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The Representations of the Capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*) and the Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) in Romano-Campanian Wall Paintings and Mosaics

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Birds seem to have interested man throughout history. Such a statement is a commonplace, but this does not make it any less true. The reasons and explanations for this particular interest are many and have changed with men and times, but the abundance of avifauna in nature and their characteristic ability to fly seem to be the basic reasons at least for the permanent decorative value of birds.

In Romano-Campanian wall paintings, too, birds are the most abundant and prominent group of animal subjects, as well as being standard motifs in most Romano-Campanian wall paintings in general. In this respect it is not entirely anachronistic that even today it is very often precisely the birds that are chosen as some kind of emblems or "advertisements" of Romano-Campanian wall paintings: A Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) from the garden paintings in the so-called Auditorio di Mecenate was chosen as the "cover-bird" for the catalogue of the exhibition "L'archeologia in Roma capitale tra sterro e scavo" in 1983, and a Little egret (*Egretta garzetta*) from the paintings in the Casa

del Menandro decorates the cover of the first volume of the "Rivista di Studi Pompeiani" published in 1987.[1]

Usually the birds in Romano-Campanian wall paintings are not as easily identifiable as these two. The birds may be intentionally fantastic ones, or free variations of certain models or combinations and/or confusions of several species. Without going into detail we can say that to be able to estimate the significance of various details as distinguishing marks (or not as such), a systematic study of a great number of bird motifs is necessary. This is clearly shown e.g. by the representations discussed in two articles published in two earlier volumes of the present journal (Arctos 19 [1985] and 20 [1986]), which emerge from my work on a comprehensive study of bird motifs in Romano-Campanian wall paintings. The comparison material has to be as large as possible because in some cases the "key" to identification and/or interpretations may be found in one or two representations only.

On the other hand, abundant comparisons and knowledge of many bird representations may in some cases misleadingly predetermine the way a given bird motif is seen. Being aware of this risk I used a lecture at the meeting of the ornithological society Tringa (Helsinki, 6.4.1989) to test some of my identification proposals against those made by several trained

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[1] The Rivista di Studi Pompeiani is reviewed elsewhere in this volume. On this occasion reference must also be made to the poster of the exhibition of the material from the Tomba François in 1987, which shows the detail of the augurial Swallow from the well-known paintings of that tomb. There is no doubt of the ornithological identification of this specimen, nor of its augurial character, which on the other hand does not justify its identification as a woodpecker as suggested by F. Coarelli, Le Pitture della Tomba François a Vulci: una proposta di lettura, in: Ricerche della pittura ellenistica (Quaderni dei Dialoghi di archeologia, vol. 1), Roma 1985, 56-57 (fig. 10), who wants to see here the *picus martius* because it was an important augurial and mythological bird.

ornithologists who had not previously seen or been acquainted with birds in Romano-Campanian wall paintings. This identification test gave interesting, and in some cases surprisingly varying results which I hope to be able to publish in my forthcoming Phd. dissertation.

In the following, I discuss one illustrative case which led to the identification of the Capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*) in a Pompeian wall painting, which further supports the identification of another representation in a Pompeian mosaic as this species. As far as I am aware, these two cases are the only known representations of the Capercaillie in ancient art.

The bird in question is among the several birds which enliven the garden scene to the right of the famous megalography which has given the modern name to the Casa di Adone ferito (VI 7,18).[2] (See fig. 1 at the end of this article). The north wall of the viridarium (room no. 14) is divided into three panels by two painted red Ionic columns in front of which there are painted statues of Chiron teaching Achilles.[3] The megalography in the central panel shows the wounded Adonis being cured by amorines

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[2] I. Bragantini & al., Pitture e pavimenti di Pompei II (PPP), Roma 1983, 150-153 with further references, of which particularly valuable is W. Jashemski, The Gardens of Pompeii, Herculaneum and the Villas Destroyed by Vesuvius, New York 1979, 66-67 and 83 giving a colour photograph (fig. 107). This photograph unfortunately shows only the central detail of the right panel.

[3] According to E. Moormann, La pittura parietale romana come fonte di conoscenza per la scultura antica, Assen Maastricht 1988, 170 (Cat.n. 198f.) the two statues though slightly different both represent a variant or copy of the statue of Chiron teaching Achilleus known from Pliny to have been exposed in the Saepta in Rome. This statue is known only from this and another Fourth Style wall painting from the so-called Basilica from Herculaneum (ibid. 102-103 cat.n. 019). In the latter Achilleus and Chiron are represented as "living" figures whereas in the Casa di Adone ferito they are clearly shown as statues. Moormann suggests the left one to be closer to the original which was probably from the 2nd c. BC. (Ibid. 46 and 69).

and Aphrodite.[4] Of the garden painting in the left panel only minor traces of plants are preserved.[5] This is most unfortunate, since we can assume it to have been as spectacular as the garden painting in the right panel.

In fact, the whole decoration of the viridarium can be regarded as spectacular, though the house is relatively modest in size. This holds true for the composition as a whole, i.e. garden paintings on both sides of a large megalography with a mythological subject, which seems to have been relatively rare and presumably also somewhat exclusive. Among the numerous garden paintings in Pompeii such a combination is preserved in only two or three houses. The best known is the Orpheus with animals flanked by two garden panels in the Third Style wall paintings which have given the modern name to the so-called Casa di M. Vesonius Primus o di Orfeo (VI 14,20).[6] Orpheus with animals combined with garden paintings is also reported to have figured in the Fourth Style wall paintings which were in the Casa di Stallius Eros (I 6,13), but not enough is preserved to allow us to interpret these paintings.[7] Better preserved are the Fourth Style paintings in the peristyle garden in the so-called Casa della Venere in Conchiglia (II 3,3), where between the garden panels in the rear wall there is the famous scene with Venus in a shell.[8]

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[4] According to Jashemski 66 the Adonis is "today only faintly visible and known chiefly from the excavation report published in 1838." In reality the painting is surprisingly well preserved even today and its high quality is revealed also by some older photographs, see PPP II 152 for further reference.

