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Iconographic Aspects of the Winged Demon of the *Villa dei Misteri*¹

The atmospheric and ambiguous Dionysiac megalography in the *Villa dei Misteri* – and above all its mysterious demon in a short dress, a pair of hunting boots and holding a scourge – has always attracted the attention of scholars. In the following pages I shall concentrate in particular on a few iconographic aspects, focusing in particular on Italic and Etruscan documents. My considerations will be aimed at clarifying the position of the demon in the previous and contemporary art and underlining – as far as possible – a few possible hints regarding its value.² Since the interpretation of the character and its function is particularly controversial among the scholars, a preliminary excursus on the *status quaestionis* is required.

The Controversial Meaning of a Mysterious Presence

The demon was often connected to the kneeling girl on its left, who would be involved in a rite of whipping. Such an idea was firstly expressed by De Petra³ and shared by Toynbee,⁴ Bieber,⁵ Macchioro,⁶ Maiuri,⁷ Pi-

¹ I wish to express my deepest thanks to Dr. Daniele Maras for his help and illuminating suggestions.

² Regarding other possible meanings of the demon – suggested by a few literary texts – I am writing a further article which I hope to publish in the next future. Scapini M., The Demon in the *Villa de Misteri* Fresco and the Spinning Top in Ancient Rituals (forthcoming).

³ De Petra G., *Villa romana presso Pompei*, *Notizie degli scavi*, 8, 1910, 139-145.

⁴ Toynbee J., *The Villa Item and a Bride's Ordeal*, *JRS*, 19, 1929, 77-87.

⁵ Bieber M., *Der Mysteriensaal der Villa Item*, *JDAI*, 43, 1928, 298-330.

⁶ Macchioro V., *Zagreus. Studi sull'orfismo*, Bari 1929.

⁷ Maiuri A., *La Villa dei Misteri*, Roma 1931.

card,⁸ Simon,⁹ Schefold,¹⁰ Zuntz,¹¹ Boyancé,¹² Brendel,¹³ Marsoner,¹⁴ Grieco¹⁵ and Merkelbach.¹⁶ A few scholars, however, denied the relationship between such characters. The first was Rizzo,¹⁷ followed by Comparetti,¹⁸ Rostovtzeff,¹⁹ Bendinelli,²⁰ Nilsson,²¹ Turcan,²² Ricciardelli,²³ Guarducci²⁴ and Veyne.²⁵ As we are going to see, the presence of the whip was differently interpreted as the allusion to a punitive and expiatory ritual or to a practice of initiation or fecundation.

De Petra²⁶ is the first who considers the whipping scene as the peak of a Dionysiac initiation. In order to support his hypothesis, he quotes a passage by Pausanias concerning a whipping ritual involving women in

⁸ Picard G.-Ch., *La Villa Item (Pompéi) devra-t-elle rebaptisée: Villa sans mystères?* Revue Archéologique, II, 1954, 96-102.

⁹ Simon E., *Zum Fries der Mysterienvilla bei Pompeij*, in *JDAI*, 76, 1961, 111-172.

¹⁰ Schefold K., *Pompejanische Malerei. Sinn und Ideengeschichte*, Bâle 1952.

¹¹ Zuntz G., *On the Dionysiac Fresco in the Villa dei Misteri at Pompei*, Proceedings of the British Academy, 49, 1963, 177-201.

¹² Boyancé P., *Dionysos et Sémélé*, *RPAA*, 37, 1966, 79-104.

¹³ Brendel O., *Der grosse Fries in der Villa dei Misteri*, *JDAI*, 81, 1966, 206-260 and Brendel O. J., *The Great Frieze in the Villa of the Mysteries*, in O. J. Brendel (ed. by), *The Visible Idea. Interpretations of Classical Art*, Washington D. C. 1980, 91-138.

¹⁴ Marsoner A., *La struttura ad anello nel grande fregio della Villa dei Misteri*, *Annali dell'Istituto italiano per gli studi storici*, 11, 1989/1990, 27-54.

¹⁵ Grieco G., *La grande frise de la Villa des Mysteres et l'initiation Dionysiaque*, *La Parola del Passato*, 34, 1979, 417-441.

¹⁶ Merkelbach R., *I Misteri di Dioniso*, Genova 2003.

¹⁷ Rizzo G. E., *Dionysos Mystes. Contributi esegetici alla rappresentazione dei misteri orfici*, *Memorie dell'Accademia Arch. Di Napoli*, 1914, 39-101.

