

## Article

# The Waiting-Servant Motif in a Late Antique Textile in Chicago: Iconography, Visuality, and Materiality

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**Abstract:** This article explores the use and adaptation of the iconographic motif of the waiting servant, known primarily from late Roman wall paintings, mosaics, and other media, within the sphere of Late Antique furnishing textiles. Taking as a case study a fifth- to sixth-century CE hanging in the Art Institute of Chicago's collection, the first section argues that the addition of elaborate, multihued architectural settings and floral motifs in this hanging and several comparable examples built upon the existing waiting-servant iconography offer an enhanced message of "the good life" within the household. Such compositional elements were rooted in earlier Greek and Roman artistic traditions, namely architectural polychromy and the visual interplay between artifice and reality. However, they also exemplify the Late Antique "jeweled style", an aesthetic characterized by dazzling visual and polychromatic effects and an interest in artistic mimicry of other media. Striking visual parallels between the waiting-servant hangings and contemporary painted interiors suggest that textiles were considered on par with permanent media and operated in a system of cross-media artistic exchange. The article concludes with a consideration of the materiality of the Chicago hanging and its potential functions within a Late Antique residence, exploring how its portability as a woven object encouraged its flexible use within the home and allowed it to convey and even amplify particular messages through its juxtaposition with other objects, architecture, or people.



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## 1. Introduction

Among the Art Institute of Chicago's encyclopedic holdings, one of the lesser known areas of the collection is its corpus of Late Antique textiles from Egypt.<sup>1</sup> Comprising over 150 fragmentary works dated from approximately the third to seventh centuries CE,<sup>2</sup> textiles such as these were originally fabricated either as interior furnishings or decorative elements on garments and are preserved today due to their burial in Egypt's dry climate.<sup>3</sup> The largest and best-preserved example in the Art Institute's corpus is a fragment of a hanging (Figure 1), currently dated to the fifth to sixth century CE, which was likely used as a furnishing textile in a Late Antique home.<sup>4</sup> Remarkable for its large scale, brilliant color, and visually striking composition, it depicts a nearly complete image of a male figure standing in a colorful architectural setting. To date, the hanging has not been the subject of a comprehensive art historical examination, but the current study is intended to rectify this gap. The figure, which was previously identified as a warrior,<sup>5</sup> has more recently been interpreted as an example of the iconographic motif of the waiting servant.<sup>6</sup> This motif, which is associated with the representation of standing attendants bearing offerings at the banquets of the wealthy, is found initially in a number of wall paintings, mosaics, funerary monuments, and luxury objects dated primarily to the third and fourth centuries CE. Broadly, such images were intended to communicate messages about the patron's wealth, social standing, and prestige, as well as the hospitality and abundance of

the household.<sup>7</sup> However, the motif is also attested in a small number of artworks of a later date, particularly furnishing textiles.



**Figure 1.** *Fragment of a Hanging*, 5th–6th century CE. Byzantine; Egypt. Linen and wool, plain weave with weft uncut pile and embroidered linen pile formed by variations in back and stem stitches; 136.5 × 88.3 cm (53 3/4 × 34 3/4 in.). The Art Institute of Chicago, Grace R. Smith Textile Endowment, 1982.1578.

This article explores the use and adaptation of the motif of the waiting servant in Late Antique furnishing textiles, using the Chicago hanging as a case study through which to consider issues pertaining to its iconography, visuality, and materiality. I begin with an overview of this iconography in the later Roman world and explore its deployment in Late Antique furnishing textiles thought to have been used in domestic contexts. While the primary features of the waiting-servant motif were retained, additional iconographic elements, namely an elaborate architectural setting framing the figure and a series of floral motifs in the background, helped to present an enhanced message of “the good life” within the household. I then address how these additional elements are rooted in earlier Greek and Roman artistic traditions, specifically the polychromy of ancient architecture, as well as the longstanding interest in the visual interplay between the real and the fictive in different artistic media. I then explore how the composition of the Chicago hanging exemplifies a new Late Antique aesthetic system, known as the jeweled style, which is grounded in these earlier traditions and is characterized by an emphasis on variety in color, light, materials, and motifs as well as the transgression of boundaries across media. Works reflecting the jeweled style typically produced magnificent, opulent effects that would imitate and even exceed the experience of the natural world. I conclude by considering the relationship between the materiality (medium, materials, and spatiality) of the Chicago hanging and its potential function within a Late Antique domestic context, exploring how its portability as a pliable, woven object encouraged its flexible use within the home, enabling it to serve a variety of functional and iconographic purposes, through which it could convey and even amplify particular messages through its juxtaposition with other artworks.

## 2. Overview of the Chicago Hanging

### 2.1. Physical and Technical Description

The Art Institute’s hanging is the largest and best-preserved object in its corpus of Late Antique textiles.<sup>8</sup> Exemplifying many of the characteristics associated with Late Antique art, including frontality, abstraction, and a tendency toward flatness, the hanging depicts a male figure, represented at roughly 1/3 life-size scale, who stands within a colorful architectural setting. He stands frontally with his head turned sharply to his right, with his eyes glancing in the same direction. His expression, rendered in contours, is solemn, if not severe. He has a pale complexion with smooth cheeks, suggesting that he is either a clean-shaven adult or an unbearded youth. From a distance his dark hair seems to be closely cropped, but upon closer inspection it extends below his shoulders, a feature that supports the likelihood that he falls into the latter group.<sup>9</sup>

The figure wears a brightly colored costume, the most outstanding part of which is his green, knee-length tunic. It is cinched at the waist with a red belt and adorned with a number of yellow decorative elements characteristic of the clothing of the period, including *orbiculi* (roundels) at the shoulders, *clavi* (narrow vertical bands running down from the shoulders), paired cuffbands at the wrist, and *tabulae* (squares) at the bottom edge.<sup>10</sup> Beneath his tunic he wears yellow tights as well as blue shoes, the tops of which are brown. The figure stands with his arms raised to chest height and extended outward, and the absence of his now-missing hands prevents the clear identification of the objects or attributes he may have been shown holding.

The composition also includes an elaborate, polychromatic architectural setting rendered in different hues of red, yellow, orange, and green. It comprises two red columns, each with a narrow, vertical green band at the interior. Each column is encircled with three golden (yellow) bands that are embellished with rectangular motifs, nearly all of which are green and likely represent gemstones.<sup>11</sup> The columns stand on similarly golden bases, beneath which is a ground line of crenelated rectangles in alternating colors. Atop the columns is a delicate, rainbow-colored arch, the width of which does not fully extend from column to column, leading to the question of the form that its capitals once took. Framed by this elaborate structure, the male figure stands within a nearly empty field, save for the alternating motifs that populate the background. These include rainbow-striped,



heart-shaped, floral motifs and small rectangular motifs in red and green, the latter of which echo the forms of the presumed gemstones of the architecture. Although the figure seems to float in this fictive space, he is more likely intended to be set back from the arch, with his reduced scale suggesting his distance from the viewer.

The hanging is woven of linen and wool, materials that are indigenous to Egypt (Mayer Thurman 1984, p. 54; 1992, p. 11). Because parts of both selvages (the finishing edges at the right and left sides of the textile) are preserved, it is clear that it represents a complete loom width, and thus the maximum width of the textile. The design was created using discontinuous supplementary wool wefts, which were incorporated during the weaving process as loops of yarn that project from the plain weave foundation to form tufts or pile, which was left uncut.<sup>12</sup> The design appeared in weft-loop pile only on the front, making this the primary viewing side, although the associated wool wefts would presumably also have been visible on the back but not in loop form, creating a sort of flattened effect of the same design.<sup>13</sup> Supplementary weft-loop pile was frequently used in furnishing textiles in Egyptian households because it added softness and warmth, yet from an artistic standpoint it could also be used to introduce color gradations that could create impressionistic and perspectival effects (Krody 2019, pp. 86–87).<sup>14</sup>

Despite the flatness of the composition as a whole, the weaver achieved a notable sense of three-dimensionality in the depiction of certain elements by employing lighter and darker shades of certain colors of yarn to suggest shading and depth.<sup>15</sup> This is apparent in the modeling of the figure's hair and face, with a brownish-purple used in the hair crowning his head and brown in the longer hair in back, as well as pink and red used to highlight the contours of his nose and jawline. It is seen more clearly in his clothing: contrasts between light and dark green in the lower part of the tunic as well as light and dark yellow in the tights suggest the three-dimensionality of his body.<sup>16</sup> Such contrasts would seem to indicate that he stands near a light source located at the center or just to the viewer's right of center. Similar approaches to shading are seen in the red columns, which gradually shift to a lighter red as they reach the interior, as well as in the golden bands encircling the columns, which transition from yellow to orange from top to bottom, suggesting shadows on their undersides. While this masterful use of color creates an illusion of three-dimensionality, the weft-loop pile itself further enhances this impression, as it quite literally stands out in low relief from the plain weave ground. In this way, its materials and medium contribute to the overall illusionistic effect.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.2. Function and Context

Historically, the Chicago textile was identified in neutral terms as a hanging (Mayer Thurman 1992, p. 11),<sup>18</sup> a function that is supported by its large size and the scale of its motifs.<sup>19</sup> It might have been displayed against a wall in a stationary manner, serving as both insulation and decoration. However, it more likely hung in a doorway or colonnade, where it was fully opened in order to display its imagery. Such an arrangement in a doorway or colonnade would have allowed the textile to serve as a temporary wall, screen, or barrier, an issue to which I return below.<sup>20</sup> In this way, its function likely differed from that of other types of furnishing textiles that could be tied back, functioning comparably to what would be described today as a curtain. An example of this arrangement is seen in the curtains represented in a mosaic depicting the Palace of Theodoric from the Church of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna (Figure 2). In this mosaic, nearly all of the curtains include repeated, decorative designs that would not be obscured when knotted or pulled to the side.<sup>21</sup> A similar arrangement is seen in a hanging in Boston depicting an *ostiarius* (doorkeeper) (Figure 3), who pulls a curtain back from an elaborately adorned arcade. Here the folds of the curtain are indicated by its accordion-like, alternating light and dark vertical stripes as well as the zigzag pattern of its red horizontal bands.<sup>22</sup>





**Figure 2.** Wall mosaic depicting the Palace of Theodoric, c. 526 CE. Byzantine; Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna. © José Luiz Bernardes Ribeiro. Digital image available under Creative Commons license CC BY-SA 4.0 ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Theodoric%27s\\_Palace\\_-\\_Sant%27Apollinare\\_Nuovo\\_-\\_Ravenna\\_2016\\_\(crop\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Theodoric%27s_Palace_-_Sant%27Apollinare_Nuovo_-_Ravenna_2016_(crop).jpg); downloaded 7 September 2021).



**Figure 3.** Fragment of a hanging: *Ostiarus Drawing a Curtain*, probably 5th century CE. Eastern Mediterranean, probably Egyptian, late Roman. Linen; tapestry-woven; linen and wool yarns; 188 × 93.5 cm (73 × 36 13/16 in.). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Charles Potter Kling Fund, 57.180. Photograph © [2022] Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA, USA.

While the Chicago textile's scale and technique of manufacture provide some clue to its basic function as a hanging, its iconography, specifically the depiction of a waiting servant, is thought to suggest its original display context, that of the domestic sphere. To be sure, despite the fact that nearly 1000 Late Antique residences have been excavated throughout the Mediterranean world (Bowes 2010, p. 11), furnishing textiles are not usually found in

situ and intact in such domestic contexts (Thomas 2002, p. 42).<sup>23</sup> Rather, the majority of extant furnishing textiles (and also dress textiles) can be traced to the cemeteries of ancient Egypt, where they were preserved due to their secondary use as grave goods, often as burial shrouds (Stephenson 2014, p. 12; Bühl 2019, pp. 15–16).<sup>24</sup> Such textiles were long described as “Coptic” due to their Egyptian manufacture and presumed Christian associations; this term has since fallen out of scholarly favor when used specifically in reference to Late Antique textiles.<sup>25</sup> Such textiles came to light primarily through excavations carried out in Egypt in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many of which were conducted by amateur archaeologists who did not adequately document the burial contexts. This resulted in the loss of invaluable information pertaining the textiles’ dating as well as their relationships to specific sites, patrons, and other objects (Trilling 1982, p. 14; Thomas 1990, p. 1; 2007, pp. 137–45). Thousands of such examples, many of which lack precise information pertaining to their archaeological provenience, flooded the art market and entered private and museum collections worldwide.<sup>26</sup> The Art Institute’s hanging was similarly purchased on the art market, and its precise findspot remains unknown.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the comprehensive consideration of its iconography, style, and materials can potentially reveal the ways in which it was understood and used in its original, Late Antique domestic context.

