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Olympian Jupiter. Winckelmann and Quatremère de Quincy on Ancient Polychromy

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Abstract. A number of Western museums may boast of their important collections of Classical Greek and Roman art. Marble statues of deities or heroes from Classical Antiquity, and important works in painting and architecture from different historical epochs, have traditionally made up the canon of Western art. In recent years, critics have claimed that this tradition represents an idealisation of the white, Caucasian body type which excludes other races from the concept of beauty. Although we today know that ancient statues in marble were often painted in vivid colours, they say that art theorists have either been ignorant of, or glossed over, this fact. While the German art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann has often been regarded as a proponent of our Western predilection for whiteness, the French archaeologist Antoine Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy is by many celebrated as the first to realise the extent and importance of ancient polychromy. In this paper, I will try to show that this is a distorted view, especially where Winckelmann's theories are concerned. Far from being ignorant about ancient polychromy, Winckelmann was an important source for Quatremère de Quincy. In addition, Winckelmann's appreciation of the white marble surface was not the result of racial prejudice, but the expression of an aesthetic opinion that he shared with Quatremère de Quincy.

It is now generally accepted that Ancient Greek and Roman marble statues were originally lavishly decorated with colour. Over the last few decades a number of studies that document the extensive use of polychromy in ancient statuary have been published. Among the most important of these is the work of Vinzenz Brinkmann and his research team, who used modern technology to reconstruct the original painted surface colour of ancient objects.

An exhibition dedicated to the findings of this research group, which was held in Munich in 2003, sparked an international debate on the traditional role of museums in the Western world which, according to some, have promoted a Classical and Neo-Classical aesthetics based on white race ideals. Some have called for an act to challenge the leading canon of Western art which until today has secured a place for the white marble statues of

Greece and Rome in high-ceilinged, centrally located rooms, while objects from other parts of the world (especially outside Europe) are exhibited in less attractive spaces.¹

Furthermore, some also claim that the white marble bodies of ancient statuary were part of a 'white concept' that was promulgated through the musealisation of our cultural heritage.² This paved the way for a new visual rhetoric in the twentieth century which systematically used white marble as an emblem of racial whiteness, fusing ancient symbols with new ones in an aesthetically appealing wrapping. In the fascist version of Classical art, the image of the athlete, and, in general, depictions of nude, male bodies, were given aggressive facial traits that reflected the belligerent atmosphere typical of the pre-World War II period. As a symbol of *romanità* and the white race, marble was, literally, a central element in the construction of fascist identity.³

Although fascist architects and sculptors might find inspiration in monuments from Classical Antiquity that are still visible in Rome, their abuse of history had other sources. According to the British historian Eliza Marian Butler, the Germans (and, I guess, also the Italians) had suffered from an overdose of Greek art and literature.⁴ The main source for the renewed Hellenism of the eighteenth century was the appraisal of the masterpieces of Greek sculptors like Phidias and Praxiteles that the German reader could find in Johann Joachim Winckelmann's (1717–1768) *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* from 1764. More than any other book, Winckelmann's *Geschichte* gave rise to a new interest in Greek civilisation, inspiring leading German intellectuals like Goethe, Schiller and Hölderlin. According to Butler, it was the negative influence from Winckelmann's Hellenism that encouraged the Nazis to fashion Europe in the image of ancient Greece.⁵

While the generation of Goethe may have been most interested in how ancient art mirrored the 'quiet greatness' (*edle Einfalt und stille Größe*) typical of the Greek character, classicist aesthetics also tacitly fused the image of the ideal in art with the depiction of blond people. Art thus encouraged the identification of Europeans from different nations with the ancient Greeks, enabling these peoples to see themselves as heirs to that great civilisation.⁶

The idea that Winckelmann's studies nourished ideas of heritage that were intrinsically racist was later substantiated in Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* (three volumes from 1987 to 2006). I also think it is fair to say that the conviction which today seems to be generally accepted, that there is a connection between Neo-Classical aesthetics and racism, is due to some extent to the rise of 'whiteness studies'. Advocates of this discipline, which has developed in the USA since the late twentieth century, consider whiteness as a socially constructed hierarchy that justifies discrimination based on race.

¹ Mirzoeff 2017, 14.

² Santillo Frizell in Houby-Nielsen (ed.) 2010, 40.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Eliza Marian Butler 1935.

⁵ Butler 1958.

⁶ Mosse 1995, 165-166.

However, in this scenario, beginning with Winckelmann's praise of ancient Greek art and ending with Nazi race theory, something important is missing. Although modern research, using advanced technology to trace microscopic fragments of colour pigment that are invisible to the human eye, has revealed hitherto unknown aspects of ancient art, the discovery of ancient polychromy as such is not of recent date. This discovery has usually been attributed to the French archaeologist Antoine Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy (1755–1849), who studied the use of coloured material (stone and metal) and paint in Greek sculpture and architecture from the 1780s onwards.⁷ The fact that the results of his investigations were published in *Le Jupiter Olympien* in 1814 demonstrates that everyone who took an interest in this field had access to relevant information. The archaeological milieu, at least in France, must have had some knowledge about ancient polychromy by the third decade of the nineteenth century.

