CHAPTER 14

Greek Painting and the Challenge of *Mimēsis*

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A pigeon had grown very thirsty, so she flew from place to place looking for some water to drink. She saw a water jar painted on a wall and thought that it was actually full of water, so she flew right into the wall in order to take a drink.

Aesop, *Fables* 431, *The Pigeon and the Painting*

Introduction: The School of Sicyon, *Chrēstographia*, and "undecaying beauty"

The city of Sicyon, known for centuries for her famous school of arts (Strabo VIII, 6, 23; Plut. *Arat.* 12), auctioned her public painting collection to pay debts to Rome sometime in the second half of the first century BC (Cic. *Ad Att.* I, 19.9; 20.4). The paintings were acquired by the Roman aedile Aemilius Scaurus in 58 BC and exhibited at the wooden theater in the Campus Martius (Pliny, *NH* 35.127). Numerous wooden panels were seized as war booty from Greek cities or purchased to decorate public and private buildings in Rome (Raoul Rochette 1836; Carey 2004; Rouveret 2007a). However, the paintings created by the Sicyonian masters seem to have been the most prized ones. The orator Hortensius paid 114,000 sesterces to buy the Argonauts of Cydias and made a shrine for its display at his villa at Tusculum (Pliny, *NH* 35.130). Augustus paid the city of Cos a hundred talents to carry Apelles' legendary Anadyomene off to Rome, where it was dedicated in the Shrine of his father Caesar (Pliny, *NH* 35.91). Following the conquest of Egypt, he transferred many of Apelles' paintings, together with the wooden panels that originally decorated Alexander's funerary cart (Diod. Sic. 18, 26–28), in order to embellish the most frequented parts of his forum (Pliny, *NH* 35.94).

Apelles, the painter par excellence of the Sicyonian school, was appointed court painter by Philip II and his son Alexander (Pliny, *NH* 35.93), with whom he was in high favor (Moreno 2001). Apelles was probably the only painter to be allowed to reproduce Alexander's image (Horace, *Ep.* II, 1, 239; Pliny *NH* 7.125; Apuleius *Florid.* 117). But what was so unique about Apelles' portraits that Alexander thought they would be a glory both to the artist and himself (Cic. *Ep. ad fam.* V, 12, 229)? Probably the reason lay in the fact that the portraits went beyond the mere reproduction of a remarkable physical likeness, a legendary characteristic

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of many of Apelles' paintings (Pliny, *NH* 35.89, 95). Various ancient authors speak with high praise of his skills and his intellectual qualities: an extreme precision of lines and a certain "truth" in their drawing (Pliny, *NH*, 35.81–83; Dio Chrys. *De Invidia* II, 421; Herondas, *Mim.* 4, v. 73–73); an admirable sense of proportion (Pliny, *NH* 35.107); a delicate use of color in subdued hues (*colores austeri*, Pliny, *NH* 35.50); technical innovations (*atramentum*; Pliny, *NH* 35.97); modesty (Propert. 1, ii, 21–22); intellectual brilliance (Diog. Laert. I, 38). But what distinguished his own paintings and gave him supremacy among painters was the "graceful charm," the *charis* his figures emanated (Pliny, *NH* 35. 79–80; Quintil. *Inst. Orat.* XII, 10, 6; Ael. *VH* 12.41; Plut. *Demetr.* 22.6). Pliny holds that this painter almost certainly contributed more to painting than all other artists put together. He was also a theorist and had published books on the principles of painting (Pliny, *NH* 35.79).

The eulogy of the worshiper Kyno to the paintings of Apelles at the temple of Asclepius at Cos lays stress on the realism the painter's figures emanated and on the almost "true" appearance of the flesh, "so warm and throbbing with life," and calls Apelles' hands "truthful" in terms of the accuracy of his lines (Herondas, *Mim.* 4; Zanker 2006; Gutzwiller 2009). A similar comment is made by Pliny with regard to Apelles' nude hero who challenged Nature herself (*natura ipsam provocavit*; Pliny *NH* 35.94–95). Pliny further recalls that Apelles made his pictures resemble the persons represented in such an exact fashion that the physiognomists were able to form a judgment as readily from his portraits as they would have been had they seen the originals (Pliny, *NH* 35.88). The portrait of Alexander holding a thunderbolt was finished with so much skill and dexterity that it used to be said that there were two Alexanders: one invincible, the son of Philip, the other inimitable, the production of Apelles (Plut. *De fort. Magni Alexandri* II. 2). In Apelles' uniquely lifelike portraits, as Jaś Elsner points out, "representation effectively transcends the limits of art" (Elsner 2007).

Let us now return to the school of Sicyon and its tradition of panel painting. According to Plutarch, when Apelles came to Sicyon and paid a talent to be admitted into the society of its artists, he was already a renowned painter, but he desired "to share their fame rather than their art" (Plutarch, *Aratus* 13). In the same passage Plutarch further reports that "the fame of Sicyon's beautiful and refined paintings was still in full bloom, and they alone were considered the possessors of an undecaying beauty" (*ēnthei gar eti doxa tēs Sikūōnias mousēs kai chrēstographias ōs monēs adiaphtoron echousēs to kalon*). The word *chrēstographia* is not easy to translate into English, for it evokes a more profound and complex meaning than merely "beautiful" or "refined." It also encompassed the notion of "morally good," as in the noun *kalokagathia* in which both the notions of beauty and virtue are combined (see Aristotle on the requirement of tragedy that its characters be morally good "*chrēsta*," in order for the true tragic effect to be achieved; *Poet.* 54a19–22; Manieri 1995; Zanker 2000). In my opinion, *chrēstographia* is a key word for our understanding of the Sicyonian school's fame, and its significance has to do with the philosophical and aesthetic question of "how to represent" and "what is worthy of being represented" in figural painting, as originally defined through the highly influential, yet different, views on mimesis of Plato and Aristotle (Halliwell 2001, 2002, 2005).

