

The image features three marble busts of women, likely from the Roman period, arranged horizontally. The bust on the left is a plain white marble with curly hair. The middle bust has reddish-brown painted hair. The bust on the right has yellowish-gold painted hair and red lips. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Exploring Art in Graeco-Roman Antiquity

Everyday Life in Athens and Rome (HPHP4020)

Studying “art” from Antiquity – baggage

- Renaissance and onwards: concern with *naturalism* (and *idealism*).
- Concerns with stylistic development.
 - Pliny *Natural History* as a source. See also Quintilian (*Inst.* 12.10.2-9).
 - Emphasis on individuals and their accomplishments (Polyclitus, Lysippus, Zeuxis, Apelles, etc.).
 - *Connoisseurship* and attribution.
- Pliny – start of third century BCE, “art ceased” only to be resumed in an inferior form by mid-second century BCE (*NH* 34.49-52).

Polykleitos's
Doryphoros, National
Archaeological
Museum, Naples



Reception and contextualisation

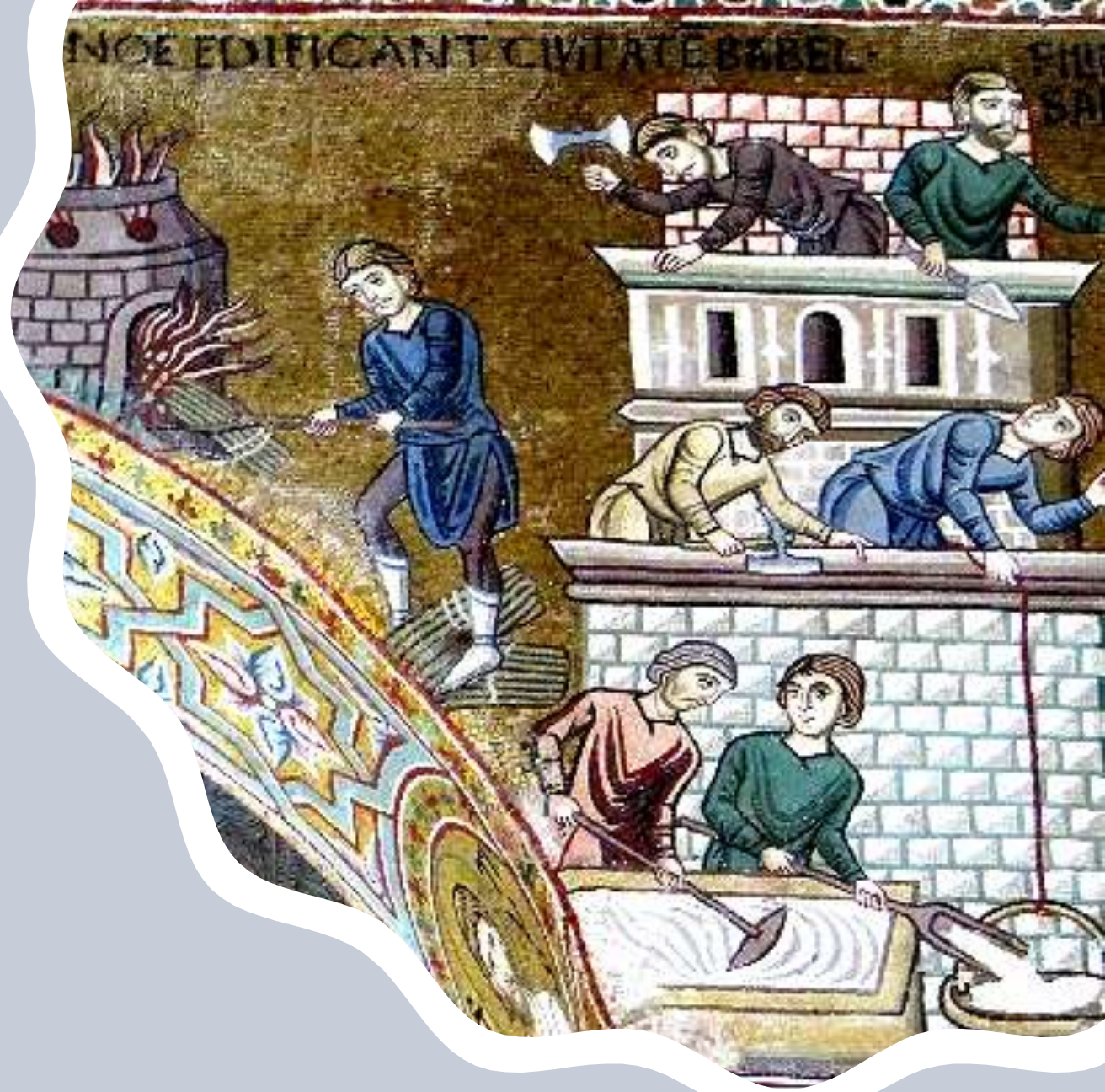
- Many Roman “copies” actually new creations modelled on earlier forms.
- More recent shifts in interest towards reception.
 - Looking at social, cultural, political and religious contexts.
- Role of “art” in creating and asserting a sense of identity.
 - From tombstones to imperial “propaganda”. Constructions of identity based on status and gender.
- Interactions between (physical) “art” and literature.



