VISUAL POWER IN ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME

Between Art and Social Reality

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PORTRAITS AND ROLES IN ART AND IN LIFE

Today, nobody will insist on a rigid concept of individual portraits as nothing but faithful, realistic reproductions of particular persons. Indeed, the Greeks proceeded, from the fifth century B.C. on, toward the depiction of individual physiognomies: well-known portrait heads represent Themistokles (fig. 85), Pindar (fig. 86), and Sokrates (fig. 87). Nevertheless, individuality in these images is strongly imbued with characteristics of more general types: Thus, Themistokles appears with robust features that call to mind a generic Herakles type; Sokrates, with features typical of a Silenus. Later, the highly individualized portraits of Greek philosophers were shaped according to more or less clearly distinguished 'school' types: Stoic philosophers are depicted with the strained physiognomy of intense thinking; Epicurean philosophers, with traits of authoritative intellectual power; Cynic philosophers, with an attitude of intentional physical self-neglect. Likewise, Greek statesmen and rulers, poets, and athletes are characterized in their portraits by recognizable group features.[6]

In a more general sense, such collective characterizations correspond with widespread ways of viewing and categorizing real-life persons in present societies: On the one hand, individuals tend to *shape,* consciously or not, their features, roles, and ideals according to collective concepts of visual appearance and behavior; on the other hand, we *perceive* others according to such categories: politicians, academics, or workers, traditionalists, or progressives, and so forth.

The messages of such portraits transcend individuality: They define social roles and ideals. This observation applies in particular to Greek and Roman antiquity, when portrait images had an almost exclusively public function, enhancing the public importance of the person represented.

In general, figurative art represents particular personal roles on three levels: first, in the person's face; second, in its entire corporeal appearance; third, in scenes of action, interaction, or interconnection: that is, within some significant part of the surrounding world. All three levels are implied in the de Chirico photograph: face and body in the portrait statues of Greek philosophers, poets, and statesmen. Some further examples may illustrate how such visual strategies work, in images as well as in real life.

Often such roles stamp the actor's physiognomy. The former chancellor of Germany Gerhard Schröder liked to present himself, in the media as well as in real public appear-

FIGURE 60
Former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder with Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi (2004). (*Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung*, 16–17 October 2004.)

FIGURE 61
Former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder, election poster (2002). (Photo-Archiv Institut für Klassische Archäologie, Universität Heidelberg.)

ances, as a bright, successful, self-confident statesman—whereas during his last election campaign, he preferred to appear as an earnest politician, a man of experience and responsibility. This is one and the same individual in two different roles expressed by two different images (figs. 60, 61). On the other hand, a leading German newspaper showed two political officials of the former German Democratic Republic, the president of the National Sport Association and his successor, with a striking similarity, strongly suggesting continuity. These are two individuals in one and the same role expressed by one and the same type of image (fig. 62). To be sure, their similarity is consciously enhanced by the photographer, but it is based on an underlying similarity of self-stylization. Artistic portraits as well as real appearances of persons are not only visualizations of individuals but constructions of their social roles.[7]

FIGURE 62
Two officials, successor (left) and predecessor (right), of GDR National Sport Association. (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.*)

Such visual roles may be consciously shaped in order to express the identity of particular individuals or social groups: thus, in Early Imperial times a 'realistic' physiognomy of old age and austerity in the tradition of the Roman Republic was retained in portraits of middle-class citizens and freedmen, whereas Classical features imitating the style of Augustus seem to have been adopted by upper-class adherents of the emperor. But visual roles may also be stamped by more general collective ideals of periods and generations. In Roman portrait sculpture faces of the same period often look remarkably similar. This *Zeitgesicht* 'period physiognomy' is evident in a certain number of rugged, fat faces during the time of the Flavian dynasty, similar to the physiognomy of the emperor Vespasian (figs. 63, 64); or in various noble bearded heads resembling the new imperial 'image' of Hadrian; or finally in the spiritualized physiognomies of the period of Septimius Severus; and so forth. Galen reports that adherents of the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus distinguished themselves by imitating their respective hairstyles and beards.[8]

Again, this is not merely a phenomenon of art. To be sure, similarities between imperial and 'private' portraits are in part created by technique and style—for example, by a particular rendering of curled hair, of the skin, and of the pupils of the eyes. But the hairstyle itself, which is a decisive element of similarity, must refer to a person's actual appearance; haircut and beard were especially effective means of real-life visual self-stylization.

Probably we can go even further, assuming that a basis in social reality also exists for particular expressions of the gaze and the mouth or the pose of the head. Today schoolchildren are accustomed to shape their facial expressions earnestly in front of the mirror, either imitating famous people or else adopting widespread typologies. In some cases it is possible to identify the origin of such physiognomic roles in some model of great public impact. Thus, Princess Diana was replicated with striking success in the physiognomies of a whole generation of teens, in her lifetime and even more after her death in an accident caused by paparazzi chasing the limousine in which she was riding (fig. 65).

