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The Colour Black and the Sculpture of Classical Antiquity: Shades of Meaning in an Architectural Context

Jan Stubbe Østergaard

Abstract

The paper offers a preliminary exploration of the research potential of focusing on the use of a particular colour – black – in the architectural sculpture of Classical Antiquity. An outline is given of references to blackness in Greek and Latin, evidence from the ancient literary sources is presented and the relevant stones and pigments are briefly described. A definition is provided of the sense in which the term ‹black› is applied, covering a spectrum from uniform black to shades of black as in ‹dark›. The main section of the paper is devoted to two case studies on the use of ‹black› in Greek and Roman sculpture, within an architectural context. The first case study is the Frieze of the Erechtheion, involving a debatable, broader understanding of the role of black in sculpture; the second is the portrait statue of Matidia Minor in the scaenae frons of the Antonine era theatre at Suessa Aurunca (Campania). Two ‹dimensions› are tentatively suggested as the primary, but not exclusive, motivators for the use of black in the two case studies: the aesthetic/technical and the symbolic/ideological. A final section recommends this angle of approach to understanding the polychromies of sculpture from Classical Antiquity in general. It is argued that this study generates a synergy with data acquisition by raising new and relevant research questions.

Keywords: Sculptural polychromy, Greek and Roman architectural polychromy, black (colour), coloured stones in Antiquity, Erechtheion, Suessa Aurunca, Matidia Minor

Introduction

Over recent decades, the study of polychromy in ancient sculpture has led to a paradigm shift in our understanding of Classical sculpture as a visual medium[1]. This is clearly expressed by such influential exponents of classical archaeological studies as S. Settis and J. Boardman and is documented by an increasing number of published investigations[2]. Moving from the general to the more specific, W. Maßmann's precise observations during his study of the technical finish of stone surfaces on what must now be called the ‹Berliner Kore› are essential[3]. Maßmann showed that the very highest levels of expertise were involved in the production of early 6th cent. Archaic marble sculpture, with the statue being finished prior to the application of polychromy. It in turn provided the character of a three-dimensional canvas and was conceived in close collaboration with the painter, being perhaps one and the same person[4]. Polychromy thus represents an integral factor in the equation whose sum is the sculpture of Classical Antiquity.

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2 Abbe 2015; Boardman 2016, 7. 80 f.; Settis 2018; Østergaard 2018; Bourgeois 2019.
3 W. Maßmann, in: Heilmeyer – Maßmann 2014, 88–94 (‹Die steinbildhauerische Bearbeitung, Formensprache›).
4 W. Maßmann, in: Heilmeyer – Maßmann 2014, 93.

Definitions

It is against this background that I offer some observations on a particular colour in classical sculpture, namely the appearance of black in an architectural context. To make a proper start some definitions are needed.

Firstly, is black a colour at all? No, not in physics, where colours are defined by their wavelength within the spectrum of visible light. There, black is not a colour because it represents the absence of light, and therefore the absence of colour. But in the present context, black *is* a colour because we are operating in the world of visual media. Here, black and white are not defined by a specific wavelength, but by being neuro-optically perceived as colours.

Secondly, on a similarly basic level, one must distinguish between ‹black› as an abstract colour term – as when dealing with the term in the literary sources – and ‹black› as a comparative colour-value term. So, the ‹black› stones used in Classical Antiquity do not possess the homogenous and uniform colour of a single black pigment; rather, stones described as ‹black› are found in a spectrum of hues around the adjective ‹dark›. In what follows, I will be speaking mainly about architectural sculpture in stone, to the exclusion not least of that in terracotta[5].

Thirdly, I have chosen to apply a very broad definition of what we might mean by ‹black in the architectural sculpture of classical antiquity›. First and foremost, this refers to the presence of black in sculpture, and what this black is used for. But I will be transgressing the boundaries of taxonomies which traditionally structure the discipline of classical archaeology. In polychromy studies this is regularly required, as one sees in the traditional and otherwise significant differentiation between sculpture and architecture.

