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Sounds from under the Ashes: The Music of Cults and Mysteries in the Ancient Vesuvian Land

Haec iuga quam Nysae colles plus Bacchus amavit; hoc nuper Satyri monte dedere choros.

(Mart. Ep. 4.44.4–5)

The Roman people living in the land dominated by the threatening Mount Vesuvius (Fig. 1) still regarded the Greek heritage as their own. It was in fact on the island of Pithekoussai (now Ischia, near Naples) that the first Greeks landed in the beginning of the eighth century BCE. They had sailed across the Mediterranean Sea in quest for new lands to settle, bringing with them a cultural heritage that included a pantheon and music. The sonorous horizon of the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, and the villas of Stabiae and Oplontis, built some centuries later, are the offsprings of a melting pot in which the Greek tradition was deeply intertwined with the themes and the customs of the Italic and Etruscan communities. In the year 79 CE the volcano erupted, sealing the Vesuvian area along with its rich culture under layers of ash and lava.



Fig. 1: The Vesuvius from the forum of Pompeii.

Excavations in Herculaneum began in 1738, and a decade later, in Pompeii; Spanish, Austrian, German, French and Italian archaeologists have been taking turns excavating the two sites in an ongoing international engagement. At first, the findings were kept in the Reggia of Portici (a royal palace near Herculaneum), but finally, fearing another eruption, they were transferred to the new Naples

National Archaeological Museum.¹ Among these unearthed treasures — astonishingly preserved for centuries by the lava's seal — there is much valuable evidence concerning sounds and music.

Among the findings from Pompeii and Herculaneum housed in various museums are specimens of several musical instruments whose Roman names are *cornus*, *tuba*, *bucina*, *discus*, *crepitaculum*, *cymbalum* and *tintinnabulum*. Above all, the recovery of numerous *tibiae* (the Roman version of the aulos) is particularly remarkable: numbering in many dozens, they include some exemplars that are almost intact as well as fragments in different states of preservation (Fig. 2). Nine *tibiae* unearthed at the rustic Villa of Fondo Prisco, in the Pompeii countryside, were bound together and set in the *cella ostiaria* (the room near the entrance) (Fig. 3).

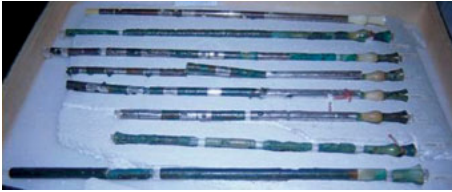


Fig. 2: Some *tibiae* preserved in the Naples National Archaeological Museum.

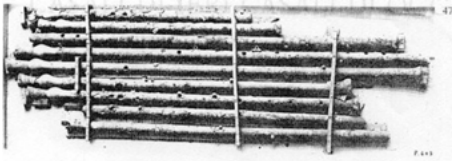


Fig. 3: Nine *tibiae* recovered in the Villa of Fondo Prisco, near Pompeii.

The *cymbalum* is an extraordinary musical instrument for the scholars: rooted in ancient oriental origins, it had crossed centuries of history enriching different cultures in every corner of the globe. In the Vesuvian land this musical instrument was often represented in paintings and statues, rife with symbolic significance. Many ancient specimens have been preserved and are today in the Naples National Archaeological Museum. Cast in bronze, these finds come in various dimensions — their diameters ranging from 5 cm to 11 cm — depending on whether they were held by two fingers or hand-held by the whole palm (see

¹ Inaugurated in 1801, this prestigious institution is today named Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (MANN). Some findings are exhibited also in the Antiquarium of Boscoreale and in the Antiquarium of Castellammare di Stabia, and many others are displayed in museums around the world.

Fig. 4). In some types the disks are linked by a chain. While this feature may have hindered the possibility of striking the two elements freely (the connecting chain is rather short), its existence may point to a ritual use of the instrument. Actually, the *cymbala* had a symbolic role also in the primitive creed of the *arbores sacrae* (holy trees), and for this reason it is not unusual to see them suspended from a branch. An exceptional occurrence was the discovery of an *actual* pair of *cymbala* in the Praedia of Julia Felix (a sort of residence in Pompeii II 4, 3),² in the same room where this instrument was also depicted in a fresco, among the symbols of the god (see Fig. 5).