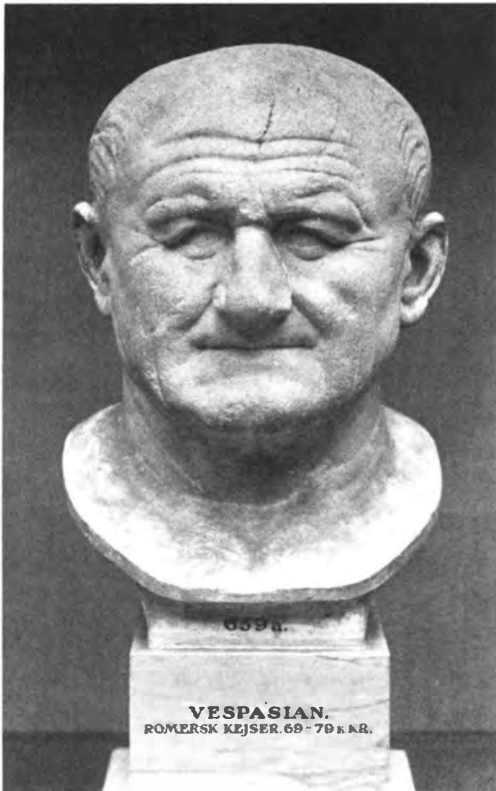


FIGURE 63

Portrait of Vespasian, 69–79 A.D. (Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek; Photo © Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.)

FIGURE 64

Portrait of an unknown freedman. Grave monument, circa 80 A.D. (Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano; H. Wrede, *Archäologischer Anzeiger*, 1977, 407 fig. 80.)

FIGURE 65.
Princess Diana of England. (© dpa Picture-Alliance GmbH, Frankfurt a.M.)

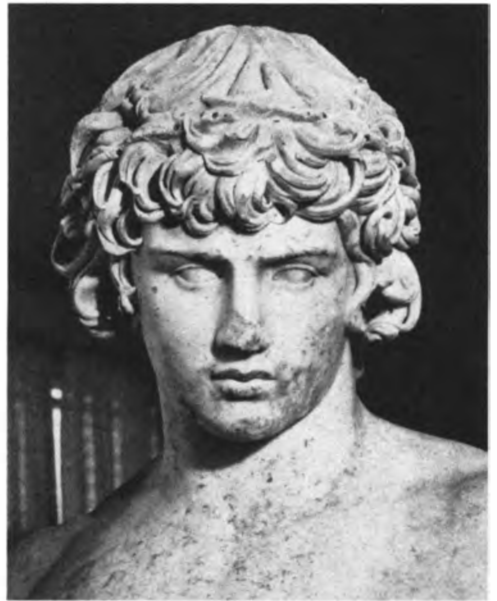


FIGURE 66
Delphi: portrait of Antinous, circa 130–38 A.D. (Delphi, Museum; Chr. W. Clairmont, *Die Bildnisse des Antinoos* [Rome, 1966], pl. 2.)

Of course, nowadays the diffusion of guiding models is strongly promoted by modern mass media, but to a somewhat lesser degree we may observe the impact of facial expression in the portrait type of Antinous, the favorite of the emperor Hadrian, with his beautiful long locks and his dreamy, sensual gaze. Like Diana, Antinous became a utopian ideal through his untimely death in a dreadful accident, plunging from a ship into the Nile and being devoured by crocodiles (fig. 66). In both cases their mysterious ends

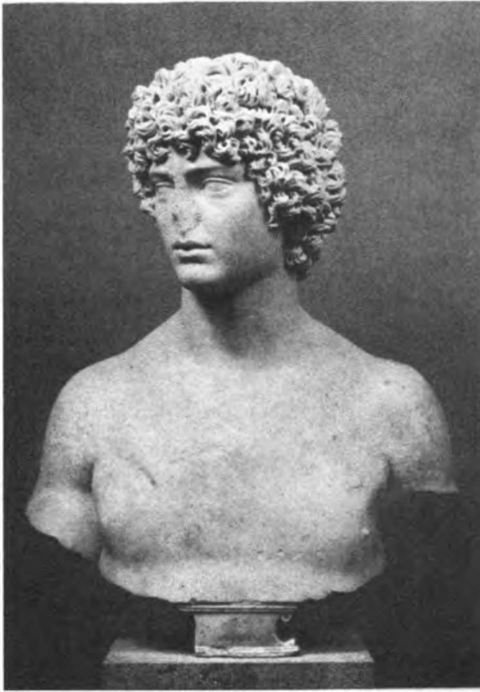


FIGURE 67
Portrait of an unknown young man, circa 170 A.D. (Munich, Glyptothek; Photo-Archiv Institut für Klassische Archäologie, Universität Heidelberg.)

caused rumors and legends and a worldwide mass mourning—albeit with significant differences; for whereas Princess Diana aroused a spontaneous quasi-religious sympathy in opposition to the royal state authorities, Antinous was mourned and venerated in religious cult by order of the emperor himself. Nonetheless, a comparative study, seeking coincidences as well as differences between these two suggestive models of youthful glamor, may lead to interesting insights into the genesis and fabrication of guiding physiognomies. Regarding the features of Antinous, we can only guess how far the appearance of this unique youth was imitated in real life by his coevals among the court elite. The portraits of the young Marcus Aurelius, at least, follow Antinous's dreamy mood; and portraits of various youths from the following generation seem to indicate some close imitation (fig. 67), not least among them the portrait type of Polydeukion, the favorite young pupil of the famous Greek philosopher and politician Herodes Atticus.[9]

Yet, the interrelation between the emperor and his subjects does not follow a one-sided, top-down direction: in other cases the 'private' sphere precedes the emperor. Thus, the new fashion of beardedness as the sign of a refined lifestyle, in reality as in art, seems to have originated before Hadrian's ascendance to the throne and to have been only reinforced and diffused by his authoritative role. Likewise, the features of the emperor Septimius Severus are anticipated, even with his characteristic hairstyle of locks hanging down over his forehead, by private portraits from the period of his predecessor Commodus. Thus, the phenomenon of *Zeitgesicht* is not always to be explained by the unique

