A Time for Fashion: Roman Pearls, Pompeian Paintings, and the Materials of Modernity

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Abstract

For writers from Charles Baudelaire to Giles Lipovetsky, notions of ephemerality, of an ever-increasing pace of change, have linked the concept of fashion with that of modernity. Fashion is doubly temporal, defined equally by fleeting shifts in visual and material manifestations and by its constitution of a momentary now. Using late eighteenth and early nineteenth century treatments of ancient Mediterranean art as a lens to consider the modes in which early fashion theorists encountered Greek and Roman dress practices, this contribution advocates for a paradigmatic shift, one that acknowledges the artificiality of temporal boundaries in order to reframe the terminologies applied to dress practices across the ancient Mediterranean. While notions of shape and drape drive much discussion of ancient Mediterranean dress practices in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century discussions, comparisons between figural Roman statues — visual references at the core of many early discussions of ancient Mediterranean dress — and Pompeian wall paintings, suggest that for Latin authors and Pompeian painters alike, fashion is dependent upon shifts in material, rather than upon changes in form.

In 61 BCE, Gnaeus Pompey Magnus celebrated his defeat of Mithradates of Pontus with a triumph. These military parades, which wound their way through the city of Rome, culminating at the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitoline Hill, were at once an award granted for outstanding military endeavors and a public celebration of imperial might, introducing novel commodities into the Roman system, thus highlighting the benefits of victory. With these public spectacles came increased interest in the material culture presented in the procession itself. When Lucius Cornelius Scipio Asiaticus defeated Antiochus and was awarded a triumph in 189 BCE, his triumphal procession featured nearly three thousand pounds of gold and silver vessels (Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis*, 33.53; Livy, *Ab Urba Condita* 37.59.4-5.) Gnaeus Manlius Vulso's triumph of 187 BCE included multiple types of furniture, including pedestal leg tables, which Livy suggests is fashionable in the period of the triumph, but of less interest in his own time (Livy, *Ab Urba Condita* 39.6.7). Both Pliny the Elder and Livy present the triumph as the mechanism through which such materials were popularized (Ostenberg 2009, 91). While broad conceptualizations of fashion might well include such products, for those concerned with intersections between dress, the body, and time determinate change, it is the third triumph of Pompey Magnus in 61 BCE that offers insight into this portion of the debate. For, when Pompey defeated Mithradates, he brought pearls to the Italian Peninsula (Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis,* 37.14-16).

It is here, in this discussion of the introduction and adoption of novel materials into the ancient Roman market, that modern scholars are invited to reconsider both our current usage of dress- and fashion-related terminologies in ancient Roman contexts and our interpretations of the terms used by Latin authors.

Discussions of the adoption of new forms and materials by the populace, and the notion that such interest is fleeting, suggests the applicability of a particular term: fashion.

With the introduction of pearls comes the opportunity to consider the notion of time-based changes in dress, and with this to reconsider the popular application of the term fashion itself: what did fashion look like in an ancient Mediterranean context? To evaluate this question requires close considerations of the terms dress and fashion themselves, together with a shift in expectation, one that highlights changes in material as much as changes in shape or form.

THE FASHION QUESTION: TIME, SPACE, AND TERMS

Designer Ying Gao has argued that "fashion is an encounter with time" (Romashevskya 2016). But in what times do we encounter this phenomenon? Ephemeral and mutable, the concept of fashion is linked both to the passage of time and to episodic points in time, with changing styles serving as a visual and material double for the cyclical nature of human time perception. For, much as the changes that define fashion are non-linear, human perceptions of time are similarly not linear; instead, they are "a loop connecting memories of the past, present sensations, and expectations about the future" (Di Lernia et al 2018, 1). Such entanglements are common to time and fashion alike. Garments and shoes, jewellery and hairstyles persist beyond the present, serving as enduring memories of a fleeting moment, as elements perceptible across many times, but fashionable in few. Thus, fashion is doubly temporal, defined equally by fleeting shifts in visual and material manifestations and by its constitution of a momentary now. Indeed, the term fashion itself has often been tied to particular time periods and to the elusive concept of modernity.

For theorists such as Giles Lipovetsky, the concept of fashion is temporally dependent. As he states, "Fashion does not belong to all ages or to all civilization; it has an identifiable starting point in history...I view it as an exceptional process inseparable from the origin and development of the modern West" (Lipovetsky 1994, 15). He is not alone in this. Fernand Braudel suggests that fashion first emerges around the year 1350 CE (Braudel 1981, 317; Welters and Lillethun 2018, 4-5, 153). Anne Hollander posits a slightly earlier date for the first iterations of something that might be termed fashion, dating the concept to the period of the thirteenth century CE and after (Hollander 1978, 17). Such viewpoints provide a glimpse of a more pervasive conceptual stance, for much as Lipovetsky ties the concept of fashion both to a timeframe and an area associated with the "modern West," Braudel, Hollander and the scholars who follow them associate fashion with particular types of garments, those with "significant distortion and creative tailoring (as opposed to creative draping and trimming)" (Hollander 1978, 17). If fashion applies only to these certain types of garments, and to quick changes in the shapes of such garments, then the term would be inappropriate to apply to late first century BCE and early first century CE Rome, as such garments are not in use in this time or place. Similarly, if as Georg W. F. Hegel argues, the classical mode of dress is both monolithic and static, then the application of the term fashion in ancient Mediterranean contexts could be deemed problematic (Hegel 1988 [1835], 701-791).

