Thalia: Muse Reconstruction

For my restoration project I have chosen the muse statue labelled Nr. 142 that is displayed at the Prado in Madrid. Currently, Nr. 142 is labelled as Erato and exhibits heavy restorations. The restorations are highly speculative, the cupid especially, and will not be included in my reconstruction. I will provide my own digital reconstruction of Nr. 142 based on an identification of the muse cycle of which Nr. 142 is a part. I will argue that the current identification of Nr. 142 is incorrect and that Nr. 142 may more accurately be identified as Thalia, the muse of comedy and pastoral poetry. I will discuss the process of my digital reconstruction and provide a brief argument for the statue’s placement in the south theater of Hadrian’s Villa.

Nr. 142 was one of a collection of muses first illustrated by Pirro Ligorio that were unearthed at Hadrian’s Villa during the reign of Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503). Presumably, the statues were discovered in the Odeion in the southern part of the villa and were used to decorate the proscenium.¹ At the time of Ligorio’s writings, the muse statues were located in the vineyard of Pope Clemens VII (also known as the Villa Madama) on Mount Mario.² The muse statues were next documented in the 1530s, when a Dutch painter named Marteen van Heemskerck sketched four torsos of seated muses at the Villa Madama that matched well with Ligorio’s descriptions.³ The muse statues from the Villa Madama were then gifted to Christina

³ Rausa, “Un gruppo statuario dimenticato,” 44.
Queen of Sweden in 1681, passed through several other owners after her death, and eventually ended up in the Prado museum in Madrid.⁴

In its current condition, Nr. 142 is heavily restored, most of the restorations dating to the ownership of Christina of Sweden (Figure 1).⁵ The statue depicts a muse seated on a rock with crossed legs. She wears a chiton belted under her breasts. The left hand holds a kithara that rests in her lap and the right hand hangs down to her side. On the right side of the muse a cupid stands on a rocky protrusion jutting from the base of the rock. The original state of the statue, depicted in the Heemskerck sketch, is far less complete (Figure 2). The right arm, left forearm with attribute, head, cupid, parts of the feet, and parts of the rock and chiton are all modern restorations. The cupid was removed in 1830 by V. Salvatierra but replaced in 1996.⁶ ⁷ The cupid and attribute are highly speculative restorations based on Nr. 142’s identification as Erato.

The original, poor condition of Nr. 142 makes an identification of the statue difficult, especially since there is no trace of an attribute. But we may pursue an accurate identification in a less direct manner. In line with previous scholars, let us assume that in a muse cycle all nine muses will be represented and there will not be duplicates of a particular muse.⁸ As support for this assumption Rausa comments that during the reign of Hadrian, to which Nr. 142 dates, a cycle of nine muses seemed to be popular among the aristocracy.⁹ Thus, if we may identify the cycle to which Nr. 142 belongs, by process of elimination we may narrow down the possible identifications. Nr. 142’s current identification as Erato no doubt employed similar reasoning; Erato was chosen to create a full muse cycle in the Prado. But this identification then relies on

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⁴ Rausa, “Un gruppo statuario dimenticato,” 45.
⁵ Schröder, Katalog der antiken Skulpturen, 206.
⁶ Schröder, Katalog der antiken Skulpturen, 206.
⁷ An interesting question is why such an improbable restoration was restored.
⁸ See Rausa and Schröder. But it is worth noting that there were muse cycles with repeated muses, see Taback.
⁹ Rausa, “Un gruppo statuario dimenticato,” 45.
the decision that the Prado muses are an original set, a point of disagreement among scholars (Figure 3).

The implications of grouping Nr. 142 with differing muse cycles is demonstrated in the contrasting identifications proposed by Schröder and Rausa. Schröder has put forth two potential identifications (Clio and Erato), while Rausa argues that Erato must be a different statue in the cycle to which Nr. 142 belongs. This difference in opinion is a manifestation of a deeper disagreement between the two. Rausa believes that among the statues displayed in the Prado only those corresponding to the torsos sketched by Heemskerck are from Hadrian’s Villa. In contrast, Schroder maintains that all the statues in the Prado may be attributed to Hadrian’s Villa.

