

The Impact of Colour on the Roman City
during the Augustan Period

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations for following texts according to those listed in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3rd Edition).

Gell. *NA* – Aulus Gellius *Attic Nights*

Caes. *B Gall.* – Caesar *Gallic War*

Enn. *Ann.* – Ennius *Annals*

Juv. – Juvenal (*Satires*)

Mart. *Spect.* – Martial *Liber de Spectaculis / Epigrammaton liber*

Plin. *HN* – Pliny the Elder *Natural History*

Plin. *Ep.* – Pliny the Younger *Letters*

Plut. *Vit. Luc.* – Plutarch *Parallel Lives, Lucullus*

Sen. *Controv.* – Seneca the Elder *Controversiae*

Sen. *Ep.* – Seneca the Younger *Epistles*

Suet. *Aug.* – Seneca *Life of Augustus*

Suet. *Dom.* – Seneca *Life of Domitian*

Vitr. *De arch.* – Vitruvius *On Architecture*

Introduction

In modern society, the colour of an object in art, or the choice of shade in a painting, is very significant to us. Our cultural heritage contains a wealth of colour associations. Our literature is filled with rhetorical devices that use colour to evoke emotion; we decorate our houses with different colours to create different atmospheres; we use colour in day to day life to signify heat on a cooker, or how eco-friendly an appliance is.¹ Yet as a society, the idea that the ancient world was brightly coloured baffles us.

Through preservation and analysis, we can see that the ancient world was covered in colour, appearing on almost every surface² – and very rarely in subtle tones. The classical world was a riot of gaudy colour and intricate patterns,³ leaving our surviving pieces of art as pale, unfinished shadows of their former selves.⁴ This flies against our established ideas; the presentation of ancient art in its surviving form, with little mention of their colourful past, has cemented our view of the classical period as subtle and refined.⁵ This means that while the presence of polychrome has been accepted for more than a century, any discovery of art with surviving paintwork is met with surprise from the public.⁶

The study of colour as a subject has a relatively recent beginning, focussing initially on the issues of the Latin vocabulary for colour, and how we might align that

¹ Gage (1999) p22

² Fejfer (2008) p162

³ Ball (2001) p67

⁴ Østergaard (2008) p40

⁵ Østergaard (2008) p40

⁶ Bradley (2009)b 427

with our own.⁷ That colour is present is widely accepted, and most books on Roman art make mention that most pieces made use of colour, but few discuss the impact of this, and fewer still make colour their primary focus. These include Reinhold's *History of Purple* in 1970, Panzanelli's *Color of Life* (2008), and most recently Mark Bradley's *Colour and Meaning in Ancient Rome* (2009). This means that there is rarely prior discussion of a particular piece of art within the context of colour, and my research has therefore covered many genres – not only looking into the form and background of the art, but exploring other interdisciplinary approaches to the topic of colour as a whole. I have come to realise that researching other disciplines and applying that wealth of information to this subjects is highly beneficial if not indispensable to create a well-rounded view of the subject.

In this dissertation I will apply this research to specific examples of Roman art from the Augustan period to explore their use of colour, and how this was tied into the social experience of that art. To begin, I will first discuss both modern and ancient colour theory, to create a basis of understanding from which to look at these examples. It is important for us, before looking at specific cases, to appreciate broad themes in colour perception from this period.

I have chosen to focus on the period around Augustus' rule for this dissertation, as throughout this period we see dynamic changes in the use of colour. In wall painting, which will be the subject of my second chapter, three different styles span this period, demonstrated in my case study: the *oecus* of the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor. I will then go on to discuss a less well known medium - that of polychrome marbles - in my third chapter, focusing on the pavements at Augustus'

⁷ Bradley (2009)a ix

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Forum in Rome. Finally I will move on to a more unusual example; my fourth chapter will discuss a portrait bust of Augustus, glazed with faience, from Egypt. With this example I will demonstrate that applying an understanding of colour perception to a piece that we know so little about allows an insight into the impact that piece of art had on society.

I aim to highlight and remove our misconceptions about the study of colour in the Roman world and prove that colour has a firm place in our analysis of any ancient art.

What is Colour?

In this chapter, I will discuss how Roman society viewed colour, and how it differed from our own in so many ways. To do this colour must be defined and the difficulties that accompany a definition of such an ephemeral subject explored. This discussion requires a kind of self-awareness about colour that has only recently been developed in scholarly literature, and work on classical colour specifically has in general been very scarce. Although as a civilisation we have inherited many Roman ideals, when it comes to classical colour we have lost their perspective of it, and often adopted misconceptions in its place.

An example of one of these misapprehensions can be seen from the 19th Century when both Goethe and Gladstone promoted the theory which suggested that the Romans were blind to the colour blue entirely.⁸ This arose due to its scarcity in art in comparison to other colours, and the lack of any decisive term for the colour blue as a focal hue. Since then, we have accepted that it is incorrect that ancient societies had poor colour vision – 29 different pigments have been recorded as being in use in Pompeii. The paintings found there prove their ability to create realistic images both as portraits and landscapes, something that would be impossible if their eyes were not able to view the world in full colour.⁹

It is wiser to think of classical colour awareness as simply different from our own. We know that they saw colour, so the question is then *how* they understood it. Without our scientific knowledge of the colour spectrum, it appears that the Romans

⁸ Pastoureau (2001) p26, Ball (2001) 17, Bradley (2009)a ix

⁹ Ball (2001) 15

arranged colours differently. It seems that instead of chromatic divisions, colours in the Roman palette could be classified by whether they were light, dark, bright, rough and smooth.¹⁰ This developed through the Roman awareness of the senses, where the texture of the colour was more than or at least as important as hue. This emphasis is shown in the language used to describe it.

Expressing Colour

There are languages still in use today, where colour is described as much by touch as by sight – this particular language features only four words for colour: “light”, “dark”, “fresh” and “dry”.¹¹ In Latin, we can see this similar emphasis on texture with the word *caeruleum*, which is normally labelled ‘blue’. In reality it was somewhat more complex - *caeruleum* originally comes from the term for wax, *cera*, which is a pale creamy white and appears to describe more the smoothness of the finish rather than the colour – it is associated with smooth honey, or clear sky: the texture of the colour and its brilliance being more relevant than the specific hue. In Latin, this word can mean anywhere between yellow to the dark blue green of the sea,¹² focussing on smooth, clear colour as opposed to identifying a particular hue. Interestingly, yellow and blue have been linked together in many different languages; indeed *flavus*, another word for yellow, is the etymological root for our own word, “blue”.¹³ *Flavus* is normally accepted to mean ‘blond’,¹⁴ but on several occasions, it is associated with water, which we would naturally connect with blue. Pacuvius refers to *flavua lympha*,

¹⁰ Pastoureau (2001) 16

¹¹ Ball (2001) 17

¹² Ball (2001) 15

¹³ Ball (2001) 16

¹⁴ Bradley (2009)a 1-7

or yellow water, with which one could wash,¹⁵ and Ennius describes a ship, flowing though *flavum marmor*, literally a yellow marble sea.¹⁶ This disparity is explained in Aulus Gellius' *Attic Nights*, where two speakers discuss this passage;¹⁷ here *flavus* is referred to as a mixture of green and white, and therefore the *flavum marmor* is the foam of the green sea. While this seems to explain that particular reference, it exposes our difficulty in grasping a definition of *flavus* itself; it can be yellow, blond, blue, and a light shade of green. Here, I would suggest, we also see a description of texture more than hue – all of these uses of *flavus* show something flowing – be it blond hair, poured water, or surf at the bow of a ship: perhaps *flavus* is a more textured, flowing version of *caeruleum*.

When comparing these colour terms with our own, this emphasis on texture creates an unusual difficulty – how to translate *caeruleum* or *flavus* into our language, in which it must be placed using its hue, not its consistency. With most languages, the equivalents for our primary colours are easy to identify – it is not a complex issue to identify a word for yellow that encompasses all possible shades of yellow. However, difficulties arise when we look to the more specific, complex colours – how can we define where a Roman writer describes a gold, as opposed to a lemon colour, if Latin does not have the equivalent differentiation.¹⁸ This same idea is discussed within the context of red in Gellius' *Attic Nights*, between Roman and Greek. Here, *rubor* or *russus* are labelled as the focal colour of red, but agreement where terms for red shades match between the languages of Greek and Latin is difficult.¹⁹ This then is a

¹⁵ Pacuvius, *Tragedies* 244

¹⁶ Enn. *Ann.* 384

¹⁷ Gell. *NA* 2.26.21-23

¹⁸ Ball (2001) 14-15, Gage (1999) p21

¹⁹ Gell. *NA* 2.26.4-8

perennial issue when looking at primary sources discussing colour, as our own structure of thinking about colour differs from the Roman in such a fundamental fashion.

