

Portraying the Individual in the Roman East: Local-Imperial Entanglements in Sculpture, Mosaics and Paintings (1st–4th Centuries CE)

12–13 December 2024

Organized by Rubina Raja (Aarhus University)



AARHUS
UNIVERSITY

CARLSBERG FOUNDATION



Bust of Yedi Bel, IN 1146 (Photo: Anders Sune Berg ©Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek).

Front cover
The Beauty of Palmyra, IN 2795 (Photo: Anders Sune Berg ©Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek).

Table of Contents

Outline	4
Programme	6
Abstracts	
Jane Fejfer: Portraying the Emperor – Seeing the Emperor: Between Typology and Individuality	10
R. R. R. Smith: Theoi Sebastoi Olympioi: Hellenising Imperial Images in the Greek East.....	11
Rubina Raja: Local Portrait Habit in an Imperial World: The Portraiture from Palmyra	12
Michael Blömer: Portraying the Individual in Syrian Hierapolis.....	13
Olympia Bobou and Chris Dickenson: The portrait statues from the Artemision at Messene	14
Barbara Borg: Portrait Mummies from Antinoöpolis as Evidence for Élite Interaction between Egypt and Syria.....	15
Christopher H. Hallett: Painted Portraits and Individualized Masks on Mummy-Cases in Roman Egypt.....	16
Dietrich Boschung: The Other Half of the Empire: Portraying the Individuals in the West.....	17
Maureen Carroll: Funerary Portraits on the Rhine in the Mid-1st c. CE: Sartorial Expressions of Cultural Awareness and Ethnic Belonging.....	18
Nadežda Gavrilović Vitas: Citizens, Emperors and Gods: Portraiture in the Roman Central Balkans.....	19
Amalie Skovmøller: From Periphery to Centre Stage: ‘Zenobia in Chains’ (1859) by Harriet Hosmer and ‘The Death of Cleopatra’ (1876) by Edmonia Lewis	20
Venues	22
Organizer	23
Conference Webpage.....	23

Outline

Roman-period statues and busts, both from private, public or tomb contexts, representing individuals — painted or sculpted, figured in relief or in the round — have long been a major focus of interest in Classical Archaeology and Art History. This also extends to numerous examples from the regions beyond the centre of the Roman Empire. However, no synthetic overview, analysis or overview exist of this material from the ‘peripheries’, i.e. places, cities and regions that often did not consider themselves peripheral and which also had been and was in contact with a variety of other cultures, including Greek, Hellenistic, Egyptian and Persian.

This conference will bring together scholars who work on statues and busts – in different materials, produced both inside and outside the Roman Empire, in order to consider new lines of inquiry and new ways of researching the widely disseminated ‘individual-portrait’ as a period-specific cultural product.

The main point of departure for the conference is provided by the decade-long research within and results from the Palmyra Portrait Project, which has collected and documented the largest single corpus of portraits of the Roman period found outside of Rome, approximately 4000 portraits. This dataset now stands alongside several other corpora, all of them more or less contemporary: the countless statues, busts and reliefs from all over the Roman Empire, found on tomb façades and in tombs, on stelai and on sarcophagi; more than a thousand painted mummy portraits from Roman Egypt; the forest of honorific portrait statues that stood in the public spaces of the cities of the Empire; and the authoritative formulaic images of the Roman emperor—large and small, fashioned in a wide range of materials — found just about everywhere, from the sanctuaries, over private houses and public spaces.

Our rapidly increasing knowledge of the visual culture of the Roman provinces and beyond and the economically vibrant border regions raises, now with a slightly different emphasis, a series of questions about the nature and function(s) of the Roman individual-portrait and its proper interpretation. In particular, the issue of local versus imperial (court) portrait styles, and the connections (‘entanglements’) between the different existing traditions of portraying individuals, which vary considerably from city to city, and from region to region.

Papers at the conference will engage with mainstream portrait styles — as well as significant deviations from those styles. Papers will trace the impact of the Roman imperial image on local traditions, or the way that some artistic and production traditions can be seen to persist relatively untouched by external influence. Questions about materials, polychromy, resources, workshops and distribution may also form part of the programme, as well as new work on the reconstruction of noteworthy display contexts on well-attested cases of reworking or reuse of portrait images, or the establishment of particular chronological developments/links in provincial visual culture.

