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# Decoration and ideology in Nero's Domus Aurea in Rome

Paul G.P. Meyboom and Eric M. Moormann

*Some 140 rooms remain of the reception pavilion on the Oppian hill in Rome, which once belonged to Nero's Golden House. It was built and decorated between AD 64 and 68. The study of the paintings reveals that these were made by three workshops, each of which worked in its own typical style; all three are variations of the Pompeian Fourth Style. Moreover it appeared that marble wall revetments played an important role in the decorations of several rooms, which actually were the more important rooms, and that these marble revetments were valued higher than the wall paintings. The fashion of marble revetments originated in the Hellenistic kingdoms of the eastern Mediterranean. With the adoption of this fashion Nero wanted to emphasize his claim to the absolute monarchy over the Roman world.*

## 1 HISTORY OF THE RESEARCH

In the last quarter of the 15th century underground rooms were discovered beneath the remains of the Baths of Trajan on the Oppian hill. These rooms were part of the famous Domus Aurea, the Golden House, which Nero Caesar built between AD 64 and 68. Until this discovery, its marvels were only known from descriptions by Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.42-43) and Suetonius (*Nero* 31). These underground rooms, usually c. 10 m high, were named "le grotte" and they attracted especially the attention of artists like Raphael and his school, who admired the fantastic wall paintings which they named the "grottesche", a name which survives in our term grotesque. In the following centuries more rooms were discovered and at present some 140 rooms and corridors are known. Now and then some wall and vault decorations were copied and published, like the 56 fine plates in the large folio volume edited in Rome in 1776 by Mirri and Carletti after colour drawings made on the spot by V. Brenna, M. Carloni and F. Smugliewicz (see e.g. fig. 5).

The first serious attempt at a scholarly study was undertaken by De Romanis and appeared in Rome in 1822. Later some newly discovered rooms were published only occasionally, but a complete study of the structure and its decorations was not undertaken except for the important study by Weege (1913) who published several parts of the east wing. This lack of scholarly interest may have been

caused partly by the enormous size of the building, the poor state of the paintings covered with layers of dirt and deposits of lime, and the difficult working conditions in the dark, cold and damp rooms.

Serious scholarly attention to the building decorations was given by the Dutch school of students of Roman wall painting founded by H.G. Beyen (Professor of Classical Archaeology at Leiden University 1954-1965), his pupils F.L. Bastet (Leiden University) and W.J.Th. Peters (Radboud University Nijmegen), and their pupils P.G.P. Meyboom (Leiden University) and E.M. Moormann (Radboud University).

Traditionally four styles are distinguished in chronological order in Roman wall decoration, called the four Pompeian Styles after the Campanian town of Pompeii which is the most important source of Roman wall painting. The First Style actually is not real wall painting but an imitation of marble revetment in painted stucco relief and does not contain figural elements. Real wall painting, containing illusionistic and figural elements, began with the Second Pompeian Style in the beginning of the 1st century BC.

After studies of the Second Style by Beyen (1938; 1960) and R.A. Tybout (1989) and a study of the Third Style by Bastet and M. de Vos (1979), the Fourth Style became the subject of study (Peters 1982; 1993). This style flourished in Pompeii roughly in the period between the earthquake of AD 62 and the destruction of the town by the eruption of the Vesuvius in AD 79. The largest number of wall paintings preserved in Pompeii belong to this style. Because of the large number and the relatively short period from which they date, it proved difficult to establish a stylistic development and a chronology. Therefore the attention was diverted to the wall paintings in Nero's Domus Aurea which usually are dated in the even more limited period of AD 64-68. However, it appeared that – like we just saw – these wall paintings never had been the subject of a more complete and serious study.

Around 1980 Peters and Meyboom started a survey of the decorations, and some 15 years later Moormann took over Peters' part. The original plan was to obtain some insight into the wall paintings in the Domus Aurea in order to acquire a better understanding of the Pompeian Fourth Style. However, they found such a variety in styles and forms that it became

necessary to study the remaining paintings as a whole in order to achieve a real insight, and because of the monument's enormous size and the large amount of remains of decorations, the work almost developed into a life's work. In the near future a comprehensive monograph will appear (supplement BABesch) on the monument and its decorations by the present authors who offer here a summary of their research.

## 2 HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION (fig.1)

### 2.1 *The development of the imperial residences in Rome*

The first imperial residence in Rome was the house that Augustus built on the south-west corner of the Palatine hill in the 30s and 20s of the first century BC. Some houses of patrician families related to the imperial family, like the house of the Claudii on the west side of the Palatine, were

connected to it. Upon this house Nero, who had come to the throne in an irregular way in AD 54 at the age of 17, built a palace rising above the Forum, which later was called the Domus Tiberiana. Besides that, he built some luxurious pavilions, one of which is now erroneously called the Domus Transitoria. Nero built the real Domus Transitoria (Transitional House) on the Velia and the Oppius with the purpose of connecting his possessions on the Palatine to the Villa of Maecenas on the Esquiline, which Maecenas had already bequeathed to Augustus. In AD 64 the great Fire of Rome broke out and destroyed especially the poor people's quarters in the valleys between the Palatine, the Oppius and the Caelius. The last-mentioned hill had also become an imperial possession since Agrippina, wife of the emperor Claudius and Nero's mother, had started there the construction of the huge temple for the Divus Claudius.

