

ASPECTS OF GREEK AND ROMAN PAINTING

BEAULIEU (M.-C.), TOILLON (V.) (edd.) *Greek and Roman Painting and the Digital Humanities*. Pp. xii + 191, figs, ills. London and New York: Routledge, 2022. Cased, £120, US\$150. ISBN: 978-0-367-54701-1.

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This is a thin volume, comprising ten terse chapters (c. twelve pages each), bookended by a brief introduction (ten pages) and an even shorter conclusion (c. three pages). It is divided into three parts. Part 1 describes the Digital Milliet project; Part 2 explores digital tools for art history; and Part 3 offers case studies on Roman wall painting. The book stems, in part, from a 2018 conference of the same title held at Tufts University, though the chapters are a result of the participants' discussions and not a mirror of the conference programme (available here: https://sites.tufts.edu/digmilconference/files/2018/07/Program_revised.pdf). What readers should know before delving into this volume is that the Digital Milliet is a project for the curation of textual sources about ancient painting, and, consequently, only Chapters 8–11 deal directly with art. Moreover, only Chapter 8 genuinely fulfils the promise of the title, applying digital tools to ancient art, minimally, if interestingly. Forearmed with this understanding, the contents will be more informative.

Chapter 1 briefly introduces the *Recueil Milliet* (RM) and attempts to situate its digital counterpart, the Digital Milliet (DM), within the discipline of digital humanities (DH), especially in the area of funding. That placement is somewhat rushed, a fact that undermines the editors' desire to take a reflective approach to the DM in this book, a goal no doubt better accomplished at the conference. Chapters 2 (A. Rouveret) and 3 (Toillon) detail the fascinating background of the original RM, the men who curated it and the academic milieu of the Belle Epoque. These chapters must be read together, and the unfamiliar might benefit by jumping to page 41 of Toillon's paper to understand what the RM is: a collection of 551 ancient texts concerning ancient art, accompanied by commentaries and some translation. Not to be overlooked are Toillon's interesting visualisations (figures 3.3–4) on the distribution of authors and the chronology of their works.

In Chapter 4 Z. Fletcher describes the digital design of the DM project. At the time of this review, the site's functionality is limited to browsing by author or by commentary (and then sequentially). I applaud the courage of the project leaders to make this early stage of development available, as incomplete is better than absent when it comes to research data. The tags present at the bottom of the commentary pages will undoubtedly become functional, and full-text search is surely only a matter of time, even if Fletcher does not mention it.

Chapter 5 details the *Dire le Décor Antique* (DDA) project, which endeavours to provide 'a reliable collection of Greek and Latin texts covering all aspects of art in antiquity' (p. 67). The differences between DDA and DM are not made clear, but D. Lauritzen describes a long-standing, interdisciplinary team working on a larger dataset than RM over a longer time frame. The greatest distinction is that the DDA will appear as a print volume.

B. Almas (Chapter 6) opens Part 2 on digital tools with an exposition of Alpheios, a browser extension for enhanced reading of Greek and Latin passages online. In Chapter 7 M. Brunet makes a well-argued appeal that we can do more with the materiality of inscriptions in the digital environment, using already established text-encoding tools.

Neither of these papers is about painting, and only in F. Bièvre-Perrin's exploration of the cross-torch motif do we have an example of a paper that fits the book's title. While the small sample set (eleven examples) does not make the most of the digital platforms deployed, Bièvre-Perrin is to be commended for demonstrating how traditionally derived data (e.g. typological dating, identifying 'hands' and workshops) can be meaningfully revisualised. Additionally, the goal to 'configure a dynamic, collaborative tool' and not an 'exhaustive corpus' is a gentle indictment of the desire for comprehensiveness in producing long delays in research and publication.

Part 3 comprises three high-quality case studies in ancient painting that represent the most valuable contributions to the volume. First, F. Bologna (Chapter 9) provides an excellent overview of the current understanding of Roman wall painting from a technological point of view, concerning how walls are plastered and painted. At the same time, the chapter blurs the line between construction and artistic processes, and the research discussed is informed by interdisciplinary work with the natural sciences rather than DH. Next, S. O'Connell (Chapter 10) begins with a fascinating discussion of the earliest hints of figural depictions layered within materiality of First Style painting before addressing the role curtains play in forming illusion and deception in art. The lack of images is a real loss for this excellent paper. Finally, J. García (Chapter 11) provides a detailed discussion of the *oecus* in I.3.25, but then makes an interpretative misstep in relying on outdated arguments about moral geographies and the identification of gladiators at Pompeii to populate this building.

