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Autor: Wharton, David B.
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DAVID B. WHARTON

PRESTIGE, COLOR, AND COLOR LANGUAGE IN IMPERIAL ROME¹

ABSTRACT

This paper explores some ways that the human desire for prestige affected language in early Imperial discourses of color. It identifies the desire for prestige as a fundamental human psychological disposition that is often expressed through the acquisition and display of expensive objects, both in antiquity and the present, and examines the role of color in enhancing products' perceived desirability. It argues that connoisseurship is an important component of choosing and acquiring high-status objects, requiring the ability to make fine-grained color distinctions. A broad comparison of the color vocabularies used by Cato the Elder and Columella in their agricultural works suggests an increasing desire in the early Empire to discriminate among the wide variety of colored luxury and imported agricultural products available to Roman elite consumers. Meanwhile, the importation of expensive dyes and pigments sparked lexical borrowing and innovation in color-related terms. Competitive status displays in textiles and other decorations, such as flowers and gems, required status-conscious consumers to use increasingly sophisticated color concepts and expressions, including conceptual metaphors, in order to distinguish effectively among high-status items. Although the Romans' color conceptions tended to be organized around the material substances that produced the desired colors, they were also capable of forming abstract color categories and terms in differentiating colored products. However, 'prestige' is a fluid concept and should not be understood as a

¹ Part of the research for this project was funded by a University of North Carolina at Greensboro Undergraduate Research and Creativity Award. The assistance of Emily Gering was invaluable in gathering data on the color vocabularies of CATO THE ELDER and COLUMELLA.

set of monolithic preferences among the elite; different subgroups therefore responded differently to purportedly prestigious colored items or color terms. Colored items, in turn, in their economic and social contexts, were capable of evoking a variety of emotions, including desire (for acquisition), admiration, envy, disapproval, and even disgust.

1. The desire for prestige and its connection to colored objects

In this paper I will explore some ways that the human desire for prestige affected language in ancient Roman discourses of color. I will argue that prestige-seeking activity had noticeable effects on Latin's language of color in that it motivated borrowing² and innovation at the lexical level. Furthermore, I will argue that there is plausible evidence that status-seeking activities were involved in increasing sophistication and innovation in Roman color cognition, as the desire to acquire goods that were markers of high status among Romans required new ways to conceive, categorize, and compare fine-grained color distinctions.

The connection between the need for prestige and its expression through the possession of valuable objects is attested in our earliest Greek literature. In the *Iliad*, for example, Achilles' fierce desire for proper recognition of his worth as a fighter ignites his equally fierce anger when that recognition is denied to him. The plot of the *Iliad* turns precisely on the tight connection between the hero's status and the valuable, tangible goods that were understood as signs of his status. In the case of Achilles, it is Agamemnon's appropriation of the enslaved woman Briseis that angers him so deeply that he brings disasters on the Greeks and on himself, but human-made objects are also very common tokens of prestige in the Homeric world. For example, Odysseus's son Telemachus receives as a guest-gift a silver and gold wrought mixing bowl from Menelaus (*Od.* 4,

² Defined broadly by THOMASON / KAUFMAN (1988) 21 as "the incorporation of foreign elements into the speakers' native language".

611-619), and a beautiful garment woven by Helen (*Od.* 15, 100-110) as signs of his high status. In the gift economy of the Homeric world, these material goods conferred as much prestige on the giver as on the recipient.³

Of course, the connection between status and material objects is not found only in antiquity. In the modern world, social scientists have also studied this dynamic. The American economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen, in the late nineteenth century, linked the human desire for prestige with the acquisition of expensive consumer goods in his book *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. In the chapter titled “Conspicuous Consumption” (an expression that remains a catchphrase in American popular culture), Veblen speculated about the historical development of consumer tastes in pre-capitalist societies. He wrote,

“Since the consumption of ... excellent goods is an evidence of wealth, it becomes honorific; and conversely, the failure to consume in due quantity and quality becomes a mark of inferiority and demerit ..., it now becomes incumbent [upon a wealthy person] to discriminate with some nicety between the noble and the ignoble in consumable goods. He becomes a connoisseur in creditable viands of various degrees of merit, ... [and] in seemly apparel and architecture.”⁴

Veblen argued that such connoisseurship lies at the heart of effective status displays, and his insight will be central to my argument as well. Veblen was also sensitive to the fact that the motives for this mode of acquisition are often mixed, or “blended” as he phrased it, since the objects that project prestige are usually desirable for aesthetic or other reasons, although it is easy for the consumer to mistake the expense of an item for its beauty. He said,

“The marks of expensiveness come to be accepted as beautiful features of the expensive articles. They are pleasing as being marks

³ See HOOKER (1989) and MORRIS (1986). FINLEY (²1965) 129-130 comments, “Gift-giving too was part of the network of competitive, honorific activity. And in both directions: it was as honorable to give as to receive. One measure of a man’s worth was how much he could give away in treasure. Heroes boasted of the gifts they had received and those they had given as signs of their prowess”.

⁴ VEBLEN (2017) 64.

of honorific costliness, and the pleasure which they afford on this score blends with that afforded by the beautiful form and color of the object; so that we often declare that an article of apparel, for instance, is 'perfectly lovely', when pretty much all that an analysis of the aesthetic value of the article would leave ground for is the declaration that it is pecuniarily honorific."⁵

Somewhat more recently, in the middle of the twentieth century, psychologist A.H. Maslow identified the need for esteem from others as a universal human psychological trait in his widely influential and comprehensive psychological theory of human motivation:

"All people in our society ... have a need or desire for a stable, firmly based, (usually) high evaluation of themselves, for self-respect, or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others. By firmly based self-esteem, we mean that which is soundly based upon real capacity, achievement and respect from others ..., we [also] have what we may call the desire for reputation or prestige (defining it as respect or esteem from other people), recognition, attention, importance, or appreciation."⁶

Maslow was careful to stress that this psychological need, when understood as a motivation for any particular action, is nearly always entwined with other needs in such a way that we can never entirely disentangle it as an independent cause.

Veblen's and Maslow's views, in modified form, are still important for a twenty-first century understanding of the connection between consumption and status display. Indeed, as personal wealth has expanded in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, researchers in business and marketing have become increasingly interested in the connection between luxury consumption and status displays, even devising mathematical models to explain and predict the extent to which both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations are related to conspicuous consumption behavior. In the model of Truong, for example, 'extrinsic motivation' refers to the

⁵ VEBLEN (2017) 97.

⁶ MASLOW (1943) 381-392.

desire to purchase luxury items to impress others, whereas ‘intrinsic motivation’ refers to the desire to purchase them for personal fulfillment and enjoyment, and it is assumed that both motivations are active in driving consumer preferences.⁷

However, we must also keep in mind that ‘prestige’ is itself not a simple concept. Miriam Meyerhoff observes that ‘prestige’ is “a complex value that speakers orient to in different ways”.⁸ Here she is referring primarily to prestige variants in language, but the principle applies equally to prestige variants in orientation to material goods — that is, objects that are considered to be of higher or lower prestige value — and we will see that items that have prestige value for some may be negatively valued by others. Milroy also observes that ‘prestige’ cannot be understood simply as attaching to the behavior or speech of a monolithic upper class, but rather it interacts in more complex ways with perceptions of ethnicity, identity, gender, and in-group and out-group norms.⁹

While these insights are clearly pertinent to understanding the culture of consumption in the modern world, the question of their applicability to Roman antiquity immediately arises. The ancient world, after all, did not have a capitalist-style industrial and consumer economy, so we must be very careful not to impose modern economic and social concepts inappropriately onto ancient economic and social activities.¹⁰ Nevertheless, I will assume here that the fundamental insights of the social sciences — that the need for prestige is a human universal and that this need can find expression in the acquisition and display of material goods — are as valid for the Romans as they are for us.¹¹ However, given the complexity

⁷ TRUONG (2010).

⁸ MEYERHOFF (2011) 41.

⁹ MILROY (1988) 2-13. WEBER (1978) 305-306 also argues for the general social importance of status as well as the fluidity of the concept.