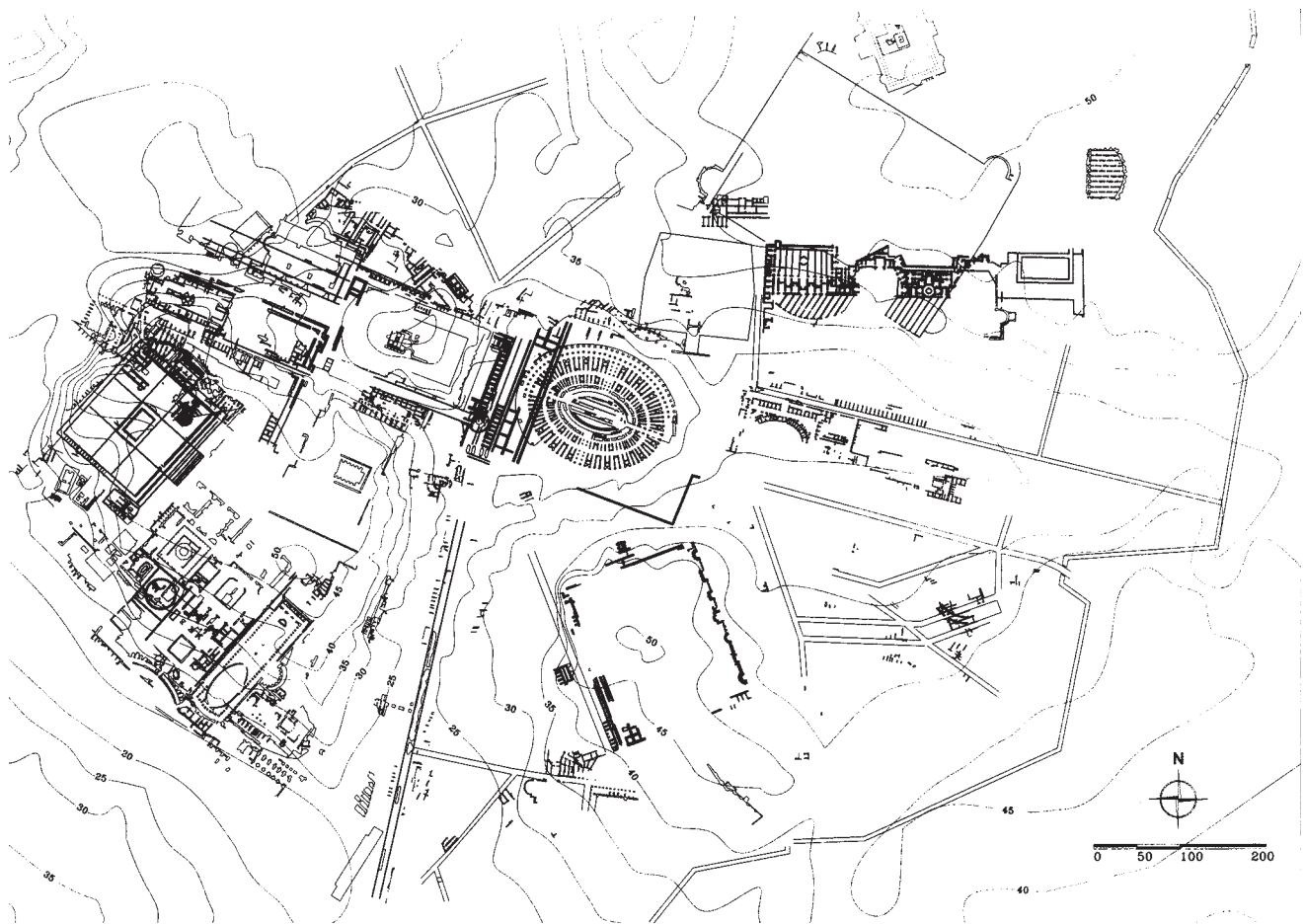


Figure 1 Plan of the Domus Aurea complex, left the Palatine, right the Caelius and above right the Oppius with the pavilion (after Fabbrini 1995, 377, fig. 18).

## 2.2 *The various parts of the new complex* (fig. 1)

The disastrous Fire, at least for the people of Rome, gave Nero the opportunity to combine the imperial possessions on the mentioned hills in the centre of Rome into one huge complex of ca 100 hectares. Nero named this new complex the Domus Aurea, which suggested the beginning of a new Aetas Aurea, a Golden Age, in imitation of his ancestor Divus Augustus. From the temple of Divus Julius (the deified Julius Caesar and the founder of the dynasty) on the Roman forum ran the old Sacra Via, flanked by large porticoes, towards a large rectangular platform which later was included in the platform of the temple of Venus and Roma and which still exists. This platform was also surrounded by porticoes and served as forecourt to the new complex. On it, in the centre of Rome, rose an enormous bronze statue c. 40 m high, which represented the emperor as Apollo-Sol, the bringer of the new Golden Age. This statue, which became known as the Colossus, must have been visible from all the hills of the city.

From this forecourt one could turn right to climb the Palatine with the imperial possessions, including the palace which may have served for public functions.

