



Publikationen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts

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in: Zink et al. - Colour & Space. Interfaces of Ancient Architecture and Sculpture.: Proceedings of the 10th International Round Table on Polychromy in Ancient Sculpture and Architecture

<https://doi.org/10.34780/8g07xf66>

Herausgebende Institution / Publisher:
Deutsches Archäologisches Institut

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Σκιά and χρώμα – The Importance of Preliminary Drawing

Paolo Liverani

Abstract

An important issue in the research on ancient sculptural polychromy is the initial layer applied to a ground, which serves as a base for subsequent layers of paint. It was identified in a number of cases and labelled as ‘underpaint’ (in German, *Untermalung*) or ‘underdrawing’ (in German, *Unterzeichnung*). These definitions have not always been used in a consistent way. In the field of conservation, the common terminology contains a subtle but important difference: underpaint is necessary for giving a nuance or shadow to the final layer, while underdrawing is only a preliminary drawing, a trace to follow in applying the colours. In order to avoid misunderstandings, it is useful to clarify our terminology. In this regard the

ancient sources on painting on sculpture are not very helpful, but we can consider the much richer information concerning paintings on wooden panels. In this field, the Greek technical term for ‘underdrawing’ is σκιά or σκιαγραφία. The most detailed sources on this process date back to the period of late antiquity, although the earliest attestations are found in the *Epistles to the Hebrews and the Colossians* from the 1st cent. A.D. Given the widespread diffusion of the underdrawing technique in panel paintings, we are also equipped to interpret the traces found on sculptures according to the same principles.

Keywords: underdrawing, underpaint, panel painting, preliminary drawing, sinopia

Introduction

During the studies which contributed to the preparation of the exhibition *Bunte Götter* (2003), a series of technical issues arose which were discussed in the following years. One of the results concerned some aspects of the painting technique. Our knowledge in this field is still far from complete or even satisfying, yet what is already clear is the need to study polychromy by considering the painting as a stratified process with several layers, each one of which has different functions and aims to obtain specific effects, not considering restorations or repaintings.

The analysis of the Caligula head in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen identified several carbon black traces of a drawing outlining the eyes of the emperor, while other similar details were recognized in the fringe of the hair¹. These traces were de-

scribed as ‘underpaint’ (in German, *Untermalung*). Some years later, the study of the Treu Head in the British Museum identified a carbon black ‘underdrawing’ (in German, *Unterzeichnung*), which was applied directly onto the stone surface followed by the application of the flesh tones². More precisely, this underdrawing consists of outlines of the eyes, the irises, the pupils, the eyelashes, and the eyebrows. The authors proposed a comparison with the line drawing on the eyes and eyebrows in red paint of the head of the Wounded Amazon, recently discovered at Herculaneum³, but it remains unclear whether the traces on the Amazon correspond to the final paint layer or to a preliminary drawing for other now-lost paint layers. A few other Roman sculptures could be added to the list, such as the Livia from the Villa of

¹ Brinkmann et al. 2003.

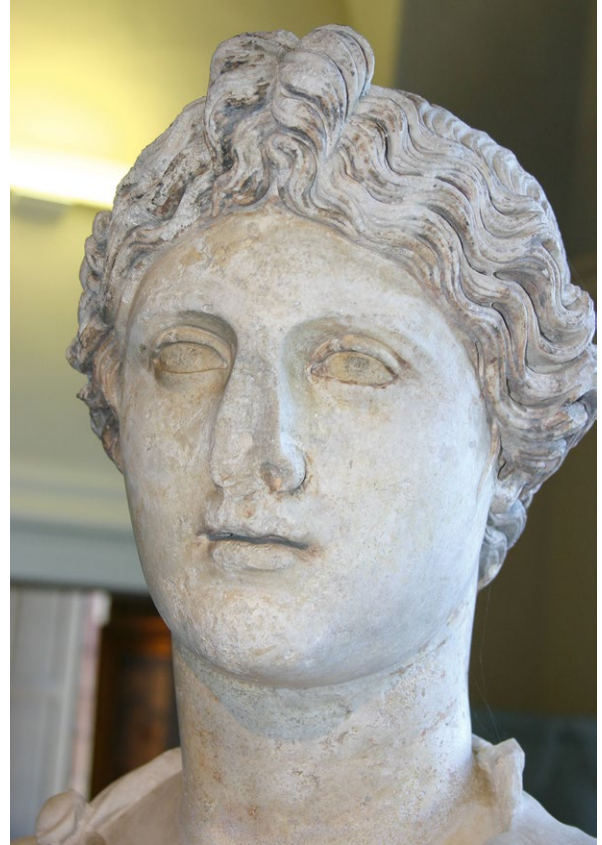
² Verri et al. 2010, 51; Verri et al. 2014, 161.

