Marble Wall Revetment in Central Italy during the First Century A.D.: Aesthetics and Decorative Effects

Abstract: Marble was a characteristic part of the decoration of Roman public and private buildings. It was used in imperial residences in Rome as well as in private houses and villas. From the Late Republican period onwards in central Italy, as the taste for coloured marble in interior decoration grew, elite patrons began to exploit marble for wall revetment. By the end of the mid-1st century A.D., literary and archaeological evidence indicate that marble revetment had replaced wall painting as the most prestigious form of elite wall decoration. To examine this change, the paper focuses on two aspects of marble – its aesthetic dimensions and the specific decorative qualities it offered. To this end, the first part of the paper examines the ancient perception of marble as a material and the technical requirements for its use as revetment. In the second part, it examines revetment schemes in the Vesuvian area, initially by looking at the sizes of slabs, the marble types and their organisation within schemes, and then by looking precisely at the decorative effects of wall revetment in specific settings and in relation to other decorative features to understand how revetment helped create different room atmospheres.

Introduction

Pauper sibi videtur ac sordidus, nisi parietes magnis et pretiosis orbibus refugerunt, nisi Alexandrina marmora Numidicis crustis distincta sunt, nisi illis undique operosa et in picturae modum variata circumlitio praetexitur.1

As the above quote from Seneca makes clear, marble wall revetment (incrustationes)2 was able to equal wall painting in both colour and pattern. While it was first attested in Rome during the mid-1st century B.C., at this point its use was very limited and exceptional in domestic contexts, even those of elite residences.3 By the mid- to late 1st century A.D. in central Italy, its diffusion had grown markedly, with revetment now deployed in imperial palaces, and private villas and town houses alike; however, it was still limited and reserved for specific uses and for clients of the highest level. Through the period under consideration here, then, marble revetment was one of many choices for wall decoration consciously made by house and villa owners. Other decorative options included plaster (smoothed or moulded, and painted), paintings ranging from single colour compositions

1 Sen. Ep. 86, 6: “One seems poor and mean if one’s walls are not resplendent with large and costly mirrors, unless Alexandrine marbles [Egyptian granites such as porphyry] are not set off by panels of marmor numidicum, if their borders are not faced over on all sides with difficult patterns, arranged in many colours like paintings”.
2 See Becatti 1969, 123–128, for discussion of and references to ancient terminology related to wall revetment, e.g., incrustationes (wall revetment) and crustae (single slabs of veneer).
3 Caesar’s praefectus fabrum and likely agent in the initial development of the Luna quarries, Mamurra, seems to have been the first (c. 69–45 B.C.) to possess domestic marble wall revetment: Plin. HN 36, 7. 48–50; Fant 1988, 149 n. 11.
4 For a general discussion of marble wall decoration, see Deubner 1939; EAA 4 (1961) 130–134 s. v. crustae; Becatti 1961; Dohrn 1965; Guidobaldi 1989; Bruto – Vannicola 1990; Guidobaldi – Angelelli 2005; Barker 2015; Guidobaldi – Guiglia 2016. See also the contribution by Beck, this volume, for marble use in public structures.
5 Private use of wall revetment must have always run counter to the regularity of its inclusion in public architecture, which is hinted at in a letter by Pliny the Younger (c. A.D. 108–109) to the architect Mustius. In writing about the reconstruction of the Temple of Ceres on his property, Pliny (Ep. 9, 39) states: Videor ergo munifice simul religiosoque facturas, si aedem quam pulcherrimam exstruero, addidero […] marmora quibus solum, quibus parietes excolantur (‘I consider that it will be an act of piety and munificence, when rebuilding this temple on the noblest scale, if I add to it […] a quantity of marble for laying the floor and encrusting the walls’).
to elaborate figural or architectural scenes, or mosaic facing. Moreover, surviving examples show that approaches for revetment could vary widely: schemes could cover whole or parts of walls with one or more marble types and with varying designs and compositions. As with other decorative options, the choice of material and design changed according to the relative status and function of the building or room as well as the cost and availability of materials and the skill of the workforce. In addition, these choices must also have been based on the material and aesthetic characteristics of different marble varieties and the atmospheric qualities that they brought to a room’s decoration, as well as the perception of the marble itself. This paper, therefore, focuses on these aspects to identify what made marble wall revetment the elite form of decoration in central Italy by the mid-1st century A.D.

First and foremost, we must ask a basic question: why put marble on walls? Marble revetment was imitated in paint long before real marble found its way onto the walls of public buildings and private houses in Roman Italy. The progression from imitation to real marble revetment must at least in part relate to the importance of marble as a ‘material’, but what were the advantages of marble compared to ‘imitated’ marble in wall paintings? Here, the connotations of luxury (wealth, status and the exotic origins of these materials) that embodied the ‘real’ material stand out. Moreover, marble created different aesthetic and synaesthetic effects: marble is cooler, for instance, than plastered walls. In addition, the decorative impact and the physical, workable qualities of marble (hardness and ability to take a polish) were the defining features of the ancient term marmor, which is translated here (and elsewhere) as marble.

To fully understand the perception and materiality of marble wall revetment we also need to be aware of its development during this period and its social context. The extent to which wall revetment was used (or could be afforded), for example, would have added to its perception as prestigious by ancient viewers. This is evident from its limited distribution amongst the villas and town houses in the Vesuvian area (discussed below). In private contexts, marble was first used for thresholds, then floors and only later for walls. On the one hand, this must relate to technical and economic developments (for example, the growing capacity of the marble trade to supply the materials necessary), but on the other hand aesthetics must also have been at play (for example, the visual impact of revetted as opposed to painted walls). Here we also need to consider the technical difficulties of preparing and installing wall revetment and how these related to its perception as a decorative form.

In considering the aesthetic and phenomenological dimensions of wall revetment, the present article considers a number of elements: the specific surface quality (brilliance, shine, softness) and

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6 See Bruto – Vannicola 1990, 335 f. 342–375, for some of the different schemes employed.
7 While Vitruvius’ comments about painted imitation marble revetment during the First Style (c. 200–80 B.C.) explicitly imply that real marble revetment existed, no real examples have been identified from this period. See Vitr. De arch. 7, 5, 1, with commentary by Tybout (1989, 61 f. 78 f.). In contrast, painted imitation stones have been found. See Cavari – Donati 2015; Cavari et al. 2015, for the use of painted imitation marble in both public and private structures in Etruria from the late 2nd and early 1st centuries B.C. The authors suggest that travelling painters trained in reproducing real eastern marbles, such as alabasters found in Hellenistic palaces and tombs. For imitation marbles in Alexandrian tombs of the Hellenistic period, see Adriani 1966, Figs. 194. 288. 382 f. 385 f. It should be noted that even after the introduction of real marble, painted imitation remained a popular form of decoration: see Eristov 1979 and Barker – Taelman, forthcoming, for a more recent discussion.
8 See also the contribution by Anguisola, this volume, for a discussion of luxury, its critique and the author Pliny the Elder.
9 The term ‘marble’ is used throughout for any hard-stone capable of taking a polish, and I have opted to use the ancient names for marbles where known rather than the 19th-century names created by the Italian scalpellini: see Russell 2013, XX f. 10 f. (glossary). However, where ancient names are not known I have used the latter. Details of all the stones mentioned in this paper can been found in Oxford, University Museum of Natural History, Corsi Collection of Decorative stones, published online by Monica Price and Lisa Cooke: <www.oum.ox.ac.uk/corsi> (02.10.2020) and in Siena, Museo di Storia Naturale dell’Accademia dei Fisiocritici, Collezione di Marmi e Alabastri di Roma e sue adiacenze, catalogued by Lorenzo Lazzarini, and now published online: <http://www.musnaf.unisi.it/marmi.asp> (02.10.2020).
treatment (polishing), along with the ways in which marble revetment was staged and applied in specific contexts\(^\text{10}\). From the outset, it should be noted that the limited number of ‘complete’ contexts has necessitated a focus on the Vesuvian area. Even here, however, survival remains an issue and as such this article is built around a small number of well-preserved examples from which it is possible to reconstruct not only the revetment scheme and the arrangement of the marbles used but also a significant portion of the room’s overall decorative scheme. These examples are approached first by considering revetment schemes in broader terms – the sizes of slabs, the marble types and their organisation within schemes – and second via an in-depth look at the precise effects of wall revetment in six rooms distributed in two town houses at Herculaneum and Villa A at Oplontis. Here, each scheme is considered in its individual, specific setting and in relation to other decorative features of the room in order to better understand why marble revetment was chosen and how it functioned in its decorative environment.

**Marble and its Semantic Associations**

In addition to the aesthetic qualities of marble wall revetment that will be discussed more fully below, marble carried cultural meanings\(^\text{11}\). Polychrome marbles were easily identifiable by eye, and during the Roman period the prospecting of new quarries seems to have targeted polychrome marbles on an enormous scale in order to satisfy the growing tastes of elite patrons\(^\text{12}\). Seneca the Younger (c. A.D. 45), for example, decried that Roman eyes could *non ferunt nisi varium ac recenti cura nitens marmor*\(^\text{13}\).

