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Epilogue: Answers, More Questions, and Ways Forward

Stephan Zink

The 10th Round Table on Polychromy in Ancient Sculpture and Architecture, held in Berlin in 2020, spanned two and a half days during which 30 papers were presented. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the event was conducted entirely online. Naturally, this conference publication lacks some of the fundamentally important contributions that were integral to the success of the online meeting, and it would be incomplete without acknowledging them.

Under the title «Painted or Not Painted – That is Still the Question», R. Posamentir (Tübingen) provided a brilliant commentary on the state of research on colour schemes, while A. Nunn (Würzburg) in «Mesopotamische Statuen – Farbe, Licht und Architektur» offered a crucially important Mesopotamian perspective which is unfortunately absent in this volume. The paper by E. Neri (Paris), N. Kopczynski (Paris), F. Béjaoui (Tunis), and F. Baratte (Paris) titled «Portraits romains dorés de l'odéon de Carthage» discussed the context of gilded Imperial statues; similarly, C. Barandoni's «Analysing, Documenting, and Re-Contextualizing the Farnese Collection Statues From the Baths of Caracalla in Rome» contributed significantly to our understanding of coloured statues in their original architectural settings.

H. Brecolaki's paper «Why Purple? Colour as Medium and Message on the Walls of the Mycenaean Palace at Pylos» explored colour symbolism in the Bronze Age, a perspective that is missed in this volume. The same applies to the Achaemenid period, which was represented through A. Nagel's work «On Choreographed Polychromies at Persepolis, Susa and Beyond: Achaemenid Monumental Façades between Painted Stone, Glaze, and Wall Painting». V. Ruppene's (Würzburg) «Colours and Marmora in the Aula Palatina of the Late Antique Imperial Palace at Trier» was the only paper specifically dedicated to coloured marbles, a topic that is underrepresented in this volume despite being addressed in various contexts (e. g., by L. Ungaro).

F. Henke (Erlangen-Nürnberg) provided a literary perspective on the cultural and aesthetic significance of marble in his contribution titled «White Marble»,

emphasizing its unique status in Classical antiquity. «Reflections on the Polychromy of the Archaistic Statue of Diana from Pompeii» by K. Sonne Møller (Copenhagen) examined the phenomenon of retrospective style and colouring, also highlighting the possible variations in modern colour reconstructions of the statue.

The technical reports in the «News from Current Research» section began with E. Aggelakopoulou and A. Bakolas (Athens) presenting on «The Parthenon's Cornice Blocks – Study of the Ancient Pigments and Painting Techniques via Analytical Methods». We also heard from E. Neri (Paris), L. de Viguierie (Paris), C. Bouvier (Paris), A. Brunelle (Paris), F. Béjaoui (Tunis), and F. Baratte (Paris) on their study titled «The Polychromy and Wax Finishing of an Imperial Colossal Statue from Thugga in the Bardo Collection (Tunisia)». Additionally, C. Barandoni and A. Rossi (Naples) presented «A Scientific Step Forward in the Study of Three Famous Venuses From the National Archaeological Museum of Naples», while R. Iannacone (Sassari), B. Vak, K. Uhlir, M. Griesser, and K. Zhuber-Okrog (Vienna) discussed «Recent Analyses on the Polychromy of Campana Reliefs in the Antikensammlung of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna». M. Naes, P. Agoridou, I. Mantouvalou, F. Förste, S. Schmid, and B. Kanngießner (Berlin) presented on a «Technical and Provenance Study of Recently Discovered Nabataean Marble Sculpture from Umm al-Biyara in Petra, Jordan».

While we regret that it was not possible to include all these papers in the present volume, we were pleased and grateful that Lothar Haselberger accepted our invitation and contributed a study on Hermogenes and the polychromy of the great Ionian temples in Asia Minor specifically for this volume.

In concluding this volume, we return to the initial question: has our attempt to examine the interfaces of sculptural and architectural colouring within their spatial contexts, using cutting-edge techniques, provided new answers to old questions or allowed us to formulate new inquiries? Here are a few preliminary conclusions.

The Meaning of Colours and What Material Evidence Can Teach Us

Colour semantics and symbolisms, or the meaning of colours, have been widely discussed from a literary perspective. The range of papers presented in this volume demonstrates the potential to expand this discourse through a contextual investigation of colour use. In fact, looking at colours within architectural settings, as part of material and chromatic dialogues or as a means of interacting with form, can reveal surprising insights about their meanings. Given the relatively limited colour palettes, understanding their messages relies heavily on specific settings.

The volume shows that colours could be statements on social status or expressions of religious, cultural, ethnic, or other identities. Indeed, colours alone had the power to change the meaning of architectural and

sculptural designs. Several Late Antique sources quoted by P. Liverani in this volume speak of the «the truth» that colours added to a design. This serves as further evidence that, even for the ancients, a sculpture or a building without colours was incomplete. While this is not news to scholars of polychromy, the data presented underscores this point with new complexity.

The more case studies like the ones presented in this conference we gather, and the more we approach them with questions of meaning in mind, the better we will be able to pinpoint patterns of meanings and thus contribute to cultural and social histories. As J. S. Østergaard rightly pointed out in this volume, the history of ancient polychromy is inevitably also part of social history.

The Technical Know-How of Colours and Their Applications – a Field for Exciting New Discoveries

Over the two decades, the technical interfaces between architectural and sculptural surfaces have become increasingly apparent. This conference reiterated this point while also reminded us that we are still far from understanding the full complexity of the technical know-how of ancient surface colouring. Clearly, there still is significant potential for new insights, whether through analysis of literary or material evidence.

