Coloring Ancient Corinth

Thanks to a generous preliminary agreement with Professors Guy Sanders and John M. Camp and Dr. Ioulia Tzonou-Herbst, American School of Classical Studies, as well as funds provided by the University of Michigan Institute for the Humanities and Interdepartmental Program in Classical Art and Archaeology, I was fortunate during summer 2006 to conduct the first systematic study of what is left of the original paint that once adorned the statues, houses, and shops of the ancient Greek cities of Corinth and Athens.

Asked what defines classical statuary, many modern viewers would immediately mention glistening white marble. The idea that ancient sculpture and architecture were marked by an absence of any color other than that of the stone harks back to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century neoclassical tastes. Indeed the Victorian artist Lawrence Alma-Tadema perpetuated this view in works like An Audience at Agrippa’s. In this oil painting of 1875 a statue of the emperor Augustus found at Prima Porta near Rome is depicted as white, although paint was still visible when the statue was excavated in 1867. Some nineteenth-century scholars went so far as to propose that the ancient Greeks were colorblind.

By the end of the nineteenth century, however, a few archaeologists had concluded that when people in the ancient Mediterranean region looked at the statues and buildings they lived among, they saw something radically different from these modern images. By studying the paint residue left on ancient artifacts, these archaeologists began to understand that the private houses of the rich, the temples, the marketplaces of the ancient world were all filled with painted images of gods and emperors. To introduce these ancient colors to the public, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1892 presented an exhibition on polychromy in Greek and Roman sculpture organized by Edward Robinson, the museum’s curator of classical antiquities, and Alfred Emerson, one of the founding fathers of classical archaeology in America. A year later Emerson mounted a similar exhibition of some fifty-two objects, including various watercolors and repainted plaster casts of famous statues, in another special exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago.

Yet despite these efforts, several factors—the fading, weathering, and sometimes heavy cleaning of ancient statues, as well as a certain lack of interest in color—continue to prevent modern tourists and museum-goers from realizing that the cities of the ancient Mediterranean were actually brightly painted. Additionally, museum curators have been—and still are—resistant to color reconstructions, preferring to leave ancient civilizations looking like gray-and-white landscapes to the modern visitor.

Inspiration from Aegina
My own interest in painting on ancient statuary was sparked by an exciting exhibition entitled “Bunte Götter” (Varicolored Gods) that toured Munich and a number of other European cities in 2005–2006, attracting thousands of visitors and offering a fresh approach to the cultures of the ancient Mediterranean. The exhibition, organized by a group of German, Danish, and Italian scholars, provided an eye-popping introduction to the issue of paint on statues in antiquity. It concentrated mainly on sculptures of about 500 BCE from the pediment of the temple of
Notes from the Director

The ceremonial groundbreaking for the William E. Upjohn Wing took place last May, and a good time was had by all. We are now awaiting the arrival of the backhoes for the real thing, expected either in November or February, depending on the outcome of final negotiations over the most cost-efficient construction schedule.

Construction plans have not brought activities to a halt within the current building. Just the opposite. Under the expert leadership of Elaine Gazda the new exhibit designs are moving from dreams to reality. We are planning to make much of our collection available to the public on a regular basis by employing “open storage” casework especially designed for that purpose. With the help of much of the staff, I am busy writing grant proposals and raising money to pay for the state-of-the-art cabinetry that will house these expanded displays.

We have welcomed two new staff members since I last wrote. Michelle Fontenot (see profile on page 7) has replaced Robin Meador-Woodruff in the Registry; Claudia Chemello has joined Suzanne Davis in the Conservation Laboratory. Her position is (see profile on page 7) has replaced Robin Meador-Woodruff in the Registry; Claudia Chemello has joined Suzanne Davis in the Conservation Laboratory. Her position is funded by money raised in the NEH Challenge Grant (see list of donors on page 7), for which we are busy raising the remaining $900,000 to meet the challenge.