³ Verri et al. 2014, 162 f.; Moesch 2008.



1 Left eye of the Togatus at Formia with traces of underdrawing

the Mysteries at Pompeii⁴, the head of a togate in the Museum of Formia⁵ (Fig. 1), the Darting Apollo⁶ of the Villa Corsini at Florence (Fig. 2), and the 3rd-cent. portrait of a Serapis priest in Berlin⁷. C. Blume⁸ took stock of the situation by describing and discussing this type of trace in Hellenistic sculpture as *Untermalung* or *Vorzeichnungen*, that is ‘underpaint’ or ‘(preliminary) sketches’.



2 The head of the ‘Darting Apollo’ at Villa Corsini

Terminology

I think that it is high time to clarify these issues, first of all with regard to the modern terminology to avoid misunderstandings, and then – if possible – regarding the ancient terminology, to see whether the archaeological evidence can find some correspondence in the ancient sources.

In the field of conservation, the common terminology is based upon a subtle but important distinction between underdrawing and underpaint. Allowing for a certain degree of simplification, by not considering the evolution of the technique in modern times, underdrawing can be defined as the ‘preliminary drawing made before the application of an overlying

layer⁹’. Conversely, underpaint is ‘a preliminary layer of paint’ which serves ‘as a base for subsequent layers of paint and to define colour values for later painting details¹⁰’. For instance, an underpaint has been recognized when the deepest part of a drapery fold was painted with a dark tone in order to obtain the effect of a shadow as the final layer of painting was superimposed and acquired a darker nuance due to the ground tone¹¹.

An underdrawing, by contrast, in the case of a portrait, helps the painter to fix the fundamental features of the face in order to apply the nuances and shadows of the colour of the skin or the hair. In other

⁴ Maiuri 1930, 13–17; Reuterswärd 1960, 189, 211; pl. XIII; Winkes 1995, 204 no. 189; Bartman 1999, 157 f. no. 27. Unfortunately, the traces – which are still clearly visible in the early photographs – are now lost.

⁵ Aurigemma 1921, 324–331 figs. 22–24; Goette 1990, 126 B a 269; Cassieri 2001, 28–30 no. 7; fig. 18; Liverani 2014, fig. 25.

⁶ Paolucci 2010, 139–142, 272–274 no. 67. Cf. also a portrait of the age of Philip the Arab in a private collection, where the underdrawing is partially covered by traces of the skin colour: Brinkmann et al. 2010, fig. 270.

⁷ S. Mägele, in: Scholl 2016, 219 f. no. 141.

⁸ Blume 2015, 27–29, 35–37.

⁹ Ward 2008, 721 f. German: Unterzeichnung, Italian: disegno preparatorio, French: dessin préparatoire.

¹⁰ Weyer et al. 2016, 60. German: Untermalung, Italian: campitura preparatoria, French: sous-couche.

¹¹ Blume 2015, 36, 191 f. (Muse from Delos no. 22, folder of the nebris). 275 f. (child statuette no. 84). 287 (Alexander Sarcophagus no. 87).

words, the underpaint will influence the final tones, as G. Treu already correctly pointed out¹², whereas the underdrawing will be completely covered, so that the outline of features such as the eyelashes and the

eyebrows need to be repainted over the skin with final retouches. In the future it would be useful to distinguish more clearly between the two practices just described.

Sources

This clarification complete, we now may investigate the ancient literary sources in search of equivalent terms, if they ever existed. In the technical Greek terminology, I was not able to find any specific word corresponding to underpaint, but there are two terms for underdrawing: σκιά and – more commonly – σκιαγραφία, together with the cognate verb σκιαγραφέω.

