

Colors of Conquest: A Regional Survey of Hellenistic Painting

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Abstract: *Of all that survives in the form of artistic and architectural expression from the Hellenistic world, wall and panel painting are arguably the most underrepresented. In the case of painted wooden panels, or pinakes, that served as something akin to portable canvases for Greek and Hellenistic painters, the long span of over two thousand years has not been kind. Wooden panels, however, were not the only medium on which painters chose to apply their craft. A modest corpus of both painted friezes and painted panels has survived on the plastered walls of monumental Hellenistic tombs, from elite Hellenistic residences, and from mid to late first century BCE elite Roman domestic contexts. This paper undertakes a brief survey of these surviving remnants of the rich and prolific legacy of Hellenistic painting.*

The Hellenistic world was a web of complex interconnectivity where architectural, technological, and artistic expression was exchanged from one corner of Alexander the Great's vast empire to the other. Alexander's kingdom stretched from Macedonia in the west to Afghanistan in the east, from Ptolemaic Egypt in the south, to Bulgaria in the north.¹ It is not hard to imagine that the wide array of arts, crafts, and luxury goods that would emerge from this massive expanse of territory would themselves be unique products of this fluid exchange of intellectual and artistic ideas and conceptions. Modeled off of a major trend in the scholarship of the Hellenistic world, as suggested by Andrew Stewart, this survey of Hellenistic painting is generated from regional and site studies.² The survey begins with paintings from early Hellenistic monumental tombs in Macedonia. From there, the discussion continues with the Hellenistic tomb paintings at Marisa in Israel. Transitioning to Hellenistic domestic structures, the survey moves north into Syria and what used to survive from Jebel Khalid on the Euphrates River. The survey then moves west into the unavoidable shadow of Roman conquest where it shall conclude with an analysis of two painted friezes from late Hellenistic Roman contexts. The common threads that tie these groups of Hellenistic paintings together shall be explored as well as the specific themes, painted motifs, and artistic styles that helped these works effectively communicate within their funerary and their domestic contexts. Finally, the matter of how these works functioned within their larger Hellenistic context will be considered.

The bulk of what remains from Hellenistic wall painting "east of the Adriatic," beginning in the mid-fourth century and continuing into the third century BCE, is comprised of monumental tomb paintings spanning a vast region from Macedonia in the north to Ptolemaic Egypt in the south.³ The most well-documented examples come from Macedonia, with a notable exception at Marisa. All examples are taken from elite burials. It is within this funerary context of royal and aristocratic burial that a preliminary framework for interpretation and understanding

¹ Miller (2014), 171

² Stewart (2005), 506

³ Miller (2014), 170

of the figural programs contained can commence. Miller, herself, provides this framework by identifying several major themes that appear consistently in monumental tomb painting from this period. Scenes of banqueting, hunting, and abduction and rape will make up the bulk of the focus here.⁴ Within these themes it is possible to make connections with the larger and headier concepts of *kleos* (lasting fame or glory) and *arete* (valor or honor). This demonstrates that elites of this early Hellenistic period from at least two distinct geographical regions maintained an affinity with the philosophical beliefs of classical Greece.

Before beginning our analysis of monumental tomb painting, a word on Macedonian tomb architecture is useful. The practice of carving vaulted tomb chambers from living bedrock, or by assembling cut blocks of stone or masonry to create a *tholos*, accessible by a long and narrow corridor (*dromos*), was a practice that can be attested throughout the ancient Mediterranean as far back as the Bronze Age.⁵ Macedonian tomb architecture involved the construction of a vaulted tomb below ground with distinctive architectural features that often included suggestive façades, as will be discussed shortly. The structure was then covered with earth to create a large, visible mound on the landscape.⁶ The Great Tumulus at Vergina (ancient Aigai, once the capital of Macedonia before Philip II moved it to Pella) is a testament to this surviving tradition into the early Hellenistic period. The Great Tumulus contains no less than four of these vaulted chamber tombs. One of the most striking aspects of the architecture of these vaulted tombs is the manner in which they often seem to mimic elite domestic, or even civic, architecture.⁷ They do so through false architectural facades, such as those of Tomb II (the so-called “Tomb of Phillip”) (see fig. 1) at Vergina, and the Tomb of the Judgment at Lefkadia (fig. 2) in Macedonia.⁸ Both of these tombs, through a combination of paint, stucco, and stone relief, recreate a Doric façade with engaged column shafts that support a classic *triglyph* and *metope* frieze, on top of which an entablature rests containing a narrative painted frieze. In the case of the Tomb of the Judgment at Lefkadia, which dates to the late fourth century BCE, the tomb architect(s) has taken the illusion one step further by creating what appears to be a second story to the façade, complete with seven shuttered windows painted and framed by fluted Ionic columns. A triangular pediment that probably once contained a painted group itself caps the entire architectural program.

