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Texture and Materiality of the Roman Portrait

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Abstract

Roman portraiture is among the most visually thrilling, not simply for the apparent directness of viewer engagement, but also due to the evolving form and stylistic treatment, the staggering technique skills, and the quantity of surviving examples. The strong link between image and individual has meant that traditionally portraits have primarily been treated as articulating the status message of the one who was portrayed. Through an examination of different marble techniques and innovations and through a variety of case studies in the rhetoric of forms and styles, this thesis will focus on the impact of viewing and how the image is related to the process of viewing. The aim is for an awareness of portraits as dynamic intermediaries of social interaction. To this end, the thesis will look at the handling of the material as a link with visual texture and engagement. In essence, the thesis concerns the materiality of portraiture more than the recognizability of portraits.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and many friends as well as professors. A special feeling of gratitude to my loving mother, Antonia Carrera, whose words of encouragement and push for success still ring in my ears as I write this. My sisters and brother, Fabiola, Alejandra, and Juan, who have always been there, no matter what.

I also dedicate this work to many friends of mine, who supported me over the process of writing and kept me sane; no need to list their names, they know who they are. I will always appreciate what they have done for me and I will hold those moments dearly. In particular I thank Polina Nasonova for listening to me uncountable times, while passionately talking about marbled beards. Thank you for helping me develop my technological skills as well. Thank you for being my cheerleader and for believing in me when I wasn’t doing it myself.

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Finally, I want to dedicate my thesis to my dear professor, advisor, and first reader-- Inge Hansen. Thank you for guiding me through this long process. Thank you for conveying your passion for Roman art and marbled beards. Thank you for making me fall in love with the so-called soldier emperors. You have set an example of excellence as a researcher, mentor, instructor and role-model. Your guidance helped me throughout this whole process. I could not have wished more than what you have given me as an advisor and mentor.
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Introduction

Portraiture was a crucial part of Roman culture, immortalizing Roman leadership through sculpture. As individualized representations, choices in the making of portrait depictions reflect the needs of society for which they were created. Each imperial dynasty aimed to emphasize appropriate morals and convictions and to make a certain association with the predecessors. The aim of such depictions was to make the image of the emperor omnipresent-in public and throughout the Empire- in accordance with his own self-conception and with the objective of favorable perception. The tradition of Roman imperial portrait had already been implemented during the early reign of Augustus and developed from there on, influencing the whole subsequent imperial imagery. As an art historian, I find fascinating the sudden change from the Republican veristic style that aimed to enhance each wrinkle and imperfection of the skin, to a youthful and idealized Augustan face. Not only that, but the fact that Roman portraits were constantly being updated throughout the period styles in correspondence to their predecessors is something to take into consideration. In fact, portraits provoked responses; a portrait carried a message, and both had an agenda and biography.

Throughout the study of Roman portraiture scholars have approached the study of these in different ways from reading what is behind the portraiture itself to how to deal with the different types. What has dominated in the research of Roman portraiture in recent years, however, are enquiries into the actual messages that specific portraits or elements of portraiture convey, and into the social practices that surround them. Recent research has made it clear
beyond a doubt that portraits are an important source of information on the value systems and social norms of a given time and place, and thus contribute substantially to Roman social history. However, the main concern of scholars is the physical contextualization of portraits and how it has contributed to the understanding on how they conveyed a message.

Kleiner, in *Roman Sculpture* (1992) treats sculpture as a main part of Roman Art and discusses it in the context of the historical and social background. While simultaneously looking at social backgrounds and geographical locations, and typologies of monuments as well as discussing the historiography of Roman art, she successfully shows a modern approach to the study of monumental sculpture in its cultural, political and social context. She will be of great help to shed light into certain roman busts in terms of “reading” a portrait.

Instead, P. Zanker’s book 1996, *The Mask of Socrates: The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity*, approaches the study of portraits in a different way. He offers the first comprehensive history of the visual representation of Greek and Roman intellectuals. Zanker’s primary interest is in the specific visual images presenting problems of self-identity as conveyed in literary sources. He draws attention on a variety of source materials such as Greco-Roman literature, historiography and philosophy. His work focuses on the earliest visual images of Socrates and Plato to the contemporaneous civic dignitaries. He discusses extensively the famous beard in Hadrian’s bust and the innovative techniques in marble, yet he does not discuss on the actual technique but rather focusses on the origin behind the beard. He sheds light into what it meant in the social political context in the Roman Empire.

Fejfer in her 2008 *Roman Portraits in Context*, approaches her study on portraiture to ask the ever-lasting questions on how and why these became a pivotal role in expressing political ideology, social and intellectual identity and be able to respond through discussion. Fejfer offers
a study of the understanding and contemplation Roman portraits statues greatly enriched considering its wider historical context, its original setting, the circumstances of its production and style, and its base which, in many cases, bore a text that contributed to the rhetorical power of the image. She covers all these issues with a wide range of primary evidence, including inscriptions, literary sources and portraits. The result is by far the most comprehensive and best-supported approach to this important material from the imperial period. However, she detaches herself from looking at the style, typology and chronology but rather looks at reconstructing the socio/historical and physical context of portraiture itself and makes a clear statement that she is not certainly looking at the vast history of Roman portraiture.

Where my approach differs from the scholars mentioned above, is that the focus is not on the figure of the individuals or what messaged they conveyed, but rather on the handling of the material, the colors and technical requirements of this, and the strong link with the visual engagement within the roman imperial period. What I propose in Chapter 1 is a history of the early imperial portrait, focusing on what was traditionally done in terms of portraiture as well as the introduction of the term verism and its certain characteristics. I will shed light into the materials that were available in the Empire before marble became a definite medium for portraiture. For this reason on my Chapter 1, I shall proceed on showing the different bust portraits made of other types of materials and propose two case studies of one same emperor: Lucius Verus, in terracotta and silver. The depths and textures will be looked at as well as the effects and how each material differ from one another. On my Chapter 2, I will finally arrive to the predicted marble bust portrait with its entire innovations and techniques always using Lucius Verus as a great example, exploring in depth his frenetic curls and beard. Hence, I will discuss
also how sculptors were “playing” with marble. In other words, chiseling and drilling were being explored extensively. This is why Verus’ portrait is the greatest example to appreciate the drilled and carved locks of hair and beard. This will show how marble becomes a more palpable material to depict shades, depths and textures. Furthermore, I study in technical terms the tools available throughout the empire and the techniques developed. Once I have done that, I will bring up the emperor Nero with his exquisite beard and full cheeks and lovely sideburns to shed light into how sculptors were now fully aware about the medium and what their tools could do and until what extent the drilling and carving was being employed in portraiture.

