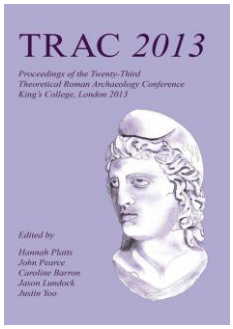

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Roman Sexuality or *Roman* Sexualities? Looking at Sexual Imagery on Roman Terracotta Mould-made Lamps

Sanja Vucetic

Introduction

This paper examines Roman terracotta mould-made lamps with motifs of human sexual activity from four Roman provincial sites: Ampurias in Spain, Carthage in Tunisia, Salamis in Cyprus and Vindonissa in Switzerland. Its aim is to highlight key issues in the current approaches to the study of Roman sexuality and to demonstrate the value of systematic and contextualised analysis of sexual imagery on lamps. Using both quantitative and qualitative analyses, this study charts the temporal, regional, stylistic and iconographic patterns of distribution of the images in question. The analysis of the frequency of themes, motifs, and their variations and an examination of stylistic and iconographic treatments of the images reveal that there is a distinct variation in the frequency of distribution of the images throughout time and location. This suggests that there are site-specific affinities for particular visual representations of sex. As the findings presented here are drawn from the first systematic study of sexual imagery on lamps, it is not possible to provide in-depth explanations of the meaning behind all the patterns found. Nonetheless, the findings demonstrate that Roman sexuality is not a monolithic concept that can be applied to the whole of the Roman world and that sexual imagery on lamps can be a useful source of information in the study of regional Roman sexual identity formation.

Background

In studies of ancient Roman sexuality, four key issues are apparent. First, almost all studies function within Foucault's theoretical framework (Foucault 1978; 1985), despite the significant flaws of this approach (Foxhall 1998; Richlin 1991; 1998). Second, iconographic studies generally neglect imagery found on widely distributed and frequently used objects, thus drawing broad conclusions from a small proportion of the media on which such imagery is found (Clarke 1998; Varone 2001). Third, whilst claiming to examine the images in their own context, a majority of studies often disregard the cultural and ideological context in which such images occur (Clarke 1998: 20–1, 224ff). Clarke, of course, has made a crucial contribution by looking at Pompeian wall-paintings in their archaeological and cultural context (Clarke 1998: Ch. 6), where before

they were looked at too often as autonomous art works. Moreover, he does include some mass-produced non-elite examples of depictions of sex amongst the objects he studies (2003: 136–48). Whilst he adds one category of material, however, it is arbitrarily chosen and does not do much to mitigate the overwhelmingly elite-centric characteristic of his account. Finally, studies present the notion of Roman sexuality almost exclusively as a monolithic and static concept that pertains equally to people of different status, class, gender and ethnicity throughout the Roman world. These issues have limited researchers' ability adequately to explore the complexity of sexual identities within the Roman Empire.

Sexual identities are 'culturally situated in time, place and society' (White and Beaudry 2009: 210) and, as such, their construction in the Roman world should be examined through a study of sexual representations on common and mass-produced media such as lamps. Lamps are well-documented objects that were available throughout the Empire. Their diverse context permits an examination of regional sexualities, whilst their prolonged use, and accessibility to different social strata, broadens the focus beyond Roman elite media. The apparent standardisation of the lamp repertoire across the Empire, the repetition of the same iconographic themes and motifs, and the continuity of specific motifs emphasise the significance of lamps' sexual imagery. Moreover, a brief survey of common sexual representations on lamps highlights the presence of specific motif variations that operate within a strict set of iconographic themes. Any meaningful investigation of sexual imagery on lamps, however, necessitates a systematic and contextual approach (Eckardt 2002; Karivieri 1996; Leibundgut 1977) as such a methodology would address several of the key issues highlighted above.

Data and Methodology

This sites used in this study, Ampurias, Carthage, Salamis and Vindonissa, were selected for a number of reasons. Their lamps are well documented, with principal catalogues providing relatively good quality images and easy access to material (Deneauve 1969; Leibundgut 1977; Oziol 1977; Casas-Genover and Soler-Fusté 2006). Since, in these catalogues, the lamps are approached from a typo-chronological perspective, it was possible to use such information to place most of the lamp motifs into chronological sequence. The dating of the objects is commonly bracketed within a fifty-year span. In cases where dating was not possible, the images were either assigned to a hundred-year bracket or designated as 'uncertain'. Each of these sites yielded a substantial number of lamps featuring sexual motifs, thus allowing inferential and iconographic analysis of the collected data set. Finally, selecting a number of sites from different geographical regions allows for a broader understanding of stylistic changes in the collected images and contributes to the study of the symbolic meaning of the lamps' sexual imagery across the Roman world.

All quantitative analyses were conducted using Predictive Analytics Software Statistics (PASW) v.18. To enable such analyses, the catalogued images were coded according to date, provenance, scene type, figure type, and type of sexual act/coital position (Fig. 1). Descriptive analyses were conducted for all variables and, in cases where sample size permitted, inferential analyses were conducted, using Pearson's chi-square analyses and Fisher's exact tests. Inferential analyses were used to identify deviations of the observed frequencies of specific motifs and categories from expected frequencies of the same (VanPool and Leonard 2011). The statistical data were used to examine the differences and similarities of the temporal visual representations of sexuality over time within and between sites.

