

POMPEII, THE SECRET CABINET, OR HOW TO DEAL WITH SEX

POMPEIA, O GABINETE SECRETO, OU COMO LIDAR COM O SEXO

Pedro Paulo A. Funari¹

José Geraldo Costa Grillo²

ABSTRACT: In this paper we deal with sex, that is, sexual intercourse and other explicit sexual acts that embarrassed people dealing with material evidence and arts coming from Pompeii and the Vesuvian area. We start by exploring some epistemological issues relating to looking for differences in the past. Next, we present a brief history of the Cabinet. Then we turn to a couple of iconographic and epigraphic evidences and explore their interpretive potential. In this sense, we argue that the secret cabinet reveals the embarrassment caused since the 18th century by the discovery of iconography and epigraphy relating to explicit sexual activities. Fact that led early on to lead to secrecy and restriction of access up to the end of the 20th century. The last few decades witnessed a lot of changes in perception and there has been a growing body of scholarship pledging for recognizing differences of perception, including aesthetic ones. For the Romans were different, and the case of the secret cabinet shows this clearly. The couple of evidences explored here enables us also to gather how iconography and epigraphy are interwoven and gain when studied in tandem and in historical and cultural context. And finally, the wider access to the secret cabinet, since 2000, opens new opportu-

-
- 1 Department of History - Campinas State University. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0183-7622>. email: ppfunari@uol.com.br
 - 2 Department of Art History - Federal University of São Paulo. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3498-977X>. email: jcggrillo@unifesp.br

nities to the lay public and contribute to foster a critical scholarly approach to this collection.

Keywords: Secret Cabinet; Sexuality; History; Iconography; Epigraphy.

RESUMO: Neste artigo, temos o sexo como tema, isto é, relações sexuais e outros atos sexuais explícitos que envergonhavam as pessoas que lidavam com evidências materiais e artes vindas de Pompéia e da área do Vesúvio. Começamos explorando algumas questões epistemológicas relacionadas à busca por diferenças no passado. Em seguida, apresentamos uma breve história do Gabinete. Em seguida, voltamos-nos para algumas evidências iconográficas e epigráficas e exploramos seu potencial interpretativo. Nesse sentido, argumentamos que o gabinete secreto revela o constrangimento causado desde o século XVIII pela descoberta da iconografia e epigrafia relacionadas a atividades sexuais explícitas. Fato que levou desde o início ao segredo e à restrição de acesso até o final do século XX. As últimas décadas testemunharam muitas mudanças na percepção e tem havido um crescente corpo de estudiosos prometendo reconhecer diferenças de percepção, incluindo as estéticas. Para os romanos era diferente, e o caso do gabinete secreto mostra isso claramente. O par de evidências exploradas aqui nos permite também perceber como a iconografia e a epigrafia estão interligadas e ganham quando estudadas em conjunto e em contexto histórico e cultural. E, finalmente, o acesso mais amplo ao gabinete secreto, desde 2000, abre novas oportunidades ao público leigo e contribui para fomentar uma abordagem acadêmica crítica a esta coleção.

Palavras-chave: Gabinete Secreto; Sexualidade; História; Iconografia; Epigrafia.

INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with a difficult subject: sex. Sexual intercourse and other explicit sexual references embarrassed people dealing with material evidence and fine arts scholar coming from Pompeii and the Vesuvian area. In this paper, we start by exploring some epistemological issues relating to looking for differences in the past. This is followed by a brief history of the Cabinet since the inception in the eighteenth century, including several original documents, translated by ourselves. Then we turn to a couple of iconographic and epigraphic evidences and explore their interpretive potential.

LOOKING FOR DIFFERENCES

Pornography is a modern concept and the use of this word applied to earlier periods requires caution. Paul Veyne described history as a catalogue of differences, as David Lowenthal defined it as a foreign country, stressing the inevitable discontinuities of perceptions of social life. Lucien Febvre (1942) may be considered a pioneer in this respect in proposing to paying attention to a specific and different past mindset, people who did not think like us: that is the difficult but important question to the historian “qui ne pensaient point comme nous: voilà le difficile et, pour l'historien, l'important” (p. 39). In this regard, Michel Foucault may be considered a true heir to Febvre (Salomon, 2019) in exploring difference of perceptions. In any case, even if it is impossible not to use our own concepts, those of our own period or invented after the studied epoch, the exercise of disentangling present or recent (mis)conceptions and past ones is a must. This exercise is particularly relevant in relation to the ancient world, first of all for there was no distinct social spheres, such as science and religion, much later concepts. Science (*episteme*, *scientia*) was knowledge, and religion (in Greek *threskeia*, *Eusebia*, was cult or piety) and Latin *Religio* was not religion, but scrupulousness, reverence, so that the sacred or magic are much more relevant concepts, as stresses Chris Gosden (2020). Then there is another aspect: religiosity as human in general, and specific and particular, in any case. Religiosity here is taken as a neologism, trying to address the complex feelings relating to spirituality, to a most subjective sentiment, so that everything is relevant to *ánemos* (Greek), *animus* (Latin), breath. Religion may be a misleading word, implying some kind of institutional framework and hier-

archy, while religiosity allow the inclusion of a variety of practices and beliefs, such as magic (Gosden, 2020)

