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# A COLLECTION OF ORIENTALIST PAINTINGS IN THE IMPERIAL PRIVATE GALLERY IN NAPLES[•]

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In a group of epigrams by Martial (14.170–182) Lehmann (1945) discovered an art gallery located in the *pronaos* of the Templum Augusti (Pl. I). It was a carefully selected set of works of art displayed by Tiberius, notorious for his artistic snobbery. The poet visited the museum and described its statues, reliefs and paintings in a curious poetic guide composed of 13 epigrams. The prestige of the Imperial gallery speaks for originals, and not copies. 'The order of the epigrams,' observed Lehmann, 'reflects an arrangement not of poetic invention but of an actual – surprisingly modern – museum.'[1] Pliny the Elder's history of sculpture and painting can be read largely as a guide to the Roman art galleries of his time, to the Gallery of Asinius Pollio, the Porticus Octaviae, Pompeii, and Philippi, the Templum Concordiae and others. In his learned description of Greece Pausanias introduced his readers to the painting galleries of the Stoa Poecile and Theseion on the Athenian Agora, the Pinacotheca at the entrance to Athenian Acropolis, the precious gallery of the Olympian Heraion, the famous Lesche of the Cnidians or the Tholos of Epidauros with the collection of paintings by Pausias, and many others. Philostratus the Elder in his turn compiled a learned guide to a painting gallery in Naples. His book *The Imagines* comprised 65 pictures described in such a detailed way that perhaps only Lucian of Samosate could have rivalled his expertise. A visitor to the gallery, who came

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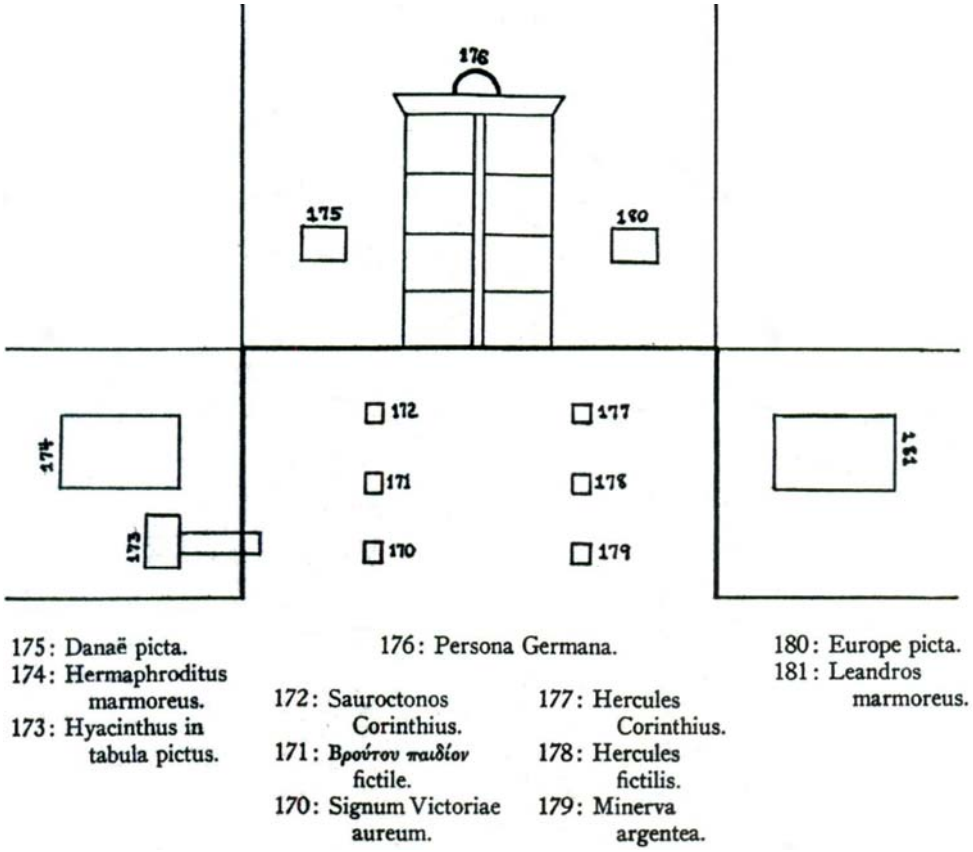
[1] Lehmann 1945, 269.

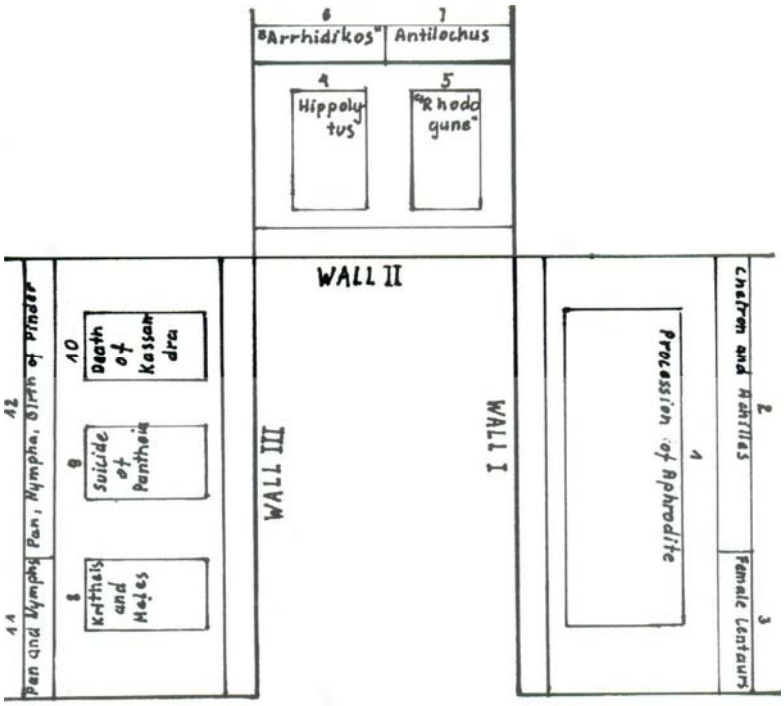
from the East, would have been amazed by a number of the images of the Orient displayed on the walls of this Napolitan museum.



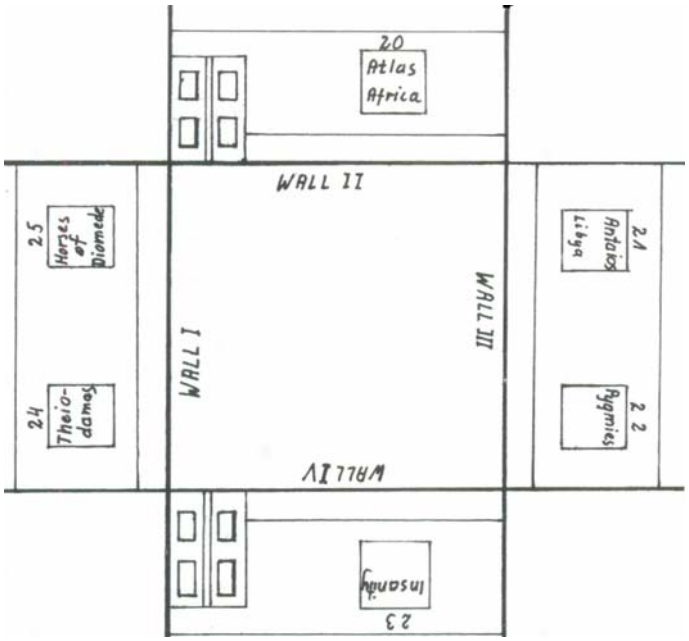

**Pl. I. The art gallery of Martial (from Lehmann 1945, fig. 1)**

Lehmann-Hartleben (1941) arranged Philostratus' collection along a chain of rooms and identified a number of thematic cycles grouped in a number of rooms, which he labelled successively as the Rooms of the Rivers, of Dionysus, of Aphrodite (Pl. II), of the Primitive World and of Heracles (Pl. III). Within these thematic cycles we can easily identify painting genres in the gallery, as for example mythological heroic subjects, still nature, landscape painting or hunting scenes, all of them corroborated by the archaeological evidence.

I would like to focus on a selection of 'Orientalist' paintings from Philostratus the Elder's gallery. Let us begin with the Room of Heracles (Pl. III), which contained six paintings picturing the deeds of Heracles, and among them his fight with Antaeus.




