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TOILETRIES AND TAVERNS. COSMETIC SETS IN SMALL HOUSES, *HOSPITIA* AND *LUPANARIA* AT POMPEII

RIA BERG

... *pyxidas invenies et rerum mille colores*¹

In the above passage from Ovid's *Remedies to Love*, the poet tells the lover how to stop loving: he must enter the boudoir of his mistress and find her numerous toiletries, the cylindrical *pyxis* jars containing repulsive, poisonous ointments and the deceitful palette of a thousand colors for the make-up that fills her table. This passage and its counterpart in *Ars Amatoria*, advising the woman not to show the table filled with cosmetic *pyxides* to her lover,² offer two rare glimpses of Roman women's dressing tables, and have often been cited as evidence of the everyday cosmetic and grooming practices of Roman matrons.³

Can such descriptions of rich grooming sets, in the literary sources, be compared with toiletry items actually found in Pompeian house-floor contexts, buried by the 79 CE Vesuvius' eruption? Were such abundant collections of cosmetic substances, contained in *pyxides* and *unguentaria*, indeed present in the

¹ Ov. *rem.* 351 (ed. Kenney 1994).

² Ov. *ars* 3,209–10: *non tamen expositas mensa deprendat amator / pyxidas*.

³ For example, Virgili (1989, 13) starts her discussion of Roman female cosmetics with this latter Ovidian verse, taking it as a general example of the Roman use of toiletries. For the Ovidian passages, see Rimell 2005, 186; Saiko 2005, 256. For another passage (*rem.* 437–438), that suggests more extreme remedies to cure love through observing toilet practices of the mistress, see Koloski-Ostrow 2015, xi.

everyday lives of all Roman matrons, and what, exactly was their meaning for their users?

In the laconic expressions of funerary epitaphs, the ideal Roman matron is defined as essentially beautiful, yet, quite as essentially, modestly adorned.⁴ The ideals of Roman female beauty and especially of its cosmetic aids are extremely conflicting, placed on a slippery surface between virtue and vice, moderation and excess.⁵ This duality is significantly underlined by the Galenic differentiation between good, health-promoting remedies that enhance natural beauty (*kosmetiké tékhne*), and bad, artificial and deceitful cosmetic arts, i.e. make-up (*kommotiké tékhne*).⁶ In a monographic study on Roman women's clothes and adornment, Kelly Olsen discusses the strong pronouncements of the "anti-cosmetic tradition" of Roman literature concerning this latter type of beautification, that condemned the cosmetic arts as frivolous and immoral. She concludes that these restrictions would not, *de facto*, have been observed: "to judge from archaeological evidence, however, Roman women firmly ignored such pronouncements."⁷ Other scholars (at least implicitly) similarly state that lavish cosmetics were a part of the daily lives of most Roman matrons. Such a dual system – a rhetorical condemnation but tacit acceptance and use – is thus currently widely agreed on in the literature on Roman beauty and cosmetics.⁸

But do we actually have archaeological evidence that supports the idea of widespread use of cosmetics among all Roman women? In archaeological research, gendered objects, including toiletries, have mostly been discussed typologically, or in funerary contexts. Less work has centered on the analysis of single functional groups, distribution patterns and diffusion of gender-bound

⁴ Like *Turia* of the famous *laudatio* (*CIL* VI 1527): *ornatus non conspiciendi, cultus modici*. On defining the ideal woman in funerary epitaphs, see Larsson Lovén 1997; Hemelrijk 2004; Cenerini 2009, 17–38; Riess 2012; Olson 2008, 89–91. See also Sebesta 1997.

⁵ For discussion on Roman female adornment and morality, see Wyke 1994, 2002; Richlin 1995 and D'Ambra 1989, 1996, 2000; Berg 2002, 2010a, 2010b; Olson 2008, 2009; Shumka 2008; Michel 2016.

⁶ Gal. 12,434–35, 12,445–46, 12,449–50. On the Galenic definitions of cosmetics, see Virgili 1989, 11; Saiko 2005, 220–24, Olson 2008, 59, and n. 7 with further bibliography.

⁷ Olson 2008, 58.

⁸ More recently, Shumka 2008 and Michel 2016. See also Virgili 1989; Cipollaro – Di Bernardo 1999, 111: "Il maquillage costituiva per la matrona parte importante nella vita giornaliera e le donne romane disponevano di un fornitissimo arsenale di belletti"; Saiko 2005, 134–36, 197–98.

objects. Assemblies of such objects may reveal more subtle traces of female presence and behavior, normative or non, in ancient households, and also in other kinds of habitations than the elite *domus*.⁹ Pompeian houses offer a unique opportunity to contextualise everyday Roman utensils in relation to other groups of functional objects and to the types of houses in which they were found. The fragmentary state of many contexts, and the problems involved in recording them, however, make a purely quantitative analysis inadequate, and call for a wider understanding of the cultural context from literary and iconographic sources.

In this paper, the *loci* of fifteen exceptionally rich sets of Pompeian toiletries are synthetically presented, and the social status of the women who used and owned them is discussed – were these women matrons, or courtesans, for example? I also discuss, as case studies, three of the fifteen houses, in which there seems to be a specific connection between exceptionally numerous toiletries and hospitality services.

Entering the Pompeian Boudoirs

In an earlier, contextual study of 137 Pompeian mirrors, in only fifteen houses was a mirror found together with more than ten other toiletry items.¹⁰ In most

⁹ On gendered objects (including toiletries) and space, Nevett 2010, 95–96; Allison 2007; Berg 2016. See in particular the critical views of Allison (2007, 346–48) on engendering domestic objects, and the most useful analysis by Cahill 2002 on the household inventories of Olynthus.

¹⁰ This has been evinced in the data collected a doctoral dissertation on female-associated toiletries in Pompeian house-floor context, on which this paper is based, Berg 2010a, 161–62, 77–82, 297–301. The archaeological study examined the find contexts of the 137 mirrors now kept in the archaeological storerooms of Pompeii, that is, the material excavated after the 1890s, as finds before that date have been moved to the *Museo Nazionale Archeologico* of Naples. A basic result of the research was that in nearly 90% of cases the mirrors were, indeed, accompanied by other toiletries. However, no all-toiletry contexts were found, as the storage of *mundus muliebris* is closely connected with the general system of storage in the household, and they were mostly stored with other valuables. In the study, mirror has been considered as the emblem of the group, and other main categories considered are containers for ablutions (washing basins, dippers, pitchers), instruments for grooming the hair (hairpins, combs) and the skin, including cosmetic equipment (*unguentaria*, *pyxides*, *spatulae*, cosmetic spoons, strigils, tweezers, *coticulae* for preparing cosmetic mixtures, pumice stones in bronze cups for depilation).

Pompeian houses, toiletries found together form only modest arrays, of less than ten items. These fifteen houses and contexts seem to be worthy of particular observation, both for their composition and for the habitations in which they were found. Can rich cosmetic contexts be connected with elite lifestyles?

