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REDNESS AS PERCEIVED THROUGH THE EYES OF THE ROMANS

The article is an attempt to revise the long-established belief in the alabaster-white exterior shape of Roman antiquity, which in fact turns out to be full of colours that bring life to its image. The authors implement this intention by indicating how intensely the colour red was present in the reality described by classical Latin authors – contrary to the accusation that one of the participants of the discussion on this subject in Aulus Gellius' *Attic Nights* (Gell. Noc. Att. 2.26) makes of the alleged poverty regarding various shades of red in Latin terminology. The material presented contradicts the opinion expressed in Gellius' text, and at the same time makes us realise how colourful and lively the world that emerges from the literary works of the classical Roman period was. In comparison with it, the reality witnessed by the literature of the Christian era – this parallel is what the authors of the article focus on, concluding their deliberations – in which red becomes almost exclusively a sign of shame, turns out to be ascetically sterile and depressingly colourless.

Keywords: ancient Rome, colours, red, terminology

Słowa kluczowe: antyczny Rzym, kolory, czerwień, terminologia

IL ROSSO VISTO ATTRAVERSO GLI OCCHI DEGLI ANTICHI ROMANI

L'articolo è un tentativo di rivedere l'antica credenza della realtà romana nella sua visione esterna bianca alabastro. Rievocando la discussione di cui Aulo Gellio narra nel suo scritto "Le notti attiche" (*Noctes Atticae* 2.26), gli autori ricordano che la lingua letteraria latina rappresenta con sfumature e gradazioni del colore rosso diverse evidenze di un'unica umanità e di una stessa natura di piante,



uomini e animali contraddistinti da uno stesso colore cangiante nel tempo e a seconda delle stagioni. Il materiale richiamato giova quindi a smentire l'opinione ventilata da Gellio e allo stesso tempo, proprio attraverso i richiami letterari, fa capire quanto fosse colorato e vivace il mondo che possiamo conoscere grazie alla tradizione letteraria di quell'epoca classica latina. In relazione ad essa sta oggi la visione e la testimonianza che ne dà la letteratura cristiana. Concentrando la loro ricerca su questo parallelo, gli autori osservano che nella letteratura cristiana il colore rosso è diventato per lo più, se non proprio esclusivamente, un segno di vergogna o di ribellione rivelandosi, al fine, come segno di vergogna e di rivolta o opposizione asceticamente sterile e deprimentemente incolore.

Parole chiave: Antica Roma, colori, rosso, terminologia

In recent decades, the development of chemistry has helped to state that the belief supported since the Renaissance that the white colour of marble was the dominant colour of antiquity was not entirely right.¹ It turned out that the ancient buildings and statues were in fact, in the vast majority of cases, covered by intense polychromies.² In this situation, it seems justified to ask whether the passion for colour and the ancients' sensitivity to a wide spectrum of colours can also be found in the pages of the literature that they left: this is the subject of interest of the authors in this study.

The topic of colours and their terminology was discussed by Aulus Gellius in his compilation called *Noctes Atticae*, written most probably in the second half of the 2nd Century AD. Gellius cites a conversation between the philosopher Favorinus of Arelate and the rhetor Cornelius Fronto, during which Favorinus notices that there are more colours existing than there are words to name them, and this deficiency is particularly visible in Latin.³ He claims that "the fire's red is different, blood's red is different, purple is different, [...] and Latin does not differentiate these individual tones with separate and proper names but all of them calls with the one name of »red«."⁴ In response, Fronto tries to convince his interlocutor that, in terms of colour naming, the Latin language is not as poor as it might appear at

¹ Modern technology has made it possible to discover even the smallest traces of colour on ancient statues, and even to reproduce their colours. These actions have released a riot of colour, which has shattered the public's conviction of the immaculate whiteness of ancient sculpture. Cf. Étienne 1990. Traditionally considered as the quintessence of beauty, the whiteness of a classic sculpture has become, according to some scholars, a symbol of Eurocentrism and racism in general, laying the grounds for the theory of white race superiority. Cf. Bond 2017.

² Recent studies on colour in the realities of ancient Rome focus on three issues: 1) A deeper understanding of the techniques and practises of Roman painters on stones; 2) Explaining what the colour code means for Roman art in a long-term perspective; 3) Connecting more closely the philological and archaeological results of research in this field (Liverani 2014: 9). Cf. Götter 2003. The results of these studies presented at the exhibition in Munich were published in the book: Brinkmann et al. 2017.

