

ON THE DIONYSIAC FRESCO IN THE VILLA DEI MISTERI AT POMPEII

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Read 19 June 1963

BEFORE a gathering like this it would be impertinent to indulge in prefatory trivialities about the Villa dei Misteri, its location, discovery, and importance. Nor need I urge, here, that every great work of art is inexhaustible, and so is this fresco, the greatest extant monument of ancient painting. But I have to say that, if I venture to try and formulate some of the impressions which it has conveyed to me, I do so with grateful appreciation of the fundamental observations of many students; particularly of two who have recently passed away: Amedeo Maiuri and Reinhard Herbig.¹

That inexhaustible essence of a great work of art is conveyed by the original, and only by the original. Photographs may serve as a reminder of it but not as a substitute. Our eyes and minds have been so corrupted by the incessant parade of mechanical replicas that we are liable to forget how essentially every photograph falsifies its model; the more dangerously so the more exquisite it be. We tend to accept as true the outlines and the spatial relations which the lens unavoidably distorts and the colours which can never repeat the unique shades of the object. Our mind deceives our eyes even before the very originals, effacing them and putting in their place the familiar dead counterfeits, and a strenuous and ever-repeated effort is needed to rid ourselves of this corruption.

¹ A. Maiuri, *La Villa dei Misteri*, 1931, second edition 1947, and several articles; R. Herbig, *Neue Beobachtungen am Fries der Mysterienvilla in Pompeji*, 1958. Both these books contain full bibliographies; I shall in the following quote only such literature as has some specific bearing upon my argument. The fresco was discussed in a seminar held by Professor S. G. F. Brandon and myself in 1961; I wish to thank him and all members for their fruitful collaboration. Since then, E. Simon and K. Lehmann have presented fresh contributions to the subject (*Jahrb. d. Dt. Arch. Inst.*, lxxvi, 1961, pp. 111 ff.; *Journ. Rom. Stud.* lii, 1962, pp. 62 ff.); the following will show why I cannot accept the views of these justly esteemed scholars.

This is said by way of warning. I shall have to refer to photographs; the best I could find—and they are deceptive. For example, the room containing the fresco is not large, as on the photographs it will appear to be—in fact, it measures 7×5 m., i.e. about 20×14 feet; the life-size figures therefore appear even larger in it and closer to each other. They absolutely dominate the room; this is not like a gallery in a museum. The photographs, moreover, will not enable us to look around and, with one glance, to take in the room as a whole, so as to appreciate the interrelation of all parts of the composition; they will fail to show essential details and, worst of all, they cannot convey the magic of the place. In short, the original cannot be repeated; and, after all, it is good that this is so.

Let us imagine then—aided, if so it be, by these maligned replicas—that we are privileged once more to enter the *Sala del gran fresco*. We enter it, as is intended, by the wide doorway through one of the shorter walls¹—and are faced, opposite us, by the representation of Dionysos at his union with Ariadne.² It is unfortunate indeed that of the fresco otherwise so miraculously preserved only this central panel should have suffered damage; happily, however, replicas of this group exist which enable us, with a little effort of our imagination, to visualize it as it was; at least in outline.³ And we perceive that the central figure on this wall, and therewith of the whole fresco, was Ariadne. She is seated, erect and high, in its very centre, the loving god in her lap. Dionysos, the women's god, in the arms of the mortal woman whom his love made into a goddess . . . On the right and left of

¹ I am not convinced by the argument by which Herbig (p. 14, n. 1) seeks to refute his own earlier view according to which the small side-door, which actually cuts off part of the heel of the 'Woman entering', is a later addition. It spoils the organic proportions of the room, is broken through the decorated wall with the ruthlessness which stands out in many other alterations made by the uncivilized last owner of the villa, and it brings the spectator into the room at a most unsuitable point. Moreover—as Professor Kraiker (Kiel) observed to me—if this side-entrance had been there from the first, the painter would not have so placed his first figure as to have its right foot mutilated by this inorganic element. If this argument is correct, here is the end of much fond speculation about the relation between the fresco and the neighbouring 'bridal chamber'. See Plate V.

² See Plate I.

³ See, e.g., the terra-cotta group reproduced by Herbig, loc. cit., fig. 31, a cameo in Vienna (Maiuri, p. 151, fig. 58) and Roman coins (E. Simon, loc. cit., p. 131, n. 56). All these replicas, and likewise the central group of the fresco, appear to derive from an outstanding cult image in a temple of Dionysos, probably in Smyrna.

the divine pair are corresponding groups of three figures each: Silenus and two satyrs on the left, but human women, engaged upon some devotional task, on the right. Human women, then, have entered, like Ariadne, the domain of the god; and not these alone but others, whom we notice at the very end of the frieze and after the puzzling figure of the winged daemon, on that part of the adjoining long wall remaining between the corner and the large window on the right.¹ Opposite it, the 'realm of Dionysos' continues, after the satyr-group mentioned, on the left long wall:² Silenus gazes across to his lyre-playing brother there, behind whom we notice the bucolic group of Paniscus holding his flute, with Panisca suckling a kid. Human women on Dionysos' left; on his right—our left—his train, into which one terrified human maiden has strayed. This train, however, by no means fills the whole of the left wall, for the first scenes of the fresco again show human beings. They are women carrying out various rites—in preparation, no doubt, for their entering the god's realm.

As we contemplate this gathering, human and divine, whose secret the earth kept for nearly two thousand years, we are made to feel like intruders presuming to see what is not for them. The beings on these walls do not seem in the least to exist for the attention of any beholder. They are, in this respect, quite unlike many other representations that come to mind; unlike, for example, those satyrs who, gay and bold, snap their fingers at us from many an Attic vase; unlike, too, the assembled gods who, on the Parthenon frieze, receive the procession of Athenian citizens. Here we find ourselves in the presence of beings entirely absorbed in their own existence, engrossed in their pursuits and abiding, completely unconcerned about us, in a world apart from ours. The concentrated devotion in the scenes of ritual first; the unassailable freedom, next, of mythical beings; the god with his love and, finally, the experiences and emotions of human women who have entered his realm: all this exists as though in another atmosphere; far from our day as are the apparitions of a vivid dream; a dream transferring us, for a time, into an existence, more real than our own, from which no word, no gesture, no glance reaches of what we are wont to call 'our world'.

Some figures in the picture, it is true, are looking towards the spectator. The maiden carrying a tray with offerings; the satyr holding up the mask:³ they are indeed looking in our direction;

¹ See Plate II.

² See Plate III.

³ Plates I, III, IV.

but their glance by-passes us; they see, but they do not see *us*. That same absorbedness is in the eyes of all the persons on the frieze, confining them within their pursuits and their devotion. A divine company, indeed; self-sufficient and self-contained.

Fascinated by it and at the same time repudiated, we become aware that we are not alone with this unique company. Our first attention had been drawn towards the central panel and, from there, towards the figures converging upon it from the right and left. Turning around, we now perceive, beside the entrance, the noble figure of the seated Domina¹ and, in the line of her pensive glance, beside the great window opposite, the Bride who is being adorned for her nuptials.² In the eyes of both these there is the same absorbedness as with the figures on the main frieze.

Turning, after this preliminary survey, to contemplate the fresco in some detail, we shall reserve for later consideration these two figures as well as the 'Woman entering', 'La Entrante', at the very left of the main frieze.³ The reason for this procedure will soon become clear; it may, however, be stressed at the outset that they are, all three, integral elements of the grand composition which makes the room stand out as one organic whole. In considering the main frieze we shall strive to do justice to those features which have so far emerged as well as to the evident sincerity of its religious inspiration and the overall clarity and directness of the representation—which call for a consonant response. Here is no gnostic abracadabra to be approached with speculative convulsions; here is *humanitas*, open and profound as the day. If our understanding of the fresco is halting, gradual, and liable to error, this is because we are far from this *humanitas*.

