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The other classical body: cupids as mediators in Roman visual culture

A dissertation presented

by

Elizabeth Mitchell

to

The *Department of the Classics*

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

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Ruth Bielfeldt Elizabeth Mitchell

The other classical body:

cupids as mediators in Roman visual culture

Abstract

The myriad cupids of Roman visual culture typically attract one of two responses: either they are seen as replicates of the god of love, Eros or Amor, or they fade into the background as ornamental bodies so banal that they preclude any focused attention at all. This dissertation offers a reconsideration of these figures. It suggests that one of the driving features behind cupids' success is their ability to act as mediators – not just between lovers, or between divine and human realms, but also in a more straightforwardly visual sense: cupids are one of the most vital connective tools of the artist's repertoire, used to link together different parts of an object or image surface, or to gesture outwards from the constructed environment of the artwork to the space of the viewer. As such, they are best understood not as isolated iconographic units but in relation to the surfaces, spaces, and other bodies on, in, or around which they are found.

Cupids are not simply neutral units of visual syntax, however; they possess distinctive bodies which make significant demands on the viewer even before they are considered within wider contexts. Combining the divine, the infantile, the birdlike and the servile in one body, their behaviour is typically tactile,

tender, caring, playful, and exploratory. I argue that the embedding of such tactile, mobile, marginal bodies within the built environment works to emphasise and inflect the viewers' own sensory relations to their surroundings, calling into question the boundaries between image and ornament, touch and vision, viewer and viewed, and facilitating a more fluid and exploratory relationship between viewer and visual-material world.

Ever responsive, cupid bodies can resonate in different ways depending on the medium and social context in which they are employed, and on the other bodies (real or represented, living or dead) which come within their orbit. In successive chapters, I focus on the cupids found on domestic and bathhouse mosaics from 2nd-5th century CE North Africa and Roman Syria, on sarcophagi from 2nd-3rd century Italy and Asia Minor, in a subset of 1st century CE Pompeian wall paintings and on a 1st century CE imperial temple. Focus on groups of objects in different media and from different time periods and geographic regions allows a sense both of the underlying stability of the figure type, and of the constellation of ways in which cupids can be manipulated by artists and patrons and understood by viewers in different settings. I look at their interrelations with the dominant bodies of these contexts – from the corpse interred within a sarcophagus to statues of emperors within an imperial temple – and at the ways in which they interact and contrast with other "ornamental" figures such as birds, gorgoneia, or nikes. In Chapter 4, I argue that the acts of mediation, support, and care performed by fantastical bodies can never be entirely separated from comparable acts performed by human actors, and reflect on the

use of cupids to reinforce, or to transfigure beyond recognition, particular visions of power relations within a highly stratified social order.

Cupids are pervasive and distinctive enough that no understanding of visual culture in the world of the Roman Empire can be complete without an understanding of their place in it. As well as offering reasons for the popularity of cupids *per se*, a more nuanced account of how these bodies work within larger object contexts contributes to ongoing discussions on the role of the sensory within Roman viewing, on the ways in which figural ornament shapes the lived environment of its human user-viewers, and on the representation of tenderness and interpersonal care in Roman culture.

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Fig. 3.31 Sarcophagus with cupids holding weapons on the lid, ca. 210 CE, from the so-called "Licinian" tomb on the Via Salaria, Rome. Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, inv. 23.36. Image: Walters Art Museum.

Fig. 3.32 Sarcophagus with cupids flanking a shield and two vignettes of Psyche disarming cupid, 2nd century CE, unknown provenance. Passed through Sotheby's, London (14.12.95, 146). Image: Schauenburg 1997, fig. 7.

Fig. 3.33 Sarcophagus with nereids holding armour, first half of 2nd century CE, provenance unknown. Belvedere Courtyard, Vatican Museums, Rome. Image: *ASR* V, 1, pl. 46.

Fig. 3.34 a Sarcophagus, 140-150 CE, probably Rome. H. 27,5 cm; L. 110 cm. Staatliche Museen, Antikensammlung, Berlin, inv. Sk 855. Image: *ASR* V, 2,1, pl. 1, fig. 1.

Fig. 3.34 b, c Details of **3.34 a**.

Fig. 3.34 d Detail of **3.34 a**.

Fig. 3.35 Sarcophagus, 140-160 CE, probably Rome. Villa Albani, Rome, inv. 291. *ASR* V, 2,1, pl. 1, fig. 3.

Fig. 3.36 Drawing of sarcophagus shown in **Fig. 3.33**. Codex Pighianus fol. 94 (Ms.lat.fol.61 p. 92 v), ca. 1550. Image: *ASR* V, 2,1, pl. 1, fig. 2.

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Fig. 3.38 a Sarcophagus, 140-160 CE. Pisa, Camposanto, inv. C11 int. (XXV). ASR V, 2,1, pl. 1, fig. 5.

Fig. 3.38 b Detail of **3.38 a**.

Fig. 3.39 Silver cup, 1st century CE, Berthouville. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques, inv. 56.6. Image: Lapatin 2014, fig. 26.

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Fig. 4.19 Detail of a wall painting showing a cupid flanked by two big cats, 71-79 CE, upper right-hand zone of the east wall, tablinum 11, House of the Ancient Hunt (Pompeii VII.4.48). In situ. Image: Allison—Sear 2002, fig. 109.

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Fig. 4.24 Luna marble relief of a cupid holding a garland, likely from cella façade, Temple of Venus Genetrix. Museo dei Fori Imperiali, Rome, inv. nos. FC 1020, 1320, 1000, 1319, 1339, 1216, 1051. Image: EM.

Fig. 4.25 Reconstruction drawing of a relief of cupids sacrificing bulls, probably from the external side walls of the cella, Temple of Venus Genetrix. Museo dei Fori Imperiali, Rome, inv. nos. FC 1011, FC 1017. Image: Milella 2007, fig. 122.

Fig. 4.26 Luna marble relief of cupids sacrificing bulls, probably from the front wall of the cella, Temple of Venus Genetrix. Museo dei Fori Imperiali, Rome (FC 1021, FC 1008, FC 1016). Image: EM.

Fig. 4.27 Luna marble relief of cupids sacrificing, Temple of Venus Genetrix. Torlonia Collection, Villa Albani, Rome, inv. 644. Only the right-hand cupid is original. Image: Allroggen-Bedel—Bol 1994 Vol. IV, pl. 176.

Fig. 4.28 Luna marble frieze showing cupids holding weapons and vessels, from the interior of the cella, Temple of Venus Genetrix. Musei dei Fori Imperiali, Rome, inv. FC 4503. Image: Roger Ulrich.

Fig. 4.29 Luna marble relief showing cupids carrying an amphora and an unidentified object, internal cella frieze, Temple of Venus Genetrix. Musei Capitolini, Magazzino sculture, inv. S 1524. Image: Parisi Presicce 2008: 19.

Fig. 4.30 Soffit relief from architrave, Temple of Venus Genetrix. Reconstructed in situ. Image: Milella 2007: 118.

Fig. 4.31 Detail of soffit relief from architrave, Temple of Venus Genetrix. Image: Milella 2007: 119.

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Fig. 4.33 Relief of cupids pouring libations from the temenos colonnade of the Forum of Trajan. Museo Pio Gregoriano Profano, Vatican City, inv. 9700. Image: Packer 1997, fig. 79.

Fig. 4.34 Relief of a griffin and a cupid pouring a libation from the temenos colonnade of the Forum of Trajan. Museo Pio Gregoriano Profano, Vatican City, inv. 9648. Image: Packer 1997, fig. 80.

Fig. 4.35 Frieze with cupid emerging from scrolls, Basilica Ulpia, inv. nos. 2671, 2672, 2780. Image: Packer 1997, fig. 140.

Fig. 5.1 Wall painting showing a woman painting a priapic herm, aided by a small boy whose naked body and cloak draw on the iconography of cupids, 62-79 CE, House of the Surgeon (Pompeii VI.1.10, room 19). Museo Nazionale Archeologico, Naples, inv. 9018. Image: Coarelli et al. 2002: 217.

Fig. 5.2 Wall painting showing a cupid pouring water into a basin so that Narcissus can observe his own reflection, 62-79 CE, House of M. Fabius Rufus (Pompeii VII.16.22). In situ. Image: Jackie and Bob Dunn.

Chapter 1

Introduction

I. Why are there so many cupids in Roman visual culture?

The visitor to any collection of Greco-Roman antiquities is guaranteed at some point in their visit to find themselves face to face with a cupid. Cupids or erotes are the most widely replicated bodies of Greco-Roman antiquity, found across almost all media on which any kind of figuration appears, and with a geographical and chronological reach not exceeded by any other figure type. They are found in miniature on tiny gemstones and in the concave image-surfaces of terracotta lamps, on the monumental stone friezes of theatres and temples, on tombs and in private houses, in freestanding sculpture and relief, in fresco, mosaic, stucco, and textile form. They are found as far from the Mediterranean basin as Gandhara in modern Pakistan, where under the Kushan empire of the 1st-3rd centuries they were employed in a wide range of image types.[1] First taking on the form of small children in the early Hellenistic period, they were still being depicted in a similar guise almost a millennium later; their use in the very public context of church mosaic floors in the 6th-century CE Levant marks them out as one of the very few mythological-fantastical figure types to survive the transition to Christian late antiquity.[2]

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[1] See e.g. Zwalf 1996: 31 and via index; Pons 2008; Filigenzi 2008 Cats. 202, 219.
[2] Toynbee—Ward-Perkins 1950: 37.

For many viewers and in many contexts, the most immediate association of these figures would have been with Eros or Amor, the god of love, or with Cupido, the god or personification of desire. Where several of them are shown together, they can be identified as *erotes*, *amores*, or *cupidines*, half-brothers to the love god or *vernuli* of Venus, who also carry connotations of love and desire, albeit with a lesser narrative and religious charge than the god himself.[3] While the literary traditions surrounding Eros/Amor/Cupido are complex and contradictory,[4] such identifications provide these figures with an iconographic fixed point, allowing us to explain their presence in an image or on an object with relative confidence: they are divinities who preside over love and desire, and they bring an air of eroticism and romance to the contexts in which they are found.

Faced with the sheer numbers of cupids to be found in Roman visual culture, however, and with the myriad ways in which they are used, the characteristic "love" seems inadequate to the task of explanation. Where they hold up garlands or *tabulae ansatae*, gather in the vintage, or playfully circumnavigate mosaic waves on the backs of dolphins, it is difficult to see eroticism either as the driving force behind the artist's or patron's intention, or as the central touchstone of the viewer's reception. As much as they are bearers of symbolic meaning, cupids are the prime filler bodies of Roman visual culture, banal, inoffensive, adaptable figures available to soften hard corners, provide or undercut symmetry, or add a few more faces to fill the gaps in a sarcophagus relief. Ubiquity perpetuates its own success, and by the time period from which this study draws its material,

[3] See the definitions provided by Philostratus the Elder *Imagines* I.6.1 and Claudian *Epithalamium* v. 72-77, discussed below, and Apuleius *Met*. 5, 29.
[4] See *LIMC* Vol. III.1: 850 (Eros) and 952-3 (Eros/Amor, Cupido).

the early centuries of the common era, they were commonplace enough that there was probably very little sustained reflection by individual artists, patrons, or viewers about what it might mean to insert a cupid into an image. In such circumstances it is easy to dismiss them as possessing very little meaning to be uncovered and analysed, and much of the time, this is probably how the viewer is expected to respond, processing them as little more than pleasant – or unnecessary – ornament.

The suggestion of this dissertation is that their banality may be one of the most interesting things about cupids.[5] Looking beyond the love god(s), it focuses on the bodies and activities of these winged infants, asking not so much what they *mean* as what they *do* in the many contexts in which they are found. It interrogates the physical composition of their bodies, and the ways in which they interact with adjacent imagery and with the built environment – where they look, stretch, and touch, and how. An underpinning assumption of this approach is that, even more than for most other figures, it makes little sense to study cupids in isolation. Cupids are interconnecting, reactive, contrasting figures, frequently facing in two directions at once, continually directing the eyes of the viewer to something beyond themselves. It is in relation to other objects and other bodies that their meanings and functions are constituted, and it is in relation to these other objects and bodies that their ubiquity in the Roman world should be understood. Although they are not alone in this privileged capacity for

[5] The defense of banality is not an original position to take; Benjamin 1988 [1933] talks of a movement towards 'esteem for the insignificant' ('Andacht zum Unbedeutenden') among art historians of his own day, while Schor 1987 has provided the main impetus for more recent discussions on the politics (and in particular the gender politics) of focusing on or ignoring detail.

connectivity, and although they form only one component part of the much larger phenomenon of the enlivened built environment – one might think, for example, of the twisting tritons and serenely floating nereids who so often appear alongside them – I will argue that the mediation of cupids is distinct from those of these other figures, filling a unique niche in the complex ecostystem of Roman visual culture. But by dealing critically with cupids, I shall argue, we can also open up channels for thinking more broadly about the ways in which figural ornament of different types is embedded within larger environments.

After the present introductory chapter, which looks at the literary and visual development history of erotes/cupids and introduces a series of framing methodological considerations, chapters 2 and 3 are structured by medium, with Chapter 2 focusing on mosaics from Roman Syria and North Africa, and Chapter 3 on sarcophagi from Rome and Asia Minor. While focus on these two different object groups entails different chronological parameters (the mosaics stretch from the second to the fifth centuries CE, and in one case even into the sixth, while the sarcophagi are from the second and third centuries CE), the division by media allows me to highlight ways in which cupids mediate not only within the representational world, but also between the constructed world of objects and architecture and the world of the viewer. Chapter 2 opens up a constellation of ways in which cupids inflect engagement with ornamental surfaces and with the domestic built environment more generally, while Chapter 3 draws attention to the quite different connotations of cupids' mediation in a context of death and the tomb. My fourth chapter introduces a social angle, asking whether the visual roles performed by cupids can ever be separated from real bodily hierarchies

and mediating bodies; it explores these questions within both a domestic context, looking at 1st-century CE Campanian wall paintings in which cupids surround more powerful bodies, and within the imperial, very public space of the temple of Venus Genetrix in the Forum of Caesar at Rome, which under Trajan or Hadrian was covered inside and out with relief-carved cupids . Finally, an epilogue asks whether cupids offer the viewer a distinct way of approaching Roman visual culture, and to what degree this approach can be set within broader discussions of Roman viewing.

II. Previous scholarship on cupids

In taking a contextual approach, my study differs considerably from previous accounts of cupids, which almost invariably arrange their material chronologically and/or iconographically, or see the clarification of chronological and iconographic questions as the most important issues at stake. This is especially the case for the encyclopedic studies – the *RAC* (1966) entry on 'Eros' by A. Rumpf, and the *LIMC* (1986) entries on 'Eros' by Antoine Hermary, Hélène Cassimatis, and Rainer Vollkommer, and on 'Eros/Amor, Cupido' by Nicole Blanc and François Gury. Although the commentary associated with Blanc and Gury's 'Amor/Cupido' article touches on several of the issues which will concern me here, the iconographic remit of the *LIMC* volumes means that little space can be given there to cupids' roles in larger visual and material contexts. Also focused on situating iconography and iconology within a chronological framework is

Elisa Pellegrini's *Eros nella grecia arcaica e classica: iconografia e iconologia* (2009), the fullest account of Eros in pre-Hellenistic imagery. While Pellegrini incorporates objects from many different media, she does not discuss in any detail the relationship between these figures and the object surfaces on which they are placed; she also collapses Eros and erotes into a single category, dominated by Eros in his role as love god.

The only monograph to date to focus on Roman cupids has been Roger Stuveras' *Le putto dans l'art romain* (1969). Stuveras' discussion is alert to the ambiguities and malleability of the type, and his use of the word *putto* in his title signals from the start a rejection of the automatic assumption of these figures as love gods. A review by Jocelyn Toynbee criticises him for failing to identify a single unifying notion behind the figures, and suggests as the missing link 'abundance of uninhibited vitality',[6] but, and while Toynbee does indeed identify a pervasive characteristic of cupid imagery, one of the main strengths of this book is its openness to the different ways in which cupids can be characterised. However, Stuveras too orders his material by broad iconographic category (*Le putto et le monde divin; Le putto dans les scenes de genre*), and for the most part – a function in large part of the time at which the book was written – does not discuss the role of object context in shaping the ways in which cupids were understood and experienced by their viewers.

Cupids have not transferred well from specific studies into more thematic and discursive literature on ancient visual culture. Despite their ubiquity, survey

[6] Toynbee 1971: 465.

books on ancient art offer them almost no specific attention,[7] and perhaps because they give the sense of being so easy to look at and understand, there is a widespread tendency to assign to them a single, often symbolic, meaning, and then to forgo any further analysis of function or significance. So, for example, cupids on garland sarcophagi are described variously as shorthands for love (Işık), prosperity (Smith) and childhood (Papagianni);[8] while none of these associations is wrong, none provides more than a partial account of why the figures in question are so often found on these sarcophagi, and each definition distorts in a different way. There are of course sustained and reflective engagements with cupids on specific objects and object types, and I will engage with many of these – Peter Kranz on the so-called "Dionysiac" sarcophagi from Rome, for example, and Lori Neuenfeldt on Antiochene mosaics – in the course of my own discussion. But there has been no attempt to think across object categories about the visual and affective strategies associated with the use of cupids, and perhaps in consequence, a sense of their multifaceted nature is usually missing in the wider literature on ancient art and culture. It is striking how rarely cupids have made their way out of discussions of specific object

[7] Most survey books only mention cupids in passing. The main locus of commentary on their role beyond personifying love is in discussions of the Venus Genetrix frieze (Turcan 1995: 144; Ramage and Ramage 1995: 144; Strong 1988: 128-129). They are sometimes connected to the afterlife on sarcophagi (Toynbee 1965: 100; Ramage and Ramage 1995: 230). Donald Strong is the only author of a general book to consider putti (his prefered term) as a phenomenon, and devotes a paragraph, an expansion of his discussion of Venus Genetrix, to their diverse possibilities. Cornelia Isler-Kerényi, in a chapter in the edited Oxford Handbook on Greek and Roman Art and Architecture (Marconi 2017: 572), also offers a more nuanced, if brief, appraisal of how cupid bodies function in images: she says in relation to the marine thiasos that 'the naturalism of the bodies, desirable and yet unreal, directs the viewer towards the unthinkable', and suggests that something similar may be going on in images of erotes and putti.
[8] Işık 2006: 78; Smith 2008: 389; Papagianni 2016: 99-102.

categories and into the growing subfields focused on ornament, on touch and the representation of emotions other than love, on the construction of *Lebenswelt* in architectural contexts, or on the experience and practice of Roman art viewing – all areas to which, it seems to me, they have major contributions to make.

III. The tyranny of Eros

As far as possible, I hope to escape in this study the all-consuming hermeneutic lens of love and of the god/s Eros/Amor/Cupido,[9] reasserting instead the contribution of less easily verbalised, intellectualised, narrativised characteristics to the propagation of the winged infants in Roman art. Eros is a persistent presence, however, and the precise line between the god of love and multiple cupids is not a clear-cut one. In some images, it is quite clear that a cupid is used to represent the love god. In others, such as the reliefs from Gandhara in which cupids are shown in the positions of worshippers, attendants or disciples on reliefs of the life of the Buddha, it seems probable that no explicit connection to Greco-Roman Eros would have been recognised by either artist or viewer.[10] These cases are straightforward, but there are many others which fall

[9] See Fliedner 1974 and Wlosok 1975 on the distinction between Amor and Cupido. Wlosok 1975: 177 summarises: The name Cupid is used 'to designate the solemn name of the love-god' in poetry and poetical prose, often in a context involving worship, sacrifices, and votives to Cupid and Venus. Amor, meanwhile, 'is used to designate the love-god Eros especially as a literary figure'. 'Amor frequently bears the signs of the personification of an abstract idea rather than a concrete divine figure.'

[10] On non-classical associations of the "erotes" found in Gandharan art see Zwalf 1996: 31 (with bibliography), 44; they have been linked with the 500 children of

in the hazy middle ground between them. Sometimes a lone cupid is depicted, but with none of the accoutrements of the love god and no narrative role associated with Eros to confirm his identity. At other times, multiple cupids are shown with the bows and arrows of Eros, but their replication makes it impossible to mark out any one figure as *the* god of love. Different images of cupids assign them different levels of erotic referentiality, although it is also a question of the expectations of the viewer. For many viewers, both ancient and modern, the sight of any cupid no doubt translated immediately into the word Eros, Amor, or Cupido, thereby acquiring a close relationship to both the god and to the abstract emotion of love. Indeed, it seems probable that the act of naming, requiring as it does the use of words which carry with them a raft of narrative and religious reference points, is a key point at which the meanings of cupids for their viewers mutate and ossify.

However much value there may be, then, in focusing on other properties of cupids, it is impossible to omit entirely their relationship to, and constitution of, *eros*. While I have chosen here not to make *eros* an organising theme, any consideration of cupids as "ornamental" figures must take account of a potential divine, narrative, emotive charge: a charge which will come up again and again in this study, and which will prove to be of great relevance for the popularity of cupids as framing, mediating figures.

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the goddess/demon Hariti, and with the yakshas, a type of nature spirit. It should be acknowledged that some eros imagery from Gandhara may well have assumed some knowledge of Eros as a mythological character – as, for example, the scene of Aphrodite punishing Eros on a 1st-2nd century CE steatite cosmetic palate now in the British Museum (Inv. no. 1973.0618.1).

IV. The origins and pre-Hellenistic development of erotes in Greek literature and visual culture

I begin by looking at the early development of Eros and erotes, in texts and in particular in imagery. While the cupids of Roman mosaics and sarcophagi have fundamentally different body types to the earliest erotes of Greek art, and while the range of activities in which they are shown had broadened considerably by the imperial period, there are also elements of their representation which remain remarkably constant. Features such as replication and the ability to be deployed as frame figures, weightlessness and mobility, and engagement with (particularly vegetal) ornament appear from the earliest instantiations onwards, a degree of longevity which suggests that they were important drivers in the proliferation of this figure type. In the pages which follow, I pay particular attention to the ways in which these enduring characteristics adapt to the changing visual conventions of different periods. I also ask to what extent the literary texts of various periods correspond to contemporary visual representations of erotes – and thus the extent to which they can be used as guides for thinking about the images.

A note on terminology: I will primarily employ the term cupid for the multiple figures found in visual contexts, but where images from the Greek-speaking world are under discussion in this chapter I refer to erotes. Where Greek and Latin texts are discussed, I have followed the usage of their authors – usually

eros or amor. To my Anglophone ears, putto brings with it too many connotations of the Italian baroque;[11] cupid, while it preserves a sense of the erotic, does not assert this aspect as forcefully as eros/erotes or amor/amores, which are much harder to separate from an idea of love. These are choices which are largely predetermined by my own cultural and linguistic background: Peter Kranz has noted that the choice of denominator for this figure type in modern scholarship corresponds closely to nationality/language, with German-language scholarship favouring eros/erotes, French scholarship amour, cupidon, putto, Italian scholarship amorino or puttino, and Anglophone scholarship cupid.[12]

a. Winged daimones and erotes in imagery of the sixth century BCE

The visual history of erotes qua figure-type begins with a series of images which have no relationship at all to the love god, or even to eroticism. Early Greek images of erotes have the bodies not of infants, as is common in Hellenistic and Roman imagery, but of adolescents, and when they first appear in late 6th-century BCE Greek imagery, in particular in painting on ceramics, they are often indistinguishable from other personifications such as Hypnos and Thanatos, and also from a wider group of anonymous winged figures who flock around horse-riders and symposiasts on Laconian plates **(Fig. 1.1)**. Unlike erotes, these earlier winged figures, already common in the mid 6th century, are frequently depicted

[11] The Merriam-Webster dictionary places the first usage of the term in 1644; it derives from the Vulgar Latin *puttus*, meaning 'boy'.
[12] Kranz 1999: 15-16.

clothed. Elisa Pellegrini, who has produced the most comprehensive study of pre-Hellenistic Eros, suggests that the figures connote '*le fase di crescita del giovane e della fanciulla in termini agonistico-trionfali*,'[13] and connects both these *daimones* (her term of choice) and also the later, more unambiguous Eros/erotes to the attainment by young citizen males of the qualities of *arête* and *metis*. A contrasting view is put forward by Arne Thomsen, who examines what he calls *Flügelfiguren* on Laconian and Attic symposiastic ceramics, and who, I believe correctly, rejects Pellegrini's emphasis on male initiatory processes, suggesting instead that their main purpose is to embody the *eudaimonia* of the symposium and the positive influence of the gods on human affairs.[14] Both Pellegrini and Thomsen see the figures as mediators between the realm of humans and gods,[15] although I would suggest that they both underplay the dependent, serving role played by these figures, who in many instances, if by no means always, substitute in images for human attendants.[16]

Exactly where anonymity tips over into recognisability as "Eros" or "erotes" is unclear, but there are certainly erotic connotations to the pairs of winged adolescents used as framing figures and supports for women's toilette mirrors in early 6th-century Laconia, a sequence which starts (for the winged figures) in

[13] Pellegrini 2009: 58-9.
[14] Thomsen 2011 e.g. 95, 97-8.
[15] Pellegrini 2009: 526; Thomsen 2011. Thomsen sees them as the messengers and mediators of an "interconnected cosmology" in which the affairs of humans and gods can never be fully detached from one another (see esp. pp 128-130).
[16] Thomsen 2011: 103 does present this as a possibility in relation to Louvre E667, on which two sirens, two naked winged figures, and one young male who is clearly in a serving role are presented in similar relationships to the same set of symposiasts, but does not expand on the observation or see it as relevant to the other images which he discusses.

around 540 BCE.[17] Pellegrini argues that a series of gem stones produced for the court of Polycrates of Samos ca. 550-525 BCE show the first instances of the winged *daimones* '*in campo amoroso*',[18] and certainly these share many features with later representations of Eros/erotes: the flying figures carry garlands, fillets and lyres.[19] Antoine Hermary suggests that it is not until around 520 or 510 BCE that an otherwise uncharacterised winged adolescent male can be assumed to be an eros - presumably because by this time the range of activities performed by winged adolescent males has been reduced, for the most part, to that later associated with erotes.[20]

While the first first inscribed – and so definitely identifiable – image of the god/personification Eros is an outlier from the visual tradition of winged adolescents, it is striking that it is already presented as one of a pair. On a fragmentary black-figure pinax from the Acropolis from the middle of the 6th century, a female figure, probably Aphrodite, carries in her arms two identical young males labelled *Himeros* and *E[ros]* **(Fig. 1.2)**.[21] The image is interesting in counterbalancing Eros with Himeros, the god/personification of desire, who in the image and literary traditions more broadly would go on to receive far less attention than Eros: one might argue that this pairing of the two, this splitting of

[17] See Congdon 1981 for these mirror stands; No. 3 Pl. 2 is the first in the sequence to show what is thought to be an eros.
[18] Pellegrini 2009: 72.
[19] Pellegrini 2009: 67-72.
[20] LIMC Vol. III.1: 934.
[21] Athens, National Museum, Acropolis Collections 2526. LIMC *Eros* No. 1007. Greifenhagen 1957: 39 Fig. 29; Borg 2002: 132-134, who makes the suggestion that 'das Entscheidende der Darstellung [war] die Charakterisierung der Aphrodite als Kourotrophos schlechthin (und nicht als Kourotrophos von bestimmten Knaben)'; Pellegrini 2008: 84, Cat. no. 204, Pl. XVI.

the god into two bodies and two concepts, already entails a diminution of Eros' individual agency. The first image of Eros, then, hovers between individualisation and an embrace of multiplication. But it is hard to connect these two wingless infants to the winged adult figures of the symposiastic scenes and fantastical friezes,[22] and it was not until several decades after the painting of this *pinax* that the visual trajectory of the god Eros would merge conclusively with a preexisting tradition of winged, often multiple, male figures. At its beginnings, the young winged male multiple belongs to an image tradition which is independent of the concepts of love and of the love god.

b. Eroticism and ornament in early 5th-century imagery

Most of the surviving evidence for early erotes takes the form of vase paintings, although they are also found in gem-carving and metalwork, and in at least two instances were even considered worthy of large-scale sculptures in stone and terracotta.[23] The first important shift takes place in the final decades of the 6th century, when it becomes common to place erotes in images which represent or refer to the relationship between *erastes* and *eromenos*.[24] The erotes of these images can take on both roles within such relationships: they can be shown either giving or receiving the gifts, and also as what Andrew Lear calls "middle-

[22] Pellegrini 2008: 84.
[23] Athens, Acropolis Museum 3719, Pellegrini No. 2078 (?Pentelic marble, ca. 490 BCE); private collection, UK, Pellegrini No. 2079 (terracotta, ca 500 BCE).
[24] Greifenhagen: 1957; Pellegrini 2008: 109-155 documents and analyses this shift in more detail.

men" and "activators" between the two main partners in the exchange –[25] although as Lear points out, erotes '[bear] the gifts to the *eromenos as* an *eromenos*.'[26] Where they serve as go-betweens in this way, their bodies are often shown at a smaller scale to those of the *erastes* and *eromenos*, but where they themselves play one of these roles, they are often depicted at the same scale as the human or divine figures on a vase, with strong, muscular adult bodies and wings stretching more than half of their length – a figure type which contrasts palpably with the winged figures of the 6th century, who were represented at a much smaller scale than the protagonists whom they surrounded.

A compelling example of erotes in erotic context in this period comes from a red-figure aryballos of around 490-480 BCE found in a grave in Athens **(Fig. 1.3 a, b, c)**, on which two erotes assault a running youth, grasping at the corners of his cloak, which he attempts to pull from their grasp.[27] The depiction here is interesting in that it sets the erotes somewhat at odds with the expected *erastes/eromenos* divide – a feature also found on other vases from this period. On the one hand the erotes are clearly assailants, in aggressive posture, their bodies much larger than that of their victim, and with their huge wings hemming him in on either side. But they also display many similarities to the running youth: the musculature, facial features, and filleted hair of all three figures are identical, while the folds of the young man's cloak provide a striated backdrop for his body which is similar to that provided by the erotes' wings. Moreover, the near symmetrical bodies of the flying erotes are at least as much on display as

[25] Lear—Cantarella 2008: 157-161.
[26] Lear—Cantarella 2008: 155.
[27] Greifenhagen 1957: 57-58 Figs. 43-45.

(more so than?) that of the young man, and one function or side-effect of their horizontal-yet-active posture is surely to invite desire – even, perhaps, to allow the viewer to imagine different configurations of a single male body. The potential for separating and merging the different bodies is helped too by the configuration of the image around the cup: in order to piece together the scene, the viewer must turn the cup in their hands, encouraging focus on each of the bodies in turn. The aryballos presents erotes as both desiring and desirable, menacing and yet simultaneously placed on display for the erotic pleasure of the viewer, symmetrically deployed and thus notionally under the control of artist and viewer, but also threatening that symmetry with grasping and pricking hands.[28]

There are also many instances from the early 5th century of erotes with far less overt erotic or narrative significance, perhaps floating across the undefined space of the surface of a vase and carrying a fillet, a musical instrument, or a stalk of vegetation.[29] A thematically very different, but formally comparable, pair of erotes to those of the Athens aryballos are found on a red-figure lekythos also dating to ca. 490-480 BCE and probably excavated in the region of Gela in Sicily **(Fig. 1.4 a, b)**.[30] Seen from the side, this vessel seems to be almost undecorated,

[28] See Lear—Cantarella 2008: 162 Fig. 4.22 for a neck amphora, Villa Giulia 47214, with clear parallels to this vase, although only one eros is present, flying in from the left of the youth with a similar goad/pointed stick in his hand, the youth carries a lyre, and an altar is placed beneath the flying eros. On the kylix Berlin 3168, Lear—Cantarella p163 Fig. 4.23, also attributed to Douris, a similar interaction is incorporated into a gymnasium scene; here, the single eros carries a sandal, and on all sides other young men flee from the scene.
[29] For examples see especially Greifenhagen 1957 Ch. 1.
[30] Herbig 1928: 571; Beazley *ARV* 293 Nr. 210. Greifenhagen pp. 7-13, figs 1-4. LIMC *Eros* 95.

but on closer inspection it emerges that the shoulder has been the site of considerable effort on the part of the painter. Here, two winged naked males, one beardless and one with a pale (youthful?) beard showing on the underside of his chin, float, fly, or pull themselves through a landscape of fronded palmettes. Their relation to this greenery is one which rewards close looking: where we might elsewhere expect such palmettes to be presented to us as formal ornament, here the flying figures use them as a support for their movement, and, as Nikolaus Dietrich has suggested, even seem to pull and ease the decoration into place on the shoulder of the vase.[31] The bearded figure reaches behind him to tug a lopsided palmette upright, and they both reach out a hand to steady the palmette which sits between them, perhaps to move it into position directly over the otherwise unexplained white circle which lies beneath it. When we consider the lopsided symmetry of the figures themselves, the whole image comes into focus as a playful meditation on the borderlines between figure, landscape, and ornament – a meditation which also hints at the custom of ornamenting vases with real garlands.[32] It is also an image which suggests that their connection to *eros* was not the only reason for the popularity of winged male figures at this time: while these bodies are evidently supposed to be attractive, and may well have been identified by their 5th-century viewers as erotes, the activity in which they engage is one of care, play, the assertion and disruption of *kosmos*, and the

[31] The suggestion was made in the course of a conference on 'Figure and Ornament' organised by Nikolaus Dietrich and Michael Squire at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin in June 2015. The conference volume appeared in print too late for me to be take it into account in this dissertation.
[32] Milette Gaifman discussed representations of the act of garlanding or state of being garlanded on classical Greek vases in a paper titled '"Florals": leaves and flourishes on classical Greek vases' at the 'Figure and Ornament' conference mentioned in the preceeding note.

interrogation of the boundaries between the representational and the ornamental far more than it is one of erotic love.

The erotic and the ornamental images have much in common, however. Both show dynamic figures, who move through their surrounding environment and engage with it in a highly tactile manner. Each eros employs his two hands to different effect, reaching towards, grabbing at, thrusting at, or easing into place the thing or person with whom he engages. On both images, symmetry and its distortion play a vital role. Both painters have made conscious use of the circularity, and in the case of the Pan Painter, the function and expected decorative conventions, of the vase. While the corporeal characterisation of erotes would change substantially over the following decades and centuries, these behavioural and structural characteristics will reappear throughout the lifespan of eros/cupid imagery, suggesting their centrality to the longue durée popularity of this figure sequence.

c. From gymnasium to oikos and thiasos: imagery from the later fifth and fourth centuries

Where in the first half of the 5th century the male world of symposium, gymnasium, and pederastic relationships had dominated eros imagery, the second half of the century sees a move to heterosexual relationships, the female-

dominated world of the *oikos*,[33] and the spheres of Aphrodite and Dionysos. Some of the new roles associated with erotes are brought out on a red-figure pyxis from around 420 **(Fig. 1.5 a, b)**, where an eros aids a woman at her toilette in a series of contiguous scenes: he bathes her by pouring water from an amphora over her hair, holds a wooden chest as she adorns herself, and is finally found within a grandly columned structure, seated on the lap of either her or another woman.[34] It seems probable that the series shows the various stages of preparation for marriage,[35] with the bride herself standing with veiled head to the right of the architectural setting. The eros/Eros here is at once servant, pet or child to be dandled on the knee, and enabler of desire and desirability; it is surely relevant that the crouching pose of the bathing woman was to become one of the most popular poses of Aphrodite herself over the course of the Hellenistic period. While this precise combination of scenes is not replicated on other vases, the roles which it assigns to the eros are ones which would be reprised across large numbers of Attic vases depicting the "women's sphere" from the second half of the 5th century.

A related group of vase images, often including multiple erotes, gained great popularity in Southern Italy, particularly in Apulia, during the 4th century **(Fig.**

[33] See e.g. LIMC 1981 Vol. 3.1: 935; Pellegrini 2009: 109-155. It should be noted, however, that earlier images in which Eros/erotes are associated with heterosexual love do exist, such as Villa Giulia 1054, dating to 480 BCE (Greifenhagen pp40-41, fig. 30), on which two small erotes attend the encounter of a man and a woman. Erotes can also be shown as attendants of Aphrodite, as on the Acropolis pinax discussed above and on Berlin F2291, dating to 490-480 BCE, on which four small erotes surround the veiled figure of Aphrodite, pictured as part of a scene of the Judgement of Paris (although the interior tondo of this kylix shows a romantic encounter between a bearded man and a young boy).
[34] The LIMC entry (*Eros* 651d) suggests that the seated women are goddesses.
[35] Lee 2015: 208-210.

1.6 a, b). These erotes are closely connected with female beauty and adornment, and are often shown with the tools and objects associated with a woman's toilette and also with her dowry: mirrors, pyxides, garlands, baskets, ornate platters of fruit.[36] Where the early 5th-century Attic vases had characterised erotes as somewhere between *erastes* and *eromenos*, these multiples of the love god sit on a spectrum between lover and servant, sometimes closely corresponding to one of these roles, sometimes hovering between the two.[37] There seems to be little significance behind the use of one or several erotes, with a major determining factor being space. Where the early erotes had possessed the strong bodies and often the hairstyles of idealised elite Athenian youths, the later 5th- and 4th-century erotes of the women's sphere have large, fleshy bodies whose shape is close to that of the women whom they attend, and sometimes even plumper;[38] on at least one vase, an eros bearing basket, garland, and pyxis is presented drifting along next to a dolphin, a juxtaposition which clearly seeks to emphasise their shared rotundity.[39] In many instances the erotes share the women's high topknots, and they are frequently laden down with strings of beads and other jewellery. One function of these exaggerated prepubescent

[36] Trendall—Cambitoglou 1978/1982 *passim*. Schauenburg 1989 suggests that such scenes when shown on lekanai constitute a reference to a blessed afterlife.
[37] For eros as servant compare Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982 Vol 2 Pl. 183 Fig. 3. Taranto 8893 (18/135; p511) with Pl. 183 Fig. 4 Boston 10.234 (18/146; p513): the eros on the Boston pelike has exactly the same pose as a subsidiary (servant?) woman on the Taranto lebes gamikos. For eros as lover compare Vol 1 Pl. 114.5. Hanover 1966.75 (13/188) with Pl. 115.1, Taranto 54428 (13/191): the Hanover vase carries a full-height eros of very similar appearance to the lover of the Taranto vase, who has a satyr's tail and brings gifts to a woman.
[38] Trendall—Cambitoglou 1978: 451 note that this "greater degree of softness" and "increasing tendency towards effeminacy" are particularly prevalent on vases influenced by the Menzies Group (the Patera and Ganymede Painters).
[39] LIMC Eros 188 – London British Museum F439, Apulian cantharos, ca. 330 BCE.

bodies is evidently to emphasise and mirror the beauty of the women with whom they interact, but often they form the primary subject of an image in their own right, and in these images it is common for the seated, flying or loitering body to be treated almost as though it were itself one of the luxury commodities of the elite female sphere.[40] One might argue that these erotes are connoted not only in erotic terms, but also as objects of pleasure and as possessions, in a vein approaching that of the cupid who is dandled on a woman's knee on the pyxis discussed above.[41] Certainly, their rounded bodies constitute an important and under-explored antecedent to the plump child who would soon after come to dominate imagery of erotes. Also potentially related to their later infantilisation is the tendency to show cupids at a miniature scale in relation to the isolated, usually female, heads which are so ubiquitous in ceramic painting from the South Italian and Sicilian production centres **(Fig. 1.7)**.[42]

Other new contexts of erotes in the late 5th and 4th centuries BCE are the spheres of Dionysus and Aphrodite.[43] In this they participate in a broader spread and mutation of the retinues and environments associated with these gods, which over the course of the 4th century would come to incorporate the natural world and many of its creatures, some of them, such as centaurs, newly tamed and

[40] On a vase from Bari, *Trendall—Cambitoglou* 1978: Cat. 27/105, Pl. 336 Figs. 1-2, a clothed woman and a naked eros seated on opposite sides of a lekanis are almost exactly paralleled in their representation.
[41] One vase which provides particular support for this view of the commoditisation of erotes in this period is British Museum 1836,0224.172, a Campanian hydria of ca. 350-320 BCE on which a woman is shown weighing two miniature, although still long-bodied, erotes while a man looks on.
[42] On these heads see most recently Heuer 2015. On the group of the White Saccos Painter, to which this example belongs, see *RVAp* II, ch. 29.
[43] Pellegrini 2008: 157-201; *LIMC* III Eros Nos. 851-905 and III.1 p936.

detached from previous narrative associations.[44] In part indicators and instigators of eroticism, erotes also play a vital role in the exuberance of the thiasos, not only flying down to crown Dionysos, Ariadne, and Aphrodite in South Italian vase imagery but also climbing on and riding on the shoulders of cavorting satyrs and silenoi, crawling under tables, and otherwise making mischief and offering honour and attendance. One major advantage which they bring to these vases is their ability to disobey the usual rules of gravity and groundedness; on vessels whose composition often incorporates multiple figures scattered on different levels across the black background with no clear indication of physical setting or interrelation, erotes offer one strategy for conceptualizing movement and connection between different figures and different parts of an image **(Fig. 1.8)**.

Throughout this period, the relationship of erotes with ornament, and in particular vegetal ornament, continues to develop. On a late 5th-century Attic pyxis, an Eros sits casually on the long central spine of a schematic palmette, leaning with his elbow on the motif and looking over his shoulder as if to inspect the decorative landscape behind him – a more playfully self-conscious staging of the interaction between figure and ornament than that found on the Gela lekythos **(Fig. 1.9)**.[45] The 4th-century South Italian vases are a particular locus for exploration of the interaction between figures and heads, vegetal ornament, and the contours of the object itself. On a series of Apulian vases with images from the women's sphere, the magnificent wings of a seated eros are placed

[44] Morawietz 2000 discusses these changes through the focal lens of the centaur.
[45] British Museum 1867,0508.1225.

directly alongside decorative palmettes, creating contrast between the decorative qualities of the plant and the decorative qualities of the figure – both of which employ related scales and techniques **(Fig. 1.10 a, b)**.[46] This play with ornament and figuration is taken in a different direction on another series of vases from Apulia, where single erotes fly or tread lightly through exuberant plant scrolls, the rendering of which hovers between a naturalistic and an ornamental representation;[47] here, the ornament of the vase, although it retains a basic symmetry, has become a landscape to be explored and traversed. Examples could be multiplied, but the basic point, that erotes are employed to blur and interrogate the boundaries between visual categories, is clear.

d. Early texts on Eros: from Hesiod to Plato

Using texts about Eros, or even ἔρως, to make sense of images showing multiple erotes will always involve imprecise juxtapositions; texts follow different imperatives to images, with more of a tendency to name and define their subject matter, and to incorporate narrative progression. As such, we might ask whether the ambiguities and transitions which erotes facilitate in imagery would be accomplished using very different means within a text. But the Greek and Roman texts on Eros/erotes/ἔρως and Amor/amores/*amor* also provide insight into the perspectives which ancient viewers would have brought to these bodies – and

[46] e.g. British Museum 1856,1226.86.
[47] e.g. British Museum 1856,1226,67; Louvre K 100; Louvre K 213.

offer a counterpoint against which the distinctive qualities of visual erotes can be set into sharper relief.

The first mention of Eros as a god comes at least a century before the first identifiable images, when he famously makes his appearance as the third deity of Hesiod's *Theogony*, a near-omnipotent god associated with the primaeval forces of the universe.[48] Hesiod gives no indication of the appearance of his chaos-born limb-melter, and this cosmogonic aspect of Eros, while it has a long history in later texts,[49] is almost never found in the imagery.[50] Even at this early point, however, Eros may have had different traditions attached to him: later on in the *Theogony* he reappears in attendance at the moment of Aphrodite's birth, where he accompanies her, along with 'beautiful Himeros', 'when she went to the tribe of the gods.'[51] Well before the Acropolis pinax fragment, then, we find Eros counterbalanced with a related personified/deified emotional force – the beginnings of multiplication – and subordinated into attendant position in relation to the goddess Aphrodite.

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[48] ἠδ᾽ Ἔρος, ὃς κάλλιστος ἐν ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσι,
λυσιμελής, πάντων τε θεῶν πάντων τ᾽ ἀνθρώπων
δάμναται ἐν στήθεσσι νόον καὶ ἐπίφρονα βουλήν.
'and Eros [came to be], who is the most beautiful among the immortal gods, the limb-melter—he overpowers the mind and the thoughtful counsel of all the gods and of all human beings in their breasts.'
Hesiod *Theogony* 120-22. Trans. Glenn W. Most.

[49] Eros, usually under the name Phanes, is found within the Orphic tradition, while Oppian *Halieutica* 4.10 presents Hesiod's primordial Eros as one of the god's identities in the 2nd century, and Nonnos *Dionysiaca* 1.398-99 still ascribes to him the power to direct the universe in the late 4th or 5th century.

[50] The *LIMC* article on 'Phanes' (*LIMC* VII.1: 363-4) offers only one 'probable' image of Eros as Phanes.

[51] Hesiod *Theogony 201-2.* Pellegrini 2009: 14-18.

I will not attempt to summarise here the variety of textual characterisations given to archaic and classical Eros/*eros*, or the vast and ongoing body of research on this topic.[52] It is significant, though, that many of the characterisations of Eros in the texts are unrecognisable in the images: the god of Athenian tragedy, for example, a raging force often associated with pain, destruction, and madness, has no visual counterpart.[53] But epic poetry locates *eros* within a discourse of pleasant seduction and mutual love,[54] and the more aggressive erotes of imagery, like those on the red-figure aryballos from Athens, might be seen as corresponding to the bittersweet god of the melic poets.[55] Anacreon describes Eros as ἁπαλός, while a fragment which has been attributed to Ibycus calls him τακερός, suggesting that the tenderness of his body is already a defining characteristic.[56] Theognis calls him ὡραῖος, and associates him already with the coming of spring, and the blossoming of spring flowers; while the association with vegetation is far more widespread in the imagery, this passage demonstrates that at least in some textual traditions the god of love was also associated with more general fertility and abundance.[57] Pellegrini has traced a shared concern of texts and images of many genres with the role of Eros/ἔρως in

[52] Calame 1999 and Pellegrini 2009 both offer interpretations of the early texts, with the former being focused on the emotion and the latter on the god; the edited volume Sanders et al. 2013 and a new volume edited by S. Caciagli, *Eros e genere in Grecia arcaica* (2017, Bologna: Pàtron Editore), which I have not been able to gain access to, indicate that this is still a flourishing field of interest and debate.

[53] See in particular Sophocles *Antigone* v. 781-9. On ἔρως in tragedy see Thumiger 2013; she argues that he is 'presented as a negative experience for the individual, linked to madness and loss of self, and a metaphor for destructive drives'.

[54] Calame 1999 Chapter 2.

[55] See Calame 1999 Chapter 1 on the characterisation of ἔρως within melic poetry**.**

[56] Anacreon *fr.* 505d; Ibycus *fr.* 287.

[57] Theognis 1275-8; cf. Stuveras 1969: 74.

paideia and other male socialising institutions of the archaic and classical *polis* – [58] an association with broader social dynamics which is surely relevant to the texts and images of every period.[59] In almost all instances, however (exceptions are discussed in the following section), it is the single god rather than the multiples who receive textual attention.

In the late fifth and especially in the fourth centuries Eros undergoes a process of abstraction and what Pellegrini calls *laicizzazione*, 'secularisation', a merging of divinity with state of mind or philosophical principle – i.e., with the abstract noun *eros*, "love"; this process, she argues, starts with Euripides' *Hippolytus* (first performed in 428 BCE), which portrays love in terms of madness and disease, and becomes commonplace in the work of Plato and the sophists.[60] One facet of Plato's work on Eros is of particular relevance to a study of cupids as mediators; this is the sustained focus in the *Symposium* on the various ways in which Eros comes *between*, μεταξύ, different concepts and beings. Eros is described by Diotima/Socrates/Plato as corresponding to neither the good and beautiful nor the ugly and bad, neither wisdom nor ignorance, but as existing instead between these states, always desiring the good, the beautiful, and wisdom while simultaneously lacking them.[61] The son of Penia and Poros, Poverty and Plenty, he is also a being caught between ontological states, a 'great *daimon*', Δαίμων μέγας, who is between mortal and immortal, μεταξὺ θνητοῦ καὶ ἀθανάτου, and

[58] Pellegrini 2009; Calame 1999 [1992] has a related focus on the role of eros within social institutions, although his discussion focuses more on the textual evidence and on the emotion rather than the personification/deity.
[59] See Chapter 4.
[60] Pellegrini 2009: 29-46.
[61] Plato *Symposium* 202-4.

who mediates between these two spheres, 'interpreting (Ἑρμηνεῦον) and transporting/transmitting (διαπορθμεῦον) human things to the gods and divine things to men.'[62] Diotima goes on to connect corporeal love, the 'engendering and begetting upon the beautiful,'[63] to the desire for immortality, which can also find expression as love of fame, virtue,[64] knowledge, and the beautiful, and which can ultimately result in 'a wondrous vision' of essential beauty, 'existing ever in singularity of form independent by itself'.[65] It seems unlikely that eros imagery of any period is intended to offer a direct illustration of Plato's conception of this *daimon*,[66] and Plato's account ultimately prioritises themes of the Good and the Beautiful which connect Eros to underlying concerns of his writing more broadly, but this idea of Eros as conceptually and ontologically in-between has enduring implications for thinking about the in-between-ness, and the mediating qualities, of erotes in spatial and material contexts.

e. Multiple erotes in 5th century lyric

Against and alongside these accounts of Eros as god or daimon, a small number of 5th-century texts consider erotes as a multiple phenomenon.[67] Eros is first pluralised in lyric poetry; early instances are found in Simonides, Bacchylides, Pindar, Ion of Chios, and according to the 4th-century CE orator Himerius, in

[62] Plato *Symposium* 202E. Trans. (adapted) W. R. M. Lamb.
[63] Plato *Symposium* 206E.
[64] Plato *Symposium* 208C-209E.
[65] Plato *Symposium* 210A-211D.
[66] Pace Pellegrini 2009: 178-80.
[67] See Rosenmeyer 1951: 19 on the paucity of pre-Hellenistic texts.

Sappho and Alcaeus as well.68 In many of these instances it is unclear whether, and often unlikely that, the poet refers to personified erotes,[69] but in others a personified form is more certain: if the restorations are correct, Bacchylides refers to the 'Mother of the inflexible erotes', [τὰν μ]ατ[έρ᾽ ἀκ]νάμ[π]των Ἐρώτων, presumably Aphrodite,[70] while Ion of Chios describes the personification of Wine as the 'sweetest attendant of loud-thundering Loves,' ἥδιστον πρόπολον βαρυγδούπων Ἐρώτων.[71] The word βαρύγδουπος, loud-roaring or loud-thundering, is not used elsewhere of Eros - other uses are in relation to the perhaps more obviously thunderous Zeus and the winds – and it is noteworthy that in both of these fragments erotes are characterised as possessors of a considerable degree of power, and in Bacchylides even of the potential for cruelty. If Himerius is correct in seeing the line of Anacreon which he quotes as being written by Anacreon (i.e. if it is not from the much later tradition of the Anacreontea), then we would have further confirmation of this violent characterisation: it reads ὑβρισταὶ καὶ ἀτάσθαλοι καὶ οὐκ εἰδότες / ἐφ᾽ οὓς τὰ βέλη κυκλώσεσθε, 'You are violent and wicked, and you do not know against whom you will hurl your weapons.'

Two fragments of Pindar present a less threatening vision. One of these, Eulogies fr. 122, comes in the context of a song in which the opening address is to the

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[68] Sappho Fr. 194; Anacreon fr. 445.
[69] Non-personified usages of the plural are found at Pindar *Nemean Odes* 3.30, 11.48, frs. 107, 108, 113; Simonides fr. 42 (ed. Diehl). See Rosenmeyer 1951: 16.
[70] Bacchylides *Epinikoi* 9.73. Text taken from Loeb edition. See Rosenmeyer 1951: 17. The line is found in a victory ode for one Automedes of Phlius, a victorious pentathlete in the Nemean games; the year of the victory is unclear, as is the precise role of Aphrodite (if mentioned) and the erotes/loves within the poem.
[71] Ion of Chios fr. 744. Trans. David A. Campbell.

temple prostitutes at Corinth. The women are addressed as ὦ παῖδες,[72] and one of the major concerns of the (fragmentary) poem is to justify to the 'lords of the Isthmus,' Ἰσθμοῦ / δεσπόται,[73] the virtue and acceptability of this group of women who have sex with many different men. It is in this context of acceptable love-making with many partners that Pindar speaks of Aphrodite as the 'celestial mother of loves/erotes,' ματέρ᾽ ἐρώτων / οὐρανίαν.[74] As this use of the multiple personified form comes so early in the literary tradition, one might conjecture that Pindar uses it with specific intent in this poem: either because, despite the poet's protestations of its honorable nature, the single god Eros was thought too elevated for this context of prostitution, and/or as an aid to the valorisation of multiple acts of love performed by a 'hundred-bodied herd of girls,' κορᾶν ἀγέλαν ἑκατόγγυιον.[75]

Erotes receive somewhat different characterisation in the eighth *Nemean Ode*. Here, in an account of the birth of the mythical King Aeacus of Aegina intended to honour Deinias of Aegina for his victory in the footrace of ca. 459 BCE, the lyric moves from an abstract to an embodied notion of love:

Ὥρα πότνια, κάρυξ Ἀφροδίτας
ἀμβροσιᾶν φιλοτάτων,
ἅ τε παρθενηίοις παί-
δων τ᾽ ἐφίζοισα γλεφάροις,
τὸν μὲν ἡμέροις ἀνάγκας χερσὶ βαστά-
ζεις, ἕτερον δ᾽ ἑτέραις.
ἀγαπατὰ δὲ καιροῦ μὴ πλανα-
θέντα πρὸς ἔργον ἕκαστον
τῶν ἀρειόνων ἐρώτων ἐπικρατεῖν δύνασθαι.
οἷοι καὶ Διὸς Αἰγίνας τε λέκτρον

[72] Pindar *Eulogies* fr. 122 v 7. Trans. Diane Arnson Svarlien.
[73] Pindar *Eulogies* fr. 122 vv 13-1.
[74] Pindar *Eulogies* fr. 122 vv 4-5.
[75] Pindar *Eulogies* fr. 122 v 19.

ποιμένες ἀμφεπόλησαν
Κυπρίας δώρων·

Queenly Season of Youth, herald of the divine embraces of Aphrodite, you who rest in the eyes of young girls and boys, and carry one man in the gentle arms of compulsion, but handle another man differently. It is a desirable thing, for one who has not strayed from due measure in any deed, to be able to win the better kinds of love; such loves, the shepherds of Cyprian Aphrodite's gifts, attended the marriage-bed of Zeus and Aegina.

Pindar, *Nemean* 8.1-7. Trans. Diane Arnson Svarlien.

Although the poem opens by contrasting different types of love, the erotes described here are deployed to honour a single specific pair of lovers on a single specific occasion. Unlike the multiple love affairs of the Corinthian temple prostitutes, the event is the consummation of a marriage, and indeed of an elevated marriage between the god Zeus and the goddess/personified island Aegina. They are present as functionaries of Aphrodite, metaphorically assigned the lowly role of shepherds, and tasked with bringing Aphrodite's gifts (presumably primarily desire and desirability) to the newlyweds. But they are also blurred with the abstract concept of love/s: the initial use of the word ἐρώτων gives no hint that personifications are referred to, and it is only when the term is picked up by οἷοι and "the better loves" are compared to shepherds that the listener/reader is encouraged to think of them as embodied.

Comparing the two appearances of erotes in Pindar, it is clear that he treats these figures as malleable ones, both in their relationship to the abstract noun ἔρος and also in relation to human lovers, for whom they can perform different roles. His erotes are positively inflected, unthreatening and seemingly gentle figures, far removed from the powerful Eros of much of lyric. T. G. Rosenmeyer, who first wrote on the shift in literature from Eros to erotes, claimed that the new

characterisation entailed 'disastrous consequences to the majesty of [Eros'] image',[76] and that the erotes of Pindar are 'pale and anaemic' in comparison to the 'mysterious' and 'divine' Eros of Sophocles' Antigone (although this in fact predates Pindar's Odes).[77] But whether or not one sees the change in value-laden terms, Pindar's erotes certainly display already the de-individualised aspect of many of their descendents: they have moved away from the pairing between Eros and Himeros to become an internally indistinguishable group, a race or tribe a little like the nymphs or the nereids, who can be brought in, at least in Nemean 8, as a sort of docile rent-a-crowd to frame, honour, and perform services for a privileged pair of lovers.

The early textual mentions of erotes, then, offer only a very partial correspondence to the images. Where 5th-century vase imagery frequently locates its erotes in contexts of male-male love, the only 5th-century textual mention of erotes in the context of a pederastic relationship is in a fragment of Anacreon (to whom later works are notoriously attributed) quoted by the 4th-century CE rhetorician Himerius;[78] Pindar's erotes already appear in the contexts

[76] Rosenmeyer 1951: 11.
[77] Rosenmeyer 1951: 19.
[78] Anacreon fr. 445, quoted by Himerius, though it is unclear whether this could simply be one of the many poems apocryphally attributed to Anacreon in antiquity: νῦν ἔδει μοι Τηίων μελῶν, νῦν ἔδει μοι τῆς Ἀνακρέοντος λύρας, ἥν, ὅταν ὑπὸ παιδικῶν ἐκεῖνος ὑπεροφθῇ ποτε, καὶ κατ᾽ αὐτῶν ᾽Ερώτων οἶδεν ἐργάσασθαι· εἶπον ἂν πρὸς αὐτοὺς τὰ ἐκείνου ῥήματα·

ὑβρισταὶ καὶ ἀτάσθαλοι καὶ οὐκ εἰδότες
ἐφ᾽ οἷς τὰ βέλη κυκλώσεσθε.

τάχα δ᾽ ἂν καὶ ἠπείλησα τὴν ἀπειλὴν ἣν Ἀνακρέων ἀπειλεῖ τοῖς ῞Ερωσιν· ἐκεῖνος γάρ ποτε ἐρασθεὶς ἐφήβου καλοῦ, ἐπειδήπερ ἑώρα τὸν ἔφηβον ὀλίγον αὐτοῦ φροντίζοντα, λύραν ἁρμόσας ἠπείλει τοῖς ῞Ερωσιν, εἰ μὴ αὐτῷ τιτρώσκοιεν αὐτίκα τὸν ἔφηβον, μηκέτι μέλος εὔφημον εἰς αὐτοὺς ἀνακρούσασθαι.

of firmly heterosexual relationships, prefiguring the vase imagery of the second half of the 5th century. Given the paucity of evidence, however, it is difficult to say whether literary erotes track or drive changes to the imagery, and the most striking circumstance is the absence of reference to the multiplied personifications of love: erotes in the 5th century seem to have been far more attractive as a subject for visual representation than they were for textual description.

V. Hellenistic erotes

a. The origins of infant erotes

Over the course of the 4th century, and to a very limited extent in the final years of the 5th, the bodies of erotes underwent the most significant mutation in the history of the figure type: they took on the body shape and behavioural characteristics of very young children. While earlier erotes had often been represented at a much smaller scale than the adult protagonists in a scene, their bodies had always retained the rough proportions of pubescent or adult figures,

"Now I should have had songs of Teos and the lyre of Anacreon which he, whenever scorned by a beloved boy, knows how to use against the Loves themselves. I would have addressed them in his words: 'You are violent and wicked, and you do not know against whom you will hurl your weapons.' Perhaps too I would have uttered the threat made against the Loves by Anacreon: he once loved a handsome youth, and when he saw that the youth paid little attention to him he tuned his lyre and threatened that if the Loves did not at once wound the youth, he would never again strike up a song in their praise." Trans. M. W. Haslam. A further juxtaposition of erotes and boy-love in an epitaph for Anacreon attributed to Simonides (Simonides fr. 67, Campbell *Greek Lyric* Vol. III.) must be discounted, as Simonides' authorship of this poem is widely rejected (Molyneux 1992: 15).

even when distorted as on the Apulian vases. But while the adolescent eros never entirely disappears, over the course of the fourth and third centuries BCE it became more and more common for the figure type associated with desire to be shown with the body of an infant, and it is this figure type which would endure to become a pervasive presence within the Roman built environments on which my subsequent chapters will focus.

There has been no in-depth analysis of the shift to infant erotes, and as such my discussion will be a fragmented one, offering an indication of early examples and themes rather than a comprehensive narrative of spread and development. Infant cupids first appear at different times on different media, although the earliest examples are all isolated ones. The first clear appearance is on a chous from Athens **(Fig. 1.11)**, produced in around 410 BCE for the festival of the Anthesteria, on which an otherwise relatively standardised image of a small boy playing with a toy cart in a domestic interior is shown with large wings sprouting from his shoulderblades.[79] There are (almost?) no other vases from this period which unequivocally show erotes as infants,[80] but the image on an Attic squat lekythos from 400-380 BCE which belongs to the series of images of the women's private sphere does show two erotes with extremely shortened, rounded limbs and large heads in relation to their bodies; these may well be intended to be

[79] Baltimore, Walters Art Museum 48.206. Van Hoorn Cat. 307, Fig 367.
[80] It has been suggested by Stuveras and others that several of the vases pictured by Van Hoorn show infant erotes, but this is the only one to actually have clear differences of proportion from earlier images such as the British Museum pyxis discussed above **(Fig. 5 a, b)**.

childlike.[81] On an aryballos dating from c. 380 BCE in the Tarento museum an eros suckles on the breast of a beautiful woman (likely Aphrodite), while six others clamber, fly, and bring offerings to her; the bodies of these erotes are still long, however, even though they are very small in relation to the woman.[82] A gold finger ring from a tomb in Bliznitsa which shows a chubby child eros/Eros is also said by John Boardman to be '[not] necessarily later than the first quarter of the fourth century'.[83] The eros on this ring stands by the lap of a seated woman, perhaps Aphrodite, who holds a *iunx* (a type of love charm) in her hand, and his movement – the gesture of reaching towards a desirable plaything and maternal figure with grabbing hand – is clearly drawn from that of a child.

In the second half of the 4th century examples become more plentiful. At this point gold eros earrings from sites across the Mediterranean begin to take on infant form.[84] A lebes gamikos from Kertch dated to ca. 335 BCE shows a woman surrounded by longer-bodied erotes and holding a more infantile one, who seems to be intended to substitute for a very young baby, in her arms.[85] One of

[81] British Museum 1873,0820.310. The women shown on the vase also have exaggeratedly childlike proportions.
[82] Museo Nazionale in Taranto, illustrated in the *Enciclopedia dell' arte antica*, vol. 3, p430, Fig. 524.
[83] Boardman 1970: 222. Cat. 713. Hermitage Museum. Strangely, however, Boardman p224, talking about Cat. 734 (not this one) and others, claims that 'Eros in these years [the 4th century] is still adolescent. There are good studies of him with Aphrodite (Pl. 737) or alone, seated on an altar (Pl. 738). Even when he is shown summarily as a tiny figure beside his mother, his portions are still slim and mature. Only later is he shown as a chubby putto.' The tomb's other contents are dated to between 330 and 300 (Jackson 2006: 219 Pl26A.12 gives bibliography), so there may be grounds to question Boardman's dating.
[84] Jackson 2006: 139 10A.3 can be relatively securely dated to the third quarter of the fourth century. Patras Archeological Museum (no inv. no. given). Dating by reference to other finds from the same grave.
[85] St Petersburg, Hermitage 15592. Schefold 1934: 16-17, Pl. 19.

the earliest media types in which the figure is widely found is the terracotta figurine, and round-bodied terracotta cupids designed for suspension in the air – as well as a mould used to make terracotta cupids – are found from the second half of the 4th century at Athens, in Euboea and Boeotia, and at Pella **(Fig. 1.12)**.[86] Caroline Huguenot has suggested that these figurines were first developed in Boeotian territory, probably at Tanagra, around the third quarter of the 4th century.[87] The 4th century also saw the beginnings of their migration to larger-scale contexts: on the elaborate pebble mosaic excavated from a 4th-century bathhouse at Arta in Ambracia **(Fig. 1.13 a, b)**, a large-winged infant eros reaches out to grab the very similar wing of an unimpressed goose, another blows into a conch shell, and a third appears to dive off a rocky outcrop, away from the ithyphallic herm which stands directly behind him.[88] By 275-250 erotes are also common on painted Gnathia ware from Apulia,[89] and they are found on "Megarian" bowls and in relief on Tarentine vases over the course of the 3rd century.[90]

The characterisation of these early infant erotes is already broad: on the Athenian chous the eros is unequivocally a child with wings attached, while on the lekythos erotes are attendants in an eroticised women's sphere, and on the Bliznitsa ring and probably also the Kertsch vase the viewer is certainly intended

[86] Huguenot 2008: 140-141.
[87] Huguenot 2008: 142.
[88] Catlin 1985: 35, Fig. 47; Touchais 1985: 794, Fig. 74.
[89] Schmidt 1990. Schmidt seeks to update Stuveras' suggestion (1969: 8) that erotes do not appear in Gnathia ware until the mid-third century, but the examples which he offers all date from 275-250 BCE.
[90] For "Megarian" bowls see e.g. Walters Art Gallery 481; for Tarentine relief vases see Hill 1947.

to see a connection with Aphrodite even if they do not directly interpret the seated woman as the love goddess. The figures on the Arta mosaic already show a strong propensity to self-conscious investigation of the nature and bodily form of the infant eros type. The erotes of the gold earring series, the vases, and the terracottas are different again, carrying a wide range of attributes many of which do not necessarily refer directly or primarily to love – or to childhood either. On the earrings they carry phialai, musical instruments, bows, flaming torches, and wreaths, and on the Tarentine relief vases they carry items associated with the thiasos. On the terracottas they hold musical instruments, jewellery boxes, mirrors, alabastrons, masks, and garlands. These erotes frustrate any attempt to see them as individualized love gods: for the earrings they are typically paired, appendages or even extensions of the wearer's body, and in the cases of the terracottas they are found in large groups.[91] Moreover, in the case of 28 terracottas from the Tomb of the Erotes in Eretria, dating from some time between 325 and 200 BCE,[92] the hooded chlamys which conceals the head and upper body on the majority of the figurines suggests quite different possibilities for meaning and significance; Huguenot suggests that these figures are not erotes at all, and are instead to be connected to the vision of a blessed afterlife and even to the winged souls of the deceased.[93] Positive supporting evidence for such a theory is lacking (and what seems to be an early reference to very similar figures in Theocritus *Idylls* 15.120-122, discussed below, refers explicitly to erotes), but it is clear that the intersection of childhood and love does not offer a full explanation for their representation here.

[91] Huguenot 2008: 144.
[92] Huguenot 2008: 142.
[93] Huguenot 2008: 151-153.

Over the course of the Hellenistic period, infant erotes spread across the Mediterranean and through almost all artistic media. They also took on a variety of new roles: sleeping Eros, Eros with the attributes of Hercules, Eros punished, and Eros and Psyche are all themes which are first attested in this period, often in prestigious, large-scale statuary form.[94] The Attalid kingdom, and later Roman city, of Pergamon was particularly important in the development of new iconographic types, and was the location of the earliest known representations of erotes as garland-bearers (on Hellenistic ceramics) and also of the first large-scale garland-bearing erotes, already in a range of different poses, donated in around 69 BCE and found on an anta capital in the hall of the Smaller/Western Gymnasium.[95] While adolescent erotes continued to be represented throughout the Hellenistic period, enjoying a particular "classicising" revival in the 2nd century BCE,[96] in these years the infant eros was to become firmly established as the default eros figure type, a position of dominance which it was to retain for a full millennium after its first appearance in the late 5th century BCE.

b. Why the move to an infant eros? Are all cupids children?

[94] LIMC Vol. III.1: 938.
[95] Schäfer 1968 for the ceramics; Rumscheid 1994 Pl. 132.5, 6, No. 228.3, 4 for the anta capitals. Courby 1922: 458, 462 also publishes early Hellenistic erotes from Pergamon.
[96] LIMC Vol. III.1: 938.

Before turning to the Hellenistic and Roman texts on erotes, it is worth pausing to focus on this shift to childhood, and asking, firstly, why this change took place, and secondly, whether it was erotes' new infant forms which ensured the extraordinary persistence of the type for centuries to come.