³ The topic of colours and their names which appears in the text of Gellius is discussed in: Piechocka-Kłós 2016.

⁴ Gell. *Noc. Att.* 2.26.8–10, transl. by authors of this text: "aliter rubeat ignis, aliter sanguis, aliter ostrum, [...], has singulas rufi varietates Latina oratio singulis propriisque vocabulis non demonstrat omniaque ista significat una »ruberis« appellatio".

first glance, and to support his thesis he cites examples from Ennius, Vergil and Pacuvius, taking Greek names as a point of reference. Searching for the answer to the question asked in the introduction, it is worth looking at the oldest preserved Latin works, as well as texts that were more contemporary to Gellius, i.e. Latin literature created between the second half of the 3rd Century BC and the second half of the 2nd Century AD. For the clarity of the argument, our attention here will be focused on the selected colour only – which in this case is red, and on various contexts in which the ancient authors decided to use different terms for this colour.

In Latin, red was generally described as *rubor*. The interlocutors of Gellius from this term derive red-describing adjectives like *ruber*, *rufus*, *russus* and *rubidus*. The adjective *ruber* was used by the Romans almost interchangeably with the adjective *rubens* and both terms meant red or reddish.⁵ It was regarded as widely observed in various meteorological phenomena, as well as in the world of animals, plants and minerals. It was used, for example, for describing the colour of a mare's hair, cock's combs, the colouration of some bees and crayfish, as well as moss and the berries of wild dwarf myrtle.⁶ The adjective *ruber* described square stone blocks obtained from quarries located around Rome, as well as tuff from Campania.⁷ Some materials, such as bed covers, straps intended to tie papyrus rolls or crests of helmets were dyed red.⁸ Moreover, red or a reddish colour was also mentioned in contexts related to the sphere of sexuality and erotics.⁹ It is present in the descriptions of statues of the god of fertility and harvest – Priapus, and of the female face depicted by Apuleius in an erotic way (*Ov. Fast.* 1.415; *Apul. Met.* 3.19). Pliny describes gout with this adjective too, because the condition caused fever and consequently redness to the face of a person affected (*Plin. HN* 26.101).

Red with a ginger or even yellow-brownish hue was described by the Latin word *rufus*. We can read about flame-red hair mainly in comedy writers' compositions of the Archaic period.¹⁰ According to the convention of the Greek new comedy and the later developed Roman *palliata* based on it, slaves were distinguished as

⁵ Its tone was compared with the colour of wine or fire; cf. Ogorcka-Tabiś 2018: 146: kolor czerwony łączy się z winem szczególnie często u Horacego (the colour red is associated with wine especially often by Horace); *Ov. Ars am.* 1.104, *Fast.* 5.511, *Met.* 11.368; *Lucr. RNat.* 2.416; *Prop. El.* 4.1.16. The adjective *ruber* was also a component of the proper name: the "Red Sea" (*Cic. Nat. D.* 1.97; *Verg. Aen.* 8.686; *Hor. Carm.* 1.35.32; *Liv. AUC* 36. 17; *Plin. HN* 5.65; 6.143; 6.154; *Luc. Phars.* 8.853; *Tac. Ann.* 2.61). Juvenal, on the other hand, provides the information that the word *ruber* described that kind of red with which the Romans used to write the first letters of their laws (*Iuv. Sat.* 14.192).

⁶ *Plin. HN.* 2.98; 10.180; 23.165; *Varro, Rust.* 3.9.5; 3.16.18; *Verg. G.* 1.233–234; 4.47–48; *Prop. El.* 3.13.16; *Liv. AUC* 31.12.5.

⁷ The quarry, located close to the area which Cicero called the "Red Rocks (*Saxa rubra*)" (*Phil.* 2.77), Vitruvius calls *Rubric* (*De arch.* 2.7.5). *Vide* *Liv. AUC* 2.49; *Vitr. De arch.* 2.7.1; 2.8.4; *Tac. Hist.* 3.79.

⁸ *Hor., Sat.* 2.6.102; *Catull. Carm.* 22.7; *Verg. Aen.* 9.50.

⁹ *Catull. Carm.* 65.24. Cf. Clarke 1998: 172.

