

Aphrodisians on display: the public image of a local élite

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R. R. R. SMITH, with SHEILA DILLON, CHRISTOPHER H. HALLETT, JULIA LENAGHAN, and JULIE VAN VOORHIS, *APHRODISIAS II. ROMAN PORTRAIT STATUARY FROM APHRODISIAS* (Philipp von Zabern, Mainz 2006). Pp. xiv + 338, figs. 27, pls. 163. ISBN-13: 978-3-8053-3527-0. EUR. 76.80.

The Carian city of Aphrodisias has been one of the most exciting sites of the Roman East, for at least three reasons. First, the ruins of the city are unusually well preserved due to little disturbance by later construction. The small village of Geyre did not much interfere with the ancient remains buried beneath and was successfully removed to a nearby location in the 1970s. Thus the site is, to a large extent, preserved as it was left after a devastating earthquake, possibly in the 7th c. A.D., allowing its first director, K. T. Erim, to uncover much of the original city centre with its public buildings and monuments. Second, when R. R. R. Smith and C. Ratté took over after Erim's death in 1990, focus shifted to conservation and the systematic study and publication of finds made in previous decades. This was done with special attention to archaeological contexts which, in turn, would allow for historical contextualization and interpretation too. Third, the team allow others to share in their research by publishing supplementary volumes to *JRA* (three so far, a fourth in press) and extended reports and articles in various journals such as *AJA* and *JRS*, rather than making scholars wait for the final monographs.

Yet the present book fills an important gap. The second monographic site publication of excavated material, it presents all portraits in the round and in relief from the foundation of the city until about A.D. 300, many of them hitherto unpublished. As impressive in weight and size as it is by its contents, it makes a major contribution to our understanding of social life in the city during the Early and High Imperial periods and — something we would not necessarily expect of a monograph from one site — it is one of the most important recent publications on Roman portraiture in general.

The book has two major parts: an introduction, and a catalogue comprising statues (nos. 1-108), busts (nos. 109-57), detached heads (nos. 158-220) (all include even minor fragments), as well as brief discussions of portraits in relief (nos. R1-R13, but excluding those from the Sebasteion and the tomb monument of C. Julius Zoilos) and a selection of sarcophagi. The useful Table in an Appendix lists all inscriptions (H1-274) referring to portrait honours of the relevant period; hopefully they will soon be published in full, for they add important information on the subject. Inscriptions on bases belonging to portraits discussed in the catalogue, however, are presented with full Greek text, translation and brief commentary. At the end come a museum index and two concordances, but there is no general index, making it difficult to find comments on specific points of interest as the book's organization is somewhat complicated (see below).

The introduction addresses a large number of aspects relevant to the study of portraiture at Aphrodisias and, indeed, elsewhere. Fortunately, records were kept for most finds, which allow the reconstruction of their archaeological context. These contexts are discussed at length, especially in an overview (40-74) and in the catalogue entries, and conveniently illustrated by several maps and plans with indications of find-spots of both sculptures and inscribed bases. It becomes clear, first, that we are faced with a late-antique setting which is not necessarily identical with the original one. Hence, it is only rarely possible to establish beyond doubt the original context of an honorific monument of the Imperial period, yet there are still a surprising number of cases where the archaeological context strongly suggests the original location. The honorific landscape of the Imperial period can thus be reconstructed to some extent, and it indicates that Aphrodisians favoured by far the city's most prominent public spaces while, so it seems, largely neglecting the domestic and sepulchral space.¹ General trends in statue decora-

1 We must bear in mind, though, that only the city centre has been excavated fairly systematically and that

tion of individual buildings can be inferred, especially for the Agora Gate and the Bouleuterion. Yet, the reconstructions are equally revealing for our understanding of late antiquity, when Aphrodisians honoured their cultural heritage and their local benefactors both as 'heroes' of the past and models of exemplary conduct and character.

This point is supported by the careful observation of ancient secondary manipulations and repairs of sculptures, meticulously documented both in a sub-chapter on technique (29-34) and in the catalogue entries. It provides a unique insight into late-antique society's use of their material cultural heritage. This is not commented upon in the present volume but will hopefully be addressed elsewhere. One interesting result of these observations may be added: almost exclusively it is male statues that underwent any repairs. The only exceptions are the two priestesses from the Bouleuterion (nos. 94-95), the statue equipment of which, apparently, was preserved without much change through late antiquity.² This throws an even sharper light on the relative prominence of women among honorific statues of the Imperial period (6, 26, 194) since their monuments seem to have had less chance to survive into late antiquity than their male counterparts; but it also fits the general trend in this latter period of more or less excluding women from (monumental) public honours.

