

MARIA NOWICKA, *Le portrait dans la peinture antique*. Academia Scientiarum Polona, Bibliotheca Antiqua, Band 22. Académie Polonaise des sciences, Warschau 1993. 226 Seiten, 69 Abbildungen, 4 Farbtafeln.

This book, the first of its kind, is a welcome addition to the literature on ancient painted portraiture. It renders an important service by presenting a great quantity of usefully organized information on a major genre of ancient painting that has been underrepresented in scholarship. Although the title implies that all of antiquity is considered, the scope of the study is actually limited to the cultures of Greece and Rome, whose portraiture is best known through the medium of sculpture. While the author acknowledges the close relationship between sculpted and painted portraits, she believes it important to study the painted works on their own in order to come to know their particular characteristics and to distinguish those that are specific to the medium, i. e., those that cannot be realized in sculpture. The author's main goal is to gain a more complete idea of the painted portraits from these two cultures by studying the extant images – including easel (or panel) paintings, wall paintings, manuscript illustrations, and images on glass – in the light of written sources – literary, epigraphic, and papyrological. By bringing these

diverse sources of information together, she hopes to clarify the cultural and social function of Greek and Roman painted portraits from the 6th century B. C. to the 5th century A. D. Further, she wishes to place the works in their social context, that is, to enlarge the approach to the subject beyond what she regards as the traditional terms of 'pure' art history. (For further discussion of contextual studies and commentary on the nature of the discipline of art history see E. K. GAZDA / A. E. HAECKL, *Roman Portraiture: Reflections on the Question of Context*. *Journal Roman Arch.* 6, 1993, 289–302.)

In a brief introduction the author reviews three essential problems: the vexed question of how to define what constituted a portrait in antiquity; the variable and imprecise terminology of portraiture employed in the ancient texts; and the nature of the sources for the study of Greek and Roman painted portraits. Curiously, despite the author's stated interest in characteristics peculiar to the medium, she does not discuss the materials and techniques of the painted portrait; nor does she take into account the physical condition of the preserved portraits. More problematic, however, is the author's definition of the concept of portraiture in antiquity, which follows along established lines. She cites categories of portraiture based upon different concepts of representation and presumed degrees of fidelity to the likeness of the person portrayed such as 1. the intentional image, 2. the typological portrait, and 3. the physiognomic (or „true“) portrait of R. BIANCHI-BANDINELLI (EAA VI [1965] 695 ff. s. v. *Ritratto*) and the 1. intentional, 2. idealized, and 3. realistic portrait of D. METZLER (*Porträt und Gesellschaft* [1971]).

Given the stated contextual goals of the book, it is surprising that the author accepts as sufficient such overarching, synchronic concepts that threaten to obscure important nuances of intent and culturally-constructed meaning. She might have gone beyond these broad categories in an attempt to seek a greater plurality and precision of definition in connection with numerous distinctive cultural, geographical, and chronological contexts within the Greek and Roman worlds during the more than 1000-year period her study encompasses. It is likewise disconcerting that the author accepts the long-held view that credit for the invention of individual portraiture belongs to the Greeks. Not only is this a modern concern conditioned by well-known 18th- and 19th-century Romanticist views of originality and artistic genius rather than a concern of the Greeks or Romans, but it ignores a host of other cultures, some earlier than the Greek, that produced images that meet our modern criteria of individual portraiture. The question needs to be examined in each historical and cultural context, free of ingrained prejudices about the superiority of Greek art and artists, another of the familiar products of 18th-century thought. Unfortunately, this tendency to overvalue the contributions of the Greeks to the development of the art of the painted portrait runs throughout the book to the detriment of our ability to appreciate those of the Romans and others.

Discussion of the portraits themselves is organized by subject matter in four chapters: I. Portraits of Sovereigns; II. Portraits of Celebrated Personages and Benefactors; III. Private Portraits; and IV. Other Portraits, followed by Conclusions and an appendix on „Coenus [pinxit] stemmata. A propos de Plin., NH 35.139“. Throughout these chapters the author presents a great deal of useful information. Perhaps most effective and enlightening is her consistent integration of the archaeological and written evidence for painted portraits. In a book that covers so much territory, time, and material, inevitably there are some gaps. These seem most readily apparent to us in the author's presentation of Roman portrait painting, and we shall focus our remarks on several examples (see below). There are also some organizational problems. Among these is one that arises from the author's rejection (in the Preface) of the distinction between official and private portraits, routinely drawn in the study of sculpted portraits, as inappropriate to the nature of the sources for painted portraits; yet Chapter I treats portraits of sovereigns that surely served an official function and Chapter III focuses on private portraits. On the whole, however, the organization is straightforward and appropriate to a reference volume. Within each chapter the material is presented by subject categories and then chronologically within each category. Unfortunately, while this is a logical structure, it both leads to a seemingly arbitrary division of materials that are functionally related and also inhibits easy comprehension of contemporaneous developments across different portrait genres. We shall point out some of these problems in the course of the following discussion.