This said, we may first echo the outstanding scholars whom we named at the beginning and restate, in view of persisting errors, what the fresco does *not* represent. It does not, for one thing,

(a) 'reveal the secrets of the mysteries': these, by definition, were not revealed; least of all by believers—such as the mistress of the house must have been—and in a room freely accessible and destined for social occasions. Besides, the painting as a whole cannot be interpreted as depicting a series of rites (how indeed could Pan with his flute fit this programme, or Silenus with his lyre?), nor is there anything secret about the ritual

¹ Plate VI.

² Plate VII.

³ Plates III and V.

scenes at the beginning or the so-called 'revelation of the phallus' later on. Nor does the fresco (as has been suggested)

(b) 'illustrate the mythical life-story of the god'; for the reading boy at its beginning is in no way characterized as Dionysos, nor can the god be found anywhere else except in the central panel—unless the evident meaning of other scenes is dismissed in favour of aberrant fancies. Nor, again, can

(c) 'the stages of the initiation of one and the same person' (or indeed a 'soul') be found in the succession of the scenes pictured, for the human persons appearing in them are too markedly, and differently, individualized to admit of identification. And I would add that

(d) 'the rites of initiation into the Dionysiac mysteries' cannot be said to be depicted here at all; for what initiation-rites can there be where neither officiating priests (or priestesses) nor veiled novices nor sacrifices are seen? Even the preparatory ceremonies near the beginning of the frieze are far from depicting initiation-rites. Sufficient representations of such rites survive to disprove, on comparison, this interpretation of the fresco.¹

On the positive side, too, we may be content to allude briefly to what has been firmly established by earlier students; there remains more than enough that is problematical.

At the beginning of the frieze² a naked boy—a *παῖς ἀμφιθαλής*—is about to read out the *ἱερός λόγος*; his mother (so we may confidently call the woman on whom he is leaning) is ready to assist him and, when the time comes, to hand over to him the second volume, opened at the required place.³ The *ἱερός λόγος* contains ordinances for the ritual as well as the 'sacred story' of the god;⁴ the two elements, that is, which are reflected in the following pictures. After this hint at the 'service of the word' follows⁵ the girl carrying a tray with bloodless offerings (like her fellows she is crowned with an olive-wreath; the ivy is reserved for the god and those nearest to him). She is moving towards the priestess who, with two assistants, is carrying out an act of

¹ See, e.g., the Campana relief reproduced by M. P. Nilsson, *The Dionysiac Mysteries*, 1957, p. 89, fig. 18, or the sarcophagus in the Villa Medici, *ib.*, p. 90, fig. 19; cf. below, p. 182, n. 4.

² Plates III and V.

³ This is to say that her designation as a 'poetess' (by Herbig, *loc. cit.*, pp. 34 and 57) seems unconvincing to me.

⁴ On this see lately *Hermes*, xci, 1963, p. 234.

⁵ Plate III.

lustratio; a rite such as preceded many acts of worship,¹ here suited to the occasion in that its object is an olive twig and the purifying liquid, wine.

This one preliminary ritual act surely implies long devotions; for immediately after it—through it, no doubt—the realm of the god is actually present and open to his devotees. Waiting eagerly to sing the hymenaeus in his praise, Papposilenus is playing a prelude on his lyre; further back is the bucolic group of Paniscus and Panisca, with the kid and buck—a gentle scene breathing the quiet happiness that he may give whose power reinstates the unbounded sympathy of nature undivided in the place of constraining human convention. This serenity, though, is merely the fringe of the god's dominion. The terrified backward glance of the fleeing maiden leads away from it, on to the present god with his cortège, and to the torment and bliss which surrender to him entails.

All this has to be interpreted with reference to the central panel.² Here Herbig has shown the way.³ He recognized that it represents the god on the point of consummating the *ἱερός γάμος*. The two corresponding scenes on his right and left are—as we shall presently see—miracles brought about by the god's love. On the right (from the spectator) is the veiled phallus in the traditional basket (*λίκνον*). Many representations of this cult-object and the rite of its revelation exist;⁴ when they are compared, the present scene stands out as fundamentally different; for one thing, no neophyte to whom it is revealed appears in it. The phallus, under its purple cover, is here uniquely large and has risen to tremendous height: the god's 'sacred wedlock' is causing the symbol of his generative potency to grow miraculously. The maiden kneeling before the phallus, so far from uncovering it, is holding her left hand over it as though to protect it, while with her right hand she seems to be pulling down a last small flap of the covering cloth (this point was thus interpreted by Maiuri in 1948).⁵ In the context, her action may cause surprise; one might well expect the opposite move, that is, the revelation of the phallus; but as the picture actually is, her protective gesture can hardly be understood otherwise than as

¹ Cf. Dion. Hal. *Ant.* vii. 72. 15 τὰ ἱερά καθαρῶ περιανθίσαντες ὕδατι; S. E. Eitrem, *Opferritus und Voropfer*, 1915, pp. 76 ff.

² Plate I.

³ Herbig, loc. cit., p. 23.

⁴ Cf. above, p. 181 n. 1; also the stucco-relief from the Farnesina (Nilsson, loc. cit., p. 79, fig. 11) and, more generally, J. Harrison, *Prolegomena* . . ., 1903, pp. 518 ff.

⁵ *La Parola del Passato*, iii, 1948, p. 191.

her sudden reaction to the appearance before her of the threatening daemon with the raised switch.

Here I beg to state what I hope to show, or at least to argue, later on: this daemon is an intruder; a Roman interpolation in the Greek original. The latter reveals its meaning when the Erinyes is thought away (the 'daemon' is an Erinyes; and what place could an Erinyes possibly have in a genuine Dionysiac context?). Thereafter we are free to assume that the kneeling maiden originally was about to reveal the divine symbol; while behind her two others, carrying a tray with offerings (pine-twigs), are clinging to each other in terror at the exuberance of the potency growing up before them.

The same terror accounts for the attitude of the maiden who has sought refuge in the lap of a motherly friend.¹ Her wonderful head and torso—worthy of a Michelangelo—convey the agony of maidenhood facing the surrender in which it must lose self to find self; the agony endured in and by the community of women: see the other initiate approaching the tormented girl with an expression of infinite sympathy. This agony willingly undergone is the way, finally, to radiant bliss: see, at the very end of the frieze, the beatific dance of one who has gone, through surrender, to the new life with the god.

The scene on the right hand of the divine couple² corresponds closely, in form and ethos, with the one on their left. Here again are three persons. Two of them, very similar one to the other, are close together and more in the background; the third, in the foreground, is different and looks in a different direction. The action on which Silenus and the two panisci³ are engaged has never ceased to puzzle the interpreters; but some magical or miraculous import has been felt by most of them, and it is obvious how well this squares with the interpretation just outlined of the corresponding scene.

One paniscus is holding up a silenus-mask; the other is intensely gazing into a silver cup, a large, deep skyphos, which he is supporting with his left hand, while Silenus, with his right hand stretching across, is holding it by one handle. Paniscus is not drinking; this has still to be stressed, although it was rightly

¹ Plate II.

² See Plates I and IV.