Quatremère's book almost certainly represented the first systematic study of ancient polychromy,⁸ but as a theorist he did not conduct his own excavations. He had to rely on earlier published sources. This leads us back to authors who had written on ancient Greek material before him, like Winckelmann. It is wrong to claim, as I believe Barbro Santillo Frizell does, that in the midst of a number of art theorists and scholars at the turn of the eighteenth century who adopted Winckelmann's idea of a white Antiquity, Quatremère de Quincy was the sole exception.⁹ As I will try to demonstrate in this article, Quatremère's studies were not without precursors, and one of the most important of them was Winckelmann!

It is not true that Winckelmann was unaware of the fact that the statues of Greece and Rome were coloured; nor is it correct that he deliberately tried to conceal this fact to consciously promote a false image of Antiquity. It is often pointed out that he never went to Greece and based his conclusions mainly on what he saw in Roman collections. Some even claim that he deliberately refrained from visiting Greece in order to spare his Graecian myth from confrontation with real Greece.¹⁰ However, at the time of Phidias and Praxiteles, Greek civilisation covered a much vaster area than it does today; it also included the Ionian coast and large parts of southern Italy, as well as a number of other localities in the Mediterranean region. Winckelmann's stay in Italy gave him occasion to visit the archaeological excavations in Pompeii and Herculaneum several times. In his *Geschichte* he discussed at length a statue of Artemis from Herculaneum with evident traces of colour that he had seen in the Royal Museum of Portici.

As we shall see, this statue was also one of Quatremère de Quincy's main examples of ancient polychromy. Quatremère had much of his information on the art of Antiquity from Winckelmann, a fact that he acknowledges many times in his *Le Jupiter Olympien*. Would Quatremère de Quincy have been able to draw his radical conclusions concerning

⁷ Schneider 1910; Grand-Clément 2005.

⁸ Grand-Clément 2005, 146.

⁹ Santillo Frizell in Houby-Nielsen (ed.) 2010, 36.

¹⁰ Grand-Clément 2005, 142.

ancient art without Winckelmann's help? It is not easy to answer this question, so let me turn to another one that emerges from what we have learned so far: if the basic facts concerning colouring of statues were made available with the publication of *Le Jupiter Olympien*, how can it be that we still discuss this topic today?

An answer is suggested by Quatremère de Quincy himself, who, having discussed the colouring of statues and reliefs at length, realised that there is, after all, a radical difference between *anciens et modernes*. The present article aims to discuss and clarify some important aspects regarding Quatremère's relation to Winckelmann. This, in turn, casts new light on Winckelmann's view of Antiquity, which was far more complex than hitherto thought. Eventually, I will, following the argument of Quatremère de Quincy, try to clarify some aspects concerning the prevailing modern preference for whiteness in art. This was due not to ignorance of basic facts, but because the aim of the modern artist was to resuscitate the beauty of ancient Greece, not its religion.

Coloured materials

As we have seen, the first to systematically study the use of polychromy in art and architecture from Greek Antiquity was the French archaeologist and theorist, Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy. Writing extensively on topics from modern and contemporary art (including biographies on Raphael, Michelangelo and Antonio Canova), Quatremère de Quincy specialised on the art of architecture of Antiquity, writing among other things a historical dictionary on architecture (1832–1833). His book on ancient Egyptian architecture, written in the 1780s, was published in 1803; together with the collection of research articles and 'observations' called *Description de l'Égypte* that came out from 1809 to 1829. This was an important contribution to the Egyptian Revival in France, which marked the transition between the Neoclassical style and early nineteenth-century Romanticism.

Although many of his writings on archaeology focus on architecture, one important work aimed at explaining aspects relating to sculpture and relief. Underpinning Quatremère's *Le Jupiter Olympien* from 1814 was the conviction that the sculptural works of the Greeks were originally not like the marble statues (mainly Roman copies of Greek originals) that he saw (and we still see) in museums around the world. The Greeks adopted a number of techniques, such as inserting precious stones or ivory in cavities to suggest eyes, or combining marble and wood to suggest the contrast between flesh and drapes. Textual sources even confirm that costly marble was covered by paint made of wax and pigment to heighten the aesthetic and dramatic effect.

To denote these different techniques – whether they involve the application of paint or achieve chromatic effects through use of different types of materials – Quatremère de Quincy used the word 'polychromy'. His statement that all these works, whether paint is used or not, belong to *ce que j'appelle de la sculpture polychrome*, confirm not

only that he was aware that this was a new field of study, but also that he saw himself as the first to use this word in its modern sense.¹¹

Quatremère de Quincy's concept of 'polychromy' was thus not limited to statues and reliefs that were covered with paint. In fact, his *Le Jupiter Olympien* dedicated much more space to sculptural works that were composed of different materials, like acroliths and polyoliths. (Acroliths are statues that use a combination of stone and wood. Marble is preferred to suggest flesh in the exposed areas, like head, hands and feet, while wood is used for the clothed parts. In polyoliths a similar effect of contrast between flesh and draperies is achieved by mixing stones of different colour, like white marble, red porphyry or translucent alabaster.)

