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Subject selection and viewer reception of Greek portraits from Herculaneum and Tivoli

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Portraits of Greek philosophers, poets, orators, and generals, such as Socrates, Sophocles, Demosthenes, and Pericles, were used in the Roman period to decorate the luxury villas of wealthy upper-class Romans, serving as indices of their classical education and lending authority to their intellectual pursuits.* Most commonly comprising a head copied from an earlier portrait statue that was then mounted for display on a marble bust or herm pillar, these images of Greeks of the distant past affirmed the owner's sense of himself as an educated gentleman, and provided an appropriate setting for the leisurely discussions of philosophy, rhetoric, or poetry in which the villa-owner and his friends might engage.¹ Considering the crucial rôle the Roman house and its decoration is now recognized to have played in constructing and communicating an owner's personal identity,² these private portrait collections provide a fertile site for exploring the intellectual and cultural interests and aspirations of the patrons, and the tastes and concerns of the periods during which they were formed. I focus here on the Greek portraits from the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum and the Villa of 'Cassius' at Tivoli, two large and well-preserved bodies of material particularly well suited to such a study. While the sculptural display of the Villa of the Papyri has been the focus of much programmatic analysis, with the Greek portraits playing an important rôle, few have recognized the unusual nature of the portrait subjects included in this ensemble, and no one has yet considered the implications of this particularity in their interpretations. The portraits from the Villa of Cassius are less known than those from Herculaneum, but the more familiar portrait subjects represented there provide an illuminating contrast. I look first at the Greek portraits from the earlier Villa of Papyri, and then consider the later (probably 2nd-c.) portraits from

* The following abbreviations are used for frequently cited works:

C-deP	D. Comparetti, G. de Petra, <i>La villa ercolanese dei Pisoni</i> (Turin 1883).
Lorenz	T. Lorenz, <i>Galerien von griechischen Philosophen- und Dichterbildnisse bei den Römern</i> (Mainz 1965).
Neudecker	R. Neudecker, <i>Die Skulpturen-Ausstattung römischer Villen in Italien</i> (Mainz 1988).
PofG	G. M. A. Richter, <i>Portraits of the Greeks</i> (London 1965).
Richter-Smith	G. M. A. Richter, <i>The portraits of the Greeks</i> (abridged and revised by R. R. R. Smith; Ithaca, NY 1984).
Smith	R. R. R. Smith, <i>Hellenistic royal portraits</i> (Oxford 1988).
von den Hoff	R. von den Hoff, <i>Philosophenporträts des Früh- und Hochhellenismus</i> (Munich 1994).
Warden	P. G. Warden, "The sculptural program of the Villa of the Papyri," <i>JRA</i> 4 (1991) 257-61.
Warden & Romano	P. G. Warden and D. G. Romano, "The course of glory: Greek art in a Roman context at the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum," <i>Art History</i> 17 (1994) 228-54.
Wojcik	M. R. Wojcik, <i>La villa dei papi ad Ercolano</i> (Rome 1986).

- 1 Cicero's dialogues give settings, occasions, and participants: see J. Linderski, "Garden parlors: nobles & birds," in R. I. Curtis (ed.), *Studia pompeiana & classica in honor of Wilhelmina F. Jashemski II: Classica* (New Rochelle 1989) 105-27. For an overview of the intellectual climate of the late Republic see M. Griffin, "The intellectual developments of the Ciceronian age," *CAH IX* (2nd edn., Cambridge 1994) 689-728; for villa social life see J. H. D'Arms, *Romans on the Bay of Naples* (Cambridge, MA 1970) 39-61.
- 2 For the Roman house as a site of identity construction see, e.g., T. P. Wiseman, "Conspicui postes tectaque digna deo: the public image of aristocratic and imperial houses in the late Republic and early Principate," in *L'Urbs: espace urbain et histoire* (Colloq. 98, 1987) 393-413; Y. Thébert, "Private life and domestic architecture in Roman Africa," in P. Veyne (ed.), *A history of private life I* (Cambridge, MA 1987) 315-409; A. Wallace-Hadrill, "The social structure of the Roman house," *PBSR* 43 (1988) 43-97; C. Edwards, *The politics of immorality in ancient Rome* (Cambridge 1993) 150-60; J. Elsner, *Art and the Roman viewer* (Cambridge 1995) 49-87; id., *Imperial Rome and Christian triumph* (Oxford 1998) 44-50; and P. Zanker, *Pompeii* (Cambridge, MA 1998) 9-25.