Physical Resemblance and the Limits of the Visible and the Invisible

In Pliny's accounts of the development of painting – taken most often from earlier sources, mainly Antigonos of Carystos and Xenocrates of Athens – the quality of a work seems to be systematically judged on the criterion of greatest possible likeness to Nature (*similitudo*;

Isager 1991; Naas 2004). Despite the fact that reproducing Nature could occasionally be the result of an accident – as we know from Pliny's stories about the realistic effects achieved by hurling a sponge filled with paints onto a picture (on Apelles: Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 63.4; on Protogenes and Neacles: Pliny *NH* 35.102–103 and 35.104) – the prerequisite of truthfulness and accuracy seems to have dominated painters' artistic objectives and motivated their technical innovations, sometimes even leading to exaggerations. Seneca's tale (*Contr.* 10.5, 3–5) about Parrhasios torturing an Olynthian slave to death in order to use his painful expressions as a model for his Prometheus, may indeed reflect a certain obsession with lifelikeness, which impelled the artist to behave with such sadism (Rouveret 2003). Fulvius Sparsus, criticizing Parrhasios, says that he "was *making* a Prometheus, not painting one" and wonders what would have happened if the said artist had decided to paint a war (*Contr.* 10.5.3). Even for Pliny, excessive diligence and the drive for perfection could indeed become a source of "evil effects", and an artist should know when to take his hand away from a picture (Pliny, *NH* 35.80; 35.41–52). Verisimilitude, achieved through *diligentia*, although extremely valued, was not the sole criterion for artistic greatness, and qualities like *gratia* and *pulchritudo* were also considered important in the evaluation of an artwork (Daneu Lattanzi 1982; Elsner and Sharrock 1991; Perry 2000).

In one of the many tales of competition between painters, the one recounted by Pliny about the victory of Parrhasios' veil over Zeuxis' grapes is probably the most famous and often cited (Pliny, *NH* 35.65). Zeuxis had painted the grapes so realistically that the birds flew to the stage on which the picture was hanging. Parrhasios tricked his colleague's eye by painting the lifelike image of a curtain on a wall. Parrhasios won, and Zeuxis admitted he had deceived birds, but Parrhasios had deceived him, a painter. In Lacan's analysis of this anecdote, while the eyes of the birds are attracted by the visual illusion of the object, the eye of the painter is irritated by the veil and fooled by the symptomatic desire to get beyond the image itself. Illusionism reproduces "perceptual depth" only insofar as it "fools the eye" by letting it "perceive" in a "triumph of the eye over the gaze." According to Lacan, "if one wishes to deceive a man, what one presents to him is the painting of a veil, that is to say, something that incites him to ask what is behind it" (Lacan 2000, 538). Further in the same passage, Pliny says that Zeuxis subsequently painted a Child Carrying Grapes, and when birds flew down to settle on them, he was vexed with his own work, and came forward saying, with like frankness, "I have painted the grapes better than the boy, for had I been perfectly successful with the latter, the birds must have been afraid" (tr. Jex-Blake and Sellers 1896).

In contrast to the popularity that the Plinian version of the anecdote gained over the centuries, Seneca the Elder's version, recounted a century earlier (*Contr.* 10, 5, 27), did not attract particular scholarly attention:

> Zeuxis painted a boy holding a bunch of grapes, and because the bunch was so realistic that it even made birds fly up to the picture, one of the spectators said the birds thought ill of the picture: they would not have flown up if the boy had been a good likeness. They say Zeuxis erased the grapes and kept what was best in the picture not what was most like. (tr. Winterbottom 1974)[1]

The comparison of the two stories, however, is of particular interest, for it allows us to perceive a very different appreciation of Zeuxis' own work, vis-à-vis mimetic effects and the value of truthfulness in Classical painting. In Pliny's version, Zeuxis is deceived by not having sufficiently "fooled" the eye of the birds, who although attracted by the grapes, were not afraid of his insufficiently realistic boy. In Seneca's version, however, Zeuxis decides to erase the grapes and keep what is "best" in the picture (*melius*), not what is most "resemblant" (*similius*). Although the exact meaning of the adjective *melius* in this context remains rather vague, the viewer was probably unable to appreciate what lay "behind" the physical resemblance of

Zeuxis' figure. In other words, he perceived the painting through the "eye" only, but not through the "gaze." For Zeuxis, in Seneca's anecdote, the fundamental function of his art seems to have little to do with the realistic imitation of the visual appearance of the world for the pleasure of the human eye (Klimis 2003). If Zeuxis had deluded the birds, as Apelles later deceived quadrupeds (Pliny, *NH* 35.95), the viewer did not see in his *boy* what the painter sought to show. But why would Zeuxis bother to depict his human figure *melius* instead of using the same "illusionistic" technique as he did with his birds? I think the background of such an aesthetic prerequisite may be found in Aristotle's *Poetics*, where the philosopher argues that for "poetic effect a convincing impossibility is preferable to that which is unconvincing though possible," and adds that "It may be impossible that there should be such people as Zeuxis used to paint, but it would be better if there were; for the type should improve on the actual" (*toioutous einai oion Zeuxis egraphen, alla beltion; to gar paradeigma dei hyperechein*; Arist. *Po.* 1461b9). The *melius* in Seneca's story sounds like an echo of the *beltion*, the "improved appearance" of Zeuxis' figures in the Aristotelian treatise. In both cases, we are probably dealing with forms of idealization that lie beyond actual appearance. Zeuxis' famous Helen was after all the product of a composite of the best features of five different young women (Pliny, *NH* 35.64; Jex-Blake and Sellers 1896[illegible]–ii; Siebert 2009). Zeuxis' reaction of erasing the most illusionistic appearance from his painting falls within the general problematic of the representational scope of pictorial art and of whether its profit may be something more than a purely visual field.