Although exhibitions have necessarily been curtailed to prepare for the new wing, our fieldwork and publications programs continue to flourish. I had a very successful season at Kedesh this past summer (see story on page 5). A favorite find was an Egyptian good luck scarab inscribed “life happy life; happy stability happy.” I take that as a blessing on all Kelsey projects! Janet Richards will be returning to the field at Abydos this winter. With the addition of Christopher Ratté (from New York University) and Nicola Terrenato (from the University of North Carolina) to the Classical Archaeology Program, the Kelsey will be gaining affiliation with their field projects in Turkey and Italy respectively. The reach of Kelsey publications has expanded upon the signing of a distribution contract with David Brown Books. Sue Alcock and Lauren Talalay’s In the Field of a distribution contract with David Brown Books. Sue Alcock and Lauren Talalay’s In the Field, published last spring, has been so successful that the curators are now planning a companion volume on the collections, entitled In the Museum, which we hope to have ready for our reopening in 2009.

In closing I want to remind you that we are not closing our galleries during construction of the Upjohn Wing. I urge you to come visit your favorite pieces before we do have to close the displays for the move and renovations of the current building, now scheduled for the fall of 2008.

Sharon Herbert, Director

continued from page 1

Aphaia on the island of Aegina, which is a half-day trip from Corinth. In addition, copies of Greek and Roman statues, like the one of Augustus from Prima Porta, were painted to give viewers an idea of their original appearance.

As scientifically based color reconstructions indicate, every detail of a statue was painted, whether eyebrow or skin, lips or hair. Often the traces of paint are found in areas where a statue is not weathered or was sheltered by a special environment. Even “naked” statues were painted.

As the statuary from Aegina illustrates, the study of paint residue can shed light on important archaeological questions. Traces of paint on sculpted warriors from the temple of Aphaia enabled archaeologists for the first time to identify the devices appearing on the warriors’ shields. These bits of color thus prove more helpful in determining the actual battle scene depicted at the temple than do approaches based on style alone. Similarly, in several cases, the way we categorize an ancient artifact as depicting a layperson, a priest, or a deity can be revised based on paint traces. For example, the lions, sphinxes, and other creatures ornamenting the painted drapery on the statue of a maiden excavated at the Athenian Acropolis probably mean that the statue represents a goddess rather than a mortal.

The Emperor’s New Clothes

When the excavations in Corinth began in 1896, interest in color was limited to a handful of scholars. Luckily any traces of paint were often meticulously noted in excavation diaries. A diary entry on a third-century statue found in the north stoa at Corinth in 1925 reads:

Traces of red color on lips, gold and yellow on upper lip, sides of cheek and chin (deep yellow), and nostril (red), and around the eyes where the eyelids are outlined in a dark color and eyelashes painted on upper and lower lids. At the base of the throat, it looks as if the neck of a garment had been painted on in a dark color, and it is possible that the dress itself was a deep orange. There are traces of deep yellow in the hair. There is some gold just below the lower lip.

Some fifty years later, when the statue was reexamined, nothing remained of these paint traces. This deterioration demonstrates why it is so important to note every surface detail of an artifact from the moment it is excavated, as well as to begin conservation efforts in the field.

A toga-wearing statue, found at the theater of Corinth in 1926, still preserves its original red paint. Either it fell forward shortly after being placed, thus preserving its coloration, or it may have been heavily repainted in antiquity. Other painted statuary includes a recently discovered group of small-scale sculpture found in a late Roman villa context southeast of the forum of Corinth.

In addition to the archaeological evidence, a number of written sources testify to the paint on ancient statuary. The fourth-century author Ammianus Marcellinus describes the mantles of Roman senators as “figured with the shapes of many different animals.” His contemporary, Asterius, bishop of Amaseia, mentions garments decorated with “lions and leopards, bulls, and dogs, forests and rocks, hunters and the whole repertory of painting that imitates nature.” According to Asterius, “when they come out in public dressed in this fashion, they appear like painted walls to those they meet.” And indeed a statue of
the emperor Trajan excavated at Samos still has traces of painted flowers visible on the red mantle.

Not only are traces of paint preserved but so are the pigments and paint pots that were used to paint the statues. Natural pigments like malachite (green), azurite (blue), cinnabar, and ocher are all attested in Corinth. This past summer I undertook the first-ever systematic documentation of where these traces have been found on the site, a survey that should prove fruitful for future studies.

