

# FREE AT LAST!

The Impact of Freed Slaves on  
the Roman Empire

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and  
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## The Face of the Social Climber: Roman Freedmen and Elite Ideology<sup>1</sup>

*Barbara E. Borg*

There is probably no other genre of ancient art that has received as ambiguous a reception as Roman portraiture.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, the life-like representation of the heads of wrinkly old men, heroic soldiers, dandified youths, beautiful, elegant women and sweet little girls seemed to identify these images as epitomes of mimetic art. Thus, ever since Winckelmann, the majority of art lovers and art critics have relegated them to a lower class of art or even denied them access to the realm of true art altogether. But even when, during the nineteenth century, research increasingly turned to historical questions, and the opinion started to take hold that not only 'artworks' in the strictest sense were of value but the material remains of antiquity as a whole, portraits of Romans seemed to add little to these questions precisely because of their apparent photographic quality, which mirrored only the physical aspects of reality.

On the other hand, the continuing interest in such portraits from the Renaissance onwards is attested especially by the practice of their collection. Occasionally, they were arranged in galleries of 'Good Emperors', ancient philosophers, poets, and so forth, which were complemented by entirely modern busts, if necessary. Frequently, however, they were simply collected and exhibited by coincidence. In both cases, a diffuse feeling seems to have prevailed, that knowledge of the outward appearance of an historical personality would reveal information that goes beyond knowledge of their actions and writings. This feeling undoubtedly persists today, for why else would articles in encyclopaedias or book covers of novels be illustrated with portraits?

This meant, however, that interest was primarily directed towards those ancient portraits which represented familiar historical personalities – or which at least could be assumed to depict these. It is therefore easy to see why the type of portraiture under review here – tomb reliefs of Roman freedmen – did not arouse immediate interest: on the one hand, most of them were anything but aesthetically pleasing works of art; on the other hand, they portrayed individuals who were rather ephemeral figures for a historical inquiry that was interested in great men and key historical events.



Fig. 1.1. Tomb building on the Via Statilia, Rome.

### I. Tomb reliefs for freedmen

Against this background, it is not exactly surprising that these tomb reliefs were first awarded a detailed study in the 1970s, when the increasing politicization of the present resulted in a heightened interest in the political role in the widest sense of ancient, and in particular Roman, monuments, and attention turned more and more to manifestations of the lives of less prominent social groups. In 1975, Paul Zanker was the first to demonstrate how tomb reliefs could be used as evidence for the self-representation of a particular social group, the Roman *liberti*, and that they could improve our understanding of this class, their values, norms and points of reference.<sup>3</sup>

These tomb reliefs, which in most cases represent several individuals in bust form, more rarely as complete figures, are first attested c. 80 BCE. Their heyday of production is the second half of the first century BCE, when freedmen profited increasingly from the stabilizing political situation and the economic upturn under Augustus.<sup>4</sup> The reliefs were attached to the exterior of tomb monuments, mostly to altar-like cubic tombs and – in rare, early cases – to house-like façades (Fig. 1.1).<sup>5</sup>

Their existence alone is significant, for while they were rather modest in comparison with the prestigious tombs of the aristocracy, they also differ markedly from the simple interments in terracotta urns or from depositions in *columbarium* niches – not to mention the anonymous mass



Fig. 1.2. Tomb relief of the Servilii. Rome, Vatican, Museo Gregoriano Profano, Inv. 10491.

graves of the poor.<sup>6</sup> Their patrons possessed their own tomb monument and presented it confidently alongside the tombs of the nobility in prominent locations along the roads leading out of Rome, where the attention of passers-by was guaranteed.<sup>7</sup> The portraits on those monuments were also able to fulfil a function similar to the public honorific statues of the nobility. They elevated the tomb owner and his family above their 'portrait-less' contemporaries by identifying them as persons of dignity and renown, and compared them to the elite of society.<sup>8</sup>

Reliefs and inscriptions on the tombs of freed slaves thus were not a gratuitous luxurious adornment, but rather conveyed specific information about their patrons. Foremost they were meant to showcase the deceased's pride on his ascension from his former slave status and from the restrictions associated with slavery.<sup>9</sup> These restrictions included the prohibition of legal marriage and of the establishment of a legitimate family. Characteristically, most reliefs depict multiple individuals whose epigraphic and pictorial portrayal served to construct a family group. To this end, non-consanguine individuals might be given space as well, such as a patron replacing a natural father.<sup>10</sup> The highpoint of familial aspirations was the birth of a son, so that nearly all of the children depicted on the reliefs are boys. These sons were typically equipped with all the attributes of a freeborn male, i.e. the *bullā* (amulet) and the *toga praetexta* (Fig. 1.2).<sup>11</sup> Occasionally, the sons of freedmen even gained admission into the military service, an achievement which allowed for further social advancement and was duly showcased in the reliefs (Fig. 1.3).<sup>12</sup> Female status symbols include the *stola* (dress), characterizing the free wife joined to her husband *cum manu* (under his control), as well as the *vitta* (headband) covering a hair knot as the token of the *mater familias* (mother of the family) (Fig. 1.4).<sup>13</sup> Apart from the family itself, the chief status symbol for adult males was the toga of the free citizen. Occasionally it is clearly recognizable in the reliefs, although in most cases it can only be extrapolated, for in the images it is often indistinguishable from a *pallium* (cloak) or some women's garments.<sup>14</sup>



Fig. 1.3. Tomb relief of the Gessii. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Inv. 37.100.

It is in these cases that the significance of inscriptions is most evident. Today only about two-fifths of the reliefs bear inscriptions, while in the remaining cases they must have been affixed to the tombs separately. They unambiguously reveal the status of their subjects: the *tria nomina* of the Roman citizen, the freedman's status (*libertus*), occasionally a profession, especially when it was reputable and/or lucrative (auctioneer, *lictor*, carpenter, cereal merchant, silversmith, doctor or soldier),<sup>16</sup> and, importantly again, the marital and familial connections of those depicted on the monument. On a relief in Rome, the boy with his *bulla* is explicitly identified as *filius* (son), and the woman as *uxor* (wife): without the inscription, her position within the family would be uncertain, as she is not joined to her husband in *dextrarum iunctio* (i.e. the joining of the right hands, a typical visual sign of marriage) (Fig. 1.2).<sup>16</sup>

Freedmen therefore proudly expressed their new social status by means of inscriptions and pictorial representations. It is important to note, however, that the images add a range of supplementary components to these self-representations which are not mentioned in the accompanying inscriptions. As mentioned above, it was less important in the depiction of men to display the toga as a symbol of their new status than their presentation in appropriate dress, a garment earning them the *habitus* of the 'correct citizen'.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the soldiers signify on their tombs not only their formal position in the social hierarchy but also their military *virtus*



Fig. 1.4. Tomb relief. Rome, Palazzo Conservatori, Museo Nuovo VI, 12, Inv. 2231.