Finally, there is the question of periods and cultures, chronology and geography. I will be dealing only with sculpture and architecture from two centres of the Classical world, namely the Athens of the 5th cent. B.C. and Roman Campania of the 2nd cent. A.D.

Reflections on the Colour Black

Black has powerful connotations across human expressions, be it the forms of literature, philosophy or in the visual media. Within a Western cultural context, these media to a considerable extent have classical antiquity as their creative origin. Among the many visual media available to societies which fall within Greek and Roman culture, sculpture played a particularly vital communicative role in a variety of contexts. Any history of ancient polychromy must therefore invariably be considered a part of social history.

This is also the main tenet of the seminal studies on the symbolic value of colours carried out by the French historian M. Pastoureau. In his monograph on the colour black, a very basic observation is that black is primordial, as in the Bible[6]. It is the colour of the lifeless void before creation. Thus, it is the opposite of, and the prerequisite for, light: let there be light, the light of life. Pastoureau's discussion of the colour black is diachronic, extending from cave paintings to the present day. But he is above all a medievalist, not a classical scholar. His section on black in antiquity is therefore understandably somewhat weak[7]. Yet, one searches in vain for a classicist – be it a philologist, historian, or archaeologist – who has taken up the theme, and the challenge, of throwing light specifically on the meanings of the darkness of black in classical antiquity.

It is inspiring to note that Pastoureau's basic observation on the study of the history of colour also applies for any attempt to investigate the history of the presence of the colour black in the sculpture of Classical Antiquity. As already observed, such an investigation must inevitably involve social history. From the point of view of the historiography of classical studies, this is a relatively recent realization

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5 As for example from Olympia, cf. Moustaka 1993. Architectural terracottas from Italy, 6th through 2nd cent. B.C.: Lulof et al. 2019, *passim*, with references to earlier *Deliciae fictiles* volumes; for Late republican Rome, cf. Ferrea 2002.

6 Pastoureau 2008.

7 Pastoureau 2008, 19–42, esp. 39–42.

and one which, by implication, requires attention on other, related spheres of historical enquiry. Its impact on scholarship is exemplified by the introduction of the concept of ‹colour coding› in the interpretation of polychromy in Roman sculpture and by the rise of ‹synaesthesia› as a research theme[8].

The Meaning of ‹Black›

It is necessary first to touch on the meanings of the term ‹black› in its Greek and Roman linguistic context. This aspect is one which deserves separate treatment; to my knowledge, no such treatment exists. It has however been well discussed in wider contexts by A. Grand-Clément[9]. Within the given limits, only the bare bones can be offered here. On this basic level, there is a predominance of negative figurative connotations of black[10]. In Greek, the adjective μέλᾱς (*mélās*) means black, but also dark in colour, sometimes so dark as to lack colour. It is widely used in a figurative sense, from Homer onwards (‹black death›, Il. 2, 834), to refer to things that are evil, malignant, or enigmatic[11].

Similarly, the Latin ‹niger› is used of what is black, dark, or dusky in colour, with figurative meanings in the same range as that of the corresponding Greek term. ‹Niger› connotes death, sadness, the ill-omened, and the wicked[12]. The meanings of term ‹ater› are closely related to ‹niger›, including black, dark, sordid, funereal, and deadly[13].

It is next necessary to cast a cursory glance at the use of the adjective ‹black› in the written sources on ancient polychromy[14]. A superficial review suggests that its use falls into two main contexts. One is in texts dealing with naturalistic mimesis, the most famous no doubt being the one in Plato's *Republic*, and another being in Kallistratos' *Ekphraseis*[15]. The other context is that in which the colour black is used in a symbolic sense[16]. The personification of the Nile as black mentioned by Pausanias, for example, did not mean that its water took the form of a black Ethiopian, so the black was not used with a naturalistic and mimetic intention but rather to symbolize a region and its population.

The Colour Black, Physically Speaking: Pigments and Stones

The physical properties of black in sculpture are best described under two headings: the pigments and the stones. The black pigments used on stone are few and all are organic, being derived from carbonized bone, carbonized vegetal matter such as vine, and soot. The inorganic manganese black was to my knowledge

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8 Liverani 2014; Liverani 2018; Grand-Clement 2015.