The issue is, in part, one of definitions. For Lipovetsky, fashion is not only tied to change. He acknowledges the potential for variation in Greek draped garments, but suggests that this variation alone does not merit the uses of the term fashion. Lipovetsky states: "Even when ways of arranging dress varied considerably, as they did in Greece, they were nevertheless ordered, predetermined by a closed set of possible combinations...there was no formal innovation" (1994, 35). In his formulation, it is this lack of "individual aesthetic autonomy" that precludes the use of the term fashion (Lipovetsky 1994, 35). The focus upon "a single piece of rectangular cloth" highlights another key aspect of multiple twentieth century definitions: the implicit association between the term fashion and changes in shape associated with tailored garments (Lipovetksy 1994, 35; Wellers and Lillethun 2018, 124). The limitations of this focus were swiftly recognized. Joanne B. Eicher and Mary Elle Roach-Higgins confronted this directly, arguing that classifications that focus on tailoring or drape present "a very limited view" (Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1992, 11).

Those instances in which the concept of change is central to a definition of fashion, as is the case for Braudel, have been further problematized by late twentieth and early twenty-first century scholars. Braudel, by associating fashion with both change and Europe, creates a "point of demarcation between the West and the rest" (Finnane 2008, 6). For Braudel, the pace of change in fashion parallels change in society on a larger scale. He states this directly, arguing that Chinese dress "scarcely changed in the course of centuries, but then Chinese society itself scarcely moved at all" (Braudel 1967, 227). As Antonia Finnane has argued, such statements support imperialist Eurocentric perspectives that seek to construct binary oppositions (Finnane 2008, 10). If fashion is tied to European exceptionalism, then when "something very like fashion" with "rapid change and heady consumption" is present outside of Europe, it must, for those seeking to advance a Eurocentric perspective, be denied (Finnane 2008, 10). Yet, as Jane Schneider asserts "no cloth or clothing tradition was ever static" (Schneider 2006, 205). Fashion is persistently present, but the term is not consistently applied.

Given such concerns, scholars interested in bodily mediations in the ancient Mediterranean have turned to alternate terminologies to discuss the topic of clothed and augmented bodies. Thus, the title of Judith Lynn Sebesta and Larissa Bonfante's seminal 1994 edited volume *The World of Roman Costume*, highlights the term costume, referencing a tradition of costume history pioneered by Cesare Vecellio in 1590 with the publication of *De gli habiti antichi et moderni di diverse parti del mondo libiri due*, which contains 420 woodcut engravings highlighting the customary modes of dress of groups ranging from Venetian lawyers to ancient Romans (Sebesta and Bonfante 1994; Vecellio 1590). This terminology highlights longstanding interest in the study of ancient Mediterranean mediations of the body, and as Bonfante's use of the term "dress" within the text of the volume

suggests, may also reflect eighteenth-century French understandings of the term "costume" in art. As the definition provided by Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert in their *Encyclopédie* indicates "costume" is "the exact observation of that which constitutes, according to the time period, the genius, customs, laws, taste, wealth, character, and the habits of a country" (Diderot and D'Alembert 1754, 298-299; Siegfried 2009, 240).

Such definitions focus not on time or change, but upon context, and like the term fashion, they are broad. It is this breadth that is challenged through the use of the term dress, a term that references the suite of body modifiers that ranges from tattoos to hairstyles, from comportment to clothing. In defining the term, Roach-Higgins and Eicher suggest that, when discussing the body and its modifiers, dress is preferable to the term fashion, for fashion "refers to many different kinds of material and non-material cultural products" (Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1992, 7). For Roach-Higgins and Eicher the issue is one of precision. If fashion can refer equally to houses, music, automobiles or earrings, discussions of dress are limited to the final entry on the list. Dress is currently the term most commonly used in discussions of modified bodies in the ancient Mediterranean zone, both for its precision and for its inclusivity regarding modes of bodily modification (Lee 2015, 10-32). But, like the term fashion, the use of the term dress leaves open a question: is there ancient Mediterranean fashion?

As a history of scholarship dating to the sixteenth century recognizes, the people of the ancient Mediterranean dressed their bodies. This dress helped to constitute them, to underscore their identities and embody their experiences. The term — dress — is not interchangeable with fashion, although it may at times overlap with it.

Fashion is time determinate change; this change can be tracked through the ways in which groups adopt the fashionable item or idea in increasing quantities and the ways in which the item or idea is eventually supplanted.

Dress, by contrast, focuses in particular upon the body and its modifiers, which enable understandings of "embodied social practice" (Lee 2012, 180). Ancient dress is not in question; rather the rate at which such dress changed, and thus the applicability of the term fashion, as it applies to dress, in ancient Mediterranean

contexts, is the subject of debate. We should note that there may be many varieties of ancient Mediterranean fashions, including fashions in wall painting, in modes of conveyance, and in statuary, but here, our focus remains upon fashions in dress, and thus the understanding of the stuff of fashion that is perhaps the most common in our own contemporary vernacular usage.

As Mary Harlow has suggested, the problem of fashion in ancient Mediterranean contexts is complicated by the extant evidence. Shifts in uses of colour or textile production can constitute ancient fashion; however, such shifts can be difficult to identify in the textual, visual, or material record (Harlow 2021, 3-4). As Harlow's focus on colour and textiles suggests, fashion, if the term can be associated with the ancient Mediterranean, is situated not around changes in shape — a central focus for those who locate fashion in the period after the thirteenth century CE, as noted above — but upon changes in material, an idea that is integrated into discussions of ancient dress from an early date.

