

The Lineup: Passion, Transgression, and Mythical Women in Roman Painting

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Pasiphae, Phaedra, Scylla, Canace, Myrrha – five mythological women who committed crimes of adultery, incest, treason, bestiality, and suicide – once adorned the walls of a small room in a second-century villa outside Rome. About one third lifesize and dressed in pastel colors, each figure stood alone against a white background, identified by the Latinized Greek name painted beside her head as well as by a posture of distress and a telling attribute of self-destruction. Today the five women hang in separate, gilded frames in the small Sala degli Nozze Aldobrandini of the Vatican Museums, where they are routinely overlooked by visitors gazing at the more famous Roman frescoes above them, the Aldobrandini Wedding and the Odyssey Landscapes¹.

1 — This was held as a keynote lecture at the conference “Feminism & Classics VII: Visions in Seattle”, in May 2016. I am grateful to Jacqueline Fabre-Serris and Judith Hallett for their invitation to publish it and to Kathleen Coleman, Susanna McFadden, and Claudia Lega for their help. The frescoes have received little scholarly attention: Biondi (1843) 14-25; Nogara (1907) 55-59; Andreae (1963) 353-355; Micheli (2010). Since my lecture a succinct description of the frescoes has been published in Newby (2016) 189-194.

This distinctive group poses an immediate question: why would a second-century villa owner wish to embellish a domestic space with five (and perhaps more) anguished females? To modern eyes it seems puzzling that interior decoration would showcase dangerous women holding the ropes and daggers with which they will shed their own blood. And although lists of such tragic heroines are ubiquitous in earlier Latin texts and offer insights into the topic's popularity, the experience of being physically surrounded by human beings in psychic pain is entirely different from that of reading a quick succession of names within a larger, ongoing narrative. This article explores the experience of seeing the heroines together in one space. We begin by looking at what is known of the original context, then examine the women individually, and finally consider the ensemble within a wider frame of cultural reference. Scholars have often missed the communicative value of Roman frescoes because of their status as interior wall decoration and because the anonymous workshop craftsmen who painted the walls worked with a formulaic visual repertoire. But that repertoire, I believe, constitutes a kind of intervisuality that, like the intertextuality of Latin poetry, uses meaningful quotation, creates novel combinations, and betrays habits of analogical thinking. In conclusion, I will propose that the female group represents a lost tradition of pictorial galleries depicting tragic heroines which began as early as the fifth century B.C.E.

Discovery and context

The five women were found in 1817 in an undulating, wooded area called Tor Marancia just south of Rome between the Via Ardeatina and the Via Ostiense, not far from the Catacombs of Domitilla, the oldest and largest of Rome's underground burial networks. This fertile land outside the city walls was intensively cultivated in antiquity; in 1800 it came into the hands of the dukes of Chablais, Maurizo and Marianna di Savoia, who, having fled Turin and Napoleon's troops, received asylum in Rome under Pius VII. Hearing from local farmers of random finds of antiquities, they employed the archaeologist Luigi Biondi to explore the area. Between 1816 and 1823 Biondi discovered remains of two large complexes, each rising four stories high on a hillside, probably residential and productive villas, and nearby, a temple and baths².

2 — Guattani (1817; 1818); Biondi (1843) shows a plan made in 1823 with the villas, bath complex, and what was thought to be a Temple of Bacchus; he based his information on the two articles by Guattani, who in turn recounted the unpublished observations of others: Werner (1998) 191-210; 351-393. De Rossi and Granelli (2003); De Angeli (2004).

Inscriptions found in the area indicate the presence of numerous *villae rusticae* from the first century C.E. onwards that were restored by new owners sometime in the second half of the second century³. Remarkably, we may know who those owners were. The names of two aristocratic women, Munatia Procula and Numisia Procula, mark lead water pipes; Munatia appears in an honorary inscription on a statue base that can be dated exactly to December 13, 165 and on an altar in the Vatican, together with a Futa Cypare. Indeed, the Munatia, Procula, and Numisia were well-known families around Rome. The two women, wealthy *matronae doctae*, owned villas just 750 meters apart that were built at the same time using the same construction techniques and shared similar interior decoration.

The five fresco fragments belonged to a small room in the Villa of Munatia, which was discovered first. Unfortunately, no plan of the building was made, so one must work from descriptions and ink drawings of the ruins⁴. In antiquity the villa had suffered a fire and been spoliated, so that remains were found only on the top and bottom of the four levels. The Villa of Numisia, on the other hand, was much more fully documented and descriptions indicate that the general layout of the two complexes was very close, allowing one to speculate about the room in Munatia's villa with the paintings of the five women. It was one of many small rooms opening onto a central courtyard on the bottom floor and matches the location and dimensions of Room F7 (or Y) in the Villa of Numisia, which also featured white walls with individual figures; a drawing of one wall shows satyrs and nymphs (one satyr carrying baby Bacchus on his shoulders) surrounded by delicate vegetal and architectural frames. Ten of the figures from the Villa of Numisia room are now inserted into the walls of the Galleria dei Candelabri in the Vatican Museums. Although different in effect, in that the satyrs and nymphs are smaller and hover as if in flight, it is tempting to imagine the standing women in the Villa of Munatia room separated by such an elegant framework⁵.

Because the villas were continuously rebuilt between the mid-second and early third centuries, the date of the frescoes is unclear. They find parallels both in late second and early third-century paintings at Ostia. One

3 — Flavia Domitilla, the Christian niece of Vespasian, may have owned property here, which would have been confiscated after she was banished to the island of Ponza. Inscriptions and brick stamps date to the Hadrianic, Antonine, and Severan periods: Buoncore (1982) 351-393; Mosca (1991-1992); Caldelli (2004).

4 — An ink drawing signed "Camilli fece 1817", reproduced in Werner (1998) 191 and 192, shows a hill behind column bases of the portico on the lower level.

5 — Drawing of wall decoration in Villa of Numisia: Biondi (1843) 36 Pl.X; Micheli suggests that there were originally nine to twelve women. A sixth fragment identified as Byblis or Medea, thought by Biondi to belong to the group, was shown to have been found at San Basilio in 1810: Nogara (1906).

such example is a fragmentary frieze depicting Orpheus and Eurydice in the underworld, where isolated figures stand in a paratactic row against a monochromatic white background and are identified with painted names in analogous script, a popular pictorial device at the time⁶.

Among the many statues and mosaics found in the Villa of Munatia, it is worth noting the marble fragments discovered near the room with the five women, for these present tantalizing clues. Just outside the room was an altar, near which lay pieces of a statue of Venus, and in a further room just beyond the altar were three more fragmentary statues of Venus, one with two erotes. Another interesting find on the top floor of the villa were four black and white figurative mosaics with sea themes (possibly in a bath complex), one depicting the adventures of Ulysses with Scylla, the Sirens, and Circe, another lineup of threatening women⁷. We will return to these connections at the end.

Between 1817 and 1821 the frescoes moved to the Duchess of Chablais's palace in downtown Rome, where a courtyard was built to hold 100 inscriptions, statues, mosaics, and paintings. Most of these underwent restoration, including the five fragments. While the original color and intonation were respected, Biondi explicitly mentions certain sections that were overpainted, including Pasiphae's dress; the short sword held in Canace's left hand; Scylla's dress and skin and the lock of hair in her right hand. No mention is made of the unusual orthography of the painted names, suggesting that these were left as found⁸.

Upon the death of the duchess in 1827, the finds from both villas went to Pius II and today fill the Vatican galleries⁹. This immensely valuable collection has never been studied as a corpus, nor have the objects been considered within their original context. As for the villas, soon after their discovery a pozzolana quarry opened on the land and the ruins evidently were obliterated. Now one of the most densely populated suburbs of Rome, Tor Marancia is famous for the colorful graffiti painted on facades of high-rise apartment buildings. The villas may be lost to us forever¹⁰.

6 — The fresco was found in Tomb 33 in the Porta Laurentina necropolis south of Ostia, which had been built by Decimus Foliu Mela in the first half of the first century C.E.: Kossatz-Deissmann (1988) 98 #2: Vatican Museums, formerly Lateran collection 10.789. Also comparable is the third-century white ground fresco with painted names, "Cargo Ship with Wheat" found in Ostia in 1865, now too in the Sala Aldobrandini: Musei Vaticani, inv.79638.

7 — On the headless, lifesize Venus Anadyomene and pieces of another Venus statue, see Neudecker (1988) 198-199 #42.1 and #42.2. The fragmentary Venus statue with two erotes is now lost. On the mosaics, see Nogara (1910); Werner (1998).

8 — Biondi (1843); Nogara (1907) 57-58. The differing sizes and spacing of the letters look like original handiwork, but comparison of photos of the letters in Nogara with their current state (especially Pasiphae) indicates that at some point lost areas were touched up.

9 — The sculptural finds, which include a statue of Faustina, were placed in the Braccio Nuovo founded by Pius VII Chiaramonti (1800-1823).

10 — There have, however, been recent attempts to re-excavate the villa of Numisia; De Rossi

The Women

Although we may know more about the original context of the frescoes than about most orphaned objects in the Vatican, and despite the intriguing association with two high-placed Roman women, it is impossible to know who commissioned, made, or saw the five heroines. We must consider the fragments as the contemporary viewers that we are. The following short descriptions of the fragments are based upon their current appearance behind glass and upon early nineteenth-century descriptions, drawings, and watercolors¹¹.

Pasiphae, wearing a chiton, leans against a bull and stretches her right arm across his back, looking at him intently (Fig.1). It is not a specific moment in a narrative but a situation, namely Pasiphae's passion for the white bull, inflicted upon her by Neptune, which will lead to her commissioning the artist Daedalus to build her a wooden cow into which she will slip and mate with the bull, producing the hybrid monster, the Minotaur, and eventually dying in prison, most likely by hanging herself¹². This is an unusual depiction of the Cretan queen, for most often she sits, receiving the decoy from Daedalus, as in the first-century fresco in the House of Vettii in Pompeii (VI.15,1) (Fig.2)¹³. On a second-century marble relief created closer in time to the Tor Marancia frescoes, Pasiphae stands behind the wooden cow with her *himation* over her head and a hand to her face, seemingly lost in thought while Daedalus works away on it (Fig.3). Elsewhere in Pompeian paintings, Pasiphae is outdoors in a field pointing out the prominent bull to Daedalus. Nowhere is she affectionate with the animal, as here¹⁴.

