Gardens Beneath the Ash: Contextualizing Naturalistic Imagery within Pompeii's Urban Fabric

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Gardens beneath the Ash: Contextualizing Naturalistic Imagery within Pompeii’s Urban Fabric

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Classical Studies from The College of William and Mary

by

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CONTENTS

Abstract .......................................................................................................................................................... 3

Introduction ...................................................................................................................................................... 4

Chapter One: Cultivating the New State: Garden Imagery in Augustan Rome ............. 9
  The Republican Ideal, Rediscovered? ........................................................................................................... 10
  Images of Peace .......................................................................................................................................... 17
  The Defeated “Other” .................................................................................................................................. 30

Chapter Two: Sowing Seeds of Doubt: Recontextualizing Garden Imagery ............. 40
  Past Approaches and New Directions ........................................................................................................ 43
  Rus in Urbe .................................................................................................................................................. 48
  Urbs in Imperium ........................................................................................................................................ 58
  Locus Amoenus .......................................................................................................................................... 62

Conclusions ..................................................................................................................................................... 69

Appendix A .................................................................................................................................................... 71

Appendix B .................................................................................................................................................... 88

Bibliography .................................................................................................................................................. 104
**ABSTRACT**

In this thesis, I argue that the naturalistic wall-paintings decorating Pompeian peristyli during the late 1st century BCE and early to mid-1st century CE sought to identify the homeowner with broader cultural movements celebrating “Romanness.” A new understanding of Roman identity originated with Augustus’ programs of urban and civic renewal, which adopted images of nature, both literary and artistic, to put forth ideas of peace, cultural fertility, and nationalistic superiority. As the Roman empire continued to expand and change under the principate, such symbols established an opposition between the notion of proper Roman personhood and the moral decay of late Republican Rome, as well as the practices of non-Romans in the Mediterranean. My hypothesis counters scholarship that posits that naturalistic Pompeian wall-paintings created spatial illusions in an attempt to emulate wealthier homeowners for the purposes of gaining prestige. I instead develop a framework that contextualizes this artistic form within the transitionary historical period from which it hailed.
INTRODUCTION

The eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE forever altered the landscape of the Bay of Naples. Over the course of several days, pyroclastic flows engulfed fields and towns with superheated gas, mudflows, and ash. “Broad sheets of flame were lighting up many parts of Vesuvius,” Pliny the Younger, an eyewitness to the cataclysm, recorded. “Elsewhere it was now day, but there night, darker and thicker than all others” (Epistolae 6.16). Like its neighbors in the shadow of Mount Vesuvius—Oplontis, Stabiae, Nuceria, and Boscoreale—the city of Pompeii was plunged into this tephra-filled darkness. Roofs collapsed, hot debris choked the air, and people fled. By the afternoon of the second day of the eruption, Pompeii had been sealed with up to six feet of ash and pumice.

The volcanic havoc wrought on this once-peaceful region, resulting, as it did, in a tremendous loss of life and the abandonment of significant community centers, has allowed for unparalleled research into the lives of ordinary Romans during the first decades CE. From baskets to bread, papyri to frescos, the nature of deposition engendered the preservation of organic and other easily perishable materials, a benefit virtually nonexistent at archaeological sites. Multiple-story houses line streets still paved, while excavators have discovered movable artifacts lying in situ with little

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1 For a timeline of the eruption, see Berry 2007, 25. Scholars debate the month in which the eruption occurred (August or October?) on the basis of numismatic, faunal, epigraphic, and geological evidence. See Berry 2007, 20-23. See also Cassius Dio 66.21-24; Seneca the Younger, Quaestiones Naturales 6.1.1-3; and Suetonius, De Vita Caesarum 7.8.3.
2 Translated by author.
3 For information about victim counts, potential survivors, and the possibility of human activity at Pompeii after the eruption, see Cooley 2003, 50-64; Descouedres 1993; Lazer 2007, 607-619; and Thibodeau 2011, 252. A notable causality was Pliny the Elder, whose death is described in his nephew’s Epistolae 16.6.
4 However, it must be noted that the preserved city records evidence of massive damage dealt by seismic activity preceding the eruption, likely in 62 CE. Campanians were still in the process of repairing this damage when Mount Vesuvius erupted. See Cooley 2003, 17-35.
5 At Pompeii, even the shapes of organic materials have been preserved in hollows of ash. Consider the famous plaster casts of human and animal forms. For issues with the plaster-cast method of “preservation,” see Lazer 2007.
disturbance. As a result, the Bay of Naples remains a hotbed for scientific discovery and anthropological interpretation among scholars of Roman Italy.

Nevertheless, the gray, sun-drenched atmosphere of today’s archaeological park stands in stark contrast to the Pompeii of the 1st century CE. The record provides a real-world economic sense of security created by the Augustan regime. Vast networks of agricultural trade and production linked Pompeii not only to other towns in its vicinity, but also to an expanding Roman empire. Commercial market gardens, vineyards, and domestic gardens, too, informed daily routine. Pompeians worshipped at landscaped temples, exercised in landscaped palaestrae, and hashed politics on the exterior walls of landscaped domus. This was a society connected to the natural environment of the Bay of Naples and within its members’ own homes and public spaces.

The many naturalistic Third and Fourth Style wall-paintings decorating Pompeian peristylia, themselves homes to lush floral displays, Bacchic imagery, and water features, further attest to the impact of landscape in early imperial Pompeii. These frescos depict realistically-rendered and often life-sized flora, fauna, and panoramas, and they typically abut the physical plantings of the garden. Most scholars deem the paintings “purely aesthetic,” reducing them to identifications of their components or casting them off as “illusions” that made the garden space appear larger. Thus, most scholars understand a

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6 However, there is evidence that some objects might have been moved after 79 CE (by surface disruption, looters, or people returning to recover their personal effects). See Descouedres 1993.
7 For a timeline of site excavation at Pompeii and Herculaneum, see Berry 2007, 41. For an idea of the economic, political, and social life of Roman Pompeii through the lens of graffiti and primary literature, see Cooley and Cooley 2004.
8 Pompeian-produced goods, especially wine, have been discovered elsewhere. See Ibid., H1-H51, H116.
9 For a deeper analysis of the natural history of Pompeii, see Jashemski and Meyer 2002.
10 I define “peristylium” as an open courtyard in the interior of a domus, often (but not always) lined with a columned portico. For a description of the “Four Styles” of Pompeian wall-painting, see Mau 1899. For a brief history of peristylia, as well as various ways of categorizing them, see Footnotes 144 and 177.
11 For a good summary of these arguments, see Vacanti 2007, 7-8, 83-96.
painted marble fountain in a *peristylium* as standing in for a real marble fountain that the homeowner could not afford. In this way, they believe that moderately wealthy Roman homeowners could mimic elite villa gardens on cheaper, urban plots; naturalistic wall paintings were simply a practical solution to space and money constraints for wealth-hungry Pompeians.

I contend that these interpretations, although widely accepted, discount the broader cultural context during which these frescos were created. By analyzing Pompeian naturalistic artworks in conjunction with contemporary literature and imperial artworks—new styles and genres, all of which arose during the political shift between Republic and principate—I argue that we can more accurately glean the social function of the Pompeian paintings. Pompeian garden artworks did not merely emulate the grand size and wealth of countryside estates; rather, they emulated a widespread imperial language reliant on symbols of nature to articulate Roman identity during a transitionary period of Roman history. It was “Romanness,” not only wealth, I argue, that homeowners expressed.

To expound upon my hypothesis, Chapter One investigates the deployment of imagery representing nature in Augustan media. I demonstrate how the concepts of nature and agrarian living assumed moral connotations in Latin literature during the fall of the Republic and the rise of the principate. At roughly the same time, imperial

\[\text{\textsuperscript{12}}\text{Although I mention this point elsewhere in this paper, it is important to note here that it is impossible to assign a single meaning to any form. Every object possesses a multiplicity of meanings to different viewers, and even different meanings to a single viewer at different times. See Geertz 1973; Hodder 1991, 5 (cited in Vacanti 2007, 7); and Turner 1970. Therefore, my hypothesis explains a way that naturalistic artworks} \textit{could} \text{be interpreted among contemporary viewers based on an overarching cultural framework.} \text{\textsuperscript{13}}\text{Modern scholars often refer to the concept of “Romanness,” or the cultural and political qualities that constituted Roman self-image, with the term “Romanitas.”} \textit{Romanitas} \text{was coined in the 3}^{\text{rd}} \text{century CE by Tertullian in his \textit{De Pallio}. In this paper, I reject “Romanitas” in favor of “Romanness,” as the Latin word (inaccurately) implies the use of this word during my period of study, the early decades CE.}\]
monuments and artworks adopted nature-focused symbolism that portrayed Augustus’ regime as a return to order, growth, and cultural domination. I focus on the *Ara Pacis Augustae*, the Villa of Livia at Primaporta, and the Egyptianizing frescos from the House of Livia on the Palatine as models of this phenomenon. In referring back to the Republican past, or by caricaturing peoples at the margins of the empire, these monuments testified to the current strength of Rome. An understanding of the symbol-riddled social world of early imperial Rome, I maintain, is vital to the interpretation of Pompeian garden artworks.

In Chapter Two, I study the reception of Augustan visual culture in Pompeii, looking first at the Pompeian House of the Fruit Orchard (I.9.5-7). The composition of the garden frescos indicates that previous interpretations of naturalistic wall paintings, the most prominent proponents of which are Wilhelmina Jashemski and Paul Zanker, must be revisited. Having thereby called these analyses into question, I turn to my major case studies: the House of the Golden Bracelet (VI.17.42) and the House of the Ephebe (I.7.10-12), which I have modeled to provide a sense of the ancient environment.\(^\text{14}\) These homes contain frescos that share numerous iconographic links with imperial imagery from the same period. As such, they serve as prime examples for the exploration of identity-formation on the local versus the imperial level. I dissect the naturalistic decoration of both homes, pointing out parallels with the *Ara Pacis*, the Villa of Livia,

\(^{14}\) I worked in collaboration with Brianne Soful of R&A Water Features and Landscaping using the program Sketch-Up (see Appendix B). These models include the first stories of each *domus*, with the addition of the middle story in the case of the House of the Golden Bracelet. I feature only the relevant naturalistic artworks from the *peristylio*, placing the pieces *in situ* where they currently reside or where they would have existed if they have since been relocated to museum collections. It is my hope that the models offer a visual guide for the reading of this thesis, one that mimics the visual effect the artworks would have had on contemporary viewers of these house spaces.
and the House of Livia (and therefore, parallels in potential interpretation). The final section of the chapter considers the significance of the *peristylum* itself, how real garden space blended with the naturalistic artworks to generate a Foucauldian “heterotopia” that influenced viewership and experience in the garden.
CHAPTER ONE:
CULTIVATING THE NEW STATE: GARDEN IMAGERY IN AUGUSTAN ROME

This chapter explores the ways in which Augustan media mitigated the dangerous transition from Republic to principate. The first section considers an Augustan literary tradition borne from the turmoil of the previous decades. Cicero, Livy, and Virgil, among others, transformed nature into an emblem of Rome’s venerable legacy and a measure of its future success. Augustan artworks—from decorations within the princeps’ household to those meant for public consumption—expounded upon this literature through a visual emphasis on naturalistic themes. I investigate the graphic linkage between nature and the stability of Augustus’ autocracy in the second section, concentrating on the Ara Pacis Augustae and the Villa of Livia at Primaporta. The final section treats those state-sponsored monuments illustrating Nilotic imagery with an eye for how they neutralized the potential dangers of Augustus’ imperial expansion. Through his focus on restoring Republican values, coupled with his imagining of nature as a sign of cultural fertility, civic peace, and Roman superiority, Augustus inspired new, standardized, and pervasive symbols of Romanness that trickled down into the private sector of Roman life for elites and non-elites alike.

These interconnected propagandistic maneuvers masqueraded as a return to the “normal.” It was this social transformation and restitution during the principate, I argue, that fertilized the interest in realistic garden imagery so prevalent in Pompeii and its environs during the first decades of the 1st century CE. Augustus’ literary commissions

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15 For the purposes of this paper, it will suffice to explore only one aspect of Augustan propaganda: its emphasis on naturalistic themes in an attempt to highlight the peace and stability of Augustus’ reign. Augustus’ innovative deployment of propagandistic devices in a variety of other fields for a variety of other purposes, however, is the focus of much scholarly attention. See the full texts of Zanker 1988 and Galinsky 1996, cited in portions here, for more information about Augustan propaganda and culture.
and building projects had culminated in a mode of self-definition centered around nature, a language easily adapted and infused with new meanings among different social classes. This early imperial body of thought—not mere aesthetic preference or an emulation of elite villas—situated the *peristylium* decoration of interest here within a wider discourse on Roman identity.

**The Republican Ideal, Rediscovered?**

*Indeed, at Rome the garden itself was the poor man’s farm; the common folk provisioned themselves from a garden, how much more harmless their way of life was then!*  
(Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis* 19.52)

To fully grasp the transformative effect of Augustus’ principate on domestic artworks, we must first understand how Roman authors expressed their attitudes towards nature. Traditional Republican views on the natural world became the foundation upon which Augustus could launch his non-traditional aspirations. By harkening back to a romanticized, bucolic period of Roman history, Augustan writers exploited the memory of the civil strife that precluded the principate, building Augustus’ image, and an image of Roman identity at large, around an idea of Romanness that began generations prior and that had been restored under Augustus’ authoritarianism. Here, I discuss Roman imaginings of a Republican utopia that had wilted in the hands of Augustus’ predecessors. Such literature paved the way for the imagery that I investigate in the sections that follow: if Rome had prospered during its agrarian past, it would prosper again through a return to its nature-attuned heritage. We will discover how,

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16 Quoted and translated in von Stackelberg 2009, 11.
17 Scholars often dub the period from roughly 133 BCE to 27 BCE the “Crisis of the Roman Republic” to capture the instability that ultimately provoked the downfall of this government system. Although the
thematically, nature was both a danger (when overdeveloped) and a panacea (when enjoyed in a mildly controlled state).

Republican literature had already set a pattern for equating the forfeit of nature with the moral decay of Roman society. As early as Carthage’s defeat in 146 BCE, commentators observed that a shift to sumptuous city and villa living accompanied the stream of North African treasures into Rome. Polybius, associating this hunger for wealth with the loss of Rome’s pastoral values, foretold that “as this state of things goes on more and more, the desire of office and the shame of losing reputation, as well as the ostentation and extravagance of living, will prove the beginning of a deterioration” (*Histories* 6.57). Sallust agreed on the role that Rome’s frayed bonds with its humble, agrarian roots played in its present demise during the struggles unfolding in the early 1st century BCE. He urged his readers to compare their “modern mansions and villas, extended to the veritable size of cities” with the “temples which [their] ancestors, a most devout race of men, erected to the gods” (*Cataline* 2-3, 10-13). With no common enemy to unite them and a surplus of *spolia* to pamper them, Romans relapsed to *ambitio*, *avaritia*, *luxuria*, and *libido* within those villas. “For their minds, impregnated with evil habits,” Sallust explained, “could not easily abstain from gratifying their passions, and

causes of unrest remain complicated and somewhat murky, the defeat of Carthage (146 BCE), the Gracchi’s’ exploitation of the popular tribuneship (133-121 BCE), the rivalry between Marius and Sulla and the concurrent Social Wars (91-88 BCE), the disintegration of the First Triumvirate (59-53 BCE), and Caesar’s dictatorship (46-44 BCE) coalesced to foment struggles for supremacy among factions, ones fueled by territorial expansion, the spoils of war, the rise of individualism, and a slave economy. As very few primary sources hail from the period (and those that do are widely considered unreliable), historians debate these factors, but I subscribe to those listed here, from Flower 2004. See for a thorough discussion of the Republic, before, during, and after its fall.

20 Levick, 1982, 53.
were thus the more inordinately devoted in every way to rapacity and extravagance” (Cataline 11).21 Polybius and Sallust condemned the profligacy that characterized the late Republic, emphasizing a positive correlation between pastoralism and virtue, decadence and immorality. In fact, the idea spread that without the countryside—without cultivated countryside in particular—civilization could not exist (Varro, De Re Rustica 1.2.3-7).22 Writing about change by referencing lost bucolic lifestyles had therefore offered Republic authors an avenue for social critique.

