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**Histories of ancient painting**


Reconstructing a single coherent history of painted images over almost two and a half millennia and across a wide variety of cultural contexts in the Mediterranean and Europe is a daunting task, especially today, at a time when the notions of diversity and multiplicity play a crucial role in the study of classical antiquity. The editor Jerome J. Pollitt introduces this study as the first attempt, after Mary Hamilton Swindler’s 1929 *Ancient Painting*,1 to provide a comprehensive and up-to-date survey of

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1 Swindler 1929.
Ancient painting is a fast-growing field of research. In the 20th century Minoan paintings were discovered in houses at Thera, Classical and Hellenistic painted tombs were uncovered in a number of sites in Macedonia, Thrace and southern Italy, and murals have been found in disparate parts of the Roman Empire. These and many other astonishing discoveries have been prompting scholars to investigate new evidence and revise old assumptions. In addition, collections of painted fragments, often kept in museum storage for several decades, and archive photographs have been studied alongside new finds. Research on ancient painting has benefited enormously from the development of innovative methods of analysis, conservation treatments and digital technologies, which have not only advanced our knowledge of materials and techniques, but have also shed light on the relationship between the paintings and their spatial, archaeological and sociocultural contexts. Polychromy has played a key role in the study of classical art since the 18th century, and the first decade of the 21st century has seen a renewed interest in the topic, with a number of exhibitions and interdisciplinary studies that have brought together art historians, archaeologists, conservators, scientists and philologists to explore the meanings and uses of pigments and colour across different media. Classical antiquity was a world full of images and uses of pigments and colour across different media. Classical antiquity was a world full of images and scholars of ancient painting have traditionally privileged the figurative over the decorative. Numerous studies have offered sophisticated reconstructions and interpretations of paintings and viewers' experiences, often with the aid of ancient literary sources. This long-standing focus on iconography has more recently been accompanied by a growing interest in decorative schemes and by a more general shift towards contextual and archaeological approaches. Figural and decorative motifs, with their stylistic features, are now increasingly considered within a multimedia decorative environment and they are explored in connection with surrounding architecture, sculpture and other surface decorations. Finally, our knowledge and understanding of ancient painting is shaped also by their modern reception. This applies especially to Etruscan and Roman paintings, many of which were discovered, copied, collected and forged since the 17th century.

This overview shows how in 2014 the time was mature for a long-awaited and much-needed study on ancient painting. Pollitt’s comprehensive approach is a welcome complement to the dominating trend in current scholarship, which tends to focus on a single site, region or time period.

From Survey to History

Besides providing a comprehensive survey of ancient painting, the main goal of this volume is to reconstruct the history of painting in the classical world. The focus on ‘painting in the Classical world’ rather than ‘Classical painting’ is especially important, in that it emphasises that Greco-Roman painting should not be considered in isolation from other pictorial traditions that developed in mixed contexts or on the periphery of the classical world. In doing that, it addresses a readership made of Aegean, Classical and Near Eastern archaeologists, art historians and cultural historians, and encourages a conversation between them. While inevitably maintaining a Hellenocentric and Romanocentric approach, editor and authors repeatedly insist on the cultural diversity of the classical world and attempt to define its geographical and chronological boundaries in relation to the Greco-Roman pictorial tradition (x). Paintings from Etruria, Thrace, Anatolia, Egypt and Israel are therefore discussed alongside Greco-Roman evidence. Yet, broadening the scope of the investigation is only a starting point to reconstruct the history of ancient panel- and wall-painting. A history presupposes the existence of a thread of...
The corpus of paintings examined in this volume is vast and heterogeneous, spanning two millennia and covering the entire Mediterranean and beyond. The book is organised in nine chapters that follow a straightforward chronological structure, dividing the material into four main periods: Bronze Age, Archaic and Classical, Hellenistic and Roman. Within each time period the paintings are then grouped based on their geographic and cultural contexts: chapter 1 discusses Aegean painting during the Bronze Age; chapters 2 and 4 examine literary sources and vase painting in an attempt to supplement and interpret the scanty archaeological evidence available for Archaic and Classical mural and panel painting in the Greek world; chapter 3 surveys Etruscan and Greek paintings in Italy from the 7th to the end of the 5th century BC; chapters 5 and 6 focus on Hellenistic paintings in the Eastern Mediterranean and Italy, respectively; chapter 7 bridges the Greek and Roman sections of the book and is concerned largely with literary sources, looking at the place of wall painting in the history of ancient art criticism; finally, the last two chapters (8 and 9) follow the development of Roman painting from the Mid-Republic period to Late Antiquity.