In fact, without the inscription naming Pasiphae, one could easily mistake the figure for Europa, a popular subject in art from the seventh-century B.C.E. onwards. Usually Europa sits on the bull, with

and Granelli (2003); Franceschini (2005) 202-204 #72.

11 — Guattani (1820); Biondi (1843); watercolors in Raoul Rochette (1836) 397-401, Pls.1-5 (made in 1827) and Nogara (1907).

12 — For a humorous account of Pasiphae's jealousy and mistreatment of rival cows: Ov. *Ars Am.*1.289-326; a more serious account: Verg. *Ecl.*6.45-60; Pasiphae's passion for the bull was depicted on the doors of the temple of Apollo at Cumae built by Daedalus, along with the Minotaur and the labyrinth: Verg. *Aen.*6.18-19. Philostratus describes a painting in which Pasiphae is outside Daedalus's workshop gazing at the bull: *Imag.*1.16. Notably, no text mentions what happens to Pasiphae after the birth of the Minotaur.

13 — There was no visual tradition of Pasiphae before the Hellenistic period. Papadopoulos (1994) Tor Marancia: 194 #1; House of the Vettii: 196 #11. A spectacular mosaic in Zeugma of the first half of the third century C.E. depicts Pasiphae, her nurse, Daedalus, and Icarus, all identified with names: Dunbabin (2016) 202-203.

14 — Frescoes with Pasiphae in a field: Papadopoulos (1994) 195 #5 and 6. The Spada relief: Papadopoulos (1994) 196 #16; Newby (2002) 138-139 notes the similarity between the postures of Pasiphae and women on Greek grave reliefs.

Jupiter in full gallop across the waves, her garments billowing in the wind. A few Pompeian paintings depict a quiet moment just before the bull charges off. In a memorable scene from the House of Jason (IX.5.18), painted about 20 B.C.E., Europa has climbed upon the bull's back and her companions, unable to resist the bull's charms, approach and fondle him as he winks at the viewer (Fig.4).

The interchangeability of Pasiphae and Europa indicates that the Tor Marancia figure is no lazy, mechanical adoption of a standard type, but an intentional conflation that highlights their mutual genealogy as a causal force. Both Europa, mother of Minos, and Pasiphae, his wife, were tricked by male gods and enamored with bulls, but in their stories the power relations are reversed. Pasiphae, a mortal female lusting after an animal, devised through human artistry to change form and mate with an animal. Europa, a mortal female, was pursued by a god who through his divine powers transformed himself into a bull. The former gave birth to a monster, the latter to kings. Pasiphae crossed the line, Europa fell in line.

The Cretan family curse was handed down to the next generation, namely Phaedra, Pasiphae's daughter with Minos and sister of Ariadne and the Minotaur, also present in the Tor Marancia room¹⁵. For Phaedra, it was not an unnatural passion for a beast but for her stepson that led her to ruin. When Phaedra married Theseus, she became stepmother to Hippolytus, a hunter and follower of Diana, and was love-struck. Although they were not related by blood, Phaedra's unrequited attraction was considered incestuous and led to her suicide and his death. Latin poets portray Phaedra's fate as a *pudor-amor* conflict between the divine rivals Diana and Venus.

In the fresco, Phaedra wears no crown or veil like the queen that she was (Fig.5). Two armilla bracelets, alluring ornaments of Venus, wrap around her bare arm. With disheveled hair, downturned mouth, and eyes looking woefully skyward, this Phaedra differs from other representations, where she sits, veiled, consulting her aged nurse about sending a letter professing her love to Hippolytus (Fig.6)¹⁶. There is hesitation in such moments. Here, what is done is done. In contrast to the smitten Pasiphae plotting her seduction of the bull, Phaedra's fate is sealed. The

15 — The hereditary curse is clearly expressed in the *Heroides* by Phaedra herself when she claims that her love is a debt exacted by Venus for the crimes of Europa and Pasiphae as well as for Theseus's abandonment of her sister Ariadne: *Her.*4.53-66; on Europa and Pasiphae, see Alexandridis (2008) 299-303; on Pasiphae and Phaedra: Reckford (1974); the bestiality of Cretan women: Armstrong (2006) Chapter 2.

16 — Linfant de Bellefonds (1994) Tor Marancia: 358 #19; Auson. *Idyll* 6.33; Mucznik (1999) 131-134 on iconographic antecedents, which begin with South Italian vases. Swetnam-Burland (2015) discusses a Pompeian fresco depicting Phaedra and Hippolytus to which was later added a graffito with a line from Ovid voicing Phaedra's inner thoughts, an intriguing combination of text and image, demonstrating the interactive nature of viewing that such painted scenes could inspire.

letter has been passed on, she has been rejected and in anger has accused Hippolytus of rape, inciting Theseus's fury and Hippolytus's death. The post-climactic moment emphasizes her emotional turmoil. Holding a rope in her right hand, Phaedra resolves to hang herself, and her posture and clothing communicate the imminent deed: with her left hand she grasps the drapery that falls over her left shoulder, pulling it tightly around her right hip, thus auguring what her right hand will soon do with the rope around her neck.

Among three of the Tor Marancia women there are few degrees of separation. Scylla, daughter of King Nisus of Megara, met her doom through Minos, Pasiphae's husband and Phaedra's father, when he invaded her father's kingdom (Fig.7). Scylla's father Nisus possessed a magical talisman, namely a single lock of purple hair, that secured invincibility for his realm and himself. As Minos approached Megara by ship, Scylla (having been shot by Eros's arrow) watched from the city's battlements and immediately fell in love. In order to win the enemy's heart, she decided to cut the purple lock from her father's head – an act that has been seen as one of castration – and present it to Minos, ensuring his victory. However the daughter's gift was swiftly refused; disgusted by her lack of filial *pietas*, Minos quickly captured Megara and sailed away. What next transpired varies; in one version Scylla is taken prisoner on the Cretan ships, in another she swims after Minos's boat, only to drown, transform into a seabird (*ciris*), and be relentlessly pursued by her father, who after his own death had metamorphosed into a sea eagle (*haliaeetus*)¹⁷.

Few representations of Scylla's story survive, and none from before the imperial era. A faded fresco of the mid-first century C.E. in the House of the Dioscuri (VI.9.6-7), recorded in a line drawing, shows Scylla in eastern dress, accompanied by her nurse, approaching a seated Minos with the lock of hair (Fig.8). The king turns his head away and raises his hand in repulsion, the very gesture used elsewhere by Hippolytus towards Phaedra¹⁸. It is interesting that the tale appears in a range of media in the provinces, usually showing the tense encounter between the two standing figures, with Scylla offering the lock and Minos's hand firmly on the hilt

17 — Canciani (1994) Tor Marancia: 793 #4. Scylla first appeared as one of the impassioned women named by the Megarian chorus in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* 612-622. Other sources include *Ciris* 5.172-174, a small poem of the first or second century C.E. that describes Scylla shot by Eros while playing ball, Minos' siege of Megara, and Scylla taken captive on Minos's ship. See also Ov. *Met.* 8.6-151, esp. 154-151; *Her.* 12.123-4; *Trist.* 2.392-4; Verg. *Ecl.* 6.74-77; Verg. *Georg.* 1.404-9; Prop. 4.4.39-40; Hygin. *Fab.* 198.

18 — House of the Dioscuri (VI.9.6-7): Canciani (1994) 793. A fresco in the Domus Aurea (room 80), now lost, also depicted Scylla and Minos: Canciani (1994) 193 #2. Quintilian recommends the very same gesture of a thrust-out hand for orators' declarations of revulsion (*Inst.* 11.3.113); Swetnam-Burland (2015) 221.

of his sword; the presence of an old nurse and Eros insert Venus as a prime mover behind the story¹⁹.

In the Tor Marancia fresco, Scylla is dressed as a Greek woman in *peplos* and *himation*, her hair pulled up in a headband. With focused eyes and a raised arm, Scylla's demeanor is deliberate as she resolves to sacrifice father and country. Her active viewing position, *teichoscopia* or "viewing from the walls", expresses her intention and agency, and was a popular narrative strategy in texts and performances. In one famous example, Helen, looking over the walls of Troy, narrates for Priam a catalogue of the qualities of the best Greek warriors (Hom. *Il.*3.121-244). *Teichoscopia* expands vision, as a seeing character describes for others, including the audience, what is occurring offstage and out of sight; it thus enables a synchronicity of observed events, here and there. As viewers of the frescoes, we see Scylla viewing and must imagine what she sees over a parapet of the city wall, and these can be different moments: Scylla's first sight of Minos; her ongoing observation of the battles; her impulse to hurl herself into the Cretan camp; and just before offering Minos the lock of hair, which she already holds in her right hand. Scylla's assertive, *female* gaze transgresses norms of behavior, leading her beyond the confines of her familial home and into enemy waters.

Canace was a daughter of Aeolus (a wind god or a king in the Tyrrhenian sea) who became pregnant by her brother Macareus (Fig.9). When Aeolus found out, he was enraged, not because daughter and brother had committed incest, which was common among the gods, but because he had not approved their coupling. As punishment Aeolus sent Canace a sword with which to kill herself and exposed the newborn child to its death (although in some accounts it survived, and in others Macareus killed himself)²⁰. Canace is a rare subject in the visual arts of Greece and Rome, with only two known representations. A much earlier scene on a South Italian hydria of about 415 B.C.E. (Fig.10) shows her on her deathbed, hair dishevelled, clothing undone (perhaps from recent labor), and an exposed breast revealing the wound she has inflicted upon herself with the sword in her right hand. From the head of the bed Aeolus thrusts a stick over Canace's body toward Macareus, who stands, hands bound, at the opposite end. Behind, her nurse sits on an altar, mourning. The hydria was painted a few years after a staging of Euripides's *Aeolis*

19 — Provincial examples from Slovenia, Bulla Regia in Tunisia, and Arles, see Smid (2012).

