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TAGUNGEN UND KONGRESSE 2



Gunnar Brands | Hans Rupprecht Goette (Hrsg.)

SPÄTANTIKE IDEAL- UND PORTRAITPLASTIK: STILKRITIK, KONTEXTE, NATURWISSENSCHAFTLICHE UNTERSUCHUNGEN

Beiträge eines Workshops an der
Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg
13.–16. Juni 2018

Spätantike Skulptur ist seit den 1970er Jahren zunehmend zu einem wichtigen Thema der altertumswissenschaftlichen Forschung geworden. Seither ist ein deutliches Bemühen spürbar, Leitlinien für die Beurteilung spätantiker Porträt- und Idealplastik zu entwickeln. Wie zahlreiche Kontroversen beweisen, ist dies bislang nur in Teilbereichen gelungen. Nachdem gerade in den letzten beiden Jahrzehnten zahlreiche wichtige Studien zum Thema erschienen sind, schien eine Bestandsaufnahme nützlich. Diskussionsbedürftig sind einerseits Fragen der Stil- und Formanalyse, andererseits treten die verstärkte und anhand jüngerer Grabungen neu belebte Beachtung von Fundkontexten in den Blick. Zunehmende Bedeutung hat nicht zuletzt die naturwissenschaftliche Analyse der Materialien gewonnen, die entscheidende Hinweise für Werkstattfragen liefert und damit auch für den Marmorhandel und die kulturellen Verflechtungen quer durch den Mittelmeerraum. Antworten auf diese Fragenkomplexe bilden die Grundlage für die Bewertung der gesellschaftlichen, politischen und kulturellen Hintergründe für das Fortleben antiker Skulptur im 4. bis 6. Jh. n. Chr., insbesondere im Hinblick auf den Boom von klein- und großformatiger mythologischer Idealskulptur. Der Workshop, aus dem dieser Band hervorgegangen ist, wurde im Juni 2018 zusammen mit dem Deutschen Archäologischen Institut am Lehrstuhl für Christliche Archäologie und Byzantinische Kunstgeschichte der Universität Halle-Wittenberg veranstaltet.

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Vorwort: Neue Forschungen zur spätantiken Plastik

Für die Beschäftigung mit der Skulptur der Spätantike bedarf es heute keiner besonderen Begründung mehr. Allerdings ist es auch noch nicht lange her, daß spätantike Portraits als plump und flüchtig charakterisiert, die Existenz von Idealskulptur rundweg geleugnet und spätantike Plastik als aussterbende Gattung und verunglückter Versuch der Fortführung einer unerreichbaren Vergangenheit abgetan wurde, für die dem Zeitalter Wille und technische Möglichkeiten fehlten.

Unter solchen Vorbehalten litt zunächst auch das spätantike Portrait, mit dem die Beschäftigung mit der spätantiken Kunstgeschichte auf dem Gebiet der Rundskulptur begann. Seine »Expressivität« und »Abstraktion« wurden als Ausdruck einer Vergeistigung verstanden und die Spätantike insgesamt zu einem »Age of Spirituality«¹, das mangelnde Qualität, ja geradezu Häßlichkeit² zu einem Ausdrucksträger zu machen versuchte. Der Darstellung der inneren Verfaßtheit der Portraitierten würden häufig »Schönheit und Eleganz geopfert«, wie David Talbot Rice noch 1947 formulierte³. Durch die Arbeiten von Wilhelm von Sydow, Hans Georg Severin, Siri Sande und Marianne Bergmann⁴, um hier nur einige Namen zu nennen, nahm seit den 1960er-Jahren eine konsisten-

te Stilgeschichte des spätantiken Portraits allmählich Gestalt an⁵. Nicht zuletzt ist dadurch der Zusammenhang des spätantiken mit dem mittel- und hochkaiserzeitlichen Portrait deutlicher geworden, was wesentlich dazu beigetragen hat, das Augenmerk auf die gesellschaftliche, vor allem politische Bedeutung des Portraits und die veränderten Repräsentationsmechanismen in der Spätantike zu richten. Indes bleiben, wie richtungweisende jüngere Arbeiten zum Thema gezeigt haben, auf dem Gebiet des spätantiken Portraits zahlreiche Probleme bestehen⁶.

Bis in die jüngere Vergangenheit galt als unvorstellbar, daß auch Idealskulptur in der Spätantike noch eine nennenswerte Rolle gespielt habe. Sie verlor, so das Diktum, mit der Christianisierung in konstantinischer Zeit rasch an Bedeutung, um in kürzester Zeit gänzlich von der Bildfläche zu verschwinden⁷. Diese Einstellung begann sich mit der Diskussion um die Esquilin-Skulpturen in Kopenhagen zu wandeln, die zu Anfang der 1980er-Jahre von Charlotte Roueché und Kenan Erim angestoßen worden war⁸. Der Versuch, eine genauere Vorstellung von den formalen Möglichkeiten der spätantiken Idealskulptur zu gewinnen, hat durch die Forschungen der letzten Jahrzehnte – Niels Hannestad, Marianne

1 So der häufig als Epochenbegriff verwendete Titel einer von Kurt Weitzmann initiierten Ausstellung in New York: K. Weitzmann (Hrsg.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art. Third to Seventh Century. Catalogue of the Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, November 19, 1977 Through February 12, 1978* (New York – Princeton 1977); K. Weitzmann (Hrsg.), *Age of Spirituality. A Symposium* (New York – Princeton 1980).

2 Zum geistes- und fachgeschichtlichen Hintergrund der Bewertung spätantiker Kunst seit dem ausgehenden 19. Jh. vgl. B. Kiilerich, *What is Ugly? Art and Taste in Late Antiquity*, *Arte Medievale* 6, 2007, 9–20.

3 D. Talbot Rice, *The Beginnings of Christian Art* (London 1947) 30: »There are many works in which idealism and illusion are absent and where elegance, charm or concern with the direct narrative have been given place to a distinct approach, characterised by a somewhat crude vigour, and where forcefulness replaces delicacy« (deutsche Übersetzung: *Beginn und Entwicklung christlicher Kunst* [Köln 1961] 23).

4 W. von Sydow, *Zur Kunstgeschichte des spätantiken Porträts im 4. Jahrhundert n. Chr.*, *Antiquitas III* 8 (Bonn 1969);

H. G. Severin, *Zur Portraitplastik des 5. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.*, *Miscellanea Byzantina Monacensia* 13 (München 1972); M. Bergmann, *Studien zum Porträt des 3. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.*, *Antiquitas III* 18 (Bonn 1977); S. Sande, *Zur Porträtplastik des sechsten nachchristlichen Jahrhunderts*, *ActaAArtHist* 6, 1975, 65–106.

5 Zuletzt M. Kovacs, *Kaiser, Senatoren und Gelehrte. Untersuchungen zum spätantiken männlichen Privatporträt, Spätantike – Frühes Christentum – Byzanz. Kunst im ersten Jahrtausend Reihe B* 40 (Wiesbaden 2014).

6 Vgl. zusammenfassend Kovacs a. O. (Anm. 5) 17–40.

7 F. W. Deichmann, *Einführung in die christliche Archäologie* (Darmstadt 1983), 290 gab den damaligen Status quo in der Forschung so wieder, wenn er resümierte: »Doch dürfte ... feststehen, daß allgemein in der Spätantike die Bedeutung der Skulptur, vor allem der von der Architektur unabhängigen, gegenüber der vorausgehenden Zeit geringer, sie also weniger verbreitet war. In ganzen Gebieten oder selbst in wichtigen Zentren führte man manche Arten der figürlichen Plastik nicht mehr aus.«

8 C. Roueché – K. Erim, *Sculptors from Aphrodisias. Some New Inscriptions*, *BSR* 50, 1982, 102–115.

Bergmann, Lea Stirling, Christiane Vorster, um auch hier wieder nur einige Namen zu nennen⁹ – erheblich an Kontur gewonnen. Dennoch zeigt der anhaltende Streit um die Datierung der Statuen vom Esquilin¹⁰ oder der Skulpturen von Silaharağa¹¹ mehr als deutlich, daß kein Konsens herrscht. Demgegenüber wird die spätantike Datierung von zahlreichen Skulpturen, etwa der Ganymedgruppe in Tunis¹² oder der vor kurzem bekannt gemachten Dresdener Göttergruppe, weithin akzeptiert¹³, und dasselbe gilt auch für zahlreiche andere kleinformatige Skulpturen, die mittlerweile aus fast allen Teilen des Imperium bekannt geworden sind¹⁴.

Nicht selten, so unser Eindruck, ist die stilistische Beurteilung von Skulpturen zu einer Art von Glaubenssache geworden, vor der wissenschaftliche Methoden zu versagen scheinen; Meinungen ersetzen häufig begründete Ansichten¹⁵. Das Problem besteht, kurz gesagt, darin, daß zwischen Hochkaiserzeitlichem, den Skulpturen hadrianischer, antoninischer und severischer Zeit und der Plastik des 4. Jhs. oft genug nicht mit ausreichender Sicherheit unterschieden werden kann. Die Erklärungen dafür sind in verschiedener Richtung gesucht worden. Hannestad formulierte salopp, daß es bei einem Rückgriff eben genau darum gehe, das Vorbild so genau wie möglich

zu treffen¹⁶, und daß Ununterscheidbarkeit daher gewissermaßen in der Natur der Sache läge. Die Stilphänomene, die wir an sicher ins 4. Jh. zu datierenden Skulpturen beobachten, sind allerdings so vielfältig, daß man sich fragen (und bezweifeln) muß, ob »Rückgriff« das Phänomen der stilistischen Nähe wirklich zutreffend beschreibt. Der Stilpluralismus, den die spätantike Kunst des 4. und 5. Jhs. kennzeichnet, wird auf diese Weise marginalisiert¹⁷. In Zukunft wird es darauf ankommen, die Entwicklung der Skulptur zwischen dem 2. Jh. und dem ausgehenden 4./frühen 5. Jh. stärker prozessual und weniger als reinen Rückgriff der Spätantike auf die hohe Kaiserzeit zu verstehen. Dabei spielt, auch wenn das in Zeiten des Glaubens an die Objektivität des »archäologischen Befundes« (womit zumeist der Grabungsbefund und Inschriften gemeint sind) wenig populär ist, die skeptisch beäugte Stilmforschung eine entscheidende Rolle. Erst eine präzise Formanalyse wird die Grundlagen für das Verständnis von Traditionslinien zwischen hochkaiserzeitlicher und spätantiker Kunst und ihrer Eigenarten schaffen können – das gilt, auch wenn sich die Forschung in dieser Hinsicht auf sicherem Terrain zu bewegen meint, durchaus auch für die hochkaiserzeitliche Skulptur.

9 N. Hannestad, *Tradition in Late Antiquity. Conservation, Modernization, Production*, Acta Jutlandica 79, 2, Humanities Series 69 (Aarhus 1994); M. Bergmann, *Chiragan, Aphrodisias, Konstantinopel. Zur mythologischen Skulptur der Spätantike*, Palilia 7 (Wiesbaden 1999); L. M. Stirling, *The Learned Collector. Mythological Statuettes and Classical Taste in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor 2005); C. Vorster, *Spätantike Bildhauerwerkstätten in Rom. Beobachtungen zur Idealskulptur der nachkonstantinischen Zeit*, JdI 127–128, 2012–2013, 393–497.

10 Zuletzt z. B. M. Moltesen, *The Esquiline Group: Aphrodisian Statues in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek*, AntPl 27 (München 2000) 111–131; C. Häuber, *The Eastern Part of the Mons Oppius in Rome. The Sanctuary of Isis et Serapis in Regio III, the Temples of Minerva Medica, Fortuna Virgo and Dea Syria, and the Horti of Maecenas*, BullCom Suppl. 22 (Rom 2014) 202–223 Figs. 67–73. Zu den schon 1990 von Häuber geäußerten Vorbehalten zuletzt Vorster a. O. (Anm. 9) 395–405.