Analogues abound in Pergamon with the Propylon gate, and in the façades of stoas throughout the Hellenistic world, echoing this same architectural style in both civic and domestic contexts. Variants in architectural façades also include tombs that seem strongly to mimic temple façades. The Tomb of the Symposium at Aghios Athanasios in Macedonia (see fig. 3) includes carved palmette acroteria, as does the Tomb of the Palmettes at Lefkadia. To what extent these tombs are trying to function as houses for the dead, or as funerary pavilions, or as cult centers are questions that Miller raises but for which no definitive answers currently exist.⁹ Such questions are worth bearing in mind as we move forward to the paintings themselves.¹⁰

⁴ Miller (2014), 175; Stewart (2014), 248

⁵ Locations and examples range from Mycenaean chamber and tholos tombs in the Greek Argolid, to Etruscan chamber tombs carved into the tufa bedrock to create large tumuli in West Central Italy.

⁶ Tomlinson (1987), 305-06

⁷ Stewart (2014), 251

⁸ Miller (1982), 154-5

⁹ Ibid., 173

¹⁰ The subject of tombs mimicking domestic architecture has gained particular prominence in discussions relating to Etruscan tomb architecture and painting – see A. Naso (2010).

Returning to the thematic groupings mentioned earlier, those centered around banqueting and reclining at symposium are particularly steeped in meanings that highlight not only elite culture and practice, but religious cult and funerary customs associated with the god of wine, Dionysos. The most obvious of such examples is from the painted frieze of the aptly-named Tomb of the Symposium (Aghios Athanasios Tomb IV) in Macedonia. Framed by two pilasters that support a painted *triglyph* and *metope* frieze, the “focal point” of the figural frieze (in Miller’s interpretation) is on the “six semi-reclining male symposiasts sharing three *klinai*, who are accompanied by two female musicians and a youth serving wine.”¹¹ All the trappings one would expect to find at this type of all-male drinking party are present. The painter has rendered a *kylikeion*, or buffet, set up with traditional drinking vessels. The wine-server, or *pais*, along with female musicians and entertainers have been executed in paint as well. From the left enters a group of revelers, or *komasts*, while on the right a group of traditionally garbed Macedonian soldiers look on with varying degrees of interest. Such a scene reminds one of Plato’s harsh rebuke of an afterlife where wine and revelry were strongly emphasized.¹² Is this painted frieze representative of just that—a continuous drinking party that awaited the deceased in the Underworld? Perhaps it might also bear reference to the well-attested funerary practice of feasting that Miller alludes to in suggesting that tomb architecture operated as some sort of “funerary pavilion.”¹³ No doubt one is witnessing an effort on the part of the deceased (or his family) who commissioned these paintings, to align himself with the god Dionysos with whom the powers of transfiguration and rebirth were so closely associated. Altered states of consciousness through drunken intoxication, and rebirth through the god’s mythological birth from father Zeus’ thigh, must have been of some comfort not only to the deceased before their death, but to the family of the dearly departed.¹⁴

On a broader scale, stepping back from the figural frieze and viewing it in league with the other painted images, particularly those on the two shields that adorn either side of the doorway, aspects of Hellenistic piety come into view. (The left contains the apotropaic head of Medusa and the right depicts Zeus’ eagle and thunderbolt.) Stewart notes that by the end of the sixth century BCE, and well into the Hellenistic period, religious views changed so that fantastical mythological stories no longer held literal meaning (if they ever had), and the concept of religious practice took on a far more humanist undertone.¹⁵ This shift gave rise to what Stewart frames as the “Big Five” gods that came to dominate the Hellenistic world: Zeus, Aesculapius, Dionysos, Demeter, and eventually the ruler cult of the Hellenistic kings themselves.¹⁶ Perhaps what we are witnessing here in the Tomb of the Symposium is a nod to this new “take” on religion through the direct and indirect references to three of these big five: Dionysos, Zeus, and possibly a Macedonian king.¹⁷

Whatever the case, the Tomb of the Symposium stands out for its vivid depiction of wine and revelry—a custom practiced by elites in life and the promise of which in the afterlife must have helped define the *personhood* of the deceased.¹⁸ In fact, what this discussion points to are

¹¹ Miller (2014), 183

¹² Plato, *Republic* 2, 363C-D

¹³ Miller (2014), 173

¹⁴ Orphic cult flourishes too at this time, and within this context of rebirth and regeneration: Stewart (lecture on 4/21/15)

¹⁵ Stewart (2014), 154

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 161-63

¹⁷ Palagia (2011), 486

¹⁸ Stewart (2014), 245

the visual cues of *kleos* and *arete* that the symposia represent. Both concepts were inherent in the institutionalized drinking ritual, potent with civic and religious meaning for its male participants.¹⁹ Within the bounds of the symposium, a type of camaraderie among its participants existed that forged bonds of political and civic alliances. This became a type of *kleos*, or lasting fame and glory, and the act of memorializing such socio-political exchanges in painted friezes, such as that on the entablature of the Tomb of the Symposium, simultaneously memorialized the valor and honor (*arete*) of the deceased. Ever present in Hellenistic art, the narrative program, painted in fresco in this example, speaks to an “in” group that would have immediately recognized the cues in this visual rhetoric and understood their meaning.