¹⁰ *Plaut. Pseud.* 1218, *Asin.* 400; *Ter. Haut.* 1061, *Phorm.* 51.

having red hair because the ancients believed that clever, cunning, insidious people, prone to lying, usually have hair of this colour.¹¹ In later periods, we can also find a mention of hair so ginger that it seemed to be reddish (Varro, *Ling.* 7.83). Some authors sometimes felt tempted to give a reason for the shade's existence. Vitruvius believed, for example, that the red hair was a result of the influence of humid air and cold climate, and consequently was typical of people living in the North (Vitr. *De arch.* 6.1.3). Similarly, Martial, upholding this belief in some way, specifically pointed out ginger hair as common amongst the people of Gaul (Mart., *Epigr.* 14.129.1). Ancient authors used the adjective *rufus* also in descriptions of flora and fauna. Campan wheat, poppies growing in barley fields, as well as linden wood and algae, and the hair of the cattle grazing on the fields of Troy had a red-russet shade.¹² The term *rufus* was also used in medical terminology. The author of the encyclopaedic tractate *De medicina*, Aulus Cornelius Celsus, explained that saliva mixed with blood gives this reddish colour.¹³ Medical Scribonius Largus in turn recommended boiling some medications until they become reddish (Scrib. Larg. *Comp.* 213).

Red in warm brown tones was described by the adjectives *russus* or *russeus*. These terms were used primarily for various types of materials.¹⁴ Lucretius mentions that curtains, spread out on theatres' beams and masts were of this red-brown colour. They not only protected viewers from the sun, but also enhanced the perception of characters on stage (Lucr. *RNat.* 4.75). Varro reports that the crests of war helmets were of this shade too because of its high visibility from a distance.¹⁵ According to Pliny, the coachman of "the Reds", i.e. one of the teams participating in horse races (Plin. *HN* 7.186), wore a jacket of that colour. The author of *Satyricon*, in turn, by using the word *russeus* describes the tunic of Trimalchio, in which he played football, passing the time before the feast, and Apuleius uses this adjective for a ribbon, with which the tunic of a servant – the charming Fotis (Petron. *Sat.* 27.1; Apul. *Met.* 2.7) – was being strapped. Red-brown was also particularly desirable for a paramedic cloth. Pliny explains that only with a cloth of this colour should anemone flowers be collected, and then removed from it to dry, then packed into it again and worn on the neck like an amulet. He advises gathering aphrodisiacs in rags of a similar colour and claims that a couple of bedbugs wrapped up in a red-brown cloth helps to fight off daytime fever (Plin. *HN* 21.166; 28.261; 29.64).

¹¹ Diom. *GLK* 1, 489. Cf. Skwara 2001: 192. A similar connotation of red hair colour can be noticed in later centuries' writings (Pastoureau 2006: 226–234).

¹² Plin. *HN* 16.65, 18.86; 19.169, 27.42; Vitr. *De arch.* 8.3.14. Russet or a reddish colour was specified by the diminutive form *rufulus* derived from the adjective *rufus*. According to Pliny of this colour are the roots of black mandrake (*HN* 25.147).

¹³ Celsus, *Med.* 2.8.2. In medieval medical diagnostics, the adjective *rufus* described the colour of urine. In the urine colour scheme of that time, urine appearing in this shade indicated excellent digestion (*perfecta digestio*) (Moulinier-Brogi 2012: 54–55).

¹⁴ Only Catullus claims that the Celtyberians who lived once in central Spain had reddish-brown gums (*Carm.* 39.19).

¹⁵ Varro, *Sat.men.* 170. Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 9.50.

To describe the colour red, the ancient authors also used participles, which later turned into adjectives – *rubicundus* and *rubidus*. The word *rubicundus* was mainly used to describe: red, ruddy, heavily tanned. In the Roman comedy of the archaic period, we find the word *rubicundus* in the description of the face of an extremely unattractive person (Plaut. *Pseud.* 1219; Ter. *Hec.* 440). In a similar context, Ovid later uses it while drawing a picture of a peasant woman from Umbria offering it as a negative and daunting example for women who want to clothe themselves and behave properly (Ov. *Ars am.* 3.303). The adjective *rubicundus*, like the aforementioned *ruber*, appears in the description of the god Priapus, as well as in texts about meteorological phenomena¹⁶. Moreover, it was used to describe some details of the world of plants and animals, like the colour of sandy soil suitable for cultivation, grain ready for harvest, ripening dogwood, and a colour of dull fur.¹⁷ The term *rubicundus* can also be found in medicine-linked vocabulary. With this term, Celsus characterized the redness of the skin in those areas where later pustules or small ulcers may form, and Scribonius Largus – the redness and swelling accompanying gout (Celsus, *Med.* 5.28.16; Scrib. Larg. *Comp.* 158). In turn, the adjective *rubidus* was supposed to emphasize the degree of saturation with red. With its semantic help, Plautus recalls the image of deliciously browned bread and the colour of a long unused, almost rusted bottle, and Suetonius paints the face of Vitellius flushed from constant drunkenness.¹⁸