According to J. J. Pollitt¹³, σκιαγραφία has three main meanings: firstly, the drawing of a silhouette or outline; secondly, a sketch; and thirdly, what could be translated as chiaroscuro or shading. I mention only en passant that other authors have hypothesized further interpretations for the third meaning, including a combination of perspective and shadow-effect, a trompe l'œil, or, finally, even a Pointillist or Divisionist technique¹⁴. The debate has primarily focused on the first and third meanings, with special attention being given to Plato's work, while the second meaning has been discounted as being rare and less significant. However, this position is a consequence of the exclusion of late antique sources, which indeed are rich, explicit, and clear on the meaning of the term. In the late antique authors, we find a technical meaning of σκιαγραφία which is not exactly 'sketch', but rather 'preliminary drawing' or 'sinopia' when used in the case of mosaics. For the latter meaning, we

have a clear attestation in Alexander of Aphrodisias, the Aristotelian commentator of the late 2nd or early 3rd cent. A.D.¹⁵. In an interesting passage he is discussing Pythagorean numerology¹⁶ and the procedure followed by Eurytos, who took tesserae of various colours to compose a wall mosaic:

εἴτα περιχρίων τὸν τοῖχον ἀσβέστῳ καὶ σκιαγραφῶν ἄνθρωπον καὶ φυτὸν οὕτως ἐπήγνυ τάσδε μὲν τὰς ψηφίδας ἐν τῇ τοῦ προσώπου σκιαγραφίᾳ, τὰς δὲ ἐν τῇ τῶν χειρῶν, ἄλλας δὲ ἐν ἄλλοις.

Then, smearing the wall with lime and drawing the sinopia (σκιαγραφῶν) of a man or a plant, he would divide up the tesserae so that some were placed in the sinopia (ἐν τῇ σκιαγραφίᾳ) of the face, some in that of the hands, and others in other parts.

On the former meaning of 'preliminary drawing' our sources are more abundant, but they have not always been taken into full consideration. To begin with, S. Settis¹⁷, in his examination of the various meanings of the term σκιά, highlighted a passage by Pollux¹⁸, an

¹² Treu 1884, 35.

¹³ Pollitt 1974, 247–254, esp. 251.

¹⁴ Keuls 1975; Pemberton 1976; Bruno 1977, 14. 27. 34. 37. 41. 43; Keuls 1978, 38. 40. 55. 62. 89. 94. 110. 115. 129 f.; Moreno 1987, 33. 81; Rouveret 1989, 13–63; Moreno 1997; Barthelet 2012; Rouveret 2006; Stoichita 1997, 28 f.; De Rosa 2017.

¹⁵ Alex. Aphr. 827, 2, 9–17 (ed. Hayduck 1891); Diels 1951, I, 420, 45 [33] Eurytos, fr. 3: «κείσθω λόγου χάριν ὁρος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὁ ὁ ἀριθμός, ὁ δὲ τῷ φυτοῦ τοῦτο θείας ἐλάβανε ψηφίδας διακοσίας πεντήκοντα τὰς μὲν πρασίνας τὰς δὲ μελαίνας, ἄλλας <δὲ> ἐρυθράς καὶ ὅλως παντοδαποῖς χρώμασι κεχρωσμένας: εἴτα περιχρίων τὸν τοῖχον ἀσβέστῳ καὶ σκιαγραφῶν ἄνθρωπον καὶ φυτὸν οὕτως ἐπήγνυ τάσδε μὲν τὰς ψηφίδας ἐν τῇ τοῦ προσώπου σκιαγραφίᾳ, τὰς δὲ ἐν τῇ τῶν χειρῶν, ἄλλας δὲ ἐν ἄλλοις, καὶ ἀπετέλει τὴν τοῦ μιμουμένου ἀνθρώπου διὰ ψηφίδων ἰσαρίθμων ταῖς μονάσιν, ἃς ὀρίζειν ἔφασκε τὸν ἄνθρωπον». «Assume that the

definition of man is 250 and that of a plant 360 [in Eurytos's system]. Having established that, he would take 250 tesserae, some green, some black, others red – in other words, of a great variety of colours. Then, smearing the wall with lime and drawing the sinopia of a man (or a plant), he would divide up the tesserae so that some were placed in the sketch of the face, some in the sketch of the hands, and others in other parts, and thus he would complete the representation of a man by employing, in units, just the number of tesserae which he used to say defined man». Translation Pollitt 1974, 250 n. 12, with corrections. — For the abbreviations of the Greek patristic texts see *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Lampe 1961); for the Latin sources the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*.

¹⁶ Guthrie 1962, 274–276; Kirk – Raven 1983, 333; Stachowski 1992, 20.

¹⁷ Settis 2008, 601.

¹⁸ Poll. 7, 129.

author of the age of Commodus, which had previously been neglected in the discussion. In his *Onomasticon* he lists the various uses of the word:

σκιάν ὑποτυπώσασθαι, σκιάν περιγράψασθαι
περιγράψαι, σκιάν ὑποβαλέσθαι, σκιάν
περιενεγκεῖν, σκιάν ὑπερενεγκεῖν.

