

## Assignment Two. Lily White Lies<sup>1</sup>

Word requirement: **ca. 1000 words**

This past week we focused on ancient Greek cultures on the mainland and in the islands, exploring temple architecture, precious painted objects, and the use of public space. If you look carefully at the textbook, you can find interesting evidence of just how much weight the history of "Western Art" places on the flourishing of Greek art between 800-100 BCE. While our first foray into prehistoric art, Chapter One, was illustrated with 25 plates and Chapter Three, for example, with 41 colorful images, Chapter Five on "Greek Art" is packed with 78 examples of mosaics, vessels, statuary, and architecture.<sup>2</sup>

For this essay, I would like you to consider early modern attitudes towards some of these artworks, specifically white marble sculpture, and reflect on how they have been coopted by contemporary white nationalist movements. Please read an article (linked below) by Dr. Sarah Bond, a Classicist at University of Iowa, who engages in public scholarship in addition to her teaching and research responsibilities. Her work of polychromy in the ancient Mediterranean— and this article in particular— attracted a lot of attention from the alt-right. At the same time, she calls into question contemporary museum displays and the long and ongoing history of racism within her discipline.

<https://hyperallergic.com/383776/why-we-need-to-start-seeing-the-classical-world-in-color/>

Next, read more about the pushback from white supremacists that she (and other scholars of pre-modern history) have received:

<http://origins.osu.edu/article/beware-greeks-bearing-gifts-how-neo-nazis-and-ancient-greeks-met-charlottesville>

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With these articles in mind, there are three questions that I would like to you address in your essay:

- 1) How do we know that ancient Greek and Roman artworks were painted? What kinds of specific evidence and tools do we use to assess color application in the ancient world?
- 2) What were the primary motivations for stripping or denying artworks their polychromy in the 19th and early 20th century? Please be specific. What value did the artworks have to scholars and museum goers as unpainted white marble sculptures?
- 3) Why are contemporary Classicists concerned with the way in which ancient art is currently represented to the public? What are some of the present-day ramifications for 'misreading' ancient art?

*Optional related reading:*

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/drsarahbond/2017/04/27/whitewashing-ancient-statues-whiteness-racism-and-color-in-the-ancient-world/#1243d35c75ad>

<https://www.artforum.com/news/classicist-receives-death-threats-from-alt-right-over-art-historical-essay-68963>

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<sup>1</sup> This assignment was developed by Dr. Kristen Strehle. Last edited 4 December 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter Two contains 33 plates; Chapter Four, 30.