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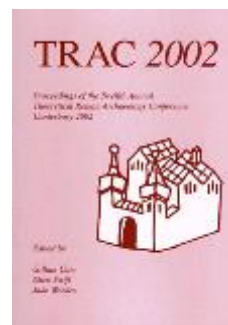
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An Empire in Pieces. Roman Archaeology and the Fragment

Iain Ferris

Artemidorus of Daldis, writing in the second century AD, in a work concerned with the recording and interpretation of dreams, described how “a man dreamt that he went into a gymnasium in his home town, and saw his own portrait actually hanging up there. Then he dreamt that the whole frame surrounding the picture disintegrated. When another man asked him what had happened to his portrait, he seemed to say: ‘There is nothing wrong with my portrait, but the frame is broken’. Unsurprisingly he went lame in both feet: for the gymnasium symbolised the good health of his entire body, while the portrait represented the area around his face, and the frame surrounding it meant the other parts of his body.” (Artemidorus *Oneirocritica* 5.3).

Our evidence for the past is all too often fragmentary, broken, damaged, or incomplete. Archaeological practice dictates that we reconstruct the past from these fragments, that we study the parts in order to understand the whole. Sometimes, when fragments are seen to be out of place in the archaeological record or their presence is perhaps too awkward to explain, we argue away that presence with terms such as residuality or contamination. However, in the Roman world the fragment or partial object or image itself was on occasions considered to represent the whole. Busts and portrait heads represented the whole person (Barr-Sharrar 1987) (Figure 1). Anatomical *ex votos* at healing shrines and sanctuaries represented the diseased whole body, or sometimes the cured whole body, of visitors to these sites (van Straten 1981; Ferris 1999). Hollow cuirasses and arms and armour hung on trophies in Roman art represented the absent bodies of defeated enemies (Picard 1957; Ferris 2000: 19–21). The process of fragmentation itself, as well as the manipulation and use of the fragment, may also have been a significant act in some circumstances in this period. Any analysis of fragmentation and the use of the fragment will encompass ideas relating to the human body, as it does here specifically, but it could equally be extended and applied to the study of artefacts and their creation, consumption, manipulation and discard.

Lynda Nead in her ground-breaking reanalysis of the place of the female nude in the history of western art asked whether there had not been for many, mostly male, art historians an allure codified within the broken female images from classical antiquity, such as the Venus de Milo, that related specifically to their fragmented and incomplete state. This aestheticization of the fragment, as she termed it (Nead 1992: 79), may have been driven by a subconscious desire to reconstruct such partial images, almost perhaps to fetishise them. Whether this fulfilled a deep-seated need within these art historians, as she suggests, is open to question. Her equation of this need to that of a child wanting to recreate its mother as a whole person, having at first viewed her as being made up of disassembled individual body parts, is based on theories first proposed by Melanie Klein (for a Kleinian view of the Neolithic see Ellis 2001). Page Dubois (1966: 55) has written about the “desire, fear, pleasure we feel” in relation to studying fragments from the past, so this is not obviously a problematic stance relating simply to the male psyche.



Figure 1. Portrait bust of unknown Roman male. Museo del Palazzo dei Conservatori, Rome. (Photo: I.M. Ferris)

Of course, modern sensibilities with regard to accidentally broken ancient artworks or those damaged through iconoclasm are not principally the issues under discussion here, interesting though they undoubtedly are (Nylander 1998).

Rather, this paper will consider the conceptual principles behind the medium of the representation of the human body as fragments or as partial figures, and how these principles can perhaps be identified and isolated in Roman art and archaeology, with an apparent differential application or acceptance of these principles discernible in different parts of the Roman world at different times and in different contexts.

Theorising the fragmented body is an undertaking that must rely heavily on the work not only of archaeologists, but also of ancient historians and classical art historians who have for some years been concerned with exploring the idea of the body, much in the same way that studies of gender in the Roman world have benefited from a similar uniting of our fragmented discipline.