The move from adolescent to infant erotes seems in large part to have been the product of changing evaluations of the roles and valuation of children between the 5th century and the Hellenistic period. The Periclean reforms of the mid fifth century accorded new significance to citizen children at Athens, and this significance seems to have led to the development of a new imagery of childhood, in which for the first time young children are depicted independently of their mothers, and with the proportions, chubby limbs, and attributes – such as pets – of early childhood.[97] The new child's body is particularly prominent on the series of choai produced for the Anthesteria, the series in which we find the first secure image of an infant cupid (mentioned above).[98] This high valuation of children seems only to have increased through the 4th century and Hellenistic period, when the new proportions and age signifiers developed in the 5th century were refined and redeveloped for use in a range of media.[99] Starting in the late 4th century it became common to dedicate expensive, large-scale statues of children carved in-the-round in the sanctuaries of deities and protective figures relating to health and childbirth,[100] a series which was to have a significant impact on

[97] Beaumont 2003: 65-71; Crelier 2008. A good example of an early image is British Museum E 396, a pelike dating to 430-420 BCE which shows a crawling infant and his doting parents.
[98] Hoorn 1951.
[99] Bobou 2014: 46.
[100] Bobou 2014.

future cupid imagery: many of the poses which these children adopt are taken up by erotes and remain in use over long periods of time.

The Hellenistic period saw an efflorescence of imagery of childhood, and a focus on the playfulness and sweetness of children is found in visual, literary, and epigraphic sources alike. Funerary inscriptions which might once have referred to a deceased child in terms of their parents' loss of security in old age dwell instead on the loss of the sweetness and pleasure which the child brought:[101] an epigram from the *Greek Anthology* describes the nine-year-old Hymnis as ἄθυρμα, a pet or plaything, and as αἰμύλος, wheedling or wily.[102] Dynamic sculptural types showing children, such as baby Hercules strangling the snakes sent by Hera, or the famous young boy strangling a goose, also become popular.[103] It is against this backdrop of the mobile and playful child that the mobile and playful figures of infant erotes begin to pervade almost all genres and all media of artistic production, and it is surely correct to see the two as closely interconnected.

One way of understanding the popularity of these new representations of children and erotes is to think about their relation to what we know and can conjecture about the real bodies of children in the Hellenistic period and in the ancient Mediterranean more broadly. In many ways the cupid body is the antithesis of the real child's body of this period, which, for all the positive evaluations of Hellenistic epigram, was also enfolded in a dense web of adult

[101] Schmidt 1997: 87.
[102] *Greek Anthology* 7.643.
[103] See Ridgway 1990: 338-340 on early statues of children.

anxiety. The statues found in sanctuaries attest not only to the high valuation of the children represented, but also to concerns about their health and wellbeing – concerns which would continue to find expression in a range of media and textual genres throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Ancient medical texts present a largely negative view of the very young,[104] while the 2nd-century CE diviner Artemidorus would later write that

> 'To dream that one has or sees young children, especially new-born infants, when they belong to the dreamer, is bad for both men and women. For it signifies cares, griefs, and anxieties over some important matters, since it is impossible to raise children without them…'[105]

With high rates of non-survival and inefficient contraception, childbearing would have been a far more omnipresent societal preoccupation than it is for much of the world today. It has been estimated that in order to ensure constancy of population size in the face of high infant mortality rates, Roman women would have had to give birth to between four and six children in a lifetime;[106] they could expect 20 to 30 per cent of these children to be dead before their first birthday,[107] and 60 per cent before their sixth.[108] While figures for the early Hellenistic period may not have been identical, and will have varied from place to place, the broad picture was the same: children were highly susceptible to illness, and a high proportion of them would die before reaching puberty.

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[104] Dasen 2008.
[105] Artemidorus *Oneirocritica* 1.15.
[106] Laes 2011: 31.
[107] Hopkins 1966; Corvisier 1985; Massenet de la Genière 1990. See also Laes 2011: 24-27.
[108] Catalano et al. 2006, using data from a necropolis at Quarto Cappelle del Prete outside Rome.

If cupids are idealised children, they systematically conceal these anxieties, presenting an image of the impossibly healthy infant body, plump and smooth-skinned, unassailable by disease or stray cart. Mark Bradley, writing on 'Obesity, corpulence, and emaciation in Roman art', sees cupids in straightforwardly survivalist terms:

> 'In an environment with high levels of infant mortality even among the wealthy, [their] ample and healthy levels of adiposity promised survival and alluded to the potential of that subcutaneous body fat to be shaped into adult muscle.'[109]

Caroline Vout, meanwhile, has pointed out that 'proto-putti', infant children formed in the same, or almost the same, mold as cupids, are almost never subjected to brutality in Hellenistic and Roman imagery.[110] Considered in this light, we might wonder whether the prevalence of cupid imagery functions to some extent as a sort of low-level apotropaeia, a continual insistence, even as the viewer recognises its falseness, on the good health of infants and on unending, non-contingent human fertility. It is an interpretation which is supported by several of the early statue types of children: Hercules strangling snakes is unquestionably a prototype of the survivor-child, while the boy strangling a goose also presents a model of flourishing health in early childhood. Perhaps a major function of the hyperbolically healthy, and almost obsessively replicated, cupid body was to constitute one more psychological, if not strictly ritually

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[109] Bradley 2011: 14.

[110] Vout 2010 e.g. 415. Pache 2004 notes that the child heroes Opheltes and Melikertes–Palaimon are shown as infants in images representing them before their death and as beautiful young men afterwards – although images such as her Fig. 26, a 2nd century Roman relief showing a plump-faced, cupid-like Opheltes being strangled by the snake (very definitely subjected to violence, and either dead or on the point of death) contradict this rule. Vout also mentions Medea's children as an exception, as they are usually shown on sarcophagi with the bodies of cupids, though one might argue that such a body form offers some sort of protection to the viewer against the unpleasant envisioning of impending violence (never explicitly shown on these sarcophagi).

efficient, barrier against the myriad threats which faced the young child in the ancient world.[111]

It is also significant that these super-children are uniformly male, a mono-gendering which persists even in gender-specific contexts such as tombs where the deceased is female.[112] This choice evidently reflects an uneven valuation of male and female offspring, perpetuated far beyond the chronological and spatial constraints even of the Hellenistic and Roman Empires, but more specifically, it reflects differences in the age at which boys and girls started to be regarded as worthy of representation. In a phenomenon already found in the corpus of statue dedications in Hellenistic sanctuaries,[113] and continued on both public and funerary monuments in the Roman imperial period,[114] male children serve as subjects for representation from early infancy, while female children only enter the visual record once they are approaching puberty, and thus marriageability. Cupids, as the major representatives of childhood in the sphere of visual fantasy,

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[111] See e.g. Carroll 2012: 49-50; and Laes 2011: 64-69 on *numina* associated with different stages of childbirth and child-rearing and on ritual practices devoted to ensuring the health of newborns; Dasen 2008: 55 on dedications and amulets and other bodily ornament designed to safeguard the child's body; Pache 2004 on the evidence for 'baby and child heroes in ancient Greece', a group with close associations to infant survival and health.

[112] A striking case is presented by *CIL* 6, 27383, where a father describes his daughter, who died at the age of two, as having had the beauty, appearance, and strength of a Cupid (*quae speciem voltus habuitq. Cupidinis artus*).

[113] Bobou 2015.

[114] Currie 1996: 179 points out the age difference between idealised male and female children on Trajan's Arch at Beneventum, while the sarcophagus Museo Chiaramonti 1304, on which boys and girls play alongside each other, shows girls who appear to be older than the boys, with much smaller heads in relation to their bodies. The phenomenon is also found in the pre-Hellenistic period: Pache 2004 shows that baby and child heroes in ancient Greece were much more likely to be male than female, and, when female, were shown with the far more developed body types of older children.

thus perform an important role in perpetuating the invisibility and insignificance of the very young female body in the collective imaginary, and it is telling in this regard that the nubile, replicable form of the nike is often found alongside, or in positions of equivalence to, cupids – the youngest female figures of the fantastical repertoire are already (post)pubescent.[115]

But erotes are not simply babies with wings. Although the transition to an infant body is made most explicit on images like that of the Athenian *chous*, where the eros engages in activities performed elsewhere by human children, the Dionysiac erotes on Tarentine vases, and the erotes with offerings and festive accoutrements of the early earrings and terracottas, engage in very different activities to those associated with human children. It appears that while cupids possess bodily attractions which originate in the biological characteristics of the young child, the effectiveness of these characteristics is not dependent on the social and cultural associations of childhood.

Key to this simultaneous closeness to and distance from the child's body is a set of characteristics which are commonly known as the *Kindchenschema*, which are typically found in young mammals of all species,[116] and which have been shown to stimulate on the part of nearby adults, both parents and those not in parental relation, a desire to socialise with the one who possesses them.[117] Consistent features in this set are: a head which is disproportionately large in relation to the

[115] The unequal juxtaposition of cupids and nikes in this regard was suggested to me by Caroline Vout.
[116] Lorenz 1943 first described the phenomenon.
[117] Sherman—Haidt 2011.

body, forehead and eyes which are disproportionately large in relation to the head, eyes situated below the midpoint of the head, plump and protruding cheeks, and a rounded body with smooth, elastic surfaces.[118] On the one hand closely associated with (both human and animal) infancy, the features of the *Kindchenschema* also invite the same attention from viewers when transposed to contexts not found in nature: one well-known study has traced the progressive infantilisation of the cartoon character Mickey Mouse.[119] Once possessed of these features, therefore, cupids can transpose them away from contexts usually associated with childhood and use them to infantilise, and to invite benign engagement with, a whole range of otherwise unchildish activities.

There may never be a definitive answer as to why infant erotes usurp the positions of their adolescent predecessors in Hellenistic art. The initial shift at least seems to have been driven by the availability and attractiveness to artists of a new body type, that of the young child. The persistence of the type is more difficult to explain, but it is surely in part driven by the desire for a widely reproducible idealised figure type which could embody and allow the proliferation of the particular, and potent, brand of corporeal attractiveness of the *Kindchenschema*. In the same way that nikes or adolescent erotes, among others, could be employed as Ur body types for eroticised young women and men, erotes provided a standardised fantastical form for a corporeal demographic, that of the infant, which exerts an equally strong – if physically distinct – biological pull on its viewers.

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[118] Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1984: 84-86.
[119] Gould 1979.

If one reason for infant erotes' success is the biological attractions of their bodies, however, another may be the increased suitability of these bodies for a wide range of visual contexts: the facility with which these compact units, even more spatially malleable than their adolescent predecessors, could be fitted into larger image schemas. Newly relieved of their potentially problematic sexual charge, and marked out with the mobile bodies of the least significant members of society, infant erotes were uniquely suited to continue and expand the role of decorative, auxiliary body, able to squeeze and squirm into the gaps between other figures, objects, and architectural members more effectively than ever before.

c. Wings

Early Hellenistic erotes are also participants in another new visual movement of the period: a predisposition to represent figures in movement and in particular to represent winged figures,[120] often in large groups. A particular locus of this phenomenon is the groups of tomb terracottas discussed above, where the figurines could be threaded with string or gut and quite literally made to fly; in addition to infant erotes we find many adolescent erotes and also nikes produced for these multi-part ensembles.[121]

[120] Borbein 1973, esp. p165 on attempts in nike sculptures toward the end of the 4th century to represent weightlessness.
[121] On these see Huguenot 2008: 137-153.

One characteristic which the presence of wings might be used to emphasise is the potential birdlike, or even animal, qualities of erotes. In Hellenistic literature it is common to liken Eros to a bird or a bee,[122] and it is far more usual in early Hellenistic than in later Roman art to find erotes represented at a scale which encourages such an assimilation. On the inhabited plant friezes popular in Centuripe ceramics from the second half of the 3rd century, for example, the size of the flying erotes in relation to the tendrils and flowers, as well as to the large heads which punctuate the friezes, brings them closer in resemblance to birds or insects than to children **(Fig. 14)**.[123] This scale of representation is repeated in the early mosaic inhabited friezes from Pergamon and Pompeii, but it sits in sharp contrast to later Roman inhabited friezes, where standing figures as tall as the scrolls themselves hunt wild beasts of similar dimensions through the vegetation – a far more humanising conceptualisation of erotes.[124] On the Centuripe lekanis frieze which I illustrate here, two erotes, one flying, one crouching, in fact stretch out their hands to pet or feed geese – a juxtaposition which plays on their half-animal, half-child-like characterisation.

But juxtapositions like this one can bring out the unrestrained animality of erotes as well as the potential for ethereal gracefulness. On the early pebble mosaic from Arta mentioned above **(Figs. 13, 14)**, a decidedly babylike eros grabs the wing of an angry goose, while in the damaged other half of the mosaic

[122] Rosenmeyer 1992:185
[123] On Centuripe ware see Wintermeyer 1976. Similar examples to this one are Louvre B 369 (Cp 3719); British Museum 1836,0224.423; British Museum 1836,0224.422.
[124] Toynbee—Ward Perkins 1950: 7-8.

tondo, a second goose stands close to an eros blowing into a conch shell. Much of the fun of this mosaic is in the play of similarity and difference between erotes and geese, in particular in regard to their identically represented wings, but perhaps also in relation to their plump, awkward bodies.[125] There may even be an invitation to compare the sound made by the conch-playing cupid with the sound of the honking goose. An obvious comparison is with the well-known statue type of a young boy strangling a goose, although that type is in fact first attested after the Arta mosaic, in the first half of the 3rd century.

Non-human-ness can also lead in another direction, and on many images/for many viewers the wings of erotes tend more towards the divine than the animal. Wings can be markers of strangeness or separation from lived experience, and it may well be that the viewer is supposed to imagine the tomb terracottas as being not more animal than they themselves are, but more ethereal, hovering somewhere on the edge of vision and the edge of concrete existence in the world. As Thomsen suggests for Archaic winged figures, there is often a sense in these images of the benign influence of the divine on human affairs, and of its extension beyond specific deities and heroes into a more anonymised, almost atmospheric force.[126]

A striking feature of the wings of erotes in the Hellenistic period is that they quickly become far smaller than those of their Archaic and Classical

[125] The statue is best known from the Louvre sculpture (Inv. no. Ma 40 (MR 168)). See Pollitt 1986: 127-128; Ridgway 2006. The first attestation is in Herodas *Mimes* 4.
[126] Thomsen 2011.

predecessors. Where the wings of the adolescent erotes attacking a youth on the Athenian aryballos were large in relation to their bodies and gave an impression of great strength, by the 3rd century BCE the wings of erotes are for the most part far too small for the viewer to imagine that they could support flight. This shrinking is a mutation which increases the sense of these bodies' incomplete development and vulnerability, presumably contributing to their attractions as representatives of the *Kindchenschema*; it was successful enough that by the Roman period, too-small wings would have become a near-universal feature of cupids' bodies. Small wings are even found on small tomb terracottas, where the figures were positioned as if they were flying; it is a choice which suggests that, even if these erotes are intended as the manifestation of a divine force, it is a type of divinity which is without pomp or majesty, relying for its effects on charm and attractive weakness instead of elegance and strength.

Wings constitute an important counterpoint to the iconography of childhood, even if they often incorporate characteristics of vulnerability and cuteness associated with children. They are also a feature which will prove crucial to cupids' visual mediating abilities, and while later chapters will explore in more detail some of their specific visual functions, a few general points should be made early on. Wings can be said to provide an initial impulse for the multiplication of cupids, and for their use as ornamental figures: the fact that they inevitably come in pairs serves to amplify existing symmetries in cupids' forms and provides encouragement for the viewing of these bodies as entities to be redoubled and replicated still further. In allowing cupids to inhabit the conceptual in-between, an uncategorisable space between mortal and divine,

wings also lend themselves to the marking out, and exploration, of physical in-between spaces. In allowing their possessors to fly, they allow them also to occupy the parts of an object or image surface which are not logically accessible to more grounded figure types: cupids are often found, for example, at the centre of stucco ceiling coffers, a surface type whose positioning makes full use of their aerial capabilities.[127] Even more often, though, wings seem to be a spur to non-normative movement of other sorts: we frequently find cupids floating or sailing alongside sea creatures, balancing skillfully on the backs of unruly horses, or climbing over anything and everything. It is a skill which combines their childish mobility with the mobility provided by their wings, and leads to cupids becoming a prime tool for exploring non-intuitive ways of using and inhabiting space.

VI. Erotes in Hellenistic and Roman literature

a. Erotes in early Hellenistic literature

As we might expect in a period in which visual images of erotes were undergoing fundamental changes, in the 4th century BCE there appears to have been a considerable degree of concern about the proper representation of the love god. The corporeal form of Eros was already a question for debate in the *Symposium*, but in the work of the comic poets Alexis and Eubulus we find particular anxiety focalised around the changing appearance of Eros/erotes in the visual arts, with

[127] Ling 1999 offers numerous examples.

both authors explicitly criticising artists for their fallacious depictions of the god.[128] Eubulus (fl. 370s-360s BCE) offers the following tirade:

> τίς ἦν ὁ γράψας πρῶτος ἀνθρώπων ἄρα
> ἢ κηροπλαστήσας Ἔρωθ᾽ ὑπόπτερον;
> ὡς οὐδὲν ἤδει πλὴν χελιδόνας γράφειν,
> ἀλλ᾽ ἦν ἄπειρος τῶν τρόπων τῶν τοῦ θεοῦ. |
> δέστιν γὰρ οὔτε κοῦφος, οὔτε ῥᾴδιος
> ἀπαλλαγῆναι τῷ φέροντι τὴν νόσον,
> βαρὺς δὲ κομιδῇ. πῶς ἂν οὖν ἔχοι πτερὰ
> τοιοῦτο πρᾶγμα; λῆρος, εἰ κἄφησέ τις.
>
> What man was he, what modeller or painter,
> Who first did represent Eros as winged?
> He was a man fit only to draw swallows,
> Quite ignorant of the character of the god.
> For he's not light, nor easy for a man
> Who's once by him been mastered, to shake off;
> But he's a heavy and tenacious master.
> How, then, can he be spoken of as winged:
> The man's a fool who such a thing could say.
>
> Kassel-Austin *Eubulus* fr. 40 (41). Trans. C. D. Yonge (adapted).

It will be unsurprising to any reader of Plato's *Symposium* that we find controversy – and indeed, the literary staging of controversy – around the appearance of Eros, or that the specific composition of his body should be seen as linked to his powers as a god. Eros' appearance was of great importance for his conceptualisation, and where collective cult worship of Eros existed in the pre-Roman Greek world, it is almost always associated with specific and well-known statues. As such, Barbara Breitenberger has argued that the divinity of Eros is bound up with his (greatly divergent) images to a far greater extent than that of most other gods.[129]

[128] Kassel-Austin *Eubulus* fr. 40 (41); Kassel-Austin *Alexis* fr. 20; fr. 247. On early debates over the physical appearance of Eros see Hägg—Utas 2009: 157-159.
[129] Breitenberger 2007. On the Thespian cult pp 142-144.

But we might conjecture a more specific cause of Eubulus' anxiety. Particularly given his mention of swallows, it is highly possible that the poet is responding in this poem to the incipient trend for an infant, birdlike Eros, already known in a few isolated images from the early 4th century. The infant Eros does not appear for certain in the extant literature until sometime after his proliferation in imagery – he is perhaps first described as *micros* and *neognos* in the epigrams of Asklepiades of Samos (fl. ca. 270 BCE) –[130] but over the course of the 3rd century a widespread and detailed conception of Eros as infant arose. This is most famously explored in Book 3 of Apollonius' *Argonautica* (written between 283 and 221 BCE, at a time when images of infant erotes were already widespread), where, in a scene which has often been likened to a sculptural group,[131] a childlike Eros plays at knucklebones with Ganymede in the garden of Zeus.[132] It is possible that Eubulus' complaints constitute the earliest literary traces of this new corporealisation.

The earliest plural erotes of Hellenistic literature were not explicitly linked to childhood, however. Erotes appear twice in Theocritus, first at *Idylls* 7.96, where they are associated with luck: 'the Loves sneezed for Simichidas', Σιμιχίδᾳ μὲν Ἔρωτες ἐπέπταρον, bringing either good or bad luck – the toss has been debated since antiquity –[133] and again at *Idylls* 15.119-122, "Women at the Adoneia," where they are staged at an intriguing intersection of the erotic, the funerary, the

[130] *Greek Anthology* 12.105; 12.162. Their early third century date must be treated with caution, however, as it is highly uncertain whether Asklepiades really was the author of many of the epigrams ascribed to him.
[131] The scene is often linked to the *astragalizontes*.
[132] Apollonius *Argonautica* 3.111-166.
[133] Hunter 1999: 180.

mythological, and the artistic. The setting for this appearance is the ritual marriage/funeral bed of Aphrodite and Adonis, decorated by the Queen Arsinoe and placed in the palace of Ptolemy II at Alexandria, and which the public were invited to come and view as part of the festival of the Adoneia. The set-up surrounding the divine couple is described by a professional singer whose hymn forms part of Theocritus' poem:

> πὰρ μέν οἱ ὥρια κεῖται, ὅσα δρυὸς ἄκρα φέροντι,
> πὰρ δ' ἀπαλοὶ κᾶποι πεφυλαγμένοι ἐν ταλαρίσκοις
> ἀργυρέοις, Συρίω δὲ μύρω χρύσει' ἀλάβαστρα,
> εἴδατά θ' ὅσσα γυναῖκες ἐπὶ πλαθάνω πονέονται
> ἄνθεα μίσγοισαι λευκῷ παντοῖα μαλεύρῳ,
> ὅσσα τ' ἀπὸ γλυκερῶ μέλιτος τά τ' ἐν ὑγρῷ ἐλαίῳ.
> πάντ' αὐτῷ πετεηνὰ καὶ ἑρπετὰ τεῖδε πάρεστι·
> χλωραὶ δὲ σκιάδες μαλακῷ βρίθοισαι ἀνήθῳ
> δέδμανθ'· οἱ δέ τε κῶροι ὑπερπωτῶνται Ἔρωτες,
> οἷοι ἀηδονιδῆες ἀεξομενᾶν ἐπὶ δένδρῳ
> πωτῶνται πτερύγων πειρώμενοι ὄζον ἀπ' ὄζω.
> ὦ ἔβενος, ὦ χρυσός, ὦ ἐκ λευκῶ ἐλέφαντος
> αἰετοὶ οἰνοχόον Κρονίδᾳ Διὶ παῖδα φέροντες,
> πορφύρεοι δὲ τάπητες ἄνω μαλακώτεροι ὕπνω·
>
> [Adonis] has beside him everything that the fruit trees bear in season, and delicate gardens enclosed in silver baskets, and golden bottles of Syrian perfume; all the cakes, too, that women shape on their kneading boards when they mix colorings of every kind with refined wheat flour, and those they make using sweet honey and smooth oil. All creatures of the earth and air are here with him, and green arbors have been built, festooned with soft dill; boyish Cupids fly overhead like young nightingales that in a tree test their fledgling wings flying from branch to branch. O ebony, O gold, O eagles of white ivory bearing to Zeus son of Cronus a boy to pour his wine, and purple coverings above, softer than sleep!
>
> Theocritus *Idylls* 15.112-125. Trans. Neil Hopkinson.

This passage is particularly interesting in that it describes a group of erotes deployed in a very similar way to the terracottas known from tomb contexts: the singer almost certainly describes what are intended to be a group of figurines suspended on strings through the 'green arbors'.[134] In this elevated setting, it is possible that we are supposed to imagine erotes constructed not of painted

[134] Gow 1952: 297.

terracotta but of ebony, gold, and/or ivory, like the figure of Ganymede described directly after them. As a literary court production, the poem evidently describes a very specific occasion and plays to a very specific audience, but it may also be suggestive for thinking more broadly about the connotations of such "flying" erotes to their viewers. Theocritus does not make explicit the association with the funerary realm, and this may speak against Huguenot's argument for such figures as being connected to the soul and the afterlife.[135] But he may also raise a new possibility for the staging of terracotta tomb erotes: perhaps those tableaux too could originally have incorporated greenery, resulting in occupied arbors which spread across the ceilings of mausolea. In terms of their characterisation here, part of their appeal is certainly in their erotic connotations, which form part of the nexus of eroticism centred on the divine marriage between Aphrodite and Adonis, but Theocritus chooses to play up not this but instead their similarities to small, harmless birds, likening them to nightingales – recalling the comparison made by Eubulus between the painter of Eros and the painter of swallows.

The association of erotes with the funerary sphere is one which would endure, and it is made even more emphatically by the late-2nd-century poet Bion in another poem celebrating the Adoneia. The poem opens with the couplet

> Αἰάζω τὸν Ἄδωνιν, "ἀπώλετο καλὸς Ἄδωνις"·
> "ὤλετο καλὸς Ἄδωνις," ἐπαιάζουσιν Ἔρωτες.
>
> I lament for Adonis, "Beautiful Adonis is dead."
> "Beautiful Adonis is dead," the erotes lament back.
> Bion *Idylls* 1.1-2. Trans. Stephen M. Trzaskoma, R. Scott Smith, Stephen Brunet.

[135] Huguenot 2008: 151-152.

Later in the poem, the erotes are characterised as the sons of Venus (v 59), but they are also transfigured into mourners for, and layers-out of, the dead Adonis:

> κέκλιται ἁβρὸς Ἄδωνις ἐν εἵμασι πορφυρέοισιν,
> ἀμφὶ δέ νιν κλαίοντες ἀναστενάχουσιν Ἔρωτες
> κειράμενοι χαίτας ἐπ' Ἀδώνιδι· χὠ μὲν ὀιστώς,
> ὃς δ' ἐπὶ τόξον ἔβαλλεν, ὃ δὲ πτερόν, ὃς δὲ φαρέτραν·
> χὠ μὲν ἔλυσε πέδιλον Ἀδώνιδος, οἳ δὲ λέβητι
> χρυσείῳ φορέοισιν ὕδωρ, ὃ δὲ μηρία λούει,
> ὃς δ' ὄπιθεν πτερύγεσσιν ἀναψύχει τὸν Ἄδωνιν.
> "αἰαῖ τὰν Κυθέρειαν," ἐπαιάζουσιν Ἔρωτες.
>
> Delicate Adonis has been laid on the purple-dyed bedclothes.
> Around him, weeping, the erotes groan in lamentation and
> shear their hair for Adonis. One put his arrows on the bed,
> another his bow, and one brought his well-feathered quiver.
> One untied Adonis' sandal, others bring water
> in a golden bowl, another washes his thighs,
> and one stands behind Adonis and dries him with his wings.
> "*Aiai*, Cythereia!" the erotes lament back.
>
> Bion *Idylls* 1.79-86. Trans. Stephen M. Trzaskoma, R. Scott Smith, Stephen Brunet.

As in *Idylls* 15, these erotes serve as enlivened emotional backdrop for the central event of the poem. But far more than in the earlier poem, the focus here is on a privileged association with care and grief. No longer birdlike, they are visualised not at a spatial remove, hovering over the body, but instead actively surround it, tending to it and touching it in a way which highlights and creates similarities with human actors – in particular the women of a household, to whom the primary tasks of mourning and laying out dead bodies were usually assigned. Among a wide cast of mythological mourners, ranging from Hymenaeus and the Graces to the rivers and the oaks, erotes are presented as the foremost, with the refrain ἐπαιάζουσιν Ἔρωτες, "the erotes lament back," reappearing throughout the poem. This continual return to the erotes' lamentation, while decidedly literary as a technique, may also be interesting as a

comparandum for repeating imagery of erotes such as that found, much later, on Roman garland sarcophagi. Alongside a highly ecphrastic narrative account of their identities and behaviour, the poet uses erotes as an articulating device, interweaving their sad yet benign presence through the poem as the fundamental point of return, a repeating pattern which holds the lament together both structurally and emotionally.

b. Erotes in epigram and the Anacreontea

A funerary characterisation is by no means the only way in which erotes were received in Hellenistic literature. A far more joyful, naughty tradition, and also a more dominant one, comes from the corpus of epigrams, which often emphasise the wicked playfulness and conceptual instability of the god. It should be noted, however, that epigrams are notoriously hard to date, and while some of the poems discussed here are certainly Hellenistic compositions,[136] many will be from the period of the Roman Empire.[137] Love is understandably a major topos of this genre, which was designed for performance in the tipsy context of the symposium, and conveniently for my focus on material culture, these artful poems, intensely aware of their own craftedness, and performed among all the clutter and display of elite eating and drinking, also frequently take as their subject matter valuable items of skilled craftsmanship such as silverware. In the

[136] e.g. *AP* 5.139, attributed to Meleager and dated to ca. 100 BCE, in which erotes seem to be the embodiment of the poet's desire, and are associated with his confusion over the source of this desire. See Gutzwiller 2014: 83.
[137] On different attempts to date the Anacreontea see Campbell 1982: 10-18.

following pages I first discuss a handful of poems from the Anacreontea and the Greek Anthology in which Eros or erotes are described as part of the ekphrasis of an object, and then move onto a series of texts from the 2nd-4th centuries CE which either describe artworks involving erotes/amores or offer a verbal image which clearly draws heavily on extant visual models. I should offer the caveat that in focusing on texts which deal in particular with Eros/erotes in material culture, I miss out many of the key themes of epigrams about Eros proper, which have received far more attention in scholarship: his narrative possibilities, his childish willfulness, and his potential for cruelty are all themes which will go underexplored here, but which form part of the broader picture of Eros' representation in epigram.[138] My justification for focusing on erotes/amores who are explicitly described as constructed objects or images is that these texts have a particular insight to offer into the ways in which ancient viewers conceptalised the cupids of material culture; as such, they will form both a basis and a reaction point for my own analyses of images and objects.

In several instances, erotes described as part of larger image and object schemes seem to be included as much because they are appropriate decorative figures for a valuable object as because they have any specific narrative or visual role to play. In *Anacreontea* 4 and 5, each of which presents itself as a commission for a new silver cup, erotes are listed as components of multi-figure compositions which incorporate Dionysos and Aphrodite as well as the nymphs, the Horae, and many other figures from the wider Dionysiac sphere. The erotes of *Anacreontea* 5 are described as being unarmed, while *Anacreontea* 4 opens by emphasising the

[138] Rosenmeyer 1992 (via index) discusses many of these themes.

peaceful nature of the commission (no helmet this) and its subject matter, but we hear little else about the specific arrangement of the various figures. With no obvious narrative role to play, these erotes function primarily as participants in a canonised list of figures appropriate to a particular context, in this case part of the iconography of pleasure and feasting, a clear demonstration of what Tonio Hölscher has described as visual *decorum*.[139]

Anacreontea 57 gives a clearer idea of how erotes fitted onto the object which it describes. This poem describes a carved silver plate showing the birth, or triumph, of Aphrodite. After focusing on the skill with which the sea has been represented – "What metalworker created the sea? What inspired art poured waves on a salver?" (ἆρα τίς τόρευσε πόντον; / ἆρα τίς μανεῖσα τέχνα / ἀνέχευε κῦμα δίσκῳ;) and dwelling for several lines on the naked form of Aphrodite, the poet ends by describing a guileful Eros and laughing Himeros ὑπὲρ ἀργύρου δ᾽ ὀχοῦνται, 'riding over the silver' on dancing dolphins alongside a chorus of leaping fish. The description corresponds closely to many images, in silverware and other media, in which two or more (unnamed) erotes accompany a marine Aphrodite, and the role of the erotes is a frequently reiterated one: as well as helping to eroticise Aphrodite, they contribute to the sense of playfulness and movement of the scene. Moreover, in riding 'over the silver' they are made to contribute to the seamlessness with which a sensuous image emerges from the object of which it forms a part, becoming conduits through which both the reader and the imaginary viewer can try to access the materiality of the silver plate, to bridge the gap between description, image, and object.

[139] e.g. Hölscher 2009.

It is a trope of epigram to play with the borders between object and image, image and reality,[140] and artworks of Eros are considered in this light more often than most other artistic subjects. On several epigrams, Eros is described as imparting particular physical powers to the objects on which or as which he is represented. This can be the case for a statue, as at *Greek Anthology* 16.14, which asks 'Who carved Eros and placed him by the fountain, thinking to still this fire with water?', but it can also be the case for more functional objects. So we find an epigram in which Eros is turned into the handle of a frying pan,[141] one in which he is asleep on a pepper castor,[142] and one in which he is carved on a bowl.[143] In all of these instances, he is explicitly described as adding to the 'fire' associated

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[140] See e.g. Squire 2010.

[141] *Greek Anthology* 16.194 (all translations from *GA* 16 are by W. R. Paton):
Εἰς ἄγαλμα Ἔρωτος:

Χάλκειόν τις Ἔρωτα μετήγαγεν ἐκ πυρὸς εἰς πῦρ,
τήγανον ἁρμόζων τῇ κολάσει κόλασιν.
On an image of Love:
Someone has transferred this brazen Love from fire to fire, fitting a frying-pan onto him, torment to torment.

[142] *Greek Anthology* 16.208:
Εἰς Ἔρωτα καθεύδοντα ἐν πιπεροπάστῃ:

Οὐδὲ κατακνώσσων, οὐδ᾽ ἄπνοος, οὐδ᾽ ἐνὶ δαιτὶ
νόσφι πυρισπάρτου δήγματός ἐστιν Ἔρως.
On Love Asleep on a Pepper-Castor:

Neither when asleep, nor when lifeless, nor at the banquet, is Love without a fire-scattering nip.'

[143] *Greek Anthology* 9.749**:**
Εἰς Ἔρωτα ἐν καυκίῳ γεγλυμμένον:
Ἐν κυάθῳ τὸν Ἔρωτα τίνος χάριν; ἀρκετὸν οἴνῳ αἴθεσθαι κραδίην· μὴ πυρὶ πῦρ ἔπαγε.
On Love carved on a Bowl:
Why Love on the bowl? It is enough for the heart to be set on fire by wine. Add not fire to fire.

with the objects: the heat of the frying pan, the nip of the pepper, and the heart-inflaming wine which is drunk from the bowl. To the right viewer and in the right circumstances, objects incorporating the form of Eros could be imagined as possessing significant, and dangerous, powers of their own.[144]

As this suggests, Eros is also a character whose sculptural incarnations are particularly conducive to response and interaction on the part of the viewer. One epigram series takes pleasure in addressing an Eros bound to a pillar, deservedly punished for his cruelty to lovers; these poems seem to refer to statues (and perhaps also gems) showing Eros in this pose.[145] Another series imagines coming across a sleeping Eros, assuming familiarity on the part of the reader-listener with the popular series of sleeping Eros sculptures. While one of these poems delights in describing the woodland environment which surrounds the sleeper, two others express fear that Eros will dream a dream which is bitter, πικρός, for them, thus providing a discomfiting new perspective to viewers of such sculptures.[146] Epigram is a literary genre which takes particular pleasure in giving life and voice to statues, meaning that the degree of agency and enlivenment allotted to representations of Eros cannot be ascribed to the powers of the god/personification alone, but his images are certainly some of the most frequently brought-to-life in these poems.

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[144] Bielfeldt 2014b discusses this idea of power/*dunamis* inherent in objects in relation to Roman lamps.
[145] *Greek Anthology* 16.196-199; Platt 2007: 92 suggests that the term lithoxoos, used in 16.196, may be equally applicable to the carvers of gems as to stone carvers.
[146] *Greek Anthology* 16.210-212.

The tendency to read Eros into his image taps into more wide-reaching concerns about the material embodiment of love; epigrammatic narrators often play, for example, on the idea that Eros is indistinguishable from, or actually is, a beautiful young boy or boys.[147] Ontological instability is exploited to the full in a series of epigrams on the cult statue of Eros from Thespiae, carved by the sculptor Praxiteles (and, unlike sleeping Eros or Eros punished, an Eros with an adolescent form).[148] The poems play with the relationship of Eros the god to his statue, and to the statue's sculptor, asking whether the visible erotic powers of the beautiful statue indicates that the god has overpowered Praxiteles, or, conversely, whether Praxiteles has power over the god whose body he himself has chiselled into shape. In some poems, Praxiteles' lover Phryne also takes part in the transaction, chastely dedicating a statue received as a gift or payment for her love to Love himself,[149] and even the speaking voice of the narrator can claim a participatory role in the web of power-play.[150] It is a series which exploits to the full the blurred boundary-lines between the emotion *eros,* Eros the god, and his images, reminding the reader that the instability of Eros' material presence is inseparable from the unstable emotions and embodied reactions associated with the emotion of *eros*.

[147] So for example *Greek Anthology* 12.76, 77, 78.
[148] *Greek Anthology* 12.56, 57; 16.167, 203-206**.** Prose accounts of the episode at Pausanias *Periegesis* 1.20.1-2; Alciphron *Letters of Courtesans* Letter 1 [fr. 3]; Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 59.13. The fullest discussion of the epigrams is Gutzwiller 2004. Platt 2011 discusses the related epigram series on the statue of Aphrodite at Knidos.
[149] *Greek Anthology* 16.203.
[150] *Greek Anthology* 12.57.

Such a sense of power is more rarely allotted to erotes plural, although *GA* 16.214 and 215 describe statues or friezes on which erotes are depicted along with the weapons of the Olympian gods, acquired by them as the spoils of battle. But while there is an aspect here of triumph over the gods, the epigrams also focus on the childishness of the victors, and their delight in decking themselves out in stolen costumes. And unlike many of the epigrams about Eros, there is no sense here of the agency of these figures beyond the world of images in which they appear.

A final poem from the Anacreontea does not describe an object, although its subject is one which is found also in the image tradition,[151] but constitutes one of the most playful meditations in any genre on erotes, and evokes a highly pictorial image of them. *Anacreontea* 25 is a text which returns to the question of what erotes are and how they should be embodied, but where Eubulus had once agonised over the difficulties of representing Eros, here the potential of this body type for corporeal mutation and instability has become a topic for light-hearted play:

σὺ μέν, φίλη χελιδόν,
ἐτησίη μολοῦσα
θέρει πλέκεις καλιήν·
χειμῶνι δ᾽ εἷς ἄφαντος
ἢ Νεῖλον ἢ᾽ πὶ Μέμφιν.
Ἔρως δ᾽ ἀεὶ πλέκει μευ
ἐν καρδίῃ καλιήν·
Πόθος δ᾽ ὁ μὲν πτεροῦται,
ὁ δ᾽ ᾠόν ἐστιν ἀκμήν,
ὁ δ᾽ ἡμίλεπτος ἤδη·
βοὴ δὲ γίνετ᾽ αἰεὶ
κεχηνότων νεοττῶν·
Ἐρωτιδεῖς δὲ μικροὺς

[151] On nests of erotes see LIMC Amor/Cupido 48-53.

οἱ μείζονες τρέφουσιν·
οἱ δὲ τραφέντες εὐθὺς
πάλιν κύουσιν ἄλλους.
τί μῆχος οὖν γένηται;
οὐ γὰρ σθένω τοσούτους
Ἔρωτας ἐκβοῆσαι.

Dear swallow, you come every year and weave your nest in summer, but in winter you disappear, off to the Nile or Memphis; whereas Love is always weaving his nest in my heart: one Desire is getting his wings, another is still an egg, another is half-hatched already; and there is a continuous shouting from the wide-mouthed chicks; little baby Loves are fed by bigger ones, and when they are fully grown they immediately beget others in their turn. What remedy can there be? I have not the strength to shout down all these Loves.

Anacreontea 25. Trans. David Campbell.

Following Theocritus in seeing small birds as a major reference point for the bodies of erotes, and thus constructing a strong foundational visual metaphor, this poem takes advantage of erotes' unclear genealogies and mythological affiliations[152] to invent a flighty new origin myth, founded on a paradigm of endless multiplication within the speaker's heart. It links the instability of erotic feeling (butterflies in the stomach, perhaps), and the potential for a single love to multiply into many, to the instability of the cupid's body, between baby, god, and bird, and also to the bursting boundaries between a single Eros/eros and the many pothoi and erotes to which that Eros inevitably gives birth/gives rise. And not only are the individual bodies of erotes treated as subjects for continual creative appropriation and reinvention, but they also become a group for whom continual increase, continual replication, is an inherent and unstoppable characteristic. Both of these characteristics are ones which resonate strongly with the visual sources, and not only with those where a nest of erotes is represented.[153]

[152] *LIMC* Vol. III.1: 850; 952-3.
[153] As in the House of the Tragic Poet at Pompeii (VI.8.3).

The epigrams and Anacreontea provide a range of lenses through which to look at object-grounded images of Eros and erotes. In *Anacreontea* 4 and 5, represented erotes are simply appropriate decor, part of a line-up of figures associated with pleasure and the symposium, and subject to no further analysis. In *Anacreontea* 57 they bring movement and gaiety, and are connected to reflections on the materiality of a scene and of the object on which it appears. This connection with materiality is linked in certain poems (those on sleeping Eros or Eros punished) to a heightened predisposition to imagine statues of Eros as living beings with whom the viewer can engage; in others (where Eros is depicted on a pepper pot or as a frying-pan handle), it transfers into an association of the agency of Eros with the agency of the object as a functional thing. Finally, in *Anacreontea* 25, erotes are associated with playful conceptual and bodily instability and with the possibility for unbounded replication. These different ways of thinking about cupids – as appropriate decor, as bringers of movement and vitality, as possessing a privileged relationship to object materiality and object agency, and as unstable, endlessly reproducing bodies – are themes which will recur and intersect at many points in imagery of erotes, and provide valuable lenses for reflecting on the visual sources.

c. Prose and hexameter texts, 2nd-4th centuries CE

Further descriptions of erotes as part of artworks, this time in paintings, are found in Greek prose texts of the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE. While only one of these paintings takes erotes as its primary subject, each of the descriptions which I discuss, by Achilles Tatius, Lucian, and Philostratus, has something to reveal about the ways in which images of erotes were composed and perceived. I end my discussion with the late-4th-century hexameter *Epithalamium* by Claudian, which allows us to think about changing conceptualisations of erotes/amores at the beginning of Late Antiquity.

In the opening scene of Achilles Tatius' novel *Leucippe and Clitophon*, an unnamed narrator describes in vivid detail a painting which has been dedicated outside the temple of Astarte at Sidon. It is an image of Europa being abducted by Zeus,[154] and the description leads from the flower-filled meadow in Sidon on which the princess's companions grieve and wonder at her kidnap, to the surging sea through which the bull carries Europa towards Crete. The narrator ends by turning to the erotes who surround the pair:

> ἡ δὲ δίκην ἐπεκάθητο τῷ ταύρῳ πλεούσης νεώς, ὥσπερ ἱστίῳ τῷ πέπλῳ χρωμένη. περὶ δὲ τὸν βοῦν ὠρχοῦντο δελφῖνες, ἔπαιζον Ἔρωτες· εἶπες ἂν αὐτῶν γεγράφθαι καὶ τὰ κινήματα. Ἔρως εἷλκε τὸν βοῦν· Ἔρως, μικρὸν παιδίον, ἡπλώκει τὸ πτερόν, ἤρτητο τὴν φαρέτραν, ἐκράτει τὸ πῦρ· ἐπέστραπτο δὲ ὡς ἐπὶ τὸν Δία καὶ ὑπεμειδία, ὥσπερ αὐτοῦ καταγελῶν, ὅτι δι᾽ αὐτὸν γέγονε βοῦς.
>
> 'Thus she was seated on the bull like a vessel under way, using the veil as a sail; about the bull dolphins gambolled, Cupids sported: they actually seemed to move in the picture. Love himself led the bull—Love, in the guise of a tiny boy, his wings stretched out, wearing his quiver, his lighted torch in his hands: he was turning towards Zeus with a smile on his face, as if he were laughing at him for becoming a bull for his sake.'
>
> Achilles Tatius *Leucippe and Clitophon* 1.1.13. Trans. S. Gaselee.

[154] Or possibly Selene; see Morales 2004:36-48 for a discussion of scholarly opinion on this point.

In this passage, erotes and Eros are described in quite different relation to Europa and the bull. Much as in *Anacreontea* 57, the erotes are set alongside the dolphins, bringing play and above all movement to the image, and providing the *enargeia* which will bring the picture to life in the mind of the reader. Along with the dolphins, and with the foamy wave-crests described earlier on in the ekphrasis, they seem to frame the central group. Eros also provides movement, but it is of a different sort: permitted to engage directly with the bull-Zeus, and thus allotted a role in the narrative of the myth, he leads the figures, and thus the narrative, forward.

The distinction made between Eros and erotes in this passage is especially striking because the extant images of Europa from the imperial period make no such separation. While these sometimes incorporate an eros holding a torch and leading the bull,[155] there are rarely more than two erotes surrounding the central group,[156] and they are not characterised in substantively different ways from one another. It is likely, then, that the separation of the two figure types here is due less to any real image prototype than to the desire to balance a sense of the visuality of the painting with the narrative demands of an incipient love story. The mention of Eros ultimately marks the end of the long description and forward movement to the next stage of the novel's opening: as the narrator is admiring the part of the picture where Eros leads the bull, he is approached by a stranger, Cleitophon, who will go on to tell the first narrator the story of his own,

[155] e.g. LIMC Europe I No. 161, a mosaic from Kos dating to the first half of the third century.
[156] An exception is LIMC Europe I No. 126.

Cleitophon's, love affair with Leucippe.[157] By contrast, the gamboling erotes suggest delay and directionlessness and the pleasures of the present tableau, slowing down Europa's passage across the sea and our own passage, as readers, from the ekphrasis into the toils and adventures of the novel proper.

A second example of erotes as activating agents is found in Lucian's description of a painting by Aëtion of the marriage of Alexander and Roxana:[158]

> ἔστιν ἡ εἰκὼν ἐν Ἰταλίᾳ, κἀγὼ εἶδον ὥστε καὶ σοὶ ἂν εἰπεῖν ἔχοιμι. θάλαμός ἐστι περικαλλὴς καὶ κλίνη νυμφική, καὶ ἡ Ῥωξάνη κάθηται πάγκαλόν τι χρῆμα παρθένου ἐς γῆν ὁρῶσα, αἰδουμένη ἑστῶτα τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον. Ἔρωτες δέ τινες μειδιῶντες· ὁ μὲν κατόπιν ἐφεστὼς ἀπάγει τῆς κεφαλῆς τὴν καλύπτραν καὶ δείκνυσι τῷ νυμφίῳ τὴν Ῥωξάνην, ὁ δὲ τις μάλα δουλικῶς ἀφαιρεῖ τὸ σανδάλιον ἐκ τοῦ ποδός ὡς κατακλίνοιτο ἤδη, ἄλλος τῆς χλανίδος τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου ἐπειλημμένος, Ἔρως καὶ οὗτος, ἕλκει αὐτὸν πρὸς τὴν Ῥωξάνην πάνυ βιαίως ἐπισπώμενος. ὁ βασιλεὺς δὲ αὐτὸς μὲν στέφανόν τινα ὀρέγει τῇ παιδί, πάροχος δὲ καὶ νυμφαγωγὸς Ἡφαιστίων συμπάρεστι δᾷδα καιομένην ἔχων, μειρακίῳ πάνυ ὡραίῳ ἐπερειδόμενος—Ὑμέναιος οἶμαί ἐστιν (οὐ γὰρ ἐπεγέγραπτο τοὔνομα). ἐτέρωθι δὲ τῆς εἰκόνος ἄλλοι Ἔρωτες παίζουσιν ἐν τοῖς ὅπλοις τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου, δύο μὲν τὴν λόγχην αὐτοῦ φέροντες, μιμούμενοι τοὺς ἀχθοφόρους ὁπότε δοκὸν φέροντες βαροῖντο· ἄλλοι δὲ δύο ἕνα τινὰ ἐπὶ τῆς ἀσπίδος κατακείμενον, βασιλέα δῆθεν καὶ αὐτόν, σύρουσιν τῶν ὀχάνων τῆς ἀσπίδος ἐπειλημμένοι· εἷς δὲ δὴ ἐς τὸν θώρακα ἐσελθὼν ὕπτιον κείμενον λοχῶντι ἔοικεν, ὡς φοβήσειεν αὐτούς, ὁπότε κατ᾽ αὐτὸν γένοιντο σύροντες. Οὐ παιδιὰ δὲ ἄλλως ταῦτά ἐστιν οὐδὲ περιείργασται ἐν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἀετίων, ἀλλὰ δηλοῖ τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ τὸν ἐς τὰ πολεμικὰ ἔρωτα, καὶ ὅτι ἅμα καὶ Ῥωξάνης ἦρα καὶ τῶν ὅπλων οὐκ ἐπελέληστο.
>
> The picture is actually in Italy; I have seen it myself and can describe it to you. The scene is a very beautiful chamber, and in it there is a bridal couch with Roxana, a very lovely maiden, sitting upon it, her eyes cast down in modesty, for Alexander is standing there. There are smiling Cupids: one is standing behind her removing the veil from her head and showing Roxana to her husband; another like a true

[157] Bartsch 1989: 57 and Morales 2004 among others see this initial ekphrasis as prefiguring the themes and trajectory of the story to come.

[158] Pliny NH 35.78 names an Aëtion who was an outstanding artist in the 107th Olympiad, 352 BCE. This Aëtion is generally taken to be painter of the picture seen by Lucian, which is possible given that the marriage of Alexander and Roxana took place in 327, but is perhaps made less likely given that Lucian describes this as a recent story (*Herodotus or Aëtion* 4), and that we have no evidence of cupids characterised like this from this period (although this may be an accident of survival).

> servant is taking the sandal off her foot, already preparing her for bed; a third Cupid has hold of Alexander's cloak and is pulling him with all his might towards Roxana. The king himself is holding out a garland to the maiden and their best man and helper, Hephaestion, is there with a blazing torch in his hand, leaning on a very handsome youth—I think he is Hymenaeus (his name is not inscribed). On the other side of the picture are more Cupids playing among Alexander's armour; two of them are carrying his spear, pretending to be labourers burdened under a beam; two others are dragging a third, their king no doubt, on the shield, holding it by the handgrips; another has gone inside the corslet, which is lying breast-up on the ground—he seems to be lying in ambush to frighten the others when they drag the shield past him. All this is not needless triviality and a waste of labour. Aëtion is calling attention to Alexander's other love—War—, implying that in his love of Roxana he did not forget his armour.
>
> Lucian, *Herodotus or Aëtion* 5-6. Trans. K. Kilburn.

Again, these erotes are providers of *enargeia* and movement. They seem to function at once as a sort of moving frame, and also, somewhat paradoxically given their marginal role, as the main agents of this image: the protagonists themselves remain, so far as we can tell, almost entirely stationary. It is the cupids who perform all the activity of eroticisation – revealing Roxana to Alexander, pulling Alexander towards Roxana – on the one hand externalising the mental states and pheromones of the pair, no doubt, but also to some extent distancing the performance of emotion from them, and thereby absolving them of responsibility for or agency in the interaction.

The erotes in this scene – there are at least nine of them – distract from the main event as much as they draw attention to it. They lead the eyes of the viewer, in this case Lucian, to wander away from the main figures and devote half of his description to a subsidiary scene-within-a-scene in which six erotes play with the weapons of the groom. Lucian concludes his description by presenting this secondary scene as a commentary on the main image, maintaining that it refers to Alexander's love of war, but the most closely comparable extant paintings, of

the adultery of Mars and Aphrodite,[159] suggest that the point may be as much about the re-staging of the armour and the warlike body which usually occupies it as spaces of play and eroticism. This subsidiary activity on the part of the cupids is used to provide a distraction from, and even an undercutting of, any serious import which might be assigned to the action of the picture. In engaging with the armour, they both accentuate its size and significance and, at the same time, completely distance it from its original purpose, ignoring the importance which they have just underscored: they treat the lance as a beam, the shield as a royal stretcher or sledge, and the corselet as a hiding place. This focus on the raw physicality of the objects (and also bodies) with which they come into contact is a characteristic of cupids which will reappear in many contexts.

A final point about this painting is that the cupids have an impact beyond the internally depicted scene. Lucian tells us that when Aëtion displayed the picture at Olympia, one of the judges was so impressed that he gave his daughter to the painter as a wife.[160] While the point is in some ways sophistic, it is surely not entirely irrelevant, particularly given the interest in the material powers of eros imagery evidenced by the epigrams, that a painting of cupids facilitating a famous love affair should possess sufficient agency to win a bride for its painter.

A third and very different ekphrasis of a painting of erotes is found in Philostratus' the Elder's *Imagines* I.6.[161] The picture described by Philostratus here is one of a whole host of erotes in an apple orchard, engaging in a wide

[159] See Chapter 4.
[160] Lucian, *Herodotus or Aëtion*: sections 4, 6.
[161] See Schönberger 1968 ad loc. for commentary on this ekphrasis.

range of activities: harvesting apples, dancing, running about, sleeping, playing catch with an apple, shooting arrows at one another, wrestling, and hunting. Philostratus' concern in the *Imagines* in general is to strike a balance between sensory and intellectual engagement with the pictures which he discusses,[162] and it is therefore no surprise that right from the start of this ekphrasis he makes an effort to intellectualise the painting's subject matter, revealing information which is not explicitly shown by the artist:[163]

> Μῆλα Ἔρωτες ἰδοὺ τρυγῶσιν· εἰ δὲ πλῆθος αὐτῶν, μὴ θαυμάσῃς. Νυμφῶν γὰρ δὴ παῖδες οὗτοι γίνονται, τὸ θνητὸν ἅπαν διακυβερνῶντες, πολλοὶ διὰ πολλά, ὧν ἐρῶσιν ἄνθρωποι, τὸν δὲ οὐράνιόν φασιν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ πράττειν τὰ θεῖα.
>
> 'See, Cupids are gathering apples; and if there are many of them, do not be surprised. For they are children of the Nymphs and govern all mortal kind, and they are many because of the many things men love; and they say that it is heavenly love which manages the affairs of the gods in heaven.'
>
> Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines* 1.6.1. Trans. Arthur Fairbanks.

But this is also a description which reveals something about the visual, and more broadly *physical*, properties of such an image. Firstly, the picture is strongly marked by the possibility for sensory involvement: 'Do you catch anything of the fragrance hovering over the garden,' Philostratus asks his young interlocutor, 'or are your senses dull? But listen carefully; for along with my description of the garden the fragrance of the apples also will come to you.' 'And let not the hare over there escape us, but let us join the Cupids in hunting it down.' With these instructions, Philostratus invites the reader-viewer to imagine smells and movement as well as a visual image, perhaps in part a function of the sensuous,

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[162] Newby 2009; see also Squire 2013 on literary strategies of *enargeia* in the *Imagines*.

[163] This characteristic is also found later in the passage, where Philostratus expounds on the magical properties of hares.

ever-exploratory erotes.[164] A second striking aspect of the description/image is its fragmentation: where most of Philostratus' *Imagines* describe a single more or less coherent scene, here we are asked to imagine a whole series of different ones, all situated within the same orchard or bucolic idyll, but with no clear relationship between them. While the point is moot as the painting probably never existed,[165] one plausible format may be a long frieze of the sort found in the House of the Vettii; or at least, one can see how cupid imagery of this sort might have lent itself to such episodic friezes. Philostratus presents his readers with an image which encourages the gaze to wander – even to chase a hare – from one scene to the next, with no priority given to any one over another; the thematisation of the absence of Aphrodite from the final scene (where she is substituted for by a shrine to which erotes bring offerings) serves only to underscore the lack of a visual or narrative centre to this painting. This mode of fragmentary, decentralising composition, and the modes of looking which it assumes and encourages, are ones which will appear again and again in cupid imagery.

A final text which offers ways of thinking about the composition and viewing of images of erotes, in this case labelled amores, is the Latin hexameter *Epithalamium* of Claudian, written on the occasion of the marriage in 398 CE of Honorius, emperor of the Western Roman Empire, to Maria, the daughter of the powerful general Stilicho. While this text does not explicitly refer to a painting or

[164] See Squire 2013 on the attempts made in the *Imagines* to appeal to the various senses of the reader.
[165] This is a topic which has been the subject of much debate; Primavesi—Giuliani 2012 provide an overview of competing opinions.

other constructed visual image, its description of Venus' journey to the royal court is clearly influenced by contemporary images of the triumph of marine Venus (some of which are discussed in Chapter 2),[166] and incorporates many of the groups of figures who commonly accompany Venus in images: the graces, a supporting triton, nereids on a range of exotic hybrid sea-creatures, and the 'tender race of amores, of identical face and similar age,' *ore pares, aevo similes, gens mollis Amorum*.[167] As in other texts, the amores are used here to create a visual effect of *enargeia* and of movement: they are described as a vast winged chorus, agitating the surface of the sea.[168] But more than in the earlier descriptions, there is a pronounced concern in the *Epithalamium* about their status. As in Philostratus, a distinction is drawn between Amor and the amores, with Amor characterised as the son of Venus and the divinity of heavenly and royal love, and the amores as the children of the nymphs, in charge of earthly love affairs.[169] But where Philostratus characterised his erotes in decidedly playful ways, even when they were performing potentially productive tasks such as harvesting apples, the characterisation here is very much as the servants of Venus. She describes them as her *exploratores*, scouts,[170] and they in turn refer to her as their *domina*.[171] They are sent out to find another servant, Triton, who will

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[166] Frings 1975, in his commentary on the epithalamium, writes (p63) that it is unclear whether Claudian had a particular image in mind when describing Venus' marine voyage, but the broader links of the scene to visual prototypes are indisputable.
[167] Claudian *Epithalamium* v. 73.
[168] Claudian *Epithalamium* v. 153-4: *prosequitur volucer late comitatus Amorum / tranquillumque choris quatitur mare.*
[169] Claudian *Epithalamium* v. 72-77. It is unclear from the Latin whether the amores have faces and ages similar to that of Amor proper, or simply to one another.
[170] Claudian *Epithalamium* v. 146.
[171] Claudian *Epithalamium* v. 142.

carry Venus to the wedding, and on arrival at the court they are assigned a whole range of servile tasks: hanging up lamps, garlanding the doorposts with myrtle, lighting incense, and decorating the marriage bed.[172] The text seeks to achieve a balance between the visual impact of the amores, their mythological and eroticising significance, and their place in a carefully stratified late-antique status hierarchy, staging them as a backing chorus for Venus not entirely unlike the throng of soldiers who surround Stilicho, father of the bride and commander of the Western Roman legions, at the end of the poem, 'scatter[ing] flowers like rain and [drenching] their leader in a mist of purple blossoms'.[173] In a context where history as well as myth was being written, laden with the significance of a royal marriage, amores as much as any other figure evidently needed to be carefully defined and fitted into the rigid protocols and (visual) systems of meaning of a fantastical court, and indeed they play an important role in the court's hierarchy here, as the witnessing, supportive audience and minions who constitute the physical manifestation of the agency of a central figure.

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These four texts have certain things in common with the epigrams and *Anacreontea*. One constant is their use of cupids to provide an impression of

[172] Claudian *Epithalamium* v. 202-227.
[173] So Wasdin 2014: 52. Cf. v. 295-298: 'Meanwhile the army has laid aside its swords: the soldiers are dressed in white and throng around Stilicho, the bride's father. No standard-bearer nor common soldier fails to scatter flowers like rain and to drench their leader in a mist of purple blossoms.' *Candidus interea positis exercitus armis / exultat socerum circa; nec signifer ullus / nec miles pluviae flores dispergere ritu / cessat purpureoque ducem perfundere nimbo.* Trans. Maurice Platnauer.

movement, and to arouse in the beholder a desire for sensory engagement: in the case of Philostratus' *Imagines*, a desire to smell the flowers and chase the hare within the image, and in the cases of Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon* and Lucian's *Herodotus or Aëtion*, a turn to thoughts of love. Toynbee used the word 'vitality' to describe the effect of adding cupids to a scene or object;[174] I have used instead the word *enargeia*, a term from ancient rhetorical theory which was seen as one of the vital components of a successful *ekphrasis*, and which denotes the capacity of language not simply to describe a scene, but to bring it vividly to life in the mind of the viewer.[175] It is a quality of activation and enlivenment which may be even more relevant to the cupids of imagery than to those of the texts.

The cupids of these texts also retain a tendency to encircle other characters, and by so doing to emphasise their beauty or power, with a sense of social hierarchy asserting itself most forcefully in this respect in Claudian's late-4th-century court composition. The privileged relationship to objects observed in the *Anacreontea* and epigrams is extended and adapted by Lucian, who suggests that cupids may be able to undercut, even as they accentuate, the significance of an object (here Alexander's armour), or even to grant it a new significance which it had not formerly possessed.

More than the epigrams and *Anacreontea*, however, these texts also raise the issue of how the presence of cupids affects narrative imagery. It is a difficult

[174] Toynbee 1971: 465.
[175] For a discussion of *enargeia* see Zanker 1981; Webb 2009: 87-106.

question to answer; on the one hand these figures can appear to delay narrative progress, holding the reader in the pleasures of a vivid visual tableau, as in Achilles Tatius. But Lucian's description of the encounter between Alexander and Roxana may present different possibilities; it could be argued that the cupids here offer a way of depicting and substituting for narrative movement, through an externalisation of emotional states which, the reader-viewer knows, also expresses the expectation of contact between bodies. However, in widening out the image's field of engagement to include multiple bodies and interactions, in preventing any kind of direct encounter between Alexander and Roxana, and in particular in their introduction of a subsidiary multi-part scene focused around the arms of Alexander, cupids undeniably serve to distract and delay as much as to focalise and frame, encouraging on the part of Lucian, their viewer, a description which moves away from the central action to dally on a series of only tangentially related episodes. This potential for visual distraction is one which will form a constant of cupid imagery; it is exemplified also in the related mode of composition which can be pieced together from Philostratus' description, in which, rather than distracting from a central interaction, the episodicity of cupid imagery requires a paratactic, wandering description, frustrating the expectations of those viewers who look for a narrative or compositional centre in the work.

d. Hellenistic and Roman texts: conclusions and caveats

These texts introduce important considerations for thinking about Hellenistic and Roman perceptions of cupids within imagery, and many of the characterisations which have emerged here will turn out to have rich and highly developed visual correlates. But there is also a danger in relying too heavily on textual accounts: texts have a tendency to intellectualise, to seek to define the precise relationship of multiple cupids to Venus (as in Philostratus and Claudian), or to justify cupids' presence by regarding them as erudite allusions to something outside the picture (such as Lucian's use of them to refer to Alexander's love of war). Moreover, the texts ignore the vast majority of cupid image types: despite the constructions which I have placed on Bion's repeating lament, there is no explicit mention in any of the texts of repeated, "ornamental" cupids, and there are few which discuss cupids who are both the main or only characters of a scene or object and at the same time not characterised as Eros. It seems that such scenes and arrangements are simply not appropriate objects of textual focus, and perhaps the majority of erotes were understood by the majority of (verbalising) viewers as something like those in the poems about silverware from the *Anacreontea*: inoffensive figures without whom many spaces or scenes would be incomplete, but who required no further comment. While highly suggestive, then, literary sources offer only a partial cipher to the ubiquitous presence of cupids in Hellenistic and Roman visual culture.

VII. Bodies in the walls: additional approaches to Roman cupids

As this dissertation seeks to interrogate cupid bodies in interaction with surrounding figures, objects, and environments, the following pages introduce a series of additional frameworks which can be used, in addition to the ancient texts, to describe and make sense of the non-symbolic aspects of cupids – their visual, sensory, syntactic relations to larger image and object schemas. I indicate here the ways in which my approach is informed by i) theories of framing and the parergon, ii) the modern discipline of phenomenology and ancient ideas about touch, and iii) discussions of the empathetic, interactive qualities of architecture, ornament, and objects. While I do not systematically apply any one of these approaches to the objects under discussion here, their influence will show throughout my study.

a. Cupids within larger visual structures

Cupids are found in a variety of structural relations to the figures, images, and objects alongside, in, and on which they are shown. In some instances, such as when they flank portrait roundels or inscriptions on sarcophagi, they might be seen as inviting analysis in terms of frame theory – whether in the terms associated with Immanuel Kant, whereby the frame is seen as something separate from the object, serving to enhance or detract from the pleasure which it gives, or, more obviously, in Jacques Derrida's sense, whereby the frame or parergon is seen as a permeable boundary, serving to complicate and interrogate

the exceptionalism of the object and any idea of a fixed distinction between inside and out.[176]

In other cases, though, they might be seen as sitting more naturally within different structural visual categories; in Lucian's description of the marriage of Alexander and Roxana, for example, it is tempting to draw comparisons between the distracting scene of cupids playing with weapons and Michael Camille's study of 12th-14th century marginalia on illuminated manuscripts, *Images on the Edge*, which traces not only the affinities between centralised image/text and marginalised additions and accretions, but also the ability of such images to undercut the message of, or simply fail to correspond to, the primary subject of a page.[177]

Verity Platt and Michael Squire, in the introduction to their edited volume *The Frame in Classical Art: A Cultural History*, have argued for a historically and culturally specific understanding of "framing" in Greco-Roman antiquity,[178] in which embellishment is seen as part of a larger system of order, and not as supplemental or peripheral to a central core. One of the points at which this specificity becomes clearest is in their discussion of the ancient terms associated with our modern word "ornament":

> 'While the Greek term *kosmos* has yielded our terminology of the 'cosmetic', its derivation points to something much more macrocosmic: it refers at once to the whole universe, and to a system of universal order that material forms can visually echo (whether jewellery, elaborate accoutrements or other emblazoned devices). Similarly, if Latin words like *decor* and *ornatus* have generated our

[176] Derrida 1978.
[177] Camille 1992.
[178] Platt—Squire 2017: 4-5; 39.

> language of the 'decorative' and 'ornate', their etymology stands at an important conceptual remove: these Latin terms refer to a sort of seemly 'propriety' or lustrous 'embellishment', one that again works on both a physical and metaphysical level.'[179]

This notion of the integrated, ordered system offers a useful hermeneutic for thinking about cupids (although it might be questioned whether the term "frame" at some point ceases to be useful as a descriptive category for thinking about this system). Cupids are perhaps the only common figure type in Roman art who can be found in just about every register of a decorated space or object; in the same painted room or on the same sarcophagus they can be found within central narrative tableaux, in subordinate, "marginal" scenes, and as frame figures or within vegetal ornamental friezes **(e.g. Figs. 2.5; 2.14a; 3.38)**. In a visual system which has as one of its distinctive features a tendency to juxtapose stylistic and image registers of very different types,[180] they function as vital agents of connectivity and integration. The links which they draw are both concrete and conceptual: on the one hand they stretch between and around other images and objects, serving as physical mediators between one thing and another, while on the other they serve as a point of contact and ambiguity between the divine and the earthly, the mythological and the metaphorical, the tangible and the intangible. To an extent which is only hinted at in the Hellenistic and Roman texts, they challenge their viewers to collapse or to think between fixed categories of reference, to shift perspective, to embrace structural fluidity.

[179] Platt—Squire 2017: 45-46; cf. also Barham forthcoming.
[180] A canonical discussion of this tendency in Roman art is Hölscher 2004 [1987].

b. The touching body

One aspect of cupids which makes it difficult to regard them simply as framing, connecting devices, interchangeable with, for example, a meander band or a vine scroll, is their distinct physicality, and their tendency to interact in a markedly tactile manner with anything which comes within reach. The propensity to touch is already clear on the Gela lekythos, where the image plays with the ambiguous relationship of the erotes' bodies and hands to the plant tendrils. And it is still prominent in Lucian's description of Aetion's painting, where almost no figure or object described escapes the clutching, in this case eroticising, hands of the cupids.

Almost more than any other figure in Greco-Roman art, cupids explore the possibilities of tactility as a way of approaching their surrounding environments. In an almost unending series of bodily postures, they explore the limits of kinaesthetic and vestibular possibility – the body's capacity to move and to balance.[181] As Stuveras has noted, unless they come from the same mold, no two cupid bodies are identical.[182] Their capacity for connective touch is marked out in textual descriptions as *tener*, tender, soft, yielding, ἁβρός, delicate, ἁπαλός, tender, soft to the touch, τακερός, tender, melting, or *blandus,* caressing, flattering, fawning.[183] In images they test the surfaces of bodies and objects with their hands, drawing attention to the possibilities of cutaneous contact –

[181] Paterson 2007: ix sees cutaneous, kinaesthetic, and vestibular touch as the three main components of proprioception, the "Perception of the position, state, and movement of the body and limbs in space."
[182] Stuveras 1969: 165.
[183] *LIMC* III.1: 851-852; 953-4 collect examples of usage.

sensation as it is constituted between skin and other surfaces. And any privileged capacity for tactility assigned to this body type is compounded by their own attractive physicality: these are bodies which not only model touch, but which at the same time invite it from their viewers in their own right. While it is well established that cupids provide a means of representing erotic intersubjective connections, I shall argue here that cupid imagery was a major locus in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds for the representation and exploration of a much wider range of interaction grounded in emotionally charged, but not primarily or solely erotic, touch.

