A Roman Portrait “Head of a Man” in the Collection of the
Staten Island Museum

By Frank Cretella
SIM Inventory Number: A1963.83
Culture and Designated Title of the Artifact: Roman portrait; “Head of a Man”
Material and Method of Manufacture: White, fine-grained, highly polished marble (possibly from Luna); carved
The State of Preservation: Fragment of the front part of the face is intact from the crown of the head to the bottom of the chin with the neck and the back of the head missing. There is discoloration on the face as well.
Proposed Provenance: Said to be from Baiae, Italy (SIM Documentation)
Proposed Date of Manufacture: 1st Century BCE- Early 1st Century CE
Accession Date: 11/1963; Gift of the Ingram Merrill Foundation and the Piero Tozzi Gallery
In 1963, the Staten Island Museum (SIM) received a Roman marble portrait head, henceforth referred to as a “Head of a Man,” as a gift from the Ingram Merrill Foundation and the Piero Tozzi Gallery in New York City. This fragmentary portrait depicts the head of an older man. It was carved from white, fine-grained marble. The marble is highly polished, as is evident on the subject’s proper left cheek. The piece was carved with chisels and drills. The head is intact from the crown of his head to the bottom of the chin. There is no neck, and the back of the head is missing, which makes it difficult for one to determine whether the head was part of a statue, a funerary relief, or a bust. The head is 9.25 inches and the width is 6.25 inches. The face has been discolored by dirt, or perhaps the salt in the soil, that has accumulated over the years. The back of the head is a flat, white surface, and, due to its fragmentation, shows the marble’s original color.

The man is depicted as old since he has wrinkles in his forehead and around his mouth. He has a receding hairline, and his hair is cropped. His eyebrows are furrowed, and he has crow’s feet next to his eyes. The man’s mouth is closed and is fixed in a tight-lipped scowl. The man has high cheek bones, and his cheeks are sunken. These characteristics give the man a sullen appearance similar to those of other portraits of the era, which I will discuss at length later in this essay. The subject’s eyes are open, and there are no pupils that are represented. Perhaps the pupils were once painted on the piece, since many sculptures of this period were painted. However, there appears to be no remnants of paint on this portrait.

This essay will demonstrate, through a comparative and contextual historical analysis, that this artifact can be identified as a marble portrait of man of rank, and it should be dated between the 1st century BCE and the early 1st century CE, during the late Roman Republic and the early Roman Empire. This essay will argue for a plausible provenance in Baiae, Italy as is stated in a SIM document. This paper will contend that the portrait was carved from white marble, which likely came from quarries in Luna.

This essay will also convey the possible functions and cultural context of this artifact, since the fragmentary nature of the sculpture leaves us unable to ascertain the artifact’s exact context. The carved head could have been part of a portrait bust, a funerary relief, or a statue. It could have been displayed in a public setting, such as a

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1 Piero Tozzi to George O. Pratt, Jr., October 21, 1963, Staten Island Museum, Staten Island, New York
forum, or a more private setting, such as a villa or a tomb. Regardless of how the sculpture was displayed, the foremost purpose of the sculpture would have been to honor the subject and his family into posterity. This essay will demonstrate that Roman portraiture of this period can inform us about the high level of admiration Roman élites had for their ancestors.

The portrait was carved in the so-called veristic style, which is known for its depiction of people in a realistic manner. This essay will also prove that the attention to realism through the representation of old age is typical of portraits from the late Republic and early Empire. This essay will demonstrate that Roman portraiture was influenced by a combination of Hellenistic portraiture and Roman traditions. These realistic portraits were influenced by the Roman practice of creating wax death masks that depicted prominent individuals who had died. Our knowledge of these masks comes from Polybius and Pliny, who describe the use of these masks in funerary processions to honor one’s ancestors who held political offices. Based on the sculpture’s adherence to the conventions of the veristic style, one can conclude that the subject likely would have been a freedman, a senator, or a member of the local élite. This essay will conclude that this sculpture can help us understand the great role that portraiture played as a means of representing a person’s elevated social status during the late Republic and early Empire.