Fig. 1.5. Tomb monument of the Gratidii. Rome, Vatican, Sala dei Busti, Inv. 388.

(virtue). The women's portraits draw on the iconographies of Hellenistic statue types, characterized by covered hair and arms bound within their garments, which remained popular throughout the imperial period and among elite women as well, whereas more sensual, playful and luxurious Hellenistic types were not copied. In a different context, Zanker has surely rightly attributed these statues to a behavioural ideal, which can arguably be linked to such terms as *pudicitia* (chastity) and *castitas* (purity), and which, in any case, signpost a woman's 'correct appearance' in a manner similar to the garment of men.<sup>18</sup> For freedmen, this virtue meant not only their acceptance of generally binding norms of Roman society but also their demonstrative negation of the proverbial immoral lifestyle of slaves. In this context, the *dextrarum iunctio* should be interpreted not just as a marker of the *matrimonium iustum* (legal marriage) but also as a symbolic expression of the couple's *concordia* (harmony) and *fides* (loyalty) (Fig. 1.5).<sup>19</sup> In similar fashion, the hand or arm on the shoulder of the spouse is not only an expression of matrimonial affection,<sup>20</sup> but also and above all else an expression of *concordia*, as it is on coins and sarcophagi.<sup>21</sup>

Freedmen's tomb reliefs and their inscriptions therefore express two things: their newly-gained social status and the moral virtues upheld by those depicted. They are thus part of a confrontation with the legal and moral deficits of slave life, which are shown to all to have been overcome:

not lacking freedom and legal rights but free and with the privileges of a Roman citizen; not deprived of marriage rights and children but legally married and blessed with legitimate offspring; not adhering to a permissive and immoral lifestyle, but joined correctly and in concord, demure, and loyal.

## II. Portraits and physiognomy

While all of these characterizations can be seen as reactive negations of slavery's main deficiencies, the semantic content of the reliefs seems also to include an active choice of further positive attributes to be adopted – at least in the image. In this regard, it is primarily the portraits themselves which are instructive.

Adopting a traditional approach, Paul Zanker emphasized the realism of the portraits, and assumed that 'the *libertini* quite evidently wanted to be seen the way they looked'.<sup>22</sup> This is contradicted, however, by the strong stereotyping of the images.<sup>23</sup> As Valentin Kockel demonstrated in his monograph on these reliefs, the representations make use of a relatively limited stock of basic physiognomic types which convey a more marked sense of individuality only when viewed in isolation.<sup>24</sup> This observation is interesting for two reasons: on the one hand, the same basic physiognomic types can be found across workshops, so that they cannot be explained simply by artisanal traditions; on the other hand, the same types can also be found among the portraits of the nobility and the leading men of the state. We can better understand this phenomenon in light of some general observations about Roman portraiture.

The diffuse feeling, mentioned above, that knowledge of the outward appearance of a person would allow conclusions about their personality and character, had already informed ancient physiognomic writings.<sup>25</sup> These theories – clearly absurd and often contradictory – have not been taken up in contemporary treatments of portraits. However, modern impromptu interpretations of portraits resting on some general impressions – like those offered by Ludwig Curtius as the most famous example of the twentieth century – are equally problematic.<sup>26</sup> I do not want to repeat yet again the example of his famous interpretation of the portrait of Pompey, but would like to cite instead a more recent example which demonstrates that the premises on which his work was based were still current even in the 1960s. Discussing an image of Nero in the Terme Museum, Helga von Heintze, a well-known German portrait specialist, argued that

with every facial feature, [the portrait] reveals his pathological character. As the last descendant of the Julio-Claudian family – albeit only through his mother – he bears the results of a long line of family marriages. His face is bloated and smudged, his mouth small and pouting, his short-sighted eyes

[...] are sunk deep. They reflect an inhuman, cruel friendliness and incalculability. His full, thick hair, which has been coiffed into neatly undulating, long, irregular curls, serves to underline the vanity of his character [...].<sup>27</sup>

Von Heintze would surely have strongly denied the accusation that she was applying a simplistic psychologizing approach here; after all, her representation is in line with the equally uncomplimentary characterizations of the emperor by ancient authors and thus seems to possess a reliable foundation. The implied preconditions of such interpretations were therefore questioned by modern scholars all the less: first, the presumption that the physiognomy and facial features of a person would allow for conclusions about particular character traits; second, the assumption, mentioned above, that the portraits represented the individuals in question in such a way as they in fact appeared.

The 1960s were also a period, however, in which the foundations of this approach began to be questioned with the first-time systematic attempt to name and date Roman portraits.<sup>28</sup> It soon became apparent that the sculptural and numismatic representations of male and female members of the imperial family could be classified into groups converging so closely that they must derive from a shared prototype. At the same time, this insight allowed scholars to distinguish more reliably between imperial and private portraits, and to become aware of an interesting phenomenon: not only did private citizens imitate imperial hairstyles but they also sometimes likened themselves physiognomically to members of the ruling family (conventionally referred to as a *Zeitgesicht* or 'period face'). Portraits of both emperors and private citizens could therefore not have been simple, mimetic copies of actual physiognomies, but were evidently meant to convey specific messages as well. That these messages must have been positive – at any rate in the eyes of their contemporary beholders – can be deduced not least from their public display.

Of course this also rendered the traditional interpretation of the Nero portrait obsolete. Now it became clear that while Suetonius' characterization might have been accepted by some of his contemporaries, it was by no means the only opinion on the emperor, and it certainly did not represent the emperor's own view of himself. From this it followed that the message of imperial portraits had to be positive, independently of what precisely one thought this message was.<sup>29</sup> And more than that: this intention must have been *understood* as positive by the wider public, for how else could one explain that private persons attempted to emulate the appearance of the emperor in their own portraits?<sup>30</sup>

Of course, the mere observation of the existence of a programmatic intention behind a portrait was not enough; rather, the aim was to get to the contents of the messages, often by using the traditional 'method' of unmediated empathy and only avoiding negative interpretations. However, this approach in fact misses a more fundamental problem: it is

probably true that facial expressions often only allow for a limited range of interpretations (e.g. laughter, which can hardly be interpreted as anger; or a frown, which is difficult to associate with excited agreement). But a survey of other cultural spheres reveals how misleading *ad hoc* interpretations can potentially be, and how culturally-specific an interpretation of seemingly universal facial features in fact is. Nelson Goodman, for instance, cites a paper of the anthropologist Ray L. Birdwhistell:

Insofar as I have been able to determine, just as there are no universal words, sound complexes, which carry the same meaning the world over, there are no body motions, facial expressions or gestures which provoke identical responses the world over. A body can be bowed in grief, in humility, in laughter, or in readiness for aggression. A 'smile' in one society portrays friendliness, in another embarrassment and, in still another, may contain a warning that, unless tension is reduced, hostility and attack will follow.<sup>31</sup>

Goodman further reminds us how difficult it was for Western audiences to understand what kinds of emotions the actors in the first available high-quality Japanese films wanted to convey; for instance, whether a particular facial feature 'was expressing agony or hatred or anxiety or determination or despair or desire.'<sup>32</sup> And even once we have recognized, described and named a particular facial expression, we can only deduce the actual meaning of this 'gesture' when we situate it within its cultural context.