11 Der zuerst von R. Fleischer (Rez. von N. de Chaisemartin – E. Örgen, *Les documents sculptés de Silaharağa*, Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, Mémoire 46 [Paris 1984], Gnomon 60, 1988, 61–65) vertretenen Datierung ins 4. Jh. folgen B. Kiilerich – H. Torp, *Mythological Sculpture in the Fourth Century A.D. The Esquiline Group and the Silaharağa Statues*, IstMitt 44, 1994, 307–316; zurückhaltend Bergmann a. O. (Anm. 9) 18–20 (»Die Datierung der Skulpturen von Silaharağa in die Spätantike ist deshalb eigentlich unsicher und gewinnt vor allem durch den Kontext des gesamten »Kunstkreises« an Wahrscheinlichkeit«).

12 E. K. Gazda, *A Marble Group of Ganymede and the Eagle from the Age of Augustine*, in: J. H. Humphrey (Hrsg.), *Excavations at Carthage 1977 Conducted by the University of*

Michigan 6 (Ann Arbor 1981) 125–178; s. u. im Beitrag Attanasio – Prochaska Fig. 7.

13 C. Vorster, *Spätantike Götterbilder*, in: K. Knoll – C. Vorster – M. Woelk (Hrsg.), *Skulpturensammlung Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Katalog der antiken Bildwerke II. Idealskulptur der römischen Kaiserzeit 1* (München 2011) 604–626. s. auch hier den Beitrag von Attanasio – Prochaska, Anm. 34. Ob die Statuette des Mars, die aus anderem (wohl parischem) Marmor besteht und stilistisch etwas abweicht, zur Gruppe gehört, ist nicht klar.

14 Ein Kurzbericht während des Workshops galt den Skulpturenfunden aus den Villen von Valdetorres de Jarama und Quinta das Longas, die G. Brands und H. R. Goette 2018/2019 neu aufgenommen haben und die im Kontext anderer Skulpturenbefunde der Iberischen Halbinsel in Zusammenarbeit mit T. Nogales-Bassarate und A. Carvalho vorlegt werden sollen.

15 Symptomatisch für diese Haltung ist die Arbeit von J. van Voorhis, *The Sculptor's Workshop, Aphrodisias 10* (Wiesbaden 2018). Vgl. dazu die nicht zuletzt methodisch erhellende Rezension von M. Kovacs, *Gnomon* 92, 2020, 641–648.

16 Hannestad a. O. (Anm. 9) 153 f. Anm. 261 (»If a pastiche shows similarity to the period it imitates, it should cause no surprise – that is the whole idea!«).

17 H. Brandenburg, *Ein frühchristliches Relief in Berlin*, RM 79, 1972, 135 hat das Richtige gesehen, wenn er formulierte, »daß wir in dieser Zeit, die sich so sehr an die klassischen Vorbilder anlehnt, damit rechnen müssen, daß verschiedene Möglichkeiten der Brechung und unterschiedliche Stufen klassischer Formgebung, je nach Art des Monuments, des Vorwurfs und auch der Fähigkeit und Schulung des Künstlers nebeneinander bestehen können.« s. dazu auch B. Kiilerich – H. Torp, *Hic est: Hic Stilicho*, JdI 104, 1989, 319–371, bes. 339–350.

Dazu gehört, beim Portrait ebenso wie auf dem Gebiet der Idealskulptur, eine intensivere Beschäftigung mit der – nicht erst in der Spätantike – weit verbreiteten Wiederverwendung und Umarbeitung von Skulptur¹⁸.

Bei dem Versuch, konsistente und methodisch belastbare Kriterien für die Beurteilung spätantiker Idealskulptur zu entwickeln – und das in einem relativ kurzen Zeitraum von kaum einer Generation seit diese Forschungen in größerem Stil eingesetzt haben – sind Vereinfachungen oft unvermeidlich. Als einen solchen Topos könnte man die Neigung der Forschung ansehen, die gesamte Idealskulptur in die zweite Hälfte des 4. Jhs. oder das frühe 5. Jh. zu datieren; die konstantinische Jahrhunderthälfte bleibt gewissermaßen ein weißer Fleck. Ist eine solche Dichotomie sachgemäß oder war der formale Klassizismus, der für den Habitus der Skulptur der zweiten Jahrhunderthälfte (theodosianische Renaissance) steht, bereits viel früher stärker ausgeprägt, als uns Portraitplastik und Sarkophagproduktion suggerieren¹⁹? Handelt es sich also um eine formale Dialektik von Gattungsgrenzen?

Erst eine Antwort auf diese und die stilanalytischen Fragen bildet die Grundlage für die Bewertung der gesellschaftlichen, politischen und kulturellen Hintergründe des Fortlebens antiker Skulptur, insbesondere im Hinblick auf den Boom von klein-, aber durchaus auch großformatiger (mythologischer) Idealskulptur, in die die Forschung bereits eingetreten ist²⁰.

Weitere Themen, die die Forschung zunehmend beschäftigen, sind die Fragen nach der Herkunft der in der Spätantike verwendeten Marmore, ihr Handel und ihre Verbreitung im Römischen Reich und den Werkstätten. Mittlerweile gewinnt man beinahe den Eindruck, daß aphrodisiensische Werkstattbetriebe den mittelmeeischen Markt völlig beherrscht hätten. Martin Kovacs fragte in seinem Vortrag folgerichtig »Alles Aphrodisias?« und versuchte die Frage mit einem Seitenblick auf Athen zu beantworten; die

Situation im spätantiken Griechenland beschäftigte im Rahmen des Workshops auch andere Teilnehmer²¹. Nachdem erst vor kurzem die stadtrömische Produktion näher untersucht wurde²², war es aus unserer Sicht folgerichtig, der Thematik von Herstellungsorten und Verbreitungswegen an weiteren Beispielen, etwa Südfrankreich, der Iberischen Halbinsel und Syrien, nachzugehen.

Einen wichtigen Hinweis zur Beantwortung der Frage nach den Werkstätten liefert die naturwissenschaftliche Analyse der Materialien und in der Folge die Bestimmung der Steinbrüche und somit indirekt der Werkstätten. Dabei ist der Beitrag der Archäometrie zur spätantiken Plastik noch längst nicht so umfangreich wie für die Werke der frühen und mittleren Kaiserzeit.

Der Workshop, aus dem dieser Band hervorgegangen ist, wurde im Juni 2018 zusammen mit dem Deutschen Archäologischen Institut am Lehrstuhl für Christliche Archäologie und Byzantinische Kunstgeschichte der Universität Halle-Wittenberg veranstaltet²³. Unser Anliegen war es, die hier skizzierten Fragen in einem kleinen Kreis von einschlägigen Spezialisten zu diskutieren, neue Befunde und Forschungsprojekte zu erörtern sowie nach erfolgversprechenden Ansätzen Ausschau zu halten.

Als Diskussionsforum konzipiert, war eine Publikation nicht von vornherein vorgesehen. Die Entscheidung, doch einige Beiträge vorzulegen, war nicht leicht zu treffen, zumal von den 20 Vorträgen und Kurzberichten, die in den vier Tagen der halleischen Zusammenkunft gehalten wurden, nur etwa die Hälfte in die vorliegende Publikation aufgenommen werden konnte. Das hat mehrere Gründe. Nicht wenige Referate verstanden sich als Werkstatt- und Vorberichte umfangreicherer Vorhaben und mussten mit Rücksicht auf die noch andauernde Beschäftigung mit den Themen deshalb außen vor bleiben. Einige andere Vorträge, die uns während der Tagung als Folie für die Diskussion sehr nützlich waren, hät-

¹⁸ In Halle berichtete Cristina Murer über ihr mittlerweile abgeschlossenes Berliner Habilitationsprojekt (Transforming the Past: Tomb Plundering and the Reuse of Funerary Material in Late Antique Italy [in Druckvorbereitung]). Vgl. zum Thema auch die Beiträge von H. R. Goette – Á. M. Nagy und C. Vorster in diesem Band.

¹⁹ Der Vortrag von S. Feist »Ein Stil für jede Bildwelt? Spätantiker Stilpluralismus am Beispiel von Sarkophagen« erscheint unter dem Titel »Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen in der stilistischen Erforschung der spätantiken Sarkophagplastik«, in: M. Kovacs – M. Dorka Moreno (Hrsg.), Ästhetik versus Programmatik? Perspektiven der archäologischen Stilkritik, Kolloquium Tübingen 2019 (in Vorbereitung).

²⁰ Vgl. N. Hannestad, Mythological Marble Sculpture from a Regional and Supra-Regional Perspective, in: I. Jacobs (Hrsg.), Production and Prosperity in the Theodosian Period, Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion 14 (Leuven – Walpole 2014) 215–249.

²¹ s. Anm. 22.

²² Richtungweisend C. Vorster, Spätantike Bildhauerwerkstätten in Rom. Beobachtungen zur Idealskulptur der nachkonstantinischen Zeit, *JdI* 127–128, 2012–2013, 393–497.

²³ Die Tagung fand unter dem Titel »Neue Ansätze zur Erforschung spätantiker Ideal- und Portraitplastik: Stilkritik, Kontexte, naturwissenschaftliche Untersuchungen« statt.

ten wir ihrer Bedeutung wegen gern in einer Publikation gesehen; das gilt etwa für den Beitrag über spätantikes Silber und seine Beziehungen zur gleichzeitigen Skulptur. Leider erwies sich eine vertiefende Beschäftigung mit diesem wichtigen Themenbereich, ebenso wie in einigen anderen Fällen, in der Kürze der Zeit als nicht realisierbar. Schließlich waren einige Beiträge von vornherein – etwa wegen ihres monographischen Umfangs – für eine Veröffentlichung an anderer Stelle vorgesehen und liegen teilweise bereits vor²⁴. So sehr man diese Fragmentierung bedauern mag, hoffen wir doch, daß die Studien, die in dem vorliegenden Band versammelt wurden, auch in dieser Auswahl von Nutzen sind. Sie spiegeln nach unserem Verständnis exemplarisch die Themenbereiche,

die uns bei der Konzeption des Workshops besonders wichtig waren.

Die Finanzierung der Tagung verdanken wir der Fritz Thyssen Stiftung in Köln und dem Deutschen Archäologischen Institut in Berlin, das den Band in die neue Reihe der »Tagungen und Kongresse« aufgenommen hat. Allen, die die Durchführung des Workshops und den Druck des Bandes ermöglicht haben, gilt unser herzlicher Dank. Besonders verpflichtet fühlen wir uns Sabine Feist und Stefan Lehmann, die an der Planung und Durchführung der Tagung in Halle maßgeblich beteiligt waren, sowie dem Generalsekretär des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Philipp von Rummel, für seine dauerhafte Unterstützung.

