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**Euripides' *Alcestis* and the "Aldobrandini Wedding"**

In 1601 the "Aldobrandini Wedding" fresco was cut from the reticulate masonry of a late 1<sup>st</sup> - century BC Roman house near the Arch of Gallienus on the Esquiline. It remained in the possession of the Aldobrandini family until purchased for the Vatican in 1818. (The *Sala delle Nozze Aldobrandini*, which also contains the *Paesaggi dell' Odissea* frescoes, is presently closed for restorations.) This was one of a few examples of Hellenistic wall-painting known before the excavations in Campania. Two separate monographs on the scholarship and documents relating to the discovery of the fresco, its interpretations, and its many copies and imitations, were published in 1994 by Giulia Fusconi (Vatican) and Frank Müller (Amsterdam).

Accepted "wedding"- interpretations of the picture (e.g. Peleus and Thetis [Winckelmann] or Alexander and Roxanne [Dutens]) were not challenged until 1994, when Müller argued for a scene from Euripides' *Hippolytus*. Reactions to Müller's theory have been mixed, for the details of the picture do not always accord well with the text of the *Hippolytus*, nor with ancient representations of the theme in painting and sculpture. Accord with Euripides' *Alcestis*, however, is better supported by both the text of the play and by ancient reliefs and vase-paintings representing scenes of Alcestis' final moments and of the intervention of Admetus' intoxicated house-guest, Heracles.

This paper examines four passages from *Alcestis* as clues to the meaning of the "Aldobrandini Wedding": *Parodos* (77-135) where Alcestis is dying; first *Episodion* (158-195), where a maid tells how Alcestis bathed and dressed, prayed to Hestia, visited the palace altars with myrtle and prayers, then fell on her bed again in tears; second *Stasimon*, where it is prophesied (445-447) that *mousopoloï* would one day hymn the virtues of Alcestis with the seven-toned mountain-tortoise lyre and in lyreless song; fourth *Episodion*, where the intoxicated and garlanded Heracles (747-860) revels by himself in the guest-wing, deceived by Admetus about who has died. Evidence from Plato's *Symposium*, and from sarcophagus reliefs and vase paintings presenting the story of Alcestis will also be considered.

F. Cappelletti and C. Volpi, trans. Charles Hope. "New Documents Concerning the Discovery and Early History of the *Nozze Aldobrandini*." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 61(1993): 274-279.

Giulia Fusconi. *La Fortuna delle 'Nozze Aldobrandini.'* *Dall' Esquilino alla Biblioteca Vaticana*. Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1994.

Ross S. Kilpatrick. "When a God Contrives. Divine Providence in *Alcestis* and *Ajax*." *Dionysius* 10 (1986): 3-20.

Frank G.J.M. Müller. *The Aldobrandini Wedding*. Iconological Studies in Ancient Art III. Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1994.