The σκιά can thus be «sketched out, circumscribed or outlined, underdrawn, delimited around, overdrawn». Of course, for our analysis «σκιάν ὑποβαλέσθαι» is particularly relevant, as this is exactly the definition of underdrawing.

In the same period, we can consider the *Acts of John*, an apocryphal text of the 2nd or early 3rd cent. A.D., which narrates the deeds of the apostle. While John was in the house of Lycomedes, an influential citizen of Ephesos, his host commissioned a painter to secretly portray the evangelist¹⁹:

Ὁ οὖν ζωγράφος τῇ πρώτῃ ἡμέρᾳ σκιαγραφήσας
αὐτόν ἀπηλλάγη· τῇ δὲ ἐξῆς καὶ τοῖς χρώμασιν
αὐτόν κατεκέρασε.

The painter, then, on the first day made a preliminary drawing (σκιαγραφῆσας) of him and went away. And on the next day he painted him in with his colours.

Another example is in the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, a Neopythagorean philosopher from the early 3rd cent. A.D.²⁰:

Πλάτων τε βαδίσας ἐς Αἴγυπτον καὶ πολλὰ τῶν ἐκεῖ
προφητῶν τε καὶ ἱερέων ἐγκαταμίξας τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ
λόγοις καὶ καθάπερ ζωγράφος ἐσκιαγραφημένοις
ἐπιβαλὼν χρώματα, οὕτω μαγεύειν ἔδοξε.

After Plato had visited Egypt, he inserted in his writings many quotations from the priests and seers of that country, like a painter filling in with colours the outlines he has sketched (ἐσκιαγραφημένοις), but for all that he was never accused of practicing magic.

A final and more detailed description of the painting process is of a rather later date; it comes from the treatise *The Adoration and Worship of God in Spirit and Truth* by Cyril of Alexandria and dates in the early 5th cent. A.D.²¹:

Οἱ τὴν ἐν πίναξιν καὶ γραφαῖς εὐτεχνίαν ἐξησκηκότες,
οὐκ εὐθὺς τοῦ γράφειν ἀρχόμενοι, τὸ ἀνευδεῶς
ἔχον, καὶ εἰς ἅπαν ἀπηρτισμένον ἐπιφέρουσιν εἶδος
ταῖς γραφαῖς, ἐν εἶδει πρότερον καὶ ἀκαλλεστέρῳ
χρώματι σκιαγραφοῦντες εὖ μάλα, καὶ ὥνπερ ἂν
ἔλοιντο τυχὸν ἀμυδροτέρων ἔτι τοὺς τύπους
προαναφαίνοντες, εἴτα ταῖς σκιαῖς ἐπαλειφόντες,
τὸ ἐκάστη πρέπον τε καὶ ἀρμοδιώτατον σχῆμα,
μεταφέρουσι τοὺς τύπους ἐξ εἶδος τὸ ἐμφανές, καὶ
ἀσυγκρίτως ἄμεινον, ἢ τὸ ἐν ἀρχαῖς.

Those who practice the art with panels and paintings do not immediately begin to paint what is impeccable and which gives the paintings the fully accomplished appearance, but first they accurately sketch (σκιαγραφοῦντες) its shape with a colour of less beauty and show preliminarily the models of the chosen subjects in little detail, then applying the most suitable and convenient appearance on the preliminary drawings (ταῖς σκιαῖς), transfer the models (τοὺς τύπους) in a clear form, incomparably better than they were initially.

Admittedly, all the sources I have just examined and those which I will consider in a moment do not treat the phenomenon of painting on sculpture, but rather painting on wooden panels or tablets. In previous studies the latter technique was considered the best comparison to understand the characteristics of the former²², so in what follows I will suggest that the basic steps of the two practices were similar.

The work of another Christian Father, John Chrysostom, in the late 4th cent. contains a wealth of information of the various phases of painting on wood. In one of his homilies on the Gospel of John, there is a very precise reference²³:

Ἐν τοῖς τύποις καὶ ἐν ταῖς εἰκόσι, καὶ ὁ ἐπὶ τῶν
χρωμάτων τῶν λευκῶν διὰ τοῦ μέλανος χρώματος

¹⁹ Acta Ioannis 27 (ed. Bonnet 1898, 165. Translation James 1924). If not expressly stated, the translations are by the author.

²⁰ Philostr. Ap. 1, 2. Translation Eells 1923.

²¹ Cyrill. adorationes 1, 5 (PG 68, 140 C).

²² E. g. Verri et al. 2014.

²³ Ioh. Chrys. hom. 14 in Jo. 1 (PG 59, 93).