Fig. 4: Bronze *cymbala* from Pompeii.



Fig. 5: *Cymbala* and other objects related to the cult of Dionysus (wall painting from the Praedia of Julia Felix, Pompeii).

² The buildings of Pompeii are referred to using archaeologist Giuseppe Fiorelli's space organization system, proposed in the nineteenth century: *regio*, *insula*, *domus* (district, block, building).



Fig. 6: Pan and Daphnis (marble statue in the Naples National Archaeological Museum, Farnese Collection — Sculptures and Baths of Caracalla).

The *syrinx* appears in reliefs on altars — on an *arula* (a small altar) from Pompeii, for example (D'Ambrosio and Borriello 2001: 32) — probably where the rites were related to less “orthodox” worships. According to myth, this instrument was invented by Pan, the god of the wild nature, multiform and universal. It is therefore easy to imagine the *syrinx* in the hands of supernatural beings who dwell in mountains and woods. Traditionally, it appears far away from the values of the city. Pan is represented in a famous statue — now exhibited in the Naples National Archaeological Museum — teaching the young Daphnis to play his instrument (see Fig. 6). Pan’s pupil learned well and, according to tradition, he continued to play the *syrinx* as he tended the herds and composed the first bucolic songs. Unfortunately, because of the perishable materials from which the *syrinx* is made, no ancient specimen survived in its entirety; some pipes excavated in the Vesuvian area are perhaps part of this instrument.

At the Forum in Pompeii the consecration of a temple is taking place. It is the time of the *suovetaurilia* (purificatory immolation of pigs, sheep and bulls) — sacrifices offered to the god Mars on the occasion of *lustratio*, the purification rite. The priest performs the rites preceding the *praefatio* on the *focus* (altar), as the

victimarii (attendants at a sacrifice) arrive with the bull intended for immolation; servants and other cult attendants crowd the scene. In the midst of these events, a musician is playing a *tibia*. During an earlier part of this rite, this performance set the rhythm for the *pompa* (the procession to the temple), then accompanied the *circumambulatio* (the parade of the sacrificial bulls already harnessed) and, as the ceremony progresses, the sound of the *tibia* drowns all negativity (the *toga* on the priest's head has the same symbolic function). This scene is represented in the reliefs that adorn the marble altar in the temple of the *Genius Augusti* (the sanctuary for the cult of Augustus) in Pompeii (Fig 7). It demonstrates the essential role of music in this ritual. Other iconographic evidence from Rome and from the empire's provinces also testifies to the centrality of the music players in different ceremonies. Most commonly portrayed is the *tibicen* (player of the *tibia*), but sometimes it is a *cornicen* (who played the *cornu*) and, more rarely, a *fidicen* (a *cithara* player, as seen in the famous Ara of Domitius Enobarbus), accompanied by a singer.



Fig. 7: Representation of a sacrifice (marble relief on the altar in the temple of the *Genius Augusti*, Pompeii; in situ).

Hundreds of iconographical representations (paintings, statues, stuccoes and cameos) instruct us about the different aspects of that sonorous horizon. Moreover, the details of musical instruments are sometimes so accurate that they enable the study of the technology used by artisans in those times. Some Erotes playing a *cithara*, for instance, are represented in a painting from Herculaneum, in a context that recalls Apollo (Fig. 8). We can clearly see how they handle the strings using their fingers and a plectrum, and we can also notice the details of the bridge, the tailpiece and the pegs. In the Vesuvian area graffiti are another important source for scholars. In some, it is possible to find references to musicians: we read about *tibicenes*, or about the player of a wind instrument who is mentioned with the Greek word *au(l)eta*.



Fig. 8: Eros playing a *cithara* (wall painting from Herculaneum).



Fig. 9: Representation of a sacrifice (wall painting in the *lararium* of a house in Pompeii Regio VIII 2; in situ).

