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'*CAPITA TRANSFORMATA*: REWORKED PRIVATE ROMAN PORTRAITS, FIRST THROUGH FOURTH CENTURIES AD'

A Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History at Massey University

MARK HIRST

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ii

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND PHOTOGRAPHIC CREDITS iv

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER ONE:
REWORKED MALE AND FEMALE PORTRAITS 8

CHAPTER TWO:
FEMALE PORTRAITS: PIECED OR REWORKED? 45

CHAPTER THREE: REWORKED PORTRAITS FROM AN
HISTORICAL AND CONTEXTUAL PERSPECTIVE 72

CONCLUSION 86

CATALOGUE OF PORTRAITS 90

APPENDIX ONE 102

BIBLIOGRAPHY 103

ILLUSTRATIONS 126

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND PHOTOGRAPHIC CREDITS

Figs. 1-3, no. 1. Head of a woman, reworked from an earlier head. *Date of original*: unknown. *Reworked*: AD 14-37. (Padgett 2001, no. 3).

Fig. 4. Head of a woman. AD 14-37. (Fittschen and Zanker 1983, no. 55, pl. 70).

Figs. 5-7, no. 2. Reworked head of a man. *Date of original*: c. AD 138-192. *Reworked*: AD 253-268. (Wataghin 1988, figs. 3, 4, 6, respectively).

Figs. 8-11, no. 3. Reworked bust of a girl. *Date of original*: AD 117-138. *Reworked*: AD 200-210. (Fittschen and Zanker 1983, no. 152, pl. 180).

Figs. 12-13. Head of Plautilla. C. AD 202. (Wiggers and Wegner 1971, pls. 29 a-b).

Fig. 14. Bust of a man. AD 117-138. (Goette 1990, pl. 50.1).

Fig. 15. Bust of a man. AD 117-138. (Goette 1990, pl. 50.3).

Fig. 16. Bust of a man. AD 117-138. (Goette 1990, pl. 50.4).

Figs. 17-21, no. 4. Statue of a woman with a reworked head. *Date of original*: c. AD 98-138. *Reworked*: early to mid-fourth century AD. (Johansen 1995 (b), no. 87).

Fig. 22. Statue of Sabina. AD 117-138. (Wegner 1956, pl. 41 a).

Figs. 23-25, no. 5. Statue of a man with a reworked head. *Date of original*: early third century AD (?). *Reworked*: mid third century AD. (R. Bol 1999, pl. 68; Wrede 1981, no. 127, pl. 16.4).

Fig. 26. Attic Sacrifice Panel, Arch of Septimius Severus, Leptis Magna. C. AD 203. (Kleiner 1992, fig. 309).

Fig. 27. Head of Trajan Decius. AD 249-251. (Bianchi Bandinelli 1971, fig. 8).

Fig. 28. Head of Claudius (reworked from a head of Caligula). AD 41-54. (Fittschen and Zanker 1985, no. 15, pl. 16).

Figs. 29-30, no. 6. Reworked head of a man. *Date of original*: AD 69-96. *Reworked*: AD 96-98. (Trillmich 1982, figs. 185-186).

Fig. 31. Head of Domitia Longina. AD 70-81. (Daltrop 1966, pl. 53 a).

Fig. 32. Head of Nerva. AD 98-100. (Daltrop 1966, pl. 36 b).

Figs. 33-35, no. 7. Reworked head of an elderly man. *Date of original*: c. AD 98-117. *Reworked*: last quarter of the third century AD. (Blanck 1969, pls. 20 a, 20 b, 21 a).

Figs. 36-37. Bust of Matidia. AD 98-117. (Wegner 1956, pl. 39).

Figs. 38-41, no. 8. Head of a woman, reworked from a head of Antinous. *Date of original*: AD 130-138. *Reworked*: c. AD 200. (Johansen 1995 (b), no. 88).

Fig. 42. Head of Antinous. AD 130-138. (Johansen 1995 (a), no. 46).

Fig. 43, no. 9. Reworked head of a woman. *Date of original*: late republican or early first century AD. Reworked at an unknown time. (Scrinari 1972, no. 265).

Fig. 44. Head of a woman. Late first century BC or early first century AD. (Padgett 2001, no. 1).

Fig. 45. Head of Antonia Minor. AD 14-37. (Johansen 1994, no. 43).

