

The 25th Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference

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Programme and Abstracts



Society for the Promotion
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Barbican Research
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**University of
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School of Archaeology & Ancient History,
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Nobilia opera? Re-staging Greek Artworks in Roman Contexts. New Approaches and Perspectives

Session organisers and chairs: Gabriella Cirucci and Alessandro Poggio

Current scholarship has reached opposite conclusions on the role played by ancient Greek artworks in Roman society. Regardless of the fact that the reuse is explained in terms of art collection (Bounia 2004; Rutledge 2012) or—on the other hand—of a resemantization deprived of any aesthetic purpose (Hölscher 2006; Bravi 2012), most of the interpretations tend to be one-sided, and none of them can be considered fully satisfactory. The conventional approach to the topic has favoured a focus on specific categories of objects (Greek masterpieces of canonical artists), audience (élite viewers), or on specific historical periods, personalities, and settings. In this perspective, minor attention has been devoted to the material evidence, which consists mostly of anonymous and more ordinary sculptures and reliefs unearthed in Roman contexts of reuse. At the same time, transformation of both objects and display settings over time and space has consistently been overlooked.

This session aims to reverse this disinclination by adopting a more object-oriented, and a wider cultural historical perspective. Thanks to recent studies on the impact of non-Roman artifacts on the Roman material culture (Versluys 2002; Bricault et al. 2007), and theoretical reassessments of the scope of Roman eclecticism (Elsner 2006; Tronchin 2012), we intend to shed new light on the reuse of Greek artworks in Roman contexts. Both the original significance of the reused Greek artworks at the time of the first removal to Rome, and the later meaning(s) they assumed by change of ownership, audience, and settings will be explored in light of the mutual interaction between reused objects and contexts of reuse. We are particularly interested in papers discussing both theoretical approaches to the topic and case studies focusing on the transformation of reused Greek artifacts and Roman display settings over time. The main areas of research are late Republican and Imperial Rome and Italy, but we welcome papers dealing with other areas or periods in a comparative perspective.

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Sunday morning, Lecture Room 5

- 09.00 Gabriella Cirucci (SNS, Pisa) - *From the Grave to the Garden. Re-staging Greek funerary sculpture in Roman contexts*
- 09.30 Mariateresa Curcio (Paris 1 – La Sapienza) - *The Fascinating Hybridity of Nobilia Opera. Bodily models in Roman male nude portraits*
- 10.00 Eva Falaschi (SNS, Pisa) - *More than words. Re-staging Protogenes' Ialysus: the Many Lives of an Artwork Between Greece and Rome*
- 10.30 COFFEE BREAK
- 11.00 Nathaniel B. Jones (Washington University) - *Greek Art in Augustan Rome: Discourse, Dedication, and Reflection*
- 11.30 Lisa Hughes (Calgary) - *Dionysus and Performance: A Penchant for Greek Sculpture in the Pompeian Domus*
- 12.00 Alessandro Poggio (SNS, Pisa) - *"The Great Beauty". Greek Art and Urban Environment in Imperial Rome*

From the Grave to the Garden. Re-staging Greek Funerary Sculpture in Roman Contexts

Gabriella Cirucci (SNS)

Scholarly interpretations of the role played by imported Greek artworks in Roman visual culture are commonly founded on the *nobilis opera* described by ancient authors. These interpretive paradigms, however, appear inadequate to explain the reuse of less canonical and more serial products, such as the numerous Greek architectural and relief sculptures unearthed in Roman contexts.

In this perspective, the paper will examine significant examples of funerary sculptures and reliefs, dating from the sixth to the fourth centuries B.C., that were removed from Greek necropoleis to be adapted to completely different contexts of use—such as Roman gardens—and functions. The research will focus on the multiple lives of these objects by exploring the interaction between their original meaning and the significance they acquired in the new display settings. Which conditions and judgments determined their selection? Had they been specifically acquired as “authentic Greek artworks”? Did they retain any relation to their original function?

