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## Officers and Gentlemen

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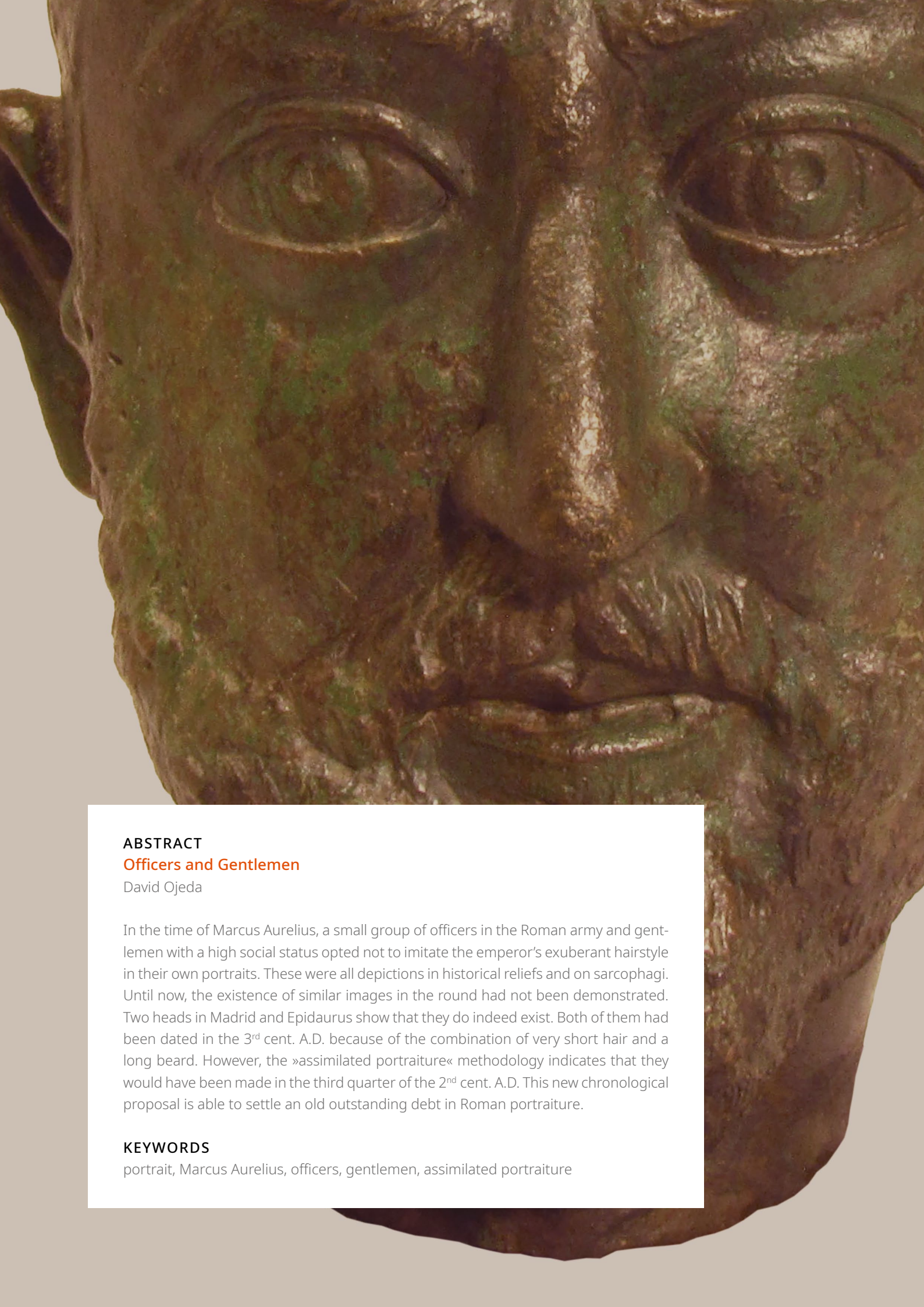
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## ABSTRACT

### Officers and Gentlemen

David Ojeda

In the time of Marcus Aurelius, a small group of officers in the Roman army and gentlemen with a high social status opted not to imitate the emperor's exuberant hairstyle in their own portraits. These were all depictions in historical reliefs and on sarcophagi. Until now, the existence of similar images in the round had not been demonstrated. Two heads in Madrid and Epidaurus show that they do indeed exist. Both of them had been dated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. A.D. because of the combination of very short hair and a long beard. However, the »assimilated portraiture« methodology indicates that they would have been made in the third quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. A.D. This new chronological proposal is able to settle an old outstanding debt in Roman portraiture.