Johann Joachim Winckelmann, in his foundational opus History of Ancient Art, devotes seventy pages to a detailed discussion of Greek and Roman clothing, jewellery, shoes, and hairstyles (Winckelmann 1872 [1764], 3-73). His descriptions of details related to such bodily modifications often highlight not only details of dress, but also the materials depicted. In his discussion of wall paintings from Herculaneum, he remarks that the artists take care to render the iridescence of silk, utilizing variations in colour to suggest differences in texture between depicted textiles, and directly associates the use of such fabrics with the early first century CE (Winckelmann 1872 [1764], 7). Winckelmann's detailed account of changes in colours and materials, fabrics and details of dress constitutes a discussion of fashion. Winckelmann himself hints at the stylistic variability of dress when he states that "the nude body might be learned from four or five of the most beautiful statues, yet drapery must be studied on a hundred. One statue is rarely found to resemble another in its drapery" (Winckelmann 1872 [1764], 73).

While such statements seem only to underscore the presence of ancient Mediterranean fashion, for Winckelmann and the subsequent late eighteenth and nineteenth century CE writers and artists who reference him, this variability is of less interest than the distinction between the dress of the people of Greece and Rome and that of contemporary Europe. In his 1755 treatise, Reflections on the Imitation of the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks, Winckelmann develops an argument that distinguishes the natural mode of drapery from the artifice of contemporary fashion, contrasting drapery with garments like stays, designed to adjust the shape of the body (Winckelmann 1765 [1755], 7). His assertion that in order to be great, one must imitate the Greeks (Winckelmann 1765 [1755], 2), elevates the depicted ancient Mediterranean dress above European fashion

and separates such dress from this system. While the fashions of Winckelmann's present are framed as restrictive, Greek dress is both natural and free, a contrast that underscores Winckelmann's conceptualization of personal and political freedom in Greek society generally (Donohue 2005, 167-168). Winckelmann's present is in part designed by fashions that both hold their own form and re-shape the figure and comportment of the wearer; the idealized Greek past is separate from such constraints.

Such conceptualizations of disparity, of the essential difference between the dress of the idealized Greco-Roman past and the fashions of the present are similarly emphasized by contemporary artists. In 1779, Daniel Chodowiecki's Natur und Afectation juxtaposes two couples (Figure 1 and Figure 2). In the first panel of the set, two figures, both swathed in drapery, stride toward the viewer. Following classicizing norms, the man is largely nude, while the woman wears pale cloth, thin enough to suggest the form beneath. The woman's hair is loosely bound, while the man has a close-cropped beard and lightly curled hair reminiscent of mid-first century CE imperial Roman portraiture. The long strides of both figures stand in contrast to the second panel in the series, in which a second pair, both festooned with fashionable attire stand in a carefully considered pose, with closed stances that are both constrained by cumbersome dress such as panniers and reminiscent of ballet (Rauser 2015, 479). These oppositional pairings resonate with Winckelmann's conceptualization of the distinction between contemporary fashion and ancient dress, while, as Amelia Rauser argues, anticipating the fashionable garb of the late eighteenth century (Rauser 2015, 479).

FIGURE 1 GOLD BAR EARRINGS WITH PENDANT PEARLS OF THE TYPE KNOWN AS *CROTALIA*. FIRST CENTURY CE. METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART 20.234.

FIGURE 2 HEMISPHERICAL EARRINGS SET WITH PEARLS. POMPEII, CASA DEGLI ARCHI, MID-FIRST CENTURY BCE-MID FIRST CENTURY CE. MUSEO ARCHEOLOGICO NAZIONALE DI NAPOLI.

FIGURE 3 HEMISPHERICAL GOLD EARRING WITH CONVEX BODY. FIRST CENTURY CE-SECOND CENTURY CE. METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART 74.51.4001.

It is this shifting fashion that is itself the focus of a 1797 satirical print executed by Alexis Chataignier that again depicts two couples (Figure 3). On the left, a woman wearing a long pale gown referencing the contemporary neoclassical style that was anticipated by Chodowiecki takes a long stride forward, as the man standing alongside her gestures towards another pair. On the right, a woman and a man dressed in the fashion of the ancien régime, embellished with embroidery and wigs, panniers and shaping garments, display a disjunction that mirrors that of Chodowiecki's *Natur and Afectation* of twenty years prior. Here, while nature and artifice are intertwined with Chatagnier's commentary, it is fashion, and fashionability, that is under scrutiny. As the text beneath the image suggests, the couple on the left decries the couple on the right as relics, while the couple on the right suggests that the new fashions are madness. It is in such images that we can begin to grasp not only the distinctions between types of fashionable dress at various points in the late eighteenth century CE, but also the ways in which Winckelmann's conceptualizations of the nature of Greek and Roman fashion are integrated into European thought. These images also help to illuminate the ways in which shifts in fashionability are expressed in print. While studies of extant garments can highlight changes in textile usage, in weave, in colour, and details of embroidery and embellishment, changing shapes and levels of elaboration are at the core of Chatagnier's work.

