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Wall Decorations and Their Colours in Hellenistic Houses

Elena Walter-Karydi

Abstract

Wall decorations, which originated most likely in Athens towards the end of the 5th cent. B.C., are characteristic of a new type of Greek residence. They contributed to the ‹noble› character of such houses by equipping the main rooms with features reminiscent of the exterior of public buildings, but with added polychromy; the result was a coloured and modelled stucco work, which reflected the structural logic of its walls. These walls never featured large paintings; instead, they sometimes displayed scenes with small-scale figures on the string course: childish Erotes, Nikai, and myths mostly related to Dionysos dominated the imagery of the ‹noble› houses (including mosaics), as well as unexpected subjects such as the Battle of Marathon. In these string course scenes, we find a great variety of colouring, but their red or dark

ground shows that they were considered secondary zones; large wall paintings always had a white ground. It seems that even in the Hellenistic palaces only wall decorations, not large wall paintings, existed. Consequently, the wall decorations were the product of groups of craftsmen, rather than the painters responsible for the renowned *pinakes*, whose names are frequently cited in the written sources. These ‹Hellenistic wall decorations› spread out from Greece across the Mediterranean and maintained a consistent character until the early 1st cent. B.C., despite local variations over time.

Keywords: ‹Noble› houses, wall decorations, ceiling decorations, Hellenistic palaces, Dionysiac character, reflections of monumental architecture and famous buildings

Towards the end of the 5th cent. B.C., a novel architectural type emerged in Greece, likely originating in Athens, which can be called a ‹noble› house¹. Notably, the elements that changed the hitherto modest character of houses were drawn from public buildings. For instance, instead of the customary unpretentious, irregular courtyard², the ‹noble› residences featured rectangular peristyle courts³, a design originally invented for public buildings, such as the Pompeion in Athens⁴. Columns, a noble feature par excellence, previously had no place in the domestic architecture. Moreover, in the main rooms of ‹noble› houses two new art-forms were introduced: wall decorations and

floor mosaics⁵. By the 4th cent. B.C., ‹noble› houses were found all over Greece, but also beyond⁶. While there is ample evidence of the prevalence of wall decorations in Hellenistic ‹noble› houses, pinpointing the precise timing of this expansion remains challenging and, in certain cases, quite impossible.

The wall decorations featured a coloured and modelled stucco work, camouflaging the modest building materials while imitating the ashlar masonry seen in monumental architecture. By replicating the exterior of public buildings within the interior main rooms, these decorations ‹ennobled› them. However, contrary to the public buildings' exterior, the interior of the

1 Cf. Walter-Karydi 1998, 1–4. 84–95. Bruno 1969 already posited that the wall decorations were invented in Athens. In contrast, Th. Lappi (2021, 8 f. and *passim*) considers their invention to have occurred at the same time everywhere where finds occur, the reason of this being «das Bedürfnis nach repräsentativem Wohnen» (p. 15). However, given the vast geographical area and the coexistence of distinctly different societies within it, it seems implausible that a uniform need for representational living

spaces (if indeed this was the catalyst for the development of ‹noble› houses) would have emerged simultaneously.

2 E. g. Walter-Karydi 1998, fig. 2.

3 As e. g. in the ‹House of Mosaics› in Eretria, dated to ca. 370 B.C. (Reber 1998, 164, fig. 221).

4 Hoepfner 1999, 323.

5 Cf. Walter-Karydi 1998, 33–64.

6 E. g. in Priene, cf. Rumscheid 2010, 126 f.



1 Delos, «Maison des Comédiens», oecus maior N, late 2nd cent. B.C. Scheme of wall decoration and reconstruction in colour

main rooms in the «noble» houses was entirely coloured, often with ornamental or figured friezes on the string courses, as in the Delian «Maison des Comédiens» (Fig. 1)⁷. The decorative scheme reflected the structural composition of a wall, featuring a sequence of a low plinth, red isodomic courses as orthostates, a string course with theatre scenes (which gave the house its modern name), then a representation of isodomic ashlar masonry, and a topmost light blue field. In place of the blue field, stucco reliefs with elements of monumental architecture, such as triglyphs and metopes, could appear, as in some examples from Athens⁸ and Delos (Fig. 2)⁹. These reflections underlined the character of a public building which the wall decorations aimed to evoke, thereby enhancing the room's prestige. It is noteworthy that these decorations did not draw inspiration from Greek temples or chamber tombs¹⁰; instead, only public buildings served as the exclusive models for wall decorations in «noble» houses.

It must be stressed that «noble» features were only to be found inside the house; placing columns on the exterior, even on a single side, would have been deemed inconceivable. Furthermore, there were strict limitations within the wall decorations – large paintings were never featured. Additionally, small-scale scenes which sometimes occurred on the string course (Fig. 1) did not have a white ground like the large wall paintings such as the depiction of Pluto abducting Persephone in the chamber of the Persephone Tomb ca. 330 B.C. in Vergina¹¹. Instead, they had a dark or red ground benefitting their secondary status; they were clearly regarded as such. Large wall paintings were exclusively reserved for temples, stoas, public assembly buildings, and Macedonian tombs. The story that Alcibiades locked up the painter Agatharchos in his house to compel him to paint it must have been made up to portray Alcibiades as a braggart¹².