[5] Jashemski 67 "could make out faint traces of oleanders with red blossoms and other barely visible plants painted against blue sky."

[6] PPP II 278-280 with further references.

[7] PPP I 39 with further references.

[8] PPP I 222-224 with further references.

The preserved garden scene in the Casa di Adone ferito is in most respects similar to garden paintings "in general", but shows some rare details, which support the suggestion of its exclusive character. One is the sleeping figure at the edge of a semi-circular rocky pool, which forms the central subject in the scene dominated by the dense vegetation – mainly Oleander and some Madonna lilies in flower – enlivened by a dozen birds. The young male figure has from Helbig onwards usually been identified as a Satyr. This is in deed the most likely alternative if the figure is leaning with its left hand against a skin as stated in earlier descriptions of the painting. In the present state of preservation this cannot be ascertained, though near the right hand there are remains which probably represent the mouth of such a skin. Because such skins are typical of representations of Satyrs, this identification is to be preferred to that of the Eros suggested recently by Moormann.[9] Should it be a skin it would be a further support for the identification of the figure as a fountain statue, though the colours and the very lively represented posture suggest that the painter might have intended the figure to represent a "living" one. Be the figure represented a statue or a "living" Satyr/Eros, in either case it is an exceptional one in Romano-Campanian wall paintings.[10] Though there are many

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[9] Moormann 170 cat.n. 198f. gives also a bibliography of earlier studies, but surprisingly enough does not even mention the possible skin which, used by an Eros would be unusual, see also B. Kapossy, Brunnenfiguren der hellenistischen und römischen Zeit, Diss. Bern 1969, 30-38 for statues of Satyrs (sleeping ones 33-34) and ibid. 40 for statues of sleeping Eros. Jashemski 67 mentions a wineskin, but the figure's right hand is not exactly clutching the skin as she states.

[10] Just as in real gardens, statues are frequently found in Romano-Campanian garden paintings. Usually the painted statues seem to be made of white marble, but also polychrome ones are known. It is noteworthy that the distinction between statues and "living" figures is not always clear in wall paintings (as shown by figures on bases represented like "living" ones). For statues in garden paintings, see Moormann 40-48, and for

garden paintings with birds on the brim of a fountain, like the two white Domestic pigeons here, such a pool is found only rarely; the lower part of it is destroyed.[11] Another fairly uncommon detail attesting the high quality is the twisted marble candelabrum on the top of which there is, over the vegetation, a pinax showing a goat being attacked by a feline (most likely a leopard).[12] In addition to the two Pigeons at the pool, among the vegetation there are ten birds, the identifications of which are given in the text for fig. 1.[13]

The majority of the avifauna are those occurring in numerous other garden paintings – doves, warblers and thrushes being standard species. The Purple gallinule is also known in some

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statues of Eros and Satyrs, ibid. 53-55. Polychromy and choosing of materials is discussed by Moormann 71-75. In my opinion the colour of the Satyr(/Eros) in the Casa di Adone ferito is brown instead of white as stated by Moormann 170 (cat.n. 198f.). It is, however, a different brown from the colour used for the clearly "living" figures in the central panel, resembling the colour of the nearby statue of Chiron (whereas the figure of Achilleus being taught by Chiron is white). "Living" human figures (including mythological figures in human form) are quite exceptional in garden paintings. The only example where this is undoubtedly the case is an amorine holding a double flute and flying with a Swallow, a Domestic pigeon and a passerine in the small viridarium (no. 9) in house IX 6,8, see PPP III 496 with further references. Though clearly an Eros this winged figure is not an actual parallel for the figure in the Casa di Adone ferito. The "love-story" in the central panel in the Casa di Adone ferito, as well as the pomegranate and the Kingfisher near the feet of the figure in the garden painting – if indeed love symbols (see here n. 15) – could be interpreted as a support for Moormann's identification of the figure as an Eros.

11 The only similar one is represented in the garden painting in the Casa di Apollo (VI 7,23), see PPP II 157 and 160-161 with further references.

12 According to Moormann 170 (cat.n. 198f.) the relief in the pinax would show the fight between Eros and Pan. Moormann adds that this part of the painting is now almost illegible, but at least in 1984 the feline and the goat could be distinguished without any difficulty.

13 Jashemski's 67 description and identifications are in this case surprisingly inaccurate, cf. here notes 4 and 16.

other garden paintings, though it is clearly less common.[14] Unusual in this particular specimen is the posture in which the bird is very skilfully represented, seen from above and almost frontally. Several exceptionally accurate details in the execution of the other birds confirm the talents and ambitions of this painter. Work of this quality also seems to imply a keen observation of real birds. Such observation was not necessarily done by this particular painter himself, but even the choice of such peculiar models justifies his (or perhaps her?) characterization as an "ornithologically orientated" painter.

This also explains the presence of two species which are so far unique in garden paintings. One is the tiny but prominently represented Kingfisher at the foot of the pomegranate near the feet of the Satyr (/Eros). This has been discussed together with other representations of the species in an earlier article,[15] where

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[14] One Purple gallinule is represented among the numerous birds in the garden paintings from Livia's villa at Prima Porta, see M.M. Gabriel, Livia's Garden Room at Prima Porta, New York 1955, 53 n. 69 Pl. 34 erroneously identified as a dove species. In Pompeii a Purple gallinule is found in garden paintings in the summer-triclinium near the Palaestra (II 9,7), see PPP I 243-244 with further references, in the viridarium (h) of the Casa dei Ceii (I 6,15), and in the fragments of garden paintings probably from house VI 17,42. In 1984 I saw but had, however, no chance to study these fragments at that time under restoration. They seem very similar to those from the oecus from VI 17,42 recently restored, see PPP III 17-18 and Riv.Stud.Pomp. 2 (1988) 148-153 figs. 9-10.