FIGURE 68
U.S. president George W. Bush announcing Iraq resolution with political leaders (2002). (*The Boston Globe*, 3 October 2002.)

impact of great individual models: in these cases, the emperor seems to have taken over a fashionable appearance that had grown bottom-up. Contemporary experience, in the media as well as in real life, confirms this possibility of an 'anonymous' emergence of fashionable facial expression. Every model is a product of its time, generated in a reciprocal process: Tendencies create exponents, and exponents promote and reinforce tendencies.[10]

A striking literary description of the phenomenon can be found in Robert Musil's *The Man without Qualities*, in which the novel's author describes the first encounter of the main character, Ulrich, with his new lover, Leona: "Ulrich was immediately reminded of old photographs or engravings of dated beauties in ancient issues of forgotten women's magazines. . . . There are, of course, in all periods all kinds of countenances, but only one type will be singled out by a period's taste as its ideal image of happiness and beauty while all other faces do their best to copy it, and with the help of fashion and hairdressers even the ugly ones manage to approximate the ideal. And only those . . . faces will never adapt themselves whose regal and banished ideal of beauty of a bygone epoch expresses itself without compromise. Such faces wander about like corpses of past desires in the great void of love's traffic." In this passage the unity of perceiving real faces and shaping meaningful 'images' is described with extraordinary precision; for it is the same taste

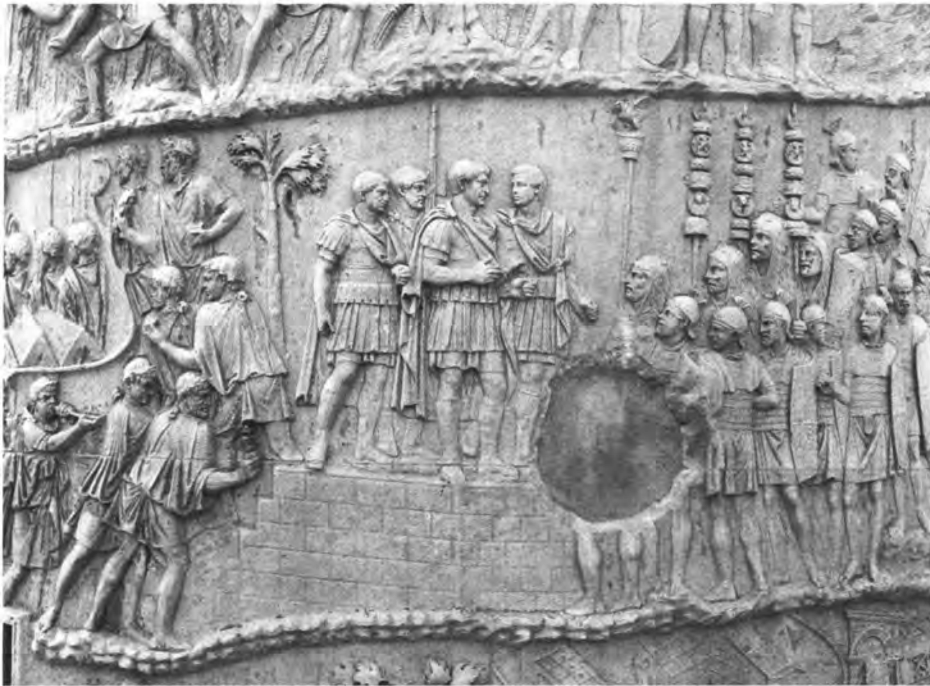


FIGURE 69
Trajan with military advisors, adlocutio to the troops. Column of Trajan, Rome, scene 61, 106–13 a.d. (© DAI Rom, D-DAI-ROM 1468.)

that perceives and evaluates the natural physiognomies, that selects out of their multiplicity certain ideals, that stylizes and shapes the variegated faces by facial expressions, cosmetics, and hairstyles according to these ideals, and finally creates these ideals in works of art.[11]

Often, public roles are expressed by a complex staging of individual persons in meaningful scenes. Frequently such staging follows old devices and techniques that almost constitute a system of visual semantics transmitted through centuries. When in October 2002 President George W. Bush tried to convince his nation of the need to wage war against Iraq, he announced his agreement with leading members of the Senate in a television show in which he appeared surrounded and literally backed by top political leaders; they shared with him the facial expression of responsibility and determination (fig. 68). The same topos was adopted already on the Column of Trajan, where the emperor as ruler and army commander is represented in all major scenes in the company of high officers, demonstrating that he is always surrounded by authoritative counselors. We even find the same austere physiognomic expressions of authority and vigor (fig. 69). Later, three weeks before starting the war, President Bush presented in a programmatic television broadcast his vision for the future order of the Near East with

FIGURE 70
U.S. president George W. Bush before his speech on the Iraq War (2003). (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 28 February 2003.)

an attitude of concentration, seated in front of the Stars and Stripes lined up in series in the background (fig. 70). Again, this arrangement comes very close to a scene on Trajan's Column in which the emperor receives the submission of the whole Dacian population in front of a Roman fortification, with a series of Roman military ensigns held up in the background (fig. 71). The American national flags, like the Roman standards, lend the state leader's appearance a strong aura of political sacrality.[12]

These images constitute bridges between the spheres of art and life in a twofold sense. First, both scenes are staged pictures with a powerful visual impact; but at the same time both scenes are reproductions of real appearances of leading statesmen in a meaningful ambiance of political power. The viewer is intended to engage in a continuous reciprocal shift between the image and reality. Second, in these images almost all elements are of an altogether general character, except for the political protagonist, who is identified through his individual portrait features: Public speeches to the nation are no less regular political performances of U.S. presidents than were ceremonies of submission of enemies to Roman emperors. Correspondingly, the U.S. flags as well as the Roman military ensigns are 'eternal' symbols of 'national' identity, appropriate for the public appearance of any leading statesman. In both scenes, however, these general motifs are attributed to a particular U.S. president and an individual Roman emperor, respectively. Thereby, the supraindividual

FIGURE 71
Trajan receiving submission of Dacians. Column of Trajan, Rome, scene 75, 106–13 a.d. (© DAI Rom 41.1468.)