Thus, it is no wonder that, while Greek wall paintings were created by individual artists, whose names are often given in the written sources, domestic wall decorations were carried out by groups of craftsmen and remained anonymous. Occasionally, we only stumble upon rare instances like a certain Theophilos (mid-3rd cent. B.C.) whose letters are preserved. In a letter to Zenon, the secretary of the commander of the Fayum region Diotimos in Philadelphia (Fayum), Theo-

7 Bezerra de Meneses 1970, 154–157 fig. 110; pls. 21–27. 28, 1. 4; Alabe – Bezerra de Meneses 2005, 117 fig. 23.

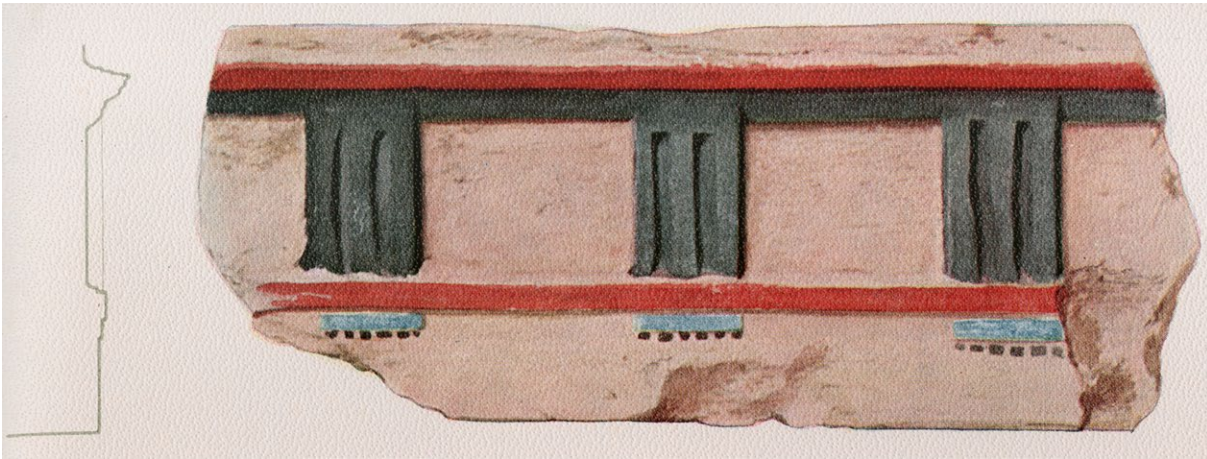
8 Wirth 1931, Beil. 15; Lappi 2021, 14 pl. 1, 5 (from the Pompeion; it is difficult to determine whether this wall decoration belonged to a renovation of the Pompeion or to a «noble» house nearby).

9 Fig. 2: After Bulard 1908, pl. 8 a. Other examples from Delos: Bezerra de Meneses 1970, 156 fig. 112; 158 fig. 114; 167 fig. 123.

10 As some scholars suggest, e.g. Lappi 2021, 8 (the Temple of Apollon at Bassai and the Tholos at Delphi). 9 (graves in Alexandria).

11 Andronikos 1994, pl. V; Walter-Karydi 2019, 56 fig. 4 (with further bibliography).

12 Mentioned in an apparently fictitious speech by Andokides (DNO 1632) and by Plutarch (DNO 1634).



2 Delos, fragment of a wall decoration from a house

philos gives an estimate for painting certain parts of wall decorations in the house of Diotimos¹³ (by the way, this indicates the existence of ‘noble’ houses with wall decorations in Egypt at the time). Then, in a second letter to Zenon, Theophilos writes that he is out of work and begs for a new assignment, namely to paint *pinakes*, that is, independent paintings¹⁴. Notably, in this letter, Theophilos calls himself a painter («ζωγράφος»), which he did not in the first one, where he concerned himself with wall decorations!

Even in the Hellenistic palaces, there appears to be an absence of large wall paintings; the small fragments of wall decorations discovered in the Macedonian palaces at Vergina¹⁵ and Demetrias¹⁶ bear resemblance to domestic designs. Hence, the story recorded by Aelian (175 – after A.D. 222, a late and unreliable source)¹⁷ claiming that king Archelaos (ca. 413–399 B.C.) had commissioned the painter Zeuxis for exorbitant sums for wall paintings in his Pella palace must have been invented to illustrate Archelaos’ legendary riches.

Even the well-known string course of a wall decoration from Palace IV in Pergamon¹⁸, while showcasing

superb workmanship, shares similarities with domestic wall decorations: a marbled ashlar masonry between polychrome ornament stripes and a red ground frieze of antithetical pairs of gold-yellow, blue winged griffins with gold-yellow amphorae between them and gold-yellow candelabra behind them (Fig. 3). The lower part, found in situ during excavation, mirrors typical elements of domestic wall decorations: a yellow plinth with red joints supporting bright red orthostates above¹⁹. Additionally, two layers of polychrome fields above the string course have been reconstructed.

Large figural scenes and elaborate ornaments were exclusively featured in the floor mosaics of ‘noble’ houses, contrasting with the restrained nature of wall decorations. However, due to the constraints of this brief article, it is not feasible to delve into both art forms that introduced polychromy into domestic spaces.

The wall decorations of ‘noble’ houses expanded from Greece across the entire Mediterranean in the Hellenistic era. Despite their roots in the Late Classical period, they are best referred to as ‘Hellenistic wall decorations’²⁰. While maintaining a consistent

¹³ DNO 3054.

¹⁴ DNO 3054a. Cf. Rouveret 1989, 190 n. 69. Such *pinakes* are mentioned in Delian inscriptions as dedications in sanctuaries (Vallois 1913); there is no mention of *pinakes* in the Hellenistic houses.