Then, there is another hurdle: pornography as a sexual deviation. Both terms, sex and deviation are modern, not ancient. *Eros* is desire, physical, emotional, sacred, as a deity. *Pórne* is a much later term, related to selling, and so to prostitution, as *meretrix* in Latin refers to *merces*, gifts. There was thus no pornography in the ancient world. One may argue that Christian tenets condemned lust, and this is true, but sin is human and not a deviant behavior, a so-called scientific, neutral, natural concept. For this reason, sins are forgivable, while deviation needs correction or destruction. Deviation is a normative concept and there is a growing criticism of those normative models as being too rigid. People do take social norms in consideration, but do not restrict themselves to those norms, behave differently and think outside the rules “the rules are to be broken” as the saying goes. Sexual deviation is a very recent invention, taken in reprojection to earlier times, starting not by the ancient world, but to the ancient regime mores and mindset, as Marquis de Sade. It is not a coincidence that Sade died in 1814 and the Secret Cabinet was established in the wake of a reaction to ancient regime sexuality, using antiquity as a pretext or case in point. The *Kulturkampf* was against the most recent past, not against the ancient one.

There are still other issues, such as private and public. There is a couple of aspects relevant at least in all class societies, if not earlier. However, private and public differ in time and space. Private in the 19th c. acquired odd features, still with us: hidden, admissible only to him or herself (and to the psychoanalyst). Private in ancient times was a very different matter. Slaves were in the most intimate situations, including sex, people mixed in the latrines, there was no privacy, in the modern sense. In this sense, the ancient were not limited by modern conventions, such as sex (that is, sexual intercourse) being presented to children and to strangers. On the contrary, sexual intercourse was sacred, public and propitiatory (Funari, 1995), not at all the modern concept of it. A case in point is the so-called Warren Cup (Oliva Neto, 1995), among others, blurring the divide between private and public in our modern understanding, for the slave gaze was taken as part of the sexual, in this case homoerotic, intercourse. Then there is the social variety of people interacting with images and inscriptions. Even though illiteracy was overwhelming, the ubiquitous presence of inscriptions suggests the role of the

written word, much beyond the literate people. Furthermore, in the ancient world all reading was aloud, so that this had a multiplying effect. Considering that even the most elite houses had a social mix of people having access to them, from slave and clients to fellow rich people, we may gather that inscriptions and images reached society as a whole (Funari, 2012).

Last, but not least, there is the question of female agency, and Pompeii furnishes unique evidences (Osanna, Grimaldi & Zuchtriegel, 2016; Osanna, 2019). Ancient societies were patriarchal, as our own modern ones, but very differently. There has been a modern prevailing male and sexist view about ancient evidences. However, in the last decades, since at least the 1960s, thanks to social and intellectual movements, female agency in the present and in the past has been stressed (Rabinowitz & Richlin, 1993). Feminism has played a key role in classical archaeology and ancient art history (Brown, 1997), but also in archaeology in general (Blackmore, 2015), from prehistory onwards (Bolger, 2013). Overall, this paper pledges for a critical reading of the evidence and of the modern literature, so that we try and fight against prejudices and preconceptions.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SECRET CABINET

The trajectory of the Secret Cabinet may be traced back to 1752, when at the so-called *Villa dei Pisoni* (The Villa of the Pisones), in Herculaneum, a sculpture of Pan with Goat was found (fig. 1). The archaeological report by Karl Weber served to the publication by Giulio de Petra and Michele Ruggiero, as follows:

28 Febrero – 4 Marzo (Registro W.). A la rampa no ha habido nada de nuevo. A Cichare una estatua de marmol, que representa un satiro desnudo haciendo el amor con una cabra, lo que se llebó á Caserta á S. M., y lo ha vuelto á traer á Portici... (De Petra, 1883, p. 155).

La semana del 28 febrero hasta el 4 marzo de 1752. Resina. A Moscardillo y la rampa no ha havido nada de nuevo. Ciehare. Una estátua de mármol que representa un sátiro desnudo haciendo el amor con una cabra, la que se llebó á Caserta á S. M. y la vuelto à traer á Portici. Faze coito... Relación (min.) (Ruggiero, 1885, pp. 123-124).

February 28 – March 4 (W. Record). There has been nothing new on the ramp. At Cichare a marble statue, representing a naked satyr making love with a goat, which he brought to Caserta to His Majesty, and has brought back to Portici... (Our translation).

The week of February 28 to March 4, 1752. Resina. There has been nothing new at Moscardillo and the ramp. Ciehare. A marble statue representing a naked satyr making love to a goat, which was taken to Caserta by His Majesty and brought back to Portici. Intercourse scene... Report (min.) (Our translation).

Figure 1 – Pan and the Goat



Sculpture. Marble. 44.2 x 47.5 cm. Herculaneum, Villa of the Papyri. 1st century BC. Naples, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 27709.

Source: © Creative Commons Attribution. Photography by Marie-Lan Nguyen. License:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pan_goat_MAN_Napoli_Inv27709_no1.jpg#mw-jump-to-license

Explaining the villa plan, Weber states that the sculpture was found the first of March 1752: “un Satiro y cabria de marmol juntos, en 1 marzo 1752” (De Petra, 1879, p. 254), that is, together Satyr and a marble goat. The inventory of the Portici Museum, signed by Joseph Canart, three days later, the 4th of March, 1752, the sculpture was stored, forbidding its exhibition to anybody, following the wishes of His Majesty, Kind Charles the Third:

Satiro che sta in copula con una capra, il quale si conserva in mia casa dentro una cassa chiusa, da che S. M. con dispiaccio de 4 marzo 1752 si servi farlo a me consegnare, proibendomi di farlo vedere a chi che sia; e d'allora in poi detta cassa non s'è aperta altro, che per il Conte Virtemberg ed il

Milordo Rochefort precedente due R. ordini a me comunicati per Segreteria di Stato (Canart, 1762, p. 232).