Chapter I is devoted to the portraits of Greek tyrants, Alexander and other Hellenistic kings, and Roman emperors. The author concludes from the written sources that Greek sovereigns of the 6th century B. C. were probably represented in painted ex-votos deposited in temples, and that Alexander was represented in diverse modes (as king, as divinity, in allegorical scenes in the company of divinities and personifications, in battle, and in scenes of private life), which she briefly notes were of propagandistic value. The Hellenistic period saw the creation of compositions of mythical or allegorical figures into which the faces of members of the royal family were inserted; it became popular to illustrate the courage and military talent of the ruler and to place complete sequences of portraits of kings of the same dynasty in the temples where they could serve the needs of the dynastic cult, again to propagandistic ends. The author's system of classification does not allow her to include in this chapter the portraits of the prominent

political figures of the Roman Republic, who modeled themselves in part on the Hellenistic kings; thus, she begins her discussion of Roman rulers with the early Empire where she detects a „strong and varied“ development of the ruler portrait in the service of the emperor’s personal and dynastic propaganda. In the eastern provinces the images of the emperor, and on occasion his wife, were assimilated to those of divinities and their painted portraits used in cultic ceremonies. The author claims that the portability of painted images made them more useful than sculpted images for certain purposes. She concludes that they were probably made in series, exhibited in houses, shops, and streets as signs of loyalty to the emperor, and were obligatory in offices of the Roman administration, especially in the provinces and in small localities. From the time of the end of the 3rd century A. D., when the centers of power were dispersed, the author asserts that the painted portrait, which was easily executed and transported, served the propagandistic needs of those in power better than three dimensional portraits in stone or bronze.

These are thought-provoking conclusions that inspire deeper probing. In a concise treatment of such a broad subject it is perhaps unrealistic to expect full exploration of their implications. Yet one misses, for example, a more explicit connection that might have been drawn between the author’s discussion of the figures that she regards as portrayals of Alexander in the Kom Madi paintings and the literary sources on his diverse representations. Moreover, by consigning the discussion of Republican generals to the following chapter, the author loses an opportunity to assess the contribution of their political use of painted portraits in triumphs, which, although undoubtedly influenced by Hellenistic πομπή, were rooted historically in Etruscan religious practice. The commemorative practices of prominent Republican families, which made effective political use of painted portraits in funerary processions, also fall victim to the organizational structure of the book. The author’s discussion of such practices occurs in another context (see „Commemorative Portraits“, in Chapter III on Private Portraits, pp. 162–165), however without acknowledgment of similarities to and differences from Hellenistic official practice. Thus, the different qualities that conferred fitness to rule in the respective cultural settings, such as divinity versus mortal *virtus*, go unnoted. Another specifically Roman context that fails to emerge clearly from the dispersed commentary on it is that of the army. Discussion of Roman military portraits includes such works as the Tetrarchic murals in the *castra* at Luxor (pp. 46–48), portraits on *vexilla* (pp. 29, 52), the painted portraits of Republican generals (pp. 74–75), and the painted portraits of Roman military officers garrisoned at Dura Europos (pp. 182–183). These might have been dealt with profitably as a separate genre or category.

On the subject of painted portraits of Roman emperors, the author cites the famous passage from FRONTO (Ep. 4,12,35) which notes their ubiquity in the Empire (pp. 35–36), but she does not integrate this valuable Antonine testimony as effectively as she could with the three examples of Severan painted imperial portraits that have actually been preserved: the Berlin tondo with portraits of Septimius Severus, Julia Domna, Caracalla and the expunged Geta, and two painted wooden panels from the Fayum that probably depict Caracalla. All three of these painted imperial portraits were found in Egypt and depict members of the Severan Dynasty, who visited Egypt in 199/200; Caracalla made a second visit as sole ruler in 215/216. Rather than connecting any of these images with official imperial visits to Egypt and the Roman imperial cult, the author favors a private, domestic context for them (pp. 39–40).

