

**The art of piety and profit at Pompeii:  
A new interpretation of the painted shop façade at IX.7.1-2.\***

**Charlotte R. Potts**

There are 74 catalogued examples of figured art painted on Pompeian façades, almost all of a religious or talismanic nature.<sup>1</sup> This street art appeared near compital altars and entrances to shops and houses and contributed to a vibrant street aesthetic. Exterior figured paintings have not received a great deal of scholarly attention, however, with studies tending to focus on iconography rather than considering how street art may have functioned in its original setting. The potential value of painted façades as evidence for religious, commercial and civic values, for which there are scant literary sources, has consequently been overlooked.

This study explores how our understanding of the significance of one particular piece of street art, a painted façade on the Via dell'Abbondanza at IX.7.1-2, can change when its physical, social and civic contexts are taken into account. Previous interpretations of this façade have struggled with a perceived tension between the shop's commercial identity and the religious imagery on its façade. I will show that

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\* I would like to thank Amanda Claridge for her detailed criticism and continued support of my study of this and other Pompeian façades. Errors of fact and analysis remain mine alone.

<sup>1</sup> T. Fröhlich, *Lararien - und Fassadenbilder in den Vesuvstädten: Untersuchungen zur 'volkstümlichen' pompejanischen Malerei* (Mainz, 1991) is the authoritative catalogue of 74 façade pictures and 128 *lararium* paintings at Pompeii. For discussion of the prevalence of religious images on façades see V. Spinazzola, *Pompei alla luce degli Scavi Nuovi di Via dell'Abbondanza (anni 1910-1923)* (Rome, 1953), i, 163ff. The author of the present article has also completed a dissertation arguing that it is possible to interpret the majority of figural paintings on exterior walls at Pompeii as part of a general boundary-marking aesthetic.

this interpretive tension is unnecessary and can be resolved by looking beyond the immediate set of frescoes.

## I. THE PAINTED FAÇADE AT IX.7.1-2

The iconography of the façade at IX.7.1-2 is predominantly religious. Frescoes on the architrave and both sides of the entrance to IX.7.1 depict gods and participants in religious processions (Fig. 1), but the pilaster between doors IX.7.1 and IX.7.2 carries electoral graffiti, as does the lower corner of the fresco on the left of IX.7.1. Evidence suggests that these religious and civic paintings decorated the front of a wool-working business.

### Architrave

The architrave above door IX.7.1 is painted with the busts of four deities, each depicted in a rectangular frame on a yellow ground (Fig. 2). From left to right are Sol-Apollo, Jupiter, Mercury, and Luna-Diana. Sol-Apollo wears a radiating crown and has a quiver over his left shoulder. Jupiter is garlanded and carries a sceptre. To his left are remains of a small terracotta phallus. Mercury wears a red winged *petasos* and rests his *caduceus* on his left shoulder, over a purple cloak. Luna-Diana wears a purple dress accessorized with a quiver leaning on her right shoulder and a crescent behind her head.<sup>2</sup> The four deities have the same iconography, palette, brushstrokes and highlighting techniques as a set of four *tondi* in *cubiculum* 14 in the Casa della

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<sup>2</sup> Fröhlich (n. 1), 333 interprets the quiver in the Sol-Apollo and Luna-Diana panels as a whip-handle.

Caccia Antica (VII.4.48); both sets can probably be attributed to that house's so-called Painter B.<sup>3</sup>

### Left façade

To the left of the doorway is a white-ground fresco of Venus, framed at the top by a garland suspended at three points (Fig. 3). The goddess stands upright but leans slightly to her left on an upturned rudder. She is heavily draped in a long purple dress with gold embroidery and wears gold earrings, rings and a necklace. In the crook of her left arm she holds a sceptre and in her right hand she carries a branch. Her clothing and matronly appearance distinguish her from other representations of Venus found in Pompeii, and it is likely that the attributes of a turreted crown and rudder identify this particular Venus as Venus Pompeiana, the town's patron goddess.<sup>4</sup> She is accompanied by Eros, himself clothed in a gold-starred green mantle, standing on a pedestal and holding up a round mirror. The pair is flanked by two flying cupids carrying a garland and a palm frond. Like the architrave, the palette of this fresco is characteristic of Painter B, and Venus' facial characteristics, hair and fingers also have parallels in the artist's work in *cubiculum* 14, *ala* 13 and *exedra* 18 of the Casa della Caccia Antica.<sup>5</sup> Of similar iconography but not attributable to the same painter are the images of Venus Pompeiana in a *lararium* painting from room 16 in the Casa del Labirinto (VI.II.8-10) and in the calendar medallions found in an unidentified house in the Insula Occidentalis.