Berlin, im Dezember 2021

Gunnar Brands und Hans Rupprecht Goette

24 S. Bassett, Late Antique Art and Modernist Vision, in: C. Olovsson (Hrsg.), *Envisioning Worlds in Late Antique Art. New Perspectives on Abstraction and Symbolism in Late-Roman and Early-Byzantine Visual Culture* (c. 300–600) (Berlin 2019) 5–28; N. Hannestad, What Did the Sarcophagus of Symmachus Look Like? Late Antique Pagan Sarcophagi (Aarhus 2019); S. Katakis, Bemerkungen zur spätantiken Skulptur aus Apta und West-Kreta. Alte und Neue Funde, in: Akten des 15. Internationalen Kolloquiums zum provinzialrömischen Kunstschaffen (Graz 2019) 210–223; A. Robertson Brown, Corinth in Late Antiquity. A Greek, Roman and Christian City (London 2018); N. Tsvikis, Mesene and the Changing Urban Life and Material Culture of an

Early Byzantine City in the Western Peloponnese (4th–7th Century), in: B. Böhlendorf-Arslan – R. Schick, *Transformations of City and Countryside in the Byzantine Period, Byzanz zwischen Orient und Okzident 22* (Mainz 2020); C. Vorster, Skulpturen Cleveland mit Verschlingung des Jonas, Ausspeisung des Jonas und Jonas in der Kürbislaube, in: F. Rumscheid – S. Schrenk – K. Kressler (Hrsg.), *Göttliche Ungerechtigkeit? Strafen und Glaubensprüfungen als Themen antiker und frühchristlicher Kunst* (Petersberg 2018) 298–306; G. Brands, Some Methodological Remarks on Late Antique Sculpture on the Iberian Peninsula, in: *Actas de la X Reunión de Escultura Romana en Hispania, Faro y Mertola 27–29 octubre de 2022* (in Druckvorbereitung).

Marble Statuary and the Discourse of Display in Late Antique Aquitania

Sarah Beckmann

Introduction

The last two centuries of excavation, survey, and study in southwestern France have brought attention to sculptures found in late antique villas of Roman Aquitania¹, a region with a 4th c. leitmotif in both text and archaeology². At present, marble sculptures made in the 4th and early 5th c. – mythological statuary but also several portraits – have been identified at six of region's villas, together with Imperial-era portraits and Idealplastik. These sites include: the villas of Chiragan and Montmaurin near the foothills of the Pyrenees; the villas of Lamarque-Castelculier, La Garenne-Nérac, and Séviac in central Aquitania; and the unexcavated villa of Petit-Corbin near Saint-Georges de Montagne, east of Burdigala/Bordeaux (Fig. 1)³.

These villas and their sculptures have attracted much attention in recent years, in response to mounting interest in the statuary habit of Late Antiquity. Lea Stirling's 2005 monograph, for example, was the first to discuss these six villas as a collective ensemble. Her study of late-mythological statuettes identified a significant number of finds in this region, which she interpreted as material evidence for elite engagement with *paideia* well into the late antique period⁴. In the 1990s, Marianne Bergmann and Niels

Hannestad undertook independent investigations of large-scale mythological sculptures in relief from the villa of Chiragan. Both authors associated these stylistically with late Aphrodisian workshops, although a recent article has emphasized their production and display in situ⁵. These studies of mythological sculpture in the region complement recent work on more than a half dozen late antique portraits spread across villas of Chiragan, Séviac, and Lamarque-Castelculier⁶.

And yet, interest in specific genres has inadvertently downplayed the diversity that is characteristic of Aquitania's sculpture collections – finds recovered in excavations of late antique villas exhibit extraordinary chronological and typological range, with additional variations in size, format, and manufacture. The display of antique and contemporary sculptures of all kinds into the early 5th c. is, moreover, a practice with no immediate parallel in the late Roman West⁷. For example, although several other villas document either late antique sculptures, or Imperial-era antique sculptures, few exhibit the eclecticism that is characteristic of the Aquitanian assemblages. Or, when a villa provides evidence of both antique and contemporary sculptures in

1 »Aquitania« is used throughout this piece to refer to the area in southwestern Gaul that encompassed the late antique provinces of Aquitania I, II, and III (or Novempopulania), created at the end of the 3rd c. by the subdivision of the Imperial-era province of Aquitania. All dates in this article are A.D.

2 Material evidence for late antique culture is currently concentrated in the rural sphere; for a catalogue of late antique villas: Balmelle 2001. Literary evidence for the region's importance appears in the career and poetry of Ausonius, vide Or. 18, 20; Sivan 1993, 31–48.

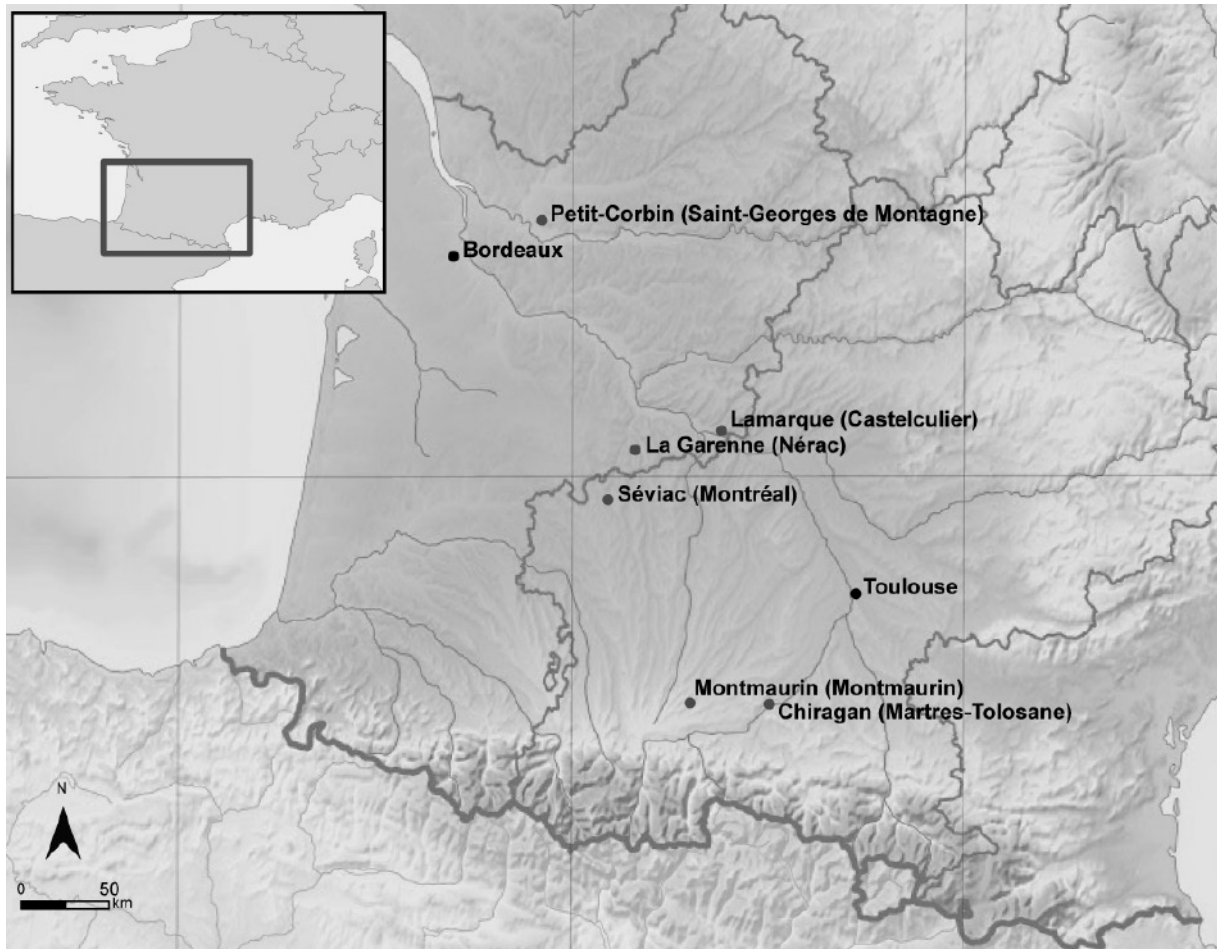
3 I count here only the sites with published assemblages of multiple sculptures. Other villas in the region have not been excavated extensively, or published in depth (e.g. Balmelle 2001, 427–440), and more late antique villas with statuary collections may come to light.

4 Stirling 2005.

5 For the reliefs and itinerant Aphrodisian sculptors: Bergmann 1999, esp. 26–43; Hannestad 1994, 135–141; for their local production and display: Beckmann 2020; Attanasio et al. 2016.

6 For the portraits at Chiragan, see Balty – Cazes 2005; Balty – Cazes 2008; Balty et al. 2012. For discussion of all three portraits: Witschel 2016, 75–77; Beckmann 2022.

7 Here I acknowledge a great debt to Lea Stirling's work in this region. Stirling notes the high concentration of sculpture finds in southwestern Gaul and the great variety of iconographies represented, but, because her monograph also discusses other late-mythological statuettes around the empire, her conclusions (about the social function of these objects as expressions of *paideia*) are applicable to the elite writ broad: 2005, 138–232.



1 Map of the Aquitanian villa sites discussed in this article

late occupation levels, the site is an anomaly in its region; that is, neighboring sites do not mark the collection and display of sculpture as a widespread phenomenon, as in southwestern Gaul⁸. In what follows, therefore, I argue that the sculptures recovered in Aquitanian villas reflect the idiosyncratic decorative

signature of the region's domini. Although this signature was engendered in part by extra-regional factors, the high concentration of finds in Aquitania's villas is incomparable to other villa clusters in the West, and must therefore be analyzed as the product of local environmental, economic, and socio-political concerns.

The Corpus: Sculpture in the Late Antique Villas of Aquitania

This micro-contextual analysis necessarily begins with the archaeology. Unfortunately, our understanding of late antique sculpture displays in this region is complicated by several factors, namely, the

post-occupational destruction of many sites, and their rediscovery in the 19th and early 20th c. before systematic archaeological excavations. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the early 19th c. excavations of Chiragan

⁸ E.g. the villa of Woodchester in southern Britain, which is one of only two villas in Britain with sculpture: Clarke 1982; see also Stirling 2005, 190–192.

and La Garenne-Nérac did not proceed stratigraphically, while the sculptures from Petit-Corbin (Saint-Georges de Montagne) were recovered superficially, leaving the villa unexcavated and poorly understood. At the villas where sculptures were found in later 20th c. excavations – Montmaurin, Séviac, Lamarque-Castelculier – modern archaeological methods were employed, but most sculptures were recovered in secondary contexts dating to post-occupational reuse of the sites.

One of the first sites to be explored was the villa of Chiragan, located on the left bank of the Garonne River approximately 60 km southwest of ancient Tolosa (Toulouse). The villa was the subject to a series of archaeological campaigns after an impressive array of marble sculptures came to light in 1826 during a storm⁹. Work began under the direction of Alexandre Du Mège, who was concerned with recovering fragments of more than 100 marble statues that had been heaped in a large pit dug into a courtyard of the *pars urbana*¹⁰. This pit was created at an unknown point in time after the apparent destruction of the residence, loosely dated to the first quarter of the 5th c. terminus post quem by late antique marbles and ceramic evidence¹¹. Du Mège's pit seems to have comprised the bulk of the villa's statuary. Finds included at least five late antique portraits, nearly three dozen late antique relief sculptures, and over fifty Imperial-era portraits and mythological statues¹². This juxtaposition of contemporary and Imperial-era works inadvertently signals their presence in the villa through its final phase of occupation.

The full extent of the villa of Chiragan was determined in a final campaign of excavations led by Léon

Joulin from 1897–1899. This revealed a massive, terraced *pars urbana* (Fig. 2), structures associated with a *pars rustica*, and a mural enclosure to the north of the site, fencing in an area of 13–16 ha with the Garonne River as the presumed border to the south¹³. In the course of this work, more sculptures came to light: nearly 300 marble fragments were found in a small basin in the *pars urbana*, and fragments of reliefs and other sculptures were recovered in and around the northern »court of honor«¹⁴.

