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On the cover of this interesting book, an antique portrait of Plato is placed next to a reconstruction in flesh and blood. This person has dark-blonde hair, with some gray in it, and a straight beard. The broad mouth has red lips and the eyes have blue irises. The couple of images illustrate the subtitle of the book. One may question, however, whether the man in the right image really could represent Plato: he rather looks like a northerner, more specifically like a *Mitteleuropäer*. Was Plato a German?

This book is the result of a 2005-2006 *Habilitationsschrift* in Freiburg im Breisgau (Germany), edited in a nice volume. The study has been written in conjunction with an upcoming study on ancient portraits in a private collection at Havana, a town many readers would not expect to be so rich in antiquities! The question, 'what is a Greek portrait?', put in chapter 1, cannot be answered easily, since we have neither the ancient sitters nor their opinions about the bronze and marble faces made of them. Antique portraits contain elements of genre (prince, philosopher, citizen), realism vs. idealism and the like, which are gathered in a system of tokens. For German readers, there is a distinction between *Bild* (figural representation) and *Bildnis* (idem, but of specific person). Individuality is lacking in some forms of personal representation like funeral reliefs, where the message must be that of a good citizen, soldier or the like. At the same time, I would add, our photographic 'exactness', as we all know, is also biased by factors of time, space and the eyes of photographer and beholder.

On the basis of this sketch of general preliminary problems, Jaeggi develops some specific paths of research in the following eight chapters. In chapter 2 the history of study on portraiture is tackled. It is striking how many Germans and how few students from other countries have been involved in the discussion of Greek portraits. From the sketched discussion two 'positions' are either the outcome: (1) ancient portraits are an interplay between a realistic rendering of a person and abstract additions underlining specific qualities or (2) they form sets of iconographic tokens that define a person in his or her function (politician, military man) or qualities (wise or brave man/woman) In chapter 3 Jaeggi places himself within this tradition on the basis of ancient philosophical texts (mainly Plato and Aristotle), arguing that a portrait cannot express the sitter's psyche. Looking for character in representations of sitters, consequently, is a modern concept, influenced by psychology and even Christian theology (man as *effigies* of God). Another bias is the Winckelmannian concept of 'idealism' still influencing modern discussion of portraits. Some scholars strongly adhere to this idea of 'beautiful realism', to paraphrase an expression of Bernhard Andreae (p.
Jaeggi’s conclusion is that (possibly) ideal and beautiful traits are intermingled with other elements. As an example, he analyses the well-known portraits of Themistocles and Pericles, transmitted in various Roman copies: despite individual details they display iconographic stereotypes of military leaders. The boxer’s ear of the Ostia Themistocles (fig. 8) is even defined as a failure of the sculptor, with which Jaeggi simplifies the issue and puts a lot of scholarly reasoning into the garbage bin (p. 58).

Chapter 4 explains Jaeggi’s definition of a portrait as a means of communicating a person’s physical presence, including representation and/or politics, as demanded by the commissioner. Although he does not say so explicitly, the latter is not necessarily the sitter him- or herself. When a portrait is a concoction of data, we must try to unpeel the features and to define the semantic codes. In the following three chapters, he tries to illustrate his thesis. Chapter 5 discusses portraits of princes and the esthetics of youth, chapter 6 circles around figures of thinkers and chapter 7 discusses women. Chapter 5 tackles the problem we saw in an immediate way: the ‘ideal’ form of Polyclitus’ Doryphoros and its variants became a fixed element in many representations of rulers. As to the heads, short curly hair, deep-set eyes, a broad chin and a small mouth with thick lips can be observed in both mythical and historical figures. The comparison of a set of profiles in fig. 33 illustrates the similarity of many rulers’ portraits. Other factors for recognizing specific dynasts are the wish to resemble earlier rulers and/or gods. In sum, princes are portrayed with a series of smaller and larger conventions in portraiture. In many cases the individuality of the portrait would be established by an inscription, now normally missing, as well as by the original location of the sculpture.

Chapter 6 focuses on the genre of Philosophenporträts, portraits of persons who wanted to be associated with learnedness and intellectual skills. Jaeggi demonstrates very clearly how this group, again, shows repeating characteristics that can also be seen in heads of other persons (Heracles, fig. 38) and genre figures like fishermen (the famous so-called Seneca). Their individuality is less clear, when you look at them from this point of view. When they are represented as philosophers or literary authors, they show their pride and mature individuality contrasted with the young heroic image of the rulers of chapter 5.

The variation in male portraiture is much greater than in female portraits that are highlighted in chapter 7. Jaeggi observes general characteristics like stance, dress, age, shape of head and facial details that, like in the categories discussed previously produce portraits that in our eyes lack really personal traits. The messages these women (or their commissioners) wanted to express were gathered in these details. They had to be good wives (most portraits indeed show mature women), good citizens and examples of virtue. The iconography of citizens and princesses does not differ very much, apparently since the messages they transmit are similar. As in the case of their male counterparts, princesses are seldom individually recognizable. The suggestion of identifying Cleopatra VII with the Esquiline Venus (pp. 128-130) is an example of asking too much and of the wish to interpret such a presumably peculiar figure as the portrait of a peculiar personality. Attributes can define statuses of women; nudity, an attribute of Aphrodite, pops up much more rarely than in the case of men.

Chapter 8 concentrates on the development of style in Greek and Hellenistic portraits. It is common knowledge that the chronology of Hellenistic sculpture is imprecise because there are few securely dated monuments. As we have seen, the method followed by Jaeggi makes clear that portraits are defined by signs and that these signs are not connected with specific moments. The estheticism asked for in connection with the personality depicted determines the use of features that were previously associated with chronology and fashion. Therefore,
these portraits are often of little help in establishing chronology. Even coinage does not give sound clues for the interpretation and dating of portrait sculpture. Nevertheless, Jaeggi offers a wide time frame (pp. 147-150) in which esthetics are the guiding lines. In his last chapter (9) he concludes that portrayal in the sense we are used to is more or less absent in the Classical and Hellenistic world: ‘portraits’ express the qualities of a person rather than his physical aspects. In that sense they strongly differ from Roman portraits, even the idealized imperial heads. Jaeggi’s study is highly provocative and will be of great importance in future studies on portraits and other sculpted objects, surely more for its prudence in assuming rules than in the discussion of single pieces. His work is full of theoretical approaches that may discourage the often too confident scholars who want to see an antique celebrity in each beautiful head.

Notes:

1. A similar very cautious strategy of recognizing individual Hellenistic rulers with great care, viz. those from Pergamon, can be observed in H.U. Gans, *Attalidische Herrscherbildnisse. Studien zur hellenistischen Porträtplastik Pergamons*, Wiesbaden 2006. This is in contrast with the positivistic studies of F. Queyrel and others mentioned with critical notes by Jaeggi n pp. 80-81.