A *tibia* player is often seen also near the domestic Pompeian *lararia* (the family shrines dedicated to the protecting spirits or *genii*). A beautiful example is the famous wall painting from Pompeii Regio VIII. In the lower register, the *agatodemoni* (“good spirits” in the form of two snakes) appear. In the center of the upper register a sacrifice scene is depicted (Fig. 9) with a couple of dancing *lares* and other figures bearing offerings on both its sides. The officiating priest stands next to the altar holding a *cornucopia* (horn of plenty), as does a musician who accompanies the ceremony. This image is remarkable, for it allows us to infer that the *tibicen* is using a Phrygian-type instrument (*tibia Berecynthia*, made of bound pipes of varying lengths and terminating in a curved horn) while he establishes the rhythm working a *scabellum* with his left foot.

According to Greco-Roman mythology, the genesis of music is associated with the gods; Hermes, Athena, Pan and Cybele — the *euretai* — are credited with the invention of musical instruments. Let us take Hermes, for instance, portrayed in the Villa San Marco, in Stabiae (Fig. 10). According to the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* 24–51, he extracted the bowels from the sacrificed cows, stretched them between two horns and plucked them on a tortoise carapace, to create the *lyra*. Apollo, charmed by the sound of the new invention, bartered his herd in exchange to the musical instrument.



Fig. 10: Hermes with female figures, one holding a *lyra* (wall painting from Villa San Marco, Stabiae).



Fig. 11: Apollo playing a *cithara* near an omphalos (wall painting in Casa dei Vetii, Pompeii; in situ).

Apollo appears frequently in the Vesuvian area, owing to the high esteem in which Greek-inspired classicism was held (harmony, elegance and culture), especially during the time of Augustus. Among the best-preserved images of Apollo are those appearing in the spectacular paintings — masterpieces of the “Fourth Style” — preserved in the peristyle of the Casa dei Vetti (Pompeii VI 15, 1/27). These iconographical representations clearly attest to their owner’s desire to illustrate his intellectual ambitions (see Fig. 11).



Fig. 12: Apollo Citharoedus (wall painting from Moregine, near Pompeii).

Although Augustus also presented himself as Apollo, the most celebrated emperor-citharist in history remains the emperor Nero. In what is arguably the most beautiful fresco rescued from Moregine, a suburb of Pompeii, the depiction of Apollo’s face seems to portray Nero (Mastroroberto 2003: 485–494). The figure’s pose is hieratic; it seems as if it is soaring amid the fantastic architectural images surrounding the *triclinium* (Fig. 12). The god is playing a big, “modern” *cithara*: he holds a plectrum in his right hand and with his left he plucks the strings from the other side of

the instrument. In this depiction Apollo is surrounded by the Muses, as is common in representations of his divine entertainments. These celestial beings were not stingy with their joyful invention, and made music the gods' gift to mankind:

Such is the holy gift of the Muses to men. For it is through the Muses and far-shooting Apollo that there are singers and harpers upon the earth; but princes are of Zeus, and happy is he whom the Muses love: sweet speech flows from his mouth (Hes. *Theog.* 93–97; English trans. by the author)³

The idea of music was essential in those ancient times, in part because it was a privileged medium between heaven and earth:

So was ancient music and this was the aim for which it was useful. Heracles, as it is told to us, used the music, as did Achilles and many others, according to tradition, [he] had the wise Chiro as an educator, who was a teacher of music and also of justice and medicine. (Plut. [*De mus.*] 1145f–1146a)

A painting from Herculaneum shows the centaur Chiron teaching music to the young Achilles — illustrating the words of Plutarch (Fig. 13). The figure of the hero as a student of music is exemplary in that it not only demonstrates the importance of learning the arts and the thaumaturgical power of music, but also emphasizes the teacher–pupil relationship in the transmission of this knowledge.



Fig. 13: Achilles and Chiron (wall painting from Herculaneum).

³ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are the author's.

Orpheus, son of the Muse Calliope, was well versed in the power of music, and the *Hieroi logoi* (Sacred Discourses) were therefore attributed to him. *Orphism* may have evolved into a form of metempsychosis. The cult of Orpheus left its mark in the ancient Vesuvian land: in the Casa di Orfeo (Pompeii VI 14, 20), on a vast wall fresco bearing the same name, Orpheus is depicted in a typical scene, charming the beasts with his music and song (Fig. 14). In a relief found in Torre del Greco, near Herculaneum, he is portrayed with his beloved Eurydice, holding his musical attribute, the *lyra*, and watched by Hermes as the Lord of Heaven.