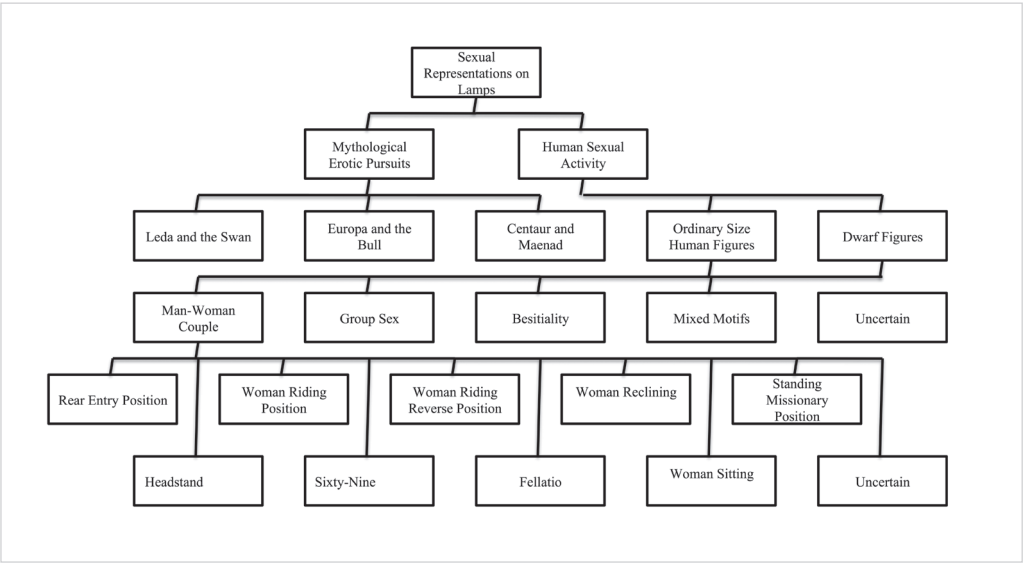

Figure 1: Categorisation of data (Note: Scenes of mythological erotic pursuits are not discussed in this paper).

To reinforce and expand on quantitative findings, images were also examined from a detailed iconographic perspective. Particular emphasis was placed on the identification of consistencies and differences in the iconographic and stylistic treatment of different themes and motifs. The interpretation of the qualitative and quantitative analyses is embedded in the theoretical argument that past societies' visual cultures act as a communicative medium, a system of meaning, which carries particular messages (Lévi-Strauss 1969; Tilley 1989). Art can be viewed as an expression of cultural reality and ideology and, as such, it acts as an agent of cultural conformity through which social norms are transmitted (Layton 1991). The images were approached as a structured system of signs, in which their meaning depends on the pattern of combination and the permissible permutation of iconographic symbols within the structure. Utilising a structuralist approach, the analysis involved identification of broad iconographic themes within which specific motifs operate. The study of representation and analysis of presented motifs was designed to reveal possible correlations between the iconographic and stylistic treatment of the images and the patterns of representation drawn from the quantitative analysis. In light of this, the stylistic and iconographic analyses of the images, in the context of variation in visual communication, were used to chart themes, motifs, and their variations in time and space.

Study Sites

Ampurias was a large urban site and trading centre, originally established by the Greeks. Following the formation of a Roman military camp in the second century B.C., the site grew into a Roman colony active until the end of the third century A.D., after which it lost its importance. Lamps recovered from this site lack detailed contextual information (Casas-Genover and Soler-Fusté 2006: 5). Carthage was, during the Roman period, one of the major urban centres whose active occupation continued into the Christian period. Although a significant proportion of the

lamps were found within the Roman necropolis, a number also came from unknown contexts (Deneauve 1969: 73). Salamis, emerging as an important trading centre towards the end of the eight century B.C., was in continuous use into Byzantine times. It was under Roman rule from the first century B.C. No further information regarding the archaeological context of the studied lamps is available. Vindonissa was established during the first century as a Roman military camp. Excavations have revealed a number of lamp workshops, established to meet the demands of local legionary garrisons (Leibundgut 1977). Many lamps from this site also come from funerary and domestic contexts.

Quantitative Findings

As a proportion of total lamps within each site, sexual representations are most frequently found in Salamis *(*6.10%) followed by Carthage *(*4.74%) and Vindonissa *(*4.14%). The lowest frequency of examples is found in the corpus from Ampurias *(*2.13%) (Table 1).

Table 1: Proportion of lamps with sexual representations from the total number of lamps from each site.

