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LATE-ANTIQUITY PORTRAIT STATUARY IN ROME. AN OVERVIEW

(Taf. 6–12, Abb. 1–13)

Abstract

This paper aims to examine statistically the extant, life-size or larger portraits in the round which were set up in Rome between the Tetrarchic period and the end of the statue habit in the sixth century. It will consider how many are imperial portraits, how many are female portraits, how many can be securely dated on external grounds, and how many were made *ex-novo*. Finally, it will look at the relationship between extant portraits and extant statue bases and how the evidence for the city of Rome compares to evidence from other areas of the Empire.

The physical evidence of late-antique portrait sculpture (bases and fragments of statues and busts) in Rome is significantly greater than in any other ancient city, and yet it has never been addressed as its own entity in a comprehensive study. This paper, which is based on the research of a three-year project entitled the Last Statues of Antiquity, endeavours to present this evidence in a statistical manner with emphasis on indisputable facts¹. Although it presents general findings regarding the epigraphic record, its focus is on the statuary.

Other major cities of the Roman Empire preserve between 50–100 physical pieces of evidence (either bases or fragments of statuary) of honorific portraiture for the period between the Tetrarchy and the mid-sixth century (Abb. 1). The ratio of extant bases to extant statuary fragments in these cities interestingly generally favours statuary. For example, the ratio of bases to statuary is 2:3 at Aphrodisias, 1:2 in Athens, 1:4 at Corinth, 1:1 at Ephesus. Only at Lepcis is it significantly inverted, 7:1. This reflects the careful publication of the bases from the site and probably unrecognized re-use of high-imperial statuary in late antiquity².

In Rome, the number of recorded bases is 350. This is more than four times that recorded at Lepcis Magna, the city with the next highest number of bases. Given that statuary is generally preserved in higher numbers than bases, one might expect that the sculptural record in Rome would be equally, if not more, dense than its epigraphic record. At the very least, one might expect four times the total number of the next highest city, Aphrodisias, which would yield some 240 items. However, the Roman evidence defies easy numeric assessment.

Forty-nine fragments of late-antique sculpture have secure find-spots in the city of Rome, and another thirty are thought to be from Rome (a total of c. 80). Yet Rome has for centuries been a source for collectors of ancient statuary and the site of a thriving art market which gathered, and still to a lesser extent gathers, material from all of central Italy. There were 15th–17th century Italian collectors who mainly garnered objects from their own properties, then a surge of “Grand Tour” European collectors as well as new excavations in the 18th and early 19th century, and finally the modern, late 19th and 20th, collectors who frequently purchased finds made during the construction of the new capital city. In addition to the c. 80 fragments from Rome, there are 90 other pieces which may be associated with the city. These come from old and more recent

¹ The project was directed by ROLAND R. R. SMITH and BRIAN WARD-PERKINS at the University of Oxford. Its results are published on www.laststatues.classics.ox.ac.uk and in “The Last Statues of Antiquity” (Oxford University Press 2016). All objects mentioned in this article are referred to with an LSA number which can be found on-line as well as with a single bibliographic reference. I thank especially my colleague CARLOS MACHADO for providing the information on the epigraphic evidence from the city of Rome.

² The bases at Leptis have been studied and published thoroughly in contrast to the sculpture. See Tantillo – Bigi 2010. All of the other cities mentioned and their evidence, are discussed in Smith – Ward-Perkins 2016, here at fn. 1.

Roman collections (for example, those of the Albani, Barberini, Borghese, Campana, Doria Pamphili, Giustiniani, Medici, and Torlonia), or are in the major museum collections of the city without specific provenance or were purchased in the city in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This makes for a total of almost 170 objects with a potential provenance of Rome.

Included among these objects are, for example, the colossal Constantine Giustiniani, first recorded in 1631 and now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York³; the portrait statue of a woman, purchased for Castle Howard from the Mattei “di Paganica” in 1740⁴; and the fine, fragmentary portrait of an emperor in a diadem, purchased in Rome in 1923 and now in Berlin⁵. Size in the first case, quality in the last case, and iconography in the middle case provide supporting arguments for a metropolitan origin⁶.

Objects acquired during the years of the major building in Rome, 1870–1900, are likely to be from Rome; for example, certain pieces acquired by WOLFGANG HELBIG for the Glyptotek in Copenhagen⁷. There is less clarity concerning other purchases made in Rome. For example, two heads now in Copenhagen, one purchased from the collection of LUDWIG CURTIUS⁸, and the other, a Constantine acquired from the scholar HANS PETER L’ORANGE⁹, as well as two female portraits of the later third century, now respectively in Boston and Munich¹⁰. Although it is possible in some cases that the buyers and sellers knew the provenance to be Rome, there is a margin of error. The head, possibly of a Tetrarch, now in Oslo, serves as a warning¹¹. It was purchased in 1930–1931 in Rome but is so similar to the portrait of a Tetrarch in Sperlonga that it seems most likely to have come from there¹².

