Beyond the Four Styles
Reflections on Periodizations and Other Matters in Roman Wall Painting

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This paper offers some reflections on wall painting studies concerning what we call the First to Fourth style in Italy. First, it advocates the validity of Mau’s articulation as a time frame, while at the same time it proves to be problematic for the cultural interpretation of changes in fashion. Some remarks follow on the genesis and development of the First style and the expressions of the subsequent styles. This leads to observations on chronology. The case of the House of Augustus and its environment is singled out as an example. Setting and environment of decorations are treated in a subsequent section. Marble veneer (true and mock) play an important role in modern scholarship to explain certain developments. As a homage to Mau, I include some of his plates, illustrating specimens of his four styles.

This paper offers some reflections on wall painting studies concerning what we call the First to Fourth style in Italy. In some way, it expands upon a contribution published in 1998 in a volume accompanying an exhibition in Rimini entitled Romana Pictura¹.

Four styles: terminology, employability, chronology

In the 1870s August Mau developed the brilliant idea of articulating for the first time a chronological sequence of the Pompeian wall decorations, for which he used, as a starting point, Vitruvius’ brief statement (De architectura 7.5.2) on the development from ‘some time ago’ up to his own days². His work was the result of the close collaboration of German and Italian scholars in the post 1860s in Fiorelli’s ‘new’ Pompeii.

It has been argued ad nauseam that Mau had achieved a wrong notion with the definition of his Pompeian styles³. Style, clearly, first of all pertains a personal way of making art (I simplify by referring to visual arts only) or, secondly, specific manners or motifs used in specific cultural epochs or realms, say with Alois Riegl, as expressions of Kunstwollen in determinate periods and time spans⁴. So indeed we can say that, to name one, Rembrandt had a style of painting, although his oeuvre shows a wide array of … styles! At the same time we speak of Empire and Jugendstil or Art Nouveau, for every spectator recognizable, but differing from town to town and from country to country. Therefore Mau’s styles have a sense as well, if we connect them with periods and regions, and use the term as a variation of Zeitstil⁵ like mid-republican [First] style, late-republican [Second] style, Augusto-Tiberian [Third] style, Julio-Claudian and Flavian [Fourth] style. The Fourth style, however, covers a long time span and the artistic tendencies differ too much. We observe the same awkward feeling as Mau must have had, who, by the way, depreciated fourth-style paintings: this Fourth style is the most difficult phenomenon to get grip on. He (and we) did not (don’t) understand it well.

Mau’s subdivision does not explain the cultural and spatial phenomena expressed in wall paintings. While for Mau and many subsequent scholars the framework of the four styles was, is, and will remain a handy tool to establish a rough chronological approximation not only for Pompeii, but also for great parts of the Mediterranean world, the cultural implications have been a matter of debate: why were these fashions of decoration en vogue in determinate periods or moments and why did they display so specific elements

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¹ Moormann 1998. I like to thank Alix Barbet, John R. Clarke, Yves Dubois, Domenico Esposito, and Stephan T.A.M. Mols for many critical comments. John Clarke has been so kind to polish my English text. Hans Rupprecht Goette, Librarian of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in Berlin, was so kind to make the reproductions of fig. 1–3 from the Institute’s copy.
² Eristov/Monier 2014.
³ i.a. Squire 2009, 375–376, who is too simplistic in ignoring the chronological sequence of the four styles. See also Falzone in this volume.
⁴ Stilfragen (Berlin 1893), translated into English by E. Kain as Problems of style (Princeton 1992).
⁵ Fine remarks of Filippo Coarelli in a discussion on the Second style, in Perrier 2007, 506.
in the First, Second, Third styles yet such eclectic ones in the Fourth style? I cannot discuss all tendencies and will focus on the First style, while adding a few remarks on the subsequent styles.

**The First style**

The Roman First style (fig. 1) is seen as a development of the masonry style in the Hellenistic Greek world, and it has the longest life of the four styles, that is, if we include early examples of the masonry style in the Italian sphere like those in Sicily, the entire 3rd and 2nd centuries, while it might end in the first decades of the 1st century, in all some 230 years. This long life might be explained by the rather slow pace of artistic development in combination with the societal situation during the mid and late Roman Republic. Romans imported the device from the east where they had seen real marble veneer in temples, public buildings, and (royal) palaces in towns like Alexandria and *Pergamon*, but did not deem it proper to import this precious material. In a way the imitations were luxurious as well: the stucco makers needed good skills to create the relief structures of ashlar blocks and mouldings and to adorn these mock walls with convincing colour schemes. Moreover they had to add a modest number of illusionistic spatial devices to enlarge the real space by suggesting windows or blue planes in the upper zones and by placing pilasters in front of the blocks, which would correspond with the fashionable portico architecture.