Modern Colour

In the modern era, bright colours are associated with childishness, vulgarity, or fantastical or whimsical creations. This distaste can be seen in the words of Le Corbusier who blamed the east for this ‘decadence’, and suggested that colour was *“suited to simple races, peasants, and savages.”*²⁰ While this statement certainly seems reminiscent of Pliny the Elder,²¹ it is not caused by the same influences - it mainly stems from the opinions of the Victorian period. When interest in classical art history and archaeology was revived with Neo-Classicism in the 18th and 19th Centuries, emphasis was placed on the simple, more conservative, plain white finish of the marble, which suited better the atmosphere of that time, and this impression of classical art has passed down to us relatively unchallenged.²²

This lingering preconception within the classical community adds another layer of difficulty to the study of this subject. While a book on classical art will often make note of, and accept that, a piece of architecture or statue would have been in polychrome, very little discussion is accorded to the significance of this.²³ It has become tradition, either because of lack of evidence, or these misconceptions of clean white art, that the subject matter and form of a piece has priority over colour.²⁴ Allen Patillo is

²⁰ Le Corbusier (1998) 135

²¹ Ball (2001) 13

²² Bradley (2009)b 427

²³ Karatheodoris (2012) 97

²⁴ Karatheodoris (2012) 97

recorded as saying, 'a large part of what has been written about paintings, it's fair to say, has been written almost as if paintings were in black or white,'²⁵ a statement with which I find much agreement. To my mind, eliminating colour excludes us from gaining vital information about the piece. If colour is a representation of society, then colour applied to art is a cultural commentary on the piece, and deserves more than cursory discussion.

Looking further afield

Due to this scarcity of discussion about colour among authors of Classical research, I have found myself exploring works by authors who are principally anthropologists, artists, psychologists, or even chemists and physicists. This contributes its own set of difficulties. When talking about classical attitudes, these sources can be less precise, lending a generalisation based on their own familiarity of the subject, and in some cases I am applying theories about the human interaction with colour which were not written with Classics in mind.

There are sensory reactions to colours that would have been as relevant to the Romans as they are today. On viewing red for example, the eye becomes long-sighted, making it appear nearer than blue, which causes the eye to become short-sighted and therefore seem more distant.²⁶ Pure colours – like a white or deep black – give the impression of close proximity to the eye,²⁷ while colours in the distance are more

²⁵ Arnheim (1974) 344

²⁶ Birren (1969) 76

²⁷ Birren (1969) 76

muted and fade towards grey.²⁸ This is simply the result of the mechanics of the eye, and the way it has developed to interpret nature.

For the artist, or the study of art, colour is anything but easily defined. The whole idea of colour is extremely subjective, and its perception and interpretation depends on the mindset of the beholder.²⁹ Colour is in many ways a form of our imagination; it is an impossible thing to 'understand', and attaching meaning to it is a peculiarly human form of cognition. This is not something that can be simulated artificially,³⁰ but is developed alongside the cultural construct that has formed our personalities and the way in which we think about the world. It is not science, then, that forms the meaning of colour; a society is necessary for this development as it is a culture that establishes the way it is used and the attitudes surrounding it.³¹ Therefore, understanding the use of colour and its associations gives us a rare insight into the way in which classical cultures viewed the world.

However, if colour is established by society, any discussion is then influenced by the cultural background of the author, and similarly, the experience of understanding it will be prejudiced by the social preconceptions of the reader. There is no way to separate the discussion of colour perception from our culture.³²

²⁸ Birren (1969) 77

²⁹ Gage (1999) 21

³⁰ Pearce (2012) 60

³¹ Pastoureau (2001) 10

³² Pastoureau (2001) 7, Birren (1969) 77

Origins of Colour Thought

Although there are cultural boundaries that make discussion of this subject inherently difficult, some anthropologists³³ have suggested that there is a hierarchy in which colours develop as society evolves. This places black and white as the first colours to develop names. From there red develops, followed by yellow and green, then blue and eventually other secondary or tertiary colours, like purple.³⁴ It seems then, that the understanding a civilisation has of colour develops from its earliest interactions with colours. This is the initial way in which colours attain meaning, and it appears that the earliest colours were those that could be experienced at this primal level – black of night, white of bone and red of blood³⁵ - these were the colours used most in the Palaeolithic period.³⁶ It has been proposed that on a subconscious level, our colour association still stems from this primitive stage –that while we might not associate fire with the colour red, on some level we associate the colours red and orange with fire, and therefore experience a feeling of ‘warmth’ when viewing them.³⁷

Geographical and Chronological Colour

Another important factor in how colours developed is geographical availability. For the Romans, red in particular remained a popular hue, and took on meaning as a sacred colour, sometimes with the faces of gods painted bright red.³⁸ This is in part due to the availability of strong red dyes, like madder and kermes, in the area. The

³³ Discussed in Berlin & Kay (1969) *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution*; University of California Press, Berkeley.

³⁴ Ball (2001) 16

³⁵ Gage (1999) 22

³⁶ Pastoreau (2001) 13

³⁷ Gage (1999) 23

³⁸ Ball (2001) 67

process of dyeing arrived in Europe in the 4th millennia BC, and during this period the vast majority of fabrics were dyed in tones of red.³⁹ Even the latin names for red show its importance – both *ruber* and *coloratus* could mean red.⁴⁰ This means that, to the Roman mind, if something was coloured it was a form of red. While we (owing to scientific development) know that white is the combination of all colours, the Romans would have considered a red item more strongly coloured than a yellow one. This suggests that for a Roman viewer, red could be the very symbol of something becoming coloured. Blue, on the other hand, was not easily found in the area where Roman civilisation was fostered; in the Roman period blue was accessed through woad, indigo, lapis lazuli, azurite and Egyptian blue frit. Woad is an extract of the plant ‘*Isatis tinctoria*’, used extensively by the Celts.⁴¹ Indigo is first mentioned by Vitruvius in the first century AD⁴², imported from India and the middle east. Roman lapis was not carefully purified and such dyes were not as strong, resulting in lapis being imported from modern day Iran and Afghanistan.. Azurite was an inferior dye, being less stable or brilliant, and was imported from Armenia and Cyprus, and blue frit was an artificial compound made by the Egyptians from copper. This array of dyes shows us that blue as a colour was certainly present in later years through trade with other nations, but the Romans did not have access to it at the time that red was attaining its meaning; blue was associated with the east and the barbarians who lived there. As a result, the Romans used it only sparingly, and as will be discussed later, often with negative connotations.⁴³

³⁹ Pastoureau (2001) 14-15

⁴⁰ Pastoureau (2001) 14-15

⁴¹ Ball (2001) 202, *Caes. B Gall.* 5.14

⁴² Ball (2001) 201-2

⁴³ Pastoureau (2001) 17-23

It is also worth remembering that colours seen on sculptures and paintings are rarely as they would have appeared to the Romans of the early empire. Not only have colours decayed or fallen foul to zealous 'cleaning', but the light in which we view them now is entirely different to that in which they would have been viewed at their creation;⁴⁴ the clear lighting in a museum is a far cry from a dimly lit room.

Thankfully, awareness of these issues has resulted in great caution now being applied whenever museum collections are cleaned and displayed,⁴⁵ and many new exhibitions place a polychrome reconstruction alongside the original. These reconstructions, are created from close analysis using infrared and ultraviolet fluorescence, which reveal echoes of paint.⁴⁶ We have seen great advances in our ability to recreate classical art – an example being the famous Prima Porta statue, which was first reconstructed in 1886 [Fig.1], but then improved in 2003 [Fig.2] by thorough and scientific study.⁴⁷ We can use science therefore to give us an enhanced insight into how the ancient world looked.

In this chapter we have equipped ourselves with knowledge we can apply to the Roman art which we will now begin to explore in detail. We have seen that the colour vocabulary of the Romans, while diverse, does not necessarily marry with our own; often with overlapping definitions. Through this chapter, many complexities in

⁴⁴ Pastoureau (2001) 8

⁴⁵ Bradley (2009)b 427

⁴⁶ Bradley (2009)b 428

⁴⁷ Østergaard (2008) 40

the Roman understanding of colour are evident. Surely then, in a culture so rich, these connections were utilized in their art? Armed with these thoughts about colour, we will now move on to discuss specific artistic examples from different media.

Colour on the Wall

In this chapter, the use of colour in wall paintings will be considered. This medium is one that has received much attention and it is in this context that we are most familiar with the extent of colour that permeated Roman life. Here I will focus on the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale, and specifically the megalographia that can be found in the *oecus* (room H). This room, while not quite as famous as its counterpart in the Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii, has received a great deal of scholarly attention; therefore I will hope to propose a new angle on this piece, by considering further the impact of the colours used in this room.

The Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor

The villa is situated a little north of Pompeii, an ostensibly agricultural building and by no means the largest of these rural villas. The eponymous owner is known due to a bronze jug on which his name was inscribed.⁴⁸ He appears to have not been the original proprietor and decorator whose name, Lucius Herennius Florus, is known from a stamp, found in the baths. The decoration is from around 30BC, and of a standard so high that it must have required considerable expense.⁴⁹ Synistor, who is thought perhaps to have been a freedman,⁵⁰ could certainly not have afforded such splendour; it is significant that upon his acquisition of the house he did not redecorate as was the usual practice, but maintained the decoration installed by his predecessor.

The villa was discovered in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, and excavated privately. The objects from within the villa were sold, the most impressive

⁴⁸ Bergmann (2010) 14

⁴⁹ Pappalardo (2004) 78

⁵⁰ Leach (2004) 90

paintings carved from the walls, now to reside in four different museums, and any areas that were deemed uninteresting were reburied, with only brief descriptions to record them.⁵¹ This problem has inhibited the consideration of the villa as a complete piece, but recent work has produced a virtual reconstruction, [Fig.3] with the paintings arranged as they would have been seen.

This is very important for the understanding of the wall paintings – it is only through this that we can view the spaces in the manner they were designed to be. What kind of experience would the viewer have had of the artwork – would they have seen it as they moved through the house, or be given time to consider and muse upon it? For example the walls of the peristyle are simply decorated as marble panelling hung with garlands [Fig.4], while the reception room, or *oecus*, has vastly more attention paid to it.⁵² This understanding of the space applies to colour as well as form; colour themes could match the flow of the house – in this case, the paler yellows and greens of these panelled peristyle walls contrast with the bright splash of many colours in the *cubiculum*, or the dazzling red of the *oecus*. The colours of the rooms could therefore create a means of differentiation, and therefore contribute to the hierarchy of importance of the rooms.⁵³

Representative colour

The decoration of the building as a whole is generally of the Second Style (from around 80-20BC) which was grand and architectural; imaginary vistas with incredible use of perspective giving the sense that the room continued beyond the boundary of

⁵¹ Ling (1991) 104

⁵² Wallace-Hadrill (1994) 28

⁵³ Clarke (1991) xxiii-iv, Leach (2004) 62

the wall.⁵⁴ This style appears in the *cubiculum*, where the architectural scene takes the form of a sanctuary or sacred space and stretches into the horizon⁵⁵ [Fig.5]. This colourful vista was designed to be viewed as a panoramic piece, and in form created realism to the furthest extent of the painter's skill. The spaces envisioned in the *cubiculum* are thought to have been the aspirations of the elite during this time; Plutarch tells us of the ostentatious villa belonging to Lucullus at Baiae.⁵⁶ Here, it is suggested, a Roman interpretation of the splendour of Hellenistic royal complexes is seen; a grandiose 'porticus' version of the Second Style,⁵⁷ as opposed to influence from painted backgrounds for Hellenistic theatre.⁵⁸ Certainly, the scenes are emblazoned with colour that seem almost too bright to be realistic – vivid red columns are decorated by what looks like precious stones, and everything, even the sky, appears so bright as to be some kind of fantasy world. The brilliance of these colours would carry the message of the wealth and investment that the owner demonstrated in commissioning the piece,⁵⁹ as the most intense pigments, were highly expensive, and this would have been recognised by fellow members of the elite when visiting the house.⁶⁰

The Megalographia

The decoration in the *oecus* is referred to as a megalographia, a term first introduced by Vitruvius⁶¹ to describe pictures of statues.⁶² The *oecus* was one of the

⁵⁴ Rozenburg (1994) 11-12

⁵⁵ Balch (2008) 29

⁵⁶ Plut. *Vit. Luc.* 38

⁵⁷ Leach (1982) 153, Clarke (1991) 47

⁵⁸ Strong (1988) 68, Vitruvius *De Arch* 7.5.2

⁵⁹ Stroocka (2007) 302

⁶⁰ Bradley (2009)b 438

⁶¹ Vitruvius *De arch.* 7.5.2

largest rooms at the villa, measuring 8m by 7.5m,⁶³ and was arranged to be opposite from the *fauces* of the house, providing a sight line from the entrance, as shown in Fig.6. The hall itself was framed by painted columns that matched those surrounding the peristyle, creating a sense of continuity and depth, and dividing the space on the walls into three intercolumnations on each side.⁶⁴

On the back wall [Fig.7 & 8], the scenes depicted Dionysus and Ariadne to the left, the Three Graces to the right and Venus in the centre.⁶⁵ This arrangement was reminiscent of a poem of Horace's in which a toast is given to this collection of gods.⁶⁶ The paintings on either side were reburied as they were too damaged, but the central scene, and focal point, survives. Though unfortunately Venus is now headless, and the painting is not as pristine as some of the others in the room, enough detail remains for us to see Cupid poised on her knee, shooting at a figure we believe is Psyche. She stands further back with more Cupids who are fishing in front of a *tholus*, and on the opposite shore another building displays a statue of Fortune, holding a cornucopia.⁶⁷ This image was bordered by more of the columns, making the frontal figure of Venus, approaching into the foreground, step into the room itself.⁶⁸ Venus herself is the brightest figure in the scene, her robe showing both yellow and purple. Here the purple clearly denotes her divine status, and the yellow used is a bright gold, almost shining from the wall, while the scenery behind her is far more muted and pastel. This comparative brilliancy, as we found in the first chapter, has the effect of pulling the

⁶² Clarke (1991) 98

⁶³ Lehmann (1953) 23

⁶⁴ Lehmann (1953) 25

⁶⁵ Ling (1991) 105

⁶⁶ Pappalardo (2004) 83

⁶⁷ Ling (1991) p105, Bergmann (2010) 24

⁶⁸ Bergmann (2010) 24

figure of Venus towards the foreground and the bright red, while the heavenly scene disappears behind her. If we put the room into context too, this phenomenon seems even more pronounced. The cinnabar red dye used to give the background such a bright hue was not only expensive but also very fragile. If the paint were exposed to bright light, this red would turn a muddy black, so the *oecus* must have been kept dim.

⁶⁹ This means that the difference in intensity of colour would have been very obvious for the viewer – these bright yellows and purples with their symbology of power and luxury shining through on Venus' clothing against a pale view into heaven; perhaps with the suggestion that this pastel view is all that the mortal eye can comprehend.

Surrounding these images, near life-size figures appear on the background of bright, striking red. These groups of figures have caused a significant amount of controversy, and debate about their identity would far outstrip the remit of this piece.⁷⁰ They were careful and realistic portraits which, as almost life size, would have formed a presence in the room [Fig.9 & 10]. What is agreed is that there is a strong Hellenising flavour to these characters, and it seems likely that they were inspired by earlier Greek paintings or statues,⁷¹ which the artist either copied deliberately or used as familiar portrait images with which to decorate the rooms he worked upon. Connections are formed between many of the figures, with their gazes reaching across the room⁷² and interacting with the images of the gods on the rear wall. These figures were set in front of the bright cinnabar red background, with columns dividing them

⁶⁹ Ling & Ling (2000) 58

⁷⁰ Discussion of the identity of these figures can be found in Ling (1991) 101-110, Pappalardo (2009) 36-37, Strong (1988) 65, Lehmann (1953) 34

⁷¹ Ling (1991) 105

⁷² Bergmann (2010) 26

forming the boundary of the foreground.⁷³ This allowed the viewer to imagine that these figures were simply stood or seated at a distance,⁷⁴ beyond the columns, but in front of the red which formed the canvas for the scene. In this way, the viewer has been placed on the same level as the fictive figures; a visitor walking into the room is ensconced in this bright cinnabar red, along with the painted guests, divided only by the columns which are painted into the foreground between them. The entire arrangement of the room, and the gazes of the figures, all draw the visitor to this scene of the goddess Venus, walking forward to join them in the room.

