

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: SWINGING, STILLNESS, AND SELF-REFLECTION: AN EXPERIENTIAL APPROACH TO CAMPANIAN OSCILLA

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Modern studies of Roman *oscilla*, in their focus on the Latin etymology of the term and their treatment of the iconography as standardized Dionysiac imagery, neglect the animation of—and subsequent viewer engagement with—the objects themselves. *Oscilla* were double-sided marble reliefs suspended in the intercolumniations of predominantly domestic atria and peristyles. This thesis develops an experiential methodology to study the *oscillum*'s form, context, and disposition and examines their presence in elite and sub-elite houses and in atria and peristyles. The traditional view has characterized *oscilla* as commodified ancient agrarian ornaments that depict standardized imagery fit for a garden space; I argue in this thesis that the *oscillum*'s presence within such inherently social spaces as the Roman atrium and peristyle warrants more scrutiny. No two discovered *oscilla* are the same, and it is the varied imagery and forms that visually and mentally stimulate the Roman viewer as he waits in the reception spaces of the atrium and peristyle to conduct business with the head of the household.

I discuss the *oscilla* programs of three Campanian houses, where *oscilla* are displayed in various parts of the Roman house, in houses of diverse social strata, and in different levels of quality. My first case study, the House of the Telephus Relief in Herculaneum, offers an opportunity to begin reconstructing a wealthy ancient viewer's cognitive experience as four tondi

oscilla are reinstalled *in situ*. These *oscilla* depict scenes of active movement, urging the viewer's physical engagement alongside his intellectual recognition of proper decorum in the socially and politically charged space of the atrium. In my second case study, I investigate the *oscilla* program in the peristyle of the House of Marcus Lucretius in Pompeii, where images of solitary masks and instruments provoke theatrical participation and recollection; the *oscilla* frame and simultaneously disrupt the framing of the theatrical garden to draw attention to the aristocratic viewer's participation in social performances. Finally, at the House of Fortune in Pompeii, a freedman involved in trade commissioned numerous albeit poor-quality *oscilla* that pair scenes of conflict with those of cooperation to convince the viewer of the patron's social and civic participation in the domestic sphere. Together, these case cases demonstrate the *oscillum*, a unique double-sided and suspended decorative object, inherently mobile and mutable, offered multifaceted experiences between the object's two sides and for many different types of Roman viewers.

SWINGING, STILLNESS, AND SELF-REFLECTION: AN EXPERIENTIAL APPROACH TO
CAMPANIAN OSCILLA

by

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
2023

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Introduction

Modern studies of Roman *oscilla*, in their focus on the Latin etymology of the term and their treatment of the iconography as standardized Dionysiac imagery, neglect the animation of—and subsequent viewer engagement with—the objects themselves. *Oscilla* were double-sided marble reliefs suspended in the intercolumniations of predominantly domestic peristyles and atria. They were in fashion from the early 1st century to the middle of the 2nd century CE in the western Roman Empire.¹ The *oscillum* was inherently kinetic and mutable, decorated with different heights of relief on the two sides; the intrinsic oscillation of the object demands more study than given so far. In addition, the *oscillum* is displayed in the reception spaces of the Roman house, sites of daily activities for the inhabitants, business spaces for the *paterfamilias* (the head of the household), and sources of fresh air and light for the house. Both spaces were elaborately decorated, as the Roman house was seen as an extension of the owner's identity; the house attested to the owner's social status by displaying his wealth, aesthetic and cultural sensibilities, and education.² Academic scholarship on *oscilla*, however, has removed the suspended and double-sided objects from these spaces.

¹ It is debated when *oscilla* were first introduced in the domestic sphere. Corswandt 1982, 10-26, argues for a late Republican, early Imperial period introduction (no later than Tiberius, r. 14-37 CE); Bacchetta 2006, 67-71, offers several examples from a similar period. Bacchetta 2006, VI.n.35, disagrees with Dwyer who argued that the *pelta* shape (a broad lunate shield with griffin protomes at the end) appeared no earlier than the Neroian period (r. 54-68 CE); I was not able to access Dwyer's text to confirm. Gil 2000, 147, states Dwyer uses the representations of tondi *oscilla* in dating the introduction to the 2nd or 3rd quarter of the 1st century CE. Pailler 1982, 768-774, argues it is too difficult to consider a date of introduction because of the complicated stratigraphy and excavation records and the lack of provenance from other locations (especially in ancient Gaul). Instead, he argues that the height of popularity was in the Neronian-Flavian periods (54-79 CE), and that current installations of *oscilla* discovered in Campania were likely reinstalled after the devastating earthquake of 62 CE; Bacchetta 2006, 65-66, agrees on the installation and preserved examples occurring after the earthquake. Scholars all agree on the height of popularity in the Neronian-Flavian period, and they generally agree on a date of the first half of the 2nd century CE of diffusion from the domestic sphere: Corswandt 1982, 33-45; Pailler 1982, 811; Bacchetta 2005b, 77. A number of *tympana* were discovered at Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli and are often considered the last instance of *oscilla* in the domestic sphere, but Bacchetta's analysis reveals these *tympana* are entirely different objects (Bacchetta 2006, 59-62).

² Platts 2019, 27-29.

I study the form, context, and disposition of *oscilla*—their shapes, their context in intercolumniations of the Roman house's social spaces, and the *oscillum*'s suspension. The *oscillum* appears in high and low quality in elite and sub-elite houses, in the atrium and in the peristyle. This thesis examines the *oscillum*'s presence and possible significance in these spaces. I develop an experiential methodology of studying the *oscillum*, examining the cognitive experience of the viewer as demonstrated through a series of possible kinesthetic actions, sensorial encounters, and interactions with viewers and decoration. I investigate how the suspension and subsequent mutability of the object animated the internal relationship between its two sides while also creating external relationships between the *oscillum*, viewer, and within the *oscilla* program. I separate my thesis into four chapters, three of which are case studies that explore the *oscilla* programs of different Campanian houses. The eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE preserved much of the ancient cities that lie around the volcano's base (in the modern-day region of Campania). The material record's biased nature favors beginning an experiential study with Pompeii and Herculaneum. While limited in geographical scope despite a larger distribution network across the western Roman Empire, the three case studies chosen for this thesis aim to investigate *oscilla* in different parts of the Roman house, in diverse social strata, and in varying levels of quality.³

³ At least 72 *oscilla* from central-southern Italy: Bacchetta 2006, 147-150; Pailler 2009, 796, claims only 50 from Latium in his review, which likely corresponds to Bacchetta's admission that only around 50 have a sure identification (Bacchetta 2006, 147); Pailler 1982, 781, records 53 from Latium (14 in Rome), 13 from the modern-day Venice region, 6 in central Italy, 10 in ancient Etruria (modern-day Tuscany, northern Lazio, and northern and western Umbria), and 2 in Sicily. Other research has added two *oscilla* to Sardinia: Teatini 2002; Amadasi Guzzo and Zara 2018. Around 132 *oscilla* are from Northern Italy (ancient Cisalpine Gaul): Bacchetta 2006, 143-147; Galve Izquierdo 2012, 222; Pailler 2009, 796, summarizes Bacchetta's study as naming 110; Bacchetta 2005a offers an overview of the selection. At least 75 *oscilla* are from central and southern France (ancient Narbonne Gaul and Belgica Gaul): Bacchetta 2006, 150-157; Pailler 2009, 796, records it as 70, and just from the Narbonne Gaul area. Pailler 1982, 781, records 50 himself from the Narbonne region. Loisy 1999 identifies around 100 *oscilla* for all of Gaul. From the Iberian Peninsula, 20 *oscilla*: Bacchetta 2006, 157-159; Galve Izquierdo 2012, 222. Recent work has increased the total to 35 *oscilla*: Galve Izquierdo 2012, 222 offers a literary review. Pailler 1982, 781, records from his study, at least five from Émilie and Tarragona. A few *oscilla* are from Northern Africa: Bacchetta 2006, 159-160, records four; Pailler 1982, 781, identifies eight from Africa. One *oscillum* from Athens is recorded with a

My first chapter frames my experiential methodology in understanding the importance of the ancient Roman viewers' presence in the context of the Roman house and the importance of the *oscillum*'s potentiality for movement and mutability. I split this chapter into two parts; I state the importance of the *oscillum*'s disposition as suspended and mobile objects, and I advocate for an experiential investigation.

For the first half of the chapter, I re-evaluate the ancient literary sources discussing *oscilla* and their academic interpretations. Academic scholarship developed a narrowed focus on *oscilla* as sacral objects of ancient agrarian rites commodified as ornaments for the domestic sphere.⁴ As a result of the *oscillum*'s commodification, the scenes and figures that decorated the *oscilla* are repetitive, though to originate from a standardized repertoire derived from Late Hellenistic art and Roman admiration for Greek art and culture.⁵ Yet such repetition was not simply a result of commodification or derivation, nor should it lessen the impact of the differences. Despite the evidence of *oscilla* as ornamental products of workshops,⁶ no identical *oscilla* have been found,⁷ not even within the same domestic program, nor do *oscilla* in one program originate from the same 'workshop.'⁸ Modern scholars, however, have rendered the

findspot of "some *domus* of the Roman age excavated at the end of the 1940s:" Bacchetta 2006, 160. Another *oscillum* from Rhodes has no provenance: Bacchetta 2006, 160. From Pergamon, one *oscillum* was discovered near the Sanctuary of Demeter, and another *oscillum* was discovered near the Temple of Domitian in Ephesus: Bacchetta 2006, 160-161.

⁴ Taylor 2005, 92; Roscini 2013, 252.

⁵ Bacchetta 2006, 10; Rodríguez Gutiérrez et. al. 2008, 193.

⁶ Dwyer 1982, 129-133 identifies five "Local Hands," in a study of five Pompeian *domus*' sculptural collections, though these five "Local Hands" do not include the local 'imitations' that he claims are from local workshops; he also does not give a "Local Hand" designation to those that do not have a pair. Pailler 1982, 765-766 identifies 11 workshops across the Roman Empire.

⁷ Pailler 1982, 768, states out of approximately 300 objects, no two are the same.

⁸ Dwyer 1982, 130, states the four *oscilla* from the House of Marcus Lucretius (to be discussed further in Chapter 3) is from "two different craftsmen." From the House of Fortuna (Chapter 4), he attributes three or more "Local Hands" (131-132). For the House of the Citharist (also known as the House of the Lyre Player, Domus L Popidius Secundus (Augustianus), I.4.5), he attributes at least eight hands to 11 works, most of which are local (133); Dwyer 2012, 314: "In an analysis of *oscilla* [from 1981] that could be traced to individual Pompeian collections, I found no collection that was composed of the work of a single craftsman." I could not look at his 1981 publication.

oscillum immobile in their studies, often prioritizing one side and the form and image of the theatrical and satyric mask over the others.⁹ The mask imagery is where Dionysiac associations are especially explicit; scholars argue the material decorative object retained an “atmospheric dionysianism,” a “cultural allusion,” a “nod of complicity for the visitors” to the religiosity of nature and the garden.¹⁰ The *oscillum* relates to the world of rural religiosity but does not necessarily belong within it.

The identification of a ‘dominant’ side, often labeled Side A, which is proposed to face the garden area or the atrium proper, removes the imagery from its counterpart on the opposite side that faces the actual ambulatory space of the porticoes.¹¹ The ancient authors, however, place deliberate emphasis on the movement of an *oscillum*; indeed, *oscilla* are identifiable to some ancient authors *because* they move as they are suspended from tree branches.¹² The movement makes the object function properly to purify and protect the land from being defiled and corrupted by the displeased spirits of those who died hanging. However, academic scholarship on *oscilla* and its Latin etymology has neglected to discuss the significance of the *oscillum*’s disposition. This thesis asserts that the ancient authors’ emphasis on the movement of the *oscillum* must be re-inserted into the study of the material artifact and deny a reduction of the iconography to standardized.

In the second half of my first introductory chapter, I recontextualize the material artifact of the *oscillum* into the social spaces of the atrium and peristyle of the Roman house (Figure 1).

⁹ For a discussion on the various forms of *oscilla*, see below, “A Note on Modern ‘*Oscilla*.’”

¹⁰ Loisy 1999, 48; Bacchetta 2005b, 71; Bacchetta 2006, 394.

¹¹ Bacchetta 2006, 38-39. The notion of a ‘dominant side’ originates from one side of an *oscillum* often being of higher relief. It also originates from the scholarly tradition of one primary viewing angle for objects. Farrar 1998, 126, states that both sides of an *oscillum* were carved in low relief, which made them more visible in different lighting conditions, and thus harder to tell which is a ‘dominant’ side.

¹² Servius Auctus, *Commentarius ad Georgica*, 2.389. The passage and others are discussed further in Chapter 1’s first part, “Latin ‘*oscillum*,’ ‘*oscilla*.’”

The head of the household, usually a man of some higher social status, would welcome clientele into the atrium. The clientele would be composed of men of similar social status (or even lesser); they would wait in the atrium to be called upon. Business could be conducted in the office space, the *tablinum*, which separates the atrium and peristyle, or it could move into other reception rooms, such as dining rooms called *triclinia*. Due to the amount of time spent in the reception rooms, or those rooms that looked out onto the reception areas, the decoration program needed to elevate the owner by displaying considerable wealth, power, and erudition, or knowledge and education.¹³ In the Roman Empire, people competed with each other via the sophistication or extravagance of their domestic entertainment; the *paterfamilias* had to act as interpreter and guide of an experience through the curated assemblage.¹⁴ The reception spaces' decorative programs were meant to stimulate the visitor visually and intellectually; by including a variety of media, variations in scenes in wall paintings and on objects, and particular visual framing, the viewer was meant to find the differences and similarities and use the imagery as grounds for self-aggrandizement.¹⁵ The subtle differences in similar compositions provoked contemplation and intellectual conversations among the viewers. In their conversations, the visitor would have to present his own wealth, aesthetic and cultural sensibilities, and erudition to gain the owner's favor to get the best outcome for their business discussions and build beneficial relationships. Research on the significance of repetition and standardization of imagery in the domestic sphere is prevalent in Roman wall painting,¹⁶ architecture,¹⁷ and sculpture.¹⁸ Scholarship on *oscilla*, however, has reduced the variations on both sides of the *oscillum* to merely representing

¹³ Zanker 1998, 11; Tronchin 2012b, 344.

¹⁴ Dunbabin 1996, 79; Tronchin 2012a, 279.

¹⁵ Bergmann 1999, 93; Sachs 2019, 53-54.

¹⁶ Bergmann 1999; Pearson 2015.

¹⁷ Dickmann 1997; Wallace-Hadrill 1997; Raff 2011.

¹⁸ Bartman 1988; Gazda 1995; Dwyer 1998; Kennedy 2004; Surtees 2011.

common domestic iconography, neglecting the unique display context as a suspended object in the intercolumniations.

Chapter 2 presents my first case, the House of the Telephus Relief (Ins. Or. I.2-3), in Herculaneum, Italy. Today, four tondi *oscilla* are suspended by a metal chain from the architrave in the colonnaded atrium (Fig. 2). Currently, it is the only location where *oscilla* are reconstructed in situ.¹⁹ I use the modern reconstruction of the *oscilla* in the House of the Telephus Relief to explore how one might have been able to physically and visually engage with the suspended and double-sided objects. In addition, I examine the significance of the *oscilla*'s presence within an atrium and an elite house. The House of the Telephus Relief was a part of one of the largest residential complexes within Herculaneum, owned and renovated by a Roman senator. The *oscilla* in the colonnaded atrium elevate the space by offering sites for contemplation and conversation as viewers waited to do business with the elite *paterfamilias*.

My second case study, in Chapter 3, re-inserts the *oscilla* of the House of Marcus Lucretius (IX.3.5.24)²⁰ in Pompeii into the decorated space of its garden. Due to the garden's unique elevation above the *tablinum* and atrium space, as well as older reconstructions of the peristyle's garden sculpture by its excavators (Fig. 3), the peristyle of the House of Marcus Lucretius is relatively well-studied.²¹ However, its *oscilla* alone—one tondo, three *peltae* (broad, lunate shield-shapes), and one rectangular²²—are not studied in great detail. However, as the House of Marcus Lucretius was owned by a member of one of the most prominent families of

¹⁹ Other sites, such as the House of the Gilded Cupids (VI 16.7) in Pompeii, had previous installations of *oscilla*. The several sculptural theatrical masks hung in the intercolumniations of the peristyle were present from the early 20th century before being removed in 1978 for preservation: Bacchetta 2006, 300.

²⁰ Also known as the Casa delle Suonatrici.

²¹ Castrén et al. 2008; Hughes 2014; Trentin 2019.

²² One *pelta oscillum* is fragmentary and currently lost, so it will not be discussed here. See Dwyer 1982, 39-40; Bacchetta 2006, 526; Kuivalainen 2019, 108. Another *oscillum* took the form of a sculptural mask, but it is suggested to have been (re?)used as a fountain feature and not used in Bacchetta's study, so, therefore, will not be included here. See Kuivalainen 2019, 103.

the local elite, the *oscilla* within the peristyle emphasize the garden as a theatrical stage populated with Dionysiac sculpture and the owner's role as patron of entertainment. Due to the chapter's length limitations, the current study does not recontextualize the *oscilla* into the larger decorative program as much as would be necessary to understand the whole peristyle. Rather, I am interested in using my experiential methodology and observations developed in Chapter 2 to return autonomy to the *oscilla* in Chapter 3 as mutable and kinetic objects. The images decorating the *oscilla* are of static instruments and theatrical masks, seducing the viewer to take them up and assume a satyric identity; the potentiality of movement with the viewer as he assumes the identity and of the object itself enhances his experience of the theatrical landscape. At the same time, the intentional framing and separation of the garden cause the viewer to become conscious of the act of performance—a performance in which he must participate for the sake of social decorum.

My last case study, in Chapter 4, is the study of the *oscilla* program at the House of Fortune (IX.7.20)²³ in Pompeii. The House of Fortune was owned by a freedman and his wife, who were involved in commercial activities. Despite having one of the largest programs of *oscilla* and a unique addition of an arched portico in the east (Fig. 4), the House of Fortune is largely neglected in academic scholarship. Two tondi,²⁴ five *peltae*, and four rectangular *oscilla* were discovered in the peristyle; the prevalent imagery of theatrical masks and animals exhibit an aspirational and theatrical interest of the patron.²⁵ The potential for movement animated the scenes while simultaneously stilling them, mimicking the viewer who moved through the space

²³ Also known as the House of the Arches, House of Caprasius Felix and Fortunata, and House of Fortuna.

²⁴ One further tondo, which is now lost, will not be included in the current study. See Dwyer 1982, 72; Bacchetta 2006, 448, T115.

²⁵ One *syrinx* (pan-flute) *oscillum* was also discovered but is now lost and thus will not be discussed in the present study in detail. See Dwyer 1982, 75; Bacchetta 2006, 590, S3. Three mask *oscilla* were also discovered but are, similarly, lost, so they will not be discussed here. See Dwyer 1982, 75-76.

and subsequently completed the image. In addition to studying the variety in iconography and physical forms of the *oscilla* program, I include the House of Fortune in this thesis to examine the significance of *oscilla* of “poor” quality and high number in a sub-elite house’s peristyle.

Overall, this thesis develops an experiential methodology to study the form, context, and disposition of *oscilla*. A unique double-sided and suspended decorative object, inherently mobile and mutable, the object and its varied iconography offered multifaceted experiences with the viewer and between the two decorated sides. The *oscillum* is not simply an ornamental object, as everything in the Roman house was intentionally displayed to elevate the owner and provoke contemplation and conversation from the viewers who would have been wandering in the reception spaces of the atrium and peristyle as he waited to conduct business. The *oscillum*’s presence in elite and sub-elite houses, in the atrium and the peristyle, and of high and low quality attest to its significance, which is doubled by its appearance throughout garden frescoes in the Campanian repertoire, such as those from Pompeii: the House of the Orchard (I.9.5)²⁶ (Fig. 5) and the House of the Golden Bracelet (VI.17.42)²⁷ (Fig. 6), and the House of Optatio (VII.2.14), now lost (Fig. 7). As important objects, *oscilla* deserve more autonomy and attention than they have thus far been granted in academic scholarship, as they help create a well-rounded understanding of Roman domestic spaces and viewer experience. This thesis inserts the *oscillum* more firmly into the study of Roman domestic art.

²⁶ Also called the Domus of Euplia or House of the Floral Cubicula.

²⁷ Also called the House of the Wedding of Alexander.

Operating Under Working Limitations

Academic scholarship concerning *oscilla* has been limited to the investigation of their ritual and literary origins,²⁸ morphological traits,²⁹ distribution networks,³⁰ possible typologies,³¹ and proper identification.³² Scholars have neglected an experiential understanding of the *oscillum*; I thus operate under several limitations.

First, I follow Bacchetta and numerous other scholars who believe the *oscillum* was suspended from a chain or rope from the architrave.³³ Material evidence on surviving *oscilla* of metal hooks, nails for anchorage, and holes in the center of the top edge support a suspended reconstruction;³⁴ a rectangular *oscillum* from the ancient city of Caesaraugusta, Spain (modern-day Zaragoza) preserves the anchorage within the object on the upper edge (Fig. 8).³⁵ Visual evidence supports the suspension by chain or rope, such as a lunette decoration on the antechamber's east wall of the first lower level of the Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum (Fig. 9), a marble cinerary urn from Vigna Catoni along the Via Appia (Fig. 10), a Campanian terracotta plaque of a *palaestra* (gymnasium) colonnade from the Louvre Museum (Fig. 11), and a Campanian garden fresco now housed in the Miho Museum in Koka, Japan (Fig. 12). For some surviving fragments, though, there are no surviving points of attachment on the object itself or several holes inconsistent with the rest of the repertoire, leading some scholars to suggest a metal

²⁸ Voisin 1979; Wootton 1999; Briones 2004; Taylor 2005; Wilk 2014

²⁹ Pailler 1982; Loisy 1999; Bolla 2002; Bacchetta 2005a; Bacchetta 2005b; Bacchetta 2006; Roscini 2013.

