Marcham wall plaster

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A total of 1,944 fragments of wall plaster were recovered from the whole site, weighing 13.5kg . No wall plaster was found *in situ*. The wall plaster recovered was very fragmentary, the average weight of plaster fragments ranging from 2.1g to 10.9g. The fragments of unpainted plaster were larger than the painted fragments, however both were small.

Wall plaster fragments were concentrated in a small number of trenches, 44% were found within the temple precinct in Trenches MFNA6 and MFNA7 (over the temple building) and at the entrance buildings to the temple precinct (in MF18). 56% of the wall plaster fragments were found in the trenches around and in the amphitheatre (Trenches MF1, MF9 and MF29). No wall plaster was found in zone MFP, Figure 1.

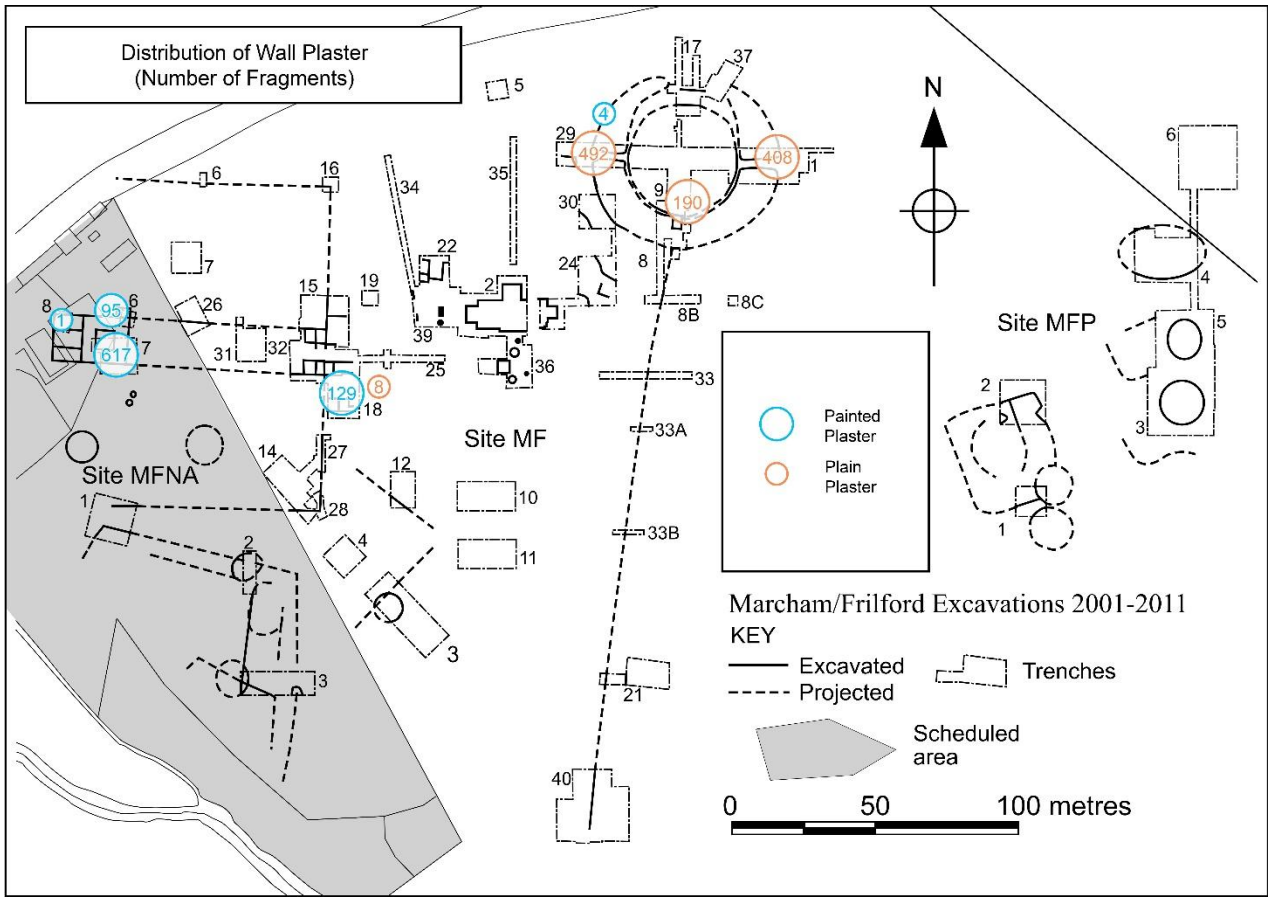


Figure 1. The distribution of wall plaster fragments

Painted wall plaster fragments were restricted to the temple area and the buildings at the entrance to the precinct (MFNA Trenches 6 and 7, and MF Trench 18, Appendix Figure 4), with only four fragments of painted plaster found in the amphitheatre area (Trench MF29). Unpainted plaster was recovered mainly from the amphitheatre area (Trenches MF1, MF9, and MF29, Appendix Figure 4).

Except for four painted fragments, all the plaster recovered around the amphitheatre was unpainted. It is known from amphitheatres elsewhere that the wall surrounding the central arena of the amphitheatre would be plastered, and in many cases painted. This was certainly the case at Marcham with patches of white plaster surviving on the arena wall, Figure 2. There were hints in different areas of the arena, Trenches MF9 and MF1, that the white background plaster had a pattern of 'ashlar blocks' painted on it in a deep red colour.



Figure 2. The arena wall in Trench MF1 showing patches of white plaster with deep red decoration

Painted fragments recovered were plain colours or striped. No figurative designs were found. 43% of the wall plaster fragments were painted. Of these painted fragments, 49.2% were plain white, 29.1% were red/pink, with much smaller numbers in pale green/turquoise, green, blue and grey/black (Appendix Figure 6). 15% of the painted fragments were decorated with stripes, including red stripe on white, red stripe on green, green stripe on white and green strip on red, grey stripe on white, and a few 'patterned' (disintegrated stripes) fragments or coloured stripes (Figure 6).