Recent scholarship on touch has been profoundly shaped by the discipline of phenomenology, and in particular by the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who proposed that the conscious subject "I" is inextricable from the human body,[184] arguing in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) that bodily experience is the primary, and indeed the only, way in which the surrounding environment – the world – can be grasped, explored, and understood:

> 'In so far as we believe in the world's past, in the physical world, in 'stimuli', in the organism as our books depict it, it is first of all because we have present at this moment to us a perceptual field, a surface in contact with the world, a permanent rootedness in it, and because the world ceaselessly assails and beleaguers subjectivity as waves wash round a wreck on the shore.'[185]

For Merleau-Ponty, our understanding of the world is first and foremost a 'non-thetic, pre-objective and pre-conscious experience,'[186] not grounded in any rational analytic framework. It is only in relation to our own bodies that we make

[184] This is in contrast to the earlier work of Husserl, who focused on the experience of a more disembodied "I".
[185] Merleau-Ponty 2002 (translating Merleau-Ponty 1945): 240-241.
[186] Merleau-Ponty 2002: 281; see also 475.

sense of outside objects and of the spaces which we occupy and in which we are embedded,[187] and it is specifically in bodily actions and movement that 'the spatiality of our body is brought into being'.[188] In fact, there is no strict distinction to be made between the body and the world with which it engages: the body extends at the same time inwards toward the mind and outwards into the world, breaking down any distinction between subject and object,[189] and at one point in *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty refers to the 'subject-object', [190] a category which he would go on to explore further in his final unfinished book, *The Visible and the Invisible*.

There are many ideas here which resonate with the ways in which cupids are configured in imagery, not least given Merleau-Ponty's fascination, following that of Freud and Lacan, with childhood as a particular period of pre-objective knowledge acquisition.[191] Cupids are presented as highly sensate but non-analytic characters, never obviously moving from the realm of experience and activity into that of judgment and reflection. They are always in motion, and always trying out different positions, different ways of being in the world. They are systematically used to depict the relationships between human bodies and the world which surrounds them: providing a corporeal bridge between the discrete bodies of Roxana and Alexander, for example, but also, perhaps, helping the "subject" external viewer to imagine contact with the "object" artwork and the untouchable bodies which it contains. In all of these ways, cupids provide a

[187] Merleau-Ponty 2002: 116, 171.
[188] Merleau-Ponty 2002: 117.
[189] Merleau-Ponty 2002: 411.
[190] Merleau-Ponty 2002: 109.
[191] Merleau-Ponty 2002: 414.

cultural locus for thinking through modes of interacting with the world which we now term phenomenological. Iris Marion Young has criticised Merleau-Ponty for assigning an implicitly male gender to his experiencing subject, but it is a gendering which seems to be assumed by Roman artists and viewers as well in their representations of this most privileged of tactile agents.[192] One question which this study will attempt to negotiate is that of the extent to which cupids present a tactility in which the viewer feels that they can participate, and the extent to which their tactile experience of the world is opposed to the intellectualising, optically-based approach of the external viewer.

Ancient texts also offer suggestive models for thinking about cupids as agents of a specifically phenomenological or tactile impulse. The starting point for any discussion of ancient touch is the work of Aristotle, who famously defines it as the most base of the senses, but also as the most basic, on which all others rely.[193] In *On the Soul*, he describes touch as the sense which distinguishes animate beings from plants,[194] humans from animals, and superior from inferior humans:

> ἐν μὲν γὰρ ταῖς ἄλλαις λείπεται πολλῶν τῶν ζῴων, κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἁφὴν πολλῷ τῶν ἄλλων διαφερόντως ἀκριβοῖ. διὸ καὶ φρονιμώτατόν ἐστι τῶν ζῴων. σημεῖον δὲ τὸ καὶ ἐν τῷ γένει τῶν ἀνθρώπων παρὰ τὸ αἰσθητήριον τοῦτο εἶναι εὐφυεῖς καὶ ἀφυεῖς, παρ᾽ ἄλλο δὲ μηδέν· οἱ μὲν γὰρ σκληρόσαρκοι ἀφυεῖς τὴν διάνοιαν, οἱ δὲ μαλακόσαρκοι εὐφυεῖς.
>
> [I]n the other senses [man] is behind many types of animal, but in touch he is much more discriminating than the other animals. That is why he is of all the living creatures the most intelligent. Proof of this lies in the fact that among the human race men are well or poorly endowed with intelligence in proportion to

[192] Young 1980.
[193] Aristotle *On the Soul* 3.13.435a13-435b26.
[194] Aristotle *Parts of Animals* 4.5.681a27-8.

> their sense of touch, and no other sense; for men of hard skin and flesh are poorly, and men of soft flesh well endowed with intelligence.
>
> Aristotle, *On the Soul* 2.9.421a21-26. Trans. W.S. Hett.

Despite the unsettling connection which Aristotle makes between social status and intelligence, implied by the contrast between hard and soft hands, this passage is significant in its insistence, similar to that of Merleau-Ponty, that touch can be linked to cognition. Rebecca Steiner Goldner has argued that Aristotle is the first person to make this connection,[195] and she points out as well that, later in *On the Soul*, he describes the faculty of desire as being inextricably embedded within the faculty of sensation.[196]

The connection of touch with desire accords well with the idea of cupids as privileged tactile entities, although the question of where they would sit on the scale of soft-skinned human to hard-skinned human to animal to plant is less easy to answer. As Aristotle's division between the tactile capacities of different humans indicates, touch was – and still is – an index of socio-cultural as much as biological identity, and although cupids are fantastical creatures, their gestures and postures cannot be analysed along purely biological or psychophysiological lines. While, along with other fantastical figure types, they are excluded from studies of ancient body language,[197] in many ways cupids' postures, gestures, and relations to other bodies and objects are as "real" as those of the heavily idealised images of elites, acrobats, and paedagogoi who do receive analysis: they are present, in large numbers, in the real spaces occupied by viewers, and they

[195] Steiner Goldner 2017: 50-51.
[196] *On the Soul*, 3.7.431a10-14, quoted in Steiner Goldner 2017: 62.
[197] See for example the summary of recent literature on body language at Masséglia 2015: 7-11.

exhibit physical traits and behaviours which are grounded in reality as much as in fantasy. Chapter 4 will look in more detail at connections between the roles and activities of cupids and the defined social roles of human actors.

The nature and significance of cupidic touch must also be considered, however, in the very different context of the tactile – or rather, the haptic, the optical illusion of tactility – as it is found in art and art writing. Meditation on the power of touch, and the power of optical illusions which invite touch, is found in several of the foundational myths of Roman thinking about art. The many epigrams describing the lifelike qualities of Myron's bronze statue of a cow, and the anecdote in which the rival painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius manage to deceive, respectively, a flock of passing birds and the rival artist with their paintings, all insist on the haptic qualities of the ideal artwork.[198] The story of Pygmalion and Galatea also thematises the connection between touch and the created image; here the touch of the sculptor is an activating one, with the power to bring carved ivory to life.[199] In the introduction to her recent edited volume on *Touch and the Ancient Senses*, Alex Purves has suggested that the myth of Midas offers an alternative paradigm of human tactile relations with objects: where Pygmalion's touch brings warmth and life and unexpected texture to his statue, the touch of Midas renders everything around him the same, everything gold, removing all other sensations from the world.[200] Given the popularity of stories like these, it is surely relevant to look in ancient imagery not only for the haptic

[198] Squire 2010 discusses Myron's cow; for the Zeuxis/Parrhasius story see Pliny *Natural History* 35.36 and Squire 2017: 222-228.
[199] Ovid *Metamorphoses* 10.243-297; see Purves 2017: 7-8.
[200] Purves 2017: 9-10.

image as marked out by its stylistic traits – its efforts at what we now call "realism" – but also for visual signifiers or shorthands for an image's haptic qualities. Cupids are ideal candidates for such a role: firstly, in their endless probing and exploring, they allow vicarious access to haptic experiences of objects which must otherwise remain purely visual for the viewer, inviting the external beholder to imagine participating in touching the wreath of Venus or the dense represented vines which cover a surface. Secondly, and in consequence of this, they invite reflection on the material properties of the thing being looked at, asking the viewer of a garland frieze on a sarcophagus or public façade to navigate between the haptic perspectives of a Pygmalion and a Midas, between the activating vision which sees the garlands as fruit and leaves and the flattening vision which sees them as cold hard stone.

Touch and corporeality in imagery are subjects which can only be studied in a limited way using the terms and discursive frameworks of the ancient world: as my invocation above of the *Kindchenschema* has suggested, I believe that there are aspects of representation and human behaviour which, however much their specific expression is subject to cultural and historical constraints, also respond to human drives which were not necessarily part of philosophical discourse in antiquity, let alone the more broadly disseminated discourses of which artists and patrons might have been aware. The lack of explicit theoretical reflection on issues such as the comparative attractions of different body types does not mean that such ideas were not present, and even reflected on, in a wide range of cultural productions. My discussion in this study will thus try to strike a balance between ideas which received verbal exploration and interrogation in the

ancient world, and ideas which were explored more fully in non-verbal, visual media.

A final point which may be of relevance to a discussion of cupids and haptic viewing is that ancient optical theories usually regard viewing as being in some sense tactile, relying either on particles from the eye making physical contact with the object of viewing (extramission theory), or on particles from the object making physical contact with the eye (intromission theory).[201] While it would certainly be excessive to suggest that cupids and figures like them are consciously used as illustrations or physical manifestations of optical theory, we might ask whether there is not at least a connection between a discourse on optics which consistently emphasised physical contact between viewer and viewed, and a visual culture which consistently imagines physical contact with the thing being viewed.[202]

c. Embodied viewers and engaging architecture/ornament

The capacity for a haptic experience of images or surroundings is not only dependent on representations of touch and of bodies.[203] In the pages which follow I offer a third lens for the case studies of this dissertation, looking at

[201] See for example Darrigol 2012: 1-5.
[202] Ritter 2005a discusses a lekythos (Hermitage b 4524) on which an eros drips liquid directly from a patera into Menelaos' eyes, with the implication being that this fills him with love for Helen – an image which invites interrogation in terms of haptic visuality.
[203] I take the phrase "haptic visuality" from Marks 2002.

discourses in which architecture and objects have been thought to exist in bodily relationship to their viewers and users. Architecture and architectural ornament have long been thought of as providing structure to visual – and other sensual – experience, serving as extensions of and bounding limits for the human body, and even possessing agency of their own with the potential to affect and interact with that of their viewers. I shall argue that it is within this wider framework of architectural affect that the haptic qualities of cupids become most apparent and most fully operative – and also, to flip this formulation on its head, that cupids are activators and enhancers of the haptic aspects of architectural and object space.

It has long been recognised that architecture (and objects) can stimulate the senses of the beholder. 18th-century French architectural theorists already wrote of the different moods and characters which an architect could give to a building, from gaiety to sadness, mysteriousness to a pastoral tone.[204] The idea that architecture can have a corporeal effect on the human body, however, underwent its most thorough elaboration in the late 19th century, and emerges out of the interdisciplinary discussions around the concept of *Einfühlung*,[205] 'empathy', originally a philosophical term which soon became a broader hermeneutic tool for explaining 'the phenomenological immediacy of our aesthetic appreciation of objects',[206] whether surrounding environments or other human beings. Theodor Lipps, the main figure in the development of *Einfühlung*

[204] Di Palma 2016: 31-32.
[205] The term first appears in Robert Vischer's *Das optische Formgefühl: Ein Beitrag zur Ästhetik* (1873), and is extended most fully in the work of Theodor Lipps.
[206] Stueber 2017.

into a concept which could be applied beyond philosophical aesthetics, investigated among other things its role in human spatial perception; one theory of his, which has been corroborated by recent scientific research, is that humans have a basic physiological attraction to the abstract swelling or bulge, *der Wulst*, in a range of media.[207] These ideas were brought into architectural theory in the work of Heinrich Wölfflin; Wölfflin suggests that architecture, 'like clothing',[208] is an outward projection of human *Körpergefühl*, and that it resonates with the body of the beholder and the maker; it is by relating it to their own sense of bodily self that viewer and artist understand and produce architecture.[209]

While *Einfühlung*/empathy theory fell out of fashion for much of the 20th century, the ideas which it brought to prominence have experienced a revival in recent decades, in particular in the work of Juhani Pallasmaa, whose ideas are also strongly, and more explicitly, indebted to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.[210] In his book *The Eyes of the Skin* (1996), Pallasmaa writes that

> Architecture is our primary instrument in relating us with space and time, and giving these dimensions a human measure. It domesticates limitless space and endless time to be tolerated, inhabited and understood by humankind.[211]

Pallasmaa demands a return to a phenomenological approach to, and appreciation of, architecture, whose meaning and value he sees as being

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[207] Payne 2012: 142, citing Lipps 1906, *Die ästhetische Betrachtung und die bildende Kunst*.
[208] Payne 2012: 124, citing Wölfflin 1899, *Die klassische Kunst: eine Einführung in die italienische Renaissance*, 227.
[209] Payne 2012: 118, citing Wölfflin 1886, 'Prolegomena zu einer Psychologie der Architektur'.
[210] See for example Pallasmaa 1996: 49, quoting Merleau-Ponty on the paintings of Cezanne: 'In my view, the task of architecture is "to make visible how the world touches us".'
[211] Pallasmaa 1996: 19.

produced in the interaction with its human users, rather than being objective qualities inherent in the built structures themselves. He roots architectural experience in something very similar to Wölfflin's *Körpergefühl*, in his case seeing the exploration of the oral cavity as the first "architectural" experience of the human being:

> Our sensory experience of the world originates in the interior sensation of the mouth, and the world tends to return to its oral origins. The most archaic origin of architectural space is in the cavity of the mouth.

For Pallasmaa, it is through the outward projection of this haptic sensitivity that we understand the architectural spaces which surround us.

One of the main means through which large-scale construction has been thought to invite interaction from human viewers is through ornament, where architecture manifests itself at a small enough scale to be understood in an embodied sense by humans.[212] First argued for by Gottfried Semper, the privileged ability of ornament to mediate between people and the built environment was also explored by Wölfflin and by August Schmarsow, who saw it as providing an impetus for viewers to slow down and focus on the physical space in which they stood.[213] More recently, the anthropologist Alfred Gell has argued that ornament (although not specifically in architectural context) functions as a technology for entangling and trapping the viewer, able to hold them in the visual grip of an object and, where the ornament is well constructed, denying any prospect of escape due to the incapacity of the eyes to comprehend

[212] Payne 2012: 124-125, citing Wölfflin 1899, *Die klassische Kunst: eine Einführung in die italienische Renaissance*.
[213] Payne 2012: 144-5, citing Schmarsow 1910, 'Anfangsgründe jeder Ornamentik'.

or grasp its totality.[214] The main modern proponent of ornament's mediating qualities, however, has been the art historian Oleg Grabar, who has explored four categories of ornament commonly found in Islamic art: writing, geometric ornament, represented architecture, and vegetal ornament. Grabar argues that ornament is vital to the establishment of 'practical, physical, sensory, and psychological', and also emotional, relationships with objects, artifacts, and buildings.[215] He sees it as both medium and message: in some instances particular types of ornament are 'intermediary veils through which works of art are perceived and ultimately reached',[216] while in other cases, 'ornament itself can be the message that is communicated'.[217]

How do these concerns help us to think about cupid imagery? Cupids are often employed as part of repeating "ornamental" schemas, merging into and forming part of architectural backdrops, their bodies molded and bent so as to fill a gap, emphasise an archway, or otherwise underline the sensuous qualities of architectural space. Sometimes, viewers may even experience them almost as an integral part of an architectural structure, as semi-abstract swelling forms in the sense described by Lipps, inviting a pre-conscious physiological reaction far more than any categorising, attentive look. If this is accepted as being the case, then cupids' very unassumingness may constitute the key to a deep-seated and widespread impact within the spaces in which they are found: as Pallasmaa writes, 'The very essence of the lived experience is moulded by unconscious

[214] Gell 1992; Gell 1998.
[215] Grabar 1992: 44.
[216] Grabar 1992: 46.
[217] Grabar 1992: 44.

haptic imagery and unfocused peripheral vision… Peripheral vision integrates us with space, while focused vision pushes us out of the space making us mere spectators.'[218] The diffuse, decentralised, immersive quality of much cupid imagery, often covering too much of an image or surface for a viewer to be expected to look at each figure individually, is surely experienced far more as affect than as percept (to use the terms popularised by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari), as atmosphere rather than defined object of the gaze.[219]

But where architecture has been said to 'make visible how the world touches us',[220] cupids take this sense of the haptic even further. Hovering over the boundary-line between the ornamental and the representational, they promise to "touch" and connect the viewer, and the architecture, in many different ways. They connect on the one hand at the most basic physiological level of the curved lines of their bodies, and at the level of the connection which their moving, wriggling forms provide between one spatial or experiential zone and the next. But they also, as we have seen, possess attractive bodies which invite particular types of tactile attention from their viewers, and, furthermore, they are used to represent touch, performing acts of stroking, grabbing, placing which surely provide an impetus to the human beholder to imagine touching in turn. Finally, they are used to personify the abstract quality of love, a fundamentally connective and tactile human impulse. From the level of their structural integration into the surrounding environment to the level of their symbolic,

[218] Pallasmaa 1996: 14-15.
[219] Deleuze—Guattari 1987 [1980]. Their translator Brian Massumi offers a gloss of affect on p xvii. The term is applied to ornament in Moussavi 2015: 8-12.
[220] Pallasmaa 1996: 14, quoting Merleau-Ponty on the paintings of Cezanne.

intellectualised meaning, cupids embody, and invite thoughts of, interconnectivity, tactility, and the sensuous, providing a fundamentally – and multiply – haptic mode of mediation between human viewers and the spaces, objects, and other figures who surround them.

In recent decades, accounts of Roman material culture have given increasing attention to the ways in which buildings (or the makers and patrons of buildings) seem to encourage their users to engage with them in particular ways. On the one hand this has taken place at the level of structural engagement with architecture and imagery, as in the work of Andrew Wallace-Hadrill and Ray Laurence, who have investigated the extent to which we can reconstruct behavioural patterns within the house and the city respectively from the ways in which these zones are visually and functionally articulated, whether by wall painting or by the distribution of public fountains.[221] But viewer-object relations have also been explored through the close viewing of images, image assemblages, and decorated spaces, with the work of Jas' Elsner and Bettina Bergmann in particular providing sophisticated accounts of the ways in which the panel paintings and illusionistic imagery of elite Campanian houses challenge and tease their viewers, forcing them to engage with and question any preconceptions they might have had about fixity and coherence in the spaces they inhabited.[222] Elsner talks of a 'constant play with desire' in illusionistic painting, where the viewer is both offered and denied access to the alternative (ir)realities on the walls,[223]

[221] Foundational texts are Wallace-Hadrill 1994; Laurence 1994.
[222] Elsner e.g. 1995, Chapter II; Bergmann e.g. 1994, 2002.
[223] Elsner 1995: 75; 84.

while Bergmann has focused on the 'phenomenological, bodily experience'[224] stimulated by illusionistic schemes, pointing to the 'restless, potentially changeable cohabitation of things and spaces,'[225] and the 'rich cacophony' which results '[w]hen all sides of a room are allowed to "speak".'[226] While Campanian wall paintings have constituted the main locus of such sensory interrogations, the list could be extended substantially; to take two examples of scholarship relating to media discussed in this dissertation, Rebecca Molholt's PhD dissertation *On stepping stones: the historical experience of Roman mosaics* has recently offered the possibility of reconstructing a phenomenology of the floor,[227] while articles by Jaś Elsner and Verity Platt in a recent volume on sarcophagi have given new prominence to the intertwined social and sensual qualities of mythological funerary imagery.[228] Many of the articles in Ruth Bielfeldt's edited volume *Ding und Mensch in der Antike* also deal with material encounter with objects, using object agency and *Bildakt* theories to think about enlivenment, *Verlebendigung*, and animation, *Belebung*, in ancient texts and objects.[229]

However, there has been very little focused consideration in scholarship either of the ancient world or of later periods of the ways in which non-narrative figural ornament impacts on the relationship between humans and objects/architecture. A notable exception is the work of Alina Payne, who has

[224] Bergmann 2002: 17-18.
[225] Bergmann 2002: 23.
[226] Bergmann 2002: 40.
[227] Molholt 2008.
[228] Elsner 2012; Platt 2012.
[229] Bielfeldt 2014.

looked extensively at architectural sculpture and at figural relief friezes of the early modern period, reviving the debates of Wölfflin and his peers and exploring the idea of locating a building's agency in these architectural in-between zones where buildings come some way to meeting the human body. In one article, 'Living Stones, Crying Walls,' Payne writes about putti.[230] It is a paper which opens with the ultimate account of an "enlivened" building: a Romanian legend about a woman who is physically built into the walls of a church to guarantee its structural integrity and beauty. Later on in the article, Payne moves on to the more formulaic enlivenment of putti on 15th-century architectural friezes:

> 'Agents of movement, represented as bodies and not as abstract patterns, the rows of putti are ultimately a bizarre architectural ornament, and a potentially violent one that hints at forces that are not benign and *somehow* pertain to architecture—an unruly aliveness (or enlivenment), a potential cruelty (typical of children), loose, unbound by convention, acting out raw emotion and body movements. If there is a recollection of the embedded life inside the walls, then the putti 'manifest' it and invite a reciprocal motion (or enactment) around the building—not a direct frontal interaction but a dance around its perimeter.'[231]

And again, talking about the frieze figures from the Pergamon altar:

> '… in the same way [as the putti of the Quattrocento, these] pointed at a liveliness outside of control, that threatened to dissolve the whole, that hinted at enlivenment run amok, when the boundaries between object and subject are stretched so thin that a collapse is felt to be imminent. And it may also have hinted at the need to push that boundary as far as it would go, at the need to create a deep correspondence between body and thing—to turn architecture into "living presence".'[232]

Are cupids a manifestation of "living presence" in architecture and objects? I will argue here that in many ways they are. Cupids are one way of making explicit the ways in which the world, objects, architecture, literally try to, or pretend to, touch their viewers. But where Payne's understanding of Renaissance putti

[230] Payne 2014: 318.
[231] Payne 2014: 327.
[232] Payne 2014: 332.

emphasises 'unruly aliveness' and 'potential cruelty', I will look at a wider range of possible meanings and performative functions for this *lebendige Architektur*, and *lebendige Okjekte* too, in a range of different contexts.[233]

VIII. Summary of chapters

It is the goal of this study to investigate the roles played by cupids in a range of different image and object contexts in the hope of drawing into sharper focus the particular physical, psychological, social, emotional, and haptic constellation of responses which cupids might have invited from their viewers – and also from those who looked straight past them, on to the end of the vista, to the named mythological characters in the painting, to the *point* of the image. In order to do this I ask a range of questions of different types of object and surface on which cupids are found: How is their tactility visually expressed? How does it interact with larger image schemes? Does it encourage the viewer to engage in particular ways with larger spaces and image schemes? What relationship do the bodies and activities of cupids have to "real world" bodies and social relations? I offer neither a complete account of any object genre nor a complete iconographic study; instead, I investigate various contributions of a particularly persistent figure type to the wider "cacophony" of visual voices,[234] and I suggest that a cupid's eye view (the perspective from a cupid's fingertips? The ocularcentrism

[233] The term '*lebendige Architektur* comes from a letter written by Jacob Burckhardt to Max Alioth, dated 5th April 1975, where it is used in relation to Baroque architecture.
[234] I use the word in the sense of Bergmann 2002: 40.

of our language proves hard to avoid)[235] encourages new ways of thinking through marginality, enlivenment, and the depiction and social connotations of touch in Roman visual culture and society.

Chapter 2 begins by looking at cupids within the spaces of domestic architecture. Focusing on mosaic floors of the 2nd to 5th centuries from Roman Syria and North Africa, it investigates some of the many strategies through which cupids question and transform the materiality of the floor, opening up a range of perceptual and experiential possibilities for those who view and use these planar walking horizons.

Chapter 3 looks at cupids as framing and mediating figures for the dead. Taking as its case studies a series of 2nd- and 3rd-century CE sarcophagi from the contrasting – but also connected – funerary landscapes of Rome and of central Asia Minor, it seeks to reconstruct some of the haptic associations and experiences which cupids might have invited from mourners and other tomb visitors, exploring the ways in which they transform and make approachable both the architecture of death and the dead themselves.

Chapter 4 introduces a social dynamic to these visual and behavioural strategies. It looks at cupids as framing and mediating figures for powerful bodies, asking how they can be used to represent and transfigure the omnipresent social hierarchies of Roman imagery and society. Considering the connection between cupids and slave attendants, it asks how this particular

[235] The term is from Jay 1993.

mode of representing or connoting slavery differs from other possible models, such as that of the *servus callidus* of New Comedy. It then uses the very different case studies of domestic Campanian fresco paintings and the imperial temple of Venus Genetrix to argue, firstly, that hierarchy can be manifested in even the most "ornamental" of architectural settings, and, secondly, that ornament and imagery involving cupids may have resonated differently for viewers within semi-private domestic and public imperial contexts.

Finally, a brief **Conclusion** puts cupids into the context of ancient writing on "innocent viewers" of art objects, arguing that these figures, so often involved in the making, displaying, and discovery of objects and images, should stimulate new thinking on the ways in which images, objects, and spaces were experienced and understood in imperial-period Rome.

Chapter 2

Bodies underfoot: cupids on mosaic floors

> 'Emotion pours into a person and melts, loosens, dissolves him. … Eros pours, drips, heats, softens, melts, loosens, cooks, boils, dissolves. Men pride themselves on being able to resist such assaults on their physiological and psychological boundaries.'
>
> Anne Carson, *Putting her in her place*

Anne Carson puts an old point well: under the influence of love, bodies and emotions change. Eros brings about the dissolving of boundaries, slippage between material states. Carson's is an image of only partial relevance to my discussion here: while there are many ancient texts which refer to the fires and the cookery of love, the cupids of Roman imagery do not always boil those who look on them.[236] But in another sense it is an idea which tallies well with what we can observe of cupids in the visual arts: closely bound up in the exploration and interrogation of material certainties, they mount a constant assault on the physiological and psychological boundaries of the viewer, an insistent drip between one mode of viewing and another.

This chapter follows the cupids who inhabit the surfaces of the domestic built environment, and more specifically the mosaic floors which were one of the most conspicuous sites of domestic decoration across the Empire from the 2nd century CE onward. It explores ways in which cupids challenge and exploit the claims to substance

[236] *Greek Anthology* 12.92 describes Eros as a 'cook of the soul' (ψυχῆς ἐστὶ μάγειρος Ἔρως), while *Greek Anthology* 9.749, 16.194, and 16.208, mentioned in Chapter 1, all describe objects related to eating and drinking which are made hot or fiery by the presence of an eros.

and illusoriness, depth and surface, made by these pavements, and their ability, in the process, to question and redefine the relationship of the viewer to their constructed surroundings.

Floor mosaics have the potential to offer one of the most compelling – or confusing – of visual experiences. Because the viewer often walks across them rather than observing them from a distance, remaining physically connected by their feet to the surface, they necessitate an "embodied" mode of viewing, an awareness of the body in relation to the mosaic, of a quite different sort to that invited by, for example, a wall. Where the wall has a vertical logic, and usually makes implicit acknowledgment in its design of the viewer's eye level, most floors will be seen from a range of different angles – a mode of viewing very different from the false flat verticality which published aerial photographs attribute to them. It is a viewing constraint and possibility which is often reflected in floor designs: while some mosaics follow the logic of the panel picture and seek to impose a single angle or direction of viewing, the majority employ compositions in which multiple viewing perspectives are accommodated.

This chapter considers mosaics in which cupids appear in parergonal spaces and non-narrative overall designs, and in which no one single viewing angle is prescribed for the viewer. It asks how they respond to, make sense of, and distort the specific viewing contraints of the floor. My discussion is divided between two categories of mosaic which are particularly well suited to such modes of viewing, "inhabited scrolls" and "inhabited seas", and concentrates on pavements from Africa Proconsularis and Syria-Palaestina (with a focus on the region around Antioch) dating for the most part from the later 2nd

to the 5th centuries CE. Falling somewhere between repeating ornament and claims to representational status, these are both highly malleable image/ornament categories; an inhabited sea or scroll landscape can be expanded and adapted with relative ease to fit the contours of the room in which it is found. Both scrolls and seas teem with cupids, and it is my contention that cupids have a uniquely privileged role to play within such architecturally responsive imagery, allowing mosaicist and viewer to exploit and explore the optical, illusionistic, and kinaesthetic constraints and possibilities of the decorated surface. As such, these floors provide a useful focalising point for thinking through the fluid – or at times, tentacular – boundaries between figuration, ornament, and physical surface in Roman visual culture, and about the vital role played by cupids in acknowledging and overriding them.

Africa Proconsularis and the Antioch region were both major centres for mosaic production, with continuing traditions which outlasted the division of the Roman Empire into East and West. Although North Africa in particular lays claim to its own traditions,[237] there is a significant degree of overlap between the compositional and iconographic choices made in these two regions: as Katherine Dunbabin has emphasised, the specific technique of cutting and setting mosaic means that the array of designs and images employed by mosaicists are far less likely to display obviously 'local' characteristics than are those found in many other media, sitting instead in a trans-Mediterranean dialogue focused on their original Greco-Roman centres of

[237] Dunbabin 1999: 160 writes that 'only in a few rare instances can local characteristics be identified' in the mosaics of Roman Syria.

production.[238] Cupids offer a particular perspective on such cultural continuity and diversity: while some floors on which they were found would have been almost equally comprehensible to viewers from both of the regions under discussion, belonging to a repertoire of image types familiar (if not identical) within elite settings from across the Empire, on other floors they appear in the context either of localised or of distinctly unusual compositions and iconography. In these instances, I shall suggest, their familiar bodies can function as a point of access and connection, allowing novel or localised designs to be integrated into broader cultural dialogues in much the same way as they allow mediation between different image and architectural zones.

I. Approaches to floor mosaics and their viewers

In focusing on the role of cupids within larger ornamental landscapes, I build on an ongoing trend in mosaic studies to describe the ways in which mosaic designs are integrated into the spatial and social worlds of their users, and before delineating some of the ways in which cupids inflect these worlds I will situate my own approach in relation to scholarly work of recent decades.

The watershed moment in thinking about the impact of figural floor compositions on viewers' understanding and navigation of buildings came with John Clarke's 1979 book on black and white figured mosaics from Ostia. Clarke was the first to suggest that

[238] Dunbabin 1999: 1-2.

mosaics can serve 'the architectural functions of spatial division and enclosure, program denotation, and traffic direction',[239] and to emphasise the 'motor response'[240] which they provoke in the viewer. His narrative is structured around change over time, and he argues that whereas for most of the 2nd century CE the mosaics of Ostia seemed to encourage continual spectator movement, in the Severan period the 'mechanisms of kinaesthetic address' serve rather to fix the spectator at a single point, or at several separate points across a floor.[241] While Clarke's work is crucial for thinking about movement, however, he does not consider the ways in which specific figure types – floating nereids and tritons on the one hand, or charging huntsmen on the other – might have complicated a viewer's proprioceptive experience within a building, and instead remains focused on overall rhythms and directions of flow.

Christine Kondolean's work has also addressed the extent to which mosaic floors are embedded in social and behavioural concerns. Her 1994 book-length study of the mosaic scheme of the House of Dionysos on Paphos set out to 'reconstruct the concerns and intentions of its inhabitants through the decoration',[242] and in addition to considering the ways in which mosaics are used to demarcate spatially and transition between the different zones of the house she offers an account of the associations to which different mosaic schemes might have given rise: the appropriateness of a vine arbour (albeit underfoot) for a triclinium setting, for example, or the pleasures of wandering from episode to episode within a hunt scene arranged paratactically around

[239] Clarke 1979: xxiii.
[240] Clarke 1979: 20.
[241] Clarke 1979: 28-29; 52.
[242] Kondoleon 1994: 3.

a peristyle courtyard. Susanne Muth's 1999 article on the Great Hunt mosaic from Piazza Armerina engages with a similar set of issues, bringing together the figural, thematic, and spatial aspects of the floor with the social dimensions of the setting to analyse the logic of this vast room from the perspective of a viewer-visitor to the palace.

Muth's 1998 book *Erleben von Raum – Leben in Raum* offers the most sustained focus to date on mosaic bodies, issuing an important warning against overly textual, narrative "readings" of the mythological figures encountered on mosaic floors. Focusing on mosaic emblemata from North Africa and Hispania showing Hylas being seduced by the nymphs and Achilles on Scyros, Muth argues that the physical characterisation of these figures causes them to participate in particular ways in the social space of a room. She suggests that their bodies are used to explore tensions between *otium* and *negotium*, and between *virtus* and erotic appeal, characteristics relevant to their elite viewers in ways which go well beyond the immediate mythological narratives to which the scenes refer, and which play a major role in inflecting the domestic built environments within which they are staged.

The role of mosaic ornament in shaping viewer experiences of the built environment has also received attention. Rebecca Molholt (2008) and Ellen Swift (2009) both look at the optical illusions – such as the ubiquitous tumbling blocks – through which mosaics can at once embed viewers within a space and alienate them from it, and consider the wider ramifications of these compelling landscapes. Molholt investigates the ways in which different types of surface ornament/imagery, from represented water to represented jonchée leaves and branches, might have invited response and interaction

from viewers; the influence of her work on the materiality of mosaic water will be clear in my discussion of inhabited seas. Swift, meanwhile, considers ornament within a Gellian anthropological framework, arguing that complex patterns hold the viewer captive in both a visual and a social sense, and seeing the rise in popularity of elaborate geometric mosaics in the late Roman period as corresponding to the needs of an increasingly stratified society.[243]

Amongst these discussions, one aspect of mosaic imagery which has received very little analysis in terms of its effect on the viewer is the prevalence of non-narrative, non-focalised figures, falling somewhere between narrative imagery and ornament, whose bodies and movement are subordinated to the demands of a larger composition. Clarke recognised that such figures constitute a vital connecting thread between viewer and architecture, and outlined the broader structural relationships in which they participate. But the contribution of their specific phenomenologies to such relationships remain under-interrogated: figures like cupids and nereids are too representational in nature to be discussed in Swift's and Molholt's studies on mosaic ornament, and despite Muth's call to focus on bodies rather than narratives, her analysis is restricted to two named figures (Hylas, and Achilles on Skyros) who appear almost exclusively within centralised, narrativising emblemata, and are addressed to a static rather than a moving viewer.

The guiding assumption of this chapter is that the enlivened peripheries of these mosaic floors offer one of the most fruitful gateways into exploring viewers' own embodied

[243] Swift 2009: 102-103.

relationships to their surfaces. As such, a focus on cupids' roles on mosaic floors can yield benefits not only in clarifying the affordances of this specific figure type, but also in offering an entryway – both for my purposes, and, I suggest, for ancient viewers – into thinking about the operation of subordinate bodies on mosaic floors more generally. I look here at what cupids *do* on mosaic pavements: what they touch, where they reach, what sort of address they make to the external viewer, the structural relationship of their bodies and activities to broader compositions and frame structures. In some of these instances, cupids are the only humanoid 'inhabitants' of a mosaic surface, but on many pavement types they also interact with other bodies, and I will follow the lead of Muth and Molholt in considering these visual interlocutors too, so far as is possible, in terms of their physical properties and associations as much as for their narrativising, symbolic potential.

The most sustained discussion to date on erotes on mosaic floors is found in Lori Neuenfeldt's MA dissertation on 'Eros and Erotes in the Late Antique Mosaics of Antioch' (2009). Neuenfeldt has laid out the chronological pattern for Antiochene mosaic erotes, showing that the multiples begin to appear in the 2nd century CE, peak in the 3rd, and decline in number in the 4th century, with only two securely dated examples remaining from the 5th century.[244] She argues convincingly that erotes constitute part of a visual display of status within the household –[245] a point which I discuss further in Chapter 4 – and that they are conceptual boundary-crossers, '[existing] in both the

[244] Neuenfeldt 2009: 12.
[245] Neuenfeldt 2009: 28-40.

divine and secular worlds, as well as in public and private spaces'.[246] She does not, however, tie these observations into analyses of the specific ways in which these bodies function in the space of the house, either on particular mosaics or more generally.

II. Inhabited scrolls

One of the most fruitful, enduring, and manipulable fields of interplay between representational and ornamental modes to be found in Roman visual culture is the combination of cupids and vegetal scrolls. First known from late classical/early Hellenistic metalwork, 'inhabited scrolls' are found in multiple media across the Roman Mediterranean, with particular links between Africa Proconsularis, Gallia Narbonnensis, and Asia Minor; Asia Minor seems to have been a key location for the periodic rejuvenation of the motif repertoire.[247] Inhabited scroll mosaics were already common in the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE, particularly in North Africa, and became even more popular between the 4th and 7th centuries;[248] over the course of the 4th century cupids are replaced by human vintagers as the most common inhabitants of these

[246] Neuenfeldt 2009: 39.
[247] Toynbee—Ward-Perkins 1950 provide the fullest account, with a focus on early metalwork and on monumental relief sculpture. While they use the term 'peopled scrolls,' 'inhabited scrolls,' as suggested by Gough 1952, has the advantage of including non-humanoid actors such as birds and animals.
[248] Dauphin 1987: 183. Dauphin 1987 provides the most comprehensive quantitative survey of structural trends in inhabited scroll mosaics; Kondoleon 1994 has a more iconographically and stylistically-oriented discussion focused around the triclinium mosaic from the House of Dionysos at Paphos on Cyprus.

landscapes.[249] Usually employing variants on acanthus and vine scrolls, the most common use of such scrolls is either as a frame motif, with single or double scrolls running in a controlled band, or as a space-filler, expandable to cover a panel or surface of any size and degree of irregularity. Some scrolls display a considerable degree of naturalism, while others are better described as lightly vegetalised geometric frames – highly regular line patterns ornamented with occasional leaves and florets.[250] A variety of reference points, often overlapping, can be adduced to account for their popularity and longevity: the connection of the vine to the Dionysiac sphere; the idealised vision of hunting, agriculture, and more generalised fertility; and the careful balance of order and disorder, nature and culture, which they present. But their success is surely connected as much to the ways in which these designs conceptualise and complicate the surfaces on which they are found as to any external reference points *tout court*.

In the following pages I interrogate the roles of cupids in inhabited scroll mosaics by looking at a series of examples from two major categories: cupids in vines and hunting cupids in acanthus and/or olive scrolls. Each section focuses on material from a different region, and each category requires a different approach. For the vine mosaics I offer individual discussions of a series of pavements from the province of Africa Proconsularis, where this design was particularly common, using these floors to explore a constellation of ways in which these designs can be used to define the relationship between architectural spaces and their viewers. By contrast, in the case of cupids hunting in scrolls, popular in Syria-Palaestina from the late 2nd or early 3rd through to

[249] Dauphin 1987: 194. Eckersley 1995 provides a catalogue of vintaging mosaics from Roman Spain and North Africa.
[250] See Ben Khader *et al.* 2001 on vegetalised geometric frames in North Africa.

the 5th century CE, I treat the published instances of the type as a single body, structuring my discussion not by individual mosaic but by treatment of specific aspects of the design; this is because there is less variety in the structure of these designs, all of which are in frieze form around a central pictorial panel or panels. This homogeneity must be in large part due to the fact that friezes can be transferred from one context to another far more easily than surface-covering vines, which are more likely to be one-off compositions designed specifically in relation to the space in which they are to be placed. But as one of the most enduringly popular designs for framing a space, these acanthus scrolls offer important evidence for the ways in which the qualities of cupids were conceptualised in relation to other motifs, textures, and bodies – as well as provoking questions about the relationship between the friezes and the diverse range of central panels around which they are found.

a. Cupids in vines

i. Cupids as repeating ornament: the House of Bacchus and Ariadne at Ostia

Before turning to the African mosaics it is instructive to pause on a black and white mosaic from Ostia, dated between 120 and 130 CE **(Figs. 2.1 a, b)**. This is a floor on which, in contrast to the later examples to be discussed, both cupids and scrolls are rendered in highly stylised, highly "ornamental" form. The mosaic is from the triclinium of the House of Bacchus and Ariadne, a building which was located close to the

Serapeum, and which may have been associated with it.[251] A visitor would have entered the room from the portico, and would have found themself on a surface of stylised vegetal scrolls, structured around, and structuring, a series of small panels containing birds of different species. Continuing to the back of the room, they would have encountered a second panel: a roughly circular (16-lobed) ornamental scroll structure, organised around a gorgoneion and radiating outward to fill the space between the three couches. Integrated into this design are eight birds, facing one another in pairs around the central panel, and eight hybridised cupids, growing out of the ornament and aligned with its major axes, who reach out their arms to hold onto the scrolls on either side of them.[252]

It is a floor on which every floret has its partner, on which no element is allowed to disturb the regularity of the overall composition. In line with this, the cupids are about as schematic as cupids can be. The slight sinuous bend to the right visible in the bodies of some of the figures suggests muscle tension, but there is very little divergence from pattern, and their status as near-silhouettes encourages a view of them merely as articulating devices for the scrolls. Without the context of bodies, their wings would be indistinguishable from the florets and calyces found elsewhere in the design. In fact, they are quite literally an extension of the plant ornament, from which they are physically inseparable: in addition to their leafy skirts, for most of them it is unclear whether their arms hold onto the adjoining plant tendrils or turn into vegetal shoots themselves. But far from being mere connecting ciphers, the cupids are vital in making

[251] See Becatti 1961: 153-159 on the mosaics from this house.
[252] Hybridisation is discussed in more detail below, in the section 'Cupids hunting in acanthus scrolls'.

this design appear more than just a compilation of disparate motifs, offering a sense of structural, and embodied, forces running through the scrolls.

Their role is closely connected to that of the gorgoneion at the centre of the room. Gorgon mosaics in Africa Proconsularis are often shown with scales radiating outwards from the gorgoneion, and Molholt suggests that these encircling ornaments serve to extend the agency of the highly-charged apotropaeic heads through a room.[253] Something similar can be said for Italian mosaics on which gorgon heads sit at the centre of schematised plant scrolls **(Fig. 2.2)**: while these scrolls are less threatening than the writhing snakes which are directly attached to the gorgons' heads, they in some ways constitute an extension of these snakes, still part of the zone of the gorgon's control and liable to shift position at any moment beneath the feet of the viewer.[254] On the floor from the House of Bacchus and Ariadne, the play of eyes, attention, and conversation took place across this circle, and might be imagined as meeting over the protective motif at its centre.

While the gorgon provides a centring force, the cupids offer lateral support, braced around the ring of the circle. Their act of holding the plant scrolls in place suggests that the symmetry of the floor relies for its continuity on their good offices, which give a sense of muscular forces running through the design, and of the ornament more broadly as an organic, self-tending and -supporting whole. In touching the scrolls, moreover,

[253] Molholt 2008: 67-70.
[254] See for example Becatti 1961 No. 371, Pl. LXXIX, from the Insula dell'Aquila, or the polychrome gorgon mosaic found near Rome and now in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, also dated to the Hadrianic period.

they provide routes into them for the eyes, activating a sense of contact between the different elements of decoration which would have been far more elusive on a similar floor without cupids. They may even make the viewer question the floor's horizontality: their deployment, particularly when we take into account the birds above their heads, suggests a vertical dimension, giving the ornament the potential to rise up from its flat plane. It is a design which demonstrates on the one hand how far towards "pure" ornamentality cupids can go, but which shows at the same time that even at their most schematic and regimented, they consistently offer enlivening routes into the ornament and surfaces on or of which they are part.

ii. Vine as tamed landscape and site of exploration: the House of Icarius at Uthina

On a mosaic dated to between 160 and 180 CE from Uthina (Oudna) in Africa Proconsularis the relationship between cupids and vegetal ornament is far less rigidly conceptualised **(Figs. 2.3 a, b)**.[255] Africa Proconsularis was a major centre of mosaic production from the later 2nd century onwards, and its mosaicists had a diverse repertoire of vegetal designs.[256] It was also an important agricultural region, a fact which may have contributed to the popularity there of all-over vine mosaics.[257] Uthina, a *colonia* located 25 km southwest of modern Tunis, was large enough to have possessed its own amphitheatre, and appears to have flourished in particular during the Antonine and Severan periods. The mosaic in question comes from the so-called House

[255] For dating, which is on stylistic grounds, see Dunbabin 1978: 240-241.
[256] For an overview of mosaics form the region see Dunbabin 1978. See Ben Abed-Ben Khader et al. 2001 for vegetalised geometric designs.
[257] Eckersley 1994.

of the Laberii[258] or House of Icarius, the largest residence known from the city, which was advantageously located on the breezy northern slope of the acropolis, and whose rooms and smaller courtyards were clustered around a vast internal peristyle courtyard **(Fig. 2.4)**.[259] At least 36 spaces within the house were decorated with mosaics,[260] which were executed to an extremely high standard.

The vine mosaic was located in a triclinium, colonnaded on three sides, off the central peristyle. In the late 3rd or early 4th century the entrance to this room was marked out on the peristyle mosaic:[261] while most of the peristyle was decorated with a repeating honeycomb pattern, the area directly in front of this entrance was framed off as a separate zone, filled with two rows of large-scale acanthus scrolls whose ends terminated in the heads of wild animals.[262] Crossing the threshold, the visitor then crossed a smaller mosaic with a scene of hunters and their dogs chasing a fox and a hare before coming to the vine. This double threshold with its wild animals and violent movement would have provided a sharp contrast with the peaceful Dionysiac vine, although it introduced already, at a larger scale, the theme of the inhabited scroll, and it may be that the hunters should be understood as offering an introduction to the rustic pleasures which awaited the viewer within. In the second half of the 2nd century, when the vine mosaic was laid, these later panels were not yet in position, but it is an

[258] This attribution is only a conjecture on the part of Gauckler (Gauckler 1896: 182).
[259] Gauckler 1896: 183 gives the dimensions as 40.5m on the WNW and NNE sides, 40m on the ESE side, and 42.25m on the SSW side.
[260] Carucci 2007: 427-428.
[261] Carucci 2006: 429.
[262] Gauckler 1896: 207-210.

enhancement which suggests the enduring appreciation of the vine mosaic over a period of at least a century.

Where the occupied scrolls from Ostia were ornament first and representations of plants second, the vine which faces the viewer entering this room is far more representational in its intentions. Situated within a space colonnaded on three sides, where the natural standpoint of the viewer would be from one of the edges, it almost takes the place of a decorative garden, a miniaturised version of the garden which likely filled the courtyard outside. The panel is structured by four craters from each of which two vine stems emerge, intertwining to create lens-shaped diagonal axes leading towards the centre of the image.[263] While a basic geometric plan is followed, however, the tendrils which grow out of these stems are rendered freely and unevenly – in some ways comparable to real trained vines, whose direction of growth can only be controlled up to a point. Unlike the rigid Ostia cupids, the cupids who occupy these vines move freely within the branches; while there is certainly a degree of regularity, as with the cupids on the diagonal axes who lower baskets through the branches, other cupids move haphazardly, stretching full-length along tendrils to reach bunches of grapes, or crouching down to interact with the small birds who, again, occupy the vine alongside them. It is a space which is carefully contained, both by a double ground-line around the edge and by a garland, which both gives a festive, sacral air to the scene and creates a (ritual?) boundary between the space of the vine and the space of the viewer. But the

[263] On the likelihood that diagonal cross designs on mosaic vines reflect the structures of groin vaults (even where these latter are not present in the room) see Kondoleon 1994: 252. Dauphin 1987: 190 sees these cross designs as typical of the 2nd, and to a lesser extent the 3rd, century.

vine also extended tendrils into the space beyond the garland: the report from the initial excavations of the House of the Laberii, conducted in 1893, claims that the room's platform (presumably corresponding to the apsidal structure at the back of the room), the columns, and the walls were decorated with stucco and iron appliqués of cupids running in vines, of which several remains were recovered by the excavators.[264]

Just as the gorgoneion and the cupids in Ostia offered different ways of thinking about the tensions and directions of travel embedded within the scrolled design, the cupids on the Uthina vine offer ways of thinking about different possibilities for movement across this surface. The vine is "inhabited" in a manner which is far rarer on genre scenes showing human vintagers; where humans tend to stick to the ground and the lower spatial registers, cupids, like birds, can occupy all areas of the vine.[265] While some balance on and climb through the branches, leading the eye on meandering routes, others walk or dance around the ground-lines of the image, encouraging the viewer to take a mental journey around the edges of the space.[266] Cupid bodies both punctuate these journeys and facilitate them; on the one hand they provide the interactions, the moments of concentration, which encourage the viewer to stop and look closely at the pavement, modeling the cupids' own close and careful engagement with their surroundings, but on the other they always gesture onwards, looking or reaching beyond themselves in such a way as to ask the viewer too to linger only temporarily on

[264] Gauckler 1896: 207.
[265] Kondoleon 1994: 231-269.
[266] This peripheral focus of composition/viewing is noted by Malek 2005: 1338-1340 for other mosaics from this region.

their light-hearted activities. We might describe the aesthetic as encouraging a sort of punctuated meandering, a combination of close attention and aimless distraction.

A further spatial dimension to this vine is provided by the extent to which it invites viewing as a vertical intrusion into the room. Amina-Aïcha Malek has written about the ways in which North African vegetal mosaics may have seemed to rise up as 'marvellous gardens' around the feet of those walked on them,[267] and the cupids here are even more insistent in their assertion of an "up" and a "down" than would be the case in a purely green space: the cupids around the ground-line are clearly intended to be underneath the vine, while the corner figures with suspended baskets encourage us to imagine a significant vertical element to the scene. The sense must have been compounded by the presence of more cupids on the walls and columns of the space, who really did occupy the vertical axis of the room's decor. Particularly given that the mosaic's own "vertical" axes run in four (or eight) directions, it is a mode of delineating space which proclaims this floor as a resistant landscape, whose crossing requires not just walking but climbing, and that at a scale impossible for clumping human feet. In making these claims, the mosaic might even be seen as resisting straight passage, urging eyes, if not feet, to deviate from the direct route in their perambulations: the viewer who insists in marching across the surface with their eyes will end up disorientated and upside down.

The central emblema too participates in this visual play. Showing Icarius receiving the gift of the vine from Dionysus, it is unlike the rest of the vine in that it demands viewing from a single direction, and in introducing an element of narrative it demands a

[267] Malek 2005.

different conceptual approach – a different understanding of before and after – to that required by cupids and tendrils. It offers a scene which is at once removed from and integrated into the rest of the panel. On the one hand it is framed off by the vine tendrils as a panel picture in the traditional sense, depicting an episode from a narrative story in which Icarius receives the gift of wine from Dionysus and is subsequently killed by his drunken neighbours.[268] But, like the handful of other images of Icarius from the Roman period, the scene offers no indication of the violence which is so central to the literary accounts,[269] and it is also viewable as a gathering of figures which takes place beneath the vine arbour, playing out within the same temporal moment as the activities of the cupids, and even within the space of the viewer. Perhaps the vine also becomes the site of an epiphany of the god, as on vine mosaics from Thysdrus and Hadrumetum, where Dionysus rides in triumph beneath the hanging grapes.[270] The viewer has choices: they can view this either as interpolated panel picture or as integral part of the vine landscape, and they can give priority in their viewing either to the god and his companions, for whom the cupids and tendrils would then be merely an elaborate frame,[271] or to the vine and its occupants, which extend over far more of the floor than does the central vignette, and in some ways is far more visually engrossing, full of movement and ocular entanglements. The majority of vine carpets from North Africa

[268] The story is recounted in Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.191-192; Pseudo-Plutarch, *Greek and Roman parallel stories* 9; Aelian *On Animals* 7.28; Pseudo-Hyginus *Fabulae* 130; and Pseudo-Hyginus *Astronomica* 2.2, which gives two versions, only one of which ends with the death of Icarius.
[269] *LIMC* Vol. V *s.v.* 'Ikarios I'; Kondoleon 1994:174-184 discusses the two other known mosaics, one from the House of Dionysus in Paphos and one from Vinon in Gaul.
[270] Eckersley Cat. 2; Cat. 8.
[271] This is the case for Kondoleon 1994: 238, who says that the vine is 'subordinate to an enclosed mythological scene,' and, again, 'The encircling leafy network is peopled with vintaging Erotes who, although thematically related, are essentially secondary to the mythological scene.'

incorporate a central scene,[272] and on a vine mosaic from the mid to late 3rd century, the compositionally similar titular floor from the House of Silenus at Thysdrus (El Djem) **(Fig. 2.5)**, the central panel also shows a vignette which can be mentally situated beneath a vine: a drunken, reclining Silenus, accompanied by a naked female and by three small cupid-like figures who bind up the Silenus in a tendril which has presumably come from the vine.[273] Here the scene is marked off by an abstract line rather than by vine tendrils, but the presence of cupids around Silenus makes it more difficult than on the Icarius mosaic to regard the image in isolation from the surrounding vine, insisting on the interpenetration of these two elements.[274]

Silenus, Icarius, and Dionysus also present models, or counterpoints, for the users of these spaces, asking them to make sense of their own relation to the centralised figures and thus also to the surrounding vine. No trace remains of the wall decor which surrounded Silenus in his vine,[275] but at Uthina we know that the room's decor gestured towards its own identity as fantastical vineyard. Ensconced on the platform beyond the mosaic vine, the diner enthroned himself as an ersatz Dionysus – or, if he was imprudent in his distribution of wine, an Icarius. Given that this is marked out as the main reception room of the house, it is possible to imagine an entering viewer coming in

[272] Kondoleon 1994: 238. Eckersley 1995 Cats 1, 2, 4, 9 (House of Silenus mosaic), 11 (House of Icarius mosaic), 20 and 25 all incorporate central scenes.
[273] Foucher 1961: 23-30 on the house, 27-29 on this room (Room 10), Figs. XI, XII. Dunbabin 1978, Cat. El Djem 16 d.
[274] Eckersley 1995. catalogues several such images within the vine. One frequently-reproduced example is that from the House of the Arsenal at Hadrumetum, now at the Sousse museum, on which Dionysos rides in triumph through a vine withn whose branches are vintaging cupids. The vine cuts off at right angles to create a central panel for the wine god, but no definitive dividing line is interposed between the two areas of the pavement. Foucher 1960 Pl. XXIII, Cat. 2.
[275] Foucher 1961: 29.

and encountering first Dionysus and then *dominus*, lined up on the same axis, each staged within a delicate bower, at the centre of his own controlled, well-tended fantasy agricultural kingdom.[276] For his own part, the *dominus* too, or whoever was seated behind the vine, was still able to view the fantastical landscape which stretched beyond his couch, the upside-down figures at its centre providing only a minor inconsistency in the view. The cupidic vine makes possible a figured landscape whose attractions are equal from every direction, providing a solution to one of the main problems in mosaic floor design. Ornament is restaged as the tamed landscape, whose tendrils are trained around the organising central principle of the wine god and the *dominus*.

A final question which might be asked in relation both to this floor and that from Ostia is what the relationship is between cupids and birds, two body types which often appear together, and which share a prominent bodily feature, wings. One thing which both cupids and birds do within images is to create a sense of the (eternal) ephemerality and sensory richness of the present moment, perching and stretching precariously on tendrils, and plucking or pecking at stray bunches of grapes. But there are also differences between the two. We are familiar by now with the idea of birds as archetypal victims in the game of ornamental illusionism, and thus as markers of an image's success: both in the stories recounted by Pliny in which birds are deceived by painted images, and also in the many "still-life" images from wall painting and mosaics on which they appear, at that point already incorporated within the constructed image

[276] Contrast with the mosaic from the baths of Curaria Fortunata at Themetra, where the central panel contains a drunken Dionysos supported by members of the thiasos. Foucher 1958: 16, Cat. 5.

itself, but still important agents of its claims to lifelikeness.[277] The demands which cupids make on the viewer are slightly different: they are clearly fantastical, and their presence in an image already signals an illusionistic rather than a naturalistic mode, but they also modes of touch and proprioception to which the viewer can relate far more easily. As such, I would argue, where birds frequently gesture towards naturalism as the correct mode of viewing, cupids ask their viewers to accept the falseness of the representation but at the same time, in spite of that knowledge, to imagine touching and interacting with it, giving substance to something which can never be other than logically impossible.

iii. Bursting out of the floor: the Sector of the Protomes at Thurburbo Maius

A later, 4th-century mosaic vine creates an even clearer sense of spatial continuity between its fantastical occupants and its human viewers. It comes from Thuburbo Maius, a city 60km southwest of Carthage on the road leading to the Sahara, which achieved the status of *colonia* under Commodus and flourished in the period following the unrest of the 3rd century; the mosaics from the city all date from the 3rd and 4th centuries.[278] In the large domestic residence known as the Sector of the Protomes, within the larger building known as the House of the Protomes, a colonnaded courtyard has as its centrepiece – an even more insistent ersatz garden than that at Uthina – a composition of four vines extending from corners to centre, with cupids in their

[277] Pliny *Natural History* 35.36; Squire 2017: 223-228 discusses the incorporation of the motif of the deluded bird within Campanian wall painting, with bibliography on the passage from Pliny in n. 224.
[278] *Princeton Encyclopaedia of Classical Sites*, s.v. 'Thuburbo Maius'; Ben Khader 2001: 39.

branches **(Figs. 2.6, 2.7)**.[279] The house has a *terminus post quem*, provided by pottery, of the second half of the 4th century.[280] While exuberant in their foliage, and emerging from acanthus calyces rather than craters, the vine scrolls here are far more regular than those of the Uthina mosaic, while the cupids are far larger (perhaps 70cm in height)[281] and fewer and displayed in almost direct frontal relation to the viewer. There is no separate central emblema; instead, a single cupid, framed by eight curlicues of the vine and with right leg skilfully foreshortened, appears to step right out of vine and image.

In compositional terms, these cupids bear some resemblance to those from the house of Bacchus and Ariadne at Ostia: posted along four cardinal axes, they spread out their arms as if to hold in place the symmetrical vine stocks which grow up on either side of them, integral to the regularity, and thus ornamentality, of the vine. It is a formalisation of pattern typical of the 4th century (and which would continue, on even more grid-like models, until the 6th), when scroll mosaics tend to display more symmetry and regularity than their 1st-3rd century predecessors.[282] But rigid adherence to identical replication is rejected here: as their slight bodily torsion and the lifted foot of the cupid in the lower right-hand corner of **Fig. 2.7** suggest, these cupids offer the pretence of having been caught at a critical, fortuitous moment just before they turn in another direction and break the equilibrium of the composition entirely. It is a scheme which

[279] *CMT* II, 3: 8-10, Cat. 259, Pl. II-III, LV, Fig. 2, Plan 3.
[280] *CMT* II, 3: 5-6.
[281] This is a rough estimation based on their size in relation to the overall size of the panel, as shown on the published aerial photos of the mosaic.
[282] Dauphin 1987: 190. As she documents, many 4th-7th century all-over scroll fields can be reduced to a grid pattern.

exploits a careful balance between the schematic in one direction, and the vividly disordered in the other.

We might even say that, unlike the Ostia and Uthina pavements, the Thuburbo Maius vine imagines its occupying cupids as almost bursting out into the space of the viewer and the floor. Where the vines from Uthina primarily imagined movement through and around and underneath their tendrils, here the bodies are rendered from a frontal angle, inviting confrontation and, at least in the case of the central cupid, a certain disorientation: as he steps towards us, as he appears to, the viewer is forced to imagine what happens next, at the completion of his step – a question which creates the strongest clash yet between the horizontality of the mosaic and the implied verticality of the representation. In this respect, the representation of the cupids resonates strongly with – and may have been influenced by – the mosaic decoration of one of the rooms which led off the peristyle in which they were found: here, a series of animal *protomai* leap out of leafy frames **(Fig. 2.8)**.[283] The vividness of encounter is helped by the size of the distinctly un-bird-like bodies of the cupids, who are large enough that the viewer may be able to imagine them, fantastical as they are, as bodies which have physical presence within their own space. The frieze of wild animals which borders the vine, running between the columns which hold up the peristyle roof, also sits in challenging contrast to the neat Uthina garland and to the benign-looking, apparently tamed wild animals who roam the ground-line of the Thysdrus pavement, bringing a sense of danger and uncontrollability to the overall scheme.[284]

[283] *CMT* II, 3: 17-23, Cat. 263, Pls. IX-XII, LVI, LVII, Fig. 2.4, Plan 3.
[284] *CMT* II, 3: 10-12, Pls. II-IV, LV, Plan 3.

The relation of viewer to occupied vine is further shaped by the broader setting of this pavement **(Fig. 2.9)**. Within the peristyle, the floor is covered with a second inhabited scroll landscape, this time one made up of acanthus scrolls with birds of various species nestled in their coils.[285] While the foliage is different, the size of the acanthus scrolls, a little larger than the vine scrolls within the court, must have created some sense of continuity between these two spaces. Perhaps the juxtaposition of these scroll types even allowed the perambulating viewer the sense of being themself an occupying figure within the acanthus scrolls: in this case not so much a removed and godlike Dionysus figure as a moving, real-life counterpart to the lively cupids who threaten at any minute to burst out of their ornamental setting, alternative inhabitants of the inhabited vine.

iv. The trellis and the grid: the House of the Dolphins, Thysdrus

One mosaic which makes particularly self-conscious sport of the blurred boundaries between the ornamental and representational qualities of the vine is found in the House of the Dolphins in Thysdrus (El Djem), a wealthy city situated between Sousse and Sfax which dominated the trade between port and hinterland for that region until the crisis years of the 3rd century, and whose mosaics are among the most numerous and well-constructed in Africa Proconsularis.[286] Here, on a floor which takes us back to the first half of the 3rd century, we encounter a vine which is far more schematically-rendered than those from Uthina and Thuburbo Maius: stocks, tendrils, and even grapes have been eliminated and we see only vine leaves, lined up to create a grid pattern set at a 45˚

[285] *CMT* II, 3: 12-16, Cat. 260, Pls. V-VIII, LV, Fig. 2.3, Plan 3.
[286] *CMT* III, 1: 86-89, Cat. 36 A-E, Room XXV, Pls. XLVII-XLIX, LXXIII, Plan 5.

angle to the frame **(Figs. 2.10, 2.11)**. It is at once an ornamental grid, governed by the practical techniques used to lay out a surface for mosaic decoration and the desire for regular order, and a trellis, a representation of a real ordered landscape, with the meandering lines of the vine leaves complicating any straightforward geometric viewing.[287] The motifs within the diamonds also encourage contradictory ways of looking, alternating highly non-naturalistic four-pointed flower calyces with the figures of cupids and wild animals, each one isolated against the white ground, and viewable either as separate disconnected motifs, or as inhabitants of the trellis landscape, who at any point might come face to face with one another. The postures of the cupids, who run, prance, and balance on one leg to investigate a passing butterfly, encourage a representational interpretation. But at the same time, their activities are always isolated and subordinated to the demands of the grid scheme.

Quite how far this grid plays with the viewer's perception becomes clearer as the viewer moves further into the room. The vine forms part of a floor which is divided into three parts, and would have been the first section encountered by the entering viewer. The second section has a unique composition: another sinusoid lattice framework, this time made up entirely of the curving bodies of dolphins, with the spaces between them occupied by flying swans.[288] The design plays on the jarring juxtaposition between, on the one hand, these two compelling physicalities, and, on the other, the ornamental structure to which they are subordinated. Perhaps, encouraged by the trellis 'scene' of

[287] A more representational mosaic trellis, although one which still plays with the grid pattern used to structure pavements, is found on the 'Tennis Club' mosaic from Caesarea. Dunbabin 1978 Pl. XLII.
[288] Compare the mosaic of satyrs and bacchantes from Sousse (Foucher 1960: 99, Cat. 57, Pl. L b).

the first third of the pavement, some viewers would have seen here a flock of geese flying over a sea of dolphins, but the sense of regular pattern is far more insistent here than it was in the vine section, and it is difficult to view this as a representational image. The final section of the mosaic, added in the second half of the 3rd or at the beginning of the 4th century, is purely geometric in design, consisting of a scheme of 21 (3x7) small square panels, each with a non-figurative design, most of which operate according to a four-way symmetry. It is here that the couches for diners would have been placed, a placement which accounts for the discrepancy between frames on different parts of the floor and also for the lesser attention accorded to execution. Contrasting trellis and dolphins, land and sea, the floor puts pressure on the traditional grid of mosaic design,[289] implying that it may be far more contingent on outside agents, and far more temporary and unstable, than its regular pattern would have us believe.

One might conjecture that senses sharpened by this unexpected rule-bending are ripe for a second look at the surrounding mosaic frames, where a double border employs plant scrolls and a thong design, deriving originally from the patterns made in lacing leather thongs. Perhaps the dolphins and cupids, the former entirely subordinated to the demands of ornament, the latter bursting its bounds, encourage the viewer to reactivate the buried representational reference points, or simply to enjoy anew the curves and the rhythm, of these frame designs, so frequently repeated on mosaic floors that much of the time they likely register simply as "ornament" and nothing more. Or perhaps these comparatively commonplace designs serve rather to emphasise the

[289] As Dunbabin 1999: 282 notes, almost all geometric mosaic designs can be reduced to 'a simple underlying structure based on the principles of the orthogonal grid, the diagonal, and the arc of a circle.'

novelty of their mold-breaking centerpieces. Either way, this mosaic offers a clear-cut example of cupids providing an entry-way into the ornamental fabric of a surface, both offering and denying the viewer a foothold in the elusive landscape of the decorated floor, and suggesting to them the different ways in which it might be approached: by charging at full pelt, by skipping lightly on the tips of ones toes, or as a functional organic entity to be harvested for its grapes. As the components of the design which are least constrained by the demands of repeating pattern, they are also the best placed to insist on the sensory qualities of the other elements of the pavement.

v. Cupids in vines: conclusions

The combination of cupids with vegetation works so well largely because both components are caught in the middle-ground between ornament – repetitive decorative elements serving primarily to accentuate and articulate the contours of a larger object or architectural surface – and representational imagery – imagery which seeks to depict a real or fantastical state of affairs removed from the present architectural context. Depending on the artistic choices made, and on the viewer, vegetal scrolls can come into focus either as rhythmic abstract shapes or as real plants. At the same time, large surfaces covered in vegetation function as landscapes within or against which the viewer can conceptualise their own body. A given scheme can tend to abstraction or to naturalism, to repetition and regularity or to disorder. Each requires a different approach on the part of the viewer, a different conceptualisation of self in relation to surface, and what the viewer sees will depend not only on how a surface is laid out but also on how they choose to look, whether they focus on a specific scroll or body, or whether the whole scheme fades out to be experienced as a whole. Moreover, in

fostering such irresolvable modes of viewing, these designs may also make us question whether such terms as ornament and representational image, abstract pattern and naturalism, are actually useful in describing designs which seem to transcend any such neat categorisation.

As a mode of organising a surface, scroll mosaics also elude categorisation according to our modern ideas of frame and framed: on mosaics like those from the House of Icarius at Uthina and the House of Silenus at Thysdrus, the vine landscape is staged as a frame which has burst its bounds to overshadow, both literally and figuratively, the panel pictures which nestle in its branches, as well, potentially, as the reclining diner, framed in the room's apse at Uthina. It is a mode of decoration found not just on floors but on walls and ceilings as well, so that the visitor to, for example, the 4th-century mausoleum of Sta Costanza in Rome could imagine themself walking beneath a vine arbour.[290] In placing the viewer in impossible relationship to the vine, asking them to trample wholesale across something which ought to have vertical presence within a space, floors perhaps even more than ceilings draw attention to the competing visual claims of these surface-filling designs.