Figure 2. The so-called Barberini togatus statue, Museo del Palazzo dei Conservatori, Rome. Photo: Faraglia DAIR 37.378

Recently Mary Beard and John Henderson (Beard and Henderson 2001: 207) have noted in their volume on classical art in the Oxford History of Art series that “it was an emphatically Roman, rather than Greek, drive to surround available living-space with armies of abbreviated figures of prestige-heads or busts; and to leave the western world with a collective acceptance of the convention of representing persons from the neck up.” Although this is not an original observation, it is interesting that this Roman innovation is still deemed worthy of comment in this way.

Beard and Henderson (2001: 230–232) go on to discuss the possible origins of this Roman predilection for portraits and suggest its positioning within a cultural milieu that encouraged this development into a wider social phenomenon than the funerary context in which it is thought to have first appeared. Does it really logically follow, though, as they suggest and had

been earlier suggested by J.J. Pollitt (1993: 224), that the creation of the new medium of the Roman portrait bust naturally grew from a desire on the part of Roman aristocrats to have more durable representations of their ancestors' images than was represented by the *imagines* or wax ancestor masks attested by historical sources but absent in the archaeological record?

The use of such masks or ancestors' images (Rambaud 1978; Dupont 1987; Flower 1996) was described by the Greek historian Polybius in the second century BC, when he wrote that "they place a portrait of the deceased in the most prominent part of the house, enclosing it in a small aedicular shrine. The portrait is a mask which is wrought with the utmost attention being paid to preserving a likeness in regard to both its shape and its contour. Displaying these portraits at public sacrifices, they honour them in a spirit of emulation, and when a prominent member of the family dies, they carry them in the funeral procession, putting them on those who seem most like [the deceased] in size and build." (Polybius *Historiae* 6.53). Pliny in his *Natural History* of the mid-first century AD (Pliny *Naturalis Historia* 35.6–7) also made mention of such masks and their display in the *atria* of Roman houses (Dwyer 1982). As Harriet Flower has pointed out (Flower 1996), these wax images would all have been of male ancestors, given that they were allowed to be made only for those who had held the office of *aedile* or higher, roles reserved exclusively for men.

The so-called Barberini *togatus* statue represents one of the most significant and important pieces of evidence for the way in which fragmentary representations, in this case in the form of ancestral busts, may have been used (Figure 2). Though restored, with another ancient portrait head grafted onto the original statue's shoulders, the work is otherwise complete and portrays a togate male, his clothes marking him out as a member of the Roman elite, standing in an upright pose with a portrait bust of a man held in each hand. The busts face forward and the viewer's gaze is invited to move between the faces of the two busts and that of their owner in an almost triangular movement. There is a sense of anticipation in the piece, as if the man is about to join a procession or walk into a room. As has been pointed out by both Harriet Flower and Diana Kleiner (Flower 1996: 5–6 and 10; Kleiner 1992: 36) the male figure is holding portrait busts probably modelled in terracotta, and is not holding *imagines*, images in the form of wax masks of dead ancestors who had held magisterial office, as they have been incorrectly identified by a number of authorities in the past. Such busts could have been kept in the home, like the *imagines*, or have been placed in burial *columbaria*, like the three busts, two male and one female, found *in situ* in the *columbaria* of Vigna Codini in Rome (Della Portella 1999: 128). Flower stresses the point that the wax *imagines* were never intended to be placed in tombs in this way.

In the Greek world the representation of a head without a body was largely confined to the herm, with a head on top and a phallus at the front. Two-dimensional images of heads or busts appeared on coins after Alexander and on late Hellenistic gems. The Roman infatuation with the head or bust representing the whole body may have been a visual manifestation, as Janet Huskinson has suggested, of "the ancient study of physiognomics which related physical features to moral traits, making the body, and especially the face, an image of the whole person" (Huskinson 2000: 157), although this does not altogether tie in with the story about one individual's perception of the significance of his portrait recorded by Artemidorus of Daldis and alluded to above. More widely, the bodies of Roman statues sometimes acted simply as 'props' for the heads which were often carved separately (Kleiner 1992: 10).