### 3. The Waiting-Servant Motif

The male figure in this hanging was recently identified as an example of the iconographic motif of the “waiting servant”. This motif, which was extensively addressed by Katherine Dunbabin in her pioneering study on the topic (Dunbabin 2003b), is associated with the representation of the household attendants, or more accurately, the presumed domestic slaves, who served at the *convivia* (banquets) of the Roman elite.<sup>28</sup>

For the purposes of this article, I follow Dunbabin in the use of the term “servant” or “attendant” as opposed to “slave”, as my focus is primarily on the function of the figures represented in the works, rather than their legal status (Dunbabin 2003b, p. 443, n. 1). However, it is important to recognize that slaves were possessions, not unlike the contents of the houses in which they served (Joshel and Petersen 2014, pp. 9, 27). Viewed as an *instrumentum vocale* (“speaking tool”), the ancient slave was, “at the most basic level . . . regarded as an object whose very body could be employed by the master to accomplish tasks” (Lanski 2013, p. 130).<sup>29</sup> Wealthy owners could count slaves numbering in the dozens, if not hundreds among their property, all of which enhanced the image of their economic standing and prestige (D’Arms 1991, p. 171; Joshel and Petersen 2014, p. 27). Patrons had direct control over the actions of their slaves, and as such they assigned both their servile duties and the locations in which their work took place. Owners also attempted to control aspects of their slaves’ behavior, from their performance of specific tasks to the timing of their movements and gestures, even limiting their ability to speak, laugh, or sneeze.<sup>30</sup> They could also determine the physical appearances of slaves, dressing them in specialized clothing, requiring them to don distinctive hairstyles, and expecting them to groom themselves in certain ways.<sup>31</sup>

Images of household servants offer visual evidence of the cultivated appearances, tasks, and potential gestures and poses of actual slaves. Typically shown well-dressed, elegantly groomed, and bearing wine, food, and other offerings or attributes, these figures obediently stand mute and motionless, perpetually awaiting a command from their patron.<sup>32</sup> While images of both male and female servants are attested,<sup>33</sup> there is a particular emphasis on youthful male figures who are richly dressed, physically attractive, often shown with long hair and smooth cheeks, both of which are suggestive of their age, and tasked with serving wine (D’Arms 1991, 173; Dunbabin 2003a, p. 151; 2003b, p. 454–58). The actual individuals on which such images were based were described by contemporary authors as *pueri delicati*, a term used for attractive, often androgynous, youthful male slaves (Pollini 1999, p. 34; 2002, p. 55; Rooijakkers 2018, p. 49).<sup>34</sup> In the artistic record, they have been identified

specifically as an iconographic type of luxury servants (Fless 1995, pp. 38–45, 56–63).<sup>35</sup> Regardless of the specifics of their physical appearance, such images of household servants were often isolated within simple rectangular panels or frames, a compositional element that Dunbabin suggested provides the figures a more ceremonious and honorific effect characteristic of the period.<sup>36</sup>

The waiting-servant motif initially appeared almost exclusively in Roman literary sources of the early imperial period that focused on the banquets of the wealthy (D’Arms 1991). It was not until the third and fourth centuries CE that the motif became more commonly represented, at which time it was employed in variety of media, including wall paintings, mosaics, funerary sculptures, and luxury objects. Such artworks were found in a range of contexts both in Rome and the provinces (Dunbabin 2003b). Broadly, images of waiting servants were intended to communicate messages about the patron’s wealth, social standing, and prestige, as well as the hospitality of the household, conveying an overall image of “the good life”.<sup>37</sup> In the case of images of banquet servants in particular, they evoked the presence of actual attendants, who “were no less essential for the successful achievement of even a small dinner than the variety of the food served, the fineness of the wines, and the elaborateness and richness of the drinking and serving vessels” (Dunbabin 2003b, p. 444).<sup>38</sup> In this way, it is likely that waiting-servant imagery went hand in hand with the longstanding tradition of representing not only the abundant food and produce available within one’s home and on one’s estate, but also the prepared meals and fine dinnerware that were critical to a lavish meal. This theme was particularly apparent in mosaics incorporating *xenia* motifs, as seen in a group of eight mosaic panels in Chicago (Figure 4), which feature depictions of food and objects associated with dining, such as an almond cake, a fish on a golden or bronze platter, and a bound rooster about to be prepared for a meal. The group also includes two representations of personified seasons, alluding to the cyclical nature of time and agricultural regeneration, which resulted in the bounty of nature that was enjoyed at the Roman table.<sup>39</sup>



**Figure 4.** Eight Fragments from a Mosaic Pavement, 2nd century CE. Roman; Rome. Stone, glass, and mortar. Starting from top left: Mosaic Floor Panel Depicting a Fish on a Platter, 28.9 × 36.8 × 6 cm



(11 3/8 × 14 1/2 × 2 3/8 in.), 159.2012; *Mosaic Floor Panel Depicting a Bound Rooster*, 28.6 × 37.5 × 6.4 cm (11 1/4 × 14 3/4 × 2 1/2 in.), 160.2012; *Mosaic Floor Panel Depicting an Almond Cake*, 27 × 27 × 6.4 cm (10 5/8 × 10 5/8 × 2 1/2 in.), 164.2012; *Mosaic Floor Panel Depicting a Loaf of Bread or a Platter*, 29.5 × 34.9 × 6 cm (11 5/8 × 13 3/4 × 2 3/8 in.), 166.2012; *Mosaic Floor Panel Depicting a Brazier*, 27.9 × 27.9 × 5.1 cm (11 × 11 × 2 in.), 165.2012; *Mosaic Floor Panel Depicting a Sack*, 27.9 × 27.9 × 5.1 cm (11 × 11 × 2 in.), 163.2012; *Mosaic Floor Panel Depicting a Personification of a Season*, 28.9 × 28.9 × 7 cm (11 3/8 × 11 3/8 × 2 3/4 in.), 161.2012; and *Mosaic Floor Panel Depicting a Personification of a Season*, 28.9 × 28.9 × 5.1 cm (11 3/8 × 11 3/8 × 2 in.), 162.2012. The Art Institute of Chicago, promised gift of Lynn Hauser and Neil Ross.

Not surprisingly, images of the waiting servant have been found in a number of domestic contexts, a setting where their subject matter would have been entirely appropriate.<sup>40</sup> For example, the wall paintings in the Odeion Terrace House at Ephesos, which are dated to the first half of the fourth century CE, include images of two well-dressed male servants, each of whom is set within an individual panel.<sup>41</sup> The first servant, an unbearded, youthful male (Figure 5), holds a glass beaker in one hand and a towel in the other, indicating his role as a wine servant. The second attendant (Figure 6), a bearded, mature male, holds a large plate of figs and a slaughtered fowl, perhaps suggesting his role in the preparation of food.<sup>42</sup> Standing frontally and directing their gazes at the viewer, these painted servants were placed strategically to greet the actual guests who were entering the adjacent, well-appointed room, presumably in a direct allusion to the dining festivities that likely occurred within the home (Dunbabin 2003b, p. 449; Zimmermann and Ladstätter 2011, p. 168).<sup>43</sup>



**Figure 5.** Wall painting depicting a servant with a glass beaker and a towel, 4th century CE. Ephesos, Odeion Terrace House. Efes Müzesi Selçuk. Photo: OeAW-OeAI/Norbert Zimmermann.



**Figure 6.** Wall painting depicting a servant holding a plate of figs and a slaughtered fowl, 4th century CE. Ephesos, Odeion Terrace House. Photo: OeAW-OeAI/Norbert Zimmermann.

Such images also appear in funerary contexts, not only on sarcophagi and other funerary monuments but also in tomb paintings, both pagan and Christian.<sup>44</sup> The paintings in cubiculum 10 of the Christian catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus in Rome (Figure 7), which are dated to the second half of the third century CE, include two figures identified as servants. They hold a jug and a cup, respectively, and are set within individual panels. Here, however, they appear to serve not the viewer but rather the deceased, who is likely the subject of an adjacent image of a reclining woman with a drinking vessel, beneath which are two smaller figures of individuals with their arms raised in the orans (praying) pose.<sup>45</sup> Such images reflect the multivalency of banqueting iconography through its associations with this life and the next, as well as the continued use of the waiting-servant motif in Christian contexts.<sup>46</sup>





**Figure 7.** Wall painting depicting servants, second half of 3rd century CE. Rome, Catacombs of Peter and Marcellinus, *cubiculum* 10, entrance wall. Photo: Wilpert (1903), p. 107.3. Public domain (<https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.1339#0109>; downloaded 10 September 2021).

Finally, the waiting-servant motif was used outside of banqueting contexts to display more general ideas about wealth, status, and luxury, as for example on *The Projecta Casket* in the British Museum (Figure 8), a lavish object created around 380 CE to transport an elite female patron's bathing apparatus to the public baths.<sup>47</sup> On the body of the casket is a procession of elegantly dressed male and female servants who carry offerings and various toilet articles to their female patron, the seated figure at the center of the casket's front side. Similar to the framed images of servants in domestic and funerary wall paintings, these servants are shown in an isolated, compartmentalized fashion: each one stands within a single bay of the larger architectural setting, which is composed of columns that support alternating arches and gables. The use of architectural elements to frame each servant, isolating them individually while simultaneously displaying them within a larger group, would appear to foreshadow a critical element of later depictions of the waiting-servant motif in textiles, as is addressed below.

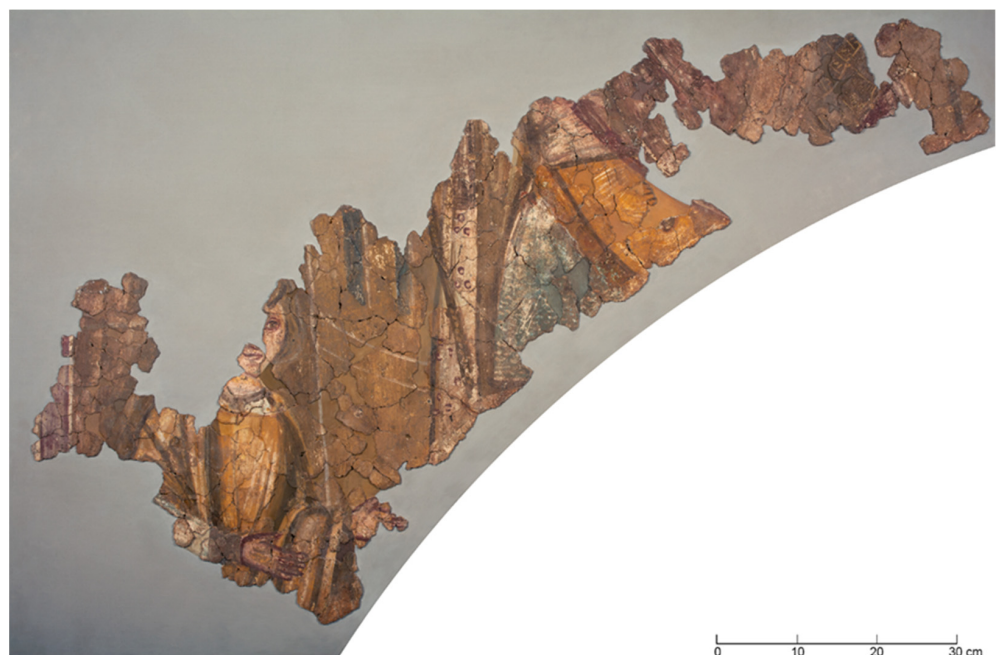
While the aforementioned examples are largely assigned to the date range of the third and fourth centuries CE noted by Dunbabin, later examples of the motif are known in secular and sacred contexts but are far less numerous.<sup>48</sup> At least one painted example from a domestic context can be added to this corpus: a fragmentary painting identified as an image of a draped female figure,<sup>49</sup> perhaps a servant, from the MMS/S residence at Sardis, which was constructed around 400 CE (Figure 9).<sup>50</sup> The female figure, which is dated both stylistically and archaeologically to the late fifth to early sixth century CE, was found in space E, which was identified as both an entrance and organizing court for the home (Greenewalt et al. 1995, p. 482).<sup>51</sup> Here the figure was displayed on the west side of the room, on the south springing of the lower east face of a brick arch. She holds what appears to be a towel over her arm, perhaps suggesting a role as a wine servant and alluding to the dining that occurred in the adjacent triclinium (room D) similar to the painted images of servants at Ephesos discussed above. She gestures with raised hands to the viewer's right, seemingly directing their gaze toward what may be images of patterned,



multicolored curtains as well as the adjacent arch.<sup>52</sup> The late fifth to early sixth century CE dating of the painting and its association with a domestic setting are significant as they suggest the continued use and relevance of waiting-servant imagery in residences well into Late Antiquity. While the Sardis figure is to this author's knowledge the only late example of this motif in a wall painting from a domestic context, additional examples are found in the more flexible and portable medium of textiles.



