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HERE COMES THE BRIDE? AN EXPLORATION OF MN 9022, A WOMAN’S TOILETTE SCENE IN FRESCO FROM ROMAN CAMPANIA

By
Laura M. Winn
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Chair: Barbara Barletta
Major: Art History

This thesis is an exploration of MN 9022 in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, a fresco scene illustrating the dressing and adornment of a young elite Roman woman in her toilette. Although MN 9022 is recognized as describing the interior of an elite woman’s domestic dressing room, the fresco’s absence of original archaeological context and surrounding wall decoration makes an interpretation of what the toilette scene represents problematic. My research seeks to define the event taking place in MN 9022, and argues that it does not represent a daily toilette, but rather a specific event in a young Roman woman’s life.

Scholars have granted the Naples toilette scene the titles of “Vestizione della Sacerdotessa” (Dressing of the Priestess) and “Vestizione della Sposa” (Dressing of the Bride). By utilizing these titles I examined the iconography presented in MN 9022 in an attempt to establish visual parallels with representations of the Roman priestess and bride, as well as underline how these representations illustrated the activities and roles of women within Roman society. The study aims to answer the questions of what the toilette scene represents, why the event was significant within the ancient Roman woman’s life, in addition to offering possible solutions surrounding the fresco’s audience and function within the context of a domestic decorative program.
The investigation reveals that MN 9022 contains influences from Roman religious and nuptial spheres, as well as imagery and iconography displaying the diverse geographic and cultural idioms working within the Bay of Naples. To understand the fresco’s eclectic blend of Greek, Roman, religious, and nuptial influences, we can look to the equally enigmatic megalographic fresco frieze from room 5 of the Villa dei Misteri in Pompeii as setting a standard and precedent for the integration of these visual spheres within Campania. The shared polysemic visual language and activities that fall within the religious and nuptial context complicate our modern reading of MN 9022, making it difficult to identify the young woman definitively as a Roman bride or priestess, because she may be both.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, women’s toilette scenes have been utilized to immortalize, commemorate, instruct, and propagandize the women they represent. While scenes of classical bridal chambers and chaste matrons in women’s quarters, known as the *gynaecium*, were rendered on Attic red-figure vases to articulate the patriarchal ideology regarding women’s role in Greek society, centuries later, Madame de Pompadour carefully choreographed and self-constructed her own image and persona through her representation in the toilette. Unlike the prescribed and instructive iconographic representations male patrons and artisans created of Athenian women, Pompadour, Louis the XV’s *maîtresse-en-titre*, in collaboration with Francois Boucher, constructed her image as an artist, literally painting herself with cosmetics at her morning toilette.¹ Within the historical repertoire of women’s toilette scenes, these two images illustrate how the representation of the toilette reflected the evolving customs, constructions of feminine identity, and gendered space throughout history.

This particular inquiry into the history and function of toilette scenes will focus on fresco scenes created in Roman Campania during the first century B.C.E. through the first century C.E. To understand the Romans’ use of the toilette scene genre we must first look to the rich tradition of Mediterranean scenes, which featured the women’s quarters. The Egyptians were one of the first civilizations to represent a woman’s toilette in the visual arts. During the eleventh dynasty Queen Neferu was immortalized in low relief on her elaborately carved and painted limestone tomb (Figure A-1). The queen was depicted in her royal toilette, as she received the attentive

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decking of her hairdresser Henut.² The ancient Egyptians believed the application of cosmetics and attentive grooming was linked to allure, reproduction, and in turn rebirth in the afterlife. The representation of Neferu’s ritual preening would have served as a conduit to her successful passage into the next world.³

The Egyptian queen’s toilette scene reveals the private and intimate workings of the elite ancient female’s life, while also illustrating the more than four-thousand-year importance and fascination with the representation of women’s domestic scenes. Over the centuries, the purpose, presentation, and intended audience of toilette scenes have evolved, enabling the genre to be utilized in a variety of contexts and thereby allowing these intimate scenes to remain popular throughout the Mediterranean and western world.

Nearly two thousand years after Queen Neferu’s royal toilette was captured in limestone, artisans working in Roman Italy, appropriated the visual imagery and iconography of Egyptian and Greek toilette scenes and continued the tradition within their own representations. The popularity and longevity of women’s toilette scenes begs the question of who and what these scenes represent, and how these intimate images reflected women’s lives and their role in society.

In Greek and Roman imagery, women’s toilette scenes appear in three general contexts. The first category represents prenuptial scenes, in which, the bride is depicted in the process of being decked by her attendants and female family members. The second toilette context falls within the funerary genre, where the deceased is shown in her dressing room surrounded by

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³ “Sunk Relief of Queen Neferu,” Brooklyn Museum Website. https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/3599/Sunk_Relief_of_Queen_Neferu
attendants as she prepares for the day or a special event. These funerary toilette scenes often represented the deceased in her bridal toilette, as a Greco-Roman woman’s wedding and preparations were a significant and pivotal event in her life. Bridal toilette scenes were figured on the funerary decoration of young women who died before they were able to marry, symbolizing the bride and mother they would not have the opportunity to become. These representations carry a serious and nostalgic air, and are traditionally figured on grave stelai or vessels utilized in burial. In addition to the bridal and funerary contexts, women in domestic spaces and toilettes appear in scenes that call upon and recreate episodes from ancient Mediterranean literature, theatre, and mythology. The goddess Venus is frequently pictured in her toilette preparing for her amorous encounter with Mars, and Euripides’ heroine Phaedra is often figured within the confines of the gynaeceum as she contemplates her forbidden love for Hippolytus.

As modern viewers of these ancient representations we must ask ourselves, who commissioned and created these toilette scenes, what did the scenes represent, and why was the event important enough to render in fresco and stone? Additionally, who were the principal and intended viewers of the scenes and how did they function within the Romans’ domestic decoration? This thesis aims to answer these questions and to underscore the importance of women’s toilette scenes in the repertoire of Roman imagery. My study will focus on women’s

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toilette scenes in fresco from Roman-Campania, with a particular emphasis on a single toilette scene, MN 9022, now in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, Italy (Figure A-2).

The fresco MN 9022 was discovered in 1761 by Karl Weber during the Bourbon excavations in Herculaneum. The painting was found among other frescoes of similar size and palette that are believed to have been salvaged from Third Style wall decoration damaged in the 62 C.E. Campanian earthquake. After the earthquake, the frescoes were cut out of their original location, presumably with the intention of being reused in a new Fourth Style decorative program. Before MN 9022 was incorporated into a freshly plastered wall, on August 24-25, 79 C.E. the toilette scene and other frescoes discovered in the same chamber were encapsulated in the pyroclastic flow of Vesuvius’ volcanic eruption.

Although MN 9022 is unanimously recognized as describing the interior of an elite woman’s domestic dressing room, the fresco’s peculiar discovery and absence of original find spot and surrounding wall decoration makes a reading or interpretation of what function, context, and particular event the toilette scene represents problematic. This thesis seeks to define the event taking place in MN 9022, and argues that it represents not a daily toilette, but a specific event in a young Roman woman’s life. I believe this inquiry can be answered through an exploration of the objects, iconography, and figural representation included in MN 9022.

I begin my inquiry in Chapter 2 with a formal description of the figures and contents pictured in MN 9022, as well as the importance the toilette held within the daily activities of elite Roman women. In addition, Chapter 2 will discuss the history of the Bourbon excavations at

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Herculaneum, which led to the unusual discovery and lack of archaeological record for MN 9022. The fresco’s unknown original decorative program and location continues to compound questions of content and context surrounding the fresco.

After introducing MN 9022, Chapters 3 and 4 will continue with an overview of the various titles scholars have granted the Herculaneum toilette scene, and what these titles reveal or conceal about the event pictured in MN 9022. By using the proposed titles of “Vestizione della Sacerdotessa” (Dressing of the Priestess) and “Vestizione della Sposa” (Dressing of the Bride). I will continue my inquiry by examining the iconography utilized in Roman fresco and sculpture that features the bride and priestess. My intention is to link the objects and imagery displayed in MN 9022 with the established iconography of the priestess and bride, as well as underline how these representations illustrated the activities and roles of women within Roman society. The location of these frescoes will be considered in an effort to define public/private and male/female spaces within the fabric of the Roman city, domus, and villa.

The investigation will conclude in Chapter 5 with an interpretation of the iconography in MN 9022, in addition to outlining the problems created by Campania’s cross cultural influences and overlapping nuptial/religious spheres, which continue to make a definitive reading of this fresco problematic.
Herculaneum Toilette Scene and the Art of Artifice in Ancient Rome

The Romans’ preoccupation with habitual cleaning is evident through the numerous public and private bath complexes incorporated within Roman cities. In the *Art of Love*, Ovid recommended that women “not let your armpits reek like a goat…do not let your teeth turn black through laziness…but wash out your mouth every morning.”¹ The Roman author Seneca reported that a complete bath was taken once a week, or every nine days on the market day, in addition to daily washing of the arms, legs, and face.² Well-to-do ancient women had a myriad of attendants and household slaves to aid them in their daily toilette and ritual cleansing. The term “toilette” can be understood not only as the process of daily or ritual grooming, but also the traditionally private physical space where this activity occurred.

The large corpus of archaeological materials linked to the “feminine arts” of adornment attest to the importance Roman women placed on their daily preening and toilette.³ Elite women crafted their beauty as a means of elevating grace, dignity, and sophistication.⁴ A regimen of baths, cosmetics, perfumes, wigs, hairdressing, and rich clothing was prescribed to signify the social standing of elite women who could afford such luxuries, yet the true art was making the artifice achieved within the toilette appear natural.⁵

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⁵ D’Ambra, *Roman Women*, 113.
The Romans’ desire to capture the art of the toilette through visual representation is illustrated by the fresco of a young Campanian woman’s toilette (Figure A-2) currently housed in the extensive collection of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. The fragmentary fresco is relatively small in scale measuring 44 x 44 cm (1 palmi y 9 on. por 18 on. per Karl Weber’s correspondence with King Charles III.)⁶ The painting has suffered damage resulting in horizontal and diagonal fracture lines on the surface as well as the complete loss of the painting in the top right quarter of the composition. Unfortunately, it is impossible to ascertain whether this damage was incurred before or during the 79 C.E. eruption of Vesuvius.

The surviving scene is arranged within a square composition that is divided nearly in half by a vertical, white, smooth, and unornamented column placed in the center of the background. The column, in addition to other simplified architectural elements, informs the viewer that this scene takes place within an interior domestic context, more specifically a woman’s toilette or dressing room.

The toilette scene in MN 9022 is comprised of four female characters that busy themselves with, or attentively watch, as the main female character is decked. In the left of the composition a matron is presented in three-quarter profile as she sits in a throne-like chair with elaborately carved legs. The woman’s elite status is revealed through the head-to-toe festooning of gold jewelry she has received. In addition to her jeweled necklace, earrings, and bracelets, the woman’s coiffure is ornately dressed with gold accessories, as well as golden sandals to adorn her feet.

The elite woman was most likely the domina and materfamilias of the home. As the female head of the household she ruled, only second in command to the paterfamilias, as owner and

⁶ Karl Weber’s measurements of the fresco noted in Ruggiero, Storia degli Scavi di Ercolano, 339.
master of the domus and slaves. The domina is pictured gently grasping the light blue veil or palla that rests on the back of her umber colored hair, while she gazes pensively beyond the picture plane. Although jewelry was an important part of the toilette and feminine adornment, a well-to-do Roman woman’s hair was “her crowning glory.” Elizabeth Bartman believes that hair functioned as a gender marker “at its most basic level, a woman’s hairstyle signaled her female sex.” In many ancient cultures a woman’s hair held expressive and communicative power. In ancient Egypt the styling and touching of hair was equated with sexuality and fertility. In ancient Greece a woman would let her traditionally bound hair down to convey sadness at a family member’s passing. Greek funerary vases often depict mourning women pulling at their hair as an expression of extreme grief and pathos.

The ever changing style and manner in which Roman women displayed their long locks is presented through the hairstyles women wear in extant portrait sculptures, frescos, reliefs, and coinage. Popular coiffures ranged in style from the more classical and subdued centrally parted and plaited locks of the Augustan era, to the flamboyant and towering hairstyles fashionable during the Flavian and Antonine periods.

These beautifully constructed coiffures conveyed their owner’s allure through piles of springing curls held in place with jeweled tiaras and gold, ivory, and silver accessories. The symbolic and potential eroticism of hair was a theme many ancient authors, such as Ovid and

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7 D’Ambra, *Roman Women*, 118.


10 Barman, “Hair and the Artifice of Roman Female Adornment,” 5, 8.
Juvenal, discussed in their poetry and literature.\textsuperscript{11} Although the intricate dressing of the hair was an important visual cue of the elite Roman matron’s appearance and social status, a respectable matron would cover her head and body with a \textit{palla} or mantle when in public.\textsuperscript{12} In the Roman world, luxurious hair was associated with Venus, sexual desire, and availability; therefore a chaste matron covered her coiffure as a symbol of her honor and marital status when outside the interior domestic world she ruled. The \textit{palla} in MN 9022 is pictured as a rectangular piece of cloth that is worn on the back of the matron’s head. The garment was most likely intended to protect women from the elements; however the accessory evolved into a necessary garment, which functioned as a sign or emblem to protect a matron’s chastity and fidelity.\textsuperscript{13}

In addition to her \textit{palla}, the domina pictured in MN 9022 wears a white \textit{stola} with a light blue border at the foot that matches the fabric of her \textit{palla}. The \textit{stola} was a long, draped garment that was worn over a \textit{tunica} and suspended on the shoulders by straps. Much like the \textit{palla}, the \textit{stola} communicated the matron’s chastity and marital status.\textsuperscript{14} A wealthy matron’s dress was worn proudly like a uniform that distinguished her as an elite and respectable woman to the public.\textsuperscript{15} The fresco painter rendered the matron as an imposing and statuesque figure, shown through the large folds of drapery in her \textit{stola}, which outline her foreshortened legs and body. The domina is shown gently embracing a young girl who leans into the older woman from the left side of the scene. It appears that the fresco painter has attempted to convey the youthful age

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} Barman, “Hair and the Artifice of Roman Female Adornment,” 3-4, 6, 14.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Alexandra Croon, \textit{Roman Clothing and Fashion}, (Charleston: Tempus, 2000), 109-110.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Alexandra Croon, \textit{Roman Clothing and Fashion}, 109-110.
\item \textsuperscript{15} D’Ambra, \textit{Roman Women}, 3 and Sebesta, “Symbolism in the Costume of the Roman Woman,” 48-50.
\end{itemize}
of the girl through her relatively small scale in relationship to the imposing stature of the seated domina.

