

LECTURES ON ANCIENT ART

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649628001

Lectures on Ancient Art by Raoul Rochette

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RAOUL ROCHETTE

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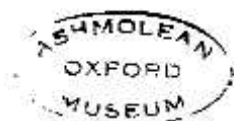
By **RAOUL ROCHETTE.**



MINERVA, FROM THE GEM OF ARRAS.



LONDON:
ARTHUR HALL, VIRTUE & Co., 25, PATERNOSTER ROW.
1854.



LONDON:
BRADBURY AND EVANS, PRINTERS, WHITECHURCH

PREFACE.

As in the following lectures R. Rochette strongly defends the taste for Polychromatic Sculpture, I would wish to say a few words with regard to what I consider a mistaken idea which generally prevails on the subject of colouring sculpture, which was sometimes practised by the Greeks, and particularly as the example of the Greeks has been advanced by the first sculptor of the age as his authority for colouring his statue of Venus. It is generally supposed that the celebrated Greek sculptors coloured the nude parts of their marble statues. This mistake has arisen from a misconception of the word *circumlitio*, which expresses a painting round (*περιχρῖσις*) a framing of the borders of drapery, the hair; a painting of the ground around the figures, in order to separate and make them stand out, as Quintilian, viii. § 2, shows: a "*circumductio colorum in extremitatibus figurarum quæ ipsa figura aptius finiuntur et eminentius extant.*" This practice was confined alone to the metopes, bas reliefs, and the background of statues in pediments, and all such objects as were placed high up and were to be seen from a distance. The effect was calculated for height and distance. The most ancient instance of which, one of the metopes from one of the temples of Selinus, I have given. A modern instance we have in the so-called Wedgwood ware. We may

remark further, that it was practised only at an archaic period, for Plutarch tells us that the ancient statues (*τα παλαια των αγαλματων*) were daubed with vermilion, and no stronger evidence can be adduced of the imperfection, antiquity, and, we may add, barbarism of the art in any nation, than this custom of painting sculpture, as may be seen in the early sculptures of Assyria, India, and Mexico. The *καυσις* applied by the so-called painters of statues, *αγαλματων εγκαισται*, to the nude parts, was not paint or colouring, but white wax melted with oil, which was laid on with a thick brush, and rubbed dry: *ita signa marmorea nuda curantur*, Vitruvius says—a practice adopted by Canova. On the other hand, we have no proof that the Greeks coloured the nude parts of their statues; on the contrary, we have positive evidence that the masterpiece of antiquity (which may be an example to all modern sculptors) the Cnidian Venus of Praxiteles was colourless. That the Venus de' Medici had her hair gilt cannot be adduced as any evidence, for in the opinion of Flaxman, to whose correct taste this fashion was totally repugnant, it is a deteriorated variety of the Venus of Praxiteles, and consequently of a later period, when art was in a declining and degraded state. We may therefore be led to this conclusion, that the custom of colouring sculpture was only practised at the worst periods of art, at the archaic period, and when it was in its decline.

H. M. W.

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