The essential importance of music was evident both in public and in secret rites. In the Dionysian cult, official rites and arcane aspects are intertwined, and music possesses an essential power originating in the dawn of history:

Close to Messenes, a nearby mountain is called Mount Eua; the name derives from “*euoi*,” the sacred cry let out here for the first time by Dionysus and by women of his retinue. (Paus. 4.31.4)



Fig. 14: Orpheus (wall painting on the façade of the Casa di Orfeo, Pompeii; in situ).



Fig. 15: The triumph of Dionysos (wall painting in Casa di M. Lucretius Fronto, Pompeii; in situ).

When the god arrives, he is engulfed in a riot of sounds: “Around roar the taut drums and the concave cymbals: with raucous sound threaten the horns, and with Phrygian lilt the cave flute stirs the heart” (Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 2.618–620). Close iconographical parallels to these words of Lucretius can be found in several Vesuvian wall paintings: for example, one from the Casa di M. Lucretius Fronto (Pompeii V, 4a), (Fig. 15), another from the Casa di Marcus Lucretius (Pompeii IX 3, 5/24) and a third wall painting recovered in the Villa di Carmiano, near Stabiae.



Fig. 16: Scene of cult for Dionysos (marble relief in the Naples National Archaeological Museum, Farnese Collection).

Myth and rite converge in different manifestations in the cult of Dionysos-Bacchus. In the myth, and also in the reality of those times, the woman that follows the god is overcome by rhythm and by sounds, becoming herself possessed as maenads and bacchantes: “*Cymbala* and *tympana* shaken by quivering hands played everywhere on the beach...There are maenads with loose hair and nimble satyrs, the crowd that precedes Bacchus the god...” (Ovid, *Ars am.* 1.535–536, 539–540). This crowd is the *thiasus*, the god’s mythical retinue (Fig. 16). Images of maenads and satyrs appear often in scenes in Pompeian paintings, although in some images the scene seems to soften into more poetic shades, as it happens

in the beautiful flying maenads depicted on the dark background sides of the so-called Villa di Cicerone, in Pompeii (Fig. 17).



Fig. 17: Flying maenads (wall painting from the so-called Villa di Cicerone, Pompeii).

The religion of Dionysos was both exoteric and esoteric: On the one hand, the god sat in the pantheon; he was considered the patron deity of the theatre, the inventor of the dithyramb and the patron of wine. On the other hand, he often appears in relation to situations in which spiritual aspirations coexist with wild vital energy that emanates from nature. For Quintilian, there are also social reasons besides mystic aspirations:

That is the aim of the Bacchic initiation, that the depressive anxiety of the less-educated people, caused by the conditions of their life or by some troubles, be removed through rite's melodies and dances in a joyous and cheerful way. (Quint. *De mus.* 3.25)

The Bacchic cult generated a disruptive force overflowing like lava from a volcano and, in the Dionysian form, sometimes became *mania* 'trance, orgy'. It was the spread of these particularly disquieting aspects that impelled the Roman Senate to issue a decree, intended to put an end to the frenzy: the *Senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus* from 186 BCE banned the celebrations in honor of Bacchus (Livy *Epon.* 39.18.3). Nevertheless, it soon became evident that nothing could hold back

the vehement emotions of the initiates. A topical case can be found in the Villa dei Misteri (House of Mysteries) in Pompeii, where the extraordinary *megalographies* staging a Dionysian ceremony were realized more than a hundred years after the decree. In the exegesis of these frescos we cannot disregard the music (Musella 1949): in a reference to an archaic world, the old Silenus plucks the strings of a *lyra* (Fig. 18) and a naked woman seems possessed as she dances shaking *cymbala* (Fig. 19).



Fig. 18: Silenus playing a lyra (wall painting in Villa dei Misteri, Pompeii; in situ).