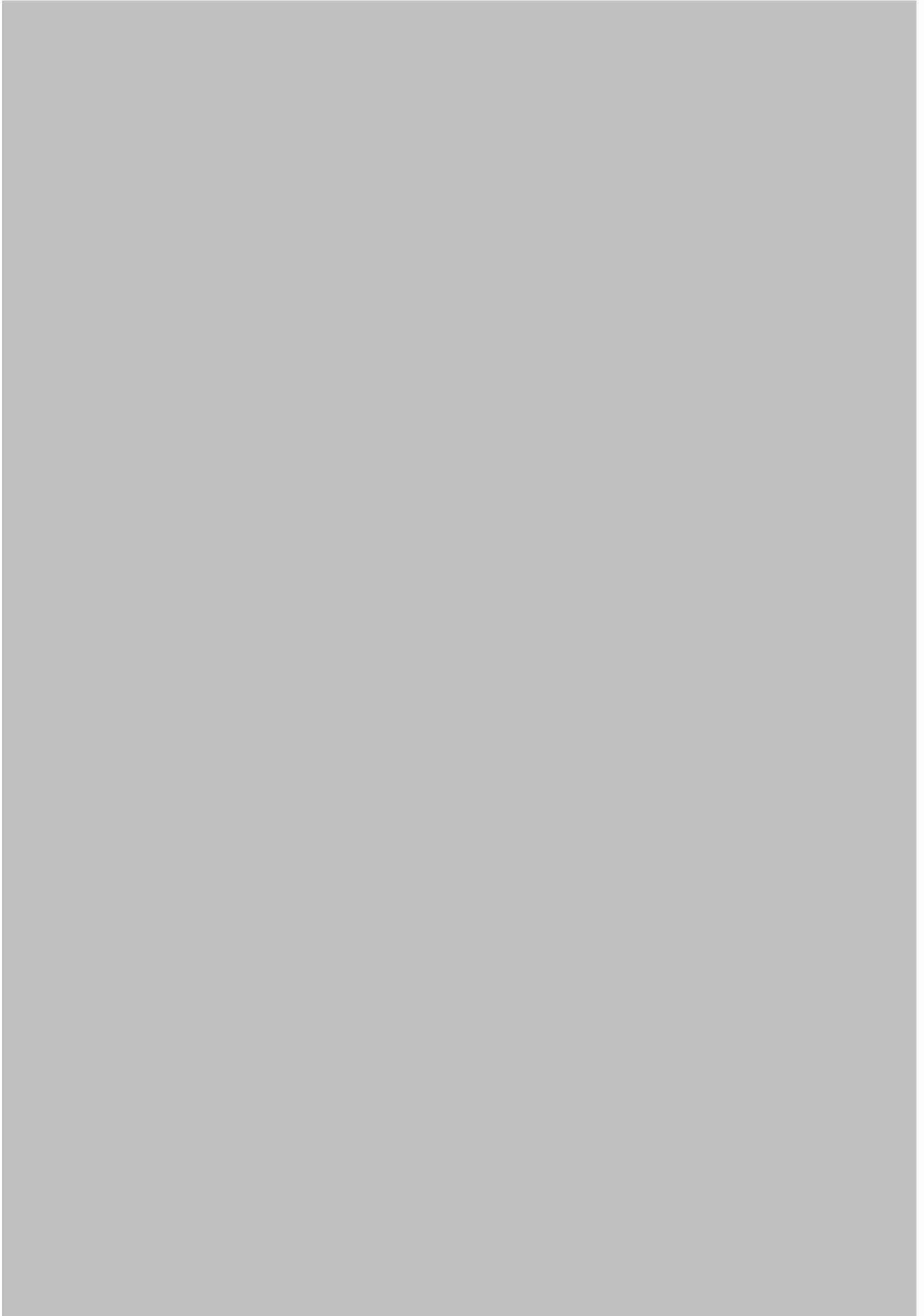
political orders of the United States of America and the Roman Empire are put into close relation with their foremost individual protagonists and highest representatives.

As a result, portraits to a significant degree are visual constructions of roles. Such roles, as they were represented in images, were the structural forms of any efficient social and political acting. Obviously, the social significance of individual persons, as they are depicted in their portraits, rests not on the individual shapes of their noses, mouths, eyes, or foreheads but on their roles in their societies. It is precisely in their capacity as depictions of roles that portraits are representations of real agents of social life.

On the other hand, real-life persons, with their concrete bodies and faces, are not only real individuals: they also play roles in social life—and these real roles are 'images.' Individual persons give themselves a significant appearance by their hairstyle, by the decision to shave or not, by clothing, jewelry, cosmetics, and furthermore by their attitudes, gestures, and facial expressions. Every individual is his or her own image. Human beings, in their real appearance, in their physical *habitus,* are visual constructions of their social roles.

Both constructions—on the one hand the *images of living persons* representing their social roles, on the other hand the *real persons* themselves performing their roles *as living images*—have much in common. Images represent the reality of personal appearance in

significant aspects, while the reality of personal appearance, insofar as it is styled into a significant shape, appears as an image. The image of art and the 'image' of real-life self-stylization are two media the particular qualities of which are used to produce visual effects and impacts, often in an analogous way, but equally also with diverging goals.