Of course, painted scenes of symposia were not the only means by which an individual’s *kleos* could be attested to after death. One of the most surprising elements of this type of visual rhetoric comes from the painted abduction scene of Persephone by Hades on the north wall of the Tomb of Persephone (Tomb I) in the Great Tumulus at Vergina (see fig. 4) dated to roughly the middle of the fourth century BCE. Pollitt refers to this fresco as “one of the great archaeological discoveries of the twentieth century.”²⁰ Although an exact identification of the deceased has proven as tantalizing as it has elusive, iconography on the ossuary that contained the original burial indicates that the individual first interred in this tomb was probably a woman.²¹ To our modern sensibilities, how an abduction and rape scene seems an appropriate subject for a female burial is puzzling. However, if one were to view the scene from the perspective of *kleos*, a more satisfactory explanation emerges in light of the patrilineal society that produced this image. In spite of such male domination, Miller points out that women, too, were able to achieve a kind of *kleos* through “*aidos* (modesty) and *sophrosyne* (discretion and dignity).”²² Perhaps then, what we are witnessing in this scene is another kind of visual rhetoric that spoke to an “in” group—one that saw beyond the fear and anguish on Persephone’s grimacing face, the cowering posture of her handmaiden, beyond Demeter’s broken heart, and past the lustful and crazed expression the artist has captured on Hades’ face. Such a scene might have been interpreted as a rite of passage for Persephone, who it was known would eventually become co-regent of the Underworld.

From an art historical point of view, this scene might be described as a *tour de force* in proto-Hellenistic baroque. The scene captures one of the most dramatic moments in classical mythology—the abduction and rape of Persephone by the god of the Underworld, Hades, a shadowy figure who also happens to be her uncle. The painter ratchets up the drama through techniques that emphasize movement. Hatched shading in sets of parallel lines diverge and outline the figures of Hades and Persephone. The couple themselves is positioned in opposition to one another—Hades thrusting forward to the left, while Persephone’s body and arms thrust to the right. Pollitt notes that the hatching in parallel lines also increases depth and mass of the vibrant pink drapery that billows violently all around Persephone.²³ Stewart further emphasizes the use of *chiaroscuro* to heighten the dramatic mood of the scene.²⁴ Stewart notes Demeter’s blue monochrome figure in contrast with the polychrome used to render Persephone. He suggests

¹⁹ Miller (2014), 182

²⁰ Pollitt (1986), 191

²¹ Miller (2014), 174-5; Additionally, as Stewart noted to me in 2015, reanalysis by a Greek paleosteologist now points to several individuals of both sexes and all ages as having been interred in the ossuary, indicative of secondary deposition.

²² Ibid., 174

²³ Pollitt (1986), 191

²⁴ Stewart (2014), 248-9

that it gives us reason to rethink the notion that Greek and Hellenistic painters were mechanical in their repertoire of techniques. Rather, he suggests, this contrast between the figures of Demeter and Persephone from within the same tomb demonstrates that painters were dynamic in their use of technique, making judgment calls based on the mood of the subject matter they were painting and the emotional effect they hoped their composition would achieve.²⁵

Similar depictions of the abduction of Persephone show up a generation later in the pediment from Lefkadia Tomb VII, and on the “Throne of Eurydice” in the tomb of the same name also at Vergina and might possibly be mimicking the rite of passage that the deceased must endure. Death abducts living flesh in the same manner that Hades abducts Persephone, dragging her down into the Underworld with Hermes at the head of Hades’ chariot as an escort into the afterlife. These paintings no doubt held potent symbolic meaning for the deceased and their bereaved kin, and a scene capturing the trial (and eventual tribulation) of Persephone might have stood as a comforting reminder of what death and the afterlife could hold for a loved one. The narrative scene achieves a tragic beauty, a quality that is reinforced by the viewer’s awareness of the exalted position Persephone will ascend to as queen of the Underworld.

Turning to another of Miller’s themes, the hunt, the most notable example from Macedonia appears on the painted entablature of the Tomb of the Judgment at Lefkadia, mentioned previously. This scene, like the others, exudes the same hyper-masculinity encountered before in The Tomb of Philip. Depicted from left to right appear to be vignettes of a young man’s life. Beginning with a stag and ending with a bear, the boy becomes a man before the viewer’s very eyes with the progression of animals he is shown besting. Miller reminds us that the boar hunt was the *rite-de-passage* through which a man was able to gain full entry to the symposium.²⁶ In fact, the boar hunt is the second vignette, sandwiched between the killing of the stag and the killing of the lion.