The sensitivity of the ancient Romans to different tones of red can be indicated by the adjectives, which are composed of the preposition *sub*, such as *subrubicundus*, *subruber* denoting a reddish or slightly red shade and *subrufus* – reddish-russet. We find this kind of addition mainly in medical, botanical and mineralogical vocabulary. Pliny reports that the herb similar to the wall germander (*teucrium chamaedrys*) has a slightly reddish (*subrubicundus*) stalk (Plin. *HN* 25.167). In this way, Celsus determines the colour of the blood stream coming out of the patient's wounds or the colour of the throat irritated by inflammation. According to Celsus, the tip of the ulcer is marked by a reddish shade (*subruber*), just after the removal of pus, and urine of this colour is a sign of a disease.¹⁹ Vitruvius explains that cinnabar was extracted in the form of an iron-like ore, but redder in tone (*subrufus*) and covered with red dust, and after processing, became *minia* (Vitr. *De arch.* 7.8.1). According to Pliny's report, among all irises the best quality have those in reddish-russet shades, despite the fact that they cause sneezing when rubbed. In his opinion, some of the Indian stones had a similar colour to those irises.²⁰

¹⁶ Idem, *Fast.* 1.415, 6.319; Sen. *QNat.* 7.11.3; Luc. *Phars.* 10.274.

¹⁷ Varro, *Rust.* 1.9.5; 2.8.6; Columella, *Rust.* 2.20.2; Hor. *Epist.* 1.16.8.

¹⁸ Plaut., *Cas.* 310, *Stich.* 230; Suet. *Vit.* 17.2.

¹⁹ Celsus, *Med.* 5.26.20; 5.28.4; 7.12.3; 5.28.8; 2.4.8.

²⁰ Plin. *HN* 21.41; 37.170. The term *subrufus* can also be found in the archaic literature, namely in one of the comedies of Plautus, who characterized the slightly red hair of a boy from the East named Philocrates by using this term (*Capt.* 648).

The main participant in the discussion about colours cited by Gellius also mentions among the shades of red the colour referred to by the adjective *phoeniceus*, which is usually understood as the equivalent of purple, because purple dye-products were first obtained by Phoenicians and the rich Phoenician cities – Tyr and Sidon – that were the main centres of their production.²¹ In Latin literature the adjective *phoeniceus* is found mainly in Pliny's descriptions of plants and animals. According to Pliny, the male species of a plant called *anagallis arvensis*, commonly known as scarlet pimpernel, can be distinguished by its purple flower. In his opinion, the head of a tragopan, commonly known as a horned pheasant, has this colour (Plin. *HN* 25.144; 10.136). Lucretius in turn calls Phoenician purple using the form *puniceus* (Lucr. *RNat.* 2.830). This is how the later authors poetically described Aurora's chariot or Aurora itself.²² The colour of the blood or the shade of skin that was bloody was also called in this way.²³ They also used the attributive *puniceus* to denote a certain type of roses, crocuses, and some species of growing or already ripened berries.²⁴

However, the adjective *purpureus* was the most popular term for purple in Latin literature. It can be found in many descriptions concerning the world of nature. Purple was attributed to some species of plums, pears and ripening grapes. Therefore, wine was also described sometimes by this colour.²⁵ Also certain types of flowers such as roses, violets and poppies were characterized as purple.²⁶ Consequently, spring was poetically called in such a way too, due to the general colour impression given by flowers blooming at this time of year.²⁷ The attributive *purpureus* also appears in the descriptions of the colour of the sea or sea water. According to ancient authors, the water took this shade of red because of the rising sun reflected in it, the blood spilled in it, or the high salinity of water.²⁸

²¹ Cf. Tib. *El.* 2.3.58. It should be emphasized that purple was the name of a dye, not of a specific colour, and therefore the term purple could refer to both reddish and bluish shades (Rzepińska 1983: 88–89; Phipps 2010: 7; Bradley 2009: 18). Cf. André 1949: 97.