Programme: Thursday 12 December

8:30–9:00 Coffee (3rd floor)

9:00–9:30 Welcome and Introduction
Rubina Raja (Aarhus University)

Chair: Christopher H. Hallett

9:30–10:20 Portraying the Emperor - Seeing the Emperor:
Between Typology and Individuality
Jane Fejfer (The Saxo Institute, University of Copenhagen)

10:20–11:10 Theoi Sebastoi Olympioi: Hellenising Imperial Images in the
Greek East
R. R. R. Smith (University of Oxford and Bilkent University)

11:10–12:00 Local Portrait Habit in an Imperial World: The Portraiture from
Palmyra
Rubina Raja (Aarhus University)

12:00–13:00 Lunch (3rd floor)

Chair: Rubina Raja

13:00–13:50 Portraying the Individual in Syrian Hierapolis
Michael Blömer (Westfälische-Wilhelms Universität Münster)

13:50–14:40 The portrait statues from the Artemision at Messene
Olympia Bobou (Aarhus University)
and Chris Dickenson (University of Groningen)

Chair: Rubina Raja

14:40–15:10 Coffee (3rd floor)

15:10–16:00 Portrait Mummies from Antinoöpolis as Evidence for
Élite Interaction between Egypt and Syria
Barbara Borg (Scuola Normale Superiore)

16:00– Visit to New Carlsberg Glyptotek

20:00 Speakers' Dinner (Delphine, Vesterbrogade 40)

Programme: Friday 13 December

9:30–10:00 Coffee (3rd floor)

Chair: R. R. R. Smith

10:00–10:50 Painted Portraits and Individualized Masks on Mummy-Cases in Roman Egypt
Christopher H. Hallett (UC Berkeley)

10:50–11:10 Coffee (3rd floor)

Chair: R. R. R. Smith

11:10–12:00 The Other Half of the Empire: Portraying the Individuals in the West
Dietrich Boschung (University of Cologne)

12:00–12:50 Funerary Portraits on the Rhine in the Mid-1st c. CE: Sartorial Expressions of Cultural Awareness and Ethnic Belonging
Maureen Carroll (University of York)

12:50–13:50 Lunch (3rd floor)

Chair: Barbara Borg

13:50–14:40 Citizens, Emperors and Gods: Portraiture in the Roman Central Balkans
Nadežda Gavrilović Vitas (Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

14:40–15:30 From Periphery to Centre Stage: 'Zenobia in Chains' (1859) by Harriet Hosmer and 'The Death of Cleopatra' (1876) by Edmonia Lewis
Amalie Skovmøller (University of Copenhagen)

Chairs: Christopher Hallett and Rubina Raja

15:30–16:00 Final Discussion and Closing

16:00 Reception at the academy

18:00 Speakers' Dinner (Vækst, Sankt Peders Stræde 34)

Portraying the Emperor – Seeing the Emperor: Between Typology and Individuality

Jane Fejfer
The Saxo Institute, University of Copenhagen
fejfer@hum.ku.dk

During excavations in 2007–2008 in the ancient city of Sagalassos in Pisidia in south-western Turkey, a gallery of statues of Roman imperial family members, all in colossal size, when standing well over 5 m tall, were uncovered in the so-called Imperial Baths. There were several hands, arms, feet, legs, and three well-preserved heads, two male and one female. The fragments added up to at least six statues, all made in acrolithe technique with nude body parts carved in white Docimion marble, while the clothed body parts were most probably casted in bronze, gilded, and then attached to a wooden core.

Two of the three preserved colossal portraits were immediately identified as representing members of imperial family, Hadrian and Faustina Maior. To determine the identity and date of the third portrait of a mature man with long beard, by most scholars assumed to represent Marcus Aurelius, proved more difficult, however. Why is that so?