Chiragan boasts the largest collection of late antique sculpture in the region which, interestingly, takes the form of large-scale sculpture reliefs. The program includes a full set of Hercules' labors (e.g. Fig. 3), at least 13 circular medallions of gods and goddesses, a portrait-qua-historical relief, and various other relief fragments, all of which gesture to contemporary sculpture hanging on the walls, presumably in reception spaces¹⁵. The reliefs were made in local marble sourced at the quarries of Saint-Béat¹⁶. Although scholars now agree that the reliefs are late antique, debates surround the date of their manufacture, and the persons responsible for the commission. As previously mentioned, Bergmann and Hannestad associate the Hercules reliefs and the shield medallions with 4th c. itinerant Aphrodisian workshops because of the heavy use of the drill, exaggerated musculature, and formulaic coiffures (in particular, fork-shaped locks in male coiffures); these are also attested in Aphrodisian exports like the Esquiline group¹⁷. Jean-Charles Balty and Daniel Cazes, however, have loosely attached the same reliefs to the end of the 3rd c. and to the emperor Maximian because of stylistic similarities with the free-standing head

⁹ The essential publication of the site remains Joulin 1901; see also recent summaries of excavation at the site in Balty – Cazes 2005, 21–45; Balmelle 2001, no. 28, 367–370; Massendari 2006, 213–229.

¹⁰ Du Mège's daily reports to various official parties are summarized in Balty – Cazes 2005, 31–42. Du Mège never published an archaeological report of his excavations but for catalogs of the sculptures recovered in these campaigns see Du Mège 1828, 1835. The Du Mège sector and the statuary pit was re-excavated in 1891–1892 under A. Lebègue, who provides the first concise description of the pit (1891, 594–596). He remarks »Tout ce terrain a été, il me semble, bouleversé par une série de cataclysmes (594).« Lebègue has difficulty reconciling the evidence for relatively well-preserved marble architecture and rich decoration with the turned earth and extremely fragmentary rubble of what were once thick, strong walls. Joulin would later concur and interpret the charcoal and architectural fragments as evidence for the creation of the pit after the villa's destruction by fire: 1901, 62–64.

¹¹ Joulin suggested a late-4th or early-5th c. destruction for the villa based on a coin of Arcadius (383–404) and historic accounts of the Vandals invasion in 406–410 (1901, 71–73). For critiques

see Balmelle 2001, 367–368, who argues that occupation likely continued into the early 5th c. based on imported ceramics and late-mythological statuettes.

¹² There is no comprehensive publication of the sculptures but see Du Mège 1828, 1835; Joulin 1901, 79–140 pls. VI–XXV; Espérandieu 1908, nos. 891–1006. 1008–09. 1011. 1013. 1030. See also Cazes 1999.

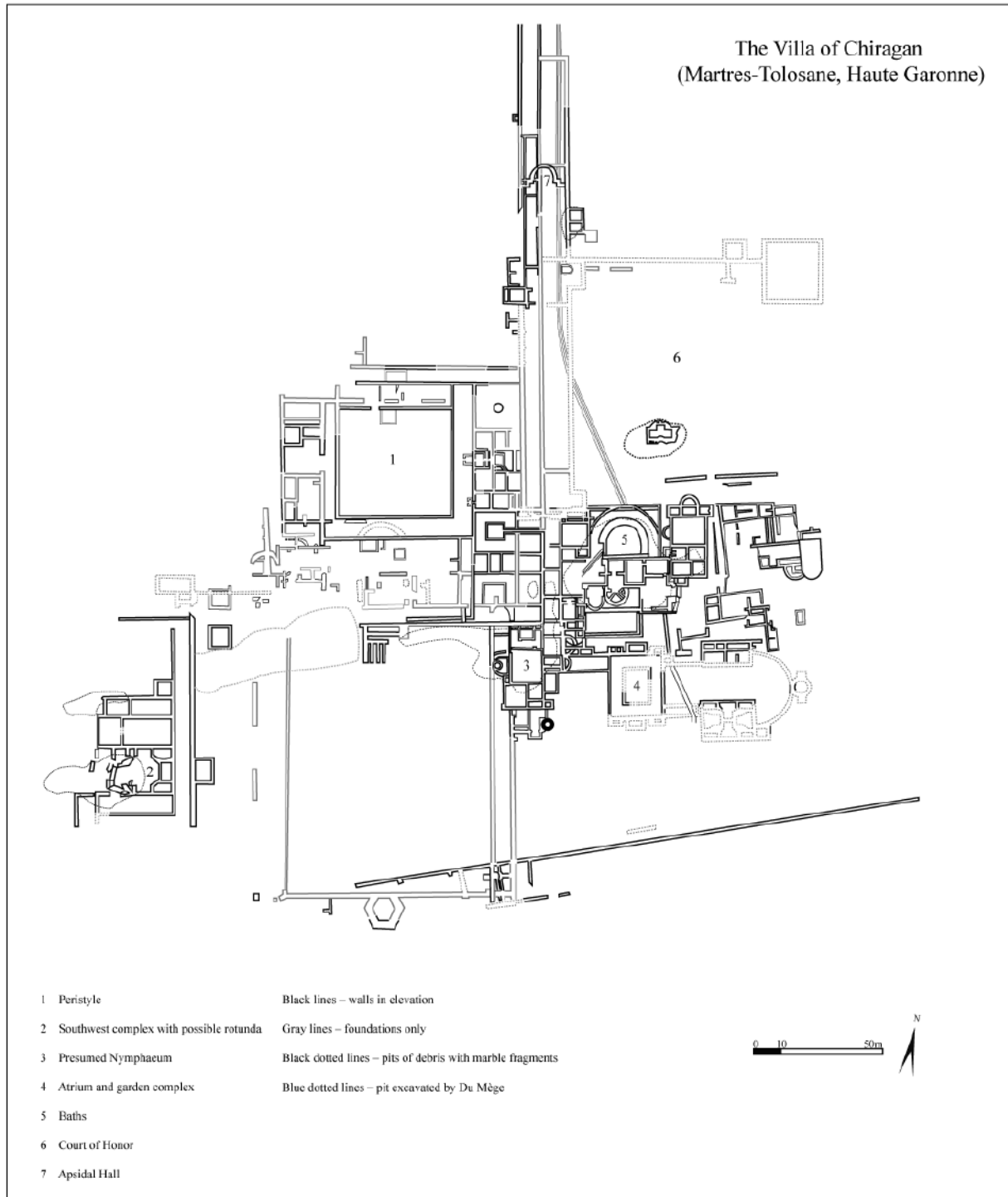
¹³ Joulin estimated that the site extended 16 ha, 1901, 22–47, but Balmelle lists it as extending over 13 ha in her recent catalog, 2001, 367–370.

¹⁴ For Joulin's discovery of 300 sculpture fragments in a basin of the *pars urbana* see discussion of Group V structures, 2001, 28–30. 266. Other fragments were found in structures associated with groups X and IX (the »court of honor«) 268. The sculptures found in Joulin's excavations are associated with a number and the letter »E« in his plates, e.g. pl. X nos. 128E. 132E (both are late-mythological heads).

¹⁵ Beckmann 2020 on the significance of this program.

¹⁶ Attanasio et al. 2016.

¹⁷ Bergmann 1999; Hannestad 1994. For the Esquiline group and Aphrodisian sculptors, see Erism – Roueché 1982.



2 Plan of the *pars urbana* of the villa of Chiragan

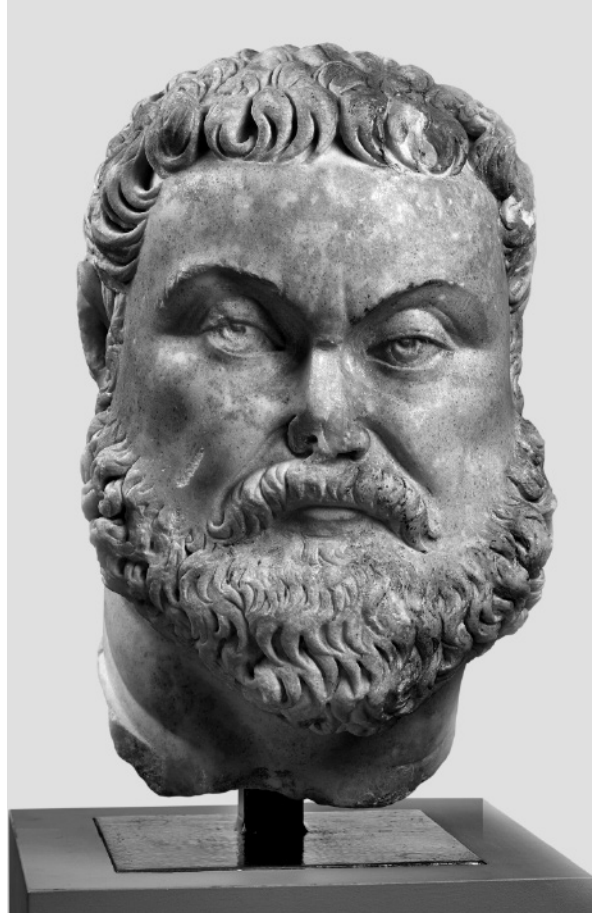
Chiragan's sculptures have long been touted as exceptional – the size of the collection is unmatched. And yet, several sites in Aquitania parallel the typo-

logical and chronological diversity of the Chiragan assemblage²³. Another eclectic if fragmentary sculpture assemblage known from 19thc. excavations

¹⁸ Balty – Cazes 2008, 133–138 for the reliefs. The authors also stress Hercules as Maximian's patron deity.



3 Toulouse, Musée Saint-Raymond, inv. Ra28b: Panel relief of Hercules and the Hydra from the villa of Chiragan, max. H. 141 cm



4 Toulouse, Musée Saint-Raymond, inv. 34b: Male portrait from the villa of Chiragan, max. H. 43 cm

that they identify as the Tetrarchic emperor (Fig. 4)¹⁸. Recent work by this author supports the link between this same free-standing male head and the relief program, but pushes the date of these objects to the later 4th c. because of the highly plastic character of the reliefs, the voluminous coiffure and beard of the adult male, and a probable free-standing pendant portrait of a female wearing a turban, which finds comparanda among later 4th and early 5th c. female portraits¹⁹. These two portrait heads belong to a larger collection of at least five late antique portraits found at Chiragan that were made (like the reliefs) in local marble from Saint-Béat²⁰.

If these objects are manufactures of the later 4th c., they evince a concerted effort to build a contempo-

rary collection of late antique sculpture, a fraction of which was imported. Indeed, Stirling's work has identified several later 4th or early 5th c. small-scale mythological statuettes at Chiragan, including a sleeping Ariadne, a youthful Dionysus, and a fragmented female head²¹. Recent work by Pascal Capus suggests yet another late-mythological statuette of a diademed, nude Venus (Fig. 5)²². From the pits wherein most of these objects were found, moreover, we may safely conclude that the display of statuary at Chiragan broadly included the contemporary objects discussed here, together with antique sculptures: free-standing Idealplastik (including Roman-era replicas of Myron's Athena and the Aphrodite of Knidos), and imperial and private portrait busts of all ages.

¹⁹ Beckmann 2020.

²⁰ Balty – Cazes 2008 for these portraits a dynastic group with portraits of the emperor Maximian and his family; see also Beckmann 2022, 34–38 for the 4th c. date of Chiragan's portraits in Saint-Béat marble.

²¹ Stirling 2005, 49–62.

²² Capus 2019.

²³ Sites with only one to two sculptures are not included in this study, e.g. the villa of Moncrabeau, at which at least one portrait was found. For the site: Balmelle 2001, no. 31, 371–374.