²² Such a description can be found in Vergil (*Aen.* 12.77: *puniceis invecta rotis Aurora*; cf. Val. Flacc. *Argon.* 7.539; Prop. *El.* 3.13.16). We will notice, moreover, that in the indicated place of the "Aeneid" – which is somehow pointed out by L. Pelletier-Michaud, who wrote: il évoque l'Aurore rougissant sur son char de pourpre punique (*puniceus, Aurora, rubere*) du jour où le sang (*sanguis*) mettra fin à la guerre (Pelletier-Michaud 2016: 261) – the use of colour symbolism is twofold: this intense red means on the one hand a bloody war struggle, but at the same time it means the end of these struggles announced by the appearance of Aurora on her purple chariot.

²³ Ov. *Met.* 13.887; Plaut. *Rud.* 1000, *Pseud.* 229.

²⁴ Hor. *Carm.* 4.10.4; Ov. *Fast.* 5.318; Lucr. *RNat.* 5.941; Prop. *El.* 3.13.28.

²⁵ Plin. *HN* 15.41; Ov. *Met.* 3.485; Prop. *El.* 3.17.17; Columella, *Rust.* 12.10.4.

²⁶ Hor. *Carm.* 3.15.15; Plin. *HN* 21.130. Cf. Prop. *El.* 1.20.38.

²⁷ Verg. *Ecl.* 9.40 (on Vergil's extraordinarily frequent use of the adjective *purpureus*: Segura Ramos 2006: 47–48); cf. Ov. *Ars am.* 3.687.

²⁸ Verg. *G.* 4.373; Cic. *Luc.* 105. Horace (Hor. *Carm.* 2.12.3) and Valerius Flaccus (Val. Flacc. *Argon.* 3.422) described the sea as purple emphasizing the origin of this colour as from the blood spilled in it (Prop. *El.* 2.26.5). According to Pliny, on the other hand, the impression of the purple

Sometimes the adjective *purpureus* was used to describe the colour of blood and, consequently, bloody, and thus red or ruddy, cheeks.²⁹ So when, e.g. at the time of death, the face was getting pale, in the poetic description the blushes were losing their purple tinge.³⁰ For the same reason, the purple shade was associated with life. In Vergil's text, the dying Retus in his last minute "spat out a purple soul" (*purpuream vomit ille animam*).³¹ The radiance of youth or the amazing light, compared to Aurora, which was beaming from the faces of goddesses or gods was also poetically painted with words related to this colour.³² The Romans used the term *purpureus* to emphasize the almost divine look, or even the divine origin, of the people with purple lips. Catullus describes in this way the colour of a girl's lips seen through the eyes of a boy who is in love with her, and Horace attributes this colour to the lips of Augustus (Catull. *Carm.* 45.12; Hor. *Carm.* 3.3.12).

Purple pigment was very expensive and, therefore, only the most influential and wealthy people could afford purple-dyed fabrics.³³ For this reason, just like gold, it became a symbol of power in Rome.³⁴ Purple clothes were worn by kings, senators, military leaders, dictators, emperors and probably also by the more empowered priests.³⁵ Senators and their sons, before they came of age, had the so-called *toga praetexta*. Its characteristic feature was a purple stripe 2 to 3 inches wide (5 to 8 cm), initially located along the bottom rounded edge of the toga, and later alongside the edge of a pocket. Senators and Roman equites (equestrian order members) wore woollen or cotton tunics underneath their purple togas and these were decorated with purple stripes too. To distinguish two social classes, the equestrian tunics had two stripes running from shoulder to waist, while the

shade in sea water could be brought on by the salt it contained. Pliny says that in some parts of the Earth, sea salt had different tones of red, e.g. it is red in Menfi, reddish in the vicinity of Oxo, and purple in Centuripa, as well as in the vicinity of Gela in Sicily (*HN* 31.86).

²⁹ Val. Flacc. *Argon.* 3.107; Ov. *Tr.* 4.2.6; Sen. *Agam.* 214; Stat. *Sliv.* 2.1.41, *Theb.* 2.231; 7.148. Other parts of the body were also described as bloodshot with the use of *purpureus* – such as the bloody eyes (*orbis purpurei*) of dying Admon (Val. Flacc. *Argon.* 3.179) and the neck of Damocles, living in eternal danger (*cervices purpureae*) (Pers. *Sat.* 3.41).

³⁰ Verg. *Aen.* 11.819. Cf. Edgeworth 1992: 287.

³¹ Verg. *Aen.* 9.349; more on the appropriate interpretation of this purple, which is difficult to combine with the generally accepted concepts of the human soul: Elliott 2008: 188–189.

³² *Idem*, 1.591; Ov. *Met.* 3.184; Columella, *Rust.* 10.289.