Figs. 46-47, no. 10. Reworked head of a young man. *Date of original*: AD 14-54. *Reworked*: AD 253-268. (Photos: Musei Brescia).

Figs. 48-49. Head of Gallienus. AD 260-265. (Wegner, Bracker, and Real 1979, pl. 45 a-b).

Figs. 50-52, no. 11. Reworked head of a man. *Date of original*: unknown. *Reworked*: mid third century AD. (Linfert 1992, no. 23, pl. 33).

Figs. 53-54. Head of Nerva (reworked from a head of Domitian). AD 96-98. (Macchiaroli 1987, pl. 1).

Figs. 55-56. Head of Alexander Severus. AD 222-235. (Fittschen and Zanker 1970, figs. 1-2).

Figs. 57-59, no. 12. Head of a boy, possibly reworked from a head of Nero. *Date of original*: AD 51-54. *Reworked*: c. AD 100. (Bergmann and Zanker 1981, figs. 63 a-c).

Figs. 60-61. Head of Nero. C. AD 50. (Johansen 1994, no. 67, and fig. 20).

Figs. 62-63, no. 13. Head of a man, reworked from a head of Nero. *Date of original*: AD 59-64. *Reworked*: AD 117-138. (Varner 2000, no. 31).

Figs. 64-65. Head of Nero. AD 59-64. (Kleiner 1992, fig. 112; Bergmann and Zanker 1981, fig. 5).

Figs. 66-68, no. 14. Head of a man, possibly reworked from a head of Julius Caesar. *Date of original*: AD 14-37. *Reworked*: mid third century AD. (Photos: Archaeological Museum, Corinth).

Fig. 69. Head of a man. AD 14-37. (Wiseman 1972, fig. 10).

Fig. 70. Head of Julius Caesar. Augustan. (Johansen 1987, fig. 1 a).

Figs. 71-73, no. 15. Head of a man, reworked from a head of Geta. *Date of original*: AD 205-208. *Reworked*: mid third century AD. (Fittschen and Zanker 1985, no. 90, pl. 109).

Figs. 74-76. Head of Geta. AD 205-208. (Fittschen and Zanker 1985, no. 88, pl. 106).

Figs. 77-78. Head of Gordian III. C. AD 242. (Fittschen and Zanker 1985, no. 109, pl. 134).

Figs. 79-81, no. 16. Reworked head of a man. *Date of original*: Julio-Claudian. *Reworked*: mid third century AD. (Photos: Archaeological Museum, Corinth).

Fig. 82. Head of Germanicus. C. AD 23-29. (Fuchs 1987, pl. 71).

Fig. 83. Head of a man. AD 14-37. (León 2001, no. 15).

Figs. 84-85. Reworked head of Augustus. Mid third century AD. (Boschung 1993, no. 211, pl. 153).

Fig. 86. Head of Maximinus Thrax. AD 235-238. (Kleiner 1992, fig. 324).

Figs. 87-89. Heads of Balbinus. AD 238. (Wiggers and Wegner 1971, pl. 79 a-b; Jucker 1966, fig. 2).

Fig. 90. Head of Trebonianus Gallus. AD 251-253. (Wood 1986, fig. 11 b).

Figs. 91-92, no. 17. Reworked head of a man. *Date of original*: early first century AD. *Reworked*: mid third century AD. (Adriani 1938, pl. 13.2; fig. 25).

Fig. 93. Head of Tiberius. AD 14-37. (Johansen 1994, no. 47).

Figs. 94-95, no. 18. Reworked head of a man. *Date of original*: AD 98-117. *Reworked*: mid to late third century AD. (Giuliano 1957, pl. 52).

Figs. 96-97. Head of Trajan. AD 98-117. (Fittschen and Zanker 1985, no. 39, pl. 42).

Figs. 98-101, no. 19. Reworked head of a man. *Date of original*: Julio-Claudian (?). *Reworked*: early fourth century AD. (Photos: Archaeological Museum, Corinth).

Fig. 102. Head of a man. C. AD 300. (L'Orange 1965, fig. 64).

Fig. 103. Head of a man. C. AD 300. (L'Orange 1965, fig. 62).

Figs. 104-105, no. 20. Reworked head of a man. *Date of original*: AD 41-54. *Reworked*: c. AD 290-300. (Inan and Rosenbaum 1966, no. 260, pl. 162).