¹⁵ Andronikos et al. 1961, 27 f. n. 1 (fragments of painted isodomic ashlar masonry in red, white and grey; grey fragments with incised ornaments). From the palace at Pella, no finds are recorded.

¹⁶ Marzloff 1996; Batziou-Efstathiou 2002, 19 f. fig. 18–20, colour pl. 22; 22 f.: red and white plaster on the wall of the main room and two adjoining rooms.

¹⁷ DNO 1721. Cf. what we know of Zeuxis’ paintings (DNO 1724–1749).

¹⁸ Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, inv. V1.2-33. Kawerau – Wiegand 1930, 47–50 pl. VII; V. Kästner, in: Grüßin-

ger et al. 2011, 504 f. cat. 5.16; Schwarzer 2015, 166 f. fig. 1; Schwarzmaier 2019, 67 fig. 2.

¹⁹ Schwarzer 2015, 166.

²⁰ This term seems to be more appropriate than ‘Masonry Style’ (Bruno 1969, 308), in German ‘Mauerwerkstil’ or ‘Strukturstil’ (Wartke 1977), in French ‘style structural grec’ (Barbet 2009, 12–18) or ‘style de grand appareil’ (Alabe 2011, 406), in Italian ‘stile strutturale’ (Tarditi 1990), as well as ‘hellenistische Architekturalmalereien’ (Tybout 1989, 109–143) or ‘Griechische Wanddekorationen’ (Andreou 1988). Some scholars apply the term ‘First Style’ to the Hellenistic wall decorations as a whole, cf. Lappi 2021, 7–10 (erster Stil in Pompeji und Mauerwerkstil in Griechenland und östlichem Mittelmeer); Lappi 2021, 10: «im Folgenden wird der Begriff ‘Erster Stil’ auch für die Funde im östlichen Mittelmeer verwendet».



3 Pergamon, Palace IV. String course of a wall decoration (h 0.45 m, l 1.80 m), first half of the 2nd cent. B.C. (Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, inv. V1.2-33)

overall character, regional nuances distinguished the wall decorations of houses in diverse locations, such as those in the Bosphoran kingdom (Fig. 4)²¹ from those in Greece (e. g. Fig. 1). Greek wall decorations typically depict the actual wall structure, whereas in Pantikapaion, the focus shifts towards a more decorative effect, almost disregarding the wall structure.

What A. Mau referred to as the ‘Incrustationsstil’ in his seminal work on Pompeian wall decorations (1882) actually pertains to Hellenistic wall decorations from Pompeii, which were the primary examples known to him, alongside those from other places in the West Mediterranean region that were discovered later and may be called the ‘First Style’²². In a ‘First Style’ wall decoration, the bright colouring²³ and general design mirrors those found in Greek and Eastern Hellenistic wall decorations, yet with a less distinct rendering of the wall structure, as illustrated in Fig. 5²⁴. One distinctive feature is, for instance, the high socle, replacing the low plinth beneath the orthostates.

In the string course of wall decorations, friezes adorned with ornaments like polychrome garlands²⁵

were consistently continuous, while those featuring figural scenes were commonly divided into panels alternating between dark and red grounds, as depicted in Fig. 1. The prevalent theme in these scenes often revolved around depictions of childish and playful Erotes, engaging in various activities and often mimicking adult behaviour. For instance, in the wall decoration from a house in Jebel Khalid, a city on the Euphrates, the Erotes appear in a red ground frieze driving chariots pulled by goats (Figs. 6. 7)²⁶. Often, the childish Erotes are depicted gliding through a garland, as seen in the narrow polychrome stripe positioned above the main frieze of a wall decoration string course in a house in Knidos. Within the main frieze, figural scenes appear in panels segmented by narrow fields that imitate alabaster. According to O. Bingöl, the subject of these scenes portrays Achilles learning to play the lyre²⁷.

Nikai frequently appear in continuous string course friezes as well²⁸. An example from Rhodes illustrates chariots being alternately driven by men and Nikai (Fig. 8)²⁹. In this representation, polychro-

21 Rostovtzeff 2004, pl. 38. 39; Barbet 2009, 19 fig. 15.

22 The comprehensive lists of wall decorations from the west Mediterranean in Lappi 2021 are a great benefit for further research on the First Style.

23 Cf. e. g. the well-preserved decoration of the north wall of the tablinum in the house of Sallust (6, 2, 4) in Pompeii: Kraus – von Matt 1977, fig. 292. House of Sallust: PPM IV (1993) 87–147, figs. 41. 42 a. b.

24 Guldager Bilde 1993, 159 fig. 1 (redrawn from Ling 1991, figs. 8. 9). Cf. also the examples of the First Style wall decorations from Monte Iato (Lappi 2021, pl. 13, 1. 2), Cosa (Lappi 2021, pl. 38, 3. 6), Formia (Lappi 2021, pl. 39, 1), Fregellae (Lappi 2021, pl. 40, 1. 2), Palestrina (Lappi 2021, pl. 41, 3), Rimini (Lappi 2021, pl. 44, 5), and Marano di Valpolicella (Lappi 2021, pl. 47, 6).