Thus, the number, roughly 170 for late-antique sculpture from Rome, lacks the quantitative certainty of the evidence from Corinth, Ephesus, or Aphrodisias. It is however the most accurate figure that can be arrived at and, given the number of bases from Rome it is not a spectacularly large number. Three hundred and fifty statue bases and 170 statuary fragments yield a ratio of two bases to one element of statuary. The statistics from the total database of the Last Statue of Antiquity project are the inverse: one base for every two sculpted objects.

Honorands

The categories honoured by the Roman sculpture are remarkably traditional. Fifty-seven statues (34%) can be recognized as imperial; 51 (30%) are of non-imperial men; 39 (23%) are of women, and 17 (10%) are of cultural heroes¹³. In the two largest categories, imperial and male, this sculpted evidence fits well with the percentages provided by the epigraphic evidence from Rome, which shows 125 (36%) imperial and 113 (32%) non-imperial men.

There is more discrepancy between the sculpted and epigraphic evidence for portraits of women and cultural heroes. This probably depends on the fact that the extant portrait statuary of women and philosophers will have come from domestic settings as herms, shield portraits, or busts where inscribed bases may not have been necessary. For example, possibly as many as four versions of the portrait of Menander are known from late-antique Rome¹⁴. Two, if not three, are from shield portraits, and one is labelled on the rim of the shield (Abb. 2). The statue for a mother-in-law set up by Eubolion, now in Copenhagen, bears that dedicatory

³ LSA 554 = Schäfer 1999, 295–302 pl.69, 1–3.

⁴ LSA 1271 = Borg *et al.* 2005, 43 f. no. 8 pls. 9, 1–2 and 10, 1–2.

⁵ LSA 589 = Blümel 1933, 51 no. R 122 pls. 79 and 80.

⁶ Giuseppe Mattei Orsini 1673–1740 was last Duke of Paganica. The family had property on the Caelian hill which is interesting given that the statue has attributes of Isis.

⁷ Moltesen 2012.

⁸ LSA 804 = Johansen 1995, 164 f. no. 71.

⁹ LSA 807 = Johansen 1995, 170 f. no. 74.

¹⁰ LSA 1592 = Comstock – Vermeule 1976, no. 380; LSA 1552 = Bergmann 1977, 196 f. pls. 59, 1 and 60, 1.

¹¹ LSA 850 = Stutzinger 1983, 414 f. no.32.

¹² LSA 1043 = Cassieri 2000, 75 f. fig. 38.

¹³ There are also two to three portraits of divinities and a portrait of a child.

¹⁴ LSA 1193= Mustilli 1933, 101–104 no. 9 fig. 8; LSA 2106= Picozzi 1996, 271–278; LSA 2109 and 2110: Richter 1965, 227 no. 2 figs. 1528–1530; 234 no. 53 figs. 1569–1572. For a possible group of tondi portraits of cultural heroes from Rome, see Lenaghan in: Smith – Ward-Perkins 2016, 261 f.

text on the plinth of the statue, provides an example of domestic sculpture which probably did not require a formal inscribed base (Abb. 3)¹⁵.

If we consider the city-wide ratio of two bases for every sculpted element, the number of female portraits from the city is striking. In addition to the 39 fragments of statues of unknown women, there are nine female portraits which wear diadems and are therefore considered to be imperial statuary. These 48 sculptural monuments (39 unknown, 9 imperial) have a corresponding testimony of 27 bases (19 unknown, 8 imperial). The ratio for bases to statuary of non-imperial women, one base for almost every two statuary fragments is nearly the opposite of the general trend in Rome.

Portraits of women appear nowhere else in the Roman world in such quantity. Most of the Roman examples are preserved as detached heads, many of which have been removed from busts on which they were set at some unknown point. Nonetheless, there are three life-size statues of imperial women, two of the seated Helena and one a re-used black basalt statue of Agrippina, and six statues of unknown women¹⁶. As with portrait statues of men, these are new monuments made from extant pieces, that is, pastiches. Thus, the traditional statue of a woman in an undergarment and over-garment continued to be the appropriate mode to represent the ideal mother and wife. Only minor details of more modern, late-antique fashion, such as shoes, belt, or necklace, were deemed necessary additions to old statues and only upon occasion¹⁷. Female portraiture, a mainly private endeavour, in these numbers is an excellent demonstration of the continuity of the statue habit and the deep-seeded conservative nature of Rome.