¹⁸ Comparetti D., *Le nozze di Bacco e Arianna*, Firenze 1921.

¹⁹ Rostovtzeff M., *Mystic Italy*, New York 1928.

²⁰ Bendinelli G., *Il fregio dionisiaco della Villa dei Misteri a Pompei*, in *Miscellanea della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia*, Torino 1936 and Bendinelli G., *Ultime considerazioni intorno alla villa pompeiana detta dei misteri*, *Latomus*, 27, 1968, 823-831.

²¹ Nilsson M. P., *The Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman Age*, Lund 1957.

²² Turcan R., *Pour en finir avec la femme fouettée*, *Revue Archéologique*, 1982.

²³ Ricciardelli G., *Mito e performance nelle associazioni Dionisiache*, in *Tortorelli Ghidini M., Storchi Marino A., Visconti A. (ed. by), Tra Orfeo e Pitagora. Origini e incontri di culture nell'antichità. Atti dei seminari napoletani 1996-1998*, Napoli 2000, 265-283.

²⁴ Guarducci M., *Dioniso e la cosiddetta Villa dei Misteri a Pompei*, *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, IV, Roma 1993, 521-533.

²⁵ Veyne P., *Lissarrague F., Frontisi-Ducroux F., I misteri del gineceo*, Roma-Bari 2003. For a more general and complete bibliography regarding the fresco see my PhD thesis, *Riti dionisiaci tra la tarda repubblica e l'inizio dell'impero: forme e valori attraverso l'iconografia*, defended in Verona, Verona 2012, 191-284.

²⁶ De Petra, op. cit.

the temple of Dionysus in Alea.²⁷ Macchioro²⁸ develops such a hypothesis and quotes both the passage of Pausanias regarding Alea and the mention of some *thyrsopleges* – “beaten by the thyrsus” – in the Bacchic ceremonies, made by Hesychius.²⁹ In particular, he interprets the character as Teletè, the patroness of initiations, and such an interpretation is followed by Rostovtzeff.³⁰

On the contrary, Rizzo³¹ thinks that the winged figure is rather in relation with the woman painted on its left, who is unveiling the Dionysiac *liknon*. According to this perspective, the demon is supposed to be a mysterious being, hostile to the initiation. The scholar suggests that this scene mirrors an Orphic conception which perceives the existence of an opposition between the divine nature of the human soul and occult forces who try to bind it to the cycle of reincarnation. Nilsson³² develops the Orphic hypothesis and interprets the demon as a punishing force, in particular Dike, to whom the souls’ judgement is generally entrusted in the Orphic literature. Such a punitive interpretation is basically shared by Ling, Ricciardelli and Zuntz.³³ Others – following a suggestion of Matz³⁴ – identify the character with Nemesis crediting her with different meanings and roles: expiation required by the initiation (Marsoner³⁵), protection of the secrecy of the bridal chamber (Veyne³⁶), divine punishment (Sauron³⁷).

A further interpretation, recalling the Roman ceremony of *Lupercalia*, suggests instead that the whipping has a fecundating meaning (Toynbee, Bieber, Maiuri, Picard, Simon³⁸).

Finally, there are others – *in primis* Schefold, then Boyancé, Brendel, Guarducci³⁹ (though, following Turcan, she denies the presence of a whipping rite in the fresco) – who consider the whipping as the stimulus

²⁷ Paus., *Perieg.*, VIII, 23.

²⁸ Macchioro, *op. cit.*

²⁹ Hesych. s. v. θυρσοπλήγες · οἱ ἐν τοῖς Βακχεῖοις ἐνθεαζόμενοι.

³⁰ Rostovtzeff, *op. cit.*

³¹ Rizzo, *op. cit.*

³² Nilsson, *op. cit.*

³³ *Op. cit.*

³⁴ Matz F., *Διονυσιακή τελετή*, Archäologische Untersuchungen zum Dionysoskult in hellenistischer und römischer Zeit, Mainz-Wiesbaden 1963.

³⁵ Marsoner (*op. cit.*) suggests in particular that Nemesis was conceived by the ancients as a minister of the Mysteries, such as Teletè.

³⁶ *Op. cit.*

³⁷ *Op. cit.*

³⁸ *Op. cit.*

³⁹ *Op. cit.*

to Bacchic *enthousiasmòs*, caused by an infernal Fury, such as Lyssa (Brendel) or Mene (Boyancé).