Both Plato and Aristotle refer to figurative art partly because of its prominence in their surrounding culture, and especially in Athens. But debates on representational mimesis were already under way a century earlier than Plato's thinking about mimesis evolved, when the first recorded generation of great masters, such as Polygnotos, was already attempting the truthful reproduction of Nature (Halliwell 2002, 120–124). In the earliest non-Platonic text to discuss the representational capability of painting, Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, Socrates' questions to the painter Parrhasios focus on whether visual mimesis can be enriched with an evaluative dimension, can represent the non-sensory, and can perceive and depict character (*ēthos*) through physical expression. Although it is a commonly held belief that Plato limits visual mimesis to the mirroring of visible reality, based on his famous treatment of painting in the first part of *Republic* 10, in a passage in the *Cratylus* (422e4) he actually acknowledges that the relationship between a painted image and its model is not confined to the mere reproduction of the actual world (Goldschmidt 1986; Halliwell 2000, 2005). In *Republic* 3.401a–d Plato develops his ideals regarding the education of the young based on the notions of beauty and grace, qualities, he claims, that should be found in painting and all similar craftsmanship. Plato encourages one to search for those craftsmen who are capable of following the "trail of true beauty and grace" and to ban from the Republic the "other craftsmen" that represent the "licentious, illiberal and graceless." According to Xenophon's dialogue, painting is capable of showing character through the figures depicted. In *Republic* 3 mimesis is engaged in making moral sense of the human, through the conciliation of art with beauty and truth. Art should aspire to be *kalon* in the fullest sense of the word, the idea of beauty including moral and spiritual as well as physical beauty (Janaway 1995; Destrée 2012).

Some centuries later, Aelian (*Hist. Misc.* 4.4) recalls a story that had attracted his attention to a law of the Thebans: "I hear that in Thebes a law was in force which instructed artists – both painters and sculptors – to make their portraits better than the original. As punishment for those who produced a sculpture or painting less attractive than the original the law threatened a fine of a thousand drachmae." In the Loeb edition "*es to kreitton tas eikonas mimeisthe*" is translated "make their portraits flattering" (tr. Wilson 1997). In the context of Classical painting and aesthetics, however, as suggested above, to make a portrait *es to kreitton* does not necessarily mean to flatter the individual represented, as was clearly the case with the latter-day

"professional flatterers" who embellished the portraits of individuals in order to satisfy their personal vanity. In Lucian's discussions of the differences between flattery and praise and the problems of eulogistic discourse in an imperial context, the author uses the eloquent example of portrait painters to condemn people fond of being flattered and fooled in their images (*Pro Imag.* 6): "What these people look for in a painter is readiness to improve nature." Further on, referring to the proper formulae of panegyric, Polystratos concludes that the flatterer praises for selfish ends and cares little about truth, whereas the panegyrist's success depends on the "goodness" of his illustrations (*Pro Imag.* 19). He claims that "this goodness is shown not when the illustration is just like the thing illustrated, nor yet when it is inferior, but when it is as high above it as may be." In Lucian's account the panegyrist takes the virtues his subjects really do possess and makes the most of them. In praising a dog, for example, a skillful panegyrist should be able to liken "the dog's size and spirit to the lion's" (tr. Fowler 1905). Aristotle in his *Poetics* (1448a1–6) already refers to the possibilities poetry offers for representing men "better," or "worse," or "much what they are," just like in painting: *Polygnotos men gar kreittous, Pauson de cheirous, Dionysios de omoious eikazein*. In his *Politics* (1340a36–38), he recommends young men not to contemplate the works of Pauson, but those of Polygnotos and of any other moral painter of sculptor (*estin ēthikos*). Although G. Zanker believes that Aristotle is alluding to social class at *Poetics* 1448a1–6 (Zanker 2000), I think the reference actually has to do with moral status, as is more commonly believed (Reinach 1921; Rouveret 1989; Manieri 1995) – even if there is probably a certain association between social class and moral status anyway – and that the possibility of painters depicting men as "better" or "worse" also relied on their personal skill. It is interesting to note that while Polygnotos is considered a master painter (for all relevant accounts of Polygnotos see Reinach 1921, 86–152), Aristophanes alludes to a painter Pauson using the adjective "scurvy knave" (*Arch.* 854; tr. Rogers 1986) and, according to the scholia of *Archanians*, Pauson was a "perfectly wicked caricaturist" (for negative judgments on Pauson's character and the mediocre quality of his art, see Reinach 1921, 174–175). As far as Dionysius is concerned, according to Plutarch, although his paintings are full of strength and vigor they "seem forced and labored" (*Timol.* 36.2).

Discussing the end of virtue in his *Magna Moralia* (I, 1.19–20), Aristotle maintains that a painter might be a good imitator (*agathos mimētēs*) and yet not be praised, if he does not make it his aim to imitate what is best in his subjects (*ta kallista mimeisthai*). In his *Poetics* (1454b8–11), he advises poets to "ennoble" the defects of character of their subjects while preserving the type, following the example of the good portrait painters, who reproduced the distinctive form of the original, while also creating a likeness which was true to life and yet more beautiful (*omoious poiountes, kallious graphousin*). The question of "idealization" is posed in terms of both physical verisimilitude and *ethical* understanding of reality, and the representational capabilities of the painters are challenged in both the reproduction of the visible *kalos* and of the invisible *ēthos*. Polygnotos, the *agathos ēthographos*, seems to have transcended the sensory domain and delineated character, evoking *ēthos* in terms of moral excellence (Rouveret 1989; Brecoulaki forthcoming). Zeuxis, although devoid of "ethical quality" (… *ē de Zeuxidos graphē ouden echei ēthos;* Aristotle, *Po.* 1450a16–28), depicted his figures as more "beautiful", aspiring to an idealized form of "beauty" (Arist. *Pr.* 961b9). It is possible that the famous painters of the Sicyonian school, having assimilated the technical achievements of their predecessors and acquired a theoretical/philosophical background to the problems of representational *mimēsis*, achieved the merging of both qualities in their paintings: a remarkable likeness on the one hand, as attested in the numerous textual sources; a significant insight into a person's noble signs of character (*sēmeia*; Aristotle *De interp.* 1.16a3–8) on the other, as the term *chrēstographia*, in my opinion, suggests. The *chrēstographia* of the Sicyonian school would in fact have reflected objectives of mimesis conditioned by

moral aspects and artistic goals, rather than material/professional motivations, thus producing "unprofitable imitations of art" (*mataiotechnies*; Quintilian, *Inst. Orat.* II, 20.3).