Unique emperor portraits are not exceptional, in particular not in Asia Minor from where there are several, but these are usually explained as being of poor workmanship made by a sculptor who either could not follow the official model well or did not have a model at all. However, this does not apply to the Sagalassos portrait. On the contrary, I argue in this paper that it seems to be a unique example of how a local portrait artist chose to represent the emperor Septimius Severus as he looked and not how he was styled in Rome in his official coinage. The Sagalassos Severus brings new insight into the how, with what means, and why local commissioners and artists constructed their own way of seeing and relating to the emperor through the portrait medium.

Theoi Sebastoi Olympioi: Hellenising Imperial Images in the Greek East

R. R. R. Smith
University of Oxford and Bilkent University
bert.smith@ashmus.ox.ac.uk

The emperor's portrait was designed in authorized central models that were made available, in some form, for any kind of imperial image to be set up elsewhere. Busts and statues might follow the available models closely, or they might not. Scholarship in this area has tended to privilege a central perspective of imperial models and provincial 'replicas' which ill-suits the highly varied character of the evidence. In most cases, 'replica' is a serious misrepresentation of the evidence in local contexts outside Rome.

The paper discusses some of the more 'disobedient' versions and re-purposing of imperial images in their varied receptions in the Greek East. Examples are selected from Aphrodisias and Ephesos, as well as from some other eastern cities. Material, function, local technologies, and local ideas all played a part in their variety. Most striking are imperial images in which emperors became Hellenistic-style ruler-gods. Eastern cities forged their own vision of the emperor that converted what to modern eyes was the most Roman of subjects into Theoi Sebastoi Olympioi. Such statues were shaped by ideas that were alien to, often opposed to, the basic ideological premises of the 'central' images on which they were based.

Many eastern cities thus conjured Hellenistic rulers out of Roman emperors, not with any purpose of denying imperial reality, but to mould a style of ruler more in tune with local perceptions of these strange new all-powerful divinities.

Local Portrait Habit in an Imperial World: The Portraiture from Palmyra

Rubina Raja
Aarhus University
rubina.raja@cas.au.dk

The oasis city Tadmor, better known as Palmyra, holds the largest group of representations of individuals handed down to us from the first centuries CE in the ancient world. The more than 4000 portraits – of which most stem from the rich funerary monuments surrounding the city – have been the focus of the Palmyra Portrait Project since 2012. Within the project the entire corpus of sculpture from the city – local and imported – has been studied, both in their own right and as expressions of the local society's relationship to and knowledge about the world beyond Palmyra – with Rome and Parthia as important players, but also as allies, enemies, and competitors, at least at one point for power over the region. This paper focuses on trends and outliers in the sculptural corpus, which span almost three centuries of portrait habit(s) from this urban place in the middle of the Syrian Desert, bringing to the forefront ways of applying the sculptural corpus as a key source to our understanding of the city, the region, and broader developments in the ancient world in the first three centuries CE.

Portraying the Individual in Syrian Hierapolis

Michael Blömer
University of Münster
michael.bloemer@uni-muenster.de

The city of Hierapolis in northern Syria is best known as the centre of the cult of Atargatis / Dea Syria. Lucian gives a vivid description of the main sanctuary, and many studies have been devoted to the cult of this goddess in the Roman Empire. However, the site of Hierapolis itself and the material culture of the city remain largely unknown.

For example, it is little known that Hierapolis was one of the main centres of sculpture production in ancient northern Syria. Several statues and reliefs associated with the cult of Dea Syria, as well as many funerary reliefs and statues, can be attributed to the city. Since the early twentieth century, travellers to Hierapolis have documented finds of such sculptures at the site. However, very few attempts have been made to study this corpus in a holistic way. In this paper I will first discuss the characteristics of the sculpture from Hierapolis, focusing on the funerary portraits. In a second step, I will focus on the regional and supra-regional connections of the portraits. The relationship with funerary portraits from neighbouring cities will be discussed, as well as the influence of Roman traditions. This will contribute to a better understanding of the complex and diverse landscape of funerary portrait production in ancient northern Syria.