This literary practice extended into Augustus’ lifetime, when late Republican and early imperial writers continued to paint the elite villas with enormous gardens that proliferated in central Italy as badges of corruption.23 Now, however, gardens—not just the shift from farms to villas—acquired a negative connotation. Cicero writes at length about the late Republican tendency to conflate “garden” with “villa” with “luxury,” generating social perversion and competition.24 Wealthy homeowners strove to create ever more extravagant (and unnatural) floral displays to satisfy their appetites for otium. Marcus Caelius Rufus, the subject of Cicero’s Pro Caelio, had been indicted for wanton displays in his gardens at Baiae, which featured “lusts, and loves, and adulteries,…and doings on the sea-shore, and banquets, and revels, and songs, and music parties, and water parties” (35).25 In this way, transgressive behaviors—greed, laziness, sex, and the

21 Translation from Davis, 1912 (above). See sourcebooks.fordham.edu.
22 Paraphrased in von Stackelberg 2009, 86.
23 Spencer 2010, 12-13. For examples for the distaste for luxury villas from this period and slightly later, see Cicero, De Legibus 2.2; Horace, Ode 2.15, 18; Martial 12.50, 57, 66; Ovid, Fasti 6.639-348.
24 von Stackelberg 2009, 11, 96-97, 150. For select examples of Cicero’s opinions on luxury villas, see Cicero, Pro Caelio 35-36, 38, 49; In Verrem 2.87, 4.121. Cicero condemns Marc Antony for his decadence in gardens in his Philippics (2.67, 2.71, 2.109, 3.30, 8.9, 13.11). For a discussion of Marc Antony’s wantonness, see pages 31-34.
mixing of men and women—materialized in overly-lavish garden spaces. Villa gardens retained their notoriety even beyond Augustus’ reign. Seneca, for one, scorned the behaviors that tainted these places under Nero: “It is a pleasure for you to make your carcass sluggish with ease, and to seek a repose akin to sleep, to lurk in deep shade and amuse the torpor of a languid mind with the most delicate thoughts, which you call tranquility, and in your garden lair you stuff bodies pallid with sloth with food and drink” (De Beneficiis 4.13.1). As Augustus’ principate loomed in the horizon, villas and their horti served as a medium through which critics could remark on cultural defects.

Augustan writers appear to have embraced their power to rebuild a sense of moral order by adopting the nature themes that permeated late Republican literature. The princeps’ propagandistic machine thus manufactured virtue—and proposed a solution to Rome’s problems—through literary works that alluded to the agrarian paradise of Cato the Elder’s day. A writer from the end of the 2nd century BCE, Cato attributed Rome’s historic success to its time-worn farming practices, contrasting the degenerate villa atmospheres described by Polybius, Sallust, and Cicero. Cato warned, “Remember that a farm is like a man—but however great the income, if there is extravagance but little is left” (De Agricultura 1.6). His overarching agricultural treatise argued that a close

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26 von Stackelberg 2009, 96-100. A more tangible example of such transgression occurred during the Bacchic conspiracy of 186 BCE. The conspiracy arose out of orgiastic rituals that took place in gardens and that culminated in a political crisis in the Senate (Livy, Ab Urbe Condita 39.8-19).

27 Quoted and translated in von Stackelberg 2009, 96.

28 It is important to note that scholars debate the extent to which Augustan literature served as propaganda for Augustus’ regime. I support the arguments of White 1993, who believes that while Augustan writers had the freedom to choose their own topics and themes, they were nevertheless influenced by the social climate of the age—and the benefit of Augustus’ patronage. This can explain the noticeable interest in nature themes during this time.

29 Augustan propaganda did so in various other ways beyond the interest of this paper, from programs of marriage reform to the construction of new temples across the empire. For more information on Augustan moral reform, see Zanker 1988. See also Res Gestae Divi Augusti.

relationship to the earth fostered the Republican ideals of reliability, industry, and independence.\textsuperscript{31} To grapple with the corruption of the late Republic, to represent their newfound stability under Augustus, and to come to terms with the form of Augustus’ reign, writers during the mid- to late-1\textsuperscript{st} century BCE reinvigorated an interest in Cato’s agrarian Italy. Horace advised that those licentious Republican villas were “not so prescribed by the institutes of Romulus, and the unshaven Cato, and ancient custom,” the moral authorities that all Romans should admire (\textit{Ode} 15).\textsuperscript{32} Only an old-fashioned Rome would overcome extravagance and immorality.

Consequently, as the writers who had come before, writers of Augustus’ day used nature to deliver social commentary—and as a gauge of Rome’s health—but this time, highlighted its positive aspects by referencing the past. Through histories and pastoral poems, Augustan literature advanced an origin story for Roman society that was tied to the productive value of the earth. For example, Livy’s \textit{Ab Urbe Condita} glorifies the farmer-citizen.\textsuperscript{33} The rural, embodied by Romulus and Remus, vies against the evils of civilization inherent in a greedy King Amulius. Book 1 stresses that the twins had been abandoned and raised by characters at the fringes of society: a she-wolf and a farmer. The boys, “thus born and thus brought up, when as soon as they came of age, roamed the glades of the mountains hunting, not neglecting the farmstead nor the flocks” (1.4).\textsuperscript{34} These agrarian skills nurtured “courage” and “strength,” a desire to share the fruits of

\textsuperscript{31} von Stackelberg 2009, 11.
\textsuperscript{33} From its publication to the modern era, \textit{Ab Urbe Condita} has enjoyed a fair amount of celebrity. Pliny the Younger relays a story about a man who travelled from Spain to Rome solely to meet Livy after reading his history (\textit{Epistolae} 2.3). Such popularity suggests that Livy’s work held sway over popular opinion, bringing the attention of a wide range of people to the opposition between rural and urban lifeways.
\textsuperscript{34} Translated by author.
their labors with their kinsmen (1.4). Such an upbringing empowered the twins not only to topple the monarchy that had oppressed them, but also to found a new city that would flourish over the following centuries. In the changing world that was the Augustan era, Livy’s narrative grounds the mythical foundations of Rome in contemporary concerns by ascribing importance to nature. The parallels he draws between Romulus and Augustus are apparent: like Romulus, Augustus ascended from the lower echelons of society, and, like Romulus, he possessed the know-how to create a prosperous Rome out of disorder, overindulgence, and violence. Most importantly, through Livy’s etiology and its emphasis on leaders in-touch with nature’s morality, Augustus’ regime had attached itself to an exalted past suggestive of “unshaven Cato’s” treatise, a past that had been crafted in the 1st century BCE.

In poetry, too, Augustan writers co-opted bucolic landscapes to describe Rome’s moral footing. This was a time, according to Diana Spencer, when “nostalgia-soaked rural aesthetics gain[ed] political bite and a public edge.” Nowhere is this more obvious than in the pastorals of Virgil and Horace. Like many of his other works, Virgil’s

Georgic 4 praises traditional farming practices and the arete that attended them, this time

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35 Miles 1995, 178. 
36 Certain passages of Livy’s work can be interpreted as critical of Augustus’ rule. However, as with the equally-controversial Aeneid, I have selected passages that make strong arguments in favor of Augustus. The Aeneid connects Augustus’ greatness to another mytho-historical founder of Rome, Aeneas, in Jupiter’s famous prophecy: “From this illustrious line will be born a Trojan Caesar, who will bound the empire with the ocean, his fame with the stars, Iulus [Augustus], his name descended from great Iulus [Ascanius, son of Aeneas]” (1.286-288). Translated by author. For a critique of my interpretation of “Iulus” as Augustus, see Dobbin 1995. 
37 Compare the ideological link between Augustus and Romulus seen in Ab Urbe Condita to the statue of Romulus that Augustus erected in the Forum of Augustus, Rome, among other members of his lineage (including Aeneas).
38 Spencer 2010, 14. 
39 Both authors published a number of works in the pastoral tradition: Virgil, the Eclogues and the Georgics, and Horace, the subtler Odes and Satires. These pieces contain numerous references to bucolic lifeways and the dangers/inconveniences of city life, but for the purpose of brevity, I have selected only a few examples here.
in the form of “an old Corycian man, who had a few acres of derelict farmland, not fertile enough for bullocks to plough for grain.”\textsuperscript{40} The man nevertheless persevered until his plot sprouted with crops. Interpreted within the broader scope of the \textit{Georgics}, Katherine von Stackelberg recognizes the farmer’s garden as an idyllic haven far removed from the decadence of villas and city living, a bastion of ancient virtues and naturalistic lifeways.\textsuperscript{41} After all, writes Horace, “Blessed is he, who far from the cares of business, like one of mankind’s ancient race, ploughs his paternal acres, with his own bullocks, and is free of usury’s taint...shunning the forum, avoiding proud thresholds of citizens holding more power” (\textit{Epode} 2).\textsuperscript{42} A commune with true nature safeguarded against the vices within the politics and social competition that polluted elite hangouts. Accordingly, Horace himself ached for a rustic lifestyle: “This was [ever] among the number of my wishes: a portion of ground not over large, in which was a garden, and a fountain with continual stream close to my house, and a little woodland besides” (\textit{Satire} 2.6).\textsuperscript{43} His theoretical garden alludes to the productive farmlands of Cato’s \textit{De Agricultura}, and also, just as Virgil had done, brands the garden as an escape from corrupting civilized life. This “tension between nostalgic utopianism and contemporary social pressures”\textsuperscript{44} cast gardens as the answer to Rome’s struggles, even as (and precisely because) they had been the cause of them during the late Republic.

\textsuperscript{40} Quoted and translated in von Stackelberg 2009, 13.  
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 14. von Stackelberg finds support in Thibodeau 2011, who bases his evaluation of Virgil’s \textit{Georgics} on a statement from Seneca the Younger. Seneca dubbed Virgil an agronomist “who aimed at what could be said with the highest degree of decorum rather than the highest degree of truth, and who meant to enchant readers, not teach farmers” (\textit{Epistolae} 86.15). Translation from Thibodeau 2011. Thibodeau concludes that Virgil’s “unqualified insistence on the worthiness of country life” is indeed a revolution of traditional thought.  
\textsuperscript{43} Quoted and translated in Vacanti 2007, 11.  
\textsuperscript{44} von Stackelberg 2009, 14.
The literary dichotomy between overdevelopment/vice/ruin and agrarianism/morality/success opened the doors for Augustan propaganda based in naturalistic imagery. By reaching into the past, Rome’s agrarian origins, Augustan writers could make sense of the present. This process provided Augustus with the toehold necessary for stabilizing a stricken populace in a way that augmented his own status, whether or not these authors had intended to enable him to do so. If, as these writers claimed, a genuine communion with nature underlay Rome’s greatness from Romulus’ time through to the mid-Republic, a leader that could restore that landscape to Italy would restore Rome in its entirety. Nature was thus the means by which the political, economic, and social institutions of Rome could be reorganized and reinvented for the benefit of the people, or, as was the case for Augustus, the benefit of the monarch at the helm.

Images of Peace

*On humbled knee, Phraates
Has acknowledged Caesar’s control and authority.*

*Meanwhile Plenty
Pours from her full horn a golden harvest over Italy.*

(Horace, *Epistolae* 1.12.27-29)45

While Augustan writers were bringing naturalistic themes to the fore of Roman thought—simultaneously connecting nature to Rome’s moral well-being and expressing a need for nature’s return—Augustus was developing a complementary movement through a more visual language. He reintroduced the natural world into Rome with public parks, thereby distributing luxury among all social classes and limiting the buildup of wealth.

45 Quoted and translated in Holliday 1990, 555.
within elite properties inside the city. At the same time, he sponsored the creation of buildings and artworks infused with naturalistic imagery, tethering his reign to the morality of the earth with religious and ideological associations. This section analyzes state-created monuments such as the *Ara Pacis Augustae* and the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta for their emphasis on the stability of Augustus’ reign, an era of Augustan peace. These constructions, like the pastoral literature above, rise from the ashes of the fallen Republic to elucidate the artistic choices made on the domestic level of Pompeian homes. Augustan monuments had constructed a standardized platform of symbols from which all classes of Romans could express their ideas of self.

“Augustus beautified the city, whose appearance had in no way reflected its greatness and glory and was besides constantly plagued by floods and fires, and so utterly remade it, that he could justly boast that he found Rome a city of brick and left it a city of marble,” writes Suetonius in his *Divus Augustus*. The *princeps* designated both practical improvements and beautification ventures in the capital to his colleague Agrippa. In his quest to inaugurate Rome as a literal and symbolic hub of culture befitting his revitalized empire, Augustus, veiled by Agrippa, subsidized public parks, pools, and fountains; porticoes; sacred groves; and *Horti*. The most famous of the latter, the *Horti Agrippae* and the *Thermae Agrippae* contained within, revolutionized urban garden space using the prescribed grammar of Augustus’ agenda. Significantly, Agrippa willed the estate to the people shortly before his death in 12 BCE (Cassius Dio 54.29.4), but he had designated

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46 Quoted and translated in Zanker 1988, 139.
47 By operating behind the screen of Agrippa, Augustus could more easily avoid accusations of having usurped too much power, as his adopted father Julius Caesar had failed to do.
48 Newby 2012, 363; Kellum 1994, 211; Zanker 1988, 139-143. I omit here Augustus’ construction/expansion of numerous temples and public buildings throughout the city that do not relate directly (or indirectly) to the natural world and an interest in naturalistic imagery. Kontokosta 2019 defines “*Horti*” as “large, elaborate peri-urban (*sub urbe*) estates owned by the most affluent and elite” (60).
the area as public domain since its acquisition in c. 25 BCE (53.27.1) (see FIG. 1). Up until this point, the term “Horti” had referred to private villa complexes with extensive gardens inside a city’s pomerium, not to civic, landscaped parks for public use. By styling the Horti Agrippae as belonging to the people, Augustus’ regime could integrate nature into the city without also referencing the infamy of late Republican villas.

Agrippa’s insertion of such features as a lake and canal (the stagnum and euripus), baths, and sculptures—including the well-known lion of Lysippus—enhanced the splendor of the planted commons around them. Here and through similar projects, the princeps had established a precedent through which he could express the ideology of his autocracy. Even within confines of urbanity—or likely because of the urban setting—Augustus had latched onto nature and naturalistic imagery to promote the validity of his rule.

The plantings that accompanied his building schema, according to Kellum, provided “a living link with the purity of the city’s primeval past…and at the same they affirmed the continuation of the golden age that was at hand.” As a result, from the Horti Agrippae in the Campus Martius to the Gardens of Maecenas, Augustus pointedly inundated Rome with patches, large and small, of nature. These landscaped public areas echoed in real space the ideological implications of nature to his regime. Most obviously, the sensory appeal of flowers, trees, and shrubs inaugurated Augustus’ Rome as the locus

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49 All primary material on the Horti/Thermae Agrippae compiled in Richardson 1992, 196. Kontokosta 2019 emphasizes how the Thermae Agrippae were a revolutionary break with tradition for the benefit of the lowest classes of Roman society.
50 Richardson 1992, 196.
51 Ibid. See Pliny the Elder, Historia Naturalis 34.62, 35.26; and Strabo 13.1.19, 590.
52 Kellum 1994, 211. Virgil makes direct references to this “golden age” in Eclogues 4.19-20.
53 It is difficult to locate the Gardens of Maecenas, but they are (potentially) attested to by several primary sources, as well as by the remains of the Auditorium of Maecenas on the Esquiline Hill. For more information from primary literature, see Horace, Satires 1.8.14; Cassius Dio 55.7.6; and Fronto, Ad M. Caesarem 2.2.
of restrained *otium*, leisure intrinsically linked to peace, the opportunity to pursue the pleasures of the mind and body.\textsuperscript{54} The new green spaces throughout the city, along with the revamped community buildings, amplified public spectacles, and increased *alimentaria* boasted in Augustus’ autobiographical *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, came to be associated with the *princeps*’ ability to fashion harmony, his public munificence and sacrifice to the common good.\textsuperscript{55} “I rebuilt the Capitol and Theater of Pompey, each work at enormous cost, without any inscription of my name,” he records.\textsuperscript{56} Paul Zanker dubs this physical aspect of the emperor’s propagandistic endeavors a “villa for the masses.”\textsuperscript{57} This phrase underscores Augustus’ introduction of luxury, leisure, and the benefits of greenery into the lives of urban citizens in order to cement his own position, however subtly he did so. One might say that Augustus had found Rome a city of brick and left it a city of marble—and plants.

Before exploring two Augustan monuments representative of Augustus’ naturalistic propaganda—the *Ara Pacis* and the Villa of Livia—we must first identify how the *princeps* deployed nature in defining his personal identity in his own house and through numismatic devices.\textsuperscript{58} This visual imagery combined with the new physical landscape of Rome to influence cultural identity throughout the empire, as in the garden decorations in Pompeii. Augustus was notorious for adorning his villas “not so much with

\textsuperscript{54} For a thorough discussion of “*otium*” and its relationship with garden plantings, see Myers 2005. It is important to note that Augustus’ version of *otium* differed markedly from the extreme *otium* of luxury villas during the late Republic. Augustus’ *otium* had connotations of erudition and restraint.

\textsuperscript{55} Many passages in the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* enumerate Augustus’ public works projects, especially passages 15-24. For other references to his public works (particularly those that established green spaces), see Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis* 12.3; and Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.33.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid. This sentiment is also echoed in Suetonius, *Divus Augustus* 29-30.

\textsuperscript{57} Zanker 1988, 139.