## KEYWORDS

portrait, Marcus Aurelius, officers, gentlemen, assimilated portraiture

# Officers and Gentlemen

<sup>1</sup> In the time of Marcus Aurelius, many of the Empire's inhabitants were portrayed with a beard and an unmistakable hairstyle: a mass of bulky curly hair very similar to that represented on the princes' official portraits<sup>1</sup>. Surprisingly, in the same historical period, some men decided to diverge from that iconographic trend and were shown with a beard but with unusually short hair<sup>2</sup>. The few known cases of that anachronistic fashion were individualised in the 1970s and 80s by K. Fittschen and M. Bergmann. They were the following figures<sup>3</sup>:

- Ti. Claudius Pompeianus. Officer in the Roman army and Marcus Aurelius's son-in-law. Historical relief. Rome, Capitoline Museums. Inv. MC 0807<sup>4</sup>.
- Unknown man. Officer in the Roman army and urban praetor<sup>5</sup>. Sarcophagus. St Petersburg, Hermitage. Inv. A 433<sup>6</sup>.
- Unknown man. Magistrate in Rome<sup>7</sup>. Sarcophagus. Rome, San Giovanni in Laterano. Inv. 221<sup>8</sup>.
- Unknown man. Member of Marcus Aurelius's entourage. Historical relief. Rome, Arch of Constantine<sup>9</sup>. Not inventoried.

<sup>1</sup> Examples are: Fittschen et al. 2010, 116 no. 115 fig. 143; Fittschen 2021a, 46 f. no. 23 fig. 24; 54 f. no. 27 fig. 25. For Marcus Aurelius's portraits, see most recently: Niederhuber 2022, 60–75; Fittschen 2025, 231–235.

<sup>2</sup> For private portraits (see infra n. 13) with short hair in Marcus Aurelius's time: Fittschen 1971, 117; Fittschen 1980, 114; Bergmann 1982, 145–147; Reinsberg 2006, 44; Smith – Niederhuber 2023, 91. The variety of hairstyles in Marcus Aurelius's reign is similar to that shown for Hadrian's time by Fittschen 1992/1993. In addition to portraits with masses of bulky curly hair (see supra n. 1) and those with very short hair studied here, there are examples of hair in the 'Trajan-style'. See, e.g., La Rocca 1986, 40 fig. 41, 1; Reinsberg 2006, 202 no. 33 figs. 1, 2 and 4, 1. 3–4. 6. For this last case: Fittschen 1971, 117 n. 77.

<sup>3</sup> I have not included the three examples in Bergmann 1982, 145 nn. 23, 25: the hair of the officers on the sarcophagi in Sicily (Tusa 1995, 76 f. no. 77 fig. 123) and Pisa (Reinsberg 2006, 209 no. 58 fig. 24, 5, 6) is not as short as in these four cases. The officer on the Column of Marcus Aurelius appears to have been bald (Coarelli 2008, 176 fig. 32).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., La Rocca 1986, 40 fig. 37; with detailed photographs in fig. 47. It was identified as one of the portraits in Marcus Aurelius's time with a beard and short hair by Fittschen 1980, 113 n. 39 and 114 n. 48. For the portraits of Pompeianus, see the summary in Fittschen 2013, 167.

<sup>5</sup> For the man's profession: Reinsberg 2006, 118–123.

<sup>6</sup> Reinsberg 2006, 232 f. no. 137 fig. 57, 2; with detailed photographs in fig. 60, 5, 6. It was identified as one of the portraits in Marcus Aurelius's time with a beard and short hair by Fittschen 1971, 117 n. 77.

<sup>7</sup> The presence of Fortuna and Honos on the left of the sarcophagus is the main justification for identifying this gentleman as a Roman magistrate. For the reasoning: Reinsberg 2006, 126–129.