For ancient viewers, polychrome marbles also represented the resources (of both the Romans in general and the house owner in particular) that were required for its extraction and transport\(^\text{14}\). The ancient names given to marble types were often directly associated with their geographic source, for example, Numidian (*marmor numidicum*), Phrygian (*marmor phrygium*) and Karystian (*marmor carystium*)\(^\text{15}\). Furthermore, there was a clear association between the marbles, their origin and the idea of Roman conquest/empire – a kind of ‘material map’ of Rome’s expanse\(^\text{16}\). Ancient literature leaves little doubt that homeowners could recognise the specific marbles they saw or read about – Statius’ late 1st-century A.D. descriptions of Pollius Felix’s villa near Sorrento and the Baths of Claudius Etruscus in Rome highlight this\(^\text{17}\). Statius exploited both the chromatic and ethnographic qualities of different marble types, such as the description of *marmor carystium* as ‘wave-lashed’ (*undosa Carystos*) in reference to both the marble’s source and its visual similarity to waves\(^\text{18}\).

This knowledge was clearly so well known by the elite of Rome that Pliny the Elder (A.D. 70s) simply said, *Marmorum genera et colores non attinet dicere in tanta notitia nec facile est enumerare*

\(^{10}\) For a discussion of the relationship between decorative principles and perception, see Haug 2020, 16 f. 37 f. 45–49.

\(^{11}\) See the contribution by Haug –Hielscher, this volume, for a discussion of the relationship between semantic, aesthetic and functional aspects of material culture.

\(^{12}\) Russell 2013, 8–36.

\(^{13}\) Sen. Dial. 3, 35, 5: ‘only endure to see the most variegated marble’.

\(^{14}\) For studies on ancient perception of marble and the ability of viewers to identify different varieties, see Bedon 1984, 28 f.; Russell 2013, 15 f. For ancient references to the qualities and origins of stone types, see Vitr. De arch. 2, 7; Mart. 1, 88; Juw. 16, 307; Stat. Silv. 1, 2, 148 f.; Lucian. Hipp. 5 f.; Sid. Apoll. Epist. 2, 2, 7.

\(^{15}\) Schneider 1986, 139–160; Vell. Pat. 2, 33, 4. Some were also named for the person who first displayed the stone (e.g., L. Licinius Lucullus [consul in 74 B.C.], *marmor Luculleanum*) or who was responsible for its discovery (e.g., *marmor Claudianum*). See Plin. HN 36, 49.

\(^{16}\) Story et al. 2005, 163. See, for example, Isserlin 1998; Paton – Schneider 1999; Peacock – Williams 1999, for a discussion of marble as embodiment of empire and control over nature. See also Beck, this volume.

\(^{17}\) Stat. Silv. 1, 5, 11–13. 34–43 (Baths of Claudius Etruscus); 2, 2, 82–94 (Villa of Pollius Felix).

\(^{18}\) On this point, see Bradley 2006.
in tanta multitudine\textsuperscript{19}. Similarly, Pliny referred to ‘our favourite marbles’: ‘our’ presumably meaning wealthy and educated Romans from elite families\textsuperscript{20}. Ancient sources leave little doubt that among such groups the ‘identification, discrimination and discussion of marble surfaces was [...] the subject of a highly refined and sophisticated intellectual discourse\textsuperscript{21}. The use and display of coloured marbles in spaces for entertaining and dining, then, offered a rich opportunity to demonstrate authority, knowledge and the owner’s wealth and status, as well as the chance to participate in erudite debate on aesthetics and culture\textsuperscript{22}.

It should be stressed that this meaning attached to imported polychrome marble related to central Italy. Cicero, for example, famously condemned the walls of Chios (the source for several coloured marbles, including the much valued marmor chium), which had been constructed in local polychrome marble: magis mirarer, si Tiburtino lapide fecissetis\textsuperscript{23}. Here, we can see the explicit link between marble, the technical requirements for its acquisition and use, the distance of its source and its prestige. While some authors criticised marble use because of its association with luxury or because of its destruction of nature\textsuperscript{24}, the archaeological evidence demonstrates that the positives clearly outweighed the negatives. Clearly, the status and atmospheric qualities displayed by marble revetment compensated for any ethical ambiguity.

**Technical and Practical Considerations**

In the mid- to late 1\textsuperscript{st} century A.D. in central Italy, almost all marble had to be imported from the Aegean, Asia Minor, North Africa or Egypt\textsuperscript{25}. The labour and technical achievement represented by the extraction, movement and handling – shaping with chisels and saws and surface finishing with abrasives by specialist workers – was ‘stored’ in the marble itself\textsuperscript{26}. Moreover, completed products like revetment also provided a visual expression of technical virtuosity\textsuperscript{27}. This embodiment of technical ability and labour input added to the semantic associations of marble discussed above, to further imbue marble with qualities that made it impressive to Roman viewers. This can clearly be seen in ancient texts, where authors explicitly link marble’s prestige with the technical requirements for its exploitation and use. Strabo, for example, calls attention to this in his discussion of the quarries for marmor phrygium at ancient Dokimeion. He records that ὥστε καίπερ πολλῆς οὔσης τῆς ἐπὶ θάλατταν ἀγωγῆς τῶν τηλικούτων φορτίων ὅμως καὶ κίονες καὶ πλάκες εἰς Ῥώμην κομίζονται θαυμασταὶ κατὰ τὸ μέγεθος καὶ κάλλος\textsuperscript{28}. Strabo would have been familiar (as perhaps would his...

\textsuperscript{19} Plin. HN 36, 55: ‘It is not important to state the types and colours of marbles so well known; nor is it easy to list such a multitude’.

\textsuperscript{20} Plin. HN 36, 46.

\textsuperscript{21} Bradley 2006.

\textsuperscript{22} Haug 2020, 32f.

\textsuperscript{23} Plin. HN 36, 46: ‘I should be much more amazed if you had made them of stone from Tibur (Italy)’. See Russell 2013, 14, for polychrome marble decoration in the east as imitation of imperial decor.

\textsuperscript{24} See, for example, Plin. HN 36, 1F. 24. 123–125; Schneider 1986, 137f. 150f.; 2001, 6; Beagon 1992, 41f. On the criticism of Nero’s marble decoration in the Domus Transitoria as embodiment of his kingly ambitions, see Fusco 2010, 84; Meyboom – Moormann 2013, 28. 74f.

\textsuperscript{25} See Maischberger 1997; Lazzarini 2002; Pensabene 2002; Russell 2013.

\textsuperscript{26} See the contribution by Wagner, this volume, for a similar idea of ‘stored labour’ related to polish and gloss.

\textsuperscript{27} Pliny the Elder, for instance, praised artists capable of overcoming the difficulties of carving statues from a single block of stone (that is compositions ex uno lapide or ex eodem lapide): see Plin. HN 36, 7. 34. 41. 66. While the production and installation of panels of marble veneer is of a more modest artistic output, in the context of a domestic setting, it nonetheless represented (and displayed) a degree of technical accomplishment. In another section of the Naturalis historia, Pliny praised the ingenuity of the art of cutting marble – sawing being the method by which veneer slabs were produced: see Plin. HN 36, 9.

\textsuperscript{28} Str. 12, 8, 14: ‘Although the transportation of such heavy burdens to the sea is difficult, still, both pillars and slabs, remarkable for their size and beauty, are conveyed to Rome’. 

readers) with the considerable effort and expense needed to move this marble from its quarry at Dokimeion overland before it was loaded onto boats for river transport and then transferred from Ephesos or Nikomedia to ships bound for Italy29. This represents just one of the long and arduous journeys that were required to transport different marble varieties to Italy. The larger sizes of the blocks needed to create wall revetment schemes would have been a visual testament to the labour and ingenuity required to transport the marble across the Mediterranean.

Different decorative wall surfaces required different materials, techniques and specialist skills, with more luxurious materials and elaborate patterns requiring more skilled labour and, thus, incurring higher costs. Simon Corcoran and Janet DeLaine, for example, have convincingly demonstrated the higher cost of marble wall revetment in comparison to painted decoration30. This relates primarily to the factors noted above, namely the cost of transport and the production of slabs for veneer (including, for example, their sawing31 and polishing32). These labour-intensive processes were required for slabs used on both floors and walls. However, the latter added the further technical difficulty of working on a vertical rather than horizontal surface, which would have necessitated both additional time and costs33. In contrast to floors, marble wall revetment required the use of a fixing system with slabs installed from the bottom upwards34. Revetment slabs (crustae) had to be securely bonded to a vertical surface by means of a layer of mortar35 – something that was much more difficult than the construction of floors36. The principal difference was the use of clamps embedded in the wall at regular distances to hold the revetment panels in position while the mortar set37. These added technical difficulties involved in preparing and installing wall revetment – which would have been recognised and understood by most ancient viewers – directly impacted how wall revetment was perceived as a decorative element.