¹⁰ There is little consensus on how ancient economies are to be understood or characterized. For brief summaries of the problems and scholarship, see MORRIS (1986) 3-4, his preface to FINLEY (1999) ix-xxxii, and BANG (2007).

¹¹ See FINLEY (1999), especially 35-64, on the importance of status for the ancients in their economic activities.

of the concept of prestige and the entwinement of this need with other human needs and desires, we will not be able to trace it precisely as a unique cause for any particular instance of color-language change; we will have to be satisfied with drawing plausible inferences about its effects based upon the cases that will be presented. Nor will we be able to put individual colors or colored objects in a one-to-one correspondence with emotions they might arouse in the context of status seeking. The desire for status, strictly speaking, is a disposition rather than an emotion, but in this social context we can easily imagine what kinds of emotions were most likely to be aroused by prestigious colored items: on the positive side, pleasure, delight, or wonder at their aesthetic beauty, and joy at possessing them, but also envy if one should perceive an item with particularly desirable color qualities that is owned by another. And we find at least one instance of feelings of anger and begrudging, in the case of the emperor Nero in wishing to restrict the use of a particular color to himself, which we shall discuss below.¹²

2. Color semantics and color terms

Before beginning an analysis of changes in Latin's color vocabulary, I would like to be explicit about what I mean when I discuss 'color terms', as the expression itself is somewhat ambiguous. Speakers of modern languages tend to think of color terms as words that in their principal and dominant meaning¹³ denote an abstract color concept such as we use when we name colors such as 'red', 'yellow', 'blue', 'green', and so forth. In English these words typically also display homonymy between their uses either as adjectives or nouns; that is, one can say, "blue is my favorite color", (noun

¹² Suet. *Ner.* 32, 3-4.

¹³ 'Dominant meanings' in the psycholinguistic literature refer those that are used most often and are likeliest to come to mind in neutral contexts. They are contrasted with subordinate meanings, which are used less often and may depend more on contextual factors in order to be activated in the mind. See FORAKER / MURPHY (2012) for an overview of the literature.

use) or “the sky is very blue today” (adjectival use). The situation in Latin is quite different. Although André (1949) amassed a list of about 500 Latin color terms in his comprehensive survey, almost none of them function either semantically or syntactically in this way, and in very many cases Latin color words refer to a semantic bundle of abstract and material properties simultaneously such that it is not often clear to us the extent to which the Romans habitually conceived of these as separate qualities.¹⁴ One of the best examples of this kind of color term in Latin is *uiridis* (“green”), which in Roman literary prose and poetry usually describes living plants and typically includes in its meaning semantic features such as moisture, life, or growth as well as hue.¹⁵

What, then, counts as a color term in Latin? In this chapter, I have included in my inventories of color terms words in which a color meaning is promoted or highlighted¹⁶ as a salient semantic feature in their context of occurrence, even if the word is not being used simply as a descriptive color adjective. Thus, I included words like *rubricosus*, which describes a kind of soil that is rich in *rubrica*, or red earth, because when used in context, red color was a distinguishing and important semantic feature. In many instances, however, words that have potential color meanings, but do not have that feature highlighted in context, may not have been counted as color terms in the context in question. For example, the adjective *aeneus* (“made of bronze or copper”) occurs frequently in Cato the Elder’s inventories of necessary farm equipment listed in his *De agri*

¹⁴ See BRADLEY (2009) 1-19 and WHARTON (2016) on the problem of abstract and concrete meanings in color terms. The propensity of words to communicate more than one sense at a time, and problems in distinguishing boundaries between senses are discussed in WHARTON (2011); TAYLOR (2003); CRUSE (2002); GODDARD (2002); GEERAERTS (1993); TUGGY (1993); and NUNBERG (1979) 147-154. I leave aside here the contested question of whether Latin has Basic Color Terms as defined by BERLIN / KAY (1969) and KAY *et al.* (2009); BRADLEY (2009) generally thinks not, but ONIGA (2007) and LYONS (1999) disagree.

¹⁵ BRADLEY (2009) 8; WHARTON (2016) 182-189. In technical and scientific literature, however, color words usually have abstract meanings; see FRUYT (2006).

¹⁶ The notions of promotion, highlighting, and backgrounding of senses are taken from CRUSE (1986) 52-53.

cultura,¹⁷ but the term in this context of use is in every case relevant only to the kind of metal out of which the object is made; the semantic feature of color is backgrounded, since color is not relevant to the context. But in other contexts, *aeneus*'s color quality is capable of being strongly highlighted. For example, in Suetonius's *Nero*, we find this description of Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus, Nero's ancestor: *In hunc dixit Crassus orator non esse mirandum, quod aeneam barbam haberet, cui os ferreum, cor plumbeum esset*.¹⁸ Although Crassus in this quotation puns on the ambiguity of *aeneam*, evoking the word's metallic quality, he simultaneously uses it with a primary reference to color of Gnaeus Domitius's beard, and hence I consider that it functions as a color term in this context.

3. Evidence of diachronic change in Latin's color lexicon

Before we examine specific uses of color language in context, we will look briefly at some coarse-grained evidence for color language change or variation by comparing the color vocabularies of two agricultural writers separated by about two centuries. Cato the Elder's *De agri cultura* is a bare-bones manual for managing a typical elite-owned farm in the second century BC. It treats the production of cattle, grain, olives and olive oil, vineyards, wine, fruits, and vegetables, and includes as well recipes, religious rituals, and prayers. The work is fairly short and is written in a famously direct, simple style. Columella's

¹⁷ For example, *Agr.* 13, 1 (where Cato uses the archaic form of the word, *ahen(e)us*): *In torcularium in usu quod opus est: urceum, ahenum I quod capiat q. V, uncos ferreos III, orbem aheneum I, molas, cribrum I, incerniculum I, securim I, scamnum I, seriam uinariam I, clauem torculari I, lectum stratum ubi duo custodes liberi cubent ...* "For the pressing room the following are needed: a pitcher, one bronze vessel holding five quadrantals, three iron hooks, one bronze disk, millstones, one sieve, one axe, one bed where two free guards may sleep ...". (All translations in this paper are my own unless otherwise indicated.)

¹⁸ "Crassus the orator said about him that one should not be amazed that he had a bronze beard, since he had an iron mouth and a leaden heart", Suet. *Ner.* 2, 2.

De re rustica, written in the first century AD, is much longer, and addresses the needs of farms that are much more diversified, catering to an increasingly wealthy and discerning set of consumers throughout the Roman Empire. Columella's work covers basic products such as cattle, grains, olives, and vineyards, as well as different kinds of oxen, horses, mules, sheep, goats, swine, dogs, poultry, and eggs. It also discusses luxury farm products such as thrushes, doves, peacocks, geese, ducks, Numidian chickens and guinea fowl; fish ponds and fish; wild animals and their enclosures; bees and different kinds of wax and honey; different varieties of apples, pears, figs, pomegranates and methods of preserving them, and several varieties of olive oil, wine, and mead. It should not surprise us that the two manuals display distinctively different color vocabularies.