<sup>8</sup> Reinsberg 2006, 224 f. no. 113 fig. 65, 1; with detailed photographs in figs. 64, 8, 9 and 66, 3, 6. It was identified as one of the portraits in Marcus Aurelius's time with a beard and short hair by Fittschen 1971, 117.

<sup>9</sup> Scott Ryberg 1967, 34, 37 fig. 25. It was identified as one of the portraits in Marcus Aurelius's time with a beard and short hair by Bergmann 1982, 146 n. 41.

2 These portraits share two curious features. First, they only represent officers in the Roman army or gentlemen with a high social standing; and second, they are all reliefs. Nobody has yet found similar images in the round. This absence is an old unsolved problem in the study of Roman portraiture. It was noted by Fittschen in 1980 and its cause was described thus: »Portraits in the round in that time [reign of Marcus Aurelius] with that hair style [very short hair] have not been identified so far, possibly because they are difficult to differentiate from middle Severan portraits on account of the hair«<sup>10</sup>. Two Roman heads in Madrid and Epidauros can fill this gap.

3 A bronze head of a man is on display in the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid (Fig. 1. 2. 3. 4). Unfortunately, there is no information about its provenance<sup>11</sup>. Its inventory number is 2009/151/1. It is 32 cm high and measures 27 cm from the chin to the top of the head<sup>12</sup>. It represents an adult male. As no replicas of it are known, he cannot have been a member of the imperial family. It must therefore be a private portrait<sup>13</sup>. His hair is very short and his beard is trimmed so that it is short on his cheeks and increasingly long towards his chin. It finishes in a point, which gives a certain triangular shape to his physiognomy. His wrinkled forehead, thick eyebrows, and wide-open eyes endow the figure with great expressiveness. The artist marked the iris and pupil with two concentric circles. His ears are large and stick out somewhat, as can clearly be appreciated in the photograph of the back of the head.

4 As far as I know, this portrait has only been published once<sup>14</sup>. This is a brief comment that suggests it was made in the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> cent. A.D. This proposal is based on three reasons: his beard copies that of Septimius Severus; the way of working the locks of hair most resembles the portraits of Caracalla; and his short hair contrasts with the voluminous styles in the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. A.D. However, I believe that none of those reasons can guarantee a date for the portrait in about A.D. 250, for the following considerations:

1. No representations of Septimius Severus with a beard finishing in a point are known. His four types of portraits show very different beards<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, that iconographic detail could never determine the age of the Madrid bronze. Its use is attested in Roman portraiture for over 300 years<sup>16</sup>.
2. Neither is the way of shaping the locks of hair in the Madrid head a reliable argument to establish its chronology. They are poorly preserved and it is difficult to imagine their original form. In my opinion, the intention of the artist is most clearly seen in the left profile, between the top of the ear and the temple. There, the hair seems to be depicted with *a-penna-Technik*<sup>17</sup>. This is a technique in which the locks of hair look like feathers; they overlie each other like scales and are clearly differen-

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10 Fittschen 1980, 114 n. 48. For some examples of Severan portraits with short hair and beard: Meischner 1984, 321 fig. 26; 337 figs. 32. 35. 36; Fittschen – Zanker 1985, 112 f. no. 95 fig. 117; 126 f. no. 106 fig. 130.

11 The Madrid bronze may be quite an old find. The lower edge of the neck is smooth and perfectly circular. This might mean that the head was restored in the modern age to be placed on some kind of support. For similar processes, see, e.g., Lahusen – Formigli 2001, 181–183 no. 109; 292 f. no. 182.

12 For the importance of the latter measurement in the study of Roman portraits: Fittschen 2018, 113.

13 Roman portraits can be divided into two groups. On one hand, those of members of the different imperial families; on the other, the remaining likenesses, which are usually grouped under the name of private portraits or portraits of unknown persons. For this question, see the summaries in Fittschen 2010, 235 f.; Fittschen 2015, 52 f. For the term »private person«, see also Fejfer 2008, 16 f.

14 Ruiz-Nicoli 2009, 12 with illustration. The first edition of the same catalogue (published in 2008) does not mention the head.