One of the abovementioned visual characteristics of marble that made it stand out as a material was its ability to take a polish – various limestones, marbles, granites and porphyries were included in the term ‘marble’ (rather than the generic *lapis* /’stone’), which came from the Greek μαρμαίρον (‘to shine’)38. The effect of the technical processes involved in polishing would have been immediately visible to viewers from the shine or gleam of the marble wall surface. This is particularly true

29 Barresi 2003, 103; Christol – Drew-Bear 2005, 199 n. 35; Burrell 2012.
30 Wall painting (9 denarii/ft²), revetment in white marble (45 denarii/ft²) and *marmor numidicum* (206 denarii/ft²); Corcoran and DeLaine (1994) used Diocletian’s Edict of Maximum Prices based on marble prices in square feet to estimate the cost of materials and preparation.
31 Bruto – Vannicola 1990a, 288. 315–323. The labour needed for sawing depended on the hardness of the stone, with compact limestones and marble, for example, requiring 20–40 hours per m². Ricci (1877, 114) and Salmojraghi (1892, 289) provide labour times for sawing different marbles and granites.
32 See Bruto – Vannicola 1990a, 313f. on the types of abrasives, techniques and processes involved in polishing marble. The time needed to polish stones depended on hardness, structure and inclusions, as well as the shape of the surface, with marble requiring c. 16–33 hours per m² and granites and porphyry requiring c. 100–200 hours per m².
33 For example, polishing after installation (due to the difficulty of working on a vertical surface) and additional elements like cornices that needed specialised work: see Bruto – Vannicola 1990, 327f. Fig. 3.
35 Guidobaldi – Angelelli 2005, 34f.
36 Pre-fabricated panels became more common for floors from the Flavian period onwards: see Cozza 1974/1975, 96–98; Guidobaldi – Guidobaldi 1983, 176–181; Guidobaldi 1985, 22f.; Guidobaldi et al. 1994, 49–51 Fig. 3.
37 Ball (2002, 558) noted that the clamps were not to support the panel’s weight against gravity but to resist the revetment panels being pushed into the wall or pulled out from it while they were being installed. On the different scenarios for applying the mortar, see Bruto – Vannicola 1990, 332; Ball 2002, 560–562; Guidobaldi – Angelelli 2005, 35f.
as different levels of polish could have been achieved (from velvety matte to extremely high gloss) through the use of different abrasive stones and/or powders.39

Moreover, it is possible that different levels of surface finish could have been combined in the same scheme with both matte and high-gloss finishes applied to different marble types or elements; however, the exact level of polishing and surface finish is not easy to reconstruct in the majority of cases. Unfortunately, when marble is exposed to the elements, it loses its smooth polished surface. The surviving panels from the Vesuvian area, however, suggest that a range of finishes from matte to gloss were present. The panels of breccia corallina at Villa A at Oplontis, for example, have a softer appearance, suggesting that they were given a matte finish, while the panels in oecus (21) of the Casa del Rilievo di Telefo (Ins. Or. I.2) at Herculaneum appear to have had more polish, bringing out the rich purple in the breccia di Settebasi and the yellows and reds of the marmor numidicum. In both cases, the level of surface finish shows a certain attention to the aesthetic atmosphere of the room in which they had been installed (see below).

A final point worth stressing here is the large size of panels that were often used for wall revetment and the technical implications that this demanded. At a very basic level, large panels represented a challenge in terms of supplying the necessary size of marble blocks. In general, the main aim when transporting marble was to keep the total cubic mass of the block required to a minimum; however, while the overall total square metres of material used in pavements and wall revetment might have been similar, the size of individual marble slabs needed for wall revetment was much larger. An examination of surviving revetment schemes from the Bay of Naples demonstrates that large central panels were a consistent feature of marble wall decoration, with individual panels often between 50 and 70 cm high and 75 to 150 cm wide (Tab. 1). Some of the most striking examples include the large central panels of triclinium (18) in the Casa del Rilievo di Telefo, whose largest panels measured c. 125 × 170 cm (Fig. 1), the large panels of oecus (17) of the Casa dei Cervi (IV 21) at Herculaneum, whose largest panels measured c. 90 × 130 cm (Fig. 2), and the panels from oecus (48) of the Casa dei Dioscuri (VI 9,6) at Pompeii, whose largest panels were c. 100 × 120 cm. These panels, discussed further below, were generally offset by frames – on a basic level simply by thin bands set above the plinth and below the crown band, but in more complex schemes, by narrow panels on either two or four sides. In all three cases, the bands were executed in a different variety of marble in order to provide a chromatic contrast that highlighted the large central panels. The large revetment panels would not only have been a striking visual testament to the labour and ingenuity required to transport, saw and polish the marble but would also have presented a greater surface area of precious coloured marble than those used in other decorative schemes. Therefore, the use of contrasting colours to highlight these panels was a conscious decorative choice.

In addition, the ‘continuous’ view of marble provided by plinths or crowning bands in the same marble variety that stretched the length of a wall or around a room made more efficient use of a stone’s visual properties than smaller panels or floor decoration. Here, then, we can see the inherent value in the integrity of large panels. From both the craftsman’s and the client’s point of view, large panels (made without joining or patching) not only demonstrated the craftsman’s skill but also had aesthetic and semantic advantages for the house owner.

Within the Vesuvian area during this period, where difficulties or shortages in supplies must have been a constant reality, the ability to acquire large blocks would therefore have had significant logistical and economic implications. That the acquisition of marble blocks large enough for the most luxurious wall revetment could have been a challenge, even in high-status contexts, is evident from the surviving examples. At Villa A (Oplontis), for example, slabs had to be patched together to create ‘larger’ pieces in the revetment of rooms (64) and (65).41

39 The higher the gloss finish or shine desired, the more (and finer) the abrasives that were required. For a discussion of finish and polishing processes, see Wootton et al. 2013, 12f.; 2013a, 9.
41 Barker – Fant 2019.
‘patched slabs’ was still impressive and acceptable. Even in the 4th century A.D., the senator Symmachus described the marbles in his father’s house as *superiora conclavia crustis teguntur ea operas levitate, ut conpago solidum mentiatur*. Similarly, Choricius of Gaza (active c. A.D. 500) described the church of Saint Stephen in Gaza, comparing the marbles to paintings: ‘[…] bands of well-fitting marble cover the wall. They are so joined together as to appear to be a work of nature, and so variegated with their natural colours as to resemble altogether a hand-painted picture’.

We can see from this section that an important element within wall revetment was its visual display of the difficulties overcome to use it – its quarrying, transport, sawing, polishing and installation. Large panels in particular tapped into this technical virtuosity, while providing the opportunity to visually exploit the lively chromatic appearance and aesthetic effects of marble by presenting a greater surface area of coloured marble. Schemes such as that in *triclinium* (18) of the Casa del Rilievo di Telefo distinguished themselves in this respect from other schemes applied in other houses, as will be seen below.

### Marble Wall Revetment in the Vesuvian area

Revetted walls of marble, already found in Rome in the Late Republican period, emerged alongside an ever-increasing fascination with and demand for lithic decoration that ultimately far outstripped anything seen before in antiquity. In the context of the houses and villas of the Bay of Naples, wall revetment primarily belongs to the final phase of marble use prior to the A.D. 79 eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. This decorative trend therefore stands as one of the last developments in marble consumption at Pompeii, Herculaneum and in the villas of the Vesuvian area. Here, as in Rome, marble use had begun during the Late Republican period and was much expanded throughout the Augustan and later Julio-Claudian periods. We have no evidence to indicate that wall revetment
was used in the houses or villas of the Vesuvian area before the late Third Style. In fact, in all likelihood the majority of examples, both public and private, belong specifically to the late Fourth Style in the period following the A.D. 62 earthquake. With the exception of one example, all of the walls with marble revetment at Herculaneum are datable to this period. By this time, following Nero’s (A.D. 54–68) large-scale palace building campaign in Rome, marble wall revetment had supplanted wall painting as the most prestigious form of wall decoration. This can be seen particularly in Nero’s Domus Aurea, built after the great fire of A.D. 64. In the Oppian Pavilion alone, over 2,100 m² of marble wall revetment was used, only for the most prestigious rooms (Fig. 3). While this revetment was spoliated for reuse elsewhere sometime between the death of Nero in A.D. 68 and the pavilion’s demolition for the construction of the Baths of Trajan in A.D. 104, the scheme can be identified from the impressions of the marble slabs preserved in the mortar preparation layer. From this, it seems clear that the importance of rooms was reflected in their position within the pavilion and the quantity of marble applied to their walls.