25 Cf. e. g. the garland on a fragment from Delos (Bulard 1908, pl. VIII c).

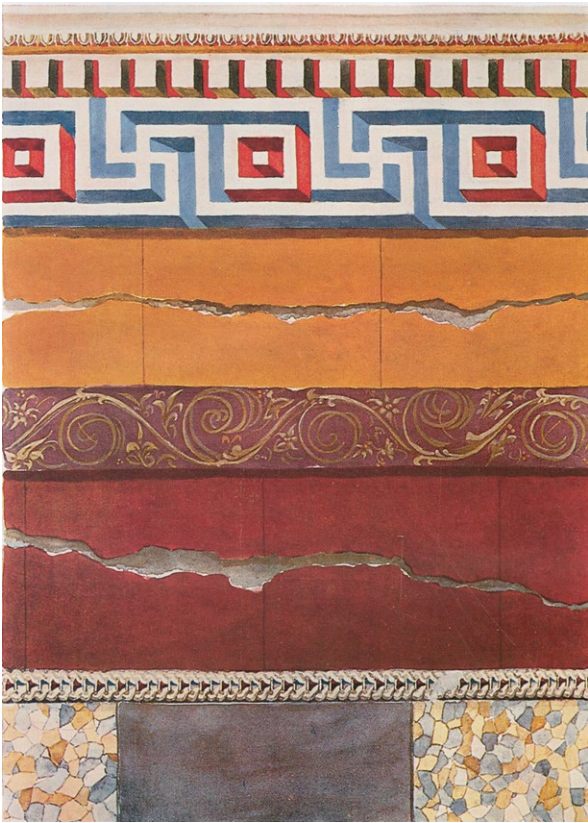
26 Fig. 6: Jackson 2009, 236–238 fig. 16. Fig. 7: Jackson 2009, fig. 8. Jebel Khalid was a city apparently founded by Seleukos

Nikator sometime in the middle of the 3rd cent. B.C., if not earlier; cf. Jackson 2014.

27 Bingöl 1997a, 92. Bingöl 1997b, 333 mentions that in the Bodrum museum there are other string courses from wall decorations in Knidos which remain unpublished.

28 In a very badly preserved string course from the ‘maison des Tritons’ in Delos, Erotes appear running between chariots driven by Nikai (Bezerra de Meneses 1970, 183–185 pl. 25 [drawing]). In another example, the Nikai, holding wreaths, are floating over the charioteers of a chariot race (Delos house St I A: Plassart 1916, 164, not illustrated).

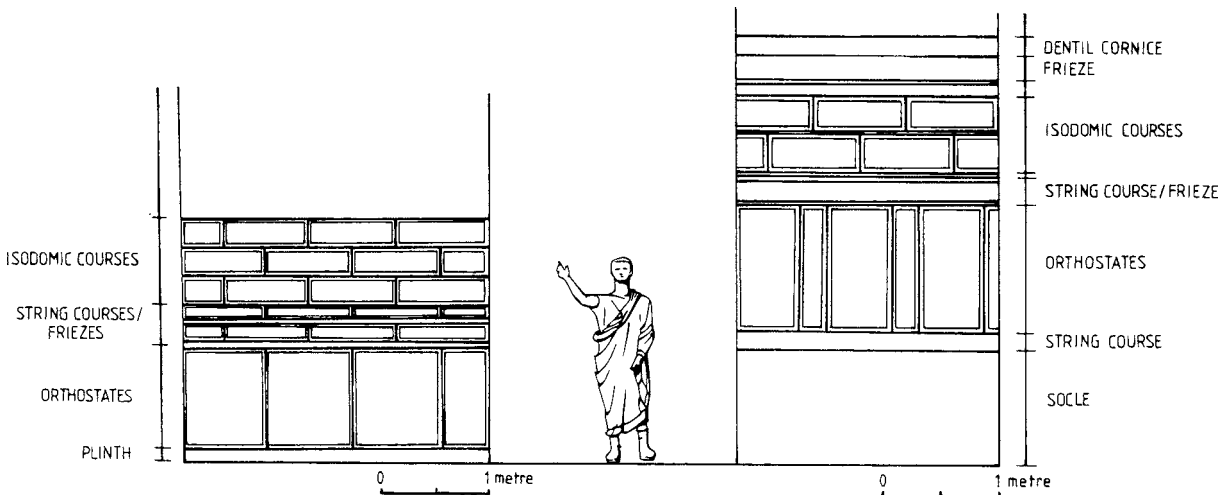
29 Rhodes Museum, see Konstantinopoulos 1986, 150 f. colour pl. XXX; Kreeb 1999, 202 misunderstood the long-gowned chariot drivers as female. Kreeb 1999, 204–206 fig. 2, also presented fragments of a string course frieze from Rhodes with pygmies fighting against cranes. The same subject appears in a Hellenistic wall decoration in Pantikapaion (LIMC VII [1994] 596 no. 21 s. v. Pygmaioi [V. Dasen]).