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<sup>3</sup> A. Allison and F. B. Sear, *Casa della Caccia Antica (VII.4.48)* (München, 2002), 85.

<sup>4</sup> M. H. Swindler, 'Venus Pompeiana and the New Pompeian Frescoes', *AJA* 27 (1923), 302ff.

<sup>5</sup> Allison (n. 3), 85.

The lower left corner of the fresco is partially obscured by a graffito urging people to vote for Helvius as *aedile*, supported by the *coactiliari*, the felt-workers (*CIL* IV 7809). This graffito has been dated to A.D. 79 and is the primary basis for identifying IX.7.1 as an *officina coactiliaria*, or felter's shop. A second graffito referring to the election of Paquius Proculus as *duovir* (*CIL* IV 7814), dated to A.D. 74, extends beneath the fresco of Venus Pompeiana and establishes that the fresco was painted between A.D. 74 and A.D. 79.<sup>6</sup>

### Right façade

To the right of the doorway is a white-ground fresco depicting a procession of Cybele (Fig. 4). Eighteen figures form a procession beneath a garland suspended at two points. The participants are all wreathed and have clearly differentiated roles. Four litter bearers, two of whom are bearded, wear white tunics with purple mantles and have just put down a *ferculum* carrying a statue of Cybele. The goddess is shown seated on a high-backed throne draped in green material covered with stars. Cybele wears a purple dress and turreted crown. In her right hand she carries a *patera*, while a sceptre, branch and tambourine lean against her left side. At her feet are two gilded lion cubs. To the right of the *ferculum* are two litter bearers, a small round altar and two candelabra. The rest of the participants are arranged to the left, with the foreground figures dressed in white and carrying utensils for the sacrifice. Those behind them wear darker clothes, carry ritual objects and are playing musical

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<sup>6</sup> J. L. Franklin, *Pompeii: The Electoral Programmata, Campaigns and Politics AD 71-79* (Rome, 1980), 62, 67 and Table 6 for the dating of Helvius' and Paquius Proculus' campaigns; cf. *PPM* ix: 768-73 'IX.7.1 e 2: Officina coactiliaria e officina infectoria' (V. Sampaolo).

instruments, including a double flute. A niche with a small, ivy-wreathed archaizing herm of Dionysus has been inserted into the far left of the fresco. On the extreme left of the composition are two small figures with a *syrinx* and cymbals. The details of the fresco are not preserved well enough to identify the painter.<sup>7</sup>

### **Pilaster between IX.7.1 and IX.7.2**

The pilaster between the two doorways has no figured paintings but was a popular site for electoral graffiti. Few are legible but one states that the *infectores*, a group of workers who dyed wool, supported Calventius for *duovir* (CIL IV 7812). As the pilaster forms the right side of the façade of IX.7.2, the reference to the *infectores* has been used to identify this establishment as an *officina infectoria*, or dyeworks with furnace.<sup>8</sup> Excavation of the doorway at IX.7.2 uncovered a deep lead cauldron decorated with a winged phallus in a stucco temple. The cauldron is the strongest evidence that some type of manufacturing took place at IX.7.1-2.

## **II. A COHERENT ICONOGRAPHIC PROGRAMME**

The few scholars who have discussed the façade's iconography since its discovery in 1912 see a tension between the manufacturing and retail activities associated with an *officina coactiliaria* and *infectoria*, and the religious nature of the paintings on the façade. The religious iconography led the excavator to suggest that IX.7.1 may not

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<sup>7</sup> Allison (n. 3), 85. Note that Fröhlich (n. 1), 333 believes it is possible to establish that all the paintings on the shop façade are contemporary.