During its principal period of use in the Vesuvian area, therefore, the diffusion (even if somewhat limited) of marble wall revetment can be connected to imperial tastes in Rome. At the very least, it is clear that Vesuvian marble workshops watched Rome carefully not only for decorative

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45 The first identifiable use of wall revetment was probably at the Villa Arianna (ancient Stabiae) in atrium (26) (c. mid-1st century A.D.): see Barker et al. 2013, 8.
47 Guidobaldi et al. 2014, 445f. 516f. Tab. XX.
48 See Pliny’s (HN 35, 1, 2f.) slightly later comments on marble ousting frescoes from walls.
49 Meyboom and Moormann (2013, 75f.) suggested that this was due to the idea that marble was more suitable to Nero’s imperial self-representation.
50 Barker 2012.
51 Meyboom – Moormann 2013, Fig. 73, 1.
52 Meyboom and Moormann (2013, 71f.) recognised three classes of rooms ranging from rooms with marble revetment up to the full height of the wall to rooms with only painted decoration.
schemes (evident in the adoption of sectilia motifs as well as wall revetment)\textsuperscript{53} but also in the stones employed (especially Egyptian granites, which first appeared in Rome in the palaces of Nero and Domitian\textsuperscript{54}). Evidently, owners were working to keep up with trends at the imperial court, where revetted walls belonged to the most prestigious form of wall decoration available for domestic contexts.

The luxurious nature of wall revetment is shown not only in its limited use but also by its association with the decorative schemes of prestigious sea view houses at both Pompeii and Herculaneum, and the large villa complexes\textsuperscript{55}. Often, wall revetment specifically decorated the rooms that commanded direct sea views or looked directly onto gardens, pools and sculpture\textsuperscript{56}. In total, wall revetment can be found in 14 domestic structures in the Vesuvian area: four in Herculaneum, seven in Pompeii and three in the villas at Oplontis and Stabiae. The revetment is generally applied only to the lower zone of a wall, with only two extant examples covering middle and upper zones with total heights over 3 m (Tab. 1). The exclusivity of revetment in private houses is evident when we consider that revetted walls account for only c. 150 m\textsuperscript{2} of wall decoration from the surviving houses at Pompeii: a small amount when considered against the c. 25,611 m\textsuperscript{2} of wall paintings that survive in the city.\textsuperscript{57} Even if we consider the surface area of wall revetment against contemporaneous Fourth Style painted decoration (c. 9,584 m\textsuperscript{2}), the limited application of wall revetment remains strikingly evident\textsuperscript{58}. Wall revetment was therefore limited in diffusion and chronology, and only employed for specific uses and clients of the highest level. The ‘marmorisation’ of town houses (striking in the post-A.D. 62 renovations of several houses at Herculaneum) and villas was therefore a fundamental development of the Early Julio-Claudian period and following decades, when owners evidently invested heavily in all manner of marble architectural and sculptural components – wall revetment being a central part of almost all of these ‘marmorised’ residences.

The surviving schemes of marble wall revetment show a certain degree of consistency in terms of appearance and marble use. The most common form consisted of (from bottom to top) a low plinth, a thin (often moulded) band, a series of large (often framed) panels, a thin (often moulded) band and a finishing band\textsuperscript{59}. The design and composition did however vary from one example to another, with highly elaborate decoration consisting of architectural schemes that included additions such as columns and capitals, as in triclinium (18) of the Casa del Rilievo di Telefo at Herculaneum. This of course provided the opportunity for aesthetic variety within revetted wall schemes. The scheme could have a high degree of repetition, with the same layout and marble types (and therefore colours) reproduced throughout the room, or panel sizes and marble types could be alternated throughout the room.

Wall revetment schemes often played with depth as well as panel colour and size. Large framed panels, which formed the main component of most schemes, were typically recessed by 1 or 2 cm...
from the surrounding frames, while the lower plinth and crowning moulding were generally deeper, extending beyond the central panels. Likewise, the top crowning moulding set above the central section of panels was inverted so it projected 1 or 2 cm outwards at the top. These differences provided additional texture and depth to individual revetment schemes, which helped individual elements (and marble varieties) to stand out. These schemes generally made use of various polychrome marbles; however, more muted schemes consisting of mainly white and grey marbles were also popular. The following section will look at how different marbles were employed, before moving on to consider some examples in detail.

**Marbles Used for Wall Revetment**

The lack of preserved examples of wall revetment in the Vesuvian area makes in-depth study problematic. While the schemes can often be reconstructed, the types and combinations of marble used are often impossible to determine, due to spoliation in antiquity or during the course of 18th-century excavations\(^60\). This of course has the potential to greatly distort our view from a number of perspectives, such as that of the differences between Pompeii and Herculaneum, and the differences in the types and ways in which marble was employed. Indeed, it is easy to over-emphasise the wealth of marble decoration at Herculaneum due to the higher level of preservation of marble revetment; however, two of the most impressive examples of marble wall revetment from the Vesuvian area are found not here but in Pompeii: the Casa di Fabio Rufo (VI 17,16–19) and the Casa dei Dioscuri. The former had a floor-to-ceiling revetment scheme c. 3.8 m high in *triclinium* (21) that would have required over 100 m\(^2\) of marble (Fig. 4)\(^61\). Unfortunately, only the socle of Luna bardiglio remains in situ. Meanwhile, the Casa dei Dioscuri is the only extant house at Pompeii with wall revetment in two rooms: ambiente (22) and cyzicene *oecus* (48) (revetment to a height of 3.7 m, most likely in

\(^60\) Barker – Fant 2018; 2019.

\(^61\) Barker – Fant 2018.
Marble Wall Revetment in Central Italy during the First Century A.D.: Aesthetics and Decorative Effects

Fig. 5: Herculaneum, Casa dei Cervi, tablínium-oecus (15).

*marmor luculleum, taenarium, numidicum* and alabaster\(^{62}\). Judging by the imprints of the mortar preparation layer, both schemes seem to have been similar to those employed in Nero’s Domus Aurea. These examples demonstrate how the poor survival of marble revetment makes it difficult to determine with any precision both the types of marble used and, more importantly for this paper, how they were used, for the majority of examples from the Vesuvian area. Consequently, it is not possible to compare like-with-like.

Despite these problems, it is still possible to make observations from the extant wall revetment schemes, where two general approaches to materials stand out. First, there are schemes that employ only a limited amount of polychrome marble, instead focusing on white or grey marbles, as can be seen in oecus (17) and tablínium-oecus (15) in the Casa dei Cervi at Herculaneum (Fig. 5), where polychrome marble is only represented by thin fillets of *marmor taenarium*\(^{63}\). Second, there are schemes that are predominantly or almost entirely composed of polychrome marbles. Here we can make a further distinction between schemes that typically employed the marbles favoured in imperial architecture (such as *marmor numidicum, phrygium, luculleum* and *chium*) and those that made use of ‘new’ or ‘rare’ marble types (such as breccia corallina, breccia di Settebasi and *marmor chalcidicum*), which are essentially absent from imperial building projects. Examples of the former include the wall revetment of triclinium (18) of the Casa del Rilievo di Telefo and that of the monumental hall (VPSO(a)) at the Villa dei Papiri\(^{64}\), while examples of the latter include the revetment in room (64/65) at Villa A (Oplontis), which employed breccia corallina alongside *marmor luculleum* and white Luna marble (Fig. 6)\(^{65}\), and oecus (21) of the Casa del Rilievo di Telefo, which made use of breccia di Settebasi (Fig. 7)\(^{66}\). Moreover, based on the surviving evidence there seems to have been a clear difference between the marbles available to decorate walls in the Vesuvian area and those available in Rome\(^{67}\).

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62 Bechi 1829, 21; Richardson 1955, 63–65 Pl. 14, 2.

63 Other houses that primarily relied on grey marble, especially for larger central panels, include the Casa di Sallustio (VI 2,4) and the Casa della Regina Carolina (VIII 3,4) at Pompeii.

64 Guidobaldi et al. 2014, 87–89 cat. no. 45 and Guidobaldi et al. 2012, 159 f., respectively.


66 Guidobaldi et al. 2014, cat. no. 48b.

67 For example, Egyptian granites were used in Rome for wall revetment, but only painted imitations were found in the Vesuvian area: Barker – Taelman, forthcoming. See Carettoni 1949, 57 f. Figs. 8–10, for the Domus Transitoria.
While certain types of marble may have appealed to private homeowners precisely because they were found in imperial or public settings, we should not dismiss the decorative appeal of marbles in their own right – their distinctive colours and patterns served to make them desirable material for decoration in and of themselves. The use of what we might call ‘new’/‘rare’ (or at the very least, less common) marble varieties may represent aesthetic innovation by house and villa owners seeking to display colourful and patterned marbles. This may be the reason that large central panels of breccia corallina were used in the revetment of room (64/65) at Villa A (Oplontis) and breccia di Settebasi was used in oecus (21) of the Casa del Rilievo di Telefo. In both examples, however, it is worth noting that the panels had similar tonal qualities to the much more frequently employed marmor phrygium. At Villa A, the panels of breccia corallina have a striking purplish hue\(^68\), while the pink or orange clasts often found in breccia di Settebasi are almost entirely absent, leaving the panels with a uniform purple ground and white clasts. Indeed, it is possible that this ‘innovation’ was simply due to availability and/or cost (i.e., the owners had indeed desired better-known marbles but could not acquire or afford them), but it is equally possible that originality was the impetus here\(^69\).