Comparanda

There are several artifacts that are similar to the Staten Island Museum’s (SIM) “Head of a Man.” One such artifact (Fig. 1.) can be found at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It is a marble head from a Roman funerary relief from the early Augustan period in the late first century BCE. Its height is 9 5/8 inches. This head also appears to have suffered the same level of discoloration that the SIM “Head of a Man” has undergone. Like the SIM “Head of a Man,” this artifact has no surviving neck. The head also has wrinkles on his forehead and crow’s feet around his eyes. His eyes are open and no pupil can be seen. It is possible that his pupils were painted on, but eventually deteriorated over time. The subject’s eyebrows are furrowed and his wrinkled mouth is fixed in a scowl.

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This representation of old age is indicative of the veristic style of the late Republic and early Empire.

The Metropolitan Museum head (Fig 1) came from a funerary relief, and it likely represents a freedman. Freedman portraits were common during the late 1st century BCE and early 1st century CE. The funerary relief of Lucius Vibius, his wife Vecilia Hila, and their son Lucius Vibius Felicius Felix from the Vatican Museum (Fig. 2) is another example of a portrait that is comparable with the SIM “Head of a Man.” The portrait of Lucius Vibius, which will be the comparandum that I will use from this relief, is in the veristic style. His scowling mouth and sunken cheeks resemble those of the SIM “Head of a Man.” His eyes are open do not depict pupils. Perhaps they were painted on at one point, but there is no published evidence to prove that this was the case. He has a furrowed brow and crow’s feet around his eyes. He is also similar to the “Head of a Man” because his hairline is receding, yet another sign of old age that is indicative of the veristic style.

The Vatican funerary portrait of Lucius Vibius is intact, and it is still attached to the relief, which bears an inscription. The epitaph reads as follows: L(ucius) Vibius L(ucii) F(ilius) Tro(mentina) Vecilia (retrograde C) L(iberta?) Hilae L(ucius) Vibius Felicio Felix VIII A(nni) L(ucius?) L(ibertus?) Prima. The inscription states that Lucius Vibius was the freeborn son of a man also named Lucius. He was from the tribe of the Tromentina. His wife Vecilia Hila was a freedwoman, who (as indicated by the

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3 Polybius Histories 6.53; Pliny Natural History 35. 2
retrograde C) was freed by a woman. Next, the name of Lucius Vibius’ son, Lucius Vibius Felicius Felix, appears on the epitaph, which states that the child was eight years old. The date of this relief is somewhere between 13 BCE to 5 CE, which allows us to date the SIM “Head of a Man” to a similar time.\(^5\)

Portraits of freedmen, such as the two discussed above (Figs. 1 and 2), were carved in the veristic style to emulate the Republican portraits of senators, for reasons which I will discuss later in this essay.\(^6\) The Museo del Palazzo dei Conservatori’s marble statue of the man wearing a toga while holding the busts of two of his ancestors (Fig. 3) is another example of the veristic style, since the three faces are depicted as old. The crease on the subject’s neck indicates that head of the statue was not originally part of the statue but was attached later. The subject and the bust that he is holding in his proper left


\(^6\) Ibid., 78.
hand have receding hairlines. All three busts have wrinkles on their foreheads. The three faces have furrowed brows, crow’s feet, and open eyes. The subject has sunken cheeks and high cheek bones. The subject and the bust in his proper right hand both have scowls. The statue is said to date from the late first century BCE. The facial features of the three heads are similar to those of the SIM “Head of a Man.” This allows us to date the SIM “Head of a Man” to approximately the late first century BCE.

Another Roman Republican portrait that can be used as a comparandum is the marble head of a man, who was likely a patrician, from Otricoli in central Italy. This portrait (Fig. 4.) dates to approximately 50 BCE and can be found in Rome’s Museo Torlonia. The subject has a receding hairline, has wrinkles on his forehead, and has furrowed eyebrows. His cheeks are indented and covered with wrinkles. His eyes, like those of the other portraits, are open but do not show pupils. The subject’s mouth is
frowning and conveys a solemn appearance. This work is an excellent example of the veristic style of the late Roman Republic and is another key piece of evidence for dating the SIM “Head of Man” to this period.