To this category belongs also 'chryselephantine', which is sculpture made with ivory and gold. Obviously, a statue could not be made of solid gold. Instead a wooden frame was made, to which was attached thin pieces of ivory to suggest skin, and sheets of gold leaf for draped areas as well as for hair, armour, jewellery and other details. In addition, semi-precious stones along with ivory were used for the eyes.

Costly materials like gold and ivory were only used for the most important works of art, for instance, the famous *Athena Parthenos* that once stood in the Parthenon temple in Athens. The original *Athena*, which was sculpted by Phidias (c. 480–430 BC), one of Greece's most renowned sculptors, is lost, but we know what it looked like from a number of ancient small-scale copies in marble like the *Varvakeion Athena* (third century AD) in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens, as well as coins, engraved gems and votive objects. A detailed written account is given in Pausanias' *Description of Greece*.¹²

Another example, also by Phidias, is the giant (about 13 metres tall!) statue of Zeus from the sanctuary of Olympia in Greece (Fig. 1). Considered to have been one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the statue of Zeus was made with the intention to rival the beauty of Athens. The statue showed the god seated, so the work also included a highly elaborate cedarwood throne that was decorated with figures and wrought images in ebony, ivory, gold and precious stones. Its original appearance can be gathered from coins as well as (again) Pausanias' description, but not, as in the case of *Athena*, from statuettes in marble or bronze. In fact, Quatremère de Quincy's book is to a certain extent written as an attempt to reconstruct for the reader the appearance of this great work of art which, by the way, also gave the name to his book, *Le Jupiter Olympien*.

Quatremère de Quincy is sometimes labelled as an 'armchair archaeologist' because his research to a large extent depended on ancient textual sources and recent archaeological findings published by other scholars in modern journals. His favourite ancient authors included Pausanias and Pliny. One passage in Pliny is of special importance.

¹¹ Quatremère de Quincy 1815, 32. See also Grand-Clément 2005, 146.

¹² Pausanias 1918, 123-25.

Fig. 1 Le Jupiter Olympien vu dans son trône. A.-C. Quatremère de Quincy, *Le Jupiter Olympien, ou l'art de la sculpture antique*, Paris 1814, frontispiece.

In book XXXV in his *Natural History*, the Roman author discusses the considerable amount of money that was due to experienced masters of painting like Pamphilus, the teacher of Melanthius and the famous Apelles. This, Pliny concluded, is why there had not been any famous works ‘neither in painting nor in the art of *statuary* ... that were executed by any person who was a slave’.¹³

The exact meaning of the word *toreutice* in Pliny, which in English versions is sometimes translated ‘statuary’, was much debated at Quatremère’s time. He criticised his precursor, the French aristocrat and archaeologist, Comte de Caylus (Anne Claude de Caylus, 1692–1765), who, in his *Recueil d’antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques, romaines et gauloises* (1752–1755), based his theory on the description of the engraved figures of the shield of Achilles in Homer. Hence, *toreutique* (as it was called in French) had to be synonymous with engraving, Caylus said. This hypothesis, Quatremère replied, is contradicted by some descriptions in Pliny which clearly discuss reliefs.

To the list of errors Quatremère could add similar mistakes made by all the archaeologists who had discussed the theme before him. The German theologian and classical philologist Johann August Ernesti (1707–1781) said that all kinds of small-scale sculptural works were *toreutique*, whereas Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729–1812), apparently was at variance with himself, defining it first as a form of *bas-relief* before, later, suggesting that it had to do with casting sculpture in bronze.

Against these theories, Quatremère de Quincy said that *toreutique* was not limited to small works, ornaments or details in metal, or any other a subcategory of art. On the contrary, along with marble and bronze it must have constituted one of sculpture’s main categories. It comprised work in ivory, metal and other materials, and consisted of making statues or relief where the ability, among other things, to chase gold, silver or bronze was required.

The art of making statues by combining different materials was an ancient one, and according to Quatremère de Quincy it developed along lines that were independent from the art of carving marble. Since composite statues often included materials that were more expensive than marble, *toreutique* was to a large extent limited to statues of the gods for the most important sanctuaries. The most eminent sculptors excelled in this branch, and both Phidias and Praxiteles were referred to as *toreuticiens*.¹⁴

It was his studies of *toreutique* that made Quatremère de Quincy change his idea on ancient art. First, he thought, like most archaeologists and experts on Antiquity at his time, that most Greek statues – and certainly the most famous and important ones – were executed in clean Parian or Pentelic marble, and thus almost identical to the Roman copies of them that we find in a number of Western museums. However, confronted with acroliths, polyoliths and sources that document the existence of marvellous statues of chryselephantine in the temples of Olympia and Athens, he gradually came to realise that

¹³ Plinius 1841, Book 35, ch. 36 (my italics).

