6.6 PARTHENON RUNNING GODDESS

Cast before conservation - front

Cast after conservation

Cast before conservation

Cast after conservation

6.6.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE OBJECT

TITLE: Parthenon Running Goddess, copy of the sculpture from Pediment in Temple of Athena – Parthenon in Acropolis in Athens, Greece, between 443 and 438 B.C.
NUMBER(S): 037, P007 (068)
TYPE OF OBJECT: Plaster cast with a metal/wooden structure inside.
MAKER: Unknown
SIGNATURE/INSCRIPTION: None
DATE: 1839
OWNER/LOCATION: Edinburgh College of Art, Lauriston Place, Edinburgh, EH3 9DF.
DIMENSIONS/WEIGHT (APPROX): H: 1440mm W: 870mm D: 790mm
Weight (approx):

6.6.2 BRIEF CONDITION REPORT BEFORE CONSERVATION

STRUCTURAL STABILITY: Structurally sound; slight movement in the wing, but seems stable.

SURFACE DUST AND DIRT: Severe, 100% coverage.

VISIBLE PAINT LAYERS/UNSIGHTLY MARKINGS: Soft brown/cream patina; pencil marks and paint splashes, especially by the lower edge due to previous plinth maintenance; surface of the cast worn and possibly stained due to previous cleaning regime and handling.

CHIPS AND LOSS: Chips to all sides of the cast, especially to edges and front of the base.

ABRASIONS: Severe abrasions to all sides, overall 40%.

PREVIOUS REPAIRS: From college archives we know that casts have been previously treated many times but unfortunately the documentation is not very detailed, so we don't know what previous treatment they have exactly received. There is a large amount of previous work to the base, front and dexter arm. Following the cleaning of the surface, old over-paint in these areas became visible.

Old repairs and over-paint

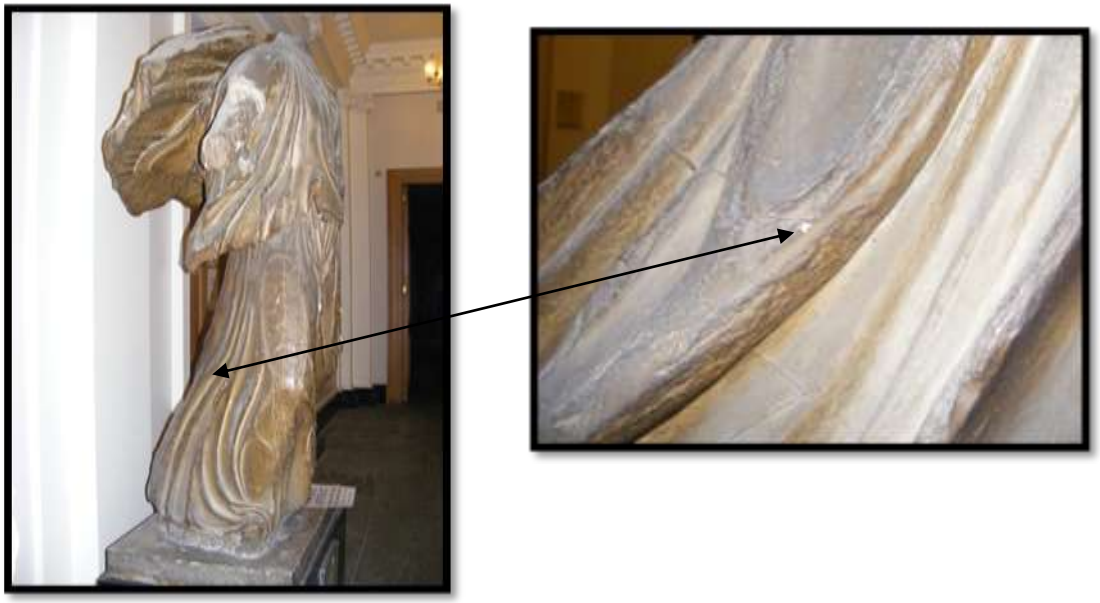
Paint splashes
Chips, abrasions and missing surfaces
Areas of previous repairs