Tables 1 and 2 present the fifteen architectonic and material contexts for the toiletries. Table 1 summarizes the types and sizes of the houses, where the largest contexts were found. None of the houses has a full axial sequence of *atrium-tablinum*-peristyle, and none of them are among the best-known Pompeian habitations, either for architectural features or paintings; many of the houses are without a conventional name. The houses are mostly small or medium sized, in quartiles 2 and 3, except those with larger open spaces, i.e.

House	Name	House type	Surface m ²	Quartile
I 11, 6.7	Casa di Venere in Bikini	<i>Atrium-viridarium</i>	186	3
I 11, 17	Casa Imperiale	<i>Atrium-viridarium</i>	128	2
I 13, 1	Casa di L. Crassius Crescens	Peristyle without <i>atrium</i>	263	3
I 13, 2	Casa di L. Helvius Severus	<i>Atrium-viridarium</i>	351	4
I 14, 8.9	<i>Hospitium</i>	Irregular	200	3
I 16, 4	-	<i>Atrium-viridarium</i>	366	4
V 3, 10	-	<i>Atrium-viridarium</i>	214	3
V 3, 11	-	<i>Atrium-viridarium</i>	241	3
V 4, 3	Casa del Flamen	<i>Atrium-viridarium</i>	289	3
V 4, 13	Casa delle Origini di Roma	<i>Atrium-viridarium</i>	295	3
VI 15, 23	<i>Hospitium</i>	Peristyle without <i>atrium</i>	433	4
VI 16, 28	Casa della Caccia dei Tori	<i>Atrium-viridarium</i>	155	2
VI 16, 32	<i>Lupanar</i> di L. Aurunculeius Secundio	<i>Atrium-viridarium</i>	135	2
VI 16, 40	<i>Thermopolium</i> di Felix e Dorus	<i>Thermopolium</i> with living quarters	99	2
VII 16, 19	-	Shop	25	1

Table 1. The types and sizes of fifteen Pompeian houses in which exceptionally rich toiletry sets have been found.

vineyards.¹¹ Two of them have conventionally received the label of *hospitium* or inn, one has been defined a *lupanar* and includes a *thermopolium*, one is a large *thermopolium* with back rooms, one is a one-room shop. The *atrium* house of Venus in Bikini has a secondary entrance through a *taberna*, probably also a food and drink outlet.

In Table 2 the objects classifiable as toiletries (found together in one room), are listed.¹² The number of toiletries ranges from eleven to fifty-four items in total. The most numerous group among the categories present are the *unguentaria*, with up to twenty-eight specimens. The presence of bronze, bone or glass *pyxides* in many contexts is also noteworthy.

Strikingly, none of the houses in which the most conspicuous toiletry sets were found is likely to have belonged to the municipal elite. In elite houses, the number of *unguentaria* (according to the database of Allison) seems to be rather low and not combined with other toiletries (*unguentaria*: Casa del Menandro: 10, Casa di Iulius Polybius: 9, Casa delle Nozze d'Argento: 5, Casa di Giuseppe II: 5, Casa dei Vettii: 5, Casa di M. Lucretius Fronto: 3, Casa del Sacello Iliaco: 3, Casa dei Quadretti teatrali: 3). Could this be explained by the disorder, upheavals and lootings that most afflicted the wealthiest *domus* during or after the eruption?¹³ As a counterargument, it could be stated that cosmetic equipment, with the exception of silver mirrors and pins, is for the most part of relatively low value – a collection of glass *unguentaria* and bone pins would probably

¹¹ Only three houses belong to the largest quartile by square meters, according to the classification of house types and sizes by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (1994, 81). Of these three, only one is an *atrium* house (I 13, 2). In total, ten houses are modest *atrium* houses that have a minimal green space or a garden area with no colonnades at rear. The house of L. Crassius Crescens (I 13, 1) has a peristyle garden, but does not have a traditional *atrium*. Some of the houses belong to the type 'case a schiera', with a traversal *atrium testudinatum*, without an *impluvium*. The count of the decorated rooms per house is also revealing: all but two houses have only two or three painted rooms. The two exceptions to this rule are, again, the house I 13, 2, and the house of Venus in Bikini (I 11, 6.7) which, despite its small size, presents figural painting in virtually all the rooms.

¹² Many of these objects, in particular various pins and *unguentaria*, can also have other purposes (i.e. *unguentaria* could contain medicine, spices etc.), Berg 2010a, 83–87; Allison 2007, 346–47. In many cases the presence of specific luxurious items (very small, decorated *ampullae*, or those in precious materials) make it most likely that they were filled with perfumed oil or other cosmetic substances.

¹³ <http://www.stoa.org/projects/ph/home>; Allison 2004, 192–96.

House	Toil. Total	Mirr.	Unguen.	Tweez.	Pins etc.	Strigils	Other
I 11, 6.7	21	1	13	2	4	-	pumice
I 11, 17	29	1	21	2	2	1	2 <i>pyxides</i>
I 13, 1	11	1	10	-	-	-	-
I 13, 2	54	2	28	1	13	-	2 <i>pyxides</i> 5 <i>coticulae</i> 3 combs
I 14, 8.9	16	3	13	-	-	-	-
I 16, 4	31	3	18	5	3	-	2 (probe) handles
V 3, 10	12	1	10	1	-	-	-
V 3, 11	25	2	19	2	2	-	-
V 4, 3	22	1	10	2	6	1	bronze <i>aryballos</i> <i>coticula</i>
V 4, 13	15	1	6	4	1	1	2 pumices
VI 15, 23	41	4	28	1	5	2	rectangular medicine box
VI 16, 28	13	1	9	-	3	-	-
VI 16, 32	15	2	4	-	7	1	<i>pyxis</i>
VI 16, 40	40	1	18	2	19	-	-
VII 16, 19	21	1	9	-	5	3	3 <i>coticulae</i>

Table 2. Toiletry assemblages in fifteen Pompeian houses (with more than ten toiletry items found together with a mirror). Toil. – Toiletries, Mirr – Mirrors, Unguen. – Unguentaria, Tweez. – Tweezers, Pins etc. – Pins/probes/spoons/spatulae.

not be among the first items to be salvaged or stolen. Furthermore, the fifteen contexts used in this study seem more likely to be functional grooming sets than casual collections of looted valuables.

For limitations of space, I concentrate only on three of these fifteen houses more thoroughly. One of them, the so-called House of Aurunculeius Secundio (VI 16, 32.33) is a *thermopolium/lupanar* with living quarters, the second is a large irregular house conventionally defined as a *hospitium* (VI 15, 23), and the third a small *atrium* house called Casa Imperiale (I 11, 17).