**Figure 8.** *The Projecta Casket*, c. 380 CE. Late Roman; Rome. Silver, gold; 28.6 × 56 × 48.8 cm (11 1/4 × 22 × 19 1/4 in.). The British Museum, 1866,1229.1. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.



**Figure 9.** Painting of a female servant, late 5th to early 6th century CE. Excavated in MMS/S residence, Sardis, west wall. Sardis inv. WP21.003. © Archaeological Exploration of Sardis/President and Fellows of Harvard College.

#### 4. The Waiting-Servant Motif in Late Antique Furnishing Textiles: Enhanced Iconography of “The Good Life”

Although not included in Dunbabin’s previous studies, the Chicago hanging and several other closely related examples of Late Antique textiles clearly incorporate the iconographic motif of the waiting servant and its associations with wealth, status, and hospitality, as well as additional elements that support its overarching message of “the good life”. Comparative examples belong to the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (Figure 10),<sup>53</sup> the Musée du Louvre in Paris (Figure 11),<sup>54</sup> and (formerly) the Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Figure 12).<sup>55</sup> All four hangings have generally been dated within the range of the fourth to sixth century CE,<sup>56</sup> and they bear striking similarities in terms of their iconography, scale, materials, and method of manufacture.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, all four textiles are generally thought to have been discovered in Egypt.<sup>58</sup> While there are undoubtedly some minor variations among the textiles, their clear formal, stylistic, and technical similarities raise the question of whether they might have been produced in the same workshop, albeit perhaps by different weavers.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, it is possible that large hangings such as these were purchased and hung in sets, rather than as individual pieces (Stauffer 1995, p. 10). While this is not to suggest that the four textiles considered here were intentionally created as a discrete group, I would argue that they might have belonged to assemblages similar to this in their original display contexts, in which the number of hangings likely varied depending on the needs of the intended space as well as the patron’s preferences and financial means.



**Figure 10.** *Fragment of a curtain, 4th–6th century CE. Late Roman. Linen plain weave with polychromy wool weft pile loops; 97.5 × 131 cm (38 3/8 × 51 9/16 in.). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Charles Potter Kling Fund, 49.313. Photograph © [2022] Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.*





**Figure 11.** *Hanging*, 420–570 CE. Byzantine; Egypt. Loop weaving in wool and linen; 75 × 69 cm (29 1/2 × 27 1/8 in.). Musée du Louvre, E 10530. Photo: Thierry Ollivier. © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.



**Figure 12.** *Curtain*, 5th–6th century CE. Byzantine; Egypt. Weft-loop pile in wool on plain-weave linen ground; 85 × 88 cm (33 1/2 × 34 5/8 in.). Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst (formerly in the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, lost in World War II), 9223 (after Wulff and Volbach 1926, p. 2). © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst.

#### 4.1. Woven Images of Waiting Servants

From an iconographic standpoint, many of the features characteristic of the waiting-servant motif outlined by Dunbabin are also seen in the male figures represented in these four textiles: each is depicted with long hair and smooth cheeks, wearing a colorful, embellished tunic, and standing in a largely frontal pose.<sup>60</sup> With their heads turned, all seem to guide the viewer within the space, perhaps to a door or another point of interest.<sup>61</sup> Alternatively, one wonders whether they may intentionally avert their gazes from the



viewer, suggesting their direct engagement only when called upon, given their roles as “human props” at a banquet.<sup>62</sup> With the exception of the Chicago figure, who is missing his hands and any potential accompanying attributes, the figures from the other three textiles retain the objects associated with their particular occupation: a ladle and a wine bowl for the Boston figure, and candlesticks for the Paris and Berlin figures. The latter may provide a clue to what the Chicago figure held, as he is shown with similarly outstretched arms.<sup>63</sup> With their well-groomed appearances and servile attributes, all four figures clearly evoke the iconographic type of the luxury household servant and its associated messages, as discussed above.

In the case of the Chicago figure, his servile status also appears to be supported by the color of his tunic. Comparable costumes involving green tunics and yellow decorative elements are employed in other contemporary images of servants, as illustrated in the *ostiarius* hanging in Boston noted above (See Figure 3 above).<sup>64</sup> This male servant, who stands adjacent to an arcade as he pulls back the furnishing textile hung within it, wears an even more elaborate variation on the costume of the Chicago figure, complete with a jeweled belt, long yellow *clavi*, yellow *orbiculi* with interlocking geometric motifs, and red tights (Salmon 1969, pp. 146–47; Kondoleon 2016, p. 88). The green-and-yellow tunic is also seen in a mosaic dated to the sixth century CE in the Basilica of San Vitale at Ravenna, where a member of Emperor Justinian’s retinue, the third figure to the left of the emperor, wears a similar garment that also includes yellow cuffbands at the wrists (Figure 13).<sup>65</sup> The wearing of the green tunic by household servants also finds some earlier literary support. In Petronius’s *Satyricon* (Petronius, *Satyricon* 28), the narrator, Encolpius, briefly makes note of a porter wearing a green tunic and a cherry-colored belt, who stands near the doorway while shelling peas into a silver dish.<sup>66</sup> Such visual and literary references to the trope of a servant in a green tunic, standing near or within a doorway, help to bolster the likelihood that the Chicago figure can be identified as a luxury household attendant. Beyond this small number of examples that connect green tunics with servile status, it is unclear whether the color was chosen to carry a more specific meaning depending on the patron and the context.<sup>67</sup>



**Figure 13.** Mosaic depicting Emperor Justinian and his attendants, 6th century CE. Byzantine; Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna. © José Luiz Bernardes Ribeiro. Digital image available under Creative Commons license CC BY-SA 4.0. ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mosaic\\_of\\_Justinian\\_I\\_-\\_San\\_Vitale\\_-\\_Ravenna\\_2016.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mosaic_of_Justinian_I_-_San_Vitale_-_Ravenna_2016.jpg); downloaded 13 September 2021).

#### 4.2. Additional Elements: The Architectural Setting and Floral Motifs

While the figure of the waiting servant appears to retain its earlier iconographic significance in these later textiles, additional elements that appear in each composition, namely, the lavish architectural setting and the floral motifs dispersed through the background, undoubtedly enhanced the figure's message of wealth, status, prestige, and hospitality.

Among the four hangings, the architectural features are preserved to varying degrees, but each includes boldly colored columns encircled with golden bands, some of which are bejeweled.<sup>68</sup> Additional opulent elements appearing among one or more textiles include the golden column bases, multihued capitals, and a crowning element in the form of either an open gable or an arch.<sup>69</sup> On a formal level, such architectural settings can be seen as a more elaborate version of the simple rectangular panels that framed individual figures of waiting servants in earlier paintings.<sup>70</sup> Here, however, they undoubtedly perform a more meaningful role than that of simple framing devices. More specifically, their depictions of colorful, extravagant architecture, complete with golden and jeweled embellishments, may evoke actual architectural elements found in elite homes.<sup>71</sup> Such depictions of magnificent architecture may have reinforced the iconographic message of the wealth and abundance of the household already suggested by the motif of the servant. As noted by Thelma K. Thomas, "real and fictive (simulated) architectural features, often depicted in textiles as gilded and decorated with jewels, framed these subjects as explicit (and aspirational) references to luxury and other aspects of "the good life" of the household" (Thomas 2016b, p. 22).<sup>72</sup>

This iconographic theme is further emphasized through the addition of floral elements in the background in the form of the rainbow-hued, heart-shaped motifs.<sup>73</sup> These elements, which are found in all four textiles, can be identified as abstracted depictions of roses.<sup>74</sup> Their placement in the background appears to allude to the practice of scattering rose petals on the ground during a banquet, a tradition associated with the concept of hospitality.<sup>75</sup> Similar images of roses can be seen in a textile dated to the fourth century CE in the Cleveland Museum of Art (Figure 14), which depicts a satyr and a maenad reveling during Dionysiac festivities, reinforcing the flowers' association with convivial gatherings.<sup>76</sup> In the Cleveland hanging, the leaves and stems are also represented, making the identification of such heart-shaped motifs as flowers explicit. Comparable floral motifs are also seen in contemporary Late Antique and early Byzantine mosaics, where the motif's identification as a representation of petals strewn on the floor is more immediately apparent, as seen in a fragment of a mosaic pavement depicting a giraffe and handler in the Art Institute's collection (Figure 15).<sup>77</sup>

Building upon late Roman images that focused on the servant itself, I would argue that the combination of motifs appearing in the waiting-servant hangings, figural, architectural, and floral, conveyed an enhanced message of the wealth, status, and prestige of the patron as well as the hospitality and abundance within the home. Moreover, the more complex imagery of the hangings may have even been intended to offer a closer approximation of some of the visual aspects of the experience of attending a banquet: one can imagine the viewer observing the attendants silently waiting in the wings for their patron's command, or marveling at the lavish architectural setting of the host's residence, or even glancing down upon the rose petals strewn about the floor while taking in the overall spectacle of the event.



**Figure 14.** *Fragment with Satyr and Maenad*, 4th century CE. Byzantine; Egypt. Undyed linen and dyed wool; plain weave ground with tapestry weave; overall: 139 × 86.4 cm (54 3/4 × 34 in.); mounted: 153.6 × 100.4 × 3.9 cm (60 1/2 × 39 1/2 × 1 9/16 in.). The Cleveland Museum of Art, Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund, 1975.6. Digital image available under Creative Commons license CC0 1.0.



**Figure 15.** *Mosaic Fragment with Man Leading a Giraffe*, 5th century CE. Byzantine; Syria or Lebanon. Stone in mortar; 170.8 × 167 × 6.35 cm (67 1/4 × 65 3/4 × 2 1/2 in.). The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Mrs. Robert B. Mayer, 1993.345.



#### 4.3. Formal Parallels: Personifications of Abundance and Orant Figures

The basic composition featured in the waiting-servant hangings, with a single figure set within a distinctive architectural setting, does not appear to have been unique to the type. Rather, it is frequently used in textiles and other media of the period to represent other subjects. In some instances, the figures are allegorical in nature and convey a message similar to that of the waiting servant through their associations with the themes of abundance, prosperity, and “the good life”.<sup>78</sup> For example, a hanging in the collection of Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC (Figure 16) depicts two elegantly dressed, haloed male figures standing within a bejeweled arcade who bear gifts that potentially identify them as personifications of the seasons or the months of the year.<sup>79</sup> On the left is a man in Persian-style dress, who holds an elongated flask and a bowl resembling that in the Boston waiting-servant hanging. On the right is a man carrying a large fish and pomegranates, who wears a mantle over a belted tunic embellished with the standard decorative elements.<sup>80</sup> They stand within gem-encrusted arcades against a background incorporating vegetal motifs. Of particular interest are the schematic leaves surrounding the figure on the right, which resemble the abstracted rose petals found in the waiting-servant hangings. Similar imagery is found in a number of comparable hangings in other museum collections, which may have been produced within the same workshop.<sup>81</sup>



**Figure 16.** *Fragment of a Hanging with Two Figures in Arcades*, 6th century CE. Byzantine; Egypt. Tapestry weave in polychrome wool; H. (warp) 42.0 cm × W. (weft) 63.2 cm (16 9/16 × 24 7/8 in.). Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington, DC, BZ.1970.43. © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC, USA.

