



Color reconstruction of a battle scene between the Greeks and the Persians depicted on the so-called “Alexander sarcophagus.” The original work (ca. 320 B.C.)—not in the exhibition—in plain white marble, below.

MUSEUMS

Carved in Living Color

Leave your preconceived notions of ancient art at home. A groundbreaking exhibition at Harvard University’s Arthur M. Sackler Museum in Cambridge, Massachusetts, shows how marble statues actually looked in antiquity: covered from head to toe in vibrant paint. Based on 25 years of research by Vinzenz Brinkmann, formerly a curator at the Glyptothek Museum in Germany, *Gods in Color: Painted Sculpture of Classical Antiquity* features more than 20 full-size color reconstructions of Greek and Roman



works, alongside 35 original statues and reliefs.

“The exhibition corrects a popular misconception,” says Susanne Ebbinghaus, curator of ancient art at the Sackler, who points out that people generally associate classical art with white marble sculpture. “What you would have seen when you walked through an ancient city, cemetery, or sanctuary,” she explains, “would have been

colorful sculpture: painted marble, colorful bronze, gold and ivory cult images. It completely changes our picture of the ancient world.”

Walking through the galleries, I pause in front of a color reconstruction of a marble portrait of the Roman emperor Caligula, who ascended the throne in A.D. 37 at age 25, and ruled until his assassination four years later. I’m used to seeing him in “classic white”: his pupil-less eyes set against a ghostly pallor, frozen in a regal gaze. But color makes me focus on different facial features, such as the mop of thick, brown hair that frames his fleshy face, which is accented by bright hazel eyes and soft rosy lips. His cheeks are shaded

Marble portrait of the Roman emperor Caligula (A.D. 39–41) and a color reconstruction. The original work did not travel with the exhibition, but contemporary pieces of similar style are on display.



in areas that bring out a plumpness, revealing his youth. I feel as if the deceased despot from my dry history books was actually once young, handsome, and *alive*.

Most scholars haven't paid much attention to the light traces of pigment that remained on the surface of marble statues. One reason is that ancient artists used mineral-based paints with organic binding media that disintegrated over time. Also, as statues were later collected and displayed, paint remnants were likely lost during cleaning. And even after extensive visual and scientific analysis of the original sculptures, Ebbinghaus admits, scholars still don't know if the paint was applied in one or two coats, how finely the pigments were ground, or exactly which binding medium

would have been used in each case—all elements that would affect the appearance of a finished piece. Generally, though, the color reconstructions in the exhibition "truly look closer to ancient sculpture than just the plain white marble," she says.

Color makes us rethink what ancient artists were actually trying to achieve, Ebbinghaus notes. "To me," she says, "it was a revelation."

Gods in Color is a traveling exhibition, previously shown throughout Europe. It is on view at the Sackler, the first U.S. venue, through January 20. Some pieces will be displayed at the Getty Villa in Malibu in an exhibition titled **The Color of Life** (March 6–June 23, 2008). Additional images are available online at www.archaeology.org.

—ETI BONN-MULLER

BOOKS

There and Back Again

Gudrid Thorbjarnarsdottir, the heroine of Nancy Marie Brown's *The Far Traveler: Voyages of a Viking Woman* (Harcourt, 2007; \$25), is less a biographical subject than an excuse to explore the rich world of Viking archaeology. Mentioned in two Norse sagas, Gudrid was part of the first European expedition to settle North America. She spent three years living in what is now Newfoundland and she gave birth to a son named Snorri, the first European to be born in the New World. Gudrid outlived two husbands and continued traveling late into life, eventually making a pilgrimage from her home in Iceland to Rome before dying in the early twelfth century.

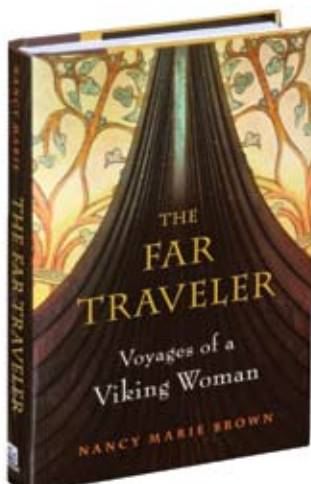
Brown strikes a good balance

between a novelistic narrative and hard science, but excessive detail occasionally swamps the story. Gudrid largely disappears as Brown reports on archaeological advances at sites across

Viking territory. Her quest to "find" Gudrid even drives Brown to volunteer on a 2005 dig at a longhouse in northern Iceland, where the sagas say "the far traveler" and her husband settled after their last trip to North America. Not surprisingly, archaeologists are circumspect about the likelihood of the longhouse being Gudrid's: Brown gamely reports how often they

try to check her enthusiasm for the literary source that inspired her journey. "You can believe it was her house if you want," one archaeologist tells her.

—JENNIFER PINKOWSKI



SUBSCRIBE TODAY

GET A FREE DVD WITH YOUR FREE FIRST ISSUE

ANCIENT EGYPT

THE WORLD'S LEADING EGYPTOLOGY MAGAZINE



Published six times a year, *Ancient Egypt* is the world's leading Egyptology magazine. Articles cover a wide-range of subjects and are not limited to 'ancient' but occasionally feature Coptic and Islamic Egypt. For more information and a full list of articles visit:

www.ancientegyptmagazine.com

An annual subscription to Ancient Egypt magazine costs \$75 or you can take advantage of our two year subscription (\$144) a 15% saving on the normal price.

To subscribe and claim your free copy, fill in the form below, call us on **+44161 872 3319** or follow the links on the website to subscriptions quoting '**AIA magazine**'.

YES! I WANT TO SUBSCRIBE TO ANCIENT EGYPT MAGAZINE

1 year - (\$75) 2 years - (\$140)

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY.....

STATE ZIP

TEL:

EMAIL

I ENCLOSE A CHEQUE (PAYABLE TO EMPIRE PUBLICATIONS)

PLEASE CHARGE MY CREDIT CARD (MASTERCARD/AMEX/VISA)

CARD NO:.....

EXPIRY DATE:..... CVC.....

Please return to:
ANCIENT EGYPT MAGAZINE,
1 NEWTON STREET, MANCHESTER M1 1HW
UNITED KINGDOM

WWW.ANCIENTEGYPTMAGAZINE.COM