Minding the Gap

One of the major challenges in trying to reconstruct the history of ancient Greek painting is the discrepancy between the scanty archaeological evidence available for the Archaic and Classical periods and the wealth of information supplied by literary sources. How can these be reconciled? The first four chapters approach this issue from different angles: exploring the antecedents of Classical painting, combining literary evidence with vase painting, and looking for elements of Greekness in non-Greek contexts.

The volume opens with a chapter on Aegean painting in the Bronze Age, a tradition that the author, Anne Chapin, claims may be considered in many ways ‘foundational to the later artistic achievements of Classical Greece’ (60). Chapin begins by introducing Aegean geography and chronology and then looks at the rise of pictorial painting on Minoan Crete in the 2nd millennium BC. The discussion proceeds chronologically from Minoan to Cycladic and Mycenaean painting, and Chapin provides a thorough review of individual paintings, tackling long-standing problems of dating and iconography, as exemplified by the ‘Saffron Gatherer Fresco’ and the ‘Priest-King Fresco’ at Knossos (11–13). One of the many merits of this chapter is that it provides a lucid analysis of the factors that led to the emergence and decline of pictorial painting in the Aegean and of the connections between different pictorial traditions. In particular, Chapin argues that frescoes recently discovered in Egypt, northern Israel and Syria show how itinerant artists working at a variety of sites in the Eastern Mediterranean contributed to the formation and diffusion of an Aegean style and technique (27–28). This suggests that human mobility and technological transfer played a key role in the development of this artistic tradition, thus elucidating the place of Aegean painting within the broader cultural phenomena of Minoanisation and Mycenaeanisation. Pictorial vase painting is also well-integrated into the discussion. In the conclusion, Chapin comes to ‘the significance of Aegean painting for later Classical art’ (58), a question crucial to the broader scope of the book. She introduces some of the features shared by Aegean and Classical painting, namely pursuit of

12 Immerwahr 1990; Morgan 2005; Brecoulaki, Davis and Stocker 2015.
13 On the relationship between vase painting and wall painting in the Aegean during the Bronze Age, Vlachopoulos 2013.
naturalism and iconographic subjects like athletes, anthropomorphic deities and chariots. While her suggestions are thought-provoking, the discussion is brief and since this question is not picked up in later chapters it remains unclear what place Bronze Age painting had within the history of painting in the classical world.

Jeffrey Hurwit (chapter 2) and Mark Stansbury-O’Donnell (chapter 4) take upon themselves the daunting task of filling the gap in evidence left by Archaic and Classical painting in Greece. Taking a cautious and rigorous methodological approach, Hurwit offers an insightful and honest assessment of our current knowledge and understanding of Archaic panel- and wall painting. He identifies three categories of material to take into account: free paintings from sanctuaries and cemeteries in mainland Greece (painted plaster fragments, terracotta and wooden panels, and grave stele),14 Greek polychrome vase painting,15 and murals from Anatolia and Etruria. While wooden pinakes, like the Pitsa plaques, may offer us precious insights into the lost art of Greek panel-painting,16 from a technical standpoint terracotta pinakes are ultimately nothing more than flat vase paintings. Hurwit suggests that they were most likely commissioned to vase painters, which introduces the crucial question of what relationship existed between vase- and free-painting in the Archaic Greek world. Challenging what relationship existed between vase- and free-painting, Hurwit convincingly argues for an interdependence between these two arts, in which free painter and vase painter potentially shared the same iconographic repertoire and stylistic vocabulary. The final part of the chapter discusses a selection of murals from Archaic Lycia, Phrygia and Etruria. Hurwit looks primarily for Greek influences in the paintings’ subject matters and stylistic features. This perspective is fully justified by the scope of the chapter; yet, while Etruscan tombs are extensively discussed in chapter 3, the Anatolian ones are nowhere treated in their own right. Hurwit emphasises their hybridity and, in this respect, it may have been worth considering the painted decoration of the Tatarlı tomb (c. 480 BC). This chamber tomb was looted and excavated in 1969–1970 near Tatarlı, in the province of Aykonkarahisar, and its paintings, executed on wood, have been thoroughly studied and published.18 One of the painted wooden beams features a miniature frieze with a multi-figured battle scene that combines Achaemenid motifs with a subject matter well-known from Near Eastern and Eastern Greek art, including Assyrian reliefs and Clazomenian painted sarcophagi.19 The model was probably an Archaic painting, but a number of stylistic features support a dating in the Early Classical period.20 The Tatarlı paintings, like those from other Anatolian tombs, attest to the ‘cultural interpenetration’ of Phrygian, Lydian, Greek, and Achaemenid traditions.21 They also provide us with further elements to better understand the transition from Archaic to Classical painting.