In the valley behind the forecourt, more or less the centre of the entire complex, an artificial lake was created and the slopes of the surrounding hills were covered with groves, rivulets and pastures for grazing cattle. In this landscape-villa setting various kinds of structures were built, like monumental nymphaea, baths (the so-called Baths of Titus may originally have been the baths of the Domus Aurea) and pavilions for banquets and other amusements, such as the famous circular dining room which turned around day and night, the exceptionally shaped base of which seems to have been discovered recently in the north-east part of the Palatine (see the descriptions by Tacitus and Suetonius).

What Nero actually was trying to do was to create in the centre of Rome a huge palace complex – comparable to the royal palace of Alexandria with its shrines, courtyards, porticoes, parks, the mouseion and the zoo – which combined all aspects of a public residence and a luxurious private villa. It was a kind of microcosmos symbolizing his absolute power over the Roman Empire. The Roman people had known extreme luxury in the villas outside Rome but never in their city, and they strongly resented that Nero had sacrificed the centre of their city for what they considered to be a megalomaniac's folly.

After his death in AD 68 his ultimate successors, the Flavian dynasty, stopped the building of the Domus Aurea, opened the area to the public and symbolically expressed the return of the city to its people by the construction of the famous Flavian amphitheatre in the centre of the Domus Aurea at the place of the artificial lake. This policy was aptly summarized by the contemporary poet Martialis

(De spectaculis 2,11-12): “*Reddita Roma sibi est et sunt, te praeside Caesar* (i.e. Titus), *deliciae populi quae fuerant domini*” (Rome has been restored to herself and, under your guidance, Caesar, the delights which once were reserved for a tyrant now belong to the people). Ironically the amphitheatre later was called the Colosseum after Nero's Colossus, which in a somewhat modified form still stood beside it until late antiquity.

Among the various structures in this enormous complex was the pavilion on the Oppius which is now usually called the Domus Aurea and which is the subject of our study.

## 3 THE PAVILION (figs. 1 and 2)

This pavilion has survived because it was partly incorporated into the substructures for the Baths of Trajan which were dedicated in AD 104. Now it is roughly 200 m long but originally probably c. 350 m, the centre presumably being the stupendous octagonal hall (128). The east wing was demolished because it extended beyond the Baths. This pavilion consisted mainly of dining rooms, other kinds of reception rooms and corridors, and served for the *otium* of the emperor, such as receptions and, banquets, but not for living in. It thus resembled the Royal Pavilion at Brighton built by the Prince Regent of England in 1815 and following years. It had the character of a portico-villa, i.e. a long structure with the main rooms in the façade which, through a portico and a terrace before it, had a fine view on the landscape park lying in front of it.

Here is not the place to present a detailed chronology of the building and its decorations. In the last decades some efforts have been made to ascribe different parts of the building and decorations to the Early Neronian or to the Flavian period. Our conclusion is, however, that the building and the decoration took place in the short period between the Fire of Rome in AD 64 and the death of Nero in AD 68.

This is in the first place, because there are no traces in the building of serious fire damage. This seems strange if it had existed already before the Fire, because the poor people's quarter, lying immediately below it in the valley of the modern Via Labicana, was totally destroyed by the Fire. Secondly, the pavilion is orientated towards the crescent-shaped Caelian hill just facing it on the other side of the Via Labicana valley, which must have offered a fine view on the landscape park (fig. 1). It is highly improbable that this fine scenic design for Nero's belvedere was planned before the Fire, when the poor people's quarter with its smells and noises directly below the pavilion, still existed. And thirdly, it could be concluded that the three painters workshops which decorated the pavilion (see below) worked more or less at the same time alongside each other in different parts of the building. Also it is apparent that throughout the whole building rooms remained undecorated, which implies that