Other examples employ similar design schemes but incorporate Christian iconography, specifically that of the orant (praying figure). This imagery appears in other weft-loop pile textiles of the period, such as a curtain panel in Detroit, which depicts a young girl, identified as such by her earrings and the bulla around her neck, standing in the prayer pose (Figure 17).<sup>82</sup> Although the Detroit textile is much smaller in scale than the waiting-servant hangings, perhaps indicating that it once belonged to a larger textile, its subject also stands frontally with her arms raised and is framed by a patterned, multi-hued arcade.



**Figure 17.** *Curtain Panel*, possibly 5th century CE. Coptic; Egyptian. Linen and wool; 69.9 × 63.5 × 50.2 cm (27 1/2 × 25 × 19 3/4 in.). Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase, Octavia W. Bates Fund, 46.75.

A larger-scale example showing the repetition of the orant motif within an elaborate architectural setting can be found in the fourth-century CE wall paintings from the Roman villa at Lullingstone, Kent, England (Figure 18), which adorned a house church set within the residence (Meates 1987).<sup>83</sup> On the west wall is a scene depicting six figures with their arms raised in the position of prayer, each of which is individually framed within a polychromatic arcade embellished with different patterns.<sup>84</sup> The Lullingstone figures' poses seem to resemble those of the figures on the Chicago and Paris hangings, who stand with their arms above the waist and extended outward. In the Paris hanging, however, the candlesticks in the figure's hands make his identification as a servant explicit. Beneath this main zone of the west wall at Lullingstone is a dado zone with paintings that have been identified as images of colorful open roses set against an imitation marble background (Meates 1987, p. 33). One wonders if this dado level was, comparable to the background of the waiting-servant hangings, intended to represent a floor covered with rose petals. If so, perhaps the multivalency of this image allowed it to convey a similarly broad message of hospitality and celebration but with a focus on otherworldly pleasures rather than those of the terrestrial realm, given the function of the space as a house church.<sup>85</sup>

At a minimum, there appears to be a basic, formal relationship between these figural motifs, the waiting servant, allegorical figures evoking "the good life", and the orant—, which to this author's knowledge has yet to be fully explored in the scholarly literature, particularly with regard to their use in different social, cultural, and religious contexts.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to suggest that one of their compositional similarities, the use of an elaborate architectural setting as a framing device, can be attributed to their participation in a broader, Late Antique aesthetic system.



**Figure 18.** Wall painting from Villa at Lullingstone, Kent, England, 4th century CE. Romano-British. Length: 420 cm (165 3/8 in.). The British Museum, 1967,0407.1.b © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

### 5. Earlier Traditions of Artifice and Reality and the Late Antique Jeweled Style

Turning back to the waiting-servant textiles, it is important to recognize that their architectural elements and floral motifs perform more than simply reinforce the iconographic message of wealth, status, and hospitality; they also situate these hangings firmly within well-established traditions in Greek and Roman art and architecture. First, the depiction of boldly colored columns in the hangings reflects the longstanding practice of integrating color into architecture and architectural decoration. Frequently, this architectural polychromy was achieved through the use of paint,<sup>87</sup> as seen in the rich tradition of wall painting as well as in the remains of stuccoed and painted columns found in a number of houses at Pompeii and Herculaneum.<sup>88</sup> The taste for color in architecture gained further popularity in the Roman imperial period and was enhanced through the addition of mosaic tesserae, colored stones, and other materials.<sup>89</sup>

Second, the architectural settings and floral motifs seen in the waiting-servant hangings also reflect the enduring taste for illusionistic effects that can trick the eye and delight the viewer, albeit in a more stylized, abstracted manner characteristic of Late Antiquity. Such effects can be traced back in part to the Hellenistic conceit of the ‘unswept floor’ (*asàrotos òikos*) mosaic, which depicted the detritus covering the floor after a luxurious banquet, a type also attested in the Roman empire (Figure 19).<sup>90</sup> This interest in the visual interplay between artifice and reality found particular favor among Roman audiences, and such visual games were played especially in the medium of wall painting.<sup>91</sup> This tradition began with the first Pompeian masonry style, in which paint was used to mimic costly colored marbles, and it flourished in the second Pompeian architectural style, with its focus on the creation of elaborate, colorful architecture that framed illusionistic and often fantastical vistas. This painterly play between real and pictorial space is exemplified in the first-century BCE wall paintings from Room M (the cubiculum) of the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale (Figure 20), where painted pilasters frame perspectival views of townscapes, colonnaded buildings, and sacred precincts enlivened with statuary and rich vegetation, creating a fictive expanse that extended beyond the wall itself.<sup>92</sup> This Roman visual delight in artistic mimicry, trompe l’oeil effects, and toying with the boundaries



between the natural and created worlds carried on throughout the Roman period to varying degrees and in different ways.<sup>93</sup>



**Figure 19.** Signed by Heraklitos, detail of mosaic depicting 'unswept floor' (*asàrotos òikos*), 2nd century CE. Musei Vaticani, Museo Gregoriano Profano, 10132. Photo Credit: Scala/ Art Resource, NY.



**Figure 20.** *Cubiculum M*, Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor, Boscoreale, view of west wall, c. 50–40 BCE. Roman. Fresco; room dimensions: 8 ft. 8 1/2 in. × 10 ft. 11 1/2 in. × 19 ft. 1 7/8 in. (265.4 × 334 × 583.9 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 03.14.13a–g. Digital image available under Creative Commons license CC0 1.0.

By Late Antiquity, these longstanding artistic traditions laid the groundwork for a new aesthetic system characterized primarily by an emphasis on variety, color, contrast, and opulence, now described as the “jeweled style” (Roberts 1989). In his 1989 publication, *The Jeweled Style: Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity*, Michael Roberts first described this aesthetic, identifying it primarily within period literary sources but also finding parallels in the visual arts, particularly in mosaics, architectural sculpture, sarcophagi, ivories, and manuscripts. Such artworks could dazzle the viewer with their brilliant, polychromatic effects and variety of motifs, patterns, colors, and materials.<sup>94</sup> Additional characteristics of the style included an emphasis on abstraction, repetition, and a tendency to break a composition into “self-contained, highly elaborated panels or registers [that allow the viewer] . . . to admire the play of brilliance and color between compositional units” (Roberts 1989, p. 112).

A particularly illustrative example of the Late Antique jeweled style can be found in the sixth-century CE paintings in the Red Monastery church at Sohag in Egypt (Figure 21). In the trilobed eastern end of the church, or triconch, are two stories of architectural sculpture comprising curved and square niches with decorative gables that are framed by pilasters, half-columns, and columns. The interior largely retains its paintings comprising vegetal and geometric motifs, also described as “ornamental” paintings, which are generally dated to its second phase of painted architectural decoration.<sup>95</sup> These paintings appear in a riotous array of colors and patterns, which densely populate both the two-dimensional surfaces of the walls and the three-dimensional surfaces of the architectural elements. Many of the niches also include figural paintings depicting Christian subjects, which are attributed to the slightly later, third phase of painting (c. sixth century CE).<sup>96</sup> Harkening to earlier illusionistic tendencies, many of the vegetal and geometric paintings used trompe l’oeil effects to mimic textiles, mosaics, molded stucco, and colored marbles. Moreover, the organization of the interior into registers comprising individual, richly painted niches exemplifies Roberts’ emphasis on separating the elements of a composition into discrete units to enhance the visual effect of color and brilliance.<sup>97</sup>

In her extensive studies of the Red Monastery church’s architectural polychromy, Elizabeth Bolman expanded upon the concept of the jeweled style first outlined by Roberts to explore the aesthetic principles behind its opulent decoration, considering how authors from the Justinianic period emphasized the importance of variety as a driving principle when evaluating architectural interiors, specifically in terms of their diversity of color, light, decorative patterns, and materials (Bolman 2006, 2010, 2016c).<sup>98</sup> In particular, different patterns and motifs embellished all surfaces, reflecting a horror vacui aesthetic that diverged from Roman wall paintings of the preceding periods, which typically included some fields of solid color.<sup>99</sup> Such variety was valued not only for its extravagance but also for its playfulness.

Woven fabrics produced in Late Antiquity also strongly reflect the qualities associated with the jeweled style. Thelma K. Thomas emphasized how the materials and techniques used in textiles created dazzling visual and polychromatic effects and even allowed them to expertly imitate other media. These qualities were acknowledged in contemporary literary sources describing public and private contexts as well as religious and secular spaces, reflecting the omnipresence of this aesthetic in Late Antiquity (Thomas 2002). More recently, Elizabeth Dospěl Williams argued for the need to recast the jeweled style as an aesthetic system concerned not only with visual effects but also with artistic processes and materiality (making, medium, and spatiality). In particular, Williams suggested that Late Antique audiences valued textiles both for their “artistic bravura, as artists pushed against the limits of their materials and superseded them” and the resulting visual qualities (Dospěl Williams 2018, p. 37).





**Figure 21.** Interior of the Red Monastery Church, Sohag, Egypt, northern lobe of the triconch, paintings dated c. 6th century CE. Reproduced by permission of the American Research Center in Egypt, Inc. (ARCE). This project was funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Photo: Patrick Godeau.

Applying these concepts to the waiting-servant hangings, it is apparent that they exemplify the main characteristics of the Late Antique jeweled style. For example, the Chicago hanging clearly reflects the principle of variety in its use of rich colors, which in turn are modulated to convey different qualities of light shining on the figure and the architectural setting. Moreover, the design itself covers the majority of the plain weave ground, reinforcing a “more is more” aesthetic by leaving no major sections of the textile unadorned. Such an effect was undoubtedly intentional, as the elements rendered with supplementary wefts were not critical to the structure of the textile.

Finally, the Chicago hanging’s materials illusionistically and playfully subvert the boundaries with other media by mimicking a variety of different materials. For example, the dyed wool of the loop pile imitates more costly, lavish materials, including colored stone (perhaps porphyry) in the red columns, as well as gold and gemstones in the bands that encircle them. It also simulates more fragile, organic materials, such as colorful rose petals. Even the depiction of a delicate rainbow arch above the columns participates in this visual game in evocation of an ephemeral, atmospheric event, which was transformed into a solid architectural element.<sup>100</sup> More broadly, it was suggested that the use of the weft-loop pile technique, which allows for the creation of rich, coloristic effects through the deliberate juxtaposition of blocks of specific colors side by side, intentionally resembles the impressionistic appearance of polychrome mosaics.<sup>101</sup> The other three textiles of the group, although not identical to the Chicago hanging, clearly participate in the same aesthetic system. Collectively, such varied and colorful elements would have created an impressive



visual spectacle, in which the aesthetic effect of the entire composition outweighed that of any single motif. In this way, its visual impact was, similar to its iconographic message, enhanced and amplified by the combination of its different components.

Based on this brief overview of the vegetal and geometric paintings from the Red Monastery church at Sohag and the corpus of waiting-servant hangings, one cannot help but notice that they bear striking stylistic similarities to one another. To provide just one comparison, certain aspects of the Chicago hanging seem to mirror features of one particular niche at the Red Monastery church, specifically the niche located second from the left on the second register of the northern lobe (Figure 22). This niche, which depicts the monastic father Shenoute in a bust-length portrait (Bolman and Szymańska 2016, p. 165), similarly incorporates a colorful architectural setting: it comprises illusionistically painted red columns encircled with golden bands, which are embellished with green rectangular motifs suggesting gemstones. Both columns sit atop yellow column bases. On the interior sides of the niche are tall, rectangular panels that were painted to resemble cipollino verde.<sup>102</sup> Turning back to the Chicago hanging, one wonders whether the narrow green bands that sit just inside of the red columns can in fact represent such panels, albeit in an abstracted, reduced form. Alternatively, they may instead depict shading at the interior of the columns. Moreover, while the niche at the Red Monastery church incorporates a colorful painted braid in its arch rather than a rainbow as in the Chicago hanging, neither of these features are capable of functioning in reality as structural elements in actual architecture. Consequently, their use in these instances allows them to destabilize their viewers' perception of the spaces in which they were displayed (Bolman 2016c, p. 127).



**Figure 22.** Interior of the Red Monastery Church, Sohag, Egypt, northern lobe of the triconch, detail of second register, paintings dated c. 6th century CE. This project was funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Photo: Arnaldo Vescovo.