Satyr copulating with a goat, which is kept in my house in a closed chest, since His Majesty with a dispatch dated 4 March 1752 made use of having it delivered to me, forbidding me to show it to anyone; and from then on the said coffer has only been opened for Count Virtemberg and Milordo Rochefort due to two Royal orders communicated to me by the Secretariat of State (Our translation).

All of this suggests that the sculpture raised a moral issue, as it is clear reading its first publication, three years later, by Ottavio Antonio Bayard, in 1755. He refuses to describe it arguing a religious, Christian reason:

Un Satiro, che sta con una Capra in atto talmente sconcio, e disdicevole, che per modestia Cristiana non si describe (p. 182, n° 346).

A Satyr, who is with a Goat in an act so obscene and unbecoming, that out of Christian chastity it cannot be described (Our translation).

A little later, John Nixon, in his letter about the temple to Serapis at Pozzuoli, dated the 14th March, 1757, Nixon mentions a painting, obscene in character, then at a private room at the Portici Palace, accessible only by special royal permission:

I have but one more particular to add concerning the apartment in the north-west angle of the temple, viz. that, when it was cleared of its rubbish, there was found in a niche in one of its sides a male and female figure naked, and in the most flagrant act of natural lewdness. It is now (as we were informed) in a private room in the palace at Portici, nor can be seen without the King's special permission. In the same place, probably, may stand the statue of a satyr in an unnatural action with a goat, which was found at Herculaneum, and is, they say, of exquisite sculpture, but concealed in the palace above-mentioned with the same strict care as the former (p. 170).

Referring to Portici, Francesco Sacco states that there was a palace build in 1738 by Charles the Third and also a museum attached to the building, storing findings from Herculaneum, Pompeii and Stabiae:

Palazzo Reale fatto edificare nel mille settecento trentotto dal Re Carlo Borbone.
[...].

In questo stesso Palazzo Reale vi è un altro contiguo edificio diviso in tre Piani, ove si conserva un Museo, ch'è l'unico in tutto il Mondo, sì per le pitture fatte sull' intonico delle mura, e sul marmo; come per ogni specie d'antichità ritrovate nelle scavazioni delle distrutte Città di Ercolano, di Pompei, e di Stabia (Sacco, 1796, pp. 127, 129).

Royal Palace built in seventeen thirty-eight by King Charles Bourbon.
[...].

In this same Royal Palace, there is another contiguous building divided into three floors, where a museum is kept, which is the only one in the whole world, both for the paintings made on the plaster of the walls and on marble; as for every type of items found in the excavations of the destroyed cities of Herculaneum, Pompeii, and Stabia (Our translation).

The bronze and marble statues were at the first floor, comprising seventeen rooms, as he stated. However, his report of this floor finishes by an eighth room, comprising a whole set of obscene artefacts, such as the sculpture of Pan with the goat, so that it was always closed.

La decima ottava stanza, la quale è sempre chiusa, contiene tutto ciò che è osceno; come il Tripode de' Priapi, il Satiro in unione della capra ec. (Sacco, 1796, p. 133).

The eighteenth room, which is always closed, contains everything that is obscene; like the Tripod of the Priapi, the Satyr in union with the goat etc. (Our translation).

HERCULANEUM MUSEUM

It was founded as a museum at Portici, in 1750:

Anno 1750. [...]. Viene fondato il Museo Ercolanese in Portici nella Real Casina (Del Pozzo, 1857, p. 59).

Year 1750. [...]. The Ercolanese Museum is founded in Portici in the Real Casina (Our translation).

Stefano de Caro stresses that the museum served to store the huge archaeological findings from Herculaneum: "In order to cope with this treasure trove, the royal Villa in Portici was adapted in 1750 as the 'Museum Herculense', which quickly filled up with thousands of finds" (De Caro, 1996, p. 12).

THE REAL BOURBON MUSEUM

In 1794 the Museum was moved from Portici to Naples at the *Palazzo degli Studii* (De Caro, 2000). February the 22nd 1816 the King of Naples, Ferdinand the fourth, has named it as the Royal Bourbon Museum:

FERDINANDO IV per la grazia di Dio Re delle Due Sicilie, ec.
[...].

Abbiamo decretato e decretiamo quanto segue:

ART. 1. I monumenti antichi di qualunque natura, che durante l'occupazione militare si erano riuniti nel nostro real palazzo di Napoli, e che son divenuti di nostra particolare pertinenza, resteranno depositati nell' edificio de' regi studi, che da ora innanzi porterà il titolo di Real museo Borbonico, e riuniti a' monumenti antichi, alla biblioteca, a' papiri ed al museo Borgiano, per tenersi esposti all' osservazione degli amatori e de'dotti (Decreto, 1816, pp. 147-148).

FERDINAND IV by the grace of God, King of the Two Sicilies, etc.
[...].