**Pl. II. The Room of Aphrodite in Philostratus' painting gallery. Drawing by E. Polańska**




**Pl. III The Room of Heracles in Philostratus' painting gallery. Drawing by E. Polańska**

Antaeus was a giant-king of Libya, a strong and skilled wrestler, and son of Poseidon and Gaia. He would challenge his guests to fight in the arena, and killed them in his crushing grip. Then he put up the skulls of his victims as ornaments in the temple of his divine father. Antaeus happened to challenge Heracles, who was once wandering to the Temple of Zeus in the Oasis of Siwa. Despite the assistance received from Gaia, Antaeus breathed his last in Heracles' iron grip. There was another painting in the gallery showing the fight between the giant Phorbas and Apollo (*Imag*. 2.19). Phorbas, King of the Phlegyans, shared Antaeus' barbaric habit. 'The heads (of his victims) hang dank from the branches, and some you see are withered and others fresh, while others have shrunken to bare skulls,' (*Imag*. 2.19.2) (transl. A. Fairbanks), writes Philostratus the Elder with a symptomatic sense of the macabre looming in the paintings he liked best (*Imag*. 2.18; 2.6; 2.10; 2.23; 2.25). The position of the wrestlers' bodies as described in the *ecphrasis* of Antaeus corresponds with that in the bronze sculpture by Lysippus (the *Hochhebetypus* of the Pitti wrestlers).[2] In a similar way to the Pitti marble statuary, so impressive for its massive tension and air of monumentality, the Philostratean Heracles 'throws his opponent in wrestling above the earth' (καταπαλαίει δὲ αὐτὸν ἄνω τῆς γῆς) (*Imag*. 2.21, 5). The Philostratean Heracles, too, 'caught Antaeus by the middle just above the waist, where the ribs are', which is exactly paralleled by the Pitti athletes. In consequence of this rear tackle, Heracles 'set him (Antaeus) upright on his thigh still gripping his arms about him'. The painted Antaeus is 'groaning and looking to the earth, who does not help him' (*Imag*. 2.21, 5).

His body was ridiculously distorted, his limbs overgrown and unnaturally swollen which emphasized his primitivism. Antaeus in the Philostratean tableau was monstrously ugly, almost animal-like.

The Roman art brought a renewed interest in the Antaeus and Heracles motif as shown by their numerous images on coins, gems, mosaics and sarcophagi of the Imperial period.[3] There is a group of the most impressive antiquities of the Imperial era which coincide almost exactly with the biography of Philostratus the Elder. The popularity of this subject in the Antonine and Severan periods justifies the purchase of the particular work in question, the objective being to enrich the private Neapolitan art museum. A pilaster relief in the Basilica of Leptis Magna was engraved in the early 3rd century. The Antaeus sarcophagus in the Museo delle Terme also originated in the Severan

[2] Hebert 1983, 94: *ein Epigram auf eine bronze Ringergruppe von Herakles und Antaios lässt in seiner flüchtigen Beschreibung keine Rekonstruktion des Kunstwerkes zu, es wird sich aber um die häufigste Darstellungsart dieses mythischen Kampfes, den Hochhebertypus, gehandelt haben, der auch dem bei Philostrat beschriebenen Gemälde zugrunde liegt*.

[3] Olmos, Balmaseda 1981, 801, cf. n. 31; Brommer 1971, 25–28.

ateliers. Similiraly the Avenches mosaic which pictures the fight of Heracles and Antaeus was also made in the 3rd century AD (Pl. IV).[4]

**Pl. IV. Heracles and Antaeus on the mosaic of Avenches, the 3rd century AD**

The crude, block-form and monstrous, almost animal bodies of the pugilist which manifest a bare, brutal, irresistible and primitive force immediately call to mind the athletes from the mosaics once in the Baths of Caracalla in Rome. Now these mosaics are on show in the Museo Gregoriano Profano, one of the most impressive museums I have ever visited, where antiquities are arranged in an ultra-modernist space populated by forms shaped in steel, concrete and wood. Heracles was always popular in the Imperial propaganda. We can safely attribute a Severan date to the wrestlers of Avenches, by analogy with the athletes on the large-scale mosaics once on the floors in the Baths of Caracalla in Rome. So conspicuous for their studied style of brutality and primitivism as well as for size, they could not have failed to stir the imagination of the thousands who visited the Baths.

[4] Olmos, Balmaseda 1981, no 40, fig. 40; Deonna1942, pl. 56; von Gonzebach, 1961, pls.76–77.

In his *4th Isthmian Ode* composed in honour of Melissus of Thebes, Pindar compared his victory with an air of pathetic exaggeration to the triumph of Heracles over Antaeus. In his lofty verse Pindar, one of the Classical authors most studied and admired by the Second Sophistic Movement and Philostratus the Elder himself, confronted the Greek hero 'short in stature but in soul unflinching' with the Libyan savage who 'roofed Poseidon's temple with the skulls of strangers' (vv. 55–56). This antithesis corresponds well with the already mentioned *ecphrasis* of Phorbas (*Imag*. 2.19). According to Philostratus' description the artist counterpoised two contrasting forces: the young Greek's skill and power against the brutal force of primitivism. 'Rays of light rise from about Apollo's brow and his cheek emits a smile.' (*Imag*. 2.19.3). Phorbas 'is already stretched on the ground,' 'the blood gushes forth from his temple'. Γέγραπται δὲ ὠμὸς καὶ συώδης τὸ εἶδος (he is depicted as a savage and of swine-like features). Both Antaeus and Phorbas used to cut off the heads of their defeated victims.. In this way Philostratus the Elder described one of his favourite paintings, remarkable for its mannerist tone of the macabre. We know an existing painting gallery from the Flavian period, namely the gallery in the House of the Vettii family who like Philostratus appreciated gloomy styles and dark dispositions. It is intriguing whether such a choice of paintings was inspired in the rich Pompeian owners or in the Severan aristocracy and contemporary intellectuals by their mannerist predilections for insane passions, or by the very substance of the Hellenic mythology with its stories of cruelty, jealousy, violence and vendetta. However, if we set side by side the Olympian *metope* picturing Heracles taming the mares of Diomedes with the corresponding subject on the painting documented in Philostratus' *Imagines*, with its 'half-eaten body of Abderus, which Heracles has snatched from the mares... the portions that are left... still beautiful... lying on the lion's skin' (transl. A. Fairbanks), we can easily observe that it was not so much the subject as its treatment that proved decisive. The scholiast to Pindar mentioned Antaeus' ἀνανθρωπία and ἀσέβεια (inhumanity and impiety).[5] This image of the non-Greek neighbouring peoples had already been deeply rooted in the Greek mentality for a long time in fact. It is sufficient to adduce a similar picture of the Cyclops (*Od*. 9,106f–108) or the Laestrigonians, who in the words of Homer were οὐκ ἄνδρεσσιν ἐοικότες, ἀλλὰ Γίγασιν (*Od*. 10,120: they were similar rather to the giants than to human beings).

The African scenery is also visible in the Philostratean *ecphrasis*: καὶ Λιβύη ταῦτα ( *Imag*. 2.21.1). This is Libya. and Antaeus is African. He is black (μέλας – *Imag*. 2.21.4), and 'resembles some wild beast, being almost as broad as he is tall, and his neck is attached to the shoulders in such wise that

[5] Ed. Drachmann III, 235–236; Olmos, Balmaseda 1981, 801.

most of the latter belongs to the neck, and the arm is as big around as are the shoulders' (*Imag*. 2.21.4). One of the Archaic vase painters deliberately emphasised the monstrosity of Antaeus' face.[6] Conventional elements of the African landscape were materialized in many works of Greek and Roman art. The observer, if attentive, could catch a glimpse of κόνις (sand) (*Imag*. 2.21.1). We can see palm trees behind Heracles and Antaeus engaged in fighting on an Attic *oinochoe*.[7] Egypt remained in fashion for a couple of centuries among the Greeks and Romans during the Late Hellenistic and Early Imperial period. It is sufficient to refer to the great mosaic of Palaestrina, the Egyptianizing style in the wall decoration in the Campanian cities, the decoration of the Roman Iseum and Serapeum or the imitation of Egyptian antiquities in Tivoli with 'the pyramids' and the elegant architecture of its Canopus.[8] A private mania for the Orient was never expressed on a more monumental scale in the West than by the Emperor Hadrian, a snobbish intellectual and pretentious art connoisseur.

Heracles and the Pygmies (*Imag*. 2.22) was once put on display beside the Heracles and Antaeus canvas (*Imag*. 2.21) in the Philostratean gallery (Pl. III). The Greek hero was pictured lying asleep on the African sands after the slaying of Antaeus. The painter emphasised the difference between Heracles' heroic body with Hypnos standing behind him in the background, and the dead, withered body (αὖον) of his monstrous adversary. The artist introduced a fine description of the Pygmies depicted in their everyday life. It is followed by their attack against Heracles. Brandishing their weapons, the Pygmy units direct their assault against Heracles' feet and hands. His right hand is besieged by a double force of Pygmies, since the hero's dexter is naturally stronger than his left hand. The painter individualised the bowmen and slingers among them. The main force, however, under the command of their king, the most courageous of the Pygmies, is launching an attack against Heracles' head. They deploy fire and different engines of war in their effort to blind the hero with a mattock, and also to suffocate him with a sort of clamp thrust straight at Heracles' mouth and nose.