[15] A. Tammisto, Arctos 19 (1985) 218-242. For the painting in the Casa di Adone ferito, see ibid. 240-241. A supplementary remark also has to be made about the Kingfisher, of which I stated in n. 67 that: "there is no need to see in it any allusion to "Gattenliebe und liebender Klage" referring to the famous megalography (in the panel to the left) with Aphrodite and the wounded Adonis cured by amorines." I had, however, not noticed that on the rock above Adonis' shoulder there are some fruit which according to F.P.M. Francissen are "a quince and pomegranates, the attributes of Venus, the goddess of love and nature." Id., Riv.Stud.Pomp. 1 (1987) 114 fig. 5 (see also here fig. 1). Thus the pomegranate with the nearby

I proposed that the other exceptional bird to the right of the head of the Satyr (/Eros) most likely represents a Pheasant (see fig. 2 at the end of this article).[16]

The blue colour and the slim habitus with a fairly long neck seemed to be features deriving from the Peacock frequently represented in garden paintings. The long slim tail (top destroyed), however, clearly excluded the Peacock suggesting instead the Pheasant. Also the dark neck feathers, the light prominent bill, and particularly the red area around the eye could be interpreted as features of the latter species. Thus it seemed that the painter had aimed to represent a male Pheasant from memory, but being uncertain about the details he "borrowed" some features of the Peacock, the best known fowl at least in wall paintings. This explanation seemed the most likely one, as such confusion often occurs in wall paintings.[17]

The possibility of a Capercaillie seemed entirely unlikely as I could not recall any representations of this species; moreover, it is an inhabitant of remote woodlands (mainly coniferous), in southern Europe in hills and mountains. The specimen in the

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Kingfisher in the garden scene may suggest that this rare and particularly beautiful bird could also perhaps be a sophisticated love symbol.

16 Tammisto, Arctos 19 (1985) 240-241 n. 67. Also in PPP II 153 the bird is called a "faggiano". Jashemski usually attempts to be accurate in the identification of flowers and birds using specialists when needed. It is thus surprising that in the description of the garden paintings in Casa di Adone ferito she states inaccurately and erroneously – perhaps based on hasty field notes(?): " A large white bird drank from the pool. Two peacocks could be made out at the right of the painting, and a marble *pinax*, perhaps two, farther back in the garden, and there were many birds throughout the garden."

17 I refer here only to two birds in the paintings in ala (F) in the Casa dell'Ara massima (VI 16,15), see PPP II 358. The distinctive white peckles are a characteristic of the Guineafowl (*Numida meleagris*) but the other colours and the habitus of the birds are clearly those of a Purple gallinule.

painting in question was shown together with the Purple gallinule among the representations in the above-mentioned identification test in which answers were received from 21 members of the ornithological society Tringa. The slide was shown for c. 30 seconds for identification proposals which varied as follows:

Capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*)	7
Peacock (*Pavo cristatus*)	2
Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*)	2
Black francolin (*Francolinus francolinus*)	1
Galliformes sp.	1
Total 13 proposals	

Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)	6
Purple gallinule (*Porphyrio porphyrio*)	3
Rail species (*Rallidae sp.*)	1
Total 10 proposals	

The fact that over half the answers proposed a Capercaillie led me to reconsider this possibility. Even if the tail is somewhat too slim for this species, a closer examination of the colours of its uppertail coverts showed that the representation corresponds better to the colours of the Capercaillie than to those of the Pheasant. The bluish-grey (somewhat greenishinshade) of the body is lighter than the dark grey of the male Capercaillie, thus resembling the colour of the Peacock, but together with the brown wings and back they correspond best to the Capercaillie. Noteworthy is the fact that the neck is dark, most likely aiming to represent the bird with erected hackles. The emphatically large bill also more likely refers to the Capercaillie than to the Pheasant. The Capercaillie also has red above its eye, though this detail in the painting remains more pheasant-like. The right leg is not clearly visible, but the left one seems to show that the feet

were also represented as feathered. If so, the representing of this distinctive detail would be remarkable evidence for an accurate autopsy.

Instead of the somewhat arbitrary suggestions of a combination/confusion of a Pheasant and Peacock, the bird must thus be a male Capercaillie. The colours and the feet, if indeed feathered, show that someone had closely observed the species. As stated above, however, this someone need not have been the painter himself. In fact, inaccuracies such as the pheasant-like slim tail and habitus with the red colour around the eye suggest that the painter himself had not seen the actual bird but worked from a model giving the essential characteristics only.

This model may also have been merely a verbal description. In addition to being a rarity attesting the ornithological knowledge of the painter and representing wild and remote nature the bird may be a specific wish by the commissioner, so impressed by the curious bird that he/she wished to have it in the garden scenes decorating his/her own viridarium. Among the paintings of this house there is also another detail supporting the suggestion that this (these) painter(s) based their work on keen observations of animals and had – or their commissioner had – high ambitions in choosing individual, or at least rare subjects. There is a still life on the north wall of the east portico of the peristylium (no. 13) representing an ordinary looking, but very well depicted dog. What the object(s?) to the right of it was (were), cannot be judged with certainty. The dog has several parallels in the numerous *cave canem*-like representations, but this kind of still life is, as far as I know, without parallel. Whether or not this subject has some symbolic content, other than a genre scene, has at present to be left for further studies.[18]

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[18] J.-M. Croisille, Les natures mortes campaniennes (Coll. Latomus vol. 76), Bruxelles 1965, 84 n. 2168, Pl. LXXXIII n. 162: "Chienne tournée vers la droite; plat posé sur un bloc. Helbig: *Scabellum* et 2 flutes(?)."