9 Grand-Clément 2011, 352–361 and *passim*; Grand-Clément 2018, 360 f. on ‹darkness›, and *passim*. A translation into English of Grand-Clément 2011 is needed; it might finally lead to a review in English of this ground-breaking contribution.

10 See Grand-Clément 2011, 354 on positives and 355 on the need to avoid simplification of negative aspects. Grand-Clément 2018, 360 comments on the ‹net of associations› connected with ‹darkness› (‹noirceur›), including the positive valency of ‹fertility› as an aspect of the predominantly chthonic value connected with Demeter.

11 Liddell – Scott (1940), s. v. μέλᾱς at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=me/las> (07.08.2024).

12 Lewis – Short, s. v. ‹niger› at <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0059%3Aalphabetic+letter%3DN%3Aentry+group%3D13%3Aentry%3Dniger1> (07.08.2024).

13 The Oxford Latin Dictionary (1968), s. v. ‹ater›.

14 Henke 2020 is an indispensable publication on the written sources.

15 Plat. rep. 4, 420 c–d: «It is as if we were colouring a statue and someone approached and censured us, saying that we did not apply the most beautiful pigments to the most beautiful parts of the image, since the eyes, which are the most beautiful part, have not been painted with purple but with black, [420d] we should think it a reasonable justification to reply, ‹Don't expect us, quaint friend, to paint the eyes so fine that they will not be like eyes at all, nor the other parts. But observe whether by assigning what is proper to each we render the whole beautiful›» (transl. Shorey 1930, 316–318). Kallistratos Ekphraseis 4, ‹On the statue of an Indian› (*Eis to indou agalma*), 1–3: In black stone with white eyes.

16 Paus. 8, 24, 12: «The people of Psophis have also by the side of the Erymanthus a temple and image of Erymanthus. The images of all rivers except the Nile in Egypt are made of white marble; but the images of the Nile, because it descends to the sea through Aethiopia, they are accustomed to make of black stone» (transl. Jones 1935, 20).

only used in terracotta sculpture, since it survives firing at high temperatures[17].

The dark stones most frequently used for sculpture were as follows[18]:

– *Nero antico* (*numidico*), a marble from Tunisia (Africa Proconsularis);

– *Bigio morato*, a marble, mostly from Northern Tunisia (Africa Proconsularis) and Western Turkey (Göktepe, near Ephesos);

– Basalt, a volcanic rock, from Egypt;

– Basanite, also a volcanic rock, from Wadi Hammamat in the Eastern Egyptian desert; and

– Black granite (‹Black Egyptian Granite›; ‹Black Cairo granite›), from Aswan.

The Archaeological Sources: Dimensions of Black

In the following, I limit myself to representations of human figures, to the exclusion of animals and mythological hybrids of human and animal form, as well as artefacts from Etruscan culture. By ‹black›, I do not mean only uniform black; I also include shades of black, as found within the spectrum covered by the adjective ‹dark›.

Within these limits, it seems to me that the shades of meaning of black in sculpture within an architectural context belong to at least two categories or dimensions. On the one hand, we see black as an aesthetic category, while on the other hand black appears as a category which combines a dimension of aesthetic effect with aspects that highlight the prestige of the material, the technique, and the context. Within each shade of meaning, others may well be active to some degree. The present focus on an architectural context means that the naturalistic and mimetic use of black is not included, nor the ideological one, as in the case of Roman portraits and ‹ideal› statues carved in dark stone used as a connotation for classical bronzes[19].

Black as Background for Greek Polychrome Architectural Sculpture: Readability and Aesthetic Impact

It is debatable whether this first section on the aesthetic dimension belongs within the subject I have set for this paper. It will at least challenge our taxonomies to ask the following two questions: does the meaning of a certain shade of black necessarily have to do with the sculpture itself? And is it permissible to view the dark colour of the background as an element of the intended sculptural effect?