Figs. 106-107. Head of a tetrarch. C. AD 290-300. (Bergmann 1990, no. 254).

Figs. 108-110, no. 21. Reworked head of a man. *Date of original*: Julio-Claudian (?). *Reworked*: early fourth century AD. (Blanck 1969, pls. 22 a, 23 b, 23 a).

Figs. 111-112. Head of Maxentius. AD 307-312. (L'Orange 1984, pl. 24).

Fig. 113. Bust of a tetrarch. C. AD 300. (Ramage and Ramage 1996, fig. 11.19).

Fig. 114. Head of Licinius, Arch of Constantine. AD 312-315. (L'Orange 1984, pl. 29).

Fig. 115, no. 22. Reworked head of a man. *Date of original*: AD 14-37. *Reworked*: late third or early fourth century AD. (Blanck 1969, pl. 19 a).

Figs. 116-117, no. 23. Reworked head of a man. *Date of original*: early first century AD. *Reworked*: shortly thereafter. (Herrmann 1991, figs. 17 a-b).

Figs. 118-122, no. 24. Reworked head of a man. *Date of original*: AD 14-37. *Reworked*: mid third century AD. (Goette and Hitzl 1987, pls. 24 a, 23, 24 b, 25 b, 25 a).

Fig. 123, no. 25. Reworked head of a man. *Date of original*: late republican. *Reworked*: early fourth century AD. (Adriani 1938, pl. 13.1).

Fig. 124. Head of a man. Late republican. (Zanker 1976, fig. 17).

Fig. 125. Relief panel depicting a sacrifice and the Temple of Magna Mater. Reused on the 'Arcus Novus' in the late third century AD, from an earlier first or second century AD monument. (Laubscher 1976, pl. 1).

Fig. 126. Reworked head of an imperial subject on fig. 125. (Laubscher 1976, pl. 2).

Figs. 127-129, no. 26. Reworked bust of a man. *Date of original*: early second century AD. *Reworked*: c. AD 238. (Jucker 1961, pl. 44).

Fig. 130. Bust of a boy. AD 98-117. (Johansen 1995 (a), no. 5).

Figs. 131-134, no. 27. Reworked head of a man. *Date of original*: AD 81-96. *Reworked*: early fourth century AD. (Johansen 1995 (a), no. 23).

Fig. 135. Lictors on the Cancelleria Relief depicting the *profectio* of Domitian. C. AD 80-90. (Magi 1945, pl. 13).

Fig. 136. Head of Domitian. C. AD 88. Fittschen and Zanker 1985, no. 32, pl. 36).

Fig. 137, no. 28. Reworked head of a man. *Date of original*: AD 81-96. *Reworked*: mid third century AD. (Koeppel 1984, no. 9, fig. 13).

Figs. 138-139, no. 29. Reworked head of a woman. *Date of original*: AD 30-50. Reworked at an unknown time in late antiquity. (F. Poulsen 1928, figs. 43-44).

Fig. 140. Head of Agrippina the Elder. AD 37-41. (Wood 1999, fig. 91).

Figs. 141-144, no. 30. Reworked bust of a woman. *Date of original*: AD 117-138. *Reworked*: c. AD 220. (Fittschen and Zanker 1983, no. 155, pls. 182-183).

Fig. 145. Bust of a woman. Late Hadrianic. (Fittschen and Zanker 1983, no. 84, pl. 105).

Fig. 146. Bust of a woman. Late Flavian/early Trajanic. (Fittschen and Zanker 1983, no. 63, pl. 79).

Fig. 147. Bust of a man. Hadrianic. (Jucker 1961, pl. 33).

Figs. 148-151, no. 31. Reworked head of a woman. *Date of original*: c. AD 96-117. *Reworked*: hair reworked c. AD 98-125. (Herrmann 1991, figs. 1 a, 1 d, 1 c, 1 e).

Figs. 152-153. Head of a woman. Early Trajanic. (Herrmann 1991, figs. 11 a-b).

Fig. 154. Head of a woman. C. AD 110. (Herrmann 1991, fig. 4 b).

Fig. 155. Head of a woman. AD 110-125. (Scrinari 1972, no. 241, fig. 241).