The girl, most likely the daughter of the domina, is presented in profile as she rests her chin on the back of her hand. This iconographic gesture was used throughout antiquity and still appears in contemporary iconography to suggest thought and contemplation.16 The girl is finely robed in a gold tunic-like dress, which may have been a toga praetexta, a garment worn by Roman freeborn girls until their marriage.17 In addition to the girl’s rich dress and gold jewelry, her dark amber hair is neatly arranged and bound with a vitta, a woolen fillet utilized to secure women’s hair in place. Vitae were used to bind and decorate women’s hair of all ages. While a matron bound her hair with woolen bands to indicate modesty and fidelity to her husband, the young girl in MN 9022 wears a single, white vitta symbolizing her youth and purity.18 The well-to-do girl gazes intently across the scene to the set of female figures pictured on the right side of the composition.

Here the fresco painter has rendered a second set of women. The more mature figure, also indicated by her larger stature, stands in near profile behind a younger and thus smaller, but more ornately dressed woman, and is presumably a servant or hired hairdresser. The older woman is busy in the process of dressing the younger woman’s hair. In addition to the work of cooking and cleaning for wealthy families, female slaves and manumitted servants hired by elite families

16 See the Ilissos Stele, with father and son from Pedley, Greek Art and Archaeology, 314, fig. 9.39 and the fresco of Penelope or the Muse Polyhymnia from Stabiae: Valerie Sampaolo & Irene Bragantitini, La Pittura Pompeiana (Napoli: Soprintendenza Archeologica Napoli e Pompei, 2009), 456.

17 Freeborn and patrician boys also wore the toga praetexta along with a bulla until after they reached puberty. At time the young men traded the garment in for the toga virilis. See Sebesta, “Symbolism in the Costume of the Roman Woman,” 48-50.

18 Sacrificial animals were also adorned with white vitae to indicate their purity to the gods. Sebesta, “Symbolism in the Costume of the Roman Woman,” 49.
often took on the duties of dressing and deck ing their mistresses and their daughters in the toilette.\textsuperscript{19} A female slave who was an expert and tasked with the chore of hairdressing was known as an \textit{ornatrix}.\textsuperscript{20}

The attendant dressing the young woman’s hair in MN 9022 illustrates the slave-working class costume. In contrast to the rich and multilayered costume wealthy Roman women proudly donned, slaves and working freedwomen were traditionally depicted in a simple girt tunic, which was a loose, usually neutral-colored, and undecorated garment worn without the signature \textit{palla} or \textit{stola} that signified the status of the domina.\textsuperscript{21} This particular woman wears a slate-colored, short-sleeved tunic. Much of the hairdresser’s own hair has been obscured by damage to the fresco’s surface, rendering it unrecognizable, but it appears to be pulled back from her face in a simple knot or \textit{nodus}, the signature coiffure of servants and working class freedwomen.\textsuperscript{22} Female attendants or household slaves are a familiar iconographic element within domestic and toilette scenes.

The main character of the group and the recipient of her attendant’s careful decking is presented in a frontal pose. The young woman stands with her weight on her back leg in a contrapposto stance, with her foot turned so that a foreshortened gold slipper peeks out from the intricately embroidered design on the hem of her floor-length \textit{tunica}. The front of the young woman’s hair has already been dressed and bound in gold by her attendant, who now works intensely on the back of the coiffure. Much like the domina and filia previously described in the

\textsuperscript{19} Natalie Kampan, \textit{Image and Status: Roman Working Women in Ostia} (Berlin: Mann, 1981), 127.

\textsuperscript{20} D’Ambrosio, \textit{Women and Beauty in Pompeii}, 13.

\textsuperscript{21} Kampen, \textit{Image and Status}, 64.

\textsuperscript{22} Kampen, \textit{Image and Status}, 92.
left of this scene, the young woman, most likely the eldest daughter of the seated matron, is richly dressed from head to toe. She is robed in a violet tunica, covered by a white garment with overfold, and then wrapped in an olive colored mantle.

The violet color of the young woman’s dress is an indication of her wealth and social status. The dye utilized to make purple, violet, and indigo garments was produced from crushing the murex conchylium, a shelled mollusk, with iron rods. The mollusk shards were then ground into a mortar and mixed with honey for preservation, making the indigo dye a luxurious commodity in the ancient Mediterranean world.23

The young woman gazes assertively out at the viewer and draws her right arm towards her left shoulder, while letting her left arm hang loosely toward the floor. To the right of the attendant and her mistress in the foreground of the picture plane is a wooden table with carved legs. A variety of vegetal branches, possibly laurel, olive, or myrtle, is pictured on the table’s surface, in addition to a piece of cloth and a small decorated chest. Greco-Roman toilette scenes include an array of jewelry boxes, cosmetic jars, and perfume bottles that exemplify their use within the regimen of feminine preening. These containers were made from various materials, and survive in extant examples of bone, bronze, ivory, and glass.24

In addition, Greco-Roman toilette scenes often featured jugs and pitchers that were employed in the transportation and pouring of water, which was necessary for baths and daily cleaning. In MN 9022 the fresco painter has included a large transparent pitcher with a single vertical handle under the wooden table. The glass vessel appears to be a hybrid of Greco-Roman

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24 D’Ambrosio, Women and Beauty in Pompeii, 12.
materials and shapes. While the use of glass on this scale is distinctly Roman, the slender shape, vertical handle, and spouted mouth are reminiscent of the *loutrophoros*, produced in clay throughout Greece.\(^{25}\)

Although not present in MN 9022, an object that is frequently represented in toilette scenes is the mirror. Ovid stated, “There is not just one type of adornment; let every woman choose that which best becomes her, after due consultation with her mirror.”\(^{26}\) The Greeks, Romans, and Etruscans utilized a vast array of mirror types. As well as laying claim as Venus’ signature attribute, the mirror was no doubt one of the most indispensable and utilized tools in the Roman matron’s toilette.

The fresco painter contained his toilette scene within a painted frame that borders the figural scene on all sides. The first frame, closest to the female characters consists of an approximately 2 cm band of white. The frame continues outward from the figural scene with a strip of green, then another strip of reddish-brown. The band of white and the thin strips of color are all contained within an exterior dark brown frame.

The painter’s use of framing as an artistic device, the fresco’s small size, and miniature scale of the composition, as well as its classicizing style place the toilette scene within the Third Style of Pompeian wall painting.\(^{27}\) This style was introduced during the late first century B.C.E., gaining popularity during the reign of Augustus and into the mid-first century C.E.\(^{28}\)

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\(^{28}\) Ling, *Roman Painting*, 52.
One of the most salient features of Third Style wall painting is the rejection of surface illusionism and architectural edifices, as found in the Second Style, for a preoccupation with rich ornamental detail, such as thin columns and candelabras. These delicate elements served to break up and divide flatly colored wall into zones and aediculae. Framed figurative and landscape fresco scenes, such as MN 9022, were included within these wall divisions, as if they were framed paintings or *pinakes* in a gallery. MN 9022 would have served as a *pinax*-like framed scene within a larger decorative program. The framed vignettes rendered within Third Style wall painting adhered to the classicizing style popular during the Augustan era.

The classical revival began in Athens during the Late Hellenistic period around 150 B.C.E., incited by the Romans’ demand for sculptures that were copies or adaptations of Greek fifth and fourth-century classical works of art. The neoclassical style is evident in Neo-Attic Roman sculpture from the Late Republic and early Empire but also spread and influenced all forms of artistic media including domestic wall painting. The Romans’ interest in this revivalist style is exhibited through the extant sculpture, fresco painting, metal work, and architecture commissioned during the reign of Augustus in Rome and Campania. The Emperor Augustus utilized the restrained but idealized Greek style symbolically to link the *Pax Romana* of first-century Imperial Rome to the Periclean Golden Age of Athens.

Greek artisans trained in Athens in the neoclassical style emigrated and set up workshops in Italy, lending their talents to public and private Roman art during the first century. MN 9022 like many other Third Style figurative scenes embodied the classical tendencies found in

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Augustan era works, such as the detailed rendering of the figures and the scene’s sense of harmony and stillness.\textsuperscript{31}

Additionally, the posture and drapery of the main female character receiving the attentive decking is recognizable as a popular Greek statue type known as the Small Herculaneum Woman. The figural type acquired its name from the discovery of a pair of draped female statues in Herculaneum, which inspired King Charles III to sponsor the excavation for antiquities in the ancient city. The Large and Small Herculaneum Women were believed to have been displayed on the stage facade of Herculaneum’s Roman Theater. The figural types were modeled after original Hellenistic sculptures and used extensively to portray the wealthy and elite women of Rome.\textsuperscript{32} The Herculaneum Women statues and MN 9022 were both created in the early to mid-first century C.E. Perhaps then, it is possible that the public display of this popular statuary type in the Herculaneum Theater may have influenced the posture and drapery of the main female character in MN 9022.

The next sections will further discuss the history of the Bourbon excavations at Herculaneum and the peculiar find circumstances of MN 9022, which continue to complicate and obscure an understanding of the toilette scene’s content and context.

\textsuperscript{31} Ling, \textit{Roman Painting}, 57.

History of the Bourbon Excavations at Herculaneum

According to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the ancient city of Herculaneum was founded by Hercules in the late sixth century B.C.E. as the hero returned from his laborious journey in Iberia.³³

When Hercules had settled all his affairs in Italy as he wished, and when his fleet had arrived safely from Spain, he sacrificed a tithe of his spoils to the gods, and founded a small city at the place where his fleet lay.³⁴

Apart from this mythological account, the city’s early history is unclear. Like its sister city Pompeii, Herculaneum is believed to have been occupied by the native Oscan and Samnite people until the fourth-century B.C.E., when it came under Greek control.³⁵ Herculaneum surrendered to the Roman Republic after Sulla defeated a revolt of the Campanian cities during the Social War of 89 B.C.E.³⁶ In 79 C.E., the thriving Roman city suffered the same fate as its southern sister city Pompeii and was entombed in volcanic ash during Mount Vesuvius’ violent eruption.³⁷ After being covered in up to 20 or more meters of ash and solidified pyroclastic flow, the lost city was rediscovered in the early eighteenth-century under the modern city of Resina, a suburb of Naples, Italy.³⁸ In 1706 the Austrian Prince d’Elboeuf ordered a well to be sunk, and in doing so his workers accidently encountered the stage of Herculaneum’s theatre.³⁹


³⁵ Deiss, *Herculaneum, Italy’s Buried Treasure*, 5.


³⁷ Deiss, *Herculaneum, Italy’s Buried Treasure*, 5.

The first excavation of Herculaneum commenced on October 1, 1738. The project was sponsored by the Bourbon monarch King Charles III, the Spanish king who conquered and subsequently ruled over the kingdoms of Naples and Sicily. Charles III appointed Spanish military engineer, Rocque Joaquin de Alcubierre, to direct his excavations in Campania. As soon as the excavations were initiated scholars such as Johann Joachim Winckelmann and Camillo Paderni, who ironically would later take over as curator of the collections in the Royal Portico Museum at Herculaneum, condemned the archaeological methods of Alcubierre and the Bourbon excavators. Paderni reported to the members of the Royal Society of London:

The first mistake those men they call [engineers] have committed is their having dug out the pictures without drawing the situation of the place, that is, the niches where they stood. For they were all adorned with grotesques composed of most elegant masques, figures and animals; which not being copied, are gone to destruction, and the like will happen to the rest…Besides, there are pillars of stucco extremely curious, consisting of many sides, all variously painted, of which they do not preserve the memory.

Alcubierre’s methods were criticized by many as treasure hunting for the Bourbon king’s insatiable appetite for antiquities. The early excavators exhibited no interest in recording the architectural remains, rather “the ruins were viewed as repositories of the works of art whose recovery would enrich the king’s collection.”

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40 Maiuri, Herculaneum, 9.

41 Parslow, Rediscovering Antiquity, 1.

42 Paderni’s description of the remains at Herculaneum to the Royal Society of London, translation from Parslow, Rediscovering Antiquity, 33.

43 Parslow, Rediscovering Antiquity, 1-2.
Herculaneum’s artifacts were displayed in the heavily guarded royal museum. The museum’s visitors were prohibited from bringing in anything with them in which they could take notes or draw sketches, leaving scholars frustrated and bitter. One of the most notable critics, the so-called father of art history J. J. Winckelmann, stated that Alcubierre was “as familiar with antiquity as the moon is with crabs.” Winckelmann vilified the Bourbon operations because of the team’s plundering, as well as the rejection he received to his request to access and study the royal collections.