The example chosen is the frieze of the Erechtheion. Whatever their enigmatic iconography[20], the sculptures which made up this frieze were executed in white Parian marble, in very high relief, and mounted on slabs of ‹dark› Eleusinian limestone (Fig. 1)[21]. The visual effect achieved has traditionally been interpreted as producing a contrast between the ‹chiaro›, the white of the marble, and the ‹oscuro› of the background. Since the late 18th century, the aim of achieving a similar ‹chiaroscuro› effect has also been given as the reason for the holes drilled at the intersections of the plastically rendered triple guilloche

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17 Cf. the ‹Tracking Colour› investigations of 5th cent. B.C. Etruscan terracotta antefixes in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek: Sargent 2012.

18 For the stones listed below: Gregarek 1999, 36–38. 111. 147 (despite the title, other coloured stones are included); De Nuccio et al. 2002. Literature on coloured stones in ancient sculpture is heavily biased towards marbles. Work is needed on granites and volcanic stones.

19 Cf. De Nuccio et al. 2002, 353 no. 56 (mimetic naturalistic) 321–327. 347. 351 no. 53 (portraits); 341 no. 41 (ideal sculpture). Gregarek 1999, 138–139 (predominance of dark stones in Roman ‹Buntmarmor› statuary). See also, for the Roman Imperial period, Schneider 2002, esp. 88 f. 95 f. (ideal sculpture).

20 For the iconography, cf. Räuchle 2015, 2–32.

21 Could the dark stone have been chosen in order to achieve a deep uniform black through the application of a black pigment? I thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

1   Erechtheion Frieze. Fragments of the high relief figures in Parian marble (Athens, Acropolis Museum, inv. 2830/2830a; 1300; 2825), mounted on dark Eleusinian limestone; 409–406 B.C.; height of frieze (North Porch) 68.3 cm

2   Façade of the tomb chamber in the tumulus of Aghios Athanassios, 20 km west of Thessaloniki. Doric and Ionic friezes. Stuccoed limestone. Total height c. 4.5 m; c. 315 B.C.

on the torus of the Ionic capitals of the North Porch. Only thanks to the 1985 contribution by the Dutch classical archaeologist E. M. Stern do we now know that coloured glass buttons were in fact inset in these holes – as documented in 1811 by Haller von Hallerstein and later by others[22]. A similar triple guilloche decorates the upper torus of the bases of the North Porch columns. Here, the far larger buttons at the intersections are plastically rendered in marble, not glass, but were originally surely polychrome, as on the capitals above. Similar guilloche mouldings with stone ‹buttons› appear in several places elsewhere on the Erechtheion[23]. Furthermore, the volutes of the North Porch capitals were polychrome in a combination of gilding of the volute eyes and pigments on the volutes. The egg-and-dart moulding under the guilloche torus and the relief lotus and palmette frieze running round the neck of the capitals were also polychrome[24].

In light of this and the evidence now available on the polychromy of Attic Classical marble sculpture, we may hypothesize that the sculptures in the Erechtheion frieze were entirely polychrome[25]. I suggest that the choice of the dark Eleusinian stone as background was made for two reasons: one was communi-

cative, namely to increase the visual readability of the figures; and the other was aesthetic, namely to increase the effect of *poikilia*, the festive splendour of the polychromy[26]. In this respect, the Erechtheion frieze is comparable with, and perhaps related to, the effect achieved in the painted pediment and Ionic frieze on the otherwise Doric façade of the tomb chamber in the late 4th cent. B.C. Macedonian tumulus at Aghios Athanasios, some 20 km north-west of Thessaloniki (Fig. 2). The pediment, with its palmette acroteria was given a dark ground for its polychrome decoration. The trompe l'œil effect of plastic volume in the shading of the leaves of the acroteria may be understood as a pointer towards the three-dimensional character of temple architecture. The leaves on the painted frieze of a late 5th cent. B.C. Attic marble sarcophagus from Kition are rendered in a similar manner, suggesting that the painted figured pediment of the sarcophagus also reflects the polychromy of contemporary architectural sculpture[27]. In the frieze at Aghios Athanasios, the deep blue-black background makes the figurative scene stand out and enriches the chromatic profusion, the *poikilia* effect. Some of the figures approaching from the left are carrying torches, indicating that the whole of the otherwise brilliantly lit scene is taking