For Georg Hegel, who builds upon Winckelmann's concepts, the problem is again one of artifice, and explicitly, of shape. Expanding upon his conceptualization of the superiority of Greek art to later European works, he contrasts what he terms drapery, the clothing depicted upon ancient Mediterranean statues, with the fashions of his period. In his estimation, this previous mode of dress is laudable because it conforms to the body, unlike the fashions of his day that create a silhouette distinct from the bodies that periodically inhabit them (Hegel 1988 [1835], 165-166; Doy 2002, 21). Such drapery is both a-temporal and formless, with swaths of lightly pinned fabric standing in direct contrast to the seams and cuts of later periods. If, as Hegel argues, fashion is "continually altering" (Hegel 1988 [1835], 707), then the dress of the people of Greece and Rome, conflated onto the forms of statues and textual actors, becomes a conceptual anti-fashion. This concept both separates it from and elevates it above contemporary depictions of normatively clothed bodies. His celebration of the natural and of the ideal is complicated by his expectations regarding visual change.

What follows is an attempt to reframe this discourse, through the presentation of a case study focused on pearls in late first century BCE and early first century CE Rome.

This study suggests that, while shifts in the width of skirts, in the shape of necklines, and in the volume of sleeves may mark changes in fashions in later periods, for Romans, fashion is a matter of material.

POMPEY'S PEARLS: FASHION AS MATERIAL IN ANCIENT ROMAN CONTEXTS

Pliny argues that it is Pompey Magnus's triumph of 61 BCE that prompts an interest in pearls, and he argues that as people generate new modes of wearing this material, this interest grows. He suggests that triumphs function in this way, generally, citing Scipio Asiaticus's gold and silver vessels and the furniture introduced by Gnaeus Manlius Vulso as part of the same system. After seeing such goods in triumphs, the people of Rome seek to purchase them (Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis,* 37.6). In his discussion of pearls themselves, Pliny suggests that not only are pearls popular as a material, but they also prompt their own trends, and these trends, while they may originate with the wealthy, are taken

up by those of the plebeian classes (Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis,* 9.56). Here, the change with which Pliny is concerned is both based upon trends and upon social order. If plebeian women can purchase and wear pearls, this visually elides distinctions between social groups, which undermines the function of Roman society (Wallace-Hadrill 1990, 146-147). And, while pearls as a material might constitute a sound investment, the uses to which pearls are put, much like the ephemeral nature of purple dyes, an idea that Pliny uses to introduce his discussion of the popular colour, generates instabilities of valuation. As a material, Pliny argues that murex dyes, which produce the colour purple, should not command a price as high as that of pearls, which are longer lasting (Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis,* 9.60). It is demand, rather than material value, that determines price. Such concepts, particularly the notion of a cycle of adoption and imitation that blurs social boundaries echoes conceptualizations of fashion, particularly that of late nineteenth-century sociologist Georg Simmel, in which the cyclical, changing nature of fashion is understood to be driven by imitation and a desire for group inclusion and imitation (Simmel 1957, 543-544).

While a trend for pearls was prompted by Pompey's triumph, Romans were aware of pearls in earlier periods. Pliny indicates that pearls were first used in Rome in the late second century BCE, but that these pearls were not as large, nor as pale in colour, as those that became available after Pompey's eastern conquests (Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis,* 9.59). Pliny himself associates the growth of the pearl trade with the increased accessibility of the Indian Ocean (Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis,* 12.83-84), and this trade is facilitated by the trade infrastructures supported by the Roman state and the maintenance of trade routes that transported pearls from India and Sri Lanka, together with pearls from the Persian Gulf, into Rome through Egypt and Syria (Schörle 2015, 44, 46).

For *triumphators* like Pompey Magnus, and for many subsequent buyers of pearls, their value was likely multi-valenced. The availability of such materials itself underscores shifting power and imperial connectivity, while the pearls themselves carry established monarchical ties, associating their wearers and owners with elite status. While not all Roman buyers may have been aware of sixth century BCE caches of pearls in the royal garden at Pasargade, oyster shells excavated at Cyprus attest to the integration of pearls into the Mediterranean region following Alexander the Great's forays into India (Schörle 2015, 44). For Pompey Magnus, and for the subsequent triumphators like Julius Caesar and Augustus who similarly elected to integrate pearls into their triumphal processions (Östenberg 2009 106), suggesting a fashion for pearls within the space of the triumph itself, as pearls offer the opportunity simultaneously to compare their military victories to that of Alexander the Great and to adopt the trappings of kingship in a socially acceptable manner. To impress upon their spectators the sumptuousness of the stones, and through them the material impact of victory,

Pompey Magnus and Julius Caesar both elected to present a quantity of pearls in larger compositions; in Pompey Magnus's triumph, pearls were used to generate a portrait of the general himself (Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis* 37.6). The inclusion of such a portrait was both novel and problematic to traditional Roman conceptualizations of appropriate display; however, as Ida Östenberg argues, without situating a large number of pearls in close proximity to each other, they would have been difficult for spectators to properly view. As she puts it, "Rich as they may be, their opulence would not easily have been comprehensible if displayed on their own" (Östenberg 2009, 107).