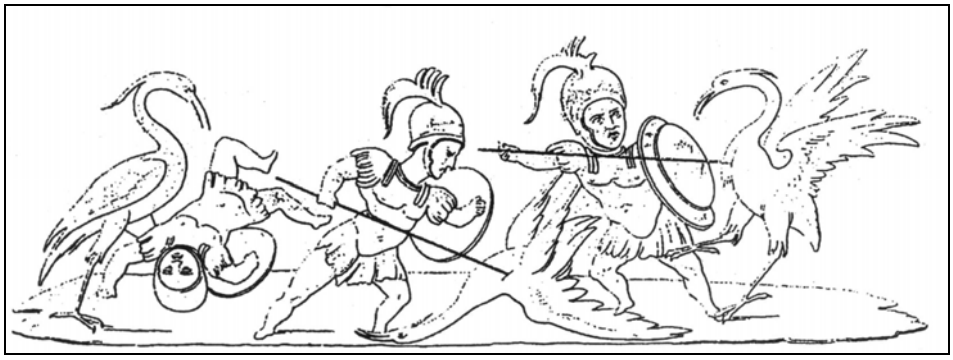
The Pygmy painting in the collection of the *Imagines* (2.22) must have originally been a component in a series of paintings probably by the same hand, which illustrated the African adventures of Heracles. This African cycle was conspicuous for its air of grotesque, parody and burlesque. The original cycle probably began with (1) an exhausted, sweating Atlas and Heracles eager to help with the giant's burden (*Imag*. 2.20), which was displayed in the same Room of Heracles, and was followed by (2) Heracles in the Garden of the Hes-

[6] On the oinochoe from Stanford, Olmos, Balmaseda 1981, 13, fig. 13, dated c. 500–480 BC; cf. the famous beaker painted by Euphronios, Louvre, ibidem, no 24, fig. 24, c. 515–500 BC.

[7] A black-figured oinochoe, Munich, c. 500–480 BC, Olmos, Balmaseda 1981, no 8, fig. 8.

[8] Roullet 1972; Morenz 1969; Malaise 1972; Turcan 1992.

perides,[9] not represented in Philostratus' Neapolitan museum, but alluded to in the next panel in the series, (3), where Heracles was preparing for combat with an Antaeus distinguished by his distorted, monstrous limbs (*Imag*. 2.21.1–2). It might have been a secondary scene to a central one showing the fight between the two wrestlers (*Imag*. 2.21.3–6). In Philostratus' narrative order there should have been a place for a picture with scenes of everyday life in the Pygmy world (*Imag*. 2.22.1). Its contents might have been exhaustively illustrated by the Pompeian painting and mosaics, consequently it cannot be treated as a purely literary motif with no relation to the figural arts, but as the art historian's digression into the popular genre of "Orientalist" painting, cited from memory in the immediate context of the Heracles African cycle of the Neapolitan museum. (4) On the next painting of the cycle Heracles was being attacked by the Pygmies (*Imag*. 2.21.2–3). This panel probably contained a secondary scene with Heracles carrying the Pygmies in the lion's hide on his back (*Imag*. 2.21.3). It seems that the original cycle comprised four paintings: Atlas (*Imag*. 2.20), the Hesperides (mentioned in *Imag*. 2.21), Antaeus (*Imag*. 2.21), and Heracles and the Pygmies (*Imag*. 2.22).



**Pl. V. Pygmies in hoplite armour fighting cranes on the drawing by W. Zahn, Pompeii VII 4, 31, 51**

The tone of the Pygmy images in the Greek works of art ranges from good-humoured warm ridicule to malicious caricature. Philostratus' Heracles and the Pygmies would have been included among the former, together with numerous pictures of armed Pygmy warriors bravely fighting the cranes. They fight with maces, curved batons or slings, as in Philostratus *Imagines* (2.23) (σφενδονητῶν ὄχλος).[10] The Pygmies' accessories, their caps, shoes, *peltae* and

[9] Cf. the analogies offered by the Pompeian painting: *Pompei. Pitture e mosaici* I, Reg. I,7,7, 592; von Blanckenhagen 1968, Taf. 45, 1 (Reg. V, 2, 10), Taf. 45, 2 (Reg. I, 7, 7).

[10] Dasen 1994 (Pygmaioi), fig. 1 (Vase François, by Kleitias, c. 570 BC); fig. 2, aryballos, by Nearchos, c. 550 BC, N.York, MMA 26. 49; rhyton, by Brygos, Ermitage (679, St. 360), c. 480

bows, are sometimes suggestive of their Oriental descent. Philostratus also mentions "bowmen" (τοξόται) among his Pygmies (*Imag*. 2.22). They can be seen on the fine miniature paintings from the masterly hand of the Brygos Painter.[11] Sometimes the Pygmies would be armed with long spears and protected by cuirasses, helmets and shields like the Greek hoplites, which we may see on the paintings from the House of Ariadne (Casa dei Capitelli Colorati VII 4, 31.51) (Pl. V).[12] Their ἀριστείαι in the combat with the cranes, and their glorious death on the battlefield makes of this mock heroic epic a thematic counterpart of the great epic tradition. Philostratus apparently alluded to the genre when he wrote ἀλλὰ τοῦ θράσους (but ah, their boldness!) (*Imag*. 2.22). It was also documented by Kleitias on his *opus magnum*, the François Vase, where the Geranomachia neighbours on the Calydonian Boar Hunt, the Liberation of the Athenian Children by Theseus, and a grandiose, pathetic scene with Ajax carrying the body of the dead Achilles. Homer wrote that the cranes κλαγγῇ ταί γε πέτονται ἐπ᾽ Ὠκεανοῖο ροάων | ἀνδράσι Πυγμαίοισι φόνον καὶ κῆρα φέρουσαι ('scream overhead... over the flowing waters of Okeanos to bring death and destruction on the Pygmies') (transl. S. Butler) (*Il*. 3,5–6). This detail is additionally illustrative of the argument which says that the François Vase was inspired by the Archaic epics.[13] Philostratus informs his readers that the Pygmies "dwell in the earth just like ants... they sow and reap and ride on a cart drawn by Pygmy horses, and it is said that they use an axe on stalks of grain believing that these are trees" (*Imag*. 2.22) (transl. A. Fairbanks). This picture immediately calls to mind dozens and dozens of mosaics and paintings showing the tiny folk in Nilotic scenery. The Pygmies won in the rivalry with the earlier Archaic and Classical *geranomachiai*, or the Busiris and Heracles motif, and eventually, during the Hellenistic and Imperial period, dominated the African grotesque genre. On one of the Pompeian frescoes two little humanoids are busy catching fish. They sit in a boat facing each other, so that their angling-lines cross over their heads. They do not seem to mind at all that a monstrous crocodile and a hippopotamus are lurking among the reeds with the apparent aim of making their own catch for dinner.[14] On yet another painting a dwarfish creature runs happy and free as a bird over a bridge under which a huge crocodile lies in

BC; fig. 11, rhyton, Mus. Vivenel 898, Compiegne, c. 450 BC; 17, cantharos, Staatl. Mus. Berlin, V.I.3159 (from Kabirion).

[11] Dasen 1994, fig. 8.

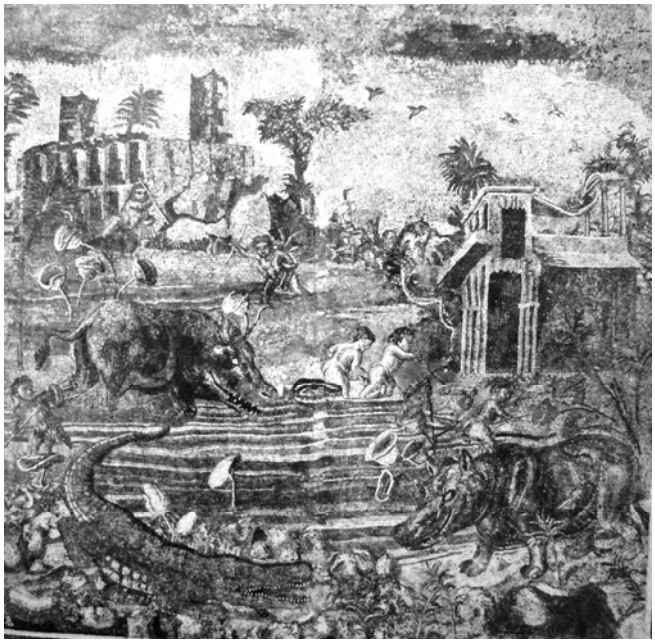
[12] Dasen 1994, fig. 20 bis, kelebes, Mus. Arch. Florence 4035; Casa delle nozze d'argento, *Pompei. Pitture e mosaici* V, 2, no. 76, 713; *Pompei. Pitture e mosaici* VI, VII 4, 31.51, fig. 80 a-c, 1053, vanished, c. 70 AD; Dasen 1994, fig. 23.

[13] Schefold 1991, 513–526; Buchholz 1991,11–44.