¹⁴ Quatremère de Quincy 1815, XV.

marble was only the ‘tip of the iceberg’, so to speak. If it was still possible to believe that the traces of colour found on some marble statues represented exceptions, and that works carved in one stone were made to have a monochrome appearance, this idea was impossible to sustain when it came to *toreutique*. These works were made of precious materials that, without doubt, were employed to be seen as such. The ancient Greeks must have appreciated colour, not only in paintings, but also in sculpture!

It remained for Quatremère de Quincy to demonstrate that acroliths, polyoliths and works in *toreutique* actually were common in the fourth and fifth centuries BC. Again, his antagonists were Caylus and Heyne. ‘One may find it surprising,’ he said, ‘that Mr de Caylus did not remember how numerous the polyolith statues are in Rome, and how little our eyes are disturbed by this so-called variegation.’¹⁵ In his *Recueil d'antiquités* Caylus had discussed this strange ‘variegation’ (*bigarrure*) that he often encountered in ancient works of art, which for him (and for the typical nineteenth-century art lover), was so difficult to get used to. Against Caylus, Quatremère de Quincy found support in the studies of the British antiquarian Richard Chandler (1737–1810), whose important *Travels in Greece* from 1776 had been translated into French by the time Quatremère wrote his *Le Jupiter Olympien*. In his book, Chandler had demonstrated that most of the herms (a statue where the body below the head is replaced by a plain, squared section) in Greece were of exactly the type that Caylus criticised; they were either acroliths or what Quatremère de Quincy called *hermès polyolithes* – statues composed of different types of stone.

Painted statues

Much of *Le Jupiter Olympien* is dedicated to the discussion of acroliths and *toreutique*. It is the discovery of the centrality of these techniques that led Quatremère de Quincy to change his idea on the aesthetics of ancient art, and it is also on this argument that one can safely say that his studies contributed new insights to the study of polychromy in ancient art. However, polychromy is also painting and colouring. On this point he praised Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781), the famous author of *Laocoön* (and Winckelmann’s antagonist), for convincingly having demonstrated that, first, the Latin word *pingere* (to paint) was not restricted to the painting of pictures, but also applied to sculpture, and, second, that *ceræ pictæ* may refer to statuettes in wax.

As with the discussion of *toreutique*, Quatremère de Quincy’s theories regarding colouring were to a large extent based on a close reading of ancient textual sources. In Pliny’s *Natural History* he found another ambiguous word: *circumlitio*. What exactly this word means is not very clear. According to Oliver Primavesi, it corresponds to the Greek *enaleiphen*, which means the coating of marble sculpture with colours.¹⁶ From Pliny’s description one gathers that it is something that has to do with the completion and final stages of the work on a statue. Quatremère de Quincy was convinced that it denoted the

¹⁵ Quatremère de Quincy 1815, 38.

¹⁶ O. Primavesi in Brinkmann et al. 2010, 28.

painting of sculptures, and could not, as the Italian philologist Carlo Dati (1619–1676) claimed, refer to the polishing of the marble surface, since the sources clearly mention that a kind of substance was applied to the surface. Nor can the theory, proposed by Caylus, Durand and Falconet,¹⁷ that *circumlitio* refers to the varnishing of statues, be correct, since this contradicts the experience of modern sculptors. According to Quatremère de Quincy, sculptors will confirm that if you apply varnish to the marble surface to create lustre, this will cause disagreeable optical effects.

Furthermore, polishing and varnishing are simple jobs that great sculptors like Phidias and Praxiteles could easily have done themselves. They could also, of course, have it done by an assistant, but is it not natural to think that a great master would like to give his work the final touch himself? Quatremère de Quincy thought they would, based on what he knew about the practice of contemporary artists. Quatremère was a close friend of the Italian sculptor Antonio Canova, who ‘was renowned for his care with the final surface of his sculptures, which he insisted on carrying out himself’.¹⁸

Sources also confirm that sculptors at the time of Phidias had this kind of work done by people who are described as experts in the field of *circumlitio*. This means that *circumlitio* must be a discipline in its own right. In addition, we know that this job was assigned to persons who elsewhere are referred to as painters.¹⁹ According to Quatremère, the fact that Nicias, a painter who was famous for his works in encaustic technique, is mentioned as one who performed this kind of work, confirms that *circumlitio* involved painting, and hence, that ancient marble statues were painted.