This new mode of wall decoration can be associated with technical innovations. Marcello Mogetta, for instance, has related the beginning of the First style in Latium to the genesis and early development of Roman concrete. Following fine studies by Mario Torelli and Francesco Marcattili, Mogetta argues that the development of the masonry style took place in combination with the new establishment of prestige after the Roman conquest of the Greek Near East. The construction of basilicas and *quadriporticus* full of colonnades and their decoration with imitations of ashlar marble revetment and mock columns had its repercussions on stock components of the interior decoration of houses, whereas in villa culture more things were possible.

This highly plausible suggestion unfortunately cannot fully be substantiated by concrete examples of both categories, since the buildings in question have either completely vanished or have been preserved in small parts under later refurbishments. We may recall a couple of instances from temples from the second half of the 2nd century BC, among which that of *Fregellae* is the most conspicuous case. Historically, this import can be connected with the cultural boom in Rome observed by Pliny the Elder during the 156th Olympiad, that is 156–153 BC (*Naturalis Historia* 34.52). If this is true, the first instances of the First style should be sought in the elite ambience of mid Republic of Rome: the conquistadores erected temples and porticoes as clear tokens of their victories and exhibited works of art in them. The notion of a colonnaded gymnasia could also be relevant for the introduction of these motifs in Roman painting. The revetment of the buildings’ walls with relief imitations of marble ve neers would be a logical appropriation of the

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7 Guidager Bilde 1993, 158. Coined for Pompeian decorations before the 2nd century, which show elements also present in Etruscan context: Torelli 2011, 404, with references.
8 Brief but fine definition in Mulliez 2014, 11. She only ignores the presence of architectural features like columns and (mock) windows cum parapets in the First style, suggesting that ashlar masonry is the only matter suggested. On mouldings and cornices in early First style decorations from Sicily and their origins, see Campagna 2011. On *Pergamon*, Schwarz in this volume.
9 The first two styles have been topic of various papers in two conference proceedings, that is the volume in honour of Anna Gallina Zevi, result of a round table in St-Romain-en-Gal, and the proceedings of a round table in Messina launched in 2009: Perrier 2007; La Torre/ Torelli 2011; my review on the latter in BAbesch 89, 2013, 269–270.
10 Mogetta 2015, 28–31, 33 note 127.
11 Mogetta (2015, 33 note 127), however, remarks that walls constructed with blocks were stuccoed as were those made in concrete and smaller blocks.
12 Torelli/Marcattili 2010, 47–48, fig. 10 (*Fregellae*). They mention in Rome the Temple of the *Dioskouron* on the Forum (117 BC), that of the *Fortuna Huiusce Diei* in Largo Argentina (101 BC). They provide further examples of temple decorations in Latium and Etruria. See also Marcattili 2011 (partly in the same formulation); Moormann 2011, 49–61, esp. 55. For Cosa: Torelli/Marcattili 2010, 48, fig. 11. For the adaptation in Pompeian houses: Oriolo/Zanier 2011, esp. 491–494.
13 On the gymnasia concept in Roman Italy, see most recently Mayer 2012, 186–187. Good examples: Oriolo/Zanier 2011 present a corpus of fourteen first-style decorations with pilasters or lesenes in peristyles and gardens only.
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Fig. 1  Pompei. House of Sallustius (VI 2, 4), atrium, south wall (top); House IX 3, 2, garden, south wall (bottom).
Restoration by A. Sikkard. From Mau 1882, pl. II; courtesy DAI, Berlin.
decorative apparatus of similar buildings in the just-conquered regions or the states which had become clients or peers. Since these generals could not construct palaces due to the appearance of modestia they had to keep up, their houses could only become private palaces by means of the application of this new decorative fashion. Susan McAlpine, however, puts question marks to these notions and argues that the First style does no more and no less than showing a koinê in the Mediterraneum expressing luxury without a necessary reference to opulence and the public realm.

All this would explain why we do not observe great differences between the interior decoration of temples, public buildings, and private houses during the 2nd and 1st centuries BC. This corroborates the words of Vitruvius on the development of house decoration in combination with an examination of the archaeological record. The uniformity might change, if I am correct, with the introduction of figural motifs.