Even within the field of the conception of whole bodies as portrait busts there were changes in Roman art in terms of what constituted a bust. Pollitt has noted (1993: 249) that while originally portrait busts had included just the head, neck and part of the shoulders, in the later

first century AD more of the shoulders and the chest were included in some depictions. Of course, the portrait bust came to be copied in other media in two dimensions, on mosaics and gemstones for instance and on coins, though the cropping of other types of human image by framing or by the bleeding of images into the frames did not occur.

Interestingly, though, some of these new uses of portrait busts and heads were confined to funerary contexts. Roman freedmen reliefs with rows of portrait busts, including women and sometimes children, became fashionable in the Augustan period, based on Republican forerunners then reserved for the tombs of the aristocracy (Walker 1985: 45–46) (Figures 3–5). It was also relatively common on children's sarcophagi of the first to fourth centuries to have a portrait bust of the dead child framed and confined within a *clipeus* (see, for instance, Huskinson 1996, nos. 6.33, 8.15 and 9.36). Away from Rome and Italy, perhaps the most interesting group of material is the so-called Fayum encaustic portraits attached to the mummified bodies of those men and women depicted. The earliest of these date to the first half of the first century AD and mark a firm break with previous Egyptian burial rites (see, for instance, Doxiadis 1995). Local forms also appeared at Palmyra, in the shape of funerary reliefs of portrait busts (see, for instance, Vermeule 1981, nos. 329–333), and in Cyrenaica (Libya) where miniature bust portraits were set in niches in rock-cut tombs (Walker 1995: 82).

Links between the Roman funeral and the Roman triumph have been pointed out by John Bodel (1999), amongst others, who noted that such links were even thought worthy of comment in Roman times. At triumphs “missing persons were represented by realistic portraits” (Bodel 1999: 261), in the same way that the absent deceased ancestors were represented by the *imagines* in funeral processions or later by busts and other portraits at the burial place.

Highly symbolic in this context is the treatment meted out to the Dacian king Decebalus after his suicide, ahead of his imminent capture by Roman military forces. He was subsequently beheaded and his right hand was chopped off, these gruesome trophies then presumably being somehow preserved, to allow them to be taken to Rome to be paraded in Trajan's triumph to mark the end of the Dacian Wars, when Decebalus' head is recorded as being thrown onto the Gemonian Steps. This incident, together with other incidents of headhunting depicted on Trajan's Column, marks a perverse blurring of the boundaries between image and reality, between the whole and the fragment, between the living and the dead (Ferris 2000: 80–81).

But it is not only heads that were treated as separate parts in this way in Roman art, and indeed this treatment of the head may be part of a more complex phenomenon. Both Richard Brilliant and Diana Kleiner (Brilliant 1963: 26–31; Kleiner 1992: 10 and 34) have referred to the ‘appendage aesthetic’, a phrase used to describe a trend in first Etruscan sculpture, and then in Roman sculpture, towards the singling-out and overemphasising of a particular part of the body of a sculpture, the best examples of which are probably the orator or *Arringatore* statue of Aulus Metellus of c. 90–70 BC, with his exaggeratedly and unfeasibly outstretched arm (Figure 6), and the Prima Porta statue of Augustus, again with an outstretched arm that appears to have some independent existence away from the body to which it is attached (Nodelman 1975: 15–16).



Figure 3. Grave relief of unknown freedmen. Museo Romano di Brescia. (Photo: I.M. Ferris)

There may certainly be some links between Etruscan and Italian belief systems and later Roman practices (Gazda 1973; Damgaard Andersen 1993). Stefano Bruni (2000: 368–369) has discussed a specific link between death rites and artistic representation at Vulci in the seventh century BC when composite statues made up of assembled parts, often made in different materials, appeared. These “recompose the image of the deceased, which is ‘de-structured’ as a result of the particular treatment to which the body was submitted” (Bruni 2000: 369), in this instance cremation. “They give monumental expression to the same ideology as that expressed by the sealed cinerary urns with lids in the form of the human body, which were typical of this area from the last quarter of the eighth century to the middle of the seventh century BC”.