This is also confirmed by numerous works that still present traces of their original colour. The most famous examples are the friezes and metopes from the Parthenon temple in Athens (which he refers to as the temple of Minerva), which Quatremère de Quincy knew through James Stuart’s *The Antiquities of Athens* (published with Nicholas Reverett in 1762). As in other cases, the evidence of polychromy at the Parthenon was judged by ‘sceptics’ to have been exceptions to the rule that Greek sculpture was monochrome. Colour can be found in certain cases, these people would say, where, as at the Parthenon, the reliefs are placed high up, far from view. Colour gives contrast to the figures and makes them easier to recognise from ground level. Another argument that is often used is that polychromy belonged to the ‘low centuries’ of Greek art, i.e. the Archaic period of the seventh century BC as well as the phase of decline in Hellenistic art after Alexander’s conquests. In contrast, colouring of marble is rarely seen in Classical art of the fourth- and fifth centuries BC, some claimed. Among the defenders of this theory was Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), who in his book on sculpture, *Einige Wahrnehmungen über Form und Gestalt aus Pygmalions bildendem Traum* (1778), claimed that ‘it was in the youth

¹⁷ Durand may be Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand (1760–1834); French architect. Falconet is almost certainly Étienne Maurice Falconet (1716–1791); French sculptor who translated the parts of Pliny’s *Naturalis Historia* relating to sculpture into French.

¹⁸ Bindman 2016, 235.

¹⁹ Quatremère de Quincy 1815, 45–46.

of the art, when monuments were still made of wood, that statues were coloured. In the most beautiful ages statues did not require drapery or colours, eyeballs or silver; art stood naked like Venus, and this was all the adornment and riches it needed'.²⁰

It has often been suggested that Winckelmann shared Herder's view that polychromy in sculpture either represented a phase of 'infancy' before the period reached full maturity, or a phase of decline and degeneration.²¹ Indeed, this may very well be how he regarded ancient art before his first visit to Italy in 1755. In 1758 he went to see the archaeological excavations in Pompeii and Herculaneum (Herculaneum had been rediscovered not long before, in 1738), and in 1762 he visited the Royal Museum of Portici near Naples. In the Royal Museum he encountered a very interesting statue of the goddess Diana (Artemis) from the excavations of nearby Herculaneum (Fig. 2). The evident traces of colour puzzled Winckelmann, but he explained this rare phenomenon by categorising the statue as a work from an early period. The braided, stylised hair, the drapes constituting a geometrical pattern and the static frontality of the figure's pose seemed to confirm this view. The work might not even be Greek (Naples was originally a Greek settlement), and in his *Sendschreiben von den Herculanischen Entdeckungen* from 1762, he classified it as an Etruscan work.

He confirmed this view in the publication of his principal work on archaeology in 1764, the *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, but before the issue of the second edition of his *Geschichte* (published posthumously in 1776), which included a new section on 'Painted statues', he must have changed his mind. Reconsidering his first analysis of the style of the Artemis, he realised that some details, especially the figure's 'archaic smile', was typical of Greek art.²² His conclusion that the statue was Greek, not Etruscan, eventually led him to change his whole view of Greek sculpture, accepting widespread use of polychromy as integral to ancient art of this region, including works belonging to the Classical period of the fourth- and fifth centuries BC.

This new hypothesis, that much of Greek sculpture had originally been painted, could also be backed by written evidence. Descriptions of polychromy are found in Pausanias' *Description of Greece* as well as in Virgil's *Eclogues*, but of special importance for him was a passage from Plato's *Republic*. The passage, which is written as a dialogue between Socrates and Adeimantus, was translated by Winckelmann himself and quoted in his *Geschichte*. In it, Plato discusses the relation between happiness and 'the good', and to which degree one can say that making an object more beautiful is doing something good to it. Plato (and Socrates) admitted that this is true insofar that the beauty does not interfere with a higher good or a more important purpose. The beauty of an object is not a problem as long as this object is perceived individually, but as part of a whole the beauty of the part

²⁰ Herder 2002, loc. 728.

²¹ Grand-Clément 2005, 151.

²² Primavesi in Brinkmann et al. 2017, 72.

Fig. 2 “Artemide marciante.” Late first century BC-early first century AD. Greek marble. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples.

must not interfere with the beauty of the whole. To explain his point of view, Plato gave the following example: it is 'just as if someone who should find us colouring a statue should censure us because we are failing to put the most beautiful colours upon the most beautiful parts of the figure; since we would have coated the eyes, though being the most beautiful, not with purple, but with black, etc.'²³

In Antiquity, most colour pigments were not synthetic, but occurred naturally, like ochres and iron oxides. Lapis lazuli, which is a rich blue, was made of a semi-precious stone from Afghanistan while purple was extracted from the shells of tiny snails. Although purple was expensive and the eyes are the most important part of the body, it was obvious to Plato that the eyes must be dark or brown or blue, not red. For Winckelmann, the passage from Plato's *Republic* along with archaeological evidence, confirmed beyond any doubt that the practice of colouring statues was widespread at the time.