Given the remarkable visual similarities between the waiting-servant hangings and the Red Monastery church's architectural polychromy, along with their roughly comparable date ranges and Egyptian provenience, it is tantalizing to consider the possibility that the artists who produced these works were operating within a system of cross-media artistic exchange. To be sure, it is important to recognize that such exchange did not always occur unidirectionally from "major" genres such as wall paintings and mosaics to the so-called "minor" arts such as textiles. Rather, iconographic exchange was multidirectional and non-linear, and the portability of textiles allowed them to function as important intermediaries in this process (Dospěl Williams 2018, p. 36).<sup>103</sup> While the precise relationship between the Red Monastery church paintings and the textiles, if any, will never be known, their striking visual similarities support the argument that the textiles can and should be viewed as on par with more permanent media.<sup>104</sup> They reflect the same aesthetic preferences of the period and their artists' mastery over their respective media, and they were similarly appreciated in their own right for their unique material properties.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, it is important to recognize that textiles were undoubtedly integral to the adornment of interior settings of this period, both sacred and secular, public and private, complementing and augmenting the messages conveyed by paintings, mosaics, and other media displayed in a given space.

## 6. Conclusions: Function and Materiality in the Domestic Context

In the concluding section, I address issues pertaining to the function and materiality (medium, materials, and spatiality) of Late Antique furnishing textiles in order to consider how the Chicago hanging was likely used and understood in its domestic context. In particular, I explore how its portability as a pliable woven object was critical to its flexible use within the home, allowing it to serve different functions while also helping to convey or even amplify particular iconographic messages through its potential juxtaposition with other objects, architecture, or even people.

As noted above, there is an unfortunate dearth of textiles from excavated Late Antique domestic contexts, leading to considerable challenges in understanding precisely how such furnishings functioned. However, it is clear from written sources and pictorial representations of textiles in other media that they served a critical role in Late Antique domestic space (Stephenson 2014). Recent exhibitions on Late Antique furnishing textiles, including *Designing Identity: The Power of Textiles in Late Antiquity* at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at New York University in 2016 (Thomas 2016a) and *Woven Interiors: Furnishing Early Medieval Egypt* at the Textile Museum at George Washington University in 2019 (Bühl et al. 2019b), along with a number of other recent scholarly publications, have rightfully called attention to the numerous roles, both functional and iconographic, that furnishing textiles performed within the home.<sup>106</sup> These pathbreaking studies have paved the way for a more holistic approach that views textiles as equal to wall paintings, mosaics, and sculpture in their ability to convey messages about the patron and the household through their imagery, in addition to their use in structuring social relations within the Late Antique home.<sup>107</sup>

Beyond their iconographic meaning, furnishing textiles served many physical and environmental functions within the home: they buffered climate, light, and sound; they added color, texture, and warmth to the hard surfaces of architecture and furniture; and they transformed the appearance of an interior spatial shell by covering walls and other surfaces.<sup>108</sup> By virtue of their materiality, furnishing textiles undoubtedly enhanced the sensorial experience of the domestic space in which they were displayed and used. For example, as tactile objects, furnishing textiles likely created an environment that encouraged touch, in turn promoting a haptic experience.<sup>109</sup> Textiles also could have altered the auditory experience of a space by absorbing sound or reducing noises. From an olfactory standpoint, images such as the roses in the Chicago hanging and its counterparts could have invited the viewer to imagine oneself taking in the flowers' sweet fragrance. In the case of the Boston hanging, even the depiction of a servant with a ladle and bowl brimming with wine could also have inspired the viewer's gustatory senses.<sup>110</sup>



In addition to elevating the sensorial experience of a space, furnishing textiles also regulated movement by creating temporary walls and doors, closing passageways, and subdividing rooms.<sup>111</sup> The use of textiles to control movement and access within the home may be related in part to an increasing emphasis in Late Antiquity with distinctions in social hierarchies, as well as a growing preoccupation with privacy and visibility and the practices of concealing and revealing, as reflected in both domestic and religious contexts.<sup>112</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, many Late Antique furnishing textiles prominently feature architectural elements, including arcades and columns (Figure 23).<sup>113</sup> Such designs blurred the line between real and fictive architecture by transforming a space both physically and pictorially. For example, woven architectural elements, which served no structural purpose (unlike the actual architecture), could be used to visually enlarge a small space, or to make a large room feel more private and intimate. In this way, textiles “offered flexible, movable units that could expand or contract space and also carry meaningful imagery” (Kondoleon 2016, p. 93). However, unlike wall paintings and mosaics that remained static in the spaces in which they were displayed, textiles could be shifted among the different spaces of the house depending on the needs of the patron or the occasion.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, their materials and medium as woven fabrics undoubtedly facilitated a subtle form of movement by the textiles themselves, as light winds or perhaps even the movement of passersby would have created enough of a breeze to gently shift or sway the textile, creating a dynamic yet fleeting effect.<sup>115</sup> Such spatial and material considerations are critical to a more comprehensive approach to textiles that views them not simply as carriers of imagery and meaning but rather as objects that were valued by contemporary viewers both for their multi-functionality and flexibility as woven, three-dimensional objects.<sup>116</sup>



**Figure 23.** *Hanging with Polychrome Columns*, 5th–6th century CE. Found Egypt, near Damietta. Linen, wool; tapestry weave; overall: H. 90 1/2 in. (229.9 cm), W. 61 1/2 in. (156.2 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Arthur S. Vernay Inc., 22.124.3. Digital image available under Creative Commons license CC0 1.0.



The Chicago hanging, similar to other Late Antique furnishing textiles from Egypt, might have served different functions within the home. If it hung on a wall, the hanging itself might have been more stationary in its arrangement, and the colorful architectural setting in which the figure stands would have visually expanded the room beyond the wall itself. Alternatively, if it were hung in a doorway, arcade, or peristyle, its woven architectural elements undoubtedly would have enlivened the appearance of the actual architectural elements with its bold color and fictive jeweled adornments. In this way, it might have created a sort of layering or nesting effect resembling that of the architectural polychromy at Sohag (see Figures 21 and 22 above). Moreover, the hanging's medium and materials would have further enhanced its three-dimensional appearance. Specifically, and as noted earlier, the use of a thick, weft-loop pile in the creation of the design would have allowed it to stand out from the plain weave ground, creating an illusionistic effect that could potentially trick the viewer's eye into temporarily reading the woven elements as actual architecture, depending on the viewing conditions.<sup>117</sup>

Given the prominence of the waiting-servant motif in the Chicago hanging, which has long been associated with the institution of the banquet, it seems reasonable that it would have been displayed in a space that could have been used for dining and entertaining (Thomas 2016b, p. 34). It is clear that the Roman practice of banqueting continued into Late Antiquity,<sup>118</sup> at which patrons would host their friends and clients in the lavishly adorned settings of their homes in a literal feast for the senses. Such events provided opportunities for educated and engaging conversation among attendees, which drew on their command of *paideia* (classical education and culture),<sup>119</sup> and they also incorporated diverse forms of entertainment.<sup>120</sup> More important, they featured elaborate meals presented on costly tableware,<sup>121</sup> which were served by elegantly dressed and well-groomed attendants, the physical appearances of which might have resembled those of the figures in the waiting-servant hangings.

Numerous forms of evidence reveal aspects of Late Antique dining practices. This includes contemporary literary sources, artworks depicting convivial feasts, and the survival of actual furnishings employed at such events, including silver and glass tableware, dining couches, tables, and other equipment and accoutrements.<sup>122</sup> The archaeological evidence of Late Antique houses throughout the Mediterranean also reflects the continuation of banqueting practices. To be sure, Late Antique houses appear to have followed the model of earlier Roman residences, in which spaces were used multifunctionally. More specifically, banqueting practices might not have been limited to the spaces identified by contemporary scholars as dining or reception spaces based on their form, scale, location, and adornment.<sup>123</sup> That said, many Late Antique houses incorporated one or more apses, a feature that could accommodate the placement of a type of semicircular dining couch, known as a *stibadium* or *sigma*, the popularity of which overtook that of the traditional *triclinium* with its three rectangular couches by the late empire (Dunbabin 1991). In many houses with multiple apses, such as those with three apses arranged in the form of a *triconch*, the banqueters seated on *stibadia* would frequently overlook a central space used both by entertainers as well as servants attending to the diners' needs.<sup>124</sup> This type of layout placed the visual spectacle of the banquet front and center before the guests, in turn making a clear allusion to the patron's access to all of the trappings of a successful event.<sup>125</sup>

If the Chicago hanging was indeed used in a dining room as part of the functional and iconographic apparatus of the banquet, one can imagine that additional factors might have contributed to the viewer's overall experience of its imagery and materiality. For example, the time of day and weather conditions undoubtedly had an effect on its reception, particularly in the evening hours when viewed under the dim light of an oil lamp. Similarly, reflections of lamplight and other furnishings off the highly polished silver tableware in the banquet setting might have contributed to the overall dazzling effect. Even the room's location within the house could have impacted the viewing experience, as its proximity to a courtyard or other outdoor-adjacent space could have promoted the hanging's movement

in the breeze. This type of placement might even have enhanced the *trompe l'oeil* effect of the design itself by providing the figure and the flowers in the background with a sense of subtle and playful movement.<sup>126</sup> There is also the likelihood that the viewer, as a guest at a banquet, was consuming wine (and potentially copious amounts of it). For an inebriated guest, the boundaries between artifice and reality might have been blurred even further, particularly with regard to the presence of actual servants and their woven counterparts. While the former might have obediently and silently stood motionless between tasks, the latter were permanently fixed in this form, providing a visual model of servile ideals for the actual servants (Lenski 2013, p. 147).

As noted above, it was suggested that large furnishing textiles such as the Chicago hanging were purchased and hung not as individual pieces, but rather in sets (Stauffer 1995, p. 10). The Chicago hanging could very well have functioned as one of a group of comparable hangings displayed within an elite dining setting. If this were the case, it seems reasonable that there were some intentional differences in the figures' appearances, dress, attributes, and architectural settings. Such a grouping would not only have reinforced the jeweled-style emphasis on visual variety, but it also might have created the illusion that the patron had a large crowd of attendants serving diverse occupations at their disposal, further enhancing the presentation of their wealth and prestige among their peers, clients, and guests.<sup>127</sup>

As Thelma K. Thomas suggests, the physical impossibility of compositions such as these "teasingly opens an imaginative realm, inviting the viewer to envision herself there" (Thomas 2016b, p. 22). In the case of the Chicago hanging, and its counterparts in the other hangings, the presence of the figures who emphatically turn their heads in either direction would seem to direct the viewer's eye into this fictional expanse, and perhaps also within the room itself, a task undoubtedly undertaken by the servants operating within the space. When combined with the actual servants in a residence, and perhaps even in conjunction with additional images in wall paintings or floor mosaics depicting servants or other allegorical figures, this multiplication of attendants of different types (both real and fictive) would surely have had a rhetorical, amplifying effect, enhancing the display of the patron's wealth, status, and prestige, as well as the message of the abundance, hospitality, and "the good life" experienced within the household.<sup>128</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> To date, the Art Institute of Chicago's holdings in Late Antique textiles from Egypt, which are housed in the museum's Textiles Department, remain largely unpublished and relatively unknown in the scholarly community. Brief references to the collection are made in (Mayer Thurman 1984, p. 54) and (Mayer Thurman 1992, pp. 11–13). However, parts of the collection were included in the "Census of Byzantine Textiles in North America", a subproject of the "Byzantine Object Census" started in 1938 and largely concluded by 1943, which is currently held in the Image and Field Work Archives of Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC. Special thanks to Elizabeth Dospěl Williams and Stephanie Caruso for informing me of this resource.

<sup>2</sup> Generally, the period identified as "Late Antiquity", which covers both the later Roman empire and the early Byzantine empire, is defined as extending from the third to seventh century CE. See (Weitzmann 1979; Stauffer 1995, pp. 6–7; Thomas 2016a, p. 11). Some scholars suggest that the period had a shorter duration; for example, for a range of c. 200–500 CE, see (Stephenson 2014,

p. 3); for a range of 300–500 CE, see (Elsner 2004, p. 271). However, others suggest it covers a broader timeframe; see (Bowersock et al. 1999, p. ix) for a range of 250–800 CE. For a succinct summary of the degree of overlap between the terms Late Antique, late Roman, and early Byzantine as well as the implications of such terminology, see (Trilling 1982, pp. 11–13). On the arbitrary nature of such terminology, see (Cameron 1993, pp. 7–8).

On the discovery of Late Antique clothing and furnishing textiles in burials in Egypt, see (Thompson 1971, p. 1; Thomas 1990, pp. 1–2; Bühl 2019, p. 15).