\(^68\) Breccia corallina from Verzirhan, Turkey typically has a coral red ground with orange to salmon pink or brown and cream-white clasts. For a discussion of this stone, see Lazzarini 2002; 2006.

\(^69\) Barker – Fant 2019; Barker 2020.
The appeal of having highly variegated schemes is evident from Statius’ description of Pollius Felix’s villa near Sorrento, which shows that part of the attractiveness and luxuriousness of such decoration was the display of multiple ‘foreign’ varieties – in this case, seven different polychrome marbles, none of which came from Italy. Such choices most likely reflected a number of factors, including economy, aesthetics and prestige. All of the polychrome marbles used in the most impressive wall revetment schemes, irrespective of whether they were found in imperial projects, are multi-coloured and include particularly beautiful stones. This seems to correlate with the observations of Ben Russell in his discussion of stone prices in the early-4th-century Edict of Maximum Prices, that the higher prices of certain stones, such as marmor numidicum and phrygium, were likely based on their function/decorative appeal rather than the remoteness of their sources.

In this light, the monochromatic wall revetment schemes of mainly white and grey marbles that we find in several houses on the Bay of Naples suggest that the choice of this material was related to the overall architectural and decorative atmosphere of the room. While these examples typically employ more ‘common’ marble varieties (Luna white and bardiglio), the arrangements are sometimes still of considerable height (over 1 m). Two wall revetment schemes from the Casa dei Cervi at Herculaneum, for example, which belong to the post-A.D. 62 renovations in two of the most luxurious rooms, used mainly grey and white marble with the addition of thin bands of marmor taenarium (1 cm high). The limited height (c. 53.5 cm) of the revetment in tablinum-oecus (15) was designed to present a continuous band of revetment around the lower zone of the room without interruptions from the room’s large windows. Moreover, the quality of the execution and the monochromatic scheme created a band that provided a neutral background surface highlighting the room’s colourful Fourth Style wall painting, its intricate polychrome marble sectilia floor and its views – looking out on both the house with its temple pediment façade featuring a mosaic-decorated tympanum and the garden with its marble furnishings (i.e., the famous stag statues), as well as the ‘loggia’ with its sea views. The high quality and colourful pavement with rare varieties of marble (for example, breccia corallina and gabbro eufotide) was clearly the focus of the room’s decoration, with the wall revetment designed to enhance (but not detract from) it. Here, as in room (64/65) at Villa A (Oplontis) discussed below, the revetment was present, but its monochrome approach aided the wider decorative program of the room.

In contrast, revetment composed of polychrome marbles provided a very different aesthetic quality to a room. These marbles (generally colourful breccias) often contained two or more colours in each block with variable patterning. Marmor numidicum, for example, can range from pale yellow to dark yellow/orange with purple, and from a relatively homogenous matrix with large white (calcite) clasts to dense brecciation. Moreover, the employment of different marbles in individual schemes offered chromatic contrast for an impactful visual effect. The bands framing larger panels could provide lighter and/or darker contrasts, which could in turn be repeated or alternated. Here we can recall the words of Seneca quoted at the beginning of this paper, where he describes rare marbles arranged in complex patterns and offset by other marbles of differing colours. In the Vesuvian area, the chromatic contrast was often displayed with frames and/or separating bands of

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71 Prices (in denarii) are given: 250, 200, 150, 100, 75, 60, 50, 40. Marmor numidicum and marmor phrygium are listed at the second highest price of 200 denarii, marmor luculleum is listed as the third highest, 150 denarii, and marmor carystium at the fourth highest, 100 denarii, for example. Russell (2013, 34–36) based this on the price differences and the apparent inflation of the most highly coloured marbles in Diocletian’s Edict of Maximum Prices.
72 This included tablinum-oecus (15) and oecus (17); Guidobaldi et al. 2014, 249 cat. no. 224b.
73 Guidobaldi et al. 2014, 248f. cat. no. 224a. The floor included intricate shapes and a large variety of marbles: bardiglio, white marble, marmor numidicum, luculleum, phrygium, chiun, taenarium and carystium, as well as rarer varieties, such as alabaster, breccia corallina, breccia Appenninica semesanto, gabbro eufotide, lumachella gialla, paesima, etc.
74 See Ardeleanu 2018, for this stone and its use in the Early Roman period.
marbles that differed in colour or tone from the larger panels. The most common schemes alternated between stones with darker colours, such as *marmor luculleum* (black or dark green matrix containing pink, white, red and green clasts) and *marmor taenarium* (uniformly red-brown), stones with intermediate tones, such as *marmor phrygium* (white clasts in a purple matrix), *marmor carystium* (streaked green and white marble) and bardiglio (streaked medium-grey and white marble), and stones with lighter colours, such as *marmor chium* (pink or grey clasts in a red-pink matrix) and *marmor numidicum* (matrix of purple, orange or yellow with yellow clasts). However, caution is needed. For example, *marmor numidicum* is susceptible to a strong reddening of colour caused by the heat from the A.D. 79 eruption, as we can see in the floor of *triclinium* (18) of the Casa del Rilievo di Telefo at Herculaneum\textsuperscript{75}. This distorts the original decorative scheme, with the original yellow tones replaced with red, pink, white and grey tones throughout the floor, creating a less lively and varied effect.

To explore the ways in which the specific aesthetic qualities of marble wall revetment were used in decorative schemes, it is necessary to look at the limited number of surviving examples that can be accurately reconstructed alongside other decorative elements. At Herculaneum, this includes the Casa del Rilievo di Telefo and the Casa dei Cervi, and at Pompeii there are a further three examples at the Casa della Regina Carolina (VIII 3,14), the Casa delle Vestali (VI 1,6.8.24–26) and the Casa di Sallustio (VI 2,4). Finally, there are also a number of rooms at Villa A (Oplontis) where such reconstruction is possible. However, the present discussion will focus on just three rooms: *triclinium* (18) and *oecus* (21) of the Casa del Rilevo di Telefo, and *oecus* (64/65) at Villa A (Oplontis). Here, the emphasis is on looking at the choices made by individual house and villa owners, and how the material characteristics of different marble varieties were used to create different room atmospheres. While all of these examples represent substantial monetary expenditure, they were employed in different ways to achieve different effects.

**Triclinium (18) and Oecus (21) of the Casa del Rilievo di Telefo**

One of the largest houses uncovered at Herculaneum (over 1,000 m\textsuperscript{2}) is the Casa del Rilievo di Telefo, which contained three rooms with marble wall revetment, two of which will be discussed here: the grandiose *oecus/triclinium* (18) and the luxurious *oecus* (21). Unfortunately, another room, *oecus* (10), cannot be sufficiently reconstructed for in-depth analysis. The marble decoration of these rooms belongs to an important restoration undertaken after the earthquake of A.D. 62 and represents some of the most complex and high-quality examples preserved in the Vesuvian area. In addition, the owner seems to have had a high commitment to marble as a decorative element of the house. It is the only house in Pompeii or Herculaneum to have more than two rooms with marble wall revetment and more than three marble *sectilia* floors, all of which were wall-to-wall, itself a rare feature.

The revetment of *triclinium* (18) was unique in a number of ways. First, the wall revetment reached a considerable height (over 1.7 m), even if it did not represent the tallest example from the Bay of Naples\textsuperscript{76}. Second, its blind colonnade and use of spiral semi-columns with Corinthian pilaster capitals to separate large panels provides the only architectural scheme surviving in the area\textsuperscript{77}. The

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\textsuperscript{75} On this point, see Guidobaldi et al. 2014, 81–87.

\textsuperscript{76} The wall revetment in *triclinium* (21) of the Casa di Fabio Rufo at Pompeii, for example, reached a height of c. 3.8 m.