His most important archaeological example of polychromy was the above-mentioned Artemis statue. Winckelmann must have been dazzled by it, since it is discussed several times in his *Geschichte*. In one chapter where he discussed the origin of polychromy, he proposed, interestingly, as Quatremère de Quincy did, that it derived from acroliths – statues of wood and stone. He also suggested that such statues were sometimes dressed with real clothes to make them appear as similar as possible to real people. From this practice, he said, 'originated the idea of painting marble figures so as to represent the dress...'²⁴

As far as I can see, there is nothing in the *Geschichte* that indicates that Winckelmann thought that only the eyes and the eyebrows should be painted, and that he, as some claim, never could imagine that Greek sculptors of 'the most beautiful ages', as Herder would have said, did anything more than add a few touches of colour to the hem of the draperies.²⁵ On the contrary, the fact that Winckelmann relied on convincing arguments from archaeological evidence and written sources made his *Geschichte* the inevitable 'starting point of an intensive exploration of polychromy in the early nineteenth century'.²⁶ Among the not many examples of painted sculpture that Quatremère de Quincy discussed (after all, his main interest was *toreutique*) was the same Artemis-statue from Herculaneum that puzzled Winckelmann fifty years earlier, and as evidence of the widespread use of polychromy in Greek sculpture he used the very same passage from Plato's *Republic* that Winckelmann had quoted.

As regards the passage from Plato's *Republic*, Winckelmann had taken care to make his reader aware of one detail that made his interpretation uncertain. The Greek word *ἀνδρῶδες* normally translates as 'statue', and it is reasonable to think that Plato had a statue in mind when he explained his thoughts. However, Winckelmann added that one cannot

²³ Winckelmann 1872, 111. *Republic* IV, 420c-d.

²⁴ Winckelmann 1873, 215.

²⁵ Purdy 2004, 92.

²⁶ Primavesi in Brinkmann et al. 2017, 71.

totally exclude other possible meanings of that word, so he left to his readers to decide whether it sometimes (and possibly in this context) could have meant ‘image’.²⁷ Pondering over why his German predecessor was so hesitant when he came to the translation of this particular word, Quatremère concluded that

Winckelmann could not understand it otherwise; and it is, I imagine, of a certain respect for modern ideas that he has admitted some doubt as to the true meaning of this word in the passage in question, relying on others, as he said, to judge if it can also mean painting ...²⁸

Be that as it may, Winckelmann read the passage as meaning ‘statue’ and used it as evidence that Greeks painted their statues even in Plato’s time. (Plato was a contemporary of one of the greatest sculptors of Greek classical art, Praxiteles.) Quatremère de Quincy was well aware that the writings of Winckelmann were the natural starting point for anyone, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, who wanted to study ancient polychromy. One may even ask whether he would have been able to arrive at his conclusions if it were not for the important work of his predecessor.

For this reason, he never criticised Winckelmann as severely as his fellow Frenchman, the Comte de Caylus. On the contrary, in a letter to the Venezuelan military leader Francisco de Miranda on the French abduction of antiquities from Rome, he hailed Winckelmann as the first who brought:

... the genuine spirit of observation to the study of antiquity. He was the first who thought to analyze antiquity and specify the periods, peoples, schools, styles, and nuances of style; he was the first to blaze the way and stake out the new territory. He was the first who, by classifying the epochs, brought history to bear on monuments and, by comparing them, discovered certain characteristics, certain principles of critical appraisal, and a method that, by destroying many errors, instigated the discovery of a multitude of truths. At last returning from analysis to synthesis, he made a corpus from what had been only a heap of debris; he truly reunited the *disjecti membra poeta*.²⁹

The letter was written in 1796, but his esteem for Winckelmann was the same twenty years later, when he published *Le Jupiter Olympien*. On this later occasion, on the very first page (the *Avant-Propos*), Winckelmann is praised as one who more than anyone else contributed to popularising *le gout et l'étude de l'art des anciens* among all nations.³⁰ Winckelmann was the first, Quatremère said, who, based on written sources, observations and intuitive insights, and:

²⁷ Winckelmann 1872, 111.

²⁸ Quatremère de Quincy 1815, 30 (my translation from the French).

²⁹ Quatremère de Quincy 2012, 101.

³⁰ Quatremère de Quincy 1815, I.

by means of a careful analysis of different styles and works of art from different periods and different schools ... of which Rome has preserved the remains, has managed to put together the mutilated body of the arts of antiquity, to restore it, so to speak; to give it a kind of integrity.³¹

In short: Winckelmann was the first who was able to see how individual parts constituted a coherent whole, spotting the greatness of Greek civilisation behind the innumerable fragments stored in Roman museums.

Winckelmann's observations were mainly based on what he saw in Roman collections and on his trips to Pompeii and Herculaneum. In Rome he worked as a librarian for Cardinal Alessandro Albani, who had built a marvellous villa on the outskirts of Rome, near Via Salaria. Albani was about to form an important collection of antiquities, which, among other things, contained a series of statues with bodies of alabaster and heads of marble. In addition, there were herms of the same type composed of different types of stone, the head of white marble and the body of *alabâtre fleuri ou agatisé*.³²