We have decreed and indeed decree the following:

ART. 1. The ancient monuments of any nature, which during the military occupation were gathered in our royal palace in Naples, and which have become of particular relevance to us, will remain deposited in the royal studies building, which from now on will bear the title of Royal Bourbon Museum, and gathered together with the ancient monuments, the library, the papyri and the Borgian museum, to be exposed to the observation of amateurs and scholars (Our translation).

THE EARLIEST THREE NAMES OF THE SECRET CABINET

As early as 1817, Giovanni Battista Finati mentioned “una collezione non ordinaria di oggetti osceni”, as well as a “Galleria degli oggetti osceni”, that is, an extraordinary collection of obscene objects and a Galley of obscene objects at the Bourbon Museum (Finati, 1817, p. xiv). The following year, Lorenzo Giustiniani mentioned a couple of new rooms, for glasses and obscene objects: “due nuove stanze, ove sonosi riposti i vetri di Pompei, e gli oggetti osceni” (Giustiniani, 1818, p. 215), that is two new rooms, one for glasses from Pompeii and the other for obscene objects. Even if the term obscene was thus common, it was not yet used officially.

The Cabinet of obscene objects resulted from a visit of the heir to the throne, Prince and then Francesco Primo, or Francis the First, in February 1819 (cf. De Caro, 2000), as stated Michele Arditi in his book about a

bas-relief (Fig. 2) showing a phallus and the inscription *hic habita felicitas* (cf. Funari, 1995, on this inscription). During the visit, Francesco counseled him to reserve a room to store and exhibit the obscene objects, so that the access should be restricted to mature and good reputation people:

Che sarebbe cosa benfatta il chiudere tutti gli Oggetti osceni, di qualunque materia essi fossero, in una Stanza; alla quale Stanza avessero poi unicamente ingresso le persone di eccitolo da si pia e lodematura età e di conosciuta morale (Arditi, 1825, p. 45, n. 2).

That it would be a good thing to close all obscene objects, of whatever material they were, in a room; to which Room only people of such pious and praiseworthy age and of known morals could enter (Our translation).

In 1863 and 1864, the then director of the renamed National Museum of Naples, Giuseppe Fiorelli, published the whole collection (Fiorelli, 1863a, 1863b, 1864a, 1864b, 1864c). Fiorelli lists the successive names used to refer to the collection from 1819 to 1860: Collection of obscene objects, in 1819; Collection of reserved objects, in 1823; and from 1860, Pornographic Collection.

La Raccolta Pornografica venne costituita nell'anno 1819 a richiesta di Francesco I, Duca di Calabria, il quale nel visitare il Museo osservò, che sarebbe stata cosa ben falla di chiudere tutti gli oggetti osceni, di qualunque materia essi fossero, in una stanza, alla quale avessero unicamente ingresso le persone di matura età e di conosciuta morale [...]. Essa fu composta di 102 oggetti, ed ebbe nome di Gabinetto degli oggetti osceni, che il 28 agosto 1823 mutò in quello di Gabinetto degli oggetti riservati, con l'assoluta inibizione di mostrarsi a chicchessia, senza averne prima ottenuto permesso dal Re. [...].

Finalmente il giorno 11 settembre 1860, per ordine del Dittatore gli oggetti riservati rividero la luce, e si procedette al riscontro del l'antico inventario nel 19 dicembre dello stesso anno. Fu allora che molti se ne rinvennero non descritti, perchè trovati in Pompei posteriormente alla chiusura di quelle sale, e furono aggiunti all'antica collezione, che quindi venne più opportunamente denominata Raccolta Pornografica (Fiorelli, 1864c, pp. 181-182).

The Pornographic Collection was established in the year 1819 at the request of Francesco I, Duke of Calabria, who when visiting the Museum observed that it would be a very good thing to close all the obscene objects, of whatever material they were, in one room, to which only people of mature age and of known morals could enter [...]. It was made up of 102 objects, and was called the Cabinet of Obscene Objects, which on 28 August 1823 changed to that of the Cabinet of Reserved Objects, with the absolute inhibition of

showing oneself to anyone, without first having obtained permission from the King. [...].

Finally on 11 September 1860, by order of the Dictator, the reserved objects saw the light again, and the ancient inventory was compared on 19 December of the same year. It was then that many were found undescribed, because they were found in Pompeii after the closure of those rooms, and they were added to the ancient collection, which was therefore more appropriately called the Pornographic Collection (Our translation).

The Cabinet of obscene objects and the Cabinet of reserved objects were closed to the lay public, and the access was restricted to those obtaining an especial permission. In the earliest case, a decree of king Ferdinand the First, dated the 7th May, 1821, article 9 prohibited all that could induce to immoral behavior or ideas, such as books, obscene paintings and other objects:

Sono vedati tutti i libri [...]; tutte le pitture oscene, tutti gli altri oggetti che conducono ad imoralità (Decreto, 1821, p. 58).

All books are prohibited [...]; all obscene paintings, all other objects that lead to immorality (Our translation).

The change to reserved objects had similar reasons, that is, decency. At this moment, the minister of the interior, Girolamo Ruffo, decreed the change of name:

Per serbarsi la dovuta decenza trovo più plausibile che da oggi innanzi il Gabinetto degli oggetti osceni del Real Museo Borbonico sia intitolato Gabinetto degli Oggetti Riservati (20 agosto 1823, Archivio di Stato di Napoli, Min. Int., II Inv. b 2012, inc. 414) (De Caro, 2000, p. 88).