Three Houses with Rich Toiletry Sets

I. Lupanar of L. Aurunculeius Secundio

In the house of L. Aurunculeius Secundio (VI 16, 32.33) fifteen toiletry items, including two rectangular bronze mirrors, were found. Two entrances gave access to the house: a wide *fauces* (A) and a *thermopolium* (C), both leading to the testudinate *atrium* (B) (Fig. 1), which featured an unusual fireplace for cooking in its SW corner.¹⁴ Besides the bar, decorated with vignettes of birds, the habitation counted only two rooms with wall-paintings, *triclinium* (E) and a *cubiculum* (F). In the garden, the owners had installed a *biclinium* for outdoor dining. Most of the movable finds of the house, including almost all valuables, were stacked in an undecorated store room (D), where the excavators also found the toiletries.¹⁵

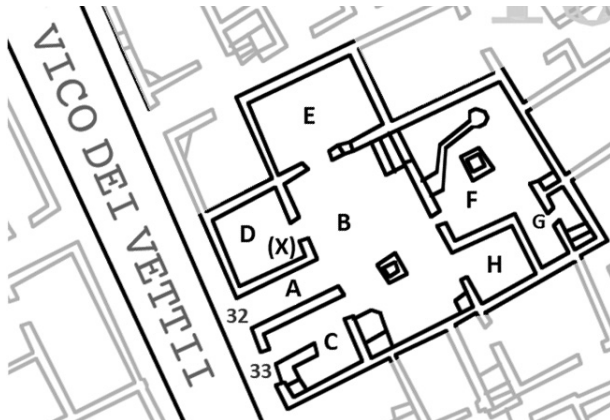


Fig. 1. Plan of the house/lupanar of L. Aurunculeius Secundio (VI 16, 32.33) with the indication of the findspot of the toiletries (x).

¹⁴ For the house in general, *NSc* 1908, 272, fig. 1; 287–98; Della Corte 1965, 71–72, n. 95–96; Kleberg 1957, 41; Eschebach 1993, 231; Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 216; *PPM* 1994, vol. V, 960–73; De Felice 2001, 256–57, n. 91; McGinn 2002, 39; McGinn 2004, 276; Ellis 2005, 384–86; Berg 2010a, 276–80.

¹⁵ The number of objects found in various rooms confirms the predominance of room (D) as a deposit area: room (D) 73 items, *atrium* (B) 16, garden (F) 15, *thermopolium* (C) 8, latrine (G) 4.

Fig. 2. Finds from the house of L. Aurunculeius Secundio (Pompeii, Archivio fotografico B30).



McGinn and Guzzo include the house in their catalogues of possible brothels of Pompeii, and it is also classified as such by Eschebach,

because of the explicit phallic paintings that originally decorated the selling counter of the bar, and the close connection between the bar and the living quarters.¹⁶ During the original excavations in 1904, Antonio Sogliano immediately noted the large number of toiletries, as – quite exceptionally – photos were taken of them as a groups, and some published in the *Notizie degli Scavi*.¹⁷ In two further images of the Photographic Archives of the Superintendency of Pompeii, several of these items are grouped (Fig. 2: strigil, glass aryballos with suspension chains, bronze pyxis with suspension chains, two spoons and a knife still with its blade, two unguentaria; Fig. 3: bronze amulets, three hair-pins, four bracelets, a ring, a fibula, a rectangular mirror), and jewellery (a textile gold band and four silver bracelets, two decorated with phallic reliefs, and bronze amulets, one in the form of Isis, Fig. 4.3) are displayed together. While some objects were destroyed during the war, the jewellery has been transferred to the Archaeological Museum of Naples. The items still preserved in the archaeological storerooms Pompeii (Fig. 4) constitute a functional cosmetic set.¹⁸

¹⁶ The now detached painting depicts, at the center, a large ejaculating phallus, with two heraldic masturbating male figures in tunics on either side, see *PPM* V, 963, fig. 5 (AFS B234). McGinn 2002, 39, cat. 15; McGinn 2004, 276, cat. 15; Guzzo 2009, 39, cat. 23, Tav. XVI; Eschebach 1993, 231.

¹⁷ *NSc* 1908, 291, fig. 14; 292, fig. 15.

¹⁸ The set contains the following objects: **Two bronze mirrors** of rectangular form (Type Lloyd-Morgan A), one larger (Fig. 4.1, 55821) and the other smaller (Fig. 4.2, 55862). **Bronze pyxis**,

Fig. 3. Finds from the house of L. Aurunculeius Secundio (Pompeii, Archivio fotografico B31).

Numerous other finds, including a large group of bronze vases, were stored in the same room.¹⁹ Many of the bronze vases, like the classic set of pitcher (Tassinari form D) and *patera* (Tassinari form H), have a function connected with ablutions, though most likely those during banquets, rather than female ablutions. All in all, the collection of finds in this house, or *thermopolium/lupanar*, confirms



decorated with relief ribbing (Fig. 4.9, 55829, Tav. 39,3; *NSc* 1908, 292, fig. 15.). **Four glass unguentaria**: One large *unguentarium* of type Scatozza 49, h. 14 cm (Fig. 4.12, 55863); a small glass bottle ("bocsettina") of h. 9 cm (Fig. 4.7, 55865). The *aryballos* is not preserved (ex 3346), but has been documented by the photo Fig. 2 and in *NSc* (1908, 292, fig. 15). It was of the general form De Tommaso 10, spherical and with four "dolphin-shaped" handles to which bronze chains were attached for suspension, h. 11 cm. The fourth *unguentarium* is 6,5 cm high (Fig. 4.8, 55866), with ovoid body, short neck and out-turned lip of type De Tommaso 19, in blue glass striped with white. Of the **three silver spoons** (ex 3308) two have been documented in the photo in *NSc* 1908, 291, fig. 14, and Fig. 2. These have been counted here in *mundus*, as no other element of a silver table service were present. Spoons may, however, also have served for culinary purposes. **Bone spatula** (Fig. 4.4, 55875) was 18,7 cm long, of flat and tapering form. The wider end is rounded and quite worn, the narrow end has double points. A silver "**hair-pin**" (ex 3309), documented in a photo in *NSc* (1908, 291, 14, Fig. 3), was of curved form and ending in a bottom-shaped head. **Two bone hair-pins** were present: one 14,5 cm long, with a top in the form of Venus *Anadyomène* (Fig. 4.6, 55879); the other of cm 10, with a stylized pine cone at top (Fig. 4.5, 55878). A **small knife** with a handle in bone originally had an iron blade (Fig. 4.11, 55880). The handle is round in section and decorated with incised lines, ending in a circular knob. A small decorative knife can plausibly be part of cosmetic utensils. A miniature **bronze strigil** (Fig. 4.10, 55817) is of the general form A of Riha.

¹⁹ Tassinari 1993, I, 182; II, 494. Even if the presence of non-pertinent objects is consistent, as a rule, we may presume that the higher the number of toiletries found together, the higher the probability that it is an intentionally formed set.