Dated Portrait Sculpture

A few items from the city can be dated by external evidence, by inscriptions or by costume. These occur almost regularly throughout the late-antique period: There are two Tetrarchic statue groups, six in the Constantinian period, three Valentianic, three early-fifth century, and four early sixth century. These portraits are fixed points against which other material should be compared.

Two small-scale statue groups of emperors in porphyry that once decorated columns were found in the area of the “Baths of Domitian”¹⁸. Their number and iconography identify them securely. Beyond these, there are series of probable Tetrarchic portraits. Two, identified as Constantius I, and three, identified as Maxentius, were all acquired in Rome or from Roman collections¹⁹. They are identified as these tetrarchic-period emperors because they are types which appear to be based on the same model and which are deemed to correspond in physiognomy to coin images of these individuals. None of them display the attributes of an emperor or are identified by external facts. Three further heads can be added to these “probably” from Rome and “possibly” Tetrarchic portraits of emperors: these are two heads now in Copenhagen and one in the Vatican²⁰. Yet, these portraits are all out of context and notably devoid of any identifying imperial iconography.

The imperial portraits dated securely to the period of Constantine from Rome include the two colossal heads, one from the Basilica of Maxentius and the other from the Giustiniani collection, and the two cuirassed statues with *coronae civicae* of Constantine (Abb. 4. 5) and Constantine II from the Baths of

¹⁵ LSA 409 = Johansen 1995, 196–199 no. 87.

¹⁶ Helena: LSA 965 = Fittschen – Zanker 1983, 35 f. no. 38 pls. 47–48, and LSA 966 = Mansuelli 1961, 131 no. 171 pl. 168; Re-used Agrippina basalt: LSA 1597: Moltesen – Nielsen 2009; Six non-imperial women: LSA 409 = above fn. 15. LSA 1271 = above fn. 4; LSA 985 = Schade 2003, 197 f. no. I 38 pl. 47, 2–3; LSA 1296 = Carinci *et al.* 1990, 157–163 no. 87; LSA 1314 = L’Orange 1973, 43–53 figs. 1–5; LSA 1591 = Moreno – Viacava 2003, 210–212 no. 192; LSA 2122 = Calza 1977, 306 f. no. 379 pl. 219.

¹⁷ Shoes: LSA 1314; Belt: LSA 985; Necklace: LSA 1296. Full references above at fn. 16.

¹⁸ LSA 840 and 841 = Laubscher 1999, 207–239 with illustration.

¹⁹ Two heads of Constantius I, now in Copenhagen and Berlin, acquired respectively in 1893 and 1909: LSA 806 = Johansen 1995, 168 f. no. 73; and LSA 855 = Demandt – Engemann 2007, no. I 9, 1; Three portraits of Maxentius are LSA 895 (Vitali, now Torlonia) = Evers 1992, 9–13, LSA 896 (Bellori in 1698, now Dresden) = Demandt – Engemann 2007 no. I 7, 5, and LSA 897 (Barberini, now Stockholm) = Evers 1992, 9–22 figs. 6. 10. 13.

²⁰ LSA 810 and 811 = Johansen 1995, 184 f. no. 81; 186 f. no. 82. LSA 851 = Giuliano 1957, 80 no. 98 pl. 58.

Constantine²¹. The size and iconography of the first two portraits ensure that they represented Constantine; the second two have inscribed plinths that date them between 317–337 AD. Another cuirassed statue with a *corona civica* as well as a re-cut head wearing a *corona civica* also belongs securely in the early Constantinian period²². The *corona civica* was replaced by an imperial diadem by Constantine, and its appearance in statuary ends with Constantine and his sons. All of the above-mentioned imperial portraits from Constantinian Rome are re-carved from earlier monuments and so remain strongly within the Roman tradition of imperial iconography.

There is one private portrait from the Constantinian period from Rome that of C. Caelius Saturninus signo Dogmatius, dated to c. 325 (Abb. 6). He wears the traditional Roman toga and a short-bearded fashion that was well-rooted in third century styles and uninfluenced by the clean-shaven appearance of the Emperor Constantine²³. He began his career as an equestrian and the most recent achievement noted on his base is his adlection to the Senate. His statue notably wears the traditional *calceii* of the equestrian order.