5 Toulouse, Musée Saint-Raymond, inv. Ra 151–Ra 144: Late-mythological statuette of Venus from the villa of Chiragan, max. H. 77.5 cm

comes from the villa of La Garenne-Nérac, located roughly 20 km southwest of Aginnum (modern Agen). Excavations at the site began less than a decade after those at Chiragan. The campaigns at Nérac were also led by Du Mège, and began after reports of superficial finds like mosaic pavements and assorted marbles. The gallery-façade villa was only partially uncov-

ered, however, and the full extent of the site and its contents remain unknown²⁴. Some of the statues recovered are now missing, but from the limited archaeological reports that were produced it is possible to reconstruct: a small diademed female head, and two additional larger-than-life heads – either portraits or mythological statues; a hand holding a cup; and a bronze statuette of a goddess (Minerva?)²⁵. Several other finds are still extant, including a portrait of Marcus Aurelius found near the villa's entrance, and some late-mythological statuette groups²⁶. With respect to the latter, Stirling documents a headless statuette of a draped female figure, identified as a Venus-Victory type; a statuette base with a hoofed leg, a tree stump, and a human foot, possibly associated with a Pan-nymph group; and a leaping animal (a dog?) which may be associated with the former or yet another group²⁷. Since excavations at Nérac did not continue, the recovered sculptures from this site are important evidence for the villa's occupation through the 4th c. and possibly into the early 5th c.

Perhaps the least well-known site in this corpus is the villa of Petit-Corbin, located east of Bordeaux near Saint-Georges de Montagne. This site is home to two veritable icons of this late-mythological statuette genre: the so-called Diana of Bordeaux and a Venus Anadyomene statuette group²⁸. A villa was identified here in 1843, not far from the right bank of the Dordogne River. Its occupation through the 4th and perhaps into the 5th c. is based on the recovery of contemporary statuary, ceramic fragments, 4th c. bronze coins, and architectural fragments of column capitals and other veneers loosely dated to the 4th–5th c.²⁹. The villa was never excavated, but according to reports, fragmentary walls extended over an area of 10 ha³⁰.

Although more sculptures were found at Chiragan, the site at Saint-Georges is home to the largest quantity of late mythological statuettes in the region. Stirling reconstructs at least six distinct groups from the extant fragments; her definitive study of these finds (and this genre of sculpture) is such that only a brief review is necessary here. Both the celebrated Diana (Fig. 6) and the Venus are in excellent condition. Their late antique date is based on facial features that parallel chronologically secure portraits,

²⁴ Du Mège 1832–1833, 231–236; Balmelle 2001, no. 39, 390–393.

²⁵ Reported in Du Mège 1832–1833; Samazeuilh 1865, 451–452.

²⁶ This head is now in the Musée de Nérac, inv. no. 47.1.346. Its provenance is contested, see discussion in Fages 1995, 259 fig. 180. Most Roman-era finds in the Musée de Nérac come from either Nérac or the villa of Moncrabeau.

²⁷ Stirling 1997, 2005, 62–67; see also Braemer 1982 135–136 for the Venus-Victory statuette.

²⁸ For recent work on the site see Stirling 1996; Balmelle 2001, no. 33, 375. The sculptures are also discussed in Antmann 1904; Braemer 1982, 114–125; Stirling 2005, 33–37.

²⁹ Stirling 1996, 138–142 for concise synthesis of the non-sculptural late antique evidence.

³⁰ For the walls at Petit-Corbin: Antmann 1904, 75.



6 Bordeaux, Musée d'Aquitaine, inv.71.16.1: Late-mythological statuette »Diana of Bordeaux« from the villa of Petit-Corbin, max. H. 92 cm

sculptures, and sarcophagi (puffy eyelids, arched brows and facial contours), and other characteristics like the rubbery anatomy of figures, the heavy use of the drill, the high polish, a lack of attention to depth, the inclusion of subsidiary animals and/or landscape elements, and the use of molded bases³¹.

Beyond the Diana and Venus, there are four additional miniature heads – two female figures (goddesses?)³², and male heads identified as an Apollo

Musagetes and an Ares Borghese type. Numerous other fragments of late mythological groups appear in Stirling's publications, including a male torso in the style of Meleager, draped legs, an amor head, several animal fragments, tree branches, and one or two bases. But, like other sculpture assemblages in this region, there are finds beyond the late-mythological genre³³. A shield relief of a mythological scene with Minerva may also be late antique³⁴. A life-size Imperial-era marble male torso and child's foot are also reported, although the whereabouts of the former are unknown. Fragments of antique limestone sculptures include a head of Minerva and a Jupiter in triumph over a giant.

The three remaining villas in this study were excavated in the last century using modern methods, yet their excavations have provided comparatively little evidence about how sculptures might have been viewed during late antique occupation. The villa of Montmaurin is a case in point. The site was excavated from 1947–1961 under Georges Fouet³⁵. Although Fouet's excavations proceeded stratigraphically, and recent scholarship suggests the villa's occupation into the 5th c.³⁶, its sculptures were found in post-occupational contexts, with fragments dispersed throughout the site. Finds include three portraits and two late mythological statuettes. The portrait heads came to light in the early 20th c. as superficial finds. Two were sold on the antiquities market, which suggests their Imperial-era date given aesthetic tastes at the time³⁷. The third head, a bust portrait of a juvenile male dated to the 2nd c. (Fig. 7), remained in a private collection until it was attached to its foot, which was recovered in the course of Fouet's excavations of a small atrium, rebuilt in the final phase of renovations mid-4th c. terminus post quem³⁸. In addition to these portraits, a late-mythological Venus-Victory figure was found in the rear garden portico of the upper terrace, and fragments of Venus-Adonis group statuettes were strewn about this same garden portico

31 For the dating of late-mythological statuettes and characteristics of the genre: Stirling 2005, 91–110.

32 Although the female heads presumably belong to goddesses, one may have been a contemporary portrait since the woman wears a »Scheitelzopffrisur« hairstyle, which was the preferred style for female portraits in the Theodosian era: Schade 2005, 95–96.

33 I note that this site does not furnish secure evidence for a portrait (see Stirling 1996), although we must remember that the site was never explored systematically. See above n. 31 for a possible late antique female portrait.

34 Illustrated in Stirling 1996, fig. 19.

35 Fouet 1969.

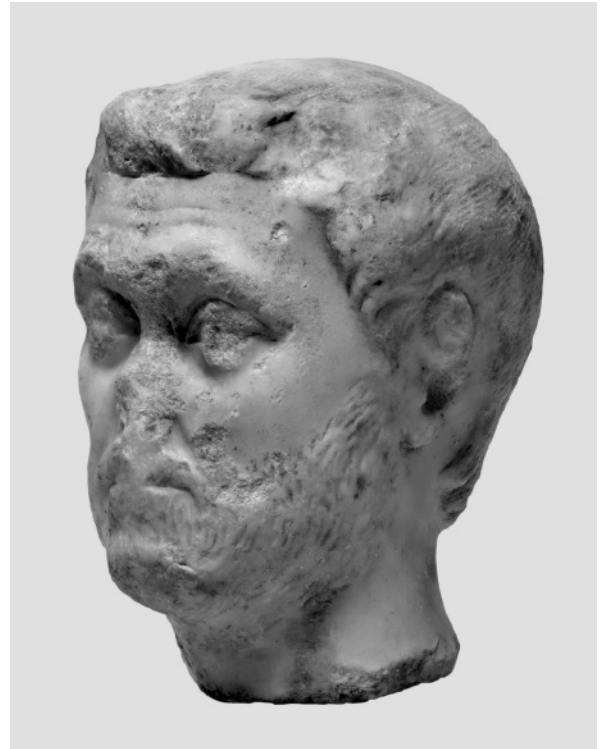
36 Fouet's chronology for occupation periods and phases of renovation at the villa were based almost exclusively on hard dates provided by numismatic evidence, see Labrousee, in: Fouet 1969, 335–381. Some of these coins, however, were found beneath mosaic pavements, which Balmelle rightly notes provides a terminus post quem rather than a precise date for the villa's renovation in the mid-4th c., discussion in 2001, no. 35, 379–385.

37 The early 20th c. amateur excavator and landowner of the site, Jean Miró, reported that these heads were fine quality works – a fully preserved bust of a bearded male, and another fragmentary portrait bust, see Fouet 1969, 186.

38 Fouet 1969, 186.



7 Montmaurin, Musée du site de Montmaurin: Portrait of a youth from the villa of Montmaurin, max. H. 52 cm



8 Séviac, Musée du site de Séviac: Male portrait from the villa of Séviac, max. H. 22 cm

and the baths³⁹. The emphasis on portraiture and late-mythological statuary at Montmaurin underscores what we have seen earlier, but I would also note the post-occupational context of these finds as significant.

Indeed, evidence of destruction and post-occupational recycling or reuse is also present at the villa of Séviac, located along the banks of the Baïse River, about 12 km south of ancient Elusa (modern Eauze), the probable capital of Aquitania III, or Novempopulania. This peristyle villa, excavated over the second half of the 20th c., is the subject of a forthcoming monograph directed by Briec Pages⁴⁰. This comprehensive study is poised to augment our understanding of both the villa's late antique sculptural assemblage and its occupation, which seems to have continued through the first half of the 5th c. With the imminent publication of this revised chronology and

a thorough study of its material culture forthcoming, discussion of the previously published marble finds is necessarily brief. Superficial finds include an Imperial-era torso of Hygeia, an over life-size limestone hand, and a colossal bronze toe (now missing)⁴¹. But most of the villa's extant sculptures – including two Imperial-era portrait busts, a fragment of a late antique philosopher portrait, and various fragments of late-mythological statuettes – were found piled in the central courtyard of the *pars urbana*⁴². Their presence attests to the acquisition of sculpture in the late 4th or early 5th c.⁴³. A male portrait head dated to the first quarter of the 5th c. may also provide a bookend for portrait commission and/or statuary display at the site (Fig. 8)⁴⁴. Curiously, this portrait was found buried beneath the mosaic floor of an apsidal hall with an elaborate mosaic pavement of fruit trees, dated stylistically to the second quarter of the 5th c.⁴⁵.

³⁹ Stirling 2005, 39–49 for full discussion. Braemer also attributed the fragments of the latter to a Venus-Adonis group: 1982, 138–139. For the archaeological context of these fragments: Fouet 1969, 91–93.

⁴⁰ Pages et al. (pers. comm.). For summaries of the site, see also Balmelle 2001, no. 38, 386–390.

⁴¹ The early finds are summarized in Lapart 1994.

⁴² The central court was uncovered fully in the 1970–1976 campaigns, see Aragon-Launet 1971, 1977; for the marble finds:

1971, 236. These fragments are subject of a study by Lea Stirling, in: Pages et al., forthcoming, but see also her summaries in 2005, 69–70.

⁴³ Stirling 2007, 308.

⁴⁴ LSA 1666. The head is the subject of a forthcoming catalogue publication by J.-Ch. Balty, in: Pages et al., forthcoming, but see also Braemer 1982, 139–141; Balmelle 2001, 229.

⁴⁵ This mosaic was brought to light in the 1974–1976 excavations in the apse of room no. 25 of the northeastern corner of the



9 Castelculier, Musée du site Villascopia: Late-mythological statuette of Minerva from the villa of Lamarque, max. H. 41 cm

The final site in this study, the villa of Lamarque at Castelculier, located about 4 km east of Aginnum, was not excavated until 1986 after a series of aerial surveys and sondages⁴⁶. Excavator Phillipe Jacques has documented six phases of construction from the mid-3rd c. into the later 4th or early 5th in the *pars urbana* and bath complex⁴⁷. A small but diverse assemblage of sculpture is known here. Superficial finds that predate the excavations and were recovered in agricultural work include a 1st c. male portrait, a female portrait, now lost, a headless draped bust, probably dating to the 2nd or 3rd c., and statuette of Minerva, recently dated to the late antique period by Stirling (Fig. 9)⁴⁸. Several others were found in the excavations: another antique portrait of Marcus Aurelius in a highly fragmentary state, and two private late antique male portraits interred near the villa's monumental entrance, one of which surely dates to the Theodosian era⁴⁹. Once again, the display of these portraits, and of sculpture at the villa more broadly, is difficult to reconstruct since the three sculptures with stratified contexts were recovered in levels dating to the later 5th or 6th c.⁵⁰.