³ The two are similar to each other like brothers. The difference in the shape of their ears recurs with the two panisci in the 'bucolic group'; it gives as little reason for distinction ('satyr' and 'paniscus') here as there. In fact one might, I suppose, legitimately call all these figures 'satyrs', even though their old, more animal type is avoided.

stated fifty years ago;¹ his mouth does not touch the rim of the beaker but is in the region of its centre. The beaker, moreover, is light, that is it is empty: this follows from the position of the fingers holding it.

What is it that Paniscus is so keenly striving to discern? 'His own mirrored image' or 'the reflection of the mask above': these answers too were suggested half a century ago; with the corollary that some kind of magic is implied.² These old suggestions have been pursued in various more or less fantastic ways; at present their elaboration by K. Kerényi³ appears to be most widely accepted.⁴ According to him, the young paniscus (or satyr, as this view requires) is made to see in the bowl, instead of his own reflection, that of the mask; that is, 'Father Silenus'. Therewith and thereby he feels, and is, changed from a youth into a man, a '*patris imago*'; and the scene accordingly is supposed to represent one of the (now so fashionable) 'rites de passage'; the young paniscus (or satyr, or silenus) standing, somehow, for the youth who is to be the bride's husband.

With every respect for a scholar whose learning and intuition have illuminated important aspects of Greek religion, I have to confess that to me this exposition seems far-fetched and contorted beyond credibility; that, moreover, it is contradicted by actual details of this panel and at variance with the spirit of the fresco as a whole—which, for one thing, shows human women in the realm of Dionysos but no men; and how could any spectator have recognized the human outsider in this one paniscus, alone of all the mythical figures?

I wonder if Kerényi and his followers have tested his theory

¹ By Miss P. B. M. Cooke (*Journ. Rom. Stud.* iii, 1913, pp. 167 f.); but 'Silenus gives a boy something to drink': thus Nilsson, loc. cit., p. 75.

² By P. B. M. Cooke, loc. cit. ("*λεκανομαντεία*"). Miss Cooke quoted (p. 168, n.1) a suggestion by 'Miss Talbot' according to which the mask was to be mirrored in the bowl. A. Delatte, in his immensely instructive book *La Catoptromancie grecque . . .*, 1932, pp. 197 f., tentatively argued for an act of catoptromantic, the mask being designed to produce in the 'satyriscus' a state of hallucination. Following a suggestion by M. Hubaux he quoted (p. 197, n.1) and reproduced (fig. 22) the interesting but irrelevant engraving by D. Hopfer which impressed also Kerényi and Herbig (p. 43).

³ *Eranos Jahrbuch*, 1948 (pub. 1949), pp. 198 ff. The reference to a painting in the cryptoporticus of the Villa Homeric, which Kerényi took over from Rostovtzeff (*Mystic Italy*, 1927, pp. 65 f.), has lost all relevance through the convincing, unmystical interpretation by V. Spinazzola (*Pompeii alla luce degli scavi nuovi . . .*, i, 1943, p. 507 with fig. 571b and iii, tav. xxix).

⁴ e.g. by Herbig (pp. 28 and 43), Ph. W. Lehmann, *Gnomon*, xxxiii, 1961, p. 81; K. Lehmann, *Journ. Rom. Stud.* lii, 1962, p. 67.

experimentally. They would have found, first, that silver, if it is to serve as a mirror, has to be given a special polish; otherwise it will yield no reflection at all. The skyphos on the painting does not seem to show this polish, and that such should have been applied to its inside, right down to its bottom, is anything but obvious. Accordingly, it is improbable that this drinking-vessel could have yielded any reflection. But let us posit that it was highly polished inside. Its bottom is convex, for it is concave from the outside. With his head so near the cup, Paniscus would probably see no reflection at all in its darkened inside; if anything, he would see on its bottom the centre of his own face reflected in grotesque distortion. The projection, welcome to magicians of all ages, of the mirrored object upside down could not have come about unless the bottom, though concave outside, was perfectly spheroid inside—which is against all likelihood; and what good could it have done?¹ Kerényi², however, asserts that 'with mathematical certainty', and to the amazement of Paniscus, the mask would appear where he expected to see his own image. The fact that he sees the mask upside-down leaves him unruffled; but its substitution for his own image has the aforesaid magical effect of suddenly (and no whit too early) transferring the presumed bridegroom from puberty to manhood.

In fact, it is 'mathematically certain' that nothing of the kind could have happened, even if all the unbelievable but indispensable conditions mentioned were granted. With the head and right shoulder of Paniscus between mask and cup, and the cup tilted as it is, the mask could not be reflected in its inside. With luck, it might be reflected on its inner rim, but distorted past recognition and so small as to be hardly visible. And it ought not to be argued—though it has been done³—that either this paniscus or his brother are adjusting the cup, or the mask, so as to make the mirroring possible. In that case, the standing paniscus ought at least to be looking at his fellow, or at the mask; and how abstruse is the idea that he who is to be struck by the magic substitution of the mask for his own image should himself be striving to bring about the *pia fraus*!

This interpretation, then, had better be abandoned. If the painter had wanted us to understand that an act of mirroring was here performed, he would have shown in Paniscus' hand some article suitable for mirroring—a mirror, that is, or a dish,

¹ Still another alternative—namely, that Paniscus is mirroring himself in some liquid inside the cup—is precluded by its tilted position.

² Loc. cit., p. 200.

³ Herbig, loc. cit., p. 28.

or a flat bowl;¹ and if the image appearing in this mirror were of any consequence, it would itself be shown in the picture—as is actually the case elsewhere in this very room. Before the seated bride stands a little Eros holding up a mirror to her.² Her image in it is presumably far less important than that in the scene under discussion is supposed to be; none the less it is shown, and that in defiance of verisimilitude. I could quote other instances.³ The upshot is: the expounder of a pictorial representation (or, for that matter, of a text) must not supply from his own invention essential features which are not indicated in it. Hence I venture to propose a different interpretation which, I trust, may be found to agree with the details of the scene and the gist of the whole fresco—even though its correctness cannot, in the nature of the case, be proved. I suggest that Paniscus is peering into the empty cup in the expectation that, through the presence of the god, it will miraculously be filled with wine.

We noted the analogy, in form and sentiment, between this scene and the one on the other side of Dionysos and Ariadne; we should expect a similar correspondence also of substance. On the right, the loving presence of the god causes the sign of his procreative power to grow in terrifying potency; what could it be, equal in significance and corresponding in character, that is so keenly awaited by Paniscus? What portent can be expected to arise in the empty wine-cup held by Silenus, the fellow reveller ivy-crowned like his Master near by?

The frieze shows, in succession, various aspects of the god's dominion: bucolic calm as well as terror; music, love, dance . . . It is notable indeed how restrained in it are those features which stand out in earlier representations; the rapture, wildness, and abandonment of his followers are signally toned down. Even so, it is beyond credibility that there should be not as much even as a hint at the most outstanding of the wine-god's gifts⁴; and yet

¹ All the obstacles, so far summarized, in the path of Kerenyi's interpretation are signally absent from the engraving by Hopfer (above, p. 184, n. 2).

² See Plate VII.

³ e.g. the mirrored images on a silver cantharos from Berthouville (A. Delatte, loc. cit. [above, p. 184, n. 2], pp. 187 ff. and figs. 14-17); the eidolon on the shield held by the priestess on the Boscoreale fresco (P. W. Lehmann, *Roman Wall Paintings* . . ., 1953, p. 186; E. Simon, *Die Fürstenbilder von Boscoreale*, 1958, pp. 28 ff. and Abb. 8); Thetis mirroring herself in the shield wrought by Hephaistos on a Pompeian painting (L. Curtius, *Die Wandmalerei Pompejis*, 1929, fig. 134).