The painted plaster from the temple area had the widest range of colours, including plain white fragments (52%), red/pink fragments (33%) and smaller numbers in pale green/turquoise, green, blue and grey/black. Striped fragments included red stripe on white, red stripe on green, green stripe on white and green stripe on red, grey stripe on white and a few 'patterned' (disintegrated stripes) fragments (Appendix Figure 5). The fragments from the buildings at the *temenos* entrance (MF Trench 18) showed a smaller range of colours, with 36% of the painted fragments in white, four red/pink and three green fragments, and 58% coloured striped fragments.

Painting on wall plaster can be difficult to date. It may be contemporary with the wall to which it is applied or have been done some time after construction, and could have been repainted multiple times, so dating tends to be based on typology (Ling, 1985: 21). Ling identifies three main types of wall painting: simple two-dimensional panel schemes, architectural schemes with some element of perspective, and large-scale figure paintings which fill the whole wall. Ceiling paintings also occur, usually as a repeat geometric pattern. Panel schemes are most common, occur in all periods, and are paralleled on the near Continent. Architectural schemes appear in the later second or early third century, and figure paintings which occupy the whole wall appear in the third and fourth centuries.

Painted walls are usually divided into three zones: the dado, the main or middle zone (usually three times the height of the dado), and the frieze (Davey and Ling, 1982: 31). The middle zone tends to receive the most decoration. Panel schemes have large rectangular panels, often with intervals between painted in a different colour, or with horizontal bands at the top and bottom to frame the rectangle. Red and black schemes were popular in the late first and second centuries, as well as schemes with a single ground colour (often white) across the panels and intervals of the middle zone, with panel borders in a different colour or bands of colours. Polychrome decorations, mostly red, green and yellow were common in the first and second centuries (Ling, 1985: 25-27).

Whilst wall plaster at Marcham discussed here is fragmentary, it does suggest that decorative schemes included plain coloured walls of red/pink or white, and linear, coloured stripe patterns, including red, green or grey stripes on a white, green or red background. This is supported by the plaster remaining on the arena wall (Figure 2). Whilst the fragmentary nature of the plaster recovered does not allow us to determine the detail of the designs used, the linear decorated fragments are consistent with simple panel schemes. The single white or red ground colour scheme with red and green stripes would also be consistent with the common late first and second century schemes described by Ling, but without more detail of the decorative designs employed it is difficult to assign dates with any certainty although the surviving pattern on the arena wall does suggest this early date.