20 — Tor Marancia: Berger-Doer (1990) 951 #3. Ov. *Her.*11; Hygin. *Fab.*238 (Aeolus kills Canace); 242 (Macareus kills himself after Canace's death); 243 (Canace kills herself); Plut. *Parallel Lives* 28: "Macareus and Papirius Romanus" (Macareus commits suicide).

in 423 B.C.E., in which the final scene must have looked like this, with Canace on her deathbed²¹.

The Tor Marancia fresco is the second known representation of Canace and the least well preserved of the five fragments. Her mantle, chiton, and hair have faded to a monotone with contours in reddish brown, as if just sketched out. Yet posture, arms, and hands still vividly convey her plight. With mouth open, she raises her drapery to hide her swollen belly, rests her left elbow on her right hand, which clasps a reed quill (today barely visible), and supports her head with her left hand, which wields a thin sword. Canace is alone, pondering her fate, and the painter has used a familiar iconographic type of dread that has precedents as early as the mid-fifth century B.C.E. On the east pediment of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, Sterope stood in the same contemplative, anxious pose; so too did grieving females on Athenian gravestones and on the fourth-century B.C.E. Mourning Women Sarcophagus in Istanbul; so too Niobe turning to stone on South Italian vases; Alcestis wagering her own life for her husband's on a Roman relief in Aquileia; and Iphigenia being led to sacrifice on an altar in Florence²². Despite their distinct predicaments, in each case the pose conveys profound sadness, *dolor*, and imminent bloodshed.

An even closer adaptation of the type can be seen on a marble relief depicting Medea with two of the Peliades (Fig.11). Medea stands on the left, holding a container with magic herbs while Pelias's daughters prepare the bath in which they will boil their father's body parts, hoping to rejuvenate him. Like Canace, the daughter on the right leans her head on the hand gripping the sword as she deliberates Medea's scheme²³. Canace's two attributes of pen and sword find a specific textual analogue in her opening words to Macareus in Ovid's *Heroides*: "My right hand holds the pen, a drawn blade the other holds, and the paper lies unrolled in my lap. This is the picture of Aeolus's daughter writing to her brother; in this guise, it seems, I may please my hard-hearted sire" (Ov. *Her.*11.3-5)²⁴. The various adaptations of the standard figure show how easily a specific

21 — Hydria by the Amykos Painter from Canosa, ca. 410 B.C.E.: Berger-Doer (1990) 951 #1.

22 — Settis (1984) 207-208 on the adaptability of the "Sterope" type; at 211 he sees such adaptations as "iconographic synonyms". Sevieri (2008) 226-232 argues that the Niobe type was inspired by a local revival in Apulia of Aeschylus' *Niobe* around 360 B.C.E. The Mourning Women sarcophagus offers a veritable pattern book of eighteen poses of grieving women and is an early example of what became a common composition in Roman art of isolated females standing between columns: Fleischer (1983).

23 — Vatican Museums, Museo Gregoriano Profano inv.9983. A better preserved version shows the daughter holding not a sword but branches, presumably herbs for the bath: Antikensammlung Berlin, inv. Sk 925 [K 186]. On the Peliades relief and the iconographic type: Settis (1984) 207.

24 — "Dextra tenet calamus, strictum tenet altera ferrum, et iacet in gremio charta soluta meo. Haec est Aeolidos fratri scribentis imago; sic videor duro posse placere patria", Ov. *Her.*11.3-6, trans Showerman. The quill was visible to Biondi (1843) 16-17.

narrative could be created by adding an inscription, attribute, or other figures, and still retain the original sense of the type, in this case, dread.

The last of the five (if not originally seen in this order) is Myrrha, also called Smyrna, daughter of Cinyras and Cenchreis and, most memorably, mother of Adonis (Fig. 12). Consumed by an unnatural lust for her father, Myrrha decided on suicide but was found out by her nurse, who offered to help if it would save her life. While Cinyras's wife was away at a feast of Ceres, the nurse offered him a mistress, then led Myrrha to him in the dark. After several nights, Cinyras brought a lighted torch, recognized his daughter, and tried to stab her, but Myrrha, already pregnant, escaped and fled as far as Arabia and further exotic lands until, after nine months, half dead, she begged the gods for mercy, was transformed into a myrrh-tree, and from her trunk gave birth to Adonis²⁵.

Of the five fragments, Myrrha's is the best preserved and needed little to no restoration²⁶. In demeanor, she differs from the other four; while Pasiphae and Scylla quietly plan their crimes and Phaedra and Canace dwell on the aftermath of theirs, Myrrha runs, actively in transit between her transgression and her metamorphosis, visually frozen in a kind of perpetual exile. Wearing a red tunic and yellow boots, she is escaping from her father (whom we should imagine close behind), her arms raised in alarm, eyes looking in one direction and body moving in another. Again, a well-known figural type was employed to capture the heroine's plight. The solitary figure of a fleeing young woman is based upon the renowned "Niobe Chiaramonti", one statue of a sculptural group that was set up by king Seleukos in south coastal Asia Minor and moved to Rome in 38 B.C.E. to decorate the temple of Apollo in the Campus Martius (Fig. 13). A version of this figure was recently found in an Augustan villa near Ostia, together with a base bearing her name: "Ogygia", Niobe's daughter²⁷. This particular victim was hardly an accidental appropriation for Myrrha. Just as Niobe insulted Leto for bearing fewer children than she, prompting a massacre by Diana and Apollo, Myrrha's mother boasted that her daughter was lovelier than Venus, resulting in the daughter's lust for her

25 — Myrrha's is the longest tale sung by Orpheus in the tenth book of the *Metamorphoses*, coming after Pygmalion and before Venus and Adonis (10.398-518). It was also the subject of an epic poem called *Zmyrna* by the neoteric poet Helvius Cinna of about 55 B.C.E. (now lost). Versions appear in Hyg. *Fab.* 58, 242, Apollod. *Bibl.* 1. 14.4, and Antoninus Liberalis *Metamorphoses* 33 (100-300 C.E.).

26 — Biondi (1843) 23. Berger-Doer (1992) Tor Marancia: 692 #1. Although a few images survive of Adonis's birth from the myrrh tree, none of the incest story seem to exist. Frescoes depicting the tree and birth: Berger-Doer (1992) 692 #4 and #5. A rare image of Myrrha's earlier story is on the neck of an Apulian pelike where beneath a figure of Eros Myrrha is speaking with her nurse; the main scene below shows Kalliope's judgment of the contest between Venus and Persephone for Adonis: Berger-Doer (1992) 692 #2.

27 — Salvo (2009); Calandra, Betori, Lupi (2015).

father. In addition, just as Venus enflamed Myrrha with passion for her father, inversely Leto inflicted yet more retribution on Niobe by having her father fall in love with his own daughter²⁸. In both cases, a mortal mother's hubris towards a goddess leads to the punishment of their mortal daughters. The conflation of Myrrha with the famous figure of the Niobid may well have spurred a viewer's visual memory, inviting comparison of the two young women's fates. Pose and gesture embody certain situations and such situations, caused by human actions, are doomed to repeat themselves.

Recognition and Visual Literacy

Mute, isolated on a monochrome surface with their weapons of ruin, the five women represent fugitive moments during which time is suspended. Unusual in Roman art are their individualized facial expressions, postures, and gestures. At a very basic level, a viewer with no knowledge of the stories would recognize females in distress from their faces and body language alone. Yet in planning the décor someone saw a need to identify the women by name, adding a trigger to memory. A learned viewer would read the heroine's name, recall her story, and – most importantly – imagine her psychological struggle and internal debate. What is more, the single figure suggests the presence of other, unrepresented figures which we are invited to supplement and in this way recreate, in the mind, a larger narrative.

So much can be intuited about the process of recognizing the individual heroines in the room. Beyond this, what might have been an ancient viewer's frame of reference? A few interpretative strategies suggest themselves. One can consider the social context, namely that of a second- or early third-century painted room in a villa near Rome that was ostensibly owned by an aristocratic woman. One can seek parallels in Roman literary texts and records of theatrical performances. Both offer significant information, but in my view, a traditional art historical approach is especially fruitful. Iconography has fallen out of fashion in recent years, in large part due to past attempts to pinpoint a lost "original", preferably "Greek", and thereby ignore the immediate historical context of the image. In the case of Tor Marancia, the iconography of the figures is exceptionally

28 — Only at the end of the episode in the *Metamorphoses* does Ovid mention the parallel between Venus's and Leto's punishments. It is, however, noted in the handbooks by Hyg. *Fab.* 58, 242 and Apollod. *Bibl.* I. 14.4. For a earlier, different version of the first century B.C.E. see Parthenius of Nicaea's *Erotica Pathemata* 33 "Assaon" in which Niobe is the daughter not of Tantalus but Assaon, and the wife of Philottus; her punishment for insulting Leto was Assaon's passion for his own daughter, who, after Niobe's refusal to become his wife, invited her children to a banquet and burned them to death, whereupon Niobe flung herself from a high rock: Fabre-Serris (2015) 66-67.

illuminating, for it reveals a thoughtful creative process that requires a visual literacy among contemporary viewers. As we have seen, codified body postures (*schemata*) establish connections: Pasiphae echoes Europa; Myrrha a Niobid; Canace any number of fraught females. Together, the women take on meaning in relation to each other and generate a network of associations that transcend their personal stories and invoke universal human (or better: *female*) struggles²⁹.

The iconography of the Tor Marancia women may invoke earlier representations and performances of their tales. The heroines were the subject of lost paintings by famous fifth- and fourth-century B.C.E. artists. Androkydes of Cyzicus painted a picture of Myrrha. Although Pliny does not name Canace, he mentions a picture by Artisteides of Thebes showing a maiden who, lovestruck for her brother, is dying (Plin. *HN* 35.99)³⁰. In Pausanias's description of Polygnotos' famed fifth-century B.C.E. mural of *Nekyia* at Delphi, Ariadne sits on a rock looking at her sister Phaedra, who, Pausanias astutely notes, sits on a swing grasping the rope in either hand, foreshadowing her suicide by hanging (Paus. 10.29.3)³¹. Unfortunately, these paintings, created five or six centuries earlier than the frescoes, can shed little light on the room at Tor Marancia, not just because they are lost, but because it is increasingly clear that Roman artists adapted pictorial schemes quite loosely for each new context.