Once I mention the awareness of workshops on the techniques employed in marble then on Chapter 3, I will discuss on how not only carving and drilling are techniques to show textures but also colored quarries can have the same effect and impact. Each type of quarry connoted a meaning and a feeling. This is when Augustus (Octavian) from Via Labicana will come up to explain the use of two types of marble in a single standing portrait and how these two types of marble helped to give different textures at the same time to convey the emperor’s ideals. The costs of marble will be discussed since also the marble being transported from other islands or cities represented a monetary value.

Lastly, on Chapter 4 I will reach to the how the format of roman portraiture completely changed and moved to an abbreviated format. I will introduce what the Greeks were doing when it came to portraiture; they were doing these thinking the Italians were doing so. These busts were exhibited in public places such as gardens and libraries and the engagement with these also changed. Portraiture shifted from a “looking up” to an emperor’s portrait to an eye level, face-to-face engagement. This is important because now the features of the emperors are more pronounced and more realistic.
Nevertheless, I believe this method has a certain distinct approach making such extensive theme attractive and interesting. In most instances it matters less who is represented and what such portraiture is trying to convey but rather that what is happening when textures, depths and colors are added into the marble.
Chapter 1: Texture and Materiality

Traditional Roman Portraiture and Marble Availability Throughout the Empire

The aim of an imperial portrait may have been to make the image of the emperor omnipresent-- in public and throughout the Empire-- in accordance with his own self-conception with the objective of favorable perception.\(^1\) However, the portraits themselves also conveyed information about the person honored, the reason for the dedication, his or her status, offices, virtue, inscriptions, dress and posture, as well as the portrait head, all of these elements worked together to communicate their messages to the viewer.\(^2\) In other words, imperial portraits were of great importance to all aspects of Roman society since it articulated the Emperor’s relationship with the Senate, the whole Empire and the Roman military. It is important to mention that in order to ensure a ‘lifelike’ individual recognizability, changes of style and approach were constantly being made.

Traditionally, in Roman Portraiture there were two main factors on the making of a portrait. The first factor is the circumstances of its creation, who commissioned and why. However, the second factor is the “balance between the internal and external in the portrait”.\(^3\) In other words, how is it representing the values and morals of the represented person and how does it represent physical characteristics. Patrons could affect choice of style and attributes as well as fundamental details like the shape and size of the image. Around the Roman Empire the portrait

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styles of metropolitan Rome often blended with local traditions. In the Roman Empire the need for official portraits of the leader increased sharply. Identifiable images were required, to command loyalty and when appropriate, to emphasize dynastic connections.

**Interests in Textures**

Before discussing the first case study, a summary of late Republican traditions of portraiture is useful. Roman Republican portraiture is characterized by verism influenced by Hellenistic portraiture. Such verism, seemed to reflect the Roman belief that the individuality of a person laid in his or hers facial features. I dare to make a slight contrast with the Greek view since Greek portraits were less focused on physical individuality. In other words, Greek sculptures portrayed men with perfect bodies and faces, which formed an overall image. For the Romans the statue body served as a kind of prop for the head, and identified the subject’s profession or role, such as general or magistrate. The Roman Republican portraiture depicts sculptures of older men, and included an emphasis on wrinkles, creases and other signs of old age. Such characteristics were indeed needed in the Republic since they signified experience and public duty. It is remarkable how in the goal to create an image of a specific person, the furrowed eyebrows and the wrinkles become the subject of the work of art.

In the late Republic, only mature men were considered to be worthy subjects of portraiture; there are no surviving republican portraits of youths or children since portraits were liked to public office. Many

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5 Ibid., 158.
ancient portraits were made for funerary settings. Here, the emphasis is often (not always) on the individual as a private person, portrayed in idealized, prospective terms. To be able to understand Roman portraiture one has to take into consideration that these portraits worked as public statements, giving in a narrative and working with social engagement.

The portraits of the Julio-Claudians as well as the Flavians showed the family union through similarities on their portraits and the workshops made sure to highlight the predecessor’s dynasties. Portraits of the imperial family were disseminated and replicated in recognizable local versions throughout the Empire. However, it is important to mention that the need to emphasize a link with the predecessor’s dynasty at a certain point is disrupted and there is an intrepid change in portraiture. Private portraits follow the ancient distinction between a person publicus and a person privatus. During the empire privatus was usually employed to contrast with the members of the domus Augustea or with the emperor himself, who was publicus. In addition, “private” they were emphatically not, in means of the status of those represented, since they were public statues of city leaders, but the term is a convenient collective misnomer that avoids negative definitions.

Verism, as well as expressing diverse social, or even personal identities, was used to express shared civic values or even personal relationship to a “boom” in the production of portrait statues set up to benefactors in the third and second centuries in the Hellenistic Greek cities. Even though most part of these portraits have been lost, some inscriptions on their bases survive: the portrait statue is a symbol of relation between city and benefactor. The statue itself is absorbed into the general history and social network of the city and the collective civic values

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7 Huskinson, “Portraits.”, 158.
9 J. Fejfer, Roman portraits in context, 1 online resource (ix, 592 pages) : illustrations (some color). vols., Image & context ; v. 2 (Berlin ; Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 17. On the so-called private portraits.
10 Ibid.
became linked with the individual. Hence, a portrait style was needed that neither suggested extraordinary or even divine honors as the heroic youthful images of Hellenistic kings and leaders. Having mentioned the origins of the veristic style, it is not until the very late Republican period that the multiple varieties of apparent verisimilitude developed further, into depictions of bald or thin-haired old men with wrinkles, sagging skin, toothless mouths, warts and so on. Such portraits may have stood outside the old aristocracy, and therefore possibly preferred to relate in their portrait styles to the honorific and commemorative portrait tradition of the Italic cities. It also coincided with the exploitation of marble: the use of marble had become much more widespread, with easy access to the high-quality white marble in the quarries at Luni.11 Marble took polychrome paint much more easily and naturalistically than bronze; the latter was displayed either in its natural golden-brown color or gilded all over, and restricted the use of color to eyes, eyebrows, and lips inlaid in different materials. Bronze, therefore, could not create the same illusion of naturalism as painted marble could.