The Kelsey Museum houses similar paint pots, excavated in 1935 at the Terenouthis necropolis. Recent examination of these pots reveals that the pigments used for the paint include various ochers, gypsum, organic brown and green earth, as well as the famous Egyptian blue. It remains unclear why these pots are found in tombs.

Beyond Corinth
My studies in summer 2006 were not limited to the site of Corinth. In other collections of ancient statuary and architecture throughout Greece, much color can also still be detected. In Athens the capitals that once adorned the columns of the stoa of Attalos still show much of their original blue and red pigment.

While in Athens I was also able to browse through the archives of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut. There I found an old black-and-white photograph, taken around 1930, showing some of the original paint that had indicated eye lashes and brows on a male marble portrait head in the Corinth Museum. Again, today the paint has largely disappeared from the surface of the head. Thus even archival photographs can assist in the effort to reconstruct original colors.

Why Color Matters
"The whole past," André Malraux once remarked, "has reached us colorless." But I am convinced we can at least partially reconstruct that colorful environment. At present, the examination of color and paint on ancient statuary raises as many questions as it answers. A late Roman author, for instance, informs us that the emperor Hadrian had blond hair. Was this author looking at a statue he saw in a marketplace, or could he rely on people who had met Hadrian in person? How sure can we be that ancient painters did not alter colors or that colors did not change due to weathering and sun? Many ancient authors may have relied on statuary to describe the appearance of emperors they had never seen. Thus the artistic license of the painter or the effects of weathering may be responsible for Augustus's hair becoming red, Caligula's dark brown.

Were statues and temples repainted once the first colors had faded in the Mediterranean sunlight? Did the painted clothing of the statues reflect what was actually worn in everyday life? Did the hair color of the image of an empress serve as a model when a provincial woman dyed her hair? How do colors on the images of statues in the round compare to those on wall paintings or woven textiles?

Much more remains to be done in terms of color studies: pigments need to be analyzed; portable X-ray Diffraction is needed to examine and identify what is invisible to the naked eye. Further work in the archives may help reveal traces of paint still visible in earlier generations. The importance of these studies is unmistakable. Only when we deal with the original paint can we come closer to the original meaning and perhaps even find alternative solutions for problems of dating ancient statuary. Further investigation can also fill a void in our knowledge about the symbolism and meaning of colors for our predecessors. Next summer I hope to continue studying these and other questions.

Alex Nagel, IPCAA Student

Clay bowl with traces of blue pigment, found in 1935 in a fourth-century tomb at the Terenouthis necropolis in the Egyptian Fayum. KM 21258.

Corinth Museum Curator Dr. Ioulia Tzonou-Herbst and IPCAA student Alex Nagel studying marble sculpture in the museum courtyard.

Head of a warrior from the pediment of the temple of Aphaia on Aegina, ca. 500 BCE: in the background the original, in the foreground a reconstruction based on ultraviolet light detection, as displayed in the exhibition “Bunte Götter.”
Mysterious Mounds in the Struma River Valley, Bulgaria

Rich in cultural heritage yet off the beaten track, Bulgaria represents one of the last archaeological frontiers, underexplored and overshadowed by its southern neighbor, Greece. In antiquity Thrace was known for its fertile land and mineral resources. The Thracian king Rhesus in fact became proverbial for his wealth. At present the mention of archaeology in Bulgaria is most commonly associated with images of a Thracian tomb or its lavish golden contents that have often appeared as flashy front-page newspaper stories over the past few years.

Any visitor to Bulgaria will confirm that mounds represent a ubiquitous phenomenon in the Bulgarian landscape, yet not all of them contain royal burials. They can yield more puzzling and precious finds than the undeniably photogenic golden masks. Recent excavations at mound sites in the Middle Struma Valley (the ancient river Strymon) unearthed large stone structures unparalleled in southeastern Europe, which are contemporary with the palaces of Mycenaean Greece, thus filling a hitherto blank space in our knowledge of the transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age north of Greece.

The sites are studied under the aegis of the Struma River Valley in Prehistory Project, a joint expedition headed by Mark Stefanovich of the American University in Bulgaria (situated in Blagoevgrad) and Ijla Kulov, curator of the Historical Museum of Blagoevgrad. The Project, which has conducted reconnaissance of the Middle Struma Valley since the early 1990s, focuses mainly on manifestations of Late Bronze and Early Iron Age activity.