The "undecaying beauty" of Sicyonian paintings most probably encapsulated forms of idealization in both their physical and moral aspects. Apelles' "inimitable Alexander" would have achieved not only a remarkable physical likeness, but also an insight into Alexander's ambitious and charismatic persona, possibly with a heroic overtone, "ennobling its character," in the way Achilles was portrayed by Agathon and Homer (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1454b14). Apelles had achieved a reproduction of the image that Alexander wished to be handed down to posterity, one that showed "the same fierce martial vigor, the same great and glorious genius, the same fresh and youthful beauty, the same fair forehead with its back-streaming hair" (Apuleius, *Florid.* 7; tr. Butler 1909; Nielsen 1992). What is worth stressing, however, is that Apelles achieved such an "inimitable" painting with a simple, extremely limited and low-cost pigment palette.

The Aesthetics of the "Four-Color Palette"

Describing the portrait of Alexander the Great holding a thunderbolt, Pliny invites his readers to remember that the highly realistic effects achieved in the painting – paid in gold coins measured by its weight – were produced using only four colors (*NH* 35.92). As Stewart points out, "This parsimony is the key to the entire description, deflating Alexander's extravagance and locating the pictorial genius at the hub of the narrative" (Stewart 1993, 35). Pliny blames luxury (*luxuria*) for the moral decline of Rome and for the decadent state of the art of painting (Isager 1991), and expresses his preference for the old Greek masters, concluding with the nostalgic phrase: "Everything in fact was superior in the days when resources were scantier" (35.50; tr. Rackham 1952). In the same passage he gives an account of the four pigments that Apelles, Aetion, Melanthius, and Nicomachus used; pigments consisting of red and yellow ochers, a white clay, and charcoal black. This modest gamut of pigments allowed painters to produce their "immortal works." This praise of the "simplicity" of a painter's palette in a way echoes the moral connotation of the Platonic *haplotēs*, the corner-stone of Plato's city, presented in the education of the young as the pursuit of *euētheia* (*Rep.* 400e) and should be viewed in the light of Pliny's more general instructive moralizing and his attack on *luxuria*, as the opposite of the "ancient virtues" promoted by the Flavian dynasty. Pliny, by opposing the category of simple and somber colors (*colores austeri*) to the *colores floridi*, was above all concerned to show that the simplicity of the ancients was preferable to the modern proliferation of expensive materials (Isager 1991, 226–227; Brecoulaki 2006b; Rouveret 2007b).

But if we move from art criticism and take a closer look at the actual painter's palette, to what extent did the restricted number of pigments indeed represent an aesthetic choice? What were its "pictorial" virtues and limitations? Could it be specifically related to the painting of flesh, as J. Cage has suggested (Cage 1981)? The subdued pictorial effect resulting from a palette from which bright and highly prized pigments were excluded was indeed more appropriate for achieving physical likeness, considering the fact that saturated colors attract the eye of the spectator, often creating high contrasts and enhancing bi-dimensional effects. Cinnabar, for instance, the brightest red of the ancient palette, was too harsh to be used in figural painting, and that is why painters opted for the most opaque and less brilliant hues of iron-based ochers (Pliny, *HN* 35.114–115). Even though we may not need to interpret Pliny's circumstantial account literally, for painters felt free to improvise by adding or subtracting a color from their palette, it was possible for skillful painters to exploit the virtues of a limited palette and produce a large enough gamut of hues with a restricted number of

pigments. By mixing red ocher with white, a range of pinkish hues is achieved; by adding black, a range of browns and purple; the mixture of red and yellow produces orange hues; from the mixture of black and white, cold gray hues can be used for shading, giving the impression of blue when seen from a distance (on the "bluish" aspect of black see Bruno 1977, 73–77); olive-green hues may also be achieved through a mixture of yellow ocher and black. The expansion of intermixtures between the four pigments alone could in fact produce 819 color variations (Bertrand 1893, 139; Cage 1981)! Despite the negative connotation that the word "mixture" (*krasis*, *mixis*) was occasionally endowed with in textual sources, due to its metaphorical association with decay, corruption (*pthora*), and alteration (*metabolē*, *alloiōsis*), the very practice of mixing pigments practiced by painters, either by physical blending or by superimposition of multiple paint layers, is well documented in surviving Classical and Hellenistic painting (Brecoulaki 2006a, 442–450). In fact even Plutarch, who seems to praise the purity of unmixed colors as "virgin and undefiled" (*Quaest. Conv.* 725c), elsewhere, discussing Polygnotos' *Sack of Troy*, admits that realistic painting may not be achieved without mixtures and that such practices need not take away from the reputation of the artist (*De def. orac., Moralia*, V, 47). In Lucian's *Imagines* (6–7), the quality of a painter is measured in terms of his skill in mixing and laying on colors.

The Painter's Material Touch and the Evidence from Surviving Documents of Greek Painting

The information retrieved from texts is often confirmed by the surviving body of ancient Greek painting. Sometimes, the actual painted documents allow us to learn even more about the pictorial experience of Classical painters than the textual sources have recorded, and to document technical details that become significant in the context of mimetic representation. Despite the fact that no Classical panel painting has survived and that the documentation we possess comes from funerary contexts of the Late Classical and Hellenistic periods, it is possible to appreciate, if not the quality of lost masterpieces, at least a tangible testimony of the achievements of Greek painting at a time when this art had reached its culmination. The best preserved corpus of paintings, the one which allows us to evaluate a variety of technical applications and stylistic approaches to figural representation, comes from ancient Macedonia (Brecoulaki 2006a). Macedonian kings were patrons of the arts, articulating their cultural and political aspirations and adorning their court with the glory the art of painting had gained thanks to the great Athenian public buildings and Panhellenic sanctuaries. Prolific artists are said to have taken up residence at their court. King Archelaos had hired Zeuxis to decorate his house at Aegae (Aelian, *Hist. Misc.* 14.17), numerous portraits of Philip II and Alexander were produced by famous artists (Pliny, *NH* 35.95; 35.114), and Ptolemy Philadelphos collected drawings and paintings by the Sicyonian school (Plut. *Aratos* 12.5; 13.4; Ath. *Deipn.* 5, 196A–197C). On the facades and interiors of Macedonian funerary monuments – ranging chronologically between the third quarter of the fourth and the end of the third century BC – and through a variety of themes associated with male activities (hunting, war, racing, the symposium, philosophy) or in mythological scenes, we find painters dealing with the realistic rendering of the human figure. It is interesting to note that although the surviving paintings have all been executed on wall or stone, their technical background relied on the *technē* of panel painting. This is particularly evident in both the use of organic binders mixed with their pigments, testifying to a generalized use of *secco* and tempera techniques, and in the manipulation of color in sophisticated mixtures and superimpositions of paint layers (Brecoulaki 2006a, 399–407). The meticulously executed paintings that are preserved