Figs. 156-158, no. 32. Reworked head of a woman. *Date of original*: AD 244-249. *Reworked*: hair reworked c. AD 253.

Figs. 159-161. Head of Otacilia Severa. AD 244-249. (Fittschen and Zanker 1983, no. 37, pl. 46).

Figs. 162-163. Head of a woman. Early Gallienic. (Inan and Rosenbaum 1966, no. 268 a, pl. 167).

Figs. 164-165. Head of a woman. Severan. (Fittschen and Zanker 1983, no. 145, pl. 173).

Figs. 166-169, no. 33. Head of a woman. Julio-Claudian. Reworked to provide some sort of decorative addition? (Photos: Deutsches Archäologisches Instituts, Rome).

Fig. 170. Head of a woman. Tiberian/Claudian. (Johansen 1994, no. 78).

Figs. 171-173. Head of a woman. Claudian. (Johansen 1994, no. 40).

Figs. 174-177. Bust of a girl. C. 30 BC. (Bol 1989, no. 105, pls. 185-186).

Figs. 178-179. Reconstruction of the bust of a girl in figs. 174-177. (Trillmich 1976, pl. 4).

Figs. 180-181, no. 34. Bust of a woman. Trajanic. (Richter 1948, no. 63).

Figs. 182-183. Head of Alexander Severus. AD 222-224. (Fittschen and Zanker 1985, no. 101, pl. 124).

Figs. 184-185. Head of Gordian III. AD 242-244. (Fittschen 1969, figs. 1-2).

Figs. 186-188, no. 35. Statue of Julia Procula. Trajanic. (Wrede 1981, no. 162, pl. 2.2; Herrmann 1991, figs. 19 a-b).

Figs. 189-191. Head of Faustina the Younger. C. AD 152. (Andreae 1994, pl. 562).

Figs. 192-193, no. 36. Head of a woman. C. AD 159. (Photos: Archaeological Museum, Thessaloniki).

Fig. 194, no. 36. Drawing of the head of the woman in figs. 192-193. (Claridge 1990, fig. 23).

Figs. 195-196. Head of Nerva. AD 96-98. (Jucker and Willers 1982, no. 45).

Figs. 197-198. Head of a woman. Early Augustan. (Inan and Rosenbaum 1966, no. 115, pl. 68).

Figs. 199-200. Head of Claudius. Claudian. (Inan and Alföldi-Rosenbaum 1979, no. 29, pl. 24).

Figs. 201-202. Head of a woman. Hadrianic. (Inan and Alföldi-Rosenbaum 1979, no. 93, pl. 82).

Figs. 203-206, no. 37. Head of a woman. C. AD 160. (Photos: Deutsches Archäologisches Instituts, Rome).

Fig. 207. Head of a woman. C. AD 160. (Fittschen 1996, fig. 13).

Figs. 208-209. Head of a man. C. AD 180. (Padgett 2001, no. 16).

Figs. 210-211. Head of Lucilla. AD 165-169. (Fittschen and Zanker 1983, no. 24, pl. 33).

Fig. 212. Head of Lucilla. AD 165-169. (Fittschen 1982, pl. 45.3).

Figs. 213-216, no. 38. Head of a woman. Mid 150s or early 160s AD. (Photos: Deutsches Archäologisches Instituts, Rome).

Figs. 217-218. Head of a woman. Late second century AD. (Brilliant 1975, pl. 36.1-2).

Figs. 219-220. Head of Crispina. C. AD 178. (Jucker 1981 (b), figs. 48 a-b).

Figs. 221-222. Top portion from a head of Antinous. AD 130-138. (Meyer 1991, no. I29, pl. 31).

Figs. 223-225. Head of a priest. Constantinian. (Inan and Alföldi-Rosenbaum 1979, no. 194, pl. 146).

Fig. 226. Head of a man. Late republican. (Claridge 1988, fig. 2).

Figs. 227-229. Head of Crispina. C. AD 180. (Fittschen 1982, pl. 54).

Fig. 230. Head of Faustina the Younger. C. AD 162. (Fittschen 1982, pl. 36.1).

Fig. 231. Head of Faustina the Younger. C. AD 152. (Fittschen 1982, pl. 22.3).

Figs. 232-235, no. 39. Head of a woman. Early Severan. (Photos: Deutsches Archäologisches Instituts, Rome).