The rarity of certain subjects and species is, as we know, largely bound to the "Pompeian scale". With this reservation we may note that rarely represented birds are usually found in paintings of better quality. High quality in wall paintings does not, however, imply abundant use of bird motifs. Moreover, also among paintings with numerous bird motifs we can distinguish rare subjects which seem to imply a particular interest in bird motifs; we have described these painters as "ornithologically orientated". It is not surprising that the most outstanding examples are found among garden paintings in which the avifauna is particularly prominent. Without going into detail, we refer here only to the most monumental and best known example from Livia's villa at Prima Porta (now in the Muzeo Nazionale di Roma), and to the Pompeian garden paintings in the Casa dei cubicoli floreali (I 9,5) and in house VII 17,42. The two latter ones are by the same or a filial workshop, and they may be related to the above-mentioned decoration in the Casa di Orfeo.[19]

In addition to the garden painting in the Casa di Adone ferito discussed above, particularly interesting are those in the triclinium-nymphaeum in the Casa del Centenario (IX 8,3), which show unusually many species of fowl including such a rarity as the Guineafowl. There is also a Domestic cock (*Gallus gallinaceus*), which is otherwise very common, but very rare in garden paintings.[20] The faunistic ambitions of these painters are

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[19] For Livia's villa see Gabriel; for the houses in Pompeii see PPP I 94-102; PPP II 279-280; PPP III 17 (all with further references).

[20] For the viridarium (n. 33) in the Casa del Centenario see PPP III, 525-528 with further references. The Guineafowl in Romano-Campanian wall paintings can be identified with certainty in only three other cases: Casa dei Vettii (VI 15,1) atrium (c); fragment from Campania now in the Museo Nazionale di Napoli, inv. 9624; paintings from the Colombario di Villa Doria Pamphilij now in the Museo Nazionale di Roma. In five cases the Guineafowl is probably meant, but is not to be distinguished from either the Peacock or the Purple Gallinule. The only cock in a context related to

also shown by the animal hunts and the fish- and river-scenes in this room, and by the exceptionally abundant avifauna among the slender garlands in room no. 11 of the house, including the rarely represented Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*).[21]

Such "ornithologically orientated" painters evidently used pattern books with numerous bird subjects most likely deriving from illustrations of zoological works. Further evidence of such pattern books are the paintings from the Colombario di Villa Doria Pamphilij (now in the Museo Nazionale di Roma), with numerous still lifes among the loculi. The still lifes are dominated by various birds, including such rarely represented species as the Pelican (*Pelecanus sp.*), Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*), Guineafowl, Kingfisher and Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*). Together with the numerous Egyptian subjects in the paintings these argue for the Alexandrian origin of the models.[22] It has been suggested that scientific illustrations from the *Mouseion* in Alexandria served as models for earlier Nile- and fish-mosaics.[23]

Though figurative subjects in Pompeian mosaic pavements were largely replaced by mostly black-and-white geometric patterns during the time of the Second Style, there is one exception with numerous birds most likely deriving from pattern books as suggested above. This is the floor mosaic – usually dated the Third Style – in the atrium of the so-called Casa di Paquius Proculus o di Cuspius Pansa (I 7,1), which is divided into 50 squares. Except for one square in the centre of each side of the

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garden paintings is among the bushes decorating the plutea in the peristyle of Casa del Menandro (I 10,4), not mentioned in PPP I 113-115.

[21] The only other Flamingo in Romano-Campanian wall paintings known to me is near the feet of the Orpheus in the above-mentioned painting in the Casa di Orfeo.

[22] Tammisto Arctos 19 (1985) 234-237 with further references (notes 56-59). See also Z. Kadar, Survivals of Greek zoological illuminations in Byzantine Manuscripts, Budapest 1978, 84-90 and 113ff.

[23] P.G.P. Meyboom, MNIR 39 (1977) 51ff.

impluvium, each square shows a bird in white on a black background. Thirty-eight birds are preserved.[24] Most of them cannot be identified more closely because of the restriction to black and white and because of the clumsy execution. Thus the diversity – all 38 seem to represent different species – at first seems a result of rather occasional variation.[25] As such I also interpreted the features of the bird shown in fig. 3 at the end of this article. The identification of the Capercaillie in the wall painting discussed above led me to reconsider the identification of this bird too, and I now suggest that it is most likely representing this species. Most distinctive is the tail, which is in the characteristic courtship display. The overemphasized curved bill very likely aims to underline its large size. The legs are destroyed, and it cannot be ascertained whether there was also a crest or some tuft on the head. Some reservations also remain on account of the evident restoration of the mosaic. Because nothing can be said about the colours, we cannot completely exclude the possibility of a male Great bustard (*Otis tarda*), which also may hold its tail in a similar posture. The possible tuft would, moreover, point to the latter species.

The suggestion that here too the intention was to represent a Capercaillie is supported by the fact that apart from the clumsy execution in black-and-white of this mosaic, some of the birds can be identified as other distinctive species which are also rarely represented. In addition to the common Peacocks and a Ring-necked parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) and a sacred ibis (*Threskiornis aethiopicus*), there is a Guineafowl and a Crane

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[24] PPP I 45-47 with further references. Symmetrically on both sides of the impluvium the space of two squares is occupied by a rhomb in which there is a polychrome Peacock. Green and red tessellae are also used in the figure of a Ring-necked parakeet.

[25] Tammisto, Arctos 19 (1985) 235 note 54. The identification of the Kingfisher was there left uncertain.

(*Grus grus*), the latter being the only one known to me in Romano-Campanian wall paintings and mosaics. The bird very likely representing a Kingfisher is another rarity, as is one which because of its emphasized "horns" most likely shows the Pheasant. In the light of these examples it seems that the unidentifiability of the other birds represented in this mosaic – most of which resemble passerines – is due to the clumsy execution and the black-and-white technique rather than free variation. It is plausible to assume that these mosaicists relied on polychrome pattern books, but that perhaps for economic reasons they had to execute their own work in the black-and-white technique.