In Rome, unfortunately, our knowledge of material from the mid 2nd century is extremely scanty. Now the question rises, whether the just sketched Rome-centric development is correct or if similar developments took place in other parts of Italy – and elsewhere – as well. Do those cases of the First style in the late 2nd century depend on the establishment of this new mode of decorating public and, subsequently, private buildings in Rome or may we indeed speak of a koinê, with a contemporary expansion of the same motifs from the Hellenistic Near East without a specific anchoring in Rome itself? Do we see, as Monica Salvadori has called it in respect to late 2nd-century decorations in Rimini, a piena ricezione nelle dimore riminesi di età repubblicana del modello di importazione greca? Consequently, can we, as has been argued, even think of Hellenistic masters coming to Italy to adorn complexes of Roman patrons? It is difficult to answer these questions. First of all, we have no data about previous decorations in casu Rimini, but elsewhere the same question is of interest) on which a sort of local tradition could have been based, or, rather, did these systems come out of the blue? Secondly, Salvadori makes clear that, though scanty, similar remains were found in other towns in the north-eastern part of Italy as well, all dated to the last decade of the 2nd century or the beginning of the 1st century BC. Andrea Salcuni connects the (very scanty) vestiges of First style floors and paintings in the Abruzzo region with a process of Romanisation and the connection of local military and commercial elite members with the Hellenistic east. Rome, however, seems not to have been far away as well.

Rather extensively, Emanuela Murgia has sketched a similar image for northern Italy, while the same explanation has been given for the presence of this painting fashion regarding temple decorations in Fregellae, Praeneste, Populonia, and Volterra, as well as for slightly later complexes elsewhere in Italy. Almost all instances of the First style known date to the late 2nd century only, so that Rome's primacy seems warranted, but as observed by some scholars in their studies on these early decorations, the inhabitants of these towns travelled to the east in the same way the Roman elite did, so that, indeed, it is better not to stick to a too Romano-centric model, but to assume a koinê development. The role of Sicily may have been decisive in this process, since the island was conquered as early as 211 BC and became a source of cultural inspiration in many forms.

As already mentioned, various scholars have argued that it was Greek craftsmen who realized the First style decorations, having arrived in Italy in the wake of the military conquerors. Considering the presence of Greek artists in Rome, as noted by Pliny and others, this suggestion is attractive, but without a shred of evidence, there is the risk of creating an inaccurate scenario. What is more, sculptors were considered to be artists in this period, whereas painters belonged to the much less esteemed class of craftsmen.

This long discussion of the beginnings of the First style illustrates how difficult it is to really understand a long-lived fashion and its implications for society. I shall, therefore, in this paper not try to sketch the possible reasons for changes in respect to the subsequent styles. All in all, we observe a development of the Second, Third, and Fourth styles as well as later fashions all-over Italy and abroad in the same time frame. The expansion from the second quarter of the 1st century BC has surely to do with Rome's central position in the
Mediterranean and will have determined maybe even more than previously the styles to be adapted for patrons who wanted to present themselves as real Roman citizens. It has been observed, for instance, that the Second style started as a typical Roman fashion, without early parallels (let alone antecedents) outside Italy. Culturally, Rome’s dominance grew under Augustus and his successors to dominate all sorts of artistic developments throughout the empire, often without great time distances. A good example is the introduction of marble veneer in the domestic realm, first in the emperors’ palaces, later in private interiors.

The Second style

The Second style clearly works out notions that had come into vogue in the preceding centuries, yet expressed in a two-dimensional fashion (fig. 2). This flattish aspect has various advantages, in the first place that of creating space for figural elements and larger architectural details as constituents of the decorative schemes. Painters are able to enhance the spatial effect in particular and to create a sphere of luxury by adding objects and living creatures. The meticulous imitation of material, architectural elements, and objects of art like precious metal and glass vessels, candelabra, and sculptures requires skilled personnel and designers. All these elements serve to strengthen the representation of status and peerage of the Romano-Italic elite of the waning Republic and beginnings of Augustan leadership. Apparently the time was not yet ripe to insert elements made from these precious materials.