Another marble portrait head from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, of which an illustration is not provided here, will serve as a fifth *comparandum*. The marble head is 33.1 centimeters high and 19.6 centimeters wide. It dates from the late Republic from approximately 40-20 BCE. The subject’s hair is cropped and his hairline is receding, like that of the SIM “Head of a Man.” The subject’s eyes are open and his pupils are not depicted. He has wrinkles on his forehead and his eyebrows are furrowed. He has high cheekbones, and his mouth is set in a frown. The portrait is discolored on the proper left side of the subject’s face. This head was carved from fine grained marble, similar to that of the SIM “Head of a Man.”

A portrait of a man formerly from the Staatliche Museen in Berlin also shares similar features to those of the SIM “Head of a Man.” The portrait is marble and dates from the 1st century BCE. The subject’s eyes are open and do not illustrate pupils. The subject’s nose has broken off and is missing from the portrait. His hair is cropped, and his forehead is covered with wrinkles. His furrowed eyebrows, high cheekbones, crow’s feet,

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7 Ibid., 56-57.
8 Ibid., 38
and scowling mouth are also key indicators of the veristic style, thus making this piece a good comparandum to help determine the date of manufacture for the SIM “Head of a Man.”

Yet another portrait of a man (Fig. 5) can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It dates to the late first century BCE during the early Augustan period. The head is 12 3/8 inches high, and it was carved from white marble in the veristic style. Unfortunately, the sculpture is not completely intact since the nose has broken off. His hair is cropped, and his hairline is receding. His frowning mouth and furrowed brow are also key indicators that this bust was carved in the veristic style. The subject has high cheek bones and wrinkled, sunken cheeks. His eyes are open and, like many of the other portraits that I have discussed thus far, do not depict pupils.\(^\text{11}\) As I have said earlier in this essay, pupils could have been painted on, but there is no way of knowing such details of these sculptures.

At this point in this essay I will provide examples of Hellenistic portraiture, which predated Roman Republican busts, and Imperial portraiture, which followed the Republican veristic style, in order to provide a chronological framework for Roman Republican portraiture and the SIM portrait. Hellenistic\(^\text{12}\) and Roman Imperial\(^\text{13}\) portraiture tended to be more idealizing than Roman Republican sculpture. However, as we will see, there was significant overlap in the chronology of these different art forms.

Hellenistic portraiture tended to idealize kings and royalty in a way that depicted

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them as divine or heroic.\textsuperscript{14} Portraits of Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE) began this artistic trend, and served as a model for portraits of later Hellenistic rulers. This portrait from Princeton University (Fig. 6) dates from the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century BCE, and was carved from fine-grained white marble. Its proposed provenance is from Hermopolis, Egypt. Its height is 18.4 centimeters, and its width is 14.7 centimeters.\textsuperscript{15} This marble portrait of Alexander the Great depicts the conqueror as a young man, which is quite different from the veristic style of the SIM “Head of a Man” and Republican portraiture in general. Alexander is beardless and has his hair in an \textit{anastole}, a hairstyle that surrounds his head like a wreath that is parted in the center. His

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\textit{Fig. 7 - Portrait of a Man}, possibly from Cumae, c. 50 BCE. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts. http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/bust-of-a-man-155696 (accessed 12/07/12)
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\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Princeton University Art Museum}, “The Portrait of Alexander the Great,”
head is tilted slightly, and his eyes, with pupils carved onto them, are gazing upward. The idealization of Alexander the Great was done to equate him with mythological heroes, such as Achilles and Herakles.\(^{16}\)