	Ampurias	Carthage	Salamis	Vindonissa
Total number of lamps from site	1407	843	672	1303
Lamps with sexual imagery (incl. mythological imagery)	30	40	41	54
Percentage of total	2.13%	4.74%	6.10%	4.14%

Distribution of lamps with sexual imagery: general trends

Representations of human sexual activity are frequent lamp decorations during the first four centuries A.D. Plotting the chronological distribution of all lamps from each site suggests that in some cases, the temporal distribution of lamps with sexual imagery corresponds to site-specific trends in lamp distribution. For instance, the disappearance of lamps with sexual imagery in Vindonissa corresponds to the general decline and almost complete disappearance of all lamps on this site after the second century. Conversely, in Ampurias and Carthage, although lamps with sexual imagery do not occur after the second century, there is a continuation in the presence of other lamp motifs for an extended period of time.

The general trends indicate that the frequency of images of human sexual acts notably declines after the second century when the images stop being present in Ampurias, Carthage and Vindonissa. Unlike elsewhere, the continuation of representations of sexual acts of ordinary size humans is characteristic of Salamis where, after a decline in the second century, the images appear in higher frequency again in the third and fourth centuries. Interestingly, this later period is characterised by a different range of motifs of coital position and group sex.

Inferential analyses indicated that there is a statistically significant relationship between the sites and figure type (p=.001), and between time period and figure type (p=.001). This appears to be best explained by the underrepresentation of dwarfs in Salamis and their overrepresentation in Carthage and by the underrepresentation of dwarfs during the third and fourth centuries (Table 2).

Table 2: Temporal distribution according to figure type and site.

Site	Figure Type	Date	Frequency	Percentage	Percentage of total lamps from site in this period
Ampurias	Ordinary size human figures				
		50–100 A.D.	11	84.6%	3.03%
		100–150 A.D.	1	7.7%	0.32%
		Uncertain	1	7.7%	0.30%
		Total	13	100.0%	-
	Dwarf figures				
		0–50 A.D.	1	9.1%	0.40%
		50–100 A.D.	10	90.9%	2.75%
		Total	11	100.0%	-
Carthage	Ordinary size human figures				
		0–50 A.D.	6	54.5%	2.11%
		50–100 A.D.	2	18.2%	0.79%
		100–150 A.D.	2	18.2%	1.02%
		Uncertain	1	9.1%	5.5%
		Total	11	100.0%	-
	Dwarf figures				
		0–50 A.D.	7	36.8%	2.46%
		50–100 A.D.	5	26.3**%**	1.98%
		100–150 A.D.	1	5.3**%**	0.51%
		150–200 A.D.	6	31.6**%**	23.08%
		Total	19	100.0%	-
Salamis	Ordinary size human figures				
		0–50 A.D.	7	25.9**%**	6.48%
		50–100 A.D.	3	11.1**%**	1.14%
		200–250 A.D.	6	22.2**%**	12.2%
		250–300 A.D.	2	7.4**%**	3.92%
		300–400 A.D.	9	33.3**%**	9.09%
		Total	27	100.0%	-
	Dwarf figures				
		50–100 A.D.	4	100.0**%**	1.53%
Vindonissa	Ordinary size human figures				
		0–50 A.D.	14	56.0**%**	2.75%

Site	Figure Type	Date	Frequency	Percentage	Percentage of total lamps from site in this period
		50–100 A.D.	7	28.0**%**	1.08%
		150–200 A.D.	4	16.0**%**	6.90%
		Total	25	100.0%	-
	Dwarf figures				
		0–50 A.D.	5	21.7**%**	0.98%
		50–100 A.D.	10	43.5**%**	1.54%
		100–150 A.D.	8	34.8**%**	9.20%
		Total	23	100.0%	-

Spatial and Temporal Distribution According to Coital Position

Ordinary Size Human Figures

Scenes showing ordinary size human figures are present during the first two centuries across all four sites, with the highest frequency occurring during the first century. Notably, the images examined in this study show only man-woman coupling (excluding bestiality), thus omitting representations of man-man/woman-woman couples. In the representations of group sex, the images follow the pattern of one woman and two men. In the portrayal of the threesome, both men are always engaged in a sexual act only with the woman, and not with each other. In this respect, the lamp imagery is dissimilar to sexual representations on other media, such as Arretine ware and wall paintings (Clarke 1998; Williams 2000), where depictions of sexual activity between two men are frequently portrayed.

Ordinary size human figures appear most frequently in combination with the rear entry motif, representing 40.0% of the corpus (n=28) (Fig. 2). This is also the most frequently occurring motif across three sites: Vindonissa (60%, n=15), Carthage (36.4%, n=4) and Salamis (33.3%, n=7). The woman reclining position motif is the second highest in frequency, forming 36.4% of the examples in Carthage (n=4), and 24% in Vindonissa (n=6). Lamps from Salamis offer a range of coital position motifs that are unique to that site. These include the standing missionary position (14.3%, n=3), headstand (9.5%, n=2) and sixty-nine position (4.8%, n=1). Representations of *fellatio* appear to be restricted to Ampurias (15.4%, n=2) and Vindonissa (4.0%, n=1).

