

Sharing the Wealth: Common Motifs in Third Style Wall Painting, Jewelry, and Metalware
Elizabeth A. Wueste (University of California, Berkeley)

In contrast to August Mau's well established "four styles" of Pompeiian wall painting, whereby wall paintings are assigned a direct place within a chronological evolution, I propose that Roman wall painting should be studied on the basis of its content, not style. The third style, with its fanciful whimsy, vegetal scrolls, spirals, tiny medallions, and attenuated miniaturist scale, appears markedly out of place in Mau's chronology as it seems to have no evolutionary predecessor, as Vitruvius so famously points out. I propose that much of the attenuated whimsy and delicacy of the third style are traceable motifs within ancient jewelry and metalwork, both of which enjoy longer histories than that of Roman interior wall painting. Features which are specifically associated with the third style, and cited as examples of its peculiarity, are traceable in jewelry. Thin acroterial spirals bear an uncanny resemblance to gold filigree work in diadems and earrings. Tiny portraits suspended in the middle of a wall look like cameo portraits on medallions, coins, and signet rings. Miniature friezes with curiously simple, single ground compositions find a similar scale and compositional correlate in jewelry. Pendants and disc-shaped jewels dangling from columns parallel dangling shapes in earrings and necklaces. And finally, vivid colors like blues and greens which dot the walls and columns of third style paintings recall inset jewels and inlaid stones from the jewelry tradition. Beyond jewelry, contemporary Roman metalwork also preserves similar motifs of Roman wall painting, including thin columns and urn shapes found on metal handles and utensils. Thus, while third style wall painting does not seem to conform to any type of evolutionary, chronological narrative as Mau envisioned, it did not develop its decorative schemes in a vacuum, and by looking at the subject matter instead of an evolution of style, we find jewelry and metalwork to have common motifs with wall painting. It is therefore of more use to view Roman wall painting in terms of *what* is depicted, as opposed to *how* and *when*, as August Mau suggests, as it reveals that Roman wall painting reflects a body of content common to other mediums of Roman art.