4 Bosphorus, Mount Mithridates. Wall decoration from a house



6 House in Jebel Khalid. Reconstruction of northern wall of area 19



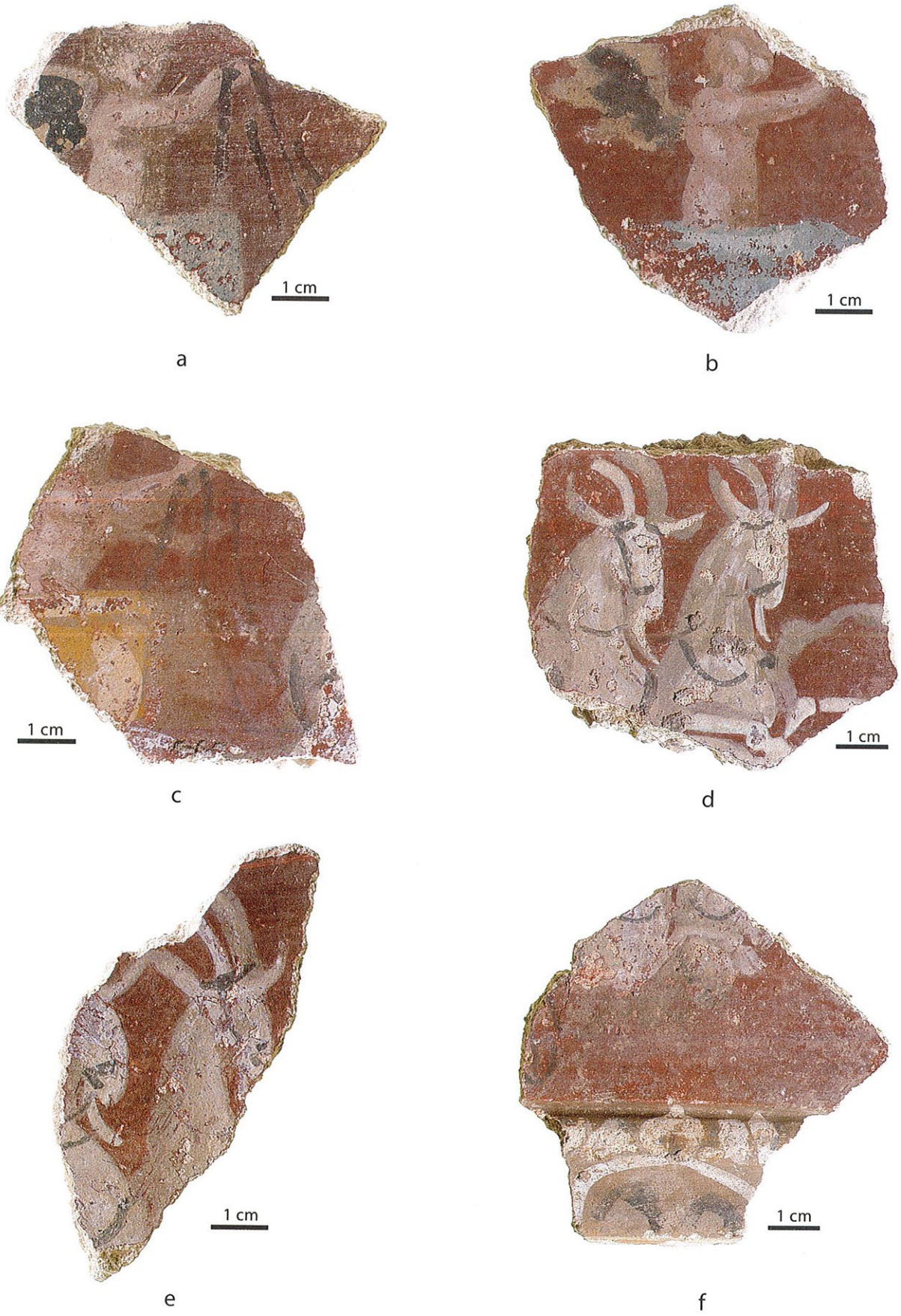
5 a) Hellenistic wall decoration; b) First style wall decoration

my is absent. The figures are kept dark, with incised details, on a light blue-grey ground, reminiscent of a black-figured technique. In another example, Eroses

appear in a sea thiasos (Fig. 9)³⁰. The figures are grey, with some details in deeper grey or white, on a light blue-grey ground.

³⁰ Konstantinopoulos 1986, pl. XXX; Kreeb 1999, 204 f. mentions Eroses riding on dolphins alternating with Nereids riding *hippokampei* and other sea creatures, with Eroses holding the reins; in one fragment an Eros is riding a dolphin while another

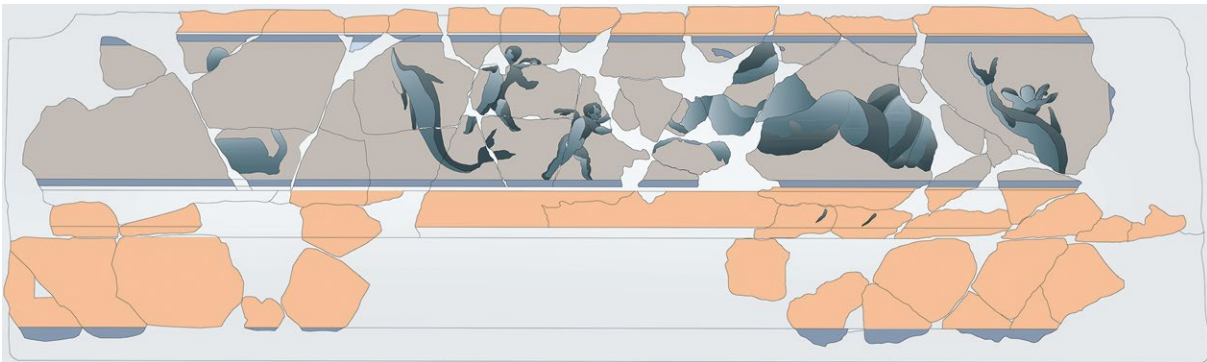
Eros stands on a dolphin (Kokkou 1993, 38 fig. 3, right). In the Rhodes Museum, I could not find any other fragments of this frieze than those illustrated here in Fig. 9.