Rausa is not unaware of the controversy surrounding his opinion. Rausa states that considering the Prado muses as a complete cycle is “one of the false reconstructions most persistently accepted and recurring in the history of archaeological studies.” The source for the confusion, Rausa claims, is Pirro Ligorio’s report of nine seated muse statues from Hadrian’s Villa that were brought to the Villa Madama. But the fact that there was a full muse cycle present, does not necessitate that Queen Christina acquired the full cycle. Indeed, Rausa includes a correspondence that documents the gifting of four, not nine, of the Villa Madama muses to Queen Christina. The fact that Queen Christina’s muses are from more than one collection is further supported by documentation of Queen Christiana’s acquisition of four additional muses from the Esquiline Hill. Rausa continues on to identify records of two of the remaining

10 Schröder, Katalog der antiken Skulpturen, 212.
11 Rausa, “Un gruppo statuario dimenticato,” 43.
12 Rausa, “Un gruppo statuario dimenticato,” 46.
13 Schröder, Katalog der antiken Skulpturen, 207.
14 Rausa, “Un gruppo statuario dimenticato,” 43.
15 Rausa, “Un gruppo statuario dimenticato,” 44.
Hadrian’s Villa muses present at the Villa Madama, statues that were not given to Queen Christina. Rausa provides a convincing argument, firmly based on antiquarian sources. And yet four years later in 2004, Stephan Schröder gave a contrary opinion in his respected catalog of the sculpture from the Prado.

Schröder believes Queen Christina did come into possession of at least eight seated muses from Hadrian’s Villa and that claims to the contrary are “rather improbable” because of the “origin details” of the statues. Schröder does not include sources documenting Queen Christina’s acquisition of all eight statues but instead relies on a stylistic analysis of the statues. Schröder divides the Prado muses into two groups based on differences in the carving of drapery and the rocks upon which the muses are seated. Despite the differences in manufacturing, Schröder still thinks it likely that the Prado muses were made around the same time. According to Schröder, it is because of these two stylistic groupings that Heemskerck chose strategically to depict two muses from one group and two from the other, capturing the variety of the muses he saw at the Villa Madama without the need to sketch all nine.

While Schröder does have a discerning eye for sculptural style, his argument does not refute Rausa’s sources indicating that Queen Christina acquired the statues from multiple sources. No doubt Queen Christina, and whoever was helping her in finding muse statues, made a concerted effort to collect a set of muses that would complement one another. It seems Schröder commits the error that Rausa sought to extirpate, citing the exact passage that Rausa cautioned had led to so much misunderstanding. Schröder relies on the sole antiquarian source of Ligorio in establishing the provenience of the muse cycle, taking as fact a report that “very

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16 Schröder, Katalog der antiken Skulpturen, 207.
17 Schröder, Katalog der antiken Skulpturen, 208.
18 Schröder, Katalog der antiken Skulpturen, 202.
19 Schröder, Katalog der antiken Skulpturen, 208.
likely … reported oral sources known to scholars and local people interested in antiquity.”

Thus, Rausa’s conjecture, that the Prado muses are not of one group, seems the more likely.

Rausa identifies three standing muses, discovered by Ligorio, as members of the same muse cycle as Nr. 142. Sketches of these statues may be found in Heemskerck’s journals. These three additional statues were found in the Odeion, where purportedly the earlier nine seated muses were found. Thus, 12 statues identified as muses were reportedly unearthed in the Odeion at Hadrian’s Villa. All 12 cannot be from the same cycle, since that would violate our previous assumption that only nine muses are represented without repetition. Were the statues moved to the Odeion by later looters or is Ligorio’s report of nine seated muses erroneous? Rausa seems to think the later, raising concerns about the reliability of Ligorio’s sources.

Schröder also has misgivings about the discovery of nine seated muses, remarking on the oddity of a fully seated muse cycle. Regardless, in reporting the three standing muses, Ligorio is reporting on his own excavation. Since this is a primary source, we may safely ascribe it greater versimilitude.

The muse cycle that Rausa constructs has striking similarities to another muse cycle discovered at Tivoli. This muse cycle, discovered in 1774 at the Villa of Cassius near Hadrian’s Villa, is currently in the Sala delle Muse in the Vatican. The postures of all seven muses discovered at Hadrian’s Villa correspond perfectly with the postures of the Vatican muses (Figure 4). Normally, typological similarity in terms of posture is not enough to make an

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20 Rausa, “Un gruppo statuario dimenticato,” 43.
21 Rausa, “Un gruppo statuario dimenticato,” 45.
23 Rausa, “Un gruppo statuario dimenticato,” 43.
24 Schröder, Katalog der antiken Skulpturen, 208.
25 Rausa, “Un gruppo statuario dimenticato,” 44.
identification. Schröder recognizes the close similarity between the four torsos sketched by Heemskerck and the Vatican muses but sees this as no reason to identify the corresponding statues similarly. The attributes given to muses was fluid during the time of Hadrian, precluding using posture as a consistent identification criteria. But in this case, it may be shown that both statue groups, Hadrian’s Villa and the Villa of Cassius, are copies of the same prototype.

