

Water and stone: the economics of wall-painting in Pompeii (A.D. 62-79)

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This article investigates production times, workforce, and materials involved in the creation of wall-paintings, applying figures obtained from pre-industrial building manuals and through experimental archaeology. This is a crucial yet — at least with regard to Roman wall-painting — unexploited avenue for research, one that has already been successfully applied to the study of ancient construction, stone-working, and mosaic production.¹ The implications of this type of study are twofold: estimating labour figures allows us to assess painters' working practices and workforce organization, yet it can also help uncover the burden sustained by patrons in both economic and personal terms, thereby providing a more realistic notion of what it meant to have one's house decorated. Ultimately, this can lead to a better understanding of local markets and of the socio-economic implications of the wall-painting industry.

Many studies have examined the relationship between wall-paintings and the people linked with them, focusing particularly on ancient viewers and patrons to appreciate how they experienced this art form and the logic behind the choice of specific painted subjects.² That is not to say that painters have not been investigated, for the study of wall-painting has been characterized by different attempts at identifying individual workshops or makers based on stylistic analysis.³ Still, previous scholarship has not really engaged with the

1 I draw attention to a previous attempt by P. M. Allison to assess the number of wall-decorators working in Pompeii based on the assumption that an 'average' house took about 1 month to decorate, even though it is not made clear how she reached that figure: "Subject matter and meaning in the paintings of the Casa della Caccia Antica in Pompeii," in D. Scagliarini Corlàita (ed.), *I temi figurativi nella pittura parietale antica (IV sec. a.C. – IV sec. d.C.)* (Bologna 1997) 19. For studies focusing on the use of labour figures to estimate building times and costs, see J. DeLaine, *The Baths of Caracalla: a study in the design, construction, and economics of large-scale building projects in Imperial Rome* (JRA Suppl. 25, 1997); P. Barresi, "Anfiteatro flavio di Pozzuoli, portico in summa cavea: una stima dei costi," in E. C. De Sena and H. Dessales (edd.), *Metodi e approcci archeologici. L'industria e il commercio nell'Italia antica* (BAR S1262; Oxford 2004) 262-67; id., "Calculating the cost of columns: the case of the Temple of Apollo at Didyma," in P. Pensabene and E. Gasparini (edd.), *ASMOSIA X* (Rome 2015) 933-40; D. Maschek, "The marble stoa at Hierapolis. Materials, labour force and building costs," in T. Ismaelli and G. Scardozzi (edd.), *Ancient quarries and building sites in Asia Minor* (Bari 2016) 393-402, and papers in S. Camporeale, H. Dessales and A. Pizzo (edd.), *Arqueología de la construcción I-II* (Anejos AEspArq 50 [2008] and 57 [2010]). In the field of mosaic production, see W. T. Wootton, "Figuring out the facts: calculating mosaic labour times in 4th-c. A.D. Britain," *JRA* 28 (2015) 261-82.

2 K. Schefold, *Pompejanische Malerei. Sinn und Ideengeschichte* (Basel 1952); id., *Vergessenes Pompeii. Unveröffentlichte Bilder römischer Wanddekorationen in geschichtlicher Folge herausgegeben* (Bern 1962); M. L. Thompson, "The monumental and literary evidence for programmatic painting in antiquity," *Marsyas* 9 (1961) 36-77; P. Zanker, "Mithenbilder im Haus," in R. F. Docter and E. M. Moormann (edd.), *Proceedings of the XVth Int. Congress of Classical Archaeology* (Amsterdam 1999) 40-48; id., "Immagini mitologiche nella case pompeiane," in P. Zanker and E. Polito (edd.), *Un' arte per l'impero. Funzione e intenzione delle immagini nel mondo romano* (Milan 2002) 112-32; L. Romizzi, *Programmi decorativi di III e IV stile a Pompei* (Naples 2006); K. Lorenz, *Bilder machen Räume. Mythenbilder in pompeianischen Häusern* (Berlin 2008).

3 H. G. Beyen, "The workshops of the Fourth Style at Pompeii and its neighbourhood," in E. J. Brill (ed.), *Studia archaeologica Gerardo van Hoorn oblata* (Leiden 1951) 43-65; L. Richardson, jr,