22   Stern 1985 w. pl. 96, 2–4.
23   Stern 1985, 412.
24   Stern 1985, pl. 96, 1.
25   For polychromy in classical sculpture, cf. the survey in the relevant section in Østergaard 2018. For an experimental digital reconstruction of the polychromy of the Erechtheion: <https://www.anasynthesis.co.uk/index.php/erechtheion/3d-erechtheion> (07.08.2024). The reconstruction attempt is of some value, even though the North Porch column capitals are wrong, being taken from the columns of the East Porch. If we add the synaesthesia of the large cult festivals on the Acropolis, the music, singing, dancing, burning of incense, and wearing of floral wreaths, the

architectural and sculptural polychromy of the Erechtheion finds its place quite effortlessly.
26   On *poikilia*, see Grand-Clément 2015. One may usefully relate the dark background of the Erechtheion frieze to the colours chosen for the background of metopes and friezes in Greek architecture. On synaesthesia, see Bradley 2013; Blakolmer et al. 2017 with references; Grand-Clément 2021.
27   Sarcophagus from Kition: Georgiou 2009, 127 fig. 1; the background colour of the frieze does not appear dark. Cf. also the shading of the leaves of the palmette corner acroteria from the workshop of Phidias at Olympia, Kyrieleis 2011, 90 fig. 97.

3   Casa dei Vettii (Reg VI, 15, 1). Scene with Cupids making perfume. From the Cupid Frieze in the triclinium/oecus. Height c. 40 cm (?); 62–79 A.D.

place at night; an evening party. It is the same ‹deep blue – black› background as found in the pediment of the façade, where a nighttime setting is hardly intended. As in the Erechtheion Frieze, the dark background colour of the frieze is rather a device to make the colourful figures in the frieze stand out the more clearly.

It is of course debatable whether this use of a black-to-blue-black background for architectural sculpture may be understood as conveying a ‹shade of meaning› about the sculptures themselves. Be that as it may, we can in any case follow this primarily communicative and aesthetic device in fresco painting into the Roman Imperial Period, as seen in the oecus, the dining room in the peristyle of a Pompeian town house, the domus known as Casa dei Vettii (Fig. 3)[28].

Black Stone in Roman Architectural Sculpture: Social Prestige and Aesthetic Effect

From 1995 to 2005 excavations directed by S. Cascella took place at Sessa Aurunca, ancient Suessa Aurunca, in northern Campania[29]. The most important of the monuments investigated was the Roman Antonine-era theatre. An earthquake had damaged an earlier Julio-Claudian structure and a reconstruction took place c. A.D. 140–150; this was an act of munificence on the part of Matidia Minor, who lived from A.D. 85 to after A.D. 161. Matidia's social status was exalted: she was a great-niece of the emperor

Trajan, half-sister of Hadrian's wife, Vibia Sabina, and biological aunt to Annia Galeria Faustina, the wife of Antoninus Pius. She lived most of her life without a husband and was by all accounts vastly wealthy[30].

The reconstruction project was very extensive, comprising the repair of a portico above the cavea of the theatre, an access road from the forum, the lower approaches to the cavea with a nymphaeum, two basilicas, a new marble paving of the orchestra and

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28   De Angelis 2011.
29   Cascella 2016.