The Third style

The Third style, practiced in the time of Augustus’s last decades of leadership and that of Tiberius, makes a large use of monochrome panels, often adorned with fine small ornaments, borders and slimmed architectural elements which often can no longer be recognised as such, unless placed in the tradition of wall compositions of previous decades (fig. 3). These decorations show a sometimes dramatically diminished degree of openness and a miniaturisation of architectural elements. Large figural scenes may enrich the closed panelling sequence executed in one or two colours. Monochrome sometimes reigns these decorations and render the rooms closed and sober. It is often said that the Third style reflects a strong taste for intimacy, which would mean a sort of retirement from the public world within the walls of the citizens’ houses. All this, therefore, suggests a high degree of

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15 McAlpine 2014, Chapter 3, esp. 84–85.
18 Salvatori 2012, 20–22. She connects the early Second style with this same tendency. No first and Second style in Piemonte (Preacco 2012) and Liguria (Bulgarelli/Gervasini 2012).
19 Salcuni 2012, 141, 144. The same is done for other areas by Mariani/Pagani 2012, 41.
22 E. g. La Torre 2011, 272–273 (Sicily); Salvatori 2012; Mariani/Pagani 2012, 41–43 (Cisalpina); Murgia 2012 (Aquileia); Salcuni 2012, 141–144 (Abruzzo).
23 Campagna 2011, 218–219 makes the connection between Hellenistic Sicily in the 3rd and 2nd centuries and eastern centers like Alexandria and Pergamon, with Syracuse under Hiero II as the cultural center of the island. La Torre 2011 offers a similar panorama on Sicily as «isola ponte al centro del Mediterraneo» (p. 255). Moormann 2011, 55 gives some further considerations. See also the Lappi, in this volume; Lucore in this volume.
24 I refrain from quoting too many studies, and refer to La Torre 2011, 257–258 and various other papers studies in the edited volume La Torre/Torelli 2011.
25 Marcattili 2011, 417 on the afflux in Italy of «efficienti équipes di artistian e di copiosa manodopera schiavile.» He gives references to relevant scholarship. He also mentions sculptors (p. 419; the same in Torelli/Marcattili 2010).
26 Zevi 2007. In the subsequent discussion (printed in Perrier 2007, 505–516) various contributors expressed doubts as well as consensus regarding this point, assuming that Delos might have decorations which can be seen as predecessors.
28 On this topic, most recently Mulliez 2014; McAlpine 2014, Chapter 4.
simplicity matching the laws and regulations of soberness made by Augustus in his last reigning years, but we all know that the very fine decorations, executed in precious colours often must have been very expensive.

It is relevant to observe that in this period we have no examples of marbling at all. As far as I know, this observation has never been problematized. Was it because of the building boom with the application of marble visible everywhere in the towns of the Empire? Did owners of houses no longer want to import tokens of prestige or power, now that the new imperial, Augustan constitution had entered their worlds? I’ll come back to that point.

The Fourth style

The growth of demonstration of wealth and luxury from the time of Claudius onwards, first in imperial residences, had its effect on the refurbishment of the private house with paintings. We observe a sort of retro taste, picking up colourful elements, especially architectural vistas and ornaments, from the late Second style, while the monochrome panels and closed nature of many walls as well as the use of embroidery-like ornaments are continuations of third-style forms (fig. 4). «Anything goes», seems to have been the motto of these paintings, and it might be an
Fig. 3 Pompeii, House of M. Spurius Mesor (VII 3, 29), triclinium 1, north wall.
Restoration by A. Sikkard. From Mau 1882, pl. XII; courtesy DAI, Berlin.
expression of new social and cultural conditions in the Roman empire during the last two Julio-Claudian emperors (with respect for the past, but removal of classical elements), which, despite political turmoil, was to continue some more decades until the first quarter of the 2nd century (see note 41). Since the array of possibilities and combinations is so vast that no one has ever been able to establish an articulation, either chronological or typological, of these paintings, we must conclude that the Fourth style label is the weakest of all four sobriquets given by Mau. Apart from his depreciation, he could not distinguish specific tendencies, as can no subsequent scholar. More chronological anchors may be necessary to make clear specific fashions at specific moments so that a finer subdivision à la Beyen will become feasible. The Golden House decorations, however, have shown that within one building decorated in no more than four years a bewildering set of combinations and compositions was achieved, which makes fear that better definitions are still far away.

Chronology

When we come to the topic of chronology, we can say that Mau’s four-styles model is more or less still valuable. There have been quibbles about the transition from the second to the third and from the third to the Fourth style over the last decades, but nowadays a certain communis opinio accepts the following timespans:

- First Style: 3rd and 2nd centuries BC
- Second Style: 100–20 or 10 BC
- Third Style: 20 or 10 BC–AD 40 or 50
- Fourth Style: 40 or 50–100 or 138.

To begin with the last dates, Mau’s traditional Fourth style finishes with Pompeii’s destruction in AD 79, but it has often been argued that the tendencies of what we call Fourth style continue for some more decades. The paintings from the Villa Negroni (unfortunately only known from water colours) might be the latest examples known.