In examining ordinary size human figures, inferential analysis indicated that there was a significant relationship between site and coital position (p<.001); this relationship appears to be best explained by the overrepresentation of the standing missionary motif in Salamis and the woman sitting motif in Carthage. A significant relationship was also found between time period and coital position (p<.001), most likely due to the overrepresentation of the woman reclining and woman sitting motifs in the second century, the standing missionary motif in the third and fourth centuries, and the headstand motif in the fourth century. The overrepresentation of the threesome and mixed motifs in Salamis led to a significant relationship between site and scene type (p=.004), while the significant relationship between time period and scene type (p=.001) was likely due to the overrepresentation of threesome and mixed motifs in the fourth century.

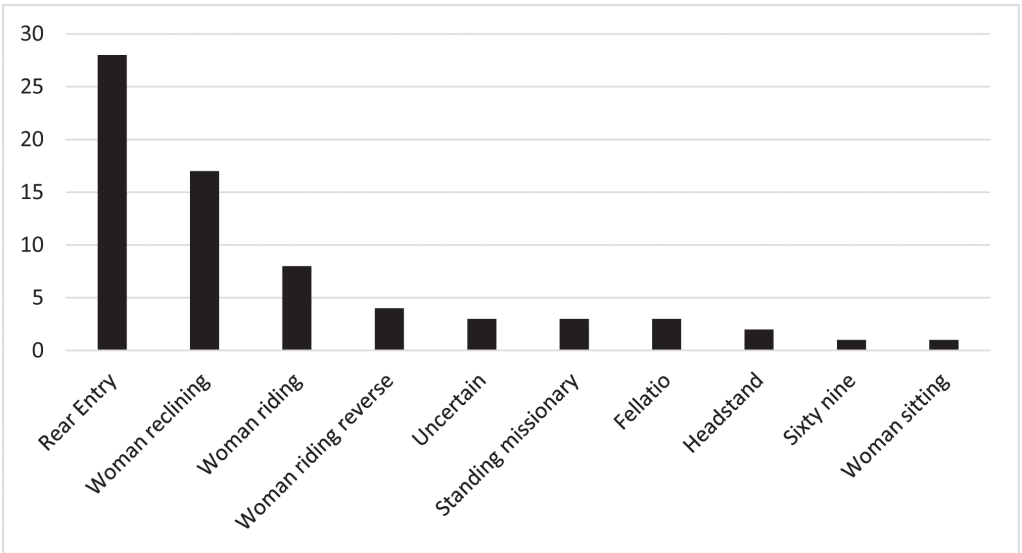

Figure 2: Frequency of coital positions amongst ordinary size human figures.

Dwarf Figures

In comparison to sexual representations of ordinary size human figures, lamp images of dwarfs reveal a smaller variety of coital positions with rear entry being the most common. In Carthage 66.7% of all dwarf scenes manifest this motif (*n*=12), 63.6% in Ampurias (*n*=7) and 55.6% in Vindonissa (*n*=10). Interestingly, Salamis has no representations of the rear entry motif, with the woman riding reverse motif accounting for 100% (*n*=4) of images of dwarf sex. This particular motif is also present in all other sites: Vindonissa (44.4%; *n*=8), Carthage (22.2%; *n*=4) and Ampurias (18.2%; *n*=2). Notably, the motif of *fellatio* is represented only by a single image at Ampurias (Fig. 3). Besides one representation of an ordinary size woman and a horse from Salamis (fourth century), representations of bestiality are restricted to the first century and to Carthage and Vindonissa. These images exclusively represent a dwarf woman and a crocodile. As with ordinary size human figures, representations of dwarf figures in the current corpus exclusively show man-woman coupling (excluding bestiality).

Representations of dwarfs have the highest frequency during the first century, across all four sites (Table 3). Interestingly, in Carthage representations of dwarfs in the second half of the second century are highly prevalent, representing 23.1% of all lamps from this site in this period. In the context of dwarf imagery, inferential analyses found a significant relationship between the sites and coital position (p=.050) and between time periods and coital positions (p=.047). This finding seems to be best explained by the overrepresentation of *fellatio* in Ampurias and the woman riding reverse motif in Salamis, as well as by the overrepresentation of rear entry and the underrepresentation of the woman riding reverse position during the second century. By the third century, images of dwarfs copulating vanish from lamp decorations completely.

Figure 3: Frequency of coital positions amongst dwarf figures.

Table 3: Spatial distribution of human sexual activity scene type according to the type of figure.

Site	Scene type	Frequency	Percentage
Ampurias	Ordinary size humans	13	54.2%
	Dwarf	11	45.8%
	Total	24	**100.0**%
Carthage	Ordinary size humans	11	36.7%
	Dwarf	19	63.3%
	Total	30	**100.0**%
Salamis	Ordinary size humans	27	87.1%
	Dwarf	4	12.9%
	Total	31	**100.0**%
Vindonissa	Ordinary size humans	25	52.1%
	Dwarf	23	47.9%
	Total	48	**100.0**%

Qualitative Findings

During the first two centuries, images of human sexual acts across sites show no variability in underlying pictorial traditions. Iconographic themes following a consistent representational convention occur in all four sites. The images are characterised by a shared set of iconographic motifs that operate within a specific grammar of the compositions. Combinations of these motifs form a number of representational variations within each theme. For instance, the motif of the woman reclining only occurs in combination with the ordinary size human figure, whilst the combination of bestiality and the dwarf motif creates only one theme – the dwarf woman and crocodile. Additionally, on the paradigmatic axis, the dwarf woman-crocodile theme in the rear entry position is compositionally similar to the dwarf figures rear entry position variant (a) theme, thus making the figure of a dwarf man and the figure of the animal interchangeable. The significance of such themes and their meaning is emphasised by the system of unique and exclusive relations between the specific motifs.