³⁰ Pailler 1982; Dwyer 1982; Loisy 1999.

³¹ Corswandt 1982; Bacchetta 2006.

³² Balland and Goudineau 1967; Righini 1967; Williams 1978; Gil 2000; Teatini 2002; González 2010; Barratta 2010; Galve Izquierdo 2012; Bacchetta 2015; Amadasi Guzzo and Zara 2018

³³ Williams 1978, 83; Dwyer 1982, 129; Corswandt 1982, 7; Wootton 1999, 315; Gil 2000, 145; García-Entero 2003-2004, 66; Bacchetta 2006, 10, 42-44, 56-57; Rodríguez Gutiérrez et. al. 2008, 186; Jackson 2010, 27; Roscini 2013, 238; Mora 2014, 1443.

³⁴ Bacchetta 2006, 37-44 (*tondi*), 49 (*peltae*), 50 (rectangular *oscilla*), 57 (*clipei*), 59 (*syrinxes*).

³⁵ Galve Izquierdo 2012.

ring around the reliefs was the point of suspension (Fig. 13).³⁶ Yet scholarship concerning *oscilla* has neglected the *significance* of suspension, especially as *oscilla* were carved on both sides.

Furthermore, no studies discuss to what extent *oscilla* were mobile, especially in spaces once much more enclosed, like the atrium, than current preservation suggests. All *oscilla* fragments are of marble, making them unlikely to move as easily as the plaster casts reinstalled in the colonnaded atrium of the House of the Telephus Relief.³⁷ However, the formal and dimensional differences meant the visual stimulation and interactive capabilities of the *oscillum* and its program were greater than those of a stationary relief. The object's very suspended nature offers the potential for movement, creating a sense of visual tension—would the object move, or did the viewer need to? Although the *oscillum*'s suspension requires much more research, its disposition is crucial to viewer engagement. Any interpretations presented in this study admit these limitations and are preliminary.

This paper is limited in scope to *oscilla* in the domestic context (where the majority survive), particularly the domestic context of Campania.³⁸ However, *oscilla* also were discovered in domestic contexts in Roman Gaul and Hispania.³⁹ The proveniences of the *oscilla* found outside of Campania are difficult to ascertain, as the stratigraphy of Roman Gaul and Hispania is unclear.⁴⁰ Identifications of objects as *oscilla* occur once the objects have already reached museums.⁴¹ Even within Campania, archaeological documents from the 18th and 19th centuries,

³⁶ Bacchetta 2006, 42-44, 56-57; Rodríguez Gutiérrez et. al. 2008, 186.

³⁷ Bacchetta 2006.

³⁸ From the Campanian area, Pailler 1982, 781, identified 104 *oscilla*, with approximately 90 from Pompeii and 10 from Herculaneum. Bacchetta identified around 170 from the Vesuvian area (Pailler 2009, 796, regarding Bacchetta 2006, who does not state the total number).

³⁹ Supra n.3.

⁴⁰ Bacchetta 2005a, 81.

⁴¹ Loisy 1999; Teatini 2002; García-Entero 2003 on garden decoration in Hispania; Briones 2004 addresses mythological scenes on a tondo from Córdoba; Bacchetta 2005a overviews Northern Italy; Rodríguez Gutiérrez et al. 2008 and 2009 on the Casa del *oscillum* in ancient Astigi, modern-day Écija, Spain, and its *oscilla* and decorative program reconstructions; Galve Izquierdo 2012.

when many *oscilla* were discovered, served more as “administrative documents” than as proper archaeological records:⁴² findspots were not well-recorded, stratigraphy was loose, descriptions were “vague and unreliable,” and reports were not well published (if at all).⁴³

Oscilla were also discovered in some public contexts, such as Roman theaters.⁴⁴ The Verona theater alone has 64 securely identifiable *oscilla* and possibly up to 89 total pieces.⁴⁵ Bacchetta remarks that the sizes of the Veronese *oscilla* are slightly larger than the average of the rest of the repertoire and might suggest some kind of “monumentalization” of the decorative objects fit for a grand stage.⁴⁶ It is crucial to note the significance of *oscilla* as decoration is not limited to atria or peristyles and can extend into the public sector as well. Due to the length limitations, however, this paper examines only the possible significance of *oscilla* within different domestic contexts.

Additionally, this paper approaches *oscilla* experientially from the perspective of male viewers. However, they were not the only ones who engaged with *oscilla* or the social spaces of the atrium and peristyle. The houses’ inhabitants included women, children, and slaves; visitors would not have been exclusively male.⁴⁷ While scholarship is becoming more inclusive with these viewers in mind, especially in the domestic realm, the current study is limited to the experience of the *paterfamilias*, a male, and his business clientele, who were also male.⁴⁸

⁴² Berry 1997, 187.

⁴³ Dwyer 1982, 15. Dwyer’s “Introduction” overviews early excavation publications at Pompeii and the resulting complications.

⁴⁴ Bacchetta 2006, 357-364; “I contesti teatrali in cui sicuramente documentato risulta essere il rinvenimento di rilievi sospesi sono quelli di Ercolano (1 tondo), Falerio (1 tondo), Nemi (1 tondo), Orange (2 toni), Parma (2 toni e 1 *pelta*), Sepino (1 tondo e 1 *pelta*) e Verona (36 toni e 28 *pelate*). A questi si aggiungono alcuni singoli casi di provenienza presunta ma non accertabile con sicurezza (Autun, Vaison-la-Romaine, Velleia), di cui dunque non ci occuperemo in maniera specifica” (357-358). Picard 1965 examines the *oscilla* at the theater at Orange.

⁴⁵ Bolla 2002; Bacchetta 2006, 144-145, n.VIII.7, 364-375.

⁴⁶ Bacchetta 2006, 367.

⁴⁷ Clarke 2003, 221.

⁴⁸ See Clarke 2003, Platts 2019, Simelius 2022.

Lastly, the current study does not recontextualize the *oscilla* within the larger decorative program of the house. To understand *oscilla*'s relationships with wall paintings, mosaic floors, free-standing sculptures, other reliefs, and furniture, however, it is necessary first to grant agency to the *oscillum* as a decorative object in its own right in a socially-charged space. The rest of the decorative program can contain similar types of Dionysiac, standardized, and varied imagery, thus, reduplicating and communicating with the variations and standardization of *oscilla* iconography. This paper, though, focuses on the *oscillum* as a physical object. This paper, while limited to examining the possible interactions of the domestic *oscillum* and its Campanian male viewers, aims to broaden methodologies to study other *oscilla* as impactful decorations.

A Note on Modern 'Oscilla'

In 1999, R. Loisy summarized the modern confusion of the term '*oscilla*' and its objects:

“The indiscriminate use of this term [*oscilla*] has some disadvantages when the same word comes to designate marble bas-reliefs from the 1st century AD, masks or dolls hanging from trees in old Italic cults, small terracotta medallions from the 4th century BCE found in tombs in Greece or Sicily, or even any mask, *tympanum* or shield of an Amazon integrated into an architectural decoration.”⁴⁹

In addition, Italian archaeologists refer to *oscilla* as loom weights.⁵⁰ Smaller versions of '*oscilla*,' like loom weights, held a variety of functions: toys, apotropaia, ex-voto objects hung on walls or panels, and objects hung in trees for protection and prevention of birds eating crops,⁵¹ possibly a (hanging) sign of tax collection or payment.⁵² Roscini, meanwhile, argues that the term '*oscilla*' should apply only to those that fit the Vergilian passage that identifies *oscilla* in terms of “masks of hollowed bark.”⁵³ The different forms of an *oscillum* often vary between

⁴⁹ Loisy 1999, 2.

⁵⁰ Bejor 1973; Meo 2017, 494. Meo, in his article, argues for not using the term '*oscillum*' to refer to the loom weights.

⁵¹ Wilk 1999.

⁵² Meo 2017, 493-494, outlines previous scholarship detailing these forms.

⁵³ Roscini 2013, 252. The Vergilian passage is discussed in Chapter 1.

scholars as well.

Scholars generally agree that the *oscillum* can take three forms: that of the tondo, framed rectangle (which some scholars refer to as a *pinax*), or *pelta*.⁵⁴ A few scholars, including Bacchetta, add the forms of the *clipeus* (a circular form akin to military shields)⁵⁵ and the *syrinx* (a pan-flute), though there is a significantly smaller number of these preserved.⁵⁶ Sometimes, scholars consider the mask form as a type of *oscillum* or separate the mask form from the discussion entirely.⁵⁷ In addition, some scholars deny the *pinax* title and instead opt for just ‘rectangular,’ as ‘*pinax*’ relates too much to heavier and thicker stationary double-sided reliefs (often in the garden).⁵⁸ Loisy says that Pailler’s total number of *oscilla* (350) must be reduced because he includes these stationary *pinakes*.⁵⁹ Other scholars use the two terms interchangeably.⁶⁰ This paper follows Bacchetta’s designation that the stationary double-sided rectangular reliefs are *pinakes* and should not be considered as *oscilla*.⁶¹ Rather, Bacchetta uses the term ‘rectangular’ to describe the rectangular form the suspended *oscilla* can take.⁶² Though this chapter outlined limitations in its scope, it has also revealed the significant gap in academic scholarship concerning the double-sided and suspended object of the *oscillum*.

⁵⁴ Pailler 1982, 745; Teatini 2002, 2321-2322; Taylor 2005, 83; Roscini 2013, 249.

⁵⁵ González 2010, 107, says these share the same form as tondi but that Bacchetta has only separated them based on the visibility of relief seen in profile.

⁵⁶ Corswandt 1982, 8, selects to include the *clipeus* form but not the *syrinx*; Dwyer 1982, 130, says *syrinxes* “are considerably rare...at least two marble *syrinxes*, however, have been found in Pompeii;” Wootton 1999, n. 7, remarks the representations of the *syrinx* “are rare and need concern us only in so far as they relate to Bacchic themes;” Bacchetta 2006; Jackson 2010, includes these two forms but not the rectangular reliefs (27); Roscini 2013, 10.

⁵⁷ Corswandt 1982; Pailler 1982, 745-751; Farrar 1998, 125-127; Zanker 1998, 169; Wootton 1999, 315: “pieces of decorated marble sculpture in 4 forms: *pinakes*, tondi, *peltae*, and masks;” Bacchetta 2006, 26-31; Wilk 2014, 391, identifies small heads or masks, tondi, and *peltae* as the forms; McFerrin 2019, 4, does not define *oscilla* by type but includes masks as a form.

⁵⁸ Corswandt 1982, 9, though *pinakes* here included all rectangular reliefs; Wootton 1999, 316; Loisy 1999, 2; Bacchetta 2006, n. Intro.2.

⁵⁹ Loisy 1999, 2.

⁶⁰ Dwyer 1982, 129.

⁶¹ For an overview on *pinakes*: Jackson 2010.

⁶² Bacchetta 2006, n. Intro.2.

Chapter 1: Ancient Activation and ‘Atmospheric Dionysianism’

Despite my previously mentioned intention of moving beyond the literary sources, as Loisy argues is necessary, the ancient literature pervades almost all scholarship on *oscilla*, and so, too, must be considered here.⁶³ I do not intend to investigate or evaluate the ritual origins of the *oscillum* as numerous scholars have done.⁶⁴ Rather, I will examine the necessity of movement on the object’s ritual function(s) and the role of the viewer/benefactor/beneficiary. The ancient sources greatly emphasized *movement* as activating and fulfilling the apotropaic and purification functions of an *oscillum* intended for a larger community. In addition, the ancient authors discussed the importance of reinforcement through repetition; for the object to function properly, it needed to operate almost independently and perpetually, and its strength depended on the multiplication of form and image. While oscillation is acknowledged as the “most salient dynamic characteristic” of *oscilla* in scholarship, little attention has been paid to the importance of movement in Latin sources.⁶⁵

The second half of this chapter recontextualizes the *oscillum* within the Roman house. Standardized Dionysiac imagery, as it appears on *oscilla*, is argued by scholars to create or emphasize a *locus amoenus* quality of the peristyle, where pleasure, solace, and comfort are a respite from business.⁶⁶ The sacralized nature connotations associated with the god’s convivial and theatrical domains also extended to suspended objects. However, the atrium and peristyle also acted as liminal spaces, where they neither belonged to the public nor the private realm, neither interior nor exterior, neither artificial nor natural. They are spaces of transition and framed experiences. Both spaces required permissibility to proceed further into the *domus*, the

⁶³ Loisy 1999, 12.

⁶⁴ Picard 1965; Voisin 1979; Loisy 1999, 8-12; Teatini 2002; Taylor 2005; Bacchetta 2006, 77-88; Roscini 2013.

⁶⁵ Taylor 2005, 101.

⁶⁶ Bacchetta 2005b, 71; Bacchetta 2006, 390; Rodríguez Gutiérrez 2008, 206.

house, and interact with the *paterfamilias*. The spaces were imbued with social hierarchies and decorum, which the visitor and owner must navigate. Decorum in the Roman world was “appropriateness in terms of nature, culture and/or tradition;” in the case of social interactions in the Roman *domus*, it is ⁶⁷ Roman *decor*, an artistic version of decorum, relates to the appropriate relationship between a setting and its decoration, where the decoration reinforced the function of a space—or, perhaps more accurately, the social interactions and hierarchies within a space.⁶⁸ The *oscillum* in such social spaces as the atrium and peristyle operated as sites of conversation and contemplation, in line with the decorum required of the viewers as they interacted with each other and the *paterfamilias*, as well as the *decor* outlined by the *paterfamilias* for his visitors.

Overall, this chapter is a foundation for considering *oscilla* experientially in their display contexts throughout the Roman *domus*. The necessary for viewer engagement and performance informs and is informed by the *oscillum* as it is suspended in intercolumniations.

Latin ‘*oscillum*,’ ‘*oscilla*’⁶⁹

The Latin meaning of the term ‘*oscillum*’ is difficult to pinpoint, as there are few uses of it in ancient literature and various debates concerning it in late antique works. All ancient references must be viewed cautiously; many predate or postdate the material record of *oscilla* and survive by way of transcription into late antique and medieval manuscripts (most of which sometimes exists only in a few copies).⁷⁰ The texts describe two different forms of *oscilla*—that of effigies or anthropomorphic elements and that of actual swings. Both forms, however, displayed similar mythologies that emphasize the apotropaic and purificatory qualities of the *oscillum* and the social environment in which the object operates.

⁶⁷ Swift 2021, 205.

⁶⁸ Tronchin 2012a, 270-271.

⁶⁹ Unless stated otherwise, the Latin is from the Perseus Digital Library, and the translations are my own.

⁷⁰ Supra n.1 for an overview of the debated introductory date of *oscilla* into the domestic sphere.

Oscilla as Effigies

The most commonly referenced passage about *oscilla* in academic literature comes from Vergil's *Georgics* (38-32 BCE). Vergil described the Ausonian (Italic) people putting on masks of "hollowed bark" and then hanging "soft masks [*oscilla*]" on trees in a ritual to invoke Bacchus: "They put on hideous masks of hollowed bark, invoking you, Bacchus, with glad song; and for you, they hang soft masks [*oscilla*] from the lofty pine."⁷¹ Much has been written about this passage in relation to the material artifact.⁷² The Vergilian passage also has the most extensive commentaries by late antique scholiasts of all the Latin references to '*oscilla*' and its cognates. Academic scholarship has taken from Vergil's passage a narrowed focus on the form and image of the theatrical mask; such an image does dominate the material record of *oscilla*.⁷³ However, scholars have neglected the significance of a mask as containing two sides—an interior and an exterior. Indeed, this is one aspect of the mask and ritual of suspending *oscilla* that Vergil emphasizes in his passage.

Few have attempted to breach this gap in scholarship concerning the wearing and viewing of theatrical masks. McFerrin investigated the mask *oscilla* from the House of the Gilded Cupids (VI.16.7)⁷⁴ in Pompeii, arguing that the theatrical masks were a "locus of mimetic potentiality, in part because they facilitate interpretation of the human form through externalization, then depictions of masks externalize the masks themselves, inviting the viewer to

⁷¹ Verg. *G.*, 2.387-389: "Nec non Ausonii, Troia gens missa, coloni/versibus incomptis ludunt risuque soluto/oraque corticibus sumunt horrenda cavatis/et te, Bacche, vocant per carmina laeta tibi/que/oscilla ex alta suspendunt mollia pinu."

⁷² Bacchetta 2006, 76-84; Roscini 2013, 233-237; Wootton 2014, 388-390. Roscini argues that the term '*oscilla*' should apply only to those that fit the Vergilian passage as it is the most securely definable instance of the term from antiquity: supra n.53.

⁷³ Pailler 1982, 745-746, states out of 350 specimens, 47% had images of theatrical masks, 24% had offering scenes at a rustic altar with satyrs, maenads, Pan, and Silenus present, 25% had other elements (marine animals, mythological creatures, musical instruments, sacral instruments), and 7-8% had scenes other than Dionysiac/satyrical ones (Hercules, Iphigenia, other deities, mortals).

⁷⁴ Also known as the House of the Golden Cupids or the House of Gnaeus Poppaeus Habitus.

think about mimetic processes, serving as a sort of *memento depicti*.”⁷⁵ McFerrin argued that the mirroring interaction, or the mimetic potentiality of the mask and its movement as suspended, realized for the viewer the social process with which he was involved.⁷⁶ Other scholars have interpreted the mask *oscillum* as apotropaic, deriving from similar images of the gorgons,⁷⁷ or simply casting the gaze of the god around the space.⁷⁸ These interpretations, however, address only the *front* of the mask.

Vergil’s passage implied the mask’s two sides as significant to the success of invocation, as one wore masks to invoke Bacchus and then subsequently, in more of a votive sense, hung masks from the pine for the god. Before the isolated passages scholars use given above and the subsequent wearing of the hollowed bark masks by the viewers, Vergil stated that the Ausonians “make merry with rough rhymes and boisterous mirth.”⁷⁹ Part of the invocation, then, according to Vergil, was the viewer’s participation in creating an atmosphere into which the god would be welcome—a task aided by the hanging *and* wearing of masks. The hollowed bark masks opened the Ausonians to welcome the god inside, in *enthusiasmos* (having the god inside you) and ecstasy. The absence of a wearer in the “soft masks” suspended from the pine offered another place for the god to manifest. The empty mask might also simply suggest the god’s presence; the gaze’s reciprocity through the masks, too, might mean direct contact with the god.⁸⁰

Furthermore, after the isolated passage scholars use, the result of invocation was not just contact with the god, but the god’s blessing on the harvest of the vineyard, which Vergil had been

⁷⁵ McFerrin 2019, 90.

⁷⁶ McFerrin 2019, 98.

⁷⁷ Wilk 2014.

⁷⁸ Loisy 1999, 7.

⁷⁹ Verg. *G.*, 2.385-386: “Nec non Ausonii, Troia gens missa, coloni/versibus incomptis ludunt risuque soluto” Trans. *Project Gutenberg EBook of the Georgics*, 2008.

⁸⁰ Hales 2007, 338-339.

describing thus far in Book 2 of the *Georgics*, “wherever the god turned his honorable head.”⁸¹ For Vergil, it was not just hanging a mask, nor the hanging mask itself, but the viewer’s participation, gaze, and movement that successfully invoked Bacchus and benefited the vineyard.

Viewer participation (physically and visually) and creating an appropriate setting for the *oscilla* to function successfully are present in ancient commentaries on Vergil. The most extensive commentary on the *Georgics* passage comes from the late antique scholiast, grammarian Servius Auctus (also known as Servius Danielis or Maurus Servius), who operated perhaps in the 7th-century CE.⁸² Servius offered the myth of Erigone, daughter of an Attic king, Icarus, as the reason bodies or effigies are hung from trees to stop the plague (literally, mania) as an act of purification.⁸³ As a result, the *Aiora*, or “Swinging,” festival was instituted in Athens.⁸⁴ The Athenians supposedly suspended “shapes in the likeness of their mouths [masks],” which

⁸¹ Ver. *G.*, 2.390-394: “Hinc omnis largo pubescit vinea fetu,/complentur vallesque cavae saltusque profundi,/et quocumque deus circum caput egit honestum.”

⁸² Kaster 1978, 181.

⁸³ Servius Auctus, *Commentarius ad Georgica*, 2.389: “*oscillorum* autem variae sunt opiniones; nam alii hanc asserunt fabulam. Icarus Atheniensis, pater Erigonae, cum acceptum a Libero patre vinum mortalibus indicaret, occisus est a rusticis, qui cum plus aequo potassent, deebriati se venenum accepisse crediderant. huius canis est reversus ad Erigonam filiam, quae, cum eius comitata vestigia pervenisset ad patris cadaver, laqueo vitam finivit. haec deorum voluntate inter astra relata est, quam virginem vocant. canis quoque ille est inter sidera collocatus. sed post aliquantum tempus Atheniensibus morbus inmissus est talis, ut eorum virgines furore quodam compellerentur ad laqueum; responditque oraculum, sedari posse illam pestilentiam, si Erigonae et Icaris cadavera requirerentur. quae cum diu quaesita nusquam invenirentur, ad ostendendam suam devotionem Athenienses, ut etiam in alieno ea quaerere viderentur elemento, suspenderunt de arboribus funem, ad quem se tenentes homines hac atque illac agitabantur, ut quasi et per aerem illorum cadavera quaerere viderentur. sed cum inde plerique caderent, inventum est, ut formas ad oris sui similitudinem facerent et eas pro se suspensas moverent. unde et *oscilla* dicta sunt ab eo, quod in his cillerentur, id est moverentur ora: nam ‘cillere’ est movere, unde et furcillae dictae sunt, quibus frumenta cillentur. alii dicunt *oscilla* esse membra virilia de floribus facta, quae suspendebantur per intercolumnia ita, ut in ea homines, acceptis clausis personis, inpingerent et ea ore cillerent, id est moverent, ad risum populo commovendum. et hoc in Orpheo lectum est. prudentioribus tamen aliud placet, qui dicunt sacra Liberi patris ad purgationem animae pertinere. omnis autem purgatio aut per aquam fit aut per ignem aut per aerem, sicut et in sexto ait “aliae panduntur in- anes suspensae ad ventos, aliis sub gurgite vasto infectum eluitur scelus aut exuritur igni”: ut nunc per *oscilla* genus purgationis, quod est maximum, intellegamus; nam primum est aquae, secundum ignis, tertium aeris. et aliter: ‘mollia’ hic pro ‘mobilia’. et videtur Vergilius opinionem illorum sequi, qui in honorem Liberi patris putant *oscilla* suspendi, quod eius sit pendulus fructus. *oscilla* autem dicta, sive quoniam capita et ora hostiarum in summis perticis figebantur, sive quia hunc lusum Osci dicuntur frequenter exercuisse et rem per Italiam sparsisse.”