The subject matter of the frieze is far from unusual, and is one of several contexts in which Alexander’s successors attempted to depict themselves in order to better align themselves with their deified leader. Miller wades into the murkier aspects of trying to identify the specific remains of the individual interred here by noting that some scholars have seen in the painted frieze the image of Philip II and his son, Alexander.²⁷ Those same scholars have used this for their tenuous identification of the tomb as that of Philip II. Stewart disagrees. Rather, he suggests that this might have been the tomb of Alexander’s developmentally disabled younger half-brother, Philip III, assassinated by Alexander’s mother after Alexander’s death in June of 323 BCE.²⁸ In Miller’s own words, “discussion is far from over.”²⁹ What we can say with confidence is that hunting, and additionally symposia, were defining aspects in a male elite’s life. Their representation on the walls of monumental tombs is hardly surprising in a society where *kleos* and *arete* were of the utmost importance.

The pervasiveness of these virtues, in fact, may underlie similar images of the hunt that show up on tomb walls from Hellenistic Marisa in Israel. Marisa was an important trading center from at least the third century BCE, located in southern Judea. The city was under Ptolemaic control from as early as 259 BCE, as tax collection records show, but soon became part of the Antiochus III’s Seleucid Empire in 200 BCE when Antiochus III defeated the armies of Ptolemy

²⁵ Stewart (lecture 4/21/15)

²⁶ Miller (2014), 173

²⁷ Ibid., 192

²⁸ Stewart (lecture 4/21/15)

²⁹ Miller (2014), 194

V at the battle of Paneion.³⁰ The paintings in Chamber Tomb I, also known as the Tomb of Apollophones (see fig. 5), consist of a vignette of a hunter followed by a detailed parade of animals, both real and fantastical.³¹ A “generic” hunter is painted on horseback hurling a spear at a female leopard that is bleeding from a previous wound. The tomb with its multiple *loculi* was meant to hold the remains of an entire family. Miller, therefore, speculates that the hunter was a “one size fits all” representation meant to confer upon the tomb occupants the *arete* associated with the elite activity of hunting.³²

This has particularly interesting undertones, given the cultural and political influence Marisa would have felt under the yoke of Ptolemaic control. Kallixeinos of Rhodes records a magnificent symposium and great procession in Alexandria by Ptolemy II that would have been contemporaneous to the dating of the Tomb I.³³ Ptolemy II’s command of the natural resources of his kingdom was made abundantly clear, as the procession included a veritable menagerie of wild animals purported to be from the “Alexandrian zoo.” Jacobson and Miller both suggest this to be a direct link to the animal parade painted in Tomb I from Marisa.³⁴ The paintings at Marisa do not boast the same level of sophistication as those on the painted tombs in Macedonia. Nonetheless, they offer direct proof of the common threads that held the Hellenistic world together through concepts like *kleos* and *arete*. It leads one to contemplate the vastness of the Hellenistic world, and the lack of central authority—at least in comparison with the shadow that the Roman conquest would begin to cast on all parts of the Mediterranean and beyond, beginning in the mid-second century BCE.

Before turning attention to domestic Roman contexts and questions of reception, one must first look northwest of Marisa to Syria to one of the most well-preserved examples of domestic wall painting from the Hellenistic period—the fragments at Jebel Khalid on the Euphrates. Wall paintings in domestic contexts from the Hellenistic world (outside of Italy) are exceedingly rare. Only a precious few fragments on painted plaster from houses at Priene, Pella, and on Delos survive.³⁵ The painted fragments that do survive consist mainly of those characteristic of an artistic style referred to as “Masonry Style,” a name derived from the way the painted wall was meant to imitate stone masonry with the application of raised stucco elements.³⁶ This type of decoration has long been thought to be the precursor of so-called “First Style” Roman wall painting whereby plaster was painted to mimic painted marble slabs adorned with stucco architectural revetments.³⁷ This is the type and style of decoration that is found on the surviving painted wall fragments at Jebel Khalid. Fragments from “Area 19” within an aristocratic residence depict not only examples that mimicked painted stone slabs, but also contain evidence of a figural frieze with Erotes and chariots pulled by goats. H. Jackson speculates that the frieze was a continuous one as no evidence of architectural revetments of *metopes*, painted or in relief, was found along with the fragments.³⁸

³⁰ Jacobson (2007), 16-18

³¹ Miller (2014), 195-96

³² Ibid., 192

³³ Stewart (2014), 294-98

³⁴ Miller (2014), 196; Jacobson (2007), 18

³⁵ Stewart (2014), 30, 213-5

³⁶ Jackson (2009), 235

³⁷ Stewart (2014), 31; It should be noted that Miller (2014) does not necessarily see a “linear connection” between First and Second Style Roman wall painting with Masonry Style and Architectural Style we see in the Hellenistic world, respectively (p. 172).