6.6.3 ORIGINAL MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES

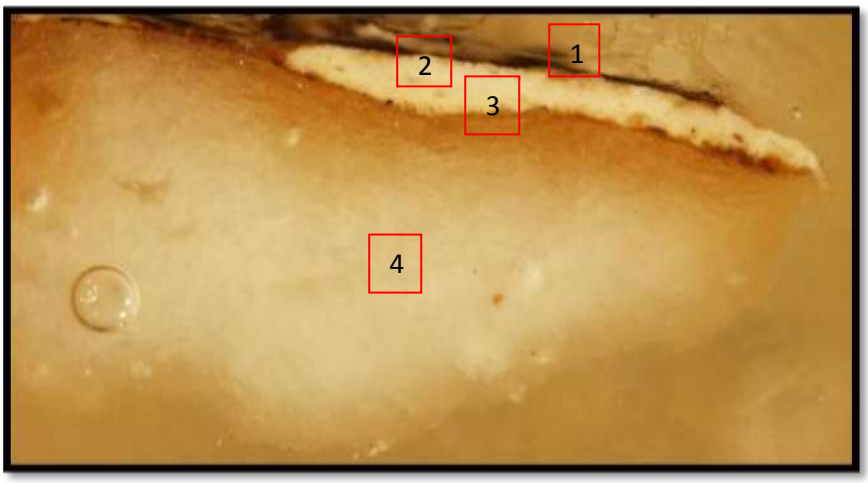
The object is a plaster cast with a metal/wood reinforcing structure inside. The surface of the cast is brown/cream. In order to find out the stratigraphy, and to identify the materials of the polychromed layer, samples of the plaster with paint were taken from the cast and sent to the University of Northumbria for analysis.

Investigation of coating samples from ECA Plaster Cast Collection, Edinburgh. Consultant: Brian W Singer.

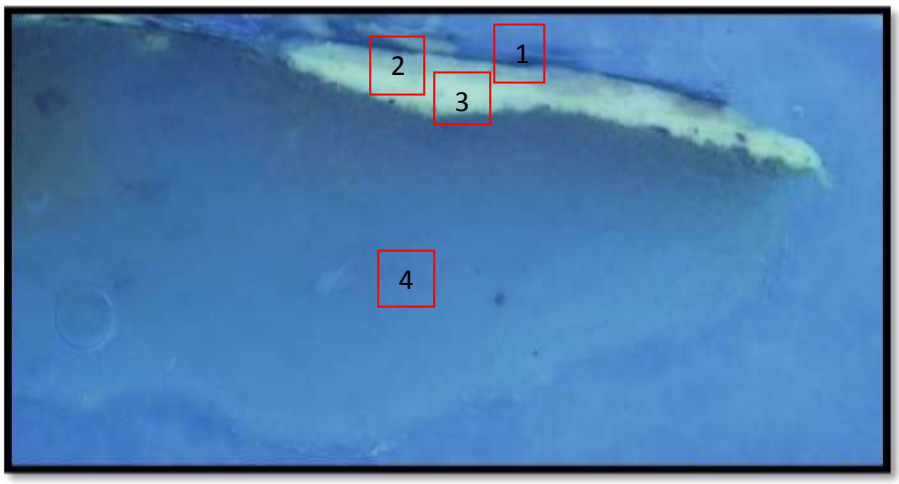
Parthenon Running Goddess – Cross-section



Area of paint sample



Photograph of the cross-section sample from cast of Parthenon Running Goddess



Photograph of the cross-section sample from cast of Parthenon Running Goddess in UV light

At the bottom of the cross-section, from the cast of Parthenon Running Goddess, is a thick plaster, which appears red towards the top, perhaps due to the presence of oil or resin. The lower layer of paint is white and fluoresced a greenish white colour, suggesting zinc white but the upper layer, also white, fluoresced blue – white, suggesting the presence of lead white. Above this, as photographed, there seemed to be a thin black layer containing either black pigments or dirt. EDX analysis might be useful on this sample to help identify the pigments in the two layers.