In contrast to Caylus and Heyne, who were bewildered when they discovered the chromatic splendour of Antiquity, Winckelmann included these works without hesitation in his canon of Classical art. 'Without any critical condemnation,' Quatremère said, Winckelmann 'describes two figures in the Villa Albani where only the head is of metal, and the rest of alabaster, and he also praises a bronze copy of the Apollo Sauroctonos (whose eyes, he says, and his diadem, are of silver).'³³ He also defends the restoration of the said statue (Apollo), including the gilding of the bronze lizard that climbs on the tree trunk which Apollo leans on. In this he (Winckelmann) said, 'we have followed the indication of the taste of antiquity'.³⁴

Aesthetics of form and colour

Despite the fact that Quatremère de Quincy essentially had a positive view of Winckelmann's contributions to the study of ancient art, he also clearly saw its limits. Winckelmann was aware of the great variety of forms of art among the Greeks, but he never realised that a true recognition of this fact ought to entail a change in our perception of the nature of art in Antiquity. This lack was due to the fact that only a tiny part of all that had been produced of artworks in Greek and Roman Antiquity was available to him. Much had been lost and will never be recovered, but one must also take into considerations the quantity of archaeological objects that saw the light of day in the years after Winckelmann's death in 1768.

³¹ Quatremère de Quincy 1815, VII.

³² Quatremère de Quincy 1815, 38.

³³ Quatremère de Quincy 1815, 44.

³⁴ Ibid.

The question of quantity was important to Quatremère de Quincy, for it demonstrated that coloured sculptures were not exceptions to the rule – they were the rule! In fact, he dates his own ‘conversion’ to a period of great archaeological discoveries. In the introduction of *Le Jupiter Olympien* he says that the idea of writing the book was conceived 30 years earlier, in the 1780s. This was under the pontificate of Pius VI (Giovanni Angelico Braschi, pope from 1775 to 1799). Although Pope Pius on another occasion was criticised by Quatremère for signing a treatise with Napoleon that accepted the handing over of important works of art³⁵ – among others the *Laocoön* group and the *Apollo Belvedere* – he acknowledged the Pope’s importance as a great patron of the arts. The museum in the Vatican dedicated to pagan art from Greek and Roman Antiquity, founded by Pius’ predecessor, Pope Clement XIV, was enlarged during his period, and got the name Museo Pio-Clementino. In just a few years it grew to become Europe’s largest collection of antiquities. Quatremère de Quincy said of this epoch that ‘it is memorable in the history of art. Never, in such a short period of time, have more ancient monuments been brought to the light of day’.³⁶

With this one should believe that most of the questions relating to ancient polychromy had been answered. But it was not that simple. Quatremère de Quincy lived in a period when the Neo-Classical movement in art was still very strong. The art scene in France had been strongly influenced by the style of Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665) since Charles Le Brun became head of the *Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture* in Paris in 1648. This Neo-Classical trend was amplified with the publication of Winckelmann’s books, and the controversy between *anciens et modernes* was not yet settled in favour of the moderns by the time Quatremère de Quincy published his *Le Jupiter Olympien*. So, if old statues still could be used as models for contemporary art, and, in addition, one could confirm that ancient art was multicolour, did that mean that contemporary artists should start colouring their statues? If Quatremère de Quincy was right about colour, and if we still believe that Phidias and his generation once and for all had revealed the only true and universal rules of great art, wouldn’t that insight force modern sculptors to change their practice?

Interestingly, some careful attempts to do that came from Quatremère’s friend Antonio Canova. Quatremère and Canova knew each other quite well, and during the former’s stay in London in June 1818, he wrote a series of letters to Canova on the situation of the Elgin marbles.³⁷ Canova is known to have made two versions of the Greek goddess Hebe, which both, when they were first put on display, were reported to being lightly rouged in their face, ‘while the draperies kept the natural whiteness of the marble’.³⁸ It should be emphasised that it is more correct in this case to speak of tinting rather than

³⁵ Against the Treaty of Tolentino, which legitimated the handing over of major works of art (ancient and modern) from Italy to France, Quatremère de Quincy wrote *Lettres à Miranda* (1796), where he emphasised the strong bond that connects a work of art to its place of origin.

³⁶ Quatremère de Quincy 1815, I.

³⁷ Quatremère de Quincy, 2012.

³⁸ Bindman 2016.

colouring, since the colours were not very strong, and were applied to the statue only with the purpose of giving life to the flesh parts.

It is likely that Canova's idea of giving a modest tone of colour to his works came from Quatremère de Quincy. David Bindman says that 'he was probably influenced by Quatremère de Quincy's discovery of ancient colouring', since he, through his friendship with the French archaeologist, had 'access to the latest thinking on the question of the colour of antique sculpture'.³⁹

Canova could obtain chromatic effects in several ways: by careful selection of types of marble, which is never simply white, but vary in colour and texture; by manually applying coating to the surface, or highlighting with flesh colours and gilding. Bindman says that Canova, in his mature years, almost always added a coating to create contrast between flesh and drapery, however, 'except for one possible example ... all traces of such additions have been scrubbed off'.⁴⁰