³⁸ Jackson (2009), 236

Jackson is interested in identifying connections between Macedonia and this corner of the Seleucid Empire during the second century BCE. She notes that on a fragment where one of the goat-driven chariots appears, its wheel distorts the front of the chariot, requiring the leg of the Erote inside of it to be foreshortened. Jackson states that, “foreshortening of limbs in response to frontal positioning is a strong feature of Hellenistic painting...in Macedonia,” citing examples that include the distorted wheel of Hades’ chariot from the aforementioned abduction scene in the so-called Tomb of Persephone, and on the Eurydice Throne from the Tomb of Eurydice, also at Vergina.³⁹

Jackson’s theorized reconstructed elevation of the entire northern wall of Area 19 (see fig. 6) draws heavily on similar reconstructions of a frescoed wall from the House of the Comedians on Delos, further emphasizing the likelihood of cross-cultural artistic pollination that occurred throughout the vast expanse of the Hellenistic world.⁴⁰ The foundations of the wall at Jebel Khalid were *in situ*, and quite clearly show large orthostates painted red, black, and yellow, and presumed to be nearly square in shape. Jackson places the continuous figural frieze of Erotes and chariots roughly center on the wall, framed by various bands of decorative elements ranging from egg and dart patterns, vegetal motifs, and wave patterns, to name just a few. Above this concentrated midsection of highly decorative elements, she theorizes a course of painted ashlar blocks, possibly in the same red, black, and yellow used for the orthostates below. The entire architectural illusion was capped with a row of dentils and molded *triglyphs*. Jackson rightfully notes that Macedonian houses must surely have been as richly decorated. She suggests that the presence of the painted wall fragments from Jebel Khalid demonstrates an interconnectedness not only with Macedonia, but with the major trading outpost on Delos where similar decoration, as already noted, appears.

It is to Rome then that this survey of Hellenistic painting moves next, by considering the reception of Hellenistic painting as witnessed in surviving wall paintings from Roman domestic contexts. Arguably the largest corpus of late Hellenistic wall painting that has been passed down to us survives in the form of Roman wall painting from the first century BCE. The concentration of these examples, as one would expect, survive in the excavated ruins at Pompeii, Herculaneum, Stabiae, and any number of other Vesuvian sites and villas that once dotted the landscape around the Bay of Naples. These painted wall friezes and painted picture panels are the closest link that exists to the Greek originals thought to have inspired these Roman counterparts.⁴¹

For instance, a painted frieze from Boscoreale, hacked from the walls of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at the turn of the twentieth century and sold piecemeal to museums (including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Museo Nazionale in Naples), has received much attention for its connection to an alleged Hellenistic original. A reconstruction by R.R.R. Smith identifies and interprets five panels from the megalographic frieze thought to date to the mid-first century BCE.⁴² This late Hellenistic painted frieze is believed to be a Roman copy of a Hellenistic original of unknown provenience, with a speculative original date sometime in the third century BCE. The first panel depicts an aged old man leaning on a cane (see fig. 7). Ling suggests this man to be and Epicurean philosopher—an identification that fits well with the regal theme that begins to emerge from the entirety of the painted program. Panel 2 depicts two seated figures. The first wears what scholars agree is a traditional Macedonian *kausia*, or hat, with a

³⁹ Jackson (2009), 238

⁴⁰ Ibid., 244-45 [16, 17]; Stewart (2014), 215 [126]

⁴¹ Blanckenhagen (1982), 251

⁴² Smith (1994), 107

diadem underneath.⁴³ She holds a spear, the end of which rests on a rock below where she sits. Most agree this figure to be a personification of Macedonia. The figure on the right, sitting below this personification is thought to be the personification of Asia, wearing a traditional oriental headdress, not dissimilar from the one we see the Persians wearing in the Alexander Mosaic. The landscape between them with rocky outcroppings and the hint of water must be the Hellespont, and the spear that rests on the rocky shore, must be symbolic of Alexander's Asian conquest. In Panel 3 a female kithara-player is depicted. Ling and Smith both speculate this figure to be a member of the Macedonian royal family.⁴⁴ Panel 4 depicts a ruler and his wife. The ruler is naked and sits upon a throne-like chair. Damage to his face makes identification difficult. Smith, however, suggests that through the "older, more realistic-looking style" of Alexander's early successors, an identification of this figure can be made. In Smith's estimation, the best guess for the ruler is Antigonos the One-Eyed, with the apparition that appears in the shield in Panel 5 referencing his son, Demetrios the Besieger, the yet unborn heir.⁴⁵ It should be noted that scholars like Palagia have found reason to believe that the figures represented are in fact multiple representations of Alexander the Great. Stewart, however, rejects this interpretation outright.⁴⁶

The fact that this frieze exists on the wall of a Roman villa dating to the late Hellenistic period is significant. As Ling points out, the mural reproduces "something of the greatness of lost Hellenistic masterpieces."⁴⁷ We know from many Roman sources that original works of Greek and Hellenistic art, particularly painted *pinakes*, were brought back to Rome as plunder.⁴⁸ A connoisseurship of Greek originals seems to have developed in Rome during the second century BCE as the city was flooded with plunder from conquests. These artistic treasures were paraded in triumphs celebrating military victories in various locations throughout Greece, Macedonia, Asia Minor, and eventually Egypt. Authors like Cicero, Diodoros, and Quintilian extol the virtues of artists like Praxiteles and Lysippos, according to Blanckenhagen.⁴⁹ It is the advent of the art collector in the Roman aristocracy that gave rise to the abundance of Roman copies that have been passed down from Greek originals.⁵⁰ What appears to be happening, at least within villa culture of the late Republic, is an attempt on the part of wealthy Roman elites to align themselves with the perceived cultural capital of the Greek and Hellenistic world. It seems that concepts of *kleos* and *arete*, conceived of in life as in death in the Hellenistic world, had a cultural capital all their own—one that was conferred on the Roman art consumer. To what extent did the P. Fannius Synistor and his guests recognize the visual cues in the painted frieze? Surely to educated Roman elites, the message would have been easy to decipher.