*Fragment of a Hanging*, 5th–6th century CE. Byzantine; Egypt. Linen and wool, plain weave with weft uncut pile and embroidered linen pile formed by variations in back and stem stitches; 136.5 × 88.3 cm (53 3/4 × 34 3/4 in.). The Art Institute of Chicago, Grace R. Smith Textile Endowment, 1982.1578.

See (Art Institute of Chicago 1983, p. 18; 2009, p. 318; Mayer Thurman 1984, p. 54; 1992, p. 11; Hali Magazine 1985). In recent years, the figure has no longer been identified explicitly as a warrior. See Manchester for a more general identification of the figure as a “man” (Manchester 2012, p. 102).

To the current author’s knowledge, the first reference to the Chicago figure as an image of a servant appears in (Dospěl Williams 2015, pp. 14–15). See also (Thomas 2016b, pp. 22, 24, 34; Rooijackers 2018, p. 47; Dospěl Williams 2019b, pp. 38, 60, cat. 23). Rutschowskaya identifies a similar figure in a textile in the Musée du Louvre as a “person (a priest?)”; see (Rutschowskaya 1990, p. 52). See also Section 4 below for further discussion of the hanging in the Louvre.

For Dunbabin’s pioneering article on the motif of the waiting servant, see (Dunbabin 2003b). For a brief summary of the issues addressed in this article, see (Dunbabin 2003a, pp. 150–56).

The hanging was purchased on the art market in 1982 from the Merrin Gallery (then known as the Edward H. Merrin Gallery) in New York. Curatorial object file, Textiles Department, Art Institute of Chicago.

For further discussion, see Section 3 below.

For the suggestion that the weaver very carefully depicted the details of the male figure’s tunic, see (Dospěl Williams 2019b, p. 60). For a useful diagram illustrating the placement of the different types of decorative elements on the basic Late Antique tunic, see (Thomas 2016b, p. 44, Figure 1–1.3).

Upon close observation of the textile, the topmost band of each column does not fully encircle the column itself, as it ends abruptly upon reaching the vertical green band at the interior. Additionally, on the right column, the lowermost ring has a green rectangle on the left and a blue rectangle on the right. The reasoning behind these design decisions is unclear, but it does not appear to be related to any technical considerations associated with its construction. In the case of the blue rectangle in particular, one wonders whether the weaver intentionally introduced an element of variety with the use of a different colored yarn or if this was instead due to practical matters, e.g., a lack of green yarn to complete the composition. Rare examples of gilded bronze appliques incorporating gemstones, which likely served as architectural attachments, were found in the Horti Lamiani in Rome. See (Zink 2019, Figure 26).

On the construction of the hanging, see (Mayer Thurman 1984, p. 54; 1992, p. 11).

The hanging is permanently stitched to fabric that wraps around a wood stretcher, meaning it is not possible to view the back. Special thanks to Melinda Watt for her insight into the construction of the hanging and the likely appearance of the back, which she suggests would have resembled a “worn-down rug”.

On the uses of weft-loop pile in both furnishings and clothing, see (Colburn 2019).

On the difficulty of achieving this three-dimensional effect in weaving, see (Mayer Thurman 1984, p. 54; 1992, p. 11).

One also wonders whether the brown upper part of each of the blue shoes was intended to represent a light source shining on the tops of the figure’s feet, or if the brown elements should instead be identified as part of his footwear.

On the use of the weft-loop pile technique to create three-dimensional effects, see (Kondoleon 2016, p. 88).

For the identification of the Chicago textile as a curtain or a hanging, see (Mayer Thurman 1984, p. 54). There is considerable scholarly debate about the proper nomenclature to use when identifying furnishing textiles (Schrenk 2009; Stephenson 2014, pp. 12–18). See also (Schrenk 2004, pp. 23–145) for the identification of various types of furnishing textiles in the collection of the Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg, based on technical and iconographic analyses. On the ancient vocabulary used to describe furnishing textiles, see (Clarysse and Geens 2009, pp. 39–41).

On the role of the scale (both in terms of the textile itself as well as that of its motifs) in helping distinguish between garments and furnishings, see (Dospěl Williams 2018, p. 33).

See Section 6 below.

On the depiction of curtains in this mosaic, see (De Moor and Fluck 2009, p. 9; Stephenson 2014, p. 21).

On this hanging, see (Salmon 1969, p. 146; Maguire 1999, p. 244; De Moor and Fluck 2009, p. 11; Kondoleon 2016, p. 88; Bühl 2019, p. 20).

The remains of fittings to hang furnishing textiles including rods, hooks, and hoops, have been found in earlier Roman and Late Antique domestic contexts as well as in sacred spaces, for example in Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome and Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. See (Stephenson 2014, especially pp. 12–13, 18–21; Bühl 2019, p. 16).



- 24 It is important to recognize that textiles found in Egypt were not necessarily fabricated there (Trilling 1982, p. 17) as examples of Roman and Late Antique textiles have also been discovered in Syria, the Middle East, and the coastal area of the Black Sea; see (Stauffer 1995, pp. 7–8). Textiles found in Egypt and elsewhere may also have been imported, as reflected in their materials, weaving techniques, ornamentation, or in the case of garments, the style of clothing. See especially (Thomas 2017).
- 25 Most recently, see (Bühl et al. 2019b, p. 11).
- 26 For recent perspectives on the collecting of Late Antique textiles from Egypt in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with a particular focus on major collections in the United States, see the essays in Part 2 of (Thomas 2016a). See also (Thomas 2007, pp. 137–45).
- 27 See n. 8 above for provenance information.
- 28 For an overview of the occupations, responsibilities, and treatment of slaves at Roman banquets, see (D’Arms 1991).
- 29 In *De Re Rustica* (1.17.1), Varro identifies slaves as “speaking tools” in the context of discussing the three types of instruments necessary for the management of the Roman estate: *alii [dividunt] in tres partes, instrumenti genus vocale et semivocale et mutum, vocale, in quo sunt servi, semivocale, in quo sunt boves, mutum, in quo sunt plaustra* (“Others divide them into three categories: the articulate sort of tool, the inarticulate, and the mute; the articulate includes slaves, the inarticulate cattle, and the mute wagons”), as translated in (Lenski 2013, p. 148, n. 5).
- 30 On this restriction of movement as a “geography of containment”, one aspects of which is the “choreography of slave movement”, see (Joshel and Petersen 2014, pp. 8–13).
- 31 For references to specific literary passages, see (Joshel and Petersen 2014, p. 9, n. 33).
- 32 For a discussion of anthropomorphized functional objects, such as candelabra and incense burners, which likely depict slaves, see (Lenski 2013). Such objects blurred the lines between slaves as tools and tools as slaves, in turn providing a model of obedient slave labor as an expression of beauty.
- 33 To the current author’s knowledge, no scholar has previously assessed the frequency with which depictions of male slaves occur relative to that of female slaves. However, images of female slaves appear to occur less commonly than male slaves, although they are not necessarily rare. For examples, see (Dunbabin 2003b).
- 34 See Pollini for a more detailed discussion of the literary and artistic evidence of the hairstyles of *pueri delicati* (Pollini 2002, pp. 53–57). See also Rooijakkers on the use of different terms used in ancient literary source to describe the hairstyles worn by such youths (Rooijakkers 2018, pp. 49–51).
- 35 For further discussion see (Dunbabin 2003b, pp. 454–58). For marble portraits dated to the mid to late first century CE that may depict *delicati*, see (Fless 1995; Pollini 2002, pp. 53–62). As Dunbabin notes (Dunbabin 2003b, p. 456, n. 48), if the identification of the subjects of these portraits as *delicati* is accurate, it reflects the existence of the iconographic type of the long-haired slave boy well before it was used specifically to depict banquet servants.
- 36 Dunbabin repeatedly notes the use of simple panels to frame the figures but does not explore this feature in detail, although she suggests that it may find its origins in the more ceremonious formulaic art of the imperial court. See (Dunbabin 2003b, p. 463).
- 37 See especially (Dunbabin 2003a, p. 151; 2003b). On representations of “the good life” in the artworks of the Late Antique domestic sphere, see (Maguire 1999; Török 2005, pp. 217–36; Thomas 2016b, p. 22; Dospěl Williams 2019b, p. 37).
- 38 On the food and tableware associated with elite dining contexts, see especially (Dunbabin 2003a, pp. 156–164). More generally, see (Raff 2011). For a mosaic pavement that illustrates all of the elements of a banquet including the guests, furniture, servants, tableware, and even the lavish meal, the remains of which covers the floor in the manner of an *asàrotos òikos* (unswept floor) mosaic, see (Dospěl Williams 2019b, p. 36, Figure 4).
- 39 On this group of eight mosaic panels, see (Raff 2017). These panels reflect the use of *xenia* motifs in mosaics in the second century CE, but later examples are attested. For example, see the fourth-century mosaic pavements from Toragnola on the Via Prenestina in Rome, now in the Sala degli Animali of the Musei Vaticani (45007 and 45008). On these mosaics, see (Raff 2017, para. 18, Figures 146–153.17, 146–153.18), with additional bibliography.
- 40 For a discussion of the relevant examples from domestic contexts, see (Dunbabin 2003a, pp. 151–53; 2003b, pp. 446–49). Among these domestic examples one should also consider the paintings from the Schola Praeconum (headquarters of the public heralds) in Rome, where a room off the courtyard featured mid third-century CE paintings depicting life-size male servants. Standing at regular intervals before a fictive architectural setting, these attendants direct their actions into the space and the actual viewer, rather than engaging with each other. They hold various objects, a garland, a napkin or towel, a box of perfumes or ointments, conveying a message of both status and hospitality. On these paintings, see (Mielsch 2001, pp. 121–22, 173; Ling 2014, p. 406). See also (Dunbabin 2003a, pp. 100–2; 2003b, pp. 446–47).
- 41 On these paintings, see (Strocka 1995, pp. 82–89; Zimmermann and Ladstätter 2011, pp. 168–69). The remains of the simple rectangular panels that frame each of the servants are only partially visible in Figures 5 and 6 of the current article as well as the images published in (Zimmermann and Ladstätter 2011, p. 168, Figures 349 and 350), but they are more easily discerned in (Strocka 1995, p. 84, Figures 10 and 11).
- 42 D’Arms indicates that it was a sign of status and conspicuous consumption to have differentiated slaves within one’s household (D’Arms 1991, p. 177). An example of such differentiation is presumably seen in the varied appearances of the painted servants

at Ephesos, as well as in a mosaic from a house at Thugga (Dougga) in Africa Proconsularis depicting servants of different ages and body types wearing different forms of clothing and engaging in varying activities, including carrying, pouring, and receiving wine in a bowl. On this mosaic, see (Dunbabin 1978, p. 123; 2003b, pp. 448, 457).

See D'Arms on the literary evidence for the three main types of household slaves in Roman banquets, including "supervisory duties, gate keeping, and guest control; the various food services; and the duties of the wine staff" (D'Arms 1991, pp. 172–73).

For examples of comparable images, see (Dunbabin 2003b, pp. 449–54, 461–62).

On these paintings, see (Wilpert 1903, p. 477; Deckers et al. 1987, pp. 209–10, no. 10; Zimmermann 2002, pp. 177–78; Dunbabin 2003b, p. 452).

On this point, see (Dunbabin 2003a, pp. 185–86).

The *Projecta Casket* is one of the over sixty silver objects belonging to the Esquiline Treasure, so-named for its discovery on the Esquiline Hill in Rome in the late eighteenth century. See (Shelton 1981, 1985; Buckton 1994, pp. 33–34, cat. 10). On the interpretation of its iconography, see (Elsner 2003). Interestingly, Elsner notes that many of the objects belonging to the Esquiline Treasure appear to be carried by the servants on *The Projecta Casket* (Elsner 2003, p. 28). On the depiction of the procession of servants on the casket, see also (Dunbabin 2003b, pp. 458–59).

Dunbabin notes that by the turn of the fourth to fifth century CE, funerary images of banqueting scenes largely disappear, likely due in part to the church authorities' disapproval of the practice of funerary banqueting as well as its clear associations with material things and luxury. Additionally, secular banqueting scenes also begin to disappear at this point in time, although the reason behind this is less clear given the literary and archaeological evidence of the persistence of banqueting customs into the sixth century, albeit primarily in the eastern part of the empire. See (Dunbabin 2003a, pp. 191–93).