Cato's Color Terms	Columella's Color Terms		
<i>albus</i>	<i>albicans</i>	<i>flauus</i>	<i>pullus</i>
<i>ater</i>	<i>albidus</i>	<i>fulgens</i>	<i>puniceus</i>
<i>atramentum</i>	<i>albus</i>	<i>fuscus</i>	<i>purpura</i>
<i>candidus</i>	<i>arquatus</i>	<i>glaucus</i>	<i>purpurare</i>
<i>coloratus</i>	<i>ater</i>	<i>heluus</i>	<i>purpureus</i>
<i>excandescere</i>	<i>atramentum</i>	<i>incanus</i>	<i>rauidus</i>
<i>flauescere</i>	<i>auratus</i>	<i>infuscare</i>	<i>robius</i>
<i>heluiolus</i>	<i>caerul(e)us</i>	<i>infuscatus</i>	<i>roseus</i>
<i>niger</i>	<i>candens</i>	<i>infuscus</i>	<i>ruber</i>
<i>pullus</i>	<i>candidus</i>	<i>lacteus</i>	<i>rubere</i>
<i>purpura</i>	<i>candor</i>	<i>liuidus</i>	<i>rubeus</i>
<i>ruber</i>	<i>canus</i>	<i>luteolus</i>	<i>rubicundus</i>
<i>rubrica</i>	<i>cereolus</i>	<i>luteus</i>	<i>rubor</i>
<i>rubricosus</i>	<i>chrysomelinus</i>	<i>murinus</i>	<i>rubrica</i>
<i>rusceus</i>	<i>cinereus</i>	<i>niger</i>	<i>rubricosus</i>
<i>uiridis</i>	<i>coloratus</i>	<i>nigrans</i>	<i>rutilus</i>
	<i>concolor</i>	<i>nigrere</i>	<i>sanguineus</i>
	<i>croceus</i>	<i>nigrescere</i>	<i>uersicolor</i>
	<i>decolorare</i>	<i>niueus</i>	<i>uirere, uirens</i>
	<i>discolor</i>	<i>onychinus</i>	<i>uirescere</i>
	<i>erythraeus</i>	<i>ostrum</i>	<i>uiridans</i>
	<i>excandescere</i>	<i>pallens</i>	<i>uiridis</i>
	<i>flammeolus</i>	<i>pallor</i>	
	<i>flauens</i>		

Of course, the greater number of color terms in Columella's text may be partly attributed to the greater length of his work. At the very least we would expect many more color-term tokens in the *De re rustica* than in Cato's *De agri cultura*, but we would not necessarily expect so many distinct color lexemes, and the meanings of many of the words in Columella's vocabulary reveal a stronger interest in making fine color distinctions and in noticing color-related processes than we find Cato's, including in the BLACK¹⁹ category not only *niger* and *ater*, but *nigrans*, and *nigrescere*; in the WHITE range we find *albus*, *albicans*, *albidus*, *candor*, *candens*, *pallens*, *pallor*; in RED are *ruber*, *rubeus*, *rubicundus*, *roseus*, *erythraeus*, *puniceus*, and *sanguineus*; in the YELLOW range we find *flammeolus*, *flauens*, *flauus*, *luteus*, *luteolus*, *cereolus*, *chrysomelinus*, *arquatus*, *auratus*, and *croceus*, and in GREEN are *uiridis*, *uiridans*, *uirens*, and *uirescere*. Columella also includes color areas that are not mentioned in Cato at all, such as the GRAY words *cinereus*, *rauidus*, *canus*, and *incanus*, and *caerulus/caeruleus* for BLUE, a color range not mentioned in Cato. Columella also shows interest in color combinations and comparisons with words like *decolorare*, *discolor*, *concolor*, and *uersicolor*.²⁰ About twenty percent of the words in Columella's list are only attested in the Augustan or post-Augustan period, and some are extant only in Columella's text, for example *chrysomelinus* (describing a variety of *malum*, and apple or quince) and *cereolus* (a kind of plum). These lists of course do not demonstrate a *direct* causal link between the Romans' desire for luxury items and changes in the Latin color vocabulary, but we can make a reasonable inference that a more sophisticated color vocabulary had become

¹⁹ The categories I use here are those of Basic Color Terms in modern languages like English, although (as noted above) it is doubtful that these were the cognitive categories that the ancients used to organize their color conceptions. I use them here only as a convenient way for modern readers to grasp the range of Columella's color vocabulary without any further implication about ancient color cognition.

²⁰ GOLDMAN (2013) 135-149 provides a good summary of the semantics of these terms in wider Latin literature.

useful and perhaps necessary as the Romans' material consumption expanded and diversified.²¹

4. Imported luxuries, loanwords, and lexical innovation

The word *chrysomelinus* stands out in Columella's list as an obvious loanword from Greek, based on a noun *chrysomelon* ("golden apple"), which is not attested in Greek literature, but turns up just once in Latin, in Pliny's *Natural History* (15, 10), and the adjective *chrysomelinus* appears only here in Latin literature, where Columella is discussing different kinds of fruits:

Praeterea malorum genera exquirenda, maxime Scaudiana, Matiana, orbiculata, Cestiana, Pedusiana, Amerina, Syrica, melimela, cydonea, quorum genera tria sunt: strutia, chrysomelina, mustia, quae omnia non solum uoluptatem sed etiam salubritatem adferunt. (Col. 5, 10, 19)²²

This variety of fruit was likely imported from some a Greek-speaking part of the Mediterranean world, and its color-descriptive name came along with it. I will have more to say about Greek names and color-naming strategies below, but here my interest is in the broader phenomenon of the importation of high-prestige colored products and their spread into the Latin color lexicon.

Of course, the most obvious source of such words in Latin is the *murex* mollusk²³ that the Romans called *purpura*, a name that is an adapted loanword from Greek *porphyra*, itself a word of

²¹ For a general philological overview of the historical development of Latin's color vocabulary, see also BARAN (1983).

²² "Moreover the following kinds of apples are desirable: in particular the Scaudian, the Matian, the rounded, the Cestian, the Pedusian, the Amerine, the Syrian, the honey-apple, and the quinces, of which there are three kinds: the sparrow-quinces, the golden quinces, and the must-quinces, all of which bring both pleasure and health."

²³ In fact, a variety of different mollusks and processing techniques were used throughout the Mediterranean world. See CARDON (2007) 553-586 for a description of the species and processes.

uncertain origin.²⁴ The connections of the dyes derived from the mollusks to high prestige are so widely known and thoroughly discussed elsewhere²⁵ that I will not repeat them here. I will only point out that the desire to use the dyes and products made with them to denote status and luxury at the highest levels has linguistic consequences. First among them is the generation of multiple senses, primarily through metonymy. The noun *purpura* has many different senses, though their meanings are sometimes combined or vaguely specified in context;²⁶ it may refer to the mollusk itself, to dyes that are produced from it, to clothing colored with these dyes and to social ranks and orders associated with specific applications of the dye, and more abstractly to a range of hue, saturation, lightness, and sheen that we would call a ‘color’. In this sense it sometimes refers colored items that are not dyed, such as flowers or even hair.²⁷ The Romans’ color concept associated with *purpura*, however, does not map accurately onto any single color term in modern European languages, since its range of hue reference goes from light red through the red-blue range and into dark violet, though we often (and misleadingly) translate it as “purple”.

Purpura also has spawned many morphological derivatives, including the adjectives *purpureus* and *purpuratus*, the latter of which can function either as an adjective describing someone wearing purple garments or as a noun referring to the person whose high rank is denoted by wearing such garments. We also find the nouns *purpurissum*, which is the name of a costly pigment manufactured from the dye, and *purpurarius*, which denotes one who manufactures or sells purple dye or purple garments, and the

²⁴ BEEKES / VAN BEEK (2010) 1223-1224 *s.v.* *porphyra*: “No known Indo-European connections; probably a loanword from a Mediterranean language”.

²⁵ See REINHOLD (1970) for an overview of antiquity; BLUM (1998) and GRAND-CLÉMENT (2016) for the Greeks, BRADLEY (2009) 189-211 for the Romans.

²⁶ *S.v.* *purpura* in GLARE (1982) and the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*. The different senses of this word and of all the dye and pigment terms as well as the morphological derivatives which are discussed in this section are attested in their respective articles in both lexica.

²⁷ E.g. VERG. *G.* 4, 275; OV. *Met.* 8, 80.

verbs *purpurascere* (“to become purple”) and *purpurare* (“to cause something to become purple” or “to be purple”). There are several rare forms also attested such as the nouns *purpuramentum* and *purpurio* (= *purpurarius*) and the adjectives *purpurissus* and *purpurissatus*. *Purpura* and its derivatives are very frequently-appearing color word tokens throughout Latin literature, outnumbering nearly all other color-word tokens, except those for white (*albus*, *candidus*) and black (*niger*, *ater*), in Classical and Patristic Latin.²⁸

The word *conchylium* is closely related to *purpura*, as it also may refer to murex shellfish, to red-purple dye manufactured from it, to dyed garments, and to the color associated with the dye. It too is a loan from Greek (*kogchylion*) and spawned the derivatives *conchyliarius* (“a dyer”), *conchy(lio)legulus* (“one who collects the shellfish”), and *conchyliatus*, describing something dyed with *conchylium*. Similarly, *ostrum*, borrowed from Greek *ostreon*, which in Greek may refer to all bivalves as well as to purple dye,²⁹ refers in Latin to murex shellfish, to the dye derived from them, and to items colored with the dye; it provides the derivatives *ostrinus* and *ostricolor*.