While Hellenistic art is typically thought to have spanned from 330 to 146 BCE\(^ {17}\), Hellenistic methods of representation appear in Republican portraiture as well. For instance, the portrait of a man in Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) is said to be from Cumae (Fig. 7). The MFA portrait exhibits both Hellenistic and veristic styles of representation. The MFA head is made of terracotta and dates from the late Republican period in approximately 50 BCE. He has typical attributes of the veristic style, such as the furrowed brow, crow’s feet, a scowling mouth, and thinning hair. The bust is completely intact, and we can see that his neck appears to have loose, sagging skin. However, the MFA bust has features that one would associate with Hellenistic sculpture as well. The man’s head tilts slightly to his proper right. His pupils are carved onto his eyes as they gaze upward.\(^ {18}\)

These are similar features to those of the portrait of Alexander the Great (Fig. 6). Thus, one could argue that the MFA head is a hybrid of the Hellenistic and veristic styles. The purpose of providing this _comparandum_ is not to equate it with the SIM “Head of a Man,” but to demonstrate that the distinctions between different types of portraiture, in this case Hellenistic and Roman Republican, are not always rigid.

The MFA head is not the only Roman Republican portrait that represents its subject by combining Hellenistic and Roman Republican techniques. The portraits of Julius Caesar (100-44 BCE), Pompey (106-48 BCE), and Crassus (115-53 BCE) are all examples of this hybrid representation.\(^ {19}\) The men were depicted in a Hellenistic manner because this method allowed them to be depicted as heroes or divinities, in the same way Alexander the Great was portrayed. The portrait of Pompey has an _anastole_ similar to that of Alexander the Great. However, the portraits of the _triumviri_ also reveal veristic qualities through the depiction of wrinkles and furrowed brows. Thus, during the first

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\(^ {19}\) Paul Zanker, _The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus_, trans. Alan Shapiro (The University of
triumvirate, which was around the proposed date of the MFA head, we have a hybrid of portraiture techniques due to the desire to adhere to Republican norms on the one hand and the wish to be glorified on the other.\textsuperscript{20}

Hellenistic sculpture, such as the statue of Alexander the Great from the Istanbul Archaeological Museum (Fig 8), often depicted leaders and gods with nude or semi-nude bodies. The Istanbul sculpture, which is said to be from Magnesia during the late second century BCE, depicts Alexander with an idealized face as seen in Princeton’s portrait of Alexander the Great (Fig.6). The Istanbul sculpture also depicts his body with a bare, muscular chest, and with a mantle draped over his shoulder and genitals.\textsuperscript{21}

Hellenistic sculpture, such as the Istanbul statue of Alexander, influenced Republican sculpture that depicted famous Romans with semi-nude bodies, such as the statue of a Roman General from the Museo Nazionale delle Terme. The sculpture is said to have come from the Temple of Hercules at Tivoli. The sculpture depicts a general with a bare, muscular chest and with a mantle over his shoulder and covering his genitals, just like the Alexander Statue from Istanbul (Fig 8). However, the Statue of the General stays true to Republic norms of portraiture, and depicts the general with a veristic face.\textsuperscript{22} The depiction of leaders with semi-nude bodies is a technique that continues into the early Empire as seen with the Statue of Tiberius from the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, Denmark. This statue depicts Tiberius with a bare, muscular chest, and with

\textsuperscript{10} Michigan, 1988), 10-11.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 8-11.
As we can see, there is some continuity in the way leaders are represented in the Hellenistic, Republican, and early Imperial periods.

The onset of Imperial style of portraiture, resulting from the establishment of Augustus’ Principate (27 BCE- 14 CE), marked the beginning of a new form of representation in portraiture. This form of portraiture was idealized and was a departure from Republican forms of portrait depiction. However, the idealized portraits of Augustus, although similar to Hellenistic portraits, did not portray the emperor as mythological hero. Instead, the portrait of Augustus depicted the emperor as “purposeful and reassuring.” Early Imperial portraiture also represented Augustus as

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The portrait of Augustus in the Museo Nazionale delle Terme, shown in Figure 9, is an excellent example of the manner of representation that I have just discussed. The portrait depicts the expressionless face of Augustus. He appears young without any of the signs of aging indicative of the Republican veristic style. Although the portraits of Augustus reveal a new style of portraiture, they occur at the same time as many veristic portraits (Figs. 1, 2, 3, 5), which means that there was some chronological overlap between the styles.