Fig. 19: Possessed woman holding cymbala (wall painting in Villa dei Misteri, Pompeii; in situ).

The Vesuvian land was also the cradle of another religion that was based on arcane theories and characterized by secret ceremonies: the cult of Sabazius. It would seem that in the Casa di Sestilius Pyrricus (also called the House of the magical rites; Pompeii II 1, 12), in the times preceding the eruption, the followers of Sabazius celebrated mysteries that involved mystic exaltation and wicked sexual practices (Turcan 1993). The sonorous component of those rites was not of secondary importance in this context, since *cymbala*, *tympana* and *syrinx* are among obscure symbols appearing on sacred objects, like a famous clay pot (see Fig. 20) or the strange *Mano Pantea*.



Fig. 20: Symbols of the cult of Sabatius (relieves on a fictile vase, from Casa dei Riti magici, Pompeii).



Fig. 21: *Memento mori* (relief on a silver cup, from Villa di P. Fannius Synistor, Boscoreale).

Music, religion and mysteries — what brought to this intense interpenetration? For many people the vibration of sound could be one with that of the universe. Through a new creed they sought universal harmony, in which music and philosophy intertwined (theorems, treatises and proportions were as valid for a taut string as they were for the equilibrium of the world: just think of Pythagoras's experiments). It seems that the men initiated into these secret rituals were able to

free themselves from the negative aspects of earthly life — *soma sema*, the body is the grave, wrote Plato in *Cratylus* — and live a new, bright life after death. Furthermore, as suggested by Plutarch (*Non posse* 1105b), many “think that a sort of initiations and purifications will be helpful: once purified — they believe — they will carry on to playing and dancing in Hades in places full of splendor, pure air and light.” An iconographical parallel for this description may be found in a depiction of skeletons in an epicurean, low-relief *memento mori*, on a silver cup retrieved in the Villa di P. Fannius Synistor, in Boscoreale (Fig. 21). Another specimen on display in the Naples National Archaeological Museum is a golden lamina recovered in Thurii (Calabria) that contains an inscription with accurate guidelines to the afterlife (Pugliese Carratelli 2001: 98–99). Regarding the connections between music and philosophy, we must point out that a treasure was found among the scrolls astoundingly recovered from the Villa dei Pisoni (also called Villa dei Papiri, because of this find), in Herculaneum:⁴ a text of Philodemus of Gadara, a master among the Epicureans (Rispoli 1974: 57). In this philosophy of life, the importance of music was not overlooked; it had a magical role, and at times a subversive one as well.

Before the fatal eruption, the men and women of Pompeii, Herculaneum and other territories in the Vesuvian region, broadened their cultural horizons, adding to their pantheon of atavistic gods new figures adopted from the East. Religions originating in Thrace, Anatolia and the southern coast of the Mediterranean Sea promised their followers extraordinary experiences in life and the comforting temptation of an afterlife. Among these newly imported Eastern gods was the Great Mother, Cybele, honored along with Attis both in public celebrations and in assemblies for initiates, radiating music herself. She inspired sacred songs — such as *nomoi* — whose obscure mythical origins lie in the dark days preceding Greek civilization. Besides the first mythical performers (such as Hyagnis and Olympus), historic authors too received from the goddess vital sap for their compositions: Euripides, for example, drew from a Cybelian *nomos* on Orestes to write the *Song of the Chariot* (Eur. *Or.* 1381).

The cult of Cybele and Attis exalted the power of sound and music: “I ate from *tympanon*, I drank from *kimbalon*; I have become a *mystes* of Attis” (Firm. *Mat. Err. prof. rel.* 18.1). Since 204 BCE, when the cult was imported to Rome, iconographical representations of the goddess, inseparable from her musical instrument, spread across Roman society. In Pompeii, she is depicted on the façade of

⁴ The papyrus *PHerc.* 1497, discovered in 1752, is the largest, most significant of ten papyri related to the importance of musical education. The Abbot Piaggio started to study this find, inventing a simple, yet ingenious, machine that enabled to unroll the carbonized scrolls and to read parts of these extraordinary writings; nowadays more sophisticated technology can be applied.