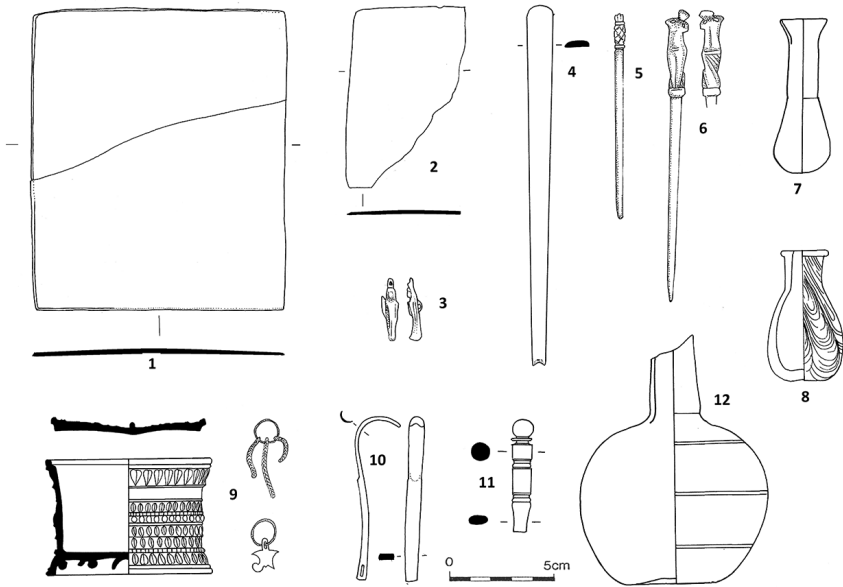


Fig. 4. Toiletry set found in the house of *L. Aurunculeius Secundio*. For descriptions, see n. 18 (drawing: author).

an above-average quantity of female grooming equipment, including jewellery associated with males (signet rings with names of *L. Aurunculeius Secundio* and *A.B.L.*) and females (hair-pins, golden hair-band, bracelets, snake-ring), and also above average quantities of furnishings for banquet services.

2. *Hospitium VI 15, 23*

Another house where a large presence of toiletries is combined with evidence of the hospitality business, not elite housing, is the unnamed *hospitium VI 15, 23*, where one of the largest of the fifteen contexts – forty toiletry items in total – was found.

The building, excavated in 1896–1897, has an anomalous form, probably derived from the division of an earlier *domus*, conserving the peristyle without an

atrium (Fig. 5).²⁰ The entrance leads directly into a four-sided peristyle (a), onto which a kitchen (c), and a series of *triclinia* and *cubicula* open, undecorated when the house was last occupied. The toiletries, found in the 1 October 1896, were collected in a cupboard in the *ambulacrum* in the SW corner of the peristyle. Among the toiletries were four bronze mirrors of different shapes, twenty-eight *unguentaria*, two strigils, tweezers, four pointed instruments, a cosmetic spoon and a knife (Fig. 6).²¹ No pyxids were present, but a rectangular

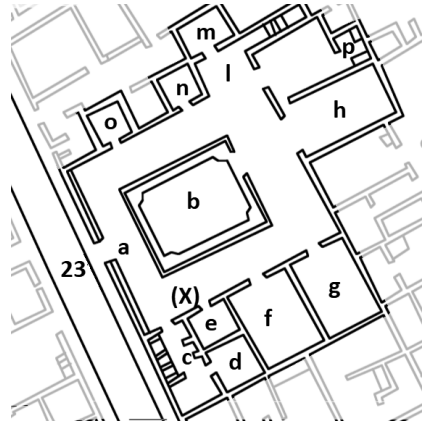


Fig. 5. Plan of the hospitium VI 15, 23, with the indication of the findspot of the toiletries (x).

²⁰ *NSc* 1896, 473–75, 535; *NSc* 1897, plan p. 14, 105–8, 155–57, 340; 1898, 174, 269; 1900, 603; Eschbach 1993, 223–24; Tassinari 1993, I, 176; II, 438; Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 215; *PPM* V 1994, 701–8.

²¹ Berg 2010a, 272–75. **Four bronze mirrors**: a grip mirror lacking the handle, the disc decorated with perforate holes around the rim, Lloyd-Morgan type K (Fig. 6.1, 53527), simple unadorned disc in fragments (Fig. 6.2, 53528, Lloyd-Morgan type B), and two rectangular plates (Lloyd-Morgan type A) of medium and small sizes (Figs. 6.3–4, 53533, 53534). A rectangular **bronze container** with a mobile lid (Fig. 7, 53535) is of type normally used for medical substances. A **bone pin** (cm 13,5) has spiralled grip and ends in a pinecone shape (Fig. 6.11, 53548). Another **bone probe** (cm 9,2) of uncertain function ends in a caprine hoof similar to many Pompeian hair-pins (Fig. 6.9, 53547). A small **bronze spoon-probe** ('nettaorecchi', cm 12,7) has a small round concave cup, and a handle ending in sharp point (Fig. 6.7, 53536, type Riha E). **Two pins, in bone**, not found for the study, are described in the *Inventary* as "asticciole finienti a punta in uno estremo, e concave nell'altro", and were quite probably cosmetic spoons (ex 1090). **Two bronze strigils** of medium size (Figs. 6.5–6, 53529, 53530) both belong to the form A of Riha. A **bronze tweezer** (8,5 cm) is of the type with offset shoulders (Fig. 6.10, 53531). All glass-ware was transported to Naples Museum in the expedition n. 240 of 22 July 1899. Originally present were **28 unguentaria in glass** according to the information contained in the *Inventary*, there were seven pear-shaped small bottles of ca. 15 cm in height probably belonging to type Scatozza 49 (ex 1018–24), eight bottles of small, closed form, under 10 cm of height, probably Scatozza 46–47, (ex 1024–32), two of miniaturistic size, of h. 2–4 cm (ex 1033–34), five globular *ollae* type Scatozza 56 with the height ranging from 9 to 5 cm (ex 1038–42); one has horizontal linings and is probably Scatozza 43/Isings 70, even if only 5 cm high (ex 1057), one example has three small feet, as the type 25 of De Tommaso (ex 1058). Two are of

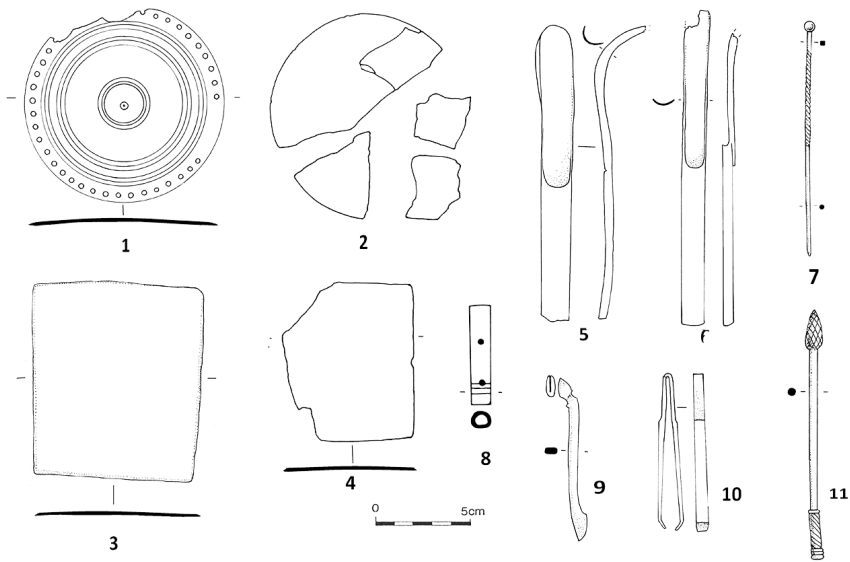


Fig. 6. Toiletry set found in the hospitium VI 15, 23, and conserved at Pompeii Archaeological Storerooms. The unguentaria transferred to MANN are not figured. For descriptions, see n. 21 (drawing: author).

bronze box with a sliding lid is of the type connected with medicine and cosmetics (Fig. 9).²² The jewellery included two *fibulae* (inv. 1083–4), two gemstones (inv. 1093–4), a silver clasp (inv. 1095) and a gold earring (inv. 1096).