The art historian Linda Nochlin, in her published lecture ‘The Body in Pieces. The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity’ (1994), has explored the way in which the conscious manipulation of the fragment or the fragmentary was a recurring trend in certain schools of painting from the end of the eighteenth century onwards. While she was careful not to claim that her isolated and discrete chosen case studies constituted a generalised situation or a regular trajectory of intent, she nevertheless felt that together they at least constituted a model of difference, and that two main trends could be differentiated, one in which the fragment played a ritualistic or psychosexual role, as sacrifice or fetish, and the other in which it maintained a rhetorical role as metonymy or synecdoche (Nochlin 1994: 56).



Figure 4. Grave relief of freedman and family members. Museo Nazionale, Ravenna. (Photo: I.M. Ferris)



Figure 5. Grave relief of Roman family group. Museo del Palazzo dei Conservatori, Rome. (Photo: I.M. Ferris)

Nochlin discussed occasions during the French Revolution in which “both outright vandalism” and a kind of “recycling of the vandalised fragments of the past for allegorical purposes” (Nochlin 1994: 8) took place. “The imagery-and the enactment-of destruction, dismemberment and fragmentation remained powerful elements of Revolutionary ideology at least until the fall of Robespierre in 1794 and even after” (Nochlin 1994: 10). Underlying what simply may be viewed as iconoclasm were several sets of deeply felt tensions – between the act and action, between image and reality, and between tradition and modernity.

Tellingly, towards the end of her lecture, Nochlin declared that “it is by no means possible to assert that modernity may only be associated with, or suggested by, a metaphoric or actual fragmentation. On the contrary, paradoxically, or dialectically, modern artists have moved towards its opposite, with a will to totalisation.” (Nochlin 1994: 53). This struggle to attempt to bring forth order out of a perceived social, physical, or political chaos suggests that the fragment can be seen as both a positive and a negative trope. But is the “sense of social, psychological and even metaphysical fragmentation” merely a marker for modern experiences? – “a loss of wholeness, a shattering of connection, a destruction or disintegration of permanent value” (Nochlin 1994: 23–24) – (and for modern urban life in particular, with its concomitant desire for a return to the whole?) Or is it possible to pursue this question, though not perhaps to answer it, through examination of a number of archaeological contexts of the Roman period?

Turning away from the subject of busts and heads, consideration will now be given to other disassociated body parts in the form of what are known as anatomical *ex votos*, models or representations of body parts dedicated principally at healing shrines or sanctuaries throughout the Graeco-Roman world, though with perhaps significant chronological, geographical and representational variations. Creation and use of such *ex votos* possibly had independent origins in Greece and the Italian regions of Etruria and Latium in the fifth and fourth centuries BC (van Straten 1981). In Italy the dedication of anatomical *ex votos* had become a less common custom by the first century BC, though it does occur as a manifestation of Graeco-Roman

practice at numerous sites elsewhere within the empire well beyond this date, of which the Gallo-Roman healing shrine of *Fontes Sequanae* at the Source of the Seine, near Dijon, represents one of the best published examples.

Simone Deyts, in one of her studies of the remarkable collection of dedicated *ex votos* and statuary from the site (Deyts 1994: 15), has tabulated and quantified the occurrence here of different kinds of representation in different types of material, that is stone, bronze, pipeclay and wood, and compared this assemblage with those from other healing sanctuaries.

At the Sources de la Seine there is a large number of representations of what might best be termed here, awkward though it is, whole people, a total of 97–102 men, women, unsexed representations and swaddled infants. There are 212 busts and heads, 172 torsos and pelvises, 57 internal organs, 149 legs and feet, 54 hands and arms, 119 eyes, a ratio of body parts to whole people of *c.* 7:1. At the other three sites quantified by Deyts, that is Alesia, Essarois and Halatte, ratios of body parts to whole people are respectively 200:1, *c.* 11:1 and *c.* 2:1.