a building on the Via dell'Abbondanza (the *officina coactiliaria* and the *officina infectoria*; Pompeii XI 7, 1/2) where she is a statue waiting to be carried in a procession (Fig. 22). The sacred entourage includes many musicians. In the myth they were the Corybantes, the nine descendants of the goddess: "...and Corybas gave the name of Corybantes to all who, in celebrating the rites of his mother, acted as men possessed" (Diod. Sic. 5.49.3). They roused an orgiastic dance, accompanied by the sound of wind instruments and *tympana*, that dazed its participants and had them thrown into ecstasy. We know that in reality the dances were performed by the *galloi*, the cult priests who, disguised as soldiers, in a paroxysm of violence, inflicted wounds and mutilation on each other (See Strabo *Geogr.* 10.3.7).



Fig. 22: Procession for Cybele (wall painting on the façade of the *officina coactiliaria* in Via dell'Abbondanza, Pompeii; in situ).

The characteristics of that music must have been vigorous and well pronounced, employing — according to Plutarch ([*De mus.*] 1141b) — the rhythm of *choreis*, extremely fit for frenetic dances. Catullus, too, composed the poem *Attis* (*Carmen* 63) using the *galliambus*, a Latin, excited lyric meter considered by the Alexandrian scholars as orgiastic and “barbaric.”

In the Greek tradition, official performers were often integrated into the cultic system; there are instructions for “the musicians in charge of dances accompaniment”:

The *hieroi* every year give notice of *auletes* and citharists that possess the necessary qualification and that will officiate during sacrifices and during mysteries: whoever was notified had to give his service in honor of the gods (*LSCG* 65.73–75)

Even so, situations did exist in which musical expression could be manifested in different manners. The *metragyrtoi*, for instance, were wandering musicians, begging in Cybele’s name: they are perpetuated in the ancient Vesuvian area, where they are portrayed in a theatrical setting. In this representation — the celebrated mosaic by Dioscurides (Fig. 23) — the musicians play an *aulos*, *cymbala* and a *tympanum*. The *cymbala* are part of the Cybele liturgy because they resemble the “two sky’s hemicycles that surrounded the earth, mother of the gods” (Serv. *ad Virg. Georg.*

4.64), while the *tympanum* is the true attribute of the goddess. Being of perishable material, no *tympanum* survived, but its representations are numerous.



Fig. 23: Theatrical scene with street musicians (mosaic from the so-called Villa di Cicerone, Pompeii).



Fig. 24: The modern playing of *tammorra*.

With the *tympanum* and the sounds of initiation, *mania* and ecstasy echoing in our minds, we realize the significance of the above-mentioned evidence offered by the Vesuvian region, enabling us to tie together the musical strings that connect present-day culture with the civilizations of the past (see Fig. 24).

In his discussion of aspects of the tradition remarkably preserved in this region, Roberto De Simone (a respected musician) writes the following:

My particular experience as an ethnomusicologist, in these moments, runs to the peasant and pastoral world from which, in the 60s and 70s, I gathered many musical documents. The connection was spontaneous, due of the persistence in the ethnic tradition of the Campania of different musical instruments portrayed in the ancient Pompeian paintings (De Simone 1999: 229).

So even today, particularly in processions, ceremonies and sacred-pagan rites, the Cybelian and Dionysian spirit is perpetuated in songs and dances — the *tam-murriata*, the *tarantella* and the *fronne* — that express yearning for the liberation and expression of life's profound meaning (De Simone 1979).

The arcane cult of Isis and Osiris originated in the southern Mediterranean coast and arrived in the Italian Peninsula. The god “traveled over the whole earth civilizing it without the slightest need of arms, but most of the peoples he won over to his way by the charm of his persuasive discourse combined with song and all manner of music. Hence the Greeks came to identify him with Dionysus” (Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 356b). After elaborate evolutions of the Roman pantheon, Serapis became syncretic with Osiris, and was venerated with the goddess Isis in many of the region's temples.



Fig. 25: An Isiac ceremony (wall painting from Herculaneum).