The large quantity of graffiti with explicit erotic content scratched on the façade, nearby the entrance, naming at least seven women, may suggest that the house was a *hospitium*, or brothel.²³ In this case too, the connection between exceptionally abundant toiletries and the hospitality business seems quite possible,

forms not recognizable by description (ex 1035, 1054–56).

²² Inv. 53535. H. 3.0, l. 8.1, w. 5.5. For bronze boxes as containers for medicines, see Krug 1993, 79. For box containers of *coticulae*, see Riha 1986, 44–45.

²³ Della Corte (1965, 60–61) identified the house VI 11, 16 on the opposite side of the Vicolo del Labirinto as a *lupanar*, but notes that a concentration of erotic graffiti mentioning several women, *Ap(h)rodite*, *Secunda*, *Nym(p)he*, *Spendusa*, *Veneria*, *Restituta* and *Timele*, is found on both sides of the street (CIL IV 1374–91; 1402–7; 4435–44).



Fig. 7. Fragmentary medical/cosmetic bronze box from hospitium VI 15, 23 (photo: author).

even though the identification of the house as a *hospitium* is less certain than in the first case examined.

3. Casa Imperiale I 11, 17

A further example of an exceptionally rich toiletry set found in a small and modest house is that of the so-called Casa Imperiale.²⁴ The only decorated rooms of the house were *cubiculum* (6) and *triclinium* (4), whose window opened onto a small open rear court (7) and kitchen (8) (Fig. 8). Despite its modest appearance, the house contained one of the richest collections of toiletries of the fifteen houses. Excavators found a silver lid mirror decorated with incision, together with twenty-four other toiletry items, some

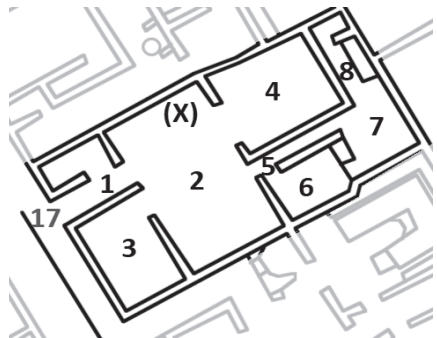


Fig. 8. Plan of Casa Imperiale (I 11, 17) with the indication of the findspot of the toiletries (x).

²⁴ Eschebach 1993, 62; Berg 2010a, 209–10; Berg 2016.

luxurious, in its undecorated *atrium* (Fig. 9).²⁵ The toiletries include tweezers, probes, twenty *unguentaria*, some of them quite rare (one stands on tripod feet, one is carved in faceted rock crystal, one is divided internally into two compartments) and two *pyxides*, one carved in limestone and decorated with gilding, another in bronze. These objects had probably been contained in a wooden box, which decomposed, as demonstrated by the surviving bronze

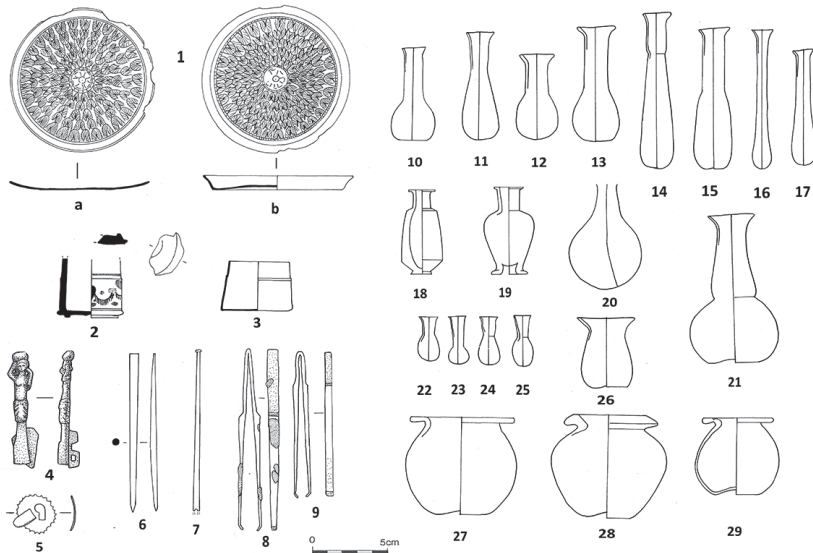


Fig. 9. Toiletry set found in Casa Imperiale. See n. 25 (drawing: author).

²⁵ Toiletries include: a silver **mirror** (Fig. 9.1, 12730), a bronze **strigil** (12752), a simple bronze **pyxis** (Fig. 9.3, 12753), a **pyxis** in limestone (Fig. 9.2, 12758), two bronze **tweezers** (Figs. 9.7–8, 12754 A–B), two pointed **instruments** in bronze (Figs. 9.6–7, 12755 A–B). Furthermore, 20 **unguentaria** of different shapes were present. These include: eight of the common forms Scatozza 46–47 (Figs. 9.10–17, 12777 A–H), a larger, rounded bottle (Fig. 9.21, 12767), an **aryballos** formed rounded bottle with an internal division in two (Fig. 9.20, 12778), glass **unguentarium** on three feet (Fig. 9.19, 12781), **unguentarium** in rock crystal (Fig. 9.18, 12782), four miniature **unguentaria** (Figs. 9.22–25, 12779 A–D), three globular **ollae**, type Scatozza 56 (Figs. 9.27–29, 12767–12769) and a small, narrower **olla** (Fig. 9.26, 12780). Jewellery found together include a bronze ring (12731), a bronze signet ring (12732), and four buttons in rock crystal (12736).

lock elements, in particular a clasp in the form of Venus *Anadyoméne* (Fig. 9.4–5).²⁶

This house, like the house of L. Aurunculeius Secundio, was exceptionally well furnished with bronze vases suitable for ablutions during banquets.²⁷ Even if we cannot identify the house as a tavern or restaurant through any structural element, its movable finds suggest that in this house too, some kind of hospitality business, with a notable female presence, may have been run.

In these three cases, lavish cosmetic sets would plausibly have been associated with women abiding in small-medium sized houses, with some connection to restoration services. Here, the discourse again meets that of the conflicting ideals of Roman female beauty and habits, the "anti-cosmetic tradition" and its transgressions. The following chapters trace, as an *excursus*, the literary evidence on the status and *loci* of cosmetic use of the Roman courtesan.