The Ara Pacis Augustae is an excellent example of this coexistence of portrait styles. In the procession on the southern side of the monument (Fig. 10), Augustus is marching with the imperial family and with priests (flamines). Augustus and his family are represented in an idealized manner, but some of the priests, such as the one shown on the viewer’s left, are depicted in the veristic style (Fig. 11). The priest on the viewer’s left displays veristic qualities with his furrowed brow, wrinkled forehead, and scowling mouth. The priest on the viewer’s right is depicted in an idealized manner, typical of the early Empire. This indicates that the veristic portraiture of the late Republic coincided with the idealizing portraiture of the early Empire.

This idealistic mode of representation was continued by subsequent emperors. A bust of the emperor Tiberius, which dates from 22-23 CE, also exhibits these qualities.

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The marble head is slightly turned to his proper right and the subject shows no signs of aging. The idealized portraiture of Julio-Claudian period occurred at the same time as veristic portraiture. One such example is that of a veristic portrait of a man (Fig. 12), which is currently in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It dates from approximately the mid 1st century CE, which implies that Republican portraiture was still in use during the Imperial period. As Cornelius Vermeule points out, “verism went on being practiced by portraitists as late as the Hadrianic period,” which means that verism lasted until the 2nd century CE. The bust’s nose, mouth, and chin are damaged. It is made of marble, and is 17.5 inches high. The subject has thinning hair, a furrowed brow, high cheekbones, sunken cheeks, and a frowning mouth. These features coincide with those of the SIM “Head of a Man” and with those of the veristic style in general.

Based upon the comparanda that I have just discussed, we can date the SIM “Head of a Man” to approximately the 1st century BCE to the mid-1st century CE. We can determine that the head was part of a statue (Fig. 3), a bust (Figures. 4, 5, and 12), or a funerary relief (Figures. 1 and 2). Since the head is fragmentary, with the neck and the back of the head missing, we cannot know exactly on what kind of medium the head belonged. Unfortunately, there is also a paucity of information regarding the provenances and types of marble used for these works, which makes it difficult to determine from what material and where the SIM “Head of a Man” was made.

**Carved in Baiae from Luna Marble?**

According to a letter from Piero Tozzi to George O. Pratt, Jr., who was the Director of the Staten Island Museum in 1963, the SIM “Head of a Man” was found in Baiae, located on the Bay of Naples, at the beginning of the 20th century. Unfortunately, there are no records supporting Piero Tozzi’s claim. We do not have any irrefutable evidence regarding the artifact’s provenance before 1963, the year that the piece was

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30 Piero Tozzi to George O. Pratt, Jr., October 21, 1963, Staten Island Museum, Staten Island, New York
purchased. The archaeological practice of documenting an artifact’s provenance, while it is standard now, was not commonplace during the early 20th century. Therefore, due to the lack of documentation, the provenance of the SIM “Head of a Man” is uncertain. The aim of this section of the essay is not to definitively argue that the SIM “Head of a Man” came from Baiae, but to demonstrate the plausibility of this assertion.

The Bay of Naples was a popular resort for Roman élites to relax. Senators needing a break from their public duty (negotium) would retreat to their villas in the towns of the Bay of Naples, such as Baiae, for some privacy and relaxation (otium). Cicero describes the lifestyle of Baiae in Pro Caelio when he states that “Certainly the plaintiffs boast of pleasures, affairs, adultery, Baiae, beaches, banquets, parties, songs, symphonies, and boats” (Accusatores quidem libidines, amores, adulteria, Baias, actas, convivia, comissationes, cantus, symphonias, navigia iactant). Many patricians owned villas in Baiae. Their villas not only provided them with a means to relax, but also served to proclaim their social status. As Carol C. Mattusch writes, “Baiae became synonymous with fine living, and owning a villa on the bay became a status symbol for every Republican nobleman.” Élites did not only go to Baiae for parties and relaxation in their villas. Baiae was also a popular spa resort among the élites, who enjoyed the thermal bath complexes that were built in Baiae.