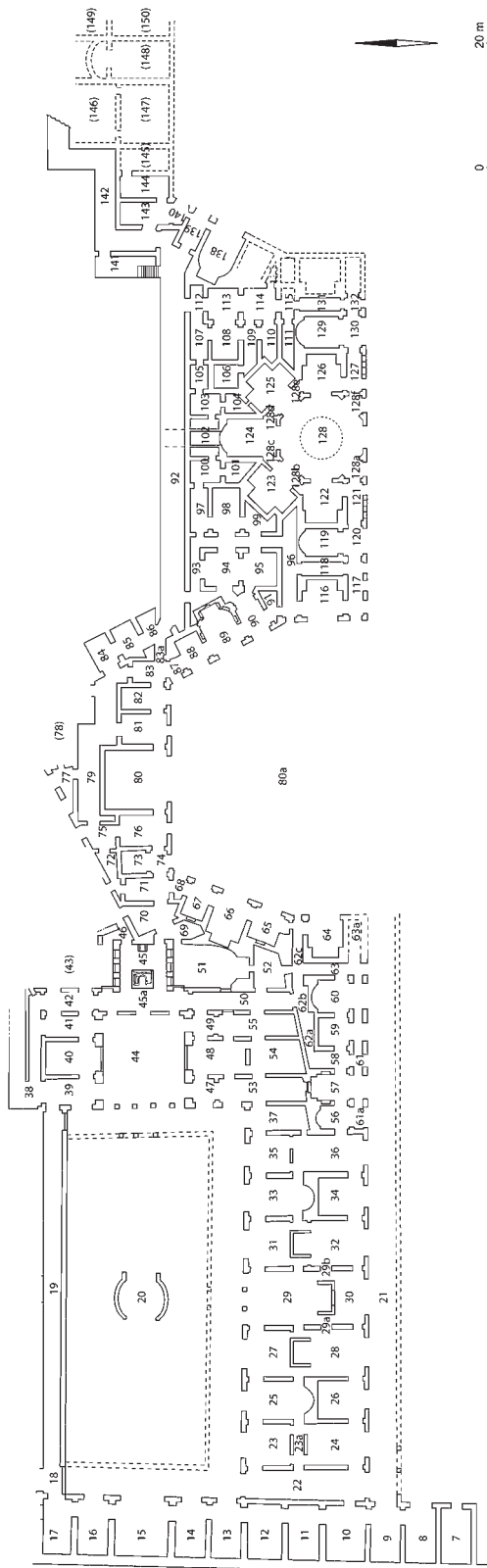


Figure 2 Plan of the Domus Aurea pavilion (after Fabbrini 1995, 400–401, fig. 21, with some adaptations).

the pavilion cannot have been in full use. These observations can only be explained by linking them with the death of Nero and the ensuing closing of the pavilion by the Flavian emperors in AD 68.

#### 4 THE DECORATIONS

##### 4.1 *The painted wall decorations*

In about 90 of the *c.* 140 rooms, traces of the decorations have been preserved consisting of remains of wall paintings and – in a smaller number of rooms – imprints of marble revetments. In many rooms only little remains of the original decorations. In several cases, however, old drawings and watercolours show much larger parts of the original decorations. In such cases it is uncertain to what extent these copies correctly depict the original decorations. There are, however, several rooms in which the original decoration has been entirely preserved beneath the layer of dirt and lime which now covers the walls, and the copies of these decorations appear to be faithful reproductions of the original decoration (fig. 5). These copies may therefore help with the reconstruction of the original decoration.

After having made an inventory and documentation of all the decorations which in one way or another have been preserved, we have been able to draw conclusions regarding the original decorations of the pavilion. In the first place a clear distinction could be made between three kinds of decorative styles which we ascribed to three workshops named A, B and C.

Workshop A used a white background, on which were painted more or less monumental architectural elements like columns in various combinations, including perspective views, in yellow, red and blue, which sometimes were combined with human figures (fig. 3). These decorations thus created a light, open and spatial impression. We named this style the Architectural Style.

Workshop B used much smaller architectural elements and favoured a large variety of unusual exotic colours. Pink, orange and purple, light and dark green and blue, are combined in one decoration. White is totally absent, as are human figures (fig. 4). So this style shows no spatial illusions and its main characteristic is the variety of brilliant contrasting colours. These colours are mentioned especially by Vitruvius (*Arch.* 7.5.8) who states that white, yellow, red and blue, were the usual household colours of a painter's workshop which the painters had to bring with them themselves, but that the mentioned exotic colours were expensive because of the rare pigments and had to be paid for separately by the clients. We named this style the Polychrome style.

The style of workshop C is characterized by large panels with a plain background, often black or red, with miniature architectural elements and ornaments in yellow and white,



Figure 3 Corridor 131, wall painting by workshop A (after Picard 1970, pl. 47).



Figure 4 Passage 87, wall painting by workshop B (photo Radboud University).

reminiscent of gold and silver (fig. 5). A suggestion of openness is entirely absent in this style. We named this the Miniaturistic style.

Moreover it appeared that the workshops A and C in general used two forms of their style, i.e. a monumental façade for more important rooms and a form with large panels for less important rooms (figs 3 and 5). The remains of the decorations by workshop B are too fragmentary to allow conclusions in this respect. Furthermore it appeared that figurative elements played a minor part. The relatively few figurative panels show sometimes mythological scenes and more often landscapes and still lifes, single figures usually show connections with the theatre and the cult of Dionysus.

If we now look at the distribution of these three styles in the pavilion it appears that, roughly, the three styles may be found in three more or less coherent parts of the pavilion (fig. 7). The Architectural style of workshop A can be found in particular in the eastern part of the pavilion and in the façade of the western part, the Polychrome style of workshop B in the central part, and the Miniaturistic style of workshop C around the peristyle in the west wing. The different styles

may therefore be considered as the house-styles of three workshops that worked at the same time alongside each other. It appears that only in a late phase of the decoration process artists of a certain workshop, for example of workshop A, were employed in the area where another workshop was engaged in decorating rooms which had not yet been decorated.

Besides these three styles, we found a number of very simple decorations in red on a white or yellow background (fig. 7). These decorations were applied to rooms which had not yet been decorated by one of the three workshops or they served to redecorate new smaller rooms which were created by a subdivision of existing larger rooms. They belong to a post-Neronian phase when parts of the pavilion were perhaps used to house workmen who were employed in activities of the Flavian emperors, such as the removal of the marble revetments and building of the amphitheatre.