6.6.4 TREATMENT REPORT

- Prior to any conservation treatment, the cast was photographed. This photographic documentation was continued throughout all conservation processes.

- Initially, the cast was dry cleaned with soft brushes and Wishab Sponges with a rubber-nozzled vacuum to pick up the loose dust and dirt.

Cast during dry cleaning (top corner cleaned)

- Following a variety of wet cleaning spot tests, the surface of the cast was cleaned with 2-5% Vulpex liquid soap in de-ionised water, V&A mix and with white spirit, using cotton wool swabs.

Cast during wet cleaning

- All areas of raw plaster were given an application of 10% Paraloid B72 in acetone to provide an isolating layer between the original plaster and the repairs.

- Areas of loss, and chips were filled with white micro-balloons mixed with 12% Paraloid B72 in acetone. Larger areas of loss and chips on edge of the base were filled with an inert filler to provide extra strength.

Cast during fill repair

The previously repaired back sinister corner had to be re-secured after it loosened during the moving of the cast on to the new plinth. In order to do so stainless steel dowels were installed with polyester resin.

Corner of the base during repairs

- All the fills were toned out with fine artists acrylic paint, mixed with matting agent, to match the surrounding patina.

- Finally, the entire cast was given an application of micro-crystalline wax so as to protect the surface.

- The plinths for the casts were conserved by a separate contractor. In order to do so the cast had to be lifted off the old plinth and then, following works to the new plinth, relocated on to it. The handling of the cast involved manoeuvring an A-frame aluminium gantry with block and tackle into position over the sculpture, and locating slings securely to the cast with Plastazote softening to protect the plaster. This ensured the sculpture was safely supported during its removal and installation onto the new plinth. In order to minimise the potential for future damage, caused by vibrations during the moving of the cast around the college, a softening layer of Plastazote was placed between the new plinth and base of the cast.

6.6.5 MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME

CLEANING

The cleaning programme would involve the trained operatives, wearing the appropriate PPE, (nitrile gloves must be worn to protect the plaster as well as the operative) removing the loose dust using soft brushes and a vacuum cleaner with a rubber nozzle that would have muslin attached to its end. The muslin prevents any potential damage to the plaster from being lost in

the vacuum cleaner. Any fragments that are dislodged, and their locations on the cast, should be documented and wrapped carefully in acid free tissue prior to being stored in a safe location. A trained conservator should be contacted immediately in order to repair the damage.

NB At no time should cleaning products or any liquid (including water) be used.

HANDLING AND CARE RECOMMENDATIONS

Certain measures should be taken prior to and during the moving of these pieces:

1. It is recommended that all technicians and at least one member of the Curatorial/Archives Dept. should complete a course in sculpture handling. Any moving of sculpture should involve the attendance of at least one person who has attended such a course.
   The National Galleries of Scotland can supply the name of a recommended course.

2. A manual on the handling of sculpture should be made available to staff and students. (‘The Care and Handling of Art Objects’ by Shelley is recommended.)

3. Before handling an object it should be examined closely and any old repairs and structural weaknesses noted. Do not test or probe areas that appear weak. Never grasp projecting elements (arms, etc.) of the object as they will not support the weight.

4. Gloves should always be worn when handling or touching objects as acids and salts from perspiration can damage many materials especially plaster.

5. Report any damage to the object immediately and collect all fragments before leaving the area.

6. The object should be well protected with padding in the form of foam, Plastazote and bubble-wrap especially any fragile or projecting areas that are likely to catch on doorways etc.

7. Avoid haste and confusion while handling as this can result in injury to the handlers or damage to the object. The route to be taken, door sizes and the space for the object at the receiving end should be assessed before a move begins. Two people, at least, should be present throughout the move, one of them to open doors, steady the object where necessary and watch parts of it that the carrier cannot see.