7 House in Jebel Khalid. Fragments of the figures from the string course in Fig. 6



8 String course fragments: chariots driven alternately by men and Nikai



9 String course fragments: Erotes in a sea thiasos

A great variety of colouring can be observed in the string course scenes, including a monochrome rendition where light coloured figures are set against a dark ground: a sleeping female, apparently Ariadne, and a winged female hovering protectively over her (Fig. 10)³¹. This is the only illustrated fragment of this frieze. Another fragment features a man, likely Theseus, sitting on a rock and near a ship³², and a third fragment shows Dionysos seated on a kline or seat, with additional fragments suggesting a Dionysiac procession or revelry. These scenes must have represented the myth of Ariadne's abandonment by Theseus on Naxos, her subsequent encounter with Dionysos, and their union. Dionysos, the god of wine and symposion, of the theatre, the *joie de vivre* and prosperity, dominates the imagery of Hellenistic «noble» houses, appearing in both the string course scenes of the wall

decorations and the mosaics. Within these depictions, he appears either alone or accompanied by his thiasos, with scenes of myths connected to him and theatrical imagery, including theatre masks.

The monochrome colouring seen in Fig. 10 is also evident in a string course from the Delian granite palaestra, where a scene unfolds with a threatening panther approaching two youths³³. A tree behind him indicates an outdoor setting and while the figures are sketched, they exude a sense of vitality and agility. These swiftly executed monochrome scenes may evoke the so-called *compendiaria*, said to have originated in Alexandria during the 3rd cent. B.C. Described in written sources as rapidly executed paintings with sketchy yet sophisticated quality, these works were characterized by their *audacia* (audacity, vivid character)³⁴.

31 House VI, O, in the theatre quarter. Bruno 1985, 35 f. colour pl. XIV; Hadjidakis 2003, 218 fig. 298. According to Chamonard 1922, 66 in this frieze there appear panels alternately with black and with red ground.

32 Bezerra de Meneses 1970, 189 n. 70.

33 Delorme 1961, 23; Bruno 1985, 31–41 pls. Xb. XI (I cannot follow his argument that such monochrome friezes imitate relief

friezes in black stone in sculpture); Hadjidakis 2003, 219 fig. 300. The same colouring also occurs in the string course scene with a chariot race from this palaestra (Hadjidakis 2003, 220 f. fig. 302).

34 Cf. Pollitt 1974, 327–334. 416. 445 (who stresses the uncertainty of sources on the *compendiaria*); Rouveret 1989, 229 f. 254. 259. 264. 275.



10 Delos, House VIO, theatre quarter (now Museum). Sleeping Ariadne, fragment from the string course

The actors' friezes from the «Maison des Comédiens» (oecus N) also belong to the group of friezes with Dionysiac character (Fig. 1)³⁵. Here, the actors appear in panels with alternating reddish and dark grounds, with a light-coloured stripe at the bottom as a modest reference to the ground surface, which had been a revolutionary invention in Greek paintings shortly after the mid-4th cent. B.C. An example of this is the masterful wall painting of Philip's tomb façade in Vergina, in which the hunt of Philip, Alexander, and their companions is depicted on a hilly ground (the rendering of the white sky will be discussed below)³⁶.

Some actors, such as the one in a short white dress (Fig. 11)³⁷, represent stock characters from New Comedy, apparently from identifiable plays, while another group (Fig. 12)³⁸ must portray Ismene (the actor is wearing a white mask) and her blind father from the Sophoclean tragedy «Oedipus at Kolonos». Oedipus, with white hair and a stoop, leans on a walking stick in his right hand while steadying himself with his other hand on Ismene. Both figures are draped in heavy red-brown garments which show a high-quality modelling with light and shadow.

Another scene of remarkable quality appears in a dark ground polychrome frieze, showcasing a battle between Greeks and Persians (Fig. 13)³⁹. A Greek warrior in a short red chiton and blue mantle holds a shield (red in the interior) and hurls a spear at a fallen Persian adversary. The Persian, dressed in a yellow garment and tight-fitting whitish trousers, leans on his shield while the Greek warrior strikes him on the neck. The end of an inscribed word («[...]jeios») between them probably provides his name⁴⁰. On the right appears another attacking Greek, with blue mantle and red chiton, and in another fragment, there is part of a fallen Greek with red chiton and yellow armour⁴¹. It is noteworthy that a battle scene, both in myth and reality, is an uncommon subject for a string course frieze. The presence of an inscribed word, presumably a name, near the Greek warrior

hints at the specificity of the depiction. F. Queyrel's compelling assertion linking the scene to the Battle of Marathon offers a plausible explanation for this unconventional choice⁴².

These selected examples offer a glimpse into the remarkable diversity of techniques and colour schemes that characterize the string course scenes. Comparing these late-2nd cent. B.C. fragments to Classical and Hellenistic sculpture would introduce another intriguing dimension, though delving into this comparison would extend beyond the scope of this paper.

In the «noble» houses, the ceilings of the main rooms were also decorated, likely from their earliest origins. While earlier examples are not preserved, references to decorated ceilings in ancient texts suggest their presence. In Aristophanes' *Wasps* (v. 1215), Bdelkleon is instructed by his son, who tries to teach him good manners, to scrutinize the ceiling as a means to appear as a connoisseur of beautiful things. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates makes reference to someone observing ceiling decorations (Politeia 529B). Additionally, in the mid-3rd cent., Theophilus (see above) detailed the projected cost of decorating the ceiling of an andron with seven klinai within Diotimos' residence.

Late Hellenistic examples of ceilings from Delos, reconstructed by F. Alabe (such as Fig. 14)⁴³, feature stripes of decorative motifs without figural scenes, occasionally including tiny individual figures. The vivid colouring and marked polychromy match the aesthetic of the wall decorations.

