting factor that they all seem to have. In this public Roman household, the frescoes in each room serve to illustrate the status of the Popidii family, both through their impressive quality and in their imagery. In particular, in the state of the house as it existed after its restorations following the earthquake of A.D. 62, the frescoes express the status and wealth of Lucius Popidius. The house represents his place in society as a wealthy *augustinus* of the Roman emperor Nero and shows some of his values through his subject choices in the frescoes that decorated his home.

The Orestes and Pylades fresco decorating the east wall of exedra 35 is of particular importance, as it clearly illustrates the nature of Popidius' relationship to Nero, painted in a nearly life-size fresco of outstanding quality and value. On one hand, it

shows Popidius' wealth, since he was able to begin restorations on his house so quickly after the incredibly destructive earthquake of A.D. 62, when resources were scarce and often directed to public projects. The size and impressive quality of the fresco also demonstrates the funds Popidius could spare on the decorations of the House of the Citharist. Perhaps the most important aspect of the fresco, however, is the fact that it includes the portrait of Nero on the face of Orestes, and possibly the portrait of Popidius on the face of Pylades. This clearly conveys a message to visitors of Popidius' political affiliations and importance as an *augustianus* of Nero.

This blatant connection to Nero is only reinforced by other themes in the house, specifically those of Apollo Citharoedus, with which Nero continually identified himself. Although one cannot know the original location of the bronze Apollo statue after which the house was named, it was placed in one of the (most likely public) rooms in the House of the Citharist. Additionally, the fresco from *oecus* 23 depicting Apollo Citharoedus (fig. 4), while dating to an earlier period, sat in a prominent place in the House of the Citharist that was visible even from *fauces* 3 and anywhere along the line of sight shown in figure 24. The fresco, and possibly the statue, stood in the house before Nero was emperor and created his band of *augustiani*, but they both remained even when the house was undergoing restorations after A.D. 62. It is likely that Popidius kept them because, in combination with the Orestes and Pylades fresco, these pieces served to reinforce Popidius' wish to convey his connections with the emperor Nero through the decoration of his home.



Figure 24: View from *fauces* 3 into *oecus* 23<sup>1</sup>

With its immense size, rich history, and variety of themes in its decorative scheme, the House of the Citharist is a truly fascinating building that could reveal much more to scholars in further studies. It certainly demonstrates the prestige and political associations of Popidius, seen throughout the house, but more importantly in the Apollo Citharoedus bronze statue and fresco panel, and in the Orestes and Pylades fresco in exedra 35. Still serving one of its purposes, the House of the Citharist continues to remind its visitors in Pompeii of the wealth and status of its previous owner, Lucius Popidius, and his connections to the Roman emperor Nero.

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<sup>1</sup> My adaptation of de Vos' map (fig. 1). Note that the wall extends slightly over the line of sight in this diagram, which I discovered to be incorrect when I visited the House of the Citharist. When standing slightly inside the *fauces*, one can see the Apollo Citharoedus fresco as indicated in this diagram.

## APPENDIX

The following is a list of the rooms in the House of the Citharist, as numbered in figure 1. The room types and location of the frescoes are identified by de Vos in her article on this house.<sup>1</sup> I have modified some of the room types, noted by an asterisk.

Room Number	Room Type	Fresco Panels
1	Adjoining shop*	None surviving
2	Adjoining shop*	None surviving
3	<i>Fauces</i>	None surviving
5	Uncertain	None surviving
6	Atrium	None surviving
7	Uncertain	None surviving
8	Uncertain	None surviving
9	Uncertain	None surviving
10	Uncertain	None surviving
11	<i>Cubiculum</i>	None surviving
12	<i>Ala</i>	None surviving
13	<i>Ala</i>	North wall: Satyr medal (not discussed)
14	<i>Tablinium</i>	None surviving
15	Corridor	None surviving
16	Staircase*	None surviving
17	Peristyle	None surviving
18	Exedra	South wall: Poet medallion (not discussed)
19	Triclinium	South wall: Maenad (not discussed)
20	Triclinium*	North wall: Aeneas and Dido (Fig. 6) East wall: Laomedon (Fig. 8) South wall: Leda (Fig. 11)
21	Uncertain	North wall: Judgment of Paris (not discussed)
22	Uncertain	None surviving
23	<i>Oecus</i> *	North wall: King and messenger (not discussed) East wall: Apollo Citharoedus (Fig. 4) South wall: Pindar and Corinna (not discussed)
24	Pantry*	None surviving
25	Corridor/storage room*	None surviving
26	Adjoining shop/stable*	None surviving

<sup>1</sup> de Vos, "Casa del Citarista," 1:117-177.

27	Adjoining shop/stable*	None surviving
28	Adjoining shop/stable*	None surviving
29	Adjoining shop/stable*	None surviving
30	Triclinium	None surviving
31	Uncertain	None surviving
32	Peristyle	None surviving
33	Niche*	None surviving
34	<i>Cubiculum</i>	None surviving
35	Exedra	East wall: Orestes and Pylades in Tauris (Fig. 20) South wall: Bacchus and Ariadne (Fig. 18)
36	<i>Cubiculum</i>	None surviving
37	Triclinium	North wall: Io (Fig. 13) West wall: Luna and Endymion (Fig. 16) South wall: Adonis (Fig. 17)
38	Uncertain	None surviving
39	Uncertain	None surviving
40	<i>Tepidarium</i>	None surviving
41	<i>Caldarium</i>	None surviving
42	Kitchen	None surviving
43	Tetrastyle atrium	None surviving
44	Uncertain	None surviving
45	Niche	None surviving
46	<i>Fauces</i>	None surviving
47	Atrium	None surviving
48	Uncertain	None surviving
49	Uncertain	None surviving
50	<i>Cubiculum</i>	North wall: Satyr and Maenad (not discussed)
51	<i>Ala</i>	None surviving
52	Uncertain	None surviving
53	Triclinium	None surviving
54	<i>Ala</i>	None surviving
55	Uncertain	None surviving
56	Peristyle	None surviving
57	Uncertain	None surviving
58	<i>Oecus</i>	None surviving
59	Uncertain	None surviving
60	<i>Cubiculum</i>	None surviving
61	Uncertain	None surviving
62	Uncertain	None surviving
63	Uncertain	None surviving
64	Uncertain	None surviving
65	Uncertain	None surviving

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