Marble is a medium that is tactile, exquisite, and inviting; it also invites the viewer to get lost in its luxurious lines, and its playfulness that creates the chiaroscuro effect. The refraction of calcite allows light to penetrate into the stone, as it does in the human skin, resulting in the typical “waxy” look, which gives the stone a human appearance.

Furthermore, Flavian portraiture also had an interest in textures, which is shown, for instance in exploiting the contrast between smooth flesh and the elaborate honeycomb hairpieces then in fashion for women. These two features, retrospective allusion and exploration of textures, recur throughout the next century or so of imperial portraiture. Classicism emerges again with the philhellenic emperors in the early second century and Gallenius in the mid-third, while

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realism (though of a different style) appears in portraits of third century soldier emperors such as Philip The Arab. In these, the interest in texture shows in the pecked surface of hair. But it is not all a matter of oscillation between styles; there are changes in detail. In other words, there is a need to emphasize a particular visual aspect. During the Flavian era, sculptors made remarkable advancements in technique that included a revolutionary use of the drill. In this period, as mentioned above, also female portraiture of the period is renowned for its elaborated corkscrew hairstyles. The beard becomes popular for men after Hadrian, and details of the eyes are carved rather than painted from roughly the same time.\textsuperscript{12}

The Romans worked stone, precious metals, glass and terracotta but favored bronze and marble above all else for their finest work. However, as metal has always been in high demand for re-use (they would melt it and turn it into another sculpture), most of the surviving examples of Roman sculpture are in marble. During the first century, stone—as opposed to bronze, silver, gold, and other costly materials—was increasingly used for portraits. The production of portraits in stone made possible the economical replication of sculptured likenesses of important personages and also permitted the commissioning of durable portraits of Roman of lesser means, notably freedmen.\textsuperscript{13}

Yet, until the second century, the vast majority of imperial portraits were made out of silver and bronze. However, it is impossible to determine the exact format in which they were executed. An inscription from Ephesos records a letter from Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus to the gerusia to be allowed to melt down some old and worn silver images of previous emperors into images of the new emperors.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12} Huskinson, “Portraits.”, 165.
\textsuperscript{13} Kleiner, “Roman sculpture”, 31.
\textsuperscript{14} Fejfer, “Roman portraits in context”, 167.
Lucius Verus: Terracota vs Marble

The portrait of the emperor Lucius Verus in terracotta is a clear example of how Roman portraiture was traditionally done and the high visual impact it connoted. Not only that but the textural interplay that was developed in the Flavian Dynasty was now more fully explored in male portraiture. Terracotta sculpture for instance allows for experimentation since it is a somewhat slow-drying material—this allows the artist the freedom to experiment with forms and effects. Lucius Verus (fig 1) is shown as a bearded man with a head full of perfect curls. Such corkscrew hairstyle is posterior to the Flavian dynasty, just like it was seen on the experimentation with women’s hair. His elaborately styled hair frames his forehead and such hairline is connected to his curly beard. It is noticeable that there is a certain experimentation of textures in terms of the curls on the beard. The full-haired sideburns are combed outwards as well as the untamed curls from his beard. Also, the way each lock of his beard interacts with each other is outstanding since it shows a high sense of dynamism with each lock curling upwards and downwards, from one side to the other and yet still contained. In terms of facial features, Lucius’ face shows an emphatic familial resemblance to Hadrian, in other words, he is shown as a never aging bearded adult. Lucius Verus’ portrait has a clear nasolabial fold; it forms only from one side of his face and is rather deep. In addition, right on top of his rather thin upper lip there is a deep philtrum, which is surrounded by his perfectly trimmed whiskers that once again connects to his luxurious beard. He has got almond-shaped eyes and the inside of the eyes (pupils, iris) are well carved. Underneath his eyes there are remarkable lines of tear troughs. Finally, in his eyebrows there are thin lines of hair that merge with each other forming nicely shaped, full eyebrows. Now that I have discussed the technical aspects on what is depicted on
Lucius Verus’ portrait, I would like to go in depth on how he is being depicted. Lucius Verus is shown with a slight tilt of the neck, something that by now should recall the royal Greek portraiture. His sight is not looking up like those divine statues but rather looking far ahead, almost suggesting that he is looking like a philosopher. One can see that this slight twist of the neck adds dynamism to Lucius’ figure. If one stands in front of this bust, one can see that there is a nice and subtle play of chiaroscuro on the left side of his portrait, the twist of the neck causing his hair to be one of the main focal points, adding a slight dynamism to the “frozen picture” of the emperor. This slight tilt of the neck causes a slight shadow on the side of his distinctive nose, just like it would happen naturally when someone’s head is tilted to the side. Taking into consideration that this bust was meant to be set up to an eye level, one engages first with his luxurious and rich beard, each lock of hair intertwining with each other, to finally form a well-kept abundant beard. As the eye captures the astonishing beard it automatically focuses on the untamed hair and his sensual curls that are combed forward that still manage to curl wildly and get to cover half of his forehead, almost creating a curled fringe.