In 1954, while archaeologists where excavating the ruins of baths dating from approximately the 1st century BCE in Baiae, the remains of a plaster cast workshop were found. Plaster casts of various famous Hellenistic sculptures were found, and were likely used to create marble copies. Although the remains of plaster casts that were found were of Hellenistic statues, it is possible that this workshop also produced casts in order to make marble portraits. One could argue that the production of marble portraits from plaster casts is similar to the use of wax death masks in the production of marble portraits, a topic which I have mentioned earlier in the essay and will explore further in

32 Cicero Pro Caelio 35.
the next section of this paper. Sculptors were able to create marble portraits from plaster casts through the use of the three caliper method. Ancient sculptors would take measurements of a plaster cast and transfer them over to the marble by means of calipers. The sculptor would then chisel the marble according to the measurements indicated by the calipers.

Earlier in the paper, I stated that the marble used to carve the SIM “Head of a Man” possibly came from quarries in Luna, Italy. Luna marble was first exploited in the late Republican period, during the late 1st century BCE, and continued to be exploited until the 3rd century CE. Olga Palagia describes Luna marble as fine grained and pure white, sometimes with a “bluish tinge.” She also states that Luna marble was “readily available, widely used, and easily transported.” The marble used to carve the SIM “Head of a Man” is white, fine grained marble, and could be from quarries in Luna. However, there was marble of a similar quality available in Thasos, for example. Thus, it is difficult to determine from where the marble used to craft the SIM “Head of a Man” came. Ultimately, only scientific testing of the marble’s isotopes can confirm its provenance. Although we cannot know for certain if the marble used to carve the SIM “Head of a Man” came from Luna, it is plausible to assume that Luna marble was used to carve this veristic portrait.

**Wax Death Masks and the Origins of Veristic Portraiture**

Some scholars argue that the veristic style of the Republican period was inspired by the ancient Roman practice of molding wax death masks from the faces of deceased nobles. These ancestral portraits were displayed and carried in funeral processions as a way for the living to honor the deceased and their forebears. Polybius, writing in the 2nd century BCE, states:

> And after all the funerary rites and celebrations of the customs, they put the image of

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*Collecting and Displaying from Classical Antiquity to the Present*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 35.

36 Ibid., 18.


38 Ibid., 287

39 Ibid., 284

40 Ibid., 284 and 288.

the deceased into the most prominent place of the house, placing it in a wooden shrine. The image is a mask having been completed remarkably in a likeness both according to the mold and outline of the face… When any prominent member of the family dies, they carry it into the funeral procession.

(μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα θάνατος καὶ ποιήσαντες τὰ νομίζόμενα τιθέασι τῇ ν εἰ κόνα τοῦ μεταλλαζόντος έτι ζῷον τὸν ἐπιφανέστατον τόπον τῇ ζῷοι κίας, ξύλινα ναόι περιτιθέντες. ἡ δ’ εἰ κὼν ἐς τοι πρόσωπον εἰς ὁ μοίωτα διαφερόντως ἐξειργασμένον καὶ κατὰ τῷ πλάσμιν καὶ κατὰ τῇ ν ὑπογραφήν… ἐπάντες τῶν οἱ κείων μεταλλάξῃ τις ἐπιφανῆς, ἃ γουσιν εἰς τῇ ν ἐκφοράν).

Pliny, writing in the 1st century CE, also gives testimony to this practice when he states, “The faces made from wax were placed in individual chests, so that there were masks, which were carried in the funeral of the clan” (expressi cera vultus singulis disponebantur armariis, ut essent imagines, quae comitarentur gentilicia funera). Based upon these accounts of ancestral portraits, one can determine that Romans venerated their illustrious ancestors.

These prominent individuals would have been elderly at the time of their death. If what Polybius (c. 200- 118 BCE) and Pliny (23-79 CE) wrote is true, then wax masks in the form of an elderly person’s face would accurately depict the person’s age. Unfortunately, none of the wax masks survive, but, because of the survival of these ancient literary sources, we can find an influence for veristic portraiture. Although the importance of the wax ancestral mask is evident due to the testimony of Pliny and Polybius, we should not disregard the influence of Hellenistic portraiture.