15 For the beards in Types I, II, and III, see, e.g., Balty – Cazes 2020, 86–116 nos. 1–3 with illustrations. For the beards in Type IV, see, e.g., Raeder 2000, 151–153 no. 50 figs. 64. 65.

16 For an example in the time of Hadrian: Fittschen et al. 2010, 96 no. 90 fig. 108. For an example in the Severan period: Fittschen 2021a, 75–77 no. 42 figs. 44. 45. For some examples in late antiquity: Kovacs 2014, 281 f. no. B89 fig. 49, 4; 277 no. B66 fig. 50, 1; 283 f. no. B97 fig. 81, 4.

17 The technique is unusual in bronze portraits, but has been identified in a few cases. See, e.g., Lahusen – Formigli 2001, 275–278 no. 172 and 284–286 no. 178 (both with illustrations).



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Fig. 1: Madrid, National Archaeological Museum. Inv. 2009/151/1. Private portrait, front

Fig. 2: Madrid, National Archaeological Museum. Inv. 2009/151/1. Private portrait, back

Fig. 3: Madrid, National Archaeological Museum. Inv. 2009/151/1. Private portrait, right side

Fig. 4: Madrid, National Archaeological Museum. Inv. 2009/151/1. Private portrait, left side

tiated from each other<sup>18</sup>. Portraits in which the hair is represented in that way are not exclusively dated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. A.D. Some are documented much earlier. One of the first preserved examples is a man depicted on the Arch of Trajan in Benevento<sup>19</sup>.

3. The short hair close to the man's head cannot be used to prove a date in the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. A.D. for the Madrid bronze. Portraits with a similar hair style dated in an earlier time are not unusual. It suffices to cite the bust of an unknown individual from the time of Hadrian found in the villa of Herodes Atticus at Eva/Loukou in Kynouria<sup>20</sup> or the portraits of Commodus of Type VIII<sup>21</sup>.



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Fig. 5: Paris, Louvre Museum. Inv. Ma 1161. Portrait of Marcus Aurelius, Type III

5 Since it is impossible to date the sculpture based on the three previous criteria, it is necessary to find other ways to determine its age. It has long been noted that many private portraits imitate those of the contemporary emperors. This phenomenon is known as »assimilated portraiture« (*Bildnisangleichung*)<sup>22</sup> and is usually a reliable dating method. The person represented in the Madrid bronze displays an extraordinary resemblance to the portraits of Marcus Aurelius of Type III, whose prototype was created in about A.D. 160<sup>23</sup>. A portrait of the emperor in the Louvre<sup>24</sup> looks rather similar (Fig. 5). The gaze in his eyes and the form of the beard are two aspects shared by both figures. If this parallel is accepted, the head in the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid must also have been made in the third quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. A.D.

6 A portrait in the Archaeological Museum of Epidaurus (Fig. 6. 7. 8. 9) poses a similar problem to that of the Madrid bronze. It was found in 1892 in the proximity of »Building Φ« at Epidaurus<sup>25</sup>. Its inventory number is ME21. It is 29.5 cm high but unfortunately I do not have the chin-top of the head measurement. It represents an adult male. Once again, the lack of replicas means that it must be the likeness of a private person. The most notable damage is the missing nose, some small fractures near the eyes, the loss of part of the ears and the break on the