⁴ This remains incredible even if the suggestion (offered below, pp. 188 f.) is considered that the Hellenistic original may have contained scenes of

there is none, if it is not in this scene. If it is, the gift of wine on the right of the god, and love on his left, effect a symmetry uniquely fitting: *vinum atque amor*. This then seems to be the purport of what is actually seen on this panel: the love of the present god and his consort will forthwith cause his gift to rise in the cup held by Paniscus and Silenus. Many a sacred story tells of similar miracles. Thus the advent of Dionysos made the empty jars to be found filled with wine in the sealed room reserved for this portent at the Elean feast called Thyia; the people of Teos exhibited on the frieze of their Dionysos-temple the miracle of a spring flowing with wine in proof of the god's birth in their city; on Naxos a spring, similarly flowing with wine, arose at his union with Ariadne.¹

If this interpretation is accepted, the intimation of a significant miraculous event which this scene spontaneously conveys is vindicated and correlated with the main subject of the whole frieze; it is, moreover, in agreement with two features not yet considered. Behind the two who are holding the cup, the other paniscus raises the most expressive symbol of Dionysos' dominion: the silenus-mask. Right above the seated individual Silenus, its hollow, hypnotic stare, together with its holder's earnest gaze into the void, bespeak and demand concentration upon a unique moment: what here comes to pass—the parousia of the loving god and the miracles flowing from it—is of supreme and timeless significance. This significance is further emphasized by the posture and expression of the 'Donna atterrita', the 'Fleeing maiden' at the near end of the neighbouring wall.² She is not in fact fleeing: she *has been* fleeing, terrified no doubt at the appearance of the god. Like the maiden on the opposite wall—structurally and materially her counterpart—she has perceived the threat to her individuality; but, unlike her, she was unprepared for surrender. Now, suddenly and violently, she has stopped her flight and looks back, with anxious attention, to the scene of the miracle which in the end no doubt will fortify her

revelry which are not reproduced on the extant fresco. The comprehensive Pompeian composition could not be so essentially incomplete as to represent the wine-god with no intimation of his chief characteristic.

¹ For these and many similar Dionysiac miracles see Pausanias, vi. 26; for Teos, Diod. iii. 66. 2 and W. Hahland, *Österr. Jahreshfte*, xxxviii, 1950, pp. 85 f.; moreover, Propert. iii. 17, *Eur. Ba.* 706 and 770-4 (with Dodds' note), and the other passages quoted by Preller-Robert, *Griech. Mythol.* i, 1894, p. 708 n. 1; J. Vürtheim, *Class. Quart.* xiv, 1920, pp. 93 f.; M. P. Nilsson, *Gesch. d. griech. Religion*, i, 1955, p. 589 nn. 8-10; and especially Silius Stat. vii. 186 ff.

² Plates I and III.

allegiance. The seated Silenus is not, I think, 'angrily looking at her' (as Herbig¹ thought); in fact no one in the divine train is taking any notice of the presence of mortals; nor does he really look angry. He is looking towards the other Silenus who is awaiting his signal to break into song when the miracle has accomplished itself. This, and everything, thus depends on the supreme moment, awaited in fervid suspense, of the union of the god and his consort.

The frieze as so far examined has been found to show the god in his power and with his followers, among whom are human women who have entered his realm through sacred rites, terror, and surrender. This composition was not originally designed for the place where it has been recovered; this organic unity of structure and content was not invented to decorate a Roman drawing-room. What we see at Pompeii is a copy, of excellent quality though with certain imperfections and essential alterations and additions, of an outstanding Greek original. This inference ought to be as obvious here as it is with regard to, for example, the Alexander-mosaic or the great frescoes from Boscoreale; it is confirmed by the very presence of the Roman alterations and additions. These we shall presently turn to consider; first, though, I would offer some suggestions concerning the original—which may have adorned the sanctuary of Dionysos at Pergamon.²

To begin with, it seems likely that the original contained some further scenes which do not reappear in the Villa dei Misteri. Here the transition from the divine to the human sphere happens with a suddenness—Papposilenos standing in front of the servant girl who is pouring wine over the sacred twig—which makes one suspect that the painter had to strive hard to fit him into the all-too-narrow space and may well have omitted other parts of the original. This in fact becomes probable in view of the 'bucolic scene', so different in its ethos from the all but tragic concentration of all the rest. The original which embraced these outskirts of the Dionysiac realm is unlikely to have been lacking other more central provinces. Admittedly this is a guess incapable of proof; but it is puzzling that a representation so comprehensive as this should be without any trace of the most characteristic denizens of the bacchic world. Here are no ribald

¹ Loc. cit., p. 29.

² The same suggestion has been put forth by E. Simon (loc. cit., pp. 144 ff.), basing herself upon a different mode of arguing; as a comparison will show.

satyrs feasting upon the wine-god's gift and pursuing frightened or willing nymphs, no maenads in ecstasy. . . . A conscious principle of selection seems here to stand out, and the very presence of the 'bucolic scene'—a rudiment, so it seems, of a still fuller composition—can support the guess that this selection was not a feature of the original. It would then be, rather, a motive of its Roman adaptation.

The attempt at locating that apparently more comprehensive original is possible thanks to the proficiency of the master painter who transferred it, though with some omissions and alterations, to the walls of the Roman villa. We may here utilize, first, that paramount feature previously noted, the expression of self-contained absorbedness in all persons on the frieze: they seemed to breathe and move in the atmosphere of another world. Thus to make visible the essence of an ideal world and to make its representation convey the otherness of the divine: this was, in sculpture, the achievement of Praxiteles; it is enough to recall the Knidian Aphrodite. But only in Pergamene art do we find the same atmosphere pervading the artistic rendering of whole scenes with many persons. Only one of the surviving relevant paintings has been securely traced to its origin; namely, the picture (from Herculaneum) showing Herakles finding his son Telephos.¹ It breathes the same 'absorbedness'—I can find no better English equivalent for the German 'Entrücktheit' or 'Versunkenheit'—as the Dionysiac fresco; that is, it too imbues the representation of a mythical moment with an atmosphere of timelessness by the posture of the persons depicted and in particular by the dreamy, or visionary, glance of their eyes. The Telephos-picture doubtless derives from a Pergamene original,² and the community of this essential feature is a strong argument for tracing the fresco, likewise, to Pergamon. A strong but not a compelling argument; for we cannot know whether the same characteristic occurred also in productions of other schools.³ But the fresco has other features pointing back to Pergamon.

¹ Reproduced, e.g., in Pfuhl-Beazley, *Masterpieces*. . . , no. 126.

² This was first recognized by O. Jahn (*Archaeol. Aufsätze*, pp. 160 ff.); cf. lately K. Schefold, *Pompejanische Malerei*, 1952, p. 139; similarly Wilamowitz, *Glaube der Hellenen*, 2. Aufl., 1955, ii, p. 362 n. 1.

³ The 'visionary' atmosphere is notable also in the much-discussed megalographiae from Boscoreale (Ph. W. Lehmann, *Roman Wallpaintings from Boscoreale* 1953; E. Simon, *Die Fürstenbilder von B.*, 1958)—which have likewise been traced to Pergamon (K. Schefold, loc. cit., pp. 47 ff., Ph. W. Lehmann, loc. cit., pp. 139 f.).