I want to reconsider a recently tackled problem, that of the chronology of the House of Augustus. The excavator, Gianfilippo Caretoni, opted for 36–28 BC and connected this date with the erection and dedication of the Temple of Apollo as well as traditional dating of the House of Livia. In a brief note on the first discoveries (Rooms of the Masks and the Pine Garlands), the major painting scholar of that time, Hendrik Gerard Beyen, placed the decorations in his phase IIa, that is 50–25 BC. Although there remain a lot of uncertainties in respect to Caretoni’s excavations (now more or less better understandable thanks to the publication of his excavation notes and diary), the archaeological data do not help us to establish a sound dating, since the fill of most rooms was found disturbed and there were no clearly-datable finds. A historical analysis of what happened on the Palatine after the acquisition of the building lot by Octavian in 42 BC has been the basis of a new timeframe, that is the construction and decoration of the house we know immediately after 42 and before 36. It would have been destroyed in 36 and replaced by a house combined with the temple of Apollo (after 30 named Apollo Actiacus, but that is of no consequence for the chronology). This seems to shatter some existing chronological constructs, especially Beyen’s phases Ila and Iib. Yet, a meticulous study of the decorations would illustrate that the parallels from decorative complexes in Campania mostly date to the decade 40–30 BC. As in the House of Augustus, more or less imitable and fantasy elements easily match. Caretoni was well aware of congruencies with, to name a few, the House of the Cryptoporticus in Pompeii, the Villa of Boscoreale, and the like. First of all, the rooms which look upon the courtyard have systems composed of architectural frameworks with protruding columns and marble veneer. There are some prospects with people and a couple of small figural panels (cut out, by the way, possibly in Antiquity). The fictive piers in the Room of the Masks and in the Room of the Pine Apples are similar to those in the House of Via Graziosa, better known as the room of the Odyssey landscapes, firmly dated to the forties BC.

The egyptizing decorative elements in the so-called ‘studiolo’ and the adjacent oecus are no problem either, since elements from the Egyptian world were transferred and picked up in Roman culture from the late 2nd century onwards. In our case we may recall the vowing of an Isis shrine by the members of the Second Triumvirate in 43 BC. Whether the temple (which then would be the predecessor of the Iseum Campense) was really built or is, is not that relevant for the introduction
of things Egyptian in the realm of Octavian’s house. In the frame of both an early dating, that is 42–36, and a later one, 36–28, the decorations do not necessarily convey political messages, unless one wants to connect the egyptianizing motifs with the Battle of Actium of September 31, but in that case any other sort of allusion to Octavian’s victory is lacking.

Consequently, the House of Augustus – or rather Octavian – seems to fit well into the fashion of the mid 1st-century elite and deviates little from that tradition. Its opulence, especially regarding the use of colour schemes, should be taken into account to explain its somewhat different initial appearance. If we compare complexes like the House of Livia and the Aula Isiaca on the Palatine as well as the Villa della Farnesina, I believe that we would come to the conclusion that, all in all, these paintings date to the early phases of Octavian’s career. Such a conclusion would imply that the chronology of painting in Rome should be reshuffled in some respects and would result in a lack of material before the beginning of the 1st century AD. Alternatively, we may consider the decorations of the Aula Isiaca and the Villa della Farnesina, with

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29 For the corpus Meyboom/Moormann 2013. Irene Bragantini observed this problem in a reaction to my paper.
30 Stroka 1996, 2007; Bragantini 2014 – to name a few contributions only.
31 Beyen 1964. See ultimately the Gianfilippo Carettoni’s notes collected by Maria Antonietta Tomei (2014), esp. 175–176 (workshop from Alexandria), 319–320. The so-called Studiolo or ´Cubicolo superiore´ (Tomei 2014, 135, 321–322) would belong to a different set of rooms, probably made slightly later; assessment in Bragantini 2014, 319–321, who is rightly cautious.
32 Tomei 2014.
33 Only the fill of the Room of the Masks and the Room of the Pine Festoons would show, according to Carettoni, a use until the Neronian age (M. Archer in: Tomei 2014, 329), while Jacopi and Tedone had assumed 28 BC as the latest possible date. The brief analysis of the finds from these two rooms would be in favour of the latter date (Tomei 2014, 330). But see Iacopi 2007, 76.
34 Iacopi 2007, 76; La Rocca 2008. This proposal has met support from various scholars, ultimately Sauron 2016 (with a brief review of opinions on p. 591–592).
35 To point out one thing only, that is the floors in opus sectile, they show patterns like the lozenges in perspective which had a long tradition, to begin with the House of the Grifins on the Palatine and the slightly older House of the Faun in Pompeii, not to speak of previous examples in temples.
36 Instances in Tomei 2014, 173–174, 314, etc. See also Bragantini 2014, 321.
37 Most recently the quite original approach of the scenes as a mythical promenade O’ Sullivan 2011, 116–149. O’Sullivan (2011, 128–131, fig. 8–10) recalls the pilasters for which we have real parallels in the praedia of Julia Felix in Pompeii.
their slightly different, more fantastic character, are somewhat younger than the heavy paintings in the houses of Octavian and Livia. In both scenarios Rome shows its avant-garde position and makes us aware of the problem we have concerning our set of material in various parts of the empire: it is not easy to compare Rome to Pompeii and maybe we should not do this at all. Only the opulent villas might have been decorated by painters from Rome. Fragments from a recently explored villa along the Via Tiburtina provide material of great relevance for our topic.