\textsuperscript{77} It is possible that this unique case is not solely the result of preservation but in fact also reflects the owner’s original decorative decisions. A marble cache, probably awaiting reuse, was found on the Janiculum Hill in Rome and most likely came from the nearby Julio-Claudian Domus Agrippinae. This cache represents a similar (albeit more elaborate) marble revetment scheme with large panels, architraves and pilasters with capitals and bases, as well as other figural inlays. This scheme used a wide array of marble varieties, including alabaster, white marble, breccia di Settebassi, *marmor taenarium*, *numidicum*, *luculleum*, *chium*, *phrygium* and *carystium*: see Filippi 2005. Additionally,
revetment consists, from bottom to top, of the following elements: a plinth of *marmor luculleum* crowned with a moulded band of white marble (3 cm high) and above this, a series of framed rectangular panels are separated by spiral columns (c. 13 cm wide and 125 cm high). These columns of *marmor carystium* have the appearance of semi-columns but are in fact almost entirely flat and only give the illusion of projecting and being semi-circular. The columns are equipped with small white ‘bases’ (1 cm frames), and the white marble capitals (15 cm high) are separated from the columns by a thin strip of *marmor taenarium* (1 cm high), which runs along the entire wall. The columnar elements support a false continuous moulded architrave of *marmor chium* (14 cm high). Beneath this architrave and between the capitals runs a continuous band of bardiglio marble (15 cm high). The small columns frame panels that alternate between vertical and horizontal orientations. The vertically-oriented sections (c. 125 × 80 cm) consist of central panels of *marmor carystium* framed by a 9 cm band of *marmor phrygium*, resting on a band of *marmor numidicum* (14.5 cm high). The horizontally-oriented sections (c. 125 × 170 cm) consist of alternating enormous panels of *marmor phrygium* or *marmor numidicum* (c. 80 × 155 cm) framed by an 11 cm band of *marmor numidicum* or *marmor phrygium*, respectively, resting on a c. 30 cm high band of *marmor carystium* (Fig. 1).

The regular alternation between horizontal and vertical panels, and the resulting placement of the semi-columns, creates a rhythm for the overall decorative scheme. This sense of movement is strengthened by the chromatic characteristics of the different marble varieties employed, with the brighter panels of *marmor phrygium* or *marmor numidicum* standing out against the darker background created by the panels and columns of *marmor carystium*. Moreover, the rhythm of the room is structured and enhanced by the use of *marmor carystium* and its characteristic wavy green and white banding. The panels were cut differently for use in different areas of the revetment in order to accentuate the direction of this banding. This can be seen most clearly in the southeast wall. Here, the lower panels, which were placed just above the plinth, were positioned so that the banding appeared vertical, drawing the viewer’s eye from the floor up to the large horizontally-oriented panels of brighter marble. In contrast, the vertically-oriented panels of *marmor carystium* were cut so that the banding ran horizontally, thus drawing the viewer’s eye towards the *carystium* columns and back to the large horizontally-oriented panels of brighter marble. In this way, the dark green marble panels were positioned to constantly force the viewer’s eye around the room to the large (and therefore costly) panels of *marmor phrygium* and *marmor numidicum*. This careful choice of blocks and orientation of banding for the *marmor carystium* utilised here demonstrates that the choice of marble variety was not the only important decision when commissioning costly wall revetment: the colour and pattern of individual marble blocks were also exploited to create the optimal aesthetic effect.

This scheme, however, changed on the southwest wall of the room. Here, the wall decoration is divided into three sections: the left and right sections are identical schemes of horizontally-oriented panels of *marmor numidicum* with *marmor phrygium* frames with the same upper and lower decoration as the rest of the room. The middle section of the wall is occupied by a large door looking out towards the sea that is flanked by *marmor carystium* spiral semi-columns. Here, the rhythm of the room’s wall revetment is intentionally broken to showcase the phenomenal sea view and to invite the viewer through the door and onto the wooden balcony that surrounded the room. Additionally, the homogenous appearance of these panels works to enhance the continuous rhythm of the overall decoration.

While most of the revetment on the northwest wall has not been preserved, it is clear that the two large windows (and their views) were the main architectural features. The scheme would

Guidobaldi (et al. 2014) noted that pilaster columns were not common even in the most complex revetment schemes from later periods.

Guidobaldi et al. 2014, 87–89 cat. no. 45.

For a discussion of the wooden balcony, see Camardo et al. 2015, 272–274.
undoubtedly have been similar to that on the other walls where possible, with very low white marble windowsills projecting into the room: these would have shone with the light entering through the windows. The projecting marble windowsills would also have mirrored the white marble threshold that led out to the balcony. Moreover, the three-dimensional quality of the windowsills was mirrored in the wall revetment scheme, with its moulded white marble band above the plinth, the strip of *marmor taenarium*, the moulded architrave, and of course the Corinthian capitals and spiral columns. These differences in the depth of the marble elements used in the revetment provide both physical and visual texture to the revetment, drawing the viewer’s eye in and out of the decorative scheme itself – something that is also reflected in the ceiling decoration, as will be seen below.

The marble revetment of *triclinium* (18) was undoubtedly high quality, displaying a level of craftsmanship and materials not found elsewhere in the Vesuvian area. Of particular interest is the simulation of architectural decoration and the careful attention to the polychromy and texture of the marbles used. Moreover, the large panels were created with single pieces of marble rather than through joining smaller panels of the same marble. The high status and cost of such large panels was also displayed through the choice of marble varieties, which were those favoured in imperial projects, and the unique and complex layout whose only known parallel is from the city of Rome (see above).

The high quality of the decorative scheme in this room was amplified by the presence of an intricate *sectilia* pavement that made use of 23 different marble varieties, and a coffered wooden ceiling that was decorated in geometric shapes and painted in red, green, blue, beige and gold. The overall decorative scheme must have assailed the viewer with a riot of colours and geometric shapes. The atmosphere of the room was therefore designed to keep the viewer’s eyes in constant motion and to prioritise the room’s magnificent sea views.

The exceptionally well-preserved ceiling, unlike the later, up-to-date marble wall and floor decoration, was an earlier Augustan decoration that was carefully preserved and reused in *triclinium* (18), seemingly after the earthquake of A.D. 62. The coffers were decorated with polychrome relief decorations in geometric patterns that contrasted dark and light colours to play with light, shadow and depth. It is interesting to note that paint and gilding were used to cover up the locally-sourced silver fir. Moreover, Domenico Camardo noted that the red paint on particular panels was used to create the impression that the wooden decoration was made from more expensive woods, such as cedar from Lebanon. Other lacunar panels presented different geometric decorations in different colours, with emphasis placed on the central part of the panel and the frame. These coffers were once again designed with different depths, giving a chiaroscuro effect that pulled the viewer’s eye in and out. Like the wall revetment, the decorative scheme played with both colour and depth to create interesting and inviting textures.

The high level of skill required to create, preserve and reinstall the ceiling decoration, as well as the intentional placement of specific decorative elements, can also be observed in the creation of the marble pavement. The *sectilia* pavement was divided into two sections: the section in the southwest half of the room consisted of a uniform pattern of geometric shapes in multiple marble varieties, while the northwestern half of the room was less homogenous. Again, even though a portion of the floor does not survive and there are some questions about the authenticity of its restoration in certain places, it is clear that marble decoration was used to create

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80 Savalli et al. 2015, 357.
81 This dating was based on dendrochronological analysis of the wood of the roof support and some of the panel frames: Camardo et al. 2015, 291–293.
82 See the contribution by Anguissola, this volume, for a discussion of gilding in Roman thought and aesthetic tradition.
83 Camardo et al. 2015, 272–275.
84 See, for example, the discussion in Guidobaldi et al. 2014, 81–87 cat. nos. 44a–c; Savalli et al. 2015, 357.
specific aesthetic effects. In the northwestern half of the room, (mainly) plain squares of white and bardiglio marbles in several different sizes (Guidobaldi’s Q motif) were situated in a U-shape, presumably reflecting the placement of the dining couches on the floor. The most valuable and colourful marbles and complex designs were placed in the centre of this ‘U’, where diners would have been able to view them directly. This prestigious area included rare marble varieties, such as *marmor lacadaemonium* (from Krokeai, near Sparta, Greece), and unique designs, such as a heart within a circle within a square. The layout, which was a ‘sampler’ rather than a repeated pattern, and the choice of marbles in this area of the floor would have drawn the viewer’s eye to this section of the room, inviting them to linger and focus on the intricate shapes and inventive craftsmanship. The repetitive pattern of the southwestern half of the pavement would have then acted as a sea of marble in contrasting colours that drew the eye to the southwest wall and, when the doors were open, to the view beyond.

The play of colours, shapes and depths in the marble wall and floor decoration would have created an atmosphere designed to engage the viewer and direct their eyes. The views were carefully framed and constructed depending on the viewer’s dining location. The axial view from the central couch looked across the marble floor towards the room’s southwest wall, where the identical revetment panels and its spiral semi-columns framed the central opening and its views across the bay. The view would have invited the diner to cross the room and go through the doorway onto the balcony to further appreciate the view. The guest seated on the northeastern couch would have had a view through the two large windows across the bay and the edge of the city, while the guest on the northwestern couch would have had a view of the unbroken marble wall. The room could have provided views on all sides; however, instead of providing a window with a view outwards and downward into *viridarium* (15), the southeast wall presented a continuous and unbroken view of the wall revetment scheme with its simulated architectural decoration (Fig. 8). The intention was to *exclude* a window/view in favour of the revetment, which was lit from the windows on the opposite wall and the opening in the southwest wall. The three large openings would have bathed the room and its marble decoration in light when the doors and shutters were open. This light would

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85 For the floor motif, see Guidobaldi et al. 2014, 81–87 cat. nos. 44a–c.
86 This included designs in Guidobaldi’s QOS and QOQ2: Guidobaldi 1985, 183; Guidobaldi et al. 2014, 81–87.
87 For a list of all 23 marble varieties used in this section of the pavement, see Savalli et al. 2015, 357f.
88 The balcony would not have impacted the amount of light allowed into the room or the views from the door or windows, based on the reconstruction by Camardo (et al. 2015, 273f.).
have changed throughout the day\textsuperscript{89}, giving the effect of alternating light and dark spaces along the marble vista, especially during the evening as the sun set and bathed the green, red, yellow and white marbles in golden light.