I would argue that there is a recurring division of labour in inhabited scrolls, with one element looking in to the architecture and one outward to the viewer: where spreading vegetation resolves more easily into an extension of the surface, relating closely to the structures on which it lies, the individuated bodies of cupids turn even the most regimented of plant scrolls into spaces of action and engagement, offering the external

[290] On dining beneath vine arbours see Kondoleon 1994: 249-252.

viewer a vicarious sensory foothold on the floor – even as their fantastical bodies simultaneously create distance between viewer and surface. Between them, the two component parts thus (claim to) bridge the visual and conceptual gap between viewer and built environment. Cupids engage with vegetation in a range of ways, some relatable and some not: as structural components of schematic ornament, who physically hold the scrolls in place; as explorers of and workers within a represented Dionysiac vineyard, inspecting the tendrils intently and at close range; or bursting out from the coils of the plant, intrusive participants into the architectural landscape occupied by the viewer. In showing fictional bodily connection to the vine, they call into question the connection of the viewer's body to the plant ornament and the built environment, highlighting the ongoing tension between the built surface as a place of exploration for the eyes, and the floor as a place of passage for the feet.

b. Cupids hunting in acanthus scrolls

A structurally quite different way in which cupids are incorporated into mosaic vegetal environments is as part of the running frieze of acanthus scrolls. Where vines are typically used to cover open expanses of surface, occupied acanthus scrolls are usually employed as a frame motif, running in bands around the edges of a central panel or a floor and employing rolling swirls of vegetation to create a series of circular frames-within-the-frame. Each scroll has its own occupant, and the typical sequence consists of wild animals alternating with hunting cupids, interspersed with large disembodied

heads who appear as outgrowths of the foliage at the corners and/or the centre of the frieze. Placed in additive rather than integral relationship to the rest of the pavement on which they appear, these friezes offer an opportunity to think about the ways in which cupids within scrolls operate in conjunction with other body types to modulate the viewer's approach to a discrete panel picture or series of quasi-*emblemata*.[291]

Occupied acanthus scrolls are first encountered in mosaic form, although without the hunting element, in Hellenistic Pergamon, where the scrolls dominate over their miniscule, bird-like occupants.[292] By the 1st century CE, when they are found in Campanian wall painting, the relative scales of scrolls and occupants had shifted to give equal prominence to both elements,[293] and in this form the genre achieved widespread popularity in both public and private architecture across the Empire. Acanthus scrolls are particularly common in Asia Minor, Syria, and North Africa, and it is in Asia Minor and Syria that most variants which went on to achieve trans-Mediterranean popularity first developed;[294] in Asia Minor and Syria-Palaestina in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, inhabited scrolls (whether vine or acanthus) on mosaics are found only within border frieze designs.[295]

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[291] This term refers to small panels which have a closed composition and are visually distinct from the larger pavement, but which have been worked *in situ*, rather than imported from a removed site of manufacture as with true *emblemata*.
[292] See above, Chapter 1.
[293] Toynbee—Ward-Perkins 1959: 11.
[294] Toynbee—Ward-Perkins 1959: 30; 30-37 on occupied scroll motifs in the eastern provinces.
[295] Dauphin 1987: 184.

My observations here are based on a series of scrolls borders found in cities across Syria-Palaestina: in the reception rooms of elite residences at Zeugma **(Fig. 2.12 a, b)**,[296] Sepphoris **(Fig. 2.13 a, b, c)**,[297] and Mariamme (Mariamin) **(Fig. 2.14 a, b, c, d)**,[298] and in buildings of unknown use at Flavia Neapolis (Nablus) **(Fig. 2.15 a, b)**,[299] Philippopolis (Shabha) **(Fig. 2.16 a, b, c)**,[300] Apamea,[301] and Antioch **(Fig. 2.17 a, b)**.[302] Most are dated to the late second or third centuries CE, although one side of the Philippopolis frieze has been dated to the early 4th century, that from Apamea to the late 5th, and that from Antioch to the 6th century – it is a scheme which laid claim to substantial longevity. On the one hand these should be thought of as a specifically "Syrian" group in that they are all found in the same province, but they are also

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[296] Abadie-Reynal—Darmon 2003; Abadie-Reynal 2012. The mosaic is stylistically dated to the early decades of the 3rd century, and comes from a triclinium. The central emblema shows a scene from Menander's *Synaristosai*.
[297] Talgam—Weiss 2004. They date the initial construction of the house to the late 2nd or early 3rd century CE, and place the mosaic at a similar date on stylistic grounds. The frieze is from a triclinium, and surrounds a series of emblemata on which are shown scenes relating to the mythology and cult of Dionysus.
[298] Zaqzuq—Duchesne-Guillemin 1970. Zaqzuq dates the mosaic to the second half of the 3rd century; Dauphin 1979: 28 places it in the middle or third quarter of the 3rd century. The mosaic was found in a room with a raised apsidal section on the back wall, and the emblema shows women and two winged cupids playing a variety of instruments.
[299] Dauphin 1979. She dates the pavement to the middle or third quarter of the 3rd century CE. The central scene contained a figure group but is otherwise unreconstructable; smaller emblemata showing scenes relating to Dionysus are preserved along one of the outer edges of the frieze.
[300] Balty 1977: 24-25, Cat. 7; Dauphin 1979: 28-30. Balty dates the three sides of the pavement to the mid 3rd century, and the fourth side, which runs "above" the emblema, to the first quarter of the 4th century. The emblema carries a scene of a divine couple, probably Dionysus and Ariadne, receiving homage from Gaia and the Seasons.
[301] Balty 1977: 118-123, Cat. 54-56. Dated to last quarter of 5th century. The emblema shows a man and a woman, identified as Meleager and Atalanta, hunting on horseback.
[302] Levi 1949: 363ff. Pls. 170-175. Dated to first quarter of 6th century CE. The central panel contains a series of isolated figures and groups of hunters and their quarry against a white background, viewable from all sides of the room. Worcester Art Museum Inv. 1936.30.

participants in a much broader shared visual idiom; it has been argued that the mosaicists who worked on the Flavia Neapolis, Mariamme and Shabha-Philippopolis pavements originated from outside Syria,[303] and although in the case of Shabha-Philippopolis this has been disputed,[304] there appears to have been a concerted effort there, for the mosaics as much as for the rest of the city, to '*faire du romain*'.[305] It might in fact be argued that the addition of an acanthus scroll frieze functions as a sort of Romanising paratext for the central panels of these pavements, containing and constraining images which deviate often quite substantially from trans-Mediterranean norms within frames which gesture to a shared visual culture.

The central panels of these mosaics are a diverse group. The Zeugma and Mariamme pavements both contain stills from a performance: on the Zeugma pavement is a labelled scene from Menander's play the *Synaristosai*, 'Women eating breakfast together', appropriately positioned so that the dining women could be viewed from the angle of the couches in its triclinium setting; and on the Mariamme pavement, which was situated in front of a raised apsidal area, a rare image of a musical performance, in which women, and two winged cupids, play a variety of instruments against what appears to be the backdrop of a theatrical stage.[306] On the Neapolis and Sepphoris pavements, meanwhile, the acanthus frieze contains or abuts a sequence of smaller narrative and/or generic panels. On the Neapolis pavement, whose central panel has been lost, at least one of the outer sides of the frieze abutted a series of smaller panels,

[303] Dauphin 1979: 32-33.
[304] Campbell 1988; Balty 1997: 52.
[305] Coupel—Frézouls 1956: 128, quoted by Dauphin 1979: 31.
[306] Duchesne-Guillemin 1975 analyses the significance of this scene for the history of music.

with two of the three which are partially preserved relating to Dionysus. The Sepphoris pavement is a huge (7.2 x 5.3 m) and unique multi-zonal composition, within which the acanthus frieze encircles 15 panels showing scenes from the myth and cult of Dionysus, and is bordered in turn along just under half of its outer edge by a U-shaped frieze containing a cultic procession and a later Nilotic scene. The mosaic from Philippopolis shows a frontally-posed group of personifications, almost certainly centred around Dionysus and Ariadne.[307] The later Apamea and Antioch mosaics are very different from one another in style, but both show scenes of hunting: on the Apamea pavement, a man and a woman on horseback have been identified as Meleager and Atalanta, while on the Worcester Hunt mosaic from Antioch a complex, multi-figure and multi-directional hunt takes place, with each figure or group allotted their own space against an abstract white background.[308]

The connection of frieze to central panel on these pavements is not for the most part clear-cut. For the Mariamme musical performance, one might point to the presence within both frieze and central panel of winged cupids, and for the Mariamme and Zeugma mosaics the connection to staged performance may be relevant: acanthus friezes in which cupids hunt wild animals, as well as cupid animal hunts with less schematised landscape backdrops, were popular elements of theatre and amphitheatre architecture.[309] The hunt mosaics also share an obvious thematic similarity between panel and frame, and perhaps the pairing can be justified for the Dionysiac pavements

[307] Balty 1977: 24.
[308] On the composition of Late Antique hunt mosaics see Lavin 1963.
[309] See Altenhöfer—Bol 1989 on the animal hunt frieze (with non-vegetal backdrop) from the theatre at Miletus. The theatre frieze from Arles offers an example of putti hunting in acanthus whorls.

through reference to a 'Dionysiac' landscape, though the point is never pushed. In general, however, and with the exception of the hunt scenes, these friezes are relatively generic additions, which might, arguably, be replaced with a meander or undulating ribbon band without substantively changing the experience of the viewer.

What do these friezes do that a meander band would not? Most obviously, and even before we look more closely at the figures within them, they offer a way of viewing and moving across the floor which competes with that of most of the central images in encouraging circumambulatory movement and multiple perspectives. In the Sepphoris triclinium, the frieze with its rolling scrolls and moving occupants functions as the conjunctive element between the smaller Dionysiac scenes within it, offering passage from one to the next and presenting the floor as a space of occupation and exploration as well as simply a surface for disembedded representation. In the triclinium from Zeugma, where the central panel is angled so as to be seen from the position of the dining couches, the frieze functions to lead the entering viewer around the upside-down image to a position from which they can see the women at their breakfast.[310]

The friezes encourage particular ways of looking in other senses too. The acanthus roundels both draw attention to the larger structural dynamic of the frame and draw the viewer in to focus on the textural qualities of individual scrolls – whether feathery and sprawling as on the Philippopolis pavement, or rendered dense with secondary foliage on those from Sepphoris and Mariamme. Black backdrops create the illusion of

[310] For the plan and description of the sequence of rooms see Abadie-Reynal 2012, esp. 55-60, on this room (P13).

depth, holding the viewer within the scroll landscapes. Along the length of the friezes, meanwhile, punctuating figures hold the eye, demanding continual shifts in viewing strategy. Half-hidden behind the acanthus scrolls, these figures too contribute to the sense of depth in these images, suggesting to the viewer that they only see part of what is going on.

The bodies of the cupids who hunt in acanthus friezes are, with the exception of those from Shabha-Philippopolis, more muscular and adult in stature than the small, plump, fluid forms found in vine scrolls. They often wear cloaks, they run instead of climbing, and their wings are diminutive and unpronounced; on the Flavia Neapolis, Sepphoris, Apamea, and Antioch ("Worcester Hunt") pavements they have no wings at all, and the excavators of the Sepphoris mosaic categorise those figures, which are slimmer than the others, as 'youths'.[311]

The braced and thrusting postures of the cupids are set against the bounding, charging movements of the animals, and they are shown in the critical moment of thrusting a javelin, drawing a bow or letting loose a hound – never after the act of the kill.[312] On the Mariamme pavement a cupid is shown running away from a tiger, but the general dynamic is very much one of encounter, in which the contrast between strong and weak, fierce and unthreatening, large and small is both played up and at the same time flattened into a uniform representational mode. As with the many instances in which cupids fight animals of theatre relief friezes, it is a landscape in which no one gets hurt:

[311] Talgam—Weiss 2004.
[312] In the (cupid) hunt scenes found in other media, it is common to find a dead boar slung on a pole and carried by two hunters.

the two figure types are rendered at the same size and thus assigned a degree of equal status, while the characterisation of the humanoid combatants as cupids assures us that this is only play fighting. But the cupids and animals are also the agents of a visual strategy of incompletion, and in contrast to the wandering, working, supporting cupids of the vines, they stage the floor as a space of swift movement, tension and uncertainty.

These charging pairs sit in sharp contrast with the other main occupants of these friezes, the isolated heads which articulate the corners and centre-points of every frieze except that from the Antiochene Worcester Hunt Mosaic. Vast in proportion to the cupid bodies, anonymous, bodiless heads are one of cupids' most enduring companion figure types, and as early as the 4th century BCE the two are found together on funerary ceramics from Magna Graecia,[313] although the vast majority of the Italian heads are female, whereas the mosaic heads discussed here are, with the exception of the Sepphoris heads, male. The heads depicted within these mosaics have no clear mythological or symbolic identity: they are not overtly theatrical or Dionysiac in tone, and while a sense of unbounded growth and fertility is certainly relevant, there is no clear association with the personified seasons.[314] Given the lack of mentions of this type in ancient literature, it makes more sense to interrogate these heads for their visual characteristics, and to ask whether, like cupids, one of the main motives governing their use is their aesthetic effect and ability to invite certain types of viewing and interaction. One visual cognate is the gorgoneion: where that ends in snakes, this ends in leaves and

[313] Heuer 2015 writes on the South Italian ceramics and has linked that particular corpus to the afterlife and to chthonic cults, but for most of the early examples this remains firmly in the realm of conjecture.
[314] Dauphin 1979: 25-26, citing Foucher 1963.

tendrils. But there is a fundamental difference between the ways in which these two relate to their surroundings; whereas the gorgon head radiates energy into the decorative schemes which surround it, the foliate face more often appears to recede into the ornament within which it resides, peeping out from its protective vegetal cover.

Set alongside cupids, the characteristics of both parties are further clarified by contrast. Firstly there are the contrasts between body and head, the small and the large. Then there is the contrast between the incessant motion and tension of the hunting cupids and the impassive stillness and calm of the heads. Where cupids traverse the acanthus scroll landscape, the heads are an integral part of it, looking out from its depths. And where cupids move laterally through the scrolls, the heads are positioned almost frontally in relation to the viewer, making far more of a direct address to them. It is an address which gains extra potency from the fact that these faces are usually significantly larger than the viewer's own head.[315] Unlike most gorgons, however, the mosaic heads do not for the most part look directly outwards; instead, they glance sideways, their pupils angled more than their faces, as if observing, imperceptibly to their viewers, the action which takes place in the scrolls of which they are a constituent part. This coy, reflective mode of engagement is again far removed from that of the cupids, who engage wholeheartedly and bodily with the scrolls' other occupants. Between them, cupids and heads invite two very different approaches to the acanthus bands in which they appear, and, by extension, to the panels and wider floor surfaces around and within which these bands are found.

[315] To give a sense of size: the volutes of the Nablus mosaic are 54 cm in diameter (Dauphin 1979: 14), those of the Shabha-Philippopolis mosaic 50 cm (Dauphin 1979: 28), and those of the Sepphoris mosaic 60.5cm (Talgam—Weiss 2004: 88).

Three of these friezes, those from Mariamme, Nablus, and Philippopolis, also incorporate hybridised figures whose upper bodies grow directly from the acanthus scrolls **(Figs 2.14 d, 2.15 b, 2.16 b)**. Foliate skirted figures have been traced back by Toynbee and Ward-Perkins to ornamental metal-work of the 4th and 3rd centuries BCE,[316] although by the imperial period they were most common in sculpture, where they are found until the 4th century CE.[317] The foliate figures on these mosaics show considerable divergence in their designs. At Nablus, where another scroll contains a rosy-cheeked centaur – a different genre of hybrid altogether, though still with the upper body of a wingless cupid – the head and shoulders of a diminutive figure with foliate headdress peer out from behind a much larger scroll.[318] At Philippopolis, the single foliate figure stretches the height of the frieze, with a larger, slimmer body than those of the hunting cupids, and a headdress of leaves reminiscent of those of the foliate heads. Like the cupids it is winged, but with wings which are much larger than theirs, and which bear a close resemblance to the acanthus foliage of the scrolls. Like the earlier foliate cupids of the Ostia mosaic, the figure reaches out with each hand to grasp the scrolls on either side. On the Mariamme mosaic, meanwhile, four long and dynamic cupid torsos, close in appearance to the full-bodied cupid hunters, emerge diagonally at the four corners of the frieze, with flesh only giving way to scrolls part-way down the thighs. Two of these figures appear in the guise of seasons, one with a gazelle draped over his shoulders and another with a basket of fruit on his head, while the other two appear to be engaged in conflict with the animals in the nearby scrolls: one holds a

316 Toynbee—Ward-Perkins 1959: 4-5. The earliest torsos are of female figures.
317 Dauphin 1987: 188.
318 Dauphin 1979 Pl. 3.

round shield in his left hand and what may be a short sword in his damaged right, while the other wields a small tree branch in a manner reminiscent of fighting centaurs.[319]

Despite being derided by Vitruvius as a sign of the degenerate habits and irrationality of his day,[320] vegetal hybrids were enduringly popular in Hellenistic and Roman art. Most of the literature discussing so-called grotesques, *grotteschi*, focuses on the Renaissance and subsequent periods, and it is often noted in these contexts that they provide a way of exploring and negotiating the boundaries between order and disorder or non-order in ornament.[321] But these conceptual boundaries are also closely tied to the liminal spaces which they occupy in a room: as Vasari noted, it is an image type suited to difficult spaces: areas high up in a room, friezes, and places where there are divisions between different types of surface.[322] The mosaics discussed here all negotiate these tensions in different ways: one offers up its hybrid figure almost as an accidental outgrowth of the scroll from which he emerges, a humanoid bud; the second follows the pattern, common since the earliest foliate figures of Hellenistic metalwork, of a figure who physically sustains and directs the ornament/landscape from which he emerges, an equal yet different part of a coherent, self-reinforcing structure; the third, from Mariamme, offers straining bodies positioned at the breaking points of the frieze, the corners, who appear both to harvest the fruits of this verdant landscape and to attack its inhabitants, disregarding any sense of a boundary between ornament/landscape and occupants. The floor produces its own inhabitants as part and parcel of an ornament

[319] Zakzuq—Duchesne-Guillemin 1970 Figs 5, 8, 12, 15.
[320] Vitruvius *De Architectura* 7.3-7.
[321] See e.g. Squire 2015: 461 quoting Robertson 1996: 1.
[322] Vasari 1998 [1550] Ch. 27.

which can be either self-sustaining or (on the Mariamme floor) self-destructive, but which in any case involves a questioning of its own integrity and ability to be subordinated to any single category. It is striking that in all three of these cases it is cupid or cupid-like bodies, themselves already caught between physical and conceptual categories, which are used as the agents of such ambiguity.

As is the case for many instances in which they are found, the cupids of these designs derive much of their aesthetic power from the possibility for systematic contrast which they offer, asserting a corporeal physicality, modes of movement, and emotional affect which work together with very different physical types – here the wild animals and the isolated heads are their main interlocutors – in such a way as to assert the physical qualities of all of these figures and motifs as major elements in the image field, impressing themselves on the viewer more forcefully than does any symbolic or referential meaning. The inclusion of hybrid characters in some of these friezes serves to draw attention to such contrastive physicality, in particular as it operates between cupids and foliage, and so does the distortion of scale which renders tigers, cupids, heads, and even, on the 5th- and 6th-century Apamea and Worcester mosaics, a song-bird and assorted *xenia* all at the same size.

One way of understanding the phenomenon of contrastive physicalities in relation to the wider floor and to the central panel/s would be to see it as a displacement of the bodily, the sensory, to the edges, separating it from the "real" object of focused attention and potential intellectualisation which lies within the frame. But we might also ask whether the ways of looking invited by these friezes, which both encourage and

frustrate viewing as real, coherent spaces, and which entangle the viewer in visual knots in the process, are intended to transfer over into the viewing of the emblemata, drawing out the illusionistic qualities of these images too, and encouraging the viewer to engage in more than one type of looking, whereby the central panel as well as the frame becomes a plane to be encountered head on, glanced at from an oblique angle, or wandered around and viewed from all sides. It is a way of looking which may make particular sense for a pavement like the one from Zeugma, where the emblema of the Synaristosai, "staged" between the couches of a triclinium, already asks viewers to make the mental leap between viewing it as a picture and viewing it as a stage play. The Mariamme pavement does something similar: here, the highly unusual central tableau is of women, aided by two winged cupids, playing musical instruments – a scene which already demands that the viewer activate sensory modes not strictly stimulated by the image. In the case of the 6th-century Worcester Hunt mosaic from Antioch, meanwhile, they offer a diminutive second perspective on the central design, which shows men on horseback hunting, framing it in contrastive terms which may encourage the viewer to take a second look at the main hunt, reconsidering it not only in terms of its subject matter but in terms of its distinctive physical and stylistic qualities.[323] The addition of the cupids within acanthus scrolls to this scene, executed in a far more schematic way than are the central figures and trees, is caught between parody and earnest, adulatory re-appropriation of the human hunt.[324] One of their most important functions here,

[323] See Lavin 1963 on composition within Late Antique hunting mosaics.
[324] This dynamic, whereby parody can be appropriative as well as deconstructive, is most fully discussed by Linda Hutcheon (e.g. Hutcheon 1988), who sees it as one of the defining features of postmodernism. While I do not here seek to portray cupids as proto-postmodern, the frequency with which they are associated with displays of self-

perhaps, is that they offer an impetus for the viewer to turn outwards towards the walls of the room, and thus also inwards again, stimulating continual, renewed engagement with a pavement whose logic already assumes a series of isolated encounters on a white ground. In constantly re-framing and re-corporealising encounter, and in leading the viewer ever onward around a space, cupids in acanthus scrolls put up a continual struggle against the notion of architectural environment and planar image as fixed entities, reasserting their presence in the ongoing moment of mobile viewing.

c. Inhabited scrolls: conclusions

The cupids found within vegetal ornament are staged as integral parts of their surrounding environment, reaching beyond their own bodies to model diverse modes of interaction with the scrolls. They insist on the depth and sensory complexity of the flat surface constructed from a single material type, at once taming the outdoors for use within the house and allowing domestic space to burst its usual boundaries. The ephemerality of their infant bodies and the momentary nature of their movements contributes to a sense that this fixed, contructed surface exists within the now, might at any point mutate and shift into a new configuration – that the floor really might have a life of its own. Even when the viewer engages directly with these designs, they are ungraspable at a single look, discouraging directness by allowing encounter only on a partial basis via a succession of similar-but-different access points. In their continual

consciousness and secondariness in Roman visual culture may make this a fruitful topic for further investigation.

variations on a theme, both all-over vines and acanthus scroll border friezes encourage a continual readjusting of perspective, the constant renewal of haptic engagement and encounter, whether with the scroll landscape itself or with other images positioned close by. To borrow Walter Benjamin's terminology, we might talk of an aesthetic of continual distraction, whereby deviations into the haptic function to defer and counter either an approach of concentrated contemplation of a central image or images or optical mastery over a whole design or space.[325] An interpretative approach to images is replaced by a mode which rides – or clambers – roughshod over all manner of spatial and visual conventions, delighting in and exploiting the gaps and inconsistencies between modes of representation.

III. The inhabited sea

A second group of mosaics which draw heavily on cupids' ability to traverse and ignore conceptual and spatial boundaries are those which show what we might call the 'inhabited sea'. On these pavements, cupids, usually seated on dolphins or in small boats and often accompanying other members of the marine thiasos, are set against a backdrop of water filled with fish of diverse species. Like the plant scroll mosaics, inhabited seas can be easily adapted and extended to suit the space available, incorporating named (Oceanus, Tethys, Venus) or anonymous (tritons, nereids, cupids) mythological figures into larger designs which vary from the hierarchically ordered to

[325] Benjamin 1935.

the decentralised and apparently random. These pavements too offer rich possibilities for the interrogation and transformation of the relationships between represented sea, solid floor, and human viewer. But the precise ways in which these relationships are played out are quite different: most obviously, perhaps, where the vine or acanthus offer the illusion of rising up into a space, the promise of the sea is of immense and unfathomable depth, a receding space which stretches far below the surface of the floor itself.

The popularity of marine mosaics across the Roman Empire is closely connected to the intimations which they make of luxury and of coolness. Private fish pools were a trope of luxurious living, and in a hot Mediterranean climate the sight of cool water was clearly an appealing one; many of these mosaics were incorporated within real water installations, whether pools, fountains, or baths, a strategy designed to double the effect both of the decorated surface and of the liquid which covered it.[326] This doubling is aided by the representational conventions used for water: as Molholt has argued in relation to the North African mosaics, the abstract lines and zigzags scattered throughout a usually white field can interact with real ripples in cases where the mosaic is displayed under water, and can also help to blur the distinction between the pavement as floor and the pavement as image surface.[327] One of the great pleasures of these floors, then, is the intersection of desirable external associations with material

[326] D'Arms 1981: 82 n. 43 points out that a fishpond could lead to increased valuations of Roman houses; Molholt 2008 *passim* (esp. p165) collects a range of textual quotations indicating the status associated with water features in the house; Dunbabin 1989 discusses pleasures and dangers associated with bathing. Neuenfeldt 2009: 28, suggests that the popularity of marine mosaics in the area of Antioch may be linked to the city's rich water resources.
[327] Molholt 2008: 159-160. See also Barry 2007.

immediacy: as well as enjoying the sight of a well-stocked pool from raised couch or ornamental frame, the viewer can walk across these fishy seas, wet or dry, enjoying the frisson of water shifting beneath them and fish "swimming" around their ankles.

The association of cupids with the sea dates from their earliest appearances in mosaic: the outer frieze of the 4th-century BCE Arta pebble mosaic **(Fig. 1.13 a, b)** already shows an eros leaping off a cliff into a band of geometric waves, while the inner panel, where erotes interact with reluctant swans, contains, counter-intuitively given the standing swans and sitting cupids, leaping fish.[328] One of the Hellenistic mosaics from Delos, the eponymous pavement from the House of the Dolphins (130-88 BCE) **(Fig. 2.18 a, b)**, contains in each corner the motif of an adolescent winged figure, each carrying the attribute (thyrsus, caduceus, trident) of a god, clothed in the short tunic and trousers of charioteers, and depicted astride a pair of comparatively vast, sharp-toothed dolphins; the figures steer these around the floor by means of reins attached around their heads.[329] While not corresponding precisely to the expected form of erotes, these riders have much in common with them, and later cupids would often be shown handling divine attributes which did not strictly belong to them. Again, the figure groups activate the geometric ornament of the circular bands, which incorporate concentric circles of interlocking wave bands, inviting an understanding of this pavement as being simultaneously flat, patterned surface, turbulent sea, and flooded fantasy hippodrome. In fact, even the tails of the dolphins begin to blur the boundary between representational and ornamental visuality, interlocking in such a way as to suggest the

[328] See above, Chapter 1.
[329] Bruneau 1972: 235-9 No. 210 Figs. 168-75 Pl. B, 1-2.

beginnings of a guilloche pattern. Already from an early period, then, mosaicists are making use of erotes to suggest interactions between figure, non-figural ornament, and the substance of the floor, and are choosing the marine motif of the wave band through which to give material form to this connection. Two centuries later, the black and white mosaics from Ostia also situate cupids in marine contexts, now within larger scenes of the marine thiasos; in Room 4 of the Baths of Neptune cupids sit and stand on the backs of dolphins, while in Room 3 a cupid floats across the white ground in front of a long-tailed hippocamp, a quiver of arrows in his hand, the context making it unclear whether he moves through water or air **(Fig. 2.19)**.[330] Again, it is an exploitation of visual ambiguity which would resurface at many points in the later corpus of (cupid) marine mosaics.

My focus here is again on mosaics of the later 2nd century onwards from Africa Proconsularis and Syria-Palaestina, and on a series of motifs and mosaic categories in which cupids are prominent. I investigate some of the most common fantasies and physical illusions employed on these designs, and look in particular at the ways in which cupids function as the glue of such illusionism, both facilitating and complicating the frequent underlying assumption of these surfaces that the ocean is coextensive with the floor. In comparison with the literature on vegetal scrolls, there is a lack of widely-available synthetic scholarship on marine mosaics. Sabah Ferdi's 1998 book *Mosaiques en eaux en Algerie* has had only limited circulation in Alegria and France, and Naima Smati's doctoral dissertation *Les mosaiques figurées à thème marin en Afrique du Nord*, also submitted in 1998, has not been published in book form; I have been unable to

[330] Beccati 1961: 47-60, Pl. CXXIV-CXXVI.

access either of these. Beyond a series of thematic chapters on the sea in books on Tunisian mosaics aimed at non-specialist audiences,[331] most articles are confined to specific mosaics or image types, such as the crowning of Venus[332] or the chronological development of Tethys/Thalassa.[333] Luz Neira has catalogued postures of tritons and nereids in mosaics,[334] and Jean Lassus and Molholt have both written on the ranges of ways in which water can be depicted and the different visual effects which this can lead to,[335] but, perhaps because of the immense diversity of the corpus, little has been written about the relationships of particular figure types to the larger compositions within which they are found, or about the distinctive haptic evocations of these figures. While my account here is by no means comprehensive, my suggestion is that a focus on marine cupids offers a good way of dipping a toe into the specific visuality and hapticity of the mosaic sea.

a. The tender and the slippery sea: cupids on dolphins

[331] Blanchard-Lemée et al. 1996 contains a chapter on 'The sea: fish, ships, and gods'; Ben Abed-Ben Khader 2003 contains a section on 'Mare Nostrum.'
[332] Picard 1941. Lassus 1965 offers a partially synoptic account of mosaics of marine Venus from Algeria, and Dunbabin 1978 discusses Ocean (pp149-54) and Venus (pp154-8) within a chapter on 'Religious scenes and figures', where she contrasts their 'decorative' and 'religious' or 'symbolic' uses. Campbell 1988-9 discusses marine Venus mosaics from Asia Minor and Syria.
[333] Wages 1986.
[334] Neira 2002.
[335] Lassus 1965: 186; Molholt 2008 Ch. 4.

Cupids on dolphins are one of the most ubiquitous motifs of mosaic seas. It is a pairing which remained in use at least until the 5th century CE,[336] although by that period, and sometimes much earlier as well,[337] dolphins were replaced by boats in which one or more cupids could sit, corresponding to more explicit associations between cupid bodies and human labour in Late Antiquity. Unlike the dolphins on the Delos mosaic, these fish are typically the equals in size of the cupids, posing no threat to their riders, and the cupids hold either fishing rods or whips with which to urge on their steeds.

A pavement from the House of the Drinking Contest at Seleucia Pieria showcases several basic features of the type **(Figs 2.20, 2.21)**.[338] The panel in question was situated in the internal courtyard of the House of the Drinking Contest, and formed the central third of a three-part rectangular pavement, of which the remaining two panels each contained small, regularly disposed red and blue diamonds on a white ground. Measuring 2.92 x 2.87 m including the meander border, the panel shows three cupids riding on dolphins within a sea or pool of different types of fish; each cupid holds a fishing line, and each has apparently just succeeded in hooking one of the fish. The pavement has been dated to 200-230CE, although should perhaps be down-dated to the late 2nd century given the recent secured-dated finds from nearby Zeugma.[339]

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[336] The mosaic from Constantine showing the triumph of Neptune and Venus is dated 315-325, the Setifis mosaic of marine Venus to the 4th or 5th century, and the mosaic from the Yakto complex at Antioch to the late 5th.
[337] An early example is the wall painting from a nymphaeum at Rome published in Wirth 1934: 80-82, Pl. XIII, which he dates between 130 and 145 CE.
[338] Levi 1947: 156-163, esp. 162-163, Pl. XXXI.
[339] Dunbabin 2013: 150-151 suggests that Levi's post-Severan group of Antioch mosaics corresponds to the securely dated Severan and just post-Severan period mosaics from Zeugma, and should be reassigned to this period.

Easily multiplied and reoriented to suit the demands of a space, cupids on dolphins are well suited to the demands of this space: the panel lay at the meeting point of several of the main sight-lines running through the building, visible from the main triclinium and also from the small reception rooms bordering the portico/corridor which ran along one side of the court.[340] The fish too are oriented towards the different sides of the panel, but, although some of them are shown with upturned tail to give the impression of movement through the water, their bodies are in general far more static than those of the cupids and dolphins;[341] it is these larger pairs which give the sense that this is a space to be moved around, which activate the potential for vivacity of the fish and encourage the viewer too to circulate. Rather than engaging in continual circular motion, however, the cupids and their mounts face in different directions, preventing the dominance of any single direction of movement; at one point the fishing lines of two of them even appear to have caught on one another, creating an entanglement within this otherwise free-flowing space. The equal status of all viewing perspectives (so long as they are outside the panel itself) is cemented by the white ground, which, unlike other modes of representing water, gives no sense of an up or down and in fact creates continuity between the space within the panel and the white ground of the non-figured regions of the floor beyond, allowing us to view it at once as floor, sea, and the sky against which the upright bodies of the cupids are silhouetted.

[340] Dobbins 2000.

[341] Molholt 2008: 166-167 points out the 'encyclopaedic' effect often visible in these fishy seas, where the specimens have clearly (and understandably) been examined by artists after they have been pulled from the net, and often 'look as if they were already laid out on a table, whether at the market stall or on the serving platter'.

The twinning of cupids with dolphins has a long history. There is a textual tradition which sees dolphins as the friend of humans, and includes a series of anecdotes in which individual relationships form between particular boys or young men and dolphins.[342] But from a very early stage, the relationship in the visual images seems founded as much on the complementary bodily characteristics of its two component figures as on any moralising or narrative imperative. 4th-century vases from Magna Graecia show a particular concentration of erotes with dolphins, often, as on a 330-310 BCE kantharos from Apulia now in the British Museum **(Fig. 2.22)**,[343] incorporating objects with no identifiable relation to the sea and which come instead from the female private sphere. Such compositions clearly rest on the assertion of similarity between the two bodies superposed one over the other: both are plump, without muscular definition, and in undefined, floating relation to the image field around them.

This play between comparable-yet-incomparable body types is evidently still one of the driving forces behind the cupid-dolphin pairings of Roman mosaics, where the cupids are less muscular and more sinuous in outline than was the case, for example, with the hunting cupids from the acanthus scrolls. The bodily affinity is at play on the mosaic from the House of the Drinking Contest, where cupids and dolphins are represented at the same scale, each with a sinuous line along the back and a body whose roundedness is emphasized through shading. In addition, the small grey wings of the cupids are visually similar to the (anatomically incorrect) tripartite tail, crest, and "whiskers" of the

[342] E.g. Pliny the Elder *Natural History* 9.8 (and 9.9 on dolphins who help humans to fish); Pliny the Younger *Letters* CVII. Stebbins 1929 collects literary sources on dolphins, and discusses images of them on coins.
[343] British Museum inv. 1867,0508.1162.

dolphins. A more pointed thematisation of these two bodies as objects for comparison is found on the pavement of a water basin of the second half of the 3rd century from Utica **(Fig. 2.23)**.[344] Where a cupid swims through the open sea, his companion dolphin follows, positioned at the same diagonal angle behind him. Where two cupids grapple with one another, their dolphins too seem about to engage in combat. Another pair drift along companionably together, the plump, relaxed body of the cupid resting on the dolphin's ample back, while two more sport upside-down, the one dependent for his orientation on the movements of the other. In every instance on this mosaic, and in almost every instance in which it is found, this is a juxtaposition which invites reflection on the sensory closeness of – and simultaneous gulf between – the slippery and the tender touch.

This focus on the tactile relationship between humanoid and fish creates a bridge between viewer and fishy pool/sea. In inviting a comparison of, and thus a focus on, the sensory aspects of these bodies, the pairings invite the viewer to mentally animate the other fish, conceptualising them too as things with real physical body and presence, who exist, via the fishing rods, in spatial relation to humanoid actors, and thus to human viewers. In so doing, the figures create a connection to the floor (which is sea) as well: just as Anacreontea 57 described cupids on dolphins as 'riding over the silver' of a sea scene carved on a silver plate, so the cupid-dolphin pairings of the House of the Drinking Contest must be seen as riding over the mosaic floor.[345] But whereas on a silver plate cupids are tiny in relation to the viewer, the cupids of marine mosaics are

[344] *CMT* I, 3: 40-42, Cat. 288, Pls. XXIII, XL.
[345] See Chapter 1.

large enough that they can almost be imagined as participants in the same spatial reality as the viewer. Cupids riding dolphins create a sense of the fish-filled sea as something to be touched, a tamed space filled with miniaturised dolphins and contained within the safe bounds of a geometric frame, even as they flaunt their own illusory status, offering a meditation on the limits of the graspable, and on the uncontainability of a floor which threatens always to slip out of reach.

Cupids on dolphins are particularly popular as a motif for basins, as in the case of the mosaic from Utica mentioned above, or in that of a five-part water feature from the 3rd-century House of the Boat of Psyches at Daphne, where each lobe contains a dolphin rider, each of whose bodies, as on the Utica mosaic, relates in a different way to the body of the dolphin on which he rides.[346] Narrowly contained by walls and covered with water, the impression of these mosaics is almost one of a fish tank with particularly exotic occupants, the boundless sea rendered accessible and tame. With certain basin mosaics, the viewer can even aspire to a direct physical connection with the fishy surface. A plunge pool from the baths near the House of Icarius at Oudna has its walls decorated with mosaics showing cupids on dolphins and in boats, a represented body of water expanding the bounds of a real one which would have allowed bathers to swim alongside these denizens of the sea.[347] A later, early 4th-century semi-circular basin from the House of Nicentius at Thuburbo Maius has cupids more tightly packed around its sides, some of them in boats, some swimming towards the boats, their bodies

[346] Levi 1947: 185-6, Pl. XLI.
[347] Sear 1977: 160, Cat. 208, with bibliography; Molholt 2008: 180-181, Figs. 116, 117. The complex has not been precisely dated.

presumably partly submerged by real water.[348] On the floor of the basin, comparatively vast fish indicate the potential danger from which the cupids seek to escape. Unlike with the vine mosaics, these mosaics assume a physical contiguity between watery image and water-filled setting, using cupids as tactile agents who allow the creation of mental connections between the two.

b. The materiality of water: a marine thiasos from the House of the Triumph of Dionysus at Antioch

The Hellenistic mosaics with their circular wave designs already used erotes to bridge the gap between representational imagery and ornament, and on a 2nd-century mosaic from the House of the Triumph of Dionysus at Antioch this ability of cupids to activate multiple materialities on the same surface plays out in a related, if different, way. The mosaic in question is a long, narrow panel (Levi's plan indicates an approximate length of 6 metres) laid out in a corridor space between a triclinium on one side and a large semicircular basin on the other **(Figs 2.24, 2.25, 2.26)**, and was designed to be viewed from the side of the triclinium; a colonnade half-separated the corridor from the triclinium, and for viewers from this direction it would have appeared in the framing context of the water behind it.[349] The panel shows a marine thiasos, with two tritons, one old and one young, moving from left to right, one of them holding the reins of a winged ichthyocentaur. The sinuous tails of the younger triton and the icthyocentaur

[348] *CMT* II, 1: 43-45, Cat. 37, Pls. XIV, XV, Plan 10.
[349] Levi 1947: 91-92.

coil across the lower half of the image, providing a resting place for two nereids, one clothed and one nude. Triton and icthyocentaur tails frequently trail far behind the torsos of these figure types, and it is a trait which was emphasised on the black-and-white mosaics from Ostia,[350] but in this instance the tails are particularly prominent; due to the generous, well-moulded volume of the coils, shaded in dark-blue and with a serrated red spine running along their tops, and due also to the uniformity with which they are posed along the length of the design, they are clearly intended to be seen not only as fish-tails, but also as the (surf-topped) waves of the sea through which the thiasos moves.[351] The billowing cloths framing the two nereids, both of which are rendered in the same blue colour, add to the visual confusion between sea and figures, and so too do the wings of the icthyocentaur (and perhaps even of the cupid), which might also be seen to resemble surf-laced waves. Around the edge of the panel, a geometric wave border adds yet another mode of visualising water.

The composition incorporated at least one, and likely two, cupids; a second has been added by restorers. The preserved cupid is shown in motion across the landscape of tails/waves, perhaps in the process of touching down on or taking off from a coil, perhaps hovering slightly in the foreground. While his body, clothed in a long red cloak, leans forward in the direction of travel of the tritons, his face turns back towards the nereid behind him, and he holds up a mirror, which he also angles back towards her. Mirrors in the context of marine thiasoi are usually explained as referring to the beauty

[350] The tritons and other hybrid sea creatures from Room 3 of the Baths of Neptune have particularly long tails.
[351] Similar triton/hippocamp tails which serve a double function as waves are found in apse 7 of the Baths of the Marine Thiasos at Sidi Ghrib (Ennabli 1986, Pl. IV), although the cupids here are more solidly positioned on their backs.

of nereids and their similarities to Venus,[352] but perhaps they should also be seen as markers of self-consciousness, acknowledgements of the doubledness of these scenes which already rest on a vision of the sea as a site of distorted reflections, a vast shimmering surface where the traveller may well think that they have seen the leaping hooves of an icthyocentaur or the coils of some unknown creature rising out of the depths.[353] The reiteration throughout Roman visual culture of the unthreatening marine thiasos seeks to tame such fears, and mirrors work with them to insist on the illusoriness of both floor and sea – an illusoriness which is never more explicit than here, on the coiling swell of a doubled sea of triton tails. Cupids, frequent bearers of mirrors, are the archetypal agents of this dual materiality; where the nereids always treat the fish tail as tail, as a solid, weight-bearing structure on which to recline, cupids, existing on the boundaries between flesh and air themselves, can be imagined in relation both to the coils as coils and to the coils as waves.

c. The floating goddess and the floating image: cupids as attendants of marine Venus

As the mosaic from the House of the Triumph of Dionysus suggests, the mosaic sea is a shifting substance, with a wished-for tactility which is expressed not only through a range of different ways of representing water but also through the various bodies – of fish, dolphins, cupids, ketoi, tritons, and nereids – which throng its depths and its

[352] Taylor 2008: 41.
[353] On mirrors as a marker of self-awareness in ancient art see Balensiefen 1990.

surfaces. These *Glücksvisionen*, visions of bliss, as Zanker calls the marine thiasos scenes of the sarcophagi,[354] are largely without hierarchy, following a drifting, paratactic logic, and cupids often flit and float between the larger figures, touching, tending, and connecting as on the mosaic of the marine thiasos from Room 32 at Piazza Armerina.[355] Sometimes, however, bodily attractiveness is concentrated into a single, focalised figure, that of marine Venus. Found from the late 2nd century into the 5th,[356] and particularly popular in the 4th century,[357] with the vast majority of examples coming from North Africa (though they also appear at Zeugma and at Philippopolis in Syria), these images display the goddess of love in triumphal toilette scenes, seated in a giant cockle shell held up by two tritons and surrounded by cupids bearing items associated with the rituals of beautification.[358] Frontally displayed and drawing on the iconography of the triumph and the advancing chariot, these pavements merge the imagery of public and private spheres to depict female sexuality as a force which radiates power and exerts control over its surroundings.

Lassus has commented on the individuality of the Algerian marine Venus mosaics, where goddess and composition vary greatly depending on 'sentimental' and architectural circumstances.[359] It is an individuality which is achieved in part through graphic choices made in the representation of the goddess, but a major role is played

[354] Zanker—Ewald 2004: 116.
[355] See Carandini et al. 1982: 258-68, with bibliography to that date. Pl. XXXVIII.
[356] Taylor 2008: 41 n. 80; see Lassus 1965 for a proposed relative chronology of marine Venus mosaics in Algeria, the leatest examples of which are dated to the 5th century.
[357] Dunbabin 1978: 155; Dunbabin traces the development of the motif from images of anonymous nereids on ketoi.
[358] See above, introductory section to 'The inhabited sea,' for bibliography on marine Venus.
[359] Lassus 1965: 185-6.

also by peripheral characters in these scenes, who can be used to frame Venus – or to distract attention from her – in very different ways. On some pavements, such as those from Bulla Regia **(Fig. 2.29)** or Setifis (Sétif), cupids and other figures are symmetrically arrayed around Venus, spatial hierarchy used to (re)produce social hierarchy, in a manner reminiscent of Claudian's description of the goddess and her retinue in his *Epithalamium*.[360] On others, such as one from Carthage and another from Leptiminus (though on this latter example, Venus, flanked by attendant cupids, is shown standing and wringing out her hair rather than in triumph) **(Fig. 2.27)**, the attendant figures, who are cupids or cupid-like young boys, are arranged in a disordered way in relation to the goddess, oriented towards all sides of the mosaic and with their attention directed towards other activities, usually connected to fishing or play.[361] The disconnected episodicity of these mosaics makes them far closer in ambience to the episodic image of the garden of erotes described by Philostratus the Elder in his *Imagines*, although unlike the ekphrasis the pavements do still incorporate a dominant figure who commands more attention than do the other vignettes. Both of these broad compositional groups, which we might call the hierarchical and the paratactic, can be extended indefinitely through the addition of extra figures to suit the space available, even as they encourage different routes for the eyes roving over an image: in the first case all bodies and peripheries lead back to the goddess, while in the second there is no clear sense of center and periphery, and she is merely one stop on a longer visual exploration of the

[360] See above, Chapter 1.

[361] Leptiminus: Ben Lazreg 2001: 259-92, Pls. H-P; he suggests a late 3rd or early 4th century date (p291). Carthage: *Inv. Tun.* 671; Dunbabin 1978:156 dates it to the end of the 4th or start of the 5th century. A further example, on which Venus is shown at almost the same size as the cupid fishers who fill the sea around her, is found on the wall of a circular pool from Sousse (Foucher 1960: 72-3, Cat. 57.159, Pl. XXXV c).

surface of the floor; on the Carthage mosaic, she is positioned as a sort of gateway figure to the chaotic sea beyond.

I turn now to two marine Venus pavements which in their basic outlines are very similar, and both "hierarchical" in character, but each of which showcases the ability of cupids to frame the encounter of viewer with goddess within the confines of a particular architectural context, and allows reflection on the ways in which subordinate figures can be used to open out what could be thought of as an relatively 'closed' image composition. The first of these, which dates to the 3rd century CE,[362] comes from the vast House of Amphitrite at Bulla Regia, where it is still in situ, located in one of the subterranean dining rooms typical of the city, designed to keep out the hot sun **(Figs. 2.28, 2.29)**.[363] The mosaic is best visible to the entering viewer, who on their way to this space would have come down a flight of stairs and along a wide corridor decorated with ornate labyrinthine meanders and vegetalised geometric work enclosing the bust of a female personification. Turning a corner between two columns, they would have found themself in a cross-vaulted triclinium space, presumably surrounded by three couches, in front of, or with their feet already within the shallows of, a fish-filled sea.

The central panel of this space is a long one, and from the perspective of the viewer entering at the intercolumniation is designed in several distinct zones. First comes a section of water filled with fish and shells. Next are two symmetrically-disposed cupids

[362] Picard 1960: 47, n. 3.
[363] Besaouch—Hanoune—Thébert 1977 do not give dimensions, but from their plan (Fig. 65) the building appears to measure at least 35m from SW-NE and at least 45 from NW-SE. The vaulted room covers an area of 25m^2.

riding on dolphins, one with a pyxis in his hand and the other holding up a mirror. Next comes the goddess herself, carried on the backs of two tritons (although not in this instance framed within a shell), and above her come two more symmetrical cupids, this time flying down to place a wreath on her head. This separation of elements draws attention to the various stages of progressing through the space, a progression necessary both for diners on their way to the couches and for the slaves in attendance on them. Each element, to a certain extent, resists the walker's passage. To step onto the panel is, according to the fiction of the mosaic, to step into a sea full of fish. Beyond the fish, the cupids on dolphins are positioned almost as sentinels, guarding the way to Venus. All four cupids engage in actions of care towards Venus' body, gesturing towards her beauty and desirability, but they also hinder access to her, creating a buffer zone of bodies and refraining from direct touch; even the two cupids who fly down to crown her hover at a distance above her head. It is a gentle and unthreatening buffer zone, but a buffer zone nonetheless. To step onto the dolphin-riders is to interrupt the image and to break into the space of the marine boudoir, all the more so in that such a step would involve stepping between the goddess and her (invisible) reflection in the mirror held up by the right-hand cupid. In this way, the pavement situates the viewer too within the hierarchy, staging them as a courtier approaching Venus head-on. Of course the logic of the room requires most viewers, in order to reach the couches, to step in any case onto the cupids and the goddess too, but even then they end up seated around Venus, spatially subordinated to her and in reclining postures which might even be seen as related to the poses of the always-reclining tritons and nereids present on so many other mosaics.

Of course, cupids are not the only guards of Venus here; their soft attentions towards her are contrasted with the more powerful, if inactivated, protection promised by the tritons. But they are the figures who extend outwards from the central image, creating points of contact between the relatively typecast outline of the goddess and those who approach her, multipliable and adaptable according to the demands of the specific architectural context. We might even posit, given the frequency with which cupids are shown holding up mirrors, that they are privileged agents in the creation of the fictitious image itself, signaling visual replication, symmetry, and secondariness even as their own bodies (themselves replicated, their symmetry enhanced by wings) perform it.

On a second mosaic of marine Venus, this time from Zeugma, cupids are quite literally made to bend over backwards in order to reconcile image to architecture. The mosaic is one of a large number found in the House of Poseidon, one of the largest houses to have been excavated in the city.[364] The mosaics in this house, most of which show mythological scenes or named personifications, date from building phases in the late 2nd and the first half of the 3rd century,[365] and several of them are clustered around the peristyle courtyard which would have greeted the visitor at the end of the house's entrance *fauces* **(Fig. 2.30)**.[366] Here, a central impluvium gave onto a mosaic-paved pool, within which Poseidon rides through a sea of fishes over the heads of Oceanus and

[364] Excavation report – Önal 2012: 65-182; Abadie-Reynal 2012: 183-238.
[365] Abadie-Reynal 2012: 233-237 offers remarks on the periodisation of the House of Poseidon as a whole, but not on the specific mosaics. Darmon 2005: 1298 suggests a date for the house's mosaics after the Severan reconquest of Mesopotamia in 198.
[366] Önal 2012: 91.

Tethys,[367] and rooms connected or indirectly connected to this courtyard contain a bewildering array of scenes; in addition to Aphrodite we find Achilles on Scyros, a plump adolescent Eros seated alongside a veiled *matrona*, Satyros pursuing Antiope, Pasiphae and Daedalus, and Dionysos on his chariot.

The mosaic from room A13/P37 **(Figs. 2.31, 2.32)**, which has irregular sides of between 4.32 and 5.32 m,[368] contains a central panel (1.75 x 1.30m) within which a marine Venus is shown, carried in a shell by tritons and crowned by cupids. Viewed from a position in which the goddess is upright, the cupids fly upside-down, and they crown her with a wreath which – as the remaining ribbons show – is also upside-down. In the spaces around the cupids and around Aphrodite's head is written, upright in relation to Aphrodite, ZWSIMOS SAMO/SATEUS EPOIEI (Zosimos of Samosata made it) ONOMATA TREI/TW/NWN (the names of the tritons [?are]) AFROS / BUQOS (Foam/Depths[of the sea]). Around its edges, separated from the central scene by a black frame and a perspectivally-rendered undulating ribbon, runs a scene of cupids hunting wild animals, orientated with their feet pointing outwards towards the four edges of the mosaic and their heads pointing inwards towards Aphrodite. Beyond this is a decorated band of alternating circles and crosses.

The function of the room is unclear,[369] but the mosaic may well have been the main focus of interest; where many walls in this house carried figural or other frescoes, the

[367] Önal 2012: 76-91. Room A6/P9.
[368] Barbet 2005: 120.
[369] Önal 2012: 98 calls it a 'pièce de repos'. Barbet 2005: asks whether it could be a *cubiculum*, but leaves the question open.

decoration here consisted of white stucco panels, with a frieze of vegetal scrolls at the top of the wall, in white stucco against a yellow ochre background.[370] It has been suggested that fragments of blue surface covering found during excavation may have belonged to the ceiling.[371] On the west wall was a niche, 0.70m from the ground, 1.95m wide, and 0.40m deep (the height is unknown).[372] The south wall of the room, like many walls and indeed whole rooms from Zeugma, is carved from the limestone bedrock, a circumstance which would have helped to keep the room cool on hot summer days. As can be seen from the plan, there are two doors, one at the eastern end of the south wall, opening onto room A14/P36 and one at the northern end of the east wall, opening onto corridor A12/P38. There was also a large window in the north wall between this room and the courtyard, 1.05m from the ground and 1.95m wide; fragments of glass were found within the room, and the excavators suggest that it was glazed.[373]

It is in relation to the two doors and the window that the floor must be understood. The mosaic is clearly designed with a primary viewing angle in mind: the viewer – whether worshipper or voyeur –[374] is encouraged to approach the goddess face-on, coming from the south side of the room so that she appears "upright". But the positioning of the cupids acknowledges the fact that that not all viewers would see the mosaic for the first time from this angle. Many viewers would have caught their first glance through the

[370] There is a difference between the excavation reports here: Önal 2012: 98 gives the scrolls a height of 0.55m, positioned at 2.20m from the ground, while Barbet 2005: 120-121 had described a frieze 0.30m high with volutes 0.25m in diameter.
[371] Barbet 2005: 120-121.
[372] Önal 2012: 98.
[373] Önal 2012: 98.
[374] See Dunbabin 1978: 157 on the extent to which these can be considered religious images.

window from the courtyard, while the entrance in the east wall seems a more obvious one than the entrance in the south wall, which requires a detour through another room. Even the visitor entering from the south, having come through Room A14/P38, where the mosaic floor shows Satyros assaulting Antiope, would have found themself off axis on entering the room, and would have needed to move leftward/westward in order to view the central emblema straight on.

It is cupids who are used to resolve these spatial infelicities. The upside-down cupids allow the viewer-through-the-window an immediate purchase on the image; flying directly in front of the window, they function as a symmetrical frame for the goddess who lies beyond – and more broadly for the floor as a whole. Seen "the right way up" from the south, their positioning is potentially awkward, but whereas with any other figure type the whole logic of the image would be disrupted by the insertion of upside-down figures, where cupids are concerned the viewer can just about imagine that they might simply be bending over backwards in their concern to crown the goddess – a little silly, and a little clumsy, but reconcilable with what we know to be affordances of the cupid type. The lack of cloaks, worn by the cupids in the Bulla Regia mosaic, assists in this manipulation of spatial possibility, as it leaves the direction of movement more ambiguous. As at Bulla Regia, the cupids both protect the goddess and act as intercessors between her and her human admirers.

A further point of interest in relation to the visual dynamics of this central emblema is the question of the text, and the hederae or fleurons which surround it. It should be noted, first, that the mosaics of this house demonstrate something of an obsession with

the authority of the verbal. In several rooms, generic images of Dionysiac figures have been assigned specific identities; were it not for their accompanying labels, for example, Satyros and Antiope next door would be indistinguishable from any other assault of a satyr on a maenad. Here, the names *Buthos* and *Aphros* for images of tritons are only otherwise known only from a handful of mosaics.[375] The text performs more than one function: in addition to labelling the tritons, it gives the name of the mosaicist, Zosimos of Samosata, who also put his name to the mosaic of the Synaristosai discussed in the section on acanthus borders above, and who may have laid several floors in the House of Poseidon.[376] These grammatically separate texts are physically separated from each other, but in such a way that it is difficult to know where to start reading. Does the viewer begin with the central text, 'Zosimos of Samosata made it'? Or do they start in the top left hand corner with ONOMATA, and then follow the text across to the top right (TREI), bottom left (TW), and bottom right (NWN) hand corners to read 'the names of the tritons', before moving upwards again to the names themselves? Are the tritons' names predicates of the phrase ONOMATA TREITWNWN, or simply free-floating, as they are in other instances in this house where figures are named? Particularly given the fragmentation of this text, one wonders how many viewers would actually have been able to read these words, and to what extent lettering functioned as ornament – and visual statement of intellectual authority – as much as it did as carrier of specific content. To a great extent, textual content has been subordinated here to the logic of decorative space, and in this context, the use of hederae, schematic ivy leaves, becomes particularly interesting. Hederae are typically used to mark a break between sentences,

[375] Neira 2011: 633-635.
[376] Darmon 2005: 1298 proposes that Zosimos laid the Satyr/Antiope and Poseidon mosaics as well as this one.

items in a list, or other units of text,[377] and these ones do perform that role, framing the central artist's signature and marking off the bottom of the text-dominated zone of the mosaic. But in comparison to the usual schematically-rendered textual dividers these are remarkably numerous and alive, seemingly darting across the image surface and encouraging the eyes too to dart about, even as they ask to be "read" also for their accepted meaning, the break or pause. Perhaps they encourage the viewer to move between one unit of text and the next. Certainly they play a vital mediating role between the textual and the visual – both in their engagement with the visuality of a text made up of particulate tesserae and fragmented syllables, whose materiality/ornamentality they assert and celebrate, and in the sense that they create continuity between the text and the figures around which it runs. In particular, they facilitate the co-existence of text with cupids, something made easier by the fact that for the hederae, even more than for the cupids, there is no upside-down and no right way up. For the viewer looking through the window, who has not yet seen the colourful, linear sea on which Venus sits, this profusion of darting arrows may even seem to be a novel way of representing water, allowing them to imagine the cupids the right way up, and floating or swimming rather than flying.[378] As we will see in later chapters, cupids often exist in an unusually close (for figural forms) relationship to texts; here, it is striking that cupids, the most ornamental of narrative figures, and hederae, the most imagistic of textual marks, together function as mediators between different conceptual and visual zones, different

[377] See Wingo 1972: 122-126 on the uses of hederae for punctuation; Parkes 1992: 61 points out the decorative potential of the sign, and notes that early medieval codices used it for decoration as well as for punctuation, while by the 12th century it may have lost all value as a unit of punctuation – suggesting that in certain circumstances of transmission, its decorative value was able to triumph over its punctuating function.
[378] See Molholt 2008: 161-163 on the representation of water using black lines on a white surface on North African mosaics.

modes of describing and representing, and different ways of understanding movement through space.

Moving outwards from the centre, or inwards from the fringes of the room, we come to the frieze of hunting cupids,[379] a design related to the cupids in acanthus scrolls discussed above. The choice of an episodic, populated frieze for this room sets it apart from other rooms in the house (though many have large acanthus scrolls), but fits well with the room's awkward configuration of entrances in relation to the central image. The entering viewer does not immediately face Aphrodite frontally, but the frieze provides a way of moderating this disjuncture, offering immediate points of visual interest which they can follow round until they come face to face with the goddess, or offering alternative modes and angles of engagement to the viewer who has stood too long in one place, transfixed by the single perspective demanded by Aphrodite. Sea is contrasted with land, and the aggressive-yet-unthreatening energy of cupids and animals figures a different set of sensations, different terms of engagement to those invited by the calm, sedentary central image. The encircling aspect of the frieze is picked up in the more regular, less jolty flow of the stucco scrolls at the top of the wall, as well as in the undulating ribbon and guilloche bands of the floor.

The mosaic also uses cupids to provide visual overlap between frieze and central image. The cupids of both "divine"/"mythological" and "genre" zones are approximately the same size and have similar wings, hair, and body types. As such, and especially for the viewer who looks through the window from the north side of the room, where the flying

[379] On hunting mosaics in the eastern Mediterranean see Kondoleon 1994: 271-314.

cupids are directly juxtaposed with a hunting cupid, they encourage the eyes to move between one part of the mosaic and the other, drawing the two zones together as part of the same built surface and inviting connection and contrast, whether consciously formulated or not.

The mosaics from Bulla Regia and Zeugma both use cupids to alleviate the perennial problem of the panel picture laid flat on the walking horizon of the floor. Stretching between the unitary composition of the central group and the non-hierarchically structured sea beyond, they allow the motif of Venus carried by tritons to preserve at the same time a degree of integrity and a degree of open-endedness, the possibility of existing in contiguous relation to the architecture of the room and to the external viewer. It is surely significant that Venus is one of the few non-anonymous figures for whom such a compositional strategy is common: the compositionally "open" image allows the viewer to imagine their relationship to the desirable love goddess as one of encounter rather than just removed observation, an encounter which reminds, even as it tantalises, of the physical impossibility of entering any planar image.[380]

d. Ocean in close-up: cupids with the heads of Oceanus and Tethys/Thalassa

[380] With the exception of images of Oceanus and Tethys/Thalassa, discussed below, the other main image group involving the viewer in a frontal relationship are those showing the advancing chariot of Poseidon, as on the atrium mosaic of the House of Poseidon at Zeugma.

One of the most visually challenging groups of mosaics found in the Roman Mediterranean is made up of those on which a vast bust or pair of busts, representing the marine deities Oceanus and Tethys or Thalassa, are shown at the centre of a sea of fish and cupids. The most striking feature of these mosaics is the scale at which the heads are represented: the late-4th-century head of Oceanus from Aïn-Témouchant near Sétif in Algeria measures over six foot from lobster-claws to beard.[381] Bath-house mosaics from Africa Proconsularis (where the examples given by Dunbabin date from the 3rd century to at least the late 4th) tend to show the detached, frontal, bearded head of Oceanus, either surrounded by nereids, with cupids on dolphins riding out from the watery locks of his beard **(Figs. 2.33, 2.34)**, or alone, as if floating up from the depths;[382] by contrast, the pavements from Syria-Palaestina and in particular from the Antioch region (dating from the 2nd to 6th centuries CE), which are more often found in domestic houses, are likely to show the god/personification of the sea alongside his spouse, their heads slightly angled to one side and attached to shoulders, giving the impression that giant bodies may be lurking in the depths beneath the mosaic surface **(Figs. 2.35, 2.36)**.[383] From the end of the 3rd century it becomes more common in the Eastern Mediterranean to separate out the male and female deities, with Tethys or Thalassa often appearing alone on a floor.[384]

The six-foot Aïn-Témouchant head is accompanied by an explicitly apotropaeic text, and Katherine Dunbabin has suggested that North African Oceanus heads more generally

[381] Dunbabin 1978: 151-2; Molholt 2008: 182-3.
[382] See Dunbabin 1978: 149-54 on heads of Ocean from North Africa.
[383] Eraslan 2015 discusses examples from this region.
[384] Wages 1986: 124; she also discusses the overlap between Tethys and Thalassa, and the possible shift from one to the other as the subject of these mosaics.

may have had an apotropaeic function.[385] She also points to a passage in John Chrysostom in which a generous patron of the theatre at Antioch is acclaimed on his arrival in the building with the cry of 'Ocean! Ocean!',[386] an assimilation which makes it possible, for the Syrian mosaics at least, that these serene couples placed in prominent places within a house in some way monumentalise the stature and bounty of the *dominus* and *domina* of the household. It is possible, given the differences in representation between the heads from these two regions, that they resonated in different ways for the two geographically distinct groups of viewers.

Whether we accept either or both of these reference points as being generally applicable, the dominating characteristic of these heads is their size, which leads to a significant physical imposition upon the space of the room or pool in which they are placed. In a fountain from the House of Bacchus and Ariadne at Thuburbo Maius, an Ocean head is placed so as to fill a basin entirely,[387] and in every instance in which they were found their scale would have dwarfed that of the human viewer. Whether these heads are experienced, as in Africa Proconsularis, as distorted faces of the sea seen incompletely through ripples of real water, or, as in Syria-Palaestina, as being attached to bodies which extend the conceptual space of the image far below the surface of the floor, this is a mosaic type which is deeply unusual in its ability and intention to make the users of these spaces feel small.

[385] On the mosaic from Aïn-Témouchant see Dunbabin 1978: 151-152; 149-154 for discussion of the apotropaeic qualities of these heads.
[386] Dunbabin 1989: 27, quoting John Chrysostom *De inani gloria* 4.
[387] Molholt 2008: 185-6, Figs. 122, 123.

In consequence of this – and probably a reason why more mosaic types did not employ a similar scale of representation – the viewer has an imperfect view of these faces, always seeing them either in foreshortened perspective or, if standing next to or on top of them, detail by detail rather than as a unified whole. One way of putting it would be to say that the viewer is denied the mastery which comes with the totalising viewpoint, forced always to piece together the totality of the image from a succession of close-up viewings.[388] The scale of representation is poetically appropriate to the scale of the thing represented, the vast sea itself, but it might be argued alongside this that the subject matter of Ocean provides an excuse for a particular desired viewer-mosaic dynamic, with scale driving subject matter as much as subject matter drives scale.

The cupids on the Syrian mosaics, such as a recently excavated pavement from the House of Oceanus at Zeugma **(Fig. 2.35)** and another from the House of Menander at Harbiye **(Fig. 2.36)**, model and encourage fractured modes of viewing.[389] Where the huge shoulders gesture to unseen depths concealing bodies many metres long, the cupids frolic happily on the surface of the water. Scooting around these huge fleshy centrepieces from all angles, too small to engage on equal terms with the sea gods, they seem to encounter them in an even more partial way than a human would, their small size making the heads seem even larger than they actually are. Despite the single dominant orientation of the heads, the cupids encourage approaches from the wrong direction, thus apparently encountering the head as abstract object or impediment within a space. It is an approach encouraged by the heads themselves, whose very size

[388] Cf. Stewart 1984: 70; discussed below in section on the floor from Ammaedara.
[389] On the House of Menander: Levy 1949: 214-216, Pl. CLIX. The excavation report of the House of Oceanus at Zeugma has not yet been published.

forces a focus on detail and the corporeal – on the likeness of blue-grey locks of hair to water, on the wings and lobster claws emerging from their foreheads, on large planes of bare skin – but these characteristics are rendered even more prominent by fact that they are the same size as the cupids. Between them, heads and cupids at once issue an invitation to look closely and engage in a strategy of defamiliarisation: in not fully engaging with the divinities, and instead simply inhabiting the space around them, the cupids invite the viewer too to pay only partial attention to the heads. To use the metaphor of cinema, the main modern locus of theory on the close-up/*gros plan* image,[390] they offer models for a visual strategy of zooming in and then zooming out again, or, here, of the gaze which wanders around a space until it comes up against something to hold its attention, but which may subsequently wander on, returning to play among the dolphins. And as with the cinematic close-up, which breaks into the narrative trajectory of a film to force the spectator to consider their own relationship to the object or, most often, face represented at supersized scale on the screen, these images break with any sense of classic pictorial composition to create a space in which the spectator must face the relationship of their own body to the striking physicality displayed on the floor.[391]

On some of the North African mosaics, the relationship between heads and cupids is such that the head of Ocean actually stands in for the physical ocean itself, functioning as a landscape to be occupied and explored. On the pavement of a basin from Acholla, a

[390] Doane 2003: 93 discusses the different implications of the English, French, and Russian terms for this technical manoeuvre: where the English 'close-up' emphasises intimacy and close looking, the French and Russian terms emphasise the larger than life, monumental aspects of an object seen up close.
[391] Doane 2003: 108.

cupid in a small boat rows over the head of Ocean, while on the mosaic from the main hall of the House of Cato at Utica **(Fig. 2.34)** and on the famous Catalogue of the Ships mosaic from Althiburus **(Fig. 2.33)**, symmetrically disposed cupids on dolphins appear to ride and swim out of Ocean's beard into the surrounding sea, suggesting the continuity between these two elements.[392] On the Althiburus mosaic the similarity between dark blue beard and dark blue sea confirms the connection, while on the House of Cato pavement a connection is made not only between beard and sea, which are depicted using the same colour tesserae and similar representational "textures," but also between the sea and the surrounding meander pattern: the waves of the sea are unusually depicted using straight lines and right angles, so that the cupids appear almost to ride across a surface of watery meanders, allowing the shifting rivulets of Ocean's beard to flow out into the (already illusionistic) surrounding ornament.

A further way in which the physicality of these seas (as also of others which do not include giant heads) is evoked and obscured is through the whips and fishing rods carried by the cupids and wingless boys. On the mosaic from the House of Oceanus at Zeugma, both implements are found, each of them a long wavy line of dark tesserae extending from the bodies of the cupids/boy out into the space of the mosaic, curving through whichever medium it meets, either air or sea. Each one creates a different type of relationship between cupids and fish, but also a different type of tension within the image, a different way of imagining movement and connection. At the same time, they

[392] House of Cato, Utica: *CMT* I, 2: 41-58, Pls. XXXIII-XXXV, Plan 14. Catalogue of the Ships Mosaic, Althiburus: Bardo Museum Inv. A 166; Gauckler 1905.

are present simply as abstract lines on the still surface of the mosaic, leading the eyes out along their length.