It has long since been noticed that many of the figures in the fresco are derived from traditional types.¹ Not only is the divine pair in the centre reproduced from an outstanding cult-image; the 'Donna atterrita' recalls one of the Niobids; also the lyre-playing silenus looks like a statue transformed into a painting; the girl kneeling before the *liknon* is derived from the typical representations of the *revelatio phalli*; and so on. And yet, every one of these traditional types has been infused with the breath of the great new invention into which they have all been absorbed. The ability to adopt, and recreate, traditional motifs is a characteristic of Pergamene art. Its inspiration was powerful enough not to be quelled by eclecticism; it was able to give a new life and meaning to inherited types and to marry them with its own new creations. Thus in our fresco. And where else in post-classical Greek works do we find that grandiose pathos and inexhaustible invention—except in Pergamon; the constant ally of Rome and, later on, the inspirer and indeed the creator of the most outstanding works of Roman art, such as the Ara Pacis?

Finally there is the relation of the whole picture to the Dionysiac mysteries; a relation which does not indeed prove its Pergamene origin but agrees with it perfectly. As already observed, no specific mystery-rites are depicted in it; no initiation or any other mystic ceremonies. Even so, the very fact that human women are shown together with the divine company—not merely as worshippers, as on many a dedicatory relief, but in the variety of their experiences—and that antecedent rites of initiation are implied though not depicted: these features are evidence that the temple of Dionysos adorned with the original painting (it can only have been designed for a temple) was the place of a mystic cult; the primary purpose of this, as of all mysteries, being to bring about a close union of human beings and their god. In Pergamon, Dionysos was one of the chief gods worshipped; his priesthood was customarily filled by members of the royal house and his cult is explicitly termed *mysteria*.²

Hence it seems a reasonable assumption that the original of the frieze in the Villa dei Misteri may have adorned the royal temple of Dionysos at Pergamon. The extant reproduction retains very much of its artistic quality; it conveys much also of its religious inspiration; but its meaning and intention, as well as much detail, have been decisively affected by its adaptation for a new purpose.

¹ Summarized by Herbig, loc. cit., pp. 57 f.

² Cf. *Hermes*, xci, 1963, p. 237.

The extant painting adorns not a temple but a private house; a Roman not a Greek house; the original accordingly has been made to serve a Roman not a Greek concept. This is palpable, first, in one primitive and self-evident fact. The faces of the human persons on the fresco, almost all of them,¹ are unmistakably portraits. This feature is, in a religious picture, essentially un-Greek; but if today you go through any Italian town, you will time and again see physiognomies which could have served as models for one or other of them. There would, by the way, have been little point in introducing this innovation, unless the persons portrayed had some particular relation to the subject of the Pompeian painting; that is, they are highly likely to have been members of a local *thiasos*. These individual likenesses are perfectly integrated into the overall trend of the fresco (very differently from the boorish senatorial countenances which spoil the ideal sweep of the procession on the Ara Pacis); they share that absorbedness in a supra-human reality: the master painter must himself have been imbued with the Pergamene tradition.

We now turn to those figures which so far have been left out of consideration. On the left of the very beginning of the frieze, before the reading boy, and on a separate panel, is the 'Woman entering', 'La Entrante'.² Alone depicted entirely in profile, and attired, like no other, in a classical garb, she is still further set off from all the rest of the frieze by the expression of infinite concentration in her wide-open, big eyes and tightly closed lips, her posture, and her solitary position in relation to the whole picture. I quote from Herbig's sensitive description:³ 'She is placed', he says, 'further into the foreground than any of the other figures . . . pensively, in deepest seriousness, she seems to be gazing into the void . . . completely isolated, without any contact with the others, she moves in her own sphere.' These observations refute the current view which would here find a 'postulant' asking for admission and having the laws or rites of the community read out to her. But who is this lonely woman in the attire of a past age, entirely gathered in herself, moving, with that visionary glance, between the self-contained domain of Dionysos and the spectator? She is 'in the picture' yet is not part of it; she is walking, nay wafting, past all the other figures like a ghost. . . . Hers is a reality other than theirs: they manifest their timeless existence; she passes through, or along it like a sleep-walker—and

¹ With the exception of the 'tortured maiden', on which below, p. 197; on the other hand, the two panisci combine animal and portrait features.

² Plates III and V.

³ Loc. cit., p. 33.

therewith that whole colourful world of myth and faith seems to become: her dream.

With the introduction of this figure, so it seems to me, the whole image of the Dionysos-world is moved on to a different plane. It is now perceived, as it were, in reflection. What the beholder sees is no longer his own immediate experience; he is made to share the series of visions experienced by that isolated figure. The question remains: Who is she? And why was she introduced?

Behind her sits the 'Domina', and opposite, the 'Bride'.¹ I take these traditional designations to be evidently correct; and likewise the inference that the former is the mistress of the house who had the room decorated in accordance with her allegiance to Dionysos, and that the girl preparing for her wedding is her daughter. The further, widely-accepted inference that the room was 'reserved for the wedding ceremonies of the daughters of the house' seems unrealistic—for how often could an event of the kind be expected to recur?—and the description, equally current, of the whole fresco as depicting 'the Dionysiac consecration of the bride' (or 'of brides')² has, I think, proved insufficient. The assumption is still permissible, and indeed attractive, that the room received its decoration on the occasion of the wedding of a beloved daughter. This could have induced her parents to commemorate the day by commissioning the painting which would remain to preserve the likenesses of the bride, her mother, and other members of her *thiasos* and to intimate the religious convictions with which they approached the event. This assumption, though, would be no more, nor less, than a first step towards the solution of the problems raised by the Roman adaptation of the original painting.

The dreamy glance of the bride goes across the room in the direction of the 'Entrante'; with an expression of shy expectancy on which I am loath to comment. The Mother is gazing in the direction of her daughter. 'Her wonderful eyes', says Herbig,³ 'are opened wide; their glance goes across to the bride as though in visionary contemplation.' There is something contradictory in this fine description. It is of the essence of the 'visionary glance' that it sees—nothing; nothing material, that is; and indeed the

¹ Plates VI and VII.

² Thus, e.g., Herbig, p. 48; after M. Bieber (*Jahrb. d. Dt. Arch. Inst.*, xliii, 1928, pp. 298 ff.) and J. M. C. Toynbee (*Journ. Rom. Stud.*, xix, 1929, pp. 67 ff.).

³ Loc. cit., p. 39. Somewhat at variance with this description, Herbig subsequently (p. 49) states: 'She contemplates the whole as one initiated and knowing.'

Domina is absorbed in her vision. This vision, though, may very well have been called up by the sight of the young bride opposite: her daughter, who is about to experience what she has experienced herself—and what now rises before her mind.

The Domina's vision looms before her—and before us: the whole frieze is her vision.¹ She is seeing herself in years past entering, through marriage, into the realm of Dionysos. The 'Entrante', then, is the projection of that pensive woman at the entrance,² and her quasi-somnambulist progress along the unheeding figures of the frieze symbolizes the way the Domina went, through sacred rites and overwhelming experiences, to become the *matrona* who is now recalling her self-realization in devotion to her god.

The addition of these three figures, Domina, Bride, and 'Entrante', thus entails a thorough re-interpretation of the original. If we are to assess it, we must first deal with the remaining instances of Roman interference with the Hellenistic model. Two small but characteristic points will prove significant. First, we may note that, in an almost obtrusive manner, nearly all the women whose hands are visible, and even Ariadne, wear rings. This stressing of their married state is one more Roman feature—wedding-rings are not a Greek custom; it coincides with other indications, long observed, of matrimonial legalism in the Villa and, once more, alters the trend of the original. For, although the Greek Dionysos is not entirely unconnected with the institution of marriage,³ the frieze as such surely does not aim to show the god in this aspect.