\textsuperscript{58} In this section, I draw from the tactics demonstrated in Kellum 1994 by emphasizing Augustus’ use of laurels in his house and on his coins. Other floral motifs, like the acanthus, will be explored below in relation to the *Ara Pacis* and Villa of Livia. See pages 24-29.
handsome statues and pictures as with terraces and groves” (Suetonius, Divus Augustus 72.3). Accordingly, his program of reform using floral motifs extended from the very public arena of the city at large to the more private, yet equally visible, realm of his home on the Palatine Hill. The plants here at the Domus Augusti possessed carefully selected philosophical connotations. Of these, the pair of laurels facing his entranceway epitomized his administration. Laurels had a long history in Rome for their connection to Apollo Agyieus, the “celestial victor” and caretaker of roads and cities; beyond the real laurels outside, Apollo Agyieus’ laurel iconography appeared in the nearby Temple of Apollo and in the Room of the Masks within the Domus Augusti (see FIG. 2). We also find two laurel trees on an Augustan denarius from c. 18 BCE (see FIG. 3). Pliny the Elder and Plutarch relate the god and his arboreal signifiers to situations where one grants clemency, thereby curing and repairing old wounds. In placing mythologically-charged laurels in strategic locations associated with himself, namely on his house, the Temple of Apollo, and his coinage, the princeps conjured specific ideas about peace and restoration. Kellum concludes that “the laurel trees must have…betokened Augustus himself and the era of peaceful concord that he had initiated.” Augustus thus manipulated the religious associations of plants to paint himself in a favorable light in the already-symbolic arena

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59 Quoted and translated in Kellum 1994, 211.
60 These laurels are mentioned in Cassius Dio 53.16.4.
61 Kellum 1994, 212-213. These attributes include laurel boughs and the betyos.
62 Ibid. writes that on this coin, “the two trees alone served as a metonymous symbol for [Augustus]” (213).
63 Pliny the Elder, Historia Naturalis 23.152; Plutarch, Questions Graecae 12. For a consideration of how Pliny the Elder thematically related nature and man in numerous other contexts, see Beagon 1992.
64 Kellum 1994, 213. She also ties Augustus’ use of laurel imagery to Julius Caesar, the laurel boughs placed on the Regia during triumphs, and other imperial/political usages of the plant.
of his home.\textsuperscript{65}

Augustus directed this naturalistic symbolism to monuments outside the boundaries of his \textit{domus} to engender a similar response. Although the imagery on the \textit{Ara Pacis Augustae}—arguably the most well-known and meaning-laden memorial from Augustus’ rule—has inspired numerous modern interpretations, with the exception of David Castriota, these remain confined largely to the figural friezes of the monument’s upper registers (see FIG. 4a-d).\textsuperscript{66} Such studies include debates over the precise identification and representational connotation of many of the characters featured here on the \textit{Ara Pacis’} outer walls, such as Tellus, Roma, Agrippa, Augustus, and his imperial family. Nevertheless, most scholars agree that through the inclusion of powerful iconography recalling Rome’s mythical origins and current successes, this “Altar of Augustan Peace” celebrated the \textit{princeps’} ushering in of a new, fruitful golden age, one that effectively halted the dissention that preceded his reign and that cast him as the chief source of its creation. Educated elites and general audiences alike could appreciate this message, considering, for one thing, that many of the motifs percolated into middle-class funerary art.\textsuperscript{67} Augustan poets, too, latched onto the essence of the \textit{Ara Pacis} and

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\textsuperscript{65} Augustus was aware of the political implications of the form and design of his house, as attested by Suetonius, \textit{Divus Augustus} 72.

\textsuperscript{66} For the purposes of this paper, a brief summation (drawn from generally accepted literature) of the figural reliefs will suffice. On the north and south walls, processional characters march in celebration of Augustan peace, featuring lictors, priests from major Roman \textit{collegia}, members of the imperial household, and attendants. In addition to these panels, we find four mythological scenes on the altar’s shorter sides. These show: 1) a man (Aeneas?) making a sacrifice (to Juno?), 2) a seated woman (goddess? Tellus? Venus?) surrounded by the bounty of the Roman empire, 3) Romulus and Remus in the Lupercal grotto, and 4) a seated woman (Roma) atop stacked weapons. For more information on these panels, see Castriota 1995, Galinsky 1996, Holliday 1990, Weinstock 1960, and Zanker 1988, among many others.

\textsuperscript{67} Galinsky 1996, 150; Holliday 1990, 557. One motif that lower classes adopted from the \textit{Ara Pacis} was the scene of a child tugging at his parent’s clothing. For an example, see Galinsky 1996, 151, Fig. 68. For a more class-conscious reading, see Clarke 2006. For a discussion of the Roman “middle-class” and their artworks, see Mayer 2012. The application of this term has been challenged. See Simelius 2018, 15. Although I use the term in this paper for the sake of brevity, it is important to note that the Romans had no conceptions of a middle-class as we do today.
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The *Ara Pacis* had been vowed by the Senate, Augustus explains, “when [he] returned to Rome from Spain and Gaul, having successfully accomplished matters in those provinces, when Tiberius Nero and Publius Quintilius were consuls [13 BCE]” (*Res Gestae Divi Augusti* 12): in other words, to honor the safe return of Rome’s *pater patriae* after he peaceably resolved discontent in the provinces. Rather than commemorating victories in war following the Republican tradition of a triumphal procession, Augustus’ *Ara Pacis* emphasizes only those deeds that bred harmony, reconciliation, and cultural fertility. It worked alongside other media to disseminate the idea of concord on several levels: 1) spatially, with the nearby Mausoleum and Horologium in the Campus Martius (see FIG. 1); 2) temporally, with the closing of the Temple of Ianus in 13 BCE; and 3) literally, with the circulation of popular literature, like Horace’s *Odes* and Virgil’s

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68 For a compendium and analysis of Horace’s poems (especially those from *Odes* 4) that play into Augustan propaganda, see Bernario 1960.

69 Augustus was awarded this honor (“pater patriae”) later, in the February of 2 BCE, but his adoption of this role in his behavior and political programs occurred as soon as his defeat of Antony at Actium in 31 BCE. His acceptance of the title can be found in *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* 35.

70 Many of these older triumphs were enumerated on the *Fasti Triumphales*, erected in 12 BCE in the Forum Romanum. On the *Ara Pacis*, Augustus simultaneously conformed to triumphal tradition and broke away from it to weaken any connotations of warfare and its attendant suffering.

71 These monuments stand in close proximity in the northeast section of the Campus Martius. Each one attests, through its own symbolism, to the power of Augustus and his reign. A brief discussion of the implications of such Egyptianizing monuments to Augustus’ subjugation of Egypt will follow below. See pages 30-39.

72 Weinstock 1960, 48 argues that Horace’s *Carmen* 4.15.8, “et vacuum duellis Ianum Quirini clausit,” and *Epistolae* 2.1.253, “tuisque auspiciis totum confecta dualla per orbem claustaque custodem pacis cohibentia Ianum,” could refer to the Temple of Ianus being closed in 13 BCE to coincide with the vowing of the *Ara Pacis*. Even if this was not the case, we know that it was closed three times during Augustus’ reign (*Res Gestae Divi Augusti* 13; Suetonius, *Divus Augustus* 22), signifying that “by land and sea, peace had been secured through victory.” Both Suetonius and Augustus record that the temple door had been closed only twice prior to Augustus’ rule.
Similar to Horace’s verse quoted above, Virgil’s epic poem makes overt statements about Augustus’ admirable character, thus helping to justify his autocracy:

“[Here is] Caesar Augustus, son of the deified, who shall bring once again a golden age to Latium, to the land where Saturn reigned in early times” (*Aeneid* 6.792-794). Therefore, the *Ara Pacis*, together with complementary agents, served as a multi-faceted emblem that illustrated Augustus’ desired reputation among the Roman populace. All signs pointed to Augustus’ creation of a golden age.

A reading of the monument that emphasizes its figural linkage to peace is generally accepted and of widespread scholarly interest, but the acanthus friezes that envelop the lower half of each side of the *Ara Pacis* enjoy far less discussion (see FIG. 5). Since these acanthus scrolls (“what may well have constituted the single most widespread mode of ancient decorative art”75) emerge repeatedly in public and domestic artworks—from the ornamental borders of wall-paintings in Campanian homes to the carved capitals of composite columns fronting temples—their symbolic undertones warrant a careful dissection. The floral motif, in fact, connects directly to the naturalistic peristyle decorations from Pompeii, as well as to the theme of peace, of a golden age, espoused by the figural decoration of the *Ara Pacis*. Vitruvius attributes the origin of acanthus leaves as a pattern to the Greek architect Callimachus, who had been intrigued by an acanthus tendril sprouting in a young girl’s toy basket to such an extent that he

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73 The Roman literacy rate is considered quite low, about 10 percent of the population being literate (according to the widely-cited Harris 1989). However, it is worth noting that residents of Pompeii often quoted the *Aeneid* in their graffito, like in *CIL* IV.10059, IV.1282, IV.5002, and the famous spin created by the fullers, *CIL* IV.9131. This implies the popularity of the *Aeneid*, even if most people only knew of it orally through pithy “catchphrases.”

74 Quoted and translated in Holliday 1990, 556.

75 Quote from Castriota 1995, ix.
invented the Corinthian order (*De Architectura* 4.1.9-10) (see FIG. 6).\textsuperscript{76} Augustus commandeered the Greek ornament by infusing it into his crowning monument, igniting a veritable explosion of the motif in contemporary artworks across Italy.\textsuperscript{77} Lizards, birds, snakes, snails, and scorpions play among the unfurling tendrils. In other places, ivy, laurel, and grape leaves weave into the scene. The overall impression is of a bountiful natural landscape brimming with life, one imbued with the special associations conjured by acanthus leaves: regeneration, healing, and prolonged existence.\textsuperscript{78}

Instead of merely filling space at the margins of the *Ara Pacis*, the huge swathes of vegetation complement and enhance the figural repertoire detailed above.\textsuperscript{79} Galinsky writes that “the abundant floral frieze, which is larger than the figural ones,…expresses the abundance and fertility of nature without assuming the dimensions of ‘paradisiac’ Golden Age.”\textsuperscript{80} While the acanthus tendrils are well-organized in accordance with the Augustan regime of stability—signifying the long-standing peace that he had introduced, the flourishing of the Roman people—elements of insecurity appear.\textsuperscript{81} I argue that such

\textsuperscript{76} Most researchers believe that the earliest appearance of the acanthus in architecture and/or art hails from the Temple of Apollo Epicurius at Bassae, c. 450-420 BCE.

\textsuperscript{77} Castriota 1995, 13-33. This idea, that Augustus adopted a Hellenistic motif, is at odds with Zanker 1988, who contends that Augustus purged the Hellenistic from his design to establish something firmly Roman.

\textsuperscript{78} Although I am unable to find any Roman sources attesting to this symbolism, these associations are mentioned frequently by modern art historians and derive from the medicinal uses of *Acanthus mollis* and *Acanthus spinosus*.

\textsuperscript{79} Here, I agree with Castriota 1995 in that I believe even the minute details of the acanthus friezes connoted specific themes to Roman audiences, overall an idea of “beneficial concord” (86). However, I do not go as far as he does in attributing each specific animal and flower to the “blessing of the specific divinities responsible for such prosperity” (22). I believe that for the average viewer regarding the monument briefly and/or from a distance, the acanthus friezes would generate an overarching feeling in line with the Augustan propaganda engendered by the figural friezes above. A closer study very well may have conjured up one’s detailed knowledge about religion and the culture-specific meanings of plant and animal life, but I do not think that most ancient people analyzed the monument to such a degree. My statement is echoed in Galinsky 1996, 152.

\textsuperscript{80} Galinsky 1996, 152.

potentially violent characters as the scorpions (known for their painful stings) and the snake attacking a bird’s nest (hidden between the acanthus leaves) function as reminders of the necessity of Augustus’ rule. As one cultivates a garden, the princeps had tamed the Mediterranean basin, but even the most successful governmental system could not preclude the occasional dissent. It was only his autocratic regime, however, that would subdue those dissenting scorpions and snakes, just like the neat rows of acanthus vines overpower the animal life on the Ara Pacis. To recall a line discussed above, “Your era, Caesar [Augustus], brought back fruits and fertile fields” (Horace, Odes 4.15.4-5). Literally and symbolically, the Ara Pacis states that Augustus had restored order.

Once again, naturalistic imagery—this time acanthus fronds—broadcasted a poignant message about the desirability of Augustus’ administration; this message drew upon viewers’ existing understanding of the flora and bolstered (and was bolstered by) the numerous other visual components of Augustus’ program of reform, including other fertility images on the Ara Pacis itself. The Tellus relief on the east side, for example, touts many of the products of Augustan peace: children and agricultural bounty, to name a few (see FIG. 4c). The princeps’ painstaking manipulation of these symbols cast nature as forceful player in his new autocracy, asserting his reign’s positive aspects while

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82 Scorpions were considered a grave threat in Greek, Roman, and Egyptian culture. Tod 1939 collects several inscriptions from Greco-Roman Egypt describing the dangers posed by these creatures; a sandstone grave stela states: “[Tomb] of Cleopatra, daughter of Menon. Farewell,…, thou who hast perished ingloriously and indiscriminately by a violent death, unworthy of thy goodness; for stung by a scorpion in the sanctuary of Thripis by the hill on the tenth day of Thoth in the 38th year at the 5th hour, she passed away on the 11th (56). Snakes, on the other hand, could evoke positive, spiritual connotations, like in their capacity as benevolent protectors along with the lares in neighborhood and household shrines. See Flower 2017. However, on the Ara Pacis, the snake is shown attacking a bird’s nest, referencing instead the snake’s potential for violence as a predator animal.


84 The identity of the figures on this panel are fiercely debated. See Holliday 1990, 551; and Galinsky 1996, 148. Regardless of the central woman’s precise identity (Tellus/Mother Earth? Venus? Ceres? Pax?), the nature imagery relating to fertility is apparent: cows and other domestic beasts, grains, and a fertile woman nurturing her progeny. Her pose is reminiscent of mothers in contemporaneous artworks.
lessening any negative reactions among the Roman people. It is “this particular Augustan proprietorship of nature, and the political messages of power, fecundity, and universal rightness it facilitated,” Kellum stresses, that “allows us to enter into the highly constructed reality of Augustan Rome.”

As we will see, Augustus’ landscapes infiltrated private, two-dimensional artworks outside of Rome proper, an indication of the successful inculcation of his propaganda and the standardization of these symbols across time and space. The clearest link between naturalistic peristyle decorations from these domus and state-sponsored Augustan art remains the triclinium decoration from the Villa of Livia ad gallinas albas, the so-called “Garden Room” (see FIG. 7a-b). A subterranean, seasonal dining area belonging to Livia Drusilla, Augustus’ wife since 39 BCE, each wall exhibits a continuous, floor-to-ceiling fresco scene. The foreground consists of landscaped strings of flowering vegetation: irises, hart’s tongue ferns, ivy, and violets, with oaks, pines, and spruces occupying the recessed sections of a wicker fence that borders the extent of the garden. Behind these well-maintained blooms, a wild copse dominates most of the fresco. The undomesticated plants here, by virtue of their artistic difference, emphasize the manicured organization of the garden flora they surround. While the effect produced

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86 Pliny the Elder explains the origins of Roman landscape painting in Historia Naturalis 35.116. This occurred at around the same time that Augustus had introduced his own naturalistic artworks.
87 It is worth noting here that ancient sources believe that Livia herself brought two symbolic cultivars to the city of Rome: a grapevine that grew at the Porticus of Livia and yielded new wines every year (Pliny the Elder, Historia Naturalis 14.11), and a cinnamon root given to Augustus’ temple on the Palatine to commemorate her husband’s death (Pliny the Elder, Historia Naturalis 12.94). Kellum 1994, 218 recognizes that both of these plants express overt connotations of rebirth and continuation, fitting representations of the rebirth and continuation of Augustus’ empire.
88 The plants’ identification hails from Kellum 1994, 215, 217. Consult for a more detailed description of the appearance of these paintings (as well as diagrams).
by this trompe-l’œil painting does in fact trick the eye into perceiving an illusion of spatial depth (and, by extension, adds an element of grandeur to the space), in my view, this was not the primary message of the piece. Distinct from many Pompeian homeowners, the Villa of Livia’s imperial proprietors enjoyed the luxury of planting a real pleasure garden within the borders of their villa complex. Rather, the juxtaposition between wild and manmade echoes the orderly acanthus leaves seen on the *Ara Pacis.*

The repeated theme yet again conjures up ideas about Augustus’ ability to fashion stability where chaos once reigned; as on the *Ara Pacis,* chaos in the naturalistic imagery implies social chaos. On another, more specific level, the contrast establishes a dichotomy between “civilized” and “barbarian” modes of being, “Roman” versus “Other.” Below, I show how the Augustan conquest of Egypt allowed Augustus to refine his definition of “Romanness,” his appropriation of the long-standing Roman tendency to brag of their superiority over the forces of barbarism. For now, it suffices to recognize that the imagery within the Garden Room at the Villa of Livia *ad gallinas albas* strengthened Augustus’ claims of personal and cultural dominance, this time through a medium that reverberated throughout the rest of Augustus’ empire: naturalistic wall-paintings.