Certain of these mosaics also create contiguity between image and viewer by placing one of the fishing figures on a rock in a corner of the panel, jutting out from the geometric frame band. The pavement from the House of Menander at Harbiye has two winged cupids on rocks, diametrically opposed in the corners of the mosaic; the House of Oceanus and Zeugma incorporates a rock on which sits a figure similar in size, face, and hairstyle to the cupids, but with no wings, slimmer legs than his companions, and wearing a short one-sleeved garment and pointed "Phrygian" cap. In both cases, this is a placement which stages the frame, likely the standpoint of the viewer, as an extension of the water's shore, and for the Zeugma mosaic, the humanising characteristics applied to the fisher connect him to human space, even as his shape, stature, and rod link him also to the fantastical space of the cupids. There is a similarity here to the vine mosaics from The House of Dionysos at Paphos and the vault of Santa Costanza in Rome, where humanoid figures are found around the edges of the image and fantastical ones climbing in the tendrils at the centre of the panel.[393] At the same time as the central heads estrange the viewer, the peripheral figures work to create points of contact with them, encouraging entry into the simultaneously tame and alienating world of the mosaic ocean.

Floors with the heads of Ocean and Tethys/Thalassa bring up a whole range of optical issues and possibilities, not only requiring the viewer to merge the personification with

[393] See Kondoleon 1994: 231-69 on the Paphos mosaic.

the thing personified, but asking them to manipulate ideas of recession and protrusion, to approach the represented surface detail by detail and often from the "wrong" direction, and to accept the physical subordination of their own body to the one/s on the floor. Cupids are important agents of these impositions on the viewer, and one of the crucial features exploited by this mosaic group is their size: cupids' acknowledged smallness creates distortions of scale and relationship which make us newly alert to the physicality and facture of the objects and people alongside whom they appear, making those things seem even larger than they actually are by comparison. It is a feature which was already present in the juxtaposition of large fleshy faces with small bodies on the acanthus mosaics, and is relevant across wide swathes of imagery in which cupids appear (and arguably all of it, in that even where no other represented bodies are present the viewer's body always stands as benchmark). But images of the personifications of the sea provide one of the most clear-cut examples available of an instance in which the scale at which cupids are represented is used to distort and reframe a viewer's perception both of a represented image and of their own body in relation to it.

e. Framing the sea

Where Oceanus/Tethys mosaics sometimes employ peripheral rocks to connect the open sea to the mainland of the floor, physically connecting 'framing' cupids to formal framing structures, a small and diverse subset of this group, whose examples date to the

4th and 5th century, engages in more experimental play around the relationship between frame and framed, employing imagery of the sea and the marine thiasos, and in particular of cupids, to test the limits of inter-permeability between central image and surrounding border.

A mosaic from Philippopolis dated to 325-350 and measuring 2.66 x 2.65 m **(Fig. 2.37)** preserves the zonal integrity of frame and framed.[394] Within its central panel is a large and striking bust of Thalassa or Tethys, with fish dripping from her hair, a golden starfish ornamenting her forehead, and a ketos which does double service as a torque round her neck. A separate border contains a sea scene which runs around the four sides of the central panel, with an inner/upper white border of sky and an outer/lower one of sea, which is rendered in variegated blue-greys. The water is packed with unusually vivacious fish and with cupids, carried on the backs of dolphins and rowing in or fishing from small boats. Where most images of Oceanus and Tethys leave all or most of the background white so as to make it ambiguous whether the cupids appear against sea or sky, here the image settles on a horizon-line for the sea, making it impossible for the viewer to merge the two different modes of perception required into a single scenario.

Two 5th-century mosaics, from the Yakto Complex at Antioch **(Fig. 2.38)** and from Alexandretta (İskenderun) **(Fig. 2.39)**, seek to have the best of both worlds in this regard: they not only employ a blue frame of water around the edge of the panel but

[394] Balty 1977: 66-9; the mosaics from Shabha-Philippopolis more generally show unusual variety and originality in their frames.

also incorporate within it large figures of Thalassa/Tethys whose upper bodies are set off against the central white space.[395] In the watery frames, cupids ride on dolphins which seem to rest on the surface of the sea (on both mosaics), wade through the water and fish from a boat (Antioch), and even glide across the sea using a floating amphora with a makeshift sail as a windsurfing board (Alexandretta). Their behaviour is as whimsical as the mode of representation; the result is in many ways a disharmonious marriage of different visual modes, in particular where the dark water abruptly makes a right-angled turn at the corners of the panels, and the conceit appears not to have gained wide popularity. Even Doro Levi, illustrating the Yakto Complex pavement, seems to show tacit disapproval of the design: his plates show only a selection of details rather than the mosaic as a whole, cutting out the goddess so that she appears almost without her accompanying cupids – only one stray leg betrays their proximity.

Where the Philippopolis mosaic imposed a separating line between focalised figure and frame, these pavements insist on the continuity between framed and frame, embedding the one within or around the other. As if to emphasise this contiguity and fundamental sameness, the Thalassa figure from the Yakto Complex holds in her hand a miniature dolphin, the counterpart of the ones ridden by the cupids who surround her. It is unsurprising that cupids are the privileged figures who are able to cross this divide, their upper bodies projecting up into the white space of the 'picture' even as they serve as the regular motifs articulating the space of the frame. Through exploring the discrepancies between the viewer's sense of the horizontal and vertical, and between

[395] Yakto: Levi 1947: 633. Alexandretta: Wages 1986: 125. Wages 1986 dates both mosaics to 450-475 CE

the dual reference points of their own single-point perspective and the square space of the room, these designs use cupids to explore the limits of the formal "frame" as a way of delineating an image and its relation to a larger architectural space.

f. Exploring the Mediterranean on a floor from Ammaedara

A final inhabited sea reverses the scalar relationship of cupids to the rest of the image; instead of emphasising the immense size of their companion imagery they dwarf it, miniaturizing what ought to be massive **(Figs. 2.40, 241 a, b)**. The mosaic in question, dated to the 3rd century CE, comes from a building of unknown function at Ammaedara (Haïdra), a large city about 260 km south east of Carthage, and thus far from the coast, which provided access to the mountainous interior, and was home to a Roman legion after 30 BCE. The inland location contrasts sharply with the subject of the mosaic: the large (6 x 5.30 m) panel, situated in the centre of a room with three exedrae paved with geometric patterns around the edge, shows a scattering of islands against a square blue sea; around the edge of the blue, rocks project into a black band 0.33 m in width.[396] The rounded forms of these rocks and the dark colouring of the water suggest that this band is intended to represent the landscape of the sea bed. Each of the islands is labelled with the name of a real island or city in the Mediterranean,[397] and each is the site of a complex architectural structure or structures, as well as trees, vineyards, and on one,

[396] Published by Bejaoui 1997; see also Bejaoui 1998.
[397] The islands are labelled as follows: Scyros, Cypros, Idalium, Rhodos, Paphos, Cytherae, Erycos, Lemnos, Naxos, Egusa, Cnossos.

Eryx, even a mountain in the distance. Fish, crustaceans and molluscs occupy the waters between the islands and along the framing sea bed, and empty boats lie in the sea on three of the four sides; the fourth side has been entirely destroyed by rainwater. Towards the centre of the image, scattered around the central group of three islands, are three winged cupids: one rowing a boat, one swimming through the water in pursuit of a fish, which it is in the act of grasping by the tail, and one, partially destroyed, sitting on a rocky outcrop with a fishing rod, in the act of pulling a fish out of the water.

The Mediterranean geography offered by this floor is by no means a navigable one; the islands are positioned in incorrect relation to one another, their coastlines bear no resemblance to the real coastlines of the islands supposedly represented, and, to take just one glaring infelicity, Idalium and Cyprus are shown as separate land masses despite the fact that Idalium was in actual fact a city on Cyprus.[398] Fathi Bejaoui, who has published the mosaic, argues that a common theme uniting many of these islands and cities is the presence on or in them of temples and sanctuaries to Venus, and he suggests that the mosaic may have commemorated either a pious voyage made by its purchaser, or a mythological voyage of some sort;[399] there is, however, no evidence in the mosaic imagery to support these hypotheses. Gian Franco Chiai suggests *otium* and the *locus amoenus* as governing representational principles.[400]

As with so many other floors on which cupids are employed, this is a surface which asks its viewers to employ double vision in their optical peregrinations. On the one hand this

[398] Bejaoui 1997: 850-851.
[399] Bejaoui 1997: 852-855.
[400] Chiai 2014: 99-100.

is a mosaic which does allow the viewer mastery over its objects of representation, offering an impossible birds-eye view over the Mediterranean in which a whole fantasy archipelago can be taken in at a single glance. Taking into account the sea bed around the edges of the floor, the mosaic even allows its viewers to conceptualise this vast expanse of water in three dimensions, using colour and peripheral location to signal depth. But it is also a surface which invites a more peripatetic look, one which moves from island to island or simply along the sea routes between them. The cupids are key to this: each one suggests a different way of interacting with this sea, and they are staged in such a way as to emphasise their physical embeddedness in this landscape. The sea around the swimming cupid has a particular concentration of white lines and zigzags, suggesting the disturbance to the water caused by his presence there. The rocky outcrop on which the fishing cupid sits, meanwhile, is of completely different facture to that of the islands: where they are shown simply as flat, sandy planes with a double border of grey and white tesserae around the edge, this is shown in dramatic relief, with complex layers of shadow and highlighting, in a style resembling the cliff edge of the Hellenistic tiger rider mosaic from the House of the Faun at Pompeii.[401] Due to damage to the pavement in this area it is impossible to tell, at least from photos, exactly how these rocks relate to the island behind the cupid, but stylistically they clearly come from very different models, which seem simply to have been juxtaposed with one another. It is a representational choice which asks the viewer to focus in on the physicality of the landscape at this point, to regard it as experiential rather than simply informative terrain. Cupids require a shift from regarding the floor as a landscape to be surveyed

[401] Pompeii VI.12.2, now in Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples; cf. Dunbabin 1999 Fig. 43.

from a mountaintop to regarding it as an inhabitable space through which different routes can be taken, different details focused on. They encourage exploratory, tactile looking. Perhaps the sea bed around the edges, with its rocks reaching out almost like fingers towards the central image, is also part of this making-tangible of the unreachable: an experiential supplement to an informational sea. One even wonders, given that the room in which the mosaic was found had large exedrae on three sides (judging by the plan; Bejaoui does not give dimensions) whether this was a triclinium in which diners faced one another across an expanse of sea. Perhaps, spurred on by the cupid who rows himself through the waves towards the Lemnian beach, the viewer is even supposed to imagine stepping on their own account into one of the boats drawn up along the edge of the mosaic and embarking on their own winding journey through the archipelago.

Scale is again important here. Cupids, as fantastical creatures, have no "true" size, but they are almost always smaller that the human(oid) characters alongside whom they appear, and the assumption of a viewer will always be that they are small; some images, like those of the heads of Ocean and Tethys, make them even smaller in relation to adult humans than a human infant would be. So when a cupid is shown with an arm-span almost as wide as an island, the result is a miniaturisation of this landscape. In her book *On longing: narratives of the miniature, the gigantic, the souvenir, the collection*, Susan Stewart writes that 'The miniature… presents a diminutive, and thereby manipulable, version of experience.'[402] She also points out that a model railway erases any memory of

[402] Stewart 1984: 69.

the labour necessary to its full-size equivalent.[403] It is a strategy for the reframing of 'real life' experience which is clearly exploited here: the dangerous seas and rocky headlands of the Mediterranean are re-articulated as a safe, even cute, environment, a terrain fit for winged infant divinities to co-opt as their playground, and for elites to co-opt as a diverting space for receiving guests. Without the cupids, and to a lesser extent the fish, the map would still function as a miniature version of an absent reality, but it would be a space whose scale separated it entirely from the space of the viewer, and whose islands existed primarily as intangible shorthands, a memory palace directing the viewer to (remembered or imagined) real cities and societies. But the cupids insist on the possibility of bodily engagement with this landscape, and even, given that they are large enough to have real presence in the space of the viewer (using Bejaoui's measurements as a baseline and measuring on the surface of the photo, I estimate that the swimming cupid has an armspan of, very roughly, 75cm) draw the islands and their porticoes and their vineyards into the ambit of the viewer's own body, asking them to imagine the islands as things to be walked on and around rather than as abstract representations of an absent reality. It is perhaps particularly appropriate in a city in the continental interior many days journey from the coast, where the sea must have seemed very distant and intangible even to those who had seen it and had commercial or political interests relating to it, that a stratagem should be employed which rendered these far-off islands at once more fantastical and more touchable, more available to the wandering gaze of the spectator.

[403] Stewart 1984: 59.

IV. Conclusions

The sea is a place of strange textures and deceptive visuality, where a viewer's sense of scale or direction can easily become distorted and surface and depth exist in uneasy relationship to one another. On marine mosaics, this sense of the illusoriness of sensation and spatiality is always at issue. Many ways of representing water offer little or no sense of an up or a down, and with no vine stocks to mark salient axes there is often far less sense of navigable structure to these surfaces than was the case for vegetal ornament. Symmetry is less likely to be a governing feature, and the grid patterns on which mosaicists usually lay out their designs leave less of a trace.

Like vine mosaics, however, the pleasures offered by inhabited seas are the pleasures of the peripheral, a periphery which in both cases extends so far that it regularly challenges the central scene or emblema for dominance, or usurps its position entirely. In both cases, cupids function as syntactic markers, suggesting possible ways of navigating and travelling across these floors. They often invite what we might think of as a wandering gaze, fragmentary and inconclusive and with no prescribed single route of travel, appealing enough in their activities that the eye is encouraged to linger, but at the same time always reaching beyond themselves with whip or fishing rod or outstretched arm, sending the viewer off again into the labyrinth of vine tendrils or open expanse of sea to search for a new stopping point or a new entanglement. Where they are organised around a central narrative or divine image, an "upright" image on the floor, they issue a challenge to single-point perspective, preserving the sense of a more or less integrated scene but suggesting to the viewer that they might approach from the

side, or the top, of the image, or asking them to imagine what the view might look like from an imaginary intra-pictorial perspective.

For both categories, but in the case of marine mosaics in particular, cupids invite reflection on the tactile qualities of the inhabited floor. Through their plastically-rendered bodies, often set off through contrast with other distinct physicalities such as those of dangerous animals or plump dolphins, and through their own propensity to touch, they seek to activate the viewer's capacity for haptic looking, as well as an awareness of their own physical relationship to the floor. Nor is this unmarked tactility: the entry-routes into images which cupids model, the modes of engagement and concentration which they encourage, are ones which prioritise at once the essential innocence and pleasure of viewing, but also unflagging tenderness and care. On the acanthus scroll friezes, cupidic enthusiasm is set off against the peering, impassive gaze of outsized heads, which model a more distanced mode of engagement with the surrounding environment. Their relationship to the viewer in this regard is always a double-sided one: on the one hand they invite a vicarious experience of the floor through their bodies, modelling particular perspectives and modes of engagement, but at the same time they always remain at a distance: miniature, fantastical beings who encounter the floor in ways which inevitably remain unavailable to the human viewer.

Both floor categories exploit the boundary between order and disorder, between ornament and representational image; while vegetal ornament is usually more obviously governed by a sense of regularity, inhabited seas as well deploy fish and cupids at regular intervals, so that from a certain distance they fade into something akin

to pattern. This semi-ornamental, semi-representational status is closely connected to the frequency with which cupids participate in the breakdown or bridging of zonal divisions, and on several mosaics from North Africa they even mediate the merging of vegetal with marine landscapes: a mosaic from Equizitum (Ouled-Agla) in Mauritania Sitifensis shows a cupid riding on a dolphin in the medallion of an acanthus scroll **(Fig. 2.42)**,[404] while on a mosaic from a basin in the House of Venus at Dougga, in which Venus, carried by tritons and attended by cupids, reclines at the image centre, more cupids, smaller and plumper than Venus' attendants, swim around the edges of the basin and the sea, their bodies in the water but their heads set off against the garland which runs as a border around the wall of the basin **(Fig. 2.43)**.[405] In both of these instances, cupids compress two different spatial illusions into one, rendering them more haptically accessible even as they double down on the fictionality of the ornamental landscape. On the mosaic from the House of Venus they also insist on an essential continuity between central image and frame. Time and again they draw attention to, delight in, and flagrantly disregard the fault-lines of imagistic and spatial construction.

I have focused in this chapter on two landscape types, vegetation and water, which can be seen either as representations of an absent reality or as abstract ornamental ground. But cupids can be used to activate – to give inhabitable qualities to – even "pure" geometric ornament. On a triclinium pavement from Vienna (Vienne) in Gallia Narbonensis, a city whose mosaics stand out for their elaborate, often rectilinear,

[404] Wuilleumier 1928: 78, Pl. XII.3. He suggests a date not before the 2nd century.
[405] Jeddi 1994. She dates the pavement to the 4th century.

geometric frames and patterning,[406] a complex meander frame incorporates within it a series of small emblemata, in each of which carries a vignette of cupids in action: hunting, boxing, or running **(Fig. 2.44)**.[407] The logic of the mosaic requires that the viewer imagine that the cupids can move through the geometric meanders; otherwise the hunting cupid will never reach the deer which he chases, and the two boxers will never join fists. The meander pattern is thus transformed into a traversable landscape along whose labyrinthine paths the cupids can move, and the viewer is asked to conceptualise the pavement as a surface of doubled scale and occupation: on the one hand a floor whose abstract pattern is addressed to (and seeks to entangle?) the human viewer, and on the other a resistant landscape where meander bands impede straightforward movement across the space for the cupids. In contrast to another floor from nearby Lyon **(Fig. 2.45)** which employs a similar meander field but without the figural insertions,[408] this one uses cupids to turn the floor into a site of irresolvable tension between different ways of viewing and experiencing the built environment. They are even used to build thematic irresolution into the design: while the boxers and the hunter each have something to aim for, a telos embedded within the design, the single running cupid at what must have been the entrance to the room, with no clear goal in sight, offers a suggestion of movement without end along the line of the decorated bands.[409] As is the case for innumerable instances in which cupids are found,

[406] Cf. Lancha 1981.
[407] Lancha 1981: 136-139, Cat. 318, Pl. LX.
[408] Swift 2009: 52-53.
[409] A mosaic which is in some ways structurally similar is published in Balmelle et al. 1999, where a black and white geometric ground contains a series of circular frames in which are found, in colour, several different types of bird, along with, in a single central square frame, a cupid with bow and torch who appears to be on the point of shooting at the birds or in some other way disturbing the order of the whole.

both on mosaics and elsewhere, they are the agents here of an embodied viewing which is at once non-interpretative and inexhaustible. They continually approach anew the surface and substance of the built environment, continually try it on for size, continually probe its material qualities. At once participants in and unveilers of imagistic illusionism, these deceptively complex figures force their viewers to approach spaces and images with a more multivalent perspective than they may ever consciously realise, suggesting that the fabric of the built environment is constituted and maintained, and therefore must also be experienced, through continual movement and use.

Chapter 3

A sweet embrace for death: cupids on sarcophagi

I. Introduction: 'the tedious multiplication of erotes…'[410]

One of the most common places, and in some ways one of the most perplexing, in which cupids are found is on funerary monuments. While disproportionately common on children's sarcophagi, they are also widespread on adult sarcophagi from across the northern shores of the Roman Mediterranean between the 2nd and 4th centuries CE, with spikes in production at Rome from 150-190, and, more pronounced, from 270-310 CE.[411] One recent tally counts 373 sarcophagi from Rome alone on which cupids are the dominant figure type,[412] although this does not include garland sarcophagi, which from around 100 CE frequently use cupids as articulating figures, or the other types of funerary monument (ash urns, altars, mausoleum architecture etc.) on which cupids are common.[413] There are certainly over 300 garland sarcophagi known from the city of Rome (though this figure also includes those without cupids),[414] and putting these two groups together, it seems likely that the tally of sarcophagi on which cupids played the most prominent figural roles equalled that of all mythological sarcophagi from the capital put together.[415] These totals would be significantly increased if we possessed

[410] Nock 1946: 144, in relation to cupids on funerary monuments.
[411] Zanker 2005: 247.
[412] Zanker 2005: 247.
[413] Herdejürgen 1996: 58.
[414] Ewald 2004: 235 (the bar chart only gives numbers up to 300).
[415] Zanker 2005: 247 lists 587 mythological sarcophagi for the city of Rome.

figures for the rest of Italy, Greece, Asia Minor and Gallia Narbonnensis; large numbers of sarcophagi with garlands held by cupids have been catalogued from Aphrodisias[416] and from Attic workshops, but the corpus is by no means complete.[417] Nonetheless, catalogues produced in the past two decades of *Erotensarkophage* from Rome (Schauenburg 1995; Bielefeld 1997; Kranz 1999) and of *Girlandensarkophage* from Italy in the 1st and 2nd centuries, Aphrodisias, and Attica (respectively: Herdejürgen 1996; Işık 2006; Papagianni 2016) have made these objects more readily accessible for study than ever before.

Ancient texts offer almost no help in understanding this superabundance of funerary cupids. The one text which refers explicitly to a cupid on a sarcophagus is an enigmatic epigram describing a winged figure dressed as a hunter, with spear and boarskin. The narrator of the poem explicitly rejects any association with love – '"Love" I cannot call you. What! does Desire dwell next to the dead? No! the bold boy never learnt to wail' (οὐ γὰρ Ἔρωτ᾽ ἐνέπω σε—τί γάρ; νεκύεσσι πάροικος / ἵμερος; αἰάζειν ὁ θρασὺς οὐκ ἔμαθεν…). Instead, he concludes that the figure is a play on the name of the *sophistês* who lies within the tomb, a mythic Meleager corresponding to the poet Meleager who is buried here, and that it represents at the same time 'the winged word for which he is famed' (ὁ πτερόεις, τοὔνομα τοῦδε, λόγος).[418] Clearly, this complicated, intellectualising explanation cannot be transposed onto the many hundreds of funerary cupids of which we know; it is both person- and monument-specific and bound up in the conventions of

[416] Işık 2006.
[417] Papagianni 2016.
[418] *Greek Anthology* 7.421. Trans. W. R. Paton (adapted).

a very specific literary genre: the funerary epitaph as riddle.[419] But while it would be unwise to universalise the epigram's claim that *eros* and *himeros* are inappropriate neighbours for *thanatos*, there may well be a degree of wider applicability to the rejection of love as a valid hermeneutic for funerary cupids; the epigram indicates, if nothing else, that these figures did not always make sense to their viewers as incarnations of *eros*.

Cupids on tombs became a discursive touchstone in scholarship when Franz Cumont suggested in *Recherches sur le symbolisme funeraire des Romains* (1942) that they represented the souls of the deceased, with wingless figures standing in specifically for the souls of deceased children. Sarcophagus evidence offers no support for this viewpoint, and Cumont's ideas about funerary eschatology are no longer widely accepted, but even now this debate often dominates discussions of cupids in funerary art, with few alternative meanings or functions discussed in much detail.[420] Alternative viewpoints do exist, however: Stuveras, while he regards specifically Dionysiac cupids as related to the passage to and pleasures of the afterlife,[421] otherwise follows Ernest Will in treating most funerary cupids as tomb attendants. This is a role which supposedly traces its origins to earlier representations of Attis as serving figure, and, ultimately, to the slaves who in certain traditions were burnt or buried alongside their deceased masters, but which is softened on Roman sarcophagi to the less overtly sacrificial role of eternal custodian of the dead. Further possibilities are put forward by

[419] See e.g. Goldhill 1994.
[420] For a fuller account of this debate, see Kranz 1999: 15; Backe-Dahmen 2013. Cumont's main critic Arthur Darby Nock in fact agrees in broad terms with Cumont's assessment of erotes (1946: 144).
[421] Stuveras 1969: 41-58.

Augé and Linant de Bellefonds in the LIMC article on Cupido/Amor: they suggest that cupids 'évoque seulement, dans un symbolisme assez simple, la tristesse de ceux qui restent devant la disposition de l'être cher', and also that mourners would naturally have drawn connections between cupids and deceased children.[422]

The association of cupids with grief prefigures broader recent trends in sarcophagus scholarship. In the work of, among others, Michael Koortbojian, Janet Huskinson, Paul Zanker and Björn Ewald, and Ruth Bielfeldt, an increasing emphasis has been placed on the contexts of tomb ritual and mourning which would have framed the reception of sarcophagus imagery by its viewers, and on the ways in which this imagery is shaped by, and shapes, such contexts, often serving to provide the *vivi*, the living, with processing strategies in the face of death.[423] The range of images and messages offered by sarcophagi is not necessarily the same as those offered on other types of funerary monument, and reflects their own specific status and context of viewing: where the inscription on an extra-urban roadside memorial might have called out to passing strangers to stop and remember the person buried there,[424] sarcophagi from 2nd- and 3rd-century Rome were usually either shut away in private mausolea or directly interred in the ground; if they were viewed at all after the funeral, it would have been by family members, who would have visited these tombs on anniversaries, specific feast days for the dead, and on the occasion of new burials within a tomb.[425] In such a context, an image of violent mythological kidnap or murder – of Persephone, Clytemnestra or

[422] *LIMC* 1986 Vol. III.1: 938-939.
[423] Koortbojian 1995; Huskinson 1996; Zanker—Ewald 2004; Bielfeldt 2005.
[424] So, for example, *CIL* III, 236, which reads 'Lollius has been placed by the side of the road so that every passer-by may say to him "Hello Lollius".'
[425] See Toynbee 1971; Zanker—Ewald 2004: 33-36.

Medea – may have functioned as a way of acknowledging the violence of death,[426] while a scene in which Meleager lies on his deathbed surrounded by weeping figures may have mirrored and encouraged the mourning of human visitors to the tomb.[427] A peaceful image of the feasting marine thiasos, meanwhile, might have been resonated positively with the feasts held in honour of the dead.[428] Sarcophagus imagery from Greece and Asia Minor may have required a different set of approaches again: displayed on open-air pedestals along main roads outside cities as well as in private mausolea, these are often much more public monuments than their metropolitan Roman counterparts, accessible to, and thus perhaps intended to address, a much wider, and not necessarily personally implicated, audience.[429]

Two articles by Verity Platt and Jas' Elsner elaborate on this grief- and memory-based model, exploring the status of the sarcophagus not just as surface for representation but as highly charged physical barrier and mediating object between tomb visitor and entombed. Elsner's article opens with a reminder of the sarcophagus' etymological roots as "body-eater", and with the observation that its symmetrical, non-anthropomorphic form serves to conceal the shape and decomposition of the body within.[430] He sets up a contrast between different modes of figuring the relationship between sarcophagus and corpse – the sarcophagus with kline lid, for example, which offers a reminder of the

[426] Zanker—Ewald 2004: 76-98; Buchanan 2012.
[427] Zanker—Ewald 2004: 68-75.
[428] Zanker—Ewald 2004: 116-134.
[429] See in particular Ewald 2004, who points out that Attic sarcophagi seem to have been designed with a public audience in mind even where the likelihood was that they would be locked in private mausolea and seen by very few people.
[430] Elsner 2012: 179. On sarcophagus as body eater see Pliny the Elder *Natural History* 2.98 and 36.131.

interred body, is set against the "roofed" sarcophagus, which presents itself instead as a concealing house or, he suggests, prison for the dead –[431] but he ultimately argues that all sarcophagi engage in 'simultaneous concealment and signaling of the body – which is no longer a body – inside'.[432] Platt, in a similar vein, describes the funerary receptacle as 'a practical and metaphorical frame' for the dead, which 'problematizes the relationship between exterior and interior, decorative ornamentation and practical function, for it acts as both a frame that surrounds and protects the ultimate focus of ritual visits to the tomb (the remains of the deceased) and as an aesthetic object in its own right (the focus of the external viewer's gaze).'[433] Both articles draw attention to the play of permeability/impermeability achieved through the use of motifs such as lion-head spouts and half-open doors,[434] and both see such motifs as responses to the fundamental problem of managing and figuring the ongoing relationship (which is not purely one of grief and tomb ritual) between living and dead.

More than almost any other object category, then, sarcophagi are marked out as a "body" genre, charged always with an agency which is dependent upon the simultaneous presence and absence of the deceased, whether we seek to understand this in explicitly corporeal terms of the rotting corpse, or in more abstract terms of the gulf between the living and the dead. Any viewer, whether they had a personal relationship to the deceased or not, would have had to contend with this absent presence.

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[431] Elsner 2012: 180.
[432] Elsner 2012: 193.
[433] Platt 2012: 213.
[434] Platt 2012: 218-224**;** Elsner 2012: 185.

In this chapter I argue that cupids offer a persuasive set of strategies for addressing this problem. Possessing an insistent corporeality of their own, which, as Chapter 1 has argued, can be very difficult for a viewer to circumvent, the presence of cupids on funerary monuments results in an expansion of the two-body relationship between living and dead (although of course there can be more than one of either) into a relationship of at least three body types, with cupids firmly in the middle between human and once-human participants. Bound up as they are in a visual discourse which so often prioritises touching over looking, and prone to gesturing outside themselves while simultaneously displacing emotion and bodily reaction onto their own bodies, cupids may be uniquely suited to a context in which the ultimate object of attention remains always out of sight.

In the following pages, I investigate the visual syntax of a series of such tactile tombs, taken from both metropolitan Rome and also from very different display contexts in Asia Minor. To deal in disparate case studies inevitably means that I barely scratch the surface of the known corpus of cupid sarcophagi, but against a body of cupid sarcophagus scholarship which has tended to specialisation, it seems more valuable to show something of the range of effects which are sought and achieved than to concentrate on the internal variations of one specific sarcophagus type. Through these case studies, I ask how, in the light of recent reconsiderations of sarcophagi as an object group, we can elaborate on and complicate the viewpoints put forward by Stuveras and by Augé and Linant de Bellefonds. I ask how cupids function as a frame for the dead, and as a barrier between living and dead; I ask in which different ways they are used to

recorporealise the walls of the tomb; and I ask which emotions and behaviours they seek to arouse in their viewers, and how.

One outcome of investigating sarcophagus cupids more closely is, I hope, the ability to make new claims about recurrent roles of cupids across a wide range of (though certainly not all) sarcophagi on which they are found. Another outcome, which has resulted in some case-studies being explored more fully than would be necessary simply to make an argument about the roles of the cupids on them, has been the need to rethink in fundamental ways the broader logic of several specific relief types. In the discussion which follows, the arguments about garland sarcophagi, weapon-frieze sarcophagi, the so-called "Dionysiac" sarcophagi, and the sarcophagus from Grottaperfetta all differ in fundamental ways from previous accounts of these objects, while the section on Selene and Endymion sarcophagi proposes new reference points and purpose for figures often regarded as superfluous to the core meaning of the images. By taking the bodies and behaviour of cupids seriously it is possible to understand more not only about these figures themselves, but also about the larger visual schemes and contexts in whose gaps and margins they appear.

II. The sweet sleep of death: cupid as corpse

One enduring use of cupids in funerary contexts sees them as surrogates for the dead body itself. It is rare to find a depiction of a non-mythological, "realist" corpse on a

Roman sarcophagus, and the few examples which survive are mostly found on mid-2nd-century children's sarcophagi.[435] But while showing the dead was problematic, there was far less of a taboo around the representation of sleeping figures, and one of the most popular of these was the sleeping cupid, found sometimes in relief on sarcophagi but more often in the form of a sculpture in the round. Over 180 examples of this figure type are known, dating between the 1st and 4th centuries CE.[436]

Not all sleeping cupids were funerary; one is known to have come from a bathhouse,[437] and the epigrams on sleeping cupids mentioned in Chapter 1 give no indication of a link with death.[438] However, it seems likely that the most common use of the type was in funerary contexts, and that their popularity rested on the imprecise relationship, comforting to the mourner, between sleep and death.[439] In fact, the multitude of other, non-funerary associations to which these figures gave rise may well have provided a large part of their appeal in a funerary context: the viewer of a sleeping cupid might have seen in one and the same figure an image of peaceful death and a tricksy love god asleep in a wooded glade.

A kline lid from Rome offers a particular invitation to reflection on the relationship between sleeping cupid and the deceased **(Figs 3.1 a, 3.1 b, 3.2)**. The main figure here

[435] Huskinson 1996: 13.
[436] Söldner 1986 catalogues these statues. The type is usually thought to go back to the Hellenistic period. See Corrado Goulet 2007, esp. 73-82, on assimilation between children and cupids in imperial Roman funerary monuments.
[437] Trier, Rheinisches Landesmuseum 09.793; Söldner 1986 Cat. 74. pp. 636-637.
[438] *Greek Anthology* 16.210-212.
[439] Sorabella 2007: 360-362; she also provides bibliography on the relationship between sleep and death.

is a young girl, and the lid is the earliest known from Rome in a long tradition of presenting the dead as full-length, reclining figures in the round, on sarcophagus lids designed to look like couches.[440] The girl is tranquil and very much alive, petting a small dog and with two dolls propped up at the far end of the couch.[441] But there is an unexpected intrusion into this otherwise naturalistic portrait, a small reclining figure carved onto the back of the couch, just at the level of the girl's head. From a distance it is negligible, but viewed from up close it changes the whole tone of the scene. It is the recumbent figure of a cupid.

The sleeping cupid does not pretend to be either girl or corpse. But he allows the viewer to bridge the different modes of encountering the dead presented by the sarcophagus: the inevitable encounter with the corpse inside and the attitude of mourning demanded by such an encounter, and, in stark opposition to this, the visually reinforced encounter with a "living" simulacrum of the deceased, complete with dolls and dog, a figure who demands that the girl be remembered as a living being untainted by the decay of the body beneath. In a very material sense, the cupid's body proclaims itself as a surrogate and substitute for that of the girl. It takes on the element of death in this image, leaving the girl to enjoy life. But the smallness and sweetness of the cupid's body, and the familiarity by this point of the motif of sleeping Eros, will inevitably dull the idea of painful and final death. Perhaps he also gives us thoughts of *eros*, of the adult loves – or even children? – which the young girl, still playing with her dolls, will never have

[440] Wrede 1990.
[441] Sorabella 2007: 361 points out that on kline lids where sleeping cupids are shown the adults' eyes are usually open.

known.[442] As harmless as one of the toy dolls by the young girl's feet, the cupid offers a rosy-tinted bridge between the live, false body and the real dead one. This cupid offers a sort of meta-image for the sarcophagus's two full-size bodies, directing our interpretation and merging of the two; perhaps, given the lack of recent precedents for such a kline lid, the artist or patron felt the need to explore and offer some explanation for the relation of life-size sculpture to corpse, and the cupid provided the most convenient way of doing so.[443]

The case for self-consciousness on the part of image maker or patron gains potential support from the inscription along the front of the lid, which reads as follows: HIC SPECIES ET FORMA IACET; MISERAB[ILIS] AETAS EFF[ca. 20 letters missing] IS. The foregrounding of *forma* and *species* open up the possibility that not only the beauty of the young girl is referred to here,[444] but also, forgoing the metaphorical senses of the words, the literal sight, image, or form of the deceased – that is to say, the *imago* presented to us on the lid in lieu of the girl herself.[445] Read in this light, this becomes an epitaph which works with the sculptured forms on the lid not just to represent the dead,

[442] On the increasing commemoration of girls as they approach marriageable age see e.g. Laes 2011: 104: 'The sex ratio (i.e. the number of epitaphs for boys divided by those for girls) invariably lies above 150 among children under the age of 7.' After this age the representation of girls becomes more common. It is a pattern also noticeable in Bobou's research on Hellenistic sanctuary dedications: in the category which she labels as infants, 14 statues are male and 2 female, and among in the 2-4/5 yr age category 34 are male and 8 female, but in the category of 5 yrs + the balance flips, with 13 statues gendered male and 14 female.
[443] The parallel is by no means exact, but one might also think here of sarcophagi such as Amedick 1991 Cat. 63 and Cat. 274, where the boxes show children playing and the lids cupids drifting or floating, the usual constraints of gravity lifted.
[444] So Wrede 1990: 17-18.
[445] The doubled sense of the inscription was pointed out to me by Emma Dench.

but also to acknowledge the difficulty of doing so, and the central place of substitute bodies and dissembling images in this endeavour.[446]

III. The indestructible body: cupids as lion-tamers

The popularity of the sleeping cupid as metonym for the dead body must be connected to the paradoxical combination of extraordinary strength and extraordinary fragility accorded to cupid bodies. As Vout has noted, cupids are almost never shown dead, and a key aspect of the sleeping cupid sculptures is that the recumbent figures are not actually dead, but merely asleep.[447] On other sarcophagi, this assertion of bodily strength is sometimes taken to extremes. One sarcophagus, made in Dokimeion in Phrygia for a Roman customer in ca. 155-160 CE, and carved on all four sides in high relief, carries on one of its long sides a scene of cupids fighting lions **(Fig. 3.3)**.[448] It is a bizarrely evenly matched fight, and the cupids, of comparable size to the lions, fight serenely and with no sign of damage to their persons. Their special status in this image becomes all the more evident when we look at the other sides of this sarcophagus: the second long side shows Achilles dragging Hector around the walls of Troy, a demonstration of great mythic

[446] On the ways in which substitutional images are used to mediate between the living and the dead see Belting 2014 Ch. 6.
[447] Vout 2010: 415. An exception is found in certain images of cupid chariot races, where the bodies of cupids are sometimes seen on the ground beneath the wheels of the chariots, or falling from a chariot which has crashed. But even in these cases, the choice of cupids as protagonists is presumably related to the difficulty of imagining these bodies coming to any harm.
[448] Providence, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design 21.074; see Waelkens 1982: 35-36 Pl. 9.1, 2; 10.1, 2.

strength, but also a representation of a hero brought low. Even more revealingly, one of the short sides carries a continuation of the lion hunt **(Fig. 3.4)** – but this time with human protagonists, who fare far worse than the cupids do: one of them bends down on hands and knees under the pressure of the claws of the attacking lioness, who is about to leap on top of him, while the second leans backward with an expression of terror on his face, raising a stone above his head and preparing to hurl it down onto the attacking animal. Nothing could be further from the impassive expressions of the cupids, who face their lion opponents straight on, betraying no signs of fear or discontent. On this relief, cupids provide a way of representing violence and danger which is not constrained by the need to show alongside them suffering, weakness, or even physical discomposure.

A second sarcophagus from Phrygia, excavated on the site of ancient Pappa-Tiberiopolis near modern Konya and also dated to the mid 2nd century,[449] also uses a juxtaposition of cupids and wild animals to explore ideas of bodily strength.[450] Three sides of this sarcophagus, which is articulated by ornate columnar architecture, are taken up with the labours of Hercules, and the muscled form of the mythic hero is shown off in twelve different stances as he kills off his human and animal opponents one by one **(Figs 3.5)**. The fourth side, a world away from this display of strength and exertion, shows three idealised elites, a woman and two men, who sit and stand against the same backdrop of rich architectural ornament. On the kline lid, not designed for this box but conjoined

[449] Özgan 2003: 37 dates it to between 250 and 260.
[450] Konya Arkeoloji Müzesi 1002; Özgan 2003: 16-19, Cat. 4, Pl. 18-21.

with it by the time it was excavated, when it held the remains of two skeletons,[451] is the fragmentary sculpture of a married couple.

Cupids are found in several different registers on this sarcophagus, with the lid alone carrying cupid figures of two different scales, a bodily barrier between viewer and reclining figures.[452] I want to focus here on a series of cupids who might at first escape notice, and who are cramped into the spandrels of the colonnade above and alongside the many heads of Hercules, carved with far less care and skill than the figures of the main register **(Fig. 3.6 a, b)**. Each of these miniscule cupids sits in relaxed position, legs akimbo, and reaches out to tease, pet, or play with a big cat, perhaps a lioness, who is several times the size of the cupid. In a strict sense, these figures have no direct connection to Hercules. But the sight of them is impossible to unsee, and their presence demands a refocalisation of the entire image scheme of the box: where Hercules kills the Nemean Lion, the cupids reach out to pet the lion's relatives. It is an image which brings the viewer back to a realm of safety and play: an undercutting of the main image register which might be compared to the friezes of cupids fighting wild animals from theatre façades, an image type which reconceptualised the extreme violence which went on in these buildings (often the designated locations of gladiatorial fights) as a game in which no one was in danger of getting hurt.[453]

While the viewer looking at these images may not have related them directly to the corpse, the juxtaposition certainly encourages reflection on competing notions of bodily

[451] Boysal 1958.
[452] On cupids of this type see Amedick 1991: 19-22.
[453] See Bol 1989: 31-32.

strength and power. In one sense, the cupids might even be regarded as *more* powerful than the majestic Hercules: where he is forced endlessly to fight against these wild beasts, the cupids simply play with them. Where Hercules asserts muscular power with every sinew of his body,[454] cupids express life-force and indestructibility in a language of fleshy ephemerality. However we interpret them, the cupids invite us to take a second look at the other bodies on this sarcophagus, offering an alternative phenomenology both to that of Hercules and also to those of the urban elites on the final short side of the chest, and on the kline lid which was added at the time of use.

This reification of a combination of infinite strength and infinite weakness is made particularly explicit on sarcophagi which show cupids with lions, but in less emphatic form this characterisation surely lies behind the use of cupids on a wide range of – and perhaps even all – sarcophagi where they appear. In one quite concrete way, cupids in fact seem to possess the "strongest" possible bodies available for decorating the walls of a sarcophagus, no matter the motifs or scenarios with or within which they are depicted. In Chapter 1 I discussed the positive effects stimulated by physical characteristics associated with small children and animals, but in a funerary context such characteristics may have even more potency than they might elsewhere. It has been argued by the psychologists Gary D. Sherman and Jonathan Haidt that "cuteness" constitutes the most perfect opposite to the "disgusting" or "revolting" when considered in terms of the reaction it provokes in subjects. Where disgust stimulates a "dehumanizing" response which creates affective distance between the subject and the entity which disgusts, and inhibits the assignment to that entity of "mentalizing"

[454] He fits neatly into the trend described in Ewald 2004.

capabilities, i.e. the assumption of possession of conscious intention, cuteness stimulates the subject to "humanize" the cute entity and to incorporate it within their "moral circle" (the circle of beings with which they are able to empathise and desire to have social interactions).[455] It is surely the case, then, that one effect of cupids in funerary contexts such as this one is to stimulate an alternative set of bodily responses to those provoked through proximity to the corpse. In such a context, the "strongest" body in terms of its effects on the viewer may well, paradoxically, be the one which in other circumstances would be dismissed as the weakest.

IV. Touching the frame/the frame which touches

a. Cupids flanking an inscription

On most sarcophagus reliefs which incorporate cupids, the alternative phenomenology which they offer is not explicitly marked out as a stand-in for that of the corpse. Indeed, the most often-repeated sarcophagus types on which cupids are found present them as attendant, framing figures, clearly signalling their parergonality to the dead body, their status as a thing outside it and separate from it. In this section I look at an example of one of the most widespread sarcophagus motifs found in the Mediterranean: two cupids flanking an inscription panel. It is a visual formula which is repeated arguably to the point of meaninglessness, and like many common motifs is often found in poorly-

[455] Sherman and Haidt 2011.

carved, schematic renderings.[456] But it might also be argued that its very ubiquity is an indication that there is something powerful about this image type.

The two cupids flanking an inscription panel on **Fig 3.7** are no masterpieces.[457] So worn as to be visible only in their outlines, they are drawn from an extensive group of almost identical sarcophagus reliefs made in the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE in the city of Aphrodisias in Caria, a major centre of sculptural production whose output has been traced across the Mediterranean. Along with many others of the same type, this sarcophagus has been dated to the late Severan period, a time of great prosperity for the city. The back of this particular example carries a plain moulded frame,[458] making it possible that it was displayed on a platform in the open on one of the main roads leading from the city, although it may also have been placed in a tomb building, the final context of most sarcophagi from Aphrodisias.[459]

The cupids are wingless, and their schematically bulbous bodies flank the large inscription panel which occupies the centre of the front side of the sarcophagus. Balancing with striding legs on buoyant sprays of greenery, they each reach up with one hand to hold in place the garland which encircles the tomb, and across their bodies with the other to touch the jutting central projection of the inscription's frame. For all the roughness of their production, these are dynamic forms: while their lower bodies and

[456] The examples provided in the *LIMC* article on *Cupido/Amor*, nos. 207-212, are in gross disproportion to the number of cupids flanking *tabulae* in existence.
[457] Smith 2008 Cat. 24, pp 377-378, fig. 67. Işık 2007 and Smith 2008 catalogue many other sarcophagi of a similar type.
[458] Smith 2008: 377.
[459] Smith 2008: 348.

outer arms face inwards towards the centre of the sarcophagus, their heads and inner arms look and curve outwards, away from the frame of the inscription. While the use of plant sprays, the lack of wings, and the particular topknot of these cupids are characteristics specific to Aphrodisias and Asia Minor, the twisting bodies which engage in bodily contact with an inscription tablet would have been familiar across a much wider geographical area, and in non-funerary as well as funerary object genres .

Before thinking about the type of engagement invited by these cupids, it is useful to think about the content and purposes of an inscription on a sarcophagus like this. This tabula ansata was in fact used twice, once in the mid 3rd century and then again in the second half of the 3rd century. The later lettering tells the reader that 'the sarcophagus, the *platos*, and the *topos* belong to Aurelia Leontis, daughter of Marcus Aurelius Apollonios also called Porphyrios, son of Diogenes'.[460] First and foremost, an inscription like this is a place for telling us who the dead was; in this case, Aurelia Leontis' identity is defined, as is often the case, in relation to her male ancestors, her father, who probably received citizenship under Caracalla's empire-wide dispensation of 212, and her grandfather.[461] It is also a place for telling us that this tomb is the property of the dead, and in many instances from Aphrodisias and elsewhere in Asia Minor, a tomb inscription will follow its act of naming by enumerating the penalties for violating or reusing someone else's tomb.[462] We might speculate as to whether it was the lack of

[460] The translation is Smith's.
[461] On the visibility of new Roman citizenship on sarcophagi from Aphrodisias see Smith 2008.
[462] This phenomenon is clearly illustrated in the Aphrodisian sarcophagus inscriptions published by Joyce M. Reynolds and Charlotte Roueché in Işık 2007. See also Strubbe

space, or, instead, the fact of reuse which stopped such a warning from being including here, but in any case, Aurelia Leontis or her descendents certainly saw fit to define the sarcophagus and the place in which it is placed as the inalienable property of the deceased.

In some ways it might seem bizarre that soft-bodied, idealised cupids are given the task of standing on either side of a serious text like this one. Indeed, it might seem bizarre that a text can be touched at all: inherent in textuality and verbality is a sense of intangibility, a rejection of physical, phenomenological presence in favour of other means of communicating. And yet the cupids make a performance of touching the elaborated edges of this inscription. Their touch is a gentle one, one of care; on other similar sarcophagi **(Figs. 3.8. 3.9)** we can see in more detail the way in which they make contact with the frames, and their hands seem barely to rest on the projecting curlicues, perhaps offering the lightest touch of support from underneath, apparently easing the inscription into place or simply displaying it to the viewer.[463] On some reliefs they simply gesticulate towards the tabula ansata, not touching it at all.[464] Their upper hands sometimes support garlands, as here, and in other cases rest lightly on the top edge of the tabula ansata.[465] In many cases, their arms are disproportionately long in relation to their legs and bodies, a feature which serves to highlight their holding and displaying role.

1983 on the high number of curses against tomb robbers inscribed on tombs in Asia Minor.

[463] e.g. Işık Cat. 101.

[464] e.g. Işık Cat. 100.

[465] e.g. Işık Cat. 101.

One of the main effects of these cupids on the inscription, I would argue, is to declare it a discrete object, a site of engagement, and a focus of care. In drawing attention to the contours and physicality of the framed inscription, they draw attention as well to its role as a substitute for, and a channel for thinking about, Aurelia Leontis. For all its un-bodied-ness, the inscription is the point on this sarcophagus which refers most precisely to the person buried here, and it constitutes a major focal point (another might be the portrait busts, here unfinished) through which a literate mourner or passer by might remember or become acquainted with this woman. The touch of cupids provides a way of figuring the human, corporeal presence behind the written words, and perhaps also, because they touch only disembodied stone, gestures towards the distance between the external viewer and the body within.

Another function of the cupids' touch may be to indicate that the tomb itself is an object which can be touched without fear. Their bodies provide a distraction from the decomposing body within, and in touching the frame around the inscription which refers to the deceased, they may also suggest that the mourner too can touch, either the tabula ansata or simply the sarcophagus itself, the stone frame of the body within.

For viewers to have been affected by these cupids, and for the tenor of their engagement with the inscription, the sarcophagus, and the dead to have been altered as a result, they would not even have had to consciously draw a connection between the cupids and their wider context. As at least two cognitive psychophysiological studies, including that of Sherman and Haidt cited above, have shown, the effects of the "cute" body on viewers result not only in increased attention towards the "cute" entity itself, but also in

increased attention and levels of concentration towards unrelated, but proximate, objects. In tests, engagement with images of "cute" animals resulted in subjects performing subsequent tasks with greater care and attention, even though these tasks bore no relation to the animal images.[466] In a similar way, we might posit, the sympathetic feelings aroused through encounter with the bodies of cupids may have generated a more attentive, sympathetic attitude towards the inscription and the tomb, even when viewers did not seek to draw a connection.

In this regard, it is striking that the cupids on this relief turn away from the inscription. Sometimes such cupids seem to look outward towards the viewer, but more often their gaze turns away to the side, defined rather in terms of what it is *not* directed at than what it is.[467] It is a visual tactic which clears the viewer's line of sight, inviting them (us) to engage directly with the inscription with no intermediary, interfering eyes to offer instruction in how to look – even if, as we have seen, the cupids may well be influencing the tone of engagement. It is also noteworthy that in most instances in which cupids flank a funerary tabula ansata, both at Aphrodisias and elsewhere, they do not themselves grieve: instead, the most common facial expression is one of impassivity, leaving the prerogative of emotional response to the viewer.

The cupids on the sarcophagus from Aphrodisias are unequivocally mediating figures, facing both ways, both inward towards the inscription and the body, and outwards towards the world of the living and the viewer-mourner. It is a role which is replicated

[466] Sherman, Haidt and Coan 2009; Nittono et al. 2012.
[467] On e.g. Rome Muz. Naz. Rom. 128578, the cupids look out at the viewer. On Arles KS 320 they look towards the inscription, but this is rare.

and adapted in other image schemata; it is common to find two cupids holding up a portrait bust, a different sort of *imago* of the dead, and figuring in a similar way the simultaneous closeness and distance of the represented face, its validity or necessity and its inadequacy as a stand-in for human flesh. On one sarcophagus from Rome, flying or floating cupids even flank the recumbent body of a child, holding the head and foot of the bed in which he lies in much the same way as Aphrodisian cupids might hold the edges of a tabula ansata.[468] More often, however, this act of mediation is reduced to a formula, and it is in its formulaic nature that the potency of this image type resides. It is an image type which reiterates again and again the necessity of gentle, caring touch as a way of accessing, tending to, displaying and framing the dead, both as fleshy bodies and as abstract absences, representable only through the dematerialising veil of an image or an inscription.

b. Cupids and other mediating figures on a Dokimeion garland sarcophagus

Non-judgmental, caring touch will be a constant characteristic of cupids as frame figures on sarcophagi. But cupids are not the only figure type found on tombs; as on the mosaic friezes in which they were shown alongside wild animals and 'green man' heads, they frequently form part of a multifigural "cacophony" of visual voices,[469] their individual effect muted and mutated through reference to other bodies. Before looking further at the variety of ways in which cupids themselves mediate between the living and the

[468] Huskinson 1996 Cat. 4.2 Pl. 10.1.
[469] I borrow the sense of Bergmann 2002: 40.

dead, therefore, I look first at a sarcophagus on which cupids are only one among many figure types, asking what sets cupids apart from the other framing or mediating type-figures on offer to sculptor and consumer, and how a range of different figure types functions together to create a particular set of effects which transcends the individual effect of any one of them.

My focus in this section is another garland sarcophagus, an object from one of the most common, and the most widely distributed, object categories in the Roman world, with particular concentrations in Rome, Athens, and Asia Minor.[470] From the Hadrianic period, cupids had superseded the bucranium relief to become the most popular supports for garlands within the city of Rome,[471] and it was a popularity which would last for centuries, ending only at the end of the 3rd century in Asia Minor, and continuing on into the Tetrarchic period at Rome.[472] Cupid-like figures holding garlands are in fact one of the few iconographic types which make it as far as the Kushan empire in Gandhara; these (non-funerary) friezes, although carved by Gandharan sculptors and displaying several features which would seem alien to a viewer whose cultural canon had been shaped around the Mediterranean basin, still have much in common with the garland sarcophagi which were common in Asia Minor at this time.[473]

In contrast to the sarcophagus of Aurelia Leontis, the sarcophagus which I focus on here would have been a high-status, expensive commission **(Figs. 3.10-18)**. It was made in

[470] Işık 1986:181.
[471] Honroth 1971.
[472] Koch—Sichtermann 1982: 230; Işık 1993.
[473] See Andreae 2008: 72; 73.

Dokimeion in central Asia Minor, but then exported to Rome, where it was used, and excavated in situ, in the tomb of a senatorial family. It is a roofed structure, and is decorated on all four sides with a range of figures, busts and heads, which hold up, emerge from, or fit into the spaces between the encircling garland. As on the sarcophagi from Aphrodisias there are nikes and portrait busts here alongside the cupids, and there are also aestheticised gorgon heads with youthful male faces and bouffant hair, and theatrical masks which occupy the centre of each long side. In the pages which follow I will first examine each of these component parts in turn, and I will then ask how the imagery of this sarcophagus works as a whole: how the combination of bodies and faces gathered here functioned to shape and affect the encounter of the living (whether mourner, would-be tomb robber, or casual passer by) with the dead. An underlying assumption of my analysis is that cupids are not the only figures whose specific corporeality is often downplayed, and because there has been very little discussion of the visual effects of garland sarcophagi to date, I discuss each component part of this sarcophagus in turn, increasingly tying my discussions together to think about how the different elements interact with one another; I believe that my broader claims and arguments are transferrable to other multi-figure "garland" sarcophagi.

The appropriateness of a mode of analysis which treats each element as a distinct unit is not necessarily a self-evidently useful one for this image group; there is a strong argument to be made that a scheme such as this one was valuable mainly as visual white noise, as *décor* in the sense recently expounded by Tonio Hölscher: appropriate

adornment which offended no-one and whose purpose more or less ended there.[474] Such a viewing mode is encouraged by the fact that variations on the gallery of faces and bodies found here are common not only on sarcophagi but also on other objects and in other spaces (domestic, theatrical) with no funerary connection,[475] and it is likely that many visitors to the tomb experienced them in just this way. But perhaps there is a case for asking why variants on this particular decorative scheme rather than any other were the visual white noise of choice in the 2nd-century Roman Mediterranean sarcophagus market: whether there was something about their specific openness which allowed them to resonate effectively in a funerary context, and how such a context might have brought out aspects of this iconographic mix which a similar collection laid out, say, in tesserae on the floor of a domestic residence would not.

i. Contexts of production and use: from Dokimeion to the Via Salaria

Both marble and design allow the Walters garland sarcophagus to be traced to the Dokimeion quarries and workshops in Phrygia in Asia Minor, and it has been dated to around 150 CE on stylistic grounds.[476] Imported to Rome, it was employed in the tomb of a senatorial family along the Via Salaria, where it was one of ten sarcophagi found in the tomb, nine of them decorated with high-quality relief carving and between them covering a time period from 130 CE into the 3rd century. The tomb is usually called the tomb of the Licinii Crassi, although by the time the sarcophagi were made and placed here this family name seems not to have existed; it is now acknowledged that the tomb

[474] Hölscher 2009, esp. 62. His arguments are not specifically made in relation to garland sarcophagi.
[475] Herdejürgen 1996: 52 discusses the range of objects on which masks are found. See also Paulsen 2015.
[476] Waelkens 1982: 26-27.

probably belonged instead to another branch of the family, the Calpurnii.[477] It was the only example in the group not to have been locally quarried and manufactured, and unlike the other sarcophagi found in the chamber and tomb it is covered on all four sides with relief ornament and has a lid shaped as a pitched roof – unusual for Rome but common design features in sarcophagi from the major production centres of Asia Minor, ones which reflect a context of expected use in which all sides of the sarcophagus would be publically visible, very likely in an outdoor location.[478] A sarcophagus of this sort was not a complete anomaly at Rome: Marc Waelkens counts six Dokimeion garland sarcophagi and 43 Dokimeion sarcophagi in total in Italy,[479] and has suggested not only that this particular workshop was producing work which responded very specifically to metropolitan Roman tastes,[480] but also that the most likely sales model involved specific commissions from Roman customers rather than speculative production on the part of the workshop.[481]

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[477] Van Keuren et. al. 2003 discuss the identification with the Calpernii, and provide evidence that Kragelund et al. 2003 were wrong in doubting the accuracy of 19th century descriptions of the tomb.
[478] Cormack 1997: 138 notes that sarcophagi in Asia Minor could be interred or placed within a tomb structure as well as displayed in the open air, but outdoor display was far more likely in Asia Minor than at Rome.
[479] Waelkens 1982: 9 Fig. 7 provides a table of findspots for the 370 catalogued sarcophagi; Italy is shown to be the third biggest market after Phrygia and Pamphylia, which account respectively for 112, 68, and 43 sarcophagi. 36 of the 43 Italian sarcophagi date to the 2nd century, i.e. early in the workshop's production period, and Waelkens suggests that the workshop was exporting to Italy before it had established a large network in Asia Minor (124). 6 garland sarcophagi from the Dokimeion workshop have been found at Rome (compared to 20 in Phrygia and 7 in Pamphylia).
[480] Waelkens 1982: 33, 36. Cormack 1997: 147 notes that while garland sarcophagi appear at around the same time in Rome and Asia Minor, the motifs which they use are developed from those found on altars and cinerary urns, which were uncommon in eastern funerary contexts.
[481] Waelkens 1982: 126.

The discrepancy between place of production and place of use may be connected to a peculiarity in the placement of the sarcophagus within the tomb. Like others from Dokimeion, the box is decorated with a full complement of figures and faces: the nodes of the garlands are marked by nikes on the corners and cupids along the long sides, while the lunettes contain theatrical masks, young male gorgon heads, and portrait busts. The two short ends carry gorgoneia, while of the long sides one carries a mask flanked by two gorgons, the other a mask flanked by two portrait busts. In Phrygia or Caria, the privileged front side of a sarcophagus like this one **(Fig. 3.11)** would have been the side with the portraits. But in the Licinian tomb, this side was turned to face the wall, so that two gorgons flanking a mask faced outward into the room. That this was an active choice on the part of the purchaser is clear. At the point at which it was placed in the tomb this sarcophagus was still unfinished in several particulars[482] perhaps due to the time pressure caused by a contractual deadline or departing ship.[483] But the decision was taken to make the *less* finished side of the sarcophagus **(Fig. 3.12)** the front side in the tomb, even though this involved an awkward inversion of the lid so as to render the unfinished antefixes invisible.[484] It is a decision which the current guardians of the object have chosen to overturn: as displayed in the Walters Art Museum, and illustrated here, the original, "Phrygian" front of both box and lid (with portraits) face the viewer, while the "Roman" front of the box (with gorgons) is hidden against the wall of the gallery.

[482] Lehmann-Hartleben—Olsen 1942: 68 n. 208 provides a full list of unfinished aspects of the relief.
[483] Waelkens 1982: 125, following Wiegartz 1974: 348-359; 364-369; 375-379.
[484] Lehmann-Hartleben—Olsen 1942: 18.

When talking about the ways in which the imagery on this sarcophagus works, then, we must take into account at least two distinct contexts: a) the context of production in Phrygia and the extent to which the underlying design choices were based on local funerary needs and customs, and b) the context of use in Rome. On the one hand, this is an object whose iconography participates in a trans-Mediterranean visual *koine* broad enough to appeal to – and to seem normal to – customers from many different places. But given the extra effort and expense involved in commissioning and importing a sarcophagus from Dokimeion, it is surely the case that part of its appeal lay in its alien status, in the degree to which the precise configurations of its decoration rendered it novel within the tomb and funerary context in which it was to be placed. In such a context, the physical and stylistic differences between these bodies and heads and those familiar from Italian garland sarcophagi may have taken on new resonances, invited the viewer to look anew at what on one level were familiar, even hackneyed, image types. Certainly, the turning round of the box suggests that someone involved in the interment, or one of the interments,[485] which took place here saw these figures as more than entirely meaningless, interchangeable decor.

ii. Tomb as building

Whether visitors took conscious note of it or not, one of the major ways in which this sarcophagus works to frame encounter with the dead is through its architectural form. The pitched roof with its acroteria and antefixes and the elaborate plinth assert a clearly

[485] It is unclear from the documentation currently published whether human remains were recorded within this sarcophagus at the time of discovery.

recognisable mode of physicality, evidently supposed to resemble a building.[486] Although the details do not match those of private residences,[487] and although later sarcophagi from Sidamara have been clearly shown to draw their most direct influences from public structures such as baths, libraries, and porticoes,[488] in an imprecise sense this is clearly a house, or temple, or perhaps even, as Elsner puts it, a prison for the dead.[489] Such a characterisation seeks to define the sarcophagus as a place, a location, rather than simply a thing; it is a shape which implies claims to permanence and immoveability, and offers a way of expressing the inviolability – and uninheritability – of the tomb, allotting to the deceased the agency which comes with assertion of rights to physical space and property, as well as containing and protecting the body. It is easy to see how such claims are reinforced by the freestanding, open-air positioning of the many sarcophagi in the extramural necropoleis of Asia Minor, where they constitute both coffin and tomb building. But the sarcophagus now in Baltimore ended up in a subterranean tomb full of metropolitan Roman sarcophagi, a context which offers less agency to the individual sarcophagus as the "home" of the dead: the decoration of the other sarcophagi in the Licinian tomb only allows for viewing on one or at most three sides and assumes the additional framing protection of an abutting wall, a supplementary roof and a locked door. In physical terms, metropolitan Roman sarcophagi usually resemble moveable objects rather than immovable property and

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[486] For the position of the cornice and sockel ornament in a chronological sequence of sarcophagi from the Dokimeion workshops see Waelkens 1982.
[487] Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 39-78.
[488] Thomas 2011.
[489] Elsner 2012: 180. Platt (2012: 216) and Wallace-Hadrill (2008: 42) both quote the later *Codex Theodosianus* 9.17.4, which threatens "those who violate the habitations of the Shades, the homes, so to speak, of the dead" (*Qui aedificia manium violant, domus ut ita dixerim defunctorum*….).

locations in their own right. In such a setting, the performative architectural features of the garland sarcophagus stand out all the more, but they are also in some sense rendered redundant, reduplications of functions already performed by the tomb building itself.

iii. Garlands

The garland swags are the main intermediate structure between the sarcophagus as object (or as building) and the figures depicted on its relief frieze: large enough in their broad outlines to respond to the architectural framing, they are also small and regular enough in their details to pick up the tonality of the bead-and-reel and other ornamental bands which run along sockel and cornice. It is well-accepted that the presence of garlands on sarcophagi is related to actual and imagined rituals of tending to the dead: garlands were placed on the tomb at the funeral and again in ongoing rituals of mourning and commemoration, and their representation in stone must correspond to a desire to figure the perpetuation of such attentions, ensuring that the tomb is ever tended to and ever alive, or at least in close proximity to the pseudo-alive.[490] Given the evident concern for the tomb's physical integrity, however, it is significant too that they encircle the sarcophagus, marking, even binding, its perimeter and simultaneously asserting and denying their own, and the stone chest's, role as barrier between living and dead. While it would probably be excessive to read conscious apotropaeic intent here,[491] the effect of the garlands is certainly to bind and to enclose, and to deny,

[490] See e.g. Herdejürgen 1996: 25. Sinn 1987:56 has extended bibliography.
[491] Köchling 1913 emphasises this aspect for *coronae*, seeing their apotropaeic force as a major function (52-88) and even suggesting (54) that the ritual of crowning the dead prevents them from leaving their tombs and working harm against the living.

through a gesture of encirclement, either vulnerability or visual resolution. Even on the most simplified of "garland" sarcophagi, where no attempt is made to pick out the specifics of the greenery, the looped line provides an articulated visual trajectory around the anxiety-laden body and container of the dead. To be fully activated in visual terms, such a technology of entanglement[492] would require a setting of a sort more common in the sarcophagus' region of origin, in which all four sides were visible and ideally in which it could be walked around, or at least thought around, in a continuous circle; as in the case of its architectural features, placement against a wall in the Roman tomb constitutes a partial taming of such agency, denying the discreteness of the object and making redundant the completeness of the decoration.

iv. Masks

Of the many figures and faces who populate these walls, the most obviously arresting are the theatrical masks which occupy the centre of each long side. Both masks derive in their basic shape from those associated with Athenian tragedy, but only one of them, the mask on the front side, has the open mouth which was the most obvious marker of that genre.[493] By the time this sarcophagus was made, theatrical masks had been a feature of Roman funerary iconography for several centuries[494] and also had an enduring presence in sacral and domestic contexts.[495] Roman metropolitan sarcophagi present

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[492] I borrow the terminology of Alfred Gell (1992); the idea of the object as (visual) trap seems particularly appropriate in this context.
[493] Lucian *On the dance* 27 indicates that the open-mouthed mask was seen as specific to Greek tragedy by the 2nd century CE.
[494] Herdejürgen 1996: 51-52 discusses forebears for the masks of the Roman garland sarcophagi.
[495] See Allrogen-Bedel 1974 on masks in wall painting; Paulsen Bahmer 2015 on mosaic floors.

masks in garland lunettes in increasing numbers from about 130 CE onwards, typically pairing two masks within a single lunette, which in turn are paired with two more masks in the adjoining lunette, usually in profile or in three-quarter view;[496] on sarcophagi from Asia Minor they are more likely to face the viewer head-on.[497]

The immense popularity of masks in the visual arts is no doubt due in large part to their association with the Dionysiac,[498] and in particular to their status as instruments of illusionism, as the material instantiation of the gap between seeming and being, representation or performance and reality.[499] In the context of the tomb, there may be a sense in which they gesture towards the *mimus vitae*, the mime of life,[500] and also towards the role of the sarcophagus as concealing simulacrum or "mask" of the body. But even as they proclaim the irreality of the tomb's ornament, and perhaps its own substitute status, the masks on the Baltimore sarcophagus are the elements of its decoration which do most to draw the viewer into direct confrontation with image and object. Unlike the masks on Italian sarcophagi, the mask in the centre of the "Phrygian"

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[496] Herdejürgen 1996: 51.
[497] Frontality of masks on sarcophagi from Asia Minor: Işık 2007: 82. Waelkens provides images of several comparable masks from the Dokimeion workshops: Malibu G1 (Pl. 2,1); Denizli G2 (Pl. 2,2; 2,3); Antalya G3 (Pl. 3, 3); Rom G3 (Pl. 4, 1; 4, 2) (all with open mouths); Izmir G2 (Pl. 7, 1) (with closed mouths).
[498] On masks on garland sarcophagi as representatives of the Dionysiac see Işık 2007: 81-82 and Herdejürgen 1996: 52; both give bibliography. See also Geyer 1977 on the difficulties of proving a specific relationship between Dionysiac imagery and Dionysiac cult practice.
[499] Herdejürgen 1996: 52 suggests that masks act as a means or vehicle for the transformation or metamorphosis which she sees as a unifying theme of Roman and Italian garland sarcophagi, but she rejects the trope of *mimus vitae*, the 'mime of life', the world as stage, as a relevant viewing lens. Elsner 2012: 186 connects masks, along with garlands, to 'falsehood and theatricality', and thus to 'a certain ambivalence of attitude toward death and the afterlife'.
[500] Allroggen-Bedel 1974: 70-73.

front faces the hypothetical visitor to the tomb head-on. At its centre is a gaping black hole, a focalising point for the whole façade ornament, the only place on the relief where the carving gives way to unknowable void. The anguished expression of the empty, ugly mask contrasts strongly with the impassive cupids and calm, beautiful portrait busts on either side. Despite being unfinished, the mask on the other side of the sarcophagus, the Roman front, is also strongly emotive; here excess emotion is expressed through downcast eyes and a far more subdued, if equally unhappy-looking, mouth.[501] Horror on one side is countered with grief on the other. One function of this incorporation of the grotesque into tomb iconography may be to displace revulsion away from the corpse and onto surrogate figures, who arouse fear only to subsume it within a network of ritual and festive associations. But viewed as mediators between corpse and visitor to the tomb, as responses to death and the process of dealing with death, the masks surely also seek to represent some of the extra-ordinary emotion which death arouses, its hyperbolic horror and its grief. Whether they arouse emotion in the viewer or whether they instead offer a substitute for such emotion is difficult to say. On the one hand the (female) masks might serve as instruction and incitement to the (female?) viewer to open their own mouth in mourning. But they also supply surrogate and permanent faces for the continuation of performative grief, with anguish caught on an empty cipher between viewer and corpse, the sign and shell of a face without the human life to fill it, transferred away from the real bodies into the (safe and separate?) realm of performance, theatricality, and illusionism.