The wall revetment in oecus (21) of the same house, however, was designed to create a different room atmosphere (Fig. 9). As opposed to the riot of shapes, colours and depths that drew the eye and directed the viewer in triclinium (18), the revetment scheme in oecus (21) focused on warm colours and a homogenous repetitive design on the lower zone of the walls, creating an intimate atmosphere. The wall revetment (c. 90 cm high) is intact and in situ, consisting from bottom to top of the following elements\textsuperscript{90}: a bardiglio plinth (14 cm high), a moulded cornice of marmor taenarium (4 cm high), rectangular panels of breccia di Settebasi (c. 55 × 80 cm) framed by vertical bands of marmor numidicum (4 cm wide) which themselves were bordered by thinner vertical bands of marmor taenarium (0.5 cm wide), a moulded cornice in bardiglio (3 cm high) and marmor numidicum (14.5 cm high) (Fig. 7). This repetitive scheme focuses on the dark purple and white of the breccia di Settebasi, highlighted by the yellow and red of the marble frames.

Once again, the craftsmen used the pattern of the marble blocks to create movement in the wall decoration. The panels of breccia di Settebasi were positioned to ensure the diagonal alignment of the white calcite clasts in the dark purple matrix, with panels alternating (either every panel or every two panels) between the white clasts ‘flowing’ from bottom left to upper right, and then from upper left to bottom right (Fig. 9). This created an undulating rhythm that flowed around the room. Moreover, the revetment panels towards the centre of the northeastern wall, opposite one of the room’s two large windows, mirrored each other perfectly\textsuperscript{91}. Once again, this demonstrates that the homeowner and/or the craftsmen paid careful attention to the choice of marble variety as well as to the aesthetic potential of each marble block. Block selection for larger panels would have had cost implications, with different blocks of the same stone costing more than others based on the quality of their aesthetic characteristics\textsuperscript{92}.

Here, the soothing rhythm of the panel orientation is enhanced by the rich warm tones of the overall decorative scheme: the dark purple and white wall panels highlighted with accents of red

\textsuperscript{89} For discussions of the effect of time of day, season, weather, etc. on room function and decoration, see Nissinen 2009; Dickmann 2011, 61; Haug 2020, 19f.
\textsuperscript{90} Guidobaldi et al. 2014, 91f. cat. no. 48b.
\textsuperscript{91} For a similar decorative approach to marble selection and the mirroring of marble revetment slabs, see the Hadri-anic ‘Marble Hall’ in Dwelling 6 of Terrace House 2 at Ephesus.
\textsuperscript{92} See Pettinau (1983) for different early 19\textsuperscript{th}-century prices for different versions of the same stone based on block size, grain size and colouring.
and yellow; the homogenous red ‘wallpaper’ style wall painting; and the marble sectilia pavement\textsuperscript{93} made with the same marble varieties as the wall revetment and following a homogenous pattern that focused on the orangey-yellow hues of the marmor numidicum, highlighted and framed by geometric patterns of red, purple and white\textsuperscript{94}. The warmth and intimacy created by the entire decorative scheme was intensified by the smaller size of the room and the light reflecting around the rich red, yellow and purple hues that covered the walls and floors.

It is clear that the different ways in which marble wall revetment was used in these two rooms, both in and of itself and alongside other decorative elements, was the result of aesthetic choices rather than questions of finance. The choice of material and the execution were both of exceptional quality, with perfectly alternating colours and matching floors and walls. Moreover, as Guidobaldi has noted, the pavement was not created according to the usual modular dimensions but rather was designed to fit the specific measurements of the room\textsuperscript{95}. Once again, this emphasises the high quality of material and craftsmanship that went into the decorative scheme of these rooms, as well as the different aesthetic and atmospheric ways in which marble wall revetment was used.

\section*{Room (64/65), Villa A at Oplontis}

Villa A at Oplontis also displays a strong commitment to both architectural and sculptural marble decoration. The villa’s marble decorative program is concentrated in the eastern wing, which was a major addition in the Fourth Style period, after A.D. 45\textsuperscript{96}. There is revetment in four rooms: (64/65), (69), (73/74) and diaeta (78). The revetment schemes in rooms (64/65), (69) and (73/74) might well have been the same with the only difference being in height: 110 cm in (64/65) and (73/74), and 125 cm in (69); however, the lack of preservation in all but rooms (64/65) makes this impossible to determine\textsuperscript{97}.

While listed as two rooms, (64) and (65) are more accurately described as a room (65) and an alcove within said room (64). The revetment in room (64/65) consisted of the following, from bottom to top: a plinth of breccia corallina (12 cm high), a white Luna cornice with a cyma reversa moulding (c. 4.3 cm), large panels of breccia corallina (c. 65 cm high with variable widths – with the shorter panel due to the fact that it is below a window)\textsuperscript{98} framed by strips of marmor luculleum (c. 8 cm), a white Luna cornice with cyma recta moulding (c. 4 cm) and a rectangular panel of unknown marble (identifiable from imprints in the mortar bedding; c. 12 cm high) (Fig. 6). The plinth in room (65) is notable in that it is composed of a rare variety of breccia corallina with unusually intense purple veins.

\textsuperscript{93} The floor is mainly composed of a Q2 motif: Guidobaldi et al. 2014, 90 f. cat. no. 48a.
\textsuperscript{94} This kind of harmonious scheme was similar to the approach taken in oecus (17) of the Casa dei Cervi at Herculaneum. Here the very tall revetment (c. 130 cm high) combined only two marbles: white marble (c. 125–130 or 85–90 cm x 85–90 cm) separated by vertical partitions in bardiglio (c. 30 cm wide). The limited chromatism is also present in the floor, which consists of Guidobaldi’s Q2 motif in bardiglio and marmor chium. Overall, the combined wall and floor decoration provide a simple decorative scheme characterised by limited colour range but with varieties of marble carefully alternated with precision and according to chromatic harmony. See Guidobaldi et al. 2014, 250 f. cat. nos. 226a, 226b.
\textsuperscript{95} Guidobaldi et al. 2014, 90 f. cat. no. 48a.
\textsuperscript{96} For the construction history of the villa and the dating of the eastern wing, see Thomas – Clarke 2007; 2008. The marble decoration, which included sectilia pavements, wall revetment and marble columns, was unique in private contexts in Campania prior to A.D. 79: see Barker – Fant 2019; Clarke – Barker 2019. For the marble sculpture, see Moormann 2019.
\textsuperscript{97} Barker – Fant 2019, 790 f.
\textsuperscript{98} Much of the marble decoration in room (64) survives, and it seems that the entire space was decorated in the same manner: see Barker – Fant 2019, 790 f.
It seems that this marble wall revetment was the main focus of these rooms, as traces of the remaining wall painting suggest that the walls were for the most part painted white and the floors were laid with a simple white, bias-laid mosaic\textsuperscript{99}. In addition, there are traces of blue paint on the (now lost) wooden door and window frames of the room\textsuperscript{100} (Fig. 10). It seems, however, that the revetment scheme was not meant to take away from room (64/65)’s views: a large door opened onto porticus (60) with its colonnade of grey marble and its pool that was lined internally with marble. A selection of marble sculpture was also arranged along the eastern side of the pool. Room (64/65) formed part of a north-south ‘vibrant visual axis’ that included viridaria (61 and 68), which could not be entered but could be seen, and through which the viewer could also see into neighbouring rooms. The viridaria were painted with warm yellow backgrounds and images of birds, fountains and vegetation\textsuperscript{101}. Moreover, these rooms were unroofed and let in large amounts of light. Room (64/65), as one of three marble revetted triclinia (65, 69 and 74), therefore presented a visitor dining on one of its triclinia with carefully framed views across porticus (60) and the pool to the east, or across the fictitious gardens – rooms (61), (68), (70) and (87) – to the north and south\textsuperscript{102}.