The latter has generated here nothing less than «a new chapter in our knowledge of the history of ancient Greek painting techniques», as noted by the authors of the Pilina research project. Indeed, the discovery of a previously unknown lime-based painting technique is a triumph of modern scientific analysis and methodological protocols. This breakthrough

suggests we should now revisit earlier data that pointed to the seemingly inexplicable use of organic colourants on exterior architectural surfaces, which often used a lime binder. The success of the Pilina project also evolved from the technological capability to handle large data sets and find the unknown in these haystacks. Simultaneously, it also highlighted the ongoing difficulty in identifying pigments and colourants, as evidenced by the challenge of pinpointing a specific purple dye.

All this underscores two key needs for the future: first, to continue researching the technical underpinnings of the art of achieving colour effects in antiquity; and second, to further refine scientific methods and test new and innovative analytical techniques.

Light and Shadow – Notoriously Absent Yet Always Present

It is indeed intriguing that, while the original light conditions of the objects and sites studied by scholars

of ancient polychromy are now lost, their echoes still linger on the extant surfaces. The «lost light» is reflect-

ed in colour choices, gilded or painted highlights, or chiaroscuro effects. Several papers in this volume have touched on the pivotal role of light and shadow in shaping architectural and sculptural surfaces, a role that only becomes truly apparent when we endeavour to re-create original spatial settings. The subject at hand even appears more intricate now than we initially conceived.

We need to even rethink some of the assumed taxonomies such as the notion that lighter colours were used in dimly lit situations to counterbalance the lack of natural light – while this was a possibility, the opposite strategy was just as valid. An illustration of this can be seen in the design of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi, where the use of darker colours in less-lit areas served to manipulate the viewer's experience of the site. Another example are the capitals of Hermo-

genes' Magnesian Temple, where it appears that painted shading was used to counteract the natural light conditions. This effect became evident only upon reconstructing the original placement of the capital on the building, exemplifying the intricate relationship between colour and space.

Emphasized once more in this volume is the importance of surface characteristic beyond the actual colour hue. In understanding the modelling of surfaces with light and shadow effects, factors such as brilliance, shine, and reflection need to be taken into account, as well as grain sizes of pigments, the quality of the binder, and the workmanship of the carrier surfaces. The topic of light and shadow is still insufficiently understood, yet it emerges once again as such a fundamental component of ancient polychromy that it would warrant a conference on its own.

Let's Not Forget About White

In the «chromo-euphoria» of postmodernist scholarship, it seems that the essential role of white has at times been overlooked. Even statues or buildings that were carved from the most exquisite white marble were often coated in white to achieve a perfectly uniform backdrop for the application of colour refinements. When marble was left uncoated, it was usually to exploit specific translucent or light reflective qualities.

This volume rekindles our focus on white, a topic that has been essential for the 19th century polychromy debate. Whether it be white marble with a white coating, finely polished stucco, or white plaster slurries on terracotta, the use of a homogeneous white surface was the basic recipe for creating perfectly well-defined forms and enhancing their three-dimensionality through effects of chiaroscuro. In terms of colour schemes, this necessitates recognizing varying degrees of colour application.

More Reconstructions and Visualizations

The first and perhaps greatest challenge in attempting to understand coloured surfaces in their original context is the highly fragmentary state of the evidence. As a result, reconstructions involve significant extrapolation and uncertainty, often leading to multiple, equally plausible interpretations – a precarious foundation for definitive conclusions. Not only is it challenging to bridge the gaps in knowledge, but it is also difficult to accurately recreate what is known using a different medium. Whether analogue or digital, it is practically impossible to fully replicate a lost reality.

The case study of the Medieval alabaster panels presented in this volume masterfully explores these

limitations by comparing sophisticated hands-on artistic techniques with state-of-the-art digital methods. Both approaches, in different ways, are abstractions of what the original objects truly were. Does this mean we should abandon reconstructions? On the contrary. As this volume demonstrates, reconstructions and visualizations form the basis for deeper discussions and understandings of colour phenomena, while the process of creating them is epistemic in nature. Of course, it is crucial to methodologically delineate the difference between evidence and assumption, ideally both in writing and through visual conventions.

We need more reconstructions, accompanied by an ongoing dialogue in which we educate ourselves on their potential and limitations and subsequently adjust our expectations.

The Way Forward: Collaborations and Studies Across Visual Media

Lastly, this volume shows that new answers to old questions are achievable only through interdisciplinary collaborations that bring together diverse methodologies. In fact, polychromy research has always straddled the intersection of science and the humanities, dating back to the earliest chemical analysis of pigments in the early 19th century. Nowadays, it requires the expertise of archaeologists, architects, conservators, material scientists specializing in different analytical methods, graphic designers, virtual modelling specialists, and artists. When it comes to the spatial dimension, even reconstructing the structural framework alone, without considering the surfaces and their colours, is a challenging and time-consuming yet rewarding task, as we have seen.

Overall, the collaborative examination of sculptural and architectural polychromy and their interactions within spatial settings has helped shed light on the significance of colour in ancient Mediterranean societies and their Medieval successors. A key conclusion drawn from this endeavour is the vast potential for gaining further insights by exploring the theme of colour across all visual media in which it was utilized. This encompasses not just sculpture and architecture but also wall and vase painting, toreutics, terracotta production, mosaic art, stone revetting, textile manufacturing, glass working, and more. As a result, we aspire for this publication to act as an open invitation for experts from various fields to join the discourse on colour.