The prestige conferred to a room by wall decorations could be heightened not only by their imitation of monumental architecture, as in the triglyphs and metopes mentioned above (Fig. 2), but also by half-columns in relief on their upper section⁴⁴. This architectural element was borrowed from public buildings such as the Hieron in the Samothracian sanctuary of the Cabiri (late 4th cent. B.C.), the place where cult initiates gathered⁴⁵.

35 Bezerra de Meneses 1970, 168–172 pls. 21–25 figs. 1. 4.

36 Cf. Walter-Karydi 2019, 56 f. fig. 5.

37 Bezerra de Meneses 1970, 168–172 pl. 21, 3; 23, 3; Hadjidakis 2003, figs. 291. 297.

38 Bezerra de Meneses 1970, 168, S62, 4 (the group is not named) pl. 22, 4; Hadjidakis 2003, fig. 289. 295.

39 Chamonard 1906, 531–534: battle between Greeks and barbarians; Bezerra de Meneses 1985, 219: a battle between Greeks and Galatians, followed by a battle between Greeks and Amazons. Queyrel 1989, 292–294 fig. 35 identified the battle as that at Marathon. See also Fig. 13: after Bulard 1908, pl. IX. X (colour copies).

40 Chamonard 1906, 533. Bruno 1985, 35–41 pls. VIII-Xa read the letters as «-zelos» and restored the name as «Polyzelos» or «Epizelos».

41 Bulard 1908, 91–184.

42 See above note 39.

43 Alabe 2002, 232 f. 242 fig. 13 (ceiling 2; gouache N. Sigalas); Hadjidakis 2003, 72 fig. 51. Cf. also Alabe 2002, 238 fig. 6 (ceiling 1, «Maison de l'Épée»); 241 figs. 11. 12. 14 (ceiling 3, «Maison des Sceaux»).

44 E. g. Bezerra de Meneses 1970, 153 fig. 109 Room J. Cf. an example from Pergamon: Pirson 2016, 141–146 fig. 10 (A. J. Schwarz: an attempt at a reconstruction).

45 Lehmann 1969, 142. 208–212.



11 Delos, «Maison des Comédiens». Actor, scene from the string course (cf. Fig. 1).



12 Delos, «Maison des Comédiens». Oedipus and Ismene, scene from the string course (cf. Fig. 1)



13 Delos, «Dionysos House». Battle between Greeks and Persians: the Battle of Marathon.



14 Delos, «Maison des Sceaux». Ceiling decoration

Similarly, on Samothrace, the Arsinoeum, an expansive assembly hall dedicated to the Cabirion by Queen Arsinoe during the early 3rd cent., introduced a novel architectural concept that possibly influenced a new element in wall decorations⁴⁶. The upper part of this building featured plain Doric piers on the exterior, and Corinthian half-columns on the interior, with reliefs and thin marble plaques between them. Such an exterior decoration was an innovation that could not be adopted in the «noble» houses. However, a discernible influence of the Arsinoeum can be seen in the wall decoration of an exedra in a house at Pella, where white relief pilasters between red parapets and, above them, blue panels, create a festive ambience (Fig. 15)⁴⁷. The well-preserved colours of the wall decorations reveal the primary intention of endowing the exedra the ambience of a public space.

⁴⁶ McCredie et al. 1992, pl. 71 (restored section B-B, Hellenistic period), pl. 72 (restored elevation, Hellenistic period).

⁴⁷ M. Siganidou, who excavated the house (Siganidou 1982, 31–36) informed me (in December 1992) that the house is to be dated to the late 3rd cent. B.C., but there is no excavation report establishing this date; cf. Andreou 1988, 123 f. Nr. 151: 2nd cent. B.C.? Lilimbaki-Akamati has wisely refrained from dating this wall decoration (Lilimbaki-Akamati – Akamatis 2003, 27 fig. 18; 126 fig. 169;