When we turn to Pompeii for parallels for these styles it appears that all three styles may be found there in more or less the same way. Furthermore, it may be observed that the greater part of the Fourth Style decorations in Pompeii show the Architectural style of workshop A and that it may even



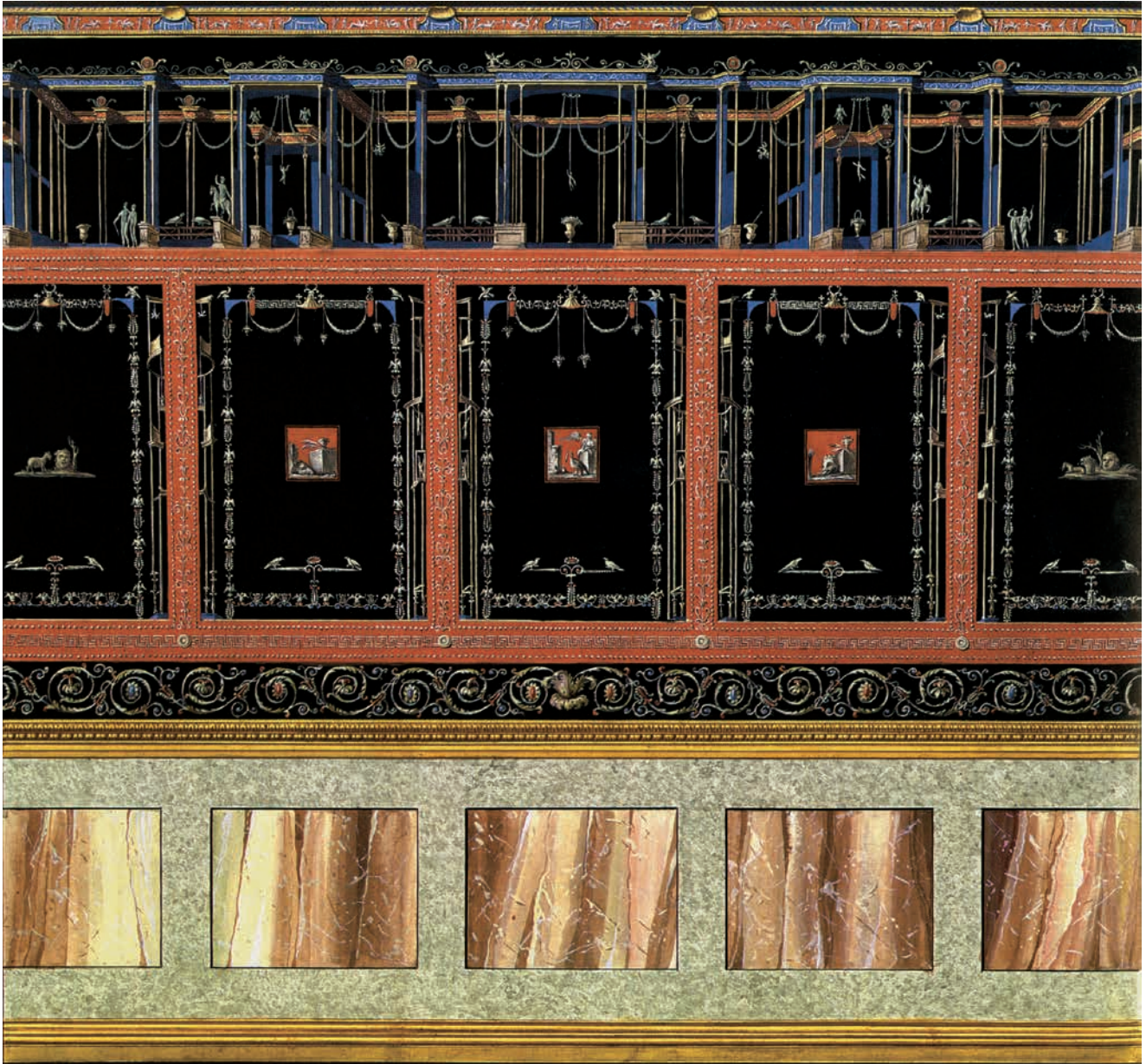


Figure 5 Room 32, wall painting by workshop C (after Mirri 1776, contemporary hand-coloured copy in the Louvre.

have appeared there before AD 62. The Polychrome style of workshop B is rare in Pompeii, probably because of the high costs mentioned by Vitruvius. The Miniaturistic style with plain backgrounds of workshop C also appears quite rarely in Pompeii while more examples may be found in Herculaneum, especially in the Flavian period. So it seems that a certain degree of development within the Fourth Style can be

distinguished. The Architectural style of workshop A was the earlier and more common version of the Fourth Style, the Polychrome style of workshop B was a rare (and perhaps somewhat late) variation of it, the Miniaturistic style of workshop C with plain backgrounds seems to reflect a somewhat later return to the closed decorations of the Third Style. Nevertheless, this relative development does not allow

an absolute chronology because all three styles may be found alongside each other in the Domus Aurea pavilion. The fact that different styles could appear alongside each other leads to the conclusion that the character of the wall paintings in the pavilion was of no great importance to its owner, the emperor. Actually, as we shall see below, in the more important rooms of the pavilion the walls were decorated with marble revetments instead of wall paintings.

#### 4.2 *The vault decorations*

In the pavilion the decorations of more than 30 vaults have been preserved. This is more than in any other structure, or even site (except possibly Pompeii and Herculaneum) in the ancient world, and this makes the vault decorations of the pavilion the most important source of our knowledge of vault decorations in antiquity. Most of the vault decorations in the pavilion were executed in paint and stucco-relief in the important rooms and only in paint in the less important rooms. Workshop C did not use any stucco decoration. Only the vaults of the two splendid reception rooms 44 and 128 and the adjacent nymphaea 45 and 124 show traces of mosaic decorations. Because the vault decorations do not appear to be relevant for the study of the ideological aspects of the decorations of the Domus Aurea pavilion, we will give here only a brief introduction to the subject.