Fig. 236. Head of Augustus. Augustan. (Boschung 1993, no. 86, pl. 73).

Fig. 237. Head of a woman. Second or third quarter of the first century BC. (Inan and Rosenbaum 1966, no. 139, pl. 81).

Figs. 238-240. Head of a woman. Antonine. (Harrison 1953, no. 33, pl. 21).

Figs. 241-243, no. 40. Head of a woman. First quarter of the third century AD. (Goette 1984, figs. 19, 18, 16).

Fig. 244. Head of a woman. Early to middle Severan. (Fittschen and Zanker 1983, no. 125, pl. 157).

Fig. 245. Head of a woman. First quarter of the third century AD. (Mansuelli 1961, no. 134, fig. 134).

Fig. 246. Reconstruction of the head of the woman in figs. 241-243. (Goette 1984, fig. 24).

Figs. 247-248. Posthumous head of Faustina the Elder. Early Hadrianic period. (Fittschen and Zanker 1983, no. 15, pl. 19).

Fig. 249. Head of a woman. Late Antonine. (Fittschen 1991, pl. 76.2).

Figs. 250-252. Head of Athena. Antonine copy of a Greek original from the second quarter of the fifth century BC. (Andreae 1994, pl. 750).

Figs. 253-254. Head of a woman. Late tetrarchic. (Fittschen and Zanker 1983, no. 177, pl. 206).

Figs. 255-256, no. 41. Head of a woman. C. AD 193. (Photos: Deutsches Archäologisches Instituts, Rome).

Fig. 257. Funerary relief. Early-third century AD. (Eckstein and Beck, no. 74, pl. 74).

Figs. 258-261, no. 42. Bust of a woman. C. AD 220-230. (Jucker and Willers 1982, no. 79).

Fig. 262. Head of a woman. AD 205-230. (Inan and Alföldi-Rosenbaum 1979, no. 168, pl. 127).

Fig. 263. Head of a woman. AD 205-230. (Johansen 1995 (b), no. 21).

Fig. 264. Head of Julia Domna. C. AD 193-194. (Kleiner 1992, fig. 290).

Figs. 265-267. Head of Julia Mamaea. AD 222-235. (Kersauson 1996, no. 196).

Figs. 268-269. Head of Julia Mamaea. AD 222-235. (Fittschen and Zanker 1983, no. 35, pl. 44).

Figs. 270-271. Cult statue of a goddess, probably Demeter. Late fifth century BC. (Boardman 1995, fig. 192.2).

Fig. 272. Head of Aphrodite. Late fourth century BC. (Boardman 1995, fig. 57).

Figs. 273-275. Head of Aphrodite. Flavian copy of a Greek original from about 440 BC. (Andreae 1994, pl. 351).

Figs. 276-277. Head of Aphrodite. Early Trajanic copy of a Greek High Classical work. (Strocka 1967, figs. 1-2).

Figs. 278-279. Head of a woman. AD 275-300. (Inan and Rosenbaum 1966, no. 273, pl. 150).

INTRODUCTION

Long before the modern day interest in recycling, the Romans were reusing materials such as stone and precious and base metals in their art and architecture. In fact, any culture that produces art works from laboriously obtained or scarce materials is likely to reuse these elements. The extent of such recycling by the Romans is far-reaching and surprising, and reflects the entrenched practice of reuse in that society. Building material was commonly reused, ranging from architectural elements and sculpture to create the aggregate required for concrete, to decorative marbles to be reinstalled in a new context.[1] Honorific inscriptions carved on marble could be turned and reused for other purposes.[2] In clever and very practical examples of sleights-of-carving, old or disused architectural elements were transformed even into likenesses of a given subject.[3] Statues could be reused by replacing the original head with that of someone else, sometimes with amusing and incongruous results.[4] Funerary inscriptions and altars could be reused by having the inscriptions recarved.[5] Architectural reliefs were also recycled, by having the portrait features reworked.[6]

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[1] For the reuse of building material, see Kinney 1997, 122-129. The most well known example of re-employed marble ornamentation is the Arch of Constantine in Rome: see most recently, Elsner 2000, with earlier literature. Reused material was also employed in the construction of mosaics. Existing evidence also suggests that mosaicists salvaged and recycled material from redundant pavements. Examples have been found both of mortar beddings from which *tesserae* (cubes of stone, glass, or terracotta used in the making of a mosaic) have been systematically removed and of reused *tesserae* with traces of old mortar adhering to them: Ling 1998, 13.