Representations of sexual activity of ordinary size humans include specific motifs, such as hand gestures that belong to the established vocabulary of Roman visual art. In Figure 4, both images show a man figure with his right arm curved around his head. This recurring motif has a long history in both Greek and Roman art and can be traced back to the Greek representations of Apollo Lykeios where it signifies tiredness (Connor 1984 in Clarke 1998: 68). By the Roman period, the gesture is used in mythological scenes, where it is associated with the notion of innocent sexual willingness, in particular with the representations of Endymion and Ariadne on Roman sarcophagi (Sichtermann 1992). In the context of Roman sexual imagery, as Clarke (1998: 68, 181) notes, the gesture could be understood as an indicator of sexual eagerness but perhaps without the element of innocence that underlies the mythological figural representations.

Comparing the lamp iconography of ordinary size human figures with the visual representations of dwarfs' sexual activity demonstrates notable disparities. Although both figural types are represented in combination with the rear entry motif, their iconography is markedly different. In general, the strong emphasis on the physical abnormalities in dwarf representations stands in direct opposition to the norm, communicated through the pictorial tradition of the 'desirable' Graeco-Roman body type of ordinary size human figures. This stylistic treatment of the dwarfs stays unchanged over time and space with all lamp imagery following a unified stylistic convention. This standardised representation of dwarfs appears to be established soon after the Roman conquest of Egypt and is present in other media of the period. The stereotypical portrayal of dwarfs occurs along a particular set of iconographic motifs, which evoke festive and fertility activities associated with the Nilotic flood (Versluys 2002: 436–8). This motif grouping is also evident on lamps with sexual imagery. For instance, a lamp from Ampurias shows a dwarf couple in woman riding reverse position. A dwarf woman is shown playing castanets, alluding to a banquet or orgiastic setting, whilst the choice of the coital position of the figures particularly emphasises the passivity of the man and activity of the woman. The combination of these specific iconographic motifs appears to also be associated with shameless and ludicrous behaviour (Meyboom and Versluys 2007: 172). Interpretation of dwarf sexual scenes, however, is not straightforward as the meaning of such imagery is highly contingent upon their regional and temporal context and the media upon which they appear. Further contextual analyses, including a detailed investigation into the provincial context of the imagery in question, are desirable.

Figure 4: Ordinary size human figures in woman riding position, thematic variation (c) (Left) and representation of a couple engaged in sexual activity. House of the Centenary, room 43, south wall. Pompeii. 62–79 A.D. (Right) (after Casas-Genover and Soler-Fusté 2006: 56/G4; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/fa/Roemer61.jpg accessed on 17/11/13).

Representational dissimilarities between ordinary size figures and dwarfs are detected in the portrayal of the women, in particular, their gaze. Due to the head position of the ordinary size woman in the rear entry position, her gaze is typically directed towards her lover or away from him but never outside the image. A comparison of variants (b) and (c) (Fig. 5) emphasises slight differences in the iconographic treatment of the woman. In variant (b) the woman is presented crouching down, with lowered buttocks and her gaze directed towards the ground. These particular iconographic details allow for the woman to appear more static, under the dominance of her sexual partner. This contrasts with variant (c), whereby the lifting of the woman's right leg and the folding of her left leg offers an opportunity for the artist to present a more explicit illustration of the penetrative act, offered to the gaze of both the viewer and the figure of the man. The interlocking of the couple's gaze further eliminates the dominant element (of both the viewer and the man figure) detected in Fig. 5 (b), thus making the figural relation appear more dialogical in nature.

Similarly, in the images depicting *fellatio* (Fig. 7 (a, b)), the ordinary sized man is seated on a stool, leaning backwards and directing his gaze at the woman's face. The man's left hand is wrapped around the woman's torso. Although in the images the woman is kneeling and seated respectively, both images follow the same representational convention. The composition of the image draws the viewer's attention to the figure of the man, however the man's gaze immediately directs the viewer towards the figure of the woman, who is presented below the man in the lower right corner of the image. Conversely, the dwarf woman, in the context of the rear entry motif (Fig. 6 (c)), is presented in frontal or three-quarter view, with her gaze directed out of the image and at the viewer.