[501] Pollux' account of ancient masks (*Onomastikon*, IV, 133-154) offers no obvious clues as to whether these particular mask-types were associated with specific characters.

Where garlands invite the eye to encircle the sarcophagus, these masks transfix and arrest their audience, compelling them to engage, however theatrically, with the horror and grief embedded in the object – even as, at the same time, they work to distance and estrange the viewer. It is a mode of engagement particularly suited to a context of viewing in the open air, employing a comparable rhetoric to that of tomb inscriptions which ask the passerby to stop and remember the dead. But in the darkness of a tomb chamber at Rome, lit only by flickering lamplight, the open-mouthed mask may have presented a terrifying prospect, and perhaps this is part of the reason why, when the sarcophagus reached its final context of use, the choice was made to turn the black scream at the centre of the frieze to face the wall.

v. Gorgons

Another possible reason for the turning of the sarcophagus box may have been in order to exploit the shielding capabilities of the two gorgon heads which flank the closed-mouth theatrical mask on the "Roman" front; two more are found on the ends of the sarcophagus. These are smooth-skinned, androgynous-male faces, imparting no obvious emotion, and their movement and energy is provided mainly by their luxuriant and unruly heads of hair. For all their sanitised beauty, a primary function of these heads inevitably remains their symbolic capacity for protection; the apotropaeic powers of *gorgoneia* were unequalled by any other motif in the Greco-Roman world.[502] On another later sarcophagus from the same tomb the force of the image is made more explicit: the head of the gorgon is placed on a shield held up by nikes, who themselves turn away

[502] McKeon 1983: 134. Platt 2012: 219 writes that gorgons on the recessed panels of the door motifs often found on sarcophagi 'emphasize the inviolability of the tomb at the same time as defining a clear boundary between the upper and lower worlds'.

from the sight which is thrust upon the viewer, while a second smaller gorgoneion held up by erotes on the lid presumably guarded against those who wished to lift the lid and disturb the remains of the dead.

Like the masks, gorgons work through direct confrontation with the viewer:[503] gorgons mark the boundaries of the tomb in a way which insists that engagement stops when the eyes of the viewer meets their eyes and tangled hair, refuting any notion of the sarcophagus as porous boundary through which an interaction can take place between living and dead. It is an address to the viewer which asserts impenetrability, distance, and the primacy of the ocular over the tactile; as we know from myth, the main way in which they can make a physical mark on the world around them is not by touching it but by looking at it, turning it to stone from a distance.

But the smooth, expressionless faces on the Dokimeion sarcophagus offer little embodied hostility to the well-meaning visitor, and in their unblemished beauty they might be regarded as carrying an erotic more than a lithifying charge; there is no sign of the point where the head has been severed, which is obscured by the knots of Hercules under their chin. The knots complete the circle and enclose the emblema, reinforcing the gorgons' shielding capacities against the visitor who comes with malicious intent, but perhaps these faces are designed more for the eyes of the tomb visitor than those of the tomb robber, providing calm reassurance more than the threat of retribution.

vi. Portrait busts

[503] Bielfeldt 2005: 317.

On the "Phrygian" front of the box, a third type of head sets up yet another variety of interaction between living and dead. These two unfinished portraits, one of a woman and one usually identified as female but more likely male,[504] are typecast images which may not have been intended as the likenesses of real individuals: while the face of the left-hand female is unfinished, it was already carved in enough detail to preclude any but the most small-scale modifications to suit a specific individual; it seems unlikely that a head left unfinished to receive a portrait would have been brought so close to completion. It is a face which was replicated in funerary portraits from the Fayoum to Palmyra; the hairstyle is identifiable as that favoured by Faustina Maior, the wife of Antoninus Pius, whose image and memory remained influential for twenty years after her death and official apotheosis in 140.[505] For all of the generalised aspects of these faces, however, they are still the most pointedly "human" figures on the sarcophagus.[506]

At Rome such images may have found resonance with the bust portraits of a family's ancestors which could be displayed in house or tomb.[507] But they would have been more readily understood in Asia Minor, where sarcophagus portrait busts like these ones were common, and where R. R. R. Smith has seen them as 'monumental

[504] Ruth Bielfeldt observed to me that this portrait may have been carved to leave open the possibility of a male gendering, which would fit with the observation of Smith 2008: 349 that sarcophagi like this from Aphrodisias never carry two female busts. However, a similar hairstyle in finished state on a female portrait is visible on a sarcophagus from Konya (Özgan 2003 Cat. 20).
[505] Bergmann and Watson 1999: 17-18.
[506] Platt 2012: 226.
[507] There is great uncertainty about the wax ancestor masks mentioned by Pliny the Elder (*Nat. Hist.* 35.4-14) and Polybius (6.53-54), which were supposedly worn by actors during funeral processions during the Republican period (see Flower 1996). Perhaps more relevant here would be the busts carried by the Barberini Togatus (Capitoline museums, Inv. Cat. MC 2392).

expressions of group membership'[508] which sought to connect the subject with 'the language of public honour'.[509] Whether conceived primarily in terms of family or city, however, by performing the appearance and implicitly the values of elite civil society, this form of representation signals honorific memorialisation as a major avenue for engagement with the dead. Portraiture is a channel for the perpetuation of the human form: as Platt writes, an *imago* of the deceased can 'assert a form of material and corporeal continuity, whereby the form within, while swiftly "eaten" by its marble container, is perpetuated by the form without.'[510] It is of seemingly little importance that these are probably not portraits of the real individuals interred within; the attractiveness of memorialisation as a mode of commemoration extends even beyond the desire to memorialise the specific appearance of the individual deceased.

The portrait busts offer a third and final possible contributing factor to the reversal of the sarcophagus box. Given that they are the most distinctively non-metropolitan-Roman elements on the frieze, and that they are more specific in their reference to the deceased than any of the other image types, they may have been perceived as unsuitable

[508] Smith 2008: 349. Smith is speaking in particular about the boom of such portrait busts in the period immediately following Caracalla's grant of universal citizenship in 212, when the group in question would have been not just the local civic body but also the Mediterannean-wide body of Roman citizens. As such, his conclusions cannot be applied wholesale to busts of this earlier period, when the group to which these portraits implied membership must have been somewhat differently constituted. The internationalism of the garland sarcophagus as a whole, however, offers support for the view that even in 150 CE these portrait busts would have been associated not just with locally- but also more broadly-directed statements of participation in public life. Öğüş 2014: 127 has also discussed the presence of full-length figures on colonnaded sarcophagi from Aphrodisias in terms of the emulation by 'middle class' purchasers of the public statues of aristocratic elites which were placed in the colonnaded facades and porticoes of the urban centre.
[509] Smith 2008: 389.
[510] Platt 2012: 226.

for the person or persons, probably a child or children, interred here; they assert a specific corporeality and a specific mode of commemoration which was probably more difficult to transfer from one geographic context to another than were the other motifs.

vii. Nikes

I turn now to the full-length figures on this box, the nikes and cupids. On each corner of the sarcophagus is a full-bodied female figure recognisable as a nike. Conceived more than any other elements of the sarcophagus as sculptures (almost) in the round, they are designed to be seen both from the front and in double profile. They are dressed in flowing double-girded chitones which fall down at the right shoulder to expose one breast, and the fabric frills out at the *kolpos* and the lower hem in such a way as to suggest swift movement of the body through air. Three of the nikes hold a palm branch in one hand, and each has one foot poised on a small spherical globe, although in three of the four cases these are only partially represented.

Cumont saw nikes on sarcophagi as an allegory for victory over death,[511] and "read" for iconographic content alone, the four nikes on the corners of this sarcophagus surely carry with them – and indeed cannot evade – embedded implications of the victorious moment; the palm branches and the globes underscore such a significance. But the public, military, and imperial connotations of *Victoria Romana*,[512] even if they constitute the most readily extractable symbolic *meaning* of these figures, do not exhaust their effects on sarcophagus and mourner, and Friederike Sinn is surely right to speak of

[511] Cumont 1942: 481.
[512] On the political and public use of Victoria Romana see Hölscher 1967.

funerary nikes as bringers and guarantors of blessings and prosperity, chosen more for their decorative value than their symbolic implications.[513]

I want to suggest a further angle. It is an unorthodox hermeneutic tool, but I have found particularly suggestive for thinking about these nikes an article on closural devices in Horatian poetry. In 'Feminine Endings, Lyric Seductions,' Ellen Oliensis discusses the poetics of hair in Horatian poetry. She looks at the coincidence of eroticised descriptions of beautiful young men and women with loosened hair with the closural stanzas of poems, and sees in this coincidence a purposeful avoidance of resolution in which ungraspable bodies coexist with a trailing, 'fugitive syntax' on the part of the lyric itself.[514] Where married and marriageable women with carefully coiffed hair are ready for the binding "yoke" of matrimony, the (male and female) figures on whom the poet's, and by extension the reader's, desire lingers are those who remain, physically and by extension socially, unbound and untamed; it is in their hair in particular that we are entangled, in poems which themselves fail to receive the metaphorical yoke of satisfactory resolution. In describing this poetic strategy, Oliensis revives and reclaims the outmoded term "feminine ending," seeing the traditionally negatively connoted 'weak, trailing, disposable' unstressed syllable/inconclusive final stanza as offering 'a displacement of marriage by seduction, (self-)possession by erotic pursuit, inevitable death by ineluctable desire, [and] thereby rediscovering, somewhere within the middle

[513] Sinn 1987: 78-79, on 2nd century funerary ash urns. See also Vollkommer's article in *LIMC* Vol. VIII.1: 268-269 on the multiplication of figures of Nike/Victoria in the second century, which he associates with a new conceptual distancing of the figures from the specific sense of military victory.
[514] Oliensis 2002: 100.

of the ongoing narrative, a space of lyric delay or dallying.'[515] For Oliensis, the entanglements of hair and desire and lyric dalliance hold both poet and reader in their knots, encouraging return to the poem's seductions and rereading of its erotic, narrative and capillary refusals.[516]

A tomb is not a poem, but in certain striking ways the bodies of the nikes here exist in an obliquely comparable relationship to the physical and visual structure of the sarcophagus. Their bodies are openly and performatively eroticised, covered by a chiton which falls in disarray over their torsos and fanning out in overlapping windswept layers, both revealing and refusing to reveal the flesh beneath.[517] On the left-hand front corner **(Figs. 3.15, 3.16)**, dress and wings fan outwards from the body almost as if they were acting as a parachute for the nike's landing, and her right arm too participates in this radiating frame for her face and the bare flesh of the upper body. Her hair is bound up, but it too sweeps backward from the face in bold lines and waves. It is the body and its coverings, not the face, which is the prime bearer of meaning here, and the haste and disarray which are so prominently displayed in these bodies and their loosened, flowing garments must denote a figure which eludes control, untamed and ungraspable, operating in a state of exception outside the accepted norms of the (human) female form. The nikes contrast sharply with the adjoining portrait busts: low status divine females alongside high-status humans, eroticised bodies offering an alternative model of (equally but differently) idealised femininity to that embodied by the left-hand bust.

[515] Oliensis 2002: 104.
[516] Oliensis 2002: 105-106.
[517] Cohen 1997 discusses the bared breast as signifier of the relationship between eroticism and violence.

But where the linear process of reading or writing a poem demands that one body gives way to another, so that Horace's soon-to-be-tamed Lalage is replaced in our ears and minds with a quick succession of fugitive Pholoe, white-shouldered Chloris who gleams like the moon on the sea, and finally the androgynous Gyges, *solutis / crinibus ambiguoque voltu* (*Odes* 2.5),[518] on the sarcophagus the ordered and the disordered, the chaste and the sexualised, sit in continual tension or balance with one another, always viewable at the same time by the same viewer. As well as drawing attention to the calm propriety of the busts, the nikes supplement the missing body of the human female/s, eroticising and disordering the chaste woman/women through proximity.

These tousled figures, moreover, are inextricably embedded in the box of the sarcophagus itself – not only are they the figures who occupy its four corners, but, stretching almost from top to bottom of the chest, they *are* its four corners, far more prominent and tangible than the right-angled edge which in theory marks the meeting of two flat planes. It is an affordance of nikes which does not transfer to sarcophagi where cupids alone are used as garland bearers: cupids are never embedded into the corners in this way, their bodies remaining entirely on the front side of the box. More than any other figure the nikes bring a sense of movement and lightness to the relief ensemble and to the sarcophagus chest, and their movement is all the more elusive for its indecipherability: the logic of a victory implies that they are in the moment of touching down, but in purely visual terms they might as easily be taking off again. In their perpetual state of arrival or departure they function to soften and visually dissolve the hard boundary lines which mark the physical – and as Platt reminds us, religious

[518] See Oliensis 2002: 97-100.

and legal – edges of the tomb,[519] itself a substitute shell for the increasingly unbounded decaying body within.[520] It is an impression which is strengthened by the blurring of the nike's own boundaries within the logic of the relief: the body, wings, and clothing of the nike are visually almost inextricable from the *taniae* and laurel leaves which stretch out behind her flowing chiton, leaving her physical reach trailing and ill-defined. Furthermore, her headlong rush challenges the very notion of support inherent in her ostensible task as garland-bearer, and through this movement she becomes the source of a centrifugal impulse which threatens to disturb the carefully-looped garlands and to unravel the whole structure of the sarcophagus' carefully calibrated ornamental relief – even as she also serves as the human knot at the vulnerable point in the surround where the garlands join/break. It is a role which is in some ways reflected in the visualisation of the ribbons which are used to tie the garlands: on the one hand knotted guardians of the integrity of the whole visual scheme, they are also the points at which cohesion tails off and apparent unpredictability is allowed to creep in at the image edges. Against the ostensible finality of victory and death, the nikes' corporeal disruption and dissolution figure a challenge to the integrity, graspability, totalising comprehensibility of the tomb and the (physical, ontological) state of what is interred within.

These nikes are also bodies with links to the specific visuality of mourning, constituting not just a challenge to social and ritual order but also, potentially, a tool for its reinforcement, responding to the need for social and corporeal porosity and overreach

[519] Platt 2012: 214-218.
[520] Elsner 2012: 179-180.

which death brings with it. Where the tragic mask supplied open-mouthed performative grief, the nikes supply bodies in disarray, their clothes falling open and their bodies in rushed motion, characteristics which also, at several removes, correspond to the visible signs of the mourning rituals usually assigned to *praeficae* hired to tear at their breasts and hair by the side of the corpse as it lay in state in the house.[521] One might hypothesise that the task of active, physical grieving is divided on this sarcophagus between body (nikes) and face (masks). Where the open mouth of the mask focalises pain and rewrites it (re-weeps it) as performance, on the corners of the sarcophagus the recognised signs of extreme physical mourning dissolve into eroticism, their edges blunted by the blurring of irresolvable death into irresolvable desire.

viii. Cupids

I turn finally to the four cupids, two on each side of the sarcophagus, where they hold up the knots of the garlands on either side of the central theatrical masks **(Figs. 3.17, 3.18)**. The proliferation of cupids on garland sarcophagi has so far gone largely untheorised. Helde Herdejürgen in the *ASR* volume on garland sarcophagi in Italy offers no conjectures as to their role.[522] Fahri Işık, writing on garland sarcophagi from Aphrodisias, writes simply that '*Da die Ikonographie der Eroten und Niken als Girlandenträger und ihr Bezug auf Liebe bzw. Sieg geläufig wird, wird hier nicht näher drauf eingegangen*.'[523] R. R. R. Smith, also writing about Aphrodisian garland sarcophagi, including that of Aurelia Leontis discussed above, sees them, along with the acanthus

[521] Toynbee 1971: 44-45.
[522] Herdejürgen 1996: 34-36; 48-53.
[523] Işık 2006: 78.

leaves on which they stand, as 'time-honoured symbols of fertility and abundance.'[524] Eleni Papagianni sees cupids on all Attic sarcophagi, many of which are garland sarcophagi, primarily as stand-ins for deceased children.[525] While such associations are certainly valid, a symbolic explanation for these figures can only ever be partial, and their effect on the viewer arises as much from their physical, visually observable relationships to the sarcophagus box and the other figures lined up along its surface as from learnt meaning.

The cupids on this sarcophagus have longer, "older" bodies and less smooth curvilinearity of form than the cupids found in many other media. It is a build usual for garland sarcophagi, where the design often requires them to stretch almost from base to cornice as articulating figures;[526] the faces of the two on the front, though, are pneumatic and seemingly indicative of extreme youth.[527] Their hair is long, with its closest comparanda in human representations appearing in the long, curling hairstyles associated with young slaves;[528] their wings are larger and more pointedly symmetrical than would be usual in most media. The surface of their skin still shows the marks of the claw chisel, and was evidently unfinished; on the left hand figure on the back this is particularly evident, while the right hand cupid on the back is missing one wing. They

[524] Smith 2008: 389.
[525] Papagianni 2016: 99-102.
[526] Although this is not true of the garland-bearing cupids from Aphrodisias, who are usually far smaller in relation to the height of the sarcophagus chest and whose body shape is in many cases correspondingly less elongated. See Işık 2006 for examples and images, although he does not discuss the cupid garland-bearers.
[527] On the problems of assigning precise age categories to cupids see Stuveras 1969: 166-167.
[528] See Pollini 2003: 152-159 on long wavy hair as a distinguishing feature of young male slaves.

are sturdy figures: one foot is thrust forward to take the weight of the garlands, a motion which roots them firmly on the upper ridge of the sockel, and the spreading toes of the right hand foot of the left-hand cupid on the front side offer a careful display of the mechanics of balance and weight distribution. They are arrayed as regular counterparts to one another: on the back side they take up a near-identical stance, while on the front side they mirror each other, between them forming a symmetrical frame for the central swag. It is possible that the viewer brings with them enough associations from other contexts to read something of the ludic, or at least a degree of levity, here, but the earnest expressions and poses suggest that they function more as guards or attendants than as figures of play.[529]

Like the nikes, the cupids are closely tied into the encircling net of garlands and *taniae*. They serve as human pilasters for the support of these garlands, undercut so that they stand out from the sarcophagus chest almost as figures in the round, and casting dark shadows on the surface behind them.[530] They are closely implicated into the garland surround in that the garlands appear to rest on, or even to pass through, the point at which their wings join their body. Wings and *taniae* act as centring devices for the garlands' anchor points, as well as for the cupid body itself. But in contrast to the dishevelled forms of the nikes, each cupid offers an expanse of perfect and intact flesh, which through its smooth planar surfaces can be easily detached by the eye from the wings, taniae and garlands which extend and disavow its ultimate boundaries. And

[529] One might look here to the figure type common on Aphrodisias garland sarcophagi (Işık 2006), where the cupids are energetic to the point that they seem almost to be engaged in boisterous play.
[530] Lehmann-Hartleben and Olsen 1942: 69: 'These *putti* are not so much figures in relief as they are statuettes on a narrow stage…'

where the rushing nikes threaten to dissolve the whole schema, the firm stance of the cupids makes a display of holding together, supporting and sustaining the garlands, on the front side at least providing a centripetal force to counter the outward movement at the corners. While their bodies lean inwards towards the centre, their heads turn in the other direction, making them the only figures on the sarcophagus to provide lateral, connecting movement.

How do cupids compare to the other figures on this tomb? Where the nikes figured disintegration and dispersal, and the masks an empty shell, the cupids present a smooth body which stays within carefully defined limits. In contrast to the effortless support of the lightly-stepping nikes, cupid bodies present the act of holding up garlands, and by extension the task of tending to the tomb and the dead, as one which requires energy and continued effort. On the front side each cupid reaches round with his outer arm to hold onto the central garland swag, a motion of touch, care, and reinforcing support quite different from the downward- and outward-stretched, palm-bearing hands of the nikes. Instead of the talismanic logic of curse magic through which the gorgons ward off harm, cupids provide security and consolation through the tenderness of soft, harmless, non-interrogative bodies. They turn away from the horror of the central mask, far removed from the anguish of face and overt theatricality for which it stands. And where the portrait faces honour, memorialise, and historicise the deceased, cupids engage in the here and now of commemoration, ever straining under the weight of the garlands, caught in their interstices, ever in the act of renewing and perpetuating the tomb's offerings.

ix. Sarcophagus as body genre

The power of the garland sarcophagus rests at a fundamental level on the competing physicalities of the hodgepodge of figures who stand on, hang from, or simply float on its surface. Considered as a whole, one effect of this arrangement must be to replicate, and to interact with, the potentially chaotic array of offerings which a well-tended tomb would have received. The expensive stone decoration which indicates concern for the enduring memory of the deceased conceptualizes itself in its overall aesthetic in part as the simulacrum of temporary ornaments and offerings. But rather than being depicted as the inert objects of human agency, the figures and faces on the sarcophagus lay claim to a life of their own – and moreover declare the sarcophagus itself as a "living" object, bursting with the potential energy and agency embedded within its walls. The sarcophagus also invites engagement at the level of the individual motif, and each of these has the potential to provoke its own particular embodied response in the viewer. Where "cute" cupids arouse the desire to interact, figuring an attitude of ongoing care and support towards the tomb, nikes figure eroticism and bodily disarray, suggesting ungraspability and material instability. Between these standing figures, masks address the viewer head-on with theatrical outbursts of extreme emotion, while gorgons balance talismanic curse magic with serene reassurance. Meanwhile, portrait busts create an ersatz corporeality for the deceased, reshaping, honouring, historicising the absent presence in terms acceptable to the living.

The film theorist Linda Williams speaks of certain types of film as "body genres", eschewing the narrative-driven structures of classic Hollywood cinema and instead having as their main aim the production of particular types of bodily response in their

viewers.[531] Williams points to pornography as a genre which seeks to erotically arouse its audience and induce the physical response of orgasm, melodrama as a genre which seeks to induce extreme emotion and the physical response of tears, and horror as inducing fear and bringing on a physical response of shuddering. It is an overreading of the bodies, but these are categories which apply too to the Baltimore sarcophagus, on which nikes gesture towards the pornographic, the weeping mask towards melodrama, and the gorgons and screaming mask towards horror. We could easily add another category to Williams' list: the cute film, whose focus is on unthreatening bodies which the viewer wants to engage with, hold, and cuddle. Each of these corporealities is an insistent one, responding to basic human needs, fears, and desires. But unlike the films discussed by Williams, the Baltimore garland sarcophagus aspires to encompass every possible body genre at once.

One function of this smorgasbord of bodily stimuli, one reason for the popularity of figure clusters like this, must be the ability of these bodies to distract from and transform the inevitable, perhaps overriding, response of the viewer to the ultimate embodied stimulus: death and the dead body. But at the same time as these bodies distract they also provide access, competing modes of mediation between the bodies within and the bodies without. No single mode of corporeal representation is sufficient to withstand by itself with the pressure of encounter, and no single image or mode of response is given ultimate priority. Bodies and faces work to both attract and repel the outsider, some of them representing extremes of emotion while others distance themselves from the excesses of grief. Each of these figure types demands different

[531] Williams 1991.

strategies of looking and different strategies of processing. Some demand direct encounter, while others, through the orientation of their own mobile bodies, direct the gaze of the viewer onwards even as they attract it to themselves. A portrait viewed next to a tragic mask on the "Phrygian" front may be strengthened in its honorific aspirations, but its integrity as a substitute for an individual may equally be threatened by the juxtaposition, opened up to accusations of its own theatricality and unreality; considered next to a cupid, meanwhile, the portrait may raise questions of the competing temporalities of mourning, asserting an honorific, historicist image of the deceased against the cupid's presentist attentions to the tomb. Youth is set against age, horror against serenity, support against fragmentation. The encircling garlands guarantee the continual movement of gaze and attention from one part of the image surface to another, allowing faces and bodies to blur into and out of focus in succession, each one replacing, countering, modifying the agency of the last. The sarcophagus creates a selectively permeable buffer zone of bodies between living and dead in which contact is always partial and fragmented, endlessly rerouted onto other bodies and other desires.

This visual strategy of intricacy and multivocality may well have offered different experiences even to a single visitor returning on multiple occasions. Where the cupids might have been seen on one visit as embodiments of prosperity or love, on another they may have affected the viewer more through their promise of support and consolation, and on yet another they may not have been consciously registered at all. It is a possibility of return and reconsideration similar to that described by Gell in relation

to an 'oriental' carpet,[532] which, he suggests, generates an enduring and shifting relationship with its owner over time:

> 'Patterns, by their multiplicity and the difficulty we have in grasping their thematical or geometrical basis by mere visual inspection, generate relationships *over time* between persons and things, because what they present to the mind is, cognitively speaking, always 'unfinished business'. Who, possessed of an intricate oriental carpet, can say that they have entirely come to grips with its pattern; yet how often the eye rests on it and singles out now this relationship, this symmetry, now that. The process can continue interminably; the pattern is inexhaustible, the relationship between carpet and owner, for life.'[533]

One can well see how an object inviting such a long-term relationship might have proved attractive in the context of a tomb, where the 'unfinished business' of mourning demands an ever-renewed relationship to the body and its container.

Finally, we might ask whether the success of such a multi-vocal image scheme is connected to its reflection of the differentiation of roles in Roman funerary practice, even if the parallel can never be more than suggestive. Certainly, the well-known relief from the tomb of the Haterii **(Fig. 3.19)**, the most detailed image we possess of a Roman laying-out scene,[534] shows a highly specialized economy of grief, with servants, family members, a musician, and even the furniture (the two female figures who appear to be constitutent parts of lamps) engaging in different modes of lamentation.[535] Even the architecture of the atrium plays a role, with columns supporting garlands in a manner not entirely unlike that of the cupids on the Baltimore sarcophagus. Everyone has their assigned place, and no single mode of expressing grief is marked out as predominant or

[532] Gell 1998: 80.
[533] Gell 1998: 80.
[534] Toynbee 1971: 44.
[535] Museo Gregoriano Profano, inv. 9999. Toynbee 1971: 44-45; Sinn—Freyberger 1996: 45-51, cat. 5, Pls 8-10.

sufficient in isolation. The laying-out ceremonies found on metropolitan mythological sarcophagus reliefs often display a similar division of mourning activity between different figures and groups, with gender, age, status, and relation to the deceased all factoring into represented responses.[536] While there is no straight correlation between the figures on the Baltimore sarcophagus and the roles assumed by different mourners and funeral professionals in a real funerary context, this object too offers both introverted and extroverted models of expression: the distressed and emotive (female) masks and nikes, and the impassive (male) gorgon heads and cupids. On a relatively broad level the diversity of figures on the Baltimore sarcophagus surely responds to the need, both societal and personal, to offer a diversified emotional and physical response to death.

Over the course of this discussion I have systematically "over-read" the imagery of this sarcophagus, engaging in a surfeit of looking and interpreting, and identifying phenomenologically charged addresses to the viewer where no doubt many viewers were aware of no such thing. It is my suggestion that this may be an important process through which to put many such "ornamental" motifs, insisting on the strong version of their effects even as their actual impact is always a diluted one, impressed on the mind and body of the viewer more through frequent reiteration than a single striking encounter. To some extent, the jostling of divergent corporealities is surely one of the major attractions of the genre of garland sarcophagi as a whole, at least where a degree of definition is given to the motifs; even where only cupids and garlands are shown, an

[536] E.g. the so-called 'Pianabella' sarcophagus now in Ostia; a sarcophagus in the Louvre showing the death of Meleager (Inv. Cat. Ma 539 (MR 879)).

implicit contrast is made between their bodies and those of the dead. But the faces and bodies of the Baltimore garland sarcophagus may have radiated more affect than most. Not only is this a highly skilled production, carved in high relief and with a clear concern for the physical attractions of its objects of representation, but it was also displayed in a location far from its site of manufacture. Stylistic and iconographic choices which stood apart, however subtly, from the usual run of garland sarcophagi at Rome may have provided a spur to viewers to consider this hackneyed imagery anew, investing familiar image types with a physicality just unfamiliar enough to assert itself on the imagination of its Roman viewers. It is in contexts such as these, where the prosaic undergoes a process of partial estrangement, that effects which are usually subliminal may have been newly amplified, or even given way to conscious engagement with the bodies on, as well as in, the box.

Statistically speaking, cupids are the least dispensable bodies on garland sarcophagi; when reduced to a simpler form in which only garlands and a single repeated figure remain, it is usually the cupids who are left. The corporeal rhetoric of tender touch and of bodily coherence, of unthreatening strength and of unwavering support, appears to have been one of the primary visual mechanisms through which the purchasers of funerary monuments across the Roman Empire sought to bridge and manage the divide between the spheres of the living and the dead. But although cupids are important, they are only one of a matrix of different physicalities employed on sarcophagi, functionaries within a distinctly somatic approach to the dead which is in many cases irreducible to a single body type.

V. The coffin which cares: cupids as ministrants to the bereaved and to the dead

The garland sarcophagi from Aphrodisias and the "Licinian" tomb both use cupids to suggest the possibility of a caring, supportive relationship to the dead, characterised by gentle and constant touch. As this is an aspect of cupids' use on sarcophagi which has gone underanalysed, I turn now to three categories of sarcophagus primarily known from metropolitan Rome on which this idea of care for the dead is more explicitly depicted. In these case studies, each of which offers a new perspective on the sarcophagus type in question, the tactile, caring qualities of cupids are used to recharacterise respectively the tomb visit, the sarcophagus/body, and the wider funerary landscape of tombs and offerings.

a. Visiting the tomb: Cupids on sarcophagi with the myth of Selene and Endymion

I turn first to a series of sarcophagi on which cupids participate in a narrative scene. Sarcophagi showing the visit of Selene to Endymion enjoyed a long-lived popularity among customers at Rome, and around 110 examples stretching from the late Hadrianic to the pre-Gallienic period are known today.[537] This long lifespan, far longer than those of most other mythological image subjects known from sarcophagi, begs the immediate

[537] Sichtermann 1992.

question of why the scene was so popular.[538] While the attractions of the myth must have contributed to this longevity, it seems likely that the success of this subject was also embedded in the image type itself, which remains remarkably consistent within the object corpus.

In its bare outlines, the myth concerns the love affair between the moon goddess Selene and her lover Endymion, a shepherd or hunter from Mount Latmos in Caria. Endymion had been granted the choice between the ordinary human life cycle of old age and death, and eternal youth compromised by eternal sleep. Having chosen sleep, he remains forever on his Carian mountainside, where he is visited each night by the adoring goddess, who pauses from her circuit of the skies to lie with him.[539] Although the textual sources on Endymion are many and inconsistent, and in many cases make no mention of his divine lunar lover, the relief imagery of the sarcophagi invariably focuses on the arrival of the moon goddess Selene at Endymion's resting-place in a rocky landscape.

Even before the images themselves are taken into account, the versions of this story which involve the moon goddess and eternal sleep have obvious funerary potential. The incomplete alignment of sleep and death has a long history,[540] and Endymion, the unwaking sleeper, is easily imagined as a partial stand-in for the dead body within the sarcophagus. Alongside this vision of the body at peaceful rest is set the figure of the unforgetting lover, whose desire to see and lie with the beloved remains unchanged

[538] Ewald 2004: 235 Fig. 1 shows relative popularity of different mythological scenes on Roman sarcophagi.
[539] See Sorabella 2001 on the textual tradition, as well as Gabelmann's article on Endymion in LIMC III.1 (1986).
[540] Homer *Iliad* 16.681ff already describes Hypnos and Thanatos as brothers.

even in the face of his failure to wake. Read onto the context of the tomb, Selene's love for Endymion is inevitably refigured so as to appear, not just as a love for the beautiful sleeper himself, but also as a typecase of a love strong enough to overcome death. It is an elegant and satisfyingly irresolvable way of figuring death and the corpse, and surely one which most viewers of this imagery had the ability to tease out and relate to.

But the sarcophagus reliefs offer more material for consideration than would appear to be necessary to fulfill these relatively limited allegorical aims, and any discussion of the images must account for other figures than those of Selene and Endymion. An example which introduces many of the main characters common across the series is a child's sarcophagus now in the Glypthothek in Copenhagen **(Fig. 3.20, 3.21)**.[541] In the centre of the image, Selene steps down from her chariot, and is guided by two cupids, one of them bearing a torch to light the way, toward Endymion, who reclines on a rocky couch at the left-hand end of the image, his shepherd's crook held in his right hand. The body of the moon goddess seems to tilt backwards slightly, as though she were hesitant at the idea of the encounter; one of the cupids appears to be physically pulling her towards Endymion. Behind Endymion is the bearded figure of Hypnos, who with one hand pours sleep over the upturned face and with the other holds a characteristic poppy stem. This encounter between the lovers takes up exactly half of the image surface; behind Selene's back, the horses of the chariot of the moon, tended to by a third cupid and a winged female figure,[542] await her departure; one of them paws at the ground in apparent impatience. Beyond the winged female, the rocky mountain landscape continues with a

[541] Sichtermann 1992 Cat. 35.
[542] She is usually labelled Aura, although there is no conclusive evidence to back up such an identification.

young shepherd, who sits meditatively and fondles the head of his dog while his flocks lie at rest in the background; because the winged groom faces one way and the shepherd another, there is little connection between these sub-sections of the scene. The frieze is bookended by two tall cupids resting on inverted torches, and on this sarcophagus the lid is also prominent; here, two large disembodied heads and two winged nikes flank an inscription which proclaims the dedication of the sarcophagus by two parents to their *filius dulcissimus*.

Even the earliest, and most sparsely populated, of the sarcophagus series (**Fig. 3.22**; dated to before 150 CE) carries several figures in addition to Selene and Endymion, and far more than those found on images of the scene on other object types:[543] Hypnos to hold the body, a tethered dog lying alongside the pair, a personification of Mount Latmos in the background of the scene, and three cupids, one of whom leads Selene to Endymion while the other two wait with the chariot and horses. In later images, the figure-count explodes. On **Fig. 3.23 a, b**, from around the same period as the Copenhagen sarcophagus, a second chariot has already been incorporated, allowing Selene to be shown both arriving at Endymion's cave and departing, her horses leaping into the sky above the emerging head of personified Earth; between these scenes, a shepherd sits with an extensive flock of sheep and goats.[544] Fifty years later, the number of figures on several of these scenes would be overwhelming, frustrating any attempt to make sense of the whole image in a single glance. On a sarcophagus of around 220-250 CE, probably made at Rome but found in a tomb near modern Bordeaux in Gallia

[543] See the images collected in the *LIMC* entry 'Endymion'.
[544] Sichtermann 1992 Cat. 51. On restorations see Sichtermann 1992; the cupids are heavily restored on this sarcophagus.

Narbonnensis **(Fig 3.24 a, b)**, six large-scale figures, eight small ones, and sixteen animals are included in addition to Selene and Endymion – not counting those on the lid.[545] Earth, the winged female attendant, Latmos, and an uncharacteristically young Hypnos are all present, and the two ends of the box are bookended by a bearded shepherd, sitting reflectively at the viewer's left, and two beautiful, androgynous males described by Sichtermann as *Quellnymphen* to the viewer's right.[546] The sides of the sarcophagus contain yet further scenes: on the left end, a young man (Endymion?) standing by a tree and resting on a shepherd's crook, and on the right end, the departing chariot of Selene, though with oxen rather than horses in the harness. Bucolic characters, superfluous to the demands of narrative, have here grown to the scale of the protagonists themselves, while their smaller counterparts, cupids, goats, and miniaturised personifications, have overrun the whole scene, settling not just around and above the shepherd himself but also beneath the legs of the rearing horses, alongside Selene's chariot, and around the sleeping figure of Endymion. One goat even lies alongside the sleeper, almost mirroring his posture. Most of these figures have no apparent relation to the mythic "core" of this image whatsoever – and in fact, their proliferation might be thought of as presenting a significant existential threat to that "core", which seems to have been swallowed almost entirely by the secondary, tertiary, quaternary figures which take up most of the sarcophagus front.

Why are these sarcophagus reliefs so overloaded with figures? In part, the multiplication of figures must be due to the requirements of the long relief frieze, and

[545] Sichtermann 1992 Cat. 72.
[546] Sichtermann 1992: 126.

the increased bodycount and prominent bucolica of the later 2nd- and early 3rd-century sarcophagi are consistent with broader trends in sarcophagus design. Michael Koortbojian has described this corporeal enrichment as 'an example of the transposition to the visual arts of the literary device of *amplificatio*': the simple adduction of more material to emphasise a narrative or allegorical point which was already made.[547] For Koortbojian, the point to be emphasised by this excess 'staffage' on Selene sarcophagi is the metaphorical promise of a 'blessed life to come',[548] and shepherds and their flocks combine with the undying Endymion to make 'implicit eschatological claims for immortality or apotheosis'.[549] The argument that these sarcophagi envision a life after death has been generally unfavourably received, however, and most recent discussions have emphasised above all the open-endedness of these images: Hellmut Sichtermann doubted that any single interpretation could account for the popularity of the myth throughout its lifespan;[550] Jean Sorabella, focusing on the spectacular sarcophagus in the collections of the Metropolian Museum, in addition to emphasising the themes of love and the abundance of the earth, makes much of the ways in which the smaller scenes on the lid would stimulate a play of associations, and of the comforting familiarity of a tale whose telling and retelling may have formed a bond between different generations;[551] Paul Zanker places emphasis on love, a landscape suggestive of *otium*, and the idea that the sarcophagi may seek to depict the encounter with the dead in dreams.[552]

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[547] Koortbojian 1995: 74.
[548] Koortbojian 1995: 78.
[549] Koortbojian 1995: 99.
[550] Sichtermann 1966: 83; quoted and reaffirmed in Sichtermann 1992: 52.
[551] Sorabella 2001.
[552] Zanker and Ewald 2004: 55, 99-102; Zanker 2014: 198-199.

Such *amplificatio* makes far more sense if we think of these scenes both as a representation of a mythical moon goddess visiting her sleeping lover, and, at a secondary level, as a representation of a bereaved woman visiting a tomb. It is a connection which recent discussions have mentioned only in passing: Sorabella and Ewald both draw a comparison between the flickering lights carried by the cupids and the flickering lights by which visitors to a Roman mausoleum might have viewed sarcophagi like these ones, while Platt invokes, only to reject as incomplete, the parallel between the visits of Selene to Endymion and those of the mourner to the tomb.[553] But it is a parallel which even if incomplete can withstand much closer inspection, and one whose elaboration brings new sense to the many cupids who throng through the in-between spaces of these images.

Such a viewing gives new purpose, first of all, to the framing of the images, which almost without exception place the arrival of Selene at their centre, with Endymion displaced to one of the sides. The uneven weighting of the couple makes the subject of this image the visit, the arrival, far more than the love affair itself, which on the sarcophagi at least is never shown.[554] The context of the tomb visit would also account for the prominence given to Selene's wagon, which frequently shares the image centre with her, and which on many sarcophagi is represented twice – once waiting for the goddess, and once at the

[553] Sorabella 2001: 78; Zanker—Ewald 2004: 32, 319; Platt 2012: 354.
[554] A small group of grave stelai and reliefs from the Norian Pannonian region show the couple lying together. Pettau Ptuj, Mus. RL 769; Steinamanger-Szombatheley, Savaria Múz.; Augst, Römermus (no inventory numbers available for these last two). On one highly atypical sarcophagus fragment now in the Berlin Staatliche Museen, Inv. SK 846 (LIMC Hypnos/Somnus 107), Endymion has awoken and lifts his right arm toward a frontally-facing Selene; Hypnos is shown drawing away in the background.

point of departure. The focus is as much on the going as on the coming; even at the point of arrival we are reminded on many sarcophagi, not least by the horses straining at the bit, held in check only by the guiding hands of their cupid drivers, that the visit is only a temporary one. While the reminder of the imminent departure is clearly appropriate for the moon goddess Selene, who is only able to visit Endymion by truanting from her proper place at the reins of the lunar chariot, it could also provide a reassuring model for the mourner visiting a tomb, who is reminded by the image that they too will leave and return and leave again. On **Fig. 3.22**, the earliest known example, the scene is bordered at one end, behind the sleeping Endymion, with a tree, and at the other by an ornate, relief-carved arch, through which the waiting horses will depart.[555] The archway has no obvious relevance to the mountainside of Latmos, but might make sense when considered in the contemporary context of the sarcophagus' production and use: a visit to a tomb always meant a trip out of the city proper and into the extra-urban "cities" and gardens of the dead. If such a model is accepted, the shepherds and their flocks, whose presence is so constant on these images, could also be viewed as markers of the idealised extra-urban space in which tombs were supposed to be located.

Several other aspects of the images respond well to such a viewing. For the viewer with death in mind, the robe of Endymion, which on the later Capitoline sarcophagus **(Fig. 3.23 b)** is lifted up by cupids so that Selene can look on his sleeping body, performs secondary duty as a shroud, while the rocky ledge on which Hypnos rests in this image is almost straight enough to be thought of as one of the sides – or even the lid – of the

[555] Sichtermann 1992 Cat. 27.

tomb.[556] Certainly this particular Endymion is enclosed within a very squarely delineated space, with the javelin alongside him and the ledge beneath that contributing to the impression that he lies on a cut stone slab. The figure of Hypnos, who on the Copenhagen and Paris sarcophagi leans over the recumbent figure and pours sleep into his eyes, could also be assigned a funerary role, as provider of libations for the dead,[557] while a garland carried by Selene on the well-known Metropolitan Museum sarcophagus is an offering which makes at least as much sense for a corpse as for a lover.[558] The Louvre sarcophagus in fact carries a scene of garland production on its lid, undoubtedly a reference to the garlands used for decorating tombs.[559] If this assimilation between mythic lovers and the real deceased/mourners were widely accepted as a driving force behind these sarcophagi during the second and third centuries, it would also help to account for the exceptional number of portrait heads found on sarcophagi of this type – particularly obvious here on the Louvre sarcophagus, where the heads of both Selene and Endymion were left uncarved in expectation of portraits.[560] And while the cosmic figures and reminders of lunar cyclicality can certainly be accounted for in terms of the myth itself, and also in terms of the incorporation of the deceased into larger temporal and cosmic contexts, they may well

[556] Cumont 1942: 413 suggested that this ledge represents the edge of the cave in which Endymion lies.
[557] Lehmann-Hartleben and Olsen 1942: 38 n. 107 read a Hypnos figure as Death, and Schefold 1961: 204 suggests the analogy of the two figures.
[558] Cf. the relief from the tomb of the Haterii, on which the dead body is garlanded as part of the laying-out rituals. Sichtermann 1992: 115 notes that the right arm and wreath of the "Aura" figure on the later Capitoline sarcophagus are restorations.
[559] A point which has been regularly made; see for example Zanker 2014: 195.
[560] It is also significant that the Louvre sarcophagus is one of a pair which showed recumbent bodies: where this one, which contained male bones, carried the image of Selene visiting Endymion, the second contained female bones and depicted the discovery of Ariadne by Dionysos – an obvious visual pendant. For the Ariadne sarcophagus see Baratte-Metzger 1985: 138ff Cat. 67.

have resonated for mourners whose own tomb visits operated according to a regular annual cycle, in which both public festivals of the dead, such as the *violaria, rosalia, parentalia*, and *ferialia*, and the private feasts of the birthday and deathday of the deceased were marked by festivities and commemoration by the graveside.[561]

Cupids play a significant role in such an interpretation.[562] They push and pull and guide Selene towards her lover, they light the way with a multitude of torches, they lift Endymion's robe to reveal his body to her, they look back at her to determine her response, and they wait at the reins, impatiently, ready to get back on the lunar path once more. On the one hand these are the actions of lovers' attendants, and we might compare them to the crowd of cupids who surrounded Alexander and Roxana in Lucian's description of Aëtion's painting. But the pomp and practical assistance which they provide to Selene the divine lover can be easily reframed as services required by a woman visiting a tomb, and once seen through this lens, their specific distribution and characterisation on these reliefs invites us to reframe the relationship between the living and the dead in terms which are largely determined – or at least heavily inflected – by these intervening bodies.

Firstly, cupids form a buffer zone between Selene and Endymion, preventing their bodies from ever coming into physical contact with one another. But they also provide

[561] Platt 2011: 343.

[562] On previous discussions of the cupids, see Sichtermann 1992: 51; he notes that there has been very little discussion of them, criticises those who link them to the souls of the deceased, and himself calls them '*spätere, römische Einfügungen*', claiming '*dass sie nicht um der Bereicherung der Handlung wegen eingeführt werden*'. He ultimately argues for a primarily erotic significance.

and constitute contact: like the cupids on garland/inscription sarcophagi from Aphrodisias, these are figures who move and touch in both directions. On the Copenhagen sarcophagus one of them tugs on Selene's robe with his left hand and gestures towards Endymion with his right, his body flying or floating towards the youth while his face turns back to the goddess. Above him, a second cupid, who holds a torch to light the way, is similarly oriented, body directed towards Endymion and head looking back towards Selene. It is a pattern of dual directionality which we see repeated throughout the corpus. Their actions suggest a sense of care for the goddess, and also a direct interest in her reaction; the cupids on the Copenhagen and earlier Capitoline sarcophagi seem to look back with solicitude, as if to reassure Selene in the face of a potentially anxiety-inducing encounter. On the Louvre sarcophagus, this invitation to and examination of response is diversified: not only cupids but also the personification of Latmos and perhaps even one of the goats look back toward her. Engagement with the body of Endymion is both prevented and facilitated, and if we see these scenes as tomb visits then the cupids' role becomes a fascinating one: they guard against the solitary encounter between living and dead, and serve as midwives of Selene's/the mourner's emotion, simultaneously asserting the corporeal distance between visitor and visited, woman and man, waking and sleeping, goddess and mortal, living and dead, but at the same time rendering the sleeping/dead body viewable, touchable, and loveable. It might also be argued that, as the figures who lift the robe/shroud and make direct contact with the body of Endymion, their behaviour gestures towards the very practical roles of those who tend to the corpse, preparing it for public display and

burial; one might even ask whether the idea of pollution from contact with the dead influenced the use of minor, instrumental figures in such a charged liminal space.[563]

The goddess' response is a crucial theme here: in contrast to fresco paintings and mosaics of this meeting, where the half-naked goddess steps and looks blankly into the void, an object for the viewer's desire more than a desiring agent herself, and accompanied by one cupid at most **(Fig. 3.25)**,[564] the sarcophagus Selenes, often fully clothed and allotted a high degree of majesty, are usually depicted actively striding and looking towards Endymion. This allotment of agency to the female protagonist as viewer is itself an argument for intended resonance with the tomb visit: the funerary sphere was one of the few contexts where we can be sure that women were assigned privileged roles as both actors and viewers. The Selene of the early Capitoline sarcophagus seemed reticient, needing to be coaxed on by her accompanying cupid, but most later Selenes have far more agency of their own. The cupids, meanwhile, look back and up at the moon goddess, seemingly awaiting her response to the body; it might even be argued that their dual directionality is reminiscent of the behaviour of cupids flanking inscription panels, who look away from the inscription and leave the tasks of interpretation and emotion to the viewer.

But Endymion is always visited and viewed on two axes: along the line of the relief by his divine lover, and also from the front, at a right angle to the arrival of Selene, by human viewers who come with their own torches and carriages. On the many images

[563] See Bodel 2000 on the low status of undertakers at Rome; Lindsay 2000 on the limited extent to which rituals relating to pollution were preserved in the 2nd century.
[564] *LIMC* Endymion 14-30.

where cupids lift his mantel to reveal his unblemished body, they do so for the eyes of the external viewer as much as for Selene; the body is always angled so as to facilitate the external gaze. Usually, the cupids performing this role look back at Selene, but on the later Capitoline sarcophagus **(Fig. 3.23 b)** we find a telling deviation from the usual conventions: here, the cupids who lift up Endymion's robe direct their gaze out of the image and towards the external viewer.[565] By inviting the tomb visitor, whose presence at the sarcophagus is presumably already predicated on an intention to engage with the recumbent body of the deceased, to focus their attentions on another body, these cupids become central to the blurring between the erotic and the grieving gaze, between the body of Endymion as mythical love-object and the body of Endymion as cipher for the body within the tomb.[566] The cupid on the left actually reaches out toward the visitor, a further bid for their participation in this scene. Perhaps he performs a similar act of unification to that of the cupids who touch Selene with one hand and gesture to Endymion with another, enabling a tactile connection between Endymion and the viewer which goes in both directions. It seems likely, however, that the action serves equally to fend off the viewer, demanding that they too keep the same distance as Selene does, admiring, but not touching, the sleeping body: this is a gesture which is elsewhere linked with fear and the desire to ward something off.[567] This image, in which Endymion is framed both above and below by flat rock, is perhaps the most explicit of all of these reliefs in its references to a tomb context, and it is tempting also to make a

[565] See also Sichtermann 1992 Nos 49 (Ostia, museum, 1304), 65 (Malibu, Getty Museum, 76.AA.8), on each of which the cupid who lifts Endymion's robe looks outward towards the viewer.
[566] On other sarcophagi, such as Sichtermann Cat. 52 (Mantua, Palazzo Ducale), a cupid lifting the shroud looks directly at Endymion.
[567] See the section on "DIonysiac" sarcophagi below.

loose connection between these Endymion figures and the vogue for kline lids carrying full-length reclining sculptures, which are first found at Rome in the second quarter of the 2nd century CE.[568]

On several Selene sarcophagi (twelve of those catalogued by Sichtermann), dated for the most part to between 150 and 180 CE, and to which the Copenhagen sarcophagus belongs, cupids appear not only as participants in the narrative itself, but also as larger framing figures at either end of the sarcophagus.[569] These figures offer an abrupt disjuncture with the narrative scene, which has already established the scale of cupids within its fiction as small and mobile figures flitting through the gaps between larger protagonists. As tall as Selene herself and substantially plumper, these cupids demand a shift in viewing strategies. On the one hand they still participate, awkwardly, in the narrative, resting their inverted torches on the continuation of the rocky landscape occupied by the other protagonists. But they also demand consideration in light of the sarcophagus as object: pressed against the edge of the box and with their dimensions entirely determined by its contours, they are part of its structure and architecture as much as they are bystanders to Selene's visit. In some ways, the role which these cupids play is comparable to the role played by the small cupids within the narrative tableaux: where the mythological cupids mediated the approach, seen primarily as erotic and secondarily as funerary, of Selene to Endymion, these larger *Stützfiguren* perform a similar task for the visitor to the tomb, constructing a visual, tactile, and emotional bridge between mourner and corpse, both providing a cipher for engagement and

[568] Zanker 2014: 194.
[569] See Sichtermann 1992 Cat. 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 47, 48, 50, 59.

preventing full contact between the two. They also serve as connecting threads in the ambiguous triangulated relationship between corpse, mourner, and mythological sleeper. Their intrusions into the narrative scene – their echoing of meditative or visibly mourning shepherds,[570] their direct juxtaposition with the body of Endymion, so that they seem to mourn directly over him, the paralleling of their inverted torches with the light-bearing torches of Selene's cupids, and of the wreaths which they sometimes hold in their hands with those held by Selene[571] – forces the viewer to keep drawing connections between their own visit to a recumbent body and the visit represented on the box, reading back the grief aroused by the sarcophagus, however illogical such a transposition may seem, onto the ostensibly erotic narrative image, and the erotic image onto the encounter with the deceased. On the Louvre sarcophagus, made several decades after such figures went out of common use on this sarcophagus series, a small mourning cupid in low relief has even been placed directly behind the head of Endymion, a very deliberate cross-contamination of these two different modes of viewing a body. Perhaps most resonant of all are the framing cupids' closed eyes and drooping heads: like Endymion, they are asleep. As such, they invite the viewer to reflect once more – though still obliquely and through the lens of other bodies – on the uneasy relationship between sleep and death, aiding the passage of thought through which the dead body or bodies in the sarcophagus are transfigured into the beautiful sleeping youth Endymion, and Endymion in his turn is rendered a double for the corpse, but at the same time, through the addition of a third sleeper to the "analogy", preventing

[570] Sichtermann 1992: Cat. 32, 33 are examples of reliefs containing figures in attitudes of mourning; others, such as Cat. 35 or 47, the attitude seems closer to one of meditation.
[571] On Sichtermann 1992: Cat. 30, 32, 35 one or both cupids holds a wreath.

such a direct transposition, insisting that the mythological image's echo chamber of connections and emotions remains open. The standing cupids are figured both as sleepers and as mourners, stand-ins for the living as well as for the dead, whose bodily attitudes seek to encompass the two states at once.

Sarcophagi showing the myth of Selene and Endymion use cupids in several different ways to acknowledge the Janus-faced task of this object type, exploring the idea that it offers care in equal but different measure to the deceased and to the living. We might even argue that the mythological images come close to offering exegesis to many of the cupids found in non-narrative roles on sarcophagi; it could be argued that the cupids flanking inscriptions on the sarcophagi from Aphrodisias, and indeed, the very similar cupids flanking a blank inscription panel on the lid of the Louvre Selene sarcophagus, occupy the same position between viewer-mourner and deceased as Selene's cupids do between her and Endymion. Both sets of figures are tactile guides who provide access to the loved body, dispelling fear and awaiting the viewer's response, performing the acts of touch and care from which the mourner herself recoils.

b. The body in (adamantine) pieces: Cupids with weapons

Another category of sarcophagus reliefs, mostly dating to the 2nd century and from the area of Rome,[572] contains images of cupids who are placed, if possible, in an even closer

[572] Schauenburg 1997.

physical relation to the dead body within. Sarcophagi on which cupids hold up or hammer out weapons are usually discussed in terms of their relation to Mars: the cupids present arms to the god of war, who is thus both armed and overcome by the god of love. Konrad Schauenburg, a recent exponent of such an interpretation, suggests in addition an allegorical relationship of the cupids' activities to '*ein seliges Leben im Jenseits*';[573] Stuveras thought that their popularity was due primarily to the desire to imitate the internal cella frieze from the Trajanic/Hadrianic imperial remodeling of the temple of Venus Genetrix in Rome.[574] But, while the connection to Mars is certainly not ruled out, and is sometimes actively underlined through the use of iconography specific to the war god, and while the designers of these friezes, all of which date to between 130 and 215 CE,[575] certainly looked to the Venus Genetrix reliefs, an equally palpable reference point of these images is the body of the deceased and the sarcophagus itself. Perhaps more explicitly than any other sarcophagus type, this group of sarcophagi refigures the process of corporeal fragmentation and decay associated with death – and, unsurprisingly, it is cupids who are used to envisage possibilities for protecting, displaying, and even providing a new skin or shell for, the corpse.

On a child's sarcophagus now in the British museum **(Fig. 3.26)**, eight curly-haired cupids hold up the fragmented armour and weapons of a warrior: a spear, a lorica with pteruges attached, a shield, which does double-duty as a panel for an inscription, a sword, and a helmet, which rests on a small pillar. With the exception of the breastplate-

[573] Schauenburg 1997: 679. Bonnano Aravantinos 1998 also sees the arms held by the cupids as the weapons of Mars. Schauenburg 1998: 68-70 refutes several other improbable interpretations.
[574] Stuveras 1969: 36.
[575] Schauenburg 1997.

lifters, the cupids all look away from the objects which they hold, and even the remaining two do not look directly at the lorica. The inscription can be translated as follows: 'To the spirits of the dead. For Sallustius Iasius, son of Gaius. Domitius, treasurer of the imperial accounts, together with his wife Sallustia Caeliana, had this made for his well-deserving foster-son, who lived five years.'[576] There is surely a sense, firstly, in which these arms are intended not only for the god Mars but also for the body of the five-year-old Sallustius Iasius, either as spolia placed on the tomb to honour his body or as protective armour for a boy who will never go to war. But this is also an image of fragmentation and lack: what is displayed to us, in lieu of the body itself, are the substitutes for its dismembered parts, the body in pieces, in which head and torso sit on either side of the outsized, centrally-positioned, protective clipeus. The straining bodies of the cupids contrast with the still passivity of the armour, simulacra of body parts with no capacity of their own for movement, activated only by the external energy of their handlers.[577]

On some sarcophagi from this group the emphasis is very much on display, but on others, and especially where the lorica (marked out on the British Museum sarcophagus by its too-long neck and close-rendering of the pectoral muscles) is concerned, the

[576] CIL VI 8454; translation from British Museum webpage.
D(is) M(anibus)
Sallustio C(aii) f(ilio) Iasio
alumno suo b(ene) m(erenti)
qui vixit ann(is) V Do/mitius Aug(usti) n(ostri) disp(ensator)
rationis mon(etae)
cum Sallus/tia Caeliane
coniuge sua
fecer(unt)
[577] Lissarrague 2008 has a suggestive discussion about the relationship between bodies and armour on Attic vases of the mid-6th to mid-5th centuries BCE.

cupids seem almost to hug the armour, which is set into explicit relationship with their own bodies **(Figs. 3.27, 3.28)**. It is an engagement which is almost as tender as that envisaged several centuries earlier by Bion in his *Lament for Adonis*, where the erotes bring their own bows and quivers to lay on Adonis' bed, and one of them 'stands behind Adonis and dries him with his wings.'[578] As in Bion's *Lament*, the sarcophagus images lay themselves open to being viewed through the lens of the rituals of care performed on the dead body: they are images of placing and tending, in which the simulacrum for the human being can be touched without anxiety.

On other sarcophagi, cupids not only hold up arms but also make them.[579] On one now in Marseille **(Fig. 3.29)**, the left half of the box is taken up with a scene of the forge, while in the right half of the image three cupids are at work on a helmet. Two more flank a clipeus, supported by a sphinx, on which is represented Romulus and Remus with the wolf – an image which offers support for an association of these weapons with Mars, the twins' father.[580] In the foreground near the forge lies a lorica with attached pteruges, a reclining body under construction. On a second sarcophagus with a scene of furnace and anvil, formerly in the Lansdowne collection **(Fig. 3.30)**, the different parts of the suit of armour are carefully displayed so as to emphasise the absent human/divine body: the image centre is occupied by two cupids who hold an oversized

[578] Bion *Idylls* 1.86: ὃς δ' ὄπιθεν πτερύγεσσιν ἀναψύχει τὸν Ἄδωνιν.
[579] Schauenburg 1997 divides sarcophagi of cupids with weapons into two groups: those in which they are produced at the forge (group I/C), and those in which weapons are held ready for Mars (group II/D).
[580] Schauenburg 1997 cat. 8. His cat. 23, from the Casino Massimo in the Villa Giustiniani at Rome, also incorporates a shield with this motif.

helmet above an upright lorica.[581] On the one hand, these protective outer shells devoid of occupying warrior hint at the impermanence of the human body and the corpse themselves. But the scenario presented distorts the discourse of fragmentation even as it parade its parts, presenting this as a site for the making – the hammering out and welding together – of the body rather than of its decomposition. Instead of (or as well as) focusing on the body as a site of lack, these sarcophagi, in replacing it with disconnected arms, allow the viewer also to reflect on the physical strength and *virtus* which should accompany the possession of arms. Where recent discussions of the fragment have seen it most often as a marker of deficiency and mutilation,[582] these disconnected body parts remain caught between competing claims of making and taking apart, boasting a strength and coherence even greater than that of the intact human body even as they proclaim that body's absence.

The performance of protection and of making which runs through the images is even in some ways close to the functions of the sarcophagus itself: as protective outer skin and "mimesis" for the decomposing body within, the sarcophagus functions as the closest thing there is to a shield or suit of arms for the deceased. It is a form of protection which seems almost programmatically designed to complement the form of protection offered by the cupids: against the soft, yielding, caring touch are set the rigid defensive shells of metal and stone.

[581] Schauenburg 1997 cat. 36.
[582] Nochlin 1995; Shahar 2007.

Different weapons friezes are thus differently inflected; it is possible that the relationship envisaged between cupids and cuirass in particular (embrace, display, cautious touch, etc) influenced the viewer's conceptualisation of their own relationship to the sarcophagus and the corpse within. Other imagery on the sarcophagus box inevitably plays a role in determining the reception of these scenes as well: on one of the sarcophagi from the so-called tomb of the Licinii **(Fig. 3.31)**, the cupid and weapon frieze on the lid is inflected strongly by the triumphalist scene of barbarian captives on the main box and the *signa* held by the two nikes, a strong invitation to a reading of these weapons as battle spolia, set up by the cupids as a decorative honorific offering for the deceased. Indeed, one could regard all of the friezes in this series as displays of spolia instead of or as well as figurations of the corpse. But protection is also prominently thematised on the Licinii sarcophagus, most obviously by the matching Medusa head tondi-cum-clipei on box and lid, while the undeniably phallic quivers poking out of the cornucopial vases on the box demand a restituation of (this part at least of) the fragmented body as a token of fertile superfluity. And indeed spoliated arms themselves always already refer back in some sense to the bodies which once wore and used them. The link to the body of the deceased is still one valid (and, I would argue, intended) interpretational strategy for this lid frieze, but it is insufficient to drown out entirely all of the other loud claims for meaning and significance made by this particular image surface.

A sarcophagus which passed through Sotheby's some years ago and is now in private hands **(Fig. 3.32)** explores in a particularly marked way the partial correspondence between armour and the tomb. Two flying or floating long-bodied cupids flank a central

inscription panel, their bows and quivers resting beneath them at the lower edge of the relief surface. At each end of the sarcophagus is a scene of Psyche and Cupid – a common pairing on sarcophagi, but differing here from the standard pattern in that rather than kissing Cupid, these Psyches instead disarm him; at each outer edge of the sarcophagus lies a discarded helmet. While the act of disarming and disrobing a lover (who is Love himself) frustrates any unequivocal analogy with funerary practice, it certainly has the potential to be understood in this relation: the exposure of the body as a preparatory act for lovemaking can be easily refigured as the "disarming" (and perhaps re-wrapping) of the body in the context of death and burial.

Such interpretations are supported by the origins of the image type, even if it is unlikely that the 2nd-century viewer would have had this in mind. The handling of arms by unwarlike bodies goes back to 6th-century BCE Greek vases showing nereids who bring arms for Achilles. This scene was always already a prefiguration of Achilles' death and was thus well-suited to the funerary contexts for which many of these vessels were intended;[583] it is picked up again on at least one 2nd-century CE sarcophagus **(Fig. 3.33)**.[584] But the nereids carrying arms on a sarcophagus differ from cupids in several ways: where several cupids will gather round a vast helmet, and two will strain together (as on the sarcophagus of Sallustius Iasius from Frascati) to lift a breastplate, only one nereid holds each weapon or piece of armour, and where cupids tend to look away, the nereids are staged using and contemplating their cargo, with those who carry helmets in particular shown in direct confrontation with the faceless "head" in their hands. The

[583] Barringer 1995: 45-48.
[584] *ASR* V, 1, cat. 120.

nereids are carried on the backs of sea-monsters, floating and passive and pensive, engaging on their own account with the objects which they hold, while the cupids are engaged instead in tasks involving immense physical but very little mental effort, apparently uninterested in the possible symbolic or emotional weight of their load, whose implications are left to the viewer to determine.

Sarcophagi with cupids holding arms exploit the unstable symbolism and corporeal/physical facture of both component elements of their iconography. They set against one another love and war, the hard and the soft, but they also rely on the viewer's recognition of the paradoxes inherent to each element, the strength of the cupids and the weakness of the weapons. Arms entail *virtus*, but they have been decommissioned here, their force sapped through fragmentation. Conversely, the cupids who hold them have weak bodies, but it is their energy and dynamism, their capacity to make and lift and protect, which is brought to the fore. With their tendency to refer and respond to the object on which they are depicted, cupids ask the mourner to reflect on the specific materiality of the tomb and of the body within. But they also seek to transform the experiential circumstances under which that engagement takes place, inverting hard stone and rotting cadaver so that they appear to the viewer as an adamantine body held in tender hands.

c. The tomb landscape as playground

Where the Selene sarcophagi used cupids to transpose grief into an erotic encounter within a bucolic idyll, and where the weapons sarcophagi used them to imagine the forging of, and tending to, an indestructible yet fragmented body, another series of metropolitan Roman sarcophagi dominated by cupids foregrounds a very different atmosphere, and a different approach to death. On the relief friezes of these sarcophagi **(Figs. 3.34-38)**, all of them child-size and dated to between 140 and 160 CE,[585] the early years of the mid-2nd-century boom in cupid sarcophagi at Rome,[586] a whole crowd of cupids clambers, reaches, and fights its way through a landscape of baskets, basins, amphorae and wine cups. The scene is one almost of a playground, and the designs seem to rejoice in the multitude of possibilities for representing the cupids' bodies: crawling on top of a basket full of fruit, rolling on the floor with arms and legs raised in the air, or leaning pensively on the edge of a vessel, hand to chin, in the pose now most commonly associated with the cherub who leans on the painted edge of the picture frame in Raphael's Sistine Madonna. No two bodies on a single sarcophagus sit, stand, clamber or gesticulate in quite the same way. Scenes and vignettes which are repeated from one sarcophagus to another include a cupid climbing on the back of another to reach into a fruit basket; two cupids fighting by a water basin while others, including the pensive cupid, look on; a cupid wearing the outsized mask of a Silenus to terrify one of his companions; a cupid who opens a cista mystica to frighten another cupid with the snake inside; and a cupid in near-frontal pose who appears to urinate outwards into the space in front of the sarcophagus.

[585] Kranz 1999: 18-19.
[586] The table of sarcophagus distribution by chronology and subject at Zanker 2005: 247 shows a spike in cupid sarcophagi produced at Rome from 150-190 CE and a second, larger spike from 270-310 CE.

Peter Kranz, whose *ASR* volume on cupid sarcophagi with "Dionysiac" themes offers the fullest account of the reliefs and their iconography, emphasises similarities with the imagery of late Hellenistic and early imperial silverware, gems, and painting.[587] The cupids' bodies, much rounder and more compact than those found on the other sarcophagi discussed so far in this chapter, with neat, leaf-like wings, have close resemblances to those found, for example, on objects like the silver vessels of the 1st-century CE Berthouville treasure **(Fig. 3.39)** – and in fact, two of the Berthouville *scyphi* actually show cupids, along with centaurs, among what seems to be the detritus of a feast, an outdoor landscape in which large vessels are positioned haphazardly beneath a canopy of trees.[588] This overlap with the material culture of luxurious feasting is even self-consciously referenced on the sarcophagus now in Pisa, where one cupid dunks the head of another into an outsized cup whose slim handles with supporting struts indicate that it is a piece of silverware.

Most modern viewers of these reliefs have seen them as depictions of the paradisiacal afterlife which awaits the dead child buried in these objects;[589] Kranz, against this, argues simply that '*Die Darstellungen … beschrieben also zunächst einmal in erster Linie eine allgemein idyllische, man könnte sogar sagen, paradiesische Atmosphäre, die geprägt*

[587] Kranz 1999: 76-80 on possible iconographic sources and models; on 128 and elsewhere he states with more certainty the influence of metalwork on the iconography of these sarcophagi.
[588] Paris BnF Inv. Cat. 56.6; 56.7. See Colonna's entry in Lapatin 2014: 46-51.
It might be noted that the sarcophagus now in the Villa Albani has a branch extending onto the relief from the right-hand end, hanging over a table on which a handled jug is placed, and with a wreath suspended from it. (The Berthouville *scyphi* are not used by Kranz as comparanda.)
[589] See Kranz 1999: 120 for bibliography on earlier views.

ist von sorglosen Tätigkeiten und scherzhaftem Spiel.' He disagrees with those who see '*ein gewisses tranzendierendes Element*' in these images, writing that although they incorporate Dionysiac symbolism (such as the Silenus mask and cista mystica, and in one case a thyrsus)[590], they have no specifically sepulchral Dionysiac content.[591]

But while these reliefs may not refer to life beyond death, there is much on them to link this apparently innocuous imagery not only to feasting and play, but also to the tomb and the funerary landscape more broadly. An initial point to make is that there are few precise comparanda in other object genres for most of these scenes – it is more the atmosphere and the body types which have commonalities with silverware etc.[592] With this in mind, I would argue that one major resonance of these outsized containers, most of them displayed on rectangular plinths and interspersed with palm branches, garlands, and cornucopiae, is with the tomb landscape, the cities of the dead which surrounded those of the living, and which were filled with monuments, containers, and temporary offerings to the dead.