Other high-prestige dyes had similar effects in Latin’s color language. The word *coccum*, a loanword from Greek *kokkos*, referred to what many ancients thought was a fruit or seed³⁰ from the kermes oak (*quercus coccifera*) tree, but was in fact the body of a gravid insect now called *kermes vermilio*.³¹ The bodies of these insects were processed to produce a deeply saturated scarlet colorfast dye, and because of the great number of insects need to produce the dye, it was very expensive;³² Pliny the Elder

²⁸ According to word searches performed in the *Library of Latin Texts* — Series A of the authors in its *Antiquitas* and *Aetas Patrum* databases (August 2019), but see the Discussion below for comments about terms for gold (*aurum*).

²⁹ *S.v. ostreon* in LSJ (101996).

³⁰ See for example PLIN. *NH* 9, 141, who calls it a *rubens granum* (“red kernel”).

³¹ Greek *kokkos* may mean “grain”, “seed”, or “berry”, but was also used specifically to refer to the *kermes vermilio* (*s.v. kokkos* in LSJ [101996]), and it was in this sense alone that the Romans borrowed the term.

³² See CARDON (2007) 609-619 for fascinating details on the harvesting and processing of this dye material. She calls this dye “the most highly prized and most expensive dye that ever existed” (614).

tells us that it was used for dying the *paludamenta* of generals.³³ The Latin noun *coccum* can refer to the source of the dye, the dye itself, or to dyed garments, and, like *purpura*, it generated several morphological derivatives: *cocceus*, *coccinatus*, *coccineus*, *coccinus*, and perhaps *coccotechnus*.³⁴ Archaeological evidence from lead tags used in the garment-dying trade to keep track of customer orders gives us an additional, otherwise unattested verb form *cocare*, possibly an abbreviated form of *coc[cin]are*, meaning to dye with *coccum* or perhaps to dye a garment a comparable hue.³⁵ Finally, the red pigment *minium* was an expensive import from Spain, and its name appears to be an Iberian loanword.³⁶ It was used for luxury decoration of in art and architecture,³⁷ and produced the derivatives *mineus*, *miniacus*, *miniarius*, *miniatulus*, *miniatus*, *miniastrum*, and *miniolum*.

Without going further through a full inventory of dyes and pigments,³⁸ let us make a few observations about the language surrounding these colorants. Their names were borrowed into

³³ PLIN. *NH* 22, 3.

³⁴ *S.v.* in *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*.

³⁵ GOSTENČNIK (2013) 76, who says that it might equally be a form of *cociliare* (= *conchyliare*, an otherwise unattested backformation from *conchyliatus*). See also BECKER (forthcoming).

³⁶ There is considerable confusion about the materials that go by this name in antiquity, and *minium* is often translated by the modern terms “cinnabar” and “vermillion”, which can refer to red mercuric sulphide and to hues similar to that of this substance. According to FORBES (1955) 208-213, both Pliny and Vitruvius refer confusedly to a number of different pigments by the name *minium*, and to make matters worse for us, Pliny refers to a different red pigment using the name *cinnabaris*. But the *minium* pigment that was most prized by the Romans, according to Pliny, was that which was mined in Spain. Its supply and processing were very carefully guarded, and its price was tightly regulated, although counterfeiters in the *minium* guild (*societas*) made high profits by adulterating it (PLIN. *NH* 33, 40).

³⁷ See VITR. 7, 8-9; CIC. *Fam.* 9, 16; it was also used as a pigment for making wax crayons: CIC. *Att.* 15, 14, 4; 16, 11, 1. Pliny reports that in early Roman times it was used to color the face of the statue of Jove, to color the bodies of people in triumphal processions, and to color Jove in paintings, a custom he found puzzling (PLIN. *NH* 33, 36).

³⁸ See FORBES (1955) 215 for a useful list of pigments; FORBES (1956) 99-136 for dyes.

Latin when the colorants entered the Roman world through trade, and the use of their root morphemes to name not just the colorants but products made from them, or otherwise or related to them, clearly shows the close connection in the Romans' mind between many color concepts and specific, concrete materials.³⁹ For a Roman, describing a garment or textile as colored with *purpura* or *coccum* is very different from our saying it is "purple" or "scarlet", because, in modern languages, those color terms carry no presuppositions about the origins, manufacturing, or expense of the colorants. But the Roman terms did so, and it is precisely those presuppositions and their implications of wealth and status (as well as of beauty, of course) that motivated the Romans often to prefer materially-based color terms to abstract ones when talking about such colored items.⁴⁰ More interestingly, the Romans' desire to use these expensive products generated a robust manufacturing and trade economy, which is reflected in technical or trade terms such as *purpurarius*, *purpurio*, *conchy(lio) legulus*, *coccotechnus*, *cocare* (*coc[cin]are*), and *miniarius*. That is, the desire of elite Romans for these products had linguistic effects even in non-elite strata of language, since these terms appear in inscriptions, law codes, or technical literature, and reveal to us the effects of status-seeking the non-elite language of the Mediterranean economy. One imagines that the workers in these trades likely had an even more robust and detailed color vocabulary for describing their materials, processes, and products which never percolated up to the literary productions of wealthy Romans.

It is notable as well that a number of high-prestige color products cluster together tightly in the red-purple chromatic range,

³⁹ This is a central thesis of BRADLEY (2009).

⁴⁰ In comparison, a less expensive and less prestigious dye material such as *lutum* (dyer's weld), which was used for yellow dye, has only *luteus* and *luteolum* as morphological derivatives. The term for inexpensive red madder dye, *rubia*, is derived from Latin's basic root morpheme for "red" (*rub-*) and has no other special designation.

and it appears from Pliny's discussion of the processing of shellfish dyes and their products that shifting fashions necessitated their consumers to make ever-finer distinctions among these colored products, which in turn generated additional color terms. Pliny quotes Cornelius Nepos on changing fashions in *purpura* during his lifetime:

*"Me", inquit, "iuuene uiolacea purpura uigebat, cuius libra denariis centum uenibat, nec multo post rubra Tarentina. Huic successit dibapha Tyria, quae in libras denariis mille non poterat emi. Hac P. Lentulus Spinther aedilis curulis primus in praetexta usus improbabatur, qua purpura quis non iam", inquit, "tricliniaria facit?"*⁴¹ (NH 9, 63)

The changing color fashions here track with increasing expense and display, and the descriptors of the dye are also revealing, denoting not only hue but provenance and manufacturing processes. These descriptors come close to what modern marketing executives would call "brands" that lend additional prestige to the item and their owners.

It also becomes clear from Pliny's discussion that the words *purpura* and *conchylium* can have specialized senses referring to two kinds of dyed products that were manufactured using different processes, each producing somewhat different ranges of hue, saturation, and lightness. After describing the different shellfish sources and manufacture of *purpura*, he writes,

*In conchyliata ueste cetera eadem sine bucino, praeterque ius temperatur aqua et pro indiuiso humani potus excremento; dimidia et medicamina adduntur. Sic gignitur laudatus ille pallor saturitate fraudata tantoque dilutior quanto magis uellera esuriunt.*⁴² (NH 9, 64)

⁴¹ "When I was a young man", he said, 'violet-hued *purpura* was popular, a pound of which sold for a hundred *denarii*, and not long after, red Tarentine came into vogue. After this came double-dyed Tyrian, which couldn't be bought for a thousand *denarii* a pound. P. Lentulus Spinther, the curule aedile, was criticized for first wearing this on his toga praetexta, but who today does not fit out his dining couches with this *purpura*?"