<sup>8</sup> Sampaolo (n. 6), 769.

have been a shop at all, but rather a meeting place for a religious group, the home of a priest of Cybele, or a small temple to Cybele or both Cybele and Dionysus.<sup>9</sup> Another scholar has argued that the gods on the architrave ‘set up a cosmos’ of standard Roman religion so that the owner was safely able to depict his ‘non-standard’ religious practices in the lower frescoes.<sup>10</sup> According to this interpretation, the premises did have a commercial function but the shop-owner commissioned the frescoes because he was a devotee of Cybele, perhaps a priest, and wished to show his regard for two goddesses who may have been particularly important to the women in his family.<sup>11</sup> A third scholar has explained Cybele’s appearance as an aberrant sign of the shop-owner’s spiritual beliefs on the basis that Cybele ‘certamente non è divinità da collegare ad attività commerciali’.<sup>12</sup> These three interpretations perceive the paintings as serious religious iconography and hold that the premises were owned by someone more anxious to advertise their religious affiliation than any merchandise.

The gods on the architrave have been seen as hints to another interpretation of the whole façade. The figures in the architrave are four of the planetary and weekday gods, representing, from left to right, Sunday, Thursday, Wednesday and Monday. It has been proposed that the four days alluded to in the architrave were important for

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<sup>9</sup> Spinazzola (n. 1), i, 237. The wide door, a defining characteristic of shops, makes these identifications unlikely; c.f. A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton, 1994), 118.

<sup>10</sup> J. Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans: Visual Representation and Non-elite Viewers in Italy, 100 BC - AD 315* (Berkeley, 2003), 89.

<sup>11</sup> Clarke (n. 10), 92-93.

<sup>12</sup> Sampaolo (n. 6), 768.

the shop-owner or his business.<sup>13</sup> Studies of weekday gods in other contexts have led to the common interpretation that they had an apotropaic function,<sup>14</sup> and representations of the seasons, planets, and astronomical deities, all popular in Pompeii, have been interpreted as conservative messages about seeking comfort in the divine order of the universe, where the gods ensure stability and blessings as the days and seasons change.<sup>15</sup> Venus Pompeiana fits into a programme of petitioning divine blessings, as she is responsible for the town's fortunes; she is also a weekday goddess, associated with Friday, and is depicted with the other weekday gods in the iconographic guise of Venus Pompeiana in the calendar medallions.<sup>16</sup> Cybele was also worshipped for her ability to ward off catastrophes,<sup>17</sup> and the phallus on the cauldron in IX.7.2 is likewise apotropaic. It has thus been argued that the whole façade was intended to avert bad fortune.<sup>18</sup>

The above theories have been the only attempts to interpret the iconography of the whole façade. Other studies have focused on isolated elements, such as the gods on the architrave or Venus Pompeiana. One such study does not discuss the gods on the architrave but interprets the frescoes on either side of the doorway as examples of subtle advertising, arguing that the sumptuous clothing worn by Venus Pompeiana and the cult statue of Cybele may have been examples of the felt-makers' craft. The

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<sup>13</sup> A. and M. De Vos, *Guida Archeologica di Pompei* (Milan, 1976), 206ff.

<sup>14</sup> C. R. Long, 'The Gods of the Months in Ancient Art,' *AJA* 93 (1989), 589.

<sup>15</sup> Long (n. 14) 595; G. Hanfmann, *The Season Sarcophagus in Dumbarton Oaks* (Cambridge, MA, 1951), i, 140-141.

<sup>16</sup> C. R. Long, 'The Pompeii Calendar Medallions,' *AJA* 96 (1992), 484.

<sup>17</sup> J. Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion* (Edinburgh, 2003), 156.

<sup>18</sup> Fröhlich (n. 1), 53.

clothing worn by the figures in the procession fresco is carefully detailed, with the officiants wearing the *tunica lato clavo*, the tunic with two narrow red-purple stripes associated with the Roman elite.<sup>19</sup> The *galli*, the priests of Cybele, were known for their extravagant personal appearance (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* II.19), and their assumption of office was marked by a new uniform of a long, yellow or multi-coloured garment with long sleeves and a belt.<sup>20</sup> The façade would thus have advertised the business as a supplier of oriental fabrics as well as cloth suitable for the wealthy and divine.

It is possible, however, that the shop-owner carefully selected this combination of subjects to make a more distinctive statement to passers-by. The apotropaic interpretation is plausible but the choice to depict Cybele in a street procession, rather than simply as a stand-alone figure like the Venus Pompeiana, would evoke certain associations in viewers' minds. All the figured paintings on the façade could be part of a coherent iconographical programme unified by an established visual language: the iconography of spectacles.