Unlike the *Ara Pacis,* used and scrutinized by people that ran the gamut from rich to poor, educated to uneducated, the Garden Room was occupied only by those selected

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90 The homeowners did, in fact, plant several gardens. The most famous is described in Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis* 15.137. According to this account, augurs recommended that a laurel branch be planted at the villa to ensure the successful propagation of the rare white hens after which the villa is named. The laurel tree grew and multiplied, and it became a Julio-Claudian tradition for emperors to plant triumphal laurel wreaths in the grove. Pliny claims that the labelled laurel trees still grew at the villa during his lifetime. For more information about the laurel grove, see also Suetonius, *Galba* 1; and Cassius Dio 63.29.3.

91 Kellum 1994, 217.

92 See pages 30-39.
by Emperor Augustus and subsequent members of his dynasty. It therefore follows that the nuanced interpretations generated by modern scholars may have been realized by ancient audiences. More than any other plant variety, assorted types of laurels swamp the fresco, some cultivated, some wild, but all reflective of Augustus’ unique relationship with the tree outlined above. Kellum recognizes that most of the painted flora and fauna, including the laurel, can be described by an etiological myth involving metamorphosis.

“Her prayer scarcely finished, a heavy numbness seized her limbs,” Ovid writes of Daphne’s transformation into a laurel. “Her soft bosom was closed over by thin bark; her hair grew into foliage, her arms into branches; her feet so speedy a moment ago stuck in sluggish roots; her head became the crown of a tree” (Metamorphoses 1.549-552).

These references simulated in two-dimensional form the very real metamorphosis of Roman society during the mid- to late-1st century BCE into a fecund culture of learning, procreation, and authority. Thus, in the fresco, all of the flower- and fruit-bearing plants bloom simultaneously; this unrealistic phenomenon (which recurs in peristyle artworks at Pompeii) stressed the undying fertility of the new Augustan world. In these ways, the specific plants in the Garden Room fresco tied into Augustus’ ideological regime.

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93 This can be inferred from the fact that the Villa of Livia was, on a basic level, a palatial residence. It was perhaps more functional/agricultural than some other imperial complexes, but it was one nevertheless governed by the social relationships required at analogous elite villas. For more information about traffic flows at imperial residences, see Booms 2012. See also Kellum 1994, 224.

94 While I disagree with Castriota 1995’s (over?) analysis of each element on the Ara Pacis considering its far more general audience (see Footnote 79), I support Kellum 1994’s unraveling of the deep symbolism of the Garden Room’s artworks.

95 Kellum 1994, 220-221. These plants and animals include: laurel (Ovid, Metamorphoses 1.548); pine (Ibid., 10.103-105); cypress (Ibid., 10.106); nightingales (Ibid., 6.669; Virgil, Georgics 4.511-515); and magpies (Ovid, Metamorphoses 5.29).

96 Translated by author. It is worth remembering here that Augustus aligned his public persona with the mythology of Apollo. The god himself played a key role in Daphne’s transformation into the laurel, later adopting the laurel as his personal symbol.

97 Ibid., 221. Perpetually ripe fruits also appear on the inner walls of the Ara Pacis.
From physical gardens within the city’s boundaries to laurels on the princeps’ coinage, the *Ara Pacis* to the Villa of Livia *ad gallinas albas*, flora and naturalistic imagery assumed a role that signified the bounty of early imperial Rome. Nature honored Augustus’ reign as a noticeable break from the civil strife of the past few decades, a break that nevertheless incorporated and reconstituted traditional Republican symbols. As summarized by Rebecca Armstrong, it aimed “to stay in step with venerable tradition while producing something radial and new; to reflect the best Republican values of modesty and piety while investing the reinvigorated city with the suitably grand trappings of world domination.”

That pretense of world domination characterized other Augustan media, this time advertising Augustus’ consolidation of Eastern powers under Roman rule in a way that accentuated Rome’s cultural superiority under his autocracy. Such visual implications provided Campanian homeowners with the means by which they could express their own perceptions of the Augustan principate and their place within it.

**The Defeated “Other”**

> We must make some mention, too, however cursorily, of the pyramids of Egypt, so many idle and frivolous pieces of ostentation of their resources, on the part of the monarchs of that country...There was great vanity displayed by these men in constructions of this description, and there are still the remains of many of them in an unfinished state.

(Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis* 36.36)

Beyond injecting propagandistic undertones into the floral symbols of his new order through associations with the past and nature’s religious connotations, Augustus’ regime also tapped into nature to make connections to the successes of the present. Where on the

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98 Hardie 2009, 75.
*Ara Pacis* and at the Villa of Livia nature suggested peace, restoration, and a return to Republican tradition, numerous Augustan monuments emphasized Octavian’s conquest of Hellenistic Egypt, the effective incorporation of—and dominion over—the “Other.”\(^{100}\)

These structures joined contemporaneous literature to prompt an Orientalist craze that swept the Italian peninsula.\(^ {101}\) In this way, Augustan Egyptomania adopted a nature-focused guise that saturated the domestic sphere. I believe that this movement worked in much the same way as the *Ara Pacis* to influence the artistic choices made within Pompeian *peristylia*. Imperial Egyptianizing imagery, too, provided Roman lower classes with the language necessary to express their reactions to the changes that accompanied the principate.

Octavian owed his triumph over Marc Antony’s Eastern forces and his subsequent acquisition of Egypt to another publicity campaign, one that once again cast Octavian as a servant of traditional Roman values. Antony’s fellow triumvirs acquiesced to his desire to govern the client kingdoms of the East after the Battle of Philippi in 42 BCE. During this time, his philhellenic leanings manifested through his participation in Eastern cult, and he even went so far as to accept the title of “New Osiris/Dionysus.”\(^ {102}\) Pro-Octavian

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\(^{100}\) In this section, I refer to Augustus as Octavian, as is customary in scholarship treating Augustus’ actions in the years between 44 and 27 BCE. Octavian attained the epithet “Augustus” in 27 BCE by decree of the Senate.

\(^{101}\) “Orientalism” as a formal movement arose during the 18\(^{th}\) century, but the term can be employed to describe a similar cultural exchange during the Roman period. Here, I use the definition of Orientalism found in Said 1979, 13: “Orientalism is…a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves (Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of ‘interests’ which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it *is* rather than expresses a certain *will or intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel world).” See also Dubi 2018, 8-9.

\(^{102}\) Valerius Maximus said of Antony, “Can there be anything more deplorable than a Roman magistrate having to disguise himself in the trappings of a foreign religion?” (*Memorabilia* 7.3, 8). Quoted and translated in Sorek 2010, 38.
writers during the period emphasized Antony’s increasing indulgence in foreign luxuries while settling matters in the East. Pliny the Elder writes that “the orator Messala has recorded that the triumvir Antony used gold chamber-pots for all the calls of nature, a charge that would have shamed even Cleopatra” (Historia Naturalis 33.50). These highly-publicized and un-Roman actions, real or not, allowed Octavian to capitalize upon existing Roman prejudices against Egypt. He tore apart his former ally’s reputation in mainland Italy by casting Antony’s loyalty to the Republic into question. The dichotomy he established between himself—the dutiful Roman—and Egyptians—the decadent “Other”—emerged frequently in Augustan state-sponsored artworks and, eventually, in homes across the Bay of Naples.

An historical moment indicative of Roman attitudes towards Egypt and a crucial step in Octavian’s journey to princeps was the public reading of Antony’s will. The tension between Rome and Egypt came forcefully into play. “Caesar laid most stress on the clause in the will relating to Antony’s burial,” Plutarch explains, “for it directed that Antony’s body, even if he should die in Rome, should be borne in state through the forum and then sent away to Cleopatra in Egypt” (Antony 58.4). Octavian’s scheme resulted in a declaration of war against Egypt “to take away from Antony the authority which he had surrendered to a woman” (60.1). Octavian’s effective (and illegal) propagandistic move demonstrates that Romans prized native Italic customs, recoiling from the taboo of

103 Quoted and translated in Kelly 2014, 131. Cleopatra herself endured a poor reputation among the Roman populace, especially after her defeat at Actium. Numerous writers described her as a foreign seductress who flaunted her wealth with quite an un-Roman audacity. See Cicero, Letter to Atticus 15.15; Horace, Odes 1.37; Lucan, Pharsalia 10.59; Ovid, Fasti 2.319-325; Plutarch, Antony 25-26; Propertius 3.11; and Virgil, Aeneid 8.685-688.


105 Ibid.
dwelling permanently in an exotic, corrupting land. Whereas a proper Roman like Octavian wished to be interred in a mausoleum in Rome—a statement of his patriotism—Antony intended to cast off his Romanness for a foreign nation. More broadly, Octavian’s Rome adhered to a patriarchal governmental system that branched from customs instituted during Romulus’ time. The Egyptian state under Cleopatra represented an inverted power structure with unnatural female leadership. A symbol of “Oriental” lasciviousness, she had acquired kingship though seduction, intrigue, and a flaunting of her affluence. Rather than responding to Antony’s early requests to meet her to attend to business of state, for example, “she treated him with such contempt and laughed at him to the extent that she sailed up the River Cydnus in a river-craft covered in gold, its purple sails in the wind, its rowers pressing on with silver oars to the sounds of flutes, pipes, and citharas” (Plutarch, Antony 26.1).

Regardless of whether one regards the Aeneid as a work of propaganda, Virgil underscores this contrast between “Roman” and “Other” in his account of the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE. He alludes to Rome’s power, where, “on one side Augustus Caesar stands on the high stern, leading the Italians to the conflict, with him the Senate, the

106 For a discussion of Roman testamentary practice (and Augustus’ sabotage of that system), see Champlin 1991. He points out that “it is abundantly clear that the will was indeed perceived as a vessel of truth, a document carefully weighed and written free of ordinary constraints and without fear or favor, since it became public knowledge only when its author was past caring [i.e., after death]” (10). Even though Octavian’s reading of Antony’s will was a major breach of decorum, the will, once made public, symbolized, as Pliny the Younger writes, a man’s true nature: “creditor vulgo testamenta hominum speculum esse morum” (Epistolarum 8.18.1).

107 See Livy, Ab Urbe Condita 1.8.7.

108 The issue of womanhood and kingship is too large to tackle within the scope of this paper, but it is important to mention that Romans associated the East with female monarchs and conniving seductresses, a subversion of Roman values. The literary treatment of Cleopatra mentioned above is a prime example. See Footnote 103.

109 Translation from Perrin 1920 (above). See perseus.tufts.edu.
People, the household gods, the great gods…” (Aeneid, 8.678-680). In other words, all Roman forces promoted Octavian, from the penates to the ancient Republican governing body. Virgil continues that “on the other side [was] Antony, with barbarous wealth and strange weapons, conqueror of Eastern peoples and the Indian shores, bringing Egypt, and the might of the Orient, with him, and furthest Bactria: and his Egyptian consort follows him (the shame)” (8.686-690). Numerous words accentuate the foreignness of the East and thrust Egypt’s exoticism into sharp focus: “barbarous,” “strange,” “furthest,” etc. The wider section of the poem furthers this theme by conflating various Eastern tribes with one another, reducing their collective importance (8.704-706). This literary device, one not atypical of Augustan literature, “reveals a combination of commodities, imperial ideology, and mystification within the same discourse,” says Grant Parker. “It is this combination that broadly distinguishes the east (and to some degree south) from the west and north of the empire.” In this way, the Aeneid and works like it set the tone for the treatment of the East in Augustan imagery, and in fact clarifies the princeps’ need to address Egypt in his architecture in the first place.

Once defeated by Octavian and reestablished as the Roman province of Aegyptus in 30 BCE, the area between Cyrenaica and Judea blossomed into an economic and cultural breadbasket for continental Italy. Egypt had long been a Mediterranean power with far-reaching exchange routes, especially since it entered into the Hellenistic world

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11 Ibid.
12 Other Greco-Roman authors from roughly the same period, especially Diodorus Siculus, made attempts to describe the “barbarian” Egyptian race in ethnographic terms (Bibliotheca Historica 1.4.6).
13 Parker 2011, 29.
14 For more examples of the propagandistic “war” between Octavian and Antony, see Zanker 1988, 44-77.
15 Eck 2007, 42-44.
with the arrival of Alexander the Great in 331 BCE. However, only after Egypt’s reconstitution as a Roman territory did an influx of agricultural products, cult objects, peoples, and general allure take root in Rome at large. Octavian’s issue of a coin in 27 BCE that boasted *aegypto capta* (“Egypt has been captured”) prompted a flood of Egyptianizing imagery in celebration of a different form of Augustan stability (see FIG. 8). Obelisks, some requiring special ships for their importation and all erected in prominent locations, altered the physical countenance of Rome; Egyptian trading vessels laden with goods departed from Alexandria and returned empty to Egypt; pyramidal Roman tombs cropped up across Italy. At last, Virgil’s land of “barbarous wealth and strange weapons” had succumbed to Roman might, Augustus’ might.

The spread of so-called “Egyptian” symbols in Roman artworks was matched only by the caricature of Egyptian culture that those symbols enacted. Roman importers of Egyptian goods focused more on conveying an impression of Egypt than on comprehending the complex messages behind true Egyptian imagery. Some objects

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116 For a thorough analysis of Ptolemaic policy in Egypt, see Stephens 2003. Cunliffe 1978, 232 reminds us that under the Ptolemies and during the rise of Rome, squabbles over leadership had undermined Egypt’s political power in the Mediterranean, leaving the nation “in a state of near collapse.” Julius Caesar attempted to assuage this confused political arena to Rome’s benefit beginning in 48 BCE.

117 Notable agricultural imports included oil, grain, and papyrus. Religious imports included the newly-popular cult of Isis and Serapis. See Sorek 2010, 38. For a discussion of Roman interest in Egypt prior to Actium, see Swetnam-Burland 2015, 1-2.

118 Quoted and translated in Zietsman 2009, 2. Zietsman writes that “it would perhaps be more appropriate to say that Egyptian culture, architecture, art and religion crossed the Roman frontier and captured the imagination of the Roman world, as it eventually did even that of the modern world” (2).

119 One of the obelisks, the Montecitorio obelisk, possessed a Latin inscription underscoring Egypt’s subordination under Augustus on multiple levels: “Imperator Caesar Augustus, son of the divine high priest, dedicated this, when he was imperator for the twelfth time, consul for the eleventh time and tribune of the people for the fourteenth time, to the sun, after Egypt was brought in the power of the Roman population.” Quoted and translated in Versluys 2002, 7.

120 See Strabo 17.7.

121 An extant example of this phenomenon is the tomb of the praetor Cestius in Rome.

122 The quote from Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis* 36.36 used to introduce this section is a prime example of the Roman tendency to gloss over a deeper reading of Egyptian symbols in favor of a surface-level understanding of Egyptian culture. Note, however, the apparent comprehension of the monarchical connotations of Egyptian obelisks, significant later in this paper. See Footnote 124 and pages 58-60.
hailed from Egypt, and others were fashioned to resemble Egyptian craftsmanship in what Molly Swetnam-Burland calls an “Egyptian mein” (see FIG. 9).123 All of the objects, nevertheless, had become Roman, now digested by minds shaped by a distinctively Roman worldview.124 By reducing Egypt to digestible parodies of itself, Augustus could integrate a foreign land into his visual program of imperial unification in a way that underlined Rome’s superiority and fueled interest in that region. Indeed, formulaic representations of Roman domination over the East appeared not only in the artworks of Augustus’ autocratic regime, but also in the small-scale artworks of Pompeian peristylia. These pieces articulated Roman identity in the new social landscape called the principate.

It was the Nile that entered the Pompeian domestic sphere as an emblem of imperialistic expansion and Roman superiority. “The character of this river is remarkable…and Egypt owes to it not just the fertility of the land but the land itself,” writes Seneca in Quaestiones Naturales 4a.2. “It is a most beautiful sight once the Nile has poured across the fields.”125 Although we can surmise that the river was featured on Agrippa’s lost world map in the Porticus Vipsania, Rome,126 some of the best evidence

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123 See Swetnam-Burland 2015. While hieroglyphics adorned Roman monuments of the Augustan age, modern analyses have proven some of the script to be unintelligible. A good example of this is a cameo glass flask from c. 25 BCE-25 CE with Egyptianizing figures and indecipherable “hieroglyphics.”

124 However, Swetnam-Burland 2010 points out that a vital way in which elite Roman audiences understood an imported Egyptian artwork was by appreciating its significance as an art-historical piece. In this way, Romans communicated with Egyptian artworks with the baseline knowledge that they were important monuments because of their initial Egyptian context. In reference to the Montecitorio obelisk that Augustus re-erected in Rome, she explains that “the obelisk was refitted for a cultural system in which time and space were understood differently than in its original context, but the obelisk’s original expression of the relationship between gods, rulers, and men through the agency of the sun was elaborated, not repudiated, in that refitting” (150).