⁴² "In *conchylium*-dyed cloth everything (in the dye process) is the same except that the *bucinum* shellfish is not used, and in addition the juice is diluted with water and with human urine in equal quantities; and only half the amount

Purpura and *conchylium* for Pliny are not just different colors; they are different products.⁴³ We do not know how widespread this technical knowledge was among Roman consumers, but it helps to make some sense of a passage in Pliny which has been found difficult to interpret:

*fasces huic [purpurae] securesque Romanae uiam faciunt, idemque pro maiestate pueritiae est; distinguit ab equite curiam, dis aduocatur placandis, omnemque uestem inluminat, in triumphali miscetur auro. Quapropter excusata et purpurae sit insania; sed unde conchyliis pretia, quis uirus graue in fuco, color austerus in glauco et irascenti similis mari?*⁴⁴ (NH 9, 60)

Pliny here asserts that the Romans' desire for *purpura*-dyed textiles is excessive but justifiable given their role in marking social and political status distinctions that every true Roman believed were essential for maintaining an orderly society, and also because the textiles are beautiful. What he objects to is the high cost of a related color product, *conchylium*, which produces a smelly dye — it is after all made with human urine — whose textiles are not as beautiful as those made with *purpura*, and which serves no officially-sanctioned social functions. Pliny seems to concur with Veblen's judgement that, for status-seekers, the expense of a product can make consumers believe that it is beautiful simply because of its high-status value.

of dye is used. This produces that admired paleness, with the saturation reduced, and the more it is diluted, the more the fleeces absorb the color."

⁴³ This distinction of meaning between the words is not maintained throughout the rest of Latin literature, however, and they are often treated as nearly synonymous in many other contexts. Pliny may well be using technical meanings of the words that were not their ordinary meanings.

⁴⁴ "The official rods and axes of Rome clear a path for *purpura*, and it also marks the honorable state of boyhood; it distinguishes senators from knights, it is called in to appease the gods; it brightens every garment, and in triumphs it is blended with gold. Therefore, the madness for *purpura* may be excused; but what is the cause of the prices paid for *conchylium*, whose dye stinks, and whose color is a gloomy gray-blue like an angry sea?"

5. Flowers and color categories

The desire for these high-status colored textiles had a spillover effect such that the colors themselves, even when not embodied in manufactured objects, came to be fashionable and desirable. Pliny comments that the Romans' desire for expensive goods even affected their judgements about the best kinds of flowers:

Et de odoratis floribus satis dictum, in quibus unguento uicisse naturam gaudens luxuria uestibus quoque prouocauit eos flores qui colore commendantur. Hos animaduerto tres esse principales, rubentem ut in cocco, qui a rosae nigrantis gratia nitido trahitur suspectu et in purpuras Tyrias dibaphasque ac Laconicas, amethystinum qui a uiola et ipse in purpureum quemque ianthinum appellauimus. Genera enim tractamus in species multas sese spargentia. Tertius est qui proprie conchylii intellegitur, multis modis: unus in heliotropio et in aliquo exilis plerumque saturatior, alius in malua ad purpuram inclinans, alius in uiola serotina conchyliorum uegetissimus. Paria nunc conponuntur et natura atque luxuria depugnant. Lutei uideo honorem antiquissimum, in nuptialibus flammis totum feminis concessum, et fortassis ideo non numerari inter principales, hoc est communes maribus ac feminis, quoniam societas principatum dedit.⁴⁵ (NH 21, 22)

Pliny clearly disapproves of the fact that the Romans' love of luxury has affected their judgement about the beauty of flowers so much

⁴⁵ "And enough has been said about fragrant flowers, in which luxury, rejoicing to have conquered nature with its unguents, also challenges those flowers which are recommended for their color. I notice these three principal colors: (1) red color as in *coccum*, ranges from the pleasant appearance of a dark rose with a shining appearance even into Tyrian, double-dyed, and Laconian *purpuras*; (2) *amethystinus* color which shades from violet and then into the *purpureus* color we call *ianthinus*. (I am discussing categories of color that scatter into many shades.) (3) The third kind is understood as belonging to *conchylium* in various ways: one in the heliotrope, sometimes thin, but usually more saturated; another in the mallow, tending into *purpura*; another in the late violet, which is the liveliest of the *conchylium* shades. At present nature and luxury are equally matched and fighting it out. I note that the most ancient honor is for *luteum* [yellow to yellow-red], restricted now to women's wedding veils, and perhaps for that reason is not included among the principal colors for flowers, that is, those common to men and women, since it is common use that gives them pre-eminence."

that they esteem most those flower colors that resemble their most expensive and high-prestige dyed garments. Yet these dye-based terms provide the only linguistic means he has of making such fine-grained color distinctions, although for us, whose culturally-conditioned experiences of color are very different from the Romans', and who do not share their almost obsessive attention to color variations in the red-purple range, it is difficult to understand precisely what defines the color categories he describes here. Two of the color adjectives he uses to describe flowers — *amethystinus* and *ianthinus* — are attested elsewhere in Latin literature, though rarely, referring only to expensive dyed garments,⁴⁶ and the terms appear to be similar to what we would call high-prestige trade names or brand names. The emperor Nero is said to have interdicted the use of *amethystinus* dye in order to reserve to himself the prestige of using it, and to have ordered his agents to remove a garment colored with the forbidden dye from a woman who was wearing it at one of his musical recitals, and to have confiscated her property as well.⁴⁷ Thus it appears that the Romans' connoisseurship of expensive dyes provided them with very refined color concepts and categories that could be transferred across semantic domains — in this case from textiles to flowers. In fact, the etymologies of the terms show that more than two domains are involved. *Amethystinus* as a dye descriptor is derived metonymically from the name of the gem, then transferred to dye and textiles, and then to flowers. The term *ianthinus* had a floral origin, from the Greek word for violet (*ion*),⁴⁸ which was metonymically applied to dyes and textiles, and finally back to flowers again.

6. Dissenting views of color prestige

I mentioned above that 'prestige' does not have a fixed value, but that different groups may relate to it in different ways.

⁴⁶ See e.g. MART. 1, 96, 4; 2, 39, 1.

⁴⁷ SUET. *Ner.* 32, 3.

⁴⁸ PLIN. *NH* 21, 27.

We have already seen that Pliny himself does not accept the prestige values placed in items by many of his peers, and he is not alone. The Roman poet Martial, writing about the same time as Pliny, suggests several different ways of assessing the prestige values of color and colored items in poem 2, 96:

*Si non molestum est teque non piget, scazon,
Nostro rogamus pauca uerba Materno
Dicas in aurem sic ut audiat solus.
Amator ille tristium lacernarum
Et baeticatus atque leucophaeatus,
Qui coccinatos non putat uiros esse
Amethystinasque mulierum uocat uestes,
Natiua laudet, habeat et licet semper
Fuscos colores, galbinos habet mores.
Rogabit, unde suspicer uirum mollem.
Vna lauamur: aspicit nihil sursum,
Sed spectat oculis deuorantibus draucos
Nec otiosis mentulas uidet labris.
Quaeris quis hic sit? Excidit mihi nomen.⁴⁹*

Martial here contrasts two cultural approaches to color. The unnamed subject of the poem disapproves of men who wear garments dyed with *coccum* or with *amethystinus* dye, and associates those colors with effeminacy. He prefers instead to wear undyed (*baeticatus*, *natiua*), gray (*leucophaeatus*), or merely dark colors (*tristis*,⁵⁰ *fuscus*). Martial presents this character as trying to display a different kind of status through his austere color choices, denoting self-restraint, a rejection of luxury, and adherence to

⁴⁹ "If it's not too much trouble and you don't mind, please, my limping verse, say a few words in friend Maternus' ear, so that he is the only one to hear them. That lover of sad-colored cloaks, who goes about in Baetic wool or gray, thinks people who wear *coccum*-dyed clothes unmanly, and calls *amethystinus* clothes dress for women, though he praises undyed stuff and be always darkly attired — his morals are *galbinus*. He will ask how I come to suspect the man of effeminacy. We bathe together. He never looks up, but watches the athletes with devouring eyes and his lips work as he gazes at their cocks. Who is it, you ask? The name has escaped me." (trans. SHACKLETON BAILEY, adapted)

⁵⁰ *Tristis* is not usually used as a color term in Latin, but may be so used to denote dark-colored items that also carry implications of gloom or somberness; see GLARE (1982) *s.v. tristis* 6, b.

personal virtue and traditional Roman simplicity. But Martial lampoons this man's affected morals with a deftly deployed color term, *galbinus*, a word that appears only a few times in Latin literature, always in connection with garments that the authors consider to be signs of effeminacy or homosexuality and tastelessness.⁵¹ It probably refers to a bright green or yellow-green hue, and for Romans of Pliny's class and moral inclinations, *galbinus* is an anti-prestige color term with implications of immorality, even though it is apparently used on expensive items, turning up only in contexts of extreme luxury. No doubt it held a different status value for those who chose to wear it.