³³ The Tyrian purple was produced from molluscs of the genus *Murex*, which could yield a reddish purple as well as the deep bluish purple shades. Due to the fact that the purple colour obtained from molluscs was very expensive, it was replaced with a more easily available dye, obtained from some dye-producing insects. Cf. Phipps 2010: 6–10.

³⁴ Dupont 2006: 273; Elliott 2008: 176 (purple as a communicator of prestige); Liverani 2014: 20.

³⁵ Ov. *Met.* 7.103; 8.33, *Trist.* 4.2.48; Lucr. *RNat.* 2.52; Stat. *Silv.* 2.7.47; Mart. *Epigram.* 12.29.5; Caes. *BAfr.* 57.5; Cic. *Phil.* 2.85; Hor. *Carm.* 1.35.12; Juv. *Sat.* 4.31; Suet. *Calig.* 35.1. Residues of colour found on some ancient statues indicate that purple covered the entire toga. It is concluded that the purple vesture may have been reserved for priests or consuls (Liverani 2014: 22–24).

senators' tunics had one wide stripe which ran through the middle.³⁶ According to Pliny, the sails of the Admiralty ship were also purple (Plin. *HN* 19.22). Purple was considered to have extraordinary properties. The king of Megara Nizus was said to have a purple lock of hair that guaranteed his own and the whole city's safety.³⁷

Favorinus, in Gellius's text, suggests that the poverty of the Latin language in terms of colour terminology forces the need to borrow names from nouns to which one wants to refer and if – for example – someone wants to specifically emphasize the similarity of the colour to blood (*sanguis*), because of the lack of other options, he is constrained to call it 'bloody' – *sanguineus*. Indeed, this was a common practice among the Latin writers. With this adjective they described the drops of blood as bloody tears, eyes bloodshot from rage, faces full of blood from agitation, bloody hands and bodies, swords, spears and armour dripping with blood, as well as bloody streams flowing from wounds; and, finally, river water which became red from the blood spilled in it.³⁸ The word *sanguineus* was used in both the exact and the figurative sense.³⁹ Poets mention the bloody attributes of war-related deities, such as Bellona's whip or the bloody trumpets that supported Mars.⁴⁰ In addition, the attributive *sanguineus* can be seen in the descriptions of selected parts of some plants, not only well-known pigment plants. Vergil, for example, refers to this colour when mentioning elderberries (Verg. *Ecl.* 10, 27), and Pliny alludes to the root of the *Anchusa officinalis*, known as common bugloss or alkanet with which the wool gained a very deep shade of red (Plin. *HN* 22.48). This colour was also attributed to some unusual phenomena, such as bloody rain or comet tails, which the Romans called "crested" (*crinitas*) (Cic. *Div.* 2.60; Plin. *HN* 2.89).

In Latin literature we can also find definitions of certain shades of red (*miniatus*, *coccineus*, *cerasinus*, *rubeus*), which the speakers in Gellius's work do not mention. A bright, vivid red of mineral origin, found in mines in a natural state was called a *minium*.⁴¹ Pliny uses the adjective *miniatus* to define a bright red collar around the neck of a green parrot from India, called "siptace" (Plin. *HN* 10.117).

³⁶ The prestigious meaning of that purple which – in this interpretation – "distinguishes the senator from the knight" emphasizes Gage (Gage 1993: 25). Hunt in turn points to the legislative restrictions applied in Rome, which reserved purple gown borders for the senatorial state (Hunt 1996: 20). It is worth mentioning that, in general, to wear clothes of this colour was legally allowed only on some statutory days of the Roman calendar (Reinhold 1970: 45), and periodically there were even prohibitions on "the sale and use of the finest quality purple" (Elliott 2008: 183).

³⁷ Verg. *G.* 1.405; Stat. *Silv.* 3.4.84, *Theb.* 1.334; Tib. *El.* 1.4.63.

³⁸ Ov. *Met.* 1.143; 13.85; 14.408; Val. Flacc. *Argon.* 4.235. Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 4.643; 8.622; 12.67; Ov. *Rem. Am.* 153; Hor. *Carm.* 1.27.4; Stat. *Theb.* 2.460; 2.705; 3.170; 11.266; Liv. *AUC* 1.32.12.

³⁹ On the symbolism of flowers of this colour as an attribute adopted in Roman funeral ceremonies: Thomas 1979: 311.

⁴⁰ Verg. *Aen.* 8.703; Luc. *Phars.* 7.568 (cf. Gryksa 2018: 45); Stat. *Theb.* 3.85.