Another source of knowledge for Greek wall and panel painting is represented by vase painting. Both Hurwit and Stansbury-O’Donnell rightly see a turning point in the first decades of the 5th century BC, when vase painters and wall painters seem to have started to work independently (89, 144).22 It becomes therefore significantly more challenging to detect ‘reflections’ of Greek monumental painting in vase painting of the 5th-4th centuries BC. In chapter 4, Stansbury-O’Donnell examines vase painting and later literary testimony in order to identify the most significant achievements of Classical and Late Classical painting; among them, a new interest in expressing pathos and ethos, the adoption of skiaographia (‘shadow-painting’) and skenographia (theatrical ‘scene-painting’), and developments in the choice and use of colour.23 These technical and stylistic features are discussed in connection with a rich body of red figure and polychrome vase paintings from Attica, Southern Italy and the Black Sea. The connection between South Italian vase painting and Greek wall painting remains problematic, as it is not clear to what extent Apulian or Lucanian vase painters would have been exposed to Greek wall paintings. Rather, stylistic and technical features point to a relationship with native funerary paintings from Lucania, Campania and Apulia.24 Stansbury-O’Donnell acknowledges the limitations of the evidence and the methodological challenge of comparing vase and wall painting after the Persian Wars, and warns us that several of his observations apply to the conception of the picture rather than the paintings themselves.

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14 Philipp 1994; Moormann 2011, 43–6.
15 Tateurs 2006; Williams 2006.
17 Robertson 1953; Schaus 1968, 116.
18 Summerer and von Klienlin 2010.
20 Summerer 2007, 7, 27.
21 Tuplin 2010, 190.
24 E.g. polychrome pottery from Canosa and Arpi (van der Wielen-van Ommen 1992; Gadaleta 2011) and the Hypogaeum of Nike at Arpi (Mazzei 2002–2003; Steinbrücker 2005).
If mainland Greece left us only with a pale reflection of pre-Hellenistic monumental painting, Italy provides the bulk of the archaeological evidence. In chapter 3, Stephan Steingräber looks at Etruscan and South Italian paintings dated before 400 BC. The evidence comes mostly from burials, although some traces of painting on plaster have been found in Temple A at Pyrgi, thus suggesting that Etruscan public buildings were also decorated with frescoes. Chronology and iconography remain controversial matters in the study of Etruscan painting. Responding to a long scholarly tradition that has often used Etruscan tomb paintings to reconstruct their historical and cultural contexts, Steingräber argues that funerary paintings have a polysemic character and images could be adapted to fit different historical and sociopolitical assumptions. This is an important observation and one that applies to ancient funerary painting more broadly. The discussion proceeds chronologically, dividing the paintings into Etrusco-Geometric, Orientalising, Archaic, and Sub-Archaic and Classical. For each period, general remarks about architecture, iconography, style and workshops are followed by a detailed description of a selection of major tombs. The final section of the chapter is devoted to South Italian paintings, which include outstanding monuments like the Tomb of the Dancers at Ruvo di Puglia and the Tomb of the Diver at Poseidonia. Surprisingly, the latter is given only a brief description. Ever since the tomb was discovered by Mario Napoli in 1968, its frescoes have been widely investigated in connection with issues of artistic quality, religious beliefs and social and cultural identity, but none of these matters are properly addressed in the chapter. Steingräber labels these paintings ‘Greek’ without explaining why and in what ways: does it mean that the paintings were executed by a Greek artist or that the deceased was of Greek descent? Recent studies have shown that the Tomb of the Diver was not a completely isolated example in fifth-century BC Poseidonia, as other painted tombs have been uncovered in urban and extra-urban necropoleis. None of them is decorated with figural scenes, but the so-called Tomb of the Palmettes from the urban necropolis of Arcioni deserves special mention because its covering slab features the same decorative motif framing the diving scene on the lid of the Tomb of the Diver. While it is at times hard to label these fifth-century BC tombs Greek or non-Greek, their painted decoration provides an opportunity to reflect on the social, political and cultural interactions between Greek, Etruscan and Italic groups in southern Italy.