In retrospect, it is easy to criticize the non-scientific or even bungling techniques the early Bourbon excavators utilized; however as Christopher Parslow notes, Alcubierre and his workers were appointed the task of retrieving artifacts because they were trained as military miners, not because of their knowledge in classical art and architecture. The scientific and systematic field of archaeology did not exist; therefore Alcubierre and his men employed the methods and approaches best known to them at the time.

Despite his erratic and highly dangerous tunneling techniques, Alcubierre changed the future study and field of archaeology when he requested that Swiss military engineer Karl Jakob Weber be appointed his assistant to oversee the excavation efforts at Herculaneum and Pompeii in 1749. Unlike the Spanish engineer, Weber saw the value in recording the context of his discoveries. He meticulously sketched and reported the Vesuvian cities’ urban fabric: streets,

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public and private buildings, fountains, and baths, in an effort to understand the ancient city as a collective and connected unit.\textsuperscript{47}

Despite Winckelmann’s biting criticism of Alcubierre and the royal museum’s secrecy, the art historian praised Weber stating, “to this intelligent man are owed all the sensible arrangements.”\textsuperscript{48} Nevertheless, despite Weber’s more scientific approach to the excavations at Herculaneum, the discovery of MN 9022 remains peculiar and frustrating to archaeologists and art historians.

**Discovery of MN 9022: Problems of Original Intent, Audience, and Context**

In the summer of 1760, Weber’s team at Herculaneum discovered a small bronze base inscribed with hieroglyphics (MN 1107) on the street outside what Weber believed to be the “Temple of the Mater Deum,” now identified as the southern vestibule of the Palestra in Insula Orientalis II (see Figure A-3). This find encouraged the engineer to continue tunneling along the street in hopes of recovering the statuette that belonged to the bronze base.\textsuperscript{49} Weber’s excavations along Cardo V in Insula Orientalis I and II in search of the votive statuette recovered several bronze ornaments and candelabra, but after months of labor failed to produce any artifacts significant enough for the king’s collection.\textsuperscript{50}

Despite the lack of considerable finds, Weber stubbornly continued to tunnel along Cardo V in search of a noteworthy discovery. While many on his team believed the continued excavations in this area would prove fruitless, the engineer’s persistence was rewarded in

\textsuperscript{47} Parslow, *Rediscovering Antiquity*, 3.

\textsuperscript{48} Parslow, *Rediscovering Antiquity*, 3.

\textsuperscript{49} Weber identified the southern vestibule of the Palestra in Orientalis II in Herculaneum as a temple because of an inscription found in July 1757 recording restorations by Vespasian in 76 C.E. of a Templum Matris Deum (MN 3708) following the 62 C.E. earthquake. Parslow, *Rediscovering Antiquity*, 134-5.

\textsuperscript{50} Parslow, *Rediscovering Antiquity*, 134-148.
February of 1761 when one of Weber’s most competent and trusted workmen, Aniello Diacampo, sank a shaft from one of the higher story rooms bordering the Palestra down into a room on the first floor of the building complex that flanked the great apsidal hall. Diacampo’s tunnel fortuitously dropped onto a collection of framed fresco fragments that rested against one another on the room’s white mosaic floor. The series of frescoes were found leaning against one of the walls where they had been fixed in place by the Vesuvian eruption’s pyroclastic flow. Despite the excitement these frescoes created, the exact findspot or even chamber was not recorded and remains unknown.

Amedeo Maiuri, the archaeologist who directed the Herculaneum and Pompeii excavations during the early twentieth century, described the hall that flanked the chamber where the fresco collection was discovered as: “a great apsed room [that] opens upon the middle of the portico wing and behind it, on a higher level, there are other large vaulted rooms still containing parts of their beautiful wall decoration with architectural motifs on a black ground.”

The structure in which this collection of frescoes was discovered was an impressive complex composed of residential apartments and merchants’ shops. The massive edifice spanned a length of 80 meters along the east of Cardo V and the athletic palestra. The ground floor

51 Parslow, Rediscovering Antiquity, 148.
54 Based on the descriptions provided in Weber and Paderni’s letters Parslow believes the frescoes were discovered in a chamber flanking the Great Apisidal hall that led out onto the Insula Orientalis II palestra. Sampaolo and Bragantini’s 2009 publication La Pittura Pompeiana lists Insula Orientalis II, 4, 19 as the findspot. This was the vestibule entrance to the palestra, which Weber erroneously identified as the Temple of the Mater Deum.
55 Maiuri, Herculaneum, 55.
56 Maiuri, Herculaneum, 54.
consisted of shops and workshops while the upper floors each contained several apartments. Access to the stories above was granted through a staircase on the ground floor. The layout of the multistory structure led Amedeo Maiuri to believe the residents of this apartment block were also the owners or tenants of the establishments housed below.\footnote{Maiuri, \textit{Herculaneum}, 54.}

While Weber’s team did not record a specific findspot for the collection of fresco paintings, this frustrating lack of location and context was further complicated by the ancients’ practice of cutting out and removing frescoes from their original plastered walls to be preserved in wooden frames.\footnote{Parslow, \textit{Rediscovering Antiquity}, 221, 352.} Camillo Paderni, curator of royal antiquities in the Herculaneum Museum at Portico, was on site the day the Palestra frescoes were discovered in the commercial/residential complex and suggested the paintings had been salvaged from architecture damaged during the 62 C.E. Campanian earthquake, an early warning of the disaster and destruction Vesuvius would cause 17 years later.\footnote{Lawrence Richardson Jr., \textit{A Catalog of Identifiable Figure Painters of Ancient Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Stabiae} (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), 34.}

Paderni was so eager to view the discovery that he had himself lowered into the room to inspect the work in situ. His excitement was curtailed by the lack of oxygen and the overwhelming heat in the narrow tunnel.\footnote{Per Paderni’s letter to Charles Feb 21, 1761 from Ruggerio, \textit{Storia delgi Scavi di Ercolano}, 341.} The Prime Minister, Bernardo Tanucci, found the discovery of these frescoes important enough to include in his report to the king. Tanucci noted that in Paderni’s preliminary assessment of the work, the latter found the paintings to be of fine quality and coloring, like miniatures. The Prime Minister stated that “[Weber] found a room in which the pictures had already been cut down, a sign that the ancients esteemed these paintings...
much as we do.”

More evidence for the Herculaneum collection’s planned reuse was Weber’s discovery of frescoes in the Praedia Julia Felix in Pompeii that had been cut out of their original walls and placed into wooden frames for preservation.

After hearing of the discovery, Winckelmann displayed extreme interest in the group of paintings. The scholar’s excitement was caused by the collection’s classicizing style, which led Winckelmann to pronounce the works as original paintings from Greece or Magna Graecia that had been transported to Campania to be reused in Herculaneum’s wall decoration. Despite this original assumption, the art historian later acknowledged the Campanian production of the frescoes within the neoclassical style popular during Augustus’ reign.

Weber’s neglect to record a specific chamber or findspot in the Insula Orientalis II apartment complex leaves many unanswered questions in regard to how the ancient owner of these framed scenes may have intended to utilize them in new interior decoration. Were the frescoes going to be used in a public shop, in a picture gallery, or in a private domestic space? Without knowing the specific room in which these paintings were discovered, we can only speculate on the possible function of that room.

Despite the lack of an established findspot, even if a more precise record of the discovery was documented, because the frescoes were removed from their original location, a modern reading of the scenes, without knowledge of the painting’s original and intended decorative

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61 Ruggerio, *Storia dei Scavi di Ercolano*, 353 Tanucci’s correspondence with King Charles III on Feb 24, 1761.


context, remains problematic. The next section will discuss the collection of frescoes discovered by Weber in Insula Orientalis II and their proposed authorship.

**Connection and Authorship of the Herculaneum Fresco “Collection”**

In his correspondence with King Charles III on February 21, 1761, Karl Weber reported that several fresco scenes were discovered in Herculaneum in a chamber under the Bisogno property along Cardo V with a white mosaic floor.\(^{65}\) The frescoes are now located in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli and cataloged accordingly: MN 8970, MN 9019, MN 9020, MN 9021, MN 9022, MN 9041, MN 9816, and MN 9906.\(^{66}\)

Several of the paintings discovered in the Herculaneum Palestra group are of similar size, scale, and palette, which has led some scholars to suggest the frescoes’ ancient owner intended to utilize them as decoration in a single room.\(^{67}\) Problems with this theory arise from the number of pieces recovered. The four framed fresco scenes (MN 9019, MN 9020, MN 9021, and MN 9022), in addition to the fragmentary frescoes found in the same chamber (MN 8970, MN 9149, MN 9816, and MN 9906) were too many to decorate a single room, such as a triclinium or cubiculum, of average proportions in Campania.\(^{68}\) Additionally, there appears to be no defining

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\(^{66}\) Various scholars cite frescoes that were not mentioned by Paderni or Weber in their original letters. Richardson Jr. and Sampaolo include MN 8993 “Perseo Libera Andromeda” originally believed to have been found in Pompeii among the collection of frescoes recovered in Feb 1761 in Herculaneum, Insula Orientalis II. See Ruggiero, *Storia Delgj Scavi di Ercolano* and Reale Accademia Ercolanese di Archeologia. Database of digital reproduction of a rare book in its entirety: *Le Antichità di Ercolano Esposte, vol I-IX*. http://www.picure.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/arc/ercolano/index.html.

\(^{67}\) Richardson Jr., *A Catalog of Identifiable Figure Painters*, 34.

\(^{68}\) See n. 74, several scholars also include MN 8993. Richardson Jr., *A Catalog of Identifiable Figure Painters*, 34.
theme or mythological story, which links all of the fresco scenes to support their incorporation within a single decorative program.

In an effort to elucidate who and what the scenes in the Herculaneum Palestra fresco group represent, scholars have suggested that the four framed scenes, (MN 9019, MN 9020, MN 9021, and MN 9022) constitute a collection. Several scholars have taken on the task of evaluating details in the rendering of the hands, facial features, drapery, and proportions, as well as the preferred palette and subject matter of these paintings in an attempt to expose their creators’ identities. These scholars believe that a detailed examination of the paintings in a Morellian manner may reveal the frescoes’ authorship and enable them to link the work to other extant frescoes and workshops. Before discussing the proposed authorship it is necessary to outline who and what the Palestra collection’s scenes portray.

The first of this framed Third Style group is MN 9019 entitled the “L’Attore Re” (Figure A-4). This was the initial and only fresco Paderni was able to describe briefly before he was overcome with heat and lack of air in the tunnel where the frescoes were unearthed. The genre scene is composed of three figures. The principal male figure, on the left, is a tragic actor whose disheveled and matted hair suggests he has just finished his last scene. He is seated, dressed in a theatrical costume, holding a scepter and what appears to be a sword in a scabbard on his lap. The actor’s attention is focused on the woman in the right of the picture who is dressed in loose robes and kneels before a tragic theatrical mask in order to paint a dedication. The third figure stands behind the mask and looks on as the woman carefully attends to her painted dedication.

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Paderni made note of the painting’s fine quality and coloring, reporting to King Charles III the fresco’s great merit, comparing it to the excellence displayed in the painting of Chiron and Achilles (MN 9109) recovered from the Herculaneum Basilica.\textsuperscript{70}

Another fresco from the group stacked on the mosaic floor is MN 9020, entitled “Due Eroi” (Figure A-5). The painting features two nude male figures that are believed to be representations of Achilles and Patroclus.\textsuperscript{71} The hero Achilles is seated on a gold throne at the right of the square composition. The hero’s sword is sheathed in its scabbard and rests against the throne. To Achilles’ right stands a nude male figure, leaning against his spear for support. The standing figure’s head and right shoulder have been obscured through damage to the fresco’s surface. However, because of the figure’s relation to Achilles he is presumed to be Patroclus. A wall separates the two male figures in the foreground from a stable represented in the left background with a horse and attendant. The horse’s head and shoulders have also been damaged and left unreadable.

A third fresco discovered with the Herculaneum “collection” is MN 9021, the “Concerto” (Figure A-6). The square composition pictures three characters in the act of a musical performance while two male figures with wreathed heads are pictured in the left background enjoying the concert. The first musician figured in the left of the picture is a woman whose instrument or attribute is unreadable due to the fresco’s damage. The female figure wears a wreathed headdress and is donned in a sleeved tunica. She is seated with her legs crossed and has a stool to support her feet. The female musician turns toward the male aulos, or flute player, who is rendered at the center of the composition. He is seated facing forward and is dressed in long

\textsuperscript{70} Ruggerio, Storia del gi Scavi di Ercolano, 340-1.

\textsuperscript{71} Richardson Jr., A Catalog of Identifiable Figure Painters, Ragghianti, The Painters of Pompeii, and Sampaolo, La Pittura Pompeiana cite the two male figures as Achilles and Patroclus.
elegant robes. A third musician flanks the aulos player on the right side. This young female figure is shown in near profile while she plays the cithara. The young woman’s hair is adorned with flowers. She looks out at the viewer, while her delicate hand is suspended in the air following a stroke of her instrument. The last fresco that makes up this “collection” is the toilette scene at the center of this investigation, cataloged in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli as MN 9022 (Figure A-2).

The four frescoes were all similarly framed, square in shape, and of comparable size and figural proportions. Paderni stated in a February 26, 1761 letter to King Charles III that the group was of fine quality and high merit but also ends by writing “all the paintings, or rather the fragments, are of great merit, but by various authors.” This statement makes it clear that he believed the frescoes were created by various painters and therefore not a unified collection in the sense of authorship.

