



Collaborative Endeavors in the Chemical Analysis of Art and Cultural Heritage Materials (ACS Symposium Series)

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The chemical analysis of art and cultural heritage materials began two centuries ago. In 1815 renowned British chemist Sir Humphry Davy described the analysis of pigments on objects excavated from the ruins of Pompeii in a paper that he read to the Royal Society (1). He wrote: "When the preservation of a work of art was concerned, I made my researches upon mere atoms of the colour, taken from a place where the loss was imperceptible: and without having injured any of the precious remains of antiquity, I flatter myself I shall be able to give some information, not without interest to scientific men, as well as to artists, and not wholly devoid of practical applications." Sir Davy hoped to not only become acquainted with the nature and chemical composition of the pigments, but to discover some idea of the manners and styles of the artists (2). The scientists authoring the chapters in Collaborative Endeavors in the Chemical Analysis of Art and Cultural Heritage Materials have taken the same footpath as Sir Davy in regard to the practicality of their research, but they have outpaced Davy in its appeal to a broader audience. The reader will find interesting chapters describing: the process of uncovering forgeries and counterfeits (Chapters 1, 11, 12, 16); the pedagogy of teaching the chemical analysis of art to undergraduates and the history of that "movement" (Chapters 13, 14, 15); the results of scientific investigations on art and cultural objects that have been performed primarily by students and their faculty mentor (Chapters 10, 11, 16, 17); the use of the latest technology in identifying pigments on prehistoric rock paintings, the dating of ancient objects, or the characterization of dyes or biomarkers on archeological samples (Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, 8). The reader will also enjoy reading the viewpoint of museum conservators who have played a major role in writing and contributing to the science reported in some of the chapters (Chapters 1, 2, 3, 12 and 16). Perhaps most thought-provoking, is a chapter in Collaborative Endeavors that asks the question, "What can science alone tell us?" (See Chapter 9.)

But the book is not just a collection of several case studies of describing the chemical composition of objects of cultural or artistic interest; the book aims to illustrate how the chemical and physical analysis of art and cultural heritage materials is a perfect model of collaboration with museum curators, with historians, with students, with religious scholars, anthropologists, and/or with other specialists who partner to answer interesting and important questions about an archeological work or piece of art worthy of study: What are the materials? How was it made? Who influenced the work? How has it changed or deteriorated? Why was it made? Since no one scholar or scientist can answer all these questions, experts from many areas using many different kinds of analytical techniques are drawn together in Collaborative Endeavors to share their knowledge and experience. As a result, an understanding of how the molecular and atomic world plays a role with physical products of human expression is presented from many different perspectives.

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