125 Quoted and translated in Merrills 2017, 172.

126 The best evidence for Agrippa’s Campus Martius map hails from Pliny the Elder’s Historia Naturalis 3.17. Here, he emphasizes the political aims of the map, writing, “Agrippa was a diligent and careful man. Who could believe that he—and along with him the Divine Augustus—made a mistake when he displayed the orbis terrarium to the gaze of the world? For he [Augustus] finished the porticus begun by his sister,
for the allure of Egyptianizing symbols of Roman authority comes from objects as unobtrusive as terracotta panels. One hundred and fifty of these “Campana reliefs” blend an indigenous medium—Italic terracotta—with an interpretation of an Egyptian riverscape: pygmies boating through a Nile teeming with North African fauna (see FIG. 10). Hippopotami, ibis, ducks, and crocodiles watch on in what was obviously a mass-produced pattern for decorative roofing. Formulaic and exoticizing, the reliefs adorned high-profile structures within Augustus’ city between the middle of the 1st century BCE to the first quarter of the 1st century CE. Such mold-made panels suggest an Egyptomania so pervasive that a workshop (or workshops) had developed a pattern book to accommodate the popularity of the Other, albeit a cartoon of that Other. From the stereotyped pygmies to the horde of crocodiles, the grass huts to the flooded Nile itself, each element of the Campana reliefs solidified, in visual form, Roman conceptions of Egypt. The mass production and conspicuous display of these scenes on the exterior of important buildings helped to disseminate that Egyptomania across central Italy. The reliefs advertised the same theme that was nestled more discreetly within people’s homes following the design and commentarii of Marcus Agrippa.” Quoted and translated in Merrills 2017, 33.

However, while we do know that this map likely displayed all of Rome’s provinces under Augustus—including Egypt and the Nile—we cannot be certain what this cartographic Nile looked like. As a result, I have selected Nilotic artifacts that lend themselves to visual analysis and that still, for the most part, hail from imperial contexts.

Besides these panels, Egyptianizing funerary monuments and landscape painting had become common in Italy. See Merrills 2017, 33-37; and Versluys 2002.

Roman writers believed in the existence of a race of dwarfs somewhere near the Nile’s origin (even though they often did wonder why so few had been seen, like in Strabo 17.2.1). This notion deepened the mystique surrounding Egypt. See Juvenal 15.124-128; and Pliny the Elder, Historia Naturalis 6.188.

Most of the Campana reliefs duplicate this scene. Some of them even contain crude hieroglyphic inscriptions like the one found on the cameo glass flask above (see FIG. 9). For other examples, see Versluys 2002, 87-90. Of the three “types” identified, this type (showing a double arch framing a Nilescape with pygmies) is by far the most popular.


In fact, Augustan wall-paintings from the period echoed the iconography and cultural implications of the Campana reliefs. For extant examples from Augustus’ own household, we must turn once again to an imperial residence, this time the House of Livia on the Palatine Hill. Such frescos directly suggest the trickle-down of nilotica from Augustus to the Roman populace and in particular, the Pompeian households that are the focus of this study. Within the House of Livia’s ala and cubiculum, Egyptianizing frescos dominate the walls. One painting shows the flooded Nile peppered with islands, boaters, palm trees, a statue of Isis-Tyche, shrines, and other manmade structures encased within a yellow background (see FIG. 11a). Another painting, part of a series of four Egyptianizing panels in a cubiculum, depicts a boating pygmy drifting past North African flora and fauna (see FIG. 11b). The similarities between the frescos and Campana reliefs become immediately apparent, but here, due to their imperial context, the social implications of the artworks are more pronounced. Just as at the Villa of Livia ad gallinas albas—where Augustus had installed naturalistic imagery to signify the fruitfulness and harmony of his rule—he Palatine complex latched onto landscape imagery to affirm Augustus’ political and economic achievements in the provinces. Maerten de Vos asserts that the formulaic Nilescapes imply through the use of color and caricature the golden age that washed over Italy after Octavian bent Egypt to Roman subjugation. Caricatures of Egyptian lands like these expanded beyond the important communities of

131 See Versluys 2002, 71-73. Most scholars believe that after renovations in the late 1st century BCE, the house had become part of Augustus’ imperial complex.
132 de Vos 1986, 67-75. He believes that the artist’s use of yellow to surround the Nilescape in the ala symbolized the saculum aurem, Octavian’s “golden age.” See also Versluys 2002, 72.
central Italy at around the same time. The incorporation of nilotica through traditional domestic artworks like terracotta roofing, water features, mosaic, relief, and garden fresco had become a means by which Romans (and Augustus himself) could acknowledge Augustus’ territorial expansion—the incursion of alien ideas and peoples—and renegotiate their role within this stable (yet unfamiliar) cultural climate.

Altogether, therefore, Egypt loomed large in the Roman psyche as an ancient land bursting with exotic customs, peoples, and ecosystems. Like Augustus, the Roman people adopted diluted symbols of Egyptian culture to express a simultaneous fascination and condescension. Augustus had subdued Egypt in the political arena, but the process of social incorporation and understanding required a complex network of symbols, whereby Romans absorbed Egyptian-inspired imagery on their own terms. The Nile, or at least Roman imaginings of it, had assumed that burden. By the mid-1st century, many inhabitants of Pompeii consumed grain shipped from Egypt while reclining in peristyla adorned with miniaturized versions of Egyptian Nilescenes. These Nilotic garden scenes, comparable to the artistic use of orderly rows of vegetation or Augustan writers’ portrayals of Marc Antony, aided in the defining of self. In the following chapter, I turn to the Pompeian garden wall-paintings that appeared during this period, the interpretations that have obscured their relationship to the identity-focused cultural climate of the early principate, saturated, as it was, with standardized imperial imagery.

133 Versluys 2002, 13. I will explore the Nilotic scenes in the House of the Ephebe in the following sections. See pages 58-62, 66-68. These painted vignettes strongly parallel the Nile scenes on the Campana reliefs and in the House of Livia.
134 Egypt was by no means the only “tamed” landscape that homeowners recreated in their peristyla. Greece, as well as local environs, make frequent appearances.
135 Merrills 2017, 151 echoes this sentiment: “Viewed collectively—and alongside other forms of geographical representation in use at the time—these landscapes were an important medium by which members of an imperial society could establish their own position within the world.”
CHAPTER TWO:
SOWING SEEDS OF DOUBT: RECONTEXTUALIZING GARDEN IMAGERY

The analysis of naturalistic wall-paintings from Pompeian peristyla has been hindered by paterfamilias-centric interpretation, which prioritizes readings of domestic space based on contemporaneous literary sources that describe their use.\textsuperscript{136} Such a reliance on the political and economic aspirations of the dominant, male homeowner has resulted in theories for domestic wall-paintings that divorce them from their wider cultural framework—and thus from their wider significance among the people who interacted with them \textit{in situ}. In this chapter, I discuss two prevailing hypotheses that supposedly account for the realistic depictions of flora and fauna so common in Pompeian garden rooms during the transition from Republic to principate. While their approaches differ—one art-historical, the other a top-down evaluation based on theories of social emulation—both of them overemphasize the paterfamilias’ acquisition and display of wealth through artworks, neglecting the artworks’ capacity for identity-formation for him (and other household members) beyond the economic sphere. To moderate such linear thinking and to reconnect these artworks’ to the shifting social world of early imperial Rome, I provide evidence in the following sections to support the claim that Campanian homeowners adapted the standardized visual language of moral reform and societal superiority to express their own reactions to the changes that came along with the Augustan era—their own realities of urbanity, morality, and territorial expansion.\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{136} To this day, many scholars rely on the paterfamilias-heavy paradigm created by Wallace-Hadrill 1996, who (for the first time) attempted to dissect Pompeian houses into sectors based on their social functions, not their artistic components. Even though his model paved the way for more anthropological interpretations of homes that incorporated social theories of space use, it reduces the input of other inhabitants of the home—namely women, slaves, and children—in favor of the paterfamilias’ hunger for wealth and status. For a critique, see Nevett 2010. For an artifact-based reading of space, see Allison 2004.

\textsuperscript{137} Mintz 1985 would label the process I describe as a process of “intensification” as opposed to one of “extensification”: “In ‘intensification,’ those in power are responsible both for the presence of the new
Although I disagree with previous scholarship regarding the extent to which naturalistic wall-paintings operated as beacons of materialistic desire, it is apparent that in general, wall-paintings, like other decorative objects from the Roman household, did convey wealth, status, and taste to visitors as part of a larger system of domestic contestation.\textsuperscript{138} It is also apparent—though most extant examples have emerged in Rome and the Bay of Naples—that wall-paintings of all kinds appeared in homes across the Italian peninsula. Vitruvius mentions a tradition for wall decoration that “the ancients” practiced in domestic contexts, evolving into the pervasive frescoes one would encounter during his day (\textit{De Architectura} VII.5).\textsuperscript{139} Under Augustus, the subset of nature-inspired painting had trickled its way into everyday contexts, as well (see FIG. 12).\textsuperscript{140} Pliny the Elder recognizes an artist named Ludius as the creator of naturalistic wall-paintings, a man who “in the period of the divine Augustus,…was the first to bring in a singularly

products and, to a degree, for their meanings; with ‘extensification,’ those in power may take charge of the availability of the new products, but the new users inform them with meaning” (152). I argue that, due to the meanings that Augustus’ regime had provided and elaborated upon, Pompeian homeowners implemented the same symbols that Augustus deployed to cement his position. Pompeians absorbed those meanings in unique ways to accommodate their unique positions (i.e., they did not copy them by rote), but the general symbolism remained the same.

\textsuperscript{138} Berry 2007, 168; Trentin 2014, 1; Tronchin 2010, 63. These sources, as well the writings of Jashemski and Zanker below (see pages 43-48), do not extend their interpretations of domestic artworks beyond the domestic rivalry between men of different households, as I aim to do.

\textsuperscript{139} Translation from Rowland, I. D. 1999. \textit{Vitruvius: Ten Books on Architecture}. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See penelope.uchicago.edu. For clarification, in this translation (and others I have referenced), the author takes the Latin phrase “ab antiquis” to mean the English phrase “by the ancients,” which I believe to capture the essence of Vitruvius’ statements. It is from these passages that Mau 1899 famously developed his “Four Styles” of Pompeian wall-painting. It is also interesting to note that Vitruvius voices disgust at the overly-elaborate paintings of the late Republic (the so-called Third Style). He deemed the spindly columns and fantastical beasts “monstrosities painted on stuccoed walls, rather than true-to-life images based on actual things.”

\textsuperscript{140} To reiterate a point from the introduction, I use the term “naturalistic wall-painting” to refer to any large-paneled, realistic nature scene that portrays real-looking flora, fauna, and landscapes in a way that accentuates their spatial depth through perspective systems. Therefore, a “naturalistic wall-painting” may indicate anything from the eponymous “illusionistic” portrait of a garden that spans a garden room’s entire wall (like at the House of the Fruit Orchard [I.9.5-7]), to a smaller panel of a villascape in a Third-Style \textit{cubiculum}, to a Nilotic scene on an outdoor \textit{triclinium}. For more categories of naturalistic wall-painting, see Trentin 2014. von Stackelberg 2009 makes a distinction between “garden paintings” and “scacro-idyllic paintings” (33), but I do not deem this a significant distinction for the purposes of this paper.
delightful fashion of wall-painting: villas, colonnades, examples of landscape-gardening, woods and sacred groves, reservoirs, straits, rivers, coasts…” (Historia Naturalis 35.116-117).

Therefore, at roughly the same time that nature imagery surfaced as a mode of imperial expression in literature and as a motif in state-sponsored monuments like the Ara Pacis, it earned a place among other wall-paintings in the homes of middle- and upper-class citizens.

Naturalistic designs and real landscaping coalesced in Roman peristyla, producing a domestic space within which various social interactions occurred, where messages could be articulated in a highly-constructed decorative environment visible to—and digested by—household members and invited guests alike. Shelley Hales deems frescoed peristyle gardens a beating heart that enabled “the whole house [to act] as a threshold between different long-established rhetorical topoi: public and private, town and country, mortal and divine, Roman and alien.” I argue in this chapter that the social oppositions that Hales identifies within peristyla should be set against the background of the social environment of Augustan Rome. In the previous chapter, I considered the various ways in which the princeps capitalized on the existing religious

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141 Translation from Woltmann, A, et. al. 1888. History of Painting. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company. Historic copies of the Latin text refer to Ludius as “Spurius Tadius” or “Studius.” As a result of Woltmann’s 1888 report, many scholars now believe that Ludius’ was the hand that painted the Garden Room at the Livia of Livia at Primaporta. For an in-depth examination of Ludius (Studius), see Ling 1977.

142 Peristyla and the rooms surrounding them hosted a number of interactive social events that brought together clientes and patrones, men and women, masters and slaves. The most important of these social events in identity-formation were dining activities. The significance of communal dining in fostering social relations cannot be understated. See Dunbar 2017 and Mintz and DuBois 2002. Dining in and immediately around peristyla is attested to by the archaeological record in the form of faunal remains, pottery sherds from dining vessels, and some extant triclinia and biclinia for reclined dining. See Allison 2004; and Jashemski 1979, 89-96.

143 Hales 2003, 151.

144 Peristyla had arrived in Rome as part of a sweeping Hellenizing movement that started in earnest during the 2nd century BCE after the fall of Corinth (146 BCE). Trentin 2014, 6-8. However, by the age of Augustus, Roman peristyla had assumed a distinctive, Roman form rife with new social functions.
and social connotations of nature through the installation of green spaces, Horti, and monuments to ease the transition into an imperialistic government system, to promote the image of its success. I assert that the plethora of naturalistic artworks inside domestic peristylia, too, fostered ideas of cultural fertility, peace, and superiority: Romanness. By creating a microcosm of the natural world, a decorated Pompeian peristylium was a clearly demarcated zone within which ideas of self were forged in accordance with the language of the early principate. The rest of this paper explores these assertions as they relate to the House of the Golden Bracelet (VI.17.42) and the House of the Ephebe (I.7.10-12). Before introducing the case studies, however, it is useful to look at prior theories regarding the use and symbolic meaning of garden spaces.

Past Approaches and New Directions

Two notable theories address naturalistic artworks within the Pompeian peristylium, but each hypothesis is reductive, treating the imagery displayed as lesser than the space it beautified, while also ascribing too much significance to the practice of conspicuous consumption. The most cited view, generated by Wilhelmina Jashemski, blends these two interpretations in arguing that realistic garden artworks illusionistically extended the space of urban gardens whose owners lacked the funds, room, or resources to actually enlarge their domestic horti. This “charming practice of making a small garden appear

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145 Thorstein Veblen coined the term “conspicuous consumption” in his 1899 book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions*. In the case of popular theories regarding Pompeian peristyle artworks, his idea of “invidious consumption” may be more fitting, wherein proprietors “consumed” goods (like high quality, illusionistic paintings) to provoke the envy of other homeowners.

146 See Jashemski 1992 and Jashemski and Meyer 2002. Jashemski is well-known for her extensive excavations of numerous peristyle gardens (and other planted plots) in Pompeii and its environs. These resulted in the creation of root casts that have allowed for the identification of the plant species grown in Roman gardens shortly before the eruption of 79 CE. For this reason, Jashemski’s interpretation of garden artworks has held much sway over subsequent researchers.
larger by painting a picture of a garden on one or more of the garden walls,” she writes, “was a common one at Pompeii and other Vesuvian sites.”\textsuperscript{147} In her estimation, fresco—enhanced by animal statuettes, three-dimensional artworks, and the real plantings of the garden—deceived viewers’ perception to promote a sense of simulated space that aggrandized the homeowner’s property; even the smallest gardens could evoke the atmosphere of a sprawling villa garden through \textit{trompe l’œil} tactics.\textsuperscript{148}

I concede that this “extension of space” theory is compelling.\textsuperscript{149} For one, the pre-existing boundaries of Pompeian \textit{insulae}, evident from the city plan, restricted \textit{domus} expansion without the absorption of neighboring properties (even if individual homeowners could afford such an endeavor), making garden space a premium for urban elites and non-elites alike (see FIG. 13).\textsuperscript{150} Naturalistic wall-paintings typically border those landscaped \textit{peristyli} that could be accommodated, often becoming visible upon entrance into a Pompeian house and likely contributing to an illusory effect.\textsuperscript{151} Many of the artworks also employ perspective systems that heighten an observer’s sensitivity to spatial depth on flat wall surfaces (see FIG. 12).\textsuperscript{152} Zahra Newby highlights garden paintings’ potential for illusionism in her study of naturalistic scenery at the imperial dining room at Sperlonga. She concludes that various artworks combined to “blur the boundaries between art and nature, inviting guests to suspend their distance and enter into...

\textsuperscript{147} Jashemski 1992, 104.
\textsuperscript{148} For other supporters of this theory, see Berry 2007, 185; Trentin 2014, 233; and Vacanti 2007, 18.
\textsuperscript{149} Indeed, it is the explanation that was provided to me while touring Pompeii.
\textsuperscript{150} There are clearly cases, like with the House of the Faun (VI.12.2, 5, 7), where entire properties were purchased or annexed during phases of home expansion, but even so, usually not for the purpose of adding green space to the enlarged homes.
\textsuperscript{151} For a discussion of sightlines in Roman houses, see Hales 2003, 107-108.
\textsuperscript{152} For a discussion of various perspective systems from Second Style wall-paintings (which are analogous to the ones employed by large-scale nature murals), see Stinson 2011.
the world of myth which they created.”