30   For the biography of Matidia Minor see Wood 2015, 235–237; Woodhull 2020, 203–205.
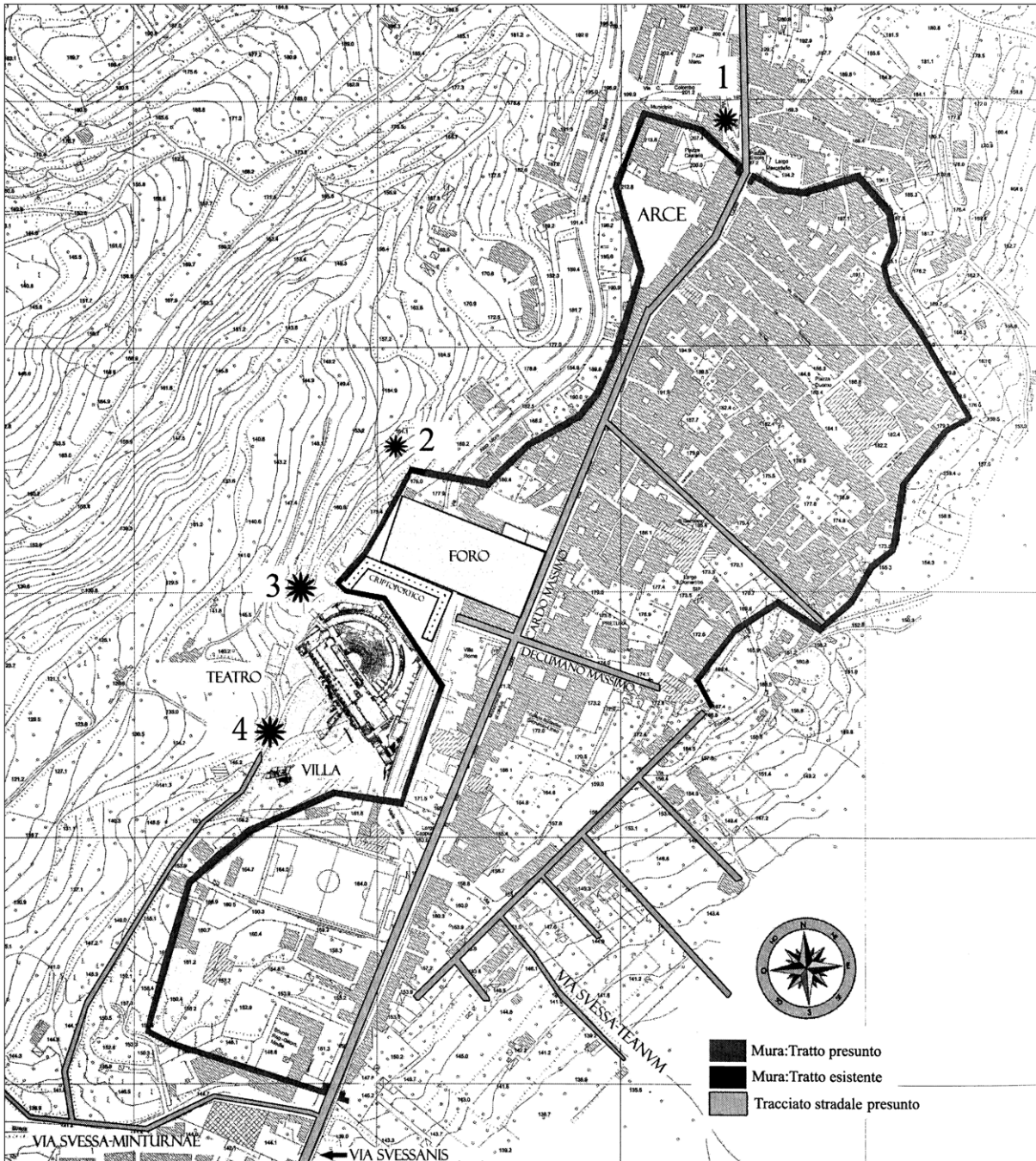
4 Plan of the theatre and surroundings as renovated, c. A.D. 140–150 (presumed course of access from forum in stippled lines on lower left): 1. porticus post scaenam; 2. scaenae frons; 3. sacellum; 4. northern basilica

marble finishing of the seating in the cavea (Fig. 4). Coloured marbles were extensively used, mostly from imperial quarries in Roman provinces around the Mediterranean. In the Southern Basilica, the walls had revetments in Euboean *cipollino* and *pavonazzetto* from Asia Minor; in the orchestra an opus sectile grid of *cipollino, portasanta* from Chios, *giallo antico* from North Africa, and Italian *lunense* marbles

framed alternating squares and tondi of red and green Egyptian porphyry. This abundant use of coloured marble in an architectural context was closely similar to prominent Imperial showplaces in Rome, such as The Forum of Augustus, the Basilica of the Forum of Trajan and the Pantheon.