Again, in the representation of *fellatio*, the dwarf woman appears in a kneeling position with her face in three-quarter view (Fig. 7 (c)). The image is notably less ambiguous in its representation of the man's penis. This outward gaze of the dwarf woman invites the viewer to engage directly with the image. It produces an on-going discourse between the viewer and the

image and effectively implicates the viewer in a voyeuristic relationship to the image (sexual act) (Lacan 1977; Mulvey 1975). The effects of this voyeuristic relationship are twofold – it blurs the boundaries between the reality of the image and the viewer's reality, and forms a channel through which the viewer's subjective desires correspond to the image. In other words, the figural gaze corresponds with, and confronts, the viewer's individual desires, encourages suspending of the viewer's own reality and allows the viewer to become part of the iconographic experience (Elsner 1995: 33). The significance of this motif on lamps is stressed through its relation to the figural and sexual motifs along with which it occurs. The gaze provides the avenue through which the interrogation of the relationship between the image and the viewer can be approached. More specifically, it offers a possibility for exploration of the ways the viewer's desire is articulated in relation to a particular sexual imagery (Elsner 1996: 247).

Figure 5: Ordinary size humans in rear entry position, theme – variation (a) woman crouching down, looking straight ahead; variation (b) woman crouching down, looking down; variation (c) man holding woman's leg above his head, woman looking back at the man (after Bailey 1980: 66/Q935, Q835; 67/Q823).

Figure 6: Dwarf figures in rear entry position, theme – variation (a) man holding the drapery and variation (b) woman's right leg on man's shoulder (after Bailey 1980: 66/Q887; 67/Q828).

Discussion

General Trends

The aim of the current study was to plot the spatial and temporal patterns of iconographic representations of human sexual acts on lamps, so as to highlight the utility of systematic and contextualised analysis of sexual imagery. From the presented data, some general and tentative conclusions can be drawn. Distributional patterns suggest that images of human sexual activity emerge during the first century A.D. and continue to be present until the end of the second century, after which the frequency of such images declines in Ampurias, Carthage and Vindonissa, continuing only in Salamis until the end of the fourth century.

As this was the first systematic study specifically focusing on sexual imagery on lamps, identifying appropriate datasets for comparison has proven difficult. However, Eckardt's study of Roman lamps in Britain (2002), allows for a comparison with five additional Roman sites and regions for the first century A.D. (Table 4).

Table 4: Lamps with sexual imagery, as a proportion of all lamps, across sites in the first century A.D. (adapted from Eckardt 2002: 127-9). Note: The data presented by Eckardt (2002) was originally drawn from: Aquileia (Di Filipo Balestrazzi 1988) Trier (Goethert-Polaschek 1985), Sidi Khrebish Benghazi (Bailey 1985), Britain (Eckardt 2002) and Pannonia (Ivanyi 1935).

Ampurias	Carthage	Salamis	Vindonissa	Aquileia	Trier	Benghazi	Britain	Pannonia
22/509 (3.60%)	20/529 (5.95%)	14/365 (3.79%)	36/1153 (3.10%)	12/523 (2.29%)	23/539 (4.27%)	4/203 (1.97%)	15/325 (4.62%)	0/556 (0%)

In the current study, the percentage of lamps with sexual imagery as a proportion of overall lamps ranges from 3.10% to 5.95% across the sites. In Eckardt's dataset, these proportions range from 0.00% to 4.62%. Sexual imagery is not present on lamps from Pannonia. This represents a striking outlier, and it may be the case that representations of sexual acts were excluded (Eckardt 2012: 128). The highest proportion of sexual imagery occurs in Carthage (5.95%) and Trier (4.27%), which is similar to the observed proportions of lamps bearing sexual imagery for the whole of Britain (4.62%). Eckardt's data are broadly similar to those reported in the current study, suggesting distinct distributional patterns for lamps with sexual imagery in this time period. Unfortunately, as the dataset presented in table 4 is restricted to the first century A.D., a comparison of changes over time is not possible. Nonetheless, a comparison of the longevity of iconographic motifs of sexuality on lamps is traceable in the context of our four sites.

The longevity of sexual motifs on lamps varies by site. In Ampurias and Carthage, the highest number of lamps with sexual imagery occurs during the first two centuries. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this is also the period in which the total number of lamps from the sites is the highest. In the subsequent periods lamps continue to be used but cease to be decorated with scenes of sexual activity. In contrast, the frequency of lamps with sexual imagery in Vindonissa and Salamis coincides with the overall distribution of lamps from these sites across time. In Vindonissa, there is a rapid decline in overall lamp frequency after the first century. On this site,

Figure 7: Representation of fellatio with ordinary size human figures (a, b); representation of fellatio with dwarf figures (c) (after Casas-Genover and Soler-Fusté, 2006: pl I/G14; pl XXXVIII/G623; pl XXXVIII/G621).

lamps with sexual imagery also decline in numbers during this period, however, this decline is not as pronounced. In Salamis, lamp sexual imagery declines after the second century until it reoccurs in the third century and continues to be present throughout the fourth century. In this period the frequency of all lamps at Salamis becomes higher. The data, therefore, do not offer a unified pattern of distribution over time and space, and, as such, it is not possible to make broad conclusions about overall *Roman* attitudes toward sexual imagery and *Roman* sexuality in general. However, a closer examination of distribution patterns within individual sites may allow some conclusions regarding region-specific reception of this imagery to be drawn.