Firstly, the elements of the frescoes of Venus Pompeiana and the procession to Cybele can be seen as complementary. The procession fresco has an internal coherence with the inclusion of Dionysus recalling the similar character of Cybele and Dionysus as oracular divinities whose worship included frenzied elements. Depicting Cybele in an orderly procession, however, would prompt viewers to consider the more solemn and sacred festival of Cybele in April, the *Megalesia*,

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<sup>19</sup> B. Kellum, 'The Spectacle of the Street,' in B. Bergmann and C. Kondoleon (eds.), *The Art of Ancient Spectacle* (Washington, 1999), 289.

<sup>20</sup> M. J. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis: The Myth and the Cult* (London, 1977), 97, 101.



which was marked by processions through the streets, banquets and theatrical performances – the realm of Dionysus.<sup>21</sup> Despite not being formally paired, Cybele and Venus Pompeiana have similar iconography in the frescoes, with elaborate robes, turreted crowns, and branches, and they also echo one another functionally as female deities of life, growth and fertility.<sup>22</sup> They are further linked in Roman religion by their association with Aeneas. When Cybele was incorporated into the Roman pantheon she was not seen as a new, exotic goddess but as the goddess from Mount Ida, whence Aeneas first fled after the sack of Troy.<sup>23</sup> Her official title of *Mater Deum Magna Idaea*, Great Mother of the Gods from Mt Ida, reveals this link with the Trojan origins of Roman identity.<sup>24</sup> Both goddesses also had festivals in April: the *Veneralia* to Venus and the *Megalesia* to Cybele. Religious festivals in April propitiated the divine forces responsible for the annual renewal of fertility and abundance, particularly the different forms of the ‘Earth Mother’ such as Venus and Cybele.<sup>25</sup> By the first century A.D. the cult of Cybele was very popular and patronized by the Roman elite and emperors including Vespasian, who rebuilt a temple of Cybele at Herculaneum after the earthquake (*CIL* X 1406); it is a mistake to interpret the Cybele fresco as a representation of a ‘non-standard’ element of early imperial Roman religion requiring other imagery to balance it.

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<sup>21</sup> R. Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1996), 38-47; Vermaseren (n. 20), 124-125.

<sup>22</sup> D. Stewart, 'The Silence of Magna Mater,' *HSCPh* 74 (1970), 78-79 commenting on Lucr. *De Rerum Natura* 2.600-645.

<sup>23</sup> J. A. North, *Roman Religion* (Oxford, 2000), 56.

<sup>24</sup> North (n. 23), 56.

<sup>25</sup> Other April festivals were the *Fordicia*, *Cerealia*, *Vinalia*, *Robigalia* and *Floralia*. H. H. Scullard, *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic* (London, 1981), 96-115.

Secondly, the complementary nature of the Venus and Cybele frescoes gains greater significance when the gods painted on the architrave are taken into account. A recent study of domestic mosaics identified that the combination of spectacle images (for example, processions, feasts and amphitheatres) and images of time (such as the month gods or seasons) is often deliberate and reveals a concern for, and identification with, public events as ways of expressing identity and of marking the annual passage of time. The combination of these images can be considered an iconography of spectacles.<sup>26</sup> Such a combination is apparent on the façade at IX.7.1-2. Here are time markers in the form of weekday and planetary gods, associated with the earthly and cosmic calendars; a street procession; and two deities with festivals celebrated during the month of April. There is also an iconographic association between the use of the Cybele and Attis myth during the *Megalesia* to celebrate the seasonal renewal of the natural world, and the seasonal renewal associated with time deities such as the gods on the architrave. The combination can be seen on a late Roman silver plate known as the Parabiago Dish, where abstract personifications of time (Aion and the Seasons) and the natural world (the Sun, Earth and Moon) surround a religious myth (Cybele and Attis).<sup>27</sup> Such imagery was not out of place in the Roman commercial sector, as a brief survey of street art and mercantile mentality will show.

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<sup>26</sup> C. Kondoleon, 'Timing Spectacle: Roman Domestic Art and Performance', in Bergmann (n. 19).