Previous Parallels with Reliefs, Paintings, Pottery, Terracotta, Cameos and the Djemila Mosaic

It is the dark colour of the demon's wings, along with diverse iconographic parallels, that suggests the connection of the character with furies belonging to the infernal sphere, such as Lyssa, Mene, Nemesis and Dike.⁴⁰ While the overall style of the fresco and the various groups of characters – e. g. the central Dionysiac scene or the Menadic dance – are well rooted in the Hellenistic imagery,⁴¹ many parallels of the winged demon were found in the Italic art.

Rizzo,⁴² for instance, compares the demon with a winged figure in one of the *pinakes* from the “Casa della Farnesina”: here the winged character flanks two figures who seem to be involved in a teaching scene.⁴³ He thinks that, in this case, the goddess is taking to Ades the souls not yet purified by

⁴⁰ Regarding the dark colour as symbolism of death see Colonna G., L'Apollo di Pyrgi, Śur/Śuri (il “Nero”) e l'Apollo Sourios, in *Studi Etruschi*, 73, 2007 [2009], 101-134.

⁴¹ Most scholars have underlined the relationship between the Pompeian megalography and the Hellenistic art, claiming that the fresco is nothing but a Roman copy of a Greek masterpiece: among them see in particular Rizzo, *op. cit.*; Mudie Cook P. M. (Mudie Cooke P. M., *The Paintings of the Villa Iam at Pompei*, in *JRS*, 3, 1913, 157-174 and L. Curtius (Curtius L., *Die Wandmalerei Pompejis*, Leipzig 1929) who ascribe the original to Smyrne. Boyancé (*op. cit.*) in particular ascribes to Smyrne the central group and is followed, among others, by Veyne (*op. cit.*). Bendinelli (*op. cit.*) recognises in the fresco the influence of Skopas, whereas Zuntz (*op. cit.*) ascribes the original model to Pergamon. See also Sauron (*op. cit.*) who, although he thinks that the thematic composition of the work is original, recognises that its formal aspects depend basically on Hellenism: the fresco would be therefore an eclectic product. Many interpreters express a similar idea: Maiuri (*op. cit.*); Ling (Ling R., *Roman Painting*, Cambridge 1991, 101-104); Clarke (Clarke J. R., *Living Figures within the scaenae frons: Figuring the Viewer in Liminal Space*, in Scagliarini Corlaita D. (ed. by), *I temi figurative nella pittura parietale antica (IV sec. a. C.-IV sec. d. C.)*, Bologna 1998, 43-45.); Davies (Davies J. in E. K. Gazda (ed. by), *The Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii: Ancient Ritual, Modern Muse*, Ann Arbor 2000). Schefold, Grieco and Brendel (*op. cit.*), in particular, underline the originality of this eclecticism. Maiuri and Herbig (*op. cit.*) see in the fresco (and in its characters) influences from the local “substratus”. Indeed, as we are going to see, many parallels between the winged demon and the local art support the hypothesis which considers the fresco an eclectic work.

⁴² *Op. cit.*

⁴³ Bragantini L., De Vos M., *Museo Nazionale Romano. Le pitture*. II, 1, Roma 1982, 82-119, inv. 1197. For the status quaestionis concerning the “Casa della Farnesina” see again my PhD thesis *Culti dionisiaci*, 323-356.

the mysteries, and so condemned to reincarnate. Macchioro⁴⁴ mentions also a demon that appeared in a frieze of the Neronian *Domus Aurea*. This picture by now has disappeared, but we know about it from ancient drawings, such as the reproduction made by Francisco Hollanda in 1500 or the painting realized by G. P. Bellori.⁴⁵ In the *Domus Aurea* the winged goddess was next to a boy identified as a little Dionysus. Macchioro interprets her as the Orphic Teletè, the patroness of mystery and initiation, and similarly interprets the Pompeian demon. As concerns Rostovtzeff, he compares the winged goddess with a demon next to two women and a child who appears in a *pinax* found in the "Casa del Criptoportico" in Pompei.⁴⁶ Nilsson,⁴⁷ on the other hand, in order to support the identification of the demon with Dike, observes that the goddess wears a haunting dress - short skirt and high boots - which was typical of the Poinai, the punishing demons painted on the South-Italic vases. To support his idea he mentions in particular a vase from Ruvo, where two images of Dike are represented, next to an enthroned Persephone, Hekate and Orpheus: one of them has a pair of wings.⁴⁸ He mentions also a South-Italic amphora, which shows another scene of afterlife judgement:⁴⁹ here, close to the queen of the underworld, we can see a winged demon akin to the mysterious character of the *Villa dei Misteri*. Again, Brendel⁵⁰ compares the Pompeian goddess with the demons of death represented on the late Etruscan urns, made in the same period of our fresco. He mentions, e. g. the images of the myth of Likourgos, where Lyssa appears as a nocturnal demon, with a haunting shape.⁵¹

On the other hand, many scholars see parallels between the Pompeian scene and a few "Campana" reliefs,⁵² certain cameos and the Dionysiac mosaic of Djemila. The cameos and the reliefs similarly show a woman

⁴⁴ Op. cit., 129.