6

DECOR

Images and the Order of Things

Seht ihr den Mond dort stehen?
Er ist nur halb zu sehen,
Und ist doch rund und schön.

Look at the moon so lonely!
One half is shining only,
Yet she is round and bright.

GERMAN *VOLKSLIED*; TEXT
BY MATTHIAS CLAUDIUS

INTRODUCTION TO AN APORIA

Ancient works of art are seen by modern viewers in circumstances entirely different from those of antiquity. To mention only two obvious cases: The sculptures of the Parthenon are—still—presented in the British Museum at eye level in a wide, calm hall, imbued with an aseptic classicism, and are visited by cultivated and focused spectators (fig. 125); whereas on the original site, the Athenian Akropolis, they were to be seen at a height of more than twelve meters, at a more or less steep angle—the frieze, moreover, to be seen in the half-light between architrave and cella, and all this to be viewed amid the turmoil of sanctuary activities (fig. 143). Similarly, engraved gems are displayed in showcases, often with a magnifying glass added, for long and concentrated study, whereas in antiquity they were worn as rings on hands that were continuously in motion, and never presented in a stable position to the eye of an observer. Moreover, such works of art are published with photographs, often with many details, in available books; they can be studied in libraries or at home and even compared with other works of art with which an ancient viewer had no acquaintance at all.

The difference between antiquity and our own time regarding the nature of images and viewers' perception of them has two aspects. On the one hand this difference concerns, as has been argued in the last chapter, the functions of works of art: Images in antiquity were not exhibited in specific aesthetic spaces like modern museums; their purpose was to make present in social life such beings as could not, in fact, be there at the time: the

FIGURE 143
Athens, Akropolis: Parthenon, 447–432 B.C. (Reconstruction by G. P. Stevens; G. P. Stevens, *The Setting of the Periclean Parthenon* [Athens, 1940], frontispiece.)

gods in their temples, the mythical heroes in sanctuaries and other contexts, the deceased ancestors on their tombs, men of public importance in public places, and so forth. Images constituted a conceptual society within which living men found their social orientation. Dealing with images did not mean only viewing and interpreting them; it also meant living with them and participating in social situations that were in part determined by them.

On the other hand the difference between antiquity and our own time concerns the visibility of figurative art—which again poses the fundamental question of the nature of works of 'art,' and in particular of images, in Classical antiquity. As we shall see, living with images implied a kind of viewing and visibility that differed in many respects from the conditions of purely aesthetic contemplation.

Modern scholarship has only recently bothered with the visibility of ancient works of art. The most critical and controversial discussion in this regard developed around the Column of Trajan, crowned by a statue of the emperor, and its decoration, a helical band of reliefs describing Trajan's war campaigns against Dacia in 101–2 and 105–6 A.D. (figs. 144, 145). Paul Veyne stirred up the debate with a provocative article insisting on the fact that the reliefs of this famous monument, at heights of ten, twenty, and even thirty-five meters, could by no means be perceived with all their innumerable details by ancient

FIGURE 144
Column of Trajan, Rome, 106–13 A.D. (© Fototeca Unione, American Academy in Rome 476.)

viewers. From this observation, he drew the conclusion that the complex interpretations of their ideological messages by modern scholarship were essentially misguided, that the monument's real effect on its audience was in fact a general impact of amazement and admiration, and that this impact was the only legitimate subject of scholarly investigation.[1]

Obviously, this was a challenge to the whole enterprise of archaeological interpretation—and defenses were not lacking. On principle, it was affirmed that ancient viewers in fact *had* an opportunity to perceive and comprehend the content of these reliefs: climbing up to the terraces on top of the surrounding buildings, or reading the *commentarii* of Trajan on his Dacian Wars that were kept in the adjacent library, or maybe studying the preliminary designs of the sculptors' workshops, which were imagined as having been exhibited in the surrounding porticoes.[2]

In principle, these are two antithetical positions: on the one hand, the limited conditions of perceiving the monument in its ancient context are taken seriously—with the

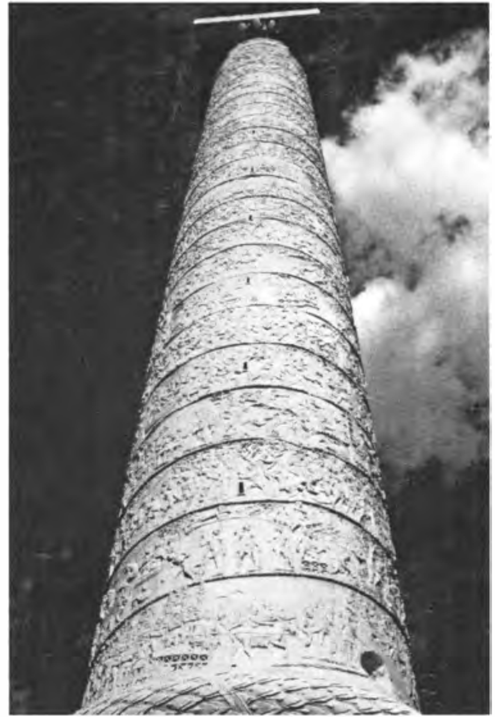


FIGURE 145
Column of Trajan, Rome, 106–13 A.D., prospect from below. (© Photo-Archiv T. Hölscher [Sabine Früh].)

consequence that complex meanings are negated; on the other hand, the monument's complex significance is acknowledged—with the implication that its limited perceptibility has to be compensated for through a network of supplementary conditions and experiences that supported its understanding. Both positions have raised important questions and contributed stimulating answers—but always by neglecting those facts and phenomena that contradict them.