However, the fact that Roman society is in many ways alien to us is demonstrated not least by the physiognomic interpretations by Curtius, von Heintze and others, which are belittled today but which were once regarded as entirely obvious. The oft-quoted dictum by Uvo Hölscher about the 'closest other' sums up the dangerous ambiguity in our relationship with Classical Antiquity: on account of our tradition, we feel a certain sense of kinship with ancient culture, which makes us forget its otherness all too easily.<sup>33</sup> A look at the portrait of Octavian well illustrates how mediated our access to ancient portraits as historical documents really is (Fig. 1.6): the ruffled hair over his forehead, for example, might perhaps strike an unbiased observer as 'dynamic' (although many a museum visitor simply believes Octavian to be uncombed); that it is, in fact, a reference to Alexander the Great requires someone proficient in the iconography of Alexander, on the one hand, and in the modes of self-fashioning and the usage of visual templates in ancient portraiture in general, on the other.<sup>34</sup> Comparable misunderstandings are a scholarly reality. The portraits from a tomb monument in the Vatican frequently referred to as Cato and Porcia (Fig. 1.5) became a textbook example of a Roman married couple and Roman virtues. According to the associated inscription, however, these two individuals are a certain M. Gratidius Libanus and his *liberta* Chrite, whose ethnic background was most likely anything but Italo-Roman.<sup>35</sup>

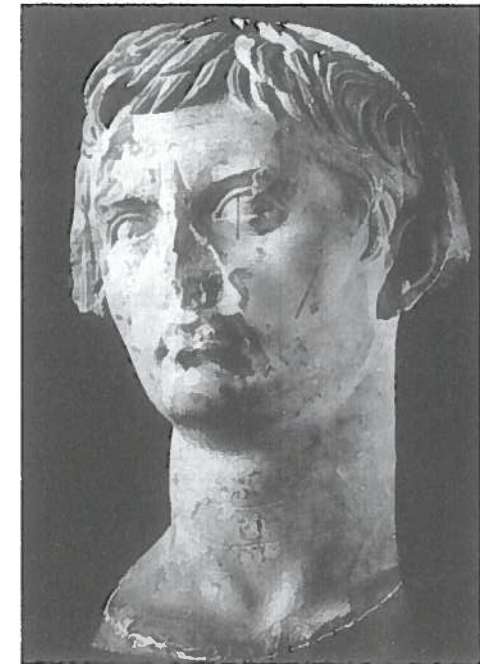


Fig. 1.6. Portrait of Octavian. La Alcudia, private collection.

Luca Giuliani paid heed to these considerations in his aptly-titled work *Bildnis und Botschaft* ('Portrait and Message') by illustrating the programmatic representational intentions of republican portraits and proposing a new interpretive approach.<sup>36</sup> On close inspection, the seemingly mercilessly realistic and individual portraits of the late republican upper class showcase specific and recurrent mimic formulas (termed 'pathognomic' by Giuliani) which were added like attributes to the features of individual persons. Giuliani interprets these mimic formulas as some kind of gestures, largely canonized and fixed in their meaning, and rooted in the value system of appropriate behaviour, just as the gestures of orators in public gatherings were. A passage from Cicero's *In Pisonem* serves as one example among numerous ancient sources which justify such an approach. Here the reputable consul L. Calpurnius Piso Caesonianus is accused:

Do you begin to see, monster, do you begin to realize how men loathe your face?<sup>37</sup> [...] it was your eyes, eyebrows, forehead, in a word your whole countenance, which is a kind of dumb interpreter of the mind, which pushed your fellow-men into delusion; this it was which tricked, betrayed, inveigled those who were unacquainted with you. There were but few of us who knew of your filthy vices, few the crassness of your intelligence and the sluggish ineptitude of your tongue. Your voice had never been heard in the forum; never had your wisdom in council been put to the test; not a single deed had you achieved either in peace or war that was, I will not say famous, but even

known. You crept into office by mistake, by the recommendation of your dingy family busts, with which you have no resemblance save colour.<sup>38</sup>

Already at a young age, Piso is said to have fooled people with his 'assumed and crafty grave face'.<sup>39</sup> It thus seems that the pictorial ciphers of specific mimic features identified by Giuliani corresponded in part with factual rules of behaviour.

What is important in comparison to previous approaches is that Giuliani applies the known value system neither to an entire social group nor to a general feeling evoked by the images in our biased mind. Rather, he connects individual values and virtues with specific pictorial formulas and thus creates a kind of reading guideline for portraits of the republican upper class. While contemporaries doubtless understood the signs intuitively – based on their viewing habits and their familiarity with general norms of behaviour – and thus did not have to decipher them consciously, the approach proposed by Giuliani opens up a sophisticated methodological access route to the various ways of self-representation, one applicable even for us today.<sup>40</sup>

### III. Portraits and freedmen

On the basis of these ideas, another look at the tomb reliefs of freedmen is salutary for, as already suggested, many of the physiognomic types of these reliefs resemble the portraits of important personalities of the late Republic.<sup>41</sup> In individual cases, a physiognomic type that resembles the so-called 'Tusculum Type' of Caesar from the 40s BCE, for example – which has led to the most abstruse identifications of certain portraits as Caesar by modern scholars – might indeed have been due to a personal admiration for Caesar by those who had their images carved in a style imitating his own. The same might be true for the assimilation of some freedmen to Caesar's later portrait type (Figs 1.7, 1.8).<sup>42</sup> However, it is just as likely that such assimilations did not refer to the person himself but to the values and ideals expressed by his outward appearance. This is supported by the fact that the similarities are of a comparatively general nature in most cases, and that the preferred physiognomic types and models were those which accorded the civic, 'stately' virtues of the aristocracy. Someone who chose a representation in the style of Cicero might not have meant to show explicit support and admiration for his person but might perhaps have wanted to be perceived as a man of letters or to claim some other character features for himself which were embodied by Cicero's likeness, whatever these might have been.<sup>43</sup>

The unforgiving representation of age (Fig. 1.3), which has so often been (mis)understood as just an indication of a 'realistic' style of representation,<sup>44</sup> attains new meaning when it is linked with keywords in contemporary rhetoric including *consilium* (judgement), *ratio* (reason),

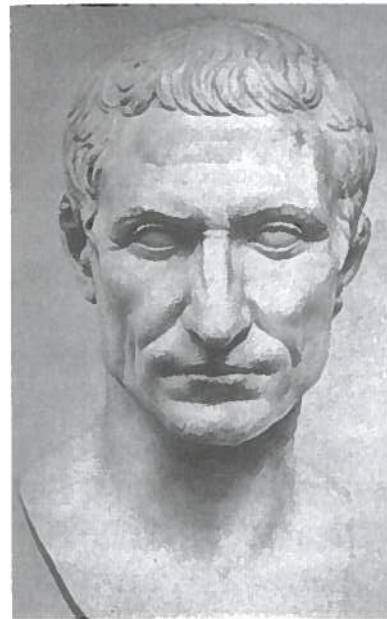


Fig. 1.7. Portrait of Caesar, Pisa/Chiaramonti- Type. Rome, Vatican, Sala dei Busti, Inv. 713.