The author was apparently unaware of an important article by H. HEINEN (Herrscherkult im römischen Ägypten und Damatio Memoriae Getas: Überlegungen zum Berliner Severerondo und zu Papyrus Oxyrhynchus XII 1449. Mitt. DAI Rom 98, 1991, 263–298) that takes as a starting point the P. Oxy. 1449 inventory of temple property belonging to shrines of the imperial cult in the Oxyrhynchite and Kynopolite nomes of Egypt. Among the possessions listed are „a small portrait (εἰκονίδιον) of our lord, the emperor Marcus Aurelius Severus Antoninus [Caracalla] *felix pius Augustus*, and his deified father Severus and Julia Domna, the Lady Augusta“. Heinen makes the case that the εἰκονίδιον listed in P. Oxy. 1449 is a painted group portrait on the order of the Berlin tondo, and connects the promulgation of such images with the official visit to Egypt by the Severan family. Further, he suggests that such images were probably mass-produced and distributed throughout Egypt, in official buildings and temples as well as private homes, in a concerted effort to promote the imperial cult, thereby fleshing out a rich historical, political and religious context for the three painted Severan portraits.

The author’s treatment of emperors of the 4th and 5th centuries A. D. is very useful, but it too leaves out some important contextual connections. For example, when discussing the Tetrarchic paintings in the Luxor Temple that was remodeled to serve as a Late Roman fortress ca. 300 A. D., she scarcely alludes to the complex interplay of the imperial cult, the military cult of the standards, and late antique ceremony that informed these fragmentary frescoes. Similarly, in her fine summary of the role of the *laureata imago* in late antique court ceremony and political maneuvering, she might have connected this type of image („interpreted as a scene on wood, light and easily transportable, bordered by a wreath of fresh laurel or a wooden frame in the form of such a crown“ [p. 49]) to earlier panel portraits like the Berlin tondo. By integrating evidence represented by the Severan εἰκονίδια from Egypt, the Tetrarchic frescoes in the

Luxor Temple, where portraits of the *Augusti* and *Caesares* are framed by scenes of *adlocutio* and *adventus*, and literary references to *laureatae imagines*, the author could have said something about the role of painted portraits in the evolution of the late antique imperial cult into Byzantine court rituals and ceremonies. Moreover, a directive in the Theodosian Code and a note from Oxyrhynchos dated 318, both concerning payment to painters for the execution of imperial portraits (mentioned on p. 56), might indicate continuity in a tradition of imperial portrait painting that must reach back at least to the mid-second century A. D., the date of Fronto's letters.

Chapter II, „Portraits of Celebrated Personages and Benefactors“, includes the following categories: 1. Olympic Champions, Athletes, Gladiators, Charioteers; 2. Generals and Strategoi; 3. Men of Letters; 4. Sages, Philosophers, Savants; 4. Actors and Artists; and 5. Diverse Personages. In this chapter the author tends merely to present lists of examples instead of engaging in contextual interpretation on a more substantive level than the physical placement of the images. In her conclusions, however, an interesting division between public and private does emerge. Portraits of generals and officials were exhibited in temples and other public buildings, those of intellectuals and artists were often incorporated into domestic environments, while portraits of athletes, gladiators, and charioteers appeared in both public and private contexts.

Although the author draws the commonplace distinction between the status of celebrated athletes in the respective societies of Greece and Rome, she says little about the meaning of painted and mosaic depictions of athletes in their respective Greek and Roman contexts. In Greece, victorious athletes were honored as civic heroes; as the author points out (pp. 64–65), their painted portraits were proudly exhibited in official venues such as the Athenian Pinacotheca and in sanctuaries. In the Roman West, however, portraits of athletes, gladiators and charioteers seem to have been largely confined to public buildings such as bath complexes, where care of the body was the architectural *raison d'être*, and in private homes of the wealthy élite. In the latter context, floor mosaic portraits of competitors in specific games served as permanent records of actual entertainments sponsored by the *patronus*, intended to impress guests at banquets in *triclinia* or visitors to private peristyles and bath suites with the civic benefactions of their host. The author cites K. Dunbabin's article (Am. Journal Arch. 86, 1982) on the victorious charioteer in Roman art but neglects to mention her interpretation of this motif in Roman interior decoration as primarily apotropaic and luck-bringing. Likewise, in her discussion of eminent figures in the arts and letters – writers, artists, actors, sages, and philosophers – contextual interpretation is confined to brief remarks, such as: „The likenesses often constituted a decorative element in the mosaic pavements of public buildings and private houses – testimony to the quality of the master of the house as a *μουσιζὸς ἀνὴρ*, a person of a high spiritual level and elevated cultural aspiration“ (p. 120).