⁴⁵ Bellori G. P., *Le pitture antiche delle grotte di Roma, e del sepolcro de' Nasonj diseg-nate & intagliate alla similitudine degli antichi originali da Pietro Santi Bartoli, e Francesco Bartoli suo figliuolo*, Roma 1706.

⁴⁶ Rostovtzeff, op. cit. About the "Casa del Criptoportico" and the bibliography see again my PhD thesis, 160-163. The *pinakes*, among which is the one mentioned by Rostovtzeff, were found in the *oecus* 22, an underground space decorated with pictures in the Second Pompeian Style (40-30 BC).

⁴⁷ Op. cit.

⁴⁸ Jatta M., *Monumenti antichi*, XVI, 517, pl. III.

⁴⁹ *Wiener Vorlegeblätter*, Ser. E. pl. VI, 4.

⁵⁰ Op. cit.

⁵¹ See for example the Ruvo krater of the British Museum, in Brendel, op. cit., 111, pict. 16.

⁵² These are Italian architectural terracotta reliefs produced from the first half of the 1st century BC. Their name derives from Giampietro Campana who collected and studied them: he published a catalogue of them in 1842.

unveiling the *liknon*, and a winged figure who consequently escapes.⁵³ It is precisely the parallelism between our demon and the winged character of the cameos and the “Campana” terracotta which makes Rizzo interpret the goddess as a spirit hostile to the initiation. As concerns the mosaic, it is dated to the 2rd or 3rd century AD and was found in Algeria. It depicts a figure showing repulsion for the *liknon* as well. Leschi is the first to outline the parallelism between the woman disgusted by the *liknon* and the winged demon in the *Villa dei Misteri*.⁵⁴ According to him, these figures represent psychological states, as the attribute of the wings suggests. In particular, he thinks that they personify the psychology of the neophyte, frightened by the initiation ritual. He sees the demon as a personification of Nemesis, rather than Dike.

A new iconographic parallel allows Lehmann to give an original interpretation of the demon: it is the picture of a similar figure found in an Egyptian tomb with a graffito which labels it as “Agnolia”⁵⁵, the personification of ignorance. According to him, the demon of the *Villa dei Misteri* is therefore such a goddess, and represents the sad condition of women not yet initiated.⁵⁶

Finally, as a further parallel of the demon Schefold⁵⁷ mentions two winged Dionysiac *genii* portrayed at the edge of the entrance of “Room H” in the Villa of Fannius Sinystor in Boscoreale.⁵⁸

New Iconographic Parallels with Internal Demons on Etruscan Paintings and Mirrors

By following the path of Gilles Sauron,⁵⁹ I hypothesize in particular a strong iconographical parallel between the Pompeian character and the

⁵³ Rizzo, op. cit., 128, pict. 35; 36.

⁵⁴ See Leschi L., *Mosaïque à scene Dionysiaques de Djemila-Cuicul (Algerie)*, Monuments et mémoires. Publiés par 'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres (Fondation Piot), 35, 1935/36, pls. VIII and IX. The analogies between the Djemila mosaic and the Pompeian fresco are underlined also by Bendinelli (Bendinelli, *il fregio dionisiaco*, cit.) and by Matz (op. cit.). A recent analysis of the mosaic of Djemila is in Jaccottet A. F., *Chosir Dionysos: les associations dionysiaques ou la face cachée du dionysisme*, I e II, Zürich 2003, 189-196.

⁵⁵ Lehmann K., *Ignorance and Search in the Villa of the Mysteries*, JRS, 52, 1962, 62-68.

⁵⁶ This interpretation will be followed by Etienne (Etienne R., *La vie quotidienne à Pompéi*, Paris 1966, 270-272) and criticized by Boyancé (Boyancé P., *Méné-Hécate à la villa des Mystères*, RAC, 42, 1966, 57-71), 60 and Grieco, op. cit., 430.

⁵⁷ Op. cit.

⁵⁸ Regarding the Villa of Boscoreale and the two *genii* see again my PhD thesis, 285-315.