Already in the Greek world two main types existed for the decoration of ceilings and vaults, i.e. the coffer pattern and the canopy motive. In the Late Classical and Hellenistic periods these types could become richer in form and include figural elements but essentially they remained the same.

Only in the Augustan period do we find an increasing tendency to create freer and even fantastic decorative schemes, in which the existing motifs may be combined in very original ways. The pinnacle of this development is in the Fourth Style period and the vault decorations in the Domus Aurea pavilion is the best illustration of this. Splendid vault decorations, like the Volta Dorata (the Gilt Vault) (room 80, workshop B, fig. 6) and the Volta delle Civette ((the Vault with the Owls, room 29, workshop C), show fantastic compositions made up of concentric friezes and axial elements which may even suggest complicated vault constructions like cloister vaults and perhaps even cross vaults (which in fact seem to have been created in this period) instead of the simple barrel vaults which they decorate. To these complicated compositions may be added panels of various shapes and sizes with mythological or genre scenes, and all this executed in a wealth of colours and in some cases even gilt. These were the highlights of ancient vault decoration. These vault decorations in particular greatly impressed the artists of the Renaissance, and their influence may be noticed in the Vatican and other Renaissance palaces and villas. After the Fourth Style period,

when Ostia is our main source for Roman ceiling and vault decorations, the genre seems in general to have lost its impetus and becomes more traditional again, like wall painting.

We have seen that the wall paintings in the Domus Aurea were quite traditional and did not differ essentially from those in Pompeii and Herculaneum. This was probably due to the fact that for the walls of the more important rooms marble revetment was preferred to wall painting as we shall see below. The vault decorations in the pavilion show the stylistic characteristics of each workshop and therefore must have been made by the same artists who made the wall decorations. Several examples of the vault decorations, however, do show a striking richness and originality. These vault decorations can be found in the rooms where marble revetments played an important part. The splendor of the marble wall decorations seems to culminate in the richness of the vault decoration (fig. 6). So it appears that, when the situation asked for it, the painters really were capable of creating highly original decorations. These were presumably designed by the masters of the different workshops, while the assistants executed the more simple wall paintings.

#### 4.3 *The marble decorations*

While we were making an inventory of the remains of the painted decorations in the pavilion, it became clear that another aspect originally had played an important role in the decoration of the rooms, viz. the marble revetments. This aspect had been largely overlooked until then, because the costly marble revetments had been removed after Nero's death to be reused elsewhere. Nevertheless, the imprints of the marble slabs left in the mortar which covered the walls allow for the reconstruction of the original decorations (figs. 5 and 6).

In more than 65 of the 140 rooms traces of marble revetment could be found. We could distinguish three types of marble decorations. In the first type the entire walls, more or less 6 metres high, were decorated with marble slabs (fig. 6). This type was found in 10 rooms (fig. 8). In the second type about two-thirds, 4-5 m, of the height of the walls was covered with marble slabs. This type was found in more than 30 rooms (fig. 8). In both types the composition of the marble decoration consisted of a socle-zone, 2-3 m high, in which the marble slabs were placed horizontally, and a main zone with larger slabs placed vertically (fig. 6). Above the latter could be placed a second row of small vertical slabs or, more frequently, one or more marble friezes. In the third type the marble decoration remained restricted to the socle-zone with horizontal slabs (fig. 5). This type was found in c. 15 rooms (fig. 8). In all rooms with such marble revetments the floors were decorated in marble *opus sectile*. Some imprints of intricate geometric or



Figure 6 Room 80, the Volta Dorata, vault decoration by workshop B and imprints of marble slabs on the wall (photo S. Mols, Radboud University).

floral patterns survive. Thus in more than 40 of the 140 rooms in the pavilion, marble wall decorations were the most important aspect of the room's decorations and in *c.* 25 other rooms there were marble socle decorations.

In the remaining *c.* 75 rooms were no traces of marble decorations. If these rooms were decorated at all, the walls were decorated entirely in paint. The floors of these rooms

were decorated with simple black and white mosaics. Although in the last type marble wall decoration did not play a part, we included it as a fourth type of wall decoration forming together four decorative types. Now it is interesting to study the distribution of these four types of decorations throughout the pavilion and to compare this with the zones where the three painters' workshops were active (figs. 7 and 8).