To maintain due decency I find it more plausible that from now on the Cabinet of obscene objects of the Royal Bourbon Museum will be entitled Cabinet of Reserved Objects (20 August 1823, State Archives of Naples, Min. Int., II Inv. b 2012, inc. 414) (Our translation).

Regarding this, the Real Bourbon Museum established in the second chapter of its regulations, dedicated to access and control, article 16, that a series of objects should remain closed with key, and article 17 stated the same procedure to the Cabinet of reserved objects. The keys were kept under

the control of the Controller, who would give them under formal permission by the Minister of the royal house.

Gli armadii del medagliere, e quelli nei quali trovansi custoditi gli oggetti minuti e preziosi, saranno chiusi a doppia e diversa chiave, una delle quali si conserverà dal Custode, l'altra dal Controloro, affinchè non possano tali armadii aprirsi senza l'intervento e personale assistenza di entrambi (Regolamento, 1828, Art. 16, p. 11).

The cupboards of the medal collection, and those in which small and precious objects are kept, will be locked with two different keys, one of which will be kept by the Custodian, the other by the Controller, so that these cupboards cannot be opened without the intervention and personal assistance of both (Our translation).

The 17th October, 1860, a decree changed the name of the museum to National Museum of Antiquities and Fine Arts:

Art. 1. Il real Museo Borbonico assumerà da oggi innanzi il nome di Museo nazionale di antichità e di belle arti (Decreto, 1860a, p. 326).

Art. 1. The Royal Bourbon Museum will henceforth assume the name of National Museum of Antiquities and Fine Arts (Our translation).

The 7th December, 1860, an organic decree divided the Museum in four sections, the first one referring to ancient times, divided itself in further six sections, comprising the fourteen collections stored in the museum. The fifth section was dedicated to the pornographic objects, as follows:

La chiave del gabinetto degli oggetti riservati si terrà soltanto dal Controloro, alla di cui cura restano esclusivamente affidati, per mostrarli a coloro che ne avranno ottenuto il permesso dal Ministro di Casa Reale (Regolamento, 1828, Art. 17 p. 12).

ART. 1. Il Museo nazionale sarà diviso in quattro sezioni, cioè

Sezione 1 - antichità figurata;

Sezione 2 - numismatica ed epigrafia;

Sezione 3 - monumenti della vita privata;

Sezione 4 - monumenti del medio-evo e del risorgimento.

[...].

4. Ciascuna delle sezioni indicate nell'articolo primo comprenderà varie delle quattordici raccolte onde si compone il Museo, en el modo seguente:

Sezione prima.

1. Statue di bronzo;

2. Statue di marmo e bassorilievi;
3. Dipinture greche e romane, monocromi, mosaici;
4. Vasi italo-greci;
5. Oggetti pornografici;
6. Monumenti egizi (Decreto, 1860b, pp. 134-135).

The key to the cabinet of reserved objects will only be held by the Controller, to whose care they remain exclusively entrusted, to show them to those who have obtained permission from the Minister of the Royal Household (REGULATION, 1828, Art. 17 p. 12).

ART. 1. The National Museum will be divided into four sections, viz
 Section 1 - figurative antiquity;
 Section 2 - numismatics and epigraphy;
 Section 3 – monuments of private life;
 Section 4 - monuments of the Middle Ages and the Risorgimento.
 [...].

4. Each of the sections indicated in the first article will include various of the fourteen collections which make up the Museum, in the following way:
 Section one.

1. Bronze statues;
2. Marble statues and bas-reliefs;
3. Greek and Roman paintings, monochromes, mosaics;
4. Italo-Greek vases;
5. Pornographic objects;
6. Egyptian monuments (Our translation).

This collection of pornographic objects was named by Giuseppe Fiorelli in his articles as Pornographic Collection (Fiorelli, 1863a, 1863b, 1864a, 1864b, 1864c), as in the official publication of the objects, called Catalogue of Pornographic Collection (Fiorelli, 1866). The Secret Cabinet denomination was used first by Cesar Famin (1832, 1836), later on by Louis Barré (1840), even if this was not the official name of the collection at this period. Even though the cabinet was open to the public from 1860, it continued to be closed several times, over the years, as late as the year 2000, when it received the official name of Secret Cabinet and was open without conditions to the public, acquiring in the process a scholarly function, as well as offering opportunities to museography studies (cf. De Caro, 2009).

A COUPLE OF EVIDENCES: ICONOGRAPHY AND EPIGRAPHY IN TANDEM

We now turn to a couple of evidences, starting by the most famous *hic habitat felicitas* (happiness lives here), a phallic image and then we deal

with a wall painting describing sexual intercourse and a suggestive sentence: *lente impelle* (push on slowly).