⁸⁴ For an overview of the connection of the Greek festival of *Aiora* with the Latin *oscilla*, Cannetti and Tronca 2020.

were called *oscilla* because they moved.⁸⁵ Others said, according to Servius, the *oscillum* was an effigy made of flowers, suspended in intercolumniations “in such a way that men, with solemn masks, would lean into it and make it move with their mouths, that is, move it, to stir up laughter in the people.”⁸⁶ Servius emphasized the *movement* of the bodies, how the masks/effigies were animated, and how the masks animated the viewer. The sense of reciprocity is evident in the necessary action of the viewer to activate the movement (e.g., the blowing on the flower effigy, shaping in the likeness of the mouth to be movable) and the response from the viewer (e.g., laugh). Furthermore, the *oscilla* suspended in intercolumniations not only required movement from the viewer, but the viewer was also actively engaged in a performance of perpetuation, wearing masks and then responding to the movement of the objects. Interactions with such suspended objects were sensorial and psychological.

In another commentary from Servius, this time on Vergil’s *Aeneid* (30-19 BCE), he recorded an attestation of *oscilla* as deriving from Varro, who supposedly discussed the rural cultic origins of *oscilla* as being hung in imitation of death by hanging to appease those hanged and their restless spirits.⁸⁷ Voisin interpreted Varro’s comment in the context of an agrarian and purification ritual where hanging “small dolls, masks, disks or rectangles” in exchange for an absent body was a way to purify and return the tree to *arbor felix* (fertile, lucky tree) and shift the possible bad luck onto another object.⁸⁸ Hanging *oscilla* resulted from the social responsibility to maintain fertility and ward off evil spirits, as the shift to an *arbor infelix* (bare, unlucky tree) had

⁸⁵ Servius Auctus, *Commentarius ad Georgica*, 2.389: “sed cum inde plerique caderent, inventum est, ut formas ad oris sui similitudinem facerent et eas pro se suspensas moverent. unde et *oscilla* dicta sunt ab eo, quod in his cillerentur, id est moverentur ora: nam 'cillere' est movere, unde et furcillae dictae sunt, quibus frumenta cillentur.”

⁸⁶ Servius Auctus, *Commentarius ad Georgica*, 2.389: “alii dicunt *oscilla* esse membra virilia de floribus facta, quae suspendebantur per intercolumnia ita, ut in ea homines, acceptis clausis personis, inpingerent et ea ore cillerent, id est moverent, ad risum populo commovendum.”

⁸⁷ Servius Auctus, *Commentarius ad Aeneida*, 12.603: “Varro ait, suspendiosis, quibus iusta fieri ius non sit, suspensis *oscillis*, veluti per imitationem mortis parentari.”

⁸⁸ Voisin 1979, especially 449.

long-lasting and widespread repercussions. As Vergil's *Georgics* mask *oscilla* allowed the god to give his blessings to the vineyard wherever he faced, the very nature of the *oscilla* from Servius's commentary on the *Aeneid* requires movement to successfully repel corruption and defilement of community resources (the land). It is also the notion of movement that the ancient authors seem to emphasize that modern scholars neglect despite the decorative *oscillum* following the suspended disposition of the ancient sacral object.

While much later than the phenomenon of *oscilla*, another ancient literary discussion of 'oscilla' emerged in the 5th century CE, possibly revealing lingering meanings of social decorum and activation of the object. Macrobius's *Saturnalia*, written after 431 CE, discussed the offering of masks or effigies (*oscilla*) in place of human heads to Dis Pater as an origin for the offering of candles established by Hercules during the holiday of Saturnalia.⁸⁹ Macrobius alluded to the commodification of the *oscilla* through the sale of candles and seals instead of the creation of statuettes.⁹⁰ The festival included exchanging gifts (from clay figurines to candles to food) and loosening moral restrictions; the upturning of social behavior during the festival is contrasted and complemented by the context of Macrobius's text. The *Saturnalia* was a dialogue between learned men in a sympotic environment and a teaching of "behavior appropriate to one's social station;" discussing *oscilla* might address how such offerings of *oscilla* and their subsequent (or prior?) commodification acted within the context of social responsibilities.⁹¹ While Macrobius post-dates the phenomenon of *oscilla* as known in the material record,⁹² Macrobius's passage

⁸⁹ Roscini 2013, 238. Macrobius, *Sat.*, 1.11.48: "Pelagos post quam felicior interpretatio capita non viventium sed fictilia, et utroque aestimationem non solum hominem sed etiam lumen significare docuisset, coepisse Saturno cereos potius accendere et in sacellum Ditis arae Saturni cohaerens *oscilla* quaedam pro suis capitibus ferre."

⁹⁰ Macrobius, *Sat.*, 1.11.1 e 49: "vel nunc Sigillaria, quae lusum reptanti adhuc infantiae *oscillis* fictilibus praebent, temptat officio religionibus adscribere... Ex illo traditum ut cerei Saturnalibus missitarentur et sigilla arte fictili fingerentur ac venalia pararentur quae homines pro se atque suis piaculum pro Dite Saturno facerent."

⁹¹ Kaster 1980, 226.

⁹² Indeed, Roscini 2013, 246, suggests that Macrobius's *oscilla* are loom weights or pebbles, and thus, not applicable to the same material record of marble double-sided reliefs.

also hinted at the continuous use of *oscilla* in festival-like contexts.⁹³ In all of the above contexts, and those literary references to be discussed below (that place the *oscilla* in a context of real swings), *oscilla* are votive gifts and ritual instruments. They operate as such, however, because they are mobile.

Oscilla as Swings

If the *oscilla* and the “swinging” rites were actual swings, as suggested by some sources, the interpretation of the *oscillum* as needing activation from the viewer and being reliant on movement strengthens. In the *Fabulae* (early 1st century BCE), by the Latin author and freedman of Caesar Augustus, Hyginus, the swing as a tool to ward off the plague (mania) in the myth of Erigone and Icarus was described using ‘*oscillationis*.’⁹⁴ Roscini imposes the ‘swinging’/‘oscillating’ of a “plank interposed between hanging ropes” onto the term ‘*oscillationis*’ from another work by Hyginus, *De Astronomica* (30 BCE-17 CE),⁹⁵ where he elaborated on this swinging movement.⁹⁶ The ceremony of purification, according to Hyginus, was “solemn” and performed both publicly and privately.⁹⁷ The ‘*oscillationis*’ as a rope swing is attested in Attic vase painting (Fig. 14). If the early *oscilla* were more akin to rope swings, they would be objects that required both animation and activation through viewer participation. Swinging oneself is attested in another instance of ‘*oscillatio*,’ where Sextus Pompeius Festus

⁹³ *Oscilla* used in a festival connection also appears in another commentary on the *Georgics* passage by either Marcus Valerius Probus, a grammar student from the reign of Nero (r. 54-69 CE), or Probus, a late antique scholiast. Probus describes the *oscilla* in the “frequent rite of swinging” (likely the *Aiora* festival), a “celebration of the seed holidays:” Probus, *In Vergilii bucolica et georgica commentarius, accedunt scholiorum veronensium et aspri quaestionum vergilianarum fragmenta*, 2.389. See Roscini 2013, 236.

⁹⁴ Hyg. *Fab.* 130.4: “Quo responso de pastoribus supplicium sumpserunt et Erigonae diem festum *oscillationis* pestilentiae causa instituerunt.”

⁹⁵ Roscini 2013, 239-240.

⁹⁶ Hyg. *Astr.* 2.4.5: “Qui quod ea se suspenderat, instituerunt uti tabula interposita pendentes funibus se iactarent, ut qui pendens uento mouetur. Quod sacrificium sollemne instituerunt. Itaque et priuatim et publice faciunt, et id Aletidas appellant, quod eam patrem persequentem cum cane, ut ignotam et solitariam oportebat, mendicam appellabant, quas Graeci ἀλήτιδας nominant.” Latin from Doria and Giuman 2016, 7, n.25 (trans. M. Grant).

⁹⁷ Hyg. *Astr.* 2.4.5: “Quod sacrificium sollemne instituerunt. Itaque et priuatim et publice faciunt.” Latin from Doria and Giuman 2016, 7, n.25 (trans. M. Grant).

(ca. 3rd century CE) used the word to emphasize how movement can differentiate the living (animate) and object (inanimate).⁹⁸

The Lewis & Short *A Latin Dictionary* defines Festus's use of the term in his compilation of Marcus Verrius Flaccus's *De significatu verborum* (ca. 31 BCE-14 CE), *Sexti Pompeii Festi de Verborum Significatione*, as a reflexive verb: "to swing oneself." After discussing the apotheosis and assimilation of the Latin king to Jupiter Latiaris that led to a festival game of 'oscillatio,'⁹⁹ Festus said, "the memory of the beginning of the accepted life is restored by the movement of the cradles and the food of milk, because, by them, the days of holidays and *oscilla* are moved."¹⁰⁰ It was, in particular, for Festus, the movement that equated, or at the very least signaled, life, death, and time passing. Festus also admitted the etymology sometimes meant people playing the game, 'oscillatio,' were called *oscillantes*, who used to swing while wearing masks (*oscilla*).¹⁰¹ Here, too, there was an element of identifying the living through movement working in tandem with the element of other effigy-like elements taking the place of the dead. The movement of the *oscilla* in earlier-discussed sources also emphasized their animation, as the *oscilla* worked to appease the spirits of the dead and purify the defiled environments.¹⁰² Indeed,

⁹⁸ Festus likely operated in the 2nd or 3rd centuries, as based on the references, the work was written after Martial (86-104 CE) and before Marcobius (after 431 CE).

⁹⁹ *Fest.* p.194, 9 and 10 Müll.: "*Oscillum*: Santra dici ait, quod *oscellant*, id est inclinent, praecipitesque afferantur. *Oscillantes*, ait Cornificius, ab eo quod os celare sint soliti personis propter verecundiam, qui eo genere lusus utebantur. Causa autem eius iactationis proditur...Latinus rex, qui praelio, quod ei[s] fuit adversus Mezentium, Caeritum regem, nusquam apparuerit, iudicatusque sit Iupiter factus Latiaris. Itaque scit eius dies feriatus liberos servosque requirere eum non solum in terris, sed etiam qua vide[n]tur caelum posse adiri per *oscillationem*, velut imaginem quandam vitae humanae, in qua altissima interdum <ad infima>, infima ad summum efferuntur. Atque ideo memoriam quoque reintegrari initio acceptae vitae per motus cunarum lactisque alimentum, quia per eos dies feriarum et *oscillis* moveantur, et lactata potione utantur. Nec desunt qui exemplum Graecorum secutos putent Ital[ic]os, quo illi quoque, iniuria interfecto Icaro, <cum> Erigone filia [eius dolore impulsa suspendio perisset, per simulationem...]"

¹⁰⁰ *Fest.* p.194, 9 and 10 Müll.: "Atque ideo memoriam quoque reintegrari initio acceptae vitae per motus cunarum lactisque alimentum, quia per eos dies feriarum et *oscillis* moveantur, et lactata potione utantur."

¹⁰¹ *Fest.* p.194, 9 and 10 Müll.: "*Oscillantes*, ait Cornificius, ab eo quod os celare sint soliti personis propter verecundiam, qui eo genere lusus utebantur." Canetti and Tronca 2020, 52.

¹⁰² Another attestation of *oscilla* as related to the growth of life, though a precarious example, comes from Columella's work, *De re rustica*, from the mid-1st century CE, which has been translated by the Lewis & Short *A Latin Dictionary* (1879) to mean "a little cavity in the middle of leguminous fruits, where the germ sprouts forth." In

the *movement* gave life to the effigies and allowed them to function appropriately. In the reflexive form of the verb, the movement of oneself perpetuates recognition and enactment of the life cycle, which can be projected onto other objects, like *oscilla*.

As argued by Lindstrøm, the projection of animacy onto inanimate objects is a “spontaneous, unconscious and strong” psychological and neurological impulse; based on the movement of inanimate objects, especially those that look like a face, we attribute agency and intentionality as though it acted (or could act) of its own volition.¹⁰³ I argue that this very impulse to project and realize animacy is intrinsically imbued in the *oscillum* as an object—an impulse encouraged by its double-sided carvings and location within the liminal and transitional spaces of the atrium and peristyle. The ancient authors did not underestimate the power of activating the apotropaic functions of whatever they believed to be *oscilla*. Rather, each one emphasized it, setting the ‘ritual of swinging’ and its variants within a festival-like context. Perhaps, then, the *oscillum* had assumed not just the Dionysiac, ritualistic connotations by the form of the theatrical masks but also by the way the viewer must *perform* or produce the rites within the festival to activate the *oscilla* as apotropaia. Furthermore, Canetti and Tronca identify the oscillatory swinging movement as suitable for restoring order and meaning, its very suspension suggesting “an ontological and psychological condition of uncertainty and instability.”¹⁰⁴ *Oscillatio*, to them, in a more etymological approach, served to resolve “a state of

Book 2, generally concerned with the care of crops, Columella says, “Reliquum quod semini superest, in tabulatum, quo fumus pervenit, optime reponas, quoniam si umor invasit, vermes gignit; qui simul atque *oscilla* lupinorum adederunt, reliqua pars enasci non potest. Id, ut dixi, exilem amat terram et rubricam” (The rest of what is left of the seed, store it very well on the floor where the smoke reaches, because if moisture invades, it creates worms; those who came at the same time as the wolves came, the remaining part cannot be killed. As I have said, that loves the thin earth and the red). It might be equating *oscilla* to another similitude of a type of body that requires some type of nurturing and activation (this time, by way of the wolves). Nevertheless, the term ‘*oscilla*’ does not, at least as identified in the Lewis & Short *A Latin Dictionary*, appear elsewhere in Columella’s work or other agricultural treatises.

¹⁰³ Lindstrøm 2015, 215.

¹⁰⁴ Canetti and Tronca 2020, 53.

tension, a fracture, a breached border.”¹⁰⁵ The *oscillum* as a material object, suspended in intercolumniations in domestic atria and peristyles, operates similarly to this *oscillatio*. The decorative object both brought attention to this tension and protected the viewers from it; the movement and reciprocity of the two decorated sides—sometimes explicitly with masks and figures gazing back at the viewer—allowed it to function apotropaically and also offered sites for contemplation and conversation for the viewers to interact appropriately with the *paterfamilias*.

Domestic Stages

The atrium and peristyle were crucial in displaying one’s wealth, power, intelligence, and cultural interests—all informed by and informative of social status.¹⁰⁶ From the entrance, a viewer could look through the *fauces* (the entrance hallway), the atrium, the *tablinum* (office), and into the peristyle, which served as a refreshing ending visual of sunlight and greenery (Fig. 15).¹⁰⁷ Front doors were rarely closed during the day in the Roman world, meaning people would be invited to look in, and the spaces into which they could look must reflect the owner’s social and political status adequately.¹⁰⁸ Platts argued that the Romans considered “the corporeal experience of the home as a means of controlling displays of power and standing.”¹⁰⁹ The decorative program was deliberate, meant to exalt the owner visually while offering him the opportunity to expound on his social, political, cultural, and aesthetic sensibilities.

Vitruvius remarked the architecture should reflect the owner’s status: shop owners should have architecture more suited to their profession than ornamentation, lawyers and orators needed large spaces for their audiences, and elites needed such reception spaces that evoked the

¹⁰⁵ Canetti and Tronca 2020, 53-54.

¹⁰⁶ Jackson 2010; Platts 2010; Giesecke 2012; Trentin 2014; Hughes 2014; Trentin 2019; Simelius 2022.

¹⁰⁷ Simelius 2022, 64: “a vast majority of the [total number of Pompeian] peristyles (210) are on the main entrance axis.”

¹⁰⁸ Berry 2016, 127, 130-131. Platts 2019, 81-89, discusses the likelihood of other barriers, such as secondary doors at the end of the *fauces*, as possible breaks in the line of sight.

¹⁰⁹ Platts 2019, 27-29.

grandeur of public architecture (especially theaters).¹¹⁰ In particular, Vitruvius noted that men of high social status had an obligation to not only decorate their homes for the entertainment of their many guests but also to provide spacious atria and peristyles that allowed for walking.¹¹¹ Walking was connected to meditation and philosophical contemplation;¹¹² Cicero directly links the peristyle and the act of circumambulating it to contemplation and reflection, which the politically active Greeks did in their free time, or *otium*.¹¹³ The *decor* of the atrium and peristyle in the Roman *domus* offered many chances for thoughtful contemplation and revelations of the *paterfamilias*'s social and political status, cultural and aesthetic sensibilities, and erudition.

The atrium was the primary nucleus of the *domus*, as every visitor entered the space. The *paterfamilias* would perform the daily ritual of *salutatio*, or the acceptance of his business clientele, within the space.¹¹⁴ Visitors would wait in the atrium to be called upon by the *paterfamilias* to conduct their business. Partitions, such as the one well-preserved in the House of the Wooden Partition in Herculaneum (Fig. 16), and doors to the rooms surrounding the atrium regulated access into certain spaces; the *tablinum* could be closed during a business meeting, requiring permission and guidance from the *paterfamilias* to move further into the *domus*.

¹¹⁰ Vitr. *De arch.* 6.5.2: “Qui autem fructibus rusticis serviunt, in eorum vestibulis stabula, tabernae, in aedibus cryptae, horrea, apothecae ceteraque, quae ad fructus servandos magis quam ad elegantiae decorem possunt esse, ita sunt facienda. item feneratoribus et publicanis commodiora et speciosiora et ab insidiis tuta, forensibus autem et disertis elegantiora et spatiosiora ad conventus excipiundos, nobiles vero, qui honores magistratusque gerendo praestare debent officia civibus, faciunda sunt vestibula regalia alta, atria et peristylia amplissima, silvae ambulationesque laxiores ad decorem maiestatis perfectae; praeterea bybliothechas, pinacothecas, basilicas non dissimili modo quam publicorum operum magnificentia habeant comparatas, quod in domibus eorum saepius et publica consilia et privata iudicia arbitriaque conficiuntur.”

¹¹¹ Vitr. *De arch.* 6.5.2: “qui honores magistratusque gerendo praestare debent officia civibus, faciunda sunt vestibula regalia alta, atria et peristylia amplissima, silvae ambulationesque laxiores ad decorem maiestatis perfectae.”

¹¹² O’Sullivan 2006, especially 134.

¹¹³ Cic., *De or.* 2.18: “num tandem aut locus hic non idoneus videtur, in quo porticus haec ipsa, ubi nunc ambulamus, et palaestra et tot locis sessiones gymnasiorum et Graecorum disputationum memoriam quodam modo commovent?”

¹¹⁴ Jackson 2010, 32-38. The prevalence of the *salutatio* in the Julio-Claudian and Flavian periods within the domestic sphere has been questioned; for an overview: Simelius 2022, 58-59. Platts 2019, 89-92, remarks that some people might not even be able to make it *into* the *domus* for the ritual of *salutatio* based on their social status and relation to the *paterfamilias*.

Despite the physical accessibility of the atrium, visitors were highly restricted once inside, as there were doormen (usually slaves), protective and warning floor mosaics, and the open design allowed “effective visual control.”¹¹⁵ The atrium, after all, was the liminal space between the civic space and the core of the *domus*, so control needed to be exerted in different ways while allowing visitors to spend time observing and interacting with the elaborate decoration.¹¹⁶

Indeed, since the domestic sphere and status of the owner were so intertwined with social and political interactions and status, ‘privacy’ in the Roman *domus* was less clearly defined: it was how well you knew the family that determined access to “zones of increasing intimacy,” which were located farther within the *domus* and hid behind doors (such as those rooms surrounding the atrium).¹¹⁷ Distinctions of space helped define social positions.¹¹⁸

The atrium and peristyle were highly decorated with illusionistic wall paintings, furniture, mosaic floors, sculpture, and architectural embellishment. Beacham equates the architectural and decorated setting of the atrium, with its painted or real columns, as referring to the theater, “publicizing, dignifying, and aggrandizing” the space.¹¹⁹ The atrium’s quality, as also established by Vitruvius, displayed the owner’s status and immersed the visitor into a setting of social performance—one in which he must judge and lay witness to the owner’s performance and one in which he must participate as he works to get the best business outcome, build his social network, and displays his own status.¹²⁰ While they waited to do business with the *paterfamilias*, visitors could wander (in philosophical contemplation) around the atrium, visually and intellectually engaged and stimulated by the variety of media and subject matter. Similar

¹¹⁵ Berry 2016, 136-137.

¹¹⁶ Platts 2019, 92.

¹¹⁷ Clarke 2003, 222.

¹¹⁸ Grahame 1997, 159-160.

¹¹⁹ Beacham 2013, 374.

¹²⁰ Beacham 2013, 364, 373-374.

compositions could be employed across media or within the same medium with slight differences. The variety and discrepancies between the objects challenged the viewer to find the similarities and differences and question why they mattered. The viewers were animated by, as Bergmann says, discussion and memory.¹²¹ Such recollections were necessary for the viewer's act of erudition, displaying his social, aesthetic, and cultural sensibilities in addition to his wealth, power, and intelligence.