Sarcophagus with a Greek Physician, Ostia, ca. 300 CE

Questions to consider: what survives and what is missing?

- Sculpture and portraiture – may be rendered in a variety of mediums, stone/marble and metals - gold, silver, bronze – ivory, e.g. Britannicus (*Suet. Div. Tit. 2.1*).
 - **Loss of portraits and sculpture** through melting down of metals and burning of marble for lime.
- Many earlier classical Greek statues survive only as Roman period “**copies**” – more original works of the Hellenistic period.
- **The challenge of provenance:**
Antiquarianism – focus on monuments and artwork from antiquity; even issues with modern trade in antiquities.



Mosaic in the Cappella Palatina in Palermo, Sicily.

Ancient Authors on Art – what can literary sources tell us?

- Some descriptions by Imperial period Graeco-Roman authors – e.g. Pliny the Elder *Natural History* (books 33-34); *Pausanias Description of Greece*.
- Inscriptional evidence quoted (notably by Pausanias).
- **Ekphrasis** - rhetorical descriptions of works of art.
 - “Zeuxis, that best of painters, did not paint popular and common subjects such as heroes, gods or wars; but rather always tried to do something new... something unusual and strange... Among his other daring innovations Zeuxis represented a female centaur, who in turn was feeding twin centaur children, mere infants.”
– **Lucian Zeuxis**.





Representing the “other”

[Description of certain peoples in East Africa] “The Satyri (called this because of their supposed similar look to Satyrs), beyond their figure, have nothing in common with the manners of the human race, and the form of the Aegipani is such as is commonly

“It is also asked whether we are to believe that certain monstrous races of men, spoken of in secular history, have sprung from Noah's sons... Others are said to have no head, and their eyes in their shoulders; and other human or quasi-human races are depicted in mosaic in the harbour esplanade of Carthage...” – **Augustine *City of God* 16.8.**

What constitutes art?

- Might many statues originally had religious or politically symbolic meaning?
 - **Would this technically count as art still or is this a modern imposition?**
- What about works taken from their original context?