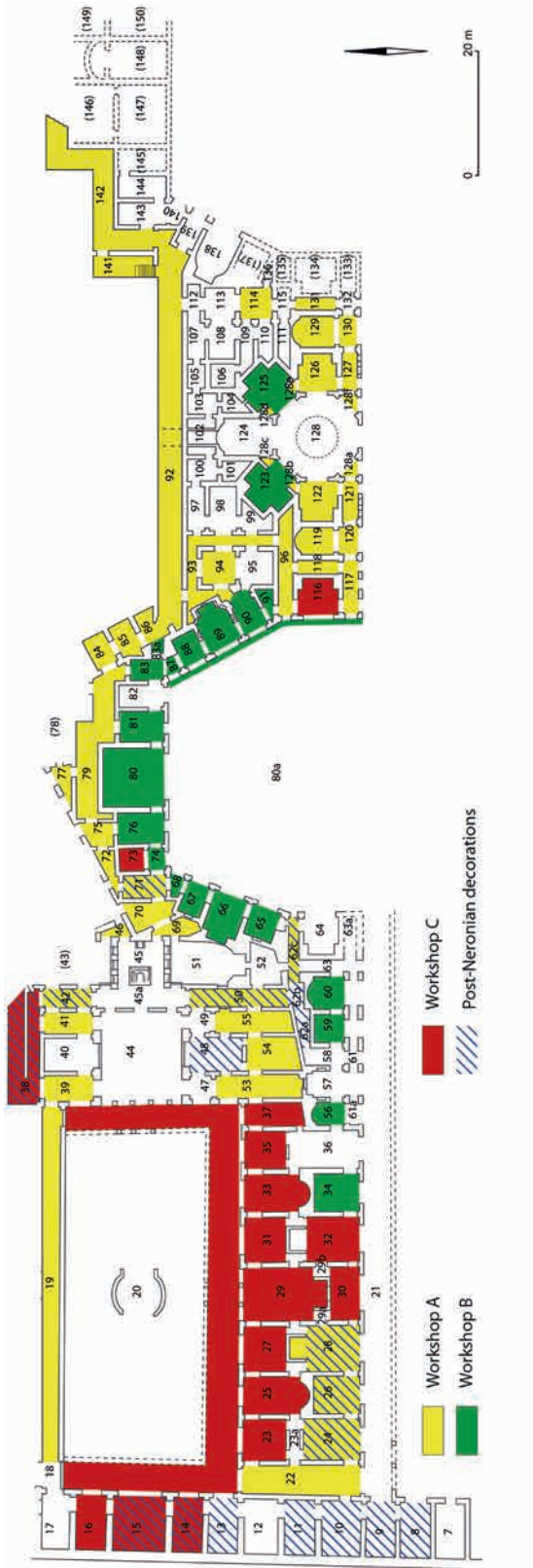


Figure 7 Plan with indication of the decorations by the various workshops (design by the authors, execution J. Porck, Leiden University).

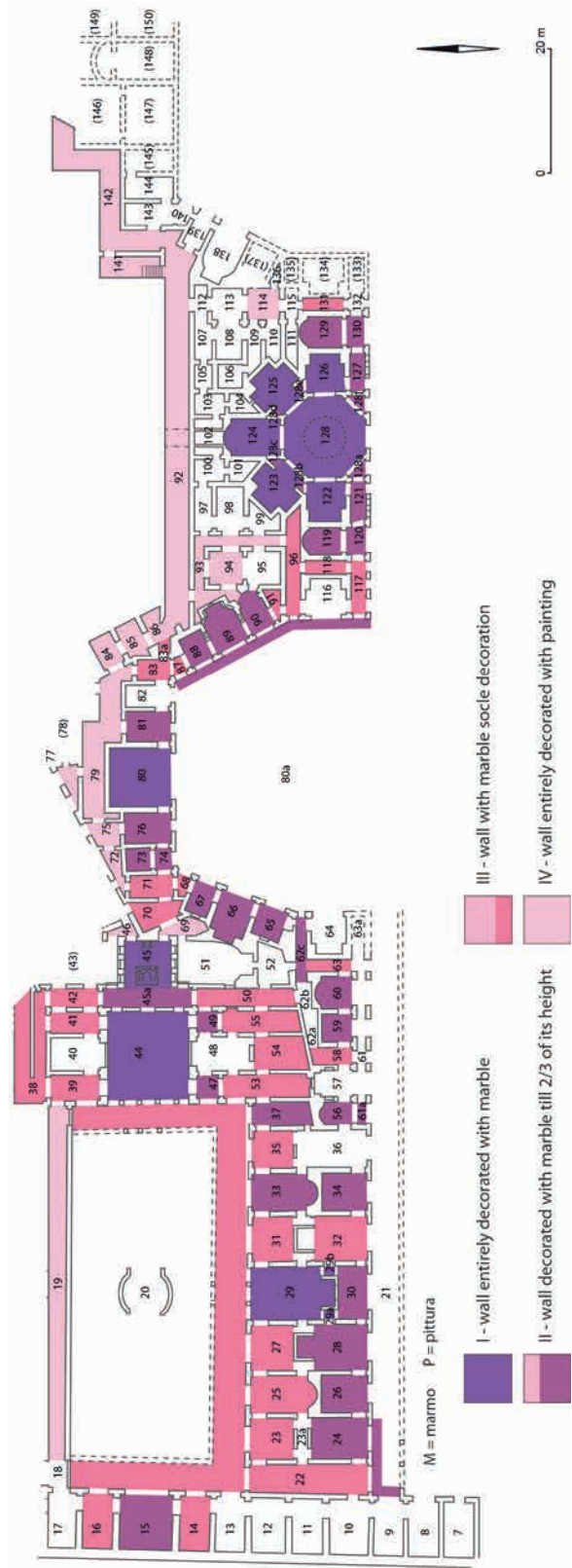


Figure 8 Plan with the indication of the four decorative classes (design by the authors, execution J. Porck, Leiden University).

The rooms decorated with the first type, *i.e.* walls decorated entirely with marble, were the largest rooms in the pavilion and were always positioned in the centre of a certain part or wing. Such rooms were flanked by smaller rooms decorated with the second type, walls decorated with marble until circa two-thirds of the height of the walls. These rooms were surrounded by rooms or corridors of the third type with marble socles. The fourth type with painted walls appears only in the back parts of the pavilion.