[14] *Pompei. Pitture e mosaici* I, Reg. I, 7, 1, no. 84, 533.

ambush. In this painting Egypt was symbolised by the idol of the Apis bull set on a high stone base.[15]

In his paper *Les mosaiques nilotiques africaines* L. Foucher collected a number of motifs remarkable for their "humeur parfois féroce." On the El Alia mosaic a Pygmy armed with an axe confronts a monstrous hippo.[16] A huge hippopotamus swallows a little Pygmy on the mosaic of Ouad ez Zgaia.[17] The Pygmy may sometimes feel confused or even frightened (El Alia, Zliten). Sometimes he catches water birds with a lasso. Landscapes showing the River Nile as it winds between the rocks of Upper Egypt, its river banks abundant with a multiplicity of animal and floral species, adorned with the exotic shapes of the local architecture, still look impressive. I am thinking of the great Palestrina mosaic or the mosaic from the Aventine Hill, now in the Terme Museum (Pl. VI).[18]



**Pl. VI. Nilotic landscape on the Aventine mosaic, Museo Nazionale Romano**

At the extreme end of the iconographic and thematic spectrum we find paintings like those published by A. Maiuri, discovered in the Casa dello Scultore

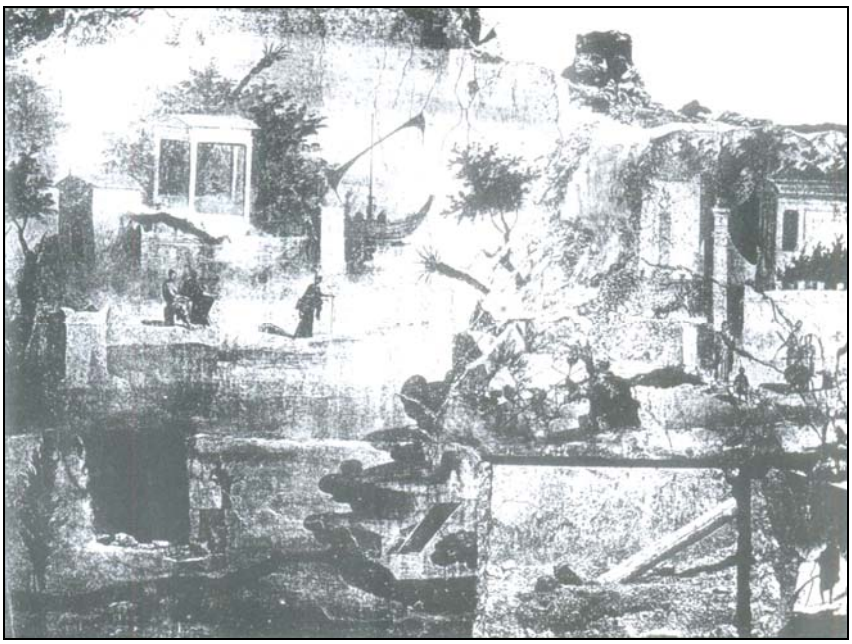
[15] *Pompei. Pitture e mosaici*. Reg. I 7, 11, no 173, 718, Casa dell'Efebo.

[16] Foucher 1965, 137–45, figs.1–23, here: fig. 138.

[17] Foucher 1965, fig. 22.

[18] Gullini 1956. The author clearly showed the scale of later restorations; Mayboom 1995; a wonderful reproduction in Charbonneaux et. al., 1973, fig. 181.

(VIII 7, 24).[19] The distorted, steatopygic, short-legged bodies in them, surmounted by overgrown heads with hideous faces, move in the rhythm of an orgiastic African dance. All of them are macrophallic and remarkable for their protuberant bellies. A group of them swings in a wild, ecstatic dance on a boat, which Maiuri euphemistically calls a "piroga priapea."[20]



**Pl. VII. The River Nile winding between the rocks of Djebel, Pompeii I, 6, 15**

Just as the images of the Pygmies, which range from good-humoured burlesques to extreme caricature, similarly the African landscape may appear as a ritual and idyllic vision with the tranquil waters of the Nile flowing among the Egyptian sanctuaries and palm groves, as in the charming fresco from the Casa dei Cei (Reg. I 6, 15) (Pl. VII), or alternatively it may take the shape of a Nilotic green thicket populated with primitive, lustful, dwarfish humanoids, as can be seen in the ryparographic pictures of the Casa dello Scultore (Reg. VIII 7, 24).[21] It is interesting to observe that the anonymous owner of the Casa dell'Efebo commissioned a painter to cover the walls of a sort of private summer-house in

[19] Maiuri 1955, Tav. I, 2; II, 2; III; V, 1.

[20] ibid. Tav. V, 1; Dasen 1994, fig. 44.

[21] Cf. caricatural images of the Pygmies in the Nilotic scenery in a mosaic tondo, *Pompei. Pitture e mosaici* I, Casa di Paquius Proculus, I 7, 1, fig. 84; a similar mosaic in the Casa del Menandro, Reg. I, 10, 4, *Pompei. Pitture e mosaici* I, 297.

his garden with these perverted Pygmy images.[22] These caricature images were obviously a smash hit on the Late Hellenistic and Roman Imperial markets. The grotesque dominated the characteristics of the Pygmies. Pictures of them were rarely inventive and fresh. They were represented again and again along a set of standard patterns. In the same way Africa's cavalry forces, the exotic beauty of the women, the landscapes of palm-groves and ancient ruins, the African air of cruelty, mystery, lust and luxury – became a run-of-the-mill matrix for the 19th-century French and English "Orientalists" who turned the Orient into a "style." Their paintings are remarkable for their touch of exoticism, seductive and fascinating, impressive in its unusual composition of colours and strange objects.

The panel with Heracles and the Pygmies (*Imag*. 2.22) had its stylistic pendant in the River Nile and the Cubits, a burlesque painting put on display in Lehmann-Hartleben's Room of the Rivers (*Imag*. 1.5). In the Philostratean painting the Cubits were shown sitting on the Nile's shoulders, clinging to his curling locks, slumbering in his arms, while others were playing on his chest or clattering an Isiac *sistra*. A protective divinity keeping guard over the sources of the Nile was standing behind, surmounting the main scene.

Numerous sculptures, mosaics and coins, collected in the contemporary museums, as well as a number of preserved literary passages mostly from the Imperial period, attest to the popularity of the image of the personified Nile, a reclining divinity with thick curly locks flowing down unto his shoulders. This creation proved a real success. No doubt the Philostratean Nile was a picture of the reclining Nile, as suggested by the placement and occupations of the Cubits. Philostratus was right when he observed that crocodiles and hippopotami were the usual components of the imagery of the Nile personification (*Imag*. I, 5, 2). The hippopotamus is the attribute of the personified Nile most frequently documented by the archaeological evidence.[23] The figure of the Nile reclines on a hippopotamus in a mosaic from the House of Kyrios Leontis in Scythopolis/Bet Shean, dated mid–5th century AD,[24] or in another Palestinian mosaic in Sepphoris.[25] Lucian's Nile also reposes on a hippopotamus or a crocodile (*Rhet. praec*. 6). The painting described by Philostratus the Elder remains unique in this respect. The exotic monsters "are now lying aloof in its [the Nile's] deep eddies so as not to frighten the children" (*Imag*. 1.5.2). Deviation from an established iconographic pattern is one of the favourite devices in Philostratus' rhetoric. It offers him a chance to make the most of his erudition as an art historian. On one occasion he toys with variation on the

[22] *Pompei. Pitture e mosaici* I, Casa dell'Efebo, Reg. I, 7, 11, fig. 164.

[23] Jentel 1992 (Neilos), nos 7–18, 35–36 (hippopotami), 19–24 (crocodile), 1 (hippopotami, crocodile, mangoust).

[24] R. Ovadiah et al. 1987, Pl. 22, 1; Jentel 1992 (Neilos), fig. 7.

[25] Weiss, Netzer 1996, 127, 131, fig. 61.

theme of Dionysus, who is dressed in purple and wreathed with roses, but shown without his usual attributes (*Imag*. 1.15); another time with a Meles who "does not pour forth turbulent streams at his source, as boorish rivers are equally painted... the water trickles noiselessly by" (*Imag*. 2.8.2). Yet on another occasion he focuses his attention on a painting with a mad Heracles not accompanied by the Erinies, which would have been the standard practice.[26] In an Andromeda painting he describes Eros as a young man παρ᾽ ὃ εἴωθε (as is not usual) (*Imag*. 1.29.1). In the same way the *sistra* carried by the Cubits replace the usual Nilotic animals synonymous of Egypt in Philostratus' Nile. On a well-known Pompeian panel which depicts Isis welcoming Io with the long-haired muscular Nile who bears her on his waves, an Egyptian priest accompanied by a little Cubit clatters the *sistrum*.[27]

The River Nile with its people and natural environment, and Black Africa with its seductive exoticism, exerted a magnetic attraction on the Greek and Romans. This attraction was a mixture of fascination, fear and alienation in the face of the undecipherable hieroglyphs of that enormously vast land which stretched south of the Mediterranean. The Nilotic landscapes, known from numerous paintings, mosaics and other media,[28] is a class of antiquities which we automatically associate with the orientalist style. The group is in no way uniform. Among them are the sacred and idyllic landscapes, Pygmy grotesques, illustrations with animals and vegetation, and hunting scenes (Pl. VI). The great Barberini Mosaic in Palestrina and the mosaics from the Casa del Fauno belong to the best-known examples of the style.[29] Among the paintings we come upon different techniques. Sometimes it is a yellow monochrome painting with Egyptian elements like a camel, a statue of Isis, a winged sphinx, all of this intermingling with not specifically Egyptian temples, porticoes or columns, and even Greek deities, as in the Casa di Livia (c. 30 BC).[30] Sometimes it is a frieze composed of *uraei*, Egyptian crowns and the double feather of Isis with a hippo and a Pygmy at a well, as in the Aula Isiaca on the Palatine Hill. Isiac statues grow out of fantastic, vegetal candelabra reminiscent of Vitruvius' critique of the contemporary wall decorations: "there are monsters rather than the definite representations taken from definite things. Instead of columns there rise up fluted reeds; instead of gables, decorative appendages

[26] Brunn 1861–1867, 195.