This investigation aims not only at achieving a deeper understanding of the values assessed through the reuse of Greek funerary sculpture in Roman contexts, but also at clarifying how, and to what extent, the change of ownership, audience, time, and space may affect evaluation. The importance of looking closer to this material also rests on its potential to illuminate fundamental, but still underestimated, aspects of the circulation and consumption of Greek artworks in the Roman world.

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The Fascinating Hybridity of *Nobilis Opera*. Bodily Models in Roman Male Nude Portraits

Mariateresa Curcio (Paris 1 – La Sapienza)

The matter of authorship in Roman sculpture has always been focused on two key issues: the copies of ancient Greek statues (the so-called *nobilis opera*) and the relationship with previous artistic models.

The common interpretation, related to an aesthetic and prescriptive approach, has often relegated some typology of Roman sculpture at the lowest rung of the ancient art history. On the contrary in the last twenty years, new studies have proposed different interpretations. From these premises, I will take into account the Roman male nude portraits (e.g. Ofellius Ferus), a sort of hybrid composition of male faces and bodies. These works, among the several images borrowed from the repertory of Greek *nobilis opera*, reuse the most appropriate model to represent the idea of power and virility: i.e the artworks of Polykleitos (Doryphorus) and his supposed school that are usually connected to the idea of the athlete that is in turn an expression of manly values. Then, following the concept of decorum (appropriateness), I'll try to describe the polykletian body as a manifestation of an expressive continuum in male body depiction that has encouraged different levels of perception and understanding in which the memory of Greek masterpiece doesn't play an authoritative role. Indeed, according to intertextual interpretative paradigms, in the artistic process the oldest model not always is the main one. Moreover, in these naked man which combine a bodily scheme from a polykleteyan matrix and “Roman” faces, it is possible to consider the interaction with the Greek models not as a mere imitative process but as a translation process, through which the semantic codes of artworks, as well as the formal and cultural ones, acquire new and different meanings. Therefore, we need to consider these works as a medium of social behaviors and not a visual container, showing that art is not a simple aesthetic expression but it rather serves to build dynamics of social negotiation.

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More than Words. Re-staging Protogenes' Ialysus. The Many Lives of an Artwork between Greece and Rome.

Eva Falaschi (SNS)

Protogenes' Ialysus was one of the most famous paintings in Antiquity, but unfortunately it is known only through literary sources. This paper argues that, even though we cannot reconstruct it, it is worth considering its “biography” in order to understand the impact the Ialysus had in different periods and places.

Before arriving in Rome, probably in the first century A.D., the Ialysus had already had a glorious history. It was dedicated in Rhodes to celebrate a local hero. There it was admired for long as a great artwork, as Strabo and Cicero confirm. Moreover, Pliny the Elder and Plutarch testify its fortune during the Hellenistic period, by relating Apelles' and Demetrius Poliorcetes' judgements. Its "Roman life" is problematic: Pliny saw it in the Templum Pacis, where it was shown next to other Greek masterpieces, but Plutarch's statement that it was destroyed in a fire disagrees with historical data on the Templum Pacis.

How did the past history of the Ialysus influence its re-staging in Rome? And how did its re-staging impact the way Imperial authors narrate its "Greek life"? Which new meanings (aesthetic, political, social) did it assume and/or which ancient values did it embody in this new context?

The paper intends to revise the history of the Ialysus, by focusing on its re-staging in the Imperial Rome as a turning point in the fortune of the painting. Indeed, after its destruction the Ialysus continued providing inspiration for later authors. Its fame transformed it in a "literary artwork of memory", bringing it to a new life in the cultural context of Rome and far away.

This research aims at transforming the "limit" of knowing an artwork only through literary texts in the opportunity of reassessing the traditional art historical approach to sources by contextualizing them within their cultural frame.