- 18 For an example of this sculpting technique and a description of its formal aspect: Fittschen – Zanker 1985, 117–121 no. 99 fig. 122.
- 19 Goette 2020/2021, 57 fig. 35, 2. For hair represented with the *a-penna-Technik* in the Trajanic period: Fittschen 2021b, 10 n. 56. For the use of *a-penna-Technik* in the time of Hadrian: Fittschen 1992/1993, 470. The *a-penna-Technik* is also seen on the back of a Hadrianic portrait found in Antequera: Rodríguez et al. 2016, 473–475 figs. 1. 2. For the most usual dates of this way of depicting hair: Fittschen – Zanker 1985, 118; Fittschen et al. 2010, 147; Fittschen 2022a, 315 n. 116; Ojeda 2023, 565. I have not found any good images of it, but the use of the *a-penna-Technik* has been noted on a bust from the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> cent. A.D. found in Balçova: Kovacs 2014, 144 figs. 70, 4; 71, 4.
- 20 Spyropoulos 2006, 119 fig. 26. For its date: Fittschen 2021b, 10 f. fig. 1.
- 21 Smith – Niederhuber 2023, 90 nos. 92. 93 fig. 84.
- 22 For this phenomenon in Roman portraiture and its application: Fittschen 2010, 236 f.; Fittschen 2015, 65. For the limits of this methodology, see the summaries and examples in Fittschen 2010, 238 f. and Fittschen 2015, 67. See also Fejfer 2008, 270–279. For the term »period face« (*Zeitgesicht*) and its limited usefulness for establishing the dates of Roman portraits, see: Fittschen 2010, 237; Fittschen 2015, 65.
- 23 For the date of the portraits of Marcus Aurelius of Type III, see most recently Knoll – Vorster 2013, 289 and Niederhuber 2022, 72 f.
- 24 de Kersauson 1996, 226 f. no. 99 with illustrations. See most recently Niederhuber 2022, 98 no. 59 fig. 255. A portrait of Marcus Aurelius of Type III in the Vatican Museums is also very similar: Wegner 1939, 197 fig. 21. See most recently Niederhuber 2022, 97 no. 29 fig. 252.
- 25 For the »Building Φ« and the possible connection of Portrait ME21 with that place: Katakis 2002, 306 f.

right side of the moustache. His hair is very short and his beard quite long. It covers all the area below his lower lip and practically reaches the start of his neck. While the hair on the top of his head is stuck closely together, the hair in his beard is much more separate. This is shown by the channels that the sculptor opened between the strands with a chisel. The moustache was not trimmed; it clearly hangs over the upper lip and even touches the lower lip. The points at its ends are arched and form right angles<sup>26</sup>. The iris is represented by an incised semi-circle and the pupil by a bean-shaped motif. A slightly wrinkled brow gives the final touch to the man's physiognomy.

7 I am only aware of two studies of this head. In both of them, it was dated in the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. A.D.<sup>27</sup>. This chronology is based on a very similar argument to the one used in the case of the bronze head in the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid: the combination of short hair and long beard has been interpreted as a typically Severan iconographic fashion<sup>28</sup>. This claim is not false<sup>29</sup>, but we now know that it should be nuanced as similar portraits were made in the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. A.D.<sup>30</sup>.

8 »Assimilated portraiture« can again solve the chronological problem. The Greek head shows a clear relationship with portraits of Marcus Aurelius of Type IV. Very similar physiognomic features can be seen in two heads of the princeps in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek<sup>31</sup> (Fig. 10) and in the Capitoline Museums<sup>32</sup> (Fig. 11). Another two heads in Vienna Museum of Art History<sup>33</sup> display almost identical beards (Fig. 12. 13). The similarities are not limited to the shape of the beard and the way of sculpting it. The long moustache which hangs over the upper lip with its ends turned up in right angles at the corner of the mouth is practically identical in the ruler and his subject. The form of the beard between the lower lip and the chin, without leaving any skin free, is another obvious coincidence between them. Marcus Aurelius's Type IV was created in about A.D. 160–170<sup>34</sup>. Owing to these resemblances, a similar age is the most likely option for the head from Epidaurus.

9 No epigraphic sources are available to determine the identity of the men represented by the heads in Madrid and Epidaurus. Only their portraits allow a partial approach to their identification. They must have been officers in Marcus Aurelius's army, gentlemen with a high social status, or both things. Their short hair and their beards leave few doubts in that regard. To date, those are the only options that have been documented for the biographies of males in the middle of the Antoninian period depicted with this infrequent iconographic fashion<sup>35</sup>. Whoever they were, these two men re-emphasise an old axiom in Archaeology and Classical Art: the combination of very short hair and a beard cannot be used as reliable evidence to refute the date of a Roman portrait in the third quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. A.D. Fittschen and Bergmann discovered that more than 40 years ago<sup>36</sup>. We should not forget it.

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26 For similar forms of the ends of moustaches in Roman portraiture: Fittschen 2022b, 282 f.