Other important topics include a discussion of general trends in honorific decrees, their terminology, the social practice of erecting portrait monuments, and the ideas expressed by them (19-28). Although there are only a few instances where a statue is preserved with its proper base and inscription, Smith and colleagues are surely right in looking at all the inscriptions for guidance in their interpretation of the meaning of iconographic detail, most prominently of dress (or lack of it). Costumes are discussed briefly in the introduction (35-38) and at greater length in introductions to the individual parts of the catalogue, organized according to this very category.

Some parts of the latter read more like students' introductions than scholarly comments (e.g., the rehearsal of the terminology and development of the toga), but there are important and new insights presented too, such as on cuirassed statues, on priests, or on nude statues. For the last, C. Hallett makes the important distinction between 'heroic' and athletic nudes, pointing out that the former type was primarily used in the Early Imperial period and most often for members of the imperial family, while the latter is extremely rare. Given the controversial discussion about the meaning of nakedness in Classical Greece, the transfer of this costume and its meaning into the Roman period would not necessarily be either as smooth or as easy as suggested (132).³ While Smith and Hallett convincingly relate the Roman 'heroic' nudes to inscriptions honouring deceased youths explicitly as heroes (134, with examples from Aphrodisias in n.18), we would still like to know what this actually meant. As for athletic nudes, one wonders why they are so rare in Aphrodisias (only two athletic victors [nos. 39-40] are identified). The number of c.20 statue bases for such victors (135), along with the fact that the only surviving statues were repaired and used in a late-antique setting, may suggest that, as with women, the late-antique selection process should receive more attention than it usually gets when it comes to reconstructing honorific landscapes and preferences in the Early and High Empire.

This is not the place to summarize or discuss the wealth of insights and interesting aspects presented throughout the book. Rather, I will mention some more wide-ranging issues which seem to me to be most relevant for the study of Roman portraits in general. The first affects the reputation of Roman portraiture among scholars and students alike. Both the repetitive nature of the inscriptions, with a rather limited number of virtues recorded, and the equally limited repertoire of habit and costume have contributed to the lack of interest with which Roman

the late-antique selection process contributed to the present state.

2 The (presumably) later addition of plastic markings of the eyes of the god-like priestess(?) no. 207 and the repair of no. 217 fall in the different context of re-working female portraits (nos. 213 and 217) most probably into images of goddesses or personifications.

3 For a much fuller account see C. H. Hallett, *The Roman nude: heroic portrait statuary, 200 BC-AD 300* (Oxford 2005).

inscriptions and portrait sculpture have often been met. However, the authors convincingly argue that it is our modern demand for, and high regard of, originality that leads to such an attitude. In antiquity, the repetitions indicate a public consent about norms and values as well as rôles in society, and in each case these *topoi* are carefully selected from the repertoire in order to "describe [...] individual combinations of shared values" (25; see also 157, etc.).

Another important aspect is dating and chronology. This is usually perceived as the most boring part of the study of Roman portraiture, yet how could we ever draw conclusions about the social history as expressed through these monuments without having an idea about their date? Here the merit of the present book is twofold. Firstly, we can now identify shifts in tastes and preferences at Aphrodisias. Chapter 2 discusses periods of the city's history (Late Hellenistic, Early Empire and 1st c. A.D., 2nd c., 3rd c., the end of the civic portrait tradition) in relation to portraits, looking in particular at different locations preferred for display either in one of these periods or throughout the city's history; at the identity of the dedicatees and honorands; and at general trends in portrait iconography (and thus self-perception). Notably, there is an unusually high number of Early Imperial portraits due to the close and favourable relationship with the Julio-Claudian emperors, and an early extensive use of marble (6).