on the royal tombs of Aegae, for instance, clearly reflect the dependence of these paintings on pre-existing panel originals which were probably created by famous painters of the Macedonian court. However, a wall painting – even one executed in a tempera technique – could hardly be expected to reproduce the mimetic effects that a painter using the encaustic technique on panel could achieve, this allowing the artist a broader spectrum of opportunities to exercise his craftsmanship, for example through the creation of more translucent and smoother layers of paint, thus enhancing subtler gradations of color.

From the technological studies of the Macedonian paintings, almost the entire gamut of pigments of the Classical painter's palette, as described in the textual sources, has been reconstructed (Brecoulaki 2006a; Kakoulli 2009). An ample variety of pigments of mineral and organic origin, including both sober and bright hues, testify to the coloristic possibilities that painters created in their quest to achieve realistic effects. A restricted palette, expanded by intermixtures, is used to render large-scale figures, but blue and green pigments are also introduced to indicate details in the faces or produce cool shadows in the bodies. The painters' color repertory is significantly amplified and diversified for the rendering of draperies, various objects, and floral motifs. I will use some of the most representative examples taken from the corpus of funerary Macedonian painting to show how anonymous yet skilled painters of the fourth century BC assimilated the technical know-how of their predecessors and experimented in the creation of lifelike painting effects to suggest body volume, facial features, and expressions.

Large-scale representations are usually painted directly on white, abstract backgrounds and are rarely part of a realistic landscape, as is the case of the hunting scene on the tomb of Philip II at Aegae (Andronikos 1984; Saatsoglou-Paliadeli 2004). Dark blue backgrounds are also used to enhance the three-dimensional effect of the figures, showing a reliance on the sculptural tradition of pedimental compositions (Rhomiopoulou and Schmidt-Dounas 2010). In the majority of the paintings, flesh tones are rendered with a very limited variety of iron-based pigments, producing hues ranging from light pink and orange to dark brown and purple. The Classical "simple" palette offered the necessary ground on which painters relied in order to reproduce their figures and does not seem to represent a distinctive marker of a specific class of painters. Each artist uses its materials to fulfill different aesthetic requirements, according to his personal style and skill, but also depending on the "message" a painting is expected to transmit to the viewer, within its specific social and cultural context. The earliest surviving painting preserved on the back of a marble throne in the so-called Tomb of Queen Eurydice at Aegae (third quarter of the fourth century BC) offers our closest parallel to a panel painting of the fourth century BC, in terms of both format and technique (egg tempera).[2] The painting reproduces a couple on a *quadriga*, identified as the gods Hades and Persephone, detached on a light blue background (Andronikos 1987; Kottaridi 2006). What is remarkable about this painting is the extreme accuracy in line drawing, combined with subtle tonal variations, which bring to mind the achievements of great masters. A detailed preliminary drawing was sketched directly on the white marble surface. The predilection for the use of lead white – a common panel painting material often attested in the later portraits of Greco-Roman Egypt (Corcoran and Svoboda 2010) – offered the painter advanced possibilities to build up his figures due to its thickness and opacity, and to highlight facial details in sharp and well-defined brushstrokes, as in the reflected light in the figure's eyes (Figure 14.1). In accordance with the older Greek painting tradition in which differences in sex are represented using different skin colors (Grand-Clément 2011, 196–106), the god Hades' complexion is rendered in orange-brown, while Persephone's flesh preserves a peachy light hue. It is interesting to observe that despite the iconographic limitations imposed by the subject matter, a divine epiphany, the painter is experimenting with the realistic rendering of his figures' facial features, as if he was striving to reproduce personalized traits. Prerequisites of realistic representations are even more evident on larger-scale figures, as,

Figure 14.1 Aegae, "Tomb of Queen Eurydice," second half of fourth century BC. Painted marble throne. Hades and Persephone on a quadriga, detail. Photo C. Simatos/ Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities.

for example, on the reclining couple on the pediment of the so-called Tomb of the Palmettes in the nearby city of Mieza, or the standing figures on the facade of the tomb of Aghios Athanasios, near Thessaloniki, both monuments dated to the late fourth and early third centuries BC.

The two male figures depicted as standing guards on the facade of the Aghios Athanasios tomb, when seen from a distance, give the impression of real, three-dimensional bodies (Tsimbidou-Avloniti 2005, 142–147; Brecoulaki 2006a, 294–302, pls 99–101). It is perhaps the most tangible evidence of how ancient painting could produce *trompe l'oeil* effects with remarkable simplicity of means, even on walls (Figure 14.2). For the creation of the flesh of the two figures, unique in terms of their quality and excellent state of preservation in the corpus of early Hellenistic figural painting, a restricted palette of pigments, as described by Pliny, has been applied, producing a paler pinkish complexion for the figure on the left and a darker orange-brown tint for the figure on the right. A close look at the figures' faces allows the spectator to further discern individualized facial features and to get an insight into their "invisible" emotional disposition which is captured in the painted *eikon*. Their reclining heads and downward gaze, the sober expression of their faces and the luminous blue in the whites of the eyes as if they are about to burst into tears (Figure 14.3), release a feeling of grief and introversion: the spectator sees the face, but he also perceives emotions "through" it. Even if the painter of Aghios Athanasios was not a genius like the ones praised in literary sources, he was certainly able not only to effectively convey a lifelike appearance through his figures, but also to evoke their emotional state.