While writers like Pliny may have decried Pompey's choice to include a pearl portrait of himself in his triumph as both hubristic and uncomfortably over luxurious, it does appear to have engaged the minds of spectators, impressing upon them the potentials of the material. Over the course of the subsequent generation, the desire for pearls grew so great that by 46 BCE Julius Caesar instituted sumptuary legislation designed to incentivize increased birth rates by restricting the use of pearls to freeborn women with children (Suetonius, *Vit. Jul.* 43; Kunst 2005, 137). The demand for high quality stones allowed them to command high prices; the short-lived emperor Vitellius pawned one of his mother's pearl earrings and earned enough ready money from the transaction to fund a military campaign in Gaul (Suetonius, *Vit.Vit.* 7.2). Such anecdotes offer insight into systems both of economic valuation and of conspicuous consumption. These notions are especially apparent in Julius Caesar's attempts to curtail and incentivize the wearing of pearls.

Thorstein Veblen, in his late nineteenth-century articulation of the entanglements between conspicuous consumption and the leisure class, suggests the following:

> …much of the charm that invests the patent-leather shoe, the stainless linen... which so greatly enhance the native dignity of a gentleman, comes of their pointedly suggesting that the wearer cannot when so attired bear a hand in any employment that is directly and immediately of any human use. Elegant dress serves its purpose of elegance not only in that it is expensive, but also because it is the insignia of leisure. (Veblen 1899, 79)

Curtailing this joining of excess resources with excess leisure is at the heart of Caesar's late first century BCE legislative agenda, for together with limiting the use of pearls to women of a certain rank, age, and childbearing status, he also limited the use of purple, which was both famously expensive and ephemeral, and the use of litters (Suetonius, *Vit. Jul.* 43), an overt marker of conspicuous leisure. That Julius Caesar felt such laws were warranted is a marker of the effects of fashion, for fashion is intertwined with aspiration. Julius Caesar seeks to restrict the use of pearls to a status marker; that he must enact legislation to do so suggests that they have transcended this position. If those in power must

reinforce that power through legislation seeking to curtail the activities of those they seek to render powerless, these structures of power are themselves unstable, and this instability is both driven and highlighted by fashion, as much for those subject to Julius Caesar's laws as for the well-heeled matrons that are the purview of Thorstein Veblen.

The addition of pearls to women's shoes, as Pliny described (Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis,* 9.56), suggests that Veblen's notions of both conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure were in effect in Rome. To add pearls to shoes suggests the excess resources of the wearer, or the wearer's family. To put an expensive material upon a shoe suggests, not perhaps that one is so unconcerned with expenditure that one is happy to crush gems when one walks, but perhaps that one has little need to do something mundane as actually step upon a street, arguing that the wearing of pearls, and the positioning of those pearls has a value for the wearer that extends beyond the monetary. This concept is underscored by the archaeological records of the sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum.

PEARLS IN POMPEII: TOWARDS A METHODOLOGY FOR FRAMING ANCIENT ROMAN FASHION

How do we locate change over time? In archaeological contexts, one response may be: through numbers. If fashion is present in a system, we might anticipate seeing a rise in the number of a certain type of object, during which time this object is in increasing use, suggestive of what we might in modern parlance term a trend, followed by a decrease in the appearance of this object, or a re-interpretation or re-imagination of it. While the object of interest might, in some periods, be less prevalent, it would likely not disappear entirely, as the adoption of a new style or trend does not lead to the total erasure of things that were previously popular. A pair of earrings might become heirlooms, a favourite pair of shoes might be worn despite their unfashionability. Instead, we would anticipate that such instances would become outliers within the data set, present but not prevalent. Initial data suggests that such is the case with the use of pearls on the Bay of Naples.

In Pompeii, 28% of all earrings excavated on the site are of a single style; at Herculaneum, nearly 25% of earrings found on the site are of the same type (D'Ambrosio and de Carolis 1997, 23, 83). This type of gold bar earring (Figure 4), with two hanging pendants, each of which terminates in a pearl, are generally termed crotalia, a designation provided by Pliny (Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis,* 9.56). The name of these accessories ref–erences the sound that the earrings make

FIGURE 4 HEMISPHERICAL EARRINGS WITH HEXAGONAL EMERALDS ON A CONVEX GRID. FIRST CENTURY CE. BRITISH MUSEUM 1856,1226.1405.

when a woman walks, which was reminiscent of the clacking of instruments known as *crotala*, used by dancers, similar to modern castanets. As she moves, the pendants swing, and the pearls knock against each other, making a clicking sound that is audible to passers-by, drawing attention to their wearer.

The prevalence of this style of earring within the archaeological record suggests that beyond an interest in pearls themselves, this variety of earring type, one that seems to come into being, in part to showcase the material qualities of pearls, both their sheen and their resonance, is fashionable. Such earrings, and pearls themselves, are a component of a larger visual system, a necessary element of what might be termed the early imperial look, an idea that is further attested by the presence of imitation pearls, often shaped from mother of pearl or shell, within the archaeological record. A pair of earrings from Oplontis Villa B, located around 4 kilometers west of the site of Pompeii, appear to be pendant pearls, suspended from a smooth gold ring (D'Ambrosio and de Carolis 1997, 64). Yet, these pearls are instead mother of pearl, giving the look of the desired material without the cost of obtaining such large oceanic gems. In another example from Oplontis Villa B, a set of twenty-six pale stones with gold settings form a hemispherical earring, similar in style to a set of earrings found in the Casa degli Archi in Pompeii (D'Ambrosio and de Carolis 1997, 31, 64; Gazda and Clarke 2016, 242). However, while examples from Pompeii display a hemispherical cluster of pearls (Figure 5), the set from Oplontis uses quartz to generate a similar effect. If imitation materials are sought, and if these dress elements are as interesting in depiction as they are in actuality, as is suggested by the presence of pearls in Roman period wall paintings and mosaics — in which period pearls first enter the visual record of the ancient Mediterranean (Schörle 2015, 45) — then the interest in pearls, as intertwined with economics as it may be, extends beyond it.