[27] Schefold 1972, Pl. 43, the original dated c. 150 BC, ibid. 253.

[28] Egyptian landscapes on mosaics, terracottas, coins, lamps and gems, bibliogr. Morenz 1969, 117, n. 5;

[29] Mayboom 1995, dated c. 120/110 BC; an excellent illustrations in Charbonneaux et al. 1973, fig. 181, dated c. 80 BC, 182: 'the taste for exoticism and local colour (...) was doubtless never again carried quite so far in Greek art'; the landscapes with the Pygmies in Morenz 1969, p1. 18–19; a mosaic with the Pygmies in Carthago in Aug. *Civ. Dei* 16.8.

[30] Ling 1991, 142–143, fig. 149.

with curled leaves and volutes. Candelabra support shrine-like forms, above the roofs of which grow delicate flowers with volutes containing little figures seated at random, some with human, some with animal heads" (*de architectura* 7, 5, 3). The observer can sometimes come upon a tranquil *paysage* with the Djebel rocks of Upper Egypt rising up in it, or palms and boats sailing along the winding band of the Nile, as in the Casa dei Cei (I 6, 15) (Pl. VII),[31] or eerie landscapes filled with half-real architecture, grotesque humanoids and animals, with piquant erotic scenes appended, as in the Casa del Efebo (I 7, 11),[32] or in House VII 2, 25 in Pompeii.[33] Their chronological and territorial extent show that they enjoyed incessant popularity for many centuries in the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean.[34] The Nilotic landscapes have their literary parallels, e.g. in the *Romance* by Achilles Tatius who described the Egyptian Delta and its animal life (IV, 11–13) or in the *Natural History* by Pliny the Elder (*HN* 7,2).[35] The Nilotic landscapes caused a real invasion of exotic animals and birds into the Graeco-Roman art: elephants, monkeys, lions, tigers, rhinoceros, hippopotami, ibises, storks, ducks, the latter depicted with the use of splendid, fresh colours for their plumage to cheer the eyes of the viewer.[36] The representations of the birds are so exact, vivid and colourful that they recall to one's memory the Atlases of Birds.[37] The papyri were later used as models for egyptianizing architectural landscapes placed on the walls of Roman and Campanian houses. It may also happen that the scale of those mosaics is so impressive that they change into some sort of mosaic zoological garden, as in the great hunting mosaic of the Piazza Armerina, which depicts Numidia, Egypt and India.[38]

This room of the museum (The Room of the Rivers) contained another painting thematically related to the River Nile tableau – the Death of Memnon with the

[31] *Pompei. Pitture e mosaici* vol.I, f. 107; D. Michel, Casa dei Cei (I 6, 15), 1990, Häuser in Pompeji 3.

[32] *Pompei. Pitture e mosaici* vol. I, fig 166, 186–7; 173 a-b.

[33] *Pompei. Pitture e mosaici* Vol. VI, figs. 7,8; cf. a mosaic tondo with the Pygmies on the boat, C. del Menandro I, 10, 4, *Pompei. Pitture e mosaici* vol. I, 297; a tondo with a Nilotic landscape, I 7, 1, C. di Paquius Proculus, *Pompei. Pitture e mosaici* vol. I, f. 84; emblema in Cardiff, White House, *AJA* 1985, Pl.28.

[34] Alföldi-Rosenbaum 1965 149–153, Pl. LV-LVIII; the Nilotic mosaics in Tabgha and Sepphoris, Murphy-O'Connor 1998, fig. 71, The Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes; Weiss, Netzer 1996 127–131, figs. 61–64; Piccirillo 1993, 37, cat. 752 (Umm al-Marabi), cat. 660 (Zay al-Gharby), cat. 209 (Khirbat al-Mukhayyat).

[35] Morenz 1969, 109, n. 1, on Seneca and Virgil in Egypt.

[36] cf. Toynbee 1973, 32–34; Boesneck1988; Houlihan 1986; Keller 1909–1913; Scullard 1974.

[37] Schefold wrote a paper on Alexandrian illustrated papyri produced for Greek and Roman visitors (Schefold 1956).

[38] Carandini, Ricci, de Vos, 1982, Taf. I, fig. 122, 123.

Vocal Colossus in the background of the composition (*Imag*. 2.7). The painting showed Negro mourners, the soldiers of Memnon, who occupied the central part of the field. They gathered around the dead body of their king on the plain closed on the sides by the walls of Troy and the trench of the Achaean camp. With his long hair and muscular body, Memnon was beautiful even in death. His complexion was dark, but not black like his soldiers. Up in the sky the painter placed the figures of Eos, the Night and probably Helios. On the verge of the tableau the viewer could see the Egyptian Colossus of Memnon. The painting had a concentric composition, with the fallen body of Memnon in the lower part of the field, surrounded successively by the mourners, next the city walls and the trench, and finally by the heavenly divinities. This regular composition had one divergence. Probably in the upper right corner of the picture the painter placed the Vocal Colossus in order to allow the viewer to identify the subject. Dark and even black hues made up its colouristic dominant (black skin, the Night, the Colossus), lit out probably by the golds of Helios and rays touching the lips of the black seated Memnon on the edge of the picture. It may also be interesting to observe that the ancient Orientalist painting prompted a fascination which is not unfamiliar to us, as can be illustrated by J.-G. Gérôme's *View of the Plain of Thebes* (1857), with the Colossi of Memnon dominating the perspective of the rugged land of the Egyptian desert (Pl. VIII).

**Pl. VIII. Jean-Léon Gérôme. View of the Plain of Thebes, 1857, oil on canvas, Musèe des Beaux-Arts, Nantes**

In this point we are concluding our visit to the Rooms of Heracles and the Rivers and turning our steps to a somewhat different Room of Aphrodite popu-

lated by female heroes, where Philostratus the Elders' gaze came to focus on a tableau showing the Death of Pantheia (*Imag*. 2.9) (Pl. II). At the beginning of his description the rhetorician directs the observer's attention to the city walls of Sardis, just taken by the Persian warriors, its houses gutted by fire, its women fallen into slavery. In the foreground the old master painted a scene marked by tragic overtones: Pantheia was killing herself in an act of mourning over the horribly bloodstained and mutilated body of her young husband Abradatas who had fallen in action. A chariot stood beside the central group, loaded with funeral gifts and the proverbial Lydian golden sand brought by King Cyrus to pay his last respects to the dead hero. Pantheia had just driven a short Persian sword through her bosom. She was portrayed still breathing in agony. Her loveliness in dying gave Philostrates the focal point for his *ecphrasis*. She looked tranquil, as if not suffering at all, modestly dressed, unadorned, without any jewellery, her thick black hair flowing down her neck and shoulders. Philostratus detailed the bloody scratches on her neck, done with her own fingernails in the ritual act of mourning. Her eyes were sparkling with a fateful blend of sagacity, love and dignity. Eros and the Lydian woman dressed in a golden robe, who personified the Power of Love and the land of Lydia, formed a frame for the central group.

The panel recounted historical events, namely the seizure of Sardis, Croesus' stronghold, by Cyrus the Great in 546 BC. The story of the Elamite Prince Abradatas and his wife Pantheia of Susa, presented against a vast historical panorama, displayed all the features of historical romance: the story of a mutual, undying, conjugal love which joined a heroic warrior with the most beautiful woman of the Orient. Xenophon wrote on the subject in his *Cyropaedia* in Books 3. (6. 11), 5. (1. 2–8), 6. (4. 4–10) and 7. (3. 2–16). In a horrifying scene depicted in the *Cyropaedia* Cyrus takes hold of the dead warrior's hand unaware that Abradatas' arm has been severed off his body (*Cyr*. 7.3.8–9). The maker of the Philostratean painting influenced by this passage, showed the hero's body literally cut to pieces in the turmoil of the deadly clash with the Egyptians (*Imag.* 8,3). What was the position of Pantheia's body on the painting in relation to her husband's corpse? Philostratus said that the heroine was dying ἐπ᾽ αὐτῷ 'beside him' i.e. beside Abradatas (*Imag*. 2.9.2). Further on we can learn that she κεῖται 'she lies there' (*Imag*. 5). 'Pantheia liege mit zurückgesunkenem Kopfe im Dreiviertelprofil und sitze nicht'.[39] A Pompeian painting with Pyramus and Thisbe showing the heroine half lying beside the dead body of her lover may probably illustrate the position of the two bodies in their mutual relations as represented on the Philostratean painting (Pl. IX).[40]

[39] Schönberger 1968, 406.
[40] Reinach 1922, 182, 2.