27 Katakis 2002, 99 f. no. 103; 180. 274. 306 f. 323. 326 fig. 111; Katakis 2023, 53. 59 fig. 6.

28 See particularly Katakis 2002, 180.

29 See supra n. 10.

30 See supra nn. 9. 21.

31 Johansen 1995, 198 f. no. 81 with illustrations.

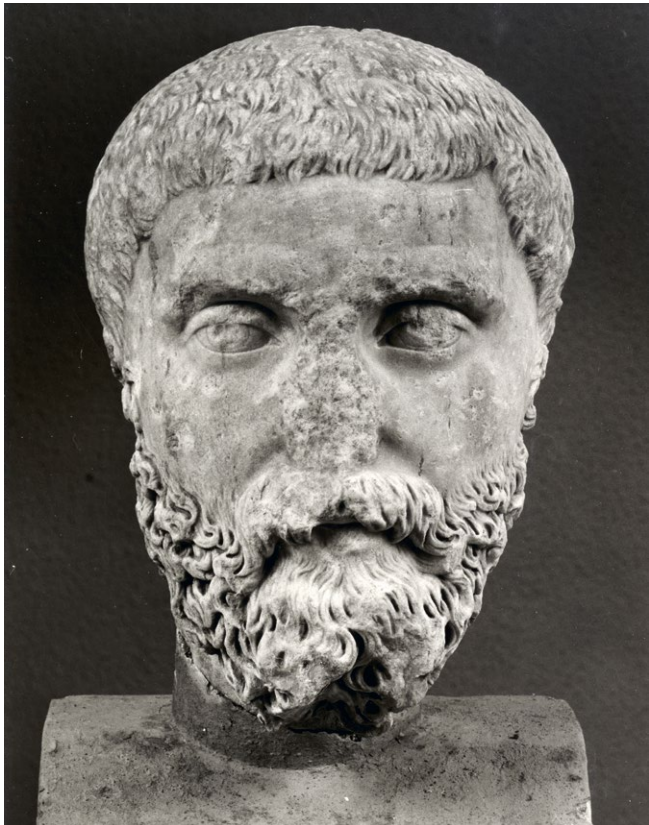
32 Fittschen – Zanker 1985, 76 f. no. 69 fig. 81.

33 Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Antikensammlung, Inv. I 13, <https://www.khm.at/kunstwerke/kaiser-marc-aurel-50354> and Inv. I 65, <https://www.khm.at/kunstwerke/kaiser-marc-aurel-51671>. See most recently Niederhuber 2022, 99 nos. 28. 29.

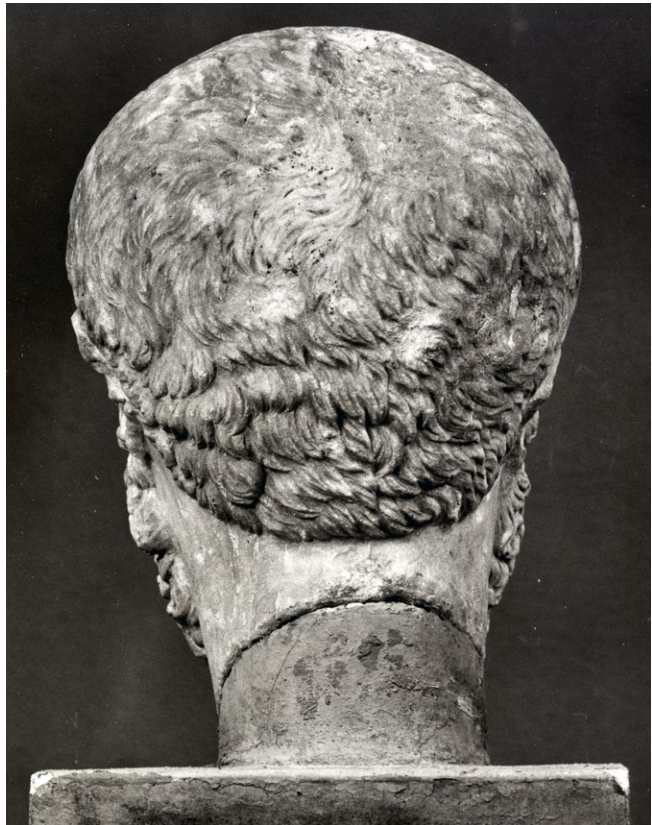
34 For the date of the portraits of Marcus Aurelius of Type IV, see most recently Niederhuber 2022, 73 f.