⁴¹ Today's equivalent of this name is "cinnabar" (Rzepińska 1983: 85).

Writing to Titus Pomponius Atticus, Cicero expresses his worries hoping that Atticus would not critically mark too many places in the newly emerging Cicero's work with his red raddle, i.e. a crayon with a pressed, cinnabar-coloured chalk, because he – that is to say Cicero himself – does not seem to be in the best writing form (Cic. *Att.* 15.14). Cicero also uses the attributive *miniatus* when comparing the colour of sauce, in which octopuses were served, to the cinnabar-coloured face of the Capitoline Jupiter.⁴² The adjective *coccineus*, in turn, is used by the author of *Satyricon* as the equivalent of a dark red shade when he is describing the colour of the mantle that the host of Trimalchio's famous feast was wearing. With the same name, he describes the colour of the wool that filled the pillows in his home (Petron. *Sat.* 32.3; 38.5). According to Martial, this colour characterized the capes of competitors of one of the teams participating in chariot races.⁴³ However, the term *cerasinus* as a cherry red, can also be found in the works of the author of *Satyricon*. Cerise was the colour of the tunic of Fortunata, Trimalchio's wife, as well as their door attendant's belt (Petron. *Sat.* 28.8; 67.4). Furthermore, the great colour sensitivity and a kind of sophistication of the ancients can be indicated by the Latin term *rubeus* (blackberry) present in the description of the colouration of horned cattle coats and the plumage of chickens.⁴⁴

Summarizing the whole of the observations presented above, it can be stated that Favorinus was not entirely right in accusing the ancient Romans of a lack of diversification in their colour terminology. In addition to the vocabulary mentioned by the participants of Gellius's dialogue, pointing to various shades of red such as reddish (*ruber vel rubens*), russet (*rufus*), brownish (*russus vel russeus*), slightly red (*rubidus vel rubicundus*) or purple (*poeniceus vel puniceus vel purpureus*), they used names describing light red (*subrubicundus*), bright red (*miniatus*), dark red (*coccineus*), as well as reddish-russet (*subruber*), cherry (*cerasinus*) and blackberry (*rubeus*) tones. Even if the mentioned terms of different shades of red do not indicate the Romans' creativity in the 'new word-formation' exercise – as Favorinus pointed out – their diversity remains nonetheless a testimony to the ancients' remarkable sensitivity to colour and its various, sometimes complex, shades.

The variety of the red colour terms used by the ancient Romans becomes also a testimony to the colour richness of the reality perceived, but also created, by their several centuries' long civilization effort. Even the occurrence of the word *ruber* can serve as an example, as it was the basic term for the colour red, making the natural world of fauna and flora colourful in Romans' minds and, at the same time, enlivening their everyday utensils and military equipment in a coloristic way, not to mention the human emotional states determining that kind

⁴² Cic. *Fam.* 9.16. Cf. Plin. *HN* 33.7; 35.12.

⁴³ Mart. *Epigram.* 14.131. Cf. Plinius (*HN* 7.186), who defines the colour of the cape of "the Reds" by the adjective *russeus*.

⁴⁴ Varro, *Rust.* 2.5.8; Columella, *Rust.* 6.1.3. Cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 136.2; Columella, *Rust.* 8.2.8.

of body colour. A similar example is offered by the broad range of usage of the adjective *purpureus*, which we find in the description of the fruit orchard, some types of wine, as well as in details of the floristic world, the human face animated with emotions, the splendour emanating from the robes of senators or even of the sea's colour, commonly perceived as blue, just as ships' sails usually considered to be white.⁴⁵

If, in turn, the attention is turned rather towards the diachrony of the appearance of these red-related expressions, attested in literary testimonies of antiquity and the later ages, it would have to be sadly concluded that the fascinating ancient 'redful' reality was to a considerable extent transformed, under the influence of changes to mentality caused by the progressive dominance of Christian ideology, into a barren and colourless emptiness of ascetic, everyday life, now treated as the entrance hall to the posthumous life only. If we consider two representative, as can be assumed, writings of Tertullian⁴⁶ or *The City of God (De civitate Dei)* by Saint Augustine, we find that the red colour so intensely present in the "pagan" reality of ancient Rome becomes almost exclusively a sign of shame in those new realities. It is represented mainly by the verb *erubesco* (blush with shame), only sometimes by the term 'red' as such, with not many exceptions from this meaning.⁴⁷ For example, Tertullian writes about the red face of a daughter who felt shame because of "paternal madness", and about the unknown Filomela, whose loss of virginity causes the same psychological and physiological reaction.⁴⁸ That description, by analogy, brings to mind the phrase of Arnobius informing about the existence of the redness caused by some great wrongdoings.⁴⁹ It is worth mentioning one situation depicted by Augustine, that

⁴⁵ This purple red so intensely present in the Greco-Roman antiquity becomes even – as Reinhold states – "a symbol of the ancient world" (Reinhold 1970: 71).