The well-known hunting scene from the facade of the tomb of Philip II at Aegae offers the most complete surviving composition of ancient Greek painting. Since its discovery, it has attracted scholarly attention from various points of view, both historical and art historical, and many questions remain open as to the meaning of the scene and the identity of the

Figure 14.2 Aghios Athanasios, Thessaloniki, end of fourth century BC. Painted facade. Large-scale male figure, detail. Photo M. Tsimbidou-Avloniti, 2005, pl. 38.

persons depicted (Ignatiadou 2010; Franks 2012). Nonetheless, most scholars agree in recognizing Alexander in the central equestrian figure – in which case, this is the only original painted portrait of Alexander surviving today. Despite its scanty state of preservation, it is still possible to distinguish facial features and the will of the painter to emphasize Alexander's gaze with a large brushstroke of dark color below the eyes, one of his strongest features according to our textual sources (Plut. *Alex.* IV, 3). The actual color of the face's complexion is rather pale, but originally it must have been painted with hues of pink, as the rest of the best-preserved figures allow us to assume (Saatsoglou-Paliadeli 2004, pl. 14). In Plutarch's well-known passage on Alexander's physical appearance, the author notes that "when Apelles painted Alexander wielding a thunderbolt, he did not reproduce his complexion accurately, but he made it appear darker and swarthy, whereas we are told that he was fair-skinned, with a ruddy tinge that showed itself especially upon his face and chest." It is possible that Apelles' decision to enhance Alexander's complexion by giving it a darker hue corresponded to the Archaic convention of depicting the male flesh skin as darker, as a marker of vigor and, by extension, of heroic allure. Such an example is made evident on

Figure 14.3 Aghios Athanasios, Thessaloniki, end of fourth century BC. Painted facade. Large-scale male figure, detail of the face. Photo H. Brecoulaki, 2006, pl. 101.2.

another Macedonian tomb (the so-called Tomb Bella) dated to the early third century BC, close to the royal necropolis of Aegae, where three large-scale figures occupy the upper part of its plain facade. The central figure, dressed in military attire, presumably identical to the person buried in the tomb, is flanked by a female offering him a wreath and by another warrior sitting upon a pile of shields (Drougou and Saatsoglou-Paliadeli 1999, 66–69, figs 90–94). The color of the central figure's flesh is significantly darker than that of the two other figures, probably serving to accentuate the status of the deceased with a heroic overtone (Brecoulaki 2012; Grand-Clément 2013). The association of a dark complexion with the heroic universe is made evident in Plutarch's account of Euphranor's Theseus, whose reddish skin – unlike the light complexion of Parrhasios' Theseus, "who had lived on a diet of roses" (Pliny, *NH* 35.129) – make the viewer exclaim, "Race of the great-hearted hero Erechtheus, whom once Athena nurtured, the daughter of Zeus" (*De Gloria Athen*. 345.2).

A different requirement of artistic verisimilitude, however, seems to have determined the color of the hunter's flesh in the Aegae scene, posing the problem of the interdependence between aesthetic and "moral" values in the production of a painting. In terms of coloristic effects, the hunting scene offers the most tangible evidence of a remarkably balanced use of warm and cool hues, which aims at reproducing realism and depth in both the rendering of the human figures and the elements of the landscape. Mastering the use of shading and manipulating the effects of his light source, the painter transfers onto the wall a technical knowledge which derives from the tradition of panel painting. A recent technological examination of the wall painting enriched our knowledge of the materials and pictorial methods applied to reproduce the human figure and achieve realistic effects.[3] Apart from the usual earthen gamut of pigments, which represents the base of an ancient painter's palette, organic pigments of pinkish and purple hues, together with copper-based green and blue pigments,

Figure 14.4 Aegae, Tomb of Philip II, 336 BC. Facade, painted frieze, detail of a hunter's body. Photo C. Simatos/ Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities.

have been identified. The warm hues resulting from iron-based and organic pigments were selectively applied to the bodies and faces of the figures to highlight muscles in rosy hues, to mark body elements that come forward in more intense purplish pink (Figure 14.4), or to color the cheeks and the lips in more or less saturated hues of red (Brecoulaki 2006a, pls 31–32, 35). The painter applied uniform layers of a dull olive-green color to achieve cooler hues and indicate shading in the receding parts of the bodies (Figure 14.5), by mixing carbon black with a rare copper-based green pigment, conichalcite (on the properties of this mineral see Brecoulaki and Perdikatsis 2002). The use of a green-hued color to produce shadows on the hunters' bodies represents a stylistic marker of the Aegae painter and inaugurates the tradition, in Western painting, of the so-called *verdaccio* technique, a soft greenish-brown hue that Italian and Flemish masters adopted as an underpainting, in order to enhance realism in the depiction of the flesh tone. The light color of the hunter's complexion does not follow the aesthetic convention of a dark, brownish-red color for the male flesh. On the contrary, for both the bodies and the faces the painter uses delicate rosy and peachy hues that bring to mind the softness and transparency of coloris which Apelles achieved in his famous Pancaspe (Lucian *Imag.* 7), "neither too pale nor too high-coloured." The Greek work Lucian uses for the description of Pancaspe's flesh tint is *enaimon*, suggesting the effect produced by the fragile blood vessels running just under the skin. The only figure in the composition painted