Rausa refers to this prototypical muse cycle as the Thespiades, a term made popular in the scholarship by W. Amelung. The Thespiades were a famous statue group whose first mention is by Pliny during his visit to the Temple of Felicity in the Campus Martius. Both Varro and Ovid tell us that the Thespiades were a muse cycle. These statues were formerly identified as the work of Praxiteles but this claim is now disputed. W. Amelung argued that the Vatican muses were the Thespiades but Rausa disagrees. While Rausa seems to think Amelung’s effort to connect the Prado muses to the famous muse cycle attested in ancient sources is a futile one, Rausa coopts the term Thespiades because like Amelung his argument draws from the idea that entire statue programs would be copied. Why Rausa dismisses Amelung’s claim is unclear, but for our purposes an exact identification of the Thespiades, i.e. prototypical statue group, is unessential. Rather, the pertinent aspect for the identification of Nr. 142 is the claim that both the Vatican muses and the Hadrian’s Villa’s muses are meant to be similar in iconography. Rausa

26 Schröder, Katalog der antiken Skulpturen, 212. See also Taback, Natlie, “Untangling the Muses: A Comprehensive Study of Sculptures of Muses in the Greek and Roman World” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2002): 78.
29 Amelung 25-49
30 Jacob Isager, Pliny on Art and Society.
31 Rausa, “Un gruppo statuario dimenticato,” 45.
claims that it was the Hadrian’s Villa muses that inspired the Vatican muses and that both these muse groups, and another muse cycle from the Villa at Mount Calvo.\textsuperscript{32}

If this is the case, and as Rausa claims the Thespiades muse cycles should correspond almost perfectly, then we may use the identifications of the Vatican muses to help identify the Hadrian’s Villa muses. Luckily, the Vatican muse that corresponds to Nr. 142 has only minor restorations and may be confidently identified as Thalia, the muse of comedic and pastoral poetry (Figure 5).\textsuperscript{33}

There are several other statues with the same pose as Nr. 142.\textsuperscript{34} One of them, currently held in Dresden, has also been identified as Thalia, although I am unsure how much restoration has occurred and how confident this identification is.\textsuperscript{35} While another held in Wörlitz has been restored as Erato. I am also unsure how confident an identification this is, for the attribute is a modern restoration (Figure 6).\textsuperscript{36} For future work it would be worth checking to see if the statue groups of these similar muses also correspond to the Thespiades style.

Identifying Nr. 142 as Thalia means that almost all of the modern restorations of Nr. 142 are incorrect, especially the cupid. For the arms and head I will draw directly from the Villa of Cassius Thalia (Rausa agrees that the Prado muses likely had the same features as the muses from the Villa of Cassius).\textsuperscript{37} Even if the statues did not exactly resemble one another, the lyre

\textsuperscript{32} Rausa, “Un gruppo statuario dimenticato,” 47-48.
\textsuperscript{33} Art Institute of Chicago, \textit{Preliminary Catalogue of the Elbridge G. Hall Collection of Casts of Sculpture} (Chicago Knight and Leonard Co., 1892), 66.
\textsuperscript{34} Taback, “Untangling the Muses,” 317.
\textsuperscript{35} Prince T. Mark, \textit{Guide to the Royal Collections of Dresden}, trans. C. G. Fox (Dresden: Albanus Printing Works, 1897), 244.
\textsuperscript{37} Rausa, “Un gruppo statuario dimenticato,” 13.
attribute that Nr. 142 currently holds is very uncommon for a Thalia statue.\(^{38}\) In the most canonical form, Thalia would be holding a comedy mask, and this is the case for the Villa of Cassius Thalia.\(^{39}\) Thus, it seems likely that Nr. 142 would hold a similar mask. As such, I think it is reasonable to restore Nr. 142 with the same attributes. The right arm holding the lagobolon poses no problems in terms of what is still extant on the statue. But it should be noted that there is no remaining trace of the drum that rests on the muse’s lap. The fact that the drapery directly beneath the lyre currently held by Nr. 142 indicates that the area were an attribute, such as a lyre or a drum, would have rested was lost. I will also add color to my restoration model based primarily on the preserved frescoes from the Praedia of Julia Felix.\(^{40}\)