In the years 1994–2000 the Project excavated the site of Kamenska Chuka, a substantial mound situated on a prominent peak in the valley south of the city of Blagoevgrad. Under a layer of collapsed stone a two-story structure (10 x 15 meters) was unearthed, built of massive dry stone walls (over 1 m thick), with a staircase leading to what originally had been a second floor of wattle-and-daub construction. The floor of the house, built into bedrock, contained a large number of storage vessels, some still in situ. The house had suffered damage in an earthquake, after which its northern wall was reinforced. Nevertheless, it later collapsed, probably as a result of another earthquake followed by a fire—as suggested by its pitched walls and a solid layer of burnt daub and rubble sealing the structure. Archaeomagnetic dating of burnt clay, radiocarbon dates, as well as diagnostic pottery point to a date of 1230–1160 BCE for the destruction. Attempting better to understand the purpose of the structure, the Project has recently undertaken excavations at a smaller site, a suspected analogue to Kamenska Chuka, situated on a hilltop above the nearby village of Krsto Pokrovnik. I have served as a supervisor at this site, where our excavations during 2004–2005 confirmed expectations. Beneath a massive pile of fallen stones, we uncovered about an 8 m length of a stone-built wall, again built in two phases. Furthermore, we found a layer of burnt daub and incised pottery identical to the specimen from Kamenska Chuka. This structure contained far less pottery than was found at Kamenska Chuka yet provided sufficient diagnostic sherdsto establish a date around the turn of the twelfth century BCE. Overall, excavations at Krsto Pokrovnik provided sufficient parallels to secure the analogy with Kamenska Chuka.

The function of the two sites, however, remains unclear. The lowland location and rich ceramic inventory of Kamenska Chuka suggest a redistributive function or a toll station at the crossroads of the traffic passing through the Middle Struma River Valley. Krsto Pokrovnik, situated on a hilltop overlooking the Struma River Valley and controlling a mountain pass, may have functioned as a defensive site or watchtower. These interpretations, however, remain preliminary until we have a better understanding of the sites’ economic functions and relation to each other.

The similarities between architecture and ceramic inventories at the two sites suggest that they formed part of a regional network. Surface survey identified a number of other mounds that may be analogous, yet these need verification through further excavation, field survey, and spatial analysis. The possibility of finding a sophisticated society contemporary with the Mycenaean palaces, yet north of Greece, is very exciting.

Unraveling the mystery of the Struma Valley mounds will be the main objective of the Struma River Valley in Prehistory Project in upcoming seasons.

Adela Sobotkova, IPCAA Student
This summer I had the opportunity to excavate with Kelsey Museum Director Sharon Herbert and a team of students from the University of Michigan and the University of Minnesota. In late May, I traveled to the site of Tel Kedesh, located in the Upper Galilee of northern Israel. Tel Kedesh had been excavated in earlier seasons, but a five-year respite found the tel quite overgrown with vegetation, and our first few days were spent clearing the hilltop of thorny bushes and four-foot-tall grasses. Once the site was cleared (and we could actually see the ground), the team laid out five trenches that would provide the trench supervisors with their mini-kingdoms for the summer.

This season the team was quite small, and in order to move the earth that we hoped to move we needed the help of ten Druse. These local workers were divided up among the five trenches. My team included the foreman, Hussein, and an octogenarian, Ali, who probably moved more earth than workers half his age! With the pair of Druse and two undergraduates from the University of Minnesota, fondly referred to as the twins, I began to supervise the excavation of a 5 × 5 meter square in the hopes of uncovering a possible bath complex on the eastern side of the central court of the “big Hellenistic building.” The digging went quickly thanks to Hussein and Ali, and the twins and I sifted every bucket of dirt, before it was dumped, to screen for valuable special finds and small pieces of pottery.