**Hellenistic Koine and Local Cultures**

From the 4th century BC contact between different cultures and societies across the Mediterranean became more intense and painting can help to shed light on these interactions. Stella Miller’s chapter on Hellenistic painting from the Eastern Mediterranean (chapter 5) examines a rich corpus that spans approximately three centuries and stretches from northern Greece to the Black Sea, Egypt and Israel. The chapter deals mainly with funerary monuments, including painted tombs and grave stelae, but it contains also a welcome discussion of murals from houses and palaces, and brief sections on ceramics, mosaics and textiles. The analysis of the painted tombs is organised thematically around popular iconographies, such as Underworld, symposion, war, hunt, games and myth. As Miller herself points out, this structure is slightly loose (175), but it has the important merit of illustrating how in the Hellenistic period wall painting reflected the formation of an artistic koine in which stylistic vocabulary and iconographic motifs circulated across the Mediterranean and were re-elaborated and adapted to a variety of local contexts. The survey, which incorporates numerous recent discoveries, is comprehensive for Macedonia and Thrace and more selective for Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean. Due to the royal character of several of these tombs, a long-standing debate has focused on the historical identity of the dead and on the chronology of the burials. Stylistic features and iconographic details of the tombs’ painted decoration have been used to support different theories, many of which remain conjectural. Miller presents some of these proposals, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses, but sensibly avoids getting tangled in the discussion. The chapter ends with two clear and informative appendices.

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25 On Tarquinian painted tombs, see recently Marzullo 2017.

26 Lubtchansky (2017, 86–8) neatly summarises the emergence and development of sociological and semiotic approaches in the 1970–1980s, especially emphasising the contributions by Cristofani, d’Agostino and Cerchiai.


29 Cipriani 2016.

30 Miller’s endnotes and bibliography are extensive, and I only wish to draw attention to two important studies that have appeared after this volume was published: Marjorie S. Venit’s latest monograph on funerary painting in Graeco-Roman Egypt (Venit 2015) and Consuelo Manetta’s publication of painted tombs in Bulgaria (Manetta 2019).

31 The debate has been especially lively for Macedonian tombs: e.g. Palagia 2000; Borza and Palagia 2007; Lane Fox 2011.
on attributions and technical matters respectively. Regarding the attribution of wall paintings to specific artists or schools, usually based on literary sources and stylistic observations, it is worth mentioning a graffito found in the round chamber of the Alexandrovo Tomb, in Bulgaria, which has been tentatively interpreted as a signature of the artist who decorated the tomb accompanied by his self-portrait.\(^{35}\)