Toiletries and Taverns

The moralistic tradition of Roman literature never recommends the use of cosmetics to matrons, who should be distinguished by the sobriety of their grooming and their modest clothing; neat, clean and unadorned.²⁸ In fact, cosmetics were often associated with women of dubious moral conduct, in particular adulterers and prostitutes.²⁹ The visual distinction between the clothing and grooming of a matron and a prostitute was of crucial importance, not only morally, but also legally, as noted by Olson and McGinn.³⁰ On the basis of Pompeian

²⁶ For the clasp, see also Berg 2017. Clasp: Inv. 12751, lock element: Inv. 12759

²⁷ Tassinari 1983, I 148–50; II 413–15. In particular, basin type S2121 (inv. 12737), pitcher B2220 (12741), dipper I1120 (12742), two oval cups O2000 (12745), handle of *patera* H3200 (12750).

²⁸ For the appearance of the matron with *stola* and *palla* drawn over the head and hair bound with the woollen *vittae*, see Sebesta 2001, 48–49; Olson 2008, 27–39.

²⁹ Saiko 2005, 256–57; Olson 2006; Ciocoloni 2006, 100, n. 13; Berg 2010a, 58–61. To be noted also that the cosmetic manuals of antiquity were written by and for courtesans, such as Elephantis (Gal. 12.416), Aspasia, and Cleopatra, author of *ornamenta corporis* (Plin. *nat.* 9.119).

³⁰ For the distinction between the appearance of matrons and prostitutes in general, McGinn 1998, 158–60, and especially Olson 2006 (on the difficulties of distinguishing *matronae* from *meretrices*, p. 198). For the legal definition of matronly appearance see McGinn 1998, 154–56.

material evidence, exemplified by the three cases presented above, I suggest that such distinctions in clothing and use of cosmetics was also reflected concretely in the ownership of toiletries.

Although often cited as evidence for the grooming practices of Roman matrons, at a closer look, the most detailed grooming scenes in Roman literature, for example in Plautus' *Mostellaria* and *Poenulus*, actually take place in courtesans' boudoirs.³¹ Similarly, the two Ovidian passages cited at the beginning of this paper, mentioning a profusion of *pyxides* on a woman's toilet table, both refer to elegiac *puellae* rather than matrons; likewise, the hundred *pyxides* in the epigram of Martial belong to a courtesan, Galla, and are found in her apartment at Suburra.³²

If cosmetics were firmly associated with prostitutes, prostitution was, in turn, just as firmly associated with taverns and inns. In effect, *thermopolia*, *popinae*, *cauponae* and *hospitia* were equal to *lupanaria* in Roman law as *loci inhonesti*, even if this certainly does not mean that prostitution was conducted in all Roman food and drink outlets.³³ This brings us to the long-debated question of the identification of brothels in Pompeii, well summarised by McGinn, who stresses that even if we only can identify one 'purpose-built brothel' in Pompeii, this must represent only a minor fraction of a larger social phenomenon, more elusive in multipurpose taverns, inns and private habitations, and more difficult to define.³⁴

³¹ The scene in *Mostellaria* (248ff.) is set in the boudoir of the courtesan Philemation assisted by old Scapha. The scene in *Poenulus* includes discourse on female toiletries by Adelphasium and Anterastilis, forced to work as courtesans (228–31).

³² *Ov. rem.* 351; *ars* 3,209–10. *Mart. ep.* 9,37. Galla is described as putting her teeth, eyebrows and practically her whole face in *pyxides* for the night. According to Henriksén (2012, 35–36), the name Galla appears in Martial's verse in another fifteen epigrams, and in most cases probably points to a prostitute. Her price is in epigram 9.4 indicated as *aureolis... duobus*.

³³ The definition of prostitution in Ulpian's first chapter ad *Legem Iuliam Papiam* (D. 23,2,43pr.) is central, "*palam quaestum facere dicemus non tantum eam quae in lupanario se prostituit, verum etiam si qua (ut adsolet) in taberna cauponia, vel qua alia pudori suo non parcat.*" Cf. D. 23,2,43,6; D. 4,8,21,11. For further discussion of these passages, and descriptions of prostitution according to Roman law, see Guzzo – Scarano Ussani 2001, 991, n. 39 with bibl.; Guzzo – Scarano Ussani 2009, 21–22 *et passim*; McGinn 1998, 127; De Felice 2001; McGinn 2006, 162–63. Often cited as evidence of the inclusion of *puella* in the bill of a *hospitium* is *CIL IX 8442*. Cf. also Edwards 1997. On the evidence of the assimilation of barmaids with prostitutes at Pompeii, see Savunen 1997, 108.

³⁴ McGinn 2002, 8–11: The estimated numbers range between one and thirty-five. So far, architec-

Movable finds have so far received almost no consideration among the possible clues to identify *lupanaria* in Pompeii.³⁵ In contrast, for example, in the Kerameikos zone of classical Athens, a possible brothel (building Z) has been identified as such partially on the basis of female toiletries and sympotic crockery, as noted by James N. Davidson.³⁶ Furthermore, the study of prostitution in the Roman world has mostly concentrated on its lowest, most servile forms. Its higher status equivalents, although less evident in their architectural features, could, however, be more detectable on the basis of movable finds, including toiletries and banquet equipment.

Such establishments would range from *popinae* and *hospitia* with their *coepae* and *ancillae* serving middle class clients, to the socially and economically independent courtesan/*hetaira*, of freed or freeborn status, associated with the elite. In this latter case, not only sexual services were paid for, but the whole setting of a *convivium* in a pleasant atmosphere; dining, entertaining discussion and musical performance in the presence of women.³⁷ Directly pertinent to such phenomena are, for example, the series of four graffiti from the Suburban Baths of Herculaneum, stating the conspicuous sum of 422 *asses* spent on such an evening.³⁸

ture with *cellae*, the presence of masonry beds, erotic wall paintings, graffiti and topographic zoning have been considered the most significant criteria. On the difficulties of defining brothels in Roman Pompeii and their relation with *cauponae*, *popinae*, *cellae meretriciae*, and *deversoria*, see Kleberg 1957, 89 *et passim*; Wallace-Hadrill 1995; McGinn 2002, 11–13; Varone 2005, 94; 106; Guzzo and Scarano Ussani (2009, 113–14). The latter estimate the number of prostitutes active in Pompeii as 80–100, of which perhaps only 20 worked in the *Lupanar* VII, 12, 18–20, and the rest, consequently, in other places.

³⁵ As other possible material indicators, McGinn proposes lamps placed outside the establishments and statues of Venus or Priapus (2002, 10–11, 35). Scarce finds have been recorded as coming from the Pompeian purpose-built *Lupanar*, see *Giornale degli scavi* of Giuseppe Fiorelli, 1862, 48–59. On this argument, Berg (forthcoming).

³⁶ Davidson 1997, 85; Lind 1988. In Rome, cf. Tomei 1995. For an interesting parallel for a funerary context of a courtesan, see Deodato 2011, 92–93.

³⁷ Davidson 1997; James 2003; for courtesans' presence and behaviour at dinner parties, see for example James 2006, 228–229.

³⁸ The banquet, organised by *minister Epaphroditus*, is documented by two participants, *Apelles, cubicularius Caesar(is)* and *Dexter*, in three graffiti: *CIL* IV 10675: *consumperunt persuavissime cum futuere HS CV s(emis)*; *CIL* IV 10677: *pranderunt hic | iucundissime et | futuere simul*; *CIL* IV 10678. For these, see also Varone 2005, 104 *et passim*. A fourth graffiti found in the room is a salutation to Novellia Primigenia (*CIL* IV 10676).

