

Sensual fresco discovered in ancient Pompeii bedroom

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The fresco "Leda e il cigno" (Leda and the swan) discovered last Friday in the Regio V archeological area in Pompeii, near Naples, Italy, is seen Monday, Nov. 19, 2018. The fresco depicts a story and art subject of Greek mythology, with goddess Leda being impregnated by Zeus - Jupiter in Roman mythology - in the form of a swan. (Cesare Abbate/ANSA via AP)

Archaeologists have found a fresco in an ancient Pompeii bedroom that

depicts a sensual scene of the Roman god Jupiter, disguised as a swan, and a legendary queen of Sparta from Greek mythology.

The figure of Leda being impregnated by the god in swan form was a fairly common home decoration theme in Pompeii and Herculaneum, another town destroyed in A.D. 79 by the volcanic eruption of Mount Vesuvius near present-day Naples.

But Pompeii archaeological park director Massimo Osanna praised this fresco as exceptional since it was painted to make it appear Leda was looking at whoever saw the fresco upon entering the bedroom.

"Leda watches the spectator with a sensuality that's absolutely pronounced," Osanna told Italian news agency ANSA.

The fresco's details include a depiction of Leda protecting the swan with her cloak as the bird sits on her lap.

Osanna noted the fresco's context of the Greek "myth of love, with an explicit sensuality in a bedroom where, obviously beside sleep, there could be other activities."

The fresco, with its colors still remarkably vivid, was discovered Friday during ongoing work to consolidate the ancient city's structures after rains and wear-and-tear in past years caused some ruins to collapse, the tourist site's officials said.



An archeologist cleans up the fresco "Leda e il cigno" (Leda and the swan) discovered last Friday in the Regio V archeological area in Pompeii, near Naples, Italy, Monday, Nov. 19, 2018. The fresco depicts a story and art subject of Greek mythology, with goddess Leda being impregnated by Zeus - Jupiter in Roman mythology - in the form of a swan. (Cesare Abbate/ANSA via AP)

The bedroom is located near a corridor by the entranceway of an upscale domus, or home, where another splendid fresco was discovered earlier this year, said the archaeological park, which is part of the Italian Culture Ministry.

Leda is an important figure in Greek mythology. She was said to have borne children fathered by the god Zeus, the Greek version of Jupiter, and by a mortal king of Sparta. According to myth, her children included the beautiful Helen of Troy and the twins Castor and Pollux.

Osanna said one hypothesis is that the home's owner was a rich merchant who wanted to give the impression he was culturally advanced by incorporating myth-inspired frescoes. It appeared the artist was inspired by a 4th century B.C. sculpture by Timotheos, he said.

Because of safety concerns, unexcavated parts of the domus will probably remain that way, ANSA said. Archaeologists are considering removing both frescos found in the home to a place where "they can be protected and shown to the public," Osanna was quoted as saying.

Pompeii's sprawling, partially excavated grounds are one of Italy's top tourist attractions.

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