To illustrate the link between texture and material, it is worth comparing this astonishing terracotta bust with a silver bust portraying the forever-young emperor Lucius Verus. This is a significant bust piece and is one of the few examples along with the equestrian Marcus Aurelius bronze in the Capitoline Museums, of a surviving Antonine portrait in precious metal. This is a clear example how different mediums had different impact in terms of textures. Silver bust portraits were not common throughout the Empire, the use of such material in portrait conveyed an almost divine/God like connotations and these necessarily represented luxurious statements. Silver as a material differs drastically from terracotta. The first difference is their texture. Terracotta can be manipulated easily while silver, on the other hand, has to be melted and once it
“dries off” it is impossible to alter it. Lucius Verus’ portrait has a flatter effect rather than the terracotta example but it gives a shiny sensation that once again connotes luxury. Lucius Verus (fig 2) is represented with a full head of hair that covers most of his forehead. His locks of hair are curled and brushed upwards and back, almost giving the sensation as if he is using gel to keep them in place. His hair descends to his full curly sideburns that connect with his curly beard. His beard at the chin level has a slight separation and is brushed towards the left beautifully and rather unnaturally. I dare to use the term “unnatural” because I have spent time looking at men’s beards and none of these have shown to have such “control” of their beard. Lucius is wearing a full moustache and his prominent philtrum is accentuated. Right underneath his lower lip a few growing hairs are coming out; yet these do not touch the beard nor reach the bearded chin. Lucius Verus’ portrait is quite odd since his eyes are almond shaped and his irises are well incised but has strabismus eyes. Lucius eyebrows are slightly shown with thin and rapid strokes of hair over his hooded eyes. In terms of textures, the beard and hair are the most outstanding features. If seen from the side, his profile and face is rather flat. For instance, there is no obvious volume around his cheeks nor evident lines of age, as seen on the terracotta example. In other words, silver as a medium is not as versatile and experimental as terracotta is when it comes to volumes but rather focuses on the surface, giving it another texture to the portrait. Lucius Verus in this portrait, however, is shown fully frontal, there are no dramatic tilts of his head; undoubtedly, it was felt that this more formal aspect suited the material. The chiaroscuro in this medium is affected and cannot be properly seen in Lucius’ face but rather on his curled mane, seeing that it is rich with quick strokes of the “chisel” or a pointy artifact to create the thin lines of hair along his curls. This portrait is based on the imperial Roman type, which I will talk about in the following chapter.
Chapter 2: Texture and Tridimensionality

Lucius Verus in Marble

It is true that the dynasty of the Antonines has served as primary examples for the study of the innovative techniques in the development of imperial portraiture, especially with marble. The technical developments are traditionally linked to Hadrian as a starting, and his first portrait denominated the “accession” type reveals something completely different from what was used/accustomed in the Republic and early imperial Rome. It is true that Hadrian’s portrait gives a lot to talk about and pose many questions from what we are seeing. In fact, Paul Zanker discusses the motifs behind Hadrian’s beard and questions if the emperor wanted to look as a Greek philosopher or even associate himself as a god.\textsuperscript{15} The fashionable elegance of Antonine portraits became popular around the Empire, from Ostia to Alexandria, and was probably much more than simply an imitation of the emperor’s image.\textsuperscript{16} Now that we have seen how each medium has a different impact and visual texture-- with terracotta it is more visible to appreciate surfaces and hollow surfaces. On the other hand, working with silver, the overall textures are rather flat but the fact that is a cold surface and silvery, so to speak, still has a different visual engagement. This is why I decided, once again, to look at Lucius Verus, this time in marble. (fig. 3)

\textsuperscript{15} Further reading into Paul. Zanker, \textit{The mask of Socrates : the image of the intellectual in antiquity}, Sather classical lectures ; vol. 59 (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1995).

Lucius Verus resembles Marcus Aurelius even though there was no familial link between the two. I have to point out that it is no surprise to see the co-emperors of Rome assimilated to one another; in fact the resemblance is intentional. Lucius Verus has an oval face, narrow eyes under relatively straight eyebrows, a long, hooked nose and rounded lips. His hairstyle is closely approximate to that of Marcus Aurelius, although it is not identical. It is a full, curly, and tousled coiffure that is, however, straighter than Marcus’s across the forehead and arranged in a framing mass of curls above and in front of the ears. Verus’s beard is as long as Marcus’s, and its arrangement in parallel strand is also comparable to that of his elder co-ruler. Verus’ moustache is not that long and thick as Aurelius’s. Lucius’s neck is slightly tilted to the side adding a certain dramatization and dynamism to the “frozen picture” of the emperor.

Lucius Verus’s hair is deeply drilled and carved, long crescent-shaped drill holes are used by the artist to create shadows between the locks and accentuate the lively motion of hair seemingly caught up in a passing breeze; each curl from his head perfectly curled up and down that intertwine with each other and still curl dramatically. It is visible how the eyebrows are beautifully and delicately incised and each hairline carefully drawn to represent thin-hairy eyebrows that are still visible from whatever angle. The eyes are incised and the eyelids are visible even if they are opened. Lucius Verus’s was indeed a handsome man and had almost a perfect facial structure (please, stand near him and just look at that profile). In fact, his cheekbones are high and the apples of his cheeks are indeed luscious, or at least this portrait says so.

\[17\] Kleiner, “Roman sculpture”, 273.
\[18\] Ibid., 274
Tools

Roman portraiture always had an interest on revealing textures, the medium was not an obstacle, workshops were always per se avant-garde in terms of stylizing bronze, silver, marble, terracotta, limestone and so on. But to have a better understanding of the materiality on portraiture it is important to go over what has been discovered in the 21st century when it comes to techniques.

The earliest-known Greek marble sculpture was created before the iron and bronze technology had appeared; it was probably produced with the aid of stone hammers, scrapers and abrasives. The inventiveness of the Greeks in developing marble carving is of great significance for the history of sculpture. The reason why marble was the perfect medium is because it lends itself well to the imitation of organic (human) form and most importantly because it provided an excellent surface for polychromy (this shall be discussed in Chapter 3).