On the basis of what we know of the Capercaillie and related species in ancient sources – literary as well as visual – it is improbable that there would have been a picture of it in Hellenistic scientific literature.[26] The above representations of the Capercaillie most likely derive – even if not directly – from observations of specimens kept in Roman aviaria. Here it must be underlined that the two representations do not seem to be based on a common source, at least judging by the fact that the bird in the wall painting is not shown in courtship display, as the one in the mosaic is. We now also have visual evidence confirming that the Capercaillie was known – though not very widely – to the ancient Romans, as attested by the literary sources to be discussed below.

We concentrate here on Pliny the Elder, who once again is not only the main source but actually the only one in which the Capercaillie can reliably be identified.[27] Under the name *tetrao*

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[26] Kadar 77-90 and 113ff. for the illustrations; for the literary sources see below.

[27] Plin. nat. 10,56-57. For the Greek literary sources see the discussion about the identification of the bird tetrax by Sir D'Archy Wentworth Thompson, A Glossary of Greek Birds, 1936 (2nd ed.), 282-283; see also

Pliny describes two species.[28] "...its gloss and its absolute blackness, with a touch of bright scarlet above the eyes" are clearly features pointing to the male Black grouse (*Lyrurus tetrix*), though the characteristic lyre-shaped tail is not mentioned. Consequently the other species (Pliny uses the word *genus*) which is mentioned to be larger than the vulture must refer to the male Capercaillie.[29] The observation of the bird's great weight is developed into a sort of *mirabilium* typical of Pliny with the statement that the bird can grow to "such a size that it is actually caught motionless on the ground."[30] In reality the Capercaillie is a rapid flyer, its noisy "take off" being a particularly characteristic and impressive feature.

There is no direct reference to the remarkable communal display habits of either species. However, Capponi may be wright in suggesting that Pliny's story of the Capercaillie caught motionless on the ground goes back to an observation of the

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J. Pollard, Birds in Greek Life and Myth, 1977, 22. For the Latin literary sources on the identification of birds called *tetrao*(*n*?) see F. Capponi, Ornithologia latina, Genova 1979, 483-484; see also ibid., 484-485 s.v. *tetrax*. See also V. Hehn, Kulturpflanzen und Haustiere, 1963 (reprint of the 8th ed. by O. Schrader 1911), 367-369, and O. Keller, Die Antike Tierwelt II, Leipzig 1911, 165; also a brief discussion by J.M.C. Toynbee, Animals in Roman Life and Art, 1973, 256 and by W. Richter, KP I, 730 s.v. "Auerhahn".

28 Plin. nat. 10,56-57 (following the Tusculum-edition 1986): *decet tetraonas suus nitor absolutaque nigritia, in superciliis cocci rubor. alterum eorum genus vulturum magnitudinem excedit quorum et colorem reddit, nec ulla ales, excepto struthocamelo, maius corpore inplens pondus, in tantum aucta ut in terra quoque inmobilis prehendatur. gignunt eos Alpes et septentrionalis regio. in vivariis saporem perdunt. moriuntur contumacia spiritu revocato.*

29 Translation cited from the Loeb-edition by H. Rackham (1967). See also F. Capponi, Latomus 21 (1962) 591-592.

30 Ibid. For "*mirabilia*", see M. Vegetti, Zoologia e antropologia in Plinio, in: Plinio il vecchio sotto il profilo storico e letterario, Como 1982, 117-131, particularly 119.

courtship display of the species. In the mating season, the cocks are very aggressive and may even attack men. In such cases, as well as during the ecstatic stage of the displays, the cocks may be an easy prey.[31] Very likely such occasions have indeed been used, if we can trust Pliny's comment that these birds were kept in aviaria. There were evident difficulties in so doing as can be judged from Pliny's statement that in aviaria "they lose their flavour, and obstinately hold their breath till they die."[32]

The representations of a Capercaillie as such are not evidence of the presence of the species in ancient Central or Southern Italy, particularly as Plin. nat. 10,56 states the *tetraonas* to be inhabitants of the Alps and northern regions. This well characterizes the distribution of the Capercaillie (as well as that of the Black grouse for that matter) in present-day Italy. The Capercaillie has, however, been said to have occurred in Central Italy until the 19th century.[33] Remote woods in mountainous areas would also be a potential habitat further south on the peninsula, e.g. in Apulia. This agrees with the suggestion that in ancient Italy the area of distribution of the Capercaillie was larger. If so, then perhaps its shyness and elusiveness influenced its characterization as a northern species. Without underestimating these observers, we may say that their knowledge of

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[31] Capponi, Ornithologia 483. Among the 94 species of birds which have been attested in finds from Roman Britain the Black grouse is found, but the identification of Capercaillie remains uncertain. At any rate it was not common game in Roman Britain. See, A.J. Parker, Oxford Journal of Archaeology 7 (1988) 197-226, especially 214.

[32] According to F. Capponi, Le fonti del X libro della "Naturalis Historia" di Plinio, Genova 1985, 295 n. 63 this statement might derive from a (vanished) work by Varro. See also Capponi, Ornithologia 483-484.

[33] So Keller II 165-166 referring to Bechstein. As early as in Keller's time the Capercaillie was found in Italy in southern Tyrol only, like today; see also P. Brichetti, Atlante ornitologico italiano I, Brescia 1976, 159-160.

the distribution and provenience of animals was open to errors from many sources.