**Pl. IX. Thisbe commits suicide over the dead body of Pyramus, a fresco in Pompeii, V 4a**

All the components of Philostratus' *ecphrasis* of Pantheia, the details hardly touched upon, the outlines of the pictorial pattern, its hints as to light and colour, its literary layer with numerous citations and allusions, all that directs the reader as if along converging lines to the focal point of the *ecphrasis* – Pantheia's facial portrait. This ascending structure up to an emphatic highlight is typical of his descriptive technique. His portraits of Pantheia (*Imag.* 2.9), Rhodogoune (*Imag*. 2.5) and Kritheis (*Imag*. 2.8) show his personal predilection for portrait painting, which he studied with the passion of a connoisseur and a man of taste, incorporating it in his rhetorical workshop

conspicuous for a perfected artistry of *ecphrasis*. Pantheia's facial portrait, as well as Rhodogoune's and Kritheis', belong to the most perfected and detailed likenesses of Philostratean women.

Philostratus' Pantheia reflects a markedly Hellenistic predilection for antithesis, sometimes coloured by dramatic, pathetic or even startling overtones. Richter pointed to 'a love of movement and of violent contrasts... of a tendency toward dramatic and turbulent effects.'[41] On the Philostratean painting the blood-stained, horribly mutilated corpse of a warrior was contrasted with the subtle charm of a woman. The still visible flush on her cheeks getting paler and paler showed the struggle between life and death. In his Rhodogoune (*Imag*. 2.5) Philostratus constructed a veritable hierarchy of contradictions and opposites. A young, graceful lady on horseback was dressed in male armour, and represented in a scene of triumph over the vanquished male sex. Her hair was partly decently fastened up, but partly hanging loose in disarray. Her girlish joy contrasted with her haughtiness and authority as a queen.

However one detail in the Pantheia painting may prove to be decisive for the establishing of the date of the original. It is a short Persian dagger, an *akinakes*, Pantheia's suicide weapon: δὲ κώπη ῥοπάλῳ χρυσῷ εἴκασται σμαραγδίνῳ τοὺς ὄζους. Its hilt was golden and branched out at the top into emerald ramifications (*Imag*. 2.9.5). We have such Iranian daggers among the Luristan bronzes.[42] However, we are able to adduce an even closer analogy: an undoubtedly Achaemenid, exuberant golden *akinakes* from Hamadan (Ecbatana), dated exactly by a vessel adorned with inscriptions which clearly refer to Xerxes I. The emerald colour of the ramifications in the painting can be explained by the inlays, well represented in the extant Achaemenid art. The Greeks of Mainland Greece as well as Ionia witnessed an inflow of wealth from the Persian spoils of war, which were taken during Alexander's expedition and the following decades of hostilities. Weaponry must have prevailed among them. The old master who painted Philostratus' Pantheia studied the Persian dagger with great attention. He knew that such detail was essential in a historical painting. It always gave an air of authenticity even if chronologically incorrect. Besides, such a detail contributed special qualities to the artefact, bringing an Oriental colour to a painting which otherwise was very Greek in its iconographic and literary references (Pyramus and Thisbe, the fall of Sardis), proverbial beauty of the Lydian women (cf. Sappho 218(96)), Lydian golden sand and the riches of Croesus.[43] The original tableau, in my opinion, was not of Imperial date, as sometimes suggested. It can be dated within the span of the 3rd and 2nd century BC.

[41] Richter 1950, 107.
[42] Van den Berghe 1959, 91, Pl. 117.
[43] Pedley 1972,73–83.

In the very first word of his Rhodogoune *ecphrasis*, located in the Room of Aphrodite (*Imag*. 2.5), τὸ αἷμα (blood), Philostratus the Elder impinges on our imagination, to make it remain under the impression of the intense red dominating the chromatic scale of the tableau. The expansive red hues heightened the effects in a composition marked by the confusion of corpses of fallen warriors, horses running amok in terror, and the turbid and polluted waves of the river. A battle had just finished.[44] All the lines of the composition focused on the central figure of the Persian princess and her horse. She had led her soldiers to victory over the treacherous Armenians, who had broken the peace treaty. The observer could see a group of them taken prisoner beside the *tropaion*. Here Philostratus turned with undisguised fascination to the description of the queen's wonderful, thorough-bred, black Nisean mare, with her noble white legs, and her body adorned in a rich harness studded with jewels. Rhodogoune herself was envisaged pouring the libation to the gods in an act of thanksgiving. She wore a scarlet robe and trousers, held a spear and a small shield (*Imag*. 2.5.4). However the highest note in the ascending scale of this description, which passes more and more from the general to the particular, is Rhodogoune's portrait, one of the most detailed and accomplished in the artistic spectrum of the gallery. The portrait engages more than half of the whole *ecphrasis*.

Rhodogoune was entirely clad except for her face. Her robe fell 'only to her knee' (*Imag*. 2.5.2), and was clasped with 'a charming girdle' at her waist (ἐν ἡδεῖα δὲ τῇ ζώνῃ), resembling a Parthian tunic, as can be exhaustively illustrated by the impressive collection of Hatran sculptures. King Uthal, whose statue was found at Hatra, wore a warrior's ceremonial costume, made of richly decorated textiles, with sword and belt, 'a typically Parthian costume' as noticed by Ghirshman.[45] It appears that Rhodogoune was dressed in a male Oriental uniform.

Rhodogoune's story reflected the popular archetype of Oriental warrior-queen, both brave and beautiful, vengeful, cruel and cunning, particularly in her relations with men. In this form she entered the *belles lettres* and fine arts of the

[44] In Cämmerer's view the painting showed two different scenes, the first with Rhodogoune emerging from the chaos of the battle in the background, and the second showing the princess before the *tropaion* (Cämmerer 1967, 48). One cannot find any hint in the description which would suggest the battle was yet continuing. It looks that all the lines of the composition focus on the central fogure of the queen, which celebrates the victory. Cämmerer proved unable to find any archaeological parallel for a composition which would join together the triumphal scene with captives and the battle scene (Cämmerer 1967, 50). The battle sarcophagi dated from the second half of the 2nd century AD show the battle scenes with the tropaia in the corners of the frontal decorative slab (Cämmerer 1967, 51). It was a triumphal scene which was represented on the painting. The enemies were shown as either dead or captive.

[45] Ghirshman 1962, fig. 100, 89; Homès-Fredericq 1963, VI,1; Seyrig 1937.

Greeks. We recall the Herodotean Queen Tomyris, who ordered the dead body of Cyrus the Great to be drowned in a *buklak* filled with the blood of his executed soldiers (Hdt. 1.205–216); we recall Semiramis of Ctesias, or even Kanake from the *Romance of Alexander*, who in the eyes of the Macedonian conquerors appeared as γυνὴ ἔχουσα κάλλος ὑπερήφανον ("a woman of unparallelled beauty"). Diodorus also described Semiramis' military exploits in Libya, Ethiopia and India (Diod. *Bibl*. 2.14–19, sec. Ctesias). Xenophon penned a similar portrait of the local autocratrix Manya, a friend and ally of Farnabazos, and a participant in his military expeditions (*HG* 3.1.10–15).

The Rhodogoune painting stylistically represented a new Orientalist stream which emerged in the Hellenistic age. This new Orientalism which reaped the harvest of Alexander's expedition exceeded the formal limits of the previous Classical Orientalism that decidedly preferred Oriental themes in purely Classical forms with additions of theatrical, scenic and conventional 'Oriental' elements. The new Hellenistic Orientalism constituted an important aesthetic factor in the Greek art of its age and deserves separate treatment in the handbooks on the Hellenistic art.[46] The Rhodogoune painting belonged to the circle of artworks by those Hellenic masters who were markedly influenced by the Oriental world which found reflection in their works in its most apparent requisites like clothing, art, architecture, landscape, ethnic features or animal world. The painting of Rhodogoune was remarkable for its specific mixture of Hellenic components (facial portrait, composition, illusionist forms) and Oriental elements (textiles, harness, weaponry, fashion of dress) combined together. This strange blend of Hellenic and Oriental ingredients is also symptomatic of the Parthian art. The phenomenon of the Greek-Oriental eclecticism is clearly visible in the reliefed scene in Arsameia which represents the King of Commagene, Antiochus I (69–34 BC) in the attire of an Oriental monarch face to face with a naked Hellenic Heracles.[47] In my view the original painting of Rhodogoune in the Philostratus the Elder's gallery of Naples can be dated in the 3rd or 2nd century BC, and probably not later than the mid 2nd century BC.