In the Hellenistic period, Greek artistic models and painters reached also the shores of Italy, where they came into contact with other traditions and took on original forms. In chapter 6, Agnes Rouveret discusses the development of funerary painting in Italy during the 4th and 3rd centuries BC. She provides an excellent analysis of several of these monuments,\(^{36}\) which come from Italiote poleis of Magna Graecia and from Etruscan andItalic sites, placing them in the context of contemporary sociopolitical events and exploring their relationship with Greek and Roman art. The chapter looks primarily at tomb paintings and sarcophagi, whereas painted stelae are left out and polychrome vases are only mentioned in passim.\(^{37}\) The first part of the chapter focuses on late Etruscan tombs and looks for element of continuity with and change from the previous tradition. An increasing presence of Greek myth (Tomb of Orcus) is accompanied by a new interest in portraiture (e.g. Tomb of the Shields) and historical narrative (François Tomb) that foreshadow later developments in Roman funerary art. An important section follows on painted sarcophagi, among which the Amazons Sarcophagus from Tarquinia stands out for its pictorial and technical quality.\(^{38}\) The second part of the chapter looks at South Italian tomb paintings, with a particular focus on Paestum. Building on Angela Pontrandolfo’s and her own studies on Paestan painting,\(^{39}\) Rouveret summarises its iconographic and stylistic development. The notion that funerary painting was introduced in Poseidonia from the Lucanian take-over of the city in the late 5th century BC and ended with the establishment of the Latin colony in 273 BC (261) is to some extent problematic\(^{40}\) and painted tombs seem to be attested after the Roman conquest of the city.\(^{41}\) A close connection between South Italian funerary painting and Roman conquest can be found also in Campania and Apulia, where painted tombs first appear in the second half of the 4th century BC, as the Romans were gaining control of those regions.\(^{42}\) A chamber tomb from Cumae, found looted in 2003, features a banquet scene on the rear wall, a subject matter not documented elsewhere in contemporary South Italian funerary painting. While Rouveret links the scene with Etruscan and Tarentine models, it should be noticed that a similar rendering of the Totenmahl motif is found on a group of about 20 painted funerary stelae from Lilybaeum, in western Sicily.\(^{43}\) The stelae have been dated on epigraphic and stylistic grounds from the 3rd to the 1st century BC and they display local, Greek, Roman and Punic features. The banquet motif merges Sicilian models with artistic influences from the Aegean, where, as Miller discusses in chapter 3 (204), painted tombstones bearing the banquet theme became popular in the 3rd-2nd centuries BC. Like Cumae, Lilybaeum was a multicultural centre with a large Greek community and had recently come under Roman domination. The Cumaean tomb and the stelae from Lilybaeum thus seem to attest to the circulation of Greek and Eastern Mediterranean models in southern Italy during the Hellenistic period and to their re-elaboration by local elites in the wake of the Roman conquest. Rouveret concludes her chapter with a section on Apulian tomb paintings, emphasising their eclectic character, which combines Macedonian models with Italic motifs and the so-called ‘Tarentine manner’.\(^{44}\) In this chapter, Rouveret clearly shows how Eastern and Western traditions come together in Italy, ultimately bridging the Greek and Roman chapters of this history.

Re-framing Roman Painting

The last two chapters on Roman painting are preceded by Pollitt’s essay on the history of ancient art criticism and the ways in which it can contribute to our understanding of classical wall painting (chapter 7). Three main traditions are identified – truth to life, didactic utility and technical and aesthetic connoisseurship. Pollitt focuses almost entirely on the last one and discusses indirect...
evidence from treatises by ancient Greek painters that may have formed the basis of art history in the Hellenistic period. He argues that Hellenistic historians were likely responsible for passing the substance of this professional criticism to writers of the Late Roman Republic and Roman Empire, including Pliny the Elder, Cicero, Dionysios of Halikarnassos and Quintilian. Using these sources, Pollitt examines the classification and effects of colours, styles and techniques. Particularly relevant is his discussion on the four-colour palette and the opposition between colores austeri and colores floridi. He rightly observes that the distinction between these two categories was probably rather flexible and may have depended on subject matter, style or an optical effect. This author wonders whether the Eikόνες of Philostratus the Elder should have been discussed here rather than in Roger Ling’s chapter on Roman painting from the Middle and Late Empire (402–404). Some passages also dwell on skiagraphia, a notion discussed both in this chapter and in chapter 4, showing how crucial a component it was in ancient art criticism. More importantly, these literary descriptions would nicely fit in with the discussion of painting in ancient art criticism and are relevant to both Greek and Roman painting. As Ling himself points out (403), the paintings described by Philostratus were not all products of the Severan Age and some could have derived from earlier periods, possibly acquired from older collections. This would further elucidate the complex relationship existing between the Greek masterpieces brought to Rome in the Hellenistic period and the Roman pinacothecae discussed in chapters 8 and 9.