⁵⁹ Op. cit.

Etruscan Vanth along with further Etruscan death demons.⁶⁰ I point out, for example, a fresco discovered in the “Tomba del Cardinale” in Tarquinia, dated to the last decades of the 3rd century BC. Here we see another terrifying demon threatening a kneeling figure, such as in the Pompeian painting.⁶¹

Moreover, many Etruscan mirrors of different epochs – mainly from the 5th to the 2nd century BC – show winged infernal demons in situations which can be connected to the Pompeian fresco. I recall in particular an Etruscan mirror from Praeneste in the Archaeological Museum of Bologna,⁶² where we appreciate a further example of a minister of Death associated with a Dionysiac marriage. It is an Artemis/Artames, provided with the hunting attribute of the bow, instead of the boots. She takes part in the union between Ariadne/Esia and Dionysus/Fufluns. As an angel of Death sent by the gods, she tries to tear away the girl from the arms of her lover, and to take her to the Hell.⁶³ But the god, assisted by Athena/Menerva, will manage to save Ariadne. So this episode demonstrates Dionysus’ power against death.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, according to this icono-

⁶⁰ As Ingrid Krauskopf has recalled, we are not yet certain whether “Vanth” was a collective name for all female demons of death or if the character had specific functions (Krauskopf I., *The Grave and Beyond in Etruscan Religion*, in de Grummond N., Simon E. (ed. by), *The Religion of the Etruscans*, Austin 2006, 66-89). Regarding the female chthonian demons see already Enking R., *Culsù und Vanth*, in *RM*, 58, 1943, 48-64 and Rallo A., *Lasa. Iconografia e esegesi*, Firenze 1974, 50-53. See also the recent Krauskopf I., *Gods and Demons in the Etruscan Pantheon*, in MacIntosh Turfa J. (ed.), *The Etruscan World*, London 2013, 513-538. The scholar underlines the liminal function of such figures.

⁶¹ Van Essen C. C., *Did Orphic Influence on Etruscan Tomb Paintings Exist?*, Amsterdam 1927, 17.

⁶² *CSE* (Corpus speculorum Etruscorum), *ITALIA* 1, I, 10.

⁶³ Artemis appears in a particular version of the meeting of Dionysus and Ariadne (already in Hom., *Od.*, XI, 321-325): “And Phaedra and Procris I saw, and fair Ariadne, the daughter of Minos of baneful mind, whom once Theseus was fain to bear from Crete to the hill of sacred Athens”; but he had no joy of her, for ere that Artemis slew her in sea-girt Dia because of the witness of Dionysus” (transl. by A. T. Murray). According to this myth, there is a hostility between the god and the girl. According to Van Hoorn, the latter would actually represent an ancient goddess of nature, antagonist of the former. Under this point of view, Dionysus would ask Artemis to make Ariadne die (Van Hoorn G., *Dionysos and Arianna, Mnemosyne*, 12, 1959, 195).

⁶⁴ The examined mirror does not follow the myth mentioned in the previous footnote, because the latter speaks about a cooperation between Dionysus and Artemis. The iconography seems thus to mingle different versions of the tradition. Giovanni Colonna underlines the initiatic value of the iconography: according to him Arianna is “esia” since she is “consecrated to the god”, after the guilt of her union with Dionysos (Colonna G., *Riflessioni sul dionisismo in Etruria, in Dionysos. Mito e Mistero* (Atti

graphy Minerva, instead of Artemis, is winged.⁶⁵ Such a document is very ancient – it is dated to the 5th century BC – but the thematic similarities with our fresco are quite attractive. The dressing of the ancient Etruscan Vanth and the Praenestine Artemis does indeed exclude the short skirt and the boots. However, the oddity of her look might depend on the fact that the shape of these characters in the manner of Hellenistic style had not yet been developed. In fact, the first representations of winged female demons of revenge in a hunting dress appear chronologically later. Anyway, Ingrid Krauskopf underlines that the Etruscan Vanth originally was a kind guide who maintained this rather “pacifist” attitude even when the “West Greek 'huntress' type of the Erinyes” (in a short chiton or skirt, crossed shoulder straps and boots) was adopted for her. It was only later, under the influence of these West Greek Furies, that her character began to include less benevolent aspects.⁶⁶