7. Pliny's gem descriptions

Now I would like to turn to Pliny's treatment of gems and precious stones. That these were important items for Romans' status displays is not in question, and Pliny spends the first seven chapters of book 37 in the *Natural History* describing how they were used in just this way by prominent Greeks and Romans, focusing on their uses by Pompey the Great and by the emperors Gaius and Nero.⁵² As with costly dyes and pigments, Pliny does not approve of these uses, but he nevertheless catalogs and describes a large inventory of gems and precious stones in minute detail, taking up nearly all of book 37. Part of his motivation for doing so probably derives from his innate curiosity and desire to pass on a sense of wonder at nature's creations to his readers,⁵³ but he also wants his readers to be able to distinguish expertly among the various types and to be able to sort out valuable gems from those of lesser quality or counterfeits (*NH* 37, 55-56). Eugenia Lao expresses his attitude

⁵¹ MART. 3, 82, 5; IUV. 2, 97; PETR. 67, 4.

⁵² *NH* 37, 5-7.

⁵³ On Pliny's general desire to inspire wonder, see BEAGON (2011) 80-86. VOELKE-VISCARDI (2001) argues that Pliny connects the gems, their materials, and their colors to forces of nature and their functioning in the cosmos.

concisely when she says that even though Pliny frequently speaks against the consumers of luxury throughout the *Natural History*, he also speaks *to* these consumers, educating them to be connoisseurs, and that Pliny's predominant voice through the *Natural History* is as a consumer and connoisseur of luxury items himself.⁵⁴ Being a connoisseur is itself a high-status activity, and the language he uses in the descriptions enables him and his readers to achieve that status.

The subtle and intricate color distinctions and combinations present in gems push Pliny's color language to its limits, and in his descriptions, we find many color expressions that are found rarely or never elsewhere in Latin literature. In particular, as he seeks ways to describe the perceptual or aesthetic qualities of various colors, he uses a number of metaphorical expressions that are drawn from non-visual sensory experience. Of course, it is a common technique of metaphor in general to draw comparisons across different sensory domains to communicate otherwise difficult-to-express sense impressions, but many such metaphorical expressions describing colors in Latin are unique to Pliny.⁵⁵ For example, in describing a variety of amber, he writes,

*Demonstratus lyncurium uocat et fieri ex urina lyncum bestiarum, e maribus fuluum et igneum, e feminis languidius atque candidum.*⁵⁶ (NH 37, 11)

It is possible that his use of *languidius* is borrowed from his source,⁵⁷ but the use of the metaphor of the weakness of a body as a metaphor for color quality occurs only in Pliny and once in Lucretius (5, 421). When describing another variety of amber,

⁵⁴ LAO (2011) 54.

⁵⁵ For discussion of the phenomenon in Greek, see IRWIN (1974) 19-20.

⁵⁶ "Demonstratus calls amber *lyncurium* and says it comes from the urine of lynxes; from males it is dark yellow and fiery, from females it is more sluggish (*languidius*) and white."

⁵⁷ Demonstratus was "an historian and Roman senator of the early first century A.D." about whom nothing more is known (HEALY [1999] 60 n. 77).

he invokes two tactile metaphors that are not attested elsewhere to describe visual color experience:

*summa laus Falernis a uini colore dictis, molli fulgore perspicuis in quibus et decocti mellis lenitas placeat.*⁵⁸ (NH 37, 12)

More strikingly, he uses an auditory metaphor to describe a disapproved color in a certain kind of Cyprian gem:

*ad hoc quibusdam intercurrit umbra, surdusque fit colos, qui inprobatur etiam dilutior.*⁵⁹ (NH 37, 18)

Pliny alone seems ever to have used this metaphor of hearing to describe color appearance, and he adds to it in this passage another metaphor of color which is more familiar to us, that of the dilution of liquids to describe the reduction or lessening of a color impression. Outside of Pliny's *Natural History*, the term *dilutus* is applied to color by only one other author, Aulus Gellius, in his famously puzzling account of color categories.⁶⁰ If Pliny's pioneering use of such language does not strike us as unusual, that is likely because we are the inheritors of a tradition of complex and sophisticated color expressions that were rare in Latin.

More significantly, Pliny uses conceptual metaphors to describe relations between different colors. By conceptual metaphor I mean the notion that was developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) wherein one conceptual domain is mapped onto another in a systematic way. In Pliny's color language, the source domain is that of location and motion in space, and the target domain is color, and the governing metaphor is that COLORS ARE REGIONS or BEING A COLOR IS BEING IN A REGION.⁶¹ That is, Pliny abstracts

⁵⁸ "The highest praise is for Falernians, named from the color of the wine, which are outstanding for the soft (*molli*) shine in which the softness (*lenitas*) of reduced honey is pleasing."

⁵⁹ "In addition, a shadow runs through some stones and the color becomes mute (*surdus*), and the more diluted (*dilutus*) the color, the less it is approved."

⁶⁰ GELL. 2, 26, 14. See BRADLEY (2009) 231, who suggests that Gellius uses the term to pun on the color term *luteus*.

⁶¹ For more detailed discussion Pliny's use of these metaphors, not only when describing gems but other objects as well, see WHARTON (2016).

color concepts from their material embodiments and he places them in an abstract color space in order to describe how these color concepts are related or intersect.⁶² We use such metaphors frequently in modern languages when we say that one color is “close to” another or that one color can “shade into” another, and so forth, and modern color science has embraced the spatial metaphor wholeheartedly by inventing various color spaces to represent color relations.⁶³ However, such expressions are not found commonly in Latin except in Pliny, who uses them not infrequently (not only of gems but of many other colored items), and in two occurrences in Columella.⁶⁴ For example, Pliny describes the *callaina* stone’s color as follows:

*Comitatur eam similitudine propior quam auctoritate callaina, e uiridi pallens.*⁶⁵ (NH 37, 33)

I interpret the prepositional phrase *e uiridi pallens* as representing what Talmy calls “fictive motion”⁶⁶ along a path out of focal or paradigmatic green hue toward a lighter color region. That is, there is no actual motion away from green expressed by the preposition, but the color of the stone is located, in our mental model, on a metaphorical path between green and lightness or *pallor*. We should note as well that Pliny has used the color adjective *uiridis* as a noun referring simply to a hue, which is rare in Latin. We see a similar case in Pliny’s description of the *chrysoprasos* stone:

*Praefertur his chrysoprasos porri sucum et ipsa referens, sed haec paulum declinantem a topazo in aurum.*⁶⁷ (NH 37, 34)

⁶² MACLAURY (1997) argues that use of such cognitive color spaces is fundamental to all human color cognition and is foundational to his approach to color cognition in Mesoamerica.

⁶³ KUEHNI (2003).

⁶⁴ COL. 8, 2, 566 and 11, 3, 808.

⁶⁵ “With this stone is associated, but more closely because of its likeness rather than value, the *callaina*, paling-out-of-green” (*e uiridi pallens* = “light green”).

⁶⁶ TALMY (2000) 103-122.

⁶⁷ “The *chrysoprasos* is preferred to these, which likewise reproduces the tint (*sucum*) of a leek, although in this case producing a tint turning away slightly from the *topazus* into gold” (*paulum declinantem a topazo in aurum*).