Parallels and Similarities

From the assemblages of these six villas it is possible to make some general observations about sculpture in late antique Aquitania. First, it would seem that wealthy villa owners here appreciated, and even courted, extraordinary range within their sculpture collections. All six sites attest to Imperial-era sculptures in the same levels as late antique sculptures. At the five villas located in southern Aquitania, moreover, mythological sculpture is demonstrably joined by portraiture, and both genres are represented in several sizes and formats. Colossal, life-size and

small-scale free-standing mythological sculptures are known, and at Chiragan, there is also evidence for figural relief sculptures. The date for ongoing collection or acquisition of new sculptures in the later 4th c. or early years of the 5th c. is suggested by late mythological statuettes at all six sites, by the contemporary portraits from Lamarque, Chiragan and Séviac, and by the reliefs at Chiragan⁵¹.

Also significant is the fact that the villas with sculptural assemblages are among the largest in the region. Their sizable residential quarters cover more

peristyle: Aragon-Launet 1977, 322. For dating of the mosaic, see Balmelle 2001, 297–298. Beneath this mosaic a sondage revealed an earlier pavement, a mortar floor 90 cm below; hypocausts had been added to heat the room, and a portrait head dated to 400 was found at this level in the southern half of the apse, according to Aragon-Launet 1977, 323. See also Fages et al., forthcoming for the context of this find, and Beckmann 2022, 41–42 for the socio-historical motivations behind the portrait's burial.

⁴⁶ Early finds are reported in Boudon de Saint-Aman 1859, 58–59. 198–199. 211. 217–218. 241.

⁴⁷ For a summary of the recent excavations at the site, see Jacques 2006; Stéphanus 2009. See also Balmelle 2001, no. 14, 348–351.

⁴⁸ For the sculpture finds: Fages 1995, 185–195; Stirling 2005, 67–69.

⁴⁹ Portrait of Marcus Aurelius: Jacques 1994; late antique male portraits: Jacques 2006, 90, fig. 30; see also discussion in Beckmann 2022, 26–29.

⁵⁰ Jacques 2006, 89–90.

⁵¹ Suggested dates for Chiragan late antique portraits and reliefs range from the later 3rd through the turn of the 5th c., see n. 16–19.

than 5000 m² and are fashionably attired with apsidal reception halls, monumental entrances, and appended or stand-alone bath complexes, often lavishly paved in polychrome geometric or floral mosaics, or opus sectile pavements⁵². At the sites with excavated occupation chronologies (Montmaurin, Lamarque, and Séviac), structural and decorative renovations like these are documented throughout the 4th c. and into at least the first quarter of the 5th c. These dates square with Catherine Balmelle's broad chronology for the aggrandizement of the Aquitanian villa,

which seems to have occurred somewhat later than in other regions of the West⁵³. Using numismatic but also ceramic, sculptural, mosaic and architectural evidence, Balmelle proposes an initial wave of architectural renovations in the first half of the 4th c., and a second period of activity in the later 4th and/or early 5th c.⁵⁴. This second phase, according to Balmelle, witnesses the aggrandizement of bath complexes, together with decorative renovations throughout the *pars urbana* – mosaic or opus sectile pavements and, in some cases, the acquisition of new statuary.

Sculpture in Context: Post-Occupational Activity at Villas of Aquitania

Although similarities like the use of semi-circular courtyards and polychrome geometric mosaics have been interpreted as evidence of local koine⁵⁵, the composition of statuary assemblages in southwestern Gaul has received little consideration as a regional penchant. This is in part a consequence of the villa of Chiragan and its unmatched assemblage of more than 120 sculptures. But, although the sheer quantity of sculptures at Chiragan should not be disregarded, it is also true that scholarly synthesis of the site has suffered somewhat because of it⁵⁶. The villa is usually presented in an anomalous fashion that forces it to stand apart from others in the region. It is regularly identified as an imperial villa, despite a dearth of inscriptional or historic evidence for such claims⁵⁷.

Different conclusions about the site, however, emerge from an analysis that privileges the context of Chiragan's sculptures, together with evidence provided by the fragmentary assemblages from other

elite villas in the region. As previously mentioned, most of Chiragan's sculpture was found in a large pit that had been dug into a central courtyard of the *pars urbana* and was uncovered in the early 19th c. (Fig. 2). The material found in Du Mège's pit – sculptures from the 1st–late 4th or early 5th c., as well as charcoal and building materials – points to a post-occupational deposition following the cessation of elite occupation and the burning of the site. Some see this post-occupational collection as a means of clearing land for agricultural work in the post-antique period, while others believe that the marbles were amassed because they were destined for a lime kiln⁵⁸.

The latter explanation is supported by the findspots of sculpture at other sites. At the villa of Séviac, for example, most of the sculpture recovered in excavation was found heaped together in the center of the peristyle, presumably gathered from various rooms throughout the *pars urbana*. At the villa of Montmau-

52 Balmelle 2001, fig. 51; for mosaics and architectural trends, note the use of sigma-shaped courtyards (Balmelle 2001, 147–152; Bowes 2010, 95–97) and the attention given to bath complexes (Balmelle 2001, 178–201).

53 E. g. the late antique aggrandizement of villas in the Iberian Peninsula begins in the second half of the 3rd c., see discussion in Chavarria-Arnau 2007, 89–91.

54 Balmelle 2001, 115–118.

55 For the mosaics, see Balmelle 2001, 238–325; for sigma-shaped peristyles: 147–152.

56 N.B. Although Balmelle estimates that Chiragan's *pars urbana* – at 18,000 m² – is three times that of neighboring villas like Montmaurin (5800 m²) and Valentine (8400 m²), the complex is thought to have extended over 13 ha, which is actually smaller than Balmelle's estimate for the nearby villa of Montmaurin; mural enclosures there suggest an 18 ha site: 2001, 125. 367. 379.

57 The site was recently associated with the Tetrarchic emperor Maximian: Balty – Cazes 2008, 132–133. The only inscriptional evidence at Chiragan is a 2nd c. statue base with a fragmentary inscription to the genius of Gaius Aconius Taurus: CIL XIII 11007. Yet this cannot be taken as evidence for the gens Aconia, a senatorial family known in 4th c. Italy, as owners in the late antique period. For further discussion, see Bergmann 1999, 43; Eck 2000.

58 Joulin proposed that the villa's sculptures were simply cleared aside to make room for agricultural farming (1901, 160–161). Both he and Bergmann (1999, 27) think that the mélange of statuary and building materials negates identification of a pit for lime-burning, but for discussion of this possibility see Munro 2016, 60, who marks the collection act as only the first in the process of making lime from sculpture.

rin, larger marble statuary fragments were found near the entrance portico, while smaller fragments were recovered throughout the complex as though they had been strewn or intentionally fractured into smaller pieces that were easier to carry⁵⁹. Beth Munro's study of post-occupational economic activity at Roman villas has shown that sculptures tend to be collected in easily accessible areas of the residence, like the entrance portico at Montmaurin or a central peristyle at Séviac or Chiragan; this is usually the first step towards preparing marble for lime-burning⁶⁰.

No kiln was found at Séviac or Montmaurin, and yet, Munro has shown that kilns are rarely discovered at villa sites because the structures are difficult to identify, and frequently located beyond the walls of the *pars urbana* in zones that have not traditionally interested archaeologists⁶¹. In rural settings, however, it is significant that extant kilns are often associated with villas, and two are known in Aquitania. One was identified at the site of La Hillère, about 1 km downriver of Montmaurin along the Save⁶². It is possible that many of Montmaurin's sculptures ended up in this kiln. And at the villa of Lamarque, excavations of the final phase of activity at the end of the 5th or early 6th c. recovered evidence for a lime kiln built directly atop the baths⁶³. The marble fragments that were strewn throughout the site, together with the

kiln, signal the post-occupational destruction of marble objects. From this evidence, it seems logical to assume that villas like Lamarque, Montmaurin, and Séviac once held larger assemblages of sculpture.

This hypothesis also impacts our understanding of Chiragan. I have already shown that the typological and chronological makeup of the extant sculptures at the aforementioned sites parallel those from Chiragan. If these same villas once held larger collections of sculpture too, scholarship should recognize Chiragan as a participant in local dialogues about display and decorum, as opposed to an anomalous case. In this way, the site is the exception that proves the rule of heterogeneous statuary collecting well into Late Antiquity among villa owners in Aquitania.

Chiragan's participation in local elite culture, however, is not mutually exclusive with superior standing in the region. Balmelle has described Chiragan as the alpha site in the region by virtue of its size and its statuary assemblage⁶⁴. I stress that the discussion that follows does not prevent Chiragan from maintaining its exceptional status, but rather argues that the particular character of Chiragan's exceptionalism vis à vis sculpture was fostered by the local environment. That is, the villa played an active role, together with its neighbors, in establishing the collection of eclectic sculptures as a convention of its elite domini⁶⁵.

Regional Variations: The Aquitania Cluster in Comparison to the Rest of the West

This argument is further encouraged by a comparison of Aquitania's late antique sculpture assemblages, and sculpture finds known from other late antique villas in the western provinces. Among villas of Roman Britain, for example, statuary finds of any age are extremely uncommon⁶⁶. More than a hundred

late antique villas have been identified in southern Britain, but at present, only two furnish evidence for sculpture⁶⁷. A sort of disinterest in statuary seems possible from the popularity of figural mosaic floors among Romano-British domini, but it is also likely that access to sculpture was somewhat limited by the

⁵⁹ See also discussion in Munro 2016, 63–65.

⁶⁰ Munro 2016, 57–58, 63.

⁶¹ Moving marble was a costly process in the post-antique era that most avoided: Munro 2016, 66–67.

⁶² Fouet 1972, 83.

⁶³ Jacques 2006, 89–90.

⁶⁴ Balmelle 2001, no. 28, 367–370.

⁶⁵ Methodologically, this re-interpretation of Chiragan is encouraged by recent work on other exceptional late antique villas once presumed to be imperial estates like the Villa Casale at Piazz-

za Armerina in Sicily (Carandini et al. 1982; Wilson 1983). Its mosaic pavements are unparalleled in surface coverage but also, they reflect decorative preferences of Sicilian villas in Late Antiquity (Dunbabin 1999, 142–143).

⁶⁶ Scott 2000 for the late antique villas in Roman Britain, with emphasis on mosaic pavements and regional ateliers.

⁶⁷ These include the villa at Woodchester (Clarke 1982) and the villa at Lullinstone (Meates 1979). For recent synthesis see Scott 2000, 87–90, 100–101; see also discussion in Stirling 2005, 190–193.

region's distance from both decorative stone quarries and trade networks of the Mediterranean basin⁶⁸.

Yet the same cannot be said of Roman Sicily and its villas, given the island's enviable location. But in Sicily, as among Iberian villas and the suburban estates and domus of North Africa, archaeology attests to the dominance of contemporary figural mosaic pavements⁶⁹. Statuary finds of any age are infrequent; when marble sculptures are found, they are usually Imperial-era antiques⁷⁰.

The situation in Iberian villas is perhaps most illuminating⁷¹. Although there is more evidence for sculpture displays during late antique occupation than in the aforementioned regions, Iberian assemblages demonstrate little to no chronological range. That is, Iberian villas with late antique sculptures do not furnish evidence for Imperial-era sculptures, and vice versa⁷². At present, late antique sculptures have been identified at only two sites: the villa of Quinta das Longas near modern Elvas (Portugal), 100km from ancient Augusta Emerita, and Valdetorres de Jarama, ca. 25km northwest of Complutum (near modern-day Madrid)⁷³. Both sites have been placed in dialogue in recent years and connected to Stirling's work on Gallic villas⁷⁴, but it should be noted that they are regional anomalies in terms of their decorative choices. The mythological mosaics that are characteristic of late antique residences in Hispania are absent at both, and the distance between them (more than 500km) is not conducive to discussion of Iberian interest in contemporary sculpture at either the micro-regional or provincial level⁷⁵.