A related feature is in the notable concern for (to use the current, improper term) 'propriety'. Sexual organs are not

¹ A reference by K. Schefold (*Die Wände Pompejis*, 1957, p. 293) has shown me, too late, that this point, as well as some related ones, had been anticipated by O. von Salis (*Österr. Jahreshfte*, xxxix, 1952, p. 92).

² Actually, the term 'projection' is unduly technical and modern. The figure is neither a portrait of the *Domina* at an earlier stage of her life nor an abstraction. The Romans who commissioned the picture had it added to signify their 'passing through' the divine reality represented on the frieze. The classical, i.e. timeless, costume of the figure as well as the somewhat indefinite outline of its face serves to intimate its wellnigh allegorical import in indicating a long-drawn-out experience. I cannot quote a precise parallel for this device; one may, however, compare the combination of persons living and dead on Attic gravestones; of gods and dedicants on many reliefs and, in particular, the ever-increasing use, in Roman times, of allegorical figures. For instance, a river-god like Danubius on the columns of Trajan and Marcus is, and is not, 'in the picture' in a similar manner to 'La Entrante'.

³ Cf. M. Bieber, *Hesperia*, Suppl. viii, 1949, pp. 31 ff.

visible except on the lyre-playing Silenus and the reading boy, and are in both these instances reduced to all but nil. In a Dionysiac composition as comprehensive as this, the fact calls for an explanation. Like the foregoing feature, this also may be ascribed to some Roman preoccupation, and it is tempting to correlate it with the absence, previously noted, of typical Bacchic scenes of the more unrestrained kind.

The preceding observations may support a suggestion concerning the most problematical figure of the whole fresco; namely, the winged daemon. As already stated, I incline to regard this figure as a Roman intrusion. My reasons are:

- (a) it upsets the balance between this and the corresponding three-figure scene on the other side of Dionysos and Ariadne;¹
- (b) to fit the 'daemon' in at all in the available space (the corner panel had, as throughout, to remain free), the group of the three maidens had to be precariously pushed towards the left. Thereby the equilibrium of the whole composition was still further impaired. Its centre is marked by the figure of Ariadne, from which the Silenus-group is separated by the distance of almost a whole panel, while the *liknon*-group is crowding up to it; the foot of the kneeling girl is in front of Ariadne's and one asks where, in the region of Ariadne's head, the huge torch ended which is balancing on the girl's shoulder. And even so, the 'daemon' is almost standing on the *liknon*, and her switch might hit the kneeling girl rather than the crouching one on the neighbouring wall. When the 'daemon' is thought away and the group of the three girls moved to the right, these snags vanish and perfect balance results.

¹ Above, p. 183. This argument would be seriously impaired, if Ph. W. Lehmann (*Gnomon*, xxxiii, 1961, p. 80) were right in asserting, against Maiuri and Herbig, that the two maidens behind the kneeling one are actually only one, badly designed, figure. In this case, an impressive formal correspondence could be found between the two girls on the right and the two satyrs on the left, while the daemon would correspond with the silenus—both of these concerned with a figure on the neighbouring wall (and one might even go on to suggest a connexion between this scene and the ritual flagellation of women in the Dionysos-cult at Arcadian Alea [Pausanias 8. 23. 1], the home of the mythical founder of Pergamon, Telephos [cf. C. Robert, *Arch. Jahrb.*, iii, 1888, pp. 90 and 104]). To me, on examining the original, the older view seemed to be right. No one denies that the hands of inferior assistants are apparent in many places (as in the distorted left leg of the kneeling girl)—but not to the extent of blowing up one frontal figure so as to make it fill the same width as the three figures in the corresponding panel; besides, I seemed to notice a marked difference of colour distinguishing the dresses of two figures.

(c) This figure is the one startling exception to the rule—which is constitutive in the concept and composition of the whole frieze—that the mythical beings on it are sublimely unconcerned with the presence of mortals.

(d) The 'daemon' is herself out of place within the context of the frieze. Iconographically this is a unique figure—if an identical one could be found, its interpretation would not be as controversial as it actually is—but its closest relatives are (as has been noted long ago)¹ the avenging daemons in representations of tragic themes and of scenes from the Underworld, particularly on South Italian vases and also on sarcophagi.² These daemons may occasionally be given particular or generic names (Tisiphone, Poinai) and tasks; even so, they all are 'Erinyes' or 'Furies'. They are characterized, as Aeschylus and Euripides had visualized them, by their hunter's attire: short belted chiton and high boots: their arms and legs are usually bare (sometimes also their breasts); their weapons and attributes are snakes, torches, swords, whips, lances, or pointed sticks. Very rarely, they are given repulsive faces; more often they could be taken almost for representations of Artemis.³ As often as not they are winged, their wings—if any—being expressively large, and (as is only natural) no one representation shows all these features combined.⁴ The figure under discussion falls under the type thus summarized; she is, then, a specific variety of the genus 'Fury'. Furies have no legitimate place within that world of Dionysos which the frieze represents.⁵

¹ By Kern and Rizzo, according to M. P. Nilsson, *The Dionysiac Mysteries*, 1957, 125 n. 27.

² e.g. C. Robert, *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs*, iii, pl. 77 and 91; text pp. 292 f.

³ e.g. on the vase Naples 3219; see Roscher, *Lexikon . . .*, ii, p. 2198.

⁴ The fullest list (not quite without slips) of relevant monuments and literature is in P.-W. *Realencyklopädie . . .*, Suppl. 8, s.v. Erinyes; cf. also Roscher, loc. cit., s.v., and (inaccessible to me) A. Rosenberg, *Die Erinyen*, 1874. One may compare, e.g., the (lost) vase in Millingen, *Coll. Coghill*, 29. 1 = Roscher, i. 1334 (I am advisedly quoting older publications which are clearer than modern photographs); R. Rochette, *Monum. inédits*, pl. XLV (also XXXV, top); Reinach, *Coll. (Millin-)Millingen*, pl. i = Baumeister, *Denkmäler . . .*, fig. 918 (cf. *ibid.*, fig. 1795); C.V.A. Karlsruhe 63 = Roscher, i. 1810; P. Orsi, *Riv. R. Ist. Arch.* ii, 1931, pp. 167 ff.; Bock, *Arch. Anz.* 1935, pp. 495 ff.; Furtwängler-Reichhold, *Griech. Vas.*, Textband, iii, pp. 362 ff.; Trendall, *South Ital. Vas.* i, pl. III; E. Simon, *Öst. Jahresh.* 1955, pp. 15 ff.

⁵ In order to account for the presence of an 'envoy of Hades' on the fresco, M. P. Nilsson (loc. cit. 122) sought to prove from one or two later texts that 'a belief in the punishments and horrors of the Underworld was an integral element of the Bacchic mysteries'; but the texts in question are far

Nor, by the way, are they suitable agents to carry out fertility rites: nor does this fierce avenging 'daemon' show any features which could mark her out as the heavenly Virgo of Hesiod, Aratus, and Vergil—that virgin Δίκη who left the world of wicked men to stay with her Father Zeus. A syncretism as implied by interpretations of this latter kind, to be credible, would require the figure in question to be characterized by unmistakable attributes. In the absence of these, the disparate notions of a Bringer of the Golden Age, avenging Fury, and Dispenser of Fertility cannot reasonably be supposed to be fused in this one figure; she remains, very inappropriately, a Fury.¹

(e) This figure is undeniably derived—though thoroughly changed—from that of a winged female who rejects a *revelatio phalli* in a composition of which several Roman replicas exist, e.g. on the Dionysiac mosaic found at Djemila in Algeria.² On the fresco the same basic elements recur, but the group is split up, in that the 'daemon' is brought into relation with the figure on the next wall. This procedure is unlikely to have been employed by the creator of the Pergamene original; and indeed on the Djemila mosaic the group in question forms part of a quite different composition.