Anatomical *ex votos*, along with other categories of *ex votos* dedicated at religious sites, signify the making of a contract between a man or woman and their gods, in this case related to petitions for the restoring of health to a sick individual through divine intervention. Every type of *ex voto*, anatomical or otherwise, through purchase or commissioning and by dedication relates to an individual person. Anatomical *ex votos* obviously and very specifically relate to that individual's body and in many cases to highly specific parts of that body. The sick in the Graeco-Roman world have been described by the medical historian H.E. Sigerist (1977: 390–391) as being viewed as temporarily or permanently stigmatised, depending on the nature or duration of their illness. Seeking a cure for the sick body was not only linked to issues of personal health, it was also a way of seeking reintegration back into society. The special tension inherent in many assemblages of *ex votos* between emotion and feeling on the one hand, representing self, and documentation on the other, mirroring their time of creation, is somewhat allayed by the overall sense of structural order in the way they were used.

In a paper delivered at a previous TRAC conference in 1993 I considered the use of anatomical *ex votos* in Roman Britain, and concluded that the number of these so far recovered by excavation at various religious sites was extremely small, compared to numbers recovered in other areas such as Gaul, though, of course, no strictly comparable sites to the Sources de la Seine have been identified or excavated in Britain (Ferris 1999). Indeed, I identified a trend towards the customisation of other artefacts to create anatomical *ex votos* rather than there being an industry making these items to order.

Perhaps such items were not particularly regarded by Romano-Britons as acceptable parts of the religious rites at healing shrines, and, indeed, it might be suggested that a reason for this could be a failure on their part to engage in mental strategies of disassembling bodies into body parts, as was required as part of the process. Following on from this, an examination of the published volumes of the *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani* volumes for Britain suggests that busts and portrait heads, in other words representations of whole individuals by partial portrayals, are again not well represented among the art from Roman Britain. Does all of this imply that the fragmented image and the concepts behind it were anathema to most of the people of Roman Britain? If so, this would appear to represent a perhaps significant difference in perceptions of both the individual and the body, and the role of art in articulating such perceptions between Roman Britain and other parts of the empire.



Figure 6. Bronze statue of Aulus Metellus, the 'Arringatore'. Museo Archeologico, Florence. (Photo: Koppermann. DAIR 62.40)

Another artistic innovation of the Roman period was the use of what is called continuous narrative, but which might be better called simultaneity, which, by displacing time, fragmented human experiences and turned disparate events into actions all apparently happening simultaneously, though not in what would have appeared to the viewer as real time. The images of individuals replicated in adjacent scenes become fragments of the one, same body; they once more become something other than the corporeal body. While Trajan's Column in Rome is perhaps the best known example of this style of narrative, with multiple Trajans adorning the relief spiral scrolls around the column shaft, another interesting example is provided by the legionary distance slab from Bridgeness on the Antonine Wall in Scotland. I have discussed this scene at length elsewhere (Ferris 1994 and 2000) and here will only briefly draw attention to the appearance of what is intended to be an image of the same individual barbarian appearing four times in a single scene. His Roman opponent, a cavalryman in this case, appears only once. The barbarian is first knocked over by the charging horse, he then drops or throws away his shield and sword, he then sits in a mourning pose, lamenting his defeat and awaiting capture, and he then appears, quite literally, in fragments, beheaded, doubtless by his Roman captors.

In its ability to defy linear or sequential time, to allow a version of the past sometimes to coexist with the present, continuous narrative, often when used as a technique on imperial and military monuments, contradicted the concept of reality being defined by physical and visible phenomena alone, and dealt with a reality from which fragmentary elements could be selected and reorganised to form a new visible representation of the whole.

It is suggested that collage theory, as well as the study of modernist approaches to the use and definition of the significance of the fragment and of the partial image, as exemplified by the work of Nochlin discussed previously, has a considerable relevance to the study of the fragment and fragmentation both of images and of time. Underpinning the theoretical basis of the arts of collage and assembly as defined by Kurt Schwitters in the first quarter of the twentieth century, was the process he called, using a self-created word, *Entformung*, a process involving, through assembly, both the metamorphosis and the dissociation of fragmentary or fragmented objects and materials which he viewed as possessing what he called *Eigengift*, that is "their own special essence of poison" (Elderfield 1985: 51), which would be lost during, and as a result of, their *Entformung*. The intention was not that these materials would now function as if they were transformed into some other kind of material, rather that they now formed part of a new whole.