The *paterfamilias* could further divide the clientele by bringing some visitors into the peristyle area, which served as a second nucleus in the Roman *domus*.¹²² In addition, the rooms surrounding the peristyle were sites of entertaining guests, including highly decorated *triclinia* for a longer interaction of dining and drinking with the *paterfamilias*, who also provided various entertainments such as pantomime, singing and dancing, and literature recitations.¹²³ Located further from the entrance, the peristyle was a more private part of the *domus*. In addition to business activity, the peristyle served as the water reservoir,¹²⁴ a place for cult activity surrounding the Lares (the household gods),¹²⁵ and the center of air and light.¹²⁶ It was a place of daily activity for the inhabitants, especially as it offered physical access to much of the *domus*.¹²⁷ Being allowed into the peristyle permitted a certain privilege, a type of “social dependence.”¹²⁸ The visitor had to earn his right to be allowed within such spaces; being allowed to share the more private area of the *domus* encouraged the visitor and owner to compete convivially while

¹²¹ Bergmann 2008, 64.

¹²² The peristyle replaced the atrium as the primary nucleus in the 2nd century CE: Dickmann 1997; Wallace-Hadrill 1997 explores this phenomenon outside of Pompeii.

¹²³ Dunbabin 1996, 67.

¹²⁴ Trentin 2014, 71-79; Simelius 2022, 43-51.

¹²⁵ Trentin 2014, 61-71; Simelius 2022, 51-54.

¹²⁶ Wallace-Hadrill 1997, 236, 239; Simelius 2022, 51.

¹²⁷ Simelius 2022, 40: “59 peristyles had stairs opening onto the space, and in 24 peristyles the stairs were in the peristyle itself.”

¹²⁸ Dickmann 1997, 136.

acknowledging the power of the other. The garden within the peristyle operated as a theatrical space figuratively and literally; the owner and visitor could perform their social responsibilities of conviviality and competition in a space ruled by the god of theater, Dionysus.

Gardens offered an escape from the urban landscape, bringing the rustic countryside inside the *domus*. As noted, several scholars acknowledge the garden as a domestic *locus amoenus* or sacro-idyllic landscape. The structure of the peristyle derives from Hellenistic public structures that provoked conviviality and overindulgence (in the form of public feasting areas) and education and contemplation (in the form of the Greek *gymnasium*).¹²⁹ The peristyle garden controlled Hellenistic excess and nature in an architecturally ordered, aesthetically pleasurable form that spoke of discipline and temperance.¹³⁰ As one contemplatively circumambulated the peristyle, just as he did in the atrium, he could have engaged with the variety of decorations that expanded to include the variety of plants growing in the garden; all of these could serve as conversation starters with the *paterfamilias* and his fellow visitor. The same decorative program, then, that elevated the *paterfamilias* served as a way for the visitor to compete and keep up with the owner to display his own status.

Populated by columns, too, the atrium and peristyle provided multiple partitioned views.¹³¹ Bergmann notes, “the images constantly change as columns and openings operate like frames, offering ever-new aspects, forcing the eye to refocus.”¹³² This is especially true in the illusionistic wall paintings in the atrium, where the flat wall is broken into new, fictional landscapes. Beacham argues that these fictional landscapes further immerse the viewer into a theatrical experience, where he recognizes the *paterfamilias* as patron; the *paterfamilias* can also,

¹²⁹ Dickmann 1997, 124-125.

¹³⁰ Austen 2023, 18.

¹³¹ Austen 2023, 115.

¹³² Bergmann 2008, 63.

in this theatrical space and fictional landscape, curate and interpret the visitors' experiences for his own exaltation as he does business with them.¹³³ The physical columns that decorate the peristyle, according to Austen, generate "porous membranes" where "the 'garden' element can simultaneously be framed space and the frame itself."¹³⁴ Bergmann and Austen consider the garden a space of animation, disorientation, and organization. The peristyle structure does not just act as an ambulatory space to the rest of the *domus*; it also acts significantly as a space for breaking down conventional dichotomies, never providing a singular point of view of the whole space, inside and out. I argue that the atrium, too, can be this space of animation and disorientation, especially with the presence of *oscilla* in the intercolumniations. The view would offer a more complex and consistently animated scene when suspended objects and the lighting conditions throughout the day are considered.

Oscilla were not the only objects suspended in intercolumniations, as garlands and lamps are also attested; in addition, the open roofs of the atrium and peristyle make the space and the viewers' experiences dependent on the weather conditions.¹³⁵ As perishable items, garlands do not survive today but are well-attested in all visual media, especially sarcophagi; a now lost Pompeian wall painting depicted the crafting of garlands by Cupids (Fig. 17). Garlands are often suspended in intercolumniations or gardens, as depicted in the instances of *oscilla* in wall-paintings provided thus far (Figs. 5, 6, and 12), and in a terracotta Campanian plaque that also depicts hanging elements from the curve (Fig. 18). Cloth could also be suspended in intercolumniations, sometimes with *oscilla* and other features suspended from it, such as in the so-called Cup of the Ptolemies (Fig. 19). Some *oscilla* or other objects were even hung from

¹³³ Beacham 2013, 377-380.

¹³⁴ Austen 2023, 27.

¹³⁵ Farrar 1998, 98.

garlands, as depicted in an exedra off the peristyle in the villa owned by P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale (Fig. 20). At one time, in the reconstructed House of the Gilded Cupids, garlands were hung from the *oscilla* (Fig. 21). Farrar also recorded evidence on columns in the peristyle for a curtain pole or the use of panels, which might have served to shade colonnades.¹³⁶ The suspended objects and curtaining devices would block the direct line of sight and access through spaces and disrupt the vertical framing of the columns. The very presence of *oscilla* as suspended objects brought attention to and disrupted the verticality of the columns, especially as the objects moved on a horizontal plane as dictated by their one-point suspension. The definition and disruption of verticality, just as they framed and disrupted the frame of the colonnade's animation, disoriented the viewer, especially as the objects moved (and each *oscillum* moved differently than its group). Simultaneously, however, the viewer was reoriented in the liminality of the atrium and peristyle, encouraged to move forward and interact appropriately.

The *paterfamilias*'s curated tour, and/or the visitor's wanderings, would change depending on the lighting conditions, as both the atrium and peristyle were open to the elements. Though artificial lighting through lamps and torches was undoubtedly present, the visibility through the *domus* would rely heavily on the amount of sunlight; depending on the positioning and material of decoration, some objects might have been highlighted at different times of the day. Depending on the weather, the extent of the *oscilla*'s movement could draw more attention—perhaps their stillness was an indication of the weather, as well. On the other hand, when looking up at the *oscillum* from within the portico or closer to the structural wall of the atrium, the bright sunlight might be the best view of the object's low-relief carvings. It should be noted that many of the images online of the House of the Telephus Relief's *oscilla* are from this

¹³⁶ Farrar 1998, 29.

angle. *Oscilla*, in their white marble appearance, were embellished with polychromy (as discussed in Chapter 3), but their suspended nature was unique amongst the rest of the decorative program. Their movement, context within intercolumniations, and variety of forms would visually stimulate and engage the viewer from a distance, deny a privileged vantage point, and encourage the viewer to move. The atrium and peristyle were spaces of *transition*, but they were also spaces in which one was meant to spend time. The *oscilla* demanded movement through the spaces to see both sides, while they also encouraged prolonged engagement to understand the standardized iconography and its deviations. Furthermore, the display context between intercolumniations disrupted and presented framing from *two* sides: as one looked out into the garden space from the portico (Fig. 22) or gazed into the reception rooms around the atrium and peristyle (Fig. 23). *Oscilla*, then, were intentionally displayed to be viewed from multiple perspectives. They served as sites of conversation and contemplation in different social settings: in the atrium as a client waited with another client, in the peristyle garden or *tablinum* as the client conducted business with the *paterfamilias*, and in the reception rooms around the peristyle where drinking and dining occurred with the *paterfamilias* and, possibly, friends.

These aspects of the *oscilla*'s display context are neglected in academic scholarship. However, these aspects matter most to an ancient viewer's interaction, engagement, and interpretation of the object and its decoration. Indeed, as scholars immobilize the *oscillum*, they approach only one side of the object from a static perspective; the atrium and peristyle spaces, however, were transitional spaces where viewers were constantly moving and stimulated. Furthermore, the atrium and peristyle also acted significantly as a space for preparing for and participating in social performances. They were interior and exterior spaces, places of *otium* and *negotium* (business). It is in these types of liminal spaces that the *oscilla* were situated, serving as

much to protect viewers from the dangerous place of transition, the “state of tension,” as to demand attention via its suspended and double-sided nature.

Conclusion

This chapter argued for the importance of movement and viewer engagement in the studies of the *oscillum*. *Oscilla* scholarship has limited the understanding of the Latin sources to the object’s anthropomorphic appearance and its ritual context with Dionysiac connections. As Voisin argued, there was some social responsibility in purifying and protecting the trees to protect oneself and maintain one’s lifestyle, evident in the ancient literature; indeed, the very gaze of the mask is remarked to produce abundance and fertility by Vergil in the *Georgics*. The Latin sources, while they do indicate an intentional use of the *oscillum* in ritual contexts, also reveal the viewer’s required participation to activate the object’s purificatory and apotropaic qualities, whether the object is conceived as an effigy or as a swing.

The atrium and peristyle were spaces that perpetuated and reinforced social hierarchies. The atrium produced the theatrical stage and setting where the visitor would have to insert himself to conduct successful business with the *paterfamilias*. The peristyle was accessible only through permission and guidance, where he must perform adequately to gain access to the appropriate social circles. Standardized and varied decoration populated the spaces, animated by and animating the viewer as he moved through the spaces of transition and ambulation. Within these spaces, the *oscilla* operated as protective and informative objects in the liminal areas between the columns and suspended in the air. In their liminal state that invoked tension and uncertainty, as suspended and between columns, the *oscillum* provided sites for conversation and contemplation for the viewers to perform socially. *Oscilla*, and other suspended objects, served to disorient and reorient the viewers just as much as the colonnades did—indeed, *oscilla* did so

by disrupting the emphasis on verticality of the architecture. As the next chapter on the House of the Telephus Relief will demonstrate, *oscilla* cannot be divorced from the inherently social space within the Roman *domus*, where they outline social decorum through their standardized imagery and deviations.

Chapter 2: The House of the Telephus Relief: A Modern Analog to Ancient Experience

Introduction

The House of the Telephus Relief is located in the southeast corner of Herculaneum in Insula Orientalis I (Fig. 24 Fig. 25). It was a part of one of the largest residential complexes within the city, along with two other dwellings.¹³⁷ The complex was likely owned (and reconstructed) by a senator named Marcus Nonius Balbus in the 1st centuries BCE and CE.¹³⁸ In the middle of the first century CE, the House of the Gem was carved out of the House of the Telephus Relief, and the colonnaded atrium became the new design.¹³⁹ Three Doric columns on the north and south sides and two Doric columns on the west (at the entrance) support an upper floor.¹⁴⁰ Scholars believe the *oscilla* were installed in the intercolumniations at this time.¹⁴¹ Bacchetta, however, noted that the number recovered does not fit into the available intercolumniation spaces, and thus it is likely that another location might have displayed some of the reliefs.¹⁴² Off the colonnaded atrium lie a *tablinum* (Fig. 25.3), a *cubiculum* (Fig. 25.4), and an *andron* (men's room, usually for symposia) that leads to the back area of the house (Fig.

¹³⁷ Guidobaldi and Esposito 2013, 304.

¹³⁸ Guidobaldi 2012, 277-279.

¹³⁹ Guidobaldi and Esposito 2013, 303.

¹⁴⁰ Guidobaldi 2012, 288.

¹⁴¹ Guidobaldi 2012, 288, n. 42. The excavator, A. Mauiri, recorded finding the *oscilla* fragments on the same day, mostly near the northern colonnade, though he also stated that if some fragments were meant for the south side, they might have been disturbed by the excavation: Bacchetta 2006, n. XI.178, 335.

¹⁴² Bacchetta 2006, 335.

25.5). The atrium has two entrances from the street, *Cardo V* (Fig. 25.2 and .3); only one entrance directly leads into the colonnaded atrium (Fig. 25.2). The colonnaded atrium and its surrounding rooms are largely isolated from the larger parts of the house and residential complex. The House of the Telephus Relief, then, offers a crucial foundation for examining the form, context, disposition, and the resulting internal and external relationships of the *oscillum* in the socially-charged space of an atrium.

This chapter will examine the four tondi reconstructed in situ today.¹⁴³ Bacchetta understood the *oscilla* program at the House of the Telephus Relief to illustrate three levels of complexity to his “atmospheric dionysianism” (relating to the world of rural religiosity but not necessarily belonging within it). The three levels translate, according to Bacchetta, to three iconographic subjects: characters of the Bacchic *thiasos* (satyrs, maenads engaging in cultic rites and religious ecstasy); masks (tragic and ‘satyric’ with other figures that define their nature and underlying references); and Dionysiac connected animals, both fictive and realistic.¹⁴⁴ Examining the *oscilla* program in the House of the Telephus Relief reveals the intentional pairing of similar scenes that speak of transgression and conviviality to the viewer, crucial teachings in a socially charged reception space of the atrium, where similar social responsibilities, politics, and erudition are at play.

Tondi *Oscilla*

I use Bacchetta’s catalog numbers and dimensions for the *oscilla* fragments, as it is their most recent publication. I could not access these objects, or their reconstructions, in person, so my remarks on ancient experiences regarding their size and mobility must be taken cautiously.

¹⁴³ Pailler and Bacchetta attribute two more tondi *oscilla* fragments, but they were found on the black market and thus will not be considered here: Pailler 1982, 815; Bacchetta 2006, 334. Jashemski 1998, 273, records a *pinax* amongst the suspended *oscilla*, but Bacchetta 2006, n. XI.180, says morphologically, it is a stationary *pinax*.

¹⁴⁴ Bacchetta 2006, 336.

Side A of T42¹⁴⁵ (which survives in its entirety)¹⁴⁶ depicts a dancing maenad facing left, standing on a rocky landscape (Fig. 26). Her head is thrown back in ecstasy, her eyes and mouth open; the tie in her wavy hair loosens. She sweeps her cloak behind her in a wide arc as the cloth falls from her grasp. On Side B, the surface is smooth and undecorated beyond the molded border.¹⁴⁷ Side B is not photographed and presented in Bacchetta's catalog, but tourists' images online display no border (Fig. 27).

On Side A of T43,¹⁴⁸ a humanized satyr with panther skin draped over his shoulders reaches out to the right, where a rocky altar supports a satyric mask (Fig. 28). Side B is uncarved beyond the molded border;¹⁴⁹ like T42, Bacchetta does not photograph or include this side in his catalog, and tourist photos document no border (Fig. 29).

T44¹⁵⁰ also survives entirely, though it is almost half the size of the previous two.¹⁵¹ On Side A, Pan holds a *cista mystica* (a box or basket for sacred things) in his left hand and a downward-facing torch in his right. He strides to the right, where the corner of a rocky altar with a lit pyre sits (Fig. 30). Side B is similar, though it is a humanized satyr holding a fruit bowl (Fig. 31). The satyr's head looks up, whereas Pan looks straight ahead.

T45¹⁵² also survives whole and has similar dimensions to T44.¹⁵³ Side A depicts a hippocampus facing right above a wavy field that occupies a third of the field (Fig. 32). Side B depicts a sea panther facing left above a wavy field that occupies a quarter of the field (Fig. 33).

¹⁴⁵ Ercolano Antiquarium inv. 76462. Bacchetta 2006, 419.

¹⁴⁶ 44.6 cm in diameter, a thickness of 1.2 cm. Bacchetta 2006, 419.

¹⁴⁷ Bacchetta 2006, 419. The border on both sides is 2.3 cm wide.

¹⁴⁸ Ercolano Antiquarium inv. 76461. It measures 44.5 cm in diameter and 1.9 cm in thickness.

¹⁴⁹ Both sides have the double-molded border measuring 2.3 cm wide. Bacchetta 2006, 419.

¹⁵⁰ Ercolano Antiquarium inv. 76458.

¹⁵¹ It measures 29.5 cm in diameter, 3 cm in thickness with a flat border measuring 3 cm on both sides. Bacchetta 2006, 420.

¹⁵² Ercolano Antiquarium inv. 76457.

¹⁵³ It measures 28 cm in diameter and 2.7 cm in thickness. Its border is also flat and is 2.2 cm wide on Side A, and 1.8 cm on Side B. Bacchetta 2006, 420.

Recontextualizing Experience

As currently reconstructed, from the entrance on the west to the *tablinum* (Fig. 25.3) on the east, the order in the north portico is T45, T42, T44, and T43. While there is little documentation regarding the choice to suspend these in such an order, the alternation between small and large *oscilla* offers a sense of balance.¹⁵⁴ The varying shapes also inherently produce different possible movements, as the larger ones are likely harder to move than the smaller tondi because of their weight; at the same time, they have more surface area to be affected by the wind. Tourists' online images support the latter: the larger tondi (T42 and T43) are often spun around, showing Side B, while the smaller tondi only show slight movement but remain displaying Side A (Fig. 34, Fig. 35). Although the conditions are undoubtedly different than in antiquity, and the reconstructions are likely plaster, we can understand in some ways how the different sides engaged with each other and the larger program.

Side A of T45 depicts a hippocampus facing right, leading the viewer into the space; the sea panther echoed that movement to lead the viewer out of the *domus*. Even if the placement is inaccurate, the wavy landscape illustrates movement paired with the movement of the *oscillum*. Even if the *oscillum* was still, the depiction of the ocean waves denies complete stillness. The waves are especially curvaceous; the highs and lows of the waves suggest rough seas. Additionally, the sea monsters themselves were protective ferries, which ancient audiences would have known through Greek and Etruscan public monuments, vase paintings, mosaics, and other visual media.¹⁵⁵ Dionysus is also associated with marine animals because he slew a

¹⁵⁴ There is no documentation of the choice of suspension, nor about the change of suspension from hooks close to architrave as seen in photographs before 2013, to the current rendition as suspended by metal chains. Farrar 1998, 44, remarked that the reconstruction suspended the *oscilla* higher than in antiquity to prevent theft. There is no documentation on the decision for change or their initial installation. However, it is possible that the excavator, A. Mauiri's restoration of objects in the park "in situ" in the mid-1900s led to the installation; for his work in the park, Guidobaldi and Esposito 2013, 24.

¹⁵⁵ Shepard 1940.

monster that attacked his worshippers.¹⁵⁶ Thus, the figures and their movement were imbued with a protective characteristic. Indeed, as the viewer moved into the portico or out of the other entranceway (Fig. 25.6) into the atrium proper, he saw the creatures facing different directions, and they guided him in both directions. However, just as the hybrid sea animals were protective, they were also dangerous.

As much as the sea benefited man, it was also dangerous and unknown. The hippocampus and the sea panther both occupy more of the decorative field than the sea, filling the space almost entirely. They fill the space not only horizontally but also vertically; even though the upper part of the sea panther is shorter, its tail reaches high. The small size of the tondo makes the figures larger and, thus, emphasizes their dangerous nature. The similarity in the animals' bodies, though, with the curving of their tail and the stretch of their necks, also emphasizes their differences. The serpentine curl of their tails contrasts against the stretch of their neck; the sea panther's open mouth and bared teeth emphasize its monstrous nature, especially as a hybrid creature. Their ferocity can also be realized in the movement of the *oscillum*; as the *oscillum* moved in the wind, especially in storms (though the extent to which the objects would move in the colonnaded atrium, which is separated from the elements by a roof and upper story, is unknown), the danger of the hybrid animals would be enhanced. The suspended nature of the *oscillum*, then, would only heighten the visual experience of movement.

The movement of *oscillum* T42, which depicted a maenad in ecstasy and dance, might also visualize a frenzied episode of religious revelry. In stillness, the maenad is consumed by Dionysus, enthralled in *enthusiasmos*. She is free, as depicted by how her hair becomes undone in her dance. However, the loosening of her hair recalls maenads' "blood-soaked, god-inspired

¹⁵⁶ Bacchetta 2006, 242.

rages,” which would not have been forgotten, especially in a localized Bacchic cult.¹⁵⁷ With disheveled hair, scantily clothed (or here, losing the grip on her cloak), the maenad no longer is a composed woman.¹⁵⁸ Dionysus, after all, was a god of delusion and madness, which the maenad’s wide open mouth and eyes, uncomfortably bent neck, and slipping cloak might have visualized. The open eyes and mouth recall a theatrical mask, emphasizing how she has let the god in and externalized herself in ecstasy. If the *oscillum* moved as significantly as it appears in modern days, the frenzy might have been enhanced to the viewer. The lack of decoration on the opposite side of the maenad may have also aided in the viewers’ recognition of her descent into madness.

If we follow Bacchetta’s comprehensive study, which stated that Side B retained a molded border, the blank field of decoration was possibly intentional. It is possible that the interior field of decoration was painted, as there is evidence of *oscilla* retaining paint (to be further discussed in Chapter 3). However, the interior field simply being smooth is also believable. Indeed, based on the possible movement of the *oscillum*, I argue that the smooth field would prompt a moment of self-reflection, curiosity, and subsequent realization of the social performances one would carry out in the atrium. The blank space would serve as a reflection of the slippery boundaries the god represents; the lack of an image might indicate his absence, but the very nature of the maenad suggests his presence. The smooth decoration acts as a site of erudition and reflection; one might recall and then expound upon the frenzy of the maenads where they tear Pentheus, king of Thebes, limb from limb after he insulted Dionysus.¹⁵⁹ The recollection might serve as a reminder of transgression against the god, especially as Pentheus

¹⁵⁷ Hales 2007, 337.

¹⁵⁸ Mucznik 2017, 172.

¹⁵⁹ Eur. *Ba.*, 1043-1153.

was lured to his death with the expectation of spying on the women and seeing sexual activities. The transgressions might translate to the *domus* through warning the visitor not to stray without the supervision and permission of the owner. If the viewer viewed Side B in the atrium, one might become curious like Pentheus and move around to see the maenad dancing on the other side, re-enacting the tragedy. In the movement of the *oscillum*, its two sides could emphasize the assumption of the god and externalization of one's self, realizing the assumption of a new identity or role, which he must do in the presence of the *paterfamilias* (or from the owner's perspective, in the presence of the visitor).