15 Pella. Wall decoration of a house; h 5m. Pella, Museum.

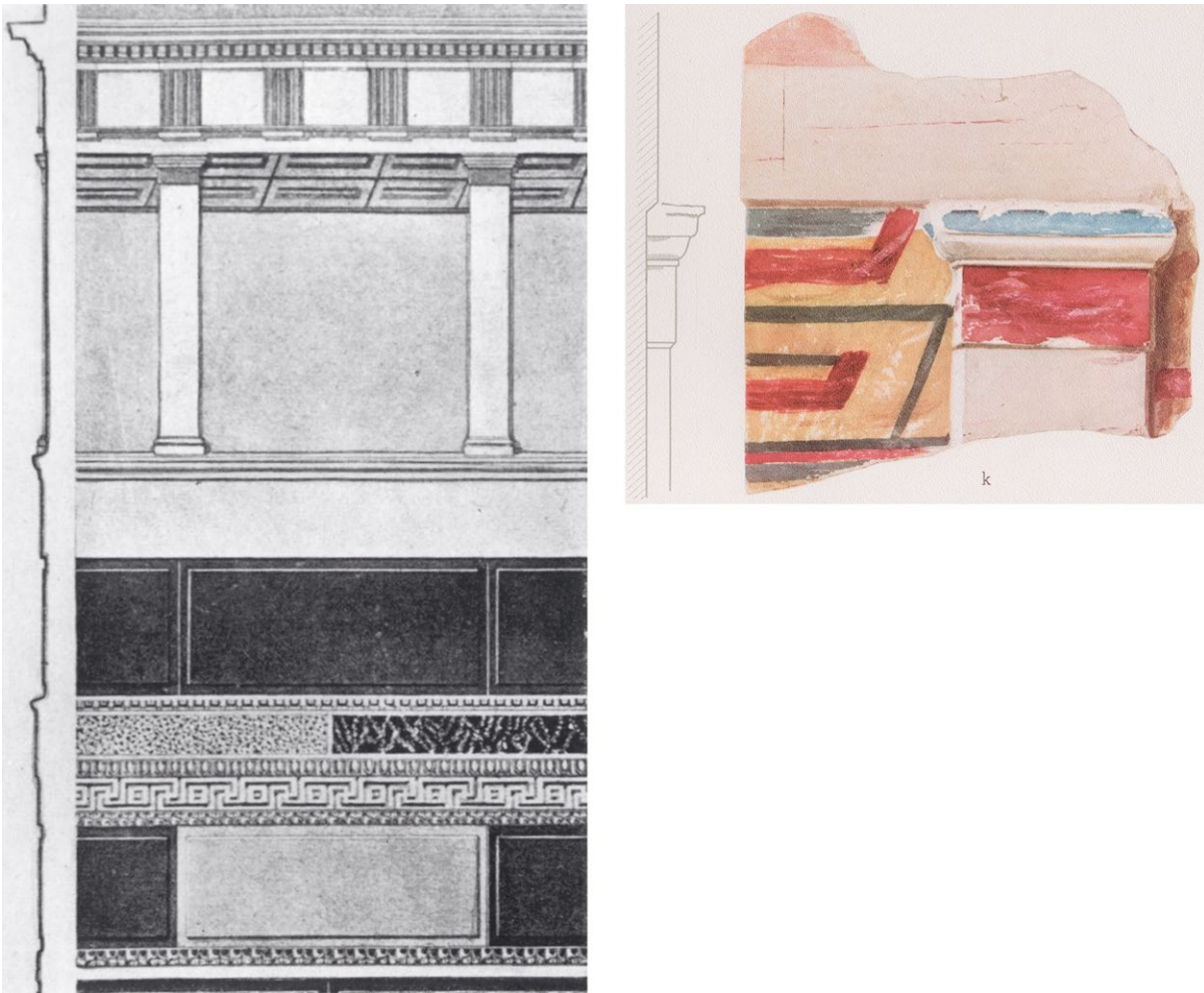
Could the blue fields over the balustrades be representing the sky, as previously suggested⁴⁸? In Greek painting the sky is typically portrayed as white, with the setting – whether outdoor or indoor – indicated not by colour but by objects such as trees or rocks, as seen in the wall painting on the façade of Philip’s tomb (see above). This practice is also evident in depictions of furniture in indoor scenes⁴⁹. However, the sky is certainly blue in the wall paintings of the Second Style, for instance in the *Odyssey* landscapes from ca. 50–40 B.C.⁵⁰. It is unknown whether this blue colouring of the sky was invented by late Hellenistic painters of *pinakes*, as no examples have survived. If

Lilimbaki-Akamati, in: Descamps-Lequime 2011, 271 Abb. 46). M. Lilimbaki-Akamati gave me the permission to re-print fig. 15.

⁴⁸ Cf. e.g. Tybout 1989, 127 n. 437.

⁴⁹ Cf. Walter-Karydi 2003, 183 f.

⁵⁰ Biering 1995 pls. 1. 4. 7. 10. 13. 16. 19. 22; Bulard 1908, 113 f. 152; pl. VI A fig. A; Chamonard 1922, fig. 83. The colour between the pilasters is not preserved, but there are traces of painted figures in the spaces between the pilasters.



16 Delos, «Dionysos house», room D. Left) Scheme of wall decoration; right) Coloured sketch drawing of a detail of the upper part

the wall decoration in Pella were to be dated about 100 B.C., it is plausible that the blue fields over the balustrades indeed represented the sky. For the moment, this question must remain open.

Sham galleries, like the one in the Pella house, are not uncommon in wall decorations. However, scholars have given particular attention to the one in the «Dionysos house» on Delos due to its unique coffered ceiling painted in perspective, which some scholars suggest foreshadows the Second Style (Fig. 16 a. b)⁵¹. Nevertheless, the absence of a floor representation in this gallery limits the perception of spatial depth compared to wall paintings like, for

instance, the «Casa dei Grifi» on the Palatine in Rome, which exemplifies one of the earliest instances of the Second Style⁵². All in all, although the latest Hellenistic wall decorations are certainly contemporary with the earliest Second Style wall paintings in Rome, they lack features that anticipate the Second Style⁵³.

The study of Hellenistic wall decoration and their polychromy remains an area warranting further research, particularly in the publication of still unpublished material. Such studies, even if the *pinakes* of the great Hellenistic masters are lost, offer a substantial insight into the colouring of Hellenistic painting.

51 By Bezerra de Meneses 1970, 191. Cf. Engemann 1967, 41 f. pl. 57, 12; Andreou 1989, 207 cat. 104; Tybout 1989, 126 f. pl. 86, 2.

52 E. g. Ling 1991, 22 fig. 19 (room II, left wall); Mielsch 2001, 30 fig. 14.

53 According to Alabe – Bezerra de Meneses 2005, 119 many traits of the Hellenistic wall decorations «sont un pas vers le

«Second Style pompéien»». Later, F. Alabe changed her mind, stating that there are no Second Style wall decorations in Delos (Alabe 2011, 406–414 fig. 5. 6. 9 a. b). B. Wesenberg 1988, 1990 had already rejected any such speculation.

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