



11th International Round Table on Polychromy in Ancient Sculpture and Architecture
THE MATERIALITY OF POLYCHROMY
9-12 November 2022, Rome, Capitoline Museums and National Roman Museum

Polychrome statues from the necropolis of via Tiburtina: some unpublished examples from the Capitoline Museums Collections

Guglielmi S., Bartolozzi G., Iannaccone R., Magrini D.

In the Capitoline Museums Collections there are some interesting polychrome statues from the necropolis of via Tiburtina, discovered *in situ* and almost intact, with traces of color still visible today.

During excavations between 1872 and 1878, carried out in order to expand the public Verano cemetery on Via Tiburtina in Rome, the sculptures were discovered, when some remains of burials belonging to the roman necropolis were brought to light. The necropolis, only sporadically investigated, was in use from the Republican period until late antiquity.

A statue of a child playing, together with a male statue with a chlamys (fig.1), were discovered in 1878 in the Pincetto area, near the upper part of the Verano cemetery: both retain evident traces of color on the marble surface.



1. Musei Capitolini, Centrale Montemartini
MC/S 1854



2. Musei Capitolini, Centrale Montemartini
MC/S1139

The subject of this contribution is a small and very refined statuette, a rare simulacrum of the Terra Mater placed inside an aedicule (fig. 2). Found in 1872 in the Quadriportico area of the Verano cemetery, not far from the Basilica of San Lorenzo, it preserves some traces of its original polychromy. The aedicule was found still *in situ*, in a room surrounded by reticulated walls.

The small naos is decorated on the front with a marble epistyle and door jambs; it was probably closed by a small wooden door, as can be deduced from the presence of some hinges near the jambs.

On the aedicule epistyle the following inscription is preserved:

"*Terrae Matri s(acrum) / A. Hortensius Cerdo, deae piae / et conservatrici meae d(onomum) d(edit)"*.

The dedication of the Simulacrum was made by Aulus Hortensius Cerdo between the second half of the 2nd century AD and the first quarter of the third century AD, as we can see from the epigraphic characters.

The statue of the divinity, on the other hand, is much earlier, and can be dated in the Julio Claudian age, according to the characteristics of her face.

The Goddess is seated on a throne decorated with palmettes; she is dressed in a chiton and peplum. A cloak covers most of her legs and veils her head, descending over her left shoulder. Her head is crowned with ears. Her right arm, now almost entirely lost, was stretched forward; her left arm, raised and bent, also fragmentary, probably held a torch and a scepter, of which remains only the lower part.

The iconography of the enthroned Terra Mater is practically unique in Rome: only one other example is known in Spain, preserved at the Archaeological Museum of Murcia. The most ancient depictions of the goddess date back to the Augustan age, when with the renewal of the Ludi Saeculares she was accepted into the state religion: she is mostly depicted according to an iconographic scheme that became canonical, in which the goddess is semi-reclining on the ground, resting on a bent arm.

Terra Mater is identifiable with Tellus, the Italic goddess of vegetation, who presides over the fertility of the fields: she is the creative force of nature in charge of animal and vegetable fertility, welcoming in her womb, after death, all living beings: therefore, it is not surprising her connection with the sepulchral sphere; to her are addressed the invocations "*sit tibi terra levis*", an auspice frequently used as an epigraph for tombs.

THE ARCHAEOMETRIC SURVEY – The analytical survey carried out offered the opportunity to investigate in a totally non-invasive way, the residual polychromy. The study was focused on the evaluation of the state of conservation and on the identification of pictorial materials. A good number of ancient colors have been identified by crossing results obtained with the combination of imaging and single spot techniques, revealing additional archaeometric data. First evidences from the non-invasive protocol allowed to reconstruct the original palette, made of red ochre, Egyptian blue and organic pink lake.



Visible, UVL and VIL images indicating the coexistence of a red lake and Egyptian blue



Portable microscope image of residual red lake on the folds of the veil

ANALYTICAL NON INVASIVE PROTOCOL

Ultraviolet luminescence (UVL) imaging
Visible induced luminescence (VIL)
Portable microscope
Portable X-Ray fluorescence (p-XRF)
UV-ViS-NIR reflectance spectroscopy (FORS)
Raman

Bibliography

For the Terra Mater aedicule: C.L. Visconti, *Antichi monumenti entrati di recente nel museo capitolino*, in *BCom* 1872-73, pp. 24-28, tav. 3; H. Stuart Jones, *A catalogue of the ancient Sculptures preserved in the Municipal Collection of Rome. The Sculptures of the Palazzo dei Conservatori*, Oxford 1926, p. 127, tav. 45; W. H. Helbig, *Führer durch die öffentlichen Sammlungen klassischer Altertümer in Rom*, Tübingen 1963, n. 1521; E. Ghisellini, s.v. "Tellus", in *LIMC* VII, 1, p. 880, n. 3; H. v. Hesberg, *Archäologische Denkmäler zu den römischen Göttergestalten*, in *ANRW*, 2, 17, 2, 1981, pp. 1066-67.
For the inscription on the aedicule epistyle: CIL VI, 3731 = 31052; NCE 2732; G. L. Gregori, M. Mattei, *Roma (CIL VI)*, I, *Musei Capitolini*, p. 560, n. 2176.

S.Guglielmi, Soprintendenza Capitolina, serena.guglielmi@comune.roma.it

G.Bartolozzi, CNR-IFAC, g.bartolozzi@ifac.cnr.it

R.Iannaccone, Università di Sassari, riannaccone@uniss.it

D.Magrini, CNR-ISPC, donata.magrini@cnr.it