The attribute of Isis was a particularly sonorous object: made of metal, sometimes precious, it was called at first *iba* and later on *sehem*. The Greek referred to it as the *seistron* — *sistrum* in the Latin world (see Fig. 26). As Plutarch explains:

The *sistrum* also makes it clear that all things in existence need to be shaken, or rattled about, and never to cease from motion but, as it were, to be woken up and agitated when they grow drowsy and torpid. They say that they avert and repel Typhon by means of the *sistrum*...(Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 376d)

Sistra had always been associated with the concepts of life and death, and, accordingly, the following objects display symbols pertaining to them. On the handle, lotus flowers are depicted along with the love goddess, Hathor, and Bes, the god of music and happiness; the crossbars on the frame terminate in snake-heads and on the top, the goddess Bastet is shown, nursing her kittens. While the rites for Isis provided impressive moments — dances accompanied by *tibiae* and *tympana* seen in a famous painting from Herculaneum (Fig. 25) — the hieratic character of these ceremonies was dictated by priests who managed the magical sound of the sacred instrument:

...but the men had their crowns shaven, which were the terrene stars of the goddesses, holding in their hand instruments of brass, silver and gold, which rendered a pleasant sound. (Apul. *Met.* 11.47; Adlington 1639)



Fig. 26: Bronze *sistrum* from Pompeii.

In these ceremonies, priests and devotees are brought to life in the evocative images from Pompeii, Herculaneum, Stabiae and Boscoreale. It is remarkable that, in a climate of religious syncretism, the *sistrum* had great significance both as a confessional element and as an element of cultural identification. This is evident also in the portrayals in the peristyle of the Casa degli Amorini dorati (Pompeii VI 16, 17) and in other depictions characterized by deep allegoric mean-

ings, such as the images of *Io a Canopo* seen in the Casa del Duca di Aumale (Pompeii VI 9, 1) with replicas in the Pompeii's *Iseum*. Many *sistra* were found in the Vesuvian area (see, for example, Fig. 26); they are often well preserved, and can even be played. As more than one *sistrum* was found in the Domus Volusii Fausti (Pompeii I 2, 6/10), one may argue that the building housed a workshop. Moreover, the Domus Volusii Fausti is located not far from the city's cult place for Isis — the *Iseum* (Pompeii VIII 7, 27/28). The *Iseum* was one of the first buildings to be rebuilt after the disastrous earthquake that hit Pompeii in 62 CE, and one of the first structures to be excavated in modern times (Fig. 27). The recovery of the



Fig. 27: The ruins of the temple of Isis, Pompeii.



Fig. 28: Scenography of the first representation in the Teatro alla Scala (Milan, 1816) of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*.

temple during 1764–1766, along with its decorations and artifacts, all found in an exceptional state of preservation, left a profound impression on the archaeological community and on the general public far and wide. This discovery contrib-

uted greatly to the rise of *Egyptomania*⁵ that spread through Europe in the late eighteenth century. Pompeii became an important venue in the celebrated *Grand Tour*, and even Wolfgang Amadeus and Leopold Mozart were among the city's numerous visitors. During their journey to Italy, on June 1770, Leopold wrote, "On Monday and Tuesday we will go and have a closer look at Vesuvius, Pompeii and Herculaneum, the two cities that they are excavating, we will admire the extraordinary things already found" (Scialò 1991: 39-40). The young genius, only fourteen at the time, was probably fascinated by the evocative power of the *Iseum*, and must have recalled these impressions when, years later, he composed *Die Zauberflöte*:

Thanks be to Isis, Osiris always! Strength is the victor!
In glory be crowned, In wisdom and beauty for ever abound!⁶

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⁵ The archaeologist Mariette de Vos Raaijmakers (1980) dubbed the Roman fascination with Egyptian style in the first years of the Empire 'Egittomania': "Everything of that land became fashionable after the events regarding Cleopatra and the conquest of the Kingdom of Egypt." (trans. R. M.)

⁶ These words are taken from the final chorus from *Die Zauberflöte*. The libretto to this opera, which premiered in Vienna in 1791, was written by Emanuel Schikaneder; Fig. 28 shows the set of the first staging of this opera in Milan, in 1816, in the Teatro alla Scala.

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Cypro-Archaic I period, 750–600 BCE.

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