Some carving techniques however, have been shown to be distinctly Roman innovations. It is clear that the sculptors in the Roman tradition worked “quickly and freely”, in a manner that can be described as “spirited directness”. The main tools used were the point and chisel; interestingly there seem to have been very little claw work. The modeling stage was carried out rather with a combination of fine point and rough flat chiseling. Durnan further argues that the Romans used a toothed scraper in the form of a fine-toothed scraper with a bent-over blade. This tool would have been pulled over the stone surface for final smoothing and texturing. Furthermore, the bull-nosed (round-headed or rounded) chisel was much used by the Romans, giving a distinctively subtle, undulating surface. The marks of this chisel are sometimes

20 Ibid., 33.
interpreted as being those of a gouge (a form of chisel with a concave blade). Therefore, the bull-
nose chisel produces marks like a series of very shallow channels with regular curved
striations.\textsuperscript{21}

**Techniques: Carving and Drilling**

Tool marks on sculpture, supplemented by depictions in funerary reliefs\textsuperscript{22} and finds from
excavations indicate that Roman sculptors continued to use the basic types of iron tools that had
been developed among the Greeks as mentioned above, though the quality of iron, forging, and
tempering had improved. In fact, Claridge has done an extensive research in terms of carving and
techniques for a better understanding of Roman portraiture. Depending on the size of the work
and the amount of stone to be removed, the initial phases is called “roughing-out”. These were
done with wooden-handled, iron-headed hand-picks with pointed tips and/or pointed chisels
struck with an iron-headed hammer. As the shaping got closer to the eventual surface the pointed
tools were exchanged for the finer, less powerful action of claw or toothed chisels, whether
curved (roundel) or square (flat). Roman flat chisels could b very robust (probably cross-cut),
capable of replacing claw chisels in the transition from roughing-out to definitive form. Deep
channels, hollows, and gaps were achieved with the aid of drills, which worked without shock.
Drill bits were forged like chisels, with a rounded or flat bladed tip but a pyramid-shaped head,
which fitted into a wooden stock with a handle at the top. The stock was turned back and forth
either by the sculptor himself with a bow or by an assistant with straps. To make a deep channel,

\textsuperscript{21} Durnan, “Stone Sculpture”, 33. Durnan uses Rockwell’s words to describe each tool and the techniques employed.
\textsuperscript{22} A. Claridge, “Marble Carving Techniques, Workshops and Artisans,” in *Oxford Handbook of Roman Sculpture*,
ed. Elise A. Friedland, Melanie Grunow Sobocinski, and Elaine K. Gazda, Oxford Handbooks (New York, NY:
Berufsdarstellungen* (Berlin: Mann, 1982).
a series of vertical holes was drilled close together in a line and then the bridges were knocked out to then be further shaped by chiseling, for which a special channeling tool (with an extra-thin shaft) was often employed.

It is important to mention that throughout the centuries there has been a misconception and misused term when it comes to the technique used in the Roman portraiture during their innovation process to add dimension and depth. It has finally been cleared out that the term “running drill” is in fact a misunderstanding of the German “laufende Bohrer”.\textsuperscript{23} Drillwork developed into a virtuoso skill in the later second century AD, used to great effect in the shaping of hair, beards, drapery, foliage, and fur. The definitive carving was then, followed by other tools that did not involve shock: rasps, scrapers, and abrasive such as emery, corundum, volcanic scoria, and quartz sand. The main was to produce a stun-free and thus durable surface, to which paint and wax would then be applied.\textsuperscript{24}

**Nero: Luxurious Textures**

Nero is, perhaps, one of the most infamous of all the Roman Emperors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, a dynasty that, after the death of Caesar Augustus, was followed by four emperors. However, I shall not discuss whether Nero was a good emperor or a tyrant but rather how in his last two portrait types the importance of texture is a main feature.

It is important to mention that throughout Nero’s rule five types portrait types were made. The creation of each portrait type has been linked to an even in the life of Nero.

\textsuperscript{23} Claridge, “Marble Carving Techniques, Workshops and Artisans”, 107. Translation from the German “running drill”\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 108.
Nero’s adoption by Claudius in 50 was the occasion for the production of the first boy portrait type that is attested on the coins of 51. It was, in fact, in 51 that Nero assumed the toga virilis and was voted numerous other honors. Coins of 51-54 depict a youthful Nero with high cheekbones, fleshy jaw and neck, and a head full of tousled hair that is brushed from the crown of his head, down low to his forehead. Furthermore, two full-length portraits of the boy Nero in tunic and toga and the bulla, indicating that he has not arrived at adulthood. The portraits depict a young boy with a round, fleshy face and even features. The hair is brushed in long strands from the crown of his head, low on the forehead and parted slightly in the center, with the remaining strands following the direction of the part on the either side.

A new coin type was issued at Nero’s accession in 54 (fig. 4) that depicted him in a profile portrait facing his mother, Agrippina, and demonstrates her dominance over Nero at the beginning of his principate.25 The hairstyle and portrait features are essentially the same as those in the first portrait, although the die-cutter has attempted to make Nero look more mature. Later on, Nero gains prominence over his mother in the coins issued in 55 CE (fig. 5).26 Although his hair remains the same, the cheeks, chin and neck are flesher than before, and so this type remained until 59 CE and is referred as the Cagliari type.

A new type was initiated on coins and mainly for portraits in the 59 CE, possibly in the celebration of Nero’s quinquennium, his fifth year of rule. The most striking feature of this type is the introduction of a new coiffure that was to appear on coins until 64 CE and consists of curls combed leftward in a parallel broken pattern, only over the right eye where they change direction.27 The features are increasingly fleshy versions of those of the younger Nero. The only

26 Ibid. In fact, the portraits at this point overlap with Nero in the foreground, and his mother’s profile is “silhouetted” beneath his own.
extant marble example of this type is the well-known portrait of Nero found on the Palatine Hill and now located in the Museo Nazionale delle Terme. (fig 6). This type is also referred as the Terme Museum type. The portrait differs from the numismatic image in that Nero is shown with long sideburns that become a light beard beneath his chin, but in other ways the depictions are comparable. Nero has a round, fleshy face with full cheeks, chin, and neck. His eyes are deeply set beneath slightly protuberant eyebrows, his lips are rounded with slight dimples at the corners. The hair is very full and is brushed in thick waves from the crown of the head to the forehead where they are arranged in parallel strands facing left and turning right only at the corner of the right eye. The forehead curls are pushed up somewhat to form a kind of crest over the forehead. The emperor’s hairstyle is described by Suetonius as *coma in gradus formata* (shaped into terraces).