With this setting, I would like to propose that there was no accident in choosing red for the background of this room. With the presence of the gods, the room becomes a kind of meeting between the mortal and divine, facilitated by the presence of the sacred red colour all around. As discussed previously, red was often associated with the religious activity, but according to Pliny, the cinnabar pigment was particularly used for sacred purposes.⁷⁵ The audience, placed on a similar level as the painted figures set into the wall, is confronted with the gods, through a frame of luminous red; the pastels behind Venus become heavenly, while the bright red signals the mortal world.⁷⁶

There are other examples that suggest this relationship. Though these come from slightly later, two other scenes show gods deliberately bordered with red to create this same effect. One is from the 'White room' in the villa at Boscorecase,⁷⁷ where a figure of Apollo again approaches forward from a paler, but idealistic

⁷³ Ling (1991) 104

⁷⁴ Strocka (2007) 309

⁷⁵ Plin. *HN* 33.36

⁷⁶ Bergmann (2010) 24

⁷⁷ Rozenburg (1994) 24

background – again a *tholus*. This is surrounded by red paint, giving the image an emphasis of the sacred. Secondly, a composition of a winged goddess in the Eros rooms is supplied with a red and deep purple-red frame.⁷⁸ Within the scene, the goddess, who we must assume is Victory, crowns a small Cupid in another heavenly scene. In contrast, in the Villa della Farnesina, an image is portrayed of two women going about domestic tasks. This image is bordered by yellow and green, and gives the impression of the image as a pictorial copy of an earlier panel painting.⁷⁹ This suggests to me that there was a continued association with red colours framing divine scenes.

In this chapter we have discussed how brilliancy of colour pigmentation could indicate status in the Roman villa, and how it could help define the status of a room within that complex. In the *oecus* we have seen how pastel colours could indicate the ethereal qualities of the Roman heaven, contrasting against the brilliant red of the mortal world. This sacred colour has allowed the onlookers on the other walls, as well as the visitor themselves, to experience the goddess who steps forward into the scene in front of them. This gives us a good example of a well-discussed subject about which we can expand our knowledge through the use of colour.

⁷⁸ Rozenburg (1994) 116

⁷⁹ Platt (2009) 41

Paved with Marble

In this chapter I aim to address the influence of colour in marble flooring; to investigate whether these polychrome marbles conveyed a message to the viewer, and the depth of this communication.

The first issue when discussing marbles from the ancient world is that in Roman understanding of these rocks, their colour was deeply connected to what they were. Sensory information provided the means to identify an object in the Roman period, as opposed to today, where pre-aligned classifications allow us to name what an object is without having any personal interaction with it at all. In Pliny's discussion of geology, we see a preoccupation in connecting the colour or the object with its *genus*,¹²⁰ and this reflected across any primary discussion of these marbles. While we understand each material as having many different values as well as pigment – its strength, its base composition, or the process of its geological formation – the colour of the marble was to the Roman eye an intrinsic part of what the marble was.

Augustus and marble

The age of Augustus has long been associated with the influx of marble into the city of Rome. One of the most famous quotes concerning Augustus was penned by Suetonius, who wrote that, 'he so improved it that it was with justification that he boasted he had found it a city of brick and left it a city of marble.'¹²¹ Marble had been

¹²⁰ Bradley (2009)a 89

¹²¹ Suet. *Aug.* 28

used in Rome before as early temples were built from it, but the first mention of coloured marbles used for decoration comes in the late 4th, early 3rd century BC.¹²³

It appears that prior to the Augustan period, only a few types of marble were available; *giallo antico*, which was mined from around 100BC,¹²⁴ *portasanta* from Chios, and *africano*,¹²⁵ first brought into Rome within the first century BC.¹²⁶ But it was under Augustus that the mines in Italy were exploited¹²⁷ - for example the quarries in modern day Carrara,¹²⁸ which contained the 'Luna' marble, had been opened by Julius Caesar, but only used to any significant degree by Augustus,¹²⁹ forming the backbone for many public structures. Under Augustan momentum, the trade for different marbles was established, and resources from all over the empire were transported to Rome.¹³⁰ At least two other polychrome marbles were added to the selection available— Phrygian *pavonazzetto*, and Carystian *cipollino*.¹³¹

These different types of marble were to form a whole topic of interest and discussion among scholars. Pliny suggests that most areas in the known world could be identified by the marble that was found there as, 'there are few places for which a characteristic marble is not found to exist.'¹³² This fascination with marbles appears to have become a preoccupation of the elite: knowledge about the origins of each kind of marble was as much prized as that of the geography of the empire, or as

¹²³ Plin. *HN* 36.44

¹²⁴ Malacrino (2010) 28

¹²⁵ Fant (2007) 339

¹²⁶ Malacrino (2010) 26

¹²⁷ Fejfer (2008) 168

¹²⁸ Sear (1982) 84

¹²⁹ Fant (2007) 338

¹³⁰ Sear (1982) 51

¹³¹ Fant (2007) 339

¹³² Bradley (2009)a 89

strongly debated as moral conduct.¹³³ Marbles therefore, due to their colours denoting different parts of the empire, would have ‘a wide range of aesthetic, cultural and ethnographic associations.’¹³⁴

Forum of Augustus

The forum of Augustus was dedicated in 2BC, and served as a kind of *scaena* for Augustan imagery and ideals. As examples, the temple of Mars Ultor connected Augustus with his adoptive – and more importantly, deified – father, and the statues of the great Republican patricians showed his respect for the past. The elder Pliny described the Forum of Augustus as a wonder of architecture and listed it as one of ‘the most beautiful the world has ever seen.’¹³⁵

However, perhaps unlike our preconceived idea of the appearance of this space, Augustus’ forum was awash with colour.¹³⁶ Of particular interest to this discussion, the main porticoes, *exedrae* and temple itself were paved with a mixture of polychrome marbles. The arrangement of these marbles differed across the separate areas of the forum. In the *cella* of the temple of Mars Ultor we see a pattern of *africano*, *giallo antico* and *pavonazzetto*, here shown in Fig.11. In the *exedrae*, there was a checkerboard of *africano* and *giallo antico* [Fig.12], and across the portico an arrangement of *bardiglio*, *giallo antico* and *africano* has survived [Fig.13].¹³⁷

¹³³ Bradley (2009)a 90

¹³⁴ Bradley (2009)a 89

¹³⁵ Plin. *HN* 36.101-2

¹³⁶ The rear wall of the Colossos room has been reconstructed with the polychrome ‘curtain’ painted on it, see Østergaard (2008) 55

¹³⁷ Hofter (1988) 151-4

The arrangement of these marbles is not likely to be by chance. For the Romans, the space revolved around ritual,¹³⁸ and the composition of the marbles as they were walked across would have reverberated more strongly with the Roman audience than it might today. In particular, movement was associated with the gaining of wisdom, as a metaphorical continuation of fact; in the process of travelling across the Mediterranean, one's understanding and knowledge could be broadened.¹³⁹ From this association began a preoccupation with travel and the improvement of the mind; here, where each marble represents a different part of the empire through its colour, a visitor walking across the forum could feel that they were metaphorically traversing the empire, and in this way gaining knowledge about the Roman world.¹⁴⁰

Marbled Messages

The question then is whether these marbles had any significant meanings - the obvious connotation being that of wealth and opulence due to the expense and rarity of some of these marbles.¹⁴¹

Bardiglio marble seems to have come from Italy, and may have simply been used as a contrast with the others, due to its green hue as seen here, in Fig.14. The *giallo antico*, however, seems to me to have a more stable connotation which Augustus would have wanted to exploit as fully as possible. The Latin name for this marble was *marmor numidicum*, it was a soft yellow colour with red veining, [Fig.15]

¹³⁸ Clarke (1991) 1

¹³⁹ O'Sullivan (1975) 97

¹⁴⁰ O'Sullivan (1975) 104

¹⁴¹ Fejfer (2008) 168

and was mined at Simitthus in Tunisia.¹⁴² The first record we have of its use, Pliny tells us, is from around 78BC, when one Marcus Lepidus used a block of this Numidian marble as a threshold slab. Even at this time, the marble must have been prized highly, as Pliny goes on to explain that Lepidus received great censure for using the marble in 'the most sordid manner.'¹⁴³

In April 46BC, Julius Caesar won the battle of Thapsus, which was seen as a conquering of Numidia, and Caesar formed the early province of Africa from the lands he had won there.¹⁴⁴ As a result, Numidian marble was associated heavily with Julius Caesar: at his funeral pyre and cult a monolithic column 20 feet high was put up, made of Numidian *giallo antico*. There seems little doubt to me that this link would have survived into the Augustan period, particularly in a forum which honours the memory of Julius Caesar, and I would imagine that the use of this marble spoke loudly of the prestige of Augustus' adoptive father.