***Hetairai* in Pompeii: fiction or reality?**

In Pompeian erotic paintings, the figures of luxurious *hetairai* have conventionally been seen only as poetic citations of Hellenistic iconography, without any direct reference to existing realities.³⁹ Likewise, in earlier gender studies prostitutes of high status have been considered "a fabrication of the male mind", or a mere myth and romanticisation.⁴⁰ The figure of the free courtesan, as an existing social category in Roman society, has more recently been thoroughly profiled in the works of Sharon James, who convincingly identifies the *docta puella* of Roman love elegies not as an adulterous matron, but as an 'avatar of the Greek *hetaira*', mostly of freed status and foreign origin.⁴¹ As James has pointed out, the elegiac poets carefully avoid any discourse on monetary compensation, insisting that only their poems and other gifts (expensive jewels, perfumes and clothes) would be exchanged, thus masking the fundamentally mercenary character of the relationship.⁴² In Tibullus', Propertius' and Ovid's narratives, such women figure as owners of substantial material means.⁴³ The

³⁹ See, for example, Clarke 1998, 103, 201–6. The types of jewellery worn in the paintings indicate contemporaneous rather than Hellenistic inspiration; see d'Ambrosio – De Carolis – Guzzo 2008, 54–55.

⁴⁰ Keuls 1983a, 199; Keuls 1983b, 35.

⁴¹ James 2006, 226–27. According to the scholar (2003, ix), the elegiac *puella* "can be nothing other than a courtesan of formidable intelligence, education and independence." On the earlier discussion of the identification of the elegiac *puella*, previously seen generally as an adulterous wife or an unreal fantasy projection of a Hellenistic past, or a metaphor for elegiac poetry, see James 2003, 2, 41, 212. See also Keith 2011, 26, who states that (31) "the elegiac mistress herself must thus be counted another luxury import from eastern Mediterranean, like the silks, gems and perfumes in which she conventionally dresses." For the epigraphic evidence of Greek courtesans in Rome, called by names of famous classical *hetairai* (Thais, Lais, Phryne, Lycoris), see Solin 2003.

⁴² Plaut. *most.* 286 on gold and purple as suitable gifts to a *meretrix*. On the difference between payments and gifts, see Davidson 1997, 109–10. For the status of freeborn or freedwoman independent courtesan, in contrast to the servile prostitute, see, for example, Formigoni Candini 1991, 17–19; James 2006, 232, 238.

⁴³ The elegiac mistresses, personified under the names of Corinna, Delia, Cynthia and Nemesis all lived in relative luxury. Propertius narrates Cynthia's large house (2,6,1–4), numerous servants (4,8), and her golden statue of Venus (4,7,47–48), golden clothing (4,8,39–40). Cf. *meretrix* figures living with luxury objects and having numerous servants in Plautus' *Trinummus* (250–51) and *Truculentus* (51–56). A historical courtesan figure, Chelidon, mistress of Verres, had a large and lavishly fur-

freeborn or freed status of the women would have been of major importance, because the difference between slaves and free prostitutes was crucial, as slaves could not own property, nor have any control over their bodies (whether working in a household or in a *lupanar*), whereas women of free status, even courtesans, could.⁴⁴

Notably, courtesans were often stationed in their own houses, able to decide who could enter and who could not. Indeed, their houses are mostly referred to only through the metaphoric door – certainly not that of a father or a husband, and unlikely to be that of a common *lupanar* – guarded by a *ianitor* and other dependent staff.⁴⁵

The existence of independent courtesans of free status also in the Vesuvian cities is hinted at by abundant material, in the form of graffiti, that takes up the elegiac theme of *exclusus amator*; for example, telling the *ianitor* not to let in lovers who do not bear gifts.⁴⁶ The appearance of several freeborn female

nished household (Cic. *Verr.* 2,2,116). See Olson 2006, 195 and Berg (forthcoming) on prostitutes wearing gold jewellery. Also the Greek *hetairai* are frequently described as owners of luxurious possessions, see Cohen 2006, 110, n. 112; 113. See, for example, Lucian's *Dialogues of Courtesans* 4, 1.

⁴⁴ The free courtesan could attain a paradoxically high level of independence for the parameters of Roman culture, or, as formulated by James, as she was neither a wife nor a slave, she ultimately controlled her own life. For slaves and free prostitutes in classical Athens, cf. Cohen 2006. The very definition of prostitution in Rome requires that venal sex is practised *palam*, publicly, and *vulgo*, without choosing the client, excluding *de facto* free courtesans from this classification: D. 23,2,41 with McGinn 1998, 125–27. As noted by Guzzo and Scarano Ussani (2001, 995), on the limits of prostitution: 'atti sessuali prestati a pagamento, ma non *palam*, non configuravano il meretricio'.

⁴⁵ Among the house owning courtesans Chelidon can be recalled, in whose house Verres conducted public business and brought his clients, and which he inherited from her (Cic. *Verr.* 2,1,136–7; 2,4,7; 2,4,83). For further discussion of the passages, McCoy 2006, 179–81. For Volumnia Cytheris, *mima*, freedwoman and lover of M. Junius Brutus, M. Antonius, to whom Gallus wrote elegies by calling her Lycoris, mentioned by Vergil, see Keith 2011, 30–31. On the door motif: the passages of Ovid describing the hardness of the door, the threshold, the door's guard, see James 2003, 127; on *paraclausthiron* in general, James 2003, 136–41; on the topos of an assault of a courtesan's house and the breaking down of its door, James 2003, 196.

⁴⁶ Quotations of verses of Ovid (*am.* 1,8,77–78, *CIL* IV 1893): '*surda sit oranti tua ianua, laxa ferenti. / audiat exclusi verba receptus amans*' and of Propertius (4,5,47–48, *CIL* IV 1894): '*ianitor ad dantis vigilet; si pulsat inanis / surdus in obductam somniet usque seram.*' On verses as gifts and monetary compensation also *CIL* IV 1860. There is an explicit offer of money in the message of Zosimus to Victoria (*CIL* IV 1964), 'if you think I don't have money, don't love me.'

names on the *Lupanar* wall graffiti (VII 12, 18.20) could also be significant in this respect.⁴⁷ Even if Pompeian material culture does not point to excessive luxuries comparable to those of the *Urbs*, figures such as the *mima* Novellia Primigenia could plausibly have played there the role of a provincial elegiac mistress.⁴⁸

Another obstacle to interpreting rich toiletry sets as evidence of prostitution is indeed the scholarly tendency to consider all precious metals in archaeological contexts, *a priori*, as symbols of high social status.⁴⁹ The presence of precious metal items in modest habitations, such as the silver mirror in Casa Imperiale, thus compels us either to consider them as plundered and out of context, or to explain their presence there in other terms. Here, the aforementioned grooming scene of Plautus' *Mostellaria* could be brought to mind again: in this passage, the courtesan Philemation possesses and uses a silver mirror, a fact underlined by the advice of her elderly servant Scapha to wash her hands after holding it, lest they take on the smell of silver, referring to accepting money. Indeed, several Pompeian silver mirrors come from *hospitia* and modest private houses.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ According to Varone (2003, 202; 2005, 95), a remarkably high percentage (20.7%) of female names mentioned in the graffiti of Lupanare Grande are *gentilicia* (Ilia, Aplonia, Fabia, Cadia, Rusatia and Anaedia). The high number of individuals, most probably female, who have written graffiti praising male sexual performances, of the type '*Felix bene futues*' (CIL IV 2176), has been noted by Varone (2003, 207–9). Varone suggests such texts might have been written by women of free status, involved with men who prostituted themselves, but a more plausible explanation could be that they were prostitutes or courtesans of free status, but without a proper house.