At Nettleton and at Uley painted wall plaster was also concentrated on the temple and associated precinct buildings. In addition to panel decoration, more complex decoration including garlands, trellis patterns, marbling effects, architectural schemes and fragments of a figure, were focused on the temple itself.

The wall plaster from Nettleton came from the octagonal shrine and consisted of a range of colours and designs including red and brown/purple bands, panels, garlanded decoration, and part of a male figure dressed in purple, assumed to be Apollo, to whom the temple was probably dedicated (Wedlake, 1982: 182-188). Painted plaster included plain white and red, purple, grey-black, and blue bands on a white background, plain buff and decorations on a buff background, plain red, and complex interlacing trellis patterns of multicoloured bands. Marbled and mottled effects, sprays of leaves, a simple flower shape, and possible ribbon or garland decoration indicate more complex decorative schemes.

At Uley, 135kg of painted wall plaster was also associated with the temple, and spread across a number of structures (Woodward and Leach, 1993: 184-188). Decoration included imitation marble, stripes, panels and curvilinear motifs in a range of colours. Colour schemes included various combinations of red, grey, pink, yellow or white geometric panels, bordered in red, white, and yellow stripes, or red/lilac and red/yellow borders, red and white stippling on pink, and grey stippling on grey (to imitate marble). More elaborate decoration was indicated by fragments of vertical garlands, trellis pattern, dark green and grey vegetative patterns, and shaded grey or brown architectural features. It is thought that the architectural designs and green vegetation covered the walls of the ambulatories, and the pink walls decorated with red garlands the interior of the *cella*.

Wall paintings were part of decorative schemes which included mosaic floors and marble or stone architectural elements intended to be viewed together. Elaborately decorated walls were often balanced by simpler floors. Elaborately decorated walls contrasted with simpler floors of limestone at the temple sites at Nettleton (Wedlake 1982:32) and Uley (Woodward and Leech 1993:179). The wall decoration at Marcham appears to be less elaborate, but the flooring is more decorative, comprising tessellated pavements of orange/red ceramic tesserae, including some form of coloured patterning.