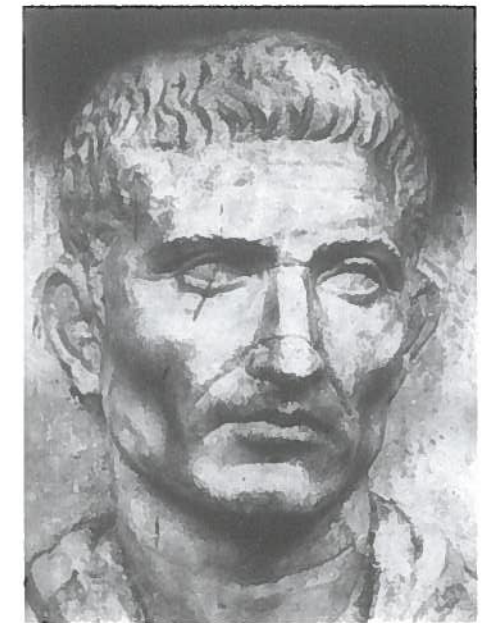


Fig. 1.8. Relief portrait of P. Furius: detail. Rome, Vatican, Museo Gregoriano Profano, Inv. 10464.

*sapientia* (wisdom), *sententia* (opinion) or *auctoritas* (authority), which are particularly associated with advanced age. Alternatively, these features could perhaps be associated with the accomplishments achieved throughout a long life: no other group of portraiture displays signs of age as relentlessly as the reliefs of freedmen.<sup>45</sup>

Energetic images which arguably combine ideas of *fortitudo* (bravery), dynamism and energy with the wisdom of old age are rare and mostly early (Fig. 1.9).<sup>46</sup> They are still reminiscent of late Hellenistic portraits like that of an anonymous though important man of the late second century.<sup>47</sup> However, the majority of men present us with a calm, serious face, as we can see in the images of Cicero, Caesar (Fig. 1.7), Crassus (Fig. 1.10) or Agrippa.<sup>48</sup> The contracted brows, the pressed lips and the entire facial features of the Crassus portrait, for instance, recall the passage above from Cicero's speech and could be linked to such terms as *gravitas* (seriousness), *severitas* (sternness) and *constantia* (firmness), which also assured the *dignitas* (dignity) of a senatorial office (Fig. 1.10).<sup>49</sup> Even if this office lay outside the reach of those portrayed on our reliefs, the necessary characteristics equally honour an ordinary citizen and *pater familias* (head of the family) (Fig. 1.11). Whatever the reasons for the curb in pathos that we observe across ancient Mediterranean art from the second third of the first century



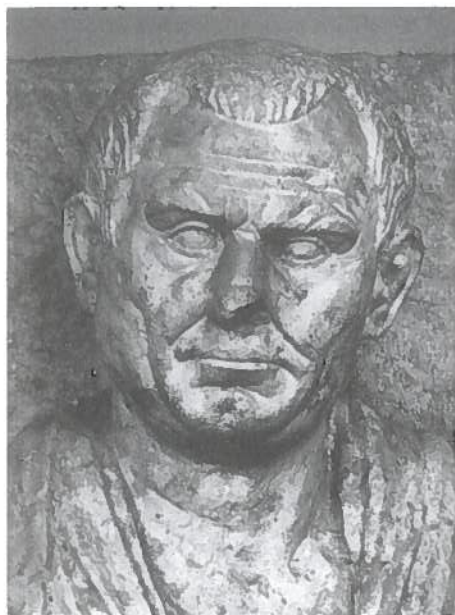


Fig. 1.9. Full-figure tomb relief of a couple: detail. Rome, Palazzo Conservatori, Braccio Nuovo, Inv. 2124.

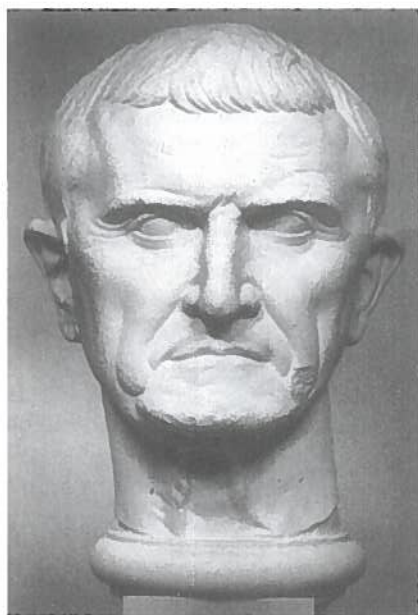


Fig. 1.10. Portrait of Crassus. Plaster cast in Munich after the original in Paris, Musée du Louvre, Inv. Ma 1220.

BCE, the calm and collected expression of Caesar's portraits (Fig. 1.7) and related images, which renounced any imperial air, must have been interpreted at Rome as a sign of *temperantia* (self-control) and *mansuetudo* (mildness), of *modestia* (restraint) and *constantia* (perseverance) – values which continued to be invoked in the face of the cruelties exacted by the civil war.<sup>60</sup> Yet, these characteristics in particular were not exclusive to emperors but were worthy of imitation by any good citizen, including freedmen.