Capponi has rightly observed that the passage where Pliny treats the *tetraonas* together with the preceding *chenerotes* and the following *otidas* (Plin. nat. 10,56-57) has little in common with the themes of the preceding or following chapters (Plin. nat. 10,51-55 on geese and 10,58-60 on the cranes). Capponi suggests that the passage 10,56-57 was placed here as it provides further examples of large birds belonging to the group called *alites* in Plin. nat. 10,43.[34] According to Capponi, the statements about the economic and culinaristic value of the *chenerotes*, *tetraonas* and *otidas* in Plin. nat. 10,56-57, with information about their habitat, provenience and distribution, are taken from the same source as similar observations in Plin. nat. 10,132-135 discussing rare birds and their use (e.g. at table).[35] The information about the *tetraonas* in particular seems to fit Plin. nat. 10,133-134, where e.g. the *lagopus* (Ptarmigan, *Lagopus mutus*) is mentioned as a hare-footed alpine bird, which is tasty but difficult to keep "as it does not grow tame in habits and very quickly loses flesh."[36] Capponi suggests that the source for this digression on Alpine species is a *Corografia*, of which no more is known; but the gastronomic information may also be based on a lost work by Varro.[37]

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[34] Capponi, Le fonti 295 n. 64. Plin. nat. 10,43: *Nunc de secundo genere dicamus, quod in duas dividitur species: oscines et alites: illarum generi cantus oris, his magnitudo differentiam dedit.*

[35] Capponi Le fonti, 295-297. For the identifications of the other birds see under the respective names Capponi, Ornithologia.

[36] Capponi, Le fonti 295-296. Translation cited from the Loeb-edition by H. Rackham, who erroneously translates *lagopus* as the Willow Grouse (*Lagopus lagopus*) instead of the Ptarmigan as Capponi, Ornithologia 311-312 rightly identifies it.

[37] Capponi, Le fonti 295-296 n. 63; L. Bodson, Aspects of Pliny's Zoology, in: R. French & R. Greenaway (eds.), Science in the Early Roman Empire: Pliny the Elder, his sources and Influence, London -

Varro is an important, though not the only source about Roman aviaria kept both for display and for profit, particularly from the early 1st c. BC. onwards. The Romans adapted and significantly developed the keeping and eating of tasty fowl and other birds, also as part of the luxurious life, as it was known and/or imagined, of the ruling class of the Hellenistic world.[38] Thus it is no wonder that particularly exotic fowl – Peacock, Pheasant and Guineafowl above all – appear in literary sources as emblematic of the *Tafelluxus* and of the luxurious life-style in general.[39]

This is also attested by the highly illustrative extravagance which Suet. Cal. 22,3 reports in regard of the cult which Caligula is said to have introduced for his own *numen*. His *aureum iconicum* was dressed each day in clothing corresponding to that the Emperor was using, and for each day of the week a different species of sacrificial bird was reserved which Suetonius characterizes as *excogitissimas hostias*, listing them as follows: "*Hostiae erant phoenicopteri, pavones, tetraones, numidicae,*

Sydney 1986, 102-105 considers the treatment of Alpine fauna as "...an example of Pliny's original contribution to the description of the palearctic fauna...". According to Bodson, Pliny's "...statements about the ibex, marmot, mountain hare, ptarmigan, capercaillie and black grouse are so accurately and vividly written that they sound like eyewitness reports, supported by personal and careful observation in the field." Bodson refers to Steier's suggestion that Pliny may have made personal observations while on military duty from about 46 to 53/54 or 57/58 AD. Bodson also states that this was probably supplemented by "...further information collected in Rome, where several of these species were imported either for the circus parades and games, or for the aviaries, or as delicacies for some imperial banquet."

38 For Varro's aviarium see G. Fuchs, RM 69 (1962) 96-105; see also F. Coarelli, Architettura sacra e architettura privata nella tarda Repubblica, in: Collection de l'École française de Rome 66 (1983) 191-217, particularly 206-215.

39 Chr.W. Hünemörder, "Phasianus", Studien zur Kulturgesichte des Fasans, Diss. Bonn 1977, 45-48, 52-63, 245-250.

meleagrides, phasianae, quae generatim per singulos dies immolarentur." This was evidently expensive for the priests responsible for the costs, but the more exclusive the sacrifice, the better the chances to remain one of the Emperor's favourites – and the better also the tasty flesh of the birds![40] What species Suetonius meant by *tetraones* cannot be ascertained, but very likely the same species that Pliny described. At any rate Suetonius attests the exclusiveness of the birds, now also confirmed by the representations discussed above.

Visual evidence completes that of the literary sources not only for the Capercaillie, but also for the other birds mentioned by Suetonius, which except for the ubiquitous Peacock are only rarely represented in Romano-Campanian wall paintings. As far as I am aware, the Flamingo is known in only two Pompeian paintings.[41] Similarly the Guineafowl is identifiable with certainty in only two Pompeian paintings and in two other Romano-Campanian paintings.[42]

The Pheasant, too is very rare, particularly as the supposed representation discussed here more likely denotes the Capercaillie after all. As already stated, the only Pheasant so far identifiable with certainty in Romano-Campanian wall paintings is in the Second Style wall paintings in room no. 15 in the so-called Villa di Oplontis. It is represented among spectacular architecture on the podium near a gate opening to a wood in which stands a monumental tripod. Though thus sacred to Apollon, the birds in the painting seem to have no particular

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40 For the identifications of the birds mentioned by Suetonius, see Capponi, Ornithologia under respective names. Hünemörder 144-145 rightly criticizes Köberlein's erroneous reading and overinterpretation. Hünemörder does not mention that Thompson 283 earlier read the passage as "*tetraones numidicae*" (without a comma), identifying them as Guineafowl.

41 See above, n. 21.

42 See above, n. 20.

Apollonian association. Together with a blue passerine-like fantasy bird standing on the podium on the other side of the curtain, and the well-known splendid Peacocks on the curtains above, the Pheasant here rather represents exotic and luxurious fowl in general. This view is supported by the figure of a Black francolin in the paintings in room no. 23 in this villa.[43]

It is therefore all the more surprising that the Pheasant represents a female, the plumage of which is modest in comparison to the splendid male. The "horns" are a charasteristic of the male, which evidently was considered so essential that they are here "transferred" to the female.[44] Similar "horns" on one of the birds in the floor mosaic in house I 7,1 make it probable that the bird is intended to denote the Pheasant, though this cannot be concluded with certainty.[45]

Some uncertainty also remains concerning the second probable presentation of the Pheasant, which is the one in the Fourth Style wall paintings from the so-called Praedia di Iulia Felix (II 4,3), now in the Museo Nazionale di Napoli (inv. 8611 A.[46] The bird is represented as dead, lying on a shelf. To the left of the hanging head is a splendid silver kylix. Most unfortunately the picture is only partly preserved and the tail, which could confirm the identification, has vanished. Because there is no wattle and because the neck is longer than that of domestic fowl the bird very likely represents a female (or a juvenile male)

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[43] A. De Franciscis, La villa romana di Oplontis, in: Neue Forschungen in Pompeji, Recklinghausen 1975, figs. 8, 24-27.