<sup>27</sup> Kondoleon (n. 26), 329; Turcan (n. 21), 72-73.

### III. A SUITABLE PROGRAMME

#### The façade in its visual context

Images of deities and processions were not uncommon in Pompeian streets. As one of Pompeii's main arterial roads, the Via dell'Abbondanza was lined with shops, *tabernae*, *thermopolia* and entrances to private houses. The street frontages were crowded with images: shop façades were painted with point-of-sale advertising (for example, the *amphorae* at IX.11.4); *lararia* and compital shrines were decorated with divinities and apotropaic devices (such as the serpents and gladiators at IX.12.7); popular gods like Mercury and Hercules appeared on shops and house fronts (as at II.2.5); mythical characters such as Romulus and Aeneas guarded doorjambs (together on the Fullery of Ululutremulus, IX.13.5); and graffiti prompted people to vote for candidates, partake in public mockery, or ponder philosophy (including *CIL* IV 9123 at IX.13.4). Such decorations should not be regarded as exclusively commercial: of the 74 catalogued examples of painted figures on Pompeian façades, six appear around doors leading to *atria*, and as it was usual practice throughout the city to site shops in façades and to build compital altars against front walls with their decorations painted directly onto the exterior of the property behind, it is more accurate to consider façade paintings collectively as a form of exterior decoration than to attempt to confine them to the exterior of one particular type of space.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> F. Pirson, 'Shops and Industries', in J. J. Dobbins and P. W. Foss (eds.), *The World of Pompeii* (London, 2007), 469 notes that twenty-five percent of all Pompeian shops were incorporated into houses, while another forty-five percent were part of other larger structures such as public buildings or commercial complexes. Fröhlich's

‘Religious’ images were common in busy parts of town and were part of a multi-functional street art used to greet visitors, invite blessings and increase sales.

The façade at IX.7.1-2 is not the only example of commercial premises fronted by images of a procession and a protective deity. Further along the Via dell’Abbondanza viewers would have seen a procession motif and protective deity on the front of the *officina coactiliaria* of Verecundus (IX.7.5-7), where Venus Pompeiana is depicted riding in triumph in a boat-shaped *quadriga* drawn by four elephants.<sup>29</sup> As at IX.7.1-2 the goddess stands leaning against a rudder, wears heavy blue drapery and a turreted crown, and is accompanied by Eros holding a mirror up to her. On the opposite pilaster was a fresco of Mercury exiting a temple and carrying a marsupial, *caduceus* and money-bag. A similar combination of motifs also appeared on the façade of a wood-working shop on the Via di Mercurio (VI.8.8-12), where there was a painting of a procession of carpenters carrying a *ferculum* with miniature images of the craftsmen at work, a small statue of Minerva, and two characters that may represent Daedalus standing over the body of Perdix.<sup>30</sup> This fresco is usually interpreted as a record of a street procession organized by trade guilds during the festival of *Quinquatria*, dedicated to Minerva, the patron goddess of craftsmen.<sup>31</sup> The rest of the façade has been lost but illustrations made by the excavators show that the doorways

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(n. 1) misguided distinction between façades associated with commercial, residential and religious spaces

undermines his interpretation of figured façades as a decidedly mercantile aesthetic.

<sup>29</sup> Spinazzola (n. 1), i, 189-210.

<sup>30</sup> *PPM* iv: 389-94, s.v. ‘VI.7.8-12: Bottega del Profumiere’ (I. Bragantini).

<sup>31</sup> e.g. Clarke (n. 10), 86-87, and S. A. Muscettola, ‘Religious Life’, in M. R. Panetta (ed.) *Pompeii: The History, Life and Art of the Buried City* (Vercelli, 2004), 110.

were decorated with paintings of Fortuna and Mercury.<sup>32</sup> The choice of a fresco of Venus Pompeiana on one doorway and a procession to Cybele on the other at IX.7.1 simply varied the formula.