ἐγχαραττόμενος, ἄνθρωπος λέγεται, καὶ ὁ δεξάμενος τὴν τῶν χρωμάτων ἀλήθειαν.

In models and portraits, both the shape of a man scratched with black lines upon a white ground is called a man as well as that which has received the truth of the colours²⁴.

Due to its brevity, the exact meaning of this passage is clear only through comparison with other similar discussions by the same author. Here, Chrysostom contrasts the τύπος (the model, the preliminary sketch²⁵) with the εἰκών, the final portrait. The former – the underdrawing – is outlined in carbon black on a white ground, while the latter was completed with all the colours in order to obtain the best likeness. The technique of drawing black on white has its purpose: it was the ordinary way for preparing a painting on a wooden panel, whereas for imperial portraits the technique was slightly different, and the underdrawing was white on blue ground. Chrysostom describes this second technique in several places. In a homily delivered in 387, for instance, he says²⁶:

ἐκεῖνοι [scil. οἱ ζωγράφοι] τὰς σανίδας προθέντες, καὶ λευκὰς περιάγοντες γραμμάς, καὶ τὰς βασιλικὰς ὑπογράφοντες εἰκόνας, πρὶν ἢ τῶν χρωμάτων ἐπαγαγεῖν τὴν ἀλήθειαν, μετ' ἐξουσίας ἀπάσης τὰ μὲν ἐξαλείφουσι, τὰ δὲ ἀντεγγράφουσι, καὶ διορθοῦντες τὰ ἡμαρτημένα καὶ μετατιθέντες τὰ κακῶς ἔχοντα· ἐπειδὴν δὲ τὴν βαφὴν λοιπὸν ἐπαγάγωσιν, οὐκέτι εἰσὶ κύριοι πάλιν ἐξαλεῖψαι καὶ ἀντεγγράφαι, ἐπεὶ τῷ κάλλει τῆς εἰκόνης λυμαίνονται.

When they [the painters] prepare the panels and draw white lines and sketch the royal portraits,

before adding the truth of the colours they freely scrape off some details and redesign others, correcting the errors and modifying the bad parts. After applying the colour, however, they are no longer masters of making changes and redesigning again, because they would damage the beauty of the portrait.

There are other passages relating the same topic but I will omit them for the sake of brevity²⁷. In the first homily *On the betrayal by Judas*, Chrysostom seems to describe in more detail the process of underdrawing, divided into two sub-phases²⁸:

οἱ ζωγράφοι ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ πίνακι καὶ τὰς γραμμάς περιάγουσι καὶ τὴν σκιάν γράφουσι, καὶ τότε τὴν ἀλήθειαν τῶν χρωμάτων αὐτῷ ἐπιτιθέασιν·

On the same panel the painters both trace the outlines and sketch the underdrawing (σκιάν), then finally they apply the truth of the colours.

To return to the technical term σκιά, we can indeed follow its usage to the Byzantine authors; however, for our purposes, it is more interesting to document its earliest attestations in order to understand whether we can use it in relation to the aforementioned archaeological evidence, which dates to the first centuries of the imperial age. The earliest attestations we have examined so far date back to the late 2nd and early 3rd cent. But there are some more sources from the 1st cent. A.D. that we can examine, beginning from the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, written by an author of the school of the apostle Paul. The crucial passage comes at the end of the third section of the letter²⁹:

²⁴ Cf. e.g. Ioh. Chrys. hom. in Phil. 10, 2 (Field 1855, V, 113; PG 62, 257): «Καὶ γὰρ ὁ τύπος, ἕως ἂν μέλλῃ ἔρχεσθαι ἡ ἀλήθεια, καλεῖται τοῦτο· ἐπειδὴν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἡ ἀλήθεια, οὐκέτι καλεῖται. Οἷον ἐπὶ σκιαγραφίας· ὑπέγραφέ τις βασιλέα σκιαγραφῶν· ἕως ἂν οὐκ ἐπάγῃται τὰ ἄνθη, οὐ λέγεται βασιλεὺς· ἐπειδὴν δὲ ἐπιτεθῇ, κρύπτεται μὲν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ ὁ τύπος, καὶ οὐ φαίνεται· τότε δὲ καὶ λέγομεν, Ἰδοὺ ὁ βασιλεὺς». «For the type while the truth is yet to come, is called this, but when the reality has come, it no longer retains the title. As in preliminary drawing (σκιαγραφίας), a man has drawn a king in outline (σκιαγραφῶν); so long as the colours are not put on we do not name it the king, but when they are added, the type is covered by the truth, and ceases to show, then we say: Lo, there is the king!».