Interestingly, Imperial-era sculptures are found with greater frequency in the Peninsula's late antique residences. The best example of an antique sculpture collection comes from the villa of El Ruedo, where the conservation of Imperial-era statuary through the mid-4th c. is verified by excavation⁷⁶. But no late antique sculptures were found at El Ruedo⁷⁷, nor at other Iberian villas with Imperial-era sculptures. The chronologically varied collections that appear in southwestern Gaul are therefore absent from the excavated late antique residences in the Peninsula, just as they are from the villas clustered in Britain or Sicily. Nor does any immediate parallel emerge in the western provinces for the spatial clustering of finds, as it does in Aquitania⁷⁸.

Beyond these regional case studies for private sculpture displays, the popularity of figural mosaics in late antique villas of the West merits consideration. Contemporary mythological narratives, genre scenes, and even portraits are ubiquitous among the villas of Sicily, Britain, and the Iberian Peninsula, but in mosaic pavements as opposed to sculpture⁷⁹. Conversely, in Aquitania, villas are regularly paved in polychrome geometric or vegetal mosaics, but figural mosaics are incredibly rare⁸⁰. Rather, the extant evidence suggests the primacy of sculpture as a medium for figural art, which further distinguishes the decorative practices of the Aquitanian elite from those of other villa owners in the West⁸¹. The constellation of factors responsible for the sculpture finds in southwestern Gaul, therefore, warrants attention.

⁶⁸ For limestone quarries in southern Britain in the Imperial era: Blagg 1990.

⁶⁹ For late antique mosaics in Sicily and North Africa: Dunbabin 1999, 101–159. See also Wilson 1983 and Gentili 1999 for Piazza Armerina.

⁷⁰ E.g. for the half-dozen Imperial-era mythological statues from the Villa Casale at Piazza Armerina: Wilson 1983, 33; Gentili 1999, 11–28. See also discussion of late antique residences with antique sculptures in Stirling 2005, 173–178 (Italy and Sicily). 185–190 (North Africa).

⁷¹ A recent catalogue of Iberia's late antique villas identifies more than twelve dozen sites: Chavarría-Arnau 2007.

⁷² See also Stirling 2007 for a comparison of Iberian and Gallic collections, which underscores regional differences; Iberian villa owners seem to prefer mythological sculptures, and portraits are rare.

⁷³ For Valdetorres de Jarama, see Puerta et al. 1994; for Quinta das Longas, see Nogales Basarrate et al. 2004. The small number of sites with sculptures would suggest that Iberian owners had more limited access to sculpture in Late Antiquity, which itself merits greater attention.

⁷⁴ Stirling 2005, 178–185; Nogales Basarrate et al. 2004.

⁷⁵ Ripoll 2018 for a summary of decorative trends in the late antique residences of Hispania.

⁷⁶ Vaquerizo Gil – Carillo Díaz-Pines 1997.

⁷⁷ If late antique sculptures had been part of the collection, they, too, would likely have been heaped in the central pool of the villa's peristyle alongside the Imperial-era sculptures found by excavators. This deposition was probably for a lime-burning that did not take place because of the rurality of the site, see discussion in Munro 2016.

⁷⁸ N.B. In the Eastern Empire, late antique sculpture collections composed of both contemporary and antique objects are an urban phenomenon, e.g. the baths of Lausus, see Bassett 2000.

⁷⁹ For an overview, see Dunbabin 1999, 88–159.

⁸⁰ E.g. for the figural pavements at the villa of Saint-Rustice: Balmelle 2001, 301; for mosaics in Aquitania broadly: Balmelle 2001, 238–325.

⁸¹ Recent scholarship has drawn attention to the palatial estates of Aquitania as a unique and unexplained phenomenon in the late antique world, although statuary finds are rarely singled out in such discussions, e.g. Buffat 2018, 231–233; Cleary 2018, 53–59.

Environmental Factors: Geography and Geology

Although previous scholarship has emphasized the social and intellectual motivations behind private collections of sculpture in Late Antiquity, environmental influences on such displays have received less attention. With Aquitania, however, the geographic and geologic makeup of the region was instrumental in supporting the acquisition and/or commission of both imported and locally-made sculptures. Indeed, geography permitted greater access to imported sculptures than was enjoyed by other domini in the West. Topography and location facilitated commercial imports, among which were imported late antique sculptures.

Although only the isotopic analyses of Chiragan's marbles have been published, they attest to a high number of imported sculptures; most of the Imperial-era private and imperial portraits were made in marble from the Göktepe quarries in Asia Minor, as were the aforementioned late-mythological statuettes⁸². As far as Chiragan's Imperial-era sculptures are concerned, scholars are divided as to whether these objects entered the villa over many centuries, or at single moment in time as antiques in the late antique period⁸³. It is beyond the limits of this paper to entertain them as late antique acquisitions, although historical and archaeological evidence for the

transport of heirloom sculpture in Late Antiquity does not rule this out⁸⁴. Moreover, access to the imported sculpture industry in the 4th and 5th c. is suggested by contemporary finds – Chiragan's late-mythological statuettes are joined by many others in the region, and by contemporary portrait heads found at Séviac and Lamarque. Archeometric studies of this material will further discussion of their manufacture⁸⁵, but for the moment, we assume they originated in Eastern workshops⁸⁶.

The high number of imported late antique sculptures advises connections to maritime trade⁸⁷. As a case study, consider the small-scale late-mythological statuettes that cluster in Aquitania. This genre is rather well represented in the West in comparison to other types, and yet, finds are more common in places with immediate access to Mediterranean harbors, like Arles⁸⁸, Carthage⁸⁹, Ostia and Rome⁹⁰. Although southwestern Gaul's villas were located further inland, the rivers that fragmented and fed its countryside facilitated the transport of imports, connecting the region with harbors at Narbo Martius via a terrestrial route to Tolosa⁹¹. The Garonne River in particular, which flowed through Tolosa and onto Bordeaux, was navigable year-round, and provided a cost-effective route for Mediterranean merchandise

⁸² Attanasio et al. 2016, table 1; for the late-mythological pieces, nos. 32 (statuette of Dionysus), 37 (old fisherman statuette).

⁸³ According to Hannestad 1994, 129–133, Chiragan's imperial portraits may have been deaccessioned from a local cult site; Bergmann 2007 has argued for their acquisition over many generations. Both arguments, however, depend on the transport of marble blocks or, more likely (partially?) worked sculpture to southern Gaul in the Imperial period. This is attested by the physical evidence (the marbles themselves) but also by the evidence from shipwrecks; Russell 2013a, 350–354 has argued that the small ships found wrecked off the southern coast of France carrying 10–30 tons at maximum would have facilitated the transport of marble into the Gallic hinterland via the rivers.

⁸⁴ The phenomenon of heirloom sculpture transport in the late antique period is well-studied in Constantinople, e.g. Bassett 1991, 2004.

⁸⁵ E.g. analyses of the sculptural material from Séviac are forthcoming in: Fages et al.

⁸⁶ For archaeometric analyses, see the results of the studies of the late-mythological statuettes from Chiragan (Attanasio et al. 2016); analyses of the late-mythological finds and the late antique portrait from Séviac are also forthcoming in: Fages et al. Note, the only securely identified late antique workshop is located in Aphrodisias: Rockwell 1991; van Voorhis 2018. For late mythological sculptures made in the East: Erim – Roueché 1981 for the Aphrodisian origin of the Esquiline group; Attanasio et al. 2015 for the marble analyses; see also de Chaisemartin – Örgen 1984 for the Silahtarğa sculptures. For late-mythological statuettes and Eastern workshops broadly: Stirling 2005, 117–130; Gazda

1981, 160–167. For late antique portraits made in the East: Gehn 2012, 323–486 (catalogue of finds); contributions to Smith – Ward-Perkins 2016; for Aphrodisias: Smith 1999; Corinth: Brown 2019; Ephesus: Inan – Alföldi-Rosenbaum 1979. See also Russell 2013a, 354–356 for late antique stone cargoes and their association with the Eastern Mediterranean.

⁸⁷ For stone transport generally in the Imperial-era see Russell 2013b. See also Smith 1990 for the philosopher tondi of the Atrium house in Aphrodisias; Bergmann 1999, 45–47, 58–60 for other tondi associated with Aphrodisian workshops. For mythological sculptures: Erim – Roueché 1982 and Attanasio et al. 2015 for the Esquiline group and its connection to Aphrodisias; see also de Chaisemartin – Örgen 1984 for the Silahtarğa sculptures.

⁸⁸ Late mythological statuettes of a diademed female head and a dancing maenad were found here: Stirling 2005, 73–75. There is also evidence of Proconnesian and Carrara marble used in the city's late antique sarcophagi workshops: Gaggadis-Robin 1995.

⁸⁹ Gazda 1981.

⁹⁰ Although antique statues are more common than late-mythological statuettes: Stirling 2005, 169–173 for the Cupid-Psyche group and other antique finds from Ostia; Stirling 2005, 165–169 for Rome, where the dancing maenad in the Vatican is the only extant late antique statuette. For small-scale late-mythological finds in cities of the East, see also Stirling 2005, 199–219; 2008; Stirling – Jacobs 2018.

⁹¹ For discussion of river routes in Roman Aquitania: Sillières 1990. See also Braemer 1982, 1984a for marble commerce in the region and the importance of rivers.

well into Late Antiquity⁹². At the most basic level then, the high number of imported sculptures⁹³ found in Aquitanian villas is possible because of the region's fluvial routes⁹⁴.

These rivers, and the Garonne in particular, also played an integral role in the movement of stones quarried in the Pyrenees, namely, white marble from Saint-Béat and colored griottes from quarries near Campan⁹⁵. Some of this work supplied the necessary stone for architectural decoration in the region's villas; local marbles⁹⁶ from the Pyrenees appear in pavements, wall revetments, and in architecture as free-standing columns and capitals⁹⁷. White but also colored Pyrenean marbles are especially prevalent at villas located near the quarries, like Montmaurin⁹⁸ or the villa of Valentine (about 30 km east of Chiragan)⁹⁹. And, as previously mentioned, isotopic analyses confirm the use of Saint-Béat marble for Chiragan's late antique program of figural wall reliefs and free-standing portraits¹⁰⁰. Although the use of local marble for these objects in particular is usually interpreted as a consequence of necessity, it may also reflect an understanding of local stones as a source of

pride and economic potential, especially in Late Antiquity.

In fact, Balmelle has postulated a link between the export of marble quarried in the Pyrenees and the economic prosperity visible in Aquitania's late antique villas¹⁰¹. This argument is based on 4th c. laws preserved in the Codex Theodosianus that facilitate, even encourage, the private exploitation of marble, presumably to fill imperial-wide needs for stone¹⁰², as well as evidence for the continued use of Pyrenean quarries well into the 5th c.¹⁰³ Indeed, beyond their architectural use in local villas, Pyrenean marbles were used for statuary, as at Chiragan, and for late antique sarcophagi, a regional industry that flourished in the 4th and 5th centuries¹⁰⁴. Stones were also exported beyond the region for use in civic and sacred architecture, as far east as Constantinople¹⁰⁵.

Although it is difficult to securely document the increased exportation of Pyrenean marble in Late Antiquity from this evidence¹⁰⁶, literary references are further suggestive. A letter of Sidonius, for example, includes an ekphrastic poem about the Cathedral at Lugdunum, in which the author celebrates multi-

⁹² Sillières notes the cost-effectiveness of riverine transport in Late Antiquity in a comparison of the prices for chariot vs. riverine transport listed in the Diocletianic Edit of Prices: 1990, 431.