### **The world of the Roman merchant**

Studies of ancient economic mentality have traditionally focused on well-documented elite values. There is less written evidence about the priorities of Roman businessmen, and elite values are often projected onto merchants through the concept of ‘anticipatory socialization,’ the imitation of elite values in the hope of being assimilated into, or passing as a member of, the higher social group.<sup>33</sup> The religious images on the façade at IX.7.1-2 align with non-visual evidence about the worldview of Roman merchants, which indicates they saw no contradiction between religious observance and profit. Businessmen routinely invoked Hercules and Mercury, the Roman gods of trade, in commercial oaths.<sup>34</sup> Patron gods were responsible for a town’s prosperity, and artisans and tradesmen had patron deities.<sup>35</sup> Skilled tradesmen such as Daedalus were even part of the religious firmament.<sup>36</sup> Festival time was prime economic time when visitors with purchasing power flocked into towns and

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<sup>32</sup> Bragantini (n. 30), 389-394.

<sup>33</sup> K. Verboven, ‘The Associative Order: Status and Ethos among Roman Businessmen in the Late Republic and Early Empire,’ *Athenaeum* 95 (2007), 888.

<sup>34</sup> N. K. Rauh, *The Sacred Bonds of Commerce: Religion, Economy and Trade Society at Hellenistic Roman Delos, 166-187 BC* (Amsterdam, 1993), 151-188.

<sup>35</sup> M. Silver, *Economic Structures of Antiquity* (Westport, 1995), 3-4.

<sup>36</sup> c.f. Silver (n. 35), 6.

equipment had to be provided for games and processions.<sup>37</sup> Religious syncretism furthermore facilitated the exchange of goods and technology, with traders meeting in Rome's Forum Boarium under the protection of Hercules.<sup>38</sup> The benefits were not all one way: economic growth enabled merchants to spend more money and resources worshipping the gods.<sup>39</sup>

There was also a close relationship between commerce and religion in the professional associations, or *collegia*, which formed the prime social framework for Roman businessmen.<sup>40</sup> Information about imperial *collegia* is drawn primarily from legal codes, decrees about patrons, and inscriptions on statue bases and tombs.<sup>41</sup> Some based their identity on feasts or cult activities, but it is clear that most *collegia* served a mixture of professional, religious and funerary functions.<sup>42</sup> Epigraphy indicates that *collegia* received benefactions and undertook euergetism in the form of erecting statues, hosting feasts and building tomb monuments for their members and patrons. Three groups of *collegia* appear to have undertaken a particularly high number of public activities: the *fabri*, who may have been craftsmen, perhaps carpenters; the *centonarii*, who were involved in the textile trade, possibly as rag-

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<sup>37</sup> O. Van Nijf, *The Civic World of Professional Associations In the Roman East* (Amsterdam, 1997), 139.

<sup>38</sup> Silver (n. 35), 9-10.

<sup>39</sup> Silver (n. 35), 34.

<sup>40</sup> Verboven (n. 33), 888.

<sup>41</sup> J. R. Patterson, 'The *collegia* and the transformation of the towns of Italy in the second century A.D.' in M. Cebeillac-Gervasoni (ed.) *L'Italie d'Auguste à Dioclétien. Actes du colloque internationale de l'école Française de Rome, 25-28 mars 1992* (Rome, 1994), 233.

<sup>42</sup> A. H. Greenidge, reviewing J. P. Waltzing, *Étude historique sur les Corporations professionnelles chez les Romains depuis les origines jusqu'à la chute de l'Empire d'Occident, Tome I. Le droit d'association à Rome. Les collèges professionnels considérés comme associations privées* in *CR* 10 no. 1, 51-53; Patterson (n. 41), 233.

men; and the *dendrophori*, wood-workers. The three were known collectively as the 'three *collegia*', as at Cemenulum (*CIL* V 7905), or as the *collegia principalia*, for example at Sentinum (*CIL* XI 5749). In effect, the public role of *collegia* made them one of the three central groups in Roman civic life between the first and third centuries A.D. alongside the *Augustales* and *decuriones*.<sup>43</sup>

For the Roman business elite, membership of *collegia* was also tied up with claims to social status. When a *collegium* was involved in euergetism its members gained public standing by association. *Collegia* offered wealthy merchants the chance to exchange economic assets for symbolic assets and participate in a system where wealth could be linked to honour.<sup>44</sup> Collegiate euergetism could thus been seen as a justification for the mercantile way of life and a validation of commercial pursuits. There is also evidence that civic society was willing to recognize the *collegia*'s claims. Aristocrats accepted roles as patrons of *collegia*, and the professional associations rewarded this recognition by increasing their patrons' public prestige through voting honorific statues and decrees, as well as canvassing for support of their chosen candidates in municipal elections.<sup>45</sup> Merchants could thus fashion an acceptable civic identity through the collegiate framework, which seamlessly combined commercial, religious and funerary activities.