The pièce de resistance of the whole restoration project was the three-storied scaenae frons (Fig. 5).
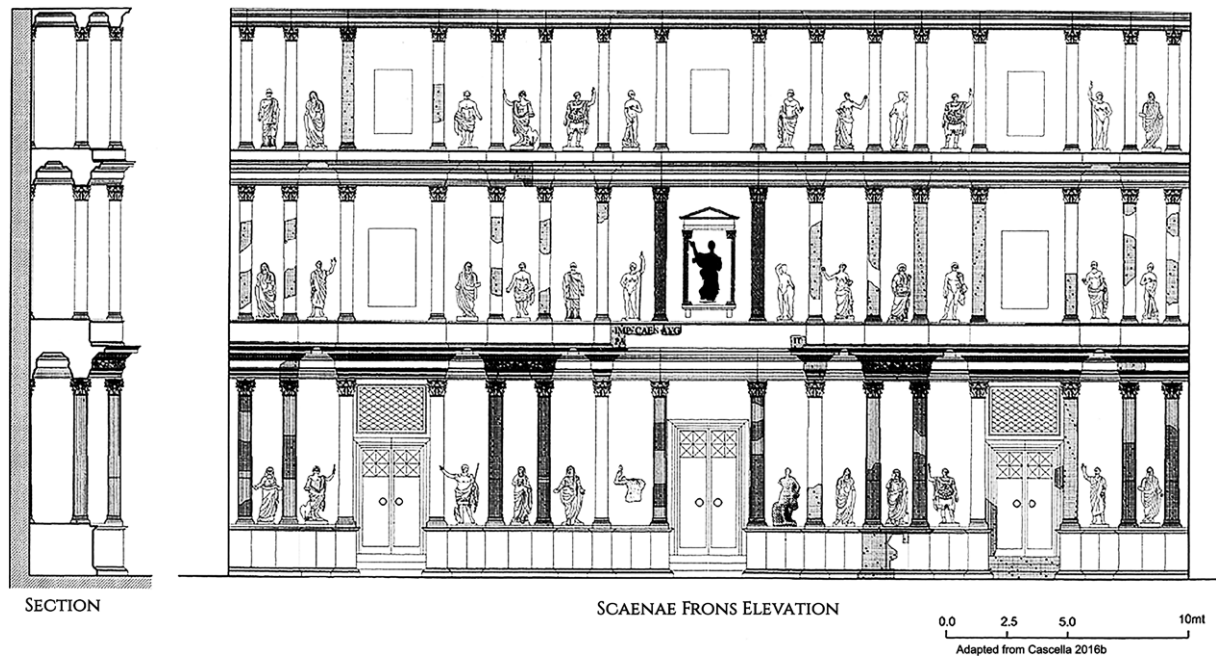
5   The Antonine-era theatre at Suessa Aurunca. The reconstructed scaenae frons of the theatre showing the sculptures as preserved.

Articulating its three orders were monolithic composite and Corinthian marble columns of *giallo antico*, *fior di pesco*, *breccias*, *carystian* marble, *portasanta*, and *cipollino*, which were finished into smooth, vertically fluted, or spirally fluted surfaces. The many niches contained sculptures of divinities and portrait statues. The latter included portraits of members of the imperial families and the local nobility[31].

Among the finds from the area of the scaenae frons was a fragmented portrait statue of the building's patron, Matidia Minor (Fig. 6 a). The statue had been set up in the central niche of the second story, above the central, ground floor porta regia entrance to the stage. This niche was flanked by spirally fluted columns in yellow *giallo antico*. Columns of the same material flanked the porta regia below. The statue casts a new light on the ways that a prominent woman's likeness could be depicted in a public setting and on the stylistic options available for such images. Rather than following one of the familiar types used for portrait statues of elite women, such as ‹The Larger Herculanean Woman› (Fig. 6 b)[32], this one

used a composite technique of white and dark marble from Asia Minor (Aphrodisias and Göktepe) and a flamboyantly dramatic pose[33].