Lawrence Richardson Jr. employed Morelli’s and Beazley’s technique of careful observation of details in a figure painter’s rendering of eyes, ears, hands, and feet. Richardson, like Paderni, believes the “collection” of four framed frescoes can be assigned to various authors, some of whom he has named and identified with other works in Campania. He attributes the toilette scene in MN 9022 to the Principe di Montenegro Painter, while asserting that the “Concerto” (MN 9021) was created by the Bisogno Painter and “L’Attore Re” (MN 9019) and

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72 Weber reports the approximate sizes of the fresco in his Feb. 21, 1761 letter to King Charles III as follows MN 9019: 1 pal. y ¼, MN 9020: 1 pal. y 9 on. por 18 on., MN 9021: 1 pal. y 9 on. por 18 on., MN 9022: 1 pal. y 9 on. por 18 on. See Ruggerio, Storia degli Scavi di Ercolano, 339-340.

73 From Paderni’s Feb 26, 1761 letter to King Charles III: “che tutte le pitture o se vogliam dire le frag. sono tutte di sommo merito ma sono di vari autori.” Ruggerio, Storia degli Scavi di Ercolano, 342.
“Due Eroi” (MN 9020) were of unique and non-attributable authorship. Although Paderni highly praised the “great merit” of MN 9022’s artful composition and draftsmanship, Lawrence is more critical in his assessment stating the Principe di Montenegro painter’s:

figures are painted in a rather heavy palette too dark and tending too much yellow and red in the flesh of male figures, too chalky in the flesh of women. The earmarks of the painter’s style are easily recognized. The heads are long and narrow with an odd fullness and softness to the oval jaw, as if the chin were held pulled back. The facial expression is one of abstraction and worry and tends to be understated. The eyes are small and thin, slightly raised brows only the upper lid is distinctly marked. Nose and ear are elongated the nose usually unhooked, the ear set high and poorly studied but with a distinct lobe tight against the jaw. The forehead is always excessively high and the hair fits over into a cap. The neck is usually distinctly long. The arms are almost always short and light, but the hands are of good size, although poorly drawn… the painter is fond of adding lines and patches of shadow in several gradations to the figures in finishing his pictures; although he observes the rule of light source he works within the reverse logic, the darkest shadows falling on the most important figures.

In addition to Richardson’s assessment of the Herculaneum Palestra “collection,” Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti evaluated frescoes from Campania in an effort to establish stylistic trends and links among the authorship and workshops of fresco painters in the Vesuvian cities of Herculaneum, Pompeii, and Stabiae, as well as in outlying Campanian villas. Unlike Richardson, Ragghianti believed that MN 9019, MN 9020, MN 9021, and MN 9022 were created by the same fresco painter, to whom he bestows the title of Maestro “Ellenico.” This title refers to the classical style and themes Ragghianti believed the Third Style painter appropriated from Athens.

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74 Richardson also assigns the fresco MN 9816 Peresus freeing Andromeda by the Principe di Montenegro Painter to the Herculaneum group where most scholars believe this fresco came from Pompeii. Richardson Jr., *A Catalog of Identifiable Figure Painters*, 34-5, 80.

75 Richardson Jr., *A Catalog of Identifiable Figures Painters*, 80-1.

Through an examination of the large corpus of Campanian wall painting, Ragghianti suggested that the Maestro “Ellenico’s” work was identifiable through the characteristics of “transparent liquidity of color.” He stated that the fresco painter was distinguished by:

an architecture of graded and graduated planes, very pure and simple of deliberate and ordered rhythms in the luminous space and of elegant volumes and often he loves to use backgrounds all of one deep and resonant color. The range of colors is extremely frugal and of a transparency that is at times a concealing veil, but always divided into areas as if to keep virgin the original mineral pureness of the colors, the lights and darks are calculated so as to integrate the generally contemplative nature of the volumes and at the same time be a vital confirmation of the planes. There is a deliberate “archaism” and unmistakable, that is to say, an unambiguous turning of the attention to the forms of the fifth and fourth century B.C.

Despite the fresco painter’s work in Campania, the Maestro “Ellenico’s” classicizing style and inspiration may also reveal his Hellenic fresco training and heritage. The substantial number of Greek inscriptions and classical elements incorporated in Vesuvian wall painting during the late Republic and early Empire confirms the prevalence of Greek artisans working in Rome and Campania. This master’s style and subjects suggest that the painter may have been a Greek artisan, or was trained in a local, Campanian workshop in the classicizing style.

Although scholars may never agree upon the attribution of the four fresco fragments as a collection created by the same master’s hand, MN 9019, MN 9020, MN 9021, and MN 9022 do display similarities in the rendering of the figures, their drapery, and the painted white, green, and red Third Style framing device. These qualities in addition to the frescoes’ relative size, scale, and classicizing style, reveal that the paintings may not only have been created by the same master, but potentially decorated the same space. What detracts from this theory is that the


78 Ragghianti, *The Painters of Pompeii*, trans. by Shirley Bridges, 47.

four scenes display no obvious connection in theme or subject matter that would further substantiate their original placement in a single chamber. Despite the various genre, mythological, and theatrical scenes the four frescoes depict, their discovery, as framed and grouped, leaning against one another, suggests that regardless of their original location they may have been set aside for reuse in a single chamber.

While MN 9022’s relationship to the other framed fresco scenes discovered in the Herculaneum Palestra complex deserves more in-depth study, the focus of this thesis will attend to the questions of who and what the toilette scene in MN 9022 represents. Chapters 3 and 4 include an examination of the iconography exhibited in Roman art that features the priestess and bride in an effort to link these scenes to the imagery and iconography included in MN 9022.
CHAPTER 3
REPRESENTATIONS OF THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN PRIESTESS

What’s in a Name: What Previous Interpretations of MN 9022 Reveal and Concel

The interior domestic setting, cosmetic accoutrements, and presence of a female servant indicate that the scene in MN 9022 portrays an elite woman’s toilette, but what this toilette actually represents is still subject to debate. Scenes that illustrate a woman’s toilette or *gynaeceum* have enjoyed a rich tradition of representation in the visual arts spanning from the ancient into the modern world. These scenes were created to convey multiple meanings and various functions.

The large corpus of Greek and Roman women’s domestic and toilette scenes were primarily intended to serve a funerary and or nuptial function. A third category recreated popular scenes from ancient literature, theatre, and mythology. Allusions to a Roman woman’s daily toilette and domestic activities were often transported to the fantastic, mythological, or allegorical realm. Mythological or allegorical references to the toilette and *gynaeceum* are illustrated through the numerous representations of Venus at her toilette and muses at work within the domestic setting, symbolizing mortal women’s art, music, and intellect on Campanian walls.¹

Lower classed “popular art,” which depict humorous and pornographic imagery of female prostitutes and flute girls on Greek symposia vessels and Roman brothel walls, was imagery of females created and intended for a privileged male audience.² In turn, domestic and feminine imagery of proper women within the *gynaeceum* may have been created for a privileged female

¹ Examples of women’s allegorical activities are the female painter MN 9018 from the Casa del Chirurgo, and the female concert displayed in MN 9023. For women producing art and music in the guise of Minerva, see Kampen, *Image and Status*, 101-102.

audience to serve as instructive examples of behavior or bestow a higher intellectual, allegorical, or religious message.³

While MN 9022 recreated the private interior of an elite woman’s toilette and ritual decking in Roman Campania, what does the scene actually tell us about the pictured event and its significance within the ancient Roman woman’s life? Besides the representation of domestic activity, what event does MN 9022 represent within Roman society, and why was this event worthy enough to capture in fresco?

Over the centuries, scholars have put forth various hypotheses attempting to determine what the decking in MN 9022 describes. The majority of scholars, art historians, classicists, and archaeologists employ the generic titles “Vestizione di una fanciulla” (Dressing of the young girl) or “Toilette delle donne” (Women’s toilette) when referring to the toilette scene depicted in MN 9022.⁴ I believe these generalized titles do not convey the actuality or significance of the event represented, or more accurately, the event for which the women pictured are carefully preparing. The preening illustrated in the Herculaneum fresco extended beyond the typical, daily woman’s toilette, which explains its preservation in fresco.

Those who do not adopt the generic titles “Toilette delle donne” or “Vestizione di una fanciulla” acknowledge the image’s ritual or religious associations. These scholars have posited two hypotheses for the ceremonial toilette scene illustrated in the Herculaneum fresco. Some have proposed that the scene represents the main female character’s preparation as a priestess readying to perform a religious sacrifice. The 1986 edition of the Le Collezioni del Museo Nazionale di Napoli, the Naples museum’s sponsored catalog, entitled the scene “Vestizione

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³ Kampen, Image and Status, 44, 82-83,105.

⁴ Kampen, Image and Status, 150 and Ragghianti, Pittori di Pompei, 55-57.
della Sacerdotessa” (Dressing of the Priestess) clearly identifying the young girl as a religious official.\(^5\)

The second hypothesis calls upon the rich visual tradition of Mediterranean bridal toilette scenes in fresco, vase painting, sculptural relief, and metal work, proposing that the Herculaneum fresco represents the prenuptial decking of a bride and her female family members in the bridal toilette.\(^6\)

Although the fresco’s meaning and context has been obscured by time for modern audiences, there is no doubt that the toilette scene presented in MN 9022 would have been read and understood by first-century Campanians. The fresco painter constructed his scene to include well known signs and iconography that would have informed the ancient viewer of the event taking place. Additionally, the toilette scene’s location and context within the *domus* may have further dictated its function and significance to the beholder. The following sections will explore the iconography presented in MN 9022 in an attempt to establish visual parallels with representations of the Roman priestess and bride.

### Toilette of the Roman Priestess?

The Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli has entitled and catalogued the toilette scene in MN 9022 (Figure A-2) “Vestizione della Sacerdotessa,” identifying the young woman receiving the attentive decking as a priestess. The 1986 edition of the *Le Collezioni del Museo Nazionale di Napoli* cited the glass pitcher, piece of cloth, vegetal branches, and decorated box included in the bottom right corner of the fresco scene as attributes confirming the young girl’s profession as a religious official. The most recent publication concerning the fresco in 2009

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\(^6\) Richardson Jr., *A Catalog of Identifiable Figure Painters*, 34-35.
entitled *La Pittura Pompeiana* made use of the established “Vestizione della Sacerdotessa” title, but did not discuss the fresco in terms of the young woman’s occupation, but rather focused on the painting’s Hellenic inspiration, thus opening the door for questions regarding the figure’s identity. Therefore, are the presence of “religious” objects included in the Herculaneum toilette scene enough evidence to successfully distinguish the young woman in MN 9022 as a priestess? This section will examine the costume, iconography, and objects included in MN 9022 in an effort to link this imagery to Roman representations of the priestess or female acolyte and substantiate the claim for the young woman’s identity as a religious official.

The principal character in MN 9022 is dressed in a violet colored *tunica* with gold embroidery at the hem. The *tunica* was fastened at the shoulders by gold clasps and then covered by a white overfolded garment. The young woman draws her right hand towards her left shoulder, which is enveloped by her olive green mantle. What does the young woman’s dress communicate, and can these garments identify her as a priestess or link her to a particular religious cult?

Representations of Roman religious costume varied to reflect the specific traditions and required dress code of a multitude of local and state sponsored cults. While priestesses adhered to their individual cult’s costume, they were traditionally depicted in the visual arts wearing an archaic or classical style *tunica* or Greek *chiton*, often with a highly belted Heraclean knot under the breasts. Many Roman priestesses are pictured with a mantle covering their heads bestowing

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7 Sampaolo and Bragantini, *La Pittura Pompeiana*, 162.

them with the appropriately pious and reverent air expected of religious officials.\(^9\) The covering of the head was not only a visual marker that identified a priest or priestess in the act of sacrifice, but also served to protect the religious official by concealing or obstructing their sight from potential evil omens that could make the sacrifice impure.\(^10\)

While these garments were often utilized in statuary, fresco, and vase painting scenes to represent priestesses, the women’s garments alone do not confirm their sacred rank.\(^11\) How then does the costume of the young woman in MN 9022 compare with the visual representation of garments worn by priestesses in Roman fresco and sculpture? Is it possible the “priestess” in MN 9022 may have served one of the most exalted feminine priesthodds as a Vestal Virgin?

Unlike other state endorsed feminine religious cults, the Vestals’ responsibilities and privileges were similar to those of male priestly colleges. The Vestals’ primary duty was to keep the sacred flame alive, which symbolized Vesta’s presence and the procreation and well being of Rome.\(^12\) The priestesses held a public and glorified role in Roman society. Because of their public persona many dedications and statues survive describing their unique costume and coiffure. Through the centuries the Vestals were depicted wearing a variety of dress and hairstyles. This diversity is illustrated through a series of statues that represented the priestesses in their ancient residence in the Atrium of the Vestals at the east end of the Roman forum (Figure A-7).

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Unfortunately, there are no extant representation of the Vestal Virgins in Campanian fresco, yet a marble head carved during the second century, which now resides in the British Museum in London (Figure A-8) exemplifies the specific dressing of the Vestals’ hair with a type of vitta known as influenza. The influenza was a red and white fillet of wool that was coiled around the head and tied at the back leaving long loops. The influenza in the British Museum sculpture appears on the Vestal’s head almost like a turban, which was then covered with her veil, known as a suffibulum. The incorporation of the wool infula and symbolic covering of the head with the suffibulum was believed to protect the priestess, allowing her to maintain pure during sacrificial activity.

The piece of cloth that rests on the wooden table in MN 9022 may be understood as a woolen vitta, but it is not distinguishable as the Vestal Virgins’ specific red and white infula. The Vestal Virgins’ appearance in Roman sculpture does not correspond to the garments and hair dressing of the young woman in MN 9022, therefore making her service to the cult of Vesta highly unlikely. Because the Vestal Virgins resided in and attended the sacred flame of Vesta in Rome, due to MN 9022’s Campanian manufacture, we may find more evidence for the young woman’s involvement in a religious cult that was fashionable in Campania during the first century C.E.