Appendix - Analysis of data

Figure 1: Number of fragments

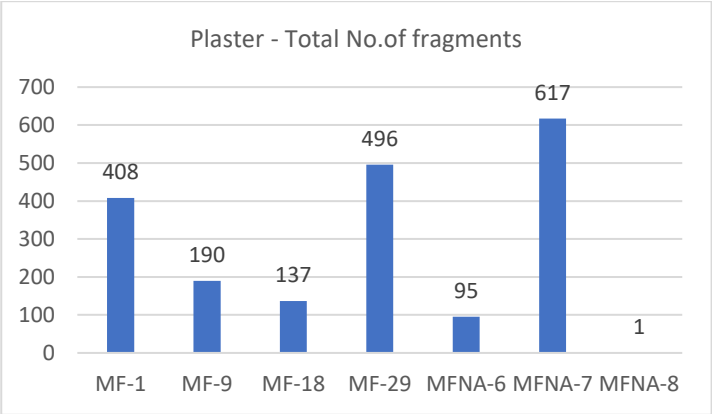


Figure 2: Total weight of fragments

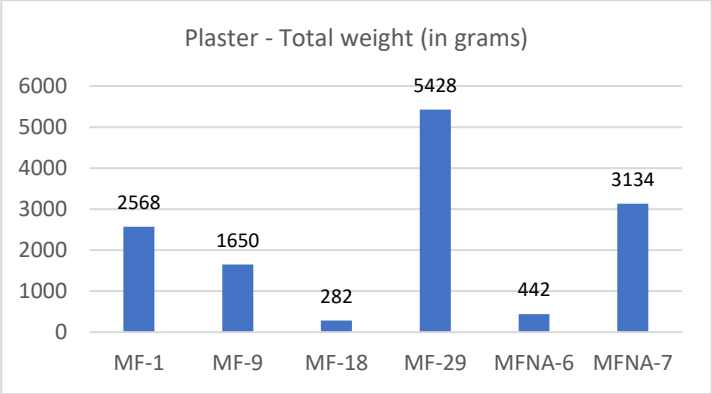


Figure 3: Average weight of fragments

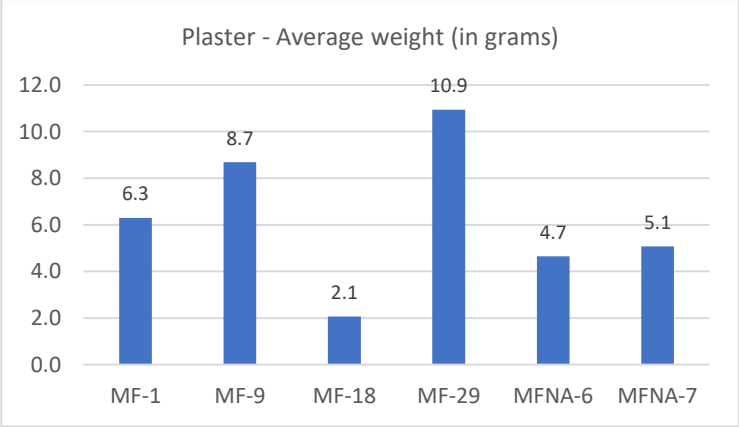


Figure 4: Painted and unpainted fragments

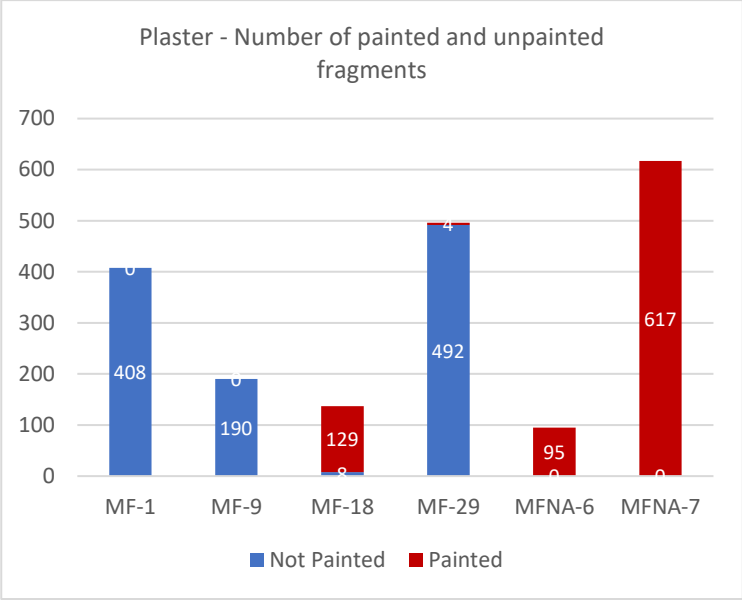


Figure 5: Painted plaster

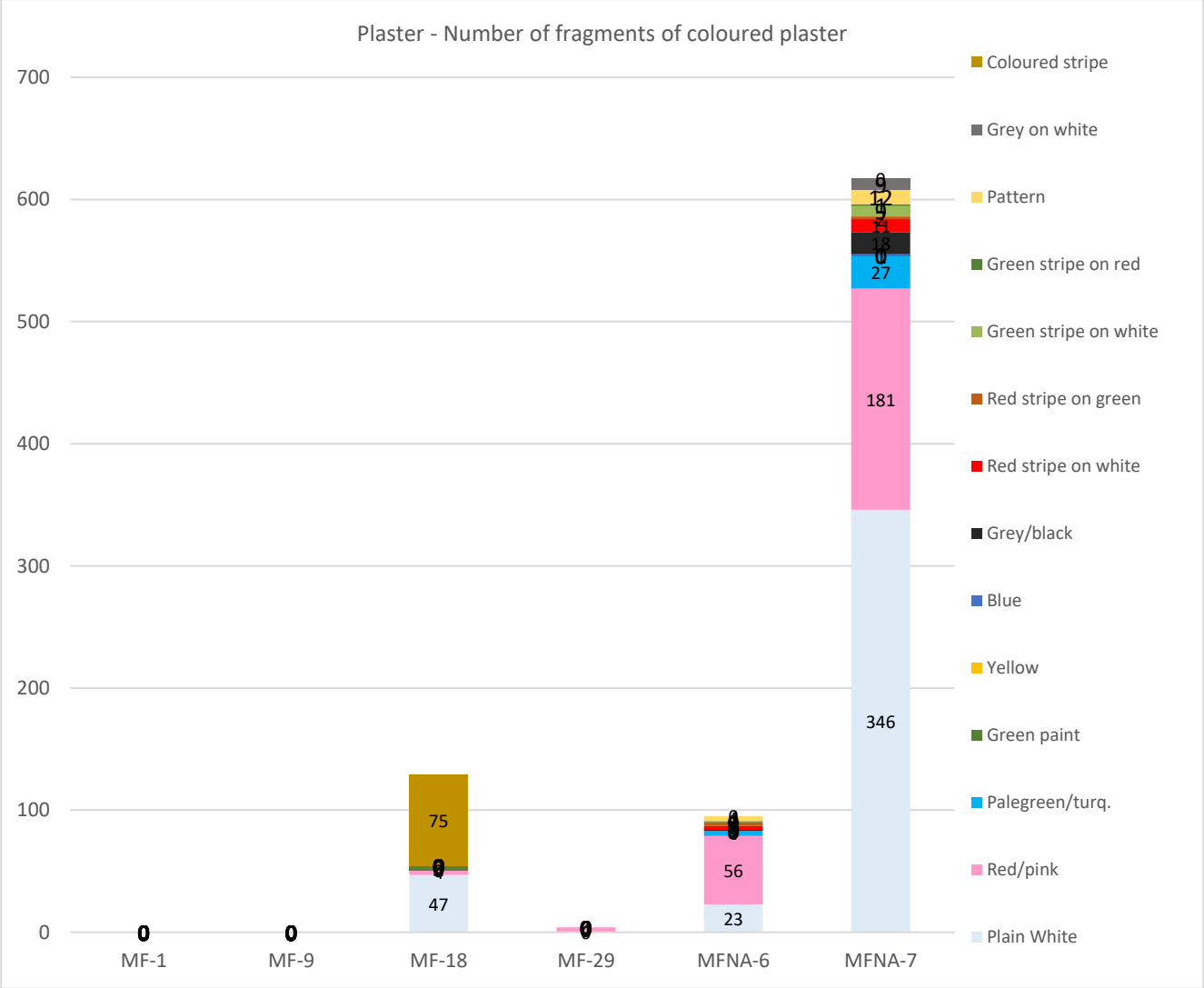


Figure 6: Painted plaster

Marcham/Frilford site, zones MF, MFNA																		
Zone	**Trench**	**Trench**	**Plain White**	**Red/pink**	**Palegreen/ turquoise**	**Green**	**Blue**	**Grey/ black**	**Red stripe on white**	**Red stripe on green**	**Green stripe on white**	**Green stripe on red**	**Pattern**	**Grey on white**	**Coloured stripe**	**Not Painted**	**Total No.**	**Total Weight (grams)**
MF	Trench 1	MF-1														408	408	2568
MF	Trench 9	MF-9														190	190	1650
MF	Trench 18	MF-18	47	4		3									75	8	137	282
MF	Trench 29	MF-29		4												492	496	5428
MFNA	Trench 6	MFNA-6	23	56	4			1	3	3		1	4				95	442
MFNA	Trench 7	MFNA-7	346	181	27		1	18	11	2	9	1	12	9			617	3134
MFNA	Trench 8	MFNA-8	0	1													1	2
			416	246	31	3	1	19	14	5	9	2	16	9	75	1098	1944	13506
% painted			49.2%	29.1%	3.7%	0.4%	0.1%	2.2%	1.7%	0.6%	1.1%	0.2%	1.9%	1.1%	8.9%			

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