With an admirable command of the evidence, Irene Bragantini (chapter 8) presents the reader with a clear and compelling narrative of how Roman painting developed from the Middle-Republican period to the end of the 1st century AD. What is especially interesting about her methodological approach is that August Mau’s nineteenth-century classification of Roman painting into four ‘Pompeian Styles’ is introduced only at the end of the chapter (359–62). This choice allows her more freedom to use broad periodisations and to focus on the historical and cultural meaning of the paintings. Recent studies, however, have shown a need to reassess the concept of Zeitsstil in Roman painting and Bragantini herself has engaged with this topic elsewhere: artists and patrons sometimes deliberately deployed earlier styles or restored paintings in order to express social prestige, thus suggesting a concept and use of ‘style’ that goes beyond changes in taste and chronological classification. These new interpretations of the Pompeian Styles are in many ways in line with Bragantini’s approach and it would have been helpful to the reader to integrate them more explicitly into the discussion. After examining elite tombs from the Mid-Republican period, Bragantini focuses primarily on domestic culture, whereas funerary painting is essentially left out. The bulk of the evidence comes from Roman Italy, while the discussion of provincial painting is limited to a few examples from Gaul, Iberia and Noricum. According to Bragantini, the development of Roman painting can be articulated into three main stages. In the 2nd-1st centuries BC, we witness the formation of a ‘common figurative language’ (311) in which the painted decoration of Roman houses reflected the commitment of the highest strata of Roman society. The end of this phase coincides with the Augustan period. It is now that mythological subjects gained increasing popularity in domestic painting, a phenomenon that according to Bragantini originates from the capacity that myth had ‘to translate into the interior of the house that climate of commitment to Augustan ideology’ (326). Finally, a decline of wall painting is triggered around the mid-1st century AD by changing societal demands: paintings are now found in the houses of lower strata of society, whereas the elite privilege other forms of interior decoration, such as marble revetments, mosaics and opus sectile. Painted tombs, especially freedman columbaria in Rome, may have contributed to strengthening and nuancing this sophisticated reading. Labelled ‘Conclusions’, the final paragraph is rather an appendix discussing the organisation and training of painters and the relevance and applicability of Pompeian styles to current research on Roman painting. The latter may have been more useful at the outset of the chapter.

Roger Ling’s essay (chapter 9) follows the development of Roman painting during the Middle and Late Empire. Post-Pompeian material is still often overlooked – or at least not fully appreciated – in scholarship on Roman painting. In investigating the social and cultural factors that determined the fortune of wall painting after the 1st century AD, Ling 45 These new 46 The bulk of 47 and use of ‘style’ that goes beyond changes in taste and chronological classification. 48 Labelled ‘Conclusions’, the final paragraph is rather an appendix discussing the organisation and training of painters and the relevance and applicability of Pompeian styles to current research on Roman painting. The latter may have been more useful at the outset of the chapter. 49 For most recent discoveries and studies, Mols and Moormann 2017; Dubois and Niffeler 2018. Important work has recently been done on paintings from Zeugma (Barbet 2005; Bergmann 2013) and Ephesos (Zimmermann and Ladstätter 2010).
faces two major challenges: many of the paintings cannot be accurately dated and the majority of the evidence available to-day comes from Roman Italy, especially the cities of Rome and Ostia. While the demand for wall painting continues throughout the Middle Empire, in both public and private contexts, a decline manifests itself in lack of invention and lower-quality technique. Painting becomes increasingly more important in the decoration of vaults and ceilings, often in combination with stuccowork and mosaic. One of the most important questions that Ling addresses in this chapter is how wall painting was employed across the Empire as a way of claiming Roman identity. In this respect, Egypt and Syria represent exceptional case studies, due to their multicultural history and tradition. A discussion of mummy portraits from the Fayum region and of the paintings from the synagogue of Dura-Europos shows how Greco-Roman and local iconographies and styles could be juxtaposed or merged, creating a bilingualism that challenges traditional definitions of Classical painting. In the Late Empire, the development of painting seems to reflect the wavering stability of government and upper class patronage. A new classicising phase during the reign of Constantine is seen as ‘the swan song of Graeco-Roman illusionistic style in its pure form’ (419), after which wall painting gave way to other arts, in primis wall- and vault-mosaics and book illustration.

