

single line in Strabo: ‘The vine did not grow there [in Susa] until the Macedonians planted it, both there and at Babylon’ (15.3.11). Consequently, the presence of vines and the vinicultural technology that came along with it were assumed to be a Greek introduction. By extension, any evidence of wine culture became an indicator of local participation in ‘hellenism’. Strabo’s comment became a generalization for the whole east and established an imbalanced power dynamic in scholarship between the colonizing Greeks and the colonized natives. Of course, this perspective reflects eighteenth- to early twenty-first-century interpretive biases more than it does an ancient reality. Within such praxis, the presence of Roman objects or iconography is theorized as simply picking up where the Greek material left off.

The project I undertook while at the BSR was in the form of a chapter of my larger dissertation project on wine culture in the Iranian Plateau between the second century BC and the third century AD. The goal of the chapter was to remove the yoke of colonial scholarship regarding the Hellenistic East from the study of Rome’s unique relationship to the Plateau. Consequently, an adverse impact is produced: unpacking the complicated interregional relationship between Rome and Parthia in terms of geopolitics and the role of trade between the two in shaping wine culture has remained under-studied. While in Rome I was able to access objects and archives collected by Italian excavations in the Plateau and Roman *comparanda*. Particularly important are the Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East (IsMEO) library, as well as the Museo Nazionale d’Arte Orientale ‘Giuseppe Tucci’, which hold the excavation material from Afghanistan and Pakistan (Gandhara), and the Centro Ricerche Archeologiche e Scavi di Torino that contains the materials from the excavations of Nisa in Turkmenistan (Parthia).

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Crafting knowledge, telling stones: the art of pietre dure tables in early modern Italy, 1550s–1660s

My doctoral thesis examines the ways in which the crafting of hardstone inlaid tables in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries acted as an interface between material techniques of diverse artistic media, between disparate epistemic cultures, between aesthetic experience of material surfaces ranging from painting, textile, gem facets to the architectonic, and between far-flung geographies and dissimilar social strata of artisanal labour.

My research during the residency at the BSR focused on the technical procedure and material operations of hardstone inlay — in particular, the aesthetics and artisanal logic of ornamental drawings and the technical precedent of hardstone inlay in ancient Roman art, *opus sectile*. The latter topic is a particularly fitting one to examine at the BSR, given its rich library holding and its intellectual community centred on the disciplines of classics and archaeology.

Among technical details I was able to explore, a particularly eye-opening one was the firing of *giallo antico* to change its hue from yellow to orange and red, thanks to its ferruginous matrix. This technique was put to task at the turn of the seventeenth century to create illusionistic depictions of nature. Another crucial yet long-overlooked material component within the technical procedure is the use of abrasive — emery (*smeriglio*) — whose hardness made it the quintessential tool for tackling the extremely obdurate stones such as porphyry and serpentine. During my residency, I was able to gather a range of primary sources, from Pliny the Elder and Dioscorides to archival documents for key construction sites in Rome and Florence and artistic and technical treatises, in order to illuminate the period's awareness of the material's affordances and its impact on the administration of artisanal labour. Lastly, I conducted a case study of a series of ornamental *modelli* housed in the Gabinetto dei disegni e delle stampe at the Uffizi, all of which linked to an extant monumental table from the late Cinquecento. Through collection research in Florence and at the Istituto Centrale per la Grafica in Rome and extensive reading of secondary literature, I was able to develop a close reading of the artisanal and material intelligence embedded within the design process and of how drawings are used by craftsmen. I hope also to advance a few more concrete connections between several ill-defined ornamental drawings (perhaps wrongly identified in nineteenth-century catalogues as 'pavement design') and extant tabletop designs in ways that could potentially clarify the function of the drawings and the dating of otherwise poorly documented artefacts.

All the aforementioned strands of research, in their different ways, feed into a specific chapter of my thesis on technical process. Along the way, I come to realize that there is no universal technique of hardstone inlay, especially considering the divergent properties of the lithic materials. My research into paper design and emery offers a partial explanation of the common technical denominators by temporarily bracketing the visual and material splendour of lithic surfaces. Whether in the case of the continuous supply of a liquid form of emery onto the recto of stone labs to facilitate the cutting of contours, or that of the imaginative working out and material deployment of paper design, we witness what historians of science and craft technique have termed 'intermediary materials and processes'. I hope also that through this interpretation we could appreciate better the arduous yet generative process of abrasion, something to which early modern theorists were not particularly sympathetic, considering it unworthy of the major art of sculpture.

In my future research, I will move from these 'common denominators' to the multifarious technical and material specificities of working with stones, from the use of translucent sheets of alabaster to reverse painted rock crystal and inset faceted gems, in order to further explore the medial and material versatility of these artefacts.

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