From the distribution of the marble decorations and a comparison with the working areas of the painters's workshops, it appears that there was no relationship at all between the marble and the painted decorations. Therefore the marble decorations cannot have been a kind of decoration favoured by one of the painter's workshops. Apparently the extent of marble decoration is linked to the position and the size of the rooms, and indicated the function and the status of the rooms. The rooms of the first type obviously were the most important reception and dining rooms, meant to be used by the emperor and his most important guests (rooms 29, 44, 80 (fig. 6) and 128 with the adjacent rooms). The rooms of the second type were less important reception rooms or ante-chambers for guests with a slightly lower status (e.g. rooms 67 and 81, 119 and 129). The rooms of the third type apparently served as rooms connecting the rooms of the first and second degree of importance with simple dark rooms of the fourth type, which served for the passing of the servants or only served to connect the splendid rooms in the façade with the hillside (e.g. resp. rooms 20a, 32 (fig. 5) 50, 55, 118, 131 and 19, 79, 84-86, 92, 114 (fig. 3), 142). For these reasons we have called the four decorative types the four decorative classes.

With regard to the decoration process, it has become clear that for practical reasons the vault decorations were applied first. Then followed the painted decoration of the walls from the upper to the lower part, except for the socle-zone. Next the floor decoration was applied and finally the socle was decorated, and in the case of classes I and II the higher marble revetments. So the height of the marble decoration of the walls must have been known before the application of the painted decoration by each workshop in its own style. This implies that the distribution of the four classes had been established and indicated beforehand. This conclusion stresses the importance which must have been attached to the marble decorations as indication of the functions and status of the rooms.

#### 4.4 *The meaning of the marble decorations*

The conclusion that a marble decoration was valued higher than a painted decoration was quite disappointing for the amateurs of Roman wall painting. The question arises therefore why the marble decoration was preferred by the

emperor and his entourage. It is possible that because of his boastful character Nero valued marble decoration higher since it was much more expensive than a painted decoration. A very rough estimate of the amount of marble used originally in the pavilion comes to a surface area of one hectare, and a considerable part of it must have been imported from all over the Mediterranean. Another reason may have been that a marble background was considered to be a better background than a painted wall for the exhibition of real pictures and sculptures in the important reception rooms. A third explanation, while none excludes the others, may be found in a passage in Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* where he discusses the history of the use of marble interior decoration (*NH* 36.48). Pliny tells us that the first person to introduce the "unworthy" habit of marble interior decoration in Rome was Mamurra. He was an agent of Julius Caesar and was notorious for the large fortune that he had gained through corruption. From this remark we learn that marble interior decoration was introduced in Rome already more than one century before the time of Nero, and that Pliny considered it an unworthy (*indignus*) habit. Furthermore, Pliny states that marble wall decoration was used for the first time in history in the palace of Mausolus at Halicarnassus around the middle of the fourth century BC (*NH* 36.47). Lucanus, first Nero's courtier and later his opponent, describes in his *Pharsalia* (10.114-116) how the royal palace in Alexandria, where Cleopatra – in Roman eyes the symbol of eastern decadence – received Julius Caesar, radiated with precious stones and marbles. From these stories it becomes clear why Pliny considered marble interior decoration unworthy: such presumptuous luxury was associated with the detested sovereigns of the Hellenistic world. By surrounding himself with marble wall decorations Nero presented himself to the Roman people as such a divine monarch, it was an act of imperial self presentation. Naturally this was considered unworthy, if not disgraceful, by men of senatorial rank who feigned to hold up old republican virtues like austerity

When we look for marble interior decorations in the Campanian towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum, we find some examples of marble socles and several examples of painted imitations. There is only one example of a marble decoration of class II, *viz.* in a discretely positioned dining room in the Casa degli Dioscuri at Pompeii. So Nero's example apparently was not considered proper for the more common people.

#### 5 CONCLUSION

We have seen that Nero's Domus Aurea complex was meant to be a fitting residence for the absolute ruler of the Roman Empire. In this complex, the pavilion served for the *otium* of the emperor. Nevertheless, also here Nero's pretensions were expressed by the marble wall decorations. It can be

concluded that there was more ideology behind Nero's pretensions and project than mere megalomania. Anyway, it was as yet not acceptable for the Roman people. In AD 68 the legions revolted and, at the age of 31, Nero committed suicide. His successors stopped the Domus Aurea project and largely destroyed it. It must be observed, however, that only some fifteen years after Nero's death, Domitian definitely established the absolute monarchy. He introduced among other things the "proskynesis" (kneeling before the emperor) and the imperial titles "dominus et deus" (lord and god), and the walls of the main rooms of his imperial palace on the Palatine were entirely covered with marble. Domitian's introduction of the absolute monarchy in the eastern mediterranean style, did no longer meet with open resistance. It was this form of absolute monarchy which was to last until the end of the Western and the Eastern Roman Empires. It was taken over by the Papal court and the European monarchies and, essentially, it survived in several countries until in the 20th century.

So in his attempt to establish an openly absolute monarchy, after the disguised monarchy of the Augustan principate, Nero was in a certain way ahead of his time, but he lacked the mental stability and the political abilities necessary for the implementation of such a creation.

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