A consequence not yet taken into account of this chronological swift would be a reconsideration of Vitruvius’ critique of contemporary painting. Since his De architectura was probably published in the 20s BC, it postdates the House of Octavian, which the author probably never visited. His allusions on things within the paintings that could not be constructed, therefore, would not refer to the residences on the Palatine, but to other complexes. The Villa della Farnesina, though now maybe also dated earlier, might be a target chosen by Vitruvius. Otherwise we must assume that he is talking about decorations no longer extant. As said before, the lacuna between the 30s BC and the beginning of the 1st century AD in the Roman dossier is large.

Our chronology is often shaky, being based on relative comparisons and preconceptions rather than on archaeological data. The study of finds from dated contexts therefore is of paramount importance and should become a basis for that of the undated complexes like those in the Campanian cities destroyed by Vesuvius. In particular, the chronological determination of fourth-style paintings is still complex, since its enormous corpus includes an extremely heterogeneous of seemingly unrelated material in terms of composition, shape, content, and iconography. There have been made various proposals to pinpoint specific decorations, but these do not yet provide a time scheme that is valuable for all decorations between, say, the Claudian and Hadrianic era.

**Context of decorative systems and meaning**

It has been argued that we can barely distinguish specific forms and painting manners (or styles, if I may) for specific categories of buildings. We observe the development from the imitation of precious materials and architectural mouldings and cornices in shrines and public buildings in the republican period moving towards the application of the same devices within the private sphere of the elite during the period of the First style. What is pertinent for Rome might also be true elsewhere. Fregellae, Cosa, and Pompeii, at least provide examples from both categories. When the painters begin to create illusionistic imitations of architecture and precious materials, the impetus seems rather to come from the owners of private houses than from the patrons of shrines.

First of all, we should briefly recall the possibilities the repertoire of the ancient painters offered to the patrons. We have already seen that the application of architectural elements, varying from entire fictitious constructions to the insertion of small elements, is a constant item throughout the history of painting. Furthermore we observe the use of plain panels with various sorts of borders, a feature starting in the Second style with mock marble veneer slabs placed as orthostats and constituting predecessors of the plain panels in the Third and Fourth styles and beyond. From the Second style onwards there are wall-filling representations of megalographiae, gardens, land- and seascapes. The First style does not include large figural scenes, which may be explained from the nature of this stylistic language as evocation of palatial architecture. Herein, figural items would have been panel paintings and mosaic emblemata – a thing we find again in the Domus Aurea and other palaces.

We should research whether these composition schemes were adopted in specific buildings and/or rooms. I fear that the answer for most of the schemes is that they could be used indiscriminately in all kinds of spaces. Temples, public buildings, and houses had their representative rooms to be adorned with architectural and panel decorations. All-over figural scenes occur almost solely in private dwellings, where both small rooms and open-air spaces like gardens were the most frequently occurring spaces with this kind.
To understand décor in its context we must analyse rooms with more or less the same form and function. This is not an easy task, since very few houses contain identical rooms, and their functions can vary greatly. The analysis of mythical images in their contexts provides some light on this question. I mention the exquisite study by Anna Anguissola on rooms with double alcoves, as an excellent example. The words «riservatezza, condivisione e prestigio» express the aspects which were relevant in the use of these – and other – spaces of the Pompeian house.