In fact, there seems to be no escape from acknowledging both premises, contradictory as they may appear: complex content on the one hand and limited visibility on the other. As we shall see, this paradox is not an isolated feature of Trajan's Column but a widespread and fundamental phenomenon of ancient art. If, however, this is true, and if nevertheless from our point of view these premises seem incompatible with each other, then this aporia may invite us to rethink our basic assumptions regarding the functions of images in Greek and Roman cultural practice. To this end, I'll try to sketch in the final part of this chapter a rehabilitation of the aesthetic notion of decorum as a fundamental concept of ancient art.

THE COLUMN OF TRAJAN BETWEEN COMPLEX IDEOLOGY AND LIMITED VISIBILITY

In antiquity, as others besides Paul Veyne have emphasized, a detailed view of the spiral reliefs of Trajan's Column was possible only to a very limited degree (fig. 146). The court

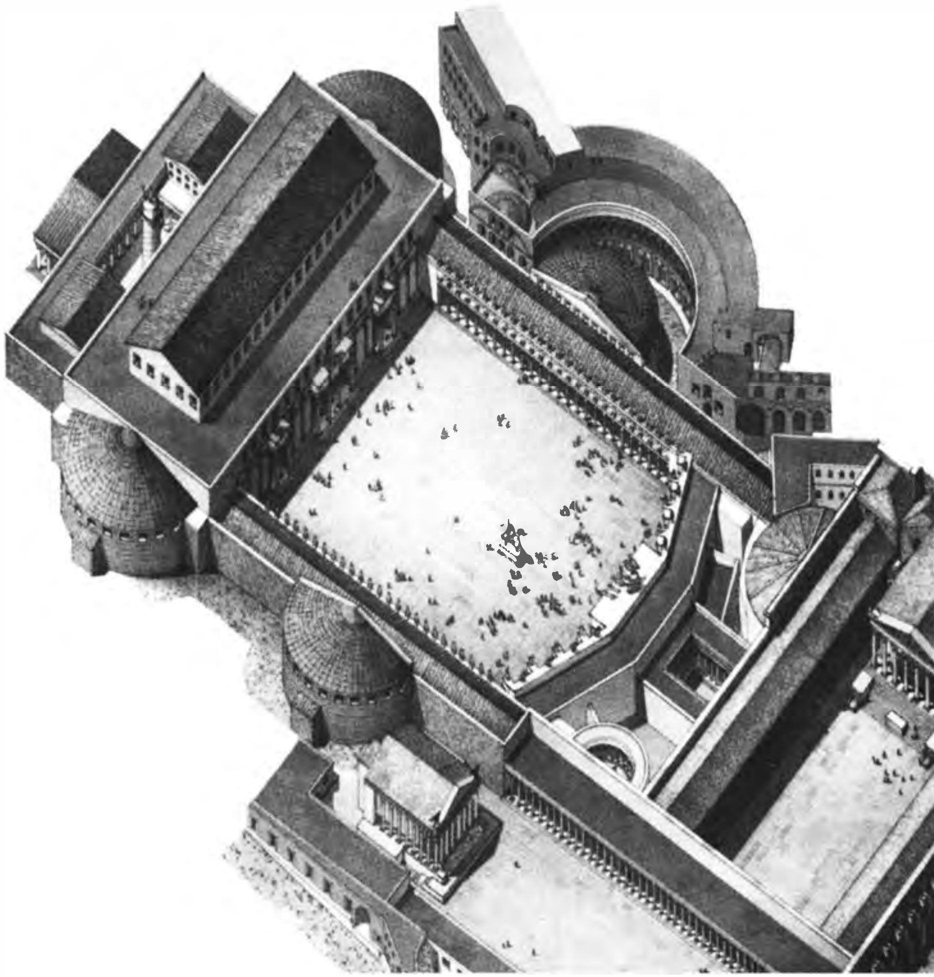


FIGURE 146
Forum of Trajan, 106–13 A.D. (Model; © Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.)

around the column, with its surrounding porticoes, was narrow, allowing a view only from a very steep angle at the reliefs up to a height of thirty-five meters. Scholars have made various efforts to avoid this irritating condition. Ancient viewers were imagined to have much better vision than their modern counterparts, and the original polychromy would have rendered the reliefs much more easily recognizable. The first argument here is desperate; the second, absolutely insufficient. The assumption that preliminary sketches were permanently on view in the courtyard is wishful thinking without further evidence; and the idea that visitors would read Trajan's *commentarii* as a guideline before stepping into the courtyard for closer observation of the column sounds rather academic.[3] More recently, a great effort was made to demonstrate that people could climb up to the

roof terraces of the surrounding buildings in order to get a more comfortable view of the reliefs. Yet first of all, it is far from certain that all these buildings, in particular the monumental entrance gate at the northwest side, had accessible roofs at all. If they did, however, we may reasonably ask how many visitors may have used this hypothetical opportunity. In addition, the perception of the sequence of scenes would have been interrupted between the view from the ground and, after the detour over the stairways, from the upper level; from both perspectives, again, only a few scenes would have been fully visible at eye level. Last but not least: since the buildings and their supposed terraces were not interconnected, our poor visitors would have had to use various staircases, one after another, losing their view of the column every time, or to jump from one roof to another around the column in order to follow its spiral narrative—which, as a matter of fact, was the basic concept of the sequence of reliefs.[4]