Thus it seems to follow that this figure is indeed a Roman interpolation in the Hellenistic context; the master painter who repeated and adapted the 'Pergamene' original for its new setting found in some Hellenistic painting the model for the Erinys which he inserted to satisfy a requirement of the owners of the villa. If so, the resulting group has to be interpreted in

from yielding this meaning. Celsus likened the Christians *τοῖς ἐν ταῖς βακχικαῖς τελεταῖς τὰ δέγματα καὶ τὰ φάσματα παρεισάγουσιν* (this wording is required: *προεισάγουσιν* does not make sense): here the very verb shows that even at this late date 'horrors and ghosts' were felt to be essentially foreign to the Dionysiac mysteries. Nilsson's second passage, Plutarch *Mor.* 611d, does not affect the issue at all.

¹ This is to say that I cannot see the slightest similarity between the Pompeian 'daemon' and those representations in which E. Simon (loc. cit., pp. 133 ff.) finds, with varying degrees of probability, the astral Virgo (the one on the Telephos-picture, from Herculaneum, in particular strikes me as showing the very opposite of a 'sister-like resemblance' to the 'daemon'); moreover, what could possibly induce this other-worldly figure to change her appearance into that of a Fury and to descend to inflict a fertility-rite upon a member of a human thiasos!

² See Nilsson, loc. cit., figs. 23, 31, 35; Herbig, fig. 30. The cameo Nilsson, fig. 36, was declared a forgery by L. Curtius in *Jahrbuch d. Dt. Arch. Inst.*, lix-lx, 1944-5, *Arch. Anz.*, p. 4.

accordance with the Roman tendencies which we have discerned; and since avenging or punishing daemons have no place in the reality of Dionysiac cult and myth (whether Greek or Roman), the figure must be assumed to convey some allegorical meaning. The late K. Lehmann suggested describing her as *Agnoia*, Ignorance;¹ but the figure thus named on a very late Egyptian painting is, I feel, very different in appearance and import, and the resulting interpretation of the fresco is strained and unconvincing. The Fury no doubt is inflicting punishment; but for what fault?

I would seek a tentative explanation from the fact that in its Roman adaptation the fresco is subordinate to the concept of legal marriage. Alone of all the women on the fresco the girl expecting the stroke of the switch wears no ring, and her face alone has not the character of a portrait. Hence I venture to suggest that those who commissioned the picture had the meaning of this figure changed, and the punishing Fury added, so as to complete the representation of their religious and moral ideals by a warning illustrative of their negation; for the resulting group can be understood as conveying a deprecation of extramarital sexual relations. The infringement of the matrimonial code, so the allegory seems to say, incurs divine punishment. Against the background of noble grandeur pervading the whole fresco, this warning admittedly would stand out as a painfully prosaic piece of moralizing; but it would not necessarily be out of keeping with Roman doctrinalism nor with the other pedantic Roman touches previously noticed. All these can easily be placed in the context of the legislation by which the Emperor Augustus strove to restore the sanctity of marriage.

On this interpretation the winged 'daemon' would be the fourth main figure added, at Pompeii, to the 'Pergamene' original. Its introduction would have entailed some slight alterations to two neighbouring figures: the matron in whose lap the girl has sought refuge is made gently to bare her back for the stroke (originally she may rather have been covering it) and to look up at the 'daemon';² and the kneeling girl on the other side is likely originally to have been about to reveal rather than to cover the phallus.

We may now sum up our observations by contrasting the Hellenistic original—so largely surviving in its Pompeian

¹ *Journ. Rom. Stud.* lii, 1963, p. 63.

² Cf. Herbig's beautiful description, p. 26.

reproduction—with its Roman re-interpretation (and he who hesitates to accept the suggested analysis of the fresco may still consider the distinction of elements Greek and Roman from a phenomenological, instead of a historical, point of view).¹ The Greek original brought the Lord of the temple before the eyes of his worshippers. The temple was the centre of a mystery-cult; the god accordingly was represented at the supreme moment,

¹ The analysis admittedly is not logically cogent; it may even be held to result from arguing in a circle. Those markedly Roman features, like wedding-rings and 'decency', the portrait-character of many physiognomies, the absence of extravagant scenes, and the presence of figures allegedly additional—all these, it may be held, cannot evince the existence of an original from which they were absent: they can be understood as elements of one Roman design conceived at Pompeii (or, according to Schefold, in Rome) and elaborated by combining, arranging, and adapting a variety of traditional Greek types. The unity of style throughout the composition and in particular the recurrence, in figures allegedly additional, of the supposedly Pergamene feature which we described as 'absorbedness' can legitimately be quoted in support of this alternative. Even so, this view seems to me to be excluded by the plain evidence of the extant picture and by its inadmissible implications. Anyone entering the *Sala* must feel, I presume, that the main frieze is essentially different, in spirit and kind, from the 'additional figures'—at least *Domina* and *Bride*. The latter are Roman and local; the frieze, in consequence, is not. Moreover, the frieze makes a whole too meaningful, balanced, and coherent to have originated from the mere juxtaposition of ready types: it bespeaks the inspiration of a creative genius, and this genius can only have been Greek. For I may as well here confess that the much vaunted 'great Italo-Campanian school of painting', which some authorities would credit with the creation of the fresco, seems a phantom to me; still less can I see any evidence for the existence in Republican Rome of so creative a school of painting. Admittedly those modest craftsmen who from Greek pattern-books daubed countless indifferent decorative pictures on Pompeian walls need not all of them have been Greeks; more ambitious decorations, such as, e.g., those in the 'Homeric house' or in the 'Casa del cryptoportico', may similarly have been executed by local artisans, and the same applies to the pompous but standardized ornamentations of the Fourth Style. Outstanding and consummate works of art, on the other hand, such as the Telephos-picture, the Theseus from Herculaneum, and the great frescoes from Boscoreale, are in a different category, and indeed I am not aware that they have ever been ascribed to the invention of local artists aided only by pattern-books; they depend upon Hellenistic originals, and the best of them could only have been done by masters bred in their tradition. The frieze in the Villa dei Misteri is very definitely in this class and consequently, like those others, presupposes a Greek original. In the last resort, the decision depends upon a sentiment which may be irrational but is not, therefore, irrelevant: the Dionysiac frieze, one feels, is in inspiration, art, and religious content essentially Greek and at variance with certain evidently Roman features of the whole composition. Once this is conceded the task of defining these elements in detail imposes itself.

the *hieros gamos*, in the repetition of which his cult culminated, and surrounded by his mythical followers, whom the faithful expected to join;¹ and this expectation was finally corroborated by the representation, at either end of the divine company, of human devotees before, and after, achieving this communion. The whole, then, was rooted in the devotion and the rites centring upon a great sanctuary; it was inspired by, and in turn inspired, the cult. Of course it was a great work of art, but this art was an instrument serving a religious purpose. It is quite possible, moreover, that individual scenes, or even the whole composition, were dependent upon learned or literary sources;² as is demonstrably the case with regard to the frieze of the great Pergamene altar. If the same could be shown in the present case, the fact would be as irrelevant here as it is there, for in either case the artistic achievement is powerful enough to speak for itself. It proclaimed the god and his cortège in their sublime otherness.