The same is true for potential correspondences between the frescoes and ephemeral performances³². The sensational moments certainly bring to mind dramatic soliloquies and gripping turning points on stage, and the same characters (with the exception of Myrrha and Scylla) were portrayed in Euripides' plays about wicked women, notably *Aiolos*, *Cretan Women*, *Cretans*, and *Hippolytus Veiled*. Those performances may have inspired the lost paintings of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E., as well as reflections in other media, such as the South Italian hydria showing the death of Canace³³. There were, of course, countless later theatrical iterations of the stories, among them Seneca's tragedy *Phaedra* (54 C.E.), in which the Cretan queen, no longer the passive victim of Euripides' *Hippolytos*, schemes to seduce her stepson. And one recalls tales of the gruesome reenactments of Pasiphae coupling with the bull (Suet. *Nero* 12.20; Mart. *De*

29 — On the uses and meanings of *schemata*, see Settis (1984) 210-211; Franzoni (2006) stresses that *schemata* should not be understood as crystallized, unchanging formulae but more like flexible dance moves, which agrees with the nuanced variations of female figural types.

30 — On the debate about whether this painting could have depicted Canace: Dilthey (1870).

31 — Stansbury-O'Donnell (1990) 218-219.

32 — On the difficulty of identifying artistic representations of myth versus performance of myth: Dunbabin (2016) 96-113.

33 — On Euripides's plays about bad and unhappy women: Webster (1967) 64-101; *Aiolos*: 157-160; the hydria depicting Canace's death: 303. Mucznik (1999) 134-139 argues for direct influence of Euripides on later representations of Alcestis and Phaedra.

spect.5)³⁴. But while accounts of certain staged scenes may resonate with the frescoes, attempts to match one of the female figures with a lost work of art, performance, or literary passage do not consider the women as a *group* that was *physically present* in the viewer's space, to be seen *over time*.

Indeed, what happens when five or more such moments are combined within one room? At first glance, the figures resemble a modern lineup, in which a group of people of matching height, build, and complexion stand side-by-side for an eyewitness to pick out a crime suspect among them. On the painted walls, the heroines' identical sizes and placement within a series create a harmonious design and at first seem to present variations on a theme. But for the viewer who takes the time to focus on each female, read the name, then stand back to note their distinctive stances and attributes, the process of identification, interpretation, and comparison becomes dynamic, open-ended, and multifaceted.

It is impossible to know exactly how the figures were originally arranged on the walls, but color schemes and stances hint at potential pendants and groupings (Fig. 14). Scylla and Phaedra correspond beautifully: turning toward each other, the colors of their clothing are reversed, with Scylla wearing a yellow *peplos* and purple *himation*, and Phaedra a purple *peplos* and yellow *himation*; their attitudes also mirror each other: with one arm alongside the body the hand clutches something, Scylla the lock of her father's hair and Phaedra her *himation*. Pasiphae and Scylla, too, share a contrapposto stance; both lift an arm, gaze intently at their object of desire, and actively touch the very things – the bull and lock of hair – that will lead to their crimes. Canace and Phaedra, their heads inclined in sorrow, wrap their clothing around their bodies and, intent on suicide, wield the weapon, a sword and a rope.

Thematic links conjure up even more combinations among women who harbor explosive, destructive desires. *Incest*: Myrrha (with her father), Canace (with her brother), Phaedra (with her son-in-law, unrequited). *Suicide*: Canace, Phaedra, Pasiphae. *Motherhood*: Myrrha and Canace (both pregnant by family member), Pasiphae (future birth of the Minotaur), Phaedra (pursued her stepson). *Adultery*: Phaedra and Pasiphae (mother and daughter, and the only wives among the five), Scylla and Myrrha (pursue married men, Minos and Cinyras). *Impiety towards family*: all of them.

A further level of interpretation emerges when one discerns the differences within the parallel situations. Consider the daughters' crimes: Scylla, Canace, and Myrrha are all disobedient to their fathers, but Scylla

34 — Coleman (1990) 64; Coleman (2006) 62–68. Suetonius records another odd appropriation of Pasiphae by the emperor Galba, who inserted her into the family stemma in his house: Suet. *Galba*. 2.

betrays family and country by chasing a foreign enemy; Canace sleeps with her brother against her father's will; and Myrrha tricks her own father into sleeping with her. Canace and Scylla are punished; Myrrha escapes. Endless are the similarities and differences among these women's stories and the unseen ones that they recall.

In the fresco series, the most engrossing variations arise from the contrasting moments in which the women are depicted. Pasiphae, shown before she consummates her desire, manifests her intention in her gaze and above all in her physical hold on the animal's back, unknown in other representations, she here conveys her desire to physically *possess* the bull. This moment gives no hint of the consequences to follow. Canace and Phaedra, in contrast, are suffering the consequences of their actions. Myrrha, just discovered and about to be punished, escapes. Scylla's active gaze encapsulates multiple moments, including the birth of her desire and her decision to act upon it. The range of temporalities adds new dimensions to the women's varied situations.

The fact that we can move the figures into multiple meaningful arrangements shows that the connections are many and could be discovered by each viewer in any order. Unlike the linear progression of a text, the spatial arrangement in a room is flexible, without beginning or end.

Catalogues

By far the richest resource for Roman interpretations of the heroines are Latin texts written in the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E. These continued Hellenistic authors' elaboration upon Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women*, Homer's epics, and Athenian dramas³⁵. In Hades, Ulysses encounters a lineup of the wives and daughters of heroes, among them Phaedra, Ariadne, and Eriphyle (Hom. *Od.* 11.225-332). Aeneas in the Underworld observes the shades of Phaedra, Procris, Pasiphae, and other precursors to Dido who were racked with despair and died violent deaths (*Aen.* 6.442-451). These passages are noteworthy because, as at Tor Marancia, the women appear outside their domestic and narrative contexts, away from their fathers, brothers, and husbands, and now as members of a group that transcends time and place.

The rosters by Hellenistic poets and Latin writers reduce heroines to their names in short catalogues of three or more *exempla* that personify behavioral traits such as *libido*, *furor*, *dolor*, *scelus*, *audacia*³⁶. Thus Scylla's

35 — There has been a great deal of scholarship on tragic heroines in Latin literature. I have had to limit myself to citing the secondary literature that directly pertains to my visual analysis. On Hesiod's catalogue of women and its later reception: Hardie (2005); Hunter (2005).

36 — On misogyny in literature: Richlin (1984); Watson and Watson (2014) 26-35. Juvenal *Satire* 6 contrasts bad wives Medea, Clytemnestra, Procris, Eriphyle with contemporary *matronae*.

name connotes betrayal, Myrrha's unnatural lust, Pasiphae's bestiality. Catullus and Propertius use mythological *exempla* as ciphers for a living, contemporary woman, implying an inevitable defect in female behavior in the continuity between past and present. In response to Cynthia's complaints about his sexual desires, Propertius makes the case that women's *libido* is stronger than men's, giving the examples of Pasiphae (bestiality), Myrrha (desire for an old father), Medea (rejected, kills her children), Clytemnestra (adulterous, destroys family), and finally Scylla (betrayed her father, punished by Minos). Significantly, Scylla assumes the most space (eight lines), ending the poem with a re-assertion of older male control over youthful female irrationality (*Ecl.* 3.19.1-2)³⁷.

A largely unrecognized, valuable resource for these poets seems to have been a compilation of passionate love affairs written by Parthenius of Nicaea, who came to Rome in about 70-60 B.C.E. and dedicated his *Erotica Pathemata* to the contemporary Roman poet Cornelius Gallus, whose own four books of love poetry in elegiac couplets, *Amores*, now mostly lost, also had great influence. Parthenius drew upon Hellenistic authors in different genres and offered narrative summaries, intended as an *aide mémoire*, that preceded by decades the *Fabulae* of the mythographer Hyginus. The brevity of each tale, the novel juxtapositions and sequencing of stories automatically invited the recognition of parallels and contrasts among female *exempla*, an art of cross-referencing that was adopted by Propertius and Ovid³⁸. A particular recurring theme is incest³⁹.

Ovid without doubt produced the most lists of tragic heroines, several featuring those from Tor Marancia⁴⁰. In *Remedia Amores* alone, six catalogues appear in 814 lines; Pasiphae and Scylla join Phyllis, Dido, Medea, and Paris (!) as examples to young men of how to get over a broken heart (*Rem. am.* 55-67). "Give me Pasiphae: soon will she love the bull no more; give me Phaedra: Phaedra's shameful love will disappear... Had impious Scylla read my verse, the purple had stayed on thy head, O Nisus"⁴¹. The *Ars Amatoria* itemizes fifty-two devious and incestuous females whose

37 — In another list, Propertius groups Phaedra, Circe, and Medea as women who made lethal potions for males (*Ecl.* 2.1.51-54); in yet another list he persuades Cynthia against using makeup by naming mythical heroines whose pure, unmasked natural beauty alone incited their abduction (*Ecl.* 1.2.19-22); Gaiser (1977) 384.

38 — Fabre-Serris (2015); (2016) on the importance of Gallus; Voisin (2016) 3-9 discusses the mixing of different times and viewpoints and recurring themes in the mythological summaries of Parthenius. Just as a posture or gesture could visually trigger associations among heroines, writers drew analogies among stories like that of Scylla and Tarpeia, who upon seeing the enemy Tattius, falls in love: Propertius *El.* 4.4. So too Leucophrye, another princess who fell in love with the enemy, Leucippus, betrayed her city: Parthenius (*Amat. narr.* 5.6) as Nanis did Sardes for Cyrus (*Amat. narr.* 5.22).

39 — On incest, see Moreau (2002); Fabre-Serris (2015).

40 — Farrell (2013) 5-13, on Canace 9-11.