T43, with its blank side paired with the image of a satyr approaching a theatrical mask on an altar, might invoke similar connotations. The humanized satyr reaches out to touch the bearded satyric mask, whose beard reaches down to touch the panther skin that spreads wide behind the human figure. How the panther's skin spreads out, occupying almost more horizontal space than the figure itself, might suggest the satyr's quick movement to grab the mask, which sits still on the altar. As the figure's legs are spread wide apart, barely touching the bottom of the field, there does seem to be increased movement. By nature, the panther skin invokes the god Dionysus and hints at the sea panther on the other *oscillum*; its connection to the god of theater might explain why the satyr is so excited to assume the role of actor. The humanized figure of the body might also allow the viewer a closer relation, especially as citizens played satyrs in the chorus a satyr-play: "identification with the satyrs was not merely natural but it was required."¹⁶⁰ As the satyr approaches the theatrical mask, the viewer becomes cognizant of his social responsibility and performance, just as McFerrin had acknowledged in the sculptural form of the mask *oscillum*. Representing the opposite of normal order, the satyr also was a devoted follower

¹⁶⁰ Isler-Kerényi 2015, 65-66.

of Dionysus.¹⁶¹ In some sense, the satyr represented acceptable worship through his loyalty; in the other *oscillum*, the satyr is also depicted dutifully approaching an altar with offerings. However, the satyr mostly represented the unacceptable side of behavior. Perhaps this liminal space was represented in the blank field on the opposing side of the energetic satyr.

With a blank slate and the possibilities inherent in a mask, especially that of the satyric mask, the viewer could use the scenes to display his own intelligence and cultural sensibilities. Such a use of the object for erudition would become enhanced through the long history of the satyr-play as originating in Greek theater.¹⁶² As satyrs were often represented drinking in excess and in mirthful attitudes, it is also likely that the scene of excitement provoked excitement in the viewer for the entertainment to come from the owner. The entertainment provided is only teased through the image of the satyr reaching for the mask; the visitor needed to be of a social status to be permitted to spend more time with the owner, especially if they were to move further into the *domus*. As the satyr represented the inverted social order and excess, however, he also served as a warning for the viewer to keep within the bounds of social decorum. The blank side of the *oscillum* would reinforce this warning, similar to the maenad's blank side. The movement of the *oscillum* would reinforce excess depicted by absence, as it played a "visual game" with the other side—always promising a show but never providing one.¹⁶³ Indeed, as one waited in the atrium to converse with the *paterfamilias*, he would have ample time to contemplate the significance of the blank side and the relationship with the opposing side of a mirthful, dancing satyr; one would also naturally consider connections with T42, especially if the *oscilla* moved differently (T43 is placed closer to an entranceway that might encourage more airflow and thus more movement).

¹⁶¹ Håkansson 2010, 95.

¹⁶² Håkansson 2010, 95. For an overview on the Latin references to satyr-plays: Wiseman 1988; Håkansson 2010, 85-94.

¹⁶³ Rodríguez Gutiérrez 2008, 191; González 2010, 108.

As he met with the *paterfamilias* or waited with other visitors, he could use the blank sides and the standardized iconography of the satyr and maenad as sites of conversation to display his own status, sensibilities, and erudition.

Conversely, T44, in its sacral actions, offers a more complicated composition. The similarities between the two sides are striking, but the differences are more so. The figure of Pan's confident posture and possession of sacred objects is paired with a humanized satyr who looks up, light on his toes. The satyr appears in a state similar to the maenad, though not as intense. He does not seem aware that his cloak reaches toward the lit fire, whereas Pan is focused intently on his job as a priest. As the *oscillum* moved, so, too, did the characters, seeming to complete their walk forward to perform the rites. Pan was also a divine figure and protector, here performing a rite more confidently than his counterpart on the opposite side. He represented wild nature, "living beyond civilization's structures,"¹⁶⁴ where his music lacked "any social or educational role in the human world."¹⁶⁵ The humanized satyr and Pan represent the inverted social order, but in this *oscillum*, it is more subtle.

As liminal figures, they represent the inappropriate behavior of excess (in drinking, virility, and music), while their depiction on the *oscilla* emphasizes their role in supporting the god Dionysus. They are both protectors and counselors on the inappropriate and appropriate ways to perform socially; as the *oscillum* moves, the figures complete their ritual while also drawing attention elsewhere. The satyr draws attention upwards as he throws his head back, while Pan draws attention to the side as he moves deliberately to the altar. Above, the viewer might have been able to gaze at the upper story or the decorated ceiling (which is attested elsewhere in the House of the Telephus Relief), provoking appreciation of the owner's wealth

¹⁶⁴ LeVen 2020, 50.

¹⁶⁵ LeVen 2020, 51.

and power while opening himself to the god; welcoming the god would allow him to assume the nature of the social actor.¹⁶⁶ Pan's lateral movement emphasizes the other suspended objects, all of which allude to social performance and possible transgressions. Like T45, where the compositions are similar, the *oscillum* with Pan and satyr requires more contemplation to understand the differences and significance of its two sides.

While undoubtedly, in antiquity, the lighting conditions would have been darker and paint would have emphasized details, the individual parts of the *oscillum* might have been difficult to see from below (Fig. 36, Fig. 37). One might have had to spend time with the objects to understand the internal relationship; the smoothed sides of T42 and T43 might have encouraged closer investigation of the smaller tondi, especially as T44's compositions are more complex in the figures' actions and setting. On the other hand, the smaller size might have directed attention to the larger tondi. The *oscillum* does not just interact within itself, its paired images provoking and completing each other, nor simply with the viewer by warning the viewer of the transgressions of his social responsibilities while guiding him toward proper protocols, but the *oscillum* interacts with the others in its program. The differences in form and potential movements, the similarities and differences amongst the collection, and the orientation of the figures and lines of sight warrant further attention and curate impactful viewer experiences and engagements.

Conclusion

This chapter provided preliminary observations about the *oscillum*'s mobility and its effects on internal and external relationships. The differences in size between T42 and T43 versus T44 and T45 naturally lend to differences in mobility; the attention required to study and

¹⁶⁶ Guidobaldi and Esposito 2013, 312-313.

understand the objects also differed. While the figures are generically Dionysiac and are involved in Bacchetta's and Loisy's 'atmospheric dionysianism' in creating the space as a *locus amoenus*, the details of the images are significant. When paired with their opposing side, the deliberate attention to the orientation of the figures blends with the varied movement of the *oscillum*, operating to complete or enhance the scene. In their very nature of close association with Dionysus and ecstatic revelry, the figures depicted are also unpredictable. They are protectors, worshippers, symbols of excess, and the god's divine power to invoke madness and revenge. In such a social and political space as the atrium, the images promote contemplation of the visitors' and owner's actions in social performance. One is warned against going beyond his bounds while simultaneously guided through conviviality, the role of actor and audience (as they compete with their companions), and the role of judge and judged (in determining the success of one's erudition). As the atrium of a senator, the decoration needed to reach all his clientele while asserting his superiority; changing standardized compositions and figures subtly reinforced his role as guide and interpreter, as highly educated and culturally sensible, and as wealthy and powerful. In the isolated space of the colonnaded atrium, the visitor was coerced to interact with and contemplate the *oscilla* as they stood out against the brightly colored walls (which likely were yellow in antiquity but are now red due to the eruption of Mount Vesuvius).

The House of the Telephus Relief offers a unique opportunity to understand the possible experiences a viewer might have had both visually and physically with the suspended objects. While the space is not as it was in antiquity, nor is the placement of the *oscilla* confirmed, the reconstruction allows for arguments to be preferred about the extent to which the *oscilla* might have moved and animated their scenes and each other.

Chapter 3: The House of Marcus Lucretius: Tense Absences

Introduction

The House of Marcus Lucretius (Fig. 38) is located in Regio X on the Via Stabiana, a major roadway through Pompeii (Fig. 39); the entrance (Fig. 38.1) led into an atrium (Fig. 38.3); a *tablinum* opposite the entrance has its rear wall open to the elevated peristyle (Fig. 38.12). In its current form, it is two complexes joined together,¹⁶⁷ creating a rough L-shape to the structure that converges on the garden area.¹⁶⁸ The owner of the house (at least in its latest phase) was Marcus Lucretius, a prominent member of the local elite, a former magistrate, and a *flamen* priest of Mars in charge of daily sacrifices and overseen by the emperor.¹⁶⁹ Graffiti from the House suggests that he might have received favors from the Imperial family.¹⁷⁰ The Lucretii family was known to occupy the city magistrate office throughout the early Imperial period, sometimes working closely alongside the emperor.¹⁷¹ Marcus Lucretius's *domus* needed to accommodate his social status, and the garden served as a great stage.

The garden lies 0.93 m higher than the *tablinum* (Fig. 38.26, Fig. 40), a level only accessible by a flight of stairs to the left of the *tablinum* (Fig. 38.17).¹⁷² Twenty-three sculptures, including five *oscilla*,¹⁷³ decorated the small trapezoidal garden area.¹⁷⁴ The sculptures stood around the garden's main feature, the arched aedicula fountain (Fig. 3). One needed to pass through a room with a wall painting that named the owner of the *domus* (Fig. 38.19) to reach the

¹⁶⁷ Berg and Kuivalainen 2019, 13.

¹⁶⁸ The other part of the *domus* surrounding the atrium near the entrance onto the side street (Fig. 38.30 and Fig. 38.28, IX.3.24) are generally considered service spaces. They will not be considered here. See Bacchetta 2006, 312; Castrén et al. 2008, 336-339.

¹⁶⁹ Berg and Kuivalainen 2019, 227; Varone 2019, 29.

¹⁷⁰ Berg and Kuivalainen 2019, 227.

¹⁷¹ Varone 2019, 30. For a history of his family, Castrén 2019, 20-21.

¹⁷² Jashemski 1993, 231.

¹⁷³ *Supra* n.22.

¹⁷⁴ Dwyer 1982, 38-48 for a catalog; Kuivalainen 2019 increased the number of attributable sculptures to the garden to 28.

large reception room on the west and stairs to the upper floor (Fig. 38.25, Fig. 38.24).¹⁷⁵ Trentin proposed that this room, and its image of the owner, would have served as a sort of signature for the ensemble.”¹⁷⁶ Much work has been done to understand the unique peristyle, garden, and sculptural decoration, but little is written about the *oscilla*.¹⁷⁷ This chapter begins to close that gap in scholarship.

The use of the spaces between piers helped elevate the small space, according to Trentin, as the sculptures and *oscilla* could be seen from multiple angles.¹⁷⁸ The possible locations for the *oscilla* described by Kuivalainen are as follows:

“In front of room 20 [Fig. 38.19] there was an open space towards the northeast corner pilaster, possibly providing space for two *oscilla*; on both sides of the aedicula there were openings to *peristylum* corridor 41 [Fig. 38.21], yielding enough space for one *oscillum* in each. The opening to *triclinium* 25 was also wide, but accounting for the doors allows for at least one *oscillum*. There must have been shutters to be used during winter for the openings facing towards *triclinium* 16 [Fig. 38.14] and *tablinum* 15 [Fig. 38.12], which may have also had an *oscillum*. Thus, seven *oscilla* could have been inserted around the garden. More could have been affixed upstairs as well.”¹⁷⁹

With Trentin’s recent experiential understanding of the lines of sight through the House of Marcus Lucretius to the garden, I reconstruct the *oscilla* as a fundamental part of the sculptural stage. The *oscilla* provided affirmations and reinforcements of Marcus Lucretius’s social and political status by providing spaces for contemplation and conversation for his visitors as they admired the highly embellished spaces to which the *oscilla* drew their attention. Although this chapter, due to limited space, will not confidently reconstruct the *oscilla* in these spaces, I refer

¹⁷⁵ Dwyer 1982, 22-23; Trentin 2019, 88-89.

¹⁷⁶ Trentin 2019, 91.

¹⁷⁷ Trentin 2019; Kuivalainen 2019.

¹⁷⁸ Trentin 2014, 320.

¹⁷⁹ Kuivalainen 2019, 77. Dwyer 1982, 38, states *oscilla* were suspended between the piers on the north and east sides, and possibly on the south and west sides as well.

to the possible locations in considering the possible experiences one may have had of the collection altogether and the *oscilla* individually.

Oscilla¹⁸⁰

T112,¹⁸¹ a tondo, survives entirely.¹⁸² The object preserves holes for suspension on both the upper and lower edges.¹⁸³ Side A depicts a beardless Silenus straddling a calf, grabbing its muzzle with his left hand and slitting its throat with his right hand (Fig. 41).¹⁸⁴ An elderly, muscular, naked satyr stands in front of the pair, crouched, as he holds a bowl to catch the blood. Dwyer recorded remnants of yellow paint on the “garment of the silen [sic], and on tail and beard of faun; red on calf and hair of silen and faun.”¹⁸⁵ Side B depicts a husky elderly Silenus in right profile, approaching a rustic altar with a basket of fruit in his right hand. At the same time, his left protects the objects from spilling over (Fig. 42).¹⁸⁶ A bearded satyric mask looks to the right behind the figure, sitting on a rocky outcrop. Dwyer recorded, “Orange paint remains on hair and beard of mask and hair and beard of silen [sic]; yellow on silen’s belt; blue on garment; grey wash on outline of rock on left; brown outline on altar on right; flame indicated in red on flat ground of relief.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁰ I use the dimensions from the more recent publication from the Pompeii Project of the University of Helsinki in 2019 (Berg and Kuivalainen 2019), which updated descriptions and study of the finds and materials from the House of Marcus Lucretius.

¹⁸¹ MANN inv. 6648.

¹⁸² It measures 30.8 cm in diameter and 2.5 cm thick. Kuivalainen 2019, 104. Bacchetta 2006, 447, recorded a narrow bordering band, its width measuring 1.8 cm on Side A and 1.5 cm on Side B.

¹⁸³ Kuivalainen 2019, 104.

¹⁸⁴ Dwyer 1982, 38. Bacchetta 2006, 447, says, “(un generico victimarius oppure un silen?)” (a generic victimarius or a silenus?). Carrella 2008, 107, calls him a “Silenus;” Kuivalainen 2019, 105, calls the figure a “sacrificial attendant.”

¹⁸⁵ Dwyer 1982, 38.

¹⁸⁶ Corswandt 1982, 87, calls the figure Papposilenos.

¹⁸⁷ Dwyer 1982, 39.

R33,¹⁸⁸ a rectangular *oscillum*, survives in only 60% of its original form; the bottom half of the object is missing.¹⁸⁹ Side A depicts two superimposed masks in right profile (Fig. 43); the one in the foreground wears a Phrygian cap with a knot at the top of the forehead. Kuivalainen and Bacchetta identify this mask as that of a maenad.¹⁹⁰ Closer to the right is a bearded satyric mask. On Side B, which is more damaged than Side A, two dolphins overlap (Fig. 44). Kuivalainen stated that numerous small holes on Side B “may indicate that the *pinax* was attached to a wooden frame, partially obscuring the picture on side B, or else e.g. hanging garlands were fastened to them, as is known from wall paintings.”¹⁹¹ Kuivalainen also recorded, “Traces of colour, e.g. red on the hair of the maenad.”¹⁹²

Peltae

P42¹⁹³ is almost intact.¹⁹⁴ Only one griffin protome survives; it is rather short. Side A depicts a satyric mask in right profile on a rocky ground with two staffs (possibly *thyrsi*, staffs covered in ivy associated with Dionysus, according to Kuivalainen) (Fig. 45).¹⁹⁵ Neither Dwyer nor Bacchetta documented the objects in front of the mask. On Side B, three stacked spherical objects sit near the center, the upper edge of the field, surrounded by what Kuivalainen proposed is a “leather bag, or hemispherical basket,”¹⁹⁶ and Bacchetta noted it as “a narrow band of relief, underlined by incised lines” (Fig. 46).¹⁹⁷ Dwyer proposed that the spherical objects are the

¹⁸⁸ D’Acunto 2008, 168, says, “Inventario: Sangiorgio 1630.” Dwyer, Bacchetta, and Kuivalainen do not give a MANN inventory number.

¹⁸⁹ Its preserved height is 16 cm, its entire width is 39.2 cm, and its thickness is 2 cm. Kuivalainen 2019, 109.

¹⁹⁰ Bacchetta 2006, 565; Kuivalainen 2019, 109.

¹⁹¹ Kuivalainen 2019, 109.

¹⁹² Kuivalainen 2019, 109.

¹⁹³ MANN inv. 6663.

¹⁹⁴ Its height measures 23 cm, width 30.7 cm, and thickness 2.5 cm. Kuivalainen 2019, 105.

¹⁹⁵ Kuivalainen 2019, 105.

¹⁹⁶ Kuivalainen 2019, 106.

¹⁹⁷ Bacchetta 2006, 525.

apples of Hesperides.¹⁹⁸ Kuivalainen recorded, “Traces of colours (yellow, red and black) on both sides.”¹⁹⁹

P43²⁰⁰ is fragmentary, missing the two protomes and its apex.²⁰¹ Side A depicts a beardless satyr head in right profile on a rocky landscape (Fig. 47). On the right edge, an object that Dwyer recorded as the “edge of a *tympanum*,”²⁰² Bacchetta agreed, claiming it is foreshortened.²⁰³ Kuivalainen suggested the edge is too narrow, and its occupation of the field suggests “the curving arm of either a barbiton or a lyre.”²⁰⁴ Side B of P43 depicts a decoration field shaped “like a leather bag or a basket,” within which is a *syrinx* and *pedum* (Fig. 48).²⁰⁵ Kuivalainen records, “Minor traces of colour remaining, e.g. red in the hair.”²⁰⁶

P44²⁰⁷ is recorded by Kuivalainen as discovered “possibly in the garden.”²⁰⁸ It survives in two pieces.²⁰⁹ The griffin protomes are especially vertical, cut sharply horizontally at the upper edge, making them almost square. Side A depicts a humanized mask of a beardless satyr facing right (Fig. 49). On Side B, a dolphin swims to the right in a wavy landscape (that Kuivalainen said is “calm”).²¹⁰ The field of decoration on Side B is that of a leather bag or basket, similar to others (Fig. 50). Kuivalainen stated that there are “traces of yellowish colour on both sides.”²¹¹

¹⁹⁸ Dwyer 1982, 39.

¹⁹⁹ Kuivalainen 2019, 105.

²⁰⁰ MANN, but location unknown.

²⁰¹ Its height is recorded as 15.7 cm, width as 23 cm, and thickness as 3.1 cm. Kuivalainen 2019, 106.

²⁰² Dwyer 1982, 39.

²⁰³ Bacchetta 2006, 525.

²⁰⁴ Kuivalainen 2019, 108.

²⁰⁵ Kuivalainen 2019, 108.

²⁰⁶ Kuivalainen 2019, 107.

²⁰⁷ MANN inv. 6669. Dwyer does not include this object in his catalog. Kuivalainen 2019, 107, notes there is confusion in the museum about its identification.

²⁰⁸ Kuivalainen 2019, 107.

²⁰⁹ Its height is 22 cm, its width 30 cm, and its thickness 1.7 cm. Kuivalainen 2019, 107.

²¹⁰ Kuivalainen 2019, 107.

²¹¹ Kuivalainen 2019, 107.

Recontextualizing Experience

Unlike the *oscilla* program in the House of the Telephus Relief, which emphasized movement, the *oscilla* at the House of Marcus Lucretius emphasized the potential for stillness. The prolific presence of theatrical masks, especially satyric ones, tempted the viewer to wear one and become part of the wild setting that was explicitly curated in the garden; the sculptures of Dionysus's *thiasos*, the domesticated animals (hares, ducks, cows), and the fountain acting as *nymphaeum* all create a sacro-idyllic landscape.²¹² The particular emphasis on framing the garden through the various rooms surrounding the garden, especially in its elevated nature above the *tablinum*, encouraged the viewer to look further. The garden was not easy to access, however, as one had to move upstairs, cross through the corridors, and move towards the reception area where the proper entrance to the garden was. The *paterfamilias* regulated these interior spaces, requiring permission and guidance to enter and move through. As the visitor was allowed to enter the spaces and move around the garden to the reception room, he would be engaged in the social performance of displaying his own social and political status, aesthetic and cultural sensibilities, and erudition as he conversed with the *paterfamilias*. As the *oscilla* moved in the wind, they drew attention both from the atrium and around the garden; the images of the theatrical masks called for viewers to assume a new social role, one that was convivial and part of the inverted social order satyrs represented. However, the very recognition of the externalizing elements inherent in the mask and the instruments waiting also caused the viewer to recognize the social performances and responsibilities at play as he moved further into the *domus*.

T112, with its figural scenes, stands out in addition to its different shape amongst the collection at the House of Marcus Lucretius. Side A depicts a scene of intense action, as the

²¹² Dwyer 1982, 42-47; Trentin 2014, 322-326.

figures are in the climax of sacrifice, catching the blood. Side B illustrates the potential for movement in the figure's stride toward the rock altar and how he cradles the fruit from falling out of the basket. The three figures are "baroque" in their muscular and husky bodies, emphasizing the gravity of the activities. As the Silenus steps in much smaller strides than those in the House of the Telephus Relief, some humor might exist in the overloading basket of offerings. The humor can also be visualized in the satyric mask behind the Silenus, as though he has just removed it and is now assuming the role of priest or worshiper. Alternatively (or additionally), the overloading bowl emphasized Silenus's goodwill and high quality of offerings. As the mask sits higher on the rocky outcrop and might be carved in higher relief than the rustic altar, it is undeniably connected to Silenus's actions. To perform his offering rite properly, Silenus removes his mask, situating himself more appropriately. When paired with the opposing image of intense action, the viewer recognizes his own social responsibilities in taking off the satyric mask (of inverted social order, excess virility, and drinking) to perform appropriately. One might also be reminded of Marcus Lucretius's position as a *flamen* priest, equivalent to the Sileni in their ritual actions and solemn piety.