While this concentration on a deliberate artistic device demonstrates one way that naturalistic wall-paintings could influence ancient viewership, the hypothesis diminishes the artworks to their aesthetic components without acknowledging their cultural appeal. Jashemski’s theory begs the questions: why did Pompeians seek the impression of larger gardens? Were they motivated solely by principles of localized domestic competition, as she implies, or were trompe l’œil garden scenes reflective of more complex social processes?

In what follows, I briefly turn to the naturalistic wall-paintings from a cubiculum at the House of the Fruit Orchard (I.9.5-7) to shine a new light upon Jashemski’s generalized reading of such pieces (see FIG. 12). I contend that, despite the obvious illusionism at play, the whimsical character of the piece suggests that viewers understood the two-dimensional plants and animals not simply as extensions of reality that made the garden room appear larger and costlier, but as charged symbols that the homeowner wished to accentuate. True, the artist(s) rendered Campanian species accurately and with the effective use of systems of perspective to establish what at first glance seems to be a straightforward, realistic, and three-dimensional landscape. However, flowers bloom perpetually; trees bear fruits unceasingly; snakes coil forever. Thus, Jashemski’s idea—that artistic illusion crafted a grander domestic environment—ignores the numerous ways in which the scene is not real. The coexistence of elements that would not (nor could not)

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154 Tellingly, large villa gardens outside of Pompeii—within homes that could (and usually did) harbor sprawling real-life gardens—also featured realistic, trompe d’œil nature scenes akin to the ones described here. For an example, reference the villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale. As the paterfamilias of this villa had no economic need to illusionistically expand the size of his home, the existence of these paintings lends credence to my hypothesis. See also the preserved villas of Oplontis.
155 These paintings serve as a prime, yet not atypical, example of naturalistic Pompeian artwork. They hail from the early 1st century CE, during Augustus’ reign, but cannot be dated precisely.
exist together in nature draws attention to those elements and the economic, religious, and social connotations therein. I posit that each romanticism, from the floating *pinakes* to the ever-blooming buds, articulated the homeowner’s ideas of personhood in much the same way that Augustus articulated his vision of Romanness through similarly-curated representations of nature. In other words, it was within the unrealities of the naturalistic wall paintings, how they broke from the real natural world, that important connections were established.

In contrast to Jashemski, Zanker attempts to tether the naturalistic wall-paintings in Pompeii to broader social customs more directly; he, too, sees them as reflective of the homeowner’s quest for wealth and does not push further into their cultural context. He grounds his theory in top-down models of social emulation. Because of the artworks’ exhibited generic patterns and focus on real-looking gardens, he reasons that they represented middle-class imaginings of true affluence. Mimicking countryside estates where the proprietors had installed enviable gardens, he argues, permitted middle-class urban-dwellers to impress guests with their knowledge of garden features rendered in smaller, limited, and two-dimensional space. I noted above that it is not debated that Pompeian homeowners deployed artworks and architecture to communicate rivalry between neighbors and *clientes*. As I have also mentioned, Pompeians embraced symbols of Romanness from elite sources in Rome and the Bay of Naples. Nevertheless, was the acquisition of a well-off status the primary driving force for naturalistic imagery in Pompeii, as Zanker indicates? If so, how did Pompeians navigate the potentially-risky

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156 Zanker 1979. In essence, his theory is a more nuanced version of Jashemski’s that incorporates anthropological theory but that remains (in the author’s opinion) too narrow-minded.
157 For support and/or an overview of this argument, see Cooley 2003, 98; Conan 1986, 352; Kuttner 1999, 9; Trentin 2014, 263; and Vacanti 2007, 87.
moral grounds inherent in emulating elite villas notorious for their corruption?

The House of the Fruit Orchard’s paintings once again expose weaknesses in a common line of thinking (see FIG. 12). An “emulation of the elite” hypothesis, while likely one aspect of the paintings’ overall purpose, disregards the artworks’ ability to produce social identity in capacities besides the economic. Here the artist(s) did paint an extravagant vision of a Roman garden in an ordinary house space, filling the cramped, inward-facing room with a profusion of fruits and flowers. However, various architectural features of the painted garden—namely the *pinakes* and suspended theatrical masks—would not adorn elite villa gardens; those exaggerated elements conjure a Dionysiac or theatrical atmosphere more in-line with literature and popular entertainments than the real world and other gardens in Pompeian homes.¹⁵⁸ The imaginary garden decorations, coupled with the plants growing impossibly in tandem, suggest that the owner of the House of the Fruit Orchard did not expect to engineer a replica of a wealthier estate on his walls.¹⁵⁹ Rather, since the naturalistic scene created an idealized scene of practical and impractical, local and aspirational decorations surrounded by imaginative flora, the painting could arouse ideas about the homeowners’ cultural identity, ones reflective of the transformative social world that Augustus spearheaded to cement his rule.

The symbolic interplay of fantasy and reality—exaggerated wall-paintings juxtaposed against plantings within *peristylium*—finds parallels in Augustan media.

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¹⁵⁹ It may be argued that many Pompeians would not know what the interior of an elite villa looked like, and, therefore, that these urban wall-paintings could have been genuine attempts to duplicate elite spaces. However, I contend that the patron-client system that dominated Italy at the time, in addition to the widespread permeation of standardized Augustan artworks akin to those within Pompeian homes, indicate that Pompeians were well aware of the unrealities of their paintings. See Mayer 2012, 166-212, 216, 218.
Indeed, nature as a motif had gained prominence under the *princeps*. I do not dismiss the fact that garden wall-paintings could pull a viewer’s eye into an illusionistic space that enlarged the feel of the room, or that the *paterfamilias* hoped to advance his station through the furnishings within his *domus*. Nevertheless, the artistic and temporal congruence between Pompeian naturalistic wall-painting and Augustus’ imagery of restoration, peace, and Roman superiority is too strong to disregard; the obvious unrealities within the wall-paintings must have held deeper meanings than previous scholars have acknowledged. If Augustus relied on this imagery to stabilize an empire with himself at the head, what did analogous imagery represent for the middle-class Romans of Pompeii, themselves affected by the turbulent events of the previous decades?

Through an analysis of the wall-paintings within the House of the Golden Bracelet and the House of the Ephebe, I demonstrate that nature could define personhood, Romanness, and societal ideals at both the imperial and the local level.

*Rus in Urbe*

*Also fertile Capua and the gardens at the Caudine Forks; Stabiae, famous for its fountains and the countryside of Vesuvius; learned Naples irrigated by the waters of the Sebethos; Pompeii’s sweet marshes near to salt-works of Herculaneum, which the Siler River waters with its clear streams.*

(Columella, *De Re Rustica* 10.132-136)\(^{160}\)

This section surveys the dissemination of gardens and garden imagery within Pompeii during the early imperial period, with particular reference to the archaeological remains from the House of the Golden Bracelet (VI.17.42) and the House of the Ephebe (I.7.10-\(^{160}\)

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\(^{160}\) Translated by Cooley and Cooley 2004, H1.
12) (see Appendix B). I relate these Pompeian landscapes, real and imagined, to the *Ara Pacis* and the Egyptianizing frescos within the Palatine House of Livia.

Compositionally, peristyle wall-paintings and other garden artworks share numerous attributes with Augustan media: orderly rows of garden plants in opposition to wilderness, scenes bursting with plants and animals, and caricatures of Egyptian lands. These concordances reveal the potential for floral imagery—in the homes of a small town, just as in the monuments of the capital—to arouse the broader themes of fertility, stability, and cultural superiority within contemporary visitors to those spaces. Such potential has not been adequately addressed in existing scholarship on Roman gardens. I argue that Pompeian urban-dwellers had internalized imperial symbols to represent their perceptions of the zeitgeist of pre- and post-Augustan Italy.

Even before the establishment of principate and continuing well beyond it, residents of the Bay of Naples admired the natural beauty of the surrounding environs. “Of everything not just in Italy, but in the whole world, the region of Campania is the most beautiful,” writes Florus in his *Epitome* 1.16. “Nothing is more fertile than its land.” In *Epigram* 4.44, Martial, too, extols Campania’s fertility before the eruption of 79 CE, marveling, “Here is Vesuvius, just now covered with green shady vine; here the noble grape had squeezed out drenching pools; these are the ridges, which Bacchus loved

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161 For the remainder of this paper, it will prove useful to reference my three-dimensional reconstructions of the House of the Golden Bracelet and the House of the Ephebe, shown in Appendix B. For each model, I inserted digital renderings of naturalistic artworks from the *domus* entire into the artworks’ current locations (if *in situ*) or their recorded positions (if lost or in museum collections). I have selected these homes for in-depth analysis due to their exceptional preservation, detailed modern scholarship, and formulaic iconography.

162 However, the Romans were by no means the first inhabitants of this area. For an occupation history of Pompeii and its environs, see Berry 2007, 1-13, 18-19, 65-85. For the Roman attraction to the Bay of Naples, see Keppie 2009.

more than the hills of Nysa.” As these statements attest, Campania’s reputation as an idyllic setting percolated into populous urban centers. It was a landscape that for some time exemplified the Republican pastoralism so vital to Rome’s moral health, a landscape that had taken on a spiritual dimension related to its agrarian makeup (see FIG. 14). As such, it was a region primed for the implementation of Augustan reform through nature.

Not surprisingly, Roman Campania matured into a mosaic of “very beautiful farms” crowning premier real estate (Strabo, Geography 5.4.8). Beyond the region’s splendor and favor from the gods, its temperate climate, mineral-rich land, and high water table—factors colloquially described as Campania felix (“productive Campania”)—attracted colonists to extract economic value from the land. Ample archaeological and literary evidence attests to thriving agricultural systems that governed both countryside and urban life in antiquity. From wine to garum, pottery to clothing, the region’s location, linking diverse ecosystems infused with volcanic soil, painted it as the perfect processing center for various industries.

The lively natural and cultivated environment of the countryside did not terminate outside of Pompeii’s walls. Jashemski’s analysis of root casts within the preserved city calculates that buildings covered 64.7 percent of the excavated area, with gardens and

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164 Ibid., C25.
165 The spiritual aura that colored Roman perceptions of Campania is demonstrated by their frequent reference to it as a land populated by gods like Bacchus and Venus. See Martial, Epigram 4.44 in its entirety. For a thorough discussion of the religious connotations of nature, see Newby 2012, 355; and von Stackelberg 2009, 86-91.
166 Translated in Cooley and Cooley 2004, C9. See also Keppie 2009.
167 Cooley 2003, 98.
168 For many examples, see Ibid., C9, H1, H14-19. Campanian wines, for example, have been discovered as far away as Spain and Turkey, indicating their popularity as exports.
169 During the earliest phases of Pompeii’s occupation and through to the city’s destruction in 79 CE, Pompeii’s walls actually incorporated vast tracts of land set aside for agricultural production, primarily in the peripheral districts. In addition, many shops, inns, and taverns included extensive cultivated gardens, presumably for the mass processing of consumables. See Berry 2007; Ciarallo 2001; Jashemski 1992; and Jashemski and Meyer 2002.
agricultural spaces occupying 17.7 percent. At the time of her article, researchers had reported at least five hundred Pompeian gardens.\textsuperscript{170} Planted spaces unearthed by excavators consist not only of functional, crop-yielding plots, but also of ornamental, aesthetically-pleasing grounds—and often both in the same location at once.\textsuperscript{171} \textit{Palaestrae} (exercise-zones), \textit{balinae} (baths), \textit{cauponae} (wine-shops), \textit{tabernae} (inns), temples, tombs, and porticos incorporated an array of flora for food and/or for pleasure within the confines of urban community.\textsuperscript{172}

Economic prosperity during the reign of Augustus—especially after Agrippa’s construction of an aqueduct branch that serviced Pompeii in 27 BCE—intensified the range of such public green spaces. As in Rome itself, nature-focused Augustan projects included the revitalization of the Forum and temples associated with Apollo or Augustan peace, like the Eumachia Building (VII.9.1, 67-68),\textsuperscript{173} the installation of water fountains at street junctures; the creation of new public parks and pools; and the embellishment of existing gardens, like the sacred grove at the Temple of Venus.\textsuperscript{174} A traveler to Pompeii in the 1\textsuperscript{st} centuries BCE-CE would thus encounter aspects of nature during any foray into public life within the city, be it at the baths or in the “rustic ruins” of the Triangular

\textsuperscript{170} For older statistics, see Jashemski 1992, 104; and Conan 1986, 349.
\textsuperscript{171} von Stackelberg 2009, 22.
\textsuperscript{172} Bergmann 1992; Conan 1986, 349; Kuttner 1999, 11; Trentin 2014, 234-235; Vacanti 2007, 11. Primarily due to the notorious comment from Pliny the Elder (\textit{Historia Naturalis} 21.14) that Romans planted few ornamental flowers beyond the rose and the lily, scholars envision Roman gardens as lush and overwhelmingly \textit{green} spaces.
\textsuperscript{173} A floral motif lines the façade of the entrance portal to the Eumachia Building. It features acanthus scrolls and birds. However, archaeologists debate the possibility that the marble revetment belonged to a different Augustan-era building on the Forum.
\textsuperscript{174} Berry 2007, 84-85; Trentin 2014, 7-8. For more information on the Temple of Venus, see Carroll 2010.
The influence of *Campania felix* had merged with Augustan propagandistic reform to saturate a bustling urban landscape with gardens for public use.

Nevertheless, it is the decorations within the Pompeian domus, the many plants towering above house walls across the early imperial-era town, that are of interest to the present study, for few scholars have connected Pompeii’s domestic environments to the ideological climate of Augustan Rome.

Regardless of incongruities in wealth, homeowners from nearly half of the excavated dwellings in the city infused garden beds into their house designs (see FIG. 15a-b). Even the residents of crowded, multi-story insulae grew what they could in window boxes above the street (Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* 19.59).

The ubiquity of Pompeian gardens across the social spectrum has facilitated the recovery of dozens of naturalistic artworks from an assortment of domestic contexts.

Indeed, although garden layouts varied depending on the space available to the paterfamilias, peristylia possessed a number of common structural and decorative elements. von Stackelberg creates a paradigm that divides these features into three categories of “architectural saturation” that likely impacted viewership within any

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175 Although likely constructed during the Samnite period of Pompeii’s occupation, the so-called Triangular Forum gained monumental status during the Augustan period, when it was dedicated to Marcus Claudius Marcellus, the nephew of Augustus. An extant inscription on a statue base attests to this dedication. The older Doric temple that sits prominently in the forum was likely the area’s focal point during the Augustan era, a site associated with the ancient religious and agrarian roots of the city.

176 The remains of tree roots in Jashemski’s plaster casts suggest that trees and large shrubs did, in fact, exist even inside of Pompeian domestic gardens. Pliny the Elder notes that urban plantings often appeared so thick that they imitated a “forest” (*Historia Naturalis* 15.14.47). Trees positively affected house value during resale (Horace, *Epistolae* 1.10.22; Statius, *Silvae* 1.3.59).

177 George 1998, 93-98. About one-third of Pompeian houses included a garden space. See Jashemski 1992, 104. By the mid-1st century BCE, most of these gardens had evolved from simple horti at the back of the home to centrally-located, Greek-inspired peristylia. See Footnote 144. For an excellent survey of the peristylia in Pompeii, see Trentin 2014, 29-80, 207-263. She identifies about 44 “true” peristyles (i.e., fully colonnaded semi-outdoor spaces) and about 178 “truncated” peristyles (i.e., partially colonnaded semi-outdoor spaces). Although scholars are most inclined to define the truncated peristyle artworks as illusionistic considering the smaller size of the gardens they fronted, true peristylia, too, often included analogous wall-paintings. For a different categorization of peristylia, see Simelius 2018.

178 Quoted in von Stackelberg 2009, 23. Consider also the House of the Bread Merchant in Pompeii (I.12.16), where the paterfamilias had decorated a miniscule, planted well bed with a fresco of a fountain.
peristyle, large or small, true or truncated. Macro-level features bounded off and/or integrated the garden to the rest of the *domus*, to include freestanding architecture such as outdoor *triclinia*, windows into the garden, and columns. Median-level features—like earthworks, water features, and the presence of light and air—narrowed viewers’ attention onto the garden itself. Micro-level features, the sculptures, paintings, and mosaics, established “an associative mood” for self-reflection and the negotiation between indoor and outdoor space. In other words, most Pompeian *peristylias* drew from a shared repertoire of macro-, median-, and micro-level decoration that provided visitors with reference points that enabled them to situate themselves within a three-dimensional space that skirted the boundary between inside and outside. The interaction between such decorative elements, as well as between those elements and the physical plantings of the garden, cast the garden as an interactive space of sensory impact.