[44] The lack of such tufts in the bird in the Casa di Adone ferito confirms that it cannot refer to the Pheasant.

[45] Some fantasy birds in Second Style paintings have similar "horns", e.g. in the oecus (n. 22) in the Casa del Criptoportico (I 6,2), see PPP I 22-25. See also the fantasy birds in the exedra n. 25 in the Casa del Menandro (I 10,4).

[46] Croisille 30 n. 11 Pl. LVI n. 107 with further references. Hünemörder 431-432 with an erroneous date to the Third Style ("um 70 n.Chr."!).

Pheasant. Such details are very likely significant in a painting of such a high quality. A Pheasant would also better than a hen underline the *Tafelluxus* of the still life. Moreover, in representations of domestic fowl there is no hen depicted like this.

With the above reservations, we stick to this identification proposed by Chr. W. Hünemörder, though the bird shown in the above-mentioned identification test was identified as follows:

Domestic fowl (*Gallus gallinaceus*)	7
Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*)	5
Galliformes sp.	1
Little bustard (*Otis tetrax*)	1

Total 14 proposals (from 21 participants)

As far as I am aware, the representations of the Pheasant discussed above are the only ones in Romano-Campanian wall paintings, and in visual sources in general representations of the Pheasant are rare if not absent until late mosaics from the end of the 2nd c. AD onwards.[47] This is all the more surprising as the species has a particular position in cultural history. This is shown by the dissertation of Chr. W. Hünemörder in which he has collected – arranged according to various topics – what literary sources from antiquity to the present day say about the Pheasant. The material aims to be comprehensive only as regards the limited ancient sources.

In addition to its splendid plumage, the Pheasant had already been praised because of its tasty flesh by Greek authors, and in Latin sources – often together with the Peacock and Guineafowl – it became an emblem for the *Tafelluxus*, especially by those criticizing the *luxuria*, as is attested from Manilius onwards. Hünemörder considers the Pheasant so central as an

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[47] Hünemörder 432-511.

emblem of this kind that he interprets its absence in Horace's Satirae as evidence that Horace did not know the bird. And as it is then mentioned by Manilius, Hünemörder thinks he can date the introduction of the bird into Italy to about 8 BC – 19 AD![48] Apart from the fact that this is an *argumentum ex silentio*, it is now also weakened by the representations discussed above. The representations alone do not imply that such birds were also introduced to Italy, but together what we know about aviaria, they support the possibility that the importing of the Pheasant most likely started at the same time as the more luxurious aviaria became popular in the 1st c. BC.[49]

The presence and popularity of both the Guineafowl and the Pheasant in the 1st c. AD in Italy is well attested in literary sources, although these species are surprisingly rare in visual sources. The dominating exotic fowl in wall paintins is the Peacock, and the Domestic fowl – mainly cocks – is also common. Other fairly numerous "standard" fowls are partridges (*Alectoris sp.*) and to a lesser extent Quails. In later mosaics – from the end of the 2nd c. AD onwards – the Pheasant is also fairly numerous, as shown by the material collected by Hünemörder. He makes no attempt, however, to explain its rarity in earlier visual sources.[50]

At present I have no better proposal than the suggestion that probably the majority of painters used cartoons and/or pattern books with well-established and popular decorations and subjects, whereas only an exceptionally active and ambitious minority of painters created more significant innovations. When exotic birds with splendid plumage were needed, most painters depicted the usual Peacocks, Parakeets and Purple gallinules.

The Purple gallinule leads us back to the above-mentioned identification test, in which the specimen in the garden scene in

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48 Hünemörder 106-107ff. and 245ff.
49 Ibid. See also above notes 36-37.
50 Hünemörder 432-511.

Casa di Adone ferito was also shown. Whereas the supposed Pheasant was subsequently taken to denote the Capercaillie, as the majority proposed, there is no need to revise the identification of the Purple gallinule, though in six of the ten proposals it was suggested to represent the Moorhen (three suggested a Purple gallinule and one a rail species). This is most likely due to the white stripe visible in the wing, which in this posture can be interpreted to denote the white colours of the Moorhen. All the other colours of this species, however, are absent. Moreover, the white stripe is not a distinguishing mark, but is used to emphasize the splendidness of the bluish-green monocoloured plumage of the Purple gallinule, as it is usually represented in wall paintings. The long red feet and strong bill – here too curved because of the stylization – are further characteristics of the Purple gallinule.

Conclusion

The two representations of the Capercaillie discussed above, which are the only ones preserved in Romano-Campanian wall paintings and mosaics, confirm the fact that even this elusive wilderness species was known – albeit as a rarity – to the ancient Romans. Presumably the species appeared in a larger area in ancient Italy than it does today, and there were also at least attempts to keep this rare species in aviaria.

The two represented specimens are both seen among many other birds, including other rarely represented species. These show that there were pattern books with numerous bird subjects, which at least some workshops could use either because of their own or their commissioner's avifaunistic interests. Though the illustrations of zoological works from the Hellenistic world, particularly Alexandria with its Mouseion, were an important

source for such pattern books, the Capercaillie is a species the representation of which most likely derives from specimens kept in Roman aviaria. We have also briefly discussed the few representations in Romano-Campanian wall paintings and mosaics that are identifiable as a Pheasant, together with related identification problems. In Latin literary sources the Pheasant is well-known as an emblem of luxuria from the 1st c. AD onwards, but its visual representations become more abundant only in mosaics from the end of the 2nd c. AD onwards.