[2] A case in point is an inscribed piece of marble in the University Museum in Philadelphia with an honorific dedication to Domitian from AD 95/6 on one side. Following the death of Domitian, the marble was turned and reused in the Trajanic period by being carved with a scene depicting members of the praetorian guard, soldiers who were employed as the emperor's personal bodyguard: see most recently, Flower 2001, with earlier literature.

[3] A column fragment in the Mariemont Museum, for example, was refashioned into the portrait of a lady: Lévêque and Donnay 1967, 78-79, no. G33. A similar example is a portrait of a Flavian man from Egypt, now in the Princeton University Art Gallery, that was carved from a Corinthian *anta* capital: Antonaccio 1992, and below, 84. A portrait of a Constantinian man from Cyrenaica was carved out of an architrave block: Rosenbaum 1960, 122-123, no. 282.

[4] See, for example, a draped female statue from the first century AD in Cyrene, which had the head replaced with a portrait of the emperor Marcus Aurelius: Catani 1996, 42-43. The replacement of the head of a statue with that of someone else is mentioned by Pliny the Elder, *NH* 35.4. See also Isager 1998, 115.

[5] For the reuse of funerary inscriptions and reliefs, see below, 83-84. For the reuse of altars: Andreae 1994, 36-37, pls. 408-409; Kinney 1997, 118, note 6.

[6] For example, the Cancelleria Relief in the Vatican depicting the *profectio* of Domitian had the features of this emperor recut to represent those of his successor, Nerva. See most recently, Meyer

Because of their value as a precious material, even cameos could be reused by having the portraits on them reworked to depict new subjects.[7]

Portraits in the round were also subject to reuse. Naturally, images made from bronze, silver, and gold could simply be melted down and reused. This explains the small number of extant works that have been executed in these materials.[8] Even portraits made from marble could be reused. The Roman sculptor faced significant technical difficulties when reworking a marble image of one individual into the likeness of another. The reworking of a marble image into another likeness was severely limited by the form of the previous portrait. Because of the restrictions involved in reworking a marble image, there are several visual clues that may indicate that a portrait has been recut. Reworked portraits often co-opt physiognomical traits, traces of coiffure, or other elements from the earlier image. The drilling of the pupils and the incising of the irises may also indicate that a portrait was reworked, if this was not practiced during the time when the image was originally produced.[9] The addition of a specific hairstyle or beard may also indicate a reworking, if these features were not stylistic elements of the period in which the portrait was originally created. Conflicting stylistic features between the head and the bust or body can also provide important visual clues for reworking. In the cases where the head was carved separately to be inserted into a body, an inserted head

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2000, 124-136, with earlier literature at 125, note 396. 'Reworking' is defined in this thesis as the recarving of the hair and/or facial features of a marble portrait to represent a different subject.

[7] See Megow 1987; more recently, see Sande 2001. This phenomenon, however, appears to have been almost exclusively limited to cameos depicting imperial subjects.

[8] It is important to note that what exists today is not an accurate reflection of what existed in antiquity. A silver portrait of the emperor Lucius Verus in Turin, and a gold image of Marcus Aurelius in Switzerland, for example, represent two cases of the few portraits surviving today in precious metal. For the silver bust of Lucius Verus, see Wegner 1939, 248, pl. 41. For the gold bust of Marcus Aurelius, see Jucker and Willers 1982, 141-143, no. 58.

[9] This innovation did not appear in any marble sculpture until AD 130, during the time of Hadrian: Wegner 1956, 10; Fittschen 1999, 18, note 135; Strocka 2000, 136. Before this time, the details of the eyes were painted directly onto the smooth stone: see Bonanno 1976, 32-33; Henig 1983, 88; Kleiner 1992, 238; Ramage and Ramage 1996, 95, 198; Ling 2000, 165. In addition to the eyes, the hair and drapery of portraits and statues were also painted in antiquity, to make such sculpture look more realistic. The paint on the majority of ancient sculpture has worn off, but some pieces still preserve traces in areas such as the crevices of the hair or drapery: see Reuterswärd 1960; Ramage and Ramage 1996, 95; Bartman 2001, 7.

could be easily replaced with a new one. However, in the cases where the head was carved in one piece with the bust or body, the head could be reworked while the rest was left in its original form. These remaining conflicting stylistic features, whereby a bust or statue body in the style of an earlier period was combined with a portrait head in a style from a later period, are important visual clues for indicating a reworking, as well as the date of the original carving.