The oriental cult of Isis offered women, elite and non-elite, the opportunity to participate and hold influential roles within its organization. Women in the Roman world were not

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secluded from society, but were restricted or discouraged from engaging in public life. An ancient woman’s place was in the domestic realm as caretaker of the children and manager of the household duties. Therefore, women of all classes could use religion as a passage to social prestige and power. Sacred rites, such as the offering of sacrifices and liquid libations, were often performed in public forums and temples, providing the Roman women who served as priestesses and religious officials an avenue of recognition and visibility within the male dominated public sphere. In turn, imagery of feminine religious activity was commissioned and created to occupy public spaces. In addition to highly visible representations of the priestess within the public sphere, she is also featured in the Romans’ domestic decoration. Visual references to the oriental deity Isis are common throughout the public and private spheres of the Vesuvian cities.

In Pompeii, a public temple to Isis was erected next to the theatre, while small shrines and imagery associated with the goddess have been discovered in many private homes and villas. Fresco scenes that illustrate the costume of the cult’s religious officials were rendered on the portico walls, surrounding the Tempio d’Iside in Pompeii. The frescoes consisted of a series of Egyptian motifs that alternated with the figures of priests and priestesses of Isis in ceremonial attire. Two scenes, MN 8918 and MN 8923, (Figure A-9) depict women as an acolyte and a priestess of Isis offering visual evidence for women’s sacrificial duties to the cult.

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17 Heyob, The Cult of Isis Among Women, 79 and 98.

18 Only 7 of the 12 religious figures have survived, see Mauri and Gilbert, Roman Painting, 90. Pompeii VIII vii.28, Temple of Isis. South Portico surrounding the temple. Pompei: Piture e Mosaici, vol 8, 772 and 775-6, figs. 62 and 68. MN 8918 and MN 8923 attributed to Nozze di Ercole Painter by Richardson Jr. see Identifiable Figure Painters of Pompeii.
The oriental deity Isis enjoyed great popularity in Campania. Despite the Roman Senate’s and Augustus’ actions to subdue the foreign cult, Campania’s location as a trading and mercantile center introduced and propagated the worship of the Egyptian goddess in Italy.\textsuperscript{19} The goddess was connected with human, economic, and agricultural fertility and served as a healer aiding women in childbirth, making her one of the most prominent deities in the Egyptian Pantheon.\textsuperscript{20} Roman women identified with Isis because she was believed to have established the arts of spinning and weaving. She was portrayed as a model wife and mother equipped with, and able to display, human emotion.\textsuperscript{21} Roman representations pictured Isis dressed in white robes with a knot tied at the front of her garments symbolizing life.

In addition to the Tempio d’Iside frescoes, the cult’s religious costume is clearly illustrated in a statue from Rome (Figure A-10) that is believed to represent the goddess or a priestess of Isis’ cult. Priestesses are depicted in oriental-inspired white, fringed garments that consisted of a tunic and long fringed cloak with a knot at the center to imitate the symbolic attire of the goddess.\textsuperscript{22} Priestesses of Isis were figured in the costume of the goddess, often making it difficult to distinguish between the cult’s female officials and the goddess herself.\textsuperscript{23} Although women’s service to the cult of Isis may have been popular in Campania, the priestesses’ unique oriental costume does not correspond to the rich gold, purple, and olive garments of the young woman in MN 9022.

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\textsuperscript{19} Takacs, \textit{Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons}, 77.
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\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{20} Takacs, \textit{Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons}, 75.
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\textsuperscript{21} Heyob, \textit{The Cult of Isis Among Women}, 48.
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\textsuperscript{22} Croon, \textit{Roman Clothing and Fashion}, 113.
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\textsuperscript{23} Heyob, \textit{The Cult of Isis Among Women}, 100.
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Another foreign female deity that received worship throughout Rome was the goddess Cybele, known as *Magna Mater Deum*. On one of Pompeii’s main streets, the Via dell’Abbondanza, a merchant’s shop (IX, 7, 1) contains frescoed wall decoration illustrating the Procession of Cybele (Figure A-11). Worship of Cybele, the mother of the gods, originated in what is now modern day Turkey during the second millennium B.C.E. Cybele’s cult spread through Greece where she was connected with her partner Attis.\(^{24}\) The fresco painter visually described the activities associated with the cult and included references to Dionysus and Venus Pompeiana, as well as mortal followers and religious officials within the procession. The goddess Cybele is represented in the form of a seated cult statue that would have been carried by her followers on a litter known as a ferculum.\(^{25}\)

The cult statue is dressed in a deep plum-colored purple and white tunic. The prominent role women played in the cult of Cybele is illustrated through the inclusion of numerous female followers and priestesses within the fresco scene. Pictured to the left of the cult statue are two female figures that Vittorio Spinazzola identified as priestesses of the cult.\(^{26}\) The first priestess dons a vegetal crown and purple garment, the same color as Cybele’s, while the second also wears a vegetal crown and is dressed in a green robe.\(^{27}\)

Although the fresco has been badly damaged rendering it difficult to read, the robes of the priestesses and cult statue featured in the Procession of Cybele could be tenuously connected to


the garments of the young woman in MN 9022 through their similar purple-violet and olive colors. Additionally, the branches included on table in the toilette scene could be potentially connected to Cybele’s religious procession through their use as vegetal crowns. Unfortunately, the presence of vegetal branches and questionable link to Cybele’s costume alone is not substantial enough to confirm the young woman in MN 9022 as a priestess to the cult of Cybele. Is it possible then, that the young woman in MN 9022 may have served as one of the frenzied and uninhibited female members of the infamous cult of Bacchus?

One of the most renowned and enigmatic ancient fresco scenes was discovered in 1909 in the Villa dei Misteri located on the outskirts of Pompeii. The Villa dei Misteri was constructed in Pompeii between 250 and 200 B.C.E. under Samnite-Oscan rule. After the city came under Roman control in 89 B.C.E., the new owner “Romanized” the villa by painting the atrium and peristyle in Second Style decoration between 80-50 B.C.E. Later modifications were made to the villa between 50-30 B.C.E. that rebuilt and reorganized the rooms surrounding the atrium into three distinct areas.\(^\text{28}\)

Margarete Bieber has suggested that the divisions created gendered suites for the master and matron of the villa, while also leaving a third suite at the southwest corner of the residence for guests.\(^\text{29}\) Rooms 4 and 5 situated in the south of the villa, which opened out onto the western portico towards the Bay of Naples, have been proposed as the domina’s suite, leaving the north

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\(^{29}\) Bieber, “Review [Untitled]; Roman Bridal Drama at the Villa of the Mysteries,” 453.
end of the house to be utilized by male occupants. The cinnabar, red ground and subject matter of the wall decoration in rooms 4 and 5 connected the two spaces of this suite.

After decades of research and analysis, the life-sized megalographic fresco frieze in room 5 continues to offer more questions than answers. Although scholars continue to debate the purpose, origin, and interpretation of the chamber’s wall decoration, the room’s overt feminine and Dionysiac imagery had led many to suggest the fresco cycle portrays women’s ritual activity and initiation into the mystery cult of Bacchus.

The mystery cult of Bacchus was assimilated into Roman religion through the syncretism of Greek Dionysus and Etruscan Liber. Dionysus/Bacchus is one of the most complex and multifaceted Greco-Roman gods. The god has many roles and images, which are often contradictory to one another. Dionysus served as the patron deity of music and theater, the inventor of wine and intoxicated madness, and the god of fertility. He is portrayed in Greco-Roman art and literature as industrious and destructive, but also charitable and loving.

The god is represented on the east wall of the megalographic cycle, which immediately confronts the viewer as he or she enters room 5. Bacchus is rendered as a young, ivy crowned,

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31 Clarke, The Houses of Roman Italy, 95-96.


Unlike the thiasus of ecstatic animal skin clad maenads and followers of Dionysus that appear on Greek painted vessels, the Mysteries frieze presents severe and reverent female acolytes within the cycle attending to their ritual duties by carrying offering trays and pouring libations (Figure A-12). These female acolytes, known as \textit{camillae}, don vegetal crowns and appear in a variety of dress. The \textit{camillae} are attired in simple tunics with a long piece of fabric tied around the hips. The mantles the female acolytes wear around their hips were frequently included in Dionysiac sacrificial scenes to signify the wearer’s service to the cult of Bacchus.\footnote{Brendel, “The Great Frieze in the Villa of the Mysteries,” 93.}

White, yellow-gold, and purple are colors featured prominently throughout the fresco cycle in the figure’s garments. Saffron yellow and Dionysiac purple were both symbolic colors, indicative of the Roman cult of Bacchus.\footnote{LaFollette, “The Costume of the Roman Bride,” 62 n.18.} The female figure positioned with her back towards the viewer in scene 2 of the fresco cycle (Figure A-13) has been proposed as a priestess or initiate of the mystery cult.\footnote{Otto Brendel cited the women dressed in white in scene 2 as a priestess in “The Great Frieze.” Jocelyn Toynbee believed the woman is an initiate in “The Villa Item and a Bride’s Ordeal,” \textit{The Journal of Roman Studies}, vol 19 (1929): 67-87. Especially pages 73, and PB Cooke offered the possibility that the female figure in white might be a priestess.} The woman is draped in white robes and wears a white head
covering, similar to a kerchief. The female figure’s head is then decorated by vegetal leaves, which Jocelyn Toynbee has suggested are myrtle branches and Otto Brendel as olive.\(^{40}\)

While the various costumes of the cult officials and followers presented in the Mysteries frieze share the similar colors of white, yellow-gold, and purple, with the young woman’s garments in MN 9022, the intricate embroidery and gold fastening of her dress are not translated into the costume of the acolytes and priestess featured in the megalographic fresco cycle. Although the similar colored garments of MN 9022 and the Mysteries cycle is a potential link, I believe because of the variety and quality of these garments, the colors alone do little to confirm or repudiate the young woman in MN 9022 as a priestess of the mystery cult.

Because of the vast array of religious costume, it may be impossible to determine the identity of the female character in MN 9022 based on her garments alone. Instead we must look to the objects or attributes the fresco painter included in toilette scene as a way to potentially signify her status as a priestess.

Among the responsibilities of Greek and Roman priestesses was the maintenance and caretaking of cult objects. Items that were sacred and significant to the cult were included in visual representations as attributes intended to communicate the priestess’ status and participation within a specific cult. Greek painted vessels and Roman wall painting include a variety of sacrificial and religious paraphernalia to suggest religious activity. These objects often included the presence of sacrificial baskets, temple keys, sacred cista, libation jugs or dishes, and

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\(^{40}\) Toynbee, Jocelyn “The Villa Item and a Bride’s Ordeal,” 73-74 and Brendel, “The Great Frieze,” 93.
vegetal branches, as well as items that communicated a religious setting such as an altar or incense burner.

Therefore, can the wool *vitta*, glass pitcher, vegetal branches, and decorated chest included in MN 9022 be viewed among the catalog of religious objects used to signifying sacred activity? How were these objects and other symbolic attributes utilized to depict the priestesses of Isis, Cybele, and Bacchus and communicate their status and responsibilities within the cult?

Archaeologists have uncovered numerous visual references to the cult of Isis that were integrated within the public and domestic fabric of the Vesuvian cities. The previously mentioned frescoes that decorated the portico of the Tempio d’Iside in Pompeii provide visual reference to the sacrificial activities of the oriental cult through the attributes included within the painted scenes (Figure A-9). In addition to the visual record, the Roman author Apuleius described the procession of Isis in his novel *Metamorphoses*, (XI 9-10).

Women, resplendent in their white robes, happily carry different kinds of emblems and decked in spring flowers, strewed the ground with blooms, drawn to their breasts, along the path that the holy company trod…a great number of people, besides, both men and women, carried lamps, torches, candles and other kinds of artificial lights to win the favor of the goddess who is in the origin of the stars and the sky…then the crowds of those already initiated into the sacred mysteries poured in, men and women of every rank and age, shining in the pure whiteness of their linen robes. The women had swathed their hair, dripping with perfume, in transparent veils. The men had shaved their heads completely to leave a glistening pate. All together they shook their *sistrums* that were bronze, silver, even gold, to make a piercing rattle.41

Sacred objects such as the *sistrum*, a distinctive rattle-like noisemaking instrument employed in the ceremony, the *situla* of Isis, a golden vessel, which is believed to have contained

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41 Translation from Beard, North, and Price, *Roman Religions* vol 2, 135.
water from the Nile, symbolizing Osiris, and a pail containing milk for sacrificial libations are all present in the Tempio d’Iside frescoes but do not appear in MN 9022.\textsuperscript{42}

Additionally, a Fourth Style fresco scene from the mid first century C.E. that illustrates a religious ceremony of the cult of Isis from Herculaneum, MN 8924 (Figure A-14) includes the iconographic objects of the palm branch, \textit{sistrum}, and \textit{situla}, but leaves the glass pitcher, \textit{vitta}, leaved vegetal branch, and gold chest from MN 9022 conspicuously absent. The lack of proposed “religious” objects from MN 9022 in representations of the cult of Isis, in addition to the absence of the signature attributes of this cult in MN 9022 provides no evidence for the young woman’s connection to the cult of Isis.

The fresco on the Via dell’Abbondanza that portrays the procession of Cybele also contains iconographic objects specific to Cybele’s cult. The goddess’ followers carry gold \textit{patera}, baskets for offerings, and musical instruments such as cymbals, \textit{tympanum}, and the Phrygian flute, which were utilized in the deity’s loud and ecstatic procession.\textsuperscript{43} These attributes are echoed in a Roman representation of Cybele carved in low relief (Figure A-15), but were not included in MN 9022.