While some of Canova's patrons appreciated his tinted statues, art critics and theorists almost unanimously hated it. With the exception of the Welsh sculptor John Gibson (a pupil of Canova), who in the 1850s made a *Tinted Venus*, few sculptors followed Canova's example. The idea of applying colour to a statue was simply too strongly at variance with nineteenth-century ideas about art. Quatremère de Quincy realised that contemporary art was not the same as ancient art. This difference he attributed to art's religious function in Antiquity. Art had a quite different cultural function then, he said. In our society art works are luxury objects — at that time they were *objets de nécessité* that had to comply with very specific religious requirements.⁴¹ One example he gives is the depiction of scenes from the Panathenaic Festival on the Ionic frieze from 442 BC to 438 BC that runs around the exterior walls of the Parthenon's cella. The Panathenaic Festival was a combination of athletic competition and religious ceremony that included sacrifices to the goddess Athena, patron of Athens. Aside from sacrificial animals, the frieze contains several groups of people: horsemen, charioteers, elders, musicians, tray bearers, women celebrants, a priestess and deities, all of them represented with characteristic dresses according to their rank. What would be more natural than depicting them with clothes and colours exactly like the spectator would see them in the real procession?

The religious significance attributed to art is also witnessed by the use of costly materials. The resources invested in the statues for the most important sanctuaries were by far superior to the sums that one would spend on other types of art, and it is also in these cases that we find chryselephantine and lavish use of semi-precious stones. In Antiquity, most art had a religious function or significance. Art was therefore made to satisfy quite different purposes. To fully meet one of these aims would compromise the other; a work of art could not be designed to serve its religious function perfectly without, to a certain

³⁹ Bindman 2016, 238.

⁴⁰ Bindman 2016, 231.

⁴¹ Quatremère de Quincy 1815, 32.

extent, compromising its beauty. On this issue Quatremère de Quincy was at variance with Lessing, who claimed that some works of art are made for religious purposes, while others are purely aesthetic.⁴²

It is easy to understand that religion would benefit from its symbiosis with art. It is more difficult to see what advantage there would be for art, but Quatremère de Quincy seems to mean that the relationship is reciprocal — that there is a synergy effect for art as well. In any case, at some time in history religious (ecclesiastic) art and private art went separate ways. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the art world had been secularised, the church was no longer the principal patron of art, and the taste of cultured art lovers had changed. The modern art lover had learned to appreciate the works (ancient and modern) that he/she was accustomed to seeing in the museums, which, when it came to sculpture, all were clean and white. ‘One tends to consider’, Quatremère said, ‘all this mixture of colours as something alien that threatens modern art’s law of monotony. In this practice [of colouring] one sees something that looks like an invasion of painting into the domain of sculpture.’⁴³ Unfortunately, he adds, artists do not see this as a new possibility, but as an abuse of art’s resources.

A bit reluctantly, he admits that modern aesthetics is based on a preference for form over colour. Again he seems to agree with Winckelmann, who in the *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* claimed that the essence of art was the precise definition of an object’s outline, while colour had only a secondary function; colour, he said ‘assists beauty; ... it heightens beauty and its forms, but it does not constitute it’.⁴⁴ Quatremère’s statement in the introduction to *Le Jupiter Olympien*, that ‘the elementary principle of the art of sculpture rests on the reality of the form of objects, and that the fullness of imitation is independent of colour... points in the same direction.’⁴⁵ Although a prudent use of colour does not prevent us from being able to appreciate the beauty of an object’s form, ‘it is possible’, he says, that ‘certain mixtures of materials have been given a property which they really did not have, to imitate the colours of painting’.⁴⁶ In other words: a careful and sparing use of colour on statues would be acceptable if it respects the distinctive character of sculpture as a medium, and avoids imitating painted pictures.

As a student of ancient polychromy, Quatremère de Quincy realised that modern taste differed from that of the ancient Greeks. Consequently, modern art, even when it sought inspiration in the great style of Phidias and his contemporaries, was not obliged to copy every aspect of this style. The refusal to colour one’s statues was therefore not necessarily based on ignorance of basic facts about ancient art, nor must it be seen as an attempt to suppress or hide such facts. The difference between ancients and moderns was to a certain extent due to art’s religious function in ancient Greece. In modern society art

⁴² Quatremère de Quincy 1815, XXIII.

⁴³ Quatremère de Quincy 1815, XIX (my translation).

⁴⁴ Winckelmann 1856, 37–38.

⁴⁵ Quatremère de Quincy 1815, XXII.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

was autonomous and could pursue purely aesthetic aims (Quatremère de Quincy had visited Germany and was familiar with Kantian philosophy). True, at one point he suggested that our view of ancient art was flawed by the fact that museums mainly exhibit surviving works in white marble, but the preference for whiteness in modern art is still legitimate due to the primacy of form. The whiteness of marble or plaster made it easier for an art student to focus on the object's form. Hence, whiteness was discussed in relation to aesthetics, not race. Quatremère de Quincy's studies did not challenge this situation, nor did he intend to do so. Clearly there is an element of purism in this, but not the purism of racial hygiene.

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