Recent scholarship on recut portraits has largely focused on the reworking of the images of imperial personages, predominantly as a result of official or *de facto* cases of *damnatio memoriae* in the wake of an emperor's fall from grace.[10] Such an emphasis reflects a broader tendency among scholars studying Roman portraiture to concentrate upon the extant portraits of famous persons, especially members of the imperial family.[11] Studies of private portraiture are much rarer,[12] and they have often made clear why private portraits have been of less interest to scholars.[13] First, because of difficulties in identifying these images, since the archaeological context of many of these portraits has been lost and rich biographies like those of famous people cannot be attached to them; and secondly, because of a lack of originality, since private portraits largely follow the style and conventions of contemporary

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[10] For reworked imperial portraiture, see most notably: Bergmann and Zanker 1981; Jucker 1981 (a); Jucker 1983; Pollini 1984; Pekáry 1985, 29-41, 134-142; Varner 1993; Born and Stemmer 1996, 101-118; Stewart 1999; Schäfer 1999; Varner 2000; Meyer 2000; Galinsky, forthcoming 2003; Varner, forthcoming 2003 (a); Varner, forthcoming 2003 (b).
It is important to note that the term *damnatio memoriae* is a modern coinage, used to refer to the wide range of penalties employed in ancient Rome against the memories of dead enemies of the state. There was no collective term referring to *damnatio memoriae* in antiquity, only a range of penalties for repressing the memories of public enemies: Flower 1998, 155-156; Hedrick 2000, 93. For a general discussion of how the Roman state attempted to purge the memory of those who were condemned as its enemies, see Hedrick 2000, 89-130.

[11] This bias is reflected, for example, by a perusal of the titles of the well-known and distinguished series in the field of Roman portraiture, the *Römische Herrscherbild* series of the German Archaeological Institute, some of which clearly reflect the focus on the portraits of a single emperor or an entire imperial dynasty: Wegner 1956; Wiggers and Wegner 1971; L'Orange and Wegner 1984; Boschung 1989; Boschung 1993.

[12] For example, Daltrop 1958, who sought to establish the chronological sequence and absolute dating of private images from the Trajanic and Hadrianic periods, based on the securely dated imperial portraits.

[13] On the private Roman portrait, see most recently, Fejfer 1999.

images of prominent personages.[14] Many extant Roman portraits, however, fall into the category of private portraiture, and depict non-imperial subjects who cannot usually be identified. These works could populate public spaces but were predominantly displayed in the home and in the tomb of the subject for the purpose of representing, retaining, and commemorating visually the subject as an individual.[15] As Patricia Erhart has written, 'private portraits are either identified by inscription, or they are not identifiable, be they patrician or plebeian, freedman or slave.'[16]

Admittedly, the loss of identity, documentary evidence, and contextual material makes private portraits less accessible for study. The study of private Roman portraiture, however, has much to offer the modern researcher. One issue that has not received the attention it merits is the reworking of sculpted portraits depicting unknown subjects. This phenomenon was by no means limited to imperial images, and impacted many of the portraits of anonymous subjects that have survived from antiquity. However, although individual pieces have been discussed, a detailed, collective study that considers the reworked portraits of private male and female Roman subjects has not been undertaken. This thesis is such a study of reworked marble portraits in the round of private male and female individuals in the Roman imperial period, that is, from the beginning of the first century AD, through to the death of Constantine in AD 337.[17]

The study is divided into three chapters. Chapter One is primarily art historical in nature, in that it discusses the stylistic and technical elements that indicate that

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[14] On this matter, see Zanker 1982, who analyses the phenomenon of *Zeitgesicht* ('the face of an age'). This was the attempt by private subjects to emulate the official imperial style in their sculpted portraits, by more or less copying the hairstyles and physiognomic traits of the portraits of members belonging to the imperial household. On *Zeitgesicht*, see further, Balty 1993, 13-14; La Regina 1998, 29. However, see also Bonanno 1988, who emphasises that there were also times when *private* portraiture introduced new fashions and styles which were then taken up in official portraiture.