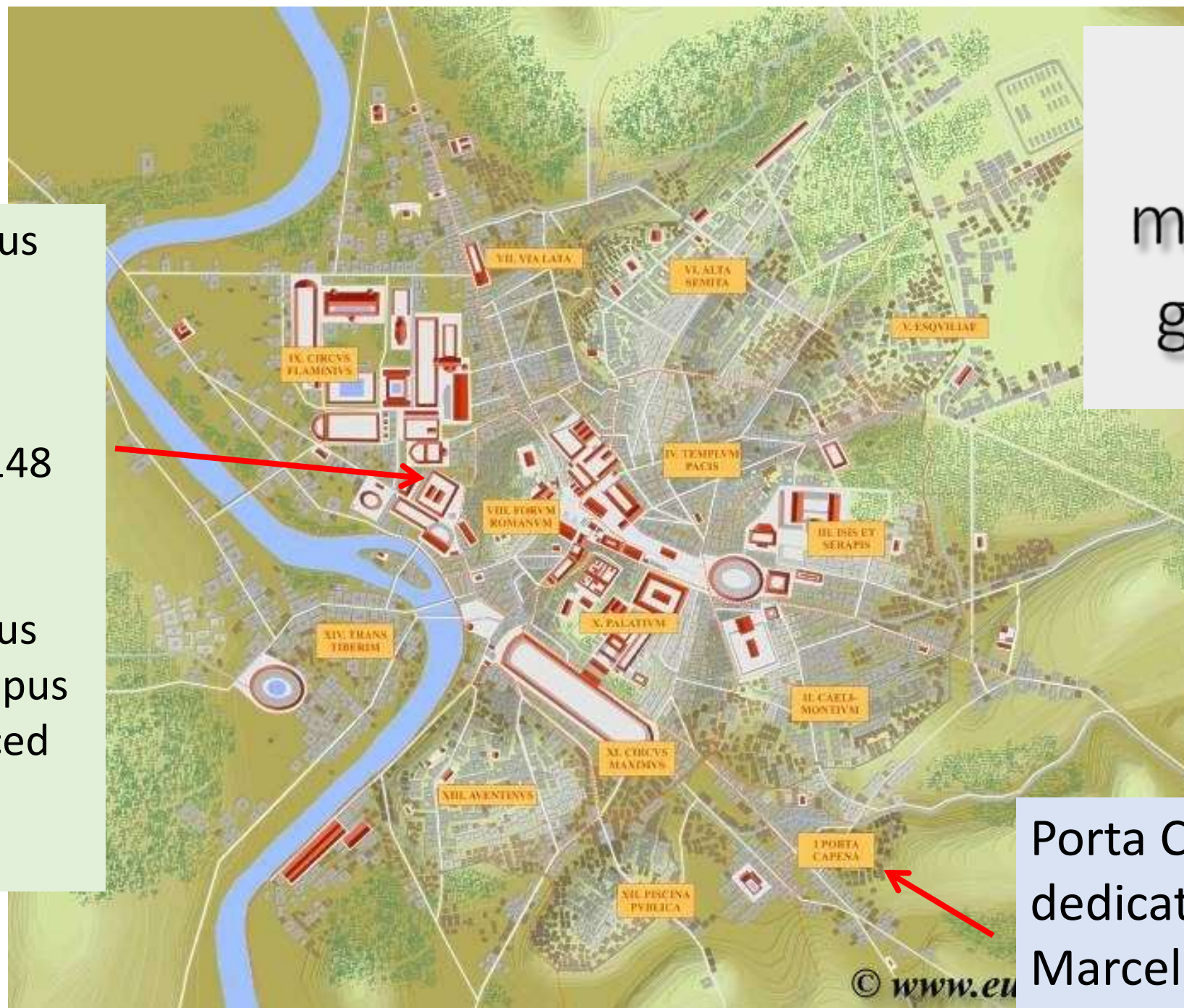
“The ornaments of the city, the statues and pictures which were so numerous in Syracuse, he [M. Claudius Marcellus - 212 BC] transported to Rome... [he] began the decadence with which all places everywhere, sacred and profane, were plundered... the temple outside **Porta Capena**, dedicated by **Marcellus**, used to be frequented by foreigners because of the spender of their ornaments...” – **Livy 25.40.1-3.**



Quintus Caecilius Metellus Macedonicus plundered Macedonia in 148 BCE.

Built the Porticus Metelli on Campus Martius (replaced by Porticus Octaviae).

Proto-museums / galleries?



Porta Capena, dedicated by Marcellus

“For in no case is one who contemplates such works of art moved so much by admiration of the good fortune of those who have possessed themselves of the property of others, as by pity as well as envy for the original owners. And when opportunities become ever more frequent, and **the victor collects around him all the treasures of other peoples**, and these treasures may be almost said to **invite those who were robbed of them to come and inspect them**, things are twice as bad. For now spectators no longer pity their neighbours, but themselves, as they recall to mind their own calamities. And hence not only envy, but a sort of **passionate hatred for the beloved of fortune flares up**, for the memories awakened of their own disaster move them to detest the authors of it. – Polybius 9.10.7-10.



Colour on Ancient “Art”

“...cinnabaris... the thick matter which issues from the dragon when crushed beneath the weight of the dying elephant, mixed with the blood of either animal, as already described... [This] colour... gives a proper representation of blood.” –**Pliny NH 33.115-116.**

- Popular imagination can picture a “pristine” white or grey look for ancient buildings and sculptures.
 - Influence of neoclassicism (becoming popular in 18th century).