In the latest portraits of Nero, an interest in texture and marble handling is immediately apparent. The artists responsible for “fashioning” the portraits of Nero were building on the experiments of Claudius’ artists, and it was, after all, in the last years of Claudius’s principate that portraits of the young Nero began to be manufactured. Because Nero was only seventeen when he became emperor and only thirty-two when he committed suicide, the aging process is incorporated in his portraiture. In fact, this is used as a foil for an increased interest in plasticity and textural contrast. For instance, the individual stands of hair that constitute a crest of curls are undercut by deep shadow, and both the thick waves of the hair and the disorderly curls that grow from the cheeks and chin in the Terme portrait are masterfully contrasted with the softness of bountiful flesh.

Chapter 3: Color and Visual Textures

Stones: Colors and Textures According to Geographical Connections

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the availability of marble throughout the empire was indeed more readily available after the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century CE. The introduction of the use of marble and quarries in Italy is linked to aspects or themes of ideological, political and enhancement of power. At the same time colored marbles had an inherent symbolical significance. The importation of colored marbles started under the principate of Augustus. Under his ruling a “marble revolution” began, introducing new aesthetic canons that are innovative and rather inimitable. And so one major innovation of Roman sculptors was the use of colored marbles to complement the standard white. The expansion of Roman Empire opened up the quarries of the whole Mediterranean basin, and from the first century BC onwards we find the Romans increasingly exploiting a range of variegated materials, such as the yellow, pink and wine-red giallo antico from Chemtou in Tunisia and the purple-veined pavonazzetto from Docimeum (Iscehisar) in Turkey.

Color became a territorial shorthand for Rome’s expansion into exotic parts of the world, and there was an awareness of their provenance in the Roman imagination. But these colorful marbles also elicited a whole range of aesthetic associations that both enriched and competed with their geographical stories. Both on public monuments and in the private houses and villas of the wealthy, imperial marbles bombarded their viewers with a range of unusual and evocative sensory experiences. These marbles, in fact, evoked new systems of artistic and aesthetic
classification, as well as associations with existing phenomena and categories of color in the Roman world.

A favorite device was to use colored stone for drapery while white was retained for the head. This practice eliminated the need for painting; indeed, the increasingly coloristic use of textural effects in the treatment of the hair. Indeed, 2nd-century CE rendering of the eyes, where shallow drill-holes suggested light glancing off the pupils, implies a move away from the tradition of painted statuary altogether. Uncolored sculpture has become the norm in more recent centuries—but only because, ironically, the sculptors of the Renaissance who took their inspiration from antique statues did not realize that these had once been colored.29

Color

Polychromy, which was integral to the meaning and immediacy of sculptural works, still survives today but only in fragmentary condition. Indeed, polychromy was essential to Roman portraiture. Import of the colored stones to Italy began as early as the second century B.C but colored stones were not systematically exploited for sculpture until the Early Empire. Roman artists used a wide range of pigments, painting media and surface application to embellish their marble sculptures. Pliny the Elder provides important information about these materials and expresses great admiration for the “virtuoso” technique of contemporary sculptors who developed a technical refinement unparalleled in classical antiquity.

Other stones were similarly exploited for their geographical connections. Pliny, for example, tells us (Natural History 36.58) that a huge statue of the Nile and his 16 children,

29 Durnan, “Stone Sculpture”, 34.
sculpted in Egyptian “basanite”—more accurately bekhen stone, the dark metallic green greywacke from the Waddi Hammamat—was dedicated by Vespasian for his Temple of Peace.\textsuperscript{30} Therefore, Roman sculptors matched stones to subject matter felt to share a common geography, counting on the materials’ ability to activate a desired set of territorial associations. By extension, it was precisely through their collective power to evoke specific locales than an international variety of stones.

In particular, the purple or brown-veined pavonazzetto marble quarried, carried ideological associations of Rome’s superiority and splendor. In portraiture two extremely hard and dense stones, Egyptian red porphyry and Egyptian green/black basalt, basanite, also had ideological connotations but of royalty. Basanite was restricted to portraits of the imperial house. However, in the Hellenistic royal portraiture this stone not only had connotations of royalty: it was probably associated with Augustus’ conquest of Egypt.\textsuperscript{31} The discovery of basanite imperial portraits, primarily in Rome itself, shows the ideological importance of the stone during that period. It is even possible that its usage was associated with Octavian’s victory over Marcus Antonius, who had also been portrayed in that material.

Egyptian red porphyry had been used in Hellenistic royal portraiture. Like basanite it also featured occasionally in imposing, idealized statuary during the Roman period. Colored stones were only rarely used for portraits during the Early Empire, but this changed during the second and early third centuries AD. The distribution of portraits in colored stones spread throughout the Empire. But they still remained rare, and a privilege of the extremely wealthy. Colored stones, therefore had clear associations with luxury and imperial splendor.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{30} Borg, “A companion to Roman Art”, 280. On stone colors according to geographical connections.
\textsuperscript{31} Feijer, “Roman portraits in context”, 168.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 168
Rosso antico quarry was reputed to one of the most expensive and treasured marbles in antiquity. When it was employed on bigger statues, which was primarily during the Hadrianic period, the statues probably adorned particularly exclusive settings such as Hadrian’s villa. To use rosso antico and not red porphyry for these “Egyptianizing” images may have signaled extreme craftsmanship and illusionism. Nero antico, a black limestone, was used in representations of Africans, and was also used for depicting Dacians and Indians.

Alabaster was only used very rarely for portrait heads. However, alabaster busts along with white marble heads enjoyed popularity during the second and early third centuries A.D. Like Basalt and porphyry, granite was also a local Egyptian stone employed in traditional Egyptian sculpture. In the later periods it was used for portraits of the Hellenistic kings. The tradition continued into the Roman era.

Costs of Marble

Having explored the different types of marbles and quarries, I want to emphasize that all materials used in Roman art carried monetary value, dependent on the cost of procuring them. In portraiture, for instance, it is all about the visual and economical engagement. So expensive was overland transport of marble as well as certain types of stones, like the ones mentioned above, were prohibitively expensive for those living in towns without easy maritime or riparian access. Taking as an example, Borg reminds us of Sagalassos, a Greek and then Roman city in what is now southwest Turkey. It existed within the regional orbit of Attaleia (present-day Antalya). However, while Attaleia enjoyed a coastal location, Sagalassos lay not only 100 kilometers

33 Fejér, “Roman portraits in context”, 170.
34 Ibid., 171.
inland, but 1,500 meters high. In other words, this imposed severe restrictions on what patrons could afford to have imported. This, while sarcophagi of Pentelic and Proconnesian marble, coming from Attic and the Sea of Marmara, have been found in great numbers in Attaleia, reflecting the city’s enviable access to cheap sea-borne transport.