Several years ago I attempted to determine whether one could detect specific forms of decoration in the realm of religious buildings. That research clearly demonstrated that the more or less public cults, associated with the public life of the Romans, had shrines adorned with schemes known from contemporary houses. Particular cults, most frequently connected with what was seen as foreign or somewhat alien cults, like those of Isis and Mithras, had their ceremonial rooms adorned with specific decorations that matched the special architectural shapes these buildings had (like Mithras’ speleum) and might have been produced by members of the relevant cult. Public buildings and temples in most cases kept the tradition of what had been developed in the 2nd century BC, whereas the fashion in the private sphere changed over the times due to new requisites of owners and the changes of house forms.

This relatively small difference in «styles» or syntaxes of paintings between various kinds of buildings can at least in several cases be illustrated by the fact that the paintings of houses as well as temples (in this case the House of the Vettii and the Temple of Isis in Pompeii) were made by the same group of painters, or conceived by the same master painter. The syntax of these decorations indeed is very similar and the egyptianizing details in the temple are so mundane that they barely reflect Egyptian religion and art.

Marble veneer

Three recent studies on the use of marble veneer and its imitation in Roman painting shed new light on the meaning of wall decorations. The presence of marbling has often been explained as a cheap alternative for the expensive coloured stone types (here for sake of simplicity taken together as «marble»). As a matter of fact, white marble, which was the most frequently used veneer, was not easily imitated, apart from veined types like bardiglio. The idea of cheap imitation has now been tackled by some young scholars in their dissertations. Maud Mulliez’ study is about the origin of marble imitation in the First and Second styles. She makes clear that the sorts of marble imitated often were precious stones not immediately available in Roman Italy and seen as an excellent medium to convey the message of power and prestige in the Roman elite house. Another approach is that of the afore-mentioned study of MacAlpine, which examines faux-marble decoration in all four styles. She concludes that these fictitious renderings constitute one of the main elements to impress and display wealth and power.

While this sounds logical from that point of unavailability, it is a more puzzling phenomenon in the Fourth style. Suzanne Van de Lievoort has shown that it is not mere cheapness that determined the application of marbling: we find examples throughout grand and humble houses, in «public» and private spaces whether large or small, and, what is more, in a few cases real and mock marble were applied in the same rooms. The imita-
tion of marble – like the motif of garden representation – was a sign of triumph over nature and of the desire for luxury throughout the private sphere. «Their appearance and their impact on viewers» were determining factors in that respect 50.

I return a moment to the Third style. The absence of marble corresponds with the absence of clear architectural references and may simultaneously express a sort of sobriety propagated at the imperial court and the Roman elite – a sobriety which is of course arbitrary, when we take into account the precious colours and extremely fine ornamentation of this fashion, which renders the decorations rather rich in modesty.

The application of veneer would have to wait until the late Claudian or Neronian era, although as early as the forties-thirties BC we see marble inserted in the House of Augustus. The same might be true for the insertion of glass pearls and semi-precious stones as in the Domus Transitoria on the Palatine in Rome. Then the ‹stile retrò› of imitation returns, as has been pointed out by Stephan Mols, as a token of self-esteem and prestige 50.

Conclusions

Let me conclude this contribution by stressing that the study of wall painting in the Roman world has really made progress over the last decades. The material itself has enormously increased and makes a panoramic knowledge almost impossible. This may imply a specialisation and, as a consequence, segregation of parts of our studies, e.g. topographically, chronologically, or regarding technique, iconography, and other partial studies. Yet, I do not fear that our field has no future. Studies devoted to the mind-set of patrons and consumers have brought us a better understanding of the cultural and societal context in which wall painting functioned. The same is true for the work on iconography and workshops, which I’ve not addressed here.

The function of the AIPMA congresses should be to bring together all sorts of approaches and specialised presentations in addition to general essays. Here and in other gremia, the study of and discussion on ancient mural decorations are astonishingly vivid and multiformal and permanently give us new insights.

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Bibliography

**Discussion**

**S. Pearson:** In your book *Divine Interiors*, you bring in some examples from temples in which there is a candelabrum painted on the walls and I wonder: Can we make a puzzle connexion and not just a correlation between temple and house wall paintings in terms of candelabra style or the desire to depict the candelabra because this three-dimensional object was standing in temples? Do we think that the wall painting draws on a three-dimensional object and then the private houses adopt that style of wall painting from temples?

**E. Moormann:** Yes, this might be possible of course, but we don’t have a good real chronological sequence with which we can determine the process of painted candelabra and decorations in religious buildings first, and then only followed by private real estates. That is a problem. At the same time, I might say that maybe it is not a problem in the sense that the real things were more important. The real candelabra standing in the rooms were first, I think, in the religious spaces. But they used to work simply as lamps so I mean they were also at home but maybe a little bit later. At the moment we see them in wall painting and they were maybe already introduced also into private spheres. So you cannot say absolutely it starts here and finishes over there, although that’s of course very plausible.