41 — *Ov. Rem. am.* 62-67, trans. Goold.

unbridled lust led to madness and crimes: Myrrha, Pasiphae, Scylla, and Phaedra (among others) prove that women will sleep with just about any man or beast (*Ars Am.* 1.283-344)⁴². Ovid also counterposes good and bad women. *Puellae* either could become virtuous like Penelope, Laodamia, Alcestis, Evadne OR become sinners like Eriphyle, Helen, Clytemnestra (*Ars Am.* 3.7-28). Long-suffering Andromache, Penelope, and Laodamia serve as models for Ovid's own wife (*Trist.* 1.6.19-36), a contrast to the villainous Phaedra, Canace, Medea, Scylla, Clytemnestra, and the Danaids (*Trist.* 2.381-408)⁴³. Yet Ovid shows little compassion for the selfless, noble wives Phyllis, Penelope, and Laodamia, recommending male lovers to keep them waiting, for absence makes the heart grown fonder (*Ars Am.* 2.348-358).

Closest to the isolated and expressive painted heroines are the first-person monologues of Ovid's *Heroides*. The first fifteen letters feature emotional statements by Penelope, Phaedra, Deianaira, Canace, and Medea, who complain of being deserted and alone (*deserta, sola, relictā*) and threaten suicide⁴⁴. Also eloquent about their fates and often in tears are Ovid's *exempla* of the victimized females from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, namely Chriseis, Cassandra, Briseis, and Helen. The women's individual perspectives, like the Tor Marancia heroines, complicate their situations. Take Phaedra. What was her crime, exactly? She desired a man who was her own age and unrelated by blood. Hers was not a crime against nature but against a law that was made by men and then elevated to a law of nature. Ovid, however, underscores the power of such laws when, in the *Metamorphoses*, Orpheus introduces Myrrha's tale with a warning to the audience that this is a story of great horror, especially to families:

“The story is terrible, I warn you. Fathers, daughters, had better skip this part, or, if you like my songs, distrust me here, and say it never happened, or, if you do believe it, take my word that it was paid for. Nature, it may be, permits such things to happen” (*Met.* 10.299-305)⁴⁵.

In self-defense, Myrrha claims that incest is natural in the animal kingdom, and that even in some human societies, “*pietas* grows with doubled love” (*Met.* 10.321-334). The same argument pertains to Canace and Phaedra: why is love between a sister and a brother a crime when the gods do it? Phaedra, in appealing to Hippolytus, cites *exempla* of Olympian rel-

42 — Other lists include the chances of being fleeced by women: *Ars Am.* 1.399-436; skilled deceivers 1.631-658. Watson (1983). Ovid's belief that learning male rhetoric (and laws) will reduce women's *furor* and increase their *ratio*: Fabre-Serris (2016) 185.

43 — Hinds (1999); Davisson (1993).

44 — Fabre-Serris (2016) 185.

Hinds (1999); Davisson (1993).

45 — Ov. *Met.* 10.299-305, trans. Humphries (1983) 243; Fabre-Serris (2016).

atives mating with each other: “Jove fixed that virtue was to be in whatever brought us pleasure; and naught is wrong before the gods since sister was made wife by brother. That bond of kinship only holds close and firm in which Venus herself has forged the chain” (*Her.*4.133-134)⁴⁶.

Whether or not these texts were familiar to the second-century patron, painter, or viewer at Tor Marancia cannot be known, but they help us see how common were such thematic groupings and how complicated and subtle their interpretation can be. What the literary catalogues and frescoes share are the ways in which the women mutually inform each other and sometimes are even interchangeable. The ambiguity of their crimes seems to be implicit in the Tor Marancia heroines, whose poses and expressions prompt debate and encourage comparisons with each other. Similarly, Phaedra’s account in the *Heroides* resembles Myrrha’s seduction plot and inner struggle between *pudor* and *amor*; for both heroines, the only solution is hanging themselves. They compare themselves to each other. In the *Metamorphoses*, Scylla, shunned by Minos, cites Pasiphae’s adultery as proof that the Cretan king is incapable of a healthy relationship with a woman: “You have a wife well-mated to you, that unnatural woman whose cunning helped her have a bull for lover, whose womb conceived the hybrid monster offspring! Do you hear me, ingrate? It is no wonder to me now, no wonder Pasiphae preferred the bull to you – the bull was gentler!” (*Met.*8.130-138)⁴⁷.

The fluid identities among tragic heroines is especially obvious in the stories of women and bulls. Pasiphae herself daydreams about being other women involved in bovine liaisons: “And now Pasiphae craves to be Europa and now to be Io, for the one was a cow, and the other was borne by a cow’s mate” (*Ars Am.*1.323-6)⁴⁸. And confusion arises in Achilles Tatius’s second-century C.E. *Leucippe and Clitophon* when the narrator opens with an *ekphrasis* of a picture of Europa (*Ach.Tat.* 1.1.2-13); Clitophon looks at the picture and later claims that he saw one representing Selene on a bull (*Ach.Tat.* 1.4.3)⁴⁹. Has Clitophon’s visual memory

46 — Ov. *Her.*4.135-136, trans. Goold (1977) 55. On the incest of Canace, Byblis, and Myrrha, see Verducci (1985) 197-234; Byblis and Myrrha: Nagle (1983); Moreau (2002); Fabre-Serris (2005).

47 — Ov. *Met.*8.130-135, trans. Humphries (1983) 185-186; on Myrrha’s fraught process of reasoning, see Fabre-Serris (2016) 183-185.

48 — Ov. *Ars Am.*1.323-326, trans. Goold. A link between Io and Europa in Parthenius *Amat. narr.*1 and 32: Voisin (2016) 10; Pasiphae compared with the daughters of Proetus who, believing they have changed into cows, do not share a shameful desire such as hers: Vergil *Ecl.*6.47-52, which may be based upon Gallus’s *Amores*: Fabre-Serris (2016) 173. Both Parthenius and Ovid present the ambiguity of the crime in the stories of Canace, in whose family (Aeolus’s) incest was not taboo but natural, and of Myrrha, who herself questions why the gods, and not mortals, are allowed.

49 — Morales (2004) 38-48; Selden (1994) 50-51 regards this as syllepsis, while Whitmarsh (2013) 79-85 and 89-93 prefers metalepsis, which does not separate but conflates and confuses; on similar, protean, multiple guises of Medea, see Hinds (1993); of Phyllis, see Fabre-Serris (2013).

failed him? If his is a double reading of a single image, it need not be regarded as a failure of recognition but rather as an associative response to a familiar iconographic type. In eastern contexts, in fact, Selene and Astarte were visualized with bulls, and Selene had an astrological connection to Taurus. Achilles Tatius seems to allow for the possibility of more than one identification, just as a viewer at Tor Marancia might see in one heroine echoes of others: Europa in Pasiphae or a Niobid in Myrrha.

Animated Iconography

One cannot say how present in the minds of viewers at Tor Marancia would have been Latin texts written over a century earlier. However, several authors writing between the second and fourth centuries explicitly appropriated from these earlier works and, intriguingly for our analysis of the heroines, they showed a keen interest in pictorial and sculptural representations of emotions⁵⁰. A vivid example is a fourth-century account by Callistratus describing the powerful viewing experience of a statue of Medea. "It was of marble and disclosed the nature of her soul...a course of reasoning was revealed, and passion was surging up, and the figure was passing into a stage of grief, and, to put it briefly, what one saw was an interpretation of her whole story. For her reasoning about her course of action revealed the schemes of the woman, the passion connoted by the onset of her anger roused her nature to the deed by introducing the impulse to murder, and the grief denoted her compassion for her children, transforming without violence the expression of the marble from passion to the natural feeling of a mother....These passions the figure strove to imitate as well as the form of the body, and one could see the marble now flashing passion in its eyes, now wearing a look sullen and softened into gloom, exactly as if the artist had modelled the woman's passionate impulse" (Call. *Descr.*13)⁵¹. Through sustained looking over time, the single figure of Medea morphs before the viewer's eyes into a gamut of violent, conflicting emotions.

If Callistratus's *ekphrasis* captures an attentive viewer's evolving perceptions of one statue, Ausonius's *Cupid Cruciatu*s, written in the later fourth century, invokes a grouping of several histrionic heroines within

50 — The recent scholarship on *ekphrasis* of works of art in Greek sophistic texts is vast and cannot be explored here, but the "readings" of fictive panels in architectural ensembles described by Lucian and the Elder Philostratus present sophisticated viewing practices that can be imagined in the room at the Villa of Munatia. For a recent overview with bibliography, see Newby (2016) 144-163; on the relation between these texts and the Spada Reliefs: Brilliant (1984) 83-89; Newby (2002).

51 — Call. *Descriptions* 13: "On the Statue of Medea", trans. Fairbanks (1979) 419. The passage recalls the famous painting by Timomachus showing Medea contemplating infanticide; placed in the Temple of Venus Genetrix in Caesar's forum, it inspired epigrams and artistic emulations: Gutzwiller (2004).

a single painting. Ausonius begins: “Pray, have you ever seen a picture painted on a wall? To be sure you have, and remember it”. The mural, seen in a wealthy host’s dining room in Trier, depicts embittered mythological women tormenting Eros, the cause of their suffering. Among the “hundreds” of women are Canace and Myrrha and the shades encountered by Aeneas in the underworld, including Dido, Pasiphae, Ariadne, and Phaedra. The narrator gives an acute visual analysis of the wretched females. Consider the characterizations of the Cretan women: “Here also is the whole story of Minos and aëry Crete glimmers like some faint-limned pictured scene. Pasiphae follows the footsteps of her snow-white bull, forlorn Ariadne carries a ball of twine in her hand, hopeless Phaedra looks back at the tablets she has cast away. This wears a halter, this the empty semblance of a crown, while this hesitates in shame to enter her hiding-place in the heifer wrought by Daedalus” (Aus. *Cupid.* 28-34). Venus herself gets caught up in the persecution of her son, but in the end, “the heroines themselves intervene, each one preferring to blame Fate’s cruelty for her death” (95-96)⁵². Spared, Eros is released and exits through the ivory gates.