See n. 33 above on the seemingly less-common depiction of female servants relative to that of male servants.

I am tremendously grateful to Vanessa Rousseau for informing me of this image of a female servant, the first known example of a human figure in monumental painting found at Sardis, and also for sharing with me the following publications that reference it: (Greenewalt et al. 1995, pp. 483–84; Rousseau 2010, pp. 88–91).

One wonders whether there is any possibility that this fragmentary female figure could instead depict an attractive, androgynous male youth of the *pueri delicati* type, given the figure's smooth skin and longer hair. Unfortunately, much of the proper right side of the figure's face and body from the waist down do not survive, thereby complicating the interpretation of the figure. An example of the re-identification of figures previously identified as female as is offered by Fless, who reinterprets a mosaic depicting thought to depict a choir or perhaps a group of girls as a group of male youths; see (Fless 1995, p. 60). See also (Dunbabin 2003b, pp. 455–56).

As Rousseau notes, the figure's gesture points not toward the adjacent triclinium (room D), but rather toward the interior of the arch, leading to the question of what (if anything) she was intentionally drawing the viewer's attention toward, perhaps books, sculpture, or other objects of display; see (Rousseau 2010, p. 89).

*Fragment of a curtain*, 4th–6th century CE. Late Roman. Linen plain weave with polychromy wool weft pile loops; 97.5 × 131 cm (38 3/8 × 51 9/16 in.). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Charles Potter Kling Fund, 49.313. On this hanging, see (Du Bourguet 1964, pp. 157–59, cat. 165; Salmon 1969, p. 148; Török 2005, p. 219; Kondoleon 2016, p. 88).

*Hanging*, 420–570 CE. Byzantine; Egypt. Loop weaving in wool and linen; 75 × 69 cm (29 1/2 × 27 1/8 in.). Musée du Louvre, E 10530. On this hanging, see (Rutschowskaya 1990, p. 52; Török 2005, p. 219).

*Curtain*, 5th–6th century CE. Byzantine; Egypt. Weft-loop pile in wool on plain-weave linen ground; 85 × 88 cm (33 1/2 × 34 5/8 in.). Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst (formerly in the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, lost in World War II), 9223. I am grateful to Căcilia Fluck for confirming that the Berlin hanging was unfortunately lost in the second World War. Email correspondence with Căcilia Fluck, 16 July 2021, object file, Textiles Department, Art Institute of Chicago. Fortunately, the hanging was documented in a color plate when it was published in 1926; see (Wulff and Volbach 1926, pp. 2, 6). Many thanks to Elizabeth Dospěl Williams for her insight into this hanging, including her thoughts on the technique used in its construction.

More specifically, the Chicago hanging is dated to the 5th–6th century CE, the Boston hanging is dated to the 4th–6th century CE, the Paris hanging is dated to 420–570 CE, and the Berlin hanging was dated prior to its destruction to the 5th–6th century CE. It is important to acknowledge that the Paris hanging was carbon-14 dated, lending some scientific support for the roughly comparable date ranges of the other hangings, which presumably were dated based on stylistic, iconographic, compositional, and technical considerations, as is the case for the Chicago hanging. I am grateful to Elizabeth Dospěl Williams for her guidance on the matter of dating Late Antique textiles and also for pointing me to the Universität Bonn's database on textile dates, with a focus on examples that have been radiocarbon dated and historically dated (i.e., dated based on inscriptions): <http://www.textile-dates.uni-bonn.de/> (accessed on 7 September 2021). See (Colburn 2019) for a recent study of a Late Antique hanging in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which illustrates how the study of weaving techniques in conjunction with technical analyses, including carbon-14 dating and dye analysis, can assist scholars in identifying groups of textiles from the same era that share common characteristics.

See notes 53–55 above for information pertaining to the three hangings' respective dimensions, materials, and methods of construction. To the current author's knowledge, the first instance in which the Chicago hanging was compared with any of the

other hangings, specifically that in Paris, appears in (Rutschowskaya 1990, p. 52). However, the first instance in which the four hangings were considered together appears in (Rooijakkers 2018, p. 47).

The entry for the Boston hanging in the online database of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston does not currently make any explicit reference to its presumed Egyptian provenience, although this generally seems to be accepted in its earlier publication history: <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/49902> (accessed on 7 September 2021). For a recent publication addressing aspects of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston's collection of textiles from Late Antique and early Byzantine Egypt (including this hanging), see (Kondoleon 2016).

It is also possible that multiple weavers worked on a single hanging at a time, which also might have introduced further variety among those being produced in the same workshop. I thank Jennifer Moldenhauer for this observation. For a recent study on the use of papyrus drawings as cartoons or models for the production of Roman and Late Antique textiles, see (Elsner 2020). See also (Stauffer 1996).

However, the Chicago figure is the only one with dark hair and wearing a green tunic.

Thomas suggests that the figures on hangings and curtains “might invite entry by turning, thus leading the mind’s eye into the depicted space”; see (Thomas 2016b, p. 22).

Special thanks to Steve Andrekus for suggesting this as an alternative reading of the figures’ pose. On the idea of banquet servants as “human props”, who were required to stand in silence throughout the dinner, see (D’Arms 1991, pp. 171, 177).

Rooijakkers suggests that the underside of a candlestick may be visible in the right hand, but I did not observe this in my in-person examination of the hanging; see (Rooijakkers 2018, p. 47). However, near the Chicago figure’s proper left hand there is a small rectangular element that is red on top and green on its underside. It is the only one of the rectangular motifs in the background that is a single color, leading to the question of whether this feature can be identified as the traces of a now-missing attribute. I thank Katherine Andereck for her close observation of this feature.

On this hanging, see n. 22 above.

Kondoleon notes the similarities between the Boston *ostiarius* and the “barbarian guards” represented in the mosaics at San Vitale in Ravenna, see (Kondoleon 2016, p. 88).

Special thanks to Lora Holland Goldthwaite for informing me of this passage.

For occurrences of the word “green” (*prasinos*, πράσινος) in ancient Greek and Byzantine literary sources, see (James 1996, pp. 50, 54–57, 60, 74–75, 78, 87, 94–95, 113, 121). To be sure, *prasinos* is only one specific term that may refer to the color green. Color terminology is a complex topic, and the translation of such terms is by no means straightforward. An actual green tunic would likely have been fabricated of wool, rather than linen, as the former takes dyes better than the latter, although dyed linen textiles survive in the archaeological record. Both linen and wool were commonly used in tunics of the period, but wool was cheaper and also thicker, warmer, and to some extent waterproof. That said, the use of wool in the construction of a tunic was not necessarily indicative of its artistic value, which would have been reflected in the complexity of its production, design, and overall materials; see (Thomas 1990, pp. 4–5; 2016c; Krody 2019). For an example of a tunic woven with a plain-weave ground of green wool, see *Child’s Tunic with Hood*, 600–900, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 27.239. On this tunic, see most recently (Thomas 2016a, pp. 54–55, 58–59, 130–32, 145, no. 17, ill. Figs. 1–2.1, 1–2.5, 2–5.3). Alternatively, it is possible that a green tunic could have been fabricated of cotton, which similarly takes dyes well and was used in textiles of the period. While cotton was imported from India into Egypt, there is also evidence that it was grown and worked in Egypt (Thomas 2007, p. 156). An example of a resist-dyed cotton hanging, which may have been woven and dyed in Egypt or in India, belongs to the collection of the Harvard Art Museums: *Hanging Decorated with Crosses and Floral Motifs*, 5th–7th century CE. Byzantine. Cotton, indigo and red pigment, plain weave, Z spun; H. 270 × W. 131 cm (106 5/16 × 51 9/16 in.). Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Cambridge, MA, Gift of The Hagop Kevorkian Foundation in memory of Hagop Kevorkian, 1975.41.31. Accessible online: <https://hvrd.art/o/288791> (accessed on 26 May 2022).

Looking more closely at the columns represented in all four hangings, one observes that red columns with golden (and sometimes bejeweled) bands are found in all except the Boston hanging, where green columns with both golden and red bands are used. Only the Chicago and Paris hangings appear to have bejeweled bands, as those in the Boston and Berlin hangings are plain.

The capitals in the Boston hanging appear to resemble Corinthian capitals, whereas those in the Berlin hanging seem somewhat more simplified; see (Wulff and Volbach 1926, p. 6) for the identification of the latter as calyx capitals. A gable is clearly depicted in the Boston hanging, whereas the Berlin hanging only preserves traces of the horizontal geison. The Paris hanging preserves neither an arch nor a gable.

One wonders whether the depiction of both gables and arches in this group of hangings reflects an interest in introducing an element of visual variety in the types of structures used to frame servants within such hangings, as previously seen in the depiction of alternating gables and arcades in the framing devices used on the body of *The Projecta Casket*, as addressed above. On the Late Antique interest in such visual variety, see Section 5 below.

See n. 11 above.

On the role of textiles in conveying the iconography of “the good life”, see also (Maguire 1999, pp. 239–40, 243). On the depiction of jeweled motifs in the architectural elements of furnishing textiles, see (Dospěl Williams 2018, pp. 33–37).



- 73 In the Chicago hanging the heart-shaped motifs alternate the direction in which they are oriented, with the point at the bottom of the heart facing either up or down. In the other three hangings, the heart-shaped motifs are all oriented with their points facing upward. However, it is important to acknowledge that the Paris hanging only preserves two of such motifs.
- 74 Artistic, archaeological, and literary evidence attests to the popularity of roses in the Roman world, which were also cultivated for use in perfumes and garlands as well as for decorative use in gardens. See (Farrar 2000, especially pp. 130–59). On the cultivation of roses in Pompeii and the Bay of Naples area specifically, see (Jashemski 1979, 1993).
- 75 On the tradition of scattering rose petals at a banquet or festival celebration, see (Kondoleon 2016, p. 88). On the association of scattered rose petals with hospitality, see (Maguire 2020, pp. 167–68, 184, n. 17). Such scattered or “freefield” flowers are also found in wall paintings, particularly in domestic contexts in painted lararia, household niches, and small cubacula, as well as in tomb contexts, namely hypogea, arcosolia, and other niches in catacombs. For an overview of the use and meaning of the freefield floral style in a group of fourth-century CE hypogea at Sardis, with a consideration of the parallels between use of the motif in paintings and textile patterning, see (Rousseau 2019, pp. 16–19). With regard to the cultivation of roses in Egypt, one finds some literary support in a passage in Athenaeus’s *Deipnosophistae* (V.196), in which the author reiterates an account provided by Callixenus of Rhodes of an extravagant banquet arranged in Alexandria by Ptolemy Philadelphus. At this banquet, a variety of flowers cultivated in Egypt, including roses, were fashioned into wreaths for the guests and scattered on the floor of a pavilion. See (Farrar 2000, p. 142, n. 64).
- 76 On this textile, see (Shepherd 1976; Arensberg 1977, pp. 4, 6; Thomas 2016b, pp. 22, 26).
- 77 On this mosaic, see (Alexander 2012, p. 33). For another Byzantine mosaic in the Art Institute of Chicago’s collection that depicts stylized flowers, albeit with the flower petals forming a diamond shape rather than a heart, see *Mosaic Fragment with Grazing Camel*, 5th century CE, Art Institute of Chicago, 1970.1065, in (Sewell 1971, p. 3).
- 78 On the associations of such allegorical images with the theme of “the good life”, see (Maguire 1999, pp. 239–40, 243–44; Török 2005, pp. 219–20; Thomas 2016b, pp. 22, 35; Dospěl Williams 2019a).
- 79 On this hanging at Dumbarton Oaks, see (Maguire 1999, pp. 239–40, 243–44; Török 2005, pp. 219–20, 247; Evans and Ratliff 2012, pp. 167–68; Dospěl Williams 2019a, 2019b, pp. 58–59, cat. 22).
- 80 On the figures’ clothing and attributes, see (Evans and Ratliff 2012, p. 168, cat. 109; Dospěl Williams 2019a; 2019b, p. 59, cat. 22). For an identification of the flask held by the leftmost figure as a vessel used for sprinkling perfume on banqueters’ hands, see (Maguire 1999, p. 244; Török 2005, p. 220).
- 81 Additional textiles that belong to the same group as the example in Dumbarton Oaks can be found in the following collections: Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, 46.128a-b; Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg, inv. 1638; Coptic Museum, Cairo, inv. 8454; Musée de Cluny, Paris, Cl. 22068. For additional bibliography on these textiles, see (Evans and Ratliff 2012, p. 164, n. 4; Dospěl Williams 2019a).
- 82 On this textile, see (Du Bourguet 1964, pp. 163–65; Granger-Taylor 2005, pp. 5–52). For a textile depicting multiple praying figures in an arcaded setting in the collection of the Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg, inv. Nr. 8 a, b, see (Schrenk 2004, pp. 51–53, cat. 8). Figures in a comparable pose are also found on limestone stelai from Egypt produced in the same period; see (Shepherd 1974, pp. 333–36).
- 83 On the paintings from Lullingstone, see (Meates 1987, pp. 5–46).
- 84 On the unusual nature of the Lullingstone figures’ clothing, see (Wild 1987).
- 85 On the repetition and alteration of the rose motif in Byzantine art in both sacred and secular contexts, see (Maguire 2020). On the multivalency of freefield floral motifs, see (Rousseau 2019, pp. 16–19).
- 86 Vanessa Rousseau and the current author plan to investigate this topic more fully in a future publication.
- 87 The scholarship on ancient polychromy (both architectural and sculptural) has expanded vastly in the last several decades. On architectural polychromy, see especially (Zink 2014, 2019, 2021). See also (Zink and Grosser, forthcoming). For recent discussions of sculptural polychromy, see (Abbe 2015; Brinkmann et al. 2017; Østergaard 2018).
- 88 Examples include the remains of the columns embellished with painted plaster in peristyle of the House of the Gilded Cupids at Pompeii (Reg. IV, Ins. 16, 7, 38) as well as those of the atrium of the House of the Relief of Telephus at Herculaneum (Ins. ol, 2–3).
- 89 For example, lavishly decorated mosaic columns that belonged to a pergola in front of an equally elaborate and nymphaeum adorned with mosaics were found in the Villa of Mosaic Columns (also known as the Villa of the Figured Capitals), Pompeii, located outside the city walls. The columns are currently in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 9995, 9996, 10000, and 10001; see (Bolman 2016c, p. 121 n. 14). See also the mosaic-adorned nymphaeum in the House of Neptune and Amphitrite at Herculaneum (Ins. V, 6–7), which also includes the eponymous mosaic depicting Neptune and Amphitrite that incorporates pumice and shells into its decoration (Clarke 1991, pp. 255–57; Dunbabin 1999, p. 244). In terms of the use of colored marbles, the Forum of Augustus, inaugurated in 2 BCE, is thought to have been the first building in Rome to have been decorated extensively with such materials. See (Platner 1965, pp. 220–23; Ungaro 2002; Jones 2003; Bolman 2016c, p. 121). One can still catch a glimpse of this type of color and variety in the Orthodox Baptistery in Ravenna, where the combination of opus sectile, stucco, and mosaic decoration remains in a state close to that when it was completed in the late fifth century CE. See (Bolman 2016c, p. 124).