FIGURE 5 DANIEL CHODOWIECKI, *NATUR UND AFECTATION,* 1777, PLATE I OF SIX PAIRS OF ETCHINGS. LONDON, BRITISH MUSEUM 1863, 0613.643-644.

FIGURE 6 ALEXIS CHATAIGNIER, AH! QUELLE ANTIQUITÉ!!!
OH! QUELLE FOLIE QUE LA NOUVEAUTÉ..., 1797, ETCHING AND
ENGRAVING. LONDON, BRITISH MUSEUM, 1892, 0714.755.

Taken together, this evidence offers insights into the mechanisms that underlie a Roman fashion system, wherein novel concepts are introduced, disseminated, propagated, and curtailed, generating confluences between temporal zones and material articulations.

Even as pearls become popular, that popularity is expressed in a variety of modes. The hemispherical earrings mentioned above interject pearls into a popular shape of earring, one that is primarily attested in gold in the archaeological records of Pompeii and Herculaneum (Figure 6) and is present in depiction in the mid-to-late first century BCE. The introduction of pearls, and imitation pearls, might constitute an update of a familiar form, while *crotalia*, in Pliny's estimation, are a new style in the first century CE. Much as William Henry Perkin's aniline purple simultaneously sparked a fashionable interest in the adoption of the new shade and a lasting intervention in the form of synthetic dyes, pearls in the Italian Peninsula are tied both to a moment and to trends and to systems of manufacture, as earring types are adapted to respond to new fashions. The bar earrings, *crotalia*, that Pliny associates directly with pearls are later appropriated to showcase other, newly fashionable materials, much as hemispherical earrings that once appeared in gold can be adapted to display pearls.

Like pearls, for ancient Romans, emeralds are associated both with a time and with a place. There were two known sources of emeralds in the ancient Mediterranean region, the first in Egypt and the second in Austria, with the Egyptian mines that were first worked under the Ptolemies serving as the primary source for Roman buyers (Shaw, Bunbury and Jameson 1999, 203), particularly after Egypt was fully incorporated into the Roman empire, with the defeat of the forces of Cleopatra VII at Actium in 31 BCE. With both, there was the advent of new techniques for polishing such gems (Shaw, Bunbury and Jameson 1999, 203) and the opening of additional mines under the emperor Claudius (Tait 1987, 88). The increased availability of these gems increased their popularity and with it, their inclusion into already prevalent jewellery types. The hemispherical earrings that first appear in gold, then in pearl, are again adapted to highlight the colour and form of emeralds (Figure 7). By the second century CE, emeralds appear in the place of pearls in some examples of crotalia (Di Giacomo 2016, Plate IX.14).

Even as emeralds rise in popularity, the introduction of a new trend does not fully negate an interest in pearls, instead, increasing numbers of multiple types of jewellry, from earrings to bracelets to necklaces, begin to combine the two stones, with the vibrant hue of Egyptian emeralds both complementing and contrasting the iridescent gleam of pearls (Di Giacomo 2016, 92). This combination of jewels begins to resonate with wearers of multiple types. The empress Lollia Paulina, one of the wives of Claudius, purportedly wore a set of emeralds and pearls worth forty million sestertii to an engagement party (Pliny the Elder, *Historial Naturalis*, 9.117; Kunst 2005, 134-135; at the House of Gratus in Pompeii, a less affluent woman turned to more modest materials to achieve a similar effect. Her gold and emerald necklace was crafted from gilded bronze with a central glass paste stone, allowing her to join in the trend at a lower cost (Roberts 2013, 140-142).
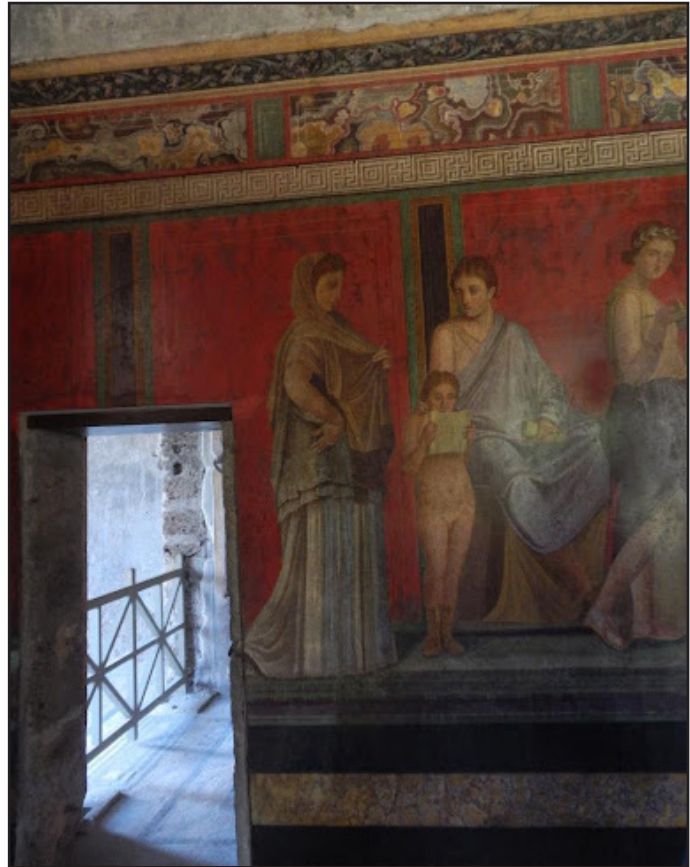

FIGURE 7 WESTERN WALL, ROOM 5, VILLA OF THE MYSTERIES, POMPEII. CA. 60 BCE-79 CE

PHOTO BY AUTHOR, WITH PERMISSION.