In her seminal 2015 article, S. Wood argues that this appearance might be inspired by the iconography of the ‹Breezes›, the *Aurae.* She suggests that the colour of the porta regia columns drew the attention of the viewer up to the statue of Matidia and that the golden warm colour of the *giallo antico* would have «complemented and enhanced» the dark bluish-black drapery of the sculpture. Besides this aesthetic effect, Wood rightly emphasizes the technical bravado of the statue and the expensive, imported materials employed: «The colourful marbles would have been immediately distinguishable in richness and texture from paint on white stone»; and «…the viewer would recognize the statue's difficult technique and valuable imported materials[34]». Wood further imagines that the portrait statues in «light marble» on lower levels were «presumably painted[35]».

One wonders, would the ‹viewer› in question be representative of the majority of the 6–7000 specta-

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31   Wood 2015, 234 figs. 1. 2; 237–241. Woodhull 2020, 209 fig. 3; 214 fig. 6; 213–215, with references to Cascella 2016.
32   As in the case of a contemporary honorific statue of Faustina the Elder: J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, inv. 70.AA.113 < https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/103SQC> (07.08.2024) with images and bibliography.

33   On this combination: Gregarek 1999, 42. 44 fig. 5. 6; on the possibility of added polychromy, see 45.
34   Wood 2015, 240. A reference to white stone thus painted is not given, nor to an argument supporting the purported abilities of the viewer. Wood does not mention any instance of applied (artificial) architectural polychromy.
35   Wood 2015, 240.

6   a) Portrait statue of Matidia Minor from the Roman theatre at Suessa Aurunca. White marble and *bigio morato*. Height 2.60 m; c. A.D. 120–140 (Sala Espositiva presso il Castello Ducale di Sessa Aurunca, inv. 297048); b) Faustina the Elder in the Large Herculanean Woman type (Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum 70.AA.113). Height 2.09 m; c. A.D. 140–160; white marble

tors which the theatre could accommodate? The same goes for Wood's assertion that Matidia would be immediately recognizable because her face «as represented in sculpture was quite familiar[36]».

Many parallels can be adduced for the use for sculptures in Roman Imperial contexts of dark, rare marbles, principally to achieve the combined effect of visual aesthetics and social prestige – not least during the rule of the Antonine Dynasty. To introduce and analyse them is not possible within the limits of this paper[37]. It is, however, hard to find a parallel for the portrait of Matidia Minor, and even harder to find one stage-managed with such flair as the one in the theatre of Suessa Aurunca. It is a pity that she cannot know that she succeeded in attracting attention far beyond her own times.

Conclusions

There seems to be broad agreement in the polychromy research community that the acquisition and publication of basic data on the traces of polychromy preserved on the sculpture and architecture of Classical Antiquity must continue to have a high priority. There is also consensus on the need to acquire such

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36   Wood 2015, 240; cf. 242: «the portrait sculptors and painters who applied the finishing touches to each replica of a type could individualize these works».
37   Gregarek 1999; Schneider 2002; De Nuccio et al. 2002.

data according to well thought out project designs and according to the strictest possible protocols, involving the application of methodologies which allow a high degree of cross-testing.

It has however also, and rightly, been pointed out at earlier Round Table meetings that the compiling of primary data can no longer stand alone. It must be accompanied by research questions dealing with the whys and wherefores, the meaning of polychromies in ancient sculpture. This requires us to focus on, for example, categories of sculpture, sculptural contexts and semantics of polychromy. Important steps have already been taken in this respect[38].

We must follow two parallel paths forwards to create a synergetic and circular interchange: acquisition of primary data should go hand in hand with the development of research questions which will be de-

cisive in directing the choice of objects for data acquisition – and in generating the kind of public and professional interest which is vital for acquiring the funding needed for further research.

The present contribution contends that studying the use of a particular colour might be one of the means of creating such synergy. The use of the colour black in the cases studied do not reveal any of the negative semantic connotations of the Greek and Latin words for ‹black›; quite the opposite. Articles such as that by A. Grand-Clément's on the colours associated with the participants in the cult of Isis and the goddess herself point a way forward: how is the evidence of the written sources reflected in the archaeological, sculptural evidence? Would a representation of the Goddess in black stone also have carried polychromy[39]?

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