Site Specific Trends

In Vindonissa, the decline in the number of sexual representations on lamps coincides with the departure of the legions from the site at the start of the second century. The general decline in lamp consumption after this period has been attributed to the low popularity of lamps amongst the local population. A possible reason is the high price of oil that was used as fuel (Leibundgut 1977). In spite of the overall decline in lamp consumption, however, the proportion of lamps bearing sexual imagery, in the context of total number of lamps from that site, actually increases across the second century.

This is a somewhat counterintuitive finding, as one would expect that such imagery would follow the declining trends in overall lamp consumption. Although it is tempting to suggest that the increase in consumption of sexual imagery on lamps, in the context of declining overall consumption, represents a broader shift in regional social attitudes towards sexual imagery – the lack of corroborating data limits our ability to draw such conclusions. One possibility is that, perhaps, following the departure of the Roman soldiers, the popularity of sexual imagery endured amongst the local population or with the Roman migrants who settled in Vindonissa. Hypotheses such as these may be better tested in future using, as a comparative dataset, other media on which sexual imagery occurs.

The most interesting patterns occur in Salamis. Here, lamps with sexual imagery are present until the end of the fourth century and the site is associated with specific motifs – the threesome and mixed motifs (man-woman couple and bestiality). What explains the presence of this unusual

sexual imagery in Salamis? One possibility is geographical location. After the second century, lamp production centres were established across the Mediterranean. Large production centres like Athens are known to have been lamp suppliers for most of the Eastern Mediterranean region (Karivieri 1996: 27–9) and are known for their diverse and distinctive motifs. Other centres, such as Ephesus, were producing lamps with sexual imagery even during the fifth and sixth centuries (Bailey 1988: 64; Clarke 1998: 253). It is possible that after the second century, the establishment of regional workshops was followed by the introduction of a different sexual repertoire that was distributed throughout the region. This proposition is further supported by the observation that some of the later motifs from Salamis have been found in other regions like Crete. Even if we consider that the diverse and distinctive Athenian lamp motifs were in line with a broader artistic phenomenon that characterised Athenian lamp production in this period, the occurrence of these unique motifs in Salamis might still reflect regional tastes regarding the nature of sexual imagery on lamps (Bailey 1997: 164). Whether Salamis expresses distinctly local taste or whether it follows a broad Eastern Mediterranean pattern in distribution of sexual imagery is not possible to determine at this stage due to the lack of comparative data from the same region. Nevertheless, the apparent popularity of these unusual motifs in Salamis, when considered in relation to Ampurias and Carthage, cannot be explained in these terms. Therefore, these questions remain: what are the reasons that such imagery continues only in some sites and not others? For what reason did the presence of the sexual motifs on lamps completely cease in certain sites of the western provinces despite the continuation of overall lamp consumption?

Previous studies of lamps (Bailey 1980: 64; 1988: 64) have suggested that there was a general decline in the distribution of sexual imagery on lamps after the second century. These studies propose that this decline is a consequence of a cohesive change in social disposition concerning sexual imagery on lamps. However, the findings of this study challenge such conclusions. Although the data indicates that a general decline in the frequency of lamps with sexual imagery does occur after the second century, the chronological and spatial distribution suggests that, if the decline is explained by changes in social attitudes, these shifts did not manifest uniformly across the Empire. Bailey also suggests that there is one unified (Roman) social attitude towards sexual imagery. Despite the apparent uniformity in the lamp repertoire during the first and second centuries, the iconographic analyses have suggested that there is a considerable spatial and temporal disparity in the distribution of specific sexual themes and their variations. In light of this the following is apparent. First, the findings contest the notion of a broad shift in the social attitudes towards such imagery after the second century. Second, the results demonstrate that during the period prior to the second century individual sites demonstrate a distinctive affinity for particular sexual representations.

For instance, in the context of the studied sites, the iconographic subject of an ordinary size woman straddling a man whilst holding a dagger and a shield (Fig. 8) is restricted to Ampurias and Vindonissa. This portrayal of the woman as the dominant figure raises questions as to the possible reasons for the apparent affinity for this unusual motif of sexual aggression in these two sites alone. Is the appearance of such motif somehow related to the military presence at these sites where the motif of sexual aggression would be seen as humorous (Clarke 1998: 260)? Or perhaps there is a meaning of such a motif that would have transcended its humorous aspect? Is it possible that the meaning of such an image is present in the relation between the sword and the male genitals, in which the man's penis would act a definer, an essential part of masculinity (Clarke 1998: 260ff), whilst the threat of castration would signify possible consequences of instances where a woman 'rules' masculinity? Further analysis appears necessary.

Figure 8: Ordinary size humans and woman riding position theme – variation (b) woman holding shield and dagger (after Casas-Genover and Soler-Fusté 2006: 56/G277).