Conspicuously, real pathos-formulas following the Hellenistic tradition are nearly entirely absent: nowhere do we find the declamatory turn of the head of Pompey or of the young Octavian (Fig. 1.6). An elevated self-dramatization and a demonstration of the *virtus imperatoria* (imperial virtue) that followed the *habitus* of Hellenistic rulers did not conform to the role of a freedman. The ruffled frontal hair of a young man on a relief in the Villa Wolkonsky (Fig. 1.12), potentially inspired by the portrait of Pompey (Fig. 1.13), represents an exception and appears to be almost ambitious-looking in comparison with the other images.<sup>61</sup> It is symptomatic that the few soldiers on the reliefs (Fig. 1.3) do not assume any of the emphatic pathos-formulas of military leaders. The 'messages' of the Hellenistic ruler portrait

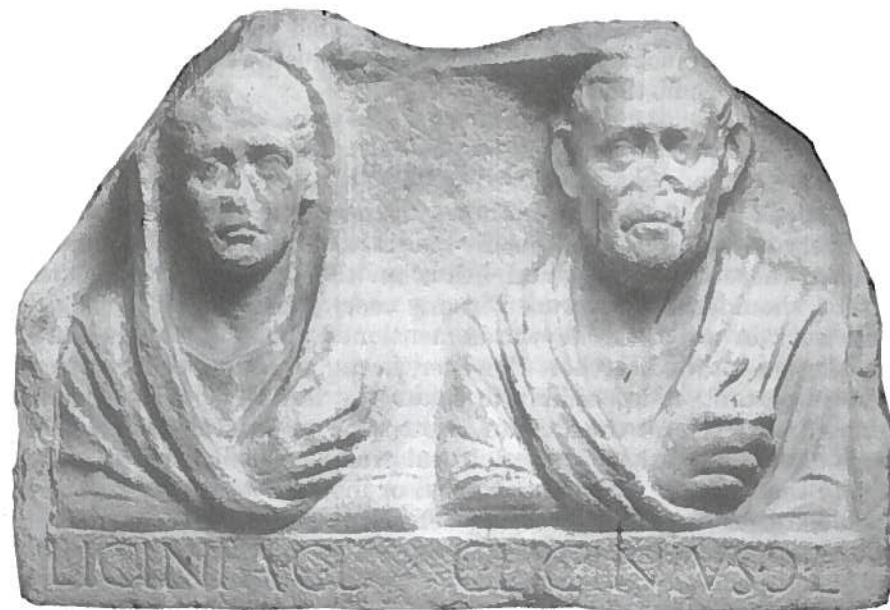


Fig. 1.11. Tomb relief of the Licinii. Alatri, Corso Vittorio Emanuele 41.



Fig. 1.12. Tomb relief: detail. Rome, Villa Wolkonsky.

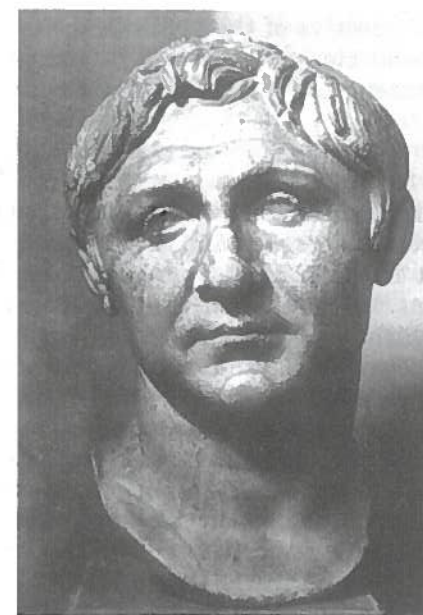


Fig. 1.13. Portrait of Pompey. Venice, Museo Archeologico, Inv. 62.

and its republican successors probably exceeded the ambition of most freedmen just as much as the ideology of the Augustan idealized portraits did, at least for some time.

#### IV. Conclusion

The scope of this work neither allows for nor requires a review of each and every one of Giuliani's specific readings of mimic formulas, nor to transfer these onto individual heads on the freedmen reliefs (this method should not be overused in any case). Nor can the ideological framework in which the keywords mentioned above unfold their true meaning be detailed further. However, in my view, one thing appears to be important: it is possible to relate the initially purely abstract values and norms of the Roman aristocracy to concrete behavioural ideals and *habitus*, that is, to a cultural practice which, after all, is the feature that decides their effectiveness or ineffectiveness in social life. These exterior ways of expressing behaviour and *habitus* in turn are reflected in visual representations, especially in those of the nobility and of political and social protagonists. The assimilation of freedmen to their likenesses therefore attests the acceptance of the norms propagated by the nobility on the part of the freedmen from their own point of view, if only on a basic level. At the same time, and from the perspective of the nobility, the communication of their norms to other social classes proves to be exceptionally successful, both in terms of content and strategies of dissemination.

#### Epilogue

The preceding paper first appeared in 2000 in an edited volume resulting from a workshop and larger project on Roman values in the late Republic at Dresden, Germany, mostly involving Latinists and Ancient Historians.<sup>53</sup> My intention was therefore to offer some insight into the ways in which Classical Archaeology can contribute to a social history of the ancient world and, more specifically, to our understanding of the value system of non-élites. I am grateful to the editors for inviting me to contribute to the present volume a translation of this paper, and for the opportunity to communicate my ideas more widely. As might be expected, I would not write this paper in exactly the same way today, but I still agree with the main points of my original argument. The editors and I have therefore decided to add to the translation only some updated bibliography, and this epilogue with some further comments and thoughts on what I would do differently if I wrote this paper now and in a different context, and on where I see scope for further research.

#### *Psychologizing approaches, biographical fallacies, and the 'trickle-down effect'*

It is by now generally agreed by scholars in the field that any psychologizing approaches to portraiture as exemplified by Curtius and von Heintze are obsolete, and at the time when I first presented the paper they had already been widely criticized. Thus, there is no need to continue nagging at these otherwise very accomplished scholars. On the other hand, Luca Giuliani's attempt at resituating the interpretation of portraits on a sound and reflected methodology appears to have had very limited impact. It may be true that some of his interpretations are too mechanical in that they are based on a semiotic concept of signs or codes with fairly definite meanings.<sup>54</sup> We should conceive of individual features not as signs conveying only a single clear-cut message, but rather as visual stimuli for a limited range of associations. But with these qualifications in mind, I still hold that his methodology is valid and worthy of continued reflection. After all, the idea of striking individualism and realism in late republican portraiture continues to be repeated despite the obviously limited set of visual formulas employed.

More recently, Bert Smith has drawn attention to what he called the 'biographical fallacy' – namely the danger of reading into a portrait what we believe we know about an individual.<sup>55</sup> As he rightly points out, a patron or artist may not necessarily want to characterize the individual portrayed with *all* his or her features, or with what *we* might regard as their most important ones. Rather, he wants to guide the viewer's perception towards a particular aspect of this person's character that was worth advertising in its *ancient* context. The statue of Sophocles is an excellent example: only by comparison with the portrait statue of Aeschines and a passage in Demosthenes can we identify the message, namely that Sophocles is presented in the guise of an Athenian orator and thus as the epitome of the politically engaged 'good citizen', as Paul Zanker has shown.<sup>56</sup> In the portrait, there is nothing that would have identified him as the tragedian we may expect to be depicted. The portraits of Hadrian are another good example: our knowledge that Hadrian was a graecophile, and the observations that the Greeks as well as Greek 'intellectuals' used to wear beards, are insufficient to support the view that Hadrian wanted himself to be depicted *as a Graecophile and an intellectual*. Rather, as Smith argues with reference to the *Roman* tradition of wearing a beard and a hairstyle like Hadrian's (among other things), he is represented in an urbane and elegant style that stresses his *civilitas* (affability) and that was meant to be contrasted programmatically with his predecessor Trajan's *simplicitas* (simplicity) and military *virtus*.<sup>56</sup> I would clarify now my original text and stress that the proposed methodology guards against the still-persistent danger of succumbing to the biographical fallacy, as much as against adopting the obsolete psychologizing approach. The suggested interpreta-

tion of elements of republican portraits is not based on any individual named portrait or on the assumption that this portrait must represent the character features we know this individual possessed. Rather, it is based on comparisons with other visual material and explicit statements in contemporary sources such as literary texts or coins about widely accepted readings of visual signs and *habitus*.