Moreover, not only the transportation had a high cost but the extraction of the quarries themselves had a high price. Therefore, it is no wonder that Roman viewers paid so much attention to material. Pliny the Elder, is a great of example of a roman citizen being aware of the cost of the making of a portrait.\textsuperscript{36} This gives a clear idea of how casual Roman viewers were better “equipped” than we are to guess roughly about the value of a given piece, based simply on attention paid to its physical fabric.\textsuperscript{37}

**Case Study: Augustus from Via Labicana**

[A]s white is the color that reflects the greatest number of rays of light, and consequently is the most sensitive, a beautiful body will accordingly be the more beautiful the white it is.

--JOHANN JOACHIM WINCKELMANN, 
*Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums*, 1764

As well as a statement of visual and economical engagement, as mentioned before, portraits could be enhanced by combining materials of great importance. There is still a vast variety of examples where a certain playfulness of marbles can be seen. Taking as a great example the portrait of Augustus from via Labicana, we see the combination of two marbles in one single portrait of the *pontifex maximus*: Though totally white, the statue is made from two different marbles, Italian Luna for the toga, and Greek Parian for all Augustus’ visible flesh. The usual


\textsuperscript{37} Borg, “A companion to Roman Art”, 276.
explanations are that blocks of such high-grade Parian marble were not available in large enough dimensions to make a whole statue. In this standing portrait, it is not the toga that glows but the flesh, thanks to the Parian marble. While Carrara marble is a dense, creamy white, Parian, which has shiny calcite crystals and is partially translucent in sunlight, glows warmly and seems to emit light. Moreover, the stone used is not just Parian marble, but that of the most refined quality called *lychnites*. Lychnites\textsuperscript{38} did not earn its name because, as Varro naively explained, it was quarried in tunnels by lamplight, but rather, as the fifth-century poet Nonnus intones, because “it turns its glistening gleams in the faces of men”\textsuperscript{39}. To Roman eyes, such marbles could therefore manifest the transparency of light.

Looking at Augustus’ portrait, the two marbles of the Via Labicana gleam, but differently. The two marbles distinguish between a relative and an absolute white, between *albus* (meaning “white” that is dull or matte) and *candidus* (meaning white, very white, innocent, pure, shine).\textsuperscript{40} So what does this mean when we see this whiteness and translucid gleams? The “glow” that Augustus radiates connotes strongly the association of a God-like persona. In a certain way, this recalls the Greek herms, since usually they were composed of two different materials. However this shall be discussed more in depth in the following chapter.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Further reading on Barry, “A Whiter Shade of Pale: Relative and Absolute White in Roman Sculpture and Architecture.” Therefore, Parian, *purus* and *clarus*, was perfect for the job.
Chapter 4: Abbreviated Format and Its Textures

Viewed Close Up Sculpted Texture

From the 2nd century AD onwards, the engagement with the Roman portraits completely changed since also their format did. The normative format was the full figure (that of Augustus at Via Labicana), slightly over life-size, seen as an honorific statue. However, a new format arises by the end of the Republic. These formats are known as abbreviated formats. Fejfer talks about how the viewing process changed from looking up at bust portraits of the imperial family to have a more “intimate” engagement. These types of busts increased significantly in both popularity and size during the early and high Empire.\(^4\) Now the bust portraits are set in public and private spaces to an eye level. Fejfer points out that such busts have been found in public settings—they were much more common in private spaces, suitable for display in houses, villas, and tombs, where they were placed on wall brackets, or tables, or in niches.\(^2\) This gave the opportunity to appreciate the busts up close, which lead to a change when it came to visual engagement. In fact, the portrait now was they eye-catcher that immediately engaged the viewer, and challenged his/her mind to explore the one being depicted. Having said so, the abbreviated format also allowed to be carried easily in processions. And so, by placing an emphasis on the head it focused the gaze of the viewer, enabling the patron to express his identity, and the viewer to respond to it. The full-figure honorific statue, with all its social, political and legal connotations, probably sparked a desire for formats that took up less room and could be adapted for interior or more intimate spaces. In addition, in the late 2\(^{nd}\) century CE,

\(^{41}\) Fejfer, “Roman Portraits”, 410.
\(^{42}\) Ibid.
\(^{43}\) Ibid., 391.
busts began to depict the toga, this one known as “contabulated toga”. The contabulated toga consisted of a broad band of stacked folds running across the chest, and this one replaced the old early imperial toga by the late 2nd century CE. The bust format became associated with metropolitan style and elegance, and was easily accommodated into the marble-adorned architectural space. Indeed the bust on the 2nd century CE gains a level of physicality and elegance and it is clearly seen in its rich textures.

Julia Domna and her rich hairs

The significance of a close up view of the textures in bust portraits, is amply evident in the next case study; though, in a different way than the rest of the portraits I have looked at. The reason why I picked Julia Domna is because of her lovely hairs and because she is an empress and so little has been talked about her and her portrait that I feel the need to bring her up in this thesis. In the portrait from Gabii (fig 8) her dramatic coiffure and detailed eyebrows are beyond delightful. In this portrait, Julia Domna is depicted with an oval face and fleshy cheeks, widely spaced eyes, long nose, and prominent chin. Her face is framed by a coiffure that is parted in the center and falls in deep waves that cover her ears. The remainder of the hair is gathered in a broad bun at the back of her head. The coiffure is often interpreted as a wig, given a naturalistic touch by the introduction of curls that appear to have escaped from the wig. Now, looking closely at her thin yet feathery eyebrows one can see how delicately the artist was when tracing each eyebrow hair: quick and long strokes form a set of arched eyebrows that meet right on her