In this way, technological change and the introduction of new materials prompt shifts in visible trends. While these trends may overlap and intertwine, they remain temporally driven. As the sight of aniline purple is novel and fashionable in the latter half of the nineteenth century CE, even as the manufacture of similar dyes extends beyond it, so too does the sight of pearl or emerald jewellry on the ancient Italian peninsula situate the viewer in time, even as the use of such stones in conjunction with other materials may continue beyond their surge. For writers like Pliny the Elder, the situation is clear. For him, there is a direct link between the moment of Pompey's triumph and the subsequent public desire for pearls (Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis,* 37.6.12). Beyond this, he suggests that this is one of the on-going effects of public spectacles such as triumphs — they serve as a space in which new ideas and materials are introduced to an audience that desires change; they are a mechanism through which fashions are disseminated.

Such resonances are so clear that, for archaeologists and art historians, these changes can constitute a relative dating system, a way to associate sites and contexts with time periods. By turning to fashion, to changes in adornment and hairstyles, it is possible to correlate depictions of individuals with a time period, in part through references to shifts in imperial portraiture and the styles that were likely disseminated through such images (Fittschen 2015, 67-68; Fejfer 2008, 347-358); using such methodologies, one can correlate artifacts and contexts with date ranges as specific as a fifteen year period (Hiesinger 1969, 40-41) — a greater level of specificity than is possible through methods such as isotope analysis. Whether there is time determinate change in styles of dress in Rome and its environs is then not the question. Rather, we might ask why such change is obfuscated terminologically. The problem is one of expectation. To ask "Is this fashion?" is not only to track change, but also to consider what constitutes change, and in what areas and ways changes can develop.

PICTURING TIME IN THE VILLA OF THE MYSTERIES

To begin to reintroduce the varieties of dress available to the women of ancient Italy, to consider the scale and pace of change in dress apparent in these environs, we turn now away from a search for mechanisms of dissemination and a discussion of past barriers, and toward the Villa of the Mysteries, a space that offers a glimpse of the ephemeral and an opportunity to view an articulation of fashion in a first century BCE Italic context.

On April 29, 1909, Aurelio Item began explorations on a plot of land at the edge of the then-known extent of the site of Pompeii, through the Porta Ercolanese and beyond the Street of the Tombs (Bergmann 2007, 239). It was soon evident that his efforts had uncovered an unexpected villa — far larger than

anything yet found in Pompeii, one that includes some seventy rooms, combining spaces for agricultural production with elaborately painted rooms associated with social display. By the following week, the near-life sized figural murals of Room 5 were visible for the first time in nearly two millennia. Room 5, situated in the south-eastern quadrant of the house, is accessible through the atrium, but not visible from it; routes leading into the space are both limited and easily regulated (Longfellow 2000, 26-29). The inaccessibility of the space parallels the impenetrability of its decorative program.

Twenty-nine figures traverse the walls of Room 5; of these twenty-nine, only one has an uncontested identification. The unbearded, partially nude man, crowned with ivy, a thyrsus leaning precariously against his thigh who sits upon the wall that faces the room's primary entrance is iconographically and compositionally equated with Dionysus, the god of wine, inebriation, and fertility. While this identification gives the room and the house its common name — the mysteries referenced are the initiation rites associated with the cult of Dionysus — to attempt to name the women and the scenes that surround him, to seek out iconographic details that could tie these images to texts, is to overlook the markers of contemporaneity and adaptability that are insistent throughout the space. For, at its core, this room is concerned, not with mythological interplays or textual references, but with women and the potentials of women. Indeed, as Elaine Gazda argues, these depictions may reference specific women, likely "recognizable individuals of the villa's household" (Gazda 2021, 141-142).

While the women on the walls of Room 5 each wear draped garments, these are not the ideal and austere swaths of fabric celebrated by Hegel.

From the translucent silk worn by the seated woman on the west wall, to the multi-coloured tunics of the women who frame the space to the north and south, from the pinned shoulders of the stola clad woman on the western wall, to the buttoned sleeves worn by her neighbour, variability is on display.

Thus the room highlights the range of options for tying a mantle — the outer wrap worn by women consistently in the space — underscoring both the ability

FIGURE 8 TERRACOTTA LEKANIS WITH LID AND FINIAL. CENTURIPE, ITALY. SECOND HALF OF THE 3RD CENTURY BCE. METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART 30.11. 4A-C.

of drapery to obscure as much as it reveals and the extent to which individuality is apparent both in modes of wearing and in personal manipulation of fabrics that are not cut into shape. In so doing, the depictions complicate Hegelian readings that depend upon similarity and a lack of artifice, but fashion is not only change, nor is it defined solely, or perhaps even primarily, through availability of options; fashion is change in the fourth dimension; it is change through time.