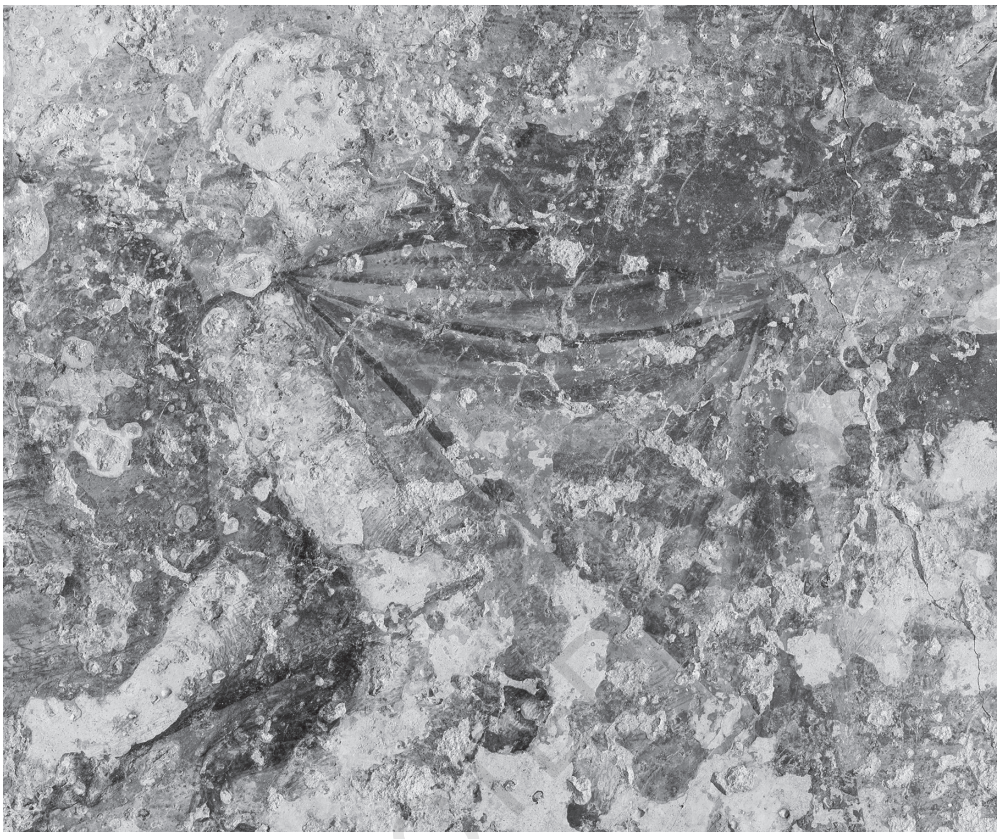

Figure 14.5 Aegae, Tomb of Philip II, 336 BC. Facade, painted frieze, detail of a hunter's body. Photo C. Simatos/Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities.

with a darker complexion in the hunting scene is the fully dressed hunter on the extreme right, "retardataire" in his fashions, as A. Cohen has remarked (Cohen 2010), holding the kind of net that Plato condemns as unheroic (*Leg.* 7.824). Ancient writings on physiognomy were very concerned with the color of complexions as an index of personality. Contrary to the positive "heroic" connotation with which a dark complexion was endowed in an older tradition, in pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomonics* the flesh color of the courageous and talented man (*andreiou* and *euphuous sēmeia*) should be of a brilliant (AI, 807b2; *to chrōma epi tou sōmatos oxū*), clear pinkish hue (AI, 807b17; *chrōma leukeruthron kai katharon*). Considering the social and cultural context in which the Aegae painting was produced, could we speculate that the painter of the hunting scene depicted his figures in a clear pinkish hue in order to mark their high social hierarchy and to simultaneously signify courage and winsomeness?

An additional cool pigment, blue this time (Egyptian blue), was used to mark the white area of the hunter's brown eyes, a technique that was also observed in the large-scale figures of the Aghios Athanasios tomb (Figure 14.3). Such a technical detail becomes significant in the field of artistic experimentations that enabled fourth-century BC painters to reproduce lifelike effects. In fact, recent research on ancient painting and sculptural polychromy has demonstrated that application of Egyptian blue in the white area of the eye represented a well-established technique, aiming at producing an effect of moistness and light that could revive and accentuate the gaze (Verri 2009; Verri, Opper, and Deviese 2010). It is interesting

to note that this method was still practiced by painters of the first and second centuries AD (for examples of "Egyptian blue eyes" in the Fayoum portraits, see Verri 2009). The importance of the eyes within a portrait is emphasized in textual sources, often with a physiognomic dimension. Philostratus stresses the ampler possibilities that painting offers among plastic arts, in conveying the varying nature of eyes (*Imagines* I, 294–295 K). In Lucian's *Imagines* (6–8), the author describes the features of the Emperor Lucius Verus' mistress Panthea, comparing them with fragments from some of the most famous sculptures and paintings and stressing the beauty of her gaze "so liquid, and at the same time so clear and winsome" (Cistaro 2009). The melting gaze and heavenward turn of Alexander's eyes is recounted by Plutarch (*Moralia* 335; *Alexander* 4, 1–2), and a generation after him, in Polemon's physiognomics, eyes with a moist and bright look "suggest lofty thoughts which accomplish great deeds" (Elsner 2007). "Good" eyes are associated with brightness and are full of "beautiful light" (Polemon, *Physiognomonics*, Leiden ch. 1, A16). On the basis of the archaeological evidence we possess, we may wonder whether use of Egyptian blue to mark the white area of the eyes not only fulfilled aesthetic requirements – to achieve a chromatic balance between cool and warm hues in the face – but was a representational invention allowing the suggestion of both physical and "moral" beauty.

Conclusion: Artistic *Mimēsis* and Ways of Seeing

While the use of a blue pigment in the white area of the eyes allowed painters to achieve an enhanced effect of physical resemblance, we have to be aware that at the same time they were moving a step away from "nature's truth," and that what they were striving to imitate was above mere physical perception and reproduction. In fact, nothing "blue" really exists in the white area of the human eye and the color blue can only be found in the eye's iris. The cool hue that ancient painters wished to evoke in the white area of the eye through technical means is their "subjective" interpretation of the rather warm hue that the small veins running under the sclera are likely to produce. What is it then that a painter *imitates*? The importance of observing likeness directly from nature and not from art works was already underlined by Aristotle in *De partibus animalium*: "If we study mere likeness of these things and take pleasure in so doing, because then we are contemplating the painter's or the carver's Art which fashioned them, and yet fail to delight much more in studying the works of Nature themselves … that would be a strange absurdity indeed" (tr. Peck 1937). The famous painter Eupompos of the Sicyonian school encouraged painters to imitate "Nature herself" and not another artist (*HN* 34, 62), because in an artistic reproduction, regardless of its degree of likeness to the original, Nature is inevitably "filtered" through the artist's eye. Likewise Pliny the Younger fears that the artist might try to improve on the paintings he is meant to copy and not produce accurate representations (*Letters* IV. XXVIII; Perry 2000). The problem of representational *mimēsis* and *homeiotēs* with the original is clearly posed not only with regard to what the eye cannot possibly perceive – the *psychēs ēthos* about which Socrates and Parrhasios are arguing in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (3.10), "that which has neither shape nor color … and is not even visible" – but also for the natural phenomena that the eye can indeed perceive. The skin color may be reproduced, as in the case of the *andreikelon* of Eupompos' Theseus, with dark red and brown ochers, with a lighter rosy complexion like the one in Parrhasios' version of the hero, or with greenish reflections through the combination of more pigments, as the Aegae hunters demonstrate (Laneyrie Dagen 2008). In each case, a painter's challenge is to embody in his paintings the knowledge of reality even while accepting that artistic reality cannot but be a subjective interpretation of natural phenomena, affected by social and cultural criteria and preconceptions about beauty and moral values.

