From the very beginning of its history, the amphitheatre had unmistakable Roman associations.

Some widespread misconceptions can thus be corrected. Keith Hopkins and others have argued that the importance of amphitheatres was a function of social conditions specific to the Empire, such as the cessation of military conquest and loss of political power on the part of the Roman people.[48] But the amphitheatre and its games were clearly a major and significant social phenomenon also during the late Republic.[49] The stone arena was born during a time of military activity and cannot, therefore, be explained as a substitute for warfare or as a symptom of collective *ennui*. It is also untenable that the Roman arena may be explained in terms of what Carlin Barton calls Roman "cruelty".[50] Not even Latin authors (except Christians) write of gladiatorial games in terms of cruelty. For ancient Romans, the games were entertaining because of the dramatic and uncertain outcome of the highly skilled combat, and useful because they promoted military courage, *virtus* — a key ingredient of the Roman self-image.

The Romans' interest in the arena had much to do with their conception of themselves as a military people, that is, their conception of what it meant to be Roman. It was probably because the amphitheatre originated in the very heart of the Roman world (the Forum Romanum) and in the military ethos of the Republic that this building type gave the Romans such a tangible sense of exactly who they were.

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48   See K. Hopkins, "Murderous games" in *Death and renewal* (Cambridge 1983) 1-30.
49   For the prevalence of gladiatorial games during the Republic (usually underestimated), see K. Welch (supra n.25) 279 ff.
50   C. Barton, *The sorrows of the ancient Romans* (Princeton 1992); cf. my review in *Journal of Social History* 27 (1993) 430-33.

# 'Powerful images': responses to portraits and the political uses of images in Rome

## Andrew P. Gregory

It is a commonplace among art historians that statues, paintings, and other such representations emerge from historically specific contexts, and serve a wide variety of functions and purposes. The physical context in which an art-work was presented to the public, and the more general historical context in which it was conceived and produced, is all important, and to understand fully ancient images and portraits, indeed art-works or artefacts produced in any period, it is not sufficient simply to know their chronology, to recognize their iconography, to state their provenance.[1] Yet art historians and non-specialists alike all too frequently forget

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1   The appearance of publications such as P. Zanker's *The power of images in the age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor 1988), which so effectively pursues the theme of the spread around the Roman world of Augustan political imagery, and the recent volume on *Roman art in the private sphere* (Ann Arbor 1991), edited by E. K. Gazda, reflects the strong current interest in analysing art objects, even whole monuments, as social constructs to be understood as components within a larger socio-cultural matrix. R. Neudecker, *Die Skulpturenausstattung römischer Villen in Italien* (Mainz 1988), also provides good commentary on sculpture in context. For a survey of the current state of the study of ancient art, see B. S. Ridgway, "The state of research on ancient art," *ArtB* 68 (1986) 7-23. Much can also be learned from the recent review article by E. K. Gazda and A. E. Haeckl, "Roman portraiture: reflections on the question of context," *JRA* 6 (1993) 289-302.