The various images of the satyric mask sitting on a rocky outcrop encourage the viewer to take up the social and free identity of the satyr while also cautioning him; why does it lay unadorned? R33 emphasizes the danger in assuming the mask and its identities—or, perhaps more accurately, in this case, allowing the god to assume him—by pairing images of the two common followers of Dionysus and metamorphosis. By depicting the masks of the maenad and satyr, the *oscilla* embody the nature of the garden that Kuivalainen described as "a mixture of the wild, the half-wild, and domestic elements."²¹³ The dolphins on the opposing side, though no

²¹³ Kuivalainen 2019, 115.

longer legible (though, given the evidence it was obscured might suggest some level of revelation in antiquity), emphasize Dionysus's powers of metamorphosis.²¹⁴ The warning of the transgression of proper decorum is evident in his relationship with dolphins, especially as the dolphins on R33 appear to be jumping out of the water. Paired with the image of the masks of the maenad and satyr, a viewer was tempted to open himself to the god and divulge in the revelry associated with the figures (dancing, music, drinking) but also encouraged to recognize the very ways the figures invert the social order and are harmed for it. As the *oscillum* moved, it is possible it invoked the figures' metamorphoses, animating the viewer and his imagination. Suppose R33 was stationary and Side B obscured. In that case, it is possible that the proliferation of masks and instruments on the rest of the *oscilla* and their potentiality would invoke similar considerations in Side A.

The associations with music are also clear in the *oscilla* program, as the instruments lay untouched on the *oscilla*. On P42, I argue that the shape in front of the satyric mask is not a staff (or staves) but rather a *tympanum*; given the foreshortened instrument in front of another mask in an identical location and foreshortened curvature on another *oscillum* in the same program (P43), and the distinct lack of ivy on the staves to make them *thyrsi*, it is possible that P42's composition is another instance of variety. P43's mask has an open mouth compared to P42's closed mouth. The satyrs have the same high-reaching and arching hair tuff above their forehead with similar wavy hair, but one is bearded (P42). Both masks are paired on the opposite side by inanimate objects. Thus, it is likely that the *tympanum* appears in both compositions, rather than two staves, as a mark of comparison and contrast and ripe for contemplation and conversation. Indeed, if the

²¹⁴ *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*.

spherical objects on the opposite side can be taken, as Dwyer suggests, as the Apples of Hesperides, the element of trickery would be infused in the *oscillum*.

Additionally, the form of the bag or basket Kuivalainen identifies as holding the spherical objects might echo the holding of the mask and *tympanum*. Alternatively, perhaps, the bag had an element of surprise and revelation. As the *oscillum* moved, the wind picked up the objects, and their shifting would seduce the viewer into participating in their revelry. The movement is even depicted on the *oscillum*, as the bag is slightly off-center—an intentional choice given how other *oscilla* with a similar field of decoration are more symmetrical. Though this has not been mentioned beyond the suspended object of the “drinking-bowl mask,” it is possible the *pelta's* form allowed some noise manipulation by breaking the wind current.²¹⁵ Indeed, the image of the musical instruments desires some physical embodiment of noise.

Kuivalainen describes P43 as not only having a lyre in Side A but also the open mouth of the mask might also signify singing. This is believable, as some of the other masks within this collection have closed mouths suitable to their compositions. The combination of the *syrinx* and *pedum* invoke the pastoral and agrarian gods, like Pan, who are often associated with Dionysus and satyrs. In particular, the association with shepherds here also provokes contemplation about the function of *syrinx*-playing, which was “to communicate with the animals they herd.”²¹⁶ The worship of Pan also required and encouraged auditory participation through his music and imagining it as one gazed upon images of the god and the instrument.²¹⁷ The combination of the *pedum* and *syrinx*, then, was not just reminiscent of the sacro-idyllic landscape that the rest of the garden embodied, but also the instrument and tool might have activated more senses. Imagining

²¹⁵ Wilk 2014, 386-387.

²¹⁶ LeVen 2020, 51.

²¹⁷ LeVen 2020, 52.

the music, watching the *oscillum* move, possibly hearing a manipulation of noise, and being near the open-air courtyard would have enhanced the experience. In addition, if the satyr's head indicates the act of singing, it would further add to the imagined chorus. As an isolated head, however, it is also possible it is indicative of a mask, possibly one serving as a chorus member who would have sung in the play. The emptiness of the mask and instruments (possibly) locked within a bag invited the viewer to free them and join in the conviviality.

Trentin, in her experiential and 3D modeling reconstructions of the House of Marcus Lucretius, reinstalls the *peltae oscilla* as such: two over the west wall of the tablinum, which looks into the garden, and two on the opposite side of the garden, further framing the aedicula fountain (Fig. 51). The idea of the *peltae* being used as a type of pendant sculpture is appealing. The similarities among the *oscilla* are striking, but so are the differences. Side A of the *oscilla* depicts the satyric masks in right profile, often with similar physiognomy; scholars attribute these similarities to the origin of the objects as from the same workshop. However, it is important to note, again, that our modern-day distinction of Side A and B denotes a higher level of importance to one side over the other. However, the garden is intentionally framed from the moment one enters the *domus*. The traffic patterns offer multiple viewing angles from within the house to the garden, revealing both sides of the *oscilla* frequently and as a part of the framed (and mostly inaccessible) garden space. As discussed in Chapter 2, *oscilla* (or at least plaster *tondi oscilla*) might have been more mobile than given credit. It is possible that the *oscilla* in the garden of the House of Marcus Lucretius were positioned such that the common image of the satyric mask faced into the garden (as is accepted of Side A), so viewers could understand them as pendant sculptures before moving around to see Side B (visible from inside the corridor or rooms) where they would realize the differences. The differences would become more apparent

the more one was greeted with the image, especially as the mouths are closed on some of the *oscilla* (R33, P42); the shifting of objects in the bag and of those in the edge of the field of decoration (especially in their slight difference in the curvature in P42 and P43 but identical location) would draw one's attention and curiosity as well. Thus, the similarities homogenized the collection, but the differences offered many ways for the visitor and owner to display his erudition as well as his aesthetic and cultural sensibilities. The *pelta* form usurping the more common form of the tondo (according to the material record) itself was a topic for discussion, as it is thought to have ritual origins and a shape originating from Amazonian shields.²¹⁸

Without knowing the original suspended height, it is difficult to tell how visible and legible the objects might have been to viewers from any given vantage point. Indeed, the decorative fields on the *peltae* are often condensed even further to the center of the object, obscuring some details like the type of object accompanying the satyr mask in P42 and P43. However, the preserved polychromy would have increased the visibility of details, especially, as Trentin elaborates, because the framing of the garden area also framed the opposing side and its rooms, promising an entire decorative tableau to enjoy. More research should be done on how the *oscilla*'s polychromy complemented or contrasted the wall paintings of those framed rooms (and the exterior walls), but the painted surfaces of the *oscilla*, especially in the case of T112, would have drawn attention to the suspended objects, even in lower lighting conditions. The evidence of painted *oscilla* in garden paintings further enhances the possibilities of the *oscilla*'s polychromy drawing attention: in the garden area of the House of Orpheus (VI.14.20),²¹⁹ two tondi *oscilla* flanking a larger mythological scene and landscape, are depicted with a red background and figures in yellow (?) (Fig. 52, Fig. 53). This painting corroborates the described

²¹⁸ Bacchetta 2006, 118-123; Kuivalainen 2019, 106.

²¹⁹ Also known as the House of Vesonius Primus.

preserved pigments in the *oscilla* from the House of Marcus Lucretius. Other instances of polychrome *oscilla* and *pinakes* appear in garden frescoes (Figs. 5, 6, 12, 54, and 55). In addition to the varied compositions, then, the *oscilla* at the House of Marcus Lucretius (particularly T112, which has the best-preserved documentation of polychromy) also attest to the possible variations in coloring that might have provoked conversation and displays of erudition from the host.

Additionally, more work could be done to examine the connection of red traces on the hair of the maenad on R33, the hair of the satyr and Sileni on T112, and the satyr mask's hair on P43. Consistent color schemes across the program (and, likely, across the garden space through the wall paintings and free-standing sculptures) visually connected and differentiated various pieces within the landscape. The polychromy, paired with the possible glistening of the metal points of suspension, made the *oscilla* a visual treat, not just in their movement.

Trentin compared the framed visions of the garden and surrounding rooms to an illusionistic garden wall painting, where one wishes to enter, but access is denied physically.²²⁰ The suspension of *oscilla* could have enhanced this separation, especially as they were common features in illusionistic garden paintings. From the surviving record of paintings, such as in the *oecus* (principal reception room) (Fig. 54) and the summer *triclinium* (Fig. 55) in House of the Golden Bracelet (VI.17.42),²²¹ it is often the mask or the tondo *oscillum* suspended above the garden. Indeed, the material record supports the tondo as the most frequent form by a large margin: out of Bacchetta's 500 specimens, 57% were tondi, 25% were *peltae*, and 12% were rectangular.²²² Using *peltae* predominantly further portrays the House of Marcus Lucretius's

²²⁰ Trentin 2019, 83-84.

²²¹ Also called the House of the Wedding of Alexander.

²²² Pailler 2009, 797. Pailler 1982, 784: 56% of around 350 specimens were tondi, 27.5% *pinakes*, and 16.5% *peltae*. In Pompeii alone, Pailler records 47% were tondi, 22.5 % were rectangular, and 30.5% were *peltae*. Dwyer 1982, 129, agrees that tondi and *peltae* are the most common, though he calls tondi "round shields."

garden as unique and untouchable. Marcus Lucretius, then, established the *oscilla* as a site for his own social performance in the very make-up of the *oscilla* program, as he displays his wealth, power, and sensibilities. The technically carved imagery, ripe with allusions to theatrical performances, demonstrated more than just his aesthetic sensibilities; the *oscilla*, and its imagery, encouraged the recognition of the social performance required from the visitor as he moved further into the *domus*.

As one moved through the room with the painting and inscription of the owner's name (Fig. 38.19), Trentin reconstructed the tondo *oscillum*. The only tondo, T112 is also of exceptional quality and different stylistically; it could be identified as a type of "collectible singleton."²²³ Located in the room where Marcus Lucretius identifies himself as a *flamen* priest, the *oscillum*'s sacral actions reinforce his own social and political status. Additionally, in its stylistic and technical prowess, the tondo would have undoubtedly reinforced the sacro-idyllic and rustic landscape the free-standing sculptures created. It also might have, as the only *oscillum* in the program with human figures in action, emphasized the very distance one had from the landscape and its rural setting. As the tondo swung in the wind, revealing the different types of worship (one with a bit of humor and/or admiration embedded), one would become aware of his distance physically and socially from the garden landscape; in this realization of externality (reinforced, and indeed, manipulated by the satyric masks and unused instruments), he would realize the social responsibilities of his current position as owner or guest.

The garden and *oscilla* were populated with theatrical themes, serving as a stage for the owner to display himself. In the realization of the owner's erudition, the visitor would also become conscious of the performance he must or was currently putting on for the owner. Indeed,

²²³ Dwyer 2012.

the visibility of the garden as elevated not only presented the owner to those passing on the street but deliberately put the visitors who were allowed into the privileged space framing it into the play themselves. The shape of the rectangle and *pelta* emphasizes the horizontal and the vertical. The *pelta*'s central, rising palmette was the point of suspension; the griffin protomes also looked up, even if they were cut seemingly harshly and horizontally as in P44.²²⁴ Additionally, the curvature of the *pelta* draws attention upward. As the *oscilla* moved, they drew attention to the concept of architectural framing, reinforced by the framing of whatever space they faced. The *oscilla*, in their movement and forms, also disrupts the architectural framing, swinging inside and out of the intercolumniations. Thus the physical motion of the *oscilla* in the House of Marcus Lucretius emphasized the potential for movement latent in the empty masks, unused musical instruments, and a climactic scene of sacrifice.

Conclusion

The *oscilla* from the House of Marcus Lucretius cannot be removed from the sacro-idyllic landscape the free-standing sculptures within the garden proper create. Their iconography serves more than another Dionysiac and rustic element. No mask depicted is in use, and even the satyr figures distinguish themselves from satyr actors by their muscular bodies and the serious actions of worshippers. Musical instruments emphasized the sensory experience that would have been enhanced by the various entertainments Marcus Lucretius would have provided in a display of wealth, power, and cultural sensibilities. The architectural construction of the garden, in part, was a sign of civic patronage from Marcus Lucretius that required actors, which he provided in the form of visitors who were tempted to take up an empty mask, which was especially

²²⁴ Bacchetta 2006, 49.

highlighted in the abbreviated field of decoration on the *peltae*.²²⁵ As a member of the local aristocracy and holding a high-ranking position in a local cult, the *oscilla* asserted and defined Marcus Lucretius's social and political position. Additionally, the latent imagery of the discarded mask required contemplation and conversation concerning the temptation to wear the mask and assume the appropriate social position. The kinetic potential present in the stillness emphasized the viewer's own movement and stillness through the space. Thus, it is crucial to consider the *oscilla* and its program in the socially-charged space of the peristyle as intentionally chosen and curated decorative objects that reflect the patron.

Chapter 4: The House of Fortune: Real Performance in a Fictional Setting

Introduction

The House of Fortune (IX.7.20) at Pompeii is located on the Vicolo di Tesmo, in the NW corner of Regio IX (Fig.56). It was likely owned by D. Caprasius Felix and his wife Fortunata,²²⁶ who were likely involved in commercial activities.²²⁷ The atrium of the House of Fortuna (Fig. 57.d) opens directly to the peristyle (Fig. 57.g), where the east sides of the arcade support a series of arches (Fig. 4, Fig. 58). The keystones' undersides retained evidence of the metal nails for suspension, though these are no longer extant.²²⁸ The relatively small size of the *domus*, in

²²⁵ For more on the pseudo-civic architecture and patronage in Roman villas as displays of wealth, power, and intelligence: Platts 2010.

²²⁶ Dwyer 1982, 69-70; Bacchetta 2006, 319. For complications of identification, see Simelius 2022, 184-185.

²²⁷ Dwyer 1982, 70; Bacchetta 2006, 319.

²²⁸ Jashemski 1993, 241; Trentin 2014, 60; Simelius 2022, 95.

addition to the “poor” quality of the *oscilla* and sculptural decoration, suggests this was a sub-elite house and owner.²²⁹ However, the large number of *oscilla* makes up one of the largest programs thus far discovered. Due to the sub-elite status and poor quality of the *oscilla*, scholars have neglected an in-depth study of the *domus* and its *oscilla* program. This paper examines why a lower-status individual would be interested in such a number of *oscilla* and why he would place them in his peristyle.

The total of 16 *oscilla* outnumber the intercolumniations available;²³⁰ some might have been inset in the walls,²³¹ made stationary in the peristyle, or some intercolumniations held more than one *oscillum*.²³² Bacchetta attributes the varied findspots of the *oscilla* to the incomplete reinstallation of the *oscilla* after the earthquake of 62 CE.²³³ This chapter applies the experiential methodology developed above to investigate the significance of variety, the effect of movement, and the possible engagements with viewers.

*Oscilla*²³⁴

Tondi

T113²³⁵ is fragmented into two pieces, missing a quarter of the surface.²³⁶ Scholars have reconstructed side A to depict Chiron crouched on his hind legs with a cloak over his shoulders and body facing right, teaching young Achilles the lyre (?).²³⁷ To the right of Achilles is a tree (Fig. 59).²³⁸ The reconstruction derives from the fresco painting in the Basilica of Herculaneum

²²⁹ Dwyer 1982, 131, Dwyer says the *oscilla* from the House of Fortune are “without exception of poor quality.”

²³⁰ Bacchetta 2006, 320, believes the entire program is preserved.

²³¹ Trentin 2014, 61.

²³² Trentin 2014, 60.

²³³ Bacchetta 2006, 320.

²³⁴ I use the dimensions provided in the 2008 Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli catalog (D’Acunto 2008).

²³⁵ MANN inv. 126234/126235.

²³⁶ It measures 27 cm in diameter, 1.7 cm in thickness. Both sides have a thin, irregular relief band for the border, measuring 1 cm. D’Acunto 2008, 195.

²³⁷ Dwyer 1982, 71; Bacchetta 2006, 447; D’Acunto 2008, 195-196.

²³⁸ The MANN catalog photograph demonstrates more fragmentation, where the upper half of Chiron is lost.

(Fig. 60) due to the horse legs of Chiron in the *oscillum* being bent similarly to the fresco, the male youth next to him implies instruction, and the image is a popular one in the iconographic repertoire.²³⁹ Side B preserves a nude Silenus sitting on a rock, facing right, bent slightly forward; a tree is on the left (Fig. 61). Scholars reconstruct the figure, possibly Marsyas,²⁴⁰ holding a double *tibia*, a flute.²⁴¹

T114²⁴² is broken into three pieces.²⁴³ Side A depicts a youth dressed in a tunic on the right, head craned back to look up at a bird in a fruit tree that spans the height of the decorative field; another bird on the left of the tree bends backward to look up at the tree as well (Fig. 62). D'Acunto recorded Dwyer proposing this was an attempt to illustrate Aesop's fable, "The Fowler and the Serpent."²⁴⁴ Side B depicts two floating masks in right profile superimposed on each other, near the top of the decoration field, slightly looking down at a rocky landscape and a small cypress tree (?) (Fig. 63). The satyr mask in the foreground has a large ear. In the background, a female (maenad?) mask has long, straight hair, a lock of which is visible under her chin. Both mouths are open. Bacchetta records scattered traces of polychromy on both sides.²⁴⁵

Peltae

P46²⁴⁶ is almost intact, except for damage at the apex at the attachment for suspension.²⁴⁷ The griffin protomes are small and rudimentary, only the heads delineated, slightly turned outwards, looking up. Side A depicts two tragic masks facing each other and the center, where a

²³⁹ Bacchetta 2006, 263, n.X.303.

²⁴⁰ D'Acunto 2008, 196.

²⁴¹ Dwyer 1982, 72; Bacchetta 2006, 447.

²⁴² MANN inv. 120332.

²⁴³ It measures 24 cm in diameter, with a thickness of 3.5 cm. D'Acunto 2008, 192.

²⁴⁴ D'Acunto 2008, 192-193, n. 290; Dwyer 1978, 400-404. I was not able to access Dwyer's own words. His 1982 catalog does not state this.

²⁴⁵ Bacchetta 2006, 448. Dwyer 1982, 72, just states "traces of color."

²⁴⁶ MANN inv. 120330.

²⁴⁷ It measures 31 cm in length, 13 cm in height, and 3 cm wide. D'Acunto 2008, 191.

rough inverted scallop shell descends (Fig. 64).²⁴⁸ On the right is a beardless satyr mask; on the left, a female mask with stylized curls organized in columns that reach below her chin and are pressed against the back of her head with a net (?).²⁴⁹ Side B is slightly similar, depicting two facing masks, with an inverted scallop shell in the center (Fig. 65).²⁵⁰ The female mask, in right profile, with an *onkos* (a topknot) of long ringed locks that curve around her chin; a low relief of a veil covers her ear and back of the head. The male mask is a satyr with a faun ear and shaggy hair.

Almost half of P47²⁵¹ is lost.²⁵² The remaining griffin protome depicts just its head, inclined upwards. Side A depicts the front half of a quadruped (Dwyer suggests a “ferret?,”²⁵³ Bacchetta a fox,²⁵⁴ and D’Acunto a dog or fox)²⁵⁵ facing a rooster which looks back. Descending from the apex, a nine-lobed palmette occupies much of the field (Fig. 66). From the apex of Side B, an acanthus leaf faces the bottom, and from whose tip two volutes flank and three wavy branches spread to each side (Fig. 67).

P48²⁵⁶ survives entirely.²⁵⁷ Its protomes are asymmetrical and rudimentary, facing outwards and upwards. It retains traces of the iron hook for suspension. Side A²⁵⁸ depicts a pair of roosters facing the center and each other, almost touching beaks and standing on an ear of

²⁴⁸ Dwyer 1982, 72, and D’Acunto 2008, 191, call the scallop shell a palmette. Bacchetta 2006, 526, is likely correct in the inverted scallop shell design.

²⁴⁹ Bacchetta 2006, 526.

²⁵⁰ D’Acunto 2008, 191, reverses the sides, though the images provided follow Bacchetta and Dwyer’s Side A and B. Dwyer’s images similarly reverse the sides.

²⁵¹ MANN inv. 120518.

²⁵² It measures a preserved 23 cm in length, 13 cm in height, and 2.5 cm in width. D’Acunto 2008, 195.

²⁵³ Dwyer 1982, 73.

²⁵⁴ Bacchetta 2006, 527.

²⁵⁵ D’Acunto 2008, 195.

²⁵⁶ MANN inv. 120331.

²⁵⁷ It measures 34 cm in length, 16 cm in height, and 2.5 cm in width. D’Acunto 2008, 192.

²⁵⁸ The images in D’Acunto 2008, 192, record this side as Side B, though the text follows Bacchetta and Dwyer.

corn (Fig. 68).²⁵⁹ On Side B, a large swan facing left stands in the center with its wings spread and neck bent down; two decorative rosettes rest in the open space beneath the wings (Fig. 69).

P49²⁶⁰ is well preserved, retaining some of the metal hook for suspension.²⁶¹ Its griffin protomes, like P48, are asymmetrical and rudimentary, facing slightly outwards and inclined upwards. The griffins' wattles are slightly delineated.²⁶² From the apex of both sides, a seven-lobed palmette reaches down, merging into a blooming lotus that touches the bottom. Two small birds in profile and facing each other flank the floral design on Side A. The bird on the left turns its head to the back; on the right, the bird pokes at the palmette (Fig. 70).²⁶³ On Side B, two small birds in profile face the central floral design, which is carved in higher relief; the one on the right raises its head, while the one on the left leans to touch the lotus (Fig. 71). D'Acunto remarked that the bird on the right might have something in its beak.²⁶⁴

P50²⁶⁵ survives almost intact (though in four pieces),²⁶⁶ save the apex, which has been damaged from suspension. Its griffin protomes are limited to the head, delineated by a relief band (collar?), and are asymmetrical.²⁶⁷ On Side A, Cupid with a rounded face, drilled eyes and textured curls, and a closed mouth faces frontally. The central design (two symmetrical volutes) sits slightly on top of his head, and he is flanked by spread wings (Fig. 72). On Side B, two facing masks flank a seven-lobed palmette that descends from the apex. On the right is a Silenic mask whose beard falls below his carved chin and is balding, and on the left is a tragic female mask whose stylized braids fall around her chin (Fig. 73). Both mouths are open.