Pavonazzetto, or *marmor phrygium*, used mainly in the cella of the Temple of Mars Ultor, is from Docimium in central Turkey¹⁴⁵. This was white with dark veining, which was usually purple in colour. It is tempting to suggest that this use of eastern marble was made possible by the recent stability in this area due to the settlement Augustus wrought with the Parthian King Phraates IV in 20BC, which ended open hostilities between the two nations. However, it is entirely possible that the marble was used here to showcase an exotic new import rather than to celebrate Augustus' political skill. From a photo of the forum as it stands today, we can see the *pavonazzetto* used next to the *giallo antico* in the room which is thought to have

¹⁴² Malacrino (2010) 28

¹⁴³ Plin. *HN* 36.49

¹⁴⁴ Fant (1999) 278

¹⁴⁵ Malacrino (2010) 28

housed the Colossal statue of Augustus. In Fig.16, it is clear that the particular form of *pavonazzetto* is heavily veined, and therefore would give a strong purple colour. This purple colour to the marble meant that the marble was associated with the power and wealth of Rome; *pavonazzetto* was also used in victory monuments as a material for statues of conquered barbarians.¹⁴⁶ This use of *pavonazzetto* therefore expressed the message of *imperium*, and as an extension of that may well have been used deliberately to convey Augustan *auctoritas*.

The *africano* marble is also known as the Latin *marmor lucullaeum*, and was introduced around 74BC, during the consulship of Lucius Lucullus who gave his name to the marble.¹⁴⁷ It is present in every area of the forum, like the *giallo antico* and was a deep red, or black. It appears to have been sourced from the coast of Asia Minor, with some sources specifying Teos,¹⁴⁸ others Chios.¹⁴⁹ In the previous diagrams, the *africano* marble is coloured red, but in fact it varies between red with black veining or black with red veining. In the images from the forum, we can see that the variety used in the forum is predominantly black [Fig.17].

In the later Roman period, and indeed to the modern day, black has a predominantly negative meaning. However, it was not always so – while black was the colour for the goddesses Nyx and Nemesis, it was also that of Demeter.¹⁵⁰ In the early history of the colour, black could be synonymous for fertile earth, and when combined with the sacred colour of red, as in this marble, this message of prosperity was

¹⁴⁶ Fejfer (2008) 168

¹⁴⁷ Plin. *HN* 36.49-50

¹⁴⁸ Malacrino (2010) 26

¹⁴⁹ Pliny *NH* 36.49-50

¹⁵⁰ Pastoureau (2009) 21

particularly strong.¹⁵¹ During the early Roman period, the two words for black – *ater* and *niger* – had well defined and contrasting meanings to match.¹⁵² *Ater* was used to describe a matte, dull colouration, and by the 2nd Century BC it had taken on a negative meaning. *Niger* indicated a glossy black – which the marble would initially have been in its polished finish - and at the beginning of the Imperial period, it rose to mean the positive expression: a beautiful black.¹⁵³ By the later period, when Pliny was writing, both *ater* and *niger* had become negative terms,¹⁵⁴ and this may account for why we see no mention of black being used synonymously for fertility. If Augustus did choose this colour on purpose, this marble could be employed to express the Augustan values of peace and prosperity.

Due to the use of these marbles, there was a huge boost in their popularity and therefore surge in demand.¹⁵⁵ The use of marble in paving caught on beyond Rome, even if to a less grand extent, as in Pompeii.¹⁵⁷

It is worth noting that all of the marbles used for the flooring of the forum were among the most costly that could be bought. Diocletian published a list of 19 marbles available in AD 301,¹⁵⁸ and on this list *pavonazzetto* and *giallo antico* are the most expensive, at 200 denari per cubic ft, that would have been available at this time. *Africano* follows closely as the next in price, at 150 denari. We must bear in mind

¹⁵¹ Pastoureau (2009) 22

¹⁵² Pastoureau (2009) 27

¹⁵³ Pastoureau (2009) 28

¹⁵⁴ Pastoureau (2009) 35

¹⁵⁵ Fant (1999) 279

¹⁵⁷ Fant (2007) 339-340: Pompeians in the Augustan period used the offcuts from Roman workshops and set them into standard monochrome mosaics in an attempt to copy the style. One example of this is at the House of General Championnet (VIII.2.1).

¹⁵⁸ Malacrino (2010) 30

also, that these are the prices during the 4th Century AD, and therefore it is highly likely that these would have been more expensive than three hundred years previously, when Augustus was acquiring them for his forum. This however does not necessarily mean that Augustus chose these deliberately due to their price – in the Roman period distance and cost were linked in an inextricable way, and as these marbles came from almost the corners of the empire at that time, expense would have naturally followed. In a public space which served as a *paean* to Augustan achievement I would suggest that the forum spoke of his control over the full extent of Roman territory. While polychrome marbles had been used before, they had never been used to this scale,¹⁵⁹ and this informs the audience of the influence and power Augustus held over such a vast region of the Mediterranean. It has been suggested therefore that the marbles are used as a form of *spolia*¹⁶⁰ – instead of the usual trophies of war the very stone had been transported to adorn the centre of Rome. The *giallo antico* in particular emphasised the link to Julius Caesar, which would therefore have given Augustus *auctoritas* by association, and the connotations of the colours present in the *pavonazzetto* and *africano* marbles may well speak of other Augustan ideals.

Over time, this use of polychrome marble as a positive symbol of power seems to have faded. The elder Seneca suggests that the interest in quarrying these stones were at ‘the whims of crazy luxury,’¹⁶¹ and introduces the idea of marble used to dissimulate: to hide the ugliness of the reality of a structure with a sheath of ‘debased

¹⁵⁹ Ward-Perkins (1970) 43-44

¹⁶⁰ Kleiner (1992) 99

¹⁶¹ Sen. *Controv.* 2.1.12

imitations.¹⁶² The younger Seneca continues this theme, discussing the delight brought by these exotic marbles, against the ultimate awareness that the marble conceals defects beneath.¹⁶³ This is perhaps more a reflection on the society of the time – a general dissatisfaction with the subversive atmosphere that surrounded Rome during that period.¹⁶⁴

In this chapter, we have seen that even in an area that we are familiar with, the centre of Rome, there are important messages that can be communicated through the use of colour. Here, looking at the medium of polychrome marble, we have seen some of the associations and meanings that would have resonated with the visitor as they walked across the floor, and the social implication of that very act. Study into this aspect of the forum has perhaps been hindered by our social predilection for imagining the ‘city of marble’ that Augustus left as being specifically ‘white’ marble. Most modern reconstructions will exclude colour entirely [Fig.18], some will add in colour on the architectural sculpture [Fig.19], and few are concerned with the flooring [Fig.20]; but only by thinking of the structure as one full artistic piece, with both the architectural art and these polychrome marbles, can we appreciate the full complexity of this architectural marvel.

¹⁶² Sen. *Controv.* 2.1.13

¹⁶³ Sen. *Ep.* 115.8-9

¹⁶⁴The stone ‘*phengites*’ provides an interesting example of this – a dissimulating material associated with both Nero and Domitian.

Chapter Three: Eye to Eye

In this chapter, we will look at one further piece of Roman art. The piece that I will focus on is a miniature bust of Augustus from Memphis, Egypt, glazed in faience. This piece is almost a complete unknown in scholarly discussion; its date has been estimated its portraiture style discussed, but very little else is known. In this chapter I will apply the knowledge learned so far about Roman colour perception to shed some light, and pose some questions, about this interesting piece.

Painted Statues

Before looking into glazed statues, it is pertinent to consider other painted statues. A Roman ring-stone from the 1st to 2nd Century AD¹⁶⁹ gives us illustrative proof of the painting of statues, as here an artist is portrayed painting a female portrait bust [Fig.21]. This carnelian carving demonstrates beautifully how commonplace it was for a statue to be painted.

Normally, colour was used on statues to add realism – paint is often found on the eyes and lips, hair and skin-tone. Some pigments appear to have worked very well to this effect – these would be absorbed into the surface of the marble itself, creating a soft and suffused wash of colour. Alternatively, the paint could be incorporated into wax, and then this applied to the statue to allow the polished surface to have depth.¹⁷⁰ These colours could be subtle and realistic tones, but bright colours were often also included, and it is generally concluded that this was mainly for the purpose

¹⁶⁹ Heilbrunn Timeline (2012)

¹⁷⁰ Fejfer (2008) 162, Bradley (2009)b 439

of visibility.¹⁷¹ Many of the statues would be set high up, or as part of an architectural arrangement on a building, and therefore the bright colours allowed details to be clearly visible from a distance.¹⁷²

Colour could be used to emphasise other additions to the statue which were symbols to convey messages. The Prima Porta statue of Augustus has been thoroughly discussed in this capacity, with both Bradley and Panzanelli highlighting where colour was used to draw attention to a social or political message communicated by the piece.¹⁷³ The analysis of this statue showed that the paint was not applied to either the skin or the material of the cuirass, leaving the natural finish of the Parian marble,¹⁷⁴ but pigments did draw attention to areas like the barbarian dress of the Parthian King and his beard, to place him in contrast against Augustus himself, portrayed here as the victorious general.¹⁷⁵ This use of colour highlights the political significance of the scene on the cuirass – the Parthian king is shown returning the standards that had been lost by Crassus decades previously.