The portrait statues from the Artemision at Messene

Olympia Bobou
Aarhus University
olympia.bobou@cas.au.dk

Chris Dickenson
University of Groningen
chris.dickenson@rug.nl

The cult of Artemis Ortheia/Oupesia was one of the most important cults at Messene. The first temple to the goddess was built soon after the foundation of the city in 369 BCE. In the second century BCE, it was replaced by a small cult room (room K) incorporated within the newly built Asklepeion complex, that was the religious and political heart of Messene. The finds from the new Artemision offer the viewer a rare glimpse into the arrangement of votive statues within a small sanctuary: twelve statue bases were found in situ in a broken circle flanking the statue of the goddess; two more bases stood in the northern aisle. Eight statues, which must have stood on some of these bases, were found within the room or nearby. The statues form two distinct groups—young girl servants of the cult and adult priestesses. In this paper, we examine two issues. The first is the tension between individual and group identity seen in these statues. The second is the interconnection or relationship between elite statuary practice and the circular arrangement of the statues. Circular or semi-circular arrangements of statues first appear in the Hellenistic period, but in the Roman period they become associated with imperial architecture and display practices. By considering these aspects, the desires and habits of the commissioners and the demands of the space, we can arrive at a better understanding of the value placed on them in the last phases of the cult room's life.

Portrait Mummies from Antinoöpolis as Evidence for Élite Interaction between Egypt and Syria

Barbara Borg
Scuola Normale Superiore
barbara.borg@sns.it

Portrait mummies from Roman Egypt are a particularly valuable source for our knowledge and understanding of this multi-cultural province and its (often underestimated) empire-wide connections. While research has mostly focussed on elements rooted in Graeco-Roman and Egyptian culture, portrait mummy shrouds from Antinoöpolis suggest that patrons looked to Syria as well. They stand out among the entire body of evidence as particularly splendidly adorned with dress types such as the dalmatica that have suggested to scholars a late antique date. I will argue instead that they are to be dated to the third century, and that their specific dress types and shapes of ornaments have their closest parallels in Syria. They should be regarded as testimony to the close connections that the city had with this province and with Palmyra in particular, and as part of élite competition between the élites of these two places.

Painted Portraits and Individualized Masks on Mummy-Cases in Roman Egypt

Christopher H. Hallett
UC Berkeley
chrishallett@berkeley.edu

The addition of highly individualized portraits to Roman-period mummies is generally explained as the result of Hellenistic or Roman influence on Egyptian funerary practice. It has traditionally been claimed that those who chose to be represented in this way did so because they 'identified' as Greeks or Romans: and the portrait thus functioned as an expression of Greek or Roman 'cultural identity'. Such portraits may also have been commissioned by prosperous members of the native population, intending to advertise their assimilation into the upper echelons of the province. In this case, the individualized portrait would serve as an indication of a high level of 'Hellenization': a claim to 'elite status', based on a self-representation including Greek and Roman hairstyles, clothing, crowns, jewellery, and other items of personal adornment. There is another possibility. The inclusion of such portraits might actually be understood as an appropriation of 'the individual portrait' by the Egyptian 'death industry': To give greater visual emphasis to some traditional ideas about the Egyptian soul's passage into the netherworld; and to make the mummy case (or shroud) express more vividly the role of the embalmed body in the passage into the afterlife.

The Other Half of the Empire: Portraying the Individuals in the West

Dietrich Boschung
University of Cologne
Dietrich.Boschung@uni-koeln.de

The depiction of individuals as part of funerary monuments in the east of the Roman Empire, which was influenced by Greek culture, had a centuries-long tradition dating back at least as far as the Hellenistic period, but in some places much further. In the west, on the other hand, it first appeared in the 1st century BCE, and in some regions considerably later. As expected, the city of Rome played a central role for the western part of the empire in this field too, as it was here that genres of funerary reliefs with portraits were first developed and subsequently adopted in other regions. Nevertheless, development in the different cities and regions of the West is not uniform; rather, local groups emerge at different times and with different durations. This paper will present funerary reliefs from Rome, northern Italy, Spain, and the Rhineland. Interactions between funerary reliefs in the East and West will also be discussed.