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<sup>43</sup> For the character and prominence of the three *collegia*, see Patterson (n. 41), 235 and O. Van Nijf, 'Collegia and Civic Guards: Two Chapters in the History of Sociability,' in W. Jongman and M. Kleijwegt (eds.) *After the Past: Essays in Ancient History in Honour of W. Pleket* (Leiden, 2002), 306.

<sup>44</sup> Verboven (n. 33), 889.

<sup>45</sup> Verboven (n. 33), 872.

The graffiti on the façade at IX.7.1-2 in which the *coactiliari* and *infectores* urged passers-by to vote for particular candidates have been used as evidence that a wool-workers' *collegium* existed at Pompeii. Other records of such an organization include an inscription on the base of a statue that the *fullones*, or fullers, erected to their patron, Eumachia (*CIL* X 813), and a wall-painting inside the Fullery of Primus (VI.14.22) which allegedly depicts the fullers celebrating the *Quinquatria* festival to Minerva in March.<sup>46</sup> This interpretation appears to be based on the presence of an owl and on a passage from Ovid (*Fast.* III.809-834) in which the poet exalts those who weave, remove stains from fleeces and make shoes, as well as schoolmasters, healers and artisans, to pray to Minerva during the *Quinquatria*.<sup>47</sup> The text has been used to define the *Quinquatria* as an artisan's festival, and in turn to identify depictions of craftsmen's processions, such as that on the shop façade at VI.8.8-12, as part of the *Quinquatria* celebrations. If the graffiti at IX.7.1-2, however, is used to support the existence of a wool-workers' association, then it is reasonable firstly to assume that the shop-owner was a member of that *collegium*, and secondly to propose that the façade's iconography identifies that *collegium*'s religious affiliation to Cybele and perhaps Venus, rather than Minerva. The commercial value of supplying the *galli* and elite worshippers has already been mentioned. In addition, the cult of Cybele, with its connection to the rebirth of souls through Attis, could have been attractive to *collegia* responsible for the funerary rites of their members.

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<sup>46</sup> W. O. Moeller, *The Wool Trade of Ancient Pompeii* (Leiden, 1976), 86.

<sup>47</sup> Ov. *Fast.* III.821-822: *Hanc cole, qui maculas laesis de vestibis aufers; hanc cole, velleribus quisquis aëna paras.*



#### IV. PROCESSIONS AS SIGNS OF STATUS

The key to acquiring respectability for a *collegium* and those associated with it was public visibility.<sup>48</sup> *Collegia* were often seen parading through the streets as part of the ritual processions that marked civic life. Their euergetism extended beyond the built environment to the organisation of religious processions, including the *ludi compitalicii* at Rome, and spectacles in honour of their patron deity or the anniversary of their foundation.<sup>49</sup> *Collegia* also participated in processions during festivals organized by the civic authorities. ‘Civic’ processions were usually religious in nature, but they were a powerful opportunity to assert and display a relative position in the community’s social hierarchy. When authorities chose which groups would participate in a procession, what they could carry, and the order in which they would parade, the appearance of a specific group made a clear statement about the civic hierarchy.<sup>50</sup> Street processions represented many different parts of society over the course of the year, and the inclusion of *collegia* was a public statement that merchants and craftsmen had a recognized place in the community.<sup>51</sup>

The practice of parading through the streets reinforced the concept that the street was a place where religious, civic and social identities were constructed and

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<sup>48</sup> Verboven (n. 33), 881.

<sup>49</sup> Verboven (n. 33), 871.

<sup>50</sup> Van Nijf (n. 37), 194.

<sup>51</sup> Van Nijf (n. 37), 206, discussing the role of *collegia* in processions in the Roman Near East. Roman *collegia* were included in the triumphal processions of Gallienus in AD 262 and Aurelian AD 273 (*HA Gall.* 8.6; *Aurel.* 34.4), perhaps the ultimate form of civic recognition; see also J. Rüpke, *Religion of the Romans* (Cambridge, 2007), 208ff.

displayed. Roman streets were performance areas even when there was no procession underway. A person was judged first and foremost on their appearance: clothes, jewellery, attendants and even posture were all carefully selected prior to an outing to make the desired impression on other people in the street (as Horace describes in *Sat.* 1.6.78-80).<sup>52</sup> The street was a place for self-promotion and an opportunity to assert one's rank in the social hierarchy.