HIC HABITAT FELICITAS

This inscription (Zangemeister & Reimerum, 1871), *hic habitat felicitas*, is in a plaque with Phallus, now stored at the *Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli* (Fig. 2). It was excavated at the bakery (*pistrinum*) of Popidius Priscus (VII.2.22). Originally, it was at the top of the oven, visible to everybody. It was on the outer wall of the furnace of the bakery connected to the house of N. Popidius Priscus, a slab of travertine with a phallus in relief with the inscription “*hic habitat felicitas*”. Most scholars interpret it as clearly apotropaic, linking the production of bread and the generative force of nature. The phallus was used in a myriad of artefacts, from *tintinnabula* (bells) to tombs or lamps, as it was also present in ancient literature (Oliva Neto, 2006). The phallus probably relates to the swelling up of the penis, and there is thus a clear analogy with the process of growing of the loaf of bread in the oven. *Felicitas* is mostly taught as a reference to good fortune, fertility, happiness, success, all derived from *felix* (nurse/feed, and so fertile, fruitful, prosperous, auspicious, luck, happy, blessed). *Felicitas* was a propitious deity and the name was used widely as propitiatory, naming cities (like Lisbon, *Felicitas Iulia Olisipo*) and as an epithet of a variety of things. The other option is to interpret *felicitas* as a personal name, as attested later as a slave or freed-woman name (Omena & Funari, 2016), even though this is considered less probable, for different reasons, not least the fact that there is no direct evidence suggesting this hypothesis.

Figure 2 – Hic Habitat Felicitas



Low relief. Painted terracotta. 25 x 40 cm. Pompeii. Naples, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 27741.

Source: © Creative Commons Attribution.

Photography by Sailko. License:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rilievo_con_fallo_e_iscrizione_%27hic_habitat_felicitas%27_da_panificio_dell%27insula_della_casa_di_pansa,_I_sec_dc,_27741.JPG#mw-jump-to-license.

LENTE IMPELLE

A wall painting at the Caupona (tavern) of Donatus and Verpus or House of the King of Prussia (VII.9.33), linked to VII.9.34, was found the 11th October, 1822, now in Naples Archaeological Museum, inventory number: 27690. It depicts a heterosexual coupling, with the woman (Girod, 2010, p. 159) on all fours looking back at the young man as she is engaged *a tergo*. There is a painted inscription, implying it a phrase spoken by the woman: *lente impelle* (CIL IV 794), push on slowly (Fig. 3). There has been an interpretation of the wall painting as part of a brothel (*caupona*, *lupanare*), but others prefer it to be in a private room (Eschebach, 1993, p. 315; Pagano & Priscian-

daro, 2006), as we also consider. In any case, the traditional view is grounded on modern prejudices, but also an ancient male gaze, such as when Lucretius refer to a female wishing to please a male as a *scorta* or harlot:

*idque sua causa consuerunt scorta moveri,
ne complerentur crebro gravidaeque iacerent,
et simul ipsa viris Venus ut concinnior esse*
(Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 4.1274-1276)

And courtesans
Are thuswise wont to move for their own ends,
To keep from pregnancy and lying in,
And all the while to render Venus more
A pleasure for the men.
(Lucretius, *Of the Nature of Things*, p. 183-184).

Lucretius' male gaze is evident, not only for describing the woman as a harlot, but also by implying that the female behavior was not for herself but for male pleasure (*concinnior*), in contrast to another ancient male, Ovidius (Weiberg, 2020):

*Ad metam properate simul: tum plena uolutas,
Cum pariter victi femina virque iacent*
(*Ars Amatoria*, 2, 728-9).

Aim for the goal at the same time: that's the greatest pleasure,
When woman and man lie in bed, both beaten.
(Our translation).

In this case, Ovid stresses equality and even female precedence (*femina virque*, woman and man). A recent modern female gaze is much closer to our own understanding and it is worth quoting in length:

She is commanding him to impel her with his penis slowly: i.e., the woman shown is given a voice, and while in the 'Passive' role and not facing him directly, she has sexual agency by telling him the speed she wants. This scene, when viewed in combination with the graffiti written above it, has led some (phallo-centric) scholars to argue that "the artistic and textual construction is a male one," because while it might "celebrate the beauty and desirability of women," it emphasizes impressive male performance and suggests being well endowed. From this perspective, another meaning of the *lente impelle* inscription plus visual scene could be that the man was being too rough and that the woman was powerless to do anything besides use her voice... but to his deaf ears. Thus, rather than her commands be-

ing followed, they were projected as un-heeded or disobeyed. Even though a male author of the graffito might very well be in which case, the misogynistic 'joke' that would imply harm to a woman regarding 'male endowment' would indeed translate from Rome to modernity), this is not the only potential reading of this scene (especially when considered alongside the nuanced examples presented earlier in this thesis). It is therefore of great importance to call attention to the blatant blind-spots inherent in such 'traditional readings' and respond to exclusions, erasures, and denigrations of female presences in readership, revealing the very-real (if not obvious) potentials that a Roman woman would indeed have written, had a voice, and interjected/dissented against an oppressive and hypocritical system. Such interventions are not only necessary, but expedient. Regardless of gendered authorship, the words are evidently a female speaking as it provides dialogue to the image for public viewing (Mitchel, 2022, pp. 81-82).

Figure 3 – Lente Impelle



Parietal painting. 43 x 34 cm. Pompeii, home of the King of Prussia (VII 9, 33). Circa 69-79 AD. Naples, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 27690.