The *ekphraseis*, like the frescoes, attract readers and viewers to reinterpret not just well-known myths and texts, but also works of art, and these have a common denominator, namely pantomime. Callistratus’s description of Medea’s mercurial character and erupting emotions, the colorful assemblage of vengeful women in Ausonius’s painting, and the expressive heroines at Tor Marancia all bring to mind the flowing, animated sequences of pantomime, in which one performer, usually male, impersonated several characters, male and female, in a series of inter-linked solo scenes, backed by musicians or a chorus⁵³. In fact, some of the Tor Marancia heroines were thus enacted. Of a performance in the time of Nero, Lucillius complains about the dancer playing Canace:

“You played in every ballet according to the story, but by overlooking one very important action you highly displeased us. Dancing the part of Niobe you stood like a stone, and again when you were Capaneus you suddenly fell down. But in the case of Canace you were not clever, for you had a sword, but yet you left the stage alive; that was not according to the story” (*Anth.Pal.*11.254)⁵⁴.

52 — Auson. *Cupid*, trans. White (1919) 207, 211, 215; Davis (1994).

53 — Lucian *Salt.*68; Lada-Richards (2003) on Callistratus and pantomime. Lada-Richards (2004) on ancient references to pantomime.

54 — *Anth.Pal.*11.254, trans. Paton (1917; 2014) 191. It is worth noting that in the same years that this performance took place Nero himself donned a mask and acted out tragedies of gods, heroes, goddesses, and even heroines such as Niobe (Cass. Dio 63.10); a favorite role of the emperor’s was Canace giving birth (*Canace parturiens*) (Suet. *Nero* 21).

The audience's last glimpse is of Canace with sword in hand, still alive, is for Lucillius a disappointing lack of closure. Yet the very same moment in the Tor Marancia fresco prompts a viewer to imagine Canace's inner thoughts and feelings before her fatal deed. It is the very lack of closure that gives the still image its narrative force. In fact, Lucillius's criticism seems to contradict what other writers describe of pantomime's "perfect moments" when the most effective poses (*schemata*) – arrested at a highpoint or between roles – present a dynamic *punctum temporis* that compresses narrative and is pregnant with possibility. Actors amplified the impact by imitating a famous statue or painting and drawing upon the spectators' familiarity⁵⁵. In preparing for the punch-line, Lucillius's epigram captures the quick transitions between the telltale poses of three mythological characters: Niobe, Capaneus, and Canace. Just such agility is noted by the fourth-century sophist Libanius of the dancer's act: ranging from quick, leaping movements to static stillness, culminating in a *tableau vivant* on stage, when "the image takes shape" (Lib. *Or.*64.118). It is not surprising, then, for a third-century compiler of Hyginus's mythological summaries to claim that the main value is to painters, teachers, and pantomime dancers, who needed to know the highlights⁵⁶. So too, the frescoes at Tor Marancia assume formulaic poses known from earlier statues, paintings, and mosaics and probably live impersonations in an ongoing, creative process of adaptation.

The fact that artists and dancers enjoyed a reciprocal visual repertoire means that one medium need not have directly influenced the other. As Katherine Dunbabin has succinctly explained: "...art and theatre were closely interwoven; together they worked not just to reflect but to create a culture whose language was mythology. The stories that the viewers saw set on the floor – and of course in paintings and tapestries and many other aspects of domestic decoration now lost – were the same that they saw and heard on the stage; they made up the body of references that the educated were supposed to recognize and to use to demonstrate their claim to Hellenic culture. It was not a matter simply of knowing the stories; a whole system of thought, speech, and reference depended upon it. Those who saw the story of Pasiphae or Phaedra as they entered a great man's dining room were being invited to display their own *paideia* by discussing the story or commenting on its implications"⁵⁷.

55 — On the relation between iconographic types and a theatrical repertoire of gestures, positions, and "perfect moments": Plut. *Mor.*747c; Settis (1984) 210. Huskinson (2002-2003) argues for the influence of pantomime on Antioch mosaics, such as the scene of Europa and the Bull in the House of the Boat of Psyche.

56 — Ps.Dositheus. *Corp. Gloss. Lat.* iii (ed.G.Goetz, 1892), cited in Dunbabin (2016) 112-113 note 124; Lada-Richards (2004) 21-23.

57 — Dunbabin (2014) 234.

Galleries of Heroines

The habit of juxtaposing individual mythological women was thus shared by authors, artists, and performers. Distinctive at Tor Marancia was the static visual presence of the heroines in a physical setting that was also inhabited by viewers, whose perceptions were inevitably shaped by the ambiance of that interior. This viewing experience, I believe, finds an even more relevant body of comparative material, heretofore not recognized, namely the fragmentary evidence for pictorial galleries of tragic heroines. It is a tradition that began long before Latin poets wrote in the first century B.C.E. and involved dynamic viewer supplementation.

We have already noted a fifth-century B.C.E. example in the mural of *Nekyia* by Polygnotos at Delphi. Although just part of a much larger composition, one section featured Greek women, identified by inscriptions, quietly standing or sitting in distinctive poses. Notably, Polygnotos placed them in pairs, contrasting those who were unhappy in love, such as Ariadne, Phaedra, and Leda and the Danaids, with those who were more fortunate (Paus.10.28.1-31.12)⁵⁸. It was in the fifth-century B.C.E., as well, that the women of the *Odyssey* began to appear in a variety of media, presumably inspired by Polygnotos's *Nekyia*. In following centuries, it is possible that the Hellenistic catalogue poems were illustrated, but due to the accident of survival, the earliest representations of two or more tragic heroines together are found in Pompeian houses of the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E.

In Pompeii, a small room in the House of Jason (IX.5.18), painted in the Augustan period, displayed three scenes of unhappy wives – Medea, Phaedra, and Helen – each about to uproot herself as keeper of the house and destroy the pillars of patriarchy (Fig.15). Visually, the females and situations seem interchangeable, impressing upon the viewer a triple exposure of a type, namely the troubled, dangerous wife. Their passionate disruption of the interior involves a crossing over of the geometries of human relationships, which split along gender lines of mothers and sons and wives and husbands⁵⁹. A different combination of heroines appeared in the House of the Five Skeletons (VI.10.2), where three scenes on the black walls of the largest room in the house presented key turning points in the Trojan war: the fatal meeting of Helen and Paris in Sparta and the war's impetus; Cassandra giving her prophecy of the fall of Troy; and the homecoming and reunion of Ulysses with loyal Penelope. In contrast to the House of Jason, here the female's stories infer more contrasts than

58 — Pausanias continues to name more women such as Thyia, Procris, Clymene, Megara, Eriphyle (10.29.7); Stansbury-O'Donnell (1990) 219-221; Cohen (1995) 38-41.

59 — Bergmann (1996); on the figural type of Penelope/Medea: Settis (1984) 205-206.

similarities, but are presented visually as parallel situations with identical backgrounds, with a large window between two columns⁶⁰. The pattern is the same as in texts: initial parallels begin to reveal differences. Other groupings of women appeared in connected spaces of other houses, such as the House of the Golden Cupids (VI.I6.7) (Helen, Briseis, and Polyxena) and the House of the Tragic Poet (VI.8.5) (Helen, Briseis, and Iphigenia)⁶¹. In the House of Music (VI.3.7) was a pairing of foreign victims: Dido weeping at the departure of Aeneas and Cassandra prophesying the destruction of Troy; and a room in the House of Dioscuri (VI.9.6) displayed a panel of Myrrha (as a tree, with the birth of Adonis) beside one of Scylla approaching Minos (Fig.8), two negative *exempla* of filial piety of daughters towards fathers⁶². These examples show how fashionable were combinations of mythological women in dire straits in first-century domestic décor, just as they were in contemporary Latin texts.

Closer in effect to the Tor Marancia heroines are female characters that are entirely abstracted from a narrative and applied, isolated and unframed, to a monochrome surface. Such compositions appeared as far north as Austria in the Augustan villa at Magdalensburg, painted about 20-15 B.C.E., where in the center of red walls appeared an unusual grouping of Bacchus, a shepherd, four dancing women, and three heroines, namely Cassandra wearing an Asian dress and laurel crown; Io, a gold *uraeus* diadem on her head, dancing with a *thyrsos*; and Iphigenia Taurica holding the cult statue of Diana⁶³. Another series of four individual, emblematic women placed at eye level on a colored background was found in 1759 in a small room opening onto the peristyle in the Villa Arianna in Stabia, dated to the mid-first century C.E. (Fig.16). The females are not tragic heroines *per se*, but, like the Tor Marancia figures, appear alone with their attributes. Two floated on a blue wall and two on a green background. Best known is the female, seen from behind on green ground, strolling ahead with a conical basket filled with flowers and delicately breaking off a flower stem. Without an inscription, her identity is difficult to pin down; her diadem, *armilla* (arm bracelet), and basket of flowers have led to earth goddesses like Persephone or Flora⁶⁴.

60 — On the frescoes from the House of the Five Skeletons: *PPM* 4:1039-1040. Helen: MANN 9002; Ulysses MANN 9107; Cassandra MANN 8999.

61 — Newby (2016) 186-189; Bergmann (1994).

62 — Unfortunately the third panel in the room that accompanied Myrrha and Scylla is lost: Newby (2016) 186-189.

63 — Kenner (1964); Walde (2005).

64 — For a similarly ambiguous female fertility figure, see the seated goddess or personification on the west end of the Ara Pacis, alternately identified as Pax, Venus, Tellus, Terra Mater, and Ceres, showing how ambiguity could generate multiplicity.

Her pendant is Leda, who in a mirror image of “Flora”, advances forward from rather than retreats into the picture plane, her drapery and the swan’s wings aflutter. The women on blue ground are more static: Medea, head inclined, stands erect, grasping the sword, and her counterpart, the huntress Iphigenia or her patron goddess Diana, draws a bow, bending forward to knock the arrow in the bowstring; both present a female with male weapons of destruction. The design of isolated females in a series is similar to many rooms that feature standing muses, but in this case two, or possibly four mortals: Leda, about to be deceived and seduced by Jupiter, and Medea, about to take the lives of her sons in revenge on Jason, and perhaps Persephone, about to be whisked away by Hades, and Iphigenia, facing sacrifice by her father. The identifications are tenuous, but the visual impact of individual females analogous to the women at Tor Marancia.