The visual language of spectacle used on the façade of IX.7.1-2 suggests that the shop-owner wanted to be associated with the April processions of the goddesses on his façade. No information about the *Megalesia* festival at Pompeii survives, but if Roman colonies used the celebrations at Rome as a template then the festival would have been closely associated with the elite elements of society. Cicero describes the *ludi Megalenses* at Rome as solemn, sacred celebrations financed by the state or wealthy citizens (*Har. Resp.* 12.24). The festival climaxed in a procession through the streets by the *quindecimviri* and other leading citizens in which the statue of Cybele was carried to the games (*Ov. Fast.* 4.179-186; *Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom.* II.19.4).<sup>53</sup> The aristocratic and exclusive nature of the festival makes it likely that participation in the procession or games was a coveted honour. If there was a wool-workers' *collegium* at Pompeii, and Pompeian *collegia* took part in street processions as they did in Rome and other parts of the Roman empire, then it is possible that the wool-workers participated in a procession during the *Megalesia* or another April festival.

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<sup>52</sup> Kellum (n. 19), 288.

<sup>53</sup> G. Showerman, *The Great Mother of the Gods* (Chicago, 1969), 51.

## CONCLUSION

Having considered the wider contexts of the imagery along the Via dell'Abbondanza, the intermingling of commercial and religious interests in Roman business, and the importance of processions for claims to status, it is possible that the façade at IX.7.1-2 was commissioned by the shop-owner to commemorate his participation in an April procession. Using images associated with spectacles, in the form of time markers and a street procession, the façade made a public statement about the owner's status as a businessman and the community's recognition of his place in the social hierarchy. Given the correlation between the three procession-related façades mentioned above, on shops associated with the textile and wood-working trades, and the principal *collegia* of the *fabri*, *centonarii*, and *dendrophori*, other shop façades with procession-related imagery could also have been designed to evoke viewers' memories of public spectacles. If so, the decoration of the front of IX.7.1-2 is just one example of how religious iconography on a façade does not have to conflict with the identification of the structure behind it as a shop or factory, and how it was possible to represent the happy alliance of religious observance, profit and status as a coherent iconographical programme.

The value of using an interpretive framework led by physical location rather than artistic style lies in its ability to raise questions about the relationships between religious iconography, civic space and identity. Recognizing that there were circumstances in which it was not inappropriate to decorate a shop's façade with religious iconography cautions against simplistic correlations between religious imagery and modern ideas of religious space, and suggests that religious, commercial, and civic space could sometimes be one and the same. It is also a reminder of the

importance of place in analyses of Pompeian frescoes; as many successful retailers then and now would probably agree, location is everything.

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

## Captions and credits

Fig. 1. Façade at IX.7.1, Pompeii. V. Spinazzola, *Pompei alla luce degli Scavi Nuovi di Via dell'Abbondanza (anni 1910-1923)* (Rome, 1953), ii, Tav. XIII. Courtesy of the Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Rome.

Fig. 2. Pompeii, IX.7.1, architrave detail showing, left to right, Sol-Apollo, Jupiter, Mercury, Luna-Diana. V. Spinazzola, *Pompei alla luce degli Scavi Nuovi di Via dell'Abbondanza (anni 1910-1923)* (Rome, 1953), i, Pl.3. Courtesy of the Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Rome.

Fig. 3. Pompeii, IX.7.1, detail of left façade showing Venus Pompeiana. V. Spinazzola, *Pompei alla luce degli Scavi Nuovi di Via dell'Abbondanza (anni 1910-1923)* (Rome, 1953), ii, Tav. XV. Courtesy of the Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Rome.

Fig. 4. Pompeii, IX.7.1, detail of right façade showing a procession to Cybele. V. Spinazzola, *Pompei alla luce degli Scavi Nuovi di Via dell'Abbondanza (anni 1910-1923)* (Rome, 1953), ii, Tav. XIV. Courtesy of the Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Rome.