Secondly (and this makes the book important for any student of Roman portraiture), the authors make a considerable contribution to methodology. We are used to studying chronological aspects of Roman portraiture by looking at metropolitan examples, which seem to indicate a continuous stylistic and technical development over time. To be sure, occasionally the shortcomings of such a simplistic view have been pointed out, by drawing attention both to local variation outside Rome and to minority trends within Rome itself,⁴ but only rarely have these considerations been developed in a more systematic way. This is exactly what the present book does, at various places and throughout the catalogue. Problems in dealing with local peculiarities start at once with the difficulty of telling apart a portrait from an ideal sculpture (divinity, hero, personification). Smith and his colleagues can demonstrate that heads with very little indication of individual features and no connection to Roman fashion hairstyles were a fairly common choice for portraits of women, young men, and children, especially during the 1st c. A.D. They establish (7, 284) a number of criteria by which a decision may be made in any individual case, admitting at the same time that certainty cannot always be achieved. However, it becomes clear that the Aphrodisians (as did many locals both in Italy and in the East) preferred to continue Hellenistic traditions of self-representation well into the later 1st c. A.D. (and beyond). This is an important point, addressed at some length by J. Trimble a couple of years ago⁵ but still all too often ignored.

Other challenges consist in local choices of stylistic features and the pace of change in them. The most striking illustration of this is the Sebasteion reliefs.⁶ Seeing them for the first time, one might well start doubting whether anything we thought we knew about stylistic dating is still of value. They illustrate clearly the independence from Rome and the liberty taken by the

4 E.g., M. Bergmann, *Studien zum römischen Porträt des 3. Jhs. n. Chr.* (Bonn 1977); P. Zanker, *Provinzielle Kaiserporträts: Zur Rezeption der Selbstdarstellung des Princeps* (München 1983); B. E. Borg, *Mumienporträts: Chronologie und kultureller Kontext* (Mainz 1996) 58-110; K. Fittschen, "Eine Werkstatt attischer Porträtbildhauer im 2. Jh. n.Chr.," in *Griechenland in der Kaiserzeit. Neue Funde und Forschungen zu Skulptur, Architektur und Topographie* (Bern 2001) 71-77; R. R. R. Smith, "Typology and diversity in the portraits of Augustus," *JRA* 9 (1996) 31-47; id., "Cultural choice and political identity in honorific portrait statues in the second century AD," *JRS* 88 (1998) 59-93; M. Bergmann, *Chiragan, Aphrodisias, Konstantinopel: Zur mythologischen Skulptur der Spätantike* (Wiesbaden 1999); J. Fejfer, *Roman portraits in context* (Berlin, forthcoming). Smith's polemic (7 f.) appears to be a bit overstated, both in the light of these and other publications, and considering the close relationship of many Aphrodisian portraits to metropolitan Roman ones.

5 J. Trimble, "Replicating the body politic: the Herculaneum Women statue types in Early Imperial Italy," *JRA* 13 (2000) 41-68.

6 R. R. R. Smith, "The imperial reliefs from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias," *JRS* 77 (1987) 88-139; id., "Myth and allegory in the Sebasteion," in C. Roueché and K. T. Erim (edd.), *Aphrodisias Papers* 1 (*JRA* Suppl. 1, 1990) 89-100.

Aphrodisian sculptors, as well as the range of local variation at any one time (47 f.). Yet, as this book demonstrates, there are several criteria, based both on well-known developments in Roman portraiture in general and on careful observation of local techniques and predilections, that will lead to satisfactory results even when some pieces can be dated only broadly (38 f.). Discussions in the catalogue are the best proof of this, and several can be read almost as a manual of how to analyze, in a methodologically sound way, portraits of non-Roman origin.

With complex and difficult material like this, it comes as no surprise that agreement cannot be achieved in every detail and case. Most quibbles, however, would not change the overall picture. Thus I would like to address just three cases of wider interest and potential consequence. The first is the veiled head of an old *togatus* from the theatre, dated to c.40-20 B.C. and identified (though with some reservations) as C. Julius Zoilos, freedman of Octavian and the most prominent local benefactor (43 f., 48, 50, 102-4). While it is true that the iconography of the image fits a character like Zoilos perfectly, and an inscribed base for him was also found at the site, the striking difference between the head from the theatre and the parts of Zoilos' portrait preserved on his tomb monument⁷ is too easily explained away by reference to the latter's allegorical character. While the togate head has the old, skinny, deeply-wrinkled features and balding forehead of many metropolitan heads of the time of Caesar, on the tomb monument Zoilos seems to look much like the priest from the Bouleuterion group (no. 41) with his mature but full and expressive face and hair drawing upon Hellenistic traditions. If both portraits, the *togatus* head and the one on the tomb monument, do represent the same character, this would need additional comment and explanation. Further suggestions about Zoilos' family members being depicted in some of the other statues from the theatre remain mere speculation, especially since the degree of re-organization of the statue programme in later periods is still unclear.