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44 Fejfer, “Roman Portraits”, 411.
46 Ibid., 410
47 Kleiner, “Roman sculpture”, 326.
nose, giving her a lovely uni-brow. What is appealing in this portrait is not only her eyebrows but her eyes. Julia’s eyes are perfectly carved, her eyelids are visible and even subtle under-eye bags are delicately visible causing a chiaroscuro tone that helps frame the area of the eyes. Her plump lips are pressed tightly together, her cupid’s bow is rather deep and right at the corners of her lips two dimples form. The empress’s neck is slightly tilted to the side and her gaze is looking to the side, this suggesting the traditional Hellenistic twist of the neck. The primary model for third-century female portraits was in fact the portrait of Julia Domna. It is her wig-like hairstyle, parted in the center and brushed in deep waves covering her ears, that is adopted by her third century successors. As an overall bust piece, the sculptor skillfully creates chiaroscuro effects with the deeply drilled and modeled surfaces of hair as well as her drapery, which we won’t be paying any attention to, vividly contrasting with the smoother surfaces of the flesh. The scale of the bust, suggests that it was publicly displayed. In fact, this bust portrait is depicted with a smooth face and no traces of aging are visible, and it is instead the ornate coiffure worn with its contrast of light and shadow, plasticity, and textural contrast that are the focus of artistic attention.

The so-called Soldier Emperors: Caracalla and Trajan Decius

Where the portrait approach of Julia Domna established a model for later empresses, the portrait style of the adult portrait of Caracalla served as the primary model for third-century AD emperor portraits. The reason why is because there is a simultaneous emphasis on the solid physical features of the portrait and its exploration of sculptural textures and planes.48

48 Kleiner, “Roman sculpture”, 361.
Caracalla in the Gabii portrait (fig 9) is depicted as an adult, with square face and cleft chin, lined forehead, closely cropped hair that recedes somewhat at the temples and forms a slight wedge shape over the forehead. There is a V-shaped crease between his eyes and across his forehead, and deep lines run from his nostrils to his mouth, forming an inverted V. Both sets of V-shaped creases create an X across the center of the face. Caracalla wears a short beard (although the earliest numismatic portraits of this type are beardless) that adheres to his jaw and is stippled in with the chisel to create what might be called a negative carving effect. The geometry of the face is accompanied by a severe expression at times associated with an expert sculptor whom one scholar, Susan Wood, calls the “Caracalla Master”49. There is a sharp turn of the head to one side, to the left, which gives the impression that the artist has captured his sitter in a momentary action. This spontaneous twist of the head accentuates the power and energy of its subject. I want to emphasize that the slight turn of the head to the side on portraiture was also characteristic of the great Hellenistic general and ruler, Alexander the Great, with whom Caracalla liked to associate himself, especially after his visit to Egypt.50

Having mentioned Caracalla served as a model for the imperial portraiture, now we have another great example: Trajan Decius (fig 10). The sinuous curves of its outline convincingly reflect the shifting surfaces of real flesh. However, a strict geometric order is imposed and deeply etched in a repetitive pattern of forehead lines and the ubiquitous X-shaped creases between the eyes and next to the mouth. He is wearing the cropped military hairstyle and short beard just like Caracalla (fig 9). The coiffure is a slightly raised cap, although the recession at the temples is very pronounced. Furthermore, the strands of hair above the ears are relatively long and are brushed toward the face. The beard conforms closely to the shape of the jaw and is, in

50 Further reading into Kleiner, “Roman sculpture”, look under Caracalla’s portrait types.
fact, chiseled from it. The eyes are shadowed by thick undulating eyebrows, and the eyes themselves are large and curve downward at the corner, giving Decius a mournful expression. The pupils are large and heart shaped, and there are sagging pouches beneath the eyes. The lips are rounded, and there are subtle indentations in the flesh at the corners. The neck is lined and sunken, showing the advancing age of the emperor.\footnote{Kleiner, “Roman sculpture”, 369.}
Conclusion

This thesis has discussed various types of Roman portraits throughout the Empire: from the Republican veristic image, to the developed and abbreviated format in imperial portraiture. It has not only been shown in the traditional “Carrara” marble as a palpable material but also other mediums with their different effects. However, having looked at the different mediums there is only two interests in common in Roman portraiture: textures and visibility. It is true that roman portraits were meant to be looked at, and especially such busts would convey a message about the emperor or empress being portrayed.

These portraits are meant to evoke on the viewer a certain feeling. They are meant to impact. Otherwise why would the sculptor have spent a great deal of time on making little details that can make a great difference. There was an awareness of textures, lights and shadows, thus Augustus (Octavian) free standing portrait, can be considered a pivot point in Roman portraiture since experimentation is taking place in the workshops. There is a playfulness of two different types of marbles in one simple emperor. This was certainly reflecting that the sculptor was aware of the different effects between one marble, from the other: one would give a “shiny” effect while the other would give a more “opaque” effect. In fact, having looked at Lucius Verus from Marengo, we can see that silver, just like bronze, was readily available in the Empire. There was already an awareness of exploiting such medium and explore the surfaces. However, as mentioned before, there are not so many examples available today since all of these were melted and reused. Under the Julio-Claudian and Flavians the interest of linking themselves to the predecessors was important but also depicting shadows, textures and touchable feeling was a
major highlight. And I hope this was well explained with the Lucius Verus portrait in marble; and the awareness of drilling and carving. However, under Claudius and Nero, revolutionary changes were introduced that were to form the basis for the art of the emperors of 68-69 and of the new Flavian dynasts. These characteristics were taken into consideration by the imperial patrons of the second, third and fourth centuries. Once again, these revolutionary innovations were fully seen on the famous Julia Domna and her wig, but also on the so-called soldiers emperors—lines, sunken surfaces, stubbly, bearded, ruffled, whiskered, frowned eyebrows—became a palpable theme. As mentioned above, portraits meant to convey messages, morals, and values, usually accompanied with inscriptions but it has not been thought that maybe that was not their only aim. But rather cause an impact on the viewer and engage with the portrait itself to an eye-level distance instead of the portrait being looked upon. As art historians we are trained to decode what is presented before us. Indeed, it is important to know who we are looking at, but also seeing beyond the “the furrowed eyebrows represent turbulence throughout the Empire” and be more like “how are the furrowed eyebrows being represented?” instead and what sensations these patterns gives us. Hence, that is what Roman portraiture is about: visual and social engagement of the materiality of the medium presented before us.