**H. Eristov:** Tu as effectivement mis l’accent sur le fait que le troisième style abolit, refuse, par cohérence avec la politique d’Auguste, les imitations de marbre en tant que manifestation de luxe. Mais je pense que cet aspect de luxe apparaît en fait au troisième style de façon beaucoup plus discrète, mais bien présente, dans l’abondance à cette époque de pièces à fond noir, extrêmement couteux et difficile à réaliser. Le troisième style déplace un peu les marqueurs du luxe.

**E. Moormann:** Je suis d’accord, je pense aussi que c’est seulement une idée de sobriété, de simplicité tandis que la décoration est très riche et très chère, ce qui commence ici dans ce type de décoration avec le vermillon. Mais cela se développe encore plus avec le troisième style. C’était, pour cette partie de ma présentation, plus important d’accentuer l’absence du marbre, dont personne ne demande jamais las raison. Et c’est pourquoi je l’ai un peu orientée dans cette direction mais tu as tout à fait raison, c’était un style où il y avait des compositions très riches. Aussi dans les tableaux, les très grandes scènes figuratives, les premiers jardins.

**M. Fuchs:** J’ai été effectivement intéressé par le “Rome-centrisme”, tel que tu l’as évoqué, qui m’a suggéré la question de l’extension du quatrième style, avec les deux propositions de son terme autour de 100 ou de 138, autrement dit après Hadrien. Ma question est de savoir s’il faut parler de quatrième style qui se poursuit, ou si, selon ce qui se fait de plus en plus pour les provinces, il faut aussi faire intervenir la notion de l’influence des dynasties impériales, et donc parler de styles flaviens, trajaniens, antonins, employés par Wirth et trop vite abandonnés?

**E. Moormann:** Oui c’est peut-être mieux de faire ainsi; je veux dire que l’idée de sobriété, de simplicité tandis que la décoration est très riche et très chère, ce qui commence ici dans ce type de décoration avec le vermillon. Mais cela se développe encore plus avec le troisième style. C’était, pour cette partie de ma présentation, plus important d’accentuer l’absence du marbre, dont personne ne demande jamais las raison. Et c’est pourquoi je l’ai un peu orientée dans cette direction mais tu as tout à fait raison, c’était un style où il y avait des compositions très riches. Aussi dans les tableaux, les très grandes scènes figuratives, les premiers jardins.

**M. Carrive:** Je voulais ajouter deux choses par rapport à ce qui vient d’être dit sur la validité des styles. Tout d’abord sur la question du quatrième style, je souhaite rappeler l’article de Renate Thomas qui a bien montré la différence entre les trois premiers styles qui constituent réellement, à Pomépi, des groupes extrêmement cohérents, et le quatrième style ou l’on voit la coexistence de plus en plus riche de différentes tendances. A cet égard, le concept de quatrième style s’avère moins solide, moins efficace et mériterait sans doute d’être repensé, comme vient de le dire M. Fuchs. Cela explique aussi qu’on ait du mal à comprendre où il s’arrête, puisque plusieurs de ses tendances coexistent perdurent assez longtemps dans le 2e siècle.

Concernant la notion de style, je suis d’accord avec E. Moormann pour vouloir la sauver. Peut-être faudrait-il distinguer les styles “pompéiens” comme une catégorie très utile pour penser les décors: quand on parle de troisième style par exemple, on a tout de suite en tête des images, des motifs, des compositions… concept qui permet de caractériser un groupe culturellement cohérent et dont il serait stupide de se priver. Ce qui a été en revanche critiqué avec raison, c’est le carcan chronologique.
que les styles pompéiens ont représenté pour la peinture du reste de l’Empire. C’est peut-être cette différenciation, cette distanciation qu’il faut opérer, tout en reconnaissant leur pertinence et leur efficacité.

I. Bragantini: Noterei che proprio il punto chiave, secondo me, in questa discussione è la Domus Aurea, l’uso della pittura nella Domus Aurea e quello che succede intorno alla committenza di Nerone, che Eric forse per modestia non ha voluto tirar fuori. Ma questo problema dell’uso della pittura secondo me spiega benissimo anche le mancanze di coerenze che nascono dal fatto che non c’è più una committenza fortissima, centrale e imitabile. Questo viene fuori molto bene dal libro di Eric e Stephan: forse potremmo ricordarcelo.