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Greek Art in Augustan Rome: Discourse, Dedication, and Reflection

Nathaniel B. Jones (Washington University)

At least from the time of Cato the Elder, Greek art occupied a paradoxical position in Rome. It stood metonymically for a wide variety of both anxieties about and hopes for the formation of a specifically Roman identity in an increasingly imperial, cosmopolitan world. An association with Greek art could alternately augment or undermine a Roman public figure's attempts to acquire political or cultural authority. By the time of Cicero, a more coherent ideology of art was developed, in which the collection and display of works of Greek art in public structures was thought to serve a common good, but its private consumption was a morally reprehensible indulgence in luxury. During Augustus' monumental re-organization of the urban fabric of Rome, this ideology was put into practice, at least in the sense that an overwhelming number of major public building projects included the display of Greek artworks in their decorative programs. But the evidence for these public displays is both fragmentary and largely textual. This paper proposes to augment the relatively sparse evidence for public art displays by appealing to a specific kind of material evidence: the evocation of Greek art in Roman mural painting, and especially the representation of panel painting. It seeks to understand the deployment of the Greek panel in the Roman mural, and thereby to better understand the status of Greek art in Augustan Rome in general, through three primary interpretive lenses: spoliation, archaism, and anachronism. Ultimately, the paper concludes, these murals present the history of Greek art in exemplary or paradigmatic terms, as parts of a system of value which could connect past, present, and future through the fluid and dynamic combination of thematic association, material presence, and aesthetic value.

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Dionysus and Performance: A Penchant for Greek Sculpture in the Pompeian Domus

Lisa Hughes (Calgary)

Should Pompeian gardens replete with Dionysiac imagery simply be seen as venues for the practice of religious rites or could they be seen as convenient backdrops for theatrical production? Pompeii's Casa degli Amorni Dorati (VI.16.7) suggests that the sculptural collection within this domus unifies the decorative program of the house as a whole and represents the characters associated with tragedy, comedy and satyr plays in the Greco-Roman world. Both the sculptural collection (with select imported Greek examples) in and architectural layout of the domus' main peristyle garden, provides an excellent case are rich in theatrical motifs (Seiler 1992). More often than not, however, a full analysis of the sculpture and the garden in relationship to theatrical performances is lacking: any references to these two features are usually secondary to the theatrical nature of the wall paintings. Examples from the

sculptural collection (53 pieces in total) are predominantly Dionysiac in theme and include double-headed Dionysiac herms, relief plaques (pinakes) resting on bases or set into walls with theatrical masks that may in certain instances represent pantomimes (Dwyer 1982), oscilla (discs with maenads, centaurs, and masks), masks, as well as portraits.

The presence of Dionysiac imagery within a garden may represent a Dionysiac-bucolic setting. Advocates see the garden as a reflection between religious practice and nature (Dwyer 1982; Mastroberto 1992; Seiler 1992). For others the Dionysiac leitmotif simply coincides with theatrical stage settings and serves as decoration for decoration sake (Dwyer 1981). More significantly, these theatrical motifs appear in mime productions during the reigns of Augustus and Nero (Beacham 1992; Jory 2002). It is within this vein that the sculptural program should now be considered: the opulent, highly crafted imported pieces function as a collection to complement theatrical productions particularly in Julio-Claudian Pompeii.

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"The Great Beauty". Greek Art and Urban Environment in Imperial Rome

Alessandro Poggio (SNS)

From the late Republican period onwards the arrival of numerous Greek artworks contributed to shape the "great beauty" of Imperial Rome, but the interaction between the Urbs and its ornamenta appears more articulated and dynamic. As a combination of long-term processes and quick transformations of urban spaces, the cityscape of Rome was a multi-layered stage, on which inhabitants and visitors did not merely admire the nobilia opera, but had fun, did business, in other words, lived.

This vivid atmosphere was not a neutral element. Indeed, it deeply influenced the perception of the displayed artworks: Pliny the Elder, for instance, pointed out this lively interplay by stressing that the frenetic daily life sometimes prevented the proper appreciation of artworks in the Urbs (NH 36.27). Moreover, themes such as accessibility and visibility in the monumental areas of Imperial Rome help assess the urban environment—the architectonic and cultural framework for Greek statues and paintings—as one of the numerous filters through which those artworks were observed, described by ancient authors, and/or classified in art historical discourses. The aim of this paper is to examine the agency of the dynamic cityscape of Rome in shaping the perception of Greek art during the Imperial period. The side-by-side analysis of Imperial literary sources and archaeological data will shed new light on the interaction between the urban framework of Rome and its inhabitants.

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