Following the Roman conquest of Greece in the 2nd century BCE, Rome came into contact with Hellenistic portraiture, and Greek artists began working for Roman patrons. Although these artists were accustomed to carving idealized portraits, their ability to carve naturalistic portraits of the people whom they needed to depict proved useful to the Romans. The Greek artist and his skills to depict people in a naturalistic manner were key elements in the development of veristic portraiture. The realism of old

42 Polybius Histories 6.53
43 Pliny The Natural History 35.2
age in the ancestral death masks and the ability of the Greek artist to provide naturalism were the artistic influences of Republican portraiture.

Depictions of old age are not exclusively found in veristic portraiture. One can find depictions of old age in Hellenistic portraiture and late Etruscan urns. The portrait of Demosthenes, which was carved by Polyeuktos in approximately 280 BCE and can be found in Copenhagen’s National Museum, is one example of old age in Hellenistic portraiture. While it is unclear if the features represented in the sculpture are accurate, the depiction of old age provides a precedent for veristic portraiture. Late Etruscan funerary urns often bear images of the deceased as old men. One such urn is the “Urn of Aruns Volumnius,” which can be found in the tomb of the Volumnii at Perugia and dates from 150-100 BCE. The subject, who is depicted reclining on a couch, has a wrinkled face. The funerary context of the urn can be connected to that of the wax death masks. Additionally, the depiction of old age in late Etruscan funerary urns can be seen as an influence on veristic portraiture.

The realistic depiction of age is an important aspect of Republican portraiture. The veristic ideal of old age stems from the desire of the senatorial élite to be portrayed as wise and experienced. These ideals of old age were to be expected in Roman senators. The Latin word senator derives from the Latin word for old age, senex. Thus, we can see a connection between the old age of the senators, and the wisdom and experience that were expected of them. Veristic portraiture sought to emphasize these qualities in the senatorial élite. It is also important to note that Roman magistracies of the cursus honorum had age requirements due to the lex Villia annalis of 180 BCE. The last two stages, and thus the highest stages, of the cursus honorum were the praetorship and the consulship. The minimum age to be a praetor was 40, and the minimum age to be a consul was 43. Thus, high office holders of the senatorial class likely sought to be

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48 Ibid., 416-417.
depicted as old in order to signify their achievement in the *cursus honorum*. As R.R.R. Smith points out, a high level magistrate, such as a consul, was supposed to be a “parent and guardian of the state” and “his portrait therefore should look stern and patriarchal.”

**The Representation of Status in Public and Private Settings**

Portraits of individuals would be displayed in either a public or private setting. A forum would be considered a public place; a tomb, a house, or a villa would be considered a private one. However, the distinction between public and private settings was not always clear. As I demonstrated earlier, portraits could have been part of statues, funerary reliefs, or busts. A specific type of portrait was appropriate for a particular setting. The place in which a portrait was established could also provide clues for the social status of the subject.

As I demonstrated earlier, the senatorial élite often spent time in the Bay of Naples. A senator would have visitors to his home (*domus*) for purposes of *negotium*. The owner would display the portrait busts of himself and his ancestors in the atrium to honor his ancestors, and to proclaim the prestige of both himself and his family. In their villas, senators had famous Hellenistic sculptures together with the portrait busts of the owner and his family. These sculptures would be on display for visitors in the atrium of the owner’s villa. Although the villa is considered a senator’s private vacationing residence, many associates of the senator would visit the villa for purposes of *otium*. The owner would display the portrait busts of himself and his family with the portraits of Hellenistic sculptures of prominent Greeks. If the subject depicted by the SIM “Head of a Man” was a member of the senatorial élite, who vacationed in Baiae, he would have done the same.

The forum of a city was a public place for portraits to be displayed. The forum was one of the busiest parts of a city, and having a portrait set up there would have been an immense honor. Portraits displayed in a public place, such as the forum, would allow

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54 Ibid., 90-91.
55 Ibid., 96-98.
the recipient to be remembered and honored for years to come. As Jane Fejfer writes, “Every time a visitor to the forum passed by a statue, he would be reminded of the prominence of the honorand and his family.”