²⁵⁹ Dwyer 1982, 73, says it is an ear of grain.

²⁶⁰ MANN inv. 120324.

²⁶¹ It measures 33 cm in length, 15 cm in height, and 3.5 cm in width. D'Acunto 2008, 189.

²⁶² Dwyer 1982, 73.

²⁶³ Both Dwyer 1982, 73, and D'Acunto 2008, 189, record this side as Side B.

²⁶⁴ D'Acunto 2008, 189.

²⁶⁵ MANN inv. 120329.

²⁶⁶ It measures 32.5 cm in length, 13 cm in height, and 2.5 cm in width. D'Acunto 2008, 190.

²⁶⁷ Bacchetta 2006, 528.

Rectangular

The entirety of R34²⁶⁸ is preserved, besides a chip on Side B from the metal hook.²⁶⁹ On Side A, two tragic masks in right profile are superimposed (Fig. 74).²⁷⁰ On the left, in the foreground, a “bearded tragic hero” mask’s *onkos* breaches the top edge of the border and the left border.²⁷¹ Behind him is a mask of a tragic heroine with a high cheekbone. Both mouths are open. Side B depicts a bearded man in right profile, seated on a rock, whose feet reach below the bottom border; he works on a large object in front of him that rests on a rocky landscape on the right (Fig. 75). He has been identified as Daedalus fashioning a large wing.²⁷² Traces of polychromy were recorded at discovery and now are preserved only on the beard of the seated figure.²⁷³ D’Acunto recorded that the bottom of the slab is smooth “to be inserted on a pillar.”²⁷⁴

R35²⁷⁵ is fragmentary, missing an entire edge.²⁷⁶ On Side A, another pair of superimposed tragic masks are in right profile (Fig. 76).²⁷⁷ In the foreground, on the left, is a mask of a “tragic hero,” whose beard curls fall only from his chin.²⁷⁸ On the right, slightly facing down, is a mask of a tragic heroine, whose curls fall over her ear and down past her chin. Both masks have open mouths. Side B depicts a nude male youth in right profile, seated on a rocky chair with a tree behind him; he works on something large (a boulder?) in front of him, whose

²⁶⁸ MANN inv. 120325.

²⁶⁹ It measures 24.5 cm in length, 20 cm in height, and 2 cm in width. D’Acunto 2008, 189. Bacchetta 2006, 566, records the width as 2.4 cm, as does Dwyer 1982, 75.

²⁷⁰ D’Acunto 2008, 189-190, calls this Side B.

²⁷¹ Dwyer 1982, 75.

²⁷² Dwyer 1982, 75; Bacchetta 2006, 566; D’Acunto 2008, 190.

²⁷³ Dwyer 1982, 75; Bacchetta 2006, 566; D’Acunto 2008, 189.

²⁷⁴ D’Acunto 2008, 189.

²⁷⁵ MANN inv. 120333.

²⁷⁶ It measures a preserved length of 21.5 cm, 20.5 cm in height, and 2 cm in width. D’Acunto 2008, 193. Bacchetta 2006, 566, records the width as 2.4 cm, as does Dwyer 1982, 74.

²⁷⁷ D’Acunto 2008, 193, calls this Side B.

²⁷⁸ Dwyer 1982, 74.

back part is lost (Fig. 77).²⁷⁹ D'Acunto proposed that this is a scene of Daedalus fashioning wings for Icarus.²⁸⁰

R36²⁸¹ is restored from two fragments.²⁸² Side A depicts two masks facing each other and the center (Fig. 78). On the far left rises a tree, upon whose trunk a beardless mask of a youth (maybe a satyr?) slightly rests. On the right, pressed against the irregular border, is a bearded and bald mask of Silenus.²⁸³ Both mouths are open. Side B depicts two more opposing masks (Fig. 79). On the left is a mask of a "youth with a turban" and drilled ear, which sits low on his head.²⁸⁴ The mouth is closed. Bacchetta identified the head covering as a flat cap,²⁸⁵ but D'Acunto suggested it is a headdress for a female mask, whose fringe appears slightly on the forehead.²⁸⁶ To the right, resting on a delineated rocky landscape, is a tragic heroine mask, whose ear sits low on her head and around which a curl of her hair rests. Her mouth is not well carved but open (?). Dwyer recorded traces of red were noted at the time of discovery.²⁸⁷

R37²⁸⁸ is fragmentary, missing an upper corner.²⁸⁹ Side A depicts two theatrical masks, one of Silenus on the left in right profile and one of a tragic heroine on the right facing frontally (Fig. 80).²⁹⁰ The mask of Silenus is without a mustache, looks slightly down at the other mask, and stands in front of a tree (?) that almost reaches the edge of the relief. The tragic heroine has a rounded face, with long curls descending on either side of her face. Both mouths are open. Side B depicts a rural scene where a shepherd is on the left in front of a tree, wearing a thin tunic and

²⁷⁹ Bacchetta 2006, 566.

²⁸⁰ D'Acunto 2008, 193.

²⁸¹ MANN inv. 120326.

²⁸² It measures 24 cm in length, 17.5 cm in height, and 2.8 cm in width. D'Acunto 2008, 190.

²⁸³ Bacchetta 2006, 567, proposes it might also be a comic mask.

²⁸⁴ Dwyer 1982, 75.

²⁸⁵ Bacchetta 2006, 567.

²⁸⁶ D'Acunto 2008, 190.

²⁸⁷ Dwyer 1982, 74. Bacchetta 2006, 567, said, "scattered polychromy residue."

²⁸⁸ MANN inv. 120334.

²⁸⁹ It measures 24.5 cm in length, 17.5 cm in height, and 3.5 cm in width. D'Acunto 2008, 194.

²⁹⁰ D'Acunto 2008, 194, says this is Side B.

holding a *pedum* in his right hand, facing three goats (Fig. 81). The goat in the foreground faces right, its head bent to graze. Two goat heads are above, facing each other. Dwyer recorded that traces of polychromy were recorded at the time of discovery.²⁹¹

Recontextualizing Experience

Moreso than in the previous case studies in this paper, the theatrical mask dominates the *oscilla*. However, like in the House of Marcus Lucretius, they are unworn and invite the viewer to assume the actor's position. Not only does the image of the mask encourage contemplation of, and participation, in the theatrical performance, but theatrical masks in the House of Fortune are never depicted alone. Many of the pairings of masks face each other as though in conversation. Additionally, the superimposition of the masks suggests collaboration in a scene, especially as they look in similar directions. Significantly, the pairing tends to be of a male and female mask, but female characters in the theater were played by men.²⁹² The pairings, however, might emphasize a social hierarchy, also prevalent across the entire *oscilla* program.

Indeed, it is often the figure of Silenus paired with another mask (mostly female); the owner as interpreter and leader through the space might have resembled Silenus, the leader of the chorus. Chiron instructing Achilles and Marysas (if the identification stands) emphasize hierarchical and educational leadership. Perhaps even the bird-hunting scene on T114 recalls some sense of instruction, as the bird on the left watches the boy in action (whether it is learning to stay safe or to hunt might depend on how the viewer positions himself socially to the owner or his fellow guests). Bacchetta described the *oscilla* program of the House of Fortune as a series of “educational practices,” where there is a “civilizing” dimension of human activity in relation to

²⁹¹ Dwyer 1982, 74. Bacchetta 2006, 567, said, “scattered polychromy residue.”

²⁹² Boyle 2006, 19.

“wild nature.”²⁹³ The reason for the “educational” and more “liberal” scenes (e.g., not relating directly to Dionysiac cults as other *oscilla* programs), Bacchetta argued, was because of the owner’s commercial interests.²⁹⁴ While, yes, the *oscilla* program was catered and intentionally selected by the owner as a form of self-representation, there is more to be learned about how viewers might have interacted with the scenes and the movement.

The program emphasizes, too, a sense of competition, particularly through the animal scenes, like those of P48 and Side A of P47. Even the frontality of the mask on Side B of R37, Cupid on Side A of P50, and the swan on Side B of P48 confronts the viewer. The figures demand attention; the swan desires a confrontation, the Cupid seeks acknowledgment, and the tragic heroine directly includes the viewer in the scene. As P47 moved in the wind, the confrontation scene was activated, and the suspense of the outcome was emphasized as one came into contact with the floral design, which denied a resolution to the conflict. Additionally, the inverted design provoked a different outcome than expected, as a viewer would have been familiar with the upright design displayed in architectural sculpture, sarcophagi, and other visual media. The floral designs on both sides of the *pelta* are also in higher relief. They are larger than the animal figures, drawing attention away from the confrontation while simultaneously emphasizing it. As one views the tense scene, he also becomes cognizant of his own competition that might strike at any moment but may have a favorable outcome.

On the other hand, when P48 oscillated, the confrontation of the roosters was activated by the movement; its outcome is similarly denied and enhanced by the image of the swan who addresses the viewer directly. By pairing two confrontational scenes, neither is resolved, but neither reaches its climax. The more realistic rendering of the swan (in its action and detailing of

²⁹³ Bacchetta 2006, 322.

²⁹⁴ Bacchetta 2006, 322-323.

feathers) is also denied by the floating rosettes underneath the wings; the viewer realizes this is not a realistic rendition of a swan nor a realistic space. He is transported into this fictional landscape populated by these confrontational animals, with mythological creatures (the griffins), mythological figures (Daedalus, Achilles, Chiron, Marysas), and theatrical masks. The movement of the *pelta* emphasizes the fictional landscape while denying the viewer entry into it. Furthermore, as the *pelta* moves and activates both scenes of confrontation, the tension increases and encourages the viewer to be more active in his competition. As the owner was a freedman, it was important for him to assert his social and political status to his visitors; the *oscilla*, with their scenes of confrontation and competition, emphasized how the owner could elaborate on his status for and with his clientele. Indeed, as the owner was involved in commercial activity, it would have been clientele who would have funded the advancement of his positions.

Similarly, the bird-hunting scene on T114 emphasized the visitor's position as judge and judged in the social space of the peristyle. The bird on the left watches the youth hunt, and the two masks on the opposing side watch the outcome; the superimposed masks look toward a tree (one of the few clearly depicted and a part of the compositional scene), almost as though they await the outcome of the hunt. The movement of the *oscillum* supports the engagement between the two sides, as it is revealed what the masks are watching on the opposite side. The pairing of the satyr and maenad masks suggests the possibility of trickery and delusion in the bird-hunt scene; the youth does not notice the other, easier prey, who watches curiously. As floating masks appear in the decorative field, the viewer is denied access more harshly than elsewhere in the *oscilla* program; indeed, paired with the bird-hunting scene, the masks already appear in their own theatrical performance (or real-life scenario). However, the natural response invites more personal association than the other empty masks and human figures, which range from

mythological heroes to youths. To avoid being caught off guard or tricked, as the youth is by the other bird (with an audience who witnesses his slight), the viewer needed to realize the competition and social performance he must partake in within the peristyle.

Another sense of confrontation, or at least direct engagement with the viewer, occurs on Side A of R37 with the frontal mask of the tragic heroine and the Cupid on Side A of P50. Amongst a series of figures in profile (and indeed, in the case of Cupid, paired with opposing masks in profile), the frontality of the figures demands attention and direct eye contact. The significance of the reciprocity of gazes is evident in their drilled eyes (present, too, in many of the other masks!), where the viewer is tempted to participate in the theatrical scene depicted on R37 and interact with Cupid. Indeed, Side A of R37 is carved in much higher relief, demonstrating the necessity of engagement. As R37 moved in the wind, the setting into which the viewer would be drawn directly would be with the goatherd. Despite the frontal gaze, though, Side B calms the sense of competition, especially as the goats are quietly grazing under the watchful eye of the shepherd. The very figure of Silenus on Side A, whose attention is on the mask that engages the viewer, also calms the tension, as he is the chorus leader and a semi-benevolent figure. Silenus is one of the few indications that the theatrical masks depicted do not indicate tragedies; rather, they establish the peristyle and *oscilla* as objects in a *satyr play*.²⁹⁵ Tragedies and satyr plays were remarkably similar, different only in their choruses, which Silenus headed. As the tragic heroine's gaze captures the viewer, under Silenus's instruction, he also assumes the goats' position being herded on the opposite side; it is the owner who takes up the dominant position. The owner actively conducted and directed the viewer physically, visually, and intellectually to present impactful entertainment that sufficiently reflected his

²⁹⁵ Griffith 2015, 132.

wealth, knowledge, and cultural sensibilities. The *oscilla* were key components in this targeted display of social and political status.

When P50 shifted from the image of the frontally facing Cupid, who simultaneously demanded engagement through direct eye contact, the opposing and facing theatrical masks would remind the viewer of his position as judge and judged, actor and audience, competitor and collaborator. For the performance to be successful, it had to have an audience and actors; the owner provided numerous theatrical masks for the visitor to take up while setting the stage (literally!) of the peristyle as that of a satyr-play and fictional space, populated by animals and mythological creatures. Cupid's spread wings emphasize the external setting through his flying nature, echoed in the addition of a tree or floral designs in almost every other *oscilla*.

Additionally, the spread wings, paired with the theatrical masks of a satyr play, encouraged one to consider and expound on the similarities and differences between the other images of wings and the other masks. Significantly, the Silenus mask on P50 provoked the conversation about variety and standardization in the missing mustache and the inclusion of the inverted palmette (found mostly in the other animal scenes). Although Bacchetta labeled them as "rudimentary," the differences and similarities in the griffin protomes offered foundations for topics of erudition, especially as they were shifted slightly outwards to draw attention in various directions.

The intentionality of lines of sight is also evident on both sides of P49. Though a simple scene of two small birds naturally curious about the large hybrid flower in between them, the birds look in different directions; one turns behind him, and the other looks further up. The viewer might be encouraged to follow their gaze, noticing the detail in the inverted palmette that can be compared to the other types across the *oscilla* collection and in the architectural space of

the peristyle (where *acroteria* might have had similar palmettes). Additionally, the griffins' wattles are delineated in this piece, emphasizing the animal nature of the protome; the wattle designs also bleed into the compositional field. Both the birds and the griffins are animals animated by the wind, as the *oscilla* are, and as P49 moved, it reciprocally moved the animals and the viewer who moved through the space. Indeed, the inclusion of simple birds on the *oscilla* more concretely placed the viewer in the real space of the peristyle, just to be disoriented by the hybrid lotus-palmette and the other *oscilla*'s images which place the theatrical display and participation in a more fictional setting. On the other hand, the images of the birds, the floral designs, and the goatherd grazing reinforce the *locus amoenus* setting.

Just as the satyr-play elements and setting provoked conviviality, however, it also warned of social transgressions. The two superimposed masks on the opposing side of the images of Daedalus (R34 and R35) are, of those in the House of Fortune, the most traditionally depicted theatrical masks with their high *onkoi*. The tragic character of the masks, without Silenus necessarily present, interacts with the aftermath of Daedalus making the wings for his son. Indeed, the superimposition and direction of gaze to the seated human figure illustrated tension. As the shape of the rectangle likely was not as mobile as the *peltae* or tondi, the potentiality for slow transition between scenes also increased the tension of the tragic outcome. However, as I have illustrated here and elsewhere, the theatrical masks emphasize the social performance one must partake in within the peristyle space; the image of Daedalus warned against the transgressions against social orders and decorum through King Minos's and Icarus's greed and naivety. That there are two instances of the scene (again, serving as a perfect example of standardization and variety, especially in their stylistic carving and breaking of borders), paired with the image of Chiron and Achilles, reinforced the necessity to perform properly and follow

the instruction and guidance of the owner. The fictional settings and scenes made real the social responsibilities one had as they engaged convivially.

Conclusion

In the House of Fortune, where *oscilla* were replete with allusions to various parts to assume (through various types of theatrical masks and animal figures), the visitor would recognize the theatrical patronage of the owner and judge the success of his performance and stage. Beacham proposed the evocative setting of the peristyle, through its Hellenistic influences in structure and art and potentiality for theatrical displays, as a type of “amphitheatricalism.”²⁹⁶ As one moved through the space, with framed visions that were interrupted by the various forms of *oscilla* while connected through similar imagery, he, as in the actual amphitheater and theater spaces, would visualize social hierarchies while participating in the creation of them. The *oscilla*'s potential for movement was a character in the social performance, too, visually and physically engaging the viewer as the owner became the instructor and the lead, and he became the actor and audience. The owner was affiliated with commercial activities and of a sub-elite status; he needed to use his decorative program to illustrate his aspirations and exaggerate his social and political status. The *oscilla* operated as sites for contemplation and conversation amongst his clientele as they conducted business in the peristyle. The *oscilla*'s scenes required the viewers to realize the owner's status, sensibilities, and erudition and participate in the social performance accordingly. Dwyer identified the *oscilla* of the House of Fortune as of exceptionally poor quality, but the intentional pairing of scenes and groups, prolific and various forms, and consistency throughout the program might suggest that their value lay elsewhere.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ Beacham 2013, 404.

²⁹⁷ Supra n.229.

Conclusion

Understanding suspended objects in the Roman house is limited to depictions of gardens and illusionistic architectural landscapes since anchorage points on architecture, suspension methods (rope, chain, etc.), and suspension heights are preserved poorly.²⁹⁸ Other perishable suspended objects like garlands and objects of terracotta and wood do not survive beyond their visual depictions. Objects like *oscilla*, which could be later inset into a wall, were sometimes reused and thus not as easily identifiable.²⁹⁹ However, the physical object of the *oscillum* provides more stimulating conversations amongst ancient viewers and modern scholars than has been thus far recognized. The emphasis of modern scholarship on discovering a literary origin has stifled a thorough and well-rounded understanding of the double-sided and suspended *oscillum*. Bacchetta has argued that the objects have an “atmospheric dionysianism,” where the objects are commodified sacral objects that continue their ritualistic connotations while obtaining an ornamental value associated with the peristyle garden, a place of *otium*.³⁰⁰ However, the *oscillum* served more than a simple ornamental purpose that implied Dionysus’s presence. Indeed, the *oscillum* appears in the social nuclei of the *domus*, the atrium and the peristyle, and requires study as objects of Roman *decor*, where decoration informs and is informed by the social interactions with a space.

I experientially examined the *oscilla* programs in the colonnaded atrium of the House of the Telephus Relief in Herculaneum, and in the garden of the House of Marcus Lucretius, and in the primary peristyle of the House of Fortuna at Pompeii. The House of the Telephus Relief offers the foundation for an experiential approach to *oscilla*, as four tondi are currently

²⁹⁸ Bacchetta 2005b; Bacchetta 2006.

²⁹⁹ Balland and Goudineau 1967; Farrar 1998, 127. There is evidence of a rectangular *oscillum* or *pinax* inset into the wall of the south side of the west wall of the peristyle at the House of the Gilded Cupids.

³⁰⁰ *Supra* n.10.

reconstructed in situ. Although the understanding of the *oscilla* as reconstructed should be taken cautiously as the viewing conditions of the *oscilla* were undoubtedly different in antiquity, and no research has been done to understand the actual extent of movement of the marble objects, the House of the Telephus Relief revealed how the movement of *oscilla* animated the depicted active figures into a cautionary frenzy of *enthusiasmos* and ecstasy that warned the viewer of transgressions against the social order. For a house owned by a senator, such warnings were crucial to affirm social hierarchies.

When such preliminary observations of the effect of movement and stillness are applied to the *oscilla* of the House of Marcus Lucretius, it is revealed that there, the *oscilla* play an integral part in the separation and framing of the elevated garden space from the surrounding rooms. Occupied by static images of theatrical (satyric) masks and musical instruments, the *oscilla* provokes the viewer to assume the role of actor, satyr, and audience. The peristyle in the house of Marcus Lucretius incorporated all areas of the house, from corridors to reception areas; *oscilla* drew and kept attention to the space. The aristocratic owner emphasized his civic patronage through the theatrical stage and performance and, ultimately, reaffirmed his social and political status as a key figure in the local elite.

In the House of Fortuna, the *oscilla* program exemplifies the importance of variety, offering multiple different forms and images; paired images of conflict and cooperation in a fictional landscape of satyr-play, animals, and mythological figures provoke considerations of competition and conviviality in the social space of the peristyle and adjoining rooms. The movement of the *oscilla* animates the conflicts while the moments in stillness calm them; as the *oscillum* moves, the images of stillness become as animated as the viewer who contemplates them. The *oscilla* in the social space of the peristyle offered chances to assert the owner's power

through the creation of a fictional, theatrical landscape where one became aware of his role of judge and judged, actor and audience, and benefactee of the owner's patronage. For a freedman (and one involved in commercial activities), the *oscilla* proved his success and social status by displaying his increased wealth and erudition in the variety of forms, subtleties in composition, and, simply, the aggressiveness with which he approached his visitors, who were business clientele of similar or lower status.

This paper has argued that the iconography of the *oscillum* as a material artifact that is suspended and double-sided is not as simply reduced to standardized Dionysiac imagery. It is not as Taylor stated: "To the extent that the *iconography* carried on an *oscillum* refers back to the *oscillum* itself, as opposed to themes that were just as prevalent in many other media, it does so only in the most generalized way."³⁰¹ Rather, the standardization of imagery on the *oscilla* brings more attention to the differences in the compositions, especially on a singular object. Uniquely suspended and double-sided, the *oscillum* was visually engaging and psychologically impactful. Like the other decorations in the domestic sphere, especially in reception rooms, the objects served as foundations for conversations that communicated one's display of erudition and civic participation to his companions. In the atrium, the decoration required contemplation. It acted as sites of display for the owner's social and political status, aesthetic and cultural sensibilities, and erudition to all before one even necessarily conducted business with the *paterfamilias*. In the space of the peristyle, where one was "socially dependent" on the owner and his relationship with him, the *oscilla* elevated the owner and allowed the visitor to legitimize his social status alongside him. The *oscillum*, then, did not merely serve as an ornamental object with "atmospheric dionysianism" already present in the garden space. Rather, the *oscillum*, in its

³⁰¹ Taylor 2005, 84.

oscillation and stillness, guided the viewer through his social responsibilities and warned the viewer against transgressions against the social order.