Here again Pliny is not describing a change of color, even though the color term is predicated of a participle of motion, but rather Pliny is placing the color of the *chrysoprasos* on a path between the color regions occupied by *topazus* and by gold, into an area that we would call greenish-yellow. Pliny's use of the word *sucus* to describe a tint or hue is also singular; the metaphor comes from a metonymic use of *sucus* ("juice") to refer to flavor, now transferred metaphorically into the visual domain. Pliny describes the *iaspis* stone using a similar metaphor, in the purple-blue range:

*[iaspis] caerulea est circa Thermodontem amnem, in Phrygia purpurea et in Cappadocia ex purpura caerulea, tristis atque non refulgens.*⁶⁸ (NH 37, 37)

Finally, describing the *hyacinthos* stone, he writes,

*Multum ab hac distat hyacinthos, ab uicino tamen colore descendens. Differentia haec est, quod ille emicans in amethysto fulgor uiolaceus diluitur hyacintho.*⁶⁹ (NH 37, 41)

Here Pliny locates the colors of the two stones in a contiguous color space using the expression *uicino colore*, but in this case it is not difference in hue that distinguishes them, but rather what we would call saturation, which Pliny expresses using the metaphor of dilution mentioned previously. I will not adduce any further examples except to point out that Pliny's discussion of the three color categories for flowers discussed previously also makes use of a conceptual metaphor of color space wherein each color category occupies a region of the space, the boundaries are marked by prepositional phrases, and the relations between them are described using verbs of motion.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ "The iaspis is blue around the Thermodon river; in Phrygia it is purple, and in Cappadocia it is blue-out-of-purple (*ex purpura caerulea* = "purplish-blue"), gloomy (*tristis*) and not brilliant."

⁶⁹ "The *hyacinthos* stone is far distant from this [the amethyst], descending from its nevertheless neighboring color. This is the difference: the violet intensity leaping forth in the amethyst is washed out for the hyacinthos."

⁷⁰ NH 21, 22.

Since Pliny uses such conceptual metaphors to describe many objects other than gems — some of which are not particularly high-prestige⁷¹ — it cannot be argued that his innovative use of color descriptions arises only in discussing objects that directly related to status displays. Yet Pliny as a purveyor connoisseurship needs to instruct his readers in the methods of distinguishing better products from worse ones across the whole range of products that may be purchased, used, or consumed, and hence the ability to use such sophisticated color language is very useful, both for displaying his own status as an expert, and for his readers' ability make proper status-related distinctions as Veblen remarked above.⁷²

8. Prestige and color-naming of gems

Pliny is forthright that the information he provides in the *Natural History* normally comes from his sources and not from his own experience, and although he usually does not identify his sources individually in context, his frequent use of expressions like *uocant* (a form which occurs almost 700 times in the *Natural History*) shows that the names and descriptions he uses come from others. Since many of his sources are Greek or otherwise non-Roman,⁷³ there is always reason to suspect that the novel features of his color language that we observe may be the result of second language interactions. This is most obviously true in scores of cases for the names ascribed to gems and precious stones, the majority of which are direct loanwords from Greek. Many of the names recorded by Pliny are *hapax legomena* in Latin and most occur very infrequently in extant Latin literature. Nevertheless, the fact that they do not occur commonly in the

⁷¹ For example, of pseudonard (12, 26), of chalk (35, 57), of grapes (14, 4, 29), and of the hemerocallis plant (21, 90), among many other such instances.

⁷² VEBLÉN (2017) 64.

⁷³ See HEALY (1999) 60-61 for a summary of Pliny's sources on gems and precious stones.

remains of Latin literature does not mean that they were not commonly used, at least among certain subgroups, namely, the producers, sellers, and consumers of such goods.

I will focus here briefly on one class of gem names. We have very little information about who actually conferred the names on the gems, but Pliny complains that the Greeks are excessively inventive about coming up with names (*NH* 37, 74). It is not clear which Greeks in particular Pliny blames, but a reasonable guess might attribute the naming process to those closely involved in mining, processing, and selling the gems, that is, people who rank fairly low in a Roman's estimation of social status. In many cases, the gem names appear to be calculated to enhance their prestige value, and hence their price, by connecting the color of the gem to the value of gold, even though none of them appear to have actual gold in them. Hence, we observe a good number of names containing the Greek morpheme *-chrys-*, which is polysemous in evoking both the precious metal and its color. It is notable that even though all these names refer to stones whose hue is in the yellow range, there are no stones at all in Pliny's inventory named using the Greek root word *xanthos*, which is a common Greek term for yellow.⁷⁴ Thus we find in Pliny's inventory the following names: *chrysolampis*, *chrysoberyllus*, *chrysocolla*,⁷⁵ *chrysopastus*, *chrysopis*, *chrysoprasus*, *chryselectrum*, *chrysites*, *chrysopteros*, *ammochrysos*, *leuochrysos*, and *melichrysos*. The fact that Pliny disapproves of the proliferation of such names says little about the broader success of their marketing strategies, which are probably aimed more at those who aspire to higher prestige than to people like Pliny, who are already near the top of the prestige ladder. Nor is it possible for us to pin down precisely the extent to which these Greek borrowed names (and the dozens

⁷⁴ Although in Greek epic *xanthos* is primarily predicated of hair, in later Greek it describes yellow objects of all kinds; see LSJ (¹⁰1996) *s.v.* *xanthos*; IRWIN (1974) 25-26, 57.

⁷⁵ See also REITZENSTEIN (2016) on this term referring to a mineral and pigment as well as a gem.

of others like them in the *Natural History* and in Columella) would have been considered high-prestige loanwords as words. Romans on the whole were deeply ambivalent about the use of the Greek language⁷⁶, and Romans of different social classes and circumstances would probably have different orientations toward the prestige value of these words.⁷⁷

9. Conclusion

I have tried to demonstrate that there is a plausible connection between Roman prestige-seeking activities in the early Empire and changes and innovations color language and conceptions, especially as they appear in Pliny's *Natural History*. However, it is impossible to know how widely these innovations were distributed among speakers of Latin. It seems probable that some were known to artisans in dyes and pigments and producers of valuable stones, and, given the popularity of these items and the importance for status-seekers to have some knowledge of them, perhaps many elite Romans used them as well. But they rarely turn up in literary Latin, possibly because, even though the products themselves conferred prestige, technical expressions and descriptions as linguistic entities were not considered to be prestigious in the literary realm. However, Latin color language in this domain shows that, even if Latin lacked a set of Basic Color Terms that primarily referred to abstract color concepts, the Romans of the early Empire were capable of abstracting color concepts from their material sources, and they used those concepts to make complex and sophisticated color descriptions of objects across many semantic domains.

⁷⁶ See ADAMS (2003) 2-14 for discussion of attitudes toward Greek bilingualism among elites, 'sub-elites', and non-elite Romans. On Pliny's ambivalence toward using Greek names in the *Natural History*, see DOODY (2011) 125-129, who remarks that using Greek names could also be interpreted as a sign of erudition.

⁷⁷ Cf. remarks by MEYERHOFF (2011) 41 and MILROY (1988) 2-13 noted above.

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DISCUSSION

D. Reitzenstein: You discussed the word *aeneus* in relation to the beard color of Gnaeus Domitius. Do you think the use of the metallic color term might also be a reference to the color or materials used in Roman portrait busts?

D.B. Wharton: It is possible that the mention of bronze when referring to the facial appearance of a famous person could invoke the related context of portrait busts, which were often made of bronze and decorated with other colorful materials (such as the famous bust of Brutus in Rome's Capitoline Museum). In the passage I quoted from Suetonius's *Nero*, Licinius Crassus the Orator could be punning on the term *aeneus* in order to enrich his witticism, and the pun would be appropriate to the person mentioned, since Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus was eminent enough to merit a bust. Suetonius says that he served as tribune of the plebs and as consul, and, after conquering the Allobroges and the Arverni, he rode through their province on an elephant in a quasi-triumphal procession (Suet. *Ner.* 2, 1-2). However, a clear reference to the reddish color of Domitius's actual beard is also present, since in the previous section of the life of Nero, Suetonius provides a legendary *aition* of the red (*rutila*) color of the beards of the Ahenobarbi (Suet. *Ner.* 1, 1), a cognomen that literally translates as "bronze bearded". The use of the other metallic terms (*ferreus*, *plumbeus*) in the joke, however, carry very little color salience, and it is difficult to find in them any reference to portraiture.