In the context of dwarf representations, Clarke (1998: 42ff) suggests that sexual images were produced purely for the amusement of Roman viewers. However, other studies have suggested that the meanings of Nilotic scenes in the Roman world changed according to their geographical context. For instance, the narrative structure of Nilotic scenes in Italy was different to the narrative structure of these images in the North African and Spanish provinces (Versluys 2002: 4–13, 436), implying that the reading of these images would have changed according to individual regions. The distinct spatial distribution of dwarf sexual imagery, characterised by specific combinations of iconographic motifs further suggests this. Analysis indicates that dwarf sex is overrepresented in Carthage and underrepresented in Salamis. Furthermore, in Salamis dwarfs are overrepresented in the woman riding reverse position whilst on this site there is no representation of dwarfs in the rear entry position. Therefore, the varied regional distribution and iconography of dwarfs cannot sufficiently be explained by Clarke's statement.

Lastly, in the context of the lamps studied, the relation between the provincial consumers and the lamp makers should be examined. Were the North Italian workshops manufacturing lamps with sexual imagery for specific provincial market, as it was the case with Late Italian terra sigillata in Cyprus (Hayes 1991)? Is particular sexual imagery produced by specific workshops, as is the case with Athenian lamp industry (Karivieri 1996)? To address such questions, the ratio of the imported and local lamps in the context of the studied sites must be assessed. However, although imported lamps from Italy have been identified in both Carthage and Salamis (Deneauve 1969; Oziol 1977), the provenance of individual objects and the general organisation of Roman lamps industry are still very much subject to debate (Harris 1980; Mattingly and Hitchner 1995). Thus, a further examination of object-specific characteristics and identification of Italian and provincial branch workshops would be necessary to address these issues in a meaningful way. As this is beyond the scope of the current paper, such questions should be considered in the future.

Summary

In light of the data presented above, it is possible to draw the following conclusions. Due to lamps' portability and availability across the Empire, these objects and their imagery were ideal for the dispersion of various social and political messages. The limited and uniform repertoire during the first two centuries A.D. suggests that sexual imagery on lamps conveyed specific and consistent messages. The overrepresentation of dwarf sexual imagery in this period, and strict and exclusive combinations of specific iconographic motifs alongside which dwarfs occur, further support this. In other words, the significance of the studied sexual imagery rests on their distinct and unique representations communicated through a strict visual grammar. This consistency of the iconographic repertoire of the sexual motifs on lamps is also in line with the process of a broader standardisation of the iconographic language across the Empire during the first two centuries (Hölscher 2004: 125–6). The prolonged production and distribution of unique sexual motifs and themes therefore becomes one of the key elements in producing particular ideals, values and beliefs regarding sexuality and was possibly used to disperse messages about Roman attitudes. Nonetheless, sexual imagery on lamps varies across sites, indicating that the provincial populace did exercise some choice in the selection of specific sexual motifs. After the second century, the new iconographic motifs are possibly a result of local production and local tastes. This suggests that social attitudes toward sexual imagery on lamps were site specific since the presence of the lamps in the provinces, and that the decline in frequency of lamps with sexual imagery does not occur consistently across all parts of the Roman world.

Limitations and Future Research

The results presented here must be examined in light of these following limitations. The small sample size limits the possibility of generalising from the data. Only one type of medium on which sexual imagery occurs is examined here. Consequently, these findings should be treated as tentative until further research is conducted. Nonetheless the study remains robust and the data valid. As sexuality is shaped through both institutional structures and social discourses (Butler 1990; 1993), future study demands reading of sexual imagery from the same regional context but on different media. Such research ought to consider whether such objects were imported or locally produced and whether certain sexual motifs are associated with specific workshops. Contextualised and comparative analysis would lead to a clearer understanding of possible regional similarities and differences and would provide a foundation upon which the studies into regional sexual identity formation could be undertaken.

Conclusion

No previous study examining the distribution of sexual imagery on lamps has been conducted. Although lamp imagery has been marginalised in studies concerning Roman sexuality, this paper has identified some important distributional patterns of lamp sexual imagery, and has recognised possible ways such findings could be used in the future.

People of different gender, age, class, religion, and ethnicity populated the Roman world. Their ideologies and beliefs were diverse and so were their social attitudes towards certain sexual imagery. The presented spatial and temporal variations in the patterns of iconographic distribution of sexual imagery on lamps appear to support this notion. Variations in the frequency of sexual

imagery on lamps suggest that the intensity of their distribution changed throughout time and space. Sexual imagery on lamps was originally produced in Italian workshops and it can be suggested that the intent of their iconographic repertoire was to convey a set of messages to their viewers. The establishing of regional workshops assisted the dispersal of this imagery across the Empire. The variations in spatial distribution suggest that such imagery was differently received in different parts of the Empire. Chronological variations further indicate that the changes in the frequency of sexual imagery did not manifest uniformly across these Roman sites. Iconographic variations also suggest that during the third and fourth centuries sexual representations on lamps are characterised by different set of coital motifs. Such findings highlight the plurality of Roman sexual identities and the regional bases for their formation.

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