Transferred to the walls of a Roman house this message is conceived differently; as we have seen. What had been element and expression of cultic reality has been turned into a commemoration of personal experience. The timeless realm of Dionysos rises as a vision before the Domina. She has entered it through holy rites; she has passed through its outskirts and to its centre; she has seen the god and, with fellow initiates, experienced the terror and the bliss that come from him; and all this has become part of her mind and her being; it has made her what she is. Through the medium of Greek art this, her experience, is perpetuated and conveyed to others; though profoundly personal, it is not confined to the Domina. As others have shared it, so others may, in contemplating the fresco, participate in it; and even we, at the distance of two thousand years, can make it our own. For it flows from the essential and universal quality of Greek religion, which conceives, reveres, and represents as divine whatever is experienced as great, beautiful, dynamic, and in any way real and significant.

The Domina has experienced and understood the main

¹ It is irrelevant whether, in actual celebrations, these followers were or were not impersonated by members of the human thiasos; the picture represents the mythical persons themselves and not human actors.

² For example, Pap. Erzherzog Rainer 29801 can help one to imagine a bucolic poem describing an idyllic scene like that of Paniscus and Panisca on the fresco; similarly Theocr. vi and xi can suggest the type of a literary model for the plump Silenus singing the god's praise.

stages of her life, from maidenhood to womanhood, *sub specie Dionysi*. Here then is Greek religion giving the Roman a clue to his understanding of self, and Greek art conveying this understanding. Even in its Roman re-interpretation the painting still expresses some of the very emotions which, in times past, had called forth the Greek vision of Dionysos; but the Roman met the Greek god in the set forms of rite, myth, and art. Grown out of a vision not his own, these forms were nevertheless pregnant for him with inspiration on any level, from allegorizing platitude to philosophical reflection and religious response; on a sublime level—which was by no means the average—Roman devotion could call up again that overpowering reality which was impersonated in this god. The notion of him was narrowed, it is true, and to some extent altered through this Roman apperception. Even so, it was this new, live, and devout apprehension which caused the Greek artist to perpetuate, in a new frame, a grandiose vision of Dionysos and his realm; a Greek vision of the Greek god. In this limited sense one may here speak of Greek art reanimated by Roman inspiration and giving expression to Roman experience.¹

It would not, perhaps, have been very difficult to give to this simple talk an appearance of profounder learning; but the fresco has, I fear, been obscured rather than illumined by much

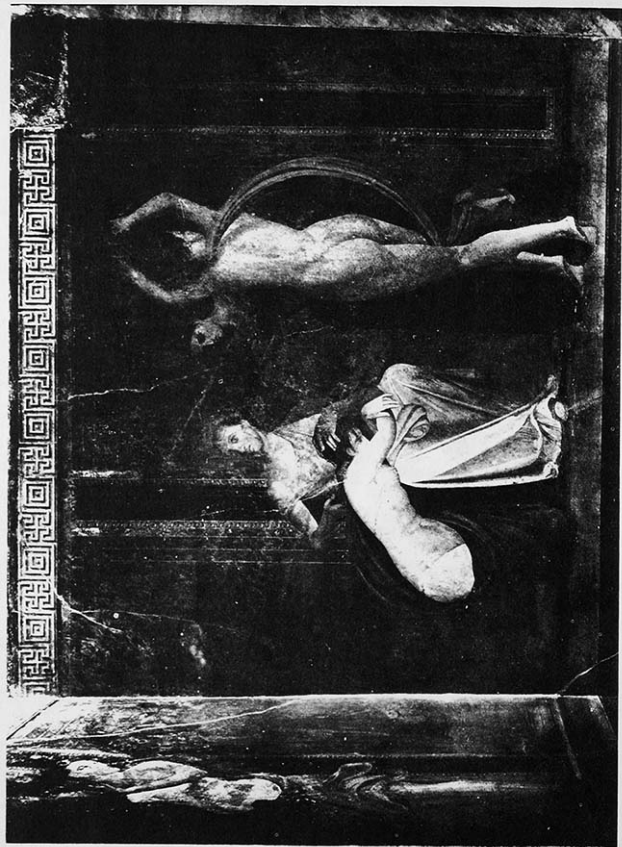
¹ The date of the Pompeian fresco is relevant to its interpretation, and an analogy with tendencies of the Augustan age has been noted above (p. 197). Where the experts disagree, the dilettante is allowed an opinion though no vote. K. Schefold (*Pompejanische Malerei*, 1952, p. 57) holds that it 'was copied about 60 B.C. from an original painted in Rome soon after 100 B.C.'; several others (M. Bieber, H. C. Beyen, A. W. Byvanck) attribute it to the middle of the first century B.C., Herbig (p. 8) to its second half (he stresses, p. 64, the analogy with the Ara Pacis of 9 B.C. yet strangely makes the fresco 'half a century earlier'). B. Schweitzer opts for 'the forties of the first century', R. Bianchi Bandinelli, M. Borda, and apparently also A. Maiuri, for the reign of Augustus. Those advocating a comparatively early date seem to be determined mainly by the fact that the décor of the walls, as distinct from the fresco, shows the characteristics of the 'Early Second Style'. Even if the—highly complicated—differentiation and dating of the various styles are accepted as binding, it does not follow that the fresco must be of the same period, for Herbig has shown (pp. 16 ff.), to my mind conclusively, that the fresco has been superimposed upon the already decorated wall. Hence its dating remains open, for no one can say how soon or how late this was done. To my mind it breathes the spirit of the Augustan age; the combination, into a new organism, of Greek artistic tradition and a lofty Roman idealism seems to place it beside the Ara Pacis and Vergil's *Aeneid*.

learned speculation. I have tried to listen to its silent voice and to translate what I seemed to hear into audible words; I shall be content if these could seem to convey a hint of its essence—be it only to a few candid beholders; be it only to one.

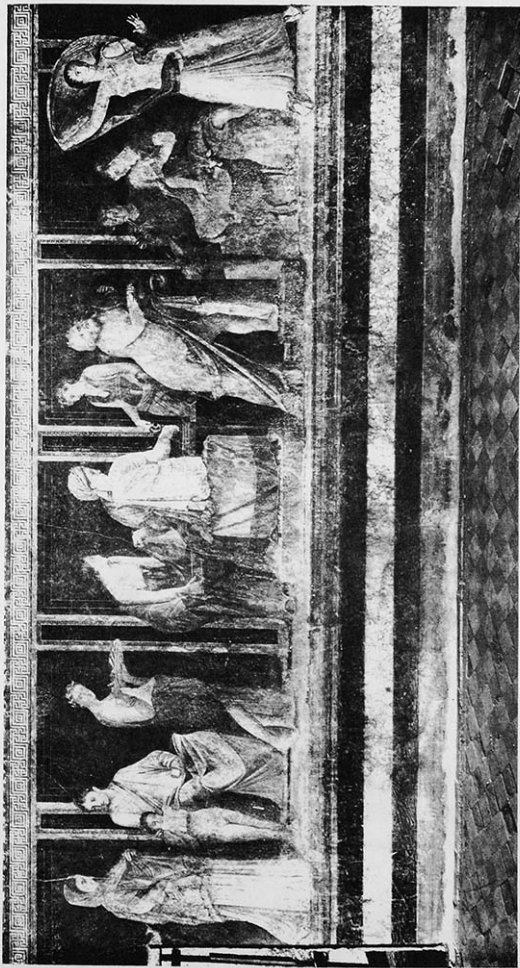


The central wall

Plates I-VII are all from photographs by Altieri



The right wall (left of window)



The left wall (from 'Entrante' to 'Atterrita')



The central wall, detail



The left wall, detail



The 'Domina' (left of entrance)



The 'Bride' (right wall, right of window)