I will mention another Etruscan mirror with a winged demon belonging to a context of love.⁶⁷ This piece, found in Perugia, has been dated to the last decades of the 4th century BC. As on the above mentioned mirror, the goddess threatens the couples Venus-Adonis and Atalanta-Meleager, and represents Atropos, as indicated by the inscription. Recalling the whip of the demon in the fresco of the *Villa dei Misteri*, this character

del Conv. Internaz., Comacchio, 3-5 novembre 1989), Ferrara 1991, 117-155). Regarding the myth of Ariadne see also Webster T. B. L., *The Myth of Ariadne from Homer to Catullus*, Greece and Rome, 13, 1966, 22-31. Also Sassatelli (Sassatelli G., in CSE, ITALIA 1, I, 29) comments on this he “obscure” version of Arianna's death. On the role of Pallas at the edge of Dionysus, moving from the Hell to Olympus, I recall a passage by Pindarus written in the first half of the 5th century BC (Pind., *Olymp.*, II, 25-27): “long-haired Semele, who died in the roar of the thunderbolt, lives among the Olympians; Pallas is her constant friend, and indeed so is father Zeus, and she is loved by her ivy-crowned son” (transl. by D. Arnson Svarlien). On this iconography see also De Grummond N. T., *Mirrors, Marriage and Mysteries*, in McGinn T. et al. (ed. by), *Pompeian Brothels, Pompeii's Ancient History, Mirrors and Mysteries, Art and Nature at Oplontis & the Herculaneum 'Basilica'*, JRA, Suppl. 47, 2002, 66-67: the scholar mentions another example of it, where Fufluns/Dioniso is bearded.

⁶⁵ For the Etruscan iconography of the winged Minerva I mention furthermore a mirror of the British Museum (Swaddling J., *Etruscan Mirrors*, London 2001, 58-61, n° 34 = CSE 1, I, 34): the goddess appears here at the edge of Hercules. See also Swaddling, op. cit., 34-37, n° 24 = CSE 1, I, 24, where is represented the child Minerva, again with wings, coming out the head of her father.

⁶⁶ Krauskopf I., *The Grave and Beyond*, op. cit., 73, footnote 47. As we learn from Antonia Rallo (op. cit., 52, in particular), the “huntress type” appears since the 3rd century BC.

⁶⁷ Gerhard E., *Etruskische Spiegel* (Band 2): *Heroische Mythologie*, Berlin 1845, Pl. 176. See also Beazley J. D., *The World of Etruscan Mirror*, JHS, 69, 1949, 1-17, 13, pict. 15 and Maras D. F., *Menerva*, *Archeo*, 300, 2010, 103.

bears instruments of sorrow – a hammer and a nail – symbols of the destiny of Adonis and Meleager.⁶⁸

As regards the function of the demon, it is worth underlining that, as Ingrid Kauskopf recalls commenting on the presence of infernal demons in Etruscan iconographies,⁶⁹ there is no evidence that judgment and punishment in the hereafter were a native element of Etruscan religion: therefore, if our demon is to be interpreted as an allusion to afterlife punishments, such a theme would be entirely Greek in its origin. Anyway Etruscan art – which was influenced by the Hellenistic model of the huntress type of the Furies, as we have seen – might well have provided an iconographical model for the character.⁷⁰

Regarding the association of Dionysus with death suggested by the Praenestine mirror,⁷¹ Colonna⁷² suggests it is a clue that Dionysism in Etruria had a mystic and eschatological value: according to such a Dionysism death was the very moment in which the status of *initiatu*s into the mysteries of Dionysus was really important. This explanation would clarify the meaning of the theme of death – represented by infernal furies – in the Italic Dionysiac funerary iconographies.⁷³ Nevertheless, in my

⁶⁸ De Grummond (op. cit.) suggests further interesting parallels between the Pompeian fresco and the iconographies of the Etruscan mirrors: nevertheless she focuses on the group with mask.

⁶⁹ Krauskopf I., *The Grave and Beyond*, op. cit., 70.

⁷⁰ Contra Veyne (op. cit., 87), who denies the presence of an Etruscan influence on the Pompeian fresco and leads the affinities between these documents back to the “internationalism” characterising the ateliers of that period, influenced by the “cultural imperialism” of the Hellenistic world.

⁷¹ And by diverse Dionysiac symbols showed by a few Etruscan sarcophagi.

⁷² Colonna, op. cit.