First, before providing a reconstruction, a state model was made of Nr. 142 (Figure 7). The initial data was a series of photos taken at the Prado. These photos were then used to create a photogrammetric model. I received this photogrammetric model from Matthew Brennan. The initial model had extra geometry as well as a lumpy and pockmarked surface. The photogrammetric model was loaded into ZBrush, the extra geometry removed, and the pockmarked surface smoothed out using the ZBrush smooth brush and flatten brush. This model was then exported from ZBrush and uploaded to Sketchfab, a website for online viewing of 3D models.\(^{41}\)

The reconstruction model was made starting from this restoration model. Both arms, the lyre, head, and the rocky outcropping with the cupid were all removed. Even though the feet in the state model are not original, the feet were not removed since they are an unobtrusive detail.


\(^{39}\) Taback, “Untangling the Muses,” 5.

\(^{40}\) This part will require some additional research to support the color restoration.

\(^{41}\) The SketchFab model is available here: https://skfb.ly/IoQC.
Then these features were replaced with geometry taken from a photogrammetric model of the Villa of Cassius Thalia provided by Matthew Brennan. The major work in joining the two models was correcting for the incomplete geometry of the Villa of Cassius Thalia. As it is displayed in the Vatican, it is not possible to get behind the statue. This meant that there was no geometry for the back of the head or the backs of the arms. Extra geometry was added using the Clay brush in Zbrush. The head was especially tricky. In order to make the join less noticeable, texturing was applied to the top of the head using an alpha channel and the Standard brush (Figure 8). The top of the head is far from perfect but ultimately unimportant. The intention is to have this model placed in the scaenae frons and once in the building the top of the head will be all but impossible to see. The final step in creating the model was applying color. Roman statuary was often painted and we have direct evidence for polychromy of muse statues. Colors for Nr. 142 were taken from samplings of a preserved fresco of Thalia from the praedia of Julia Felix (Figure 9, Table 1). The end result of the reconstruction process was then uploaded to Sketchfab (Figure 10).

One aspect of Nr. 142 remains to be addressed, where was the statue placed in the south theatre? It was common practice among Romans to decorate the scaenae frons with a group of muses and it seems the south theatre at Hadrian’s Villa was no different. Past students in the I590 courses have offered possible reconstructions for the arrangement of the statues in the scaenae frons. Four such arrangements will be discussed here, one by Beckman, two by Forstall, and one by Sugita.

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43 Taback, “Untangling the Muses,” 204.
Beckman draws primarily from depictions of muse cycles in other Greco-Roman art in determining an arrangement. While there is no total order that is well represented, Beckman extracts several sub-groupings that appear frequently between depictions. These sub-groups are: Polyhymnia and Urania next to one another and Melpomene, Terpsichore, and Erato pictured together.\textsuperscript{44} Beckman argues that, possibly, the wall painting from the Praeidea of Julia Felix actually depicts statues of the muses, and not the muses themselves.\textsuperscript{45} Thus, Beckman uses this arrangement as his starting point. The painting matches nicely with the sub-groupings Beckman observed but requires the swapping the positions of Terpsichore and Erato.\textsuperscript{46}

The other two students, Forstall and Sugita, rely more heavily on the posture of the statues to determine an arrangement. Forstall also surveys other depictions of muse cycles in Greco-Roman art but concludes that they are insufficient to determine an arrangement. Instead, Forstall uses Elizabeth Bartman’s theory of “pendant arrangement” to construct a rhythmic arrangement of the statues based on their postures and directions of the statues gaze.\textsuperscript{47} Forstall gives two different arrangements, one with all of the seated muses on the lower level, and one with the seated and standing muses intervened on both levels. Sugita gives only a partial arrangement, placing all of the seated muses in the lower level based on posture and shoulder tilt. Sugita claims this arrangement is further justified by the balance of the attributes among this grouping.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{44} Eric Beckman, “Sculptural Musings: Reconstructing the Vatican Urania,” handout received in Informatics 590: Introduction to Virtual Heritage with Dr. B. Frischer, Bloomington, Indiana, Oct. 21, 2015, 11.
\textsuperscript{45} Beckman, “Sculptural Musings,” 12.
\textsuperscript{46} Beckman, “Sculptural Musings,” 13.
\textsuperscript{47} Charlotte Forstall, “Reconstruction of the Muse Erato and the sculptural display of the Muses in South Theater of Hadrian’s Villa,” handout received in Informatics 590: Introduction to Virtual Heritage with Dr. B. Frischer, Bloomington, Indiana, Oct. 21, 2015, 11.
\textsuperscript{48} Hilo Sugita, “The Statue of Clio and Its Restoration 3D Model,” handout received in Informatics 590: Introduction to Virtual Heritage with Dr. B. Frischer, Bloomington, Indiana, Oct. 21, 2015, 14.
The arrangements that these three propose differ greatly but there are two agreements that are worth noting (Table 2). Both Forstall and Beckman place Apollo and Mnemnosyne in central positions in the upper level. Considering the fact that Apollo and Mnemnosyne as the parents of the muses afforded greater reverence, this seems a logical placement, assuming Mnemnosyne was actually present. The second agreement worthy of note is between Forstall’s first arrangement and Sugita. Both have all four seated muses on the lower level and Forstall’s arrangement is a mirror of Sugita’s.