And on the walls of Room Five are hints that such change may be afoot (Figure 8). On the western wall of the space, a woman strides, as if from the door that transects her foot, her long tunic differentiated from those worn by the rest of the women in the space by its double vertical stripes, rendered in a pale blue that is, like this mode of dress, unique within the space. To her left sits another woman, this one wearing a thin under tunic, of a fabric so fine that her legs are clearly visible through it, its sheen carefully rendered through the use of pale highlights along the folds. Her thicker pale purple mantle covers her upper body, as is appropriate for a respectable Roman woman, from her visible ear dangles a single pearl, marked as such by its lustrous sheen, and by its similarity in colour to the woman's skin.

FIGURE 9 DETAIL OF SEATED WOMAN WITH PEARL EARRING, ROOM 5, VILLA OF THE MYSTERIES, POMPEII, CA. 60 BCE-79 CE. PHOTO BY AUTHOR, WITH PERMISSION.

These women, joined both proximally and through the re-articulation of a single dress component — a gold ring with a large red stone, worn on the left hand of both figures — are disjointed chronologically. The dress of the standing woman, the folding of her tunic, the careful delineation of central double stripes, even the visible curls that fall over her forehead, are characteristic of an earlier period, attested from the mid-fourth century BCE in the nearby painted tombs of Paestum and repeated on South Italic painted pottery with dates ranging through the second century BCE (Figure 9), the period directly preceding the decoration of Room 5. For a Pompeian viewer, her mode of self-presentation is at least old-fashioned, if not wholly anachronistic.

By contrast, the seated woman (Figure 10) adopts materials that associate her with the late first century BCE, the period in which stratigraphic and architectural contextualizations suggest that the room was decorated. Domenico Espostio suggests that the room was painted around 60 BCE (Esposito 2007, 450), the same period as Pompey celebrated his triumph over Mithradates. Her pearl earring places her firmly in the period subsequent to Pompey's triumph of 61 BCE, while the transparency and sheen of her under-tunic suggest that it is not Coan silk, the costly gauze weave fabric imported from the Greek island of Cos (Olson 2008, 14), but imported Chinese silk, transported through Persia, into Phoenicia where it was unravelled and rewoven into thin, pale translucent material of the type depicted here. Like pearls, silk became available to Roman consumers in the mid-first century BCE, by some estimates around the year 50 (Herbert 1997, 120; McLaughlin 2016, x). Like the pearls she wears, this fabric enters the Roman marketplace in the period in which the room was likely painted. This woman wears materials that are newly available; her modernity is on display. She is fashionable, and within the space of the room, that fashion-ability is highlighted in part through her juxtaposition with the woman depicted alongside her.

CONCLUSION: FASHION AND THE MATERIALS OF MODERNITY

In 1991, Valerie Steele posited that for modern academics, the term fashion is bound to a series of other "f-words," amongst them frivolity, femininity, and fear (Steele 1991, 16-20). In grappling with these intersecting implications, she highlights the ways in which such biases influence the willingness to use such terms in serious academic discourse, exploring the ways in which her academic contemporaries disavow fashion in their own daily performances. Yet, this persistent and deliberate rejection of the notion of fashion itself highlights the pervasiveness of the same concept. Even when the term is rejected, the practice persists, and, as the above discussion suggests, it persists in times and spaces wherein its articulation diverges from modern Western expectations. To accept the presence of fashion in times before the thirteenth century CE and beyond Europe is to undermine systems of othering that elide fashion with the practice of cultural hierarchization. As Jennifer Craik notes, the term fashion has traditionally been unevenly applied across time and space (Craik 1994, 2); in non-Western, non-elite groups terms like folk dress, ethnic dress, uniform, and costume serve to remove the body modifications and augmentations of these groups from the fashion discourse, and in so doing, to perpetuate a terminological distinction that enables Western cultures to demonstrate "their civilized ways — to show that they are different from, and superior to, other cultures, hence the emphasis on newness and nowness" (Craik 1994, 36). The presence of ancient Roman fashion, like the presence of Qing dynasty fashion (Welters and

Lillethun 2018, 125-135), suggests that the fashion system can prevail despite less ubiquitous means of communication, without industrialized production, and across more attenuated time scales, further distancing the concept of fashion from that of modern Western exceptionalism.

The poet Ovid, writing around fifty years after the decoration of Room 5, writes that every day brings with it a new style and that these styles change so quickly that he cannot properly comprehend them (Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, 3.151-152). Separated from him by millennia, we confront his world — the world of the women of Room 5 and of the people who lined the Sacra Via in Rome, hoping to catch a glimpse of something new — in fragments.

Working with only a fraction of the once extant visual, material, and textual outputs of these periods, we see change as a glimpse, an ephemeral shift, sometimes captured through a fortunate confluence of preservation across sites, sometimes wholly inaccessible. Yet, through these glimpses, we comprehend enough of the components to begin to grasp the whole.

As we do, we see that Charles Baudelaire was correct: each period has its own modernity. Because modernity is transient, the novelty of one day fades into obscurity on the next (Baudelaire 1995 [1863], 12-13). The issue is one of perspective. As we look back, attempting to engage with earlier periods, we are confronted by something like a cognitive Doppler effect, wherein the frequency of oscillations of change decreases as distance increases. In such a system, to correct for this parallax error, it is necessary to seek out a constant, and perhaps the constant is this: while rates of change are relative, dependent upon the position of the observer, delight in the new and the changes that this pleasure prompts are consistent. Fashion, in its ubiquity, itself becomes a-temporal.

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