One *lacuna* in the author's list of painted portraits of the Seven Sages seems conspicuous, namely the notorious painting of the Seven Sages in the eponymous Baths at Ostia that depicts these *eminences grises* having an explicit scatological dialogue about the most basic of bodily functions. Despite the low humor of the subject matter, the painting itself, along with the elegant script of the dialogue, is quite refined in execution. Given the author's stated goal of providing a cultural/historical interpretation of her subject, the fact that the Seven Sages are pictorially presented as authorities in the uniquely Roman realm of the public bath merits at least a mention.

Chapter III divides the private portrait into several categories: 1. Votive Portraits, 2. „Domestic“ Portraits, 3. Funerary Portraits, 4. Portraits of Mummies, and 5. Commemorative Portraits. Several largely predictable general observations on the overall development of the painted portrait in the private realm may be summarized as follows. As in the case of portraits of sovereigns, the 6th century B. C. provides the oldest, schematic images in the form of ex-votos. At the end of the 5th century B. C. the somewhat individualized private portrait probably appeared. The second half of the 4th century B. C. saw an expansion of the private painted image, with Apelles playing an important role by capturing faithful resemblances. The great popularity of private portraits in the Hellenistic period was fostered by the material prosperity of the period and its interest in the individual. In the absence of documentary sources, the author speculates that the painted portrait may have become a feature of decor in the private house, which the activity of Greek artists in the houses of Italy may indicate, and, further, that family trees may have appeared at this time. Hellenistic evidence also includes the painted tombs of Macedonia, stelai, and votives. She regards the painted ancestor portraits of Republican Italy as a separate pictorial domain comprising both collective tableaux and genealogical trees; by contrast, commemorative portraits of deceased persons were placed in family chapels. The Roman Empire saw the spread of the private portrait, painted on wood or on walls but also depicted in mosaic. High quality portraits on glass, known since the 1st century A. D., doubtless belonged to people of means and refined taste. The painted portrait, being relatively inexpensive, spread to various social strata and was used, among other things, as a gift to friends. The use of the painted portrait in tombs was no stranger to the eastern Greek world from the 1st century A. D. onward, and became common among Greeks living in Egypt.

The author's discussion of painted portraits of Roman private citizens might have benefited by referring more generally to the function of painted and mosaic portraits in the Roman domestic context. As is well known, portraits tend to be found in two main areas of the Roman house, the *atrium*, where they inhabit shrines to the ancestors, and reception rooms, where actual or implied portraits of the *dominus* can appear in mythological scenes or commemorative representations of civic benefactions. Such decoration was designed with the uniquely Roman institution of *clientela* in mind, and functioned according to the specific requirements of Roman social relations in which the status of the *dominus* was advertised to his socially inferior clients. In this context it might have been useful to cite the passage from SALLUST (Iug. 4,85), in which Marius tots up his virtues and achievements as a *novus homo* in order to balance the fact that the atrium of his family home does not boast a collection of hoary patrician ancestral portraits. The author is certainly not unaware of this sociological significance. She speculates, in fact, that „In the houses of many wealthy Roman families there probably existed paintings illustrating scenes of the life of the master in order to express his good fortune, culture and values, and to provide his portrait at the same time“ (p. 133), but she makes no direct reference to specifically Roman social relations or domestic interior decoration.

The author's discussion of „gold glass“ portraiture (pp. 134–138) is valuable not least because this subject is rarely treated except in very specialized articles. Bringing these wonderful and controversial objects to a wider audience is a real service. Although she classifies them as „domestic“ rather than „funerary“ portraits, the only example she cites that has a good archaeological context is a glass painting from Intercisa that was found in a Roman tomb, and others are known from catacombs or late Roman columbaria where they were set into the wall under funerary inscriptions for *loculi* or *arcosolia*. Unfortunately the author does not explore the implications of the fact that every one of the authentic portraits painted on glass she mentions comes from Italy or a western province and that, with the exception of one 1st century A. D. piece from Pompeii, the glass portraits all seem to date to the 3rd and 4th centuries A. D. Given these circumstances one could raise the issues of workshops and patronage for this type of miniature portraiture that seems to have been popular in a well-defined geographical sphere during a specific chronological period.