Not all picture galleries displayed dangerous or distraught women. A room in a secluded part of the House of the Euphrates at Zeugma, painted in the early third century with white panels, featured at least seven standing figures of young women, each four feet high, with Greek names inscribed near their heads (Fig. 17)⁶⁵. Unfortunately, the names of only two on the east wall are preserved: Penelope, patient wife waiting for Ulysses on the island of Ithaca, and Deidameia, mother of Achilles’ son, also abandoned by a Greek warrior and confined on the island of Scyros. Penelope and Deidameia are often paired in literature, where they commiserate about feeling disowned and forgotten. In Statius’ *Achilleid*, Deidameia’s dilemma is resonates with that of Penelope; silent, Deidameia utters speech only on her wedding night as she tries to persuade Achilles not to leave her behind (Stat. *Achil.* 1.931-955), recalling Penelope’s lament to Ulysses about her deserted bed in the *Heroides* (Ov. *Her.* 1.81)⁶⁶. One wonders how the other five females in this room might have echoed or contrasted with each other, and if, or how, the elaborate mosaic on the floor depicting the birth of Venus might have tied the various tales together⁶⁷.

It is important to note, however, that the tradition of heroine galleries began much earlier. A striking example is an Athenian pyxis attributed to Douris of about 475-450 B.C.E. (Fig. 18). What initially appears to be a generic scene of Greek women in the household becomes, upon a closer

65 — Only on the east wall are the figures preserved; the lower part of a third figure and two more partial figures on the adjoining south wall. Room P26: Barbet (2005) 123-157. Standing women with inscriptions appear in other rooms at Zeugma: 159-160; 174-178; 297-300, and also figures of Deidameia and Pasiphae in floor mosaics.

66 — Hagedorn (2004) 39-44.

67 — Barbet (2005) 156-157 proposes that the other women were also in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, such as Chriseis, Cassandra, Briseis, Helen, Ariadne, and Phaedra.

look, a specific narrative involving heroines from the House of Atreus, identified by painted name above their heads. Iphigenia (ΙΦΙΓΕΝΕΙΑ) stands inside a door, wrapping a long *taenia* around her head as if preparing for her wedding, unaware that she will be led not to a wedding but to her own sacrifice. Approaching her from the right is another Argive princess, Danae (ΔΑΝΑΕ), carrying a large box from which she lifts a necklace, perhaps alluding to Zeus's shower of gold. Behind Danae sits Helen (ΕΛΕΝΕ), lifting a cord which she has pulled from a *kalathos* and wound round her left forearm. And facing and extending a large *alabastron* towards Helen is her sister Clytemnestra (ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΕ...ΠΑ). On the other side of a column are two women: one holds out a situla-shaped basket filled with fruit towards another, who wears a *saccos* and lifts the edge of her *chiton* from her right shoulder in a gesture of *aidos*, modesty. Above them is written ΚΑΣΣΑΝΔΡΑ, name of the Trojan princess and war prize of Agamemnon, but it is uncertain which of the two is in fact Cassandra⁶⁸. How should one understand this intriguing combination of text and image? The object, a *pyxis*, was used by women and intimately associated with the domestic, female sphere, and the figures look like Athenian women going about their normal, everyday lives. But the names of legendary female victims of male violence – some of whom were themselves enemies (remember, Clytemnestra killed Cassandra) – demands narrative supplementation. The lineup of past heroines in a contemporary setting conflates past and present and produces an ominous tension.

The groupings of mythological women listed above represent just a small selection of what must have been a rich visual tradition. A thorough study of the evidence for galleries of tragic heroines needs to be done. Fragmentary ensembles survive in statuary programs⁶⁹, mosaics⁷⁰, sarcophagi⁷¹, and textiles⁷². This short overview can only hint at how

68 — Mangieri (2010) 442-443; Lyons (2008) 74-76.

69 — A veritable portrait gallery of goddesses, muses, poets, mothers of miraculous and monstrous births, courtesans, and historical persons appeared between columns in the Portico of Pompey: Sande (2014).

70 — Upstairs from the room with the women in the villa of Munatia lay the black and white mosaic with Ulysses encountering Scylla, the Sirens, and Circe. The Red Pavement at Daphne has what appear to be theatrical scenes, perhaps influenced by pantomime: the central panel shows Phaedra, her nurse, and Hippolytus; below is a scene of Atalanta and Meleager: Huskinson (2002-2003).

71 — The juxtaposition of standing mythological heroines is common on sarcophagi since the fourth-century B.C.E. Mourning Women sarcophagus. On the Antonine columnar sarcophagus from Rapolla, Castello di Melfi of about 170 C.E., the deceased appears as Hygeia, a standard type for Roman aristocratic women; also featured are Helen, Venus Victrix, Achilles and Briseis, Meleager and Atalanta (Greek heroes and their foreign lovers); Venus, Thetis, Helen appear in conches at either end. The meaning of the grouping of figures is unclear: Ghiandoni (1995).

72 — Linen cover in Hermitage: Linfant de Bellefonds (1994) 358 #18; Gerziger (1975) 51-54. Poorly preserved, decorative bands depict rhythmically spaced women in a landscape, running with lifted or extended arms and looking behind themselves as if being chased. Still visible are some

varied and resonant such compositions could be, and persuades that the Tor Marancia heroines offer just one example of a well-established genre of negative female *exempla*.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion has shown that in multiple spheres of Roman society – performance, literature, the visual arts – the convention of reducing women to abstract concepts and recurring states of mind created stereotypes. Tragic heroines cross the bounds of *decorum* and break out of their assigned social “frames.” In the interior of the house, and in their bodies, they harbor danger and threaten pollution, and the logical outcome of their excessive passion is exile or death. The division of the sexes into separate spheres thus found its lethal side in the dissolution of clear categories. So common and repetitive were the uncontrollable, dangerous females that they came to seem natural⁷³.

Perhaps just the thought or sign of these women offered comforting proof of the supremacy of *amor*. Consider the recurring presence of Venus and Eros in the literary catalogues and *ekphraseis*, in the altar and statues of Venus found near the room in the Villa of Munatia Procula, and the birth of Venus adorning the floor where seven mythological heroines appeared on the walls of a space at Zeugma⁷⁴. Remember, too, that the renowned painting of impassioned Medea by Timomachos could be seen in the Temple of *Venus Genetrix* in Rome. In texts and in images, the isolation of these women from their narrative contexts, caught in moments of extreme pain, produced a heightened state of awareness. Multiplied and combined in a lineup, their power only increased.

The tragic heroines from Tor Marancia were not meant to be seen by millions of viewers in the Vatican. Those few individuals who inhabited the room in Munatia’s villa were prompted to take an active role, speak the women’s thoughts, narrate their fates, and perhaps debate and revise their crimes. Even as fragments in a museum setting, these “perfect moments” ask us, too, to interact, bring our knowledge of the stories, and engage with the innermost thoughts and feelings of silenced women.

attributes and names in Attic above their heads: Eulimene and Phaedra.

73 — In her study of literary catalogues of women, Glenda McLeod suggests that such lists appear at times when ties to history are threatened; they give a historical perspective, assure cultural continuity, and “illuminate the stubborn persistence of Western misogyny”: McLeod (1991) 3.

74 — Neudecker (1988) 36 suggests that the Venus statue found in the adjacent room was a metonymy for the tragic heroines; speculating on the literary tastes of Munatia Procula that informed the ensemble is Micheli (2010) 340–341; on *matronae doctae* of this time: Hemelrijk (1999) 164–168.

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Fig. 1 : Pasiphaë, Villa of Munatia Procula, Tor Marancia, Vatican,
sala delle Nozze Aldobrandini inv.79634

Source: [http://cal.byu.edu/macfarlane/OGCMA/
images/0842ANCIENTPasiphae_Aldobrandini.jpg](http://cal.byu.edu/macfarlane/OGCMA/images/0842ANCIENTPasiphae_Aldobrandini.jpg)



Fig. 2 : Pasiphaë and Daedalus, Room P, House of Vettii (VI.15,1)
Photograph by B. Bergmann, reproduced with the permission
of the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali
e del Turismo-Soprintendenza Pompeii

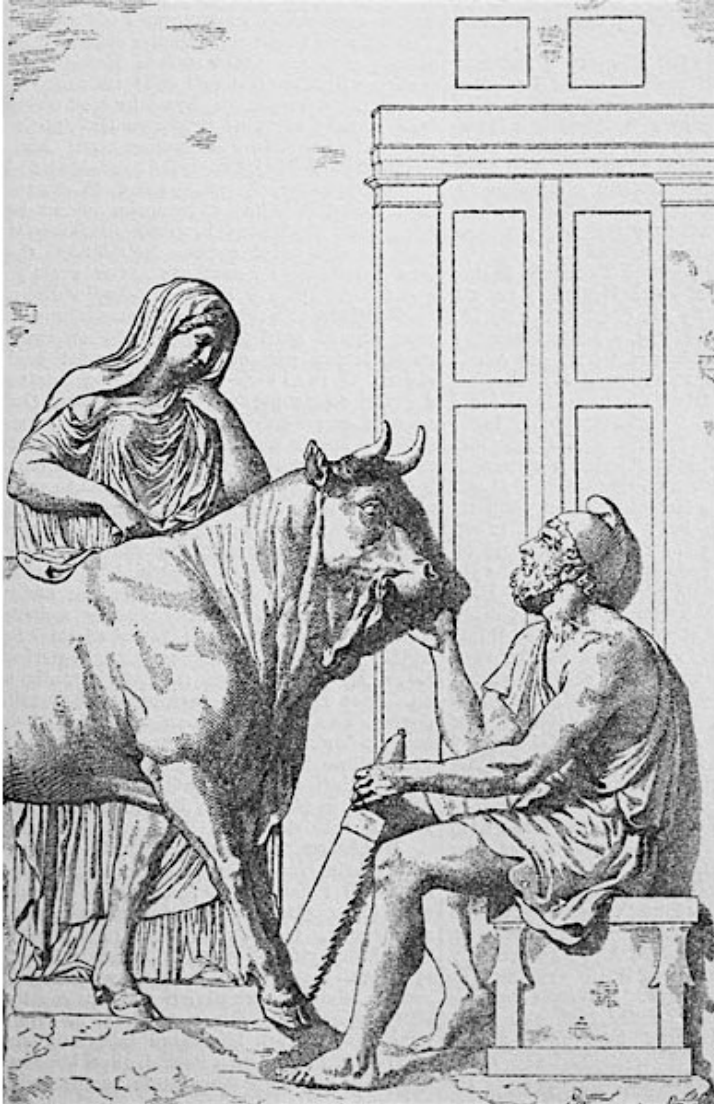


Fig. 3 : Drawing of a marble relief of Pasiphaë and Daedalus,
Palazzo Spada, Rome.