Bright colours could also be used to communicate the cultural position projected in the dress of a statue. The garb of a statue could place its subject into the social hierarchy; a familiar example is the purple border to the *toga praetexta*, denoting the position as part of the upper echelons of Roman society. Purple material was incredibly expensive, owing to the quantity of pigment needed to dye the fabric¹⁷⁶ – a small piece would cost several multiples beyond the annual wage for a baker for

¹⁷¹ Bradley (2009)b 435

¹⁷² Bradley (2009)b 436

¹⁷³ Bradley (2009)b 447

¹⁷⁴ Panzanelli (2008) 116

¹⁷⁵ Bradley (2009)b 450

¹⁷⁶ Plin *HN* 9.135

example.¹⁷⁷ Purple was associated with wealth and prestige from an early time,¹⁷⁸ and while it is no doubt the difficulty of procuring the dye that initiated this, the connotations with royalty remained even after the dye became less expensive.¹⁷⁹ Still, purple did have some difficult associations; wear too much, or too bright a hue, and contemporary critics would presume that the wearer was indulging in too much luxury, a quality not valued by the Romans.¹⁸⁰ Martial praised those who chose to wear more natural colours,¹⁸¹ and Juvenal went so far as to suggest that 'it is purple clothing, whatever it be, foreign and unknown to us, that leads to crime and wickedness.'¹⁸² We can be certain that colour would denote status, and was used in this capacity in everyday life;¹⁸³ it was the poor who wore the muted browns of plain or bleached wools, not the rich – unless waiting for trial or observing mourning, during which times tradition dictated that they not care for their appearance.¹⁸⁴

However, painting statues was not the only use of colour on statuary art. Pliny the Younger gives us evidence of this, as he records that Catus Lepidus' had statues made not only in colour but in wax, bronze, gold, ivory and marble;¹⁸⁵ these materials would therefore have produced different effects and colours. Here, I will move on another substance, one that neither Pliny nor many modern scholars discuss: faience.

¹⁷⁷ Ball (2001) 197

¹⁷⁸ Croom (2002) 26

¹⁷⁹ Ball (2001) 200 (Pliny HN 9.28)

¹⁸⁰ Croom (2002) 26

¹⁸¹ Mart. *Spect.* 1.96.4-7

¹⁸² Juv. 14.185-8

¹⁸³ Croom (2002) 26

¹⁸⁴ Croom (2002) 26

¹⁸⁵ Plin. *Ep.* 4.7.1-2

An Augustus of Blue

The bust of Augustus [Fig. 22 & 23] dates to 27-20BC, placing this in occupied Roman Egypt, potentially over a decade after the death of Cleopatra VII. This particular piece of art has not been discussed further than the museum in which it is housed, the Metropolitan Museum of Art; even its date is an estimate based on its physical style, rather than any context known about it. In some ways it is a typical example of Augustan portraiture; the features of the portrait are entirely Roman, and match with the earliest image style of his reign. However, the main difference with this portrait is that it is glazed in faience, a blue-green glassy substance artificially made by the Egyptians. It is here that I will demonstrate how the study of colour can truly add perspective to a piece that has only baffled us so far.

Faience was initially produced in the Middle East from around 4500BC, making its way into Egypt by 3000BC, and there the process was perfected and later distributed to the rest of the Mediterranean,¹⁸⁶ continuing under the Roman administration of the area.¹⁸⁷ Faience was a glaze applied onto carved soapstone figurines or statuettes to recreate lapis lazuli, which was expensive and highly sought after. The process used a mixture of shavings of a copper based material like azurite or malachite, sand and potassium, with the blue green colour appearing naturally from the copper silicates as a substance similar to that of crystalline quartz.¹⁸⁸ Faience glazed objects were traditionally used by Egyptians in a religious setting, as funerary

¹⁸⁶ Ball (2001) 56

¹⁸⁷ Kaczmarczyk (1983) 280

¹⁸⁸ Pastoureau (2001) 22, Kaczmarczyk (1983) 6

items – like miniature statuettes or beads – or as sacred images themselves,¹⁸⁹ normally at domestic altars.¹⁹⁰ Our bust is only 6.8cm high, and is thought to have been part of a full statue made for a cult to the Emperor.¹⁹¹

It is here that I believe the knowledge gained about attitudes towards colour can be applied to look at this piece in a new way. For the Egyptians, blue was a sacred colour, featuring in funeral scenes as a protective colour going into the afterlife.¹⁹² It also carried the meanings of longevity and prosperity, and this is why it was seen on so many sacred objects. This means therefore that while the bust was Roman in form and date, the colour applied to it suggested a different 'nationality'. Does this show that the piece would have been used solely by the Egyptians? If it was part of some kind of cult worship to the emperor, it seems logical that at the very least a Roman official would have approved the statue; at the most, the Roman inhabitants of Egypt would have used this statue to register their respect for the emperor. This suggests at first that there was a positive attitude towards the emperor among the Egyptians at this time, as the message of longevity of prosperity, imbued in the statue carried through to good wishes towards Augustus himself. By glazing the piece with faience, the piece then becomes associated with a traditional craft in Egypt, used previously for portraits of the Egyptian pantheon, or previous pharaohs, we can interpret from this piece that Augustus was fully accepted and integrated, as far as this art can show us, into Egyptian life.

¹⁸⁹ Pastoureau (2001) 18 (Fig.5)

¹⁹⁰ Fejfer (2008) 173

¹⁹¹ Heilbrunn Timeline (2012)

¹⁹² Pastoureau (2001) 22 (Fig.7)

However, Roman attitudes towards blue were generally negative; a dark blue was foreboding and a bright blue was ugly.¹⁹³ This dislike of blue arrived with a strong association of this colour with foreign peoples; these were the cultures that produced and prized blue. Therefore, a Roman's experience of this piece could have been difficult: if they did not know the significance this blue held for the Egyptians, would they have understood or appreciated this bust, or would they have found it offensive that their new emperor was swathed in a colour they associated with the underworld?

If however, we continue on the same basis, that a Roman magistrate accepted this piece, the question is then raised whether we are seeing here a tolerance on the part of the Roman authorities for Egyptian tradition. Statues can be found in other provinces made from gold or bronze, but throughout the course of my research I have not seen another example of an emperor portrayed in an unrealistic colour such as this. Egypt, and markedly so under the rule of Augustus, was an unusual and important province; the area had of course been integral in Augustus' rise to power, as it was the defeat of Anthony and Cleopatra, that marked the end of the civil war in 31BC, and Egypt also provided much of the grain supply into Rome. With such political importance, it seems possible that the Romans might allow the Egyptians to retain this particular part of their heritage, and celebrate Augustus in their own way. If this is so, what did that mean for their colour perception, and the way they would approach their own art afterwards?

Alternatively, if the Roman magistrate did not approve this piece, was it a subtle resistance on the part of the Egyptians? We know, due to the accurate reproductions of Augustus from all over the empire, that template busts giving the

¹⁹³ Pastoureau (2001) 27

characteristics of the portrait of Augustus were disseminated during his rule. Due to the clear match with an Augustan style, we can surmise that this piece was based on one of these templates to conform to Roman representation. If the hue of this piece would have offended the Romans, perhaps this was the Egyptian way of staking their individuality and independence on a portrait which was recreated with only standardized variation in other provinces across the Mediterranean.

In this chapter, we have seen how colour is used for realistic effect but also to emphasize symbols on the art which convey political meaning. In our discussion of the faience bust, this is extended to just the colour alone – it is this which carries the meaning behind this object.

While this analysis of the sculpture raises more questions than answers, we can clearly see that without an understanding of both Roman and Egyptian culture of colour, this piece could remain unexplored, and this insight into the possible relationship between the two societies be missed. These issues also underscore the complexity of art during this period, and Roman interaction with it.

Without any knowledge of its colour, we would lose a huge part of the significance of this small bust, and therefore the impact that it had on Roman life.

Conclusion

I have no doubt that colour made a huge impact on the Roman city. The sheer amount of polychrome art in itself asserts the importance that was attributed to it, and demonstrates that the influence of colour, whatever that may be, would be significant.

During my research, I have been amazed at the reluctance of classical scholars to talk about the colour of the art they are discussing. This uncertainty about classical colour led me to explore a more interdisciplinary approach, and it was through this research that I learned to appreciate the huge differences in the Roman understanding of colour and our own.

In my first chapter, I collected ideas about colour, broadening our view of the subject as a whole. This revealed linguistic difficulties which have confused and influenced scholarship on this subject for many years. We discussed how colour connotations were tied up intrinsically in what the substance that gave that colour was, and where it came from. The distance an object had to travel to reach its consumer was a factor much more important to the Roman world than to ours; its geographical location influenced the attitudes to the product and of course its price. These associations lingered even when the colour was used in an entirely different fashion.