⁴⁶ In this case, it will be the work *Ad nationes* and representing Tertullian's second period dissertation called *De carne Christi*, however, the material that would be worth considering may be much larger, to mention for example the *Apologeticum*, where red is represented only by the denoting shame verb *erubesco* (10 times) or the work *De patientia (erubesco twice)*, *Adversus Valentinianos* (once), to leave out a number of writings in which this colour is completely absent (*Ad martyres*, *Adversus Iudeos*, *Adversus Hermogenem*).

⁴⁷ Such an exception may be Tertullian's definition of blood as a "red-coloured liquid" (*De carne Christi* IX, 2): "quid est sanguis quam rubens humor", or the almost ascetic Augustine's arguments about fire, which "although the most beautiful in colour deprives of colour" whatever it could touch ("colore pulcherrimus decolorat") and by burning stones "although becoming red itself even more, makes the stones white" ("quamvis magis ille rubeat, illi albicent" – *Civ. Dei* XXI, 4, 2; own translation). For comparison, it can be added that the verb *erubesco* as a description of the physiological response caused by shame appears in *The City of God* as many as 44 times.

⁴⁸ Tert. *Ad nat.* II, 9, 22: "aut conscientia deformitatis aut rubore insaniae paternae"; *Ad nat.* I, 8, 4: "quam et ipsam prudentiores non linguae caede, sed rapti pudoris rubore mutam interpretantur"; cf. *De anima* V, 5: "pudorem et pauorem rubore atque pallore testetur"; *De carne Christi* VII, 7: "nemo temptat eo modo quo sciat posse se ruborem temptationis referre".

⁴⁹ Arnob. *Sicc. Adv. Nat.* VII, 33, 5: "factis et dictis turpibus, facinorum ingentium rubore" (we accept the "facinorum" version, which – as we believe – is clear from the context – the authors).

becomes characteristic of the above statement: during some pagan ceremony, when a noble matron crowns the genitals of a man, her husband stands among the people watching this spectacle, sweaty and red on his face from the feeling of shame.⁵⁰

It is worth adding that the expansion of the colour red, which was a characteristic feature in the peak period of the Roman civilization development in classical antiquity, although it finds its decrease in the realities of the emerging Christian culture, was in fact preceded by an era when its presence was marked only to a negligible degree. To reach such observations, it would be sufficient to study the basic literary “testimonia” of the Roman’s archaic age, like the remains of the literary output of Cato the Elder or the quite large number of Plautus’s surviving comedies. In Cato’s works, the term red as such appears only once in relation to a moss that is characterized by this colour⁵¹, and indicates its presence several times by mentioning the type of soil, referred to as *rubrica* or *terra rubricosa* (*Cat. De agricult.* XXXIV, 2, 1; 2, 3, XXXV, 1, 4, CXV, 2, 2, CXXVIII, 1, 2). When it comes to Plautus, in his 15 preserved comedies – apart from the aforementioned terms describing red hair colour – red does not appear at all whereas in several plays it appears very rarely.⁵² Therefore, one can make a statement that more or less intense red, nearly absent in both later and earlier realities, became a hallmark of the culture of ancient Rome in the years in which it reaches its civilizational apogee, of the culture that still speaks to us due to its expressiveness and dynamics.

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⁵⁰ St. Aug. *Civ Dei* VII, 24, 2: “Iam quod in Liberi sacris honesta matrona pudenda virilia coronabat spectante multitudine, ubi rubens et sudans, si est ulla frons in hominibus, adstabat forsitan et maritus”.

⁵¹ *Cat. De agricult.* VI, 2,5-7: “sin in loco crasso aut calido seueris, hostus nequam erit et ferundo arbor peribit et muscus ruber molestus erit”.

⁵² Plaut. *Capt.* 962: “At ego faciam ut pudeat, nam in ruborem te totum dabo”; *Pseud.* 1219: “magno capite, acutis oculis, ore rubicundo”; *Rud.* 314: “strenua facie rubicundum fortem”; *Stich.* 230: “robiginosam strigilem, ampullam rubidam”.

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