While I investigate visitors’ embodied experiences in *peristylias* in the section below, I first review macro-, median-, and micro-level garden features from the *peristylia* of the House of the Golden Bracelet and the House of the Ephebe (see Appendix B, FIG. 2 and 3). The artworks within, formulaic and repeated elsewhere in Pompeii, correspond strongly to the iconography on *Ara Pacis* and the nilotica from the Palatine Villa of Livia, respectively. I maintain that the iconographic parallels between local and imperial imagery suggest a parallel function. Augustus had introduced these naturalistic symbols to mitigate the memory of the civil wars that preceded him, to evoke the “golden age” that his rule had marshaled. As a result, Pompeians recognized symbols of nature as representations of Roman power, superiority, and identity, a way to make sense of and to

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180 Ibid., 35.
express their place within Augustan Italy. My theory, in contrast to Jashemski and Zanker, can explain the deviations from reality apparent within Pompeian frescos. If homeowners based their peristyle decoration on Augustan models that had permeated the empire through his public works projects, my theory rationalizes the homeowners’ choice of idealized natural landscapes and imaginary Nilotic riverscapes as opposed to perfect trompe l’œil illusions or rote imitations of villas.\footnote{181}

The strongest evidence to support my hypothesis exists within the House of the Golden Bracelet. The artworks from its peristylium distinctly resemble the symmetrical rows of carved acanthus on the Ara Pacis and the painted laurel garden at the Villa of Livia ad gallinas albas (see Appendix B, FIG. 2e-h).\footnote{182} I argue that the similarities are striking enough to reason that the artworks convey related themes, despite the fact that they hail from dissimilar contexts. At the Pompeian domus, naturalistic artworks mingle with the physical layout of the peristylium and its neighboring rooms. Balconies, windows, and doorways create continuous sight-lines between the architectural interior of the home and the more organic exterior plantings. The resultant effect would have absorbed a visitor into the garden and the social and ideological connections he would have made therein.\footnote{183} This evocative interplay between interior and exterior manifests especially among the three rooms that adjoin the peristylium: the summer water

\footnote{181}{It is important to note here that any object can possess a multiplicity of meanings among different viewers of that object, or even within a single viewer. Compare to the concept of “symbolic anthropology” from Geertz 1973 and Turner 1970. In the argument that follows, I do not intend to indicate that naturalistic peristyle artworks had a single meaning for all viewers. Indeed, the interpretations of those pieces likely varied widely. However, I aim to prove that however specific members of the Pompeian household received them, naturalistic artworks assumed an iconography that painted them as complicit in an Augustan movement of cultural reform through nature. See also Barrett 2017, 326.}\footnote{182}{For my interpretation of the Ara Pacis and the Villa of Livia ad gallinas albas, refer back to pages 17-30.}\footnote{183}{For a thorough description of such an effect, see Newby 2012; and von Stackelberg 2009, 49-72.}
triclinium and its nymphaeum, and the two diaetae to the north and west. Naturalistic frescos and mosaics adorn each wall, as well as the borders of interior water features. These artworks frame the peristylion’s central, semi-circular pond and fountain, where Jashemski exposed the root cavities of grapevines and of contoured borders typical of the formal box hedges seen at other Pompeian homes. Thus, the macro-, median-, and micro-level features of the peristylium would have drawn a visitor’s notice to specific garden decorations, at which point he would engage with the “associative mood” those symbolic artworks established.

Considering the similarity between the House of the Golden Bracelet’s frescos and imperial monuments from the capital, I contend that the “associative mood” within the peristylium was likewise inspired by the Augustan themes of cultural abundance, fertility, and rigid control, both of nature and of people. The Garden Room frescos at the Villa of Livia at Primaporta feature a cultivated garden encircled by a disorderly thicket (see FIG. 7a-b). Kellum believes that this visual opposition between tamed and untamed flora, a direct reference to the acanthus fronds on the Ara Pacis, “accomplishes the same thing [as the Ara Pacis does], harmonizing the beneficent world of nature and that of the state under a common rule of organic order.” So too, the famous fresco from the western diaeta at the House of the Golden Bracelet presents a manicured foreground of Madonna lilies, opium poppies, date palms, morning glories, chamomiles, and daisy chrysanthemums dotted with pinakes on herms and a central fountain (see Appendix B,

184 I have adopted the term “diaeta” (“garden room”) from Jashemski 1992, 112.
185 Ibid.
186 To reference the approach to garden space proposed in von Stackelberg 2009, 27, as above.
FIG. 2e-f). Blue-grey bustards and rock partridges perch calmly on the sculptures.

These assume the role of the wicker fence shown in the Garden Room at Primaporta to demarcate the boundary between the calm foreground and feral background in the Pompeian diaeta. The surrounding environment’s flapping birds and undomesticated flora emphasize the harmony of the garden plants and animals. Indeed, the House of the Golden Bracelet’s naturalistic imagery is a near-copy of that from Augustus’ Garden Room, which itself calls to mind the Ara Pacis, a monument well-known even in antiquity.\(^{189}\)

It is important to acknowledge how contemporary visitors used this decorated western diaeta and the similarly-adorned triclinium adjacent to it. Visitors encountered these naturalistic wall-paintings not in a public or imperial venue, but instead within the boundaries of middle-class, domestic space. Each room facing the House of the Golden Bracelet’s peristylum is windowless, relatively narrow, and open only to the peristyle beyond; each room also accommodated social activity, including general congregation, relaxation, and dining among members of the household and invited guests.\(^ {190}\) These factors would have augmented the visual impact of the wall-paintings, which swathe nearly every available vertical surface in continuous friezes (see Appendix B, FIG. 2e-h).

Immediately apparent, the life-size depictions of native Campanian flora and fauna dominate the eye-level planes of the walls. More abstract—yet still nature-focused—Third Style panels of oscilla, laurel boughs, and pinakes are positioned above eye-level

\(^ {188}\) The identification of these plants and animals comes from Jashemski 1992, 112-113.

\(^ {189}\) If they did not learn about it via word of mouth or through similar state-sponsored iconography in Campania, Pompeians who had never ventured to the capital may have witnessed the Ara Pacis on coins. Augustus, Tiberius, and Nero included the monument on some of their official coinage.

\(^ {190}\) Dining activities are the most visible archaeologically. Jashemski 1992 discovered faunal remains of typical foodstuffs in and around these rooms. Other artifacts, including marble shelves, benches, the triclinium itself, and, not to mention, the lavish decorations, suggest that gatherings occurred here.
and along the edges of the ceiling. While dining or conversing, a visitor would have been hard-pressed to overlook these decorative features. Their size, choice of color, attention to detail, and physical proximity to those engaging in various activities either inside the rooms themselves or outside in the garden undoubtedly encouraged a contemplation of the images—and themes—therein.

By emulating an imperial visual rhetoric of dominance, the owner of the House of the Golden Bracelet could assert his own ability to craft order, to control his social sphere in Augustus’ refurbished, peaceful Rome.¹⁹¹ Not merely a testament to the paterfamilias’ wealth, naturalistic peristyle decorations allowed him and other viewers from the household to participate in a broader cultural movement that celebrated Romanness—Augustus’ Pax Romana—through carefully crafted nature imagery.¹⁹² This iconography had been imbued with meaning during the late Republic by means of Augustan media campaigns. The princeps ensured that the Roman populace believed tamed gardenscapes, as Ann Kuttner puts it, “causal to Roman ethnic virtue and the urbs’ survival.”¹⁹³ In its development of images like the ones within the Ara Pacis and the Villa of Livia at Primaporta, imperial architecture testified to the return of ethnic virtue to Rome. The owner of the House of the Golden Bracelet (as did other Pompeians and, presumably, citizens across Italy) adopted this imagery to tether himself to a Roman identity that promised hope, success, and stability. Therefore, naturalistic wall-paintings in Pompeii suggest a cultural phenomenon specific to the early imperial era.

¹⁹¹ For more on this topic, see Newby 2012.
¹⁹² The paterfamilias may have commissioned artworks like these, but all household members, including slaves, would have come into direct contact with this imagery on a regular basis. See Footnote 190.
¹⁹³ Kuttner 1999, 11.
Urbs in Imperium

The House of the Ephebe speaks to the same phenomenon, but looks beyond Italy to explore Roman supremacy in the Mediterranean. Artworks in the garden recall the type of nilotica so popular in Augustus’ capital (see Appendix B, FIG. 4c-f). In the southern peristylium and fronting a nymphaeum and life-sized hunt scene, excavators discovered an elaborate triclinium, complete with fountain jets, Bacchic sculpture, and animal statuettes. Most outstanding, however, are the large Nilotic frescos on the triclinium façades. Caitlin Barrett labels the characters and locations that appear in these friezes, naming ducks, lotuses, ibises, hippopotamuses, prows, crocodiles, pygmies, animal deities, palm trees, Apis bull statues, shrines, obelisks, and the Nile’s life-giving floodwaters. Although Egyptian landscapes introduce other variables into the question of viewership, their basic role matches that of the House of the Golden Bracelet: both serve as portrayals of fertility and Roman accomplishment under the princeps.

In particular, the nilotica from the House of the Ephebe’s outdoor triclinium finds a counterpart at the House of Livia on the Palatine (see FIG.11a-b). Beyond the recurrence of an array of North African creatures—many of which, though realistic, are not entirely accurate—the artworks share similar visions of Egyptian architecture. The obelisks in each painting stand out as emblems of Roman imaginings of the region. One obelisk appears in the House of Livia fresco, and several at the House of the Ephebe. Like pyramids, which had arrived in Italy with myriad other Egyptian architectural styles

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194 As I argued for the House of the Golden Bracelet, the layout of the House of the Ephebe formed what von Stackelberg has dubbed an “associative mood.” Note the open sightlines and visual integration of the garden into the house proper apparent in the model.
195 All of the descriptions of this space cited in this paper come from Barrett 2017, 307-310.
196 Ibid., 312.
197 I examine this phenomenon in greater detail below. See Footnote 202.
and artistic motifs after 31 BCE, obelisks entered the Roman repertoire as Augustus’ political domination extended across the sea. Obelisks, however, were imported and re-erected in Roman contexts and were rarely crafted by local architects, even into subsequent Roman dynasties.\textsuperscript{198} Diners reclining in the Pompeian peristylium would have been thus struck by the Egyptian aura of the scene beneath their feet, not least of all because of the conspicuous monoliths rising amongst the painted flora and fauna.\textsuperscript{199}

Those viewers familiar with Pliny’s \textit{Historia Naturalis} or Augustus’ obelisks in the Campus Martius and Circus Maximus could understand the monuments as “symbols of imperial undertaking,” according to Swetnam-Burland.\textsuperscript{200} Not merely constructs produced by an entirely incomprehensible “Other,” obelisks testified to the power of foreign rulers, who had mobilized vast resources to raise visual badges of kingship in the form of inscribed monoliths. Pliny traces the Egyptian history of numerous obelisks to flesh out their correlation with dynastic rule (\textit{Historia Naturalis} 36.13-15, 66-71).\textsuperscript{201} His explanations could have facilitated a nuanced reading of the Egyptian-made obelisks that Augustus had transplanted to Rome in highly symbolic areas of the capital. Portrayals of power in their initial, Egyptian contexts, they had been shipped to Rome at great expense to be reestablished by another (superior) leader. In this way, by incorporating obelisks among other built structures lining the Nile, the Egyptianizing frescoes at the House of Livia and the House of the Ephebe directly reference the Roman subjugation of a

\textsuperscript{198} Consider the Montecitorio Obelisk in the Augustan Campus Martius, mentioned in Footnotes 119 and 124. See Swetnam-Burland 2010.
\textsuperscript{199} Barrett 2017, 315. These are the people to whom the Nilotic frescos would be the most visible, as diners and those approaching the triclinium would be closest to the detailed Egyptianizing landscapes.
\textsuperscript{200} Swetnam-Burland 2010, 142.
\textsuperscript{201} Cited and interpreted in Ibid.
formidable culture. Egyptian kingship had been transplanted not only to the public sphere of the capital of Rome, but also to the private sphere of Pompeian homes.

In terms of their floral elements, too, each fresco underscores the theme of Roman power under the principate, this time stressing the transferal of Egyptian fertility to Rome. Pygmies boat along the river in flood, passing non-Italian beasts so populous that they overcrowd the scene. Vast, irrigated fields flank the lotus-studded Nile. On their vessels and in the fields, some pygmies engage in sexual intercourse, while others dance drunkenly to the tune of Egyptian instruments. The pygmies have become actors in what Barrett terms a “pseudo-ethnographic fantasy”—deliberately parodied in order to represent more abstract ideas.202 From the copulating pygmies to the bobbing pastures of grain, the abundance of animal species to the river flooding its banks, both the Pompeian and the imperial nilotica emphasize the bounty of the earth. The paintings establish caricatures of the Egyptian Nilescape in which all of the figures embody the abstract concept of fertility at the expense of artistic realism. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the acquisition of Egypt in 31 BCE initiated an influx of North African grain into Italy, soon comprising a large extent of the grain dole.203 Such economic prosperity was a tangible benefit of the international Augustan policies that had brought Egypt into Roman control. Literally—through the princeps’ political maneuvers—and symbolically—

202 Barrett 2017, 311-312. Romans, including Campanians, would have been familiar with the appearance of real Egyptians (who were decidedly not pygmies). They would have encountered Egyptian traders and Egyptian expatriates. See Swetnam-Burland 2011, 343. See also Seneca, Epistolarae 77.1-3; Strabo 5.4.6; Suetonius, Divus Augustus 96. Therefore, the artistic decision to use pygmies in imperial and domestic nilotica cannot be considered a reflection of what Romans believed to be the true Egyptian populace. I argue that pygmies played a part in an intentional, symbolic representation of Egypt that conveyed ideas about domination and fertility through their relation to legendary, mythical Egyptian “history.”

203 See page 35. Writing in 70 CE, Josephus commented (perhaps in an exaggerated manner, but nevertheless tellingly) that Egypt fed Rome for eight months of the year and Egypt for four (Bellum Judaicum 2.383, 386).
through nilotica—Romans had simplified Egyptian culture into an easily digestible form that played up Egypt’s agricultural productivity in relation to Rome’s status as newfound master of that realm.

Augustus’ use of such so-called “Egyptian” imagery permitted an expression of loyalty to Rome that advanced his station; nilotica simultaneously emphasized the ways in which Romans like himself were clearly not Egyptian while also absorbing those “Others” into the Roman empire for Rome’s economic benefit.\textsuperscript{204} The far-reaching spread of such iconography, especially in light of the recent war with Marc Antony and Cleopatra, implies that the concept of Romanness, a form of Roman nationalism, had gained a significant social role during the Augustan era.\textsuperscript{205} Pompeian homeowners could justify their consumption of Egyptian products, their acceptance of Egyptian cult, and their enjoyment of Egyptian artworks by exoticizing those very things. Exoticization would have helped Pompeians to comprehend the changes that came along with imperialistic expansion, to validate the righteousness of those changes. Thus, like the peristyle frescos from the House of the Golden Bracelet declared the household’s participation in an empire-wide movement towards peace and order—the return of Republican \textit{arete} through Italian landscapes—the peristyle frescos from the House of the Ephebe proclaimed the household’s support of Roman domination in the Mediterranean—the return of Republican \textit{arete} through the addition of Egyptian landscapes. In each case, the artworks defined Romanness in a changing Roman world.

We cannot overlook the fact that most of this suggestive imagery comes from landscaped \textit{peristylia}. In the following section, I dissect how the location of the

\textsuperscript{204} See pages 30-39.
\textsuperscript{205} See Merrills 2017 and Zietsman 2009.
naturalistic artworks could have magnified the iconography’s successful inculcation among viewers to the garden. I argue that the pieces combined with the real plantings of the *peristylium* to create a microcosm of the natural world, one that generated an immersive, contemplative, and idealized version of nature that accentuated the Augustan propagandistic devices detailed above and furthered Pompeian homeowners’ declarations of identity.

*Locus Amoenus*

*Beneath the shade which beechen boughs diffuse, you, Tityrus, entertain your sylvan muse: Round the wide world in banishment we roam, forced from our pleasing fields and native home: While stretched at ease you sing your happy loves; and Amarillis fills the shady groves.*

(Virgil, *Eclogues* 1.1-5)²⁰⁶

The resemblance between imperial and middle-class Pompeian artworks, I maintain, reveals that the decoration of Pompeian peristyles articulated messages about Roman cultural identity at a pivotal period of Roman history. *How* the artworks conveyed these messages deserves more attention. Below, I discuss the embodied experience of visitors to a decorated *peristylium*, particularly those from the House of the Golden Bracelet and the House of the Ephebe (see Appendix B). Drawing on the theory of space developed by Michel Foucault, I stress that *peristyli* were places of social encounter, where homeowners had fused miniaturized versions of the natural world into their domestic

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²⁰⁶ Translation from Dryden, J. 1697. The Works of Virgil: Containing his Pastorals, Georgics, and Aeneis. London: Jacob Tonson. Quoted and interpreted in Bernstein 2011, 73-74. This passage from Virgil has long been considered the fundamental definition of “*locus amoenus*,” a term employed by other poets of Virgil’s age and continuing in popularity into the modern era. In its basic form, a *locus amoenus* represents a “pleasant place,” often outdoors, with water, shade, and grass or flowers. *Loci amoeni* were places of reflection and relaxation. On the Pompeian garden as a *locus amoenus*, see Barrett 2017, 314; and von Stackelberg 2009, 20-21.
landscapes. At the same time part of the domus and outside of it, part of the natural environment and outside of it, peristylia generated a sort of “hyperreality” that heightened viewers’ responses to the naturalistic artworks that had been placed there.²⁰⁷ Few scholars have approached garden spaces as liminal zones of synesthetic interaction, but it is through this method that we may better grasp the significance of naturalistic garden artworks to Roman citizens and the specific ways in which Augustan ideas were promulgated beyond the capital.

