**“Textiles and Dyes in the Mediterranean World”**

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*The Tactile and the Textile; a touch-based approach on Greek colour terms*

Maria Papadopoulou

Academy of Athens

What kind of experience is colour experience? Is it visual information collected by the cones of the retina and delivered to the brain by way of the optic nerve? Nevertheless, there are people who do not see colour; they hear, smell, or feel it instead. In 1858, Gladstone, addressing the problem of Homeric literature having many words to denote brightness but practically no words to denote colour, suggested that the Greeks of Homer’s time were colour-blind. Berlin and Kay (1969) argued that all human languages encode two to eleven colour terms and that Homeric Greek encoded terms for black (melas-kuaneos), white (leukos-glaukos), red (erythros-porphuros), green (chloros), and yellow (ochros-xanthos).

How many colour terms in the Greek lexical field of colour modify textiles? And how many of them relate to others senses, such as hearing, smell, or taste? E.g. when modifying voice *melas* means “indistinct” and its antonym *leukos* means “clear”; this is an example of colour terms encoding not just a visual stimulus within the colour wavelength perceived by humans, but a piece of information delivered to the cortex by means of hearing. Traditionally the senses have been considered as separate modalities that become integrated only at higher levels of the cortex; recent research challenges this view indicating that sensory modalities influence one another from the earliest stages of cortical processing (e.g. Ghazanfar and Shroeder, 2006); and there are no claims that this was not true in Homer’s time.

This paper argues that an alternative approach to Greek colour terms would be to classify them according to the modality of the sensory experience they encode. Let us for a moment take as working hypothesis that the ancient Greeks were synaesthetic, i.e. perceived colour using more senses than one: an alternative way to analyse colour vocabulary would be through the tactile channel: analysing colour terms that modify textile products can provide tangible (or palpable) evidence to grasp the complexities of experiencing colour. Dyes are performative in nature: one does things with dyes and while doing-by-dyeing one is exposed to a multiplicity of visual, acoustic and olfactory stimuli.

When looking at colour, even as product of dyeing, the precedence of vision is taken for granted. This paper aims to show that colour terms denoting textile properties are not solely linked to sight, because dyeing is not just applying colour to a surface; when dyes are applied to fabric the molecular structure of the material changes and this change precedes the visual result. So, the visual is the end result of the process and this has an impact on colour semantics and usage in language.