²⁵ Chrysostom considers σκιά and τύπος as equivalent and interchangeable in the wider frame of his exegetical typological

approach; cf. Simonetti 1985, 180–188. The same equivalence is normal in Cyril of Alexandria: Guinot 2011, 226 and note 60.

²⁶ Ioh. Chrys. cat. 1, 8 (ed. Kaczynski 1992, 124; PG 49, 235).

²⁷ Cf. e.g.: Ioh. Chrys. hom. in 1 Cor 10, 1: 4 (PG 51, 247): «Εἶδες πολλάκις εἰκόνα βασιλικὴν κυανῷ κατακεχρωμένην χρώματι, εἶτα τὸν ζωγράφον λευκὰς περιάγοντα γραμμάς, καὶ ποιοῦντα βασιλέα, καὶ θρόνον βασιλικόν, καὶ ἵππους παρεστῶτας, καὶ δορυφόρους, καὶ πολεμίους δεδεμένους καὶ ὑποκειμένους». «You have often seen an imperial portrait which is prepared on a blue ground; then the artist, by outlining white lines, makes an emperor, and an imperial throne, and horses standing nearby, and bodyguards, and bound prisoners of war lying down». Mitchell 2002, 54 note 94; Liverani 2014, 14–20; Liverani 2018, 302. 319. Translation Mitchell with modifications.

²⁸ Ioh. Chrys. hom. in prod. Jud. 1 (PG 49, 379).

²⁹ Hebr. 10, 1.

Σκιὰν γὰρ ἔχων ὁ νόμος τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν, οὐκ αὐτὴν τὴν εἰκόνα τῶν πραγμάτων, κατ' ἐνιαυτὸν ταῖς αὐταῖς θυσίαις ἃς προσφέρουσιν εἰς τὸ διηνεκὲς οὐδέποτε δύναται τοὺς προσερχομένους τελειῶσαι.

According to my suggestion we must translate:

Since the law has only a preliminary drawing (σκιὰν) of the good things to come, and not the very image of them, it can never make perfect those who come to worship by the same sacrifices that they offer continually each year.

The most common translations of these passages are slightly different. For instance, the New American Bible translates σκιὰ as «shadow», with consequences that are not simply limited to a terminological choice³⁰. The majority of the commentators³¹, with the notable exception of A. Vanhoye³², are attracted by the contraposition of «shadow» and «image» and have oriented their interpretation in a Platonic way, which is however not very likely in the context of Pauline theology. The same issues crop up in two more passages. The first appears a couple of chapters earlier in the same epistle (8, 5):

Οἵτινες ὑποδείγματι καὶ σκιᾷ λατρεύουσιν τῶν ἐπουρανίων, καθὼς κεχρημάτισται Μωϋσῆς μέλλων ἐπιτελεῖν τὴν σκηνήν· Ὅρα γάρ, φησιν, ποιήσεις πάντα κατὰ τὸν τύπον τὸν δεχθέντα σοι ἐν τῷ ὄρει.

They worship in an example (ὑποδείγματι) and preliminary drawing (σκιᾷ) of the heavenly sanctuary, as Moses was warned when he was about to erect the tabernacle. For he says: «See that you make everything according to the model (κατὰ τὸν τύπον) shown you on the mountain»³³.

The second is in the Pauline *Epistle to the Colossians* (2, 16–17):

Μὴ οὖν τις ὑμᾶς κρινέτω ἐν βρώσει καὶ ἐν πόσει ἢ ἐν μέρει ἑορτῆς ἢ νεομηνίας ἢ σαββάτων· ἃ ἐστὶν σκιὰ τῶν μελλόντων, τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Let no one, then, pass judgment on you in matters of food and drink or with regard to a festival or new moon or sabbath. These are preliminary drawings (σκιὰ) of things to come; the reality belongs to Christ.

In support of my proposal, I can add that it was not my own translation but is already clearly attested among the Fathers in several of their comments. The earliest evidence I can quote occurs in the homily of an anonymous writer from the late 2nd or early 3rd cent., the so-called Pseudo-Hippolytus³⁴:

Αἴγυπτος μὲν οὖν τοὺς τύπους προαναγγελλέτω καὶ νόμος τὰς εἰκόνας τῆς ἀληθείας προερμηνεύετω [...]. Πάντα ταῦτα τῶν μελλόντων σκιὰ, ἐν ἡμῖν δὲ τῶν εἰκόνων τὰ μορφώματα καὶ τοὺς τύπους τὰ πληρώματα καὶ ἀντὶ τῆς σκιᾶς αὐτῇ ἡ ἀκρίβεια καὶ βεβαίωσις τῆς ἀληθείας.