Source : Wilhelm Heinrich Roscher (1845-1923)
Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie,
Band I, page 935 , B. G. Teubner, Leipzig, 1884-1890.
At archive.org



Fig. 4 : Europa on the bull, House of Jason (IX.5.18), MANN 111475
Photograph by B. Bergmann, reproduced with the permission
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e del Turismo-Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli



Fig. 5 : Phaedra, Villa of Munatia Procula, Tor Marancia, Vatican,
sala delle Nozze Aldobrandini inv.79636

Source: [http://cal.byu.edu/macfarlane/OGCMA/
images/0883ANCIENTPhaedra_Aldobrandini.JPG](http://cal.byu.edu/macfarlane/OGCMA/images/0883ANCIENTPhaedra_Aldobrandini.JPG)



Fig. 6 : Phaedra and nurse, House of Jason, Pompeii (IX.5,18)
MANN 114322

Photograph by B. Bergmann, reproduced with the permission
of the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali
e del Turismo-Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli



Fig. 7 : Scylla. Villa of Munatia Procula, Tor Marancia, Vatican,
sala delle Nozze Aldobrandini inv.79635

Source : [http://cal.byu.edu/macfarlane/OGCMA/0000ANCIENTAldobr
andiMisfortunates.htm](http://cal.byu.edu/macfarlane/OGCMA/0000ANCIENTAldobr
andiMisfortunates.htm)

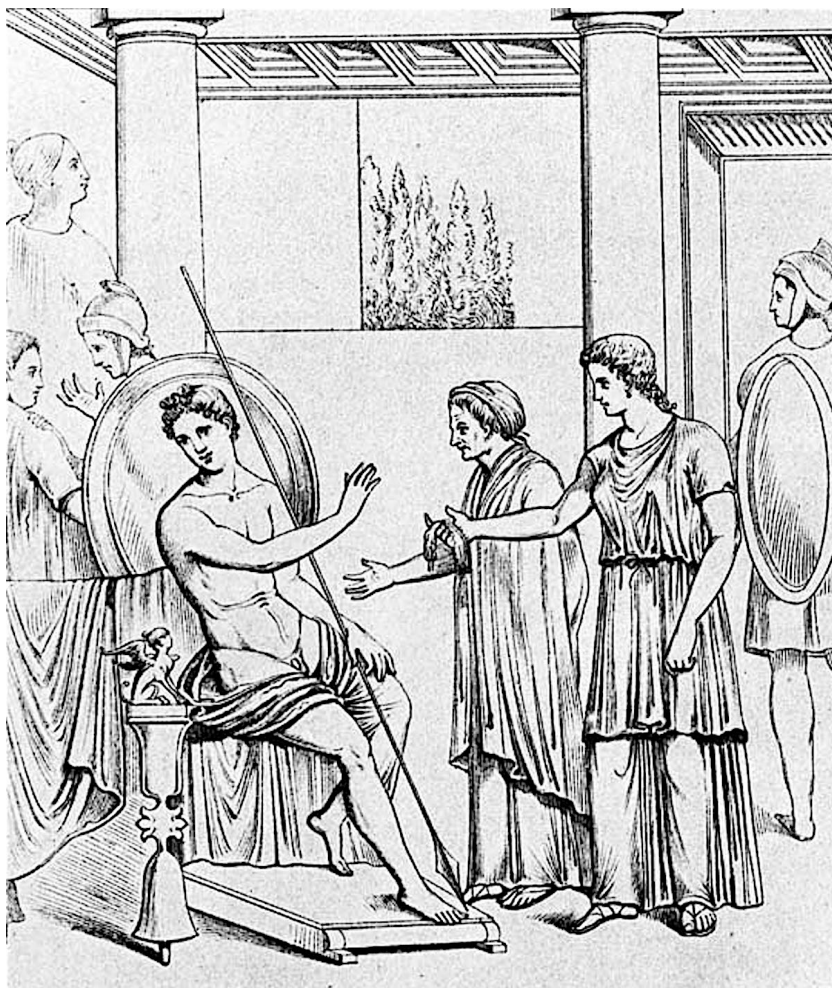


Fig. 8 : Scylla and Minos, drawing of panel from center of west wall,
Room 43, House of the Dioscuri, Pompeii (VI.9.6-7)

Source : Wolfgang Helbig, *Wandgemälde der vom Vesuv verschütteten
Städte Campaniens*, Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel 1868, 1337



Fig. 9 : Canace, Villa of Munatia Procula, Tor Marancia, Vatican,
sala delle Nozze Aldobrandini inv.79632

Source : [http://cal.byu.edu/macfarlane/OGCMA/images/
0285ANCIENTCanace_Aldobrandini.jpg](http://cal.byu.edu/macfarlane/OGCMA/images/0285ANCIENTCanace_Aldobrandini.jpg)



Fig. 10 : Death of Canace, South Italian hydria
from Canosa, Basilicata, about 415 B.C.E.
Source : [http://library.artstor.org/asset/
ARTSTOR_103_41822000406817](http://library.artstor.org/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822000406817)



Fig. 11 : Marble Relief depicting Medea with two of the Peliades,
Vatican Museums, Museo Gregoriano Profano inv.9983
Photo by egisto.sani: <https://hiveminer.com/Tags/greek%2Cmedea>



Fig. 12 : Myrrha, Villa of Munatia Procula, Tor Marancia, Vatican,
sala delle Nozze Aldobrandini inv.79633

Source : [http://cal.byu.edu/macfarlane/OGCMA/
images/0691ANCIENTMyrrha_Aldobrandini.jpg](http://cal.byu.edu/macfarlane/OGCMA/images/0691ANCIENTMyrrha_Aldobrandini.jpg)



Fig. 13 : “Niobe Chiaramonti”, Rome, Vatican, Belvedere,
Braccio Nuovo 13 (Gregoriano Profano, Inv. 1035)
Source : http://www.museivaticani.va/content/museivaticani/en/collezioni/musei/museo-gregoriano-profano/Niobide-Chiaramonti.html#lnav_info&gid=1&pid=1

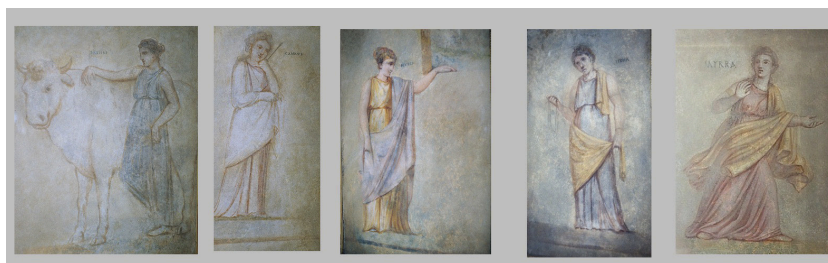


Fig. 14 : Group of Tragic Heroines, Villa of Munatia Procula,
Tor Marancia

Source : <http://cal.byu.edu/macfarlane/OGCMA/0000ANCIENTaldobr andiMisfortunates.htm>

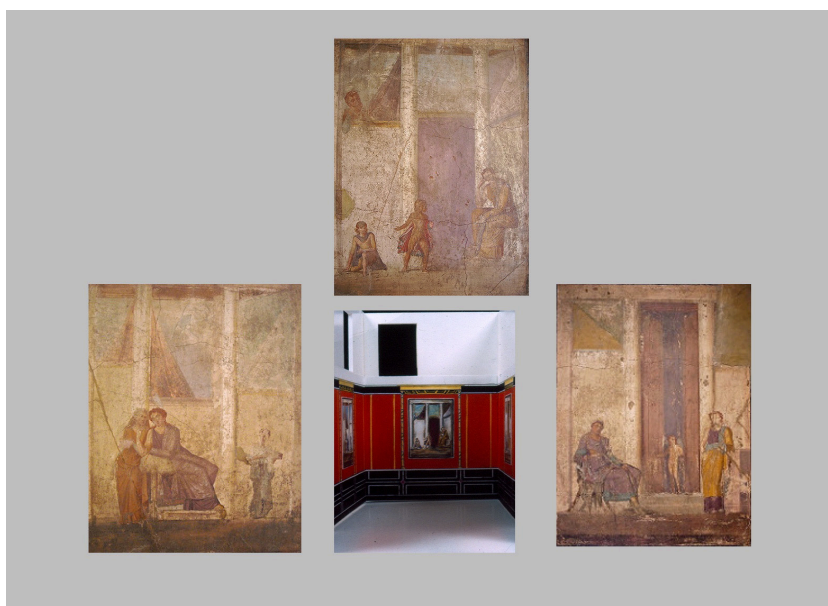


Fig. 15 : House of Jason, Pompeii (IX.5,18):
Phaedra and nurse MANN 114322; Medea and Children MANN
114321; Paris and Helen MANN 114320
Model by Victoria I. Photographs by B. Bergmann, reproduced with
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Fig. 16 : Room W26, Villa Arianna in Stabia:
Flora/Persephone MANN 8834; Leda MANN 9546;
Medea MANN 8978; Diana/Iphigenia MANN 9243
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Fig. 17 : Penelope and Deidameia, Mosaic with Birth of Venus,
Room P26, House of the Euphrates at Zeugma

Photo : Jona Lendering: <http://www.livius.org/pictures/turkey/belkis-zeugma/zeugma-mosaics/penelope-fresco-and-aphrodite-mosaic/>



Fig. 18 : Athenian red-figure pyxis attributed to follower
of Douris of about 475-450 B.C.E.

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Black-and-white photograph: http://library.artstor.org/asset/SS7731005_7731005_10784881