To conclude, theorising the fragment, real, imagined or metaphorical, in the Roman world might require the application of an interdisciplinary approach. This paper has argued that certain studies of the emergence of modernism, both in the visual and literary arts, particularly the writings of the artist Kurt Schwitters and the art historian Linda Nochlin, may be of great value in any such undertaking (as may indeed be studies by Elsen 1969 and 1969–1970 and Pingeot 1990). Page Dubois in her article 'Archaic Bodies in Pieces' (1996) and in her longer study 'Sowing the Body' (Dubois 1998) has considered the value of psychoanalytical schema for interpreting the fragmentary remains of the classical world, though she has cautioned against, as she puts it, "the ahistorical importation of psychoanalytical categories into our understanding of ancient culture" (Dubois 1996: 57). Another possible route might be in the kind of study carried out by Terry Wilfong who looked at the language of Coptic texts and how they suggested metaphorically "the disjoining and fragmenting of the human body along gender lines" (Wilfong 1998: 116) or of Caroline Bynum who has looked at the connection between fragmentation and redemption in medieval religion (Bynum 1992). Studies of the

French poetic form, the blason anatomique, literally a eulogy of the body fragment (see Pacteau 1994: 209, n3), could again provide useful frameworks for comparative analysis. Finally, in looking at the fragmented object, the work of the prehistorian John Chapman (Chapman 2000) will also prove of great value.

It can be asked whether the fragmented images of the human body discussed in this paper represent any kind of coherent pattern or trend in terms of elucidating aspects of belief or value within the Roman or Romanised societies which created and consumed such images. As ever in such studies, the key element would seem to be the context in which these fragmented images were used. Did context affect or dictate form, or are there other issues bearing upon these aspects still to be considered? Are there in fact any conceptual links between wax *imagines*, portrait busts and individual body parts dedicated as *ex votos* at healing shrines? While in Greek society and art the body remained an almost inviolable whole, in Roman art the fragmentation of the body when it occurred perhaps reflected the permeability of boundaries in Roman society and culture between life and death, sickness and health, Roman and barbarian, and class status and lineage.

Most studies of the classical body have dealt with the whole body, with issues of gender and representation, health and medical practice, or exclusion through disability or other perceived differences, but once we start to consider the concepts behind an empire in pieces perhaps other types of analysis may be required to be brought into play. In some of the situations presented in this paper the human body was not simply modified, it was transformed into a series of unrelated parts. The social body had in certain contexts approved the dismemberment of the corporeal body as images. There was an undoubted "tension between the belief in the body as an ideal form, and the body as dehumanised parts" (Pacteau 1994: 61).

In a number of the archaeological case studies presented it can perhaps be argued that the active manipulation of the fragment created a new whole and, in so doing, not only stressed the indivisibility of the present from the past, but acted as a metaphor for their conscious dissociation. Wax ancestor masks or *imagines* were used to keep the memory of notable ancestors alive in the present. They were also didactic devices for demonstrating to the young the moral qualities of earlier generations of Romans. Together these elements provided society with the experience and security of returning to the whole, a process of interpreting often ambiguous and contradictory phenomena and translating that interpretation into a new vision of reality. Partial representations in portraiture allowed the same process to be extended to other classes of Roman society and to other parts of the empire and for this to occur in other social and cultural situations, often linked to funerary commemoration. Anatomical *ex votos* were used in a process of both trying to seek a cure and reintegration back into society and in a way were props for seeking a return to the whole through re-incorporation within the social body.

No matter how much metamorphosis is reinforced by the dividing, deforming, and fragmenting of the body as an image in Roman art, the inherent tension between inner and outer reference always remains, as does the extension and even preservation of tradition in the face of what might be considered almost avant-garde technique. The metaphor of containment or inclusion frequently used was basically an image of possession, of things taken from the world, dematerialised and made to belong to society itself. In some instances the corporeal body was reduced to the status of an artefact (contra Merleau-Ponty as quoted by Meskell 2000: 16).

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