35 A link has been proposed between these short hairstyles and philosophical trends, such as Stoicism: Bergmann 1982, 146 f. Unfortunately, no definitive evidence has been put forward to support that possibility: Fittschen et al. 2010, 95.

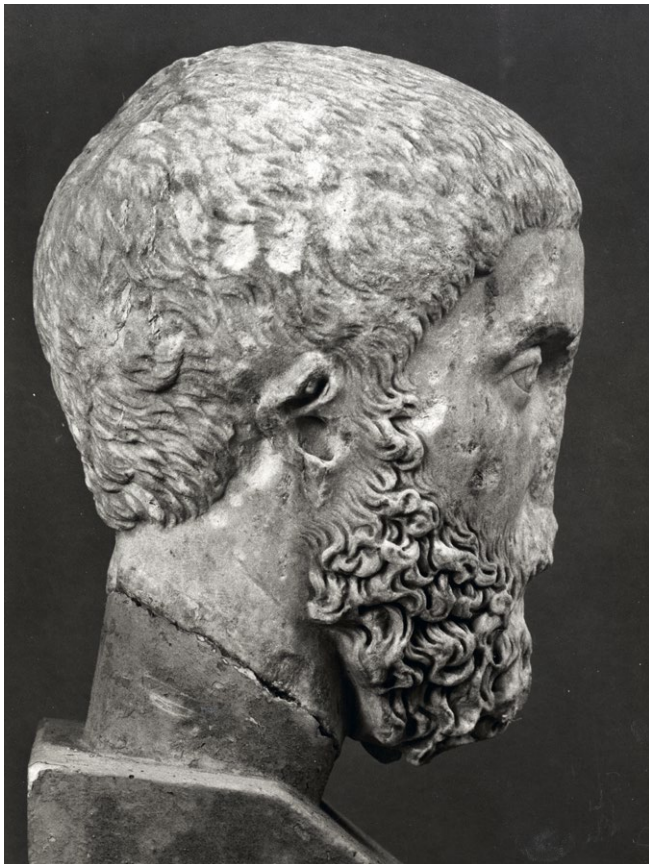
36 See supra n. 2.



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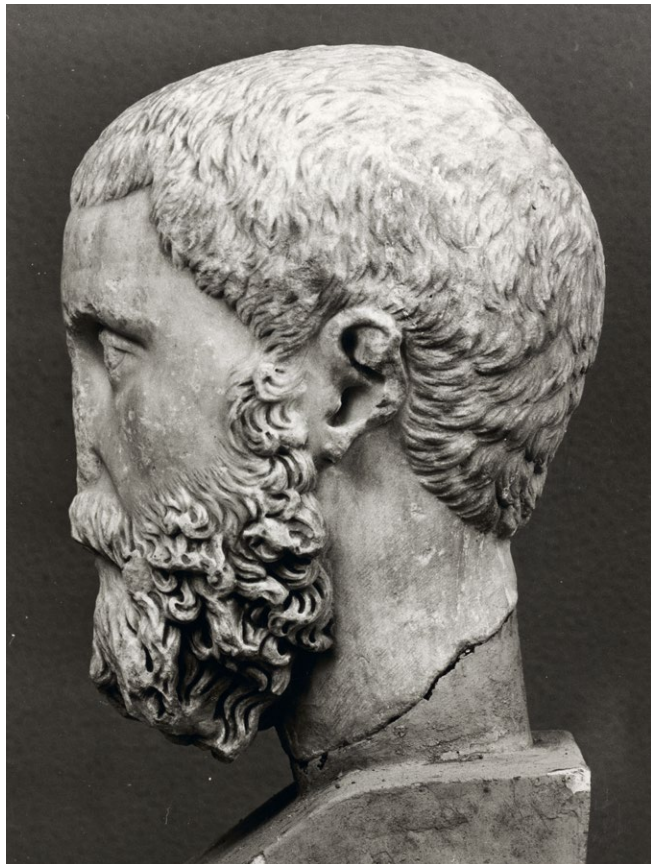


