The most significant challenges facing a study of Roman-period mural paintings from Greece result from preservation, chronology, and academic traditions. These issues have constrained the study of Roman-period mural paintings in Greece (and elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean) and have limited the potential contribution of painting studies to general archaeological and historical narratives in the ancient Mediterranean, and more specifically to cultural and material stratification in Ancient Corinth.

Research into the large corpus of Roman-period paintings at Corinth, however, demonstrates that the study of ancient paintings has much to offer to our understanding of cultural practices. This paper presents specific groups of paintings from Corinth that illustrate the patterns in painting techniques, material-use, and visual representations from the 1st to the 3rd centuries CE. It traces these patterns diachronically, integrating discussion of technical and iconographic facets with the consideration of the artistic associations of the painters, the interests and cultural resources of Corinthian patrons, and the networks of exchange in which Corinth participated during these centuries. This perspective highlights the manner in which paintings reflect cultural practices and the dynamic and multifaceted nature of artistic production in the Roman Mediterranean.

*Roman and Corinthian Painting: Research Challenges*

Few Roman sites preserve painted walls like those found in the cities and suburban villas in Campania. In fact, mural paintings from most sites throughout the Roman world are found in much less pristine conditions – sometimes adhering to walls, but in many cases found in fallen positions on floors or re-deposited within construction fills and pits. Often the arduous task of documenting, cleaning, and conserving fragmentary paintings...
remains unrealized. Thus in many situations, owing to strained resources both in terms of money and time, paintings from archaeological contexts are left unstudied, and at best, perhaps only briefly mentioned in archaeological reports. Despite the challenges presented by issues of conservation and lack of resources, however, research on provincial paintings (particularly those found in situ) is expanding, although the majority of this work focuses on paintings in the western Mediterranean and Europe.\(^1\)

Modern political interests and academic traditions are principally responsible for this discrepancy. In contrast to the northwestern Roman provinces, particularly Britain and Gaul,\(^2\) for instance, where modern national interest has played a large role in preserving, studying and publishing Roman-period sites, other former Roman provinces, such as Greece, have histories in which modern nationalistic connections are aligned with other cultural periods, particularly those that are not colonial in nature.\(^3\) For Greece these cultural connections belong with the Classical and Byzantine pasts and they play a significant part in the current paucity of scholarship on Roman paintings from Greece.\(^4\)

The strict division between the study of Greek and Roman paintings further contributes to the present state of scholarship. While these two subfields overlap at points chronologically and geographically, they remain distinct.\(^5\) This separation is maintained by academic traditions – by the evolutionary armature of history writing and the common application of the binary Greek or Roman. As the paintings from Corinth demonstrate, the classification of artistic characteristics as either Greek or Roman misrepresents the ethnic and cultural diversity inherent in the Roman Mediterranean.\(^6\) The duality of Greek or Roman also misrepresents the intensive cultural interactions predating the Roman period that fostered mutual borrowing and adaptation of artistic methods and visual forms among various Mediterranean cultures. The combination of technical

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2. Woolf (2004, 220) uses France as an example of how the Roman past is adopted by a modern nation, as is illustrated by the slogan “... nos ancestres les gaulois.”
5. A synthetic study of the specific attributes of painting traditions in various regions of the ancient Mediterranean does not exist, although Kakoulli’s recent work (2009) on Greek painting techniques and materials integrates Roman practices.