⁴⁸ For Novellia Primigenia, see Della Corte 1958, 83–113, and Varone 2000a:1091 no. 60, Varone 2003–2004: 87 and 96–97 n. 19. CIL IV 8260, 8274, 8301, 10241, 10244.

⁴⁹ d'Ambrosio notes that the scarce general quantity of jewellery found in the Vesuvian cities suggests that they were seen as exclusively elite possessions, "prerogativa solo del ceto elevato" (1997, 21). For example, Guzzo – Scarano Ussani 2000, 85 refer to prostitutes wearing substitutes for valuable elite jewellery.

⁵⁰ Looking only at the distribution of Pompeian silver mirrors, of the ten examples in my material, only three actually came from large houses: two from the house of Menander and one from the house of Fabius Rufus, although both were accompanied by very few other toiletry items. Of the remaining seven silver mirrors, four come from modest *atrium* houses and three from houses traditionally called *hospitia*. In the so called *stabulum* and *hospitium* of Equitius and Tegeticula (I 14, 13) in total two silver mirrors and three bronze ones were found. This is a large architectonic complex with a very irregular plan, including a *thermopolium*, several *triclinia* and *cubicula* scattered amidst stables

A significant parallel for the connection between precious metals and prostitution as an archaeological problem is offered by the golden bracelet with the inscription *domnus ancillae suae* found in Murecine in 2000, raising the question of how an *ancilla*, i.e. a slave, and, as Guzzo and Vincenzo Scarano Ussani have plausibly proposed, a prostitute, could own a golden *parure*.⁵¹

A third example of a similar problem connecting luxury toiletry items with brothels are the *pyxis* jars that constituted the starting point of this paper. These could certainly be luxury objects when fabricated in fused bronze and decorated with elaborate bands of relief, like the one found among the toiletries of the House of L. Aurunculeius Secundio. As these objects are quite rare among Pompeian finds, it may be significant that the closest parallel to this jar, even more elaborate and therefore frequently illustrated in exhibition catalogues, was found in the House of Mestrius Maximus (I 9, 12), together

and garden areas, situated near the amphitheater.

⁵¹ For the bracelet in general, see Guzzo – Scarano Ussani 2001, 982–86, fig. 1a–c, 2a–c. For the condition of the woman who wore it, as a slave, a *copa*, a prostitute or a *lena* (*id.* 989–92). The scholars claim that the other jewels that the woman hoarded in a purse, including gold bracelets and long chains, together with the place of discovery, a river port inn, might suggest she was involved in prostitution (see also *id.* 993; Scarano Ussani 2005, 88, n. 12). Particularly significant would be the inclusion in the purse of the long gold chains worn on the nude body, in iconography typical of Venus, Eros and prostitutes (Guzzo – Scarano Ussani 2001, 993; Scarano Ussani 2005, 88–100, fig. 24–39). Guzzo and Scarano Ussani resolve the legal dilemma of the possession, at Murecine, of gold jewellery by a slave by considering them as *peculium*, remaining ultimately in the possession of the *dominus* (2001; 2005, 104). Contra Costabile (2005, 49 *et passim*), prefers to interpret the role of the woman as a beloved of slave status rather than a prostitute, possibly consequently manumitted by the patron. Also in this case, I am inclined to interpret the status of the woman as freed, a courtesan rather than a *lupa*, and thus proprietor of the jewels, even though not renouncing her earlier role as *ancilla* (significantly not *serva*) after the manumission. If the less juridical reading of *ancilla sua* is accepted, this could indeed be a gift received upon obtaining freedom and actual possession of the jewels could thus be legitimate. *Ancilla* could, as a pet name, also refer to a state of moral dependency that continued even after manumission. In the famous funerary inscription of a probable courtesan Allia Potestas (*CIL* VI 37965, *CLE* 1988), set up by her former patron and lover, who placately commemorates also her other two lovers, she is lovingly praised for her domestic virtues, bodily beauty and, significantly, for "never having considered herself as free", *numquam sibi libera visa* (v. 16). Furthermore, her patron allegedly wore a gold item with her name inscribed upon it (v. 40–41): *auro tuum nomen fert ille refertque lacerto, / qua retinere potest auro collata Potestas*.

with a mirror and *alabastron*;⁵² both houses have traditionally been labelled *lupanaria*.

Conclusions

Jewellery and toiletries in precious metals found in archaeological contexts have mostly been read as indicators of elite status. From literary sources we know, however, of courtesans wearing and owning gold jewellery, and owning silver mirrors and houses. Examining the Pompeian artifact assemblages, it is evident that mirrors and toiletries are found in all types of houses in Pompeii, but the highest concentrations of them, including rare and precious objects, are to be found in modest *atrium* houses and taverns. I propose that there are good grounds to identify many of these houses, with anomalously rich toiletries and bronze vessels for ablutions, as places where commercial activities including eating, drinking, and banquets with prostitutes or courtesans took place. Among the possible candidates for such establishments are the *thermopolium/lupanar* of L. Aurunculeius Secundio VI 16, 32.33, *Hospitium* VI 15, 23, and the private house Casa Imperiale I 11, 17, examined in this paper as case studies. I propose, as a hypothesis to be examined in further research, to include rich collections of toiletry items, in particular cosmetic sets, as further indicators of prostitution in Pompeii.

Scholars studying Roman female dress and grooming have often supposed that moralistic rules on appearance were, in reality, largely ignored, and that, in the Imperial era, lavish adornment and make-up would have been a valid status symbol also for well-to-do matrons. This is undoubtedly true for the elaborate hairdo, a status symbol *sine qua non*, and some pieces of costly gold jewellery. As for the cosmetics, the analysis of Pompeian finds strongly suggests that the ownership of abundant cosmetic instruments, such as large collections of *unguentaria* and *pyxides*, was not a proper status symbol for elite women. The image of the Pompeian matron could thus have been a step closer to the austere Roman moralistic and rhetorical ideals than earlier presumed.⁵³

⁵² *Pyxis*, inv. 10025; *alabastron*, inv. 10036. For the house, Berg 2010a, 193–94.

⁵³ My thanks go to the Soprintendenza archeologica di Napoli e Pompei for the permission to study the materials and the excavation documentation, to dr. Grete Stefani and to dr. Antonio Varone for

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