Let Egypt announce the models (τοὺς τύπους) and the law interpret in advance the images of the truth [...]. All this (is) preliminary drawing (σκιὰ) of things to come, but for us (it is) the realized shape (μορφώματα) of images and the fullness of the models (τοὺς τύπους) and, instead of the underdrawing (τῆς σκιᾶς), (it is) the accuracy itself and consistency of the truth.

The reference to the Epistles to the Colossians and the Hebrews is clear and there is no trace of Platonic philosophy³⁵: on the contrary, σκιὰ is considered as something preliminary and a potentiality, not a shadow or pale copy of the prototype. Conversely, the term εἰκὼν denotes a μόρφωμα, that is a shape resulting at the

³⁰ The translations I propose of the Pauline epistles, however, are based on this version.

³¹ Spicq 1952, 75; Spicq 1953, 301 f.; Cantalamessa 1965.

³² Vanhoye 1995; Vanhoye 2010, 225 f. Cf. already Williamson 1970, 576–578.

³³ In the last line the *Epistle* quotes the *Book of Exodus* 25, 40.

³⁴ Ps. Hipp. In sanctum Pascha 2: Visonà 1988, 234; for the dating cf. Giulea 2009, 129 f.

³⁵ Notwithstanding Cantalamessa 1965, 196 f.; more correctly Vanhoye 1995, 271–273.

end of a process³⁶. Even clearer, however, is the comment that Chrysostom dedicates to the *Epistle to the Hebrews*³⁷:

Σκιάν γάρ ἔχων, φησὶν, ὁ νόμος τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν, οὐκ αὐτὴν τὴν εἰκόνα τῶν πραγμάτων τουτέστιν, οὐκ αὐτὴν τὴν ἀλήθειαν. Ἔως μὲν γὰρ ἂν ὡς ἐν γραφῇ περιάγῃ τις τὰ χρώματα, σκιά τις ἐστίν· ὅταν δὲ τὸ ἄνθος ἐπαλείψῃ τις, καὶ ἐπιχρίσῃ τὰ χρώματα, τότε εἰκὼν γίνεται.

Since – he says – the law has only a preliminary drawing (σκιά) of the good things to come, and not the very image of them: i. e. not the truth itself. For as in painting, so long as one does not add the colours, it is (only) a preliminary drawing (σκιά); but when one has added the bright paints and laid in the colours, then it becomes a portrait.

In another homily Chrysostom adds further details³⁸:

ὁρῶν ταῦτα σκιαγραφούμενα, οὔτε οἶδας τὸ πᾶν, οὔτε ἀγνοεῖς τὸ πᾶν, ἀλλ' ὅτι μὲν ἄνθρωπος γράφεται καὶ ἵππος, ἀμυδρῶς ἐπίστασαι ποῖος δέ ἐστιν ὁ βασιλεὺς, καὶ ποῖος ὁ πολέμιος, οὐ σφόδρα ἀκριβῶς οἶδας, ἕως ἂν ἐλθοῦσα τῶν χρωμάτων ἡ ἀλήθεια τρανώσῃ τὴν ὄψιν καὶ σαφεστέραν ποιήσῃ.

As you see these things [the subject of the painting] being sketched (σκιαγραφούμενα), you do not know the whole, and yet you are not entirely ignorant of it, but you know faintly that a man and a horse are being drawn. Who the emperor is, and who the enemy, you do not know exactly until the truth of the colours have been applied, making the image clear and distinct³⁹.

There is no space here to follow this interpretation of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* among the Fathers⁴⁰, with all their individual nuances. It will suffice to say that the topic is well attested: we could mention Cyril of Alexandria⁴¹, Synesius of Cyrene⁴², Diadochos of Photiki⁴³ or some more Platonising authors such as Theodoret of Cyrillus⁴⁴, Methodius of Olympus⁴⁵, Basil of Seleucia⁴⁶, or even some anonymous writers⁴⁷. The tradition also goes down to Cosmas Indicopleustes⁴⁸ and Photius⁴⁹.