Funerary Portraits on the Rhine in the Mid-1st c. CE: Sartorial Expressions of Cultural Awareness and Ethnic Belonging

Maureen Carroll
University of York
maureen.carroll@york.ac.uk

A significant number of free-standing grave statues and reliefs of the mid-1st c. A.D. attest to the adoption of Roman funerary monuments by the Gallic population soon after the Roman conquest in and around Mainz on the Middle Rhine. These commemorative portraits of individuals reveal a surprisingly early cultural awareness and appropriation of Greek and Roman clothing by civilian men and boys in the region that cannot be attributed entirely to the influence of Roman sculptors who carved images of soldiers stationed on the frontier. At the same time, the portraits convey the importance of local ethnic clothing for women and girls. This assemblage of images allows us to explore the potential models for regional portraits and to assess the impact of Graeco-Roman imagery on local artistic activity. By studying the portraits, we can look into the ways in which clothing as cultural symbols of the Mediterranean were adopted and perhaps reinterpreted on the western frontier. Finally, the paper discusses ethnic and gendered identities rooted in the social structures of local non-Roman communities that now found expression through the visual medium of Roman portraiture.

Citizens, Emperors and Gods: Portraiture in the Roman Central Balkans

Nadežda Gavrilović Vitas
Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade
ngavrilo@ai.ac.rs

Roman portraiture in the Central Balkans encompasses a large corpus of statues, busts, and reliefs, discovered in different contexts (votive, funerary, honorific, public) in mainly urban centres, military camps, and Limes localities, but also in imperial residences and rural settlements. Whether discussing the images of men or women, the ancient artisans were successful in modelling the images that displayed not only one's origin, social status, career etc., but also conveyed through iconography the true identity of the commissioner. Beside different messages (personal, public, political, religious) contained in male and female portraits, various artistic styles and cultural influences can be perceived, allowing us a better analysis and interpretation of the Roman portraiture in Central Balkans' territory.

Through discussion of the local character of portraits and different cultural influences in their shaping, the importance of different motifs as symbols in visual culture and various ways of imitation to achieve the best self-presentations, this paper will provide an overview and analysis of the Roman Central Balkans portraiture whose change and transformation will be followed through the centuries. This paper also reviews the importance of Roman styles and the degree of acceptance or persistence of local tradition towards it, displayed in differently styled portraits from region to region, while also arguing about the usage of various motifs to achieve or emphasize the desired image as a means of communication about portrayed person's personal or public identity.

From Periphery to Centre Stage:
'Zenobia in Chains' (1859) by Harriet Hosmer and
'The Death of Cleopatra' (1876) by Edmonia Lewis