The discussion of funerary portraiture begins with another list of various monuments and types drawn from all periods throughout the empire. Missing, however, is any acknowledgment of Rome's Etruscan heritage in funerary portrait painting. One thinks especially of the François Tomb in Vulci, with its integration of mythological and historical scenes with the genealogy and portraits of the important Satie family, as well as the generalized but individually named painted portraits of defunct banqueters such as Velcha in the Tomb of Orcus and Larth Velcha in the Tomb of the Shields at Tarquinia. The famous painting from the Esquiline Tomb in Rome that identifies two figures as Marcus Fannius and Marcus Fabius was also presumably made in the context of familiar commemoration of distinguished ancestors. The absence of such examples from the discussion distorts the evidence for a long-standing tradition of painted funerary portraiture in early Roman Italy. Another puzzling omission, in this case concerning the Italian commercial realm, are the painted portraits used as shop advertisements among the entrepreneurial lower classes.

The mummy portraits from Egypt constitute a unique corpus of painted portraits, the largest to have survived from Graeco-Roman antiquity. The author provides an effective summary of the many issues associated with these images. She prefers the term „mummy portrait“ to the alternative epithet „Fayoum portrait“, yet the latter has certain advantages for associating the paintings with their proper social context. As L. H. CORCORAN (Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt. I–IV Centuries AD. Stud. Oriental Civilisation 56 [1995]) has recently pointed out, although it is archaeologically incorrect because not all portraits of this type were found in the Fayoum, a popular district for Greek settlers, „Yet the tenacious epithet ‚Fayoum portrait‘ may be appropriate in a more general sense, if it is seen as characterizing the cultural milieu, typified by the life-styles of those cosmopolitan cities of the Fayoum, which fostered the production of these works“ (pp. 35–37).

It is in fact the „cultural milieu ... which fostered the production“ of the mummy portraits that remains, oddly, the most controversial aspect of the painted portraits from Roman Egypt. The author, following most classical scholars of the subject, opens her discussion of mummy portraits by acknowledging that „the use of mummification, so characteristic of Egyptian culture, linked to the cult of Osiris and the belief in a life beyond the tomb, was taken up by a large part of the population of Greco-Macedonian origin. Established in Egypt after the end of the 4th century BC, this population gradually adopted the mores, beliefs and, to a certain degree, the lifestyle of the local population“ (p. 152). Strains of both hellenocentrism and egyptocentrism, however, can be detected when one looks at the question of the artistic heritage of the portraits themselves. The author states (p. 158) „It seems that the funerary effigy painted on wood was born out of contact between Egyptian and Greek traditions, without the intermediary of Rome“. Since all agree that the painted portraits in question date from the Julio-Claudian

period to the 4th century A.D., it seems perverse to deny any credit for the creation and development of the art form to the Roman civilization under whose hegemony it enjoyed its greatest efflorescence. The inhabitants of the towns of Egypt where the mummy portraits were excavated may have carried Greek names and spoken and written in the Greek language, but they certainly considered themselves citizens of a Roman province. Moreover, the fact that many mummy portraits were apparently framed and hung in houses during the lifetimes of their subjects, experiencing a kind of earthly life in family portrait galleries before entering the funerary context, seems to have stronger links with Roman tradition than with local Egyptian or Greek precedent. Other scholars have pointed to the stylistic relationship between Fayoum portraits and Italian painted portraits like the famous Pompeian couple in the Naples Museum (cover illustration and fig. 38), so it seems that the cultural isolation of the Egyptian mummy portrait corpus can be exaggerated to ill effect when attempting to evaluate its proper position in the history of ancient Mediterranean painted portraiture.

Chapter IV on „Other Portraits“ is the sort of catch-all miscellany that is almost unavoidable in a book built around subject categories. It includes self-portraits, cryptic portraits, manuscript portraits of authors and biographical subjects, and „diverse“ portraits of certain Greek and Roman magistrates, as well as the above-mentioned paintings from Dura Europos. From an organizational point of view, it seems that most of this material could have been integrated fairly smoothly into earlier chapters. The same is true for the appendix on the Greek painter Coenus (Koinos). The author's argument that Coenus's paintings of *στέμματα*, or genealogical family trees, belonged to an independent Greek pictorial tradition would have provided valuable background to her discussion of Republican Roman *imagines maiorum* in Chapter III.

Although the author falls short in her aim to provide a socio-historical or contextual analysis of the function of painted portraits in several areas of Roman life – Republican politics and patrician society, interior decoration, the army, „plebeian art“, and some aspects of funerary art – the book remains a valuable collection of material, its true strongpoint being the integration of literary and archaeological evidence. With this synthesis, the author has provided an essential basis for future in-depth explorations of the varied social contexts of Greek and Roman painted portraits.