Likeness to the original, with reference both to the reproduction of the visible character of a man and the illusion of its psychological engagement (Halliwell 2002), was certainly a dominant goal among classical painters aiming at pictorial *mimēsis*. But there were many ways of "seeing" and interpreting reality, as the numerous anecdotes on painters' competitions and the reactions of viewers suggest. Apelles hid behind his works to listen to the public judgments of passing spectators, ready to correct his paintings (Pliny, *NH* 35.84–85). Alexander expressed a certain dislike on viewing his equestrian portrait produced by Apelles at Ephesos, despite the fact that the artist was considered the best portrait painter of his time (Pliny, *NH* 35.95). Together with the accumulation and assimilation of specific pictorial means which enabled painters to imitate the physical appearance of the human figure or the detailed representation of real-world objects in general, preoccupations with the depiction of the nonvisible are often to be found in textual sources. Orators have sung the praises of Timanthes' Iphigeneia for having exhausted the spectrum of grief in the expressions of all those present (Pliny, *NH* 35.74). Aristides from Thebes was famous for his ability to depict the mind and express the feelings of human beings, which the Greeks call *ēthē*, and also their emotions (Pliny, *NH* 35.98). In Xenophon's *Memorabilia* Socrates asks Parrhasios whether the feelings of sympathy and aversion that human beings express by their looks may be imitated in the eyes of a painted figure (Halm-Tisserant 2009).

No painting by Apelles is preserved today, nor is any other signed work of a Greek master from the famous *pinakothēkai* of Athens or Sicyon. By not actually existing, ancient Greek painting has incited us to imagine and reconstruct what probably never existed. Nonetheless, current archaeological evidence allows us to get an idea of what Greek painting looked like. If the preserved corpus of paintings of the fourth century BC in Greece adorns walls, stones, or furniture of funerary monuments, the extraordinary portrait *pinakothēkē* of Greco-Roman Egypt encapsulates the tradition of Greek panel painting in its last effulgence (Doxiadis 1995; Riggs 2005). In this Roman province of the Hellenized East, Greek painters of the second and third centuries AD still sought the "spiritual" in their portraits without sacrificing "materiality," as would prove to be the case of the Christian art which followed. The "fear" of Plato that lifelike paintings will interact somehow with reality and will create "false impressions," as expressed in *Republic* 10, in a sense anticipated the Byzantine iconoclastic controversy 12 centuries later. However, the requirement to make man "look high above the original," even in Byzantine icons, where representational *mimēsis* will no longer have to deal with "eikastic" image making (Guastini 2011), may be traced in the beneficial transformation John of Damascus refers to as "*kalēn alloiōsin*," a concept encompassing the Platonic notions of "beauty" and "goodness" from a different perspective.

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NOTES

[1] *Traditur enim Zeuxin, ut puto, pinxisse puerum uuam tenentem et cum tanta esset similitudo uuae ut etiam aues aduolare faceret operi, quendam ex spectatoribus dixisse, aues male existimare de tabula; non fuisse enim aduolaturas si ille similis esset. Zeuxin aiunt obleuisse uuam et seruasse id quod melius.* E. Perry discusses this passage in a footnote (Perry 2000, 452 n.25).

[2] The analytical results of this investigation have been presented at The 5th International Round Table on Greek and Roman Sculptural and Architectural Polychromy, Athens, November 7–8, 2013: H. Brecoulaki, A. Kottaridi, G. Verri, A. G. Karydas, S. Sotiropoulou, L. Lazzarini, M. P. Colombini, A. Andreotti, Z. Papliaka, J. Dyer, and G. Georgiou, "A New Technological Investigation on Two Exceptional Painted Marble Artifacts of the Late Classical Period: The Sarcophagus from Tomb 128 Et Kition and the Marble Throne from the *Tomb of Eurydice* at Aegae."

[3] A technological examination of the hunting frieze took place in February 2013, in collaboration with the 17th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, A. Karydas (International Atomic Energy Agency, Vienna), and G. Verri (The Courtauld Institute of Art, London).

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FURTHER READING

A. Reinach's *Receuil Milliet* (Reinach 1921) remains the most comprehensive anthology of ancient texts on Greek painting. Especially valuable is the reference work by Rouveret (1989), with a dense overview of ancient painting and the first systematic attempt to associate texts with images and archaeological documentation. The most stimulating and in-depth approach to the problems of artistic mimesis in ancient Greece is provided by Halliwell's seminal work (2002) and his relevant articles on the topic

(Halliwell 2000, 2001, and 2005). For Pliny the Elder and his 35th book of *Natural History*, see Jex-Blake and Sellers (1896) and a most up-to-date analysis by Isager (1991). Issues of verisimilitude and artistic quality as expressed in Pliny's writings are discussed by Perry (2000) and Naas (2004). The volume edited by Rouveret, Dubel and Nass (2006) addresses interesting questions as to the value and use of color in ancient painting and polychromy, based on the interpretation of Greek and Latin texts. Recent publications on the surviving painted documents of the Late Classical and Hellenistic periods in Macedonia have shed more light on the themes and styles of Greek painting (Saatsoglou-Paliadeli 2004; Tsimbidou-Avloniti 2005; Rhomiopoulou and Schmidt-Dounas 2010) and its technological aspects (for a synthetic presentation of the corpus of painting in ancient Macedonia and the function of color, see Brecoulaki 2006a). For a critical art-historical evaluation of aspects of Macedonian iconography see Cohen (2010).