The city would erect a statue of a patron, who was either a member of the senatorial élite or a local magistrate, in the forum. Patrons could earn a statue by making a financial contribution, providing a diplomatic or administrative service, or showing bravery in war. The size of the statue would reflect the level of prestige that the honorand received. These sculptures would often be either equestrian or togated statues, as seen in Figure 3. The portraits on these sculptures would represent the subjects realistically as old men in order to display their trustworthiness (fides), dignity (gravitas), and moral dutifulness (severitas), which were qualities that were indicative of old age and were considered vital to the conception of the ideal patron. It is possible that the person depicted by the SIM “Head of a Man” was either a senator or a local magistrate who made some type of contribution to Baiae in order to earn a portrait.

The tomb was another important location for portraits to be displayed. During the late Republic and early Empire, portraits were displayed in the façades of tombs in many Italian cities. These portraits would be displayed to showcase the status of the deceased. The city could also grant the deceased a public funeral. Although a tomb would be considered a private setting, the public display of portraits together with a public funeral obscure the lines between public and private settings.

The purpose of tomb portraiture was to preserve the memory of the dead and his status while providing comfort to his family. Funerary reliefs were the primary means of serving this purpose. Funerary reliefs were common modes of representation for deceased freedmen, or emancipated slaves, during the late Republic and early Empire. These reliefs were carved in the veristic style to emulate the ideals conveyed by senatorial

56 Ibid., 48.
57 Ibid., 18.
58 Ibid., 48-49.
60 Ibid., 33.
62 Ibid., 137.
The freedman would have wanted a funerary relief that mimicked the conventions of aristocratic portraiture so that he could display his increased social status. Based on this evidence, it is possible that the SIM “Head of a Man” was removed from a funerary relief of a freedman.

Conclusion

This essay has proven by means of a comparative and contextual analysis that the SIM “Head of a Man” can be dated between the 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE. This essay has demonstrated that Baiae is a plausible provenance for the artifact, and that the SIM “Head of a Man” was likely carved from Luna marble. I have illustrated that the SIM “Head of a Man” was a veristic portrait because of its realistic expression of old age, and its lack idealization of the subject. This paper has explored the artistic development of portraiture from the Hellenistic period to the late Republican era, and from the late Republican era to the early Imperial period. I have also illustrated that the veristic style of the Republican period was influenced by the naturalizing techniques Hellenistic artists and practice of creating ancestral wax death masks.

As I have stated earlier, the fragmentary state of the artifact makes it difficult to determine its exact cultural context. It is uncertain if the piece came from a statue, a bust, or a funerary relief. Although I cannot provide a definitive claim as to which type of sculpture the head belonged, I have presented the possible types of portraiture to which the head could have belonged. Depending on the type of portrait from which the head came, one could determine the status of the individual. If the portrait were a funerary relief, then the subject would have likely been a freedman. If the portrait were a bust or a statue, then the subject would have likely been a patron of the city, who was either from the senatorial élite or a local magistrate. I have also demonstrated that portraits could have been displayed in public settings, such as a forum, or private settings, such as a villa or a tomb. I must reiterate that the fragmentary nature of the sculpture makes it difficult to determine from what type of setting the artifact came. Regardless of the setting or of the subject’s status, the purpose of the sculpture would be to honor the subject and his

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64 Ibid., 64.
65 Ibid., 69 and 72.
family into posterity. This essay has also demonstrated that veristic portraiture reflected the high level of admiration that Romans held for their ancestors. This purpose of this essay was not to provide answers to questions regarding the exact provenance or culture context of this piece, but rather to weigh the likeliest possibilities of where this artifact could have come, what its functions were in Roman culture, and who was represented. This artifact, which is an excellent example of a distinctive Roman style of sculpture, is an outstanding piece in the Staten Island Museum’s collection because it tells us a great deal about the importance of the self-representation of status in portrait images in Roman society.
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