The Big Picture

As stated at the outset, the strength of this work lies in the breadth of its coverage and the wealth of information it contains. Each chapter is informative and intellectually stimulating, and offers a lucid overview of archaeological, artistic and literary evidence. Authors do not simply repeat or summarise discussions that have been had elsewhere, but offer new insights into matters of artistic production, cultural transmission and visual reception. Weaving together traditional and modern scholarship and approaches, they also handle carefully the gaps that still exist in the material culture. This comprehensive, well-organised and up-to-date volume is especially valuable for student readings, making materials often published primarily in languages other than English accessible to a broader readership. The book is also welcomed by specialists and serves as a convenient and useful starting point for future in-depth research on ancient painting as an artistic and cultural phenomenon.

Due to the sizable amount of evidence surviving from certain periods and areas, at times it proves difficult to combine a need for completeness with a question-based approach, so that some chapters or sections thereof tend to be descriptive in nature. There is a general attention to avoid repetitions and there are no obvious oversights or deliberate exclusions. The structure and focus of each chapter are dictated by the nature of the evidence available and by the expertise of the author. At times, however, the inclusion or omission of certain categories of material puzzles the reader: why are painted stelae and polychrome ceramics produced in Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean discussed in detail whereas those from Hellenistic Italy are almost entirely dismissed? Why are Mid-Republican and Middle and Late Imperial tombs carefully examined whereas Late Republican and Early Imperial funerary paintings are entirely left out? The authors, especially Hurwit, Miller, Pollitt and Rouveret, examine in depth the influences that different pictorial experiences exerted on each other across time and space. Yet, the unity of the volume could have been strengthened by establishing further connections between individual chapters. This is especially important in a volume whose aim is to reconstruct the history of painting in the classical world. The importance of Bronze Age painting for later developments of classical painting is introduced at the end of chapter 1, but it is not picked up later, when issues of naturalism and iconography are discussed in more detail in connection with Classical painting. In chapter 8, a reference to Paestan, Campanian and Etruscan pictorial traditions – examined by Rouveret in chapter 6 – may have helped the reader better understand early developments in Roman painting. In addition, important monuments that are relevant to different cultural contexts are mentioned in more than one chapter, without ultimately being fully discussed. This is the case of the Tomb of the Diver, briefly mentioned at the end of chapter 2 as completely indebted to red-figure vase painting (90) and in chapter 3 as ‘a rare example of pre-Hellenistic Greek monumental wall painting’ (139).

These points must not detract from the overall quality of the book, which combines depth, rigour and clarity, and will no doubt foster research in new and exciting directions. We may still be far from being able to reconstruct the history of panel and wall painting in the classical world, but focusing on multiple histories can help us enhance the dialogue between different traditions and appreciate the connectivity, diversity and transformation of ancient cultures in the Mediterranean and beyond.

51 On Late Antique painting, Dorigo 1966; Elsner 2009; McFadden 2015.
exploring networks and transcending geographical and cultural boundaries.

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Jose, H. 1981. The Decoration of Walls, Ceilings and Floors in Italy in the Second and Third Centuries A.D. Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider.


Robertson, M. 1951. The place of vase-painting in Greek art. The Annual of the British School at Athens 46: 151–159.


That Black Sea studies have become a dynamic field over the last few years is demonstrated by this new volume, edited by Manolis Manoledakis. The book results from a workshop, organised in Thessaloniki in 2015. The title clearly states the book’s ambition: collect more data and shed a critical light on them. While the book successfully achieves the first ambition of collecting new data, the second aim – introducing new theoretical frameworks – has only been achieved to a moderate extent throughout the volume. Most of the contributions remain firmly within the established interpretative boundaries and contribute little to ongoing discussions of, for example, globalisation processes in the Ancient World, to name just one omission. Only a few papers