⁷³ Regarding the relationship between Dionysus and death in Southern Italy see cfr. Patroni G., *Eros e Sirena – dipinto vascolare pestano del museo di Como – contributo allo studio delle credenze italiote d'oltretomba*, Milano 1917, 145; Nilsson, op. cit., 120-121; Brendel, op. cit., 126 and footnote 87. Regarding chthonian Dionysus in Campania see particularly Elia O., *Bacco fanciullo e Dioniso chthonio a Pompei*, Roma 1961. As regards Dionysus and death in Etruria see in particular Pizzirani C., *Identità iconografiche tra Dioniso e Ade in Etruria*, in *Hesperia*, 26, 2010, 47-70. Erika Simon recalls that in Delphi the Greek worshipped both Apollo and Dionysus. In particular, in the Delphian festival Herois the descent of Dionysus to the Underworld was commemorated: according to this tradition Dionysus was therefore given underworldly implications. As Simon underlines, the Etruscans had close relations with Delphi and therefore they inherited such a conception (Simon E., *Gods in Harmony. The Etruscan Pantheon*, in de Grummond N., Simon E. (ed. by), *The Religion of the Etruscans*, op. cit.).

forthcoming paper focused on the meaning of the Pompeian demon,⁷⁴ I suggest that the character is more probably an allusion to the Furies of Juno⁷⁵ rather than an echo of sophisticated Orphic doctrines. Indeed, the *Villa dei Misteri* is not a funerary context, and the relationship between our demon and Etruscan funerary characters is probably merely iconographical.

Further Parallels on the Pompeian Walls

It must be noticed that winged female demons in a Dionysiac context are very common on Pompeian walls. I am referring to several frescoes which show Dionysus discovering Ariadne asleep. A relation between the demon of the *Villa dei Misteri* and the winged figures close to sleeping Ariadne is suggested by Erika Simon.⁷⁶ She thinks that this character has a supporting role in the divine marriage. A few scholars suggest that the demon is Hypnos or the Nemesis of Theseus, guilty of having abandoned Ariadne.⁷⁷ If this character represented the god of sleep, however, he would have a male appearance.⁷⁸ Moreover, as Robert Turcan points out, Hypnos is usually represented as an old man when in association with Ariadne.⁷⁹ The hypothesis of Nemesis creates problems as well, since this goddess is usually represented with specific attributes like the wheel, the branch, the cubit, the griffin and the brake. Nevertheless most of the scholars suggest this identification. Even in my opinion the parallel between the winged demons close to Ariadne and the Fury on the fresco of the *Villa dei Misteri* is still valid. In fact, both situations show a black-winged goddess next to female figures, bare-chested and with closed eyes, albeit in the other Pompeian frescoes the demons have a pacific attitude. Emeline Richardson, who tries to put the Pompeian winged demons next to Ariadne in parallel with the demons on the Etruscan mirrors, explains their different attitudes imaging that in the first situation the winged

⁷⁴ Scapini M., *The Demon in the Villa de Misteri Fresco and the Spinning Top in Ancient Rituals* (forthcoming).

⁷⁵ Who commonly bear *stimuli* to produce Dionysiac *mania*.

⁷⁶ Simon E., *Zum Fries der Mysterienvilla*, op. cit.

⁷⁷ Concerning the iconography of abandoned Ariadne see Gallo A., *Le pitture rappresentanti Arianna abbandonata in ambiente pompeiano*, *Rivista de Studi Pompeiani*, 2, 1988, 57-80. For the iconography of Hypnos see McNally S., *Ariadne and Others: Images of Sleep in Greek and Early Roman Art*, *Classical Antiquity*, 4, 1985, 152-192.

⁷⁸ See Scherf V., *Fliigelwesen in römisch-kampanischen Wandbildern*, Hamburg 1967, 5.

⁷⁹ Turcan R., *Somnus et Omphale*. Note sur un sarcophage mutilé, *MEFRA*, 74, 1962, 595-606.

woman is a *Lasa*. The latter was an Etruscan female demon that could protect lovers.⁸⁰

The Winged Demos as Teletè:

A Possible Numismatic Parallel and an Arcadian Statue

The identification of the winged demon with Teletè – supported in particular by Rostovtzeff, Macchioro, Matz, Schefold and Marsoner⁸¹ – suggests different but equally interesting considerations. For instance, we could ask ourselves why the iconography of such presumed Teletè implies a pair of wings, an attribute that is rather typical of Nike.

