

Death, Isis, and Donkeys

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Abbreviations: Balch = David L. Balch, *Roman Domestic Art and Early House Churches* (WUNT 228; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), including a CD; and

PPM = *Pompei: Pitture e Mosaici* (1990-2003), 10 vols.

The first biclinium (A) is surrounded by visual representations of death, just across the plaza from the Pompeian amphitheater. The second garden triclinium (B) is decorated with scenes of Isis (Egyptomania). The third triclinium (C) has elegant visual representations of dining, commissioned by a baker next to a donkey stable.

A. Plates 1-8. Casa di D. Octavius Quartio (II 2,2; PPM III 100-05), outdoor biclinium surrounded by visual representations of death (Balch, pp. 179-85)

The garden behind (south of) the Casa di D. Octavius Quartio contains a water channel built in the form of a “T,” which symbolizes the Nile river. At the northeast corner of the garden is a biclinium, placed at the upper right end of the “T.”

Plate 1 shows the upper (horizontal) section of the “T” water channel looking east toward the biclinium.

Plate 2 shows the biclinium itself (behind the modern iron gate).

Plate 3, the east wall behind the biclinium: Thisbe grieving and bloodied Pyramus dying, after being attacked by a lion, seen in the upper left of the fresco (Balch CD 228)

Plate 4, on the north wall to the diners’ right, an amphitheater scene, a lion pursuing deer (Balch CD 229).

Plates 5-6, directly in front of the biclinium (west), the goddess Diana, angry at being viewed nude, metamorphosizes Actaeon into a deer, who is devoured by his own dogs (Balch CD 230-231). These two frescoes are behind modern plastic protective sheets, which results in poor photographs.

Plates 7-8, the garden, showing the water channel symbolizing the Nile. Plate 7 shows a view looking south toward the back gate, just outside of which is the Pompeian amphitheater. Plate 8 looks north back toward the biclinium and the house beyond. The garden (south) offers a statuette of Hercules strangling snakes (see Balch 180, n. 44 and 156, n. 73).

Plate 9: visible to the left (south) from the biclinium and just out the back gate of the garden, the amphitheater itself (II 6). (Balch CD 260)

Death is visually represented or actually available for viewing entertainment on all four sides of this dining area.

B. Plates 10-15. Casa dell'Efebo o di P. Cornelius Tages (I 7.11; PPM I 722-27), outdoor triclinium with Isis decorations. (Balch pp. 230-32)

Plate 10-12 Concrete banks of the triclinium in the garden itself. Beyond the triclinium is a wall in the center of which is a large niche, to the right of which an amphitheater scene is visually represented, a bull fleeing from a tiger (Balch CD 291ab).

Plate 13 Visual representation on one end of the triclinium bank: golden statue of Isis-Fortuna seated, holding a patera, a cornucopia in her left hand. To the viewers' right, a statue of Horus, son of Isis, in the form of a falcon. A priest stands in front of the shrine, which is surrounded by a circular colonnade, before which there is an altar that is attended by a woman. To the left, two people pass an obelisk. (Balch CD 292)

Plate 14 Visual representation of a banquet scene that includes five symposiasts reclining in a circle, seemingly undisturbed by the crocodile with open jaws wandering in front of their table (Balch CD 296).

Plate 15 An erotic scene involving a couple, a musician playing the double flute, and three or four other onlookers (Balch CD 298).

Plate 16 A similar erotic scene, an engaged couple, accompanied by a figure playing a double flute, viewed by five symposiasts sitting in a circle. Behind them stands one who may be the symposiarch. Inventory 113196 in the National Archaeological Museum, Naples. (Balch CD 299-299a)

C. Insula dei casti Amanti (IX 12,6.8; not in PPM, but see Filippo Coarelli, ed., *Pompeii* [New York: Riverside, 2002] 334-45 with color plates, and Balch 236), a newly excavated triclinium with three visual representations of symposia/convivia, an elegant room sandwiched in between a bakery and a stable, the smells of which would drift into the dining room!

Plates 17-18 three walls, then two walls, of the triclinium

Plate 19 Depending on the interpreter, the couple on the viewers' left is either leaving or just arriving. A couple, each wearing garland crowns, reclines on the triclinium couch, the woman stretching out her right hand toward the leaving/entering woman, who also has a garlanded head. A second couple reclines to the viewers' right. There are two small tables in the center and to the right, which hold several silver vessels and glasses. (Balch CD 303)

Plate 20 The second, central scene with trees and awning represents dining in the open. Two couples recline, with males represented, as is conventional, with darker skin. A slave on the viewers' right pours liquid into a bowl. (Balch CD 304)

Plate 21 The third scene with two drinking couples may represent a drinking competition, which the young man on the right has lost, having fallen into a drunken sleep. (Balch CD 305)

Plate 22 The bones of animals in the stable, who died when Vesuvius erupted (Balch CD 306)