The priestesses in the Via dell’Abbondanza procession are depicted wearing vegetal crowns. One of the women carries a \textit{patera} and a vegetal branch, while a priest holds up Cybele’s cista, which was identifiable by its cylindrical red lid.\textsuperscript{44} The cista was a vessel that contained items sacred to the cult, much in the way the tabernacle is used in the Catholic Church. Although the shape, size, and coloring of the cista in the Procession of Cybele fresco does not

\textsuperscript{42} Heyob, \textit{The Cult of Isis Among Women}, 97, 99, 101.

\textsuperscript{43} Beard, North, and Price, \textit{Roman Religions} vol 2, 211.

\textsuperscript{44} Clarke, \textit{Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans}, 91.
correspond to the gold and white chest included in MN 9022, as previously mentioned, vegetal branches are present in both scenes.

Vegetal branches make several appearances in the Via dell’Abbondanza fresco (Figure A-11). The cult statue of Cybele is shown holding a long golden branch with thin leaves in her left hand. The head priest of the cult is depicted carrying a green twig in his right hand, and the priestess dressed in the dark purple robe holds up a branch in her right hand. The prominence of vegetal branches may allude to Cybele’s consort Attis. Cybele’s companion Attis castrated himself in a love-crazed frenzy incited by the goddess. Flowers grew from the earth Attis bled onto because of his self sacrifice to the goddess. Nearing death, Attis was turned into a pine (or fir) tree, symbolizing the agricultural cycle of death and rebirth. Attis’ cycle of sacrifice, death, and rebirth “represented a promise of reborn life” and was later paralleled to Christ’s rebirth by the early Christians. Additionally, pine was used as an antiseptic and purifying agent in the ancient world. Women used pine during childbirth because they believed the branches possessed qualities that would aid in the health and purity of the mother and newborn child.

While pine branches were considered a sacred attribute to Attis and in turn Cybele’s cult, vegetal branches such as olive, laurel, palm, myrtle, and vine leaves were symbolic attributes to a variety of Greco-Roman gods and religious cults. Although a leaved vegetal branch has been included prominently in MN 9022, I do not believe it can be identified as the pine or fir variety.

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47 In addition to the resurrection, further parallels include the pine tree as connected to the cross of Christ, and Cybele as the Virgin Mary. For more connections see A.T.Fear, “Cybele and Christ,” in *Cybele, Attis and Related Cults.* ed. Eugene Lane 35-50 (New York: EJ Brill, 1996).

sacred to Cybele. Additionally, this single attribute, without the definitive presence of a red-lidded cista, *tympanum*, or even an offering dish such as a gold *patera*, cannot convincingly connect the young woman in MN 9022 to the cult of Cybele.

Much like the objects included in the Procession of Cybele and Isis fresco scenes, the items pictured in the Villa dei Misteri fresco cycle are believed to have communicated and symbolized the religious activities preformed by the mystery cult of Bacchus. In scene 2 of the megalographic frieze, a female acolyte is shown pouring water from a small pitcher in what has been interpreted as the purification of the priestess or initiate before the ritual activities. Despite the vessel’s large size and glass material, the glass pitcher figured in MN 9022 could possibly have served a similar function in the transportation and pouring of libations or purification. In addition to the possible libation vessel, both the toilette scene and Mysteries frieze include leaved vegetal branches that can potentially be identified as myrtle or olive. While these attributes are encouraging, it should be noted that libation vessels and vegetal branches can be connected to many religious scenes and are not specific to the Roman cult of Bacchus.

Dionysiac attributes included in the Mysteries frieze are theater masks identifying the god as the patron of theater, ivy covered *thyrsus*, the inclusion of large wine vessels, and the action of wine drinking, alluding to the god’s role in agriculture and the cultivation of wine. Additionally, Bacchus’ association with fertility and revelry is suggested through inebriated satyrs and musical instruments, such as cymbals, which were believed to have been utilized in the cult’s ecstatic and religious ceremonies.

Unfortunately for this inquiry, MN 9022 lacks the specific Dionysiac iconography of theater masks, wine vessels, *thyrsus*, as well as the obvious mythological inclusion of satyrs.
Likewise, the *vitta* and decorated chest have not been included within the repertoire of religious objects found in the Mysteries frieze.

The lack of a distinctive religious object, such as a *tympanum, infula, thyrsus, sistrum*, or even the generic priestly attribute of a *patera* in MN 9022 makes connecting the young woman’s service to a particular Roman cult as a priestess problematic. Consequently, questions regarding the young woman’s identity remain.

In addition to Roman sculptures and painted frescoes, the majority of Greek and South Italian vase painting scenes that represent priestesses capture them in the act of presenting offerings on *patera*, pouring sacrificial libations, or implementing sacred rites, such as the choosing and decorating of sacrificial animals. The purpose of these images was to illustrate the performance of feminine religious activity that visually articulated and legitimized a woman’s elevated status and public role in Greek and Roman society as a priestess. Why then would the painter of MN 9022 depict the “priestess” in the toilette preparing for, but not performing, the religious activities that defined and validated her purpose as religious official?

Although *Le Collezioni del Museo Nazionale di Napoli* suggested that the *vitta*, glass pitcher, vegetal branch, and decorated chest in MN 9022 are items the fresco painter included to communicate the priestess’ occupation, these objects are also associated with the bride in both Greek vase paintings and Roman frescoes. Because the toilette scene’s limited religious iconography makes it unfeasible to definitively attribute the young woman’s identity as a priestess, Chapter 4 will examine the iconography of MN 9022 in relation to representations of the Roman bridal toilette.
CHAPTER 4
REPRESENTATION OF THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN BRIDE

Toilette of the Roman Bride?

While the priestess was traditionally represented in the act of performing sacred rites, the ancient Mediterranean bride was often figured in her toilette receiving the attentive decking of attendants and female family members. The rich tradition of Greco-Roman prenuptial toilette scenes has encouraged and provides support for a second hypothesis for the young woman’s identity in MN 9022 as a bride.

Because the female figure’s costume and accoutrements cannot definitively link her to a specific religious cult, could these rich garments reveal her status as a bride? Does the costume of the young woman and objects in MN 9022 adhere to the tradition of Roman bridal toilettes described by ancient authors and visual representations? To answer these questions we must first return to the Second Style megalographic fresco frieze that decorates the walls of room 5 in the Villa dei Misteri.

Chapter 3 discussed the frieze in terms of its portrayal of the mystery cult of Bacchus’ initiation rites. While the fresco cycle’s religious associations and subsequent interpretations make the Mysteries cycle problematic, scholars have also proposed that the frescoes display imagery and iconography associated with nuptial activity and the divine realm of Venus.¹ This interpretation has led Alan Little to suggest that room 5’s feminine and nuptial imagery reveals the space’s function as a prenuptial toilette and bridal chamber for the domina’s family.²


² Alan Little, A Roman Bridal Drama at the Villa of the Mysteries (Wheaton, 1972), 9-10 and Longfellow, “Gendered Space? Location and Function of Room 5 in the Villa of the Mysteries,” 24-37. Scholars continue to
Scene 9 of the megalographic cycle (Figure A-16) the “Decking of the Bride,” was rendered in the southwest corner of the chamber. The scene is believed to depict a young bride in her toilette. While the young woman in MN 9022 is robed in violet, white, olive, and gold, the seated bride from the Villa dei Misteri appears in a long white and yellow-gold garment belted by a purple sash.

Festus (55.20 L) and Pliny the Elder (NH 8.124) reported that the traditional dress of the Roman bride was the tunica recta, a garment woven by the bride on an “old fashioned” upright loom.³ The bride’s act of weaving the tunica recta was symbolic; representing the responsibility she gained as a wife and mother to weave her family’s garments.⁴ The white nuptial garment was reported to have been tied with a belt of pure ewe’s wool and fastened with a Heraclean knot that only the bridegroom had the privilege of untying, leading to the modern expression “tying the knot.”⁵ Although not the typical all white tunica described by ancient authors, the young woman’s yellow-gold and purple-violet garments in the Mysteries cycle may illustrate the Roman bride’s tunica recta and Heraclean knot within the larger Dionysiac context of the chamber.

A female servant and two Cupid or Eros figures attend to the young woman in scene 9. The first Eros is figured to the left of the young woman. He holds a mirror for the bride, in which we can see her reflection. The second Eros is pictured admiring the young bride from behind her and her maid on the adjacent wall.

⁵ D’Ambra, Roman Women, 74.
The inclusion of Eros, the demigod of love, signifies the presence of Venus and nuptial activity in the same way the frieze’s representation of satyrs suggests the divine presence of Bacchus. Additionally, the company of Venus may be conveyed throughout the fresco cycle by what Jocelyn Toynbee has proposed are myrtle leaves in vegetal crowns worn by the female acolytes and priestess. Myrtle was sacred to Venus and utilized in marriage ceremonies in ancient weddings. The leaved branches still appear today in modern nuptial ceremonies.

Among the accouterments displayed in Greek and Roman bridal toilette scenes are objects one would expect to find in any woman’s toilette. Attendants present brides with jewelry boxes, mirrors, and cosmetic or perfume containers. The gold and white decorated chest in MN 9022 could easily be identified as a jewelry box or cosmetic container used for the ritual bedecking of the bride. In addition to the objects, which aided in the obligatory preening and gift giving, the glass pitcher rendered underneath the table in MN 9022 may also allude to the ritual events that occurred within the Greek and Roman bride’s prenuptial toilette.

The glass pitcher may be significant to MN 9022’s potential nuptial context as a vessel utilized in the transportation and pouring of the bridal bath water. In the Greek world the *loutrophoros*, or bath carrier, was a specific vessel employed to transport bridal bathwater to the prenuptial chamber. Both the bride and groom symbolically washed and purified themselves for their entrance into a new married way of life.

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The ritual decking of the bride included bathing, adornment, and dressing of her hair. The bride in scene 9 of the Mysteries frieze is shown separating her hair in sections. Ovid and Plutarch reported that Roman brides wore a signature six-locked hairstyle, known as a *seni crines*. Literary sources described the bride’s hair dressing as parted with a *hasta caelibaris*, a “celibate spear,” and then arranged in six plaited locks bound by woolen *vittae*. Fillets and *vittae* are found in a variety of scenes ranging from athletic competitions to religious sacrifice, but are also significant objects in wedding iconography.

The bride’s intricate coiffure was then adorned with a vegetal crown constructed from aromatic herbs that the bride had gathered, such as marjoram and myrtle. Visual and literary evidence of the bride’s signature coiffure is linked to MN 9022 through the woolen *vitta* and vegetal leaves that are prominently displayed within the toilette scene on the wooden table top.

Surprisingly, neither the “Decking of the Bride” from the Mysteries cycle nor MN 9022 contains what ancient authors define as the Roman bride’s most signature attribute, the flame-colored mantel known as the *flammeum*. Pliny the Elder described the *flammeum* as egg yolk in color. The mantel was pulled forward to conceal the bride’s vegetal wreath and coiffure.

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11 Why the *hasta caelibaris* was employed to part the bride’s hair is unknown. Scholars have suggested use of the spear drew out evil spirits that resided in the hair, or that the spear symbolized Rome’s first wives, the Sabine women, through their military capture. D’Ambra, *Roman Women*, 74 and LaFollette, “The Costume of the Roman Bride,” 60.


13 Catullus mentions marjoram (amaracum) “Bind your brows with flowers of fragrant marjoram, put on the wedding veil.” 61.6-7 Myrtle and marjoram were both sacred to Venus. See LaFollette “The Costume of the Roman Bride,” 56, 62 and D’Ambra, *Roman Women*, 74.

Roman bride’s ornately dressed hair was to remain hidden until she was unveiled by her new husband. The symbolic veiling and unveiling was so important to the tradition of Roman marriages that the Latin word to marry, *nubere*, also means to veil oneself. Instead, the *flammeum* appears in the last scene of the Mysteries frieze, commonly titled the “Domina” (Figure A-17), which figures a richly robed and veiled woman seated on a kline.

Some scholars believe scene 10 portrays the bride from the previous fresco scene awaiting her bridegroom on the bridal bed, known as a *lectus genialis*. The scene’s nuptial context is conveyed through what has been suggested as *tabella*, or marriage contract, which lays next to the domina on the bed, and the wedding ring the woman displays on her hand.

The woman is dressed in rich yellow-gold, purple, and white garments, which correspond to the hues of other garments included throughout the fresco. Otto Brendel has identified the female figure’s yellow mantel as the bridal *flammeum* and believes the purple *praetexta* stripe at the border is indicative of not only the scene’s Dionysiac context, but also the woman’s new social status and privileges as wife and domina.

A Third Style fresco scene discovered in what has been proposed as a women’s triclinium in the Villa Imperiale in Pompeii (VIII.1a) near the Porta Marina also depicts a bride and her attendants in the *gynaeceum* (Figure A-18). Amedeo Maiuri, the archaeologist overseeing the

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Pompeii excavations, stated the fresco was “obviously a marriage scene, and recalls the Aldobrandini Wedding both in its setting and the arrangement and expression of the figures.”

The bride carries a shy and contemplative countenance in her gaze and posture. She is pictured seated on the nuptial bed within the *gynaecaeum* or bridal chamber. Beside her is a younger woman, gazing at the bride in a similar manner to the girl who leans on her mother in MN 9022. On the left of the composition a female attendant is pictured carrying what appears to be a flabellum. Much like the domina from the scene 10 of the Mysteries frieze, the bride from the Villa Imperiale has already been unveiled by the bridegroom and now wears the *flammeum* on the back of her hair like a *palla*.