Regarding Latin terminology, the word in use to translate σκιά is *umbra*, but in general the context and the comments of the Latin Fathers to the *Letters to the Hebrews or the Colossians* – as far as I have been able to verify – do not clearly reveal the technical meaning of ‘preliminary drawing’⁵⁰. Such a meaning, however, must have existed as can be deduced from some clues that I hope to better explore in a future study. The clearest text is a passage in Isidore of Seville⁵¹:

Pictores prius umbras quasdam et lineas futurae imaginis ducent, deinde coloribus complent

Painters first draw certain shadows and the outlines of the images to come, and then fill in the colours.

A poem by Paulinus of Nola⁵² is also quite explicit:

*Propterea visum nobis opus utile totis
Felici domibus pictura ludere sancta,
si forte adtonitas haec per spectacula mentes
agrestum caperet fucata coloribus umbra.*

This was why we thought it useful to enliven all the houses of Felix with paintings on sacred themes, in the hope that they would excite the interest of the rustics by their attractive appearance, for the sketches are painted in various colours.

³⁶ On the meaning of μόρφωμα cf. Hammerstaedt 2011.

³⁷ Ioh. Chrys. hom. in Heb. 17, 2 (PG 63, 130; ed. Field 1862, VII, 206).

³⁸ Ioh. Chrys. hom. in 1 Cor. 10, 1, 4 (PG 51, 247). Translation Mango 1972, 47 f. with corrections. Cf. James 2003, 225; Franck 2006, 39; Mitchell 2002, 54 note 94.

³⁹ Cf. also Ioh. Chrys. hom. 7 in 1 Cor. 4 (PG 61, 59; ed. Field 1847, II, 75 D).

⁴⁰ Elsewhere I have published a wider treatment of the sources related to this topic: Liverani 2020.

⁴¹ Cyrill. Ep. 41, 20 (Schwartz – Straub 1928, 47); Cyrill. Lc. 5, 14 (PG 72, 561 B).

⁴² Synes. 1 (ed. Terzaghi 1944, 279).

⁴³ Diad., perf. 89.

⁴⁴ Theodor. Hebr. 10, 1 (PG 82, 745 D, 748 A); Theodor. Isaías 19, 14–32 (Guinot 1984, 238–240).

⁴⁵ Meth. Symp. 5, 7–8; 9, 2 (GCS 27, 62; 115–116).

⁴⁶ Bas. Sel. or. 10, 1 (PG 85, 137).

⁴⁷ *Apud* Ioh. Damasc. de imag. or. 1, 53 (ed. Kötter 1975, 155).

⁴⁸ Cosm. Ind. top. 5, 193 C-D (ed. Winstedt 1909, 136).

⁴⁹ Photius frg. in Matth. 5, 17 (PG 101, 1193 C).

⁵⁰ E.g. Aug. gen. ad litt. 12, 7, 17; in psalm. 67, 20; civ. 17, 8.

⁵¹ Isid. orig. 19, 16; transl. Barney et al. 2006, 380.

⁵² Paul. Nol. 27, 580–583; transl. Walsh 1975.

Some indirect indication is perhaps in Pliny the Elder, when he writes about the use of ochre and burnt ceruse to delineate the shadows⁵³, and possibly we could recognize an allusion to the two phases of the process of

painting in the letter by Pliny the Younger to Vibius Severus⁵⁴, who is inquiring into the portraits of Cornelius Nepos and Titus Catus and asking the friend 'to get them copied and painted' (*«exscribendas pingendasque»*).

Conclusions

It is time to draw some conclusions. The presence of a Greek technical term for underdrawing, but not for underpaint, suggests that the former constitutes a well-recognised and fundamental step, one which is more clearly identified by a lay audience than underpaint, which was perhaps considered only one of the various devices at disposal of the painter. Secondly, we can imagine that the practice of the underdrawing dates back to a period earlier than the 1st cent. A.D. The authors of the *Epistle to the Hebrews and the Colossians*

could only use this term as a topos if the knowledge of the basic steps of the painting process was already widely known among their listeners and readers.

Finally, I conclude that the traces identified on the Caligula of Copenhagen, the Treu Head, and a few other cases⁵⁵ are evidence of a painting procedure, the σκιαγραφία that is the underdrawing, which was widespread from the 1st cent. A.D., but which was probably older still, not being limited to panel painting but also used for sculpture.

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⁵³ Plin. nat. 33, 56: «tertium genus est pressum, [...] quo utuntur ad picturae umbras», «the third kind is dark ochre, [...] which they use for the shadows of a painting»; 35, 20: «sine usta non

fiunt umbrae», «burnt ceruse is indispensable for representing shadows».

⁵⁴ Plin. epist. 4, 28, 1.

⁵⁵ Cf. above notes 1–7.

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