Further Avenues of Research

As discussed throughout this paper, the arguments presented here are preliminary and require more research. Experimental archaeology would strengthen the possibilities of experiential studies as one would be able to understand how the different forms of *oscilla* would be affected by the elements, as well as to what extent they would even be affected as marble (rather than plaster) objects. In addition, experimental reconstructions would be able to explore the different methods of suspension and the heights of suspension to further understand the significance of the *oscillum* on the lines of sight through the spaces. However, such experimentation would also need to consider the more enclosed spaces of the colonnades of the atrium and peristyle; some colonnades, like the House of Marcus Lucretius and the House of the Telephus Relief, supported upper stories, further diminishing the exposure to elements. Such research to understand conditions for movement more accurately would greatly enhance one's understanding of the domestic atrium and peristyle's decorative program and of the experience of the decorative elements within.

In addition, this study removed certain *oscilla* from each program due to space limitations. To fully understand the programs of each space, however, and the interactions between *oscilla*, it is necessary to expand the reconstruction of experience to include all extant fragments. Furthermore, this paper was limited to understanding the *oscilla* in relation to the larger decorative program only very broadly. As the imagery on the *oscilla* is from a standardized repertoire, it is important to consider how the various objects would have reflected and built upon each other. However, this is not how the objects would have been experienced in

antiquity, as they were part of a larger decorative program with the free-standing sculptures in the atrium and peristyle (especially the double-sided *pinakes*), wall paintings (some that even include *oscilla*), and portable furniture.

Lastly, the present study broadened the potential research avenues concerning double-sided and suspended objects in the Roman domestic sphere. Such a methodology and observations could also be applied to suspended objects in public colonnades, including *oscilla* (though not as well attested in the material record), garlands, curtains, and theatrical masks. A viewer's relationship with a double-sided stationary object is different than with the mobile *oscillum*, and such objects and relationships should be put into conversation. However, this paper offered the beginnings of applying experiential studies to the broader domestic sphere by challenging the notion that standardized imagery primarily served simply to proliferate well-known themes. The variety in each *oscillum*'s scene and object, just as it exists in wall paintings that are well studied, deserves more attention in academic scholarship. This paper has begun to close that gap.

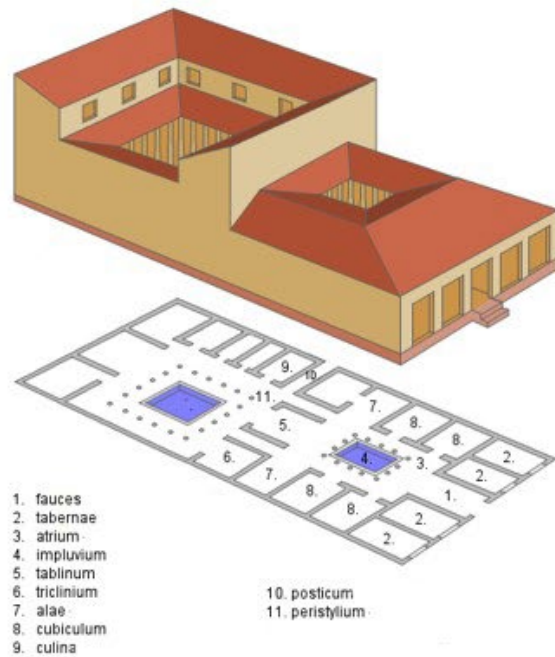


Figure 1. Plan of a typical Roman house. (Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license).



Figure 2. North portico of colonnaded atrium, 2019, House of the Telephus Relief, Herculaneum. (Photo by Lucamato, Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial License v.4).



Figure 3. From *tablinum*, looking at reconstructed garden with sculptures, 1874, House of Marcus Lucretius, Pompeii. (Photo by Michel Amodio, courtesy of Rick Bauer. From © Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.pompeiiinpictures.com, Courtesy of the MiC – Archaeological Park of Pompeii).



Figure 4. East portico of peristyle, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (Photo from Jashemski 1993, fig. 274).



Figure 5. Room 5, *cubiculum*, upper part of north wall, 2009, House of the Orchard, Pompeii. (From © Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.pompeiiinpictures.com, Courtesy of the MiC – Archaeological Park of Pompeii).



Figure 6. *Oecus* 32, garden fresco, 2008, House of the Golden Bracelet, Pompeii. (Photo by Oleg Belaychuk. From © Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.pompeiiinpictures.com, Courtesy of the MiC – Archaeological Park of Pompeii).



Figure 7. Drawing of west wall of garden room, 1880, House of Optatio, Pompeii. (After DAIR 83.123. Photo © Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abteilung Rom Arkiv. From © Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.pompeiiinpictures.com. Courtesy of the MiC – Archaeological Park of Pompeii).

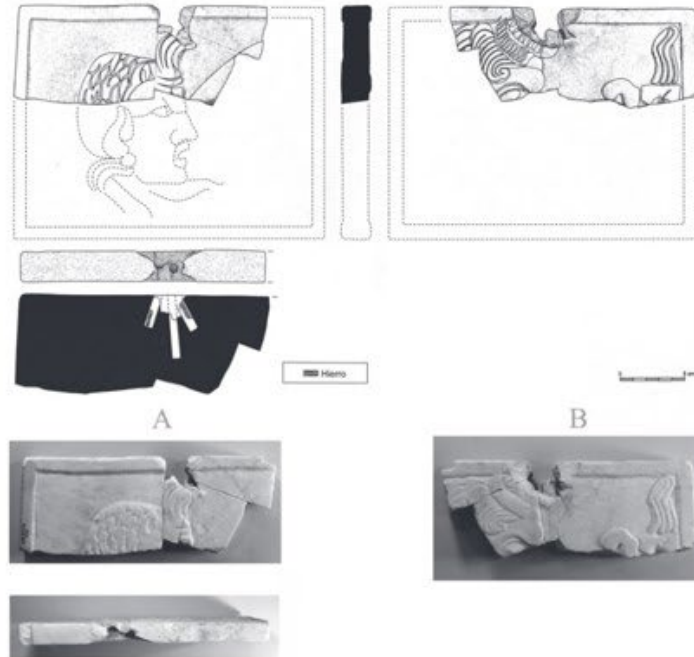


Figure 8. Upper edge and preserved suspension anchorage of rectangular *oscillum*, Zaragoza, Spain. (After Galve Izquierdo 2012, p. 223).



Figure 9. Lunette, upper south wall, Room I on lower terrace, 2010, Villa of the Papyri, Herculaneum. (Photo courtesy of Michael Binns. From © Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.herculaneum.uk. Su concessione del MiC – Parco Archeologico di Ercolano).



Figure 10. Right side of marble cinerary urn, from the Via Appia, Vatican Gregoriano Profano Museum. (After Bacchetta 2005b, fig. 5).



Figure 11. Campanian terracotta plaque, *palaestra* colonnade, mid-1st century BCE to mid-1st century CE, Louvre Museum, inv. S 799. (Photo by Anne Chauvet. © Musée du Louvre).



Figure 12. Garden fresco panels, 1st century CE, Miho Museum.



Figure 13. Tondo *oscillum*, Side A, ca. 1st century CE. (Photo by Cypsel, public domain).



Figure 14. Red-figure *skyphos*, Chiusi, Etruria, ca. 440 BCE. (Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, F 2589).



Figure 15. From entrance to peristyle, House of the Menander, Pompeii. (Photo by Carole Raddato, CC BY SA 2.0).



Figure 16. Atrium at *impluvium*, looking at *tablinum*, House of the Wooden Partition, Herculaneum. (Photo by Robert Hanson. From © Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.herculaneum.uk. Su concessione del MiC – Parco Archeologico di Ercolano).

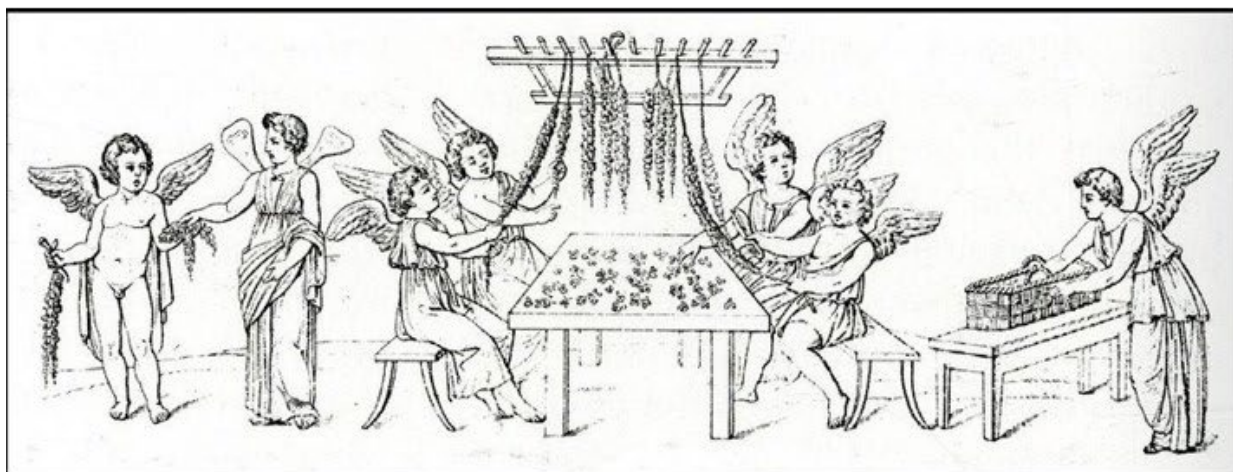


Figure 17. Drawing of a Pompeian wall painting, now lost. Cupids and psyches as flower dealers. (After Jashemski 1979, fig. 397).



Figure 18. Campanian terracotta plaque, *palaestra* colonnade with garlands, mid-1st century BCE to mid-1st century CE, Louvre Museum, inv. Cp 3832. (Photo by Anne Chauvet. © Musée du Louvre).



Figure 19. Engraving by Michel Félibien, depicting the front and the back of the Cup of the Ptolemies, 1706. (From *Histoire de l'Abbaye Royale de Saint-Denys en France*, 544–545, plate VI, public domain).



Figure 20. West wall, Room L, Villa of P. Fannius Syinstor, Boscoreale. Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, inv. 03.14.4. (Public domain).



Figure 21. Reconstructed *oscilla* in peristyle of House of the Gilded Cupids, Pompeii. (Photo from Jashemski 1979, fig. 60).



Figure 22. From Room O, looking east, House of the Gilded Cupids, Pompeii. (Photo by Stanley A. Jashemski. From the Wilhelmina and Stanley A. Jashemski archive in the University of Maryland Library, Special Collections, Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial License v.4).



Figure 23. Looking west across garden area towards large *triclinium* O, House of the Gilded Cupids, Pompeii. (Photo by Stanley A. Jashemski. From the Wilhelmina and Stanley A. Jashemski archive in the University of Maryland Library, Special Collections, Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial License v.4).



Figure 24. Plan showing location of Insula Orientalis I, Herculaneum. (Photo © Herculaneum Conservation Project and Brian Donovan).



Figure 25. Plan of House of the Telephus Relief, Herculaneum. (Photo by Robert Hanson. From © Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.herculaneum.uk. Su concessione del MiC – Parco Archeologico di Ercolano).



Figure 26. T42, Side A, maenad *oscillum*, House of the Telephus Relief, Herculaneum. (Photo courtesy of Klaus Heese. From © Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.herculaneum.uk. Su concessione del MiC – Parco Archeologico di Ercolano).



Figure 27. T42, Side B, maenad *oscillum*, House of the Telephus Relief, Herculaneum. (Photo by Mentnafunangann, CC BY-SA 4.0).



Figure 28. T43, Side A, reconstructed, 2015, House of the Telephus Relief, Herculaneum. (Photo by Martasio, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International).



Figure 29. T43, Side B, plaster cast, 2013, House of the Telephus Relief, Herculaneum. (Photo courtesy of Buzz Ferebee. From © Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.herculaneum.uk. Su concessione del MiC – Parco Archeologico di Ercolano).



Figure 30. T44, Side A, Pan and *cista mystica oscillum*, 2017, House of the Telephus Relief, Herculaneum. (Photo ©Alyson Jackson 2017, <http://www.the-silk-route.co.uk/italyHerculaneum.htm>).



Figure 31. T44, Side B, Satyr and fruit *oscillum*, 2008, House of the Telephus Relief, Herculaneum. (Photo by J, <http://bellcurveoflife.blogspot.com/2009/02/herculaneum-house-of-relief-of-telephus.html>).



Figure 32. T45, Side A, hippocampus *oscillum*, 2008, House of the Telephus Relief, Herculaneum. (Photo by J, <http://bellcurveoflife.blogspot.com/2009/02/herculaneum-house-of-relief-of-telephus.html>).



Figure 33. T45, Side B, sea panther *oscillum*, House of the Telephus Relief, Herculaneum. (From © Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.herculaneum.uk, Su concessione del MiC - Parco Archeologico di Ercolano).



Figure 34. North portico, displaying Side A, Side B, Side A, Side A obliquely of the tondi *oscilla*, 2017, House of the Telephus Relief, Herculaneum. (Photo by Miguel Hermoso Cuosta, CC BY-SA 4.0).



Figure 35. North portico, displaying Side A(?), Side B, Side A, Side B of the tondi *oscilla*, 2016, House of the Telephus Relief, Herculaneum (Photo by sébastien amiet;1, CC BY SA 2.0).



Figure 36. North portico, displaying oblique views of tondi *oscilla*, 2013, House of the Telephus Relief, Herculaneum (Photo courtesy of Buzz Ferebee. © Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.herculaneum.uk, Su concessione del MiC - Parco Archeologico di Ercolano).



Figure 37. Looking up at T44, Side A, 2015, House of the Telephus Relief, Herculaneum. (Photo by Mentnafunangann, CC BY-SA 4.0).



Figure 38. Plan of the House of Marcus Lucretius (on the Via Stabiana), Pompeii. (From ©Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.pompeiiinpictures.com, Courtesy of the MiC - Archaeological Park of Pompeii).



Figure 39. Archaeological Park of Pompeii, House of Marcus Lucretius outlined in blue, 2023. (From <http://pompeiiites.org/en/pompeii-map/>).



Figure 40. From entrance from Via Stabiana to peristyle, House of Marcus Lucretius, Pompeii. (Photo courtesy of Aude Durand, ©Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.pompeiiinpictures.com, Courtesy of the MiC - Archaeological Park of Pompeii).



Figure 41. T112, Side A, sacrifice, House of Marcus Lucretius, Pompeii (After Kuivalainen 2019, fig. 45).



Figure 42. T112, Side B, offering, House of Marcus Lucretius, Pompeii (After Kuivalainen 2019, fig. 46).



Figure 43. R33, Side A, maenad and satyr masks, House of Marcus Lucretius, Pompeii (After Kuivalainen 2019, fig. 53).



Figure 44. R33, Side B, dolphin pair, House of Marcus Lucretius, Pompeii (After Kuivalainen 2019, fig. 54).



Figure 45. P42, Side A, satyr mask and staffs, House of Marcus Lucretius, Pompeii (After Kuivalainen 2019, fig. 47).



Figure 46. P42, Side B, apples, House of Marcus Lucretius, Pompeii (After Kuivalainen 2019, fig. 48).



Figure 47. P43, Side A, satyr and lyre, House of Marcus Lucretius, Pompeii (After Kuivalainen 2019, fig. 51).



Figure 48. P43, Side B, *syrinx* and *pedum*, House of Marcus Lucretius, Pompeii (After Kuivalainen 2019, fig. 52).



Figure 49. P44, Side A, satyr, House of Marcus Lucretius, Pompeii (After Kuivalainen 2019, fig. 49).



Figure 50. P44, Side B, dolphin, House of Marcus Lucretius, Pompeii (After Kuivalainen 2019, fig. 50, photograph from MANN 1927).



Figure 51. 3D Modeled reconstruction from atrium to peristyle of House of Marcus Lucretius, Pompeii. (After Trentin 2014, fig. 4.7).



Figure 52. Detail of tondo *oscillum*, west wall, garden, 2009, House of Orpheus, Pompeii. (From © Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.pompeiiinpictures.com Courtesy of the MiC - Archaeological Park of Pompeii).



Figure 53. Detail of tondo *oscillum*, west wall, Room 18, garden, from above window, 2009, House of Orpheus, Pompeii. (From © Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.pompeiiinpictures.com Courtesy of the MiC - Archaeological Park of Pompeii).



Figure 54. East wall garden fresco, *Oecus* 32, House of the Golden Bracelet, Pompeii. (Photo by Stefano Bolognini, from ©Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.pompeiiinpictures.com, Courtesy of the MiC - Archaeological Park of Pompeii).



Figure 55. South wall garden fresco, Summer *triclinium* 31, House of the Golden Bracelet, Pompeii. (From ©Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.pompeiiinpictures.com, Courtesy of the MiC - Archaeological Park of Pompeii).



Figure 56. Location of House of Fortune in Regio IX marked by black box, Pompeii. (From ©Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.pompeiiinpictures.com, Courtesy of the MiC - Archaeological Park of Pompeii).

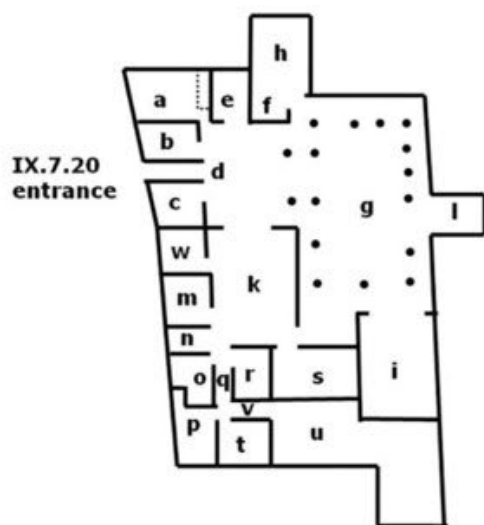


Figure 57. Plan of House of Fortune. (From ©Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.pompeiiinpictures.com, Courtesy of the MiC - Archaeological Park of Pompeii).



Figure 58. East portico from atrium, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (From DAIR 72.560, Photo © Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abteilung Rom, Arkiv. From © Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.pompeiiinpictures.com, Courtesy of the MiC - Archaeological Park of Pompeii).



Figure 59. T113, Side A, Chiron and Achilles, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXV.92).

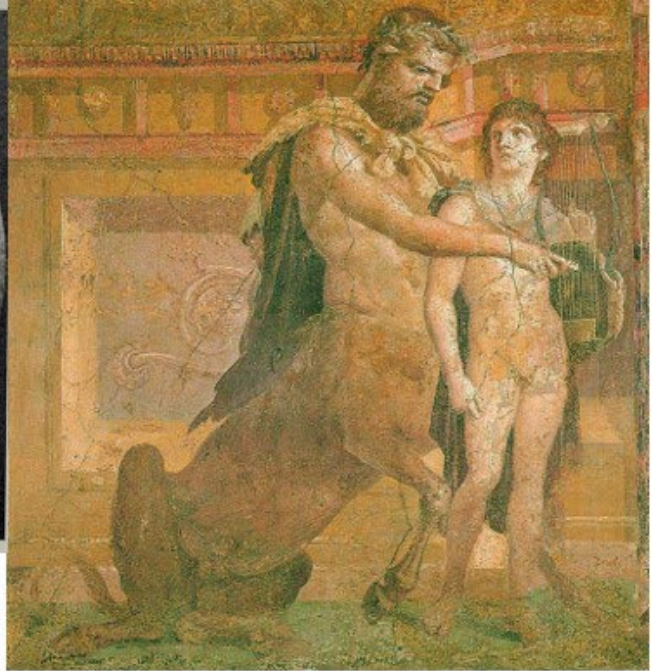


Figure 60. Chiron instructing Achilles, fresco, Basilica, Herculaneum, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (inv. 9109).



Figure 61. T113, Side B, Marysas, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXV.93).



Figure 62. T114, Side A, Bird hunting, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXV.94).



Figure 63. T114, Side B, Floating masks, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXV.95).



Figure 64. P46, Side A, Scallop and facing masks, one with hair net, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXVI.97).



Figure 65. P46, Side B, Scallop and facing tragic masks, one veiled, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXVI.96).



Figure 66. P47, Side A, Rooster and animal, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXVI.99).



Figure 67. P47, Side B, floral design, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXVI.98).



Figure 68. P48, Side A, confronted roosters, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXVII.100).



Figure 69. P48, Side B, swan, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXVII.101).



Figure 70. P49, Side A, distracted facing birds, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXVIII.105).



Figure 71. P49, Side B, facing concentrated birds, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXVIII.104).



Figure 72. P50, Side A, frontal Cupid, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXVII.102).



Figure 73. P50, Side B, facing masks and palmette, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXVII.103).



Figure 74. R34, Side A, high *onkoi*, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXX.112).



Figure 75. R34, Side B, Daedalus, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXX.114).



Figure 76. R35, Side A, mustache-less superimposed masks, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXIX.110).



Figure 77. R35, Side B, Daedalus?, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXIX.111).



Figure 78. R36, Side A, mask on tree, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXIX.108).



Figure 79. R36, Side B, opposing masks with closed mouths, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXIX.109).



Figure 80. R37, Side A, frontal tragic heroine, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXVIII.106).

Figure 81. R37, Side B, goatherd, House of Fortune, Pompeii. (After Dwyer 1982, Plate XXVIII.107).



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