The Rhodogoune painting must have been acquired for the art gallery on account of the particular thematic cycle and the architecture of the gallery as a whole. The painting had its individual setting within the frame of the *pinacotheca*, in relation to the other works of art. This situation can naturally add new meaning to the picture. In the rooms of the gallery a Greek-Oriental student might have been struck by the number of Asian and African motifs assembled together. As many as three tableaux out of a total of six put on display in the

[46] A chapter on the Orientalist style is in my view lacking in the otherwise brilliant book by Fowler 1989.

[47] Ghirshman 1962, fig. 79.

Room of Heracles[48] told the story of the hero's African adventures (Antaeus, Atlas, the Pygmies) (Pl. III). But in fact the African motifs played only a secondary role in Heracles' mythical biography and consequently in the 'Herculean' art repertory. The distinctive set of paintings in this room was remarkable for its, if I may be allowed to put it in this way, male and African dominant.

The atmosphere changed in the Room of Aphrodite (Pl. II). Here a guest to the gallery had an opportunity to study a set of paintings which portrayed Persian and Anatolian princesses: Pantheia, Rhodogoune, Cassandra. Even Critheis, though she was of Greek descent, came from Asia Minor. Let us focus for a while once again on the painting of Rhodogoune. It provides an interesting testimony of a certain heritage like the above mentioned relief from Arsameia. It is the heritage of an experiment once undertaken by many to unite different peoples of the new states which rose up on the ruins of the Empires of Darius III and Alexander the Great. This heritage proved to be topical again in the period of the Severans, an Afro-Semitic family on the Roman throne. The Rhodogoune painting might have been a later copy of the Hellenistic tableau, if so a master copy, truly worthy of the walls of a *pinacotheca*, such as that in the Propyleia of Athens or the *Porticus Octaviae* in Rome, a gallery where real *pinakes* on marble or wood were hanging on the walls. The Rhodogoune was probably traced and purchased in the East in view of the arrangement of a royal gallery, since its subject went well with the ideology of the Severan dynasty and most of all complied with the artistic tastes, intellectual occupations and Arabian origin of the Empress Julia Domna. In contrast to the Room of Heracles the Room of Aphrodite was signal for its female and Asian dominant.

The highly individualized and calculated pattern which emerges from an analysis of the whole exhibition carried out by Lehmann-Hartleben revealed yet one more African wall in his Room of the Rivers,[49] with the tableau of Memnon, a hero who himself met with a wave of new popularity in connection with Septimius Severus' Egyptian pleasure-tour, and subsequent restoration of the Vocal Colossus in Western Thebes. Concluding the painting was probably purchased as a souvenir of the romantic Egyptian holidays enjoyed by Septimius Severus and Julia Domna in the spring of AD 200. Together they visited Alexandria, Memphis, Fayum, Thebes and Syene. In May AD 200 they stayed for some days on the Island of Philae, where they attended a local feast of Isis and Osiris. In the same hall the observer had the opportunity to see the painted version of the Personified Nile. We would be no more amazed if we discovered the Ethiopian Andromeda on the wall of Dionysos' Room. Thus all the lines converge on two persons: Septimius Severus and Julia Domna.

[48] Lehmann-Hartleben 1941, 21–24, fig. 1.
[49] Lehmann-Hartleben 1941 Ibid. 36–39, fig. 5.

*Interfecto Didio Iuliano Severus Africa oriundus imperium obtinuit:* so began the Emperor's biography by the Author of *Historia Augusta*, who could neither forget nor forgive Septimius Severus his African and Semitic origin. His resentment can still be felt despite the passage of almost two centuries (*Sept. Sev*. 1.1). The Emperor's sister, who came to Rome from Africa proved to be a disgrace to the royal couple, because she could hardly speak any Latin (*Sept. Sev*. 1.7). Born in Leptis Magna, Septimius never lost his African accent and sounded Semitic until the very end of his life (*Sept. Sev*. 19.9) (*Afrum quiddam usque ad senectutem sonans*). Some of his official portraits were markedly African-styled. With the four corkscrew curls above his forehead, they were a clear allusion to the great image of Serapis.[50] Hannestad observed that this class of Severus' portraits 'indicate North African affinity.' As an illustration he cited the statue of the personified province of Mauretania.[51] The archaeological excavations once carried out in Kyrene brought to light a relief which illustrated 'Severus and his sons doing battle with barbarians.'[52] Unfortunately we know very little about Severus' African campaign. The anonymous author of *Historia Augusta* handed down to us only that Severus *Tripolim unde oriundus erat, contusis bellicosissimis gentibus serenissimam reddidit* (*Sept. Sev*. 18.3). The Antaeus and the Pygmies paintings might have been purchased as a commemoration of those military successes over the African enemies of Rome. An Alexandrian coin issued by Domitian represents a theme disseminated for the needs of the Imperial propaganda. It shows a powerful standing Heracles/Domitian with tiny weaklings scurrying around his feet in an apparent allusion to the enemies of the Empire.[53] Lehmann-Hartleben specified a Herculean (*Imag*. 2.20–25) and a Dionysiac (*Imag.* 1.14–31) cycles within the gallery. It is probably not incidental that Bacchus (Liber) and Hercules were the tutelary deities of Leptis Magna, Septimius Severus' *dii patrii*.[54] Their reliefed images adorned the walls of the Basilica in Leptis Magna, founded by Septimius Severus and opened in AD 216.[55] We may guess that Septimius Severus' *dii patrii* were actually Tammuz and Melqart, identified with Dionysus and Heracles. We need not add that Heracles had always played an important role in the cult of the Roman Emperors.

[50] Hannestad 1986, 260–261, with the NyCarlsberg Glyptothek portrait carved on the model of the Serapis type, fig. 159.

[51] Hannestad 1986, Mauretania, found in Hadrumetum, now in the Palazzo dei Conservatori, fig. 122, 261.

[52] Hannestad 1986, 272.

[53] Boardman et al. 1990, Pl. 2806, AE, AD 94–95, Mourat, Num 1900, 423–428.

[54] Kotula 1986, 78–79

[55] Kotula 1986, 63.

As we have already mentioned, the visitor to the gallery reflected again and again on the intriguing atmosphere of the macabre and the inclination for perverse passions lurking among the images on the walls. One possible explanation may lie beyond the scope of the art critic's strictly defined field. The gloomy atmosphere inherent in some of the paintings hanging on the walls was probably in a way re-echoing the fates of the Severan family history and its personalities, the perfect material for a Shakespearean tragedy. Herodian and the author of *Historia Augusta*, both conspicuous for their vivid and colourful imagination, can supply many such horrifying scenes. It is emphasized several times in the *Historia Augusta* that Severus was extremely cruel.[56] The story of his treatment of the vanquished Albinus and his relatives related by the *Historia Augusta* discloses psychological analogies with some of the Philostratean *ecphraseis* (*Imag*. 2. 9, 10, 19, 23, 25).[57] In the opinion of Cassius Dio the nature of Caracalla betrayed 'the harshness and cruelty of Africa.' (78, 6, 1). Herodian expressed the view that Severus deliberately used Mauretanian cavalry units against civilians in Syria during the civil war of the mid-nineties, because οἱ δὲ Μαυρούσιοι ὄντες φοινικώτατοι, the Mauretanians 'were extremely cruel' (III,3,5). Plautianus, the most influential figure beside the Emperor was also Libyan (Herod. 3.10.6). 'Certain parts of the higher state administration were dominated by Africans in those years,' comments Hannestad.[58]

In a similar way the Room of Aphrodite (Pl. II) may reflect the personality of Julia Domna, a woman of the highest political and intellectual ambitions, as that of Heracles might have referred to her husband. Julia was herself of Oriental descent. Nöldeke and von Domaszewski were certainly right when they observed that Domna was a rendering of Syriac ܡܪܬܐ *martha*, *dom(i)na*.[59] The syncope Domna-Domina is corroborated by few inscriptions from the Eastern Provinces of the Empire. Dio Cassius tells about Julia's behaviour after Caracalla's death. According to the historian Julia hated her son as long as he lived, but mourned him after his death. Dio explained this change of feelings in this way that Julia was to realize that she was going to loose her high position and prestige. At first then she wanted to commit suicide, but later after she had recollected herself she undertook an adventurous plan to take over the throne for herself, like 'Semiramis or Nitocris the women of the same stock' (Dio 79.23.1).[60] Interesting to ob-

[56] *Sept. Sev*. 11.7: crudelissimus; *Sept.Sev.* 17.7: crudelior; ibid. 21.9.