Within this setting, the marble wall revetment was evidently \textit{visible} but does not seem to have been intended to overshadow the carefully framed views. The scheme, which was homogeneous and repeated throughout (64/65), would have caught the viewer’s eye, as it was visible in every direction. Small sections of revetment even framed the opening onto porticus (60), but the scheme’s

\textsuperscript{99} For the mosaic pavement, see Cline 2019, 1247 f.
\textsuperscript{100} Blue paint is identifiable on planter box (61), the pair of windows along the west wall of room (64) and (probably) the shutters of viridarium (68). See Oplontis Villa A, excavation notebook no. 4 (25 November 1974 – 19 July 1983, entries for 14–17 April 1975, 16 January 1976 and 13 May 1975). For a history of this period of excavations, see Clarke 2014. For a transcription of notebook 4, see Calosi 2014.
\textsuperscript{101} Gee (2019) noted that all four viridaria had different dimensions and layouts but shared a colour palette.
\textsuperscript{102} Clarke 2018.
repeated rhythmic layout and colours would not have been overly distracting from the axial or transversal views. Such a design scheme also existed in porticus (60) and suited the long, ambulatory space – a plinth of white Luna and grey bardiglio and white ground Fourth Style wall painting with small panels at eye level and hidden figures. As Regina Gee has noted, this decorative scheme may have been designed to take advantage of the rippling light and reflections that would have played around the room from the sun reflecting off of the water in the pool. The material advantages of marble revetment and its interaction with light (and presumably water) can be seen in Lucian’s praise of the architecture and decoration of Hippias’ bath complex. Here a stone, presumed to be porphyry, was described as ‘full of abundant light and aglow with colour like that of purple wall hangings’. In this description, it is precisely the play of light on marble that creates a surface with all the colour of fine tapestries (or even wall paintings), but which also has the ability to reflect light and sound, and presumably also to withstand the moisture of a bath complex better than fabric or paint.

Again, in the decoration of room (64/65), it seems that the wall revetment was designed to best frame the main views of the room. Here, the marmor luculleum frames (around the light panels of breccia corallina) with their dark matrix mirrored, in tone and pattern, if not exactly in colour, the larger view to the pool and the grey columns through porticus (60) and its blue wooden frame. Overall, while sitting in room (64/65), the viewer was exposed to marble in every one of its major decorative uses: walls and floors, architectural elements such as capitals and columns, and sculpture (visible along the eastern walkway of the pool). Here, then, wall revetment forms a clear part of a total immersion in marble as a decorative material.

Final Remarks

This paper has focused on wall revetment in the mid- to late 1st century A.D., which was a formative period of marble use in private houses and villas. Marble decoration signified urbanity, culture and above all luxury. The decorative appeal of marble for Roman domestic interiors revolved around a number of factors: the source of marble was of course important, as were the technically demanding processes required to transport, carve and install it. For ancient house and villa owners, revetment was a displayed measure of their wealth and status, to be admired, exploited and emulated. The more remote the source of its marbles or the higher number of stones employed in a revetment scheme, the more prestige it brought to the user. Equally, the larger and more complex the revetment scheme, the more it embodied the complex and costly technical requirements of the marble’s acquisition and working. However, it should always be remembered that the aesthetic characteristics and appearance of individual marbles – their vividness and their variety of colour – along with the effects they brought, were equally important. The colours and characteristics of marble were appreciated, as demonstrated by the fact that the most impressive surviving wall revetment schemes are multicoloured and employ large panels of particularly beautiful stones with greatly varying hues, tones and patterns displayed to great effect.

Wall revetment came in many shapes and sizes. It could vary based on the height of the wall that was covered, the size of the individual panels used, the types of marble employed and the layout of its panels. Designs could therefore range from simple panels bordered by frames with limited chromatic palettes of one or two marble types, to highly variegated designs with four or more marbles and elaborate, architecturally-informed schemes with pilaster columns and capitals. The success of marble revetment lay in the decorative effects it could bring to the rooms in which

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103 Gee 2019, 1108–1124, esp. 1123 f.
104 Lucian. Hipp. 6. Cf. Statius’ (Silv. 1, 5) focus on the way that the marble decoration sparkled, shone and glowed depending on the light in Etruscus’ baths.
it was employed. Seneca the Younger, for example, noted that marble veneer gave the illusion of solid marble that cheated 'our own eyesight' even though 'we know what sort of material is being concealed'. As he stated, 'What else is it but a lie in which we take such delight?'

An in-depth look at several examples from the Vesuvian area has demonstrated that marble wall revetment schemes, across the range from principally monochromatic to lively and complex polychrome schemes, were designed to help create and complement a room’s atmosphere. The colourful architectural scheme in triclinium (18) of the Casa del Rilievo di Telefo, for example, was most likely added in the post-A.D. 62 renovations of the house and played on the existing Augustan ceiling decoration. Moreover, the revetment was installed to carefully frame the doorway and its view outwards to the balcony and sea. The unbroken marble revetment of the southwest wall used light from the two windows of the opposite wall to add drama and movement to the decorative scheme.

Similarly, room (64/65) in Villa A (Oplontis), like the neighbouring porticus (60), provided the room with the highest luxury while framing the views to the pool. The revetment scheme, however, combined white marble with marmor lucullem and a predominately purple-hued variety of breccia corallina to produce a more muted colour palette than the scheme found in the Casa del Rilievo di Telefo. There is little doubt that the wall revetment in room (64/65) was intended to both stand out and complement, rather than compete with, the carefully framed views of the villa’s real and fictitious gardens, as well as the extensive marble decoration of the eastern wing, including the dark bluish-grey marble columns of porticus (60) and the white marble sculpture lining the pool.

Overall, then, it is clear from this brief discussion that marble wall revetment was a costly decorative scheme that could be employed to highlight individual views or to create specific atmospheres in individual rooms. As noted at the beginning of this paper, marble was imitated in paint before it was widely available for domestic decoration; however, while painted marble could showcase a patron's taste and urbanity, it could never truly replicate the qualities of real marble – while stucco could be polished to a high shine, for example, it could never imitate the reflection of light on clasts and inclusions of different materials in breccias and other polychrome stones.

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Fig. 10: Reconstruction by Timothy Liddell, courtesy of the University of Texas at Austin, Oplontis Project.

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Table 1: Details for revetment in houses and villas in the Bay of Naples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>House</th>
<th>Room</th>
<th>Plinth</th>
<th>Moulding</th>
<th>Architectural elements</th>
<th>Maximum height</th>
<th>Panel sizes</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Herculaneum</td>
<td>Casa del Rilievo di Telefo</td>
<td>Oecus 10</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>90 cm</td>
<td>ca. 65 cm high with indeterminable width</td>
<td>Late IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Triclinium 18</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>174 cm</td>
<td>Large panels 126 x 171 cm / smaller panels 126 x 79 cm</td>
<td>Late IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oecus 21</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>92 cm</td>
<td>56 cm high, with approx. 81 cm with some variability</td>
<td>Late IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herculaneum</td>
<td>Casa dei Cervi</td>
<td>Oecus–Tablinum 15</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>53.5 cm</td>
<td>56 cm high, approx. 81 cm long with some variability in width</td>
<td>Late IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oecus 17</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>130 cm</td>
<td>85–90 cm high with variable width depending on the position (125–130 or 85–90 cm)</td>
<td>Late IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herculaneum</td>
<td>Villa dei Papiri</td>
<td>VPSO (a)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>110 cm</td>
<td>70 cm high with variable widths</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pompeii</td>
<td>Casa del Citarista</td>
<td>Ambiente 45</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pompeii</td>
<td>Casa di Sallustio</td>
<td>Cubiculum 34</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Surviving panel measures 44 cm high x 34 cm width</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pompeii</td>
<td>Casa di Fabio Rufo</td>
<td>Triclinium 21</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pompeii</td>
<td>Casa dei Dioscuri</td>
<td>Ambiente 22</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pompeii</td>
<td>Casa della Regina Carolina</td>
<td>Oecus 48</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
<td>ca. 370 cm</td>
<td>Largest panels ca. 100 x 120 cm</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pompeii</td>
<td>Casa delle Vestali</td>
<td>Ambiente 23</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>ca. 90 cm</td>
<td>ca. 60 cm high with variable widths (the largest ca. 70 cm)</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pompeii</td>
<td>Unnamed house at VIII.2.14–16</td>
<td>Triclinium (a)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
<td>ca. 115 cm</td>
<td>ca. 50 cm high with variable widths (perhaps up to 75 cm for the larger panels)</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pompeii</td>
<td>Casa della Regina Carolina</td>
<td>Viridarium 14</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
<td>101 cm</td>
<td>52.5 cm high with variable lengths (some over 150 cm)</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oplontis</td>
<td>Villa A</td>
<td>Room 64/65</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>110 cm</td>
<td>67 cm high with variable widths, surviving panels measure 67 x 50 cm, 55 x 122 cm, and 67 x 46 cm</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Room 69</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>125 cm</td>
<td>ca. 65 cm high with variable widths up to 100 cm for the largest panels.</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Room 73/74</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>110 cm</td>
<td>Unknown dimensions</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Diaeta 78</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
<td>ca. 105 cm</td>
<td>55 cm high with variable width, anels of the central zone of the west niche measure ca. 55 × 100 cm</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>