I should also have made clearer how my interpretation of the freedmen reliefs differs from the notion of a 'trickle-down effect', the assumption that lower social classes would emulate the élite by default.<sup>57</sup> The term 'trickle-down effect' is misleading in at least three ways. First, it suggests an automatism that largely denies any active choice. What I have proposed, however, is based on the assumption that the freedmen *deliberately chose* certain features for their representations that also appear among the élite, and that they chose them probably not primarily because they were élite characteristics but because they were characteristics of any good Roman citizen. This is most obvious in their reluctance to emulate certain other élite portrait styles, like those modelled on Hellenistic rulers. Second, the term 'trickle-down effect' suggests that the socially inferior groups necessarily received their value system and *habitus* from the élite, and from the élite only; that they used exclusively élite elements for representation, which were just watered down a bit while 'trickling down'. This is obviously not the case either. Unfortunately, our evidence for élite portrait-representation in the late Republic is extremely scarce, so that it is difficult to assess the exact relation between the likenesses of freedmen, freeborn and the élite. But the freedmen's inclusion of references to occupations is clearly not based on any élite precedent but rather on values specific to the working class(es). Similarly, Carola Reinsberg has argued that the *dextrarum iunctio* of married couples was originally used by the non-élite and entered into élite self-representation only in the Antonine era when it was inspired by imperial precedent.<sup>58</sup> These examples demonstrate some ideological independence in freedmen self-representation and imply that others may have escaped our notice too. Thirdly, the 'trickle-down' model often suggests, at least implicitly, that self-representation of social inferiors is addressed at the élite. This is equally misleading, at least for the majority of freedmen. More recently, scholars – including Lauren Hackworth Petersen, John Bodel, and Carlos Galvao-Sobrinho (in this volume) – have argued convincingly that the main addressee of freedmen self-representation was the peer group itself.<sup>59</sup>

#### Context

This leads to a more general point on the study of freedmen reliefs. As already mentioned, the original context of the essay required a focus on norms and values, and I still think that this aspect is important for our understanding of freedmen self-perception and ideology. But in a new

study on freedmen reliefs I would opt for a more contextual approach. To start with the norms and values again, it would be interesting to compare the ideas identified in the reliefs by others and myself with themes addressed in epitaphs. To be sure, we should not expect the reliefs to illustrate merely the epitaphs, nor should we expect the epitaphs to serve as captions to the images; both probably complemented each other. But these inscriptions are another important source for a better understanding of the value system of the freedmen in general, against which we could check our interpretation of the reliefs, and which may indicate additional meanings of certain features. For instance, we could argue that the gesture of *dextrarum iunctio* signifies not only the *matrimonium iustum* and marital concord, as is widely acknowledged, but also constitutes a special further comment on the wife, who is often praised in epitaphs as *univira* (married only once).<sup>60</sup>

Another aspect that would need further discussion is the question of who is actually represented in these reliefs. Hackworth Petersen has recently reminded us that only some 30% of the reliefs bear inscriptions that identify their patrons, and suggested that what we tend to take as typical freedmen art, i.e. the reliefs, could equally have been used by the freeborn population.<sup>61</sup> This is surely true in principle, and also in fact according to some attested cases, but I think that we can still support the view that these reliefs were primarily used by people from the freedmen milieu. First, it is generally agreed that the reliefs were fixed to the outside of tombs. Only three of the over 270 preserved portrait reliefs have been found *in situ*, so that we lack secure information about what kinds of monuments they used to decorate.<sup>62</sup> Two have been found on the Via Statilia set into the façades of house-like tombs.<sup>63</sup> Another one belongs to a freestanding cubic monument which may or may not have supported a lost altar.<sup>64</sup> The reliefs' frames and technical details indicate that many or even most of them were part of some larger structure, and since most of the tombs of this period lack any more elaborate chambers or even any chambers at all, the reliefs must have decorated the tombs' façades.<sup>65</sup> It is further clear from epigraphic and onomastic studies that between 70% and 80% of tomb *tituli* (title inscriptions) refer to dedications by freedmen, and the vast majority of the remaining ones to their first-generation descendants.<sup>66</sup> From this it follows that only a minority of the reliefs in question, if at all, can depict *ingenui* (freeborn citizens) with freeborn parents. This is supported by the inscriptions preserved on the reliefs. Of the 75 *tituli* that allow for an assessment of status, 65 include *liberti* among the dedicants and dedicatees.<sup>67</sup> Of the remaining ten, three are highly likely to belong to freedmen as well (one is very fragmentary, two are lacking filiations): in one instance the *tribus* (tribe) is Palatina, the typical *tribus* of freedmen, and in another one the cognomina are Greek, so that both are likely to belong to people of freedmen descent. The remaining seven reliefs could have been dedicated by and for *ingenui*, though one silversmith and

one *scriba* (clerk) point to a similar social background as the other reliefs. There is one relief indicating that, under certain circumstances, the second order might have opted for this type of relief too. It depicts three freeborn individuals in aedicula niches, of whom a young man in the centre aedicula named L. Septumius L.f. is designated as *eques*. However, his father was a *magister Capitolinus*, a position that was typically held by freedmen or foreigners who had been awarded citizen status.<sup>68</sup> Thus, even though the family had climbed steeply in the social hierarchy over just two or three generations, the links with the freedmen milieu are still clear enough. Whether the senatorial class ever used such reliefs – for instance, the rarer full-figured reliefs that are lacking the *dextrarum iunctio* motif – cannot be determined with certainty due to the very poor state of preservation of most elite tomb monuments, but so far there is no indication that they did. It is, therefore, safe, in my view, to regard the reliefs in question as well as their iconography as typical for the freedmen milieu, even if they may have been used by others on rare occasions.