The years between the death of Constantius II (361 AD) and the ascent of Theodosius in the west (392 AD) yield three externally-dated portraits from the city of Rome: a bronze togate statue of Valens or Valentinian from 364–367 AD (Abb. 7. 8) accompanied by a series of statues of Victories from the Ponte Sisto²⁴: a togate portrait bust of a man of senatorial rank, Cethegus, of c. 370²⁵; and a statue of a Vestal Virgin, Coelia Concordia set up by the wife of Vettius Agorius Praetextatus in 385 AD (Abb. 9)²⁶. The first example, the Valentinianic emperor illustrates the generic physiognomy, lank hair in a bowl-cut, and the diadem which came to characterize the emperor in the fourth century as well as the persistent re-use of traditional statuary for iconographic reasons. In this case, both the toga and the winged victory are key aspects of the imperial presence.

The second example, a togate portrait bust composed of three re-used elements, is dated by its dedicatory inscription: a son Furius Maechius Gracchus for his father Cethegus. Both son (corrector Flaminiae et Piceni in 350–352 AD, possibly Praefectus Urbis Romae in 376–377 AD) and father, a senator who died in 368 AD, are known²⁷. The bust well-illustrates re-use of old elements as well as the continued use of traditional costume and of statuary on a domestic level. It is also an item, a bust, which does not need a base or even a lengthy-inscribed text.

The third example, again from a private domestic context and again a re-used high imperial piece, bears strong testimony to the conservative aspect of the honorands and the awarders of statuary in Rome. The three individuals mentioned in the text of the inscription are the Vestal Virgin receiving the statue honour, the aristocratic woman who is awarding it, and the famous pagan husband of the woman awarder. The statue is awarded because the honorand, the Vestal Virgin, had herself set up a statue for the awarder's husband, Vettius Agorius Praetextatus. In addition, the awarder, a priestess of any number of pagan divinities, was also the recipient of at least one statue²⁸. This exchange of statue awards among aristocrats and holders of priesthoods is the typical *modus operandi* of the high Empire. It merits note also that the Vestal Virgins are a significant group of statuary awarders and recipients throughout the fourth century (11 bases)²⁹.

²¹ Constantine from Basilica of Maxentius: LSA 558 = Parisi Presicce 2007, 117–131; Constantine Giustiniani: LSA 554 = above fn. 3; Two cuirassed statues from the Quirinal hill, Baths of Constantine: LSA 555 and 559 = Fittschen – Zanker 1985, 144 f. no. 120 pls. 149–150; 145–47 no. 121 pls. 149–150. The bronze head from the Meta Sudans area (LSA 562 = Ensoli – La Rocca 2000, 71–90 no. 209) and the re-worked head of Constantine from the Forum of Trajan (LSA 833 = Maischberger 2006, 1–19) are other well-known imperial examples, the date and identification of which however are less secure.

²² Cuirassed statue with portrait head with corona civica: LSA 556 (= von Heintze 1979, 399–417. 426–437 pls. 118–129, 1; fig. 1). Portrait head with corona civica, from Casali collection and probably already in the inventory list of 1730: LSA 1066 (= Santolini Giordani 1989, 114 no. 50 pl. 8).

²³ LSA 903 and 1266 = Giuliano 1957, 81 f. no. 99 pls. 59–60.

²⁴ LSA 1820 (base), LSA 580 (head), LSA 1072 (togate statue), LSA 2584 (base for victory), LSA 2585 (base for victory), 2586 (wing of victory) = Ensoli – La Rocca 2000, 460–463 nos. 61–65 a–b.

²⁵ LSA 879 = Fittschen *et al.* 2010, 178 f. no. 177 pls. 220–221.

²⁶ LSA 1296 (statue) and 1510 (base): see above fn. 15 and CIL VI 2145.

²⁷ Many scholars have disassociated the foot of the bust and the bust. It seems to this author that the entire opus is a pastiche which should be dated by the inscription of c. 370. For fuller discussion, see Lenaghan in: Smith – Ward-Perkins 2016, 273 f.

²⁸ LSA 1474 = CIL VI 1780.

²⁹ Ten bases for Vestal Virgins: LSA 1480. 1482–1487. 1499. 1508. 1509.