As the digging proceeded, we eventually uncovered an entire room bounded on each side by walls that were covered with painted and molded plaster. Our final coup was the discovery that these walls had been built on a mosaic floor—perhaps the earliest example of opus signinum in Israel! Unwilling to remove this beautiful and extremely solid floor, which covered three-quarters of the trench, the team and I moved due west and began excavating another 5 × 5 meter square. Here we uncovered some of the central courtyard floor and then somewhat inadvertently went right through it to discover several walls dating to the Persian period.

With the season about to end, the twins and I undertook several smaller mini-excavations that could be completed in only a few days. The first of these jobs was the removal of a small section of plaster floor in the storeroom of the “big building.” Our goal for this mini-dig was to find material sealed under the floor that would provide a secure date for the storeroom and its contents. We paid special attention to a particular corner of this small dig (measuring about 1 × 2.5 meters) because earlier in the season this corner had caused a loud whir and beep from the metal detector of a visiting archaeologist. While we had hoped for a coin for its dating properties, we settled for an iron bracelet.

Our next mini-task called for us to remove a small bastion within one of the trenches that had not been excavated. This was going to be an easy job until Sharon uttered the words, “this ought to take a day at most, unless you find a tanoor.” A tanoor, or tabun, is a round, domed oven made of clay that has a long history of use in the Levant and Middle East. Ours made itself known by the bright orange-colored clay that we suddenly spotted in the brown soil. After tracing the orange clay, and finding an almost perfect circle tucked into a corner, we had irrefutable proof of the oven. The next question was how much of it was preserved. The domed roof of the small oven had been destroyed when a floor was put in over the tanoor, but it remained to be seen how much of the walls of the oven had been preserved. A day of careful excavation revealed a fairly well-preserved oven, and once it had been fully photographed and documented, we hacked out all of the orange clay and continued on our way.

The last few days of the dig were spent performing the rather tedious task of “cleaning” for final photos. This involves sweeping off every surface that has dirt on it and then sweeping up all of the loose dirt off of the ground. (Although I have several dig seasons under my belt, I never cease to be amazed at the concept of “sweeping” dirt.) Finally, on our last Friday, thanks to an extra fifteen minutes of cloud cover, we were able to get all of the dawn photographs taken before we trekked down the hill for the last time this season.

Lisa Cakmak, IPCAA Student

Lisa Cakmak sits in the partially excavated tanoor.
Pedley Fund Awardee

Thanks to generous support from the John Griffiths Pedley Travel and Research Fund and the Rackham School of Graduate Studies, I was able to participate in several exciting projects this summer. My first stop was the town of Lamta, Tunisia, where I worked with the Leptiminus Archaeological Project, directed by Dr. Nejib Ben Lazreg of the Institut National du Patrimoine and Professor Lea Stirling (IPCAA ’94) of the University of Manitoba. This interdisciplinary project explores the economic and social life of an important coastal town in Roman Africa. As a project staff member, I analyzed the numerous small finds recovered from previous excavations in an ancient kiln complex and prepared them for publication. Small finds are the artifacts, such as nails and metal fragments or worked bone, that fall outside such major traditional categories of evidence as ceramics, coins, and inscriptions.

My next stop was Rome, where I spent a month participating in the inaugural Howard Comfort Summer Program in Roman Pottery Studies at the American Academy in Rome. After three weeks of lectures by specialists and hands-on practice in identifying various categories of Roman pottery, my fellow students and I put our skills to the test by analyzing the finds from recent excavations under the early fifth-century church of Santo Stefano Rotondo on the Caelian hill in Rome. The results of our work will appear in Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome.

From Rome, I traveled to Campania, where I spent a week with the Pompeii Archaeological Research Project—Porta Stabia, codirected by Professor Steven Ellis of the University of Michigan. It was a pleasure to visit such an important excavation and to put my new ceramics skills to use by processing pottery.

My next stop was Egypt, where I spent two weeks visiting sites in the Fayum region, including Karanis, excavated by the University of Michigan in 1924–35. The trip allowed me to conduct essential preliminary research for my dissertation on aspects of agriculture and irrigation in ancient Egypt. None of these undertakings would have been possible without the support of the Pedley Fund.