[57] *Sept. Sev*. 11.7: *reliquum autem cadaver eius ante domum propriam exponi a diu iacere iussit. Equum praeterea ipse residens supra cadaver Albini egit expavescentem que admonuit, ut et effrenatus audacter protereret. Addunt alii, quod idem cadaver in Rhodanum abici praecepit, simul etiam uxoris liberumque eius*. *Sept. Sev*. 21. 9: *tristior vir ad omnia, etiam crudelior*.

[58] Hannestad 1986, 256.

[59] Kettenhofen 1979, 76.

[60] Kettenhofen 1979, 12.

serve that the Author of *HA* employed the same comparison when characterized Zenobia of Palmyra. Kettenhofen was right that there is no epigraphic, numismatic or other evidence for Julia imagined as Omphale (a sculpture in Vatican) or as Tanit (cameo), as once believed by von Kaschnitz-Weinberg.[61] However Oppian in *Cyn*. 7 learnt us to be cautious. He calls Julia Ἀσσυρίη Κυθέρεια καὶ οὐ λείπουσα Σελήνη. We can recognize in his poetic portrait of the Empress Atargatis of Hierapolis and Phoenician Astarte, which is otherwise corroborated by neither numismatic nor epigraphic evidence. In fact coins show that Julia styled herself on the goddess Aphrodite. A beautiful *aureus* depicts her as Venus Callipygos, with the legend 'to Venus Victorious'.[62] On a series of issues the Empress appears as Venus Genetrix or Venus Felix.[63]

Flavius Philostratus belonged to the closest circle of intellectuals at her side. It is not central for our argument that the 'circle of Julia Domna' eventually proved to have been a fiction of some 19th century scholars as argued by Bowersock.[64] Kettenhofen identified only three intellectuals from her circle, all of them Greeks: Philostratos from Lemnos, Gordian from Cappadocia, and Philiskos descending from Thessaly.[65] Consequently Kettenhofen argued against alleged Oriental-Syrian character of the court intellectual circle. The interests in the Orient on the part of those few Greek intellectuals probably resembled a contemporary likeness for view cards from Egypt or the Holy Land shared by those who like to see the pyramids of Gizah but simultaneously remain in isolation from indigenous people, who seem alien, dirty or at the best too 'exotic.' All those arguments do not contradict Julia's Syrian-Hellenic cultural identity. Her homeland was Syria, the Bekaa Valley, her religious milieu – the Arabic cult of Elagabal in Emesa. The land surrounding Emesa was inhabited by the Arabic tribes which came from the South.[66] During Julia's life the Syrian language was only arising to the level of the literary language. Syriac had been for a long time only a spoken vernacular of the prevailing majority of the Syrians, while the Greek played the role of the literary language used by the Greek minority and the educated Syrians. As it can happen in such cultural environments later Empress was brought up in the milieu of different cultural crosscurrents: her ethnic and cultural identity was Syrian, while literary and also cultural identity – Hellenic. We have just mentioned that Dio Cassius emphasised Julia's Oriental descent (Xiph.

[61] Kettenhofen 1979, 126.

[62] RIC 536, VENERI VICTR, 193–196 AD.

[63] RIC 578: VENERI GENETRIC; RIC 580: VENUS FELIX; cf. the As of Caracalla, Rev. VENUS GENETRIX, Venus enthroned and holding a sceptre, c. 215–217 AD, in the Czartoryski Collection, Kraków, BMC V, 229–230.

[64] Bowersock 1969, 108.

[65] Kettenhofen 1979, 15.

[66] Cf. a doctoral dissertation by Elaine Myers 2007.

343,21–24). The predominantly Classical subjects and exclusively Classical form of the paintings from the Neapolitan gallery well portrays the cultural milieu of the Severan court, hellenized Rome with an Oriental undercurrent.

I think that Kettenhofen's attitude is somewhat extreme in its neglect of different and mixed cultural identities in Julia and Septimius Severus.[67] Kettenhofen emphasized that there is no sign that Cassius Dio regarded the family as strange, exotic or 'Oriental.' 'Die nationalistische Perspektive, aus der heraus eine solche Geschichtsinterpretation verständlich wird, erledigt sich daher von selbst.' Strong words. Again and again the Westerners have been learning along the centuries, and recently only too painfully, that there are also 'others' in the world, essentially different others, although biologically the same, but meaningfully different with respect to their cultural identity, their religion or language. I think that racial or nationalist interpretation of history may bring about so much distortion and deformation in the history writing as the extremely opposite attitude which neglected substantial religious or linguistic differences.

I can not resist a feeling that the River Nile as well as the Memnon with the Vocal Colossus in the background were no coincidental choices for the gallery. They probably commemorated, which has been already mentioned, the lavish, much-publicized visit by the Imperial couple to the Land of the Pharaohs, which included in its programme sightseeing tours to the Tomb of Alexander the Great, the Labyrinth in Fayum, the Great Pyramids of Gizeh and naturally the Vocal Memnon in Western Thebes. This is also probably not coincidental that S. Severus liked to stay within the boundaries of his *res privata* – the vast land properties in Campania.[68] They were even enlarged in the wake of land confiscations. It is perhaps yet another information pointing in the direction of hypothetical owners of the Neapolitan gallery.

Who, then, was the owner of that refined and precious art collection at Naples? A member of the Severan family or an influential and wealthy aristocrat from the Imperial court circles in Rome? Why not Julia Domna herself? Her personality and the actually Imperial scale of the collection might seem to justify such a solution in the best possible way. In one of the last descriptions in the *Imagines* (2.28) we come across an intriguing and moving picture of an abandoned house, with ruined portico, and fallen columns, a house which was once prosperous, as emphasized by the author with particular feeling of nostalgia. A fallen column has always made a meaningful metaphor of the past glory. And only the spiders adorned its empty rooms with their fragile and intricate webs. Inspired by this motif Philostratus compared his own art to the work of Penelope who shed tears over her night work at the weaving machine. The image has

[67] Kettenhofen 1979, 20.
[68] Kotula 1986, 100–101.

really something painful in it. Would that be another allusion to Julia Domna and the house of the Severi? Is it not unlikely that weeping Arachne punished by the jealous gods for her divine skills, made a literary *sphragis* and a date added by the author of the *Imagines*. Were they published after the death of Caracalla (AD 217), or even, which seems more likely, after the fall of the dynasty in AD 235?

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## Plates

Pl. I. The art gallery of Martial (from Lehmann 1945, fig.1).
Pl. II. The Room of Aphrodite in Philostratus' painting gallery. Drawing by E. Polańska.
Pl. III The Room of Heracles in Philostratus' painting gallery. Drawing by E. Polańska.
Pl. IV. Heracles and Antaeus on the mosaic of Avenches, the 3rd century AD.
Pl. V. Pygmies in hoplite armour fighting cranes on the drawing by W. Zahn, Pompeii VII 4, 31, 51.
Pl. VI. Nilotic landscape on the Aventine mosaic, Museo Nazionale Romano.

Pl. VII. The River Nile winding between the rocks of Djebel, Pompeii I, 6, 15.
Pl. VIII. Jean-Léon Gérôme. View of the Plain of Thebes, 1857, oil on canvas, Musèe des Beaux-Arts, Nantes.
Pl. IX. Thisbe commits suicide over the dead body of Pyramus, a fresco in Pompeii, V 4a.

## Abstract

Pliny the Elder's history of sculpture and painting can be read largely as a guide to the Roman art galleries of his time. Philostratus the Elder in his turn compiled a learned guide to a painting gallery in Naples (Imagines). I focus on a selection of 'Orientalist' paintings from Philostratus the Elder's gallery (Heracles and Antaeus, Heracles and the Pygmies, The River Nile, Memnon, Pantheia, Rhodogoune). Philostratus the Elder confronted the Greek hero 'short in stature but in soul unflinching' with the Libyan savage whose body was ridiculously distorted, his limbs overgrown and unnaturally swollen which emphasised his primitivism. According to Philostratus' description the artist counterpoised two contrasting forces: the young Greek's skill and power against the brutal force of primitivism. This image of the non-Greek neighbouring peoples had already been deeply rooted in the Greek mentality for a long time in fact. Heracles and the Pygmies' painting was conspicuous for its air of grotesque, parody and burlesque. The Graeco-Roman attraction with Africa was a mixture of fascination, fear and alienation. Rhodogoune's story reflected the popular archetype of Oriental warrior-queen, both brave and beautiful, vengeful, cruel and cunning. The painting of Rhodogoune was remarkable for its specific mixture of Hellenic components (facial portrait, composition, illusionist forms) and Oriental elements (textiles, harness, weaponry, fashion of dress) combined together. The predominantly Classical subjects and exclusively Classical form of the paintings from the Neapolitan gallery well portrays the cultural milieu of the Severan court, hellenized Rome with an Oriental undercurrent. This strange blend of Hellenic and Oriental ingredients is also symptomatic of the Parthian art. The collection of paintings complied with the artistic tastes, intellectual occupations and Arabian origin of the Empress Julia Domna, who was probably the owner of that refined and precious art gallery at Naples.