I also wonder whether it is really a "trend in female portraits" of the 2nd c. to wear Roman fashion hairstyles after they have gone out of use at Rome (Smith, 65). The hairstyles of statues nos. 89 and 90 are particularly close to fashion hairstyles in Rome of the Trajanic period (65, 207-11), but their archaeological context in the Hadrianic Baths is all but unambiguous and does not necessarily suggest that the statues were made for that location (Smith and Dillon, 65). Rather, other figures from the same site of later and earlier date (e.g., nos. 91 and 184), and the lack of any bases which might belong to them, make it more likely that the statues were moved there at a later time, possibly in late antiquity (Dillon, 211). The hairstyle of the female statue no. 95 from the Bouleuterion would not necessarily contradict an Antonine date consistent with the building but, if it were indeed meant to be old-fashioned, she and her husband (no. 45, who does not follow Antonine Rome's fashion) could also present "individuals of a previous generation" of benefactors, as Lenaghan and Hallett suggest (216).⁸ The common assumption that provincials and non-élite tended to lag behind the fashion development of élite metropolitans still awaits more substantial proof.

My last case arises out of the striking figure of a young *togatus* from the Agora Gate (no. 3; Smith, 108-11), which figured more or less prominently in recent debates about Aphrodisian workshops in late antiquity. Controversy surrounds both its date (early 2nd c. *versus* late-antique) and the nature of its subject (portrait or personification). To complicate things more, both issues are related. Smith's arguments for a portrait statue are largely convincing, provided his suggestion for date (early 2nd c.) is correct. Should the statue, however, be later, we could, for instance, be much less sure how local Aphrodisians would have represented a figure of the Roman People. The statue's date is difficult to establish. There are indeed elements which connect it with portraits of the Early Imperial period, especially the coiffure and the unmarked eyes. Even the smooth unarticulated top and back of the head, seemingly so

7 The head is not illustrated in the present volume, but cf. R. R. R. Smith, *The Monument of C. Julius Zoilos* (Mainz 1993) especially pl. 14, but also pls. 1, 12a and 13.

8 For the inclusion of ancestors into later displays, compare sarcophagi with previous generations of family members, such as the Alcestis Sarcophagus in the Vatican (S. Wood, "Alcestis on Roman sarcophagi," *AJA* 82 [1970] 499-510).

reminiscent of 4th- and 5th-c. portraits, have parallels in early heads (e.g., nos. 2, 30, 164, 168 and 178). Thus, one of the most prominent arguments for a late-antique date does not stand the test. However, in extant examples, the fine-grained marble of the *togatus* was used exclusively for busts in the High Imperial period, and for portrait statues only in late antiquity. As Smith observes, in the Hadrianic period a type of toga where the *umbo* is hardly distinguishable from the *balteus* came into fashion. Yet these togas used to be relatively simple and unassuming, shorter than earlier togas, with relatively little fabric used and often draped fairly close around the body.⁹ In contrast, the toga of no. 3 is extremely voluminous and falls very low, with the *lacinia* even touching the ground between the feet, a feature that is typical of Augustan and Early Imperial togas (which can lack an *umbo*, as does the Aphrodisias *togatus*) but is rarely found later.¹⁰ Neither the proportions and style of the face (especially the eyes) nor that of the hair have good parallels among the portraits published in the present volume, and the same is true for the flat, spread-out, almost relief-like presentation of the figure as a whole, an impression that must have been even stronger when the part of the toga now broken off the (proper) right side of the figure was still in place. With its exaggerated shape, heavy bottom part, and abstract, evenly rounded and spherically formed features, the head strongly resembles a bearded portrait from the villa of Chiragan (Gaul), which is certainly not older than the late 2nd c.¹¹ It leads to the wider context in which the *togatus* needs to be discussed, namely the ideal and mythological sculpture from Aphrodisian workshops. There are close stylistic parallels especially with the statue group from the Esquiline (now in Copenhagen), signed and probably made by Aphrodisians:¹² note especially the exaggerated length of the bodies and the faces modelled from individual spherical units. The group's Heracles even has unmarked eyes like the *togatus*. To be sure, the date of the group too is disputed, with suggestions of either c.200 or in late antiquity.¹³ The stylistic similarities introduce a further potential date for the *togatus* and may even raise the question of the individual's identity since the figures of the group are all ideal. I shall not discuss here the equally close relation between one of the boxers (no. 40) from the Theatre and the Esquiline group (in the shape of head, locks in beard, articulation of muscles).¹⁴ The questions raised point towards a more general issue: are the traditional categories of ideal *versus* portrait sculpture actually as distinct as they appear to be, and does it make sense to study them independently? Many of the observations provided by the authors support the view that they are not.¹⁵ The cases of the *togatus* and the boxer clearly indicate that it might be helpful to look at ideal sculpture for comparison in order to establish the date and, indeed, the subject. With its local, high-quality marble and prominent workshop(s), Aphrodisias would be an ideal place to study workshop traditions more closely and to discuss this issue.