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James Cook, IPCAA Student
Kelsey Welcomes New Collections Manager

Michelle Fontenot thinks the Fates must be on her side. A couple of years ago she heard a presentation by former Kelsey registrar Robin Meador-Woodruff and decided the Kelsey would be an ideal place to work. Then this January, just when she wanted to make a move, she found a job posting for Kelsey collections manager. She took up the post in July.

Michelle had a similar stroke of luck last August. After living all her life in or near New Orleans, she left there for a brief stint in Washington, D.C., just one week before Hurricane Katrina.

Michelle may credit good fortune for her success, but clearly she comes to her new position through shrewd career planning as well. Knowing early on that she ultimately wanted to work in an archaeology museum, she graduated from the University of New Orleans as a geography major, then earned a master's degree in anthropology from Louisiana State University.

For several years after that she did a variety of fieldwork. She made maps for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Wetlands Research Center. She worked for the Louisiana Department of Transportation as an environmental impact specialist responsible for implementing a statewide bridge inventory. And she did southeast plantation archaeology at two sites in the Bahamas.

With this fieldwork background, Michelle found a job at the Louisiana State Museum as curator of education. She eventually served as registrar for the entire statewide museum system, which included twelve separate facilities. In this last position, she implemented a move of most of one collection to a new facility, an experience that should stand her in good stead when she helps orchestrate the transfer of the entire Kelsey collection into the new Upjohn Wing.

As the Kelsey’s collections manager, Michelle will be maintaining all registry records, managing loans, and handling publications permissions. Currently she is updating object records to prepare for our move. When not occupied with her full-time Museum job, Michelle stays busy working 15–17 hours a week at the Pottery Barn in Briarwood.

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Calendar of Events

Lectures
- *East or West, Roman Glass is Best* by E. Marianne Stern
  Wednesday, September 27, 6:00 p.m.
  Cosponsored with the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA) and the Interdepartmental Program in Classical Art and Archaeology (IPCAA)
- *Recent Excavations at Crustumerium* by Richard de Puma, University of Iowa
  Thursday, March 15, 5:30 p.m., 2175 Angell Hall
  Reception following, cosponsored by AIA and IPCAA
- *Roman Towns in the Tiber Valley* by Martin Millet, Cambridge University
  Thursday, April 5, 5:30 p.m., 2175 Angell Hall
  Reception following, cosponsored by AIA and IPCAA

FAST Lecture Series
*(Field Archaeology Series on Thursdays)*
*Thursday evenings at the Kelsey Museum; cosponsored IPCAA.*
- *Landscape Archaeology* by Bill Farrand, Professor Emeritus, Former Director, U-M Exhibit Museum of Natural History, 6:00 p.m., October 5
- *GIS Applications in Archaeology* by Eric Rupley, Graduate Student Research Assistant, Museum of Anthropology, 7:00 p.m., November 2
- *Archaeological Fieldwork: A Conservator’s Perspective* by Claudia Chemello, Senior Conservator, Kelsey Museum, 6:00 p.m., November 16
- *The Other Athens: Salvage Archaeology and the City’s Old Town* by Geoffrey Schmalz, Lecturer, Department of Classical Studies and History, 6:00 p.m., November 30
- *Managing Archaeology at Five Digs in Turkey: Tourism, Planning, and Heritage,* by Dan Shoup, IPCAA, 6:00 p.m., December 7

Thomas S. Jerome Lecture Series
*Sponsored by the Department of Classical Studies*
- *Reading Greek and Etruscan Images* Opening lecture by Larissa Bonfante, Institute of Etruscan Studies, New York University
  Monday, March 26, 4:00 p.m., Rackham Amphitheater
- Larissa Bonfante, topic TBA
  Tuesday, March 27, 4:00 p.m., Kelsey Classroom
- Larissa Bonfante, topic TBA
  Thursday, March 29, 4:00 p.m., Kelsey Classroom
- Larissa Bonfante, topic TBA
  Saturday, March 31, 10:00 a.m., 2175 Angell Hall
- Larissa Bonfante, topic TBA
  Wednesday, April 4, 4:00 p.m., Kelsey Classroom

Events
- Sally Ride Science Fair, September 30
- Associates Holiday Party, TBA
- Associates Spring Event, TBA

Family Days
- Ann Arbor Family Days
  Saturday and Sunday, April 21–22