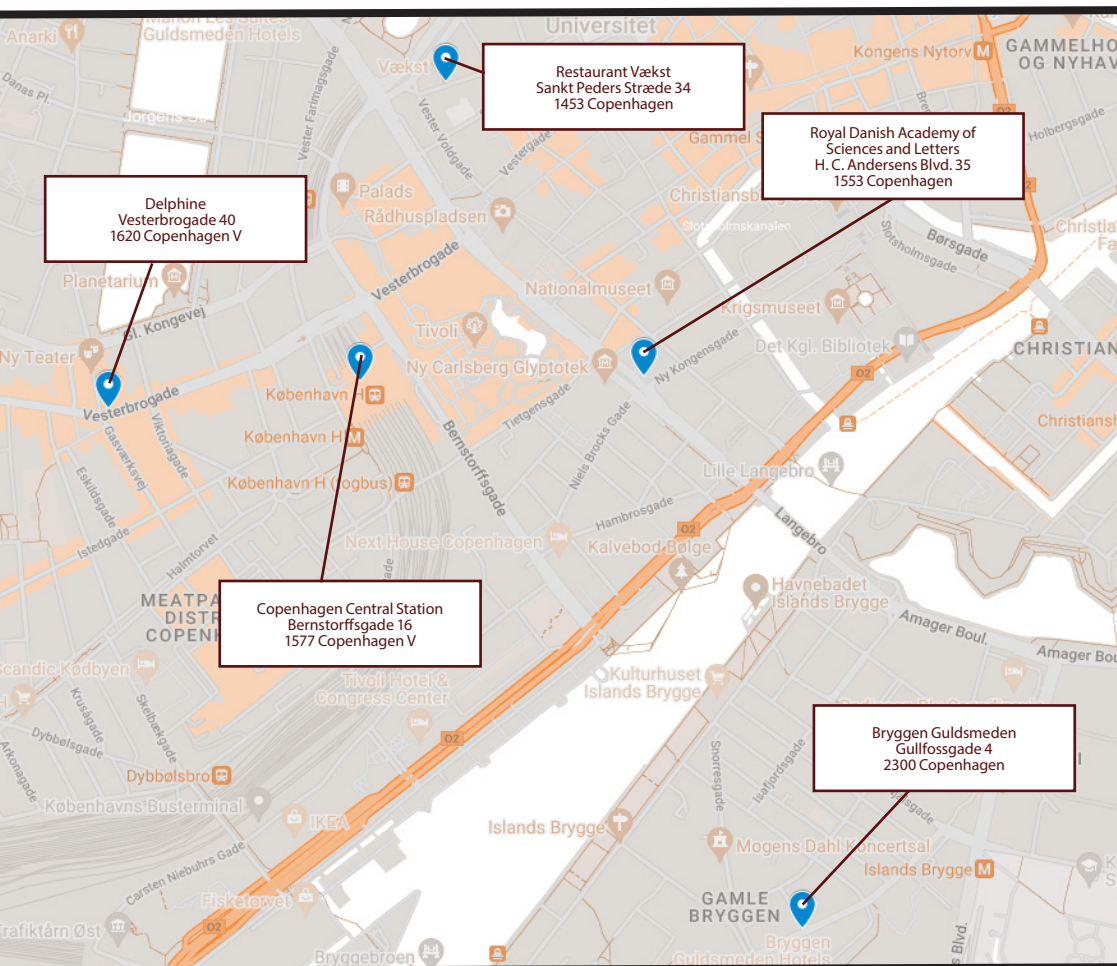
Amalie Skovmøller
University of Copenhagen
skovmoeller@hum.ku.dk

During the nineteenth century, white marble sculptures depicting the ancient Eastern rulers Cleopatra and Zenobia became popular on the European art market. Many of these marble sculptures were made by women, who channelled the ancient women rulers from the Roman East to lay claim to the highest genre of neoclassical sculpture: the mythological figure. This paper presents two of these ruler-portraits: The full-size marble sculptures 'Zenobia in Chains' (1859), sculpted by US-born Harriett Hosmer (1830–1908); and 'The Death of Cleopatra' (1876) sculpted by Haitian and native-American sculptor Edmonia Lewis (1844–1907). While the ancient queens were popular figures during the nineteenth century, Hosmer and Lewis portrayed them differently from their male colleagues, choosing to forego the male gaze on the femme fatale to channel instead their strength and resiliency. Drawing on feminist theories presented by Rozsika Parker, and Griselda Pollock in 'Old Mistresses' (2013), this paper explores these works as products of sculptors, who were women, and who choose the figures of Zenobia and Cleopatra, traditionally regarded as peripheral to the patriarchal orders of the Roman Empire, to create a new art centre where women sculptors negotiated and defined contemporary artistic rules and aesthetic values in late nineteenth century European and Western art.



Palmyrene banqueting tessera depicting a reclining priest under vines. The inscription under the kline mentions his name: 'NŠWM MLKW NŠWM – Nashûm Malkû Nashûm'. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, IN 2771 (Photo: Anders Sune Berg).

Venues



Organizer



Rubina Raja
Aarhus University

Phone: +45 2718 8390
E-mail: rubina.raja@cas.au.dk

Conference Webpage

<https://urbnet.au.dk/news/events/2024/portraying>



Book of abstracts Portraying the Individual in the Roman East: Local-Imperial Entanglements in Sculpture, Mosaics and Paintings (1st–4th Centuries CE), 12–13 Dec. 2024

Organizer: Rubina Raja (Aarhus University)

Editors: Christina Song Levisen and Rubina Raja

Back cover: Tower tombs in the landscape of Palmyra (Photo: Rubina Raja)