This takes me to my third and final point, the notion of freedmen as such. Throughout my paper and this epilogue, I have used the term as if the freedmen were a socially coherent group of people, but this was clearly not true in reality. To be sure, from a legal point of view, freedpeople were a class of their own, united by the simple fact that they were former slaves, still deprived of major citizen rights and bound by certain obligations towards their former owners. However, from a less legalistic point of view, they were anything but equal and socially coherent. It is generally acknowledged that imperial freedmen were a special group and proud of their connection with the imperial household.<sup>69</sup> But it should be kept in mind as well that, as much as there were differences among imperial freedmen, there were further differences among freedmen of other *familiae*, depending on the status of their patron, but also on their profession and rank within the household. It is the imperial freedmen who had the best chances of becoming rich and powerful through their connection with the imperial *domus* (household), and who sometimes became so influential that they even alarmed the traditional Roman ruling classes: the likes of Nero's notorious freedman Epaphroditus, Domitian's freedman Abascantus, or M. Antonius Pallas, one of three particularly powerful freedmen of Claudius, who boasted in his tomb inscription about *ornamenta praetoria* (praetorian honours) and other honours granted to him by the Senate *ob fidem pietatemque erga patronus* (by reason of his fidelity and respect toward his patron) in a language that is strongly reminiscent of honorific inscriptions for the most deserving senators, as Pliny noted with disgust in one of his letters.<sup>70</sup> More research would be needed in order to pin down the social group(s) who used the reliefs in question here, but taking into account that there is a substantial number of Augustan and Julio-Claudian reliefs, it is significant that we do not find among them any imperial freedmen or *augustales* (the priestly order who maintained the

cult of Augustus). From a preliminary overview of their inscriptions, it seems that they mostly constituted a kind of 'middle class' among the freedmen, craftsmen, traders, and a few doctors: wealthy enough to be able to afford a decent, or even more elaborate tomb with relief decoration, aspirational enough to be interested in having such a monument, but not aspiring to challenge the elite or emulate them in any respect except the fundamental norms and values every good Roman citizen would and could plausibly subscribe to.

## Notes

1. The present text is a slightly altered version of a paper presented in the autumn of 1998 at a colloquium on *mos maiorum* in the context of the Sonderforschungsbereich 537 'Institutionalität und Geschichtlichkeit' (Institutionality and Historicity) at the Technical University Dresden. I would like to thank the organizers and particularly F.-H. Mutschler, and all the participants in discussion. This work originally appeared as Borg 2000, and was translated from the German with the help of Tobias Sperlich. I am grateful to the editors of this volume for the opportunity to publish my paper here again in a more accessible way. The text has not been updated except for some bibliographical additions to the footnotes, and an epilogue that will add some further thoughts and comments in the light of recent research.

2. On Roman portraiture generally, see now Fejfer 2008; on the history of scholarship on Roman portraits see Bazant 1995.

3. Zanker 1975. Similar tomb reliefs for freedmen were also produced outside of Rome; on this see Pflug 1989.

4. Accordingly, the reliefs from this period are nearly without exception made of marble, while previously local stones were used as well. Cf. Zanker 1975, 270f., 281f.; Kockel 1993, for the oldest pieces see 83-93, group A.

5. On the associated grave types see Zanker 1975, 271-81; Kleiner 1977, 7-13; especially Kockel 1993, 7-14; on this also Borg 1996, 82.

6. On columbaria, see also Galvao-Sobrinho's chapter here; on graves of the poorest: *ibid.*, note 6.

7. On the 'streets of tombs' in general see also Hesberg and Zanker 1987; Hesberg 1992; Koortbojian 1996.

8. See Galvao-Sobrinho in this volume for more on the stature of freed slaves from imperial households as reflected in their funereal practices.

9. On the following see Zanker 1975, 283-306; Kockel 1993, 15-55; Carroll 2006, 247-53.

10. Zanker 1975, 296-98.

11. Kockel 1993, 53f.; cf. *CIL* VI 26410; on the *bullae* see Goette 1986; on the toga see Goette 1990; Davies 2005.

12. Zanker 1975, 303-6; Kockel 1993, 24f.; cf. *CIL* I 3356a.

13. Kockel 1993, 39-42, 51-3.

14. Cf. Zanker 1975, 300f., who recognizes (at footnote 120) the difficulty in making the distinction yet insists on the specific semantic function of the toga in the image; Kockel 1993, 15; on this Borg 1996, 83-5.

15. Zanker 1975, 279, 298-300; Joshel 1992; Kockel 1993, 54, 245 (index 4); Clarke 2003, 118-24; George 2006.

16. Rome, Museo Vaticano, Museo Gregoriano Profano, Inv. 10491: Kockel 1993, 141f. no. H6 plate 51b, 52a-c [*CIL* VI 26410].
17. The significance of the 'correct demeanour' is also emphasized by Zanker 1975, 300, 308.
18. Zanker 1989; now Alexandridis 2004, 39-73; Davies 2008; Fejfer 2008, 331-48.
19. Kockel 1993, 50: cf. *CIL* VI 35397.
20. Thus Zanker 1975, 286f.; Kockel 1993, 54.
21. Cf. Borg 1996, 85 with n. 46f.; now especially Reinsberg 2006, 75-85; on concord in general cf. *LIMC* V (1990) 479-98 s.v. Homonoia/Concordia (T. Hölscher).
22. Zanker 1975, 312; also Zanker 1976, where a similar interpretation is assumed for the comparable portraits of the nobility (at 591f.). I believe that the misunderstanding rests on the fact that Zanker attributes a specific semantic function only to the formulas of *pathos*, which are derived from Hellenistic portraiture, and not to the formulas of naturalistic portraiture; on this see further below.
23. The arguments developed below are not meant to deny that ancient portraits, and in particular portraits of freedmen on tomb reliefs, could have resembled those whom they represented; what is essential here is that verisimilitude is not the only – and often perhaps not even the most important – intention behind the depiction.
24. Kockel 1993, 62-7.
25. Evans 1969; on Polemon's physiognomics and its sources see Gleason 1994, especially 29-54, and now Swain 2007, especially ch. 4 ('Physiognomics: Art and Text') by J. Elsner.
26. On modern physiognomic interpretations see Giuliani 1986, 11-51.
27. Von Heintze 1961, 9f.
28. For the history of scholarship on Roman portraiture see especially Bazant 1995; on the connection with contemporary attitudes to politics and the scholarly 'paradigm shift' after 1968, see especially Hölscher 2000, and now Dally 2007.
29. On the Nero portraits and their interpretation see the summary of Bergmann 1998, 147-9; on the hairstyle in general, see Cain 1993, 58-68, 88-95.
30. On the private portrait during the Neronian period see Cain 1993.
31. Goodman 1997, 56f. = Goodman 1968, 49.
32. Goodman 1997, 56 = Goodman 1968, 48.
33. Hölscher 1994.
34. On Octavian's portraits see Fittschen and Zanker 1994, 1f.; Boschung 1993 (with problematic type classifications); fundamental: Zanker 1973.
35. Zanker 1975, 285f.; Kockel 1993, 188-90 on L19, plate 105 [*CIL* VI 35397].
36. Giuliani 1986.
37. Watts has 'impudence' but the Latin *frontis* should be translated as 'face'.
38. Translation by N.H. Watts. Cic. *Pis.* 1: *iamne vides, belua, iamne sentis quae sit hominum querela frontis tuae? [...] oculi, supercilia, frons, voltus denique totus, qui sermo quidam tacitus mentis est, hic in fraudem homines impulit, his eos quibus eras ignotus decepit, fefellit, induxit, pauci ista tutulenta vitia noramus, pauci tarditatem ingeni, stuporem debilitatemque linguae, numquam erat audita vox in foro, numquam periculum factum consili, nullum non modo inlustre sed ne notum quidem factum aut militiae aut domi. obrepisti ad honores errore hominum [...];* on this see Giuliani 1986, 227f.
39. Cic. *Red. sen.* 13: *nam ille alter Caesoninus Calventius ab adolescentia*