⁹³ Beyond sculptures, foreign marble was imported for architectural decoration (revetments, pavements, etc.) in many late antique villas, especially those that cluster in the river valleys of central Aquitania around Aginnum and Elusa. Red and green porphyry fragments, and white and rose-colored columns were found at the villa of Lamarque (Boudon de Saint-Amans 1895, 58–59; Jacques 2006, 91); a green marble column and fragments of red, grey, and green marble plaques are documented at Séviac (Aragon-Launet 1977); an exquisite opus sectile pavement of green, red, white, gray, and violet-blue marble was found in the stand-alone bath complex excavated at the villa of Nérac (Balmelle 2001, 354–357 no. 21).

⁹⁴ Fluvial routes were also likely used for the fragmentary small-scale late-mythological female head now in Bordeaux, which Stirling 2005, 73 associates with a nearby villa. Note also that the late-mythological statuettes known in Iberia are found at villas located near rivers that ultimately connect to the sea: Quinta das Longas along the Chaves River, which flowed even in the dry season and eventually fed into the Guadiana; and Valdetorres de Jarama, located on the eastern bank of the Jarama River, which connected to the Tejo.

⁹⁵ For the fine-grained white marbles quarried at Saint-Béat: Braemer 1984b; Alvarez Pérez et al. 1995. For the mauve and green griottes quarried near Campan: Braemer 1984b; Bedon 1984, 66.

⁹⁶ I use the word »marble« here as the Romans used *marmor* to refer to the decorative stones that were highly valued in architecture and sculpture; marble here does not refer to the geologic properties of the stone (as many colored stones dubbed *marmora* by the Romans are geologically not marbles but granites or limestone).

⁹⁷ Braemer 1982, 104–110; 1984b; Cabanot 1995; Balmelle 2001, 206–222.

⁹⁸ At Montmaurin, Pyrenean marble was extensively used in late antique renovations of the baths and the *pars urbana*, see discussion in Sablayrolles – Beyrie 2006 no. 385, 213.

⁹⁹ At Valentine, over 88% of recovered architectural marble fragments are grey and white marbles from the Pyrenees. The other 12% are colored marbles, but most are sourced locally, see Sablayrolles – Fabre 2002. This is not to say, however, that villas farther north did not make use of Pyrenean marble, e.g. for a column capital in local marble from Petit-Corbin, see Braemer 1982, fig. 3.

¹⁰⁰ For the sculptures: Attanasio et al. 2016, table 1. Pyrenean marble had previously been suggested by Hannestad 1994, 137 and Bergmann 1995.

¹⁰¹ Balmelle 2001, 63–64. 68–71. Balmelle builds on previous work that discourages synthesis of the Pyrenean quarries as imperial, e.g. Sablayrolles – Fabre 1995, 144–156. See also Russell's work (2013b), which has reoriented economic conversations around stones broadly to include discussion of non-imperial quarries.

¹⁰² CTh. 10.19 1–2. 8. 10–11. 13–14.

¹⁰³ Both Balmelle (2001, 63–71) and Cleary (2008, 115–119) associate the *floruit* of Pyrenean marble with the late antique period.

¹⁰⁴ Boube 1984; Immerzeel 1995.

¹⁰⁵ For architectural stones, see Braemer 1986, 296 for colored griottes sourced in the Pyrenees (e.g. from Campan) and exported as far east as Constantinople in Late Antiquity; see also Pensabene 1992, 92 for the export of white marbles from Saint-Béat imported in the Byzantine era.

¹⁰⁶ See comments in Fabre – Sablayrolles 1995, 137. It is generally accepted that in the High Empire, with the exception of colored stones (Braemer 1986, 296), Pyrenean marble was rarely exported beyond Gaul and the NW Iberian Peninsula: Braemer 1986, 301. 317; Russell 2013b, 158–161. For Pyrenean stones in the northwestern Iberia, see discussion and a summary of bibliography in Cleary 2008, 102–104. 113–115.

ple colonnades made from Aquitanian marble¹⁰⁷. A 6th c. ekphrasis of Paul the Silentiary, moreover, notes white-veined black marble sourced from the Pyrenees in an opus sectile installation added to Hagia Sophia during the Justinian reconstruction¹⁰⁸. It is tempting to read these texts as evidence for the late antique boom of Pyrenean quarries, since the same stones are largely absent from Imperial-era literature, even in historical discussions of *marmora*¹⁰⁹.

But whether the extra-regional export of Pyrenean marble rose dramatically in Late Antiquity or not, Aquitania's role as a producer in marble networks is

significant. Marble was key to the region's development and identity, well into Late Antiquity. This much is clear in a 4th c. letter of Ausonius, in which the region's native son bestows the epithet *marmoreus* on the Pyrenees: *marmoream Pyrenen*¹¹⁰. This signals a region famous for its marble, perfectly suited for private elite residences bedecked in marble pavements, wall treatments, and three-dimensional sculptures¹¹¹. In other words, sculpture as a convention of elite landowners is correlate with the region's reputation throughout the Empire as a source of decorative stones.

Socio-political Factors: Scarcity of Sculpture and a Surplus Elite

This discussion of marble imports and exports, together with the geographic and geological character of Aquitania, helps reconcile certain aspects of the peculiar phenomenon of sculpture collections here, but those same collections cannot and should not be disconnected from broader intellectual and socio-political concerns of the late antique era, which actively encouraged elite landowners in this particular corner of the Empire to collect and display marble sculpture. By way of conclusion, this final section examines sculpture as an elite possession in a period that witnessed not only the growing scarcity of these objects, but the burgeoning of the elite class.

Previous scholarship has explored various social motivations for the display of certain types of sculpture found in this region's villas: the mythological statuettes are understood as advertisements of *paideia*¹¹²; private portraits have been interpreted as visual testaments to family heritage and legacy¹¹³; and sculpted objects in general are loosely associated with elite practices fostered by court culture in the East, again because of documented production of statuary in this half of the late Empire. Together,

these arguments – all of which have merit – highlight sculpture's association with the Empire's elite class, as though owning and displaying sculpture was a prerogative of the elite. And yet, the composition of that social group has received little attention; we tacitly assume that Late Antiquity's elite were a homogenous bunch, especially in studies of the material culture associated with them.

Yet recent historical scholarship has drawn attention to the exponential growth of the elite class in the later 3rd and 4th centuries; numerically, sources attest to 4,000 individuals with senatorial status in each half of the Empire by the later 4th c.¹¹⁴. And yet, it must be noted that relatively few of these senators had inherited this status. Rather, many were granted this honor after serving in bureaucratic posts created by Diocletian, Constantine, and their successors, which dramatically changed the social makeup of the elite class. Peter Heather and others have further demonstrated that it was the Empire's provincial elite who joined the senatorial ranks; these men were called to reach beyond the social borders their ancestors had known, encouraged to abandon local careers to fill

¹⁰⁷ Sid. ep. 2. 10. 16–21: *huic est porticus applicata triplex / fulmentis Aquitanicis superba / ad cuius specimen remotiora / claudunt atria porticus secundae / et campum medium procul locatas / vestit saxea silva per columnas*.

¹⁰⁸ Paul the Silentiary, Descr. S. Sophiae 637–639: ὅσσα τε Κελτικὴ ἀνείχε βαθυκρύσταλλος ἐρίπνη / χρωτὶ μέλαν στίλβοντι πολὺ γλαγὸς ἀμφιβαλοῦσα / ἐκχυτον, ἥ κε τύχησιν, ἀλώμενον ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα. This is surely the black marble quarried near Aubert, which is streaked with white veins, see Fabre – Sablayrolles 1995, n. 10.

¹⁰⁹ Plin. nat. 36 on stones does not discuss quarries in Gaul.

¹¹⁰ Aus. ep. 24, 79; see Green 1991, 229.

¹¹¹ See also arguments in Cleary 2008, 102–115 for marble use in the Imperial-era *Convenae* near the quarries, esp. the discussion of local products like votive altars and cinerary caskets.

¹¹² Stirling 2005.

¹¹³ Beckmann 2022.

¹¹⁴ See Heather 1997 for figures; for recent work see also Kulikowski 2015; Weisweiler 2015.

new bureaucratic posts. The growing number of administrative positions in the 4th c. was such that wealthy provincial elites were promoted to fill them; this, in turn, allowed some individuals with less distinguished backgrounds to rise beyond their humbler origins¹¹⁵.

The exponential growth of elite class, I argue, should be factored into our understanding of peer polity interactions among the domini of late antique villas. The horizontal expansion of the elite blurred distinctions of family lineage, landed wealth, and aristocratic status. In this social environment, new titles and material status symbols had to be generated to differentiate degrees of ›elite‹¹¹⁶. And in Aquitania, the elite turned to marble displays in their private residences.

Interestingly, Balmelle's catalogue of late antique elite villas documented 64 sites, but marble sculpture collections can be securely documented at only about

10% of them at present. The villas associated with antique and contemporary sculptures, moreover, tend to be the largest estates with the most luxurious material culture profiles: Montmaurin at 18 ha, Chiragan at 16 ha, Saint-Georges de Montagne at 10 ha. We might therefore see sculpture collections as one of the region's recourses to the expansion and diversification of the Roman elite. In Aquitania, marble sculptures were ideal vehicles for projecting seigneurial status (whether real or imagined) – because of the objects' ideological associations with power and tradition¹¹⁷, but also because these objects were rare and difficult to procure in the West more broadly. This highly traditional yet increasingly illusive medium of art provided material reassurance of social stability amidst the societal evolutions of the late antique world, helping Aquitanian domini distinguish themselves from lesser peers who rose up alongside them.

Abstract

Late Roman villas in Aquitania are notable for their sculpture assemblages: mythological statuettes, contemporary portraits, and figural reliefs dating to the late antique period have been found alongside Imperial-era Idealplastik and portraits. And yet, the eclectic character of these assemblages and their curious rural clustering is rarely treated as a distinct variation of the late antique statuary habit. This piece surveys the finds in Aquitania, and compares them to others recovered in domestic contexts of the late Ro-

man West. It then explores the constellation of factors responsible for the finds in southwestern Gaul. Villa owners here, it is argued, enjoyed special access to marble in Late Antiquity by virtue of the region's geographic location and geologic character. This, together with the growing scarcity of sculpture throughout the Empire, and the burgeoning of the elite class, prompted Aquitanian landowners to distinguish themselves by means of marble sculpture.

115 Heather draws attention to a letter of Constantius II to the Constantinopolitan Senate in 355 recommending Themistius, whose virtues provide a rubric for the ideal late antique senator: movable wealth, land, distinction by office-holding, and education (Heather 1997, 188. 196–198).

116 The material record does indeed reflect this, e. g. discussion of honorific titles and revolutionary costumes among the late antique portrait statues of Aphrodisias: Smith 1999.

117 Previous scholarship has explored this idea primarily at the Imperial level with the use of antique sculpture by the Emperor Constantine, e. g. Bassett 1996 and 2004; Elsner 2000. For discussion of late antique portraits and the portrait medium as antique, see also Beckmann 2022.

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Illustration credits

Fig. 1 Rachel Wood, basemap by Eric Gaba

Fig. 2 Rachel Wood, after Joulin 1901

Fig. 3–5 Daniel Martin, Musée Saint-Raymond, Toulouse

Fig. 6 Hugo Maertens, Mairie de Bordeaux, Musée d'Aquitaine

Fig. 7 Pascal Lemaître, Centre des monuments nationaux

Fig. 8 Guy Laborde, Abbaye de Flaran pour le site de Séviac

Fig. 9 Sarah Beckmann

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