Yet, notwithstanding its very reduced perceptibility, the narrative sequence of the column's reliefs, as we will see, is carefully planned in all its details. Despite countless investigations that have effectively contributed to our understanding of the column, the extremely detailed concept of this visual war report still remains for the most part to be explored. In our context some fundamental examples may suffice.[5]

As is well known, the narrative sequence of the column represents Trajan's two wars against the Dacians in five campaigns: the first, second, and third in 101–2 A.D.; the fourth and fifth in 105–6. The first, third, and fifth campaigns were offensive; the second and fourth were defensive enterprises (fig. 147). The narrative of these five campaigns is strongly structured according to two key principles: the one standardizing, the other diversifying. For a demonstration of this narrative framework, the offensive campaigns are selected here, but *mutatis mutandis* analogous principles must apply to the defensive campaigns.

All three offensive campaigns are depicted as an almost rigid sequence of typical events through which the prevailing virtues of the emperor and his army are displayed. At the beginning, the *profectio* of the army, crossing the Danube, is staged as proof of aggressive power and military *virtus* (scenes 3–5). It is followed by a meeting of the war council, a demonstration of *consilium* 'good advice' and cooperation (scene 6); then by a *lustratio,* a rite of the army's constitution and protection, demonstrating the emperor's *pietas* 'piety' and *providentia* 'foresight' (scene 7); and moreover by an *adlocutio,* an encouraging 'speech,' testifying to *concordia* and *fides* 'good relations' between the emperor and his troops (scene 10). After these ideological rituals, there follows, as a second stage, a group of scenes describing concrete preparations of technical infrastructure and their first, immediate results: fortifications are built, roads are constructed, and some captured enemy soldiers are presented to the emperor. On the basis of these two groups of preparatory scenes the submission of the enemy is unfolded in a more or less fixed sequence of actions: The Roman army advances into Dacian territory, then fights a great battle—and of course the Romans win. Thereafter, the emperor delivers a laudatory speech to his soldiers. As a result, the majority of the enemy troops surrender to the

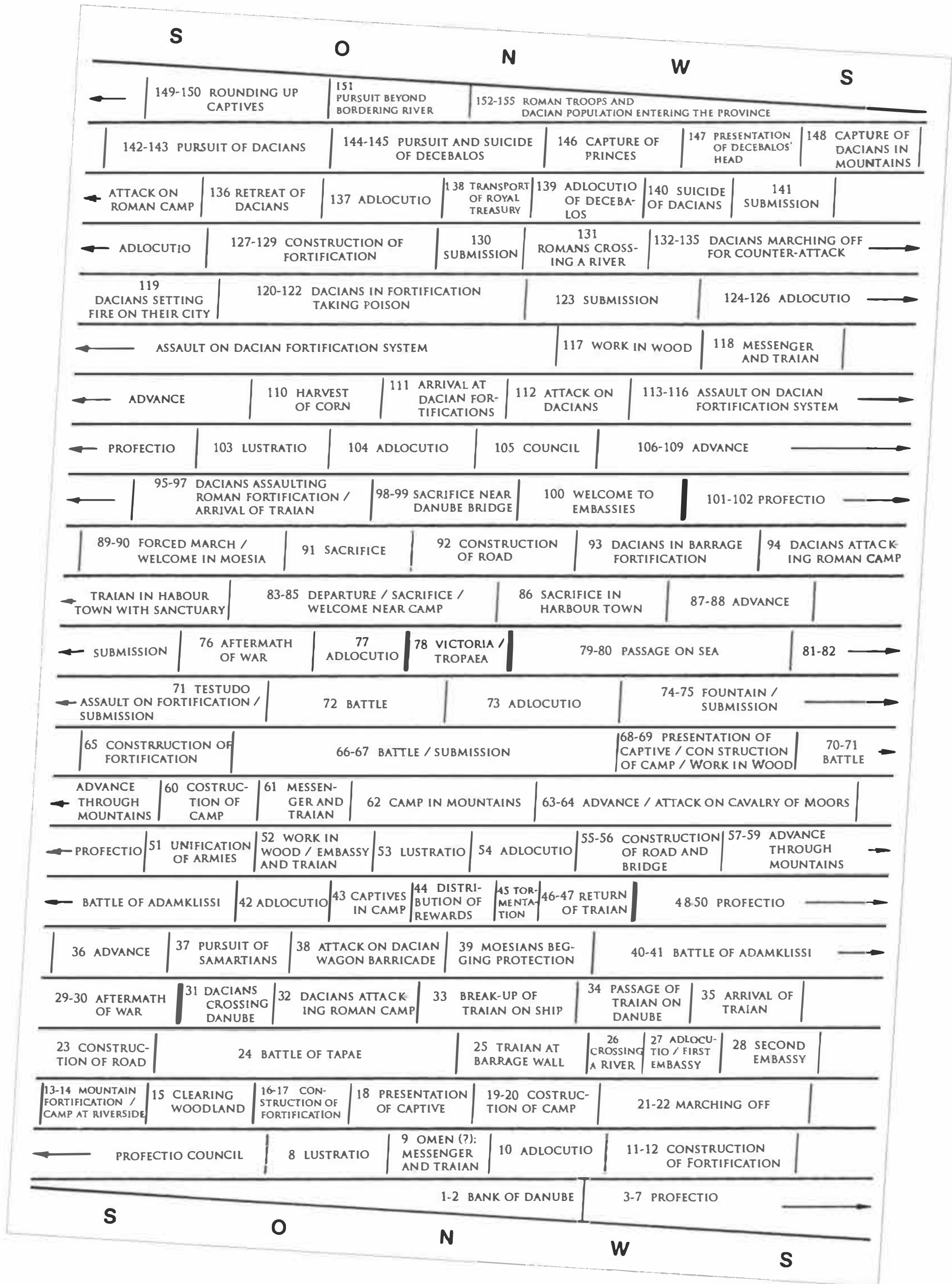


FIGURE 147

Column of Trajan, sequence of scenes. Rome. (© T. Hölscher.)

emperor. Finally, the consequences of defeat for the enemy are described: extinction, deportation, resettlement.