Rostovtzeff, in particular, supporting the existence of a connection between Teletè and Nike, claims that the palm branch, a typical attribute of Victory, “symbolizes the victory over the mystery of life and death effected by the revelation.”⁸² In my opinion the connection between the winged Victory and Teletè is confirmed by the passage of Nonnus that reports the birth of the latter from the union of Dionysus with the nymph Nikeia. Dionysus in fact gave the name of the beloved nymph to the city he founded after his victory against the Indians. The nymph Nikeia was therefore strictly connected to the symbolism of victory, and so should be her daughter.⁸³ I think that this link between Teletè and victory is quite clear in the symbolism of certain Augustan *quinarii*, where a winged Nike stands on the Dionysiac *cista*.⁸⁴ In our fresco, however, there is nothing in the winged demon that recalls the idea of victory, nor the story of Nikeia's daughter, handed down by the *Dionisiakà*.

Moreover, it is strange for the presumed Teletè to display here dark wings like a Fury. As regards such problem, Marsoner states that Nemesis was conceived by the ancients as a minister of the Mysteries. Indeed, a passage of Pausanias regarding the statue of a Fury in an Arcadian

⁸⁰ Richardson E., *The Story of Ariadne in Italy*, in *Studies in Classical Art and Archaeology: A Tribute to Peter Heinrich von Blanckenhagen*, New York 1979, 189-195, 194. Regarding the *Lasae* see in particular Rallo, *op. cit.*: the scholar describes a few mirrors where a *Lasa* flanks the couple Turan/Adonis.

⁸¹ *Op. cit.*

⁸² Rostovtzeff, *op. cit.*, 84.

⁸³ “Then from the wedding with Bromius was born a divine maiden to whom Nikeia gives the name of Teletè. She was always pleased with the feasts, dancing in the nocturnal choirs and following Dionysus, content with the sistrums and the tambourines beaten on both sides. Close to the wine lake (where the god got married with sleeping Nikeia) Dionysus will found a fair-stone city, Nikeia, the city of victory, to whom he will give the name from the nymph, after the victory against the Indians” (Nonn., *Dion.*, XVI, 399-405).

⁸⁴ See for instance a *quinarius* from Rome issued in 30-28 BC: RIC 276.

sanctuary dedicated to Demeter – Ἐρινὺς⁸⁵ seems to suggest a parallelism between Nemesis and Demeter, who was the patroness of the Greek mysteries *par excellence*.⁸⁶ Therefore, there is no contradiction between Teletè and Nemesis, and the Pompeian demon might well evoke both.

Conclusion

The proposed considerations confirm that iconography, along with the literary record, is an invaluable interpretative instrument. In particular, according to the perspective of the history of art, we are allowed to ascribe the Pompeian demon to an original artistic milieu which, whilst basically adopting the codified schemes of Hellenistic aesthetic, does not exclude the influence of local Italic and Etruscan art. Furthermore, the iconographic comparisons might provide us with a better comprehension of the hidden meaning of such a puzzling iconography. The large amount of diverse iconographic parallels – belonging to different contexts and epochs – suggests that the mysterious Pompeian demon represents a fusion of different conceptions. Among the latter, we cannot exclude the influence of a few eschatological and initiatic beliefs perhaps connected to Orphism. Moreover, the parallel of the scene with the Pompeian representations of the sleeping Ariadne protected by Hypnos/Nemesis or a Lasa, suggest a somewhat hierogamic role of the winged character. Such a function would be particularly consistent with both the central theme of the fresco and the proposed parallelism between the presumed whipping and the fecundating whipping of the *Lupercalia*.

⁸⁵ VIII, 25, 4-7: "After Thelpusa the Ladon descends to the sanctuary of Demeter in Onceium. The Thelpusians call the goddess Fury (Ἐρινὺς), and with them agrees Antimachus also, who wrote a poem about the expedition of the Argives against Thebes. His verse runs thus: – "There, they say, is the seat of Demeter Fury. "Now Oncius was, according to tradition, a son of Apollo, and held sway in Thelpusian territory around the place Oncium; the goddess has the surname Fury for the following reason. When Demeter was wandering in search of her daughter, she was followed, it is said, by Poseidon, who lusted after her. So she turned, the story runs, into a mare, and grazed with the mares of Oncius; realizing that he was outwitted, Poseidon too changed into a stallion and enjoyed Demeter. At first, they say, Demeter was angry at what had happened, but later on she laid aside her wrath and wished to bathe in the Ladon. So the goddess has obtained two surnames, Fury because of her avenging anger, because the Arcadians call being wrathful "being furious," and Bather (Lusia) because she bathed in the Ladon. The images in the temple are of wood, but their faces, hands and feet are of Parian marble. The image of Fury holds what is called the chest, and in her right hand a torch; her height I conjecture to be nine feet (transl. by W. H. S. Jones and H. A. Ormerod).

⁸⁶ At least in Arcadia.