The one major regret I have about the book is its organization. The catalogue is arranged according to type (statue, bust, etc.), then dress (toga, nude, *himation*, etc.), and then a mixture of various further criteria which are sometimes rather puzzling. The first category is fairly convincing (though the detached heads are almost all identified as belonging to statues), the others much less so. It is true that the type of costume would have been the most obvious categorizing feature in antiquity, but for a modern user of the catalogue it is much less illuminating to see all the togas and their fragments together, then the *himatia* of various types, and so on. The general comments on those costumes and their meaning, important as they are, could easily

9 H. R. Goette, *Studien zu römischen Togadarstellungen* (Mainz 1989) 54-57.

10 Noticed also by N. Hannestad, "Das Ende der antiken Idealstatue," *Antike Welt* 33 (2002) 638. For the toga types, see Goette *ibid.* 22-28.

11 Bergmann 1999 (*supra* n.4), 40 f., pls. 9.3, 12, and 13.4, who argues for a late-antique date.

12 M. Moltesen, "The Esquiline Group: Aphrodisian statues in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek," in *Antike Plastik* 27 (2000) 111-29.

13 K. Erim and C. Roueché, "Sculptors from Aphrodisias: some new inscriptions," *PBSR* 50 (1982) 102-15; N. Hannestad, *Tradition in late antique sculpture: conservation, modernization, production* (Aarhus 1994) 110-16, figs. 73-75; Bergmann 1999 (*supra* n.4); M. Moltesen, "The Aphrodisian sculptures in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek," in Roueché and Erim (*supra* n.6) 133-46; Moltesen (*supra* n.12).

14 Noted already by Bergmann 1999 (*supra* n.4) 15.

15 This distinction is clearly blurred in the case of idealising portrait heads of the 1st c. mentioned above.

have been included in the introduction, helping to avoid some repetition. The present arrangement does not tell much about ancient contexts at all, so that this departure from the more traditional chronological order of catalogues, a result of Smith's criticism of concepts of stylistic development, seems as arbitrary as any other. Moreover, it tears apart both contemporary portraits (one kind of context, even though traditional) as well as the closest stylistic parallels frequently mentioned in the catalogue, and contexts such as statue groups (notably the early Bouleuterion group, nos. 14, 26, 41-42) and (potential) pairs, which are duly addressed at various points. Since the plates are organized according to catalogue numbers, this makes it sometimes difficult for the reader to follow the arguments presented and prevents the otherwise splendid plates from speaking for themselves. No doubt there is no such thing as the ideal order of a catalogue, but the present one, with its additional sub-categories of state of preservation (not indicated in the layout of the catalogue), sub-types of *himatia*, find-contexts of female statues (but not of heads or other subjects) and so on, alongside some inconsistencies, is, at the least, too complicated to be used effectively.

Yet the volume has been very carefully produced and is an outstanding piece of scholarship. The visual presentation of the sculptures is exemplary: the photographs are printed to the highest quality; whole statues and busts are usually presented in at least 4 views, as are close-ups of the heads. The inclusion of even minor fragments gives the impression of what has been lost. Smith and his colleagues make it clear that not even in a site report is researching portraiture primarily about counting locks or dating (though those are indispensable tools) but about the central habit — a habit taken most seriously by the inhabitants of Rome's empire (cf. 20) — of erecting honorific portrait monuments for the imperial family and for those regarded as the local élite and considered 'models of excellence' not only by their contemporaries but by later generations. Studying portrait monuments is about understanding societies, their ideology, their value system, their symbolic capital, and how social relationships within them were being constructed and maintained.

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