The final paintings to be considered here are to be found in Rome as well. The group has been given the descriptive title of the "Odyssey Landscapes." This collection of painted wall panels date to the turn of the second century BCE. Salvaged from a late Republican house on the Esquiline Hill in Rome in 1848, this series of nine panels, seven of which are well enough preserved to permit analysis, now reside in the Vatican Museums. Pollitt refers to these panels as

⁴³ Smith (1994), 109

⁴⁴ Ibid., 110

⁴⁵ Ibid., 125

⁴⁶ See Palagia, O. (2014)

⁴⁷ Ling (1991), 107

⁴⁸ Pollitt (1986), 153

⁴⁹ Blanckenhagen (1982), 251

⁵⁰ For a discussion on Roman copies of Greek originals, see the introduction to *The Ancient Art of Emulation*, E. Gazda (ed.)

“the most original in conception...of all the surviving examples of Hellenistic painting.”⁵¹ The overall composition is remarkable for the manner in which it incorporates its various groups of human figures. From Pollitt’s perspective these human figures are tiny objects set against the “immensity of nature.”⁵² The sections that survive relate to Odysseus’ adventures in Books x-xii of the *Odyssey* (see fig. 8). As the narrative depicted on these panels progresses from one scene to the next, painted architectural pilasters punctuate each scene. This type of motif is indicative of Second Style Roman wall painting, and not thought to be part of the original composition. Pollitt and Ling both point out that the pilasters unevenly divide the panels so that the composition is asymmetrically rendered. Furthermore, the bird’s-eye view of the composition seems to suggest that the Greek original from which this Roman copy was derived was meant to be viewed from a lower perspective. The panels in the Roman version were painted along the top of the wall where the viewer was required to gaze up at the action being depicted on the frieze. Both of these factors have led Pollitt and Ling to argue that the panels were indeed inspired by a Greek original, executed with skill and mastery by the hands of an accomplished Roman workshop. That they are Hellenistic seems certain. Classical Greek painting that survives in red and black figure from the fifth century BCE has little room for landscape, emphasizing instead its human subject matter.⁵³ These paintings, as their title suggests, emphasize the landscape far more than they do their human elements which seem almost to float against the backdrop of beckoning sea coves, whimsical sandstone rocks and cliff faces, and delicately executed trees.

What we have here is something different, but not something entirely new. This mythological landscape where the landscape, rather than the mythological subject matter, takes precedence arguably has its antecedent in the painted figural friezes that we began this survey with—the hunting frieze that decorates the so-called “Tomb of Philip” at Vergina. Landscapes like this one were the “hallmark of Roman art,” as Miller suggests, and “revolutionized...notions of Hellenic conventions.”⁵⁴ Pollitt calls attention to the *skiagraphia*, or “shadow painting,” that infuses the *Odyssey* Landscapes, tracing its development into the fourth century with Hellenistic painters like Apelles and Protogenes.⁵⁵ Both scholars push one to begin to consider these works within their larger Pan-Mediterranean context.

The ties that existed between distinct Hellenistic kingdoms from Greece to Egypt and from the Levant to the Italic peninsula offered an unprecedented exchange of ideas, technologies, culture, and artistic expression during the last three centuries of the first millennium BCE. The Hellenistic Period harnessed this energy, creating works of art and feats of architecture that set new standards of excellence in a shifting and uncertain landscape of empire-building and conquest. Although underrepresented in the archaeological and art historical record, examples of Hellenistic painting can be found in enough examples to move beyond this survey to begin to make connections with a broader tradition of painting in the Mediterranean that, thankfully, persists to this day.

⁵¹ Pollitt (1986), 185

⁵² *Ibid.*, 185

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 186

⁵⁴ Miller (2014), 192-3; The Etruscan painted Tomb of Hunting and Fishing at Tarquinia dates to the 6th c. BCE, and arguably may contain the very first true landscape scene ever to have painted in Ancient Italy. It is this researcher’s express belief that the contribution the Etruscans made to Roman wall painting is immeasurable, and one that has until recently been grossly understudied and underrepresented.