Within this rather normative sequence, other scenes of a more individual character are inserted. Thus, in the first campaign the advance of the Roman army comes to a halt in front of a Dacian barrier fortification, behind which the enemy retires. In the third campaign the unification of two Roman armies is depicted, and a troop of African horsemen are fighting on the Roman side. In the fifth campaign a collective suicide of Dacian noblemen in a conquered city and above all the end of the Dacian king, Decebalus, are described in many details. Such specific themes and motifs refer to particular historical events and situations. Yet altogether the standardized aspects predominate.[6]

This basic structure of all three offensive campaigns is diversified according to a specific general character of each of these campaigns, and this diversification again constitutes a systematic display of different aspects of warfare.

- The first campaign is characterized as a great overture in which the foundation of the future triumph is laid out. Only in the first campaign is the *lustratio* followed by a scene that obviously represents a favorable omen: a Dacian envoy falling in a spectacular way from his mule in front of the emperor. In this campaign the construction of fortifications and roads is much more extensively described than in the other campaigns, and only here does the emperor himself appear in these scenes as promoting this sort of infrastructure. Only in the battle scene of this campaign does Iuppiter himself appear, as the divine guarantor of Roman victory; only here is the enemy's reaction to defeat represented in two different scenes, with one tribe demonstrating a certain resistance and the other submitting voluntarily, a characteristic differentiation between *parcere subiectis* and *debellare superbos*. In this campaign, finally, the consequences of the defeat for the enemy population are described more drastically than in any other campaign. The first campaign is a triumphant overture.
- The third campaign, on the contrary, following the Dacians' unexpectedly invading and their being repulsed from the Roman territory, is presented as a laborious and difficult response to the enemy threat. In this campaign the penetration into the mountainous and woody interior of Dacia is described as a lengthy and torturous enterprise. Here, instead of one decisive fight, a sequence of three battles is displayed; and these are systematically diversified as, first, a technical battle, with superior Roman fortifications and artillery; second, a tactical battle, with barbarian auxiliary troops in perfect order and with the Roman legionaries' famous maneuver of the *testudo;* and third, a final battle that leads to the enemy's complete defeat. As a result, only in this campaign are the Romans shown as masters of the land's water resources. Finally, there follows the most extended submission of the whole war; whereupon the population is transferred elsewhere, as an initial measure of consolidation and pacification of

the new province under Roman rule. The third campaign is a tremendous effort and a great success.

- The fifth campaign leads to Dacians' final, total defeat. Here, the troops' advance into enemy territory is extended into a comprehensive military parade of Roman and allied units, representing the overwhelming power of Trajan's army. Only here are the Romans shown harvesting the corn—that is, in possession of the country's natural resources. The fortified cities of the Dacians are depicted as numerous and large; their siege and conquest are described with particular emphasis; the despair of the Dacians is underscored with incomparable empathy in scenes of defeat, group suicide, and submission. The end of Decebalus and his sons is reported in several scenes with utmost determination and cruelty, culminating in the exhibition of the king's head in the Roman camp. In the end, a long series of activities aims at the extinction of any kind of resistance even as far as the most remote mountainous corners of the Dacians' territory. This campaign is a demonstration of absolute victory over and subjection of any enemy.

This diversifying narrative structure is complemented by conscious differentiation in numerous details. To give just two examples: The emperor, who in reality was entitled to be always accompanied by twenty-four lictors, appears on the column with lictors only in scenes of great public impact, such as in the first, decisive war council, in the first *lustratio*, and in the final *profectio*, which will lead to the definite defeat of the Dacians. The soldiers, who normally are represented with armor that is generic but essentially realistic, appear with historicizing Attic helmets in some scenes of a particularly celebratory character.[7]

All in all, the detailed narrative sequence of this war report is organized in a highly systematic way, amounting to an almost systematic display of typical scenes, practices, aspects, and qualities of Roman warfare.

Moreover, notwithstanding the consecutive spiral sequence of the narrative, vertical correspondences between crucial scenes have been observed. The most obvious of these references is between the scenes of *profectio* at the beginning of the first, third, and fifth campaigns, all placed on the western axis. Even more important is the corresponding placement, on the northern axis, of the initial omen in the second spiral, the great battle with the appearance of Iuppiter in the fourth, Victoria between trophies in the central spiral, and the capture of Decebalus in the penultimate one. This system of vertical correspondences conveys to the column a visual superstructure that complements the principle of dynamic continuous narration by a concept of static thematic reference.[8]

One could continue in this way: The whole column, its macroscopic structure as well as its microscopic narrative, is imbued with most complex ideological significance. Obviously, however, living viewers at the physical site of the column can by no means have been able to perceive the whole spectrum of these meanings. Thus, there seems to be no escape from two seemingly contradictory conclusions: first, the visibility of Trajan's

Column was in fact highly restricted by the conditions of its perception; second, nevertheless this monument is full of indisputable, highly complex visual significance. Any serious interpretation has to acknowledge—and to start from—these two facts, incompatible though they may appear to us.