Figure texts

Fig. 1

Fourth style painting on the north wall of the viridarium (no. 14) in the Casa di Adone ferito (VI 7, 18) in Pompeii. The birds in the garden painting in the right panel are identifiable as follows (from the left to the right and lower ones first): Domestic pigeon or Stock dove (*Columba sp.*, *C. livia/C. oenas*); unidentifiable, most likely a Domestic pigeon (*Sp.*, *Columba livia*); Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*); Warbler species, most likely Whitethroat (*Sylviidae sp.*, *Sylvia communis*); unidentifiable (hardly visible in the photograph), Dove or Passerine species (*Sp.*, *Columba sp./Passeriformes sp.*); 2 Domestic pigeons (*Columba livia*); Passerine species, most likely a Warbler species (*Paseriformes sp.*, *Sylviidae sp.*); Song thrush (*Turdus philomelos*, hardly visible in the photograph); Capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*); Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrio porphyrio*); Domestic pigeon (*Columba livia*). The two latter specimens are not visible in the photograph. Photograph from 1924 by the Archivio Fotografico della Soprintendenza Archeologica di Napoli (Neg.n. 1403).

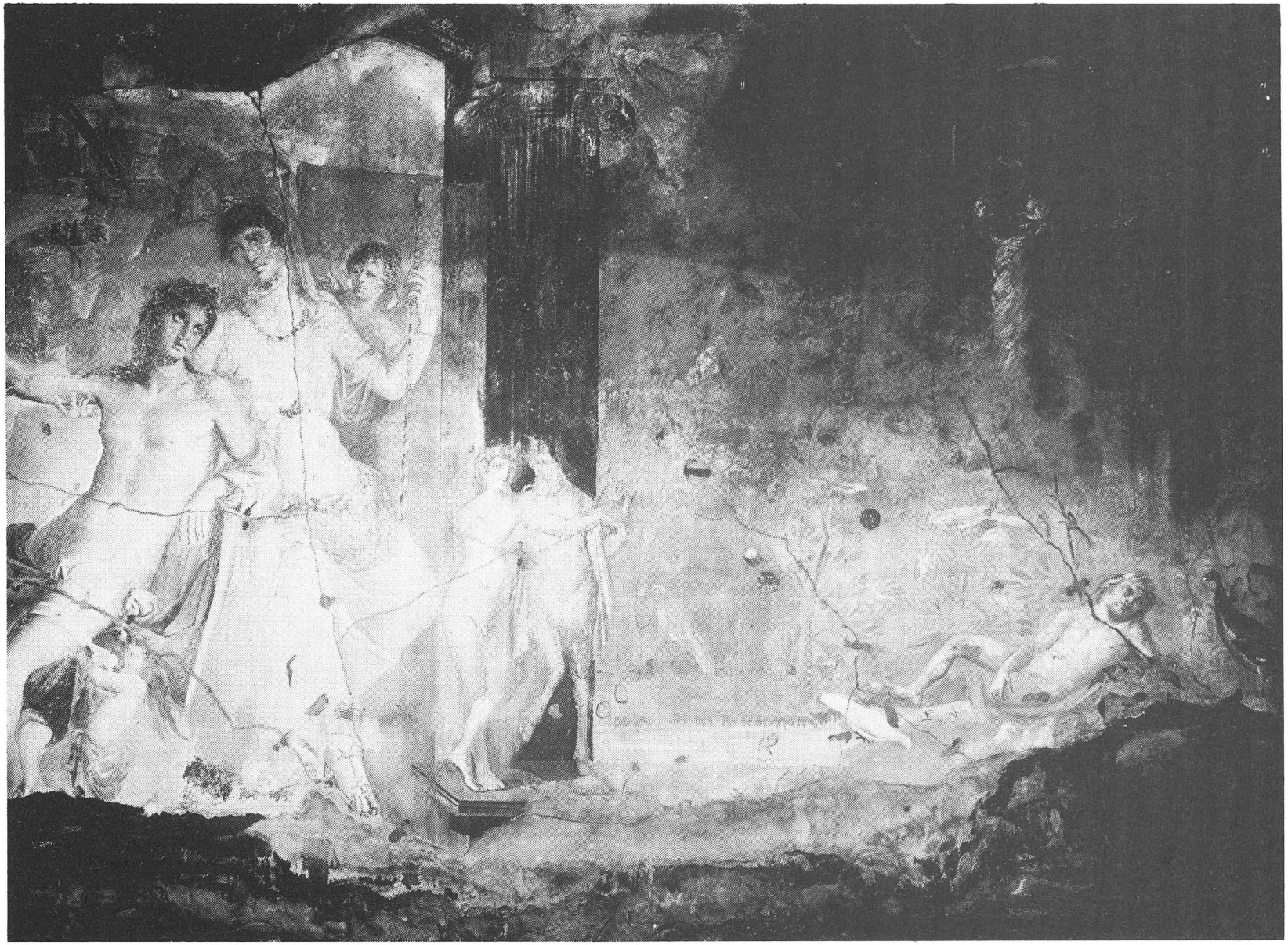

Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.

Fig. 3.

Fig. 2

Detail of the garden painting on the north wall of the viridarium (no. 14) in the Casa di Adone ferito (VI 7,18) in Pompeii. To the right of the Capercaillie part of the Purple gallinule is faintly visible (its right leg and wing and tail). Photograph from 1950 by the Archivio Fotografico della Soprintendenza Archeologica di Napoli (Neg.n. 955=ex 8105=ex 966).

Fig. 3

Detail of the floor mosaic in the atrium (no. 3) in the Casa di Paquius Proculus o di Cuspius Pansa (I 7,1) in Pompeii. The bird is most likely identifiable as Capercaillie. Photograph from 1978 by the author.