*versatus est in foro, cum eum praeter simulatam versutamque tristitiam nulla res commendaret, non consilium, non dicendi facultas, non rei militaris, non cognoscendorum hominum studium, non liberalitas;* see Giuliani 1986, 228, with additional examples. N.H. Watts translates *tristitia* as 'melancholy', but 'grave face' seems to be more accurate: cf. Giuliani 1986, *ibid.*

40. This fundamental value of his methodology is not compromised either by (justified) criticism of some of Giuliani's individual interpretations or by the claim that many of the characteristics which are now related to specific mimetic formulas had been recognized all along (see especially Fittschen 1991). Valid critique of the discussion of some individual images primarily concerns their dating and their identification by name, occasionally creating a circular argument in the visual form(ula)s' interpretation. And the fact that some interpretations have never been doubted does not prove the expendability of a methodology but simply the fact that some (but clearly not all!) intuitive interpretations were correct. Their correctness, however, is really only substantiated by applying this methodology.

41. For a broad outline of the following see Giuliani 1986, 232f.

42. Examples in Kockel 1993, 64f., who does not, however, interpret the phenomenon; bibliography on the Caesar portraits in Kockel 1993, 64f. nn. 540, 543.

43. Cf. Kockel 1993, 65.

44. The literature on the so-called veristic portraits is vast, but mostly concerned with the origins of verism: see most recently Pollini 2007, and Rose 2008, 102-18 with further bibliography.

45. Giuliani 1986, 225-33.

46. Cf. especially a full-figure relief in Rome, Museo Capitolino, Palazzo Conservatori, Pr. N II, 24, Inv. 2142: Kockel 1993, 94f. No. B1 plate 10a. 12A-b. 14A-b (here Fig. 1.9). This is not to deny that this image, too, is clearly subdued when compared to the so-called Postumius Albinus – which also renders Kockel's association with the so-called Tivoli General convincing – but in comparison with the other images in his group it still appears relatively emotional.

47. Conventionally, the images are called Postumius Albinus; cf. Giuliani 1986, 190-9, who suggests an unverifiable interpretation of the images as M. Porcius Cato the Elder.

48. Kockel 1993, 64-6.

49. Giuliani 1986, 223-5, 233-8; on the grave reliefs see Kockel 1993, 64.

50. Giuliani 1986, 200-20.

51. Kockel 1993, 33 with n. 261; 100 on B 8 plate 15c. 16A-d; on the Pompey portrait see especially Bentz 1992.

52. Braun et al. 2000.

53. Fittschen 1991.

54. Smith 1998, 62-3, 83-7; 1999, 453; Smith's own approach to portraiture seems to be influenced by Giuliani's in that his interpretations of late antique statues draw upon descriptions and characterizations of behaviour in texts, e.g. Smith 1998, *passim*. I have succumbed to the biographical fallacy myself in my remark on Cicero (above) since there is actually nothing in his portrait characterizing him as a 'man of letters'.

55. *Tim.* 25; Zanker 1995, 43-50.

56. Smith 1998, 62-3, 83-7, contra Zanker and others; see also Borg 2004.

57. For such a view most recently see Pollini 2007, 261-2, who thinks that the freedmen emulated the nobility in order to stress their *romanitas*.

58. Reinsberg 2006, 75-85, esp. 81-2, where she points out that the marriage

motif enters elite ideology only after it featured on Antonine coins celebrating the concord characterizing the marriage of Antoninus Pius and Faustina Maior, and later of Marcus Aurelius and Faustina Minor (cf. also T. Hölscher in: *LIMC V* (1990) 479-98, esp. 487 no. 94, 488 no. 108, 495 s.v. Homonoia/Concordia).

59. Petersen 2006, esp. 184-226; Bodel 2008.

60. On the significance of marriage and the *dextrarum iunctio* see most recently Reinsberg 2006, 75-85; on its special relevance for the wife, *ibid.*, 83-5.

61. Petersen 2006, 96; for the numbers see Kockel 1993, 56. A publication of the relevant inscriptions by P. Castrén was announced in Kockel 1993, 77 but it never appeared; the fullest discussions thus remain Zanker 1975, and Kleiner 1977, 22-46.

62. Kleiner 1977, 7-13; Kockel 1993, 7-9.

63. Kockel 1993, 83-5 no. A2-3. On these tombs, most of which have been destroyed after their excavation see Colini 1943 and 1944, 393-6.

64. Kockel 1993, 7-8; 103-5 no. C4.

65. Kleiner 1977, 9-13. However, a few reliefs were found in *columbaria* and thus were displayed inside the tomb: *ibid.*, 9-10.

66. Taylor 1961; Mouritsen 2004 and 2005.

67. The following is based on the inscriptions as published in Kockel's 1993 catalogue. The majority of freedmen are identified by the explicit mentioning of their status, but I have added a few in which husband and wife bear the same family name.

68. Giuliano 1981, 259-60 on inv. n. 125655 (P. Sabbatini Tumolesi); cf. Kockel 1993, 101-2 cat. C1 pls. 17a; 18a-c; cf. *CIL VI* 40911.

69. Though see the qualifications by Galvao-Sobrinho in this volume.

70. Eck 1987, 76-8 with Plin. *Ep.* 7.29; 8.6 (see also Leach's chapter in this volume for further discussion of this passage). It is these specific kinds of freedmen, in my view, not the freedmen in general, who the senatorial writers complain about, and whom they regard as a threat to their power and the traditional order. The differences among the freedmen class (among other things) also make any assessment of Petronius' Trimalchio so difficult and should warn us against drawing conclusions from this piece of literature about the class as a whole and its perception (for one interpretation of Trimalchio see Ramsby in this volume).

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