While Sugita seems to take for granted that all of the seated muses would be on the second level, there is precedent for muse cycles where seated muses are placed in both upper and lower levels.49 Furthermore, Thalia is one of the muses that is most often depicted in different levels of multi-level arrangements.50 Therefore, Sugita’s assumption that all the seated muses, Thalia included, were in the lower register is tenuous.

Even Beckman’s highly comparative study may be called into question. As Forstall remarks, context played a key role in the display of statues, dictating their placements. It follows then that the most weight should be assigned to depictions of muse cycles in similar contexts. Beckman’s primary source for his cycle, the Praedae of Julia Felix, is contextually very different from a theatre. Furthermore, the Praedae has the additional difference of being a 2-dimensional depiction, as opposed to the three-dimensional sculptures in the round we have from Hadrian’s Villa.51 However, it should be noted that while this muse cycle is indeed 3-dimensional statues, the statues were only meant to be viewed frontally with their backs obscured within the niches of

theatre. Despite this, Forstall raises serious concerns for an arrangement based purely on comparisons to different media found in different contexts.

With this in mind, what comparisons can be made with other muse cycles in similar contexts, i.e. theatres? In Taback’s formidable survey of muse statuary, she examines the contextual settings in which muse statues have been found, the theatre building chief among them. Taback astutely observes that the scena frons itself had an influence on the placement of statues, often resulting in a symmetrical arrangement. Like Forstall, Taback references Bartmans “pendant” theory as a convincing analysis of statue arrangements in the scena frons.52

Given the doubts that have been raised concerning an arrangement of the muses based solely on comparison, an arrangement based on posture seems the most fruitful direction, even though such an arrangement is still highly speculative. Therefore, I will use Forstall’s arrangement of mixed seated and standing muses for the south theatre of Hadrian’s Villa (Figure 11). I believe this to be more likely than Forstall’s other arrangement due to Beckman’s observed precedent of mixed standing and seated statues and the resulting vertical symmetry between upper and lower levels.

Nr. 142 is a striking statue that is part of a renowned collection of muses. But the statue is also an example of the destructive potential, both physically and ideologically, that reconstructions may incur. The identification of the statue as Thalia, while still fairly speculative, builds from firmer antiquarian sources than the current identification as Erato. The digital techniques used to realize this reconstruction serve both as an educational tool and as testament to the value of such a noninvasive technique.

52 Taback, “Untangling the Muses,” 208.
Bibliography


Figures

Figure 1: Nr. 142 as displayed in the Prado, Madrid.

Figure 2: Nr. 142 as sketched by Heemskerck at the Villa Madama.

Figure 3: The muse cycle displayed in the Prado.
Figure 4: Correspondences in posture between the Hadrian’s Villa muses and the Villa of Casius muses.

Figure 5: The Thalia from the Villa of Casius muses.

Figure 6: The Erato from Wörlitz.
Figure 7: A state model of Nr. 142.

Figure 8: The join at the head before (left) and after (right).

Figure 9: Depiction of Thalia from the praedia of Julia Felix.

Figure 10: Final version of Nr. 142 reconstruction.
Figure 11: Forstall’s muse arrangement of mixed and seated muses.

**Tables**

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Table 1: Colors used for Nr. 142 reconstruction. Colors not taken from the Julia Felix fresco are indicated by *.

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Table 2: Comparison of the muse arrangements proposed by Forstall, Sugita, and Beckman. U connotes upper level and L lower level.