The *flammeum* is believed to have served as the definitive attribute of the Roman bride, but it is conspicuously absent from both the “Decking of the Bride” (Figure A-16) and MN 9022. Perhaps this absence can be explained because the female figures are pictured within the toilette, in the process of having their hair dressed. Their coiffures will not be ready for the finishing touch of the *flammeum* until the bride is ready to leave her toilette and commence with the marriage ceremony. Frescoes, such as the example in the Villa Imperiale, that portray the bride after the toilette and marriage ceremony as she waits on the *lectus genialis*, include the *flammeum*, but picture the garment on the back of the newly wedded and unveiled bride’s head.

Despite the lack of the definitive *flammeum* in MN 9022, the young woman’s golden footwear may provide further evidence for her status as a bride. The Roman poet Catullus described the bride’s yellow slipper, known as the *luteum soccum*, in the “Wedding Song for Manilus and Vinia.” Additionally, visual evidence of the bride’s yellow or golden slippers is

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illustrated by two frescoes also believed to represent brides and female attendants as they await the arrival of their bridegrooms on the *lectus genialis*. The fresco scene known as the “Aldobrandini Wedding” (Figure A-19) and a fresco fragment from Pompeii now in the British Museum collection (Figure A-20) represents the Roman bride’s *luteum soccum*.\(^{21}\) The visual and literary evidence of the bride’s footwear corresponds to the yellow slippers the young woman in MN 9022 wears.

To summarize, the interior domestic setting and presence of female family members and attendants found in MN 9022 is consistent with the location and activities of the bridal scenes in the Villa Imperiale, Mysteries frieze, and Aldobrandini Wedding frescoes. Additionally, traces of the young woman’s rich clothing in MN 9022, especially her golden slippers, are echoed by Roman frescoes of brides in their toilettes and bridal chambers. While the iconographic objects of *vitta*, myrtle leaves, jewelry box, and vessel for bridal bathwater are suggestive of MN 9022’s nuptial context, the toilette scene also lacks the signature *flammeum* or presence of Venus and Cupids that would more clearly articulate the fresco’s matrimonial function to modern audiences.

The imagery of brides and Aphrodite/Venus has been indelibly linked to the toilette through centuries of Greek and Roman representations. Many Greco-Roman bridal scenes incorporated mortal men, demigods, and deities all within the same scene, blurring the boundaries of reality and mythology. The next section will discuss the numerous representations of Venus at her toilette from Campania, which I believe served as an allegorical visual reference to the Roman bride’s prenuptial toilette.

\(^{21}\) J.J. Winckelmann has suggested that the Aldobrandini Wedding fresco represents the marriage of Peleus and Thetis, while Frank Muller asserts both the British Museum fragment and the Aldobrandini Wedding fresco represent Phaedra and Hippolytus. See Frank GJM Muller, *The Aldobrandini Wedding: Iconological Studies in Roman Art III* (Amsterdam: JC Gieben, 1994) and The British Museum Research Collection Database. http://www.britishmuseum.org/research.aspx.
The Roman Bride and Allegorical Link to the Toilette of Venus in Fresco

The ancient divide between the divine or mythological realm and that of mortal reality was much different from our modern mentality. Gods and mythological beings lived within the same world and came into contact with mortal Greeks and Romans. Deities and mortals were therefore part of the same human experience, and in the case of Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, crossed over into the divine realm.22 The mixing of mythology and reality is expressed through artistic representations. Otto Brendel believes that “through art which itself is invention, can the representation of these two worlds meet so easily, without reservation.”23

During the first and second centuries C.E., the wealthy elite sought to promote their association with the gods and conflate their status by casting themselves in the guise of deities through the visual arts. These representations became known as the mythological portrait, and the portrait genre became a popular way for elite women to have themselves immortalized in fresco and stone.

The majority of these portraits depicted wealthy women in the guise of the sensual and semi-clad goddess Venus. Mythological portraits conformed to standard sculptural types such as the Capitoline and Knidian Venus, but with the individualized portrait and coiffure of the matron.24 While the nudity of these respectable women would have been viewed as indecent and scandalous, their mythological likeness as the goddess of sex and love justified and even called for nudity. Eve D’Ambra has pointed out that nudity in these mythological portraits was like a

costume.25 “The body of Venus summons the feminine arts of adornment, or cultus (cultivation), beauty regiment, cosmetics, and finery…the nudity of the portraits is not only acceptable, but desirable.”26

In the same way elite women were depicted nude or partially nude in the guise of Venus through mythological portraiture, agreeable and instructive representations of the bridal toilette and the young Roman bride’s duty to reproduce may have been allegorically transferred to a mythological realm through the numerous scenes of Venus’ toilette, creating a tasteful allusion to the expectations of sexuality, fertility, and reproduction that was conferred upon all young brides.

A fresco (MN 9088) from the triclinum 7 of the Villa di Arianna pictures a young woman seated cross-legged on a stool (Figure A-21). She wears a crimson robe, which she has allowed to slip off her shoulders and rest on her hips, leaving her breasts and torso bare. Reminiscent of the pose of the bride depicted in scene 9 of the Villa of the Mysteries (Figure A-16), the young woman holds out a piece of her hair and examines herself in the mirror she holds in her other hand. The young woman’s lack of garments and pose are suggestive of toilette scenes featuring Venus. The pose of the female figure appears to have been quoted from the painter Apelles’ “Aphrodite Anadyomene.” This painting would have been familiar to Roman audiences due to the work’s removal from Cos and placement in the shrine of Julius Caesar in Rome, as a tribute from his adopted heir Augustus.27

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27 Sampaolo and Bragantini, La Pictura Pompenian, 456.
The allegorical and iconographic association between the toilette of Venus and that of young Roman brides was so common that there are several frescoes where it cannot be determined if the female figure represents Venus or an elite Roman bride in her toilette. A fresco scene in cubiculum z from the Casa di M. Epidius Sabinus in Pompeii (IX, 1, 22) illustrates the difficulties of attribution modern viewers must content with as a result of the Romans’ frequent mixing of divine and mortal spheres in the visual arts. The fresco was damaged at the time of its discovery, which has compounded the task of identifying the female figure. The painted scene depicts Venus or a wealthy Campanian woman, presumably a bride, attended by maids in her toilette.

Among the numerous representations of Venus at her toilette discovered in the Vesuvian cities, many were located in secluded areas of the home or villa intended for the private viewing of the women of the house. This is exemplified by a fresco located on the east wall of a cubiculum from the Casa di M. Lucrezio Frontone (Pompeii V, 4, a). A nearly identical version of the Lucrezio Frontone toilette scene, by the same painter, was discovered in cubiculum 14 in the Casa Primo Piano (I, 11, 15) but was stolen from the excavation site in 1977.

Although many of Venus’ toilette scenes appear in women’s private cubicula and triclinia, representations of the goddess, often coupled with Mars, can also be found in more public spaces of the home. The north wall of the tablinum in the Casa di M. Lucrezio Frontone featured a Third

28 *Pompei: Pitture e Mosaici*, vol 10, 740.

29 *Pompei: Pitture e Mosaici*, vol 10, 740 and figure 208. “Un’altra scena di genre, ma da considerarsi quasi alla stregua di “vita quotidiana” era raffigurata nel quadro della parete S. dello stesso cubiculo (z) gia molto rovinato all’epoca dello scavo, ma documentato prima della totale scomprasa, oltre che da questo disegno. La rappresentazione viene definite Toletta di Venere; si vede una funcuilla che si avvicina con una cassettad una donna seduta, accanto alla quale sono altre due ancelle che la aiuteranno nella preparzione. Potrebbe essere in effetti una scena reale e non necessariamete riferita solo al mondo degli dei.”

30 *Pompei: Pitture e Mosaici*, vol 2, 637 fig 32, and vol 3, 997, fig 60. See also Richardson Jr., *A Catalog of Identifiable Figure Painters* attributed to the master of the Casa di M. Lucrezio Frontone Painter.
Style fresco scene of the marriage of Mars and Venus (Figure A-22). The nuptial activity of the two deities was communicated by the fresco painter’s inclusion of Hymen, the god of marriage in the center of the fresco’s composition, positioned behind cupid. Prominently displayed scenes including the union of Mars and Venus also occur on the south wall of the tablinum 8 in Casa di Meleagro (VI, 9, 2, MN 9256) and in tablinum f in the Casa dell’Amore Punito (VII, 2, 23, MN 9249).

As if mimicking the nuptial activities themselves, toilette scenes of Venus preparing for her amorous encounter with Mars appear in women’s private chambers, while scenes of their union or marriage are more often discovered in public spaces such as the atrium and tablinum, falling in line with the public ceremony and wedding procession of the bride and groom through the streets.

Chapter 5 will conclude my investigation through an interpretation of the iconography presented in MN 9022 and its connection to Roman religious and nuptial spheres. The visual evidence presented in scenes of the bride and priestess will be employed to decode, as well as substantiate, who and what I believe the toilette in MN 9022 portrays within the broader context of first-century Roman Campanian representations.

31 Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy*, 151.

32 Scholars have also interpreted the figure as Hermes, however the god should be figured with wings on his feet, not on his head. A god illustrated with wings on his head is Hymen, the god of marriage. Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy*, 156-7.

33 Sampaolo and Bragantini, *Pitture Pompeiana*, passim.

34 D’Ambra, *Roman Women*, 75-76.
CHAPTER 5
INTERPRETATIONS OF THE ICONOGRAPHY EXHIBITED IN MN 9022

Roman Priestess or Bride?

While an investigation of MN 9022 reveals that the fresco contains influences from both Roman religious and nuptial spheres, an interpretation of the scene must also take into account the painting’s Campanian production. A deeper examination of the toilette scene exposes the diverse geographic and cultural idioms working within the Bay of Naples.

Campania’s location on the southwest coast of ancient Italy meant that it was home to many port cities. These commercial ports served as conduits for the extensive trade of various Mediterranean ideas, cultural practices, and material goods. The Bay of Naples became a mixing pot for Etruscan, Hellenic, Phoenician, Egyptian, and native Italic influences, all which manifested themselves in the arts manufactured in Campania.

During the late Roman Republic and early Imperial periods, classical and Hellenistic art was reinterpreted for domestic display throughout Augustan Rome. The classicizing style and figural types emulated in MN 9022 can be understood as the “in vogue” style emanating from Rome during the first century, but also a result from Herculaneum’s direct contact with Greek artisans trained in the neoclassical style. MN 9022’s blend of Greek style and Roman elements in addition to its religious and nuptial iconography make modern interpretations of this multifaceted toilette scene difficult. Therefore, how do we approach a reading of the painting: as a Greek, Roman, bridal, or religious scene?

MN 9022’s Hellenic influence is exhibited through classicizing elements such as the women’s still and restrained countenances, the careful rendering of the figures and drapery, and the scene’s evenly weighted composition. The stance and drapery of the main character appear to have been appropriated from the Small Herculaneum Woman figural type, which was an original
Hellenistic statue, but utilized in Herculaneum for public display in the city’s theatre. In addition to visual quotations of Greek statuary, ancient textual sources provide evidence that connects the young woman in MN 9022 to the Greek bridal toilette. As discussed in Chapter 2, the elite status of the young woman was conveyed through the color of her violet tunica and jewelry. The second century B.C.E. author, Achilles Tatius, described the lavish preening and rich garments a Greek bride received on her wedding day, which corresponds to the adornment and violet tunica of the young woman in MN 9022:

She had a necklace of colored gems, and a dress all of purple, and in the place where on other dresses there is purple, on this dress there was gold. The gemstones vied with one another; the blue one was a rose in stone, and the amethyst burned bright at gold…the stone was encircled with gold, and looked like a golden eye. As for the dress the purple was not a second-rate dye, but that which the Tyrians say was discovered by the shepherd’s dog, with which even now they dye Aphrodite’s gown.\(^2\) (2.11.2-4)

The poet Sappho, writing in the early sixth century B.C.E., referred to the bride’s costume as iokolpos, meaning “with violet overfold.” This indicates that the expensive indigo garment Achilles Tatius described had been a traditional color for the dress of Greek brides. Since purple was the color associated with Aphrodite, its use may have signified that “the bride has passed into the sphere of the goddess with the beginning of her bridal preparations.”\(^3\)

While MN 9022 contains emblematic classical Greek and Hellenistic influences, the scene also discloses its Italian production through Roman elements, such as the young woman’s golden slippers and the glass pitcher figured under the wooden table.\(^4\)

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\(^2\) Achilles Tatius (2.11.1-4.) Translation from Oakley and Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 16.

\(^3\) Oakley and Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 16.

\(^4\) Naumann-Stecker, “Glass in Roman Wall Painting,” 86-98.
Because of the characteristic elements of both Greek and Roman culture, MN 9022 should not solely be understood as either a Greek or a Roman creation. Rather, it is a product of the Augustan classicizing style and the cross-cultural influences that coexisted in Campania. The toilette scene is not Greek or Roman, but distinctly Campanian. MN 9022 is not alone in its eclectic blend of Greek, Roman, religious, and nuptial influences. To understand the intricate mixing of imagery exhibited in MN 9022, we can look to the equally enigmatic Mysteries frieze as setting a standard and precedent for the integration of these visual spheres within Campania.