⁵⁵ Pollitt (2014), 188

Illustrations

Fig. 1 Vergina, Macedonian wall painting:
Tomb of Philip. Second half of the fourth
century BCE. (Drawing: G. Miltsakakis.
Photo: Hellenic Ministry of Culture /
Archaeological Receipts Fund)

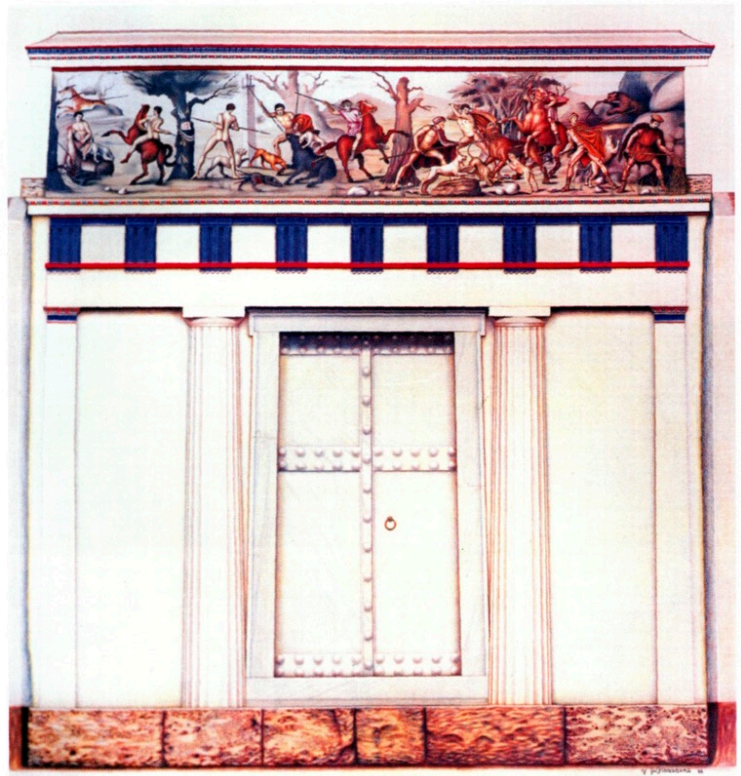


Fig. 2 Lefkadia, Macedonian wall painting:
the façade of the Tomb of the Judgment. Late
fourth century BCE. (Drawing: Ch. Lefakis.
Photo: Hellenic Ministry of Culture /
Archaeological Receipts Fund)

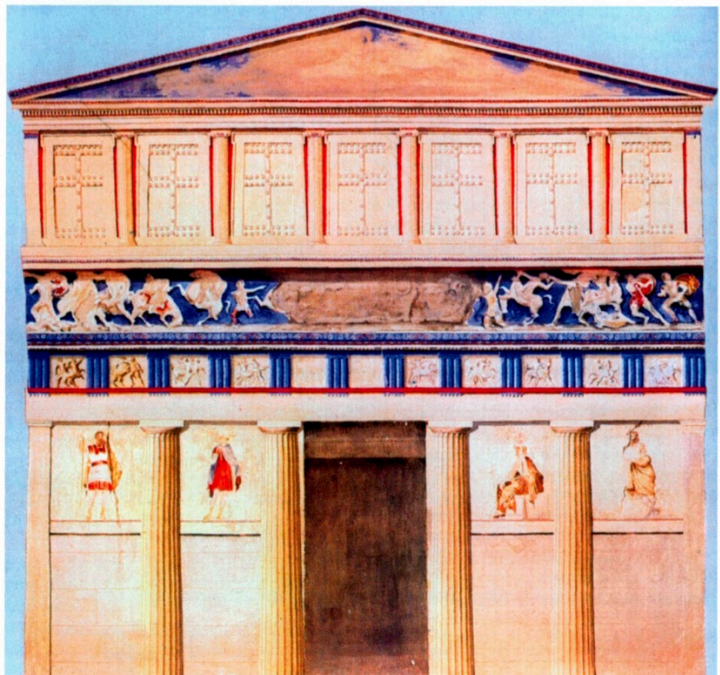


Fig 3 Agios Athanasios, Macedonian wall painting: Tomb of the Symposium. Last quarter of the fourth century BCE. (Drawing: L. Topalidis. Photo: Hellenic Ministry of Culture / Archaeological Receipts Fund)