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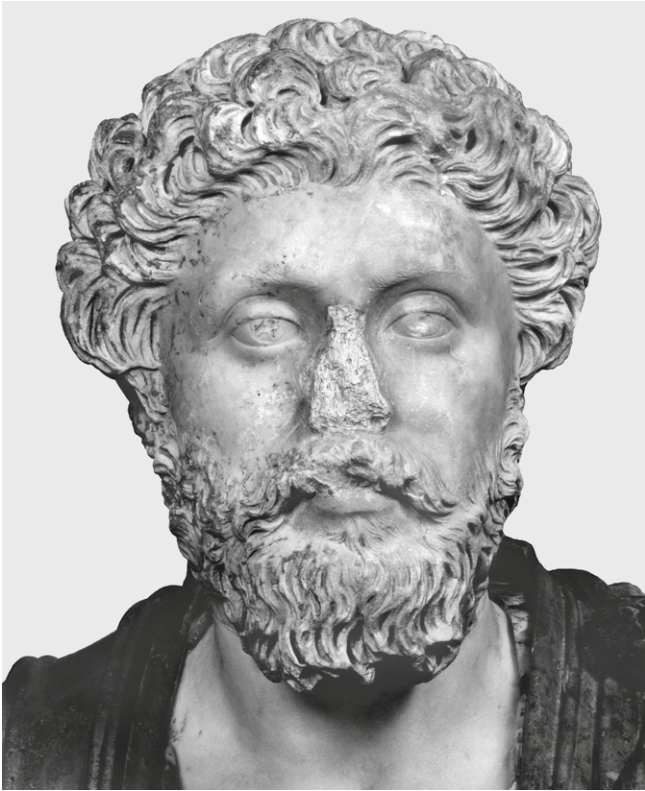
Fig. 6: Epidaurus, Archaeological Museum. Inv. ME21. Private portrait, front



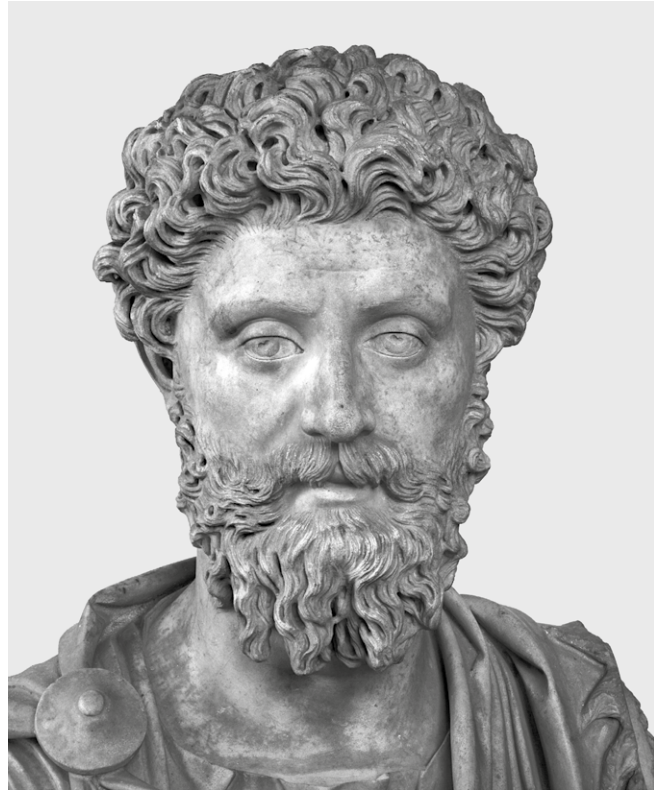
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Fig. 8: Epidaurus, Archaeological Museum. Inv. ME21. Private portrait, right side

Fig. 9: Epidaurus, Archaeological Museum. Inv. ME21. Private portrait, left side



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Fig. 10: Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek. Inv. 1538. Portrait of Marcus Aurelius, Type IV

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Fig. 12: Vienna, Museum of Art History. Inv. I 13. Portrait of Marcus Aurelius, Type IV

Fig. 13: Vienna, Museum of Art History. Inv. I 65. Portrait of Marcus Aurelius, Type IV

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