Much research and interpretation has gone into room 5 of the Villa dei Misteri’s megalographic wall decoration. Many twentieth-century scholars noted the fresco cycle’s Greek influence and subsequently examined the paintings as appropriations of original Greek works. The visual quoting that occurs in the Mysteries frieze led G. de Petra, P.B. Mudie Cooke, and Ludwig Curtius to propose that the painted frieze was a copy from earlier Hellenistic wall decoration.\(^5\)

Several scenes, including that of Dionysus and Ariadne, from the Mysteries frieze can be connected with figural groupings echoed in various media throughout the Mediterranean. The figural composition of the frescoed couple from the east wall of room 5 was reiterated through a terracotta figurine from Myrina, in the Louvre, a cameo from the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, a Domitianic coin from Smyrna, as well as a fresco from the triclinia of the Casa dei Vettii in Pompeii. A possible source for the Dionysus and Ariadne composition may be a Hellenistic period painting by Aristeides of Thebes. The painting was on display in the Tempio di Cerere in Rome during the time the Villa dei Misteri frieze was painted.\(^6\) In addition to the

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divine couple, the pose of the dancing female nude clashing cymbals on the southeast wall can be connected to a Neo-Attic relief of a maenad. Meanwhile, the leaning cupid figure from the “Decking of the Bride” composition takes on the traditional stance of Pothos.\(^7\)

A different interpretation of the villa’s decoration by Otto Brendel, Ernst Pfuhl, Amedeo Maiuri, Margarete Bieber, and more recently by John Clarke and Roger Ling, acknowledges room 5’s Hellenistic influences but understands the fresco cycle as drawing from the “visual repertoire that was available throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. The fact that this imagery appears in such a variety of media, periods, and locations erodes the foundation of the theory that the mural is strictly a copy after one particular earlier work of art.”\(^8\) These scholars believe the Campanian painter of the villa utilized and integrated a number of popular compositional types within the painted frieze, as opposed to copying the entire composition from a single prototype.\(^9\)

The Mysteries frieze discloses its original Campanian production through the painter’s arrangement of quoted figural scenes within the chamber’s complicated architectural organization of doors and windows.\(^10\) The way in which the groups of figures overlap and engage one another through interlocking glances unifies the fresco cycle. By drawing upon several periods and media found in Greek and Roman, the Mysteries frieze serves as a foundation for the practice of cross cultural mixing displayed in MN 9022.

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Additionally, the Mysteries frieze can be viewed as setting a visual precedent for the integration of nuptial and religious spheres, which occurs in MN 9022. The megalographic fresco cycle presents imagery and activities associated with the realms of Bacchus and Venus, communicating the idea that both deities had a role in Roman marital festivities. In addition to Bacchus’ status as the patron of the theatre, wine, and revelry, the Mysteries frescoes also display the god’s relationship with fertility and sexuality. Scene 6 on the east wall of the Villa dei Misteri is often interpreted as the “Likon Scene.” Michael Jameson has suggested the kneeling female figure is about to unveil a phallus, and reads the ritual as a “celebration of the life force, as a charm for fertility.”¹¹ Bacchus’ association with sexuality and fertility may explain why the god’s mystery cult was connected with Venus and women’s rites of passage. Both Venus and Bacchus were associated with sexuality and fertility, which was symbolically and physically realized through a young Roman woman’s marriage union and journey from maid, to matron, and later mother and domina of her family.

The collaboration of Bacchus and Venus was not only a part of the visual tradition, but was also exemplified in ancient literature. Otto Brendel noted that an episode in Virgil’s Aeneid parallels the sequence of events illustrated in the Mysteries frieze.¹² Unhappy with Lavinia’s betrothal to Aeneas, Amata, the queen of Latium, allows her daughter to be abducted into the woods by maenads. Amata, Lavinia, and the maenads partake in Bacchanalian revelry and cult rituals, inciting battle between the Trojans and Latium. Upon Aeneas’ victory, Lavinia is returned from the woods to be married to Aeneas. Brendel has identified equivalencies between

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this literary event and the cycle of events pictured in the Villa dei Misteri as a preparatory Dionysiac ritual followed by a wedding.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore the maenad and bride can be viewed similarly as participating in rites of passage. The visual and textual evidence suggests that the sequence of religious cult activity followed by a wedding ceremony may have been a common practice in Rome.

The mixing of nuptial and religious spheres did not only occur in relationship to the cult of Bacchus and Venus. As illustrated in Chapters 3 and 4, scenes of feminine priestly and prenuptial activity had mutual and overlapping iconographic elements, which were exhibited in Greek vase painting and Roman frescoes. Vegetal leaves were a common signifier of both marriage and religious events. The use of the Heraclean knot was utilized in the dress of both the priestess and the bride, as was the use of \textit{vittae} to bind their coiffures. The fact that the dress of many of the most visible women in Roman society, that is, appointed priestesses, conforms to that of traditional bridal garments grants us insight into the Romans’ conception of the shared liminal space and activities of nuptial and religious spheres.

The Vestal Virgins’ liminal status as brides, priestesses, and matrons is illustrated through their costume and hairdressing. The Vestals’ dress and coiffure was similar to the parting and wrapping of the bride’s \textit{seni crines}. Their hair was reported to have been plaited in the fashion of the Roman bride, and bound with woolen \textit{infula}. The priestesses’ coiffure was then covered with a mantle. In addition to the mantle the Vestals wore long, \textit{stola}-like garments, which were associated with the Roman matron.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} Brendel, “The Great Frieze,” 130.

\textsuperscript{14} Takacs, \textit{Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons}, 83.
Much in the way the Vestal Virgins’ dress and coiffure symbolized their liminal status, the Flaminica Dialis’ role as priestess was dependant on her marriage to the flamen of Jupiter. Her daily attire of the nuptial *flammeum* communicated her role as eternal bride.\textsuperscript{15} The ancient author Festus stated “the garment known as the *flammeum* is worn by the Flaminica Dialis that is the wife of the [Flamen] Dialis and the priest of Jupiter, the cloth of which is the same color of lighting.”\textsuperscript{16} The Roman author goes on to state “the bride is wrapped in the *flammeum* as a good omen, because the Flaminica, the wife of the Flamen [Dialis,] to whom divorce was not permitted, used to wear it constantly.”\textsuperscript{17}

The practice of overlapping nuptial and religious realms occurred at the official cult level, exemplified by the Vestal Virgins’ and Flaminica Dialis’ appearance, but also appeared in the average Roman’s daily activities. A shared iconographic language for brides and priestesses may be due in part to the practice of religious rites and sacrifice that took place prior to and during the wedding ceremony. Both Greek and Roman brides gave offerings before their wedding day. It was believed that a wedding signified a time of happiness and fulfillment in the bride’s and groom’s lives, causing them to be vulnerable to envy from the gods. Therefore, it was necessary for both the bride and groom to make sacrifices paying respect to the gods for their good fortune.\textsuperscript{18}

Artemis/Diana and Aphrodite/Venus received the majority of sacrifices from young brides. “In order to complete the passage to the sphere of Aphrodite, the bride had to propitiate also the

\textsuperscript{15} Takacs, *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons*, 114.

\textsuperscript{16} Festus 82.6 L, translation from LaFollette, “The Costume of the Roman Bride,” 55.

\textsuperscript{17} Festus 79.23 L, translation from LaFollette, “The Costume of the Roman Bride,” 55.

\textsuperscript{18} Oakley and Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 11.
goddess whose sphere she would leave, Artemis.”¹⁹ The bride would make offerings to the maiden goddess Artemis/Diana as a “penalty” or compensation for her loss of virginity in the marriage union.²⁰ The night before her wedding day, the Roman bride made sacrifices to the gods within her family’s home. The bride dedicated items such as dolls, toys, and breast bands, symbolic of her girlhood and passage into womanhood.²¹

The Romans’ practice of integrating religious and nuptial spheres exemplified their conception of how these entities were connected and interacted with one another on a daily basis. Religious, administrative, marital, commercial, and military realms were not specifically delineated, but rather frequently and un-problematically overlapped in the ancient Roman world. This may be a difficult concept for modern viewers because we live in a world that segregates and makes secular the activities we engage in outside of organized religion, but to the Romans, religion was an entity that touched all facets of life.

In the same way that the female figure from the Mysteries frieze may be understood as simultaneously a bride and Dionysiac initiate, the young woman in MN 9022 may be conceived within a similar framework of religious preparation or initiation followed by marital activities. The polysemy of the visual language and activities that fall within the religious and nuptial context complicate our modern reading of MN 9022. It is difficult to identify the young woman definitively as a Roman bride or priestess because she may be both.

Brendel’s notion of the relationship between Dionysiac rites and wedding ceremonies, both of which served to “transfer human beings from one station in life to another,” can be employed

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²¹ Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy*, 10.
to support an interpretation of MN 9022’s integrated nuptial and religious associations. Brendel states:

Wedding rites are intended to detach the bride from her original family and admit her to a new one. Mystical initiations transfer human beings into a new religious frame of mind and, at the same time, award them a new and higher religious degree. Mystical initiations and weddings are indeed comparable.

It is likely that MN 9022 would have been read and understood by first-century Campanian audiences within the same vein as the “Decking of the Bride” from the Villa dei Misteri frieze. MN 9022 is no ordinary toilette scene. The painter purposefully included the vegetal branches, vitta, decorated box, and glass pitcher to communicate both the event taking place and the young woman’s status. The fact that all these iconographic objects and the young woman’s violet-gold dress can be understood simultaneously within the religious and nuptial context is not a coincidence. The fresco is a snapshot-like image documenting a stage in the young woman’s rite of passage. I believe what the fresco painter intended to capture was the liminal stage between preparatory religious rites and wedding ceremony, which occurred within the bride’s toilete allowing her to simultaneously be understood as an initiate or priestess, and bride.

Conclusions: Proposed Context and Audience for MN 9022

After the earthquake of 62 C.E., the people of Campania went to work rebuilding and redecorating the public and private structures damaged during the natural disaster. Many homeowners seized this opportunity to update or refurbish their wall decoration in the “modern” and fashionable Fourth Style while salvaging prized scenes from their current Second and Third Style fresco decoration. Artisans were commissioned to cut these framed scenes from the

22 Brendel, “The Great Frieze,” 129.

outdated or earthquake-damaged walls and to integrate the panels into new Fourth Style decorative programs.

The frescoes discovered by Karl Weber’s team of excavators in 1761 in the Herculaneum Palestra complex were cut out of their original walls with the likely intention of being reused in freshly painted Fourth Style decoration. MN 9022’s discovery on the first floor of the Insula Orientalis II residential/commercial complex, which was home to many merchants’ and artisans’ shops, likely reveals the painting’s storage in a fresco artisan’s or vendor’s workshop with the objective being to refurbish or resell the painting for new wall decoration. Regardless of the merchant’s specific occupation, MN 9022’s location in the Palestra complex was a temporary holding place before the toilette scene would have been restored and reintroduced into its original owner’s home or sold to an entirely new owner and placed in a new domestic setting.

Although the Palestra complex in Insula Orientalis II where MN 9022 was discovered was a very public building, one may assume that the scene’s original context and audience were far more private. Evidence for MN 9022’s private setting is exemplified by the location of other toilette and domestic genre scenes discussed in Chapter 4, which have been discovered in situ or with established find spots. Therefore, the toilette/domestic setting and the all-female cast of MN 9022 would have likely argued for the fresco’s original location within a women’s chamber in a private domus in Herculaneum.

Although the Roman home was not strictly segregated by gender, it is not surprising to find that chambers within the domus displayed wall decoration with feminine-oriented subjects and themes. These scenes traditionally appeared in areas of the domus or villa that were more private and secluded, identifying them as chambers utilized by the domina, her female family
members, and their companions. Often these private women’s chambers were not specifically bedrooms or dining rooms, rather they most likely served a multifunctional purpose as a place for women to convene, converse, and, most importantly for this inquiry, to be used as a space for daily and ritual preening as a toilette.

Because of the Romans’ preoccupation with appropriate and instructive interior decoration, designed to visually articulate the function of specific spaces within the home, MN 9022’s original chamber may have been a private room that was utilized as a woman’s toilette. Alan Little proposed the nuptial content of the megalographic fresco frieze in the Villa dei Misteri revealed room 5’s function as a bridal toilette or chamber. Perhaps then MN 9022’s portrayal of a bridal toilette may further expose the specific function and nuptial context of the fresco’s original chamber as a space not only used for the daily ministrations of the elite matron’s toilette, but as a bridal toilette for the female family members of the home.

The same way modern wedding photographs of the bridal toilette and marriage ceremony document and preserve memories, the toilette scene in MN 9022 may have served a nostalgic purpose in reminding the women utilizing the space of their wedding day and preparations. By alluding to religious and nuptial rites of passage, the fresco symbolized the young woman’s new elevated status as an elite matron and transformation into woman and motherhood.


26 Little, A Roman Bridal Drama at the Villa of the Mysteries, 9-10
APPENDIX
LIST OF ART WORKS CITED

http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/3599/Sunk_Relief_of_Queen_Neferu


A-5. *Due Eroi* from Palestra complex, Insula Orientalis II, Herculaneum, 1st century C.E. 44 x 44 cm, Third Style fresco. MN 9020, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (in Sampaolo and Bragantini, *La Pittura Pompeiana*, fig. 48, p. 165.)


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A-21. *Fanciulla allo specchio*, from triclinium 7, Villa di Arianna, Stabiae. mid-late 1st century C.E. 50 x 33 cm, Fourth Style fresco. MN 9088, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli in...
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BIOGRAFICAL SKETCH

Laura Winn was born and raised in Wilmington, Massachusetts. In 2003 Laura completed her BFA in photography with departmental honors and in 2007 a Master of Arts in Teaching in Integrated Learning in Educational Technology from Jacksonville University in Florida. At the University of Florida, Laura’s research has focused on Greek and Roman painting and the representation of women in classical art. Laura plans to continue her education by pursing a PhD in art history with a focus in Roman Art and Archaeology.