There are a number of interesting tensions, even contradictions, within this volume that careful and comprehensive readers will come to appreciate, but which are not productively utilised by the editors. The first tension implicates the book's title, which one would reasonably assume is about how DH approaches are being used to study Greek and Roman painting. Instead, painting is a subject once-removed from the projects described, all of which apply tools and expertise to leverage the texts about ancient painting. Meanwhile, the case studies of Part 3 do not deploy DH tools. The 'and' in the book's title is doing considerable labour. The conflation of text and art surfaces a second tension in Bologna's chapter, which demonstrates the textual sources' limitations. After a fulsome tour of archaeological evidence relating to ancient literature, Bologna concludes that 'no matter how precise or comprehensive ancient texts might appear, they will never be able to account for the almost endless variety and complexity we observe in reality' (p. 137). It is telling that no author cites P. Allison's research on the parallel problem of labelling Roman domestic spaces, and though García cites E. Leach, he seems to have missed her point.

This tension continues into O'Connell's chapter, which begins with a sentence that, by position, appears to contradict Bologna's concluding remark: 'While it is true that ancient authors and artists do not tell or show us everything we want to know about themselves or their world, as new readers and viewers we maintain their works and contribute to their continued relevance today' (p. 144). O'Connell at once proves the relevance of these texts by their use in her excellent chapter, but also contributes to Bologna's point by relying on some of the latest archaeological materials to activate them. This is where the interdisciplinarity of DH should make its best contribution to Greek and Roman painting, since 'heterogeneity is a source of strength, because diversity taps different capacities over time' (p. 180).

Indeed, the diversity of approaches to even just the RM demonstrates the power of each attempt and highlights a final tension in this book. Because of its long gestation and comprehensive approach, the DDA will be a far more exhaustive, rich and indexed resource for scholars than the DM is now. But it remains unpublished. Conversely, the

DM is narrower and incomplete, but it currently exists and works. The absence of acknowledgement, let alone dialogue between these projects within this book is upsetting, not least for how much ink each dedicates to the challenges of designing, implementing and funding such projects. The power of diversity is denied when it does not inspire collaboration. The DDA has dedicated itself to content and the DM to a platform. I encourage these teams to recognise the power of a combined online resource and to see the failure in two competing and incomplete projects.

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CONNECTIONS BETWEEN ART AND SCIENCE

THOMAS (J.J.) *Art, Science, and the Natural World in the Ancient Mediterranean, 300 BC to AD 100*. Pp. xxviii + 362, ills, maps. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. Cased, £90, US\$115. ISBN: 978-0-19-284489-7.

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T.'s monograph – stemming from a recent Oxford D.Phil. – takes as its corpus artworks produced in the Hellenistic and the early Roman eras depicting animals and plants: the Praeneste Nile mosaic (Chapter 2), the Apollophanes tomb (Chapter 3), the Artemidorus papyrus (Chapter 4), Hellenistic palatial mosaics (Chapter 5), Roman fish mosaics (Chapter 6) and garden paintings (Chapter 7). T.'s central thesis is twofold: first, that, despite their differences in medium, chronology, location, quality and purpose, these artworks were all informed by developments in Hellenistic biology and, second, that these artworks in turn reveal the cultural reach of Hellenistic biology across the Mediterranean and over four centuries' worth of political change. Sometimes the lines of influence are sharply drawn, as in Chapter 1, where the Praeneste Nile mosaic is claimed to be a copy of a lost Ptolemaic court painting, whose labelled catalogue of exotic animals reflects contemporary practices in Alexandrian zoology, namely the description and classification of Aethiopian creatures that were newly encountered during royal expeditions southwards in the third century BCE. At other times the lines of influence are more faintly traced, as in Chapter 7, where Roman garden paintings are claimed to be informed more generally by naturalistic representations of plants and birds that emerged earlier in the Hellenistic east as part of broader ornithological and botanical programmes sponsored by the royal courts. Across the book, we find not only Hellenistic and Roman royalty representing natural science for cultural capital and political clout (Chapters 2, 5 and 7), but also provincial aristocrats in the Levant (Chapter 3), urban planners in Praeneste (Chapters 2 and 6), wealthy homeowners in Pompeii (Chapters 6 and 7) as well as a humble, Egyptian student/scholar (Chapter 4), whose motivation appears more purely academic.

This is an ambitiously interdisciplinary book, and T.'s grasp of the archaeological, papyrological, epigraphic, literary and scientific material is impressive. T. writes with exceptional clarity and handles his (often patchy) material with sensitivity, always cautious about imposing definite conclusions when unwarranted (in the conclusion, however, he playfully experiments with writing a bold, 'maximalist' account of the book's argument that