D. Reitzenstein: You also said that *purpura* and its derivatives are some of the most common color terms in Latin, but isn't gold (*aurum*) more frequent?

D.B. Wharton: You are right that *aurum* and its derivatives⁷⁸ far outnumber *purpura* in the number of both types and tokens. This is a confirmation of the principle that high-prestige materials attract a lot of lexical innovation because of the economic activity they inspire and because of the Romans' desire to use, display, and talk about them. Both the Greeks and the Romans liked to use gold and purple together.⁷⁹ I was reluctant to give a full treatment of *aurum* and its derivatives as a color term here, however, because of the difficulty of assessing whether in each instance its color feature is the most salient in context (for example when used as currency), but mostly because I haven't yet had the opportunity to delve into the questions surrounding color and precious metals in general. A full study of precious metals and color language would be worth doing, but it is far beyond the scope of this paper.

C. Mohr: You emphasized Pliny's development of a color space in talking about some color categories, but colors include many other features. Why reduce them to a color space?

D.B. Wharton: You are absolutely right that color impressions are not reducible to a color space, and I don't want to give the impression that color spaces in general, or Pliny's in particular, provide an exhaustive account of color. I emphasized color space and explored Pliny's color-space language in a little bit of detail, however, to show that he and his readers have the cognitive capacity to form abstract color conceptions and to talk and think about them in this way, since I was trying to show that this kind of abstraction about color is something that the Romans' culture of color and prestige needed. I emphasized it because the question

⁷⁸ *aurarius, aurata, auratilis, aurator, aureatus, aureax, aureolus, auresco, aureus, auricoctor, auricolor, auricomans, aurcula, aurifer, aurifex, auriflus, aurifodina, aurigans, auriger, aurilegulus, auripigmentum*, and probably some others. The same is true of *argentum* and its derivatives.

⁷⁹ GRAND-CLÉMENT (2016); PLIN. *NH* 9, 60 remarks "in triumphs, purpura is blended with gold".

of whether the Romans were capable of such color abstraction has been called into question, and as Mark Bradley (2009) has demonstrated, the Romans typically did not think or talk about color using abstract color terms shorn of their material moorings. But the fact that they usually did not talk this way about color, in literary genres at least, does not mean that they could not easily form and use abstract color conceptions.

C. Mohr: Your talk focused more on a psychological disposition — the need to seek status — rather than any particular emotions. Are there color preferences in Roman fashion that are expressions of dispositions other than the status need?

D.B. Wharton: Many — maybe most — color choices in colored objects are probably driven by other needs or emotions. Women's fashions in color (as described and criticized by men) receive some notable attention from Plautus (*Epid.* 223-234) and Ovid (*Ars am.* 3, 169-192).⁸⁰ In these passages, it is the variety of colors as a whole that arouses feelings of amusement and disapproval in the men who are commenting on them.

K. Ierodiakonou: What other kinds of emotions are aroused by colors?

D.B. Wharton: In one of the passages I quoted (Suet. *Ner.* 32, 3), Nero appears to have experienced at least two emotions when he saw a woman dressed in a garment that was dyed in a kind of *purpura* that he had reserved for himself (either *amethystinus* or double-dipped Tyrian), but in this instance the color *qua* color is not the simple cause of his feelings. It is the color in combination with its material and efficient causes (as Aristotle would say), that is, the “color” he reacts to includes the material out of which it was made and the process by which it was made, as well

⁸⁰ Discussed by BRADLEY (2009) 179-187; GOLDMAN (2013) 33-34; and REIZENSTEIN (2016) 181.

as the social context in which it was used, that aroused in Nero a feeling of begrudging — he did not want others to have the pleasure and prestige of wearing it — and also of anger, when he saw her wearing it in at his own recital, a context that was supposed to be devoted to his own glorification. In Martial's poem about the austere-seeming Roman (2, 96), the dark or undyed garments he wears are intended to arouse emotions, and his colors are called *tristis* — sad or serious — in a metonymic sense, referring to the feelings the colors inspire. But when Martial comments that the man's morals are *galbinus*, the implied criticism probably includes reference to other emotions — probably disapproval, perhaps disgust — that a conventional Roman would likely have experienced when seeing a man dressed in that color, though the men wearing them no doubt found pleasure in the color, as they did in wearing *coccum*-dyed and *amethystinus* clothing. Pliny also writes of *purpurae insania*, a “madness for *purpura*” (NH 9, 60), which probably includes an emotional component similar to lust, that is, a strong desire to acquire it. This is a very common emotion in modern consumer culture which most if not all of us have experienced.

P. Jockey: I agree with your definition of color terms; they are very hard to translate accurately, and I like your discussion about highlighting and back grounding the semantic feature of color. We must maintain the distinction between an abstract ‘color’ and the materials and pigments used to produce them because of the different emotions that they aroused. You also implied that the more expensive a pigment or dye, the more color terms it is likely to generate, but I am not sure this is true in Greek except possibly for gold. Perhaps this is a specifically Roman trait. In addition, Pausanias in his descriptions of colored objects does not engage with prestige.

D.B. Wharton: I think you are right about the different attitudes toward prestige in Greek and Roman cultures, and our two main sources of information about color language in these

presentations — for you, Pausanias, and for me, Pliny the Elder — reflect not only cultural but personal differences. The Romans' peculiarly strong orientation toward prestige-seeking in all things comes through throughout the *Natural History* and especially in his summation of the work at the end of book 37. He says he feels called upon to *discrimen quoddam rerum ipsarum atque terrarum facere*, "to make some judgement of the products themselves and of the world's lands" (NH 37, 77). And number one in his list of lands is Italy (surprise!), which he calls "the ruler and second mother of the world, with her men and women, her leaders and soldiers, her pre-eminence in the arts, her famous talents, the healthiness and mildness of her climate" (NH 37, 77). He goes on to list Italy's natural resources and manufactured products that give it pre-eminence over India, Spain, and Gaul; Greece is not mentioned. The inference to be drawn from this is that the final aim of the *Natural History* is not simply to catalogue all human knowledge, but to demonstrate how Nature herself has established Roman superiority.

A. Grand-Clément: As you have shown, prestige requires innovation: the elite has to be inventive in order to renew its status symbols, as the rest of the people try to adopt the same marks of prestige. Colours play an important part in this process, and especially the names given to the new materials (dyes, pigments, and gems) that were imported in Rome and came from all over the world. It even became part of "marketing strategies", as you mentioned. The development and refinement of colour vocabulary in the imperial period play with emotions and imagination. We also find in Greece a certain refinement of color vocabulary, not only in medical texts but also in the epigraphical inventories registering the textiles dedicated to deities in the sanctuaries (for instance to Artemis Brauronia in Athens). Regarding this link between colours and emotions, we saw in some of the texts you referred to (1) an allusion to some sad colours (probably the greyish hues of mourning garments that express sorrow), and also (2) a reference to the madness provoked by murex-purple. In this case, Mark Bradley

showed that Pliny draws a parallel between on the one hand the appetite of Roman for luxury purple-dyed garments and on the other hand the greediness of the murex itself, which is trapped by fishermen in baskets full of cockles, because it wants to eat them. Behind this comparison lies a moral condemnation of both attitudes, characterized by *aviditas*.

D.B. Wharton: Your observation about Greek medical language applies to Latin as well, as Michèle Fruyt (2006) has documented in her study of medical and technical uses of color terms. I believe the Romans did a great deal of borrowing in these areas, although I have not had the opportunity to study this extensively.⁸¹ But the technical uses of these terms do not often show up in literary Latin, for obvious reasons. On the subject of *aviditas*, I agree that Pliny frequently condemns this vice, but I also agree with Eugenia Lao that Pliny is himself an avid consumer and connoisseur of luxury products and so, like many people, finds himself in a state of internal contradiction.

⁸¹ ADAMS (2003) 462, 467 discusses borrowing and 'loan shifts' in general Latin medical terminology, and I suspect something similar applies to the color vocabulary of Latin medical authors.