

BOOK REVIEW

Color-Terms in Social and Cultural Context in Ancient Rome. By RACHAEL B. GOLDMAN. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press LLC, 2013. pp. ix + 193. Hardcover, \$90.00. ISBN 978-1-61143-914-4.

Goldman's monograph surveys the uses of Latin color terms in many Roman social and literary contexts, with chapters on Aulus Gellius's puzzling dialogue on color terms (*Gel.* 2.26), on dyes, dyers, and pigments, on colored clothing, chariot factions, physiognomic descriptions, and a group of Latin words based on the stem *-color*.

It appears shortly after Mark Bradley's *Colour and Meaning in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge 2009), the most important broad study of Latin color language in decades. Bradley explored Latin color term uses in most of these very same contexts, basing his analysis on the premise that the Romans mostly lacked independent, abstract hue conceptions. For the Romans, he argued, color terms nearly always evoked other, non-hue semantic features typical of their usual referents.

Given the topical overlap, one would expect Goldman to respond to Bradley's provocative work. But she almost never cites Bradley, and never engages his central arguments, even when she covers the same subjects and texts. In fact, she does not seem fully aware of the contents of his book, which she summarizes inaccurately in her Introduction (6). (Her summary of Berlin and Kay's *Basic Color Terms* (Berkeley 1969) is also badly inaccurate (4).) Goldman's treatments of topics that overlap with Bradley's are consistently less insightful than his, as she lacks his command of the secondary literature and his philological acumen. Most of these and other parts of her monograph consist of summaries of, or expansions on, ideas found in her other secondary sources, illustrated by selected Latin passages, Loeb translations, and her own commentary.

But Goldman's often tenuous grip on facts compromises her work's reliability. For example, she writes, "A red dye called *coccinus* or *coccineus* was produced from the egg sacs of the insect *Kermococcus vermilio*, which clung to plant stems and so looked like the seeds (*cocci*)" (32), and later, that Trimalchio's cloak "is *coccina*, the type of red made from *cocceus* or cochineal berries" (74). But *coccinus* and *coc-*

cineus are not dye-name nouns; they are adjectives describing items dyed with *coccum*. Nor is there a classical Latin masculine noun *coccus* that means “seed”; *coccum* -i (n.) denotes a red dye and its source, which Pliny described as a *granum* (Plin. *Nat.* 9.141) and a *scolecium* (“little worm” *Nat.* 24.8), but is actually the gravid body (not just the egg sacs) of the female Mediterranean scale insect *Kermes vermilio*, found only on the Kermes oak. *Cocceus* is a rare, late-Latin adjective, not a noun. “Cochineal berries” do not exist; “cochineal”, a noun, usually refers to dye made from a different, New World scale insect mistaken for a cactus berry by early explorers. Comparable confusions may be found throughout the book.

A deficient knowledge of Latin and Greek also damages Goldman’s credibility. A few (of many) examples: “The adjectives *fulgorem* and *splendorem*” (40); “A yellow colored mantle ... is described twice as *croceo velamen*” (59, referring to Verg. *A.* 1.649 *circumtextum croceo velamen acantho*); “this virtuous Roman *matrona*, who was known for her patience and *modestas*” (78); “[the color term] *venetus* is linguistically related to the Latin name *Veneto*, or Venice” (55); “Xenophon employs the color-terms ὀρθνινος, πορφύρις [*sic*, for ὀρθνινος and πορφύρις] and φοινικίς once to describe dyed cloth” (19). Here Goldman unaccountably leaves out a fourth color term, καρύκνιος, that Xenophon uses in the sentence she cites (*Cyr.* 8.3.3), then strangely writes later, “The Greeks ... did not employ multiple color-terms in the same sentence” (161). Her Greek lacks correct diacritics in several instances.

Because of her unfamiliarity with recent cross-cultural studies of color semantics, Goldman consistently treats Latin color terms as if they were merely calques of English terms. For example, she always translates *luteus* as “yellow”, and refers to “The color-term yellow” as if “yellow” were a term in Latin (57), failing to grasp that *luteus* refers to a different color category that includes portions of what we call yellow, orange, and pink. Latin has no single term that maps onto English “yellow”. Goldman shows a vague awareness of this, remarking that the Romans used *luteus* “inconsistently” to describe items in both the yellow and yellow-red range (57 n. 64), but does not fully appreciate that different languages partition the color space quite differently. Although she cites Edgeworth’s 1985 article on the range of hue reference for *luteus* (“*Luteus*: Pink or Yellow?” *Glotta* 63: 212–220), she misses its point. The result in the case of *luteus* is a muddled discussion of the color of women’s garments. Her failure to understand that Latin’s color categories are not those of English undermines her discussion of other terms including *caeruleus*, *glaucus*, *puniceus*, *rubor*, and *viridis*. To be fair, many of her secondary sources also assume the universality of English basic color categories. But there really is no excuse for

this 155 years after cross-cultural color studies in anthropology and linguistics were kicked off by William Gladstone's *Studies on Homer and the Homeric Age*.

The value of Goldman's work lies in its collection of hundreds of Latin color term uses, drawn from our earliest Latin prose and poetry down through late antiquity. For bibliography on color in Latin, see Bradley (2009), and on general color semantics, C. P. Biggam, *The Semantics of Colour: A Historical Approach* (Cambridge 2012).

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