Source: © Creative Commons Attribution. Photography by Sailko. License:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Quadretto_erotico_da_lupanare_con_%27lente_impelle%27,_27690,_da_pompei,_1-50_dc_ca...JPG#mw-jump-to-license

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The secret cabinet reveals the embarrassment caused since the 18th century by the discovery of iconography and epigraphy relating to explicit sexual activities, or so deemed. This led early on to secrecy and restriction of access up to the end of the 20th century. The last few decades witnessed a lot of changes in perception and there has been a growing body of scholarship pledging for recognizing differences of perception (αἴσθησις, *aísthēsis*), including aesthetic ones. Romans were different, and the case of the secret cabinet shows this clearly. The couple of evidences explored here enables us also to gather how iconography and written message are interwoven and gain when studied in tandem and also in historical and cultural context. The wider access to the secret cabinet, since 2000, opens new opportunities to the lay public and contribute to foster a critical scholarly approach to this important collection. We will be happy if this paper stimulate further studies and discussions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We owe thanks to Chris Gosden, Renata Senna Garraffoni, João Ângelo Oliva Neto, Luciane Munhoz de Omena and Mirella Romero Recio. We also mention the institutional support of CNPq, Fapesp, Unifesp and Unicamp. The responsibility for the ideas is our own and we are solely responsible.

REFERENCES

- Arditi, M. (1825). *Il fascino e l'amuleto control del fascino presso gli antichi: Illustrazione di un antico basso-rilievo rinvenuto in un forno della città di Pompei*. Stamperia Reale.
- Barré, M. L. (1840). *Herculanum et Pompéi* (Tome VIII). Firmin Didot.
- Bayardi, O. A. (1755). *Catalogo degli antichi monumenti dissotterrati dalla dis-coperta città di Ercolano*. Regia Stamperia.

Blackmore, C. (2015). Feminist archaeology. In P. Whelehan & A. Bolin (Eds.), *The International Encyclopaedia of Human Sexuality* (pp. 369-426). John Wiley & Sons.

Bolger, D. (Ed). (2013). *A companion to gender prehistory*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Brown, S. (1997). "Ways of seeing" women in antiquity: An introduction to feminism in classical archaeology and ancient art history. In A. O. Koloski-Ostrow & C. L. Lyons, *Naked truths: Women, sexuality and gender in classical art and archaeology* (pp. 12-42). Routledge.

Canart, G. (1762). Museo di Portici anno 1762. Statue e generi antichi di marmo, inventariati secondo si trovano presentemente (1762). In Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione (Org.), *Documenti inediti per servire alla storia dei musei d'Italia* (v. 2; pp. 228-234). Bencini.

De Caro, S. (1996). *The National Archaeological Museum of Naples*. Electa.

De Caro, S. (2000). *Il gabinetto segreto del Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli*. Electa.

De Petra, G. (1879). I monumenti della villa ercolanese. In M. Ruggiero (Org.), *Pompei e la regione sotterrata dal Vesuvio nell'anno LXXIX* (pp. 251-271). Stabilimento Tipografico del Cav. F. Giannini.

De Petra, G. (1883). Documenti e notizie degli scavi eseguiti nella villa. In D. P. A. Comparetti & G. De Petra. *La villa ercolanese dei Pisoni i suoi monumenti e la sua biblioteca* (pp. 145-294). Loescher.

Decreto n° 288, 22 Febbraio 1816. (1816). Portante lo stabilimento del Real museo Borbonico. In *Collezione delle leggi e decreti reali del regno di Napoli* (pp. 146-149). Stamperia Reale.

Decreto n° 33, 7 Maggio 1821. (1821). Decreto che contiene varie disposizioni di legislazione penale. In *Collezione delle leggi e de' decreti reali del regno delle Due Sicilie* (pp. 56-60). Real Tipografia del Ministero di Stato degli Affari Interni.

Decreto n° 130, 17 Ottobre 1860. (1860°) Decreto con cui si dispone che il real Museo Borbonico assuma da oggi innanzi il nome di Museo nazionale di antichità e di belle arti, e la reale Biblioteca Borbonica quello di Biblioteca nazionale. In Collezione delle leggi e de' decreti emanati nelle Provincie continentali dell'Italia meridionale durante il periodo della dittatura (pp. 326-327). Tipografia Nazionale.

Decreto n° 74, 7 Dicembre 1860. (1860b). Decreto organico del Museo nazionale. In: Collezione delle leggi e de' decreti emanati nelle Provincie continentali dell'Italia meridionale durante il periodo della Luogotenenza (v. 1; pp. 134-140. Tipografia Nazionale.

Del Pozzo, L. (1857). Cronaca civile e militare delle Due Sicilie sotto la dinastia Borbonica dall' anno 1734 in poi. Stamperia Reale.

Eschebach, L. (Ed.) (1993). Gebäudeverzeichnis und Stadtplan der antiken Stadt Pompeji. Böhlau.

Famin, C. (1832). Peintures, bronzes et statues érotiques formant la collection du cabinet secret du Musée royal de Naples. Éverat.

Famin, M. C. (1836). Musée royal de Naples, peintures, bronzes et statues érotiques du Cabinet Secret. Abel Ledoux.

Febvre, L. (1942). Le problème de l'incroyance au XVI^e siècle : La religion de Rabelais. Albin Michel.

Finati, G. (1817). Il Regal Museo Borbonico: Tomo primo delle statue di marmo, parte prima. Giovanni de Bonis.

Fiorelli, G. (1863a). Programma. Bullettino del Museo Nazionali di Napoli, 1, 1-2.

Fiorelli, G. (1863b). Raccolta pornografica [I]. Bullettino del Museo Nazionali di Napoli, 7, 106-112.

Fiorelli, G. (1864a). Raccolta pornografica [II]. Bullettino del Museo Nazionali di Napoli, 9, 137-144.