It is a connection which is made most explicitly on the Pisa sarcophagus. Looking closely at the band of images around the top of the "silver" cup here, we can make out a cupid, legs and arms outstretched, standing between two griffins **(Fig. 3.38 b)**. Where the

[590] On the sarcophagus in the Palazzo Mattei, above the Silenus mask.
[591] Kranz 1999: 121.
[592] The motif of two cupids fighting by a water basin is known from a carving on a gemstone, however (Kranz 1999: 77 n. 599; Stuveras 1969: Fig. 12), and the cupid wearing a mask is replicated at a large scale in a garden statue, now in private ownership but displayed in the Getty from 2011-2013, which may have come from the Horti Sallustiani and is thought to date to the 1st century CE. *http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2013/antiquities-n09056/lot.43.html* - accessed Nov 16 2017.

design of the relief as a whole seems to deny its sepulchral context, the very object whose form should link it most clearly to pleasure and feasting carries figures – the griffins – which are inseparably associated with death.[593] The sarcophagus carries iconography more appropriate for a cup, while the cup carries iconography more appropriate for a sarcophagus. And the association is taken further: one cupid is shown pushing the head of another into the cup, submerging it, we assume, beneath the wine within; nearby, another cupid lies stretched out, evidently passed out from drunkenness, while a fourth just about manages to support himself on one arm, clutching a heavy head. The image invites – or at least allows – the viewer to reflect on the relationship between drunkenness and death – two states which induce "sleep" of differing sorts, and two processes which involve bodily transformation facilitated by, respectively, the wine cup and the sarcophagus.[594]

The Berlin sarcophagus also carries a scene which, as several scholars have recognised, seems to make reference to the deceased **(Fig. 3.34 c)**.[595] At the centre of this relief is a

[593] The funerary iconography of this cup was pointed out to me by Ruth Bielfeldt. For griffins on sarcophagi see Koch—Sichtermann 1982: 236-237. Huskinson 1996: 60 notes that griffins on the front panels of sarcophagi are almost exclusively limited to children's sarcophagi.

[594] See Elsner 2012: 182-184 on lenos sarcophagi with "spouts," which he sets in a double conceptual context of wine and the body of the deceased, talking about 'the transformation of living material (grapes) into something different, with intoxicating and perhaps divine qualities (wine)'. The cupid komos is another popular sarcophagus topos, both in Italy and in Asia Minor and Attica; the metropolitan Roman examples are discussed in Kranz 1999. Turcan (1966: 576ff) is surely right to see the drooping figures of the drunken and garlanded "cupid Dionysus" as intentionally reminiscent of the body of the deceased, although there is no evidence to support his suggestion that this scene shows the initiation of the dead child into the mysteries. The reference works rather by figuring a changed corporeal and mental state.

[595] Backe-Dahmen 2013 subscribes to this view and offers a bibliography of the many other scholars who have also seen this figure as a substitute for the deceased.

female figure wearing a Greek, double-girded chiton which has fallen from one shoulder, holding a small bird in her hands. While her small stature, round face and plump arms bring her in some respects into the bodily sphere of the cupids, her frontal positioning and rigidity separates her from them, as does her unresponsiveness to the gesture of interaction made by the cupid to her right, making her seem more like a statue than a living protagonist within the scene. Whatever her ontological status – whether she is girl, goddess, or statue – she forms the focus of attention which is so earnest as to suggest reverence or even cult; the cupid who brings her a bunch of grapes might as easily be making his offering to a funerary statue as to a living girl.

Several other aspects of these images have the potential to be read in funerary terms: the garland held up by a flying cupid on the sarcophagus now in the Palazzo Mattei, for example, and the upturned vases on the sarcophagi from Berlin and the Palazzo Mattei, which are a common motif on funerary monuments.[596] The sundial on the Pisa sarcophagus could also be read as referring to the passing of time, and by extension as a reference to death, or to its overcoming through cyclical continuity.[597] But as important as any of these disconnected units of iconography is the scene as a whole. These are landscapes/objectscapes (not necessarily outdoor spaces) whose main articulating features are large containers on plinths of varying heights, surrounded by offerings and herms. Most of these scenes have no centre and no periphery; instead, focus is divided between two large vessels, each of which is the object of quite different attentions from the figures who surround it. It is an environment which is governed by the same

[596] See Huskinson 1996: 117 on the likelihood that overturned baskets refer to untimely death.
[597] There is also a sundial on Kranz Cat. 37, Paris MA 1341.

accretionary logic as a Roman mausoleum or tomb landscape, in which new monuments and offerings are added at irregular intervals and with no necessary hierarchical relationship to those already in place.

If the baskets and water basins are in some sense surrogates for tombs, then the cupids who crawl over them, lean on them, dip their heads into them must also be regarded as in some sense modelling for the viewer the process of encountering and responding to the tomb and the tomb landscape. If this is a correct assessment, then it is a richly variegated model of response: where some cupids sit pensive and melancholy, and some bring offerings, others treat these objects as sites for exploration, investigating playfully and fearlessly the contours of vast vessels characterised as sites of sweet-tasting bounty, containing fruits and wine in place of bodies. There is a place here for the emotion of fear in the face of unknown bodies, in the terrified cupids who fall on their backs in surprise before the snake emerging from the *cistae mysticae* (Villa Albani; Pisa), and the cupids who put up their hands in fright at the approach of a Silenus mask the size of their own body, with hand, snake, or phallus emerging through the hole of the mouth (Villa Albani; Palazzo Mattei; Geneva[598]). These are certainly images which can be read in this context not only as Dionysiac, but also as figuring the unknown contents and terrors of the tomb. But it is fear which is contained and defanged by being channelled through these gentle, eminently un-frightening bodies, and sometimes even the surrogate objects of fear, the mask and cista mystica, are removed from view: on the Berlin and Pisa sarcophagi, we find the cupid with his hands held out in fright and (on the Berlin sarcophagus) his wing feathers on end, but no mask to be afraid of, and on the

[598] Kranz Cat. 14.

Berlin sarcophagus again, a cupid rolls on the floor with arms and legs in the air, but with no sign of the cista mystica which has made him fall over in shock **(Fig. 3.34 b)**. While fear and revulsion are acknowledged and played out in these images, the pleasant scenes, reminiscent of the happy realm of feasting, also take care to remove from view anything which might remind the viewer too forcefully of the real materiality of the tomb, and the real grief, fear, and disgust which a tomb and its contents might provoke. Even the protection of the tomb is sweetened and softened: where other sarcophagi might incorporate gorgons to ward off outside threats, these reliefs rely on the safeguarding capabilities of a urinating cupid, the least threatening of threats imaginable.[599]

Like other cupid sarcophagi, the stone surface consistently reasserts softness, youth, tenderness, and tactility, both in the cupids' own propensity to explore through touch, and also, one might argue, in the ever-thwarted (because stone is never flesh) invitation to the viewer to touch as well. But where other sarcophagi place cupids in positions of secondary or tertiary importance, on the edges and in the interstices of spaces and objects, the self-conscious focus on these sarcophagi on their bodies and activities leaves the viewer with little else to subordinate them to, and with no other lens through which to focalise the tomb and body of the dead. The responses which on the Walters garland sarcophagus were divided between many different figure types are here expressed entirely through the bodies of cupids, and those cupids are far more rounded, more "cute" in their bodily form, than those who held up the garlands. Moreover, where

[599] I find it difficult to accept Kranz's suggestion (1999: 110) that the figure of 'Eros mingens' is intended to figure the male deceased.

the cupids on the other sarcophagus types looked outwards to the viewer or backwards to Selene, these cupids have their attention directed inwards to the world of the image. Only the urinating cupid faces outward, and even then his face does not look towards the viewer. Rather than allowing the viewer to dictate the terms of their own response, these cupids respond for them, anticipating their preconceptions about what this space, this object might be and mean, and seeking to transform and soften any negative feelings which might be provoked by the tomb and the tomb landscape. It seems likely that the insistence on the unthreatening nature of these sarcophagi is linked to the fact that they were designed for the bodies of children, for whom a lighter touch, both literally and metaphorically, likely seemed more appropriate.[600]

A final point to make about these sarcophagi is that, although care is suggested by some of these figures, these fleshy barriers between viewer and corpse are equally about play and movement. It is a dynamic explored both through the individual figures and through the compositional structure as a whole, and the mode of viewing which it invites. The disposal of figures defies any sense of visual hierarchy, with curving body lines and connecting sight-lines leading the viewer from one cupid to the next, offering eyes and mind much to delay them but no real place to settle. The replacement of closed composition and of extractable meaning with bodily response and onward movement, and the reframing of figures and objects which are more familiar as marginalia as primary subject matter, frustrates the desire for narrative resolution, failing to provide an "aha" moment of final comprehension. But this is also a dynamic and an approach embodied in the cupids themselves, who seem unconsciously to perpetuate this

[600] Huskinson 1996.

interested restlessness even without the activating eyes of the viewer. We might even suggest – and this is a point which could be extended to all of the sarcophagi discussed so far in this chapter – that the untroubled vitality of the cupids in intended to substitute for human interaction with the tomb as much as it is intended to encourage it, to reassure the mourners, or to reassure those who commission sarcophagi for their own future corpses,[601] that even when the *vivi* go home, and even if a time comes when the tomb no longer receives visits or offerings, it will still be a site of attention and activity, whether through play, as here, or, more often, through care and watchfulness.

VI. Cupids as connectors and destabilisers on a multi-register sarcophagus relief

The final sarcophagus which I discuss in this chapter brings together on its front surface many of the image types discussed in this chapter: a cupid weapon frieze, heraldic flanking cupids, and a cupid who leads a divine lover to a sleeping beloved – not Selene and Endymion here, but the visually very similar pairing of Mars and Rhea Silvia **(Fig. 3.40)**. Multiple cupid types and bodies are used both to construct physical links between well-known image types, and also to expand and destabilise the accepted horizons of meaning for these images. More than any sarcophagus discussed so far, it offers a sense of the multiplicity and fluidity of cupidic strategies of mediation. It also functions as a prime example of cupidic ability to mediate between different visual

[601] Obviously unlikely to be the case on child sarcophagi such as these, but valid for adult sarcophagi.

registers, a characteristic which will recur on a wide range of object types stretching far beyond the funerary context.

The sarcophagus in question dated to ca. 190 CE, and was found in a tomb chamber on the Via dei Granai di Nerva. It was evidently the result of a special commission or a particularly enterprising workshop, and by most ordinary measures the image surface is a fragmented and disordered one; in addition to the weapons frieze and the cupids bearing a shield it includes both a mythological scene, of Mars and Rhea Silvia, and two scenes from the so-called *vita privata* sequence, a sacrifice and a scene of marriage. The short sides each carry two griffins flanking a baetyl, while the back is undecorated. Perhaps because the sarcophagus fails to conform to any of the categories usual in scholarship, there has been almost no synoptic discussion of the relief, and what comment there has been has focused on the juxtaposition of a mythological episode with a marriage scene.[602] While I would not argue against this understanding of the relief, I suggest that our appreciation of the interrelationships between the different image types may be enriched if we look more closely at the figure type which connects them, appearing in almost every scenario and register presented here. In an image scheme built on disjuncture, it is cupids who offer the possibility of coherence, inviting the viewer to tie together different modes of representation and viewing into a variegated, but also interlinked, space of encounter with the deceased.

[602] Musso in Giuliano 1995 describes the sarcophagus in detail, arguing that the Mars/Rhea Silvia scene compliments the *virtus* of the occupant, and that the shield-bearing cupids have triumphal resonance, but offers little comment on how the different scenes connect to one another; Reinsberg 2006 includes it in her catalogue of *vita humana* sarcophagi (Cat. 89); Stilp 2013: 58 points out the juxtaposition of myth and *vita privata*; Newby 2016: 345 discusses this as an example of the presentation of a Roman myth (of Mars/Rhea Silvia) in intentionally "Greek" terms.

It is a pair of cupids, the largest figure group on the box, who along with the central clipeus almost certainly serve as the first point of visual access to the sarcophagus. The cupids are the only figures on this box to engage with it as object, and therefore as tomb, rather than as image surface. But they also serve as the first point of visual access to the other images: with bodies facing one way and heads another, they invite the viewer to move from scene to scene, to draw comparisons between the different registers of activity, and to dissolve the barriers between the parts. Every other scene on the sarcophagus comes into physical and/or iconographic contact with them. For the central scene in particular, their bodies provide framing architecture: the figures of Mars and of Nyx are tucked into the spaces between their gigantic thighs and bellies. It is a strange new context for the war god, and one which surely forces a phenomenological reappraisal of Mars and Rhea Silvia on the part of the viewer: the strong body and the sexualised body are here pressed directly against, and miniaturised in relation to, the *mollis* form of the cupid. Through the reversal of scale they are freed of much of their grandiosity and marked out as an inset story, of subordinate status in any viewing of the box as a whole. The nature of bodily strength and health are probed and inverted through the juxtaposition.

The large cupids also influence our viewing of the scenes of sacrifice and marriage to either side. Looking outwards towards these scenes, they complete a pattern in which the four heads of the equal-sized figures (cupids and three others) represented to each side of the clipeus face each other in two overlapping pairs: just as the married couple face each other, so the cupid to the viewer's right faces the figure of Concordia who

stands between them, even if the two cannot be imagined as "looking at" one another. The inner figures of these scenes overlap with the wings of the cupids, and in the sacrifice scene, the *signum* of the cupid and the spear of the sacrificant appear to overlap as well. Where the rules of genre and visual register demand that we separate these groups, the image-maker demands that we conjoin them as well, making each separate visual unit a porous one, to be considered both by itself and as part of the larger visual unit of the relief as a whole, in which all figures form part of one stone continuum.

The scenes of Mars and Rhea Silvia, and of the *dextrarum iunctio*, also contain their own cupids, encouraging the viewer to perform further acts of movement and comparison between the different parts of the image surface. Both of these scenes involve the relationship between a man and a woman, and more specifically the moment at which a virgin female is unveiled for her partner, and as such, the cupids here must have connotations of *eros*. But the scenes – and the cupids –also differ in character. The *dextrarum iunctio*, with Concordia in the background and the *tabulae nuptiales* in the hands of the groom, marks this relationship between male and female (each of whom has a portrait face) as a societally-sanctioned contractual bond, even if the thrusting movement and torch of the cupid constitute a reminder of the erotic component of marriage. The scene of Mars and Rhea Silvia, meanwhile, turns the bond between male and female into one which is far more openly erotic, assimilating the married/deceased couple to the mythological protagonists of a militarized, patriotic love-story.[603] It is

[603] Though Newby 2016: 345 points out the Greek visual rhetoric employed for this (rare) Roman myth.

possible that the bunch of dates hanging down from the clipeus and over the lovers is intended to evoke ideas of eternity as well as of love and fruitfulness:[604] perhaps the love of this couple will endure as long as will the offspring of Mars and Rhea Silvia, the Roman people. But the presence of Nyx pouring a libation of sleep over Rhea's head, along with the compositional similarity to the scenes of Selene and Endymion, resituates eternity in a context of death as much as love, and the cupid here is surely to be understood as possessing a similar multivalence to that of Selene's torchbearers.[605] The similarity of the two small cupids demands that we read between these scenes, relating and differentiating these different ways of commemorating the love between the deceased pair, and blurring the boundaries not just between different registers of representation but also between the contractual and the erotic aspects of a sexual relationship, between the eternity of marriage and the eternity of mourning. It is a set of concerns which is reflected, touchingly, on the interior of this sarcophagus: where we would expect to find simply a bare cuboid space inside, we find instead a space divided in two down the middle, equal compartments designed to allow a married couple to lie alongside each other for eternity.

Cupids are not the only visual connectors on this sarcophagus; one might look too, for example, to the mirrored background figures of Concordia and the attendant bearing offerings in the flanking scenes, or parallel the two pourers of libations, Nyx with the bearded heroic male who stands by the altar. Given the evident and unusual idealizing

[604] On date palms as signifiers of rebirth see Pliny *NH* 13.9; in relationship to marriage and male-female relationships Artemidorus *Oneirocritica* 1.77; Philostratus the Elder *Imagines* 9; Pliny 13.7.
[605] Vatican, Museo Gregoriano Profano Inv. 9558. Sichterman 1992 Cat. 99.

tenor of this sacrifice scene, which is the only one on a marriage sarcophagus whose participants are nude,[606] one wonders whether his offering, like that of Nyx, is intended as much for the *Manes* of the dead as it is supposed to be a depiction of the *pietas* of the husband and citizen interred here. The image offers no certain answers.

But the most obvious connector, along with the cupids, is the central shield, its blank circularity acting at once to focalise the eyes and to send them outwards towards the different parts of the image, picking up on other circles in the various different scenes: the upturned patera of the sacrificant, and the decisively juxtaposed shield of Mars, whose outer edge its own outer edge just meets. The war god's spear, jutting out of the mythological scene and across the surface of the central clipeus, reasserts the connection. A shield, perhaps to the same extent as a cupid, is a unstable semantic unit: not only an honorific trophy for the deceased, but also a component part of the armour of any warrior, a more abstract marker of safety and protection, a potential writing surface, and a perfect geometric form.[607]

This particular shield comes under contradictory semantic pressures. As Luisa Musso suggests, it is clearly a sort of private equivalent of the *clipeus virtutis*,[608] and the military standards held by the cupids, as well as the offering of dates, evoke the rhetoric of the trophy. But the visual link drawn between this shield and the shield of Mars in the scene below draws attention to it as well as an object with a potentially military

[606] All sacrificing figures in Reinsberg 2006 are clothed.
[607] On images of Victoria carrying a shield see Hölscher 1967: 98-135.
[608] Musso in Giuliano 1995 sees this shield as a tool for the elevation, the "*innalzamento*" (her quotes) of the deceased.

function, able not only to honour but also to *shield*, to protect. And at the same time it may be regarded as functioning in something like the way in which inscription panels do, serving as a surface of privileged importance in relation to the deceased, a focalising substitute for written word or tondo portrait.

Yet a further function of the shield becomes clear when we look at the lid. The relief frieze here presents the viewer with a line-up of cupids holding weapons, an image which asks them to switch visual registers once again: the genres of fictional narrative, "private life," and semi-architectural framing figures are all inadequate as hermeneutics for the fantastic pageant of these cupids, caught between ornamental, symbolic, and narrative status. From left to right, straining cupids in flowing cloaks hold up a single greave, a helmet resting on a small garlanded column or altar, a breastplate, and a spear. The right-hand end of the frieze is destroyed, but there appears to have been space for a further single figure, probably striding right and looking left as a mirror image of the cupid at the left-hand end. The breastplate is particularly prominent, centrally and frontally positioned, symmetrically flanked, and proportionately much larger than the other weapons; it is hard to imagine the body onto which both breastplate and helmet would fit. But there is no shield, usually a mainstay of these scenes, and frequently assigned the privileged central role. In order to complete the armory, then, the design requires the viewer to read down from the lid and onto the main body of the box, where the clipeus occupies pride of place.

The lid asks the viewer to rethink the clipeus once more, inserting it into a discourse of the disintegration of the body, but also emphasising its protective, shielding capacities.

It is a statement complemented especially by the presence of unmistakeably (winged) phallic quivers and bows of the lid, which similarly engage in a double gesture towards fragmentation and apotropaeic strength. The visual implication of the central clipeus with the scenes both above and below, the weapons frieze and the visit of Mars to Rhea Silvia, serves to bind the lid to the box, declaring it part of a visual and semantic continuum with the rest of the relief surface, and opening the way to comparative readings between two image groups which both grapple, in their different ways, with the problems of representing and ensuring enduring love for, and protection of, the body of the deceased. The viewer who has previously viewed the cupid in the mythological scene as the erotic counterpart of the cupid in attendance at the marriage ceremony is now asked to revise that interpretation, reviewing Mars' guide in light of the cupids who hold and display the cuirass-cum-body on the lid.

The claim of the Grottaperfetta sarcophagus – not entirely unlike that of the Walters Museum garland sarcophagus – is that no single register or conceptual framework is adequate to mediate the encounter with the dead, or to represent the relationship between the couple interred here: not *realia*, nor myth, nor idealised sacrifice, nor the semantically malleable imagery of cupids and weapons. Amid such divergent visualities, cupids, themselves of indeterminate register, become the main tool for keeping channels of meaning open between these different "accounts" of the dead, multiplying further the possibilities of what is already a multiplied response. What may seem to be closed and conventional iconographic units – the *dextrarum iunctio*, the sacrifice, the weapons frieze, the myth of Mars and Rhea Silvia – with more or less accepted and "readable" meanings attached to them, are reframed by the cupids' touch, dynamic

movement, and replication, destabilized and enriched through the flow of flesh and thus of signification. But it is a semantic and visual overload which always leads the viewer back to the soft, oversized bodies and firm stances of the central duo and the shield which they hold.

Looking for connecting trends between the different units of this relief image, certain familiar themes can be drawn out: *virtus*, *pietas*, and *amor*. But there is also a sustained theme of contact and touch, in which cupids play a major role. They are used to figure touch with the substitute body provided by the disconnected pieces of armour; to provide the most prominent tactile barrier between tomb visitor and tomb itself; to figure the (enduring) relationship of marriage between the couple who were (or were intended to be) buried here; to figure, in the Mars and Rhea Silvia image, on the one hand the love between man and woman, god and goddess, but also contact which lasts beyond the death of one of the parties. I have suggested already that Nyx and the armed sacrificant may provide oblique models for the custom of offering libations to the dead, and I would tentatively propose that Mars too may perform a further act of purposeful contact: while he is shielded by the guiding cupid from Rhea Silvia herself, with his right hand he reaches behind him to touch a rocky outcrop. While this action is often found on sarcophagi with this scene, it is rare in other media,[609] and perhaps finds resonance with the tomb visitor, themself unable to touch the body and offered instead only the very different tactile properties of stone. Perhaps on this sarcophagus it is the clipeus, the visual (and semantic) void on the charged and crowded surface of the container for

[609] Cf. Albertson 2012: Cat 46 (Mattei columnar), 47 (Vatican Greg with Selene), 51 (Vatican Belv altar).

the dead, which most obviously invites (and repels) such contact, its smooth surface the relief's most obvious reminder of the cold, hard unfleshiness of the tomb. It is a sensory abyss which only the flanking cupids have any hope of overcoming.

VII. Conclusions

This chapter has considered a range of ways in which cupid bodies are used on sarcophagi. It has looked in particular at cupids who substitute in some way for the dead body, asserting against the decomposition of the corpse a rhetoric of extreme strength and bodily health, and at cupids who engage in acts of care, either towards sarcophagus and corpse, or towards those who visit the tomb as mourners.

Again and again, cupids in the context of the tomb serve, in one way or another, to present an alternative phenomenology to that of the dead body with which the tomb visitor can engage in place of the dead, or through which they can moderate their engagement with the dead. Theirs is not the only alternative phenomenology available – Hercules, nikes, and portraits all offer ways of recorporealising the dead – but that of cupids is one of the most enduring of all, transforming repulsion into attraction and sympathy, and sometimes even the dead body into soft, attractive flesh.

In addition, cupids figure engagement with the sarcophagus to a greater extent than most other figure types, acknowledging rather than dissimulating the tomb's presence

as physical object and gesturing towards ways in which this physical gap between living and dead can be understood and even bridged. In several instances, they provide a mechanism by which different modes or scales of representation can be drawn together: on both the Copenhagen Selene sarcophagus and the multi-register sarcophagus from Grottaperfetta, for example, differently sized cupids are used to create links between the box as a surface for a narrative relief carving and the box as container for the dead. This ability to mediate between the different conceptual levels of the built environment was already a feature of many of the mosaics discussed in Chapter 2, but takes on new resonance on sarcophagi, where the question of contact with the object is fraught with the desires, fears, and taboos inherent to a funerary context.

Cupids' tactile engagement with the sarcophagus as object allows them to reinforce, and offer an alternative to, the care and protection offered by the rigid stone frame to the body within. Sarcophagi from the public display contexts of Asia Minor express these ideals using image types similar to those found in other public architectural settings, while those from Rome are likely to display imagery which is more obviously funerary in tone, even if they still rely heavily on visual metaphor to explore ideas of death. But the underlying principles remain broadly constant: just as Bion's cupid wrapped his wings around the corpse of Adonis, the multiple, soft bodies arrayed along the sides of sarcophagi both shield and embrace the dead. They reassure the *vivi* with their promise that someone will always be there, whether struggling with garlands, sleeping on downturned torch, or clambering unselfconsciously, keeping their tomb a site of interest and gentle affection. Where the will or bodies of human mourners may fail –

where Selene must return from Latmos to her lunar chariot, and her human counterparts from the cities of the dead to their homes and families and ordinary lives – the care of cupids, built into the walls of the tomb, is unceasing. The care which they offer, moreover, is directed towards both the living and the dead. Pace Augé—Linant de Bellefonds, in most instances they seem rather to console than to evoke grief,[610] offering the mourner reassurance that there is nothing to be afraid of within the tomb, and providing models for physical contact with – for touching – the sarcophagus, even as they simultaneously form a physical barrier between living and dead, a humanoid shield which is protective of both parties.

[610] *LIMC* 1986 Vol. III.1: 938-939, quoted at the start of this chapter.

Chapter 4

Soft power: cupids as participants in visual and social hierarchies

I. Introduction

Cupids are often used to encircle, to mediate access to, larger and more important bodies. The most obvious mediated body is that of Venus, and on the mosaics of marine Venus discussed in Chapter 2 the relationship is manifold: cupids serve as a structural, compositional frame for the goddess, presenting her to the approaching viewer, they indicate her divine aura, they serve as her attendants, and they form a buffer zone around her, potentially protecting her from the same viewer's attentions. In the case of sarcophagi too cupids are arrayed around a body, in this case a corpse, and again they inflect and manage the interactions of the tomb visitor with that entity. This chapter looks in more detail at instances in which cupids surround bodies, both within images and in architectural spaces where they surround the viewer or another entity, and suggests that, beneath and through the concealing veils of eroticism and play, cupids may constitute a major channel through which Roman (visual) culture represented, explored, underpinned and questioned its social bodies and hierarchies.

As a basis for thinking about cupids as participants in hierarchical relationships and networks, I begin by asking to what extent and in which image categories they can be thought of – in combination with their infant, divine, and bird-like characteristics – as

fantastical equivalents of slaves. I then turn to instances in which their correspondence to real social actors is less self-evident, focussing on powerful male bodies whose relationship to cupids has received far less attention than that of Venus. Firstly, I discuss a series of Campanian wall paintings on which cupids surround the bodies of male gods and heroes, sometimes together with Venus, and examine the range of ways in which cupids can be used to inflect and define these figures. I then suggest that the 'ornamental' cupids within the domestic built environment also have a role to play in the bodily hierarchies of the house. Finally, I turn to a very different architectural and social context, the temple of Venus Genetrix in Rome, which was rebuilt during the Trajanic period to incorporate a large number of marble relief panels depicting cupids, and ask whether and how the cupids of this imperial temple and forum can also be read as participants in a broader network of power relations.

Underpinning these transitions, between mythological imagery and the social life of the house, and between the domestic and imperial/monumental spheres, is the assumption that fantastical and mythological imagery plays an active social role within the spaces in which it is found, reflecting, constructing, and sometimes interrogating the social as well as the visual ideals of viewers and occupants.[611] Of course, such reflections are always imprecise, and much of the pleasure of mythological and fantastical imagery lies in its ability to transcend "real" social relations – but the impetus to transformation and difference may derive in large part from aspects of lived experience, whether desirable,

[611] So for example Muth 1998.

undesirable, or simply irresolvable.[612] The juxtaposition of such divergent case studies also makes the assumption that there is a high degree of mutual interpenetration between the strategies of self-representation of the *domus* and *familia* on the one hand, and the emperor and imperial family on the other. This is well accepted by now; as Bjorn Ewald and Carlos Noreña write, 'It is remarkable just how many of the statue types and iconographies used in imperial representation could be adapted by private individuals. Thus, for example, private individuals were equated, just as the emperor was, with gods and heroes, both in statues … and on their marble sarcophagi'.[613] Influence seems to have worked in both directions: on the one hand, the values and representational strategies propagated by the emperors seem frequently to have been reproduced by private citizens across the empire,[614] but on the other, the notion of *paterfamilias* served as a major metaphorical framework both for the self-presentation of successive emperors, and for their portrayal by outside observers.[615]

Divine/mythological/fantastical image types are important tools in allowing the delocalised expression of shared ideas between discrete social categories, and no figure has greater reach than the cupid; as we saw on the Grottaperfetta sarcophagus, it provides perhaps the most widely employed unit of shared iconography – of contact – across different modes of representation, equally at home in ornamental frames, *vita privata* scenes, and mythological vignettes. In addition to finding a place within

[612] For a discussion of the "ambivalent" relationship between fantasy and "real" worlds see Hölscher 2000.
[613] Ewald—Noreña 2010.
[614] See e.g. Noreña 2011, which compares the values propagated across time by imperially-issued coins with those found on inscriptions set up by local elites across the western Empire.
[615] See e.g. Roller 2001: 213-288.

competing modes of representation cupids also occupy the spaces between them, placing yet more emphasis on the connectedness and porosity of different image types. In fact, it may even make sense to consider flexibility and transferability themselves in terms of the wider "social" associations of these characteristics: perhaps the task of mediation writ large can never be entirely separated from the human bodies marked out as having "mediating," connecting roles within Roman social life.

II. Cupids as (slave?) attendants

While the bodies and behaviours of cupids draw on a wide range of reference points, their two main points of connection to human society are with children and with slaves or more generalised attendants. This connection with attendance is apparent already in the earliest representations of *Flügelfiguren* discussed in Chapter 1, where ministering figures flock around the bodies of warriors and symposiasts, and it is striking that the incipient rounded, fleshy body-type found on Attic and Italian vases of the later 5th and 4th centuries is conceptualised as a corporeality of servitude and attendance far more than a corporeality of childhood. In the following pages, I offer a broad overview of this connection within Roman imagery of the imperial period, less with a view to comprehensiveness than with the intention of creating a groundline for thinking about cupids' roles within hierarchical visual and social structures more broadly.

By no means all cupids are easily assimilated to slaves, and in some ways it might make sense to think of a sliding scale of overlap between the two groups in imagery of the imperial period, in which some images (or viewers) draw an inescapable connection, some a more subtle one, and others seem to reject the link almost entirely. To begin with some of the most clear-cut examples: the famous 'peddler of erotes' scenes from the Villa Arianna at Stabiae and the House of the Coloured Capitals at Pompeii[616] have been interpreted as scenes of *Kinderhandel* at least since Theodor Birt's 1893 article *Wer käuft Liebesgötter*,[617] relying for their effect on the ambiguous status of the cupids as slave children, poultry (they are picked up by the wings as though they were chickens or ducks), or miscellaneous "loves" being offered up to the buyer's choice **(Fig. 4.1)**. A related composition is found two centuries later on the titular floor of the House of the Peddler of Erotes at Antioch, which shows an elderly man plucking cupids from an idyllic landscape and imprisoning them in a cage.[618] Again, this image asks the viewer to activate the human aspects of the erotes as well as their similarities to birds or other wild animals – aspects which may have been particularly apparent within a region which so directly profited from the slave trade.[619] The motif of "cupid punished," a figure-type known from gems, freestanding sculptures and from a Pompeian fresco in

[616] See Micheli 1992; George 2013:170-173.
[617] Birt 1893 and 1918 (republication of the same under the title *Woher stamen die Amoretten?*; I give page numbers from the 1893 version).
[618] Doro Levi 1947: 191-195. ca. 240 CE.
[619] John Chrysostom in the 4th century (*Homil. in Mt.* 63.4 *PG* 58.608) claims that the rich of Antioch have 1000 or 2000 slaves apiece; while probably an exaggeration (Scheidel 2007: 5) it indicates high levels of slave ownership in this area. In *Ad. pop. Ant.* 16.10 Chrysostom describes the dangers of slave-catchers in the city: "Kidnappers, when they intend to steal and carry off little children, do not promise them blows and stripes, or any other thing of that kind, but offer them cakes, and sweetmeats, and such like, by which the age of childhood is usually gratified; in order that, enticed by these things, they may sell their liberty, and may fall into the utmost peril." (Transl. Stephens 1889.)

which (a usually wingless) Cupid is presented chained and subdued, has also been convincingly and subtly discussed by Michèle George as evidence of elite artistic appropriation and distorted reframing of slavery.[620]

These aspects of the slave experience – capture, sale, punishment – are ones which are rarely found in "realist" representations of slaves,[621] suggesting that cupids may have offered a fantastical and indirect means of representing aspects of slavery which could not be shown more directly. But cupids also share many of the characteristics found in "realist" images of slaves. Jane Masséglia, who analyses body language in Hellenistic art and society, sees the most important iconographic marker for slaves and servants as being the small scale at which they are represented, and describes as repeated features the state of being 'squashed up' and 'peeking out' within images, the acts of holding and proffering, of mirroring the posture of a master or mistress, of visible introspection and 'mindfulness', and of gazing up towards master or mistress – a gaze which usually remains unreturned by the social superior **(Fig 4.2)**.[622] These are all features which can be regularly identified in images of cupids. George, in a book chapter unrelated to her discussion of the "cupid punished" motif, has investigated the representation of Roman slaves in imagery, and although the appearance and even visibility of slaves was at several points a site of contention and uncertainty, and identifying slaves in images is correspondingly difficult, she argues that it is often possible to identify slaves simply by

[620] George 2013. For an alternative explanation of chained cupids on gems see Platt 2007.
[621] George 2011; although she notes (392) that several Roman victory monuments show the moment at which defeated enemy soldiers technically became slaves.
[622] Masséglia 2015: 184-203.

the jobs which they perform and the situations in which they are placed;[623] it is striking that cupids are often shown engaged in closely comparable tasks. Their frequent appearance as the attendants of Venus (and her earthly lookalikes) corresponds to the fashion among elite women to be surrounded by large numbers of slave beauticians. They perform manual labour, working the vintage and appearing in scenes of urban workshop production, most famously in the cupid friezes from the House of the Vettii.[624] They are shown hunting animals,[625] and they frequently act as cult servitors, a role performed by both slaves and the free.[626] Most obvious and numerous, though, are the cupids of the triclinium, the space for which, in a household without financial constraints, the most beautiful pre-pubescent slaves were reserved, 'another luxury commodity' 'recognisable by their long and carefully curled hair'.[627]

In other images from across the Empire, cupids are shown either working alongside slaves or set in parallel to them within contrasted scenes. A funerary relief from Rome, dating to the second half of the 1st century CE, shows a couple reclining on a high kline, attended by three small boys, marked out by their tunics and long wavy hair as slaves, and a flying cupid bearing a wreath, who is on the point of landing on the couch from above **(Fig. 4.3)**.[628] The cupid signals the love between the couple, and the beauty of the woman, but his action is one of attendance, his wreath comparable to the garland

[623] George 2011: 399.
[624] On the relation of these cupids to the industries in which they engage, and to the work of preparing for the banquets which would have taken place in this room, see de Angelis 2011.
[625] George 2011: 404.
[626] Fless 1995: 43-45.
[627] George 2011: 405.
[628] Boschung 1987: 108; Zanker—Ewald 2004: 190-1.

carried by the smallest slave. This couple, then, are the recipients of both divine and human blessings and attentions.[629] Chapter 2 mentioned vine mosaics from the House of Dionysos in Paphos and from the annular vault of S. Costanza at Rome which incorporate both cupid and human workers.[630] On a 2nd- or 3rd-century funerary monument[631] from Uxellodunum in southwest Gaul, a cupid and a human servant are depicted in adjacent panels; the human servant dresses the hair of her mistress while the cupid presents a large round mirror to his.[632] On the Projecta Casket, part of a 4th-century silver hoard excavated on the Esquiline in Rome, a human female surrounded by slave attendants is juxtaposed with the figure of Venus surrounded by cupids, nereids, and tritons.[633] Similarly, the late 4th- or early 5th-century baths of Sidi Ghrib near Carthage places a mosaic of Venus or a nereid attended by two cupids in close proximity to one which shows a human elite female attended by two servants who bring her toilette articles **(Figs 4.4, 4.5)**.

The degree to which this connection can be extended beyond specific examples and into the wider corpus of cupid imagery has received relatively little attention. Jaš Elsner has written on the "mutually fruitful play" between the different scenes on the Projecta

[629] See also *ASR* I, 4 cats. 43, 62, 112 127, 170, 201, 208, 243, 249, 286, 300, 308 and pp19-22, which show and discuss cupid-*delicia* children on kline sarcophagi, who often hold garlands above the reclining figures.
[630] See Kondoleon 1994: 231-69 on the Paphos mosaic; Stern 1958 and Matthiae 1967: 3-53, Pls. I-IX, Figs. 1-26, on the mosaics from S. Costanza.
[631] The monument is undated, but all dated monuments of "the *ornatus* scene" type in Shumka's catalogue are between the mid-2nd and late 3rd century CE, which allows us to assign a probable approximate date to within this period.
[632] Shumka 2000: cat. 100; Espérandieu 1908: 428, cat. 1658.
[633] On this see Elsner 2003.

Casket,[634] where he notes that the human servants, even as they are 'engaged in acts which commemorate their social condition of servitude', are 'implicitly compared with' the fantastical figures.[635] Michèle George acknowledges only a very limited range of images (principally cupid punished and the sellers of cupids) as drawing on this analogy, and does not extend it so far as to see a connection between the images which her earlier book chapter had identified as showing slave work, and the related images which show cupids at the same tasks.[636]

The most generalised application of the connection is found in Birt's 1893 article, where he suggestes that all cupids in Roman art should be considered as fantastical equivalents to *delicia* children, the small children, either slaves or children of a low social class, kept by elite Romans almost as if they were pets, and valued for their charm and impudence. Birt, who was the first to gather evidence for *delicia* children, is unremitting in reading real social roles and relationships onto images of cupids, a methodology which is brought out well in his interpretation of the seller of cupids from the House of the Coloured Capitals at Pompeii. Concluding that the customer has already bought the cupid which hides behind her chair, he rejects the idea that the cupids represent 'loves' on the grounds that she is now inspecting a second cupid and that no respectable woman would ever want more than one love at a time; for Birt, the scene

[634] Elsner 2003: 34.
[635] Elsner 2003: 31.
[636] George 2013. Cairns 1971 also looks at the slave connections of cupids in the very specific context of Propertius *Elegies* 2.29a.

represents an almost-direct transposition of child slaves into a costume of light fantasy.[637]

A moderated version of this generalising approach is offered by Neuenfeldt, whose MA dissertation on cupids on Antiochene mosaics postulates an oblique connection between the many erotes who populate the floors of *triclinia* in Antioch on the Orontes and the slaves who would have walked over these floors attending to the needs of diners.[638] Noting that the number of slaves at elite *convivia* could surpass the number of diners,[639] she argues that the widespread use of cupids in the reception rooms of private houses was part of a display of status which drew on the viewer's awareness of the phenomenon of slaves kept as luxury objects. Neuenfeldt's approach is important in that it acknowledges that the association of cupids with slaves or attendants can be valid in images in which it is not clearly signaled, even if it is to be taken as only part of the matrix of reference points associated with these fantastical figures.

In the pages which follow I first ask why cupids might have provided an attractive lens through which to refocalise many of the behaviours and activities associated with slavery, and then move on to a series of images and architectural contexts in which the connection is far more tenuous, and for which my argument will be not so much that we should interpret cupids as slaves but that they provide a way of representing, problematising, and fantasising social hierarchies more broadly.

[637] Birt 1893: 387.
[638] Neuenfeldt 2009: 28-31.
[639] George 2011: 405 writes about disparities between the large number of slaves in attendance at real banquets, and the smaller number depicted in realist images of banquets.

In cases where cupids function as partial ciphers for slaves, how do they compare to other representations and stereotypes of slavery? Literary characterisations of slaves in the ancient world are by and large negative, especially in instances where an undifferentiated group of slaves is discussed rather than a personal favourite. *Quot servi, tot hostes* was a proverb, and even the stories in which loyal slaves perform acts of extraordinary self-sacrifice for their masters were effective for the very reason that these anecdotes proved that there were exceptions to the rule; the usual assumption was that relations between slaves and the free would be antagonistic.[640]

Against this, cupids are paragons of slave behaviour: where the accounts of the love poets and many other literary genres make much of the difficulties and tensions of elite interpersonal contact conducted via slaves, often focusing on the physical unattractiveness as well as the ineptness of the necessary human middleman or -woman,[641] cupids (and most obviously of course Cupid) can embody an ideal of unproblematic communication between human minds and bodies, of frictionless service powered by desire alone.

What separates them most fully from the human servants of both literature and imagery is their bodies. These infantile forms are quite evidently *not* bodies formed for

[640] The point is made by Roller 2001: 226, with n. 22.
[641] See Rouhi 1999 on slave go-betweens in love poetry. Propertius 3.14 thematises the difficulty of direct contact with his beloved, who cannot be addressed except through a go-between, and always goes about surrounded by a crowd.

"productive" labour.[642] Crucially, they inscribe physiological difference between the powerful and the powerless, reworking the potentially threatening bodies of adult slaves into those of compliant children – and indeed into the winged bodies of an entirely different species.[643] One strategy for reading the cupid as slave would be to follow Birt and to see cupids as the winged counterparts of *delicia*, the young children, usually slaves or of relative low status, kept by the rich as playthings and valued for their corporeal attractions, pertness and impudence, and the relief their presence and conversation offered from the pressures of adult social interactions and hierarchies.[644] These children are described in terms redolent of luxury objects,[645] and seem often to have been extracted entirely, in some cases probably forcibly, from the context of their birth families, redefined entirely in relation to their owner or employer;[646] in this sense, they have a structural resemblance to the non-socially-networked bodies of cupids, appearing as counter-children who embody "childlikeness" without the problems of social embeddedness which would adhere to a child who is seen to have a future and a place in society defined by more than one relationship.[647] While it is highly unlikely that

[642] I use the term "productive" in the sense of Scheidel 2010: 15, where he talks about the higher valuation of male over female slaves and the consequent assumptions we can make about slave involvement in producing saleable commodities.
[643] On the question of perceived physiological distinctions between slaves and the free, see e.g. McKeown 2002; Weiler 2002; Holmes 2014.
[644] Birt 1893. For recent research on *delicia* children see Laes 2003; Laes 2010; on questions of terminology (varying use of *deliciae*, *delicium*, *delicia*, *delicatus*) see Slater 1974.
[645] Veyne 1987: 69 compared them to pet animals, although Laes 2003: 317 gives a more balanced analysis in which he points out that 'no ancient writer actually equates these children with domestic animals.' In Statius *Silvae* II lamentations for the deaths of two *delicia* children are juxtaposed with descriptions of a villa, a favourite tree, and the deaths of a pet parrot and a tame lion.
[646] Bernstein 2005.
[647] Seneca the Younger *Epistle* 1.12.3 gives a particularly pitiless account of a meeting with a former *delicium*, now adult and in poor health, in which it becomes abundantly

Roman viewers understood cupids as direct fantastical substitutes for *delicia* children, the points of similarity between these two idealised and heavily constructed child body types are telling. Both are fantasised and imagined as being without familial or social ties, or in the case of *delicia* as having blood ties which are secondary to their privileged relationship with their adoptive parents or owners,[648] both have elaborate hairstyles in which length and curliness are prized (in contrast to the sober, short and straight hairstyles which elite children were supposed to wear),[649] and both are quite clearly valued for their playfulness and the beauty of their bodies. We know that small boys were dressed up as cupids on occasion ("like the Erotes in paintings", says Plutarch),[650] opening the possibility that the ideals of artwork and elite commoditisation of human children were in certain highly spectacularised contexts mutually reinforcing. Rita

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clear that he at some point lost interest in the slave and forgot all about him, presumably once the slave stopped performing satisfactorily the extremely age- and body-contingent expected role of the *delicia*.

[648] In Statius *Silvae* 1.2 Atedius Melior is represented as grieving even more than the birth parents of his *delicium* Glaucias, while the parents are presented as being entirely dependent on their son, for whose sake they received their freedom. The relationship between master and slave is explicitly turned into a challenge to the primacy of the familial bond:

> *Raptum sed protinus alvo*
> *sustulit exsultans ac prima lucida voce*
> *astra salutantem dominus sibi mente dicavit,*
> *amplexusque sinu tulit et genuisse putavit.*
> *fas mihi sanctorum venia dixisse parentum,*
> *tuque oro, Natura, sinas, cui prima per orbem*
> *iura animis sancire datum: non omnia sanguis*
> *proximus aut serie generis demissa propago*
> *alligat; interius nova saepe adscitaque serpunt*
> *pignora conexis. natos genuisse necesse est,*
> *elegisse iuvat.* (Statius *Silvae* 2.78-88)

[649] Pollini 2003.

[650] Plutarch *Anthony* 26 – Cleopatra sails up the river Cydnus to Anthony, herself dressed as Aphrodite and with young boys dressed as Erotes surrounding her; Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 10.32 – a theatre show (pantomime?) of the Judgment of Paris in which Venus is accompanied by a crowd of cupids.

Amedick has pointed out that for many sarcophagi on whose kline lids reclining figures are accompanied by small children, it is impossible to say for certain whether these children are cupids or *delicia* children, and it is probable that in many cases such a decision was never meant to be made.[651] One might even tentatively ask whether cupids, as disconnected infants of uncertain paternity[652] find their closest real-life parallel in the familial status of slave children: with no legal fathers, and only loose connections to mothers from whom they could be separated at any time, slave children provide the most obvious model for the infant without (legally inalienable) familial relations.

If cupids are slaves, then, the suggestion of their bodies is that slavery is all a childish game, and tasks, spaces, and bodies which in any other context would be seen as degrading or disempowering become a privilege and a pleasure, the most enviable and carefree circumstances imaginable. It is a model which might be productively opposed with another mode of caricaturing Roman slavery, that of the *servus callidus* of comedy. Unlike the soft bodies of cupids, the body of the clever slave is a scarred one, his language is marked by colloquialisms and inventive curses, and he is always only one quip away from a flogging. The product of a time of slave revolt, when relations between the free and the enslaved were far more tense than they would have been in the imperial period, clever slaves function at once to spectacularise the uneasy relations existing between masters and slaves and to assuage fears about the servile population,

[651] Amedick 1991: 20.
[652] See *LIMC* Vol. III.1: 850 for the range of fathers assigned to Eros in the literary sources.

provoking and irritating their owners but ultimately acting in the interests of their superiors and wishing them well.

Kathleen McCarthy has argued that the function of these characters in the plays of Plautus is not only to allow elites to reassert dominance over the slave population, but also to allow them space to play out and reframe their own frustrations with a hierarchical social order. At certain points in the comedies, slaves actually swap roles with their masters;[653] McCarthy argues that the plays provide the free with a space of release from 'the labor of mastering those below them',[654] while William Fitzgerald describes *servi callidi* as 'fantasy projections of the free, not so much portraits of slaves as others through whom the free could play out their own agenda… the place where the free imagined escaping from the demands of "liberal" comportment and indulging in revolt against their own superiors.'[655]

Although their characterisation seems at first sight to be very different, cupids might ultimately be seen as performing a related function to these largely negative stereotypes, offering a way of alleviating the stresses and fears associated with slave ownership and exploitation. They too are often shown behaving in an uncontrolled manner, as on the sarcophagi with scenes of cupids among a landscape of large vessels discussed in Chapter 3 **(Figs. 3.32-3.36)**, or even in what seems to be open rebellion against their superiors, as in the wall paintings of drunken Hercules discussed later in this chapter. But even where cupids rebel, their rebellion is contained by their

[653] e.g. in the *Casina*.
[654] McCarthy 2000: 25.
[655] Fitzgerald 2000: 11.

unthreatening bodies and by their membership of a species which is for the most part extremely compliant to the demands of the scenarios in which they are found. Far more than the *servus callidus*, the cupid asserts the essential childishness and docility of social subordinates,[656] and where the *servus callidus* exists in an individualised relationship of tense symbiosis with his master, cupids, more often shown as a depersonalised collective, on the whole form a far more frictionless unit with the central figure/s around whom they are organised. The *servus callidus* reasserts the need for the 'labour of mastery' even as he provides a space for escaping it; cupids frequently elide it altogether, insisting on the excellence and inherent beneficence, rather than the anxieties, of the (de)social(ised) order, and suggesting an underlying sympathy, both psychological and physical, between masters and subordinates. While the link with the slave body is always incomplete and often sublimated beneath other aspects of the cupid's body and character, I would argue that the frequency with which these figures are represented in attitudes and roles associated with subservience and attendance renders them one of the major images corpuses available to us for thinking about Roman attitudes towards slavery.

One major aspect of master-slave relationships – and of interpersonal relationships more generally – which cupids provide a way of representing and acknowledging is tender touch and bodily care. This must have been a significant responsibility of slave attendants, and it seems likely that elite Roman women in particular would have had far

[656] See Mouritsen 2011: 31 n. 118 for a discussion of the literature on the use of the terms *puer* or παῖς to refer to slaves.

more bodily contact with their *ancillae* than with their spouses.[657] That a similar state of affairs held for men as well is shown by sources dating from the 2nd century BCE through to the imperial period (and no doubt beyond): in Terence's *Heauton Timorumenos* the character Menedemus reflects to his neighbour Chremes on the degree of attention which he receives from his slaves:

> *ubi comperi ex iis qui ei fuere conscii,*
> *domum revortor maestus atque animo fere*
> *perturbato atque incerto prae aegritudine.*
> *assido: accurrunt servi, soccos detrahunt.*
> *video alios festinare, lectos sternere,*
> *cenam apparare. pro se quisque sedulo*
> *faciebant quo illam mihi lenirent miseriam.*
> *ubi video, haec coepi cogitare: "hem! tot mea*
> *solius solliciti sunt causa ut me unum expleant?*
> *ancillae tot me vestiant? sumptus domi*
> *tantos ego solus faciam?*
>
> 'I returned home, sad, pretty upset, and uncertain what to do in my distress. I sat down, and slaves ran up and took off my shoes. I saw others bustling about, setting the table, preparing the dinner, every one of them doing his very best to soothe my grief. When I saw them, I began to think: "What! So many people taking all this trouble just for my sake, to satisfy one man's needs? Should I have so many maids to dress me? Should I be so extravagant when I'm living at home alone?'
>
> Terence, *Heauton Timorumenos* 122-131. Trans. John Barsby.

Elite reliance on the physical attentions of slaves is still a topos in the wall paintings from the triclinium of the House of the Triclinium from Pompeii (V.2.4, Room 15), on one of which contact between masters and slaves constitutes the main interest of the image **(Fig. 4.6)**.[658] In the foreground of the image a diminutive slave supports the collapsing figure of a much larger, drunken guest, while another slave removes the shoes of another guest. A third slave, slightly taller and broader, offers a kantharos to

[657] See Shulka 2000: 112-114 on the intimacy and activity of toilette scenes in Roman art.
[658] See *PPM* Vol. 3: 797-823 on the house, and Ritter 2005 on the social dynamics of the gatherings represented in the three paintings from this room.

the same guest. In the posterior register of the painting meanwhile, an elite male, reclining on the central couch, supports his weight on the shoulder of a smaller, dark-skinned and curly-haired male, presumably also a slave;[659] the body of the smaller figure is pressed close to that of the larger one.

While violent control of slave bodies has been well studied,[660] these more tender interactions between slaves and the free (which still, of course, took place within frameworks of structural violence) have received much less attention. They are not well evidenced in every medium – Masséglia, for example, looking at interactions between slaves and the free on Hellenistic funerary stelai, points up a relief on which a slave engages in physical contact with his master as an exception in need of special explanation.[661] It seems likely that in many contexts there was a degree of discomfort around discussing or representing such close bodily relationships: although physical contact with other people is vital to human wellbeing,[662] and would have constituted one of the most important services provided by domestic slaves, such contact was also the point at which the elite body was at its most vulnerable and exposed. In her essay 'Putting her in her place,' Anne Carson, writing about the problematic status of Greek women in earlier literature, puts it elegantly:[663]

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[659] Ritter 2005: 317 points out the likelihood that this serving figure is characterised as being of African origin.
[660] Witzke 2016 and Lenski 2016 offer overviews of the current state of research on violence against Roman female and male slaves respectively, and provide bibliographies on this topic.
[661] Masséglia 2015: 192-3, Fig. 4.21.
[662] See for example Linden 2015.
[663] Carson 1990: 135, quoting Alfred Crawley, *The mystic rose: a study of primitive marriage*, London: Macmillan, 1902.

> 'As members of human society, perhaps the most difficult task we face daily is that of touching one another – whether the touch is physical, moral, emotional, or imaginary. Contact is crisis. As the anthropologists say, "Every touch is a modified blow." The difficulty presented by any instance of contact is that of violating a fixed boundary, transgressing a closed category where one does not belong.'

Cupids offer a way of addressing these issues. In removing the act and the sensation of tender touch from the distasteful bodies of the real world (or from bodies coded as distasteful due to their lowly status) to a fantastical plane, they are able to characterise such touch as being simultaneously a behaviour of devoted and loving subordinate bodies, and something divine. Among the images and objects discussed so far in this dissertation these dual characterisations perhaps come across clearly on the mosaics of marine Venus from Bulla Regia and Zeugma, where cupids descend from the sky to gently place a wreath on the goddess's head, and on the sarcophagi on which they push, pull, or place reassuring hands on Selene. Further examples will be discussed in this chapter, but before moving away from the question of cupids' specific slave connection to a consideration of their uses for thinking about social hierarchy more broadly, it is worth emphasising the connection of privileged tactility and the associated emotional closeness with *delicia* children – in some ways an equally fantastical, mythical species. The sources which we have on these children characterise them in terms suggesting that they received far more physical affection and intimacy than would be usual for elite children – or, certainly, that they could be represented with a far greater degree of levity and intimacy –[664] and Laes, who has produced much of the recent work on them,

[664] Laes 2017 discusses 'touching children' among the free population in Roman antiquity; while he argues that children are in certain contexts assigned a privileged degree of tactility, the evidence which he gathers suggests that their association with touch is in fact relatively limited. On sexual relations between adults and (especially

suggests that 'some parents gave the affective attention they did not or could not grant their own children (e.g., by dislocation of families, being entrusted to nurses) to … *delicia*.'[665] Cupids, responding to a related set of needs and desires, appear to have elevated tender care to near-universal prominence within the fantastical registers of Roman visual culture. But in locating this tenderness in a non-human body, caught between childhood, animality, divinity and servility, they indicate ambiguous and unresolved attitudes towards such caring touch, suggesting that it was more easily represented once separated from the socially problematic bodies who usually administered it in real life.

III. The protagonist surrounded: male mythological heroes with cupids in paintings from Pompeii and Herculaneum

The lens of slavery is one way of thinking about the peripherality of cupids, their orientation in relation to larger bodies, and their tendency to engage in acts of care towards those bodies, but these characteristics also connect into broader dynamics relating to bodily hierarchy, both within the sphere of the visual arts and in wider social

delicia-)children Laes 2011: 222-268 (p222: 'In ancient sources, we find hardly any references … to sexual contact with infants or very young children.') and George 2013: 169-170, who points out that the five-year-old girl Erotion is discussed in Martial 5.37 in terms reminiscent of the eroticised *puellae* of love elegy. She argues that '…images of naked children [including "Cupid Punished"] were [not] intended to be viewed in the first instance as erotic,' but that 'Slave ownership bestowed the licence, whether exercised or not, to satisfy every unbridled appetite; *deliciae*, like all luxury goods, were reflections of that power and the forbidden pleasures it afforded the slave owner, by opportunity and by law.'

[665] Laes 2003: 316.

contexts. An excess of subordinate bodies is positively connoted as indicative of influence and *auctoritas* in Roman texts and images of many periods; as Timothy O'Sullivan has shown, a key marker of elite identity in the late Republican period was the activity of walking to the forum surrounded by one's friends and clients, the more the better.[666] In contexts like this, the elite body is defined as much by the movement which goes on around it, and by the reactions of subordinate bodies to its presence, as by its own actions. Where such a rent-a-crowd is felt to be necessary in imagery, it is very often cupids who provide it – and who, in so doing, offer new perspectives from which to understand the larger, focalised bodies around which they are positioned.

In order to examine these issues in more detail, I will begin by examining a series of fresco paintings from Campanian houses, and in one case a public building, on which cupids surround male mythological and divine protagonists: Theseus, Hercules, Adonis, and Mars. In the latter two cases it is actually a couple who are depicted, as Adonis and Mars are both accompanied by Venus. As these images will make clear, a crowd of cupids can be used to provide the mythological body with definition and characterisation of a sort which it cannot achieve in isolation from other bodies; my aim here is to unpick something of the range of characterisation which cupids have to offer to these focalised figures, and by extension of the ways in which elite bodies more generally can be defined and made meaningful by the lesser bodies which surround them.

[666] O'Sullivan 2011, Chapter 3.

a. Theseus, the minotaur, and cupid-like children

On a panel painting from the House of Gavius Rufus at Pompeii (VII.2.16, room 17, east wall of exedra off the peristyle garden), the victorious Theseus is shown at the moment of emerging from the labyrinth, the defeated minotaur lying at his feet.[667] This is usually regarded as being an image about looking **(Fig. 4.7)**.[668] Emerging from round the side of the building which Theseus exits is a crowd of spectators, mostly women, with an old man and a young boy at their head; two more young boys clasp the hand and foot of the hero. The image focuses not on narrative but on the moment, almost of epiphany, at which Theseus is revealed to the eyes of onlookers as a hero, and as Katharina Lorenz has noted, it presents him as a generic hero and saviour,[669] the specificity of his heroic act reduced to a (literal) footnote in the form of the recumbent minotaur.[670]

But it is also an image which very clearly thematises touch in its constitution of the heroic body. The two young boys on either side of Theseus clutch him tightly, while the old man who stands at the front of the waiting crowd reaches out the most cautious of fingers towards – though does not actually touch – the tip of Theseus' cloak. The woman behind the old man holds onto his shoulder in turn, almost as if by touching him she can vicariously make contact with the body of Theseus. A togate youth at the front of the crowd also looks on, but the children who are actually permitted to touch – and clutch –

[667] See *PPM* Vol. VI: 530-85 on the house more generally; 560-8 on exedra *o*, in which this painting was found.
[668] E.g. Michel 1982; Sharrock 2002: 265; Elsner 2007: 90-91.
[669] Lorenz 2008: 94.
[670] Another image of the victorious Theseus flanked by children is found at the Villa Imperiale, Lorenz 2008 K82a0. For images of the victorious Theseus from Pompeii and Herculaneum, including those without surrounding children, see Lorenz 2008: 90-93.

Theseus' body are clothed in a manner quite unfamiliar from children's portraiture. Although shown without wings and probably not supposed to be directly assimilated in this way, the body and hair of the left-hand boy are clearly modelled on those of a cupid. This is a representation of Theseus which asks the viewer to dwell on the materiality of the hero's gleaming body, on the muscles picked out with white highlights, to contrast the body beautiful with the monstrous form beside it, and even to imagine what it might feel like to touch – or, like the old man, to stretch out one's hand towards – the hand which slayed the minotaur. And it is the cupid-like children, more than any other figures in the composition, who through their touch and the bodily contrast which they present with Theseus provide the bridge by which the hero can be metaphorically grasped by his spectators, both adored and elevated above, but also reintegrated into, held down within, wider society.

A second painting of Theseus **(Fig. 4.8)** offers an even closer focus on his form and substance. This time the human adult spectators have gone, although an unidentified female deity or personification looks on from a rocky perch,[671] and there are at least four children surrounding Theseus, a combination of clothed and unclothed figures. Even more than in the painting from the House of Gavius Rufus, the child on the left in particular seems almost to test the weight of Theseus' enormous arm, while one to the right puts his hand around Theseus' club, his tiny fingers contrasting with the vast form of Theseus' own hand, which effortlessly keeps the weapon in the air. It is almost as if the body as a whole is too large and magnificent to be encompassed in its entirety by a single look: instead, each separate part must be examined, held, and adored, each knee,

[671] Moormann 2011: 133 cautiously suggests that her quiver may identify her as Crete.

elbow, or forearm requiring special honouring of its own. The body of the minotaur lies even closer to Theseus than in the painting from the House of Gavius Rufus, between his feet and those of the cupid-like child in the left-hand part of the image, and thus invites an even more direct bodily comparison between beauty and beast.

The relationship of the cupid-like children to Theseus takes on a particular significance in the display context of this image. The painting comes from one of the two Augustea in Herculaneum, a structure dedicated to the imperial cult and consisting of a large piazza enclosed on three sides by a portico, with a fourth side, where visitors would have entered, broken up into a series of arches flanking a central stepped podium **(Fig. 4.9)**. The portico contained multiple bronze statues of emperors, including Augustus, Claudius, and Titus, and the walls were decorated with a large number of mythological scenes,[672] stylistically datable to the 60s or 70s CE.[673] At least two of these scenes, showing Achilles with Cheiron and Marsyas with Olympos, have been associated with statue groups from the *Seapta Iulia* at Rome, and it has been suggested that a conscious imitation of the imperial structure was intended.[674] The image of Theseus is one of the two largest paintings in the building, and was located in an apsidal niche at the end of one of the long porticoes, against the back wall; a parallel niche on the other side carried an image of Hercules finding Telephus. In keeping with this setting, and as can be seen in the reproduction, the plane of the picture curves along the surface of the niche.

[672] Moormann 2011: 126-137 offers an extensive discussion of this building, with a summary of earlier discussions on the significance of its wall painting program.
[673] Moormann 2011: 134 dates it to the reign of Vespasian or Titus (76-79 CE), but I do not entirely follow his logic.
[674] Najbjerg 2002; Pesando 2003.

In this context, the painting's focus on tactility gains new significance. Placed in the centre of a curving niche and right at the front of the picture plane, the figure of Theseus tests the boundaries between painting and sculpture. The touch of the cupid-like children is not just a means of expressing awe and gratitude towards the body of the hero, but a way of asserting the figure's material presence, proclaiming it as a three dimensional form which makes claims on the haptic perceptive capacities, as well as the emotions, of the viewer. In bringing Theseus close to the viewer, the picture invites them to join the young boys in honouring him, if not with direct cult then at least with admiration for his role as a civic hero and for his statuesque form.

These images of Theseus work to prop up and proclaim bodily integrity, encouraging a perspective of awe and adulation on the part of the viewer in which recognition of the hero's *virtus* is nested within an appreciation of the beauty and strength of his body. But the extent of Theseus' beauty and *virtus* have a visible imprint beyond the hero's own body: they are also reflected in – and established by – the state of the subordinate bodies which come into contact with him. The good and powerful body, these images suggest, works a little like a magnet for lesser, more impressionable bodies. If these bodies are in order, it is a good sign that the body and person of the hero are as well.

b. Hercules, Omphale, and cupids

The range of interaction between cupids and heroes is not limited to awe. In an image type known from two examples at Pompeii (VII.16.10, 'Excavation of the Prince of Montenegro', tablinum; VII.1.25.47, House of Siricus, room 10 (exedra off atrium courtyard)) **(Figs. 4.10, 4.11)**, the drunken Hercules lies stretched out in a sacro-idyllic setting, garbed in what seem, at least in the painting from Pompeii VII.16.10, to be women's clothes, and watched from a distance by a group of three female figures.[675] The central female is usually described as the Lydian princess Omphale, famous for persuading Hercules to exchange clothing, and thus genders, with her, but she is seen here without the club and lion-skin common to most of her images, and the dramatic emphasis of the picture is firmly on Hercules. In the painting from the House of Siricus the women are joined by a separate group of male figures, clearly Bacchic, with one of them, second from the right, seemingly the lead symposiast and perhaps intended to represent the god himself.[676] In both images, the left-hand female looks out at the viewer, inviting us too in to join the company around the recumbent hero. Like the painting of Theseus from the House of Gavius Rufus, these are pictures which offers their viewers the opportunity of looking at looking – here, of reflecting on the mode of reflection appropriate when faced by a drunken hero in a sacro-idyll.

Unlike in the painting of Theseus, the cupids of these images are marked out as actors in their own right rather than simply as focalisers of the viewers' gaze onto the body of the hero. The ten cupids in each picture are engaged in stealing Hercules' attributes and

[675] VII.16.10, 'Excavation of the Prince of Montenegro': *PPM* Vol. VII: 480-3. VII.1.25.47, House of Siricus: *PPM* Vol. VI: 228-353; 255-297 on exedra 10, in which the painting was located.
[676] For other scenes of the drinking contest between Dionysus/Bacchus and Hercules see *LIMC* Vol. III: Dionysus/Bacchus Cats. 109-112.

accoutrements: one cupid steals his wreath, one drinks from his wine-cup, four hang his stolen quiver onto a branch above the central altar, and four more manoeuvre his club in the same direction. Hercules raises his arm, perhaps in protest, but essentially seems not to notice the thefts, or at least not to the extent of doing anything about them. As in the case of Theseus, the cupids are used to give a sense of the physicality of Hercules' body, whose massiveness is expressed by the contrast of scale and, most pointedly, through the sub-scene surrounding his club, which is so heavy as to be barely transportable by four cupids working as a team.[677] But although the cupids highlight his might, they also challenge this paradigm of bodily strength: their rebellion is key to figuring the body in a state of collapse, its integrity disintegrating as it loses control of its senses, its physical attributes, and its subordinates all at the same time.

Of course, this is fundamentally intended as a playful scene. The interventions of the cupids are benign: they threaten only the edges and the accoutrements of the hero, not the body itself, and having stolen his weapons they then proceed to dedicate them at a nearby altar; the pinax leaned against the side in the painting from VII.16.10 underscores the fact that the quiver and club are in the process of becoming offerings. Moreover, the weakening of the body through alcohol and through lust may well have been seen in a sympathetic light by guests in these domestic reception rooms, even if the painting from the House of Siricus offers in the background the closely comparable recumbent figure of the "good" symposiast, the possible Bacchus second from right in the group of male onlookers, directly behind Hercules, who drinks with his companions

[677] Cupids are often shown attempting to lift the club of Hercules, sometimes in images where Hercules himself is absent; cf. *LIMC* Vol. III: Eros/Amor, Cupido 613-5.

and not to excess. After such extreme labours as those of Hercules, one might argue, the celebration must be correspondingly intense. But however judgment falls on the morality of the scene, it is significant that self-control and its loss are expressed here as a function of the relationship between heroic and subordinate bodies.

It is surely significant that the dissolution of bodily integrity which cupids are used to figure is associated with a challenge to the integrity of the image composition itself. Where the touch and gaze of the cupid-children around Theseus served to refocus the attention of the viewer on his body, the movements of the cupids in these images serve almost systematically to distract attention from the body of Hercules, leading the gaze off into intricate secondary episodes. Physical, cognitive, and potential moral incapacitation are linked not only to the collapse of social order around the hero, but also to the disintegration of visual unity in the image as a whole.

c. Adonis, Venus, and cupids

A third species of relationship between a male protagonist and the cupids who surround him is figured in an image of Venus and Adonis (Pompeii VI.7.18, House of Adonis, peristyle) **(Fig. 4.12)**.[678] It is clear that one function of these cupids is to emphasise and service the love between this pair, reunited on Olympus after the death of Adonis in a

[678] *PPM* Vol. IV: 399-432; 428-32 on *viridarium* 14, in which the painting is located; Lorenz 2008: 173-80 on this and the other Pompeian paintings of Adonis surrounded by cupids.

boar hunt, and the cupid who peeps over Venus' shoulder is presumably to be viewed as an attendant of her amours. But a major concern of these cupids, and a concern which constitutes the main action of the painting, is the activity of bandaging up Adonis' wounded body. As in the images of Theseus, these cupids take a limb apiece, with one concentrating on the left leg and one on the right arm, but here the fact that the attention to the leg clearly has a healing intention encourages the viewer to see the cupid who attends to the arm as possessing a healing touch as well; the tone is as much one of tending to, supporting, and reconstituting the beautiful body as it is of celebrating it. Where Hercules was metaphorically pulled apart, Adonis is literally put back together by the figures who surround him.