In the second chapter, this was to a well-known example, that of the wall-paintings of the villa at Boscoreale. Here the colours on the wall not only demonstrate wealth, the brilliant red of the room formed a frame of sacred colour through which the visitor could experience the presence of the goddess Venus. From here we move

to the Forum of Augustus, and to the medium of polychrome marble. In this section the individual meanings of some of these marbles were discussed and the development in the associations of a polished black colour. Finally, we moved to a subject about which we knew almost nothing, to shed some light on a difficult, unfamiliar corner of classical art, and propose some new ideas about the piece. The bust of Augustus from Memphis shows us that the study of colour can allow us to understand so much more about the piece than simply the form can volunteer.

My overwhelming impression from this dissertation is that there are so many more areas in which understanding colour could benefit our interpretation. Particularly in their interaction with other cultures, as I have discussed with the bust of Augustus, there is a huge amount of potential for expansion. I look forward to using the research and ideas gained from this work to add to my knowledge and attempt to further explore this intriguing area of Classics.

Appendix: Images

Fig.1 Reconstruction of the Prima Porta statue of Augustus, 1886.



Fig.2 Reconstruction of the Prima Porta statue of Augustus, 2003.



Fig.3 Overview of a virtual reconstruction of the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale, including surviving wall-paintings.



Fig.4 Peristyle wall of the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale.



Fig.5 Cubiculum of the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale.



Fig.6 Plan of the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale.

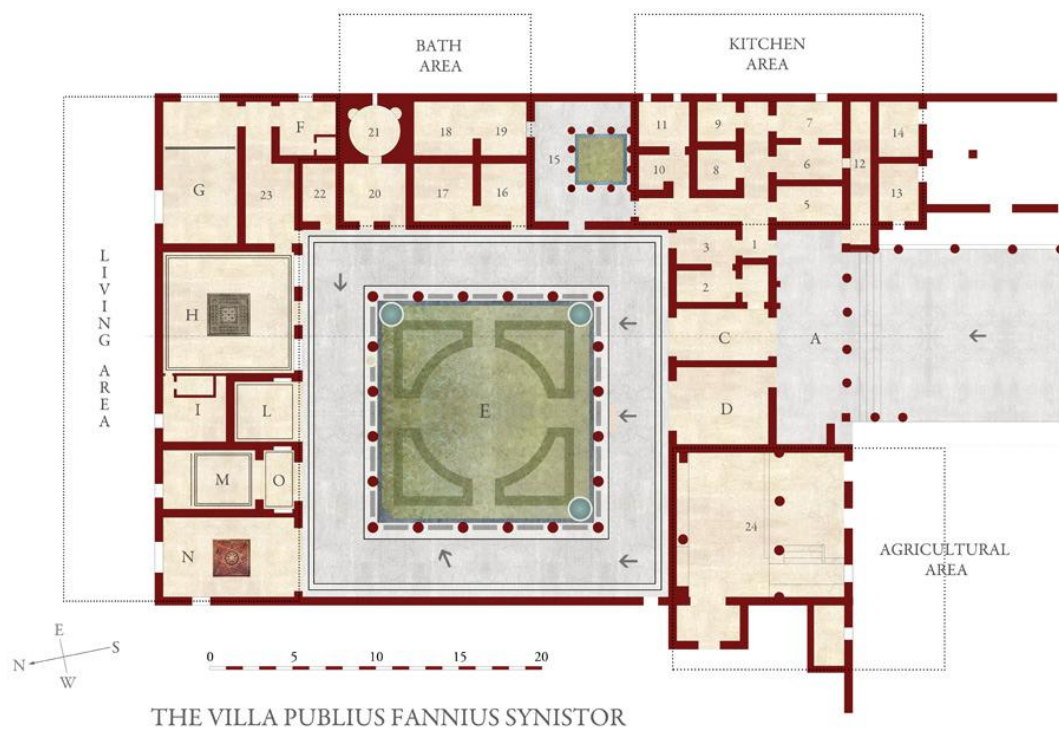


Fig.7 Rear wall of the large oecus, or Room H of Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale.



Fig.8 Drawn reconstruction of rear wall of the large oecus, or Room H of Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale.

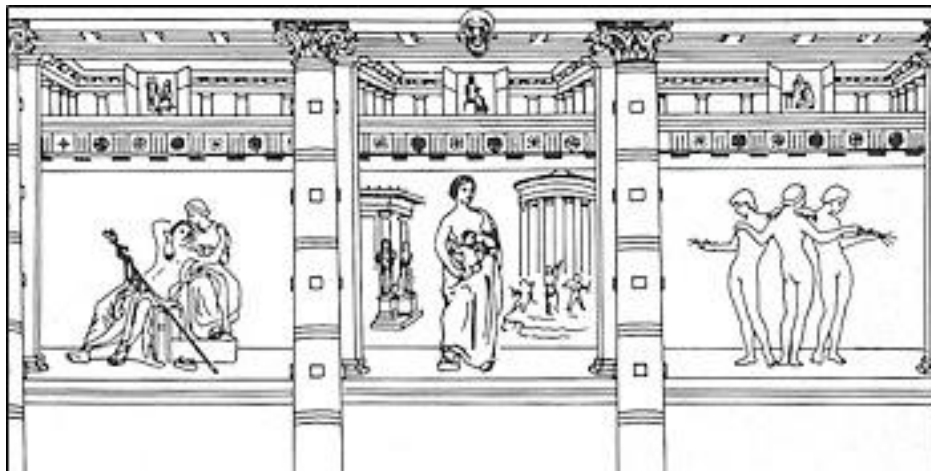
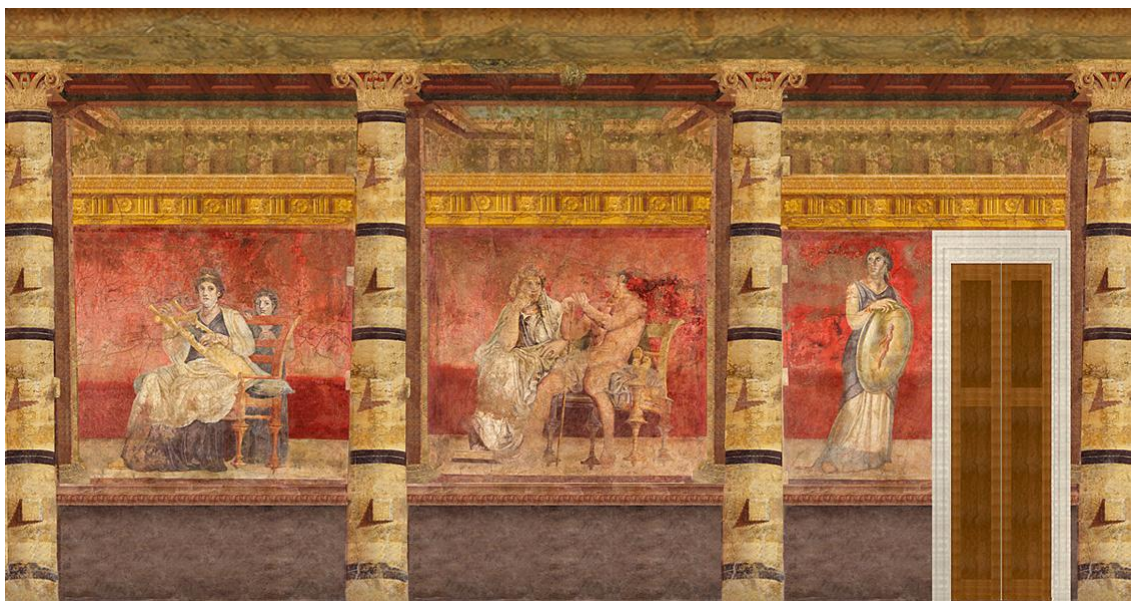


Fig.9 West wall of the large oecus, or Room H of Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale.



Fig.10 East wall of the large oecus, or Room H of Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale.



The Impact of Colour on the Roman City

Fig.11 Diagram of the marble pattern on the cella floor of the Temple of Mars Ultor at the Forum of Augustus.