- 90 The *asàrotos òikos* mosaic is said to have originally been created by Sosos at Pergamon in the second century BCE (Pliny, *Natural History* 36.184). On the Hellenistic mosaic created by Sosos, as well as the Roman example illustrated here, see (Dunbabin 1999, pp. 26–27, 270–271; Kondoleon 2016, p. 92). On the *asàrotos òikos* theme specifically, see (Fathy 2017).
- 91 For recent discussions of wall paintings in the four Pompeian styles and beyond, see (Bragantini 2014; Ling 2014), with additional bibliography. See also (Ling 1991).
- 92 On the paintings from the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, see (Bergmann et al. 2010, especially pp. 28–32 on the cubiculum; Zanker 2020, pp. 96–101).
- 93 For example, in the later Roman empire, imitations of opus sectile panels are known in both wall paintings and mosaics. On opus sectile paintings, see (Rousseau and O’Connell, forthcoming, this issue). On mosaics depicting opus sectile, some of which were created from tesserae created from the stones that the artists sought to imitate, see (Dennis 2021).
- 94 See especially (Roberts 1989, pp. 66–121). Similar effects are also found in Late Antique portraiture and polychrome sculptures. See (Liverani 2014).
- 95 For the most up-to-date study on the history of the Red Monastery church, its program of paintings, and their conservation, see (Bolman 2016a). See also (Bolman 2016b, p. xxx, Table 1) for a chart outlining the date ranges, characteristics, and supports associated with the different phases of painting. On the second-phase paintings, which are dated to c. 500–525 CE, see (Lyster 2016; Bolman 2010, 2016c). Lyster describes these paintings of the second phase as “ornamental”; see (Lyster 2016, with an explanation of the rationale for the use of this term at p. 97, n. 1). Additional surviving Late Antique interiors that reflect the jeweled style include Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, San Vitale and the Orthodox Baptistery at Ravenna, and the rotunda of St. George in Thessaloniki; see (Bolman 2010, p. 127; 2016c, pp. 123–24). For an earlier stage of the polychromatic effects seen at Sohag, see the late Roman frescoes in Luxor Temple, Egypt (McFadden 2015).
- 96 On the dates of the painting phases, see n. 95 above. Generally, the vegetal and geometric motifs were retained within the triconch during this third phase of painting, suggesting their value to their audience (Bolman 2016c, p. 119).
- 97 On the ways in which the paintings of the Red Monastery church at Sohag reflect the characteristics of the jeweled style, see (Bolman 2010, p. 133; 2016c, p. 123).
- 98 On issues pertaining to light and color in Byzantine art, see (James 1996).
- 99 As Bolman notes, “the major contrast between the Macedonian and Pompeian *exempla* and the Red Monastery church interior is the density and variety of coverage” (Bolman 2016c, p. 124).
- 100 James addresses the topic of rainbows, their colors, and their meaning in Byzantine art, as outlined in ancient Greek and Byzantine literary accounts as well as in artistic representations of rainbows. She distinguishes between naturalistic rainbows (those with at least two colors in the expected rainbow colors) and non-naturalistic rainbows (those with a single or double band of one basic color depicted in an arc shape). While the former type was associated with physical phenomena, the latter was identified as an image of the glory of God; see (James 1996, pp. 91–109).
- 101 However, unlike mosaics, which were fixed in place, such textiles could be shifted depending on the patron’s needs and preferences. On the relationship between weft-loop pile textiles and polychrome mosaics, see (Kondoleon 2016, p. 89; Colburn 2019).
- 102 The decorative arrangement of the second register of the south lobe is quite similar to that of the north lobe, and both differ from that of the east lobe, where curtains occupy the niches, rather than images of saints. See (Lyster 2016).
- 103 On textiles as a medium of transfer, see also (Blessing 2018).
- 104 Kondoleon suggests that textiles should be considered on par with floor mosaics and wall paintings, see (Kondoleon 2016, p. 88). See also Section 6 below.
- 105 As Dospěl Williams notes, it is clear that textiles “were prized as material objects as much as visual ones, appreciated for their artistic mimicry and transformative subversion of medium” (Dospěl Williams 2018, p. 34).
- 106 Recent, critical publications include (De Moor and Fluck 2009; Stephenson 2014; Bühl and Williams 2019a; Ball 2019; Colburn 2019; Maguire 2019).
- 107 Foundational studies on the use of wall paintings, mosaics, and sculpture in domestic settings to convey messages of self-identity while also structuring movement and social relations within the house include (Gazda 1991; Clarke 1991; Wallace-Hadrill 1994; Laurence and Wallace-Hadrill 1997). See also (Hales 2003; Stewart 2008).
- 108 For further discussion of the physical and environmental functions of furnishing textiles, see (Stephenson 2014, pp. 5–6; Thomas 2016b, pp. 22, 28; Bühl 2019, pp. 16–17).
- 109 On this point, see (Blessing 2018, p. 14).
- 110 For recent studies on sensorial experiences in antiquity, see (Butler and Purves 2013; Bradley 2015; Squire 2015; Purves 2017; Rudolph 2018; Butler and Nooter 2019).
- 111 See n. 108 above.
- 112 See especially (Stephenson 2014; Bühl 2019, p. 19). Ellis argued that the increasing rigidity of antique society led to the development of a more autocratic form of patronage, which in turn required the creation of different types of reception/dining

spaces within the Late Antique home that were intended for receiving friends and clients on different points on the social spectrum (Ellis 1991, 1997). For a critique of Ellis's argument and a counterargument that the reception/dining spaces of Late Antique homes were not restricted to specific types of functions and guests but rather were multifunctional in nature, much like the spaces of earlier Roman houses, see (Bowes 2010).

- 113 This hanging belongs to a group of at least four other hangings, suggesting that they were hung together in an arcade or peristyle. See (Stauffer 1995, p. 20; Evans and Ratliff 2012, pp. 80–81, cat. 50).
- 114 As noted by Bühl, "textiles played an active and changing role in relationship to architecture and to the people's activities within that architecture" (Bühl 2019, p. 16).
- 115 As succinctly and aptly put by (Maguire 2019), "Both aspects of curtains, the practical or mechanical and the affective or meaningful, were experienced by people occupying or passing through spaces where curtains were to be seen, and can better be understood by examining material evidence in conjunction with depictions and texts that help us visualize the curtains in use. Their usefulness for mundane as well as more esoteric functions depended almost entirely on sensory experiences of perception. Curtains could be almost static place-markers, with pleated folds, held in place by the ties that restrained them against a wall, a column, or a jamb; or they could gently fill with air like tethered sails; they could merely suggest or effectively complete the division of an open space; they could hide or display areas or things or persons; and they could be pushed or pulled informally or ceremonially, and gathered up or dropped to give or deny access." See also (Thomas 2002, p. 44), on the idea of textiles moving in the breeze.
- 116 See especially (Weddigen 2013, 2014) as well as (Dospěl Williams 2018, p. 34) for an overview of the relevance of Weddigen's argument to the study of Late Antique textiles.
- 117 For a similar observation, see (Kondoleon 2016, p. 88).
- 118 For a concise overview of Late Antique dining practices, see (Dunbabin 2003a, pp. 141–74, 191–202). See also (Rossiter 1991; Ellis 1997).
- 119 For a brief overview, see (Dospěl Williams 2019b).
- 120 As outlined by Dunbabin, the forms of entertainment could include different types of music (singing and instruments such as the lyre, flute, and water-organ), dancing, poetry, and storytelling, as well as acrobats, mime, pantomime, dramatic performances, and occasionally even gladiatorial combat (Dunbabin 1996, pp. 66–67).
- 121 Dunbabin notes a new preference in Late Antiquity for silver bowls, plates, platters, and trays, as well as engraved or cut glassware. See (Dunbabin 2003a, pp. 161–64).
- 122 On contemporary literary sources, including the accounts of Sidonius Apollinaris, written around the mid-460s CE, and an episode documented by Macrobius in the *Saturnalia*, written in the first half of the fifth century CE, see (Rossiter 1991). For artworks depicting banqueting scenes as well as food, tableware, furniture, and other furnishings, see (Dunbabin 2003a, pp. 141–202). On the relationship of the archaeological evidence of tableware to such scenes, see (Vroom 2007).
- 123 For an argument in favor of the multifunctional use of space in Late Antique houses, see (Bowes 2010, especially pp. 35–60). On the difficulty in securely identifying dining rooms, see (Dunbabin 1996, p. 74).
- 124 See (Dunbabin 1991, pp. 135–36; 1996, pp. 78–79; Rossiter 1991, p. 203). An illustration of this arrangement, albeit depicting a biblical subject from the Old Testament rather than a contemporary banquet, is seen in the miniature depicting Pharaoh's feast in folio 17v of the Vienna Genesis, first half of 6th century CE, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Theol. gr. 31. For a color illustration, see (Hofmann 2020, p. 322, Figure 34). See also (Dunbabin 1996, p. 78).
- 125 Ellis describes this space as "a theatrical stage to display the profligacy of the host." See (Ellis 1997, p. 50).
- 126 On the effects of lamplight and breezes in the experience of textiles, see (Thomas 2002, p. 45). I thank Lisa Ayla Çakmak for independently making a similar observation about the potential movement of the Chicago hanging if displayed in or near an outdoor space.
- 127 For crowds of actual slaves, see Section 3 above.
- 128 See (Dospěl Williams 2018, p. 35) on stacking of imagery and the resulting amplification of the message.

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