In the two other versions of this scene, from the House of Bacchus (Pompeii VII.4.10, room 8) **(Fig. 4.13)** and the House of the Coloured Capitals (Pompeii VII.4.31, 51, room 22),[679] the bandage has gone and the relationship of cupids to hero seems to be much closer to that of the Theseus scenes: their gestures seem to be as much of awe as of care.[680] It is only knowledge of the myth which could have suggested to some viewers that the admiration of these figures, who gesticulate towards and test the physical stuff of Adonis' body, may be the result not simply of his beauty but also of appreciation of its resurrection and reconstitution after a violent death. Where in the painting from the House of Adonis the wholeness of the body was dependent on the good offices of cupids,

[679] Pompeii VII.4.10, House of Bacchus: *PPM* Vol. VI: 978-81. Pompeii VII.4.31, 51, House of the Coloured Capitals: *PPM* Vol. VI: 996-1107;1030-1044 on exedra 22, where the painting of Adonis is located.
[680] Lorenz 2008: 178 points out that there is no indication of death in these images.

here it is the recognition and appreciation of that wholeness which they are used to signal.

The House of the Coloured Capitals offers a further lens for thinking about this Adonis. While the juxtaposition is unlikely to be an intentionally programmatic one, the same room contains a scene showing a seller of cupids. Within this space, then, there was already a sense of the intertwined characteristics of cupids both as mythological attendants and as living commodities.

d. Mars, Venus, and cupids

It comes as no surprise that several of the Pompeian paintings of Mars and Venus, the most (in)famous of mythic lovers, also include a crowd of encircling cupids – and perhaps also as no surprise that these cupids offer a more complex and multi-stranded characterisation of the divine couple than was the case for the image types discussed above. In three paintings of Mars and Venus from Pompeii (V.1.8, House of the Epigrams, room O; VI.16.15, 17, House of the Ara Maxima, room G; IX.7.20, House of Caprasius Felix and Fortunata, room I) **(Figs. 4.14-16)**, five cupids surround the two deities, who are seated at the centre of a rocky landscape in an image composition similar to that found in several of the Adonis paintings. Cupids are in fact one of the main elements which can be used to differentiate between these two image types: as Lorenz points out, on some images which adopt this composition for the two central

figures, the identity markers which tell us whether the young man at Venus' side is Mars or Adonis would probably escape all but the most astute of viewers.[681]

The divine couple in the Mars and Venus images are represented in a frontal, static, statuesque pose, with a minimum of physical contact and tenderness between them. Venus raises a bent-back right arm above her head in a gesture associated with passivity and receptivity to outside attentions,[682] while Mars holds her left arm with his left hand, and reaches out his right arm behind her to hold up his robe, using it to frame Venus' body and declare it the most important subject of the picture. It is a gesture of formality which creates distance between the two figures, and which is seemingly aimed at the optical appreciation of the viewer rather than at the lovers' own pleasure. Interestingly, on paintings of Mars and Venus which incorporate only a single, flying cupid – a figure more easily interpreted as the love god – or none at all, the couple is shown in more affectionate relation to one another, with Venus putting her arms around Mars' shoulders and Mars in at least one case holding Venus round the waist.[683]

While Mars and Venus initiate a frontal, formal encounter, the cupids offer alternative, oblique perspectives on the divine lovers – both in visual and in narratival/tonal terms. As on the images of Venus and Adonis, one cupid emerges from behind the lefthand shoulder of the posterior figure – in this case Mars – while another approaches from the

[681] Lorenz 2008: 173-180. A painting of Perseus and Andromeda from the House of the Coloured Capitals also employs an almost identical composition, in which only the gorgoneion which Perseus holds over the heads of the couple serves as a specific narrative marker (Lorenz 2008: 34-5, Cat. K48bW, Fig. 2).
[682] Gury 2006.
[683] See Lorenz 2008 Figs. 59 (from the House of the Cithara Player, I.4.5 and 25); 63 (from the House of Siricus, VII.1.47); 64 (from the House of the Vestals, VI.1.7).

right hand side of the anterior figure – in this case Venus. These figures provide a sense of the attractiveness of the pair, and also of the high status which is accompanied by the ministrations of attendants. The left-hand cupid in each painting offers a pyxis to Venus, a female-specific motif common on images of women at their toilette, and indicative, among other things, of the effort and expense which goes into the production and maintenance of female beauty.[684] His posture is one of subservience, and encodes recognition of the gap between his own status and that of the goddess whom he approaches. The right-hand cupid, meanwhile, holds in his hand Mars' javelin, which is several times his height, and looks down on the couple from above, with a look and posture which suggest benign protection and watchfulness – as well, perhaps, as a degree of voyeurism.

The other cupids expand the available perspectives on the scene still further. The two figures in each of these paintings who sit in the foreground trying on the helmet surely gesture to the illicit aspects of the meeting: in exploring this object which corresponds to a part of Mars' body, they hint at the bodily exploration, the "trying on" of other bodies, which will take place between the lovers. *Pace* Lucian, who in his description of Aëtion's painting of Alexander and Roxana described cupids playing with weapons as a reference to Alexander's other love, war, there is a distinctly erotic aspect to this play. It is an aspect made most explicit in the paintings from the House of Caprasius Felix and Fortunata and House of the Epigrams Graeci, where in the top left hand corner of the image a cupid sits with Mars' sword held across his lap – a piece of marginalia surely intended as a possible dirty joke.

[684] On the concepts of *cultus* and *ornatus* in the lives of Roman women see Shulka 2000.

The variety of approaches which the cupids model perform a vital role in supplementing, and even determining, the main narrative and emotional dynamic of these scenes. One way of describing it might be to see them as offering a range of different possible 'readings' of the mythic couple. As well as simultaneously buttressing and challenging the gods' *auctoritas*, and suggesting the voyeuristic pleasures of the scene to the outside viewer, they offer displaced characterisations of Venus and Mars which the conventions of divine representation are unable to accommodate, hinting at the playfulness and eroticism of the adultery myth which will always remain a subtext within images of the pair. It might even be argued that, in relocating interaction and affection away from major bodies and rechanneling them through their own, cupids function not only as ministrants, dependants, or respondents, but even, almost, as extensions of or alternatives to the focalised bodies within a composition. Richard Brilliant has written of the 'appendage aesthetic' within Roman portraiture, whereby clothed bodies are treated as units with little relation to the 'appendages' which emerge from their folds – most frequently the head and arms.[685] While the point can never be more than suggestive, we might ask whether in some cases, it makes sense to consider cupids (and perhaps other minor figures as well) as partially taking on the role of 'appendages' to a major figure, subsuming in their own bodies much of that figure's capacity for movement, expressiveness, and touch.

[685] Brilliant 1963: 26-31.

e. The protagonist surrounded: conclusions

Cupids frame and touch bodies in different ways. They can serve as a centripetal, focalising frame or as a centrifugal, distracting one. Their touch can vary from reverent to mocking to supportive and healing. They ask the viewer to think not only about the desirability of the body, but also about its health, physical integrity and substance, and moral characteristics, and they express these characteristics through their own order or disorder. In images like those of Mars and Venus – but also in *vita privata* images such as the nuptial scene on the Grottaperfetta sarcophagus – they provide a way of suggesting interpersonal contact of sorts which for whatever reason cannot be shown directly through the bodies of the image protagonists, providing dynamism for otherwise static bodies.

On the one hand such multiple, parergonal figures can be seen – as they often have been – as aura, as an expression of the psychological and emotional state of the protagonists.[686] But they also suggest that affect, aura, psychology, and character can be rooted in networks of bodies as much as in an isolable, individual self. On this viewing, the immediate order and decoration of the body become cognate with a much wider footprint of beauty, order or disorder – an idea which fits well with the expansive concepts of *ornamentum* and κόσμος discussed in Chapter 1, which place ornament within the same lexical category as natural order and even, in the case of κόσμος, good behaviour.

[686] e.g. *LIMC* Vol. III.1: 1043.

Cupids are not the only external figures who are regularly used to characterise the male body, and a productive contrast can be made with one of the most well-studied sets of images of surrounded male mythological protagonists: North African and Iberian mosaics of Achilles on Scyros and of Hylas with the nymphs of Mysia, which Susanne Muth has grouped together under the title of *ergriffene Männer*.[687] Rather than focusing on the narrative aspects of these scenes Muth looks instead at the ways in which the protagonists function as suggestive social bodies within lived domestic space, as men who are *ergriffen* by the women who surround them – a word which encompasses meanings of grabbing and seizing, but also of clasping and embracing. It is a category which could be expanded to include other images in which the main subject is a male body placed under pressure from the figures who surround it, such as Actaeon, torn apart by his own hounds in the presence of a company of nymphs, or Pentheus, torn apart by the women of Thebes. Where the Achilles and Hylas images offer relatively sanitised depictions of these figures, which Muth sees as emphasising their *virtus* and eroticism rather than the present and future dangers which await both of them,[688] Actaeon and Pentheus are quite clearly bodies under immediate threat. It is a group of mosaics which takes as a major *topos* male bodily agency and integrity, and the extent to which this is defined by the relationship between the protagonist himself and the multiple female bodies which surround, threaten, and constrain him, contrasting immediate eroticism with a narrative drive (underplayed by Muth) which will lead either to the subjugation and *sparagmos* of the male body, or to its escape into unscathed adult masculinity and domination over the women, and by extension the

[687] Muth 1998.
[688] Muth 1998: 185, 193 and *passim*.

domestic sphere, who/which threaten(s) to thwart this transition. In some instances, different floors within the same house will carry mosaics which contrast two of these figures, inviting dialogue between the different situations of their protagonists: Hylas versus Actaeon in the House of Venus at Volubilis,[689] and Achilles versus Pentheus in a recently excavated house from Nemausus (Nîmes).[690]

While for Achilles, Hylas, and Pentheus the surrounding figures are female, and sexual (in)continence plays a major role in the definition of the protagonist, where cupids are used as surrounding figures, the immediacy of erotic touch is muted and mediated. Where the pull of women threatens to weaken and destroy the male body, the touch of cupids is restorative and benign, even where the figure whom they surround is shown like Hercules at a moment of extreme lack of self-control. But the basic principle of the protagonist whose corporeal integrity and potency is proclaimed and even determined by the touch of the bodies around him remains constant. In both cases, the body and destiny of the mythological hero, and by partial extension, the idealised elite male, are closely wrapped up in the bodies of the "lesser" figures who surround them, defined from outside as much as through their own actions.

[689] Muth 1998: 103-108.
[690] Boislève et al. 2011.

IV. The labour of ornament

If cupids can provide ways of replicating, transforming, and thinking through social hierarchies, it makes sense to ask whether this can transfer into a more fully embedded architectural context, influencing the way in which viewers understood the disconnected "decorative" cupids, with little or no narrative context or scene-setting, which appeared on walls, ceilings and floors in the Roman house and beyond.

Looking back to the mosaics of Chapter 2, it is striking that the pavements which show cupids working within vines present as landscapes of productive work the reception rooms and peristyle courtyards of the wealthy, spaces supposedly devoted, at least for their elite users, to *otium*. The leisure of figures like Dionysus and Icarius, sedately positioned in the shade of the vine in the House of Icarius at Utica **(Figs. 2.3 a, b)**, is defined in contrast to the busy-ness in the space around them. Something similar is true for the marine mosaics, such as that from the House of the Drinking Contest **(Figs. 2.20, 2.21)**, on which cupids fish in an orderly way, regularly dispersed across floor and landscape: the pleasures of the ordered, productive landscape and the pleasures of visual regularity and pattern are presented as closely connected to one another, even as these floors incorporate and embrace moments of divergence from regularity and of the failure of or rebellion against productivity.

If we consider the Utica pavement less as agricultural landscape of myth and more as an ornamental carpet, a related dynamic remains: the loosely geometric design, with its symmetrical pattern of matched vine stocks intertwining to reach a central point, relies

for its order and continued existence on continued tending and attention. It is a sense which is taken to an extreme on the mosaic from the House of Bacchus and Ariadne from Ostia **(Figs. 2.1 a, b)**: here, the bodies of the cupids are fully integrated into the stylised vegetal ornament, inextricable from it to the extent that that ornament appears to tend itself, constantly performing the labour of its own decoration. Not only is labour represented in relation to the floor, but the floor *is* a continual work of labour.

This idea of servile ornament fits into a broader conceptual continuum of Roman human-object relations. Varro quotes a common categorisation of slaves as "articulate tools",[691] and the idea of equivalence between living servants and constructed ones is illustrated by the near-life-size lamp- or tray-bearing bronze ephebes/slave boys popular under the Empire **(Fig. 4.17)**.[692] Images often juxtapose "ornamental" and "real" serving figures, playing on the fact that representation in a single medium blurs the boundaries between the two; a second painting from the House of the Triclinium in Pompeii shows one such tray-bearing statue alongside living slaves in attendance on a group of diners **(Fig. 4.18)**, while the Hellenistic funerary relief illustrated above **(Fig. 4.2)** juxtaposes human maids with "architectural" caryatids. The visual rhetoric of such figures, both in freestanding form and when incorporated into architectural ornament, amounts to a continual insistence on the blurred boundaries between the human and the constructed environment, and between decoration and labour.

[691] Varro *De Re Rustica* 1.17.
[692] See Mattusch 2017 for a discussion of several of these statues.

I would argue that the sort of self-sustaining figural decoration such as that found in the House of Bacchus and Ariadne is part of the same phenomenon as these anthropomorphic tray- and lamp-holders. It is a mode of representing labour which goes even beyond the lamp-holders in that it actually vegetalises its subject, dehumanising the subordinate bodies which it represents and presenting them not only as part of the furniture but as part of the immobile built environment. Implicit in the uselessness of the task which they perform is the idea that the owner or occupier of the space has the capacity to use other bodies not only for productive labour, but also for purely decorative purposes – an idea with particular potency in the triclinium, where we often hear of an unnecessarily high ratio of slaves to guests.[693] Perhaps, too, ornament, often an index of power and status,[694] gives more pleasure to its viewers when it contains within itself the visual evidence of the extent of the labour involved in its making.

While cupids holding up vegetal ornament are clearly presented as subordinate to the human occupants of a space, there are also power relations inherent in the pervasive presence of cupids within Roman ornament more generally, even where they are not shown engaged in tasks associated with slaves. Where cupids flit across ceiling coffers, or hover and prance their way across single-colour planes in wall paintings,[695] they contribute to the viewer's sense of being the figure around whom a room revolves. In

[693] D'Arms 1991: 177 writes that 'the crowd of slave often outnumbered the diners' at Roman banquets.
[694] Swift 2009: 4.
[695] As in e.g. the House of the Ancient Hunt (Pompeii VII.4.48, tablinum 11, south wall) or the House of the Gilded Cupids (Pompeii VI.16.7, 38, Room I, Room Q), but also in wall painting from other times and places, as for example Terrace House 2, Residential Units 1 (Vault A) and 5 (Room 18) at Ephesus.

allowing the viewer to visualise circuitous routes and alternative gaits which might be taken through these spaces, they set off the primacy of elite human actors, able to move straight through these spaces without deviating through their margins. Moreover, the task of mediation is itself one with social connotations, and we might ask whether the mediation between different visual zones effected by cupids corresponds to the roles of slaves as go-betweens, able to slip between people and architectural spaces in ways impossible for elites.

Of course, intrinsic to this subordination and mediation is a sense in which cupids are privileged occupants of the built environment. The cupids who move through the non-narrative margins of wall paintings and mosaics can be seen as calling attention to the shortcomings of the elite human viewpoint – which is constrained both by the human viewer's inability to participate fully in the represented space of the decorated surface, and by the socially embedded habitus which restricts the elite viewer to particular types of movement and behaviour. Cupids can explore the physical properties of vine or sea or illusionistic architecture in ways which will always be unavailable to humans, and, like slaves, they can move in ways and places which would be inappropriate for elites. Nor are ornamental cupids always "good" subordinates: while some of them stick to the task in hand, they are frequently distracted, turning the margins of rooms into spaces of play and, perhaps mobilizing the inherent contradictions of the world-conquering infant love god, even adopting high-status roles themselves. In the House of the Ancient Hunt in Pompeii (VII.4.48), a cupid stands framed beneath a fantastical garlanded structure, cornucopia in hand, with matched big cats on either side of him, each raising a paw like a well-trained dog **(Fig 4.19)** – usually powerful bodies in the service of the physically

fragile and impotent.[696] But while they allow exploration of, and play with, a viewer's hierarchical expectations, images like this one still rely on the idea of the cupid as a marginal figure whose zone of agency is restricted to marginal locations (here, a small zone high up in the corner of a room). Even where these margins seem to make their own bids for power, they rarely, if ever, manage to disrupt the larger structural hierarchies of an image surface or a room.

V. The temple of Venus Genetrix at Rome: cupids as site of possible self-identification for the elite viewer

The final section of this chapter looks at a very different type of building and social context from the domestic spaces discussed thus far, the Temple of Venus Genetrix in the Forum of Caesar at Rome, which under Trajan or Hadrian was rebuilt and liberally decorated both inside and out with relief carvings of cupids. With the possible exception of a cupid-weapon frieze, these cupids have no connection to a narrative context, and they are important figures in the history of cupidic ornament, the first known instantiations of a series of designs which were later to be widely replicated, most prominently on sarcophagi.[697]

My question for this building is whether the availability of cupids as tools for representing and managing status relationships can be transferred out of domestic

[696] Allison—Sear 2002.
[697] Squarciapino 1950.

settings and into this very public one. In the Forum of Caesar, the dominant social hierarchy is no longer that of the *domus*, focused around a *paterfamilias* and his relations with his children and slaves; instead, the highest status positions are occupied instead by the goddess Venus and the sponsoring *princeps*. My suggestion here is that in such a context, free or elite visitors to the temple might have engaged with cupids in a very different way than they would have within the confines of a private house, reconfiguring the relationship to the changed hierarchies of the situation in hand. In addition to widening our perspective on cupids' value for thinking about status and hierarchy, if the bodies of these cupids are regarded as real actors within the networks of social relationships operating in this space, they may offer a vital counterpoint to the usual ways in which the representation of imperial power is described as operating within the Trajanic forum program.

The history of the temple of Venus Genetrix and the surrounding forum is relatively well known, and has been clarified through excavation in recent decades.[698] Vowed as a thanks offering to Venus Victrix by Julius Caesar on the eve of Pharsalus (48 BCE), the eventual honorand was Venus Genetrix, who had been worshipped in Italy for over a century before her privatisation as guardian goddess and adopted ancestor of Caesar and later of the Julio-Claudian dynasty.[699] The initial martial deity of the vow was thus replaced by a goddess whose epithet linked her to regeneration and prosperity, and, in a novel twist, to the divinity and continuity of the Julian line; any worship or wealth directed towards this goddess and temple would always be directed in equal measure

[698] Amici 1991. See also Maisto and Vitti 2009.
[699] Rives 1994: 294. Ancient accounts are found at Appian *Bellum Civile* 2.10.68, 2.15.102; Dio Cassius *Roman History* 43.22.2.

towards the Julio-Claudians, and by extension towards those who positioned themselves as the heirs of Rome's first imperial dynasty.

Begun under Caesar and completed under Octavian, the temple was probably severely damaged by the great fire of 64 CE, and new construction work, albeit of peripheral structures rather than the temple itself (the restoration of the Curia; the construction of a containing wall for the Basilica Argentaria), was started during the reign of Domitian.[700] Work continued under Trajan, with brick stamps attesting to two main phases of construction, one between 100-110 CE, which focused on structures around the Clivus Argentarius and on the construction of the vast public lavatories abutting the porticus, and a second either late in Trajan's reign or early in the reign of Hadrian, in which the temple itself was rebuilt **(Fig. 4.20)**.[701] The date of the rededication is recorded by an inscription as being May 12th 113 CE,[702] but the construction work came later. But whether the imperial patron was Trajan himself or his successor Hadrian, the project must have been financed from the spoils of the Dacian wars, and should be seen in the context of the abutting and newly constructed Forum of Trajan.[703] In the course of the renovation, new Corinthian columns and a rich acanthus frieze replaced the original façade, the cella floor was paved in Numidian yellow and Phrygian purple marble, and niches were added between the internal columns of the cella. It is unclear whether the two storeys of superimposed colonades around the interior cella walls had already been part of the original architecture or whether they constitute a

[700] Amici 1991 distinguishes the phases of the temple.
[701] Bianchi 2009: 38-41 offers a summary of this evidence; Bianchi 2010 offers a more detailed analysis.
[702] *Fasti Ostienses* I.1.XIII.1 5.
[703] Bianchi 2009: 41.

Trajanic/Hadrianic innovation,[704] but in functional terms both colonnades and niches almost certainly served as articulating devices for the valuable objects which were stored here; the temple's holdings included panel paintings, collections of engraved gems, and a breastplate made of pearls from Britain.[705]

The forum and temple were also the location of several statues of the *principes*. At least three statues of Julius Caesar were on display, two of which were set up during his lifetime (one cuirassed and one equestrian; he dedicated the equestrian statue himself)[706] and one of which, showing *divus Iulius* and located within the temple, was set up by Augustus.[707] A seated colossal statue of Tiberius was also set up near the temple by the cities of Asia Minor to whom he had offered financial aid and relief from taxes after the earthquakes of 17 and 23 CE; its appearance can be reconstructed from the preserved base of a smaller replica in Puteoli and from a coin image, and it carried on its base personifications of the fourteen cities **(Figs. 4.21, 4.22)**.[708] According to Ann Kuttner, the personifications of the original colossus would have been free-standing statues arranged on top of the base of the statue.[709] Statius offers evidence that the equestrian statue of Caesar was on display in the later 1st century, i.e. after the fire of 64

[704] Maisto and Vitti 2009: 72 suggest that the internal double colonnade was Caesarian, while the niches were Trajanic (73).
[705] Panel paintings: Pliny the Elder *Nat. Hist.* VII.126; XXXV.26, 136; breastplate: *ibid.* IX.116; engraved gems: *ibid.* XXXVII.11.
[706] Cuirassed statue: Pliny the Elder *Nat. Hist.* XXXIV.10; equestrian statue: Pliny the Elder *Nat. Hist.* VIII.64; Suetonius *Julius Caesar* 61; Statius *Silvae* I.I.84-7.
[707] Cassius Dio XLV.7.1.
[708] Phlegon *Mirabilia* fr. 13 = *FGrHist* 1182 (cat. 257) fr. 36.13 (ed. F. Jacoby 2.2 [Berlin 1929]) gives the account of the grammarian Apollonius Dyscolus, although he mistakenly locates the temple of Venus in the Roman Forum. For the Puteoli inscription see *CIL* X.1624.
[709] Kuttner 1995: 40-1.

CE, while Apollonius the grammarian, on whose account our knowledge of the statue of Tiberius is based, indicates that that statue was still to be seen in the early to mid 2nd century.[710] It seems unlikely in any case that Trajan or Hadrian would have removed the statues of their (divinised) predecessors, and it is probable that further imperial statues were to be found within this space, making this an important site of historical memory and imperial cult for the principate.

The cult statue of Venus was made by the Greek sculptor Arkesilaos, and appears to have followed models which date back to around 410 BCE, although there are competing theories as to its appearance. Traditionally thought of as belonging to the same statue type as the Louvre Aphrodite Fréjus, a sinuous Venus clothed in a see-through garment who holds out the apple given by Paris as a prize for her beauty,[711] the coin evidence (on which the earlier identification had been based) offers just as much, or even more, support for a martial type, of similar sinuous posture, but with the right hand carrying a small winged Victory rather than an apple, and the left hand holding up a spear rather than the goddess's robe; Margit Brinke concludes that no specific figure type can be conclusively assigned to Venus Genetrix.[712] Appian, who lived from ca. 95-165 CE, writes that a gold statue of Caesar's lover and the later enemy of Rome

[710] Although Apollonius' dates are not precisely known, his son Aelius Herodianus dedicated a work to Marcus Aurelius, and as such it seems not unlikely that the father's visit to Rome took place after the Trajanic/Hadrianic restitution of the forum.
[711] Bieber 1977 collects statues belonging to this group; see her Figs 124-157 and pp46-47.
[712] Brinke 1991: 18-21.

Cleopatra was displayed alongside the statue of Venus, suggesting that this had survived the 2nd-century renovation.[713]

It is to the Trajanic/Hadrianic phase of reconstruction and to this period of public prosperity that the cupid reliefs date. These were made at many different scales in Luni and Proconnesian marble and placed on multiple different architectural members around the building; following on the important early studies of Floriani Squarciapino, recent work by, among others, M. Milella, Patrizia Maisto and Massimo Vitti has done much to clarify the likely positioning of the panels on the internal and external walls of the temple **(Fig. 4.23)**. On either side of the entrance portal, whose pilasters and lintel were covered with a pattern of vine shoots and small animals, it is likely that there were two symmetrical panels on which cupids held up garlands of fruit **(Fig. 4.24)**.[714] In two related relief types, also from the external walls, symmetrically positioned cupids sacrifice bulls: on one design, probably positioned in the columnar interstices of the side walls, the cupids face one another, while on a second they stand back-to-back **(Figs. 4.25, 4.26)**. It is likely that these back-to-back double tauroctonies were flanked by single, watching cupids separated from the sacrificants by candelabrae, though only fragments remain of these figures and there is no proof of the connection.[715] Further panels, which could have been located either on the outer cella wall or between the pilasters which articulated the interior, contain cupids emerging from acanthus leaves and tending to central candalabrae **(Fig. 4.27)**.[716] Within the cella was a frieze

[713] Appian *Civil Wars* 2.102.
[714] See Maisto and Vitti 2009: 45-47 for the likely disposition and form of these panels.
[715] Maisto and Vitti 2009: 44.
[716] Allroggen-Bedel and Bol 1998:308-310 Cat. 487 Fig. 176-177.

architrave, dividing the two vertically superimposed columnar orders of the internal decoration; on the largest preserved fragment of this is a scene of cupids handling weapons and apparatus for bodily cleansing (an amphora and a water basin) **(Fig. 4.28)**, while further fragments now in the Capitoline Museums show cupids in other poses **(Fig. 4.29)**, attesting to the continuation and variety of the design.[717] A partially preserved flying cupid is likely to have been placed in the spandrel of an arch, where it was presumably paired with a second, mirroring figure.[718] Finally, on the single preserved soffit of the peripteral architrave, the upper half of a cupid's body springs from acanthus scrolls **(Fig. 4.30, 4.31)**. Other panel fragments survive, but the activities represented are difficult to reconstruct.

In short, wherever the gaze of the viewer fell, whether inside or out, they would have been faced with the image of a cupid. Rather than simply functioning as immediate frame and focalising device for the cult statue, these figures are fully disconnected from the deity, swarming around and among the objects placed within the temple. Given the novelty of the designs and deployment and the high quality of execution, the reliefs must have encouraged close engagement from the viewer on their own account, at least on the external walls where the public would have been able to view them on a regular basis. Between them, they suggest a range of different ways of exploring and understanding the mass of the building: where the flying cupids, placed in relief against the planed masonry surface, appear to skim the surface of the architecture, the cupids who tend to candelabra on the side walls appear as sedate, symmetrical outgrowths of

[717] Musei Capitolini inv. S 1524.
[718] Milella 2010: 19, Fig. 11.

the plant scrolls, an integral part of the building's ornament. By contrast, the cupids on the soffit reliefs of the peripteral architrave burst forcefully forth from the centre of four framing scrolls; it is unclear whether they are intended as physical extensions of the acanthus or merely as inhabitants or explorers of its scrolls. By and large, however, these cupids are an ordered crowd, and on the outside of the temple at least they follow a strict symmetry.

The connection to the love goddess presumably provides the primary justification for these cupids' proliferation. But among the preserved reliefs and the coin images thought to correspond to the cult statue there is no sign of a privileged Cupid, god of love, and the activities represented are not obviously to do with eroticism. It has been suggested that the cupids handling weapons on the internal frieze are intended as a reference to the arms of Venus' lover Mars,[719] but even here the presence of a quiver, not one of the war god's usual weapons,[720] makes such a precise narrative association uncertain. The net of association, then, must be cast wider.

Perhaps because of the fragmentariness of the evidence, or perhaps due to the ambiguity of the original design and the ambiguity of cupids themselves, there is no consensus on the precise roles of these cupids. Maisto and Vitti emphasise the celebratory ambience and suggest that if these reliefs are based on the Julian temple's original ornament, the cupids bearing garlands could be celebrating the inauguration of the temple in 46 BCE – an interpretation which could equally be applied to the 2nd-

[719] Schauenburg 1997: 679.
[720] La Rocca 2007: 95-97.

century rebuild without reference to the original reliefs and ceremony.[721] Amanda Claridge sees the cupids of the internal frieze as 'playing with the spoils of war,' presumably an allusion to the spoils stored and displayed within the temple.[722] Eugenio La Rocca argues that the various different objects displayed on the frieze are the attributes of a whole range of deities, and thinks it probable that the cupids are preparing for a feast of all the gods which will celebrate the goddess Venus, originator of the Julian line and protector of Rome and the Empire.[723] While none of these views characterise the cupids in precisely the same way, all emphasise their roles as attendants and worshippers, as auxiliary figures who facilitate the smooth performance of cult and temple functioning, whether epitomised through imperial inauguration, the storage of valuable objects, or the epiphany of the deity herself. The position of cult servitor is one which had been occupied by cupids since the early classical period,[724] and while some of the precise configurations are new, the roles performed on these reliefs followed in long image traditions.

An equal justification for the presence of so many cupids is found in the epithet Genetrix, and it is surely correct to see these figures in large part as agents and manifestations of the general abundance and fertility which Venus in this role provided. As a temple historically connected to the imperial family, this regeneration was here closely linked to the continuity of the imperial line. The Julio-Claudian dynasty and their familial claims on Venus Genetrix were long gone by the early 2nd century, but the

[721] Maisto and Vitti 2009:73.
[722] Claridge 2010: 166.
[723] Rocca 2007: 95-97.
[724] Grüßinger 2001: 109; see also Stuveras 1969: 139-141.

rebuilding of this monument constituted a claim on the part of its rebuilder, whether Trajan or Hadrian, to (ideological if not genealogical) descent from the figures of this golden age of the foundation of the principate. Meanwhile, the anxieties of succession – "fertility" – are relevant to every ruler. The facts that Trajan himself had come to power through what appears to have been a covert coup d'état,[725] and that Hadrian was not his biological son and may not have been designated as successor during Trajan's lifetime,[726] rendered difficult the sort of imperial fertility myth propagated by later coins of Marcus Aurelius' wife Faustina, in which the empress is shown quite literally dripping with young children,[727] but seem to have provided an even stronger impetus than usual to emphasise the "fatherly" qualities of the new *pater patriae*.[728] In such a context, the bodies of cupids are particularly useful: they embody a general idea of reproduction and of the continuing fertility of the principate. But they are emphatically not substitutes for the bodies of imperial heirs themselves – quite apart from the lack of imperial offspring, they are far too numerous and too impotent, discouraging attempts to link them to specific bodies.

Cupids may also provide a means of expressing more general hopes concerning the fertility of the emperor's subjects and dominions. It is an issue whose urgency is made clear on another imperial monument which was under construction at the same time (114-117 CE) as the temple: Trajan's arch at Beneventum. On the arch, young bodies are present in many different roles and in varying degrees of idealisation, from captured

[725] Grainger 2004: 127.
[726] *Historia Augusta, Hadrian* 4.10.
[727] Kent 1976 cat. 339.
[728] Currie 1996; Kampen 2009.

Dacian children in the crowning frieze of triumph to young Italian boys receiving the *alimenta* from the hand of Trajan, and from *ministri*, youthful religious attendants, to a pair of highly idealised children, a girl and a boy, who form the currency of a symbolic exchange between Trajan and the personified figure of Italia.[729] Sarah Currie has discussed the ways in which these different ideals of youth were brought together to represent between them a whole range of processes and ideals relating to the intertwined cycles of subjugation and renewal of land and population, all focalised around and overseen by the guiding hands of the emperor and Italia.[730] The children of Italy are fed through the *alimenta* scheme, which is itself financed by the profits on land loans, a process which '[forges] a material and conceptual link between children's bodies and the landscape, in which one resource of empire was used to reproduce another.' The children grow up to provide the manpower of the Roman army (for which Trajan is shown recruiting in one of the reliefs), and will go on to conquer other peoples, such as the Dacian children shown in the frieze of the defeated, whose subjugation contributes in turn to the expansion of the empire and the prosperity of Italy. The wealth of empire allows the cycle to start again, with more Italian children being born and fed and bred for the army. The presence on the arch of personifications of the seasons underscores the cyclicality of these processes, and, crucially, the corporeal forms allotted to the seasons serve to validate Currie's focus on children as the engine-oil of imperial expansion and reinvigoration: for the first time in Roman visual culture, so far as we know, spring, summer, autumn and winter appear here with the bodies not of young women but of cupids. Such an innovation must be the result of a highly

[729] Currie calls the attendants *camilli*, but following Fless 1995 it seems more appropriate to see them as *ministri*.
[730] Currie 1996.

conscious choice on the part of those who designed and commissioned the arch; as Currie writes, '[W]e can deduce that it was now the male child's body rather than the adult woman's that was the prime denoter of a perpetual and natural cycle.'[731] It is against such a backdrop of imperial encouragement for reproduction, and such a recoding of the cupid body, that the fantastical infant – and the cupid-plant hybrid – is made one of the main subjects of the temple of Venus Genetrix, competing for prominence within the space with the cult statue.

As we have seen, the blurred boundaries between child and slave has specific resonance within the Roman *domus*, where slaves were commonly infantilised – eternal *pueri*.[732] It is a blurring with a related but not identical resonance in an imperial context: as Matthew Roller has shown, at least from the Julio-Claudian to Trajanic period, the two major enduring metaphors for the relationship between an emperor and his subjects are those of father to son and of master to slave. The "good" emperor treats his subjects as if they were his children, the "bad" emperor as if they were his slaves – but the two metaphors are in constant dialogue with one another as ways of describing the relationship.[733] We might posit, then, that just as cupids provide a model of positively inflected servitude within the *domus*, they may also provide a model of positively inflected subserviance and subjecthood within a religious and even an imperial context. In modelling devotion and worship within the temple of Venus Genetrix, the cupids imbue the position of devotee/subject with gentleness and innocent childishness, thereby suggesting that the relationship of worshippers and subjects to fertility goddess

[731] Currie 1996: 175.
[732] Mouritsen 2011: 31 n. 118 has a discussion of literature on this topic.
[733] Roller 2017: 218-87.

and *pater patriae* is one of child to parent as much as slave to master, subject to ruler or devotee to deity, and designating such attitudes – tender, self-subordinating, unquestioning, filial – as the most appropriate ones for an approach to power.

It is a mode of engagement with the divine which sits in instructive contrast with the mode explored by the anthropologist of religion Kimberley Patton, who has examined ancient images taken from across different cultures in which the gods are represented performing acts of sacrifice. Patton asks why gods, who we expect to be the recipients of sacrifice, perform this act of veneration themselves, and her answer is to do with the embeddedness of religion and ritual practice in the bodies of the gods: 'as the gods, so religiousness'.[734] A religious space which displaces sacrificial activity away from the deity offers a profoundly different model of praxis to this: one in which religiousness, and the worshipper, are emphatically *not* like the deities (and rulers) honoured, and distance and difference form the basis of the relationship. It may be relevant to ask whether such a model is particularly well suited to the structures of an autocratic regime.

It is also a mode of engagement with power which sits in pronounced contrast with another set of sculpted figures who formed part of the Trajanic Forum program. In the adjacent new forum, statues of captured Dacians seem to have been used as non-weight-bearing caryatids on the attics of the colonnades, while other larger ones may have been placed on the attic of the Basilica Ulpia **(Fig. 4.32)**.[735] Their presence was a clear

[734] Patton 2009: 314.
[735] Packer 1997: 437.

demonstration of the Roman Empire's, and emperor's, ability to mobilise brute force, an act of visual bombast which, like the nearby column, placed the surly, downcast, conquered barbarian on permanent triumphal display at the heart of the imperial capital. Zanker uses Vitruvius's statement on the original caryatids of the Athenian Erechtheion to describe these Dacians, calling them *exempla aeternae servitutis*,[736] but while they certainly reminded Roman viewers of the power of their emperor to subdue the forces which threatened stability, they may also, as Catherine Edwards suggests, have provided a reminder (whether true or not) of the enduring threat of such forces – [737] and thus, perhaps, of the enduring need for the emperor's protection. Certainly, their presence was a reminder of the "hard" power of the Roman *princeps*, his ability to subjugate and protect through violent military might.

The cupids of the Temple of Venus Genetrix, as well as cupid reliefs of related types found within the Forum of Trajan **(Figs. 4.33-5)**,[738] allow the viewer to conceptualise power neither as something to which one can aspire oneself, nor in terms of its destructive, subjugating ability, but rather in terms of its ability to arouse affection and desire. They invite reflection on what Vout has termed the 'erotics of imperium',[739] but the desire which they embody and evoke seems to fall less into a model based on penetrative contact than into one focalised around care and veneration – more readily understandable, perhaps, in terms of non-intrusive, cutaneous touch.

[736] Zanker 1970: 512, quoting Vitruvius 1.1.5.
[737] Edwards 2003: 67-69.
[738] Packer 1997, cats. 111, 112, 133 and 167.
[739] Vout 2009.

Support for the ideal existence of such a tactile relationship to the emperor is found in vivid detail in a passage from Pliny's panegyric to Trajan, delivered in 100 CE soon after the *princeps*' accession to power, where the eulogist describes the unmediated physical proximity which Trajan permits his subjects:

> *Ac primum qui dies ille, quo exspectatus desideratusque urbem tuam ingressus es! Iam hoc ipsum, quod ingressus es, quam mirum laetumque! Nam priores invehi et importari solebant, non dico quadriiugo curru et albentibus equis sed umeris hominum, quod adrogantius erat. Tu sola corporis proceritate elatior aliis et excelsior, non de patientia nostra quendam triumphum, sed de superbia principum egisti. Ergo non aetas quemquam non valetudo, non sexus retardavit, quo minus oculos insolito spectaculo impleret. Te parvuli noscere, ostentare iuvenes, mirari senes, aegri quoque neglecto medentium imperio ad conspectum tui quasi ad salutem sanitatemque prorepere. Inde alii se satis vixisse te viso te recepto, alii nunc magis esse vivendum praedicabant. Feminas etiam tunc fecunditatis suae maxima voluptas subiit, cum cernerent cui principi cives, cui imperatori milites peperissent. Videres referta tecta ac laborantia, ac ne eum quidem vacantem locum qui non nisi suspensum et instabile vestigium caperet, oppletas undique vias angustumque tramitem relictum tibi, alacrem hinc atque inde populum, ubique par gaudium paremque clamorem. Tam aequalis ab omnibus ex adventu tuo laetitia percepta est, quam omnibus venisti; quae tamen ipsa cum ingressu tuo crevit, ac prope in singulos gradus aucta est. Gratum erat cunctis, quod senatum osculo exciperes, ut dimissus osculo fueras; gratum, quod equestris ordinis decora honore nominum sine monitore signares; gratum, quod tantum <non> ultro clientibus salutatis quasdam familiaritatis notas adderes; gratius tamen, quod sensim et placide et quantum respectantium turba pateretur incederes, quod occursantium populus te quoque, et immo maxime artaret, quod primo statim die latus tuum crederes omnibus. Neque enim stipatus satellitum manu sed circumfusus undique nunc senatus, nunc equestris ordinis flore, prout alterutrum frequentiae genus invaluisset, silentes quietosque lictores tuos subsequebare; nam milites nihil a plebe habitu tranquillitate modestia differebant. Ubi vero coepisti Capitolium ascendere, quam laeta omnibus adoptionis tuae recordatio, quam peculiare gaudium eorum, qui te primi eodem loco salutaverant imperatorem! Quin etiam deum ipsum tuum <patrem> praecipuam voluptatem operis sui percepisse crediderim. Ut quidem isdem vestigiis institisti, quibus parens tuus ingens illud deorum prolaturus arcanum, quae circumstantium gaudia, quam recens clamor, quam similis illi dies, qui hunc diem genuit! ut plena altaribus angusta victimis cuncta, ut in unius salutem collata omnium vota, cum sibi se ac liberis suis intellegerent precari, quae pro te precarentur!*

> Now first of all, think of the day when you entered your city, so long awaited and so much desired! The very method of your entry won delight and surprise, for your predecessors [i.e. Domitian] chose to be borne, or carried in, not satisfied even to be drawn by four white horses in a triumphal carriage, but lifted up on human shoulders in their overbearing pride. You towered above us only because of your own splendid

physique; your triumph did not rest on our humiliation, won as it was over imperial arrogance. Thus neither age, health nor sex held your subjects back from feasting their eyes on this unexpected sight: small children learned who you were, young people pointed you out, old men admired: even the sick disregarded their doctors' orders and dragged themselves out for a glimpse of you as if this could restore their health. There were some who cried that they had lived long enough now they had seen and welcomed you, others that this was a reason for longer life. Women rejoiced as never before to bear children now that they knew they had brought forth citizens and soldiers to live and serve under your rule and command. Roofs could be seen sagging under the crowds they bore, not a vacant inch of ground was visible except under a foot poised to step, streets were packed on both sides leaving only a narrow passage for you, on every side the excited populace, cheers and rejoicing everywhere. All felt the same joy at your coming, when you were coming to be the same for all, joy which could still grow as you moved forward, and (one might say) swell with every step. There was general delight when you embraced the members of the Senate, as they had embraced you when you went away, when you singled out the leading knights for the honour of being greeted by name without an official intermediary, when you not only took the first step in greeting your clients but added some touches of friendliness, and still greater delight when you moved slowly and quietly forward where the crowds of spectators fell back, letting yourself be jostled as one of the people, though in fact the crowds pressed thickest where you were. On that very first day you made yourself accessible to all, for no party of satellites attended you; you moved in the midst of the élite of the senators or knights, as the numbers of either party prevailed as they gathered round you, and your lictors quietly and courteously cleared your path. As for the soldiers present, they differed from the civilians in neither dress, propriety, nor discipline. But when you proceeded to mount the Capitol, how gladly everyone remembered your adoption, and what special joy it was for those who had first hailed you as Imperator in that very place! But the greatest pleasure of all, I fancy, was that of the god who was your father in his own creation. Above all, as you trod in the same steps as your father when he prepared to reveal the mighty secret of the gods, how the crowd rejoiced with fresh outbursts of cheering, as this day recalled that other which had brought it into being! Everywhere there were altars, but still not enough for their victims; everyone's prayers were for your safety alone, since each man knew they would be answered for himself and his children if they were granted for you.

Pliny the Younger, *Panegyricus* 22-23. Trans. Betty Radice.

The almost obsessive focus of this passage, illustrated in full panegyric fashion to the point of redundancy, is on the degree to which Trajan allows his subjects proximity, and even physical, unmediated access, to his person. In contrast to the "bad" emperor Domitian, he embraces his senators, greets certain knights by name and *sine monitore*, 'without an official intermediary,' and allows himself to be jostled by the crowds. The

emperor's body here is not seen as a vanquishing force, and nor is it obviously an erotic body, as Natalie Kampen and Vout have suggested:[740] even though female spectator-subjects are described as rejoicing at the idea of bearing children under Trajan's rule, their rejoicing is carefully contained within the de-eroticising language of civic and military patriotism. Instead, the emphasis is on a body which exists in a relationship of mutual protection with his subjects, whose own wellbeing – both political and personal – is inextricably connected to theirs. This is made explicit in the final remark in relation to the profusion of private sacrifices taken place, where Pliny writes that 'everyone's prayers were for your safety alone, since each man knew they would be answered for himself and his children if they were granted for you.' But the mutual interdependency of the relationship between subjects and emperor is manifested throughout the passage, and finds its fullest expression in the descriptions of unmediated access and touch.

The relationship envisaged in this passage is in many ways comparable to the mythological images of Theseus from Pompeii and Herculaneum. The emergence of Theseus from the labyrinth, heroic labour accomplished, has echoes of the imperial *adventus*, and the image from the House of Gavius Rufus in particular shows a similarly variegated crowd of viewers and touchers to that described by Pliny. And while this image, painted onto the wall of a domestic residence, might allow the male viewer to imagine himself as a latterday Theseus, adored and admired from all sides, the image from the Augusteum at Herculaneum explicitly demands an imperially inflected viewing. Staged as an almost-statue against a curving wall surface, Theseus invites comparison with the real statues of emperors which would have filled the colonnades of

[740] Kampen 1997: 271; Vout 2009: 20.

this building. Fabrizio Pesando has suggested that the building's image program as a whole refers to Vespasian's "liberation" of Rome from Nero's tyranny,[741] but even if such a claim is regarded as being too specific a reading for these more generalisable images, the reverent touching of the cupid-like boys around Theseus surely suggest to the visitor ways in which they themselves might reverence, or imagine reverencing, the statues of the emperors – and by extension, the emperor (as liberator) himself.

While the cupid reliefs of the temple of Venus Genetrix can be refocalised in the blink of an eye merely as appropriate, inoffensive decor, I would argue that the multiplicity, the all-enveloping presence, the tactility of these figures has an impact beyond this. In the sacrifices which they offer, in the garlands which they hold up, in the weapons and vessels which they carry, they model ways of making sacrifice both to Venus and to the Julio-Claudians, and of crowding round, touching, accessing and honouring imperial dynastic power in a manner not unrelated to that permitted to the crowds on the occasion of Trajan's inventus to the city. In a domestic setting such as a Pompeian house, cupids' small bodies were always attendant on, or distracting attention from, the dominant bodies in the space, either those within the centralised panel paintings or those of the *dominus*, *domina*, and their guests. But in an imperial temple, where power relationships re-direct to focus on the magnetic pole of the emperor's/emperors' body and person, the orientation of cupids shifts too, and they acquire the potential to be seen as figures for self-assimilation, as well as in attendant role upon the viewer. As Pliny's *adventus* passage indicates, when the emperor is present, everyone else, right up to the level of senators, is reduced to the status of subordinate (architectural)

[741] Pesando 2003.

decoration, of sentient parergon. While cupids are not precise counterparts of the viewer-worshipper-imperial subject (just as in domestic settings they are not the precise counterparts of slaves), they do create a prominent role at the epicentre of imperial monumental self-representation – in the heart of the complex of imperial fora – for responsive, loving, unthreatening bodies, presenting this as one of the ways in which hierarchy does or should configure itself around the dynasty and institution of the principate. They gesture simultaneously to the necessity of difference between deity and worshipper, emperor and subject, and to the possibility and desirability of respectful proximity – indeed, the necessity of such tender attentions to ensure the continuity of imperial wellbeing. Viewed in this way, I would argue that cupids present as compelling (if as partial) a model of imperial power relations as do the caryatids of conquered Dacians in the attic of the adjacent forum; indeed, they may even function as the necessary and deliberate counterpoint to the model of power as subjugation.

VI. Conclusions

The framing, mediatory, and tactile characteristics of cupids both within discrete images and in the broader built environment cannot be considered without reference to a larger social framework in which hierarchical relations played a central role. Visual parergonality can never be separated from social parergonality, and tactility too is socially marked: certain groups of people are the touchers, while others are the touched. The simple prevalence of bodies marked out as non-central, usually compositionally

dependent on larger bodies or the objects on which they are found, and often located on peripheries and in in-between spaces, is expressive of larger tendencies in social relations and of deeply rooted societal assumptions about hierarchy. The implicit claim of such spatial organisation is that some bodies are more important than others, and that for every major body, for every focal point, there must be minor ones, focalisers who serve as backdrop for their visual "superiors", providing the swift movement and bodily contortions which underscore the sedateness of the elite body, satellites in the orbit of power. In this sense, cupids are the symptoms of a mentality in which the representation of powerful bodies and the framing of elite space are unthinkable without the supporting figures, slaves or otherwise, against whom the powerful can relativise their own bodies and movement. It is a configuration of relationships which might make us ask whether two or more elite bodies can ever actually be imagined engaging directly with one another, or whether every encounter must be mediated and supported by other, more malleable bodies. It is also, I would argue, a mode of representation which seeks to constrain the powerful body as much as it glorifies it, differentiating between the body which is able to elicit order and support from its subordinates, acting on them as a centripetal force, and that which is surrounded by centrifugal chaos.

There are many minor bodies through which such hierarchies can be represented, ranging from tritons and atlantes to the beautiful human figures, half divine and half servile, which flit across the in-between spaces of Campanian walls. The enduring popularity of cupids in this context is surely based on the fantasy which they permit that the exercise of power, and the dynamics of powerlessness, are as voluntary, as

enjoyable, as "natural" as their own play-work. They provide a space for the representation and valorisation of tender touch and bodily care, obviously desirable aspects of interpersonal relations, while at the same time alienating these behaviours from the stigmatised bodies of those who usually dispense them. While they sometimes appear to rebel against the established order, it is a rebellion which is staged as play, and which offers no real threat to peace and stability. The attractiveness, and consequent relatability, of their bodies and behaviours may even provide a space in which an elite viewer can enjoy the fiction of rosy-tinted powerlessness on their own account. Moreover, they are sufficiently removed from the realities of real bodies and relationships that they can be used to figure – and conceal – uneven relationships of power, dependency, and affection which go far beyond the domestic sphere. From *domus* to imperial temple, they bring with them impression is of a world in balance, in which social relations operate through desire and goodwill rather than through coercion and force.

Conclusion

Cupids as first "viewers" of Roman visual culture?

What is the proper way to interact with and appreciate an artwork? In his *Imagines*, a textual tour of a private picture gallery in the Bay of Naples in the 3rd century CE, Philostratus the Elder came some way to offering an answer. In the preamble to a series of descriptions of individual paintings, Philostratus sets up the conditions of viewing in careful stages. The young men of the town have been badgering the visiting intellectual for a public lecture, but it is only when his host's ten-year-old son asks him to interpret (ἑρμηνεύειν) the pictures in the villa in which he is staying that he agrees to talk to them. 'And when they came, I said, "Let me put the boy in front and address to him my effort at interpretation; but do you [young men] follow, not only agreeing but also asking questions if anything I say is not clear."'[742] What follows is a series of descriptions in which Philostratus repeatedly imagines a dual response to the works: a corporealised, sensation-driven encounter focalized through the body of the young child – 'Do you catch something of the scent hanging over the garden?' [743]– and, set against it, the intellectualising, informed response of the adult – 'Surely you are familiar with the passage in the Iliad…?'.[744] As Zahra Newby has pointed out, the division poses a

[742] ἀφικομένων οὖν "ὁ μὲν παῖς," ἔφην, "προβεβλήσθω καὶ ἀνακείσθω τούτῳ ἡ σπουδὴ τοῦ λόγου, ὑμεῖς δὲ ἕπεσθε μὴ ξυντιθέμενοι μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐρωτῶντες, εἴ τι μὴ σαφῶς φράζοιμι."
[743] Philostratus the Elder *Imagines* 1.6.1 (Cupids): μῶν ἐπῄσθου τι τῆς ἀνὰ τὸν κῆπον εὐωδίας…; (transl. adapted from Fairbanks).
[744] Philostratus the Elder *Imagines* 1.1.1 (Scamander): οἶσθά που τῆς Ἰλιάδος τὴν γνώμην (transl. Fairbanks).

fundamental dilemma of viewing, 'absorption or erudition?';[745] it also reveals the difficulty of separating such approaches: without a knowledge of the correct Homeric reference point and the precise narrative moment, a viewer's capacity for absorption will often be limited, but without the shock and pleasure of encounter and absorption, there is no reason to care enough about the images to enquire after their external reference points. To experience a painting fully, to be *good* viewers, the inner circle of young men and the outer circle of the reading audience must channel the perspectives of two different viewers, synthesising the wisdom of the sophist with the supposed unmediated physicality of the ten-year-old boy.

This interest in the untutored response has a long history in Hellenistic and Roman writing about skillfully made objects and artworks. Sometimes assigned to children, such responses can also be delivered by other 'naïve' viewers such as women, or even focalised through the eyes of animals. Theocritus' fifteenth *Idyll* famously focalises the Ptolemaic royal festival of Adonis and all its material pomp through the voices of two women of Alexandria, while Herodas' description (*Mimes* 4) of a trip to the Ptolemaic sanctuary at Kos also uses female visitors to bring the experience – and the statues dedicated within the sanctuary – to life for his readers. Herodas' character Phile, whose relatively low status has already been explicitly signaled in the text,[746] responds rapturously to a statue of a boy strangling a goose: 'by the Fates, how that little boy is

[745] Newby 2009**:** 341-342. Primavesi—Giuliani 2012 also perceive a dual approach within the text, suggesting that Philostratus presents it both as a work of oratorical skill *and* as a way of acquainting the reader with the described paintings. Squire 2013 sees the *Imagines* as '[playing] … knowingly with the simultaneous promise and failure of words merging into images, and vice versa.'

[746] At v. 11-18 she brings a cockerel, not a sow or an ox, as an offering, and claims poverty as the reason.

strangling the fox-goose! If it were not plainly stone before us, you might believe him about to speak.'[747] Something related takes place in the many Hellenistic and Roman epigrams which play on the life-like qualities of Myron's statue of a cow; here the innocent viewer may be a cow-herd, or even a calf, a bull, or a gadfly.[748]

Simon Goldhill has written of Idyll 15 that

> '...rather than dramatising a response of a *sophos* to art, as so many of the epigrams do, this text dramatises the response of figures framed as *other*, different from the Hellenistic poet - an ironic strategy of distancing which turns back on the reader the requirement of evaluative response (which so many epigrams celebrate). The self-conscious but self-concealing gaze which this poem turns on the viewing of the palace celebration thus engages the reader in (seeing oneself) seeing others seeing meaning - a detour through the other which sets at stake the reader's *sophia* in the politics and poetics of viewing.'[749]

On the one hand, as Goldhill writes, these are poems which allow the reader to rejoice in their own superior self-awareness, their ability to see through the deceptions of expert naturalistic craftsmanship, but they also – and the same is true for all of these texts – perform a vital function in producing *enargeia*, vividness, in inviting the reader to imagine what the boy or the cow or the figure of Adonis looks like, or at least to imagine the fact of their compelling physical presence, *as well as* delving into the metapoetics of these descriptions. The textual evocation of material presence seems often to be a goal in its own right, and not purely (though often also) a means to a more sophisticated end.

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[747] v. 30-33: ἆ πρὸς Μοιρέων
τὴν χηναλώπεκ᾽ ὡς τὸπαιδίον πνίγει.
πρὸ τῶν ποδῶν γοῦν εἴ τι μὴ λίθος, τοὔργον,
ἐρεῖς, λαλήσει.

[748] Calf: IX.721, 730, 733, 735; herdsman: IX.713, 715, 722, 730, 731, 737, 739, 741, 742; bull IX. 730, 734. See Squire 2010 on the boundaries between visual and textual representation in these epigrams.

[749] Goldhill 1994: 223.

Even the most erudite of viewers is, or should be, susceptible to the physical attractions of the art object. This is made clear in Statius' *Silvae* IV.6, a description of a tabletop statuette of Lysippan Hercules which is written in the poet's own voice, and describes an object seen in the house of an art connoisseur. While the bulk of the poem is intellectualising and historicising, describing the colourful collection history of the object, Statius opens with a several lines in which he describes and evokes the figure's physical attractions: he wonders at the ability of the artist to create something which seems so large at such a small scale, and talks of the love which he feels for the object, which prevents him from taking his eyes off it. Even in this context of performative erudition, an affective bond needs to be established with the physical object, the exceptional nature of the artwork experienced at first hand, before there is any reason for the poet to enquire into its historical significance.[750]

One of the main convictions of this dissertation is that the figure of the cupid functions across (Hellenistic and) Roman visual culture as a programmatic naïve viewer, modelling embodied experiences in relation to objects and spaces which the viewer can then set against their own experiences – also embodied, but in different ways to those of the ever-clambering, ever-touching cupids. We might even ask whether they could be seen as systematic agents of a sort of visual equivalent to *enargeia*, helping the viewer to move from a consciousness of the forms and subjects represented to a sense of them as real physical presences – however fantastical – activated in relation to the viewer's body. Cupids can be used to draw attention to the physical properties of images and

[750] Tanner 2005: 257 focuses on Statius' 'tremendously learned, controlled and witty critical response, belying the apparent lack of control in his gaze as he initially described it,' but I would argue that the two responses are inseparable from one another.

objects through various means: an artist may focus on contrasts of scale, as on the mosaics where cupids ride around the heads of Ocean and Tethys, on contrasts of body type, as on multi-figure garland sarcophagi, or on contrasts of number and posture and tone, as on the Pompeian paintings of Mars and Venus – although in all of these cases, in fact, each of these contrastive characteristics is relevant. They continually offer a second perspective on the contexts in which they are placed, whether by serving as internal viewers of and attendants to a narrative, by treating an ornamental surface in a non-intuitive way, or through juxtaposition of a secondary, cupidic register of operation with a primary, human (or divine) one. By these means, they question the priority of the (elite) human body, or indeed any single body type, as the fundamental benchmark of physical experience, suggesting alternative perspectives, scales, corporealities through which the world can be accessed and made new.

One way of describing the effects of cupids on those who view them, or, more often, on those who have them within their range of view (but who may not necessarily be looking directly at them) would be to see them as embodying what Michael Taussig, writing on Benjamin, calls the 'everyday tactility of knowledge'.[751] Even in cases where they model concentration and focalise attention, cupids approach the world in a manner which is endlessly experimental, ephemeral, and non-intrusive; even where they engage in gestures of self-consciousness they refuse to take this stance seriously. They address themselves most frequently to the uncritical perceptive faculties of an absent-minded

[751] Taussig 1991; Benjamin 1969 [1935-6]: 240 (Ch. XV) writes, for example, that 'Tactile appropriation is accomplished not so much by attention as by habit.' ('*Die taktile Rezeption erfolgt nicht sowohl auf dem Wege der Aufmerksamkeit als auf dem der Gewohnheit.*')

viewer, asserting themselves not through single striking images but through constant reiteration, and through the continual new points of contact which they create between different parts of an image or surface. Their multiplicity and variety of posture encourage modes of viewing in which a single-point contemplative perspective is always inadequate, encouraging not just a tactile but a wandering, looping and returning (habit-forming?) gaze on the part of the viewer.

On the one hand, cupids invite the viewer to channel the cupid's characteristics in their own viewing, imagining themselves as, or actively behaving as, tactile, exploratory operators. But, and perhaps in large part because of the separation of the cupid's body and scale from that of the human, they can also create the distance which allows the viewer to become a Philostratus, the removed interpreter who sees beyond, even as they are able to recognise and appreciate, the immediate physical address of an image. It is a characteristic which is well exemplified in the topos of cupids with weapons, an image type which has appeared at several points through the preceding chapters: in Lucian's description of the painting of Alexander and Roxana, on 2nd-century sarcophagi with weapons friezes, on Pompeian paintings of Venus and Mars, and on the internal frieze of Venus Genetrix. In all of these (textual or visual) images, cupids are shown in close physical contact with armour and weapons, objects which they handle in a variety of ways: They play with them, display them to the viewer, construct them at the forge, and even embrace them. Through these different types of touch, they invite engagement with helmet, spear, or breastplate as object *qua* object, fascinating for its size and shininess and impenetrability, rather than in subordinate position to the body and character of a human warrior. But in decontextualising the objects, they also open up a

space for secondary, non-literal viewings of them, whereby the armour becomes an allegory of 'Alexander's other love: war', or connotes the sexualised behaviour which is so carefully elided from the images of Venus and Mars, or creates a fragmented simulacrum of the body of the dead within the sarcophagus. The cupids themselves do not signal an awareness of these interpretations, but their own obliviousness to the wider circumstances of their activities creates the space for the viewer to "read in" and to take control of the process of assigning meaning to images.

This dynamic may be at play for huge swathes of cupid imagery: from the sarcophagi on which cupids flank, but ignore, a central inscription (and indeed, all sarcophagi on which cupids surround a dead body without explicitly acknowledging its presence) to images of the naked love goddess in which the innocence of her framing figures, their apparent unawareness of the attractions of the love goddess, serves to draw out the compromised status of the desiring viewer – thereby, potentially, serving to provoke even greater titillation.[752] The presence of cupids is not necessarily a provocation to look for hidden meaning – often, on the contrary, they seem to shut down interpretative approaches – but it often marks the gap between viewer and viewed, issuing an invitation or creating a space for viewer response, rather than presenting the image or object as an entity complete in and of itself, already subsuming all possible interpretations. And while cupids do not necessarily make the viewer see through their eyes/feel through their touch, they do, I would argue, awaken the physical receptors of

[752] The strategy is comparable to that identified by Goldhill 1995 in Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*, where 'the framing of Chloe's naivety composes the reader as an amused and superior observer of an unsharable innocence' (14).

the viewer and ask them at least to position their perspective in relation to haptic experience.

One outcome or correlate of these characteristics is that cupids are frequently used to signal the fact of an object or image's constructedness and artistry. Often, they do this by hovering over its cracks and construction lines, as on the mosaics where they join together different visualities or the sarcophagi where they articulate and conceal the contours of the stone box and the gaps between image registers. But they are also more explicitly posed as markers of the constructed image, as on the myriad sarcophagi on which they hold up portrait tondos of the deceased, or on the marine mosaics (along with images from many other media) on which they hold up mirrors in which the faces of Venus, a nereid, or a beautiful woman are replicated, framed, and then caught in perpetuity for the pleasure of the outside viewer.[753] In a fourth style painting from the House of the Surgeon at Pompeii (VI.1.10, east wall of room 9), where a woman paints a picture of a priapic herm **(Fig. 5.1)**, it is a small plump boy, naked but for a cloak and closely approximating to an wingless cupid, who stands at her knees and holds the panel. At the same time, he leans on the plinth of the herm itself, thus connecting, but also signaling distance between, object and artwork.[754] In Pompeian paintings of Narcissus, one of the archetypal image types through which Roman art reflects on the process of image construction,[755] we repeatedly find cupids positioned alongside the mythological wooer of his own reflection, looking into the pool or basin alongside him,

[753] See Chapter 2.
[754] Museo Nazionale di Napoli Inv. no. 9018. *PPM* IV: 52-84 on the house; 73-80 on the room containing the painting; Fig. 46, p75.
[755] Balensiefen 1990; Elsner 2007 Ch. 6; Squire 2017: 245-9.

extinguishing their torches in the water;[756] in one painting from the House of M. Fabius Rufus (Pompeii VII.16.22, third quarter of the 1st century CE) **(Fig. 5.2)** a cupid even pours water from a hydria into the basin into which Narcissus looks.[757] One purpose of the extinguished torches is presumably to signal the hopelessness of Narcissus' sterile self-love, but these images also focus attention on the materiality of the medium – water – in which the image is produced, and in the case of the painting from the Casa dei Dioscuri, on the physical activity of image creation: the very aspects of these images which Narcissus himself so disastrously fails to recognise. In some circumstances at least, cupids function as a tool for pointing up the fundamental paradox of naturalistic representation: the claim of an image to represent reality can only really be appreciated when the viewer is aware that what they are looking at is a representation and not a reality. Cupids both expose artistry, and at the same time allow the viewer to collude in their own deception.

A major overlooked assertion of images and spaces held up by cupids, then, is that viewing is a mediated process – not a straightforward communion between viewer and viewed. In occupying these medial spaces, cupids suggest the inadequacy of the elite Roman viewer's own body as a vehicle for apprehension of the thing viewed, as well as the reliance of the viewed object on the labour and recognition provided by external bodies.

[756] e.g. in Elsner 2007 Figs. 6.2, 6.4, 6.5, 6.13.
[757] *PPM* VII:947-1119 on the house; 1062-75 on Room 58; Fig. 249, p1072.

There are similarities here with Elsner's description of the "supernumerary" figures in domestic Roman [Pompeian] wall painting as contributing to 'an intense visual awareness [in the Roman house] of events existing above all in the ocular dispensation of their being witnessed, of things happening always in a panopticon of spectatorship (both real and imagined)'.[758] My suggestion here is that the effect of such figures on the viewer may in many cases have less to do with the self-consciousness of being watched (most of these figures do not actually look directly out of the image) than with the expectation of, and even the comfort provided by, the attendance of surrounding bodies, usually marked out as inferior to the body of the viewer, whose activity and simple presence frequently indicates the viewer as the spatial and social point in relation to which a room or an object orients itself. In many ways, cupids could be said to function as a frame for the viewer as much as for the viewed, occupying para-corporeal as well as para-pictorial roles.

I suggested in my introduction that cupids lend themselves to consideration as phenomenologically privileged actors in the sense proposed by Merleau-Ponty, existing always in proactive, energetic relationship to their surroundings. In modern phenomenological discussions, Merleau-Ponty has in fact been criticised, notably by Iris Marion Young, for using as his universal subject 'I' a non-explicitly gendered male subject, whose experience of the world can be set against the far more receptive, passive experience which female subjects are often taught to regard as the default mode of engagement.[759] Looking at the distribution of cupids in ancient images and

[758] Elsner 2007:175.
[759] Young 1980.

architecture, however, may lead us to question whether activity and passivity carry the same connotations of empowerment/disempowerment in ancient visual culture: looking at the ways in which cupids interact with powerful bodies in Pompeian paintings, and also at their roles in non-narrative architectural settings, it seems often to be the acted-upon body which commands respect, with value accorded to the status of being a recipient of physical experience/attention from outside. Cupids allow an encoding of physical experience into the built environment which allows it to remain separate from the direct experience of the viewer themself, belying a deeply ambivalent attitude towards the exercise of tactile capacities by the elite Roman subject. Elite Roman viewers did not necessarily conceptualise their bodies in direct interaction with their surrounding environments, and one might even argue that cupids participate in a phenomenological model of idealised experience in which the environment comes out to meet its occupants rather than the other way round.

It is a paradox which lies at the heart of cupids' presence throughout Roman visual culture, raising questions not only about the ways in which images, objects and spaces stage their viewers but also more generally about hierarchies and ambiguities of sensory experience in the world of the Roman Empire. On the one hand, the assignation to cupids of tactile characteristics such as tenderness, care, and energetic attention manifests a deep sense of discomfort with the real bodies through which such care was dispensed. On the other, it provides a way of embedding these characteristics throughout the built environment, building them into the fabric of everyday life at every level, and even assigning to them a sense of divinity. While eroticism and desire offer one paradigm for understanding cupids – and for engaging with Roman visual culture –

a vast number of these images insist instead or as well on the vital significance of care and tenderness in constituting and maintaining elite body and built environment alike, joining together disparate zones and providing the bodily sellotape which keeps the illusion from falling apart.

Abbreviations

ASR I, 3 Reinsberg, Carola. 2006. *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs* Vol. I, 3. *Die Sarkophage mit Darstellungen aus dem Menschenleben. Vita Romana.* Berlin: Gebr. Mann.

ASR I, 4 Amedick, Rita. 1991. *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs* Vol. I, 4. *Sarkophage mit Darstellungen aus dem Menschenleben. Vita Privata.* Berlin: Gebr. Mann.

ASR V, 1 Rumpf, A. 1939. *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs* Vol. V, 1. *Die Meerwesen auf den antiken Sarkophagreliefs*. Berlin: G. Grote.

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ASR V, 2,3. Schauenburg, Konrad. 1995. *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs* Vol. V, 2,3. *Die stadtrömischen Eroten-Sarkophage. Zirkusrennen und verwandte Darstellungen.* Berlin: Gebr. Mann.

ASR VI, 2,1. Herdejürgen, Helga. 1996. *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs* Vol. VI, 2,1. *Die dekorativen römischen Sarkophage. Stadtrömische und italische Girlandensarkophage. Die Sarkophage des 1. und 2. Jahrhunderts.* Berlin: Gebr. Mann.

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CMT I, 2 Cécile Dulière. 1974. *Corpus des mosaïques de Tunisie* Vol. I, 2. *Utique: les mosaïques in situ en dehors des insulae I, II, III*. Tunis: Institut national d'archeologie et d'arts.

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CMT II, 3 Aïcha Ben Abed-Ben Khader. 1987 *Corpus des Mosaiques de Tunisie* Vol. II, 3. *Thuburbo Maius: les mosaiques dans la region ouest.* Tunis: Institut national d'Archeologie et d'Art.

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LIMC 1981-1999. *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae*. 8 volumes. Zürich; München; Düsseldorf: Artemis & Winkler Verlag.

PPM Bragatini, I. (ed.). 1990-2003. *Pompei: pitture e mosaici*. 10 volumes. Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana.

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