Foucault’s definitions of “utopia” and “heterotopia” aptly describe how space may have been perceived in ancient domestic gardens, providing my analysis with the building blocks necessary to tease out this synesthetic interaction.²⁰⁸ While he explains utopias as “fundamentally unreal spaces” that “present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down,” heterotopias blend fantasy with reality to create what he compares to the effect of looking in a mirror: “[a heterotopia] makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.” Otherwise stated, heterotopias exist within and reflect the real world, but subvert the expected order of things. In my view, peristyle gardens inhabited three-dimensional domestic space, presented real flora and realistic-looking decorative landscapes, yet engaged with

²⁰⁷ To use a term from Tronchin 2010, 63.
²⁰⁸ Foucault 1984. von Stackelberg 2009, 51-52, also makes this connection, using it to ground her own interpretation of garden space.
evocative, symbolic forms that deviated from reality. Thus, Pompeian garden spaceselate to this Foucauldian concept.209

I argue that a decorated *peristylium* engineered a microcosm of the natural world,
a heterotopia, that enhanced visitors’ engagement with the artworks within. An
arrangement of the tactical—smelling, touching, tasting, the sounds of running water—
merged with the fantastical imagery within the frescos.210 The resultant space allowed a
visitor to commune with the ideas represented by the naturalistic imagery of the
Augustan era in a *locus amoenus* setting of pleasant relaxation. Both the iconography of
the garden frescos and their relationship to other garden features would have conjured
these imperial-inspired themes of cultural fertility, peace, and superiority, for the
plantings and fountains echo in real space the composition of the wall-paintings. Neat
box hedges fronted wilder arrangements of grapevines in an allusion to the iconography
on the garden walls. Fountain streams flowed through *euripi* in miniaturized
approximations of riverine landscapes like the Nile.211 As a result, while rooted in the
very real landscape of domestic garden space, visitors would engage with meaning-laden
imagined landscapes reflective of the changing world of the principate.212

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209 Foucault himself describes gardens, modern and ancient, as heterotopias. He writes: “The traditional
garden of the Persians was a sacred space that was supposed to bring together inside its rectangle four parts
representing the four parts of the world…; and all the vegetation of the garden was supposed to come
together in this space, in this sort of microcosm…The garden has been a sort of happy, universalizing
heterotopia since the beginnings of antiquity (our modern zoological gardens spring from that source).” On
the other hand, Conan 1986, 352, labels gardens as “a domestic utopia, a place sharing with Utopia its
ambivalence of meaning and false etymology: both place of happiness and no place.” Although both
Foucault and Conan base their conclusions on similar ideas, I side with Foucault, seeing as peristyle
gardens blended both fantasy and reality, not simply existing as a zone of fantasy.

210 Most realistic garden artworks were placed strategically in areas that would allow them to engage with
other features of the *peristylium*. Consider also the House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto (V.4.a), where most
such pieces lined the central *euripus* (water channel) and adjoining garden rooms.

211 For references to *euripi* in primary literature, see Cicero, *Ad Q. Fronto*, 3.9.7; and *De Legibus* 2.2.

212 See Barrett 2017, 314.
For example, the House of the Golden Bracelet’s garden artworks cooperate with the architecture and plantings of its *peristylium* to fashion an interactive heterotopia (see Appendix B, FIG. 2c-h). The structures represented in the house’s naturalistic wall-paintings are brought to life in the built features unearthed in the *peristylium* by modern excavation.213 Two-dimensional, painted fountains in the *diaetae* and *triclinium* frame the real *nymphaeum*, once gurgling with water supplied by a complex hydraulic system. Such a correlation between art and reality did not merely make the peristyle spaces seem larger through an illusion of spatial depth; rather, this interplay stressed viewers’ personal relationship to the space they currently inhabited, allowing for the formation of symbolic associations. In fact, the social activities implied by the wall-paintings parallels the activities that actually occurred in the garden. Primary sources attest to the frequency with which music, dancing, poetry recitations, and theatrical performances accompanied dining activities at *triclinia*.214 Therefore, visitors to the House of the Golden Bracelet lounging at the water *triclinium*—eating, conversing, and performing, as they would—could understand the *oscilla* hanging in the naturalistic wall-paintings as reflections of their own behaviors in three-dimensional space. Put simply, the clear equivalences in architectural detail between painting and *peristylium* drew attention to viewers’ position in a highly-symbolic, decorative, and social environment where real sensations and activities related to the artistic themes on the walls around them.

This sensation was compounded by the landscaping within the House of the Golden Bracelet’s *peristylium*, which more directly grappled with the interface between

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213 “Such strategies of correlation and mirroring” between real-life and artistic features in Roman architecture are typical, according to Ibid. We observe this phenomenon in Roman houses of all sizes and in artistic media of all kinds, from painting to sculpture.

214 Ibid., 315-316. See Pliny the Younger, *Epistolar*ae 1.15; and Plutarch, *Quaestiones Convivales*. 

fantasy and reality in relation to ideas of Romanness. As mentioned above, Jashemski identified the root casts from major plant varieties in the garden, namely grapevines and box hedges.\textsuperscript{215} Any visitor to the \textit{peristylium}, regardless of status, would have confronted the visual dichotomy between these florae. Along the exterior borders of the garden, grapevines sprung haphazardly from their roots, while in the interior, box hedges maintained a rigid, manmade shape. People passing through the garden in the course of their quotidian activities thereby experienced, in real space, the opposition between “tamed” and “wild” apparent in the surrounding wall-paintings. Indeed, the visitors’ movements—and sights and smells—were bound to this two-dimensional and three-dimensional theme, with the paintings enhancing the negotiation of the real plants and vice versa. Interpreted more broadly, the garden offered a picture of naturalistic bounty that extended into the frescos around it. Here was a lush, planted area in the heart of an inward-facing, largely windowless Pompeian \textit{domus}. Overall, then, the naturalistic wall-paintings and physical composition of the garden worked together to enhance visitors’ reception of the symbols of imperial Romanness therein: order, stability, peace, and fertility.

The garden features at House of the Ephebe mixed in a similar way to develop a heterotopia suggestive of Roman identity during the Augustan era (see Appendix B, FIG. 3b-g).\textsuperscript{216} Like at the House of the Golden Bracelet, diners at this \textit{domus} would experience the wall-paintings come to life. A real “river” surged around the trellised \textit{triclinium} in the form of a \textit{euripus} and fountains with basins. In the context of the Nilotic scenes on the

\textsuperscript{215} Jashemski 1992, 112.
\textsuperscript{216} My analysis in the paragraphs that follow are strongly influenced by the interpretations of this house from Barrett 2017.
triclinium façade, these water channels likely evoked the presence of the Nile itself, tamed, for visitors’ pleasure. The paintings include humanoid figures whose actions imitate those performed by Pompeians interacting with the peristyle triclinium. Although exotic and in many ways dehumanized, the pygmies in the frescos banquet, play, and listen to music, just in a more exaggerated, comical manner than that of their Pompeian counterparts. Barrett believes that “such images may poke fun not just at Egyptians or quasi-mythical pygmies but also at the viewers’ own—presumed or aspirational—social identities as refined, self-controlled diners.”²¹⁷ In other words, the frescos and physical garden architecture would have encouraged peristylium visitors to reflect upon their own activities and identities, especially in relation to the painted “Egyptians” and Nilescape in their midst.

In sum, I argue that the physical garden combined with its nilotica to exoticize Egyptian imagery while, at the same time, rationalizing Rome’s imperialistic involvement in Egyptian affairs. The “Nile” flowing through the House of the Ephebe’s euripus—a clear reference to Egypt—springs from an Italian source sheltered in the nymphaeum: a deity representing either a nymph, Venus, or Pamona (see Appendix B, FIG. 3g).²¹⁸ Whatever her precise identity, a Roman goddess controlled the North African river, much as Rome controlled Egypt under Augustus. The artistic miniaturization of Egyptian flora and fauna in comparison to the rest of the garden, too, familiarized what would otherwise be a jarring foreign landscape (but still gave the impression of a foreign landscape).²¹⁹ Even though the lands depicted were exotic and the animals dangerous,

²¹⁷ Ibid., 314.
²¹⁸ Ibid., 317, 323. Roman writers often debate the “mysterious” source of the Nile, with kings across time and space searching (unsuccessfully) for the river’s origin. See Lucan, Pharsalia 10.268-283.
²¹⁹ On miniaturization, see also Tronchin 2010, 69. Referenced in Barrett 2017, 320, 325.
their small size in the frescos reined them in, and their adoption of typical fertility imagery localized them into the recognizable topic of agricultural productivity.\textsuperscript{220} “That which was once alien and potentially dangerous,” Barrett writes, “was now part of the domus itself, increasingly incorporated into—and constitutive of—Romanness.”\textsuperscript{221} The heterotopic blend of symbolic artworks in three-dimensional, domestic garden space would therefore encourage a specific reading of—and embodied experience within—the peristylium. This reading urged a contemplation of what it meant to be Roman in an expanding empire.

For these reasons, I maintain that the iconography of naturalistic wall-paintings in Pompeii was enhanced by the frescos’ physical proximity to other garden features. A microcosm of the natural world, one evocative of the Augustan natural world, emerged at the interface between painting and peristylium. As visitors moved through the garden, they physically experienced the themes depicted in the two-dimensional, artistic realm. As visitors observed the frescos, they could relate themselves—their own activities and identities—to those paintings based on their position within the garden. Ideas of stability, fertility, and cultural superiority were not only expressed but also felt. Thus, in my view, the heterotopias generated by Pompeian peristylium underscored households’ claims to Romaness, rather than simply flaunting the paterfamilias’ claims to wealth. Peristylium were places where cultural identity was negotiated, proclaimed, and experienced.

\textsuperscript{220} Indeed, the peristylium grew real crops and more formal plantings adjacent to its decorative elements. Barrett 2017 suggests that these florae may have been watered by the euripus (320).
\textsuperscript{221} Ibid., 324.
CONCLUSIONS

Since the intensive excavation of Pompeian gardens by Jashemski in the later part of the 20th-century, few scholars have questioned the interpretation of naturalistic peristyle frescos that posits a simple aesthetic or materialistic function. Indeed, this hypothesis, especially as it is articulated by Jashemski and Zanker, has become a standard assumption in most scholarship concerning the Pompeian peristylium. Bearing in mind the paintings’ apparent illusionism and placement in restricted urban dwellings, such an explanation seems to be the obvious designation for a curious artistic form that arose during the late-1st century BCE.

In contrast, I have advocated for a reconsideration of naturalistic artworks from Pompeian peristylia that situates them more firmly in their wider cultural framework. While these frescos clearly do craft illusions of spatial depth, and while the Roman paterfamilias surely partook in domestic rivalry using the décor of his domus, the iconography of naturalistic artworks warrants deeper scrutiny. Previous studies have failed to relate these works to radical changes occurring at roughly the same period of Roman history. In its literature and monumental architecture and artworks, the early imperial age had invested images of nature with special meanings inextricably tied to Roman identity in a transitionary political landscape.

By examining the temporal and iconographic parallels between imperial and Pompeian artworks, I have proposed a new framework with which scholars can approach naturalistic frescos. Allusions to nature in Republican literature had the capacity to measure the moral health of Roman society, especially following the defeat of Carthage in 146 BCE. Thus, as the Republic collapsed and the principate materialized under
Augustus, imperial images of nature assumed a crucial role: substantiating the peace, cultural fertility, and Roman domination that had returned to Italy with Augustan authoritarianism. Naturalistic symbolism simultaneously broadcast patriotism and rationalized imperialistic expansion. Nowhere is this more obvious than within such monuments as the *Ara Pacis*, the Villa of Livia at Primaporta, and the House of Livia on the Palatine.

In my view, we cannot interpret Pompeian peristyle artworks without addressing this context. I argue that it was the percolation of imperial symbols of cultural fertility and domination, not the pursuit of optical illusions and the parody of wealth, that motivated Pompeian homeowners to craft realistic two-dimensional garden scenes in their homes. Whether orderly garden scenes or nilotica, nature had become a vehicle by which one could declare his or her own identity in a growing Roman world. By blending such artworks with real garden space, *peristylia* had become heterotopic zones in which identity could be directly confronted and examined.

Classical archaeology is increasingly trending towards interpretive analyses of artifacts that center on embodied viewership. Rather than defining chronologies of artistic development or seeking proof of the *paterfamilias*’ materialistic goals, recent studies aim to discover what archaeological materials *meant* to their users. This thesis is a product of such trends. Although the *paterfamilias* still possesses the primary agency in my theory, I have moved past simple top-down models to explore the influence of broad cultural movements on local identities, the impact of architecture and artworks on lived experience, and the notion of “Romanness” during a pivotal snapshot in time. As today, identity—personhood—figured heavily in the lives of early imperial Pompeians.
APPENDIX A

Fig. 1
_Horti Agrippae_ and _Ara Pacis_, Campus Martius during the time of Augustus, Rome

Fig. 2
Laurel tree and *betylos* of Apollo Agyieus, Room of the Masks, *Domus Augusti*, Palatine Hill, Rome

Reproduced in Kellum 1994.
Fig. 3
Two laurel tress, Augustan *denarius*, c. 18 BCE

Reproduced in Kellum 1994.
Fig. 4a-d
Details of the *Ara Pacis Augustae*, Rome, 9 BCE

a. West face, Romulus and Remus in the Lupercal grotto and Aeneas sacrificing
b. West face, Aeneas sacrificing

c. East face, Tellus
d. South side, procession with Augustus and dignitaries

Reproduced in Holliday 1990.
Fig. 5
Details of acanthus frieze, *Ara Pacis Augustae*, 9 BCE

Reproduced in Holliday 1990.
Fig. 6
Acanthus leaf pattern, Corinthian column capital, c. 4th-3rd century BCE

Downloaded from ARTstor.
Fig. 7a-b
Garden Room, Villa of Livia ad Gallinas, Prima Porta, 1st century BCE

a. Wide-view of the south end, reconstructed in the Museo Nazionale, Rome

b. South wall panel with central oak

Reproduced in Kellum 1994.
Fig. 8
*Aegyptia capta* with crocodile with closed jaws, Augustan *denarius*, c. 27 BCE

Cited in Zietsman 2009.
Fig. 9
Egyptianizing imagery/text, cameo glass flask, c. 25 BCE-25 CE

a. Main view

b. Side B

Cited in Swetnam-Burland 2015.
Fig. 10
Nilotic scene, “Campana relief,” 1st century CE

Reproduced in Merrills 2017.
Fig. 11
Egyptianizing frescos, *ala* and *cubiculum*, House of Livia, Palatine Hill, Rome, c. 25-15 BCE

a. Flooded Nile with islands, shrines, boaters, a statue of Isis-Tyche, palm trees, etc.

b. Boating pygmy drifting past Egyptian fauna

Fig. 12
Naturalistic wall-painting, *cubiculum*, House of the Fruit Orchard (I.9.5-7), Pompeii

Fig. 13
City plan with notable gates and structures labelled, Pompeii

Fig. 14
Bacchus covered with grapes and standing before a lush Mount Vesuvius, *lararium*, House of the Centenary (IX.8.3-6), Pompeii

Photo taken by author.
Fig. 15a-b
Maps of true and truncated *peristyli*, Pompeii

a. True *peristyli*

b. Truncated *peristyli*

Shown in Trentin 2014.
APPENDIX B

Fig. 1
Floorplan, House of the Golden Bracelet (VI.17.42), Pompeii
Fig. 2
Digital reconstruction, House of the Golden Bracelet (VI.17.42), Pompeii

a. Lower level, with garden level below

b. Garden level
c. View from *peristylium* into garden rooms, *diaeta* (Oecus 32) and *triclinium*

d. Closer view into garden rooms
e. *Diaeta* (Oecus 32)
f. Paintings from the east and north walls, *diaeta* (Oecus 32)
g. *Triclinium and nymphaeum*
h. Mosaic from *nymphaeum*, paintings from walls of *triclinium*
Fig. 3
Floorplan, House of the Ephebe (I.7.10-12), Pompeii

From Barrett 2017.
Fig. 4
Digital reconstruction, House of the Ephebe (I.7.10-12), Pompeii

a. Views of lower level
b. Views of the peristyle, with outdoor triclinium and nymphaeum
c. Details of the *triclinium*, with the *nymphaeum* behind
d. Nilotic frescoes on the *triclinium*
e. Nilotic frescoes on the *triclinium* as they appear today
f. *Nymphaeum* with hunt wall-painting on adjacent wall
g. Bronze statue from *nymphaeum*
BIBLIOGRAPHY