[15] Fejfer 1999, 139.

[16] Erhart, Frel, Morgan, and Nodelman 1980, 9.

[17] For a chronological list of the historical periods and members of the imperial family mentioned in this thesis, see Appendix One.

private portraits were recut, as well as the types and extent of this transformation of these images during the Roman imperial period.[18] Since the Roman sculptor could take several approaches to the recycling of a marble portrait, the first two parts of Chapter One discuss the portraits according to the extent to which these images were reworked. The first part discusses images that were thoroughly or 'drastically' reworked. The second part of Chapter One examines private portraits that were more moderately reworked. The third part of Chapter One discusses the evidence for the reworking of imperial portraits into private likenesses. The fourth part of Chapter One discusses the conclusions that can be reached regarding the types and extent of the reworking of the images discussed in the first two parts.

Chapter Two critically reinterprets a number of private female portraits whose coiffures were supposedly updated through reworking, whereby part of the hair was chiselled away and a new portion added, to bring the hairstyle up-to-date. Attempts in recent years to find examples of female images that have been altered in this way have often been over-enthusiastic and cite a desire on the part of Roman women to update their hairstyles in response to changing hair fashions as the main reason for these supposed later modifications. Admittedly, there are a few, seemingly anomalous, cases of private female portraits whose coiffures were indeed updated through recutting. In this author's opinion, however, it can certainly be questioned whether other supposedly 'updated' images represent cases of reworking. This thesis argues that many of these images are more likely to be cases of piecing (assembling the portrait with pieces of marble carved separately and put together using dowels or adhesive) or that their appearances are related to technical reasons besides reworking.

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[18] For practical reasons, the discussion in this thesis will be limited to sculpted private portraits refashioned from other sculpted private images, and not private portraits reworked from architectural elements. Because of time constraints and the lack of first-hand examination by this author of the images discussed in this work, this thesis does not attempt to provide an exhaustive discussion of reworked private portraits. The images in this thesis have been selected on the basis of providing the clearest evidence of reworking, as well as their greater accessibility for photographic study than other recut portraits. This selection process does not in any way alter the conclusions that have been reached in this thesis from the study of such portraits.

The discussion of such portraits will not be exhaustive. Instead, the female portraits discussed in Chapter Two are representative of a number of other images whose coiffures were supposedly modernised through recutting, but which remain dubious cases similarly in need of a fresh, more critical reinterpretation. The aim of the reexamination of the female images in this chapter is to cast doubt on the modern idea that Roman women followed fashions in hair so closely that they often commissioned the updating of the coiffures on their marble images. In the light of this reevaluation, explanations as to why much fewer private female portraits appear to have been reworked in this way will be advanced.

Chapter Three examines the reworking of private Roman portraiture from a historical and contextual perspective. This chapter firstly examines the reasons for the reworking of private portraiture, which are different from those for the reworking of imperial images. The availability of imperial images for reuse primarily resulted from political causes, most notably *damnatio memoriae*, whereby any trace of the memory of a condemned emperor was eliminated through the removal, destruction, or reworking of his portraits into the likenesses of his successors or revered predecessors.[19] Although portraits of private Roman citizens were also recut to depict new identities, the central motivation behind such transformations was different. It will be argued that the reworking of private portraits was partly the result of a surplus of sculpture, and that such transformations were also facilitated by the fact that much of this sculpture must have depicted unknown or forgotten subjects. Central to this thesis, however, is the contention that a clear relationship exists between the frequency of reworking of private portraits and the level of economic prosperity, in that these images were mainly reworked as the result of a lack of money and materials.

[19] For *damnatio memoriae* and Roman imperial portraits, see above, 3, note 10.

Secondly, Chapter Three examines the intriguing question relating to the context from which portraits destined for reworking were utilised. It is unfortunate that we do not know the contexts in which the vast majority of extant portraits were originally displayed: being movable, statuary tends to migrate from its original setting.[20] Nevertheless, the extended span of time between the original carving and the later reworking and the fine state of preservation of many reworked portraits suggest that these images were stored in safe, yet ultimately accessible, locations, which allowed their reuse at a later date. This thesis will argue that cemeteries, houses, and villas would have provided the main supply of marble portraits that were reworked at a later time.

[20] Bartman 1991, 72.