Fiorelli, G. (1864b). Raccolta pornografica [III]. *Bullettino del Museo Nazionali di Napoli*, 11, 171-176.

Fiorelli, G. (1864c). Raccolta pornografica [IV]. *Bullettino del Museo Nazionali di Napoli*, 12, 179-182.

Fiorelli, G. (1866). *Catalogo del Museo Nazionale di Napoli. Raccolta pornografica*. Stabilimento Tipografico in S^a Teresa.

Funari, P. P. A. (1993). Graphic caricature and the ethos of ordinary people at Pompeii. *Journal of European Archaeology*, 1(2), 133-150. <https://doi.org/10.1179/096576693800719374>

Funari, P. P. A. (1995). Apotropaic symbolism at Pompeii: A reading of the graffiti evidence. *Revista de História*, 132, 9-17. <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2316-9141.voi132p9-17>

Funari, P. P. A. (2012). *Aspectos de la cultura popular romana a partir de Pompeya: Arte, erotismo y sensibilidad en el mundo romano*. Editorial Académica Española.

Funari, P. P. A., & Garraffoni, R. S. (2022). Grafites apotropaicos e materialidade: Uma perspectiva pós-colonial nos espaços escritos. *Heródoto: Revista do Grupo de Estudos e Pesquisas sobre a Antiguidade Clássica e suas Conexões Afro-asiáticas*, 7(2), 19-42.

Girod, V. (2010). L'érotisme discret du sein dans les représentations artistiques sous le Haut-Empire. *Histoire de l'art*, 66, 49-59.

Giustiniani, L. (1818). *Memorie storico-critiche della Real Biblioteca Borbonica di Napoli*. Giovanni de Bonis.

Gosden, C. (2020). *The history of magic: From alchemy to witchcraft, from the Ice Age to the present*. Penguin.

Johns, C. (1982). *Sex or symbol: Erotic images of Greece and Rome*. British Museum.

Lucretius. (1916). *On the Nature of Things*. E. P. Dutton.

Lucretius. (1924). *De Rerum Natura*. Loeb Clasical Library 181.

Mitchell, G. K. (2022). *Reading the writing on the walls: Representations of female erotic agency in Pompeiian graffiti*. [Doctorate Thesis, Whitman College]. <https://arminda.whitman.edu/theses/2022092>

Monteix, N. et al. (2015). Pompéi, Pistrina Recherches sur les boulangeries de l'Italie romaine – campagne 2014. *Chronique des activités archéologiques de l'École française de Rome. Les cités vésuviennes*, 1-65. <https://doi.org/10.4000/cefr.1380>

Nixon, J. (1757). An account of the temple of Serapis at Pozzuoli in the Kingdom of Naples: in a letter to John Ward, LL.D. and R.S. Vice-Præs. by the Rev. John Nixon, M. A. F. R. S. *Philosophical Transactions (1683-1775)*, 50, 166-174. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstl.1757.0022>

Oberhofer, K. (2008). Die Bäckerei VII, 2, 22 in Pompeji. In Grabherr, G.; Kainrath, B. (Eds.), *Akten des 11. Österreichischen Archäologentages: in Innsbruck. 23.-25. März 2006* (pp. 205214). (Ikarus, Bd. 3). Universität Innsbruck.

Oliva Neto, J. A. (1995). A Warren Cup e os Poemas Pederásticos de Catulo: Consideração sobre o Erotismo e as Artes na Roma Antiga. *Revista de História da Arte e Arqueologia*, 2, 45-58.

Oliva Neto, J. A. (2006). *Falo no Jardim. Priapéia Grega, Priapéia Latina*. Editora Unicamp; Ateliê Editorial.

Omena, L. M., & Funari, P. P. A. (2016). Lamento e dor: Tradução do Epitáfio de Lúcio Trébio Divo (Séc. III-IV D.C.). *Revista de Estudos Filosóficos e Históricos da Antiguidade*, 20(29), 195-206.

Osanna, M., Grimaldi, M., & Zuchtriegel, G. (Eds.). (2016). *Pompei: Guida (breve)*. Arte'm.

Osanna, M. (2019). *Pompei. Il tempo ritrovato: Le nuove scoperte*. Rizzoli.

Pagano, M., & Prisciandaro, R. (2006). *Studio sulle provenienze degli oggetti rinvenuti negli scavi borbonici del regno di Napoli*. Nicola Longobardi.

Rabinowitz, N. S. & Richlin, A. (Eds.). (1993). *Feminist Theory and the Classics*. (Thinking gender). Routledge.

Regolamento del Museo Reale Borbonico. (1828). Stamperia Reale.

Ruggiero, M. (1885). *Storia degli scavi di Ercolano ricomposta su' documenti superstiti*. Tipografia dell'Accademia Reale delle Scienze.

Sacco, F. (1796). *Dizionario geografico-istorico-fisico del Regno di Napoli*. (Tomo III). Vincenzo Flauto.

Salomon, M. (2019). “Isso não é um livro de História”: Michel Foucault e a publicação de documentos de arquivo. *Topoi*, 20(40), 229-252.

Weiberg, E. L. (2020). Tectius illa cupit: female pleasure in Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*. *Helios*, 47(2), 161-189.

Zangemeister, C., & Reimerum, G. (Ed.). (1871). *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum: Inscriptiones parietariae pompeianae, herculanenses, stabianae* (v. 4). Berolini Apvd Georgivm Reimer.