After these monuments, the sculptural evidence presents three sets of dated items which span the period from c. 400 to c. 525. These are two statues in the late antique toga from c. 400, a statue of Jupiter from c. 412, and a group of similar manufacture from just after 500 AD. The two statues, holding *mappa* and wearing late-antique togas, were found on the Esquiline (Abb. 10, 1; 11, 1; 12)³⁰. Their costume, which is the reason that they are made *ex novo*, dates them almost securely. The late-antique toga in this arrangement first appears in the Theodosian period and is probably to be connected to new Theodosian laws on dress. The Esquiline statues should not be earlier than c. 400. They are remarkable because they conform carefully to the fashion and the sculptural trends of the eastern part of the Empire (Abb. 10, 2) but are themselves the only extant examples of this new toga style and statue type in the west. They stand in sharp contrast, for example, to the probably contemporary statue of a young man in a traditional toga, also found in the city of Rome (Abb. 11, 2)³¹.

An aegis-bearing statue of Jupiter, found in the area of a villa near the Porta Viminalis, is inscribed on its plinth, “To Jupiter Optimus Maximus, Naeratus Palmatus, a man of *clarissimus* rank, lord and founder of (this) place”³². Naeratus Palmatus was prefect of the city in AD 412 and is known to have owned property in the area where the statue was found. Regardless of any religious implication that the statue might have, it is yet again important testimony of the continued private usage of statuary which is less-apparent in the epigraphic record.³³ It is also, as most of the sculpture discussed in this paper, a recycled statue.

The final group of statuary that merits mention are three portraits of an empress (Abb. 13), which are of the same style and technical manufacture; all have hollow discs for the inlay of large irises in big eyes and stylized, abstract physiognomies³⁴. Two of the three are clearly replicas of the same model; they wear the exact same headdress and diadem and repeat the same mature facial features³⁵. The third appears to show a younger woman. The headdress, a stiff bonnet adorned with gems and strings of pearls, appears certainly on the imperial portrait in the upper register of a diptych of Clementinus, dated securely to 513 AD³⁶. The honorand of these Roman portraits is therefore often identified as Ariadne, empress from 491–515 AD. A male portrait found on the Palatine (as well as one from neighbouring Tusculum with a diadem) show the same technique and style³⁷. The technique and style, which in fact appears only on heads from Italy, might even be argued to be a western or Roman product. In any case, the three female portraits, and probably the male portrait given its find location, thus constitute evidence for imperial honours in the early sixth century for which there is no corresponding epigraphic evidence. There are possibly three bases for the emperor Valentinian III and his wife Eudoxia which range from AD 425–455 and then there is a gap in the epigraphic evidence for imperial honours until the column of Phocas in AD 608³⁸. Once more the discrepancy between bases and statuary is partly to be explained by the abbreviated format of the statuary, such as busts and shield portraits, which would not have needed a traditional pedestal.

³⁰ LSA 1068 and 1069 = Gehn 2012, 523–531 no. W 9 and W 10.

³¹ The reason for this different type of toga on these statues is a matter of speculation. Is the new toga form not found in full-size statuary in Rome because of an economic reason – continued re-use of old monuments –, because of deliberate conservatism, or simply because of a lack of evidence? The togate figure of young man from Rome: LSA 907 = Giuliano 1981, 34–36 no. 26.

³² LSA 2538 = Jacopi 1980, 15–24 figs. 4–10.

³³ The re-cut portrait of a woman: LSA 984 = Carignani 1990, 189–191 figs. 36–38, found in the fourth-century context of the basilica Hilariana, a sanctuary for Cybele and Attis and seat of the college of the *dendrofori*, is another example of the continued co-existence of statuary and traditional religious practice.

³⁴ LSA 755, 756, 757 = Schade 2003, 219–224 no. I 60–62 pls. 63–64.

³⁵ LSA 755, 757 = see above fn. 33.

³⁶ Liverpool ivory: Volbach 1976.

³⁷ LSA 1079 = Ensoli – La Rocca 2000, 583 no. 272; LSA 758 = Johansen 1995, 182 f. no. 80.

³⁸ Valentinian III: possibly LSA 1293 = CIL VI 1182 and LSA 1312 = CIL VI 1198; Eudoxia: LSA 1565 = CIL VI 40806; Column of Phocas: LSA 1313 = CIL VI 1200.

Conclusion

The evidence for late-antique statuary in Rome is impressively large, far larger than that in any other city of the Empire, and it continues through the sixth century into the seventh. Unsurprisingly it testifies strongly to traditional habits. Notably women here are better attested than anywhere else, the traditional toga form persists (notwithstanding the two togate statues from the Esquiline), and the elite continued to define themselves by adorning their private spaces with portraits of contemporaries and with ideal statuary. The significant recycling of extant statuary is probably both the result of the quantities available and a conservative interest in and esteem for the past on the part of the elite.

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Abbildungen

Abb. 1: Extant late-antique statues and bases from major cities (JULIA LENAGHAN)

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