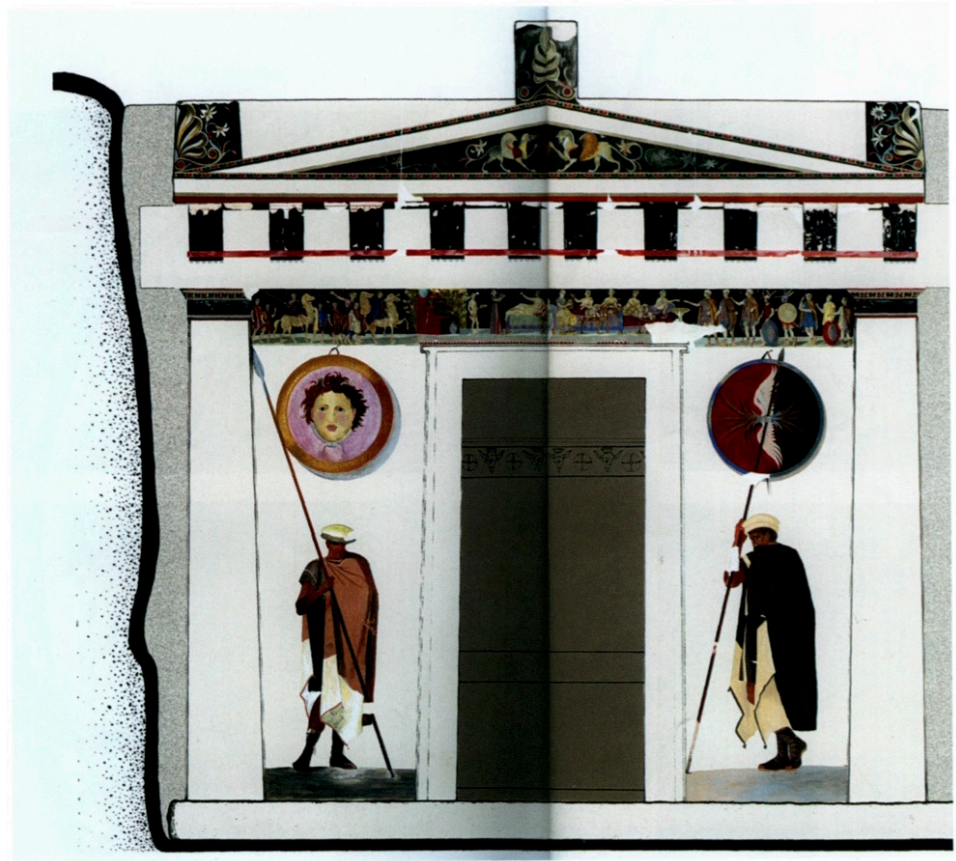


Fig. 4 Vergina, Macedonian wall painting: detail of the abduction of Persephone by Hades on the north wall of The Tomb of Persephone. Mid-fourth century BCE or later. (Photo: Hellenic Ministry of Culture / Archaeological Receipts Fund)



Fig. 5 Marisa, Indumenean wall painting: the hunt from the frieze on the south wall of Chamber Tomb I, The Tomb of Apollophanes. Third to second century BCE. (Photo: Samuel Magal / Sites & Photos)

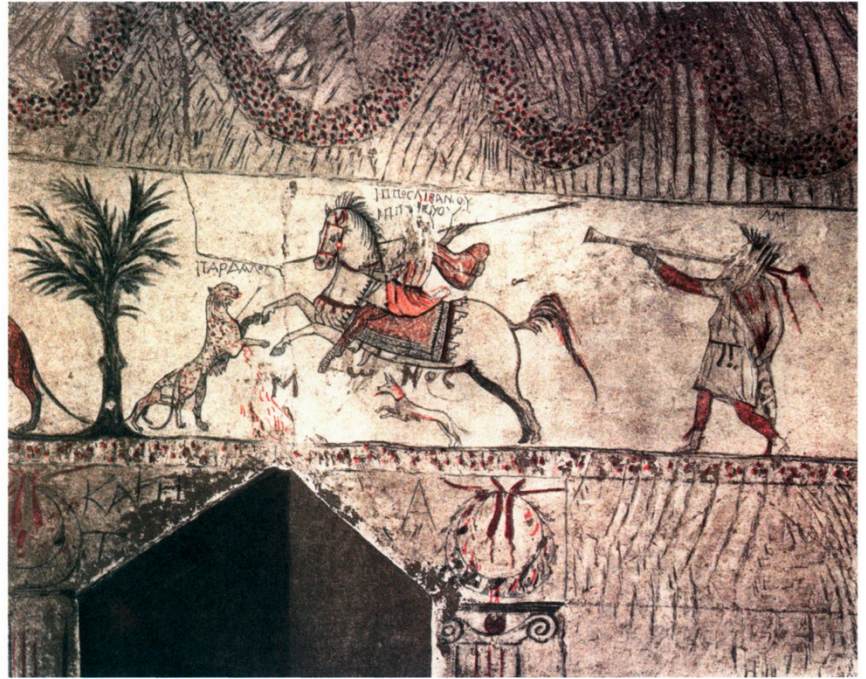


Fig. 6 Jebel Khalid, Syria: reconstruction of northern wall of area "19" from a private house. Third century BCE. (Drawing by J. Sellers)



Fig. 7 Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale. Panels 1 and 2 of painted frieze thought to depict an Epicurean philosopher and personifications of Macedonia and Asia, respectively. National Archaeological Museum in Naples. Photo:



http://www.pompeiiinpictures.org/VF/Villa_016_p3.htm.



Fig. 8 Panel from The Odyssey Frieze: Odysseus in Hades. From a private house on the Esquiline Hill in Rome. First century BCE. Vatican Museum. Photo by unknown.

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