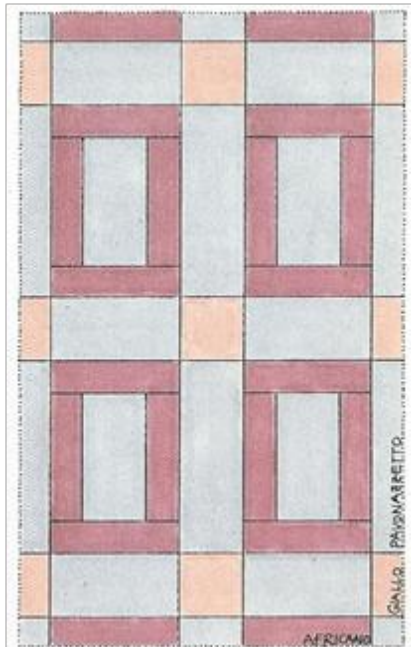


Fig.12 Diagram of the marble pattern on the exedrae floor of the Temple of Mars Ultor at the Forum of Augustus.



Fig.13 Diagram of the marble pattern on the portico floor of the Temple of Mars Ultor at the Forum of Augustus.

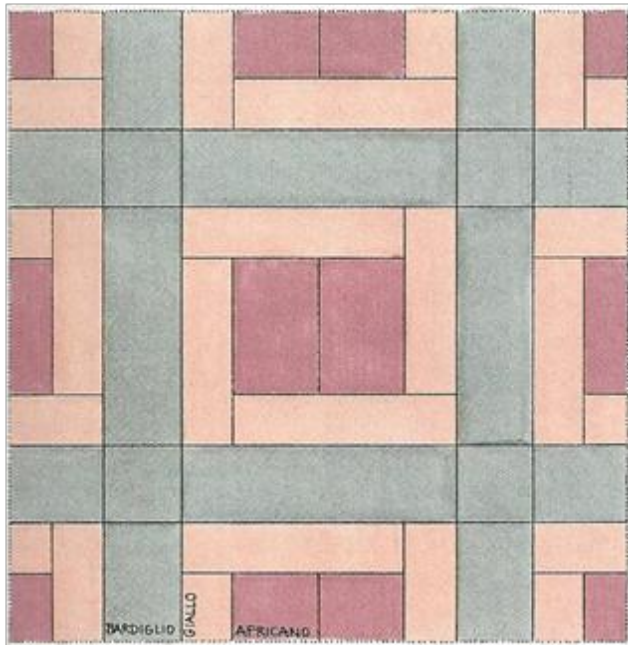


Fig.14 Example piece of bardiglio marble



Fig.15 Example piece of giallo antico marble



Fig.16 Marble flooring of the Colossos room in the Forum of Augustus



Fig.17 Marble flooring of the portico of the Forum of Augustus.



Fig.18 Single colour reconstruction of the Forum of Augustus.

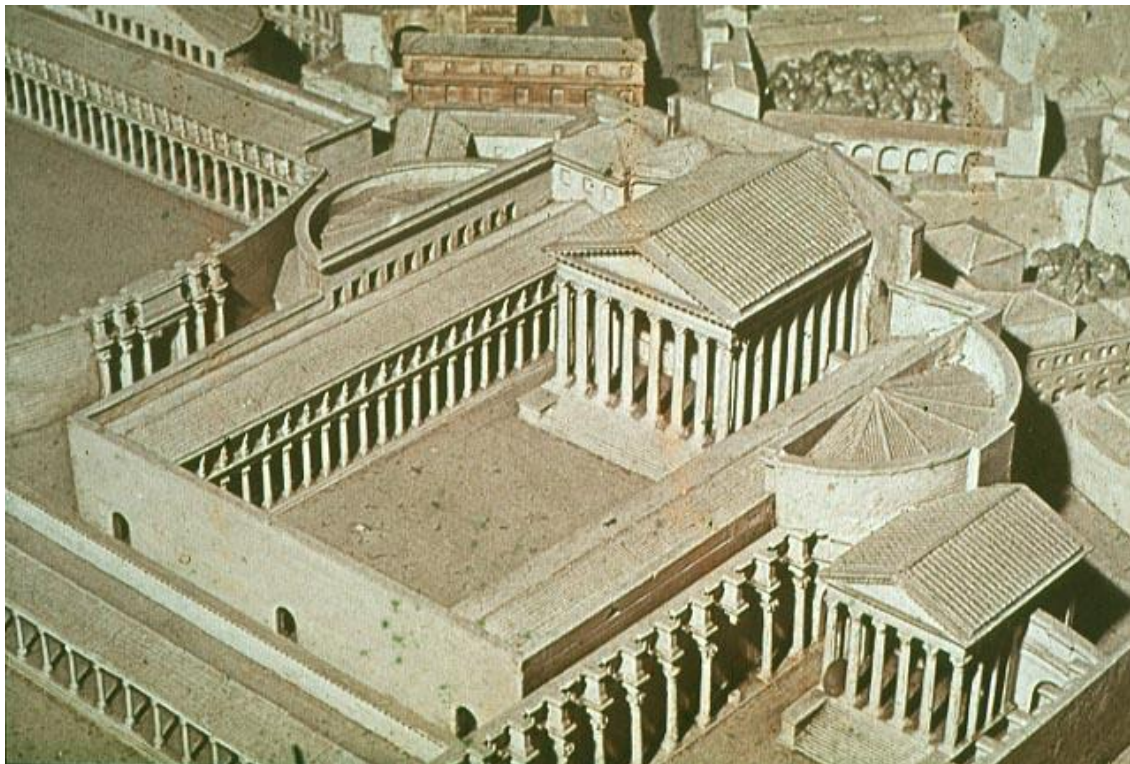


Fig.19 Reconstruction of the Forum of Augustus, with architectural sculpture picked out in colour.



Fig.20 Reconstruction of the marble floor on the portico of the Forum of Augustus.

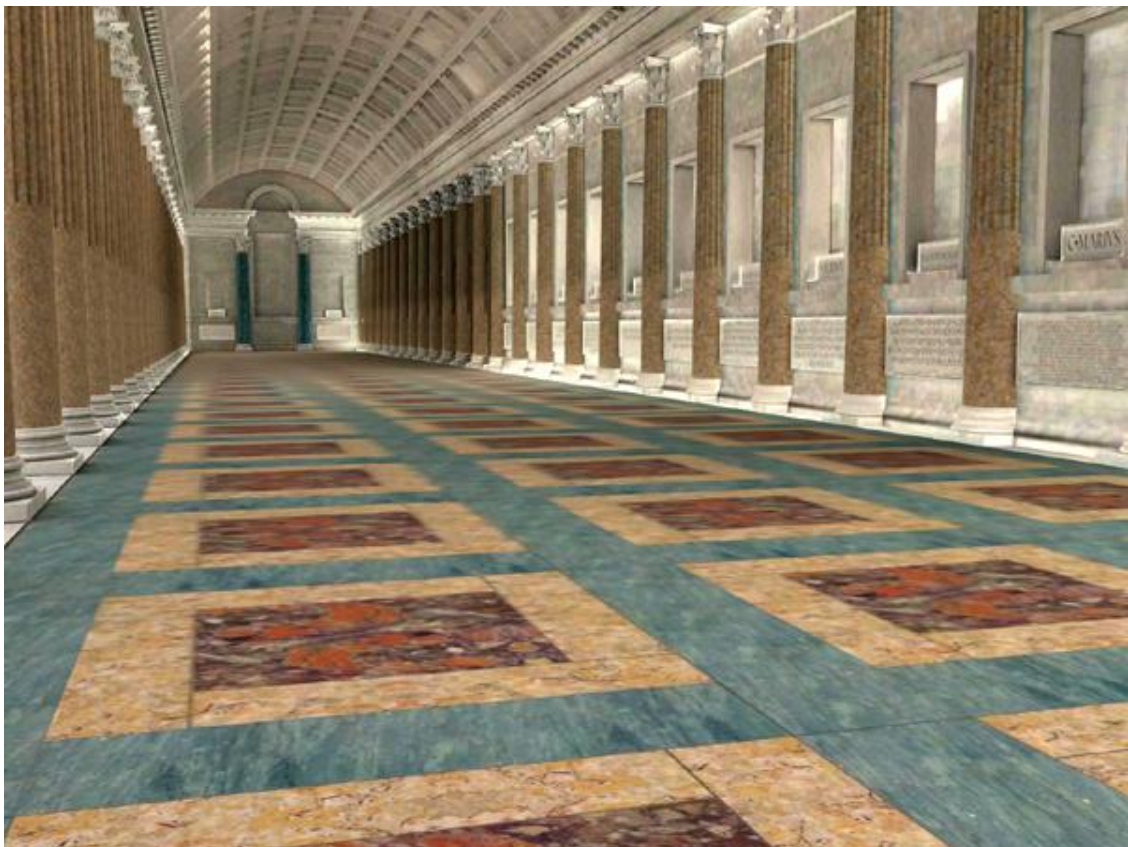


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Darmouth College

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<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/26.7.1428> Accessed 3rd March 2013.

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